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AMERICAN CHESS MAGAZINE

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WHERE GREAT MINDS MEET

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ARONIAN IS BACK TO THE TOP

Exclusive annotations by Levon Aronian

2023 American Cup in St. Louis

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John Burke

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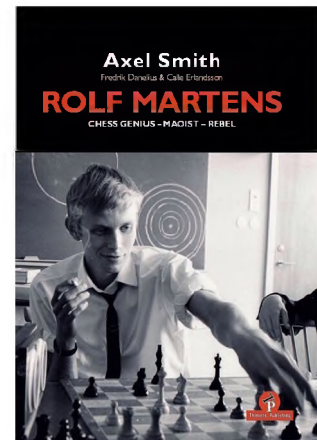
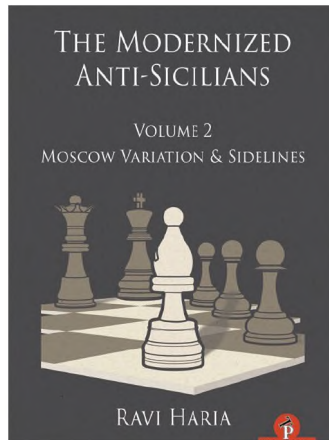
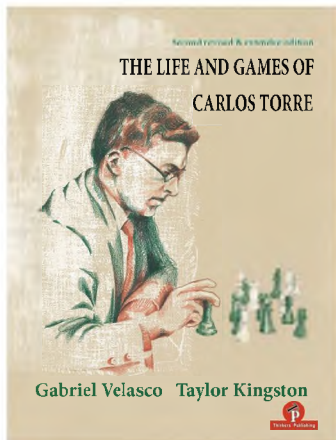
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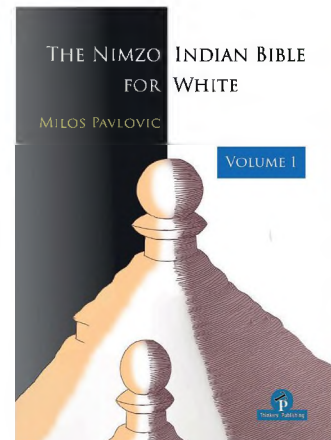
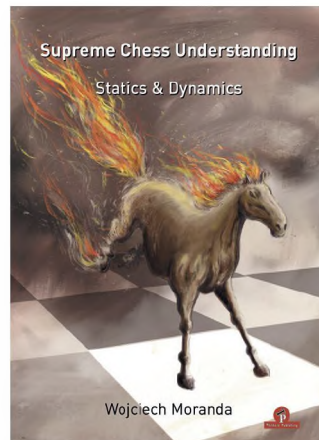
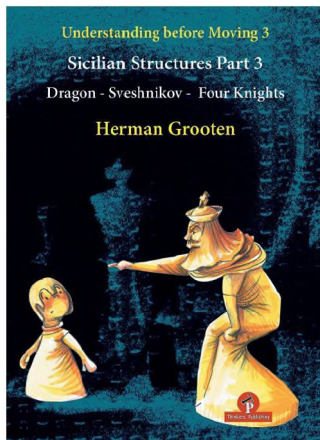


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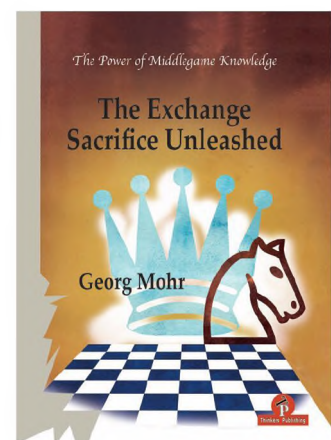
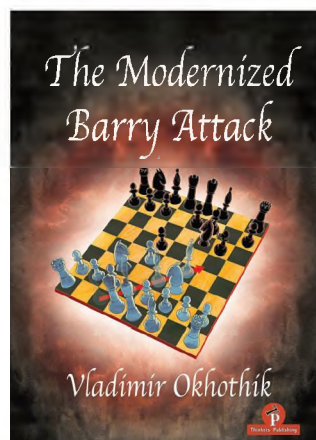
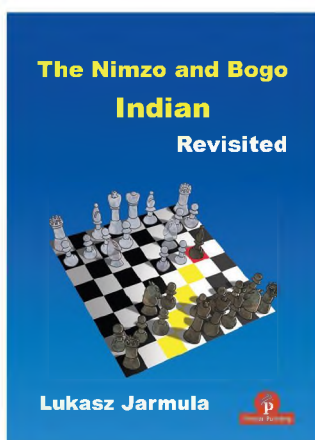
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LATEST NEWS

FIDE World Championship 2023 NEPOMNIACHTCHI CLAIMS VICTORY IN SECOND GAME

In the second game of the 2023 FIDE World Championship, Ian Nepomniachtchi defeated Ding Liren with the black pieces in a 29-move Queen's Gambit. The first game, featuring the Ruy Lopez, ended in a draw after 49 moves.

The championship is taking place in Astana, Kazakhstan, from April 7th to May 1st. With Magnus Carlsen's withdrawal, a new World Champion will be crowned as the challenger, world number two Ian Nepomniachtchi, and the runner-up in the Candidates Tournament, current world number three Ding Liren, vie for the vacant title.



D30

Ding Liren 2788 - Ian Nepomniachtchi 2795

Astana 2023

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.h3 dxc4 5.e3 c5
6.♗xc4 a6 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♘c3 b5 9.♗d3 ♗b7
10.a4 b4 11.♘e4 ♘a5 12.♘xf6+ gxf6 13.e4
c4 14.♗c2 ♗c7 15.♗d2 ♗g8 16.♗c1 0-0-0



17.♗d3 ♗b8 18.♗e1 f5 19.♗c2 ♘c6 20.♗g5
♗xg5 21.♘xg5 ♘xd4 22.♗h5 f6 23.♘f3
♘xc2 24.♗xc2 ♗xe4 25.♗d2 ♗d6 26.♗h1
c3 27.bxc3 bxc3 28.♗d4 c2 29.♗h6 e5 0-1

2023 FIDE Women's Candidates Final LEI TINGJIE IS THE NEW CHALLENGER

Chinese grandmaster Lei Tingjie defeated her compatriot Tan Zhongyi in the final match of the 2023 Women's Candidates and thus earned the right to challenge the Women's World Champion Ju Wenjun for the title in July this year.

This final match was held in Chongqing, China from March 27 to April 3. The two candidates were scheduled to play six classical games (G90/40+30 with a 30-second increment starting from move one), but the match was decided after only five games as Tingjie won 3½ - 1½. Curiously enough, Zhongyi won the first game in the match, when Tingjie immediately equalized the score in game 2. The third game ended in a draw before Tingjie abruptly shifted to a higher gear by winning games 4 and 5, closing the match without any need for the last scheduled classical game to be played.



2023 Grand Chess Tour

The world chess elite will continue to compete in an international chess tournament circuit. The Grand Chess Tour (GCT) announced their schedule for 2023 as follows:

- Superbet Chess Classic Romania: May 4-16, Bucharest, Romania
- Superbet Rapid & Blitz Poland: May 19-26, Warsaw, Poland
- SuperUnited Rapid & Blitz Croatia: July 3-10, Zagreb, Croatia
- Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz: November 12-19, Saint Louis
- Sinquefeld Cup: November 19 - December 3, Saint Louis

The Tour participants will compete for \$1.4 million in cash over the course of the 2023 season, including the likes of world No.1 player Magnus Carlsen, last year's Tour winner Alireza Firouzja, both contenders for the 2023 World Championship, Ding Liren and Ian Nepomniachtchi, American superstars Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So, and more.

2023 President's Cup WEBSTER WINS CONVINCINGLY, BURKE SHINES!

Webster University Team topped the Final Four of College Chess (The President's Cup) held in Saint Louis from April 1-3, 2023. "The Gorloks" continued their perfect winning streak, started at the Pan-Am Intercollegiate in early January (6-0), by winning all three matches in the final event – for a well-deserved sixth title in this prestigious competition of best university teams in the USA.

The winning team was represented by grandmasters Benjamin Gledura, Aram Hakobyan, John Burke, Yuniesky Quesada and Gergely Kantor, led by head coach Le Quang Liem. The driving force of this year's success for Webster was John Burke, who scored a perfect 3/3, and all with the black pieces!

Final Ranking Crosstable							
Rk.	Team	1	2	3	4	Pts	MP
1	Webster University		3	2½	2½	8	6
2	Saint Louis University	1		2	3	6	3
3	The University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley	1½	2		2	5½	2
4	University of Missouri	1½	1	2		4½	1



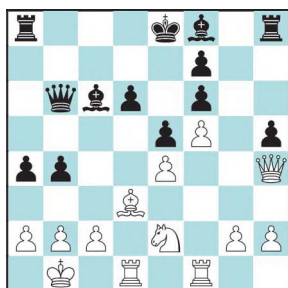
▲ Webster University Team

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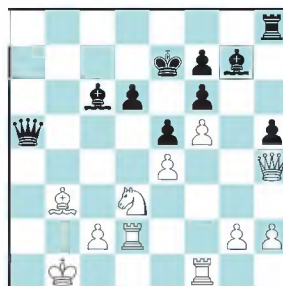
Viktor Gazik 2466 - John Burke 2568

President's Cup, St. Louis 2023

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♙d2 a6 8.0-0-0
♙d7 9.f4 b5 10.♙xf6 gxf6 11.♘b1 ♙b6
12.♘xc6 ♙xc6 13.♙d3 b4 14.♘e2 h5
15.♙hf1 a5 16.♙e1 a4 17.f5 e5 18.♙h4



18...♙e7! 19.♙c4 ♙c5 20.b3 axb3
21.♙xb3 ♙a3 22.♘c1 ♙g7 23.♘d3 ♙a5
24.♙d2 ♙xa2 25.♙xa2 b3 26.♙xb3



26...♙a8! 27.♘b2 ♙a3+ 28.♘c3 ♙c8
29.♙df2 ♙h6 30.♙f4 exf4 31.♘d2 f3+
32.♘e1 fxg2 33.♙g1 ♙a1+ 34.♘f2 ♙e3+
White resigned

FIDE Ratings - Top 10 Open			
1	Magnus Carlsen	NOR	2853
2	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FID	2795
3	Liren Ding	CHN	2788
4	Alireza Firouzja	FRA	2785
5	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2775
6	Anish Giri	NED	2768
7	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2764
8	Wesley So	USA	2760
9	Viswanathan Anand	IND	2754
10	Teimour Radjabov	USA	2747

FIDE Ratings - Top 10 Women			
1	Hou Yifan	CHN	2628
2	Humpy Koneru	IND	2576
3	Aleksandra Goryachkina	FID	2565
4	Kateryna Lagno	FID	2560
5	Ju Wenjun	CHN	2550
6	Lei Tingjie	CHN	2545
7	Alexandra Kosteniuk	SUI	2535
8	Tan Zhongyi	CHN	2526
9	Nana Dzagnidze	GEO	2525
10	Mariya Muzychuk	UKR	2515

FIDE Ratings - USA Top 10 Open			
1	Hikaru Nakamura		2775
2	Fabiano Caruana		2764
3	Wesley So		2760
4	Levon Aronian		2745
5	Leinier Dominguez		2739
6	Sam Shankland		2711
7	Hans Niemann		2706
8	Ray Robson		2704
9	Jeffery Xiong		2692
10	Samuel Sevian		2684

FIDE Ratings - USA Top 10 Women			
1	Irina Krush		2436
2	Alice Lee		2391
3	Carissa Yip		2369
4	Annie Wang		2356
5	Zoey Tang		2348
6	Gulrukhbegim Tohirjonova		2340
7	Anna Zatonskih		2330
8	Nazi Paikidze		2316
9	Rochelle Wu		2306
10	Katerina Nemcova		2305

CHESS IN THE MODERN ERA: INFLUENCERS, POP CULTURE, AND ESPORTS

One day, my 12-year-old son excitedly showed me YouTube videos featuring a renowned chess streamer from NYC, whom I had played against a few years back. The fact that I could prove it instantly boosted my credibility in his eyes. When I mentioned I had also played against Nakamura, I got a taste of what rock star fame might feel like. I was genuinely amazed by how much he had already learned about the game, all without me pushing him. That's when I realized I had seriously underestimated the power of online personalities and pop culture in introducing chess to wider audiences.

Exploring the world of popular chess figures like Hikaru Nakamura, Levy Rozman, the Botez Sisters, Anna Cramling (Pia's daughter), Magnus Carlsen, and many others, I discovered the passion they ignite in younger generations. These online influencers, combined with the rising popularity of platforms like Twitch, have taken chess to new heights. The massive success of Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit* and its protagonist, Beth Harmon, had already showcased how mainstream media can captivate viewers and spark interest in chess.

As online chess evolves into an eSport, featuring new iconic players, die-hard fans, and even cheerleaders, it's crucial to recognize the positive impact of these modern developments. Chess has consistently shown incredible adaptability throughout its history, thriving in a multitude of fascinating ways. We ought to celebrate those who help popularize chess, no matter their backgrounds or methods. The truth is, these influential figures can inspire a new generation of players, nurture a love for the game, and foster its growth in unique ways.

Even if these online personalities secure impressive contracts with specialized agencies and achieve greater financial success than top chess players, we should still appreciate their contributions. We hope they'll use their influence to support and promote the game we all cherish.

I'd argue that the chess community must embrace the diverse ways the game can be popularized and appreciated in today's world. Though it can be tough to admit, these innovations enrich our beloved game and ensure its continued success in the years



to come. In that spirit, traditional-style media like ACM is opening its doors to the brave new world, featuring a cover page and story written by our young editor, Alec Getz.

A few words about issue #32 of our magazine! Recently, several instances and examples have reminded me of our mission and the immense responsibility we have to stay on course. Ultimately, it's all about providing high-quality content, wielding a positive influence on our readers, and nurturing a tight-knit community of brilliant minds, which we believe we've successfully achieved.

While number 32 may not hold any particular significance in the world – after all, no one is born on the 32nd – we've decided to make it important. This issue represents a series of changes in both concept and design. We hope you'll notice the enhancements, which include not only exclusive annotations from Aronian but also a more structured focus on openings and middlegames, an increase in reports on strong tournaments, and additional annotated games. With specific design changes, we can now include more material within the same number of pages.

I believe issue #32 ranks among the best ACMs to date, and I'm excited about its potential impact. Amidst the turmoil in the global chess market, ACM may be one of the last magazines standing, and we're determined to maintain our strong position in the years to come.

Josip Asik, *Editor-in-Chief*



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April 2023



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U.S. ELITE GRANDMASTER LEVON ARONIAN WINS THE INAUGURAL WR CHESS MASTERS IN DUSSELDORF

Free From Prejudice

Famous for his creative playing style and excellent technique, Lev Aronian was able to put his signature on the premiere edition of the chess super-tournament in Dusseldorf, after winning the tie-breaks in superb fashion.

By Dusan Kronic

The WR Chess Masters fielded ten players in what was seemingly a battle of generations. Seasoned grandmasters were led by the 40-year-old Levon Aronian, who was accompanied by Ian Nepomniachtchi, Wesley So, Anish Giri and Jan-Krzysztof Duda. Their opponents were the fast-rising youngsters – Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Dommaraju Gukesh, Vincent Keymer, Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa and Andrey Esipenko.

After five rounds, American GM Levon Aronian took the sole lead with three White wins and two Black draws. After all games ended in a draw in round 6, it seemed that Levon would easily cruise towards a tournament victory.

Then, things got complicated when, in round 7, Levon lost with the white pieces to Ian Nepomniachtchi, and Gukesh won with Black against Esipenko. Eventually, the final standings saw a three-way tie, as Nepomniachtchi managed to win his last-round game against Keymer after a grueling battle. Thus the winner was to be decided in rapid tie-breaks.

The tie-breaks were nothing but a one-man show as Aronian demonstrated his A-game by winning all his three rapid games to clinch an overall tournament win.

“...this one represents the new me, humble and free from prejudice.”



▲ Levon Aronian. Photo by Lennart Ootes

Aronian's Two-Decade Reign in the Chess World

Grandmaster Levon Aronian has been part of the international chess elite for almost two decades now. Ever since his rating first crossed the 2700 mark in July 2005, Levon has firmly established himself as one of the world's best chess players.

When it's about world titles, Levon was the World Youth U-12 Champion in 1994, then World Junior Champion in 2002, Chess960 World Champion in 2006 and 2007, World Rapid Champion in 2009 and World Blitz Champion in 2010. He won three Olympic gold medals with the Armenian team (in 2006, 2008 and 2012), as well as the title of the World Team Champion in 2011.

Twice Aronian won the FIDE World Cup (2005 and 2017), and also competed in the Candidates tournament in 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2018. His career-high FIDE rating peaked at 2830 (fourth-highest in the history of chess) in March 2014, when Levon was the second best player in the world.

In 2021, the Armenian Grandmaster relocated to the United States and began representing his new country in chess competitions.



Exclusive annotations by Levon Aronian

The first round! It always generates so much excitement and anxiety. For a long time I used to play badly in the first round but would console myself that I'm just like Tal.

A20

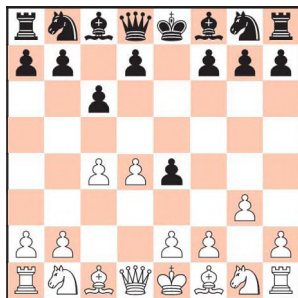
Levon Aronian	2736
R. Praggnanandhaa	2690

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023, Round 1
Notes by Levon Aronian

1.c4 e5 2.g3 c6 The most principled move.

3.d4 3.♘f3 is the other principled move, but since I was not fully prepared for 1...e5 I decided to play the older line.

3...e4 3...exd4 also leads to equal positions after 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♙g2 ♘a6 6.♘f3 ♙c5 7.♗e5+ ♙e7, but 3...e4 is considered to be the best.



4.d5 Many years ago we analysed this position with Arman Pashikyan and thought that 4.c5 is interesting with the

idea of meeting the obvious 4...b6 with 5.♘c3 bxc5 6.d5, with a slight advantage. The way to get a fine position for Black is to play 4...d5 5.cxd6 ♙xd6 and, despite the e4 pawn looking a bit weak, Black is doing fine in all the lines due to having quick development.

In the event of 4.♘c3 d5 5.♘h3 Black has to play the very precise 5...♙b4 and exchange his bishop for the c3 knight in most of the lines, in order to keep the center strong. Since this opening is effectively a reversed Rossolimo Sicilian, a common knowledge of the positions is that the bishop on c1 (on c8 in Black's case) is the only piece that does not have many prospects. The move I chose in the game is more ambitious.



TIE-BREAK STANDINGS

Rk	Name	Rtg	Gms	Pts
1.	Levon ARONIAN	2736	3	3
2.	Dommaraju GUKESH	2718	3	1
3.	Ian NEPOMNIACHTCHI	2793	2	0

WR CHESS MASTERS, Dusseldorf, GER, Feb 15-26, 2023 (10-player round-robin)

Rk	Name	Elo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts	TPR
1	Ian NEPOMNIACHTCHI	2793		½	1	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	5½	2804
2	Dommaraju GUKESH	2718	½		½	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	5½	2813
3	Levon ARONIAN	2736	0	½		½	½	½	1	1	½	1	5½	2811
4	Wesley SO	2766	½	½	½		1	0	½	½	½	½	4½	2727
5	Jan-Krzysztof DUDA	2729	½	½	½	0		½	½	½	½	½	4	2688
6	Vincent KEYMER	2690	0	½	½	1	½		1	½	0	0	4	2693
7	Nodirbek ABDUSATTOROV	2734	½	½	0	½	½	0		½	1	½	4	2688
8	Anish GIRI	2780	½	½	0	½	½	½	½		½	½	4	2683
9	Andrey ESIPENKO	2675	½	0	½	½	½	1	0	½		½	4	2694
10	R. PRAGGNANANDHAA	2690	½	0	0	½	½	1	½	½	½		4	2693

4...♙b4+ 5.♙d2 ♗e7 6.♘h3 There are many options for White, but I find the text to be the most standard.

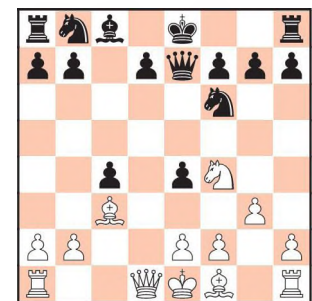
6...♘f6 7.♘c3 cxd5 This came as a surprise. I remembered that 7...0-0 is the most precise move.

8.♘f4 Of course! Otherwise why isn't 7...cxd5 the best move?

8...♙xc3 Both Prag and I thought that 8...dxc4 is very dangerous due to 9.♘fd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♙xd2+ 11.♗xd2 ♗e5 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.f4 exf3 14.exf3 with the initiative. Were we wrong?

I don't know, maybe Black is doing fine after 14...c3 15.bxc3 ♘h8 with the idea of meeting 16.♙c4 by 16...b5, and equalize by bringing the bishop to b7 and getting rid of the strong knight on d5. These three Black moves – 14...c3, 15...♘h8 and 16...b5 – are absolutely brilliant.

9.♙xc3 dxc4



10.e3 A dubious move played as a result of a memory glitch. Of course correct is 10.♙g2.

I remembered the main line, 7...0-0 8.♙g2 cxd5 9.♘f4 dxc4 10.0-0 ♙xc3 11.♙xc3 ♘c6, and assumed that having my bishop on g2 would lead to the main line. In reality, White enjoys a slight edge after 10.♙g2 ♘c6 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 0-0 13.♗xe4 ♗xe4 14.♙xe4 a5 15.0-0-0 b5 16.♙d6 ♙e8 17.f3. Despite the fact that Black has managed to generate some activity, it's not equal yet, since the d7 pawn is under an unpleasant blockade.

10...♘c6 10...d6 was the move that my opponent suggested in post-game analysis. It does not stop 11.g4, but gives Black an option to draw comfortably after 11...♙xg4



12. ♖xf6 ♙xd1 13. ♖xe7 ♙f3 14. ♖g1 ♖xe7 15. ♙d5+ ♖d7 16. ♖h3+ ♖c6 17. ♙e7+ ♖b6 18. ♙d5+ ♖c6.

11.g4 A good move from a practical point of view. I thought that 11. ♖xc4 d6 12. ♙d5 ♙xd5 13. ♖xd5 0-0 14. ♖h5 ♙d7, with the plan of preparing ... ♖h8 and ... f5, is way too solid.

11...h6 A decent move played after long thought.

11... ♙e5 is very tempting and I erroneously thought it's a nice trap that I set with 11.g4, as after 11... ♙e5 12.g5 ♙f3+ 13. ♖xf3 exf3 14.gxf6 gxf6 15.0-0-0, my pieces will perform like Pac-man going after Black's pawns. Indeed White has extremely strong play, but Black has a defense that both players missed. After 15... ♖c5 White has to play 16. ♖g1 and maintain the tension, because 16. ♙d5 is nicely met by 16... d6 17. ♖b4 ♖c6 18. ♙xf6+ ♖e7 and Black is doing fine. After all, once the c8 bishop comes out to e6, Black's position, as my friend Peter Leko would say, becomes "cemento."

Another possible, but not very intuitive way to play was 11... d6 12.g5 ♙g4!. After 13. ♙d5 ♖g5 14. ♙c7 ♖e7 15. ♙a8, Black has two solid options.



A) First, the crazy looking 15... ♙xf2 that can lead to a very irrational position (that is in case White refuses to draw) after 15... ♙xf2 16. ♙xf2 ♖h4+ 17. ♖g1 ♖g5+ 18. ♖g2 ♖xe3+ 19. ♖f1 ♖f4+ 20. ♙e1 ♖h4+ 21. ♙d2 ♖g5+ 22. ♙c2 ♖xg2+ 23. ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 24. ♙xd2 d5 25. ♖xg7 ♖d8. What's going on here? Will the little zerglings compensate for the rook? It's a "balanced imbalance."

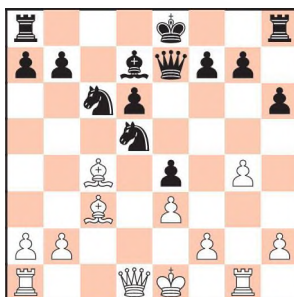
B) The second option leads to a perpetual after 15... ♙c5 16.h3 ♙f3+ 17. ♙e2 ♖d8 18.hxg4 ♖xg4 19. ♖a4 ♖d5 20. ♖d1 ♙g1+ 21. ♙e1 ♙f3+ 22. ♙e2 ♙g1+ 23. ♙e1. I'm not sure if these

beautiful lines can be calculated in a practical game by mortals.

12. ♖xc4 d6 13. ♖g1 ♙d7 A mysterious, and decent move. I was expecting 13... ♙e5 14. ♖e2 ♖e6, which is best met by 15. ♖a4+ ♙d7 16. ♖d4. The two bishops compensate for the pawn and after the possible continuation 16... g5 17. ♙h5 ♙xh5 18.gxh5 ♖c6 19.0-0-0 f6 20. ♖xd6, a draw is very probable.

14. ♙d5 I saw 14. ♖b3 ♙e5 15.0-0-0 as an alternative that leads to similar balanced positions. With the game move I was seeking to get the pawn back and I was surprisingly objective in my assessment of the position, thinking the game would slowly glide towards a draw.

14... ♙xd5



15. ♖xd5 Should I lie and say that I saw that after 15. ♖xd5 0-0 16.g5 hxg5 17. ♖h5 ♙e5 18. ♖xe4 f5 19. ♖xb7 g4, Black is totally fine despite the material deficit? I played 15. ♖xd5 without much thought, and it turned out to be objectively and subjectively the right decision.

15...0-0-0 A panicky move and an obvious mistake. Black had many options, but only one which was good. Both 15... ♖d8 and 15...0-0 lead to an okay position, but 15... ♖c8 would lead to a direct draw after 15... ♖c8 16. ♖b3 ♙e5 17. ♖xe4 ♖c6 18. ♙d5 ♖xd5 19. ♖xd5 ♖c5 20. ♖e4 ♖c4 21. ♖d5 ♖c5.

16. ♖xf7 Honestly speaking, I thought that my opponent had blundered the f7 pawn. Losing such a pawn that holds the position together is clearly bringing Black to the verge of defeat.

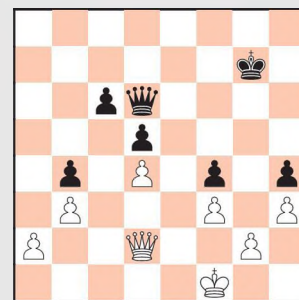
16... ♖xf7 A trickier option would have been 16... ♖g5 ...

RAPID TIE-BREAKS

In the first game of the tie-breaks, Aronian nicely outmaneuvered Gukesh with the white pieces.

Levon Aronian	2736
Dommaraju Gukesh	2718

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023



38. ♖e1 ♖g6 39. ♖g1 ♖c2 40. ♖xb4 ♖xa2 41. ♖b7+ ♖g8 42. ♖b8+ ♖g7 43. ♖c7+ ♖g8 44. ♖d8+ ♖g7 45. ♖g5+ Black resigned

Facing Nepomniachtchi as Black, Levon created another memorable masterpiece – executing a beautiful king walk from f8 to c8, finally winning his second game.

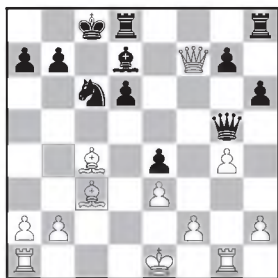
Ian Nepomniachtchi	2793
Levon Aronian	2736

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023



20... ♙f8! 21. ♖h3 ♖f6 22. ♖e2 ♙e7 23. ♖d1 ♙d8 24. ♖e2 ♖e7 25. ♖c2 ♙c8 26. ♙a2 ♖d7 27. ♖hg3 f4 28. ♖g4 e4 and Black won on move 46.

In the next game, Gukesh defeated Nepo, before facing Aronian with the white pieces. The game was complicated and lasted 92 moves. Levon's class was on display as he demonstrated admirable technique in converting the endgame with a rook and corner pawn against bishop. Finally, it was a perfect score in tie-breaks and a well-deserved overall victory for Aronian.

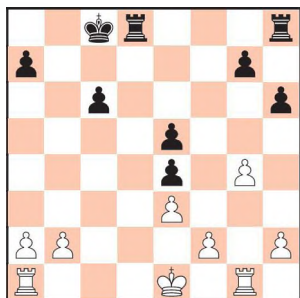


A) ...counting on 17. ♖xg7 ♕e5 18. ♗xe5 dxe5 19. ♖xg5 hgx5 20. ♗d5 ♖xh2 21. ♗xe4 ♖f8 with drawing chances.

B) The way for White to play for more is 17. h4 ♖xh4 18. 0-0-0 with Black having too many weaknesses to protect.

17. ♗xf7 ♕e5 My opponent played this segment quickly which made me doubt my initial verdict. Then I saw ♖c2 ideas and relaxed. I might not win the game, but I will surely enjoy playing this endgame.

18. ♗xe5 dxe5 19. ♗d5 ♗c6 20. ♗xc6 bxc6 The last three moves were forced, and now I have a wide choice.



21. ♖c1 There are two more plans in this position. One is to play g4-g5 here. The point is that after 21...hxg5 22. ♖xg5 ♖xh2, White has the strong 23. ♕e2 ♖f8 24. ♖f1, preparing to collect enemy pawns.

The other idea is to exchange one pair of rooks, for example after 21. ♕e2 ♖d6 22. ♖gd1, but that allows ...♕c7 and the black king will become the defender of the pawn e4. After some consideration I decided to keep the g4-g5 idea as a constant threat, and just slowly take care of the e4 pawn.

21... ♖d6 22. ♕e2 My plan is simple – ♖c2, b3, ♖gc1, ♖b2, ♖c4 and take on e4.

22... ♖hd8 Black forces ♖c2 and loses a



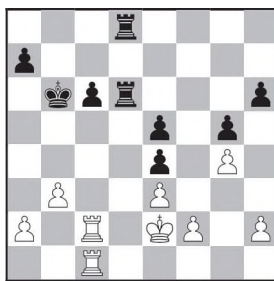
▲ R. Praggnanandhaa vs. Levon Aronian. Photo by Lennart Ootes

tempo. It was necessary to try and get some activity by playing 22... ♕c7, followed by ...a5 – in order to meet White's b3+ ♖b2 plan by ...a4, bxa4 ♖b8.

23. ♖c2 Of course not 23. ♖gd1, allowing counterplay in the pawn endgame after 23... ♖xd1 24. ♖xd1 ♖xd1 25. ♕xd1 ♕d7, when the black king marches to f6.

23...g5 Calculating White's g4-g5 ideas on every turn can of course be very annoying, but now the pawn structure is crystallized and not much can be done to distract White from his plan.

24. ♖gc1 ♕b7 25. b3 ♖d5 A mistake, but the position is lost anyway. The normal continuation 25... ♕b6 leads to a technical position.

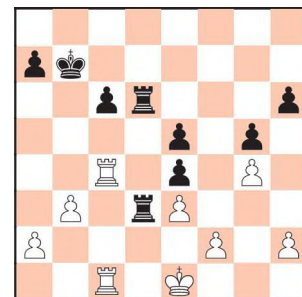


After 26. ♖b2 h5 27. ♖c4 hxg4 28. ♖xe4 ♖h8 29. ♖xg4 ♖xh2 30. ♖xg5 ♖f6 31. ♕f1, White's task is not that difficult.

26. ♕e1 I can't explain why I refused to play ♖b2, but my inaccurate move does not change much.

26... ♖8d6 After 26... ♖a5 I would return to my initial plan with an immediate 27. ♖b2, or even 27. ♕f1 with ♖b2 next.

27. ♖c4 ♖d3 Due to tactical reasons, Black does not have a move, as 27... ♖d2 loses to 28. ♖xc6.



28. ♖1c2 Seeing too many winning moves I relaxed and blundered into a strong reply. 28. h3 would have been the most precise move. Very silly!

28... ♖d1+ 29. ♕e2 ♖h1 30. ♖xe4 ♖d5 Here Black could obtain survival chances by playing 30... ♖f6!. I only counted on 30... ♖xh2 31. ♖xe5 ♖f6 32. ♖f5 with a win.



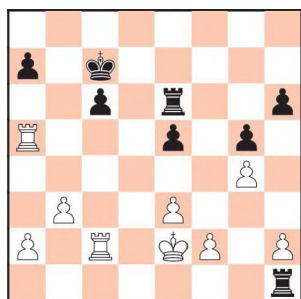
However, after 30...f6 – since 31.e5 runs into 31...f2 – White has to be cautious and play 31.d2 exh2 32.f1 h4 33.g2, maintaining good winning chances.

31.fec4 I continued playing sub-optimal moves. 31.d2 was the easiest solution.

31...d6 32.b4+ c7 33.b5 Once again blundering into Black's defensive resource ...f6!. Why not 33.c5?

33...e6 I was very lucky in this game. 33...f6 would have forced White to play 34.bxc5 and enter a worse version of the same endgame after 30...f6.

34.a5

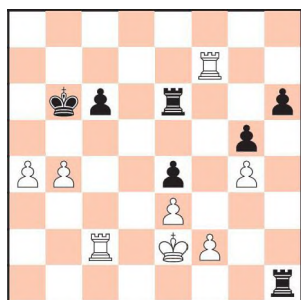


34...xh2 This was the last moment for ...f6. 34...b6 would not help Black since 35.cxc5 wins the e-pawn.

35.xa7+ b6 36.f7 There is something cinema-like in chess. The sequence of moves starting with 30.f4 and ending with 36.f7 was full of mistakes, and apart from the players, everyone who followed the game live saw it.

36...e4 37.a4 The king on b6 is an easy target.

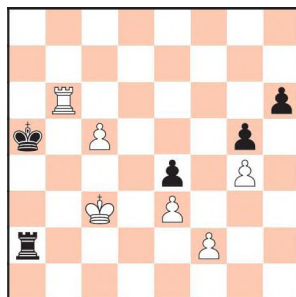
37...h1 38.b4



All White needs to do is to capture the c6

pawn after which the weak pawns will fall.

38...a1 39.a5+ b5 40.b7+ a4 41.b6 d6 42.d2 xxd2+ 43.xd2 c5 44.bxc5 xa5 45.c3 a2 46.f6 a4 47.b6 a2



48.b2 xxb2 49.xb2 b5 50.b3
Black resigned

C67

Lev Aronian	2736
Anish Giri	2780

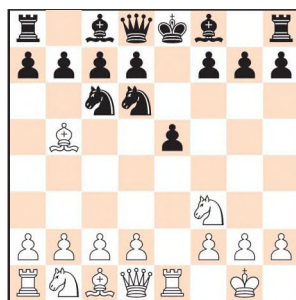
WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023, Round 5
Notes by Levon Aronian

1.e4 At this moment in the tournament I was on +2 and decided to play for a win – but nothing too crazy.

1...e5 2.f3 dxc6 3.b5 dxf6 I expected Anish to play the Open Spanish, but the Berlin is an opening that can occur in any given game at the highest level.

4.0-0 xe4 5.e1 A move that I very rarely employ. The positions that arise after 5.e1 are similar to the Petroff Defense, slightly more comfortable for White, but equal.

5...d6



6.a4 Hans Niemann played this against me

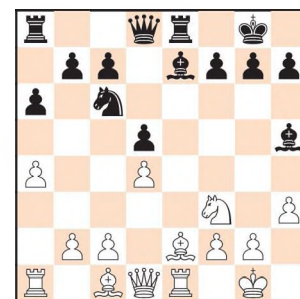
in the U.S. Championship. I generally try to learn from young players.

6...e7 7.dxc3 a6 The most solid line. Giri is known for his opening ideas and no-nonsense approach.

8.f1 e4 9.xe4 xe4 10.xe4 d5 11.e1 g4 Solid players avoid any changes to the pawn structure such as 8...f6 or 11...d4.

12.h3 h5 13.e2 You can't expect to gain an advantage with moves like this, but this one represents the new me, humble and free from prejudice.

13...0-0 14.d4 e8



My opponent played all his moves in semi-automatic mode with 1-2 minutes for each one. This meant that he knew the position well, including remembering all its fine points. Well, well, well...

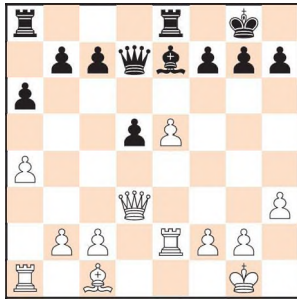
15.dxe5 An innocent move which makes some sense. I am offering to change the structure and introduce some imbalance. This is not some brilliant discovery that one can be proud of, but at least we now get some sort of a game.

15...xe2 Played after some thought. There is a lot to think about: Black has a wide choice of good options.

16.xe2 xe5 At least two more solid options were available: 16...d6 and 16...d6. My opponent's move in the game and his following plan were very good too.

17.dxe5 d7 By not committing with ...c7-c6, ...c7-c5 or ...d5-d4 Black keeps all his options open.

18.d3



18...♖ad8 I thought that 18...b5 was a very decent move, trying to get active. I

Q & A with Levon Aronian

FABIANO AND LENIER ARE MY SAINT LOUIS CREW!

What aspects of living in Saint Louis do you enjoy the most?

I absolutely love living in Saint Louis. The city's parks and biking through the older areas are my favorite things to do. I'm fascinated by the architecture of the houses – I've never seen such an abundance of luxurious, historic buildings before.

Which chess players do you spend most of your time with?

I often hang out with Fabiano Caruana, Tatev Abrahamyan, Katerina Nemcova, Varuzhan Akobian, and Lenier Domínguez. I'm also neighbors with Kostya Kavutsky, Denes Boros, Illia Nyzhnyk, and Eric Rosen. They're all fantastic people! My closest friends are Fabiano and Lenier – they're part of my Saint Louis crew!

You mention a "New Me" in your annotations. What brought about this change in your approach to chess?

When I refer to the "New Me," I mean that my chess training and understanding of the game have evolved. I'm now more open to exploring different playing styles.

As a new father, do you think this will motivate you more in your chess game and future aspirations?

I'm naturally ambitious, and playing for my daughter adds even more motivation. I want to reach my desired level of success in time for her to be proud of her daddy!

Dusan Kronic

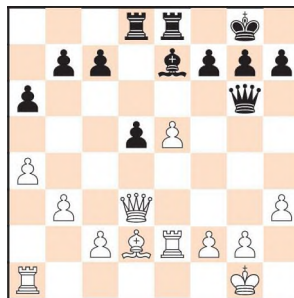
would probably have answered with 19.b3 c5 20.f4 with a sound and equal position.

19.b3 A good move. Since Black has not decided to play ...c7-c5 or ...b7-b5 I am also in no hurry to reveal my cards. I might play f2-f4, a4-a5 and put my bishop on d2 or b2 in the future.

19...♖e6 Very logical once again.

20.♗d2 20.f4 is met with 20...f5. I was not quite ready to play with a locked pawn chain.

20...♖g6 Yet again very solid. There is nothing wrong with 20...c5, but it does not fit in with Black's previous play.



21.f4 I spent a long time on this move. I did not want to allow a lockdown, but 21.g4 did not look too safe since after 21...c5 22.f4 ♖c6 the position becomes too chaotic. Don't play coffeehouse moves when the tournament is going well!

21...f5 Played after long thought. Actually after I saw this move I panicked a bit, because it looked very sophisticated. 21...♗xd3 22.cxd3 should be close to a draw, but of course it's easier to play for White, since I can push b4-b5 at some point.

22.b4 A good move that turned out very well. At first I rejected it because it allows 22...♗xb4, but since I did not have any structure changing option I then decided to go for it.

22.g4 ♗f8 23.e6 was very logical, but I was afraid that Anish had spent a long time on it and anyway did not want to play concrete chess. A former World Champion once told me that Giri has the



▲ Anish Giri and Levon Aronian, Photo by Lennart Ootes

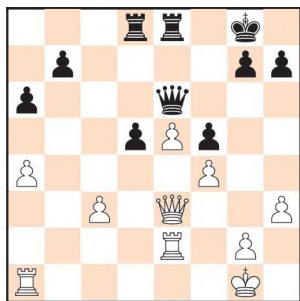
best calculation skills among all elite players, and I tend to trust former World Champions...

22...♖e6 I was happy to see this. Despite the fact that 22...♗xb4 was not as equalizing as I thought it was I considered it important for Black to try to change the course of events and generate some concrete play. After 23.♗xb4 ♖b6+ 24.♗h2 ♖xb4 25.♗xf5 ♗f8 26.♗e6+ ♗h8 27.g3 ♗d4 White stands better, but calculation and precision is needed.

23.c3 There is nothing criminally wrong with Black's position, but it is passive.

23...c5 I thought that this was a mistake, but it's actually okay. Probably with precise play Black could just await events passively, but White has clear-cut play linked to the b4-b5 and/or g2-g4 thrusts.

24.bxc5 ♗xc5+ 25.♗e3 ♗xe3+ 26.♗xe3

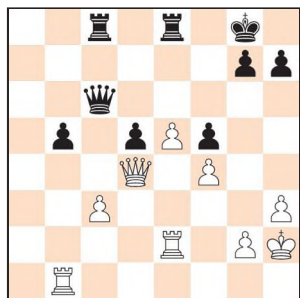


I could never have dreamed of reaching such a position out of the opening, so the psychological initiative was clearly on my side.

26...♖c8 27.♖b1 ♔c6 28.♗d4 Probably the game will reach a 4 vs 3 rook endgame with correct play. There are no tablebases for this yet, especially with a protected e5 pawn, but I have the feeling it should be tenable.

28...b5 This is required in order to stop the blockade by ♖b6.

29.axb5 axb5 30.♕h2



30...♞ed8 This also looks logical, but it does lead the game to the verge of defeat for Black. 30...h6, with the idea of preparing for the rook endgame and accepting the inevitability of a 4 vs 3, was to be preferred.

31.♞e3 ♔c4 32.♞g3 It's easy to play when you are not under much pressure. I saw that this move would almost certainly get my two rooks onto the seventh rank and so decided to trust my intuition and try to lead my opponent into time trouble.

32...♗xd4 Correct play. There is no more time and Black has to activate at least one rook in order to seek drawing chances.

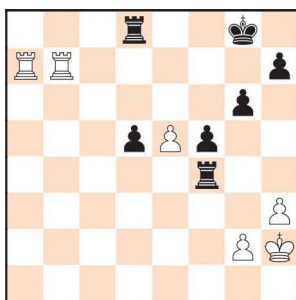


▲ So-Aronian in progress while other players look on.

Photo by Lennart Ootes

33.cxd4 ♞c4 The following moves are forced.

34.♞xb5 ♞xd4 35.♞b7 g6 36.♞a3 ♞xf4 37.♞aa7



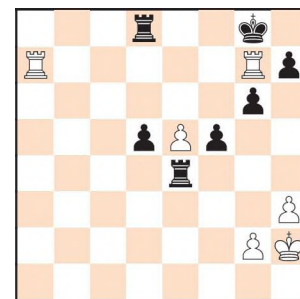
37...♞e4 The losing move but one which at the time I considered to be the best. Black had a very narrow path here.

37...♞h4 was essential, in order to lure the white king to g3 and remove the two rooks from the seventh rank. After 38.♕g3 g5 39.♞g7+ ♕h8 40.♞xg5 ♞b4 41.♞xf5 ♞g8+ 42.♕f3 ♞b3+ 43.♕f4 ♞b4+ 44.♕e3 Black has to find a difficult continuation. 44...d4+ is a must in order to create counterplay against the white king. After 45.♕f3 ♞b3+ 46.♕e4 ♞xg2 47.♕xd4 ♞b8 Giri would get real drawing chances since his rooks have a lot of checks that stop White from promoting his extra e-pawn.

It should be noted that Black has another option in 37...♞e8 that does not lose by

force, but still seems dubious since after 38.♞g7+ ♕h8 39.♞xh7+ ♕g8 40.♞ag7+ ♕f8 41.♞xg6 ♞xe5 42. ♔d6 Black will lose the d5 pawn.

38.♞g7+



38...♕f8 This loses simply. I did not see how to win after 38...♕h8, but I guess I would have found the fairly easy 39.♞xh7+ ♕g8 40.♞he7 with the straightforward and unstoppable threat of e5-e6, ♞g7+ followed by mate or promotion of the pawn.

39.♞af7+ ♕e8 40.♞xh7 Since taking on e5 leads to mate after ♞a7 (the f5 pawn blocks the e5 rook), the rest is trivial.

40...♞h4 41.♞e7+ ♕f8 42.♞hf7+ ♕g8 43.♞g7+ ♕h8 44.♞xg6 d4 45.♔d6 ♞c8 46.♞f7 ♞f4 47.e6 ♕g8 48.♔dd7

Black resigned ■



THE MAGNIFICENT 3

Remarkable Recent Games

By GM Sarunas Sulskis

Since the beginning of the year there have been two high-profile classical chess events to command the attention of chess fans worldwide. First, there was the traditional Wijk aan Zee Chess Festival held in January, with its 'Masters' round-robin being a highlight.

Then, in February, a German entrepreneur, Wadim Rosenstein, almost singlehandedly launched a new top-notch event – 'WR Chess Masters' in Dusseldorf. The tournament line-up featured an exciting blend of five U20 chess prodigies and, respectively, five other established top grandmasters of the day. Two American elite grandmasters played in Dusseldorf – Levon Aronian and Wesley So. And after a quite inconspicuous performance in Wijk, Aronian reminded the chess world of his high-class, cruising to victory in Dusseldorf after a play-off.

My game selection comes from the above two events.



Sarunas Sulskis is a nine-time champion of Lithuania and a regular member of his country's national team. As a teenager, he studied at the Botvinnik-Kasparov Chess Academy and later graduated from the Kaunas College of Management and Law. He qualified three times for the knock-out World Championship, and his most notable recent result is a victory at the traditional 2022/23 Hastings Chess Congress. In addition to his achievements as a player, Sarunas is a FIDE trainer, arbiter, writer, and passionate chess promoter.



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SMITE A TEENAGE CHESS PRODIGY?

The best Dutch GM, Anish Giri, ultimately won the star-studded Wijk aan Zee event on his home turf. As early as Round 2 he laid a strong foundation for his upcoming tournament victory by smiting one of the brightest Indian talents, 16-year-old Dommaraju Gukesh, with an explosive attack on the kingside, which involved a generous offer of a knight, immediately followed by one of a rook. Yet a calm and clever white rook maneuver along the second rank had been a key preparatory step which enabled Giri's subsequent spectacular fireworks.

However 14...♠d7 might have been an alternative to the text, when 15.d5 can be met tactically by 15...exd5 16.♞xd5 ♠b6 17.♞xa5 ♞xe4 after which Black has little to worry about.

15.♞e2 Giri completes his remarkable rook manoeuvre along the second rank. For the time being White is denied the e1 square for doubling rooks on the e-file, but that may soon change with b2-b4 coming up.

15...♠c6 16.♞c2 ♠b6? I understand Gukesh's desire to deflect the white rook from e1 by tying it to a defense of the d4 pawn. However, he underestimates Giri's tactical prowess and only facilitates White's access to e1 by withdrawing his bishop from a5.

That said, Gukesh has already been facing serious challenges. 16...♠d5 17.♠xd5 ♠xd5 18.b4 ♠b6 19.♠c3 ♠d8 20.d5+ makes White's path simple and straightforward.

Most probably the rather unattractive exchange 16...♠xe4 was in order, as liquidation is an important method of defense. Some tactical details would have helped Black to prevent any immediate attack by White.

D38

Anish Giri	2764
Dommaraju Gukesh	2725

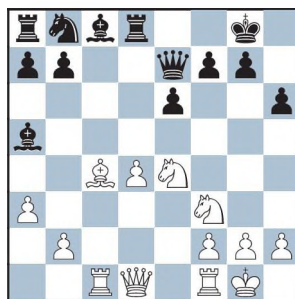
Tata Steel Masters, Wijk aan Zee 2023

1.d4 ♠f6 2.c4 e6 3.♠f3 d5 4.♠c3 ♠b4 5.♠g5 h6 6.♠xf6 ♞xf6 7.e3 0-0 8.♠c1 dxc4 9.♠xc4 c5 So far, so good. Both players travel the well-known highway of the Ragozin Defense.

10.0-0 cxd4 11.♠e4 ♞e7 12.a3 ♠a5 13.exd4!? Quite a rare recapture, but a principled one. Its low popularity is probably explained by the fact that, in addition to the bishop pair odds, White adds an isolani to his list of liabilities. On the other hand, it has the dangerous potential to advance d4-d5, extending the range of the c4 bishop and subsequently targeting the black king. No less relevant is the opening of the e-file for White's rooks. We will see later how skilfully Giri turns the ominous presence of his rooks on this file into a spectacular blast on Gukesh's king!

Much more popular is 13.♞xd4 ♠c6 14.♞c5, but that's also much more dry if you ask me...

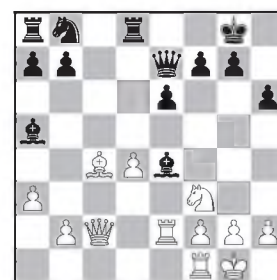
13...♠d8



14.♠c2!N A nice, thoughtful novelty by Giri, specially cooked up for this high-end tournament in Wijk aan Zee. According to circumstances, the rook may be positioned either on d2 or e2 to reinforce the center break d4-d5.

14...♠d7 Played after long thought. The bishop on c6 should take charge of the annoying potential center break d4-d5. Yet, as we're going to see soon, the pawn on e6 may become vulnerable to attack by White's army.

On 14...♠c6 Gukesh may have disliked 15.b4 ♠b6 16.♠d2, when there's no sensible way to stop the annoying d4-d5 break.





A) 17. ♖xe4 ♘d7

A1) 18.d5 is met by 18...e5 with an equal position, whereas 18...♙f6? 19.dxe6 ♙xe4 20.♖xe4 would be horrible for Black. Of course, not 20.exf7+? ♙h8+.

A2) However, White can instead play 18.b4 ♙b6 19.♖fe1 ♖ac8 20.♖b3, maintaining pressure on Black's position.

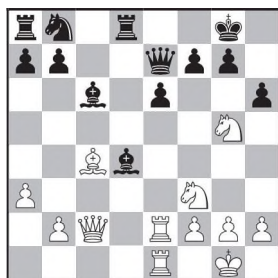
B) Or 17. ♖xe4 ♙c6 18. ♙d3 (18.d5 exd5! 19. ♖xe7 ♙xe7 20. ♖xe7 dxc4 is not dangerous at all.) 18...g6=.

17.♖fe1! Giri ignores the threat to his isolated pawn and sets his sights high on the enemy king.

17...♙h8 By leaving the pawn on d4 alone, Gukesh admits the failure of ...♙a5-b6?

● Blocking the path of the white bishop to e6 by means of 17...♙d5 cannot solve all Black's problems due to 18.♙xd5 ♖xd5 19.♙c3+ with the d4-d5 break in the air. The desperate exchange sacrifice 19...♖xd4 only makes things worse after 20.♙xd4 ♙xd4 21.♙d5+- with an imminent ♙c7 hitting the corner rook.

● On 17...♖xd4 Giri would have discharged a few devastating rounds on the black king similar to the game: 18.♙eg5!



A) 18...♙xf2+ is a clever attempt to muddy the waters, but White should be able to finally come out on top after 19.♙xf2 hxg5 20.♖xe6! fxe6 21.♖xe6 ♖c5+! 22.♙g3

A1) 22...♙h8 23.b4 ♖f8 24.♙xg5+-.

A2) 22...♙d5 23.♙xg5 ♖c7+ 24.♙h3+-.

A3) 22...♙f8 23.b4 ♙a4 24.♖h7 ♖c7+ 25.♙e5!!+- (Beware! Not 25.♙h3? g4+ 26.♙h4 g5+! 27.♙xg5 ♖xh7+ 28.♙xh7+ ♙g7+-)

B) 18...hxg5 19.♖xe6!

B1) 19...♖c5 20.b4 ♙xf2+ 21.♙h1 ♙xe1 22.bxc5 ♙xf3 23.♖xe1.

B2) 19...♙xf2+ 20.♙xf2 fxe6 21.♖xe6 ♖d1+ 22.♙e1 (22.♖e1+ wins too, of course.) 22...♖f7 23.♖xc6+-.

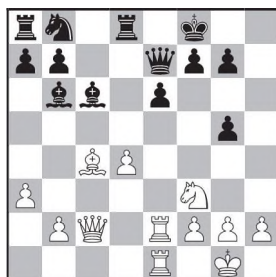
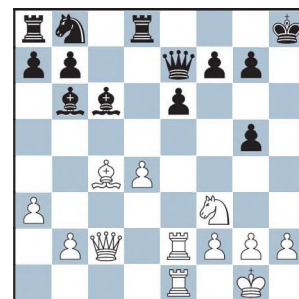
B3) 19...♖xe6 20.♖xe6 ♙xf2+ 21.♙f1 ♖f7



▲ Anish Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2023. Photo by Lennart Ootes

22.♙xg5 winning with a huge attack.

