

SHLYAKHTENKO DEEPLY ANALYZES FOUR **SO GAMES** | CHESS & ESPIONAGE | DUBOV'S BRILLIANCY

CHESS LIFE

**GM
WESLEY
SO**

*wins
2020
Skilling
Open*

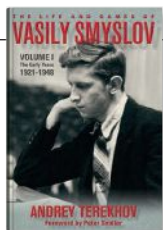
Also in this issue:

*Coverage of the
2020 Online
Olympiad
for People with
Disabilities*



US CHESS

February 2021 | USChess.org

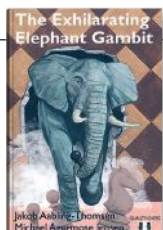


THE LIFE AND GAMES OF VASILY SMYSLOV - VOL. 1

by Andrey Terekhov

B0129RE - \$34.95

In this, the first volume of a multi-volume set, Russian FIDE master Andrey Terekhov traces the development of World Champion Vasily Smyslov from his formative years and becoming the youngest grandmaster in the Soviet Union to finishing second in the world championship match tournament (1921-1948). With access to rare Soviet-era archival material and invaluable family archives, the author complements his account of Smyslov's growth into an elite player with dozens of fascinating photographs, many never seen before, as well as 49 deeply annotated games.

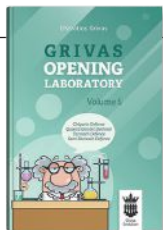


THE EXHILARATING ELEPHANT GAMBIT

by Aabling-Thomsen & Jensen

B0179QT - \$29.95

The Elephant Gambit is perhaps the boldest opening in all of chess theory. By meeting 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 with 2...d5!?, Black takes the fight to his opponent and aims to seize the initiative as early as possible. This book offers a complete repertoire for Black, based on 3.exd5 Bd6 or 3.Nxe5 Bd6 4.d4 dxe4. In return for the sacrificed pawn, Black ensures himself of quick and active development with most of his pieces pointing menacingly towards the enemy kingside.



GRIVAS OPENING LABORATORY - VOL. 5

by Efstratios Grivas

B0067EV - \$27.50

The series continuing with this book is aimed at offering a full repertoire for White based on Queen's Gambit Declined. The idea of small opening repertoire books is not new, but here the purpose and the presentation is different. The choice of variations against each reply from Black will be mine and will be based on my long experience, having played the game for over 40 years, and also served as a professional coach for approximately 20 of those!

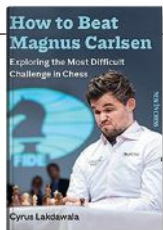


SICILIAN WARFARE

by Ilya Smirin

B0178QT - \$29.95

Sicilian Warfare is a practical guide to the most dynamic and ambitious defence against 1.e4, starting where opening theory ends and the middlegame begins. Ilya Smirin breaks down the strategic battle into easily understood elements and then looks at them in a dynamic setting. With illuminating annotations of Smirin's best Sicilian games with both colours, Sicilian Warfare offers a feast of attacking chess and a world-class guide to the most ambitious reply to 1.e4.



HOW TO BEAT MAGNUS CARLSEN

by Cyrus Lakdawala

B0244NIC - \$29.95

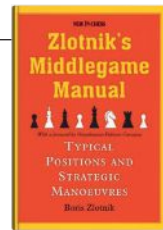
Magnus Carlsen is arguably the strongest player of all time. His dominance is such that every loss comes as a shock. This book has a thematic structure, which, together with Lakdawala's uniquely accessible style, makes its lessons easy to digest. Sometimes even Magnus gets outplayed, sometimes he over-presses and goes over the cliff's edge, and sometimes he fails to find the correct plan. And yes, even Magnus Carlsen commits straightforward blunders. Lakdawala explains the how and the why.

ZLOTNIK'S MIDDLEGAME MANUAL

by Boris Zlotnik

B0242NIC - \$27.95

If you want to improve your middlegame play, you will have to develop a FEEL for positions. That's what Boris Zlotnik has been stressing during his long and rich trainer's career. Clicking through concrete variations (a popular pastime in the computer era) is not enough. To guide your thinking during a game you should be able to fall back on a reservoir of typical ideas and methods. That is exactly what this book offers you: Zlotnik's legendary study material about the middlegame, modernized, greatly extended and published in the English language for the first time.

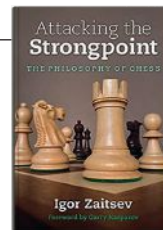


ATTACKING THE STRONGPOINT

by Igor Zaitsev

B0127RE - \$24.95

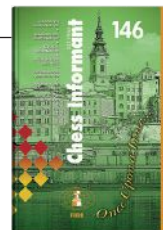
In his eye-opening title chapter, "Attacking the Strongpoint," Zaitsev makes explicitly clear a common strategic element never formalized until this book. Often overlooked by amateurs and even GMs, the idea can lead to winning tactics in many games! Topics include Combinations and Piece Harmony, Strategy and Structure and The Role of Reason and Judgment. As you read Zaitsev, you'll often find yourself thinking, "Ah, now I get it!"



CHESS INFORMANT - ISSUE 146

B0146INF - \$39.95

Chess Informant 146 contains hundreds of games, annotated by strong players, cross tables, tournament results, separate chapters on combinations, endgames, problems, studies. It includes analysis of particular openings, regular columns of top players on various themes etc.



THE MODERN SPANISH

by Vassilios Kotronias

B0128RE - \$29.95

The Breyer and Zaitsev Variations of the Ruy Lopez are two of the most dynamic lines played today. Examining them from both White and Black's point of view, the author discusses their strengths, weaknesses and presents suggested improvements where necessary. Kotronias' clear writing style, coupled with in depth analysis, makes for a splendid opening manual on two of the most topical – and solid – variations of the Ruy Lopez.

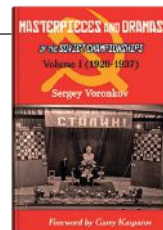


MASTER PIECES & DRAMA OF THE SOVIET CHAMPIONSHIP - VOL. 1

by Sergey Voronkov

B0035ER - \$39.95

In his three-volume treatise, leading Russian chess historian Sergey Voronkov vividly brings to life the long-forgotten history of the Soviet championships held in 1920-1953. Volume I covers the first 10 championships from 1920-1937, as well as the title match between Botvinnik and Levenfish. The key contestants also include world champion Alekhine and challenger Bogoljubov, lesser-known Soviet champions Romanovsky, Bogatyrchuk, Verlinsky, and Rabinovich, and names that today will be unfamiliar yet were big stars at the time: Riumin, Alatortsev, Makogonov, Rauzer, Ragozin, Chekhover, and many others.





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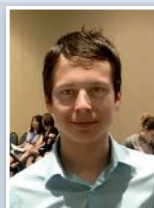
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FEBRUARY



GM Alex Yermolinsky

(Cover Story) is a native of St. Petersburg, Russia, and was one of the top players in the U.S. during the 1990s. Winner of numerous Open tournaments, he became a successful writer and lecturer during his stint as GM-in-Residence at the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club in San Francisco, California. Since 2007 Yermolinsky has lived in South Dakota and works as analyst and commentator for various internet chess sources.



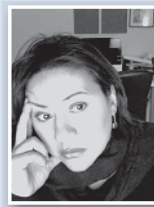
FM Robert Shlyakhtenko

(So Annotations) is ranked as one of the top 100 players in the U.S. In 2019, he became the youngest-ever Southern California state champion, was co-champion of the Barber K-8 Tournament of Champions, and won the Southern California Open. His previous article for Chess Life Online won a 2020 Chess Journalists of America award for "Best Instruction."



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(Online Olympiad for People with Disabilities) is a national master, a former U.S. national scholastic champion (K-9 and K-12), and a three-time Colorado closed state champion. He was a guest speaker at the Second Koltanowski International Conference on Chess and Education and has recently served as captain and coach for Team USA in the 2020 FIDE Online Olympiad for People with Disabilities and for Team Americas in the 2019 FIDE Confederation Cup for the Disabled.



Dora Martinez

(Online Olympiad for People with Disabilities) is a documentary photographer and filmmaker currently based in New York. Her work has been featured in numerous publications and has been exhibited in New York City. She is the founder of Lens Ethics and the creator and founder of "Documentary Work in Challenging Landscapes" — a workshop and mentorship program for youth in post-conflict and at-risk communities around the globe.



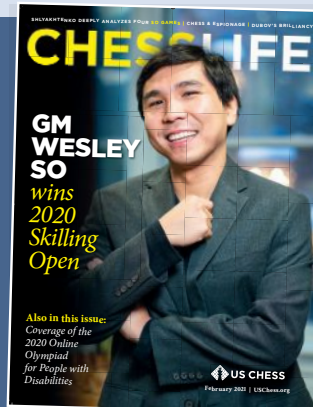
Menachem Wecker

(Chess and espionage) is a Washington, D.C. reporter who has interviewed Mel Brooks about herring and has covered everything from the origins of museum taxidermies to who writes trivia night questions, and the history of the Rumpelstiltskin story to Zoroastrian dating. He is a member of the governing board at the National Press Club.

ON THE COVER

GM Wesley So flashes his winning smile. Fresh off capturing the U.S. Championship in October, So won the Skilling Open the following month, defeating GM Magnus Carlsen in a two-game blitz overtime playoff.

PHOTO BY LENNART OOTES



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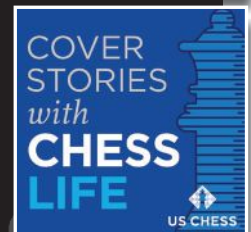
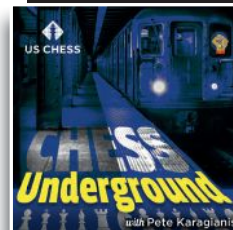


YOUTUBE Our YouTube presence is one of our new areas of emphasis. We're ramping up our content production with **interviews with America's top players**, and introducing new series like Jen Shahade's "Class is in Session" recordings and John Hartmann's "Leveling Up" **instructive videos**.

youtube.com/USChessFederation

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Letters: *Counterpoint*

SLOW DOWN, YOU'RE MOVING TOO FAST

If it is not too late, a response to Austin Burnette Mitchell in [the] October issue. I am in complete agreement with him. I started playing tournament chess long, long ago in the 1970s. Because no one wanted to pay for the extra day hotel expenses, five rounds were compressed into two days. Typical time controls were 50/2 or 40/2. At even at that young age, you played three tough games on Saturday and you felt like you had been digging ditches all day.

So here we are today. Almost all tournaments start Friday night, and yet with the extra day the time controls are getting faster and faster. My state championship tournament this year is G/80 plus a 30 second increment. To what end, I must ask? The above time control is now considered "classical," which means I guess the even slower ones of bygone days are only fit for the museum? To find anything close to the good old days, I must wait until the U.S. Open comes to town.

Call it whatever you may; at some (fast) point it ceases to be chess.

Richard J Arnold
via email

OVER THE BOARD IS NOT OVER

In response to Austin Burnette Mitchell's letter in the October Counterplay, I'd like to offer a word of encouragement. I'm the director of the Evangel Chess Club (ECC) in Montgomery, Alabama. Before COVID-19, ECC was awarded by the Alabama Chess Federation (ACF) the hosting rights to the 2020 Alabama State Dual-Rated Chess Championship. The tournament was scheduled for July 2020. In consultation with the leadership of Evangel Church in Montgomery (the host site), I decided to hold the over-the-board event as scheduled in July. Further, I made the decision to honor the original prize fund guarantees.

The tournament was held successfully under COVID-safe conditions. The tournament attendance was understandably light, but the games were played, and cash prizes and trophies were awarded. ACF leadership was very supportive and helped greatly with the financial imbalance created by the light attendance. About one-third of the players were from out-of-state, which is a good indicator of just how badly the chess-playing community wants over-the-board events. The success of the event was a real team effort, and the decision to stick with the event proved to be a good one.

Evangel held two other OTB events in summer/fall of 2020 (with more conservative prize funds) and has two more scheduled for early 2021. Additionally, there is an event scheduled for Dothan, Alabama, in January.

I think the chess-playing community is motivated to find safe, smart, and creative ways to keep OTB chess alive. Catch a tournament in Alabama sometime. I think you'll like it.

Doug Strout
via email

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE

In response to the "you can't please everyone" letter, which criticized coverage of "The Queen's Gambit" (Chess Life, January 2021):

How true you cannot please everyone, regardless of the activity. These letters keep popping up from time to time. This has been going on for as long as I have been a member of US Chess, at least since the 1970s.

Contrary to popular belief, we are, after all, humans, and human interest stories are interesting.

Whenever a game is published and just a few words are said about the player(s) — and maybe a picture too — well, that is a human interest story being told, no matter how few column inches are being used.

To subscribe to *Chess Life* is to subscribe to the entire essence of the chess experience — people, places, and games.

There are literally thousands of places on the internet that are dedicated to chess and I am sure [one could] find [a site] that only has games — no pictures, no ads, and no human interest. I also suspect there is print media out there as well that caters to said wants.

Chess Life for me is just one of many sources that I go to for chess.

As for me, keep me subscribed to *Chess Life* because I want to experience the news, information, games — and the human interest stories.

Steven E. Bickford
via email

Errata: We made a rather repetitive mistake in the 18 pages on the various U.S. Championships in our January 2021 issue — we forgot to credit the photos, which all came courtesy of the talented photographers at the Saint Louis Chess Club. Our deepest apologies to them and to the Club.

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

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The 2020 U.S. Armed Forces Open Chess Championship

A chess battle royale

By MAJOR ZACHARY KINNEY



2020 USAFO CHAMPION ANDREW PERIANO (FRONT LEFT) DEFEATED THREE FORMER CHAMPIONS ON HIS PATH TO VICTORY.

The 61st U.S. Armed Forces Chess Championship (AFCC) was held over the Columbus Day weekend (October 10-12, 2020) in Virginia Beach, Virginia. This edition of the AFCC almost did not

take place because the COVID-19 pandemic was sweeping the U.S., infecting and killing hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Thanks to the efforts of three military chess veterans, the 61st AFCC took place — over

the board, and under strict COVID-safe precautions. Retired Navy Captain Thomas J. Belke (the tournament organizer), Retired Army Colonel and US Chess Executive Board President Michael E. Hoffpauir (chief

tournament director), and Jeffrey R. Forbes, (chief assistant tournament director) worked together to ensure that the 61st AFCC is now safely in the proverbial history books.

The veteran trio extended invitations to the first 20 military chess players who signed up to play in the 61st AFCC. Each participant had to wear a face mask and observe social distancing. When the tournament started, a total of 21 chess players squared off for the

15 the two players had managed to navigate a sharp opening and an even sharper early middle game. Here Peraino brought his king into the center of the board and kept it there. The advanced centralized black king and sharp play by Peraino netted the new champion victory in the end.

Peraino nurtured and protected his passed b-pawn using precise play to fend off multiple White attacks and employed a version of the

The event was held over three days and the hand-to-hand fighting was fierce...

title of 2020 USAFCC Champion.

The event was held over three days and the hand-to-hand fighting was fierce, with six former U.S. Armed Forces chess champions in the field. When the fighting ended and the dust had settled, Information Systems Technical 2nd Class Andrew Peraino (4½ points) edged out the second-place finisher, Petty Officer First Class (retired) Larry Larkins, who had four points. Last year's winner, 1st Lieutenant Eigen Wang, finished in a three-way tie with Paul Choate and John Farrell for third place with a 3½ score.

Peraino, a US Chess rated expert, met and defeated six-time AFCC champion Larkins in round three. Peraino also defeated Wang, the defending champion and the highest rated player in the tournament at 2369, in round four. Peraino also managed to defeat Mario Murillo, another former Armed Forces champion, in round two.

Peraino led the Navy team to top honors, while the Army team came in second in the inter-service competition. Air Force finished in third place, while the Marines took fourth place and the Coast Guard ended up in fifth place. The top three scoring players from each service branch made up the service branch teams for team scoring purposes. There were no academy cadet chess teams in attendance.

We were able to capture the seminal game played between Larry Larkins and Andrew Peraino in round three. This game actually decided the individual champion title. The game pitted six-time AFCC Champion Larkins against fellow Navy man Peraino.

Larkins began the game with his usual opening move: 1. e4. Playing with the black pieces, Peraino responded to Larkin's 1. d4 with 1. ... g6. The game began as a kind of Modern or Pirc Defense before it transposed into something of a Sicilian structure. By move

shelter/Lucerna Bridge technique to secure victory. It is clear that from move 38 Peraino saw and began formulating his strategic plan to win the game, and with military precision, he executed the plan flawlessly.

PIRC DEFENSE (B08)

Larry Larkins (2107)

Andrew Peraino (2098)

Armed Forces Open (3), 10.10.2020

1. d4 g6 2. e4 d6 3. h3 Nf6 4. Nc3 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Bd7 7. e5 Ng8 8. exd6 Bxb5 9. Nxb5 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 cxd4 11. Nxd4 Qe5+ 12. Nde2 Qxd6 13. Qxd6 exd6 14. O-O Ne7 15. Nb5



15. ... Kd7 16. Rd1 d5 17. c4 Re8 18. Bf4 Na6 19. cxd5 Nf5 20. Nec3 Be5 21. Bxe5 Rxe5 22. Rd2 Nc5 23. Rad1 a6 24. Nd4 Nd6 25. Nf3 Re7 26. Rd4 Rae8 27. Kf1 Nce4 28. Nxe4 Rxe4 29. Ng5 Rxd4 30. Rxd4 h6 31. Nf3 Re7 32. Rb4 b5 33. Rd4 Nc4 34. a4 Kd6 35. b3 Nb6 36. axb5 axb5 37. Rh4 Nxd5 38. Rxh6 Kc5 39. Rh8 Ra7 40. g3 Kb4 41. Rh4+ Kc3 42. Kg2 Ra2 43. Nd4 b4 44. Nc6 Kxb3 45. Rd4 Ne3+ 46. Kf3 Nc2 47. Rd7 Ra6 48. Ne5 Rf6+ 49. Kg2 Ka2 50. Nxf7 b3 51. Ng5 Rc6 52. Ne4 b2 53. Nd2 Rc3 54. h4 Na3 55. Rd6 Nc4 56. Ra6+ Ra3 57. Rxa3+ Nxa3 58. g4 Nc4 59. Nxc4 b1=Q

And White resigned a few moves later. ♠

FACES ACROSS THE BOARD

By AL LAWRENCE



BEN JOHNSON

PRINCETON,
NEW JERSEY

Perpetually chess

Ben Johnson gets to have long talks with

the greatest names in chess and ask a lot of questions. All for free.

Treading on ellipticals or commuting to work, some 6,000 fans listen every week as Ben conducts these conversations on his Perpetual Chess Podcast. He chats with top players like former world champion GM Viswanathan Anand. He schmoozes with celebrated chess writers like GM Andy Soltis and with popular chess streamers like GM Aman Hambleton. He reviews the latest chess books and pries training tips from sudden improvers. "I look for an adult who's gaining, say 300 rating points in a year and a half, and we just go super-granular on their studying methods." What player wouldn't want to listen in?

Ben once won \$300,000 at a single poker event in Austria.

Ben's professional life — he also has a young family to dote on — is now, well, perpetually chess. In addition to his podcast, he runs school and adult chess programs and gives private lessons. But it wasn't always that way. Ben majored in politics and Russian at elite Pomona College in California. "I was one of these liberal arts people who didn't really know what they wanted to do." He earned the national master title along the way but thought he'd wind up a lawyer. "I got a job in New York City as a legal assistant, but I also knew some of the people at Chess in the Schools." He found he loved teaching chess. A stint as a bigtime poker player followed. Ben once won \$300,000 at a single poker event in Austria. "In 2011, the gravy train was slowing down." That was the year he got married.

A podcast lover himself, in December 2016, Ben invested \$1,500 in startup costs to test his idea. He recently finished his 200th show, an interview with GM Boris Gelfand from the six-time world championship contender's home in Israel. "That was an honor!"

The Perpetual Chess Podcast is available on all of the major podcast apps. New listeners can also get started at his website: www.perpetualchesspod.com.

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Register to Vote

US Chess will hold an election in 2021 for three at-large positions on the US Chess Executive Board. For full details, please refer to the call for nominations published in the October and November 2020 issues of Chess Life. (Note: nominating deadline was December 31, 2020.)

US Chess Members: Don't forget to register as a voting member here so you can vote in this year's Executive Board elections: secure2.uschess.org/voter-registration.php. Voting members elect the Executive Board. US Chess members (except those with memberships of less than one year) can register as a voting member. Voting members must be age 16 or over as of June 30 of the election year. Eligible members who are not already registered as voting members must register with the US Chess office by May 1 to be eligible to vote in that year's regular election. All members who are selected as US Chess delegates, alternate delegates, or Executive Board members are automatically registered as voting members. Once registered, a member's status as a voting member continues as long as he or she is a member. When a membership lapses, voting member status ceases and the member must, after rejoining, again register by May 1 to be eligible to vote in that year's regular election. In order to vote in a regular election, registered voting members must be US Chess members on May 5th of the election year, for the entire day Central Time. There is no registration fee.

Temporary Changes to Event Bidding

The US Chess Executive Board (EB) has approved the following temporary change to national event bidding procedures.

Prospective organizers may submit bids for available US Chess National Events that occur November 10, 2020 through June 30, 2021, as either an Over-the-Board (OTB) or Online event. Bids are subject to review and approval by the US Chess Director of Events. For events during this period that have already been awarded, the EB authorizes the Director of Events to review and approve modified proposals to move events from OTB to online formats.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the EB has been approving events that are regularly awarded as over-the-board events and allowing their organizers to run the event as online events with modifications. All events falling into this window of time require a bid or a modified bid to fully describe the terms of the event. The Director of Events will award events based on the competitiveness of the bids received. This policy will sunset with events that occur on or after July 1, 2021, unless this deadline is extended by the Executive Board.

Bids for national events should be submitted to eventbids@uschess.org.



BEATNIK BOTVINNIK

In Passing



Peter P. Lahde

DECEMBER 25, 1930 – NOVEMBER 18, 2020



Peter P. Lahde, who was instrumental in shaping chess in Tennessee, died on November 18, 2020.

Lahde moved to Tennessee in 1950, and within a few years his efforts helped spark a “chess boom” that earned a mention

in *Chess Life*. Over the next 50 years, Lahde helped organize and direct chess activities throughout Tennessee. His “Music City” tournaments drew players from all over the south, and the Music City Chess Club welcomed all. His involvement in the Nashville City Championship and Tennessee Open spanned four decades. Lahde also served as the state president for several years, and he remained active in the state association for more than half a century.

Although Lahde was a Class A player, his true calling was in chess research and journalism. In 1959, Lahde founded the *Tennessee Chess News* — a publication that continues online to this day — and served as its editor for 18 years. He edited the Music City Chess publication in the 1970s as well. Peter also published eight chess books. Topics included historical tournaments (Hastings), players (Kashdan and Hodges), and the history of Tennessee chess. Because of his keen interest in history, Lahde served as Tennessee state chess historian until his passing.

In 1989, US Chess honored Lahde with an “Outstanding Career Achievement Award.” A year later, he was inducted as a charter member of the Tennessee Chess Hall of Fame.

In addition to his chess prowess, Lahde could deal pairing cards with an expertise that would make the best in Vegas proud. He also sang tenor in his church choir. But to his friends and colleagues in Tennessee chess, Lahde will be remembered most for his wit, wealth of chess knowledge, and infectious love for the game.

Aaron Stuart Dubin

JUNE 18, 1957 – DECEMBER 30, 2020



Aaron Dubin, 63, died on December 30, 2020 after a protracted battle with Frontotemporal Dementia complicated by COVID-19. The long-time Missouri resident, who attained a master rating during the early

1980s, co-won the Missouri championship in both 1981 and 1983.

Dubin, a graduate of DeKalb High School in DeKalb, Illinois, received a B.A. in political science from Northern Illinois University in 1979 and a J.D. from Washington University in 1983. Long-time friend, Doug Eckert, says, “Like many strong chess players, he took the critical thinking skills chess teaches so well to become a successful professional. In his case, an attorney.” Dubin eventually became a partner in the law firm of Frankel, Rubin, Klein, Dubin, Siegel, and Payne.

Dubin was a sports enthusiast who especially enjoyed baseball and hockey. His favorite teams included the Chicago White Sox, the Chicago Blackhawks, and the St. Louis Blues. He also was a loyal friend. Eckert continues, “Our friendship of 40 years included being best man in each other’s weddings [and] living for a period of time next door, allowing our kids to get to know each other.”

Although he had not been active as a tournament player for the last 20 years, Eckert says Dubin was always up for a blitz game and hoped to return to tournament chess when he had more time. Unfortunately, that opportunity never arose after Dubin was diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia, an aggressive form of dementia, in 2015. Eckert points to his friend as an example of why parents should teach their kids chess, saying, “Not because their child will become world champion, but because their child can learn life skills, fairness, objectivity, and [gain] the skills to become a successful person.”

