CONTINENTAL CH ■ SO CAL CH ■ TAKE DOWN THE KID

CHESS LIFE

Looking Back

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan on forgetting losses, rediscovering confidence, and making the finals of the American Cup

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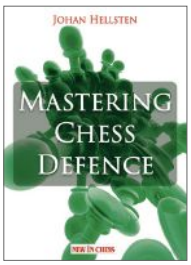
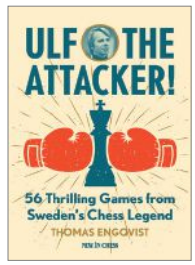


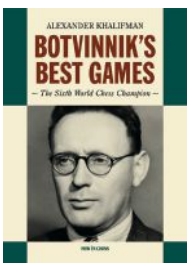
Mastering Chess Defence
Johan Hellsten

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.

Ulf – The Attacker!
Thomas Enqvist

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.



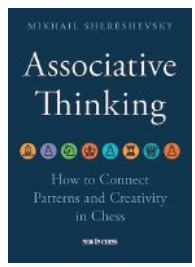


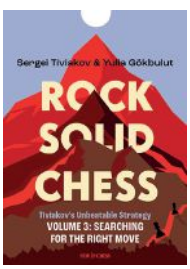
Botvinnik's Best Games
Alexander Khalifman

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.

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?.



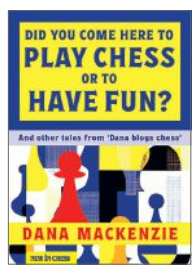


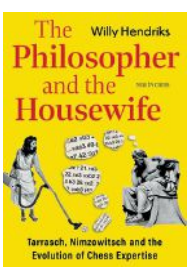
Rock Solid Chess - Volume 3
Sergey Tiviakov & Yulia Gokbulut

Choosing a move is an eternal dilemma for a chess player. How can we recognize the right solution in any position? How can we gain confidence in our decisions? Where do we direct our pieces and pawns? In ten chapters, Tiviakov explains clearly and uniquely how a single move can strengthen your position, weaken your opponent's position, or simply avoid trouble.

Did You Come Here to Play Chess or to Have Fun?
Dana Mackenzie

Dana Mackenzie celebrates the joy of chess – the ordinary, everyday chess we amateurs play. He has selected 40 of his favorite posts from his award-winning chess blog, including a diverse mix of stories, philosophical musings, chess improvement tips, and game analysis. In each story, the fun leaps off the page.



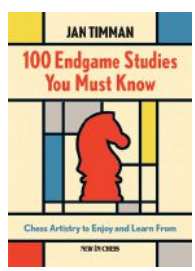


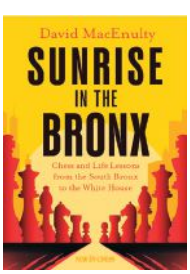
The Philosopher and the Housewife
Willy Hendriks

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.

Chess artistry to enjoy and learn from
Jan Timman

Perhaps the greatest beauty in chess can be found in endgame studies. Delightful twists and turns on the board are combined into true works of art. Chess is distilled to its purest form, with all pieces making only the essential moves. Jan Timman guides you through masterpieces of increasing difficulty. You will be amazed at the possibilities of chess and inspired to add more finesse to your own endgame play.



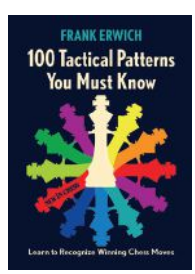


Chess and Life Lessons
David MacEnulty

David MacEnulty dared to dream big. In the 1990s he became a pioneer of chess in the public schools of the Bronx. The obstacles were formidable – poverty, crime, racism, and ignorance. Yet, MacEnulty and his students defied all expectations. In *Sunrise in the Bronx*, MacEnulty describes his transformative journey from fumbling substitute teacher to legendary chess coach.

100 Tactical Patterns You Must Know
Frank Erwich

The long-awaited middlegame companion to the bestseller *100 Endgames You Must Know*. Experienced chess trainer Frank Erwich teaches the most frequent and easy-to-learn tactical patterns. The book offers clear, concise, and easy-to-follow chess tactics instruction, ideal for post-beginners, club players, and candidate masters.



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CHESSLIFE
August

18 EVENTS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAMPIONSHIP
Next Level
BY IM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO

24 FEATURES PREPARING FOR NATIONALS
Steering Them Right
BY NM MATAN PRILLELTENSKY

26 EVENTS CONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP
Bearing Down in Brazil
BY IM MAXIMILLIAN LU

32 COVER STORY
FIGHTING BACK
What it takes to forget losses, rediscover your confidence, and make the finals of the American Cup.
BY WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

44 THEORY THE KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE
Keeping Control Versus the KID
BY GM ELSHAN MORIADIABADI

ON THE **COVER**

It's easy to imagine that the life of a top chess player is all peaches and cream, but even the best go through rough patches. WGM Tatev Abrahamyan tells the honest tale of her ups and downs in this month's cover story, and it makes for a riveting read. Oh, and the chess is pretty good too.

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8.24 Round 6	8.25 Round 7	8.26 Round 8	8.27 Round 9	8.28 Playoff	All Rounds 12:00PM

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CHESSLIFE
August

COLUMNS

14 CHESS TO ENJOY
True to Form
BY GM ANDY SOLTIS

16 GETTING TO WORK
The Slow Boat
BY WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

48 SOLITAIRE CHESS
A Storybook Beginning
BY BRUCE PANDOLFINI

50 ENDGAME SCHOOL
Supernationals Lessons
BY GM JOEL BENJAMIN

53 PUZZLES
Make Your Move!
BY FM CARSTEN HANSEN

54 BOOKS AND BEYOND
Good Thinking
BY IM JOHN WATSON

DEPARTMENTS

5 COUNTERPLAY
READERS RESPOND

6 FIRST MOVES
CHESS NEWS FROM AROUND THE U.S.

10 US CHESS AFFAIRS

12 IN PASSING

57 TOURNAMENT LIFE

62 CLASSIFIEDS

63 SOLUTIONS

64 OUR BEST MOVE
PERSONALITIES
KELLY CHEN AND CASEY AHLBRANDT-RAINS

PHOTOS: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES (TATEV, NAKAMURA), SLCC / C. FULLER (ELSHAN), 1000GM (SHLYAKHTENKO), FIDE AMERICA (SHANKLAND); CHRIS ROBERTS (SHLYAKHTENKO)

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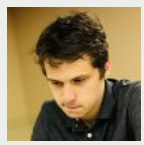
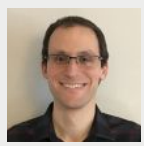


IM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO (Southern California Ch) has just completed his second year of undergraduate work in mathematics and computer science at Brown University. He is currently the 12th ranked American junior as of the June 2025 US Chess rating list. In his spare time he plays piano, and in April he performed Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor with the Brown University Orchestra.



NM MATAN PRILLELTENSKY (Prepping for Nationals) is a chess coach and currently the executive director for the National Scholastic Chess Foundation. He is a national master and has a M.A. in education as well as a Gifted & Talented certification. For more, visit *nscfchess.org*, or check out FM Davis Zong's story on Matan in the September 2024 issue of *Chess Life*.

IM MAXIMILLIAN LU (Continental Ch) has won multiple national and international scholastic tournaments and is a 10-time US Chess All-America team member. He is also an experienced ski instructor. He currently attends Yale University.

GM ELSHAN MORADIABADI (Theory) is a chess grandmaster, coach, author, and advocate. Most recently he co-won the 2022 U.S. Open, as well as the 2022 Chess Journalist of the Year award for his contributions to *Chess Life* and other publications. He coaches players at all stages of their development. Find him at *gmelshan.com*.

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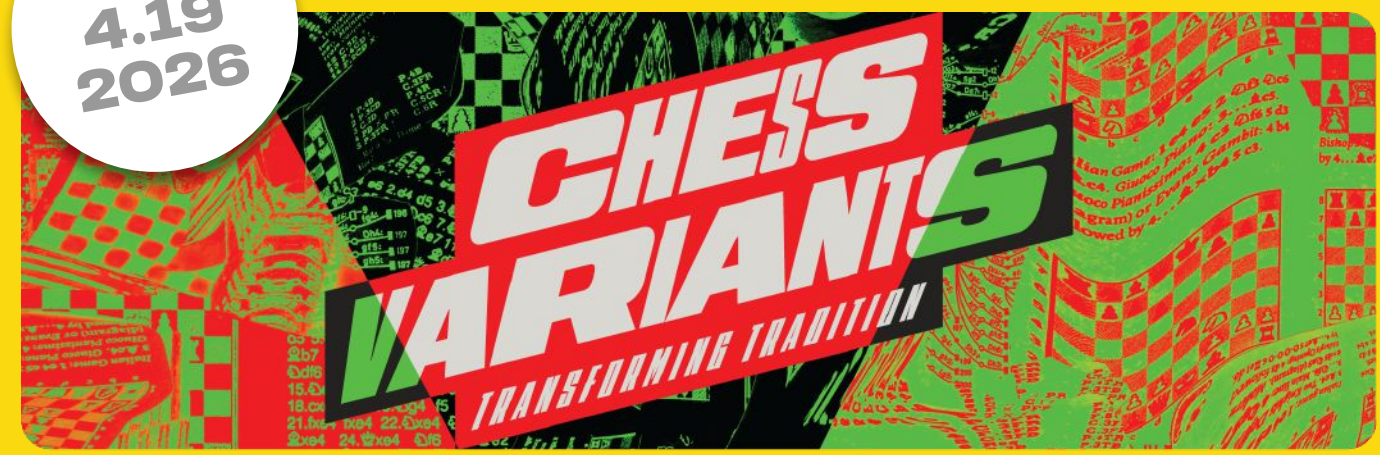

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Youngest-Ever USA Female to Earn the IM Title!

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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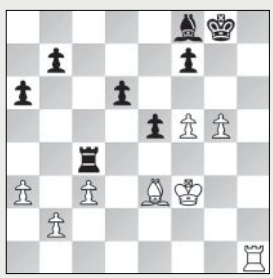
Going Deeper

There appears to be a likely drawing move missed at the inception of Gunnerson – Kavutskiy, puzzle 7 in the June 2025 "Make Your Move" column.

WHITE TO MOVE

I think Black can improve after 24. Qxc6 with 24. ... Rxc6 instead of 24 ... bxc6?!. Recapturing with the pawn confines Black's rook to a mostly defensive posture and also creates an isolated a-pawn that may become a target.

In contrast, Black's recapture by 24 ... Rxc6 allows him to subsequently play ... Rc6-c4! to horizontally control White's fourth rank and prevent the penetration of the white king as occurred in the game. For example, after 24 ... Rxc6 25. f5 gxf5 26. exf5 Kg8 27. Kd2 Rc4! 28. Ke2 Rg4 29. Kf2 Ra4 30. a3 Rc4 31. Kf3 Bf8, White has only a minimal advantage.



POSITION AFTER 31. ... Bf8

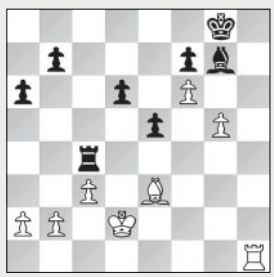
It is difficult to see how a decisive win can be achieved, particularly with the possibility of Black advancing his d- and/or e-pawn if White attempts to penetrate Black's kingside.

John Royer Shaw
Hickory, NC

John Hartmann responds:

Your suggested move is probably an improvement, but I'm not sure it leaves White with a "minimal advantage." It's interesting to break down why.

In your line, White can improve with 28. f6! and we have a position where the positional sense of the NNUE engines really shines. (NNUE engines include neural networks to evaluate positions as well as traditional methods to calculate; for more, see GM Larry Kaufman's article in the March 2024 *CL*.) The last Stockfish with a human-crafted evaluation sees this as +1.09 at depth 39, but the evaluation of the latest versions keep climbing the deeper it gets.



POSITION AFTER 28. f6

I suspect SF 17.1 understands that the bishop is really bad on f8, and freeing it requires Black to play ... d6-d5 and weaken the e5-pawn. White also has a number of tempo moves to eventually break the blockade on the fourth rank. For instance, 28. ... Bf8 29. Ke2 Ra4 30. a3 Rc4 (*30. ... Rg4 31. Kf3 Rc4 32. Bd2 d5 33. b3 Rc6 34. Rh3* and if *34. ... Bxa3? 35. Kg4*) 31. Kf3 Ra4 32. Bd2 Rc4 33. b3!; if 33. ... Rc6 34. Ke4 (*34. c4!?* also wins) 34. ... d5+ (*34. ... a5 35. Kf5 d5 36. b4*) 35. Kxe5 Re6+ 36. Kd4.

One of the great advances in engines is their understanding of long-term positional considerations. What we think holdable is shown by the engines to be a house of cards. I think this position is a paradigm case. It's really interesting and I'm glad you brought it to our attention!

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

Where the BUFFALO ROAM ...

... where the deer and the antelope play ... chess with grandmasters?

BY **GM ALEX FISHBEIN**

SHERIDAN, WYOMING, A TOWN of about 20,000 people near the base of the Bighorn Mountains, is hardly the likeliest place for a chess tradition. But for the last four years, it has hosted a tournament in early May with prizes large enough to attract strong players from across the country. The latest edition, the 2025 Wyoming Community Foundation Open, featured GMs Luka Budisavljevic, Fidel Corrales Jimenez, and your author. The Sheridan Chess Association, which organizes this annual event, also promotes youth chess in town and hosts one of the largest chess libraries in the country.

I lived in Wyoming for a good part of my formative years, including when I achieved my NM and GM titles. There were no other masters in the state, and there were almost as many antelope as people. However, I always knew that Wyoming had a quirky cultural mix that, for example, welcomed folks from the East Coast in search of quiet and open spaces. Jackson Hole is home to many celebrities and otherwise wealthy people; in the last few decades, a handful of serious tournaments were held there, but they were of the "one and done" variety.

A place where every kid meets a grandmaster

Enter Brian Kuehl and Dan Casey. Along with several other folks in Sheridan, they formed the Sheridan Chess Association simply because they loved chess and wanted to make it a significant part of life in their town. Along with the tournament, one grandmaster is selected each year to do exhibitions and talks in the schools, and when I came to play in their first big tournament in 2022, I noticed signs all over town welcoming the participants. IM Justin Sarkar of New York won that tournament.

The following year, the organizers invited GM Corrales, who came a couple of days early and visited six schools, speaking to about 1,500 students in all, including 800 in one location.

One highlight of these presentations always comes when the grandmaster is blindfolded and plays a game with a student selected from the audience (and easily wins, to everyone's amazement). But given Fidel's jovial personality, the kids were even more captivated by his talk than his blindfold play. He shared stories of how he was growing up in Cuba, and how he usually lost to his sister when he was young. As a result, he learned how to accept defeat without get-

ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY DAN CASEY

ting too upset, a trait that even now stands out manifestly. I think that visit also helped Fidel, because two months later he won clear first in the World Open!

Raising the bar every year

The 2024 event featured three grandmasters, with GM Bryan Smith visiting the schools this time. This year, the 79 participants in four sections included three grandmasters and six other titled players, drawing players as young as 8 and ranging up to their 80s. GM Budisavljevic, originally from Serbia and now studying at the University of Missouri, played blindfold games and talked to students, setting an inspiring example — he is only 21 years old himself, and was twice a bronze medalist at the World Junior.

In the top section, the three GMs (Budisavljevic, Corrales, and Fishbein) tied for first with Life Master Sullivan McConnell, who has been improving quickly. The most exciting game of the tournament was a third-round draw between "Sully" and Fidel:

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ROSSOLIMO VARIATION (B31)

NM Sullivan McConnell (2340)
GM Fidel Corrales (2632)
Wyoming Community Foundation Open (3), Sheridan, 2025

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nd4 4. Bc4 e6 5. Nge2 Nxe2
Not the most common or highly-regarded move, but Sullivan McConnell is an expert in this variation and Fidel probably wanted to take the game out of well-known paths.

6. Qxe2
With 6. Bxe2! White could would transpose to an Open Sicilian where after, for example, 6. … a6 7. d4 cxd4 8. Qxd4 Black has prematurely exchanged the knight on d4. Yet 6. Qxe2 has been played 127 times out of 131 in the database.

6. … Ne7 7. d3 Nc6 8. Be3 Be7 9. 0-0 0-0 10. f4
Black already has a comfortable position. He is controlling the d4-square, and the e6-pawn is restraining the white bishop.

10. … b6 11. Bb3 Na5
The computer suggestion of 11. … Nd4! would involve considering a pawn sacrifice: 12. Bxd4 cxd4 13. Nb5 Bc5 14. e5 d5 15. Qf2 Bd7 16. Nxd4 b5 17. c3 a5! planning … b5-b4, and the white knight is uncomfortably pinned.

12. d4 Bb7 13. dxc5 bxc5 14. Rfd1 Qc8 15. e5 f6 16. Ba4! Nc6 17. exf6 Rxf6 18. Ne4 Rf5?
This does not turn out well at all. Black might have been worried his rook would be out of play after 18. … Rg6 19. g3 or 19. Ng3, but then 19. … Nd4! would give Black equal chances.

19. Nd6! Bxd6 20. Rxd6 Qc7 21. Qd2?!
21. Rad1! is much more incisive, because 21. … Nd4? runs into a winning Exchange sacrifice with 22. R1xd4! cxd4 23. Rxd7 Qb8 24. Bxd4, and if 24. … Rf7 25. Qxe6 Qxf4 26. Qxf7+! Qxf7 27. Bb3.

21. … Rd8

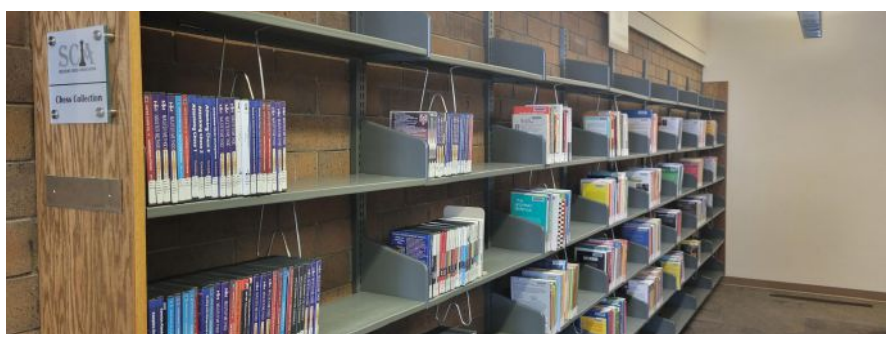
Black is threatening 22. … Nd4 for real now. How does White develop his initiative?

22. b4!!
Sully said later that he didn't calculate all the lines but knew he had to play this move as soon as he saw it. It puts an end to all Black's dreams of winning the Exchange with … Nc6-d4. Fidel now sank into thought for 45 minutes.

22. … Nxb4!
Black prefers an unpleasant ending to retreating with 22. … cxb4 23. Rd1 Nb8.

23. Rxd7 Rxd7 24. Qxd7 Qxd7 25. Bxd7 Kf7 26. Rb1 Be4 27. Ba4 a5 28. Rb2 h5 29. g3 Kg6

Left: Corrales talks to the kids. Below: The Sheridan libary collection. Right and top: Budisavljevic gives a simul.



Black should proceed with 29. … h4!; for example, 30. g4 Rf6! 31. Bxc5 Rxf4.

With the game move, he underestimates White's response, which takes away the important d5-square from Black's pieces and gives the white rook a route through d2. But his move is also the start of a king march, and we will see where that leads.

30. c4! e5

Now White would be winning after 30. … h4 31. g4 Rf6 32. Rd2!, attacking the c5-pawn and stranding the black knight.

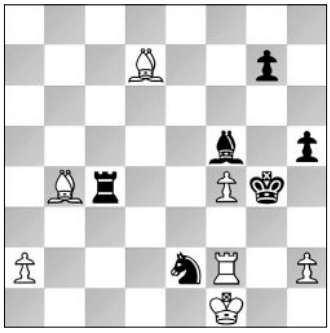
31. Bd7! Rf8 32. Bxc5 Rd8 33. Ba4 exf4 34. gxf4 Kf5 35. Bb6 Rd6 36. Bxa5 Nc6

Black is running low on the clock and is two pawns down. It's desperation time.

37. Rb5+ Kg4! 38. Be1 Nd4 39. Rg5+ Kf3!

The black king has a personal message for the white king!

40. Bb4 Ne2+ 41. Kf1 Rd4 42. Rg2! Rxc4 43. Rf2+ Kg4 44. Bd7+ Bf5

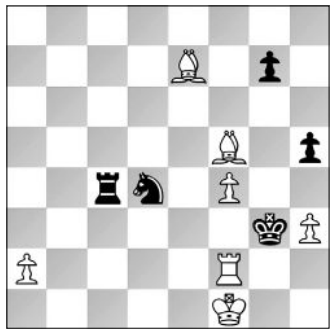


Multiple pieces are hanging, and there are back-rank mate possibilities.

45. h3+?

A step away from victory, Sully chooses a tempting but wrong check. The correct way is 45. Rg2+!, and if Black tries the same trick as in the game — 45. … Kf3!? 46. Bxf5 Nd4 — then White has mate in two with 47. Rf2+ Ke3 48. Bd2 mate!

45. … Kh4! 46. Be7+ Kg3 47. Rg2+ Kf3 48. Rf2+ Kg3 49. Bxf5 Nd4!!



The threat of mate on c1 means that White cannot save his extra piece and has nothing better than a draw. How often do you see an endgame where both kings fall into mating nets in the key variations?

50. Rg2+ Kf3 51. Rf2+ Kg3 52. Rg2+ Kf3 53. Rf2+, draw.

The playing site was a new conference center in a beautiful natural setting along Big Goose Creek. Dan Joelson, the 21-time Wyoming champion, said he would bring his fishing rod next year. Inside there was plenty of space and plenty of quiet. The only sounds you could hear were occasional moos and baas from outside, which added to the atmosphere. Overall, the playing conditions were among the best you will ever experience.

The Wyoming Community Foundation Open was made possible by many sponsors, including Kim and Mary Kay Love, the Wyoming Community Foundation, Powder River Pizza, the Kibbee Foundation for Children, Morgan Stanley, Wells Fargo, Security State Bank, Sheridan Travel and Tourism, and Lee Metal Works. And in addition to Brian Kuehl and Dan Casey, other organizers, including Mac McGlaughlin, Jay McGinnis, Angelica Bialek, Chris Walton, Rebecca Marquez, Larry Mooney, and Dan Alsup, helped make this tournament such a pleasure to play in.

In the first three years of its existence, the Sheridan Chess Association focused on school instruction and club attendance. SCA has had programs in four elementary schools and the junior high school and high school in Sheridan. In the most recent school year, about 100 kids attended the weekly chess club. On any given night, 35 to 40 players come to the club. Let me remind you that this is a town of about 20,000 people, with the nearest city about two hours away.

The club meets at the Fulmer Public Library, which now houses one of the largest chess collections in the country. The library has more than 1,000 books and videos, with 600 more to come from the SCA. Books from this collection can be checked out from any U.S. public library through interlibrary loan.

Looking ahead

Now that many of the school programs are running on their own, Kuehl and Casey are developing individual talent in Sheridan. In the past year, the SCA has sponsored young girls to travel to national scholastic tournaments. Aerial Hayes, of Sheridan, represented Wyoming in the 2024 Ruth Haring Tournament of Champions. It was her first rated tournament. This year, Kamari Barth took part in the Susan Polgar Invitational, and Casey helped her prepare. And at the end of the year, the National K-12 Grade Championships will be in Spokane, Washington. That's a very scenic one-day road trip from Sheridan.

The fifth annual Sheridan, Wyoming, tournament will be held May 1-3, 2026. If you want to combine a vacation to the West with some good chess, I hope to see you there!

Left: Aerial Hayes representing Sheridan and Wyoming at the Haring. Center: Kamari Barth trains for the Susan Polgar Invitational.

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National CHESS DAY

NATIONAL CHESS DAY IS SATURDAY, Oct. 11. For any event that includes "National Chess Day" in the event title and is held that day, US Chess is offering:

- A free email blast. Make sure that "National Chess Day" is part of your subject line. On the payment screen, select "No charge." Also, make sure the demographic you are sending this to is reasonable; generally, this will be local or regional. Do not send to the entire membership.
- Free rating fees. Use the payment code NCD2025FREE. This is case-sensitive.
- Free online TLA. Online TLAs are always free, of course, not just for National Chess Day. But we want to make sure you are aware of this option too as you promote your event. See "How to Create a TLA" at *new.uschess.org/information-new-members*.

Another way to celebrate National Chess Day is by making a gift to US Chess! What better way to celebrate National Chess Day than by sharing your passion and love for the game? Your donation will help ensure that the chess programs and events that you care so much about will continue for years to come and advance our mission to "empower people, enrich lives, and enhance communities through chess." To make a tax-deductible gift to US Chess, just click on DONATE at *uschess.org*, and choose the program or fund that you would like to support. Thank you for the impact you are making on so many lives, and for your commitment to US Chess!

Please direct any questions to John Hartmann at *john.hartmann@uschess.org*, and feel free to send him your best photos for possible use in *Chess Life, Chess Life Kids,* and *Chess Life Online*. On social media, use the hashtag *#NationalChessDay*.

Here's to a successful National Chess Day for all!

Email *john.hartmann@uschess.org*

#NATIONALCHESSDAY

MAURICE ASHLEY CHESS FELLOWSHIP ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL CLASS OF 2025 AWARDEES

The Maurice Ashley Chess Fellowship (MACF) is proud to announce the selection of its inaugural class of fellowship recipients for 2025. Founded by GM Maurice Ashley — the first African American to achieve the title of chess grandmaster — the fellowship aims to identify, support, and elevate exceptional young chess talent from underserved communities across the United States.

The 2025 fellows are:

- **Brewington Hardaway, 16** – GM and rising international talent, awarded a $20,000 fellowship
- **Jacorey Bynum, 17** – A standout player with a current national rating of 2301, awarded an $8,000 fellowship
- **Ayden Spellman-Robinson, 10** – A promising young competitor with over 150 tournaments played, awarded a $5,000 fellowship

Each of these young players has demonstrated extraordinary talent, work ethic, and passion for the game. The fellowship awards are designed to ease the financial burden of elite training, providing funding for coaching, tournaments, travel, and chess equipment.

Fellows will also be connected to a global network of mentors, peers, and sponsors, enhancing their development and opening doors to future opportunities. Beyond financial support, they will receive mentorship from Ashley and guidance from leading figures in the chess world — support designed to help them navigate the demanding path toward successful professional chess careers.

"This is more than just financial support — it's about belief," said Ashley. "Too often, brilliant kids are left behind because they don't have access to the resources or mentorship they need. This fellowship is about changing that — about opening doors and supporting the dreams of kids who deserve a shot at greatness."

The Maurice Ashley Chess Fellowship is administered by the US Chess Trust, one of the nation's oldest sports charities. The 2025 Awards Committee includes Ashley, four-time U.S. Champion GM Fabiano Caruana, and Rochelle Ballantyne.

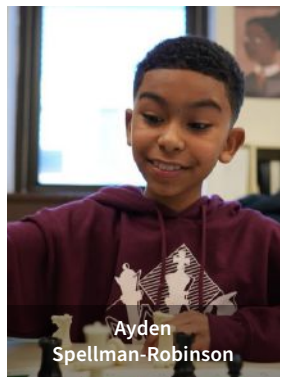
Each fellow will also take part in a give-back component, developing projects to inspire and support the next generation of young players from underrepresented communities.

Initial funding for the MACF was seeded by a $20,000 personal contribution from Ashley. Ongoing support from donors and sponsors will be critical to the fellowship's ability to grow and sustain its mission of leveling the playing field in elite chess.

To contribute to the Maurice Ashley Chess Fellowship, please visit *www.uschesstrust.org/donate/*

GM Brewington Hardaway

Jacorey Bynum


Ayden Spellman-Robinson

PHOTOS: LLADA / US CHESS (HARDAWAY), HARTMANN (BYNYUM), YOUTUBE (SPELLMAN-ROBINSON)

2025 US Chess Awards

The US Chess Federation is pleased to announce our 2025 Annual Award recipients. Congratulations to all of these individuals and organizations who are advancing our mission to "empower people, enrich lives, and enhance communities through chess."

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Barbara Swafford
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LARGE CHESS CLUB OF THE YEAR
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Las Vegas

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Fabiano Caruana
Wesley So
Leinier Dominguez
Levon Aronian
Ray Robson

The U.S. Women's Olympiad team
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Alice Lee
Irina Krush
Carissa Yip
Anna Zatonskih
Melikset Khachiyan
Alexander Onischuk

The U.S. Senior Team 50+
Jaan Ehlvest
Gregory Kaidanov
Alex Shabalov
Igor Novikov
Stuart Rachels

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Fabiano Caruana

WOMAN PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Carissa Shiwen Yip

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Brewington Hardaway

OUTSTANDING PLAYER ACHIEVEMENT
Calvin Blocker
Salvatore (Sal) J. Matera
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University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley

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Bartek Macieja

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Amy Green
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Justin Gooch

IN PASSING

WIM Rachel Crotto *1958-2025*

BY **DR. ALEXEY ROOT, WIM**

BORN DEC. 25, 1958, IN NEW YORK CITY, Rachel Crotto grew up in a potent chess environment and became a child prodigy. Like Bobby Fischer, Crotto learned from legendary chess teacher Jack Collins. This was a formative relationship: Collins included Crotto in his book *My Seven Chess Prodigies*, and in a curious twist of fate, she appeared on Shelby Lyman's PBS show about the Fischer – Spassky world chess championship match.

In 1972, at age 13½, Crotto became the youngest-ever participant in the U.S. Women's Championship, a record that stood until Irina Krush played in the 1995 championship at 11½.

Crotto fulfilled her early promise. In 1978, she tied for first in the 1978 U.S. Women's Championship with WIM Diane Savereide. Since that was a zonal year, Crotto's result earned her the WIM title.

Crotto blasted through the 1979 U.S. Women's Championship, scoring 10½ out of 11. While this was perhaps the high-water mark of her chess career, she had many other honors to her name: She was a five-time member of the U.S. Women's Olympiad team, and earned a silver medal for her performance on the reserve board in the 1984 Olympiad in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Crotto was kind and encouraging, and her efforts helped many chess players. WIM Shernaz Kennedy recalled how Crotto helped her secure a spot in the 1981 U.S. Women's Championship. Kennedy said that Crotto called her three days before the tournament began — a spot had unexpectedly opened, because nine-time champion Gisela Gresser declined her invitation, citing her husband's health issues.

Kennedy was five months pregnant and told Crotto that she didn't want to travel alone. Crotto suggested that Kennedy travel with another participant, Ruth Donnelly. Without Crotto's help, Kennedy might never have participated in the 1981 U.S. Women's Championship.

In the 1980s, Crotto teamed with Kennedy and other top women, such as WIM Dolly Teasley, to form the "Vera Menchik Brigade." The Brigade competed in multiple U.S. Amateur Team Championships, run then and now by Steven Doyle.

After the 1980s, Crotto stopped competing in tournaments but kept in touch with her many chess friends. She died June 4, 2025, after a long illness.

GAMES

FRENCH DEFENSE (C00)

WIM Ruth Haring (2051)
WIM Rachel Crotto (1921)
U.S. Women's Ch (10), 1979

1. e4 e6 2. d3 d5 3. Nd2 Nf6 4. Ngf3 c5 5. g3 Nc6 6. Bg2 Be7 7. 0-0 b6 8. Re1 Bb7 9. e5 Nd7 10. Nf1 Qc7 11. Qe2 0-0-0 12. h4 h6 13. N1h2 Rdg8
Black prepares a kingside pawn storm.

14. Bd2 g5 15. hxg5 hxg5 16. Ng4 Qd8!
Rerouting the queen so it can participate in the kingside attack.

17. a3 Kb8 18. Reb1
White tries to drum up a queenside attack, but Black's attack is faster.

18. ... Qf8 19. c3 Qg7 20. b4

(see diagram top of next page)

20. ... Rh5!
Planning for the rook to lead the attack, with the queen backing it up on the h-file.

