

**Chess
Canada**



Hammer'n Nail



Chess Canada

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submissions

Chess Canada is looking for contributions: tournament reports, photos, annotated games. For examples, see this issue or use your imagination.

suggestions

If you have an idea for a story you would like to write, email me:

cfc_newsletter_editor@chess.ca

- John Upper
editor *Chess Canada*

Chess Canada Hammer'n Nail

69 Critical Positions

6

Maili-Jade Ouellet: Beast Games

15

Mike Ivanov: the optimist

64

Across Canada

103

Appendix:

Is attacking easier than defending?

or

Would you rather be the hammer
or the nail?

172

notes:

15x WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

12x IM Mike Ivanov

TL;DR ... p.5

upcoming:

• **WIM Svitlana Demchenko**
"My Best Tournament"

• **IM Mark Plotkin**
"How I won:
my final IM Norm"

• **IM Deen Hergott**
"My 2026 Canadian Open
after 20 year break"



Game	White	Elo W	Black	Elo B	Result	ECO	Tournament	Date
1	Stremavicius,T	2533	Ouellet,M	2280	1-0	A08	Cherry Blossom	24.05.2024
2	Szpar,M	2491	Ouellet,M	2222	0-1	B51	Sevilla	14.01.2024
3	Ouellet,M	2222	Litner,I	1977	1-0	D36	Sevilla	20.01.2024
4	Ouellet,M	2283	Yoo,C	2595	0-1	E24	Southwest Class Ch.	18.02.2024
5	Ouellet,M	2267	Pham,B	2206	1/2	A57	Canadian Zonal (w)	01.04.2024
6	Lagarde,M	2604	Ouellet,M	2290	1/2	B30	Open de Porticcio, Corsica	30.06.2024
7	Vanduyfhuys,D	2112	Ouellet,M	2318	0-1	D38	45th Chess Olympiad	16.09.2024
8	Ouellet,M	2318	Stefanova,A	2416	1/2	D43	45th Chess Olympiad	18.09.2024
9	Ouellet,M	2319	Marin,M	2431	1-0	D85	Sevilla	18.01.2025
10	Juhasz,A	2425	Ouellet,M	2333	1/2	C60	Slovak Extraliga	16.02.2025
11	Ouellet,M	2305	Galperin,P	2494	1-0	E71	Stockholm GM RR	06.05.2025
12	Borda Rodas,A	2247	Ouellet,M	2350	0-1	B59	FIDE Women's World Cup	07.07.2025
13	Migot,T	2344	Ouellet,M	2331	0-1	C00	Quebec Invitational	16.08.2025
14	Ouellet,M	2331	Lesiege,A	2478	1-0	E71	Quebec Invitational	16.08.2025
15	Ouellet,M	2348	Salimova,N	2386	1/2	D17	FIDE Women's Grand Swiss	15.09.2025
16	Demchenko,S	2156	Ouellet,M	2291	0-1	C30	Canadian Zonal (w)	06.04.2026
17	Ivanov,M	2360	Xu,E	1960	0-1	C54	2021 North American Open	26.12.2021
18	Jaskolka,T	2188	Ivanov,M	2319	1-0	C08	Cracovia A, Krakow	03.01.2023
19	Ivanov,M	2339	Nijboer,F	2463	0-1	B23	Maia Chess Open	02.09.2023
20	Ivanov,M	2364	Diaz Reyes,K	2012	1-0	A08	6th San Cristobal Open	24.08.2024
21	Kumar,S	1908	Ivanov,M	2364	0-1	A50	6th San Cristobal Open	25.08.2024
22	Ivanov,M	2364	Ambartsumova,K	2404	1/2	A13	6th San Cristobal Open	25.08.2024
23	Grieve,H	2479	Ivanov,M	2364	0-1	C18	6th San Cristobal Open	26.08.2024
24	Ivanov,M	2364	Stefansson,V	2526	1/2	A07	6th San Cristobal Open	27.08.2024
25	Garcia Padron,J	2378	Ivanov,M	2364	0-1	A48	6th San Cristobal Open	28.08.2024
26	Ivanov,M	2364	Pulvett Marin,D	2482	1/2	A07	6th San Cristobal Open	29.08.2024
27	Ivanov,M	2364	Sosa,T	2515	1-0	B23	6th San Cristobal Open	30.08.2024
28	Fiorito,F	2416	Ivanov,M	2364	1/2	A15	6th San Cristobal Open	31.08.2024
29	Ivanov,M	2366	Nakamura,H	2816	1/2	B30	Maritime Open	12.10.2025
30	Hansima,C	1788	Minano,J	1633	0-1	A10	Winnipeg op, U1800	04.01.2025
31	Ng,G	2362	Keleberda,T	2388	0-1	A31	15th Calgary International	27.12.2024
32	Wiebe,I	2223	Anderson,C	2253	0-1	A33	Winnipeg Open	05.01.2025
33	Doknjas,N	2382	Taylor,A	2090	1-0	A37	New Year op, Richmond	03.01.2025
34	Adam,R	2318	Sai,K	2456	0-1	A45	Carnaval, Quebec City	21.02.2025
35	Malakar,S	2268	Plotkin,M	2490	0-1	A49	Hart House Holidays, Toronto	21.12.2025
36	Chen,Y	2226	Sanderson,T	1700	1-0	B11	New Year op, Richmond	02.01.2025
37	Lecompte,C	1275	Laplanche,G	1212	1-0	B13	Verseau U1400	12.02.2025
38	Kot,E	2237	Roussikh,M	2137	1-0	B15	Ottawa Winter op	19.01.2025
39	Boissinot,C	1431	Bergeron,N	1676	1-0	B21	Montcalm 6 2024-25	10.04.2025
40	Rainfray,A	2484	Vallieres,D	1865	1-0	B22	Carnaval Quebec	23.02.2025
41	Huxley,Z	1500	Auger,B	1883	1-0	B22	Montcalm 4 2024-25	09.01.2025
42	Barko,M	1910	Ghnatios,R	1910	1-0	B26	Mercredi 2025.04 'C'	09.04.2025
43	Plotkin,M	2474	Singh Dhaliwal,J	2240	0-1	B86	Hart House Reading Week	15.02.2025
44	Mutyalapati,M	2234	Blakely,M	2079	1-0	B87	Scarborough CC Winter Swiss	10.04.2025
45	Lattafi,Y	1994	Mendes,A	2415	1-0	B90	Ottawa Winter Open	17.01.2025
46	Preotu,R	2475	Keleberda,T	2296	1-0	C00	15th Calgary International	27.12.2024
47	Berube,M	2035	Robichaud,L	2061	1-0	C44	Pere Noel, Montreal	29.12.2024
48	Soberov,E	2240	Bahmani,A	2356	0-1	C48	Alberta Closed	29.03.2025
49	Marchand,C	2237	Fillmore,L	1881	1-0	D00	Bluenose op, Halifax	22.02.2025
50	Shi,E	1731	Dionne,F	1302	1-0	D00	Ste-Foy CC '4'	03.03.2025
51	Savard,A	1731	Gagne,L	1213	1-0	D00	Montcalm 4 2024-25	09.01.2025
52	Wang,D	2223	Jaferian,K	2348	0-1	D02	RA December, Ottawa	07.12.2024
53	Haessel,D	2060	Wu,N	2119	0-1	D20	Banff Open	11.11.2024
54	Keleberda,T	2445	Khodjimbatov,S	2289	1-0	D51	Alberta Closed	29.03.2025
55	Zhang,Y	1824	Jiang,B	1993	1-0	D85	Pere Noel, Montreal	30.12.2024
56	Demchenko,S	2336	Berube,M	1990	1-0	E46	RA December, Ottawa	07.12.2024
57	Tu,L	1819	Guo,B	1895	0-1	E81	British Columbia Open	17.02.2025

This issue features articles by two of Canada’s most active and successful young players:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet is the 4-time and current Canadian Women’s Champion.

IM Mike Ivanov is a busy and successful chess teacher, with an infectious love of the game.

Coincidentally, MJ is currently in the position Mike writes about: 3 IM Norms earned, needing only a 2400 rating for the IM title.

Neither article is a “Best Games”. On the contrary, I asked both to annotate some games they lost. Mike had some doozies in his struggle to get his rating over 2400. In reviewing MJO’s games I noticed an improvement in both her rook endings and her play against ...g6 defences, both of which you’ll see in her notes.

Normal Life



2022 North York IM Norm RR

MJ & Mike during their post-mortem.
Rohan Talukdar, Koosha Jaferian, Tianqi Wang.



The following game was an “also ran” for the Maili-Jade article: it helps show her improvement in rook endings, but we settled on even better ones for her to write up.

Still, the ending is interesting: there are tricky tactics and blunders from both players. So I kept her intro and added my notes.

-editor

Stremavicius, Titas (2533) Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2280)

A08

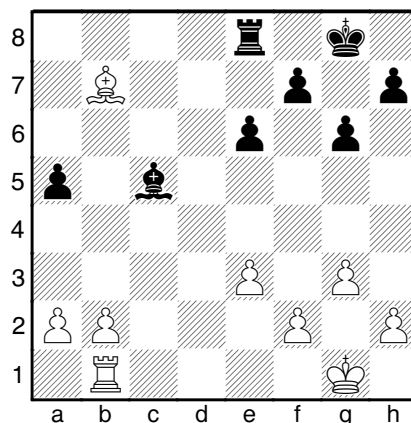
Cherry Blossom (6), 24.05.2024

Notes: John Upper

MJO:

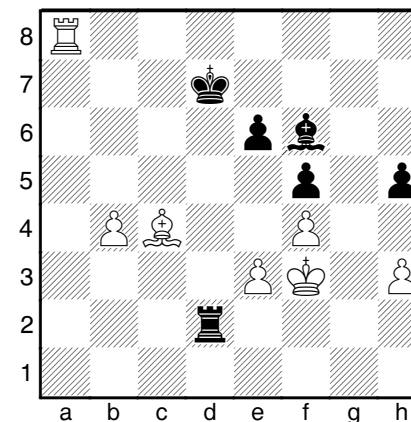
This is the second game where I lost a drawn rook endgame. However, it was not a rook endgame at first. I got outplayed in the opening, then I made a comeback, but eventually I lost. The game is filled with inaccuracies and blunders due to intense time pressure, but it was quite interesting and instructive. Lastly, this was my second time playing Titas. The first time was in 2021 and I lost quite badly. Despite losing the second game, I felt like it was a good indication of how I improved (since I had decent chances to make a draw). Our third encounter occurred in November 2024 where I played much better and got a draw as Black, and eventually, my second IM norm.

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♙g2 c5 4.0-0 g6
5.c4 ♙g7 6.♚a4+ ♙d7 7.♚b3 dxc4
8.♚xc4 ♚b6 9.♘e5 ♙e6 10.♚a4+
♘fd7 11.♘c4 ♙xc4 12.♚xc4 ♘c6
13.♘c3 a6 14.d3 0-0 15.♚b1 ♚ac8
16.♙e3± ♚d8 17.♚a4 e6 18.♚fc1
♚e7 19.♚a3 ♚fe8 20.♘e4 ♘d4
21.♙xd4 ♙xd4 22.e3 ♙g7 23.d4
♙f8 24.dxc5 ♘xc5 25.♘xc5 ♚xc5
26.♚xc5 ♚xc5 27.♚xc5 ♙xc5
28.♙xb7 a5□



White's up a pawn in ♚ & opposite ♙ ending. At 37 ply and above, SF18 rates this 0.00. Leela gives a more human evaluation +0.2. But those evals depend on perfect and near perfect play from... both sides.

29.♚c1 ♙b4 30.♚c7 ♚d8 31.♙f3 ♘g7
32.♘f1 ♚b8 33.♚a7 ♘f6 34.♙e2 ♙d2
35.b3 ♙b4 36.♙d3 ♚e8 37.a3 ♙xa3
38.♚xa5 ♙d6 39.♚a6 ♚d8 40.♘e2
♘e7 41.f4 ♚d7 42.g4 h5 43.gxh5
gxh5 44.♚a5 f5 45.♚a6 ♙c5 46.♙c4
♚d6 47.♚a8 ♙b4 48.♘f3 ♚d2 49.h3
♙c3 50.♚c8 ♙f6 51.b4 ♘d7 52.♚a8



52...♙d8?

Blunders the e-pawn.

52...♚d6 looks fatally passive, but it's better than the game line, and it seems to hold: 53.♚a7+ ♘e8□ (53...♘d8? 54.b5+- and ♚a6 will help the b-pawn advance.) 54.b5 ♙d8□ with what looks like a fortress: even if White gets his ♘ to b4 how can he make progress from there?

Computers opt for this line, which has a very unusual motif: 52...♙h4= this creates a mate threat, which is easily dealt with, but blocking the h-pawn means Black can't put it on a protected square with ...h4, so White can now win it. But the tricky point is that White can win the ♙h5 at the cost of trapping his ♚! 53.♙e2 (53.♚a2 stops the mate, but 53...♚xa2 54.♙xa2 is an opposite ♙ fortress. 54...♙e1= or 54...♙d8=)

GM Titas Stremavicius
Seville, 2024

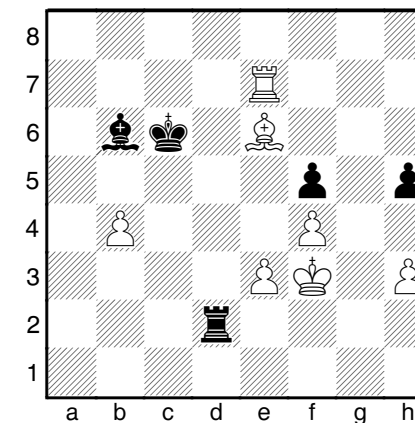
53...♘e7 54.♚h8 ♘f7 55.♚xh5 ♙f6!!
the point: the ♚ has no escape!
Luckily for White he can "activate" the trapped rook with ♚xg7 to get a draw.

53.♚a7+□+- ♘c6

53...♙c7 54.♙xe6+-.

54.♙xe6 ♙b6 55.♚e7!

Will defend e3.



55...♔b5

55...♔d6 56.♖d7+-.

56.♙xf5 ♖xb4 57.♙g6 h4

58.f5 ♙c5 59.f6 ♖d6 60.♖e4+

♖c3 61.♖f4 ♖d2 62.e4 ♙d4

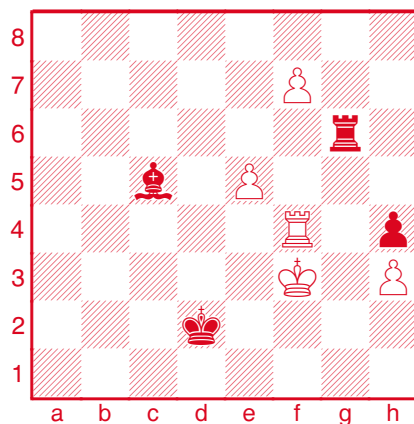
63.f7!?+-

63.e5 ♙xe5 64.f7+-.

63...♖xg6 64.e5

64.f8♙?? ♖g3#.

64...♙c5



What, if anything, could be wrong with promoting?

65.f8=♙?

White has several wins, including ♔e4. I think 65.♖xh4+- is simplest. 65...♔d3!? (65...♖g1 66.♔e4!) 66.♖h8 ♔d4 67.♔f4□+- saving e5 and supporting the pawn with ♔f5. Once again, "random details" matter: the loose ♖g6 gives White one more tempo, if it was on a3 the position would be drawn with ...♔d5!

65...♖g3+□ 66.♔e4 ♙xf8??

66...♖e3+□= 67.♔d5 ♙xf8 68.♖xf8

♖xh3 69.♖f4 ♖d3+□ 70.♔e4!?

(70.♖d4?? h3□-+) 70...♖e3+□=.

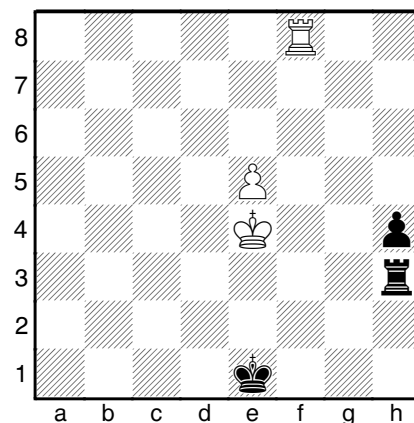
67.♖f2+□+-

Both ♖s need the 3rd rank — White as a bridge to support the e-pawn, and Black to unblock her h-pawn and return to cover the f8 promotion square — and this check forces the black ♔ away so that White gets to use it.

67...♔e1

67...♔c3 68.♖xf8 ♖xh3 69.♖f3+-.

68.♖xf8 ♖xh3



69.♖f3□

69.e6? ♔e2=.

69...♖h2

That's the extra tempo: White's ♖ is ready to build the bridge on e3, while Black has to move her ♖ but not to a square that helps stop the white pawn or a square which clears the way for the h-pawn.

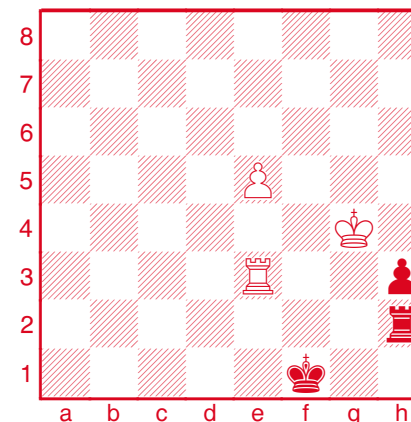
70.♔f4?

And that gives the tempo back!

70.♖e3+□+- ♔f1 (70...♔d2 is similar, with ♖d3-d8 instead of ♖f3-f8.) 71.e6□ ♖g2 72.e7 ♖g8 73.♖f3+□ ♔g2 74.♖f8□+-.

70...h3□= 71.♖e3+ ♔f1

72.♔g4



72...♔g2??

72...♖g2+□ 73.♔xh3 (73.♔f5 h2 74.♖h3 ♔g1=; 73.♖g3?? ♔f2!-+) 73...♖g8□

White's ♔ is cut off, but it still comes down to one tempo. If White's ♖ and ♔ were on the c-file (or further away) the black ♔ would not be able to attack the ♖ before White was ready to promote, forcing Black to block the pawn with the ♖ and free the white ♔, winning:

74.e6 ♔f2□ 75.♖e5 ♔f3□= the mate threat and the extra tempo off the ♖e5 make it easy to see this is a draw.

74.♖g3 is a good try, 74...♖e8□ 75.♖g5 ♔f2 76.♔g4 ♔e3□= 77.♔f5 ♔d4□ 78.♔f6 ♔d5□ 79.e6+ ♔d6 80.♖e5 ♖f8+□=.

73.e6+-

or 73.♖e2+ ♔g1 74.♖xh2 ♔xh2 75.e6 ♔g2 76.e7 h2 77.e8♙ h1♙ 78.♙e2+ ♔g1 79.♔g3+- which is something you expect to see in endgame textbooks, not OTB games.

73...♖h1 74.e7 h2 75.♖g3+

75.e8♙ feels simpler to me, but both win.

75...♔f2 76.e8♙ ♖g1

77.♙e3+ ♔f1 78.♙c1+

1-0

TL;DR

Both feature articles show the OTB skill to compete at a modern IM level in the international arena. If I had to pick only two games from each:

Lagarde - MJ (p.29): R ending save vs 2600+.

MJ - Marin (40): interesting opening, famous opponent.

Jaskolka - MI (68): from auto-pilot to screaming into the night, the pain is real!

Grieve - MI (83): key win, interesting Winawer.

Across Canada is sorted by ECO code, so you can find the openings you like (p.3). I'm glad I saw these:

Wiebe - Anderson (108): a tactical sideline from a symmetrical English, with an absurdly complicated ending with promotions and mate threats.

Malakar - Plotkin (116): beautiful KID attack.

Plotkin - Dahliwal (133): Sozin essentials.

Wang - Jaferian (156): topical Noteboom ...g5!, nice finish.

photo of Calix (152): composite of 10+ photos.

-editor





Critical Positions



selected by the editor

6

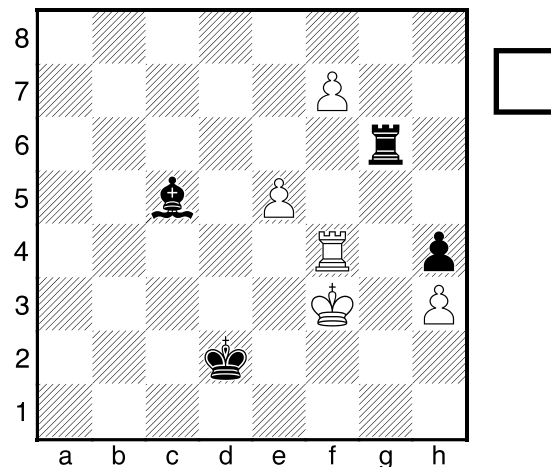
The following 69 diagrams are critical positions from this issue of *Chess Canada*. You can treat them as exercises or as a teaser introduction to what you'll find this month.

Critical positions can be:

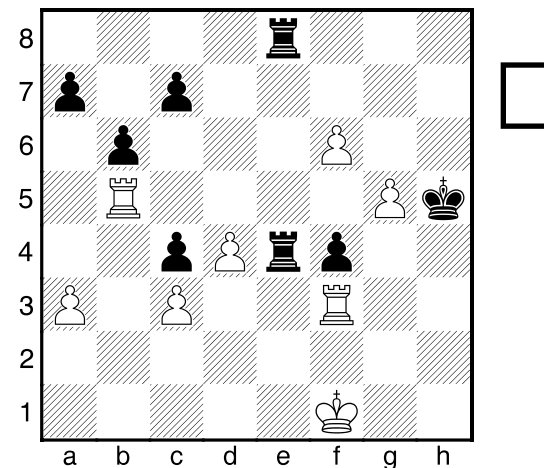
- winning combinations
- surprising tactics
- endgames requiring precise play
- simple calculation exercises
- variation-rich middlegames
- moments when one player went badly wrong.

The  and  squares next to each diagram indicate the player to move.

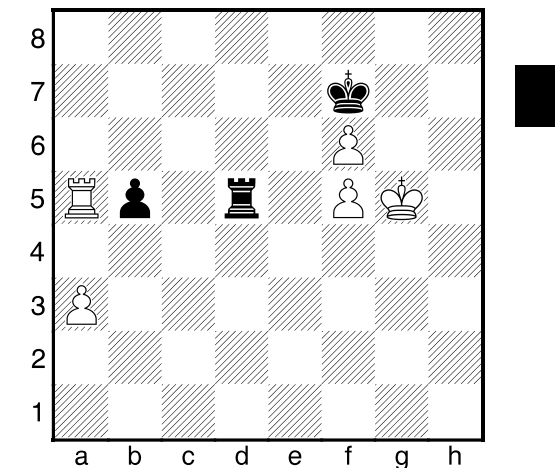
Solutions appear in the game *analysis* **below the red diagrams** in the articles named under the diagram. Critical positions usually feature significantly more analytical commentary than the rest of the game.



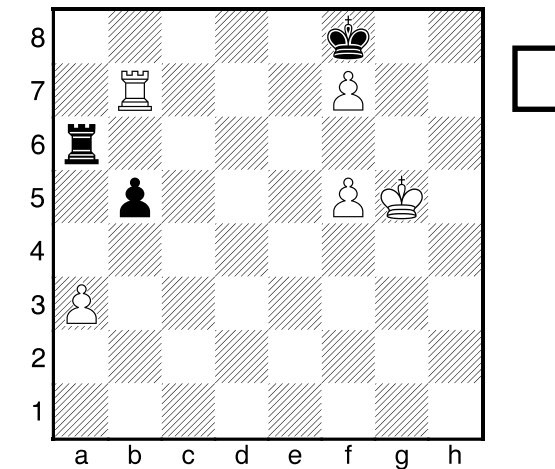
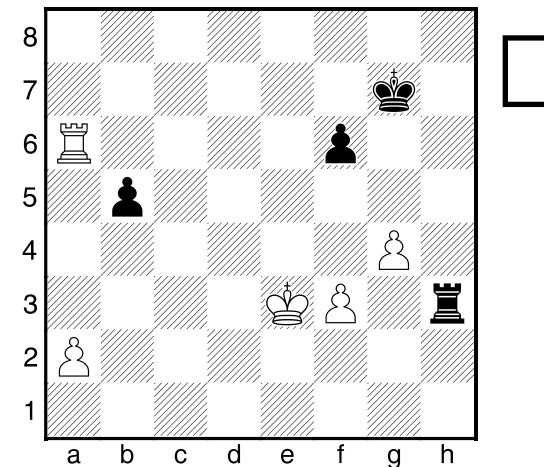
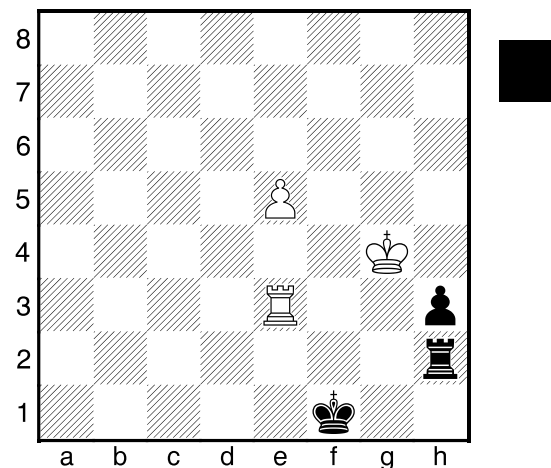
What, if anything, could be wrong with promoting?



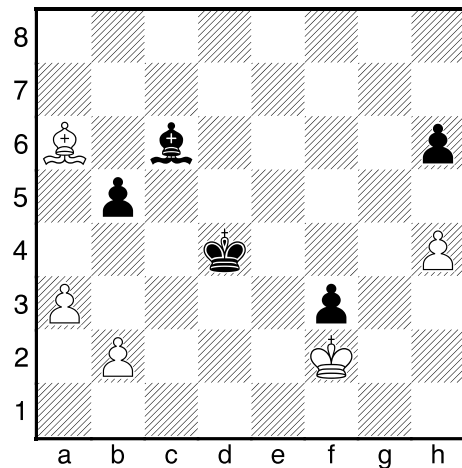
see: Maili-Jade



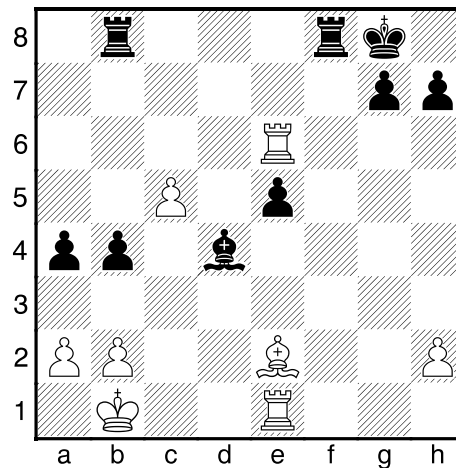
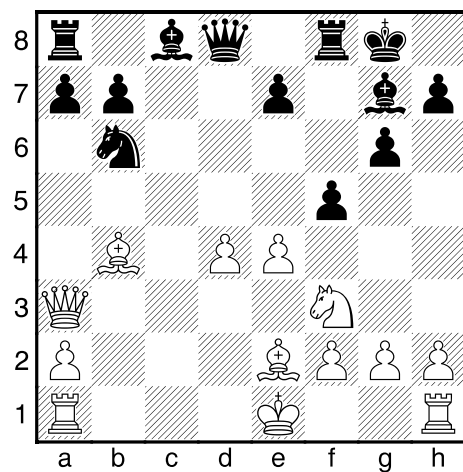
Active ...♖d3 or passive ...♖d7?



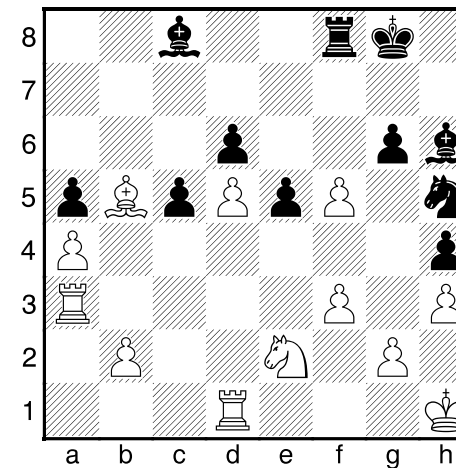
This one could be a study!



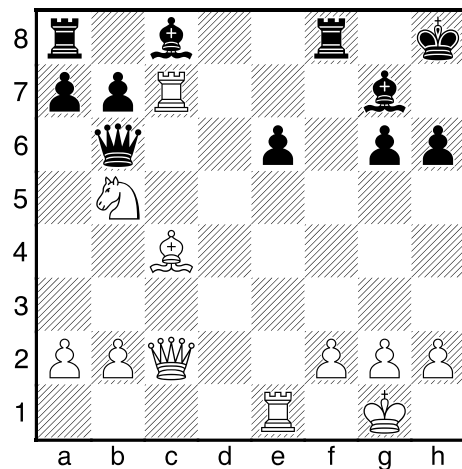
Active or Passive?
Liquidate/solidify the queenside with b3 & a4 (putting the ♔ on c4 if ...b3), or something more passive?



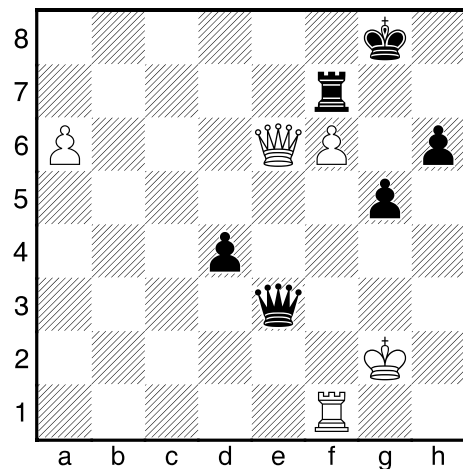
Which pawn to push?



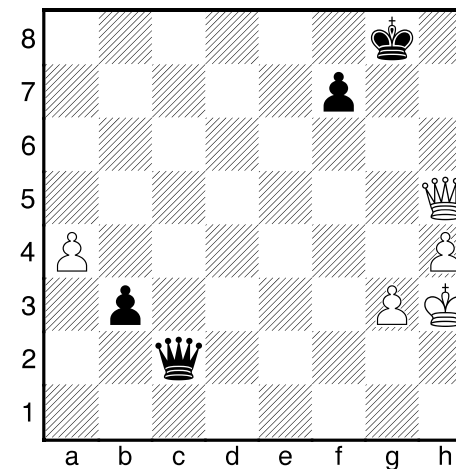
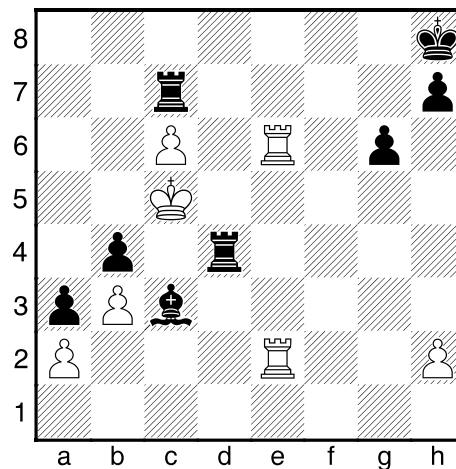
Every-Russian-schoolboy knows...

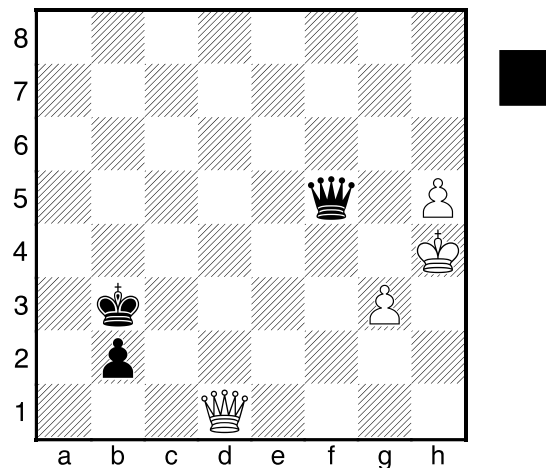


♖e3 or ♖d1?

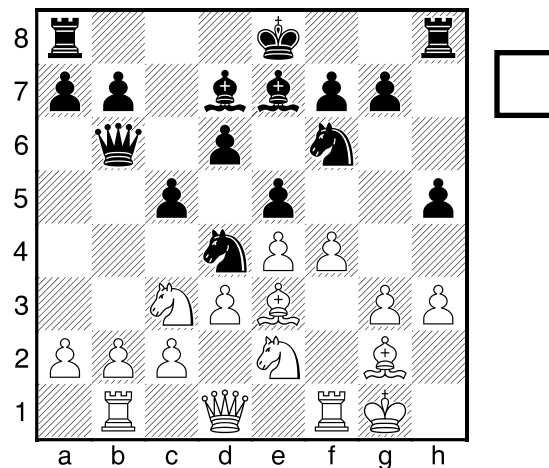


What happens if ♖e1?



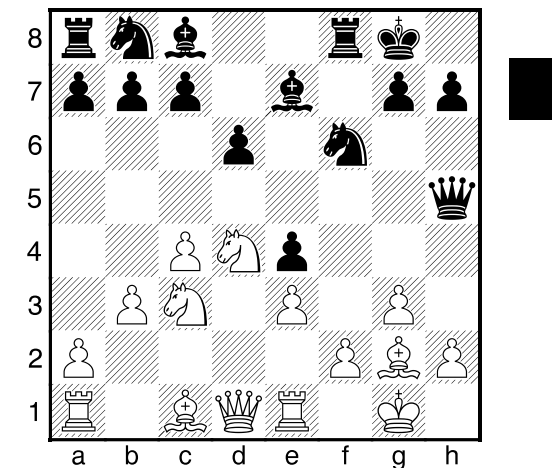
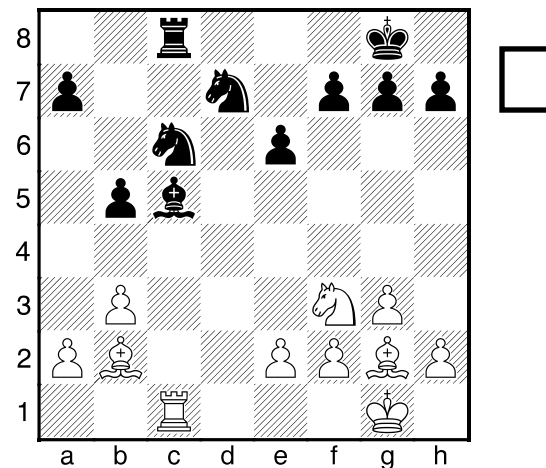


...♔c3 or ...♕c2?



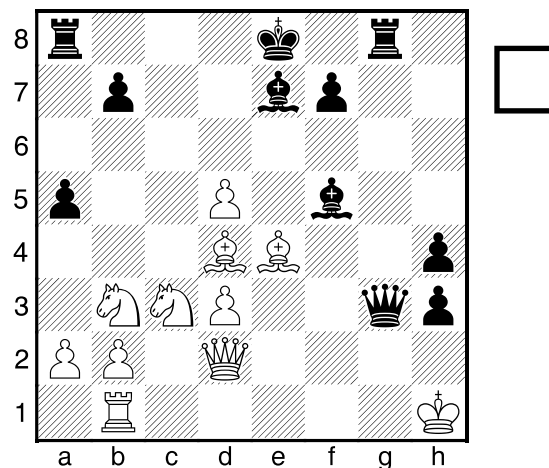
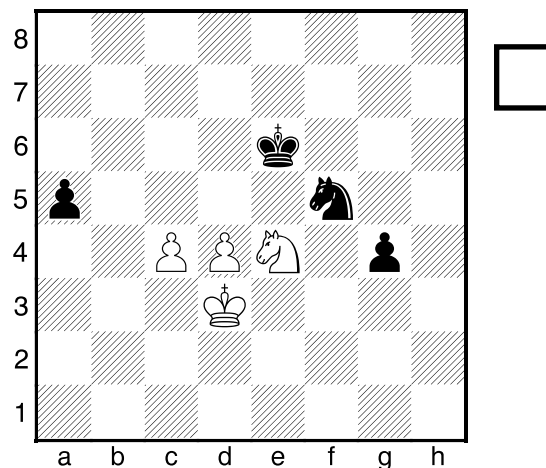
Should White go b4, ♖h2, or something else?

see: Ivanov

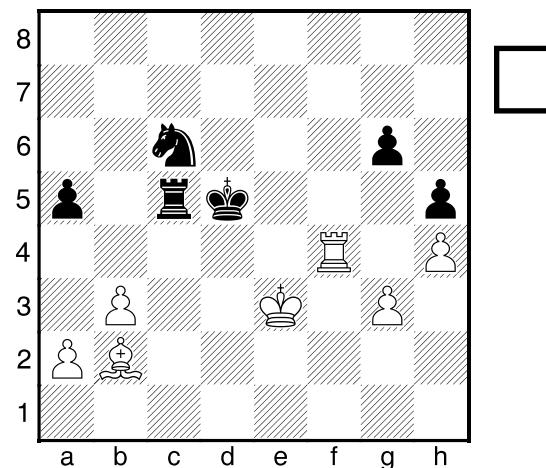


...♘g4 or ...♙g4?

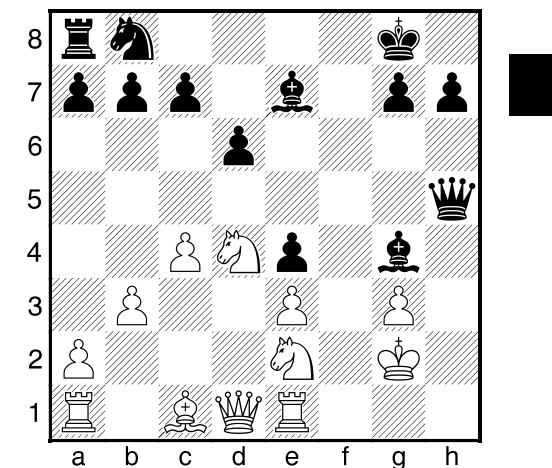
see: Across Canada



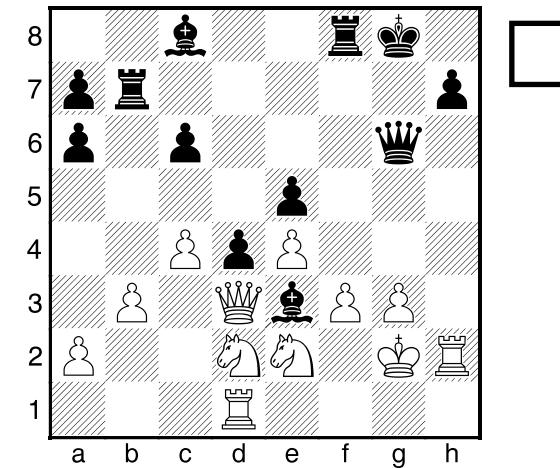
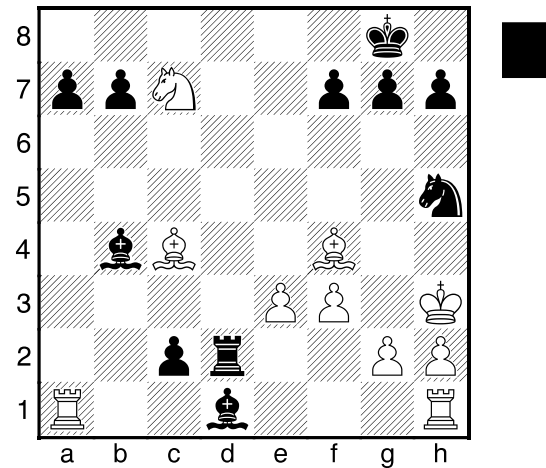
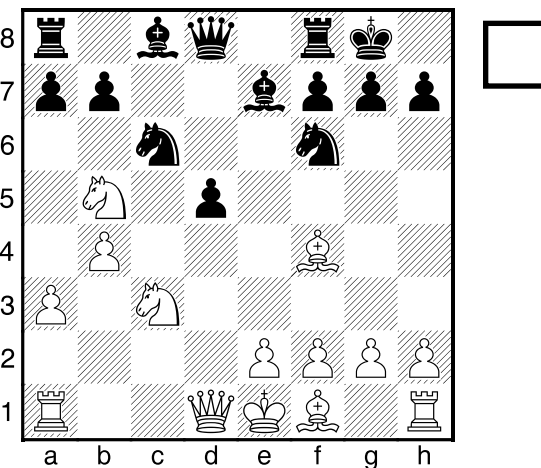
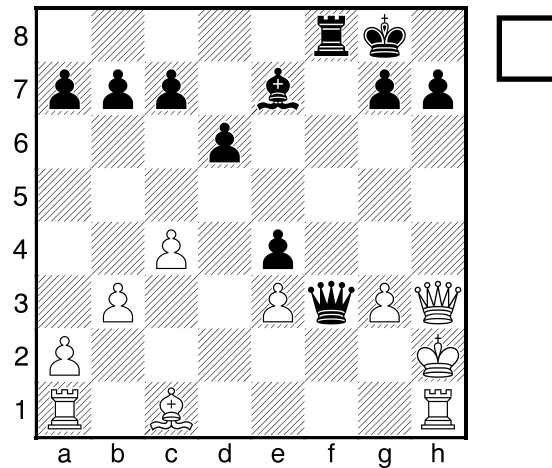
Time for an only defensive move!



What should White do about ...♙c2?



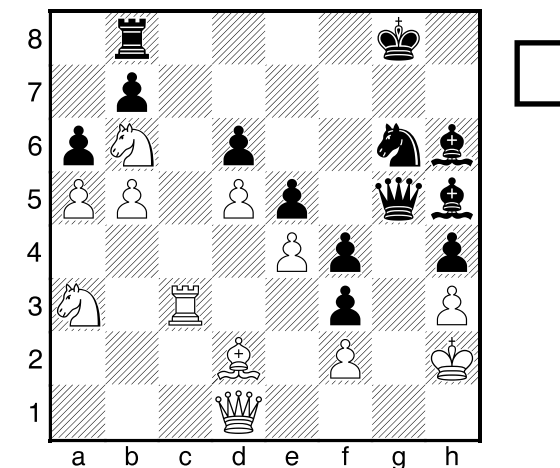
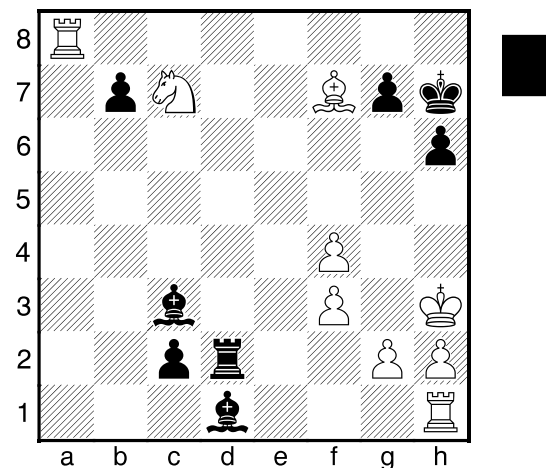
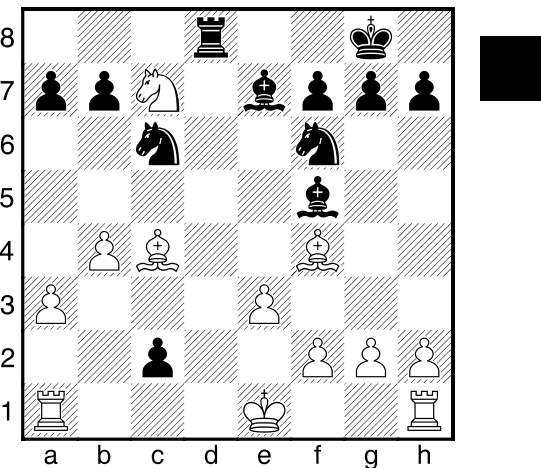
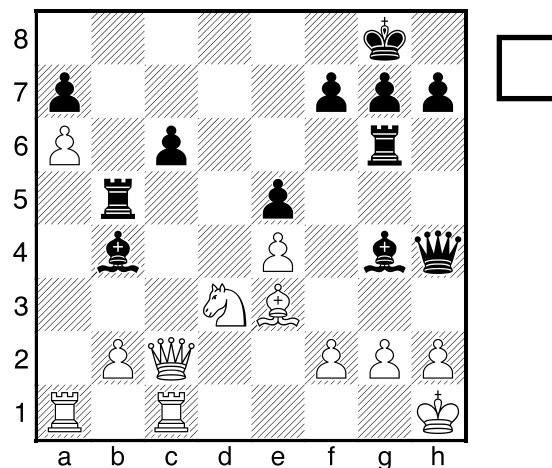
Is it easier to attack than defend?