Kimball Nedved

OCTOBER 7, 1928 – JANUARY 14, 2020



Kimball Nedved, a longtime fixture in Pennsylvania chess, died on January 14, 2020 at age 91.

Dr. George A. Chressanthis says, “Old-timers like me will fondly remember and, of course, miss him.

Kimball was a staple

of the chess scenes in Philadelphia and later in Pittsburgh. I joined US Chess in the 1960s, and knew Kimball through my father Andrew Chressanthis, another well-known chess player of Kimball’s generation.”

Nedved notably won the 1951 Illinois state chess championship, an event *Chess Life* described as “the strongest Illinois State Championship of recent years.” Participants that year included Nedved, Hugh E. Myers, former U.S. Open champion Albert Sandrin and his brother Angelo, former champion of Chile Dr. Tulio Pizzi, former Illinois state champion Paul Poschel, and Chicago city champion and Lithuanian master Povias Tautvaisis. Nedved would go on to win the 1969 U.S. Amateur Chess Championship, and in 1986, his four-person team won the U.S. Amateur Team Championship.

By 1987, Nedved’s rating was 2321. The following year, Carnegie-Mellon University asked him to compete against their Deep Thought during the testing phase.

Beyond chess, Nedved was an analytical genius who graduated from the Illinois Institute of Technology with B.S. (1952) and M.S. (1953) degrees, both in psychology. After being drafted into the Army in 1953, he put his degrees to good use doing psychological testing on thousands of paratroopers training at the Airborne School’s “Free Towers.” Nedved’s post-Army career took him into advertising and marketing. Eventually, he co-founded a company that provided market research to most supermarket chains and large retailers in North America.

Chressanthis shares this memory of Nedved: “Many years ago, after I lost a tense chess battle for the Pennsylvania State Championship, Kimball, who knew my father, came up to me to try and soothe the sting of defeat. It was a nice gesture that I still remember and [it was] emblematic of the kind of person Kimball was. I can see Kimball and my father having fun together playing their favorite game all day!”

Protection Racket

There's a quiet debate over $A \text{ minus } D \text{ equals } P$.

By **GM ANDY SOLTIS**

AFTER MIKHAIL BOTVINNIK LOST HIS world Championship title, he began a correspondence school for budding young masters. He gave them nuggets of advice, such as:

If you are uncomfortable being a pawn down, don't play the King's Indian Defense.

His students understood what he meant: Black cedes so much space in the King's Indian that he needs counterplay to survive, at the cost of a pawn if necessary.

Botvinnik also dispensed more practical guidance:

In time pressure, your pieces must protect one another.

This is easier to grasp. One of the simplest tactics is to simultaneously attack two pieces and win one of them.

TWO PIECE ATTACK

GM Fabiano Caruana
GM Hikaru Nakamura
Magnus Carlsen Invitational (8.2),
05.01.2020



WHITE TO MOVE

In a lost position, White played **41. Nxd6?** and resigned after **41. ... Rf6!**.

Protecting your pieces is fundamental to

chess. Yet Botvinnik was one of the very few masters to talk about it.

One his students, Garry Kasparov, recalled how he adjourned a game after giving up a rook for a bishop and a pawn. He telephoned Botvinnik and began to describe the position.

"Garry, tell me one thing," the former world champion interrupted. "Is your bishop protected by a pawn?"

The answer was no. "Then you are lost," Botvinnik said. Many moves later he was proven right:

UNPROTECTED BISHOP

Leonid Zaid
Garry Kasparov
Leningrad 1977



WHITE TO MOVE

Black would likely draw if he could safeguard his bishop with **61. ... Be3!**.

But **61. Rc4!** stopped that in view of **61. ... Be3 62. h4+! Kxh4 63. Rxe3** or **62. ... Kh6 63. g3!**.

Without solid protection, Black's bishop could be harassed as White slowly made progress, **61. ... Ba7 62. Re6 Rd5 63. h4+ Kxh4 64. Rxg6 Be3 65. g3+! Kh3 66. gxf4 Rd3 67. Ke2! Rb3 68. Rg5 h4 69. Rxf5 Bb6**

70. Rf6 Ba7 71. f5 and White won after a total of 87 moves.

Being a scientist, Botvinnik might have explained the subtleties of protection in an equation. This comes to mind:

A minus D equals P

A is the number of enemy pieces that are attacking one of yours. D is the number of your pieces defending it.

The result is P, the level of protection for your piece. If P is a positive number, your piece or pawn can be captured.

Sounds simple. But something is missing, as this example shows.

WHAT'S MISSING?

GM Anish Giri
GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Magnus Carlsen International (2.2.),
04.19.2020



BLACK TO MOVE

White's pieces seem secure. Only his knight is attacked by a black piece and its P factor is zero.

But the equation leaves out what David Bronstein, called "the most powerful weapon in chess" — the ability to make the next move.

QUIZ FOR FEBRUARY

A century ago the world was recovering from a different kind of long vacation from chess: There had been no strong international tournaments since World War I began in 1914. That ended with Budapest 1921, a 12-player round robin that became one of Alexander Alekhine's first great triumphs. He went undefeated in a field that included Max Euwe, Yefim Bogoljubov and Ernst Grünfeld. The tournament provides six examples for this month's quiz. Look for the fastest winning line of play. This will usually mean the forced win of a decisive amount of material, such as a rook or minor piece. For solutions, see Page 50.

PROBLEM I. Savielly Tartakower Endre Steiner



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM II. Alexander Alekhine Yefim Bogolyubov



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM III. Borislav Kostić Endre Steiner



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM IV. Alexander Alekhine Károly Sterk



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM V. Borislav Kostić Ernst Grünfeld



WHITE TO MOVE

PROBLEM VI. Alexander Alekhine Zoltan von Balla



WHITE TO MOVE

After 25. ... Rd1! the P factor for the f1-rook was zero. But there is a threat to make it plus one.

White allowed 26. Qc4 Qf3!. The only additional defender of the rook is the king but 27. Kg1 Bd4+ fails.

White resigned in view of 27. Rxd1 Qxd1+ 28. Rg1 Qf3+ 29. Rg2 because of 29. ... Rd8 and 30. ... Rd1+.

Examples like that raise a vital question. Is a piece or pawn safe when its P factor is zero?

Aron Nimzovich endorsed a policy he called "Überdeckung" or "overprotection." He was talking about a key center square. If you give it extra support, your opponent's next move won't endanger your control of it.

The great Australian writer C. J. S. Purdy suggested pieces and pawns should be overprotected as well: "It is good to have things protected in advance," he said. "But it is not so good to protect them when actually attacked." The reason is that your opponent can attack them again — after all, he gets to make the next move — and build his threats into a dangerous initiative.

Many of Mikhail Tal's first brilliancies featured sacrifices as White on e7, g7 and h7. They turned out to be "underprotected."

Tal rarely won that way in his later years. His style hadn't changed, he said. Rather, his opponents had learned about his fondness for e7, g7 and h7. "Everyone knows that," he

complained. "They protect those squares not once but four times!"

Some Soviet-era teachers taught a form of "underprotection." Bronstein was influenced by this thinking in his youth. He helped invent the King's Indian Defense but adopted a strange strategy. He seemed to make sure every piece of his was well guarded.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, ORTHODOX VARIATION (E94)

Gerald Abrahams

David Bronstein

Great Britain-Soviet Union match, London, 9.22.1947

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. d4 O-O 6. Be2 Nbd7 7. O-O e5 8. Bg5 h6 9. Be3 c6 10. h3 Re8 11. d5 c5 12. Qd2 Kh7 13. g4 Ng8!? 14. Kh2 Nf8 15. Bd3 Kh8 16. Rg1 Nh7

"I now know how you manage to win so many games," a Soviet colleague, Semyen Furman, told Bronstein. "You maneuver your pieces in such a way that the opponent can never attack them in one move."

17. Rg2 Bd7 18. Ne2 Qf6 19. Kg3 Rf8 20. h4? Qe7 21. Qc2? Nh6!

(see diagram top of next column)

The question of the proper amount of protection raises another issue: How can you win

if your pieces are closely guarding one another?



Bronstein found a way to attack anyway. Now 22. g5 hxg5 23. Nxg5 Ng4 24. Bd2 N8f6 and ... Nf6-h5+ is strong.

The rest was: 22. Nh2 Nxg4! 23. Nxg4 f5 24. Nxe5 dxe5 25. f4 Nf6 26. Rh1 fxe4 27. Bxe4 Nxe4+ 28. Qxe4 exf4+ 29. Kf3 Qxe4+ 30. Kxe4 Rae8+ 31. Kd3 Bf5+ 32. Kd2 fxe3+, White resigned.

You might think that computers would be able to improve the formula of A minus D equals P. But what we've seen from AlphaZero, Stockfish, LCZero *et al* is that they can attack with unprotected pieces because they won't be tactically surprised. Not if you can calculate 20-plus moves into the future.

As for us, "underprotection" is just an artificial guide for our inferior human brains. ♠

IN THE NEWS

The latest news from the world of chess by JOHN HARTMANN

U.S. STRIKES GOLD AT ONLINE WORLD CADETS AND YOUTH

With the COVID-19 pandemic still raging, FIDE canceled their over-the-board youth competitions and instead ran them online. The 2020 FIDE World Online Cadets and Youth Championships were contested in two parts: continental qualifiers ran from November 27-December 13, 2020, while the event finals were held from December 19-24, 2020.

Team USA sent 23 players to the 10-event finals, including 16 continental qualifiers, four wild card selections, and three players who directly qualified for the finals by rating. When the dust cleared, Americans earned a total of eight medals, including four golds, making US Chess the most decorated federation in the competition.

Congratulations to the winners!

IM Carissa Yip, gold for U18 Girls

Dimitar Mardov, gold for U12 Open

Alice Lee, gold for U12 Girls

Omya Vidyarthi, gold for U10 Girls

WIM Thalia Cervantes, silver for U18 Girls

Zoey Tang, silver medalist for U12 Girls

IM Christopher Yoo, bronze for U14 Open

Bach Ngo, bronze for U12 Open

NEW TITLES!

Congratulations to Hans Niemann, who was awarded the grandmaster title contingent upon raising his rating to 2500 at the 2020 Online FIDE Congress held in December. As he has (per “chess Twitter”) achieved that rating during recent tournaments in Europe, we congratulate him on becoming America’s newest grandmaster!

Congratulations are also in order for newly minted International Master Josiah Stearman.

RUSSIAN CHAMPIONSHIP SUPERFINALS

The Russian Chess Federation wrapped up 2020 with its two “Championship Superfinals,” held from December 5-16, 2020 at the Central Chess Club in Moscow. The 73rd Open Championship was won by GM Ian Nepomniachtchi at 7½/11, his second such



GM DANIIL DUBOV

career victory. He was trailed by GM Sergey Karjakin at 7/11 and GMs Vladimir Fedoseev and Daniil Dubov at 6½/11. GM Mikhail Antipov was forced to withdraw from the event after six rounds due to a positive test for COVID-19.

While Nepomniachtchi, currently tied for first place in the frozen Candidates Tournament along with GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and Karjakin took top honors, it was Dubov who garnered the most attention with his fantastically imaginative play. Dubov defeated both Nepomniachtchi and Karjakin in fine style, with his win over the latter destined to appear in best games anthologies for years to come.

GRÜNFELD DEFENSE, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D85)

GM Daniil Dubov (2702)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2784)

73rd Russian Chess Federation Championship Superfinals (9), 12.14.2020

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. e4 Nxc3 6. bxc3 Bg7 7. Bb5+ c6 8. Ba4 b5 9. Bb3 a5 10. Nf3 O-O 11. O-O a4 12. Bc2 c5 13. Rb1 Nc6 14. d5!?

Improving on 14. Be3 cxd4 15. cxd4 Bg4 16. Rxb5 Bxf3 17. gxf3 Bxd4 18. Rd5 Bxe3 19. Rxd8 Rfxd8 GM Nakamura-GM Nepomniachtchi (Paris 2019).

14. ... Ne5 15. Nxe5 Bxe5 16. Bh6 Ba6!?



GM ALEKSANDRA GORYACHKINA (L) AND GM IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI (R)

Offering an Exchange in the style of Petrosian!

It’s not clear that Nepomniachtchi had to give up the Exchange when 16. ... Re8 was possible, especially as the c3–pawn remains a real target. Play might continue 17. Qe1!? (17. Rxb5 Ba6 is unclear) 17. ... Qa5 (17. ... e6 18. f4 Bh8 19. e5 exd5 20. Qf2!? is an alternative) 18. Bd2 e6 19. f4 Bg7 20. d6 e5 21. f5 and things are quite messy.

17. Bxf8 Kxf8 18. f4

White tries to hold the pawn with 18. Qf3 but now Black’s queenside play seems justified after 18. ... Qa5 19. Rfc1 b4.

18. ... Bxc3 19. Rf3 Qa5 20. e5! Kg8?!

Right file, wrong square, for reasons that become quite clear. Black had to play 20. ... Kg7! when he’s holding on.

21. Kh1 Rd8

No better is 21. ... Bb7 because of 22. e6! fxe6 23. Rg3! with a serious attack.

22. e6!

Exposing the flaw in Black’s 20th move — the point is that now 23. exf7 comes with check, drawing the black king back into the kill zone, and the g6–pawn is underdefended. (This could have been played on move 21 as well.)

22. ... fxe6 23. Bxg6! hxg6 24. Qc2

Total carnage.

24. ... Bg7 25. Rg3 g5 26. Qg6! Qd2 27. Rxc5 Qc3 28. Qxe6+ Kf8 29. Re1

Now Black must give up material to keep the game alive.

29. ... Qxe1+ 30. Qxe1 Bf6 31. Qh4! Rd6

Note that Black can't take the rook: 31. ... Bxc5 32. Qh8+ Kf7 33. Qxd8 and it's time to resign.

32. Qh7 Ke8 33. Qg8+ Kd7 34. Qa8 Bxc5 35. fxc5 c4 36. h4 b4 37. Qa7+ Ke8 38. Qb8+ Kf7 39. Qxb4 Rxd5 40. Qxa4, Black resigned.

GIUOCO PIANO (C53)

GM Daniil Dubov (2702)

GM Sergey Karjakin (2752)

73rd Russian Chess Federation

Championship Superfinals (11), 12.16.2020

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d4 exd4 6. b4!?

What's old is new again, as this rare move — first played in an 1873 inter-city game between Barmen and Berlin — proves.

The hoary old 6. cxd4 Bb4+ 7. Nc3 Nxe4 8. 0-0 Bxc3 9. d5 has been analyzed nearly to death, while 6. e5 d5 7. Bb5 (7. Be2!?) 7. ... Ne4 8. cxd4 Bb6 9. Nc3 has grown in popularity as players look to avoid the mainlines of the Berlin Defense and the Giuoco Piano.

6. ... Bb6 7. e5 Ne4

The alternative 7. ... d5 8. exf6 dxc4 9. Qe2+ Be6 10. b5 has been tried a few times, most famously in an offhand game with GM Viswanathan Anand: 10. ... Nb4 11. fxc7 Rg8 12. cxb4 Qf6 13. 0-0 Qxg7 14. g3 0-0-0 15. a4 d3 16. Qb2 Qxg3+!! 17. hxc3 Rxc3+ 18. Kh2 Rxf3 19. Bg5 Bd4 20. Qd2 Rg8 21. Ra3 h6 22. Rg1 Rh3+ 23. Kg2 Rxc3+ 24. Kf1 Rxc3+ 25. Kxg1 Bd5 and White resigned in Skvortsov-GM Anand (Zurich 2017). After the text play gets very concrete.

8. Bd5 Nxc3 9. Nxc3 dxc3 10. Bg5 Ne7

It's hard to imagine that any GM would weaken the kingside with 10. ... f6 11. Bh4!.

11. 0-0 h6 12. Bh4 0-0

12. ... g5!? is an interesting alternative: if White tries 13. Nxc5 (White has attacking chances after 13. Bg3 Nxd5 14. Qxd5) there is 13. ... hxc5 (13. ... Nxd5!? 14. Nf3 Ne7 15. Bf6 with compensation) 14. Bxc5 d6 15. Qf3.

13. Re1 Qe8 14. Bb3 a5 15. Bf6! a4

The bishop is immune from capture: 15. ... gxf6 16. exf6 and the pin suffocates Black, while 15. ... Nf5!? is met with 16. g4 and White's initiative rages on.

16. Bc4 Ng6 17. Qd3 d5

Taking the bishop is still forbidden: if 17. ... gxf6 18. Qxc6+ and mate to follow.

18. exd6 e.p. Be6



19. Qxc6!!

After the game Dubov said (in the Russian language commentary) that "I saw the idea of 19. Qxc6 and, first of all, it seemed to me that I wasn't worse. Second, I decided that since I was already out of contention, why shouldn't I make a gift for myself and the spectators by playing an interesting game?" What a gift it was!

Note that the mundane 19. Bxe6 leaves Black with the advantage after 19. ... Nf4.

19. ... fxc6 20. Rxe6 Qf7

The computer proposes 20. ... Qc6 and after 21. Re7+ Qxc4 22. Rxc7+ Kh8 23. Rxc7+ Rxf6 24. Rxc4 White can only claim a minimal edge. Karjakin decides to take the bull by the horns and keep the extra material.

21. Bxc3 Kh8 22. Re4 Qf5 23. Re7 Rg8

Karjakin could have tried for counterplay with 23. ... Bxf2+ but after 24. Kh1! (24. Kxf2? Qc2+) 24. ... Rg8 play resembles the game continuation.

24. Bxc8 Rxc8 25. dxc7 Qc2 26. Be5

White has enough material for the queen, and more than enough positional compensation with the c7-pawn nearing the goal line.

26. ... Bxf2+ 27. Kh1 Bb6 28. h3! Kh7 29. Re1 a3 30. Kh2 g5 31. Nd4 Qc4 32. Nf5! Qxb4 33. Rc1 Kg6 34. Rxc7+! Kxf5 35. Rxc8 Bxc7 36. Bxc7 Qb2 37. Rc5+ Ke4 38. Rd8, Black resigned.

The 70th Women's Championship was won by GM Aleksandra Goryachkina after an Armageddon playoff against GM Polina Shuvalova. Shuvalova led throughout much of the event, but Goryachkina caught her in the final round, forcing a rapid playoff to decide the championship when both players finished at 8/11. After both games were drawn, Goryachkina was able to win the Armageddon game after Shuvalova blundered in the middlegame.

CHINESE CHAMPIONSHIP

The Chinese Championships were contested over-the-board from December 19-30, 2020 in Xinghua (Jiangsu Province). The Open Championship saw a three-way tie for first place between GMs Yu Yangyi, Lu Shanglei and Wei Yi, all at 8/11, and with Yu Yangyi taking the title on tiebreaks. Current Women's World Champion GM Ju Wenjun took fourth place with 6/11.

GM and former Women's World Champion Tan Zhongyi won the Women's Championship with 8/11, a half-point ahead of IM Guo Qui and WGM Zhai Mo, who both finished at 7½/11.

Lu Shanglei had the most picturesque position of the event at the culmination of his win over Bai Jinshi.

BISHOP'S OPENING (C24)

GM Lu Shanglei (2615)

GM Bai Jinshi (2618)

2020 ch-CHN (5), 12.23.2020

1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Nf6 3. d3 c6 4. Nf3 d5 5. Bb3 a5 6. a4 Bb4+ 7. c3 Bd6 8. exd5 Nxd5 9. 0-0 0-0 10. Bg5 f6 11. Bh4 Kh8 12. Re1 Bg4 13. d4 exd4 14. Qxd4 Bxf3 15. gxf3 Na6 16. Nd2 Bc5 17. Qc4 Nxc3 18. bxc3 Qxd2 19. Rad1 Qh6 20. Bg3 f5

Black is up a pawn, but White has compensation in his active pieces. Now watch how Lu Shanglei uses that activity to conjure a fine victory.

21. Re6 Qh5?

Black keeps control with 21. ... Rf6 22. Rde1 Rxe6 23. Rxe6 Qg5.

22. Be5!

The threat is 23. Bxc7+ Kxc7 24. Qf4! with the idea of 25. Qe5+ and mate to follow.

22. ... Qg5+ 23. Kh1 Bxf2 24. Qf1 Bc5 25. f4! Qh4 26. Rd3!

White brings his last piece into the attack.

26. ... Qh5 27. Rh3 Qf7 28. Reh6!, Black resigned.



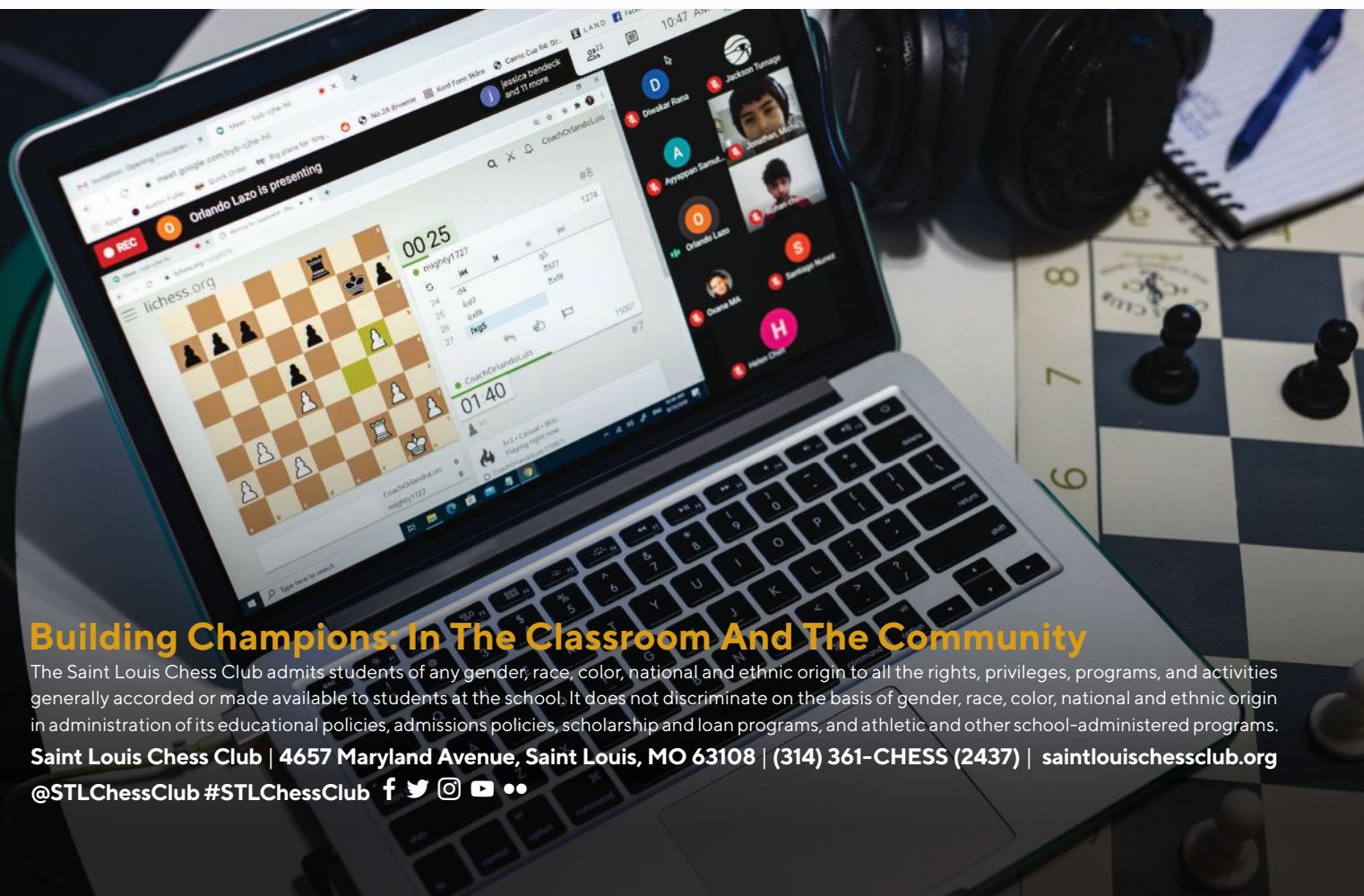
Mate is unavoidable.♚

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Masterminds: Chess Prodigies

Masterminds: Chess Prodigies is a family-friendly exhibition that tells the stories of notable chess prodigies including Bobby Fischer, World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen and the Polgar sisters. Through photographs, videos and mementos of important chess matches and tournaments from the collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, visitors will learn more about these talented young players as well as their later accomplishments. The exhibition will also highlight the achievements of players who took up the game later in life and still made a mark on the world of chess.



On View: February 11–November 7, 2021

worldchesshof.org @WorldChessHOF

#MastermindsChess     

Chesspionage

Chess is a conspicuous fixture in espionage history.

By **MENACHEM WECKER**



SPIES MAY KNOW ESPIONAGE, BUT THEY DON'T NECESSARILY KNOW 'WHITE ON RIGHT' AND 'QUEENS ON OWN COLOR.'

