

About the games (Continued from Uwe Maertens' review on the IC Freestyle Battle 2014)

Round 1 with White against jps7 – Win after 8 moves through a decision of the tournament director.

„Ruled by TD due to extreme lag by Black“. jps7 was disqualified and replaced afterwards. A pity. I was not really happy about this win. It was the first game, I was keen to get some action, and finally had to be a mere spectator.

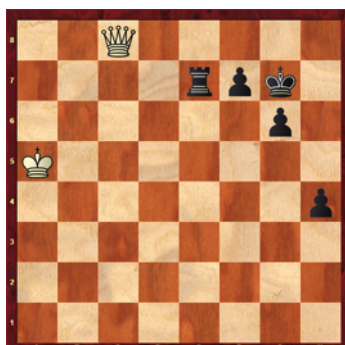


Round 2 – Draw with Black against Zorchamp

I had huge respect for Zorchamp, a machine playing without human interference. My assumption: a follow-up of Cluster Hydra with a lot of cores and a tuned superbook?!



Position after move 8



Position after move 66

About the diagram on the right: I wanted to have a look on this 7-piece position in Aquarium (convekta) per online access to get a glimpse of the absolute truth. However, in horrendous time-trouble I managed to mess things up. I forgot the simple cut & paste of the FEN and instead wanted to set up the position in Aquarium piece by piece – but then Zorchamp moved again... Damn! At any rate, the position after White queens (and afterwards) is always a draw. Fortunately, because if the tablebase had shown that Black could have won I could have kicked myself. By the way: being an average player I would rather think that Black would be the one who might try to win. Strange. The position is also a draw if the white King stays at the edge of the board. Three connected pawns plus rook offer no adequate protection against the perpetual. Chess is a gross game.

Round 3 – Winning with White against Sunnytown



Position after move 8



Position after move 41

<http://www.infinitychess.com/Web/Page/Public/Article/DefaultArticle.aspx?id=89>

The link above refers to a game analysis by Grandmaster Christopher Lutz. About the diagram above (right) he says:
„White has a big advantage: the d6-pawn is weak, the d8-bishop is passive and the a8-rook is strong. Still, the position isn't won yet and White has to find ways to make progress.“

Round 4 – Draw with White against EtaoinShrdlu



Position after move 11



Final position

A game played without too much ambition by me. I knew that Patrik Schoupal was one of the favorites in the tournament and was rather content about the result. By the way, his nickname is made up by the twelve most often used letters in the English language. A bit like „Ernst!“ in German. I did not know this. I found out while trying to gather some information about my opponent on the net.

Round 5 – Losing with Black against Intagrand



Position after move 12



Position after Qd7



The end...

An instructive game for me and an example how good Intagrand and his team played. I had read that the Breyer-Variation of the Ruy Lopez (with the knight retreat to b8) was a solid choice against computers. I was somewhat mad to agree to that system but I had to play something after all. Moreover, I do have superhardware and the entire book covering my digital back. Before I knew only a little about the „spanish torture“, but now I have an idea about the crucial ideas in these closed positions which computer handle relatively badly. But: everything on my amateur level, therefore, do not take all this too seriously chesswise!

Move-order is an important topic. If you basically know only very little about an opening and the strategic do's and don'ts of that opening, move-orders can lead to an enormous loss of time. Because the position seems to be new. That's what happened to. Intagrand „changed“ a couple of moves which, to my mind, can rather well be changed. In the line played in the game these are moves such as a4, Bc2, Nd2, Nf1, Ng3, g4, Qe2, to name just a few. It takes a while to regroup the pieces. Also a reason why computers do not understand all that too well.

In the position in the second diagram I played Qd7. To my mind, this was already imprecise. Now the rook on a8 is only protected by the bishop. Therefore Intagrand swapped rooks after axb and axb and my bishop led a rather miserable existence on a8. I needed two moves to reactivate it, and to put it via b7 to c8, where it supports the pawn-break f5 – before the bishop could go to c8 in one move. This is probably not yet decisive but typical for Intagrand's way of play – very strong. He sometimes likes to sacrifice a pawn to neutralize an enemy piece, knowing full well that this might only pay off twenty or more moves later. Later he also buried my other bishop as well. Brutal.