Bold Qc7 , or cowardly e2-e3 ?

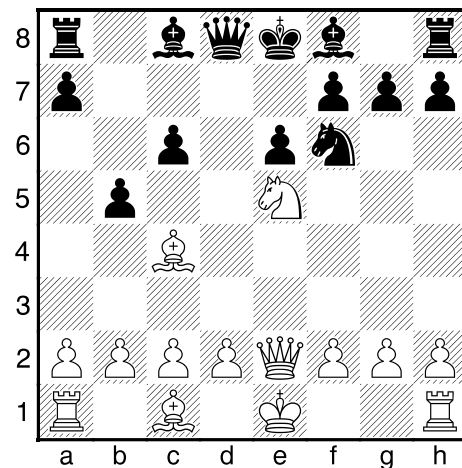
... Nxf4+ , or ... Bc3-b2 ,
or does it make any difference?

What happens on Ng1 or after Nf1 ?

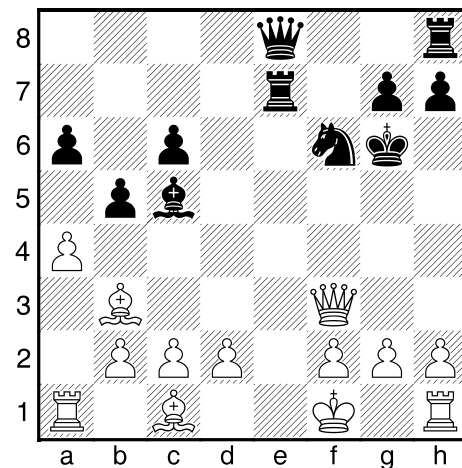


So many candidate moves...

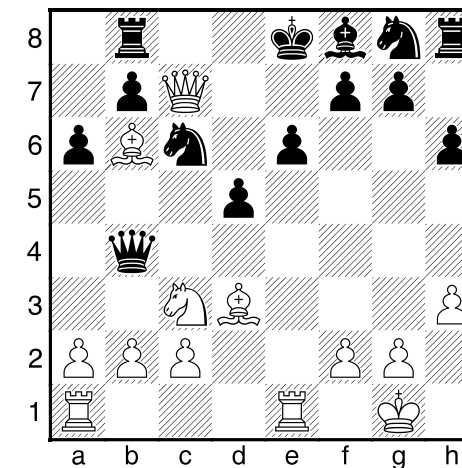
... Rd7 or ... c1=Q
or something else?



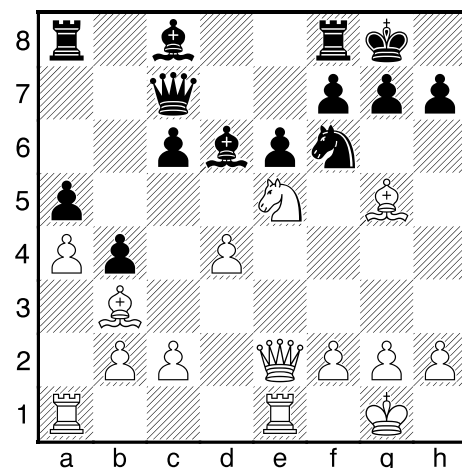
What happens if Nxc6 ?



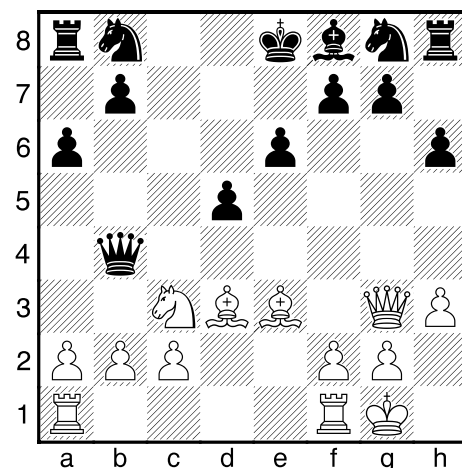
Too hard for humans?



Did White miss something, or did Black?

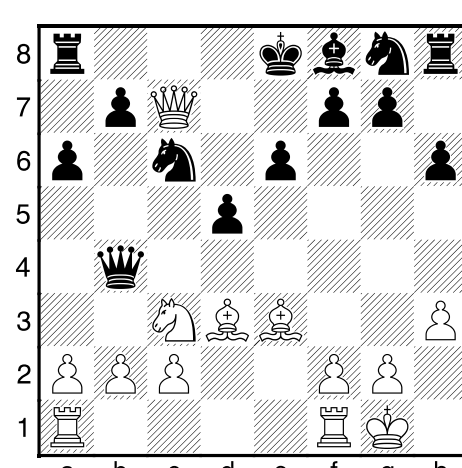


... Nd5 or ... c5 ?

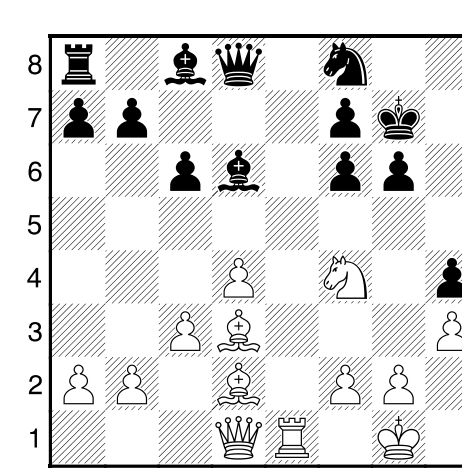


Attacking vs Defending

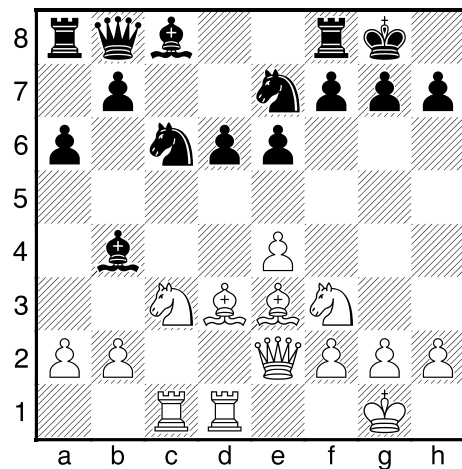
White is way ahead in development, and the black K is in the center, so, as you might expect, White has a forced win. What, *exactly*, is it?



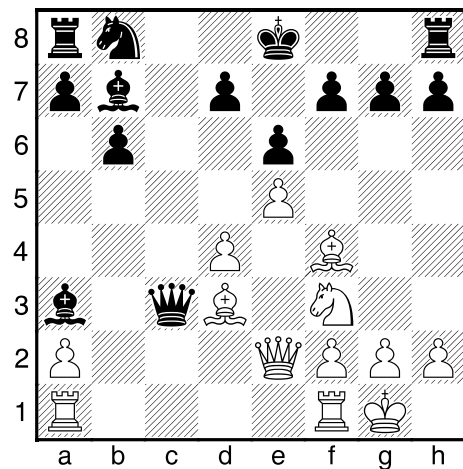
Not too hard for humans.



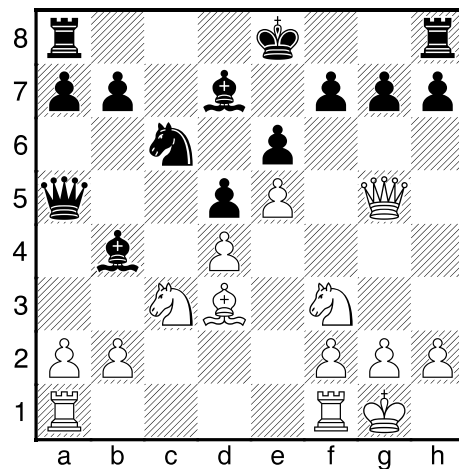
... Qc7 or ... De6 ?



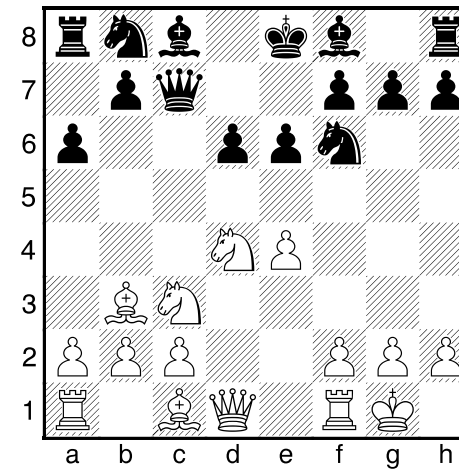
Does e5 and fxh7+ work,
or is there anything better?



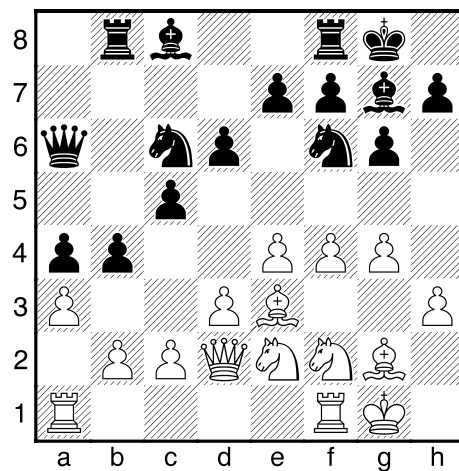
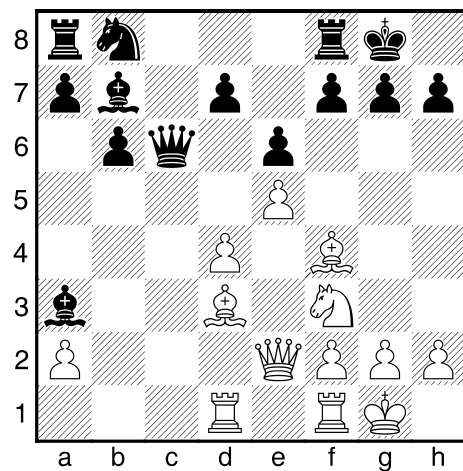
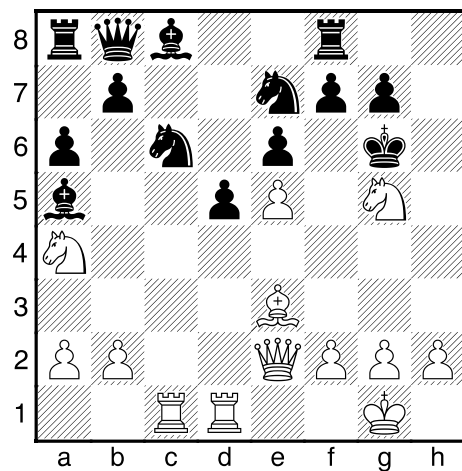
What happens on ... fxf3 ?



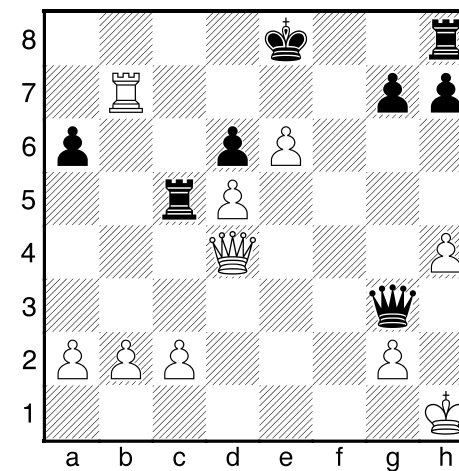
What to do about g7?

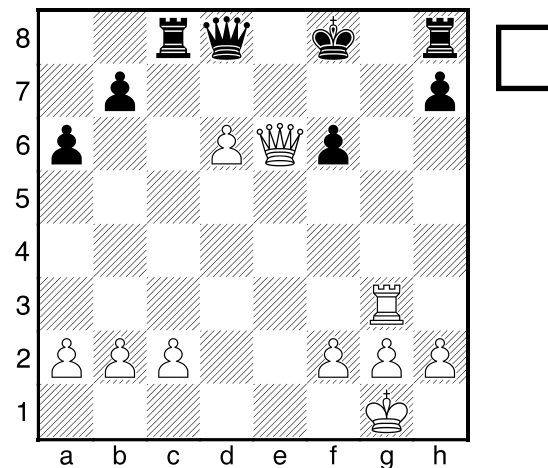


... fxe7 or ... fxbd7 ?

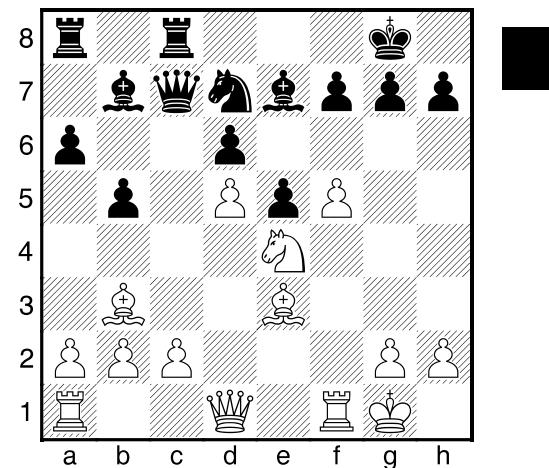


What happens if ... fxe4 !?

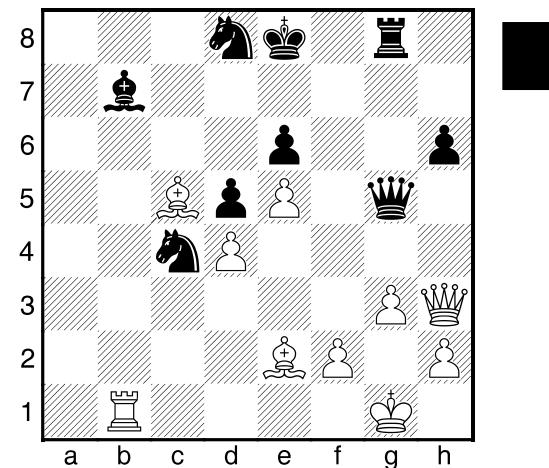




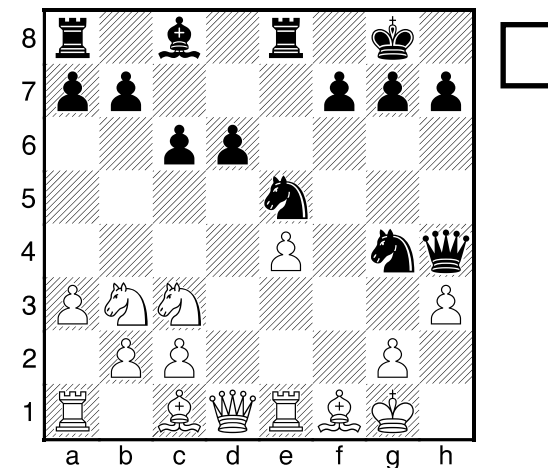
♖f3 or ♔g4
or does it matter?



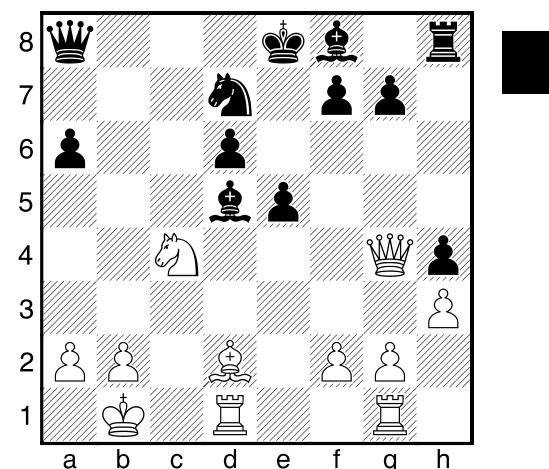
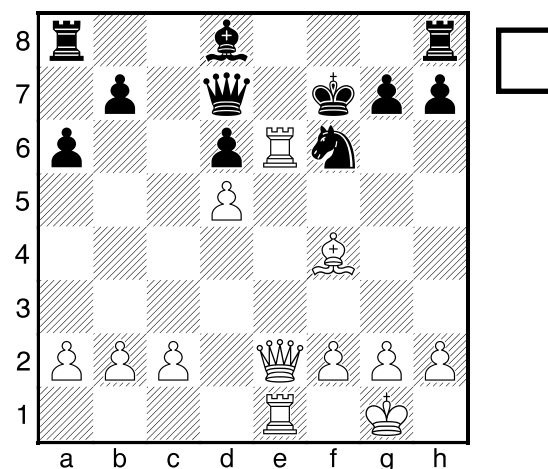
White might try to launch an attack with f5-f6. What should Black do: block with ...♗f6 or ...f6, anticipate it with ...♕f8, ignore it and go for queenside play with ...a5?



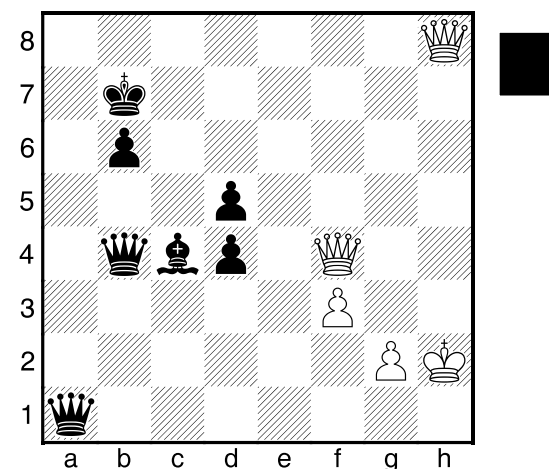
White threatens ♖xb7 then ♗xe6.



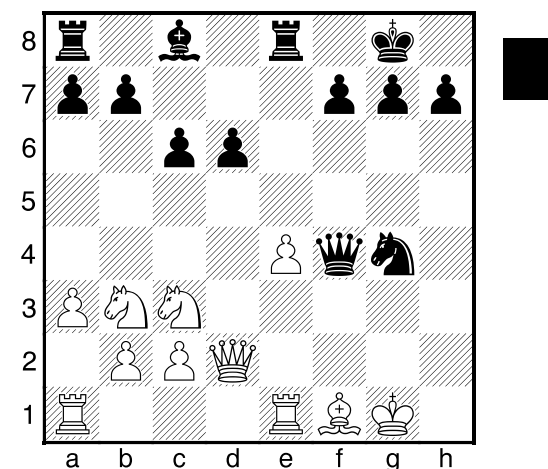
White to play and... ?



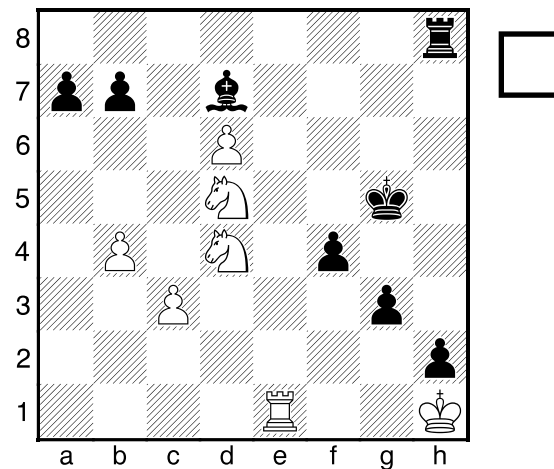
...♗f6 or ...♕e6,
or do they transpose?



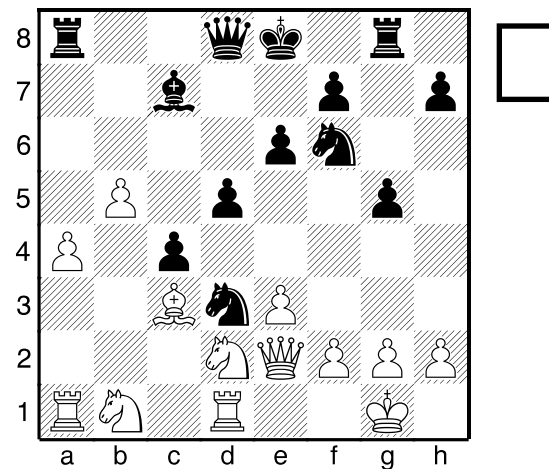
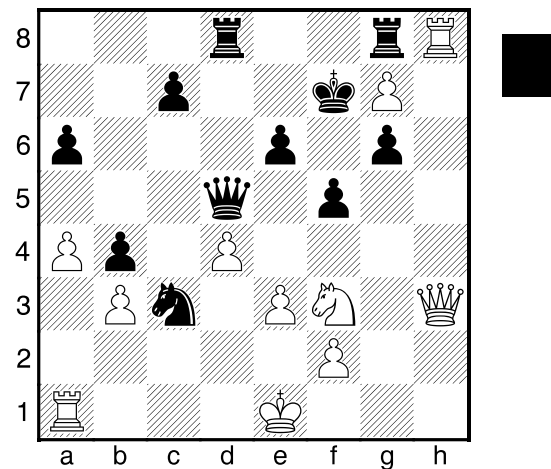
First check wins?



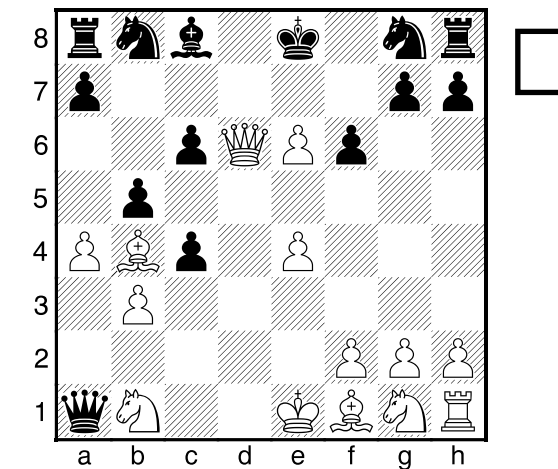
How should Black keep the queens on?



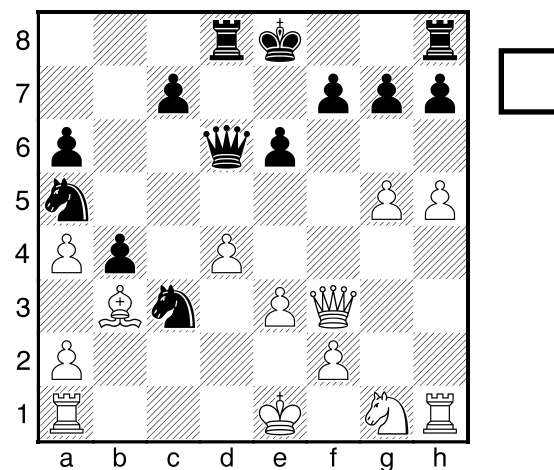
Attack with ♖e5+?
Defend with ♜f3?



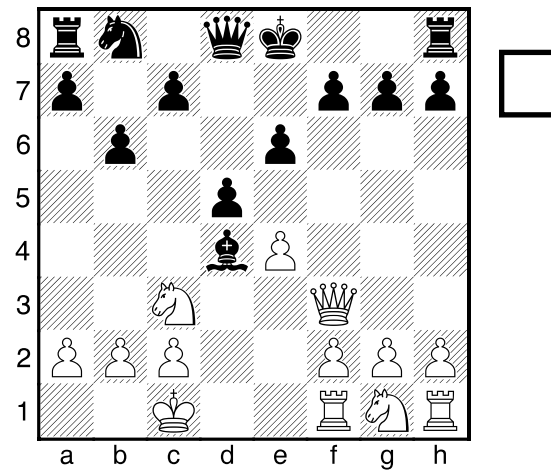
What would Stockfish do?



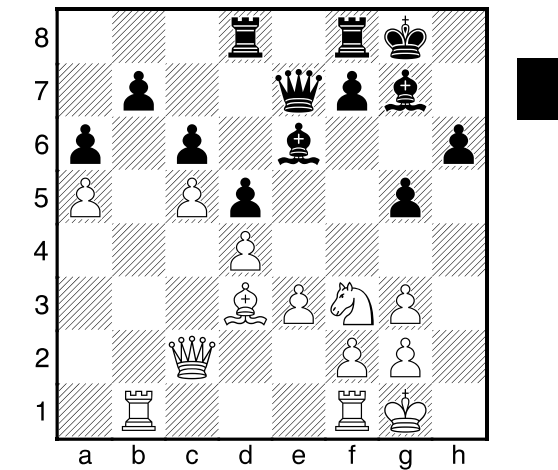
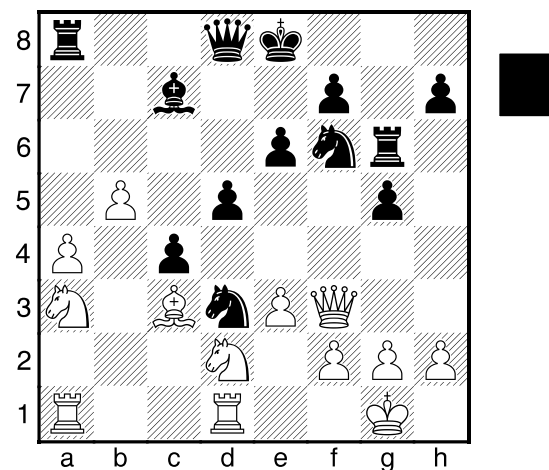
Can the white ♔ escape the checks
by running up the board?

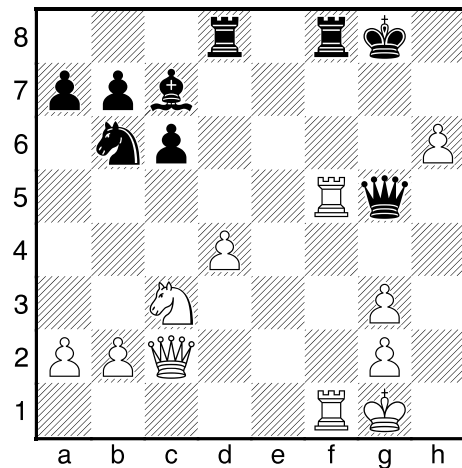


What happens if White pushes
g6 or h6?

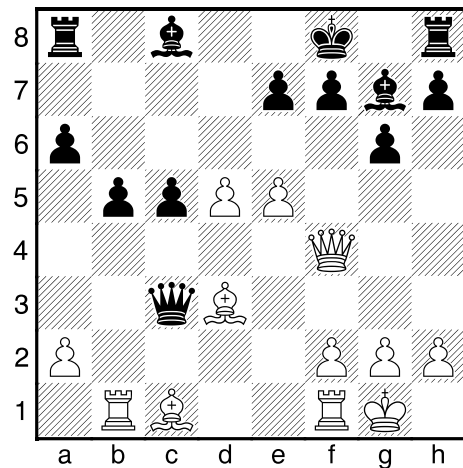


What happens if 10.exd5 ♙xc3?

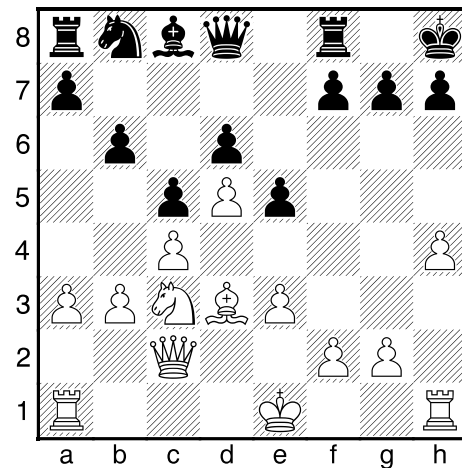




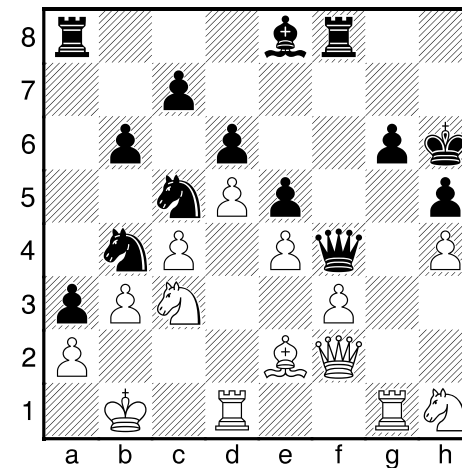
Defend with ... Kxh6 ?
Attack with ... Kxg3 ?
Something else ...?



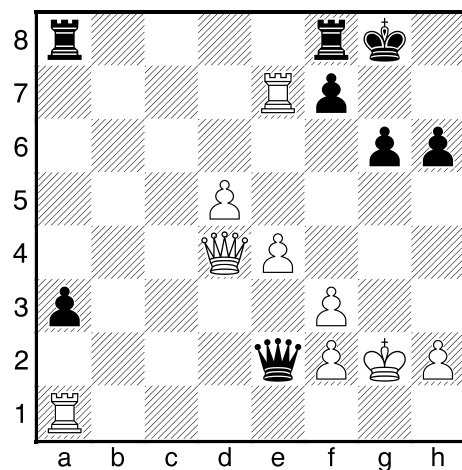
White is up a pawn, but is getting
forked on d3 and e5....



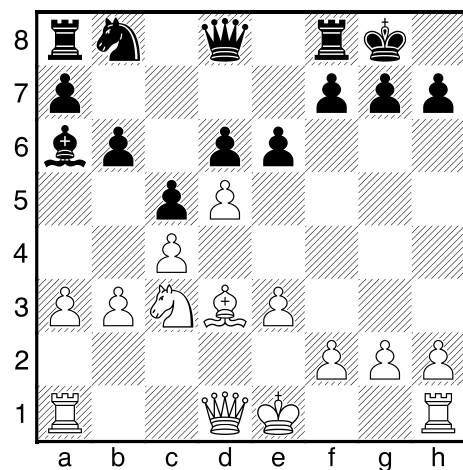
What happens if Kxh7 ?



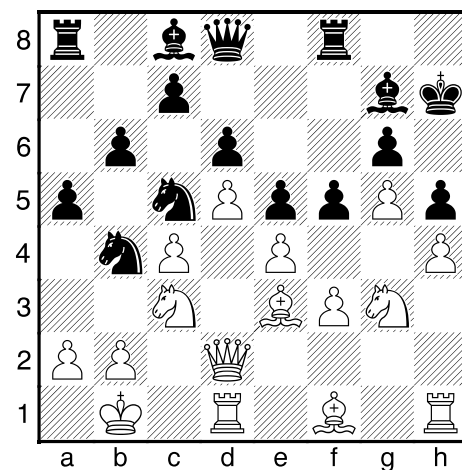
Kg3 or Kg2 ?



Passed pawns must be pushed...?



...e5 or ... Kd7 or ...exd5



You can't catch

Maili-Jade Ouellet



by **WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet**



Mini-Bio

b. May 29, 2002

From Saint-Lambert, across the St. Lawrence from downtown Montreal.

Her uncle introduced her to chess when she was 5 years old and she began competing seriously by 9.

WGM title: 2020

MJ has three IM norms:

- Sevilla 2024;
- Charlotte 2024 (IM & GM norms);
- Sofia Open 2025.

Her peak FIDE rating is 2386. When she breaks 2400 she will become Canada's first woman to be an International Master.

National Championships

Canadian Women's Champion:
2026, 2024, 2022, 2017

CYCC Champion:
2018 U16g, 2016 U14g,
2014 U12g, 2013 U12g

Olympiads

2026 — Samarkand, Uzbekistan
2024 — Budapest, Hungary
2022 — Chennai, India
2018 — Batumi, Georgia
2016 — Baku, Azerbaijan

FIDE Women's World Cup

2025 — Batumi, Georgia
2021 — Sochi, Russia
2018 — Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia

Rencontres des échecs de la francophonie (RIDEF women's winner)

2025 — Marrakech, Morocco
2024 — Québec City
2023 — Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire

Other Championships

2025 — National Collegiate Women's Chess Championship (UTD team)
2025 — Texas State Women's Champion
2019 — American Continental Women's Championship (Mexico)
2017 — Quebec Junior Champion (Open)
2016 — NAYCC U18g (Windsor)



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Q&A

Q: Do you have a favourite player, past or present?

MJO: I do not really have a favourite player. I used to admire Hou Yifan.

Q: Do you feel like team events make you a different chess player from the one who competes in individual events?

MJO: For the most part, I am the same player in individual versus team events. However, occasionally, I know I must push for a win or be open to settling for a draw (especially as board 1) which can affect my opening preparation.

Q: You have a chess scholarship at the University of Texas. Could you tell us something about that?

MJO: I did my bachelor's degree in management at the University of Texas at Rio Grande (UTRGV). I was there from August 2021 to December 2024. I did my last semester online and that is why I was playing in Europe a lot during that period. I had a full scholarship with additional chess funding.

In August 2025, I began my master's degree at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) in Healthcare Leadership in Management. I am still covered by a full scholarship. However, I am being compensated considerably more under this new agreement.

Q: What are some of the chess-related benefits of your chess scholarship at the University of Texas?

MJO: The coach at UTD is GM Mikhail Antipov. He coaches us (group and individual). The program can help us justify academic absences but generally, I find it unnecessary as I have been missing school for more than 10 years and have gotten the hang of managing my schedule and workload well. The program covers tournaments in the US. International tournaments are trickier to arrange, but most likely possible.

Q: When you annotate your own games, what are you most trying to convey: objective truth, practical decisions, the emotional "feel" of the game, something else?

MJO: When annotating my games, I usually begin with a neutral tone, but I believe the greatest benefit of going through annotated games from the player is to read about his/her point of view. As such, I add what I was thinking, how I prepared, what I considered, what the tournament situation was or whatever I deemed relevant, so the reader understands better what the situation was.

Q: What is something you now believe about chess improvement that your younger self would have rejected?

MJO: [answered in notes; p.20, 26]



2017 SPFGI, St. Louis:
blitz winner.

UTD women's Team, Dallas.

2025 Texas Champion.

11th RIDEF, Marrakech:
Top Woman.
Bouchra Kadiri, MJO,
Patrick Van Hoolandt &
Eric Bopala.



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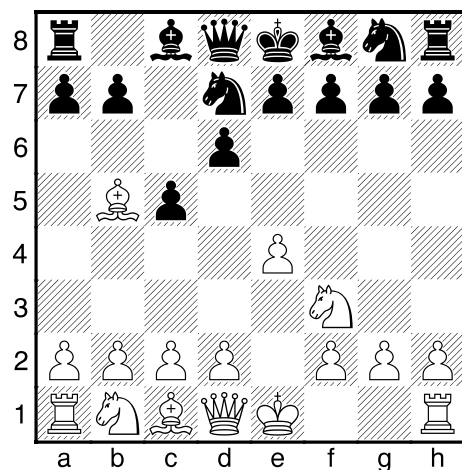
notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet**Szpar, Milosz (2491)****Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2222)****B51***Sevilla (3), 14.01.2024*

This is round 3 of the Sevilla Open, my first game against a higher-rated opponent.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♙b5+

The Moscow Variation, a popular way to avoid the Open Sicilian. I had not prepared for it.

3...♘d7

This line is more fighting and less drawish, which is why I had studied it. I generally play for a win, but it is better to be more flexible and knowledgeable of more than one or two lines to avoid preparation or to surprise your opponent. My opponent

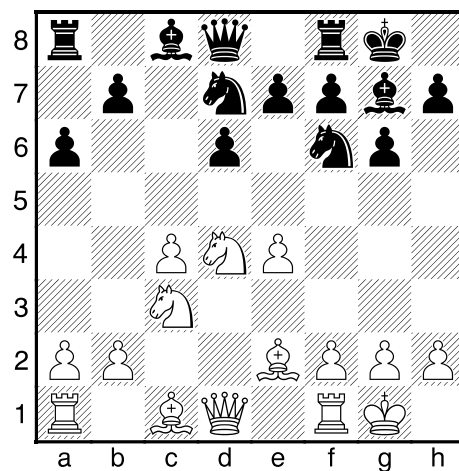
capitalized on this by eventually achieving a favorable position from the opening.

4.0-0 a6 5.♙e2!?

This is the third most played move in this position. However, I do not consider it particularly popular or well-known. I was already out of my preparation, as I had mainly focused on 3.d4 with the intention of playing the Najdorf.

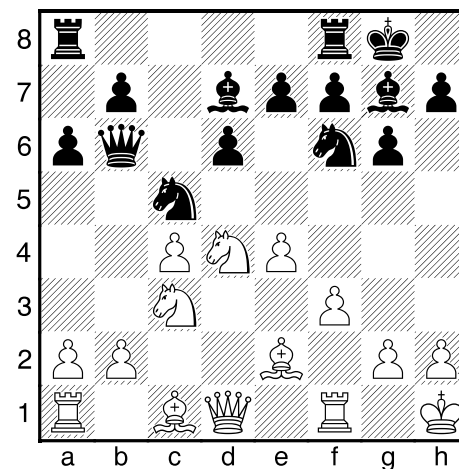
5...♘gf6 6.d3 g6!?

Although this is not a mistake, it gives White a lasting structural advantage that is difficult to counter. It is somewhat unusual, as ...g6 is typically played after White "wastes" a tempo on d3, since d4 is the ultimate goal. 6...e6 is best.

7.c4 ♙g7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.d4 cxd4 10.♘xd4

White achieves his ideal setup. I strongly believe he chose a sideline specifically to reach this position

against a Maroczy structure, knowing that I do not play the Benoni or the Dragon, leaving me with little experience here. As a result, I felt very uncomfortable and was dissatisfied with how the opening unfolded.

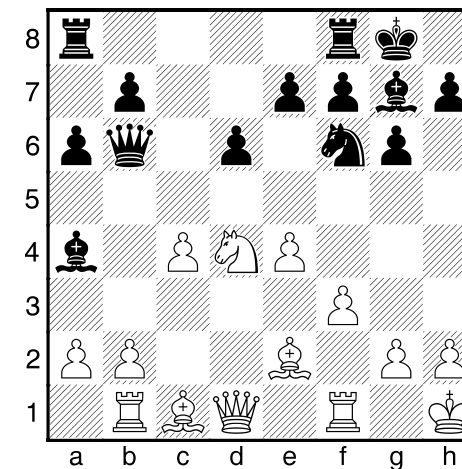
10...♘c5 11.f3 ♙b6 12.♙h1 ♙d7**13.♙b1**

Protecting the b2-pawn so that White can develop the dark-squared bishop.

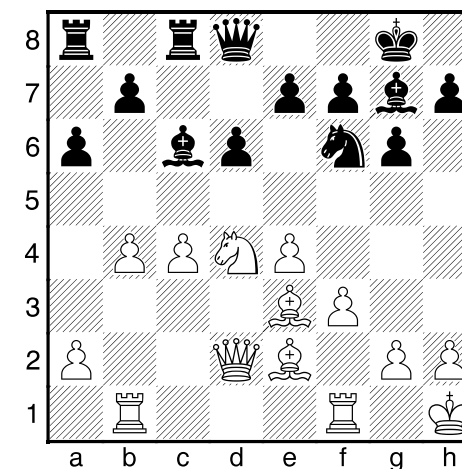
13.b3 was best as it protects the b-pawn, allows White to play ♙e3 next and prevents ♘a4.

13...♘a4!

White has significantly more space to develop his pieces. Therefore, it benefits Black to trade off as many pieces as possible.

14.♘xa4 ♙xa4**15.b3**

15.♙xa4 ♙xd4 is not a mistake objectively. However, positionally speaking, White's knight on d4 was much more active than Black's light-squared bishop, which is why White should avoid trading the two pieces.

15...♙c6 16.♙e3 ♙c7 17.♙d2 ♙fc8 18.b4 ♙d8**19.♙fc1**

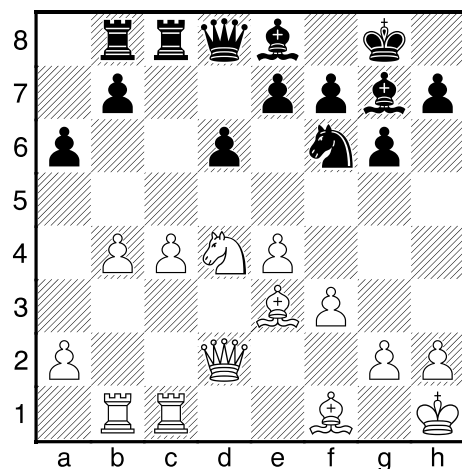
19.♘xc6 bxc6 (19...♙xc6 20.a4 is even better for White.) 20.a4!±. White is

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You can't catch MJO

better, as b5 is imminent. Opening the position favours White due to the strong and active bishop pair, while Black's pieces remain passive.

19...♙e8 20.♙f1 ♖ab8 21.♘b3 ♙a4 22.♘d4 ♙e8



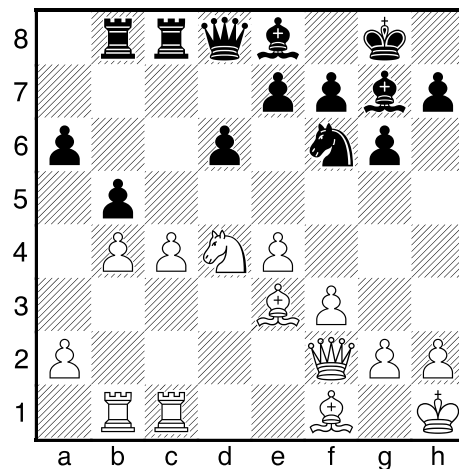
Why am I repeating? Firstly, my position is worse. Secondly, I am extremely uncomfortable with the structure, and my opponent is aware of it. Thirdly, he is significantly higher rated than me. Therefore, I had no objections to a draw.

23.♙f2?!

Avoiding the repetition. From the start, White applied significant positional pressure, but his last few maneuvers were too slow, despite being natural and reasonable.

23.♘b3 ♙a4 24.c5 was best and gave White very decent chances due to the pressure on the queenside.

23...b5



Finally, I am able to create some counter-play, gain some space and disrupt White's pawn structure.

24.cxb5

24.c5 was the best way to maintain some decent pressure on Black's position. Black must play some kind of waiting move as ...dxc5 is unfavourable:

24...♙c7 25.cxd6 ♙xd6 26.♖d1 ♙c7±;

24...dxc5 25.bxc5 allows White to create a passed pawn that controls significant space and cannot be easily captured, as the isolated pawn is more of a strength than a weakness in this position. An isolated pawn often becomes a strength rather than a weakness once it reaches the fifth rank.

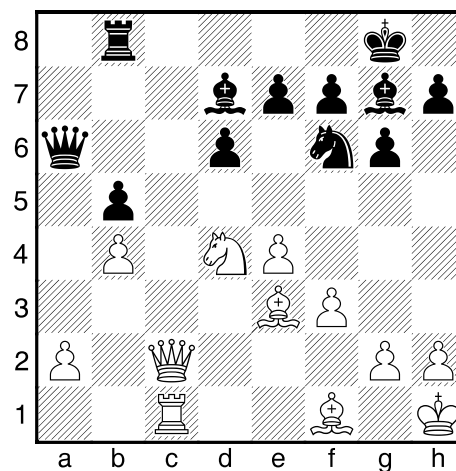
24...axb5 25.♙xc8 ♙xc8
25...♙xc8 26.♘xb5+.

