

WORLD SENIOR ■ FRENCH THEORY ■ HIKARU ON TOUR

CHESS LIFE

JANUARY 2026 ■ USChess.org



CHESS on BROADWAY

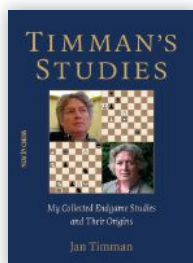


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Timman's Studies

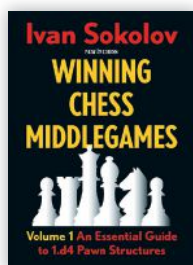
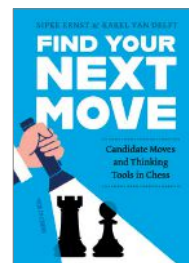
Jan Timman

In *Timman's Studies*, Jan Timman presents 160 of his finest endgame compositions, revealing their origins and creative process. A unique glimpse into the mind of a grandmaster who found artistry and inspiration in endgame studies.

Find Your Next Move

Sipke Ernst and Karel van Delft

The candidate move is perhaps the most elusive concept in chess theory. It seems straightforward and methodical enough: when considering a move, you make a list of 'candidates' in your mind, compare their merits, and make your choice. But how do you determine what a candidate move is, and how do you proceed from there?



Winning Chess Middlegames – Revised Edition

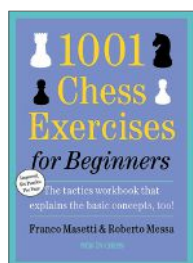
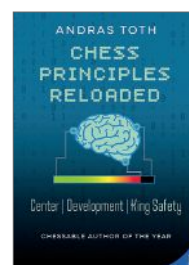
Ivan Sokolov

Ever wondered why grandmasters take only seconds to see what's really going on in a chess position? It's all about structures, as Ivan Sokolov explains in this groundbreaking book. It addresses the often ignored but extremely important topic of pawn structures, divided into four main types: doubled pawns, isolated pawns, hanging pawns and pawn majorities.

Chess Principles Reloaded

Andras Toth

IM Andras Toth's coaching experience has taught him that a common weakness among ambitious improvers, club players, and even seasoned experts is their failure to fully grasp some basic chess principles or their tendency to neglect them. This book will help make you more confident in your decision-making by reviving the most essential principles of the game.



1001 Chess Exercises for Beginners

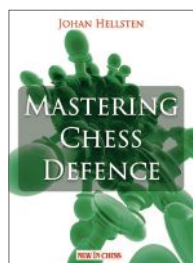
Franco Masetti & Roberto Messa

There are two types of books on tactics: those that introduce the concepts followed by some examples, and workbooks that contain numerous exercises. This tactics book does both: the authors explain the basic tactical ideas *and* provide an enormous amount of exercises for each different theme.

Ulf – The Attacker!

Thomas Engqvist

Swedish chess legend Ulf Andersson was a positional genius with a crystal clear style. The former world number 4 rarely lost a game and consistently scored victories from quiet positions. But he could also be a fierce attacker. This book offers 56 thrilling games, both entertaining and instructive.



Mastering Chess Defence

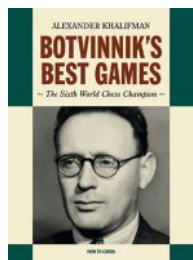
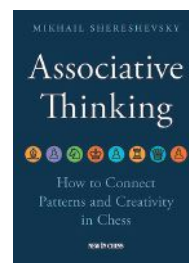
Johan Hellsten

All chess players know that they need to study tactics, calculation, and openings, but when it comes to defense, far too many wait until they're under pressure. The truth is that more games are lost because of defensive mistakes than strategic ones. This book offers the training you need to be prepared and defend.

Associative Thinking

Mikhail Shereshevsky

One of the most respected chess trainers in the world introduces an important but little-explored topic: associative thinking. It is not about specific pawn structures, but about more abstract things. For example, what is the best interaction between knight and pawn?



Botvinnik's Best Games

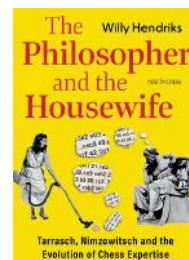
Alexander Khalifman

Mikhail Botvinnik is widely regarded as one of the greatest chess players ever. He was the World Champion from 1948 until 1963, with two short interruptions. For this modern biography, the Russian grandmaster Alexander Khalifman has selected and annotated more than fifty of Botvinnik's best games.

The Philosopher and the Housewife

Willy Hendriks

This is the fascinating story of the lifelong rivalry between the two most vain chess players in history: Siegbert Tarrasch and Aron Nimzowitsch. They clashed as personalities, players, and chess writers, both searching for the truth in chess but with very different perspectives. IM Willy Hendriks offers a fantastic and often highly entertaining look at this great controversy.



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CHESSLIFE

January

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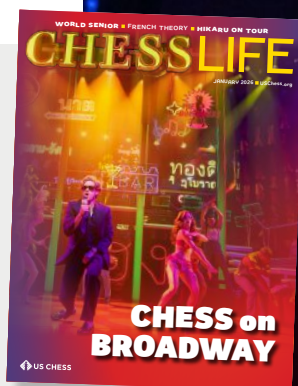
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Downriver Chess marks a new Amtrak route with a trio of events.
BY ANDREW SQUITIRO

ON THE COVER

It might be the theater nerd in me, but when I heard that *Chess* was coming back to Broadway with a new book, I was excited. When I learned that Nicholas Christopher (seen right), Lea Michele, and Aaron Tveit were involved, I was thrilled. Rick Massimo saw the show and reports from the Imperial Theatre.

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EF: \$290 online only by 1/15/26; ALL \$350 after. All teams: any changes at site or after entering — \$30 charge. **ENTRY MAXIMUM IS 330 TEAMS.** Enter early!

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state (CT, DE, MD, MA, NJ, NY (Benjamin Award), PA, VA), each plaque; Top future team (all players under age 10), Top military college, Top parent/child (2 pairs, one parent, one child), each special plaque.

ADDITIONAL PRIZES: Best Player 1-4 and top alternate, all 6-0 scores, each digital clock. Biggest individual upset each round, engraved Cross pen. Entry fee refunded Sunday night to team with best "chess related" name. Best "chess related costumes or gimmick," 1st — gourmet dinner for 4. 2nd — gourmet dinner for 4. Surprises and special giveaways each round.

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For help forming teams contact Worldamateurtteam@njscf.org

Visit new.uschess.org/2026-world-amateur-team-us-team-east for more details.



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She is also a two-time

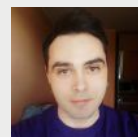
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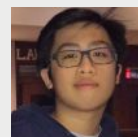
at lichess.org/coach/Mginsburg.



IM NIKOLAOS NTIRLIS

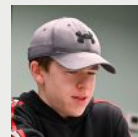
(French Defense) is an ICCF IM and the author of multiple critically acclaimed opening books with Quality Chess.

By day he serves as partnership manager at Databox. Follow him online at x.com/nikolaosntirlis.



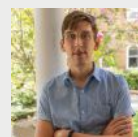
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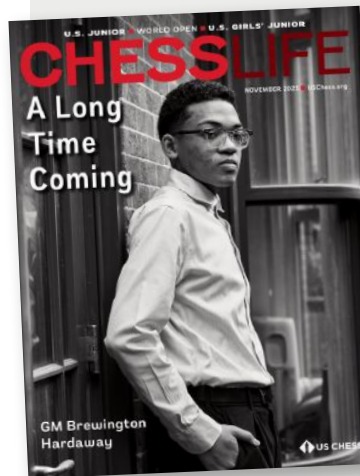
Alice Lee

"I'd like to thank the U.S. Chess Trust for their support in my chess career. I have had the honor of receiving the prestigious Samford Fellowship, which has given me encouragement and support for my chess."



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Congratulations!

I was excited to receive the latest issue of *Chess Life* (November 2025) with GM Brewington Hardaway on its cover. Hours earlier I published a video on YouTube with his game against GM Fidel Corrales Jimenez from the 2025 Princeton Open. This is a game that he selected and suggested I present.

I congratulate Brewington on becoming a grandmaster, and I offer my best wishes for even greater success in the future.

Charilaos Aneziris
Via email

John Hartmann responds:

Interested parties may wish to check out Aneziris' video. It's available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHXJP2g-UCC.

I Wonder

Regarding Awonder Liang's September article on the Grenke Freestyle Open: He claims in his notes to move 12 of his game with Daniel Dardha that "Black is way better after 13. Qh6 Qe6 14. Bxf8 Qxh6+ 15. Bxh6 Be6."

This might be true, but doesn't 14. Bf6 win for White? How can Black prevent mate on g7? 14. ... Nf5 15. Qg5+ is mate, so Black must play 14. ... Qxf6 15. Qxf6 Ng6, which leaves White with a number of easily

winning lines. Dardha may have seen this, leading him to choose a simpler way to lose.

Bob Avery
Via email

John Hartmann responds:

This is a good try, but Black has another way to defend against mate: If 14. Bf6 Qg4! and Black should win.

I love letters like this. Please, readers, keep testing our analysis and writing us with attempted busts!

Dueling
Wolfgangs

You've probably heard this a million times already, but I'll add my voice to theirs. The game in problem #6 of Soltis' quiz for October was not played between Wolfgang Uhlmann and Ortvin Sarapu. The player with the white pieces was instead Wolfgang Unzicker, and the game was from the 1970 Olympiad in Siegen.

Dr. Jeffrey Neil Burch
Via email

John Hartmann responds:

Actually, you're the first to write! You are correct that we got the wrong Wolfgang there. Apologies to you and to both Wolfgangs for the mix up.

Editor's Note:

We produce the January issue in December, and as I write these words the holiday season is already upon us.

The chess world has suffered more than our share of losses in 2025, but there have been plenty of bright spots too. I hope that our game, and this magazine, have brought solace and entertainment when you've needed it.

My best wishes for 2026.

John Hartmann

Send your letters to letters@uschess.org. Letters are subject to editing for style, length, and content.

Local Hero

A California city honors one of its great chess figures.

BY GM JOEL BENJAMIN



DAVIS, CALIF., A SMALL CITY about 75 miles northeast of San Francisco, is best known for hosting a clock simul by a young Bobby Fischer in 1964. But in the last few years, a great new tradition has arisen there: the Stephen Sosnick Memorial Chess Festival.

Sosnick, a professor of agricultural economics at University of California, Davis, from 1957 to 1991, was a long-time influential player in the local chess community. He may have started the UC Davis chess club in the late 1950s, and won championships in both Davis and Sacramento. A cerebral intellectual with a swashbuckling style of chess, Sosnick peaked at the Expert level. His passion for chess never waned, as he competed in tournaments in the last weeks before he passed away in 2014.

Sosnick's chess fervor didn't pass on to his children, but with awareness of his love of the game, they decided a chess festival would be a fitting memorial.

Beryl Sosnick, the eldest sibling, volunteered to head up the organization. The planning took off after she met local master John Langreck, whose knowledge of the chess landscape helped make the dream a reality. John's involvement was a boon for me as well: Connecting through a mutual friend, we had recently started a coach-student relationship. This led to John inviting me to be the resident grandmaster in June 2022. Fortunately, I was able to work out a scheduling conflict (thanks to Arlene Kleiman in Memphis) and I have been back ever since.

The first event proceeded in the face of tragedy, as Beryl passed away from cancer three days before the first event. The mantle was passed to her siblings Erika

Rosenbaum and Randall Sosnick, who have expertly and meticulously planned subsequent festivals.

The 2025 event was held April 4-6, a new time slot that permitted more participation from UC Davis students, who were still in session. This move helped produce a record turnout, with 116 players in Saturday's action (G/30+10) and 100 players in Sunday's rapid (G/15+10).

The festival comprises more than just a couple of tournaments, and I believe the interaction I have with the participants makes this event so special. We started off, as always, with a simul on Friday night. This year the 26 players gave me one of my hardest workouts, nicking me for two losses and a few draws. With a tight schedule this year, we used the lunch breaks on Saturday and Sunday for my lectures. I was able to inform the players a bit about the chess adventures of Stephen Sosnick, and analyze the most famous game played in Davis, Bobby Fischer's win over Ojars Celle from the 1964 clock simul (a sneak peek from my forthcoming book on Fischer's best games).

After posting their results, most of the players would bring their scoresheets to my room for game analysis. With the moves projected onto a screen, the group could learn from other people's games as well as their own. For me this is the highlight of the weekend. Most of my "customers" were players from the lower rating sections, and most of those kids. I was happy to bring a level of instruction they are not used to seeing in their modestly sized chess community.

As the rapid event produced fewer usable

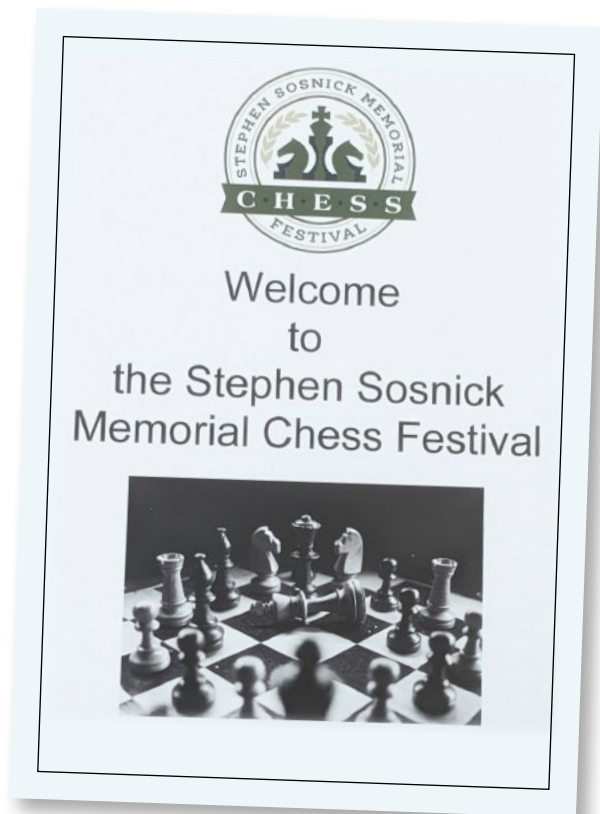
scoresheets, we spent time on Sunday tracking the live *Chess.com* coverage of the top boards next door. John Langreck provided puzzles for a solving competition, with signed copies of my books available as prizes.

The tournaments were conducted in four sections — Open, Under 1800, Under 1200, and unrated. The \$250 first prize was collected by FM Derek Wu, recent graduate of UC Davis (the campus is just gorgeous, by the way) and brother of top junior WGM Rochelle Wu. Derek swept all five games over the players who tied for second-third, Brandon Yang Xie and upstart Arvin Agrawal. Phineas Horowitz and Michael Aigner rounded out the prize list. Aigner also serves as the event's publicity director. A prominent coach, Aigner is arguably the face of the local chess community.

Si Hao Huang triumphed in the Under 1800 section; Yang Liu swept through the Under 1200, and Charlie Mellema took the honors in the unrated section.

In the rapid tournament, top seed IM Gabriel Bick battled back from a first-round upset at the hands of Ziata Mokeeva to tie for first at 5½/7, upending Derek Wu in the last round. Brendan Yang Xie also lost to Bick but tied for first, his only other blemish a draw with Wu. Russell Garcia Velasquez took third place with 5, followed by Wu and Carlos Rangel at 4½.

Cesar Bercilla Tamongdong and Jorah



Razumeyko tied for first in the Under 1800 section, and Siddharth Sonti won the Under 1200. Charlie Mellema completed a week-end double with 7-0 in the unrated section.

The best laid plans for a mid-size tournament hinge on a skilled tournament director, and NTD/IA John McCumiskey, who has helmed all the Sosnick tournaments to date, is one of the finest. This year he had an extremely qualified assistant in NTD/IA Judit Sztaray, who brought in and administered the DGT boards. The boards enabled live coverage on *Chess.com* and, in turn, these annotations.

Wu's convincing win in the action included victories over two masters as well as the third-place finisher.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E60)

Arvin Agrawal (1840)

Derek Wu (2174)

Sosnick Memorial Chess Festival Action (3), 04.05.2025

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. h4 Bg7 4. Nc3 d6 5. e4 Nc6 6. d5 Ne5 7. Nf3 Nxf3+ 8. Qxf3 h5 9. Bg5 0-0 10. Qe3 c6 11. f3 Qa5 12. Qd2 cxd5 13. cxd5 Bd7 14. Bd3 Rfc8 15. Nb5 Qd8 Black could also comfortably play the endgame here, as 15. ... Qxd2+ 16. Kxd2 Nh7 17. Bxe7?! Bh6+ 18. Kd1 Bxb5 19. Bxb5 Bf4 is to his advantage.

16. a4 a6 17. Nc3 b5 18. axb5 axb5 19. 0-0 b4 20. Ne2 b3 21. Kh1 Nh7 22. Be3 e6 23. Bf2 exd5 24. exd5 Ra2 25. Rxa2 bxa2 26. Ra1 Ra8 27. Bc4 Ra4 28. Bb3 Rxb4+



29. Bxb4?

White's dark squares are indefensible after this capture. White could still keep things balanced with 29. Kg1; e.g. 29. ... Bb5 30. Nd4 Be5 31. Nxb5 Bh2+ 32. Kf1 Bg3 33. Rxa2 (or 33. Kg1) 33. ... Rh1+ 34. Ke2 Qe8+ 35. Kd3! Bxf2 36. Nc7 Qe1.

29. ... Qxh4+ 30. Kg1 Bb5 31. g3

Black should also win after 31. Qf4 Qe7

32. Bc4 Bh6! 33. Qxh6 Bxc4 34. Nc3 Ng5! 35. Nxa2 Qe3+ 36. Kh1 Bxa2 37. Rxa2 Qc1+ 38. Kh2 Nxf3+, etc.

31. ... Qh3 32. Nf4 Qxg3+ 33. Ng2 Ng5 34. Bd1 Nh3+ 35. Kh1 Bf1 36. f4 Nf2+ 37. Kg1 Qxg2 mate.

The decisive game in the rapid featured some noteworthy swings before Bick executed a technical finish.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, MOSCOW VARIATION (B51)

IM Gabriel Bick (2370)

Derek Wu (2174)

Sosnick Memorial Chess Festival Rapid (7), 04.06.2025

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bb5+ Nd7 4. Ba4 Ngf6 5. 0-0 e6 6. Re1 Be7 7. c3 a6 8. d4 b5 9. Bc2 Bb7 10. Nbd2 0-0 11. Nf1 Rc8 12. Ng3 cxd4 13. cxd4 Re8 14. Bd2 Nf8 15. Bd3 Bc6 16. Rc1 Qb6 17. Qe2 Ng6 18. h3 Qb7 19. a4 Bd7 20. Ra1 Ra8 21. axb5 Bxb5 22. Ra5 Bxd3 23. Qxd3 Rec8 24. Bc3 d5 25. e5 Nd7 26. Rea1 Rc6 27. R5a4 Bf8 28. Ne2 Ne7 29. Ng5 Ng6 30. g3 h6 31. Nf3 Ne7 32. Ne1 Nc8 33. Nc2 Nb8 34. f4 Nb6 35. R4a2 Nc4 36. f5 Nd7 37. Nf4 Be7 38. fxe6 fxe6 39. h4 Rf8 40. Kg2 Qb3 41. Rxa6?



White maintains a nice advantage with a solid move like 41. Ne1.

41. ... Rxa6?

When you see a good move, look for a better one! 41. ... Nxb2! collapses White's position.

42. Rxa6 Qxc2+ 43. Qxc2 Ne3+ 44. Kh3 Nxc2 45. Ra7 Nxe5

Missing a spectacular equalizer in 45. ... g5! 46. Nxe6 Rf1! 47. Rxd7 Ne3 when Black's mating threats force a repetition.

46. Rxe7 Nc6 47. Rxe6 N2xd4?

This leaves the knights awkwardly tethered to each other. 47. ... N6xd4 was correct.

48. Rd6 Rf5 49. Nxd5

49. b4! was the way to exploit Black's vulnerable pieces. Now 49. ... Nb5 gave an opportunity to fight in the endgame.

49. ... Rf3?! 50. Bxd4 Nxd4 51. Ne7+ Kf7

52. Rxd4 Kxe7 53. Re4+ Kd6 54. h5?

White forces a win with 54. Rf4! Rb3 55. Rf7 Ke6 (55. ... g5 56. hxg5 hxg5 57. Kg4) 56. Rxd4 Kf6 57. Rg4 Rxb2 58. h5 winning the h-pawn.

54. ... Rb3 55. Rg4 Rb7 56. b4 Ke5 57. Rf4 Ke6 58. Kg2 Rb5 59. g4 Rg5 60. Kf3 g6 61. hxg6 Rxd6 62. Rf5 Rg8?

The king can't defend the h-pawn, so it should eyeball the passed b-pawn: 62. ... Kd7 would hold.

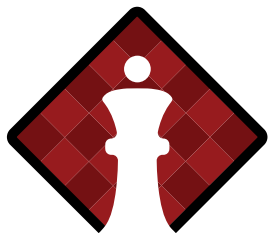
63. b5 Ra8 64. Rh5 Ra3+ 65. Ke2 Rb3 66. Rxh6+ Ke5 67. b6 Kf4 68. Rg6 Ke4 69. Kd2 Kd5 70. Kc2 Rb4 71. Kc3 Rb1 72. g5 Kc5 73. Rf6 Rg1 74. g6 Rg3+ 75. Kd2 Kd5, and Black resigned.

IM John Donaldson was the marquee entrant but unfortunately had to withdraw after becoming ill on Saturday. While the primary focus is maximum service to the local community, chess stars from the Bay Area are especially welcome. John found his way to the festival last year and was sufficiently impressed by the endeavor to join our organizing committee!

That's one example of this continuing heartwarming story bringing fun, learning, and friendly competition to Northern California. The 2026 event returns to the UC-Davis Conference Center April 10-12 and information is available at sosnickchess.com. I hope to see everyone there! ♠



Joel Benjamin speaks in front of a portrait of Sosnick.



US CHESS women

New Grants

▶ US CHESS IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE 23 grant awards (up from 17 in 2024) under the US Chess Women's program. With support from the Saint Louis Chess Club, US Chess annually offers grants to nonprofit affiliate members who are promoting programs that support women and girls in their respective communities. The 2025 grant recipients are:

Invent The Future (Fremont, CA); Chess Girls DC Nonprofit Organization (Washington, DC); Avila Royals Chess Booster Club, Inc. (Edinburg, TX); Smart Diehl Academy (Mint Hill, NC); Mint Hill Elementary School (Matthews, NC); Think Like a Queen (Doral, FL); Chicago Chess Foundation (Chicago, IL); Azerbaijani Society of New England in partnership with Melrose Public Schools in Melrose, MA (Boston, MA); Chess4Girls (San Diego, CA); The Greene School (Jupiter,

FL); Suvidha International Foundation (Folsom, CA); Medina PTA (Bellevue, WA); Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, KY); KIPP Harmony Academy (Baltimore, MD); RGV Chess Lab (Brownsville, TX); My Chess World (Mercer Island, WA); Alaska Chess Federation (Anchorage, AK); Progress With Chess (Cleveland, OH); Hunter College Campus Schools (New York, NY); Chess Enrichment Association (Sioux Falls, SD); Girls4Chess (Saratoga, CA); Gwinnett Public Library Foundation (Smyrna, GA); Michigan Chess Association (Novi, MI)

DeVaughn Croxton, the US Chess director of programs, said "US Chess is proud of the efforts of our awardees to promote the growth and retention of female players. These grants help bolster the efforts of our affiliates to strengthen the chess community across the country. They are part of a larger program initiative to elevate women and girls in chess and are funded by the Saint Louis Chess Club."

Be on the lookout for impact stories posted to *Chess Life Online* highlighting the wonderful activities that these organizations will host. Congratulations to the 2025 Women's Grant awardees! To learn more about some of last year's recipients, visit <https://new.uschess.org/news/2024-25-us-chess-womens-grant-recipients-share-experiences>. ♠

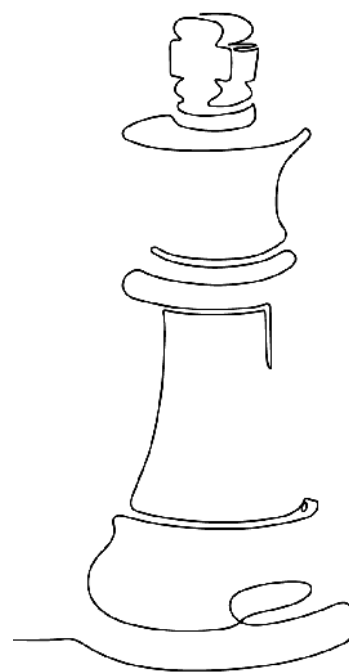
Updating US Chess Ratings from Foreign FIDE Events

▶ EFFECTIVE JAN. 1, 2026, US CHESS WILL automatically update the US Chess ratings of all members with active memberships based on their performance in FIDE-rated events held outside US Chess jurisdiction. This change aims to improve the accuracy and consistency of player ratings.

- Only players with an established US Chess regular rating are eligible for updates based on results from foreign FIDE events.
- Following each new FIDE rating list, the US Chess office will identify all current members who: Appear with a "USA" flag in the FIDE rating list, and

have played at least one FIDE-rated game included in that list.

- Additionally, the office may include other U.S. residents who are not marked with a USA flag if they are deemed eligible.
- Starting with the Jan. 1, 2026, update, all eligible players who have participated in FIDE-rated events will have their results automatically incorporated into their US Chess ratings. The previous opt-in/opt-out process is discontinued. The US Chess Executive Director must approve any exceptions.
- For each identified player, all opponents and their FIDE ratings are recorded; opponents without a FIDE rating are excluded from the calculation. Opponents' FIDE ratings are converted to the US Chess scale using the standard conversion outlined in Section 2.1 of the Ratings specs. ♠



LINE ART: SHUTTERSTOCK



Happy New Year

from the Saint Louis Chess Campus



LEARN TO
**Read & Write
Chess**

by Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield



The Saint Louis Chess Club and World Chess Hall of Fame & Galleries make it easy to improve your game with free resources, including Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield's ***Learn to Read and Write Chess***, and lessons on the Club's Youtube channel.

Paradoxical

When irony trumps logic

BY GM ANDY SOLTIS

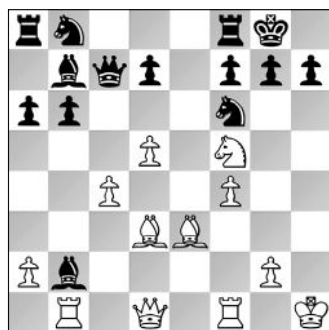
IT SEEMED NATURAL WHEN GM Alexander Grischuk tied for second in the 2024 World Rapid Championship. After all, he's a three-time world blitz champion and a five-time Candidate, and was one of the world's top 10 players for more than a decade.

But knowledgeable fans were surprised: Grischuk is a notorious time trouble addict. How can he play so slowly in classical games but excel in speed games like this?

SICILIAN DEFENSE, KAN VARIATION (B41)

GM Alexander Grischuk (2689)
GM Rinat Jumabayev (2573)
World Blitz Championship, New York,
12.30.2024

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. c4 Nf6 6. Nc3 Qc7 7. Be2 b6 8. O-O Bb7 9. Nd5!? exd5 10. exd5 Bd6 11. Nf5 O-O 12. Bg5 Bxh2+? 13. Kh1 Ne4 14. Be3! Be5 15. Bd3 Nf6? 16. f4! Bxb2 17. Rb1



Now 17. ... Ba3 walks into 18. Bxb6 Qc8 19. Bd4!, e.g., 19. ... Ne8 20. Qh5! and mates.