21. bxc5 Nxc5 22. Nfh2? Qh7 23. d4 Ba6 24. Qf3 Ne4 25. Be1 Rh8
The famed "Alekhine's Gun" formation has the queen stationed behind two rooks in a battery formation. This variant of the Gun

PHOTO: US CHESS ARCHIVES

"AN INCREDIBLE FRIEND"

BY **WFM IVONA JEZIERSKA**

WHEN I ARRIVED IN THE U.S. from Poland in December 1980, Rachel was one of the first people I met. She was an incredible friend to me, smoothing my way from Warsaw to New York City.

Introduced by a mutual acquaintance, Rachel and I attended a performance of *The Nutcracker* at Lincoln Center on my second day in New York. We played blitz chess at a bar until the early hours — her warmth and competitive spirit made us into fast friends.

She opened her spacious apartment on 83rd Street and Broadway to me as she had to others, many of whom were fellow chess players. There I met members of New York's chess community, including future IM Jay Bonin. I didn't yet speak English, but Rachel and I were both fluent in Russian, and she patiently translated everything, allowing me to find a connection and sense of belonging in a new world.

Rachel introduced me not only to the city but also to its vibrant chess scene. Her support, friendship, and hospitality made all the difference in my early years and many years to come in the United States. I will always remember her with gratitude and affection.

Jezierska (L) and Crotto (R) at the 1984 U.S. Women's Ch

POSITION AFTER 20. b4

is also very effective!

26. Qe3 Rxh2 27. Bxe4 Rh1+ 28. Kg2 dxe4, White resigned.

SCANDINAVIAN DEFENSE (B01)

WIM Rachel Crotto (2051)
Walter Shipman (2359)
Marshall CC Grand Prix, 1979
Annotations by IM Doug and WIM Alexey Root

1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. d4 Nf6
3. … Nc6 takes advantage of White's third move to attack the d-pawn.

4. Nf3 Bg4 5. Be2 e6 6. Be3 Nc6 7. 0-0 Bd6 8. h3 Bh5 9. Nc3
9. c4 offers more chances for White.

9. … Qa5

(see diagram top of next column)

How should White proceed?

10. Nb5
A reasonable move, but White had better.

POSITION AFTER 9. … Qa5

The black queen is short of squares, so 10. a3 with the idea of b2-b4 looks appealing. Unfortunately Black is still in the game after 10. … Qf5 11. Nb5 0-0-0. It is essential to deprive Black of the f5-square; therefore, 10. g4! Bg6 11. a3! wins nearly on the spot. If 11. … Qb6 12. b4! and White has both Nc3-a4 and d4-d5 in her arsenal. Another reminder that tactics can lurk in any position.

10. … 0-0-0 11. a4 Bxf3 12. Bxf3 a6 13. Qe2! Nb4 14. c4
White has a great position with the text move, but playing c2-c3, either immediately or after Nb5xd6+, seems stronger.

14. … Be7 15. Rfc1 c6 16. Bf4 axb5 17. axb5 Qb6

18. d5!
The central break is decisive.

18. … c5 19. dxe6 Qxe6 20. Rd1 Rxd1+
Naturally, if 20. … Qxe2 21. Ra8 mate.

21. Qxd1
Threatening Ra1-a8 mate. Black must shed material to avoid that fate.

21. … Na6 22. bxa6 bxa6 23. Qb3 Bd6 24. Qb7+ Kd8 25. Bxd6 Qxd6 26. Rd1 Qxd1+ 27. Bxd1 Re8 28. Ba4 Re1+ 29. Kh2 Re2 30. Qb6+ Ke7 31. Qxc5+ Ke6 32. b4 Ne4 33. Qd5+ Kf6 34. Qd3 Re1 35. Qd4+ Ke7 36. Qe5+ Kd8 37. f3, Black resigned.

True to Form

Why the first hour of a tournament is so important

BY **GM ANDY SOLTIS**

WHAT IS THE BEST TIME TO BE a spectator at a tournament? Many fans say it's the last hour of the last round. Whether you're watching online or in the playing hall, this is "the money hour," when prizes and championship titles are won.

But if you're one of the players at a tournament, the most important time may be the *first* hour of the *first* round. That's when you find out your form. If you're "in form," you will play as well as your rating says you can.

"I am not happy with my form," Magnus Carlsen said after his first-round game at Wijk aan Zee 2023. His draw that day was a tipoff: By the tournament's midway point he had a minus score and had suffered a rare-for-Magnus two straight losses.

That was big news for his fans. But a bigger story for much of 2024 was the horrendous form of Carlsen's world championship successor, Ding Liren.

His rating plummeted; he went from number 3 in the world to number 23. He feared he would still be out of form when he defended his title against Gukesh Dommaraju. "I am worried about losing very badly," Ding said.

But form is fickle. As soon as the 2024 world championship match began, he was playing at his rating level again. Ding quickly had the edge as Black and won the first game. The match became a nail-biter, not the blowout loss that many expected.

This is why your first hour in a tournament matters: It is a clue to how well you are thinking. Even elite players are concerned about what their form will be. "I am always doubting it when I feel like I haven't played for a bit," Carlsen said last year.

Viktor Korchnoi realized he was rusty at the start of his last match with his oldest rival:

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E21)

GM Viktor Korchnoi
GM Boris Spassky
Match (1), Kalmykia, 12.19.2009

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Nf3 b6 5. Qb3 a5 6. Bg5 Bb7 7. e3 h6

This position was virtually new. In similar positions 8. Bh4 gives White a slight plus after 8. ... g5 9. Bg3 Ne4 10. Bd3, for example.

Korchnoi played **8. Bxf6?!** and struggled to equalize after **8. ... Qxf6 9. Be2 d6 10. 0-0 Bxc3 11. bxc3? Nd7**.

"Evidently I was in poor form," Korchnoi wrote in *64* magazine.

Even the greatest players fall out of form. After one of the first super-tournaments, New York 1927, Alexander Alekhine wrote, "I found myself in one of those periods, thankfully not too frequent and not too long-lasting, when thinking about chess involves an especially great strain on the nerves and takes up more time than usual."

Professional athletes know what good and bad form is. In good form an NBA star has a "hot hand." He sinks every three-pointer he tries.

But athletes also know they can't predict their form. A baseball player can have his best-ever batting practice — and then strike out when he steps up to the plate for real.

Sports Illustrated magazine once underlined this when it quoted a superstar: "You can't run a (practice) mile in 3:58 and say 'I'm in good shape,'" he said.

Who was the superstar? Anatoly Karpov.

"You can only feel [your form] at the chess table," Karpov told the magazine in 1981.

That year Karpov was asked whether he was afraid of the up-and-coming Garry Kasparov. "I am afraid of no one," he said, "if I am in form."

Ding Liren's form first became mysterious after his dramatic finish in the 2022 Candidates tournament. He took a long vacation from classical chess.

No one knew what shape he would be in for the 2023 World Championship match against Ian Nepomniachtchi. He gave an answer as soon as he returned to the board.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E15)

GM Gukesh Dommaraju
GM Ding Liren
Wijk aan Zee (1), 01.13.2023

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Ba6 5. b3 Bb4+ 6. Bd2 Be7 7. Bg2 O-O 8. O-O d5 9. Nc3 c6 10. Bf4 Nbd7 11. cxd5 exd5 12. Ne1 Re8 13. Nd3 Nf8 14. Bg5 Ne6 15. Bxf6 Bxf6 16. e3

This was Ding's first classical game in six months, and his first classical game with Gukesh. Computers wanted Black to reposition his pieces with ... Be7-d6 or ... Ba6-b7, but he put White under immediate pressure with:

16. ... Nc5!? 17. dxc5 Bxc3 18. Rc1 Qf6 19. Qc2 d4!

QUIZ FOR AUGUST

THE RISE OF GM Gukesh Dommaraju has been so dramatic that when you look for his earliest games, his losses in some databases far outnumber his victories. The new world champion only learned how to play chess in 2013, the year Magnus Carlsen won the title. This month's quiz includes some of Gukesh's first tactical gems. In each of the six diagrams you are asked to find the fastest winning line of play. This will usually mean the forced win of a decisive amount of material, such as a minor piece. For solutions, see page 63.

PROBLEM 1
GM Gukesh Dommaraju
WGM Anastasya Paramzina

WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 2
IM Shahil Dey
GM Gukesh Dommaraju

BLACK TO MOVE

PROBLEM 3
GM Gukesh Dommaraju
WIM P. Michelle Catherina

WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM 4
GM Venkataraman Karthik
GM Gukesh Dommaraju

BLACK TO MOVE

PROBLEM 5
GM Kiril Georgiev
GM Gukesh Dommaraju

BLACK TO MOVE

PROBLEM 6
GM Gukesh Dommaraju
IM Dinesh Sharma

WHITE TO MOVE

Gukesh's fans began to wonder whether he was ready to play at the elite GM level.

20. cxb6 axb6 21. Rfd1 Rad8 22. exd4 Bxd4 23. Nf4? g5 24. Nh5 Qh6 25. Bf3 c5 26. g4

26. ... f5!
Because 27. gxf5? g4 28. Bxg4 Qg5 is a winning attack. Or 27. Qxf5 Bc8 28. Qc2 Rf8.

27. Ng3 fxg4 28. Nf5 Qf6 29. Be4
And here 29. Bxg4? is met with 29. ... Bc8, threatening 30. ... h5.

29. ... h5 30. b4 Kf8 31. a3 h4 32. Re1 Rxe4! 33. Qxe4 Bd3 34. Qe6 Qxe6 35. Rxe6 Bxf5 36. Rxb6 g3 37. hxg3 hxg3 38. bxc5 Bh3, White resigned.

Bobby Fischer's form was often unpredictable because he periodically went into hibernation. Before he ended an 18-month absence in 1970 he said, "I'm an unknown quantity even to myself."

Five years later, Fischer forfeited his world championship title because he refused to play a match with the challenger, Karpov. The conventional explanation was Bobby was afraid of losing. Not exactly, said Karpov; he was afraid of what form he would be in.

But there is a contrarian view that cast doubt about form: It says there is no such thing as a "hot hand." A streak is the result of the random nature of athletic performance. Eventually that NBA star who sinks three-pointers will suddenly miss easy layups. He "regresses to the mean," as the social scientists put it.

There is ample evidence for this phenomenon. After Carlsen's poor start in Wijk aan Zee 2023 he recovered and finished second; Korchnoi won that game from Spassky and went on to win the match; Ding Liren's 2023 crush of Gukesh was his only win in the tournament.

So if you feel you are out of form, the best remedy is just keep playing hard. Your performance will inevitably "regress" to your rating.

That was Carlsen's message this year at Wijk aan Zee, when GM Arjun Erigaisi began with a disastrous score of 1½-5½.

"I'm not sure we should read all that much into it," Magnus said. He recalled how Fabiano Caruana had "a nightmare of a tournament" — a 5/13 score at Wijk aan Zee in 2018.

Two months later, Caruana won a much stronger event, a Candidates tournament, and then nearly beat Carlsen in a World Championship match.

Magnus was right about Erigaisi. His form returned in the tournament and he won his final two games, including a last-round defeat of the new world champion, Gukesh. ♦

The Slow Boat

Sacrificing a rook for a minor piece doesn't have to mean a rush to checkmate.

BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**

SACRIFICES IN CHESS CAN BE broadly divided into two categories: short-term and long-term. Short-term sacrifices are straightforward; we give up something for an immediate reward, either a checkmate or material gain. Long-term sacrifices, on the other hand, offer more ambiguous advantages, such as initiating an attack, creating weaknesses, or seizing the initiative.

In my next few columns, we will explore different types of Exchange sacrifices. We saw several examples in my May column, within the overarching theme of changing flanks. I would put those more in the short-term sacrifice category, since we could clearly see the benefits of the sacrifices immediately. In earlier columns, I've dealt with the typical Exchange sacrifice on c3 in the Sicilian Defense. In this column, I will focus on sacrificing an Exchange for the purpose of building an attack over the long term.

Removing the defender

One of my absolute favorite attacking games is Bobby Fischer's victory over GM Miguel Najdorf in the 1962 Olympiad. Fischer combines tactical and positional themes to leave his opponent's king completely defenseless.

KNOW YOUR CLASSICS
GM Robert James Fischer
GM Miguel Najdorf
15th Olympiad Final (2), Varna
09.28.1962

WHITE TO MOVE

Before diving into the game, first let us summarize the position. White has given up a pawn but in turn has finished developing and has castled. Black, on the other hand, is facing a long-term problem with king safety. Even if the king doesn't come under direct attack immediately, where will it go? The queenside is out of the question; the kingside is compromised, and staying in the center is not appealing either.

14. Rxe4!
The bishop on e4 is Black's best defensive piece. Fischer therefore sacrifices an Exchange to remove the defender and leave the king completely defenseless. In a few moves, we can compare the quality of the pieces.

14. ... dxe4 15. Nf5
Now that the light-squared bishop is gone, the knight will be parked here permanently, taking away any hope of kingside castling.

15. ... Bc5 16. Ng7+ Ke7
If 16. ... Kf8 17. Bh6 Kg8, White can change flanks with 18. Qb3! Now that the black king is on the kingside, the white queen has no job left to do on a4 and will maneuver to g3. Black's position is hopeless.

17. Nf5+ Ke8
By repeating the position, Fischer takes away the king's right to castle.

18. Be3!
White has several good moves here, but I really love Fischer's approach. Once again, he trades Black's best defensive pieces, while simultaneously developing his last undeveloped pieces.

18. ... Bxe3 19. fxe3
If we compare the quality of both sets of pieces, we can clearly see that all of White's pieces are well-positioned. The only exception is the rook on a1, but it is headed to d1 on the next move. In comparison, not only are Black's pieces not even fully developed, but the rooks will prove to be poor defenders.

19. ... Qb6 20. Rd1
The last piece joins the action.

20. ... Ra7 21. Rd6 Qd8
Grabbing the pawn with 21. ... Qxb2 leads to a very pretty checkmate: 22. Bxf7+ Kxf7 23. Rxd7+ Rxd7 24. Qxd7+ Kg6 25. Qg7+ Kxf5 26. Qg4 mate.

22. Qb3 Qc7
If 22. ... Rf8 White can switch to the dark squares with 23. Ng7+ Ke7 24. Qa3 and Black has no defense against the upcoming discovered check.

23. Bxf7+ Kd8 24. Be6, Black resigned.
I don't think there was ever any doubt that Fischer's minor pieces were superior to Najdorf's rooks.

Of course, we cannot discuss Exchange sacrifices without at least one example from the king of Exchange sacrifices, Tigran Petrosian. While he may be known for his defensive skills, he was not one to shy away from attacking his opponent's king. Here's an example that shows off his tactical prowess.

NO HURRY

Peter Clarke
GM Tigran Petrosian
13th Olympiad Final (8), Munich, 10.19.1958

BLACK TO MOVE

30. ... Rxh3!
The theme is similar to the Fischer game — Petrosian removes a core defender of White's position.

31. Bxh3 Rxh3 32. Qg2 Qh7
Black doesn't have any direct threats yet and the white king looks quite safe, surrounded with his own pieces. However, White does have a lot of weaknesses, mainly the f4-square.

33. Ne3 Ng6
Black is not in a hurry, as White has no active counterplay. Petrosian is simply moving more pieces to the kingside. Once again, we will see that the white rooks are not good defensive pieces.

34. Ng4 Nf4 35. Bxf4 gxf4

With the big threat of ... Rh3-g3.

36. Kf1 Rg3 37. Qf2 Qh3+ 38. Ke2 Rg2
Black will stay ahead in material.

39. Rg1 Rxf2+ 40. Nxf2 Qh7 41. Rh1 Qg6, White resigned.

Destroying the kingside

Long-term sacrifices require patience and the ability to play while down material for a long time without constantly thinking about how to get it back. A weak king that cannot be improved is a long-term problem, and that can be enough compensation.

APPLYING PRESSURE

GM Artur Yusupov (2665)
IM Marc Narciso Dublan (2455)
Linares Open (2), 1997

Black's last move was 15. ... Nd5, attacking the annoying rook on h4. Black is relying on tactics to make this move work.

WHITE TO MOVE

16. Rxh6!
Since the black knight on d5 is hanging, White sacrifices the Exchange to ruin the kingside. Simply moving the rook drops a pawn: 16. Rg4 Nb4 17. Qc4 Nxc2 18. Rc1 d5 and the knight will escape via b4.

16. ... gxh6 17. Nxd5 Qd8
After 17. ... Qg5 the d2-knight joins the action tactically: 18. Ne4! and Black has nothing better than 18. ... Qxd5 19. Nf6+ Kg7 20. Nxd5 exd5.

18. Nf4
White has given up the Exchange for long-term play against the king. We won't see a quick checkmate or an attack. However, we won't see the black king finding safe shelter any time soon either, which means that he has a permanent headache.

18. ... Qg5 19. g3
A simple defensive move. Not every move has to be a tempo or an attack. White's next move is Nd2-e4.

19. ... Bd7 20. Ne4 Qe7 21. c4 f5 22. Nc3

White doesn't have anything direct here, but all his pieces are well placed, in particular the f4-knight. White has long-term pressure on the e6-pawn, and Black cannot really improve the bishop or get the rooks into the game in a meaningful way.

22. ... Qf6?
Black runs into a tactic, but mistakes like this don't happen in a vacuum; they happen because one side is under pressure for a period of time and has to be accurate. Best was 22. ... Qf7 23. Qf3 Rab8 24. a4.

23. Nb5!
The bishop is overworked and there is no good way to defend the d6-pawn.

23. ... Bxb5 24. Rxe6 Bxc4 25. Qxc4 Qf7 26. Qd5
White also had 26. d5, with the idea of opening the a1-h8 diagonal for the queen.

26. ... Rad8 27. Nh5
Now that the position has opened up, the White pieces are pouring in.

27. ... Kh7 28. Nf6+ Kh8 29. Qxf5 Qg7 30. h4
With the idea of g3-g4-g5, and also just asking Black what his next move is.

30. ... Rd7 31. Qh5 Rxf6 32. Rxf6 Qxf6 33. Qe8+ Kg7 34. Qxd7+
The rest is easy.

34. ... Kg6 35. Qa4 Kh7 36. h5 a5 37. Qd7+ Kh8 38. Qc8+ Kg7 39. Qxb7+ Kf8 40. Qe4 d5 41. Qf4, Black resigned.

When thinking about exchanging pieces or sacrifices, we should take into account the quality of the pieces and their long-term potential, not just their "point value." In this column, we saw examples of sacrificing an Exchange in order to weaken the opponent's king and start an attack. In my next column, we will take a look at positional Exchange sacrifices.

Next Level

The Southern California Invitational takes a step up in strength.

BY **IM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO**

WHEN I PLAYED IN THE SOUTHern California Invitational Championship in 2019, I entered the field as the top seed with a US Chess rating of 2372. This Memorial Day weekend, with a rating of 2532, I was seeded sixth out of eight players, one of only two non-GMs participating. Times have changed!

The roster for this year's event featured such legendary players as U.S. Senior Champion and former world No. 11 Vladimir Akopian and a host of strong younger GMs: Andrey Baryshpolets (a former 2600 player, winner of multiple strong European tournaments and a 2022 candidate for FIDE president); Cemil Can Ali Marandi (last year's champion, and a five-time European Youth Champion); the talented rising star Kirk Ghazarian; 2022 World Open co-champion Arman Mikaelyan, and Tsegmed Batchuluun, the highest-rated Mongolian player of all time. The underrated FM Mikayel Rostomyan, the 2024 Southern California Open champion, rounded out the field.

The historic strength of the championship was made possible through the exceptional leadership of the Southern California Chess Federation and its new president, Ala'a-addin Moussa. In total, more than $12,000 was raised in donations, and the choice of a great venue in Van Nuys (alongside the traditional Memorial Day Classic event) also contributed to the tournament's success.

Given the similar playing strength of the competitors, all the games were closely contested and it took several rounds for clear leaders to emerge. Each of the first two rounds had only one decisive game, both featuring Baryshpolets. His first opponent (your humble author) proved to be the more generous, unsoundly sacrificing a piece on the 13th move; Andrey never let go of the advantage and won convincingly.

In the second round, Baryshpolets was less fortunate — Mikaelyan played with great inspiration and produced a true brilliancy:

RUY LOPEZ, CLOSED DEFENSE (C84)

GM Arman Mikaelyan (2573)
GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2635)
Southern California Invitational Ch (2), Van Nuys, 05.24.2025

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. d3 d6 7. c3 0-0 8. Re1 Re8 9. Nbd2 Bf8 10. Nf1 g6

The most common approach is 10. ... h6 11. Ng3 b5 12. Bc2 (or *12. Bb3 Na5 13. Bc2 c5*) 12. ... d5 with mutual chances.

11. Bg5!?

A typical idea which originated from Steinitz. The pin is somewhat unpleasant for Black, and, after Nf1-e3 next, White will have good control over the d5-square. The

ALL PHOTOS: CHRIS ROBERTS

disadvantage is that in some cases the dark-squared bishop will be out of play.

11. ... h6 12. Bh4 Bg7 13. Ne3 b5 14. Bc2 Qd7

Also possible is the double-edged 14. ... a5!?, intending to meet 15. a4 with 15. ... b4.

15. a4!
Creating favorable tension on the queenside.

15. ... Bb7 16. b4 Ne7?!
The knight has few prospects here, and Black has better harmony after 16. ... Nd8. Admittedly, White can take possession of the d5-square, but after 17. Bxf6 Bxf6 18. Bb3 Ne6 19. Nd5 Bd8!? this turns out to be temporary, e.g., 20. d4 c6 21. Ne3 exd4 22. cxd4 a5! with counterplay.

17. Bb3
The subtle positional move 17. Rc1! would have left White with an advantage. Black's only active possibility is 17. ... Nh5, but this is met by 18. d4! exd4 19. cxd4 Nc8 20. d5! (this is why the rook was moved from the a1-square!) and White consolidates his advantage in the center. Also possible was 17. h3!? Nh5 18. d4 exd4 19. cxd4 Nc8 20. Ng4! Nb6 21. a5 Nc4 22. Qc1! Kh7 23. Nd2 with a better position.

17. ... Nh5!
Now Black obtains good counterplay.

18. Qc2 Nf4 19. Bg3 c5 20. axb5?!
A surprising decision, giving up the a-file; 20. bxc5!? dxc5 21. Rad1 was better.

20. ... axb5 21. Rxa8 Rxa8 22. h3 cxb4 23. cxb4
Black has equalized the position and now can play in any number of ways. Baryshpolets goes for the most ambitious continuation.

23. ... Nc6!?
23. ... Ne6 was another way to play.

24. Bxf4 Nxb4 25. Qd2 exf4 26. Ng4

The critical moment of the game.

26. ... Na6?
Underestimating White's resources. Exchanging an important attacking piece with 26. ... h5! is correct: 27. Qxb4 (*27. Ng5* is met by *27. ... Nd5!*) 27. ... hxg4 28. hxg4 Rc8! 29. d4 Bf8! and Black retains a solid position.

27. d4!
Cutting the a6-knight out of the game. Suddenly, White's attacking formation on the kingside looks menacing.

27. ... g5?
Incredibly, after this move, Black's position is no longer defensible.

The saving move is 27. ... h5! even though 28. Ng5! looks menacing:

(a) The logical 28. ... hxg4? 29. Bxf7+ Kh8 30. Qxf4 gives White a decisive attack.

(b) The computer suggests 28. ... Qe7!?, but practically speaking, this is a bad decision, as Black is forced to walk a tightrope: (b1) 29. Nxf7 hxg4 is Black's point, where White has no decisive discoveries, but here too the position is completely unclear. In fact, the computer defense hinges on the wild 30. Nxd6+ Kh7 31. Nxb7 g3!! and Black unexpectedly gains counterplay. And if instead (b2) 29. Qxf4 Rf8 30. Bxf7+ Kh8! (not *30. ... Rxf7? 31. Nxf7 Qxf7 32. Nh6+!*) 31. Nh2 Bxd4 32. Nhf3 Bc5! Black miraculously survives.

(c) The more human save is 28. ... Rf8!?, because after 29. Nh2 Nc7 30. Nhf3 d5 31. e5 Ne6 32. Nxe6 Qxe6 (*32. ... fxe6? 33. Bc2*) 33. Qxf4 Rc8 White keeps an edge, but Black's position is very much defensible.

28. e5!
From now on, Mikaelyan conducts the attack perfectly.

28. ... Nc7
There is no time for 28. ... Bxf3 29. e6!, or 28. ... d5 29. e6! (or *29. Nf6+!? Bxf6 30. exf6 Re8 31. Rxe8+ Qxe8 32. Qa5!*) 29. ... fxe6 30. Bc2.

29. Qd3!
Eyeing the light squares weakened by ... g6-g5.

29. ... Bxf3

In view of the threats of Ng4-f6+ and Bb3-c2, there was nothing better.

30. Nf6+!
A crucial intermediate move.

30. ... Bxf6 31. exf6 d5
Black loses after 31. ... Bh5 32. Re7! Qc6 33. Rxf7!, or 31. ... Bd5 32. Bc2.

32. Bc2! Be4 33. Rxe4 Kf8
Mate is coming up after 33. ... dxe4 34. Qxe4 Kf8 35. Qh7.

34. Re7 Qc6 35. Rxf7+!
The final combination.

35. ... Kxf7 36. Qh7+, Black resigned.
It is incredible that this game was essentially decided by just two moves — the erroneous 26. ... Na6, leaving the knight out of the game, and the weakening 27. ... g5. Mikaelyan conducted the final attack with remarkable energy and precision; this highly developed feeling for the initiative is one of the trademarks of his style.

The most important game of the third round was the showdown between Akopian and Ali Marandi, a repeat of their encounter in the 2024 championship. That game saw an extended positional struggle in the 6. d3 Closed Ruy Lopez which eventually ended in a draw. This time, Ali Marandi had a surprise up his sleeve, meeting the 8. a4 Anti-Marshall by playing in Marshall Gambit fashion anyway! Akopian spent some time in the opening, but found all the correct moves and reached a superior middlegame. Ali Marandi erroneously transposed into a worse rook ending; the resulting position was exceptionally subtle, and both players made mistakes. In the end, however,

GM Arman Mikaelyan

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

GM Vladimir Akopian

Akopian showed his experience and won to join the lead:

RUY LOPEZ, ANTI-MARSHALL VARIATION (C88)

GM Vladimir Akopian (2667)
GM Cemil Can Ali Marandi (2593)
Southern California Invitational Ch (3), Van Nuys, 05.24.2025

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 0-0 8. a4 d5!?
Inspired by the bulletproof reputation of the Marshall Attack (8. c3 d5), Black has recently tried Marshall-like approaches in a variety of Ruy Lopez lines. In this case, the gambit is considered somewhat speculative, but it's a dangerous surprise weapon.

9. axb5
GM Luke McShane tried 9. Bxd5 against Ali Marandi in the 2023 European Team Championship, but after 9. … Nxd5 10. exd5 Nd4! 11. Nxd4 exd4 12. axb5 Bb7 Black had decent play.

9. … dxe4 10. bxc6 exf3 11. Qxf3 e4 12. Qe2!
The safest square for White's queen: 12. Qe3? Ng4! 13. Qxe4 Bc5 14. d4 Qh4! is bad for White.

12. … Bd6
After 12. … Bg4?! 13. Qe3! White will gain a tempo with h2-h3, and Black's bishop will be misplaced.

13. h3!
The best move, played after 12 minutes of thought.

Black can force a draw after 13. Nc3 Bxh2+!, and Black maintains the balance after 13. d3 exd3 14. Qxd3 Ng4 15. h3 Bh2+ 16. Kf1 Qxd3+ 17. cxd3 Ne5 18. Rd1 (or *18. d4 Nd3 19. Rd1 Nxc1 20. Rxc1 Rd8 21. d5 Rb8*) 18. … Bf5 19. d4 Rab8!.

13. … Re8
Heading to the kingside to exploit the weaknesses created by the move h2-h3. However, White is in time to counter this.

14. Nc3 Re5

(see diagram top of next column)

15. Ra4!
An important defensive resource.

15. … Bxh3!

POSITION AFTER 14. … Re5

After 15. … Bf5 White defends with 16. Rxa6 Rb8 17. Qf1!? and Black's compensation for the two missing pawns is not clear.

16. Nxe4!
The key idea is 16. gxh3 Rg5+ 17. Kf1 Qc8 18. Qe3 Rg3!; Black holds his own after 19. fxg3 Qxh3+ 20. Ke2 Qh5+.

16. … Bg4!
White cannot take on f6 and then g4, because the e1-rook would hang.

17. Qe3
The most natural way to complete development; 17. Qc4!? Be6 18. Qc3 is also possible.

17. … Bf5 18. d3
With precise play White has rebuffed the initial attack, and now Black has to accept a statically worse position.

18. … Nxe4 19. dxe4 Be6 20. Bxe6 Rxe6
White is up a pawn, but his material advantage is temporary, as the c6-pawn will likely fall. Even so, White will stand slightly better in view of his superior pawn structure.

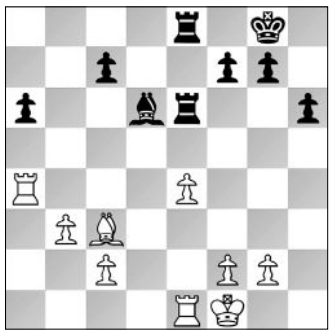
21. Qd3
It might have been marginally more accurate to play 21. b3!?. If 21. Rc4 Black can activate the other rook with 21. … Rb8! perhaps heading for b5 or b4.

21. … h6 22. b3
It's too dangerous to grab another pawn: 22. Rxa6? Rxa6 23. Qxa6 Qh4.

22. … Qe8 23. Bb2
23. Rc4?! would be inconsistent; Black's fine after 23. … Rd8.

23. … Qxc6 24. Qc3!?
The simplest approach: White transitions into an endgame with a risk-free advantage.

24. … Qxc3 25. Bxc3 Rae8 26. Kf1



POSITION AFTER 26. Kf1

26. ... Be5?

Played after less than five minutes of consideration. The transition into a rook ending is poorly timed; as it turns out, every tempo counts, and Black should have first gained valuable space on the kingside. After 26. ... h5!, Black is close to equality. There are two main options:

(a) 27. Rxa6 Rxe4 28. Rxe4 Rxe4 29. Ra5 c5!? (Not *29. ... h4? 30. Ra8+ Kh7 31. Ra4!; 29. ... Rh4 30. Ke2 Rh1 31. Be5* is also double-edged) 30. Bd2 g6 31. Ra4 Re8 32. Be3 Bf8 with a likely draw.

(b) If 27. g3 Be5! and now Black can make this exchange in far more advantageous circumstances: 28. Bxe5 Rxe5 29. Rxa6 Rxe4 30. Rxe4 Rxe4 31. Ra8+ Kh7 32. Ra7 Re7 33. c4 g5! 34. b4 Kg6 35. b5 Kf6 36. c5 Ke6 with an equal position.

27. Bxe5 Rxe5 28. Rxa6 Rxe4 29. Rxe4 Rxe4 30. Ra8+!

Pushing Black's king further away from the center.

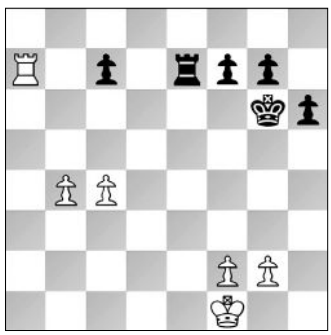
30. ... Kh7 31. Ra7!

The ideal location for White's rook.

31. ... Re7 32. c4!

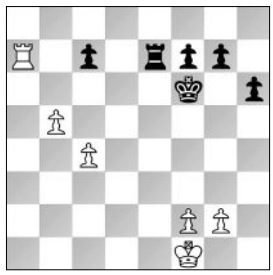
White quickly creates pressure on the queenside in an attempt to tie down Black's pieces. Not 32. b4? Re4!

32. ... Kg6 33. b4



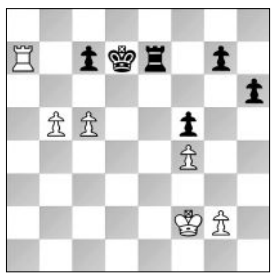
33. ... Kf6!?