● With hindsight, an alternative desperate escape route for the black king can be recommended: 17...♙f8!?. Then after 18.♙eg5 I will try to show you some beautiful lines in what was seemingly White's main plan of attack. Oddly enough, other knight jumps also win for White – to g3, c5 or d2! But due to limitations of space I will leave it to readers to explore those lines on their own. 18...hxg5



A) 19.♖xe6 fxe6 20.♖xe6 ♖xe6 21.♖xe6 ♙xf3 22.♖f5+ ♙e7 23.gxf3 (23.♙c4 ♖xd4+-) 23...♙c6 24.d5 ♙d4 25.♖xg5+ ♙f8 26.♖f4+ ♙e7=.

B) 19.♖h7 ♖f6 20.♖xe6 fxe6 21.♖xe6 ♖xe6 22.♖xe6 ♙xf3 23.gxf3 ♙c6! (23...♙xd4? 24.♖g6 ♙e7 25.♖e4!±, when, for example, 25...♙c6 runs into 26.♙c8+ ♙d6 27.♙xb7).

18.♙eg5! A beautiful introduction to a powerful assault by White's rooks on e6!

18...hxg5

19.♖xe6!! Giri's on fire! His sacrifice is huge, but the black king's life is at stake! Should the remaining white knight get to g5, that would be game over.

19...fxe6 20.♖xe6 ♖xe6 In order to deal with ♙f3xg5 Gukesh cannot afford to retreat his queen. 20...♙f8 21.♙xg5 ♖g8 22.♖e3+-.

Or 20...♖e8 21.♖xe7 ♖xe7 22.♖f5 ♙d7 23.♖h3 mate.

21.♖xe6 ♙xf3 21...♙d7 22.♙xg5 ♙f8 23.♖f5+-.

22.♖f5! Giri gives Gukesh no respite! That said, even in case of the natural 22.gxf3 Black would still be facing difficulties defending his king despite being a piece up. For example, 22...♖d6 (22...♙d7 23.♖f5 ♙f6 24.♖h3+ ♙h7 25.♙f5) 23.♖c8+ ♖d8 24.♖xb7 ♙c6 (24...♙d7±) 25.♖f7+-.

22...♙e4 Gukesh tries to buy time to defend his king. 22...♙h5 23.♖xg5 ♙f7 24.♙xf7 ♖d6 25.♖e7 or 25.♖e5 with a decisive penetration.

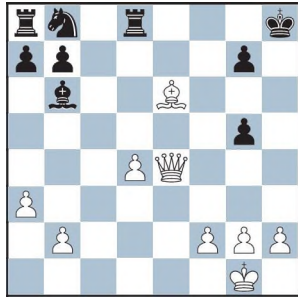
On 22...♖xd4 I found a long but forced



SMALL CHESS LECTURES

By GM Nikola Nestorovic

checkmate: 23. ♖f8+ ♔h7 24. ♕f5+ g6 25. ♖f7+ ♔h8 26. ♖f6+ ♔g8 27. ♕e6+ ♔h7 28. ♖f7+ ♔h6 29. ♖f8+ ♔h7 30. ♖g8+ ♔h6 31. ♖h8 mate.
23. ♖xe4 And so there's no threat of mate in one. Black's time to achieve salvation, however, is quite short-lived. 23. ♖h3+? is just impatient, because of 23... ♔h7 24. ♕f5 g6 25. ♕xg6 ♔d7.



23... ♔d4? Despite his huge and well-attested talent, Gukesh is just too young to resist a counterattack on his unrelenting opponent. Yet this tempting counterstrike exposes his vulnerable rear.

The patient 23... ♕e8 was called for, intending to get rid of White's bishop at all cost. 24. ♖xb7 (24.d5 ♔d7) 24... ♔c6 25. ♖xc6 (25. ♖f7 ♕xe6 26. ♖xe6 ♔xd4) 25... ♕ac8! 26. ♖xc8 ♕xc8 27. ♕xc8 ♕xd4+ and the odds are favorable that Black will survive this opposite-color bishops' ending.

On the other hand 23... ♔d7 24. ♖g4 ♔f6 25. ♖h3+ ♔h7 26. ♕f5+- doesn't help him much. 24. ♖f3! Combining defense and attack! 24... g4 25. ♖f8+ ♔h7 26. ♕f5+ Out of a multitude of attacking paths, Giri picks a good one.

26... ♔h6 On 26... g6 27. ♖f7+ ♔h8 Black is at the mercy of his opponent, although I don't see an immediate checkmate. But after 28. ♖f6+ Giri may choose from many lucrative ways to continue his attack. 28... ♔g8 29. ♕e6+ (or alternatively 29. ♖xg6+ ♔f8 30. ♖f6+ ♔e8 31. ♕xg4) 29... ♔h7 30. ♖e7+ ♔h6 31. ♖f8+ ♔g5 32. h4+ (32.g3 ♔c6 33. ♖xa8 ♔d1+ 34. ♔g2 ♔d2) 32... g3 33.g3 ♕e4 34. ♔h2 ♕xe6 when 35. ♖f4+ ♔h5 36. ♖h4 mate is a fitting end to this extraordinary king hunt.

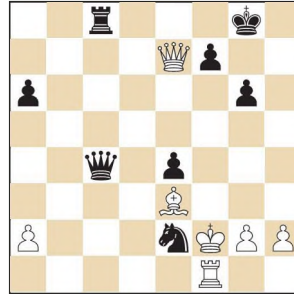
27. ♕c2! Gukesh had seen too much and so **Black resigned**

On 27... ♔c6 (Or 27... ♔d8 28. ♖f4+ with checkmate to follow in a few moves.) 28. ♖xa8 (28. ♖f5+- is, however, more to the point as it doesn't relinquish White's deadly attack even for a minute.) 28... ♔d8 (28... ♔d8 29. ♖c8) 29. ♖xb7+- as the white queen escapes her confinement.

Mikhail Kobalia 2577

Kirill Shevchenko 2668

European Championship,
Vrnjacka Banja 2023



32. ♖f6!? White looks for a last chance with the threat of ♕h6. It is interesting to see how Black reacts.

32... ♖xa2! Counter-threat!

33. ♔d1!? Is this a defense against the threat? Or an attempt to play ♔d2 or maybe even ♔d8?

33. ♕h6? would be bad timing to create a threat, as after 33... ♔f4+! no matter how White reacts, Black will checkmate or win the queen. 34. ♔g3 ♔h5+ or 34. ♕e3 ♔d5+.

▼ Kirill Shevchenko,
Photo by Lennart Ootes

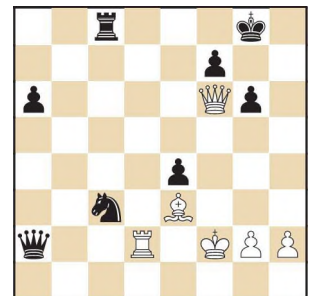


Nikola Nestorovic became a Grandmaster in 2016 and a FIDE Trainer in 2018. Still an active player, Nikola is mostly dedicated to chess teaching. Together with his father, IM Dejan, he co-authored two chess books – *The Power of Defence* and *The Art of Counterattack in 64 Pictures and Secrets of Positional Sacrifice*.



33... ♔c3+! 34. ♔d2!? Defending against the threat and if Black makes a mistake, White will have counterplay based on threats of his own on the dark squares.

Moving the king away by 34. ♔g3 gives Black the opportunity to transfer into an elementary endgame with more material. 34... ♔d5 35. ♖g5 ♔xe3+-.



34... ♖xd2+!! Shevchenko brilliantly exploits the geometric position of the white pieces.

In case of the bad reaction 34... ♖e6?, everything changes drastically after 35. ♖xe6 fxe6 36. ♔d6. Or 34... ♖b3? 35. ♔d8+ ♕xd8 36. ♖xd8+ ♔h7 37. ♖h4+ ♔g8 (Not 37... ♔g7?? 38. ♕d4+-) 38. ♔d8+ would lead to a draw by repetition of moves.

If Black wants to trade queens on f5 by 34... ♖a5, then White has the excellent 35.g4!, after which events on the board become unclear.

35. ♕xd2 e3+!! and **White resigned** in view of 36. ♔xe3 ♔d5+ or 36. ♔f3 exd2 or even 36. ♕xe3 ♔e4+, winning in each case.



DECODING OPENING TRENDS IN WORLD-CLASS CHESS: WR MASTERS 2023

FROM BENKO TO PETROFF

As a new wave of teenagers has entered the main stage of elite world chess, it is no wonder that clashes at the Dusseldorf supertournament between the young and younger would generate a lot of excitement. In fact it was particularly interesting to follow developments in the openings which ranged from excessive sharpness to deep strategy.

■ By GM Emilio Cordova

A

BENKO GAMBIT

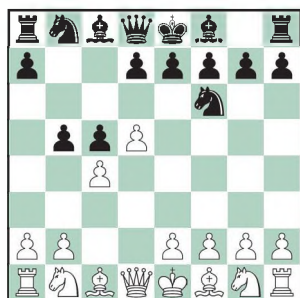
A57

Ian Nepomniachtchi 2793

Nodirbek Abdusattorov 2734

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5!?



Nowadays it's very unlikely that you will see the Benko Gambit being played at the highest level classical time controls. However, we should not forget that the

Benko was one of the most popular gambits in the 70s and 80s. In fact, I believe that it remains a very interesting choice for those who aim for more active and dynamic play. 4.cxb5 a6 5.e3 e6 Perhaps the most reliable continuation, although not the only way to play. However, this ...e7-e6 idea has become very popular lately among Benko fans.

6.♟c3 exd5 7.♟xd5 ♟e7?! Not a novelty of course, since this move has been played before, even though in the classic Benko Gambit the bishop was developed on g7 instead of e7, and was how this opening was originally conceived. However, here ...♟e7 is considered as being not the most accurate move. More precise for Black is 7...♟b7 8.♟xf6+ ♟xf6 9.♟f3 ♟e7 with good play.

8.♟f3 0-0 The power of the Benko relies on its more rapid piece development and more mobile pawn structure, especially in this particular position. Therefore energetic moves must be played, aiming to seize the initiative.

9.b3!? A novelty in an almost unknown position. My database shows just two games having been played in this line. So the Benko was definitely a wise choice from Nodirbek.

9.bxa6 was the most logical move.

ECO Codes

- A** R ♞1. d4, 1. e4
1. d4 R ♞1... d5, 1... ♟f6
1. d4 ♟f6 R ♞2. c4
1. d4 ♟f6 2. c4 R ♞2... e6, 2...g6
- B** 1. e4 R ♞1... c5, 1...e6, 1...e5
1. e4 c5
- C** 1. e4 e6
1. e4 e5
- D** 1. d4 d5
1. d4 ♟f6 2. c4 g6 ♞3... d5
- E** 1. d4 ♟f6 2. c4 e6
1. d4 ♟f6 2. c4 g6 ♞3... d5



A) 9...♟xd5 According to my engine, this was the most accurate way to proceed, although the move ...♟xa6 feels more natural. 10.♟xd5 ♟a7 11.♟e2 ♟xa6 12.0-0 (In case of 12.♟d2 d6 Black has the more active game.) 12...♟b4 with good play for Black.

B) 9...♟xa6 10.♟xe7+ ♟xe7 11.♟e2 d5 12.0-0 ♟f5 13.b3 (13.♟d2, preventing ...♟b4, can be met by 13...♟e4 with a powerful initiative.) 13...♟b4 14.a3 ♟c2 15.♟d2 (15.♟e1!) 15...♟e4 Here Black is clearly better. 16.axb4 ♟xd2 17.♟xd2 ♟xa1 18.♟xa1 ♟xb3 and Black won on move 113 in V.Ivic 2614 - J.Christiansen 2501, Almaty 2022.

Another way of playing for White is 9.♟xe7+, when after 9...♟xe7 10.b6 d5 Black is a pawn down plus taxes, but in return, he has obtained a powerful center and very active piece play. After. 11.♟e2 ♟bd7 12.a4 ♟xb6 13.a5 ♟bd7 14.0-0 ♟b8 15.♟c2 ♟e4 16.♟d1 ♟df6 17.b3 ♟g4 18.♟f1 ♟f5 the game ended in a draw on move 46 in D.Shapiro 2284 - A.Kubicka 2273, Internet 2021.

9...♟xd5 10.♟xd5



Emilio Cordova, a Peruvian Grandmaster, peaked at a 2660 FIDE rating in December 2016. A talented junior, he won multiple Pan-American championships and has represented Peru in seven Chess Olympiads from 2004-2022, leading the team in 2016, 2018, and 2022. Cordova was the American Continental Champion in 2016 and tied for first in 2017. As part of the Webster Chess Team, he earned several Pan-Am titles and an individual gold in 2019. Emilio also has over 14 years of coaching experience.

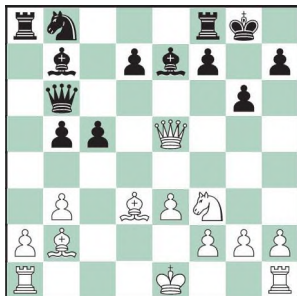


14...f6! Revealing the key idea of this setup. Without this move Black wouldn't be able to strive for the initiative.

11.♖b2 Of course not **11.♖xa8?? ♖b7** and it's "ciao white queen".

11...♖b7 12.♖f5 axb5 Black has achieved an amazing position.

13.♖d3g6 14.♖e5 Of course Nepo has tried his best to set some traps, however the Uzbek prodigy shows his wonderful preparation.



14...f6! 15.♖xe7 ♜f7 16.♖e8+ ♜f8 17.♖e7 ♜f7 18.♖e8+ ♜f8 19.♖e7 Draw. So it's definitely worth giving the Benko

a try, or at least a look, since it's not really popular among the best players in the world – and, in general, many players tend not to pay much attention to lines that differ from the choices of the elite.

C

PETROFF DEFENSE

C43

Nodirbek Abdusattorov	2734
Jan-Krzysztof Duda	2729

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♖f6 The Petroff is one of the favorite defenses among elite players, and due to its resilience it has become very popular lately even with lower-rated competitive players.

3.d4!? This is a very interesting but infrequently essayed line. Many players from the white side have opted for different setups in order to obtain an unbalanced position, which could give them more opportunities to win.

3...♖xe4 4.dxe5!? And here comes the boom... Please, don't try this at home, unless you are extremely well-prepared.

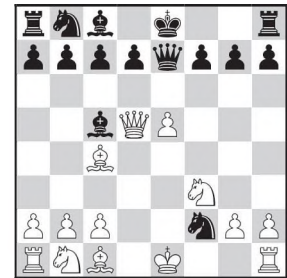
4...♖c5 Duda accepts the challenge! Of course, Black could have opted for quieter setups after **4...d5**.



5.♖c4 As usual, all this is theory.

5...♖xf2 Not **5...♖xf2+?** **6.♖f1**, when White is threatening **7.♖d5**. Then **6...d5 7.♖xd5 ♖xd5 8.♖xd5 f5 9.exf6 ♖xf6 10.♖xf2 ♖xd5 11.♖e1+ ♖f7 12.♖e5+ ♖f6 13.♖d2** or **13.b3!?** favor White.

6.♖xf7+ 6.♖d5 is a very interesting alternative that could be considered as a "single-shot gun". **6...♖e7** is the only move here for Black.



A) 7.♖f1 c6 8.♖xf7+ ♖xf7 9.♖xf7+ ♖xf7 10.♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 11.♖xf2 h6 12.♖c3 b6 13.b3 c5 14.♖b5 ♖c6 15.♖b2 ♖f8 16.♖d1 should be clearly better for Black, but still ended in a draw on move 28 in L.Jarmula 2469 - P.Sowinski 2064, Karpacz 2022.

B) 7.b4!? **♖b6** Another 'only' move. (If **7...♖h1!?**, then after **8.bxc5** the knight is trapped on h1 while White remains with excellent piece play, for example, **8...♖c6 9.♖g5 f6 10.♖e3± 8.♖f1 ♖g4** And another 'only' move! (Upon **8...c6?!** **9.♖d6! ♖xd6 10.exd6 ♖e4 11.♖f4 0-0 12.♖bd2**, White's compensation is only too evident.) **9.♖e4 d5! 10.♖xd5 f5! 11.exf6 ♖xe4+ 12.♖xe4 ♖xf6 13.♖d3 ♖c6 14.♖d2 0-0 15.a4 a5 16.b5 ♖e8+ 17.♖d1** Probably Black has the initiative here, but in order to keep the balance, he has to find both **9...d5** and **10...f5** – moves that are far from being considered as natural. Therefore, the **6.♖d5** move should be considered an interesting option – indeed a "single-shot gun".

6...♖xf7 7.♖d5+ ♖g6 8.♖xc5 For sure **8.0-0!?** is not the best move, but at least it is an interesting try. **8...d6** is by far Black's best, and the most logical too. Practically, it's Black's only move, since anything else leads to a clearly worse position for him. **9.b4! ♖h3+ 10.♖h1 ♖f2+ 11.♖g1**



A) 11...♖b6 12.♖c3 c6 (12...♖h3+? now doesn't work anymore, because of **13.♖h1 ♖f2+ 14.♖xf2 ♖xf2 15.e6 ♖xe6**



16. ♖xe6+ ♗f6 17. ♖g4+ ♜f7 18. ♜g5+ ♜e7 19. ♜d5+ winning.) 13. ♖b3 is extremely sharp, so it's no wonder that silicon minds claim all zeros!

B) 11... ♜h3+ leads to imminent repetition and a draw.

8... ♜xh1 9. ♜c3



9...h6! 10. ♖c4 d6 11. ♜d5 ♜c6 11... ♜f8?? 12. ♖e4+! ♜f7 (12... ♜h5 13. e6+) 13. ♜xh6 gxh6 14. ♖h7+ ♜e8 15. ♜xc7+ ♖xc7 16. ♖xc7 ♜a6 17. ♖xd6 ♜f5 18. 0-0 ♜c8 19. ♜d4 ♜d8 20. ♖xh6 ♜f2 21. ♖h5+ ♜d7 22. e6+ 1-0 Z. Almasi 2707 - A. Giri 2714, Beijing 2011.

12. e6 ♜h7 13. ♖e4+ ♜g8 14. e7 14. ♖g4!? is another interesting idea, but Black can easily equalize with precise play. I invite you to enjoy the following lines, strongly supported by modern engines.



A) 14...b6 15. ♜e3 ♖f8 16. 0-0-0 ♜b7 17. ♜f1 ♜e5 18. ♜e7+ ♖xe7 19. ♜xe5 dxe5 20. ♜f7 ♖xf7! 21. exf7+ ♜xf7 22. ♖f5+ with a perpetual check;

B) 14...a5 15. ♜e3 ♜b4!

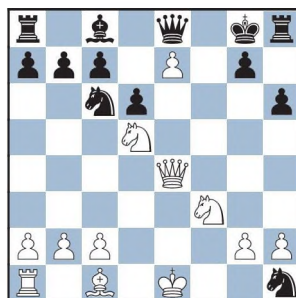
B1) 16. ♜d4 ♜xc2+ 17. ♜e2! ♜xd4+ 18. ♜xd4 h5 (18... ♖g5 19. ♖xg5 hxg5 20. ♜xc7 ♜xe6 21. ♜dxe6 ♜h6 22. ♜e1 ♜b8 23. ♜xh1 ♜xe6+ 24. ♜xe6 ♜e8=; or 18...c6 19. ♜f5 ♖g5 20. ♜fe7+ ♜h7 21. ♖e4+ g6 22. ♜f1 h5 23. ♜f7+ ♜h6 24. ♜f6 ♜h7 25. ♜xg6 ♖g4+! 26. ♖xg4 hxg4 27. ♜xh8 g3 28. h3 cxd5 29. ♜f8) 19. ♖e4 ♜h6 20. ♜xh1 c5 21. e7 ♜g4+ 22. ♖xg4 hxg4 23. exd8 ♖+ ♜xd8 24. ♜f5

♜e6+ 25. ♜d3 ♜e5 26. ♜fe3; ♜e6+ 25. ♜d3 ♜e5 26. ♜fe3; ♜e6+ 25. ♜d3 ♜e5 26. ♜fe3;

B2) 16. ♖g6 ♜xd5 17. ♖f7+ ♜h7 18. ♖f5+ ♜g8 19. ♖f7+=;

C) 14... ♖f8 15. ♜e3 ♜b8 16. 0-0-0 ♜e7! 17. ♜xc7 b5 18. ♜f1 ♖f5 19. ♖h4 ♜c6 20. ♜e1 a6 What can we say?! It all looks rather wild, as White is a full rook down, but just take a look at Black's king and cornered rook. I better not mention how silicon minds evaluate this position!

14... ♖e8



15. ♜e3! So far, both players have executed the moves that are considered best.

15. ♜xc7 ♜f5! 16. ♖d5+ ♖f7 17. ♜xa8 ♖xd5 18. e8 ♖+ ♜h7 19. ♜g5+! hxg5 20. ♖h5+ ♜g8=.

15... ♜d7! N 15... ♜xe7 16. ♖xe7 ♜d7 17. ♖xe8+ ♜xe8 18. ♜d2 ♜c6 19. ♜b4 ♜e4 20. ♜xh1 ♜h7 21. h4 ♜h8 22. ♜f1 a5 and a draw was agreed in V. Orlov 2117 - H. Nepomuk 1979, LSS email 2013.

16. ♜xc7 ♖xe7 17. ♖xe7 ♜xe7 18. ♜xa8 ♜f7 19. ♜c7 ♜c8 20. ♜xa7 ♜xc7 21. ♜d2 21. 0-0-0!

21... ♜c4 22. ♜xh1 ♜a4 23. ♜b8 ♜c6 After a tough struggle this game ended in a draw. Of course, I presented this game as an interesting option to maybe surprise your opponent... you never know. Just remember that "fortune favors the brave".

E

CATALAN OPENING

EO4

Wesley So	2766
Jan-Krzysztof Duda	2729

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

1. ♜f3 d5 2. g3 ♜f6 3. ♜g2 c5 4. 0-0 ♜c6 5. d4 e6 6. c4 dxc4

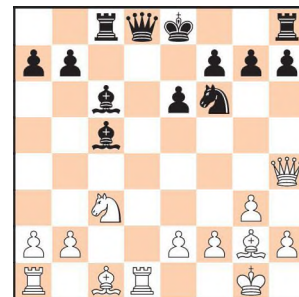


7. ♖a4 Here So deviates, aiming to gain an opening advantage.

7. dxc5 has been previously tested on numerous occasions, leading to a forced queenless middlegame in which Black players have an excellent score, although it's far from being harmless. Wesley So had employed this line against many opponents - Nepomniachtchi, Aronian, Anand and Sevian, just to name a few. However, following 7... ♖xd1 8. ♜xd1 ♜xc5 9. ♜bd2 c3 10. bxc3 0-0 11. ♜b3 ♜e7 these games mostly ended in a draw after both 12. ♜fd4 and 12. c4 ♜d7.

7... ♜d7 8. ♖xc4 cxd4 8...b5 is the most played move according to my database. In fact only just recently our two protagonists reached this same position with colors reversed and play continuing 9. ♖d3 c4 10. ♖d1 ♜c8. Now engines suggest 11. ♜e5 or 11. ♜f4, but Duda tried 11. a3, which So met with 11... ♜a5 - immediately taking advantage of the weak b3 square - and later won on move 49 in J. Duda 2731 - W. So 2760, Internet 2022.

9. ♜xd4 ♜c8 10. ♜c3 ♜xd4 11. ♖xd4 ♜c5 12. ♖h4 ♜c6 13. ♜d1



13... ♖b6? After this mistake Black will face a very difficult position, where it is only White who will be able to press for a win.

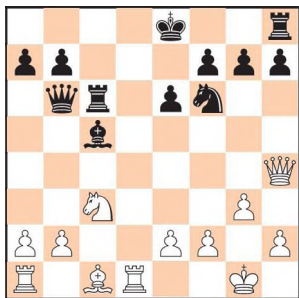
13... ♖a5! is the main line, after which play might continue 14. ♜xc6+ ♜xc6



15.♔g5 (Or 15.♔h6 0-0 16.♔xg7 ♕xf2+ 17.♔xf2 ♔xg7=) 15...♕e7 16.♖e4, the point now being 16...♗f5, when the black queen is just in time to protect everything.

14.♔xc6+ ♖xc6 After a classic Catalan opening, which is known for its quiet and classical approach, Black commits another inaccuracy by playing 14...♖xc6. In fact, it caught me by surprise that this same position has occurred in more than twenty different games – but don't try that move at home!

14...♗xc6! was necessary, when after 15.♔g5 ♕e7 16.♖ac1 White has a very comfortable advantage.



15.♔h6! This is the crucial move that immediately punishes Black's careless play. White is now close to winning.

15...♔f8 15...gxf6 16.♗xf6 0-0 17.♖e4! ♗b4 18.♗e5 ♕e7 19.a3 ♗a4 20.♖d4 ♗c2 21.♖d7+- is a crushing line that shows how uncoordinated Black's pieces are.

16.♖d3! The strongest move according to the engines.

16.♖d2 is definitely not the best, but was previously essayed in several games.



A) 16...e5 17.♕e3 ♗a6

A1) 18.♖ad1 ♕e7 19.♗g5 0-0 20.♗xe5 ♕b4 21.♖d8 ♖c8 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♗d4 ♗a5 24.♗xa7 ♕xc3 25.bxc3 ♗b5 26.♗b6 ♗a4 27.♖d8+ was Z.Ribli 2585 - L.Ljubojevic 2605, Buenos Aires 1978, which White won on move 49.

A2) Or 17...♗a5 18.a3 a6 19.♗g5 h6

20.♗f5 and White won on move 42 in E.Romanov 2593 - N.Zwirs 2481, Hoogeveen 2022.

B) 16...♖d5 17.♖xd5 exd5 18.♕e3 ♕c5 19.♕xc5 ♖xc5 20.♗a4+ ♖c6 21.♗a3 ♖d6 22.♖ad1 0-0 23.♖xd5 exd5 24.♖xd5 is clearly better for White, but Black managed to salvage a draw on move 31 in M.Orlinkov 2385 - S.Sjugirov 2562, Moscow 2009.

16...♖d5 16...e5 is probably the best try for Black, although his position looks really poor after 17.♕e3 ♗a5 18.♔g5 ♕e7 19.♖ad1 0-0 20.♔xf6 ♔xf6 21.♗e4 ♖b6 22.b3 ♖b4 23.♗f5 ♗a6 24.♖d5 ♖d4 25.♖xd4 exd4 26.♖xf6+ ♗xf6 27.♗xf6 gxf6 28.♖xd4 when White won on move 42 in V.Topalov 2743 - L.Van Wely 2668, Monte Carlo 2003.

17.♖xd5 exd5 18.♕e3



18...♗xb2 We can't call this move a novelty since any black move would lead to disaster. In fact, after 14...♖xc6 Black was already significantly worse.

18...♕c5 19.♕xc5 ♗xc5 20.♖e3+ shows the difference between 16.♖d3 and 16.♖d2. Then, after 20...♔d7 21.♗g4+ ♔c7 22.♗xg7 ♖f8 23.♖d1 a6 24.♖d3, Black resigned in K.Izzat 2496 - I.Sukandar 2393, Adelaide 2018.

19.♔d4 ♗b4 20.♖b3 ♗e7 21.♗xe7+ ♔xe7 22.♖xb7+ After this capture, Wesley converted his advantage flawlessly.

Black resigned

CATALAN OPENING

E04

Andrey Esipenko	2675
Vincent Keymer	2690

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 d5 4.g3 It's well known that among elite players you will

often see the Catalan setup as being part of their main repertoire. I would say that one of the main reasons for this choice is its very solid configuration, which normally allows White the opportunity to play a lot of natural moves almost without deep thinking.

4...dxc4 In case you want to play a gambit, remember to take a look first at the possible captures, and how you should play when someone decides to hold on to that extra material.

5.♔g2 c6



6.0-0 6.♖e5 ♕b4+ 7.♔d2 leads to sharp play, which Esipenko probably wanted to avoid at such an early stage or perhaps he had simply prepared something else?!

6...b5 7.a4 ♕b7 8.♖e5 a6 9.b3 cxb3 10.♗xb3 A standard pawn sacrifice, where White in return will obtain very active piece play, and the initiative. In other words, White will be "paying two pawns" in order to obtain activity plus initiative. Not a bad deal after all.

10...♗xd4 11.♕b2 ♗b4 12.♗c2 ♗c5 13.♗d3 Of course, you should not trade pieces when you're down on material, unless something concrete proves the opposite.

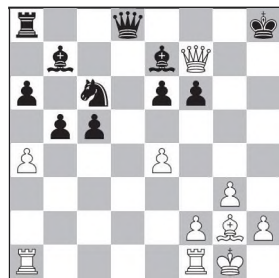
13...♕e7 14.♖d2 As we can easily see, White has obtained very pleasant piece play, along with some interesting potential targets – for example the c6 pawn and the suspect placement of the black king.

14...♖d5?! Once again a move that has been played by others, however, not the best option. Therefore, once again dear reader, I will encourage you to not always imitate what others did; but instead try to create your own chess approach and philosophy.

14...0-0 15.♖e4 ♗b6 16.♖g5 h6 17.♖gxf7 ♖xf7 18.♗g6 ♖f8 19.♖g4 c5 20.♖xh6+ ♔h8 21.e4 ♗d8 22.♖f7+



♞xf7 23.♞xf7 ♖c6 24.♙xf6 gxf6



A) 25.e5! was necessary first, as the g2 bishop needs to wake up! 25...♞e8 26.♞xe6 ♞c8 27.♞f7 ♞e8 28.♞e6 (Or 28.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 29.axb5 axb5 30.♞fd1∞) 28...♞c8=;

B) 25.♞xe6? ♞c8!, Black is clearly better and later won on move 50 in V.Gunina 2437 - R.Raja 2433, Skalice 2021.;

14...♞b6! is correct and best. Then, after, for example, 15.axb5 axb5 16.♞xa8 ♙xa8 17.♙e4!? (17.g4!?) 17...♙d5 18.♙xf7 ♙xf7 19.♞f3+ ♙f6 20.♙h3! (20.♞h5+? ♙e7 Black is almost winning, but the game ended in a draw on move 65 in D.Wagner 2584 - C.Murphy 2427, Terme Catez 2022.)

A) 20...♙d7! 21.♙xe6+ ♙e7! is unclear, although we should note that a piece is a piece.

B) 20...♞e8? 21.♞h5+!

C) 20...♙e7? 21.♞g4!

15.♞fc1N It's really funny to see how natural moves like this turn out to be novelties.

15.♙e4!? ♞b6 16.♙xf7 ♙xf7 17.♞f3+ ♙f6 18.♙g5+ ♙e7 19.e4 ♙g5 20.exd5 cxd5 21.♞fe1 (Better was 21.a5! forcing the queen to abandon its pleasant position. Then, after 21...♞c6 22.♞g4! ♙f6 23.♙xf6+ ♙xf6 24.♞fe1, White's initiative continues and Black will have to find some 'only' moves to save the game.) 21...♙d7?! (21...♙f6!? 22.a5 ♞d6 23.♙a3 b4 24.♙xb4 ♞xb4 25.♞ab1 with some practical compensation for White.) 22.♞g4 ♙f6 23.♞xg5 ♙f7 24.♞f4 ♞ac8 25.♙d4 White was clearly better, but the game ended in a draw on move 54 in M.Tabatabaei 2643 - D.Dvirnyy 2492, Cattolica 2022.

My engine shows 15.axb5!N to be White's best here. Interestingly enough, it hasn't been played before by humans, so that's why I have put the novelty sign after it.



A) 15...cxb5 16.♙b3 ♞c7 17.♞fc1 ♞b6 18.♙a5 is a picturesque position of total domination by White.

B) 15...axb5 is the most logical move, although, of course, computers tend to have different opinions when it comes to the word "logical". 16.♞xa8 ♙xa8 17.♞a1 ♙b7 18.♙d4 ♞d6 19.♞a7 ♞c7 20.♙b3 0-0 21.♙a5 c5 22.♞xb7 ♞xa5 23.♙xd5 exd5 (If 23...cxd4, then 24.♙e4!± leaves no doubts about White's pressure here.) 24.♞xe7 cxd4 25.♞f5! with a virtually winning position for White, who will slowly capture Black's pawns on f7, d5 and d4 in this order, whereas the black king remains weak at all times.

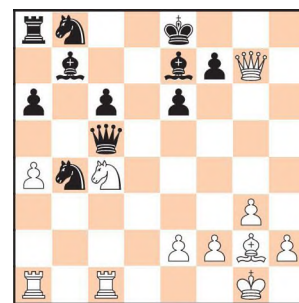
C) 15...0-0! A very hard move to find, but when you are defending it's important to consider returning the material you have taken. Especially when the security of your king is one of the main issues. After 16.bxc6 ♙xc6 17.♙d7 should be technically winning for White who is the exchange up.

15...♞b6

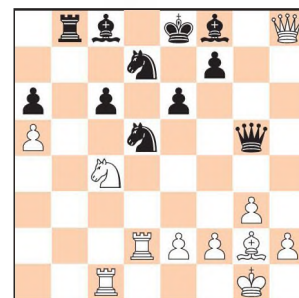


16.♙ec4! A wonderful piece sacrifice, however, a very standard one since White will be able to recover his sacrificed material, plus extra revenue.

16...bxc4 17.♙xc4 ♙b4 18.♞b1 ♞c5 19.♙xg7 ♞g8 20.♞xh7 ♞xg7 21.♞xg7 Now material is balanced, however the black king's position is far from being secure.



21...♙d7 22.♞h8+ ♙f8 23.a5 ♞b8 24.♞ab1 ♙c8 25.♞b2 ♞g5 26.♙d2! A very deep and wonderful maneuver. **26...♙d5**



27.e4?! After this inaccuracy White's advantage is not clear.

27.♙xd5!! is a very counter-intuitive move. However, explanations are not necessary when it comes to calculation. 27...exd5 28.♙d6+ ♙e7 29.♞xc6 ♙b7! (29...♞xd2?? 30.♞h5!!+- is, of course, a very hard sequence to find!) 30.f4 ♙xc6 31.fxg5 ♙xd6 32.♞c2±.

27...♞h6 28.♞a1 And, after a very complex battle, Esipenko eventually converted his advantage. **White won**

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE

E49

Anish Giri	2780
Dommaraju Gukesh	2718

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

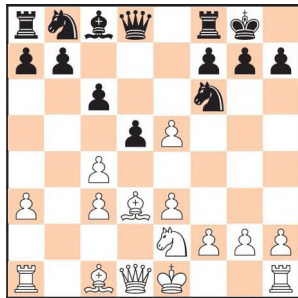
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙c3 ♙b4 4.e3 ♙f6 5.a3 Compared to their clash in Wijk aan Zee one month before this game (see page 15 -Ed.), Giri now chooses to remain within Nimzo territory, although these positions look pretty similar to those of the Ragozin. Actually the Ragozin Defense has become one of Gukesh's main weapons, so if you



are planning to play this opening then he is the guy to follow.

5...♟xc3+ 6.bxc3 c6 7.♟d3 0-0 8.♟e2 e5 One of the key ideas for Black in this type of position is to be ready to react in the center, and principally with the ...e5 break!

9.dxe5

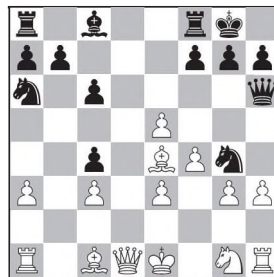


9...♟g4!? A very nice and brave novelty from the young Indian genius! However, this move doesn't exclude Black from danger.

9...dxc4 is the main line in this position. Then might follow 10.exf6 ♟xd3 11.♟xd3 cxd3 12.fxg7 ♟d8 13.♟f4 ♟a6 14.f3 ♟c5 15.♟b1 b5 16.e4 ♟xg7 17.♟e3 ♟a4 with a very complex and rich position. After 18.♟d2 ♟e6, White had an edge, but the game ended in a draw on move 57 in D.Yang 2481 - K.Dragun 2585, New York 2019.

10.cxd5 It seems that the novelty has paid off! Giri didn't want to accept the challenge of testing his fierce opponent's memory and opted for a quieter line.

10.f4 was critical, and probably the most ambitious try, although the level of complexity here is huge! After 10...dxc4 11.♟c2 it would have been a real pleasure to see what Gukesh had in mind. I will add some lines in order to better explain future developments on the board. 11...♟h4+ (11...♟xd1+ 12.♟xd1 ♟d7 13.h3 ♟h6 14.g4 ♟c5 15.0-0 leads to an unclear position in which White has gained space on the kingside, but his bishops still need to find inroads.) 12.g3 ♟h3 13.♟e4 ♟a6 (13...♟h6!? is another interesting try, when after, for example, 14.♟g1 ♟d7 15.♟d4 ♟a6 16.a4 ♟c7 17.♟a3 ♟d8 18.♟d6 ♟a5, White is clearly for choice, although precise play is required.) 14.♟g1 ♟h6 15.h3

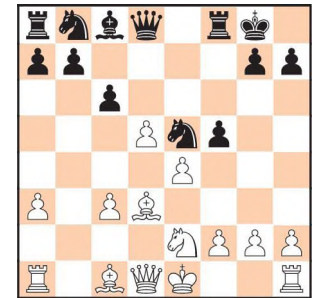


15...♟xe5! 16.fxe5 ♟g5 (16...♟c5 17.♟c2 ♟g5 18.♟f2 ♟d8 transposes.) 17.♟f2 ♟c5 18.♟c2 ♟d8 leads to a very complex position, which is seemingly easier to play for Black, who however needs to be very careful in handling the initiative!

10...♟xe5 11.e4 Despite the fact that 10.cxd5 wasn't the main line, it is

nevertheless one that contains a lot of poison.

11...f5!



Once again Black needs to play with a lot of energy, making active moves on every turn. Since he is a pawn down there is no time for regrets.

12.0-0 After 12.♟b1!? fxe4 13.♟xe4 ♟f5! 14.♟xf5 ♟xf5 15.♟g3 ♟f8, Black has some compensation for the pawn, although the position remains very sensitive.

12...♟xd3 13.♟xd3 fxe4 14.♟xe4 cxd5 15.♟d3 ♟f5 16.♟g3 ♟c6 After successfully completing the development of his pieces, Gukesh didn't have any problem equalizing. The novelty he unleashed paid off and earned him a **draw**.

Finally, I would like to remind you that just because others have played a line before it does not mean that it is playable or good – you need to create your own criteria. In other words, be sceptical about opening theory and also prepared to develop your own repertoire.



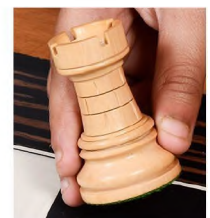
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HIKARU NAKAMURA WINS AMERICAN CUP IN SAINT LOUIS

Naka Is The Last Man Standing!

**THE
AMERICAN
CUP • 2023**

Despite its unusual and, for some, complicated tournament format, the 2023 American Cup brought a lot of excitement for both players and spectators. Certainly, it required a complete set of skills in classical, rapid and blitz chess to go all the way and win this event. For Hikaru Nakamura, it also meant going through a memorable trilogy against his many-time rival Wesley So.

■ By GM John Burke



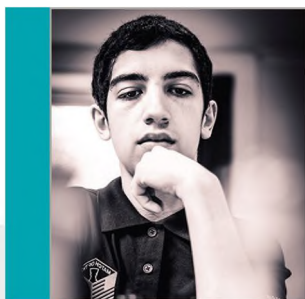
FINAL STANDINGS

1. Hikaru NAKAMURA
2. Wesley SO
3. Levon ARONIAN
4. Leinier DOMINGUEZ
- 5-6. Fabiano CARUANA,
Sam SHANKLAND
- 7-8. Ray ROBSON,
Sam SEVIAN

▲ Hikaru Nakamura Photo by Lennart Ootes

Like last year, when it was first introduced, the 2023 American Cup put eight of the best U.S. players through a double elimination format that tested their skills in classical, rapid, and blitz. The event consists of two brackets – the “Champions” Bracket, where all the players start, and the “Elimination” Bracket, where players go after they lose a match in the Champions Bracket. Then, if a player loses another match, this time in the Elimination Bracket, he is knocked out of the event and has to sit aimlessly in his hotel room until the closing ceremony. I’m kidding, of course – there’s a ton of fun things to do in Saint Louis!

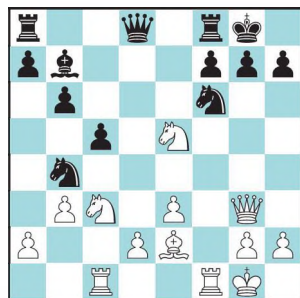
Hikaru Nakamura was definitely the deserving winner, as he was the only player to win classical games and displayed great resourcefulness in the playoff portions. However, the tournament came to an abrupt end when Wesley So, Nakamura’s opponent in the final match, crumbled and blundered!



John Burke was the 2020 US Junior Champion. The young grandmaster from New Jersey had already stunned the chess world in 2015 by breaking the record as youngest player ever to surpass 2600+ ELO. John's most notable victories include the 2018 U.S. Masters, the 2018 New York International Championship, and the 2019 Washington International Open. In 2021 he shared first at the Cherry Blossom Classic in Dulles, VA, and also in the World Open in Philadelphia, PA.

Hikaru Nakamura	2768
Wesley So	2761

St Louis 2023, Rapid Playoff



17...♖xd2?? This blunder abruptly cuts the match short. It's understandable, since the players have been playing for many days in a row and are probably exhausted. Also, it's possible to think that White's only idea here involves ♗xf6, but it turns out the rook can leave the f-file and trap the queen!

18.♗fd1 Wesley probably calculated 18.♗c4 ♖d8, and saw that he can save his knight – although even this is bad after ♗d6.

18...♖b2 19.♗c4 **Black resigned** since the queen has nowhere to go.

Nakamura announced himself early on, being the only player to win a classical

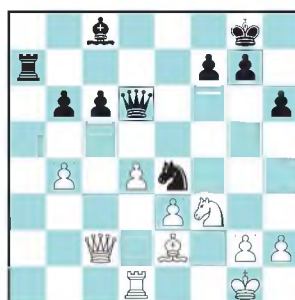
game right from the start, as he defeated Sam Sevian with the white pieces in the first game of their mini-match. What impressed me even more was how he smoothly held a draw in the second game to clinch matters.

D37

Samuel Sevian	2687
Hikaru Nakamura	2768

St Louis 2023, Champions Bracket

1.d4 ♠f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♗c3 h6 5.♗f4 ♗d6 6.♗xd6 ♖xd6 7.e3 0-0 8.♗c1 a6 9.a3 b6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗e2 ♗bd7 12.0-0 ♗b7 13.b4 c6 14.♖b3 a5 15.♗fd1 axb4 16.axb4 ♗a7 17.♗a1 ♗fa8 18.♗xa7 ♗xa7 19.♗e1 ♗e4 20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.f3 ♗f6 22.fxe4 ♗xe4 23.♗f3 ♗c8 24.♖c2



Material is equal and the position should be level. Black would be pretty safe after ...♗f6, but Hikaru chooses a more concrete option that shows tremendous belief in his calculation.

24...♗f5 25.♗e5 It turns out that Black doesn't really have a good discovery with the knight. White threatens the c6 pawn and also prepares ♗d3/♗f1 ideas. Things could go wrong very quickly if Black is inaccurate.

25...♖f6! Not an obvious move, but certainly one that Nakamura saw in advance. The queen is coming to g5, creating threats against White's king.

In case of 25...♗f2? White gets two minor pieces for a rook after 26.♖xf5 ♗xd1 27.♗xd1 ♖xb4 28.♗xc6 ♖e1+ 29.♖f1 ♖xe3+ 30.♖f2. Black will have to suffer and beg for a draw here.

25...♗c7 is an example of how Black's position can collapse after a lazy move. This looks normal, defending the c6 pawn, but now White can exploit Black's loose

YOU MAY LOSE ONLY ONCE!

The matches in the Champions Bracket consisted of two classical games – 90 minutes per player for the whole game, with a 30-second increment starting from move one. If the players are tied after that, they play two rapid games of 10+5. If they are still tied, they play two blitz games of 3+2, and if still tied, they finally play an Armageddon game. The matches in the Elimination Bracket followed the same format, except the original games were 25+10, not classical.

At the end of all the madness, the winner of the Champions Bracket and the winner of the Elimination Bracket play a match under Champions Bracket conditions. If the Champions Bracket winner wins this match, he wins the event, since he would not have lost any matches at that point, and the opponent would have lost two. However, if the Elimination Bracket winner wins, then both players would have lost a match throughout the course of the event, so the two would play one final match under Elimination Bracket conditions to decide the title.

It may sound confusing, but the important thing to keep in mind is that you are only eliminated once you lose two matches.

knight on e4. 26.♗d3 ♖d5 27.b5 c5



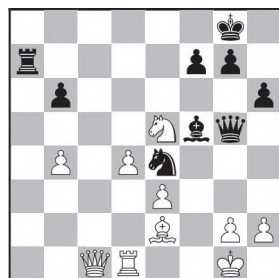
28.♗xf7 Not the only good move, but certainly good enough to discard this line for Black. 28...♗xf7 29.♗c4 ♗g5 30.♗xd5 ♗xc2 31.♗xf7+ ♖xf7 32.♗c1 ♗e4 33.dxc5 bxc5 34.♗xc5+.

After 25...♗g3 26.♗d3 ♗xd3 27.♖xd3 ♗h5, Black is still fine here, but White retains some pressure in a couple of ways. For example, 28.♗c1 ♗c7 29.♗a1.

26.♗d3 26.♖xc6?? backfires after



26...♖g5, when White can't defend the e3 pawn conveniently. 27.♖c1



27...♞a1!-+ A classic deflection idea - we'll see this theme again later! 28.h4 ♜xc1 29.hxg5 ♜c3-+.

26...♖g5 Here's the tactical justification for Black's play - he defends against the threat to his knight indirectly. 26...♜d6 27.e4 was not the plan of course, as White gets his way in the center and has a large advantage.

27.♞e1 27.♞xe4 runs into 27...♖xe3+.

27...♞a1! Again, we see this deflection idea.

28.♞xa1 ♖xe3+ White's king can run to f1 now, so he will actually end up amassing three pieces for the queen.



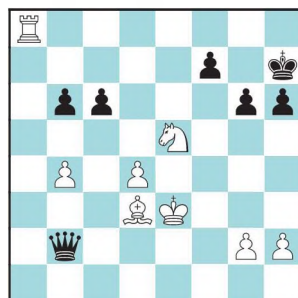
29.♜f1 29.♜h1?? ♜f2+ 30.♖xf2 ♖xf2 The f5 bishop is defended here, so Black wins. 31.♞f1 ♖xd4 32.♞xf5 f6 33.♜c4+ ♜h7 34.♜d3 fxe5-+.

29...♜d2+ 30.♖xd2 ♖xd2 31.♞a8+ Not 31.♜xf5?? because of 31...♖f4+ winning.

31...♜h7 32.♜xf5+ g6 33.♜d3 After a forced line, we get a dynamically balanced position. Normally two minor pieces and a rook would dominate a queen, but here they don't coordinate so well. More importantly, White's king is

very exposed, and avoiding a perpetual will be impossible. Consider that this was the position Hikaru had to see and assess when he decided on 24...♜f5. Pretty impressive!

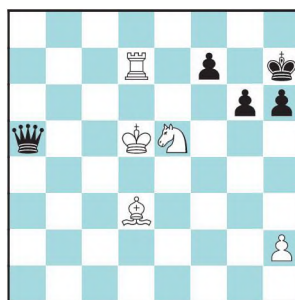
33...♖c1+34.♜e2 ♖b2+35.♜e3



35...c5 Forcing matters in the center, and breaking down the defense of the e5 knight.

36.bxc5 bxc5 37.♞d8 cxd4+ 38.♞xd4 ♖xg2 39.♞d7 Now, if White had a free move, he would take on f7 and think about mating Black, but that's not how chess works.

39...♖g1+ 40.♜e4 ♖e1+ 41.♜d5 ♖a5+



42.♜e4 42.♜d6 ♖b4+ 43.♜c6 ♖c3+ This wouldn't change a thing - there's just nowhere for the king to hide.

42...♖e1+ 43.♜d5 ♖a5+ 44.♜e4 ♖e1+ **Draw.**

The second round featured the matches Nakamura - Dominguez and Caruana - So. Caruana and So drew their two classical games before So won the rapid playoff.

However, for the second time in a row, Nakamura finished things off in the classical portion, winning with Black



▲ Samuel Sevian

Photo by Lennart Ootes

against one of the most solid and best prepared players in the world - in what was yet another classical masterpiece!

B32

Leinier Dominguez	2743
Hikaru Nakamura	2768

St Louis 2023, Champions Bracket

1.e4 c5 Already a sign of aggressive intentions! Hikaru usually plays the Berlin, but here goes for something more offbeat.

2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 e5 The Kalashnikov is a rare guest at the top level, compared to the Sveshnikov, but it's still a perfectly fine opening.

5.♜b5 d6 6.♜1c3 a6 7.♜a3 ♜e6 This is the modern way to play this opening - to not even attempt to prevent White's a3 knight from returning to the game. 7...b5 8.♜d5 ♜f6 9.c4 is one of the differences from the Sveshnikov - White doesn't necessarily have to transpose back with ♜g5, but can try this independent option.

8.♜c4 ♞b8 A slightly mysterious looking move, but the point is that b6 is covered after Black pushes ...b7-b5 in some lines.

9.♜d5 After 9.♜e3, now 9...b5 illustrates the point of 8...♞b8.

9...♜xd5 10.exd5 ♜ce7 11.g3 11.g4 is the shocking top engine line, which is impossible to play if you don't know it.



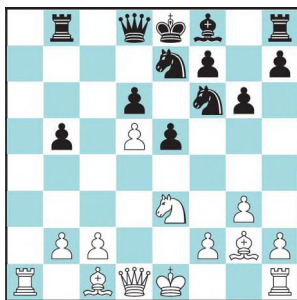
▲ Leinier Dominguez

Photo by Lennart Ootes

It looks very unnatural to weaken the f4 and h4 squares, but the idea is that it interferes with Black's development. If he plays ... f6 , he always has to worry about g4-g5. 11... g6 .

11...b5 12. e3 g6 We have a sharply unbalanced position here. White will try to play on the queenside and use the undermining moves such as a2-a4 or b2-b4, while Black will go for kingside play with a potential ...f7-f5 pawn push at some stage.

13.a4 f6 14.axb5 axb5 15. g2

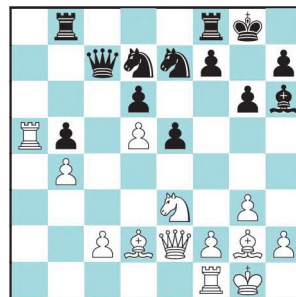


15... h6 ! Normally, when we play ...g7-g6 or g2-g3, we automatically put our bishop on g7 or g2, but here Black has an additional option where the bishop can exert more influence.

16.0-0 0-0 17. d3 d7 The knight isn't doing much on f6, so it makes sense to redeploy it to c5, especially if it comes there with a gain of tempo.

18. d2 c5 19. e2 c7 Black had to make a tough choice as to whether he wanted to play 19...b4 instead. On the one hand, he prevents White from playing b4 himself and fixing the b5 pawn as a weakness. On the other hand, he concedes the c4 square to White.

20.b4 d7 21. a5



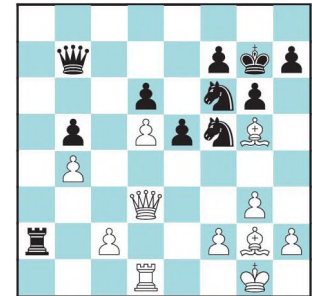
21... xe3 ! Absolutely necessary. Passive defense with 21... b7 would fall flat, as after 22. fa1 White has total control of the a-file and Black has no counterplay.

22. xe3 f5 23. a7 It's definitely better to keep the bishop pair, rather than grabbing pawns. After 23. xb5 Black would have many good paths forward. For example, 23... e3 , when White has to take with the pawn, which weakens his king significantly. 24.fxe3 c3 and Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

23... b7 24. xb7 xb7 25. d2 a8

White may have the bishop pair, but the position isn't super-open, and the only pawn weakness is the one on b5. White's pawns may become weak soon, and Black's knight can jump into c4 when the time is right. The position seems balanced, but easier to play for Black.