One more word about Houdini. When Stockfish thought my position would gradually slip below zero, Houdini confidently rejoiced with 0.00. And this with a depth of 30 - 40! What then to do in time-trouble? Of course, you are angry that you spend so much time for previous decisions, and you believe the program which considers itself to be in the drawing zone. Even though there certainly are different cases, I was shocked how badly Houdini treated the position. Analyzing with two programs, which propose entirely different moves can cost a lot of time and sweat.

In my Stockfish-ecstasy I now wanted to change that and played the next games only with the help of the freeware engine as analytical tool. Mit the linux version on the 20 core with 3 GHz and the windows version on the 24 core with 2.7 GHz, both with 4 GB Hash. Although the speed with which Stockfish calculated was almost identical on both computers the moves it proposed were often different. This might well have been due to the slightly different versions. However, I liked this variety and it was definitely not so marked as with the couple Houdini / Stockfish. In most cases I left one Stockfish to calculate quietly on its own while I used the other to go into the variations. However, Houdini was not entirely dismissed, and it still quietly calculated on my old 8 core in two line mode. And my belief in Stockfish was also to be shaken. But more about that later. And by the way Komodo also joined the game.

Round 6 – Draw with White against Idol99

Round 7 – Draw with Black against MIG29

From the very beginning I was on the defensive here, having no chances for a win. Fortunately the knight(s) on e5 managed to hold the game, basically from beginning to end.



Position after move 19



after move 59



and the final position

Round 8 – Winning with White against Flyingfatman

<http://www.infinitychess.com/Web/Page/Public/Article/DefaultArticle.aspx?id=106>

This game again had the honor to be annotated by GM Christopher Lutz (see link above). That is so instructive and a true pleasure!



Here even chess-average players like me manage to have the following considerations:

Attacking the king or trying to stir up some kind of tactical whirlwind? Does not work.

Exploiting the supposed weakness of the doubled pawns? Seems not really to work.

The only chance is to create a passed pawn on the kingside in the long term. If that is enough to win – particularly against the pair of bishops – is still moot. Anyway, trying is the only chance to win. To bring the chess program on the right (?) track

as centaur is really big fun. And the win also came about because of some minor inaccuracies by my opponent. In the diagram position, says GM Lutz, the king should not – as happened in the game – wander to c8, but rather stay on the kingside to much much later prevent the passed pawn White wants to create from pushing ahead. This position demands too much from chess programs, and might well do for a long time to come.

Round 9 – Draw with Black against LordSirKnight

Round 10 – Draw with White against deepthroat

Round 11 – Draw with Black against Ozymandias

Round 12 – Winning with White against mateinfour

I believe this was win by my hardware/Stockfish-duo – without any interference worth mentioning by me, apart from setting the calculation time per position and a little luck with the choice of opening. In the diagram right remarkable are: the diagonal of the queen on a2 to the black king and the diagonal of the bishop c3 to the squares neighboring the black king. This smells like tactic. It takes quite a while before Stockfish proposes Rf2 (right diagram). Then, however, things go quickly downhill after the opening of the f-file. But could Black save the diagram position (right)? I don't know. I assume the tactical blow came as a surprise for mateinfour.



Position after move 9



Position after move 26, before Rf2

Round 13 – Winning with Black against Donkasand

<http://www.infinitychess.com/Web/Page/Public/Article/DefaultArticle.aspx?id=124>

This game again had the honor to be annotated by GM Christopher Lutz. See the link above.



Position before the maneuver Bd8-b6-d4-c3

Round 14 – Winning with White against FrauHolle (engine stockfish only)

Again annotations by GM Lutz

<http://www.infinitychess.com/Web/Page/Public/Article/DefaultArticle.aspx?id=134>



Position after move 11

In this game FrauHolle played „engine only“. His opening book played a variation, which suits Stockfish with White. Luck for me. In addition, the hardware superiority (assumption) came to bear. The rest was simple which is meant to be arrogant. By the way, there are opening lines, which my SmartPhone-Stockfish draws against the 24 core. No joke!

Round 15 – Draw with Black against Takker



Position before the
exchange sacrifice Rxf3



Final position – Draw?

Ruy Lopez again. According to the engine Takker was actually always better. I was really happy to save a draw in the end. Somehow, I did not understand the whole and I still don't. The evaluation continuously went down and down. Then, and against engine recommendation, I went for the exchange sacrifice Rxf3. Once again horrendous time-trouble was pressing. Fortunately Takker agreed to a draw in the diagram position (right). Though the evaluation constantly shows 0.00 in the final position, even with great depths, but he might have exploited my unfortunate time-trouble, much more so because I had only a pawn for the exchange. I later found out that Takker was one of the admins on the Infinity-server. We chatted very amicably with each other. I still remembered his „Takker Tourbook“ from 2006?! He had to laugh and had almost forgotten it already. The Freestyle- and Computer Chess world is small ☺.