17. ... Nxd5 18. cxd5 Bf6 19. Bxb6 Qc3

20. Rb3! Qxb3 21. Qxb3 a5 22. Bc5, Black resigned.

Grischuk is not unique. There are many experienced players, amateurs as well as masters, who seem to handle their clock minutes much better when they don't have many.

This is a paradox, and there are several of them in chess. For examples: *Why do good defenders so often get poor positions? How can players with remarkable memory fall into opening traps?* and *Why do so many blunders occur in the endgame, when there are so few pieces?*

Paradoxes like these challenge our belief that chess is ruled by logic. Take the mystery of speed chess:

Conventional wisdom tells us there are fast players and slow ones. Bobby Fischer and Mikhail Tal were fast. They were great in five-minute games and rarely short of time in five-hour games. In contrast, there are slow players. They get time-pressured in classical games, are poor at rapid and worse at blitz.

But there are also paradoxical players: GM Viktor Korchnoi was notorious for blundering when he had seconds left in classical games. Yet he finished third, behind Fischer and Tal, in the first superstar speed tournament, Herceg Novi 1970. In America, GM Walter Browne loved speed — he created a magazine called *Blitz Chess* — but tried for years to cure his time-trouble disease.

How can we explain such players? Perhaps they feel they can afford to be paradoxical. They know from experience that they can burn middlegame minutes, calculating long variations, because later on they can play well, relying on intuition.

There is a similar explanation of why great players like Emanuel Lasker and Tigran Petrosian so often got no advantage in the opening as White and inferior positions

as Black: They could afford to. They knew their superb defensive skills would likely repair whatever damage they suffered in the opening.

Petrosian's close friend Yefim Geller said he refused to change. "There is no power in the world that can make him really prepare for a game!" Geller said, according to Igor Zaitsev's book *Attacking the Strongpoint*.

Moving on to the matter of memory/opening traps: One reason masters are masters is they develop a specific kind of chess memory. It allows them to remember elaborate opening analysis. It also permits some of them to play several games simultaneously without sight of the boards.

But how can someone who once held the record for the most blindfold simul games lose this way?

PHILIDOR'S DEFENSE (C41)

Theodore Tylor
George Koltanowski
Hastings, 12.31.1929

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d6 3. Nc3 Nbd7 4. e4 e5 5. Bc4 Be7 6. O-O O-O 7. Qe2 exd4 8. Nxd4



8. ... Re8?? 9. Bxf7+ Kxf7 10. Ne6! Siegbert Tarrasch, an all-time great, had

QUIZ FOR JANUARY

► **IT'S GETTING HARDER** and harder to win a game in fewer than 20 moves. But when it happens the method is usually instructive. Here are some of the sparkling finishes to instructive miniatures played in the past year. Your task is to find the fastest winning line of play. This will usually mean the forced win of a decisive amount of material, such as a rook or minor piece. But keep an eye out for queen traps and mating attacks. For solutions, see page 63.

PROBLEM 1

IM Bogdan Podlesnik
Zeljko Rovcanin



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 2

Paul Peglau
Iwan Cave



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 3

IM Marcin Krysztofiak
Tomasz Obrycki



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 4

Domonkos Szakmary
IM Simon Lamaze



BLACK TO MOVE

PROBLEM 5

Flawian Krawczyk
Aleksander Choroszej



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 6

GM Jonathan Mestel
Stjepan Novak



WHITE TO MOVE

famously lost in a very similar way. Black, one of the world's top 50 players, must have known that game.

10. ... Kxe6 11. Qc4+ d5 12. exd5+ Kf7 13. d6+ Nd5! 14. dxe7! Rxe7 15. Nxd5 Ne5 16. Qf4+ Kg8 17. Nxe7+ Qxe7 18. Bd2

With an extra Exchange and a pawn, White won easily.

How did this happen to George Koltanowski? He was a blindfold specialist who set the record by playing 34 games simultaneously. Yet his memory short-circuited in this and other classical games.

This paradox remains a mystery. Here's one with multiple explanations: *Why do so many blunders occur in the endgame, when there are so few pieces?*

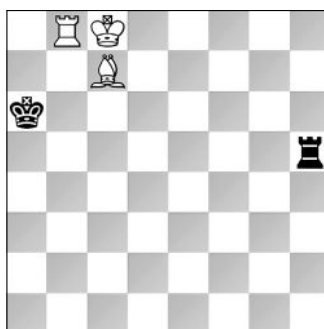
The easy answer is the fog of fatigue. Players make more grievous errors when tired.

Another answer is there are few general principles to guide us in an endgame the way they do earlier. "A knight on the rim ..." or "pawns should capture towards the center" do not work as well. Instead, we have to calculate complex variations.

Yet another explanation: Game-losing blunders are more visible in endings because there is no time to recover.

THE LONG HAUL

GM Alexandre Danin (2579)
GM Sergei Azarov (2589)
Czech Team Championship 2016

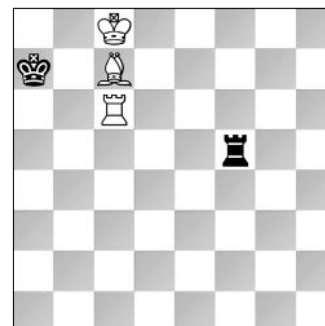


BLACK TO MOVE

Back in the middlegame, an error by Black might prompt the comment "Now White has very good winning chances." But in a simplified ending like this there are no "chances." Positions are either forced wins or lost.

So when Black chose **228. ... Rf5** (yes, 228) it was naïve to ask, "Is the move good, bad or just one of many mediocre alternatives?" There are no mediocre alternatives. This

move is horrible because **229. Rb6+!** wins after **229. ... Ka7 230. Rc6!**.



The threat is **231. Bb8+** and **232. Ra6** mate. And **230. ... Rb5** is no salvation in view of a rook move along the c-file or **231. Bd6** and **232. Bc5+**.

So the rest was **230. ... Rf8+ 231. Bd8 Rg8 232. Rc7+! Ka8 233. Rc1 Rg7 234. Bc7 Rg8+ 235. Kd7 Rg7+ 236. Kc6 Rg6+ 237. Bd6 Rg7 238. Rh1 Rh7 239. Re1** and **Black resigned** in view of **240. Re8+** followed by a bishop check on c5 and **Re8-a8** mate. If **239. ... Rh8 240. Ra1** mate. This set a record for the longest decisive classical game.

It's not just the masters. Everyone may have a paradoxical quality. How paradoxical are you? ♦

Walk Right In

King walks, Part 1

BY IM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

T

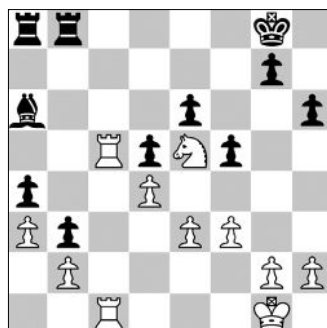
HE FIRST LESSON WE LEARN about the king is that it is weak; it's vulnerable; it needs to be put in a safe place as soon as possible, and does not become a valuable attacker until much later in the game. This is what makes king walks — a king fearlessly marching all around the board when all the enemy pieces are present — so fascinating.

Sometimes king walks are involuntary, when the king is forced to run for his life, and it's satisfying to see a king escape from a mating attack and find safety on the other side of the board. But the beauty of a king walk lies in the voluntary aspect of it. There are several reasons behind a king walk, such as preparing an attack, avoiding an attack, or becoming an attacking piece himself. In this column, we will see examples of a king as an attacking piece.

One of the most famous and illustrious examples of this concept was played by future (at the time of this game) World Champion Alexander Alekhine in 1922.

ON THE ATTACK

Alexander Alekhine
Frederick Dewhurst Yates
London (10), 08.12.1922



WHITE TO MOVE

Alekhine already has a great position. He controls the only open file and his knight on e5 is better than Black's light-squared bishop. Because Yates has put all his pawns on light squares, the bishop lacks mobility. It's on an open diagonal, but there is nothing of significance going on on that diagonal, and the bishop cannot attack any of White's pawns. On the other hand, the knight has the freedom to move around and attack targets. White's pieces are all well-placed, but so far Black is hanging on. Alekhine needs the assistance of one more piece to seal the deal.

24. Kf2

The beginning of the king march. The e5-square is currently occupied, but that's where the king is headed.

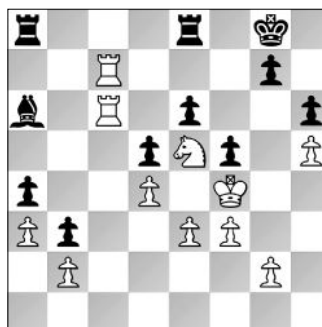
24. ... Kh7

Black can't really do anything active and has to wait and see what his opponent will do. Trading all the rooks with 24. ... Rc8 leads to a material loss: 25. Rxc8+ Rxc8 26. Rxc8+ Bxc8 27. Nd3! and once the knight lands on c5, either the a4- or e6-pawn will fall.

25. h4

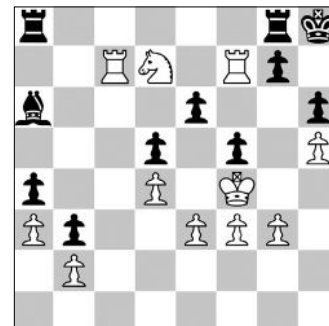
Now to fix the kingside pawn structure.

25. ... Rf8 26. Kg3 Rfb8 27. Rc7 Bb5 28. R1c5 Ba6 29. R5c6 Re8 30. Kf4 Kg8 31. h5



With the kingside pawns fixed, Alekhine presses on.

31. ... Bf1 32. g3 Ba6 33. Rf7 Kh7 34. Rcc7 Rg8 35. Nd7 Kh8



36. Nf6!

The black king is now in a mating net.

36. ... Rgf8

Not 36. ... gxf6 37. Rh7 mate.

37. Rxc7 Rxf6 38. Ke5!, Black resigned.

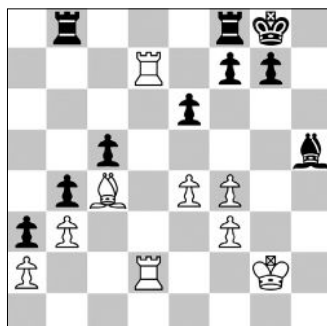
The white king reaches e5 and dominates the black rook. Attempts to save the rook lead to mate: 38. ... Raf8 39. Rh7+ Kg8 40. Rcg7 mate or 38. ... Rff8 39. Rh7+ Kg8 40. Rcg7 mate.

The white king was a vital part of Alekhine's final tactical blow. Even with all the rooks on the board, it was perfectly safe on the centralized square.

In more modern times, both Vaishali and Duda have used their kings in a similar fashion.

WALTZING IN

GM Jan-Krzysztof Duda (2760)
GM Richard Rapport (2763)
Tata Steel Masters (1), 01.15.2022



WHITE TO MOVE

32. Kg3

The king joins the action. White's idea is to defend the pawn on f3 with Rd2-d3, followed by Kg3-h4, when the bishop on h5 is going to start to feel uncomfortable.

32. ... g6

Rapport wants to keep his bishop on h5 safe but clears a perfect path for White's king entry.

33. R2d3 Rbe8 34. Kh4 Kg7 35. Kg5

As long as the f7-pawn is pinned, the king is safe here.

35. ... Rh8

Black is more or less in *zugzwang*, as he needs to make some kind of a concession.

36. Rc7 Rc8

Black would love to trade a pair of rooks and not let the other rook invade on the 7th rank, but 36. ... Rd8 leaves the e6-pawn hanging. In fact White can take it immediately: 37. Bxe6 Rxd3 38. Rxf7+ Kg8 39. Rd7+ Kf8 40. Rxd3 and White wins.

37. Re7 Rce8 38. Red7 Rhf8 39. Rc7 Rh8

Black should have resisted with 39. ... Rc8. Most likely White would repeat one more time with 40. Rcd7 Rce8 followed by 41. e5, when once again White has optimized his position and Black is out of good options. After 41. ... Rh8 42. Ra7 Ra8 43. Rxa8 Rxa8 44. Rd7 Re8 all the white pieces are perfectly placed, so it's time to strike with 45. f5!, similar to what happened in the game.

40. Rdd7 Rhf8 41. f5, Black resigned.

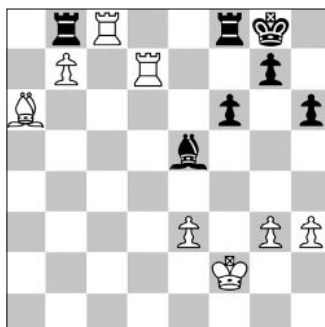
With the assistance of the king, the pawn breakthrough wins the game. Rapport resigned as the pawn is untouchable. After 41. ... gxf5 White's position is so dominant that he doesn't have to rush to take the bishop: 42. exf5 Bxf3 43. fxe6 Be4 44. Rxf7+ Rxf7 45. Rxf7+ Kg8 46. e7 followed by Kg5-f6 and Rf7-f8+.

SIDE TO SIDE

IM Vaishali Rameshbabu (2393)

Charinda Kudzanayi (1710)

FIDE Online Olympiad (1), 08.21.2020



WHITE TO MOVE

Due to the far advanced passed b-pawn, White is completely winning here. Black's only hope is the opposite-colored bishops and the fact that her dark-squared bishop controls the promotion square. Vaishali finds a winning plan on the other side of the board.

44. g4!

Moving the pawn out from under the attack and securing the light squares.

44. ... Bh2 45. Kf3

The king is headed to g6.

45. ... Be5 46. Ke4 Bh2 47. Kf5 Be5 48.

Kg6, Black resigned.

With the black king in a mating net, it's over.

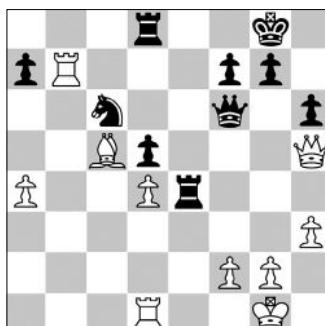
It is no surprise that in a Judit Polgar game the king was used as an attacking piece to deliver checkmate!

KING IN A MATING NET

IM Judit Polgar (2555)

IM Lars Bo Hansen (2525)

Vejstrup, 1989



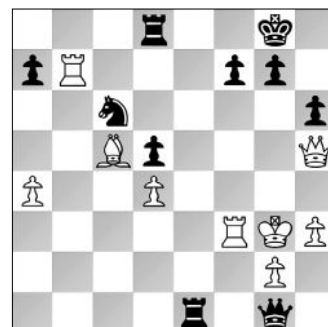
WHITE TO MOVE

27. Rd3!?

The 13-year-old Polgar is determined attack even if it compromises her king's safety.

27. ... Re1+ 28. Kh2 Qxf2 29. Rf3 Qg1+

30. Kg3

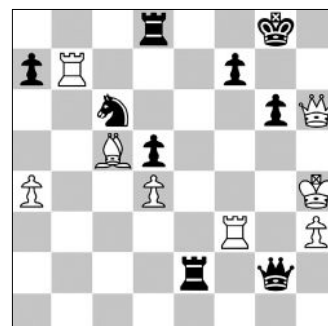


So far, the white king is perfectly safe here and Black has to worry about defending the f7-pawn.

30. ... g6 31. Qxh6 Re2 32. Kh4!

A sneaky trap!

32. ... Qxg2



Forcing a rook trade with 32. ... Qe1+ 33. g3 Re4+ would keep the black king safe. Black has a good game after 34. Rf4 Rxf4+ 35. Qxf4 Qe6.

33. Qg7+!!, Black resigned.

The whole idea behind 32. Kh4! The black king cannot escape via g5 and will get checkmated: 33. ... Kxg7 34. Rxf7+ Kh6 35. Rh7 mate. The white king is perfectly placed on h4!

King walks are not the most common idea in chess, but they're so elegant and unusual. The main prerequisite, of course, is ensuring that the king walk is safe. As we saw in the above examples, when the king becomes an attacking piece, it is almost impossible for the opponent to cope. In the next column, we will explore more strategic examples of king walks. ♠



Chaos, Camaraderie, and Champions



Team USA's wild week in Lima

BY **WGM KATERINA NEMCOVA**



THE PAN-AMERICAN Youth Chess Festival, one of the biggest youth events on the continental calendar, draws hundreds of the most talented kids

from across the Americas each year. This year's edition, held in Lima, Peru, brought together 784 players from 25 countries (including 67 from Team USA), all battling for medals in classical, rapid, and blitz events across age categories ranging from under-8 to under-18. With FIDE titles, norms, and rating points on the line, this festival provided excellent international competing grounds.

The schedule felt like a boot camp. Three days featured double rounds of classical games; two of the so-called “lighter” days squeezed in four or five rounds of rapid chess alongside a classical round, and, after the final classical game, a nine-round blitz capped it all off. Those weren’t the only challenges, as we’ll see later.

Triple Champ

CM Vivan Prakash Mulay deserves special recognition for his complete sweep of the U12 Open. By winning the classical event with 8½/9, he became a back-to-back Pan-Am champion — and then went further, capturing gold in all three formats by adding 8½/9 in rapid and 8/9 in blitz, making him the festival’s only triple crown champion. “We did not expect these results at all,” his father told me.

Vivan played highly aggressive chess, often sacrificing pieces for long-term initiative and positional pressure. Many players are willing to sacrifice when a checkmate is near, but far fewer have the courage to do so for attack and dynamic chances. Let’s take a look at one such game:

A CLASSIC SAC

Daniel Gallegos Quispe (1910)
CM Vivan Prakash Mulay (1993)
Pan-Am Youth Ch (5), Lima, 07.30.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

12. ... Rxc3!?

Excellent decision! Black is quite happy to give up an Exchange to damage White’s pawn structure.

13. bxc3 Qc7!

Black is putting pressure on the doubled pawn now.

14. c4

White prefers to give the pawn back immediately, with hopes of exchanging light-squared bishops.

Another way to defend the c3-pawn is 14. Kb2; Black would have continued putting pressure on the c-file, with his rook and both knights fighting their way toward the white king. Play could go 14. ... 0-0 15. g5 Rc8 16. Rd3 hxc3 17. Bxc3 Nb6 with compensation.

14. ... Bxc4

Better was 14. ... 0-0!?, delaying the trade of light-squared bishops and seeing how White wishes to continue. After 15. Rg1 (or 15. g5 hxc3 16. Bxc3 Rc8) 15. ... Rc8 Black has pressure on the c-file, with ... b7-b5 in mind, hoping to trade on c4 and recapture with the b-pawn, opening the b-file.

15. Bxc4 Qxc4 16. f3 d5!

This move does so much for Black! It gets rid of the backward pawn, opens up a line for the dark-squared bishop, and attacks the center.

17. exd5?

A natural response but not a good one. It lets Black activate the knight toward the center.

17. ... Nxd5 18. Rxd5

An understandable decision for White. The knight in the center was very strong.

18. ... Qxd5

Black stands clearly better here — a pawn up, with the healthier pawn structure and active attacking chances. Step by step, Black converted these advantages into a well-earned full point.

19. Qe2 0-0 20. h4 Rc8 21. g5 h5 22. Rd1 Qc6 23. Kb1 g6 24. Bc1! Nb6 25. Qe4 Qxe4 26. fxe4 Rc4

And Black eventually won.

Other Winners

Devansh Vellanki arrived with high expectations in the U8 Open. As the 2024 National K-1 Champion and the top seed here, the pressure was on, and he lived up to it in style, scoring 7½/9 to claim the gold medal on tiebreak — edging out teammate Harrison Cai, who also finished on 7½/9 to take silver. Devansh’s success didn’t stop there: He also earned bronze in rapid and silver in blitz, making him a triple podium finisher. Let’s take a look at one of his games, where he smoothly defeated his opponent:

STRIKE IN THE CENTER

Devansh Vellanki (1767)
Jose Adriano Urquiza Apaza (1516)
Pan-Am Youth Ch (3), Lima, 07.29.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

16. ... g5?

Black is overly ambitious, aiming to attack the white king along either the g-file or the h-file.

17. f5!?

Smart decision. White will not allow opening of either file and instead marches forward. It was even stronger to break the center open with 17. d5! immediately, though White carried out the same idea later in the game. After 17. ... exd5 comes 18. Rd1 with great play.

17. ... exf5?

Clearing the path for the white d-pawn was not best. Black had to try to keep the tension and go for a queenside castle with 17. ... Qd7!.



CM Vivan
Prakash Mulay

18. d5! Na7 19. Rd1 f4 20. Bxa7!

Trading the bishop for that awkward-looking knight is not an easy decision, and many players would hesitate here. But it's a strong move — White should avoid losing time with retreats and instead keep the momentum with his pawns.

20. ... Rxa7 21. d6! Bf8 22. d7+! Ke7 23. Qf2!

White is playing excellent chess, and this last move shows good positional understanding — it's time to improve the queen, and the c5-square is a perfect spot for her.

23. ... Ra8 24. Qc5+ Ke6 25. Nd4+, Black resigned.

Capturing the pawn on d7 would run into a discovered attack, leading either to check-mate or decisive material loss.

In the Girls U10 Section, WCM Abigail Zhou entered as a top contender — the highest-rated player, a returning Pan-Am champion, and the 2024 World silver medalist. She more than lived up to those expectations, going undefeated with 8/9 to claim gold in classical, and later added a blitz gold. Team USA's Sarah Nguyen earned the silver medal, Elizabeth Zhou the bronze, and Olivia Xu the fifth-place medal in the main event.

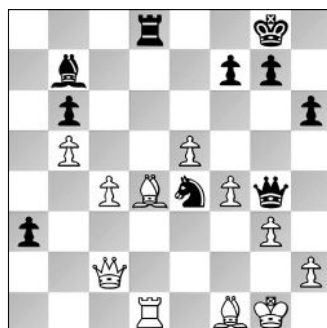
These results are consistent with what I've seen at other Pan-Ams, World Cadets, and similar events: U.S. girls in this age group continue to stand out as some of the strongest on the world stage. I am impressed and look forward to seeing that grow. Now, let's take a look at one of Abigail's games, where she combined tactics with active play to convert her positional advantage into a full point:

AN UNSAFE KING

Ana Paula Ramirez Bentos (1459)

WCM Abigail Zhou (1815)

Pan-Am Youth Ch (9), Lima, 08.02.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

33. ... Nf2!?

Abigail seizes the moment with a really deep move, taking full advantage of White's tied-up pieces!

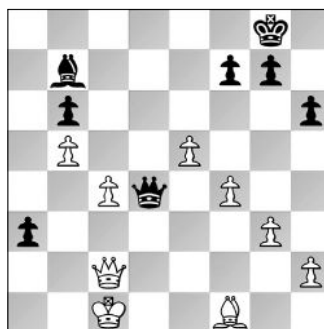
The engine loves 33. ... Nxg3, and it does end things faster, but after 34. hxg3 Black would have to find 34. ... a2!?. The point is that the white queen must stay tied to defending the rook on d1 and cannot touch the pawn. Meanwhile, Black can look to capture the bishop on d4 and eventually promote: if 35. Bg2 Rxd4!.

34. Kxf2?

The only move to keep the game going is 34. Be2! even though the position is still in Black's favor. 34. ... Qh3 is met by 35. Bf1, but after 35. ... Qg4 36. Be2 Black can go for more complications with 36. ... Nh3+!? 37. Kf1 Bf3. Black stands better thanks to the powerful a3-pawn and the pin along the d-file, but the position remains complicated and still far from a clear win.

34. ... Qf3+! 35. Ke1

35. Kg1?? leads straight to disaster: 35. ... Qh1+ 36. Kf2 Qxh2+.

35. ... Rxd4! 36. Rxd4 Qe3+ 37. Kd1 Qxd4+ 38. Kc1

White may be a pawn up and her king may look safe, but that's an illusion. The combination of the dangerous pawn on a3 with the tremendous potential of Black's queen and bishop means the game is about to end.

38. ... Qa1+! 39. Qb1 Qc3+ 40. Kd1

40. Qc2 loses as well after 40. ... Qe1+ 41. Qd1 Qxd1+ 42. Kxd1 a2!.

40. ... Bf3+! 41. Be2 Bxe2+ 42. Kxe2 Qb2+!

Black forces a queen trade and soon after promotes. The game was soon over.

Fresh off her run at the 2025 U.S. Junior Girls' Championship, Jasmine Su arrived in Lima as the second seed in the Girls U18 Section. She was clearly well prepared for the

challenge, and round after round displayed attacking chess and precision. She clinched gold with 1½ points to spare, finishing undefeated on 8/9. Along with the medal came a direct WIM title — a fitting reward for her outstanding performance. Let's take a look at her last-round win:

IT'S A TRAP

Isabela Brito Carrascal (2025)

Jasmine Su (2189)

Pan-Am Youth Ch (9), Lima, 08.02.2025



WHITE TO MOVE

30. Qd2

White is already in a difficult position, with Black's pieces firmly dominating the board. Still, White tries to push for some tactical tricks.

30. ... f4!

This was the best move in the position and the only way to keep an advantage. On the surface Black is defending against a skewer, but in reality the move carries a hidden agenda.

Black could go wrong with 30. ... Bd4+? 31. Nxd4 Rxe1 32. Rxe1 Rxe1+ 33. Qxe1 Qxd4+ 34. Be3 Qf6 and position is balanced: The trades have only helped White out of danger.

31. Qd1 Rh7!

Black is preparing to take the bishop.

32. Bg5 Qxg5 33. Nxd6!?

White is doing her best to muddy the waters, trying to create complications in a difficult position.

33. ... Rf8 34. Bxg6 Rg7 35. Qxh5

Of course not 35. Bxh5?? Qxg2 mate.

35. ... Qxh5 36. Bxh5 Bxd6

Black had a knight for two pawns, with well-placed pieces and active play. Jasmine converted the advantage into a full point without any trouble.

The U18 Open is the toughest battleground of the festival, and it was FM Tejas Rama — seeded only 16th at the start — who stole the spotlight, surprising not just his opponents but perhaps even himself with the level of chess he produced. Tejas outplayed higher-rated rivals, staying calm under pressure and never losing his footing.

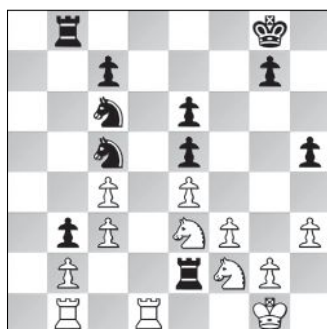
By the end, he had gone undefeated with 7½/9, winning the gold medal and earning a direct IM title — a breakthrough performance that signaled his arrival as one of America's rising junior talents. Let's review his fifth-round positional battle against a fellow American, where the result could have gone either way:

A CLEAR PLAN

Anant Adury (2215)

FM Tejas Rama (2201)

Pan-Am Youth Ch (5), 07.30.2025



WHITE TO MOVE

30. Nf1?

White chooses the wrong plan here by aiming to capture the h5-pawn. This idea is simply too slow and will backfire.

Best was 30. Nd3!, even though it's not an easy move to play. White was probably concerned about the tactic 30. ... Nxe4!? (and not 30. ... Nxd3? when 31. Rxd3 gives White a clear advantage, as the rook on e2 may soon find itself trapped). The correct plan for White in this position is far from obvious: 31. Nf1!, giving up a pawn but aiming to harass the black rook on d2 (although White also gets a small, pleasant edge with 31. fxe4 Rxe3 32. Nc5). After 31. ... Nd6 32. Nd2 Na5 33. Kf1 Re3 34. Nc5! Naxc4 35. Kf2 White has active pieces and a promising future.

30. ... Na5!

There is no time to waste: Black is attacking the weakness on c4.