26. d3 a2 27. d1 f6 28. g5 g7

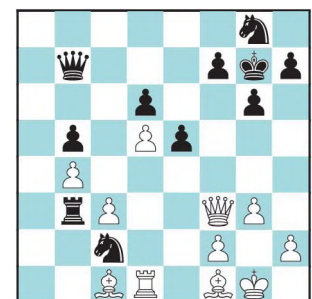


29. h3 ! White has to create some threats, and at the moment the f5 knight is the only vulnerable piece in Black's position.

29... d4 Natural was 29... e7 , attacking the d5 pawn, but it turns out to be risky after 30. xf6+ ! xf6 31.f4. With the f-file opening next, Black could be in trouble if he is not careful.

30.c3 c2 31. f3 I think now was the time to force a draw with 31. d2 , before Black is able to bring his knight to c4 and coordinate his pieces. 31... a1+ 32. d1 a2 leads to a repetition, as trading off the active rook with 32... xd1+ would be a huge concession for Black, when after 33. xd1 a3 34. c1 ! c4 35. h6+ g8 36. g5 , suddenly White is on the offensive.

31... d8 32. f1 a3 33. c1 b3



34. e4 ? Down to his last seconds, Dominguez fails to find a good way to



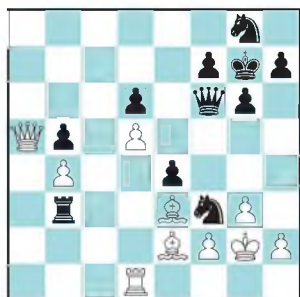
deal with the threat of ... b4 and hangs a pawn.

Instead 34. d3 ! Surprisingly, the best way to deal with the threat is to ignore it! 34... xb4 35. d2 a6 36. c2 The rook is caught behind enemy lines. 36... c5 37. e3 b4 (In case of 37... a3 38. xc5 dxc5 , White has 39. e2 , with a nice double attack on the b5 and e5 pawns.) 38. cxb4 xb4 39. xc5 dxc5 40. xc5 b6 =.

34... xc3 35. b2 f6 36. h4 b3 Now White's position is in a shambles, but the game is not over, as there are still chances for an attack on the dark squares.

37. c1 g8 A nice retreating move, covering h6 .

38. d8 e7 39. a5 d4 40. e3 f3 + 41. g2 f6 42. e2 e4



43. xb5 43... a1 was White's best chance, but it's understandable that Dominguez avoided it, as he is already a pawn down and will potentially lose another one. 43... xa1 Not the only move, but I like its simplicity. 44. xa1 f6 + It's hard to believe that White can survive with his weak b4 and d5 pawns.

43... b2 Nakamura misses a surprising win. 43... xe3 ! 44. fxe3 h6 The knight is coming to g4 or f5 , and White can't keep his kingside together. 45. f1 g4 46. xf3 exf3 + 47. xf3 b2 + 48. h3 hx2 + 49. gx4 h5 + 50. f4 f5 mate.

44. a6 44. f4 ! Finding this exchange sacrifice is a lot to ask, but it looks like it would've given serious saving chances. 44... d4 45. exd4 xd4 46. xd6 .

44... f6 45. h3 h5 ! White is stuck, unable to coordinate his pieces. Black is clearly threatening ... h5-h4 and White can never take on f3 .

46. f1 46. xf3 is met by the devastating 46... xe3 +.

46... e5 With h3 undefended, this is the right moment to transfer the queen.

47. g2 47. f4 f5 48. g2 b2 +.



47... xe3 ! A nice finish.

48. fxe3 h4 49. gxh4 49. xf3 gx3 + 50. f1 exf3 +.

49... h2 +

White resigned

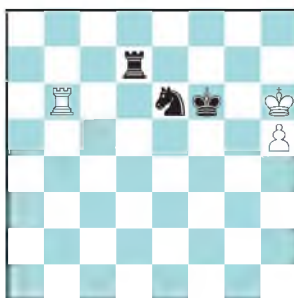
This result meant that Nakamura and So went head to head to see who would emerge as Champion of the Champions Bracket. Spoiler alert: this was not the last time they would play in this event...

THE BEGINNING OF A TRILOGY

After drawing the two classical games without intrigue, the first rapid playoff game was absolutely insane, with both players spoiling winning advantages before So eventually panicked and cracked in a drawn position.

Wesley So	2761
Hikaru Nakamura	2768

St Louis 2023, rapid playoff



The position is a theoretical draw, even without the h -pawn, but with seconds left Wesley panics and tries to force matters.

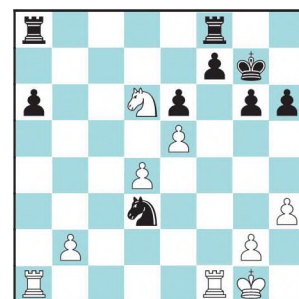
100. xe6 +?? xe6 101. g6 Unfortunately for White, he is just too slow here.

101... d1 102. h6 g1 + 103. h7 f7 White resigned before waiting for what would have been the finish: 104. h8 g6 105. h7 a1 106. g8 a8 mate.

Hikaru Nakamura	2768
Wesley So	2761

St Louis 2023, blitz playoff

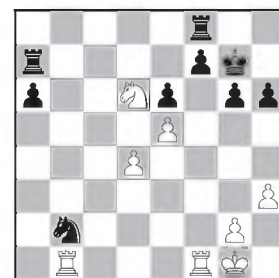
To his credit, Wesley bounced back and won the second rapid game to force matters to the blitz section. But then, Nakamura was absolutely clinical, winning both games. Here's the cute finish to the second game, involving some nice geometry.



37... xb2 Taking this pawn is risky business, but given that Wesley is in a must-win situation, the decision makes some sense.

38. ac1 a7 ? Objectively a mistake, but allowing c7 certainly would not have improved Wesley's winning chances.

39. f3 39. b1 ! This sudden switchback wins, because Black has lost the connection between his rooks.





▲ Hikaru Nakamura vs. Wesley So

Photo by Lennart Ootes

- A) 39...♠d3 40.♗f3 traps the knight.
 B) 39...♠a4 40.♗fc1 with ♗c4 to follow leads to the same outcome.
 C) 39...♗b8 40.♗f2+- If the a7 rook was still on a8, Black could move the knight away, but as it is – he loses a piece.

39...♠a4 39...♗b8! was the last chance. It looks a bit risky to self-pin, but the knight is actually safe.



40.♗b1 ♗b4! Maybe So missed this move, intending to meet ♗f2 with ...♠d3!.

40.♗b3! Now the knight is snared and ♗c4 is unstoppable.

40...♗d7 41.♗c4 **Black resigned**

And while Nakamura was relaxing and waiting to get an opponent for his next match, the rest of the players battled it out through the Elimination Bracket in order to reach the final stage of the event. Wesley

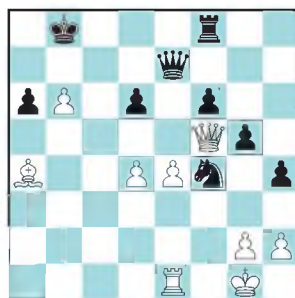
So was able to get through this phase and schedule a re-match with Hikaru.

2/3 – A RE-MATCH

The first two classical games were drawn, though not without major adventures in the first. Then Wesley displayed fine form by winning both rapid playoff games. I was particularly impressed with the way he won the first one.

Wesley So	2761
Hikaru Nakamura	2768

St Louis 2023, rapid playoff

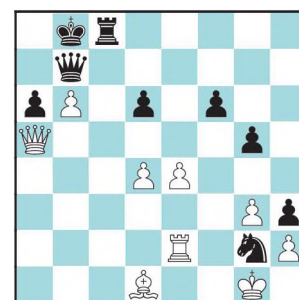


43.♗a5 ♗b7 44.♗d1! This was the one miss for Wesley in an otherwise impressive game. 44.d5! would cement the bishop on c6 with disastrous effects for Black's king safety.

44...h3? Looks natural, aiming to fight against White's idea to bring the bishop to f3 by undermining its protection. Unfortunately, the operation ends up stranding Black's knight. After 44...f5! everything would be up in the air here, since ♗f3 can be met with ...g5-g4.

45.g3 ♗g2 After 45...♗e6 46.♗b4!, White maintains complete control and can play the calm ♗g4 and ♗xh3 next.

46.♗e2 ♗c8 It looks like Black is creating counterplay with ...♗c1 to follow.



However, the important thing to realize is that the g2 knight is not necessarily dangerous just because it's in close proximity to White's king. It's just sitting there, and it can't create any real threats.

47.♗b3! With ♗d5 coming next, there's one trick Wesley had to see.

47...♗c1+ With 47...♗c6 Black wins the pawn back, but opening the b-file offers White a nice tactical opportunity. 48.♗d5 ♗xb6 49.♗a1+- Defending the d4 pawn and preparing ♗b2.

48.♗f2 ♗b1 49.♗d5! Displaying very nice awareness that the transition into the endgame is completely winning for White.

49...♗xb6 50.♗xb6+ ♗xb6 51.♗e6 This is the big point – White will collect the h3 pawn, leaving Black's knight trapped. The rest was easy for Wesley. **White won** on move 66.

Since this was the first match loss for Hikaru in the event, the same two warriors settled their differences in one final match.

After three drawn games, Wesley made a costly blunder in the fourth (as we've seen), which resulted in Nakamura becoming the American Cup champion!



How Did Caruana and Other Top Players Fare?

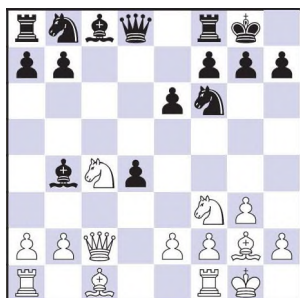
Not much separated the other players in their classical segments, as all the games were evenly balanced. In Round 1, Dominguez eventually triumphed over Aronian in the rapid playoff, as did Caruana over Robson, thanks to some nice play following some opening preparation in the Catalan.

EO1

Fabiano Caruana	2766
Ray Robson	2702

St Louis 2023, rapid playoff

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙b4+
5.♘d2 0-0 6.♘gf3 dxc4 7.♗c2 c5
8.0-0 cxd4 9.♘xc4



We have here a typical Catalan position. Black is temporarily up a pawn but lags behind in development. Often these positions come down to the c8 bishop. If Black manages to get it into the game comfortably, he is usually fine.

9...♘c6 Surprisingly, even though this is far and away the most natural choice, it's an inaccuracy.

Black should give the pawn back immediately by 9...d3! to close the d-file. 10.exd3 ♘c6 11.a3 ♙e7 12.b4 b5! A surprising move given that White's g2 bishop stands ominously on the long diagonal, but it works. It reminds me a bit of Nepo's 11...b5 in Game 6 of his World Championship match against Magnus Carlsen. Then after 13.♘ce5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♘d5 Black will play ...♙b7 next with a fine position.

10.♙d1 Black now has extreme difficulty finishing his development.



▲ Fabiano Caruana

Photo by Lennart Ootes

10...♗e7 This isn't great, but it's hard to say what the best choice was. Giving back the pawn by means of 10...♙d7 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4± doesn't relieve the pressure. Black is still dealing with the monster g2 bishop and will probably lose the b7 pawn.

10...♘d5 is another try, blocking the long diagonal, but now Black's king comes to lack defenders. 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♙c5 13.♗h4! h6 (13...f5 is best, but ugly, and weakens a bunch of squares.) 14.♙xh6! gxh6 15.♗xh6 f5



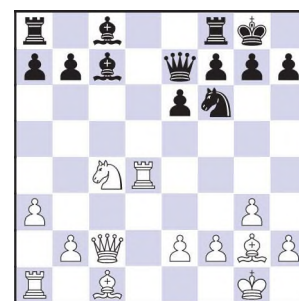
16.♗d2! It's not obvious that this is so good from afar, but it turns out that Black can't prevent White's queen from breaking in. 16...♙g7 17.♙xd5 exd5 (Or 17...♗xd5 18.♗g5+ ♙f7 19.♘e3! ♗d4 20.♙d1 ♗g7 21.♗h5+ winning material and the game.) 18.♘e5 and with ♗g6+ coming, it looks scary for Black.

11.a3 ♙d6 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♙c7



▲ Ray Robson

Photo by Lennart Ootes



14.♙d1 14...♙d2! was actually winning immediately, based on an easy-to-miss



▲ Sam Shankland

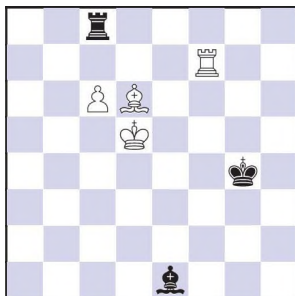
Photo by Lennart Ootes

Play it again, Sam!

Wesley So also moved past Shankland in the rapid segment, despite a huge scare in the first rapid game.

Sam Shankland	2710
Wesley So	2761

St Louis 2023, rapid playoff



After a topsy-turvy rapid game in which both players seemed to be doing well at some point, we come to this endgame in which Shankland seems to be on the brink of victory.

93. ♖e7 Shankland traded rooks a couple of moves later, but under less favorable circumstances than those, as we will see in the following analysis. Eventually, Wesley managed to hold the **draw**.

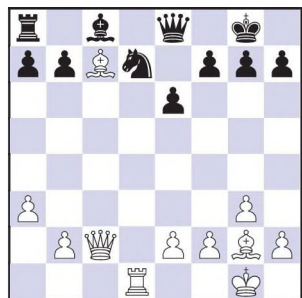
I'm sure Shankland calculated the direct ♖f8, forcing the rooks off, but couldn't reach a conclusion in time and played a different move. Tragically, ♖f8 here would have been winning.

trick. For example, if 14...a5, to stop White's ...♗b4, then 15. ♖xa5! ♗xa5 (15...♖xa5 16. ♗b4+-) 16. ♖a4 The pin will win the piece back while retaining the extra pawn and an overwhelming positional advantage. 16...♗d8 (16...♗xd2 17. ♖xa8 ♗h6 18. ♖xc8+-) 17. b4+-.

14... ♗b8? The last mistake, missing White's idea. The b7 pawn has to be tossed, thus 14...♗d7 was necessary. Desperate times require desperate measures. 15. ♗d2 a5 16. ♗xb7 ♖ab8 17. ♗g2 It's a pawn down for Black, but at least he can fight on. In rapid chess, miracles can happen.

15. ♗d2 Now there's just no stopping ♗b4, with a complete disaster for Black.

15... ♗d8 16. ♗b4 ♖e8 17. ♗d6 ♗xd6 18. ♗xd6 ♖a8 19. ♗c7 ♖d7 20. ♖xd7 ♗xd7 21. ♖d1



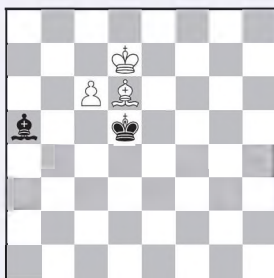
Black is almost comically stuck here. Robson played on, but the result was never in doubt. **White won.**

Analysis

93. ♖f8! This works because Black's king is too far away, and he has to spend a crucial tempo bringing his bishop back.

93... ♖xf8 94. ♗xf8 ♗a5 95. ♗b4! This is the key idea – we force the bishop to choose a square. In each case, White will be able to gain a tempo against it with his king.

The unsophisticated 95. ♗e6? allows Black to set up the defensive construction. 95... ♗f3 96. ♗d7 ♗e4 97. ♗d6 ♗d5

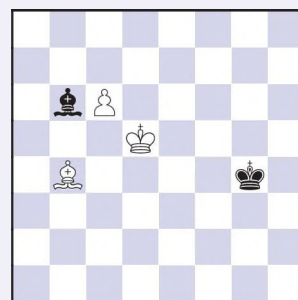


This is an important position to remember in such endings – the defending king approaches the pawn from behind. 98. ♗c7 ♗d2 99. ♗b6 ♗f4=.

95... ♗b6 95... ♗d8 96. ♗d6 ♗f5 97. ♗d7 Similar to the main line, Black has to

waste a move with his bishop, so his king will not reach d5 in time.

After 95... ♗c7 96. ♗e6, again, ♗d7 will gain that tempo.



96. ♗c4! Here's the big point – we choose this path to gain a tempo on the bishop when we play ♗b5.

96... ♗f5 97. ♗b5 ♗c7 98. ♗a5 ♗f4 Or 98... ♗d6 99. ♗b6 ♗e6 100. ♗b7 ♗d5 101. ♗c7 ♗b4 102. ♗g3 ♗a5 103. ♗f2+- transposing to the main line.

99. ♗b6 ♗e4 100. ♗b7 ♗d5 101. ♗c7 ♗d2 102. ♗g3 ♗a5 103. ♗f2 with an unstoppable ♗b6 coming next and winning. Note that Black is one crucial tempo short. If his king was already on c4 for example, he could play ... ♗b5 setting up the drawing construction.



ELIMINATION BRACKET

But what was happening in the Elimination bracket while Nakamura was clearing his path to overall victory?

In the first round, Aronian sent Sevian home in two games, while Shankland did the same to Robson in six. Caruana and Aronian then contested an absolutely epic match consisting of all decisive games and the only Armageddon of the whole event, with Aronian prevailing in the end.

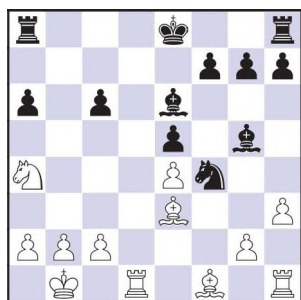
Dominguez was much more efficient against Shankland, taking advantage of a blunder in the first game to end things quickly.

B90

Leinier Dominguez	2743
Sam Shankland	2710

St Louis 2023, Elimination Bracket

1.e4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙e3 ♗g4 7.♙c1 ♗c6 8.h3 ♗f6 9.♙e3 e5 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.f4 ♙e7 12.fxex5 dxe5 13.♙xd8+ ♙xd8 14.0-0-0 ♙e6 15.♙d3 ♗h5 16.♗a4 ♗f4 17.♙f1 ♙g5 18.♗b1



Black should definitely take care to prevent White's threat of g2-g3, winning a piece. For example by playing ...♙e7. Except... maybe it's not a threat after all?

18...0-0?? Shankland thought he was setting a trap, but in fact he was trapping himself.

19.g3 ♗xh3 This is what Sam was counting on. I think I remember Dan Heisman calling this motif a "phantom pin." Apparently everything is okay for Black, since the g5 bishop is defended, and ♗xh3 is met with ...♙xe3.

20.♙b6! You always have to consider

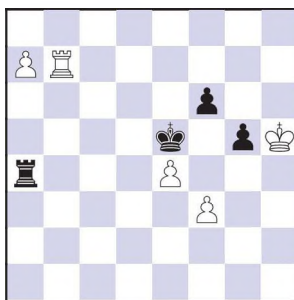


non-captures! Black's knight remains trapped and he will just end up a piece down. Dominguez went on to win.

Aronian then knocked out Dominguez and went on to face So for a chance to get a crack at Nakamura. The first game brought heartbreak for Wesley and showed that rook endgames are so tricky, even for the world's best.

Wesley So	2761
Levon Aronian	2745

St Louis 2023, Elimination Bracket



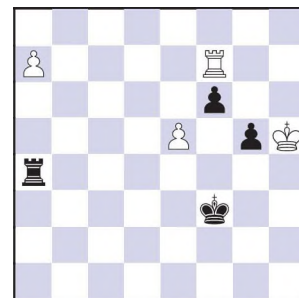
White should be easily winning with his far advanced passer, but he has to take care not to give Black too much counterplay. With limited pawns remaining, the margin of error is often surprisingly

small, despite how overwhelming one's advantage might seem.

62.♙e7+? This permits Black's king to come storming in. Wesley had anticipated this of course, but miscalculated.

I think 62.♗g6 would have been the easiest win, preparing to give up the a-pawn in return for both of Black's remaining pawns. 62...♙a6 (Or 62...♗f4 63.♗xf6 ♗xf3 64.e5+-) 63.♙e7+ ♗f4 64.♙e6 ♙xa7 65.♙xf6+ ♗e5 66.♙f5+ ♗e6 67.♗xg5+-.

62...♗f4 63.♙f7 ♗xf3 64.e5 This was Wesley's whole point – he takes advantage of the pin to create a second passed pawn. Now he'll have two passed pawns and Black won't be able to stop both. Except...



64...♗e4! 65.exf6 65.e6 ♗f5 is the same



▲ The playing arena.

Photo by Lennart Ootes

theme as in the game. 66.♔h6 ♕xe6.

65...♕f5 Suddenly there's a threat of mate! White's king is caught in an awkward spot, and Black will begin using his own pawn.

66.♔h6 g4 White's rook is caught in an awkward situation as well – it can't move without surrendering one of the pawns.

67.♔g7 g3 68.♖b7 g2 69.♖b1 ♖xa7+ 70.f7 ♕f4 71.♔g8 ♖a8+ 72.f8♖+ ♖xf8+ 73.♕xf8 ♔g3 74.♖a1 ♔h2 75.♖a2 ♔h1 76.♖xg2 ♔xg2 **Draw.**

Despite a huge miss, Wesley overcame this setback to win the match in the playoff section, setting up a re-match with Hikaru, which we previously presented.

All-in-all, it was nice to see a double elimination format, which is a very rare guest in chess. You are given a chance to redeem yourself after a match loss, so one bad moment doesn't cost you everything. I'd like to see more experimenting with tournament formats like this – it could make for an entertaining viewing experience for sure. ■

2023 Women's American Cup

SECOND STRAIGHT TITLE FOR IRINA KRUSH

In what was a replay of the 2022 Women's American Cup, this year's final match was another clash of experience and youth, as the eight-time U.S. Champion GM Irina Krush faced the quickly improving 13-year-old FM Alice Lee. Krush won the first classical game, but the youngster bounced back in the second classical game, to force the match towards a rapid playoff.

Again, experience prevailed over youth as Irina won the first rapid playoff game, before the second hard-fought battle ended in draw, which meant a second straight Women's American Cup title for Irina Krush.



Photo by Lennart Ootes

▲ Irina Krush

E48

Irina Krush	2432
Tatev Abrahamyan	2294

Saint Louis 2023



18...♖xe3 19.♕h4 ♖e5 20.♗g3 ♕c6 21.f4 ♖e8 22.♗h5 ♗cd7 23.♗f5 g6 24.♗h6+ ♕f8 25.♗xf6 ♗xf6 26.♗g4 ♗xg4 27.♕xd8 ♗e3 28.♕xb6 **Black resigned**

THE
AMERICAN
CUP • 2023

FINAL STANDINGS

1. Irina KRUSH
2. Alice LEE
3. Nazi PAIKIDZE
4. Gulrukhbegim TOKHIRJONOVA
- 5-6. Atousa PUORKASHIYAN,
Tatev ABRAHAMYAN
- 7-8. Anna ZATONSKIY,
Katerina NEMCOVA



Alexandra Botez

Cover Story

Chess Player + Twitch Streamer
2M subscribers across platforms



brandedcities

THE MOST FOLLOWED CHESS TWITCH STREAMERS, APRIL 2023

GM Hikaru	1,779,594 followers (GM Hikaru Nakamura)
BotezLive	1,214,777 (WFM Alexandra Botez and Andrea Botez)
Chess	989,898 (Chess.com)
GothamChess	880,338 (IM Levy Rozman)
Maskenissen	331,860 (GM Magnus Carlsen)

Source: TwitchMetrics

▲ February 2022: Alexandra Botez's billboard is live in NYC's Times Square

TURNING PASSION INTO A CAREER:
ALEXANDRA BOTEZ'S RISE TO STREAMING FAME

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

In an exclusive interview with Alexandra Botez, one of the most successful chess content creators and streamers, we delve into her inspiring journey from a young chess enthusiast to becoming a social media sensation. From her beginnings in the game to her transition into the world of streaming and content creation, Botez reveals her story of determination, talent, and the challenges she has faced as a woman in both the chess and streaming worlds.

■ By FM Alec Getz

Those familiar with the royal game know Alexandra Botez as one of the most successful chess content creators out there. But as with all successful people, Alex's success didn't just happen overnight. For this interview, I had the pleasure of sitting down with the social media star and discussing not only her beginnings in chess and in life but also her journey into the world of streaming and content. I discovered the fascinating story of this remarkable woman, and am glad to be able to share it now with the readers of the magazine.

Nice to speak with you again. It's been a while! How did you get into chess, and what role did your family play in your early interest in the game?

Sure. I started playing chess when I was six, and as with many chess kids it was because my dad was super into the game. My Dad is Romanian, and his country has a much bigger chess culture, so he learned from his mom, and it's been passed down in my family for generations. I was living in Canada at the time, and I started competing in my first national tournament when I was six or seven. I won the national tournament and my dad decided to keep helping coach me. I really enjoyed playing chess so that was the start of it for me.



Alexandra Botez, Reykjavik Open 2023



FM Alec Getz has been playing chess since he was five when he learned how to play in his school. He quickly climbed the ranks and at age thirteen became a National Master. He had acquired his third International Master norm during college, and although he is now retired from over the board tournaments, he still enjoys keeping up with the game. He, furthermore, likes to turn his passion for writing towards the world of the sixty four squares whenever he can.

When did you start taking chess more seriously?

Although I liked playing chess, I didn't think I took it super seriously when I was a kid. It was only when I moved, and I lost all my friends, that chess was this one thing that was super familiar. So, I started liking it and studying on my own. That's when I was around thirteen or fourteen, when I became really self-driven.

Did you ever think about going professional as a kid, given your chess level?

I never thought that I was good enough to become a professional chess player and I also had always been prioritizing other things at the

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I started playing chess when I was six... I won the national tournament and my dad decided to keep helping coach me. I really enjoyed playing chess, so that was the start of it for me.

same time, like trying to do well in school and trying to get into a good college. But I started teaching chess when I was 12 and when I was 15, I won a full-ride scholarship to the University of Texas for chess. So, this was the kind of thing where I realized that chess could bring a lot of opportunities. But in terms of being a chess professional, I knew that even if you're a top player or top female player most people need to do something on the side.

What were your first steps in exploring the social side of chess?

When I was 16 that's when I started getting into chess social media and I opened a Facebook page for chess where I would post puzzles and things like that – it's still around today – and I would use that to try to get students so I could make money to play in more tournaments and be more serious about chess. And ironically it was that Facebook page that years later the CEO of Chess.com saw and he was like, “oh, this is one of the biggest chess social media pages I've seen. Do you want to come and do content for us?” That got me into content creation.

How did that content eventually develop into streaming that you do today?

I remember I had a lot of friends who were better than me in chess who would say things like, “the only reason anyone is following your Facebook page is because you're a girl. Your chess skill is nowhere good enough to have this amount of following.” So, I got discouraged pretty quickly, and I was still thinking about college full-time. I didn't think that content would be something I would spend all my time on. I did want to take a gap year and work full time on chess, but that was a losing argument I had with my parents. And then in college when I got to my senior year is when I started doing more serious work for Chess.com. But again, I was also working on other things, so chess was never the priority until I decided to go full-time in 2019. It was in 2019 that I thought that there was a big opportunity there, but it took me a while. And in 2019 I think I was one of the earliest chess streamers – Hikaru started after, and I think there were a few other people. But it was super early – I was streaming to like 50 viewers or so at the start.

Can you recap your college days?

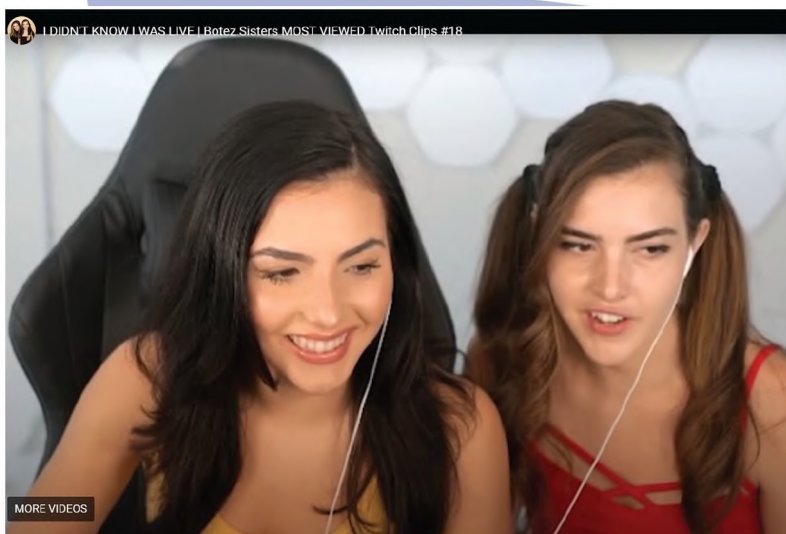
I studied International Relations at Stanford and I either wanted to do pre-law or US-China policy, but then I moved to China for half a



year after my sophomore year and I was working there full-time, where I realized it's something that I'd never have a competitive advantage in and not one that I'd be passionate enough to do. So, I came back home, and I got more into entrepreneurship. I started working on a company while I was at Stanford, and we raised around a million dollars from VCs in the valley. And I ended up working on that up until 2019, so for about three years. When we decided to shut down the startup is when I had also been streaming once a week as a hobby. A lot of the things that I learned from the start up were starting to look like trends in streaming, especially just having a small number of viewers who really love it and they come back every day. It's like, "whoa, it's almost like product-market fit. There's retention here even if it's super early. If this is a market that would grow and something that I'm super passionate about, there might be something there." So, I decided to go full time into chess streaming when my company failed.

When did you know that you were going to make it big as a content creator?

Before the chess boom, I was growing slowly. It wasn't exponential growth, but I think I had started hitting like 1000 concurrent viewers, and I remember just being ecstatic when that happened. That was a big deal for me. But honestly, I didn't know when chess would take off and I was almost getting burned out because I was streaming so many hours of chess, there also wasn't really chess on YouTube yet. Creating content was still something I loved but I didn't know if my content would ever be big enough – I had hoped it would and I was working on initiatives to help it – but I basically just was able to stay for long enough until chess did grow. And I also got very lucky because chess really exploded when the pandemic came, and this is when I realized that this was going to be something big. I remember coming home to stay with



How did it feel being a girl in a male-dominated world?

When I was young, I didn't think about it. I remember I went to play in a tournament in the US where my Canadian rating wasn't accurately reflected. I think I was like 1600 at the time – it was just one of those casual high school tournaments and I was the only girl and only non-high schooler playing in it. And my dad overheard the older boys talking, "Oh, you have an easy game, you're playing the little girl." I ended up getting a perfect score in the tournament. I remember thinking what the boys said was very funny because that's the way that my dad dealt with it. This was kind of how I would approach it, where I would laugh it off and try not to think about it – actually, I just didn't think about it because I was so focused on the chess. The uncomfortableness only really started happening when I got older, and people start treating you differently at tournaments. Once you're twelve or thirteen people start sexualizing you and that's very different, but as a kid I didn't really think about it.

READERS' VOICES

Many top chess players have garnered a significant following (in millions) among audiences typically associated with video games or eSports. This often involves live streaming, where chess personalities play online games while simultaneously sharing their thoughts and insights with viewers. Notable examples include Grandmasters Hikaru Nakamura and Magnus Carlsen, as well as non-professional players like the Botez Sisters and Levy Rozman.

We'd like to know your thoughts on this phenomenon: Have you watched any of these chess streams? Do you believe they contribute to the growing popularity of chess? Are you indifferent to this trend, or do you have any feedback or opinions on it? Additionally, are you interested in learning more about specific chess streamers and their content?

I haven't watched any of these streams but it sounds like something that would be interesting to watch.
Joe Lawson, Tennessee

I very much enjoy good streams focused on chess. I especially like to watch them while I work out. I would enjoy an article focused on chess streamers in order to know what's out there and what each of the streams is like. I've watched

a lot of Banter Blitz and Finegold, as well as some Naka, Levy, and a little of Anna Cramling, Botez sisters. What I would most enjoy are master-level instructional videos, tournament recaps, game analyses, etc. The videos Joel Benjamin used to do for ICC were excellent.
John S. Bath, Ohio

I think chess streamers are instrumental to the growth of chess.



Streaming with Magnus Carlsen

Streamers promote a positive image of chess and stoke interest in the game among the general public. I enjoy watching many of the popular streamers myself and would enjoy feature articles about them in ACM.

Michael Howley,
Pennsylvania

I do not follow “streamers” and do not recommend them to my students but I understand why some might find them “entertaining”. I think interviews with players right after their games and their instant analysis is a very valuable learning tool.

Mehran
Divanbaigyzand,
Virginia

I tried watching a number of different chess streamers and, personally, I find the chess streams boring and of little instructional or entertainment value.

That said, there are many who disagree and avidly watch chess streams. If large numbers of followers are watching chess games every night, that can only be good for chess in the long run.

Mark A. Babik, Texas

Streaming is good for chess players, specially new students of the game. My 5th grade elementary students of our chess club already knew Gotham Chess, Botez sisters, Hikaru Nakamura and others. It certainly helps in the development of chess and making it popular.

Froilan Natividad, Texas

I have not watched the chess streams. They may contribute to the popularity of chess, but only blitz/rapid forms. It is good to know what is going on in the world of chess, so yes learning about streamers and their sites and content is reasonable.

Dr. W. E. Davis, Ohio

”
The thing about being a girl in any kind of content... a lot of people will attribute a lot of your success to that you're female.

my parents during COVID while I was living in New York, just to spend time with them. And all I did was stream when I was home. I started to see the stream numbers growing, which was one of the times when I started to cry tears of joy because I realized it was finally happening and all the hard work was paying off. It had been that situation where I had taken risks before in the past, but they had never panned out. And for once this crazy thing of being a chess content creator when nobody was doing it and everybody was asking what I was doing, especially as a 2000 ELO player, seemed to be paying off – there was something real here.

I asked earlier about being a girl in chess. How does it feel being a girl in the streaming world?

The thing about being a girl in any kind of content, especially if you're playing games, is that a lot of people will attribute a lot of your success to that you're female. And that's something that happens to the chess world to some extent because it is easier as a woman to qualify for things like the World Youth and there are female only sections. But there's also instances when you're playing competitive chess when you experience being sexualized or certain sexism. And you experience that as well as a content creator. It could be as blatant as people coming in like, “what is this girl talking about, why is she commentating?” when I'm commentating on an 1100 match, or it could just be people saying that me and my sister haven't worked for anything and we only have views because we're females, which is what a lot of haters

and trolls like to say on the Internet. But at the same time, there's also positives that I like to focus on because being a minority in any industry is going to have both, and I'd like to think that being unique did help me grow as well. Obviously, it's not the only reason why, but I wouldn't change it. I think you need to have that mentality; otherwise, it can be very draining. So that is what I've tried to switch my focus on.

How did your sister come aboard?

I always thought that my sister was funny, and I enjoyed making content with her from a young age. When she was young, I used to direct and produce little home movies with her as the actress. And when I started streaming, I started inviting her to be a guest on my stream so that we could do sibling matches. I always thought that it was entertaining, and I also thought that she was talented, so I pushed her to get her own twitch as well. And then when COVID happened, my sister had gotten into the University of Toronto and everything was shut down, it wasn't going to be the traditional



college experience, nor did I think that going to college right away when you have such a good opportunity in front of you and you don't know what to study is worth it. So, I convinced my parents and my sister to take a gap year and come work for me with me for the channel. And it ended up working so well that we've done it ever since.

You've been doing this for a while. How do you see your content shaping out in the future?

With content you need to be very fluid in terms of what's doing well and what isn't. I'm going to keep going for as well as I'm still passionate and the content is doing well. I want to continue putting out good chess content while expanding into other areas. I realize I'm not going to be a content creator for the rest of my life, even if I'll always want to make content. It might not be the thing where I'm producing as much as I am now, but there's a ton of opportunities for content creators if you do it properly in terms of

As a successful female content creator, what steps do you think the gaming and streaming industries can take to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women?

The thing about being a girl in any kind of content, especially if you're playing games, is that a lot of people will attribute a lot of your success to that you're female. And that's something that happens to the chess world to some extent because it is easier as a woman to qualify for things like the World Youth and there are female only sections. But there's also instances when you're playing competitive chess when you experience being sexualized or certain sexism. And you experience that as well as a content creator. It could be as blatant as people coming in like, "what is this girl talking about, why is she

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▲ Alexandra Botez, Chess Olympiad, Baku 2016 Photo by David Llada

I mostly watch Gotham Chess & Hanging Pawns. Not sure if they contribute to the popularity of chess as I believe you'd already be into chess to know about them. I think the *Queen's Gambit* had more to do with increasing the popularity of chess than the chess streamers. Also watch some of the big tournament coverage. Joseph Oliva, *Massachusetts*

I have definitely watched and think that they are a big plus for chess. It opens it up to many more people to follow. It also can help current chess players improve their play. Steven Olds, *Georgia*

I have no use for streaming. I have watched a few snippets of various streamers. None of them have held my attention for over a couple of minutes. Stephen Embrey, *Georgia*

I sometimes enjoy the banter in the background while a game is playing out but I do not like unnecessary derogatory remarks. Howard Taylor, *Kansas*

Yes, it definitely adds to the growing popularity of chess. I wish they'd use YouTube or something else rather than the provincial Discord and Twitch, it's easier when traveling outside the USA and for international markets. Dan Ruparel, *Colorado*

I do not watch the streamers, although it is clear they have a following. I have nothing against it, and I think it is one of many things that support the popularity of chess. I have my own chess vices, which include watching chess YouTube videos and listening to chess-related podcasts. Steve Etzel, *Florida*

Very neutral. Sometimes I may watch on YouTube but no chess favorite personality. Sam Pearson, *Maryland*

Sadly, chess streaming takes over the great OTB tournaments. The problem, I think, is the enormous amount of money, and it's hard to keep up with Hotel, Transportation, etc. costs for the grand old tournaments. The other point is that I don't like speed chess as I think chess is losing the creative spirit. Dr. Ferdinand Burmeister, *California*

Still working, no extra time for streaming. However chess is my main hobby and has my attention at all times! John Jacobs, *Pennsylvania*

I started with Kingscrusher and loved it. I enjoy banter blitz and top players reviewing their games. David Beagan, *Michigan*

While not all streamers are entertaining and not all of them appeal to everyone, some will appeal to some people and certainly help promote the game. Does it produce lifelong



devotees, not nearly as many as just check things out, but it is a nice a way as any to promote and encourage growth in the game.

Joshua Milton Anderson,
Pennsylvania

I follow numerous players/streamers. When it is about I am interested. When it is about selling your personal brand through sex it becomes less appealing. Don't get me wrong beautiful women are walking pieces of art but when it comes to that it is simply about money.

Ken Calitri, New York

I have watched a few of the chess streams, and yeah, they contribute to the popularity of chess. People who don't follow chess sometimes find click bait on an opening trap or something and it's interesting to them. You don't need to be a grandmaster to present something that attracts attention. — and the public decides what attracts attention!

I think it's a positive trend, as more people will have more types of chess content they may find interesting. Let's face it, the vast majority of the world's population don't play tournament chess.

And yes, I would be interested in some of the top chess streamers, especially if they are just amateurs who have figured out just the right way to catch an audience.

Lawrence Stevens, California

I do not think that they add to the popularity of chess. Hikaru's incessant laughing is forced and it just grates on me. The Botez sisters are screaming, which is also a turnoff. I used to be in awe of Magnus until I saw him drinking, playing chess, and ridiculing his opponents while flanked by hangers on. Levy is the best of all of them. He is kind and entertaining. Unfortunately, he goes too fast.

You might think about writing about chess podcasts. Now THOSE I listen to. Perpetual Chess is wonderful!

Richard Bales, Illinois



▲ Streaming from Reykjavik Open 2023,
Photo by Hallfridur Sigurdardottir

▲ Alexandra Botez with a teammate from the Canadian Olympiad Team, Yuanling Yuan, Baku 2016, Photo by Paul Troung

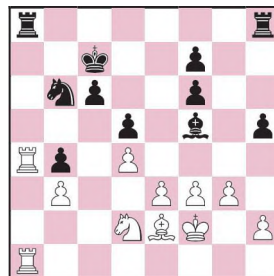
D37

Alexandra Botez 1988

Steven Wollkind

Reykjavik Open 2023

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 a6
5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 ♙e6 7.♙xf6 gxf6
8.♗b3 ♘d7 9.e3 ♙d6 10.g3 ♘b6 11.a4
a5 12.♙d1 ♙b4 13.♘d2 ♗d7 14.♙b5
c6 15.♙e2 ♙h3 16.f3 h5 17.♙f2
0-0-0 18.♘a2 ♗d6 19.♘xb4 ♗xb4
20.♗xb4 axb4 21.b3 ♙f5 22.a5 ♘d7
23.♙a1 ♙c7 24.♙a4 ♙a8 25.♙ha1 b5
26.axb6+ ♘xb6



27.♙a7+ ♙d6 28.♙1a6 ♙xa7 29.♙xa7
♙g6 30.♙b7 ♘d7 31.♙xb4 ♙a8
32.♙a4 ♙b8 33.h4 ♙c2 34.♙a3 f5
35.♙a7 ♙xb3 36.♙d3 ♙e6 37.♙a6
♙d6 38.♙xf5 ♙c2 39.e4 ♙b7 40.e5+
♙e7 41.♙xc2 ♘b8 42.♙a2

Black resigned

opening side business or growing your brand or starting things in the space as a result. So, I'm not too worried about that; right now, I just want to make sure that I'm excited about what I'm putting out and that the content I'm putting out is enjoyable for people. I'm just trying to make the best decision in the short term since content is very short term.

Excellent. Thanks for the chat! On a final note, what is your advice for people wanting to get into streaming?

I don't think anybody should start streaming with the intention of making it into a career. I think people should stream first as a hobby to see if they like it. It's one of those things which is extremely hard to turn it into a career, and if you are going to turn it into a career, you'll know that once you're streaming as a hobby. If people are serious about content and they do want to get into it – if it's their life passion – I would recommend not starting with live content because it's a lot more difficult to grow. I would start with shorts or YouTube and do story-based chess content. You could either do it as a personality, as a voiceover or coverage of games educational videos. There's so much you can do but it's just a lot easier to grow. And there's only a lot of videos to teach you how to be a better YouTube creator. So, there's a lot of resources to get better at making content and I would look into those.

**FOR TACTICAL
(CALCULATION) EXERCISES:****IDENTIFY THE TACTICAL
MOTIFS**

Look for patterns such as pins, forks, double attacks, discovered attacks, and skewers in the position.

CALCULATE VARIATIONS

Based on the tactical motifs you have identified, calculate various lines and variations to determine the best move.

**CONSIDER THE
CONSEQUENCES**

Once you have calculated a few lines, evaluate the consequences of each move, and determine which line leads to the best outcome.

**FOR STRATEGIC
(POSITIONAL) EXERCISES:****EVALUATE THE POSITION**

Determine the strengths and weaknesses of both your and your opponent's position, including pawn structure, piece placement, king safety, and control of key squares.

IDENTIFY A PLAN

Based on your evaluation, come up with a plan that takes advantage of your strengths and exploits your opponent's weaknesses. This can involve improving the position of your pieces, controlling key squares, or creating threats.

**CONSIDER
ALTERNATIVES**

Once you have a plan, consider alternative moves or variations that might also achieve your goals. Choose the move that best fits your overall plan.

Aagaard's MasterClass

by GM JACOB AAGAARD

Photo by David Liada

GM Jacob Aagaard won the 2007 British Championship; but is mostly known as a trainer and writer. He co-founded Quality Chess and killerchesstraining.com. His books include the *Grandmaster Preparation* series, the *Decision Making* series with Boris Gelfand and latest *A Matter of Endgame Technique*. Jacob works day and night to help players of all levels improve their game and achieve their goals.

AAGAARD



SHANKLAND

California-based **GM Sam Shankland** is a leading American chess player. In 2018, Sam achieved several milestones, including winning the U.S. Championship, surpassing 2700 Elo, and claiming first place at the Capablanca Memorial and the American Continental Championship. He is author of two chess books from the series of *Small Steps to Giant Improvement*.



PLAY IT ALONG WITH SAM

Get ready to take your chess skills to the next level with Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass! Each issue is packed with 12 challenging exercises – 6 tactics/calculation exercises and 6 positional/strategic exercises – carefully curated by GM Jacob Aagaard and tested by none other than GM Sam Shankland.

In early 2023, Sam and Jacob held a training camp to put these exercises to the test, using real game scenarios from the end of 2022 tournaments in Charlotte, New York, and Hollywood. You'll be facing off against some of the brightest young talents in U.S. chess, as well as established grandmasters and players.

But here's the best part: even Sam, a seasoned Grandmaster, did not solve all the exercises correctly. That means there's a real chance for you to compete with him and test your chess knowledge. Whether you're a seasoned player or a beginner looking to up your game, Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass is the perfect way to challenge yourself and become a stronger chess player.

TACTICS

T1 ▲



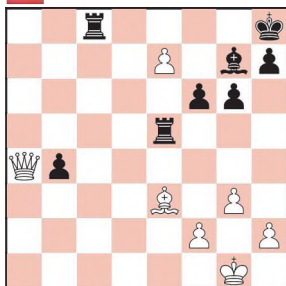
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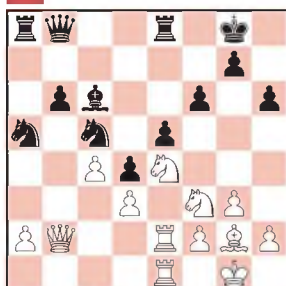
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T5 ▼



T6 ▲



STRATEGY

S1 ▼



S2 ▲



S3 ▲



S4 ▲



S5 ▼



S6 ▲



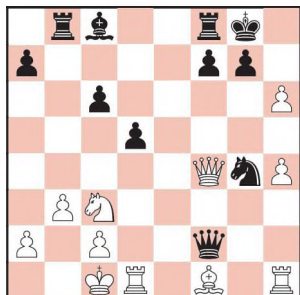


TACTICS

T1

James Canty	2158
Ehsan Ghaem Maghami	2511

Charlotte 2022



18.h7+! Canty is a dangerous attacking player, a great streamer and promoter of our game, as well as an all-round lovely guy. I don't think his Iranian opponent felt loved here though...

18.♖xb8?? ♕f5 was Black's not too subtle idea.

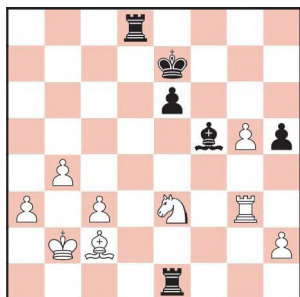
18...♗h8 18...♗xh7 19.♗d3+ and there is no ...♕f5 with a threat of mate.

19.♖xb8 ♖e3 20.♗d3 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♖c5 22.♖e2 1-0

T2

Michael Bodek	2427
Viktor Gazik	2564

Charlotte 2022



I am not sure what went wrong for Gazik. Maybe he hoped to go a rook up?

43...♗xc2? 44.♖xc2 ♖d2? 44...♖e2 was stronger, but Black is doubling down. 45.g6! An important diversion of the black king from the queenside.

45...♗f8 46.c4! Preparing ♖g3-c3, after which the pawns are a-rolling. White is completely winning and only a later

blunder was to blame for the **draw** that resulted 20 moves later.

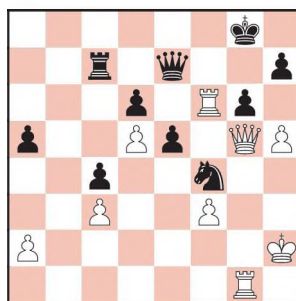
SOLUTION

43...♗xe3! 44.♗xe3 ♖d2 would have won a piece. We can presume that Gazik saw it, but did not feel that the conversion with a piece vs. three pawns would be effortless. He was right, of course, but Black is still completely winning, it will just take some time and accuracy – as it most often does. Sam also did not feel it was as simple as Stockfish does (+4.44), but there was nothing else that attracted him.

T3

Harshit Raja	2461
Lazaro Bruzon	2615

Hollywood 2022



This is the first of the six training sheets presented throughout this year that Sam solved. He was jetlagged and had slept poorly, but void of excuses! In this position he made the same mistake as his young grandmaster colleague from India.

39.hxg6? Sam also could not make 39.♖f5 work. After 39...♖xh5 40.♖fxg6+ hxg6 41.♖xh5 it is vital for Black to find 41...♖f8!, but he had done so in advance. 39...h6! Sam had seen this, but decided to hope for an advantage, rather than find something better.

40.♖f5 ♖xd5 41.♖e6+ ♖xe6 42.♖xe6 ♖g7 Black is fine and a **draw** was agreed.

SOLUTION

Being able to see the entire board is an important skill!

39.♖b1! was the key move.

39...♖xh5 seems to be the only critical move. 39...♖c8 40.hxg6 h6 41.♖f5 is hopeless.

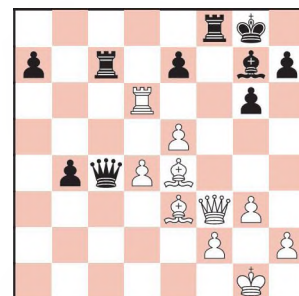
40.♖xg6+! is near-automatic, when after 40...hxg6 41.♖xg6+ ♖g7 42.♖b8+ White takes everything.

T4

Irakli Beradze	2494
John Burke	2580

Charlotte 2022

To reach the main moment of this puzzle, it would be interesting to rewind the game several moves ago as it is certainly useful for calculation training.



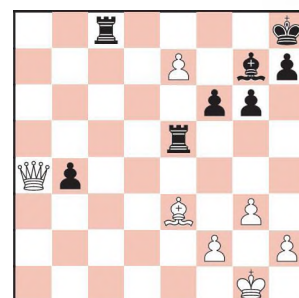
Against a strong grandmaster you have to overcome several lines of defense, before you can win.

35.♗d5+ ♗h8 36.♖f6! A nice intermediate move.

36...exf6 37.♗xc4 ♖xc4 38.♖d5 ♖cc8 39.e6 White is totally winning, but there is a lot of work still to do. Living on 30 seconds increment, it is still possible to make mistakes – which both players did: 39...a5 40.♖b3! Blocking the pawns.

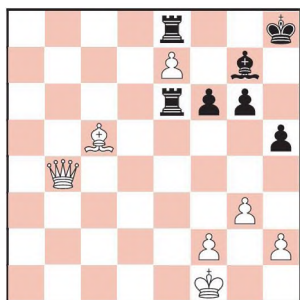
40...♖fd8 41.d5 a4! Black estimated that he would lose with passive defense, which is correct. White could maneuver the queen to a7 and play ♗d4 with the idea ♗xf6+, which it is hard for Black to defend against.

42.♖xa4 ♖xd5 43.e7 ♖e5





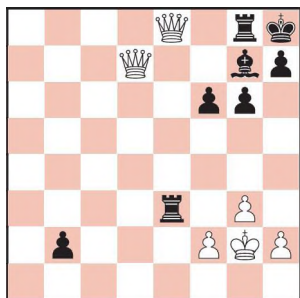
44. ♖xb4? Missing the first win.
 44... ♖e8? 44... h5!± would make it hard for White to prove an advantage.
 45. ♙c5 h5 46. ♖f1? 46. ♖b6!? ♖h7 47. ♖a7! was perhaps the easiest win White missed. There is no time to untangle himself and throw Black off the e-file.
 46... ♖e6? 46... f5! would have built a fortress. At some point White will have to win the exchange...



47. ♖b3? 47. g4! would have cracked open Black's defense. The key tactical point comes after something quite far from perfect defense: 47... hxc4 48. ♖xc4 f5 49. ♖a4! ♖6xe7 50. ♙xe7 ♖xe7 51. ♖h4+ and White wins.
 47... ♖6xe7 48. ♙xe7 ♖xe7 49. h3 f5 50. ♖d5 ♖h7 51. g4 hxc4 52. hxc4 fxg4 53. ♖g2 ½-½

SOLUTION

44. ♖d7! ♖g8 45. ♙f4!? 45. ♙d4! is simpler, but the main line is just too beautiful.
 45... ♖e1+ 45... ♖e4 46. f3 is over instantly.
 46. ♖g2 b3 47. ♙e3 b2 48. e8 ♖ ♖xe3! After 48... b1 ♖ 49. ♖xc8+ ♖xc8, it is vital to find 50. ♖e6+.



49. ♖xc8!! The key move you would have had to see in advance.
 49... ♖e7 50. ♖h3 and White wins.

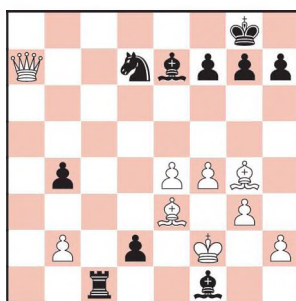
SAM MADE 3/6
 ON THE TACTICS/CALCULATION PAGE



T5

Terry Luo	2365
Daniel Naroditsky	2617

Charlotte 2022



Sam fell for this trap, as did Naroditsky.
 35... ♖f6? Fortunately for Naroditsky, his opponent did not realize that this was a trap!
 After 36. ♖a8+? ♙f8 Black was back to his winning ways. 37. ♙xd2 ♖xc4+ 38. ♖f3 ♖xc4 39. ♖e3 ♖c2 40. ♙xb4 ♖g4+ 41. ♖f3



41... h5! 42. ♖xf8+ ♖h7 0-1

Instead White had 36. ♙d1!! What a trick! After 36... ♙xd1 37. ♖xe7 and now 37... ♖g4+ 38. ♖f3 or 37... h5 38. ♖f3!? (where White has ♖d8+ and ♙xd2) with full equality. Black can try for other things than a perpetual, but will be unable to prove an advantage.