Round 16 – Winning with White against Mig2004

Annotation by GM Lutz

<http://www.infinitychess.com/Web/Page/Public/Article/DefaultArticle.aspx?id=143>



Unusual opening choice by Mig2004

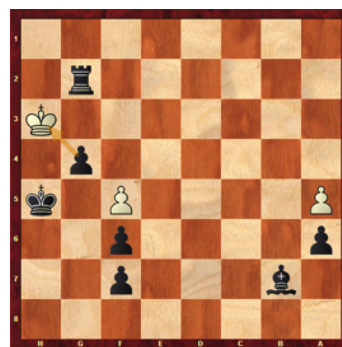
Round 17 – Winning with Black against funvillage (Engine stockfish only)



Position after move 13



22th move,
before the queen sacrifice



the relatively quick mate
on the 60th move

On the evenings before the game I thought for a long time what to play with Black against d4. I find it unpleasant if „my“ Stockfish has to bother for 20 moves with evaluations of -0.35. I know that this is nonsense most of the time, but one is human after all. My feeling in this phase of the tournament told me: With Black try to reach positions, in which you do not have to fight for equality for 30 moves while being constrained. And if possible, there should be no threat of a long-term kingside attack with a pawn storm. Thus, for instance, no closed French with castling short. Stockfish needs space, and for my strong hardware to pay off as many pieces as possible should remain as long as possible on the board. And please no super-analyzed 30-move deep variations. This might sound somewhat naïve and is rather and seems to be somewhat universally valid, but this is how I came to play the Queen’s Indian. That this worked so well against funvillage again is due to a lucky combination of several factors. And my guess can also backfire – more about that later.

Round 18 – Losing with White (!) against jobboy

A game which still annoys me. First, I made a wrong decision in the opening, and then a kind of mishap happened, no mouse-slip, but a wrong move. Here the analysis strayed too much from the real game.



Position after move 9



Regrouping the knights



Position before the mistake Rbf2

In the diagram above (left) the engines absolutely want to play c5 with White and close the position. Due to general considerations I thought the move was somehow bad. My blacksquared bishop no longer has good squares, Black can quickly play e5, possibly followed by e4. If I castle kingside, the half-open h-file might make itself felt. Moreover, there are the holes on f3 and h3, which, however, are now still protected by the bishop.

I had a look how the engines would continue after c5 and saw that Black had to try his luck on the b-file which will open. There also is the opening of the f-file with f3, giving the position some more breathing space. Ok, then e3 remains weak, but anyway. I fared so well with Stockfish and what should happen at a calculation depth of 40?

After my questionable c5 Jobboy played fantastically and above all quickly. It came how it had to come and as described above. The regroupings of his knights, played to attack on the white squares on the kingside, were above all impressive because of the speed, with which they happened. I fought back with Stockfish and found a little counterplay on the b-file. Maybe it was possible to hold the position – I think it was – had I not made this stupid mistake leading to giving up the b-file (diagram right). I had a position on the analysis board which was not the real one in the game. Such mistakes do happen. Almost everybody suffered from them. Apart from that fortune spared me from such mistakes. On the contrary, fortune was mainly on my side.

Round 19 – Draw with Black against Sun_Zhu



Najdorf with h5, fianchetto and b6

A really gross game but this had nothing to do with chess. I happened to fall victim to a torn ligament in my right foot, was absolutely fed up and had to take painkillers to just vegetate. And Freestyle on top of that... I did not at all feel like it and actually thought about letting the computer play – but without a good book? That's not what I wanted either. Therefore I quickly copied a game by Maximus, which impressed me because White did not seem to have no more ideas after b6. Up to the diagram position I almost did not care about engine evaluations. Fortunately this went well – and why not, Maximus will actually have had some ideas when playing like he did. In the end, the game was drawn after 35 moves.

Round 20 – Draw with White against Thomas_A_Anderson

Round 21 – Draw with Black against Maximus



White played 7.a4



Position after 15.Rfc8



Final position

Against Maximus I finally dared the French. I was a bit uneasy doing so but I wanted to surprise him. I managed to do so as he told me in a chat after the game. During the tournament I had a good connection to him – he is a very nice and funny guy.