31. Ng3??

White could still keep the balance with

31. Rd2!. After 31. ... Rxd2 32. Nxd2 Rd8! 33. Rd1 the pin looks uncomfortable for White, but Black has no real way to increase the pressure or extract an advantage from it. It's equal after 33. ... Na4 34. Ra1 Rxd2 35. Rxa4 Nc6 36. Ra6 with complicated play. Practically speaking, though, it's understandable why White chose to avoid this line.

31. ... Rc2 32. Nxb5 Nxc4

Black now has a strong presence on the queenside, with both rooks and knights actively placed.

33. Nd3 Nxd3 34. Rxd3 Rxb2 35. Rbd1 Rd2!

Great precision by Black. The plan is clear and direct: Push the b-pawn toward promotion.

36. R3xd2 Nxd2 37. Rxd2 b2! 38. Rd1 b1=Q 39. Rxb1 Rxb1+ 40. Kf2 Rb2+ 41. Kf1 Rc2

Black, already an Exchange up, picked up the c3-pawn and smoothly converted his advantage.

Rating Points

Aside from medals, Team USA also brought home a mountain of rating points. Across the classical event, the 67-player squad gained nearly 1,300 FIDE rating points overall (roughly 1,800 gained and only 500 lost). That kind of surge shows how talented and underrated U.S. players are on the international field, and also how much fluctuation exists in youth chess.

Top 10 FIDE Rating Points Gainers

FM Tejas Rama (U18 Open) +127.6

Darren Wang (U12 Open) +90.4

CM Vivan Prakash Mulay (U12 Open) +89.6

Harrison Cai (U8 Open) +88.4

Oliver Boydel (U16 Open) +80.0

FM Narayan Venkatesh (U18 Open) +71.2

Milo Su (U10 Open) +70.4

Michelle Zhang (U14 Girls) +66.8

Katherine Zhuge (U14 Girls) +64.8

Miranda Meng (U12 Girls) +58.8

Team USA earned 44 medals across classical, blitz, and rapid — reaching the podium in every age group from U8 through U18, in both the Open and Girls sections. No wonder the delegation also brought home the Top Federation Trophy, with a total of 13 gold medals, 10 silver medals, nine bronzes and 12 fourth- and fifth-place medals.



Devansh Vellanki



WCM Abigail Zhou



Jasmine Su

Off the Board

Commuting: The playing venue was about 40 minutes' drive from our official hotel, and players had to return to the hotel for lunch. That means they ended up spending nearly three hours a day commuting in heavy traffic and nonstop honking. With all the games and commuting, players had little



time left for meals, sleep, or preparation. If that weren't enough the rough, bumpy roads left several players carsick, and at one point a driver got lost in the city — parents had to pull up Google Maps and navigate him back to our hotel.

Playing Hall: The venue had a massive arched roof with open sides, so it was both noisy and drafty: Traffic sounds, whistles, and street noise drifted in from outside, while the constant airflow left players bundled up against the cold.

Security scans: Players passed through “scans” at the entrance, but these didn't actually keep electronics out. Phones were still allowed inside and could simply be dropped off at the arbiters' table, and only later in the week were players supervised when handing in their devices.

Spectators: Parents and coaches were allowed inside the playing hall itself, in stands overlooking the games. Unlike the players, spectators weren't scanned at all, so they could freely enter with phones or other electronics. This led to distractions — phones ringing, and even spectators using binoculars in unsettling ways, causing some players to monitor potential cheating when opponents constantly kept looking up in one direction.

Anti-cheating concerns: For our U.S. players — accustomed to strict security standards at home — this setup felt unusual and at times unsettling. Several had serious concerns about opponents possibly cheating, which led to complaints to arbiters and nearly two formal appeals. Both were eventually dropped when the evidence appeared too weak. Still, the psychological burden of competing while doubting your opponent's fairness is very real. Organizers have significant room for improvement in ensuring both the integrity of the games and peace of mind for the players.

That wasn't all — there was a tsunami alert and even a non-official drone buzzing over the playing hall. As head of delegation, I deeply admired how our players fought through every round; I don't recall ever facing such a complicated and exhausting event during my own youth career.

Bonding experience

What might have been remembered only for chaos instead became a week of camaraderie, last-minute prep sessions crammed into bus rides and corners of the playing hall, and, above all, exceptional chess. Our players showed in all sections that they could withstand challenges that would annoy and easily unsettle even seasoned professionals. I was glad we managed to pull everyone together one afternoon for a delegation photo. Afterwards, those not playing in the rapid event met for a mini team hangout, where bughouse quickly stole the show. You could hear kids calling for pieces in English, but once the strategy talk began, Chinese and Spanish took over. It was chaotic, hilarious, and exactly the kind of break everyone needed.

This was my first experience as the head of delegation, and I want to say it was a great privilege to watch these talented kids thrive and to work with parents who tirelessly supported their children.

Growing up and representing the Czech Republic, I was never part of such a large delegation as a player. This time, I could see how a big team creates opportunities for friendship and how even in the youngest categories the players had already formed friendships and enjoyed spending time together. This is a good sign that something is going very right in American youth chess. Last but not least, if Lima taught me anything, it's this: The future of American chess isn't just talented — it's tough. ♠



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Success by the Sea

IM Mark Ginsburg on seeing old friends, tying for first at the World Senior

BY **IM MARK GINSBURG**



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HE 2025 WORLD SENIOR Championship (Oct. 20-Nov. 2), held in Gallipoli, a pleasant seaside resort in southeastern Italy, was quite a trip down memory lane.

A full 40 years had passed since I had last seen GM Pia Cramling or IM Sal Matera (who told me in the mid-1980s to enter a computer certificate career-change program at Columbia, which I did). And I had not seen the Italian players GM Michele Godena or Fabio Bellini since some Belgian events in the 1980s. But here we all were again.

GM Victor Mikhalevski, of Israel, won clear first in the Men's 50+ Section with 9½/11, including a final-round win over IM Bill Paschall, an American player living in Hungary who went astray in a drawn endgame. That put Mikhalevski over Georgian GM Mikheil Kekelidze, who scored 9 points, while Godena and GM Murtas Kazhgaleyev of Kazakhstan tied for 3rd-4th with 8. Kazhgaleyev actually had a significant advantage versus Godena in the last round but didn't play the best in a complex position and lost.

Other selected American scores: Vladimir Bugayev and Paschall had 7½; IM Ali Farahat had 7; FM Alex Betaneli had 6½ and FM Dmitry Volkov had 6.

GM Ketevan Arakhamia-Grant, of Scotland, took first in the Women's 50+ group with a score of 8½/11, outpacing Cramling and the Cuban WGM Maritza Arribas, who had 7½, with Cramling taking second on tiebreak. Five players scored 7: in tiebreak order, IM Masha Klimova, Spanish WGM Monica Calzetta Ruiz, Georgian WGM Inga Khurtsilava, Czech WFM Martina Folkova, and French IM Silvia Alexieva.

In the Men's 65+ group, six players tied with 8½/11. In American events, prize money is typically divided equally, while tiebreaks determine the winner of a trophy or some other honor. Here, the tiebreaks were of vital importance for norms and prize money.

IM Alexander Reprintsev of Ukraine was first on tiebreak and was awarded an automatic grandmaster title. Next was GM Zurab Sturua of Georgia; third was IM Christian Maier of Germany, who was awarded a GM norm). Then came GM Nikolay Legky of France in fourth, myself in fifth, and Russian IM Evgeny Kargin (playing under the FIDE flag) in sixth.

Other selected American scores: FM Gregory Markzon had 6, while Matera, IM Tim Taylor, and FM Brian Hulse all wound up with 5½.

In the Women's 65+, the winner was Russian WGM Galina Strutinskaya, who ran away with the event with 10½/11, well outpacing Greek WGM Marina Makropoulou, the legendary Georgian GM and former Women's World Champion Nona Gaprindashvili and Russian WIM Larisa Khropova, all with 7½.

My event went pretty well; I defeated the only two grandmasters I played. I did suffer one reverse, after a barber incident in which my "scissor cut" pantomime was interpreted as "shave the entire head with a straight razor." It seemed to be bad luck right out of the gate, because in the next game I transformed a "plus 2" (in engine terms) against Dutch IM Gerard Welling into a debilitating loss. But the sleek cranium produced some good luck at the end, as I defeated Swedish FM Rolf Bergstrom, Belgian IM Jan Rooze, and Argentinian GM Daniel Campora in the last three rounds.

BOGO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E11)

GM Juan Bellon Lopez (2241)
IM Mark Ginsburg (2262)
World Senior Ch (6), Gallipoli,
10.26.2025

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4

My pregame preparation was now out the window: Bellon in recent games had usually opted for an early Bc1-f4.

2. ... e6 3. Nf3 Bb4+ 4. Nbd2

On 4. Bd2 I intended the Smyslov variation with 4. ... a5 followed by ... d7-d6, ... Nb8-d7, and ... e6-e5, when Black gets decent counterchances.

4. ... b6 5. g3

5. a3, 5. Qc2 and, 5. e3 are all major alternatives.

5. ... Bb7 6. Bg2 0-0 7. 0-0 a5!?

This move, believe it or not, sets up a positional trap that White falls into.

8. Qc2 Nc6

This tricky move pays off in the game, but 8. ... c5! is really best here. Black gets a decent game after 9. b3 a4!

9. e4?

Black's entire setup is based on refuting this premature advance. Correct is 9. Rd1 and

White enjoys a safe edge, or 9. b3 a4 also retains a small plus for White.



9. ... Bxd2 10. Bxd2 Nb4 11. Bxb4 Bxe4

Is it possible White did not see this *zwischenzug* when playing his ninth move? The situation is very pleasant now for Black.

12. Qd2 axb4 13. Qxb4 Ra5!

Black is getting ready to play ... Qd8-a8; White is a bad way.

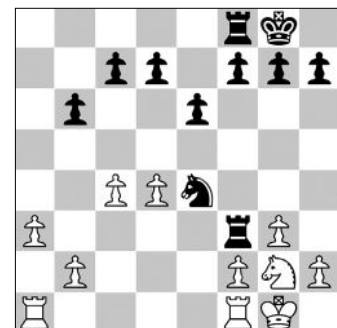
14. a3 Qa8 15. Qc3 Rf5?!

15. ... d5 is more to the point, with a solid advantage.

16. Nh4 Bxg2 17. Nxg2 Rf3 18. Qc2 Qe4

This makes sense, but Black has only a small edge now.

19. Qxe4 Nxe4



20. Rad1??

This is a losing move, in a sense. White needed to find the sequence 20. Ne3! Nxf2 21. Rae1! Nd3 22. Rxf3 Nxe1 23. Rf1 Nd3 24. b3! when White holds — Black really can't do much with a lone knight.

20. ... Rb3 21. Rfe1 Nd6 22. c5 Nc4 23.

cx6 24. Re2 Rxb2 25. Rxb2 Nxb2

26. Rb1 Na4 27. Rb4 Ra8 28. d5 Nc3?!

28. ... Kf8 first was stronger.

29. dxe6 fxe6 30. Rb3?

After 30. Rxb6 Rxa3 31. Ne3 White has chances to hold.

Left: Scenes from the closing ceremony in Gallipoli, including a rousing operatic performance from FM Nathan Resika.

FM Nathan Resika
at the boardGM Ketevan
Arakhamia-GrantGM Nona
Gaprindashvili**30. ... Nd5 31. Ne3 Nxe3 32. fxe3**

White's split pawns are a liability.

32. ... Kf7 33. Kf2 Kf6?

Careless. Black should protect b6 with 33. ... Ra6 before proceeding.

34. Kf3?

White should go for 34. Rxb6 Rxa3 35. h4 and the reduced material helps get closer to a draw.

34. ... Ke5?

Again, the careful 34. ... Ra6! was winning.

35. h4 d5 36. g4?!

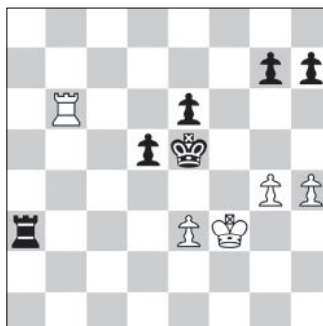
36. h5! is better. After 36. ... Ra6 37. a4 White is resisting.

36. ... Ra4?

Both sides are playing inaccurately. The precise 36. ... g6! wins after 37. Rxb6 Rxa3 38. Rb4 Rc3. Now White has an incredible resource.

37. Rxb6!

The correct first move.

37. ... Rxa3**38. Rb7?**

The final mistake. Incredibly, White draws after 38. h5 d4 39. Rb5+! Kd6 40. Ke4!! dxe3 41. Kf3!. The up-and-down king maneuver is spectacular and effective.

38. ... d4

Now Black is completely winning.

39. Rxc7 Rxe3+ 40. Kf2 h6

Black gets two connected passed pawns versus a lone h-pawn. 40. ... Kf4 also wins.

41. Rg6 Kf4 42. h5 e5 43. Rxh6 Kxg4 44.

Rh8 Rh3 45. h6 Kf4 46. h7 Ke4 47. Kg2 Rh6 48. Kf1 Rf6+ 49. Ke2 Rf7 50. Ke1 Ra7 51. Kf2 d3 52. Kf1 Rd7 53. Ke1 Rf7 54. Kd2 Rf2+ 55. Kc3 Rc2+ 56. Kb3 Rc7 57. Kb2 Ke3

If Black wanted to keep both pawns, 57. ... Re7! 58. Kc3 Ke3 59. Rd8 Rc7+! does the job. But even giving one up results in a simple win.

58. Re8 Rxh7 59. Rxe5+ Kd2 60. Rb5 Rc7 61. Rb8 Re7 62. Rb6 Ke2 63. Rh6 d2, White resigned.

DUTCH DEFENSE (A81)

IM Mark Ginsburg (2262)

GM Daniel Campora (2348)

World Senior Ch (11), Gallipoli,
11.01.2025

1. d4 f5

This was an important last-round game. Campora and I had 7 out of 10; all four players ahead of us with 8 were playing each other (Reprinstev – Sturua and Maier – Kalegin) and I had a strong suspicion they would draw. They did, but only after a “scare” — Maier as White mishandled the opening badly but got lucky when Kalegin missed a rather obvious pressure move. Campora probably went for this opening since we were trailing the leaders and thus playing a double-edged game was in order. Also, he played a suboptimal line in the closed Catalan in Round 5 against the English FM Terry Chapman. Because of all this, my closed Catalan preparation was now out the window, so I had to play on general principles.

2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 e6

Against the Leningrad with 3. ... g6 the game takes on a totally different character. Since White has not played c2-c4 yet, the response 4. c3! makes sense, blunting the h8-a1 diagonal and preparing Qd1-b3 or Nb1-d2, or even Ng1-h3, depending. After enough preparation, White might break with e2-e4.

4. Nf3 Be7 5. c4 d5

The older line with ... d7-d6 is considered somewhat weaker.

6. Qc2 0-0 7. 0-0 c6 8. b3 Ne4 9. Nbd2

Of course 9. Ba3 is playable, and it makes sense positionally, but I wanted to keep more pieces on, with a plan to repel Black and attack. Black is only slightly worse after 9. Nbd2 Nd7 followed by ... b7-b6. Curiously, the engines prefer 9. Ne5.

9. ... Nd7 10. Bb2 a5 11. a3 h5!?

To me this move looked quite bad because the black rook has left h8, but I didn't respond accurately. In any case, it's not so bad. Black does have a solid alternative in 11. ... b6. Here

if Black didn't do anything direct, I planned to start flipping the knights around: Nf3-e5, Nd2-f3, Ne5-d3, and then either Nd3-f4 or f2-f3 (after Nd2-f3-e5). This is how I gained an overwhelming edge against GM Blatny in Las Vegas 20 years ago, but I added to the “disappointing failure” file by only drawing.

12. Rad1?!

It is not surprising that 12. h4! is correct, but even so, after 12. ... b5! Black is only a little worse. I had an idea to play Bb2-d4 after the knights come off to block a possible ... Be7-c5+, but as we shall see there is an issue with that.

12. ... h4 13. Ne5 hxg3 14. hxg3 Qe8

This position is interesting and both sides have chances. At the time, I thought White was better and that Black's undeveloped queenside meant I could open it up and attack now.

15. Nxe4 fxe4 16. f3 Nxe5 17. dxe5 Bc5+



Suddenly I realized my idea of 18. Bd4 Bxa3

19. c5 shutting the bishop out is not very clear at all after 19. ... Qg6!. Black could also play 18. ... Bxd4+ 19. Rxd4 Qg6. So I decided to change course, still believing there was an attack. This was not correct.

18. Kh2 Be3!?

Here Black had a try I had not seen: 18. ... Qg6 19. fxe4 Bf2 and after something like 20. Qd3 dxc4 21. bxc4 b5 it is totally unclear. When Black played the text move, I did not understand and thought opening the game up would expose his lack of queenside development.

19. fxe4

I was very optimistic here, but the reality is that the position is unclear with mutual chances.

19. ... Qh5+ 20. Bh3 Rxf1

I still thought the f-file could be used to great effect before Black's queenside forces could join in.

21. Rxf1 c5!

It turns out 21. ... d4! is also fine. There is no way to build an attack with the paralyzing bishop on e3.

22. Rf3 Qh6 23. Kg2?!

It is more accurate to get counterplay with b3-b4 going right now. At least I found this motif later on.

23. ... d4!

Only now did I see things were trending in the wrong direction. Black is going to gang

up on the e4-pawn, not the e5-pawn.

24. b4!

Objectively not awesome, but White has to do something to confuse things before Black mobilizes the inactive units on the queenside and attacks e4 multiple times.

24. ... axb4 25. axb4 b6 26. bxc5 bxc5 27. Qb3

Of course, the queen shouldn't be able to do much by itself, but Black started to go astray here.

27. ... Ba6?

It was much better to evacuate the king with 27. ... Kh7! here, followed by ... Qh6-g6 to target the weak pawn on e4.

28. Ba3

Now White is all right.

28. ... Kh7 29. Bxc5 Rh8?

It is hard to say what motivated this; it certainly is not an attacking move. Simply 29. ... Qg6 would have kept equal chances. But now we see a mistake in return.

30. Qb6?

I was hurrying to make the time control at Move 40. The Exchange sacrifice 30. Qa4 Bb7 31. Qd7 Bxe4 32. Bxe6! Bxf3+ 33. exf3 is very good for White, but it was simply not on my radar.

30. ... Bxc4

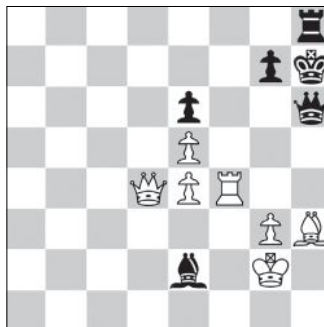
Now it's more or less balanced again, but White can press.



The 65+ Open podium, with Ginsburg second from the left



31. Bxd4 Bxd4 32. Qxd4 Bxe2 33. Rf4!



This is a little nasty for Black to face with not much time left.

33. ... Bh5?

The losing move. The only viable defense was 33. ... Rc8! as the invading rook provides enough chances after 34. Rh4 Bh5.

34. Qd7!

Is this what Black missed? It's the only winning move, but it wasn't hard to spot. Black's forces are now hopelessly awkward; the lone rook cannot generate anything because the queen is cut off.

34. ... Rb8 35. Qxe6 Rb2+ 36. Kg1 Rb1+ 37. Kf2 Rb2+ 38. Ke1 Qg5

At this point I got confused again, but I didn't mess it up too badly.

39. Qf5+

39. Bf5+ looks strong, and it is: 39. ... g6 40. Qf7+ Kh8 41. Qf8+ Kh7 and now 42. Bg4! is the move I missed. Now the passive 42. ... Rb7 is forced, and 43. Qf6 wins.

39. ... Kh6

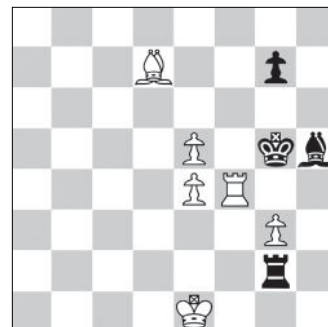
The best try was 39. ... Qxf5, but White

should be able to convert.

40. Qxg5+ Kxg5 41. Bd7!

Setting up the final trick. The prosaic 41. e6 works too.

41. ... Rg2?!



It was lost in any event, but now White can end the tournament on a high note.

42. Rf5+ Kh6 43. Rxh5+!

Not the most difficult, but pleasing.

43. ... Kxh5 44. e6 Rxg3

Now White's only task is not to let the black rook return to the e-file and vacuum up all the pawns.

45. Kf2 Rg4 46. Kf3, Black resigned.

The organization of the event at the Grand Hotel Costa Brada was very good, and the Ionian Sea was warm and swimmable. The organizers also organized excursions to other towns such as Polignano a Mare, where we learned "Polignano" was originally Greek and is derived from the words for "City-New," whereas Naples is derived from the words for "New-City." ♦



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Rise, Fall, Rise

The trials and tribulations of the French Defense, Part I

BY ICCF IM NIKOLAOS NTIRLIS



THE FRENCH DEFENSE HAS had clear peaks and dips in popularity over its history. During the late 19th and early 20th century, it was considered as good as or even better than 1. ... e5. Between the 1920s and 1950s, key strategies were developed by legends of our games like Nimzovich, Euwe, and Botvinnik. And in the decades after that, it underwent a massive theoretical expansion in the hands of Korchnoi and Uhlmann.

The French has always been a battle-

ground of ideas, but around the early 2000s something shifted. The engines — the new “objective oracles” of modern chess — began to give noticeably better evaluations to other defenses. For the best part of the next two decades, this pushed many elite players toward 1. ... e5 and the Sicilian, creating a perception that the French was strategically suspect, too cramped, and too fragile in key lines.

But the story didn't end there. While top-level classical events moved toward engine-approved orthodoxy, correspondence chess players and a handful of over-the-board heroes were quietly diving into the deepest and wildest French complications with computer-assisted precision. The verdict they brought back from those analytical trenches? The French is alive and well once more!

In fact, at correspondence level — where opening ideas are subjected to the harshest tests — several French lines hold up brilliantly. Some have even improved their theoretical status thanks to creative novelties and refined defensive resources. In this article and the one that follows, I'll share some of the major historical cornerstones that anyone building a strong French Defense repertoire should know. These moments not only shaped the opening's evolution but also reveal why the French remains one of the most strategically rich and resilient answers to 1. e4.

We begin with one of the most complex lines in the French: the Winawer Variation.

FRENCH DEFENSE, WINAWER VARIATION (C18)

GM Peter Leko (2730)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2775)

Dortmund SuperGM (4), 07.16.2012

Our journey starts in 2012. The chess engines of that time were giving White a sizable advantage after 3. Nc3, so naturally this is where the theoretical focus was.

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4!

For me this is Black's most interesting and fighting approach.

3. ... Nf6 leads into the Classical French. The story there is rather similar to that of the Winawer: It was considered a bit suboptimal, then Black players came up with improvements, White players countered them, and so on. We'll talk more about Classical lines next month, but for now, let's say that it's a question of style as to which third move Black might choose.

4. e5

White has tried a few interesting deviations, but none of them ever came close to challenging the main line with 4. e5.

One example: 4. a3 Bxc3+ 5. bxc3 dxe4 6. Qg4 Nf6 7. Qxg7 Rg8 8. Qh6 and here modern engines like a move that correspondence players discovered in the 1960s: 8. ... Bd7!?. The bishop might go to c6 or a4, and Black may even hope for a slight edge in this position.

In my book *Reimagining 1. e4* I examined the practical sideline 4. Nge2, which at the time I thought was quite smart. I still do, but Black gets a good game with 4. ... dxe4 5. a3 Be7!. This retreat, proposed by Watson in his review of my book in these very pages, seems to be objectively fine for Black; in fact, I have since used it in correspondence games as Black!

4. ... c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 Ne7 7. Qg4

There are a couple of deviations from the main line, including 7. Nf3 and 7. a4, but among them only the move 7. h4 has some poison, as we'll see later in this article.



ICCF IM
Nikolaos
Ntirlis

7. ... cxd4 8. Qxg7 Rg8 9. Qxh7 Qc7



10. Ne2

This had been considered a must. 10. Qd3 is considered in the next game.

10. Kd1 is a similar concept to that used by Tal against Botvinnik in their world championship matches, but it isn't considered anything serious today. Black continues 10. ... Nbc6 11. Nf3 dxc3 12. Ng5 Nxe5 when White has a choice: 13. f4 (13. Bf4 is met with the nice 13. ... Qb6 with good counterplay) 13. ... f6! and Black went on to win from this dynamically equal position in Tari – Goganov (Sweden, 2017): 14. fxe5 fxc5 15. Qh5+ Kd8 16. Bxg5 Qc5 17. Bd3 Kc7 18. Qh4 Nc6 19. Qf4 Bd7 20. g3 Raf8 21. Bf6 Rxf6 22. exf6+ e5 23. Qh6 Rh8 24. Qg5 Rh5, White resigned.

10. ... Nbc6 11. f4 dxc3 12. Qd3

The queen needs to get back into the center of the action.

For some time now one of the main tries was 12. h4 Bd7 13. h5 0-0-0 14. Qd3 (note that the queen really needs to get back now as 14. h6 Nf5 wins for Black!) 14. ... d4 15. h6. The key move to simplify Black's life is 15. ... Rg6!. This line was settled in correspondence chess in 2014 and 2015. White has no hope for any advantage.

12. ... d4 13. Nxd4 Nxd4 14. Qxd4 Bd7!



As far back as 2012 this position was almost automatically reached as it was thought that there was nothing better for both sides. Black's plan is to play ... Ne7-f5 and ... Qc7-

c6!. White's development is awkward as Black has counterplay against g2 and can soon castle long and start to attack the white king. Of course, White is a pawn up and has the bishop pair, so the engines of that time claimed White had a sizable advantage. The main recommendation was ...

15. Rg1!

A very logical move. It defends the sensitive g2-pawn, and later White can play g2-g4 and attack the knight that will likely come to f5.

15. ... Nf5 16. Qf2

I faced 16. Qd3? in an online game. It took me some time to spot the surprisingly strong 16. ... Qc5! with ... Bd7-c6 to follow. To prevent catastrophe, White must control the diagonal with the queen.

16. ... Qc6 17. Bd3

Else ... Qc6-e4+ would have been strong.

17. ... Qd5



18. Rb1!

This was the main line in 2012 and it is still evaluated favorably by modern Stockfish at depth 40. White's idea is to activate the rook with Ra1-b1-b3xc3.

In terms of engine evaluations, today's top choice is 18. a4, although (as always, it seems) it's a question of how deep the engine has to go to get to 0.00! Correspondence players appear to have retired this line as well with 18. ... Rc8. A typical continuation is 19. g3 Nd4 20. Kd1 Qf3+ 21. Ke1 Qd5 when the invited repetition is probably best. 18. ... 0-0-0 19. Ra3 Kb8 20. Rxc3 Bxa4 can also be tried.

18. Be3 is sometimes played if a draw is not objectionable. After 18. ... Nxe3 19. Qxe3 Rxc3 20. Rxc3 Qxc3 21. Be4 Qxh2 22. 0-0-0 Bc6 23. Bxc6+ bxc6 24. Qd4 the cleanest move was tried by a fine fellow and friend, Greek IM Panagiotis Hristodolou: 24. ... Qe2! 25. Qxc3 Qe4 26. Rd4 Qh1+ 27. Rd1 Qe4 with equality (Gkoumas – Hristodolou, Greek Team Ch 2023).

18. ... Bc6 19. Rb3 0-0-0 20. Rxc3 Kb8

So far, all good — and all still known at the time this game was played!