26.♙c1 ♙a6

The most active square for the queen

as it is protecting the b5-pawn and attacking White's a2-pawn.

27.♙c2 ♙d7



Although the position is now equal, I still lack space, and my pieces are not optimally placed, especially with many tied down to defending the b5-pawn. Therefore, repositioning the bishop to a more active square is a good move.

28.♙d2 ♘e8

A multi-purpose move: first, it defends c7, preventing White from invading with ♙c7. Second, it opens the a1-h8 diagonal for my strong dark-squared bishop. Third, it creates the possibility of developing the knight to d6 if ...d5 is achieved.

29.♙c2

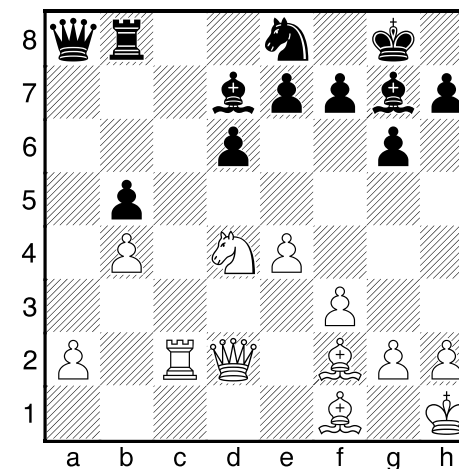
This move has two ideas. First, it allows White to double on the c-file with ♙c1 if desired. Second, it prepares the sneaky idea of a4!, putting significant pressure on the

b5-pawn. If Black captures with the queen, as the b-pawn is pinned by White's light-squared bishop, ♙a2! follows, trapping the queen.

29...♙a8

Removing the queen from the f1-a6 diagonal and threatening to open up the position in Black's favour!

30.♙f2



30...♙f6

This move protects the e7-pawn, which could become vulnerable in some lines, frees the g7-square for the king or knight if needed, and places the dark-squared bishop on a more active square.

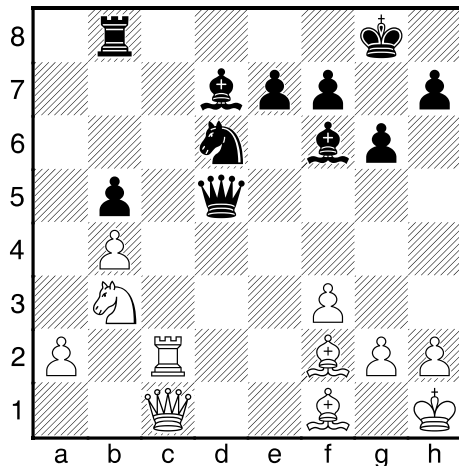
30...d5! was possible without losing any material as 31.exd5 ♙xd5 32.♙c5 was well-met by 32...♙d6! retaining the pin on White's knight, preventing all ideas of capturing on b5. 33.♙g3 leads to a drawn endgame 33...♙xd4 34.♙xd4 ♙xd4= both ♙d5 and ♙xb8 are possible for White.



31. ♔c1 d5!

Black is now the one applying pressure on White's position.

32. exd5 ♖xd5 33. ♘b3 ♞d6

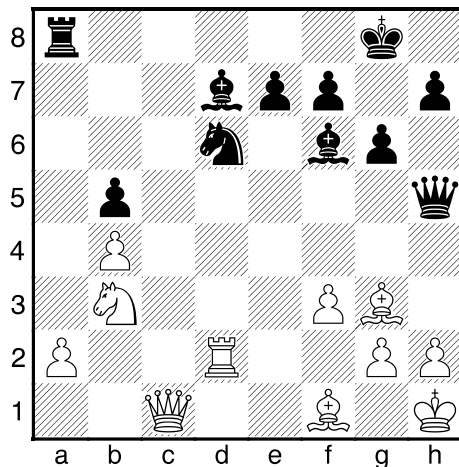


Activating the knight in the center of the board where it controls the most squares and removing the threat of ♞d2 as Black's dark-squared bishop will not be caught in the cross-hairs.

34. ♞g3 ♖a8

Activating the rook on a semi-open file, as the b5-pawn no longer needs protection, while also unpinning the knight.

35. ♖d2 ♔h5!



Black can now try to put some pressure on White's king.

36. ♞c5

36. ♞xd6? exd6 would be a positional mistake as the bishop was elemental in keeping White's king safe. Moreover, it gives up control of the dark squares as Black's bishop would start taking over. 37. ♖xd6?? ♞e5-+ White's rook is hanging and Black is

threatening mate with ... ♖xh2#. White cannot defend against both threats.

36... ♞e8

Black's bishop is much stronger than it was in the opening. The position is now open, where bishops thrive. Placing it on c6 would expose it to discovery attacks due to White's queen on c1. Although ♞e8 appears passive and defensive, it is the best move, especially since Black can later reactivate the bishop by gaining better control of c6.

37. ♖d1?!

Somehow, this move that seems to add pressure to the d-file and remove all possible threats of ... ♞g5 is an inaccuracy! 37. ♞xd6 exd6 38. ♞e4 would have maintained equality.

37... ♖h6!

The start of a nice positional

manoeuvre.

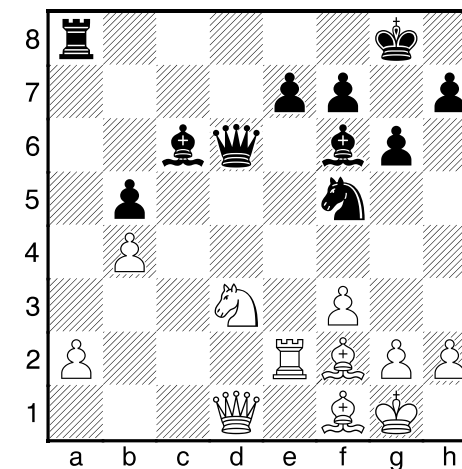
38. ♖e2 ♞f5 39. ♞f2 ♞c6

Black's last few moves were very active and contributed to the improvement of the position.

40. ♔g1 ♖f4!

One of the ideas behind ... ♖h6! Although Black's queen is well-placed on the h-file, it cannot create enough pressure to force White into further weaknesses. Therefore, it must be reactivated to an even more active square.

41. ♞d3? ♖d6! ♖



The queen is now centralized. Instead of exerting pressure solely on the h-file, it now attacks both the b4- and h2-pawns while pinning White's knight. This is its optimal placement, and recognizing that it no longer belonged on the h-file was an important realization.

During the game, my moves felt



**WGM
Maili-Jade Ouellet**

2024 Seville Open



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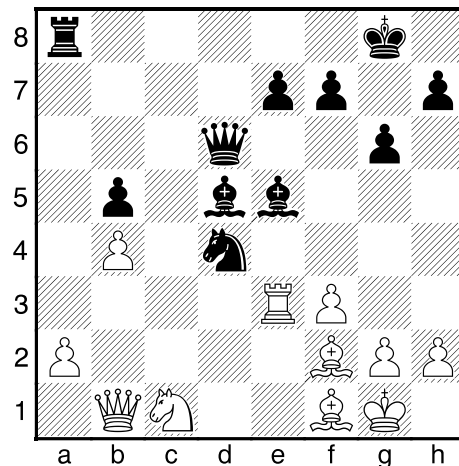
natural. I aimed to play faster to avoid severe time pressure while also putting clock pressure on my opponent. Interestingly, while preparing, I noticed he was strong in blitz (mostly online), yet during the game, I saw that the clock was visibly stressing him. This led me to believe he might struggle under time pressure.

I used to think that a good chess player should take their time, calculate carefully, and prioritize strong moves over managing the clock. Playing quickly seemed to reflect impatience and a lack of skill, despite many games being decided by time rather than the position. However, I have recently come to appreciate the benefits of playing faster when possible and now recognize that fast-playing opponents should not be underestimated. Regarding the position itself, my opponent and I analyzed it after the game and on our way back to our accommodation, and he expressed genuine appreciation for my queen maneuver. (Receiving compliments on my play from higher-rated players will always be nice!)

42. ♖b1?

White should have tried to reactivate his pieces to better squares with either ♖c2, ♖d2 or ♖c5.

42... ♘d4 43. ♖e3 ♙d5 44. ♘c1 ♙e5



With little time left, my opponent panicked and chose the most natural move.

45. ♖xe5?

45.h3 would have weakened his king greatly and although Black is still winning, it is far from over as some precision is required to seal the deal and I was still under time-pressure.

45... ♖xe5 46. ♘d3 ♖f6 47. ♖b2 ♘xf3+ 48. gxf3 48. ♙h1 ♖xb2 49. ♘xb2 ♖xa2+.

48... ♖xf3

White resigned as Black's attack was too strong: ... ♖h1 was either going to lead to mate or the loss of White's queen.

0-1

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

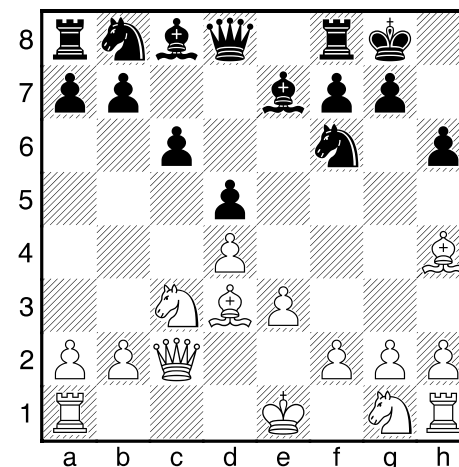
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2222)
Litner, Igor (1977)

D36

Sevilla (9), 20.01.2024

After two consecutive losses against strong, higher-rated opponents, I was in a must-win situation to secure my first IM norm, as 6.5/9 was required based on my opponents' average ratings. After such a strong tournament run, missing the norm would have been disappointing. Fortunately, I had good chances, as I was paired against a lower-rated opponent with White, though the game was far from easy.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3. ♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 exd5 5. ♙g5 c6 6.e3 ♙e7 7. ♙d3 h6 8. ♙h4 0-0 9. ♖c2



20
A common position in the Queen's Gambit Declined. I am always prepared to face the QGD, but I did not have the luxury of thorough preparation, as my opponent had few games in the database. Additionally, this was the tournament's only morning round, being the final one, and I was exhausted and not well rested.

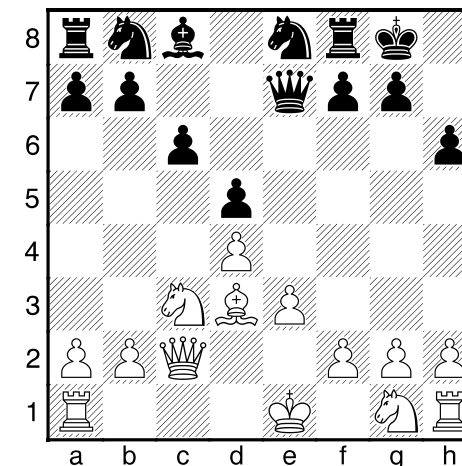
9... ♘e8!?

An idea that has gained popularity in recent years.

10. ♙xe7

10. ♙g3 ♘d6 11. ♘ge2 ♖e8 12. 0-0 ♙f8. This is the type of setup Black aims for. It is solid, scores reasonably well, and provides winning chances if White makes a mistake.

10... ♖xe7



11. ♘xd5?!

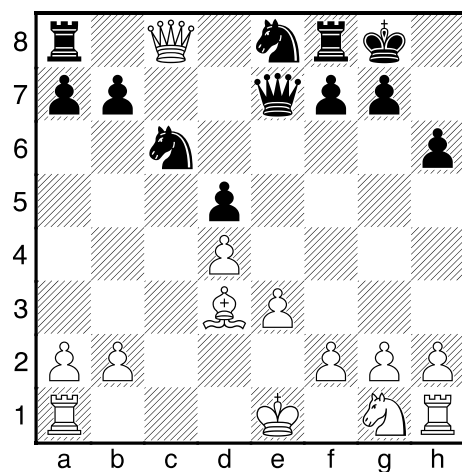
The idea is to win a pawn, as the c8-bishop is hanging after Black captures on d5. However, this move



is positionally terrible, as Black gains multiple tempos on my queen, providing ample compensation. Additionally, Black's position becomes much easier to play. Given that I needed a win, this was a poor strategic choice — extremely risky and misguided. In hindsight, I was very fortunate not to lose and be punished for such an impractical decision.

11. ♖ge2 ♘d6 12. 0-0 ♘d7 13. b4
This would have been a much better choice, providing a small advantage but, more importantly, a solid position where I could gradually outplay my opponent, given the rating difference.

11...cxd5 12. ♖xc8 ♘c6!



13. ♖f5 □

Removing the queen and putting pressure on d5.

13. ♖xa8?? ♖b4+! 14. ♔f1 ♘f6!
15. ♖xf8+ □ ♔xf8+- although material is balanced in terms of points, Black is completely winning. White's pieces

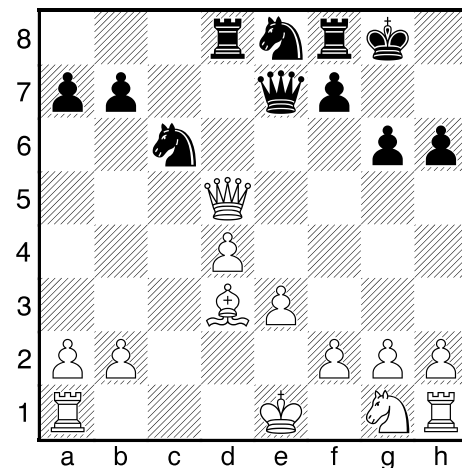
are undeveloped, lack coordination, and the king is highly vulnerable.

13. ♖g4?! ♖b4+ 14. ♔f1 ♘e5! 15. ♖d1 ♘xd3 16. ♖xd3 ♖xb2 ♞ Black is doing very well and has an easy game.

13...g6?!

13... ♘f6 Simple development was best. To emphasize how much compensation Black possesses, White's best move according to the engine is 14. ♔f1!? removing the threat of ♖b4+ without compromising White's queenside.

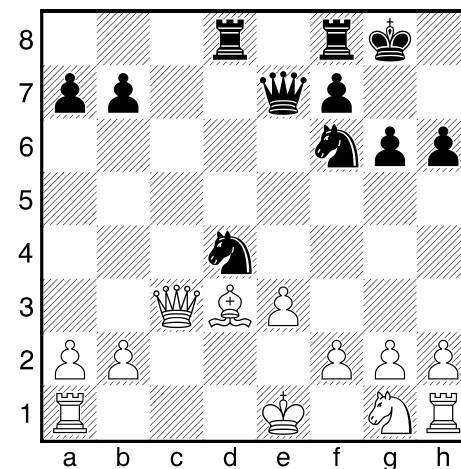
14. ♖xd5 ± ♖d8



15. ♖b3

15. ♖c4 was better as it prevents Black from winning a tempo with ♘xd4. 15... ♖xd4 16. ♖c3 ± White is happy here as ♘f3 followed by castling is next and White is a pawn up.

15... ♘xd4 16. ♖c3 ♘f6



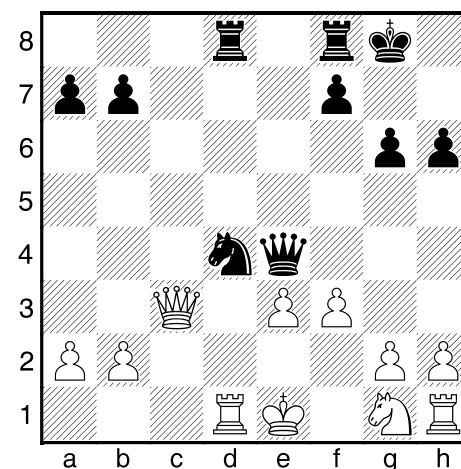
17. ♖d1?

17. ♘e2 was best. However, it led to a completely drawn endgame—something I desperately wanted to avoid, as I did not believe in my winning chances there. 17... ♘xe2 18. ♙xe2 ♘e4 19. ♖a3 ♖xa3 20. bxa3=.

17... ♘e4! 18. ♙xe4

18. ♖a3 ♘c5! Black's pieces are too active, while White's king remains in the center, far from castling to safety. 18. ♖c4 b5 19. ♖c1 ♖c8 20. ♖b1 ♖b4+ 21. ♔f1 ♘d2+-.

18... ♖xe4 19. f3



19... ♘c2+?

19... ♖c2:

20. exd4 ♖fe8+ 21. ♔f1 ♖xd1+-;

20. ♖xc2 ♘xc2+ 21. ♔e2 ♖xd1
22. ♔xd1 ♘xe3+-;

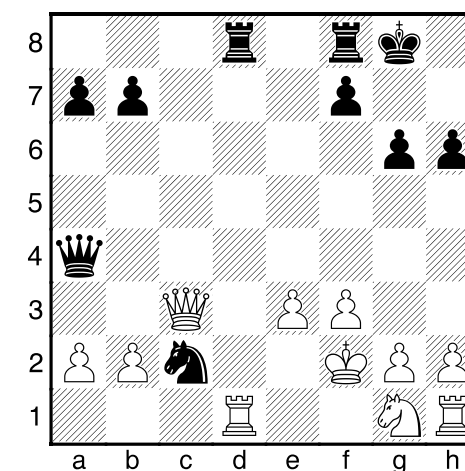
20. ♖d2 ♖b1+ 21. ♔f2 ♘b5 22. ♖c2 ♖xd2+ 23. ♖xd2 ♖c8! is the crushing move I missed while I was evaluating ♘e4 followed by ♖c2.

20. ♔f2!

Leaving the rook on d1 unprotected, but Black cannot capture it since the queen is hanging on e4.

20. ♔e2? ♖f5-+. The knight belongs on e2 while the king should be placed on f2 to accelerate the manual castling process.

20... ♖a4



21. ♖xd8

21. ♘e2? ♖xd1 22. ♖xd1 ♘xe3!-+ thus, White must first exchange the rooks.

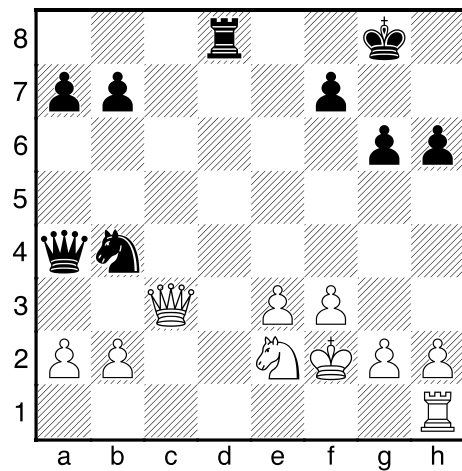
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21...♖xd8 22.♞e2 ♞b4



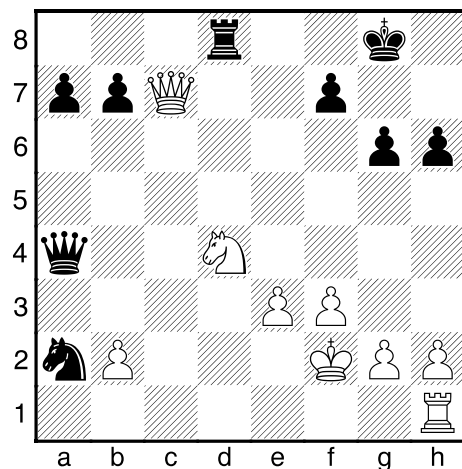
23.♞d4

Blocking the d-file and placing my knight on a nice outpost.

23...♞xa2?!

Is too greedy as it lets me activate and develop my pieces on tempo! 23...♞c6= was best.

24.♞c7



24...♞d5??

Black should have played 24...♞d7± as it protects the rook, attacks the queen and removes itself from the a-file. White remains slightly better, as the queen is active, the rook will soon enter the game, the knight has a strong central outpost, and the king is relatively safe. Meanwhile, Black's knight is badly misplaced on a2, and White can easily exploit this.

Black is now losing as it allows White to play...

25.♞a1!

A powerful pin that is extremely hard to get out of.

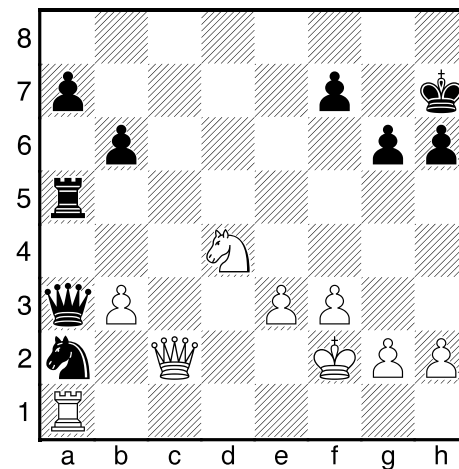
25...b6

25...♞a5 26.♞c8+ ♞d8 27.♞c4 ♞d2+ 28.♞e2 ♞xe2+ 29.♞xe2 ♞b4 30.♞xa7+- is enough for White to convert this into a win;

25...♞a6 26.b4! preparing ♞c2 by opening up the second rank AND preventing Black from supporting the knight with ♞a5;

25...♞a5 26.♞xb7+- Black is still stuck with his pieces and White can eventually convert the material advantage into a win.

26.♞c8+ ♞h7 27.b3 ♞a3
28.♞c2 ♞a5



Although material remains balanced, White is completely winning, as Black's pieces are paralyzed and cannot be untangled.

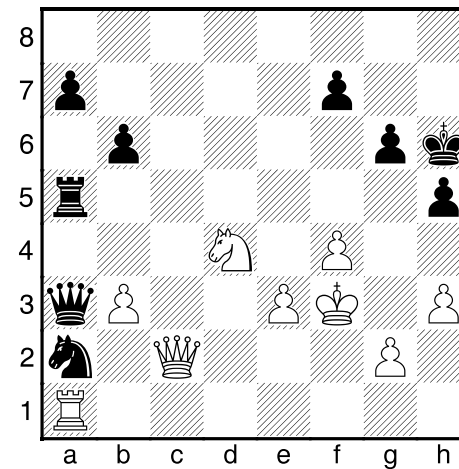
29.f4

Expanding on the kingside while also freeing the f3-square for the king if needed to escape perpetual checks. White has complete control and can play almost any move.

29...h5 30.♞f3
♞h6 31.h3

31...f5

If Black waits patiently with 31...♞h7 White can play 32.b4! ♞a4 with the rook no longer on the fifth rank to help defend Black's king, White can strike with (32...♞xb4 33.♞xa2+-) 33.♞c7 ♞g8 34.♞d8+ ♞g7 (34...♞h7 35.♞e7+-) 35.♞e6+ fxe6 36.♞d1 followed by mate in a few moves.



Continental Chess

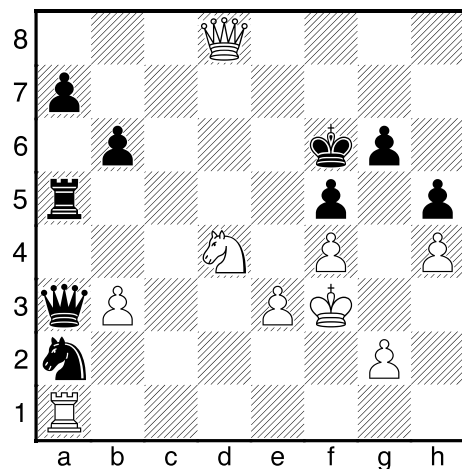
sets & clocks included
2025 Andorra Open



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32.h4 ♔g7 33.♔c7+ ♔f6
34.♔d8+



34...♔f7
34...♔e7 35.♔xe7+ ♔xe7 36.♔c6+!

35.♔d7+ ♔f6 36.♔e6+ ♔g7
37.♔e8 ♔d6 38.♔e6+ ♔f6
39.♔g5 ♔b4
39...♔e7 40.♔h8+ ♔g7 41.♔c8 ♔e7
42.♔d1+;

39...♔c7 40.♔f8+ ♔f7 41.♔xf7#.

40.♔f7#

After this thrilling game filled with tactics, inaccuracies, and blunders, I finished with 6.5/9, tied for 13th place —just one point behind the winners— **securing my first IM norm.**

1-0

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

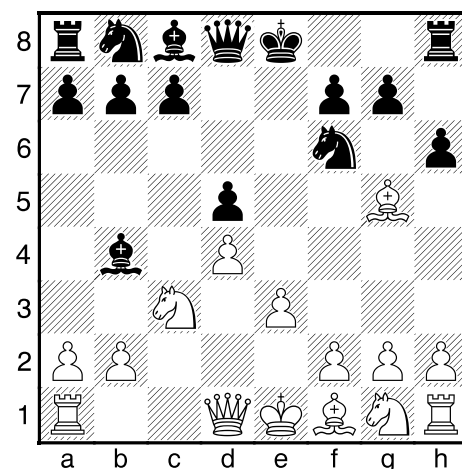
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2283)
Yoo, Christopher (2595)

E24

*Southwest Class Championship (7),
18.02.2024*

This was round 7 of the Southwest Class Championship, organized by the Continental Chess Association. Players are required to bring their own chess sets and clocks, with games using delay rather than increment. Pairings are released only shortly before the round. The tournament typically attracts a strong field and offers excellent prizes.

1.d4 ♔f6 2.c4 e6 3.♔c3 d5
4.cxd5 exd5 5.♔g5 ♔b4 6.e3
h6



7.♔xf6

With limited time to prepare, I did not anticipate my opponent playing this

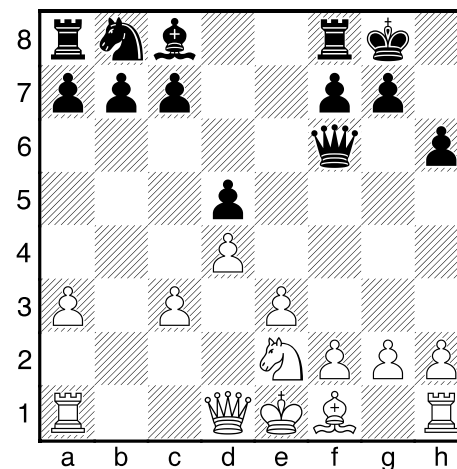
line. However, my opponent likely did not expect me to capture on f6, as it is played far less often than the main line with ♔h4.

7.♔h4 is far more popular. 7...g5
8.♔g3 ♔e4 9.♔ge2 h5 White can now play h4 or h3. The position is very messy and dynamic and White is slightly better.

7...♔xf6 8.a3!?

A lesser-known sideline that allows Black to equalize fairly easily but gives White a straightforward plan with f3 and e4.

8...♔xc3+ 9.bxc3 0-0
10.♔e2!



The best move, though not by much. I had never played this line over the board, but I had it in my files as an alternative to the forcing and well-known mainline (♔d3). The idea is simple: maneuver the knight to g3, followed by ♔d3, while avoiding Black's ...♔f5. Given White's pawn

structure on dark squares, the light-squared bishop will become a dominant piece once it reaches d3, as it is unrestrained by the pawns. Black, therefore, aims to exchange the light-squared bishops. 10.♔d3?! ♔f5!=

10...♔e8 11.♔g3

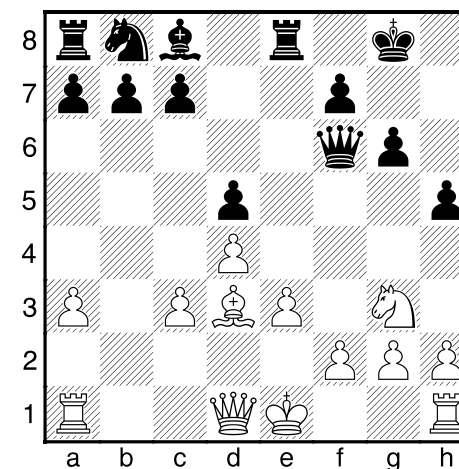
Here, Black has many options.

11...g6!?

The idea is to control h5, preventing ...♔h5 while preparing to expand on the kingside with ...h5.

11...♔d7 12.♔d3 ♔d6= would have been a fine way to continue Black's development.

12.♔d3 h5?!



13.h3

I wanted to avoid ...h4 followed by ...h3, which would weaken my pawn structure.

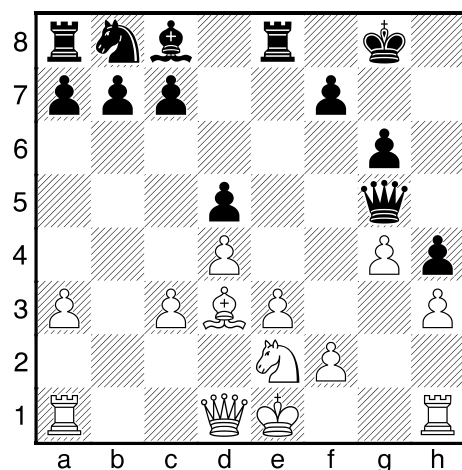
13.♔f3 was good:



13... ♖xf3 14.gxf3 h4 (14...c5 15. ♔d2± is good for White due to the strong control over the center.) 15. ♖e2 ♖c6 16. ♖f4 ♖e7 17. ♖g1 with a good game for White;

13... ♖d6 threatening ...♗g4!, trapping the queen, 14. ♖e2 preparing to meet ♗g4 with ♖f4! 14... ♖d7 15. ♖f4 ♖xf4 16. ♖xf4 ♖b6 17.a4± was the best way to proceed, objectively.

13...h4 14. ♖e2 ♖g5 15.g4!



15... ♖f6

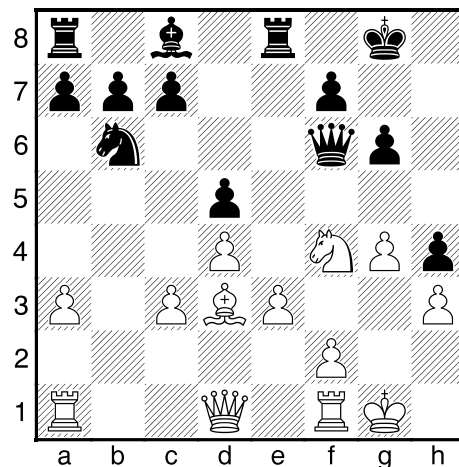
15...hxcg3?! 16. ♖xcg3± with some attack on the weakened Black king;

15... ♖d7 16.0-0 ♖f6 17.f4 ♖h6 18.g5 ♖h5 19.gxf6 ♖xe3= was Black's best continuation, as the counterplay provides sufficient compensation for the sacrificed knight. However, it is highly unnatural for a human to find.

16.0-0!

White's king is completely safe!

16... ♖d7 17. ♖f4 ♖b6



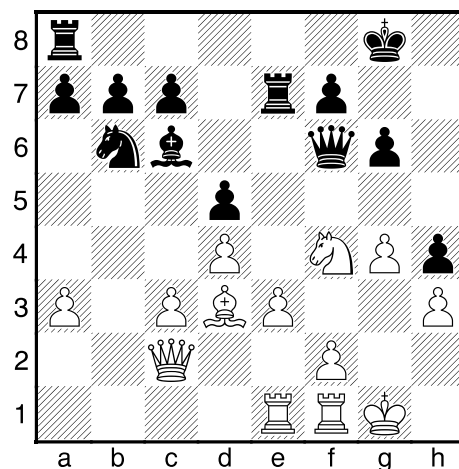
18. ♖b3

18. ♖d2± defending e3, followed by a quick f3 and e4, was the best approach.

18... ♖d7

The position was unusual, and neither of us was familiar with the correct plans. As a result, we made several inaccuracies while trying to activate our pieces to better squares.

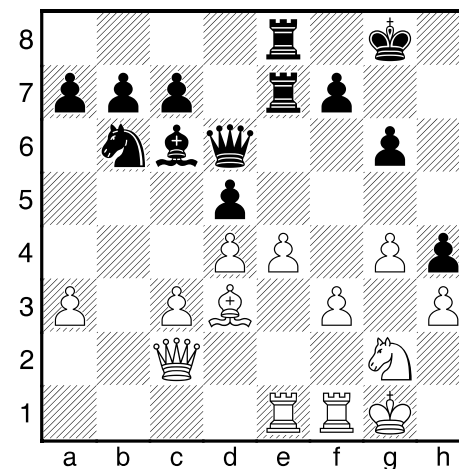
19. ♖ae1 ♖c6 20. ♖c2 ♖e7?!



With the idea of doubling on the e-file is actually an inaccuracy!

editor – one better idea is to prepare to trade the stunted ♖c6 for the more active ♖d3 by going ...a6 and ...♗b5.

**21. ♖g2 ♖ae8 22.f3 ♖d6
23.e4**

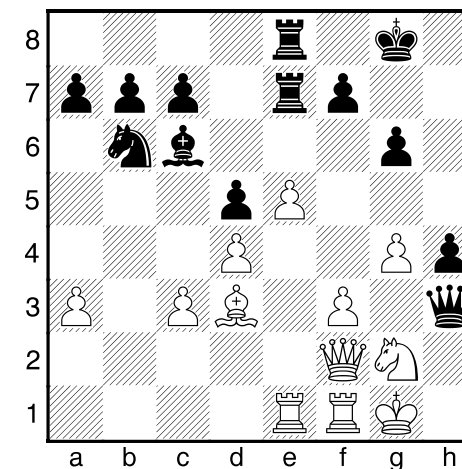


23... ♖g3?

Black is already losing as White's center is too strong!

23...dxe4 24.fxe4 ♖xa3± was the best way to put up some resistance, although White is much better.

24.e5 ♖xh3? 25. ♖f2!

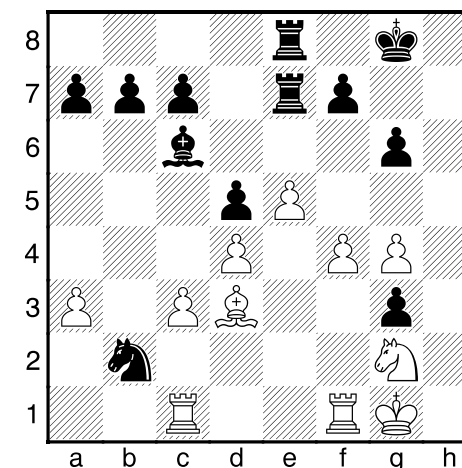


The queen is by far the most dominant piece, as Black's other pieces lack activity and control. Therefore, ♖f2 is a strong move—it not only targets the h4-pawn but also restricts Black's queen and forces an exchange with ♖f4 next!

**25... ♖g3 26. ♖xg3 hxcg3
27.f4**

27. ♖f4 followed by ♖g2 was slightly more accurate objectively and, more importantly, less messy.

27... ♖a4 28. ♖c1 ♖b2



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29.♙e2?

Is too slow, as it allows Black to counterattack with ...f6!

29.♖f3! ♜xd3 30.♖xd3+- White's pawns and active pieces are completely dominating the position.

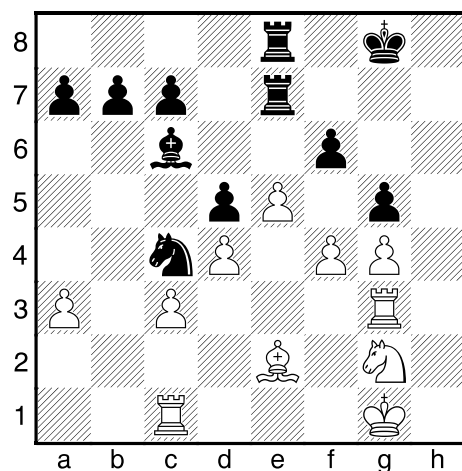
29...♞c4?!

29...f6! 30.♖f3 g5!=.

30.♖f3 f6 31.♖xg3?!

31.♙d3! was a strong move, as it targets the g6-pawn while also controlling e4 in anticipation of Black's maneuver ...♞d2-e4!

31...g5??

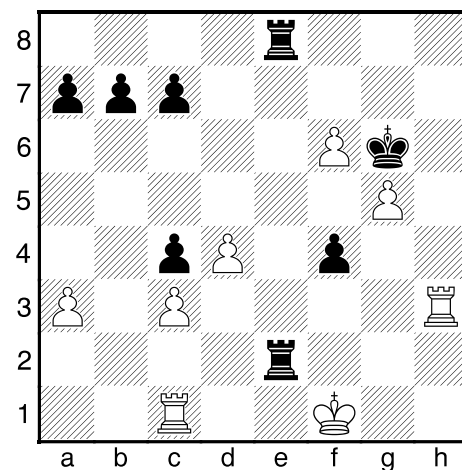


32.♖h3??

I believe I failed to find the best moves here due to extreme time pressure. My opponent played very quickly throughout the game, and if I recall correctly, I was very low on time while my opponent still had over an hour.

32.♙xc4♙+- dxc4 33.exf6 ♖e6 (33...♖e2 34.fxg5 is completely winning for White.) 34.fxg5 ♙xg2 35.♙xg2 ♖e2+ 36.♙f1 ♙f7 37.♖b1 b6 38.♖h3+-.

32...gxf4 33.♙xc4 dxc4 34.exf6 ♙xg2 35.♙xg2 ♖e2+ 36.♙f1 ♙f7 37.g5 ♙g6



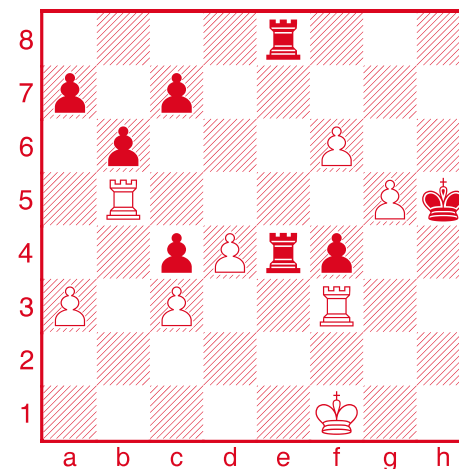
38.♖f3?

38.♖b1 b6 39.♖f3=.

38...♖2e4 39.♖b1 b6?

39...♙xg5♙ 40.♖xb7 ♙g4+-.

40.♖b5 ♙h5??



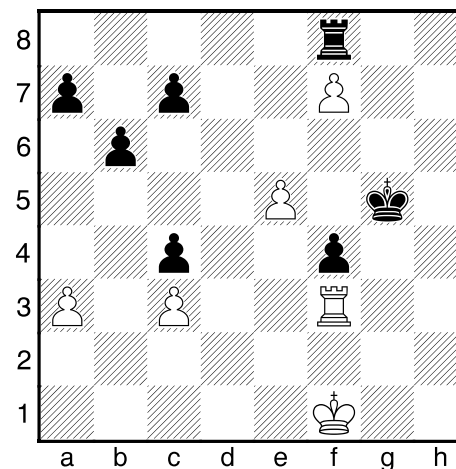
41.♖e5?

41.♖h3+♙+-:

41...♙g6 42.♖h6+ ♙f7 43.♖h7+ ♙g6 (43...♙e6 44.♖e5+-) 44.♖g7+ ♙h5 45.♖e5+- White's pawns are too powerful;

41... ♙g4 threatens the ♖ and mate in 2. 42.♖e5!! a beautiful move that I missed: White sacrifices a rook in order to promote one of the passed pawns. 42...♖4xe5 (42...♙xh3 White can take either ♖ and will promote; 42...♖8xe5 43.dxe5 ♙xh3 44.g6 White promotes.) 43.dxe5 ♙xg5 (43...♙xh3 44.f7+- White promotes.) 44.f7 ♖f8 45.e6 ♙f6 46.♖h6+ ♙e7 (46...♙g7 47.e7+-) 47.♙f2+-.

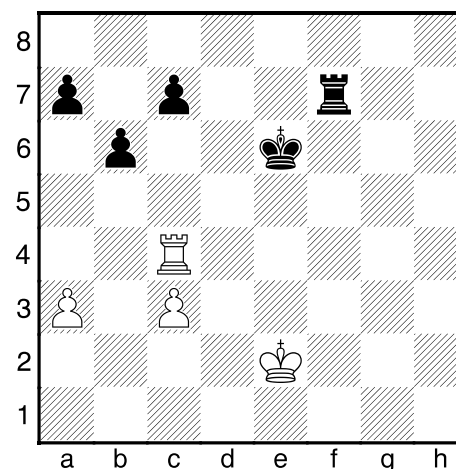
41...♖4xe5 42.dxe5 ♙xg5 43.f7 ♖f8



44.e6

44.♖xf4?? does not work 44...♙xf4 45.e6 ♙e5 46.e7 ♖xf7+-+.

44...♙f6 45.♖xf4+ ♙xe6 46.♖xc4 ♖xf7+ 47.♙e2



The endgame is drawn although Black can certainly try to win.

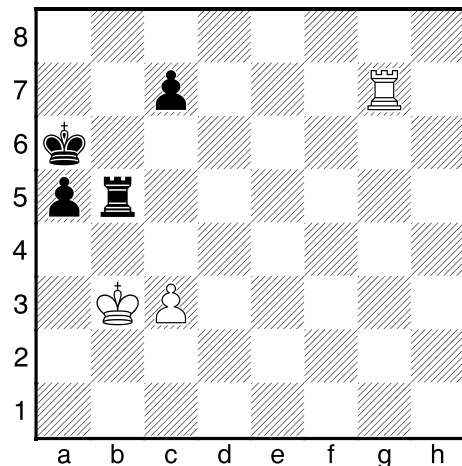
47...♙d5 48.♖d4+ ♙c5 49.♙d3 ♖f2 50.♖c4+ ♙d6 51.♖a4 a5 52.♖h4 ♙e5 53.♖h5+ ♖f5 54.♖h6 ♙d5 55.♖h4 ♖f2 56.♖h5+ ♙c6 57.♖h4 ♖g2 58.a4 ♖b2

editor: a **delay time control** (a.k.a. Bronstein TC) is a set grace period before the remaining time ticks away. Critically, fast play will not accumulate extra time. With a standard 30s increment, instantaneous play between moves 48-137 would have gained each player 45 minutes.

In other words: 90 minutes, no bathroom break.



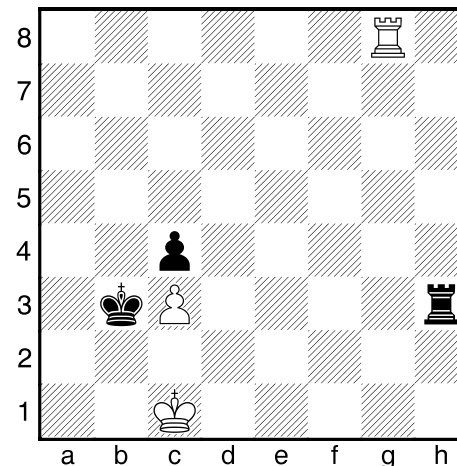
59. ♖h6+ ♕b7 60. ♕c4 ♖b1 61. ♖h7 ♖d1
62. ♖g7 ♕c6 63. ♖g6+ ♖d6 64. ♖g7 ♖h6
65. ♖g4 ♕b7 66. ♖g7 ♖c6+ 67. ♕b3 ♖c5
68. ♖h7 ♖c6 69. ♖g7 ♕a6 70. ♖h7 ♖c5
71. ♖g7 b5 72. axb5+ ♖xb5+



Theoretically, without White's c3-pawn, the endgame would still be drawn as a- and c- pawn in a rook endgame are not enough to win against someone who knows the defense.