This endgame is unbelievably subtle. After this move, White is able to force Black into *zugzwang*. Instead, Black could put up much greater resistance by ... losing a tempo! The best try was 33. ... Kf5 34. b5 Kf6!!.



POSITION AFTER 34. ... Kf6

After 35. c5 Ke6 the position is very nearly a reciprocal *zugzwang*; White would prefer for it to be Black's move, as he would be forced to make a weakening pawn move on the kingside. Nevertheless, this position is also winning for White — but in only one way: 36. f4!! (neither *36. g3? g6!!*; nor *36. f3? g5!!*) 36. ... f5 37. Kf2 (*37. b6 cxb6 38. Rxe7+ Kxe7 39. cxb6 Kd6* is drawn, because White's king lacks the f4-square) and now the best try is 37. ... Kd7! headed for c8 to free Black's rook.



POSITION AFTER 37. ... Kd7

Remarkably, Black can hold after (a) 38. b6 Kc8! 39. c6 Kb8! despite the passive positions of their pieces: 40. g3 g6! 41. Kf3 Rf7 42. Ke3 Re7+ and White cannot make progress: 43. Kd3 (or *43. Kd4 Re4+! 44. Kd5 cxb6*) 43. ... g5!.

So White only has (b) 38. Kf3!. Play could go 38. ... Kc8 39. Ra8+! Kd7 40. Rf8 Ke6 41. Rd8! cutting off Black's king, and now Black is again reduced to waiting passively: 41. ... g6 42. c6 g5 43. Ke3 gxf4+ 44. Kxf4 Rf7 45. g3! (*45. Ke3? f4+!*) 45. ... Rg7 46. Kf3 and White will be able to transfer his king to the queenside. It's not straightforward, but it's a win.

34. b5 h5

Now 34. ... Ke6 35. c5! is winning for White in a much easier way.

(a) If 35. ... g5 36. g4!.

(b) 35. ... g6 is met by 36. f4! (but not *36. b6? cxb6 37. cxb6 Rd7!*).

(c) 35. ... h5 36. f4! is similar the note to move 36.

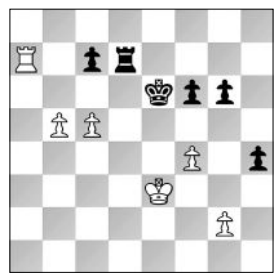
(d) After 35. ... Kd7 36. b6 Kc8 37. c6 Kb8 we get a position we've seen before with a white pawn on f4 and a black one on f5, which prevented White from taking any action on the kingside. Here, it is a different story: 38. g4! g6 39. Kg2 f6 40. Kg3 Rg7 (*40. ... g5 41. Kf3!*) 41. Kh4 Re7 42. f4 and White will create a path for his king.

(e) The key point is that 35. ... f5 36. b6! cxb6 37. Rxe7+ Kxe7 38. cxb6 is a winning pawn ending, unlike the corresponding position with a white pawn on f4. White wins after 38. ... Kd6 39. Ke2 Kc6 40. Kf3 (*40. Ke3? g5!*) 40. ... g5 41. g4!.

35. c5?

Allowing Black to gain much-needed space on the kingside.

The win starts with 35. f4!, and after 35. ... Ke6 36. c5 g6 (*36. ... Rd7 37. f5+!*) 37. Kf2 Black eventually runs out of moves: 37. ... Rd7 38. Ke2 Re7 39. Kf3 Rd7 40. Ke4 (threatening b5-b6) 40. ... f6 41. Ke3! (not yet though: *41. b6? cxb6 42. cxb6 Rd2!*) 41. ... h4 (it's an easy win after *41. ... f5 42. b6 cxb6 43. Rxd7 Kxd7 44. cxb6 Kc6 45. Kd4*) and now Black has no more good pawn moves: ... f6-f5 will open a path for White's king through e5 in the pawn ending, and ... g6-g5 is met by f4-f5+!.



POSITION AFTER 41. ... h4

So White just needs one more triangulation to force through b5-b6, which should be played when Black's rook is on the inferior e7-square: 42. Ke2! Re7 43. Kf3 Rd7 44. Ke3 Re7 45. b6 and White wins.

35. ... g5!

After this, the position is drawn again.

36. g3

36. b6 cxb6 37. Rxe7 Kxe7 38. cxb6 Kd7 draws by a tempo.

36. ... Ke6 37. f4 g4?

It was vital to create a passed pawn, which

GM Vladimir Akopian

would allow Black to obtain counterplay: 37. ... gxf4 38. gxf4 h4 39. Kg2 Kf5 40. b6 h3+! 41. Kxh3 Re3+ and Black holds.

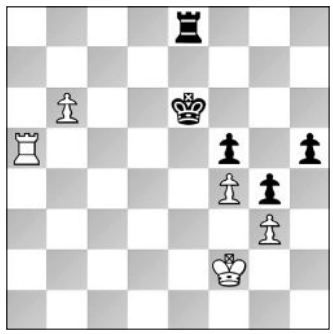
38. Kf2?
It's a draw again! Black would have been in *zugzwang* after 38. f5+! Kf6 39. Kf2. If he gives up the c7-pawn, then White's "self-propelling pawns" on the queenside win easily.

38. ... f5! 39. b6 cxb6 40. cxb6 Re8?
Again, Black had to pursue activity: 40. ... Rd7! 41. Ke3 Rd1 42. Rh7 Rg1 43. Kf2 Rb1 44. Rxh5 Rb3 and Black holds.

41. Ra5?

(see diagram top of next column)

Missing the win again, although after 41. Rh7! White must play precisely: 41. ... Ra8 42. b7 Ra2+ 43. Ke3 Rb2 44. Kd4 Kd6 45. Rh6+! is the simplest. Then comes 45. ... Kc7


POSITION AFTER 41. Ra5

46. Rxh5 Kxb7 47. Ke5 Rb3 48. Kxf5 Rxg3 49. Rg5 Kc7 50. Rxg4 Ra3 51. Rg1 Kd7 52. Re1 and Black is a tempo short.

41. ... Rb8?
The last mistake. As the weaker piece, the king should blockade the pawn, not the rook: 41. ... Rf8! 42. Rb5 Kd6 43. b7 Kc7 44. Ke3 Kb8 45. Kd4 Rd8+! and Black's counterplay is just in time.

42. Rb5 Kd7 43. Ke3 Kc6 44. Rxf5 Kxb6
The pawn ending is a win for White after 44. ... Rxb6 45. Rf6+!.

45. Rxh5 Kc6 46. f5 Rb4 47. Rh6+ Kd5 48. Re6! Ra4 49. Re8, Black resigned.
White threatens f5-f6, and 49. ... Ra6 is met by 50. Kf4.

These victories were extremely valuable for Mikaelyan and Akopian, as they came against two main contenders for the title. In the end, both Ali Marandi and Baryshpolets were affected by these defeats and finished in the bottom half of the crosstable.

The fourth round had little effect on the standings, but Ali Marandi was able to avenge his loss in the previous round by beating Baryshpolets in a beautiful 23-move miniature. The fifth round was the most exciting of the tournament, as both Mikaelyan (facing Tsegmed) and Ghazarian (facing Ali Marandi) essayed early g2-g4 thrusts to fight the Queen's Gambit Declined, albeit in very different situations. Both games were unclear for some time, but both players were eventually rewarded for their ambition.

As a result, Mikaleyan led by a half-point heading into the penultimate round. He was closely followed by Akopian and Ghazarian, who were due to play each other. Akopian outplayed his opponent in the early middlegame, but Kirk defended well and at various points seemed close to a draw. However, Akopian made the most of his chances and was able to transpose into a rook ending where his king was significantly more active, which made all the difference.

In the final round, Mikaelyan took a quick draw against Ali Marandi (the only "grandmaster draw" in the tournament), betting that Akopian would not win as Black against your author. This proved to be the case — both sides displayed the necessary knowledge in a sharp line of the Slav Defense, and a draw was agreed on move 31.

Thus, Mikaelyan and Akopian shared first and second to each win $2,250, with Akopian taking home the champion's trophy on Sonneborn-Berger tiebreak points. Thanks to a tense win against Baryshpolets in the last round, Ghazarian finished in clear third place for $1,500. Mikayel Rostomyan, who played extremely resiliently, ended up in fourth place with an undefeated 50% score; the peaceful result does not reflect the content of his games, which were all very hard-fought.

As for me, I struggled to make the most of my chances and failed to convert several promising positions, finishing with a somewhat disappointing 3/7 (losing in the first round but drawing in the rest). Nevertheless, all my games were quite interesting, and it was certainly a very beneficial experience to participate in an event of this caliber.

International Arbiter Randy Hough ably directed, and the Temecula Chess Club's Chris Roberts operated a DGT live broadcast that allowed fans to follow the games online in real time. It is rare to see a tournament of this quality organized at the state level, and I would like to thank the SCCF for their excellent work. My hope is that the strength of this year's tournament will not be a one-time thing, but rather will set a high standard for future Southern California championships.

2025 Southern California Ch

VAN NUYS, CA, MAY 23-26, 2025

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	**GM Vladimir Akopian**	2667	*	½	1	½	½	½	1	½	4½/7
2	**GM Arman Mikaelyan**	2573	½	*	½	½	½	1	½	1	4½/7
3	**GM Kirk Ghazarian**	2590	0	½	*	½	½	½	1	1	4/7
4	**FM Mikayel Rostomyan**	2378	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	3½/7
5	**IM Robert Shlyakhtenko**	2532	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	0	3/7
6	**GM Batchuluun Tsegmed**	2484	½	0	½	½	½	*	½	½	3/7
7	**GM Cemil Can Ali Marandi**	2593	0	½	0	½	½	½	*	1	3/7
8	**GM Andrey Baryshpolets**	2635	½	0	0	½	1	½	0	*	2½/7

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Steering Them Right

A coach's guide to getting – and keeping – students ready to play their best

BY **NM MATAN PRILLELTENSKY**

LIKE IN CHESS ITSELF, IT'S better for a chess coach or teacher to learn from the mistakes of others. But also like in chess, the mistakes you make yourself have a way of being the most memorable and instructive.

As a young student teacher, I went to Nationals for the first time in 2011 as the coach of a strong elementary school team. In the weeks leading up to the event, I met kids during the school day to grind tactics. During the event itself, we had team meetings. I even taught a short lesson before every round to drill opening principles into everyone's minds.

None of it worked. The tactics problems were beside the point (they were too difficult and there weren't enough of them to make a real difference); the lessons drained some of the kids' limited attention, and the team meetings were neither here nor there. Several kids underperformed, and the results were below expectations.

Fortunately, results give you immediate feedback on your work. I made some conclusions and decided to do things differently moving forwards.

I certainly don't take credit for the multiple National Championships my various teams have won since then — some schools are more set up to compete than others. But when a bunch of kids overperform, it makes sense to think about what their preparation and routines for the event had in common. Rather than detail the evolution of my thinking over the years, I will get to the point — the principles I think coaches and players can successfully use both before and during a tournament.

Before

For almost all scholastic players, Nationals should be approached as a normal tournament. Solving puzzles, usually tactical in nature, forms the basis of independent work on chess. The benefits are immense and varied: Better tactical vision during games, fewer blunders, and more accurate calculation are top of mind. But also, as players become more likely to see short tactics inside variations, they also play more aggressively and confidently.

If you are looking for a resource for day-to-day solving, there are many listed in John Hartmann's article in the June *Chess Life Kids*. But the main thing is to solve problems mindfully: Focus as if you're playing a tournament game; write down your solutions, and check your answers, either independently or with a parent/coach. Some people say you can only absorb a few new patterns each day, but I don't agree; the point of diminishing returns is real, but I think you have to do quite a bit of tactical solving before reaching it. An hour a day of solving goes a really long way.

Even at relatively low levels, a solid opening repertoire is very helpful. Players have access to more interactive resources than ever before — new Chessable courses are released every week, many of them at an amazing level of quality and depth; Modern Chess also produces courses that I have found extremely useful. But it's not easy to distill this fire hose of information into what will appear in practical play at various levels, so students tend to have a hard time working on the opening phase independently.

If you are a coach, I suggest asking yourself, "What positions will they actually get in a tournament game?" What constitutes relevant opening theory varies wildly at different levels of chess. Check what happens in the student's openings at their rating range in the Mega database; the results can be extremely revealing, and will help you understand what they need to know.

If you are a player, every game you play is a chance to deepen your understanding

Matan and friends at the 2024 K-12 Grade Championships

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of your lines. I think it was Andy Soltis who preached going one move deeper every time. In other words: Figure out where the game left your notes. (If you don't have opening notes, I suggest making some yourself, either in a Lichess study or ChessBase.) If you were the one to deviate, try to understand and remember the purpose of the move you were meant to play. If your opponent deviated, and you didn't find the optimal reply, try to understand the best move and add it to your notes. You can even do this after online blitz or rapid games. You may also find that this motivates you to take these online games more seriously.

Please don't get the impression that I think tactics and openings are the be-all and end-all of chess improvement. But they definitely help, and they might be more likely to offer an immediate return on investment than other forms of training.

During

Once the tournament starts, I try to help the kids play their best, rather than teaching them new information. At a very young or basic level, I think kids benefit greatly from analysis of their games between rounds. You may identify a massive improvement early in the game that avoids an opening disaster or inflicts one on the opponent. The blunders that happen in these games offer many opportunities to reinforce some simple process goals for the next round. For example, at the recent SuperNationals, I asked students to think about their opponent's threats, look for their forcing moves, and blunder-check their moves before playing them.

Analysis of stronger students' games during Nationals is a tricky one for me. I generally advise them to rest in between rounds and leave chess alone — it's a long tournament. But when they play a tough game, they always seem to want to look at it! In those moments I tend to default to what the student wants: Strong players have some idea what will help them play their best, and I think analyzing the game may help them process it (especially if it's a tough loss) and put it behind them until the tournament is over.

Speaking of stronger kids, I think that very often what they most want during a tournament is a friend. I normally refer my students to an IM or GM coach when they reach 1800, or sometimes even 1600. But I have regularly worked with my "graduates," including kids up to 2000, during Nationals. These kids of course value technical chess advice and opening preparation, especially from someone who knows them and is deeply invested in their success. But I think the real job of the coach in those moments is to transmit confidence to the students.

For example, before a critical last-round game in the K-8 Championship section at this year's SuperNationals, one of my graduates asked me which of two opening lines he should play. One led to a nominally higher engine evaluation than the other, but I told him he wasn't going to play against Stockfish, and asked him which move *he* had more confidence in. In the absence of extremely specific knowledge about what the opponent is going to play, I think this type of common-sense directive is what's usually needed. The better you know the kid, the better you know what to tell them. He did win the game, and I don't think it had much to do with the opening.

Coaches of school teams or large groups have the secondary task of managing their students throughout the tournament. Everyone has their own way of doing this; I will offer mine in the hope that it is useful for some of the readers.

I try to keep it low-key. I'm not big on team meetings, although there is a time and place for everything. The team room should be a calm, friendly atmosphere suitable for occasional brief preparation before games and analysis afterwards. Students should not waste their time and energy in between rounds hanging out in the team room! There is obviously a social component to scholastic chess tournaments, but part of what makes it fun for kids is striving to perform to the best of their ability. They all want to win, but often lack the self-discipline to put themselves in the best position to do that. As a result, they need (and want!) an adult to force them to do the things that will help them be successful: Rest in between rounds; eat reasonable food; get a bit of fresh air, and skip the screen-induced dopamine hits.

What about parents?

Parents can also help in getting a child to do the things they need to do to be ready for the next round. Otherwise, a parent's job is to support their child as much as possible throughout the event: Focus on the process, be happy for their successes, and support them in the difficult moments. A tough loss is not the time for home truths or criticism, and if either of those are ever needed, they should come from the coach, not the parent. Chess is a tough game, and the value of a parent's unconditional love and support is incalculable.

At the end of the day, some sense of perspective is helpful. Yes, Nationals is a major event. But it's one of many tournaments, large and small, that students will play in over the course of their chess careers. The most important thing is to enjoy the process and put yourself in a position to do your best. We are all very lucky to spend a weekend engaged in this amazing game!

Scholastic Players and Coaches

Stay tuned to Chess Life *in the coming months, as we'll have coverage and annotated games by some of the national champions crowned at SuperNationals VIII in Orlando. And keep an eye out for a preview of the K-12 Championships, set for Spokane, Washington, in December.*

Matan and Audrey Zhou

Matan and the Edgemont team

Bearing Down in Brazil

It didn't come easy, but Americans — especially GM Sam Shankland — found success at the Continental Championship.

BY **IM MAXIMILLIAN LU**

FOR 224 PLAYERS, INCLUDING eight Americans, who descended on the picturesque ecotourism destination of Iguazu Falls, Brazil, the occasion was more than just an early summer getaway; it marked the start of the 18th American Continental Championship, with competitors vying to finish in the top four and qualify to play in the World Cup.

The charm of the backyard waterfalls and the idyllic Instagram-able views of nature's wonders did not distract veteran GM and former U.S. Champion Sam Shankland from capturing the title on tiebreaks with an undefeated 8½/11. It marked a triumphant return to the event for Shankland, who competed in (and won) the event in 2018.

Three other Americans finished close behind with 8/11: GMs Grigoriy Oparin, Brandon Jacobson, and Brewington Hardaway. While the results marked a strong showing, the Americans' success did not flow as easily

as the whitewater rapids nearby. The dense playing field and marathon 11-round format resulted in many peace accords, and while lots of them were hard-fought and bruising, it was rather a disappointment for those with an uncompromising fighting spirit.

Amidst the group of players finishing just off the podium, Brewington Hardaway's story stood out in particular. I caught up with Hardaway after the tournament to talk about his maiden experience abroad after achieving the grandmaster title.

"Playing outside the country gives you a different energy," he said. "There's European energy, Brazilian energy — and overall, when you switch up the environment you feel like a new person."

Nonetheless, the adrenaline high of playing abroad was not enough to head off a shaky start for Brewington. The first disappointment came in the first round against a 2025-rated Venezuelan CM: After a chaotic game featuring a speculative Exchange sacrifice, Hardaway was unable to crack the defenses of the scrappy underdog.

After winning the next two games against weaker opposition, Hardaway was again ground to a halt by three more draws. It seemed the drought of decisive games had reached the rising star with a voracious appetite for complex play. The next morning, I woke up to a series of texts that I could hardly believe: Hardaway was considering withdrawing completely.

As we talked it over, though, he soon realized such a drastic decision wasn't the right one. He resolved to simply focus on playing good chess and to make ample time to enjoy the full experience. The weather was pleasant and uplifting; the various shops and restaurants lining the surrounding blocks always had something to offer, and the daily single 7 p.m. rounds lent a more relaxed atmosphere to the tournament. The other non-chess activities resembled an extended summer camp or the golden first few weeks of college. Between rounds, players from Brazil or other South American countries could always be found casually sipping beers, playing ping-pong and pool, hitting the gym, or lazily floating in the swimming pool. It presented a warm contrast with American tournaments, where everyone is focused on themselves, Brewington said: "It really felt like the locals were playing for the love of the game."

After yet another two draws, Hardaway managed to break free from the doldrums. Here he annotates his 10th-round win against Mexican FM Julio Diaz Rosas, which Brewington considered his best game of the tournament.

RUY LOPEZ, STEINITZ DEFENSE DEFERRED (C79)

FM Julio Cesar Diaz Rosas (2373)
GM Brewington Hardaway (2502)
American Continental Ch (10), Foz do Iguacu, 05.30.2025
Annotations by GM Brewington Hardaway

I went into this game with a score of 6/9 — three wins, six draws. It was a pretty poor performance, given that I played lower-rated opposition in every round, but this game helped me end strong with two wins.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 d6
A bit of a sideline to play a less theoretical game.

6. c4
White typically goes for ideas with c2-c3 followed by d2-d4 and is slightly better due to the resulting space advantage, but this is a solid option as well. The one downside is that the d4-square is a serious outpost for my knights.

6. ... Bg4 7. d3 Nd7 8. Be3 Be7 9. h3 Bxf3
Since the position will be more closed, it makes sense to trade bishop for knight.

10. Qxf3 0-0 11. Qg4 Nc5!?

At first glance it may seem White can just give Black tripled pawns and be much better, but it would be hard to actually take advantage of them.

12. Bc2?
My opponent spent a lot of time on this move and agreed with my assessment of the tripled pawns, but since White committed with c2-c4 early on, I now have the d4-square as an outpost for my knights. I was envisioning something like 12. Bxc5 dxc5 13. Bxc6 bxc6 14. Qe2 Bg5 and felt I could not be much worse since I control both the b-file and d-file.

12. ... Ne6 13. Nc3 Ncd4 14. Rac1 g6 15. Bb3 h5 16. Qd1 Bg5 17. Kh2 c6 18. Ne2 Nxe2 19. Qxe2 Kg7 20. Qd2 c5
Since White has the bishop pair, it is a good idea for me to keep the position locked. His light-squared bishop has no play.

21. g3 h4 22. Kg2 Bxe3 23. fxe3 hxg3 24. Rf3 Qh4 25. Rxg3 f5 26. Rg1 f4 27. Rg4 Qh6 28. Kh2 Rf6 29. exf4 Nxf4
Now we have a classic example of a good knight against a bad bishop.

30. Qe3 Rh8 31. R4g3 Nh5 32. Rg5 Nf4 33. R5g3 Rhf8 34. Bd1 Ne6 35. Qe1 Kh7 36. Bg4 Nd4 37. Kh1 Rf4 38. Qd1 Rf2 39. R3g2 Qe3 40. Re1

GM Brewington Hardaway

GM Robert Hungaski

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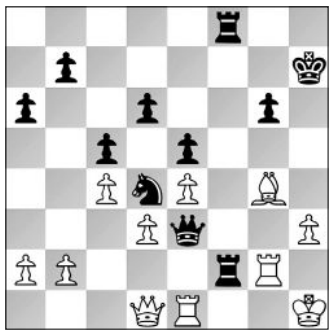
GM Alex Shabalov

GM Grigoriy Oparin

GM Sam Shankland


POSITION AFTER 40. Re1

40. ... Qf4
This doesn't throw away the win, but in time pressure I did not see the beautiful 40. ... Ne2!! , when White somehow has no way to capture the knight! 41. Bxe2 Qxh3+; 41. Rxe2 Rf1+, and 41. Rxf2 Ng3+ all lead to mate.

41. Reg1 b5 42. b3 Qh6 43. Bd7 R2f3 44. Bg4 Rf2 45. Bd7 R8f3 46. Rxf2 Rxf2 47. Qg4?
I was struggling to convert in time pressure, but this made it easier for me.

47. ... Nf3
White has to give up his queen now to avoid mate.

48. Qg3
If 48. Rg2 Qc1+ 49. Rg1 Rh2 mate.

48. ... Rh2+ 49. Qxh2 Nxh2 50. Kxh2 Qd2+ 51. Rg2 Qxd3 52. Bc6 bxc4 53. bxc4 Qxc4 54. Bd5 Qd3 55. h4 c4, White resigned.
I was happy with this game mainly because of my evaluation of the position with tripled pawns, and because even though my conversion was not the smoothest, the advantage never fully got away from me.

The takeaway? "Even if it's not going well, you gotta finish the tournament because every game's a learning experience, and I want to learn as much as possible," he reflected. "I didn't go all the way there just to withdraw. Even if you're doing well, you can end up not how you wanted, and vice versa. It's never over 'til it's over."

Indeed, this became evident in the pivotal 10th round, where leaders GMs Oparin and Luis Quesada Perez of Cuba shared the lead on 7½/9. Each needed just one point out of the subsequent two rounds to clinch a qualification spot. But a few obstacles remained, including Shankland, leading the pack of chasers a half-point behind. Thus the stage was set for a dramatic all-American showdown between Shankland and Oparin in the penultimate round.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D35)

GM Sam Shankland (2666)
GM Grigoriy Oparin (2660)
American Continental Ch (10), Foz do Iguacu, 05.30.2025
Annotations by IM Maximillian Lu

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Bg5 Be7 6. e3 h6 7. Bh4 Bg4 8. Qc2 0-0 9. h3 Be6 10. Nf3 Nc6 11. a3 Ne8 12. Bg3 Bd6 13. Bd3 Bxg3 14. fxg3 Qd6

Another option was 14. ... Nd6, bringing the knight back into play and maintaining a flexible setup.

15. g4
Shankland clearly signals that he's not afraid of allowing the queen to come to g3. He also had 15. 0-0! , sacrificing a pawn similarly to the game continuation but more directly playing for the initiative: 15. ... Qxg3 16. e4 Ne7 (not *16. ... dxe4? 17. Nxe4 Qf4 18. Rae1* and Black's queen is stuck in the middle of the board!) 17. Ne2 Qg6 18. e5 with a strong center and an attack forthcoming.

15. ... Qg3+ 16. Kd2!?
Shankland opts for an enterprising pawn sacrifice in a must-win situation. The more natural king move is 16. Kf1 with Nc3-e2 to follow. Although White loses castling rights, he will gain some tempi back by harassing the black queen, and it's unclear that White's king is really unsafe.

The timid option is 16. Qf2, which hardly leads to any more than equality after 16. ... Qxf2+ 17. Kxf2 Nd6.

16. ... Qxg2+
Far from the only move. Oparin could have decided to be more patient and bring his other pieces into the game, but he decides to force matters. Black could have played 16. ... Nf6 17. Ne2 Qd6 18. g5 Ne4+ 19. Bxe4 dxe4 20. Qxe4 Na5 and now he's the one who has sacrificed a pawn for the attack.

17. Be2 Qg3 18. Raf1 Qd6 19. g5 h5 20. Nh4

The immediate 20. g6 was also worth considering: 20. … f5 21. Ng5 Ne7 (*21. … Nf6 22. Nb5 Qe7 23. Nxe6 Ne4+ 24. Kd1 Qxe6 25. Nxc7; 21. … Rf6 22. Bxh5*) 22. Nh7 (*22. Rhg1!?* is an interesting try to keep more the position complex) 22. … Nf6 23. Nxf8 Rxf8 24. Rhg1 with a slight advantage.

20. … Ne7 21. g6 f5

Compared with the 20. g6 idea, it's clear the knight would rather be on g5 than h4.

22. Ng2 Nf6

If 22. … Nxg6?! 23. Bxh5 Ne7 24. Bxe8 Raxe8 25. Nf4, White has good play for the pawn while Black's pieces remain somewhat uncoordinated.

23. Nf4 Bd7 24. Bd3 c5

Having stabilized the kingside situation for the time being, Oparin strikes in the center.

25. dxc5 Qxc5 26. Qb3 Kh8

27. Qb4!

Offering to trade queens while down material and take on doubled isolated pawns! It seems counterintuitive, but Shankland demonstrates his deep understanding of the position: Black's queen is his most active piece and the source of most potential threats against the white king, while White's queen is ineffective in comparison. Thus, trading queens maximizes the activity of White's other pieces and turns the king on d2 from a potential liability into a potential asset.

27. … b6

Oparin doesn't take the bait, and instead challenges Shankland to trade queens on favorable terms to Black.

28. Rhg1 a5 29. Qd4

Shankland continues fixing Black's pawn structure and centralizes his queen on the d4 outpost.

29. … Rad8 30. Rg5 Bc8 31. Kc1 Kg8 32. Rd1 Qxd4 33. exd4 Rd6 34. Rdg1

34. h4 was worth considering, preempting Black's opportunity to play the move himself. Play could go 34. … Ne4 35. Rg2 Bd7 36. Kb1.

34. … h4!

Oparin seizes on Shankland's slight inaccuracy and removes the h5 weakness. Now Black's pawns control several squares on the g-file, and the h3-pawn may become a long-term weakness for White.

35. Bc2 Ne4 36. Rh5 Rff6

36. … Ba6! would have been a powerful idea, though difficult to find over the board. Essentially, Black ignores the kingside shenanigans and instead launches a counterattack on the queenside. For example, 37. Rxh4 Rc8 38. Rh5 b5 39. Re1 b4 40. axb4 axb4 41. Nxe4 fxe4 42. Kd2 Bc4 and Black is better.

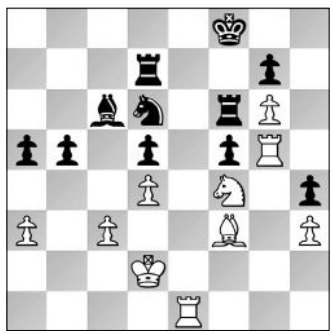
37. Bb3 Nxc3 38. bxc3 Bb7 39. Rhg5

39. Rxh4 Nxg6 would be a poor trade for White, allowing Black to relieve himself of the most intense pressure.

39. … b5 40. Kd2 Bc6 41. Bd1 Kf8 42. Bh5 Nc8?!

The first real dubious move from Oparin. He envisions the knight rerouting to e4 or c4, but he loses several tempi, is forced to awkwardly rearrange his pieces, and leaves the kingside and center open for exploitation. Sitting back patiently with 42. … Be8 would have been more effective, raising the question as to what White would do next.

43. Re1 Rd7 44. Bf3 Nd6



45. Re5

I don't see anything wrong with 45. Nh5, which seemingly traps the rook. Perhaps Shankland was so focused on converting his positional advantage that he had forgotten about other tactical factors. After 45. … Nc4+ 46. Kd1 Rfd6 47. Rxf5+ White's winning.

45. … Re7

A sad necessity. Black's pawns are both under attack and it is impossible to defend them both without making significant concessions on the kingside. If 45. … Nc4+ 46. Kd3 Nxe5+ 47. dxe5 again uses the motif of the trapped rook, and White's winning after 45. … Ne4+ 46. Bxe4 fxe4 47. Rh5.

46. Kd3 Nc4 47. Rxe7 Kxe7 48. Bxd5

Shankland finally grabs one of the key pawns in Black's position. Suddenly, the rest of Black's pawn structure becomes precarious.

48. … Nxa3

There was a better try with 48. … Nb2+ 49. Kd2 (*49. Kc2 Nc4*) 49. … Bd7, keeping the important light-squared bishop on the board to defend the weak pawns.

49. Bxc6 Rxc6 50. Rxf5 Nb1

50. … Rf6 runs into 51. Nd5+ Ke6 52. Re5+.

51. Rxb5 Rxc3+ 52. Ke4 Nd2+ 53. Kf5 Rc4

53. … Nb3 was the last try: 54. Rb7+ Kd6 55. Rb6+ (the hope is for *55. Rxg7? Nxd4+ 56. Kg4 Rg3+ 57. Kh5 Ke5 58. Rf7 Nf5* and Black escapes) 55. … Kd7 56. Ne6 Rxh3 would at least make White's life a bit harder.

54. Rb7+ Kd6 55. Rxg7 Nb3 56. Ra7 Nxd4+ 57. Kg5 Rc5+ 58. Kg4 Rc1 59. Rxa5 Rg1+ 60. Kh5 Ke7 61. Ra7+ Kd6 62. Rf7 Nc6 63. g7 Ne7 64. Kh6, Black resigned.

With this tense victory, Shankland secured a share of the lead with three other players on 7½/10 heading into the final round.

In a similarly combative game, Quesada Perez fell to Brazilian GM Alexandr Fier, giving Shankland, Fier, and the group of chasers a coveted opportunity to vault onto the podium. Without missing a stride, Shankland with a last-round draw punched his ticket to the 2026 World Cup; in the seven-way tie for first, GMs Jose Martinez Alcantara, Fier, and Jose Gabriel Cardoso Cardoso, in tiebreak order, took the other three spots.

Shankland didn't have the smoothest tournament, but, like Hardaway, he demonstrated his resilience — one of the crucial aspects separating the good from the great.

"In these tournaments, stamina is key," Hardaway said. "I could sense some people burning out after six, seven rounds. You need to really be focused every round, since every round matters, and to win you have to be at your best. The people who won totally deserve it; they all played very well and fought hard from start to finish."

Shankland channels "Tal or Judit"

GM Sam Shankland made a lot of good moves on his way to victory at the American Continental Championship, with some of the most impressive coming in his Round 4 win over GM Robert Hungaski.

Taking to social media after the game, Shankland described his play as that of a "closeted psychopath," and wrote that "every now and then, you just have to get up from the board, walk away, and let Tal or Judit take over!" It's a fantastic battle, and while it wasn't part of IM Max Lu's submission for *Chess Life*, he did annotate it for *Chess Life Online*. We present it here with Max's notes.