21. g4

I mentioned testing these ideas in online games earlier. One of those games varied here with 21. Rb3 when I thought I could sac my queen with 21. ... Qxb3!? and it turns out that Black gets huge compensation!

21. ... Nd4 22. Rg3

A few moves ago, White's pieces didn't work together, but now they coordinate almost



The field at Dortmund 2012; Caruana is third from left, bottom row.

perfectly. If Black can't generate concrete counterplay, White will be winning.

22. ... Qh1+



23. Bf1

The engine move, then and now! Today Stockfish evaluates this position at around +0.10 at depth 48. The evaluation was much higher in 2012.

The alternative 23. Qf1 was seen in the 1980s. After 23. ... Nf3+ 24. Kf2 Qxh2+ 25. Qg2 Qxg2+ 26. Rxc3 Qd5 Black will take the d3-bishop with equality.

23. ... b6!!

Nice preparation by Caruana. Sometimes it's hard to understand what makes a move strong in engine analysis. Here the point, believe it or not, is to control the c5-square, which becomes relevant in some lines where the queen retreats to d5.

24. Bb2

White is ready to play Rc3-d3 with a winning advantage.

24. a4 has also been worked out by Black: 24. ... Qe4+ 25. Rge3 Qd5 and now the a4-pawn is inconveniently hanging. Play continues 26. Red3 Qa5 27. Ba3 Nb5! and while this position has only been reached in correspondence play, Black has managed to squeeze out a couple of wins!

24. ... Be4!

Talking about coordination! White has maximized theirs, while Black is ready to play ... Rg8-h8 or double rooks on the d-file. Black's last move makes relevant the tactical threat of ... Nd4xc2+. Note that 24. ... Qe4+ 25. Rge3 Qd5 26. Rcd3 would be winning for White.

25. a4

We're still in engine prep. White's idea is Bb2-a3 and in some cases a4-a5.

25. ... Rd5!

Stopping a4-a5 and getting ready to double rooks on the d-file.

26. Ba3 Rc8! 27. Bd6+

Also dead is 27. Rxc8+ Kxc8 28. c4 Nc2+ 29. Ke2 Rd4, draw (Varlamov – Davidov, ICCF 2015).

27. ... Kb7 28. Rxc8 Nf3+??

Since this game was played, I have 10 or so correspondence games in my database that continued 28. ... Kxc8 29. Rc3+ Kd7 30. Rc7+ Ke8 31. Rc8+ Kd7 when White has nothing better than the repetition.

29. Ke2

Now White is much better, but of course it is still a big fight.

29. ... Rd2+ 30. Ke3 Kxc8 31. Rg1?! 31. Ba6+ followed by Qf2-f1 is crushing.

31. ... Nxc1 32. Kxd2 Nf3+ 33. Kc3 Nxc2 34. Be2 Qa1+ 35. Kd2 Qh1 36. Qg3? Nf1+ 37. Bxf1 Qxf1 38. Qe3 Qg2+ 39. Qe2 Qxe2+ 40. Kxe2 Bxc2 41. a5 bxa5 42. Kd2 Bg6, draw.

This game was very important for Winawer theory at the time. Black was seen to be doing OK in the main lines recommended by the engines, so new ideas had to be found. Soon players started to investigate alternatives to put Black under pressure.

The next challenge was GM Parimarjan Negi's book. The first titles in

Negi's series on 1. e4 were published after Leko – Caruana, and players were very interested in the great Indian theoretician's discoveries. One place where Negi delivered spectacularly was the French, as he came up with a novel approach to the Winawer for White.

FRENCH DEFENSE, WINAWER VARIATION (C18)

IM Sam Collins (2490)

GM Nicholas Pert (2562)

4NCL (6), England, 02.15.2015

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 Ne7 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 c5 7. Qg4 Qc7!

This move order became popular as it was one way to avoid some of Negi's most promising ideas in sidelines.

8. Bd3

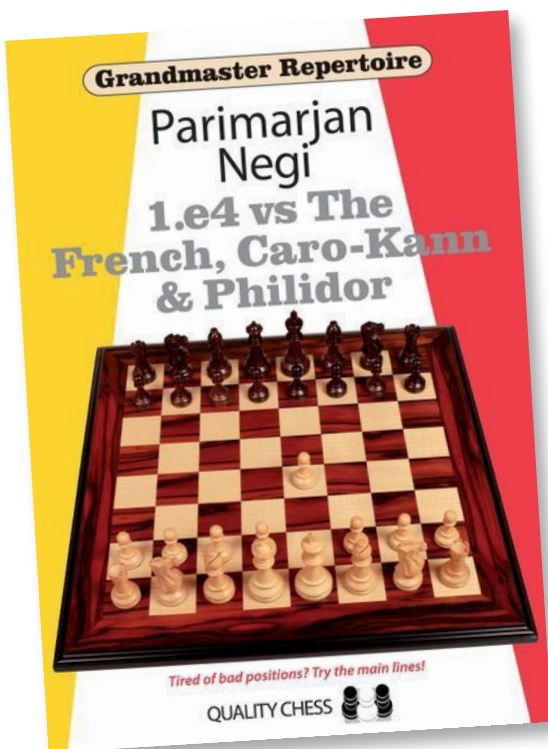
Temporarily passing up the pawn was Negi's big concept. 8. Qxg7 Rg8 9. Qxh7 cxd4 would transpose to Leko – Caruana.

8. ... cxd4 9. Ne2 dxc3 10. Qxg7 Rg8 11. Qxh7 Qxe5



The difference becomes clear. In this move order White allows the e5-pawn to be taken — but that's the big idea! Now Negi aims to get an endgame with a passed h-pawn and the pair of bishops, and this can happen practically by force.

12. h4! Nd7 13. Bf4 Qf6 14. Bg5 Qh8 15. Qxh8 Rxh8 16. Nxc3



And here we are! Negi spent many pages analyzing this position in 2014, and his conclusion was that White has at least good practical chances.

16. ... a6 17. 0-0-0 f6 18. Be3 b5

Black has a compact structure with good piece coordination. It doesn't seem that there's a lot to fear.

19. f4 Bb7 20. h5 Kf7



Still following Negi's recommendations. Here he offered two ideas for White.

21. Rh4

Also analyzed was 21. g4 Rac8 22. Kb2, and this position is still largely untested. I suspect the reason is that modern engines give 22. ... e5!? 23. fxe5 Nxe5!.. Recapturing on e5 with the knight was generally overlooked by Negi and the engines of the time. Here Black has beautiful counterplay and equal chances.

21. ... Rac8 22. Kb2 e5

The standard recipe.

23. fxe5 fxe5?

The engines in 2014 didn't appreciate taking back with the knight, but today we know that 23. ... Nxe5! is correct and equal.

24. Bg5?

24. Ne2! gives real chances for a significant advantage.

24. ... Rcg8 25. Bxe7 Kxe7 26. g4 Nf6 27. Bf5 d4 28. Ne2 Nd5 29. Ng3 Ne3 30. Rd3 Kf6 31. h6 Nxf5 32. Nxf5 Be4 33. Rd2 Bxf5 34. gxf5 Rg5 35. c3 dxc3+ 36. Kxc3 Kxf5 37. Rd6 a5 38. Rb6 Rc8+ 39. Kb2 Rg2+ 40. Kb1 Rg1+ 41. Kb2 Rg2+ 42. Kb1 Rg1+, draw.

Negi's ideas fueled White's arsenal for a few years, but eventually the dust settled here too. The idea of breaking up the position with ... e6-e5 and taking back with the knight turned out to be the easiest way to counter

these lines, something confirmed in seconds by any modern engine.

OLD WINE

With Negi out of commission, White was in need of something to challenge the French in 2017 and 2018. This is one reason that the Tarrasch variation with 3. Nd2 became more popular, as we'll discuss next month. But White got another unexpected boost when news broke of a new kind of chess engine. This was the AI-based AlphaZero, which crushed Stockfish in spectacular fashion. One of those games featured the Winawer and the surprising return of an old move.

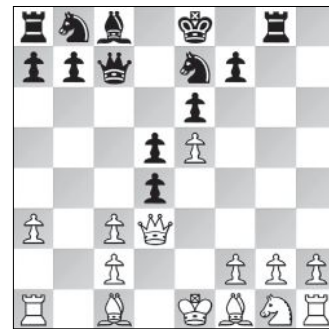
FRENCH DEFENSE, WINAWER VARIATION (C18)

AlphaZero
Stockfish 8
Match (255), London, 01.18.2018

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 Ne7 7. Qg4 Qc7 8. Qxg7 Rg8 9. Qxh7 cxd4

Here AlphaZero unleashed a new idea in the form of a move that had been considered nothing for decades.

10. Qd3!?



10. ... dxc3 11. Nf3 b6 12. h4 Ba6 13. Qd4 Bxf1 14. Kxf1 Nd7 15. h5 Rc8 16. h6 Qc4+ 17. Qxc4 Rxc4 18. Bg5 Rh8 19. g3



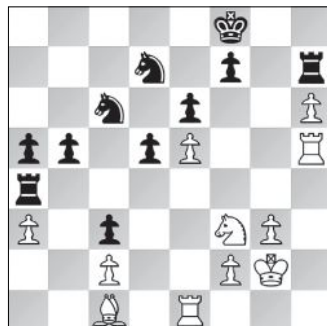
19. ... Nc6

For a human perspective on this line, check



out this online game between Nakamura and Nepomniachtchi from 2020: 19. ... Rh7 20. Kg2 Nc6 21. Rae1 b5 22. Bf6 Nxf6 23. exf6 Rg4 24. Rh5 Rg6? 25. Rxd5! Rxf6 26. Rc5 Ne7 27. Rxb5 Rfxh6 28. Rb8+ Kd7 29. Ne5+ Kc7 30. Reb1 Nc6 31. R8b7+ Kd6 32. Nxf7+ Rxf7 33. Rxf7, Black resigned.

20. Rh5 Rh7 21. Re1 b5 22. Kg2 Re4 23. Be3 Ra4 24. Bc1 a6 25. Re3 Rc4 26. Re2 a5 27. Re1 Ra4 28. Rhh1 Kf8 29. Rh2 Rh8 30. Rh5 Rh7



31. Bg5 Rxa3 32. Bf6 Nxf6 33. exf6 Ra4 34. Rb1 Rb4 35. Rbh1 Rg4 36. Ng5 Rxh6 37. Rxh6 Rxc5 38. Rh8+ Rg8 39. Kf3

We have reached a position that is wildly unbalanced. The game was (of course) drawn on move 123.

Amidst all the excitement over AlphaZero's stylish play, many humans thought this position promising for White. The ball was passed back into Black's court!

It only took a few months for correspondence players to figure out how Black should continue. Returning to the position

after 10. Qd3, the right path is **10. ... Qxe5+ 11. Ne2 dxc3 12. Qxc3 Qxc3+ 13. Nxc3** and now **13. ... e5!?** is probably the best move order for Black. As with the Negi line, Black's compact structure and central presence provides enough compensation for the bishop pair and the passed h-pawn. In Stefanov – Davidov (ICCF 2023) play continued **14. h4 Bf5 15. Bg5 Nbc6 16. f4 exf4** and the game was eventually drawn.

NEW IDEAS

After Caruana's model game and the publication of Negi's book, Black was understood to be doing well in the main lines of the Winawer. The best Negi could do in his analysis was show "practical advantages" and the occasional note of "dangerous play." This is why many new correspondence players started playing the Winawer.

I think the period between 2012 and 2018 was a golden age for the Winawer in correspondence chess, with tons of new games and sidelines being explored. Eventually White players settled on one line they found most dangerous:

FRENCH DEFENSE, WINAWER VARIATION (C18)

Paul Keevil (2083)

Nikolaos Sarakenidis (2191)

Correspondence, LSS, 10.18.2014

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 Ne7 7. Qg4 cxd4 8. Qxg7

Rg8 9. Qxh7 Qc7 10. Ne2 dxc3 11. f4 Nbc6 12. Nxc3



With this line White tries to force Black into one of two options, both of which were considered dangerous.

12. ... Nd4

Black's other option was to transpose to old Uhlmann games after 12. ... a6 13. Qd3 Bd7 14. Rb1 when the legendary German GM played 14. ... Na5! (and not 14. ... Nf5? 15. g4 Rxc4 16. Bh3) 15. h4 Nf5 16. Rh3 0-0-0. Players in the '70s understood that Black had enough counterplay, but the engines in 2014 were not impressed, offering 17. h5 with hopes for advantage. Now the key move was discovered by a young Australian in 1989: 17. ... Qc5 18. Nd1 Bb5 and while engines at that time offered White some esoteric ideas involving Exchange sacrifices, today's metallic seconds have worked everything out to equality.

13. Bb2 Bd7 14. 0-0-0 Ndf5?

Nikos Sarakenidis, my friend and a strong analyst, wasn't able to find the correct solution with the engines of the time.

Today we have learned that Black should play 14. ... Qb6!! 15. Qd3 (15. Nxd5 Nb3+ is equal) 15. ... Ndf5 16. g3 Rc8 17. Rd2 Ne3 and with the e7-knight coming to f5, Black has good counterplay to hold the balance. Current engines give an evaluation here +0.25 or so at a depth of around 46 ply, but years of correspondence practice shows that this line is settled as well.

15. Nb5 Bxb5 16. Bxb5+ Kf8 17. Bd3 Ne3 18. g4 Nxd1 19. Rxd1 Qb6 20. f5 Rxc4 21. f6 Ng8 22. Qh3 Rg1, and Black resigned.

Here we complete our exploration of the Winawer "Poisoned Pawn" line. I am happy to play the Winawer in correspondence play where I occasionally still face 12. Nxc3: This is where modern engines lead today's players, but (at least for now) this is not the most promising direction for White.



Nepomniachtchi resigns his Candidates game with MVL.

Perhaps this is why former world championship challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi put the French in his repertoire for his attempt to climb the chess throne.

HARRY THE H-PAWN

FRENCH DEFENSE, WINAWER VARIATION (C18)

GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (2767)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2774)

FIDE Candidates (7), Ekaterinburg, 03.25.2020

In this crucial game from the ill-fated Ekaterinburg half of the 2020 Candidates, GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave took another tack in his approach to the French. He showed that there was some poison to be found in 7. h4; soon his idea became the new main line at elite levels!

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 Ne7 7. h4 Qc7 8. h5 h6 9. Rb1 b6 10. Qg4



10. ... Rg8 11. Bb5+ Kf8 12. Bd3 Ba6 13. dxc5

MVL's smart preparation gave him a good position from which he went on to win a brilliant game. See annotations by IM Kostya Kavutskiy in the July 2020 report in these pages.

13. ... Bxd3 14. cxd3 Nd7 15. d4 bxc5 16. Qd1 Qa5 17. Bd2 Rb8 18. Ne2 c4 19. 0-0 Rb6 20. Qc2 Rh8 21. a4 Ke8 22. Rb4 Nc6 23. f4 Ne7 24. Rfb1 f5 25. Rb5 Qa6 26. Bc1 Kf7 27. Ba3 Rhb8 28. Bxe7 Kxe7 29. g4 Rxb5 30. axb5 Rxb5 31. gxf5 Rxb1+ 32. Qxb1 exf5 33. Ng3 Qb6 34. Nxf5+ Kf8 35. Qa1 Qe6 36. Ng3 Qg4 37. Kg2 Qxf4 38. Qxa7 Ke7 39. Qa3+ Kd8 40. Qd6 g5 41. hxg6 e.p. h5 42. g7, Black resigned.

The correspondence players had a lot of

work to do, but they did come up with a solution to this line: 10. ... cxd4! 11. Qxg7 Rg8 12. Qxh6 Qxe5+ 13. Ne2 dxc3.



Notice that this is very similar to the antidotes against Negi's and AlphaZero's systems! Play continues 14. Bf4 Qf5, which was the first idea found by the correspondence players. (Later 14. ... Qe4 was also analyzed into the ground.) Play continues 15. Nd4 (if 15. Nxc3 Ba6) 15. ... Qe4+ 16. Be3 Ba6 17. f3 Qe5 18. g4 Qg3+ 19. Bf2 Qe5+ 20. Qe3 Qxe3+ 21. Bxe3 Bxf1 22. Kxf1 Kd7 23. h6 e5 24. Nb5 f6 25. Nxc3 Nbc6 26. Rd1 Ke6. (For more on this variation, check out John Watson's

September 2022 review in these pages. ~ed.)

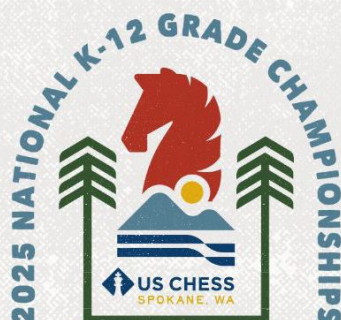
This is definitely a long line, but it clearly shows the kind of position Black aims to defend. My database shows two draws here: one between Leela and Stockfish Classical from the TCEC championships, and a high-level correspondence game from 2023.

SUMMARY

So we have reached yet another stalemate, with many key Winawer positions being worked out to cold equality by the engines. The good news is that Black can draw if they know what they're doing, but the bad news is that there's little hope for victory if White passes the memory tests!

Perhaps this is why the battlefields in the French are shifting a bit. The Steinitz variation of the Classical is seeing a resurgence in top-level over-the-board play, while White players are also trying their luck with the Tarrasch and Advance variations. We'll take a look at the current state of affairs in next month's issue. ♠

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!



It was a huge success!
Thank you to Spokane
for a great event, and
look for coverage of the
tournament here in the
months to come.



Story and Sacrifice

Nearly 40 years later, a reworked *Chess* returns to Broadway.

BY **RICK MASSIMO**



Left: The Arbiter (Bryan Pinkham) takes on new prominence in this production with a new book by Danny Strong.

DANNY STRONG FELT LIKE something wasn't adding up. In 2015, he was watching a YouTube video of a 2008 concert production of the musical *Chess*, with songs by Tim Rice and ABBA's Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus. He loved the album, which came out in 1985; he also loved Rice's previous efforts, 1970's *Jesus Christ Superstar* and 1976's *Evita*.

But those earlier hit albums were made

into musicals that enjoyed extended runs on Broadway and played all over the world for years, as well as popular movie adaptations. *Chess*, on the other hand, closed in a Broadway heartbeat — 68 performances. There was no tour. There was no film.

So what happened? That's why Strong was watching.

"It's this famous white whale of musical theater," Strong says — "one of the great rock scores for a show that famously doesn't work.

And I watched it to see: Why doesn't it work?"

Strong, a two-time Emmy winner for *Game Change* and a co-creator of the TV show *Empire*, began "naturally breaking down what I thought the problems were." At first, he says, it was just reflex — "that's my wont in life as a writer" — but eventually he began coming up with ideas. "And I thought, you know, I maybe could actually fix or improve this show."

Strong emailed one of his favorite directors: Michael Mayer, winner of five Tony Awards for musicals and plays including *American Idiot* and *Spring Awakening*. Strong asked Mayer whether he'd be interested in taking a look at the concert and coming up with new ideas for *Chess*. Unbeknownst to Strong, Mayer had actually been in the audience at the Royal Albert Hall and replied simply, "I'm in."

A mere 10 years and many workshops later, a revamped version of *Chess* opened on Broadway at the Imperial Theatre — the same venue as its ill-fated run in 1988.

Straightening out the story

Chess, set in the 1980s, tells the story of Freddie Trumper, an American grandmaster; Anatoly Sergievsky, a Soviet GM; and Florence Vassy, who begins the show as Trumper's second and girlfriend. Meanwhile, the CIA and KGB operate in the background, and the chessic and ideological battles force difficult choices from the three main players.

The show had several incarnations and revisions in the 1980s in London and New York — sometimes Freddie begins as the world champion and Anatoly the challenger; sometimes it's the other way around. Sometimes there's one world championship match; sometimes there are two. Sometimes Florence, a Hungarian national who escaped the Soviet repression of 1956, is reunited with her long-lost father; sometimes she isn't.

It's got the wonderful score, with hit songs such as "One Night in Bangkok" and "I Know Him So Well," but the fact that the songs could be worked into so many different shapes by the story isn't really a great sign. *The New York Times* said in November that *Chess* was historically "a musical as adored as it is infuriating."

"Danny didn't come up with a story from



Danny Strong



Michael Mayer

whole cloth,” Mayer says, “but he did have to figure out a way to make a story where these songs would all actually make some level of sense.”

The new *Chess* features two world championship matches, first between Trumper and Sergievsky and then between Sergievsky (now a defector) and the new Soviet hope Viigand.

Some of the songs are reordered, and the two players each reveal their emotional core early on, while Florence sets the worldview in Act I (“nobody’s on nobody’s side”). The show foregrounds the triangle among the three main characters and ties the CIA – KGB machinations to specific Cold War confrontations

(the SALT II talks in Act I, the brinksmanship of the 1983 Able Archer controversy in Act II); both secret agencies try to influence the result of the matches. All the while, the action is narrated and explained by The Arbiter, whose role is expanded in Strong’s retelling to act as the audience’s guide to the worlds colliding (see the interview with actor Bryce Pinkham on page 35).

“The artwork that I think this most reminds me of is *Casablanca*,” Mayer says. “Because it’s the love triangle, and they all make the sacrifice to do the right thing, even though it they end up heartbroken. And you know what? I’ll take it.”

Looking back

Whereas the earlier productions of *Chess* were written and produced just a few years after the events they’re alluding to, the new version has 40 years of perspective to look back on.

“That was one of the first things Tim Rice said to me when I met with him,” Strong says — “he said, ‘You know, I was writing this show and creating as these events were happening, as opposed to what you could do, which is reflect upon them from a bird’s eye point of view.’”

Bryce Pinkham, who plays The Arbiter, points out that at one moment he tells the audience, “Our players are about to collide with one of the most dangerous moments in world history that you’ve never even heard of until now.” That’s the Able Archer standoff, during which the Soviet Union was convinced that the U.S. was setting up an attack and planned to respond in kind. It reached its peak Nov. 12, 1983, which in Act II of *Chess* coincides with the last Sergievsky – Viigand game, the finale of a match whose result will influence the nuclear confrontation.

“I think we have a lot of fun with how preposterous the idea is that in any world, a chess tournament would have global impact on a Cold War manipulation and vice versa,” Mayer says, “because people are so taken with the way that these characters are revealing themselves through songs and a clear, if, again, preposterous set of circumstances.

Lea Michele as
Florence Vassy

A TALK WITH THE ARBITER

A conversation with actor Bryce Pinkham

THE BROADWAY REVIVAL OF *CHess* INCLUDES A FEW STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO THE script, but the biggest (and most successful) is the expansion of the role of The Arbiter. From a gallivanting, gloating umpire with his own theme song (“The Arbiter,” of course), the role now encompasses acting as the audience’s guide to the world of the musical and to the sometimes-abstruse chessic and Cold War maneuvers at work. Sometimes it requires a lot of explaining; sometimes it requires literally making fun of the plot twists. It’s a tall order, but Bryce Pinkham says he was ready to take it on.

Pinkham, a Tony Award nominee for *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* and the voice of Stolas in the web series *Helluva Boss*, says writer Danny Strong conceived of The Arbiter as a “sort of narrator, host, hypnotist even, that can help guide the audience through what otherwise might require a lot of attention to detail to follow. So it’s basically taking that worry away from the audience members saying, ‘I got you; I’m going to guide you through this,’ so that they can simply enjoy the fantastic music and what I think is an improved story.”

That sounds like it comes with pressure, though Pinkham says “I wouldn’t call it pressure, but I would certainly call it responsibility, and I revel in that responsibility. And I do take that very seriously, because I think the success of this iteration depends on improved intelligibility, and I think that The Arbiter is sort of part and parcel to that.”

The interactions with the audience keep him on his toes — some asides to the audience work better than others, and there are variations in that response every night — but Pinkham says that’s how he likes it: “That’s part of what keeps you on your toes and keeps the adrenaline that you need pumping through your veins.”

He’s been the only Arbiter in this iteration of the musical, which dates back to 2018, and says he’s been honored to be part of the process. “A lot of The Arbiter that now exists was born out of a collaboration between a specific actor and a specific writer and director. And we spent a lot of time on the sidelines, workshopping different things, and I’ve ad-libbed in rehearsal, things that they’ve kept and things that they’ve thrown away. I think that that sort of ‘best idea wins’ attitude is what makes things grow better and better ... you know, it’s a great relationship to have.”

Pinkham learned the game from his grandfather and, thanks to his night job, is teaching the game to his kids. He also has a family history with *Chess*: His father-in-law, Sandy Strallen, was in the original company for the 1986-88 production of the show on London’s West End. Pinkham says Strallen “has stories to tell of that time, and some of my wife’s earliest memories are going to the theater and listening to *Chess* as her dad was rehearsing.”

That makes this experience all the more gratifying: “The connection to my father-in-law, and my memory playing chess with my grandfather as a child, which I hear echoed in this story every night, and passing a game on and the show on to my kids — feels like a real, fulfilling full-circle, or maybe I should say all-64, moment for me.” ♡



Tveit (Trumper) and Michele (Vassy) with Pinkham (Arbiter) left



You can follow it and you can enjoy it. So I think that's something that *Chess* didn't have before."

The Arbiter alludes to the fact that some don't believe the Able Archer incident happened at all, and Pinkham notes that "it's juxtaposed with a chessboard — which is like what Freddie's always saying: The game is true. You play the game to win, and if you play that way ... there's nothing untrue about what happens on the board. And there's something comforting to that in our world today."

How about the game?

One of the first things a chessplayer would notice is that there's very little chess on

stage. Two games, one from each match, are depicted by actors speaking their moves into microphones along with updates on their emotional states — a pretty compelling portrayal of the changes players can go through during a game.

But there's no board, no set, on stage at any point — only large decorative pieces going up the sides of the stage. And the creators, both of whom say they played the game as kids but never took it up seriously as adults, say that was intentional. "[*Chess*] is the opposite of theatrical ... and I say this with full respect to the game," Mayer says. Strong adds that adding a physical depiction of a chess game was never a consideration: "We've actually never even had this discussion."

"We're watching the KGB and the CIA playing chess with our characters," Mayer adds; "we're actually watching that chess game at lived out on the stage, as well as the literal chess matches that they play. So I feel like it's the best way to give an audience who might not be chessplayers an understanding of what the skill set is to be a chessplayer."

While they don't show the game, and they fall into the some of the traps so common to fictional portrayals of chess (opening choices are portrayed as deep clues to the players' non-chess psyches, for example), Mayer says they communicate the essence of chess through the essence of *Chess*: "It's the word that to me defines chess, and that's sacrifice. I don't know many games where the whole concept of sacrificing your pieces to accomplish something greater is part of the DNA of the game. ... And it's so potent to the story, and I think that's something that Danny has really delved into."

Speaking shortly before the show's official opening, Strong says he's happy with what he, Mayer, and the cast have achieved.

"People ... do *Chess* in concert, right? They rarely do the show. And if we can make this work, this can be done all over the world, [like] *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, Tim Rice's two shows right before this. ... I just always thought this deserves to be done, because I think the score is just as good as those two scores. I love those two shows, and I just thought this deserves to be done the way those shows deserve to be done, and that was the mission. And, you know, I think we might achieve it now." 📌



Chess has been extended through May 3 at the Imperial Theatre in New York City. For more information, visit chessbroadway.com.



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A GM in the



Nakamura's Candidates quest takes him across the US.

BY **RALPH TAN, LUKE HENGEN, AND RICK MASSIMO**

Left and top right: Nakamura with fans in Iowa. Top left: Nakamura mid- and pre-game in New Orleans.



FOR A FEW WEEKS THIS FALL, GM Hikaru Nakamura brought the worlds of the professional and amateur chessplayer together.

