

Report from World Youth Chess Championships (7th-19th November 2012, Maribor, Slovenia)
William Gallagher and Gabriel Mirza (19th November 2012)

A group of 7 players from Ireland (ranging from U10-U18 Open), accompanied by 4 adults, ventured on an exciting and tough mission to Maribor, Slovenia for the 2012 World Youth Chess Championships. For those whom made the mistake to fly into Zagreb (one of the recommended landing points), an excruciating wait was to be had at the border between Croatia and Slovenia. Apparently, Croatia is soon to enter the bosom of the European Union, so the 7 hour journey from Zagreb to hotel in Maribor may be a thing of the past! We spent some of the time debating the quandary "Will Garry Kasparov show up or is he still in jail?". Once safely ensconced in our respective hotels, we relaxed in a tired slump waiting in anticipation for the eventful days ahead.

The Opening Ceremony, which was delayed to just before Round 1, was a bit of a mad scramble with a couple of thousand players, parents, coaches and guests crammed into a playing hall. Over 1,600 players in total from approximately 100 countries were playing at the event. Security was pretty tight throughout, with only players left into playing halls. Round 1 was, predictably, a tough one, with the Irish group scoring 1.5/7 in total, followed by a disastrous Round 2 (0/7). Round 3 was Ireland's best performance in the first phase of the tournament with 4/7. After Rounds 5 and 6 (which were on the same day), the Irish group re-charged their batteries by a tour of one of the world's largest cave systems, Postonja Caves (we used a train(!) to enter the middle of the caves, which have 21 km of galleries, tunnels and halls), and a short visit to Slovenia's capital, Ljubjana. The visit to Ljubjana, while short, was made quite eventful by Gabriel's re-telling of the "Virgins on the Dragon Bridge" story. The second phase of the competition was better for the overall Irish group, with 18 points being gained in Rounds 7-11 in comparison to 13.5 points in Rounds 1-6. Indeed, Ireland's best performance was in the final round, with 5.5/7. The Closing Ceremony was a busy but festive affair, where Garry Kasparov handed out prizes to top players.

Apart from other highlights of individual matches indicated below, Colm O'Muireagain passed his Developmental Instructor exam, having been a highly diligent student all week! It almost compares with his draw versus Boris Spassky (well perhaps not!). Gabriel also provided some key coaching during the event, which helped the younger players do battle.



Irish team at WYCC and accompanying guests at the Dragon's Bridge in Maribor.

Top row (left to right): Gabriel Mirza (Head of Delegation), Govan Jolliffe-Bryne (U18 Open), Oissine Murchadha (U16 Open), Pascale McGrath, Colm O'Muireagain, William Gallagher.

Bottom row (left to right): Tom McGrath (U12 Open), Matthew Gallagher (U10 Open), Karina Kruk (U18 Girls), Diana Mirza (U12 Girls), Eibhia Ni Mhuireagain (U12 Girls).

Some highlights from the WYCC include:

Matthew 'Want a Draw?' Gallagher (U10 Open) had a fantastic opening performance with a draw against a Mongolian boy, Yondonjamts Erdermdalai (1765 ELO). This predilection for draws was also shown with a similar outcome against Nik Krejic (1538 ELO) in Round 3, and another Slovenian in Round 7. His run of draws was broken with a win against a Korean boy in Round 9, followed by another win in Round 10 against another Slovenian, but was restored with a draw in the last round versus a Brazilian. Matthew finished with 4/11 and a rating performance of 1301.



Matthew Gallagher (right) shaking hands with Mongolian opponent, Yondonjamts Erdermdalai.

Tom McGrath (U12 Open) seems to have something against Slovenians, at least the 8 out of 11 that he faced during the tournament. Apart from being the *bone fide* "King of Blitz Chess" (self-titled), Tom was to be seen often congregating around the SHARK energy drink stand, sampling its odd herbal concoction (apparently he is going to be on the front cover of the advertising brochure!). This was Tom's first experience on the international chess scene (apart from competing in Glorney competition this year), and he performed very well. He finished with 4/11 and a rating performance of 1341.



Tom McGrath (left) shaking hands with one of his 8 Slovenian opponents, Tomaz Suta.

In Round 11, Eibhia Ni Mhuireagain (U12 Girls) managed to beat 1636 ELO rated Austrian player to round up a personal best of 5.5/11, which was Ireland's second best result.



Eibhia Ni Mhuireagain (left) shaking hands with her Sri Lankan opponent, Hansika Mendis Dasuni.

In the second round, Diana Mirza (U12 Girls) played live on board 7, against WFM Danitza Vazquez Maccarini (Board 3 of the Puerto Rican Olympic team; 1901 ELO). Although she lost this game, Diana won against the Welsh Olympic player, Alyssa Wang, in Round 8. In Round 10, although she was expecting an easier opponent, Diana faced the European champion from Prague, WFM Anastasia Avramidou (1856 ELO). Unfortunately, she doubled the black and lost in a Modern Benoni defence. Diana finished with 6/11 (Ireland's best result).



Diana Mirza (right) shaking hands with her Sri Lankan opponent, Novodya N. Batawala.

In Round 11, Oissine Murchardha (U14 Open) played the Korean Hyukmin Park and managed to find a strong positional idea in the French. He won quickly thereafter. He also had a draw against a top class Argentinian player Emilio Fiora (FIDE 2007). Oissine finished with 4/11.



Oissine Murchardha (right) deep in thought while playing the Slovenian opponent, Miha Bombek.

Fresh from the EYCC and Chess Olympiad, Karina Kruk (newly titled WCM) had a great draw versus the Morales Flores Monserrat (FIDE 1881), which involved a rook sacrifice on Karina's part which forced the Chilean's hand. Karina finished with 5/11.



Karina Kruk (right) shaking hands with Slovakian opponent, Zusana Koselova.

Within Govan Jolliffe-Byrnes's section (U18 Open), there were six GMs, with the top competitor over 2600 ELO. In Round 8, Govan did not accept an offered draw with a pawn up in Q+R ending, but lost. However, he made up for this by an earlier win (Round 6) against the top ranked Welsh player, Alex Bullen (1824 ELO). His personal highlight was wearing a Romanian T-shirt and rubbing the crest versus a Moldovan player (in Round 9); this match ended in a draw. It was also Govan's first international tournament. Govan finished with 3/11.



Govan Jolliffe-Byrne (right) versus Benjamin Blum (Canada). Are you looking at me?

Overall, this represents one of Ireland's best performances at a World Chess championships. Well done to all!



Irish team at WYCC and accompanying guests at the end of tournament.

Top row (left to right): Oissine Murchadha (U16 Open), Gabriel Mirza (Head of Delegation), Govan Jolliffe-Byrne (U18 Open), William Gallagher, Pascale McGrath, Colm O'Muireagain.

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