

Reflections by Dr Advocate Lyndon Bouah - The art of captaincy

I woke up at seven am on Saturday 12 August 2017. It was going to be an exciting day. I was going to lead my beloved chess club Steinitz in two matches today. Our first game was against Uitsig chess club. Uitsig chess club was from a tough area close to Belhar where I live. Their main anchor is George Daniels who against all the odds have succeeded in maintaining the chess club he helped to establish in 2002. We won the match easily with 6-2. I expected a bigger score but I was satisfied with the win. While Craig Willenberg and others were still playing I quietly packed the kings in the centre indicating what the results of the games were. George asked me why I was rubbing in the result. I then informed him that actually I was telling my remaining team members what the results were. It was a form of silent communication. They would now know that they could play for a win or draw because we had already won the match. This is what a captain must do. He must communicate within the rules and know what is happening on each board! George nodded and took the lesson.

The afternoon match was going to be our big test. The match was against our age old rivals Manyanani. They won the league once back in the mid-nineties but have struggled since. Dr Esau, the scion of the club, however decided to assemble quite a team to play Steinitz. He tempted IM Donovan Van Den Heever back to play and then we saw the squad assembled IM Watu Kobese on board one, IM Don the Dragon on board two, FM Dr Shabier Bhawoodien on three and Warrick Erlank on four. The top four was formidable and their bottom four was Gordon Lawrence on board five, Erfaan Hooseen on six, Neil Booysen on seven and Adeeb Abrahams on eight.

Steinitz in turn had CM Lyndon Bouah on one, Craig and Kenny Willenberg on two and three, Mark Lewis on four, Luan De Jager on five, WIM Denise Frick on six, CM Paul Khuphwathea on seven and CM Andreas De Jager on 8. On paper they were more experienced than Steinitz.



Steinitz top 3 –CM Lyndon Bouah, Craig Willenberg and Kenny Willenberg

So as captain I needed to organise my forces. I knew that on board one it was going to be tough against the wily Lion of Africa IM Kobese. I have never beaten him in over 25 years of play and can only show about two draws with defeats too numerous to mention! I however had the white pieces and knew that I must show spirit so that my teammates would be inspired.

On board two Craig essayed the Caro Kann but Don the Dragon somehow transposed the opening to a KID attack of sorts. It was going to be tough as Craig was black.

On board three I know anything was possible as a Kenny was angry having lost last week against Bellville. I told him in the week that I needed a good game from him.

On board four Mark Lewis was making his league debut which isn't always the best because of course he is a bit rusty having not played for some time.



Mark Lewis

On board five Luan De Jager (17) was playing Gordon Lawrence. Gordon Lawrence is an old campaigner and he of course won the WP Open in 1972 already! So he has been around for some time! This game could go either way.



Luan De Jager

On board six WIM Denise Frick and current SA Closed Champion was playing Erfaan Hoosen. Hoosen is a solid player and made his junior Protea debut in 1995 alongside GM Kenny Solomon in Brazil. So a tough game was expected.



WIM Denise Frick

On board seven CM Paul K as he is affectionately known was playing Neil Booysen. I fancied our chances here because Paul is quite aggressive and as he lost to Bellville last week he promised me that he would make good.



CM Paul Khuphwathea

On board 8 we had Andreas De Jager (13) playing against Adeb Abrahams who obtained his SA schools colours in 1988 long before Andreas was born. That match was evenly poised as Adeb only plays league and Andreas plays about 100 games a year.



CM Andreas de Jager

Now of course the key is to secure 4.5 because the league is decided on match points. The role of a captain is to be both the inspiration and the anchor. Many aspects relating to logistics and passion revolve around him or her. I was pleasantly surprised and delighted that MRL chess club who is leading the league have appointed Robyn Van Niekerk as the captain of their team.