Nakamura had a high enough FIDE rating to get him into the Candidates Tournament, to be held in Cyprus this spring. But between his streaming career and his Freestyle play, he hadn't played enough FIDE-rated games to be considered an active player. So his quest for the Candidates took him to some places you wouldn't think a super-grandmaster would go: the Louisiana Championship on Labor Day weekend, the Iowa Open in mid-September, and the Washington Dulles Open, in Virginia, in November.

He swept the Louisiana and Iowa tournaments, his highest-rated opponents still ceding more than 500 points to him. In Virginia, he drew quickly in the last round

PHOTOS: JAMES CULLEN FOR US CHESS (NOLA), COURTESY ALLIE HENGEN (IOWA)

with GM Praveen Balakrishnan to tie for first with Daniel Girsh.

(His other blemish came in Canada, when he drew fairly quickly with IM Mike Ivanov. He had a particular incentive to sacrifice a half-point there: He wanted to play in an online arena-style qualifier for the Comet Open. He not only qualified, but won the \$45,000 first prize.)

The grandmaster's tour of the byways of American chess electrified each tournament he appeared at. Below are reflections on the experience from one of Nakamura's opponents in New Orleans, a fellow player in Iowa and the organizers in Dulles.

In Louisiana

Ralph Tan visited New Orleans for the first time to see the sights and to "shake off some rust" at the Louisiana State Championship. He didn't realize that after winning his first three games he'd be paired against the five-time champ, someone he'd been a fan of since childhood:

I didn't know what to expect on the board, but I was eager to get the ball rolling. A

few pictures were taken before the game. We shook hands and began. In my head, I kept telling myself: "*Oh my god, I'm playing Hikaru!*" and "*Everyone's watching, this will go down in the books!*"

Around move 7, I was feeling the "Naka Effect," as Hikaru later described in his recap. I wasn't sure what to play and went into deep thought. I had seen the position many times before with all sorts of responses, but I couldn't decide what fit my mood. My candidate moves included 7. a3, 7. Rb1, 7. b3, 7. d3, 7. e3, 7. Re1, and the most critical and time-consuming option, 7. d4. It would have led to a very sharp position, but I was also worried about a kingside attack. I analyzed at least 15 moves deep, but in the end, I realized I was spending too much time and opted for the safer-looking 7. e3.

By Move 10, I already knew I was in trouble from my overly ambitious calculations. Hikaru showed exactly why he's a super-grandmaster and wiped me off the board. I honorably played 37. Rg1, allowing him to deliver checkmate. After the game, he kindly explained some of the ideas and mistakes and signed my score sheet.

The internet was quick to react; some people were disappointed (haha) but overall,

I received a lot of positive comments about getting the chance to play the world number two. Later, while I was in the lobby discussing my result with other players, Hikaru came around the corner and continued our post-game discussion. We were both analyzing the game in our heads.

He said he assumed I was a 1. e4 player, since he had prepared for me by reviewing my Titled Tuesday games; I just found it amusing that I even posed that much of a "threat" to him. We shook hands one last time, and I thanked him for the game. He went on to dominate the tournament, and I finished just behind him.

Overall, it was a wonderful experience: 6/7, tying for second place, and taking home \$200.

SYMMETRICAL ENGLISH (A37)

Ralph Tan (2233)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2871)

Louisiana State Ch (4), New Orleans, 08.31.2025

1. Nf3 c5 2. g3 Nc6 3. c4 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. Nc3 d6 6. 0-0 Bd7 7. e3 Qc8 8. Nd5 Nf6 9. a3 Rb8 10. d3 b5 11. Bd2 bxc4 12. dxc4



PHOTO: JAMES CULLEN FOR US CHESS

Ne4 13. Ra2 Nxd2 14. Qxd2 a5 15. Ng5
Qd8 16. Ne4 0-0 17. Rc1 a4 18. f4 Re8 19.

Ndc3 Na5 20. Qe2 Qc8 21. Bf1 Bc6 22.
Nd2



22. ... e5 23. Nde4 Qe6 24. Ng5 Qe7 25.
Bg2 Bxg2 26. Kxg2 exf4 27. gxf4 Qxe3 28.
Qxe3 Rxe3 29. Nxa4 Re2+ 30. Kh1 Rb3 31.
Rf1 Nxc4 32. Rf3 Rxf3 33. Nxf3 Rf2 34.
Ng1 Ne3 35. Nh3 Rc2 36. Ra1 Ng4 37. Rg1
Rxh2 mate.

In Iowa

Luke Hengen didn't get to play Nakamura, but the 16-year-old says the presence of the grandmaster turned the Iowa Open into an unforgettable experience:

My mom and sister and I were traveling from Omaha to Iowa City to the tournament

that morning. My mom was driving and I was sleeping in the car, trying to get as much rest as I could before the first round. My mom checked the entry list and Hikaru Nakamura had registered! We had heard earlier that he had come to the Louisiana State Championship, but it didn't even occur to us that he might come to the Iowa Open.

Hikaru's presence gave the tournament a whole new dynamic. It was really cool watching him play on the top board, and after every round, I made sure to check his recap videos to see his analysis. It didn't feel like a standard tournament at all. The tournament became less about my own individual results and more about Hikaru being there. It definitely felt like he was a celebrity guest.

During the rounds, people watched Hikaru play, and he would walk around to see a bit of the games. It was really cool being in the same playing hall. I was able to meet him and get a photo before one of the rounds, and he signed my sister's hoodie. He was very open to photos, and very gracious to the fans. He was making chess as fan-oriented as you can during a tournament.

The amount of effort he put into it was great, because it's hard enough to play a tournament and get there for the round, get food, and take breaks. But between rounds he was also doing his recap videos and giving his time to the fans. The experience is something I'll always remember.



Luke Hengen didn't get to play Hikaru, but he did get a photo.



Nakamura checks out the competition in New Orleans.

PHOTOS: JAMES CULLEN FOR US CHESS (NOLA), COURTESY ALLIE HENGEN (IOWA)

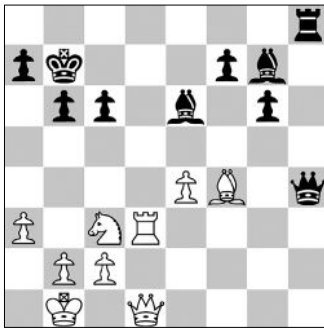
SICILIAN DEFENSE (B30)

Anjaneya Rao (2273)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2873)

70th Iowa Open (4), Iowa City, 09.07.2025

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. Bxc6 dxc6
5. d3 g6 6. Be3 b6 7. h3 Bg7 8. Nc3 Nd7 9.
Qd2 h6 10. 0-0-0 Qc7 11. d4 cxd4 12. Bxd4
e5 13. Be3 Ba6 14. Kb1 0-0-0 15. g4 Nc5
16. Qc1 Ne6 17. Rxd8+ Qxd8 18. h4 Qf6
19. Rh3 Nd4 20. g5 Qe6 21. Rg3 hxg5 22.
Nxg5 Qe7 23. Qh1 Kb8 24. a3 Bc8 25. f4
exf4 26. Bxf4+ Kb7 27. Rd3 Ne6 28. Nxe6
Bxe6 29. Qd1 Qxh4



30. Rd7+ Ka8 31. Ne2 Bxd7 32. Qxd7 Qf6
33. Nd4 Qxf4, White resigned.

In Virginia

Nakamura took a “break” in October to reacquaint himself with his fellow super-GMs at the Clutch Chess Champions Showdown in St. Louis, but then in November the scene at the Washington Dulles Open was similar to those described at the other tournaments: Crowds around Nakamura’s board, mobbed hallway analysis sessions, postgame trips through the lobby that turned into auto-graph-and-selfie marathons.

The five-time U.S. Champion didn’t give a lot of notice before the start of the tournament, and organizers described a scramble of preparations, albeit one they were happy to deal with.

On Thursday morning, IA Anand Dommalapati got a phone call from FM Sunil Weeramantry, Nakamura’s stepfather, asking about the Dulles Open.

“I thought maybe it’s [for] one of his students or somebody,” Dommalapati said. “I said it was a decent tournament to play in.” That evening, Dommalapati got another phone call from fellow US Chess Executive Board member John Fernandez, asking

whether Dommalapati could get his hands on a DGT board to allow for streaming of Nakamura’s games, and to run the apparatus.

He managed to lay hands on one (and later three more were found for the other top boards), but with a trip to India coming up the day after the tournament he probably had other plans. Still, he thought “I didn’t have any issues with running it,” Dommalapati said, crediting high schooler Ananya Ananth for helping out; “it’s just the time. But it all worked out. Everybody wants to come and play, and they want to say hi to him. So I’m happy to do it.”

The GM’s presence led to a particularly long weekend for Assistant TD Josh Hibban, but he also said it was worth it, not least for the bump in attendance that the candidate’s appearance inspired. They were expecting about 90 players and ended up with 122, with about 30 players registering after Thursday evening, when Nakamura signed up.

That caused some logistical problems, Hibban said: The other ballrooms in the hotel were already spoken for, so the options were to hold games in the lobby or pack the main tournament room. “People are packed in there like sardines,” Hibban said during Round 2. “But everybody, I think, is just happy to see Hikaru. They don’t mind being squeezed in a little bit.”

When word got out that the grandmaster might be playing, Hibban said, he got about 100 emails asking about it: “Is he really playing?” “Does he have any byes?” “I might come tomorrow during Round 2; is he going to be there?” Between the emails, directing Round 1 of the three-day schedule, and setting up for Nakamura’s appearance, Hibban said, he got to bed at about 5 a.m. Saturday, with a scholastic tournament set to start at 9.

“So we’ve been busy working around the clock, right? But you love it. I mean, we’re not complaining. It’s awesome.”

SICILIAN DEFENSE (B06)

IM Lokumannage De Silva (2493)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2874)

Washington Dulles Open (4), Sterling, 11.09.2025

1. e4 c5 2. c3 d5 3. exd5 Qxd5 4. d4 g6 5.
Nf3 Bg7 6. Nbd2 cxd4 7. Bc4 Qd8 8. Qb3
Nh6 9. Nxd4 0-0 10. N2f3 Nc6 11. Nxc6
bxc6 12. 0-0 Qc7 13. Re1 Nf5 14. Qa4 e5

Top: Versus Rao in Iowa. Middle: Against Vilamil in New Orleans. Bottom: Considering his position against Diaio in Dulles.



15. Be3 Nxe3 16. Rxe3 Kh8 17. Qa3 f6 18. Rd1 Bf5 19. Ree1 Rfd8 20. h3 a5 21. Qa4 Bd7 22. Qc2 Bf8 23. Nd2 Be7 24. Nf1 Bc5 25. Qe2 Re8 26. Rd2



26. ... e4 27. Red1 Bc8 28. a3 a4 29. Ba2 Qe7 30. Qc4 Ba6 31. Qf7 Qxf7 32. Bxf7 Re7 33. Rd8+ Rxd8 34. Rxd8+ Kg7 35. Be8 Rb7 36. Bxc6 Rxb2 37. Ne3 f5 38. Bxa4



38. ... f4 39. Ng4 e3 40. fxe3 fxe3 41. Rd7+ Kf8 42. Rd8+ Kf7 43. Ne5+ Kg7 44. Nf3 e2+ 45. Kh2 Bb7 46. Ne1 Bf2 47. Rd7+ Kh6 48. Nd3 e1=Q, White resigned.

In Dulles, it was mission accomplished: The last-round game with Balakrishnan was Nakamura's 40th FIDE-rated game of the year, making him eligible for the Candidates tournament.

The fallout

Some observers in the online world criticized Nakamura for playing down in his quest for qualification. Even FIDE CEO GM Emil Sutovsky in September told ChessBase India, "Maybe we thought better of our top players not doing that ... we should have been looking at it more scrupulously and to prevent such a loophole from happening."

FIDE responded by lowering the potential rating gain for a 2650-plus player against an opponent more than 450 points lower-rated to 0.1 points. Players with a rating advantage of 735 points or more will receive nothing for winning a game.

It's not clear how this would stop the perceived problem of "farming," even though Sutovsky said in the announcement that it was "triggered" by Nakamura's campaign

but also in response to other players' exploits. Nakamura was well clear of his nearest competition on the rating list; it was simply a matter of racking up games played. Indeed, the problem, if there is one, would appear to stem from FIDE's dropping of the minimum rating — decades ago, players didn't get FIDE ratings unless they were over 2200, so a tournament like the Louisiana Open wouldn't count in a quest like Nakamura's.

GM Susan Polgar called the criticism "fake moral outrage," pointed out that Nakamura hadn't broken any rules and added, "Looking back to when I was a 2000-2200+ player, what [a] thrill it would have been for me to play against, and then analyze with, a world-class player for free."

For the new Candidate's part, his social media presence indicated that he enjoyed getting back to the roots of the tournament experience. He congratulated Louisiana resident FM Nick Matta as "the REAL Louisiana State Champ," said from Iowa that "being at these state championships brings back all the nostalgia," and from Virginia that there's "nothing like a good weekend in the US."

He added, "Tournaments with players of all ages and backgrounds, 2-3 games a day and the typical rush to get food between games really reminds me of why I fell I love with chess all those decades ago." ♠



PHOTO: COURTESY ALLIE HENGEN



A Rail Good Time

Downriver Chess marks a new Amtrak route with a trio of events.

BY **ANDREW SQUITIRO**



THE NEW ORLEANS CHESS scene is already accustomed to some strange venues. Our club, Down-

river Chess, hosts weekly tournaments at a beignet stand, a coffee shop where we've been shushed by tourists receiving a psychic reading, and a 24-hour bar. If the space allows kids, has a bathroom, and is free, we'll play there.

So when Amtrak announced they were opening a line serving the Gulf Coast for the first time in 20 years, we knew we had to take our show on the road. The bulk of those play-

ers who commute, sometimes several hours, to our FIDE-rated tournaments come from Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Mobile — all stops along the new Mardi Gras route.

Amtrak is tricky, though; the start was continually pushed back due to delays in building platforms along the coastal towns it stopped in. Once the date, Aug. 18, was announced, we had less than a month to plan. Not only did we want to be the first club to ever play rated chess on a moving Amtrak train, but we wanted to do it on the first weekend of service.

I immediately reached out to Tom Denton,

treasurer of the Mobile Chess Club, to explain my idea: "I'm going to bring a load of chess-players over on the train and we're going to play chess with your club once we get there." We'd already met a few of his members, but never the man himself. But he was in!

I made a post on our club's Facebook announcing a firm date for the tournament and was immediately overwhelmed with interest. I initially planned a closed tournament of four players, taking up one booth in the cafe car, but decided to open it up to eight. I still ended up with a waiting list and some hurt feelings among those I turned away.

But the plan was set: We would board the Mardi Gras on Friday, Aug. 22, start an eight-person blitz round robin in the cafe car on the way there, play a quick-rated Swiss with the Mobile Chess Club players in Mobile on Saturday, and finish our round robin on the way home Saturday night. I told my players which tickets to buy, offered some hotel options, and waited the few short weeks for the adventure to begin.

A quick note about Amtrak: There's the policy, and then there are the conductors. Anyone who rides the rails often knows it's the conductor who makes the rules, and that goes double for the cafe car. Even though it's meant for passengers to relax in — and there are pictures online of card games and laughing families — that's not always what



Squitiro plays with James Klingler (center) and Leo Le-Tran (right).



Andrew Squitiro

you get. Sometimes, the conductors claim each booth in the cafe car as their own and instruct those who purchase food to take it back to their seats.

I knew the conductor could make or break our trip. I'd tried and failed to get in touch with Amtrak beforehand for clearance on this, so I told my players this tournament would have to be a punk-rock one. We'd storm the cafe car once the train left the station, buy a few snacks, and set down our boards. If our first try was stymied, well, we'd have another shot coming back.

I was anxious, to be sure. I didn't want to lead my members on a wild goose chase for a tournament where we never actually got to play! Once we departed New Orleans and the scenery went from urban to bayou, I sent in the children and the chess moms first. They were the tip of our spear. Who could say no to some cute kids playing chess? And chess moms are so nice!

TD tip: A good thing about round robins is that you can pair them in advance, with no laptop required. For punk-rock tournaments such as this, a laptop would totally blow our cover. This needed to look fun and spontaneous, not like the well-planned takeover it really was.

But all the worry was for naught: The conductor, born and raised in Mississippi, loved us. I told everyone else to come in and we had one table for the games and another for the spectators and drinks (yes, Amtrak sells alcohol). The plan was a success and we'd finished the round robin, except for

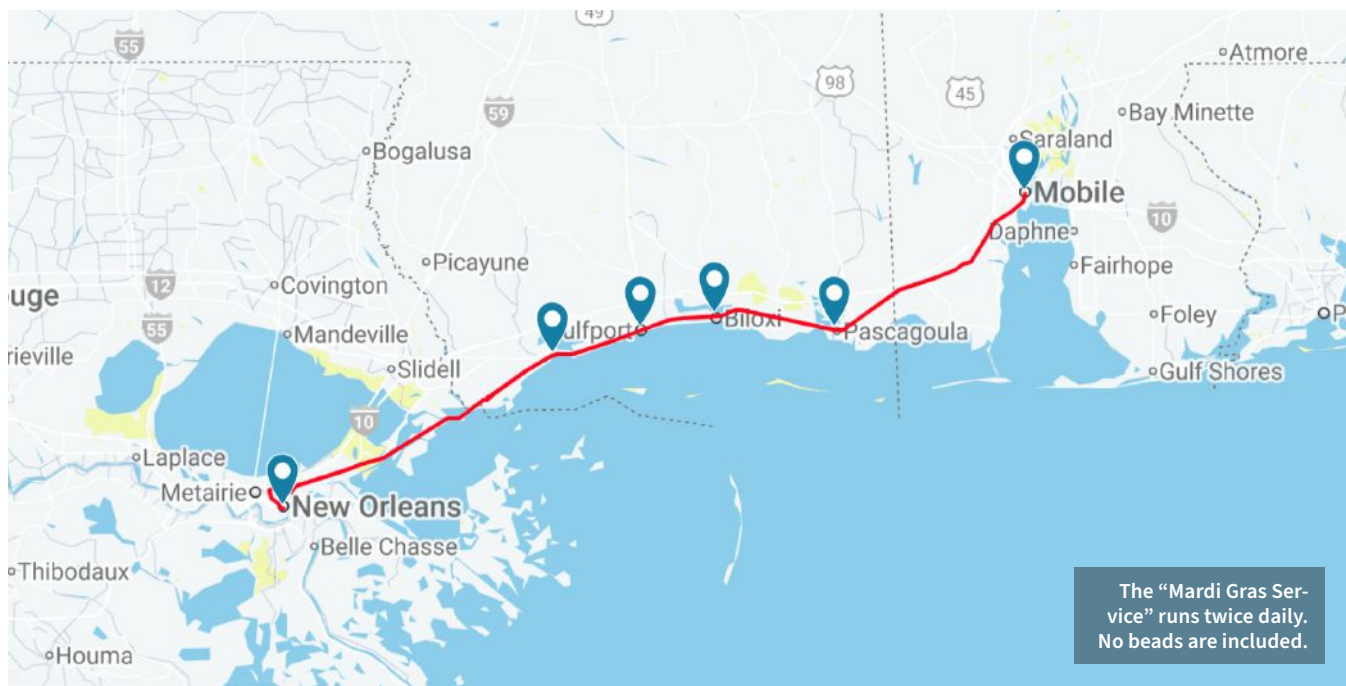
Jerry McDonald of the Mississippi Coast Chess Club. As the bayou turned to coastline and the sun began to set, Jerry boarded the train in Gulfport.

I don't think he'd even had a chance to stow his bags before we escorted him to the cafe car to play all his games in a row so we could finish the round robin. Jerry put up a good fight, but ended up winning just two of his games. The shaky rails take some getting used to! Our young upstart, 13-year-old Leo Le-Tran, easily won the tournament with a perfect 7/7 score.

While the games were in progress, it was easy to get distracted by the beautiful changing scenery: cities, bayou, marshland, small towns, and stretches of beach — not to mention the people waving to us, the first passenger train they've seen since Hurricane Katrina wiped away the line.

The other passengers on the train were attentive as well. Everyone loves chess, and since we play in public settings, we're used to spectators interrupting the games and asking about how to get involved. It's always good to have that info on hand, and of course I forgot to bring flyers.

The next morning we ate breakfast at Bob's Diner, a cozy, New Orleans-themed breakfast joint (go figure) just a few blocks from the hotel, and then piled into a few taxis to make the short journey across the bay to Spanish Fort. The Mobile Chess Club was waiting for us at Cheryl's Cafe, which is closed on weekends but had opened up just for us: US Chess members only!



The "Mardi Gras Service" runs twice daily. No beads are included.

So far we'd united the chess clubs of Gulfport, New Orleans, and Mobile, but to my surprise the members of the Pensacola Chess Club had turned up as well! It's hard enough to organize a match between two chess clubs, and here we had four! Due to the uneven numbers, however, we didn't run it as a team tournament. Maybe another day! This one was just for rating points (FIDE-rated to boot); the prize fund and entry were each \$0.

Board one in the final round came down to Denton versus Le-Tran. Leo won that one too, solidifying his perfect 5/5 score. With just an hour or so to spare, we made our way back to the Mobile train station and began our journey back to New Orleans.

We didn't intend to run a tournament each day we chugged along the coast, but since the round robin finished smoothly Friday night, we had time to do another. This one we paired as a double-quad, meaning we divided our group into a top and bottom half and everyone in each group played each other twice.

This made it easier to figure out who you're playing without bothering the TD. And, given you get to play both as Black and as White, we didn't have to get up as much as before. Getting up and out of the window seat of a diner booth going 70 mph along hundred-year-old rails can be a daunting experience!

The trains in both directions departed in the late afternoon, meaning on both journeys we got to see spectacular sunsets along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico. I've played chess in a lot of special places — our club meets twice a week in the French Quarter

— but the combination of the train horn, the ocean views, and upbeat energy and old-school diner booths of the dining car, made this one of my favorites.

The top section of our return-trip tournament saw Leo gain another perfect score (his third in one weekend, but who's counting?), your intrepid author scoring 4/6, and 10-year-old Theo McGlynn-Wright winning his section with 5/6.

Special thanks to the cafe car attendant, Randy, as well as the conductors, Travis and James, since it was their hospitality that made this all happen. We are already scheming our next railroad chess journey — most likely we'll visit the Mobile Chess Club once again in March for their flagship tournament, the Azalea City Open. And after that, who knows? Maybe an airline will reach out to us next. ♠



Gerald MacDonald



Leo Le-Tran
(left) and James
Klinger (right)

Chigorin Magic

A 19th-century Russian master comes through with a spectacular finish.

BY **BRUCE PANDOLFINI**



LONG BEFORE THE ERA OF Soviet chess came the rise of Russian chess. Russia in the 1800s developed some very creative players, especially the artful Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908). With his romantic vision and innovative talent, he fashioned all kinds of surprise moves, original ideas, and scintillating attacks. On occasion, he might take his notions a tad too far, rejecting simple wins for unclear continuations. In this month's game, a casual encounter with an unknown amateur, we see Chigorin build his position, rhapsodically give his opponent a chance to get back into the game with an error, and redeem himself with glory in the end.

KING'S GAMBIT ACCEPTED, SALVIO GAMBIT (C37)

NN

Mikhail Chigorin
St. Petersburg, 1875

1. e4 e5 2. f4 exf4 3. Nf3 g5 4. Bc4 g4 5. Ne5 Qh4+ 6. Kf1 Nh6 7. d4 f3 8. Bf4 d6 9. Nd3



Now ensure that the position above is set up on your chessboard. As you play through the remaining moves in this game, use a

piece of paper to cover the article, exposing Black's next move only after trying to guess it. If you guess correctly, give yourself the par score. Sometimes points are also awarded for second-best moves, and there may even be bonus points — or deductions — for other moves and variations. Note that ** means that Black's move is on the next line. **

9. Par Score 5 Bg7
Black develops the bishop and prepares for kingside castling. You may accept **full credit** for 9. ... Nc6 or 9. ... fxg2+.

10. c3
White solidifies his d-pawn. **

10. Par Score 5 0-0
An expected move, but you may accept **full credit** for 10. ... Nc6. **

11. Nf2
Repositioning the knight for defense. This placement especially guards h3. **

11. Par Score 5 fxg2+
By capturing, Black opens the way toward the White king. **

12. Kxg2 **

12. Par Score 5 Nc6
You may accept **full credit** for 12. ... Kh8, enabling the f-pawn to move.

13. Nd2
More stabilizing would have been 13. Bg3. **

13. Par Score 5 Kh8
Black is now free to open the position further with ... f7-f5.

14. Bg3 **

14. Par Score 4 Qg5
Black's queen is well placed here.

15. Qc2
White connects rooks, but his position remains vulnerable. **

15. Par Score 5 f5
Chigorin follows through on his premeditated advance.

16. exf5
White neutralizes the threat of 16. ... f4 (**1 bonus point** if you saw that was on the table). **

16. Par Score 5 Nxf5
New threats emerge. Black's position is becoming overwhelming.

17. Rae1
This doesn't save the day, but then nothing quite does. **



17. Par Score 5 b5
This looks like one of those romantic moves, sacrificing just to sacrifice. But it has a point — to clear b7 for the c8-bishop. You may accept **full credit** for the less imaginative 17. ... Ne3+, winning the Exchange.

18. Bb3

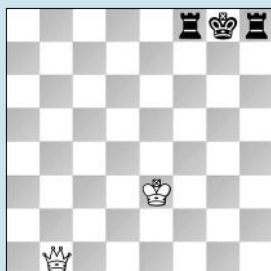
ABCS OF CHESS

THESE PROBLEMS ARE all related to key positions in this month's game. In each case, White is to move. The answers can be found in Solutions on page 63.

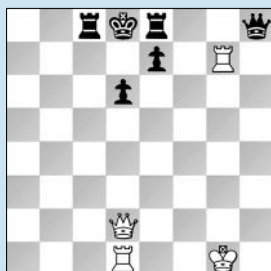
JANUARY EXERCISE

When we start playing chess, we encounter wide-ranging truisms. They work a lot of the time, and we may even begin to follow them as if they're always true. They're not. Principles are good to start the thinking process, by asking "What would the principles suggest doing in a position like this?" But they don't always apply, and they can't be relied on too broadly.

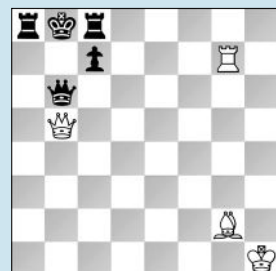
PROBLEM 1 Mating net



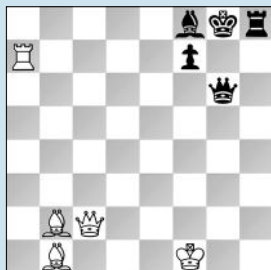
PROBLEM 2 Mating net



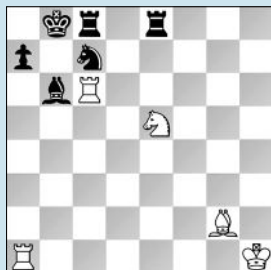
PROBLEM 3 Mating net



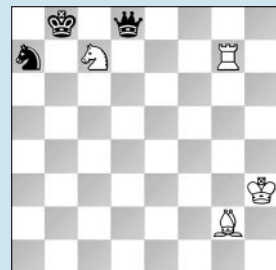
PROBLEM 4 Mating net



PROBLEM 5 Mating net



PROBLEM 6 Mating net



It turns out that retreating is no better than 18. Bxb5. **

18. **Par Score 6** **Ncxd4**
Chigorin does it his way, though you may accept **full credit** for 18. ... Bb7, after which Black is armed for the kill.