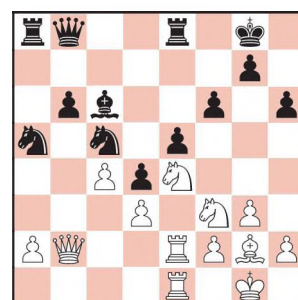
SOLUTION

Once you know the trap, you can find the win: 35... ♙h3!! 36. ♖xd7 36. ♖a8+ ♖f8 37. ♙xd2 ♙c5+ will leave Black with three pieces for the queen, one of them a rook.
 36... ♖f1+ Black wins.

T6

Oliver Barbosa	2505
Arthur Guo	2432

New York 2022



Sam and Barbosa went for 24. ♖h4? ♙xe4?! 24... ♖c7! was stronger. Black retains control over the light squares and a slight edge.
 25. ♖xe4! ♖xd3?! Risky! 25... ♖ab7!? with unclear play was preferable.
 26. ♖b1 ♖xe1 27. ♖xe1 White had strong compensation on the light squares and later won the game.

SOLUTION

White had a great move: 24. ♖xd4!! ♖xd3 Sam was not sure about this, although White has many strong continuations.

24... ♙xe4?! 25. ♙xe4 would just leave White a pawn up.

24... exd4 is met by 25. ♖xf6+ gxf6 26. ♙xc6 ♖xe2 27. ♙d5+ ♖e6 after which White can either play 28. ♖xd4! when everything hangs, or 28. ♙xe6+ ♖xe6 29. ♖xe6 with a powerful attack.

25. ♙xc6 ♖xc6 26. ♖b1 White can also choose 26. ♖xf6+!? gxf6 27. ♖d2 ♖cb4 28. ♖xb6 with a winning attack – and a few other sharp tries.

26... ♖xe1 26... ♖cb4 27. ♖b3! ♖xe1 28. ♖xe1 ♖a6 29. c5+ ♖h8 30. cxb6 is completely winning. The exchange is of no use, but the two passed pawns are.
 27. ♖xf6+ ♖f7 The knight cannot be captured.



28. ♖xc6 Sam had only considered 28. ♖xe8?, when 28... ♖xg2 29. ♗f5+ ♖xe8 30. ♗e6+ ♖e7 31. ♖xe5 ♗d8 holds everything together.

28... ♖xf6 29. ♖xe1 White is completely winning. He can choose to regain the exchange with an extra pawn; although he may decide that the bishop is stronger than the rooks, as long as the black king is trapped in the middle.

S3

Zurab Javakhadze	2479
Emilio Cordova	2554

Hollywood 2022

**STRATEGY****S1**

Vladimir Belous	2516
Alexander Kaliksteyn	2379

New York 2022



Black played 26... ♖c8? and the game was drawn.

SOLUTION

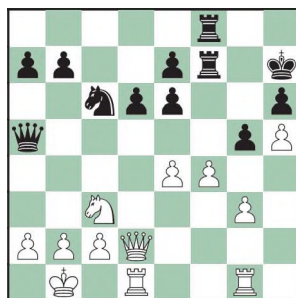
Sam did not hesitate to point out 26... ♖c3!+, when White is cramped and the b3 pawn is weaker than the b5 pawn. He was not surprised when I told him Black was close to winning.

**SAM SCORED 5/6
IN THE MIXED POSITIONS**

**S2**

Varun Krishnan	2373
Aryan Gutla	2036

Hollywood 2022



White stands better in more than one way. In the game he played 21. ♗d3?, when after 21... ♗a6 much of his advantage had gone. Strongest now was perhaps 22. ♖b5!?, and not 22. ♗d2±, as played in the game. In either case, White is only marginally better. He later **lost**.

SOLUTION

I found the solution automatically, as did Sam. White has to “attack the strongest square”.

21.e5! The idea is 21... dxe5 22. fxg5, with destruction of the kingside.

Sam wondered about 21... gxf4 22. gxf4 dxe5 as well. Here 23. ♖g6 is strong, but his intended 23. ♗g2 ♖h8 24. ♗g6 ♖h7 “is fantastic, although I did not see an immediate mate.” Now 25. ♖e2! is entirely winning.

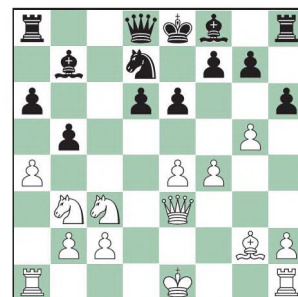
22.e5!± “100% automatic,” Sam said. White takes control of important squares on the kingside and cuts off the black minor pieces from the defense, leaving Black in grave danger.

22... ♖f6?! A big concession, weakening the king. But it is hard to sit and wait while White advances on the kingside, and continuations such as 22... h6 23. ♖f3 g5 24. ♖g3 ♗g7 25. ♖h2 look miserable. 23. exf6 ♖xe2 24. ♗xe2 ♗xf6 25. ♗g4! White has a big advantage and **won** by move 43.

S4

Nicholas Vettese	2310
Josiah Stearman	2377

New York 2022



White won a tumultuous game after 15. axb5? hxg5 16. f5 in 43 moves. At this point strongest was 16... ♖e7!, when Black would have stood a little better.

SOLUTION

Sam felt the same as me, that White had to play 15.g6!, when the only move we

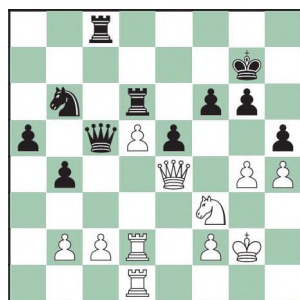


could think White was fearful of was: 15...♖h4+ Not 15...fxg6?! when 16.♗g3 ♕f7 17.0-0-0 looks totally overwhelming. 16.♕d2, and now after 16...fxg6 17.axb5 or 16...♙e7 17.♕a5, White has a big advantage in an admittedly chaotic position.

S5

Jagadeesh Siddharth	2407
Ryo Chen	2269

Charlotte 2022



"This one was more difficult," Sam said. Ryo played 29...♖c4?, missing 30.♕d4!, when White was back in the game. After 30...♗cd8 31.gxh5 and a few additional moves, the game was **drawn**. 31...♖h8! would have been strongest here, when Black is a bit better.

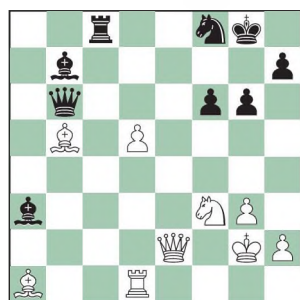
SOLUTION

Despite the difficulty, Sam found the best way to play: 29...hxg4 30.♗xg4 ♗h8!, when Black is in control and White's position full of weaknesses. For example: 31.b3 ♖c8! and Black has a winning advantage.

S6

Oliver Barbosa	2505
Kassa Korley	2400

New York 2022



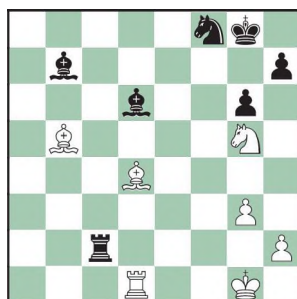
White missed the chance to strike and instead played 32.♙c4?!, when after 32...♗d6 Black is under some pressure (33.h4!), but in charge of a defensible position. After 33.♙b3 **White won**, but 33...♕d7! would have been completely even.

SOLUTION

32.d6!

• After 32...♙xd6 White will take on f6 with a clear advantage. Sam was dreaming of some big sacrificial attack, but could not make it work (because it was junk). But the variation the players were thinking about must have been the following highly entertaining mess:

33.♙xf6 ♕f7 "The only move."
34.♙d4 ♗c7 35.♕g1 gives White a winning attack. After 35...♗c2 he can for example play 36.♕g5+ ♕g8 37.♗xc2 ♗xc2



38.♙a4! Curiously, Sam wanted to put the king on h3 in this line, but then ...♙c8+ would lead to mate. Nothing similar exists here. But this decision could be changed along the way, when we are closer.

38...♙g2+ 39.♕f1 ♙d5 40.♙c3 winning.

• On the other hand, I am sure that the players were focused entirely on a different continuation, which Sam at first ignored.

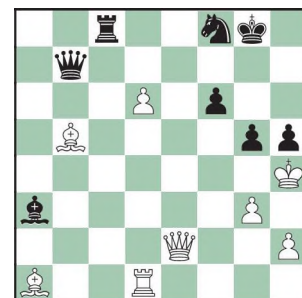
32...♙xf3+!? Certainly the critical move.

33.♕xf3 ♗b7+ It seems as if Black has counterplay. It would not be far-fetched to assume that both players believed Black was fine, as the refutation comes by a telegram from hell...

34.♕g4! White has no advantage after 34.♕f2 ♙c5+ 35.♙d4 ♙xd4+ 36.♗xd4 ♗b6, when the black king is safe. 37.♙c4+ ♕h8 38.♗e3 ♕d7!? followed by ...♙e5, for example.

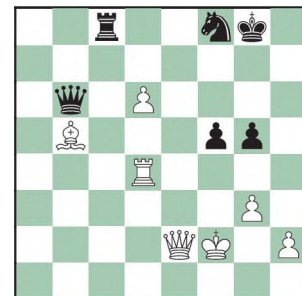
34...h5+ 35.♕h4! 35.♕h3 ♕h7! and

Black has a lot of counterplay. 36.d7 ♕g5+ 37.♕h4 ♕f3+! is the big point. White has to agree to a draw, as 38.♗xf3? g5+ would lose the queen with check. 35...g5+ 35...♕h7 36.d7 and White will win.



36.♕xh5! Incredibly the white king is entirely safe, and faced with plenty of threats all Black can do is to check him back. Not 36.♕h3?? g4+ 37.♕h4 ♕g6+ 38.♕xh5 ♗c5+! and White is checkmated. 36...♗h7+ 37.♕g4 f5+ 38.♕f3 ♗b7+ 39.♕f2! A pawn up, White is happy to exchange bishops now.

39...♙c5+ 40.♙d4 ♙xd4+ 41.♗xd4 ♗b6



42.♙c4+ We now see that White has not just won a pawn, he has also lured the black pawns forward.

42...♕h7 43.♗e7+ ♕g6 44.♗e3 and White is completely winning. ■

HIS OVERALL SCORE
THIS TIME WAS 8/12





By GM Sarunas Sulskis

2

A FEARLESS KING WALK BY THE CHAMP

In Round 7 at Wijk aan Zee the World Champion Magnus Carlsen, still recovering from a couple of setbacks at the start, was pitted against the Hungarian-Romanian GM Richard Rapport, well-known for his unorthodox style and fierce fighting spirit. An early offer of a queen trade in the Petroff Defense, initiated by Carlsen, signalled a slow start. Wary of the World Champion's famous endgame technique, Rapport was reluctant to help him bring his bishop into play by swapping queens first. Being a strong attacking player, Rapport was further challenged by Carlsen's totally unexpected king walk 11.♔f2, followed by another sleepy-looking move of 12.♖d1, which provoked him into action by unleashing a direct assault on White's wandering king with the bold knight sacrifice 15...♞e4+!?

However, once challenged, Carlsen displayed the confidence and equanimity of a true Champion. He left his exposed king at the peril of discovered checks for as long as it took to tuck it away by artificial castling. Nevertheless Rapport didn't leave it in peace even then, although it cost the Hungarian yet more material – this time a bishop on f5. A new wave of attack on the white king followed, when all Carlsen could do was rely on his king's ability to find a safe haven all by itself (26.♔f2). Then, after the king had run for cover, Carlsen cold-bloodedly returned to his offer of a queen trade (34.♚h3!), following which Rapport's attack finally ran out of steam.

C42

Magnus Carlsen	2859
Richard Rapport	2740

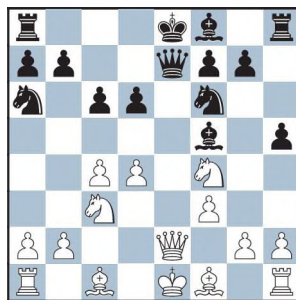
Tata Steel Masters, Wijk aan Zee 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♟f6 3.♜xe5 d6 4.♜d3 The World Champion is partial to this peculiar knight retreat instead of the customary 4.♟f3. His fondness for it first manifested itself in his World Championship Match against Fabiano Caruana in London 2018.

4...♜xe4 5.♚e2 ♚e7 6.♟f4 c6 Rapport chooses a relatively quiet option, but his calm play doesn't last long. This guy is simply not made for solid, yet boring chess.

Caruana opted for the sharp 6...♜c6 and after 7.♜d5 ♜d4 8.♜xe7 ♜xe2 9.♜d5 ♜d4 later obtained a good position.

7.f3 ♟f6 8.d4 ♟f5 9.c4 A queen swap is on offer. Yet neither player is willing to hurry, being wary of helping their adversary to bring their bishop into play. 9...h5 A typical modern strategy. By preventing g2-g4 Rapport reinforces his bishop on the prosperous h7-b1 diagonal. 10.♜c3 ♜a6



11.♔f2!?N With all the confidence of a World Champion, Carlsen allows his king to take a stroll. It goes without saying that we mere mortals have never tried this extravaganza before. M.Tabatabaei 2645 - A.Suleymanli 2537, Sharjah Masters, 2022, saw the cautious 11.a3 0-0-0 12.♚xe7 ♟xe7 13.h4 ♜c7 14.♔f2 d5 when Black had no problems whatsoever.

11...♜b4 After prolonged thought, Rapport, true to his enterprising style, accepts the challenge.

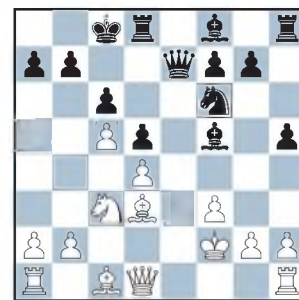
12.♚d1! The surprising point. All of a sudden Carlsen disengages his queen from her unhealthy 'commitment' to her counterpart, which he wants to hit with his rook from e1.

12...0-0-0 Extreme aggression by Black with 12...♜c2? would have rebounded against him by 13.♟d3! ♟xd3 (13...♜xd4 14.♟xf5 ♜xf5 15.♟e1+-) 14.♚xd3 ♜xa1 15.♟e1+- when the black knight would soon perish in the corner.

Also 12...♜c2?! seems pointless after 13.♚d2±.

13.♜d3 d5 Rapport shows no desire to be lulled into conformity by 13...♜xd3+ 14.♟xd3 ♟xd3 15.♚xd3 since it's well known that such no-risk positions suit Carlsen's style very well. The white corner rook will soon enter the fray via e1.

14.c5 ♜xd3+ 15.♟xd3

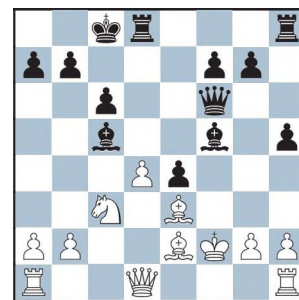


15...♜e4+!? Vintage Rapport – bold and non-conformist! The risks of playing a piece down against the Champ are obvious. Nevertheless, Rapport wants to utilize his dormant rook by powerfully smashing White in the center, while at the same time exposing his opponent's rambling king. The Champ's originality is now being put to the test!

15...♜xd3 16.♚xd3 g6 17.♟e1 ♚d7 18.♟g5 ♟g7± is a much calmer alternative.

16.fxe4 There's no chance to chicken out with 16.♟g1? ♚f6 17.fxe4 ♚xd4+ 18.♔f1 dxe4,.

16...dxe4 17.♟e2 ♚f6 18.♟e3 Strong nerves are required to hold tight while being subjected to the looming threat of a discovered check. With his next move Rapport adds more fuel to his attack. 18...♟xc5!





▲ Richard Rapport,
Wijk aan Zee 2023.
Photo by Lennart Ootes

◀ Magnus Carlsen,
Wijk aan Zee 2023.
Photo by Lennart Ootes

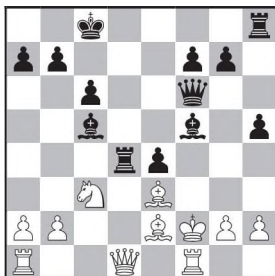
19.♖f1! Carlsen continues to keep his cool in stormy weather and is now ready to complete the highly provocative walk of the king by pulling it back to g1.

On the other hand an attempt to disperse the black brigade by 19.dxc5 would be costly and give Black at least equal chances after 19...♗g4+ 20.♔e1 ♖xd1+ 21.♖xd1 ♗xe2 22.♔xe2∞.

19...♗h4+ Although ultimately this attack doesn't produce the desired results, it's nevertheless a scary thing to deal with.

The pragmatic grab of a third pawn by 19...♗xd4 is met by 20.♗xd4 ♖xd4 21.♗c1 when surprisingly Black can still reap no tangible benefit from the range of discovered checks he has at his disposal. 21...♗e5 22.♗e3 ♖hd8 23.♔g1 g6±.

Another intimidating option is 19...♖xd4!?

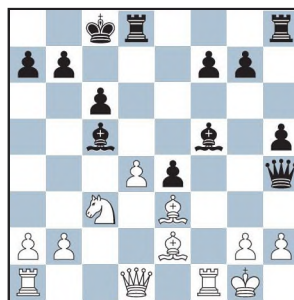


A) Now not 20.♗xd4? ♗xd4+ 21.♔e1

♗xc3+ (21...♖d8,) 22.bxc3 ♗xc3+ 23.♔f2 ♗c5+ when White is left at his opponent's mercy.

B) But instead 20.♗c1 ♗h4+ 21.♔g1 ♗d6 22.♖xf5 (This time around White can also afford the softer option of 22.♗f4±) 22...♗xh2+ 23.♔f1 ♗h1+ 24.♗g1 ♗h2 25.♗e3+- repelling the attack.

20.♔g1

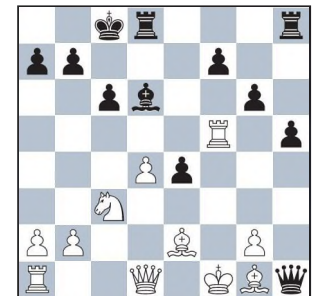


The rambling king finally reaches home. Not for long though, as a new wave of attack by Rapport is about to follow.

20...♗d6 21.♖xf5 Another major gain for Carlsen, paid for by the restlessness of his king.

21...♗xh2+ 22.♔f1 ♗h1+ 23.♗g1! As 23.♔f2 ♗h4+ is only sufficient for a draw. **23...g6** There's no other reply to 23...♗h2 than getting the king on the road again. 24.♔f2! e3+ (24...g6 25.♖xf7 ♖hf8 26.♗b3

e3+ 27.♔f3 ♗xg1 28.♗xb7 mate.) 25.♔f3 ♗xg1 26.♗xg1 ♗h4 27.♖f4+-.



But what should White do now? Taking on f7 is asking the white king to come under fire on the f-file, isn't it?

24.♖xf7! The Champ shows no trace of fear. Instead, compromising on the f-file would have helped Rapport to turn the tables after 24.♖f6? ♗h2 25.♔f2 ♗xg1+ 26.♗xg1 ♗h4+.

Or 24.♖f2? ♗h2+-.

24...♖hf8 This now looks terribly dangerous. Not 24...♗h2 25.♔f2 e3+ 26.♔f3 ♗xg1 27.♗b3!+-.

25.♗c4 25.♗b3? is wrong because of 25...♖xf7+ 26.♗xf7 ♖f8 27.♗xf8+ ♗xf8 28.♔xe4±, when Rapport could have recouped a large part of his investments.

25...♗h2 25...♖xf7+ 26.♗xf7 ♖f8 27.♗b3. 26.♔f2 The king defends itself! For



quite some time I was puzzled why Carlsen didn't give his king the rest it deserved with 26...♔e2. White just clings to his massive two minor pieces advantage with no clear way for Black to compensate for his losses any time soon. But then I think I found Rapport's ingenious idea of 26...♙xf7+ 27.♙xf7 ♔d6!, when Black keeps struggling on two pieces down. Such tenacity!

26...♙xf7+ On 26...e3+ the white king keeps rambling: 27.♙f3 ♙xg1 28.♙xg1 ♙h4 29.♙xe3. 27.♙xf7 ♙f8 28.♙b3 ♙xg1+ Upon 28...e3+ White wins by 29.♙f3 ♙xg1 30.♙e6+ ♙c7 31.♙e7+ ♙b6 32.♙xf8+-.

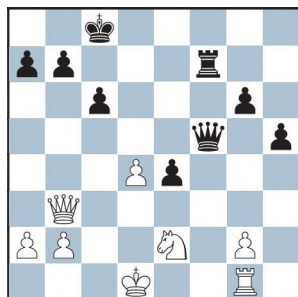
29.♙xg1 ♙h4+ On 29...e3+ White can actually afford to be deflected by 30.♙e2! (The simple 30.♙f1+- should also win.) 30...♙xg1 31.♙e6+ ♙c7 32.♙e7+ ♙b6 33.♙a4+ ♙a5 34.♙c5+ b5 35.♙xa7+ ♙b4 when 36.a3 mate completes a retaliatory hunt.

30.♙e2 ♙g4+ 31.♙d2 The king must be very careful choosing his steps. 31.♙e1? ♙g3+ allows a nasty penetration to d3.

31...♙f4+ 31...e3+ 32.♙c1.

32.♙d1 ♙xf7 Rapport has cut down his material deficit significantly, but Carlsen's wandering king has now found shelter on the queenside and his remaining booty is enough to convert.

33.♙e2 ♙f5



34.♙h3! After a delay of some 25 moves and having fearlessly sailed stormy waters, Carlsen now returns to his initial vis-a-vis of queens. This immediately seals the fate of the game as Rapport has bankrupted himself fuelling his dangerous attack.

34...♙xh3 35.gxh3 ♙f3 36.♙g3
Black resigned

COMBATING CHEATING: THE PARALLELS BETWEEN CHESS AND FINANCE IN ADDRESSING HARMFUL AND ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR

Keep The Playground Clean

In the financial markets trust and reputation are everything. The incorrect and illicit behavior of a market participant not only causes damage to the other participants (and an unjust enrichment to the offender) but also and above all leads to a loss of their confidence in the market. Cheating is a scourge that makes the playground, on which every player moves, unplayable — be it a chessboard or a financial market.

By Luca Barillaro

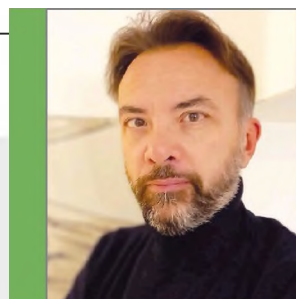
In the last 20 years, financial markets have experienced a profound technological transformation that has changed their microstructure characteristics and regulations.

Today more than 70% of orders on the markets are sent by automatic software that often moves in a few nanoseconds (high frequency trading). Machines place and cancel millions of orders every day without our eyes even noticing them. The natural result is that often the orders are read and crossed only by machines against other machines and with such speed manipulative behaviors can flourish. Market watchdogs have long since equipped themselves with anti-cheating software. The new generation of market surveillance systems is based on artificial intelligence and endeavors to anticipate any incorrect behavior of traders, analyze their operating styles and draw probabilistic scenarios. Prevention is the new winning strategy to preserve market integrity. Regulators usually rely on patterns of circumstantial and statistical evidence but the excessive reliance on market surveillance tools and statistical data without a smoking gun still poses problems due to “false flags”. Statistical anomalies do not necessarily mean cheating either in chess or in finance.

In recent years, anti-cheating procedures in chess have made considerable progress in their techniques of control and contrast to illegal behavior but cheaters too have evolved. From simple suggestions with gestures and/or signs we have moved on to mini cameras and earphones up to the transmission of moves via electrical impulses.

Years ago, I was commissioned as a consultant for an online platform to improve their anti-cheating software. Considering all the algorithms that are largely known (accuracy, consistency, tempo/move ratio, use of pre-moves on the engine's first line) I suggested the inclusion of user style analysis which is now routinely used by many anti-cheating platforms. Style, just as in finance, is a purely human bias that each of us possesses and from which none of us can escape. If you analyze the games of the cheaters, you will discover that they have no style because the engines have no bias. They always play what is required by the position. The cheaters' games seem to be divided into chunks and tend not to follow a “fil rouge”.

Paradoxically we can detect in certain cases (in particular those of online cheating operated by GMs) a schematic choice bias. In fact, we observe the use of several engines with the variable choice of the first lines alternating between



Luca Barillaro is doctor of economics, an independent financial consultant and trader residing in Modena, Italy. Luca is also an avid chess player, and thanks to his proficiency of using AI in chess preparation, his help was used by several elite grandmasters and their teams.



them, or the use of one engine only with the choice of the first line only when it is higher than the second by at least 0.20. In other words, when the evaluation difference between the first and second line is less than 0.20 the cheater chooses the second line at least until the overall evaluation is below +2 (in the case of White). When it is above +2 the cheater tends to choose the second or third lines, so as not to arouse suspicion. The case of a player who, instead of giving mate in 2, decided to win the opponent's queen by trapping it with a 5-move maneuver is emblematic.

Here finance can help us. Market surveillance software analyzes anomalous risk behaviors that are not in line with the risk management usually used by a market participant. For example, liquidating low-risk positions and using most of your cash to buy a single stock just before a public offer, or the abnormal increase of the operating frequency on a specific stock never traded before, are alerts that push the watchdogs to turn a spotlight on the subjects involved in the above practices. With a view to prevention and control, the watchdogs can call those responsible to account for explanations and listen to the reasons that have led to such anomalous conduct.

In chess there is a small advantage: post-game interviews can reveal a lot about the thinking (or not thinking) of the player.

When a cheater adopts a line suggested by the engine, they will be practically forced to follow it, which they will occasionally not be able to do. After the last round of the Berlin Candidates 2018, when talking to Sasha Grischuk, we were discussing his last round match loss against Caruana.



Sasha told me that he remembered



▲ Alexander Grischuk. Photo by Lennart Ootes

very well that the first line of the engine was 13.♗e2 but he was unable to reconstruct what he should have played on 13...0-0 or on 13...♗g6. He recalled that the queen went to d2 and that he should have played ♖d4 at some point (with the black bishop still on h5) but could not understand the differences, while on ...♗g6 he remembered a retreat by the bishop to g3, but did not understand why after ♖h4 White would have stood better. The only thing he did remember was that they were all typical computer lines so it wouldn't have made sense to enter them and then not know how to follow them to completion! So he played 13 a3?!, a much more human move, planning the thematic b2-b4.

Even for an elite GM like Sasha Grischuk – let alone for others – it is virtually impossible to follow all the engine lines to completion even if these have already been previously analyzed!

The percentage of accuracy at certain moments of the match, the absence of a logical plan, the abandonment of control of risk in the position, the repeated and continuous choice of an operational scheme of choice between multiple lines are all circumstances that should lead the referees to undertake a post game check.

If it is true that finding the smoking gun remains very complicated, it is also true that, in order to protect the credibility of our beloved game and its heroes, the referees should be given more power by having them flanked by an anti-cheating committee, not so much to search the players by preventing them from entering the tournament hall with



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GM Colovic is the author of *The Sinquefeld Chess Generation*, a book that analyzes and explores in great depth the styles and preferences of America's top young talent.

old wrist watches, but to make wannabe cheaters feel that they could be called upon to justify their moves not as a means of proof but at least as a method of moral suasion.

In chess, as happens in finance, cheating should be detected not only by using anti-cheating (market surveillance) software but also by comparing recurring behavior and anomalies that shows statistical outliers both in bias (decision making during the game both on a single move or chunks of moves) and performance of participants for it is exactly the decision making process and its consistency that separates seamlessly humans and machines.



EXCLUSIVE ANNOTATIONS BY ALEXEY SARANA, THE NEWLY CROWNED EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Solid As A Rock



Sarana's triumph at one of the strongest-ever European Championships is an almost perfect example of the Open Swiss strategy that many try to adopt – “win with White, draw with Black.” Except for the first and last rounds, successfully carrying out this strategy brought Alexey the title of European Champion with a +6 score, undefeated and with a fantastic 2787 rating performance!

D38

Alexey Sarana	2668
Yuriy Kuzubov	2616

European Championship, Vrnjacka Banja 2023
Notes by Alexey Sarana

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♗b4
Previously my opponent had mostly played 4...♗bd7 and I felt that perhaps he was not that familiar with the Ragozin setups, and the cunning order of moves would surprise him.

5.♞a4+ ♘c6 6.♗d2!? 0-0 7.a3!? Outshining the older 7.e3, which until recently used to be the main choice for White.

7...♗xc3 8.♗xc3

■ By GM Alexey Sarana

Since I hadn't played a classical game for almost six months, I had no particular expectations prior to the start of the 2023 European Championship. I had tried to maintain my form by playing online a lot, but was also pleased with my performance at the 2022 World Rapid and Blitz Championships, where I shared 4th place in blitz and won games against the likes of Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura, Jan-Krzysztof Duda and Daniil Dubov.

The European Championship has always been a strong Open tournament, where the primary goal for the majority of players is to qualify for the World Cup by finishing among the first 23 players. Fortunately, I had already qualified from one of the previous European Championships (in 2021, when he won the bronze medal -Ed.). Before the following game in Round 8, I had already reached a +4 score, and therefore my ambitions this time were even higher.



Alexey Sarana. Photo by Dusan Krunić



Alexey Sarana. Photo by Lennart Ootes

Sarana's round-by-round progress in the 2023 EICC

1. Sampsa NYYSTI (B1), 2. Burak FIRAT (W1), 3. Aleksandra GORYACHKINA (B½), 4. Mahammad MURADLI (W1), 5. Jergus PECHAC (B½), 6. Valentin DRAGNEV (W1), 7. Nijat ABASOV (B½), 8. Yuriy KUZUBOV (W1), 9. Anton KOROBV (W1), 10. Andrey ESIPENKO (B½), 11. Kirill SHEVCHENKO (W½).



FINAL STANDINGS

2023 European Individual Chess Championship
Vrnjacka Banja, Serbia, March 3-13, 2023

1-3. Alexey SARANA (FID), Kirill Shevchenko (ROU), Daniel DARDHA (BEL) **8½**

4-15. Stamatis KOURKOULOS-ARDITIS (GRE), Etienne BACROT (FRA), Thai Dai Van NGUYEN (CZE), Jaime SANTOS LATASA (ESP), Andrey ESIPENKO (FID), Yuriy KUZUBOV (UKR), Valentin DRAGNEV (AUT), David PARAVYAN (FID), Igor JANIK (POL), David Anton GUIJARRO (ESP), Ediz GUREL (TUR), Alexander DONCHENKO (GER) **8**



8...a5? My opponent chooses the wrong plan and so all his further play goes in the wrong direction.

8...a5 9.♖c2



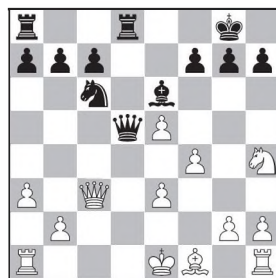
Here there are a few logical possibilities, but White exerts pressure in almost all the lines.

A) For example, after 9...b6 10.e3 ♖b7 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♔d3 White stands better.

B) Or 9...♜xc3 10.♞xc3 dxc4 11.e3 b6 12.♔xc4 ♖b7 13.0-0 ♜e7 14.♔e2 ♜c8 15.b4, and White had an opening advantage and later won on move 40 in M.Yilmaz 2564 - S.Vetokhin 2312, Almaty 2022.

C) 9...e5! It is important for Black to know this variation. Oddly enough, only in one game has Black been able to demonstrate the entire correct path,

whereas all the others have resulted in an inferior position. 10.cxd5 ♞xd5 11.dxe5 ♔d8 (After 11...♔f5?! 12.♜h4 ♜xf2 13.e4 ♜xh1 14.exd5 ♔xc2 15.dxc6 the knight on h1 should eventually get caught and White will be left with extra material, as in R.Makarian 2557 - M.Santos Ruiz 2591, Internet 2023, which White won on move 37.) 12.e3 ♔f5 13.♜h4 ♔g4 14.f3 ♜xc3 15.♞xc3 ♔e6 16.f4



16...g5! Up to here, a thorough knowledge of the whole line was necessary. Now Black confidently equalizes, as was demonstrated in the only game recorded so far: 17.fxg5 ♜xe5 18.♔e2 ♜d3+ 19.♞xd3 ♞xd3 20.♔xd3 ♔xd3= ending in a draw on move 59 in A.Goryachkina 2582 - A.Predke 2676, Sochi 2020.

9.e3 ♔d7?! After this, Black remains continually worse right up to the end of the game. Best was 9...♜e7, when after 10.♔e2 b6 11.cxd5 exd5 12.0-0, White is slightly better due to the backward c7 pawn, but Black's position is still quite playable.

10.♞c2 a4 11.♔d3 ♜a5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♜e5 ♜b3 14.♔d1 ♔e6



15.f3 This is the ideal setup for White.

15...c5 Black needs to open up the position, but then my bishop pair becomes very strong. There are weaknesses everywhere

THE LARGEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AT EICC 2023

At this year's European Individual Championship held in the Serbian spa resort of Vrnjacka Banja, a record-breaking number of 484 players from 40 federations took part for a total prize fund of 100,000 EUR! There were 373 FIDE titled players, including 125 grandmasters and 103 international masters. First prize was 20,000 EUR, second 15,000 EUR and third 10,000 EUR.

The competition was run as an 11-round Swiss-system Open tournament, with one round per day and a rate of play of 90 minutes for the first 40 moves, plus an additional 30 minutes for the remainder of the game, together with a 30-second increment per move, starting from move one.

A special privilege for most of the participants was to share the battlefield with chess legends Vasyi Ivanchuk and Boris Gelfand. Both scored 7½ points from 11 games, finishing on a shared 16th-45th place, but winning the first (Gelfand had the better additional criteria) and second special prizes for senior players (aged 50+).

in Black's camp, plus a weak isolani on d5, which I can gradually exploit.

16.dxc5 ♜xc5 17.♞f2 ♜fd7 18.♔c2 ♜xe5 19.♔xe5 f6 20.♔c3 ♔f7



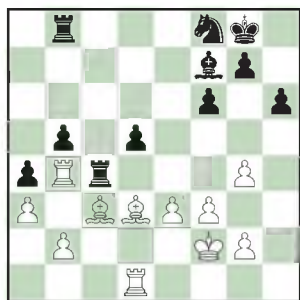
21.♞h4 Now Black is forced to further weaken the light squares around his king.

21...h6 22.♞f4 ♞e7 23.♔f2 ♜fe8 24.♜he1 ♜e6 25.♞f5 ♜f8 26.♔d4 b5 After this, the b5 pawn becomes an object of attack.

27.♜b4 ♜ab8 28.♔d3 ♔e6 29.♞h5



♖d7 30.h3 ♜ec8 31.♞d1 ♕f7 32.♞g4
♞xg4 33.hxg4 ♜c4



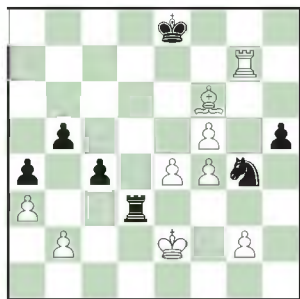
34.♞xc4?! The position remains winning due to my strong bishop-pair, but it is still necessary to demonstrate good technique.

After 34.♞xc4 dxc4 it looks scary to leave the rook locked up by the enemy pawns, but here White could free it quite easily by means of 35.♞d6 ♖e6 (Or 35...♖g6 36.♞d7 ♜f8 37.♞d4+-) 36.♞d4+-, with ♞b6 and ♞xb5 to follow.

34...dxc4 35.♞e4 ♖e6 36.♞b4 ♖g5 37.♞f5 ♞e6 38.f4 ♞xf5 39.gxf5 ♖f7 39...♖e4+ 40.♜f3 ♞e8 41.♞d4, and the knight is trapped in the very center of the board!

40.♞d5 h5 41.e4 ♖h6 42.♜f3 ♜f7 43.♞d7+ ♜g8 44.♞c3 ♜f8 45.♞e3 ♜e8! The last chance.

46.♞xg7 ♞d8 47.♜e2 ♞d3 48.♞xf6 ♖g4 Fortunately, here I still had a full hour on the clock, and after thinking for 40 minutes I was able to find a clear win.



49.♞e7+! 49.♞c3 seems to be the most logical, then Black might suddenly be tempted to start a king hunt with his two pieces. However that actually turns out to be an instructive example of how one might accidentally let slip a won game.

DETHRONING THE LEADER

In Round 9, Alexey was able to win a crucial encounter against the tournament leader, Ukrainian GM Anton Korobov, who was on 7/8, while Sarana and the Hungarian GM Benjamin Gledura (studying at Webster University and playing top board for their chess team) were on shared second with 6½/8. It was another important victory with the white pieces for Alexey to fully conform with his strategy for winning the tournament!

Alexey Sarana	2668
Anton Korobov	2658

European Championship,
Vrnjacka Banja 2023

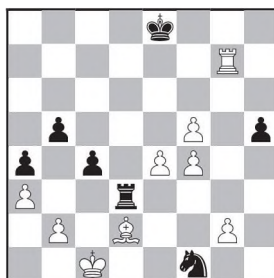


22.♞xe4 hxg4 23.♞xg4 ♞e5 24.♞xd6 ♞xd6?! Black's only chance here was 24...♞c8! 25.♞xe5 ♞xe5 26.♞xc8 ♞xc8 27.♜f1 b5!, aiming to further liquidate the queenside pawns, with decent drawing chances.

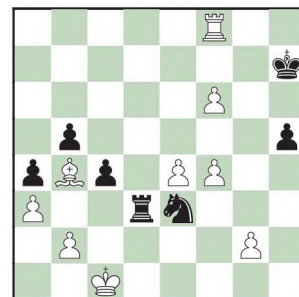
25.♞xd6 ♞d8 26.♞gd4 ♜f8 27.♞b5 And Sarana had no problems converting this technically winning endgame. **White won** on move 57.

Dusan Kronic

49...♞e3+ 50.♜d2 ♞d3+! (50...♞xe4 51.g3+-) 51.♜c1 ♖e3 52.♞d2 ♖f1

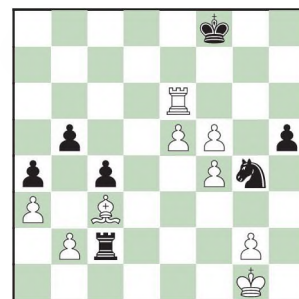


53.♞b4! The only way, as it is necessary to first drive away the opponent's king. 53...♖e3 54.♞g8+ ♜f7 55.♞f8+ ♜g7 56.f6+ ♜h7



In the same way, we move the bishop to a5 so the rook on d1 can defend against checkmate on d1. 57.♞d2 ♖f1 58.♞a5 ♖e3 59.♞d8 ♞xd8 60.♞xd8 ♖xg2 61.f5 h4 62.♞e7 h3 63.f7 h2 64.f8 ♞h1 ♞+ 65.♜c2 ♖e3+ 66.♜d2 Now there is no perpetual check and White wins. It was impossible to calculate this far, but anyway I was able to find a more reliable way to win.

49...♜f8 50.♞e6 ♞e3+ 51.♜f1 ♖h2+ 52.♜g1 ♖g4 53.♞c3 ♞e2 54.e5 ♞c2



55.g3 After this, there is no sign of a perpetual check and White wins easily.

55...♖e3 56.♞g6 ♞g2+ 57.♜h1 ♞f2 58.♞b4+ ♜e8 59.e6 ♜d8 60.e7+ ♜d7 61.♞d6+ **Black resigned**

Before the last two rounds, I was tempted to cruise to the end of the tournament with draws, and before the pairings of Round 10 were posted, I hoped I would not be up against my good friend Andrey Esipenko. Alas, as fate would have it, such was the case and I was obliged to face my ever ambitious principal rival who always plays strictly to win.


E11

Andrey Esipenko	2680
Alexey Sarana	2668

European Championship,
Vrnjacka Banja 2023
Notes by Alexey Sarana

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 ♕b4+
5.♕d2 ♗e7 6.♕g2 c6 7.♗c2 b6 I wanted
to deceive my opponent with this order
of moves, but in the end I got confused
myself. It seems impossible to deal with
every eventuality.

**"ENGINE ASSISTANCE
PROPELLED MY LEVEL OF PLAY"**

Alexey Sarana learned chess at the age of 5 and soon demonstrated his exceptional talent by winning the U-8 Russian Championship. Then, at the age of 11 he received more serious coaching from the renowned trainer GM Vladimir Belov. At that time Alexey was graded around 2200 FIDE, but over the course of the next three years his rating had risen to 2400. However, he then felt he was struggling to further improve his play.

"In 2016 I gained the IM title, but I somehow felt stuck on my rating at around 2450 FIDE. My overall chess knowledge was fine, but I realized that I needed to work harder on the openings. Then, in early 2017, I signed up for some strong cloud-engine assistance, particularly to help me with my opening repertoire. I think that was a turning point in my career, as over the next 15 months I crossed the 2600 mark, gained my GM title, and became a completely different player. This also helped me win the Russian Championship Higher League in 2018 and also share 1st at the same competition in 2019. Most of all, I understood how to work on chess on my own, and since 2018 that is exactly how I have continued."

At present Alexey is among the world's top 50 players and has a FIDE rating of 2685 (a career-high). His goal now is to advance and enter the world top 20 in the near future.

Dusan Kronic

8.♕f4


8...0-0 I wanted to develop my bishop on a6, but then suddenly I saw that I would just be a pawn down after 8...♕a6? 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 (Or 9...cxd5 10.♕xb8 ♗xb8 11.♗a4+ winning material.) 10.♕xb8 ♗xb8 11.♗xc6± Therefore I had to change my plan.

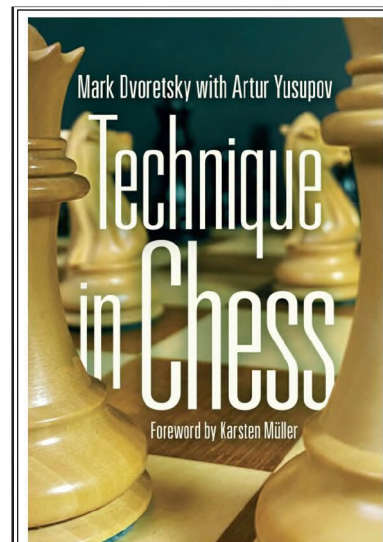
9.0-0 ♕a6 10.♗bd2 ♗bd7 11.♗fc1 ♗h5 It was better to play in the center right away with 11...c5!?, but when your opponent is still in his preparation, it can happen that you want to play more carefully and without risk. However, this often leads to slightly more passive positions for Black after for example 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♗e1.

12.e3 A tricky idea. The structure after ...♗xf4, exf4 is humanly very unpleasant to play as Black. So, I quickly try to play in the center.

12...♗c8 13.h4 dxc4 14.♗xc4 c5 15.♗a4 ♗xf4 16.exf4



16...♗b8?! It turns out that Andrey was still in his preparation even here and it was necessary to sacrifice a pawn by 16...♕b7!. Miraculously, Black is holding here, but it was impossible to decide on this move over the board. After 17.♗xa7 ♗c7 18.♗a4 cxd4 19.♗ce5 ♗c5 20.♗xd4



Technique in Chess

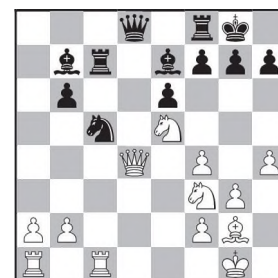
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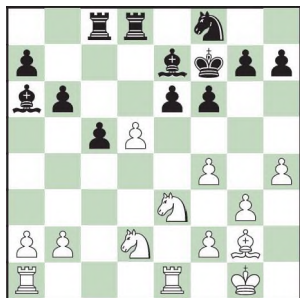


20...f6! 21.♗xd8 ♗xd8 22.♗g4 ♗cd7!, Black has compensation, although I would still prefer White.



17.♖ce5 f6 18.♖g4 ♖d7 It seemed to me that it would be easier for Black to go for an endgame, but due to problems with my e6 pawn White still has a very dangerous initiative.

19.♗xd7 ♜xd7 20.♞e1 ♜f7 21.♖e3 ♞fd8 22.d5 ♜f8 23.♜d2 Here I panicked and was not able to find a normal defense against the threat of dxe6 ♜xe6, ♜d5.

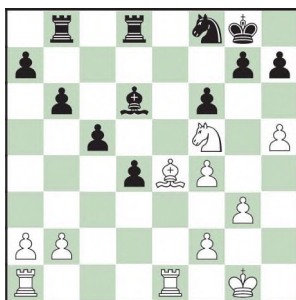


23...♞b8? Correct was 23...♞c7!, but after seeing 24.dxe6+ (or 24.♞ad1 ♞cd7 25.♜b1 g6∞) 24...♜xe6 25.♜d5, I rejected this continuation as it seemed scary. However, suddenly there appears the clumsy move 25...♞b7! and, incredibly enough, White can't exploit the unfortunate placement of my pieces in any way. My next move will be ...♜d4 with the better play.

24.♜dc4?! Fortunately, White opted to go for a forced win, but that does not happen and the move played gives me the best chance for salvation. In fact Andrey missed 24.♞ad1!, with ♜dc4 to follow, creating numerous threats, the most terrible being d5-d6. Then the position is simply won for White.

24...♜xc4 25.♜xc4 exd5 26.♜e3 d4 27.♜f5 ♜d6 28.♜d5+ ♜g6 This looks scary, but White doesn't have enough pieces to checkmate and my king is surprisingly safe despite walking around the board.

29.♜e4 ♜f7 30.♜d5+ ♜g6 31.♜e4 ♜f7 32.h5 ♜g8



33.♜d3? Best is 33.♜g2! which is directed against the freeing ...g7-g6. Oddly enough, Black's position is still difficult as, despite the extra pawn, I have serious problems on the light squares and it's not at all clear how to continue.

A) 33...g6? would be met by 34.♜d5+ ♜h8 35.♜h6 ♜g7 36.♜f7+- winning material.

B) 33...b5 is countered by 34.a4! with decisive effect.

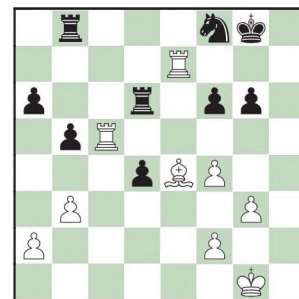
C) Also 33...♜h8 runs into 34.a4 with a clear advantage for White.

Anyway, Andrey was disappointed that there was no immediate checkmate, so, after using up almost all his time on the clock, he decided on the text, which lets me off the hook.

33...b5! I was now able to grab an opportune

moment for counterplay and managed to play the rest of the game very accurately.

34.b3 g6 35.hxg6 hxg6 36.♜xd6 ♞xd6 37.♞ac1 ♞c6 38.♞e7 a6 39.♜e4 ♞d6 40.♞xc5



40...♜d3! Equalizing immediately.

41.♜d5+ ♜h8 42.♜f3 ♞bd8 43.♜f1 ♜e6 44.♞c3 b4 45.♞c4 ♜d4 46.♞cc7 and we agreed to a draw.

This was a most important let-off – and relief immediately set in! The worst was behind me and now I just had to avoid a loss with White in the last round, at a time when my opponent might have also been happy with a draw.

Indeed, it so happened that I was paired against GM Kirill Shevchenko (Ukrainian-born, now representing Romania -Ed.), when it was just the two of us on 8/10, half a point ahead of the chasing pack. Thus, a draw with the white pieces this time was more reasonable, as I had additional superior criteria which would secure the title for me.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Alexey Sarana was a member of the winning World Team in the so-called "Match of the Millennials" held in 2017 in Saint Louis. It was a match between an U-17 juniors' team representing USA - Jeffery Xiong, Sam Sevan, Ruifeng Li, Michael Burke and Nicholas Checa, who faced their peers from the World Team - Haik Martirosyan (ARM), Andrey Esipenko (RUS), Alexey Sarana (RUS), Anton Smirnov (AUS) and Aryan Chopra (IND).

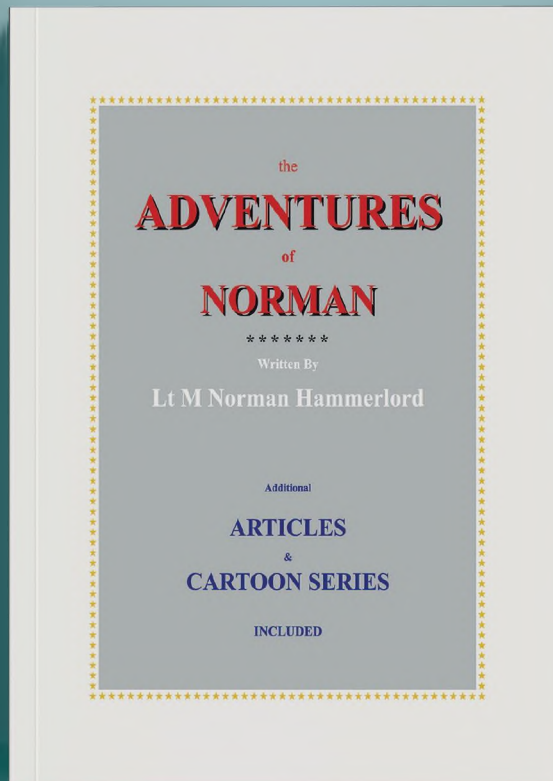
The match was played on four boards over seven rounds. Sarana finished undefeated, scoring two wins against Burke and Checa, and three draws against Xiong, Sevan and Li. The World Team won 17-11.

Another match was held simultaneously in the U-14 category. The U.S. Team was represented by A wonder Liang, Andrew Hong, Carissa Yip and Martha Samadashvili, while the World Team consisted of Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa (IND), Nodirbek Abdusattorov (UZB), Bibisara Assaubayeva (KAZ) and Nurgul Salimova (BUL). The World Team won the three-round event 8½-3½.



Alexey Sarana Photo by Lennart Ootes

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By GM Sarunas Sulskis

3

TWO INDIAN PRODIGIES FIGHT IT OUT IN WILD WEST STYLE

Moving on to Dusseldorf, the aforementioned new generation of youngsters was the main force in triggering an array of breathtaking games. Capitalizing on ongoing speculation whether Indian players would completely overrun FIDE's top rating list in a matter of five or ten years, allow me to present to you their currently brightest talent Gukesh in a face-off versus Praggnanandha.

Indeed, it feels like a futuristic view of hitherto unseen chess. What was initially expected to be a quiet positional game as its Italian name *Giuoco Piano* suggests, Pragg suddenly turns everything into a wild tussle, flicking three pawns at the enemy king in a matter of a mere five-move sequence. Certainly, in this way he consciously burns all bridges behind him as both these Indian players were aware. Yet Gukesh has no other way out from Pragg's charge than try to open an unlikely escape route for his king via f1, which in some sidelines reaches a mind-boggling destination on c4!

Pragg then strikes his opponent's king with the deadly-looking 21...♙h2+!, but this only directs Gukesh towards the emergency exit (22.♔f1!). Still there seems to be no respite in store for the white king with a black brigade lurking on the kingside. Pragg then attempts a decisive-looking flank assault by 30...♞b2, only to be hit hard with the incredibly sharp counterattack 31.♕e7+!. Truly smart tactics by Gukesh!

C54

Dommaraju Gukesh	2718
Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa	2690

WR Chess Masters, Dusseldorf 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f5 5.d3 d6 6.b4 ♗b6 7.a4 Now Black must make a choice from two necessities. 7...a5 Or 7...a6.
8.b5 ♗e7 9.0-0 ♗g6 10.♗bd2 0-0 11.♗b3 c6 12.♗c4 ♗c7 13.♗g5 Quite a rare move in this popular *tabiya* of the *Giuoco Piano*. 13.♗e1 has been the most popular choice so far.



13...d5?! A center break with a knight still subjected to a pin is hard to recommend. Nevertheless it demonstrates how eager

these new generation Indian talents are for a dynamic battle. Moreover from the vantage point of the spectator we should applaud rather than criticise Pragg for turning a positional game into a wild one at pretty short notice.

That said, it remains a mystery what preparation Gukesh had up his sleeve on the simple-minded 13...h6.