73. ♕a4 c6 74. ♖g8 ♖c5 75. ♖a8+ ♕b6
76. ♖b8+ ♕c7 77. ♖a8 ♕b6 78. ♖b8+
♕a7 79. ♖h8 ♖g5 80. ♖f8 ♕b6 81. ♖h8
♖g4+ 82. ♕b3 ♕b5 83. ♖b8+ ♕c5
84. ♖a8 ♕b6 85. ♖b8+ ♕a7 86. ♖c8 ♕b7
87. ♖h8 ♖e4 88. ♖g8 ♕b6 89. ♖b8+ ♕c7
90. ♖a8 ♖e5 91. ♖h8 ♖b5+ 92. ♕a4 ♖f5
93. ♖a8 ♕b6 94. ♕b3 ♖f1 95. ♖g8 ♕c5
96. ♖h8 ♖b1+ 97. ♕a2 ♖e1 98. ♕b3 ♖e4
99. ♖a8 ♕b5 100. ♖b8+ ♕a6 101. ♖a8+
♕b6 102. ♖b8+ ♕a7 103. ♖h8 ♖f4
104. ♖g8 ♕b7 105. ♖h8 ♖f1 106. ♖g8
♕b6 107. ♖b8+ ♕c5 108. ♖h8 ♖b1+
109. ♕a2 ♖c1 110. ♕b3 ♖g1 111. ♖h5+
♕b6 112. ♖h8 ♖g4 113. ♖b8+ ♕a7
114. ♖h8 a4+ 115. ♕a3 ♖c4 116. ♖h5
♕b6 117. ♖g5 ♖e4 118. ♖h5 c5 119. ♖h8
♕b5 120. ♖a8 ♖e1 121. ♕b2 ♖h1
122. ♕c2 ♖h2+ 123. ♕d3 ♖h3+ 124. ♕c2
♖h2+ 125. ♕c1 ♖g2 126. ♖a7 ♖a2
127. ♕b1 ♖h2 128. ♕c1 ♖h6 129. ♕b2
♖g6 130. ♖a8 ♖g7 131. ♕c2 ♖h7
132. ♕b2 ♖h4 133. ♕c2 ♖h2+ 134. ♕c1
♕c4 135. ♖xa4+ ♕b3 136. ♖g4 c4
136... ♕xc3 137. ♖g3+ ♕c4 138. ♖g4+=.

137. ♖g8 ♖h3



138. ♖g2??

The only mistake I made in the rook endgame. Many moves would have maintained equality (♖g7, ♖b8+, ♕e2, etc.), but ♖g2 is too passive. Black is winning now.

editor – even 138. ♖c8 draws, so long as White knows 138... ♕xc3 139. ♕b1 ♖=: the "short-side" defence.

138... ♖h1+ ♖-+

138... ♕xc3?? does not achieve anything as White's king and rook prevent any progress; e.g. 139. ♖c2+ ♕d3 140. ♖d2+=;

138... ♖xc3+ 139. ♕b1 ♖h3 140. ♖b2+ ♕c3 141. ♖g2=.

139. ♕d2 ♕b2

Controlling the promotion square, allowing Black to play ... ♖c1 and eventually capture the c3-pawn under winning conditions.

140. ♖g3 ♖c1 141. ♖g8 ♖xc3
142. ♖b8+ ♖b3 143. ♖c8 ♖d3+
144. ♕e2 ♕b3 145. ♖b8+ ♕c2
146. ♖a8 ♖d7 147. ♖b8 c3
148. ♖b6 ♕c1 149. ♖b5 c2
150. ♖b8 ♖e7+ 151. ♕f3 ♖e5
152. ♕f4 ♖e1 153. ♕f3 ♕d2

Naturally, I was disappointed with the result and frustrated with myself. I had winning chances early on and later had the knowledge and understanding to hold the rook endgame to a draw.

As mentioned earlier, the game was played with **delay** rather than increment. I strongly believe that I would not have lost this endgame with increment. Overall, I believe a strong chess player should be able to perform well regardless of the time control. However, this game made me realize that I do not need to participate in tournaments with suboptimal time controls and playing conditions. Since then, I have avoided tournaments using delay, and I am quite happy with my decision.

0-1

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Vishy in the House

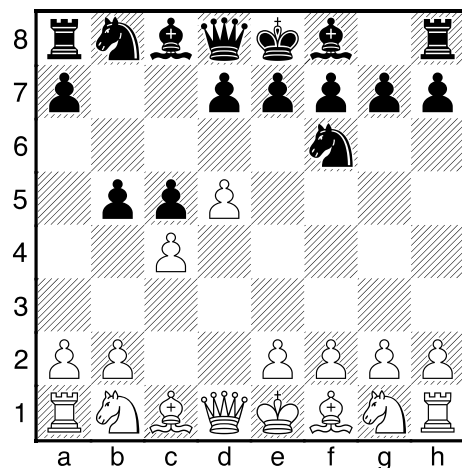
Dallas Global Chess
League Experience Center

MJ represents the UTD chess team at the UTD Chess / Tech Mahindra / Global Chess League announcement. Oct. 23, 2025.

notes:

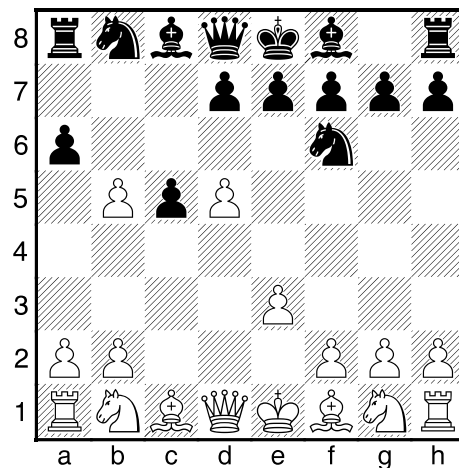
WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet**Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2267)****Pham, Bich Ngoc (2206)****A57**Canadian Zonal (w) Toronto (8),
01.04.2024

This was Round 8 of the **Canadian Zonal**. I was leading the tournament with a score of 6/7, while two players trailed closely with 5.5/7, and Penny had 5/7. The stakes were high, as this game was crucial for retaining my title, qualifying for the Olympiad, and securing a spot in the Women's World Cup.

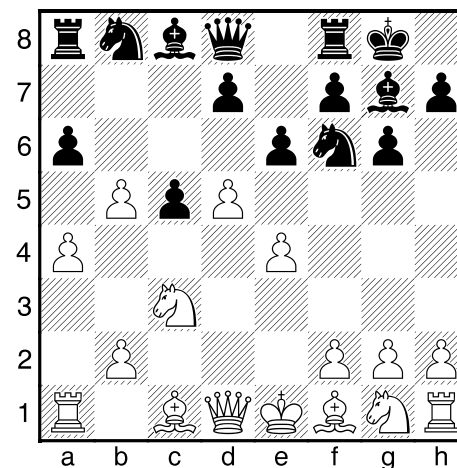
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

Penny chose a dynamic opening, as expected. Given the tournament standings, my preparation before the round had heavily focused on

reviewing these types of lines (such as the Benko, Dutch, and possibly the King's Indian Defense), anticipating her need to play for a win.

4.cxb5 a6 5.e3

This was a line I had in my files for quite some time but had never had the opportunity to play over the board, which caught my opponent by surprise. The idea behind 5.e3 is to delay resolving the queenside structure. The plan usually involves playing ♖c3, a4, and eventually e4. The kingside knight can go to f3 or e2, depending on Black's development. In the current position, Black's queenside remains undeveloped, which highlights the advantage of delaying the exchange of a/b pawns, even at the cost of a tempo (e2-e3 followed by e3-e4).

**5...g6 6.♘c3 ♕g7 7.a4 0-0
8.e4 e6****9.dxe6!?**

Although this is a decent move, it is an inaccuracy as: 9.e5! is much stronger. Unfortunately, due to a lack of experience in the line, I forgot what the best continuation was and did not play it. 9...♗xd5 (9...♗e8 10.♗f3 ♕b7 11.♕c4 White is up a pawn, while Black's pieces are undeveloped and lack space.) 10.♗xd5 exd5 11.♖xd5 ♖a7 12.♗f3± threatening to take on c5 with a good game for White.

9...fxe6

last book move

**10.e5 ♘h5 11.♗f3 ♕b7
12.♕e2 axb5 13.♗xb5 ♘c6
14.♗d6 ♕a6?!**

14...♖b6 followed by ...♗f4 was best.

15.♕g5

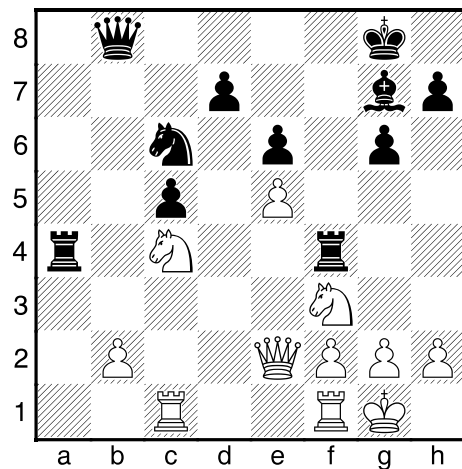
After considerable thought, I chose this move, as it appeared to be a natural continuation, developing with tempo. However, I failed to foresee that it would lead to a relatively forced sequence, resulting in the loss of my extra pawn and a slightly inferior position. From that point onward, I felt uncomfortable, as I struggled to find optimal placement for my pieces while maintaining any realistic winning chances.

♖15.♕xa6 ♖xa6 16.♗c4 would have allowed me to solidify the center and achieve a better position, with an extra pawn, well-placed pieces, and straightforward development.

**15...♖a5+ 16.♕d2 ♖c7
17.♕xa6 ♖xa6 18.♖e2 ♖a7
19.♗c4
19.b3?? ♗xe5+.****19...♖xa4 20.♖c1 ♗f4
21.♕xf4 ♖xf4 22.0-0 ♖b8**

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Putting pressure on the b2-pawn and threatening ...♖b5 resulting in a very uncomfortable pin.

23.g3

Removing the rook from the 4th-rank.

23...♖f8

23...♘d4 24.♘xd4
♖xd4 was possible but not dangerous for White.

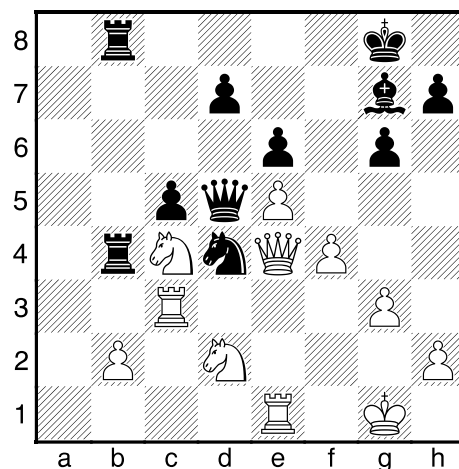
24.♖e3 ♖b4

25.♖c3 ♘d4

26.♘fd2

26.♘xd4?? cxd4
27.♖xd4 d5! winning the knight as the e-pawn is pinned.

26...♖a8 27.f4 ♖fb8 28.♖e1
♖d5 29.♖e4

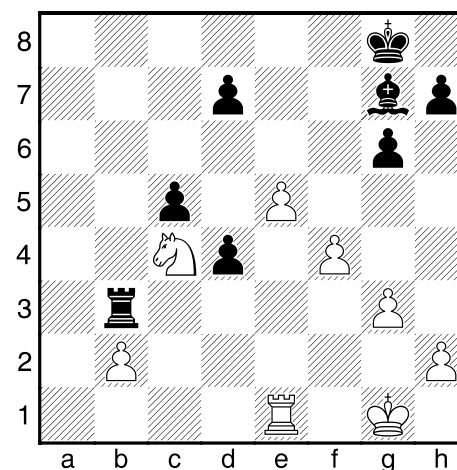


Forcing a queen exchange as my king is weak. Also, removing the queens simplifies the position and makes it easier to play under time pressure.

29...♘b3 30.♘xb3 ♖xb3
31.♖xb3

31.♖c2 ♖xc3 32.♖xc3 ♖b4 33.b3 was the easiest way to equalize for White.

31...♖xb3 32.♖xd5 exd5
33.♘e3 d4 34.♘c4



34...♖b4

34...♘f7 35.♖b1

♘e6 36.♘d2

♖d3 37.♘c4

♘f8 38.♘f2

♘d5 39.♘b6+

♘c6 40.♘c4

♘b5 41.♘e2

♖ was something I calculated

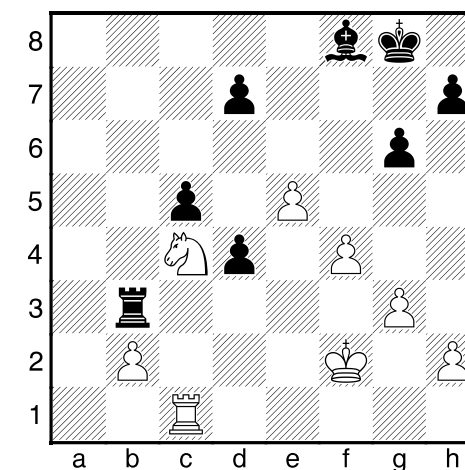
and feared as my pieces are

uncoordinated and inactive,

while Black's king and rook are very

active.

35.♖c1 ♘f8 36.♘f2 ♖b3



Throughout the game I felt uncomfortable with my position and under pressure, particularly as I believed my opponent was tactically sharper during this game. However, after Black's recent inaccuracies, I felt I had regained control and was confident I would not lose after successfully centralizing my king.

37.♘e2 ♘f7 38.♘d2 ♘e6

39.♘c2 ♖f3 40.♖d1 ♘d5

41.♘b6+ ♘c6 42.♘c4 ♘b5

Penny does not repeat.

43.♖d3! ♖f2+ 44.♖d2 ♖xd2+

45.♘xd2 c4 46.b3! c3

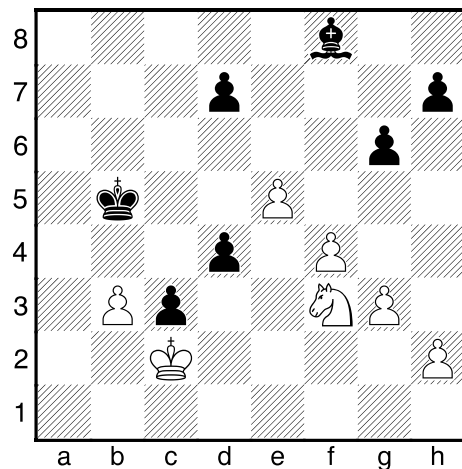
47.♘f3



photo:
Deepanshi Matai

**2024 Zonal Champion
Toronto**

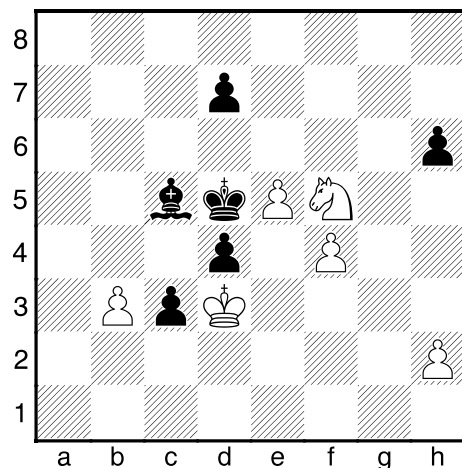
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From this point on, I was the only one with winning chances as Penny has to be very careful.

47...c5
47...c5?? 48.c3+-.

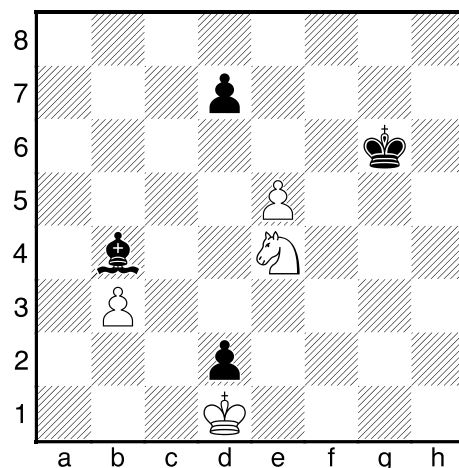
48.g5 h6 49.f3 c6
50.d3 d5 51.h4 g5
52.f5 gxf4 53.gxf4



53...c2!
Not the only move possible, but definitely the simplest and most

effective.

54.xc2 e4 55.xh6
d3+ 56.d1 xf4 57.f7
b4 58.h3 f5 59.h4 g4
60.g5 xh4 61.e4 h5
62.f2 d2 63.e4 g6



64.f6
64.xd2= but since I was not risking anything, I tried to keep some chances alive.

64...f5 65.xd7 e6
66.b8 c3 67.a6 xe5
68.c5 d4 69.a4 b4
70.c2 e3

The game could have continued a bit longer, but the position was clearly drawn, and I did not believe either of us would make a losing mistake. We agreed to a draw despite my desire to win to maintain my lead and her attempts to create chances of her own.

As a result, there was a three-way

tie going into the final round between Yunshan Li, Svitlana Demchenko, and myself. We all won our last round, but I emerged as the national champion due to better tiebreaks.

1/2-1/2

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

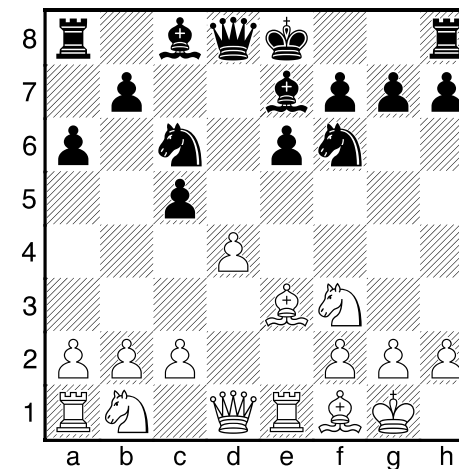
Lagarde, Maxime (2604)
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2290)

B30

*Open de Porticcio, Corsica (3),
30.06.2024*

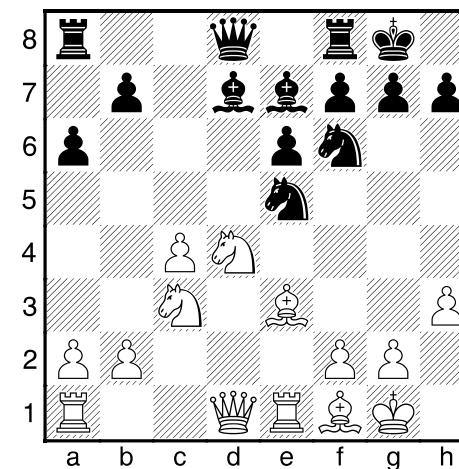
This was Round 3 of the Porticcio Open and the second round of the day. Given the limited time for preparation, I opted to play my main opening. Since I was fine with a draw, I did not feel the need to prepare extensively or worry about repetitions in the opening.

1.e4 c5 2.f3 c6 3.b5 e6
4.0-0 ge7 5.e1 a6 6.f1
d5 7.exd5 xd5 8.d4 f6
9.e3 e7



The c5-pawn cannot be won, as it runs into ...g4.

10.c4 0-0 11.c3 cxd4
12.xd4 e5 13.h3 d7



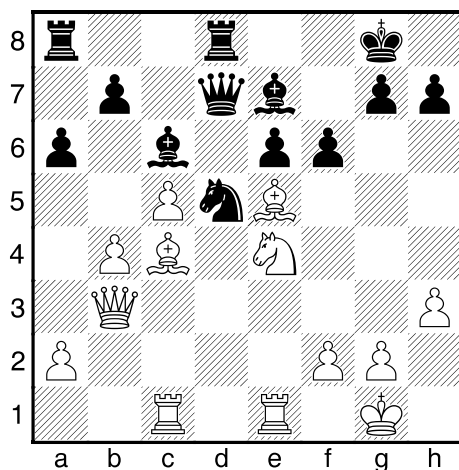
Until now, the game has adhered to the mainline of the Rossolimo with 5...e6. Although the move 6... e5 followed by ...d7 has been played on a few occasions, it is not the most widely played continuation.

14.c5 c8?

Inaccurate because it now becomes challenging to develop my pieces due to their poor coordination and the restricted space in my position.

14...♖c8 15.b4 a5 16.a3 b6 17.♙a6 ♜a8 18.♞e2 bxc5 19.bxc5 ♞c7± was the best continuation.

15.♖c1 ♜d8 16.b4 ♞c6
17.♞b3 ♞xd4 18.♙xd4 ♙c6
19.♙e5 ♞d5 20.♞e4 ♞d7
21.♙c4 f6

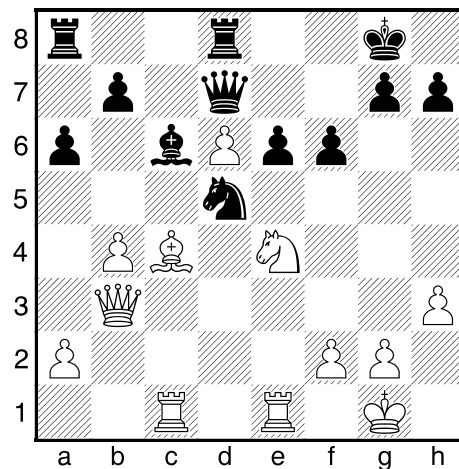


22.♙d6

22.♙g3 followed by ♙d6 would have been slightly better, but it would have required more patience.

22...♙xd6 23.cxd6

23.♞xd6 b5 24.♙e2 a5 25.♖cd1± was better.



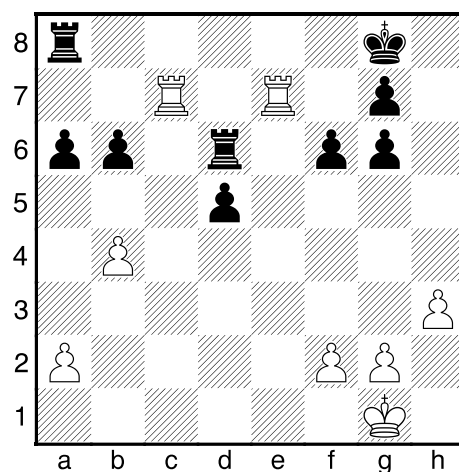
23...b6?

23...♙h8 24.♞c5 ♞xd6 25.♖xe6 ♞f4± was a better continuation.

24.♙xd5

24.♞g3 ♙h8 25.a3± was better.

24...♙xd5 25.♞g3 ♞f7
26.♖c7 ♞g6 27.♞xg6 hxg6
28.♞c3 ♖xd6 29.♞xd5 exd5
30.♖ee7



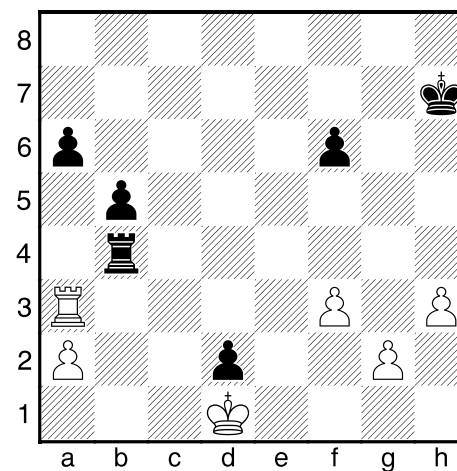
30...♖ad8

I considered this continuation: 30...d4 31.♖xg7+ ♙h8 32.♖h7+ ♙g8 33.♖cg7+ ♙f8 34.♖d7 ♖xd7 35.♖xd7 I failed to assess the position accurately: 35...a5 36.b5 ♖c8=.

31.♖xg7+ ♙h8 32.♙f1?

32.♖xg6 d4 33.♖c4 ♖e8 34.♙f1+.

32...d4 33.♖xg6 d3 34.♖c4
♙h7 35.♖g3 ♖d4 36.♖xd4
♖xd4 37.♙e1 d2+ 38.♙d1
♖xb4 39.♖b3 ♖f4 40.f3 b5
41.♖a3 ♖b4



42.g4

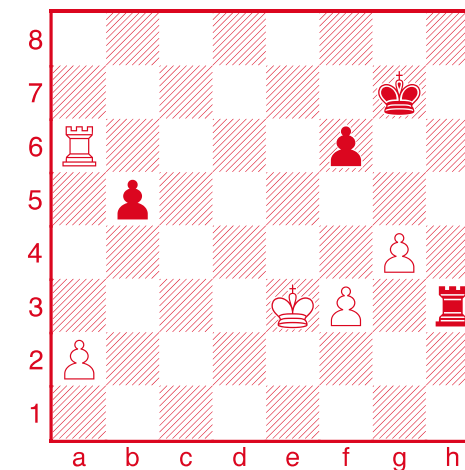
42.♖xa6? ♖b1+ 43.♙xd2 ♖b2+
44.♙e3 ♖xg2=.

42...♖b1+??

42...♖d4 43.♖xa6 ♙g7=. Even though Black is down a pawn and the remaining pawns are vulnerable to attack or potential capture by White's active pieces, the position is surprisingly balanced. Why? Because White lacks the ability to generate meaningful play, while Black can

eventually neutralize the situation with moves like ...b4 followed by ...♙g6-g5, or even ...♖d3 or ...♖f4 to capture White's threatening pawns on the kingside.

43.♙xd2 ♖h1 44.♖xa6 ♙g7
45.♙e3 ♖xh3



46.♙e4??

46.♙f4□ puts Black in a hopeless position. White is ahead by a pawn, with much more active pieces. The f6 pawn will likely be captured soon.

editor – 46.♖b6? ♖h2□ 47.a3 ♖a2
48.♖a6 b4!=.

46...f5+!!

Allows Black to equalize objectively speaking by forcing either the game move or 47.♙xf5 ♖xf3+=.

47.gxf5

The move ...f5+ was, in my opinion, the move of the game. I believe it showcases my understanding of rook endgames quite well. At this point, I



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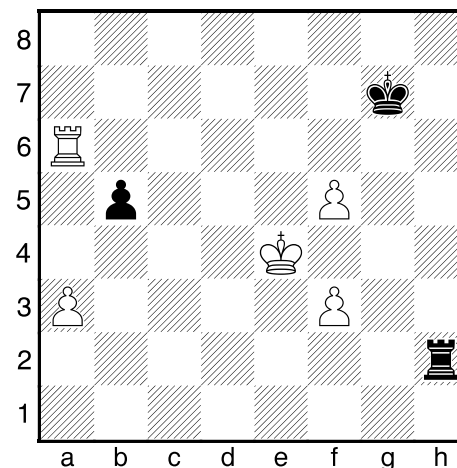
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did not have much time left, so I was trying to play as quickly as possible. The brilliance of ...f5 lies in the fact that it forces the kingside into one of two options: either two doubled f-pawns or a lone g-pawn. Both options are easily drawn if there are no other pawns. Of course, with the queenside pawns still on the board, reaching a draw becomes much more difficult, which is why there were blunders on both sides along the way.

A fun fact: after the game, one of my friends, who was spectating, told me that another GM, who was sitting next to me while still playing his own game, had been observing the position. Based on his facial expression, it seemed he thought I would lose. However, when he saw me play f5+, his expression and posture changed, indicating that he realized it would not be so easy for White. I thought it was amusing and was happy to hear this little story. Of course, I did not see any of it myself, as I was fully focused on my own board.

47...♖h2 48.a3



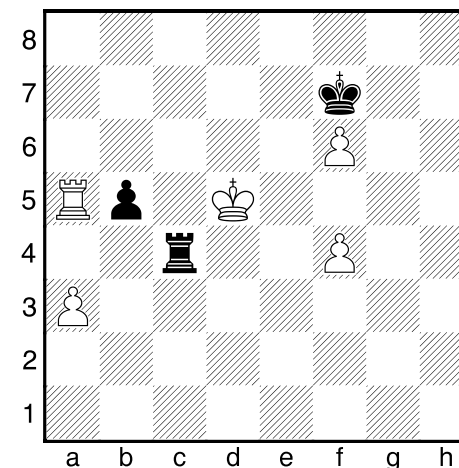
48...♔f7??

The Black rook is misplaced on h2. It should be positioned on the queenside to counter White's activity effectively. By positioning the rook on one of those three key squares, Black can hinder White's progress, either by threatening ...b4 to exchange the queenside pawns or by checking the white king; e.g. 48...♖a2 49.♖a7+ ♔f6 50.♔f4 b4=.

49.f6?

49.♖a5□ ♖b2 50.♔e5 ♖e2+ 51.♔d4 ♖e8 52.♔c5 ♖e5+ 53.♔b6 ♖xf5 54.♖xb5+.

49...♖h4+ 50.f4 ♖h5 51.♔d4 ♖f5 52.♔e3 ♖c5 53.♔e4 ♖h5 54.♖a5 ♖c5 55.♔d4 ♖c4+ 56.♔d5

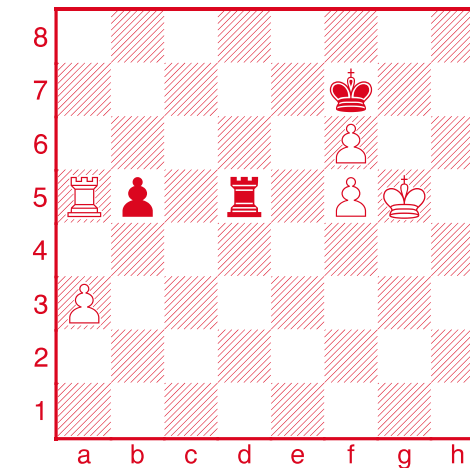


56...♖c3

Both 56...♔xf6 57.♖xb5 ♖a4 58.♖b3 ♖xf4=; and

56...♖xf4 57.♖xb5 ♖xf6 58.a4 ♔e8 59.a5 ♔d7= lead to theoretical draws.

57.♖a6 ♖c4 58.♔e5 ♖c5+ 59.♔e4 ♖c4+ 60.♔f5 ♖c5+ 61.♔g4 ♖d5 62.♖a5 ♖d3 63.♔g5 ♖d5+ 64.f5



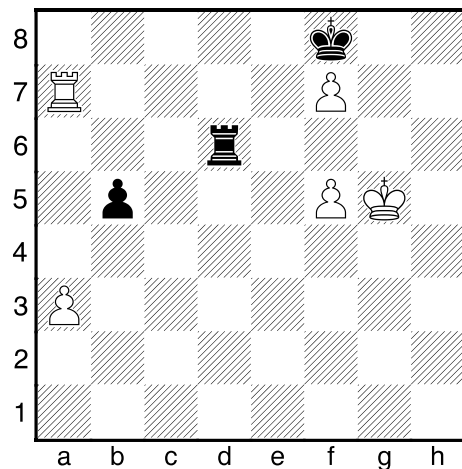
Active ...♖d3 or passive ...♖d7?

64...♖d3??

editor – 64...♖d7□= 65.♖xb5 ♖a7□ 66.♖b3 (66.♖c5 ♖xa3 67.♖c7+ ♔f8 68.f7 (68.♔g6 ♖g3+□=) 68...♖a6 69.f6 ♖xf6=) 66...♖a4□ 67.♖b7+ (67.♖e3 ♖a6 68.♖e7+ ♔f8□ 69.♔g6 ♖xa3 70.♖b7 ♖g3+□=) 67...♔f8□ 68.f7 ♖xa3 69.♔g6 (69.f6 ♖g3+= nowhere to hide.) 69...♖a6+ 70.f6 ♖xf6+!=.

65.♖a7+ ♔f8 66.f7 ♖d6

Recently, **I had lost three drawn rook endgames** to players rated 2400, 2500, and 2600, despite studying these endgames and having a solid understanding of them. However, **putting that knowledge into practice is another matter**, which is why I am so happy to have managed to survive a losing rook endgame against such a strong opponent.



67. ♖b7

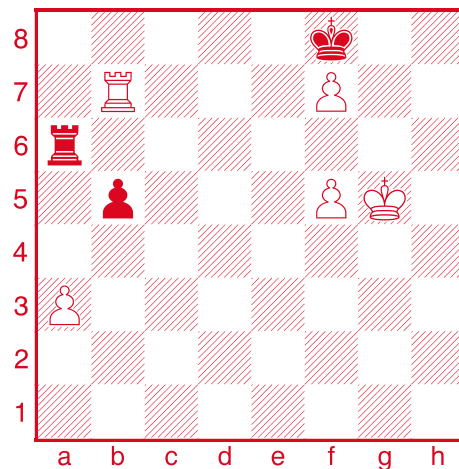
After the game, we analyzed a bit, and my friend (an IM) and I "explained" to him that he should have played 67. ♖a5 to force my rook to b6, which would have allowed him to win. The rook would be blocked by the b-pawn and unable to deliver back-rank checks to secure a draw; e.g. 67... ♖b6 68. f6 ♔xf7 69. ♖a7+ ♔f8 70. ♔g6+-.

In fact, my friend and I were wrong!

After 67. ♖a5 ... ♖b6 would lose, but Black doesn't have to defend b5. 67... ♔xf7 68. ♖xb5 ♖a6 69. ♖b7+ ♔f8 It's a theoretical draw, but actually getting that draw from here is far from trivial — see my loss to Christopher Yoo earlier! Black still has to be very careful and will have a lot of work to do.

67... ♖a6

After the game, we analyzed a bit, and my IM friend and I "explained" to him what he should have played... In fact, my friend and I were wrong!



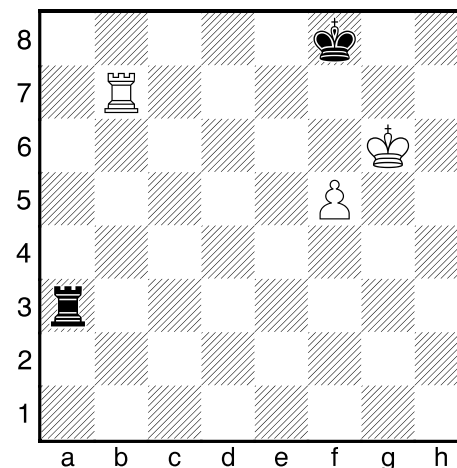
This one could be a study!

68. ♖xb5?

68. a4!!+- is a difficult move to find but also incredibly astonishing!! 68... bxa4 (68... ♖xa4 69. ♔g6 followed by mate.) 69. f6 a3 70. ♔g6 ♖a8 71. ♖b1 a2 72. ♖h1 a1 ♔ 73. ♖h8#. White wins by one tempo!

editor – 68. ♖c7 also wins, but less spectacularly: 68... ♖xa3 69. ♔g6 ♖g3+ (69... ♖a6+ 70. f6 ♖xf6+ is a standard drawing trick, but after 71. ♔xf6 there's no stalemate with Black's b-pawn free to move; 69... ♖a8 70. f6 ♖b8 71. ♖c1+- and ♖h8# is coming.) 70. ♔f6+- saved by the umbrella on f5... AND because of the ♔b5: if the black pawn was on b4 then ... ♖c3 would draw!

**68... ♖xa3 69. ♖b8+ ♔xf7
70. ♖b7+ ♔f8 71. ♔g6**



71... ♖f3!

Black attains a position that, in theory, can be drawn using the Kling and Horwitz defense.

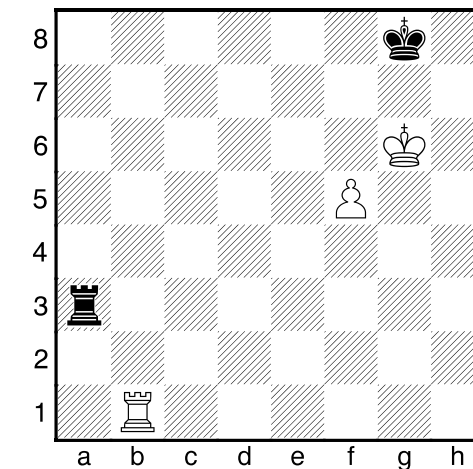
72. ♔f6 ♔g8

Black should always move towards the short side in this situation. 72... ♔e8?? 73. ♖b8+ ♔d7 74. ♖f8+-.

73. ♖b8+ ♔h7 74. ♔e6 ♔g7 75. ♖b7+ ♔f8 76. ♖b5 ♖f1

Black can easily secure a draw by keeping the rook behind White's pawn.

**77. ♔f6 ♔g8 78. ♖b2 ♖f3
79. ♖g2+ ♔f8 80. ♔g6 ♔e7
81. ♖g5 ♔f8 82. ♖h5 ♔g8
83. ♖h1 ♖a3 84. ♖b1**



84... ♖g3+ 85. ♔f6 ♖f3 86. ♖b8+ ♔h7 87. ♔e6 ♔g7

After a lengthy struggle and a highly complex rook endgame, the game concluded in a draw. Interestingly, draw offers are not allowed in Corsica. The rule is designed to encourage fighting chess and discourage quick draws. A draw can only be claimed through three-fold repetition or the fifty-move rule. However, my opponent did not repeat the position three times, and we simply agreed to a draw. I believe, out of respect for my opponent, the organizers allowed it, as we had been playing for quite a long time by that point.

Overall, this game meant a lot to me. It was **my first time drawing against a 2600+ player**. Recently, I had lost three drawn rook endgames to players rated 2400, 2500, and 2600, despite studying these endgames and having a solid understanding of them. However, putting that knowledge into practice is another

matter, which is why I am so happy to have managed to survive a losing rook endgame against such a strong opponent.

1/2-1/2

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

Vanduyfhuys, Daria

(2112)

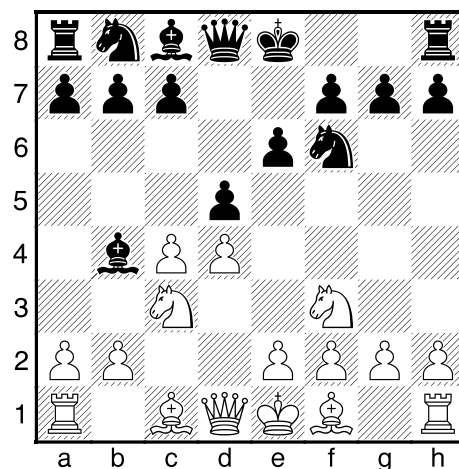
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2318)

D38

*45th World Chess Olympiad
Budapest (6), 16.09.2024*

This was round 6 of the Chess Olympiad, where we were paired against Belgium. Based on ratings, we were favorites to win the match. In general, it is difficult to know in advance who you will face for certain, as board pairings are only released at 10 AM for a 3 PM game, leaving limited time for preparation. However, board ones often play each other, especially in the women's section, where there is often a significant strength gap between board 1 and other players. In this case, Belgium's boards 2 and 3 were performing very well, while their board 1 was struggling with 0/5. Given this, my team and I expected I would likely face their board 2. Still, I had to split my preparation to be ready for both possibilities.

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5
4.♘c3 ♙b4**



The Ragozin

In my opinion, and that of many others, this opening is extremely solid. I generally avoid playing this way against lower-rated opponents, as White can steer the game into very drawish positions, with some lines even leading to forced repetitions. To highlight its solidity, I have played it six times in classical games, scoring +2 =4 -0 against decent opposition — a strong statistical result.

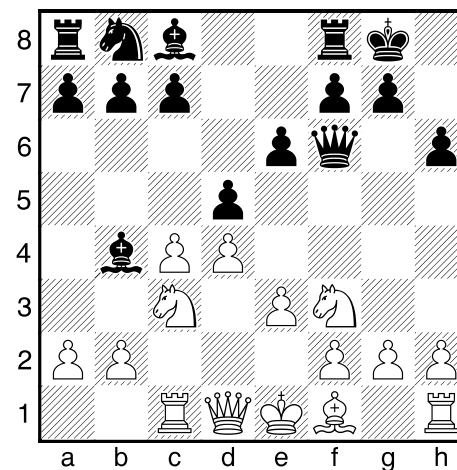
Regarding this game, my initial preparation was focused on a more aggressive approach. However, before the game, I started doubting whether I had prepared it thoroughly enough and felt it was too risky. As a result, I made a last-minute decision to play the Ragozin, as it is a straightforward system. I also mentally accepted that a draw was a likely outcome, depending on my opponent's choice of line—though some variations do offer plenty of life

and activity.

5.♙g5 h6 6.♙xf6

6.♙h4 dxc4 Black can attempt to hold onto the c4-pawn long-term and potentially convert it into a win.

6...♙xf6 7.e3 0-0 8.♖c1



8...dxc4

8...♘c6!?, combined with the idea of ...dxc4 with ...e5, was also an option. During the game, I did not feel prepared to go for it, though it likely would have created more winning chances and avoided the possibility of an early draw by repetition.

9.♙xc4 c5 10.0-0 cxd4

11.♘xd4

11.♘e4 would keep the position alive.
11...♙e7 or ♙f5

11...♙d7

Preparing ...♘c6.

12.♙b3 ♘c6!

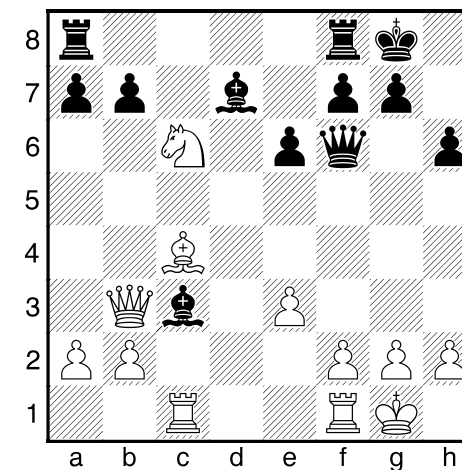
Although we are still following the

theory, ...♘c6 is a nice move as it develops an important piece, connects the rooks and surprisingly does so without losing any material!

13.♘xc6 ♙xc3

An important intermezzo as

13...♙xc6?? loses a piece to 14.♙xb4



14.♙xc3

This move makes sense, as White will capture on f6 next, weakening Black's kingside pawn structure. Black cannot prevent this with ...♙xc3 due to the ♘e7+ intermezzo. Looking back, I do not think my opponent was familiar with the theory, as she chose ♙xc3. Had she known it, she likely would have opted for the repetition.

14.♖xc3 ♙xc6 and forced a repetition with 15.♙b5 ♙d5 16.♙c4 ♙c6 17.♙b5= Black has no choice but to accept the draw, as other moves offer minimal winning chances or lead to worse positions. When I decided to play a safer line like the Ragozin, I accepted that a quick draw was a realistic

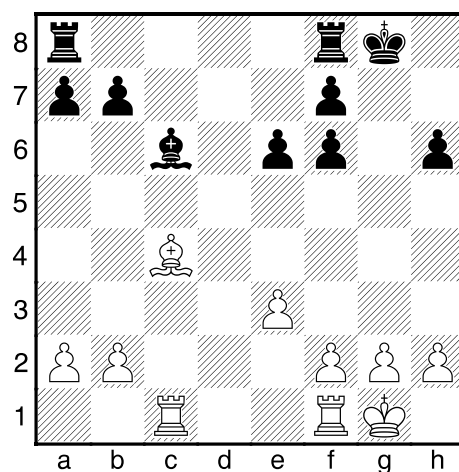


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outcome. I made peace with this decision for the good of the team and to avoid the risk of losing rating by being careless or underestimating my opponent.

editor – 14. ♖xb7 ♙xc6 is another of the semi-forced Ragozin draws; e.g. 15. ♖xc6 ♙xb2 16. ♖c2 ♖ac8 17. ♖a4 ♖c7 18. ♙d3 ♖xc2 19. ♙xc2 ♖c8 20. ♖d1 ♖c3 21. ♙b3 ♖c5 ½-½, *So, W-Carlsen, M Bilbao Masters, 2016.*

14... ♙xc6 15. ♖xf6 gxf6



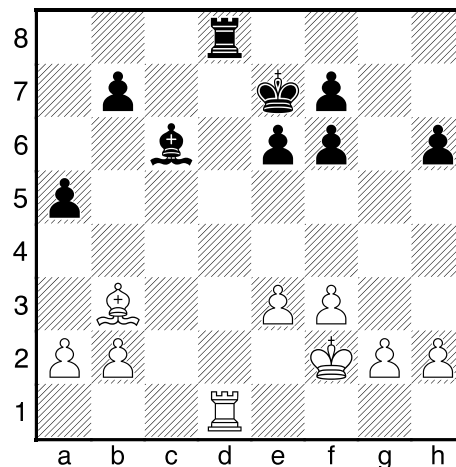
Since I had already come to terms with a quick draw, I was overjoyed to reach this position, even though it was completely equal.