19. **cx d4** **

19. **Par Score 5** **Nxd4**
You may certainly accept **full credit** for 19. ... Bxd4, with various threats in the air, but not 19. ... Bb7+, which isn't as good because of 20. d5.

20. **Qc3**
Substandard. A little safer was 21. Qd3. **

20. **Par Score 4** **Qh5**
Not the best. White can now defend by 21. Qxc7. Stronger was 20. ... Nxb3 21. Qxb3 Qxd2 (**full credit + 1 bonus point**).

21. **Rhf1**
White misses his chance at 21. Qxc7. **

21. **Par Score 5** **Bb7+**

22. **Kg1**
On 22. Nde4, Black's attack rolls on with 22. ... Rae8. **

22. **Par Score 5** **Rae8**

Black activates the rook anyway.

23. **Qd3**
White's last hope was 23. Qxc7, though Black's attack remains strong. **

23. **Par Score 6** **Rf3**
A crushing intrusion. The rook can't be safely taken.

24. **Qb1** **

24. **Par Score 6** **Re2**
Getting set up for a beautiful Chigorinized conclusion. You may accept **full credit** for the alternative path 24. ... Rxg3+ 25. hxg3 Re2.

25. **Bd1**
No move salvages the position. Chigorin's glorious vision is now realized. **

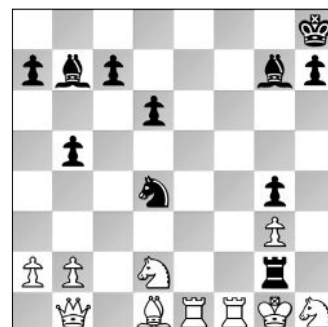
25. **Par Score 7** **Rxg3+**

26. **hxg3** **

26. **Par Score 7** **Qh1+**
What's this?

27. **Nxh1** **

27. **Par Score 5** **Rg2 mate.**
And that's an epaulette mate! What a spectacular finish! ♠



POSITION AFTER 27. ... Rg2 MATE

SOLITAIRE CHESS SCORING:

Total your score to determine your approximate rating below

Total Score	Approx. Rating
95+	2400+
81-90	2200-2399
66-80	2000-2199
51-65	1800-1999
36-50	1600-1799
21-35	1400-1599
06-20	1200-1399
0-05	under 1200

Liquidation Application

When simplifying doesn't make the win simpler

BY GM JOEL BENJAMIN

A

BRILLIANT CHESS MIND ONCE wrote a review of *Liquidation on the Chessboard* complaining that the book really wasn't about

liquidation, but rather about pawn endgames. Of course, the more you know about pawn endings, the better equipped you are to make decisions about liquidating. Even the strongest, most knowledgeable players can err in this critical moment of games.

In last year's Sinquefeld Cup, GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave made a poor decision to liquidate into a drawn pawn endgame when a straightforward victory was available with the pieces on the board. But what a pawn ending it was! GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov's endgame skill was put to a rigorous test; only after demonstrating knowledge of several typical themes did he collect the half-point.

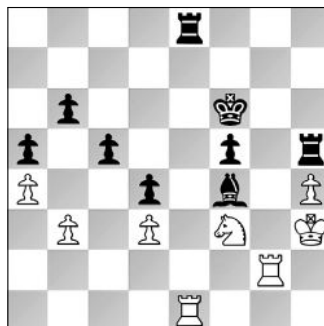
Liquidation temptation

ENGLISH OPENING (A21)

GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov (2771)
GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (2736)
12th Sinquefeld Cup (6), St. Louis,
08.24.2025

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Bb4 3. Nd5 Be7 4. Nf3 d6
5. g3 Nf6 6. Nc3 c5 7. Bg2 Nc6 8. 0-0 Be6
9. d3 h6 10. e4 Qd7 11. Nd5 Rb8 12. a4
Bh3 13. Bd2 b6 14. Nc7+ Kf8 15. Nd5 a5
16. Ne1 Nxd5 17. cxd5 Nd4 18. Bxh3 Qxh3
19. Be3 h5 20. Bxd4 exd4 21. f4 f5 22. Nf3

h4 23. gxh4 Bxh4 24. b3 Re8 25. e5 g5 26.
fxg5 Bxg5 27. exd6 Be3+ 28. Kh1 Rd8 29.
Qe2 Rxd6 30. Ng1 Qh5 31. Qxh5 Rxh5 32.
Ra2 Rxd5 33. Nf3 Kf7 34. h4 Rd8 35. Rg2
Kf6 36. Kh2 Bf4+ 37. Kh3 Re8 38. Re1



38. ... Rxh4+!

With the loss of a second pawn, you would think White's resistance would be broken.

39. Nxh4

Not 39. Kxh4?? Rh8 mate.

39. ... Rxe1

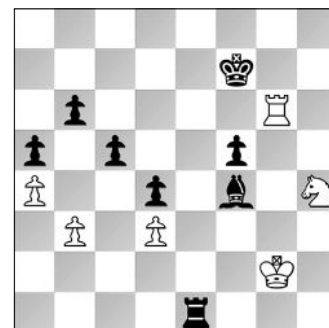
It looks like White won't even survive the next few moves, but Abdusattorov finds the only defense to the threat of ... Re1-h1+. These are underrated moments in chess; keeping the action going enables the miracles that come later.

40. Rg6+ Kf7 41. Kg2!

(see diagram top of next column)

41. ... Re2+?

Grandmasters can be too smart for their



POSITION AFTER 41. Kg2

own good. They always search for the "simplest" win, but this does not always involve simplifying. A more brute-force approach would get the job done: 41. ... Rd1 (or 41. ... Re3) 42. Rxb6 Rxd3 43. Nxf5 Rc3 and the d-pawn is just too strong: 44. Kf2 (44. Nd6+ Bxd6 45. Rxd6 Rxb3) 44. ... d3 45. Ne3 d2 46. Nd1 Rh3 47. Ke2 Rh1 etc.

42. Kf3 Rh2 43. Kxf4 Rxh4+ 44. Kxf5 Rh5+ 45. Rg5 Rh3

After 45. ... Rh2!? 46. Ke4 Rb2 47. Rh5 Rxb3 48. Rh6 White's activity clinches the draw despite the preponderance of pawns, e.g. 48. ... Ke7 49. Rc6 Kd7 50. Rh6 Kc7 51. Rh7+ Kc6 52. Rh6+ Kb7 53. Rh7+ Ka6 54. Rh8 Ra3 55. Kd5!! Rxd3 56. Kc6 Ka7 57. Rh7+ Ka6 58. Rh8 etc.

46. Rg6! Rf3+ 47. Kg4?

Even a presumed time shortage cannot explain this retreat, which seems to have nothing to recommend it over 47. Ke4! In that case, White holds after 47. ... Re3+ 48. Kf5 Rxd3 49. Rxb6 Ke7 50. Rc6! (50. Ke5 Re3+ 51. Kd5 d3 wins) 50. ... Rc3 51. Ke5 Kd7 52. Rd6+ Kc7 53. Rh6 d3 (53. ... Rxb3 54. Rh7+ Kb6 55. Rh6+ Ka7 56. Kd5 Rc3 57. Kc6! with perpetual king harassment) 54. Rh7+ Kd8 55. Kd6 Ke8 56. Ke6 Kf8 57. Rb7.

47. ... Kxg6?

Just very odd. King position is critical, and Black should play 47. ... Rxd3 with a whole extra tempo compared to the previous line. Next comes 48. Rxb6 Ke7 with an easy win: 49. Kf4 Rc3 50. Ke4 Re3+ 51. Kd5 d3 52. Kxc5 d2 and Black makes a queen. By the way, Black could even play 52. ... Re5+ 53. Kd4 d2, because 54. Kxe5 d1=Q 55. Rb5 is not a fortress. It's even winning without the a5-pawn.

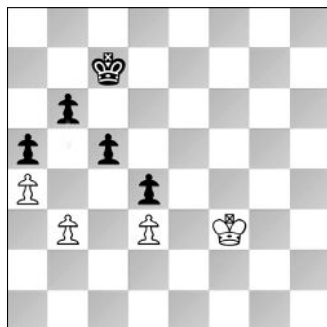
48. Kxf3 Kg5 49. Kg3

The first of many examples of holding the opposition. White loses the opposition after 49. Ke2 Kg4 50. Kf2 Kf4 51. Ke2 Kg3. With a pawn less, White cannot race: 49. Ke4 Kg4

50. Kd5 Kf4 51. Kc6 Ke3 52. Kxb6 Kxd3 53. Kxa5 Kc3.

49. ... Kf5 50. Kf3 Ke5 51. Kg4 Kd6 52. Kf3! Kc7!?

MVL keeps his options open along the way, presenting a series of quizzes for his opponent.



53. Ke4!!

Should I stay or should I go? The king has to come forward; after 53. Ke2 Kc6! White cannot defend against Black's various ideas: 54. Kd2 (54. Kf3 b5 55. Ke4 bxa4 56. bxa4 Kd6 is zugzwang) 54. ... Kd5 55. Ke2 c4! (White's king has to be on f3 to prevent this break) 56. bxc4+ (56. dxc4+ Ke4 57. Kd2 d3 58. Kd1 Ke3 59. Ke1 d2+ 60. Kd1 Kd3 wins) 56. ... Kc5 57. Kf3 Kb4 and Black will make a queen.

53. ... Kd6

White has a beautiful defense to 53. ... b5!? in 54. Kd5! Kb6 55. Ke4!! bxa4 (55. ... c4?? 56. dxc4 and White wins!) 56. bxa4 Kc6 57. Ke5! and in this mutual zugzwang position Black is forced to give ground: 57. ... Kc7 58. Kd5 Kb6 59. Ke4! is a draw.

54. Kf3! b5

White's king is exactly where it needs to be. Not 54. ... c4?? 55. bxc4 (55. dxc4? Ke5! wins) 56. Ke4 Kb4 57. Kxd4 Kxa4 58. Kc3 b5 59. d4! and White even wins.

55. axb5!

The White king has time to run back.

55. ... Kc7 56. Ke2! Kb6 57. Kd2 Kxb5 58. Kc1 Kc6

58. ... a4 59. Kb2 draws, so MVL tries another tack.

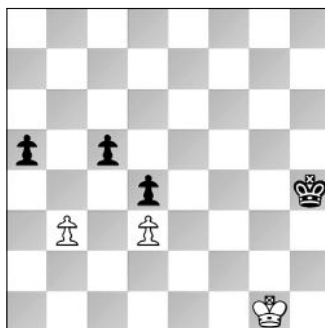
59. Kc2 Kd6 60. Kd2 Ke6 61. Ke2 Ke5 62. Ke1

White has some choice here, as both 62. Kf3 and 62. Kf1 also hold the opposition.

62. ... Kf5 63. Kf1 Kg5 64. Kg1

White's last two moves demonstrate distant opposition, and not for the last time here.

64. ... Kh4



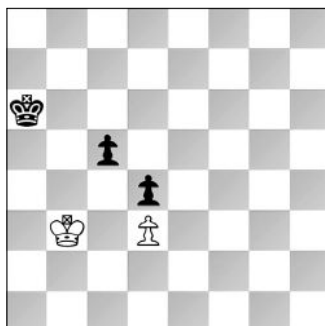
65. Kf2!

Diagonal opposition saves the day. Abdu does not fall for the trap 65. Kh2? c4! 66. bxc4 (66. dxc4 d3 with White's king lured too far away) and now Black's king can step back in the square of White's passer with 66. ... Kg5 or 66. ... Kg4, but White cannot catch the a-pawn.

65. ... Kg4 66. Kg2! Kf5 67. Kf1 Ke6 68. Ke2 Kd7 69. Kd1 Kc6 70. Kc2 Kb5 71. Kc1 a4 72. Kb2!

72. Kc2 can be met by 72. ... a3 or 72. ... Kb4 73. bxa4 Kxa4 74. Kb2 Kb4.

72. axb3 73. Kxb3 Ka6



74. Ka2!

White has to maintain the distant opposition. He could fatally misstep with 74. Kb2? Kb6 75. Ka2 Kc6 76. Kb2 Kd6 77. Kb3 Kd5 78. Kc2 Ke5 79. Kd2 Kf4 80. Ke2 Kg3. Coming forward is natural to many amateurs, but it's faulty here because squares available to the White king will be reduced: 74. Ka4? Kb6 75. Ka3 Ka5 76. Kb3 Kb5 77. Ka3 c4 78. Kb2 c3+! and the king will penetrate on the other side (not 78. ... cxd3? 79. Kc1 Kb4 80. Kd2 Kc4 81. Kd1 with a draw).

74. ... Kb7 75. Kb1

Or 75. Kb3.

75. ... Kb6 76. Kb2! Kb5 77. Kb3 Kc6 78.

Kc2! Kd5 79. Kd1 c4

White is ready to claim the opposition on the kingside, so MVL calls it a day.

80. dxc4+ Kxc4 81. Kc2 d3+ 82. Kd2 Kd4 83.

Kd1 Kc3 84. Kc1 d2+ 85. Kd1 Kd3, draw.

With all my study and knowledge, my instincts can still fail me in crunch time, as I was recently and painfully reminded!

Liquidation frustration

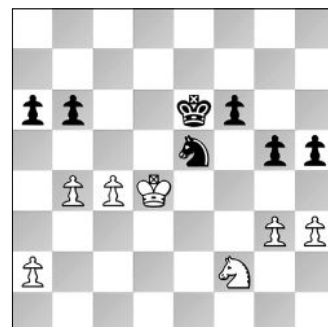
SICILIAN DEFENCE (B50)

GM Joel Benjamin (2550)

Shawn Xu (2163)

NY State Ch (2), Albany, 08.30.2025

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Nc3 a6 4. g3 Nf6 5. e5 dxe5 6. Nxe5 Nbd7 7. d4 e6 8. Nxd7 Qxd7 9. Be3 Qc6 10. Rg1 Bd7 11. Qd2 0-0-0 12. 0-0-0 Qb6 13. Bg2 Bc6 14. Bxc6 Qxc6 15. Qe2 Be7 16. dxc5 Bxc5 17. Bxc5 Qxc5 18. Qf3 Rxd1+ 19. Rxd1 Qa5 20. Rd4 Rd8 21. Rc4+ Kb8 22. Qf4+ Ka8 23. Qc7 Qxc7 24. Rxc7 Rd7 25. Rxd7 Nxd7 26. Ne4 f6 27. Kd2 Kb8 28. Nd6 g6 29. Ne8 Kc8 30. Ng7 Nf8 31. Ne8 Nd7 32. Kd3 Kd8 33. Nd6 Kc7 34. Nf7 Nb8 35. f4 Kd7 36. Nh6 Ke7 37. Ng8+ Kf7 38. Nh6+ Ke7 39. Ng4 Nd7 40. c4 h5 41. Nf2 e5 42. fxe5 Nxe5+ 43. Kd4 Ke6 44. h3 b6 45. b4 g5



White has no advantage in the knight ending, so I decided to roll the dice in the pawn ending, where all results could be possible. My young opponent accepted the challenge, though he could have drawn by declining the swap.

46. Nd3 Nxd3 47. Kxd3 Ke5 48. Ke3 f5?

(continued on page 52)

More than Material

A high-level examination of pawn sacrifices

BY IM JOHN WATSON

G

RANDMASTER IVAN CHEPARINOV has had an extremely successful playing career, reaching the world's top 20 at age 21 and winning four Bulgarian Championships as well as elite-strength tournaments such as the 2012 Politiken Cup and 2014 Gibraltar Chess Festival. He grabbed the chess world's attention while still a teenager as Veselin Topalov's second for various matches in the World Championship cycle, contributing novel opening ideas over a period of seven years. Now a full-time coach, he has produced many books, e-books, and articles. His writing is distinguished by original theoretical ideas and particularly creative analysis.

Cheparinov's recent book *Powerhouse Pawn Sacrifices* is subtitled "How to Lose Small and Win Big in Chess." Last month I reviewed Sam Shankland's *Converting an Extra Pawn in Chess*, which examines how to play when a pawn ahead. Cheparinov's work addresses the flip side: playing with a pawn down. Of course, there are countless types of pawn sacrifices with a wide variety of motivations.

Cheparinov structures the discussion by devoting the first chapter to positions with dynamic factors that compensate for the pawn but may prove only temporary. The second chapter addresses sacrifices with long-term advantages that can persist throughout the entire game. After drawing this distinction, Cheparinov uses the next four chapters to give examples of typical pawn sacrifices which arise in four major opening systems. He analyses exemplary games which illustrate the main issues all the way from the opening into the endgame, with deep analytic detail and plenty of instructive commentary.

Cheparinov concludes the book with deep analysis of five classic games won by three elite players: Fabiano Caruana, Garry Kasparov, and Veselin Topalov. He calls these games "complicated, but ... massively instructive to play through," which I think is a fair description.

Powerhouse Pawn Sacrifices is based on a series of lectures Cheparinov gave for the Killer Chess Training Academy in 2023-24. In his class, Cheparinov presented his students with exercises consisting of multiple positions from each game in the book. At the beginning of each chapter of this book, he offers a selection of similar exercises and suggests that the reader tackle the exercises first, then discover the solutions while playing through the corresponding games. This adds up to 100 exercises, which arguably are the most useful part of the book for someone trying to improve their positional judgment, calculation skills, and chess intuition. I would strongly recommend taking

this approach to the material.

Here's a relatively straightforward example from the author's own practice:

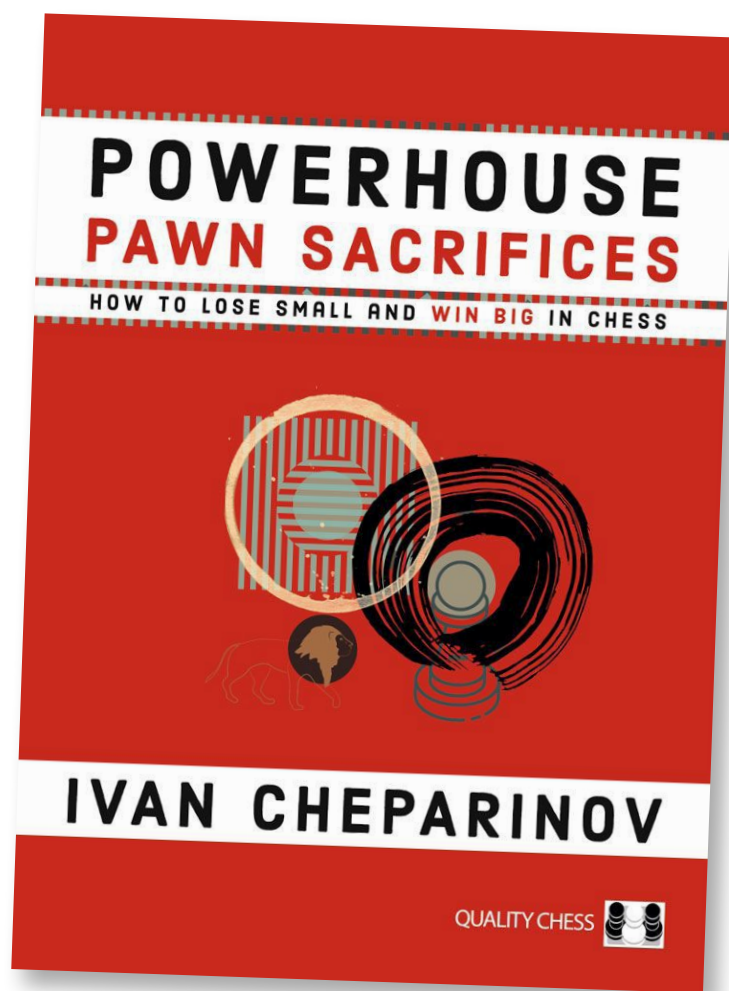
CATALAN OPENING (E04)

GM Ivan Cheparinov

IM David Gavrilescu

EU-Cup Online Rapid Ch, 2021

Annotations by IM John Watson and Cheparinov (IC)



1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5. Bg2 a6 6. Ne5 Bb4+ 7. Nc3 Nd5 8. 0-0! 0-0!
The line 8. ... Nxc3 9. bxc3 Bxc3 10. Rb1 had been played a lot with good results for White, although today's engines show that with perfect defense for Black it is probably good enough to draw.

Here's an example of how risky it is to grab material: 8. ... Bxc3 9. bxc3 Nxc3 10. Qc2, which has the idea 10. ... Qxd4? (10. ... Nb5 11. Nxc4 Nxd4 12. Qe4 0-0 13. Ba3 Re8 14. Rfd1) 11. Nxf7! Kxf7 12. Bb2 with a killing attack, e.g., 12. ... Nc6 13. Rad1 Qc5 14. Qxc3.

9. Ne4 b5 10. b3!



IC: "A typical approach, surrendering any hopes of regaining the pawn and making it into a true pawn sacrifice. It was anyway hard to imagine White regaining the c4-pawn at this point. With b2-b3, White plays to open the a- and c-files. Moreover, the annoying c4-pawn is eliminated, depriving Black of the space previously controlled on the queenside and granting the e5-knight the use of the d3-square. From there, the knight can cooperate with its colleague on e4 so that one of them can decisively land on c5."

10. ... cxb3

If 10. ... c3 11. a3! Be7 12. Qc2 with advantage to White.

11. axb3

11. Qxb3!?, which Cheparinov has also played, is another typical way to exert pressure for a pawn.

11. ... Bb7 12. Nd3! Be7?!

Today it is known that 12. ... Nd7! is better, when 13. Nxb4 Nxb4 14. Bg5 (or 14. Ba3 a5 15. Qd2) gives White compensation.

13. Nec5 Bc6 14. e4?

Inaccurate. White's pawn sacrifice is more than justified after 14. Bb2!, when 14. ... Nf6 15. e4 transposes to the game.

14. ... Nf6?

The tricky 14. ... Nc3! 15. Qc2 Bxc5 16. Nxc5 b4! leaves White with some compensation, but objectively I think Black stands slightly better.

15. Bb2 Bxc5 16. Nxc5 Nbd7 17. Nxd7! Qxd7 18. Re1

Here 18. d5! exd5 19. e5 Ne4 20. f3 Ng5 21. Rc1! threatens h2-h4 followed by f3-f4-f5 with a clear advantage. Cheparinov includes a lengthy and instructive note on this classic d4-d5/... e6xd5/e4-e5 sacrifice, with several useful examples from leading grandmasters.

18. ... Rfd8? 19. d5!

Anyway, but with the new point:

19. ... exd5 20. Bxf6! gxf6 21. exd5



21. ... Qf5

The standard but essential tactic is 21. ... Bxd5?? 22. Bxd5 Qxd5 23. Re8+! and White wins. Otherwise 21. ... Bb7 22. Qh5 wins on the kingside, for example, 22. ... Re8 23. Re4!! threatening Re4-g4+, when 23. ... Rxe4 (23. ... Re5 24. Rxe5 fxe5 25. Qg5+ Kf8 26. Qxe5 wins) 24. Bxe4 has the simple threat of 25. Qxh7+ followed by 26. Re1.

22. Be4 Qg5

If 22. ... Qh3 23. Qf3 Bd7 24. Qxf6.

23. h4 Qg7 24. Qf3

Or 24. Rc1!.

24. ... Bd7 25. d6 Rac8 26. Bb7 cxd6 27. Bxc8 Bxc8 28. b4 f5 29. Rad1 Qf6 30. Qf4 Kg7 31. Rd5

White went on to win easily. Not bad for a rapid game!

In the next game Black returns the sacrificed pawn, which is often one of the best ways to free one's game and reduce potential suffering. We also get to see how seemingly mild positional pressure can persist even in an apparently simplified ending.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E15)

GM Anish Giri

GM Magnus Carlsen

Wijk aan Zee, 2023

Annotations by IM John Watson and Cheparinov (IC)

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Ba6

5. Qc2 Bb7 6. Bg2 c5 7. d5

An old and famous pawn sacrifice which is still debated in master play.

7. ... exd5 8. cxd5 Nxd5 9. 0-0 Be7 10. Rd1

Nc6 11. Qf5 Nf6 12. e4



12. ... d6!?

12. ... g6 has been played in hundreds of games and is considered a bit more reliable. After 13. Qf4 0-0 14. e5 Nh5 15. Qc4, Cheparinov says, "White has excellent compensation for the pawn."

13. e5 Qd7! 14. Qxd7+ Nxd7 15. exd6 Bf6 16. Re1+ Kf8 17. Nc3

IC: "Accepting the danger of repeating myself, this is what happens when a sacrificed pawn is comfortably regained. We're left with a position where the difference in the activity of the pieces remains obvious, but Black does not have the extra material that makes the suffering worth it. Granted, it is a common motif for the defending side to try and return the pawn in exchange for some safety, but this counter-sacrifice must be executed with care. If the pawn is regained because our opponent couldn't find any good way of holding on to it and gave it back only to survive, then the initial pawn sacrifice could already be considered successful."

17. ... Nb4

Cheparinov gives some fairly complex analysis to demonstrate that 17. ... Bxc3 18. bxc3 Re8! is sufficient to achieve a balance. Giri in his notes to the game concurs, but doesn't think that the play is easy.

18. Ne5 Nxe5 19. Bxb7 Rd8 20. Rd1 Nc4 21. d7 Nc2!?

Correspondence players ultimately figured out that 21. ... Ke7! 22. Bc8 Nc2 23. Rb1 Nd6! leads to a draw with further accurate play, but Cheparinov's point is that in practice the ending was difficult for White.

22. Rb1 Nd4?

Later analysis showed that 22. ... Ne5! (which Giri describes as "less intuitive") should hold, again only with very accurate play.

23. b4! Rxd7?

Cheparinov gives 23. ... Ne5 24. bxc5 bxc5 25. Kg2 "with a large advantage."

24. Bd5!

Now White is winning.

24. ... Nd6 25. bxc5 bxc5 26. Ba3 Ke7 27. Bxc5

Giri suggested that 27. Re1+! was easier.

27. ... Ne6 28. Bb4

IC: "The sensible human way to play."

28. ... a5 29. Bxa5 Rc8 30. Na4 Nc4 31. Rbc1 Be5 32. Bb4+ Kf6 33. Nc5 Nxc5 34.

Rxc4 Rdc7 35. Ba5, Black resigned.

I enjoy Cheparinov's analysis and commentary a lot, and in general this book serves as an excellent instructive manual. I feel any student, and particularly advanced ones, would do well to attempt to solve the introductory exercises to each chapter, which are well suited to stretch one's imagination.

On the other hand, I do think that Cheparinov's decision to base his discussion around specific complex mainstream openings has its limitations. Although the two games given above are fairly contemporary, most of Cheparinov's examples are older (indeed, quite a few are from 20-30 years ago). Someone who slogs his way through the detailed analysis of these openings, which require precise handling at many junctures, might naturally be interested in playing them in his or her own games. But several of these systems are now effectively solved and not worth playing, while for others, you'll need to thoroughly update the theory with contemporary resources and databases.

To be clear, this by no means undercuts the instructive nature of the book

or prevents one from expanding one's chess understanding. And in any case, the same objection can be applied more strongly to studying classic tournament books or games collections, which I feel is an extremely fruitful way to spend your study time.

On the final page, Cheparinov concludes: "Let's finish the book by repeating the most important piece of advice I have to give on the matter. If the question is 'a pawn or activity?,' then 'activity' should be our default answer." This philosophy pervades the book, and applies to Cheparinov's style as a player as well. Not everyone is so inclined, of course, and improving players will have to decide under which circumstances they are more comfortable with a material advantage (inspired by Shankland, perhaps?) and when they are happier to have active pieces and pressure to compensate for material. The ability to move between the two approaches can only improve one's strength and enjoyment of the game. ♠

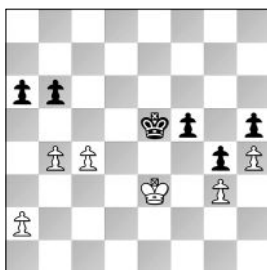
Cheparinov, Ivan. Powerhouse Pawn Sacrifices. Quality Chess, 2025. 213 pp.; ISBN 9781784832216. PB \$32.95, USCF Sales product code B0259QT.