In 1962, a game of broken telephone between two Washington chess partners likely prevented nuclear war amid the Cuban Missile Crisis. When National Press Club bartender Johnny Prokoff misheard reporters discussing a potential U.S. invasion of Cuba, he told chess partner Anatoly Gorsky an attack was imminent. A KGB officer working under the Russian news agency TASS cover, Gorsky ran the shoddy “intelligence” up the Soviet chain. Nikita Khrushchev quickly opted to

respect the U.S. blockade; eavesdropping bungled, yet crisis averted.

The story and that of Soviet spy Valentin Ivanov, who cruised through the Press Club’s 1958 chess championship before throwing the final three games likely to avoid calling undue attention to himself, appear in Steven Usdin’s 2018 book *Bureau of Spies: The Secret Connections Between Espionage and Journalism in Washington*. “Ivanov played chess with William Hamilton Martin and Bernon F.

Mitchell, two NSA (National Security Agency) cryptologists whom he recruited,” Usdin, senior editor at BioCentury Publications, told *Chess Life*.

Usdin doesn’t think highly-unpredictable intelligence work resembles comparatively sure-fire chess, but his book details several overlaps. “Chess served as an excellent opportunity to meet and spend time with potential recruits,” he said. “A game of chess is also a good way to bolster a potential recruit’s

ego. I can imagine Soviet officers calibrating their play to make potential recruits feel that they are talented and smart.”

On a recent visit to the International Spy Museum in Washington's L'Enfant Plaza neighborhood, I noticed several chess-related artifacts. They turned out to be a microcosm of a broader story of spies pitting their minds against one another over chess boards as they passed time on and between surveillance assignments.

Secretly-outfitted chess sets hid maps, compasses, currency, and sensitive documents, and covert agents met and recruited moles at chess tournaments. Even the 1963 James Bond film *From Russia with Love* opens with Vladěk Šeybal playing Czech grandmaster and SPECTRE agent “Kronsteen,” in a scene that stages the final moves of Boris Spassky's victory over David Bronstein in the 1960 Leningrad championship. (See the June 2020 issue of *Chess Life* for Bruce Pandolfini's take on the “Kronsteen” game. ~ed.)

I searched for “chess” in declassified Freedom of Information Act files on the Central Intelligence Agency website, yielding 3,738 results. At first I was floored, but concern about magazine feature word counts gave way to surprise when about 99 percent had nothing to do with black-and-white pieces. “CHESS” turned out to be a former CIA password for imagery obtained from Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance planes.

“Suggest CHESS be used as the codeword for photography by any air breathing vehicle over denied areas,” wrote an official — name redacted — in a Nov. 25, 1969 memorandum. A May 1, 1963 note, “Downgrading of Talent Acquired Photography of Haiti and Dominican Republic,” added that officials would aim, when releasing imagery from top secret to secret designations, “to negate any possible compromise of codeword CHESS.”

This was ironic. Among the Spy Museum collection was a copy of Fred Reinfeld's *Attack and Counterattack in Chess*, which Francis Gary Powers used in Soviet jail. Powers (1929-77), whose CIA spy plane — you guessed it, the Lockheed U-2 associated with the CIA “CHESS” codeword — was shot down May 1, 1960, spent a year, nine months, and 10 days in Vladimir Central Prison.

His Latvian cellmate Zigurds Krūmiņš, who apparently informed on him to Soviet authorities, taught him basket-weaving and chess. Two of the few personal items Powers carried upon his 1962 release in the prisoner exchange on Berlin's Glienicke

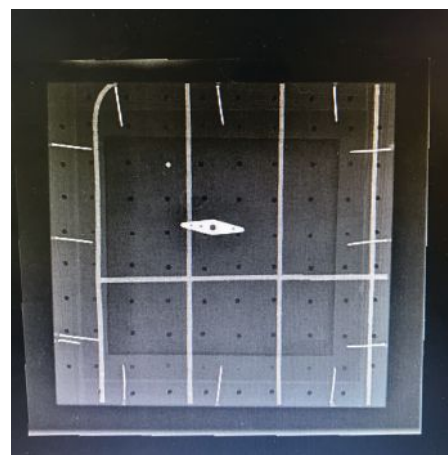
Bridge dramatized in Steven Spielberg's 2015 film *Bridge of Spies* were his chess set and the Reinfeld book. (“Library of Gary Powers” is embossed on the inside title page of the book at the Spy Museum, said Alexis Albion, curator of special exhibits.)

Over coffee recently at the Press Club's Reliable Source bar, Francis Gary Powers Jr. said his father, who continued to play chess after his release, taught him to play at 10 or 11. (Powers was 12 when his dad died in a crash piloting a helicopter.) Though his mother encouraged it, his father wouldn't let him win, and Powers, historian and founder and chairman emeritus of the Vint Hill, Virginia-based Cold War Museum, remembers winning by “dumb luck” after a few days.

The set his father brought back from Russia was about six by three inches, encased in leather with red and white pieces, Powers recalled. Sadly, someone — he suspects a friend — stole it along with silver and coins when Powers was 15 or 16. A random thief wouldn't have coveted the little set, Powers thinks, but he suspects a kid who played with it and liked it. “That always pissed me off,” he said.

Powers' father remained friends with former cellmate Krūmiņš, whom he came to believe was snitching on him when he realized the Latvian spoke five or six languages and could beat him at chess blindfolded. “Dad's beginning to think, ‘Oh crap. This guy is so smart he remembers everything,’” Powers said.

Florian Schimikowski, head of collection at Berlin's Deutsches Spionagemuseum (Spy Museum), believes chess playing and intelligence gathering involve similar muscles.



Facing page: A chess set used by the M19 (a division of the British military that assisted captured Allied soldiers) to conceal items such as maps, currency, and other escape aids. Source: The 1942 M19 manual *Per Ardua Libertas*. This page, top: The x-ray image of Phil Froom's Jaques of London secret set, on display at the International Spy Museum. When he saw the image, Froom recognized the propeller shape as a “swinger” escape compass; center: A close up of a map hidden in Froom's Jaques of London secret set; bottom: Items uncovered in Froom's set included three rare mulberry paper M19 escape maps, a Third Reich 50 and a 20 Reichsmark banknote, and the swinger compass.

“Chess trains the ability to see two or three or even more moves ahead — a skill that proves useful in a variety of spy operations,” he told *Chess Life*.

“In many operations, you have to act like in a chess game: observe and analyze the moves of your enemy, move your own game pieces (agents) in the right manner, sometimes sacrifice pieces in order to achieve the big goal,

Master Conel Hugh O’Donel (or C.H.O’D) Alexander and Philip Stuart Milner-Barry, a former British Chess Federation president, according to Schimikowski. And Alan Turing, one of the leading code-breakers, was a noted chess player and co-creator of the first computer chess program.

“Chess players were chosen for this task because they have great pattern recognition

Spy Museum. “For our visitors, it is more interesting to see how the thinking of chess players can influence espionage work, especially in cryptography,” said Schimikowski. “The chess game is one of the many fascinating exhibits, which show how creative intelligence services are in the process of converting and using everyday objects for their purposes.”

In Washington, the museum’s special



Poke a paper clip into the center hole in this chessboard to release the hidden locking mechanism. Inside, there are compartments for a URANUS 2 microdot camera.

Chessboard concealment, East Germany (HVA), ca. 1961

Above: An East German chess set from 1961, courtesy of the Mr. & Mrs. H. Keith Melton Collection at the International Spy Museum.
Below: A Russian civil war chess set, courtesy of the Francis Lara Collection at the International Spy Museum.

War Games!

This Russian Civil War chess set pits the Bolshevik leaders and secret police against the anti-communist White Army.

The Bolshevik chess pieces feature, among others, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Josef Stalin, and intelligence chief Felix Dzerzhinsky. The White Army pieces portray Cossacks and former soldiers of the Russian Imperial Army.

Chess set, USSR, ca. 1945
On loan from The Francis Lara Collection



and lure your enemy into traps,” he added.

Retired U.S. counterintelligence officer Stuart Arthur Herrington, who worked in Berlin, was known for his particularly-effective interrogation techniques. He built relationships and gained trust rather than pressuring and torturing, according to Schimikowski. Others did the same, such as the secret World War II U.S. military facility P.O. Box 1142 in Fort Hunt, Virginia.

“It is said that they mainly used cigarettes and chess to build up trust and then collect information from interrogated persons,” Schimikowski said.

Chess players’ analytical thinking is also transferable to intelligence agencies, as when the code-breaking operation at England’s Bletchley Park recruited chess players to break the Nazi Enigma code. Bletchley included famous chess players, including International

skills,” Schimikowski said. “Strong chess players have thousands of figure patterns stored in their memories, which help them to predict the moves of their opponents. These skills can also be used to find patterns in encrypted texts.”

JM “Bill” Steadman, curator of the Military Intelligence Museum in England, is unaware of studies linking chess and intelligence work. But he told *Chess Life* it’s well known that both require brain power and the ability to recognize complex patterns and data sets.

“The codebreakers at Bletchley Park were just one group of people with such attributes, and chess would no doubt have been part of many of their lives both as a pastime as well as a tool to hone the mind,” Steadman said.

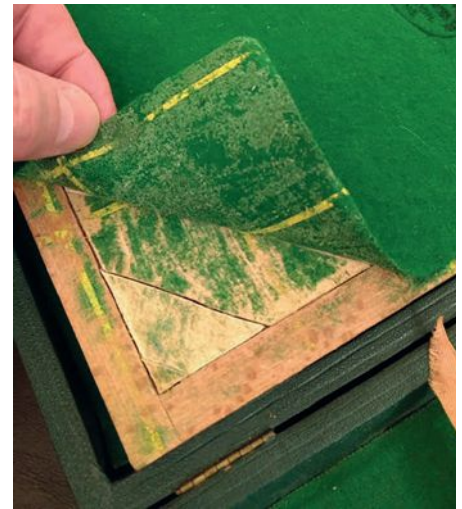
At Berlin’s Spy Museum, the lone chess-related object is a replica of a travel chessboard with a secret interior compartment for microfilm, which is on view at Washington’s

exhibits curator Albion gave some thought to the connection between chess and intelligence work. “Analytical thinking, strategic thinking — that has a lot to do with chess,” she said.

Albion shared a story about the 1961 East German chess set with a hidden lock and interior compartments to hold a tiny URANUS 2 microdot camera and film. “You were looking for normal everyday-looking objects that wouldn’t be suspicious, basically, if you were passing on something to an agent,” she said.

When a straight pin or an unfolded paperclip is inserted in the center, a locking mechanism releases, and a back compartment opens up revealing two small sections inside. Albion hasn’t handled the object, but she was in the room when the collections manager opened it. “She was fiddling with a paperclip,” Albion remembered. It took a few tries.

“She knew what she was supposed to do, but



Left: The book Francis Gary Powers used to learn chess in Soviet prison, among other belongings he brought back with him, on view at the International Spy Museum in Washington; Above: The back of the Jaques of London secret set, also at the International Spy Museum. It took a craftsman almost a hour to carefully peel back the green baize cloth to uncover the hidden secret compartment.

to find where the catch is.' As soon as you find the catch, bam, it came out," Albion said. "It's always exciting."

UK collector, historian, and former British military intelligence officer Phil Froom has a similar experience. Researching his 2015 book *Evasion and Escape Devices Produced by MI9, MIS-X, and SOE in World War II*, Froom gained access to an M19 Per Ardua Libertas book, where he learned of the World War II British intelligence arm's use of chess sets to conceal escape aids for captured spies.

The set from Froom's collection belonged to the father, who was MI9, of an "old gentleman" Froom met researching his book. On one visit, the man pulled a travel chess set out of a box and told Froom he wasn't sure why his dad, who didn't play chess, kept it. "This immediately piqued my interest, as I knew MI9 had used chess sets to conceal escape items, but I had never seen one," Froom told *Chess Life*.

The maker's name stamped on the back, Jaques of London, matched secret sets made for MI9, so Froom informed the man he might have a "loaded" set. He agreed to sell it for "a significant sum of money" if loaded, and "a figure lacking a number of zeroes if it was not." Froom took it to a local veterinarian practice, which he asked to x-ray "weird items" for him. "They were now somewhat used to the crazy old guy calling them up with another wild goose chase," he said.

When the x-ray image popped up on the screen, the vets were disappointed to see just nails and strange lines. But Froom saw a small, propeller-shape. "I think they were expecting

a Walther PPK (pistol) of Bond fame," Froom said. "My heart missed a beat, as I immediately recognized the object as a 'swinger' escape compass." He figured a Jaques of London chess set with a compass likely contained more escape items, so he called the owner, who haggled further. "He won and I became much poorer," Froom said. (He didn't disclose the price.)

Loaded set in hand, Froom contacted the still-operating game maker and asked if someone could help disassemble what the company had made some 70 years prior. Soon Froom and four directors met in a company boardroom, and a nervous-looking craftsman gingerly broke into the set. It took nearly an hour to remove the green baize cloth backing before even accessing the board, when his sharp scoring tool kept hitting wood. Froom suggested cutting further into the board.

Finally, a small cavity in the center emerged, yielding a black waterproof pouch. Everyone was excited — he remembered cries of "Well then! Open it!" — and Froom broke the seal, opened the septuagenarian pouch, and produced three very rare mulberry paper MI9 escape maps, a Third Reich 50 and a 20 Reichsmark banknote, and the compass. "Huge relief from the poor craftsman, who had fulfilled his task without ruining anything, and amazement from the board members and of course me," Froom said.

He held onto the set for a while but decided it would be better in a museum display than a drawer in his den. He held onto the pouch and its contents, but sent the set to the International Spy Museum. What better place could there be for a spy tool like this set to hide out than in

plain sight on public display in a museum.

One of the most culturally-telling chess objects at the museum is a handmade set from 1945, portraying the Russian civil war and pitting the anti-Communist White Army against the Bolshevik Red Army. The detail is impressive. Bolshevik king Vladimir Lenin has a ticker-tape machine, a technology he really used to get rapid information. Other pieces include Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the father of Soviet intelligence (the Cheka), and White Army king Pyotr Wrangel, wearing a white Cossack hat.

A sister set in the museum's collection, also circa 1945, pits the Soviets against the Nazis, with Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler as kings, respectively. The Nazi knights are paratroopers, and the pawns are SS officers.

When Albion thinks about who paid for the sets, particularly the first one which I saw on view at the museum, she figures it would have been dangerous to own such a thing, in which the White Army could ever win.

"This is really a very risky chess set. Think about it. It would have been really quite dangerous to have had this," she said. "The implication is it would have to have been somebody who had the [guts] to put it on display. It's a beautiful piece. It's beautifully done. Beautiful, deep detail, so we think it was meant to be displayed in somebody's office." Not only did chess sets sometimes have hidden compartments within, but their external appearance too could carry thinly-veiled and barely-coded messages about how important and powerful their owners were. ♠



THE 2020 ONLINE OLYMPIAD *for people with disabilities*

Team USA surges to strong tenth place finish.

Story by **LIOR LAPID** | Interviews by **DORA MARTINEZ**

When Team USA looked ahead to the 2020 Online Olympics for People with Disabilities, contested from November 21-27, 2020, they set an ambitious goal for a top-10 finish. With a starting rank of 39th out of 60 teams, this perhaps seemed an unlikely outcome.

Team USA — consisting of Michael Aigner, Griffin McConnell, Pranav Shankar, Jessica

evinced a professional level of discipline in preparing openings in-depth for many hours each day, and embodied a deep and unwavering belief in themselves against all odds. Everyone on the team played an important role in this great accomplishment, and we achieved what we set out to do: tying for 10th place overall.

The two reserve players on our team did not have the opportunity to play official

whenever “Oskie Z” was around. Having just turned 12 years old, with his rating on the rise, Zoffer will have many opportunities to represent Team USA in the future.

At nine years old, Nguyen Nam Tran had the honor of being the youngest player in the world to qualify for the Olympiad. He is another talented young player to watch for, with an ability to focus intensely that belies his years.

Tournament regulations mandated the participation of at least one female player for each team in each round, making Jessica Lauser the most essential player on Team USA. The three-time and reigning U.S. Blind Champion, and the subject of a recent article in *The New York Times*, Lauser played many exciting games in her trademark aggressive style. Her tactical prowess was on full display in an impressive victory against North Macedonia’s Marija Arsova. In the final round against Brazil, Lauser won a piece in just 10 moves by springing an opening trap we had prepared the night before. She converted her advantage with ease, securing a strong finish for the team.

Our fearless competitors possessed indomitable spirits, bouncing back with consecutive wins after each loss.

Lauser, Oskar Zoffer, and Nguyen Nam Tran in board order — faced higher-ranked teams in every single round, losing only two of those seven matches. Our fearless competitors possessed indomitable spirits, bouncing back with consecutive wins after each loss. They

games in this Olympiad, but they both deserve a special mention. Oskar Zoffer assisted with live online commentary and post-game interviews in every round, and his positive energy was contagious. Win or lose, his teammates could not help but smile



*Win or lose,
his teammates
could not
help but smile
whenever
“Oskie Z”
was around.*

PHOTO: TONY CORTIZAS JR.

RESERVE PLAYER OSKAR ZOFFER, 12, ASSISTED WITH LIVE COMMENTARY AND SPREAD GOOD CHEER TO HIS TEAMMATES.

ENGLISH OPENING (A36)

Jessica Lauser (1566)
 Marija Arsova
 Online Olympiad for People with
 Disabilities (4), 11.24.2020
 Annotations by Lior Lapid

1. c4 c5 2. g3 g6 3. Nc3 Nc6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. e3 f5 6. Nge2 e6 7. O-O Nge7 8. d4 d6 9. d5!

Lauser has a lot of experience playing this system with White, so she has a good feel for the pawn structure and strategic ideas behind it. This advance sets up her plan of playing Nf4-e6 to dominate the light squares.

9. ... exd5 10. cxd5 Nb4

Black's 10. ... Ne5 can be met the same way that Lauser played in the game: 11. Nf4 O-O 12. Ne6 Bxe6 13. dxe6 N5c6 14. Rb1! with the idea of e3-e4 next.

11. a3 Na6 12. Nf4

White has already achieved a strategically winning position.

12. ... O-O 13. Ne6

Also strong was 13. e4, e.g., 13. ... fxe4 14. Nxe4 Nc7 15. Re1 with Ne4-g5-e6 or h2-h4-h5 coming.

13. ... Bxe6 14. dxe6 Qc8?

14. ... Nc7 was much better, but 15. Bxb7 Rb8 16. Bg2 Nxe6 17. Qd3 leaves White with an overwhelming advantage thanks to her control of the light squares and Black's weak backward pawn.

15. Qxd6 Qc7 16. Qd1 Rad8 17. Qc2 Rf6



18. e4! Rxe6 19. exf5 Nxf5 20. Bd5

An understandable decision, but this bishop's impressive offensive and defensive capabilities made it worth even more than a rook in this position.

Also winning is 20. Bg5, as all of White's pieces will soon be better than their counterparts. A sample line is 20. ... Rd7 (to keep the idea of ... Rd7xd5 after Bg2-d5) 21. Nb5! Qb6 22. Qc4 Kh8 23. Rfe1 Rxe1+ 24. Rxe1 and White is winning.

20. ... Rxd5 21. Nxd5 Qd6?

Having eliminated White's powerful light-square bishop, 21. ... Qc6! would have given Black a dangerous attack with ideas like ... Nf5-d4-f3+.

22. Rd1?

It is natural to bring the rook into the game, but the knight should have retreated first with 22. Nf4.

22. ... Bd4?

The final mistake. 22. ... Nd4 was much stronger, as 23. Qc4 b5 24. Bf4 (or 24. Qa2 c4 25. Nc3 Qc6 when it's suddenly Black who dominates the light squares) 24. ... bxc4 25. Bxd6 Rxd6 reaches a winning endgame for Black.

From this point on, Lauser converts her advantage precisely and does not allow her opponent any chances to get back into the game.

23. Nf4 Rf6 24. Qe2 Ne7 25. Be3 g5 26. Nh5 Rh6 27. Bxg5 Re6 28. Qf3 Qd7 29. Nf6+ Rxf6 30. Bxf6 Qe8 31. Bxd4 cxd4 32. Rxd4 Nc5 33. Re1 Qf7 34. Rd8+ Kg7 35. Qc3+ Qf6 36. Qxc5 Nc6 37. Rd7+ Kg8 38. Re8+ Qf8 39. Qxf8, mate.

Pranav Shankar led the team with a phenomenal 5/7 score on board three, and at 13 years old, he has a bright future ahead of him. With a tireless work ethic, Shankar learned many new opening lines by heart to prepare for each specific opponent, and he also focused heavily on psychological preparation in our

White is solidly up a pawn.

9. ... g6 10. Bd2 Bg7 11. Nf3 O-O 12. O-O d6 13. a4

I was thinking about 13. c4 followed by Bd2-c3, but rejected it because of 13. ... Qa3 which recovers the gambit pawn.

13. ... Na6 14. Rfe1 Bb7 15. e4 Nc7

Now that the knight is no longer controlling the b4 square, White can push the pawn.



16. c4!

White's bishop on b5, although locked, will be an excellent piece in the rest of the game because it stops all Black counterplay on the queenside by closing it off.

16. ... Qa7 17. Bc3 Bxc3 18. Qxc3 Na6 19. e5 Bc8 20. Re3 Bg4 21. Rae1 Bxf3 22. Rxf3 Nb4 23. Rfe3!

They evinced a professional level of discipline ... and embodied a deep and unwavering belief in themselves against all odds.

training sessions. He notched upset wins over players rated about 300, 400, and even over 500 points higher than him. Shankar's eclectic strengths were on full display throughout the tournament, with games featuring strong opening preparation, decisive combinations, classy positional squeezes, and crushing kingside attacks.

BENKO GAMBIT (A57)

Pranav Shankar (1499)
 Sobrinho Elias Moyses (1884)
 Online Olympiad for People with
 Disabilities (7), 11.27.2020
 Annotations by Pranav Shankar

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6 5. e3 axb5 6. Bxb5 Qa5+ 7. Nc3 Ne4? 8. Qd3 Nxc3 9. bxc3

White is not annoyed by the black knight on b4. Instead, he keeps on going for seventh-rank domination.

23. ... Rac8 24. exd6 exd6 25. Re7 Rc7 26. Qf6 Rxe7 27. Rxe7 Qb6 28. Be8!

A nice finish to a beautiful technical game. The light-square bishop, which served very well as a stopper, now serves as the clincher by attacking f7, which is now indefensible because of White's domination of the seventh and eighth ranks.

28. ... Nxd5 29. Bxf7+, Black resigned.

Yet another rising star for Team USA is 16-year-old Griffin McConnell, who lived up to his "Comeback Kid" moniker on board two with dramatic come-from-behind victories in rounds three and six. In preparation for the fourth round, he bravely learned an opening he

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PLAYERS



BOARD ONE

MICHAEL AIGNER

How was your experience in this event?

I completely enjoyed it! It was really well run. The Tornelo platform turned out to be really convenient and none of my teammates had troubles. The [required] Zoom call, [used] to try to mitigate cheating, is unfortunately necessary and I thought that worked well. I was quite impressed with what FIDE put together for this event. Having the tournament online allowed people who otherwise cannot travel, to play from their own homes.

Do tournaments for players with disabilities offer additional value to your chess career?

Playing on board one, I played Mr. Meshkov from Russia, Mr. Severino from the Philippines, and some of the stronger players from South America. It was a competitive arena!

The schedule considered different time zones. Did this make the event more challenging?

Since I was at home, I had more flexibility. Still, the games were at 6 a.m. I got up at 4:30 a.m., had a good breakfast, and got ready for my games. I had jet lag without leaving my house!

Why do people know you as “f-pawn?”

I started playing the Bird opening first as White and I was not a good player — I was maybe 1500. I just wanted an opening which was a little bit weird and that I could play without a lot of heavy study. I played that opening far too long! I was already over 2000 when a grandmaster told me, “Michael, you’re a good player but, there is one thing you’re doing wrong — stop playing the Bird!” Eventually, I tried playing 1. e4 and he was right. In about a year and a half, my rating was 200 points higher.

Do you think that the creation of educational chess programs for people with disabilities could increase the number of U.S. players?

Absolutely! In the United States more than half of the players are kids and yet there are so few players with disabilities at scholastic tournaments. There’s got to be a certain percentage that have various physical and cognitive impairments.

Any advice for parents of children with disabilities that may be interested in taking up chess?

Reach out to your local chess community or club! There are so many people out there who love chess and love to see it spread. Now, with the internet, you can practice any time you want from home and self-teach with videos, websites or connect with a teacher online.



BOARD TWO

GRIFFIN MC CONNELL

How was your experience as part of Team USA?

It was amazing! Everyone on the team earned the right to be there. I finally met Michael and I know Pranav because we’ve been in some of the same events like the World Junior Championship for Players with Disabilities and other events. Jessica was inspiring!

What was the toughest challenge in this tournament?

When the tournament started, it was good! I didn’t have any seizures until round two. In that game, I had a seizure while I was playing the game and it got worse as the Olympiad went on. I had to tell myself not to give up!

