

The 2011 Minesweeper World Championship in Zurich

This year's world championship was the first tournament ever to take place in Switzerland and thus it meant Tommy had to organize everything from scratch. He wrote a client, that makes online tournaments incredibly easy and despite a minor bug that wasn't his fault, its test at the UK Open in Stirling was a nice success. Several online tournaments organized via the IRC-channel were to follow. In the end 9 players met in Zurich and 7 more competed online for the titles "World Champion" and "Online World Champion".

For me this tournament meant much more than a normal tournament would have meant, since my plan was to retire from Minesweeper with the last second of the competition. Although I had already beaten Tommy both in Stirling and Munich, in a test tournament right before the World Championship he got as close as 4 seconds. Nonetheless I was eagerly awaiting the tournament and of course happy to meet my Minesweeper friends Tommy, Robert, Arsen and Edu as well as new people.

So, as the tournament came closer it was time to make travel plans. While the others were smart enough to stay for several days. My plan was to leave Munich in the early morning and return right in the next morning – without sleeping in Zurich. On the train I met Stefan 'Hubi' Huber and David, one of his speedcubing friends. They challenged me to show off on Intermediate but with Hubi's mouse I could only do a 47. The rest of the train journey we spent solving cubes. In Zurich at the train station we met another cuber, Stefan, and trotted off to the ETH, where the tournament took place, on the way to which we met Robert and Edu.

Since Hubi studies at the ETH as well, it was no problem at all to find the PC lab and only minutes after our arrival Arsen and Andreas joined our group as well. Only Tommy was missing. As it turned out, he was waiting for us in room 2, while we were waiting in front of room 1. More time was spent on twisty puzzles, less minutes than usual on finding the right setup for the tournament and finally, 5 minutes before the start of the actual event, we gave 'team-blind'-Minesweeper a try. Robert told me where to move the mouse and click, Arsen and Edu were a team, Tommy lead Hubi and Stefan and David completed the starting grid. Tommy and Hubi managed a 109, Robert guided me to a 54 on 10 3BV to which Arsen and Edu got close with a 55 on 14 3BV. Sure, it was a highly unofficial side-event that almost got cancelled and the single best beginner time might not be representative, but it was a lot of fun and definitely worth to be played again at the next tournament.

Only seconds after team-blind the world championship commenced. I had big problems getting used to the cursor speed and was happy to finish 5 sub25s on intermediate within the first 5 minutes, after which I switched to expert for the next 90 minutes. During the next 20 minutes I got a bit nervous, since I just seemed incapable of reaching my normal playing speed. But eventually after 35 minutes and only seconds after my second sub50 I pulled off a 41.67 (42). Normally you would assume that setting a tournament record would help you calm down if you are nervous, this was actually the case, but soon after my 42, Tommy pulled a 43. The match was open again, at least for the next 20 minutes until I did a 43 as well. Now the ball was in Tommy's field and unless he should get a couple of really good games or I should fail epically on intermediate, I was on a good way to win. No big surprises during the remaining time and after 3 hours all players were awarded a medal and the top3 also received a trophy (see my YouTube channel for a video of that).

After the tournament we headed to Tommy's place and then to the bowling. After 'underperforming' at bowling at my 3 previous tournaments, I was quite happy with a sum of over 300 for 3 rounds – Arsen beat all competition with >160 points in the second round and 382 over 3 rounds. After a throw in which Tommy hit 9 pins, the machine dropped the last pin, leaving Tommy with a second throw at an empty lane (see video as well). We headed back to Tommy's place for some beers, talked about the Tournament, Minesweeper in general, talked a lot about cubing, solved cubes against the clock, Tommy showed us his amazing beatboxing skills and at the end when everybody except Tommy and me had left, the two of us spent the remaining hours until I had to leave to the train station watching some of the replays from the tournament until I dozed off for a few seconds. At 7am I got my train back to Munich, 5 hours later I arrived at home, tired but happy about a truly great Minesweeper tournament which was a lot of fun.

Fritz Löhner
22 Sep 2011