CARO-KANN DEFENSE (B15)

GM Sam Shankland (2666)
GM Robert Hungaski (2477)
Continental Ch, Foz do Iguacu (4), 05.25.2025

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 g6!?
Hungaski takes an unconventional approach against the former U.S. Champion. Such moves might flop or work out spectacularly, but one thing is for certain: They almost always guarantee interesting games!

4. e5 Bg7 5. h3
Surprising but powerful. Shankland immediately takes aim at Black's dormant c8-bishop and, more indirectly, the g8-knight. With the g7-bishop blunted, Black faces the awkward question of what to do with his pieces. But if he can prove that White is overextended as a result of his space-grabbing pawn thrusts, he's in the game.

After 5. Nf3? Bg4 Black has nearly equalized.

5. ... f6 6. f4 Nh6 7. Bd3 0-0 8. Nf3 fxe5?!
Keeping the tension is typically more powerful in these structures. With this move, Hungaski gives Shankland the opportunity to clarify the pawn structure and solidify his grip on the center and the kingside.

8. ... c5 would have been more in the spirit of the position, hitting at the base of White's central pawn structure. White is better after 9. exf6 Bxf6 10. dxc5 Qa5 11. 0-0 Qxc5+ 12. Kh2, but Black has more breathing room than in the game.

9. dxe5 c5

(see diagram top of next column)

Black's central pawns may look menacing, but their bite is more illusory than real.

POSITION AFTER 9. ... c5

Every time a pawn moves forward, it cannot move back. (See Shankland's book *Small Steps to Giant Improvement* for more on this topic!) Black's most obvious ideas — ... c5-c4 and ... d5-d4 — both weaken important squares in the center. Meanwhile, White will ramp up an attack on the kingside where Black's firepower is severely lacking.

10. h4!?
White faces an interesting dilemma between (a) allowing Black's h6-knight and c8-bishop back into play and (b) immediately rushing to attack Black's king. He chooses the latter.

It may have been more prudent to induce Black to make a weakness via 10. Be2, when 10. ... d4 allows 11. Ne4 with a monster attack to follow, while 10. ... e6 blocks in Black's c8-bishop, making 11. h4 even more powerful.

10. ... Qa5 11. h5!
Shankland continues with the attack, ignoring the threat to his pinned c3-knight.

There's a nice computer idea with 11. Qd2, but it's perhaps not the most practical solution. After 11. ... c4 (*11. ... e6 12. h5* is crushing) 12. b4! Qxb4 13. Rb1 Qa5 14. Rb5 Qa6 15. Be2 White has a clear advantage, given the activity of his pieces and his looming kingside attack.

But 11. Bd2?! is a mistake: 11. ... c4 12. Be2 (the computer gives the surprising, if thematic, *12. b4!* with the idea *12. ... Qxb4 13. Nxd5 Qc5 14. Be4* and an edge) 12. ... Nc6 and suddenly Black is very active while White's attack has been diverted, i.e., 13. h5 gxh5 14. Rxh5 Bg4 15. Rh1 Rad8 with counterplay.

11. ... d4 12. hxg6 dxc3 13. gxh7+
In this very messy position, the computer thinks White's only objective (if not practical) chance to claim an advantage begins with 13. b4!. Now:

(a) 13. ... Qxb4? 14. gxh7+ Kh8 15. Nh4 is bad for Black.

(b) 13. ... cxb4 14. gxh7+ Kh8 15. Nh4 Bf5 16. Bxf5 Rxf5 17. Ng6+ (*17. Nxf5?! Nxf5 18. Qh5 Nc6 19. Qxf5 Nd4*) 17. ... Kxh7 18. Nxe7 Rf7 19. Qd3+ Kh8 20. Nf5 Rxf5 21. Qxf5 Nc6 22. Be3 gives White a winning position.

(c) So Black has to play 13. ... Qb6!! 14. bxc5 (after 14. gxh7+ Kh8 15. Nh4 Nf5 the point of 13. ... Qb6 becomes clear: to stop Nh4-g6+!) 14. ... Qc6 15. Qe2! and the computer claims White is slightly better, but things are too complicated for a human to clearly understand what's going on.

13. ... Kh8

14. Nh4!
Shankland correctly ignores Black's threat of capturing his rook and promoting his pawn via discovered check. Note that 14. b4 Qb6 transposes to the previous line.

White unleases the full force of his pieces, with every member of the team contributing to the attack!

14. ... cxb2+ 15. Bd2 bxa1=Q
Black might have considered the impressive 15. ... Qb6!!, sacrificing the queen for development and initiative. For example, 16. Ng6+ Qxg6 17. Bxg6 Nc6!! 18. Rb1 (*18. Rh4 Bg4 19. Rxg4 bxa1=Q 20. Qxa1 Nxg4* is good for Black) 18. ... Bg4 and suddenly the white queen is trapped, leading to an unclear position.

16. Ng6+ Kxh7 17. Qxa1
The board is aflame: Black's queen is hanging; White threatens to take a rook with double check while the attack on the kingside continues in full force. But Black is up a rook and a knight for his troubles, at least for the moment.

17. ... Qa4 18. Nxe7+
Not 18. Nxf8+? Kg8 19. Ng6 Nc6 and suddenly White's attack evaporates, leaving him down a piece.

18. ... Kh8

19. f5!!
Down a rook and a knight, White unleashes the full force of his pieces, with every member of the team actively contributing to the attack. The same cannot be said of Black, who has just three pieces guarding his king. White has a decisive dynamic advantage in the form of an unstoppable attack.

19. ... Bxf5 20. Nxf5 Rxf5
Feeling the heat, Hungaski immediately sacrifices back a rook. But White's attack does not stop.

21. Bxf5 Kg8 22. Bxh6 Bxh6 23. Rxh6 Qb4+ 24. Ke2 Nc6 25. Rg6+ Kf8

26. Qf1
26. Qh1! would have been a picturesque way to finish the game. Swinging from one corner to the other, the white queen threatens to slide to Black's back rank with devastating effect: 26. ... Nd4+ 27. Kd3 c4+ 28. Ke4 Nxf5 29. Qh8+ Ke7 30. Qh7+ Ke8 31. Rg8+ and so forth.

26. ... Ke7
I think 26. ... Nxe5 was the most tenacious defense. White continues 27. Be6+ Ke8 28. Rg8+ (perhaps *28. Bd7+! Nxd7* (28. ... Kxd7 29. Qf5+) *29. Rg8+ Ke7 30. Rxa8* is a better version) 28. ... Ke7 29. Rxa8 Kxe6 and now 30. Qe1! is the only move to keep the winning advantage, i.e., 30. ... Qc4+ 31. Kf2 Qf4+ 32. Kg1.

27. Rg7+ Kd8 28. Bd3 Nd4+ 29. Ke3 Nxc2+ 30. Bxc2 Qd4+ 31. Kf3 Qd5+ 32. Be4, Black resigned.
A thrilling game that demonstrates the power of relative piece activity in the attack.

For Lu's original story on CLO, *visit* new.uschess.org/news/shankland-wins-2025-american-continental-qualifies-world-cup

Fighting Back

What it takes to forget losses, rediscover your confidence, and make the finals of the American Cup

BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**

AFTER A PARTICULARLY PAINFUL loss at the Saint Louis Masters last December, I was ready to swear off chess. I felt like I had suffered enough at the hands of this game already. I was already committed to playing in the World Rapid and Blitz Championship in New York City later that month, but my mediocre performance there didn't inspire any hope either.

But by mid-January, enough time had passed that the old wounds healed. I started wondering about the American Cup, and whether I would be invited back. Once the

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES

invitation came, it was time to start thinking about playing a tournament again.

This year's edition of the American Cup went back to its original format, with two-game classical matches in the first round and the Winner's Bracket. Tiebreaks in the Winner's Bracket would consist of up to two two-game blitz matches, followed by an Armageddon game. The time control for the Elimination Bracket remained G/25+10, with blitz breaking any ties, and the winners of the two brackets would meet in the final, with the Elimination Bracket winner only having one "life," while having to win two matches against the Winner's Bracket champion.

In the Open Section, GM Abhimanyu Mishra was the fresh face of the event, while GM Hikaru Nakamura returned after skipping the previous year. In the Women's Section, WGMs Atousa Pourkashiyan and Thalia Cervantes made their debuts. Surprisingly, despite being one of the top female players in the country, it was also IM Carissa Yip's first appearance — the American Cup had always fallen during her finals week at school, forcing her to decline the invitation. (Carissa has since announced she's taking a gap year and moving to St. Louis in the pursuit of the GM title.)

The period leading up to the American Cup was extremely busy for me. On top of my regular students, in February I was the GM-in-residence at the Saint Louis Chess Club; I was also starting to make weekly lessons for a smart chessboard called Chess-Up. Then Chessable informed me that it was time to record my course on studies, preferably before the tournament. It was one thing after another, and there was no time to focus on preparation.

Still, I managed to do a bit here and there. Normally, before big events I work with a GM, but this time I decided to work mostly on my own and with my St. Louis study buddy, IM Kostya Kavutskiy.

I knew I'd face IM Anna Zatonskih in the first round. I don't think I have faced anyone over my career more times than Anna — we've been Olympiad teammates for years and faced each other for two decades in U.S. Women's Championships.

The higher-rated player would always have the white pieces in the first game. Being seeded number five, I would most likely start every match with Black. Arguably, it's a better situation to be in: Regardless of the result, in the second game I would have the white pieces and know what I needed to do.

I was trying to guess what Anna would throw at me in the Nimzo when Kostya said, "Just play the King's Indian." A casual suggestion, but it changed the course of my tournament.

The idea was tempting — no move-order issues to worry about, and I was a KID player many years ago. It would surprise Anna and maybe even reignite my love for the game. Lucky for me, Kostya accompanied his suggestion with his opening files. And so ensued a few weeks of reviewing the lines and playing training games.

At some point, I might have declared myself a "natural KID player."

I decided to take the week before the tournament off everything and focus solely on preparation. A full week of nothing but working on chess, working out, and cooking dinner every night made me feel like a real chess player again.

I got a comfortable position out of the opening in the first game, and was later winning; ultimately I missed a basic tactic and drew. I was much sharper the next day.

CALL FOR BACKUP

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
IM Anna Zatonskih (2378)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.15.2025

WHITE TO MOVE

17. Na1!?
I must admit, the main reason I played this move is because I was influenced by my own articles about backward moves, specifically backward knight moves. Once I spotted this, I couldn't help myself.

17. ... Rab8 18. Nb3
I thought in the long term she would have trouble with the c5-pawn, another reason why I wanted to maneuver my knight. If we trade dark-squared bishops, the pawn will become a headache in the endgame. I had other plans for my knight in the middlegame.

18. ... Qc7 19. Bc1 Ba8 20. Bf4
One by one, my pieces are headed towards the kingside.

20. ... Na5 21. Nbd2 Rxb1 22. Rxb1 Rb8 23. Rxb8+ Qxb8 24. Ng5
The better way to go would have been 24. h4, a typical way to attack in the KIA.

24. ... Bxg2 25. Kxg2 N5c6 26. Nde4
She should be able to fend off this kingside attack. I could have gotten a big edge by going back to attacking the c-pawn with 26. Nge4 with the idea of Nd2-b3 and even Bf4-c1-a3. After 26. ... Nxe5 27. Nf3 Nac6 28. Nxe5 Nxe5 29. Qh5 Bf6 Black can barely move, and h2-h4 and g3-g4-g5 are coming up.

26. ... h6 27. Nf3 Nc8?
Anna missed a chance to strike back with 27. ... g5!, although with little time on the clock I can understand why she would be hesitant to open her king like this: 28. Bc1 Nxe5 29. Nxe5 Qxe5 30. f4 is unclear, but with her open king and an abandoned knight on a7 I think I would like my chances in a time scramble.

28. h4?
I returned the favor. Of course I saw the tactical shot but I wasn't sure it worked. But looking at 28. Nf6+ gxf6 29. exf6 Bd6 30. Bxh6 later with clear eyes, of course this is winning. I will bring my queen to d2; her king is stuck on g8 and has no defenders.

28. ... Bf8?

I got another chance. It took me couple of minutes, but I spotted it.

29. Bxh6!
Turns out, the g7-pawn is overworked.

29. ... f5
Not 29. ... gxh6 30. Nf6+ Kh8 31. Qe4 with unstoppable checkmate.

30. exf6 *e.p.* gxh6 31. Neg5!
I was quite happy about this move. Her kingside is now falling apart.

31. ... e5
After 31. ... hxg5 32. Qxe6+ Kh8 33. hxg5 I'm down two pieces, but the pawns will march and the king will come under huge attack.

32. Qe4 hxg5 33. Qg6+ Kh8 34. Nxg5 Qb7 35. Nf7+, Black resigned.

All the other favorites won their matches: Carissa survived a scare against Thalia as the latter had checkmate in four in the first game but tragically missed it in time trouble. The double rook sacrifice in the second game was the highlight of the round; I covered it in my May column. IMs Alice Lee and Nazi Paikidze split the point in the classical, but Alice was triumphant in both blitz games. GM Irina Krush's win against Atousa was a classic example of how to play with an IQP.

Krush ponders her move against Pourkashiyan

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER

BREAKTHROUGH

GM Irina Krush (2451)
WGM Atousa Pourkashiyan (2366)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.14.2025

BLACK TO MOVE

This is a pretty typical IQP set up. Black is blockading the pawn and White is set up to start building an attack.

12. ... Nbd5?
Putting a knight in front of an isolated pawn is a pretty typical idea that we learn early on, but the knight had a very specific job on b4. Black should continue development and get ready for an incoming attack with 12. ... Bd7 13. Bg5 Rc8.

13. Rd3!

Now the rook joins the attack. This is why the knight needed to stay on b4.

13. … Bd7 14. Rg3 Kh8 15. Bd3
With the rook on the third rank, the h7-square will be a kingside target.

15. … Be8 16. Rh3 g6 17. Bh6 Rg8 18. Rf3
Black is paralyzed. The f6-knight cannot move, as the f7-pawn will hang.

18. … Nb4 19. Rd1 Nxd3 20. Rdxd3 b5 21. Ne4 Nxe4 22. Nxf7+!
Unsurprisingly, the tactics work out in Irina's favor here. After improving all her pieces, she was set up for a tactical shot.

22. … Bxf7 23. Qxe4 Qd5 24. Qxd5 exd5 25. Rxf7
The game continued for a long time, but Irina had no issues converting the pawn.

25. … Bf8 26. Bxf8 Rgxf8 27. Rxf8+ Rxf8 28. axb5 axb5 29. f3 b4 30. Rb3 Rb8 31. h4 h5 32. Kf2 Kg7 33. Kg3 Kf6 34. Kf4 Rb7 35. g4 Rb8 36. Re3 hxg4 37. fxg4 Rc8 38. Re5 Rc2 39. g5+ Kf7 40. Rxd5 Rxb2 41. Rd7+ Ke6 42. Rg7 Rf2+ 43. Kg3 Rd2 44. Rxg6+ Kf7 45. Rf6+ Kg7 46. Rd6 b3 47. Kg4 b2 48. Rd7+ Kf8 49. Rb7 Rxd4+ 50. Kh5 Rd2 51. Kh6 Re2 52. g6 Re8 53. Rxb2 Kg8 54. h5 Ra8 55. Re2 Rb8 56. Kg5 Kf8 57. h6 Kg8 58. h7+ Kg7 59. Re7+ Kh8 60. Kh6, Black resigned.

The games in the Open Section were far more adventurous. Abhimanyu won the first tiebreak blitz game against Hikaru and was winning the second one when a heart-breaking rook blunder let Hikaru stabilize and win the match. GM Fabiano Caruana miraculously survived while down a piece in the first blitz game against GM Ray Robson, then out-tricked him in a worse position in the second. The match between GMs Wesley So and Leinier Dominguez battled all the way to Armageddon, with Leinier clinching the win with the white pieces.

Kostya and I continued our routine throughout the tournament: Kostya would come over before the round; we would solve a couple of positions and review some lines. The routine was both helpful and comforting, and I was starting to get my confidence back.

Next, I was set to face Carissa. I had only faced her a handful of times, but the results skewed heavily in her favor. When she's in the zone, she's rather scary — her confidence is palpable. I knew she would try to win the first game; I felt nervous and spent a lot of time in the opening, but eventually I felt she had left her comfort zone and was mishandling the position. I sensed that she would be tempted by yet another flashy Exchange sacrifice; I didn't believe in it and decided to trust my calculation.

ENGLISH OPENING (A14)
IM Carissa Yip (2484)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.17.2025

1. c4
I wasn't sure what to expect in the opening; Carissa can be quite versatile. So I prepared a little of everything.

1. … e6 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 d5 4. Nf3 Be7 5. 0-0 0-0 6. b3
Here, it occurred to me that she was either trying to play some kind of a setup rather a concrete line, or trying to trick me with a move order.

6. … a5 7. Nc3 c6
I opted for a closed Catalan setup. I figured the worst thing that could happen to me here is a slight disadvantage. Black could also play 7. … d4 8. Nb5 Nc6 9. e3 e5, but I did not want to play this structure.

8. d4 b6 9. Bb2 Ba6 10. Ne5?!
Centralizing the knight and defending the pawn might be the most natural move — Carissa played it instantly — but it is slightly inaccurate. Here I started to feel she might not have had such a good feel for the position, which gave me some confidence.

White has played 10. Nd2 b5 11. c5 b4 12. Na4 Nbd7 in several grandmaster games.

10. … Nfd7
This is why her previous move was inaccurate. The knight is not stable and her pawn on c4 will come under pressure.

11. Qc2 Nxe5 12. dxe5 Nd7
Not 12. … dxc4 13. bxc4 Bxc4 14. Rad1 Qc7 15. Ne4 Bd5 16. Nf6+.

13. f4?
Carissa is on the wrong path here. My pieces are all well placed, and there is no reason I should suddenly come under attack. She should seek counterplay in the center, but here I could sense what she had in mind.

She was better off with 13. Rfd1, getting out of the pin and preparing e2-e4: 13. … Rc8 (not *13. … Nxe5? 14. cxd5 cxd5 15. Nxd5* and the white bishops are suddenly too strong) 14. cxd5 cxd5 15. e4 is more in line with how White normally plays these positions.

13. … b5 14. cxd5 cxd5 15. f5 Rc8

I felt quite happy with my position here. I contemplated 15. … Bg5 as a way to avoid the upcoming sacrifice, but I was scared of 16. f6 g6 17. Bc1. I thought I would get mated on the dark squares, but after 17. … Qb6+ 18. Kh1 Be3! the bishop stays alive! Now 19. Rf3 Bd4 and the pawns will fall one by one.

16. f6
We were both under 30 minutes here. Carissa spent about eight minutes on this move and I knew what was coming.

16. … gxf6 17. exf6 Bxf6 18. Rxf6!?
Objectively, this whole idea was incorrect, but she had already committed to it. According to my calculation, I believed that her attack wouldn't work.

18. … Qxf6 19. Qd2 Qg6
The best square for my queen. The a1-h8 diagonal is vulnerable as my dark-squared bishop is gone and hers is menacingly staring at my king, but I didn't see a way for her to actually do anything.

20. e4 b4 21. Na4
The knight is now out of the game.

21. … Rfd8
The main advantage Carissa had here was on the clock, as I was still questioning my decisions every move. But now she started spending a lot of time herself.

22. exd5 e5
It's more accurate to activate my rook first with 22. … Rc2 23. Qe3 Re2 24. Qf3 e5 but I wanted to focus on safety.

23. Qe3 f6 24. Bh3 Rc2 25. Re1 Qh5 26. Qe4
I was certain she would play 26. g4 but after 26. … Qh4 it's hard to find a good continuation for White.

26. … Re2
This was when I felt I was on a clear path to win.

27. Rxe2 Qxe2 28. Qb1
There are several paths to victory and I wasn't sure of the best. I was mostly trying to control my nerves and stay calm and sharp.

28. … Qe3+ 29. Kh1 Bd3 30. Qd1 Be2 31. Qb1 Bf3+ 32. Bg2 Rc8 33. h4 Qf2
It's all over now.

34. Bxf3 Rc2 35. Qxc2 Qxc2 36. Kg1 f5, White resigned.

Objectively, this was the best-case scenario for me — I only needed a draw with White. But my playing style doesn't exactly yield many uneventful draws. I decided to keep things solid, and that plan backfired. First, I felt off that day: I was nervous and my thinking wasn't clear at all. Second, given the chance to castle queenside in the Sicilian, something I have loved doing since before Carissa was born, I decided to castle kingside for the sake of "staying solid."

She found some very impressive tactics to finish it off, but my position was already hopeless.

A SERIES OF SHOTS

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
IM Carissa Yip (2484)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.17.2025

BLACK TO MOVE

26. … Ra4!
Carissa finds a way to exploit the weakness of the back rank. I only now realized what was about to happen to my poor king.

27. Bxf6 Qa7+! 28. Bd4
I thought I could get away with it after 28. Kh1 Nf2+ 29. Rxf2 Qxf2 30. Qc8+ Kh7 31. Qc2+ g6 32. Qc1, but then I spotted 32. … Qxd2 winning.

28. … Rxd4 29. Kh1 Nf2+!
Another really nice shot by the current U.S. champ.

30. Rxf2 Rxd2 31. Rf1
The rook is untouchable, of course: 31. Rxd2 and 31. Qxd2 are both met by 31. … Qa1+ with checkmate in a few moves.

31. … Qf2
I think she put every one of her pieces *en prise*, but I couldn't capture them!

32. Rg1 Rxb2
I was too upset to resign immediately, but the result was never in question.

33. h3 Rd2 34. Qb4 Qd4 35. Qb8+ Kh7 36. Qb1+ g6 37. Rf1 Qd5 38. Rg1 Rf2, White resigned.

An hour or so later, we came back for the blitz. Again, I had the black pieces. Carissa walked into some preparation, and I got a pretty comfortable position. At some point, I started pushing too much and it suddenly hit me that it was unnecessary to do that with Black in the first game. I got outplayed, but luckily she missed a tactic and blundered.

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER

A COUNTER-TACTIC

IM Carissa Yip (2484)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
American Cup blitz, St. Louis, 03.18.2025

WHITE TO MOVE

32. Bxh6?
I was taken aback by this move; I'd completely missed the idea. Luckily, there is a countershot, and I was able to compose myself and find it.

She should have played 32. Rd7, when I can't really hang on to the c-pawn: Play could go 32. … Qe6 33. Rxc7 e3. In blitz, this is good counterplay, even though the engine gives White a huge advantage: 34. fxe3 Bxe3+ 35. Bxe3 Qxe3+ 36. Kf1 Qc1+ 37. Kf2 Qd2+ 38. Qe2 Qd6 39. Ra7 f4 and again, I thought this would be murky enough for blitz. White has to find 40. Bf5+ Kh8 41. g4 to stay on top.

32. … Qg6!
White wins after 32. … Qxh6 33. Qxf7+ or 32. … Nxd5 33. Bg5+, but now the geometry doesn't work for her.

33. Qxg6+ Kxg6 34. Be3 Nxd5 35. cxd5 Bxe3 36. fxe3 Rd7 37. c4 c6
I missed 37. … b5!, a nice way to point out how useless the bishop is: 38. cxb5 Rxd5 or 38. axb5 a4.

38. dxc6 Rc7 39. Bf1 Rxc6 40. Be2 Rd6 41. Kf2 Rd2 42. Ke1 Ra2 43. Bd1 Rxh2 44. g4 fxg4 45. Bxg4 Kf6 46. Be2 Ke5 47. Kd1 Kd6 48. Bg4 Kc5 49. Bf5 Rh4 50. Be6 Rh6 51. Bf5 Kxc4 52. Bxe4 Re6, White resigned.

In the second game, she chose the Sicilian again, and this time I decided to play what I normally play. I got a very good position out of the opening and soon she blundered a piece. A few minutes later, it was all over.

What a day that was! I started with a foggy, cluttered mind, but managed to put myself together. Qualifying for the finals of the Winner's Bracket was the best result I have ever had in the American Cup. I was thrilled about the result, even if I took the long route.

In the other semifinal matchup, Irina missed an unusual tactical shot, which I covered in my June column, in the first game, and Alice managed to grind her down. A draw in the next game was enough for her to advance.

Alice and I were set to meet in the final of the Winner's Bracket. The winner of our match would get a $9,000 bonus and a day off, while the loser would be sent to the Elimination Bracket to fight for her life.

In the Open Section, Hikaru's second matchup went a lot smoother than his first. He drew Leinier with White in the first game and won the second with Black — just like he did in 2023. It is hard to think of many games Leinier has lost with White, but the two that come to mind were at the hands of Hikaru.

NO FORTRESS

GM Leinier Dominguez Perez (2792)
GM Hikaru Nakamura (2862)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.17.2025

BLACK TO MOVE

39. … Kh7
The players had been shuffling for a while, but here Hikaru missed a tactical shot: Black wins a pawn after 39. … Nxb3! because if 40. Qxb3 Qd2 and there is no way to defend the f2-pawn and the second rank!

40. Ra2!
Leinier defends the second rank, stopping the tactic.

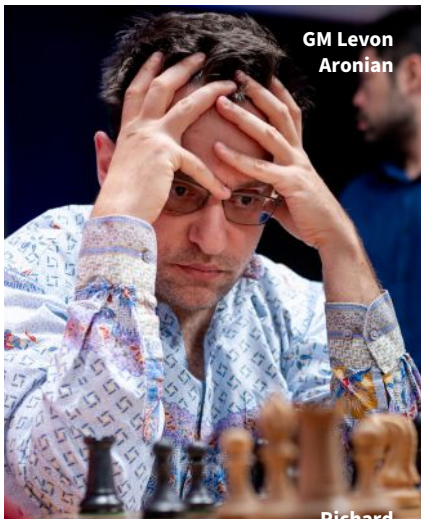
40. … Qg5 41. Qd1 Rf4 42. Re1 Qf6 43. Ree2 Rf7 44. Reb2 Qd8 45. Rb1 Nd7 46. Qe1 Qf8 47. Rbb2 Nc5 48. Qd1 g5 49. f3?
White should keep shuffling. Maybe Leinier thought he had a fortress.

49. … Kg6 50. Rb1 Rc7 51. Qd2 Rff7 52. Kf2 Ra7 53. Ke2

GM Leinier Dominguez Perez

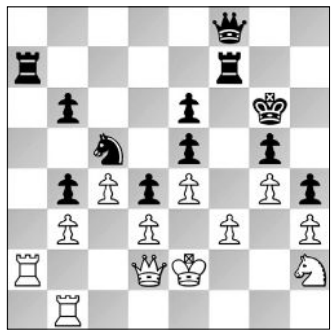
IM Carissa Yip

PHOTOS: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES


GM Levon Aronian

GM Fabiano Caruana

GM Hikaru Nakamura


POSITION AFTER 53. Ke2

53. ... Nxd3!
Hikaru doesn't miss another tactic.

54. Rxa7
Mate is coming up after 54. Kxd3 Rxf3+! 55. Nxf3 Qxf3+ 56. Kc2 Rxa2+ 57. Rb2 Qxe4+.

54. ... Nf4+
An intermediate move to retain the pawn.

55. Qxf4 d3+!
Another intermediate move! Hikaru gives up a pawn to open the d-file and the c5-g1 diagonal.

56. Kxd3 exf4 57. Rxf7 Kxf7 58. Nf1 Qc5 59. Nd2 Qe3+ 60. Kc2 Kf6 61. Rb2 Ke5 62. Ra2 Kd4 63. Ra8 Qc3+ 64. Kd1 Kd3 65. Rd8+ Ke3 66. e5 Qxe5 67. Kc2 Qc3+ 68. Kd1 e5 69. Rd5 e4 70. fxe4 f3 71. e5 f2 72. Nf1+ Kf3, White resigned.

Fabiano's path to the finals was more challenging: His matchup with GM Levon Aronian went to tiebreaks, where Fabiano found some nice geometry to claim the first victory.

IN REVERSE

GM Fabiano Caruana (2862)
GM Levon Aronian (2836)
American Cup blitz, St. Louis, 03.18.2025

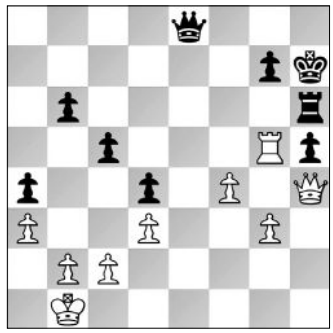

WHITE TO MOVE

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER (ARONIAN) SLCC / OOTES (CARUANA, NAKAMURA)

Material is equal, but Levon has weak pawns and, most importantly, a more vulnerable king. The latter is a big factor in blitz!

43. Qh1!
Maybe it's — again — the influence of my backward-moves series, but I'm partial to these moves! This one is multi-purpose: Fabiano is bringing the queen to the other side of the board while simultaneously stopping a ... Qe8-e1+-e6+ perpetual.

43. ... Kg8 44. Qd5+ Kh8 45. Re5 Qg8 46. Qe4
In just a few moves, Fabiano rearranged his pieces beautifully and Black's position crumbles.

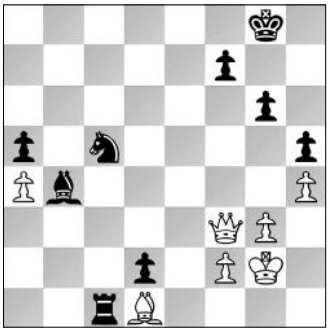
46. ... Rf6 47. Rxh5+ Rh6 48. Re5 Rf6 49. Re8, Black resigned.
After 49. ... Rf8 comes 50. Qh1+ Qh7 51. Rxf8 mate.

Levon evened the score in the next game, and the third game was a mess, with Fabiano having the advantage, blundering in a time scramble, and eventually coming out on top. Hikaru and Fabiano were set to meet in the Winner's Bracket final, fighting for a spot in the Grand Final and a $15,000 bonus.

In their first classical game, Hikaru messed up the move order in the opening with White. After a 30-minute think, he decided to go for a repetition. In the second game, Fabiano's position felt slightly better out of the opening but eventually it petered out into a draw. The match was decided in blitz: Hikaru took the first game, and Fabiano was not able to break through Hikaru's fortress in the second.

A BIG MISS

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2862)
GM Fabiano Caruana (2862)
American Cup blitz, St. Louis, 03.20.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

At this point, they'd been playing this position for 30-something moves, and Fabiano hadn't found a way to break through. But here he had a golden opportunity!

66. ... Kg7?
After 66. ... Rxd1 67. Qxd1 Nd3! the pawn is permanently defended by the bishop, and the knight will go to b2 to kick away the queen: After 68. Qe2 Nb2 69. Qe8+ comes 69. ... Bf8!!, another backward move! I'm not sure whether Fabiano spotted this idea with mere seconds left on his clock, but this is the toughest part of this line. The pawn is unstoppable.

67. Qe2 Nd3 68. Bb3 Ne1+ 69. Kh3 Rc5 70. Qe7 Rf5 71. Qe2 Nf3 72. Qe3 Rf6 73. Bd1 Ne1 74. Qd4
An unfortunate turn of events, as all Black's pieces are now tangled.

74. ... Be7 75. Qxd2 Bb4 76. Qd4 Be7 77. Qc3 Bb4 78. Qd4 Be7 79. Qc3, draw.
Hikaru could have played on for a win, but a draw was good enough to advance.

And thus, Hikaru earned his bonus and the day off while Fabiano was sent to the Elimination Bracket to meet Levon, who had defeated Wesley and GM Sam Shankland back to back to keep his tournament chances alive.

I was debating what to play against Alice; her results against the KID were quite good, but I decided to trust my prep. I managed to surprise her in the opening and had a big time advantage. Nonetheless, I lost the thread of the game.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E94)

IM Alice Lee (2466)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
American Cup, 03.19.2025

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Be2 0-0 6. Nf3 Na6 7. 0-0 e5 8. Be3 Qe7
A new approach in this ... Na6 line; 8. ... Ng4 9. Bg5 Qe8 was considered the main line for a long time.

9. Qc2
Alice was surprised by my opening choice, but she's a principled player and repeated what she'd played previously.

9. ... Nb4 10. Qd2 c5 11. d5 Ng4 12. Bg5 f6 13. Bh4 Nh6 14. a3 Na6
I was still in my preparation and ahead on the clock.