I had seen the set-up (diagram left) already, it is good against computers, if the human plays with White. Remarkable from my point of view: the back and forth of the bishop c1 to d2 and a3 and, if need be, back again. Sometimes it also penetrates on d6 into the black camp.

Diagram center: A kingside attack is in the air. In many lines a mating attack becomes very concrete. The move Rfc8 removes another piece from the kingside and makes the freeing pawnbreak f6 more difficult. On the other hand, in two moves Black can move the queen to f8 to help with the defense.

Interestingly, the final position (diagram right) is a draw though Black is an exchange down. After analyzing for 30 minutes Maximus agreed to the draw.

Round 22 – Win with White against Akhtar (engine only)

A victory I owed to my torn ligature and the sick leave resulting from it. Why? A had a lot of time to prepare. And that with access to the fabulous server in the US. In the beginning I had not quite appreciated how useful this would be. Before the tournament I would have preferred to rent both computers by the hour to save costs. Now I could fully use the „dedicated server“.

Playing Akhtar from Abu Dhabi one could expect strong hardware. Throughout the tournament his opening book had just known one reply to 1.e4, namely 1...e6, that is, the French. A fact that helps the preparation enormously. It was also remarkable that some opponents of Akhtar often used the same promising variation. But I did not want to rely on that. Adapting the tournament book during the tournament would also have been possible.



Position after 12.g3



Position before the exchange sacrifice Rxf4



Position after 34.Rc2

Fortunately, we played exactly the line, which I had spent hours analyzing the day before. (Diagram left). I had also anticipated the exchange sacrifice which appeared later on the screen. That was fantastic – particularly in regard to time-trouble. As I am prone to come into time-trouble I find the game against „engine only“ particularly difficult. These ad hoc replies by the permanent brain function or from the opening book are particularly sobering for me.

The diagram on the right shows the fruits of my preparation. Now, I rather wanted to open a little beer and to play just engine moves until mate. But the evaluation from Stockfish, which, I don't remember exactly, was something about +1,66 or so, hat zero point zero variance, no matter what search depth. That is suspicious. Programs do not mind at all, they probably only wake up shortly before the 50-move rule applies, after which they move a pawn and accept a marginally worse evaluation.

However, I did mind. Therefore, I invested some work and forced Stockfish to play h4 a few moves later to force the decision which fortunately worked.

Round 23 – Draw with Black against Victorious



Position after 14.f5



Position after 19.Bc1



Final position

A strange game I still do not understand. I managed to achieve my planned f5 relatively early and was quite happy. (Diagram 1). Then the position gradually closed more and more, and I thought about Black motives in the King's Indian, which slowly lead to a kingside attack with a pawn storm before. But even if the a-file would also have been closed – which did not happen – things somehow do not work out. (Diagram center) One has tons of time, one could play Kh8, Rf7, Bf8, transfer the knights to the kingside, after that play g5, h5 etc. but somehow all this does not work out. Probably I am here stuck on a pattern which is of no use. Grandmaster Lutz, HELP, please!

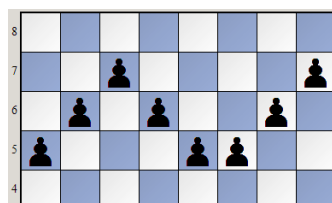
Round 24 – Draw with White against Newton296

An interesting game Newton296 really played fantastically. He told me after the game that he could follow his preparation for a long time. A game to my taste even if it was only drawn.

Round 25 – Draw with Black against Paul

Round 26 – Draw with White against Erdo

Against Erdo a couple of things did not work according to plan. When looking at his games I realized that he skillfully manages to establish a pawn-set-up like the one you see in the blue-white diagram below. To my mind that is a wise strategy against computers. Preventing White's pawn-storm on the queenside, while using a pawn-storm on the kingside to attack. This may sound banal but in practice this is not that easy to achieve against computers. I am sure Erdo has years of experience here. I tried that one morning while lying in bed against my smartphone-Stockfish. However, I prefer not to reveal what happened...



Position after 21.Rah8



Here Be2 and Bf1 would have been better



Could Erdo win here?

I expected the King's Indian and that's what happened. I had decided to strictly follow theory and to search my chances on the queenside with a4/b4 and c5. Unfortunately things developed differently and I lost my way. Suddenly I was exposed to a massive kingside attack (diagram left) – three major pieces firing against my poor king. The diagram in the center shows again the permanent threat Bxh3 and/or g4 plus knight sacrifice. In a short analysis after the games the engines said that Be2 followed by Bf1 keeps the position in the long run. But is that true?