So now I was playing the great six times SA Champion Watu Kobese and needing to lead my team to victory as well. A tall order but the challenge was there. The gauntlet had been laid down. I decided to go for a quiet early queen exchange as Watu is an every dangerous players and I felt I had chances if the queens are off. So the exchange variation of the Kings Indian Defence appeared and then I had to make a decision. I decided to take the pawn on e5 with my knight potentially putting my knight in an X ray against my own king. Watu took some time now thinking about his response.

In the meantime I decided to have a look at the other games. Craig was in a spot of bother against 2013 SA Closed Champion IM Van Den Heever whilst Kenny sacrificed a pawn in the Scotch to keep FM Bhawoodien king in the centre. Dr. Bhawoodien who was the 2003 world Amateur champion plays correct chess and loves his game. So that game would be one to watch.

Mark Lewis arrived a few minutes late after attending a funeral and his position wasn't looking the greatest after Erlank got his bishop to h6 to get rid of the Dark square fianchettoed Bishop.

On board five I noticed that Luan had the initiative but of course I knew that Lawrence was never going to make it easy! I silently prayed that a point would be in the offing.

On board six Denise and Erfaan exchanged queens early on and I was not surprised when the two players agreed to an early draw. Their position was evenly matched.

On board seven Paul was playing aggressively and secured an early advantage for us by beating Booysen. So we went into an early lead. Paul's chess is of course a delight to watch. He gets good positions and sometimes he overdoes it but in general his chess I sound!

On board eight Andreas was having a battle royal with open files and attacks on the king in the air. They seem to be playing a Sveshnikov.

So we were doing ok. Now to concentrate on the match against Watu. I am a pawn up and the crowds are gathering as I keep the pawn even into the middle game. However the bishops he has are working hard. So now of course I must be careful because one pawn does not a summer make.

By this time it is clear that the top five boards are going to be tough. Craig is struggling but fighting. Kenny found a brilliant riposte when he found Nc5 against the Scotch. This regains his pawn and he even wins a pawn as his opponent has not castled yet.

Watu then fights back and wins back his pawn. In winning his pawn however, he exposes his rooks to potential forks. I then win the exchange. This however means that his two bishops have no opposition on the board and the game is headed for broke. Time pressure is building.

At this time Luan allows a draw after his opponent tricks him into allowing a perpetual check. I accept the result because of course we are now leading 2-1. The pressure is on because of course we need 2.5 points. All the boards are now in time trouble and suddenly from the mist Kenny emerges with a clear advantage and is about to mate Dr Bhawoodien in the middle of the board. So that is a clear point. Lewis however collapses and it is clear that he is lost. IM Van den Heever is now a clear two pawns up and Craig is lost. So now we are dependent on board 8 and board one.

I cannot bear to look at the other boards and I decide to give back a rook to secure a pawn advantage which is also a passed pawn. As Nimzowitsch said a passed pawn is like a criminal that must be kept under lock and key. I am now playing for two results, win or draw, and no longer three results.

One of my teammates last week asked me to explain the concepts of three results. When you are playing in a team event it is important that you are not playing for three results. The three results are win, draw and loss. If you playing for three results it puts pressure on your teammates who will not be able to accept draws or need to take chances because your position is in danger. By only you having winning chances the draw or win is secured.

I hasten to look at little Andreas. The young man is playing the game of his life. He has an outside passed pawn and is pushing hard. He is the product of the Steinitz system that believes if you are good enough then you must play in the A team no matter your age. He is pressing for the win.

I return to compete against Kobese who is still trying to fashion something. This is something I have always admired about Kobese. No matter the position he tries to squeeze everything out of the position!

At this stage I then noticed that Andreas had beaten his rival three times his age. He had exchanged off the outside passed pawn to allow his king to roam freely. At this stage I then forced a repetition of moves to secure the draw, because although I was winning, the team needed the half point more. With the handshake we secured 4.5 with Craig and Mark losing thereafter. A great day with heroes across the battlefield. All the players played their hearts out although we were outgunned on the top boards.

I signed the score sheets and was able to celebrate with a braai the evening. And of course my adrenalin was still pumping!

Regards

Dr Advocate Lyndon Bouah
Reporting live from Cape Town