POSITION AFTER 14. ... Na6

15. Ng5
"Kids and their tactics" is how Hikaru described this move. It came as an unpleasant surprise and is a testament to Alice's ability to solve problems over the board. This idea has been seen before, but based on her time usage, I would assume she was not familiar with it. I think my main issue was that I was still in my prep before this, and not ready to think over the board. Additionally, I just did not believe in this idea of sacrificing a pawn on e6, which actually is a common idea in the KID.

15. ... Qe8
A bit of an absurd decision, and one Levon teased me about, listing several better alternatives, including 15. ... Kh8. I am essentially wasting a whole move to pick up a pawn. Of course 15. ... fxg5 16. Bxg5 wins the piece back immediately with a pawn as interest.

16. Ne6 Bxe6 17. dxe6 Qxe6
I wish I could have quit being stubborn and played 17. ... Nc7 18. Qxd6 Nxe6. I don't win a pawn here, but I will park my knight on d4. She will in return put hers on d5, but they will more or less balance each other out. White's queen has to go back with 19. Qd1 as ... Ra8-d8 is a threat. Then I don't have to rush the knight to d4; I can play 19. ... Kh8 and bring my other knight back to life via g8.

18. Rfd1 Nf7 19. Nd5 Nd8 20. b4 Qf7 21. b5 Nb8
Amazingly, this is still fine for me, but her play is much easier, and I had to spend a lot of time to find all these moves. This is just too much suffering for such a useless pawn.

22. Ne3

(see diagram next page)

22. ... Nd7?
Here, I missed a very specific chance. I was asked tons of times why I didn't play

POSITION AFTER 22. Ne3

22. … Ne6 as though the idea of getting the knight to d4 isn't the most basic idea here. The answer is I didn't play it because of 23. Qxd6 Nd4 24. Bg4!, when there's a huge threat of taking the d4-knight followed by Bg4-e6. In addition, with the bishop on the diagonal, there is no hope of my b8-knight ever getting out.

I'm also losing after 23. … Rd8?? 24. Qxd8+ Nxd8 25. Rxd8+ Bf8 26. Ng4 when I can't move and more of my pieces will fall.

But there is a brilliant saving move: 22. … Ne6 23. Qxd6 h5!! The threat is to trap the h4-bishop with … g6-g5 and … h5-h4 while also covering the g4-square. White has to waste time saving the bishop, and I think 24. Bg3 Nd4 solves my problems. I could also get flashy with 24. … Na6 threatening to trap the queen with 25. … Rad8. I'm in good shape after 25. Qd2 Nac7.

23. Qxd6
I lost the pawn I destroyed my position for.

23. … Nb6 24. a4 Ne6 25. Bg4 Rfe8 26. a5 Bf8 27. Qd2 Rad8 28. Bxe6
Killing my hope of getting a knight to d4.

28. … Qxe6 29. Qe2 Nd7 30. a6 b6 31. Rd5 Be7 32. Rad1 Nf8 33. Qf3 Kg7 34. Ng4 Rc8??

Seeing the threats on f6, I decided to move my rook. My gut told me to play 34. … Rxd5, but I didn't know why. I thought giving her a passed pawn would be the end of me, but another part of me thought the position was closed enough for me to have a blockade. Objectively, 35. cxd5 Qf7 36. Ne3 isn't good for me, but the game would have kept going.

35. Rd6
I completely missed this tactic. It felt like a very cold, unpleasant shower.

35. … Qf7
Not 35. … Bxd6 36. Bxf6+ Kg8 37. Nh6 mate.

36. Rxf6 Qxc4
Same thing after 36. … Bxf6: 37. Bxf6+ Kg8 38. Nh6 mate.

37. Nxe5, Black resigned.

I was in a must-win position with the white pieces, but I was not expecting to get an opening advantage. Instead, I got just what I wanted: a complex middlegame with a dynamic pawn structure and enough pieces on the board to keep the game going. Alice started making some committal decisions with her structure, and my position kept improving. Soon I was up an Exchange and a pawn, though she had two connected passed pawns. Objectively, my position was winning and I knew it.

I'm not exactly sure what happened to me next. Most likely it was a combination of things: little time on the clock, hesitation, excitement that I couldn't quite get under control. With every move, I could sense the win slipping out of my hand. The last part of the game almost didn't feel real — as though it wasn't me playing and I was watching someone else give away my hard work and go into a drawn endgame.

I was in such a state of shock that at first I didn't even realize what an opportunity I had missed; I even chatted with Alice a bit about the game afterwards. When I got home, reality dawned on me: I missed the chance to fight for an extra $9,000. It's not like I get opportunities like this every day, so I felt absolutely disgusted with myself. I am grateful for all the messages I received from my friends but I just wanted someone to be as mean to me as I was being to myself. But my friends refused to partake in the emotional abuse.

Of course, even if I'd won that game, I could have still lost the match, and I was still guaranteed at least third place and a nice payday. But I was in no mood to entertain rational thoughts.

I numbed myself to sleep through binge-watching some YouTube videos and playing a mindless game on my phone for hours. The idea of playing a confident Irina, who was coming off two match wins, felt like a kick when I was already down. The possibility of being eliminated felt like a relief. At some point, I realized I needed to set several alarms for the next day, as sleeping through the round would be too embarrassing. The last time I remember checking my phone was around 4 a.m.

Around 9, I woke up feeling determined. I don't know what happened to my brain during those five hours, but I was suddenly feeling extremely confident and ready to fight, albeit exhausted. I had a very good feeling about my match against Irina. I figured that as long as I kept drinking coffee, I could get through. Kostya came over as usual and reassured me that I was the favorite in the match. We did some light reviewing and solving and off I went. Finally, the KID prep paid off.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E94)

GM Irina Krush (2451)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
American Cup rapid, St. Louis, 03.20.2025

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. d4 0-0 6. Be2 Na6 7. 0-0 e5 8. Be3 Qe7
I repeated the line I played against Alice.

9. d5 Ng4
I became a bit hesitant here and spent about five minutes trying to remember my preparation. In a 25-minute rapid game, that's already a big time investnment.

10. Bg5 f6 11. Bh4 g5 12. Bg3 f5 13. exf5 Bxf5
This was all in my file. This is GM Daniel Naroditsky's pet line and has also been played by GM Alireza Firouzja a few times. Irina went into a deep think, spending 10 minutes. I sensed that she wasn't familiar with this position and was feeling uncomfortable.

14. h3 Nh6 15. Rc1 Bg6
Clearing the f5-square for the knight.

16. Re1 Rae8 17. a3

(see diagram top of next column)

17. … Qf6?!
The most logical continuation, of course, is 17. … e4, but I wasn't sure what to do after 18. Bf1. I had to spot 18. … Qd8 — a backward

POSITION AFTER 17. a3

move! The queen continues defending the pawn. Black's better after 19. Nd2 Nc5 20. b4 Nd3 21. Bxd3 exd3.

It's less accurate to play 17. ... e4 18. Bf1 Qf6 because the e4-pawn will hang. On 19. Nd2, 19. ... e3 is the correct move, because on 19. ... Nc5 20. b4 Nd3 21. Ndxe4, this pawn hangs with tempo, unlike in the main line.

18. Bd3 Bxd3 19. Qxd3 Nc5 20. Qc2 Nf5 21. Ne4 Nxe4 22. Qxe4 Qg6 23. Bh2 h5 24. Nd2
I was thrilled to see this move, because my path forward was now clear. I was certain she would play 24. g4 and I was not thrilled about entering an endgame: 24. ... hxg4 25. hxg4 Nh4 26. Qxg6 Nxg6 and now 27. Nd2 is the simplest, although taking the pawn works out tactically for White after 27. Nxg5 Bh6 28. Ne6 Rxe6 29. dxe6 Bxc1 30. Rxc1 Re8 with equality.

24. ... g4
Now I get a very easy attack, as the h-file will open and only one of us can use it. At this point, thanks to the increment, we both had a little over 20 minutes.

25. hxg4 hxg4 26. Nf1 Qg5
The future of the white king would have been grim after 26. ... Bh6 27. Rc2 Re7! when the major pieces are headed to the h-file.

27. Ng3 Nd4 28. Qe3
I thought she had to play on the c-file sooner or later, so I was expecting 28. c5; I would have responded 28. ... Re7 to keep the rook from the seventh rank, but at least here White would have some hopes for counterplay.

28. ... Qh4 29. Rc3 Rf6 30. Nf1 Rh6
At this point, I was quite optimistic about winning; I was trying to stay calm and keep things under control. I considered getting fancy with 30. ... Nf3+, but I didn't want to risk not winning some kind of imbalanced position. The engine says Black's winning after 31. gxf3 gxf3 32. Qxf3 Rxf3 33. Rxf3, but with little time left on the clock and a white knight on the board, I didn't fully trust myself to win this.

31. Qe4 Rf8 32. Rg3 Rf4 33. Qd3 Nf5 34. Re2 Nxg3, White lost on time.
Irina ran out of time here but the position is lost regardless. After 35. fxg3 (if *35. Qxg3,* then just *35. ... Qxg3 36. Bxg3 Rxc4*) 35. ... Rxf1+ 36. Kxf1 Qxh2 I will stay up a piece.

I was very nervous in the second game, and played a very safe line, which gave me flashbacks to my second game against Carissa. I kept telling myself to not mess this up and to stay focused until the end. Irina did all she could to keep the game going but I managed to keep things level. At some point, things got a bit out of control for her — losing or drawing meant the same to her — and I ended up winning that game too. For the first time, the American Cup Women's Grand Finals wouldn't be Alice against Irina.

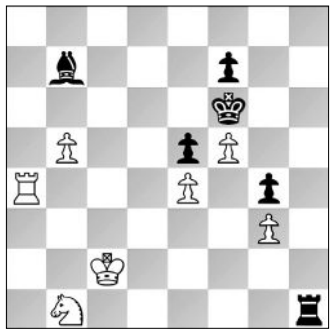
I was thrilled to have pulled this off, especially with so little sleep. If the time controls were longer, I probably would have crashed at some point, but my adrenaline lasted long enough to get me through another battle. But now I had to beat Alice in two matches.

The Open Elimination Bracket finals between Fabiano and Levon turned out in Fabiano's favor. After splitting the point in the rapid, Fabiano won both blitz games. His task of beating Hikaru in two matches was no easier than mine.

In the first game, Hikaru managed the seemingly impossible task of outpreparing Fabiano. Although he had some pressure out of the opening, the result of the game was decided in a rook endgame after a grave mistake.

A MISSED SAVE

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2862)
GM Fabiano Caruana (2862)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.22.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

GM Irina Krush

PHOTOS: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES

White is the one pressing, of course, with an extra passed pawn. The bishop on b7 is attacking the e4-pawn and also blocking the b-pawn, but Hikaru's idea is to defend the e4-pawn, then kick the bishop away with a rook.

45. ... Re1?

This gives the game away immediately. Fabiano had a defense with an interesting setup after 45. ... Rh2+. How to respond to this check?

(a) Black is happy to repeat after 46. Kd1 Rh1+ 47. Kc2 Rh2+.

(b) After 46. Kd3 Rh3 there's no time to attack the bishop: 47. Ra7?? Rxg3+ 48. Kc4 Bxe4 and Black picks up all the kingside pawns and will happily give up the bishop for the b-pawn.

(c) The most logical is 46. Nd2, but then Black has 46. ... Rg2. Of course, Black should stay active and attack the pawn but the idea isn't necessarily to capture it; the main idea is to also keep the knight pinned so the white rook cannot move. After 47. Rc4 Black makes the nice waiting move 47. ... Kg7!, rightfully claiming that there is no way for White to make progress: 48. b6 (if *48. Kd1 Rg1+ 49. Ke2 Rg2+ 50. Ke1* Black takes with *50. ... Rxg3* as there are threats of ... Bb7xe4 and ... Rg3-f3; *51. Kf2 Rd3 52. Ke2 Rg3*) 48. ... Kf6 49. Ra4 Kg7 and Black keeps going back and forth.

46. Nc3

With the knight on c3, Black cannot maintain the drawing idea we saw in the alternative variation.

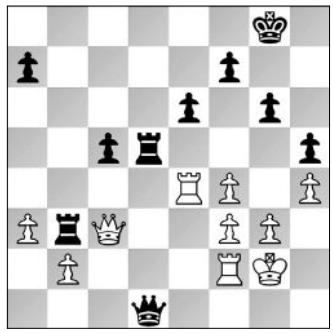
46. ... Re3 47. Nd5+ Bxd5 48. exd5 Rxg3 49. b6 Rg2+ 50. Kc3 Rg3+ 51. Kc4, Black resigned.

There is no way to stop the pawn. If 51. ... Rg1 52. b7 Rb1 53. Rb4.

I realized that repeating the KID wouldn't work out in my favor and decided to play a QGD. I felt as though Alice was surprised, which in turn surprised me. I got a good position out of the opening but misplayed the middlegame. I was very low on time but mentally I decided to let go of what could have been had I played better and to just make a draw. Alice must have seen this as her chance to score a point and started playing against my clock — instead of settling for a draw she decided to keep the game going again. This time, that strategy backfired.

FOR THE LEAD

IM Alice Lee (2466)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2404)
American Cup, St. Louis, 03.22.2025



WHITE TO MOVE

36. Qa5??

I was surprised to see this move. Her king is weak; the f3-pawn is weak, and I have a direct way of attacking it by doubling on the third rank. I figured she would offer a queen trade and we would make a draw soon after. I was low on time and was very annoyed that she was forcing me to play a longer game. I started to feel that this may not be the best move for her, but I couldn't see it immediately.

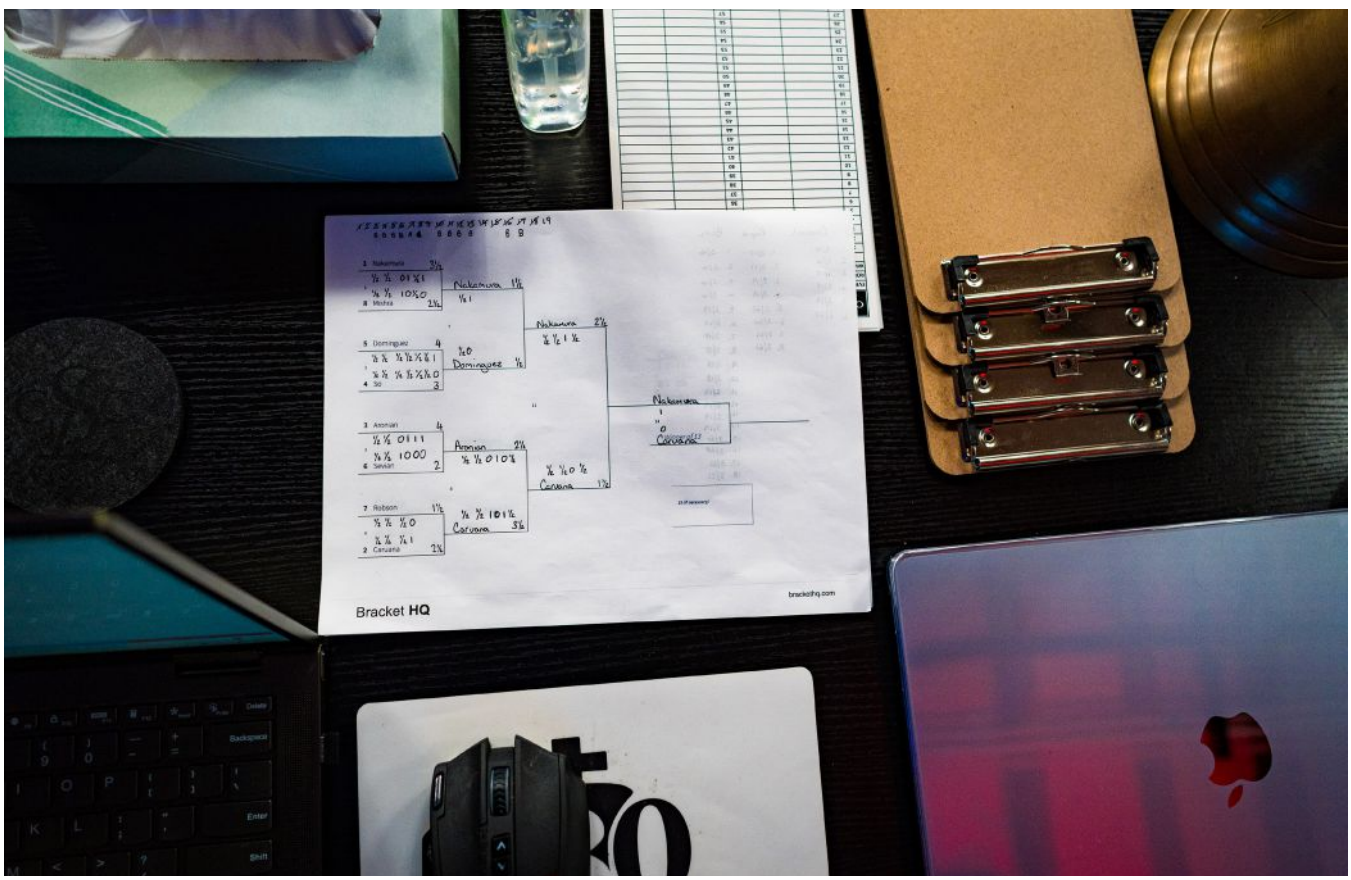


PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES

36. ... Rxf3
It suddenly occurred to me that the rook on e4 may not be very safe. It's tempting to play 36. ... Rdd3, but 37. Re1 traps my queen! Maybe Alice was simply setting up a trap?

37. Rxf3 Qc2+
Or maybe she calculated 37. ... Rd2+ 38. Rf2 Rxf2+ 39. Kxf2 Qc2+ 40. Re2, which works out beautifully for her.

38. Kh3 Qxe4
It's not just that she blundered a pawn, but her entire position falls apart. Her king is also very weak.

39. Qc3 Qe2 40. Qe3 Qxb2 41. Rf2 Qd4 42. Qe2 Qd3 43. Qb2 Qe4 44. Qa1 c4 45. Rb2 c3 46. Rg2
If 46. Rb8+ Kh7 47. Qxc3 Qh1 mate.

46. ... Rd2 47. Rg1 Qe2, White resigned.

Again, things couldn't have gone better for me. I won with Black and needed a draw with White, though recent history had shown that it was a challenging task for me. A win wouldn't guarantee anything, as we would have to play another match, but I figured that would just be a tossup.

On the day of the game, I felt the same as when I had to play the second game against Carissa: I was more nervous than I expected to be. Kostya and I did very light prep, but we didn't predict the opening. We got a very dry Caro-Kann endgame but I was feeling indecisive, spending too much time and always trying to lean towards the safer options. I was acutely punished for this as I got my rook trapped and had to resign a few moves later.

The blitz tiebreak came maybe half an hour later. It was determined that I would have the white pieces. I got an excellent position out of the opening and felt hopeful again. It felt like the Carissa match all over again — taking the long route. It turned out to be the shortest route as I lost the thread of the game then the game itself. In the second game, Alice had no issues keeping the game dry. I made some unfortunate decisions in the attempt to keep the game going. A few moves later I was lost and ended up running out of time.

And just like that, it was all over. I was surprised by how OK I felt about the whole thing. I didn't spiral like last time. I expected to feel awful, but the bad feelings never came. It just felt like a very bad day, and an unfortunate coincidence that I had to play three games. Maybe the exhaustion overtook all the other emotions, or the emotional beatdown from a few days before was enough for one event.

In the Open Section, at first it looked like Fabiano might be in a good position to strike back. After getting a better position and a huge advantage on the clock, he too fell into indecision. Watching Fabiano burn more than 40 minutes on a move made me feel slightly better about my own hesitancy, but, unsurprisingly, it did not yield good results for him: Hikaru got the time advantage and set up another fortress. The match ended before I went down in flames in my classical game. Hikaru took the title and the $90,000 prize. Two very deserving winners.

The final day of the American Cup is reserved for the American Cup Blitz. All the players are required to play, but as a grand finalist, I was given the option to skip it. I decided to play, but the second I walked into the playing hall I regretted it. The exhaustion of the grueling week had really set in and I didn't have any fight left in me. Hikaru took home the title — the first time someone other than Fabiano won the blitz — and an additional $5,000.

The players' dinner in the evening was just what I needed to finally relax and let go of the stress of the tournament. During the dinner, Sam said making a draw with White in the situation I was in isn't such an easy task, and that he has failed twice at it in his career. That knowledge, paired with a glass of champagne, made me feel better. As the evening progressed, sharing a lavish meal in the company of friends, I felt better and better for having gotten a nice reminder of the bright side of chess.

Enough time has since passed and this wound, too, has healed. Overall, despite the low points, I am satisfied with my results. I won the biggest chunk of money in my career. More importantly, I managed to bounce back after some tough losses and prove to myself that I still have some fight left in me. Often, chess players are asked to divulge the biggest lesson we learn from the game. I have given different answers throughout the years, but I think my final answer would be resilience.

GM Hikaru Nakamura

The Day 9 battle between Abrahamyan and Lee.

PHOTOS: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER (TATEV, LEE), SLCC / OOTES (NAKAMURA)

Keeping Control Versus the KID

A grandmaster trainer recommends a sound, steady system.

BY **GM ELSHAN MORADIABADI**

NOWADAYS, IT IS NEARLY IMpossible to imagine an opening repertoire that can dent any opening, let alone refute one. What is the point of suggesting an overarching repertoire with the white pieces when Black's best play leads to equality — especially since now, thanks to the proliferation of online courses, sidelines have proven less effective than ever?

I've coached players from 1000 to 2700, and my advice is simple: You need to consider four criteria, and with proper devotion and consistency, any repertoire will pay off in the long run.

Know and feel comfortable about the thematic plans: This may seem a no-brainer, but in recent years the importance of classical or thematic games has been questioned. I am a proponent of schematic thinking about anything in chess through model games, and you should have a list of classical/model games in your repertoire file.

Have a practical approach to your repertoire: There will always be positions in specific openings that are less desirable than the others, or transpositions to other openings (we will see one in this repertoire) that are less venomous or critical. Make sure to note all these nuances and know your strengths and weaknesses before delving into the theoretical research. The trade-off for whether the repertoire is worth it entirely lies in this pre-assessment.

Consider how annoying/challenging your choice could be for your opponent: You can't totally generalize about a player based on their openings, but certain lines can give you a clue into your opponent's mindset and the kind of game they want to play. If the line you're considering is annoying enough, if it gives them the kind of game they don't want, then it is a go!

Decide whether it's an opening you feel comfortable playing: Once the preliminary analyses are done, play several rapid and blitz games in the opening without knowing or memorizing the theory. If you achieve decent enough positions out of the opening, then it's a good one for you!

This last one is a tad tricky, because some players may not be confident in the opening before learning every nuance of it, but I've had students whom I spent hours and years preparing, feeding them pages of analysis on certain lines, who ended up never playing them because they finally realized they didn't like the repertoire in the first place! So do take this step seriously.

Facing the King's Indian Defense is always a challenge for a 1. d4 player, and the engines aren't much help: Especially at lower depths, they give an exaggerated evaluation in White's favor. Let me give you a suggestion based on a few thematic games, and see whether it fits the four criteria for you.

One of my former students, one of the top players in his age group, had a massive repertoire of online opening tutorials, but even though he worked hard he could never get through it. "What is it that you have a problem with?," I asked him. His response was "It's too much; it makes me nervous." I taught him the basics of this repertoire in an hour and his score against the King's Indian went from roughly 50% to over 80%.

The Smyslov Variation

The key concept of the Smyslov Variation is that White's play is, in essence, preventative. White refrains from the usual setup with pawns on c4, d4, and e4, and can also delay castling. This can provoke Black to decide on a plan that White can "read" before they choose their piece placement. Black's best plans revolve around plans that are similar to either a Benoni, a Benko Gambit, or, as funny as it sounds, a King's Indian Attack Reversed with ... d7-d6 and ... e7-e5.

Here's a key thematic game to remember when Black tries to play with the usual King's Indian Defense aggression. It's just a blitz game, but GM Daniil Dubov gives a clear example of what White can do in this line when Black goes for ... h7-h6, ... g7-g5, and ... Nf6-h5 in order to get the usual King's Indian ... f7-f5 idea.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E61)

GM Daniil Dubov (2720)
GM Bassem Amin (2680)
World Blitz (14), Warsaw, 12.30.2021

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. c4 Bg7 4. Nc3 0-0 5. Bg5 d6 6. e3 c5 7. d5 h6 8. Bh4 g5 9. Bg3 Nh5 10. Nd2 Qb6?!

The best way to go for Black is 10. ... Nxg3 11. hxg3 e6. After 12. Qc2 (or *12. Be2*) 12.

... f5 13. Rd1 Na6 14. a3 Nc7 15. dxe6 Bxe6 16. Nf3 White can play Bf1-d3 and Rd1-d2, and then decide among three setups: castling, putting the king on c1, or putting the king on d1 and the h1-rook on e1. The entire strategic fight revolves around the idea of whether Black can play ... d6-d5. They can get a good game, but this is very different from the stereotypical kingside counterattack that draws a lot of players to the King's Indian!

11. Qc2 f5?
This loses by force. Black cannot afford to weaken his kingside, because White has not castled yet!

12. Be2 Nxg3 13. hxg3 Nd7 14. f4!

Fixing the f5-pawn and preventing ... Nd7-e5. Now White wants to play f4xg5 and g3-g4.

14. ... Nf6
Black decides to die standing. After 14. ... g4 15. Bd3 Nb8 16. e4 there's no immediate mate, but it's a positional disaster.

15. 0-0-0 e5 16. fxg5 hxg5 17. g4 e4
Not 17. ... f4 18. exf4 exf4 19. Nf3 and it's really getting ugly.

18. Rdf1 Nh7 19. gxf5 Bxf5

20. Rxf5!
Not the only winning way.

20. ... Rxf5 21. Qxe4 Raf8 22. Bg4 Bxc3 23. bxc3 Qa5 24. Bxf5 Qxc3+ 25. Kb1 Nf6 26. Qe7 Qb4+, and Black resigned.

Going Deeper

The Dubov game is the dream of what White is trying to do, but as I said before, Black has other options. The good news for White is that Black's best lines take the game into a slightly different direction than they were probably looking for, which is a practical and psychological advantage for us.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Nf3
White can play 4. Bg5 first, but if Black wants to switch to a Grünfeld, this may or may not transpose to my recommended line, because after 4. ... d5 5. Nf3 Black has the extra option of 5. ... Ne4 before castling.

4. ... 0-0 5. Bg5!
This is where I say Black is caught! It is too late to switch to a Grünfeld, and now Black will face a non-theoretical line where all of his memorization is useless.

5. ... h6!
Black's best choice.

Black could play 5. ... d6 first; we don't care — we end up with similar positions either way. From here play could go 6. e3 Nbd7 and White could play 7. Bd3, provoking ... e7-e5, but I like 7. Bh4!? better. Now Black can play two ways:

(a) If Black tries to play ... e7-e5 with the knight on d7, pushing past with d4-d5 gives them what they want: a center to attack with moves such as ... c7-c6 and ... Qd8-c7. Instead, White should take on e5, get a grip on the e4-square (without having a pawn on e4 to be targeted by Black), control the d-file, and deny Black a comfortable development of the bishop on c8. Then White can play Nf3-d2-e4, possibly heading to d6.

So after 7. ... e5 I recommend 8. Be2 Re8 (*8. ... exd4 9. Nxd4 Re8 10. Qc2 h6 11. 0-0 g5 12. Bg3 Nc5 13. h3* leads to a position where it's a balanced fight, but it's Black who has to make all the difficult decisions or else they'll end up worse after Ra1-d1, Be2-f3, b2-b4 and c4-c5) 9. Qc2 c6 (*9. ... exd4 10. Nxd4 h6 11. 0-0*) 10. h3 Qc7 11. 0-0 a6 12. Bg3 b6 13. Rad1 Bb7 14. c5 bxc5 15. dxe5 dxe5 16. Na4 a5 17. Ng5 h6? 18. Nxf7 Kxf7 19. Bc4+ Kf8 20. Qxg6 and White is winning.

(b) If 7. ... c5 8. Be2! and we see the advantage of 7. Bh4. Now White can play 8. ... cxd4 9. exd4! with a slight but pleasant advantage. Black lacks space and the knight on d7 is misplaced: It's blocking the c8-bishop, which wants to be on g4, provoking d4-d5 and giving Black something to attack.

6. Bh4 c5!
Black can also play 6. ... d6, aiming for the King's Indian-style pawn moves ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5.

After 6. ... d6 we play 7. e3 and now:

(a) 7. ... c5 8. d5 (White can also play *8. Be2* but after *8. ... g5 9. Bg3 Nh5* White has to play d4xc5 or d4-d5 anyway) when Black has options:

(a1) Since we haven't played e2-e4, Black has the option of 8. ... Bf5.

POSITION AFTER 8. ... Bf5

If Black has chased the dark-squared bishop with ... h7-h6 and ... g6-g5, White should play Bf1-d3 and trade on f5, because we have a hole on that square to work with.

The engine still likes that idea in this situation, with a pawn still on g6, but I prefer 9. Nd2!. Why? Because we don't want to trade pieces when we have a space advantage, and this prevents not only a bishop trade but a future ... Nf6-e4. One example goes 9. Nd2 Qb6 10. Qc1 g5 11. Bg3 Nh5 12. Be2 Nxg3 13. hxg3 Nd7 14. f4 e6 15. e4 Bg6 16. Qc2 Rae8 17. 0-0-0 Nf6 18. Rdf1.

(a2) Black can play in Benoni style with 8. ... e6 9. Nd2 Na6 10. Be2 exd5 11. cxd5 Nc7 12. 0-0 g5 13. Bg3 Ncxd5 14. Nxd5 Nxd5 15. Nc4 Be6 16. Rc1. Here, Black's only clean equalizing idea is the hard-to-find 16. ... b6 17. Bxd6 b5! 18. Bxf8 Qxf8 19. Na5 Bxb2 20. Bxb5 Bxc1 21. Qxc1.

POSITION AFTER 21. Qxc1

It's equal, but Black has a weak king and has to play accurately, while White has simple

moves, eyeing the kingside and pressuring the c5-pawn.

(a3) 8. ... b5 9. cxb5 a6 10. Nd2! transposes after 10. ... Nbd7.

(a4) After 8. ... Nbd7 9. Bd3 b5 10. Nxb5 Qa5+ 11. Qd2 Qxd2+ 12. Kxd2 g5 13. Bg3 Rb8 14. Rhb1 Black doesn't have enough compensation in an OTB game.

(b) Or Black can play 7. ... Nbd7 8. Bd3 e5, when play can go 9. 0-0 Re8 10. Qc2.

POSITION AFTER 10. Qc2

White has arrived at a reversed King's Indian Attack with his bishop outside the pawn chain on h4. Black needs to make calm strategic moves, and for a principled King's Indian player, that is not so much fun!

(b1) If Black sits tight, play could go 10. ... c6 11. h3 Qe7 12. Nd2 Qf8 13. Rae1 and White is slightly better (not *12. ... Nf8 13. d5 c5 14. f4!* and White's winning).

(b2) And if Black takes? After 10. ... exd4 11. Nxd4 Nc5 12. Rad1 Nxd3 13. Qxd3 Black has less space and White can calmly play f2-f3/e3-e4, simply wait, or play Bh4-g3 combined with b2-b4/c4-c5. It is annoying for Black!

7. d5

It's important to push the pawn forward here. If White tries to strongpoint d4 with 7. e3, Black gets a good Grünfeld after 7. ... cxd4 8. exd4 d5!?.

7. ... b5

7. ... d6 8. Nd2 leads to Dubov – Amin.

The untested 7. ... Qb6 can be met with 8. Rb1 d6 9. Nd2 g5 10. Bg3 and if 10. ... Nh5 White should play 11. e3 with typical play and a decent advantage.

8. cxb5 a6

Now 8. ... d6?! lets White play 9. e4 a6 10. a4, and this is not a good Benko-style setup for Black.