Once again in fierce time-trouble I decided for a hara-kiri-variation, which had appeared briefly in the engine-window, but then disappeared permanently. The result was an endgame, which is shown in the diagram on the right. I did not feel comfortable here, and further analyses must show whether Erdo could have won this endgame. At any rate a great game by Erdo, who certainly will be finishing better in the next Freestyle tournaments.

Round 27 – Draw with Black against Ocirema

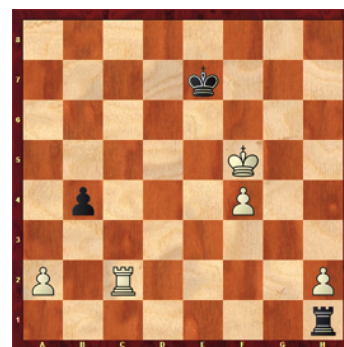
Round 28 – Winning with White against Neutrino



Position after 14.Na5



exd5 or Rfd1?



Fortunately, the rook endgame was won

A Grünfeld appeared on the board! A nice change and in computer chess arguably rather promising for White. I absolutely wanted the whole point. The diagram in the center shows the position, in which I decided against the engine recommendation (e4xBd5) by Stockfish and Komodo. Why give the passed pawn? A glance to my Octo and Houdini revealed the alternative Rfd1. That's the disadvantage of letting the two Stockys run in one-line mode.

Round 29 – Winning with Black against olivierevan

The last game. An incredible emotional roller-coaster and incredible luck at the end!



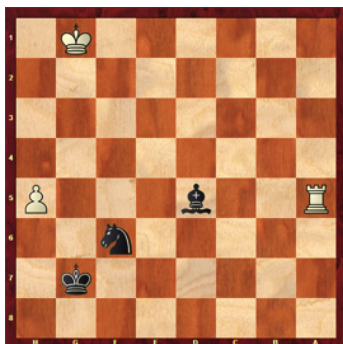
Goodbye preparation!



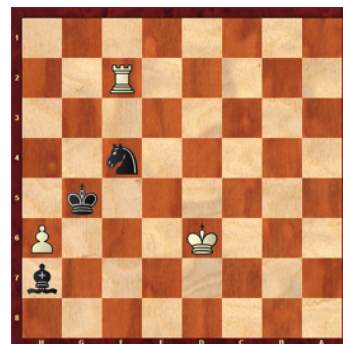
Position before Nh5, better is arguably Nd7



Position after 21.Nf6



52nd move, draw according to the tablebases



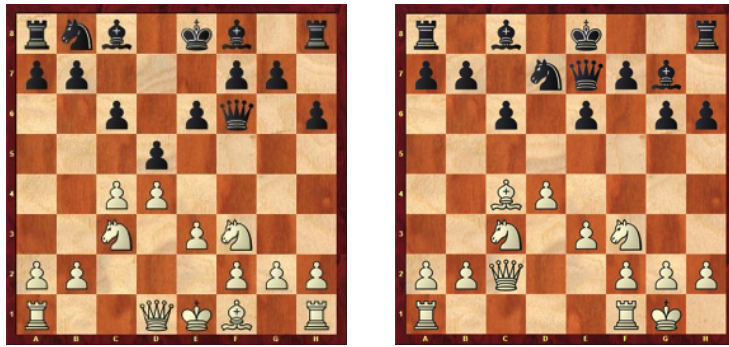
40 moves later! Position before the blunder Ke5, which allows the knight fork on d3

Diagram above left: Maybe I am wrong, but I do have the impression that the players on places 25-30 liked to play unusual openings. This is comprehensible. If you can no longer win money fun is more important. Let the others play well trodden and boring openings. Not to mention that novelties or rare variations might set the opponent some problems, and do not have to lead to a bad score automatically in Freestyle chess. See for instance Intagrand against Erdo.