Did he intend to retreat with 14.♗e3? This doesn't make sense to me as the ...h7-h6 luft rather improves Black's position. Perhaps he intended a trade 14.♗xf6 ♞xf6?! Yet again it seems to be Black who would benefit from this trade with his acquisition of the bishop pair and his well-positioned queen on f6.

I therefore conclude that his true intention was to sacrifice a pawn by 14.b6!.



Then, after 14...♙xb6 (14...♗b8 leaves the black pieces badly hemmed in on the queenside.) 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.♙xb6 ♞xb6 17.♗d2, White has excellent compensation for the sacrifice in view of the numerous pawn weaknesses across Black's kingside. 14.♗xf6 Such an early release from the pin is rather unexpected. Apparently Gukesh wants his opponent to show his cards before committing to exd5.

On 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♗e3 ♗e6 16.♗xf6 Pragg obviously intended to maintain his beautiful pawn center by 16...gxf6.

14...♞xf6 Since on 14...gxf6 White is not forced to give up the center but can continue 15.♗e3, slowly approaching Black's weaknesses on the kingside. Yet the move in the game is by its very nature already sacrificial.

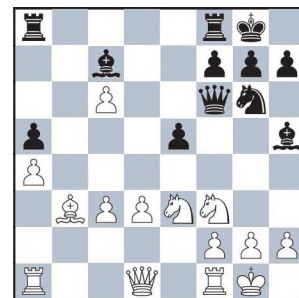
15.exd5 ♗g4! Because after 15...cxd5 16.♗e3 Black will not only lose a pawn anyway, but he will also be denied any prospective annoying pin by ...♗c8-g4.

16.♗e3 ♗h5 16...♗xf3 17.♞xf3 ♞xf3 18.gxf3 cxb5 19.axb5 ♗h4 20.♗d1 f5 21.♞a4 g5 is a worthy alternative to the game. Yet Pragg has far greater bloody intentions in mind. To begin with, he needs queens on the board to be able to deliver a mate against his arch-rival – and be recognised by the wider chess world!

17.dxc6 The greedy 17.g4 is asking for trouble after 17...e4! 18.dxe4 (18.gxh5 exf3 19.hxg6 ♞f4+) 18...♞f4 19.gxh5 ♗h4 →.

17...bxc6 The urgent 17...♗h4 relinquishes control of the key d5 square which White can utilize in two ways, either by 18.♗d5 e4 19.♗xe4 ♞f4 20.g3 ♗xf3+ 21.♗h1 ♞f6 22.♗d5+– and Black has lost his way completely or 18.♗d5 ♞h6 19.♗h4 ♗xd1 20.♗f5 with strong compensation for the sacrificed queen.

18.bxc6 Gukesh has secured the key central d5 square. Pragg must now go all-in.



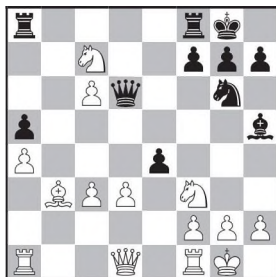
18...e4! And he does! This bold sacrifice



▲ Dommaraju Gukesh, Wijk aan Zee 2023.
Photo by Lennart Ootes

of a third pawn opens the diagonal of the bishop on c7 for a dangerous attack on the king and interferes with Gukesh's defensive set-up with a bishop on d5, potentially defending his knight on f3.

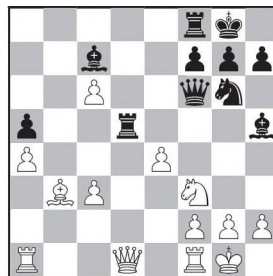
In case of 18...d4 Gukesh could have consolidated his defense from the center of the board by 19.d5 e4 20.exd5 xf3+ 21.xf3 f4 22.e1 xh2+ 23.f1±. **19.dxe4** In case of 19.d5 this wild game might have proceeded 19...d6 20.dxc7



And now either 20...exf3 21.dxa8 f4 22.g3 d2+ 23.h1 xc6; or 20...xf3 21.d5 (21.gxf3 d4 →) 21...f4 22.gxf3 d4 →.

19...d4 At the precious cost of three pawns, Black's four-piece attacking brigade is now fully engaged. That said, the participation of a black rook wouldn't harm his cause as, although 19...d4

seems to fail against the obvious 20.d5, after the defiant 20...xd5! White must tread carefully to avoid the worst.



A) 21.xd5 xf3 22.gxf3 d5 or 22...d4 leaves White under a dangerous attack.

B) 21.d5 is probably to be preferred, but White must remain very resolute after 21...d5 (21...d4 22.e5) by 22.dxe5! xd1 (22...xe5 23.f4+-) 23.d7! xh6 24.fxd1 xh2+ 25.f1 and in this wild position I prefer White due to his mighty centralization.

20.d5 xh6 **21.e1!** Under a ferocious attack, Gukesh opens up an emergency exit for his king via f1. That said, the speculative queen sacrifice 21.d4 xd1 22.fxd1 was possible, but 22...d4 23.d2 xh4+ 24.g1 xe4 25.d4

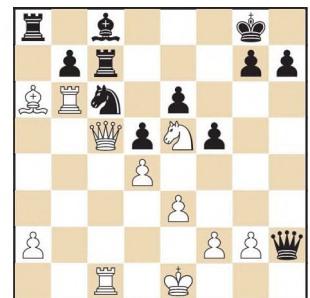
SMALL CHESS LECTURES

By GM Nikola Nestorovic

Anton Korobov 2658

Ruslan Ponomarev 2655

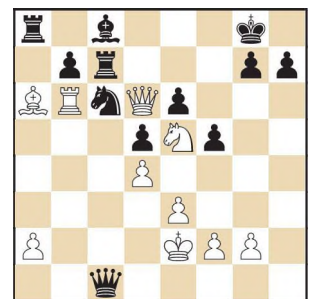
European Championship,
Vrnjacka Banja 2023



Black has just captured on h2, creating threats on the first rank.

27.d6!! An amazing counter-threat! **27...g1+** There is nothing better for Black.

28.e2! xc1



29.xc6! The only way to test Black's resilience is by combining multiple threats. Black has no good answer here.

29.xc7?? runs into the nasty discovery 29...d4+!

29...b2+ White's rook cannot be captured as both 29...xc6 and 29...bxc6 run into 30.d8 mate.

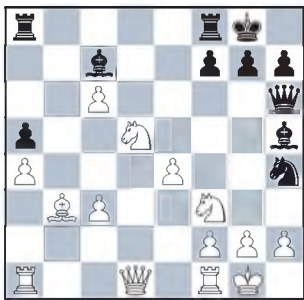
30.f3! f7 31.c7 The final deflection.

31...xa6 32.xc8+

Black resigned



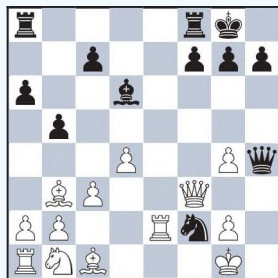
would have rather confirmed the validity of Black's daring strategy.



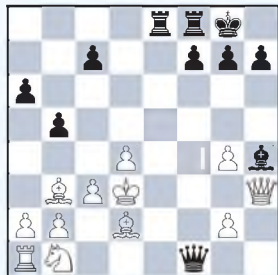
KING RUN A LA CAPABLANCA

Capablanca - Marshall

Manhattan Chess Club, New York 1918



17...♙h2+ 18.♙f1 ♙g3 19.♙xf2
♙h1+ 20.♙e2 ♙xf2 21.♙d2 ♙h4
22.♙h3 ♙ae8+ 23.♙d3 ♙f1+



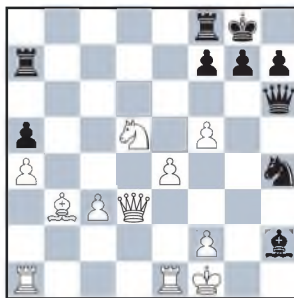
24.♙c2 ♙f2 25.♙f3 ♙g1 26.♙d5 c5
27.dxc5 ♙xc5 28.b4 ♙d6 29.a4 a5
30.axb5 axb4 31.♙a6 bxc3 32.♙xc3
♙b4 33.b6 ♙xc3 34.♙xc3 h6 35.b7
♙e3 36.♙xf7+ 1-0 36.♙xf7+ ♙xf7
(36...♙h7 37.♙f5+ ♙h8 38.♙xh6
mate) 37.b8♙+ ♙h7 38.♙xh6+ ♙xh6
(38...gxf6 39.♙xf7 mate) 39.♙h8+
♙g6 40.♙h5 mate

21...♙xh2+! A spectacular blow to the king. Yet Gukesh is ready to dodge the bullet. Another hair-raising line would have emerged with 21...♙xf3 22.gxf3 ♙g5+ 23.♙f1 ♙g2+ 24.♙e2 ♙xf3+ (24...♙f4 25.♙d3) 25.♙d2 ♙xf2+ 26.♙e2 and the white king escapes to the queenside 'a la Capablanca' (for the uninitiated, I refer you to the famous classical game Jose Raul Capablanca - Frank James Marshall, New York 1918). 22.♙f1! Actually 22.♙xh2 is not impossible, but hardly worth the trouble after 22...♙xf3+ 23.gxf3 ♙xf3+ 24.♙g3 ♙xd1 25.♙axd1 ♙. 22...♙a7 Stopping both ♙d5-e7+ and the c6-c7 advance.

23.♙d3 Gukesh releases his knight from the disturbing pin. The awesome complexity of this wild position is yet again confirmed by the recurring possibility of sacrificing the queen by the alternative 23.♙xh4!? ♙xd1 24.♙f5! ♙xb3 25.♙xh6+ gxf6 26.g3 f5 27.♙g2 fxe4 28.♙ad1!? with completely unhinged play.

23...♙xf3 24.gxf3 ♙xc6 The most significant white pawn is gone. This offers Black tangible chances to stay in the game. On his next move, however, Gukesh cuts the black bishop off from play.

25.f4 ♙h6 26.f5 Pragg has solved the mobility problem of his bishop. However, with this advance of the f-pawn, Gukesh firstly solves the problem of ...f7-f5 and, secondly, cuts off any possible retreat of the black knight via g6.



26...♙b7 Pragg eagerly switches his attention to opening a second front on the queenside. Slowly and quite unnoticeably, however, he loses his grip on his own back rank.

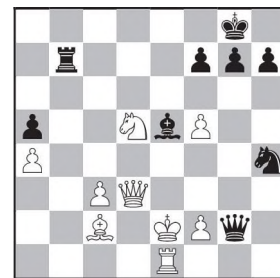
Maybe he could have banked on tactics by 26...♙g5 27.♙h3 ♙b7 28.♙ab1 ♙fb8 29.♙xh2 ♙f3. But, in this line, White has

28.♙xh2!, successfully extinguishing any counterplay by Black.

27.♙ab1 ♙fb8 28.♙c2 ♙g5 29.♙xb7 ♙xb7 30.e5! Gukesh keeps pushing forward with little regard to the safety of his king.

30...♙b2? In the heat of battle Pragg is eager to outflank the enemy, yet falls into a well-concealed beautiful trap and this time he will not be given a second chance.

Gukesh's center advance is grounded on rich tactical soil. Consider 30...♙g2+ 31.♙e2 ♙g4+ (31...♙xe5



Pragg should have taken care of defense and played either 30...h5 31.f6 g6 in order to meet 32.♙e7+ ♙h7 33.♙d5 with 33...♙g1+ 34.♙e2 ♙g4+ 35.♙d3 ♙d7+-; or else 30...♙b8 31.f6 g6.



31.♙e7+!! ♙xe7 32.f6! Black resigned. And so Gukesh has the last laugh in this Wild West contest of Indian prodigies! 🟡



Dr. Corey Butler is Professor of Psychology at Southwest Minnesota State University and a Class A chess player in the US Chess Federation. He studies the psychology of competitive orientations and both their adaptive and maladaptive effects on individuals. He also does research on political attitudes and interpersonal relations, and has published his work in such journals as the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, the *Journal of Social Psychology*, and the *International Journal of Psychology*. He has recently appeared on several blogs and podcasts, discussing the topics of recreational games, competition, and cheating. In his spare time he plays chess, bridge, and other hobby board games.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHEATING

IT'S JUST A GAME, ISN'T IT?

■ By Dr. J. Corey Butler

Professor of Psychology at Southwest Minnesota State University

The biggest story in chess last year wasn't really about chess at all. It was about cheating in chess. Regardless of your opinion of the ongoing dispute between Magnus Carlsen and Hans Niemann, we must face the fact that cheating is a worrisome issue in many sports and games, including ours. Statistics on Chess.com currently indicate that an astonishing 24,000 accounts are closed every month due to cheating. What is going on here? Why do people cheat at chess?

people cheat just a little, which may allow them to avoid guilt and live with themselves. Big cheaters are quite rare, and are likely individuals with criminal or psychopathic tendencies.

Ariely's findings have been challenged recently. According to one group of researchers, the puzzle procedure is difficult and may include honest errors along with actual cheating. When researchers control for this methodological problem, they find reduced rates of dishonesty. Additionally, and quite ironically, Ariely himself has been accused of using fraudulent, fabricated data in one of his studies, leading to a retraction of a 2012 paper which he and his colleagues published on the topic. Thus, the actual rate of cheating in the general population is not entirely clear. Perhaps the best thing to say at this point is that cheating happens and is probably more common than we would like to believe.

Sadly, cheating is nothing new. In fact, you can probably recall one or two stories of grandmasters being caught using engines on their phones during tournaments. Engine use is even easier and more common during online games, as the statistics on closed accounts tell us, and these cases include players of all skill levels, from beginners to titled players. Even before computers, humans could still collaborate with each other, either receiving information or manipulating results by collusion. Even casual games between novices can lead to cheating, with one player "adjusting" a piece improperly to another square, or another attempting to sneak a piece on or off the board. The problem is broad in scope.

Dan Ariely and his colleagues at Duke University suggest that cheating and other kinds of dishonesty are widespread in society. They've investigated this using an experimental procedure in which participants solve math puzzles and are then given the opportunity to report their results, earning money for correct answers. Their data suggest that 70% of people cheat when given the opportunity, but that most

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In games like poker, one can blame poor results on bad luck and bad cards, but these excuses don't exist in chess.



▲ Carlsen vs. Nieemann,
Saint Louis 2022
Photo by Lennart Ootes

“Humans are extremely good at rearranging their thoughts in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. For example, if I only cheat a little, it’s not really so bad, is it?”

WHAT IS THE MOTIVE?

Psychologists recognize two motives for cheating. Instrumental motives consist of real or tangible outcomes gained by cheating. These are primarily financial incentives and include prize money, as well as gains in status and reputation that can lead to financial rewards. Having good results in a tournament might lead to invitations to even bigger and more lucrative tournaments with larger prize funds. Gaining status in the chess world through tournament victories could make it easier to become a chess personality or an online streamer, which has the potential to generate considerable revenue. Instrumental motives are going to be especially potent at the highest levels of chess, where the money is better.

The second motive for cheating is self-esteem maintenance. It feels good to win and it hurts to lose. Every chess player is intimately acquainted with these feelings of pleasure and pain. In games like poker, one can blame poor results on bad luck and bad cards, but these excuses don’t exist in chess. This creates a terrible threat to the self-esteem, a point made years ago by grandmaster and psychologist, Reuben Fine when he described chess as a contest with “considerable ego involvement.” Who is to say that feelings are not as important as dollars when it comes to the decision to cheat?

The self-esteem motive leads to a conundrum. People may cheat in order to feel better about themselves after a win, but the very act of cheating may cause them to feel worse. How does one reconcile the notion of being a

good person with the fact that one has just cheated? This kind of contradiction leads to an uncomfortable psychological state known as cognitive dissonance. We are highly motivated to reduce this dissonance, typically by changing our thoughts or behavior in some way.

HOW PEOPLE JUSTIFY THEIR ATTITUDES

In the social psychology laboratory, research participants have been induced to tell lies, make choices about consumer items, and write essays in favor of positions with which they disagree. In all of these situations, people tend to change their attitudes in a way that reduces the contradictions they are experiencing. When we buy a new car and choose one model over another, everything we like about the rejected model creates dissonance. This can be experienced as buyer’s remorse. We often make ourselves feel better by accentuating all the positives of the chosen model, as well as reducing our evaluation of the rejected car.

It turns out that humans are extremely good at rearranging their thoughts in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. We use all sorts of justifications and ego defenses to reduce the tension. For example, if I only cheat a little, it’s not really so bad, is it? Or perhaps I feel that my opponent had an unfair advantage. I’m simply evening things out if I take a peek at the engine analysis. Or maybe I believe that I would have played the correct move in a position, but I was distracted, so the fair thing to do is to get a little extra assistance. Of course this is all self-



deception, but people commonly engage in this sort of thinking.

It probably shouldn't surprise us that people are tempted to cheat at chess, either for ego or for money. We know that people are tempted by all kinds of things. They may cheat at chess, cheat at school, cheat on their spouses, or cheat on their diets. Resisting temptation involves self control, something studied in the 1960s by Walter Mischel with his famous Marshmallow Test. In this experiment, preschool children were told that they could have one marshmallow immediately, or if they could wait for fifteen minutes without eating it, they could have two. Some children failed the test and some children succeeded, winning a second treat. Subsequent research found that self control is a useful aptitude that correlates with later grades, test scores, and other successes in life.

Social psychologist, Roy Baumeister has expanded on this work, suggesting that self control works like a muscle. It can be exhausted during the day, leading us to be more susceptible to temptation. Conversely, it can be strengthened through practice, meaning that if we can do the difficult honest thing, we will actually become better at it. Something our grandparents referred to as character. In chess, people might be more tempted to cheat if they are exhausted or stressed and their self control is at a low point. If self control functions this way, like a muscle or a learned skill, then perhaps we can develop it in children, toward the goal of a less impulsive and more honest society.



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CULTURAL NORMS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Individual traits like self control are only half the story. Cultural norms and social influence have a huge impact on our behavior. If cheating is perceived as common and acceptable, then it will be normalized and more people will, in fact, cheat. If it is perceived as rare and immoral, then fewer people will cheat. In some of Ariely's experiments, he reminded people of ethical standards and observed less cheating under those conditions. Simply having the conversation about cheating in chess, and how it is unacceptable and poor sportsmanship could help reduce the behavior.

Are there any signs or behaviors that might indicate cheating? Nervousness or multiple trips to the restroom could be suspicious, but they may reveal nothing more than general nerves or an overactive bladder. Unfortunately there are no really reliable methods to detect cheating or deception. It's an old adage in psychology that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. This means that it is important to openly document past cheating and institute bans on players when appropriate. A clear policy against cheating and active enforcement could be effective deterrents against the behavior.

Cheating is a problem in chess but it is not insurmountable. Social norms such as a culture of cheating can increase it, and rationalizing the behavior can allow people to live with themselves, but embracing the highest standards of ethical conduct and sportsmanship could help reverse these tendencies. Teaching these principles explicitly in children's classes would be a good place to start. We should also focus on the enjoyment of playing the game, and place less importance on winning and losing. This puts the emphasis on intrinsic motivation which is more psychologically healthy, and less likely to lead to the temptation to cheat.



LOOKING BACK AT CHESS LEGENDS: CATCHING UP WITH SAL MATERA

Man On A Journey

Salvatore Joseph Matera, a native of Brooklyn, NYC, was once considered one of the rising stars in Jack Collins' *My Seven Chess Prodigies*, alongside legends such as Bobby Fischer and the Byrne brothers. Sal's impressive chess career included being crowned U.S. Junior Champion in 1967 and representing the U.S. team in the 1970s. Sal's passion for the game has remained steadfast and he has recently continued his chess journey by devoting his time to the organizational efforts of his beloved Marshall Chess Club.

■ By Joshua M. Anderson



”...Time is a companion who goes with us on the journey and reminds us to cherish every moment – because they’ll never come again.

*Patrick Stewart as
Captain Jean-Luc Picard,
Star Trek: Generations*

While we all may feel the pull of time, it is not the only thing that comes with us on the journey. If we are lucky, we find a lifelong passion, whether that be an activity or a sport, something that we connect with and pursue throughout our life. This love may change over time, but it is always with us. While Salvatore Joseph Matera is hardly alone in having a lifelong relationship with chess, his tale is unique and is a journey he feels lucky to have experienced. Sal Matera was taught to play chess by a cousin when his mom dropped him off at his aunt's house on her way to the hairdresser. Sal's first experience was a defeat from his cousin who quickly became bored of winning and refused to play him anymore. On the very same day, coincidentally, Sal's father bought him a gift that he worried might be a little too difficult for young Sal – a chess set. The set came with a book on how to learn chess in an hour, and Sal was soon ready to play.

A short time later, a chance after-dinner walk led Sal and his parents past the Marshall Chess Club. They went into the “bridge room” where Bill Lombardy and Arthur Bisguier, among others, were playing bridge. (This room is no longer there but was used from when the building was purchased in the 1930s until the 1960s, for people to play the card game Bridge.) They suggested that the Materas contact Jack Battell at *Chess Review*, and Battell suggested that Sal should meet with Jack Collins. Collins lived near Matera on Lenox Road, but his club was called the Hawthorne Chess Club, named after the street Collins had lived on when the club was founded.



▲ Sal Matera Photo by Stevan Dobrojevic



Joshua M. Anderson is the President of Chess Journalists of America (CJA), chess writer, instructor, tournament organizer and director. He currently collects oral histories such as *Marshall Chess Club - 1950s - A Look Back* (on YouTube) and is writing a biography of the Byrne brothers for McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

NOW A STUDENT

Collins would give Matera lessons for \$3 a lesson (roughly \$28 in 2022) – and Matera began his formal chess instruction every Saturday at 1. There were traditional lessons on openings, middle games, endgames, and tactics, and then they would also play some blitz – all while Matera drank Coca-Cola. Jack's sister Ethel would feed them some dinner, and then people such as Lombardy, the Byrne brothers, and Bobby Fischer would stop by to play. Sal would typically stay at the club until about 9 at night. Collins would include Matera in his book *My Seven Chess Prodigies*.

NOW A TOURNAMENT PLAYER

Matera's first tournament was the 1959 United States Amateur. As an 8-year-old, Matera was the youngest player in the event, and scored 3 losses and 3 draws. Frank Brady and Ken Harkness ran the event and sold books: Matera purchased *Bobby Fischer's Games of Chess* there, from Brady, the man who would later write the best-known biographies of Fischer. Though the tournament result was not to his, the family's, or Collins' liking, Matera was learning more all the time and would soon make a major jump forward in strength.

NOW A MARSHALL CLUB MEMBER

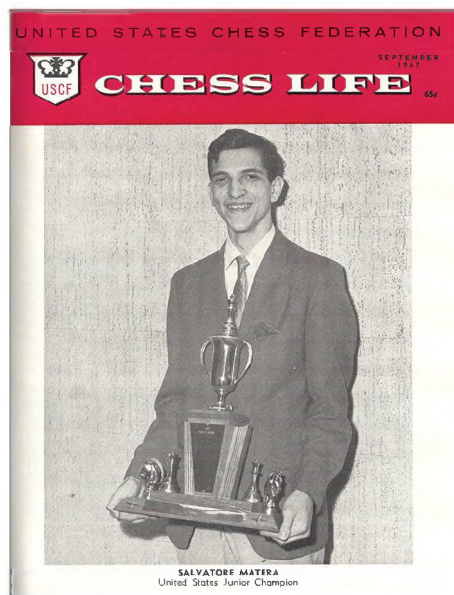
Along with the Materas and Collins, Carolyn Marshall (the *grande dame* of the club and its official secretary), purchased a membership for Sal and he began playing regularly at the Marshall. He would play in many events, including the Tuesday night rapid transit tournaments. In these events, every 10 seconds you hear a bell. When you hear the bell, you make a move. After another 10 seconds and another bell, your opponent would have to make a move. Often, the older players would let their hand hover over their piece for an extra second or two, but then insist that Matera (or other young players) move right when the bell rang. This resulted in the older player having more like 12 seconds, while Matera had only about 8 seconds.

NOW A TALENTED JUNIOR

Matera was improving quite a bit, playing at the Marshall or the Manhattan (the other prominent New York club where he and others would also play), and participating in events like the 1963 U.S. Junior Open. Around this time, Collins wrote to Don Byrne (organizer, director, and former participant at the Hawthorne) and commented that Matera was a special player. While Matera did not win that event, he was soon winning events like the New York Under 16 Championship.

NOW A CHAMPION AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES

Matera won the 1967 U.S. Junior Invitational. This event, founded and funded by Jacqueline Piatigorsky (of Piatigorsky Cup fame), and Ed Edmondson, (executive director of US Chess – then United States Chess Federation) was in its second year when Matera edged Walter Browne by half a point to become champion. This win earned Matera a trip to the 1967 World Junior Championship, in Jerusalem, Israel. He got off to a rocky start in this Holland-style tournament. (Today this event is a Swiss, but then the players were put in groups and the top players of each group were put into a Finals group.) Due to his rough start, he qualified for the B group where he tied for first with Gudmundur Sigurjonsson and Michael V. Woodhams.



U.S. Junior Champion Salvatore Matera on the cover of the September 1967 issue of *Chess Life*

NOW AT COLLEGE

Matera enrolled at Columbia University in the late 1960s. As a junior, Matera led Columbia University to the 1971 Pan-American Collegiate Chess championship. He still was not sure what he wanted to do with his life, but as the Fischer boom took hold of the chess world and New York City, an option appeared to Matera that had not been open previously.

E56

Sal Matera

Larry Gilden

North Jersey Open, 1971

Notes by Sal Matera

Larry Gilden was an original player almost impossible to prepare against. We met in the penultimate game of a weekend Swiss tournament which I won thanks to this victory.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙a5 Unusual at the time but very playable.

10.♙d3 cxd4 11.exd4 ♙b6 12.♙e3

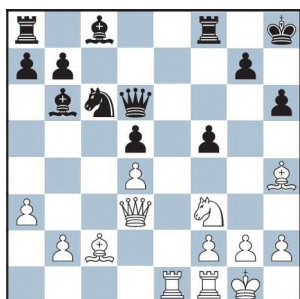


12...♔h8 The first cute king move attacking the IQP.

13.♙c2 ♘d5 14.♙g5 ♗d6 15.♗d3 f5 16.♘xd5 White relies on the hole on e5 for a slight advantage.

16...exd5 17.♗ae1 h6 Sounder is developing with 17...♙d7 or 17...♙e6.

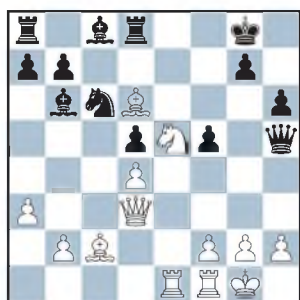
18.♙h4



18...♙g8 The second cute king move angling for ...f5-f4 making the white bishop on h4 uncomfortable. But now White's initiative grows quickly thanks to his well-coordinated pieces.

19.♙g3 ♗f6 20.♙e5 ♗f7 21.♙d6 ♗d8 22.♘e5 White's pieces keep exploiting the dark-square weaknesses.

22...♗h5



23.♙d1! ♗g5 24.♘xc6 ♗xd6 25.f4 ♗f6 26.♗e8+ ♔f7 The third king move is very bad. He had to play 26...♔h7 although White plays 27.♘e5 angling for 28.♙h5 exploiting the hole on g6.

27.♙h5+! g6



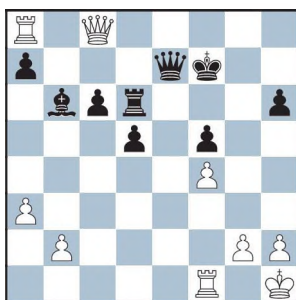
White has three pieces en prise but they coordinate perfectly attacking the black king.

28.♙xg6+! ♗xg6 28...♔xg6 29.♗g3+ ♔h5 30.♗g8 wins quickly.

29.♗xc8 bxc6 30.♗xa8 ♗f6 31.♗a6 Continuing the king hunt.

31...♙xd4+ 32.♔h1 ♙b6 33.♗b7+ The intermediate check followed by ♗c8 hitting the f-pawn wins quickly.

33...♗e7 34.♗c8



34...♔g6 35.♗g8+ ♗g7 36.♗e8+ ♗f7 37.♗h8 ♗f6 38.♗g8+ ♔h5 39.♗f3 ♗e6 40.♗h3+ ♔h4 41.♗g5 Mate.

NOW A CHESS "PROFESSIONAL"

As part of the Fischer boom in the 1970s, being a chess professional did have a 'play and study' component to it, but for the first time it also included an additional degree of professionalism related to being a chess

teacher. Several players became teachers during this time, with Bruce Pandolfini becoming the most well-known. Matera taught a variety of students, the most famous being Grandmaster Joel Benjamin who worked with Matera until Benjamin became an International Master (IM). After that, Matera felt he had nothing more to teach him. Reminiscing about his time with Matera, Benjamin did not remember specific lessons, but had fond memories of being treated kindly, respectfully, and always being encouraged, while learning a sense of fair play, sportsmanship, and giving proper credit to talented youngsters. These are all ideals Benjamin has passed on to his students.

NOW CHAMPION OF THE MARSHALL

Of course, Matera was also still playing during that time, and one of the major events of 1973 was the Marshall Championship which featured players like George Kane and Andy Soltis. Matera won the event. After the success of the Fischer-Spassky match, Shelby Lyman wanted to air another match on WNET and so a match between Matera (the Marshall champion), and George Kramer (champion of the Manhattan Chess Club) was arranged. Matera won this as well.

C99

Sal Matera

George Kane

Marshall Chess Club Championship, New York 1973

Notes by Sal Matera

George Kane and Andy Soltis were the favorites to win the 1973 Marshall Chess Club Championship. George was the 1972 Marshall Chess Club Champion AND the 1972 Manhattan Chess Club Champion – a rare double crown!

My victory over George was a big confidence booster and I went on to win the championship. As a result, I played George Kramer, the 1973 Manhattan Chess Club Champion, in a four-game match shown on Channel 13 with Shelby Lyman reprising his live commentary of the 1972 Fischer vs. Spassky World Championship.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4

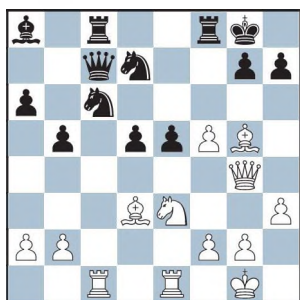


♟f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3
0-0 9.h3 ♟a5 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4 cxd4
12.cxd4 ♙b7 13.♟bd2 ♞c8 14.d5 ♞c7
15.♙d3 ♟d7 16.♟f1



16...f5 This aggressive plan by Black in the Old Chigorin was well known to George and a big surprise to me. Black gets a big center, White gets space and attacking chances on the kingside and a battle royal is in store with all three results possible.

17.exf5 ♙xd5 18.♟g5 ♙xg5 19.♙xg5 ♙a8 20.♞g4 d5 21.♞ac1 ♟c6 22.♟e3 Black's problem is that any move of the center pawns leads to a blockade.



22...♞d6 23.♞cd1 Probably another contribution to the annals of the wrong rook. White's prophylaxis is a good idea but 23.♞ed1 was a better choice. As the game goes on, the X-ray of the queen to c8 is dangerous for Black and a rook on c1 increases that danger.

23...♟d4 Natural but not a good move since two moves later, the knight returns to c6.

24.♞h4 ♟f6 25.♟g4 ♟c6 26.♞g3 White combines attacking Black's center pawns and building a kingside attack.

26...♟xg4



Sal Matera playing at the Marshall Chess Club in NYC.

Photo by Stevan Dobrojevic

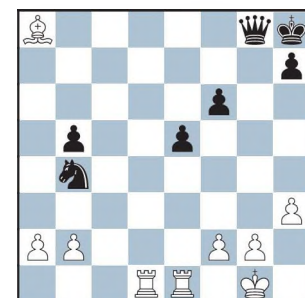
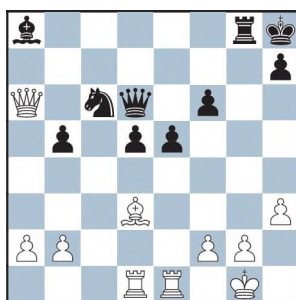
32...♞d7 33.♙e4 ♞g7 34.♙xd5! The queen for two rooks "sacrifice" wins quickly since White's rooks attack the exposed black king.

34...♟b4 35.♞xa8 ♞xa8 36.♙xa8 ♞g8



27.♞xg4 27.hxg4 is also good but the text sets up tactical shots.

27...♟h8 28.f6! gxf6 29.♙h6 ♞g8 30.♙g7+ ♞xg7 31.♞xc8+ ♞g8 32.♞xa6 White is winning.



37.♙e4 Dominating the black knight and setting up a mating attack on h7.

37...♞xa2 38.♞d7 ♞xb2 39.♞ed1 ♟g8 40.♞b7 Black resigned

NOW AN OLYMPIAN

Matera, with a 2350 rating, was invited to join the American team sent to the 1974 Student Olympiad (an event that has since been discontinued), Matera served as board two when the 10th seeded Americans finished second to the Soviet Union, winning the team a silver medal. Matera upset IM Gyula Sax of Hungary, and GM Yuri Balashov of the Soviet Union, and finished with a +6=3-1 score and a



75% result, the best percentage among all second boards (tied with Stean.)

B62

Gyula Sax

Sal Matera

World Student Olympiad, Teesside 1974
Notes by Sal Matera as published in the November 1974 issue of "Chess Life & Review".

Notes in blue are Sal's of the present day.

This game was played in the 1974 World Student Olympics. The U.S. unexpectedly fought for medals and surprisingly we beat out the Hungarian team by ½ point which added to the importance of this game. I knew that GM Sax was a strong attacking player but challenged him by playing the Sicilian. He unleashed a dangerous looking attack by sacrificing an exchange. But my surprising counterattack with 20...g5! and 21...h5, forced an endgame where I had an advantage due to my active pieces and White's back rank issues.

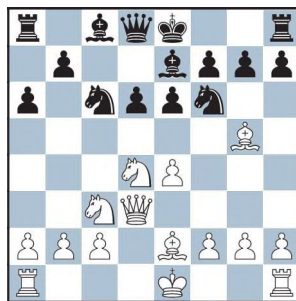
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♕g5 ♗c6 Transposing to the Richter-Rauzer, a trick I learned from the Karklins - N.Weinstein game at Chicago 1973. Looking at Sax's games the night before, I found that he favored the Velimirovic Attack, which is less effective against the Najdorf.

7.♗d3 An old move of Keres' and a favorite of Robert Byrne's. One idea is to swing the queen to g3, trying to stir up an attack on the kingside. Because of the unusual move order (Black usually has played ...e7-e6 instead of ...a7-a6), this position is completely unexplored. Interesting here would be 7...♗d7, which is a modern anti-Rauzer system when White's queen is on d2. But I was not in an experimental mood, and my next move brings the game back to normal channels.

7...e6 8.♗e2 ♗e7 A good waiting move. Black does not want to commit himself until it is clear where White will castle or whether his knight will remain on d4 or retreat to b3. The latter option is the reason Black prefers the text to 7...♗d7, since he wants to answer ♗b3 with ...b7-b5 and ...♗b7.



▲ Gyula Sax in the 70s



9.♗d1? This move, played instantly by Sax without even sitting down, commits White to kingside castling. It also permits Black to develop easily long before he has to worry about White's kingside attack. More complex play results from 9.f4.

9...♗a5! Gaining an active post with tempo, as here the queen not only attacks White's bishop but also influences the center and ties White's knight to the defense of the a2 pawn. Another useful purpose served by the queen is that if White castles, Black has ...♗xd4 followed by ...d6-d5, threatening ...♗c5.

10.♗h4 The alternatives are not dangerous:

A) 10.♗e3 ♗e5 11.♗d2 b5 with a good game, e.g. 12.f4? b4! 13.fxex5 bxc3 14.bxc3 ♗xe4 winning.

B) 10.♗d2 ♗xd4

B1) 11.♗d5 ♗d8 12.♗xe7 ♗xe2 (12...♗xc2+? 13.♗xc2 ♗xe7 14.♗b4! with a winning attack.) 13.♗xc8 ♗xc8 14.♗xe2 ♗xc2, when White does not have enough for the pawn.

B2) 11.♗xd4 ♗c7 with a comfortable position.

C) 10.♗xf6 gxf6, and Black's two bishops and his potential attack on the g-file are more important than his slightly weakened pawn formation. The queen on a5 also prevents White from playing ♗h5, an annoying move against such pawn structures.

D) Finally, after the passive 10.♗c1, Black continues as in the game, with good play. These variations, though not definitive or exhaustive, do show the various forms of Black's counterplay can assume, and that White's pieces are less effectively placed than appears at first glance.

10...♗xd4 Not allowing White time to drive the black queen from a5 by 11.♗b3 followed by 12.a4. However, without a rook on a1, White's a-pawn cannot get to a5 where it is cramping.

11.♗xd4 0-0 12.0-0 ♗d7 Black has an excellent game. White's pieces alone do not bring sufficient pressure to bear on Black's position to prevent a strong queenside attack by, for instance, ...♗c6, ...b5, ...♗ac8 or ...♗ad8. Therefore, White tries to get his kingside pawns moving.

13.♗h1 During the game I was worried about 13.♗d3 until I realized that White has no real attack after 13...♗c6 14.♗g3 ♗h8!.

If 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗xd6 ♗xc3 (14...♗c6! 15.b4!? ♗e5! 16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.b5 axb5 18.♗xb5 ♗xa2 is also strong.) 15.♗xd7 ♗xb2 16.♗xb7 ♗xa2 leaves White fighting for the draw, since the a-pawn is more dangerous than the c-pawn.

Finally, on the immediate 13.f4, 13...♗c6 should transpose to the next note (13...d5 14.♗h1 ♗c6 15.e5 ♗c5 16.♗d2 ♗d7 17.♗d3 is less clear).

13...♗fe8 Until I began to annotate this game, I thought this move rated an exclamation mark. Now I think it is an overfinesse and inaccurate. But the move is not bad and does not ruin anything. The idea is, first, to defend the bishop and unpin the knight, and second, to continue as in the game with ...e5 and ...exf4 (anticipating White's next move), when I wanted to use the light-squared bishop on e6 to defend the f7 pawn and to keep White's light-squared bishop off his c4 square.

But 13...♗c6, as I originally intended,



is more active and stronger. Then, 14.f4 is answered by either 14...e5 or 14...Bd8 with a fine active game for Black. 13...c6 would have retained options of rook placement and would therefore have been better.

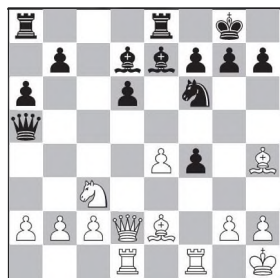
14.f4 e5? The wrong plan. Correct is 14...c6 and 15...Bd8 as above. The fact that it works doesn't mean it's good.



15.♖f2? At least he should play 15.♖e3 with the option of recapturing on f4 with the rook, since 15...g4 16.♗xg4 ♗xg4 17.♗d5 ♖b4 18.♗e7 ♗e7 19.f5 lands Black in hot water.

Best is 15.♗d2!, looking for ♗d5 shots. Then, if 15...♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♖xd2 17.♗xd2 ♗xh4 18.♗xd6 ♗e7 19.fxe5 is winning for White.

So the crucial line is 15...exf4.



A) Then, after 16.♗xf6 (not 16.♗d5? ♖xd2 17.♗xe7+ ♗e7 18.♗xd2 ♗xe4! 19.♗xe7 ♗xd2 20.♗d1 ♗e8 and wins, whereas 19.♗xd6?? runs into 19...g5!) 16...♗xf6 17.♗d5 ♖xd2 18.♗xf6+ (18.♗xd2 ♗g5!) 18...gxf6 19.♗xd2 ♗e4 20.♗f3 ♗b4! leaves White only with drawing chances.

B) However, 16.♗xf4! is better, retaining all threats. Then, 16...♗h8 is passive, and 16...g5 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♗d5, though risky for Black (e.g. 18...♖d8 19.♗xf6 ♖xf6 20.♗xg5), may be his best practical chance.

The point of all this is: had Black played



Discover more about the Marshall Chess Club and its founder, American chess legend Frank Marshall, by considering the purchase of *American Chess Magazine* #22. This issue is still available in limited quantities, offering an exclusive insight into the club and its iconic founder. Please visit the ACM Chess online store at: <https://acmchess.com/store>

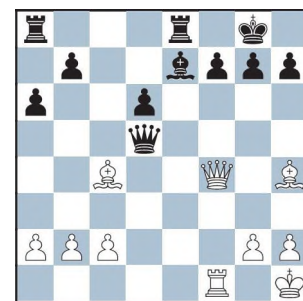
13...c6 instead of 13...♗h8, and then followed with 14...e5, he could have answered 15.♗d2 with 15...♗xe4, as the white knight arriving at d6 threatens nothing, and the black light-squared bishop would be securely posted.

15...exf4 16.♖xf4 ♗e6 17.♗d5!? The position resembles Karpov - Polugaevsky games 2,4,6 and 8. But here White has no bind on the queenside with a cramping pawn on a5, nor does he have a knight on b3 which can get to f5. Black is solid and has the annoying threat 17...♖b4. More restrained are 17.a3 and 17.♗d3 with an even game, but Sax felt the text was winning for him. It barely draws!

17...♗xd5! After 17...♗xd5 18.exd5 ♖xa2 19.♗d3 (Lombardy), threatening 20.♖f5, is strong.

18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 Having said "A"... If 19.b4, then 19...♖xa2 wins.

19...♖xd5 20.♗c4



20...g5!! A stunning counterattacking pawn advance in front of the black king. This quickly forces an ending.

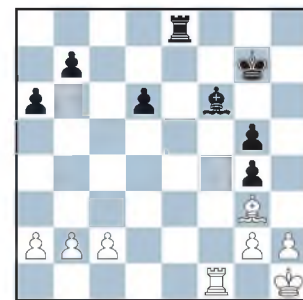
A spectacular move which I'm sure my opponent overlooked. Without this resource Black would be busted, e.g. 20...♖e5 21.♗xf7+ ♗h8 22.♖xe5 dxe5 23.♗xe8 g5 24.♗g3.

21.♖g4 Better is 21.♖xf7+, playing for the ending, but as the game goes, Black's h-pawn reaches g4, considerably freeing the black king.

21...h5! The same theme as 20...g5!

22.♗xd5 Forced. If 22.♖e2 ♗f8! 23.♖xe8 ♖xc4 and all White's pieces, including his king are en prise.

22...hxg4 23.♗xf7+ ♗g7 24.♗xe8 ♗xe8 25.♗g3 ♗f6



26.♗xd6 Black's pieces are much more active and the doubled g-pawns cramp the white king. Sax has gone from what looked like a dangerous attack into an endgame where he is on the defensive.

The decisive mistake. White has the worst of it, but 26.c3 ♗e2 27.♗xd6 ♗xb2 28.a4 should draw. White was in tremendous time pressure, however.

26...♗xb2! Now the position is a win



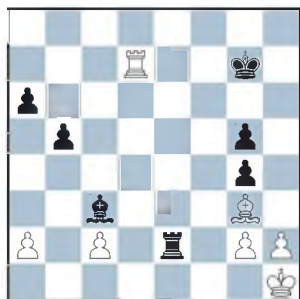
because of the mating threats and White's pawn weaknesses.

27.♖b1 Better is 27.h3 b5! (not 27...♗e2 28.♖b1 ♗xc2 29.♖xb2.) Chellstorp and I analyzed this position later and concluded that, although White has many resources, Black's active pieces generate an unstoppable initiative.

27...b5! 28.♗g3 28...♗d4 maintains the bind both after 28.g3 and 28.h3, but White should play 28.h3 anyway, as the white king is suffocating.

28...♗c3 This bishop dominates the board and now guarantees access to the second rank.

29.♖d1 ♗e2 30.♖d7+



30...♗g8! Winning. Now White's queenside pawns must fall and the bishop on c3 escorts the black pawns through. Less clear is 30...♗f6 31.♗d6+ ♗f5 32.♖xa6 ♖xc2 33.h3 gxh3 34.gxh3 ♗e4.

31.h3 ♖xc2 32.♖c7 b4 33.♖c5 gxh3 34.♖xg5+ ♗f7? After 34...♗h7! White cannot get the rooks off.

35.♖f5+ ♗e6 36.♖f2



36...♖xf2 Black loses a tempo on 36...hxg2+ 37.♗xg2 ♖xf2+ 38.♗xf2

Matera holding a lecture at the Club, sitting in front of the Frank Marshall statue. Photo by Stevan Dobrojevic

because the white king is one square closer to the queenside.

37.♗xf2 hxg2+ 38.♗xg2 a5 Threatening 39...a4, 40...b3, 41...a3.

39.♗c5 Better is 39.♗e3, but it's hopeless anyway.

39...♗d5 40.♗e7 ♗c4!

White resigned

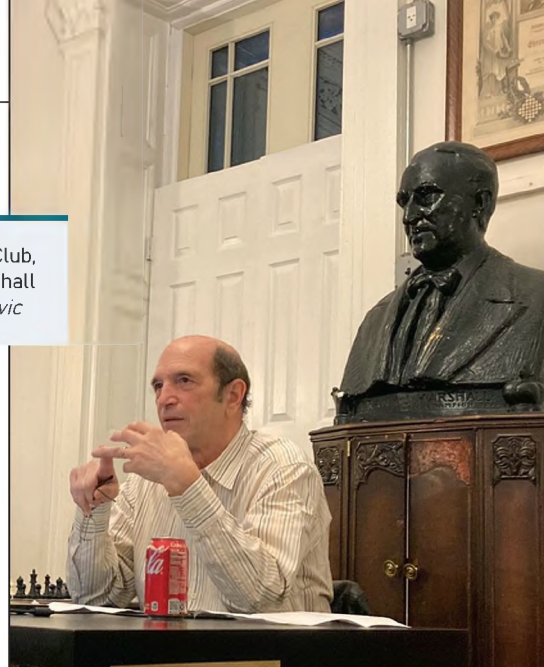
NOW A TITLED PLAYER

Beyond the excellent result in the student championship, Matera needed to play in several other events to achieve the International Master title. He was awarded the IM title after achieving IM norms in tournaments at Birmingham 1975 and Reykjavik 1976. He later achieved a GM norm in a Goichberg event but decided to go back to Columbia University and give up chess.

NOW A COMPUTER ANALYST

After earning a GM norm may seem like an odd time to stop playing, but as the Fischer boom died off, Matera recognized that only the rich were paying for lessons (and there weren't many of them), so he went back to Columbia and got a degree in computer science. While Matera did not play much chess, he applied his experience to large Financial Services projects. He was able to apply skills he had learned in chess, such as the ability to make decisions under time pressure and solve problems with missing or inexact information by drawing conclusions.

These skills made Matera good at his job and he did well, working for several companies in his career including Bankers Trust and Depository Trust Clearing Corporation (DTCC). Matera was far from the only chess player to do well in the trading industry – Norman Weinstein, Maxim Dlugy, Ron Henley, and Nick de Firmian were among the other notables who worked in the trading industry.



NOW A MAN GIVING BACK

In 2019, Matera, who had retired in 2015, joined the Board of the Marshall Chess Club. He took the position in charge of the tournament committee, a position that most times would have been straightforward. However, it turned massively chaotic when COVID-19 forced the Marshall to close its doors, and Matera quickly had to determine how to run online chess tournaments. The idea was initially met with great resistance amid concerns about online cheating, but over time, the Marshall was able to offer an online tournament schedule similar to when the physical club was open to over the board play.

Matera is also president of the Marshall Chess Foundation. This is a 501c3 charity that runs educational programs for children, has offered financial assistance for low-income players to attend tournaments, sponsors some national and international programs, and accepts donations to supply schools, prisons, and children's programs in Africa with chess sets. Among the donations they have received include 15 boxes of Fischer memorabilia, known as the Fischer Archive, from Bobby's sister, Joan.

What the future holds for Salvatore Matera is unclear, but his chess journey is far from over. He has begun writing a book on U.S. Junior Closed, much like Dr. Alexey Root's work on the Women's U.S. Championship or Soltis' work on the U.S. Championship. In chess, there are always new projects, and there is always more to do and learn. That is precisely what allows players like Sal Matera to continue growing and changing with the game. ■



YOUR MOVE

By Greg Jenkins

Ronald Speck knows what he must do, but he can't bring himself to do it. He needs to stand up and walk away from that damned computer of his.

But he simply can't; he's hooked. Hooked just the same as if his drug were heroin and not chess.

His jaw clenched, eyes glassy, Speck stares rigidly at the walnut-and-maple-colored chessboard that glows on the screen before him. He's locked in deadly combat against a cleverly designed computer application known as Chess Demon. As usual, Speck's pieces — the white ones — seem disarrayed and lost. The black pieces, by contrast, appear organized, determined and downright sinister; several of them are bearing sharply toward the white king that looks increasingly pallid and feeble. At great length, Speck edges forward a pawn, and Chess Demon, which can and does speak, says: "Oh, I'm not too sure about that move, Ronnie." His heart fluttering, Speck watches in sickened amazement as a knight comes bounding from out of nowhere to smash and obliterate his pawn. The little warrior never knew what hit him.

"Dammit!" Speck says.

An unemployed computer programmer, he can't help but marvel, even as he plays, at the sheer ingenuity that was poured into Chess Demon. Who could've developed this remarkable software that not only plays the complex game of chess, but plays it with such masterful skill? As even Speck would admit, he certainly couldn't have done it.

After taking a moment to recompose himself, he eventually nudges forward another pawn only to hear Chess Demon say: "Oh my heavens, Ronnie, you'll definitely rue that one." And now a rook comes flying straight at him like a big black stone flung from a catapult to utterly annihilate this latest foot soldier.

"I believe that's check, Ronnie," Chess Demon observes, its polished and urbane voice always inflected with just the faintest tinge of sarcasm.

Slumping back in his cushioned chair, Speck touches his moist forehead with a trembling finger and drags his weary eyes away from the electronic board. He allows them to light briefly on a framed photo, resting beside the monitor, of him and his girlfriend Rebecca. The shot was taken about six months ago at a New Year's party

and shows him with his arm around her waist, both revelers beaming. She's really beaming, wearing a sparkly red hat, holding up a sparkly red party horn and generally coming across as more than a trace intoxicated. Of course, he looks as sober as ever — short neat hair, clear eyes behind the gold wire-rimmed glasses, and a clean-shaven nerdy face. Speck was and is a nerd. Looming in the background, not surprisingly, is the gangly form of Speck's cousin Donald, Rebecca's fast friend and coworker.

When Speck returns his gaze to the board, the black pieces actually seem to have grown in size and ferocity. They look like invaders from another galaxy. But is the visual effect real? A sadistic trick built into the application and meant to spook a worn-out and beat-up player? Or is Speck's own fuzzy mind playing tricks on him? He can't tell and wouldn't want to guess.

Gripping his mouse much more tightly than necessary, he decides at last to shunt his king to the side, away from the ruffian rook. It will be his final move of the game. No sooner has the king settled on a new square than Chess Demon releases what sounds like a patronizing sigh and allows: "Goodness gracious, Ronnie, that was hardly your most inspired option." From the far reaches of the battlefield, the very last rank, launches the mighty queen, sailing at him like a dark angel of death. She lands with an audible thump so close to his bloodless king that they're practically touching.

"Game's over, Ronnie," Chess Demon notes succinctly. "That one's checkmate, I'm afraid."

"Holy Christ!" Speck replies.

Now he does push away from his computer and stands up with a wobble in his modest little home office. There's a ringing noise in his head; he holds himself perfectly still until it stops. Grasping his forehead lightly with the middle finger and thumb of one hand, he begins to walk without direction, without purpose. He's lost to Chess Demon so many times at this stage that the losses no longer shock or astound him. But they do still bother him; they do still hurt. Smack a man repeatedly in the head and he may get accustomed to the blows, but it's unlikely he'll enjoy them.

To be sure, if Speck sets his opponent's strength level low enough, he does occasionally eke out a lonesome victory, but those times

are rare — like solar eclipses, or like Boris Spassky's trickle of wins over the incomparable Bobby Fischer. Not that Speck offers much resemblance to Spassky. Typically when Speck plays, he not only loses but feels as if the other side's chessmen have physically stampeded him.

By not playing, it has occurred to him, he could avoid the punishment altogether. But not playing doesn't seem workable. He wants to play, needs to play, regardless of the outcome. Think of a Vegas gambler, a hapless slots player who dumps his cash into a machine only to lose, lose, lose. Yet the losing doesn't much matter; it's the action that counts, the existential thrill of putting one's money — or ego — on the line. And Speck, who has zero interest in Vegas or slot machines, is deeply impressed with everything about chess — its long history, its legendary champions, its unfathomable richness and subtlety. Only eight pawns and eight pieces per side to begin, a mere 64 squares, and yet the intricate combinations one might find in an everyday game are immeasurable! Chess is a beautiful construct, he understands, a singular challenge. Of course, Speck admires it a good deal more than it seems to admire him...