It doesn't work to play 8. ... Qa5? either: 9. Nd2! Qb4 10. e4 Qxb2 11. Rc1 Qb4 12. a3 Qxa3 13. e5 Qb4 14. exf6 exf6 15. Bc4 f5 was how it went in Tomashevsky – Kovalev, Pardubice 2006, and White could have kept a big edge with 16. Ne2!.

9. e4 axb5

Again, if 9. ... d6 10. a4. The blitz move 9. ... Qa5? is met by 10. Nd2 when White holds everything together and is up a pawn.

10. Bxf6

Precise. If 10.Bxb5? Nxe4 and Black is on top.

10. ... Bxf6 11. Bxb5 Ba6 12. e5 Bxb5 13. Nxb5 Bg7 14. 0-0 d6 15. Re1 Na6 16. a4 Nc7 17. Nc3 Rb8 18. Qd2 Rb4

OK, Black has good compensation. But they had to navigate a lot to get there!

The Grünfeld Option

There's one other thing Black can do: Switch to the Grünfeld. But they don't have a lot of time to do this, and it's not very likely to happen.

Against our move order (**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Nf3**), Black has to do it right away with **4. ... d5**. Feel free to study the principled lines of the Exchange Variation after cxd5 and e2-e4 if you like, but White can keep playing similarly to our structure and piece placement with **5. Bg5**. Black has to hit back with **5. ... Ne4** (*5. ... 0-0* transposes to a line that's bad for Black, as we'll see shortly).

This is where we get into a position we don't necessarily want: **6. Bf4 Nxc3 7. bxc3 c5 8. e3 0-0 9. cxd5 Qxd5 10. Be2 cxd4 11. cxd4 Nc6 12. 0-0 Bf5**. Now you can try to study 13. h4, played recently by GM Praggnanandhaa, or stick to the main line with **13. Qa4 Qa5 14. Qxa5 Nxa5 15. Nd2**.

It's a drawish endgame, although only White is pushing for a win.

But ask yourself: How likely it is for a King's Indian player to all of a sudden choose to play a boring two-results Grünfeld endgame? You also have to ask yourself: Am I confident in this position? Do I consider myself a good endgame player with solid positional understanding? The answer to the first question is probably "not very," and if the answers to the other questions are "yes," then this repertoire should be a go for you.

Like I said, Black has to switch immediately with 4. ... d5, because after **4. ... 0-0 5. Bg5**, they don't have time to play ... Nf6-e4: White grabs a pawn with **5. ... d5 6. Bxf6 Bxf6 7. cxd5** and now Black can play 7. ... c6 but then they have to know another counterintuitive move: Black does not have enough compensation after 8. dxc6 Nxc6? 9. e3, and after the better (but ugly) 8. ... bxc6 Skytte – Ramsdal, Odense 2022, went 9. e3 c5 10. Be2 Bb7 11. 0-0 Nd7 12. Rc1 Rb8 13. b3.

So that means Black has to know to play **7. ... e6!**. They get good compensation after 8. dxe6?! Bxe6 9. e3 c5, so instead we respond **8. Qb3!**.

And now Black has enough compensation if they know to play **8. ... c5!** (and not *8. ... exd5 9. Qxd5*). After **9. dxc6 *e.p.* bxc6!** Black needs to stick to the ... c6-c5 plan, opening the eyes of the bishop from b7. After **10. e3 Nd7 11. Be2 Rb8 12. Qc2 c5 13. 0-0 Bb7** Black has counterplay, but White is up a pawn in a two-results position. In today's chess, this is an opening victory.

So let's see how the opening checks out against our criteria.

(1) Black is denied the classical ideas of the King's Indian.

(2) Black doesn't get the attack most King's Indian players desire.

(3) Black's best option is opting for Benko or Benoni structures, and not all players are familiar with the techniques of playing those positions.

(4) White's moves are simple and natural. White does well just by knowing the placement of the pieces — pawn on e3, Bc1-g5-h4, Qd2-c2, Rad1, etc. And even after equalizing, Black needs to remain more vigilant; it is easy to get relaxed and lose the grip.

This simple repertoire checks out for my four criteria. Does it check out for you?

ILLUSTRATIVE GAMES

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E61)

GM Vassily Smyslov
IM Vlastimil Jansa
Rubinstein Memorial, Polanica Zdroj 1968

I cannot write an article on the Smyslov Variation without a game from the legend himself, can I?!

In this game, the seventh world champion demonstrates the technique of using the e4- and d6-squares when Black tries the traditional combination of ... c7-c6 and ... e7-e5 in the KID. It also relates to the concept of the quasi-outpost, on which I wrote an article in the June 2021 issue of *Chess Life*.

1. c4 g6 2. Nc3 Bg7 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. d4 0-0 5. Bg5 d6 6. e3 Nbd7 7. Be2 h6 8. Bh4 e5 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. 0-0 c6 11. Qc2 Qe7 12. Nd2! Re8 13. Rad1 Nf8

14. Nde4
14. Bxf6 is also good: 14. ... Bxf6 15. Nde4 Bg7 16. c5 with the same idea.

14. ... g5 15. Nxf6+ Qxf6 16. Bg3 Qg6 17. Ne4 f5?? 18. Nd6 Re7 19. f4
White is already close to winning.

19. ... gxf4 20. exf4 e4 21. Bh4 Rc7 22. Nxc8?!
22. Kh1!, with the idea of g2-g4, is even better.

22. ... Raxc8 23. c5! Kh7 24. Rd6 Ne6 25. Bc4 Re8 26. Rfd1 Bf8 27. Rd7+ Rxd7 28. Rxd7+ Kh8 29. b4 b6 30. Be1 bxc5 31. Bc3+ Kg8 32. bxc5 Bxc5+ 33. Kh1 Re7 34. Rxe7 Bxe7 35. Qa4 Kf8 36. Qxa7 Nd8 37. Qd7 Qg4 38. Be5 e3 39. h3 Qh5 40. Qd3 Nf7 41. Qxe3 Nd6 42. Be2 Qf7 43. Qa7 Qd5 44. Qa8+ Kf7 45. Bf3, Black resigned.

BENONI DEFENSE (A61)

GM Jeroen Piket (2649)
GM Dimitri Reinderman (2551)
Mondariz zonal (10), 09.13.2000

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 c5 3. d5 e6 4. c4 exd5 5. cxd5 d6 6. Nc3 g6 7. Bg5 Bg7 8. Nd2 h6 9. Bh4 0-0 10. e3

10. ... Nbd7 11. Be2 a6 12. a4 Qe7 13. 0-0 Rb8 14. h3 g5 15. Bg3 Ne5 16. a5
White has achieved a clear advantage by making normal, thematic moves.

16. ... Nfd7 17. f4
Not the only way to play. White can also go 17. Kh1 f5 18. f4 Ng6 19. Bh5 with a big edge.

If 17. ... b5 18. axb6 *e.p.* Nxb6 19. f4 Ned7, White eventually won after 20. fxg5 hxg5 21. Bxa6 Bxa6 22. Rxa6 in Halkias – Grivas, Anogia 2018, but 20. Nb3! is even better: 20. ... Qxe3 21. Rf3 Qe7 22. Na5 Bb7 23. Nc6 Bxc6 24. dxc6 gxf4 25. Bxf4 Ne5 26. Rg3 and White is winning.

17. ... Ng6 18. Kh2 b5 19. axb6 *e.p.* Nxb6 20. Bxa6
Even better is 20. fxg5 hxg5 21. Bxa6.

20. ... Bxc3 21. bxc3 Nxd5 22. Nc4 Nxc3 23. Qxd6 Ne4 24. Qxe7 Nxe7 25. fxg5 Nxg3 26. Kxg3 hxg5 27. Bxc8 Rbxc8 28. Ra7 Nc6 29. Rd7 f6 30. Rf5 Rce8 31. Rxc5 Re6 32. Kg4 Ra8??, and Black resigned.
33. Kf5 wins easily.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E61)

GM Gata Kamsky (2658)
IM Patrick Zelbel (2458)
Bundesliga, 03.05.2022

Kamsky demonstrates how White should play a Maróczy-style structure, but with the e-pawn on e3.

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. d4 0-0

GM Vassily Smyslov

5. Bg5 d6 6. e3 c5 7. Be2 cxd4 8. Nxd4 Qa5 9. Bxf6 Bxf6 10. 0-0 Bg7 11. b4 Qd8
Not 11. ... Qxb4?! 12. Nd5 followed by Nd5xe7+ with a big edge.

12. Qb3 Nc6 13. Rad1 Bd7 14. c5!
Kamsky uses his time to increase his rooks' presence in the center.

14. ... Nxd4 15. exd4 Rc8 16. Rfe1 a5 17. Bf3 Bc6 18. Bxc6
18. Bg4! was better: 18. ... e6 19. b5.

18. ... Rxc6??
Black could have equalized with 18. ... bxc6!.

19. b5 Rc8 20. Nd5 e6 21. Nb6 Rc7 22. Qg3! d5 23. Qc3 Qh4 24. g3 Qg4 25. Kg2 a4 26. h3 Qf5 27. Nxa4 Ra8 28. Qb3 h5 29. Nb6 Rd8 30. a4 g5 31. Qe3 g4 32. hxg4 hxg4 33. Qf4 Qxf4 34. gxf4 Re7 35. f3 gxf3+ 36. Kxf3, Black resigned.

PHOTO: KOEN SUYK / ANEFO

A Storybook Beginning

Harry Nelson Pillsbury showed the Hastings crowd he belonged.

BY **BRUCE PANDOLFINI**

IT'S PRACTICALLY A STORY out of a storybook, how Harry Nelson Pillsbury (1872-1906) rose to fame. He was just 22 when a Brooklyn chess club raised the money for him to take part in the great 1895 tournament at Hastings. The competition featured the world's top players, including World Champion Lasker, ex-champ Steinitz, and other notables such as Tarrasch, Chigorin, and Schlecter. Some of the participants were opposed to Pillsbury's entry, seeing him as a young upstart without any chess pedigree. Guess who won the tournament?

With pragmatic solidity and balance, and a little American bravura, he took the top prize. This month's game shows Pillsbury fighting and outplaying Jacques Mieses in the sixth round.

VIENNA GAME (C27)

Jacques Mieses
Harry Nelson Pillsbury
Hastings 1895

1. e4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Bc4 Bb4 4. f4

(see diagram top of next column)

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.**

POSITION AFTER 4. f4

4. Par Score 5 d6
You may accept ***full credit*** for either 4. ... exf4 or 4. ... Nc6.

5. Nf3
Mieses increases the pressure against e5 and prepares to castle. **

5. Par Score 6 0-0
With his king safe, Pillsbury is ready for active play. Add ***1 bonus point*** if you saw that 6. fxe5 dxe5 7. Nxe5 is met by 7. ... Qd4.

6. Nd5
White simplifies, though 6. d3, solidifying e4, also was worthy.**

6. Par Score 5 Nxd5
This trade is fine. You may accept ***full credit*** for 6. ... Bc5.

7. Bxd5 **

7. Par Score 5 Nc6
Black proceeds steadily with his development, but you may accept ***full credit*** for the greedier 7. ... exf4.

8. c3
White now has support for an eventual d2-d4. **

8. Par Score 5 Bc5
You may accept ***full credit*** for 8. ... Ba5.

9. f5
This advance restricts the c8-bishop, preventing ... Bc8-g4. **

9. Par Score 6 Ne7
Threatening to capture White's good bishop.

10. Bb3
Naturally, White withdraws the bishop to a safer place. **

10. Par Score 6 d5
With White's king not yet castled, opening the center is called for.

11. d4
A bad idea: You don't open the center with your king still in it. Better was 11. d3. **

11. Par Score 4 exd4

12. f6
White tries to use his hanging f-pawn as a battering ram to mess up Black's kingside. **

12. Par Score 5 gxf6
Black is now saddled with doubled pawns. Accept ***full credit*** for 12. ... Ng6, which clears the e-file for rook activity.

13. Nxd4
However White captures on d4, with the knight or c-pawn, Black retains a slight edge. **

13. Par Score 4 dxe4
Black's kingside is in disrepair, but he does have two extra pawns.

14. Bh6
Certainly a menacing invasion, but the way Black turns this to his advantage will come as a surprise. **

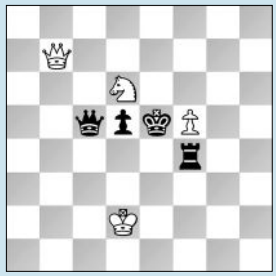
14. Par Score 7 Ng6

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.

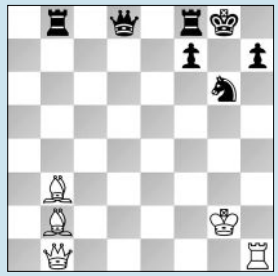
AUGUST EXERCISE:
It's easy to make mistakes in setting up positions from diagrams. Get into the habit of relying on a certain routine. Never vary your method, even when the position is uncomplicated. While doing this, don't just put things on their squares; say the names of the squares they're going on. This extra care will catch some slip-ups.

PROBLEM 1
Mating net



PROBLEM 2
Mating net

PROBLEM 3
Mating net



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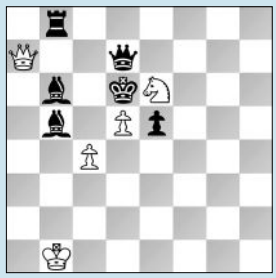
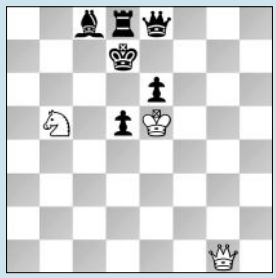
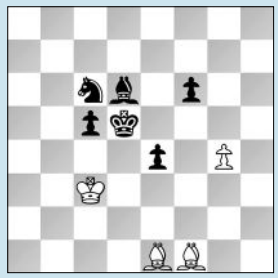
Mating net



PROBLEM 5
Mating net



PROBLEM 6
Mating net



Rather than saving the Exchange, Pillsbury sacrifices it to activate his forces further.

15. Bxf8
What else does White have? **

15. Par Score 5 Qxf8
Now White can finally castle. After 16. 0-0 Qd6, Black has the more promising game.

16. Rf1
Castling was more appropriate. Perhaps Mieses didn't want to put his knight in a pin. **

16. Par Score 6 Qh6
Black's queen is well placed here.

17. Qe2
Now we see that the pawn couldn't be safely taken. If 17. Rxf6, then 17. ... Qh4+ 18. Rf2 e3. If you saw that, take ***1 bonus point***. **

17. Par Score 5 Bxd4
Black first eliminates the imperious knight.

18. cxd4 **

18. Par Score 6 f5
White has been eyeing possible play against f7. Pillsbury turns his weakness into a strength. He now has several threats.

19. g4
Not good. Better would have been 19. g3, though Black would be closing in.**

19. Par Score 6 Nf4
As unappealing as it is, probably giving back the Exchange with 20. Rxf4 is most practical.

20. Qc4
White still pines for f7 magic, which just isn't there. **

20. Par Score 4 Nd3+
A crushing invasion.

21. Ke2
Mieses obviously didn't like 21. Kd1 Nxb2+. **

21. Par Score 4 Qxh2+
Just like that, White is faced with mate or loss of the queen.

22. Ke3
Once again, 21. Kd1 drops the queen to 21. ... Nxb2+. **

22. Par Score 6 f4+

23. White resigned.
It's amazing the way this game has gone — that forward f-pawn has become a monster. If 23. Rxf4, then 23. ... Qxf4+ 24. Ke2 Bxg4 mate; and if 23. Kxe4, then 23. ... Qe2+ 24. Kd5 Be6 mate (or 24. ... Qe6 mate). ◆

POSITION AFTER 22. ... f4+

SOLITARE 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

Supernational Lessons

Endgame School was in session in Orlando.

BY **GM JOEL BENJAMIN**

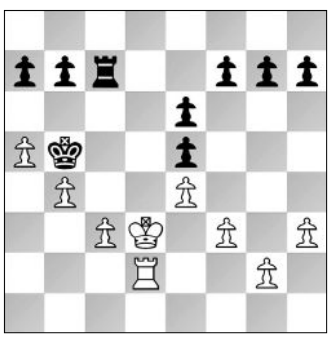
DEVELOPING STRONG ENDgame play is a critical part of a young player's development. At the SuperNationals in Orlando, players of varying levels contested interesting endgames, finding crafty ideas and making educational mistakes.

Liquidations into pawn endings never escape my attentions. Let's look at a few of varying complexity.

A TALE OF THREE LIQUIDATIONS

PART I: THE GOOD

FM Tani Adewumi (2460)
WIM Chloe Gaw (2236)
SN8 K-12 Ch (3), Orlando, 04.26.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

White's queenside majority is potentially more workable than Black's kingside majority, but Black's dominant king position squares matters.

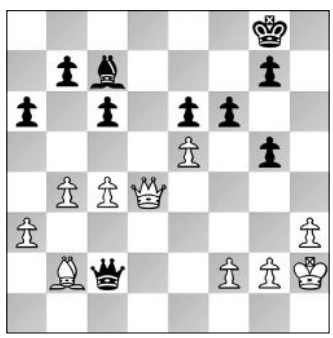
36. ... Rd7+! 37. Kc2 Rxd2+ 38. Kxd2 Kc4 39. h4 g6 40. Kc2 b6 41. axb6 axb6 42. g4 f6 43. h5 gxh5 44. gxh5 h6 45. Kd2 Kb3 46. Kd3 b5 47. Kd2 Kb2

A principled move, though 47. ... f5 48. Kd3 f4 49. Kd2 Kc4 50. Kc2 stalemate would be a stylish finish.

48. Kd3 Kb3 49. Kd2 Kb2, draw.

PART II: THE BAD

FM Narayan Venkatesh (2284)
Santiago De Jesus Casares (2233)
SN8 K-12 Ch (5), Orlando, 04.26.2025



WHITE TO MOVE

White is actually under some pressure, so he goes for a forcing continuation.

28. Qd7 Qxb2 29. Qxc7

Rejecting the perpetual check with 29. Qe8+ is a bit optimistic, as White has no objective expectation of winning. He does, however, set a trap that Black dives into.

29. ... Qxe5+??

I have written before about the hypnotic attraction of the pawn ending. Black perhaps thought the pawn ending would be a forced draw, but that would be much easier to obtain with 29. ... Qxf2. After 30. exf6 Qxf6 31. Qxb7 Qf4+ 32. Kh1 Qxc4 Black probably can't convert his extra pawn, but he can never lose.

30. Qxe5 fxe5 31. Kg3 Kf7

There is no time to keep the king out of e4 because 31. ... e4 32. Kg4 snags the g5-pawn and more.

32. Kf3 b5 33. c5 e4+

Black will lose the pawn to *zugzwang* anyway.

34. Kxe4 Kf6 35. f4!

If Black could have achieved ... e6-e5 he would have held. But now White ensures a decisive outside passer after 35. ... gxf4 36. Kxf4.

35. ... e5

Any capture will do, but so will ...

36. f5, Black resigned.

In our next game a tense endgame revolves around a possible liquidation that produces different results as the variables change.

PART III: THE UGLY

IM Bach Ngo (2453)
Tim Shvarts (2118)
SN8 K-12 Ch (2), Orlando, 04.26.2025

WHITE TO MOVE

Black dropped a pawn in the middlegame but is hanging in. With a solid extra passed pawn White might expect to win, but the vulnerability of his a-pawn and the blocked center present major technical problems.

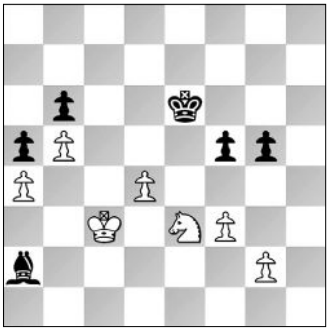
36. f3 Kd6 37. Kf2 f5 38. h4 g5?
This only serves to give White avenues of penetration. Waiting with 38. … Bc8 offers excellent chances to hold.

39. hxg5 hxg5 40. Ke3 Bc8
There is no time to clog the middle, because 40. … f4+ 41. Kd3 Bd5 42. Ne4+! Ke7 43. Nxg5 Bb3 44. Nh3 Bxa4 45. Kc4 leaves White with too many pawns.

41. Kd3?
White's plan is logical, but it doesn't work. The win was now available by opening a second front: 41. f4! gxf4+ (if *41. … g4* White can execute the plan from the game: *42. g3 Be6 43. Nd1*) 42. Kxf4 Be6 43. Kg5 Ke7 44. d5 Bc8 45. g3 Bd7 46. Nd1 Kd6 47. Ne3 and White wins by combining threats to the f5- and b6-pawns with the threat of advancing the d-pawn.

41. … Be6 42. Nd1 Bb3 43. Nb2 Kd5 44. Kc3 Ba2 45. Nd1 Ke6
45. … f4 right away is the simplest.

46. Ne3



46. … Bd5??
Black wants a fortress in the pawn ending, but this is the wrong way to get it. The plan would be realized after 46. … f4 47. Nc4 (there is no other way to make progress) 47. … Bxc4 48. Kxc4 Kd6 49. Kc3 (*49. d5 Ke5*) 49. … Ke6 50. Kd2 Kd6! with a draw. Black's king only lands on d5 if White's king goes to d3.

47. Nxd5 Kxd5 48. g3! Kd6
Any pawn move gives the White king immediate access to e4.

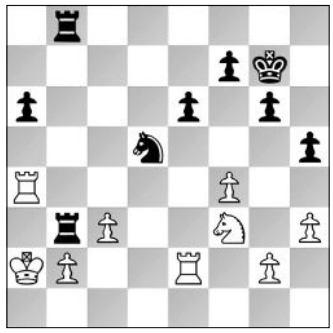
49. Kc4 Ke6
After 50. … f4 51. gxf4 gxf4 52. d5 Ke5 43. d6 Kxd6 44. Kd4 White scoops up the f-pawn and wins.

50. d5+ Ke5 51. f4+ gxf4 52. gxf4+, Black resigned.

Next we have a back-and-forth game that changed evaluations drastically on the way to a shock result.

ROLLERCOASTER

Roger Zhang (2250)
Dominic Paragua (2112)
SN8 K-12 Ch (4), Orlando, 04.26.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

Black clips a pawn on the way to bigger things.

29. … Rxc3! 30. Rd2 Rcb3 31. Ne5 Re3 32. Rc4 Rb4 33. Rdd4
I'm not sure whether both players calculated 33. Rxd5 Rxe5! 34. fxe5 Rxc4, but it leaves Black well on top in the rook ending.

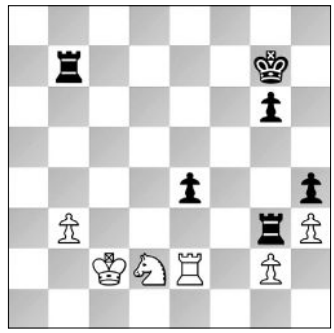
33. … a5 34. Nc6 Rb5 35. Rd2 h4 36. Rf2 Rb6 37. Nxa5 Nb4+
The advantage grows for Black.

38. Rxb4 Rxb4 39. Nc6 Rb6
Don't take your foot off the gas when you get a winning advantage! 39. … Ra4+ 40. Kb1 Re1+ 41. Kc2 Rc4+ 42. Kd2 Rb1 would wrap it up immediately.

40. Ne5 Ra6+ 41. Kb1 Ra7 42. Nc4 Rb3 43. Nd2 Rb4 44. b3 f6
I'm not wild about this plan; Black is starting to get too reckless with his pawns. I would target the f-pawn for termination, e.g. 44. … Rc7 45. Kb2 Rc5 46. Ka3 Rd4 etc.

45. Kb2 e5 46. fxe5 fxe5 47. Re2 Rb5 48. Nf3 Rab7 49. Re3 e4 50. Nd2 Rg5 51. Re2 Rg3 52. Kc2 Rc7+
The way forward with this rook placement was 52. … Rb5 53. Nxe4 (otherwise Rb5-g5 picks up g2) 53. … Rgxb3 and with two pawns left Black should win without difficulties.

53. Kb2 Rb7 54. Kc2

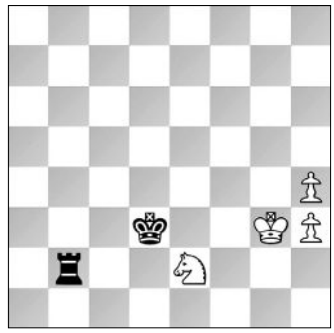


56. … g5?? 55. Nxe4 Rgxb3 56. Nxg5
Suddenly Black doesn't have enough pawns to force a win.

56. … Rb2+ 57. Kd1 Rb1+ 58. Kd2 Kg6 59. Nf3 R7b2+ 60. Ke3 Rxe2+ 61. Kxe2 Rb2+ 62. Kf1 Kh5 63. Kg1 Rb4 64. Kf2 Kg6 65. Ng1?!
White doesn't appreciate his fortress. It's an easy draw with 65. Kg1 Kf5 66. Kf2 Rb2+ 67. Ke3 (or even *67. Kg1 Kf4 68. Nxh4 Kg3 69. Nf5+!*).

65. … Rb2+ 66. Kf3?? Kf5
Back to winning for Black, as the knight is in danger.

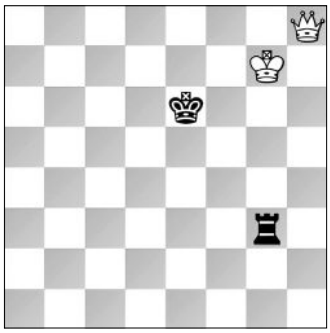
67. Ne2 Rb3+ 68. Kf2 Ke4 69. g3 Rb2 70. gxh4 Kd3 71. Kg3



71. … Kxe2??
The king needs to run back to stop the h-pawn, so this move goes against instinct. 71. … Rxe2 72. Kf4 Kd4 73. h5 Rf2+ 74. Kg5 Ke5 does the job.

72. Kf4
That winning advantage was short-lived! It seems in the coming play that Black's frustration with letting the win get away comes to cloud his judgment.

72. ... Kd3 73. h5 Rb5 74. Kg4 Ke4 75. h6 Ke5 76. Kg5 Rb3 77. Kg6 Rg3+ 78. Kf7 Rxh3 79. Kg7 Rg3+ 80. Kf7 Rh3 81. Kg7 Rg3+ 82. Kf7 Kf5 83. h7 Rh3 84. Kg7 Ke6 85. h8=Q Rg3+??



Even playing on the delay this move is hard to fathom. It looks like Black is trying for the post-promotion checkmate trick, but first of all the king would have to be on e7 to force the White king to the h-file, and secondly it only works with a queen, not a rook: Even if White did play 86. Kh7 here, Black would have to take the draw because 86. ... Kf7?? 87. Qc8 wins for White.

86. Kf8!

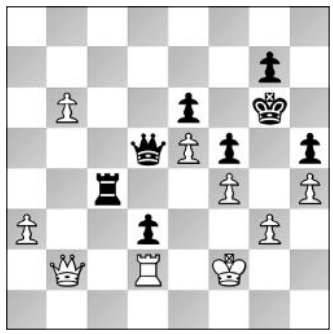
Probably neither player has ever studied queen versus rook. This ending is almost always won in practice because the defender needs to precisely calculate when his rook can go away from the king to even have a chance. Here White does a good job — the one part of this endgame that went smoothly!

86. ... Rf3+ 87. Ke8 Kf5 88. Qh5+ Ke4 89. Ke7 Rf4 90. Ke6 Ke3 91. Qg5 Ke4 92. Qd5+ Ke3 93. Ke5 Rg4 94. Qb3+ Kf2 95. Qd3 Rg3 96. Qd2+ Kf3 97. Qd1+ Kg2 98. Kf4 Kh2 99. Qd6 Kg2 100. Qd5+ Kh2 101. Qe5 Kg2 102. Qe4+ Kh2 103. Qe1 Rh3 104. Kg4 Rb3 105. Qe2+, Black resigned.

The last game is from the K-6 section, and I only know about it because the first player brought it to the Avenues team room to show me. It is full of mistakes, which I hope will encourage the players to take more time over moves in complicated endgames! The surprising tactics are too wild not to share. Black is a sixth grader, while White is only in second grade!

KIDDIE COASTER

Mark Xu (1420)
Sanchit Haripradeep (1603)
SN8 K-6 Ch (5), Orlando, 04.28.2025



BLACK TO MOVE

45. ... Qc5+?

Black is focused on supporting his passed pawn and misses a chance for a mating attack: 45. ... Qh1 46. b7 Rc1 forces White to give up everything.

46. Kf3?

Here 46. Kg2 would have produced equal chances.

46. ... Rc2?

46. ... Qg1 results in play similar to the note to Black's 45th: 47. b7 (*47. Rxd3 Qf1+ 48. Ke3 Re4+ 49. Kd2 Re2+*) *47.* ... Re4 48. Rxd3 Qf1+ and wins.

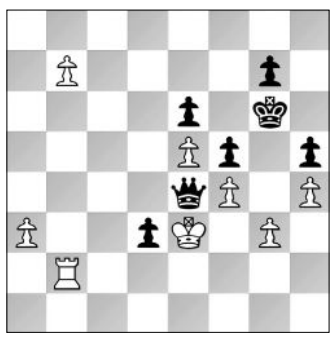
47. b7??

Young Mark has a clever idea, but it is often wise to start with the simplest possibility. There's an immediate draw with 47. Rxc2! dxc2 48. b7.

47. ... Rxb2

Take first, ask questions later! But the game would end faster with 47. ... Qd5+ 48. Ke3 Qe4+ 49. Kf2 Rxb2 50. Rxb2 Qd4+.

48. Rxb2 Qd5+ 49. Ke3 Qe4+

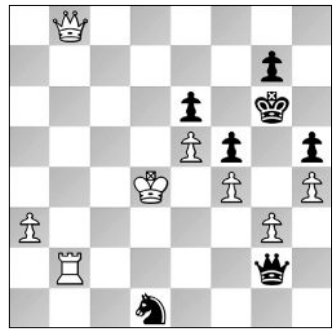


49. ... d2 is more direct: 50. Rxd2 (*50. b8=Q d1=Q*) *50.* ... Qxb7 etc.

50. Kd2 Qg2+

Black had a better execution of his ingenious idea: 50. ... Qe2+ 51. Kc3 d2 52. b8=Q d1=N+ 53. Kd4 Qe3+ 54. Kc4 Qc3+ and Black takes everything.

51. Kc3 d2 52. b8=Q d1=N+! 53. Kd4!?



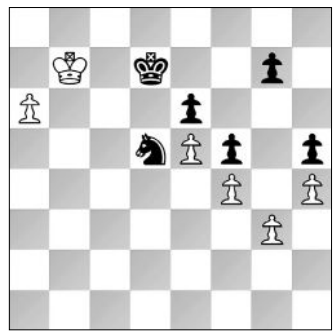
Mark didn't want to allow the rook to be taken with check, though it would have been far from trivial for Black to find 53. Kc4 Nxb2+ 54. Kb3 Kh7 55. Qe8 Qxg3+ 56. Kxb2 Qxh4 57. Qxe6 Qxf4 with a winning queen ending, and not a given that Black would convert it either.

After 53. Kd4, Black only took enough time to work out that 53. ... Nxb2? 54. Qe8+ would lead to perpetual check, so assumed the other capture must be played. But 53. ... Qd5 mate certainly merited a look.

53. ... Qxb2+?? 54. Qxb2 Nxb2 55. Kc3 Na4+ 56. Kb4

The knight is worth no more than the a-pawn!

56. ... Nb6 57. a4 Kf7 58. a5 Nd5+ 59. Kb5 Ke7 60. a6 Nc7+ 61. Kb6 Kd7 62. Kb7 Nd5



Black could have tried one more trick: 62. ... Kd8 63. a7 Na8 64. Kxa8?? (ask questions first!) 64. ... Kc7 65. g4 hxg4 66. h5 g3 67. h6 g2 and Black will mate after queening. But of course White can just play 64. Kb8! Kd7 65. Kb7 g6 66. Kb8, and Black would even lose after 66. ... Kc6? 67. Kc8.

63. a7 Nc7 64. a8=Q Nxa8 65. Kxa8 Kc8 66. Ka7 Kc7 67. Ka8 Kc8 68. Ka7 Kc7 69. Ka8 Kc8, draw. ◆

MAKE YOUR MOVE

BY **FM CARSTEN HANSEN**

THIS MONTH'S PUZZLES ARE TAKEN FROM GAMES PLAYED at the annual Norway Chess tournament that was held earlier this year. Some of the puzzles may seem a little trickier than usual. So don't get discouraged if you fail to find the right moves right away.