(Benjamin; continued from page 49)

Precipitous pawn advances can leave one's pawn vulnerable to quicker capture. Black could hold the balance with 48. ... a5, one path being 49. c5 bxc5 50. bxa5 Kd6 51. g4 hxg4 52. hxg4 Kc6 53. a4 Kb7 54. Kd3 Ka7! 55. Kc4 f5! 56. gxf5 g4 57. f6 g3 58. f7 g2 59. f8=Q g1=Q, etc.

49. a3?

Being down to a minute or two on the clock is a poor excuse with a 30-second increment! I had planned to win with 49. h4! g4 but panicked when I noticed a miscalculation.



POSITION AFTER 49. ... g4

I feared my intended 50. c5? would lose after 50. ... bxc5 51. bxc5 f4+! 52. gxf4+ Kd5,

though even this is a clear draw: 53. f5 Kxc5 54. Ke4 Kd6 55. a3 a5 56. a4 Ke7 57. Ke3! Kd7 58. Kd4! Kd6 59. Ke4 and White cannot be zugzwang-ed. 50. c5 is dopey anyway, because 50. ... bxc5 51. bxc5 Kd5 52. Kf4 Kxc5 53. Kxf5 Kd4! also draws.

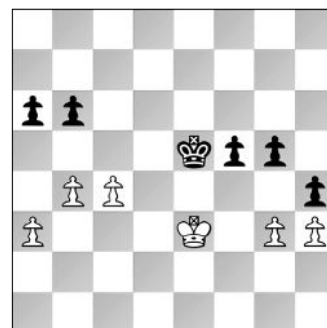
But if I reached the diagrammed position, I would have to choose a different pawn move, and they all win.

The simplest line is 50. a3 a5 51. bxa5 bxa5 52. a4 Kd6 53. Kf4 Kc5 54. Kxf5 Kb4 55. c5! Kxc5 56. Kg5 Kb4 57. Kxh5 Kxa4 58. Kxg4, when White's queening rook pawn stops Black's queening rook pawn.

White can also win with 50. a4 a5 51. b5 Kd6 52. Kf4 Kc5 (though I have never seen this position, it seems likely to be in the books somewhere) 53. Kxf5 (the flashy 53. Kg5? Kxc4 54. Kxh5 Kd4! 55. Kg5 Ke4 56. h5 f4 would throw away the win) 53. ... Kb4 (or 53. ... Kxc4 54. Kg5 Kb4 55. Kxh5 Kxa4 56. Kxg4 Kxb5 57. h5 repeats the theme seen above) and here, lying awake at night, I could see with perfect clarity 54. Ke5 Kxa4 (54. ... Kxc4 55. Kd6 Kb4 56. Kc6 Kxa4 57. Kxb6 wins) 55. Kd5! Kb4 56. c5 a4 57. cxb6 a3 58. b7 a2 59. b8=Q a1=Q 60. Qd6+ Kb3 61. b6 with a winning queen ending. Of course

54. c5! is simpler and more thematic, too.

49. ... h4!



My opponent atones for his previous mistake by utilizing a classic drawing theme.

50. gxh4 gxh4 51. c5 bxc5 52. bxc5 Kd5 53. Kf4 Kxc5 54. Kxf5 Kb5 55. Kg5 Ka4 56. Kxh4 Kxa3 57. Kg4 a5 58. h4 a4 59. h5 Kb2 60. h6 a3 61. h7 a2 62. h8=Q+ Kb1 With a draw a few moves later. ♠

For more of GM Joel Benjamin's column, check out the US Chess Digital archives: new.uschess.org/chess-life-digital-archives.

MAKE YOUR MOVE

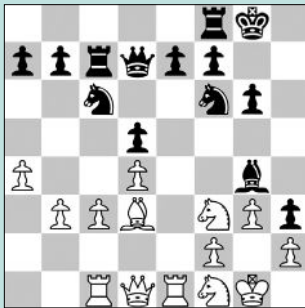
BY **FM CARSTEN HANSEN**

THIS MONTH'S PUZZLES ARE TAKEN FROM GAMES PLAYED at the U.S. Championships last October. Some of the puzzles may seem difficult, but that's the intention. Take your time, and don't get discouraged if you fail to find the right moves right away.

The puzzles start off easy and gradually become more difficult. It is worth noting that "easy" is a relative term. If you are new to the game, the easy ones can also represent a challenge.

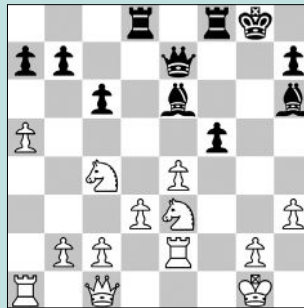
Try first to solve the puzzle before reading the text at the bottom of the page. If you're unsuccessful, play through the solution, but return to the puzzle in one or two weeks to see whether you can now solve it. That way, you gradually expand your tactical vision and you'll be more likely to spot tactics in your own games. Whatever you do, do not use an engine to solve the puzzles; you will only cheat yourself out of improving your game. Solutions are on page 63. 

TACTIC 1.



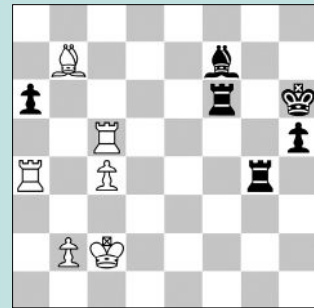
BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 2.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 3.



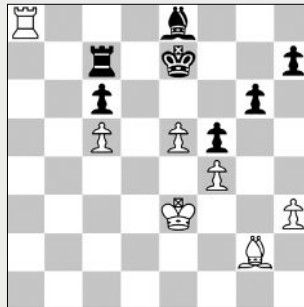
BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 4.



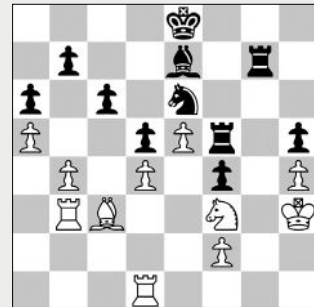
BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 5.



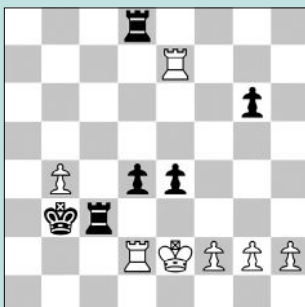
WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 6.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 7.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 8.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 9.



WHITE TO MOVE

Position 1: OVERBURDENED PROTECTOR

Position 2: THREATEN TO DISORGANIZE

Position 3: ROYAL ISSUES

Position 4: CLEAR UP THE MESS

Position 5: STUCK!

Position 6: REORGANIZE, THEN ATTACK

Position 7: QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Position 8: SURGICAL CUT

Position 9: BOTHER THE DEFENDERS

TOURNAMENT LIFE ANNOUNCEMENTS

NATIONAL EVENTS & BIDS NOW ON USCHESS.ORG Effective with the November 2020 *Chess Life*, we have removed the National Events and Bids page that has traditionally been part of our TLA section. This information continues to be available here:

new.uschess.org/national-events-calendar

For complete details on individual events, please visit [new.uschess.org/node/\[TLA ID\]](http://new.uschess.org/node/[TLA ID]). You will find the event's unique five-digit TLA ID at the top of each TLA.

Nationals

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 US Amateur Team South

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017
Site: Westgate Lakes Resort & Spa Address: 9500 Turkey Lake Road, Orlando, FL 32819 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Charles W Hatherill • kingsgambit50@earthlink.net • 7027430305 • thevillageschessclub.org

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT • HERITAGE EVENT

2026 World Amateur Team & U.S. Team East

FEBRUARY 14-16, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52576
Site: Parsippany Hilton Address: 1 Hilton Ct., Parsippany, NJ 07054 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: New Jersey Chess Federation • esdoyle@aol.com • njscf.org

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
Site: Hyatt Regency Schaumburg Address: 1800 E. Golf Rd., Schaumburg, IL 60173 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Glenn Panner • glenn@chessweekend.com • chessweekend.com

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

21st Annual KCF All-Girls National Championships

APRIL 10-12, 2026 — IL TLA# 52639
Site: Hyatt Regency McCormick Place Address: 2233 S Dr Martin Luther King Jr Dr., Chicago, IL 60616 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Renaissance Knights Chess Foundation • david.heiser@renaissanceknights.org • allgirls.knights.org

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT • HERITAGE EVENT • AMERICAN CLASSIC • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

2026 National Open

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
Site: Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino Address: 3000 Paradise Road, Las Vegas, NV 89109 Overall Prize

Fund: \$125,000 GP Pts: 200 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Vegas Chess Festival • vegaschessfestival@gmail.com • 702-930-9550 • vegaschessfestival.com

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

2026 U.S. Women's Open

JUNE 10-11, 2026 — NV TLA# 53257
Site: Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino Address: 3000 Paradise Road, Las Vegas, NV 89109 Overall Prize Fund: \$5,000 GP Pts: 60 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Vegas Chess Festival • vegaschessfestival@gmail.com • 702-930-9550 • vegaschessfestival.com

Grand Prix

The Grand Prix point totals reflect all rated event information as of December 18, 2025, for the 2025 Grand Prix. These standings are updated regularly, but should be considered unofficial. Visit ratings.uschess.org/grand-prix/standings for up-to-date information.

2025 US CHESS GRAND PRIX STANDINGS

	Name	State/Ctry	Pts
1.	GM JIANCHAO ZHOU	MA	616.00
2.	EMMANUEL CARTER	NC	145.00
3.	THOMAS FANG	NC	112.00
4.	GM FIDEL CORRALES JIMINEZ	CA	105.00
5.	FM DANILA POLIANNIKOV	MA	105.00
6.	GM ALEXANDER IVANOV	MA	97.00
7.	GM AWONDER LIANG	WI	89.00
8.	GM PRAVEEN BALAKRISHNAN	VA	82.00
9.	BHARATH SUBRAMANIAM H	FOR	82.00
10.	GM MIKHAIL ANTIPOV	MO	76.00

2025 Awards

\$12,500 in cash prizes
First Prize \$5,000

2nd: \$2,500	3rd: \$1,000
4th: \$900	5th: \$800
6th: \$700	7th: \$600
8th: \$500	9th: \$300
10th: \$200	

The Grand Prix continues in 2025. For information visit new.uschess.org/us-chess-grand-prix-program

PLEASE NOTE

DEADLINE FOR PRINT TLA SUBMISSIONS

TLAs appearing in *Chess Life* must be uploaded online on the 10th, two months prior to the issue cover date in which the ad is to appear. (For example, October TLAs must be uploaded no later than August 10th.) TLAs uploaded past this deadline cannot be published without special approval by US Chess.

HERITAGE EVENT • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 (58th) Virginia Open

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
Site: Washington Dulles Airport Marriott Address: 45020 Aviation Drive, Dulles, VA 20166 Overall Prize Fund: \$8,000 GP Pts: 40 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Mike Hoffpauir, IA/NTD, VA Chess Federation • mhoffpauir@aol.com • 7578464805 • vachess.org

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

2nd Annual Dragon Knight Chess National Spaghetti Day Grand Prix

JANUARY 4, 2026 — NC TLA# 52990
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess National Milk Day Grand Prix

JANUARY 11, 2026 — NC TLA# 52992
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

CFCF 2026 Winter Open & Scholastic

JANUARY 16-18, 2026 — FL TLA# 53026
Site: Holiday Inn Orlando Lake Buena Vista Address: 13351 State Road 535, Orlando, FL 32821 Overall Prize Fund: \$9,000 GP Pts: 40 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Central Florida Chess Club (CFCF) • info@centralfloridachess.org • (407) 312-6237 • centralfloridachess.org/cfcc-2026-winter-open-and-scholastic-week-end-tournamentnd Prix • Enhanced rand

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

17th annual Golden State Open

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — CA-NC TLA# 51868
Site: Hilton Concord Hotel Address: 1970 Diamond Blvd., Concord, CA 94520 Overall Prize Fund: \$25,000 GP Pts: 150 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

HERITAGE EVENT • AMERICAN CLASSIC • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

58th annual Liberty Bell Open

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826
Site: Sonesta Hotel Address: 1800 Market St., Philadelphia, PA 19103 Overall Prize Fund: \$25,000 GP Pts: 150 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 Michigan Master/Expert & Class Championships

JANUARY 17-18, 2026 — MI TLA# 52567
Site: Doubletree by Hilton Lansing Address: 111 N Grand Ave, Lansing, MI 48933 Overall Prize Fund: \$4,200 GP Pts: 20 FIDE: Y Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Michigan Chess Association • jeffchess64@gmail.com • 810-955-7271 • michess.org

GRAND PRIX

\$4,000 FIDE-rated Carnival Classic

JANUARY 17-19, 2026 — LA TLA# 52718
Site: Sheraton Metairie Address: Four, Galleria Blvd., Metairie, LA 70001 Overall Prize Fund: \$4,000 GP Pts: 15 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Downriver Chess Club of New Orleans • info@downriverchess.com • downriverchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

13th annual Liberty Bell Open Blitz Championship (Sunday Night)

JANUARY 18, 2026 — PA TLA# 51828
Site: Sonesta Hotel Address: 1800 Market St., Philadelphia, PA 19103 Overall Prize Fund: \$25,000 GP Pts: 150 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

delphia, PA 19103 Overall Prize Fund: \$500 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess World Snow Day Grand Prix

JANUARY 18, 2026 — NC TLA# 53621
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Child Labor Day Grand Prix

JANUARY 25, 2026 — NC TLA# 53622
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

HERITAGE EVENT • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

Land of the Sky XXXVIII

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — NC TLA# 50591
Site: Crowne Plaza Resort Asheville Address: One Resort Dr, Asheville, NC 28806 Overall Prize Fund: \$13,800 GP Pts: 50 FIDE: Y Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Wilder Wadford • info@landofthesky.us • landofthesky.us

ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

The 2026 Cardinal Open

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — OH TLA# 52649
Site: Doubletree by Hilton Akron Fairlawn Address: 3180 W Market Street, Akron, OH 44333 Overall Prize Fund: \$10,000 GP Pts: 80 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Progress With Chess • eliot@progresswithchess.org • 9144342557 • progresswithchess.org/cardinal

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Groundhog Grand Prix

JANUARY 31, 2026 — NC TLA# 53623
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Super Bowl Sunday Grand Prix

FEBRUARY 8, 2026 — NC TLA# 53624
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center Address: 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,228 GP Pts: 10 FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • dragonknightchess.com

AMERICAN CLASSIC • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

17th annual Southwest Class Championships

FEBRUARY 12-16, 2026 — TX TLA# 52346
Site: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport Hotel Address: 4545 W John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063 Overall Prize Fund: \$35,000 GP Pts: 200 FIDE: Y Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 PA State Game/75 Championship - West

FEBRUARY 14, 2026 — PA TLA# 53598
Site: William Pitt Union, Univ. of Pittsburgh Address:

5th Ave. & Bigelow Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15213 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$695 **GP Pts:** 6 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Tom M Martinak • martinak_tom_m@hotmail.com • 412-908-0286 • pscfchess.org/clearinghouse/

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Valentine's Grand Prix

FEBRUARY 15, 2026 — NC TLA# 53625
Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$1,228 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • jon@dragonknightchess.com • (919) 422-2535 • drag-onknightchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

10th annual Southwest Class Blitz Championship (Sunday Night)

FEBRUARY 15, 2026 — TX TLA# 52347
Site: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport Hotel **Address:** 4545 W John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$500 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX

The Baton Rouge Dual

FEBRUARY 21, 2026 — LA TLA# 52339
Site: Baton Rouge Bridge Center **Address:** 3033 Old Forge Dr., Baton Rouge, LA 70808 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$1,000 **GP Pts:** 6 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Downriver Chess Club of New Orleans • info@downriverchess.com • downriverchess.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

10th annual George Washington Open

FEB. 27-MAR. 1, 2026 — VA TLA# 52348
Site: Washington Dulles Marriott Hotel **Address:** 45020 Aviation Dr, Dulles, VA 20166 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$17,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
Site: Saratoga Hilton Hotel **Address:** 534 Broadway, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$4,200 **GP Pts:** 40 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

33rd annual Western Class Championships

MARCH 6-8, 2026 — CA-S TLA# 52914
Site: Hilton Orange County Airport Hotel **Address:** 18800 Macarthur Blvd, Irvine, CA 92612 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$20,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 Pennsylvania Quick Chess Championship

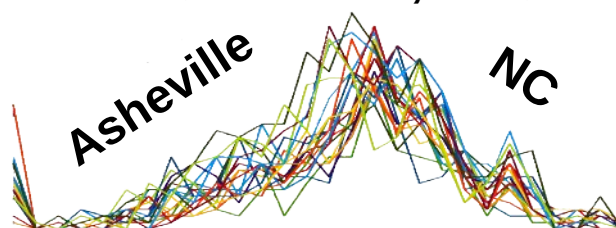
MARCH 6, 2026 — PA TLA# 53595
Site: Red Lion Hotel Harrisburg Hershey **Address:** 4751 Lindle Road, Harrisburg, PA 17111 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$750 **GP Pts:** 6 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Tom M Martinak • martinak_tom_m@hotmail.com • 412-908-0286 • pscfchess.org/pascho-lasticcham

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2026 Ira Lee Riddle Memorial Pennsylvania State Championship & Pennsylvania Collegiate Championship

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — PA TLA# 53597
Site: Red Lion Hotel Harrisburg Hershey **Address:** 4751 Lindle Road, Harrisburg, PA 17111 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$1,875 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Tom M Martinak • martinak_tom_m@hotmail.com • 412-908-0286 • pscfchess.org/pascho-lasticcham

Jan 30 – Feb 1, 2026



Land
of the
Sky

XXXVIII

<https://landofthesky.us>

17th annual Southwest Class Championships

Feb 12-16, 13-16 or 14-16, 2026 (Presidents Weekend), Irving, Texas

\$35,000 guaranteed prizes, GM & IM norms possible!

Master Section: 9-SS, Feb 12-16, 40/80, SD/30; d30. **Expert through Class E:** 7 rounds, Feb 13-16 or 14-16, 40/80, SD/30; d10 (3-day rds 1-2 G/60, d10).

Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, 4545 W John Carpenter Fwy, Irving TX 75063. Free parking, free airport shuttle. **A US Chess American Classic Tournament!**

In 7 sections, top 3 FIDE-rated. Unr may enter A-E. See peakrating.us.

Master (USCF 2100/up or FIDE 2000/up): \$4000-2000-1500-1200-1000-800-600, clear/tiebreak 1st \$200, FIDE U2300/Unr \$1800-900. FIDE ratings used, 200 GPP (Enhanced).

Expert (1900-2199), **Class A** (1700-1999), **Class B** (1500-1799): each \$2000-1000-500-300-200.

Class C (1300-1599), \$1600-800-500-300-200.

Class D (Under 1400), **Class E** (Under 1200): \$800-400-300-200-100.

Unrated prize limits: E \$100, D \$200, C \$300, B \$400, A \$500.

Mixed Doubles: \$1000-600-400. All sections OK, rds. 1-7, must average under 2200. See chessevents.us.

FIDE ratings used in Master. In **Expert/below:** Feb official ratings used, unofficial USCF ratings or USCF Online Regular ratings usually used if otherwise unrated; **cannot play** below USCF Online Reg. rating-100 points.

Master Section entry fee: \$278 at chessaction.com by 2/11, \$300 later or at site by 6 pm 2/12. **Titled/foreign entry & minimum prizes:** see chessevents.us.

Expert to Class C entry fee: \$168 at chessaction.com by 2/11, \$190 later or at site until 1 hour before rd 1.

Class D or E sections: Entry fees \$70 less than Expert through C.

Re-entry (except Master): \$80. **No checks** at site, credit cards OK. USCF membership required. See chessevents.us for special USCF dues with magazine if paid online with entry.

No Cellphone possession during play (in bag near table OK).

5-day schedule (Master): Reg. ends Thu 6 pm, Thu 7, Fri 1 & 7, Sat 11 & 5, Sun 10 & 4, Mon 10 & 3:30.

4-day schedule: Reg. ends Fri 6 pm, Rds Fri 7 pm, Sat 11 & 5, Sun 10 & 4, Mon 10 & 3:30 (no 4-day Master).

3-day schedule: Reg. ends Sat 10 am, rds Sat 11, 2 & 5, Sun 10 & 4, Mon 10 & 3:30 (no 3-day Master).

Half point byes OK all, limit 2; must commit before rd 3.

All: Bring clock, set, board if possible- none supplied. See chessevents.us for rules, details.

Hotel rates: \$132-132, use link at chessevents.us or 972-929-4500, reserve by 1/27 or rate may increase.

Entry: chessaction.com. \$15 service charge for refunds.

Email: director@chess.us.

Blitz tournament Sun. 9:30 pm, pm, enter at site Sun. by 9:10 pm.

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

30th annual Mid-America Open

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913
Site: Clayton Plaza Hotel St. Louis-Clayton **Address:** 7750 Carondelet Ave., St. Louis, MO 63105 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$20,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
Site: Tropicana Casino And Resort Hotel **Address:** 2831 Boardwalk, Atlantic City, NJ 08401 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$40,000 **GP Pts:** 200 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

7th Colonial Open

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
Site: Executive Conference and Training Center **Address:** 22685 Holiday Park Dr Ste 60, Sterling, VA 20166 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$10,000 **GP Pts:** 50 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Anand Dommalapati • co2026@capitalareachess.com • 703-627-5314 • capitalareachess.com/colonialopen

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

31st Space Coast Chess Festival

APRIL 24-26, 2026 — FL TLA# 53028
Site: Hilton Melbourne at Rialto Place **Address:** 200 Rialto Place, Melbourne, FL 32901 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$20,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Space Coast Chess Foundation, Inc. • jon@bocachess.com • 561-302-4377 • spacecoastchessfoundation.org/event/spacecoastopen

GRAND PRIX

2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
Site: Bridges Conference Center, Bridges Campus **Address:** 13 Lane Lane, Sheridan, WY 82801 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$9,000 **GP Pts:** 100 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Brian Kuehl • admin@sheridan-chess.com • 202-679-6779 • SheridanChess.com

HERITAGE EVENT • AMERICAN CLASSIC • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

35th Annual Chicago Open

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
Site: Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel **Address:** 601 North Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling IL 60090 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$100,000 **GP Pts:** 200 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

GRAND PRIX

Walter Browne Memorial National Open Blitz Championship

JUNE 13, 2026 — NV TLA# 52998
Site: Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino **Address:** 3000 Paradise Road, Las Vegas, NV 89109 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$5,000 **GP Pts:** 40 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Vegas Chess Festival • vegashess@gmail.com • 702-930-9550 • vegashessfestival.com

GRAND PRIX

1st Annual Grant Chess Open

JUNE 18-21, 2026 — CA TLA# 53517
Site: Hilton Irvine/Orange County Airport **Address:** 18800 MacArthur Blvd, Irvine, CA 92612 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$50,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Seryozha Gasparyan (GC CLUB) • contact.gcclub@gmail.com • 702-930-9550 • kingregistration.com/event/GrantOpen25

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
Site: Omni Shoreham Hotel **Address:** 2500 Calvert St., NW, Washington, DC 20008 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$20,000 **GP Pts:** 200 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

HERITAGE EVENT • AMERICAN CLASSIC • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
Site: Omni Shoreham Hotel **Address:** 2500 Calvert St., NW, Washington, DC 20008 **Overall Prize Fund:** \$208,000 **GP Pts:** 300 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chesstour.com

MARCH 6-8, 2026 — CA-S

TLA# 52914

33rd annual Western Class Championships

See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY

TLA# 52295

2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV

TLA# 52540

2026 National Open

See Nationals.

JUNE 10-11, 2026 — NV

TLA# 53257

2026 U.S. Women's Open

See Nationals.

JUNE 13, 2026 — NV

TLA# 52998

Walter Browne Memorial National Open Blitz Championship

See Grand Prix.

Regional

ALABAMA

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

ARKANSAS

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

ARIZONA

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — CA-N TLA# 51868

17th annual Golden State Open

See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

CALIFORNIA

JAN. 7, 2026-MONTHLY — CA TLA# 36404

Antelope Valley Chess Club Monthly Tournament

Site: Antelope Valley Chess Club **Address:** 333 West Avenue I, Lancaster, CA 93534 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Antelope Valley Chess Club • chessguru77@outlook.com • 661-917-7628 • avchess.com

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — CA-N

TLA# 51868

17th annual Golden State Open

See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MARCH 6-8, 2026 — CA-S

TLA# 52914

33rd annual Western Class Championships

See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY

TLA# 52295

The Atlantic City Open— A New CCA Event!

April 1-5, 2-5 or 3-5, 2026 (Easter Weekend), Tropicana Casino & Resort

\$40,000 Guaranteed Prizes with GM and IM norms possible!

Open Section: 9 rounds, Apr 1-5, 40/80, SD/30, d30, FIDE rated.

Other sections: 7 rounds, Apr 2-5 or 3-5, 40/80, SD/30; d30 (3-day option, rds 1-2 G/60 d10). U2200 & U2000 Sections also FIDE rated.

Tropicana Casino And Resort Hotel, 2831 Boardwalk, Atlantic City, NJ 08401. Free self-parking.

In 7 sections:

Open: \$5000-2500-1500-1200-1000-800-500, clear or tiebreak 1st \$200 bonus, top FIDE U2300/Unr \$2000-1000. 200 Grand Prix Points.

Under 2200, Under 2000, Under 1800 Sections: each \$2000-1000-600-500-300-200.

Under 1600 Section: \$1600-800-500-300-200-100.

Under 1400 Section: \$1200-600-400-300-200-100.

Under 1100: \$800-400-300-200.

FIDE ratings used in Open, **Apr. official USCF** in others. Unofficial or USCF Online Regular ratings usually used if otherwise unrated in Under 2200/below. USCF memb. required: see chessevents.us for special rates.

Mixed Doubles Bonus Prizes:

Best male+female combined 2-player team scores in Rounds 1-7 among all sections: \$1200-600-400-300. Teams must average under 2200, may play in different sections, register before both begin round 2.

Unrated limits: \$200 U1100, \$400 U1400, \$500 U1600. \$800 U1800. **Cannot play** below USCF Online Regular Rating - 100 points **Reentry** \$100, except Open.

U1400 through U2200 Section EF: \$188 at chessaction.com by 3/30, \$210 later or at site until 1 hr before rd 1. **U1100 Section** \$80 less.

Open Section EF: \$218 online at chessaction.com by 3/30, \$240 later or at site until 6 pm Wed (\$500 extra in Open Section unless 2200+ USCF or 2000+ FIDE). US IMs/WGMs, foreign FIDE 2000+ in Open: \$100 less, GMs, foreign IMs/WGMs in Open: **free**.

Seniors 65/over in Under 1400/up: \$50 less. No mail entries

Foreign titled minimum prize guarantees: see chessevents.us.

5-day Schedule (Open Section only).

reg. ends Wed 6 pm, rounds Wed 7 pm, Thu 1 pm & 7 pm, Fri 11 & 5, Sat 10 & 4, Sun 10 & 3:30.

4-day (no Open Section). reg. ends Thu 6 pm, round Thu 7 pm, Fri 11 & 5, Sat 10 & 4, Sun 10 & 3:30.