16. ♖fd1 ♖fd8 17. f3 ♙f8

Although it makes no difference in regard to the evaluation 17...f5 was more precise as it prevents White's central expansion with e4. Black is in no hurry to activate the king.

Thus, White should have taken advantage of this decision and played e4.

**18. ♙f2 ♙e7 19. ♙b3 a5
20. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 21. ♖d1**



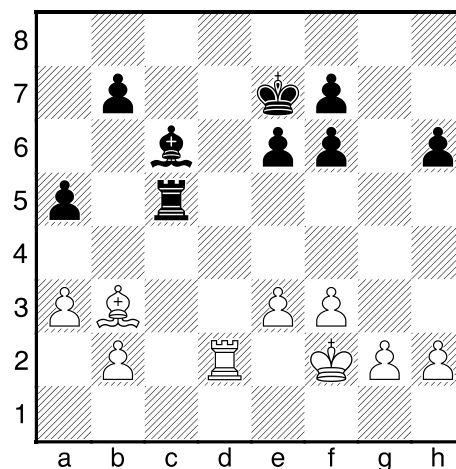
21... ♖c8

It is easier to generate winning chances with more pieces on the board.

**22. ♖d4 ♙b5 23. a3 ♖c1
24. ♖d1 ♖c5 25. ♖d4 ♙c6**

Relocating my bishop and liberating the b5-square for my rook.

26. ♖d2



Up to this point, I had been gradually improving my pieces and position over the last few moves. The position remained equal and relatively easy to play, allowing me to keep an eye on my teammates' games. I do not recall the exact timing or order of events, but Oksana won, Penny drew, and Yunshan lost, meaning my result would decide the match outcome — the pressure was on. In this moment, I started thinking more deeply, as pushing pawns is a long-term commitment that cannot be undone.

26... a4

Taking more space on the queenside and fixing White's pawns.

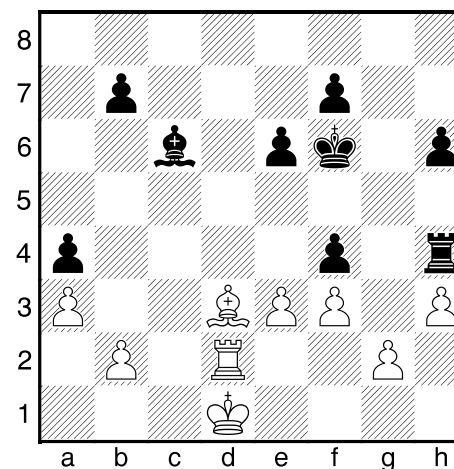
27. ♙c2 f5

And now taking more space on the kingside and creating a path for my king via f6.

28. ♙e2 ♙f6 29. ♙d1 ♖c4

With the idea of maybe playing f4.

30. ♙d3 ♖h4 31. h3 f4



This was the only plan I found to create some play.

32. ♙e2

exf4 was also a possibility. 32.e4? ♖h5+ weakens the kingside and limits White's light-squared bishop for no good reason.

**32... ♙e5 33. ♖c2 fxe3
34. ♙xe3 f5 35. ♖c5+ ♙d6
36. ♖a5 ♖h5**

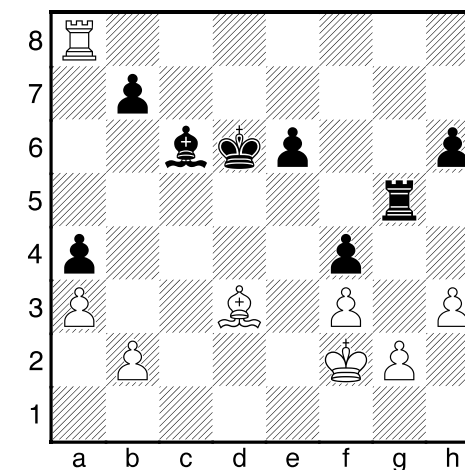
The idea is to regroup my rook to the g-file while threatening ...f4+ winning the ♖.

37. ♖a8 ♖g5 38. ♙f2

This move is positionally inaccurate, as it concedes control of the f4-square.

38.g4 fxg4 39.hxg4= was best to maintain equality.

38...f4!



Black is very satisfied with this outcome, as White's kingside pawns



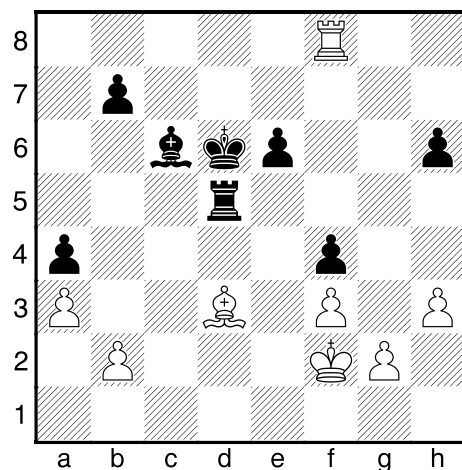
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are weak, being fixed on light squares. Additionally, both sides should aim to place their pawns on dark squares to avoid restricting the light-squared bishop and to gain more control over the board.

39. ♖f8?

39. ♖d8+ needed to be played to either misplace the king, misplace the bishop or cut off the rook from reaching the c/d-files. This would prevent Black from infiltrating the first or second rank, significantly activating the rook.

39... ♖d5□



40. ♖d8+

At this critical moment, I had just under 8 minutes to decide where to move my king before reaching the 40-move mark and gaining an additional 30 minutes on the clock.

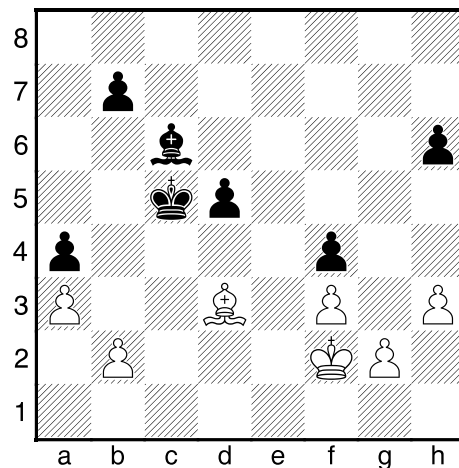
40. ♖e2 ♖b5□ 41. ♖xb5 ♖xb5 42. ♖d8+ (42. ♖xf4 ♖xb2+-) 42... ♖c5! 43. ♖d2 ♖c4⌘ Black's rook and king are too

active while White is still struggling with a weak pawn structure.

40... ♖e5?

40... ♖c5! 41. ♖xd5+ exd5!

Analysis Diagram

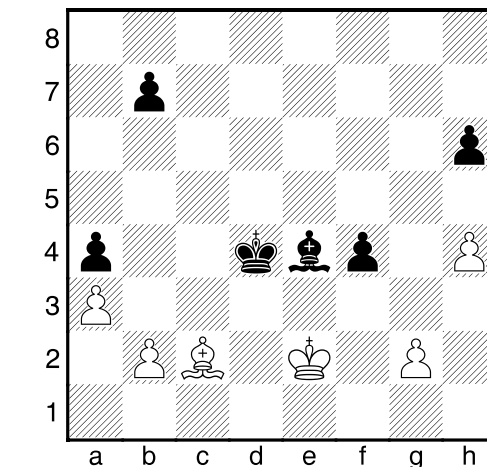


Planning ...d4 or ...♖b5 was the way to go. I saw this but failed to evaluate it as winning:

42. g3 fxg3+ 43. ♖xg3 ♖d4 44. ♖c2 ♖e3+;

42. ♖e1 ♖b5 43. ♖f5 (43. ♖c2 d4 44. ♖d2 ♖f1-) 43... ♖d4 44. ♖d2 ♖f1 45. ♖e1 ♖d3+.

41. ♖xd5+ ♖xd5 42. h4 ♖d4 43. ♖c2 e5 44. ♖e2 e4 45. fxe4 ♖xe4



46. ♖xa4

46. ♖xe4?? ♖xe4 47. h5 (47. ♖f2 h5 48. ♖e2 b6 49. ♖d2 f3+- and wins the h-pawn.) 47... b6 48. ♖f2 ♖f5+.

46... ♖xg2 47. ♖b5

The position is completely equal. White can shuffle without too much thought or even try to trade the b-pawn.

47... ♖d5 48. ♖f2 ♖e4 49. ♖e2 b6 50. ♖b5 ♖e5 51. ♖d7 ♖d3 52. ♖f3 ♖c2 53. ♖f2 ♖d1 54. ♖e1 ♖b3 55. ♖f2 ♖c4 56. ♖f3 ♖d5+ 57. ♖f2



2024 Olympiad Budapest

Oksana Golubeva
Svitlana Demchenko

Maili-Jade
Yuanshan Li

Bich Ngoc Pham sat out this round



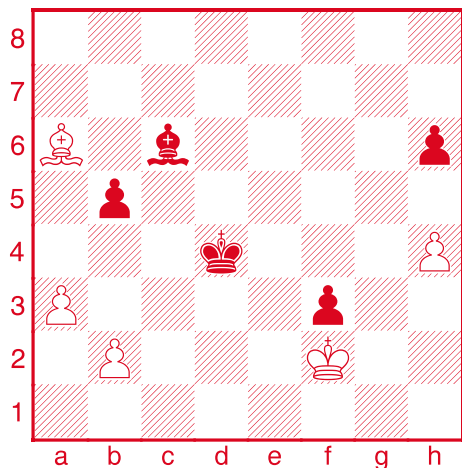
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♔e4 58.♙b5 f3 59.♙f1 ♔d4
60.♙b5 ♙b7 61.♙f1 ♙c6
62.♙a6 b5!



The position is still equal but now White has to be more precise. After several hours of continuous pressure, my opponent finally cracked, making a decisive mistake that settled the game. With six minutes on the clock, she quickly played

63.b3??

Attempting to trade Black's b-pawn for White's a/b pawns.

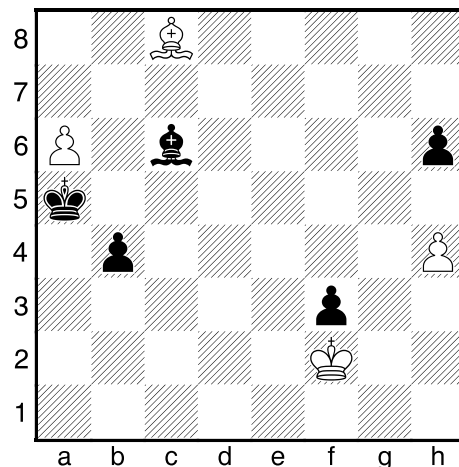
63.♙c8 ♔d3 64.♙f5+ ♔d2 and with the ♙ at a safe distance White can safely liquidate the queenside: 65.b3 ♔c3 66.a4 bxa4 67.bxa4 ♙xa4 68.♙xf3=.

63...♔c3! 64.a4 b4 65.♙c8
I think my opponent missed this when calculating 63. b3: 65.♙c4? is the only way to protect the b3-pawn, but it fails to 65...♙xa4 66.bxa4 ♔xc4+.

65...♔xb3 66.a5 ♔a4

Black has to run after the a-pawn to put a stop to it.

67.a6 ♔a5



68.♙e3

68.♙b7 ♔b6! neutralizes all threats, as the Black bishop is protected and the king remains close enough to stop the a8-pawn if White attempts to push it. 69.♙xc6 (69.a7 ♔xb7) 69...♔xc6-+

**68...♔b6 69.♔d2 ♙b5
70.♔e3 ♙xa6 71.♙e6 ♙e2**

White resigned, as Black's task is now straightforward.

This game meant a lot to me.

First, I am not the type of player who trades queens early. I prefer keeping pieces on the board to maximize winning chances.

Second, I have little experience in such positions, as I usually avoid them, believing they are too drawish.

That is why I am especially proud of how I kept generating chances, fighting throughout, and ultimately securing the win. I believe one of the key differences between good players and stronger ones is their ability to create winning chances even in equal or slightly worse positions.

This game reinforced that my hard work was paying off, that I was improving, and that I could maintain or even increase my rating—I had recently reached 2300 and was working to keep it. During the game, I kept reminding myself, Magnus would win this—so what would he do? Somehow, that mindset worked!

Lastly, this game had a huge impact on my tournament at the Olympiad. My win was critical for securing the match victory, and it also set me up in the best possible mood before the rest day. I believe that break helped me relax and led to strong play and a great performance for the remainder of the tournament.

0-1

notes:

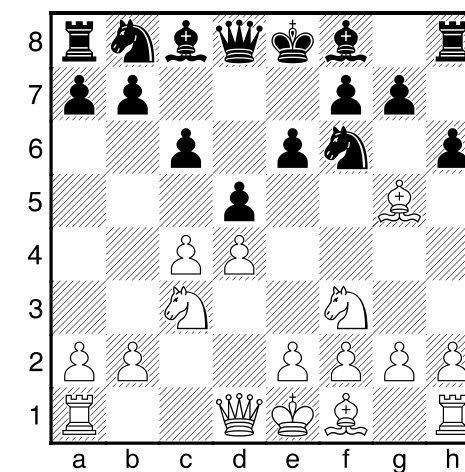
36
WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2318)
Stefanova, Antoaneta
(2416)

D43

*45th World Chess Olympiad
Budapest (7), 18.09.2024*

This is Round 7 of the Women's World Chess Olympiad. We are facing Bulgaria, the 10th seed. Canada is lower rated on all boards. Therefore, as White, I felt the need to push for a win to give the team a chance to draw or perhaps even win the match.

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6
4.♘f3 e6 5.♙g5 h6**



6.♙xf6

6.♙h4 dxc4 7.e4 g5 8.♙g3 b5 9.♙e2= was also a possible continuation as White has a lot of compensation for the pawn.

**During the game, I kept reminding myself:
Magnus would win this — what would he do?
Somehow, that mindset worked!**



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6...♔xf6 7.e3 g6 8.♘e2

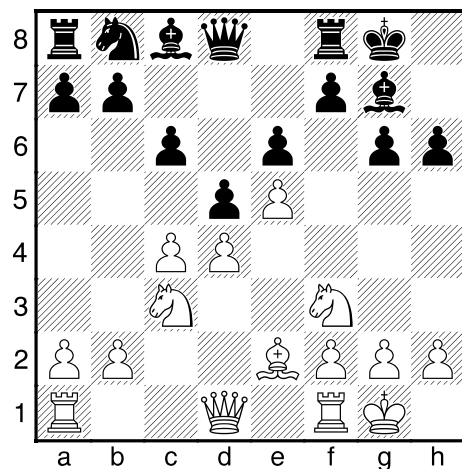
The idea was to step away from well-known theoretical lines, surprise my opponent a bit and get a game. 8.♘d3 is the most played move and is probably what she expected.

8...♘g7 9.e4 ♔d8

9...dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♔f4 11.♔c2 c5 12.dxc5 0-0 13.0-0 a5 14.♖fd1=

Black has enough compensation for the pawn, and might continue with ...♘d7, ...♗c6 and ...♘a6/c6.

10.e5 0-0 11.0-0



11...♘d7

Black should counterattack in the center before White has the opportunity to consolidate, thereby preventing White from maintaining a strong central presence and, by extension, the space advantage: 11...dxc4 12.♘xc4 c5 13.dxc5 ♘d7 14.♗e2 ♘xc5 15.♖ad1 ♗e7 Black does not have any problems.



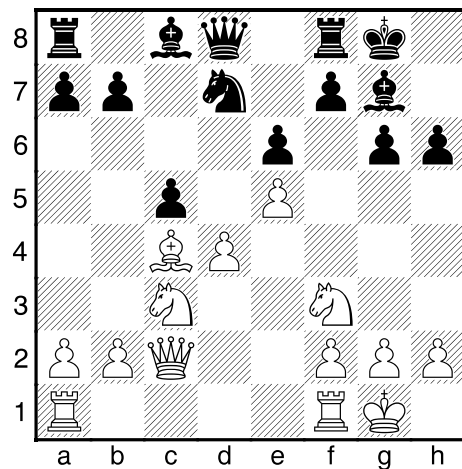
**2024 Olympiad
Budapest**

Bulgaria - Canada

**Board 1
MJO vs GM Stefanova**

12. ♖c2

The same applies to White: consolidating the center with a move like 12. ♖e1 was best. 12... dxc4 13. ♗xc4 b5 14. ♗f1 c5 15. dxc5=.

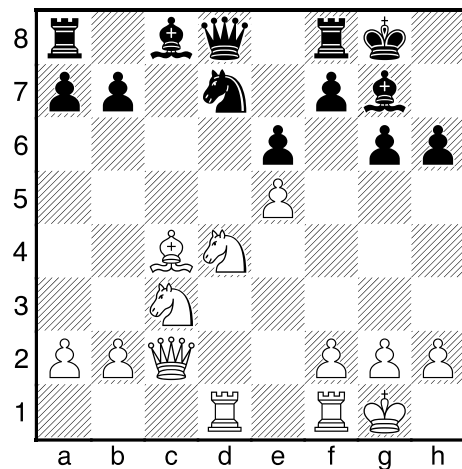
12... dxc4 13. ♗xc4 c5

Had White's pawn on e5 been better protected, it could have been considered a strength. However, Black's counterattack in the center occurred before White was fully prepared to respond. As a result, the e5-pawn has become a weakness that requires constant defense, allowing Black to seize the initiative.

14. ♖ad1 cxd4 15. ♗xd4?

I was unwilling to spend the remainder of the game under pressure, defending the weak e5-pawn. Therefore, I opted for a riskier approach, fully aware that the engine might not approve of it.

After 15. ♖xd4 ♗ White is not losing, but will have to work hard to preserve the weak e5-pawn.



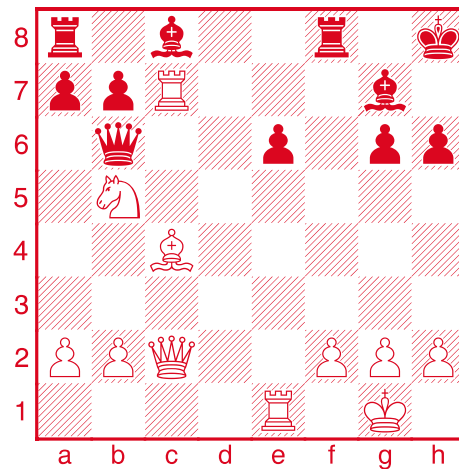
After thinking for 30 minutes! my opponent surprisingly opted for...

15... ♗c7?

15... ♗xe5 16. ♗xe6 ♖h4 17. ♗xf8 ♖xc4 18. ♗xg6 fxg6 19. ♖d8+ ♗h7 ♗ is a continuation that I saw. I was uncertain about the evaluation, as my rook on d8 would be quite active, while Black's king would remain relatively weak. However, I was not particularly pleased with the idea of giving up two minor pieces in exchange for a rook.

16. ♗cb5 ♖xe5 17. ♖fe1 ♖c5 18. ♗xe6! fxe6 19. ♖xd7 ♗h8 19... ♗xd7 20. ♗xe6+- winning the queen.

20. ♖c7 ♖b6

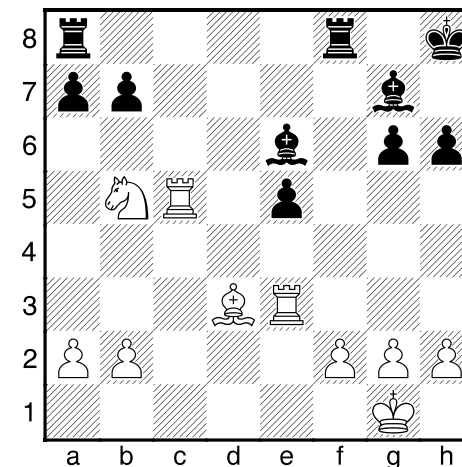
**21. ♖e3??**

Looking back, this was a terrible mistake for several reasons. First, ♖d1 was completely winning. Second, I only spent five minutes on this move when I should have taken more time, especially since I had over thirty minutes more on the clock than my opponent. Third, in the following moves, I kept looking for ways to make ♖d3 work, which made ♖d1 even more obvious in hindsight.

After 21. ♖d1! White threatens to play ♖d6 or ♖xg6 now that the rook is no longer hanging on e1 after Black plays ♖xf2+. For example: 21... a6 22. ♖xg6 ♖xf2+ 23. ♗h1 ♖f6 24. ♖xf6 ♗xf6 25. ♗d6+- White has complete control over the position and will soon gain a material advantage by taking the pawns on b7 and e6.

21... e5 22. ♗d3?

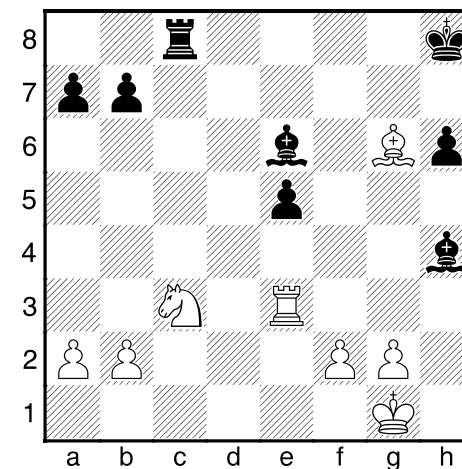
22. ♖c3 would have maintained the edge, but by this point, I believe I was psychologically unsettled, knowing that I had missed my opportunity.

22... ♗e6 23. ♖c5?! ♖xc5 24. ♖xc5**24... ♖ac8?**

24... ♖ad8 ♗ Black's pieces have a lot of potential, which is why avoiding trades is favourable.

25. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 26. h4

Grabs space on the kingside, limits Black's pawns and prevents any back-rank checkmates.

26... ♗f6 27. ♗xg6 ♗xh4 28. ♗c3



Repositions the knight and prevents Black from infiltrating the 1st rank. $\text{Re}5$ is now a threat.

28...Rc5 29.f4 Kg7 30.Qd3 Qf6 31.f5 Qf7 32.Rg3+ Qf8 33.Qe4?

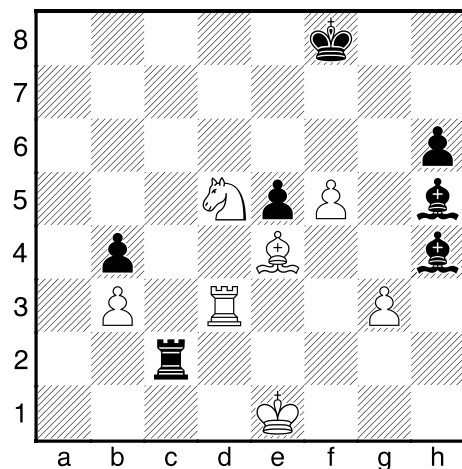
This is an inaccuracy as it allows Black to generate decent play on the queenside with ...b5.

Instead, White is fine after 33.Qe4 Rxc1+ 34.Qh2 Qd8 35.Rh3=.

33...b5! 34.a3 a5 35.Rd3

Anticipating ...b4 and preparing Qd5.

35...b4 36.axb4 axb4 37.Qd5 Qg5 38.b3 Rc1+ 39.Qf2 Qh4+ 40.g3 Rc2+ 41.Qe1 Qh5



42.gxh4

42.Re3 preventing Re2+ was best. 42...Rc1+ 43.Qf2 Qg5 44.Re1=.

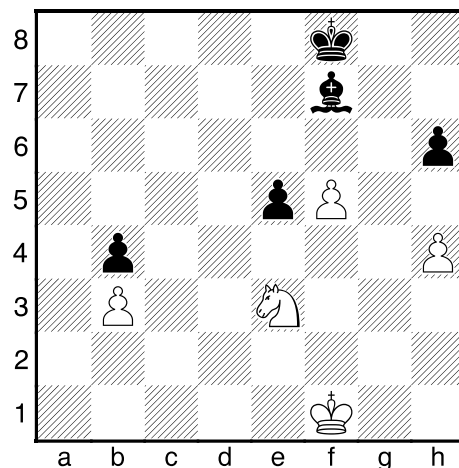
42...Re2+ 43.Qf1 Rxe4

44.Re3?

A mistake, as Black's bishop can easily capture the b3-pawn, while the Black king will reach the f5-pawn quickly.

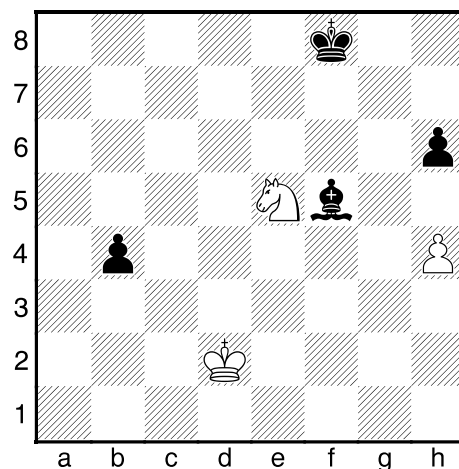
44.Qf2 Rxe4 45.Re3= White will soon capture Black's e5-pawn and regain material equality.

44...Rxe3 45.Qxe3 Qf7



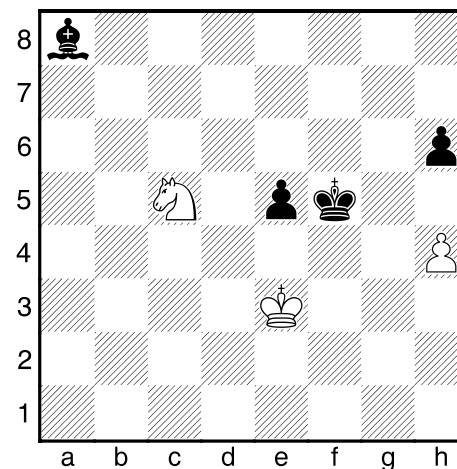
46.Qc2?

46.Qg4 Qxb3 47.Qxe5 Qc2 48.Qe1 Qxf5 49.Qd2 *Analysis Diagram*



The position is completely equal since Black will not be able to protect the b-pawn, while the remaining h-pawn is not sufficient to win. For example: 49...Kg7 50.Qc6 b3 51.Qc3 Qe6 52.Qd4 Qd5 53.Qxb3 Qxb3 54.Qxb3 Kg6 55.Qc3 Qh5 56.Qd3 Qxe4 57.Qe2 Qg3 58.Qf1=.

46...Qxb3 47.Qxb4 Qf7 48.Qf2 Qf6 49.Qe3 Qxf5 50.Qc6 Qd5 51.Qb4 Qe4 52.Qa6 Qa8 53.Qc5

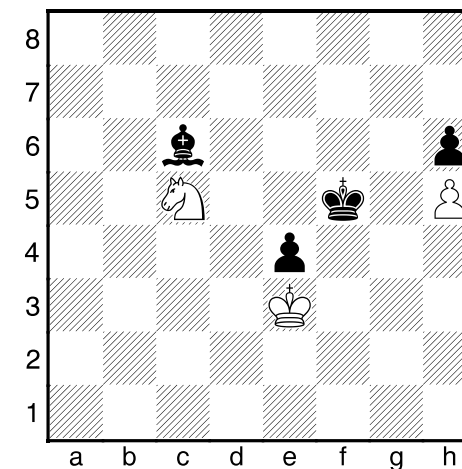


In order to win, Black needs to capture White's h-pawn while avoiding any repetitions or Zugzwangs.

53...e4?

53...Kg4 54.Qd3 e4+- followed by ...Qxe4. White can win the e-pawn, but cannot get to f1 to stop promotion.

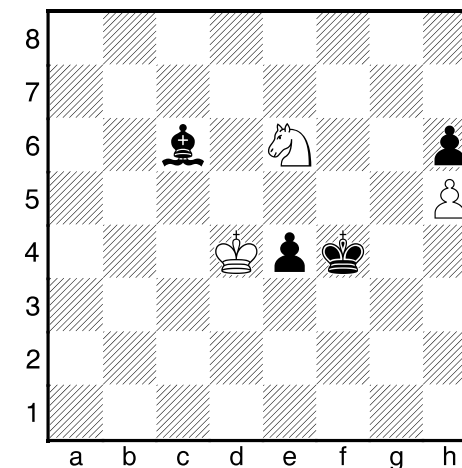
54.h5 Qc6



55.Qd4??

55.Qb3 Kg5 56.Qd4 Qb7 57.Qb5! (57.Qe6+?? Qxe5 58.Qc5 Qc6 59.Qf4 Qh4+) 57...Qxe5 58.Qd6 Qd5 59.Qf4!! Qg6 (59...Qh4 60.Qf5+ Qh5 61.Qg3+=) 60.Qxe4.

55...Qf4 56.Qe6+



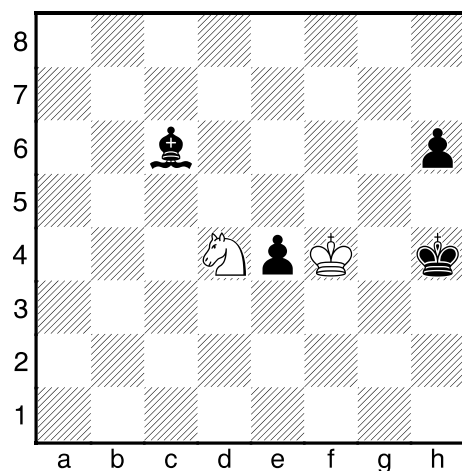
56...Qg4??

With seconds on the clock, it is understandable why Black did not wish to allow White to promote a queen.



56...♔f3! 57.♘g5+ hxg5 58.h6 e3 59.h7 e2 60.h8♖ e1♖ 61.♗f6+ ♔g4 62.♖xc6 ♗f2+! White cannot avoid the queen trade. 63.♔e5 (63.♔c4 ♗c2+; 63.♔c3 ♗f3+; 63.♔d3 ♗f3+;) 63...♗f5+ 64.♔d4 (64.♔d6 ♗f6+) 64...♗f4+-+ and wherever the ♔ moves, Black forces off the queens with a check and promotes the g-pawn.

57.♔e3 ♔xh5 58.♔f4 ♔h4 59.♘d4



Black cannot make any progress.

59...♙d7

59...♙b7 60.♘f5+ ♔h5 61.♘d6 ♙c6 62.♘f5=; 59...♙a8 60.♘f5+ ♔h5 61.♘g3+ ♔h4 (61...♔g6 62.♘e4=) 62.♘f5+ with a draw by repetition.

60.♔xe4=

Now all White has to do is sacrifice the knight in exchange for the h-pawn.

60...♔g4 61.♔e3 h5 62.♔f2

♔h3 63.♘e2 h4 64.♘f4+ ♔g4 65.♘g6 ♙f5 66.♘xh4

1/2-1/2

notes:

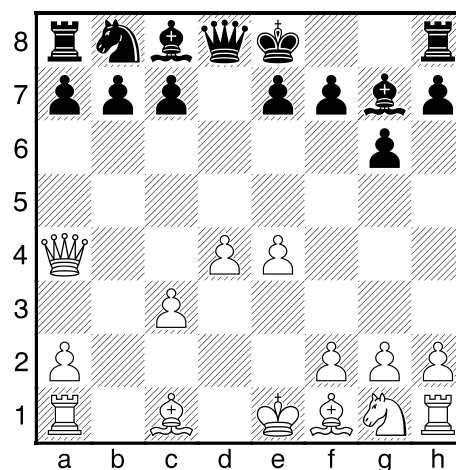
WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2319)
Marin, Mihail (2431)

D85

Sevilla (9), 18.01.2025

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♙g7 7.♗a4+



Anti-Grünfeld ♗a4+

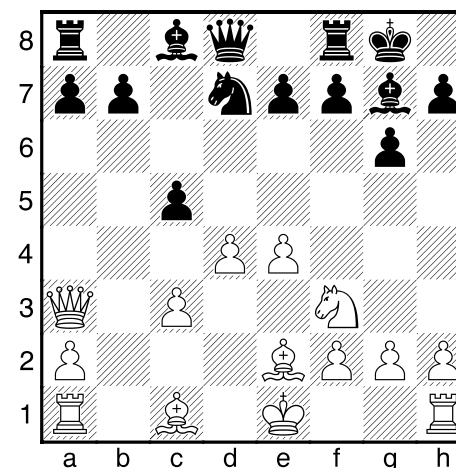
This game features a sideline in the Grünfeld Defense that is not widely known, allowing me to step away from the mainline theory and get a game.

The move ♗a4+ slightly disrupts Black's queenside development. Black has four common replies: ♘d7, c6, ♗d7, and ♙d7; but each one is a concession:

- ...♘d7: the knight is more active on c6;
- ...c6: the c-pawn belongs on c5 to counterattack the center;
- ...♗d7: blocks the queenside minors;
- ...♙d7: is less active than its usual g4 or b7 deployment.

So, while ♗a4+ may initially seem like a loss of tempo, White often regains it in other ways, leaving Black's coordination slightly compromised.

7...♘d7 8.♘f3 0-0 9.♙e2 c5 10.♗a3



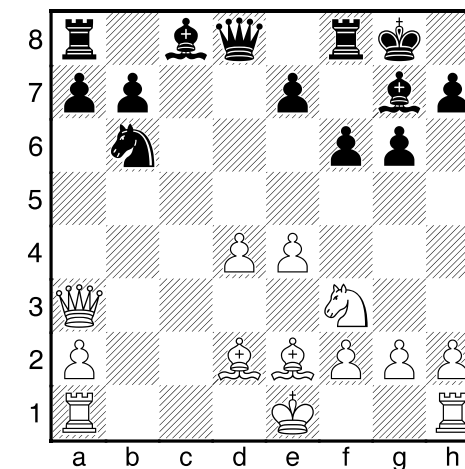
Another point of ♗a4+ is to force Black to exchange the c- and d-pawns before the knight can move away from d7 to a more active square. Once the pawns are traded, White's queen gains activity by exerting pressure along the

a3-f8 diagonal, creating additional challenges for Black's development.

10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘b6

A decent alternative to ...♘f6, which is best. This was my first time reaching this position.

12.♙g5 f6 13.♙d2



The idea behind retreating the bishop to d2 instead of e3, where it could provide additional protection to the d4-pawn, is based on anticipating Black's next move: ...f5. My reply to ...f5 will be e5, which relinquishes control of the d5-square. This allows Black's knight to occupy d5 and target my bishop on e3. Additionally, the bishop on e3 would be vulnerable to a future f-pawn push, making d2 a safer and more practical square for the bishop.

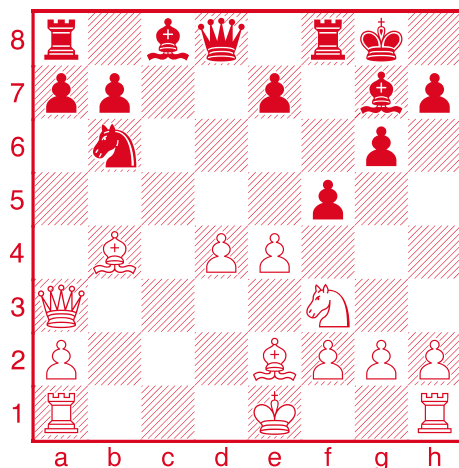
13...f5 14.♙b4?

14.♗b3+ ♔h8 15.e5± was the way to go.



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14...Re8?

When playing ♖b4 I had seen 14... fxe4 15. ♙xe7, when Black's options looked good for me:

15... ♔c7? 16. ♙xf8 ♙xf8 17. ♔b3+ I had calculated something like this and evaluated it as winning for me;

15... ♔e8 preventing ♙xf8 due to ...exf3! 16. ♘e5±;

But now I saw 15... ♔d5!+- blocking the a2-g8 diagonal with the queen — the critical detail I missed — and Black is now winning! If I play ♙xf8, Black can respond with ♙xf8, attacking my queen while my knight on f3 remains hanging. The reason ♔d5 is such a game-changer is that it blocks the a2-g8 diagonal, preventing me from playing the intermediate move ♔b3+, which would have saved my queen and allowed me to protect my knight next. With the knight now hanging, moving it would leave the d4-pawn vulnerable, as well as expose the a1-h8 diagonal, further weakening White's position.

15. ♔b3+

Forcing ...e6 to provoke exf5 gxf5, which weakens the Black king and his pawn structure.

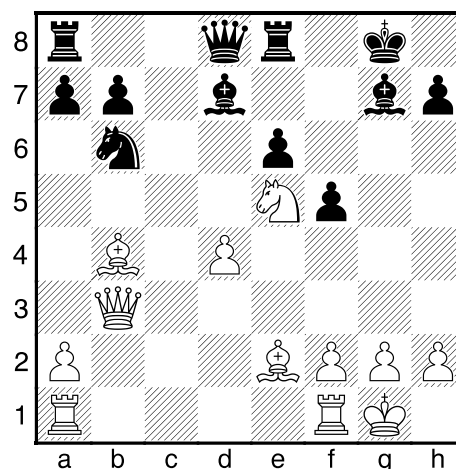
15...e6

15... ♔h8? 16. ♘g5+-.

16. exf5 gxf5 17. 0-0

My king is safe and my pieces are active.

17... ♙d7 18. ♘e5



Limiting Black's key dark-squared bishop, opening the third rank for my queen, and making it more difficult for Black to play ...♙c6, thereby preventing access to the strong a8-h1 diagonal.

18... ♙a4?

As unpleasant as it is to play, 18... ♙xe5!? was the only move that avoided reaching a considerably worse position. 19. dxe5 ♙c6 20. ♔ad1±.

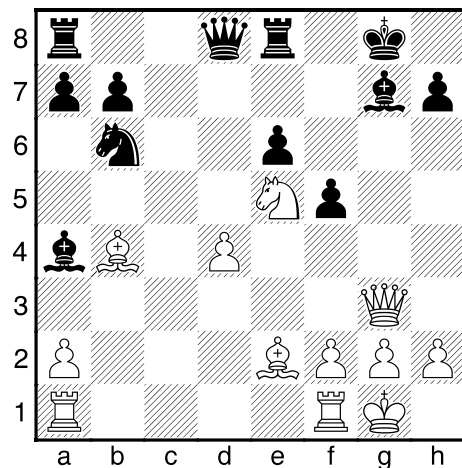


GM
Mihail Marin

He wrote the book.



19. ♖g3!



19... ♗d5

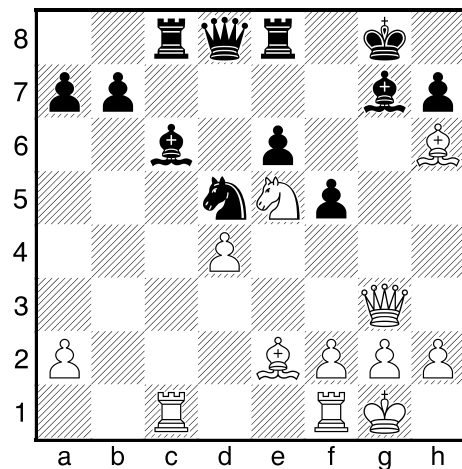
19... ♖xd4 20. ♕c3 White's active pieces are too strong. Here is an example of how to carry out the attack: 20... ♖c5 21. ♖ac1 ♖e7 22. ♕b2! ♗d5 23. ♕h5 ♖f8 (23... ♖ec8 24. ♕f7+ ♖h8 (24... ♕f8 25. h4+- with a winning attack.) 25. ♗g6+ hxg6 26. ♖h3+-) 24. ♕a3 ♗b4 25. ♕xb4 ♖xb4 26. ♖c7+-.

20. ♕d2 ♖c8?

It may seem like a regular move, but it allows me to achieve a dream position where all my pieces contribute to the attack.

20... ♖b6 21. ♕h5 ♖xd4 is still bad, but offered more resistance.

21. ♖ac1 ♕c6 22. ♕h6



22... ♖e7

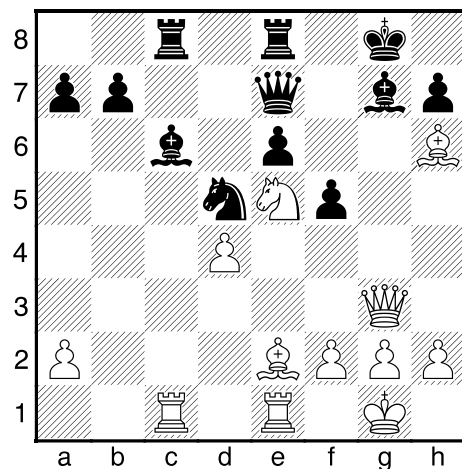
The alternatives are not much better:

22... ♖e7 23. ♕g5+-;

22... ♖c7 23. ♕h5 ♖f8 24. ♗xc6 bxc6 25. ♖xc6+-;

22... ♖c7 23. ♕h5 ♖f8 24. ♕f3+- Black's pieces are too inactive and under attack, while the Black king is still very weak.

23. ♖fe1!



Bringing the last piece into the action by adding pressure on e6!

23... ♖f8

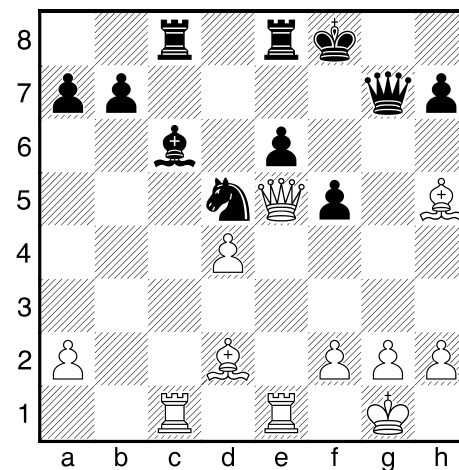
All other lines inevitably lose some material:

23... ♖h8 24. ♕h5 ♖f8 (24... ♕xh6 25. ♗f7+-) 25. ♗xc6 ♖xc6 26. ♖xc6 bxc6 27. ♖xe6!+-;

23... ♖c7 24. ♕h5 ♖f8 25. ♗xc6 bxc6 26. ♕xg7 ♖xg7 27. ♖xe6+-;

23... ♗f6 24. ♗xc6 bxc6 25. ♕c4 ♖xe6+ or ♖xe6 cannot be stopped.

24. ♕g5 ♕f6 25. ♕d2 ♕xe5 26. ♖xe5 ♖g7 27. ♕h5!



27... ♗f6

Threatening ... ♗xh5 and ... ♖xg2#.

27... ♖e7 28. ♕h6!! ♖xh6 29. ♖h8#;

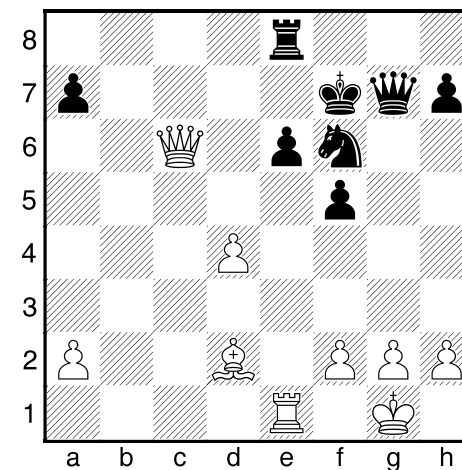
27... ♖xe5 28. ♖xe5 ♖e7 29. ♕g5 wins the e6 pawn as the rook cannot keep protecting it.

28. ♖xc6 bxc6

28... ♗xh5 29. ♖xe6+-;

28... ♖xc6 29. ♕b4+ ♖g8 30. ♕xe8 ♗xe8 31. ♖b8 ♖d7 32. d5+-.