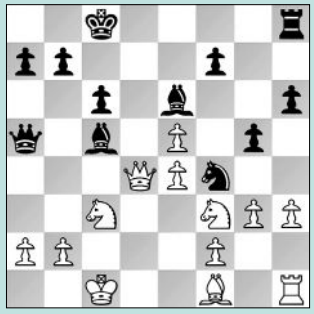
The puzzles start off easy and gradually become more difficult. It is worth noting that "easy" is a relative term. If you are new to the game, the easy ones can also represent a challenge.

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 as they occur 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.

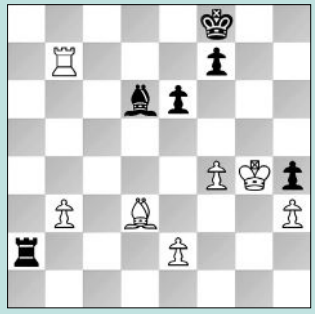
BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC 2.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 3.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 4.

WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 5.

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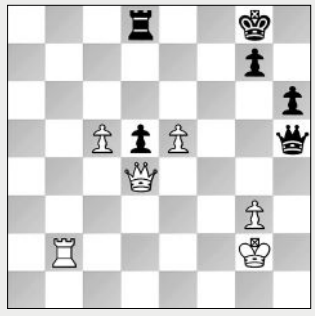
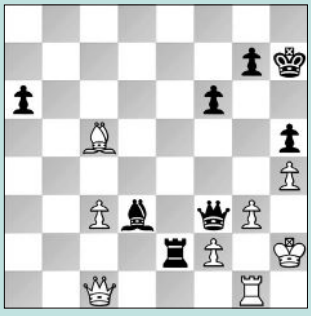
TACTIC 6.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 7.



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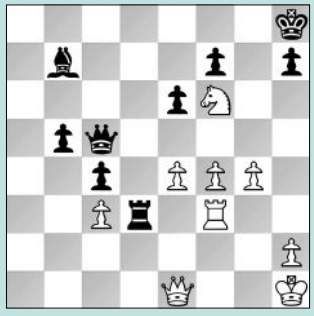
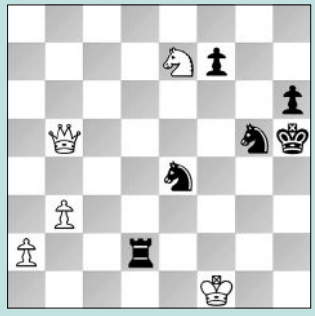
TACTIC 8.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC 9.



BLACK TO MOVE

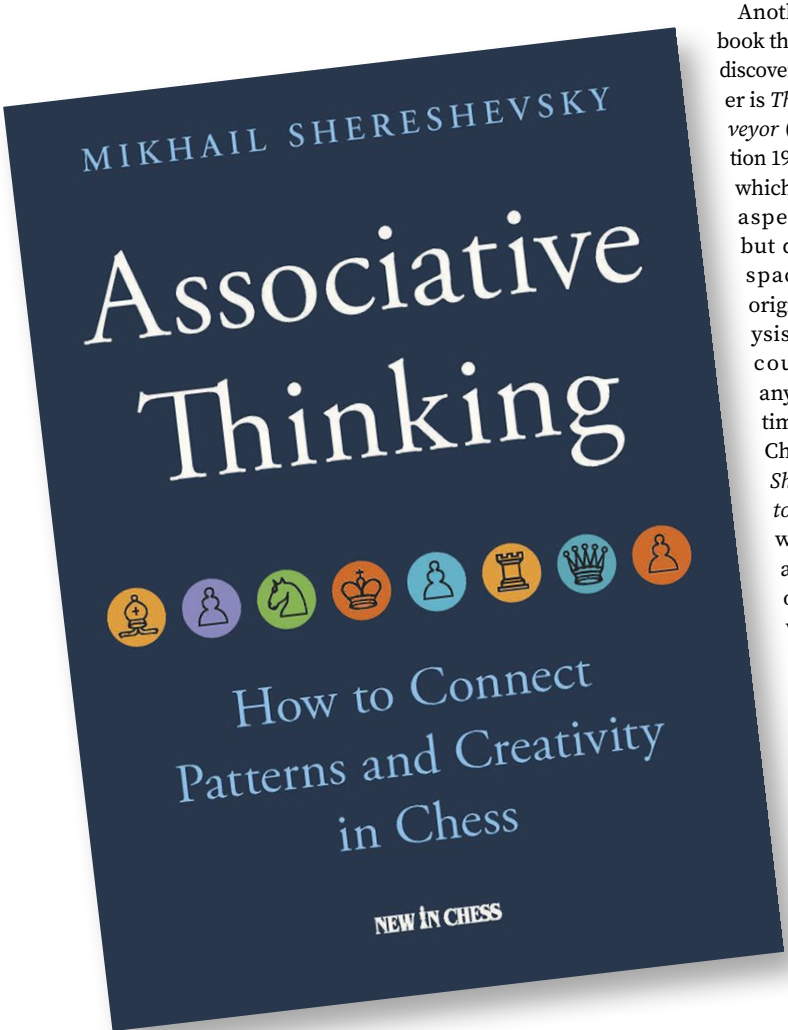
Position 1: NOT ENOUGH DEFENDERS
Position 2: LOOSE PIECES
Position 3: EXPOSE THE WEAK POINT
Position 4: TIE TO THE RIGHT COLOR
Position 5: THE COST OF BLOCKING
Position 6: FIRST ONE, THEN THE OTHER
Position 7: COMBINING STRENGTH
Position 8: PRECISION ATTACK
Position 9: ATTACK AND FIND SHELTER

Good Thinking

Shereshevsky's latest focuses on knowledge over memorization.

BY **IM JOHN WATSON**

YOUNGER READERS MAY NOT be familiar with IM Mikhail Shereshevsky, but over the years he has written several highly original and books on chess which have influenced a number of elite players. He was active as a player in the 1970s and 1980s, but has spent most of his career as a highly respected chess trainer in Belarus and Russia. His best-known work, *Endgame Strategy* — originally published in 1981 with various later editions — is a classic that has inspired players all over the world. A revised edition (by Shereshevsky himself) was republished in English by New in Chess in 2022; it is also available as a Chessable course presented by GM Sam Shankland. In contrast to technical and systematic endgame books with masses of analysis, *Endgame Strategy* takes a heavily verbal approach emphasizing principles and strategy; it's a pleasure to read.



Another Shereshevsky book that I was thrilled to discover as a younger player is *The Soviet Chess Conveyor* (first English Edition 1994), a lengthy book which discusses various aspects of the game but devotes the most space to extremely original opening analysis, much of which couldn't be found anywhere else at the time. In 2018, New in Chess published *The Shereshevsky Method to Improve in Chess*, which combines and updates some of his earlier work while addressing many new topics related to contemporary play.

Shereshevsky's most recent book is called *Associative Thinking* (subtitled *How to Connect Patterns and Creativity in Chess*). In it, he suggests an approach to improvement that supplements what younger players are nearly compelled to go through these days. Regarding the typical modern process, Shereshevsky says: "How does one achieve a high level of play in all stages of a chess game? It seems that everything is simple: learn your openings, work on typical middlegame positions, practice calculating variations and improve your endgame technique. But as soon as you start working on any stage of a chess game, you will encounter the same problem — a huge load on the memory. … In any case, you will try to learn most of the information mechanically, which, of course, is boring and ineffective. What should you do? Stop rote learning, turn on your curiosity, come up with a vivid image for the technique being studied and remember it as an association. And most likely, at the right moment you will recognize it and understand how you need to act."

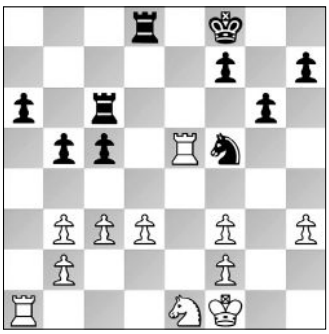
This is what he means by "associative thinking," and he tries to apply it to not only strategic planning (knowing what to do in a certain "type" of position) but other aspects of the game. As an illustration, I'll give a rather sophisticated example to which he returns several times throughout the book, having to do with what he calls "cooperation between knight and pawn."

A SQUARE FOR THE KNIGHT

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2782)
GM Magnus Carlsen (2855)
World Championship (1), Dubai, 2021

(see diagram top of next column)

Shereshevsky: "Our thought comes to the ideal arrangement of the knight and pawn: the knight is on e6, and the pawn is on f5. This arrangement of pieces allows us to control the maximum number of important squares in the opponent's camp: d4, e4, f4,



BLACK TO MOVE

g4. At the same time, the move is not at all striking. After all, on f5 the black knight stands beautifully on a strong point, whilst on e6 it seems to be 'hanging in the air.' Even so, Magnus played:"

30. ... Ng7! 31. Re4 f5! 32. Re3 Ne6
"It turns out that the knight is one square behind and to the side of the pawn ... in my opinion, this idea did not occur to Carlsen out of nowhere. As far as I know, the sixteenth World Champion studied the classics seriously and has an amazing memory. I would venture to suggest that this image was inspired by the classical examples Saidy – Fischer, Reti – Rubinstein and Fischer – Taimanov. This interaction between knight and pawn was so firmly rooted in his mind that this image at the right moment worked as a technique almost automatically."

(Note that this knight maneuver is rather at odds with the "improve the position of your worst piece" principle. Who would take two tempi to relocate the knight away from the apparently ideal outpost on f5, where it is untouchable and blockades White's doubled pawns? — JW)

33. Ng2 b4! 34. Ke2 Rb8 35. Kd2! bxc3+ 36. bxc3 Rxb3 ...
Black stands better (the game was eventually drawn). Shereshevsky concludes "For me, what Carlsen achieved in this game is an example of brilliant associative thinking. A chess player with well-developed associative thinking can quickly and accurately grasp the essence of a position and find the necessary analogy from the store of acquired knowledge. This analogy — whether it is regrouping pieces, changing the rhythm of the game, using prophylactic techniques and much more — serves as a reliable support for making the optimal decision in the face of a constant lack of time to think. ... Specific variations get forgotten, but a vivid landmark image remains in the memory for a long time."

Here are two of the several examples he shows to illustrate this idea:

THE WRONG WAY

GM Fabiano Caruana (2792)
GM Richard Rapport (2763)
Wijk aan Zee, 2022

WHITE TO MOVE

34. Ke2?
Shereshevsky: "The American grandmaster played this after just two minutes. Maybe he was short of time. But either way, he did not sense that the final critical moment had arrived. White needed to think out his defensive scheme thoroughly in this position. And its basis should be the transfer of the knight to d3 and the advance of the pawn to e4. After the moves 34. Kc3 Kf6 35. e4 Bc8 36. Nd3, we could say hello to the games Saidy – Fischer, Reti – Rubinstein, and Fischer – Taimanov. White would have retained good drawing chances."

34. ... Kf6 35. b3 a5 36. Ke1 Ke5 37. Ng2 Rh8 38. Nf4 g3 39. Rg2 Be4 40. Rd2 h3 41. a3 Rd8 42. Rb2 Bf3, White resigned.

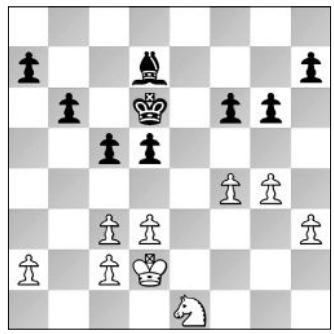
KNOW THE SETUP

Richard Reti
Akiba Rubinstein
Gothenburg, 1920

(see diagram top of next column)

Black stands better here.

34. Nf3?!
34. Ng2! is recommended by Gelfand. It has the idea of heading to e3, with the "ideal" Ne3/f4 setup; d3-d4 will also be included if there is time. He analyses 34. ... d4 (*34. ... Bc8 35. d4! h6 36. Ne3* and you can verify the effectiveness of the Ne3/f4 formation) 35. cxd4 cxd4 36. c4! dxc3+ *e.p.* 37. Kxc3 g5 38. f5 (or *38. fxg5 fxg5 39.*



WHITE TO MOVE

Kd4) 38. ... Bc6 39. Ne3 Bf3 40. d4 Kc6 41. a3 with equality.

34. ... Ke7! 35. Ke3 h5! 36. Nh2 Kd6! 37. Ke2 d4! ...
and Black went on to win.

This is pretty heady stuff, and I have no idea whether Carlsen in his game versus Nepo was calling upon stored associations or just being brilliant. Nevertheless, it's undeniable that he and other strong players have many such associations which can lead them to good solutions even with little time to think. This can be a huge advantage with modern time controls. For the reader who is intimidated by the difficult nature of this example, rest assured that most of Shereshevsky's associations are simpler and of practical use even for the average player. Also, his advice sometimes consists of what I would call "tips" rather than more complex associations, for example:

- "Exchanging rooks in positions with an extra exchange is almost *always* favourable to the stronger side ..."
- "In positions with an advantage in space, the side with this advantage should, as a rule, strive to exchange heavy pieces. First of all, the queens. If you are constrained, then you need to strive to exchange minor pieces."
- "It is important to remember: there can be a great variety of methods (or plans) in a game. For example, in sharp rook endings, the correct method of action is the following: the king should go with his own passed pawns, and the rook should fight the enemy's."
- "Remember the famous expression of grandmaster Siegbert Tarrasch? He argued that in rook endings the rook should always be behind the passed pawn — both one's own and the enemy's. ... However, many examples have

appeared in tournament practice that prove the effectiveness of placing the rook on the same rank as its 'strong' passed pawn. If you can then move your 'weak' pawn on the other flank to the same rank, the king will be freed from the task of protecting it and come to the aid of his passed pawn, I call this interaction of rook and pawns 'playing in a line'."

A simple example:

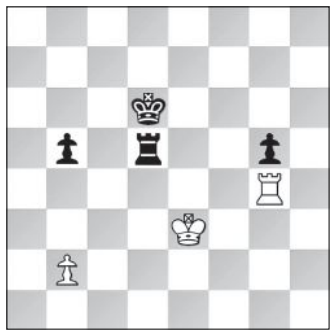
SIDE BY SIDE

GM Ljubomir Ljubojevic (2600)
IM Xu Jun (2520)
FIDE Olympiad, Novi Sad, 1990

(see diagram top of next column)

50. ... Rf5! 51. Ke3 Ke5 52. b3 Kf6 53. Ke4 Kg6 54. Rg1 Rf4+ 55. Ke5 Rb4 56. Rg3 g4 57. Kd5 Rf4 58. Kc5 b4 59. Kb5 Kg5 60. Rg1 Kh4, escorting the pawn in in a few moves.

This is only a small sample the many topics Shereshevsky addresses. It's worth mentioning that the lengthiest chapter has to do with rook endings, a Shereshevsky specialty; it would make an instructive pamphlet on its own. And while the author tries to fit all the topics into the "associative thinking" framework, he makes various excursions into broader abstract discussions such as "varying the rhythm of the game," playing consistently, defending under pressure, and how most games are decided in favor of the player "whose average move is stronger than their opponent's," rather than by spectacular tactics or inspired originality.



BLACK TO MOVE

Associative Thinking is engaging, and generally easy to follow. For many players, its most attractive feature will be that, whenever possible, Shereshevsky uses words to get his point across. One theme of the book, after all, is that students will tire of constant memorization. "In my opinion," he says, "it all depends on the balance between the verbal explanation and the number of variations."

To be sure, our 3500+-rated engines have not reached their level by applying abstract ideas, but a practical player can often make sense of masses of material by recognizing repeated patterns and seeing what works. Shereshevsky's insight is that accumulating a large repertoire of these associated patterns and understanding why they function will help lead you in the right direction when analyzing, a crucial advantage in our contemporary world of fast time controls. The player who can mix this abstract recognition with efficient calculation and a mild dose of general principles will arguably be able to improve more rapidly and efficiently than someone who relies on pure memorization. I recommend *Associative Thinking* as a way to look freshly at what you are studying and how you might translate that study into better results.

Shereshevsky, Mikhail. Associative Thinking: How to Connect Patterns and Creativity in Chess. New in Chess, *2025. 304 pp. ISBN 978-9083431345. Available at* uscfsales.com, *product code B0331NIC, $29.95.*

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].* You will find the event's unique five-digit TLA ID at the top of each TLA.

Nationals

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 US National G30 and G60 Chess Championship Tournament

SEPTEMBER 27-28, 2025 — IA **TLA# 49959**

Site: Holiday Inn & Suites @ Ameristar **Address:** 2202 River Road, Council Bluffs, IA 51501 **Overall Prize Fund:** $2,000 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Seetharaman Renganathan • *chessrockerz@gmail.com* • *www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089563144798*

Grand Prix

The Grand Prix point totals reflect all rated event information as of July 10, 2025, for the 2025 Grand Prix. These standings are updated regularly, but should be considered unofficial. Visit *www.uschess.org/datapage/GP-standings.php* for up-to-date information.

2025 US CHESS GRAND PRIX STANDINGS

	Name	State/Ctry	Pts
1.	GM JIANCHAO ZHOU	MA	393.25
2.	GM AWONDER LIANG	WI	97.389
3.	THOMAS FANG	NC	96.5
4.	GM FIDEL CORRALES JIMINEZ	CA	79.114
5.	EMMANUEL CARTER	NC	69.133
6.	GM JEFFERY XIONG	TX	65
7.	GM MIKHAIL ANTIPOV	MO	62
8.	IM ERIC CHANG LIU	TX	61.222
9.	FM RYAN SUN	MA	58.972
10.	GM SEMEN KHANIN	FIDE	58

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.*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Friendship Day Grand Prix

AUGUST 3, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50289**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $764 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

GRAND PRIX

The 5th Annual Joe Yun Memorial

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — OH **TLA# 50588**

Site: The Hilton Garden Inn Akron **Address:** 1307 East Market Street, Akron, OH, 44305 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,000 **GP Pts:** 60 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Progress With Chess • *eliot@progresswithchess.org* • (914) 434-2557 • *www.progresswithchess.org/yun*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

2025 DKC Heart of the Carolinas FIDE Summer Classic

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50328**

Site: Winston-Salem Marriott **Address:** 425 North Cherry Street, Winston-Salem, NC 27101 **Overall Prize Fund:** see online TLA **GP Pts:** 60 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

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

30th Annual Pacific Coast Open

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — CA **TLA# 48968**

Site: Hilton Orange County Airport Hotel **Address:** 18800 Macarthur Blvd., Irvine, CA 92612 **Overall Prize Fund:** $30,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

11th annual Pacific Coast Open Blitz Championship

AUGUST 9, 2025 — CA **TLA# 49052**

Site: Hilton Orange County Airport Hotel **Address:** 18800 Macarthur Blvd., Irvine, CA 92612 **Overall Prize Fund:** $500 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

55th Annual Continental Open

AUGUST 14-17, 2025 — MA **TLA# 48969**

Site: Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel **Address:** 181 Boston Post Road W, Marlborough, MA 01752 **Overall Prize Fund:** $30,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX

2025 Austin Summer Open

AUGUST 15-17, 2025 — TX **TLA# 50934**

Site: Austin Southpark Hotel **Address:** 14140 Governors Row, Austin, TX 78744 **Overall Prize Fund:** $5,985 **GP Pts:** 30 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Austin Chess Club • *austinchessclub@austinchesstournaments.com* • *www.austinchesstournaments.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

11th annual Continental Open Blitz Championship

AUGUST 16, 2025 — MA **TLA# 49053**

Site: Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel **Address:** 181 Boston Post Road W, Marlborough, MA 01752 **Overall Prize Fund:** $500 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess National Non Profit Day Grand Prix

AUGUST 17, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50863**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

20th Annual Indianapolis Open

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — IN **TLA# 49375**

Site: Hilton Garden Inn Indianapolis Airport **Address:** 8910 Hatfield Drive, Indianapolis, IN 42641 **Overall Prize Fund:** $15,000 **GP Pts:** 100 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

15th Annual Central California Open

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — CA **TLA# 49352**

Site: Doubletree Hotel **Address:** 2233 Ventura St, Fresno, CA 93710 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,000 **GP Pts:** 100 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX

4th Nashville Summer Classic

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — TN **TLA# 50205**

Site: Millennium Maxwell House Hotel **Address:** 2025 Rosa L Parks Blvd, Nashville, TN 37228 **Overall Prize Fund:** $20,000 **GP Pts:** 60 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Nashville Chess Center • *director@nashvillechess.org* • **6292544737** • *ncc.clubexpress.com/content.aspx?page_id=4091&club_id=164844&item_id=2562865*

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

57th Annual Atlantic Open

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC **TLA# 49021**

Site: Omni Shoreham Hotel **Address:** 2500 Calvert St. NW, Washington, DC 20008 **Overall Prize Fund:** $30,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

12th annual Atlantic Open Blitz Championship

AUGUST 23, 2025 — DC **TLA# 49056**

Site: Omni Shoreham Hotel **Address:** 2500 Calvert St. NW, Washington, DC 20008 **Overall Prize Fund:** $500 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess 2nd Annual National Waffle Day Grand Prix

AUGUST 24, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50864**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

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

91st Southwest Open

AUGUST 28-SEPT. 1, 2025 — TX **TLA# 50869**

Site: Wyndham Garden McAllen **Address:** 1921 S 10th St, McAllen, TX 78503 **Overall Prize Fund:** $5,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** David Ortiz • *admin@texaschess.org* • 8329085462 • www.texaschess.org

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Illinois Open

AUGUST 28-SEPT. 1, 2025 — IL **TLA# 50870**

Site: DoubleTree by Hilton Lisle-Naperville **Address:** 3003 Corporate W Dr, Lisle, IL 60532 **Overall Prize Fund:** $15,000 **GP Pts:** 100 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Wilson Chess • *WilsonSChess@gmail.com* • 8329085462 • www.kingregistration.com/event/ILopen25

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Michigan Open

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — MI **TLA# 49877**

Site: Clarion Lansing Hotel & Conference Center **Address:** 7501 W Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917 **Overall Prize Fund:** $5,100 **GP Pts:** 40 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Michigan Chess Association • *jeffchess64@gmail.com* • 8109557271 • *www.michess.org/*

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL **TLA# 49841**

Site: Holiday Inn Resort **Address:** 3011 Maingate Lane, Kissimmee, FL 34747 **Overall Prize Fund:** $11,500 **GP Pts:** 50 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Boca Raton Chess Club • *jon@bocachess.com* • 561-302-4377 • *www.bocachess.com*

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

147th Annual New York State Championship – America's Oldest Annual Tournament!

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — NY **TLA# 49022**

Site: Albany Marriott **Address:** 189 Wolf Road, Albany, NY 12205 **Overall Prize Fund:** $18,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Ohio Chess Congress

AUGUST 29-31, 2025 — OH **TLA# 50926**

Site: Cherry Valley Hotel **Address:** 2299 Cherry Valley Rd SE, Newark, OH 43055 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,200 **GP Pts:** 60 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Kathy Lin • *info@columbuschessacademy.org* • 6147467682 • *www.columbuschessacademy.org*

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.

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

Louisiana State Championship

AUG. 30-SEPT. 1, 2025 — LA **TLA# 47837**

Site: Loyola University **Address:** 6363 St Charles Ave, New Orleans, LA 70118 **Overall Prize Fund:** $3,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Downriver Chess Club & Louisiana Chess Association • *info@downriverchess.com* • 202-656-9754 • *downriverchess.com*

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

New Jersey Open

AUG. 30-SEPT. 1, 2025 — NJ **TLA# 50341**

Site: Cherry Hill Double Tree by Hilton **Address:** 2349 Marlton Pike West Cherry Hill, NJ 08002 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,250 **GP Pts:** 80 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** New Jersey State Chess Federation • *tournaments@njscf.org* • *njscf.org/77th-annual-new-jersey-open-championships/r*

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Michigan Speed Championship

AUGUST 30, 2025 — MI **TLA# 49878**

Site: Clarion Lansing Hotel & Conference Center **Address:** 7501 W Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917 **Overall Prize Fund:** $600 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Michigan Chess Association • *jeffchess64@gmail.com* • 8109557271 • *www.michess.org*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

11th annual New York State Blitz Championship

AUGUST 31, 2025 — NY **TLA# 49023**

Site: Albany Marriott **Address:** 189 Wolf Road, Albany, NY 12205 **Overall Prize Fund:** $800 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess Pony Express Day Grand Prix

AUGUST 31, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50866**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

HERITAGE EVENT • GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Peter P. Lahde Tennessee Open & Blitz Championship

SEPTEMBER 5-7, 2025 — TN **TLA# 49640**

Site: The Center at Fairfield Glade **Address:** 128 Stonehenge Dr, Crossville, TN 38558 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,000 **GP Pts:** 50 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Cumberland County Chess Club • *cumberlandcountychessclub@gmail.com* • (931) 200-0875

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess National Grandparents Day Grand Prix

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50867**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 PA State Game/60 Championship - West

SEPTEMBER 13, 2025 — PA **TLA# 50852**

Site: William Pitt Union, Univ. of Pittsburgh **Address:** 5th Ave. & Bigelow Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15213 **Overall Prize Fund:** $695 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Tom M Martinak • *martinak_tom_m@hotmail.com* • 412-908-0286 • **www.pscf-chess.org/clearinghouse/**

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

Dragon Knight Chess National Hug Your Hound Day Grand Prix

SEPTEMBER 14, 2025 — NC **TLA# 50868**

Site: Dragon Knight Chess Center **Address:** 2000 Bearcat Way, Suite 104, Morrisville, NC 27560 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Dragon Knight Chess • *jon@dragonknightchess.com* • (919) 422-2535 • *www.dragonknightchess.com*

GRAND PRIX

2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD **TLA# 50282**

Site: Ramkota Sioux Falls **Address:** 3200 W Maple Street, Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57107 **Overall Prize Fund:** $12,000 **GP Pts:** 80 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Chess Weekend Inc. • *glenn@chessweekend.com* • *www.chessweekend.com*

GRAND PRIX

2025 Sacramento Senior Championship

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N **TLA# 50688**

Site: Holiday Inn Express and Suites **Address:** 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821 **Overall Prize Fund:** $3,300 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** John McCumiskey • *sactochess@sbcglobal.net* • 916-524-9479 • *sacramentochessclub.org/index.htm*

GRAND PRIX

Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N **TLA# 50689**

Site: Holiday Inn Express and Suites **Address:** 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821 **Overall Prize Fund:** $4,800 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** John McCumiskey • *sactochess@sbcglobal.net* • 916-524-9479 • *sacramentochessclub.org/index.htm*

GRAND PRIX

CFCC 2025 Autumn Open & Scholastic

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — FL **TLA# 50779**

Site: Holiday Inn Orlando Lake Buena Vista **Address:** 13351 State Road 535, Orlando, FL 32821 95821 **Overall Prize Fund:** $8.500 **GP Pts:** 20 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Central Florida Chess Club (CFCC) • *info@centralflchess.org* • *https://www.centralflchess.org/cfcc-2025-autumn-open-and-scholastic-weekend-tournament*

HERITAGE EVENT• AMERICAN CLASSIC • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX

42nd Annual Reno Western States Open

OCTOBER 3-5, 2025 — NV **TLA# 50876**

Site: J Resort Casino Hotel **Address:** 345 N. Arlington Avenue, Reno NV 89501 **Overall Prize Fund:** $27,500 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Jerome V. Weikel • *wackyykl@aol.com* • 775-747-1405 • *www.renochess.org*

GRAND PRIX • ENHANCED GRAND PRIX • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX

14th annual Hartford Open

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — CT **TLA# 50123**

Site: Sheraton Hartford Hotel At Bradley International Airport **Address:**1 Bradley Airport, Windsor Locks, CT 06096 **Overall Prize Fund:** $10,000 **GP Pts:** 60 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

33rd annual Midwest Class Championships

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — IL **TLA# 50084**

Site: Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel **Address:** 601 North Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling, IL 60090 **Overall Prize Fund:** $20,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2025 Michigan Bottom Half Class Championships

OCTOBER 11-12, 2025 — MI **TLA# 50809**

Site: Wyndham Garden Ann Arbor **Address:** 2900 Jackson Ave, Ann Arbor, MI, 48103 **Overall Prize Fund:** $2,575 **GP Pts:** 15 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Michigan Chess Association • *jeffchess64@gmail.com* • 810-955-7271 • *www.michess.org*

GRAND PRIX

San Diego Open

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — CA **TLA# 49993**

Site: Marriott San Diego Airport/Liberty Station **Address:** 2592 Laning Rd, San Diego, CA 92106 **Overall Prize Fund:** $20,000 **GP Pts:** 120 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Charles Ensey • *chucnglo@aol.com* • (858) 432-8006 • *www.sandiegochessclub.org*

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

29th annual Eastern Chess Congress

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — NJ **TLA# 50642**

Site: Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village **Address:** 201 Village Blvd, Princeton, NJ 08540 **Overall Prize Fund:** $25,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

20th annual Los Angeles Open

NOVEMBER 7-9, 2025 — CA-S **TLA# 50643**

Site: Hilton Orange County Airport **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* • *www.chesstour.com*

GRAND PRIX

The 2025 Downriver Classic

NOVEMBER 8-9, 2025 — LA **TLA# 49811**

Site: Louisiana Bridge Association **Address:** 2709 Edenborn Ave, Metairie, LA 70002. **Overall Prize Fund:** $3,000 **GP Pts:** 10 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Downriver Chess • *info@downriverchess.com* • *www. downriverchess.com*

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

34th annual Kings Island Open

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH **TLA# 50644**

Site: Embassy Suites Cincinnati NE **Address:** 4554 Lake Forest Dr, Blue Ash OH 45242 **Overall Prize Fund:** $25,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

56th annual National Chess Congress

NOVEMBER 28-30, 2025 — PA **TLA# 50757**

Site: Loews Hotel **Address:** 1200 Market St, Philadelphia PA 19107 **Overall Prize Fund:** $45,000 **GP Pts:** 200 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

35th annual North American Open

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV **TLA# 50756**

Site: Horseshoe Casino Resort (formerly Bally's) **Address:** 3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S, Las Vegas, NV 89103 **Overall Prize Fund:** $130,000 **GP Pts:** 300 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

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

50th annual Eastern Open!

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA **TLA# 50760**

Site: Hyatt Regency Crystal City **Address:** 2799 Richmond Highway, Arlington VA 22202 **Overall Prize Fund:** $30,000 **GP Pts:** 150 **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Continental Chess • *director@chess.us* • *www.chesstour.com*

Regional

ALABAMA

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL **TLA# 49841**

2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship

See Grand Prix.

2025 - 42nd Annual Reno-

Western States Open

An American Classic & Heritage Event!

Oct 3-5 & Oct 4-5 (3-day & 2-day schedules)

6SS; 6 Sect; Open-FIDE Rated; A Weikel Tourney

NEW LOCATION: J RESORT CASINO HOTEL, RENO, NV

Hotel Rates: Sun-Thu. $92.66; Fri-Sat. $138.06

Hotel Reservation: 1-866-386-7829, Group Code CHESS102025

PRIZE FUND $27,500 (b/275) Gtd. $17,000

A great tournament - Yes!...But so much more...