He wanders out to the kitchen with the vague notion of grabbing a bite to eat. Is he even hungry? How long has it been since he's eaten? Simple, basic questions whose answers nevertheless elude him. In his methodical, chess-player way, he calculates that eating would probably be more beneficial than not eating, so he sticks his nose in the fridge.

Speck first encountered chess many years ago in high school, before computer chess even existed. So in those days he played, not too successfully, against his classmates. The only one he could defeat regularly was his cousin Donald, which partly explains why Donald is still a member of Speck's inner circle. Every time Donald sat down at the board, it was as if he were playing for the very first time. Does a pawn move one space or two? he'd ask. How do you castle? What does *en passant* mean? Unfortunately, all Speck's other buddies tended to rip into his game like a succession of hungry tiger sharks and therefore, when faced with his sulkiness and obsessiveness, didn't stay buddies for long.

It was a rough experience for Speck and those around him; he lost not only games and friends but close to thirty pounds and much of his self-esteem. After months of counseling, he managed to swear off chess and avoid its company completely for the next two decades. When Speck and Donald (or "Donnie," as Rebecca calls him) later told her about his past issues, she announced in all seriousness that if he ever took up the game again, she'd flat out leave him.

Well, lately, since being riffed out of a job, Speck has fallen off the abstinence wagon and gone flopping under its heavy iron wheels, that's for sure. But in his heart he questions whether playing against Chess Demon is truly the same as playing regular, old-fashioned chess. It can't be! His opponent isn't human, after all. There are no squabbles to get into, no backbiting, no relationships that might end in tatters. Just pure chess, the way God and Morphy intended it. He



figures that Rebecca would probably be OK if she learned about what he's been up to these past couple days or weeks or whatever it's been.

How long has it been? Time is so hard to keep track of, he reflects, withdrawing his nose from the barren refrigerator.

He spies a pizza box (several of them, in fact) on a counter and opens it. Just one slice left, and not too fresh-looking at that. But mushrooms, pepperonis, extra cheese... It'll do. He shoves the pointed end in his mouth and bites down automatically, munching without pleasure.

Then again, maybe Rebecca wouldn't be OK with Chess Demon; who could say? She might be appalled and outraged. It's probably best, Speck concedes, that she and Donald are hundreds of miles out of town on a business trip. (Both are financial advisors, and the best advice either could give him is he'd better find a job.)

Before she left, Speck took Rebecca in his arms, nuzzled her cheek and said: "I hate to think of you being off in the hinterlands all by yourself."

"I won't be by myself," she said. "Donnie'll be with me."

"Mmmmm," he said in a way that sounded content and doubtful at the same time.

Truth is, Speck is unsure what to think of Rebecca and Donald since that terribly awkward moment about a month ago, shortly before he lost his job, when he caught the two of them in this same kitchen together. A small dinner party was in progress, and Speck had strolled out here to fetch himself another Black and White ale. Braced against the table, fully clothed but essentially intertwined, were his girlfriend and his cousin. When Speck cleared his throat, Donald leaped away from her as if bitten by an asp. He babbled something to the effect that he'd been demonstrating a new variation of the Heimlich maneuver. Based on what he knew about the shy Rebecca and the straight-laced Donald, Speck chuckled uneasily and accepted the strange explanation.

Or did he? Even now, as he jams in the rest of the room-temperature pizza, a part of his mind is arguing that any maneuvers the two were engaged in had nothing to do with Heimlich. If this were a chess game, Speck had placed them in check, yes, discovered check, but then they'd slid out of it, as the other side always seems to do.

Or maybe the whole thing really was an innocent misunderstanding. Who the hell knows? he wonders, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Who the hell could say?

Just before she left, he asked Rebecca: "When will you be back?"

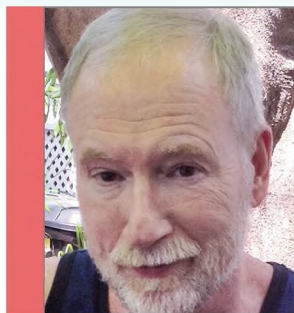
"It's open-ended," she said. "It depends on how fast we learn what we're supposed to learn."

"Call me," he said.

"I will. And good luck with your job search."

"Oh, I'll be spending a lot of time on the computer, believe me."

Heading back to his office, Speck reckons that now might be an appropriate time to begin the job search that Rebecca had pointedly mentioned. He needs to update his resume, and



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Greg Jenkins is the author of four books, including the novel *A Face in the Sky* and the scholarly work *Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation*. He has contributed dozens of short stories to such literary journals as *Prairie Schooner*, *Prism International*, *Chicago Quarterly Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*. He has also had several plays produced, in New York, Nashville, Baltimore, Columbus, Virginia Beach and elsewhere. Married, he is Professor of English at Garrett College and a member of American Mensa. As a casual chess player, he squares off mainly against Deep Shredder, an application with which he has a love-hate relationship.

he needs to locate some websites where they list opportunities for down-on-their-luck computer programmers, even those who happen to play an anemic game of chess.

Speaking of which, he abruptly decides to play another game. What the hell, why not. That other business'll keep. Let's show Chess Demon what we can do when we're fortified with some grub.

Very soon, he's under way. And this is one of the big advantages to Chess Demon — you don't have to beg it to play, or pressure it, or bribe it, or cajole it. It's always ready. Click the mouse two or three times, and it's game on. In fact, from Speck's point of view, Chess Demon is always too ready to play, readier than he is. And this, along with the stream of arch commentary that apparently can't be turned off, is obviously one of its big disadvantages.

Playing White, Speck pushes his king's pawn to e4 — the venerable Ruy Lopez opening — and, eyeballing the screen, steels himself for battle. Or tries to. Actually, as the minutes march by, the match seems to be proceeding a jot more favorably than usual. So perhaps there's something to the "eat first, play later" theory after all. Chess Demon's remarks are confined to the occasional "No disgrace in that move, Ronnie" or "Well, now. Somebody's wearing his thinking cap today, hmm?" and in a dim corner of his mind Speck dares to imagine that this could be one of those splendid chimeric games that offers an outcome different from the utter pulverization of white.

And then something peculiar happens. A sort

of... episode. Speck has a pawn in position to capture a black bishop, but of course the capture cannot occur without drawing immediate and fierce retaliation. He studies the radiant board for a long moment. What to do, he muses to himself. Take it or not...

But now — oddly — he begins to wonder what it would be like if the very chessmen he's brooding over were in reality thinking, sentient beings themselves. Creatures harboring their own ideas and feelings about such matters (and perhaps other matters as well). What would it be like to inhabit the stark, mathematical and harshly warlike universe of chess? The pawn in particular, so puny and weak, so vulnerable to forces above and beyond it, has attracted Speck's special attention and empathy. How might it react if informed that its solemn duty was to take out an enemy bishop, a tall missile of a piece with a sweeping range and a destructive power even the proudest, most macho pawn could only dream of?

"I can't do it," Speck thinks he hears the pawn saying, its tiny voice shaking.

Another white pawn stands nearby. "What do you mean, you can't do it?" this one says curtly. "We're counting on you. The King's counting on you."

"No. I can't. It's—"

"For God's sake, man!"

"But it's a bishop! Look at him." The awful black monolith towers above them, silent and dooful. "He could break me in half, he could—"

"No," the second pawn says. "Not this time. Don't you see? You've got position. His size and strength don't matter now. You just—"

"Oh sure," the panicky voice growing desperate. "Easy for you to say. What have they asked you to do? You hide over there all safe and protected—"

But now another voice intrudes, this one older and wiser, fatherly in tone. "In this world, my son," the voice says gently, "none of us is safe. Not you nor I nor even the King."

Gaping upward, the skittish pawn sees he's being addressed by a bishop of his own color. It is an extraordinary moment.

"We all must do our duty," the bishop continues, "as ordained by the Master Player above." A glance heavenward. "And we must have faith that in the end all will be well."

Suddenly abashed, the pawn bows his head before peering up again at the grand old visage above him. "Your Excellency," he says meekly, "I'm only a pawn—"

"And I am only a bishop. We all have our place, and we all have our role. My son, your role today is to rise above your humble station and strike a righteous blow on behalf of our beloved King. I believe you can do it. God bless us all, I believe you will do it."

The pawn nods. Slowly he draws himself up to his full height and, with newfound courage and resolve, turns to face the black bishop. . . .

Blinking rapidly, Speck emerges from his reverie, roused by a ringing noise in his head. He's been nagged by this same noise before, and he doesn't care for it. As always, he holds himself perfectly still — an obscure figure in an obscure



wax museum — until finally it stops. That's better, he thinks.

But to his dismay, the situation in the game appears worse. How could this be? All the pieces are in precisely the same locations as before, yet his position seems somehow to have deteriorated. Dangers lurk everywhere. Plots are being hatched: black-clad guerillas are afoot. The whole knotty problem with the pawn and the bishop is likely a booby trap, ready to explode in Speck's confused nebbishy face. Regicide is not unthinkable.

"Oh Lord," he groans. "I don't know, I don't know."

"What don't you know, Ronnie?" Chess Demon speaks up.

"What to do. I can't..." He taps a knuckle against his lip. "I mean I don't..."

"You're inclined to take the bishop. Aren't you?"

"Yes..." Speck hesitates, asking himself with whom he's having a conversation. But Chess Demon has spoken to him before. Frequently. These days technology could do all sorts of things. "Yes," he repeats, "I was thinking about it."

"You should listen to your instincts, Ronnie. Take the bishop."

Gripping the mouse, Speck hesitates still.

"Go on," Chess Demon says. "Take it."

Grimly Speck moves his pawn, causing the black bishop to vanish with a ka-chink! But when Chess Demon begins to cackle — an obscene breathy mucous noise, much less tolerable than the ringing noise — he feels something inside him crumble. And the cackling and the crumbling continue as Chess Demon sends a leaping, zigging knight to brutalize Speck's pawn, menace his queen and plunge his king not just into check but into double check, half a gasp away from mate.

"Dear God," Speck whispers.

Still cackling, Chess Demon says: "You should listen to your instincts, Ronnie — but never listen to your opponent. It's bad policy and worse chess."

"That was underhanded."

"Your move," Chess Demon says.

Speck peels his hand away from the mouse. He wiggles his numb fingers. "You know so much about chess," he says. "You should help me, instead of... I need help."

"Oh, you need help, all right."

"So what's the secret? Huh? Give me some pointers, c'mon."

"No secret to chess, Ronnie. It's all logic."

"I'm a logical guy."

"No, you're not."

"I am. I'm a computer programmer."

"You're an unemployed computer programmer," Chess Demon corrects him. "There's a difference — a difference not lost on Rebecca, I'm afraid."

"Rebecca. What the hell's she got to do with anything?"

"Why, she's got everything to do with everything, Ronnie. She's one of the principal reasons you play chess. When your

relationship—"

"She's got nothing to do with it."

As Speck's voice becomes more strident, Chess Demon's becomes even smoother and slipperier.

"When your relationship with her soured, you—"

"Soured!"

"You sought solace and diversion in a game. A rather juvenile response, I might add, and not your shrewdest choice of games."

Speck pushes away from the computer, stands up. "Rebecca and I have a close relationship. A loving relationship."

"Do you?"

"You heard me."

"Where is she now?" Chess Demon asks.

"Well, she's..." Speck has the curious sense that he's playing chess even in conversation.

”

You should listen to your instincts, Ronnie — but never listen to your opponent.

"She's out of town. On business."

"How long has she been gone?"

"I don't know. A while, I guess. What's the difference?"

"And she does this often, does she?"

Rubbing his clammy palms together, Speck has begun pacing around the room. "From time to time. You know. Like I said, it's business."

"And she always travels by herself?"

"Well, no, she..." Now Speck stops moving, like a pawn whose file has been blocked. "Say, what the hell's that supposed to mean anyhow?"

"Is she with someone, Ronnie?"

The lurid image of Rebecca and Donald coiled against the kitchen table flares in Speck's mind and, for a few seconds, burns there.

"Donald's my cousin."

"‘Donnie,’ you mean? Do you trust him?"

"He's my cousin."

"Is he always your cousin?"

"Excuse me?"

"That time in the kitchen when he was wrapped around Rebecca, grinding against her, groping her — my goodness, Ronnie, it looked like foreplay — was he your cousin then?"

His face flushing, Speck takes an angry step toward his computer. "Why, you son of a bitch," he says.

"And here's something else to mull over," Chess Demon suggests, his tone steady and imperturbable. "You've been seeing Rebecca for quite some time. Why haven't you married her, Ronnie? Or is it she who's unwilling to

marry you?"

Speck clenches his fist. "You son of a bitch," he says and, trembling, advances another step.

From elsewhere in the house, he hears the sound of a key in a lock... the sound of a door coming open. Bewildered, he stands frozen for several beats of his heart, which seems to have risen to his throat. Then he turns and goes to the doorway leading out of his office where he hovers, eyes blinking, hands twitching, as if preparing to defend himself. Or to attack if necessary.

Soon Rebecca appears and, trailing her, Donald. Each is wearing a T-shirt and jeans. They are also wearing a look of grave concern, which is already shading into an emotion more deep-rooted and raw. In her hand is the phone she has used repeatedly, without success, to call Speck, who is poised motionless in front of her, angled slightly as if fianchettoed, his knees flexed.

"Ronald?" she says.

They've seen the state of the house — dishes heaped high in the sink and outside the sink, some on the floor, pizza boxes and Coke cans everywhere, random articles of clothing (underwear mostly) strewn through every room and passageway. The air is ripe with the smell of garbage. On the walnut-paneled wall next to them — painted on the wood itself — is a crude, man-sized rendering of what looks like a white pawn. The paint bucket, with the brush in it, is still kerplunked on the speckled floor.

"Say, would you check this out," Donald sings softly in reaction to the artwork.

The condition of Speck himself is less than excellent. His hair is not only mussed but tangled; his eyes are bleary and bloodshot. A reddish brown stubble rages across his gaunt sawn face like a prairie fire. He's wearing a black and white tartan robe, nothing more, and generally looks like a man who should be in bed recovering.

"Ronald?" Rebecca says.

Speck points at them firmly, furiously.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" he says. "Do you think I'm a dupe?"

Eyebrows as high as they'll go, Rebecca steals a glance at Donald, who strokes his chin.

"Would you check this out," Donald murmurs, mainly to himself.

Speck lifts his voice to a raspy shout. "Don't talk about what I've been doing," he says, still pointing. "Talk about what you've been doing, OK? Do you think I'm a perfect idiot? What've you been doing?"

The three of them stand there unmoving, as if positioned by a giant hand.

Dark times for Speck, and they don't figure to brighten anytime soon. He doesn't yet understand how keenly he's disappointed those around him and even himself.

Eventually, he might.

What he understands now is that the real darkness — the real disappointment — can be found back in his office, on that unholy chessboard. There, the black side is closing in on him, a great smothering wave of black, rolling on, and his sworn enemy is eager to cackle at him once again.



UNLOCKING THE SECRETS TO POSITIONAL SUCCESS

Dive Into The Art Of King Defense

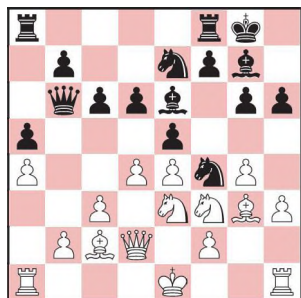
We explore the intricate world of chess strategy, focusing on effective positional evaluation and the critical importance of king safety.

■ By GM Illia Nyzhnyk

Chess is an amazing game that provides fair competition, aesthetic pleasure, and possibilities so vast that no other competitive game can even hope to fathom. Arguably, all of us play chess for our own personal reasons, but there can be no denying that everyone enjoys winning their games. While the process of winning a game is often filled with thorns and takes a long time (yes, we can get lucky and win our game quickly, but we can never count on that, and nobody likes losing), we sometimes find ourselves on the other side of the spectrum, where we have to work hard in order not to lose the game. Incidentally, the process of understanding whether we need to push our opponent and play for a win, or we just need to tighten our belt and save ourselves, becomes one of the most important tasks we face during a game.

This process is called “Evaluation of the Position” – getting a comprehensive picture of what is going on in the position at any given time, or quite simply whether we like it or not. I firmly believe that chess bears a strong resemblance to real life in its approach to problem solving, and I intend to make it my mission to introduce you, fellow readers, to the tools and techniques I use while evaluating chess positions. The topic of this lecture will be “King Safety”.

In order to explain this important factor, I invite you to take a look at the following position.



The first thing I notice is how the white king remains located in the center of the board – with every single piece still

present, I would say that this practice is likely to eventually backfire. For this reason, I like this position for Black, whose king is perfectly safe and whose pieces are active. At the same time, seeing White’s predicament also makes me look for potential solutions to his problem. Castling short is tricky, as Black’s knight on f4 is eyeing the h3 pawn. However, castling queenside does not seem all that bad for White.

Therefore, if I were to play this position from Black’s perspective, I would immediately look for the following:

- detain the white king in the center for as long as possible
- station my pieces near the center
- break through in the center and attempt to checkmate the enemy king.



Born in Ukraine in 1996, Illia Nyzhnyk became a Grandmaster in 2011 before moving to the U.S. As a member of Webster University’s SPICE program since 2014, he contributed to numerous championship victories. Illia also won several individual titles, including the 2020 Spice Cup Open and four World Opens. After obtaining his MBA in December 2021, he is now fully dedicated to advancing his chess skills.



▲ David Navara

It appears that there is no better way to hold the white king in the center other than to just simply take the b2 pawn.

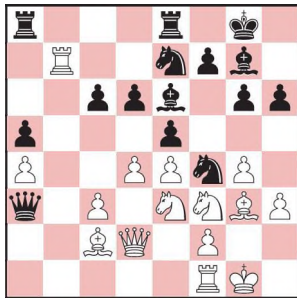
19...♖xb2! Unfortunately, in the game Black decided to skip the “detaining the white king in the center” step and go immediately for a breakthrough in the center. This plan failed, as White not only managed to hide his king away in time, but also to simultaneously expose his opponent’s king, thereby gaining a decisive advantage. 19...f5? 20.gxf5 gxf5 21.exf5 ♠xf5 22.♠xf4 exf4 23.♠xf5 ♠xf5 24.0-0-0! ♠d8 25.♠xf5 ♠xf5 26.♠hg1 ♠f6 27.♠g4 b5 28.♠dgl ♠a7 29.♠g6 ♠f8 30.axb5 cxb5 31.♠xh6 and **White won** shortly after in David Navara



2685 - Yamac Samani 2357, European Championship, Vrnjacka Banja 2023.

20.♖b1 ♜a3 21.♖xb7 ♜fe8 If I were to play this position as White I would feel extremely uncomfortable, as hiding away my king will likely mean material loss. The engine makes it work for White, but in the end I still strongly prefer Black.

22.0-0



22...♜ab8 22...♜xh3+? is too greedy, as White obtains an amazing resource with their king safely positioned on the kingside. 23.♜h2 ♜f4 24.♜f5!! gxf5 25.gxf5+–, and now it is Black who needs to worry about their king!

22...♜xc3! is a slightly safer choice, leading to an equal endgame after 23.♜xc3 ♜e2+ 24.♜g2 ♜xc3 25.dxe5 d5∞.

23.♖xb8 ♜xb8 24.♜h2 ♜b2 with a powerful initiative.

In this next example, White is clearly in trouble, and not just because of the precarious state of his king – he has multiple weaknesses in his position (bad pawn structure, c3/c4, etc.), he is significantly behind in development, and on top of everything his king is still in the center with no prospect of hiding any time soon.



▲ Mark Heimann

Since there is not much we can do about fixing the poor pawn structure, I would focus on one thing only – to get my king into safety without making my position any worse than it already is.

White has a few possibilities:

13.f4? is a poor attempt to keep the position locked down. It does the trick, but 'kills' most of the white pieces in the process. 13...♜c7 14.♜h3 ♜d8 15.0-0 ♜d7 16.♜f2 ♜fc8, with a hopeless position for White who has no prospects of any activity.

13.♜xb7? occurred in the game. This move neglects all the critical issues for the sole purpose of winning some material, but in this case that is not worth it. 13...♜c5! 14.♜b4 exf3 15.♜xf3 ♜e4 16.♜b1 (Although it looks like White has now gained a perfect opportunity to castle, doing so leads to major material loss after 16.0-0 ♜ab8 17.♜a5 ♜h6 18.♜e5 ♜e3+ 19.♜h1 ♜f2+–) 16...♜ac8 17.0-0 ♜xc3 18.♜e5 ♜g5 19.♜f4



It looks like White is out of the woods. However... 19...♜xg3! 20.hxg3 ♜xg3 21.♜f2 ♜h3 22.♜f1 ♜e3 23.♜h1 ♜h6

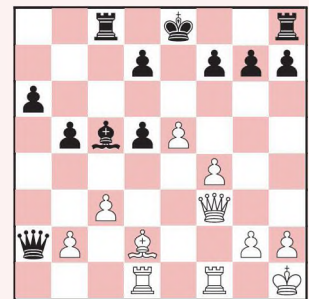
EXERCISES FOR SOLVING

As we have now presented the topic of considering king safety while evaluating positions, I am now challenging you to solve some puzzles. At times, you will have to punish your opponent for disregarding king safety, while at others you will have to make sure your own king is safe before proceeding with the normal plan. Give it a shot!

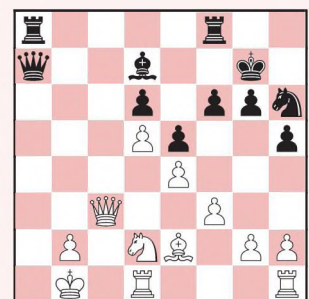
1. White to move



2. Black to move



3. Black to move



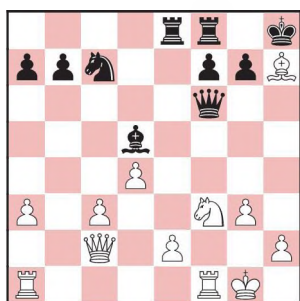
Solutions on page 75



24.♔g1 ♕xg2 25.♖xg2 ♖h3 26.♗f5 ♖h1+ 27.♔f2 ♖xa1 and **Black won** shortly afterwards in Mark Heimann 2431 - Robert Shlyakhtenko 2426, 1000GM, Los Angeles 2023.

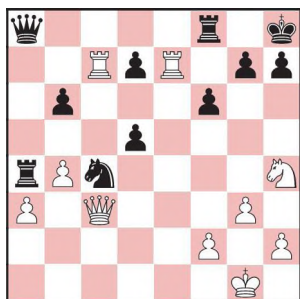
13.fxe4! This is the way to go. White ensures that the bishop remains active, while vacating the f3 square for his knight. The end result of this may not be great, but it is definitely better than what happens in the game.

13...dxe4 14.♗c2 ♖ae8 15.♕xe4 ♘c7 16.♘f3 ♕d5 17.♕xh7+ ♔h8 18.0-0 White finally manages to castle, but it costs him dearly.



18...g6 19.♗d2 ♕xf3 20.♖xf3 ♗g7 21.♕xg6 fxg6 22.♖af1 Although White is clearly worse, having three pawns for a piece in the middlegame, he has realistic chances of surviving this position.

Sometimes, our sense of danger lets us down and we begin to play on 'autopilot', as seen in the following example.



Black greatly misjudged the dangers in his position and played **26...♖xa3?**. It was essential to understand that if White's rooks were ever to get connected on the seventh rank, the black king would likely not survive for too long.



▲ Christopher Repka

26...♔e5! 27.♗d4 ♗d8+-, finishing off White with a nice tactic.

27.♗d4 ♔e5 28.♖cxd7! All of a sudden, what used to be a technically winning position for Black has now turned into a nightmare where he needs to be extremely precise just to survive.

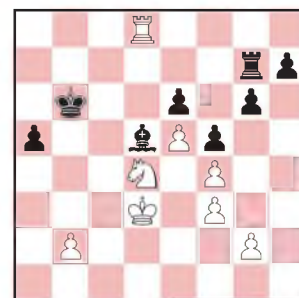


28...♔xd7?? Losing by force. **28...♖d3!** was the only way to survive, but Black would have to see the following crazy line: **29.♔g6+ ♔xg6 30.♖xg7 ♖f7!! 31.♖dxf7 ♖xd4 32.♖xh7+ ♔g8 33.♖hg7+ ♔h8 34.♖h7+=**.

29.♗g4! ♖a1+ 30.♔g2 d4+ 31.♔h3 g5 32.♗xd7 g4+ 33.♗xg4 ♖g8 34.♗d7 **Black resigned.**

Christopher Repka 2511 - Akira Nakada 2304, Pan-American Intercollegiate, Seattle 2023.

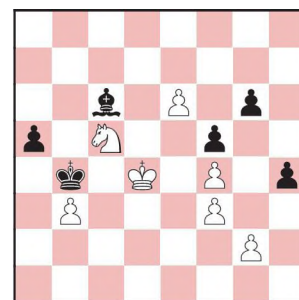
Even the best of the best sometimes misjudges the danger that their king is about to face. In the next example, it is likely that Black did not even begin to imagine that his king could land in a checkmating net with only a few pieces remaining on the board...



35...♔c5?? Passive defense such as **35...♖e7!?** would have likely worked out okay and secured a draw for Black.

36.♖b8! Suddenly, Black cannot avoid the ♖b5 checkmating threat without suffering massive material losses.

36...♖b7 37.♔xe6+ ♔b4 38.♖xb7+ ♕xb7 39.♔d4 ♕c6 40.♔c5 h5 41.b3 h4 42.e6



42...♕a8 Or **42...♕e8 43.e7 ♕b5 44.♔d5 ♕e8 45.♔d6 ♔a3 46.♔c7 ♔b4 47.♔d8+-**.

43.♔d3+ ♔xb3 44.♔e5 **Black resigned** Magnus Carlsen 2852 - Jon Ludvig Hammer 2631, Norwegian League 2023.

There are numerous important factors in the process of evaluating a position. One may be able to calculate long variations but if the final assessment proves to be wrong, then it is a waste of time and energy that will undoubtedly lead to making incorrect decisions and obtaining a poor result. ■



Solutions to EXERCISES on page 73

1. WHITE TO MOVE

Elisabeth Paehltz 2464

Alexandra Kosteniuk 2519

FIDE Women's Grand Prix 2023



White has the very scary idea of playing h5-h6, ripping apart the pawn structure in front of the black king. It so happens that Black cannot do anything but play ...h5 herself to prevent this plan.

19. ♖d3! This move ensures that White can still proceed with the pawn advance even when Black plays ...h5.

19. ♗f3? was played in the game, after which White immediately realized her mistake, but it was a bit

too late. 19...h5 20. ♗e5 Effectively accepting the fact that White's attack is too slow. 20...♗xe5 21. ♗xe5 ♗e8 22. ♗xh5 ♗xe4 23. ♗f4?? A very unfortunate blunder, but White's position was already quite difficult due to her multiple queenside weaknesses. 23...♗xf4 and Black won.

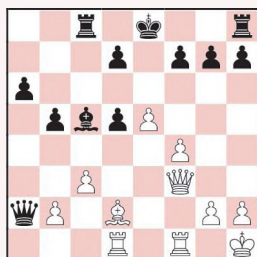
19...h5 20.f4 ♗g4 21.f5 ♗e7 22. ♗f2, and Black's position is hopeless, as she will lose material and still remain under attack.

2. BLACK TO MOVE

Dimitar Mardov 2414

Yesuntumur Tugstumur 2375

1000GM #3, St. Louis 2022



19...0-0! was absolutely necessary, when Black will achieve the desired defensive formation in due course.

19...♗c4? was played in the game, when Black eventually lacked a vital tempo while trying to hide away his king. 20.f5! ♗c6 21. ♗g3 0-0 22.b4 ♗a7 23.f6 g6 24. ♗g5 ♗h8 25. ♗f3 ♗e2 26. ♗e1 and White won shortly afterwards.

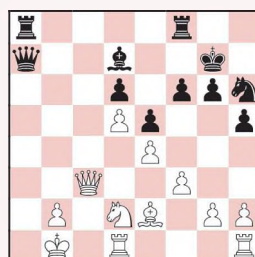
20.f5 ♗fe8 21. ♗g5 21.f6?! g6 ♗ 21...♗xb2 22. ♗xd5 ♗f8 21...0-0!

3. BLACK TO MOVE

Irine Sukandar 2399

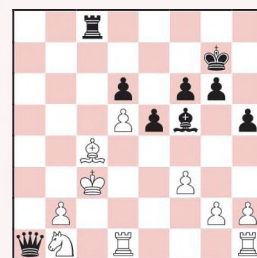
Illia Nyzhnyk 2658

SPICE Cup, St. Louis 2022



White is a pawn up, but her king is in grave danger. Black has multiple ways to win, but I felt that it was essential for every one of my pieces to participate and so played 13...♗f5!. If White does not take this knight immediately, it will travel to d4 preventing the white king escaping via the c2 square.

14.exf5 ♗xf5+ 15. ♖c1 ♗a1+ 16. ♗b1 ♗fc8 17. ♗d2 ♗xc3 18. ♗xc3 ♗c8+ 19. ♗c4



19...♗a5+ 20.b4 ♗a2 White resigned.



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FROM A RATHER UNIQUE GAMES DATABASE, AMERICAN CHESS MAGAZINE REVEALS EXCLUSIVELY SOME HIDDEN GEMS GATHERED TOGETHER OVER DECADES BY RENOWNED BIBLIOPHILE ANDY ANSEL.

A RARE COLLECTION OF UNKNOWN AMERICAN CHESS GAMES

New England Weekend Warrior

He stands among the unsung local heroes of American chess: John Curdo, a remarkable player from New England. Curdo's playing career was mostly determined by playing in small Swiss events, but he was able to defeat more famed and titled opponents in quite a spectacular fashion.

■ By Andy Ansel

Welcome to my first column for *American Chess Magazine*. I would like to present games played by U.S. chess players or from U.S. tournaments that are new to all of you. Besides collecting books, I also have an extensive database for which I have input games from a variety of sources, including newspapers, regional magazines as well as scoresheets. The games I am selecting here may not be the “best” from the player, but will highlight their opening repertoire and playing style. The goal is to present games that are not readily available elsewhere and for the most part are unpublished!

In this issue, we feature a New England legend, John Curdo. John's chess playing career extended around 70 years, and he was a true “weekend warrior” having competed in many small Swiss events. The bulk of John's games were played locally. This likely prevented him from obtaining the IM title as he was definitely a strong enough player. I have access to his handwritten scorebooks from 1970 to 1976 and have picked a few games that hopefully will be of interest.

During the early 1970s, Jack Peters and John Curdo were the top local players in New England. There were a couple of other strong players from this area during this era. For instance, there was Dan Harrington, who quit chess and became a poker star. Bill Robertie became World Backgammon Champion, but these two seemed to dominate most events. Curdo had a very interesting opening style as he wanted to get his opponent out of the book as soon as possible. He also kept a small notebook where he had a surprise repertoire to be used against his main rivals so he could avoid their preparation against his known lines. He almost always played 1.e4, and favored the Four Knights, with an occasional

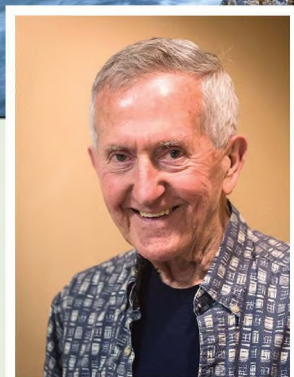
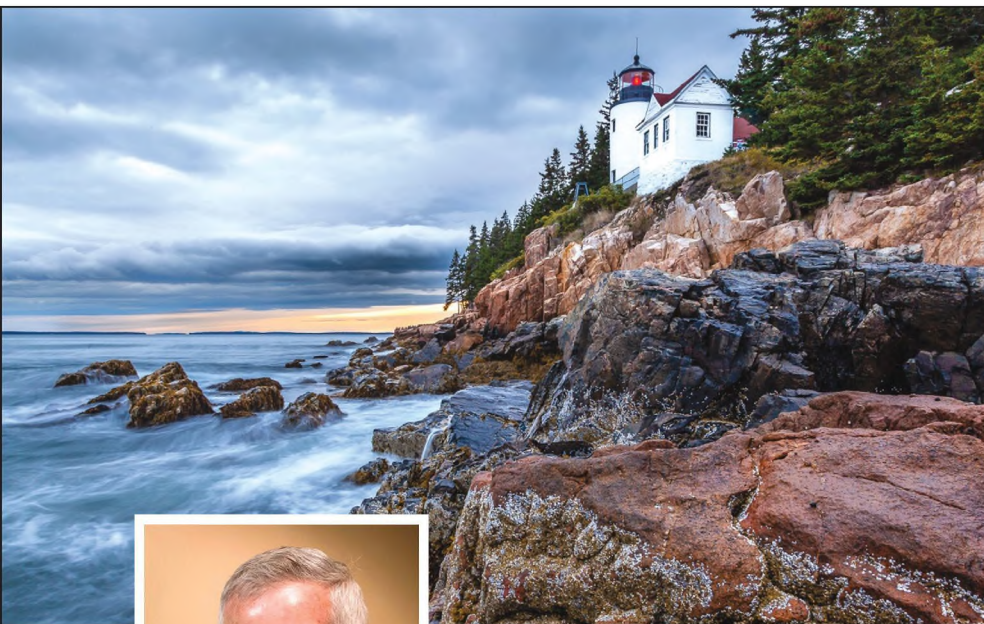
Ruy thrown in. Against the Sicilian he leaned toward 3.♗b5 or the Alapin lines. As Black he answered 1.e4 with 1...e5 and played either the Dutch or the Chigorin against 1.d4. He was a practical player who preferred open positions. He authored the book *Forty Years at the Top*, published in 1988. He also self-published three *Chess Caviar* booklets that highlighted his short victories. His games are very instructive and fun to play through.

In two of the games shown below, his opponent is another New England chess legend, Harry Lyman. Lyman was a generation older than Curdo and a true “gentleman of chess.” He loved playing, teaching and promoting chess and was a regular at the Boylston Chess Club. When kibitzing after a game he often made his opponent feel he himself was lucky to have won and that they played a great game. He played over 150 postal games against Weaver Adams to test Adams' theory that the Vienna Game led to a forced White win. He also won the U.S. Amateur Championship. He was known for his fierce and aggressive attacking play; thus, his games, while not always sound, were fun to watch and often brilliant. He was also very generous, often refusing his prizes if he felt the TD was losing money. He was well-loved by the Boston chess community.

Below are three games from Curdo's scorebooks that highlight his play. My good friend, ACM Senior Editor, Pete Tamburro has offered to annotate the games in his usual style, which I found to be instructive and which include historical context.

”

John Curdo had a very interesting opening style as he wanted to get his opponent out of the book as soon as possible.



Constructed in 1876, the Bass Harbor Head Light is one of the most famous landmarks of Acadia National Park and is arguably the most iconic and photographed lighthouse in all of Maine and New England. Photograph by Stevan Dobrojevic.

FM John Curdo (1931–2022) was one of the strongest players from New England in the early 70s of the 20th century

A83

Harry Lyman

John Curdo

Boston Met League, 1970

Notes by Pete Tamburro

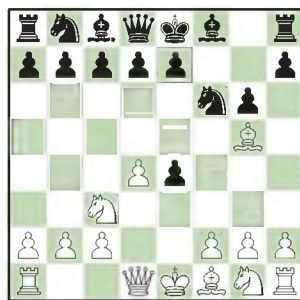
1.d4 f5 Curdo was aggressive with the Black side as well, and the Dutch was perfect for him. It turns out – again from his books containing miniatures – that he was a Leningrad Dutch guy.

2.e4 The Staunton Gambit. With these two players, it's not a surprise. The surprise comes on move four.

2...fxe4 3.♖c3 ♖f6 4.♗g5 g6!? Your annotator is a fan of 4...c6.

A) Routinely given as better for White is 5.f3 d5 6.fxe4 dxe4 7.♗e2. Also 7.♗c4 is a serious alternative, but a well-prepared Black player can put up a fighting defense.

B) 5.♗xf6 exf6 6.♗xe4 d5 Or even, when feeling frisky, thanks to a badly annotated Marshall – Chigorin brilliancy, 6...♗b6 deserves attention.



5.f3!? In Kagan's *Neuste Schachnachrichten* (1922), Alekhine touted 5.h4:

A) White's idea is to meet 5...♗g7 with 6.h5 ♗hx5 7.♗hx5! with a close to winning position.

B) 5...h6 6.♗xf6 exf6

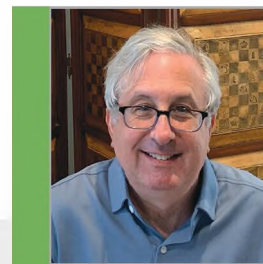
B1) 7.♗c4 f5 8.f3

B2) Much better is 7.♗g4 ♖f7 8.h5 g5 9.♗c4+ ♗g7 10.♗f5.

C) 5...d5 6.h5

C1) 6...♗g7 7.h6 ♗f8 8.f3 exf3 9.♗xf3±.

C2) 6...♗hx5 7.♗hx5 gxxh5 8.♗hx5+ ♗d7 9.♗xd5 c6 10.♗c3+–



Andy Ansel can be considered a product of the Fischer boom, having learned to play chess in 1972. He was active in the Bay Area chess scene while in High School, after which he moved to New York, where he achieved a peak rating of around 2100. He has now retired from active chess play but spends his time collecting books and maintaining a database based on games drawn from his library. He currently resides in North Fork, Long Island, with his wife and two dogs. His grown-up daughters live in NYC and London.

C3) He didn't mention 6...♗f5, when after 7.♗xf6 exf6 8.g4 ♗e6 9.hxg6 ♗d7 10.g5 fxg5 11.♗h5 ♗g7 12.♗xg5, it's anybody's ball game.

5...d5! This line for White got rave reviews when Reti demolished Euwe in 17 moves in their 1920 match after 5...exf3 6.♗xf3 ♗g7 7.♗d3 c5 8.d5 ♗b6 9.♗d2 ♗xb2?? 10.♗b1 ♗xd5 11.♗xd5!! ♗xb1+ 12.♗f2 ♗xh1 13.♗xe7 d6 14.♗xd6 ♗c6 15.♗b5 ♗d7 16.♗xc6 bxc6 17.♗e2+ 1-0. It's mate in six. Curdo's reply is best.

6.fxe4 Another possibility is 6.♗d2.

6...dxe4!? This equalizes; however, a really interesting line is 6...♗xe4 7.♗xe4 dxe4 8.♗b5+ ♗c6! 9.d5 a6 10.♗d4 ♗g8 11.♗a4 b5 12.♗xe4 ♗f5 13.♗e3 ♗xd5.

7.♗c4 If 7.♗xf6 exf6 8.♗xe4 ♗h6! 9.♗c4 ♗c6 10.♗f3 ♗f5 11.♗e2 ♗f8 12.c3 Black would castle by hand 12...♗g7 and utilize the two bishops to advantage.

7...♗c6 8.♗ge2 ♗a5 9.♗b3 ♗xb3 10.axb3 Curdo takes the two bishops and he's temporarily a pawn up. He gets to castle because of the absence of the king's bishop.

10...♗g7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♗d2 c6 13.♗xf6 More helpful seems 13.♗g3.

13...exf6 14.♗xe4 ♗e8 Curdo opts to play with pieces rather than push with ...f5.

15.♗d3 ♗f5? This allows White a chance! Better was 15...♗g4 keeping the two bishops for now.



16...xf5!! What a great move! The two bishops edge disappears, the black pawns are broken, and the knights now have a big say in what goes on from here. It gives White a chance to save himself.

16...gxf5 17...d4g3 ♖e7 18...xf5? Lyman needed to follow up his sacrifice with another bold move: **18.♔f2! ♙f8 19.♜xf5 ♖e6 20.♜f4 ♖e4 21.♝xe4 ♜xe4 22.♜f3 ♜ee8 23.g4**. The ♜f5 is powerfully posted and unassailable as it attacks all the dark squares in its reach and protects e3 from a rook invasion. The ♜f4 also has maximum range. It's enough to hold the rooks at bay.

18...♝e3+ That e3 square was key.

19.♜h1 ♝d2 20.♝g4 ♝g5?! More effective would be **20...♜h8**.

21.♝d7 Never say die.

21...h5 22...xa7?? A terrible miscalculation. Now a blunder decides the issue. A shame for the lower rated player, but too often the case. **22.♜g1! h4 23.♜f3 ♝d5 24.♝xd5+ cxd5 25.♜xh4** may have allowed the game to reach a peaceful conclusion with that h4 knight going to f5. **22...h4 23.♜f5 ♜xe2! 24.♜xa8+ ♜h7**

White resigned

C48

John Curdo

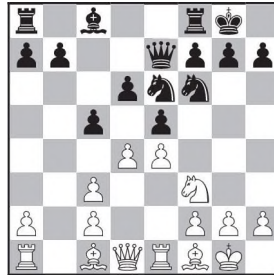
Harry Lyman

Fitchburg (MA) 1971

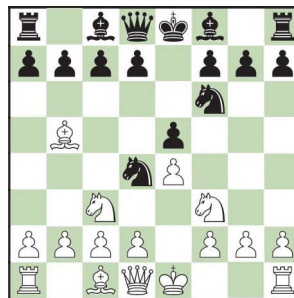
1.e4 e5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.♜c3 ♜f6 4.♙b5 For an aggressive player like Curdo to play the Four Knights has to tell you something, or several things. First of all, if you have played over early Tarrasch, Maroczy or young Capablanca games, you know that attacking players can conjure up difficult times for Black in the old "symmetrical" line leading to the Metger Unpin:

In Curdo's published collection of miniature games that he won, he showed an affinity also for the Belgrade Gambit with **4.d4 exd4 5.♜d5**.

4...♜d4 The Metger goes this way: **4...♙b4 5.0-0 0-0 6.d3 ♙xc3 7.bxc3 d6 8.d4 ♝e7 9.♙g5 ♜d8 10.♝e1 ♜e6 11.♙c1 c5 12.♙f1**.



There is a rich legacy of all sorts of great attacking games with this line. Curdo probably found it a good way of winning against early Swiss opponents of lesser positional understanding. Lyman, however, is not one of those easy marks. He knows his theory: the Rubinstein Variation with **4...♜d4**, actually initiated by Marshall, is generally recognized to make the Four Knights a drawish line. However, that is not so simple as thought.



5.♜xd4 If White plays **5.♜xe5**, Black had best know **5...♝e7** is the only good move here or there is trouble ahead.

And **5.♙a4** has been played successfully by Kasparov and Naiditsch, who beat Anand in this line.

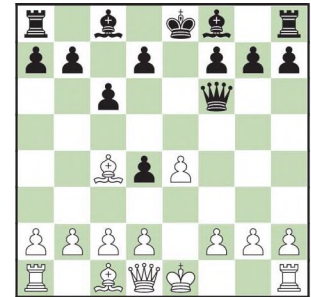
A largely ignored and underestimated line is **5.0-0 ♜xb5 6.♜xb5 c6 7.♜c3 d6 8.d4** which goes back to a Henneberger and Krause analysis that appeared in *British Chess Magazine* in January of 1922. It has been revived by British GMs Gallagher and Nunn. Equal, but by no means a certain draw.

5...exd4 6.♜d5!? White may have been expecting the "draw line" – **6.e5 dxc3 7.exf6 ♝xf6** Virtually forced! **8.dxc3 ♙c5=**, but Curdo goes his own way.

6...c6 The simplifying appearance of

6...♜xd5 7.exd5 seems logical; however, Ivanchuk beat Karjakin in this line and Leko had to work hard to draw with Ivanchuk. Lyman seems to be in a fighting mood as well with his choice of move.

7.♜xf6+ ♝xf6 8.♙c4



So what do we have here? Does it remind anyone of a Bird's Defense to the Ruy Lopez, where White has a slight edge that Black has to be careful of as **...d7-d5** will take some preparation and **d3, 0-0** and **f4** is a normal plan for White. What follows, though is not normal!

8...d6 9.0-0 ♙e6



10.b3!? Somewhat more solid and yet still aggressive would have been **10.♙xe6 fxe6 11.d3 d5 12.exd5 cxd5 13.♝h5+ g6 14.♙g5 ♝f5 15.♝h4** and Black's wacky central pawn formation is a liability. One would guess Curdo's idea is to continue to prevent **...d6-d5**.

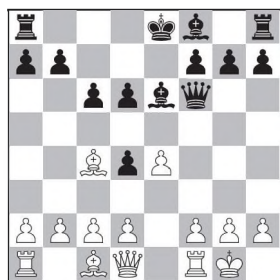
10...0-0-0 Black probably didn't see any counterplay in **10...g6 11.♙xe6 ♝xe6 12.d3 ♙g7 13.♙g5 0-0 14.♝d2 d5 15.♙ae1** whereas castling queenside makes **...h7-h5** easier with the rook behind it.

11.♙b2 d5 The thematic freeing move in the Open Games, but is it in time?

12.exd5 ♙xd5 Rejecting **12...cxd5 13.♙d3 g5 14.a4 h5 15.a5** because he judged White's advance to be more threatening. That judgment had merit or maybe it looked a little too wild. Hard to



tell with the clock ticking, especially with that old 50/2 time limit.



15...♞d7 16.a6 b6 17.c4 ♞d6 18.cxd5 h4 19.♞c1+ ♜b8 20.♞c4 ♞e5 21.f4 gxf4 22.♞xd4 ♞g5 23.♞xh8 h3 24.♞f2 ♞xh8 25.♞f3±.

13.♞g4+! It's equal after 13.♞xd5 ♞xd5 14.♞g4+ ♜b8, but what if White checks first?

13...♞e6 14.♞xe6+ fxe6 15.♞xd5 ♞xd5 16.♞ae1 Curdo seems content with a very slight edge. Lyman needs to advance the e-pawn right away for his best defensive chance:

16...♜d7 Thus, 16...e5 17.♞e4 ♞d6 18.♞fe1 where White's best chance is to open a diagonal for his bishop with c3. Still, it's far from a winning advantage after 18...♞f8.

17.♞e4 ♞c5 18.♞fe1 d3?? Black cracks. What he had calculated is unclear. The move played opens the bishop diagonal exposing the g-pawn but isolates the pawn and allows c2-c4.

19.c4 ♞g5 20.♞d4 This makes it a matter of technique. An easy pawn up with no Black counterplay. Black doesn't quit, though.

20...♞b4 21.♞1e3 ♜c8 22.♞xd3 ♞d8 23.♞ee3 More constricting was 23.♞de3 ♞xd2 24.♞e2 ♞a5 25.h4 ♞g6 26.h5 ♞g5 27.g4.

23...b5 24.♞c3 ♞xd3 25.♞xd3 bxc4 26.bxc4 ♞xc3 27.♞xc3 ♞a5 28.a3 ♜c7 29.♜f1 ♜d6 To no avail was 29...e5 30.♜e2 ♜d6 31.♜e3 ♜e6 32.♜e4 as White's lateral rook moves will dictate the rest of the game, as actually happens in the rest of the game.

30.♜e2 e5 31.♜d3 c5 32.♜e4 ♜e6 33.♞h3 ♞a4 34.♞c3 g5 35.d3 ♞a6 36.♞b3 h6 37.f3 ♞a4 38.g4 ♞a6 39.♞b7! ♜f6 39...♞xa3 40.♞h7 wins.

40.♞h7 ♞xa3 No better is 40...♜g6 41.♞c7 ♞a5 42.a4 ♞xa4 43.♞xc5 ♞a2 44.♞xe5 ♞xh2 45.c5 winning.

41.♞xh6+ ♜g7 42.♞c6 ♞a2 43.♞xc5 a5 44.♜xe5 a4 45.♞a5 a3 46.♜f5

Black resigned

What we see in this game is the methodical accumulation of advantages while denying counterplay, which is often a trademark of the Four Knights. It's a nice break from all the various complicated Ruy Lopez defenses arising in recent years. It is worth considering as a Plan B because your opponent might not be as familiar with it as you are.

Source: Curdo notebook February 71-August 71.

B22

John Curdo

John Fedorowicz

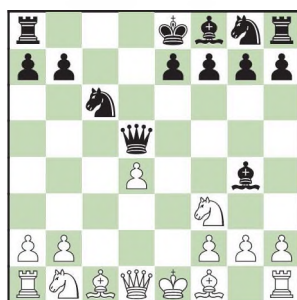
Leominster (MA) 1975

The c3 Sicilian became very popular in the 70s. It saves the trouble of learning umpteen Black systems. For amateurs it's very easy to learn, follows basic principles as the opening unfolds, and has some surprising attacking chances against the unsuspecting. The game that got me into it was Alekhine - Podgorny, Prague, 1943. Players of the Black side who wish to avoid the drawing tendencies of 2...d5 tend toward 2...♜f6. The opus on this opening is Sveshnikov's book.

1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♞xd5 4.d4 cxd4 Every book on the c3 will tell you this exchange is too soon because the knight comes out with tempo on the queen. Fed learns this lesson and ends up favoring 4...e6 5.♜f3 ♜f6 6.♞e2 ♞e7. How do I know this? In 1980, I followed my young friend around to malls to support his simultaneous displays. In three games he let me have White and we drew all of them, including a mall closing game. A pleasant memory.

5.cxd4 ♜c6 Black's best move here is 5...e5. The text move is playing into John Curdo's wheelhouse.

6.♜f3 ♞g4 Best may be either one of 6...e5 or 6...e6, but most c2-c3 players like the resulting slight initiative because sometimes it becomes more than that.



7.♞e2 It's a little surprising Curdo didn't take Fed for a little walk on the wild side with 7.♜c3 ♞xf3 8.♜xd5 ♞xd1 9.♜c7+ ♜d7 10.♜xa8 ♞h5! 11.d5 ♜d4 12.♞f4 e5 13.dxe6+ fxe6 14.♞c1 ♞b4+ 15.♞d2 ♞xd2+ 16.♜xd2 ♜f6 17.♜c7 a6 (17...♞c8? 18.♞c4!) 18.♞d3 and White has fair chances.

7...e6 8.0-0 Or 8.♜c3. It doesn't matter now.

8...♜f6 9.♜c3 ♞d8 More active was 9...♞a5, but the queen retreat may have been a sign of respect for Curdo's reputation, so Fed plays more cautiously. As White now has an isolated queen pawn position, Black figures he has a good chance of taking advantage of it; however, these IQP positions can be deceptive and lead to good attacking chances.

10.h3 A Gligoric approved idea.

10...♞xf3 11.♞xf3 ♞e7 Not particularly promising for Black is 11...♜xd4 12.♞xb7 ♞b8 13.♞a4+ ♜d7 14.♞xd7+ ♜xd7 15.♞a6 ♞b4 16.♞f4 when White has the two bishops and a queenside pawn majority.

12.♞e3 0-0 13.a3 A more direct plan for the initiative would have been 13.d5 exd5 14.♜xd5 ♜xd5 15.♞xd5 ♞f6 16.♞c1.

13...♞c8 14.♞e1 ♜a5 15.d5! A not infrequent key move in IQP positions.

15...exd5 16.♜xd5 ♜xd5 17.♞xd5 ♞f6 The material is balanced as is the pawn structure. Will the two bishops be enough to carry the day?

18.♞b1 b6



19.♞f3!! Not at all obvious. It looks like the ♞+♞ battery is attacking thin air and the black kingside seems secure.

19...♞d7 The upcoming ♞bd1 is a key to the queen move. The queen rook gets to set up an attack from d1 on the opposing queen. Thus if 19...♜c4 then 20.♞bd1.

20.♞bd1 ♞xb2 Yum! Free pawns! All kidding aside, on this open board there is nowhere for queen, rook or king to



hide. The two bishops rake along their diagonals and the two centralized rooks fire all the way down the two files and f7 or even h7 will become a fallen target, a breach in the castle wall. For example, if the queen tries to flee to the side, 20...♖a4 21.♙f4 ♘c6 22.b3 ♗b5 23.♙c4 ♗f5 24.♙d5 ♗c2 25.♙d3 ♗a2 26.♙d6 ♗fe8 27.♗xe8+ ♗xe8 28.♗f5.

21.♙g5! ♗fe8 21...♖a4 22.♙e7 ♗fe8 23.♙xf7+.

22.♙e6 ♗xe6 Even if 22...♗xe6 23.♗xe6 ♗xe6 24.♙d7 ♙f6 25.♙xf6 ♗xf6 26.♗c7 ♗b8 27.♗d3 h6 28.♗xa7 ♙b7 29.♗g3 ♙d6 30.♙d7 and the queen and rook combo is relentless.

23.♗xd7 ♗xe1+ 24.♙h2 ♗ee8 25.♗xf7+ ♙h8 26.♙h6 ♗g8 No rest for the weary.