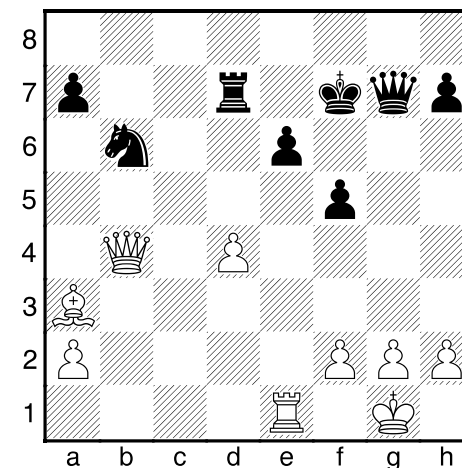
29. ♕xe8 ♖xe8 30. ♖d6+ ♖f7 31. ♖xc6



31... ♗d5 32. ♖a4 ♖e7 33. ♕c1

Reactivating the bishop on the a3-f8 diagonal.

33... ♗b6 34. ♖b4 ♖d7 35. ♕a3!



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35...♘d5

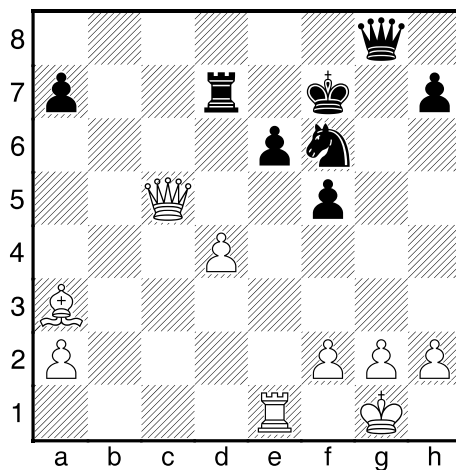
35...♖xd4 36.♙e7+-;

35...♙xd4 36.♙f8+ ♔g6 37.♖xe6+ followed by checkmate soon after.

36.♙b8

Maintains the pressure on the back rank and the a7 pawn, restricting the Black rook. Additionally, it introduces the potential threat of ♙c8.

36...♘f6 37.♙c8 ♙g8 38.♙c5



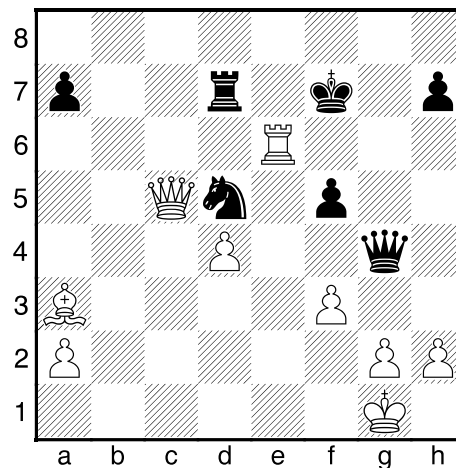
38...♘d5?

38...♘e4 was better, but still objectively losing.

39.♖xe6! ♙g4

39...♙xe6 40.♙c6+ ♔f7 41.♙xd7+-.

40.f3



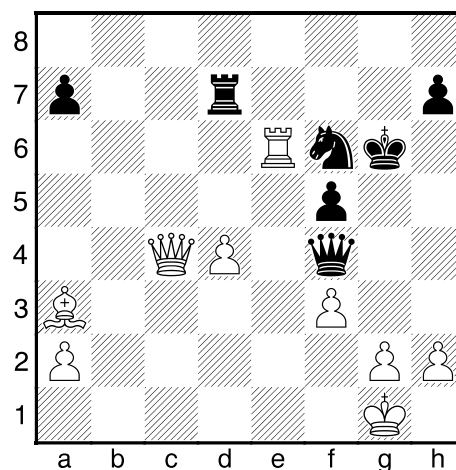
Blocking the queen's access to d1 and making the f2-square available for my king.

40...♙f4 41.♖e5 ♘f6

42.♙c4+

42.♖xf5 ♙e3+ 43.♔f1 is still winning, but messier and unnecessary.

42...♔g6 43.♖e6



43...♖b7

43...♖xd4 44.♖xf6+ ♔g5 (44...♙xf6 45.♙b2 ♙e3+ 46.♔f1+- with no more

checks for Black.) 45.h4+ ♙xh4 46.♙e2 ♙xf6 47.♙e7+;

43...♙xd4+ 44.♙xd4 ♖xd4 45.♖xf6+ ♙xf6 46.♙b2 with a winning endgame for White.

44.♙d3 ♖d7 45.g3

As the d4-pawn still cannot be taken for the same reasons as before.

45...♙c7 46.♔g2 46...♖d5 47.♙a6

The knight cannot be protected as ♙e7 is coming. My opponent could have resigned but instead he lost on time.

1-0

Overall, I am extremely happy with my play, as I calculated quite accurately (except for missing ♙d5 earlier). Positions arising from the Grünfeld or the King's Indian Defense are typically better for White but can be very tricky to navigate. Staying sharp and consistent in such positions is challenging, which makes me even more pleased with how accurately I played.

Lastly, [Mihail Marin](#) is a legend in the chess world, known for his deep understanding of strategic play, his highly regarded chess books, and his extensive annotations of top-level games for ChessBase, many of which are available in the Mega Database. As a former 2600+ player, his expertise and accomplishments are highly respected, making this win all the more satisfying!

notes:
WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

43

Juhasz, Agoston (2425)
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2333)

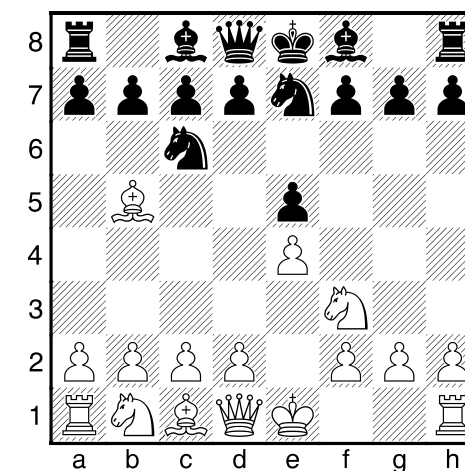
C60

Slovak Extraliga (6), 16.02.2025

1.e4 e5

I have recently started playing 1...e5 as Black and have achieved good results against higher-rated opponents.

2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘ge7!?



The Cozio Defense!

It is the sixth most popular move in this position and is generally not very well known. Some of my games were already in the database, so my opponent could have anticipated that I would play this.



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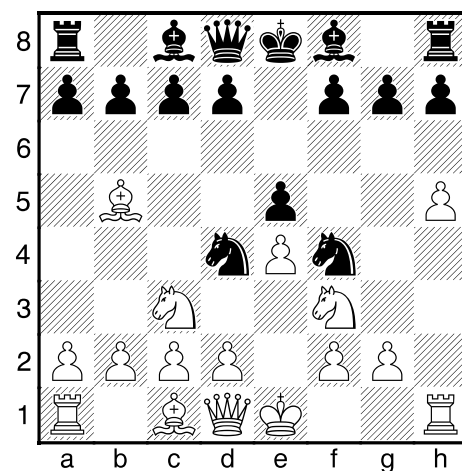
4. ♖c3 ♜g6 5. h4

This was a line I had never encountered before, so I had no experience in this variation. However, I had studied it previously since it was included in my file.

5... ♜d4 6. h5

6. ♙c4 was also possible, and after 6... h5 7. ♜g5 d5 the position becomes very complex for both sides and is filled with tactical possibilities. With precise play, White maintains a slight advantage.

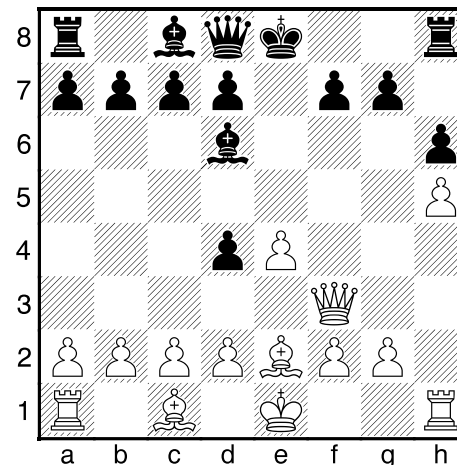
6... ♜f4



7. ♜xd4

7. ♜xe5 ♜xg2+ 8. ♙f1 ♜h4 9. d3 ♜xb5 10. ♜xb5 d6 11. ♜f3 ♜xf3 12. ♙xf3 ♙e6= with a comfortable position for Black.

7... exd4 8. ♙f3 ♙d6 9. ♜e2 ♜xe2 10. ♙xe2 h6



11. d3

11. ♙c4 0-0 12. d3 ♙b4+ 13. ♙d1 a5= was also a possible continuation.

11... a5 12. a3N

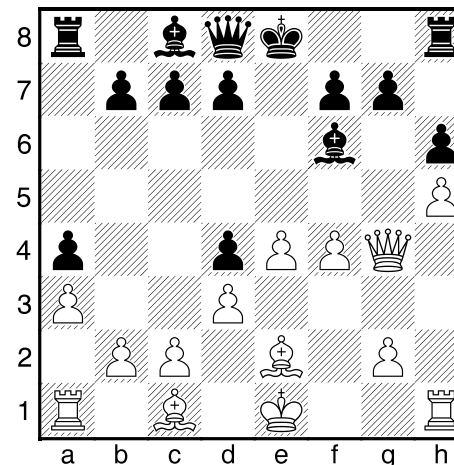
Prevents ... ♙b4+. If 12. ♙g4 ♙b4+ 13. ♙d1 ♙f6 Black does not have any problems.

12... a4!

Expanding on the queenside while preserving the option of playing ♙a6.

12... 0-0 13. g4±

13. ♙g4 ♙e5 14. f4 ♙f6



15. ♙f3

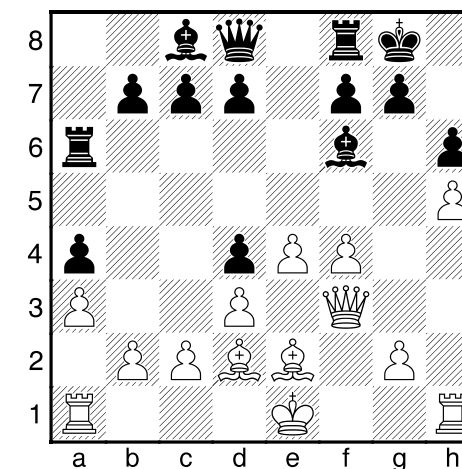
15. e5?! d6 16. ♙g3 dxe5 17. fxe5 ♙g5 White's attack is neutralized, and the trade of dark-squared bishops is welcomed. Additionally, the e5-pawn may become a weakness in the long run.

15... 0-0?!

This is dangerous and not at all in the spirit of the position. White gains significant attacking chances.

15... d6 followed by ... ♙a6-b6 would have maintained equality.

16. ♙d2 ♙a6!



Slovak League





Activates the rook, initiates some counterplay on the queenside and keeps an eye on the kingside!

17.g4

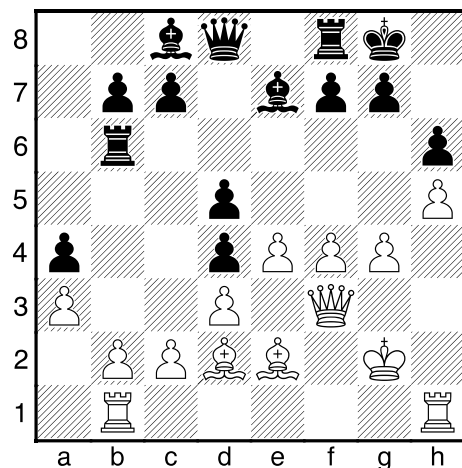
Not a mistake, but definitely felt like an inaccuracy due to the loss of tempos.

17.0-0-0 followed by g4 was more precise.

17...♙h4+ 18.♔f1

18.♔d1 ♙e7 19.♖g2± White's attacking chances remain present, while the king is better positioned away from the action, on the queenside.

18...♖b6 19.♖b1 ♙e7 20.♔g2 d5=



21.♙a5?

21.e5= keeps the position closed, which is safer for White's king.

21...♖b5

21...♖c6 22.♖bc1 dxe4 23.dxe4 g5!±

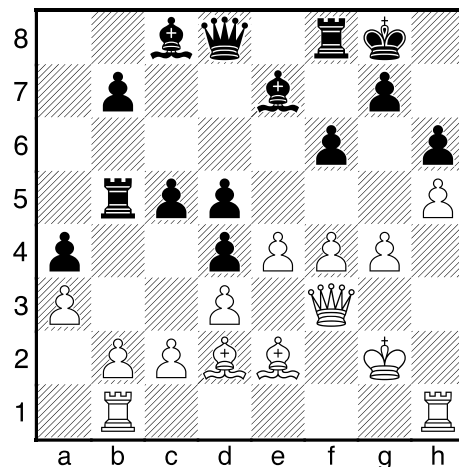
This maneuver would have enabled me to open up the position where it is White who is in danger!

22.♙e1 c5

22...c6± was better and offered more stability;

22...♙xa3?? fails to 23.bxa3 ♖xb1 24.♙h4+-.

23.♙d2 f6



Preventing g5 and stopping White's attack once and for all.

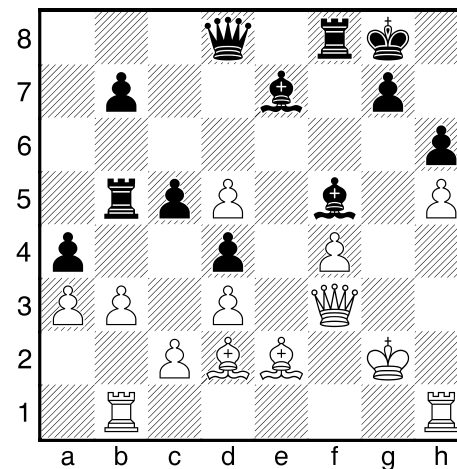
24.exd5 f5

Now that the e-pawn is no longer controlling the f5-square this move is now possible. The idea is to open the position on the kingside to activate my bishops and my rook on f8.

25.gxf5

25.g5 hxg5 26.fxg5 ♙xg5 27.♙xg5 ♖xg5+ 28.♔f2=.

25...♙xf5 26.b3



26...♖b8?

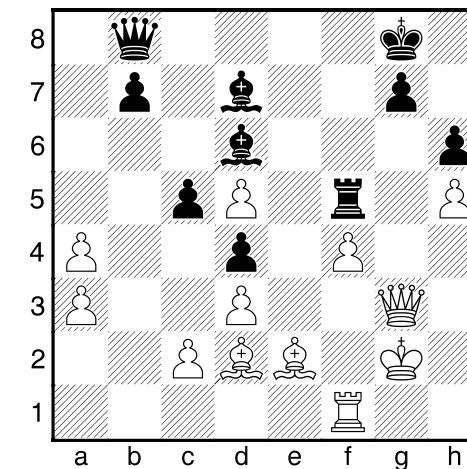
26...axb3 27.a4 ♖b4! 28.cxb3 (editor – that exchange on b4 isn't cheap: 28.♙xb4? bxc2-+ 29.♖bc1 cxb4 30.♖xc2 ♙d6-+ when, despite being a full exchange up, White would be lost: her ♔ and f4-pawn are weak, and her ♙ is trash, and if she tries to trade it with, say 31.♖g3 hoping for ♙g4, Black has 31...♙xf4!!-+) 28...♙d6± Black is slightly better due to the strong bishops, White's broken pawn structure and vulnerable king.

27.bxa4! ♖xb1 28.♖xb1 ♙d6 29.♖g3

29.a5± White's queenside activity is very strong and offers a lot of potential.

29...♙d7 30.♖f1 ♖f5

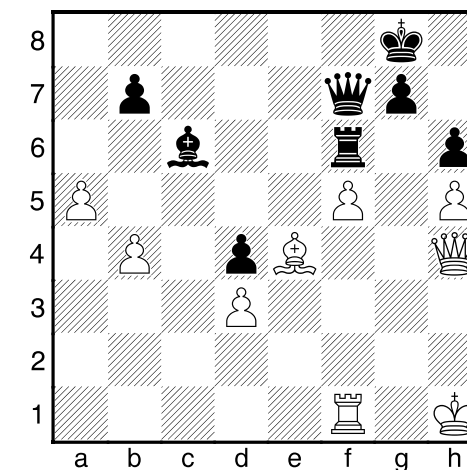
Threatening ...♖g5, winning the queen, but 30...♙xa4 was best.



31.♖h4

We both saw this: 31.♙g4! ♖g5! 32.fxg5 ♙xg3 33.♙xd7 hxg5 34.♙xg5 ♖d6 35.♙e6+±. We were both low on time, which is why I believe my opponent did not pursue it, despite it appearing very dominating and easy for White to play.

31...♖xd5 32.♙f3 ♖f5 33.♙e4 ♖f6 34.a5 ♖c7 35.♔h1 ♙c6 36.f5 c4 37.♙b4 ♙xb4 38.axb4 cxd3 39.cxd3 ♖f7





Chess Canada

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40.♔g1

40.♙xc6 bxc6±.

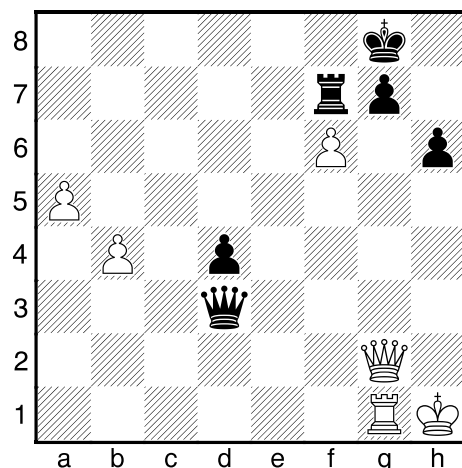
40...♙xe4 41.♖xe4

editor – 41.dxe4!? is also equal and complex.

41...♖xh5 42.♖xb7 ♕g5+

43.♖g2 ♖e3+ 44.♔h1 ♖xd3

45.♖g1 ♖f7 46.f6



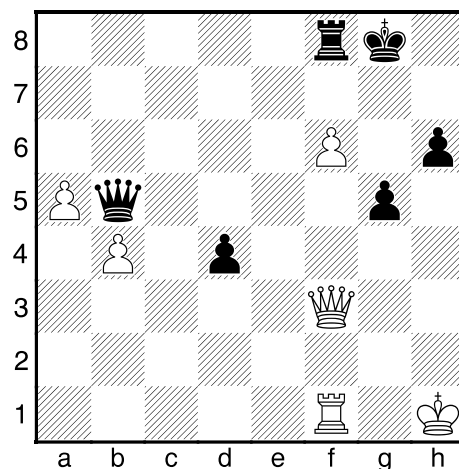
46...g5

46...♖f5 was a much easier path to a draw.

47.♖f1 ♖b5?

47...♖c4 was the only move possible to maintain a 0.00 position according to the engine.

48.♖a8+ ♖f8 49.♖f3



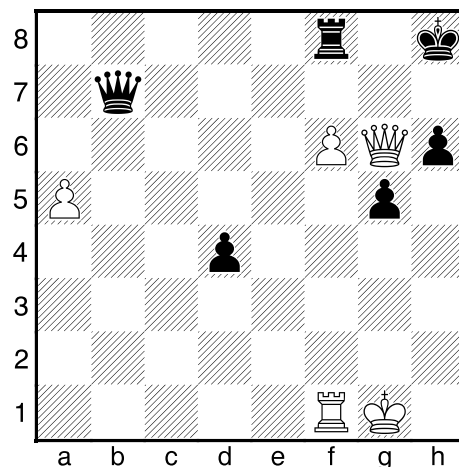
49...♖xb4??

49...d3 50.♖e4 ♔h8 51.♖d4!±.

50.a6??

50.♖e4 is completely winning for White. 50...♔h8 (50...♖f7 51.♖g6+ ♔f8 52.♖c1+-) 51.♖g6 ♖b7+ 52.♔g1

Analysis Diagram



52...♖h7 53.♖g7+!! the brilliant move I missed. 53...♖xg7 54.fxg7+ ♔xg7 55.♖xf8 ♔xf8 56.a6+-.

50...♖c3?? 51.♖f5 ♖f7

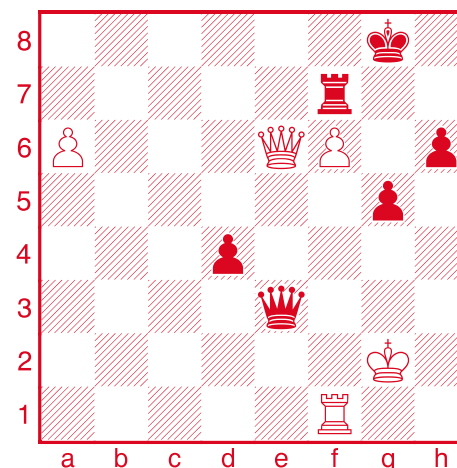
52.♖e6??

52.a7 ♖c6+ 53.♔g1+-.

52...♖d3?!

52...♖e3 was more precise, but I only saw it after the move I played.

53.♔g2 ♖e3=



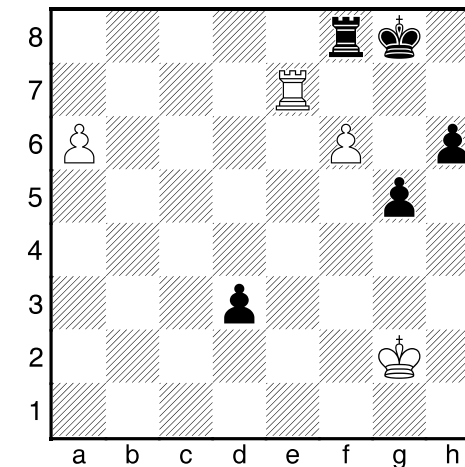
54.♖d5

54.♖e1! would have been a great attempt to try to win, as it is very tricky for Black to defend the position, particularly under time pressure.

54...♖xe6 55.♖xe6 ♖f8! (editor – 55...♖a7?? 56.♖e8+ ♔f7 57.♖e7+-)

56.♖e7 d3= Without this resource, Black is just completely lost.

Analysis Diagram



editor – Here's how it might end, illustrating some of the tricks MJ referred to:

57.a7?? now loses 57...d2+- 58.♖g7+ ♔h8 59.♖d7 ♖a8 60.f7 ♔g7+- everything else loses, but next ...♖a7 wins;

57.♖g7+ ♔h8 58.♖d7 ♖a8! 59.♖xd3 (59.a7?? d2+- trades the a- and d-pawns, but Black will win the f-pawn and the game.) 59...♔g8= (59...♖a6?? 60.♖d8+ ♔h7 61.f7+-) 60.♖d6 h5=.

54...♖e2+ 55.♖f2 ♖g4+

55...♖xa6 was also possible.

The position is equal and a draw would have been the most likely outcome. However, this was a team tournament, and after such a chaotic game, I did not want to risk losing. I later learned that a draw was all we needed to narrowly win the match, 4.5 – 3.5.

56.♔h2 ♖h4+ 57.♔g2 ♖g4+

1/2-1/2

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

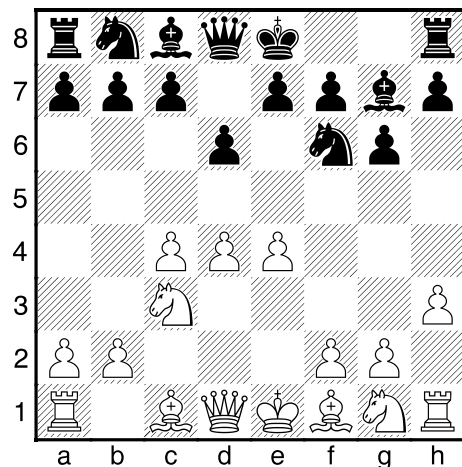
**Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2305)
Galperin, Platon (2494)**

E71

Stockholm GM Tournament (8),
06.05.2025

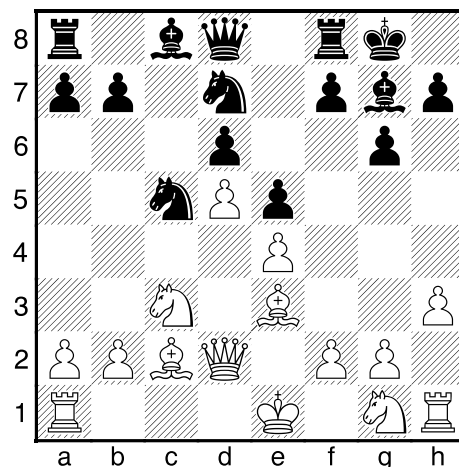
This is round 8 of a double round-robin GM norm event in Sweden. I lost the first game with Black; now I get a chance to avenge myself.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♕g7
4.e4 d6 5.h3



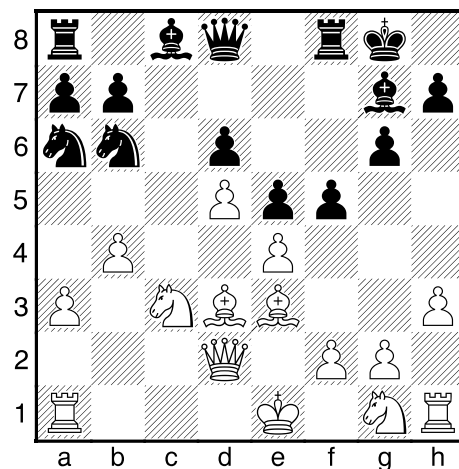
A nice line that I often play against the King's Indian. In my opinion, it is very practical and easy to play for an advantage while staying away from mainline theory.

5...0-0 6.♕e3 ♘a6 7.♕d3 c6
8.♖d2 e5 9.d5 ♘c5 10.♕c2
cxd5 11.cxd5 ♘fd7?!



A more active move like ...♕d7 or ...a5 to prevent b4 is much better.

12.b4 ♘a6 13.a3 ♘b6
14.♕d3 f5



Right in the spirit of the KID.

15.f3!?

15.♕g5 ♕f6 16.♕xf6 ♖xf6 17.♘f3± is a much more stable alternative, as it does not weaken my kingside.

15...♕d7

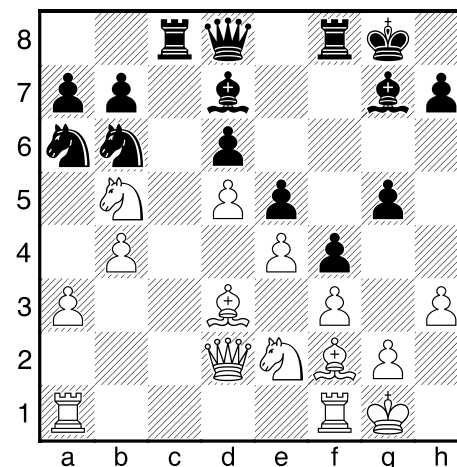
15...♕f6 heading to h4 would improve Black's DSB.

16.♘ge2 ♖c8 17.0-0 f4

18.♕f2 g5?!

18...♕f6 19.♘b5 ♕xb5 20.♕xb5 ♘c7
21.♕d3 ♕h4± White has more space and better piece harmony.

19.♘b5



19...♖f6

If I recall correctly, my opponent offered me a draw here, which I obviously declined. My pieces are active and well-coordinated, I have more space, and my king is safe.

19...♕xb5 20.♕xb5 h5 21.g4!± Black's attack on the kingside is stopped. I am better for many reasons, including the pawn structure, space advantage, the bishop pair, and piece activity.
21...hgx4 22.hgx4± (editor – if 21...fxg3 22.♘xg3+- trading h5 for f3 is equal material, but White gets ♕e2-g4 and the black ♘ is doomed.)

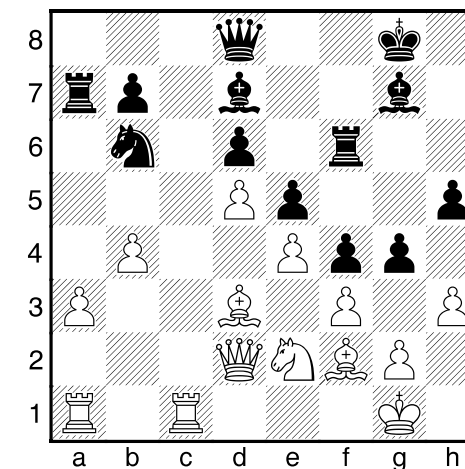
20.♘xa7 ♖a8 21.♕xa6!?

21.♘c6 bxc6 22.dxc6 ♕xc6 23.b5
♕xb5 24.♕xb5+- was more precise.

21...♖xa7

21...bxa6 22.♘c6+-.

22.♕d3 h5 23.♖fc1 g4!?



Fully committing to the attack. Although the engine does not agree with this move, it is, in my opinion, a practical option as Black's pieces are very badly misplaced, and so if Black does nothing, I would have an easy game and could afford to take my time to make small improvements and eventually obtain a decisive advantage.

24.♕h4 ♘c8

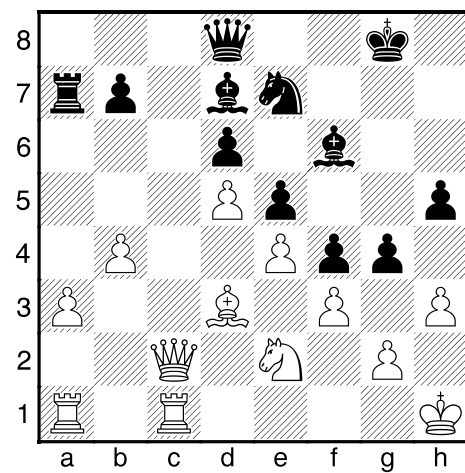
24...gxh3 (hoping for 25.gxh3?? ♖g6+!-) but 25.♘c3+- White does not have to be afraid, as Black's pieces cannot easily join the attack.

25.♔h1

I am in no hurry to capture the rook

and help Black activate his pieces. Instead, I removed my king from the g-file, which could be opened at any moment.

**25...♘e7 26.♙xf6 ♙xf6
27.♚c2**



27...b5

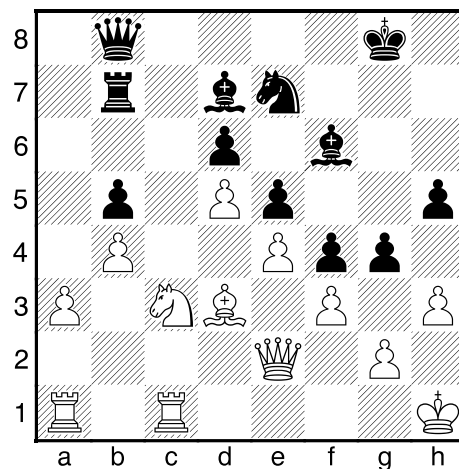
Covering the c7-square and perhaps helping the Black rook get back into the game.

27...g×h3 28.g×h3 ♙×h3 29.♘g1 ♙d7
30.♚c7+-.

28.♘c3

As Black just created a new weakness that is easy to attack, I redirected my focus to the b5-pawn. It is important to note that Black cannot make any progress on the kingside without weakening his own king.

28...♚b8 29.♚e2 ♖b7



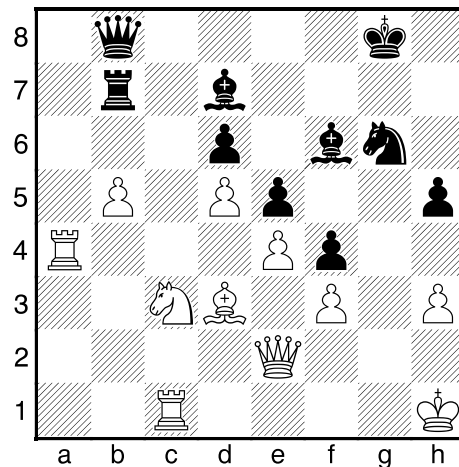
30.a4

My position is so dominant that I can sacrifice a piece for two pawns and *still* be completely winning; even 30.♙xb5!? was possible: 30...♙xb5 31.♘xb5 ♖xb5 32.f×g4+-.

30...b×a4 31.b5

I created a passed pawn, took more space, restricted Black's pieces, and am about to take on a4, opening the a-file for my rooks.

**31...♘g6 32.♖xa4 g×h3
33.g×h3**



33...♙h4

33...♙h4 34.♚a2+- White has a great position and Black has no attack.

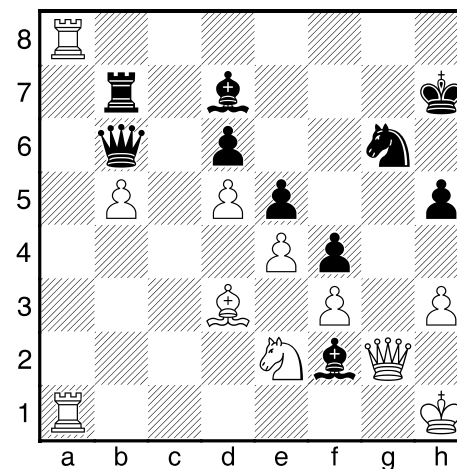
**34.♚a2 ♖c7 35.♚g2 ♙h7
36.♘e2**

Preventing Black from blocking the g-file with ...♙g3 and gaining a tempo on the queen.

**36...♚d8 37.♖ca1 ♚b6
38.♖a8**

Controlling some squares around the king and preventing Black from playing the defensive move ...♙e8. I am threatening ♖g1 next.

38...♙f2



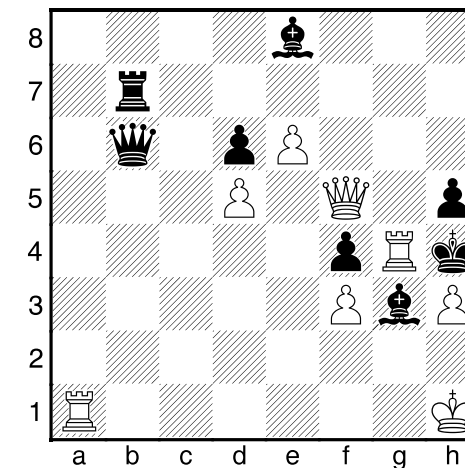
39.♘xf4!! exf4

39...♘xf4 40.♚g8+ ♙h6 41.♚h8+ ♙g5 42.♖g8+ ♘g6 43.f4+ followed by mate eventually; e.g. 43...exf4 44.♖xg6+ ♙xg6 45.e5+-.

40.e5!

Opening the diagonal for my bishop.

**40...♙g3 41.e6 ♙xb5
42.♙xg6+ ♙xg6 43.♚c2+
♙g5 44.♖g8+ ♙h4 45.♚f5
♙e8 46.♖g4+!**



With either ♚xg4 or ♖xf4 mate. Black resigned.

1-0



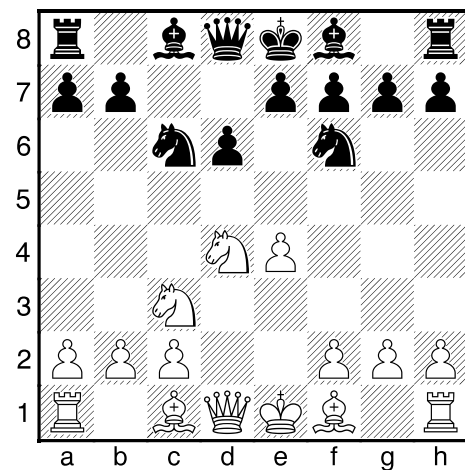
Chess Canada
You can't catch MJO

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet**Borda Rodas, Anapaola
(2247)****Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2350)****B59***Women's World Cup Batumi,
Georgia (1.2), 07.07.2025*

This is round 1, game 2 of the Women's World Cup. Every round, a player is eliminated under this knockout format. Unfortunately, I lost the first game with White. As a result, **I had to win on demand to force playoffs** to get a chance at qualifying for round 2.

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4
cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♘c3 d6!**

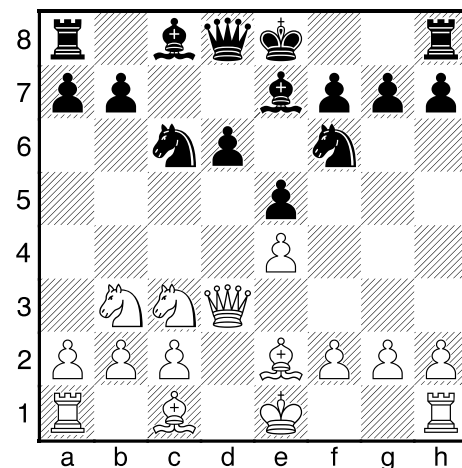
**The Classical Sicilian**

I prepared a lot for this game and,

based on my research, I strongly believed that my opponent did not have a lot of experience in this line. In addition, it was the first time I played it over the board and so I most likely surprised my opponent.

6.♙e2

The third most popular continuation and most likely a good and simpler choice considering she probably was not ready for this line and did not know how to react properly.

6...e5 7.♗b3 ♙e7 8.♙d3!?

A common idea in some Sicilian positions. In this context, it is an inaccuracy as White should focus on finishing her development. Normally, Black could equalize immediately with ...d5! Unfortunately, I am playing for a win

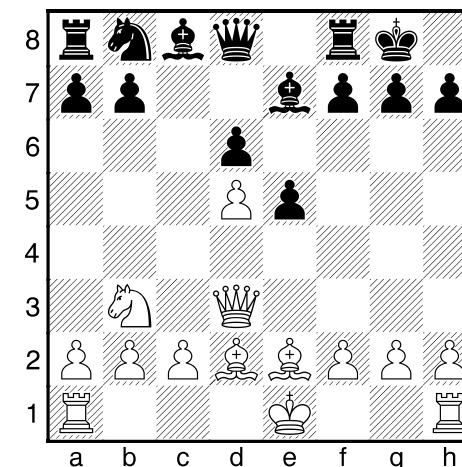
and liquidating all the pieces in the opening would be a terrible idea.

8...0-0

8...d5 9.♗xd5 (9.exd5 ♗b4 10.♙d1 0-0 Black has a very small edge.)
9...♗xd5 10.exd5 ♗b4=.

9.♗d5?! ♗xd5

I am very happy to trade the knights to provoke a change in pawn structure.

10.exd5 ♗b8 11.♙d2**2025 World Cup
Batumi, Georgia****Borda Rodas v Ouellet**



11...f5

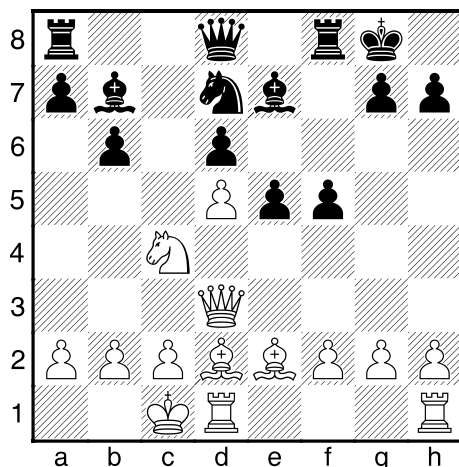
Expanding on the kingside.

11...a5 12.a4 b6 13.0-0 ♖a6 14.c4
♘d7 ♞ was best.

12.♘a5? b6 13.♘c4 ♖b7!?

13...♘d7 14.0-0 a5 15.a4 ♘c5 ♞ I
should not try to capture the pawn,
just stay flexible.

14.0-0-0 ♘d7



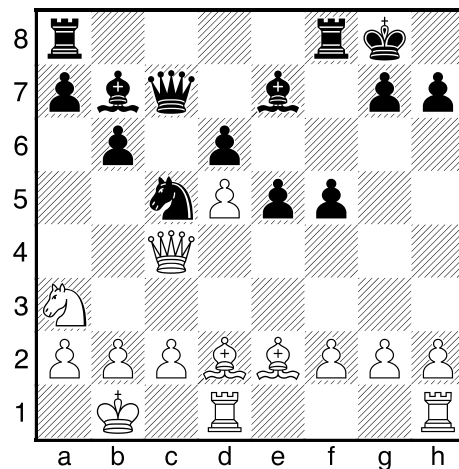
15.♖b1

15.f4 exf4 ♞ (not 15...e4? 16.♞a3 ♘xd5
17.♘b4 ♞).

15...♞c7

Threatening to pin the knight with
...♘a6 followed by placing a rook on
c8.

16.♘a3 ♘c5 17.♞c4



Threatening to win my knight with b4.

17...♞d7

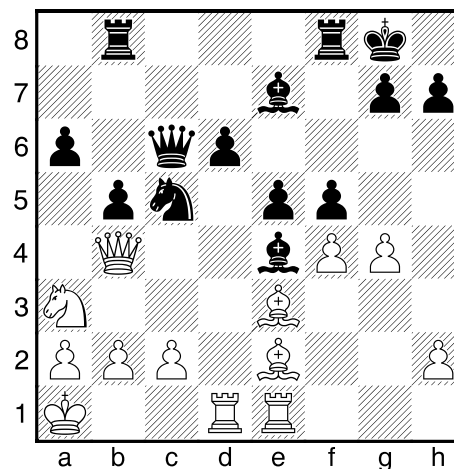
17...a6 18.b4 b5 19.♞c3 ♞fb8!
20.bxc5 b4! 21.♞e3 bxa3-+ White's
king is too weak.

18.♞he1 a6 19.f4?

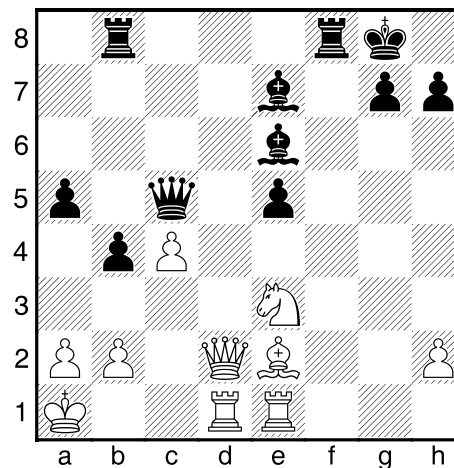
19.♘e3 ♞ White needs to reinforce the
pawn on d5, activate the bishop to a
better square and perhaps trade it for
my strong knight on c5.

19...b5 20.♞b4 ♘xd5 21.♘e3

♞c6 22.g4 ♘e4 23.♖a1 ♞ab8
To protect the pawn and prepare ...a5
followed by ...b4.



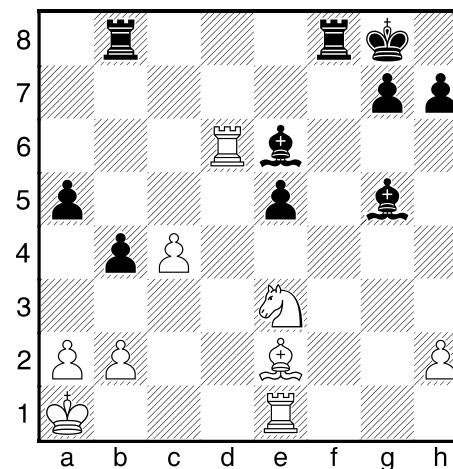
24.gxf5 ♘xf5 25.♞d2 ♘e6
26.c4 b4 27.♘c2 a5 28.♘xc5
♞xc5 29.fxe5 dxe5 30.♘e3



30...♘g5?!

I played it too fast and missed that
30...♘h4-+ followed by ...♘g5 was
just game over, and White can't stop
it with 31.♞g1 since 31...♘f2-+ is even
worse.

31.♞d6! ♞xd6 32.♞xd6



32...♘xe3??