IM John Donaldson: *"A Weikel Tournament is like a chess festival!"*

Just Look! Wed.: GM Kudrin Clock Simul/Analysis! (only $30)

Thu.: 6-7:15P Premier Chess Lecturer IM Donaldson (FREE)

7:30P GM Khachiyan - Simul ($20); 7:30P Blitz Tourney ($25)

Sat.: 3-4:30P IM Donaldson FREE Game/Position Analysis

Plus: Trophies, Sets & boards provided, Wall charts,

5 Demo boards, Entry under $195!

Player: *"I've played all over the US; this is the best organized chess tournament I've seen."*

INFO: Email wackyykl@aol.com or Web: www.renochess.org

SEE TLA on page 58

ARIZONA

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — CA TLA# 48968
30th Annual Pacific Coast Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50688
2025 Sacramento Senior Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

NOVEMBER 7-9, 2025 — CA-S TLA# 50643
20th annual Los Angeles Open
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

CALIFORNIA

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — CA TLA# 48968
30th Annual Pacific Coast Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 9, 2025 — CA TLA# 49052
11th annual Pacific Coast Open Blitz Championship
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — CA TLA# 49352
15th Annual Central California Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50688
2025 Sacramento Senior Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

OCTOBER 25, 2025 — CA TLA# 50842
USC Invitational Chess Tournament, Joseph D. Atkinson III Memorial
Site: University of Southern California, Tutor Campus Center, Room 350 / 351 / 352 **Address:** 3607 Trousdale Pkwy., Los Angeles, CA 90089 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Ben Eubanks, USC '78 • *ben.eubanks@alumni.usc.edu* • (310) 968-4459

NOVEMBER 7-9, 2025 — CA-S TLA# 50643
20th annual Los Angeles Open
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

COLORADO

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

CONNECTICUT

AUGUST 14-17, 2025 — MA TLA# 48969
55th Annual Continental Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — MA TLA# 50123
14th annual Hartford Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NOVEMBER 15-16, 2025 — NY TLA# 50845
9th Annual New York State Girls Championship!
See New York.

DELAWARE

JULY 11-SEPT. 13, 2025 - MONTHLY ON FRI. AND SAT. — DE TLA# 50388
Dover Elks Rapid Swiss Open
Site: Dover Elks Lodge **Address:** 200 S Saulsbury Rd, Dover, DE 19904 **Overall Prize Fund:** $300 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Delaware Chess Association • *aa.legolas@gmail.com* • **4102193179** • *https://delawarechessassociation.org/*

DIST. OF COLUMBIA

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC TLA# 49021
57th Annual Atlantic Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 23, 2025 — DC TLA# 49056
12th annual Atlantic Open Blitz Championship
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA TLA# 50760
50th annual Eastern Open!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

FLORIDA

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 — FL TLA# 50780
CFCC 2025 Autumn Open - Saturday Night Blitz
Site: Holiday Inn at Lake Buena Vista **Address:** 13351 State Road 535 Orlando, Florida 32821 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Central Florida Chess Club (CFCC) • *info@centralflchess.org* • *www.centralflchess.org/cfcc-2025-autumn-open-and-scholastic-weekend-tournament*

GEORGIA

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

IDAHO

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50688
2025 Sacramento Senior Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

ILLINOIS

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — IN TLA# 49375
20th Annual Indianapolis Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

35th annual NORTH AMERICAN OPEN

Dec 26-30, 26-29 or 27-29, 2025, Las Vegas - GM & IM norms possible!

$130,000 PRIZE FUND UNCONDITIONALLY GUARANTEED!

Open Section: 9 rounds, Dec 26-30, 40/90, SD/30; d30.
Other sections: 7 rounds, Dec 26-29 or 27-29, 40/90, SD/30; d30 (3-day option, rds 1-2 G/60 d10).

At Horseshoe Casino Resort, 3645 Las Vegas Blvd So, Las Vegas NV 89103. Free parking for guests.
In 8 sections. Open Section uses December FIDE ratings, other sections Dec official USCF ratings**.** Top 3 sections are also FIDE rated.

Open Section: $10000-5000-3000-2000-1300-1000-800-700-600-500, clear/tiebreak win $300 bonus, top FIDE U2400/Unr $3000-2000-1000, 300 GPP.
Under 2300, Under 2100, Under 1900: Each $7000-4000-2000-1200-800-600-500-500-400-400.
Under 1700: $6000-3000-1500-1000-800-600-500-500-400-400.
Under 1500: $5000-2500-1300-1000-700-600-500-400-300-300.
Under 1300: $4000-2000-1000-800-600-500-400-400-300-300.
Under 1000: $1500-1000-600-400-300-300-300-200-200-200.

Prize limits: 1) Unrated limit U1000 $300, U1300 $500, U1500 $700, U1700 $1000, U1900 $1500, U2100 $2000. 2) Under 26 games by Dec. list, limit U1000 $800, U1300 $1500, U1500 or U1700 $3000. 3) If any USCF post-event Regular OTB or Regular Online rating from events ending 12/20/24-12/20/25, or current Online Regular rating, was more than 40 points over section maximum, limit $1500. 4) Balance of any limited prize goes to next player(s) in line.
Cannot play below Online Regular rating minus 100 points.
Mixed doubles: $2000-1000-500-300-200. **See chessevents.us.**
Top 6 sections entry fee: $245 at chessaction.com by 9/20, $275 by 12/23, $300 later online or at site until 1 hour before round 1. **Open Section $800 additional fee unless** USCF-rated 2300+ or FIDE rated 2100+.
Special entry fee: U1000 Section $150 less, Senior 65/over in U1300/up, $100 less. Re-entry (no Open) $120.

Unofficial USCF or Online Regular USCF ratings usually used if otherwise unrated.

5-day late reg. ends 12/26 10 am, rds 12/26-28 11 & 6, 12/29 10 & 4:30, 12/30 10 am (Open Section).
4-day late reg. ends 12/26 5 pm, rounds 12/26 6 pm, 12/27-28 11 & 6, 12/29 10 am & 4:30 pm.
3-day late reg. ends 12/27 10 am, rounds 12/27 11, 2:30 & 6, 12/28 11 & 6, 12/29 10 & 4:30.
1/2-pt byes OK all, limit 3 (limit 2 in last 4 rds). Must commit before round 3.
More rules at chessevents.us
Bring set, board, clock if possible- none supplied.
USCF membership required; see chessevents.us for special rates.
Special room rate at Horseshoe $109-139. Use link at **chessevents.us** or 800-833-3308. Rooms may sell out by mid-Nov.

Entry: chessaction.com. No mail entries, no checks. Refunds, $15 service charge.
Questions, email: chesstour.info, **director@chess.us**.

Blitz tournament 12/29 10:30 pm. Enter online by 7 pm 12/29 for lowest fee.

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — MI TLA# 50840
2025 Harold Steen Memorial Cup
See Michigan.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 — IL TLA# 51078
The Marvin Cole Memorial Chess Tournament
Site: Park Forest American Legion Post 1198 **Address:** 1631 Western Ave, Chicago Heights, IL 60411 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Herbert Ferguson • *saint21961@yahoo.com* • 7089256469

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — IL TLA# 50084
33rd annual Midwest Class Championships
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH TLA# 50644
34th annual Kings Island Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

INDIANA

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — IN TLA# 49375
20th annual Indianapolis Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — MI TLA# 50840
2025 Harold Steen Memorial Cup
See Michigan.

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — IL TLA# 50084
33rd annual Midwest Class Championships
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — FL TLA# 50779
CFCC 2025 Autumn Open & Scholastic
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — OH TLA# 50847
10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
See Ohio.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 — IL TLA# 51078
The Marvin Cole Memorial Chess Tournament
See Illinois.

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH TLA# 50644
34th annual Kings Island Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

IOWA

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
2025 US National G30 and G60 Chess Championship Tournament
SEPTEMBER 27-28, 2025 — IA TLA# 49959
See Nationals

KANSAS

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

KENTUCKY

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — IN TLA# 49375
20th annual Indianapolis Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — OH TLA# 50847
10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
See Ohio.

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH TLA# 50644
34th annual Kings Island Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MARYLAND

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC TLA# 49021
57th Annual Atlantic Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — NJ TLA# 50642
29th annual Eastern Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NOVEMBER 28-30, 2025 — PA TLA# 50757
56th annual National Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA TLA# 50760
50th annual Eastern Open!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MASSACHUSETTS

AUGUST 14-17, 2025 — MA TLA# 48969
55th Annual Continental Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 16, 2025 — MA TLA# 49053
11th annual Continental Open Blitz Championship
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

REGIONALS
SEPTEMBER 6, 2025 — MA TLA# 48662
1st Richard Zyra Memorial
Site: St. John's Lutheran Church **Address:** 60 Broad Street, Westfield, MA 01085 **Overall Prize Fund:** $750 b/30 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Greater Baystate Chess • *greater.baystate.chess@gmail.com* • 4133560303 • *www.greaterbaystatechess.com*

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — MA TLA# 50123
14th annual Hartford Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

REGIONALS
OCTOBER 18, 2025 — MA TLA# 48666
1st Harvest Chess Fest
Site: Florence Civic Center **Address:** 90 Park Street, Florence, MA 01062 **Overall Prize Fund:** $700 b/30 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Greater Baystate Chess • *greater.baystate.chess@gmail.com* • 4133560303 • *www.greaterbaystatechess.com*

MICHIGAN

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
AUGUST 16-17, 2025 — MI TLA# 50241
2025 Michigan Upper Peninsula Open
Site: Bay Mills Community College, Adikameg Hall **Address:** 12214 W Lakeshore Drive, Brimley, MI, 49715 **Overall Prize Fund:** see online TLA **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Jim Sawaski • *jsawaski@yahoo.com* • *www.michess.org*

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — OH TLA# 50847
10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
See Ohio.

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — MI TLA# 50840
2025 Harold Steen Memorial Cup
Site: Crowne Plaza - Auburn Hills **Address:** 1500 Opdyke Rd., Auburn Hills, MI 48326 **Overall Prize Fund:** $6,000 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** Y **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Edward Mandell • *eman1943@aol.com* • *2486352375*

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 — IL TLA# 51078
The Marvin Cole Memorial Chess Tournament
See Illinois.

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH TLA# 50644
34th annual Kings Island Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

MINNESOTA

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

MISSISSIPPI

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
SEPTEMBER 13, 2025 — MS TLA# 50820
2025 Mississippi State Women's Championship
Site: Nissan Training Center **Address:** 300 Nissan Drive, Gate 1, Canton, MS 39046 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Mississippi Chess Association • *jmark@mcachess.org* • 615-631-3876 • *www.mcachess.org*

MONTANA

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

NEBRASKA

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
2025 US National G30 and G60 Chess Championship Tournament
SEPTEMBER 27-28, 2025 — IA TLA# 49959
See Nationals

NEVADA

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — CA TLA# 48968
30th Annual Pacific Coast Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — CA TLA# 49352
15th Annual Central California Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50688
2025 Sacramento Senior Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

NOVEMBER 7-9, 2025 — CA-S TLA# 50643
20th annual Los Angeles Open
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NEW JERSEY

AUGUST 14-17, 2025 — MA TLA# 48969
55th Annual Continental Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC TLA# 49021
57th Annual Atlantic Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 23, 2025 — NJ TLA# 47755
Hamilton Chess Club Quads
Site: Switlik Park Pavilion **Address:** Fisher Place/Joe Dimaggio Drive, Hamilton, NJ 08610 **Overall Prize Fund:** $25 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Edward Sytnik • *edmendou@aol.com* • 6097582326 • *hamiltonchessclub.com*

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20, 2025 — NJ TLA# 47756
Hamilton Chess Club Quads
Site: Switlik Park Pavilion **Address:** Fisher Place/Joe Dimaggio Drive, Hamilton, NJ 08610 **Overall Prize Fund:** $25 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Edward Sytnik • *edmendou@aol.com* • 6097582326 • *hamiltonchessclub.com*

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — MA TLA# 50123
14th annual Hartford Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — NJ TLA# 50642
29th annual Eastern Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NOVEMBER 15-16, 2025 — NY TLA# 50845
9th Annual New York State Girls Championship!
See New York.

NOVEMBER 28-30, 2025 — PA TLA# 50757
56th annual National Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA TLA# 50760
50th annual Eastern Open!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NEW MEXICO

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NEW YORK

AUGUST 10, 2025 — NY TLA# 50766
Sunday Night Staunton Quick Chess — August
Site: Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church **Address:** 175 Fifth Avenue, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Alan LeCours • *alecours1@hotmail.com* • **5189444450**

AUGUST 14-17, 2025 — MA TLA# 48969
55th Annual Continental Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC TLA# 49021
57th Annual Atlantic Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025— NY TLA# 49022
147th Annual New York State Championship — America's Oldest Annual Tournament!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

AUGUST 31, 2025— NY TLA# 49023
11th annual New York State Blitz Championship
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

OCTOBER 10-12, 2025 — MA TLA# 50123
14th annual Hartford Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — NJ TLA# 50642
29th annual Eastern Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
NOVEMBER 15-16, 2025 — NY TLA# 50845
9th Annual New York State Girls Championship!
Site: Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School **Address:** 36 West 93rd Street, New York, NY 10025 **Overall Prize Fund:** $1,000 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** Y **Residency:** N **Org:** Chess Center Of New York • *director@chessgirls.win, chesscentr@gmail.com* • *www.chessgirls.win*

NOVEMBER 28-30, 2025 — PA TLA# 50757
56th annual National Chess Congress
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA TLA# 50760
50th annual Eastern Open!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NORTH CAROLINA

AUGUST 3, 2025 — NC TLA# 50289
Dragon Knight Chess Friendship Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

AUGUST 8-10, 2025 — NC TLA# 50328
2025 DKC Heart of the Carolinas FIDE Summer Classic
See Grand Prix.

AUGUST 17, 2025 — NC TLA# 50863
Dragon Knight Chess National Non Profit Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

AUGUST 24, 2025 — NC TLA# 50864
Dragon Knight Chess 2nd Annual National Waffle Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

AUGUST 31, 2025 — NC TLA# 50866
Dragon Knight Chess Pony Express Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025 — NC TLA# 50867
Dragon Knight Chess National Grandparents Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2025 — NC TLA# 50868
Dragon Knight Chess National Hug Your Hound Day Grand Prix
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-29, 2025 — VA TLA# 50760
50th annual Eastern Open!
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

NORTH DAKOTA

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

OHIO

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — IN TLA# 49375
20th Annual Indianapolis Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — OH TLA# 50847
10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
Site: Salt Fork State Park Lodge **Address:** 14755 Cadiz Rd, Lore City, OH 43755 **Overall Prize Fund:** n/a **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Grant Neilley • *grant@neilley.com* • 6143141102 • *www.neilley.com/chess*

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — MI TLA# 50840
2025 Harold Steen Memorial Cup
See Michigan.

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2025 — OH TLA# 50644
34th annual Kings Island Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

OREGON

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50688
2025 Sacramento Senior Championship
See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
35th annual North American Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

PENNSYLVANIA

AUGUST 22-24, 2025 — DC TLA# 49021
57th Annual Atlantic Open
See Grand Prix or chessevents.us.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT
AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — NY TLA# 49022
147th Annual New York State Championship – America's Oldest Annual Tournament
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AUG. 30-SEPT. 1, 2025 — NJ TLA# 50341
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10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
See Ohio.

SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025 — MI TLA# 50840
2025 Harold Steen Memorial Cup
See Michigan.

OCTOBER 24-26, 2025 — NJ TLA# 50642
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NOVEMBER 15-16, 2025 — NY TLA# 50845
9th Annual New York State Girls Championship!
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See Grand Prix.

SOUTH CAROLINA

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2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
See Grand Prix.

SOUTH DAKOTA

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2025 — SD TLA# 50282
2025 South Dakota Governor's Cup
See Grand Prix.

TENNESSEE

AUGUST 16, 2025 — TN TLA# 50677
Johnson City Swiss
Site: Mulligan's Gaming Pub **Address:** 308 E. Main St, Johnson City, TN 37601 **Overall Prize Fund:** $350 b/30 **GP Pts:** n/a **FIDE:** N **Accessible:** N **Residency:** N **Org:** Johnson City Chess Club • *johnsoncitychessclub@gmail.com* • 5619290856

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TEXAS

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2025 Harvey Lerman Florida State Championship
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See Grand Prix.

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AUG. 30-SEPT. 1, 2025 — VA TLA# 50330
2025 (86th) Virginia Closed
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See Grand Prix.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025 — CA-N TLA# 50689
Sacramento Chess Club Weekend Swiss #25
See Grand Prix.

DECEMBER 26-30, 2025 — NV TLA# 50756
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WEST VIRGINIA

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10th Annual Golden Buckeye Senior Open
See Ohio.

WISCONSIN

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1, 2025 — FL TLA# 49841
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See Grand Prix.

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Solutions

PAGE 15 CHESS TO ENJOY

PROBLEM 1. 30. Rc8+! Qxc8 31. Nxe7 mate. Or 30. … Ne8 31. Nxe7+ Qxe7 32. Qxe7. **PROBLEM 2.** White resigned after **26. ... Qc4!** because 27. … Qxf1+ and 27. … Rb8 were threatened. If, say, 27. Rd1, 27. … Qxf4 28. Kg1 Bc5 and mate is coming up.**PROBLEM 3. 30. Qb2!** threatens 31. e6+, e.g., 30. … Re6 31. f5 or 30. … Kh7 31. Rxd7 and 32. Nf6+. **PROBLEM 4.** After **28. ... Qa7!** there is no good answer to the threat of 29. … Re2 30. Qf1 Ne3. **PROBLEM 5. 33. ... Bxh2+! 34. Kxh2 Rxd2 35. Rxd2 Rh5+.** Now 36. Kg1 Rh1 is mate; White resigned after 36. Kg3 Rg5. **PROBLEM 6. 20. Ng7+!** Bxg7 21. Rxe6+! Kd8 (21. … Bxe6 22. Qxe6+ Kd8 23. Be7+ Qxe7 24. Rxc8 mate) 22. Be7+ Ke8 23 Bd6+ wins the queen. Or 20. … Kd8 21. Nxe6+ Bxe6 22. Qxe6 Re8 23. Qxd5+.

PAGE 49 ABCS OF CHESS

PROBLEM 1. Mating net: White mates in 2: **1. Qe7+ Kd4 2. Qe3 mate**. The queen could also go to f6 or g7. **PROBLEM 2. Mating net**: White wins in 2: **1. Qxf5+ Ke7 2. Bxg5 mate**. **PROBLEM 3. Mating net**: Black feels bad after **1. Qxg6+ hxg6 2. Rh8 mate**. **PROBLEM 4. Mating net**: White subdues in 2: **1. Qa3+ Bc5 2. Qxc5 mate**. **PROBLEM 5. Mating net**: Black is brutishly mated in 2: **1. Qa7+ Kc6** (or 1. … Bb7 2. Qxb7 mate) **2. Nd4 mate**. **PROBLEM 6. Mating net**: Black has terminality after **1. Bc4+ Ke5 2. Bg3 mate**.

PAGE 53 MAKE YOUR MOVE

TACTIC 1. 66. ... Ne4! This move allows Black to attack more targets than White can defend. **67. Bxe4 fxe4** Clearing the f5-square for the knight, so it can attack the e3- and g3-pawns at the same time while forcing White's king to stay planted at f2. **68. Nc3 Nf5 69. Kf2 Kb6** Right now, White has all the potential entry squares for Black's king covered. Unfortunately, for White, he has to make a move, and this allows Black to first enter, then attack the b3-pawn, and eventually take it. **70. Na4+ Kb5 71. Nc5 Kb4 72. Nb7 Kxb3 73. Nxa5+** White managed to exchange the queenside pawns. The next problem is the e3-pawn, and here, there is no remedy. **73. ... Kc3 74. Nb7 Kd2 75. Nc5 Nxe3 76. Nb3+ Kc3 77. Nc5 Nf5 78. Nxe6 Kd2, White resigned**. The e-pawn cannot be stopped. Caruana – Nakamura, Norway Chess 2025. **TACTIC 2. 23. Qa4!** The move that Humpy Koneru had overlooked when playing her previous move (22. ... Bc5). Now the queen is hanging but so is the knight on f4. If Black exchanges queens on a4, White recaptures and simultaneously threatens the bishop on c5. **23. ... Qb6** Black keeps the queens on the board in the hope that she will be able to create complications later. **24. gxf4 Bxf2 25. Be2 Qe3+ 26. Kb1 Qxf4 27. Nd4 Bd7 28. Bg4** Eliminating material through exchanges is often the best way to convert a material advantage. **28. ... Bxg4 29. hxg4 Qxe5** Or 29. ... Qxg4 30. Nf5 gives White a strong attack in addition to the material advantage. **30. Nf5 Qf4 31. Qc4 Qxg4 32. Nd6+ Kc7 33. Qxf7+ Qd7 34. Ncb5+, Black resigned**. She loses further material. The blunder in this game undoubtedly cost Koneru the tournament victory. Lei Tingjie – H. Koneru, Norway Chess Women 2025. **TACTIC 3. 43. f5!** A very strong move. The key is to expose Black's king and take aim at the f7-square. It allows White the opportunity to win the h-pawn, providing White with an extra point of attack by advancing his h-pawn. **43. ... Ra1** Black tries to create counterplay through activity, a good practical try rather than opting for the "objectively" better move. The engines prefer 43. ... exf5+, but after 44. Kxh4! Ra5 45. Kg5 f4+ 46. Kg4, White can play Bd3-c4 with a serious advantage. **44. fxe6 fxe6 45. Bc4 Rg1+ 46. Kh5!** It would be wrong to capture the h-pawn, as it allows Black's king to escape, while trapping White's king on the h-file: 46. Kxh4?? Be7+! 47. Kh5 Kf7! 48. Rb6 Rg5+ with a perpetual check. **46. ... e5 47. e4** A simple yet beautiful move; by fixing Black's pawns on dark squares, Black is stuck with bad pawns and a poor bishop. **47. ... Re1 48. Bd5 Be7 49. b4 Re3 50. b5** Not the only way to win, but the b-pawn will cost Black either the bishop or the rook. White "just" needs to calculate whether the black h-pawn potentially can become dangerous. **50. ... Rxh3 51. b6 Bc5 52. Rb8+ Ke7 53. b7 Bd6 54. Ra8 Rf3 55. b8=Q, Black resigned**. Caruana - Wei Yi, Norway Chess 2025. **TACTIC 4. 28. g6+! Kg8** Obviously, Black cannot play the king to the h-file on account of 29. Qh5+, picking up the bishop. **29. Qb3** The point behind the previous move: the threat is the discovered check with Rd5-e5+, winning material. **29. ... Be3+** 29. ... Re3 is met with 30. c3, e.g., 30. ... Kh8 31. Rxc5 Rg3 32. Rd1 Rxg6 33. Qb4 b6 34. Rh5+ Qxh5 35. Qxf8+ Kh7 36. Qxf4 and White is winning. **30. Kb1! Kh8 31. fxe3 Rxe3** Black's problem is that the queen cannot leave e2; it has to keep protecting against a lethal check on h5. **32. Qb4! Rc8 33. Rc1! Re4 34. Qa5** Threatening Rd5-h5+. **34. ... Kg8 35. b3 Ree8 36. Qxa7 Qe6 37. Qd4 f3** Or 37. ... Rf8 38. Rd7 Rf6 39. Rf1 and White wins. **38. Rg5 Qe4 39. Qxe4 Rxe4 40. Rf5, Black resigned**. The endgame is lost. D. Gukesh – Wei Yi, Norway Chess 2025. **TACTIC 5. 24. ... Rxf4!** If Black recaptured with the pawn, White would have a small but clear advantage, e.g., 24. ... exf4 25. e5 Be7 26. e6. After the text move, however, Black takes control over the dark squares and kills all active play on White's part. **25. Nxf4 exf4 26. e5 Be7 27. d4??** Unexpected and unnecessary desperation on White's part. The women's world champion should have played 27. e6 Qc7 (or *27. ... Qxd3 28. Qxd3 Rxd3 29. Bb2 Rd2 30. Red1 Re2 31. Re1* with a potential repetition of moves) 28. Qe2 Bg6 29. Red1 Bf6 30. Bxf6 gxf6 31. Bh3 Kf8 and Black has full compensation for the Exchange but not much more than that. **27. ... cxd4 28. Bd2 Qf5** Now Black has a positionally won position and eventually converted. Ju Wenjun – A. Muzychuk, Norway Chess Women 2025. **TACTIC 6. 48. c6!** The only winning move. 48. e6? is met by 48. ... Rf8! 49. g4 Qg5 threatening ... Rf8-f4 when Black has sufficient compensation and White cannot make meaningful progress. **48. ... Kh7 49. e6!** Again, the only move. **49. ... Qg6 50. Re2** Now White has several winning ideas, but the text move does the job without allowing Black any counterplay. **50. ... Ra8 51. Qxd5! Ra3 52. Qe4, Black resigned**. Black can capture on g3, but after Kg2-f2, he is out of checks and cannot stop the passed pawns. Carlsen – Caruana, Norway Chess 2025. **TACTIC 7. 49. ... Re4!** In the game, Caruana instead went for **49. ... Be4?! 50. Qf4 Qxc3 51. Be3 Bg6 52. g4!** Creating counterplay. **52. ... hxg4?! 53. h5 Bxh5 54. Qf5+ Bg6** *(54. ... Kg8!)* **55. Qxg4 Qe5+??** (Black could hold the balance with *55. ... Qc7+ 56. Rg3 Qc2)* **56. Rg3** Now, Black loses material and the game. **56. ... Qh5+ 57. Rh3 Qxh3+ 58. Qxh3+ Kg8 59. Qg4 Bd3 60. Bh6 Re7 61. Bxg7 Be2 62. Qg6 Rxg7 63. Qe8+ Kh7 64. Qxe2 Rg5 65. Qxa6 Kg7 66. f4 Rg4 67. f5 Rb4 68. Kg3 Rb1 69. Qa7+ Kh6 70. Qf7 Rb3+ 71. Qxb3, Black resigned**. Erigaisi – Caruana, Norway Chess 2025. **50. Rd1** Or 50. Qd2 a5 51. c4 a4 52. Rc1 Qf5 53. Be3 Rxc4, and Black is winning. **50. ... a5 51. Re1 Rxe1 52. Qxe1 Be4 53. Qg1 Kh8** and White is out of good moves. Black will keep advancing the a-pawn and pick up the c-pawn. White will remain stuck due to the weak light squares around his king. **TACTIC 8. 33. Qh4! Kg7 34. f5!** The best continuation. In the game, White continued **34. Rxd3?!** which made the win a lot more complicated, albeit not impossible. **34. ... cxd3 35. Nh5+ Kg8 36. Qd8+ Qf8 37. Qxd3?** (Now, it's getting really tricky) **37. ... f5 38. Qd7 Bxe4+ 39. Kg1 Bd5 40. gxf5?** (Here, White should have played *40. Qxb5;* now Black should hold) **40. ... Qc5+ 41. Kf1 Bc4+ 42. Kg2 Qd5+ 43. Qxd5 exd5 44. Kf3 d4 45. cxd4 b4 46. Ke3 Kf7 47. Ng3 Ke7 48. Kd2 Kd6??** *(48. ... Kf6!* is the only move to hold the draw, e.g., *49. Ne4+ Kxf5 50. Nd6+ Kxf4 51. Nxc4 Ke4* with a draw, but Gukesh was playing on increments and couldn't calculate everything) **49. Ne4+ Kd5 50. Ke3 b3 51. f6 Ke6 52. f5+ Kd7 53. Kd2 b2 54. Nc5+ Ke8 55. Kc2 Kf7 56. Kxb2 Bf1 57. Ne4 Bg2 58. Ng3 Kxf6 59. h4 Bd5 60. Kc3 Ke7 61. Kd3 Kd6 62. Ne4+, Black resigned**. Erigaisi – D. Gukesh, Norway Chess 2025. **34. ... Rd1+ 35. Kg2 Qg1+ 36. Kh3** Black is out of checks and now White takes over. **36. ... Qh1 37. Qg5+ Kf8 38. Nxh7+ Ke8 39. Qg8+ Kd7 40. Qxf7+ Kc8 41. Qxe6+ Kb8 42. Ng5** and White wins. **TACTIC 9. 44. ... f5!** In the game, the Norwegian world number one instead played **44. ... Kg4 45. Qf5+ Kg3 46. Qe5+ Kf3 47. Qf5+ Kg3 48. Qe5+ Kf3 49. Qf5+ Ke3 50. Nd5+ Kd4 51. Ke1 Rxa2?** *(51. ... Rh2* would still have given Black winning chances) **52. Qd7 Ra1+ 53. Ke2 Ra2+ 54. Ke1 Ra1+ 55. Ke2 Ra2+ 56. Ke1, draw**. Black is still better, but the win is really complex. Erigaisi – Carlsen, Norway Chess 2025. **45. Qe8+** The pawn cannot be touched: 45. Qxf5 Ng3+, or 45. Nxf5 Rf2+ 46. Ke1 Nf3+ 47. Kd1 Nc3+. **45. ... Kg4 46. Qg8** If 46. Qg6, then 46. ... Ng3+ 47. Kg1 (or *47. Ke1 Re2+*, winning the knight) 47. ... Kf3 48. Qc6+ N5e4 with mate in two moves. **46. ... Kh3!,** and the threatened knight checks force White to give up the queen to delay mate.

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KELLY CHEN AND CASEY AHLBRANDT-RAINS

CHILD PSYCHIATRIST AND ACTUARY

WHEN WE FIRST MET, WE DIDN’T expect chess to come up, let alone bring us closer together. But shortly into our first date, we realized we had both played growing up: Kelly started at 10 years old, eventually earning a spot at the Denker Tournament of High School Champions. Casey had peaked earlier, winning his state’s scholastic elementary championship in third grade.

We were both pulled away from the board by other interests as we grew up. Neither of us had played in years when we met as adults, but the surprising connection led to a second date where we dusted off an old chess set to play some blitz.

Our playing styles reflect our contrasting personalities: Kelly favors classic lines and plays a long game of attrition, while Casey likes strategic chaos and forcing opponents to think on their feet. It was a night filled with laughter that ended with a tally of 6-0 to Kelly.

Casey, smitten and hoping to impress, signed up for a *Chess.com* membership and played more than 1,000 blitz games in a single month. Our go-to date became playing chess at a local Sweetwater Tavern, and we’ve brought a set with us on travels all over the world. You could say we fell in love over the board. We’re now pretty evenly matched, and chess is once again a staple in our lives.

Here’s a blitz game we played during a layover in Frankfurt on our first international trip together:

CHECKS AND CAPTURES

Kelly Chen
Casey Ahlbrandt-Rains
Blitz game, 2024

(see diagram top of next column)

True to form, Kelly had developed early and castled, while Casey had deferred castling and made a questionable bishop sacrifice (“for a little drama,” he’d playfully say). Although down material, Casey had a significant time advantage. Enticed by a strong pawn chain, Kelly played d4-d5 in the above position. Casey then stumbled upon **his best move: 1. ... Nxd5!,** hoping to catch Kelly off guard and capitalize on her tendency to overcalculate under time pressure.

BLACK TO MOVE

However, we both soon realized it was better than just a psychological bluff: White’s c3-knight is now pinned, and taking Black’s knight leads to ... Bg7xc3, forking White’s rooks. It’s not devastating for White, but over-analyzing the position cost Kelly seconds she didn’t have, and she ultimately lost on time. We appreciated the ironic outcome and chuckled as we boarded our flight and spent the next week exploring Germany and visiting family.

Chess aside, we agree that our best move was finding each other. Our contrasting styles and perspectives not only make for interesting blitz matches but bring strength and joy to our partnership. After countless games and hours together, we know each other pretty well both on and off the board. We’re excited to move forward and be married in August 2025.

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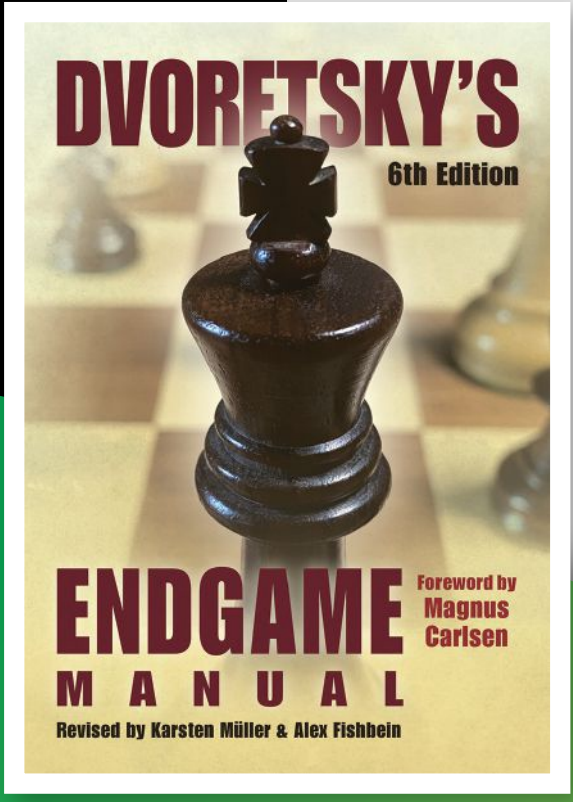

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