

Batumi - First Impressions

Arrival

Well, we all arrived here safe and well, despite various flight delays. The 8-hour layover at Istanbul Airport was a little tedious but not as painful as expected.



Jane was the first to arrive at what we **thought** was our hotel, only to discover we had been moved unexpectedly (and with no notification!) to the Georgia Palace Hotel. Now there are a few hotels of similar names in Batumi, and not being told otherwise Jane was expecting to be taken to one of these, but no: a driver with little English took her out of the city, up into the hills, and through back roads for about 40 minutes. With no mobile signal or WIFI, Jane was somewhat perturbed to say the least!

Our hotel turns out to be 25km away in Kobuleti. A beautiful place to stay, but the 40-minute trek to the venue and back each day is going to take its toll.

Thanks to Jane though, the rest of us were spared any trauma, knowing what to expect at least.

The hotel itself is a beautiful place. Stunning grounds with winding paths through woodland, lots of seating areas and outside bars, two outdoor pools (one fresh and one salt-water) and an indoor pool, gym and spa. Own private beach too, with mini-pier. This is definitely an upgrade from our original hotel!



“Anyone for Chess?”



The Opening Ceremony

Another advantage of this hotel is it is **much** closer to the Black Sea Arena, the venue for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, which is the other side of us from Batumi. That being the case, most of us decided to go to the Opening Ceremony.

We arrived early and had plenty of time to mingle with other players and have drinks, and for the Wales Women to get to know their coach, Leonid Sandler.

The team was fortunate this year to receive a FIDE development grant to cover coaching this year, and Leonid was assigned to us. He’s very experienced, so we’ve been doubly fortunate.

The Ceremony itself was a fabulous affair, with brilliant dance performances, music and singing, a few short speeches by dignitaries, the ceremonial drawing of lots for colours and a parade of flags and huge firework display to round it off.



Photos by David Llada – official Olympiad photographer

Pictures don't do it justice, but here are just a few by the official photographer **David Llada** (all delegations have permission to share these as part of reporting of the Olympiad).

Nigel Short himself said on twitter that this was the best Opening Ceremony of all the Olympiads he has been to.

And so, to Round 1

As is pretty much always the case at the start of such a big event, chaos appeared to rule...

Pairings were published later than expected.

Our bus was scheduled to leave the hotel at 12 noon, a full 3 hours before the start of the round. We protested but were told there could be no movement on this... but it seems others must have protested too because when we got there at 12 we were told it would be another half hour, then 1pm, then 1:30. It didn't eventually leave until after 2pm.

Buses from all hotels had been told to arrive at the latest by 2:30. Which it seems **everyone** took to mean they must arrive **at** 2:30; which they all did. The dozens and dozens of coaches queuing in the car park waiting to disgorge teams was a sight to behold.

The queues to get through security into the playing halls were long and very slow-moving. We realised early on that there was no way the round would be starting at the scheduled time...

Wales Women – Round 1

Seeded 71 and just inside the top half, the Women's team had a relatively "easy" pairing against the unrated (and one-player-short) Sao Tome & Principe. Could have been a banana-skin round of course, so taking nothing for granted the team went in and played good chess, winning 4-0.

Bo.	149	 Sao Tome & Principe (STP)	Rtg -	71	 Wales (WLS)	Rtg	0 : 4
72.1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Da Fonseca Gomes, Elquissandra	0 - WFM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Richmond, Jane	2053	0 - 1
72.2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gomes, Marcia	0 - WCM	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sivarajasingam, Venetia	1771	0 - 1
72.3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Santo Soares, Patricia	0 - WCM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Camp, Imogen A L	1940	0 - 1
72.4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no player	0 - WCM	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sivarajasingam, Shayanna	1788	- - +

ST&P is a tiny place – the second smallest African nation to the Seychelles. Really good to see representation at the Olympiad from them and many other small countries, alongside the chess greats.

The 4-0 win puts us in 1st equal place, ahead of Russia, China and Georgia (amongst others) whose opponents managed a few notable upsets:

- Costa Rica's WIM **Maria Elena Rodriguez Arrieta** drew with Russian GM **G Aleksandra Goryachkina**
- Tajikistan's WFM **Nadezhda Antonova** drew with China's WGM **Qian Huang**
- South Korea's WFM **Roza Eynula** beat the host Georgia's IM **Lela Javakhishvili**

We'll be playing Greece in Round 2, which will be a whole different ball-game, but as we can see, taking points off stronger player is entirely possible!

Wales Open – Round 1

The Open team had the reverse situation: Seeded 114, near the top of the bottom half, round 1 was always going to be a tough one. They faced Spain and a full team of GMs, and results went as would be expected.

Bo.	114	 Wales (WLS)	Rtg - 24	 Spain (ESP)	Rtg	0 : 4
23.1	FM	<input type="checkbox"/> Strugnell, Carl	2327 - GM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anton Guijarro, David	2639	0 - 1
23.2		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blackburn, Jonathan L B	2185 - GM	<input type="checkbox"/> Perez Candelario, Manuel	2590	0 - 1
23.3		<input type="checkbox"/> Bullen, Alex	2098 - GM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lopez Martinez, Josep Manuel	2581	0 - 1
23.4		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pleasants, Allan J	2090 - GM	<input type="checkbox"/> Ibarra Jerez, Jose Carlos	2564	0 - 1

There were no big surprises in match results throughout the whole event in round 1; most were 4-0, but with a few notable upsets in individual results in the Open too, for example:

- Morocco's CM **Mohamed-Mehdi Aithmidou** beat China's GM **Chao B Li**
- Zambia's IM **Andrew Kayonde** drew with Ukraine's GM **Vassily Ivanchuk**

The Open team has an easier pairing in round 2, against Swaziland, all rated in the 1400-1600 bracket. Nothing will be taken for granted though!

Useful Links

Live games and results can be found on chess-24, pairings on chess-results, and news, pictures and articles of interest on the official website and facebook page.

Chess Results: <http://chess-results.com/tnr368908.aspx>

Chess-24: <https://chess24.com/en/watch/live-tournaments> (search **Batumi Open** or **Batumi Women**)

Olympiad 2018 Official Website: <https://batumi2018.fide.com/en>

Olympiad 2018 Official Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/batumi2018>