Managing the time in your games must’ve been a challenge!

That was the biggest problem! Time passed when I had a seizure during a game, and all of a sudden my time went from 15 minutes to five minutes. I’m not very good at quick chess, so handling the time pressure was hard.

What has been the most surprising moment in your chess career?

It was in this Olympiad! In one of the games, my opponent offered a draw which I didn’t see because it was on my blind side. I was on time pressure and blundered a minor piece, but I managed to win. I never have surprising wins, but he got into time pressure and went crazy! That was a surprising victory. In another game, I drew an IM whose rating is 2498! That game was a draw but it still counts — I drew an IM, right?!!

PHOTOS:

TOP: MICHAEL AIGNER WAS NOMINATED FOR THE GAZPROM BRILLIANCY PRIZE.

MIDDLE: JESSICA LAUSER DISPLAYED HER TRADEMARK AGGRESSIVE STYLE.

BOTTOM: GRIFFIN MC CONNELL CHALKED UP TWO DRAMATIC COME-FROM-BEHIND VICTORIES.





PRANAV SHANKAR, BOARD THREE, LED THE TEAM WITH A STELLAR 5/7 SCORE.



BOARD THREE PRANAV SHANKAR

Tell us about your experience on board three for Team USA.

I felt proud to represent my country at an international event and I also had a deep desire to lead my team to a medal. The team did very well! We may not have gotten the medal, but it was a significant accomplishment given our seeding. We faced many challenges, but even through all this, we cheered for each other despite the outcome of the games.

What has been the most challenging thing about playing chess online?

During my games it is mostly my emotional management that is challenging. Before the pandemic, my rating was 1914 and now I am 1854. I lost rating points because we can't take breaks online; we have to stay in front of the camera. Playing in person, I have more space to move around and this makes it easier. Also, in person, the first thing I do, win or lose, is game analysis, but you can't go over your games after the rounds in online tournaments.

You refer to your disability as an invisible one. What does this mean?

When people are in a wheelchair, you can see these disabilities. [There are also] people like me, [people] who don't have characteristics that can be seen but [still] have a disability that has a significant impact on your daily life. These are invisible disabilities.

Who are your favorite players?

My favorite players are GMs Anatoly Karpov and Mikhail Botvinnik who are really logical, and I especially note them for their patience and strong emotional management. Karpov is infinitely patient and I also like GM Magnus Carlsen.

What do you look forward to the most once the pandemic is over?

I would like to participate in in-person math contests and chess tournaments. I can't wait to do this in person! Also, I want to visit my grandparents in India. I really miss them!



BOARD FOUR JESSICA LAUSER

What was it like to play in this event as part of Team USA?

While I'm certainly excited to be playing this event — and honored to be given the opportunity — I definitely felt the

weight of responsibility at being chosen, especially to play for the United States, in the first-ever such Olympiad. Something like this has been a longstanding dream of mine, considering the fact that I have qualified — six times out of six attempts — to play in various overseas Olympiads, and even World Championships, for blind and visually impaired players. A simple lack of funds has prevented me from ever doing so.

Has chess had a positive impact in your life?

Overall, I would say yes, as something I could physically tolerate and enjoy. [There are] so many other games, sports, and activities I simply could not do, having exertion-induced asthma, balance issues, and, of course, blindness. I have had to strike a balance, though, between chess and what I would call more important pursuits in life, like getting an education, maintaining regular employment, and living independently.

For me, probably most of all, chess has been a means by which I could, finally, come close to achieving some semblance of equality.

The mere act of playing chess — especially in junior high — provided me a tangible way to effectively combat near-constant teasing, name-calling, and verbal abuse I often suffered, entirely unprovoked, at the hands of classmates, all for being different. When I started beating the very same bullies in chess — who'd given me such grief for no reason — amazingly, all the teasing essentially stopped.

As a player with a visual impairment, how could getting support impact your life?

If I could get support, I would do so in the form of ongoing lessons, in order to help me finally break past some longstanding barriers to my overall chess success, which impede the kind of ratings progress many have told me I should have made by now. Likewise, I would love to pursue my academic and vocational goals to use these skills for gainful work. The point is, I want to have enough money and not have to experience homelessness again.

had never ventured to play in his life in order to exploit a specific weakness we had detected in Vladimir Trkaljanov's aggressive but narrow repertoire. Trkaljanov beat all six of his other opponents in the Olympiad, but McConnell, the underdog by nearly 300 points, obtained a winning position after just 11 moves and defeated him in impressive fashion.

SCOTCH OPENING (C45)

Griffin McConnell (1823)
Vladimir Trkaljanov (2096)
Online Olympiad for People with Disabilities (4), 11.24.2020
Annotations by Lior Lapid

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4!

McConnell had never played the Scotch in his life before this game, but he agreed that it was wise to use it just this once. We noticed that Trkaljanov always plays the 4. ... Qh4 variation, perhaps expecting this move's surprise value to compensate for its dubious reputation, and his entire opening repertoire with Black consists of risky attacking variations. With

a carefully prepared pawn sacrifice on move six, McConnell was able to turn the tables by learning and willingly entering his opponent's pet line.

3. ... exd4 4. Nxd4 Qh4 5. Nc3 Bb4 6. Be2! Qxe4 7. Ndb5 Kd8 8. O-O Bxc3 9. bxc3!

Stockfish slightly prefers 9. Nxc3 and McConnell was aware of that. From a human perspective, however, facing an opponent who appeared more skilled as an attacker than a defender (based on his hyperaggressive opening repertoire and several of his games that we had studied), we felt that this anti-positional but highly dangerous move would cause Trkaljanov serious problems in a rapid game.

9. ... Nge7 10. Re1 Qd5?

White is objectively winning now, and McConnell finds the best refutation of Black's unprincipled opening play.

Better is 10. ... a6 11. Bf3 Qg6, though after 12. Nd4 White has more than enough compensation and excellent attacking prospects.

11. Bd3 a6 12. c4 Qc5 13. Be3 Qe5

No better is 13. ... Qb4 14. Rb1 Qa5 15. Bd2 Qa4 16. Nc3 Qa3 17. Qh5 when Black's lack of development after eight queen moves leaves him in an utterly hopeless position.

14. Bb6 axb5

The best try; trying to save the queen would only lose more quickly.

15. Rxe5 Nxe5 16. Bd4 Nxd3 17. Qxd3 bxc4 18. Qxc4 d5 19. Qb3 f6 20. Re1

McConnell has played 20 perfect moves without committing even a single inaccuracy, and he maintains his relentless pressure throughout the entire game. Black has a rook, knight, and pawn for the queen, but his king is too vulnerable and his lack of coordination ensures that White's initiative remains powerful.



20. ... Ra5 21. Rxe7! Kxe7 22. Qb4+ c5 23. Bxc5+ Rxc5 24. Qxc5+ Ke6 25. Qc7 Bd7 26. Qxb7 Rc8 27. Qb3 Rc4 28. c3 Bc6 29. f3 h5 30. Kf2 Kf7

Black offered a draw here and twice more over the next few moves, but McConnell

convincingly demonstrates that there is no fortress.

31. Ke3 Kg6 32. g3 Ba4 33. Qb1+ Kh6 34. Kd3 Bc6 35. Qc1+ Kg6 36. h4! Bb5 37. Kd2 Bc6 38. Qb1+ Kh6 39. Qb6 Kg6 40. g4! Kh6 41. gxh5 Kxh5 42. Qc7 Kg6 43. h5+ Kh7 44. Qc8, Black lost on time.

Team USA could not have asked for a better leader than Michael Aigner. The seasoned master played high level chess throughout the tournament, including a positional masterpiece in round seven that was nominated for the prestigious Gazprom Brilliancy Prize. (See January's "In the News" column for that game, with Aigner's notes. ~ed.) Aigner got stronger and stronger as the tournament went on, going undefeated in the final five rounds. His two draws were secured judiciously, as he knew that in both cases a draw was enough to secure victory for our team. The rock of the team with a cool and steady personality, Aigner's constant support of his teammates helped them bounce back from adversities and believe in their abilities to defeat higher-rated opponents.

PSEUDO-TROMPOWSKY (D00)

Leonel Amato (2100)
Michael Aigner (2006)
Online Olympiad for People with Disabilities (6), 11.26.2020
Annotations by Michael Aigner

1. d4 d5 2. Bg5 c6 3. e3 Qb6

White faces an early choice: weaken the dark squares with b2-b3 or waste time with the queen.

4. Qc1 Bf5 5. Nf3 h6

Creating luft for the bishop in case of Nf3-h4, mimicking the London System with colors reversed.

6. Bh4 Nd7 7. Be2 Ngf6 8. O-O e6 9. c4 Be7 10. Nc3 Qd8 11. a3 a5 12. c5?! Ne4

Black gains the bishop pair after 12. ... g5 13. Bg3 Nh5 14. Be5 Nxe5 15. Nxe5 Ng7.



13. Bg3?

A minor mistake. Better is 13. Bxe7 Qxe7.

13. ... Nxg3 14. hxg3 O-O

Caïssa rewards the bold. After 14. ... h5?! 15. Nd2 g5 16. e4 dxe4 17. Ncxe4 g4 18. Rd1 h4 19. Qc3 hxg3 20. Nxg3 Nf6 Black's pieces stand better after the pawn storm.

15. Qd2 Qc7 16. Bd3 Bxd3 17. Qxd3 e5! 18. Qf5?!

After 18. dxe5 Nxe5 19. Nxe5 Qxe5 the bishop controls more squares than the knight.

18. ... g6 19. Qh3 Kg7 20. g4?! e4 21. Nd2 Bg5!

This discourages counterplay on the f-file by targeting the e3 pawn.

22. Qh2 Qxh2+?

Black should exploit the weak kingside pawns with 22. ... Qc8! 23. Rae1 Nf6 24. f3 exf3 25. gxf3 Re8 26. Nd1 (after 26. e4 the g-pawn falls after all the trades) 26. ... h5 27. gxh5 Rh8.

23. Kxh2 h5 24. gxh5 Rh8 25. g3 Rxh5+ 26. Kg2 Rah8 27. Rh1 Rxh1 28. Rxh1 Rxh1 29. Kxh1 b6 30. b4 30. axb4 31. axb4 bxc5 32. bxc5 Bd8



While the endgame is objectively drawn, Black's good bishop offers practical chances in time pressure.

33. Nb3 Nb8 34. Kg2 Kf6 35. Kf1 Na6 36. Ke2 Nb4 37. f3 exf3+ 38. Kxf3 Ke6 39. Ne2 Nd3 40. Nf4+ Nxf4 41. exf4

The match score dictates Amato must fight to win.

41. ... Bc7 42. Nc1 Ba5 43. g4 f6 44. Nd3 Bd8 45. Ke3 Ba5 46. g5 fxg5 47. fxg5 Bd8 48. Kf4 Bc7+ 49. Kg4 Bh2 50. Ne1 Bg1 51. Nf3 Be3 52. Ne5 Bxd4 53. Nxc6?

White captures the wrong pawn.

The right path was 53. Nxg6 Bxc5 54. Nf4+ Kf7 (Beware the trap! 54. ... Ke5? 55. Nd3+ Kd6 56. Nxc5 Kxc5 57. g6 and the g-pawn queens first.) 55. Kf5 Ba3 56. g6+ Kg8 57. Ke5 Bb2+ 58. Kd6 and the position is drawn — Black's extra pawn proves useless.

53. ... Bxc5 54. Nd8+ Ke5 55. Nb7

If 55. Nf7+ Ke4! 56. Nh8 d4 57. Nxg6 d3 and the d-pawn cannot be stopped.

55. ... Bb6 56. Kg3 d4 57. Kf3 Kd5 58. Kf4 Kc6, White resigned. ♠

Under the Microscope

Four recent Wesley So games, deeply analyzed

By **FM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO** | Photos by **LENNART OOTES**

GRÜNfeld DEFENSE (D85)

GM Wesley So (2770)
GM Dariusz Swiercz (2649)
U.S. Championship (5), 10.27.2020

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5
5. e4 Nxc3 6. bxc3 Bg7 7. Be3 c5 8. Rc1**

Currently one of the most popular ways of fighting the Grünfeld at the top level.

8. ... 0-0 9. Nf3 Qa5 10. Qd2 Bg4

The latest attempt. Other ideas: 10. ... Rd8 is still the main line, and now 11. d5 e6 leads to lots of theory, but White has also experimented with 11. h4 and 11. Be2. Black gets the typical Grünfeld endgame after 10. ... cxd4 11. cxd4 Qxd2+ 12. Nxd2 when White is playing for two results.

11. d5 b5 12. Bd3!?

This is probably no better than other moves, but it has the advantage of leaving established theory.

12. ... Nd7

So probably wanted to provoke 12. ... c4. After 13. Bb1 White is about to put a knight on d4, so Black's best is 13. ... Bxf3 (13. ... Nd7? 14. Nd4! with advantage) 14. gxf3 Nd7 and

we have a fighting position. Black's position is objectively fine, but I would take White.

13. c4 b4 14. 0-0



White's next two moves are clear: he will move the f3-knight and play f2-f4. As we will see in the game, his kingside play is much faster than Black's counterattack on the queenside, making this a very important moment in the game.

14. ... Qc7?

With such a short time control, perhaps Swiercz just didn't realize how critical the position was becoming.

Somewhat better for White is 14. ... Bxf3 15.

gxf3, mainly because Black's plan is not quite clear. Without the light-square bishop, playing ... e7-e6 or ... f7-f5 will always be strategically dangerous, whereas pushing the queenside pawn majority is just too slow. The computer suggests the exchange of dark-square bishops with 15. ... Bc3 16. Qe2 Bd4 17. f4 Bxe3 18. fxe3 e5, but after 19. dxe6 *e.p.* fxe6 20. e5 White is simply better. He has the superior minor piece, an entry square on the d-file, and multiple ways to put pressure on Black's king (for example with h2-h4-h5).

A better attempt is found with 14. ... e6. Now 15. Ng5!? is by no means the only move, but a natural one. (After 15. Kh1!? Black's best is just to wait with something like 15. ... Rfe8 with equality, while 15. ... exd5?! allows 16. cxd5! Bc3 17. Qc2 with a slight edge; the difference here is that Black cannot play ... Nd7-e5 and ... c5-c4). Play continues 15. ... exd5 16. exd5 (16. cxd5 Bc3 17. Qc2 Ne5 18. Be2 Bxe2 19. Qxe2 c4 20. f4 Nd3 is quite good for Black) when the g4-bishop is awkward for the moment, but Black holds things together: 16. ... Bc3 17. Qc2 Ne5 18. Ne4 Nxd3 19. Qxd3 Bf5 and Black is fine.

15. Ne1! Nb6



It would have been hard to play the relatively best 15. ... f5!?, when the simple 16. exf5 Bxf5 17. Bxf5 Rxf5 18. Nd3 avoids all tricks and leaves White much better.

16. f4 Bd7 17. f5!

The correct way to continue the attack. If Black's knight could occupy the e5 square, this would be a bad move, but here this is clearly not happening. After Ne1-f3 and Be3-h6 White will take control of the e5-square and crash through.

17. ... Na4 18. Nf3 Nc3

The try 18. ... e6!? does not help. After 19. Bh6 exf5 20. Bxg7 Kxg7 21. exf5 White is winning as Black cannot mount an effective blockade on the dark squares.

19. Bh6 a5 20. e5

The point of this move is not to win the rook on f8, but to exchange Black's dark-square bishop for a knight. After this Black's position will simply come apart.

20. ... Bxe5

After 20. ... Bxf5 21. Bxf5 Ne2+ 22. Qxe2 Bxh6 23. Be4 Bxc1 24. Rxc1 White wins.

21. Nxe5 Qxe5 22. Rce1

The materialistic 22. Bxf8? is still winning for White, but also completely misguided. The attack is much more important!

22. ... Qd4+ 23. Be3 Qg7 24. Bh6

So repeats the position twice in order to gain time on the clock.

24. ... Qd4+ 25. Be3 Qg7 26. Bxc5 Rfc8 27. Bxe7 Qd4+ 28. Kh1 Bxf5 29. Rxf5!

When all the pieces are playing, such sacrifices do not even have to be calculated.

29. ... gxf5 30. Qg5+ Qg7 31. Qxf5 Re8 32. d6 Rad8 33. c5

The most accurate; there is no need to allow any tricks based on ... Rd8xd6.

33. ... a4 34. Re3 Ne2 35. Bxe2, Black resigned.

There is no back-rank mate after 35. ... Qa1+ 36. Bf1, so Black resigned. A very convincing and instructive game.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED (D55)

GM Wesley So (2741)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2829)

Clutch Champions Showdown (1), 05.27.2020

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bf4!?

Playing Bf4 on move five is a well-known theoretical line, which White now achieves with a slight difference — Black has the extra

move ... h7-h6. Provoking ... h7-h6 seems to be the latest trend in the Queen's Gambit and related openings, the main argument being that White now has a "hook" to attack the black kingside. In particular, g2-g4 options become much more viable, since a white pawn on g5 will immediately come into contact with the h6 pawn and thus open lines on the kingside.

6. ... O-O 7. e3 c5 8. dxc5 Bxc5 9. a3 Nc6 10. Qc2 Qa5 11. O-O-O Be7

With the pawn on h7, this position has been seen more than 650 times (according to my database). There the most common move is 11. g4. Therefore, White's next move is not totally unexpected.

12. g4! dxc4 13. Bxc4



A critical moment. Let's again refer back to the position with the pawn still on h7: Black's main options are 12. ... e5 (180 games), 12. ... Nxg4 (27 games), and 12. ... a6 (19 games). All of these are still playable here, but having the pawn on h6 makes a big difference!

13. ... Rd8!?

Black tries to trade pieces in order to ward off the attack. But since White will now seize the open d-file with tempo, I think Black should have looked for other options.

(a) After 13. ... e5 the variations get quite complicated: 14. Bxh6!? The extra option! 14. ... Bxa3! (14. ... gxh6? is suicidal: 15. Qg6+ Kh8 16. Qxh6+ Nh7 17. Bd3 f5 18. g5 Bxa3 19. Nb5! and White wins) 15. Ng5!? The most direct; the main threat is Nd5. 15. ... Ne7! 16. Nd5 Nexd5 17. Rxd5 Bxb2+! 18. Kxb2 Qb4+ 19. Ka1 Bf5! Black has to complete development, and sacrificing the bishop is the most expedient way of doing so. At the same time, Black blocks the b1-h7 diagonal, meaning that he will actually threaten to take the d5-rook. After 20. gxf5 Rfc8 and despite being down two pieces, Black appears to be holding no matter what White plays. I cannot resist showing one more line: 21. Rc5!? (or 21. Rb5 Qxb5 22. Bxb5 Rxc2 23. Rg1 gxh6 24. Ne4+ Kf8 25. Nxf6 Rd8 26. Ne4 a6 27. Kb1 Rc7 28. Ba4 Rc4 29. Bc2 Rb4+ 30. Ka2 Rc8 31. Bd3 Rd8 and Black's activity prevents White from consolidating) 21. ... Rxc5 22. Bxf7+ Kh8 23. Qxc5 Qxc5 24. Bxg7+ Kxg7 25. Ne6+ Kxf7 26. Nxc5 Rc8! 27. Nxb7

Rc2 and, once again, Black is active enough to hold the ending.

(b) 13. ... Nxg4 would not be my first choice as Black, as it seems quite dangerous to open the g-file. With the computer leading the way, however, everything is of course equal: 14. Rdg1 Qh5 15. Be2!? e5!? 16. Nxe5 Ncxe5 17. h3 Bf5 18. e4 Bg5! 19. exf5 Bxf4+ 20. Kb1 Qh4 21. hxg4 Qxf2 with a roughly balanced position.

(c) 13. ... a6!? is quite forcing: 14. Rdg1 b5 15. g5! Nh5 16. Bd3 b4 17. gxh6 bxa3! with an unclear position. Note that 17. ... bxc3? is a mistake. In this position, open lines are more important than pieces, i.e. 18. hxg7 cxb2+ 19. Kb1 Nxg7 20. Bh6 Bf6 21. Rxg7+! Bxg7 22. Rg1 and White wins.

(d) Without ... h7-h6 played, Black also has the extra option of 13. ... Qc5!? since 14. Bd3 would eye the h7-pawn. Ideas here:

- (d1) 14. Be2 and Black can play 14. ... e5 without fear of Bf4xh6, since White's bishop is passively placed on e2. Black has two choices after 15. b4 Qb6 16. Na4: he can sacrifice a knight, or his queen! (d1a) 16. ... exf4!! 17. Nxb6 axb6 Black has only two pieces for the queen — but such great compensation! Every open file or diagonal seems to lead directly to White's king. In a practical game, I would play Black any day of the week. (d1b) 16. ... Nxb4! 17. axb4 Qxb4 18. Bxe5 b5 19. Nc3 Bb7 also offers Black excellent compensation. White simply cannot afford such a weak king.
- (d2) 14. Bd3? now runs into 14. ... e5!; note that with the pawn on h7, 15. g5! would be a strong response.
- (d3) After 14. Na4 Qa5 White has nothing better than a repetition.
- (d4) After 14. Ba2 Nxg4 is an improved version for Black over 13. ... Nxg4. Having the bishop on c4 is clearly better than having the bishop on a2.

14. Rxd8+ Qxd8!?

Black improves with 14. ... Nxd8!? as White doesn't get the d-file with tempo: 15. Rd1 (15. g5?! hxg5 16. Nxg5 Bd7 17. Rd1 Be8 allows Black to coordinate his pieces — ... Ra8-c8 and ... b7-b5-b4 are next, with fully-fledged counterplay) 15. ... Nxg4 (15. ... Bd7 16. h4! Be8 17. g5 hxg5 18. hxg5 Nh5 19. Bd6 Bxd6 [19. ... Bxg5? 20. Bb4 and White wins] 20. Rxd6 leads to a passive position for Black) 16. Nb5 e5! 17. Nxe5 Nxe5 18. Bxe5 Be6 and Black is close to completing development. However, after 19. Bd3 Rc8 20. Bc3 Qb6 21. Qa4!, à la Petrosian-Smyslov, White still has chances for an advantage. The idea is Qa4-e4.

15. g5!

From here on, it's very impressive how swiftly So builds up the attack.

**15. ... Nh5**

Also dangerous is 15. ... hxc5 16. Nxc5 Bd7 17. Rg1!.

16. Rd1 Bd7?!

The only chance was 16. ... Qa5! 17. g6! (17. gxf6 is what Black is hoping for: 17. ... Nxf4 18. exf4 Qh5! 19. Qe4 Qxh6 and now White, though still better, has something to prove in view of his crippled structure) 17. ... Nxf4 18. exf4 Qh5! 19. gxf7+ Qxf7 20. Qe4 Kf8, but even here Black's position is close to lost.

17. gxf6

Equally strong was 17. g6!?: if Black takes with 17. ... fxc6, then White wins with either the simple 18. Bxe6+ or the flashier 18. Bxh6!.

17. ... Nxf4 18. exf4 Qc7 19. Qe4

All of White's pieces are centralized and function ideally. Black's next move — decentralizing his knight — looks suspicious, and it's no surprise that White has a direct win.

19. ... Na5 20. Ne5! Be8 21. Rd7!!

A pretty tactical blow. Black cannot take in

view of 22. h7+ Kh8 23. Nxf7 mate.

21. ... Qc5 22. b4 Qxf2 23. Rxe7 Qg1+ 24. Nd1 Qxh2, Black resigned.

And without waiting for White's reply, Black tipped the king. A powerful demonstration of White's attacking possibilities after the ultra-modern g2–g4.

RUY LOPEZ, OPEN VARIATION (C80)

GM Wesley So (2770)

GM Leinier Dominguez Perez (2758)

Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz (4), 09.16.2020

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. O-O Nxe4 6. d4 b5 7. Bb3 d5 8. dxe5 Be6 9. Nbd2 Nc5 10. c3 d4 11. Bxe6 Nxe6 12. cxd4 Ncxd4 13. a4 Bb4

So far, this is all well-known theory. Here So plays a logical but rare move.

14. Ne4!?

14. axb5 Nxb5 (14. ... axb5? loses to 15. Rxa8 Qxa8 16. Nxd4 Nxd4 17. Qg4!) 15. Qa4 is the most common continuation.

14. ... O-O

I wonder what White had in mind after 14. ... Qd5, immediately asking where the knight is going. It seems that 15. Nxd4 is more or less forced, but after 15. ... Nxd4 16. Qd3 (or 16. Be3?! Qxe4 17. Qxd4 Qxd4 18. Bxd4 0-0-0 with a slight edge for Black) 16. ... 0-0 (16. ... Qc4!?, 16. ... 0-0-0!?) 17. Rd1 c5 Black is doing well. A sample line: 18. Be3 Qxe5 19. Bxd4 cxd4 20. Qxd4 Qe7 and the position is equal.

15. Be3 Nf5

Also possible is 15. ... c5, of course, but Black was understandably wary of allowing 16. Nd6.