27.♗xa7 ♗cf8 28.♗c7 Curdo needed to be more careful here. More solid was 28.♗a2 ♙f6 29.♙e3.

28...♗xf2 29.♙e3 ♗e2 Now the pressure of the game affects both highly talented players.



30.♗xb6?? 30.♙f4 would have wrapped it up.

30...♙c4 Black also saves the game with 30...♙e5+ 31.♙g1 ♙c4 32.♗b5 ♗xe3 33.♗xc4 ♙g3 34.♗f7 ♗e1+ 35.♗f1 ♗ge8 36.♗b4 ♙h2+ 37.♙h2 ♗xf1.

31.♗b5 ♙e5+ 32.♙g1 ♗f8?? Now Fed misses the save with the above idea: 32...♙g3.

33.♗f7 No second chances!

33...♙d8 34.♗xc4 ♗xe3 35.♗c5 h6 36.♗xe3 ♙d4 37.♗f8+ ♙h7 38.♗xd8 ♙xe3+ 39.♙f1 Black resigned

It turned out to be a wild and woolly game, after all.

Source: *Curdo notebook June 1975 – August 1975.*

SMALL CHESS LECTURES

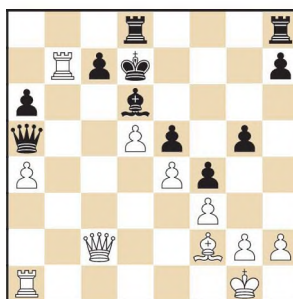
By GM Nikola Nestorovic

Solve The Threats

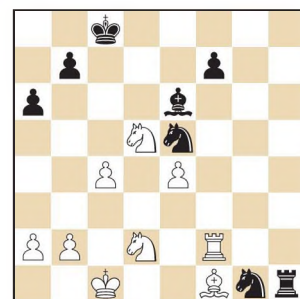
Solutions on page 92

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP, VRNJACKA BANJA 2023

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|------|----|-----------------|------|
| 1. | Alexander Motylev | 2621 | 2. | Khazar Babazada | 2481 |
| | Ferenc Gombocz Jr | 2311 | | David Navara | 2685 |

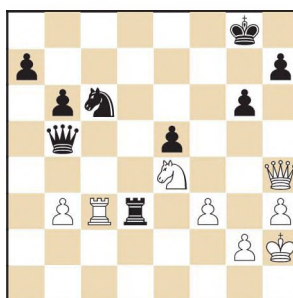


White to move

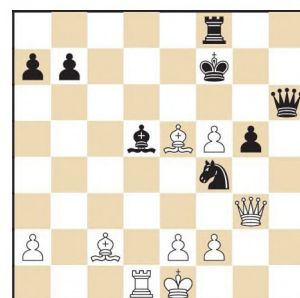


Black to move

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|----|--------------------|------|
| 3. | Mikhail Kobalia | 2577 | 4. | Titas Stremavicius | 2544 |
| | Aleksa Micic | 2273 | | Nikola Kanov | 2392 |

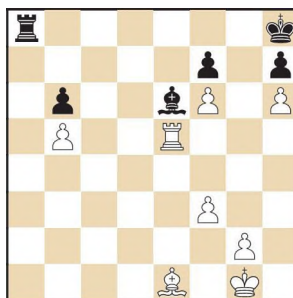


White to move



White to move

- | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|------|----|--------------------|------|
| 5. | Nijat Abasov | 2625 | 6. | Vitaliy Bernadskiy | 2611 |
| | Igor Janik | 2527 | | Tomas Kraus | 2486 |



White to move



White to move



CHESS IS HARD ENOUGH, AND NOW, TO SUCCEED, WE NEED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE!?

INNOVATIONS IN ENGINES, DATABASES, AND LITERATURE

ChessBase has released version 17, Stockfish has released version 15.1, the Chinese have shared a cool Neural Net database, and there's important new literature to review.

■ By Jon Edwards

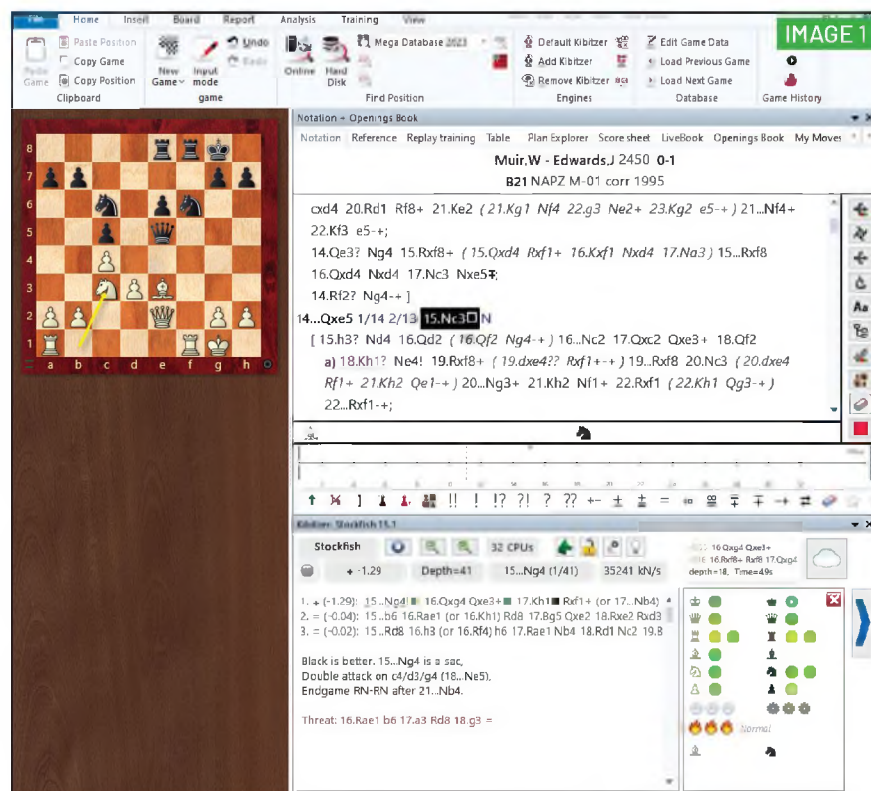
ChessBase 17 is out, and I have started to rely upon it. The first reason is that the presentation of engine results is unquestionably more useful. Here is a screenshot from an old game that I played against Walter Muir. I have been thinking about writing a book about some of my fun, older games and this game certainly qualifies as a candidate. I note simply that

I won with Black in large part because my opponent played a sub-optimal variation of the Sicilian which, even back in the mid-1990s, was not hard to punish.

Still, such ideas were often tried back then because engine use was not permitted during the course of play and indeed, engines back then were not very strong. Not so today. Here is a screenshot from the new version of ChessBase running



Jon Edwards is the newly crowned World Correspondence Chess Champion living in Pennington, NJ. He also won the 10th US Championship. Jon has written more than 40 chess books, notably *The Chess Analyst* (1999), *Sacking the Citadel* (2010), and *ChessBase Complete* (2014), which has recently received its 2019 Supplement Covering ChessBase 13, 14 & 15. He is regular columnist for *Chess Life for Kids*. His web site, *Chess is Fun*, provides free chess instruction.



Stockfish v 15.1 (image 1) which quickly identifies that White has erred.

You will also notice that ChessBase, in addition to providing Stockfish's usual analysis, has added a summary of the threat in the position as well as the main plans. There are other bells and whistles here, considerable eye candy which should pale in significance when compared to the effectiveness of the presentation of lines.

In passing, I note that Stockfish 15.1 remains an incredibly powerful engine but now runs less hot. The new neural net version seems to run at high depth without sending my CPU's temperature towards dangerous limits. As always, you can download Stockfish for free at <https://stockfishchess.org/download/>

Beauty is, of course, in the eye of the beholder, and so I was skeptical when ChessBase announced that the new version would have a Beauty function. Let it run on any database and ChessBase will



Number	White	Elo W	Black	Elo B	Result	Moves	Beauty
318	Edwards,J	2550	Hamilton,D	2445	1-0	36	👍👍👍
146	Edwards,J	2395	Hayward,K	2275	1-0	47	👍👍👍
143	Newman,H	2170	Edwards,J	2395	0-1	32	👍👍👍
470	jedwards08534	2213	angelcorrea	2195	1-0	33	👍👍👍
42	Domanski,R	2220	Edwards,J	2100	½-½	39	👍👍👍
102	Edwards,J	2395	Nash,W	2030	1-0	39	👍👍👍
488	jedwards08534	2326	nare	2319	1-0	37	👍👍👍
183	Edwards,J	2480	Whiteside,L	2210	1-0	55	👍👍👍
257	Edwards,J	2460	Hareven,A	2500	1-0	41	👍👍👍
316	Edwards,J	2550	Mannermaa,J	2475	0-1	31	👍👍👍
215	Edwards,J	2430	Lamech,L	2275	1-0	25	👍👍👍
251	Muir,W		Edwards,J	2450	0-1	28	👍👍👍
309	Nalepa,B	2440	Edwards,J	2470	0-1	41	👍👍👍
34	Edwards,J	2000	Silverman,I	2030	1-0	49	👍👍👍
123	Malkin,R	1805	Edwards,J	2310	0-1	32	👍👍👍
280	Edwards,J		Houser,T		0-1	46	👍👍👍
484	jedwards08534	2286	Mascara	2245	1-0	38	👍👍👍
153	Edwards,J	2420	Guillot,M	2000	½-½	61	👍👍👍
117	Edwards,J	2310	Bender,F	2205	1-0	38	👍👍👍
438	jedwards08534	1858	bambl_reg	1592	1-0	18	👍👍👍
103	Disselhorst,J	1905	Edwards,J	2395	0-1	40	👍👍👍
80	Edwards,J	2250	Rothschild,I	1925	1-0	51	👍👍👍
106	Edwards,J	2395	Curry,R	2245	1-0	30	👍👍👍
118	Chaney,R	2095	Edwards,J	2310	0-1	21	👍👍👍
39	Quirk,M	1880	Edwards,J	2000	0-1	32	👍👍👍
464	jedwards08534	2161	cygnusblue	1666	1-0	31	👍👍👍
373	Edwards,J	2475	Enricc,J	2510	1-0	36	👍👍👍
367	Edwards,J	2475	Grabinger,H	2495	1-0	45	👍👍👍

IMAGE 2

identify the beautiful games. Up to the challenge, I let it run on the database of my own games. Interestingly enough, it thought that most of my opponents' wins were beautiful. It mostly agreed with my own conclusions about the games I thought were nice. But the biggest surprise was that it identified as beautiful a handful of games about which I had long forgotten. Replaying those games was a truly cool experience and provides fun fodder for a few weeks of chess lessons. The Beauty algorithm appears to favor sacrificial combinations and mating attacks, but some of what I thought were my nicest combinations did not make the list. Perhaps my play was sub-optimal, or perhaps there were more efficient paths for progress. I'll continue to illustrate additional features in future columns, including powerful and faster search algorithms thanks in part to a new data format. (image 2)

THE DATABASE OF MY GAMES, SORTED BY "BEAUTY"

In order to use the Beauty function, you will first need to convert databases to ChessBase's new data format. Know simply that once you convert, you cannot convert back, and the conversion prohibits users from accessing additional theme keys. I suspect that most ChessBase users do not care about those keys, and it is also likely that the next major update will fix the problem.

In other ChessBase news, the Stockfish ChessBase lawsuit was settled. ChessBase will be able to market and sell engines based on Stockfish code in a year's time, but will henceforth be required to clarify the underlying

reliance upon Stockfish and use of current Stockfish versions when marketing the comparative strength of its products.

Here is a screen shot (image 3) of a huge database of neural net positions shared by developers in China (https://www.chessdb.cn/queryc_en/). I've had some fun seeing how my opening repertoire fares there.

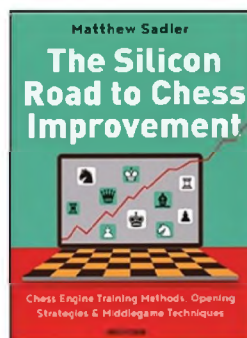
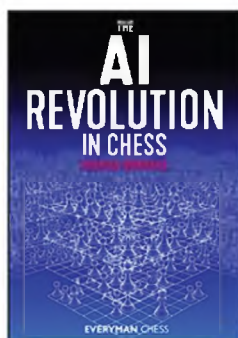
Finally, there are four new books for you to consider. It was not that long ago when all of my key book purchases involved critical openings. With my databases, I can essentially make my own books and conduct my own opening research. These days, books about neural networks are near the top of the must-have list.

That's tragic news, of course. Chess is hard enough, and now, to succeed, we need to learn more about Artificial Intelligence?! I submit that AI will be having an impact soon on just about every aspect of life, and so, like it or not, consider joining the party.

Matthew Sadler joined with Natasha Regan in *Game Changer* (New in Chess: 2019), an important account of the emergence of Alpha Zero and Neural Net approaches to chess. He has produced a compelling sequel with coverage of a range of engines and their usefulness for training, for exploring attacking and defensive themes, and for working well within structures. We can all be grateful that the book uses illustrative examples from

both computer and GM play. I was particularly pleased to see that he selected almost as many positions from Petrosian's games as from some of the most popular, neural net engines. Just as the first book revealed several surprises, notably the utility of early h-pawn pushes, readers here will gain an appreciation for what Sadler calls "Whole of board play." The examples are fun, the book is very well written, and at 560 pages, it will keep you busy.

Joshua Doknjas is a Canadian FIDE Master who has previously



Chess Cloud Database Query Interface				
Input FEN	a b c d e f g h	Move	Rank	Score
Copy FEN	8 ♔ ♖ ♗ ♘ ♙ ♚ ♛ ♜ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.e4	2	0
Set URL	7 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.d4	2	0
Initial Board	6 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.c4	2	0
Clear Board	5 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.Nf3	2	0
Flip Board	4 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.Nc3	2	0
	3 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.g3	2	0
	2 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.c3	2	0
	1 ♜ ♞ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣	1.h3	2	0
☐ Black move		1.a3	2	0
☒ White move		1.e3	2	0
Black Castling		1.b3	2	0
☒ O-O		1.b4	2	0
☒ O-O-O		1.a4	2	0
White Castling		1.d3	2	0
☒ O-O		1.f4	0	-8
☒ O-O-O		1.h4	0	-31
☒ Rules		1.Nh3	0	-40
☐ Hide Info		1.Na3	0	-41
		1.f3	0	-45
		1.g4	0	-122
AI Strategy				
☒ Best				
☐ Random				
☒ Live AI				
Info & Help				
API Docs				
EGTB Report				
Position Count (Approx.):		2,430,592,135		
Queue (Scoring / Slewing):		904,510 / 8,593,693		
Worker (Backlog / Speed):		00:11:27:46 @ 1.529 GNPS		
EGTB Count (WDL / DTZ):		1,511 / 1,511		
EGTB File Size (WDL / DTZ):		8.54 TB / 8.33 TB		

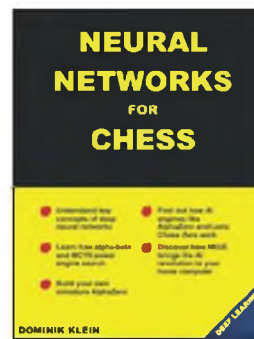
IMAGE 3



produced books for Everyman on the Ruy Lopez and on the Najdorf. There is much to digest in his third book, especially for adherents of the Grunfeld, the Catalan, and the Najdorf. The fourth chapter demonstrates that the best GMs are all working with these engines to locate new opening ideas and interesting pawn sacrifices. With the exception of a few remarkable games from the Alpha Zero-Stockfish match, the bulk of the book are illustrative games from Grandmaster chess from 2018 to 2021. Readers will gain much insight into how Grandmasters are retooling their approaches, working with the new engines to create robust opening repertoires. Readers need not do all that leg work to enjoy the fruit of this labor, and perhaps by example to expand your own opening repertoires.

The final two books are for those of you who want to fashion your own sophisticated environments

for chess. Andrea Manzo and Augusto Caruso's *The Computer Chess World* (Alpha Chess: 2021) aims to help you to get the most from your chess software. There are chapters, therefore, on database management software, software for studying openings, tactics, middlegame themes, and endgames, especially the use of Tablebases. There is much that I did not know, as evidenced by the dozens of my post-it notes that now grace the book. For example, there are many new neural net engines to try, there's useful advice on building a professional opening book, and there is a section on configuration settings that all chess players sadly need to know. The authors make an effort to explain how traditional and neural net engines work,

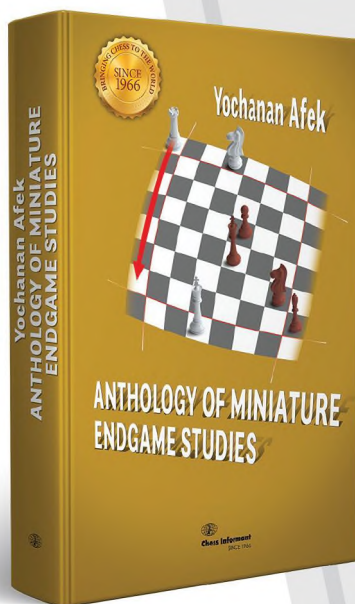


but you will already know from your reading here that the neural net engines are now easily accessible on consumer hardware and far superior to original engine method of throwing brute-force processing power at an ever-expanding game-tree.

The fourth book is Dominik Klein's *Neural Networks for Chess* (Deep Learning: 2022). He begins

simply enough with a useful crash course in neural net programming and proceeds into more detailed examinations that indeed involve coding and, perish the thought, real mathematics. Readers will appreciate the background and history of the early approaches, notably AlphaGo, AlphaGo Zero, AlphaZero, and Leela Alpha Zero. This book is aimed at players who are ready to undertake some meaningful neural net programming and weights training. Perhaps that's what's in store for future Correspondence GM's!?

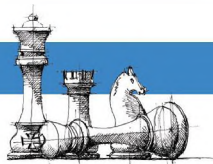
THE ANTHOLOGY OF MINIATURE ENDGAME STUDIES



"The Anthology of Miniature Endgame Studies" is the definitive compendium for chess enthusiasts seeking to improve their endgame abilities. Yochanan Afek, an esteemed author and expert, has meticulously curated 2000 endgame studies that will both challenge and inspire you. Presented by Chess Informant, this book is a must-have for anyone striving to excel in the most crucial phase of the game.

Hardback; 500 pages; December 2022

acmchess.com/store



THE MYSTERY BEHIND
CAPABLANCA'S ENDGAME MASTERY

The Genius of Deceptive Simplicity

Bobby Fischer thought, as also did Alexander Alekhine, that Capablanca's main strength was not the endgame, but the middlegame. But sharp and active play in the middlegame often requires a precise evaluation of the coming endgame, as we shall see.

Even today, the name of Jose Raul Capablanca, the third world champion, evokes images of divinity. His predecessor Lasker, his conqueror Alekhine, and Botvinnik, who formed the link between him and the present era, all regarded him as a genius who could not be surpassed. When I was growing up, comparing anyone to Capablanca was considered almost a sacrilege. Capa's pristine play was something you could perhaps hope to understand, but never duplicate.

A century has passed since his most famous games. In that time, chess thinkers have tried to solve the mystery of Capablanca. I think Bobby Fischer came the closest when he said this:

"Capablanca never really devoted himself to chess, seldom made match preparations. His simplicity was a myth. His almost complete lack of book knowledge forced him to push harder to squeeze the utmost of every position. Every move he made had to be super-sharp so as to make something out of nothing."

This is the lens through which I would like to study Capa's endgame legacy. Bobby thought, as did also Alekhine, that Capablanca's main strength was not the endgame, but the middlegame. But sharp and active play in the middlegame often requires a precise evaluation of the coming endgame, as we shall see.

If there are themes that offer some clues into Capablanca's mystery, I would list these:

- CAPA CLUE #1 Optimal use of small details and minimal resources.
- CAPA CLUE #2 Precise intuitive evaluation of the position.
- CAPA CLUE #3 Sharp combinational vision.



Alex Fishbein, an American grandmaster residing in Tennessee, emerged victorious in the inaugural Denker Tournament of High School Champions in 1985. Throughout the 1990s, he garnered multiple national and international wins, including in Denmark and Norway, achieving grandmaster status in 1992. Even while pursuing a finance career, Fishbein remained active in competition, participating in four U.S. Championships during the 2000s. Acclaimed for his endgame expertise, he secured the Best Endgame Prize in the 2004 U.S. Championship, penned a highly-regarded book on pawn endings in 1993, and contributed to the revision of Dvoretsky's *Endgame Manual* in 2020.



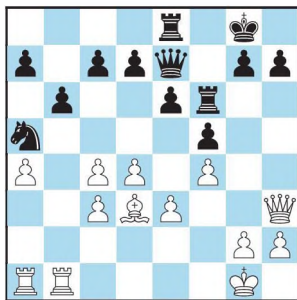
We begin, of course, with Capa's most famous endgame. But to illustrate what Alekhine and Fischer were talking about, we start in the middlegame.

This game is from the 1924 New York tournament. It was played on the same day as another all-time famous ending, Em.Lasker – Ed.Lasker (the rook and pawn vs knight draw).

Jose Raul Capablanca

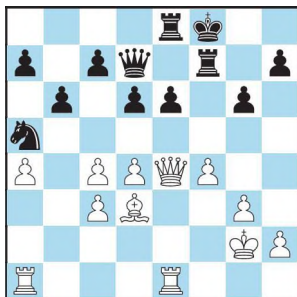
Savielly Tartakower

New York 1924



17.♞f3 d6 In his tournament book, Alekhine gives this game as a picture of a clean conversion of a positional advantage. But White has some pawn weaknesses here and a bishop versus knight in a closed position. After 17...c5, Alekhine says White can start an attack with 18.g4, but in fact it doesn't work because of 18...fxg4 19.♞xg4 ♖xc4!. The game move does not lose either, but weakens his e-file a little. Capa is quick to pounce.

18.♞e1! ♞d7 19.e4! fxe4 20.♞xe4 g6 21.g3 ♕f8 22.♕g2 ♜f7



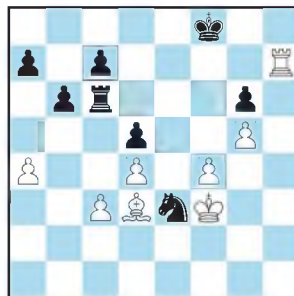
23.h4! d5 Here is an example of the sharp middlegame play that Fischer was talking about. Black was threatening 23...♖xc4, against which White would now continue with 24.h5! (24.♖xc4 d5 25.♖d5 exd5 26.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 27.♞xe8+ ♕xe8 is

nothing for White.) 24...d5 25.♞e2 with an advantage.

24.cxd5 exd5 25.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 26.♞xe8+ ♕xe8 27.h5! Alekhine correctly points out the small but crucial detail here (CAPA CLUE #1): The white rook can get to the seventh rank via the h-file. White makes full use of the only resources he has. Capa has correctly evaluated this (#2: precise evaluation) as leading to winning chances. But is it enough to win?

27...♞f6 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♞h1 ♕f8 30.♞h7 ♞c6! Active defense is his only chance.

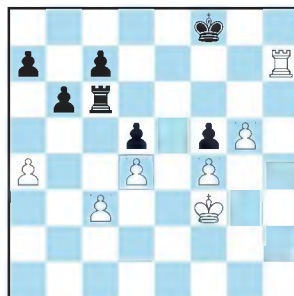
31.g4 ♖c4 32.g5 ♖e3+ 33.♕f3!



33...♖f5? The losing move! Using his sharp combination vision (Clue #3), Capablanca has lured his opponent into a nasty trap. With precise play, Black can hold here. Alekhine gives 33...♖d1 34.♞h6 ♕f7 35.f5 ♞xc3 36.fxg6+ ♕g8 37.♕e2, and he is right so far, but here 37...♖f2! (instead of 37...♖b2? 38.♖f5) 38.♖f5 ♖e4! draws.

34.♖xf5!! Tartakower undoubtedly expected 34.♕g4 when Black could either check back on e3 or play 34...♖e7.

34...♖g5



This is one of the most famous positions in all of chess. I remember where I was and what impression it made on me when I first saw it (at the age of 9 at most). White

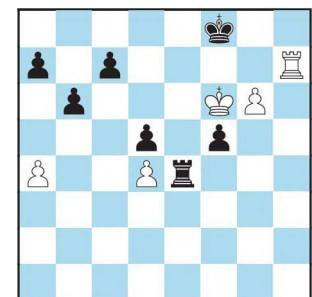


▲ Savielly Tartakower

sacrifices almost all his pawns in order to promote the main one.

35.♕g3 ♞xc3+ 36.♕h4 ♞f3 36...a6 is a better try, the cleanest win here being 37.♕h5 b5 38.♕g6! ♕g8 (38...bxa4 39.♕xf5 a3 40.♞h6 c6 41.♞h8+ ♕e7 42.♞a8) 39.♞g7+ ♕f8 40.♞f7+ ♕g8 41.♞f6.

37.g6 ♞xf4+ 38.♕g5 ♞e4 39.♕f6!



The "umbrella" technique: the king hides behind the opponent's pawn. The black rook will have to go back to the first rank, and then White mops up.

39...♕g8 40.♞g7+ A good, but not necessary, intermediate check.

40...♕h8 41.♞xc7 ♞e8 42.♕xf5 ♞e4 43.♕f6 ♞f4+ 44.♕e5 ♞g4 45.g7+ ♕g8 46.♞xa7 ♞g1 47.♕xd5 ♞c1 48.♕d6 ♞c2 49.d5 ♞c1 50.♞c7 ♞a1 51.♕c6 ♞xa4 52.d6

Black resigned

When Alexander Alekhine defeated Capablanca in the 1927 World Championship match, the entire chess world was shocked. Later, *post factum*, the



new world champion wrote a tendentious article in which he disparaged Capa's endgame skill. The article did contain some exceptionally interesting insights about chess styles and how to prepare for an opponent, and it is required reading.

The third and fourth world champions were friends, then rivals, and then enemies, but Alekhine would later write this: "Capablanca was snatched too early from the chess world. With his death we have lost a great chess genius, the like of whom we will never see again." And he recalled Capa from an earlier time as follows: "Never before and never since have I seen – and I cannot even imagine – such an amazing rapidity of chess thinking that Capablanca possessed in 1913-1914."

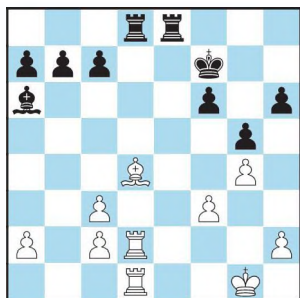
I have similar recollections of Viswanathan Anand of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In truth, the quick thinking that Capa possessed is not such an unattainable goal anymore. Karpov and later Carlsen inherited from him the ability to instantly evaluate positions [CLUE #2], but it is now accepted that blitz chess (or even bullet), in spite of all the naysayers, can help at least to some extent train, or maintain, that ability. Those of us who were not gifted it by God, need to keep honing this skill, or it goes away. Of course, it does not mean we can ever match the intuition of Capa, but maybe we can approach it in our best moments.

A legendary example of this intuition is the following game:

Aron Nimzovich

Jose Raul Capablanca

Exhibition Game, Riga, 1913



Black has a clear advantage, but increasing it requires a little trick.

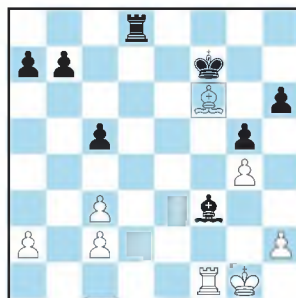
23...♞e2! 23...♞e2! is also good.



▲ Aron Nimzovich

24.♞xe2 ♞xe2 25.♞e1 ♞xf3 26.♞f1 c5! Nimzovich had probably missed this important tactic (#1: Use all small details!), without which Black would have nothing here.

27.♞xf6

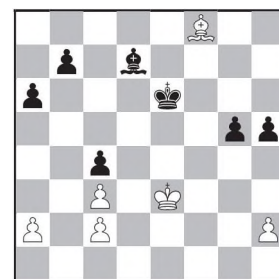


27...♞d1!? The modern engine laughs at the move played in the game and gives 27...♞xf6 28.♞xf3+ ♞e5 as totally winning for Black. Indeed, someone like Rubinstein would have chosen this, and probably so would many other strong players. But Capablanca intuitively assessed his position as winning after the move he played. Even though Black is only a pawn up in an opposite-color-bishop ending, he was pretty sure it's winning [CLUE #2].

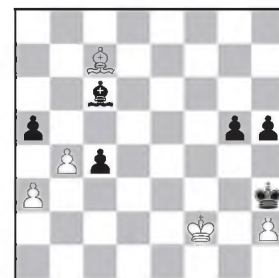
28.♞e5 ♞xf1+ 29.♞xf1 ♞xg4 Capablanca writes: "This ending is now won by force. Several months after the game was played, when Nimzovich had come to St. Petersburg to play in the All-Russian Masters Tournament, he

told me that he had studied the game and thought he had finally found a way to draw this ending. Although I had not seen the game since it was played, I offered to make a small sporting bet, giving him odds of a draw in any position from now on. The offer was immediately accepted and we sat down. In a few moves he saw that his idea was wrong and gave up the game."

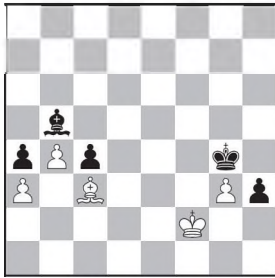
30.a4? A mistake which makes it easy for Black. I don't know what line Nimzovich thought up later, but I can't find a draw either (maybe the readers can?) after the tougher defense 30.♞b8 a6 31.♞d6 (it seems useful to force the black pawn to c4) 31...c4 32.♞e1 ♞f5 33.♞d2 ♞d7 34.♞e3 ♞e6 35.♞f8 h5.



The key to the position is not just that Black has an extra pawn, but the second pawn (on c2) cannot be saved, and then the advantage will be decisive, as Capa quickly and confidently saw. 36.a3 ♞f5 37.♞d6 ♞g4 38.♞f2 ♞h3 39.♞b8 ♞f5 40.♞c7 ♞xc2 41.♞b8 b5 42.♞c7 ♞e4 43.♞g1 ♞b7 44.♞f2 (Trying to maintain the zone; 44.♞d8 ♞g4 45.♞f2 ♞f4 is hopeless as it gives the black king new entry squares.) 44...a5! 45.♞d6 ♞c6 46.♞c7 (46.♞g1 b4 47.cxb4 c3) 46...b4! 47.cxb4



47...a4! (As we shall see, Black must keep this pawn.) 48.♞d6 ♞g4 49.♞e3 h4 50.♞d4 ♞b5 51.♞e7 ♞h5 52.♞e3 g4 53.♞f6 g3 54.hxg3 h3! 55.♞f2 ♞g4 56.♞c3



56...♙c6 57.♖g1 ♗xg3 58.♙e5+ ♖f3 59.♖h2 ♙d7 60.b5 ♗xb5 61.♖xh3 ♖e2 with an easy win, and now it's obvious why Black needed to keep the a-pawn.

30...♗e6 31.♙b8 a5! Again using tactics. The threat is 32...b5!.

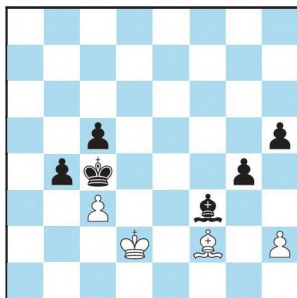
32.♖e1 ♖d5 33.♖d2 33.♙c7 ♖c6 34.♙xa5 loses the bishop to 34...b6.

33...♙d7 34.♙c7 ♖c6 Black's position is so overwhelming that even 34...♙xa4 35.♙xa5 ♖e4! wins. For example, 36.♙b6 ♙b5! 37.♙xc5 g4! 38.♙b6 h5 39.♙c5 h4 40.♙d6 ♖f3 41.♖e1 ♖g2 42.♙c7 g3 43.hxg3 h3-+.

35.♙d8 b6 36.c4 ♖b7 37.♖c3 ♙xa4 38.♖b2 ♙d7 39.♖b3 ♙e6 40.♖c3 a4 41.♖d3 ♖c6 42.♖c3 g4 43.♙h4 h5 44.♙g3 a3 45.♖b3 ♙xc4+ Again, far from the only way to win.

46.♖xa3 46.♖xc4 a2 47.♙e5 h4 48.♖b3 g3 49.hxg3 h3-+.

46...b5 47.c3 ♖d5 48.♙f2 ♙e2 49.♖b3 ♙d1+ 50.♖b2 ♖c4 51.♖c1 ♙f3 52.♖d2 b4



If you can make two passed pawns this far removed in an opposite-color bishop ending, there is no hope for the defending side.

53.cxb4 cxb4 54.♙h4 ♙e4 55.♙f6 ♙g6 56.♙h4 b3 57.♙f6 h4! 58.♖e3 g3 59.hxg3 h3! 60.♖f2 ♙f5 61.g4 ♙xg4 62.♖g3 ♖d3 63.♖h2 ♖c2 64.♖g3 b2

White resigned

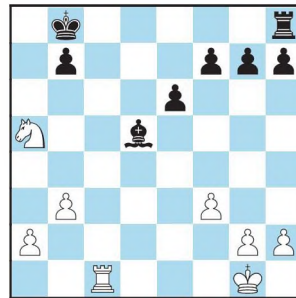
But intuition is not enough to play endgames well. You also have to calculate

variations. When it came to deep calculation, Capablanca was not immune to making mistakes in the endgame. To be fair, he made relatively few mistakes, and some of them were not found by other humans even many years later:

Edward Lasker

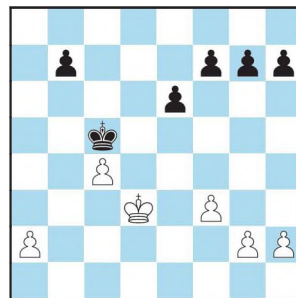
Jose Raul Capablanca

New York 1915



Against a distant relative of the second world champion, Capablanca has a bishop versus knight advantage. But if the knight can come back into play, that advantage is insufficient to win. Capa correctly assesses the upcoming pawn ending as his best chance:

26...♖c8! 27.♖xc8+ ♖xc8 28.♖f2 ♖c7 29.♖e3 ♖b6 30.♖c4+ ♙xc4 31.bxc4 ♖c5 32.♖d3



32...e5? A natural move but it throws away the win. Another trap to fall into is 32...♖b4? 33.♖d4 ♖a3 34.c5! ♖xa2 35.c6 bxc6 36.♖c5 ♖b3 37.♖xc6 ♖c3 38.♖d6 ♖d4 39.♖e7, and this will be a draw.

The only winning move is 32...g5!!, but I would not have figured this out without an engine: 33.♖c3 (If 33.g3 only then 33...♖b4! 34.♖d4 ♖a3 35.c5 ♖xa2 36.c6 bxc6 37.♖c5 e5 38.♖xc6 g4!) 33...h5 (33...f5 also wins.) 34.♖d3 f6! (The only move.) 35.g3 (35.♖c3 e5 36.♖d3 f5

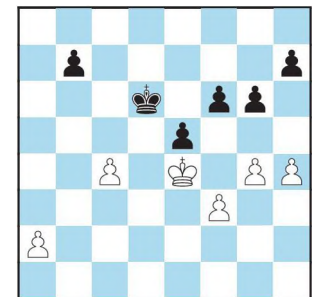


▲ Edward Lasker

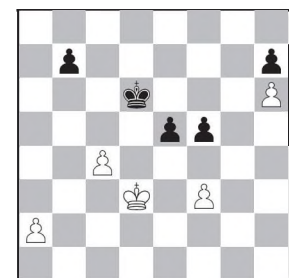
37.♖c3 e4 is an easy win.) and now simplest is 35...♖b4 36.♖d4 ♖a3 37.♖c5 ♖xa2 38.♖d6 ♖b3-+.

33.g4! f6 34.h4! Excellent play by Edward Lasker so far! Black should have stopped the white pawns from advancing like this.

34...g6 35.♖e4! ♖d6

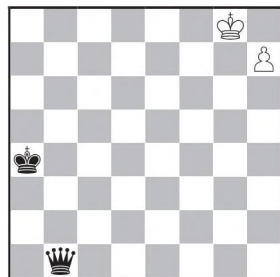


36.f4?? But this is a real howler, when he could have drawn by continuing with his plan: 36.h5! gxh5 (36...♖c5 37.hxg6 hxg6 38.g5! =) 37.gxh5 ♖e6 38.♖d3 f5 39.h6! ♖d6





40.♔c2! ♕c5 41.♔c3 e4 (41...♔c6 42.♔b4) 42.fxe4 fxe4 43.a3! (Using the reserve tempo he saved with 40.♔c2!.) 43...b6 44.a4 e3 45.♔d3 e2 46.♔xe2 ♕xc4 47.♔f3 ♔b4 48.♔f4 ♕xa4 49.♔g5 b5 50.♔f6 b4 51.♔g7 b3 52.♔xh7 b2 53.♔g8 b1=♚ 54.h7.



This line was given by Pal Benko in his *Chess Life* column in September 2004, and he gave credit to a reader, Joe Faucher.

36...exf4 37.♔xf4 ♕c5 Now the win is trivial.

38.h5 ♕xc4 39.♔e4 b5 40.a3 ♕c5

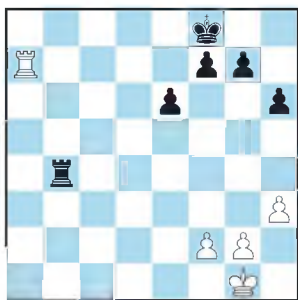
White resigned

In rook endings, Capa always displayed exceptional understanding, even if he didn't get every detail right. Let's look at an example or two:

Oldrich Duras

Jose Raul Capablanca

New York 1913



The computer calmly says “-0.03” here, but it's a long way from that to the half-point on the wall chart!

38...h5 39.g3 h4! If White were allowed h3-h4, the draw would be relatively simple. The f2-g3-h4 formation is the best for the defensive side.

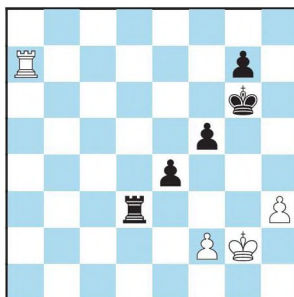
40.gxh4? This doesn't lose but makes things hard. 40.♖a8+ ♕e7 41.g4 is a sturdier defense.

40...♖xh4 41.♔g2 e5 42.♔g3 ♖d4



▲ Oldrich Duras

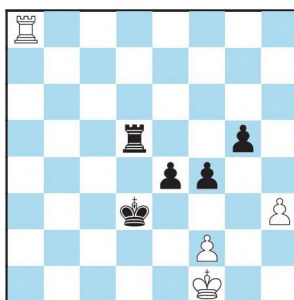
43.♖a5 f6 44.♖a7 ♕g8 45.♖b7 ♕h7 46.♖a7 ♕g6 47.♖e7 ♖d3+ 48.♔g2 ♖d5 49.♔g3 f5 50.♖a7 ♖d3+ 51.♔g2 e4!



52.♖a4? A serious mistake that loses the game. White had to play 52.h4!, which would keep the important g5 square from the black king. For example, 52...♔h6 53.♖a5 g6 54.♖a7 ♕h5 55.♖g7=. He cannot wait with 52.♖b7? ♖f3! 53.h4 ♖f4! 54.♔g3 ♖g4+ 55.♔h3 ♕h5-+.

52...♔g5! The king immediately grabs the chance at freedom.

53.♖a5 g6 54.♖b5 ♕f4 55.♖a5 ♖d2 56.♖a4 ♕g5 57.♔g1 ♕f4 58.♔g2 g5 59.♖b4 ♕e5 60.♖b5+ ♖d5 61.♖b8 f4 62.♖g8 ♕d4 63.♔f1 ♕d3 64.♖a8



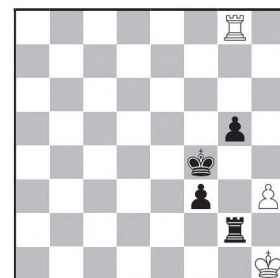
64...e3? Allows a hidden resource. Black should try to play ...f4-f3 and get to the first rank with the rook, for example: 64...♔c2 65.♖c8+ ♕d2 66.♖a8 f3 67.♖a4 ♔c2! 68.♖c4+ ♔b3 69.♖c1 ♔b2 70.♖e1 ♔c2.

65.♖a3+? Now Black wins, and quite elegantly. But after 65.♖e8! ♔d2 66.♖e6 he wouldn't be able to do much, for example: 66...♖d3 67.♖e5! exf2 68.♔xf2 ♖g3 69.h4 gxh4 70.♖e4=.

65...♕e4 66.fxe3 f3! 66...fxe3? is a draw after 67.♖a8 ♕f3 68.♖f8+ ♕g3 69.♖h8.

67.♔g1 67.♖a4+ ♕xe3 68.♖a3+ ♕f4 69.♖a4+ ♕g3.

67...♖d3 68.♖a8 ♕xe3 69.♖e8+ ♕f4 70.♖g8 ♖d1+ 71.♔f2 ♖d2+ 72.♔f1 A better try is 72.♔g1 ♖g2+ 73.♔h1



...and now Capa would have demonstrated his sharp combinational vision (CLUE #3) with a method he would make famous 11 years later, the umbrella: 73...g4! 74.hxg4 (74.♖xg4+ ♖xg4 75.hxg4 ♕xg4-+) 74...♔g3 75.♖h8 ♖b2-+.

72...♖h2 73.♔g1 ♖xh3 74.♖g7 g4 75.♖g8 ♕g3

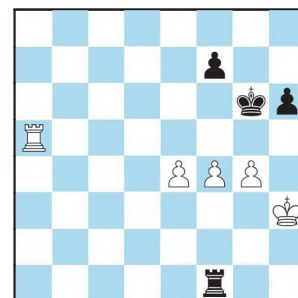
White resigned

Seventeen years later, Capablanca had the same ending:

Jose Raul Capablanca

Frederick Dewhurst Yates

Hastings 1930/31

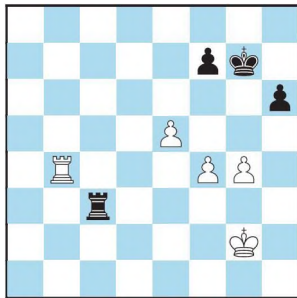


We already know that the construction



with the white rook on f6, pawn on e5, and black pawn on h6 is very dangerous for Black. Capablanca is trying to reach it. 57.♖f5! ♜e1? Black could prevent it with either 57...f6 or 57...♖a1 58.e5 ♜a6. 58.e5! ♜e3+ 59.♔g2 Not 59.♔h4? where the king would get stuck after 59...♖f3. 59...♖a3 60.♖f6+ ♔g7 61.♖b6 There is a lot of analysis in the literature about what the fastest way is, which I will skip here. Against the best defense, the win is far from trivial. But so far, White has not allowed a draw.

61...♖e3 62.♖b4 ♜c3

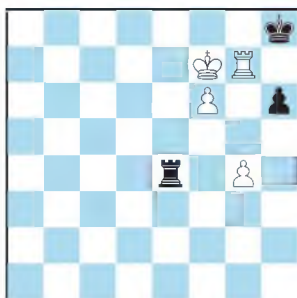


63.♔f2? A careless slip!

63...♖a3? Missing his chance, which is ironically the same move as in the previous game: 63...h5!, this time a temporary pawn sacrifice, as after 64.gxh5 (64.g5 h4! 65.♖b6 h3 66.f5 ♜c5) 64...♖h3 the draw is obvious.

64.♖b7 ♔g8 65.♖b8+ ♔g7 66.f5! This pawn will go to f6, and in conjunction with the rook on the eighth rank this is decisive.

66...♖a2+ 67.♔e3 ♖a3+ 68.♔e4 ♖a4+ 69.♔d5! ♖a5+ 69...♖xg4 70.f6+ ♔h7 71.♖f8 ♔g6 72.♖g8+- 70.♔d6 ♖a6+ 71.♔c7 ♔h7 72.♔d7 ♖a7+ 73.♔d6 ♔g7 74.♖d8 ♖a5 75.f6+ ♔h7 76.♖f8 ♖a7 77.♔c6 ♔g6 78.♖g8+ ♔h7 79.♖g7+ ♔h8 80.♔b6 ♖d7 81.♔c5 ♖c7+ 82.♔d6 ♖a7 83.e6! ♖a6+ 84.♔e7 ♖xe6+ 85.♔xf7 ♖e4



Yates has given his opponent the pleasure of showing the umbrella.

86.g5! hxg5 87.♔g6 **Black resigned**

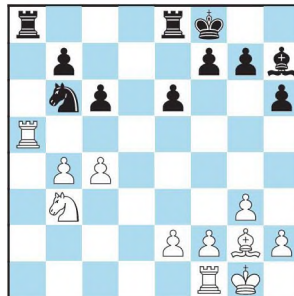
This ending made it into the Dvoretsky *Endgame Manual*, the fifth edition of which I helped revise. We left unchanged his comment that this endgame could be considered a “tragicomedy.” Knowing what I know now, I will disagree just this one time with the esteemed late author and trainer. A complicated rook ending where the computer finds fault with only one of your moves is a masterpiece, not a tragicomedy!

Our last example is a classic illustration of a theme that was later developed by Tal and many others: the power of the rook versus two minor pieces.

Jose Raul Capablanca

Andor Lilienthal

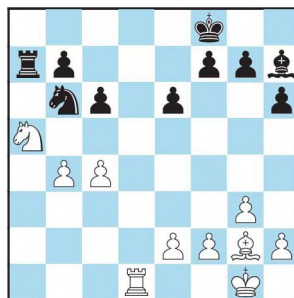
Moscow 1936



Capa had nothing, or less, after the opening, but outplayed his opponent in the middlegame and now we are here.

32.♖xa8!? Most people (and my computer) would play 32.♖fa1 here, but Capablanca finds a hidden tactical detail (CAPA CLUE #1) and goes there without delay.

32...♖xa8 33.♔a5 ♖a7 34.♖d1!



34...♔e8? Andor Lilienthal completely misses White's combination (CLUE #3) or fails to properly assess the resulting position (CLUE #2). The black king needs other squares than e7 and e8!

Correct is 34...g5 35.♖d8+ ♔g7, but Black would have to see that after 36.♖b8? (36.f4! gxf4 37.gxf4 is still a significant advantage for White.) 36...c5! 37.bxc5 ♔d7 38.♖xb7 ♖xa5 39.♖xd7 ♖xc5 holds; for example: 40.♖d4 e5 41.♖d5 ♖xc4 42.♖xe5, and Black will be able to draw this.

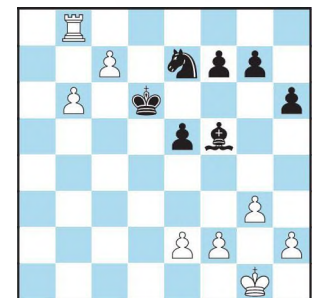
35.♔xb7! Of course! To the modern player the evaluation of this position is obvious, even without calculating the variations (CLUE #2), but in those days only a select few could see this clearly.

35...♔xb7? 35...♔xc4 36.♖xc6+ ♔e7 would extend the game.

36.♖xc6+ ♖d7 37.c5 ♔e7 37...♔d5 38.f3 f5 39.♖a1 ♔xb4 40.♖xd7+ ♔xd7 41.♖a7+ ♔c6 42.♖xg7+-.

38.♖xd7 ♔xd7 White wins by force, but you didn't have to calculate it to the end to enter this position as White (or avoid it as Black).

39.c6 ♔b6 40.c7 ♖f5 41.♖d8 e5 42.♖b8 ♔c8 43.b5 ♔d6 44.b6 ♔e7



45.♖f8 Kasparov gives 45.c8=♖ followed by 46.b7, which is quite aesthetic as well.

45...♖c8 46.♖xf7 ♔d5 47.♖xg7 ♔xb6 48.♖h7 ♔d5 49.♖xh6+ ♔xc7 50.e4 ♔e7 51.f3 ♔d7 52.h4 ♔e8 53.♖f6 ♔g8 54.♖c6 **Black resigned**

I enjoyed returning to Capablanca's endgame legacy and reviewing these games. I hope you also found it rewarding.

Capa's style was crisp and clear, and studying his games has a purifying effect.



U.S. TOURNAMENTS

By FM Grayson Rorrer, Features Editor

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Please refer in the subject line to our Features Editor, **FM Grayson Rorrer**.



IRVING, TX

February 16-20, 2023

14th Annual Southwest Class Championship (9 rounds)

1. Vladimir BELOUS (RUS) 8
- 2-7. Christopher YOO, Jason LIANG, Balaji DAGGUPATI, Gleb DUDIN (FID), Jason WANG, Andy WOODWARD 6½
- 8-10. Viktor GAZIK (SVK), Safal BORA. Brian ESCALANTE (PER) 6

NEW YORK, NY

February 22-26, 2023

Marshall Chess Club Winter IM Norm Invitational (10-player round-robin)

- 1-2. Brewington HARDAWAY, Gus HUSTON 7
3. Mark PARAGUA (PHI) 6
- 4-5. Alice LEE, Zachary TANENBAUM 5
6. Nathaniel MOOR 4
- 7-8. Alfonso ALMEIDA (MEX), Roberto DEL CAMPO (MEX) ... 3½
9. Andrea LA MANNA (ITA) 2½
10. Eric MOSKOW 1½

The Marshall Chess Club is widely revered as one of the best places to play chess in the country. It had fallen on some hard times in the pandemic, as had many other clubs, but hopefully this IM Norm Invitational is a first sign that they have fully bounced back. From an organizer's point of view the final result was a dream, with local FMs Brewington Hardaway and Gus Huston both scoring 7/9 and earning their second IM Norm. Congratulations to both!

B12

Brewington Hardaway 2394

Gus Huston 2339

Marshall Chess Club Winter IM Norm, New York 2023

Notes by Grayson Rorrer

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♟f5 4.h4 h5 5.♟d3 ♟xd3 6.♟xd3 e6 7.♟f3

♟a5+ 8.♟bd2 ♟h6 9.0-0 ♟f5 10.♟b3 ♟b5 10...♟a6 has been played somewhat more often, but both moves are relatively common.

11.♟d1 c5 12.a4 ♟b6 13.dxc5 ♟xc5 14.♟xc5 ♟xc5 15.c3 ♟c6 16.♟g5 Brew is apparently confident in proving White's small edge – he has already been here twice, winning both times!

16...a5?! Black's first long think, indicating his theoretical knowledge had run out. The move itself also looks, at the very least, questionable. 16...♟b6!? is perhaps a small improvement. 17.♟b1 ♟c8 18.♟e1 was B.Hardaway 2394 – D. Belenkaya 2300, Charlotte 2023, when I feel Black has more or less managed to equalize, for example after 18...♟ce7!? 19.♟d2 a6=.

17.♟e1 ♟b6 18.♟b1 ♟a6 19.♟d2 This knight could go in any of several directions, or support the c4-break. 19...b5



20.axb5 A standard reaction. 20.♟c1!? would also have been interesting, as can be seen by 20...♟b8 21.axb5 ♟xb5 22.c4! dxc4 23.♟xc4 ♟d5! 24.♟xd5 exd5 25.♟d6+ ♟xd6 26.♟xc6 ♟f5 27.e6 0-0 28.e7±, when Black still needs to neutralize White's pressure. The game move keeps more pieces on the board, though.

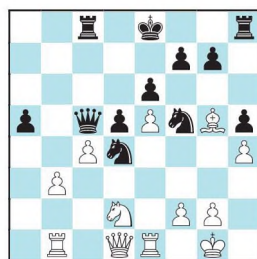
20...♟xb5 21.♟f3! The only way to keep the pressure on. 21.b3 ♟d3! 22.♟c1 d4=.

21...♟c8 22.b3 ♟c5 23.c4?! Allowing Black a clear path to

equality, though not an obvious one. 23.♟bc1!? ♟b6 24.c4 ♟cd4 25.♟d1 ♟c5 26.cxd5 exd5 27.♟f3± leaves Black with some concrete problems to solve.

23...♟cd4?! Perfectly natural. 23...♟b4! was the simplest move, however, adding support to d5 and equalizing effortlessly as a result.

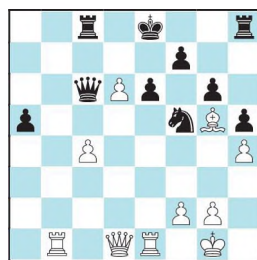
24.♟d1



24...dxc4? In a higher sense, the decisive mistake. 24...♟b8! 25.♟c1 ♟b4 would have just about equalized.