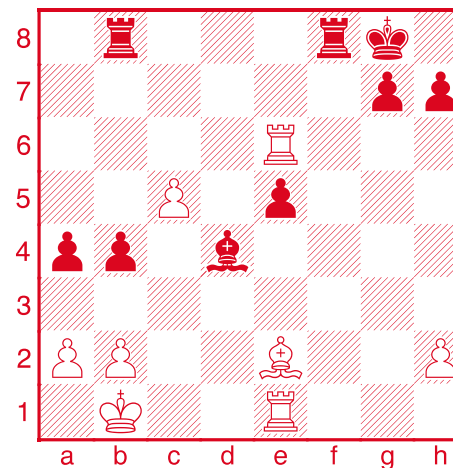
32...♘f7 33.♘d5 e4-+ another
resource I misevaluated.

33.♞xe6 ♘d4 34.c5 ♖a4?

34...♘xc5 35.♞xe5 ♘d6 36.♞xa5
♘h2 ♞.

35.♖b1?

35.♘c4 ♞bc8 36.c6= even though
White is down a pawn, the position is
equal because White's pieces are
very active and the c6-pawn is very
strong.



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35...a3?

35...b3! 36.a3 ♖bc8 37.c6 (editor – 37.♙c4 ♖xc5 38.♖c6+ ♖xc4 39.♖xc4 ♖f2+) 37...♖f2+.

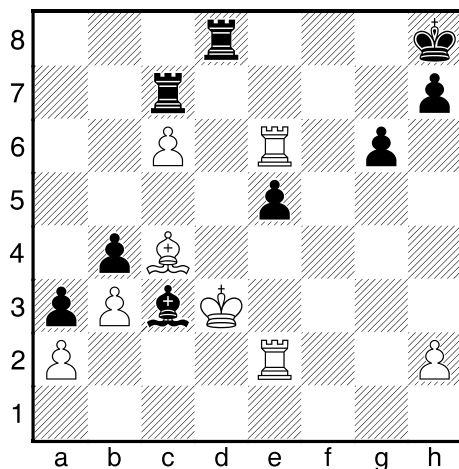
36.b3??

36.♙c4=.

36...♖bc8??

36...♙xc5 37.♖xe5 ♙d4+ Black is up a pawn and White's king is too weak.

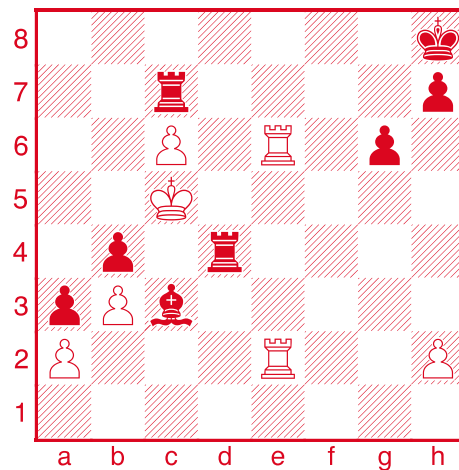
37.c6 g6 38.♙c4 ♖h8
39.♙c2 ♖c7 40.♙d3 ♙c3
41.♖e2 ♖d8+



42.♙e4

42.♙c2=. My material advantage is not strong enough to convert it into a win due to White's strong activity. As such, White does not need to activate her king as it becomes vulnerable to attacks.

42...♖d4+ 43.♙xe5?? ♖xc4+
44.♙d5 ♖d4+ 45.♙c5



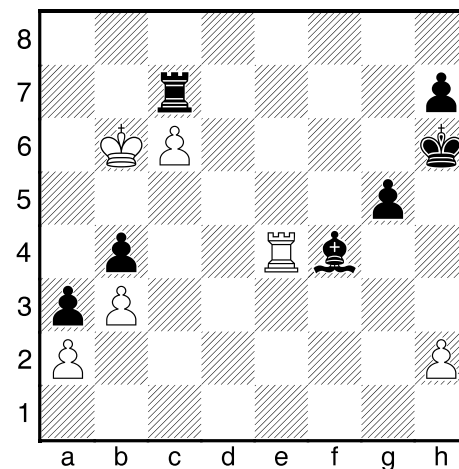
The king's activity and the strong c6 passed pawn seem good enough for a draw if not a win. However, White missed...

45...♖dd7!!

The only winning move. The idea is to keep the c7-square under control and protect the rook on c7 without losing a tempo. It also prevents any rook trades by covering the 7th rank.

45...♖f4 46.♖e8+ ♖g7 47.♖2e7+ ♖xe7 48.♖xe7+ ♖f6 49.c7 ♖xe7 50.c8♖= this was Black's second-best line. According to the engine, it is equal, but of course any result is still possible.

46.♖d6 ♖f7 47.♖e8+ ♖g7
48.♖dd8 ♖h6 49.♖c8 ♙d2
50.♖xc7 ♖xc7 51.♙b6 ♙f4
52.♖e4 g5



53.h3

53.♖xf4? ♖xc6+ 54.♙xc6 gxf4+ and the f-pawn will promote.

53...♖f7 54.♖xb4 ♖h5
55.♖c4 ♖h4 56.b4 ♖xh3
57.♖c3+ ♖h4 58.♖xa3 g4
59.♖c3 g3

White cannot prevent the g-pawn from promoting. My opponent resigned and I scored 2-0 in playoffs to qualify for round 2 against [GM Vaishali Rameshbabu](#).

0-1



photo: FIDE/Anna Shtourman

World Cup round 2

GM Vaishali (IND)

2026 World Championship Challenger,
was the end of the line for MJO.



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notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

Migot, Tangi (2344)
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2331)

C00

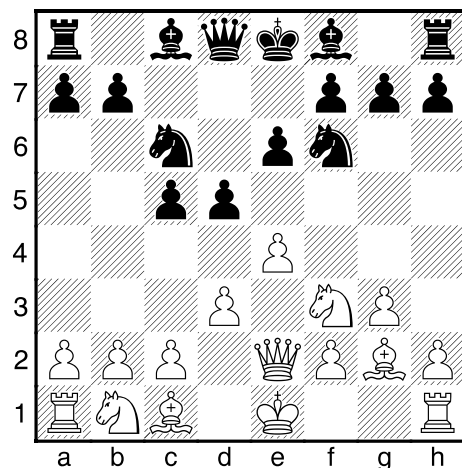
Quebec Invitational (2), 16.08.2025

This is round 2 of the Quebec Invitational, a 10-player Round Robin.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d3

This move surprised me. I expected him to go for either the Open Sicilian or the Rossolimo. Despite this surprise, I do not believe my opponent was well prepared. I am not sure what he expected me to play exactly, but I think he opted for this sideline just to avoid my preparation.

3...e6 4.g3 d5 5.♙e2 ♘f6 6.♙g2

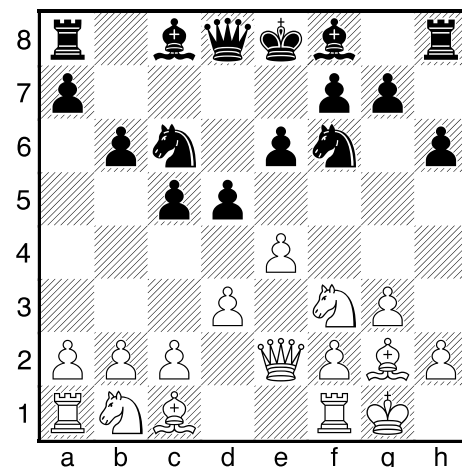


Here Black can develop normally with ...♙e7, castle, and start an attack on the queenside. However, I was in a fighting mood that day and thought

6...b6

following by long-side castle would lead to a more double-edged game.

7.0-0 h6?!

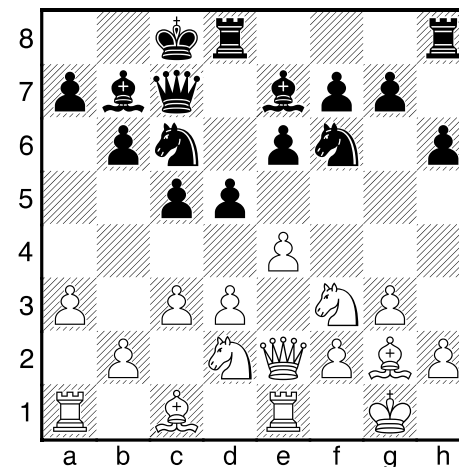


Too slow. I need to finish my development with ...♙b7 as soon as possible, especially considering I am already behind.

8.♖e1

Slow. ♖8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.c4 ♘de7 10.b4! ♙b7 (10...cxb4? 11.d4!+-) 11.b5 ♘d4 12.♘xd4 ♙xg2 13.♙xg2 ♙xd4 14.♙b2±. My opponent's pieces are more active and can be easily developed, his king is safe, and he has more space on the queenside. On the other hand, it will take many more moves for me to finish my development.

8...♙b7 9.a3 ♙e7 10.♘bd2 ♙c7 11.c3 0-0-0?!



12.e5

12.b4 g5 13.bxc5 ♙xc5 14.♘b3±, objectively White is better, but practically speaking, we are playing for three results.

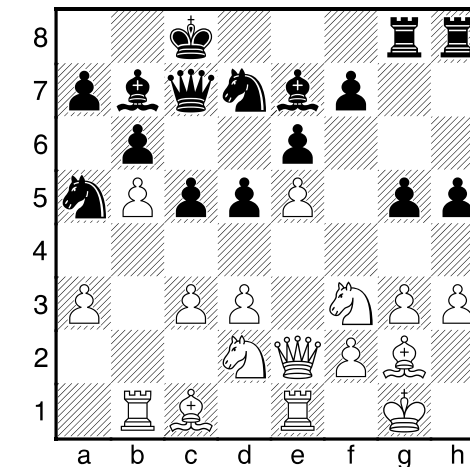
12...♘d7 13.b4 g5 14.b5

This is only a slight inaccuracy according to the engine; however, I think it is strategically much better to leave the pawn on b4 and maintain the tension.

14...♘a5 15.h3 h5

15...f5! enables me to improve my pieces. 16.exf6 ♙xf6 17.♙b2 ♙de8 editor – a super-tense position, with continuations like 18.d4 e5 19.c4∞.

16.♖b1 ♖dg8



17.a4?!

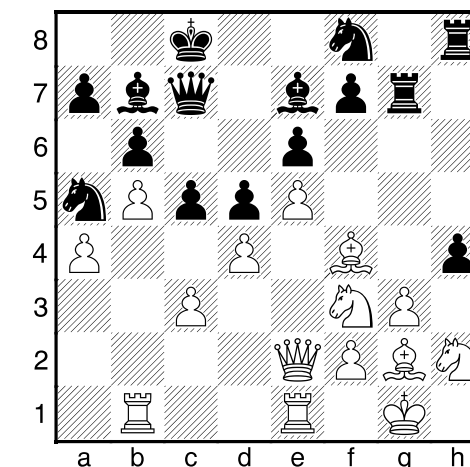
is too slow. White needs to address Black's attack on the kingside.

17.♘h2 defends against my immediate threat of ...g4 and maintains a slight edge for White.

17...g4 18.hxg4 ♖xg4 19.d4 ♖g7

To prepare ...h4 without having to worry about ♘xh4, attacking my rook on g4.

20.♘f1 h4 21.♙f4 ♘f8 22.♘1h2





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22...♘c4

Is not a bad move but allows White to close the kingside with g4. ♠22...hxg3 23.fxg3 (23.♙xg3 ♖d8+ heading to g8.) 23...♙b8.

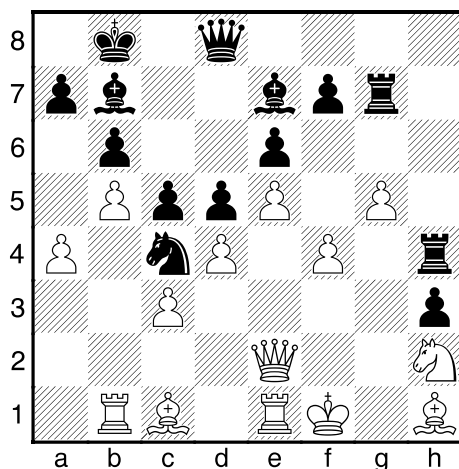
23.g4!? ♘g6 24.♙c1 h3 25.♙h1

25.♙f1 was a more active square for the bishop.

25...♙b8 26.g5 ♘h4 27.♙f1 ♖d8

Loses the initiative to White's next. 27...♘xf3 28.♘xf3 h2 is the best way to maintain the attack.

28.♘xh4 ♖xh4 29.f4!



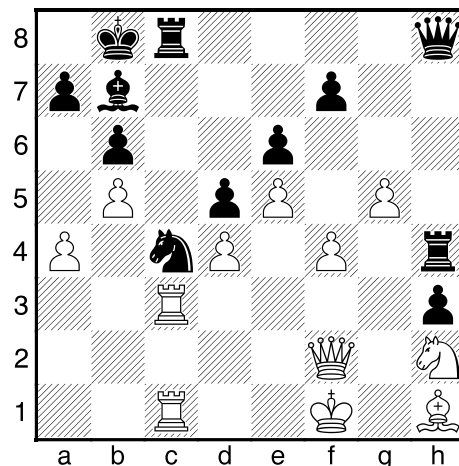
Despite this awkward-looking structure, White's king is finally safe.

29...cxd4 30.cxd4 ♙a3 31.♖f2 ♖h8

Not the right idea. Instead, ...♖gh7 was much better as it reactivates the rook and supports the ♖h4 without removing the queen from a

centralized position.

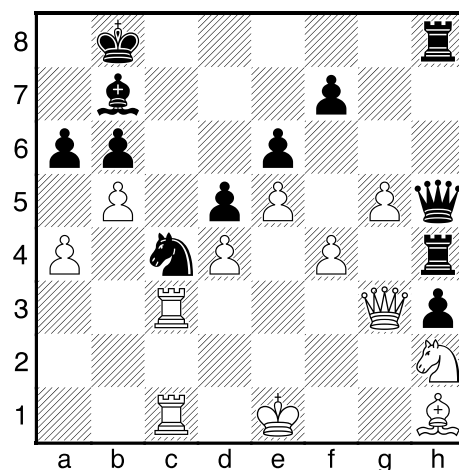
32.♙xa3 ♘xa3 33.♖b3 ♘c4 34.♖c3 ♖g8 35.♖d1 ♖c8 36.♖dc1=



36...a6

Weakening White's queenside pawns without compromising my king safety.

37.♖g3 ♖h5 38.♙e1 ♖h8



39.♖f3

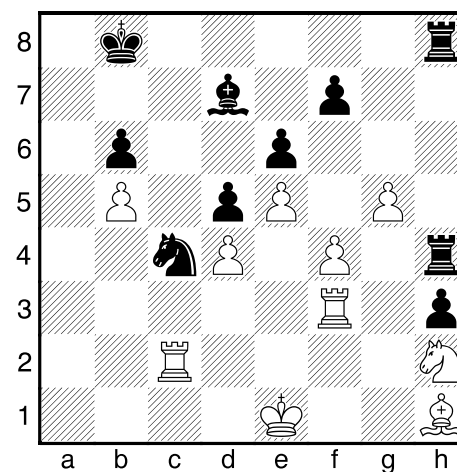
editor – Here, and elsewhere, both

sides have to consider exchange sacs on c4, which would turn the game from mostly maneuvering to sharp tactics: 39.♖xc4!? dxc4 40.♙xb7 ♙xb7 41.♖xc4 threatening ♖c3. (41.bxa6+ ♙xa6 42.♖xc4 ♖g6+) 41...♖g6 (Fighting for the c-file with 41...♖c8?? loses to the "steeplechase" 42.bxa6+ ♙b8 43.a7+-) 42.♖f3+ ♙b8 43.bxa6 ♖b1+ 44.♙d2 ♖b2+ 45.♙d3 (45.♙e3?? ♖b3+ 46.♙f2 ♖xf4+-) Black has at least a draw with 45...♖b3+ (or can play on with 45...♖g2!? 46.♖e4!∞) 46.♖c3 ♖b1+ 47.♖c2! ♖b3+∞.

39...♖xf3 40.♖xf3 ♙c8

In order to reactivate the bishop to d7.

41.♖c2 axb5 42.axb5 ♙d7

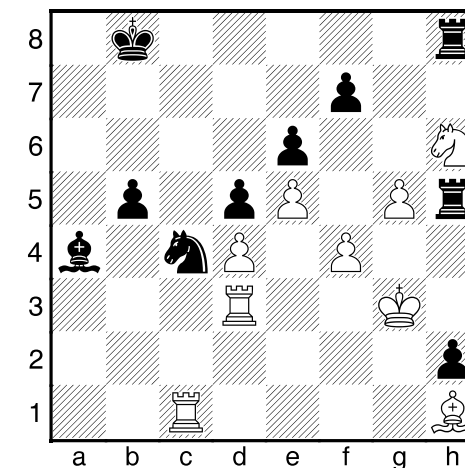


White cannot protect the pawn on b5.

43.♙f2 ♙xb5 44.♙g3 ♙a4 45.♖c1 ♖4h5 46.♖d3

46.♘g4 White needs to gain the exchange right away. 46...b5 47.♘h6= traps the rook on h5.

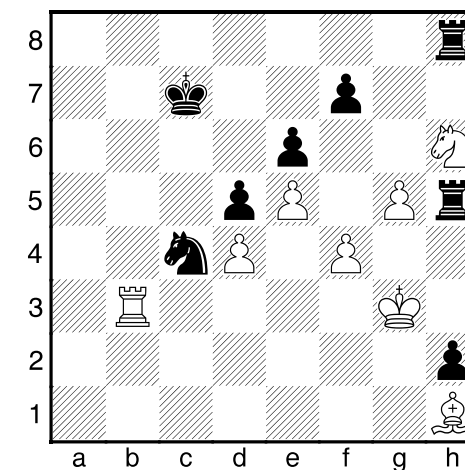
46...b5 47.♘g4 h2 48.♘h6



48...b4

editor – SF18 claims that unnaturally self-pinning the ♘ with 48...♙c7 is much better, but its reasons depend on "only moves" at the end of some tricky lines: 49.♘xf7 ♖h3+ 50.♙f2 (50.♙g2 ♖xd3 51.♘h8 ♖xd4 52.♙g3 (52.g6 ♖xf4+-) 52...♙d7 53.g6 ♘e3+- hopping to f5.) 50...♖xd3 51.♘h8 ♖xd4 52.g6 ♖xf4+ 53.♙g3 ♖f8+-.

49.♖b1 b3 50.♖dxb3+ ♙xb3 51.♖xb3+ ♙c7





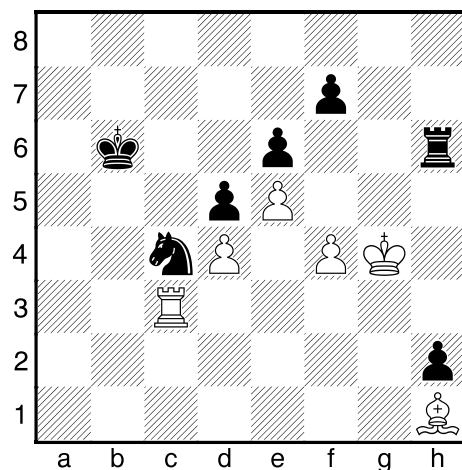
Chess Canada

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52. ♖c3?

This move is just a waste of time, and it allows me to activate my king.
52. ♖g4 ♜5xh6 53. gxh6 ♜xh6 54. ♖h3+ White is holding on.

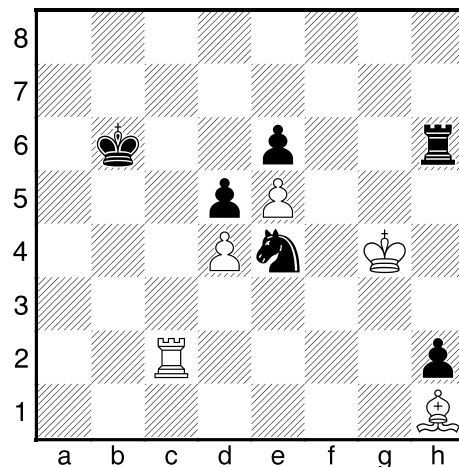
52... ♖b6 53. ♖g4 ♜5xh6
54. gxh6 ♜xh6



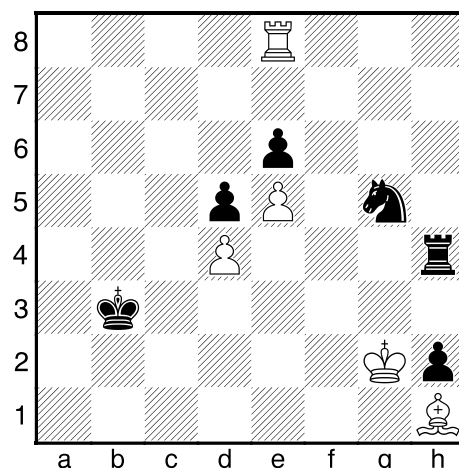
55. f5

editor – The game gets decided by the one tempo lost at move 52. Compared with the note at move 52 — where the black king is on c7 — here White loses after: 55. ♖h3 ♜xh3 56. ♖xh3 ♞d2! frees c4 and prevents ♜f3-h5 57. ♖xh2 ♖b5+ wins d4 while keeping the ♜ shut down. (57... ♞b3? 58. ♜f3 ♞xd4 59. ♜h5=)

55... ♞d2 56. ♜c2 ♞e4
57. fxe6 fxe6



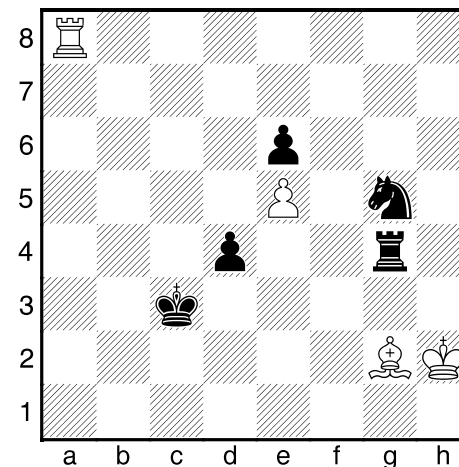
58. ♖f4 ♖b5 59. ♖f3 ♖b4
60. ♖g2 ♞c3 61. ♜f2 ♞e4
62. ♜c2 ♖b3 63. ♜c8 ♜h4
64. ♜e8 ♞g5



65. ♖g3

editor – 65. ♜g8 ♜g4+ 66. ♖f2 ♞h3+-+.

65... ♜xd4 66. ♖xh2 ♜g4
67. ♜g2 ♖c3 68. ♜a8 d4



69. ♖g1 ♞f3+ 70. ♖f2 ♞xe5
71. ♜h3 ♜e4 72. ♜c8+ ♖d2
73. ♜d8 ♞d3+ 74. ♖f1 e5
75. ♜a8 ♜e1+

After White's last mistake, the conversion was relatively easy as White's bishop was too weak.

0-1

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

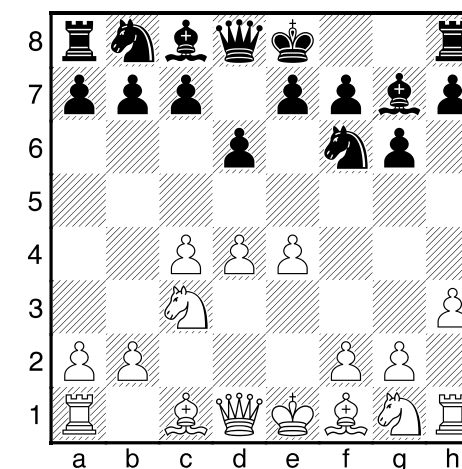
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2331)
Lesiege, Alexandre
(2478)

E71

Quebec Invitational (3), 16.08.2025

This is round 3 of the Quebec Invitational.

1. d4 ♞f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♞c3 ♜g7
4. e4 d6 5. h3



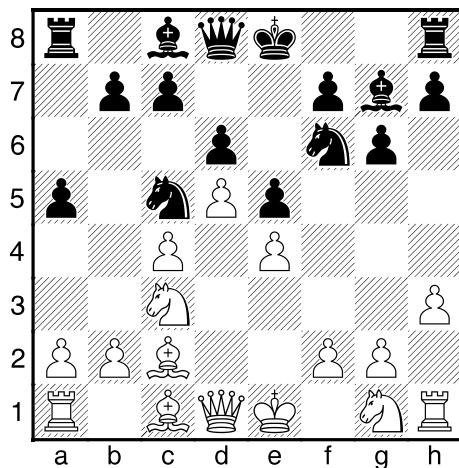
I did not expect the King's Indian at all and after some consideration, I opted for my usual line as I think it is very solid and safe even if your opponent is expecting it and is prepared for it.

5... ♞bd7 6. ♜d3 e5 7. d5 ♞c5
8. ♜c2 a5



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Here White has different possible setups with either Re3 or Rg5 , as well as Rf3 or Rge2 .

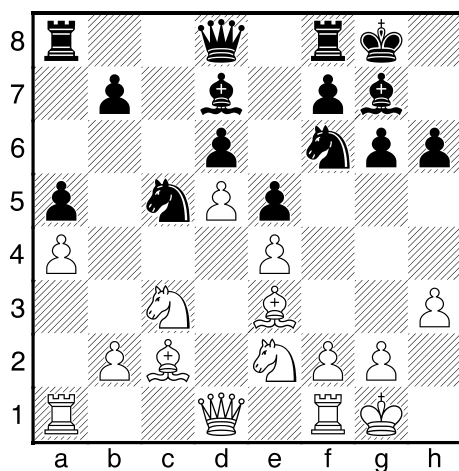
9. Rge2 0-0 10. Rg5

I believe I opted for this one because I had not played it recently and perhaps to get my opponent out of his preparation.

10...c6 11.0-0 h6

11... Rd7 12.dxc6 Rxc6 13.f3 Re6 14. Rg4 $\text{Rc7}\pm$ was best.

12. Re3 cxd5 13.cxd5 Rd7 14.a4



Taking space on the queenside and shutting down any ...b5 counterplay for the moment.

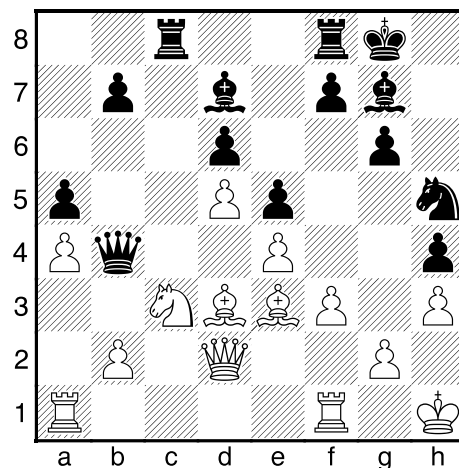
14...Rc8

14... Rb8 followed by ...b5 was still Black's best plan.

15. Rd2 h5 16. Rh1 Rb6 17. Rc1

With the idea to playing Rd3 and trading Black's strong and active knight on c5.

17...Rb4 18.f3 h4 19. Rd3 Rxd3 20. Rxd3 Rh5



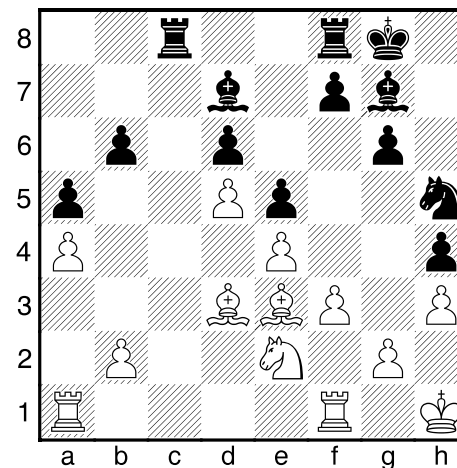
21. $\text{Re2}??$

I should not be afraid of Black's counterplay and should instead keep the queens on the board.

21. Rfc1 activating the rook to an open file and simultaneously addressing the threat of ... $\text{Rg3}+$. 21...f5 22. Rh2 fxe4 23. $\text{Rxe4}\pm$.

21...Rxd2 22. Rxd2 b6

23. Re3



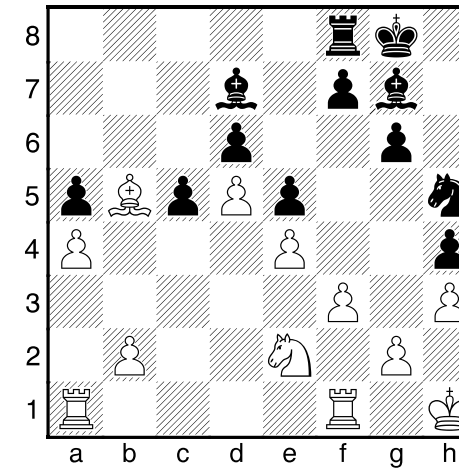
23...Rc5?!

I was very shocked by this move. I thought there were simpler means of tackling the position, but I imagine my opponent opted for this, since he saw there was great potential for counterplay. Indeed, his exchange sacrifice is not all bad, although it does shift the evaluation of the position in my favour.

23... Rb8 is too passive and allows White to control the c-file. 24. Rfc1 f5 25. $\text{Rc3}\pm$;

editor – here, or on the previous move, Black could have tried the KID-standard ...f5. It looks awful to give up b6 and d6, but Black gets enough activity; e.g. 23...f5 24. Rxb6 Rb8 25. Rc7 (25. Rxa5 Rxb2 threatening ... Rxe2 .) 25...fxe4 26. fxe4 $\text{Rxf1}+$ 27. Rxf1 Rxb2 28. Rxd6 $\text{Rxa4}=$ or 28... $\text{Rxe2}\infty$ would create the kind of unbalanced position where Black might hope to outplay White.

24. Rxc5 bxc5 25. Rb5



Black cannot take my bishop because it would open the file for my rook on a1 and seriously weaken the a5-pawn. In addition, it would allow me to create a passed b-pawn. As a result, my move activates my bishop to a better square while forcing Black to retreat to a worse square.

25...Rc8

25... Rxb5 26. axb5+-.

26. Ra3

There is only one file open for my rook. As a result, I am heading to the b-file!

26...Rh6 27. Rd1

Removing all possibilities for Black to reactivate his dark-squared bishop — and block the b-file — via d2.

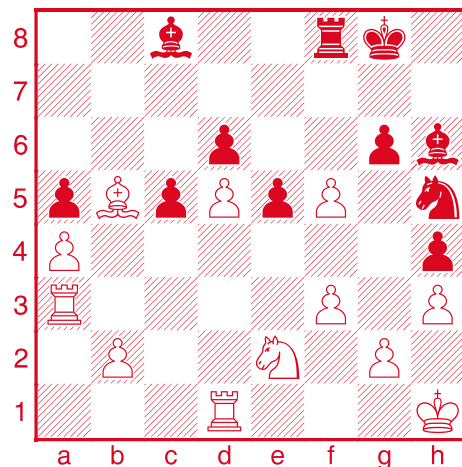
27...f5 28. exf5?!

I should not have exchanged the pawns and allowed Black to activate his pieces. A move like Rc4 or Rb3 was the way to go.



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28...gxf5

editor – As every-Russian-schoolboy knows, in positions like this you take toward the center....

But not this time, Ivan!

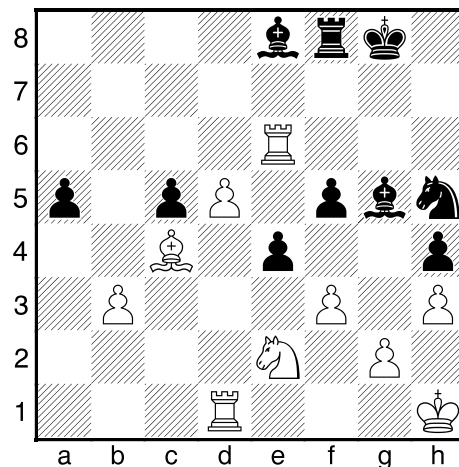
With a lot more pieces on this would definitely be the capture to make: controlling e4 and opening the g-file are both good for Black in the KID. But here Black doesn't have the pieces for an attack, and since ...fxh3 is never in the cards his LSB has no good squares with a pawn blocking it on f5.

MJO: $\triangleleft 28... \text{gxf5}$ = Black has excellent control on the kingside dark squares, and the f5 makes grabbing the b-file with b3 problematic.

29. Rb3 g5 30. c4

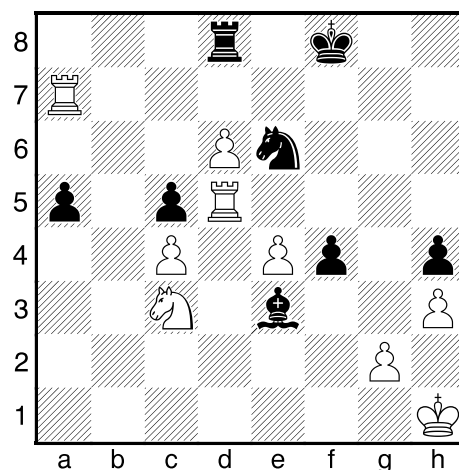
Opens up the file for the rook, with good squares on b5, b6 and b8.

30... d7 31. Rb6 xa4 32. b3 e8 33. Rxd6 e4 34. Re6



Opening the f-file by trading the pawns is unnecessary and ill-advised as it would give Black some counterplay and weaken my king.

34... f7 35. Re5 g7 36. d6 xc4 37. bxc4 e3 38. fxe4 f4 39. Re7 d8 40. Rd5 f8 41. Ra7 e6 42. c3



Controlling the b1-square and removing all mating threats and possible perpetuals.

42... d4 43. Rh5 g8 44. e5 b8 45. d7 d8 46. e4 e2
editor – 46... b8 threatens mate, but 47. f6+ mates first.

47. e6 g7 48. Rb7

I remove all forms of counterplay by preventing Black from activating his rook via the b-file. I am threatening to play e7, and Black cannot stop it.

1-0

Nurgyul Salimova



2024 Candidates
Toronto

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

56

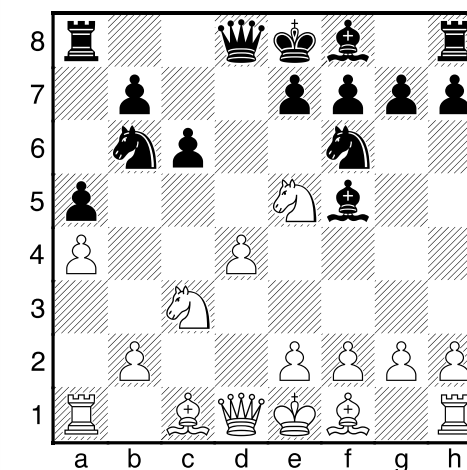
Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2348)
Salimova, Nurgyul (2386)

D17

Women's Grand Swiss (11),
Samarkand, UZB 15.09.2025

This is the last round of the prestigious Women's Grand Swiss held in Samarkand.

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. f3 f6 4. c3 dxc4 5. a4 f5 6. e5 bd7 7. xc4 b6 8. e5 a5



9. g3

Here, the most popular move is 9.f3, which I had played recently. I opted against it because my opponent surprised me by playing the Slav, and I had not prepared for it. In addition, the position can get quite

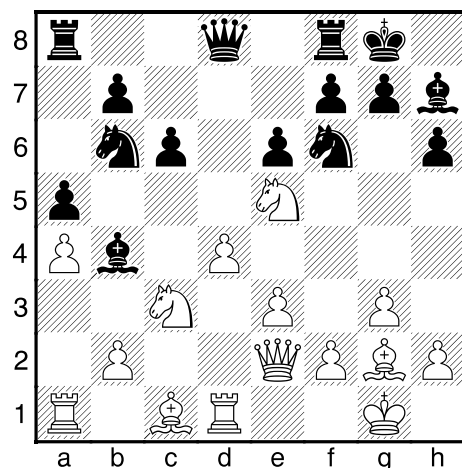


Chess Canada

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complicated, and entering this without proper understanding or being able to recall the theory is quite dangerous. For example, the game could have continued like this 9...♘fd7 10.♘xd7 ♘xd7 11.e4 ♙g6 12.♙e2 ♖b6 13.f4 e5 White is slightly better, but needs to know a lot more, as it is a very double-edged position, while White's king is very vulnerable in the center.

9...e6 10.♙g2 ♙b4 11.0-0 0-0
12.e3 h6 13.♖e2 ♙h7 14.♖d1



Up to this point, the position had already been played a few hundred times. I have control of the center and am about to finish my development. On the other hand, Black's pieces are relatively well placed, and there are no weaknesses worth mentioning in terms of the structure.

14...♖e7

14...♘bd7 or ...♘fd7 was more accurate.

15.e4 ♖fd8 16.♙f4 ♖ac8

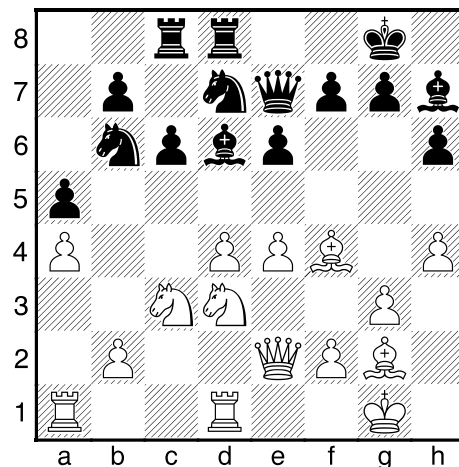
17.h4

Taking space on the kingside and discouraging any potential g5 ideas.

17...♘fd7 18.♘d3

I have more space, and generally, I would like to avoid trading pieces.

18...♙d6



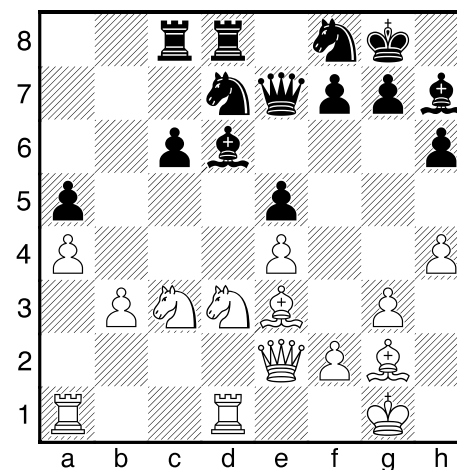
19.♙e3

I saw Black's follow-up; however, I completely misevaluated the position.

19.e5 taking space in the center was the best approach. I did not feel confident pushing my e-pawn because I was afraid of activating Black's light-squared bishop after 19...♙c7 20.♘e4±.

(editor - after 19.e5 a difficult line is 19...♙b4 20.♘xb4 ♖xb4 21.♙d2 ♖xb2∞.)

19...♘c4 20.♙c1 e5 21.d5
♘cb6 22.dxc6 bxc6 23.b3
♘f8 24.♙e3 ♘bd7



According to the engine, the position is very balanced. However, practically speaking, it is much easier to play for Black, as White's weaknesses are very easy to attack.

25.♖c2

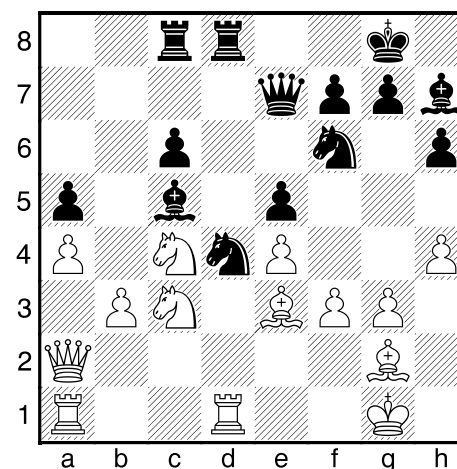
25.♘b1 followed by ♘d2 was the simplest and most solid continuation. Unfortunately, I did not think of it.

25...♘e6 26.♘b2 ♙c5

27.♘c4 ♘d4 28.♖a2

28.♖b2±.

28...♘f6 29.f3



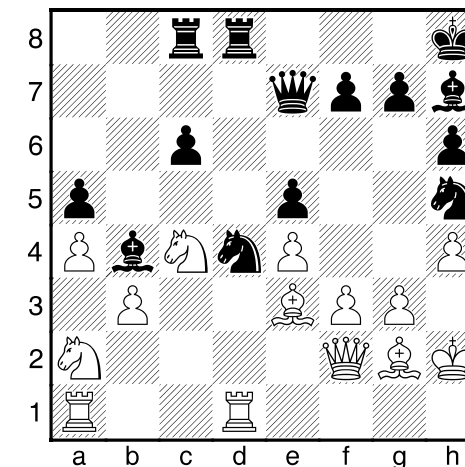
29...♘h5

29...♘d5! 30.exd5 cxd5 if I move my knight from c4, Black has many tactical wins that involve moving the knight away from d4. 31.♘xd5 (31.♘xa5 ♘xf3+-) 31...♖xd5-+.

30.♖h2 ♖h8

30...f5! easy to say, but Black should not be afraid of discovered checks. 31.b4 axb4 32.♘d6+ b3 33.♘xc8 ♖xc8 34.♖f2 f4-+ Black is completely dominating.

31.♖f2 ♙b4 32.♘a2



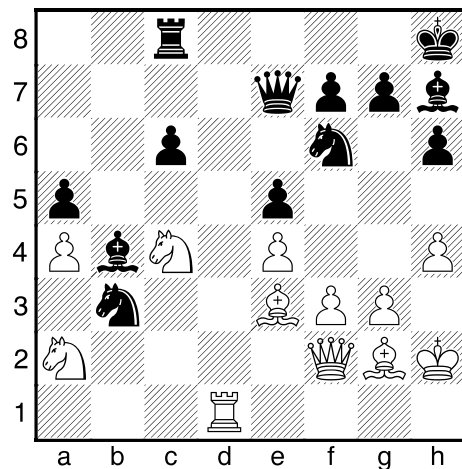
32...♘xb3

32...♙d6 kept Black's edge. 33.♘xd6 ♖xd6 34.♙h3 ♖b8±.

33.♖ab1

...and I am back in the game.

33...♖xd1 34.♖xd1 ♘f6?

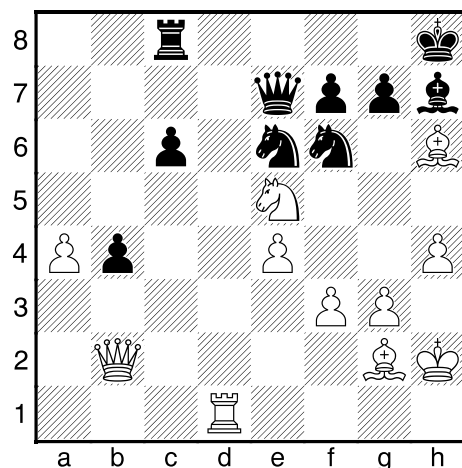


Wrong direction. Either ...c5 to solidify the queenside or ...f5 to attack my king would maintain a balanced position.

35. ♖xb4 axb4 36. ♔b2 ♘d4 37. ♘xe5
37. ♘xd4 exd4 38. ♔xd4±.

37... ♘e6?
37... c5 38. ♘xd4 (38. ♘c4±) 38... cxd4 39. ♔xd4 ♘xe4!=.

38. ♘xh6?!



Tempting, but inaccurate. Pushing the a-pawn or reactivating my light-squared bishop via h3 would have been more useful.

38... c5

38...gxh6?? 39. ♔d7□+- was the point:

39... ♔e8 40. ♔xf7+-;
39... ♘xd7 40. ♘g6+ ♔g8 41. ♔h8#.

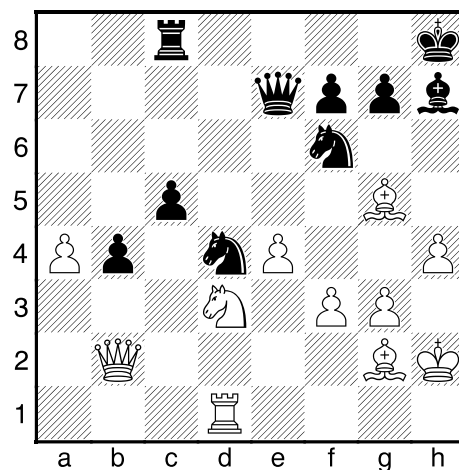
39. ♘g5?