16. Qc2!? Nxe3 17. fxe3

This is So's idea. Yes, White temporarily has the worse structure. But he will soon play Nf3-d4, and in view of the weak c6-square, Black has to trade knights. Then the resulting position (with White pawns on d4 and e5) offers many dynamic possibilities.

17. ... Qe7 18. Nd4 Nxd4 19. exd4 Rad8 20. Rad1 c5!

So far, Black has reacted well. White's

center is under attack, and simplification seems unavoidable. But White has a clever idea in mind.

21. axb5

Black's point is that 21. Nxc5? loses to 21. ... Rxd4 22. Rxd4 Bxc5 23. Qf2 Qxe5 24. Rfd1 bxa4 and White cannot escape the pin. Likewise, 21. dxc5 Qxe5 gives White nothing.

21. ... axb5

Provoking ... h7-h6 seems to be the latest trend in the Queen's Gambit ... the main argument being that White now has a "hook" to attack the black kingside.

If Black wanted a draw, he could have played 21. ... cxd4!? 22. bxa6 Qxe5. After 23. Qc4 (or 23. Nf2 Bd6 24. g3 Ra8 25. Ra1 Rfd8) 23. ... Qxe4 24. Qxb4 Qc6 25. a7 d3 the position is completely equal.

22. Qd3! cxd4

The obvious 22. ... Rxd4? allows 23. Nf6+! gxf6 24. Qg3+ Kh8 25. exf6 and Black has to give up the queen with 25. ... Qxf6 26. Rxf6 Rxd1+ 27. Rf1 Rxf1+ 28. Kxf1. Whether this is holdable for Black or not is completely irrelevant; any reasonable player would stop calculating after 25. exf6 and start searching for other options.

23. Rf5



White has sacrificed a pawn for the solidity of his center. Black's "extra" d4-pawn potentially does more harm than good: it is firmly blockaded and limits the activity of Black's pieces. This is an important point: if White's queen were on c2, for example, Black could always consider sacrificing the pawn back with ... d4-d3, and White would in fact be the one with the weaker king.

23. ... g6

There was an interesting defensive idea in 23. ... Qh4!?, trying to get into the way of White's pieces. Play should continue with 24. Rf3 (24. Rdf1 Qh6! aiming for ... Qh6-e3+; after 25. R5f3 Be7 26. Rh3 Qg6 the position is equal) 24. ... Rfe8! 25. Rh3 Qf4 26. Nd6 Bxd6 27. Qxh7+ Kf8 28. Qh8+ Ke7 29. exd6+ Rxd6 30. Qxg7 and after 30. ... Rc8! Black's centralized pieces form a shield for his king. 31. Rf1 is met simply with 31. ... Rc1.

24. Rdf1!

An imaginative move. It's not difficult to see that the rook is untouchable, and meanwhile, White brings another piece into the attack.

24. ... Kg7?

This is simply a blunder: next move Black will have to move his king back to g8 anyway.

Of course 24. ... gxf5? 25. Nf6+ Kg7 26. Qxf5 Rh8 27. Qg5+ Kf8 28. Qh6 mate was not an option. Black would hold on after 24. ... h6!?, preventing Ne4-g5. White has many attacking tries, but no breakthrough: 25. Nf6+ (25. Rh5!? Kg7 26. Ng3 Rg8! 27. Rhf5! Kh8! 28. Rxf7 Qxe5 is better for Black; 25. h3!? is interesting, but after 25. ... Kg7 White has nothing better than 26. Nf6 anyway) 25. ... Kg7 26. Qg3 Bd2! and White already has to be careful not to be worse.

25. Ng5!

It's possible that Dominguez simply missed that this was possible. I doubt he would ever have allowed this in a classical time control!

25. ... Kg8

Forced. Note that 25. ... gxf5 26. Qxf5 Rh8 27. Nxf7 wins. (27. Qg4 Kf8 28. Qh5! is also strong.) After 27. ... h5 (in view of the threat of Qf5-g4+) 28. Rf3! Be1 29. e6! Black has no defense. Now White has gained a crucial tempo for the attack.

26. Qh3! h5 27. Qg3!

Black cannot prevent Ng5xf7.

27. ... d3 28. Nxf7 Bc5+ 29. Kh1 Rxf7

If 29. ... Kg7 30. e6! Qxe6 31. Nxd8 Qxf5 32. Rxf5 Rxf5 33. Qxd3 and White wins.

30. Rxf7 Qxf7 31. Rxf7 Kxf7 32. Qf3+ Kg8 33. e6!

White threatens Qf3-f7+ followed by Qf7-f6+, so Black has no time to advance the d-pawn.

33. ... Kh7 34. Qf7+ Kh6 35. Qf4+ Kg7 36. Qc7+, Black resigned.

VIENNA GAME, FALKBEER VARIATION (C26)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2784)

GM Wesley So (2770)

Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz (16), 09.19.2020

1. e4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. d4 exd4 4. Qxd4

This variation is a rare guest in top-level events, but in a rapid game, anything is playable. White has a very simple plan, which makes this line highly attractive for fast time controls.

4. ... Nc6 5. Qd3 Bc5 6. Bf4 O-O 7. O-O-O Re8

Classical development. In general, this is the best way to play against such sidelines — usually White has some tactical idea in mind, but gets nothing if Black develops simply and solidly.

White doesn't fear the greedy 7. ... Bxf2?! and I doubt that So seriously considered it. After 8. e5! Nh5 9. Bd2 Black's pieces are very loose, i.e., 9. ... Bxg1 10. Rxg1 Nxe5 11. Qf5 d6 12. Qxh5 Bg4 13. Qg5 Qxg5 14. Bxg5 Bxd1 15. Kxd1 with a better endgame for White.

8. f3 d6 9. Qd2 Be6 10. Kb1 a6 11. Nge2

It is important to complete development before starting an attack with 11. g4!?. Here Black's central counterplay is very strong: 11. ... d5! (11. ... b5 12. Qg2! is the point of keeping the knight on g1. After 12. ... b4 13. Na4 Ba7 14. Bc1! White is better and will follow up with g4-g5, and, at a later stage, f3-f4) 12. g5 (12. exd5? Nxd5 13. Nxd5 Bxd5 14. Qxd5 Qxd5 15. Rxd5 Re1+ 16. Bc1 Rxf1 17. Rxc5 Re8 is the point. White loses with most of his pieces still on the back rank) 12. ... d4 13. Na4 Bb4 14. c3 dxc3 15. Qc2 Nd7 16. Nxc3 Bd6! 17. Bxd6 cxd6 with a complicated position in which Black has decent chances. White needs to defend the g5-pawn, after which Black can follow up with ... Qd8-a5, or with ... Nd7-b6 and ... d6-d5.

11. ... b5 12. Nc1 Ne5 13. Bg5?!

This is an interesting idea. White wants to provoke ... h7-h6, after which the g2-g4 thrust gains power. The main problem with this plan is simply the time investment: Black will already be fully mobilized by the time White can play g2-g4 and can play... well, you'll just have to see the rest of the game to find out!

The move 13. h4 would have been more consistent with what was previously played.



13. ... h6 14. Be3 Bxe3 15. Qxe3 b4

Even stronger would have been 15. ... c5! — there is no problem with “weakening” the d5-square, since White has no way to take advantage of it. In fact, Black is the one who will be aiming for ... d6–d5.

16. N3e2 a5 17. Nf4 a4 18. h4 Qe7 19. g4



A natural move, which would give Nepomniachtchi excellent counterplay if he were able to enforce g4–g5. But Black has a brilliant retort:

19. ... a3! 20. b3 Bxg4!

There are similarities here to a Sicilian Dragon, where such sacrifices are bread-and-butter. Black gets enough material compensation for the piece, but more importantly, the dark squares around the white king are extremely weak.

21. fxg4 Nexg4 22. Qd4

If 22. Qg1 Nxe4 23. Nd5 Qe5 24. Qd4 c6! and it's lights out for White.

22. ... c5!

The mistaken 22. ... Nxe4? allows 23. Nd5, when Black is unable to exploit the c3 square.

23. Qxd6 Qxd6 24. Rxd6 Nxe4 25. Rd7

Similar to the game is 25. Rc6 Nc3+ 26. Ka1 Nf2 and Black wins.

25. ... Ngf2

Precise. 25. ... Nc3+ 26. Ka1 Re1? would still allow White to defend with 27. Nd3.

26. Bc4

After 26. Rg1 Nc3+ 27. Ka1 Re1 28. Ne2 Re8 29. Bh3 Rxg1 30. Nxxg1 Re1 mate can be delayed, but not prevented.

26. ... Nxh1 27. Bxf7+ Kh7 28. Nce2 Nhg3 29. Bg6+ Kh8, White resigned.

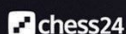
Black is up material, and crucially, the white king still cannot find any shelter. So took advantage of White's slow opening play impressively and handled the initiative very well. ♠



CHAMPIONS
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Skilling Open

WINNER

U.S. CHESS CHAMPION
WESLEY SO
\$30,000 FIRST PRIZE



CHAMPIONS
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Skilling Open

SKILLING OPEN OVERVIEW

- 22-30 NOVEMBER
(9 DAYS, NO REST DAYS)
- 16 PLAYERS
- PRELIMS: A 15-ROUND,
3-DAY RAPID ROUND-ROBIN
- TIME CONTROL: 15+10 RAPID CHESS
- THE TOP 8 QUALIFY FOR
THE KNOCKOUT
- EACH KNOCKOUT CLASH: TWO DAYS,
WITH TWO 4-GAME MINI-MATCHES
- IF THE SCORE IS 1:1 A PLAYOFF IS HELD
AFTER THE 2ND MINI-MATCH
- PLAYOFF: TWO 5+3 BLITZ GAMES,
THEN ARMAGEDDON
- PRIZE FUND: \$100,000 (\$30,000 FOR 1ST)
+ UP TO 50 TOUR POINTS



GM Wesley So wins the 2020 Skilling Open

So sets pace in new online champions tour from Play Magnus and Chess24.

By **GM ALEX YERMOLINSKY**

Wikipedia tells me that a “skilling” was a coin used in Northern Europe up until the end of the 19th century. I also hear that in the modern lingua franca in that part of the world, which of course is English, it simply means “cash.”

So we had a “Cash Open” to kick off the 2021 Champions Tour. (*Perhaps this is why Skilling Ltd., an online trading platform, chose to name itself thusly. Skilling was the primary sponsor of this first leg of the new Tour. ~ed.*) While the cash part is certainly appropriate, as all the invited players were guaranteed at least

tournaments, which started with the Magnus Carlsen Invitational back in April, such concerns are outdated. We get what we get, which is the top guys playing each other in an endless string of events. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

One thing that Team Magnus seems to have settled on is the time control, which is G/15 with a 10 second increment. I view it as a positive development. Chess players can adjust their game to the demands of a given time control, as long as it stays the same; all it takes is practice. Far worse is to be jerked around with new time

trade-off, even if blunders are impossible to avoid, and some endgames won't be played to logical conclusion.

The Skilling Open started with 16 players, contesting a round-robin over three days. The objective was to finish in the top eight to qualify for the match stage. In the end most favorites made it through, but there were some twists and turns.

Day one saw GM Anish Giri take the lead with 4/5, but the player who turned many heads was 25-year-old Spaniard David Anton Guijarro, who beat GMs Peter Svidler, Ian Nepomniachtchi, and Teimour Radjabov, drew GM Wesley So, and only lost to Carlsen. He finished the day with a score of 3½/5, not a small feat for the only sub-2700 entrant in the field. Anton Guijarro took the right approach by trying to play complete games in disregard of a short time control and fearsome quality of opposition. I wish I could show some of his games, if it weren't for limited space in this article.

Giri faced an easier field, and he took his task very professionally. His wins came in deep endgames, including an impeccable execution of a classic Philidor position in rook and bishop vs. rook against GM Santosh Vidit Gujrathi. To Vidit's credit, he defended the same ending later in the tournament against GM Hikaru Nakamura.

While Carlsen's mouseslip in a winning position against Nepomniachtchi got the most coverage in the media, my choice for the highlight of the first day is the following very unusual game, which showcases the great talent of the 17-year-old Iranian-French star.

We get what we get, which is the top guys playing each other in an endless string of events. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

\$2,500 regardless of their finish, designating the event as an “Open” was a bit strange, because participation was by invitation only.

The field for the Skilling Open, held from November 22-30, 2020, was mostly comprised of the usual suspects, with the notable exceptions of world's number two GM Fabiano Caruana and some other big names such as GMs Alexander Grischuk and Shakhriyar Mamedyarov. Surely we are going to see them back in action in future tournaments, but the rules and makeup of the Tour itself remain rather opaque.

Judging by the recent history of online

controls in any new event one plays.

The reader may be surprised with my voicing support to such revolutionary departure from classical chess, but I can hardly imagine myself, or anyone else, sitting in front of a computer screen for six hours at a time, staring at the same position. Both the players and, most importantly, the spectators are better off with faster action.

Shorter time controls allow for more games to be played, so that losing a game or two doesn't mean the end of the tournament. Players feel liberated to take risks, and they go for complications. I'll take such a



**CHAMPIONS
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Skilling Open

Happy 30th Birthday
WORLD CHESS CHAMPION
MAGNUS CARLSEN



**CHAMPIONS
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Skilling Open

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KNOCKOUT BRACKET

QUARTERFINALS (NOV. 25-26)

	Magnus Carlsen	2.5	2	-
	Anish Giri	1.5	2	-
	Levon Aronian	2.5	1	0
	Ian Nepomniachtchi	1.5	3	2
	Wesley So	0.5	2.5	1.5*
	Teimour Radjabov	2.5	1.5	1.5
	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	3	0.5	1.5
	Hikaru Nakamura	1	2.5	1.5*

SEMIFINALS (NOV. 27-28)

	Magnus Carlsen	2.5	2	-
	Ian Nepomniachtchi	1.5	2	-
	Wesley So	2.5	2	-
	Hikaru Nakamura	1.5	2	-

FINALS (NOV. 29-30)

	Magnus Carlsen	2	2	0.5
	Wesley So	2	2	1.5

**CHAMPIONS
CHESS TOUR**
2021

QUEEN'S PAWN GAME (D04)

GM Alireza Firouzja (2749)

GM Wesley So (2770)

Skilling Open Prelim (2.4), 11.22.2020

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. e3 c5 4. dxc5!? e6 5. b4

The Noteboom Variation with colors reversed is a reasonable choice if White is seeking a double-edged game.

5. ... a5 6. c3 axb4 7. cxb4 b6 8. Bb5+ Bd7 9. Bxd7+ Nbx7 10. a4 bxc5 11. b5 Bd6 12. Bb2 0-0 13. 0-0 Qc7

Beyond the extra tempo for White, there's one more substantial difference compared to a standard Noteboom: instead of a bishop on b7, Black has a knight on d7. Seeing that, Wesley decided to occupy the d3-square with his knight.

Alternatively, 13. ... Bc7 14. Nbd2 Ba5!? slows White down on the queenside, but at the cost losing control over the e5-square. After 15. Qc2 Re8 16. Ne5 Nxe5 17. Bxe5 Nd7 18. Bb2 chances are about even. It's worth mentioning that the immediate 13. ... e5?! can be strongly answered with 14. e4!.

14. Nbd2 c4 15. Bc3

Alireza leaves no doubt about his true intentions to move the passed pawns forward.

15. ... e5

Wesley must have looked at 15. ... Rfb8 16. Qb1 Nc5 17. a5 Nfe4 but after 18. b6 Black has to sacrifice the Exchange with 18. ... Nxc3 19. bxc7 Rxb1 20. Nxb1 Nb5. While the resulting position may be fine for Black, he must have deemed such extreme measures unnecessary.

16. a5!!

White sacrifices not just a pawn; the safety of his king is at stake, but Firouzja knows no fear. The absolute majority of players, dead or alive, would automatically play 16. h3.

16. ... e4 17. b6 Qb8 18. Nd4 Bxh2+ 19. Kh1 Be5 20. Nc6 Qd6 21. Nxe5 Nxe5 22. g3 Nfg4 23. Kg2

It feels like Black should be better here, but perhaps he's not.

23. ... Qe6

I'm not sure Wesley looked at 23. ... f5 but the possible reply 24. Bd4 Nc6 25. a6 Nxd4 26. Nxc4! dxc4 27. Qxd4 well illustrates the complexity of the task Black is facing.

24. Rb1 Rfb8 25. Qe2 Nd3 26. Rb5



Alireza's play is very consistent. His pieces are working around Black's formidable d3-knight, seeking better squares to hit the d5-pawn and support the passers. In this situation Wesley had to be very precise.

26. ... Ra6?

Necessary was 26. ... f5 again, the move Wesley was reluctant to consider. Now 27. Bd4 runs into 27. ... Qh6! 28. Rh1 Qc6 with twin threats to Rb5 and pawn on f2.

27. Nb1 h5?

The final error by Wesley So in this very difficult game.

It was the last call for 27. ... f5! anticipating 28. Bd4 Qh6 29. Rh1 Qg6! (Ineffective is 29. ... Qc6 30. Nc3 as the d5-pawn is about to fall.) 30. Nc3? (However, White has the miracle 30. f4! stopping all threats to his king.) 30. ... f4 31. exf4 Nxf4+ 32. gxf4 Ne3+ mating.

28. Bd4 h4 29. Rh1

Black's main problem is the terrible placement of his rooks, which effectively deprives him of any meaningful counterplay.

29. ... hxxg3 30. fxxg3 Nh6 31. Nc3 Qd6 32. Rxd5 Qa3 33. Rxh6! gxxh6 34. Qg4+ Kf8 35. Bg7+, Black resigned.

Day two saw much improved play from GMs Ding Liren, Sergey Karjakin, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and, particularly, Radjabov. "Raja" hasn't played in any previous online events of 2020, and his play at the start showed some rust, but once he got going, his attacking style began to pose problems for his opponents.

ENGLISH OPENING (A38)

GM Jan-Krzysztof Duda (2743)

GM Teimour Radjabov (2765)

Skilling Open Prelim (8.3), 11.23.2020

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. g3 g6 3. b3 Bg7 4. Bb2 c5 5. Bg2 d6 6. 0-0 e5 7. c4 0-0 8. Nc3 Nc6 9. d3 h6 10. Nd2 Be6 11. Rc1 Qd7 12. a3 Rac8 13. Nd5 b6 14. Bc3?!

This feels too slow, as White doesn't have the time to make anything meaningful out of the b3-b4 advance.

Given the position of the b2-bishop, a standard plan would begin with 14. e3 and if Black continues with 14. ... Bg4 (14. ... Ne7 is more prudent) 15. f3 Bh3 White will get a chance to strike in the center with 16. Nxf6+ Bxf6 17. Ne4 Be7 18. Bxh3 Qxh3 19. d4!.

14. ... Bg4! 15. Nxf6+

Perhaps Duda had to settle for 15. b4 Nxd5 16. cxd5 Nd4 17. f3 Bh3 18. e4 but it's hard to talk about a White advantage after 18. ... Bxg2 19. Kxg2 b5.

15. ... Bxf6 16. Ne4 Bg7 17. Bd2

More time is spent on the bishop's little shuffle. Black stands better in case of 17. f4?! exf4 18. Bxg7 Kxg7 19. gxf4 Nd4.

17. ... f5 18. Nc3 f4!

Black enjoys a perfect Closed Sicilian attacking setup.

19. Bd5+!

Duda is not backing out of a fight.

19. ... Kh8 20. f3 Bh3 21. Rf2 Ne7 22. Be4 Nf5?!

Teimour follows with an inspired pawn sacrifice, designed to open up his dark-square bishop.

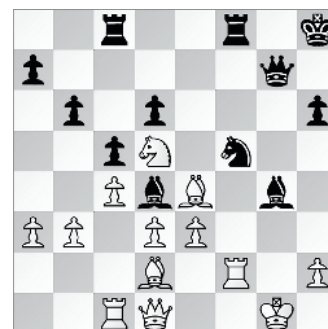
23. gxf4 exf4 24. Bxf4 Bd4 25. Nd5 Qg7?!

The immediate 25. ... g5 26. Bd2 g4 looked strong. After 27. e3 gxf3 28. Kh1 Bg2+ 29. Rxxg2 fxxg2+ 30. Bxxg2 Be5 both sides have their chances, but I'd go with Black.

26. Bd2 g5 27. e3 g4!? 28. fxxg4

Both players missed the computer defense 28. Kh1 g3 29. Re2. The best line goes 29. ... gxxh2 30. exd4 Ng3+ 31. Kxxh2 Nxe4 32. Qg1 and White gets some edge in the endgame.

28. ... Bxxg4



29. Qe1?

For the whole tournament Jan-Krzysztof Duda was not in his best form. 29. Qf1 would

TOP: MAGNUS CARLSEN'S BIRTHDAY WAS SOURED A BIT BY HIS FINAL ROUND DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF WESLEY SO ON NOVEMBER 30. MIDDLE: THE BRACKETS FOR THE KNOCKOUT COMPONENT OF THE SKILLING OPEN. BOTTOM: ONE OF THE INNOVATIONS OF THE SKILLING OPEN IS THE "GENTLER" COMMENTARY OFFERED BY GM DAVID HOWELL, IM JOVANKA HOUSKA, AND KAJA SNARE. ALL GRAPHICS COURTESY PLAY MAGNUS / CHESS24.



Meet Me in St. Louis



TOP: CARLSEN-SO, SINQUEFIELD CUP 2015 (LENNART OOTES);
MIDDLE LEFT: SO-CARLSEN, SINQUEFIELD CUP 2017 (LENNART OOTES); MIDDLE RIGHT: WESLEY SO,
SINQUEFIELD CUP 2019 (LENNART OOTES); BOTTOM LEFT: CARLSEN-SO, 2019 SINQUEFIELD CUP
(CRYSTAL FULLER); BOTTOM RIGHT: MAGNUS CARLSEN, 2019 (LENNART OOTES)
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAINT LOUIS CHESS CLUB

defend against mate and likely lead to an unclear endgame after 29. ... Bf3+ 30. Rg2 Bxg2 31. Qxg2 Qxg2+ 32. Kxg2 Be5.

29. ... Bf3+ 30. Kf1 Nh4!

Despite terrible shortage of time, Teimour was clinical to the end.

31. exd4 Bg2+ 32. Ke2 Qg4+ 33. Ke3 Bxe4 34. Bc3

If 34. dxe4 Rf3+ 35. Ke2 Rg3+ 36. Kf1 Rg1 mate.

34. ... Ng2+

Alternatively, 34. ... Qh3+ 35. Kxe4 Qe6 mate.

35. Kd2 Nxe1 36. dxc5+ Kg8, White resigned.

After two days and ten rounds of play, the playoff picture started to take shape. Giri, still in the lead with 6½/10, and the trio of Ding Liren, Carlsen, and So, trailing him by half a point, all looked like shoo-ins. At the bottom of the table GMs Peter Svidler, Vidit and, somewhat surprisingly, Jan-Krzysztof Duda were all but out of it.

But day three was still to come.

Who would have thought that the tournament leader Anish Giri and tenth placed GM Le Quang Liem, separated by two full points with just five games to go, would end up in a tie? Who would expect a five-way tie for the last two qualifying spots?

GM Levon Aronian resolved his qualification issues by going 4/5 on the last day. GM Alireza Firouzja was doing the same thing, when three wins in a row over Ding Liren, Giri, and Karjakin took him to 8/12 good for a share of first place with Carlsen. And then this had to happen....

READY PLAYER ONE

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2736)

GM Alireza Firouzja (2749)

Skilling Open Prelim (14.4), 11.24.2020



BLACK TO MOVE

25. ... f5?!

While this move helps Black to figure out the immediate tactics revolving around a possible capture on c4, in the long run it is

risky because it weakens the kingside.

Neither 25. ... Nxc4 nor 25. ... Nxe5 26. fxe5 Qxc4 can be refuted outright, but in both cases White would retain enough counterplay not to be significantly worse.

26. Nc5!

Excellent judgement from Hikaru Nakamura. The powerful e5-knight must be preserved, never mind a loss of a pawn.

26. ... Nxc5 27. dxc5 Qxc5+ 28. Kh2 Qc7 29. a4 Rxd1

Rapid games have interesting dynamics. The value of the initiative is greater, compared with slower games, where the defender has a better chance of figuring things out. Here it is more about the flow of the game. From that perspective, a surprising Exchange sacrifice, 29. ... Nd7 30. Ng6 Nc5 31. Nxf8 Rxf8 32. Rd4 b6 might have been a good idea.

30. Rxd1 Rd8?

The only move to hold things together was 30. ... a5.

31. Qxb7!!

What a bolt from the blue!

31. ... Qxb7 32. Rxd8+ Kh7 33. Ng6

The threat of mate forces Black to part with his queen and head for a gloomy knight ending.

33. ... Qc8

No better was 33. ... Qa8: 34. Rxa8 Nxa8 35. a5! Restricting the knight takes priority over material gains. (35. Nf8+ Kg8 36. Nxe6 Nb6 with counterplay) 35. ... Kg8 36. Kg3 Kf7 37. Kf3 Nc7 38. Ke3 Ne8 39. Kd4 with a decisive advantage to White.

