

### **Not Such A Cruel Mistress?**

I wrote this poem, The Cruel Mistress, thirteen or fourteen years ago, about seven years after I gave up competitive chess. I learned to play chess aged about eight but didn't take it up seriously until I was about fourteen. I resolved shortly to win the county championship (juniors), to become a master, a grand-master and then world champion. A most reasonable programme it seemed at the time. Although I did indeed win the county championship - at the second attempt - and also came joint first in a Major Tournament, I

didn't progress beyond that, and at the age of twenty or twenty-one I packed in the game. I quit chess for no single reason; among other things I had serious personal problems, but I had realised by this time that I would never be a Master, much less a successor to Fischer. I played my last congress in late 1976 or early 1977, and between then and December 1996 I played probably not more than a few dozen off-hand games. In fact, in twenty years I visited chess clubs only on two occasions: once in Leeds about 1978 and another, one of my old stomping grounds, in the late eighties or early nineties. I played quite a bit from the summer of 1983 to early 1985, but never visited a club and never picked up a chess book.

At the end of 1996, having some time on my hands and anticipating having a lot more than I wanted, I took up the game again, and also began studying theory intensely. Fortunately, having sacked my incompetent barrister and conducted my own defence, I didn't have so much time on my hands after all, and on May 1st 1997 I was a free man again. Shortly after that I joined my local chess club, and in the middle of the month played in my first congress for twenty years. And won it! Actually I was joint first - with two others - in a Minor Tournament at Kensington, a Rapidplay. I scored five points out of six. I entered another Rapidplay tournament a couple of weeks later, at Willesden, and was joint first in that too.

As a junior and as a young man, I played somewhat above the minor grade, but I figured that coming back after such a long layoff I would be entitled to play in Minor Tournaments. Also as a youngster I played extremely quickly, far too quickly. Now, twenty years on, I am frequently in time trouble, and have even lost games on time having reached winning positions. I was therefore extremely pleased to win not one but my first two ever Rapidplay tournaments.

Since then I have played in a number of tournaments with impressive if not entirely consistent results. I won a Minor Tournament outright, Metropolitan, at the beginning of October, and was joint first in another one at International Students House. One of my wins was published in the Times that same month - which also won me a best attack prize; I shared an ungraded prize in another Rapidplay, and I won the handicap blitz at my club with an impressive twelve and a half points out of fourteen.

Most impressive though - on paper - at least - I have beaten a future world champion twice and drawn with a former world champion.

Yes, it sounds impressive on paper, but...After Christmas I went down to Hastings and was one of only a handful of players to play in both the Challengers and the World Amateur. In the 4th round of the Challengers I played a young Turkish lady named Emine Yanik, who was third in the first World Amateur in 1995 and First Women's World Amateur Champion. I drew with her, and she was flattered to take half a point off me! The previous August I played and beat twice - in a blitz tournament - the talented 14 year old Rosalind Kieran. She too played in the World Amateur, and scoring five and a half points out of 11 with an average grade of 167 she became the new Women's World Amateur Champion. I had a very disappointing World Amateur, scoring a mere four points for an overall grade of 143.

*(Continued on page 53)*



*(Continued from page 5)* Not Such a Cruel Mistress

In spite of this though I did produce a stunning queen sacrifice in one of my Challengers games to force a perpetual check, and in that tournament I scored an unexpected four and a half points for an average grade of 179; I also earned a FIDE rating. If I'd played to that standard in the World Amateur, who knows, I might even have been a world champion! Maybe Caissa isn't such a cruel mistress after all?

*Thank you Alexander. Any chance of seeing the game ? - Ed.*