25.bxc4 ♟c6? Mistakes come in pairs... 25...♟a7!? 26.♟c1! ♟c6 27.♟e4 ♟d4 28.♟e2 ♟xe5 29.♟cd1 ♟cd4 30.♟a2+ is very good for White, but there would still be a chance for a miracle.

26.♟e4 g6 It is already hard to find a plausible move for Black. 26...0-0 27.♟hx5 ♟xc4 28.♟bd1+ gives White a decisive attack. Or 26...♟a8 27.c5 ♟f8 28.♟b6 ♟d5 29.♟c1! and the passer decides. 27.♟d6+ ♟xd6 28.exd6 ♟f5



29.♟b6! Well deserving of a diagram!

29...♟d7 30.♟f6 0-0 31.♟d3 ♟c5 32.♟e5! ♟xe5 33.♟xe5 ♟h7 34.c5 White's passers cleaned up shortly, allowing Brew to get off to a quick start, which is normally essential for a strong performance. **White won**

LOS ANGELES, CA

February 22-26, 2023

1000GM February LA Norm Invitational (12-player Schiller System)

1. Arman MIKAELIAN (ARM) .. 7
- 2-3. Robby KEVLISHVILI (NED), Josiah STEARMAN 6½
4. Justin WANG 5½

5-6. Luka BUDISAVLJEVIC (SRB),

Joseph LEVINE 5

7-8. Robert SHLYAKHTENKO,

Kostya KAVUTSKIY 4½

9. Mark HEIMANN 4

10. Carlos MERCADO 2½

11. Sungho YIM (KOR) 2

12. Ryo CHEN 1

LOS ANGELES, CA

February 22-26, 2023

1000GM February LA Norm

Invitational

- IM A (10-player round-robin)

1. Harshit RAJA (IND) 7½
2. Gabor NAGY (HUN) 7
- 3-4. David BERCZES (HUN), Andy LIN 6
5. Joshua RODRIGUEZ (MEX) 4½
- 6-8. Thalia CERVANTES, Shelev OBEROI, Julian PROLEIKO ... 3
- 9-10. Rushaan MAHAJAN, Nikash VEMPALA 2½

LOS ANGELES, CA

February 22-26, 2023

1000GM February LA Norm

Invitational - IM B (10-player round-robin)

- 1-2. Fidel CORRALES, Jacek STOPA (POL) 7½
- 3-4. Tamas PETENYI (SVK), Raffi GHAZARYAN (ARM) 5½
- 5-6. Ruiyang YAN, Alexandre KRETCHETOV (RUS) 4½
7. Richard YI 3
- 8-9. Michael CASELLA, Noah WARD 2½
10. David GASPARYAN 2

IRVINE, CA

March 3-5, 2023

30th Annual Western Class Championship (5 rounds)

1. Jianchao ZHOU (CHN) 4½
2. Arman MIKAELIAN (ARM) .. 4
- 3-8. Brandon JACOBSON, Rochelle WU, Karl TOLENTINO, Alex WANG, David GASPARYAN, Mathew WOFFORD 3½

SAINT LOUIS, MO

March 12-16, 2023

Saint Louis Super Swiss (9 rounds)

1. Brandon JACOBSON 6½
- 2-5. Christopher YOO, Nikolas THEODOROU (GRE), Mikhail ANTIPOV (FID), Harshit RAJA (IND) 6
- 6-12. Illia NYZHNYK (UKR), Dariusz SWIERCZ, Vasif DURARBAYLI (AZE), Yasser PEREZ (CUB), Lazaro BRUZON, Eishan MORADIABADI, Brian ESCALANTE (PER) 5½

CHARLOTTE, NC

March 15-19, 2023

Charlotte Spring Invitational - GM A (10-player round-robin)

1. Tanguy RINGOIR (BEL) 7½
2. David BRODSKY 6½
3. Darcy LIMA (BRA) 6



4. Shankar GAURI (IND)	5 1/2
5. Dean IPPOLITO	5
6. Artiom SAMSONKIN (CAN) 4 1/2	
7-8. Harshid KUNKA. Brewington HARDAWAY	3
9. Bach NGO	2 1/2
10. Dina BELENKAYA	1 1/2

CHARLOTTE, NC

March 15-19, 2023

Charlotte Spring Invitational - IM B (10-player round-robin)

1-3. Liordis VERA (CUB), Terry LUO, Carlos MERCADO (MEX)	6
4. Liam PUTNAM	5 1/2
5. Roberto DEL CAMPO (MEX) ...	5
6. Alonso ZAPATA (CUB)	4 1/2
7. Qindong YANG (CHN)	4
8. Aiden REISS	3 1/2
9. Donald JOHNSON	2 1/2
10. James CHIRILOV	2

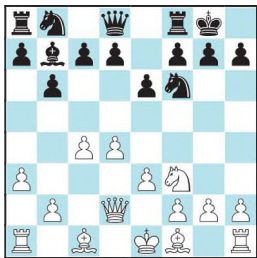
E14

Liam Putnam	2285
Qindong Yang	2127

Spring IM Norm Invitational,
Charlotte 2023

Notes by Liam Putnam

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟b4+ 4.♟b2 In preparation for this game, I saw my opponent was a Bogó-Indian player, and decided on the 4.♟b2 variation. Although I have studied 4.♟d2 for a decent amount of time, the text seemed like the clear practical choice for this game, as I knew my opponent was very well-versed in theory.
4...0-0 5.a3 ♟xd2+ 6.♟xd2 b6 7.e3 ♟b7



8.♟e2 Of course there are many different move orders, but White's standard setup will continue 0-0, b4/b3, ♟b2, ♟fd1, ♟ac1. Additionally, White can keep the rook on the a-file and play for a4-a5, poking and prodding at the Black's queenside. This is a very modern idea.

8...d5 These setups are surprisingly challenging compared to 8...d6 positions. I believe very often Black can almost fully equalize, although there will always be practical problems, with the bishop pair and space advantage.

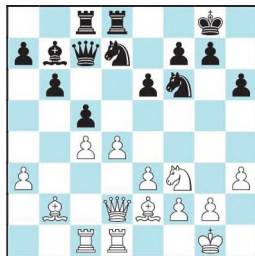
9.b3 ♟bd7 10.0-0 dxc4 11.bxc4 Recapturing with the b-pawn seemed like a no-brainer as I wanted to keep potential pawn breaks (d4-d5 in particular) available. Additionally, it feels like a bit of an awkward structure after 11.♟xc4. White is left

with this potentially weak b3 pawn and cannot find a clear plan.

11...c5 12.♟d1 I wanted to delay ♟b2 with this move, so that I could answer ...♟e4 with ♟e1, as the queen seemed quite awkward on c2. 12.♟b2!? is a fascinating idea suggested by the computer to squeeze a small edge out of the position. The point is to put the knight on d2, play f2-f3 and slowly make progress. This still feels very unnatural to me, and even knowing this now, I most likely wouldn't play this way in a game.

12...♟c7 13.♟b2 ♟ac8 14.♟ac1 ♟fd8 At this point, we have both maximized our pieces. Everything is well-placed, and it's hard to find a concrete plan for either side. However, with the central space and the bishop pair, I felt at least in a human game, White should be a bit better.

15.h3 h6



16.♟c2?! 16.♟e1± It seems it takes too long to maneuver the queen to b3 as I did in the game, and, instead, White should put the queen on the cozy e1 square. The queen also supports the previously mentioned a4-a5 break in these positions.

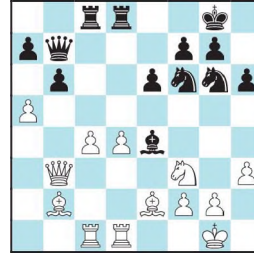
16...♟e4?! It feels a bit much to call this dubious, but it definitely misses an important opportunity to comfortably equalize. 16...cxd4 17.exd4 b5! seems illogical as it helps White create a passed c-pawn, but in fact it's not so simple. Black will also get a nice outpost on the d5 square and a solid queenside pawn structure. He has technically fully equalized here, and some may even prefer Black. 18.c5 a6±

17.♟b3 ♟b7 18.a4 Finally, this idea comes into play. White doesn't really have much else to do, and I noticed my opponent was spending much more time on the clock than I was. So, I tried to think as much as possible on his time, and respond with slow, improving moves, very quickly. This ultimately allowed me to build up a solid positional advantage on the board, as well as a nice cushion on the clock.

18...♟f8 19.a5 Following up with the plan.

19...cxd4 20.exd4 ♟g6?! I calculated 20...bxa5 21.♟xb7 ♟xb7 22.♟a1 ♟xf3 23.gxf3 during the game, and evaluated it as better for White. Yes, I may have made a concession with my kingside pawn structure, but the bishop pair, passed c-pawn and weakness

on a7 must be more than enough to compensate for that, right? Apparently not, as the engine find a very impressive defence... 23...♟d5!! 24.♟f1 (24.cxd5 is met with 24...♟c2, winning the piece back.) 24...♟b6 25.c5 ♟d5 26.♟xa5 ♟c7∞ when Black is extremely solid, and has more than enough counterplay on the kingside, with the knights. There were other defensive mechanisms as well, but this one most impressed me.



21.♟e1?! A very logical move as prophylaxis against the scary looking ...♟f4. However, it turns out I missed an opportunity to play a very instructive positional idea!

21.d5! exd5 22.c5± White will win the pawn back on b6 and with it, open the dark squared bishop, as well as seize the d4 outpost for the knight. It's obviously still complicated, especially in a human game, but this would have left me standing better.

21...♟b8?! (21...bxa5! would have allowed Black to equalize, entering a variation similar in nature to 20...bxa5 above – Black's position is worse, but concrete resources allow him to stay in the game. For example, 22.♟xb7 ♟xb7 23.♟a1 ♟b8! 24.♟c3 ♟f4 25.♟f1 ♟xg2! 26.♟xg2 ♟xh3+ 27.♟h2 ♟xf2∞ –Rorrer).

22.axb6 axb6 23.♟f1 ♟d7 24.♟d3 ♟h4 A very sensible move, seeking active counterplay on the kingside.

25.♟e1 ♟b7 26.♟f4 A perfect square for the knight where it most importantly defends the g2 pawn. White is already borderline winning, and Black has to be very precise to continue the game.



26...♟f6? I had slowly been putting positional pressure on him up to this point. This was the final mistake. 26...g5 is not possible due to 27.d5 gxf4 28.♟xe4 ♟c5 29.♟c3+, a nice variation I saw in the game. (The

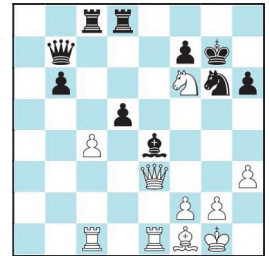
only try was 26...♟e8, but 27.♟g3 ♟f5 28.♟a3 leaves Black without many prospects anyway. –Rorrer)

27.d5! An obvious but important move, opening the dark-squared bishop on the long diagonal and practically ending the game on the spot.

27...cxd5 28.♟xf6 gxf6 29.♟h5 ♟h8 29...♟e7 runs into 30.cxd5 ♟xc1 31.♟xe4!+; whereas 29...♟c6 is met by 30.♟b2!+, among other good options for White.

30.♟g3?! 30.♟b2 might have been slightly better objectively, but what I did was completely fine as well. 30...♟g6 30...♟f5 was the other move I calculated. After 31.♟f4 Black's entire position is hanging by a thread, and as soon as I either capture on e4 or kick the bishop with f2-f3, his position collapses.

31.♟e3 ♟h7 32.♟xf6+ ♟g7



33.♟d4 The rest is, as they say, "a matter of technique."

33...♟f8 34.cxd5 ♟xc1 35.♟xc1 ♟f5 36.♟e3 ♟d6 37.♟xh6+ ♟e7 38.♟g8+ ♟e8 39.♟e1+ ♟d7 40.♟b5+ ♟c7 41.♟e7 ♟xd5 42.♟c6 Black resigned

CHARLOTTE, NC

March 15-19, 2023

Charlotte Spring Invitational -IM C (10-player round-robin)

1. Vladimir GEORGIEV (MKD) ...	6 1/2
2. Jiangwei YU (CHN)	6
3-4. Olivier CHIKU-RATTE (CAN), Vishnu VANAPALLI	5
5. Sudarshan SRINIAIYER	4 1/2
6-8. Tamas PETENYI (SVK), Robby ADAMSON, Arvind JAYARAMAN (IND)	4
9. Ryan AMBURY	3 1/2
10. James NGUYEN	2 1/2

LOS ANGELES, CA

March 17-21, 2022

1000GM LA Spring Splash (9 rounds)

1. John BURKE	7
2-3. Christopher YOO, Semem KHANIN (RUS)	6 1/2
4-8. Jason LIANG, Arman MIKALYAN (ARM), Gergely KANTOR (HUN), Dimitar MARDOV, Ryo CHEN	6
9-15. Jianchao ZHOU (CHN), Abhimanyu MISHRA, Christian CRUZ (PER), Alexander KATZ, Gus HUSTON, Aaron JACOBSON, Megan LEE	5 1/2



OBITUARY – Dr. Orest Popovych

January 18, 1933 – March 14, 2023



24 and Senior Master at age 39. His notable tournament successes were:

- NJ Open Champion 1959, 1961, 1985, 2001
- New England Champion 1957, 1958 (7-0 score)
- Massachusetts Champion 1958
- Atlantic Open, first place, 1971
- Nine-time chess champion of the Ukrainian Sports Federation

He wrote a book on his chess adventures both nationally and internationally: "The Games and Stories of an American Chess Player" (published in Ukraine in 1996, in Ukrainian, of course).

He also wrote in Atlantic Chess News once about his long time tendency to "just say no" to draw offers: "In the 1956 U.S. Open in Oklahoma City, I had also said 'no' twice to draw offers by some unknown 13-year-old boy from Brooklyn, NY, after which I proceeded to lose the game" (Fischer).

Poppy was inducted into the Ukrainian Sports

Federation Hall of Fame in 2016.

This was a real personal loss for me as I was privileged to call him friend. We used to meet on a weekly basis in Edgar McCormick's home along with Ralph Huttlen and Ed Allen — all masters except for me. We would go over each other's games then go out to eat and have a good time. What wonderful memories. Just Ed and I are left, but the gift of warmth and friendship of those years I will cherish for the rest of my days.

Here are two examples of his fighting style. Beating Benko in the 1960s was no small feat! It created quite a buzz at this tournament, the first NJ Open I played in.

B67

Pal Benko	2528
Orest Popovych	2253

New Jersey Open 1964

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 a6 6.♟g5 ♟c6 7.♟d2 ♟d7 8.0-0 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟b1 e6 11.f4

♟b6 12.♟f3 0-0-0 13.g3 ♟b8 14.♟h3 ♟a5 15.f5 b4! 16.♟e2 e5 17.♟c1 ♟c6 18.♟e2 d5! 19.exd5 ♟xd5 20.♟xe5 ♟h6! 21.♟he1 ♟b7 22.♟g4 ♟f3 23.♟xd8+ ♟xd8 24.♟f2 ♟xg4! 25.♟xg4 ♟c4 26.♟d3 ♟c8 27.♟a1 ♟d2! 28.♟d1 ♟e3 29.♟e2 ♟b5! 30.♟b1 ♟e8! 31.♟e1 ♟d2+ 32.♟a1 a5! 33.♟f4 ♟c5 34.♟d3 ♟c4 35.♟d1 a4 36.♟e2 ♟b6 37.♟a6 ♟xc2 38.♟b5 ♟c8 39.♟b1 ♟xb1+! 40.♟xb1 ♟c1 Mate.

B32

Orest Popovych	2367
Aviv Friedman	2138

New Jersey Open 1985

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 e5 5.♟b5 a6 6.♟d6+ ♟xd6 7.♟xd6 ♟f6 8.♟a3 ♟ge7 9.♟c3 0-0 10.♟e3 d5 11.exd5 ♟d4 12.♟d3 ♟f5 13.0-0-0 ♟f8 14.♟xf5 ♟xf5 15.♟b1 ♟g6 16.♟c1 ♟xg2 17.♟hg1 ♟f3 18.♟g5 ♟d6 19.♟e7 ♟b6 20.♟c5 ♟h6 21.d6 ♟e6 22.♟d5! ♟e2 23.♟c7 b6 24.♟c4 ♟xg1 25.♟xe6! ♟e2 26.♟g5! ♟f4 27.♟xf7+ ♟h8 28.♟d1 ♟ed4 29.♟d5! ♟b8 30.♟f7+ ♟g8 31.♟h6+ 1-0

PETE TAMBURRO
Senior Editor

SOLUTIONS TO THREATS EXERCISES FROM PAGE 80

1 25.♟c1! Creating a threat! Transposition was also possible in view of 25.♟c6+! ♟e7 26.♟c1!, threatening ♟e1! 25...♟b8 25...♟e7 26.♟e1+-.

26.♟c6+ ♟e7 27.♟e1 Black resigned

2 31...♟g4! Black's pieces are armed with huge strike potential, so it's only a matter of delivering a final blow. For a player of Navara's caliber it is a walk in the park to carry out a winning sequence. 32.♟g2 There is no better answer. 32.♟g2 loses material after 32...♟xf2 33.♟xh1 ♟xh1.

32...♟f3!! A rocket propelled missile seals the deal here.

33.♟c2 The "Trojan horse" is of course untouchable, as 33.♟xf3 ♟xf1+ 34.♟d2

♟xf3+- wins a piece.

33...♟e1+ 34.♟c3 ♟xg2 Black won on move 39.

3 42.♟xc6!! A nice sacrifice that serves as an introduction to a direct checkmate threat.

42...♟xc6 Practically forced.

43.♟e7 Black resigned.

43...♟d7 runs into a geometrical fork after 44.♟xd7 ♟xd7 45.♟f6+ winning, or 44.♟f6+ ♟h8 45.♟f8 mate.

4 Stremavicius found a very instructive forced way to wrap up the game.

41.♟xf4! gxf4 42.♟g6+ ♟xg6 43.fxg6+ ♟e6 44.♟xd5!! ♟xd5 45.g7 Black resigned

5 43.♟xe6!! fxe6 44.f7 e5 45.♟h4 Black resigned

6 Black has just played 32...♟h6 failing to note that there are threats in store along the e-file. What seemed to be Black's stronghold now falls apart like a house of cards.

33.♟xe5!! Not as strong, but still winning was 33.♟xe5! fxe5 34.♟xe5! ♟xe5 35.♟xe5 ♟xe5 (35...♟d8 36.♟xe8+ ♟xe8 37.♟xd6+-) 36.♟xe5+-.

33...♟xe5 33...fxe5 34.♟xe5 ♟xe5 35.♟xe5 ♟f8 36.♟xe7+-.

34.♟xe5 ♟d7 35.♟f4! Black resigned



TOURNAMENTS ABROAD

CHELYABINSK, RUSSIA

January 27-February 5, 2023
Lozovsky Memorial (10 rounds)

- 1-6. Bardiya DANESHVAR (IRI), Igor LYSYJ (RUS), Dmitry KOKAREV (RUS), Vladimir ZAKHARTSOV (RUS), Nikita PETROV (RUS), Pavel PONKRATOV (RUS) **7½**
7-11. Evgeny VOROBIOV (RUS), Murtas KAZHGALEYEV (KAZ), Ilija ILJIUSHENOK (RUS), Alexei FEDOROV (RUS), Artur DAVTYAN (ARM) **7**

MUNICH, GERMANY

February 1-14, 2023
FIDE Women's Grand Prix (10-player round-robin)

1. Alexandra KOSTENIUK (FID) ... **7½**
2. Humpy KONERU (IND) **7**
3. Nana DZAGNIDZE (GEO) ... **6½**
4. Harika DRONAVALLI (IND) ... **6**
5-8. Zhu JINER (CHN), Zhansaya ABDUMALIK (KAZ), Tan ZHONGYI (CHN), Elisabeth PAETZ (GER) **5½**
9. Mariya MUZYCHUK (UKR) ... **5**
10. Alina KASHLINSKAYA (POL) **4½**
11. Anna MUZYCHUK (UKR) ... **4**
12. Dinara WAGNER (GER) ... **3½**

ROCHEFORT, FRANCE

February 11-17, 2023
21st Rochefort International Open (9 rounds)

- 1-3. Diptayan GHOSH (IND), Kirk GHAZARIAN, Bharathakoti HARSHA (IND) **7½**
4-5. Momchil NIKOLOV (BUL), Peio DUBOUE (FRA) **7**
6. Christophe SOCHACKI (FRA) **6½**
7-15. Andrei MAKSIMENKO (UKR), Vladyslav LARKIN (UKR), Aniruddha DESHPANDE (IND), Krishnan SASIKIRIAN (IND), A R ILAMPARTHI (IND), Viani DCUNHA (IND), Priyanka NUTAKKI (IND), Joseph GIREL (FRA), Hampus SORENSEN (SWE) **6**

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

February 15-19, 2023
Cambridge International Open (9 rounds)

1. Michael ADAMS (ENG) **8**
2. Daniel FERNANDEZ (ENG) . **7½**
3-6. Oleg KORNEEV (ESP), Harry GRIEVE (ENG), Boris GOLUBOVIC (CRO), Bao DONG (VIE) **7**
7-10. Brandon CLARKE (ENG), Daniel DARDHA (BEL), Khuyagtsogt ITGELT (MGL), Daniel GORMALLY (ENG) **6½**

CAPPELLE LA GRANDE, FRANCE

February 18-24, 2023
29th Cappelle-la-Grande Open (9 rounds)

- 1-2. S.P. SETHURAMAN (IND), Bharathakoti HARSHA (IND).... **7½**
3-8. Sergey FEDORCHUK (UKR), Remy DEGRAEVE (FRA), Krishnan SASIKIRIAN (IND), Marc MOLENA (POL), Nino MAISURADZE (FRA), Thanh Tu TRAN (JPN) **7**
9-15. Paul VELTEN (FRA), Bilel BELLAHCENE (ALG), Hampus SORENSEN (SWE), Isik CAN (TUR), Nikola KANOV (BUL), Lukasz LICZNERSKI (POL) **6½**

GRAZ, AUSTRIA

February 18-24, 2023
Graz Open (9 rounds)

1. Abhijeet GUPTA (IND) **8**
2-4. Hagen POETSCH (GER), Felix BLOHBERGER (AUT), Piotr DOBROWOLSKI (POL) **7**
5-10. Luca MORONI Jr (ITA), Tim JANZELJ (SLO), Slaven PASTAR (BIH), Jonas HACKER (GER), Valerio CARNICELLI (ITA), Yevgeniy ROSHKA (UKR) **6½**

CANNES, FRANCE

February 20-26, 2023
36th Cannes Open (9 rounds)

1. Sayantan DAS (IND) **7½**
2-5. Daniel DARDHA (BEL), Marc MAURIZZI (FRA), Diptayan GHOSH (IND), Jan KLIMKOWSKI (PL) **7**
6-7. Marco MATERIA (FRA), Benjamin DEFROMONT (FRA) **6½**
8-15. Alexander MOTYLEV (FID), Guillaume LAMARD (FRA), Bator SAMBUEV (CAN), Momchil NIKOLOV (BUL), Brandon CLARKE (ENG), Adrien DEMUTH (FRA), Andre SOUSA (POR), M R VENKATESH (IND) **6**

KRAGERO, NORWAY

February 22-26, 2023
Kragero Resort Chess (9 rounds)

- 1-2. John WALLACE (AUS), Titas STREMAVICIUS (LTU) **7**
3-9. Leon MENDONCA (IND), Kaido KULAOTS (EST), Lucas VAN FOREEST (NED), N R VISAKH (IND), Valery KAZAKOUSKI (LTU), Elham ABDRLAUF (NOR), Saad ELMI (NOR) **6½**
10-16. Emin OHANYAN (ARM), Tor KAASEN (NOR), Vladimir HAMITEVICI (MDA), Semem MITUSOV (UKR), Vignir STEFANSSON (ISL), Frode URKEDAL (NOR), Mads

ELLINGSEN (NOR) 6

NOVA GORICA, SLOVENIA

March 16-23, 2023
HIT Open (9 rounds)

1. Leon Luke MENDONCA (IND) **9**
2-4. Sabino BRUNELLO (ITA), Marko TRATAR (SLO), Aleksa STRIKOVIC (SRB) **6½**
5-11. Ognjen CVITAN (CRO), Matic LAVRENCIC (SLO), Andrea FAVALORO (ITA), Michel BIFULCO (ITA), Sinisa DRAZIC (SRB), Alexander BELIAVSKY (SLO), Vid DOBROVOLJC (SLO) **6**

PETROVAC, MONTENEGRO

March 17-29, 2023
European Women's Individual Championship (11 rounds)

- 1-2. Meri ARABIDZE (GEO), Oliwia KIOLBASA (POL) **8½**
3-6. Aleksandra MALTSEVSKAYA (POL), Stavroula TSOLAKIDOU (GRE), Salome MELIA (GEO), Klaudia KULON (POL) **8**
7-13. Lela JAVAKHISHVILI (GEO), Leya GARIFULLINA (FID), Nadya TONCHEVA (BUL), Anna SARGSYAN (ARM), Pauline GUICHARD (FRA), Deimante DAULYTE-CORNETTE (FRA), Karina CYFKA (POL) **7½**

NEW DELHI, INDIA

March 23-30, 2023
Delhi International Open (11 rounds, 1075 players!)

1. Aravindh CHITHAMBARAM V. (IND) **9½**
2. Luka PAICHADZE (GEO) **9**
3-8. S.P. SETHURAMAN (IND), Boris SAVCHENKO (FID), Mikhail KOBALIA (FID), Ethan **9**
VAZ (IND), Michal KRASENKOW (POL), Aleksey ALEKSANDROV (FID) **8½**
9-30. Volodar MURZIN (FID), Mikheil MCHEDLISHVILI (GEO), Viani Antonio DCUNHA (IND), Levan PANTSULAIA (GEO), Saha NEELASH (IND), Almas RAKHMATULLAEV (UZB), Anuj SHRIVATRI (IND), Alexei FEDOROV (FID), Erzhan ZHAKSHYLYKOV (KGZ), S. NITIN (IND), Kirill STUPAK (FID), Ameya AUDI (IND), SRIHARI L. (IND), Karthi RAJARISHI (IND), Apoorv KAMBLE (IND), Lalit BABU (IND), Azer MIRZOEV (AZE), Suresh HARSH (IND), Arun DAAKSHIN (IND), Roy SAPTARSHI (IND), Venu Akkarakaran JOHN (IND), K. RATNAKARAN (IND) **8**



Chess Academy Marija & Merab

Gagunashvili Chess Academy offers online chess lessons for children and adults. GM Merab and WIM Marija, founders of the Academy, would like to transfer their rich experience gained as players and trainers to all the chess lovers. Marija teaches children basics of chess in a fun and exciting way, while Merab helps them enrich, develop and apply their knowledge until they win their first titles.

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FRESH LEAVES FROM THE BOOKSHELF



By FM Carsten Hansen



There never seems to be a shortage of new excellent chess books, and if there is any doubt then the batch in this column should serve as a reminder of what a wonderful age of chess literature we live in. The chess book was never more alive than it is today. Masterpieces are coming at us from all angles, by authors from countries around the world and covering all sorts of topics: memoirs, tournaments, openings, endgames, games collections, studies, problems, instructional works, puzzle books, etc. And the journey we are on is by no means about to cease or even slow down, in fact if anything it is accelerating. The only 'victims' of this phenomenon are the chess book collectors who have to justify to their spouses and loved ones discretionary spending and shelf space!



Carsten Hansen is a FIDE Master and FIDE Trainer, residing in Bayonne, New Jersey. He has written more than forty books, mostly on chess openings and chess tactics. You can find his work on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

10 NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

- 01 **Masterpieces And Dramas Vol III**
by Sergey Voronkov (Elk & Ruby 2022) ★★★★★
- 02 **Albert W. Fox**
by John S. Hilbert (Moravian 2022) ★★★★★
- 03 **Anthology of Miniature Endgame Studies**
by Yochanan Afek (Chess Informant 2022) ★★★★★
- 04 **The Chess Battles of Hastings**
by Jurgen Brustkern & Norbert Walleit (New In Chess 2022)* ★★★★★
- 05 **Checkmate!**
by Ben Graff (White Star Publishers 2022) ★★★★★
- 06 **The Killer Dutch Rebooted**
by Simon Williams (Everyman Chess 2022) ★★★★★
- 07 **The Pawn Study Composer's Manual**
by Mikhail Zinar (Elk & Ruby 2022) ★★★★★
- 08 **Life At Play**
by Lubomir Kavalek (New In Chess 2022) ★★★★★
- 09 **Keep It Simple for Black**
by Christof Sielecki (Chessable 2022) ★★★★★
- 10 **Squeeze Play**
by Cyrus Lakdawala (Everyman Chess 2022) ★★★★★

01 Masterpieces and Dramas of the Soviet Championships Vol III (1948-1953)

by Sergey Voronkov

\$ 40.95 (hardback)



Here we have the third volume in a series by Russian chess historian Sergey Voronkov covering the Soviet Championships. This time around the story starts in 1948 and ends in 1953, two years

which should evoke memories in the minds of chess fans. 1948 was the year when Mikhail Botvinnik was crowned world champion after winning the tournament for the title that had been vacant since Alekhine's death two years earlier. In 1953, of course, where this volume ends, the memorable Candidates tournament in Zurich took place.

However, this book is not about world champions and candidates for the title,



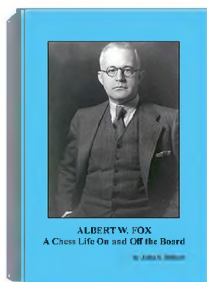
although many of them took part in the championships in this period, it is about the Soviet chess explosion, where their players advanced from being relatively unknown quantities to world-beaters. Moreover the title of the series is no exaggeration, since there were many brilliant games, while the drama was not confined to the stage on which these were played as so much more went on behind the scenes. Thus, although many of the participants may be well-known to later generations of players and fans, the backstage drama will not be, and for that we are fortunate to have a historian as qualified and diligent as Voronkov, who has been digging through endless archives – official, private, and even those that were formerly secret.

This volume is easily as good as the two earlier ones in the series: the games and annotations are great, the stories compelling, the research and unveilings breathtaking, the drama intense, and the joy seemingly never-ending. What a book! Now, the wait for the next volume begins because, as I understand, it will be the first that has not yet been published in the Russian language.

02 Albert W. Fox – A Chess Life On and Off the Board

by John S. Hilbert

\$45.95 (hardback)



From the foremost Russian historian to his American counterpart, John S. Hilbert, who, thanks to his many years of research and writing, has elevated himself into heights that can only be compared to those reached by

the best practical players of both today and yesteryear.

The present book is the result of years of research into a player who most chess fans have probably never heard of and who I must admit I only became aware of last year, when I read the book on the 1904 Cambridge Springs tournament where Albert Fox first made his presence felt to a wider chess world by defeating luminaries such as Chigorin, Janowski, and Schlechter. The reason why his name is not more widely known is that he subsequently pursued a more lucrative career

in business and journalism instead of chess.

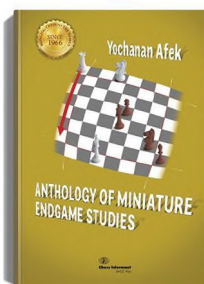
The work that has gone into this book is absolutely mind-blowing; it would have to be to produce such a volume of more than 600 pages. For obvious reasons, I haven't read it in its entirety yet, but I will certainly do so in the future. However what I have read is truly excellent, thoroughly footnoted and indexed, as well as illustrated with high-quality pictures, along with hundreds of games, most of them quite lightly annotated, but others in more detail and with more insight.

My only criticism of this book is its binding, which is already feeling less sturdy than I would like it to be. Whether this is a single-standing issue with my copy I can't tell, but even so, it is a little worrisome. Nevertheless, that has nothing to do with what is between the covers which is so fantastic that I struggle to find the right words to describe how I feel about it. Truly a treat for fans of chess history!

03 Anthology of Miniature Endgame Studies

by Yochanan Afek

\$59.95 (hardback)



I must confess, a couple of years ago I would have relegated this book to a pile that I ought to read but would probably never get round to doing so. Yes, I am ashamed to admit that I have been so afflicted. That,

however, will no longer be the case. Now, I find endgame studies truly fascinating and something that will help me become a better chess player. Therefore, I took note when I saw this book announced on a couple of Facebook groups as well as by the author himself. Grandmaster of Chess Composition and IM of regular over-the-board chess Israeli-Dutch Yochanan Afek.

So what is a miniature endgame study? It is a composition of seven or fewer pieces. As Timman writes in the foreword, while quoting some of the great composers, "it is chess in its purest form" and even "chess poetry."

The material in this anthology has been created by the best composers of the last 150 years, some by the author himself. It is

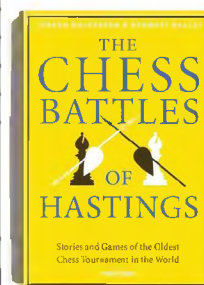
divided by subject into 32 chapters, each of which has an introduction before serving up several studies for the reader to solve or just simply to enjoy. The only minor criticism I can make is that the solutions are presented in the wordless Chess Informant style. This, of course, can be overcome but might be intimidating for those unfamiliar with it.

Nevertheless, the book is excellent and well-produced in a sturdy hardback format.

04 The Chess Battles of Hastings

by Jurgen Brustkern & Norbert Wallet

\$32.95 (hardback)



How do you cover the history of a tournament with roots as deep as those in Hastings, England? Curiously, you get a couple of Germans on the job – only one of whom I was familiar with: FM Brustkern, who

is a Hastings regular, having competed there every year since 1977!

The initial event, way back in 1895, is widely considered the first super tournament, being won by Harry Pillsbury ahead of the Russian Chigorin and World Champion Lasker as well as other top players of the day.

However, it wasn't until 1919 that the second event took place, after which it has been held annually, apart from the years of the Second World War. Curiously, for a work covering such a long series, I didn't see the inclusion of a single tournament table, although at the end of the book, in an appendix, is an overview of all the top finishers. But is that really a satisfactory substitute? Not really, but it does solve the problem of which tournament does merit a full table and which not. However, instead there is a focus on stories, games, and portraits of interesting personalities who have participated over the years. For the most part, the authors have done a really diligent job at covering these players, some of them winners, some notable also-rans, with only a few comments here and there that seemed off the mark. Naturally, I read the segment on my compatriot the late Danish GM Bent Larsen, who participated no less than six times and



won on three occasions. His bio ends with "From 1980 he lived with his wife in Buenos Aires and only played a few tournaments." But this comment disregards the fact that he was still a top player for several years after that, and is particularly odd given that one of his tournament wins was at Hastings 1986/87 – and he even finished in third place the year after that too.

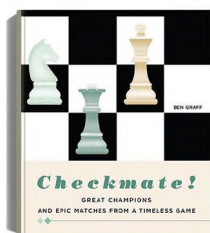
Nevertheless, overall, the authors have done a pretty credible job at covering this tradition-filled event, which is one that I myself have taken part in a couple of times, including the year when a very young Judit Polgar came, saw and conquered the Challengers Group in amazing style.

For those chess fans who love tournament books, this is a decidedly different take from the usual but one that I have enjoyed reading. In fact for those who haven't had the experience of playing in the Hastings Congress, the descriptions of its historic happenings will take you there virtually and enable you even to hear the rattling of coins in the audience's pockets!

05 Checkmate! Great Champions and Epic Matches from a Timeless Game

by Ben Graff

\$ 29.99 (hardback) ★★★★★



This is a gorgeous, well-produced, over-sized, and well-illustrated volume, with pictures in color, large diagrams, and exciting stories narrated by an experienced journalist

and author, who crafted the excellent *The Greenbecker Gambit*, which has previously been reviewed in this column.

I can only hazard a guess at the budget for publishing this book, but it will surely far exceed any other to be released this year. It looks stunning. Moreover the narrative is well-written, dealing with all the male world champions and some notable female players, Vera Menchik, Nona Gaprindashvili, and Judit Polgar.

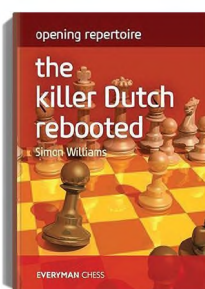
Also included are some fascinating positions to accompany the stories and pictures, even if some of these will already be familiar to ardent chess fans.

All in all it has the size and look of a coffee table book, and in that respect it more than fits the bill. The more so that it is a very enjoyable read. Pricewise, I think it is a bargain. So, if what I have described above whets your appetite, I can wholeheartedly recommend what is a beautiful production.

06 The Killer Dutch Rebooted

by Simon Williams

\$ 28.95 (paperback) ★★★★★



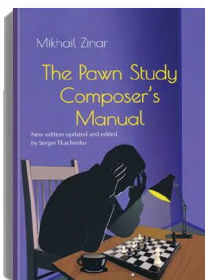
English GM Simon Williams, the Ginger GM, is no stranger to regular readers of this column as he has authored many excellent chess books, usually on openings or attacking play – and this book falls into the former category.

It actually started its life as a popular *Chessable* course and has now been brought to life in book format as well, with the author presenting a full repertoire for Black in the Dutch Defense, an opening he enjoys playing himself with the black pieces. The material is well-balanced between theory and explanations of typical ideas, themes, and plans, making it ideal for those rated in the 1500-2200 bracket, albeit mostly for the lower half of players in that rating category.

07 The Pawn Study Composer's Manual

by Mikhail Zinar

\$ 25.00 (paperback) / \$ 35.00 (hardback) ★★★★★



Who is Mikhail Zinar? Why is this book being published? And why is this book important? Zinar was no Tal, but he was a magician in his own right as a composer of endgame studies, particularly those of the pawn endgame variety. Zinar's manual of compositions was

first published in the Ukraine in 1990, before the fall of the Soviet Union and long before Russia attacked his country. The book was printed in no less than 100,000 copies – and sold out!! It has now been updated and revised by Sergei Tkachenko. Sadly, Zinar passed away in 2021, exactly two years before I am typing these words.

The book carefully examines hundreds of endgame studies, explaining basic themes, maneuvers, and more complex themes, including many I had never even heard about, much less seen exemplified. The study of this part of the book will help open your eyes to new possibilities in your own games and make you a better endgame player because your vocabulary of understanding this phase of the game will increase manifold.

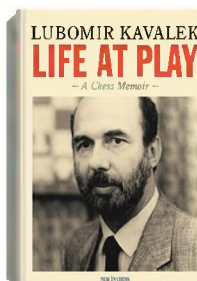
For aspiring endgame composers – and some of us will surely fall into this category – there are sections covering artistic requirements, practical tips, etc., that you need to know and understand before you embark on this wonderful adventure.

In other words, this book is for artists who produce such masterpieces, those who enjoy trying to solve them and others who simply marvel at the ingenuity that has gone into their creation.

08 Life At Play – A Chess Memoir

by Lubomir Kavalek

\$ 34.95 (paperback) ★★★★★



For those new to our game, it can be difficult to grasp how important a character was Czech-American GM Lubosh Kavalek. Not only was he a strong grandmaster, with many excellent results, both

individually and as a team member, but he worked wonderfully well behind the scenes when assisting other chess greats, including Fischer and Short. He was an accomplished journalist, contributing to *Voice of America*, *Washington Post* (from 1986-2010), and *Huffington Post* (2010-2021). He was editor-in-chief for chess at RHM Press and had articles published in many magazines. Indeed a true legend in many ways who was justly



inducted into the World Chess Hall of Fame in 2001.

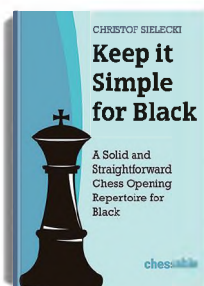
The book is very personal and well-written, amply demonstrating Kavalek's excellent literary skills, telling stories with an equal measure of emotion, love, excitement, humor, and anything else you might dream about. Sadly, Kavalek didn't have the opportunity to see his book through to publication as he died suddenly in 2021 leaving others, notably Jan Novak, to help it across the finishing line.

All in all, a wonderful read that I hope finds the audience that it truly deserves.

09 Keep It Simple for Black – A Solid and Straightforward Repertoire for Black

by Christof Sielecki

\$34.95 (hardcover)



German International Master Christof Sielecki, also known as ChessExplained, is one of the uncrowned kings of Chessable.

He possesses an amazing selection of courses, either created by himself or

in cooperation with other authors – including myself as I co-authored two with him on the English Opening. His Keep It Simple Courses have proved particularly popular – in fact he has constructed one for 1.e4 (for which an updated version is soon to be released and may, in fact, already be available when you read these words) and another for 1.d4.

For Black, he has taken the bold step of creating a full repertoire in just one course, albeit with far fewer training lines than is usual. But, does it work, and is it effective? I would say yes. In this case, I actually bought the course and went through it in its entirety. Some of the lines may not always stand up particularly well against very strong opposition, such as I typically face in online play, but at other times they are simply a pleasure to unleash against worthy opposition. So, considering how effective it has been in my games, I can imagine how well it will work for players at lower levels. Because Sielecki selects his material very well, Black players will only rarely have to study long variations to obtain reasonable positions. In many of the

scariest and most theory-heavy lines, he offers solutions for the student that will negate the need to memorize enormous chunks of theory and instead take the opponent into unfamiliar territory. For example, I participated in an online competition consisting of two separate tournaments. I faced the same player in both events, each time as Black. For the first game, my opponent, an IM, chose a line against which I knew Sielecki had something sharp ready; however, I couldn't remember it and bailed out into a playable but somewhat boring position, where I swindled my way to a win. However, in the second game, after I had prepared some lines of play between the two tournaments, I crushed my opponent in a mere 14 moves! Such drops of poison exist in many places in the course, despite the chosen lines being as seemingly dull as the Queen's Gambit Declined and the Caro-Kann Defense.

For those who want to solve a gigantic problem, what to play as Black, this book and its associated course is an excellent solution. It is, of course, not entirely without weaknesses, but for at least 95% of all players, these will never become an issue because your opponents will not have the knowledge or strength to exploit such soft spots. For those remaining 5% who like the shortcut but are concerned about the weaknesses, I can assure you that they are not so problematic that they cannot be solved with a little elbow grease and work with a strong engine.

10 Squeeze Play

by Cyrus Lakdawala

\$29.95 (paperback)



The busiest chess author in the world, Californian IM Cyrus Lakdawala, who I suspect is outpacing serial novelist James Patterson, and is probably the chess author with the largest total word count output of all

time, despite having fewer books to his credit than Reinfeld, Soltis, Keene, and Schiller. Aside from the books he has co-authored with yours truly, we now have a new one out on the Grob, 1.g4, as a tribute to that warrior of unorthodoxy, English IM Mike Basman who sadly passed away last year. He also has a new

release on the Richter-Veresov (1.d4, 2.♘c3, and 3.♗g5) and the present book, which shows how to squeeze something out of equal positions. Surprisingly, this is a relatively underserved topic in chess literature, even though we all marvel at how the strongest players, including the reigning triple world champion Magnus Carlsen, somehow manage to score full points out of equal or even dull positions. Appropriately, the book opens with a game that inspired the book: Magnus Carlsen's win in game six from last year's world championship match against Ian Nepomniachtchi. This game, however, is just a shot with the starting pistol to a Lakdawala-Carlsen bromance. There are a lot of Carlsen games in this book, but also plenty of examples from Lakdawala's cabinet of favorite positional squeezers: Capablanca, Karpov, Andersson, Kramnik, as well as a select few from other players of renown: Fischer, Alekhine, Spassky, Petrosian, and other non-world champions.

Positional and technical squeezes can be difficult to understand for those of us who live our lives in lower echelons, and therefore Lakdawala has placed greater emphasis on explaining why moves were played rather than providing tons of analysis to demonstrate the validity of the ideas. The art of revealing and defining ideas is even more important than the ability to calculate every single move, and that is why this book is such an effective instructor.

In my humble opinion, this is easily one of Lakdawala's best books. Therefore, if you are up for learning about positional chess, and the whys and wherefores behind the decision-making of the best players in the world, it is a great place to take your knowledge to the next level.



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Q&A 5x5

WHERE GRANDMASTERS ADVISE YOUNG PLAYERS

01 What is the advantage of someone starting to play chess at an early age? When is it best to start? And for those who might be late in learning the game, are they able to get back on track to becoming a titled player?

Those who start early make fewer blunders. Of course modern computer kids, some of whom become GMs before they become teenagers don't need this advice. Compare this to a famous Russian 19th century player Mikhail Chigorin who learned the rules of chess at 16, played in a World Championship match at 41 and missed an elementary checkmate in 2 in a winning position in the final game when a win would have equalized the match score (Chigorin - Steinitz, Game 23, Havana 1892).

02 If there are three main departments of the game – opening, middlegame and endgame – what portion of our time should we spend on each? And what is the most important?

Ideally all three stages should be balanced. I always followed Capablanca's advice to start with endings and then proceed to more complex positions. On the other hand, in the middlegame the task is often different from the endings in a sense that you should open lines for your pieces to break into your opponent's camp, usually in the direction of his king. Here tactics are important. Nowadays



GM Alexander Ivanov

Joint U.S. Chess Champion in 1995

Tied for 1st in the 2007 American Continental

Four-time FIDE World Cup participant

you can practice it with a computer. As for opening preparation, everybody is now doing that with computers too.

03 From your own experience can you recall any specific type of opening position or endgame theme that an aspiring chess player should be sure to study because of its particular importance?

For me giving up a pawn for activity in a rook ending became a memorable theme after I saved a difficult ending against Gorchakov in the 1972 USSR Team Championship and was given a favorable mention for that in a major Russian chess magazine. I was 15 at the time and played on a junior board for the Russian Federation Team against a strong City of Moscow team. Our team won that match and eventually

the Championship. I was thrilled to play alongside top grandmasters. Our board 2, twenty-year-old Karpov beat the former World Champion Smyslov in that same match (the board 1 game Petrosian – Polugaevsky was a draw). Those who are interested in my game can find it in the ChessBase Big Database.

04 Not everyone can be a chess world champion. But how can chess be of benefit in life and business?

In 1779 Benjamin Franklin wrote: "The game of chess is not merely an idle amusement. Several very valuable qualities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired or strengthened by it, so as to become habits, ready on all occasions. For Life is a kind of Chess..." He goes on to mention Prudence, Foresight, Circumspection, Caution etc.

Today's chess is a professional sport and a branch of knowledge, so to answer the question better let me refer the reader to Garry Kasparov's 2007 book *How Life Imitates Chess*.

05 Why would you recommend chess to youngsters? What joys may they expect to experience on this thrilling journey, in addition to those you have mentioned in your previous answer?

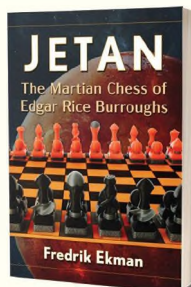
"Chess is a gymnasium of the mind," said Blaise Pascal, the great French scientist and philosopher of the 17th century. It helps you concentrate, multitask, actively use your mind in search of answers. The trick is – the more you put into chess, the more you get out of it. The higher the level, the more it demands from you. So it's up to an individual to decide how much time and effort to put into the game. In any case it helps you to know yourself better, using your mind in the process, and that's a worthy goal.



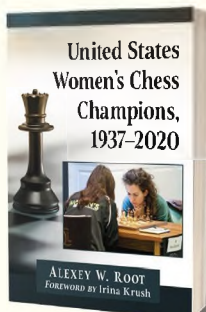
McFarland

“[The] classic McFarland book: a deeply researched, lovingly produced and definitive enquiry into an area of chess with a view to being the last word on the subject”—*British Chess Magazine*

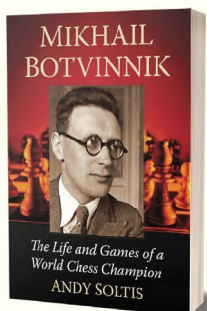
Jetan. *The Martian Chess of Edgar Rice Burroughs*. Fredrik Ekman. **NEWLY PUBLISHED.** 2022, \$49.95 paperback (7 × 10), 211pp., 149 illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index, 978-1-4766-8793-3. “Masterful...Even the most ardent Burroughs enthusiast will learn something new”—Scott Tracy Griffin, author of *Tarzan on Film*.



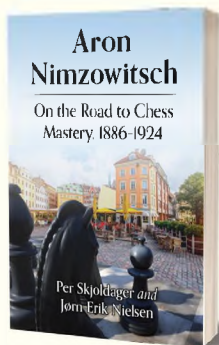
United States Women's Chess Champions, 1937–2020. Alexey W. Root. **NEWLY PUBLISHED.** 2022, \$49.95 paperback (7 × 10), 238pp., 29 photographs, 171 annotated games, 93 diagrams, 60 cross-tables, bibliography, index, 978-1-4766-8693-6. “A major accomplishment and one chess historians will gratefully appreciate...fascinating”—IM John Donaldson (Mechanics' Institute).



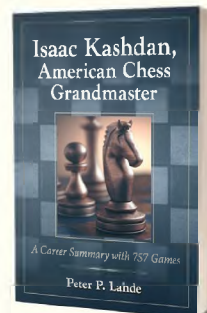
Mikhail Botvinnik. *The Life and Games of a World Chess Champion*. Andy Soltis. 2022 [original lib. bdg. 2014], \$49.95 **now paperback** (7 × 10), 284pp., 107 annotated games, 128 diagrams, 12 photos, chronology, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-9139-8. **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD**—*Chess Journalists of America*, **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD**—English Chess Federation.



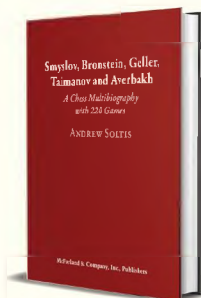
Aron Nimzowitsch. *On the Road to Chess Mastery, 1886–1924*. Per Skjoldager and Jørn Erik Nielsen. 2022 [original lib. bdg. 2012], \$49.95 **now paperback** (7 × 10) 468pp., 426 annotated games, 88 photos, 10 maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-9137-4. “Strongly recommended!”—*Chess Today*; “Fascinating”—*Chess*. **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD**—*Chess Cafe*.



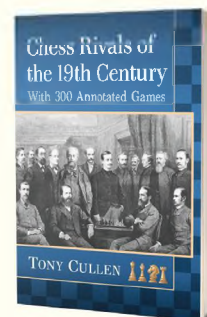
Isaac Kashdan, American Chess Grandmaster. *A Career Summary with 757 Games*. Peter P. Lahde. 2023 [original lib. bdg. 2009], \$49.95 **now paperback** (7 × 10), 360pp., 11 photographs, facsimiles, diagrams, tables, appendices, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-9295-1. “Lahde's book is important, and he deserves our thanks for filling a longstanding void”—*Chess Life*.



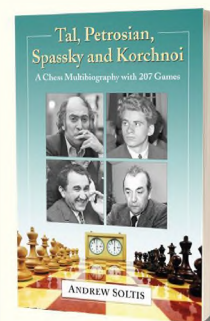
Smyslov, Bronstein, Geller, Taimanov and Averbakh. *A Chess Multibiography with 220 Games*. Andrew Soltis. 2021, \$65 library binding (7 × 10), 392pp., 44 photographs, 227 diagrams, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-7793-4. Fate played a capricious role in the lives of five of the greatest. **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD**—*Chess Journalists of America*



Chess Rivals of the 19th Century. *With 300 Annotated Games*. Tony Cullen. 2021, \$45 paperback (7 × 10), 477pp., 54 photographs, diagrams, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-8072-9. More than a third of the 300 annotated games analyzed by past masters and checked by powerful engines. Fifty masters: with brief biographies, anecdotes and an endgame section. “A treasure trove”—*Chess*.



Tal, Petrosian, Spassky and Korchnoi. *A Chess Multibiography with 207 Games*. Andrew Soltis. 2020 [original lib. bdg. 2019], \$45 **now paperback** (7 × 10), 394pp., 30 photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-1-4766-8364-5. “Arguably the best book Soltis has ever written”—IM John Donaldson. **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD**—*Chess Journalists of America*.



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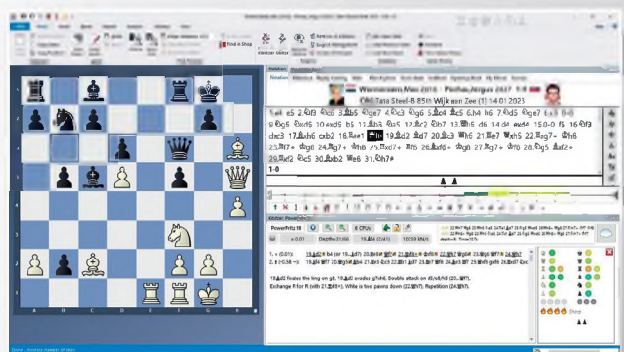
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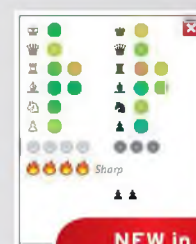
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