34. Rxc8 Nxc8 35. c5!

No moves left for the black knight, and all pawn endings are lost. Game over.

35. ... Kg8 36. Kg3 Kf7 37. Kf3 Ke8 38. Ke3 Kd7 39. Kd4 a6 40. Ke5 Kc6 41. Kxe6 Kxc5 42. Kf7 Kb4 43. Kxg7, Black resigned.

Nothing seemed lost for Alireza yet, as he only needed a draw with White against Le Quang Liem in the last round. It didn't work, as the youngster drifted into a passive position and was mercilessly ground down. Still, as the games ended, most fans believed that Alireza was on top of the tie-breaks thanks to his highest number of wins. This was incorrect. The top criteria was face-to-face scores between the five players involved in the tie, and that left Firouzja and Le Quang Liem (both 1½/4) as the odd men out.

Despite this setback, Alireza's fans should look forward with optimism. He's clearly a

very special player.

The tournament schedule provided no rest days, so the eight qualifiers returned to action the next day. Matches consisted of two sets of four games, with blitz playoffs after the second set, if necessary.

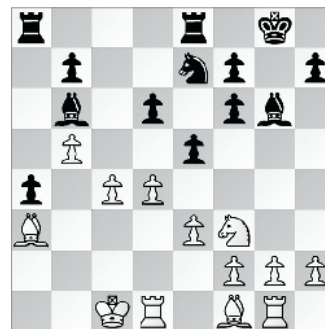
Again, it was Teimour Radjabov dazzling us with his tactical skills to take the first set.

TACTICS!

GM Wesley So (2770)

GM Teimour Radjabov (2765)

Skilling Open KO (11.3), 11.25.2020



BLACK TO MOVE

A critical point in the game. At first sight White's position looks overwhelming, but Radjabov's sharp eye spots a great tactical idea.

21. ... exd4! 22. exd4

In retrospect, White should have been content with 22. Nxd4 Bc5 23. Kb2.

22. ... Nd5!!

Absolutely brilliant! Black's active rooks and the criss-crossing bishops represent a clear danger to the white king.

23. Kb2

Note that 23. cxd5? loses to 23. ... Rac8+ 24. Kb2 Rc2+ 25. Ka1 Ba5 26. Bb2 a3.

23. ... Ba5!! 24. Bxd6

Again, 24. cxd5 is met by 24. ... Rac8 and the best defense 25. Rd3 Rc4 26. Bxd6 b6!! 27. Nd2 (27. Ba3 Rec8 with a decisive infiltration of the black rook) 27. ... Rcc8 28. Nf3 barely holds a draw for White. It is easy to show engine-generated lines while analyzing at home, but in the actual game situation Wesley faced a very tough task.

24. ... Nc3 25. Rc1

25. Re1 is busted by 25. ... a3+! 26. Kxa3 Nxb5+

25. ... Ne4 26. Bg3 a3+ 27. Ka2

(See diagram top of page 38)

27. ... Nc3+

Radjabov was low on time, and he missed the strongest continuation of his attack.



After 27. ... Bb4! 28. Kb3 a2 29. Kxb4 Nxb3 White would have to find the only move 30. Ra1! to keep the game going.

28. Kxa3 Bb4+ 29. Kxb4 Na2+ 30. Kc5??

In the end Wesley blunders into a checkmate. White could still hold after 30. Kb3 Nxc1+ 31. Kb2 Ne2 32. Bxe2 Rxe2+ 33. Kb3.

30. ... Re6! 31. b6 Ra5, mate.

This was the second win with Black for Teimour, who finished the first set early, with a score of 2½-½ in his favor. Wesley turned things around in the second set. His opening preparation was excellent, and he simply didn't give his opponent many chances. Teimour can lament a horrible endgame blunder that cost him game two of the set, and a premature queen trade in the first blitz game, but Wesley looked a bit stronger throughout.

In some ways, the Carlsen-Giri pairing was similar. Anish's best chance came early, in the first game of the first set, but he traded into an equal ending and threw away a promising position. The old soccer adage — if you don't score on your chances, the ball will end up in your own goal — proved to be true, as Carlsen took the first set in the fourth game, and drew all four games in the second set, seemingly without any problems. For Anish's fans, his competing with world champion on equal terms is yesterday's news. We want wins.

Hikaru Nakamura is not lacking in fighting qualities, as we all know. Another confirmation came in the second blitz play-off game against Vachier-Lagrave. Needing a win to stay in the match, Hikaru found himself in a very tight spot.

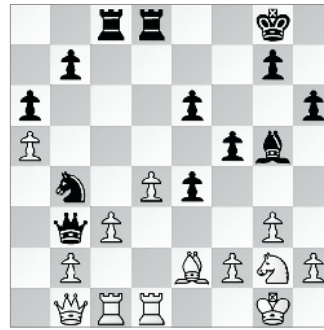
FIGHTING BACK

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2736)
GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (2784)
Skilling Open KO (1.32), 11.26.2020

(See diagram top of next column)

23. ... Bxc1

GM Alexander Morozevich recommended 23. ... Na2!? during a live broadcast on a Russian-language website, and this would put Hikaru in an impossible situation. He could repeat



BLACK TO MOVE

the moves and concede the match or continue the game after the objectively losing 24. Ne3 Bxe3 25. fxe3 Nxc1 26. Qxc1.

24. Rxc1 Nd5

Suddenly the momentum began to shift. Maxime's play became tentative, as he was looking to make a draw out of a winning position, which is an extremely unnatural thing to do and can really mess with your head.

Under normal circumstances in an MVL game we would see the resolute 24. ... Nd3! with something like 25. Bxd3 (25. Rd1 e5!) 25. ... exd3 26. Qxd3 Qxb2 27. Qe3 e5! 28. dxe5 Rd3 and a quick win to follow.

25. f3 exf3 26. Bxf3 Qb5

I'd prefer 26. ... b6! to open the b-file to attack the b2-pawn.

27. Re1 Re8 28. Qa2 Kh8 29. Bh5! Re7 30. Nh4 Kh7



31. Ng6

Possible was 31. Bg6+ Kh8 32. Bxf5 exf5 33. Ng6+ Kh7 34. Nxe7 Re8 35. Re5 Hikaru might have missed the last move that helps White to save a piece and retain advantage after 35. ... Rxe7 36. Qxd5 Rxe5 37. Qxe5

31. ... Rec7 32. Ne5 Kg8 33. Ng6 Kh7? 34. Rxe6

Nakamura is back in the match!

34. ... Nf6 35. Be2 Qd5 36. Qxd5 Nxd5 37. Bd3 Rf7 38. Ne5 Rff8 39. Rd6 Ne3 40. Rd7 Rb8 41. Rd6 Rbc8 42. Rb6 Rc7 43. Kf2 Nd5 44. Rd6 Ne7 45. Nd7 Rf7 46. Nc5 Nc6 47. b4 g6 48. h4 Ne7 49. Bc4 Rg7 50. Bb3 Rc6 51. Rd7 Nc8 52. Rxb7+ Kxb7 53. Bd5 Rc7 54. Ne6+, Black resigned.

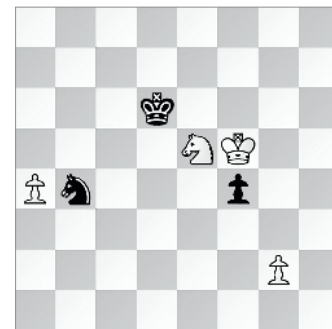
Despite an early exit, it seemed that MVL has re-discovered his passion for online chess after appearing rather indifferent to it in the summer tour. Perhaps, the announcement of the Candidates being postponed until 2021 took some burden off his shoulders. At any rate, a few weeks after the Skilling Open, Vachier-Lagrave beat Carlsen in the Chess.com Speed Challenge.

Nepomniachtchi-Aronian was a bit of an up-and-down affair. Aronian took the first set by winning games three and four, but on the second day he appeared out of gas. Nepomniachtchi took game four and both blitz games rather easily.

That set up his intriguing matchup with Carlsen in the semifinals. Magnus opened the scoring by taking advantage of Nepomniachtchi's early blunder in game one, but came close to losing his lead the next two games.

ESCAPE ARTIST

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2784)
GM Magnus Carlsen (2862)
Skilling Open KO (2.12), 11.27.2020



WHITE TO MOVE

50. Ng6?

At the end of this difficult game Ian simply didn't have enough time to calculate a win.

The continuation 50. a5 would make a good use of the a-pawn as decoy. 50. ... Kc5 (50. ... Nd5 51. Ke4! Ne3 52. g3 f3 53. Kxe3 Kc5 54. Nc4!) 51. Kxf4 Kb5 52. Ke4 and the g-pawn should queen, while the black king is helplessly watching from the parking lot.

50. ... Nd5 51. Nxf4

If 51. Ke4 Nc3+.

51. ... Ne3+ 52. Ke4 Nxb2!

Slippery as an eel!

53. Nxb2 Kc5, Draw agreed.

Nepomniachtchi wasn't done yet. He finally broke through in the opening game of day two, but an unforced error in the next game proved very costly. Magnus could only breathe a sigh of relief when he defended a dangerous-looking position in game three, thanks to a nice Exchange sac, and managed

to get the queens off on move 15 against Nepomniachtchi's Najdorf in the final game. After the match Carlsen praised his opponent, noting that Nepomniachtchi had raised his game to a new level. Those weren't just nice words of consolation. At the time of writing this article, Ian has just won the 2020 Russian Championship, and he is closing on Ding Liren for third place in the rating list.

The second semifinal match So-Nakamura was very intriguing. Ever since chess competition moved online, and to faster time controls at that, Hikaru is one of the very top dogs again, and a threat to win every tournament. Wesley is more of a mystery, but his recent win in the U.S. Championship showed his determination.

So won the first set on the strength of a great victory in game two, but he missed some chances to secure the match in the second set. It all came down to game four.

MODERN DEFENSE (A07)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2736)

GM Wesley So (2770)

Skilling Open KO (2.24), 11.28.2020

1. Nf3 d5 2. g3 g6 3. Bg2 Bg7 4. 0-0 e5 5. d3 Ne7 6. c4 dxc4 7. dxc4 0-0 8. Nc3 Nbc6 9. Rb1 Nd4 10. b3 Bg4 11. Nd2 c6 12. h3 Bf5 13. Nde4 Qc7 14. e3 Ne6 15. b4 a5 16. a3 Rad8 17. Qb3 axb4 18. axb4 Bxe4 19. Bxe4 f5 20. c5 Qc8 21. Na4 Nd5 22. Bxd5 cxd5 23. Nb6 Qc6 24. Rd1 Ng5 25. h4 Ne4



26. b5

In this tense situation we anticipated yet another Nakamura comeback.

The expected 26. Ba3 would connect the rooks and give the c5-pawn the necessary protection in view of the upcoming b4-b5 push. Hikaru must have been concerned with a counterattacking possibility of 26. ... Qe6 27. Nxd5 Kh8!? 28. Qc4 g5!?, as otherwise Black will go down with a whimper. Here White's best is 29. h5! but he has to see one more difficult-to-find move after the desperate 29. ... Nxf2!? 30. Kxf2 f4 and that is 31. h6! Still, the resulting positions are very much unclear.

26. ... Qe6 27. Rxd5 Rxd5 28. Qxd5

Nakamura gambled, seeing no advantage for White in case 28. Nxd5 Nxc5 29. Qc4 Rd8 30. Ne7+ Kf7 31. Qxc5 Qxe7.

28. ... Qxd5 29. Nxd5 Rd8

... but it was not going to work this time.

30. c6 Rxd5 31. cxb7 Rd8 32. Ra1 Nc5 33. Ra7 Nxb7 34. Rxb7 Rd1+ 35. Kg2 Rxc1 36. Rb8+ Kf7

A draw would put the match in the bag, so there was no need for Wesley to seek winning chances after 36. ... Bf8.

37. Rb7+ Kg8 38. Rb8+ Kf7 39. Rb7+ Kg8, draw.

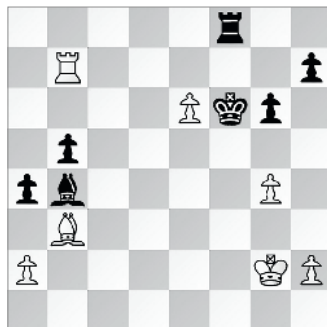
Off to the final match. Of course, Carlsen is always the favorite, especially in rapid play, but his game was a bit off in the Skilling, and he survived too many close calls. Still, a trademark endgame win in game one gave Magnus the lead.

NORWEGIAN MAGIC

GM Magnus Carlsen (2862)

GM Wesley So (2770)

Skilling Open KO (3.11), 11.29.2020



WHITE TO MOVE

32. g5+

Magnus ignored 32. Bxa4 bxa4 33. Rxb4 Rc8 as a likely draw.

32. ... Kxg5 33. Rxb5+ Rf5

Wesley So must have thought he had a draw in hand. It was next to impossible to anticipate Carlsen's magic. Otherwise, 33. ... Kf6 34. Bxa4 Bd6 35. Bb3 Rb8 36. Ra5 Rb4 would retain drawing chances thanks to a counterattack against the h2-pawn.

Now Magnus once again shows why he's the king of chess.

34. Rxb4 axb3 35. e7! bxa2 36. e8=Q a1=Q 37. Qe7+ Kh6

No better is 37. ... Qf6 38. Qe3+ Rf4 39. h4+.

38. Rh4+! Rh5 39. Qf8+ Qg7 40. Qf4+ g5 41. Qd6+ Qg6 42. Qf8+ Qg7 43. Rxh5+, Black resigned.

Truly a study-like finish, all found in waning seconds of a rapid game. Bravo!

So got a stroke of good luck at the end of a long game two, when Carlsen blundered into

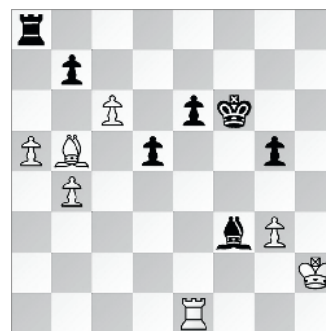
a checkmate. It proved not to be an accident, as the determined Wesley So kept on coming right back after losses. I'd particularly mention his win with Black in game two of the second set, a great lesson in endgame technique. Both sets ended in a 2-2 tie, and it was Wesley's turn to shine in the blitz playoff.

QUICK PRECISION

GM Wesley So (2770)

GM Magnus Carlsen (2862)

Skilling Open KO (3.31), 11.30.2020



BLACK TO MOVE

34. ... d4?

Instinctively, it feels like the right move, and the time trouble hardly leaves any chance for deeper consideration. I'd say Carlsen got a bit unlucky here. 34. ... bxc6 35. Bxc6 Ra7 36. Kg1 Be4 37. Re3 Ke5 would keep him afloat.

35. Rf1!

The resulting bishop ending was impeccably calculated by Wesley So.

35. ... Rh8+ 36. Kg1 Rh1+ 37. Kf2 Rxf1+ 38. Bxf1 Bxc6 39. b5 Bd7

A piece down ending leaves no hope, as the pawns are easily blockaded: 39. ... Bxb5 40. Bxb5 Ke5 41. Kf3 Kd5 42. a6 bxa6 43. Bxa6 Ke5 44. Bd3 Kd5 45. Kg4 e5 46. Kf5.

40. a6 bxa6 41. bxa6 d3

It's curtains after 41. ... Bc6 42. Bg2! (and of course, not 42. a7?? e5 43. Bg2 e4 when it's Black who's winning.)

42. Bxd3 Ke5

If 42. ... Bc6 43. a7 e5 44. Ke3.

43. a7 Bc6 44. Bf1, Black resigned.

What followed was a nervy final game. Carlsen sought to unbalance the position by trading two minor pieces for a rook and two pawns, but So's great centralization of his pieces allowed him to avoid further exchanges. Once the smoke cleared, there was nothing left on the board.

Congratulations to Wesley So, who has really earned his success. One wonders where he would be ranked now if online G/15+10 ratings were calculated, which, in my opinion, is long overdue. ♠

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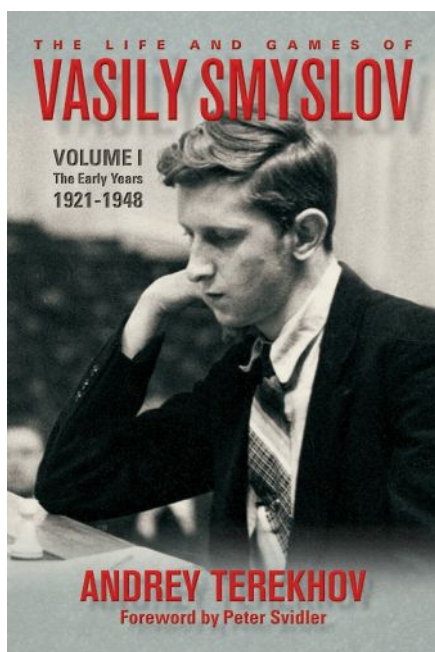
See TLA section of this issue
for complete details.



A World Champion Takes Flight

A new biography tells the tale of Vasily Smyslov's early years.

by **IM JOHN WATSON**



Of all the world champions, today's players are probably least familiar with the career of Vasily Smyslov. And yet Smyslov was arguably more successful than many of his more renowned colleagues. This is shown by his many decades of sparkling tournament and Olympiad results, and even more so by his World Championship cycle achievements.

Smyslov finished second in the World Championship super-tournament of 1948, ahead of GMs Samuel Reshevsky, Paul Keres, and Max Euwe. He then won two of the strongest Candidates tournaments in history, the first in Zürich 1953, which led to a World

Championship match versus GM Mikhail Botvinnik in 1954 (drawn 12-12), and the second in Amsterdam 1956, which culminated in winning the championship decisively (12½-9½) versus the same opponent in 1957.

Several commentators, including Kasparov, have opined that Smyslov was the world's best player for most of the 1950s, surpassing even Botvinnik. He subsequently qualified for the Candidates four more times. Amazingly, at age 62, he finished second in the 1984 Las Palmas Interzonal, followed by winning two Candidates matches, and only a loss in the finals to GM Garry Kasparov prevented from playing in still another World Championship match. Subsequently, Smyslov continued to play successfully, won the World Senior Championship at age 70, and was rated almost 2500 when he played his last event at age 80!

Considering all this, surprisingly little has been written about Smyslov's life and games. His own two-volume work *Smyslov's Best Games* (the English version published by Moravian Chess in 2003) is extremely readable, but has little biographical information and the annotations are rather superficial and limited by modern standards.

There has long been a need for another book to do justice to Smyslov's career, and the Russian FM Andrey Terekhov has devoted years of study and research to the task. *Vasily Smyslov, Volume I: The Early Years: 1921-1948* is the first installment of what the author says will very likely be more than three volumes. The first volume has already vastly expanded our historical understanding, since Terekhov has unearthed countless previously unknown games and biographical facts from the pre-war and war years. This is a

period from which records of Smyslov's life were already scarce, a situation further exacerbated by the fact that a bomb destroyed the home where he lived at the time.

Terekhov includes both well-known and previously unpublished games. The annotations take into account Smyslov's own notes and those by numerous other top-level players; this gives the reader a sense of Smyslov's own thoughts and the real-world considerations involved in the heat of battle. Terekhov supplements this with computer-assisted analysis so that one gets to the truth of key positions, but he is careful to separate impossibly exotic lines from what was realistic for the players to find in practice.

Smyslov was a late starter and didn't play a tournament game until he was 14; at that point, he quickly found his footing. In one of his first events he played a game that remained a sentimental favorite throughout his life:

COLLE SYSTEM (D05)

Kirill Gerasimov
Vasily Smyslov
Moscow 1935

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. e3 e6 4. Bd3 c5 5. b3 Nc6 6. Bb2 Bd6 7. O-O Qc7 8. a3 b6 9. c4 Bb7 10. Nc3 a6 11. Re1 cxd4 12. exd4 O-O 13. Na4 Bf4 14. Ne5 dxc4 15. bxc4 Nxe5! 16. dxe5 Qc6!?

Terekhov: "The quiet 16. ... Nd7 was probably stronger, but in that case the game probably would never have been published!"

17. Bf1?

Better was 17. Qf3 or 17. f3 with the idea 17. ... Ng4 18. Qc2.

17. ... Rfd8 18. Qb3? Ng4! 19. h3

The critical position. Can Black crash through?

**19. ... Rd3!!**

A beautiful decoy theme.

20. Qxb6

The first key tactical idea is 20. Qxd3 Bh2+ 21. Kh1 Nxf2+ 22. Kxh2 Nxd3 and wins.

20. ... Rxh3!

Terekhov: “The point. The annotators invariably point out the similarity of this combination to ‘Rubinstein’s Immortal’ (Rtlewi-Rubinstein, Lodz 1907), a game that Smyslov undoubtedly knew. It is a great example of why it is important to study the classics. However, as the next move shows, the decisive blow is based on a motif that Smyslov must have learned from another classical game!”

21. Bd4

Covering f2. There’s no time for 21. Qxc6 Bh2+ 22. Kh1 Nxf2 mate.

21. ... Bh2+ 22. Kh1 Bxe5+

... and here **White resigned** in view of 22. ... Bxe5+ 23. Kg1 Bh2+ 24. Kh1 Bc7+ 25. Kg1 Bxb6 — a “windmill” theme.

Smyslov’s ascent over the next few years was spectacular. Just two years later, in 1937, he played in a Young Pioneers championship versus some of the best young players in the country and won with a perfect 11-0 score. The very next year, Smyslov finished first in Soviet Junior Championship, tied for first in the Championship of First Category Players, and most impressively of all, won the powerful Moscow Championship, ahead of leading players like Lilienthal.

Smyslov has gained a reputation for harmonious, technically accurate play, but this volume is full of wild, double-edged struggles and miraculous escapes, arguably typical of a younger player’s game. Terekhov suggests that these adventurous contests are in part a result of Smyslov’s poor opening knowledge, and that as he improved in that phase of the game he was better able to control the vicissitudes of play. By the mid-1940s he begins to outplay other leading players consistently and establish his technical

superiority, as can be seen in games such as the following positional masterpiece from the 1948 World Championship. Terekhov supplies eight pages of detailed notes, but even without them you can appreciate how inexorably the game develops against an American legend who was extremely difficult to defeat in his prime:

RUY LOPEZ (C75)

Vasily Smyslov
Samuel Reshevsky
Moscow 1948

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 d6 5. c3 Nge7 6. d4 Bd7 7. Bb3 h6 8. Nbd2 Ng6 9. Nc4 Be7 10. O-O O-O 11. Ne3 Bf6 12. Nd5 Re8?! 13. dxe5! Bxe5

Natural but surprisingly bad is 13. ... Ngxe5 14. Nxe5 Bxe5 15. f4 Bf6 after the remarkable sequence 16. e5! (16. Bc2 Be7 17. Qd3 g6 18. Be3! is also strong) 16. ... Be7 17. Qh5 Be6 18. Be3! Qd7! (18. ... dxe5 19. Rad1 with a terrific initiative) 19. h3 Bf8 20. Rad1 Na5 21. f5! Bxd5 22. e6! fxe6 23. fxe6 Bxe6 24. Bc2 Bf7 25. Rxf7! Qxf7 26. Bh7+!.

14. Nxe5 dxe5 15. Qf3 Be6 16. Rd1 Bxd5 17. Rxd5 Qe7 18. Qf5! Nf8 19. Be3 Ne6 20. Rad1

White has a large positional advantage.

20. ... Red8 21. g3 Rd6 22. Rxd6 cxd6 23. Qg4 Kh8 24. Bb6! Nb8 25. Bxe6! fxe6

**26. Qh4!**

Terekhov: “An astounding solution. It is difficult for humans to even consider such a counterintuitive move, and one also has to notice the unusual follow-up idea that we will see next.”

26. ... Qd7

If 26. ... Qxh4 27. gxh4 and after the pawn on d6 falls, White is winning.

27. Qd8+! Qxd8 28. Bxd8 Nd7 29. Bc7

An easier win is found via 29. Ba5!, avoiding the loss of tempi that now follows.

29. ... Nc5 30. Rxd6 Rc8 31. Bb6 Na4 32. Rxe6 Nxb2 33. Rxe5 Nc4 34. Re6 Nxb6 35. Rxb6 Rxc3 36. Rxb7 Rc2 37. h4

Or 37. a4!

37. ... Rxa2 38. Kg2 a5 39. h5! a4 40. Ra7 Kg8 41. g4 a3 42. Kg3 Re2 43. Kf3 Ra2 44. Ke3 Kf8 45. f3 Ra1 46. Kf4 a2

Waiting with 46. ... Kg8 fails to 47. Kf5! Kf8 48. Kg6.

47. e5 Kg8

White wins after 47. ... Ke8 48. Kf5 Rf1 49. Rxa2 Rxf3+ 50. Ke6 Kd8 51. Ra7.