I was content with the opening, right from the start the engines evaluated the position as slightly better for Black. All pieces are still on the board. I was in good spirits and even took the time to occasionally throw a glance on the games of my colleagues who had the same number of points as I did – MiG29 and deepthroat. Stockfish and Komodo ran at full speed and after Nh5 (diagram above) I was waiting for the things to come. My recklessness was to be punished. I began to wonder when my opponent thought endlessly. Then, after about 15 minutes, Stocky and Komodo indicated Ng5, and I started to smell the rat. Suddenly all my calm was gone. I once again drifted into a massive attack on my king, which the computer despite all their calculating powers hardly sensed. After half an hour and with the help of the engines and playing lines back and forth I found a way out. However, for a long time the engines still thought that Black had advantage. Maybe this is a good test position, with much more possibilities!?

The exchange of blows ended on move 52 in a position that was a tablebase-draw. (Diagram below left). I had less than two minutes on the clock. My opponent cheerily played on and unfortunately rather quickly. Ok, it is legitimate to want to win the game on time. Particularly so, because olivierevan probably noticed that I had no direct tablebase access because I had changed to one-board-mode (plus Infinitychess). I also assumed that Stockfish would hold the draw at any rate, I thought that I would be able to do so as well. The position seemed to be simple enough. For a while I had only 45-60 seconds on the clock! Everybody can imagine the stress. After all, with a draw I would share third place with MiG29 and deepthroat, and I did not want to spoil it. In a small break I asked the tournament director how long I still had to play the position, nervous wreck that I was. Then, 40 moves (!) later, (see diagram middle center) olivierevan made a big blunder. He moved his king to e5 instead of e7 allowing a knight fork. I won the rook and the trivial endgame arose, in which knight and bishop have to mate. Meanwhile I had again two minutes on the clock and I wanted to enter the position on the tablebase-Octo. Fortunately, Stockfish masters this endgame without tablebase. Thus, I mated 37 moves later. Crazy. Infinite luck. But olivierevan also has to blame himself a bit.

Why I still asked Komodo for help? The reason was this position.



A line in the Slav, in which White abandons the pair of bishops. The position is theoretically well known and also has been played a couple of times in Freestyle-chess. While I was on sick leave at home, having access to a fine computer with which to analyze I started to look at this position like mad.

Black achieves equality or at least can liberate his position if he manages to play c5 or e5. Sure, all that is well known: the pawnbreak also liberates Black's problem child, the white-squared bishop. I looked at all available games between humans with +2700 Elo to see how this was played. I let Stockfish play against Houdini with 2 and 5 per move and vice versa. Again and again. I played a game in a game. The rule was: you have to prevent Black from playing e5 or c5. If one of these moves is played you lost immediately. I tried – with my chess abilities, mind you – to really get to the bottom of the position. I imagine correspondence chess to be similarly time-consuming. I imagined – with slight delusions of grandeur – to understand the position.

And then? I saw the game Paul against Ozymandias in our Freestyle tournament, in which exactly these positions appeared on the board. Paul let Komodo play „engine only“ winning with White against Ozy as Centaur. Komodo found TOTALLY different approaches, played h4 and h5 and in some variations even started a kingside attack. I was flabbergasted. I immediately bought Komodo and started to play let automatic tournaments play, exactly with the position in the diagram as starting position. Sometimes Komodo evaluates the position completely different than Stockfish, even though there are not that many concrete threats. Well, chess is horrendously difficult, but after all that is what makes it so interesting.

The question of all questions of a freestyler

How can I become better in Freestyle chess as an „entity“? How exactly does the team Intagrand consult with each other? How does that work? And what am I doing there exactly and why? Obviously, good hardware is important. However, I would estimate that it is only 60% responsible for success. Some people would definitely advise me to split one of the two fast computers and let one run on 12 core software 1 and to let the other run on 12 cores software 2. I don't know. A lot is simply a gut feeling. One final question: How would Carlsen have fared in this tournament with a quadcore-computer and any software as analytical tool? I guess his self-confidence is so big that he would use the machine only as blunderchecker and finish in the top.

I am looking forward to the next Freestyle and I wish Infinity Chess a great future. Infinity Chess proved to be able to execute such a big tournament perfectly. Friendly, competent, and reliable. With a great help service, either per mail, chat or on the website. For me the comments by grandmaster Lutz were a real treat. The community of the 29 freestylers plus admins – even though this might sound somewhat exaggerated, but that's the way I felt – was fantastic and a lot of fun. After the tournament I just wanted to meet them all for a beer. Let's have more of the same!

PS ☺

By the way: To calm down after the game and to be able to sleep better this video time and again proved to be helpful:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bsm-Ai1jD0Q>

(Rough translation from German by Johannes Fischer, ed. by Arno Nickel, May 2014)