3-day (no Open Section). reg. ends Fri 10 am, rds Fri 11, 2 & 5, merges with 4-day Fri at 5 pm.

Half-point byes: OK all, limit 3, must commit before rd 3.

See chessevents.us for more rules. No checks, credit cards OK. **Bring set, board, clock** if possible- none supplied.

Special Chess Hotel Rates: Sun-Thu \$59, Fri \$149, Sat \$209, \$25 extra for 3-4 in room, \$10/night additional resort fee. Reserve by 3/17 or rate may go up (see chessevents.us) or 609-340-4000.

Email: director@chess.us.

Enter online (and see advance entry list) at: chessaction.com. \$15 charge for refunds.

Blitz tournament Sat 9:30 pm, enter at site Sat. by 8:45 pm.

2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open

See Grand Prix.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431

35th Annual Chicago Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540

2026 National Open

See Nationals.

JUNE 10-11, 2026 — NV TLA# 53257

2026 U.S. Women's Open

See Nationals.

JUNE 13, 2026 — NV TLA# 52998

Walter Browne Memorial National Open Blitz Championship

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

COLORADO

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295

2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-11, 2026 — NV TLA# 53257

2026 U.S. Women's Open

See Nationals.

CONNECTICUT

OCT. 8, 2025-APR. 26, 2026 — NY TLA# 51272

11th Annual New York State Magnus High School and Junior High Chess League (Out of state welcome)!

See New York

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52920

58th annual New York State High School Championship

See New York.

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921

New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — NY TLA# 52923

58th annual New York State Scholastic Championships, OPEN TO GRADES K-8 ONLY

See New York.

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

DELAWARE

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526

2026 (58th) Virginia Open

See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 10-11, 2026 — DE TLA# 52331

Sussex County Open

Site: National Guard Readiness Center Address: 109 W Pine Street Georgetown DE 19947 Overall Prize Fund: \$1,500 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Delaware Chess Association • aa.legolas@gmail.com • 410-219-3179 • delaware-chessassociation.org

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — DE TLA# 52572

Delaware State Championship New Castle County

Site: Ramada Inn Address: 260 Champman Road, Newark, DE 19702 Overall Prize Fund: See online TLA GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Delaware Chess Association • aa.legolas@gmail.com • 410-219-3179 • delawarechessassociation.org

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

DIST. OF COLUMBIA

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526

2026 (58th) Virginia Open

See Grand Prix.

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620

4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

Site: Omni Shoreham Hotel Address: 2500 Calvert St, NW, Washington, DC 20008 Overall Prize Fund: \$17,000 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • director@chess.us • chessour.com

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FLORIDA

JANUARY 16-18, 2026 — FL TLA# 53026

CFCC 2026 Winter Open & Scholastic

See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 17, 2026 — FL TLA# 53027

CFCC 2026 Winter Open Saturday Night Open Blitz

Site: Holiday Inn Orlando Lake Buena Vista Address: 13351 State Road 535, Orlando, FL 32821 Overall Prize Fund: \$500 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Central Florida Chess Club (CFCC) • info@centralflchess.org • (407) 312-6237 • centralflchess.org/cfcc-2026-winter-open-and-scholastic-week-end-tournament

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

FEB. 8, 2026-MONTHLY — FL TLA# 53499

954Chess Scholastic Chess Open

Site: Spanish River Library Address: 1501 Spanish River Blvd, Boca Raton, FL 33431 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: N Residency: N Org: 954Chess INC • info@954chess.com • 954chess.com

FEBRUARY 21, 2026 — FL TLA# 52387

2026 FSCL South Regional Tournament

Site: Hialeah Gardens High School Address: 11700 Hialeah Gardens Blvd., Hialeah Gardens, FL 33018 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Florida Scholastic Chess League • liz@fscchess.org • 786-755-FSCL (3725) • fscchess.org

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

APRIL 24-26, 2026 — FL TLA# 53028

31st Space Coast Open Chess Festival

See Grand Prix.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431

35th Annual Chicago Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620

4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

GEORGIA

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

APRIL 24-26, 2026 — FL TLA# 53028

31st Space Coast Open Chess Festival

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620

4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

IDAHO

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295

2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open

See Grand Prix.

ILLINOIS

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913

30th annual Mid-America Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431

35th Annual Chicago Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577

54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565

54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

INDIANA

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285

2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North

See Nationals.

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913

30th annual Mid-America Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431

35th Annual Chicago Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

IOWA

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285

2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North

See Nationals.

KENTUCKY

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

LOUISIANA

JANUARY 17-19, 2026 — LA TLA# 52718

\$4,000 FIDE-rated Carnival Classic

See Grand Prix.

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017

2026 US Amateur Team South

See Nationals.

FEBRUARY 12-16, 2026 — TX TLA# 52346

17th annual Southwest Class Championships

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 21, 2026 — LA TLA# 52339

The Baton Rouge Dual

See Grand Prix.

MARYLAND

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526

2026 (58th) Virginia Open

See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826

58th annual Liberty Bell Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

HERITAGE EVENT

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — MD TLA# 53627

63rd Annual Baltimore Open

Site: BWI Sheraton Address: 1100 Old Elkridge Landing Road, Linthicum Heights, MD 21090 Overall Prize Fund: see online TLA GP Pts: n/a FIDE: Y Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Michael W Regan • mregan@stsci.edu • 4104195130 • mdchess.com

FEB. 27-MAR. 1, 2026 — VA TLA# 52348

10th annual George Washington Open

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 28, 2026 — VA TLA# 52295

George Washington Saturday 11 AM Satellite Octos

See Virginia.

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908

Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)

See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535

7th Colonial Open

See Grand Prix.

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MASSACHUSETTS

JAN. 1, 2026-WEEKLY — MA TLA# 47199
FMCA
 Site: Clock Tower Center, Future Masters Chess Academy Address: 200 Homer Avenue, Mezzanine Level, Suite 200, Ashland, MA 01721-1716 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Future Masters Chess Academy • Info@FutureChessMasters.com • (508)622-5388 • [future-chessmasters.com](#)

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
 See Grand Prix.

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52920
58th annual New York State High School Championship
 See New York.

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — NY TLA# 52923
58th annual New York State Scholastic Championships, OPEN TO GRADES K-8 ONLY
 See New York.

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MICHIGAN

JANUARY 17-18, 2026 — MI TLA# 52567
2026 Michigan Master/Expert & Class Championships
 See Grand Prix.

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North
 See Nationals.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North
 See Nationals.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MISSISSIPPI

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017
2026 US Amateur Team South
 See Nationals.

MISSOURI

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North
 See Nationals.

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913
30th annual Mid-America Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MONTANA

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

NEBRASKA

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

NEVADA

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — CA-N TLA# 51868
17th annual Golden State Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MARCH 6-8, 2026 — CA-S TLA# 52914
33rd annual Western Class Championships
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
2026 National Open
 See Nationals.

JUNE 13, 2026 — NV TLA# 52998
Walter Browne Memorial National Open Blitz Championship
 See Grand Prix.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

NEW JERSEY

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826
58th annual Liberty Bell Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52920
58th annual New York State High School Championship
 See New York.

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — NY TLA# 52923
58th annual New York State Scholastic Championships, OPEN TO GRADES K-8 ONLY
 See New York.

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

APRIL 3-5, 2026 — PA TLA# 51915
2026 World Chess Festival - Malvern
 See Pennsylvania.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

NEW MEXICO

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

NEW YORK

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826
58th annual Liberty Bell Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

HERITAGE EVENT • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52920
58th annual New York State High School Championship
 Site: Saratoga Hilton Hotel Address: 534 Broadway, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 Overall Prize Fund: \$2,550 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • [director@chess.us](#) • [chesstour.com](#)

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

HERITAGE EVENT • AMERICAN CLASSIC • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — NY TLA# 52923
58th annual New York State Scholastic Championships, OPEN TO GRADES K-8 ONLY
 Site: Saratoga Hilton Hotel and 3 other nearby locations Address: Hilton Hotel: 534 Broadway, Saratoga City Center: 522 Broadway, Saratoga Courtyard Marriott: 11 Excelsior Ave, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • [director@chess.us](#) • [chesstour.com](#)

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

APRIL 3-5, 2026 — PA TLA# 51915
2026 World Chess Festival - Malvern
 See Pennsylvania.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

NORTH CAROLINA

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 4, 2026 — NC TLA# 52990
2nd Annual Dragon Knight Chess National Spaghetti Day Grand Prix
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 11, 2026 — NC TLA# 52992
Dragon Knight Chess National Milk Day Grand Prix
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 18, 2026 — NC TLA# 53621
Dragon Knight Chess World Snow Day Grand Prix
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 25, 2026 — NC TLA# 53622
Dragon Knight Chess Child Labor Day Grand Prix
 See Grand Prix.

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017
2026 US Amateur Team South
 See Nationals.

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — NC TLA# 50591
Land of the Sky XXXVIII
 See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 31, 2026 — NC TLA# 50599
Land of the Sky XXXVIII Blitz
 Site: Crowne Plaza Resort Asheville Address: One Resort Dr, Asheville, NC 28806 Overall Prize Fund: see online TLA GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: N Residency: N Org: Wilder Wadford • [info@landofthesky.us](#) • [landofthesky.us](#)

JANUARY 31, 2026 — NC TLA# 53623
Dragon Knight Chess Groundhog Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

FEBRUARY 8, 2026 — NC TLA# 53624
Dragon Knight Chess Super Bowl Sunday Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

FEBRUARY 15, 2026 — NC TLA# 53625
Dragon Knight Chess Valentine's Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
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See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
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See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

NORTH DAKOTA

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
See Grand Prix.

OHIO

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — OH TLA# 52649
The 2026 Cardinal Open
See Grand Prix.

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North
See Grand Prix.

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913
30th annual Mid-America Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

OKLAHOMA

FEBRUARY 12-16, 2026 — TX TLA# 52346
17th annual Southwest Class Championships
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

OREGON

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
2026 National Open
See Nationals.

PENNSYLVANIA

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826
58th annual Liberty Bell Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JANUARY 18, 2026 — PA TLA# 51828
13th annual Liberty Bell Open Blitz Championship (Sunday Night)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEB. 27-MAR. 1, 2026 — VA TLA# 52348
10th annual George Washington Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 28, 2026 — VA TLA# 52295
George Washington Saturday 11 AM Satellite Octos
See Virginia.

HERITAGE EVENT • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — PA TLA# 53596
2026 Pennsylvania State Scholastic Championships
Site: Red Lion Hotel Harrisburg Hershey Address: 4751 Lindle Road, Harrisburg, PA 17111 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Tom M Martinak • [martinak_tom_m@hotmail.com](#) • 412-908-0286 • [pscfchess.org/pascho-lasticchamp](#)

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
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See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

APRIL 3-5, 2026 — PA TLA# 51915
2026 World Chess Festival - Malvern
Site: Desmond Malvern by Hilton Hotel Address: 1 Liberty Road, Malvern, PA 19355 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Joe Hanley • [hanleychessacademy@gmail.com](#) • [hanleychessacademy.com/2026WCFMalvern.html](#)

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
4th annual DC International (in cooperation with the DC Chess Association)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
54th Annual World Open, Under 1200 And Under 1000 Sections
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
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RHODE ISLAND

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

SOUTH CAROLINA

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

SOUTH DAKOTA

JAN. 30-FEB. 1, 2026 — FL TLA# 53017
2026 US Amateur Team South
See Nationals.

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
See Grand Prix.

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2026 US Amateur Team South
See Nationals.

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APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

TEXAS

FEBRUARY 12-16, 2026 — TX TLA# 52346
17th annual Southwest Class Championships
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 15, 2026 — TX TLA# 52347
10th annual Southwest Class Blitz Championship (Sunday Night)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 21, 2026 — TX TLA# 52786
Texas Action Championship 2026
See Grand Prix.

MARCH 20-22, 2026 — MO TLA# 52913
30th annual Mid-America Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
2026 National Open
See Nationals.

JUNE 26-28, 2026 — DC TLA# 53577
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See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

UTAH

MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
2026 National Open
See Nationals.

JUNE 10-11, 2026 — NV TLA# 53257
2026 U.S. Women's Open
See Nationals.

JUNE 13, 2026 — NV TLA# 52998
Walter Browne Memorial National Open Blitz Championship
See Grand Prix.

VERMONT

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52920
58th annual New York State High School Championship
See New York.

FEB. 28-MAR. 1, 2026 — NY TLA# 52921
New York State Senior Championship (With Young Adult/Middle Age Section)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

MARCH 7-8, 2026 — NY TLA# 52923
58th annual New York State Scholastic Championships, OPEN TO GRADES K-8 ONLY
See New York.

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

VIRGINIA

JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
See Grand Prix.

JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — PA TLA# 51826
58th annual Liberty Bell Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEB. 27-MAR. 1, 2026 — VA TLA# 52348
10th annual George Washington Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

FEBRUARY 28, 2026 — VA TLA# 52398
George Washington Saturday 11 AM Satellite Octos
Site: Washington Dulles Marriott Hotel Address: 45020 Aviation Dr, Dulles, VA 20166 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N Org: Continental Chess • [director@chess.us](#) • [chessstour.com](#)

HERITAGE EVENT • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

MARCH 6-8, 2026 — VA TLA# 52708
2026 Virginia Scholastic & College Chess Championships
Site: Thomas Jefferson High School for S&T Address: 6560 Braddock Road, Alexandria, VA 22312 Overall Prize Fund: n/a GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: Y Org: Mike Hoffpauir, NTD/IA • [mhoffpauir@aol.com](#) • 757-846-4805 • [vachess.org](#)

APRIL 1-5, 2026 — NJ TLA# 52908
Atlantic City Open (Replaces Continental Chess Open At Foxwoods and Princeton Open, During Easter Weekend)
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
See Grand Prix.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
See Grand Prix or [chessevents.us](#).

JUNE 25-29, 2026 — DC TLA# 53620
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WASHINGTON
JANUARY 16-19, 2026 — CA-N TLA# 51868
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MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

JUNE 10-14, 2026 — NV TLA# 52540
2026 National Open
 See Nationals.

WEST VIRGINIA
JANUARY 2-4, 2026 — VA TLA# 53526
2026 (58th) Virginia Open
 See Grand Prix.

HERITAGE EVENT • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX
JANUARY 17, 2026 — WY TLA# 53588
25th Mountaineer Open
 Site: WVU Mountainlair Address: 4Rhododendron/
 Monongahela Room, 1550 University Ave., Morgan-
 town, West Virginia 26505 Overall Prize Fund: n/a
 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Residency: N
 Org: Harrison County Chess Club • greerlaw@aol.com
 • 3046419241

APRIL 2-5, 2026 — VA TLA# 53535
7th Colonial Open
 See Grand Prix.

WISCONSIN
HERITAGE EVENT • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX
JAN. 31-FEB. 1, 2026 — WI TLA# 52685
Michael A. Selig Memorial/59th NorthEastern Open
 Site: Holiday Inn Manitowoc Address: 4601 Calu-
 met Ave., Manitowoc, WI 54220 Overall Prize Fund:
 \$1,400 b/70 GP Pts: n/a FIDE: N Accessible: Y Resi-
 dency: N Org: Mike Nietman • mike.nietman@charter.net • 608-467-8510 • www.wisChess.org

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2026 — IL TLA# 50285
2026 U.S. Amateur Team-North
 See Nationals.

MAY 21-25, 2026 — IL TLA# 53431
35th Annual Chicago Open
 See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

JULY 1-5, 2026 — DC TLA# 53565
54th Annual World Open (Open through Under 1400 Sections)
 See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

WYOMING
MAY 1-3, 2026 — WY TLA# 52295
2026 Wyoming Community Foundation Open
 See Grand Prix.

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saintlouischessclub.org/

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oceanstatechess.com/

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2026 Golden Knights (Postal) | 2026 Electronic Knights

FORMAT: Players play 6 games as single round robin, groupings based on order entries received. Players start in Preliminary round and qualify for Semi-final and then Final rounds based on scores in previous round. **ENTRY FEE:** \$35 per entry. Players can enter up to a maximum of 10 times per event. **PRIZES:** Prize fund of \$2300 based on 200 entries. \$15 correspondence chess gift certificate to players knocked out in Preliminary round.

7-Player Round Robins

Victor Palciauskas Tournament (ICCF Server)

FORMAT: Players play 6 games as single round robin, groupings based on ratings. **ENTRY FEE:** \$5 per entry. **PRIZES:** 1st place receives a signed certificate.

4-Player Quads

John W. Collins Memorial (Postal) | Walter Muir E-Quads (ICCF Server)

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 ☐ Collins Quad EF: \$10
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Solutions

PAGE 11 CHESS TO ENJOY

PROBLEM 1. Black resigned after **16. c3!** in view of 17. b4. **PROBLEM 2.** The game went **13. Nf7+ Kd7 14. Nd6+ Re7 15. Qxe7+!** and Black resigned because of 15. ... Kxe7 16. Nxc8+. **PROBLEM 3. 17. Nc4!** threatens 18. Rxe8+ as well as captures on d6, e.g. 17. ... Rxe1+ 18. Rxe1 Bxf4 19. Re8+ and mates. **PROBLEM 4.** The game went **10. ... d5! 11. Qxd5 Nxc2+ 12. Kd1 Rd8** and Black won. If 11. Qf4 Nxc2+ and 12. ... Nxa1. **PROBLEM 5. 14. Qh5!** threatens both 15. g4/16. g5 and 15. Bd3/16. Ne4. **PROBLEM 6. 14. Qe2 Nf6 15. Qe7+! Bxe7 16. dxe7+, Black resigned.** If 16. ... Ke8 17. Nd6 mate. If 14. ... g6, White wins with 15. Qe8+ Kg7 16. Ne5 Qf6 17. Bg5!. Now if 17. ... Qxg5 18. Qxf7+ Kh6 19. Qf8 mate and if 17. ... Qe6 18. Qxd8.

PAGE 47 ABCS OF CHESS

PROBLEM 1. Mating net: It's over in one move: **1. Qg6 mate. PROBLEM 2. Mating net:** Black is stunned in 2: **1. Qxd6+ exd6 2. Rxd6 mate. PROBLEM 3. Mating net:** Black is retired in 2: **1. Qxb6+ cxb6 2. Rb7 mate. PROBLEM 4. Mating net:** Black is finished in 2: **1. Qxg6+ fxg6 (1. ... Bg7 2. Qxg7 mate) 2. Ba2 mate. PROBLEM 5. Mating net:** Black is trounced in 2: **1. Rxb6+ axb6 2. Nd7 mate. PROBLEM 6. Mating net:** Black is finalized in 2: **1. Na6+ Kc8 2. Bb7 mate.**

PAGE 53 MAKE YOUR MOVE

TACTIC 1. 21. ... Nxd4! Taking advantage of the overloaded white queen. **22. cxd4 Rxc1 23. Qxc1 Bxf3 24. Qe3 Be4** The engines like 24. ... Bg2 more, but the text move also makes a lot of sense. Black has won a pawn, and White has no compensation. **25. Bxe4 dxe4 26. Nd2 Rc8 27. Nxe4 Nxe4 28. Qxe4 Rc3**, and Black converted her advantage in the endgame. Paragua – Lee, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis 2025. **TACTIC 2. 22. ... Bxc4!** In the game, Black missed this and eventually lost. **23. dxc4** After this, White ends up in a nasty pin, but 23. Nxc4?? Bxc1 is obviously out of the question. **23. ... Qxe4 24. Qe1 Rde8** White loses material as the knight cannot be protected, e.g., **25. Kf2 Bxe3+!** Not an obvious move and possibly what Black had failed to consider. **26. Rxe3 Qf4+ 27. Rf3 Qd4+ 28. Re3 f4**, and it is curtains for White. Abrahamyan – Cervantes Landeiro, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis 2025 (analysis). **TACTIC 3. 39. ... Bg6+!** Suddenly, it becomes apparent that White will either get checkmated or lose material. **40. Kd2** Or 40. Kb3 Rb6+ 41. Rb4 Rg3+ 42. Ka4 Bc2+! (not 42. ... Be8+?? 43. Ka5 and White is better!) 43. Ka5 Rxb4 44. Kxb4 Rb3+! (the point: The bishop on b7 falls) 45. Ka5 Rxb7 46. Rc6+ Kg5, and Black wins. **40. ... Rd4+!** Maybe this was the move that Shankland overlooked. **41. Ke1 Re6+ 42. Kf2 Rd2+!** Or maybe it was this one. **43. Kg3 Rd3+ 44. Kf2 Rb6!** Clever point: If White moves the bishop, he gets ladder-mated. **45. b4** If 45. Bf3 Rf6, winning the bishop. Or 45. Bc8 Rxb2+ 46. Ke1 Rg3, and White gets mated. **45. ... Rxb7 46. Rc6 Rf7+ 47. Ke2 Rg3 48. Raxa6 h4, White resigned.** Shankland – Caruana, U.S. Ch, St. Louis 2025.

TACTIC 4. 16. ... Bxa3! 17. bxa3 d4! Blocking the path of the bishop and preparing various discovered threats with the bishop conveniently located on the same diagonal as White's queen and rook. Not 17. ... Qxa3+?? as 18. Bb2 Qc5 19. Nc3 is fine for White. **18. Qf4** If 18. Bxd4, then 18. ... Nc5 wins. **18. ... Nc5!** Oh yeah — the rook on h1 is also on the diagonal of the b7-bishop. **19. Rhd1 Nxd3+ 20. Rxd3 Qe1+ 21. Kb2 Qxe2** Black is up an entire rook. White could have resigned here and soon did. Paikidze – Lee, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis 2025. **TACTIC 5. 38. e6!** After this move, Black is without a decent move. In the game, White played the less accurate 38. h4? and only won after 38. ... Kf7?? transposed into a version of the game (Black should have played 38. ... Bf7, when after 39. Bf3 Bb3 White should win, but it is a lot more complex). **38. ... h6** Or 38. ... Rb7 39. Rxe8+, winning. **39. Kd4 g5 40. Ke5 Bg6 41. Rg8!** After this move, White forces the exchange of rooks, leading to an easily won endgame. **41. ... Be8 42. Rg7+ Kd8 43. Rxc7 Kxc7 44. fxg5 hxg5 45. Kxf5**, and White easily wins the bishop ending. Shankland – Mishra, U.S. Ch, St. Louis 2025 (analysis). **TACTIC 6. 49. ... Rf8!** Not the only winning move, but the plan is the same: Isolate White's king on the h-file and then kill the monarch, like a tribe of lions attacking a herd of prey animals. **50. Bd2 Rfg8! 51. Rbb1 Rg4! 52. Rdc1** If 52. Be1, protecting the d4-pawn with the rook, Black wins with 52. ... Bxh4! 53. Nxh4 (or 53. Bb2 Be7) 53. ... Ng5+ 54. Kh2 Rxh4+ with mate in a few moves. **52. ... Nxd4! 53. Ng5** Or 53. Nxd4 Rxh4 mate. **53. ... Bxg5 54. hxg5 Nf3, White resigned.** Yip – Pourkashiyani, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis, 2025. **TACTIC 7. 40. ... d3+! 41. Ke1** Or 41. Ke3 Rc1 42. Rxe4 Kc3 43. Ra2 Re1+ 44. Kf3 Rxe4 45. Kxe4 d2, and the pawn queens. **41. ... Rc1+! 42. Rd1 Rdc8!** The only winning move. **43. Ra7** If 43. Rxe4, then 43. ... Kc2 wins on the spot. **43. ... R8c2!** Threatening 44. ... Re2+. **44. Rxc1 d2+!, White resigned.** Pourkashiyani – Lee, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis 2025. **TACTIC 8. 39. d6!** Just a few moves earlier, Black's dark-squared bishop was firmly placed on d6, preventing this advance and helping to keep White tied down. **39. ... Bxd6 40. Rd1** The point behind the pawn sacrifice: If the bishop stays on the b8-h2 diagonal, White's rook invades on d7, so Black is forced to retreat the bishop to e7, thus allowing White to win the Exchange. **40. ... Be7 41. Bxe3 Qxe3 42. Qd7!** In the game, White instead captured the a-pawn and only won after some Black inaccuracies. **42. ... f4 43. Rf1 a4** Or 43. ... Qe2 44. Rxf4, and White wins. **44. Qd1 Bf6 45. Qxa4** with a decisive advantage for White. Sevan – Niemann, U.S. Ch, St. Louis 2025 (analysis). **TACTIC 9. 40. Ne8!** A brilliant move: The knight is heading to g7 to kick the rook away from f5. **40. ... Kd7 41. Ng7! Rf4 42. Qh3+!** Now White's queen can penetrate Black's position. In the game, White missed her chance and eventually lost. **42. ... Kd8** Or 42. ... Kd6 43. Ne8+ Kc6 44. b3 Bf7 45. Rxe5, and White wins. **43. Ne6+ Bxe6 44. Qxe6**, and White wins; Black will lose too many pawns. Pourkashiyani – Paragua, U.S. Women's Ch, St. Louis 2025.


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MICHAEL MILLS

DATA ARCHITECT, NSCA
VICE PRESIDENT

I WAS BITTEN BY THE CHESS bug after getting into strategic computer games — specifically Starcraft II. One of my favorite streamers loved *The Amateur's Mind* by Jeremy Silman and often said that if you understood that book you would be good at chess. This interested me: I was competitive at Starcraft, but I could never achieve the twitchy speed needed to be a top player in most online spaces. That wouldn't matter in chess ... except to the bullet addicts out there.

I believed that I could get a book and “git gud” as they say in gaming circles. So I read my Silman and looked for a chance to play in over-the-board competition, a task that was hard for someone in a rural area to accomplish.

After moving to Omaha, Nebraska, and joining the chess scene here, I found that players of all ratings will sometimes have a coach or trainer to help them. I ended up getting some coaching from Tryfon Gavriel, whom you might know as Kingscrusher on YouTube. I remember trying to avoid playing what everyone else was playing and asking him for advice on playing 1. d4 instead of 1. e4 like everyone else I knew. He recommended that I learn the London System, which wasn't nearly as big then as it is now!

I played the London a few times and showed him games I was pretty happy with. While going over them he found that I was missing a key idea in the opening — I didn't know when to sacrifice material. With examples drawn from various opening systems he showed me a really cool tactical theme called the Greek Gift. He also encouraged me to find material on this theme myself.

After some study and a search of my games, I found that I could have offered the Gift to a particular opponent and I would have had a winning game. It took two years for the pairings to work out, but eventually I got to put this new knowledge to use at the board against them. That was satisfying.

Every chessplayer knows that sometimes you learn something and then have to wait to apply that knowledge for a long time. But once you've learned it, you know it for life. I've sent my Trojan bishop off to h7 a few times now, and it always feels good. Here's the latest example in my games.

“He also encouraged me to find material on this theme myself.”



LONDON SYSTEM (D02)

Michael Mills (1800)

helbertchess (1805)

Bullet chess, Chess.com, 11.19.2025

1. d4 e6 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Bf4 c5 4. e3 Nc6 5. c3 d5 6. Nbd2 Bd6 7. Ne5 cxd4 8. exd4 0-0 9. Bd3 Bxe5 10. dxe5 Nd7 11. Nf3 Qc7



I suspect it won't surprise you that **My Best Move** is ...

12. Bxh7+ Kxh7 13. Ng5+ Kg6 14. Qd3+ f5 15. exf6+ e.p., Black resigned.



POSITION AFTER 15. exf6+ e.p.

Why do we study chess for hours? Why do we endure the mistakes and losses? It's for these moments, when we watch our opponent try and figure out what we already know: that they're in deep, deep trouble.

It's an especially good feeling when you get to combine multiple bits of chess knowledge, especially if they're just a tiny bit obscure. I was particularly pleased with this game because it finishes with the “secret move” that differentiates serious players from dilettantes: The final blow comes *en passant!* ♠

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