48. Kf5 Rf1 49. Rxa2 Rxf3+ 50. Kg6 Kf8 51. Ra8+ Ke7 52. Ra7+, Black resigned.

The key line is 52. Ra7+ Ke6 53. Rxd7 Kxe5 54. Kxh6. Smyslov made it look easy.

Along with the games and biographical material, *The Early Years: 1921-1948* includes an informative introduction by Terekhov in which he outlines Smyslov’s place in chess history and describes the nature of his own research for the book. In addition, there are appendices entitled “Smyslov’s System in the Grünfeld Defense” and “Smyslov’s Endgames” (the latter by GM Karsten Müller), and a chapter about Smyslov’s wife of 62 years, Nadezhda Andreevna.

As he relates the events of Smyslov’s career, Terekhov gives us an overview of Soviet and international chess at the time. Apart from extended discussions of Smyslov’s world-class rivals, games are often introduced with mini-biographies of his opponents, including luminaries such as GMs Andor Lilienthal, Yuri Averbakh, Issak Boleslavsky, Igor Bondarevsky, Alexander Kotov, and Viacheslav Ragozin; IMs Ilya Kan and Vasily Panov; and opening theoretician Alexey Sokolsky. We also learn about somewhat more obscure players whose names true chess fans may nevertheless recognize, such as GM Vladimir Alatortsev (who served as Smyslov’s coach and second for many years), Nikolay Rudnev, Sergey Belavenets, Boris Verlinsky, Karel Opočenský, Georgy Dzagurov, Gavriil Veresov, and Iosif Rudakovsky. These descriptions make the book especially attractive for fans of chess history.

It’s worthwhile in and of itself to see the history of our game preserved, but a book like this can also constitute an important role in one’s chess education. Although I suspect that young players aren’t frequently examining the games of the old masters, they would be well served by taking a break from opening theory and studying these. During the years covered in this volume, Smyslov was perfecting his game and rising from an inexperienced and flawed player to parity with the best players of the world. To my mind, that’s a process worth reflecting upon and trying to learn from. ♠

Terekhov, Andrey. Vasily Smyslov, Volume I: The Early Years: 1921-1948. Russell Enterprises Inc, 2020. ISBN hardcover: 978-1-949859-24-9; ebook: 949859-25-6. 536 pages. (Available from www.uscfsales.com, product code B0129RE, \$34.95.)

Ugly Can Be Beautiful

Stylistic creativity can produce unexpected works of art.

By **BRUCE PANDOLFINI**

OBJECTIVELY, WE SHOULD ALWAYS strive to play the best moves. But we're not computers. We're human beings. We can't help instilling style into our selection process. Even so, in some instances, stylistic creativity can produce overall works of art, which wouldn't have necessarily come about through so-called "correct" play. Such is the case with this month's game played in the USSR in 1977 between Arthur Nigmadzianov (White) and Leonid Kaplun (Black). A few of White's moves are certainly questionable, maybe even a little ugly, and Black probably shouldn't have lost. But we're almost glad he did, since the effect of the winning idea is beautiful to chess fans. The game began as an Alekhine's Defense:

ALEKHINE'S DEFENSE (B05)

Arthur Nigmadzianov
Leonid Kaplun
USSR, 1977

1. e4 Nf6 2. e5 Nd5



Now ensure that the position above is set up on your chessboard. As you play through

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

3. d4 Par Score 5

White plays a straightforward developing move. You may accept *full credit* for 3. c4, 3. Nc3, or 3. Nf3.

3. ... d6

Black begins the assault against the advanced White e-pawn, while releasing the queen-bishop.

4. Nf3 Par Score 4

White develops and protects the e5-pawn. Accept *full credit* for 4. c4.

4. ... Bg4

Before possibly playing ... e7-e6, Black activates the c8-bishop.

5. Be2 Par Score 5

This breaks the pin. Now if Black plays 5. ... dxe5, White can take back with his knight, 6. Nxe5.

5. ... c6

This defends the d5-knight and also gives the black queen the a5-d8 diagonal for entering the fray. Add *1 bonus point* if you planned to answer 5. ... Bxf3 6. Bxf3 dxe5 with 7. c4.

6. c4 Par Score 5

Nigmadzianov drives the black knight from the center.

6. ... Nb6

Kaplun retreats his knight to safety.

7. Nbd2 Par Score 5

Add *1 bonus point* if you avoided 7. Nc3 because of 7. ... Bxf3, when 8. Bxf3 loses the c4-pawn.

7. ... N8d7

A more active move for Black was 7. ... dxe5.

8. Ng5 Par Score 5

White goes for tactical play. You may accept *full credit* for 8. 0-0.

8. ... Bxe2

This is a natural response. Black hopes trading will gain time, since he expects that White must surrender a tempo to take back.

9. e6 Par Score 7

Not necessarily! Here White finds a neat *zwischenzug*. If Black blunders and takes White's queen, he gets mated on f7.

9. ... f6

Well, this stops the mate.

10. Qxe2 Par Score 5

Time to take back. Each side now has a knight hanging.

10. ... fxg5

Black decides to get rid of the aggressive intruder.

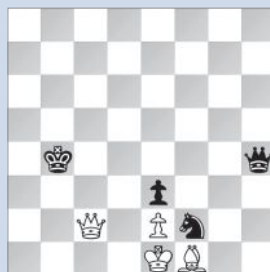
11. Ne4 Par Score 5

ABCs of Chess

These problems are all related to key positions in this month's game. In each case, **Black is to move**. The answers can be found in Solutions on page 50.

February Exercise: For this exercise you'll need a decent collection of annotated games. Pick out a game, then try to find the same one in a database, preferably without notes. Play over the unannotated game a few times until you think you understand it somewhat. Then annotate it, giving full notes, with variations, plans and ideas. (In the process, you'll be creating your own database of analyzed games.) Then go back to the original annotated game and compare your notes with the analyst's. Get into the habit of doing this and, with sufficient practice, your ability to analyze your thoughts, and communicate them, should both advance greatly.

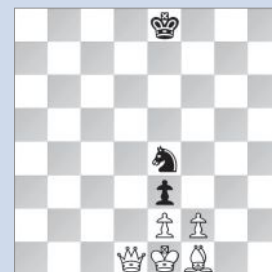
PROBLEM I.
Mating net



PROBLEM II.
Mating net



PROBLEM III.
Mating net



PROBLEM IV.
Mating net



PROBLEM V.
Mating net



PROBLEM VI.
Mating net



White goes for the gold. Probably not the best move, but for an attacking player, it's not unreasonable. Still, give yourself *full credit* for 11. exd7+.

11. ... **Nf6**

Naturally, Black saves his knight and guards h5. He's going to try to keep his material.

12. **Nxg5** **Par Score 5**

White has a forking threat at f7, but Black's position seems defensible.

12. ... **Qc7**

The threat is dealt with. Black is still okay, though keep in mind that the c7-square is now occupied.

13. **Nf7** **Par Score 5**

The h8-rook is menaced and queenside castling is prevented.

13. ... **Rg8**

Gloomy times or not, the rook must be saved.

14. **g4** **Par Score 5**

The attack must be pushed. White aims to dislodge the f6-knight.

14. ... **h6**

This takes the sting out of g4-g5, but 14. ... g6 was also possible.

15. **h4** **Par Score 5**

White reinforces the g5-advance. But Black's material advantage gives him an edge on paper.

15. ... **d5**

As a rule of thumb, a good response to a flank attack is to counter in the center.

16. **c5** **Par Score 5**

The threat to the c4-pawn is answered and the center becomes fixed. Black is becoming a little cramped, but is still very much alive.

16. ... **Nc8**

It looked risky, but 16. ... Nc4 had worthy tactical play on its side. Take note that c8 is now occupied and unavailable.

17. **g5** **Par Score 5**

The attack continues. White still hopes to clear paths to the black king.

17. ... **Ne4**

The knight now occupies a nice central square.

18. **gxh6** **Par Score 5**

Deduct 1 point for 18. Qh5, which would be answered by 18. ... g6.

18. ... **gxh6**

19. **Qh5** **Par Score 6**

Finally, White gets to occupy h5 with serious threats looming.

19. ... **Nf6**

This is a blunder that loses immediately. With 19. ... Qa5+, Black would still have had at least a draw.

20. **Nd6+** **Par Score 6**

Fortune indeed favors the brave. White's combativeness produces a double check, leading to a picturesque finish.

20. ... **Kd8**

21. **Qe8+** **Par Score 7**

A kind of smothered mate coming up! After 21. ... Nxe8, with c7 and c8 occupied, there follows 22. Nf7 mate!

21. ... **Black resigned** ♠



Did you know you could read archival copies of "Solitaire Chess" (and all columns and features)? Go to uschess.org, click on "Chess Life Magazine," and then "Archives."



MAKE YOUR MOVE!

FEBRUARY 2021 | FM CARSTEN HANSEN

This month's puzzles are mostly from online events.

The puzzles start from easy and gradually move toward being difficult. Try first to solve the puzzle before reading the text at the bottom of the page. If unsuccessful, play through the solution, but return to the puzzle in a week or two to see if you can now solve it. That way you gradually expand your tactical vision, and it will be more likely that you will spot tactics as they occur in your own games. Whatever you do, do not use an engine to solve the puzzles, as that will only cheat yourself out of improving your game.

TACTIC I.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC II.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC III.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC IV.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC V.



WHITE TO MOVE

TACTIC VI.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC VII.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC VIII.



BLACK TO MOVE

TACTIC IX.



WHITE TO MOVE

POSITION 1: Diagonal action

POSITION 2: Dual power

POSITION 3: It goes on

POSITION 4: Brute force

POSITION 5: Cans to be opened

POSITION 6: Move order is important

POSITION 7: Jumping to conclusions

POSITION 8: Strike & precision

POSITION 9: Loosen, then nailing

TOURNAMENT LIFE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Executive Board authorizes a temporary change in the US Chess Grand Prix (GP) rules for the period March 4, 2020 through February 28, 2021 out of concern for the unforeseeable impacts the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) could have on participation in GP events. The change allows organizers with guaranteed prize funds to change the status of their prize fund without first seeking US Chess permission to make the change. More specifically, organizers who have announced "XXXX in Guaranteed prizes" (or similar words) for their GP events shall be allowed to re-state their prize funds in their publicity as "XXXX in Projected prizes based on ### players," where ### represents the number of players in last year's event rounded to the nearest five players. For new GP events lacking historical attendance data, the organizer shall specify a "based on" number of players as part of the Projected Prize Fund language in their publicity. This decision includes all GP tournaments that already have been advertised in Chess Life. For any GP events being publicly advertised (whether by TLA, another website, flyers, emails, social media, etc.), organizers shall take all necessary steps to ensure their revised pre-tournament announcements call attention to this change in prize fund status and provide the appropriate "Projected based on XXX players" in the language of their updated publicity. US Chess asks that the chess community support this temporary change in the spirit that it is intended. The Executive Board shall revisit this matter as necessary.

NATIONAL EVENTS & BIDS NOW ON USCHESSE.ORG Effective with the November 2020 Chess Life, we have removed the National Events and Bids page that has traditionally been part of our TLA section. This information continues to be available here: <https://new.uschess.org/national-events-calendar>

Nationals

HERITAGE EVENT • JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

World Amateur Team & 2021 U.S. Amateur Team Championship - East (Online Event)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2021-SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021

50TH Anniversary, since 1971! 6SS, game 60 delay 10 seconds. Open to 4- player teams-no alternate. Team average (4 highest ratings—2021 January Rating list) must be under 2200. Teams rated over 2000 average no more than 1000 points between board 3 and 4. The higher of online or USCF will be used as of January 2021. Touchdown page at ICC for rules and info on allowed advance practice: <https://play.chessclub.com/usate>. EF: \$160 postmarked by 1/25/2021 After ALL-\$200 all teams. No Entries after 2/10/21. Check out official website www.njscf.org. Prizes: 1-5th Place teams, Engraved wooden anniversary chess set leather box; Top Team (Denis Barry Award) U2100, 2000, 1900, 1800, 1700, 1600, 1500, 1400, 1000 each 4 Engraved Wooden anniversary sets leather box; Top college team (same school) 4 Digital Clocks & 4 heavy weighted plastic Hastings chess sets in engraved leather bags. Top HS team (grades 9-12 same school), Top Middle School (grades 5-9 same school), Top Elementary School (grades K-6 same school), Top Scholastic team (Collins Award), Mixed Doubles (2 males, 2 females), Seniors (all players over age 50), each 4 Digital Clocks to top team; Company Team (same employer-non educational), Top Coaches (educational), Top team all female, Family (4 family members), each 4 heavy weighted plastic sets in engraved bags. State teams—CT, DE, MD, MA, NJ, NY (Benjamin Award), PA, VA, each plaque top team; Special Plaques: Top Future team, (all players under age 10), Top Military College, Top Parent/Child (2 pairs, one parent, one child), Best Player 1-4 -All 6-0 scores each Digital clock. Entry fee refunded to team with Best "Chess related" name, — Best "Chess Related costumes or gimmick"—entry refunded. Sat 2/13 Rds. 10-2-7, Sun 9-1-6. Surprises and special give-aways!! Two days only!! Grandmaster commentary. Same hysterical event with great chess!! Best pajama prize, Best masks award, team with best slippers. For help forming teams and more information contact: noreenchess@gmail.com or esdoyle@aol.com. Chks payable to NJSCF, mail by 1/25/21 to: NJSCF, 17 Stonehenge Road, Morristown, NJ 07960. (Include Team name, Captain, players full names, USCF Expiration, ID numbers and ratings in board order). No team can include more than two GMs. Include SASE for confirmation if wanted. No registered or certified mail accepted.

JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2021 U.S. Amateur Team Championship - North (Online Event)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2021-SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

Online provider TBA. Open: 6SS, G/60+inc. 10. Open to 4 player teams, no alternates. Team average (Higher of regular rating and online regular rating from Jan 2021 Rating List used) must be under 2200. EF: \$160 per team if received USPS or online by 6pm Feb. 5, \$180 if received USPS or online by 6pm Feb. 12, \$200 online until 6pm Feb. 19. Individuals wishing to play send \$50 received by USPS or on-line by 6pm Feb. 15, \$60 by 6pm Feb. 18, and request to be put on a team. (Note: we guarantee you will play but can't guarantee which board you will play or the ratings of your team). See www.chessweekend.com for more info, team rules and categories, complete prize list, and online fair play rules. Prizes: Winning team qualifies for national play-offs. Awards to top 3 teams, top teams u2000, u1800, u1600, u1300, u1000, top college team, top HS team, top junior team (HS and under), top K-8 team, top mixed doubles team (2 men and 2 women), top female team, top senior team (all 50 & over), best team name, best costume or theme, best streamer, and top individual score each board. Prizes: are online bookstore credit or Amazon gift cards. Rounds: Saturday 10:00am, 1:15pm, 4:30pm; Sunday 10:00am, 1:15pm, 4:30pm. Register after 12/15/20 at: www.chessweekend.com. Checks made payable and sent to: Chess Weekend, 21694 Doud Ct., Frankfort, IL 60423; include team's name and roster (plus ID#), captain's email and phone number. Info: www.chessweekend.com, glenn@chessweekend.com.

JUNIOR GRAND PRIX • NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

2021 U.S. Amateur Team Championship - South (Online Event)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021-SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2021

One Section, 6SS, G/60+inc. 10. Open to 4-player teams, No Alternates. Team average (All 4 Team Members — Jan 2021 Rating List) must be under 2200. US Chess rated. Higher of Regular US Chess rating or Online Regular US Chess rating used. EF: \$160 per team if received online by Feb. 12, \$180 if received online by Feb. 19, \$200 online after Feb. 19. No entries accepted after 12 noon (Central Time) Feb. 26. See <https://www.kingregistration.com/tournaments> for more info, team rules, complete prize list, and online fair play rules. PRIZES: Winning team qualifies for national play-offs. Awards to Top 3 teams, Top teams U2000, U1800, U1600, U1300, U1000, Top College Team, Top K-12 Team, Top Mixed Doubles Team (2 male and 2 female), Top Senior Team (all 50 & over), Top All-Female

Team. Top Military Team (active or retired Armed Forces members), and Top Individual Score each Board, 1 – 4. All members of team finishing in First Place overall get Champion's Plaque. Each member of top three teams gets commemorative clock. All members of winning teams of other categories get US Chess Sales Gift Certificate and commemorative medal. See tournament website for additional details. **ROUNDS (Central Time):** Saturday 10:00am, 1:15pm and 4:30pm; Sunday 10:00am, 1:15pm and 4:30pm. Register at <https://www.kingregistration.com/tournaments> (Texas Chess Association). **Mailed Entries:** Entry fee determined by postmark and must be mailed (postmarked) NLT Feb. 20. **Checks payable to Texas Chess Association.** Include Team's name, team members and US Chess IDs, and Team Captain's name, email address and phone number. Mail to: Franc Guadalupe (TCA President), 305 Willow Pointe Drive, League City, TX 77573. For more information, please email fguadalupe@aol.com or renategarcia1@gmail.com.

Class D/E (Under 1400/Unr): \$400-200-120-80. **Unrated prize limits:** Class D \$100, Class C \$180, Class B \$260. **Entry fee at chessaction.com:** \$90 by 2/18, \$110 by 11:30 am CST 12/20, entry after 9 am CST 2/20 must take half point bye in rd 1. GMs \$90 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game, rounds begin CST 10 am, 1:30 pm & 5 pm each day. **Regional EF discount:** \$20 less to residents of Texas or adjacent states. **Half point byes:** available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. **Online Regular rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings** used for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

6th annual George Washington Open SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021

5-SS, G/45+10, at Internet Chess Club. \$4000 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (side/rear camera angle). In 4 sections. **Major Section:** Open to 1900/over. \$500-300-200-100, top U2200 \$240-120. **Under 2000/Unr Section:** \$350-200-120-80, U1800 (no Unr) \$180-90. **Under 1700/Unr Section:** \$300-180-120-60, top U1500 (no Unr) \$140-70, unrated limit \$150. **Under 1400/Unr Section:** \$200-150-100-50, U1200 (no Unr) \$100-50; unrated limit \$80. **Entry fee \$68 at chessaction.com** by 2/25: \$85 by 12:30 pm EST 2/27, must take round 1 bye after 10 am EST 2/27. **Regional EF discount:** \$20 less to residents of VA, MD or DC. GMs \$50 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game. **Rounds begin EST 11 am, 1:30 pm, 4 pm, 6:30 pm, 9 pm.** **Half point byes:** Available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. USCF membership required; may join with registration. **Online Regular rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings** used for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

CCA February Open SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2021

5-SS, G/40+10, at Internet Chess Club. \$2000 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (side/rear camera angle). In 3 sections. **Open Section:** Open to all, \$400-200-100, top U2200 \$140, U2000 \$120. **Under 1900/Unr Section:** \$250-130-70, top U1700 (no Unr) \$120. **Under 1500/Unr Section:** \$200-100-50, U1300 (no Unr) \$120; unrated limit \$80. **Entry fee at chessaction.com:** \$48 by 2/26, \$65 by 11:30 am EST 2/28, entry after 9 pm EST 2/28 must take half point bye in rd 1. GMs \$40 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game,

Online

7th annual Southwest Class Blitz FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

11-SS, G/3+2, at Internet Chess Club. \$600 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (see ccazoom.com). One section, open to all. **Prizes \$200-100-60, top U2100 \$90, U1800/Unr \$80, U1500 \$70.** **Entry fee at chessaction.com:** \$27 by 2/18, \$40 by 6 pm CST 2/19, both \$10 less if playing in Southwest Class 2/20-21, no entry after 6 pm CST 2/19. GMs \$25 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game. **Round 1 begins 7 pm CST.** **Other rounds ASAP:** 15 minute break after round 6. Should finish by 10 pm CST. **Half point byes:** Available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. **Online Blitz rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings** used for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

12th annual Southwest Class SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2021-SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

6-SS, G/75+10, at Internet Chess Club. \$6000 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (side/rear camera angle). In 6 sections. **Master (2100/up):** \$600-300-180-100, top Texas resident \$100 bonus. **Expert (1900-2199):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class A (1700-1999):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class B (1500-1799/Unr):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class C (1300-1599/Unr):** \$500-250-140-90.

12th annual SOUTHWEST CLASS February 20-21, 2021 on ICC

**6 ROUNDS, G/75+10
\$6,000 GUARANTEED PRIZES**

See Online Events or chessevents.us.

28th annual WESTERN CLASS March 6-7, 2021 on ICC

**6 ROUNDS, G/75+10
\$6,000 GUARANTEED PRIZES**

See Online Events or chessevents.us.

rounds begin EST 11 am, 1:15 pm, 3:30 pm, 5:45 pm, 8 pm. **Half point byes:** Available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. **Online Regular rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings used** for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

8th annual Western Class Blitz FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021

11-SS, G/3+2, at Internet Chess Club. \$600 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (side/rear camera angle). One section, open to all. **Prizes** \$200-100-60, top U2100 \$90, U1800/Unr \$80, U1500 \$70. **Entry fee** at chessaction.com: \$27 by 3/4, \$40 by 6 pm PST 3/5, both \$10 less if playing in Western Class 3/6-7, no entry after 6 pm PST 3/5. **GMs** \$25 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game. **Round 1** begins 7 pm PST. **Other rounds ASAP**; 15 minute break after round 6. Should finish by 10 pm PST. **Half point byes:** Available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. **Online Blitz rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings used** for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

28th annual Western Class Open

SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2021-SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021 6-SS, G/75+10, at Internet Chess Club. \$6000 guaranteed prizes. Must be on Zoom (use real name) to be eligible for prizes (side/rear camera angle, see

ccazoom.com). In 6 sections. **Master (2100/up):** \$600-300-180-100, top California resident \$100 bonus. **Expert (1900-2199):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class A (1700-1999):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class B (1500-1799/Unr):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class C (1300-1599/Unr):** \$500-250-140-90. **Class D/E (Under 1400/Unr):** \$400-200-120-80. **Unrated prize limits:** Class D/E \$100, Class C \$180, Class B \$260. **Entry fee** at chessaction.com: \$90 by 3/4, \$110 by 11:30 am PST 3/6, entry after 9 am PST 3/6 must take half point bye in rd 1. New players (first CCA event on ICC) enter by 3/4 or risk not being paired for round 1. **GMs** \$90 from prize. **Log into playcca.com** 30 minutes before game, rounds begin PST 10 am, 1:30 pm & 5 pm each day. **Regional EF discount:** \$20 less to residents of California or adjacent states. **Half point byes:** available all rounds, limit 2 byes, must be claimed with registration & cannot be changed. **Online Regular rated** (will not affect OTB ratings), **Online Regular ratings used** for pairings & prizes (OTB Regular used if no Online Regular). \$15 service charge for refunds. **WARNING: YOU MUST BE LOGGED IN WHEN PAIRINGS ARE ISSUED, OR YOU WILL NOT BE PAIRED.**

2021 Virtual Scholastic Chess Exposition

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021-MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

7 or 5 Rd. G/60+10. SS. Online via Chess.com's platform. Four Sections: **OPEN, U1000, U500 and UNRATED.** EF: \$12 by 12/31; \$15 by 2/10; \$18 by 3/5 and \$25 thereafter. USCF membership required (except in Unrated). **Prizes:** Plaques for Top 25% (including ties) in each section. Medals to all who don't win plaques. **ALL:** Play one game each day; games must start between 4-8pm on weekdays and 12-3pm on weekends. Two ½

point byes are available. Sections may be merged if low turnout. For advance registration and more information: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2021-virtual-scholastic-chess-exposition-tickets-129962927615>.

Regionals

ALABAMA

Tom Nard Memorial VII SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021

4SS, Game/45 + 10 second increment per move. Round times: 9:30, 11:30, 2:30, 4:30. (Half-point byes available, limit 1, request before round 1) Location: Evangel Church, 3975 Vaughn Rd, Montgomery, AL. Three sections: **OPEN** (prizes b/20, 70%GTD): 1st \$250 + T, 2nd \$100, U2000/unrated \$100, **U1800** (prizes b/20, 70%GTD): 1st \$200 + T, 2nd \$100, U1500/unrated \$100, **U1200** (prizes b/20, 70%GTD): 1st \$150 + T, 2nd \$100, U1000/unrated \$100. EF: \$40 by February 20, \$45 thereafter. Registration: Send name, USCF ID, section, and EF (payable to "Evangel Church") to Doug Strout, 6000 Camelot Ct, Montgomery, AL 36117 (email: dsttrout@bellsouth.net)

CALIFORNIA, SOUTHERN

MARCH 6, 2021-MARCH 7, 2021
28th Annual Western Class Open
See Online Events.

MARYLAND

MARYLAND CHESS TOURNAMENTS (NORTH PENN CHESS CLUB)

Maryland Chess runs 21+ annual K-12 tournaments every other Saturday from September through June & 12+ annual 1-day or multi-day open tournaments for adults & K-12 players on weekends. See www.MDChess.org for tournament announcements, registration for tournaments, updated wallcharts, live standings, sign up for K-12 & open e-newsletters, lists of coaches & clubs, camp announcements, & news. K-12 MD players who compete in the Varsity section (for players rated 1600+) of 1 of 8+ annual MD-Sweet-16 Qualifiers can qualify for the \$48,000+ scholarship to the University of Maryland, Baltimore County awarded annually. UMBC is a perennial top-10 contender for the collegiate national chess championship.

PENNSYLVANIA

North Penn Chess Club

Main & Richardson - St. John's UCC, 500 West Main St., Lansdale, PA 19446. See www.northpennchess-club.org for schedules & info or 215-699-8418.

TEXAS

FEBRUARY 20, 2021-FEBRUARY 21, 2021
12th Annual Southwest Class
See Online Events.

CORRESPONDENCE CHESS

Check out these US Chess Rated Events!

US CHESS 74th ANNUAL 2021 Open Correspondence Chess Golden Knights Championship

\$800 FIRST PRIZE (plus title of US Chess Golden Knights Champion and plaque)
2ND PLACE \$500 • 3RD \$300 • 4TH THRU 10TH PLACE \$100 EACH • ENTRY FEE: \$25

These US Chess Correspondence Chess events are rated and open to all US Chess members who reside on the North American continent, islands, or Hawaii, as well as those US Chess members with an APO or FPO address. US Chess members who reside outside of the North American continent are welcome to participate in e-mail events. Your US Chess membership must remain current for the duration of the event, and entry fees must be paid in U.S. dollars. Those new to US Chess Correspondence Chess, please estimate your strength: Class A: 1800-1999 (very strong); Class B: 1600-1799 (strong); Class C: 1400-1599 (intermediate); Class D: 1399 and below (beginner level). Note: Prize fund based on 200 entries and may be decreased proportionately per number of entries assigned.

US CHESS 18th ANNUAL 2021 E-mail Correspondence Chess Electronic Knights Championship

\$800 FIRST PRIZE (plus title of US Chess electronic Knights Champion and plaque)
2ND PLACE \$500 • 3RD \$300 • 4TH THRU 10TH PLACE \$100 EACH • ENTRY FEE: \$25

These US Chess Correspondence Chess events are rated and open to all US Chess members with e-mail access. Your US Chess membership must remain current for the duration of the event, and entry fees must be paid in U.S. dollars. Maximum number of tournament entries allowed for the year for each player is ten. Note: Prize fund based on 200 entries and may be decreased proportionately per number of entries assigned. Golden Knights and Electronic Knights Championships are 7-player sections, one game with each of six opponents.

Mail in this form to enter or visit us online at www.uschess.org

Name _____ US CHESS ID# _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____ Est. Rating _____

Please call Accounting at 931-787-1234, ext. 130 to pay by credit card.

☐ Check here if you do not wish to have an opponent who is incarcerated (note that this may slow down your assignment).

Make checks payable to US CHESS and mail to: Correspondence Chess, US Chess, PO Box 3967, Crossville, TN 38557

Two ways to enter:

- Visit us online at uschess.org
- Mail in the form below

CORRESPONDENCE CHESS MATCHES (TWO PLAYERS)

Two or six-game options. ENTRY FEE: \$5.

☐ Win A Correspondence Chess Trophy

Four-player, double round-robin with rating-level (0000-1499; 1500-1799; 1800-2000+) pairings. 1st-place winner receives a trophy. Entry fee: \$10.

☐ Victor Palciauskas Prize Tournaments

Seven-player class-level pairings, one game with each of six opponents. 1st-place winner receives \$130 cash prize and a certificate signed by Victor Palciauskas. Entry fee: \$25.

☐ John W. Collins Memorial Class Tournaments

Four-player, double round-robin with rating-level (0000-1499; 1500-1799; 1800-2000+) pairings (unrateds welcome). 1st-place winner receives a John W. Collins certificate. Entry fee: \$7.

EMAIL RATED EVENTS (NEED EMAIL ACCESS)

☐ Lightning Match

Two players with two or six-game option. Entry fee: \$5.

☐ Swift Quads

Four-player, double round-robin format. 1st-place prize US Chess CC entry credit of \$30. Rating-Levels 0000-1499; 1500-1799; 1800-2000+. Entry fee: \$10.

☐ Walter Muir E-Quads (webserver chess)

Four-player, double round-robin webserver format tournament with class-level pairings. 1st-place receives a certificate. Entry fee: \$7.

Please check event(s) selected.

NOTE: Except for Lightning Matches, Swift Quads, Walter Muir E-Quads & Electronic Knights, players will use post office mail, unless opponents agree to use e-mail.



Gold & Silver Affiliates



US CHESS would like to recognize and thank
all of our Affiliates for their commitment and hard work.

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Bay Area Chess

2050 Concourse Drive #42
San Jose, CA 95131
408-409-6596
ask@bayareachess.com
www.bayareachess.com

Berkeley Chess School

2622 San Pablo Avenue,
Berkeley, CA 94702
510-843-0150
tournaments@berkeleychessschool.org
www.berkeleychessschool.org

Capital Area Chess

Centreville VA
703-627-5314
info@capitalareachess.com
www.capitalareachess.com

Caveman Chess, LLC

27 Morris Street
Park Ridge, IL 60068
224-985-5244
contact@cavemanchess.com
www.cavemanchess.com

ChessNYC.com

Michael Propper
1562 1st Ave #189
New York, NY 10128
212-475-8130
info@chessnyc.com
www.chessnyc.com

Continental Chess Association

P.O. Box 8482
Pelham, NY 10803
201-347-2269
director@chess.us
www.chesstour.com

Marshall Chess Club

23 West 10th Street,
New York, NY 10011
212-477-3716
admin@marshallchessclub.org
www.marshallchessclub.org

New Millennium Chess LLC

70 Pine Street, PH 5601
New York, NY 10005
212-475-8130
info@NewMillenniumChess.org
www.NewMillenniumChess.org

PaperClip Pairings

c/o Remy Ferrari
4 Jalapa Court
Brownsville, TX 78526
956-621-0377
rrferrari@bisd.us

Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis

4657 Maryland Avenue,
St. Louis, MO 63108
314-361-CHESS
info@saintlouischessclub.org
www.saintlouischessclub.org

San Diego Chess Club

2225 Sixth Avenue,
San Diego, CA 92101
619-752-4377
chucnglo@aol.com
www.sandiegochessclub.org

WilliamsburgTutoring.com

David Green
60 Broadway
Brooklyn NY 11249
info@ChessNYC.com
www.WilliamsburgTutoring.com

US CHESS SILVER AFFILIATES

Chess Center of New York (NY)

www.chesscenter.cc

En Passant Chess Club (TX)

td_edg@twc.com

Evangel Chess Club (AL)

www.evangelchurch.me

Jersey Shore HS Chess League (NJ)

shorehschessleague@yahoo.com

Little House of Chess, Inc. (NY)

littlehouseofchess.com

Long Island Chess Nuts (NY)

516-739-3907

Michigan Chess Association (MI)

www.michess.org

Oklahoma Chess Foundation (OK)

www.OCFchess.org

Rochester Chess Center (NY)

www.chessset.com

Sparta Chess Club (NJ)

www.spartachessclub.org

For all information on becoming a Gold or Silver Affiliate, please visit www.uschess.org/content/view/7905/95.



THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS



Thank you for being the sustaining force behind all our initiatives, and for making all of our programs possible.

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Solutions

Page 11 / CHESS TO ENJOY

PROBLEM I. 26. Rb8+! and 27. Nxd7(+).
PROBLEM II. 30. Bd1! Black resigns in view of 31. Bxg4 (31. ... hxd4 32. Qh8 mate). For example, 30. ... Nh6 31. Bxh5 gxh5 32. Rxh5 Rc6 33. Rg5+.
PROBLEM III. 15. Rd6! threatened 16. Rad1 and 17. Rxf6 or 17. Rxd7. Black resigned after 15. ... Qc7 16. Rad1 Rd8 17. Qd2! Bc8 18. Rxf6. **PROBLEM IV.** 24. Qe5! threatened 25. Qg5 g6 26. Qh6 and mates. After 24. ... Rc5 White can win with 25. Rxc5 (25. ... bxc5 26. Qg3). He preferred 25. Qg3 g6 26. Rxa4.
PROBLEM V. Don't take credit for 31. Qc3! (threatening 32. Qh8 mate) unless you saw 31. ... Qf6 32. Rf3! Qxc3 33. Rxf7 mate. **PROBLEM VI.** 19. Rxc3! Qxc3 20. Bb5+ Bxb5 21. Qxb5+ Kf8 22. Bh6+ Kg8 23. Qd7! resigns in view of 24. Rd1! followed by 25. Qd8+! and mates, or 23. ... Qc8 24. Qd4!.

Page 45 / ABCs OF CHESS

PROBLEM I. Mating Net: Black mates in two: 1. ... Nd3+ 2. Kd1 Qe1 mate **PROBLEM II. Mating Net:** Black mates with 1. ... Ne3+ 2. Ke1 Qd1+ 3. Rxd1 Nc2 mate. **PROBLEM III. Mating net:** It's mate by 1. exf2 mate. **PROBLEM IV. Mating net:** It is mate in two: 1. ... Qxc2+ 2. Qxc2 Bxc2 mate. **PROBLEM V. Mating net:** It's over after 1. ... Qh4+ 2. Nxh4 Rf1 mate. **PROBLEM VI. Mating net:** Black mates after 1. ... Ne3+ 2. dxe3 dxe2 mate.

Page 46 / MAKE YOUR MOVE!

TACTIC I. 15. Qxc6+ and **Black resigned.** He will get mated after 15. ... bxc6 16. Ba6 mate. Santagati - Obad, Titled Tuesday 2020. **TACTIC II. 27. Qxg6** Several other moves win, but this is the most direct way to the goal. **27. ... Rd7** This looks like desperation, but because the white queen is hanging, Black does not lose a rook. Obviously, Black cannot capture the queen: 27. ... fxc6 28. Rxc7+ Kh8 29. Rh7+ Kg8 30. Rbg7 mate. **28. Rxd7 Nxd7 29. Qg3** Momentarily, White has just won a pawn, but Black's position collapses quickly. **29. ... Nb6 30. Bxd6** and **Black resigned.** If Black moves the rook, White plays Qf4, if he does not move the rook, he will lose more material. M.Yilmaz - Pantsulaia, Euro Online Blitz ch 2020. **TACTIC III. 16. ... e5!** Because of the battery (Qc6 + Bb7) pointing in the direction of the g2-square, White cannot capture on e5 without losing material and therefore has to resort to other options. **17. d5** Blocking the dangerous diagonal. Note that 17. Bd2 e4 18. d5 Qc7 19. Nxe4 Nxe4 20. Bxe4 f5 loses material. **17. ... Qc7 18. Bg5** Both Be3 and Bd2 are met with ... e4, winning a piece. **18. ... e4 19. Nxe4 Nxe4 20. Bxe4** White could have resigned at this point, but since this game is a blitz game, he tries for a few more moves. **20. ... f5 21. Nd4 Rxe4 22. Qf1 Rxd4 23. Qe2 Re4 24. Qc2 Qxc4** and **White resigned.** J.Gunnarsson - Ulfarsson, Icelandic Blitz ch 2020 **TACTIC IV. 35. Nxf6+!** Another winning move is 35. Nxf6+! gxh6 (or 35. ... Kh8 36. Rxd8 Qxd8 37. Nf7+, winning Black's queen.) 36. Qg6+ Kh8 37. Qxh6+ (now Black gets mated by force) 37. ... Kg8 38. Qxf8+ Kh7 39. Re7+ Kg6 40. Qg7+ Kh5 41. Qh7+ Kg5 42. f4 mate or 42. Rg7 mate. A nice little king hunt. **35. ... Kf7 35. ... gxf6** transposes to 35. Nxf6+ gxh6 above. **36. Nxd5** and **Black resigned.** Vachier Lagrave - Aronian, Chess.com Speed Championship 2020. **TACTIC V. 12. Bxc4!** This is best, but White has at least one good alternative, for instance, 12. Ng5 Bxg5 13. fxc5 Qe7 14. g4 fxc4 15. Bg2 (threatening Nc3xd5) or 14. g6 h6 15. Bxh6 gxh6 16. Qxh6 with a decisive attack. **12. ... dxc4 13. d5** Or 13. h6 g6 first, before continuing with 14. d5 like in the game. **13. ... Ndxe5** If 13. ... Ndb8, then 14. d6 Bb7 15. h6 g6 16. dxe7 Qxd2+ 17. Rxd2 Nxe7 18. Nd4 Kf7 19. Ndb5 with a positional disaster for Black and it will not be long before White picks up material. **14. fxe5 exd5 15. Nxd5 Be6 16. Nxe7+ Qxe7 17. Bg5** White has not won any material but Black is struggling to keep his position afloat. **17. ... Qe8** Alternatively, 17. ... Qc5 18. h6 g6 (or 18. ... Rfe8 19. a3 Nxe5 20. Qc3!) 19. Qd6 with a decisive advantage for White. The dark-squared bishop is a beast. **18. h6 g6 19. Bf6 Rc8 20. Ng5 c3 21. Qd6 cxb2+ 22. Kxb2** White also wins with 22. Kb1. **22. ... Bf7 23. e6!** Making room for the white piece to join in on the attack on Black's cramped pieces and weak dark squares. **23. ... Bxe6 24. Bg7** Or 24. Bc3. **24. ... Bf7 25. Qxf8+ Qxf8 26. Bxf8 Rxf8 27. Rd7** and **Black resigned.** Giri - Topalov, Hainan Danzhou 2020. **TACTIC VI. 11. ... Nxd3!** In the game, both players managed to step wrong: **11. ... Bxh3??** (at first glance, it looks like this is merely a transposition to our main line, but it is not...) **12. gxh3??** (White returns the favor. However, with 12. Bf4! White

would have been winning!) **12. ... Nxd3 13. Qxd3 Qg3+ 14. Kh1 Qxh3+ 15. Kg1 Ng4** (15. ... Ne4 is more accurate, but both moves win) **16. Be3 Qxf3 17. Nd2 Qh3** and **White resigned.** Zhao Nan - Mitrabha, RBI Open Qualifier 2020. **12. Qxd3 Bxh3! 13. Be3** 13. gxh3 transposes to the game and is even worse. **13. ... Bxe3 14. Qxe3 Rae8 15. Qd3 Bd7** Black has won a pawn and has a large advantage. **TACTIC VII. 12. ... Ncb4!!** The knights become quite the dynamic duo of threats. In the game, the players continued less accurately: **12. ... Be6? 13. Kb1?** (White had the surprising 13. Ne4! available, but unless you're a computer, you probably would not spot that!) **13. ... f4?** [Natural but not the best. Black could once more have played 13. ... Ncb4! but this line is a lot more complicated than the main line in our solution: 14. Nb3 Nxa2!! 15. Kxa2 (or 15. Qd2 a5 16. Bd4 a4 and Black has a terrifying attack without having sacrificed anything) 15. ... a5 16. c4 a4 17. Nbd4 a3 18. Kb1, and here, Black has a couple of options that lead to a win, for instance, 18. ... Bf7 (and 18. ... Nxe3 19. fxe3 axb2 20. Qxb2 Bf7 21. Rhe1 c5 and Black has a large advantage thanks to White very vulnerable king.) 19. Rhe1 Nxe3 20. fxe3 c5, and Black's attack will crash through] **14. gxf4 Nxf4 15. Qf1 Nxd2** (15. ... Qd5! was better according to the computer) **16. Qxg2 Qd5 17. Nb3?** (17. b3 would even have been better for White; after the text move, White is once more in trouble) **17. ... a5 18. c4 Qf5 19. Nfd4 Qe5 20. Rhe1 a4 21. f4 Qh5 22. Nxe6? Rxe6 23. Nc5 Rxe3! 24. Rxe3 Qxd1** mate Certainly not a game without errors, but that's blitz for you. Serikbay - Skatchkov, Titled Tuesday 2020. **13. Kb1 Nc3+!** A beautiful stroke; now White king shelter will be torn wide open. **14. bxc3 Nd5!** The point behind the previous two moves: the knight will find a home on c3, causing mayhem and destruction. **15. Qe1 Nxc3+ 16. Kc1 Nxa2+ 17. Kb1 Nc3+ 18. Kc1** So far, so good. The next wave in Black's attack is a bit more subtle. **18. ... Qd6! 19. Nb3 Bd7!** White does not have the capacity to improve his position and is therefore left waiting for Black to commit. **20. Kd2 a5! 21. d4 Qb4 22. Ra1 Bb5**, threatening ... a5-a4. A possible continuation is **23. Nc5 Ne2+ 24. Kd1 Qb2** and it is curtains for White. **TACTIC VIII. 15. ... Nxf2!** Thematic. **16. Kxf2 Qxe3+! 17. Kf1** Until this point, everything is rather obvious., but now precision is needed. **17. ... Be4!!** A crucial move than prevents White from getting organized. In the game, Black went wrong with **17. ... Qf4+??** and the attack soon ran out of steam. **18. Bf3 Re3 19. Rc3 Rae8 20. Bc1 Re1+ 21. Qxe1 Rxe1+ 22. Kxe1** and **Black resigned.** Lenderman - Berkovich, RBI Open Qualifier 2020. **18. Rg1** The alternatives are similarly bad, for instance, 18. Rc3 Bxg2+! 19. Kxg2 Qxe2+ 20. Qxe2 Rxe2+ 21. Kf3 Rxb2 and Black is three pawns up in the endgame, or 18. Ba1 Qf4+ 19. Bf3 Re6! 20. Rc3 Rae8! (Black has time to build up his attack because White has difficulties improving the position) 21. h3 Bxf3 22. Rxf3 Re1+ 23. Qxe1 Rxe1+ 24. Kxe1 Qc1+ 25. Kf2 Qxh1 with a decisive material advantage for Black. **18. ... Qf4+ 19. Bf3 Re6!** Preparing to double the rooks on the e-file. **20. Bc3** Stopping potential checks on e1. **20. ... g5! 21. Bd2** Or 21. Be1 g4 22. Bg3 Qf5 23. Rc3 Kh8 and

Black wins the piece back with interest and the attack in hand. **21. ... Bd3+ 22. Kf2 Qd4+** and White gets mated by force. **TACTIC IX. 19. Qxg6!!** A stunning sacrifice that does not win the game but secures White a clear advantage. **19. ... fxc6** Black does not have a choice. **20. Rxe6! Qf7?!** Not the best move. After 20. ... Qc6! 21. Re7+ Qxc4 22. Rxc7+ Kh8 23. Rxc7+ Rxf6 24. Rxc4 Rxd6 25. Rxc3, White would only have an extra pawn and Black could fight to save the endgame. **21. Bxc3 Kh8?** Black's best chance was 21. ... Bxf2+! 22. Kxf2 Kh8 23. Rc1 cxd6 24. Rf6 (My computer also likes 24. Rxd6 but this is far more complicated, for instance, 24. ... Qf5 25. Bd3 Qf4 26. Rxc6 Rf7 27. Re1 with an ongoing attack and clearly better chances for White, but, admittedly, playing with three minor pieces for a queen is not everybody's cup of tea) 24. ... gxf6 25. Bxf7 Rxf7 26. Ke3 and White has a clear advantage in the endgame. **22. Re4! Qf5 23. Re7** The point behind the previous move, White can now attack reasonably undisturbed on the seventh rank. **23. ... Rg8** A better chance was 23. ... Bxf2+, when White has to answer 24. Kh1 Rfe8 25. Rf7!; the alternatives allow Black to survive: 25. Bxg7+ Kh7 26. Rf7 Qxf7 27. Bxf7 Kxg7 28. Bxe8 Rxe8 29. d7 Rd8 30. Rf1 Bb6 31. Ne5 with an endgame that is about even or 25. Rxc7 Re3 26. Rg8+ Kh7 27. Rg7+ with a fascinating perpetual check. **24. Bxg8 Rxc8 25. dxc7 Qc2 26. Be5 Bxf2+ 27. Kh1** White's dominating pieces and advanced passed pawn ensures White a decisive advantage. The rest of the game went as follows: **27. ... Bb6 28. h3 Kh7 29. Re1 a3 30. Kh2 g5 31. Nd4 Qc4 32. Nf5 Qxb4 33. Rc1 Kg6 34. Rxc7+ Kxf5 35. Rxc8 Bxc7 36. Bxc7 Qb2 37. Rc5+ Ke4 38. Rd8** and **Black resigned.** Dubov - Karjakin, Russian ch (Moscow) 2020.

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MY BEST MOVE

Tim Mirabile

National Master,
Chess Instructor,
Coach, and
Tournament Director

My dad taught me chess in the early 1970s when I was around age six. As I got a little older, I was able to beat most or all of my friends, but my dad still always beat me. Around 1980 I got my first chess computer, a Fidelity Sensory Challenger. I played it often, losing every game. After reading a few beginner books, and after much practice, I eventually started beating that computer, and then my dad as well. One day he managed to win a game, and declared, “That’s it. I’m never playing you again. Just remember that I won the last game we ever played!” He kept that promise to this day, and never misses the chance to tell that story any time the subject comes up.

There wasn’t much scholastic chess on Long Island, New York, at the time, so my first US Chess rated tournament had to wait until I got my driver’s license. Shortly after I turned 17, I entered the 1983 Nassau Chess Club Championship. Against the advice of tournament director Harold Stenzel, I chose to play in the highest section I was eligible for: Under 2100.

I lost all seven rounds, but I continued playing actively and broke 2200 for the first time about 10 years later. The following game is my only victory against a grandmaster so far, and the highest rated player I’ve ever played.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B87)

Tim Mirabile (2204)

GM Igor Novikov (2719)

Nassau Chess Club Championship, Mineola (5) 11.18.2002

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bc4 e6 7. Bb3 b5 8. O-O Be7 9. Qf3 Qb6 10. Be3

In 2001 I also played GM Novikov in the same tournament. With only one week to prepare, I did not feel comfortable playing the following piece sacrifice yet. I chose 10. Bg5!? instead.

10. ... Qb7 11. Qg3 Nbd7 12. Nf5!? exf5 13. Qxg7 Rf8 14. Nd5 fxe4



Having the opportunity and guts to play a legitimate positional sacrifice is challenging.

Earlier in 2002, Nassau Chess Club regular George Berg chose 14. ... Nxe4, but after 15. Nxe7 Black is already in trouble.

15. Nxe7 Kxe7 16. Rad1 Qc6 17. Bg5 Bb7



18. Rd4!

One year prior I found a Novikov game where White tried 18. Rfe1. The then-current Fritz engine quickly preferred 18. Rd4. I decided to look at this more deeply. Instead of routinely bringing the rooks to the center files, White prepares to double on the d-file.

18. ... d5

This was one possibility suggested by FM Roger LaFlair. Modern engines on faster processors suggest 18. ... a5 19. Rfd1 e3, but at the time we found no clear defense. After the game Novikov admitted that “[he] did not know what to do” after 18. Rd4.

19. Bxd5 Qxd5 20. Rxd5 Bxd5 21. Qxh7!

Not just a pawn grab — White intends to bring the queen back into play via the f5-square.

21. ... Rac8 22. Rd1 Rxc2 23. Qf5 Be6 24. Rxd7+ Kxd7 25. Qxf6

Recovering material with a big advantage due to Black’s exposed king and scattered forces. Novikov resigned on move 45. As for **My Best Move**, it turned out to be my preparation! ♠

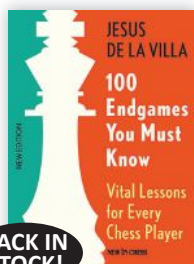
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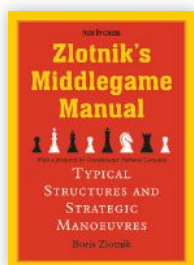
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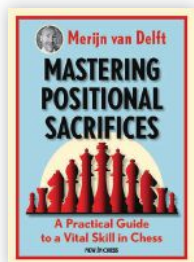


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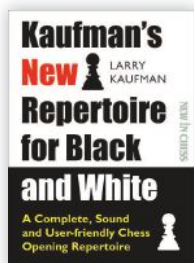
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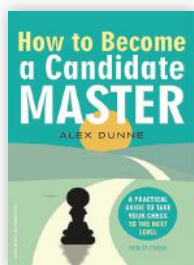
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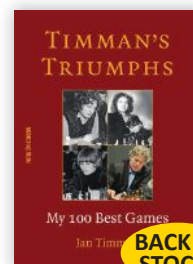
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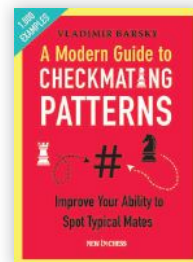


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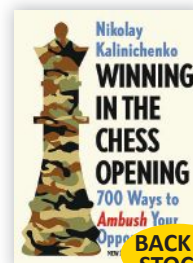
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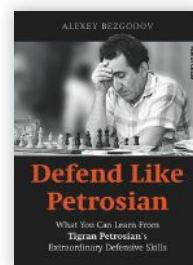


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