Although it seems quite dangerous, allowing Black to push her pawns was best: 39. ♘e3 c4 40. ♘h3 c3 41. ♔a2 c2 42. ♔c1 ♔c3 43. ♘xe6 b3 44. ♔b2 ♔xe3 45. ♘xf7+ ♔g8 46. ♘b3+-.

39... ♘d4

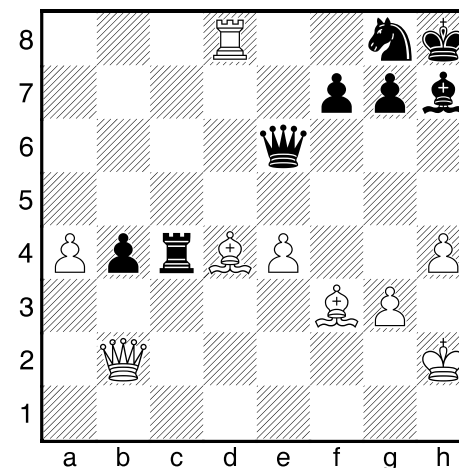
39...c4!? 40. ♔d7! c3 41. ♔a2 ♔xd7!
42. ♘xd7 ♘xg5 43. ♘e5□ (43. hxg5? ♘xd7-+) 43...c2 44. hxg5 heading to d3 44...c1 ♔□= 45. ♘xf7+ ♔g8 46. ♘h6+ ♔h8 47. ♘f7+=.

40. ♘d3



40... ♔e6 41. ♘xc5 ♘xf3+ 42. ♘xf3 ♔xc5 43. ♔d8+ ♘g8 44. ♘e3
44. ♔xb4 ♔c4 45. ♔b5±.

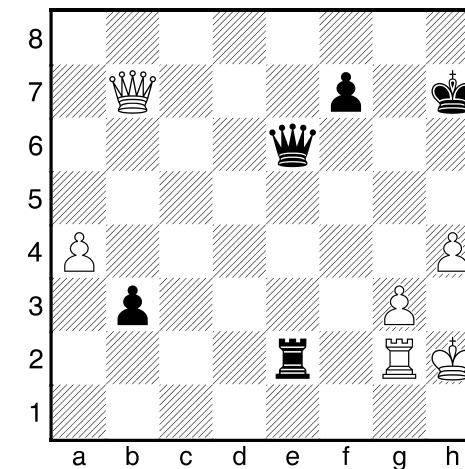
44... ♔c4 45. ♘d4



45... ♘xe4□

Capturing a pawn and taking care of mating threats. Under time pressure, I missed this resource. Had I seen it earlier, I probably would have opted for 44. ♔xb4.

46. ♘xe4 ♔xe4 47. ♘xg7+□ ♔h7 48. ♔d2□ ♔g6 49. ♔b3 ♔e4 50. ♘d4 ♘h6 51. ♔d5 ♘g4+ 52. ♔h3 ♘e3 53. ♘xe3 ♔xe3 54. ♔g2 b3 55. ♔b7 ♔e6+ 56. ♔h2 ♔e2



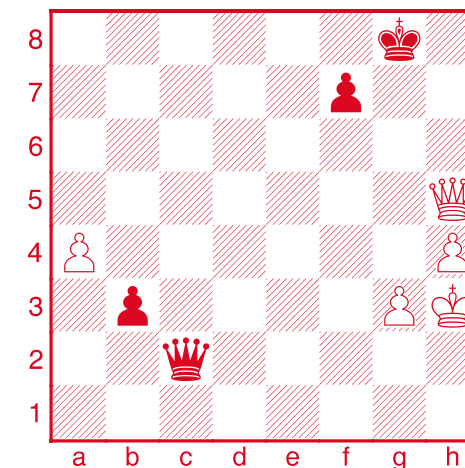
57. ♔b5??

57. a5=.

57... ♔xg2+ 58. ♔xg2 ♔e4+□ 59. ♔h3 ♔c2?

△59... ♔h1+□ luring the king to g4, making it more vulnerable to checks. 60. ♔g4 ♔b1 61. ♔b7 ♔g7 Black's king is safe from perpetual checks, enabling Black to promote the b-pawn quickly.

60. ♔h5+ ♔g8





Chess Canada

You can't catch MJO

61. ♖g4+?

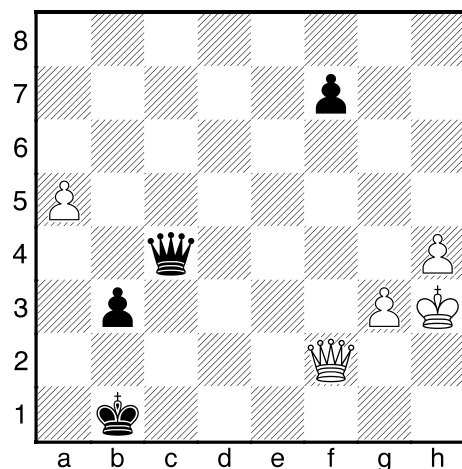
This loses because now the Black king can escape to f8 without fearing any perpetual checks.

61. ♖g5+ ♘g6 (61... ♔f8 62. ♖d8+=)
62. ♖b5 (62. ♖d8+?? ♔h7-+) 62... ♖c2
63. ♖g5+=.

61... ♔f8

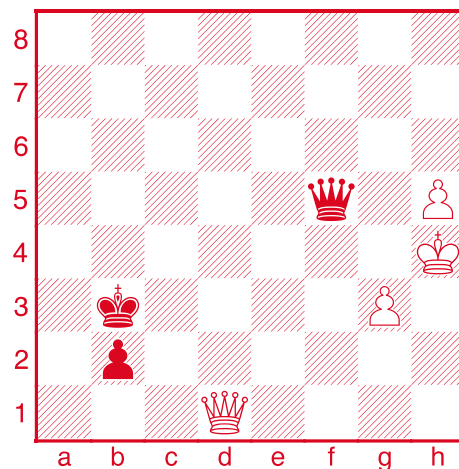
Although I am completely lost, I learned from a coach that, generally, diagonal checks are superior in queen endgames, as they are harder to block, which is the rule I mostly applied for the rest of the game.

62. ♖b4+ ♔e8 63. ♖b5+ ♔e7
64. ♖b7+ ♔e6 65. ♖b6+ ♔e5
66. ♖b5+ ♔d4 67. ♖b6+ ♔d3
68. ♖b5+ ♖c4 69. ♖f5+ ♔d2
70. ♖f2+ ♔c1 71. ♖e1+ ♔c2
72. ♖f2+ ♔b1 73. a5



73... b2 74. a6 ♖e6+ 75. ♔h2
♖xa6 76. ♖xf7 ♖e2+ 77. ♔h3
♔c1 78. ♖f4+ ♔c2 79. ♖a4+
♔c1 80. ♖f4+ ♖d2 81. ♖f1+

♔c2 82. ♖c4+ ♖c3 83. ♖e2+
♔b3 84. ♖d1+ ♔a3 85. h5 ♖c8+
86. ♔h4 ♖f5 87. ♖d6+ ♔b3
88. ♖d1+



88... ♔c3??

88... ♖c2!-+ eventually, the king can hide from all checks (otherwise, Black can trade queens). 89. ♖f3+ ♔c4
90. ♖f7+ ♔d4 91. ♖d7+ ♔e3 92. ♖a7+
♔e2 93. ♖a6+ ♔f2 94. ♖a7+ ♔g2
95. ♖b7+ ♔h2 safe at last!

editor – 88... ♔a3 89. ♖d6+ ♔b3
90. ♖d1+ repeats

89. ♖e1+ ♘

Black cannot escape the checks.

89... ♔c4 90. ♖e2+ ♘ ♔c3
91. ♖e1+ ♘ ♔c2 92. ♖e2+
♔b3 93. ♖e3+ ♘ ♔a2
94. ♖a7+ ♘ ♔b3 95. ♖e3+
♔b4 96. ♖d2+ ♔b3 97. ♖e3+
I claimed a threefold repetition.

1/2-1/2

notes:

WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet

Demchenko, Svitlana
(2156)

Ouellet, Maili-Jade (2291)

C30

Canadian Zonal (w) Montreal (7),
06.04.2026

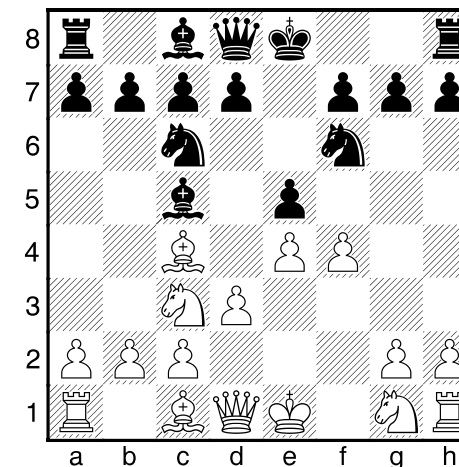
This was round 7 of the **2026 Canadian Women's Zonal**. Yunshan Li and I are leading the tournament with 6.5/7. We drew each other in round 5. Meanwhile, Svitlana suffered an early loss to a weaker player and is trailing us by half a point. As a result, I had a feeling she would play 1.e4 to push for a win. I, on the other hand, was hoping to win, but did not want to take too many risks as a loss would hurt my chances of winning the tournament greatly.

1.e4 e5 2. ♘c4

As far as I know, she has never played this, although she does have a tendency to play the Italian, which is similar.

2... ♞f6 3. d3 ♘c5 4. ♞c3 ♞c6
5. f4

59



The Vienna!?

Here, I realized I had already forgotten — or messed up — my preparation; so I started thinking about which plan was best. I never had such a position and so I considered my options carefully.

5... d6

The most stable and rational option in my opinion. There are a lot of alternatives:

5... ♙xg1 6. ♖xg1 d6 7. f5± felt very dangerous for me while she would have relatively easy moves.

5... exf4 6. ♙xf4 0-0 7. ♞f3 d6 8. d4= is a line I dismissed quickly as it looks very pleasant for White. I thought I would suffer and perhaps lose eventually, even if the evaluation is balanced.

5... h5!? is not something I considered seriously as it does not help me develop. However, it is very interesting and I would definitely play it had I known it was possible.



Chess Canada

You can't catch MJO

6. ♖f3 ♗g4 7. ♜f1 ♗xh2 8. ♜h1 ♗xf3+
9. ♜xf3 d5 10. ♗xd5 ♗d4 11. ♜g3 ♗g4=;

6. h3 d5 7. exd5 ♗xd5 8. ♗xd5 ♖e6
9. ♜f3 ♗d4 10. ♜e4 ♗xc2+ 11. ♖d2
♗xa1 12. ♗f3∞.

6. ♗f3 ♗a5

White has options, but Black is fine.

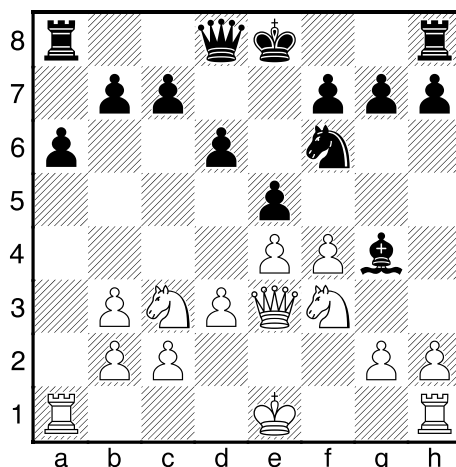
7. ♖b3

7. ♖d5 c6;

7. ♗a4 ♗xc4 8. ♗xc5 dxc5 9. fxe5
(9. dxc4? ♜xd1+ 10. ♖xd1 ♖e6!-+) 9... ♗g4
10. ♖g5 f6 11. exf6 gxf6 12. ♖h4 ♗b6±;

7. fxe5 dxe5 8. ♖d5 (8. ♗xe5?! ♜d4
9. ♖xf7+ ♖d8 10. ♜f1 ♜xe5 11. ♖f4 ♜e7±;
8. ♖xf7+? ♖xf7 9. ♗xe5+ ♖g8-+) 8... 0-0
9. ♖g5 (9. ♗xe5? ♗xd5 10. ♗xd5 f5-+
*White's king is too weak and exposed in
the center.*) 9... c6 10. ♖b3 h6 Black is
very comfortable.

**7... ♗xb3 8. axb3 a6 9. ♖e2
♖g4 10. ♖e3 ♖xe3 11. ♜xe3**



11... ♜e7

11... exf4 12. ♜xf4 0-0 13. 0-0 ♜e7 was
more precise.

12. 0-0

12. fxe5 dxe5 13. ♜g5 ♖xf3 14. gxf3
g6 (14... 0-0-0?! 15. ♜xg7 ♜dg8 16. ♜h6 ♜g6
17. ♜h3+ ♖b8 18. 0-0-0± White is up a
pawn and Black does not have much

to show for it.) 15. ♜a5 ♗d7 16. ♜xe7+
♖xe7 17. ♗d5+ ♖d6 18. ♗e3± White
has a lot of pressure and better piece
coordination.

12... exf4 13. ♜xf4 0-0

**14. ♜ae1 ♖xf3 15. ♜xf3 ♜ae8
16. ♜ef1 c6 17. ♜h3**

2026 Zonal

Podium Showdown

L2R:

WIM Yunshan Li

WIM Svitlana Demchenko

**WGM Maili-Jade Ouellet
Erin Zhou**

2nd

3rd

1st

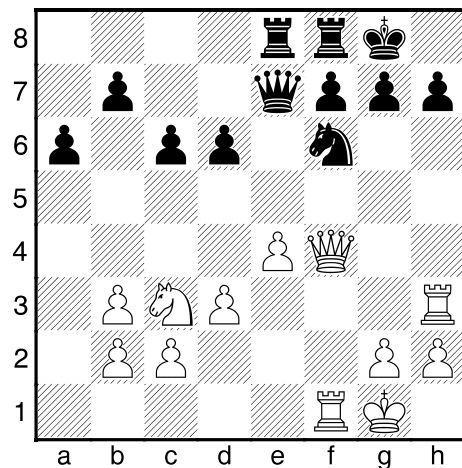
=7th





Chess Canada

You can't catch MJO



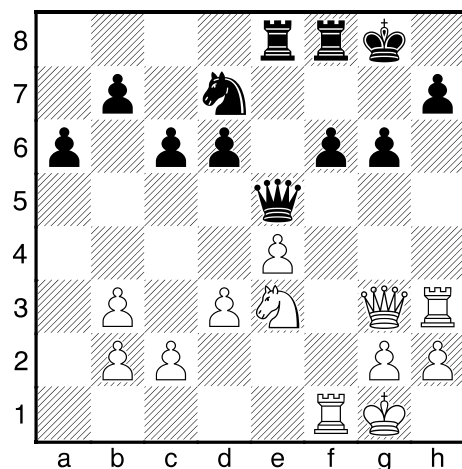
17...d7

The more active 17...d5 would equalize easily, but I did not realize that after 18.♖h4 h6 was solid enough to hold off White's attack without weakening my king too badly; e.g. 19.♖g3 ♕h8 20.exd5 ♜xd5=.

18.♜d1! g6

18...♖e5 19.♖h4 h6 20.♜e3 ♖e6±.

19.♜e3 f6 20.♖g3 ♖e5



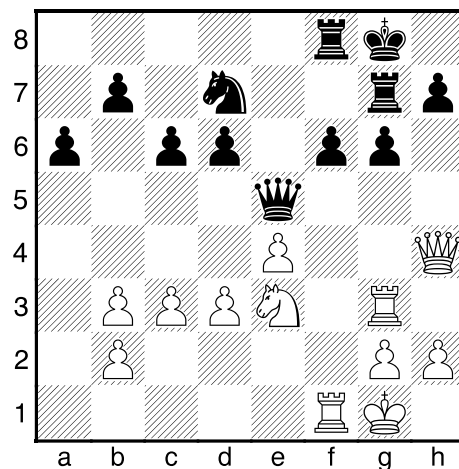
21.♖h4

21.♖g4 ♜c5 22.♖h4 ♖e7±.

21...♖e7 22.♖g3

Threatening ♜f5.

22...♖g7 23.c3

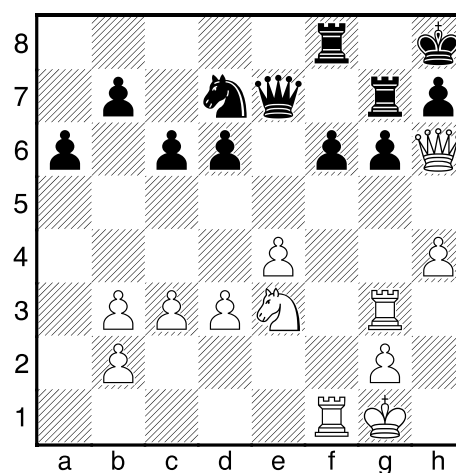


Preventing ...♖xb2 and introducing the possibility of chasing the queen with d4.

23...♔h8

23...h5 was the best way to defend as it restricts White's rooks and prevents White from playing ♖h6 followed by h4-h5.

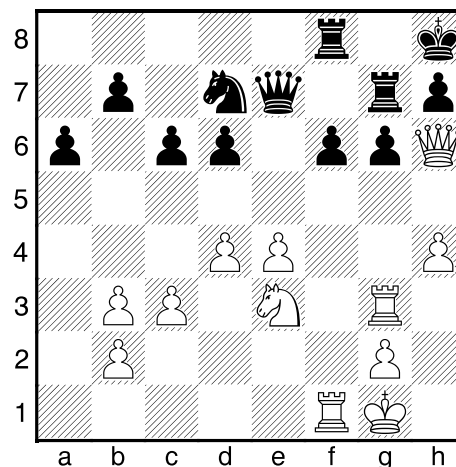
24.♖h6 ♖e7 25.h4



25...♜e5??

25...♜c5! My position would be fine after this simple move I missed. 26.h5 ♖fg8 27.♖xg6 ♖xg6 28.hxg6 ♖xg6 29.♜f5 ♖xh6 30.♜xe7 ♜xd3 31.♜f5 ♖g6 32.♖d1 ♜c5 33.♜xd6 ♜xb3=.

26.d4 ♜d7



27.♖f4

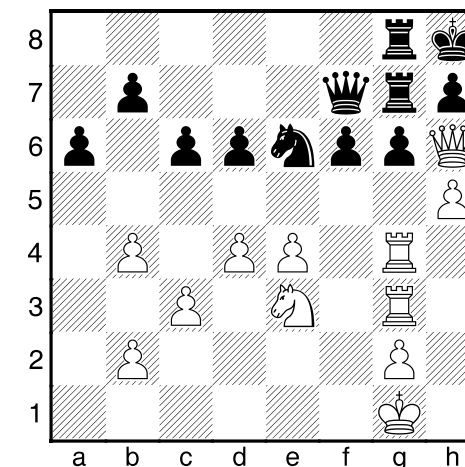
♞27.h5! ♖fg8 28.hxg6 ♖xg6 29.♜f5! ♖e6 (29...♖xh6 30.♖xg8+ ♕xg8 31.♜xe7+ ♕f7 32.♜f5+- White's knight completely dominates the position.) 30.♖xh7+!!

♔xh7 31.♖h3+ ♖h6 32.♖xh6#.

27...♖fg8 28.♖fg4 ♜f8 29.h5 ♖f7 30.b4

30.hxg6 ♖xg6 31.♖xg6 ♖xg6 32.♖xg6 ♜xg6 33.♜f5 ♖d7 34.♖h2+- Black doesn't get mated, but the d-pawn drops and White is winning.

30...♜e6



editor – White now trades so much that her kingside pressure disappears. Maybe she was worried that ...g5 would trap her ♖? Or maybe she didn't see that there was one last straw she could add to the camel's back...

31.hxg6?!

31.♜c4+- and I lose. I cannot protect both g6 and d6. 31...d5 saves the d-pawn, but 32.♜d6! and White crashes through on g6.

31...♖xg6 32.♖xg6

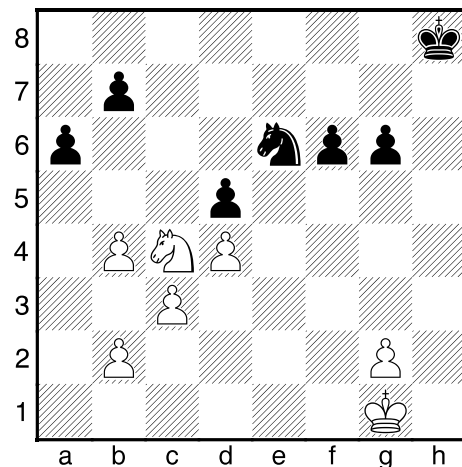
32.♖h5+- maintains the pressure.



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32...♖xg6 33.♖xg6 ♔xg6
34.♔xg6 hxg6 35.♘c4 d5
36.exd5 cxd5

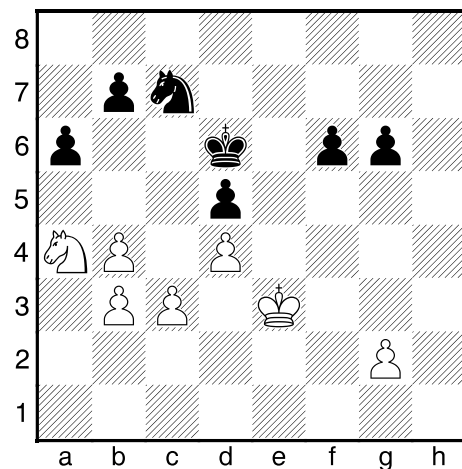


37.♘b6

♘37.♘d6 ♔g7 (37...b5? 38.♘e8 f5
39.♔f2+- Black has too many weaknesses
and White's king is much more active.)
38.♘xb7±.

37...♘c7= 38.b3 ♔g7 39.♔f2
39.c4 ♔f7 40.♔f2= (40.cxd5? ♔e7+-).

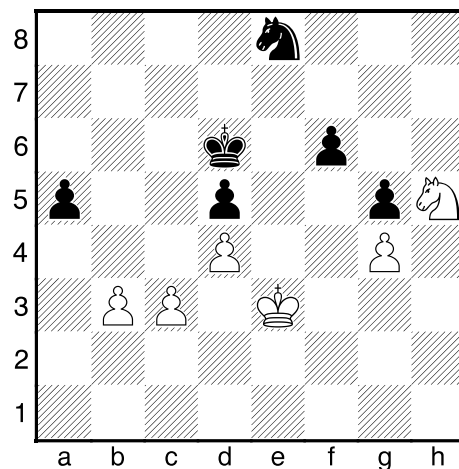
39...♔f7 40.♔e3 ♔e6
41.♘a4 ♔d6



42.g3

42.c4 doesn't threaten anything, 42...
f5 (42...b5 43.c5+ ♔e6 44.♘b6=) 43.♔f4
(43.g3 ♔c6 44.♘c3 g5=) 43...♘e6+
White's king is not getting in.

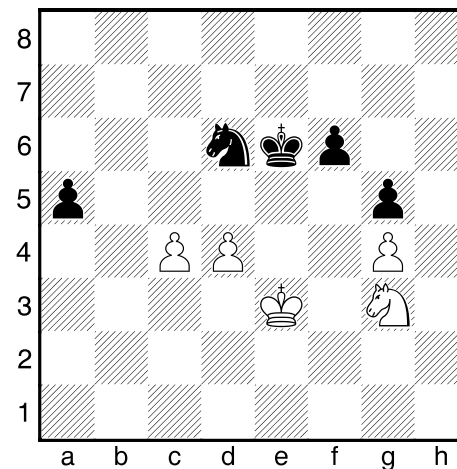
42...♔c6 43.♘c5 b6 44.♘d3
a5 45.bxa5 bxa5 46.♘f4 g5
47.♘h5 ♘e8 48.g4 ♔d6



49.c4?!

Although the evaluation does not
change after her move, it is, in my
opinion, quite a risky and counter-
intuitive approach as it allows me to
have a passed pawn. I suspect she
did not realize that I would be able to
trade my f-pawn against her g-pawn,
allowing me to create another passed
pawn. This is dangerous for her as
my two passed pawns (a and g) are
far from each other which makes it
more difficult for her to stop as both
the knight and the king do not have a
far reach.

49...dxc4 50.bxc4 ♔e6
51.♘g3 ♘d6



52.♔d3

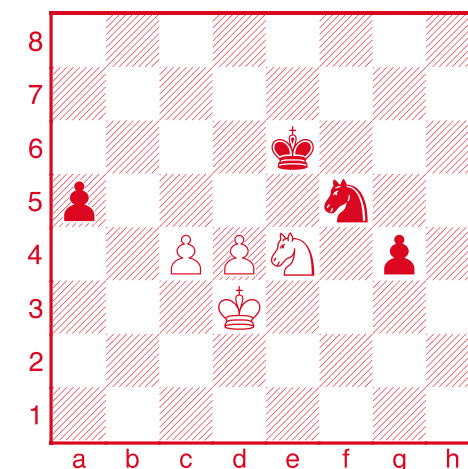
52.c5 ♘b5 53.♔d3 a4 54.♔c4 a3
55.♔b3 ♘xd4+ 56.♔xa3 ♔d5=;

52.d5+!? ♔e5 53.♔d3 (53.c5?
♘c4+♔-+) 53...a4 (53...♔f4?? 54.c5!!+-)
54.c5 ♔xd5=.

52...f5!

Although the evaluation does not
change, in my opinion, it was a
very practical decision to make
under time pressure as I finally
create some winning chances
of my own for the first time in
this game.

53.gxf5+ ♘xf5 54.♘e4
g4



55.♘d2??

55.♔c3♔= saves the game: White
can trade her ♘ for the g-pawn and
her ♔ will win the a-pawn.

55...a4?

♘55...g3♔-+ I opted for ...a4 first
under time pressure as I wanted to
prevent White from playing ♘f3, but



LPDO

IA Pierre Denomme
gives Zonal Organizer
Alexandre Ber a scare (and
MJO a laugh) when present-
ing the winner's plaque.



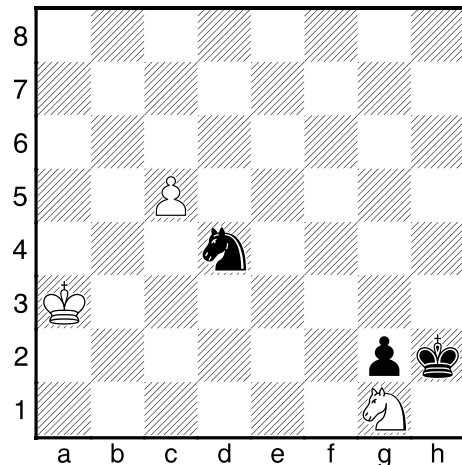
56. ♖f3 doesn't save the game: 56... g2 57. ♖c3 ♖d6-+.

editor – the reason is that deflection tactics on e4 leave the ♖f3 insecure, but pushing either of her pawns leaves the other one weak. White would like to sit, but if White oscillates the ♖, Black can go ...♖g6 and ...a4 to bring the ♖ to b4.

56. ♖c3?

56. ♖f1□= again, ready to trade ♖ for g-pawn. Her ♖ was already close enough to stop the a-pawn.

56...a3□-+ 57. ♖b3 ♖xd4+ 58. ♖xa3 g3□ 59. ♖e4 g2 60. ♖g5+ ♖f5 61. ♖h3 ♖g4 62. ♖g1 ♖g3 63. c5 ♖h2



64. c6

64. ♖e2 ♖xe2 65. c6 ♖d4 66. c7 ♖b5+-+.

64...♖xg1 65. c7 ♖b5+

0-1



left:
en route to winning the
2026 Canadian Women's Zonal
Montreal

*below: Ouellet - Girya,
GrandSwiss Samarkand
2025-09-05*



*above: Norm hunting
Toronto, 2022*



photo: FIDE/Michal Walusza

Chess Canada
You can't catch MJO

The optimist... Mike Ivanov



b. 1995, Yekaterinburg, RU

Learned chess at the age of 4 from his grandfather.

Moved to Toronto in 2004, where he has twice won both the Ontario High School Championship (2012, 2013), and the Toronto Closed (2016, 2017).

FM: 2016. IM: 2024

Alongside his competitive career, Mike has devoted significant time to teaching chess, both privately and as the head coach of the Canada Chess Youth Club. He has emphasized the importance of education and has taught in schools, after-school programs, and camps. He completed a Masters of Teaching at University of Toronto in 2017.

In 2025, he published *Best Stories in Chess*, a journey into chess personas and their lives, now available on Amazon.

The games in this article are all from his final push for the IM title. This was not the story of a prodigious leap up the rating lists, but a **three-year-long 322 FIDE-rated game grind in tournaments across 17 countries:**

- Czech Republic/Czechia
- France • Belgium • Austria
- Montenegro • Germany
- Spain • Italy • Poland
- Croatia • Hungary • Portugal
- Sweden • Tenerife • Bahamas
- Slovakia • USA • Canada

That's a *lot* to go from 2360 in December 2021, to 2402 in October 2024.

That struggle is partly because chess is difficult, and gaining rating gets more difficult the higher your rating gets. But it was especially difficult between 2021-2024. These games all occurred in the immediate post-COVID years, when FIDE ratings fluctuated wildly as they adjusted to players who had been studying at home but hardly competing OTB for two years. FIDE's anti-cheating adviser and rating analyst IM Ken Regan concluded

that U2000 juniors had ratings which lagged by over 200 points, and that masters who played them were effectively losing 5 points per game. The effects can be seen in Mike's yo-yoing FIDE rating:

+149	2021.08
-58	2021.12
+37	2022.03
-32	2022.04
+35	2022.05
-29	2023.02
+33	2023.04
+45	2024.06
+51	2024.08

So, while *this* chapter of the story ends with Mike passing 2400 to earn his IM title, the larger part of the story – in terms of time, distance, effort, and suffering – is in the gut-wrenching close calls that came before that final result. That's why I asked Mike to annotate three of the most painful losses. Thankfully, he did; and that's where his annotations begin...

- editor



by **IM Mike Ivanov**



Mike Ivanov

IM-elect at a 2024 Chess in the Park Toronto meetup to celebrate his title.

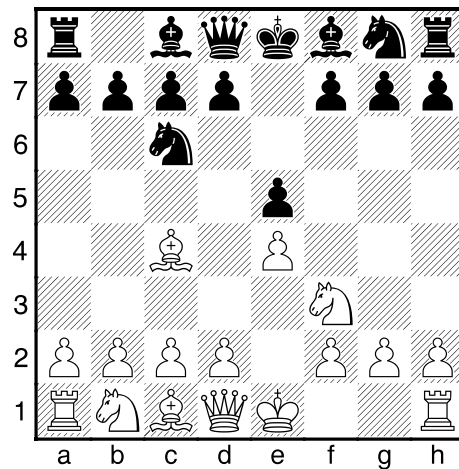
notes:

IM Mike Ivanov**Ivanov, Mike (2360)****Xu, Eddie (1960)****C54**

2021 North American Open Las Vegas, 26.12.2021

Chess players often associate cities with tournaments, and I still associate Las Vegas to bitter memories of an overpriced hotel, atrocious results, and catching COVID on the flight back.

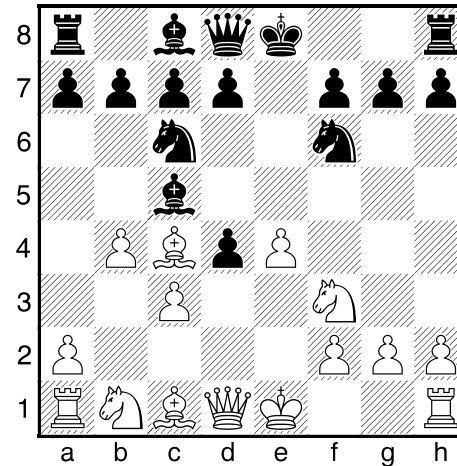
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4



This begins what turned out to be my **worst tournament ever**, at least in terms of rating loss. A part of it was focusing too much on openings and not enough on calculation. A part of it was playing underrated American juniors who all gained 200-300 points in the months after this tournament.

And a part of it was making impractical opening choices, such as the one in the game. Such was the post-COVID rollercoaster. I was trying to switch to more reputable openings from my Scotch, but play them uniquely. Too uniquely as it turns out.

3...♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 6.b4

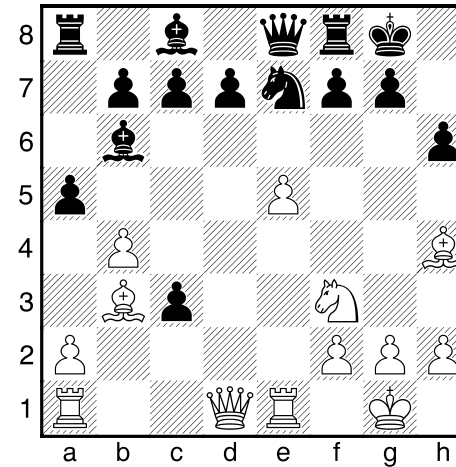


I had bought a Chessable course on this **Dubov Italian**, and was itching to use it. Note to self: never play risky openings with exposed kings against lower-rated players! They sometimes forget they're supposed to lose...

6...♙b6 7.e5 d5

This game (dubbed "Dubov's Immortal") inspired me so much that it caused me to waste 3 months learning the relevant lines in the Dubov Italian, just to lose to a 1900 player on the first try. Darn it, Dubov, why couldn't you just win normally!? 7...♘e4 8.♙d5 ♘xc3 9.♘xc3 dxc3

10.♙g5 ♘e7 11.0-0 h6 12.♙h4 0-0 13.♖e1 ♔e8 14.♙b3 a5

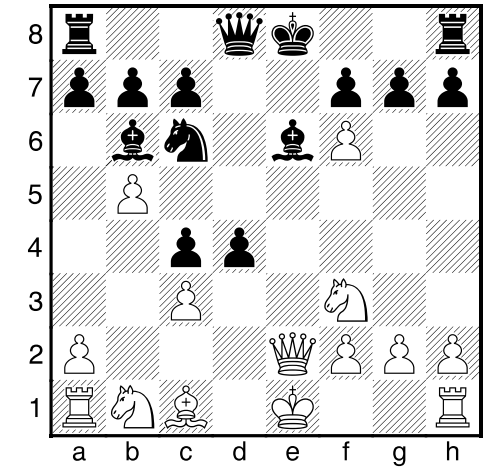
Dubov Immortal Diagram

15.♙f6!! a4 16.♙c4! ♘g6 17.♔d3 (♔17.♔c2 so a later ...xc4 does not come with tempo.) 17...d5 18.exd6 ♙e6 19.♔xg6! fxg6 20.♖xe6 ♗f7 21.♙xc3± ♘h8 (♔21...♙xf2+!!±) 22.♖e4 ♗f5 23.♖e7 ♖g8 24.♙xg8 ♖xg8 25.dxc7 ♗c2 26.♙e5 ♙xf2+ 27.♘h1 ♙b6 28.h3 ♘h7 29.♖e1 a3 30.♘h2 g5 31.♘d4 ♗c4 32.♘f5 ♗xb4 33.♖c1! ♘g6 34.♖xg7+ ♘xf5 35.♖xg8 ♙xc7 36.♙xc7 ♗b2 37.♖c5+ ♘e4 38.♖d8 1-0 **Daniil Dubov (2702)–Sergey Karjakin (2752), Russian Championship Superfinal, Moscow 2020.**

8.exf6 dxc4 9.♔e2+

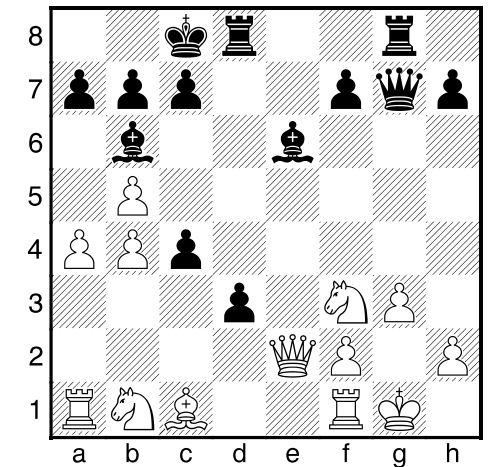
This is an important check, as it takes away ...♗e7, which would have spoiled our fun in case of fxg7: 9.fxg7? ♗e7+ 10.♘f1 ♖g8+.

9...♙e6 10.b5



10...♙a5

10...♙b4! was an interesting try by **Anand** in 2017, leading to a masterpiece. I was prepared for this, and somehow thought everyone else would go here too. 11.fxg7 ♖g8 12.cxb4 ♗f6 13.0-0 ♗xg7 14.g3 0-0-0 15.a4 d3

Anand Analysis Diagram

"Once I steeled myself to play ...♗xg3, it was hard to resist the thought of executing the move. 15...♗f6! was probably objectively better." – Anand





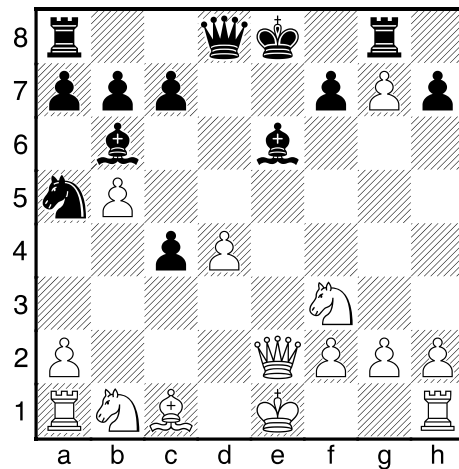
Chess Canada

Ivanov

16. ♖b2 ♜xg3+ 17. hxg3 ♜xg3+
18. ♔h2 ♜xf3 19. ♕g5? (19. ♖g7!
♜h3+ 20. ♔g2 ♕d4 21. ♖g5 h6 22. ♜xd8+
♔xd8 23. ♜a3= Anand) 19... ♕d4 ♖+
20. ♜d2 ♜g8! 21. ♜a3 h6 22. ♜g1
(22. ♕f4 ♜h3#) 22... ♜h3+ 23. ♔g2 ♜xg5+
24. ♔f1 ♜xg1+ 25. ♔xg1 ♕d5 #2.
Skvortsov, O – Anand, V (2786), Zurich,
2017.

11. fxcg7 ♜g8 12. cxd4

12. ♖xd4 ♕xd4 (12... ♜xg7 13. ♖xe6 fxe6
14. 0-0 ♜d5 15. g3 0-0-0) 13. cxd4 ♜f6
14. ♕b2 ♜xg7 15. g3 0-0-0 ♖.



Now we can take stock of our position. White is up a pawn but not for long, since g7 is falling. Black has easy development apart from his knight on a5, which is struggling. White's king isn't safe anywhere, although this wasn't clear to me at the time. Black's king will be doing just fine after ...0-0-0. I should point out that the old version of chess engine Leela which I used was much more mellow, and regularly evaluated these positions as equal or slightly better. Current Leela is under no such

illusions, giving this -.22 after ...♜f6.

12... ♜d7=

After seeing how many ways Black has to equalize here and get the initiative, I quickly realized how stupid this whole line was.

12... ♜f6 also equalizes:

a) 13. ♕b2 ♜xg7 14. g3 0-0-0
15. d5 ♜g4 16. dxe6 ♜ge8 ♖↑ is still
horrifying;

b) 13. ♕g5 ♜xg7 ♖ 14. ♖bd2 ♞h6
15. ♕h4 ♕xd4 (15... ♜xg2?? 16. 0-0-0+)
16. ♜d1 ♖xg2 ♞ 17. ♜f1 (editor
– 17. ♖e4! c3! ♞ transposes, since
(17... ♜xh1+? 18. ♔d2+-)) 17... ♕h8 (17... c3
18. ♖e4! ♞) 18. ♖e4 c3 19. ♕f6 ♞;

c) editor – my 2026 version of leela goes for this: 13. d5! ♜xg7! (13... ♜xa1
14. dxe6= f5 (14... ♜xg7 15. 0-0 ♜xb1
16. ♕h6 ♞) 15. 0-0! ♜xg7 ♖=) 14. dxe6
0-0-0 15. e7 ♜de8 16. ♕b2 ♜xg2
17. ♜f1 ♕c5 ♖ ♞ which shows this line
is playable — for a computer — but
still might be a stupid choice for
any human who isn't confident of
their ability to out-calculate their
opponent.

13. ♖c3

13. ♕g5?? ♕xd4+;

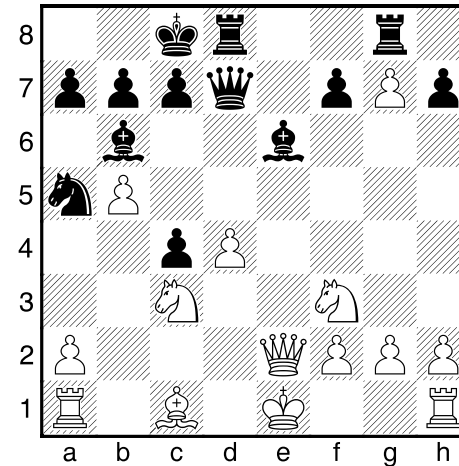
13. ♕b2? 0-0-0+;

13. ♕f4 0-0-0 14. ♖c3 ♕f5 15. 0-0 ♕d3
16. ♜e5 ♕xf1 17. ♔xf1 f6! 18. ♜xf6
♜xg7 19. ♜xg7 ♜xg7 ♖ is not inspiring;

13. d5 ♜xd5 14. ♖c3 ♜d3 ♖;

13. 0-0 0-0-0 14. ♖c3 ♜xg7 15. ♕f4 ♕g4
16. ♜fe1 ♜f5 Black is always in the
driver's seat.

13... 0-0-0



14. ♕b2?

Perhaps the losing mistake. It may look reasonable, but doesn't let White complete development safely.

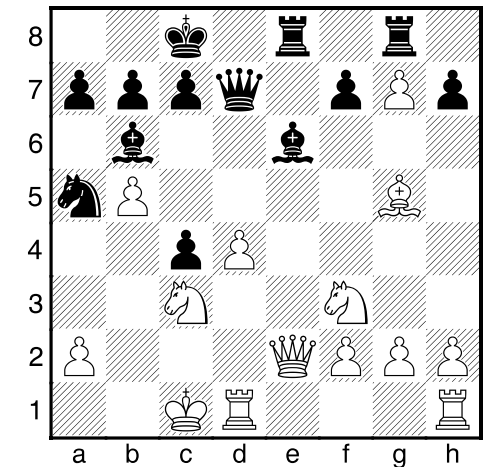
14. ♕h6 ♕g4 15. 0-0-0 (15. ♖e5? ♕xe2
16. ♖xd7 ♕xd4 ♖+ the (e7 stays trapped
after other exchanges.) 15... ♜d6 ♖ King
safety is still more important than that
g7 pawn;

14. ♕e3 ♜xg7 15. ♖e5 ♜d6 16. 0-0
♕h3 ♖;

14. ♜e5 ♕g4! (14... ♜de8 15. 0-0 ♕g4
16. ♜g3 (16. ♜f6 ♞) 16... ♕xf3 17. ♜xf3
♕xd4 18. ♕a3! ±) 15. ♕e3 ♕xf3 16. gxf3
♜de8 17. ♜d5 ♖;

14. ♕g5! was in my file, alas it was
forgotten at the board. White finds

dynamic equality. 14... ♜de8 15. 0-0-0!
(Sadly, being greedy doesn't work:
15. ♕f6? ♕g4 16. ♖e5 ♜xd4+)
Analysis Diagram



a) 15... ♕h3?? 16. ♖e5 ♖+;

b) 15... ♕f5 16. ♜b2 (16. ♜d2!?)
16... ♜xg7 17. ♜he1 ♜gg8! (17... ♜eg8
18. ♜e7 ±) 18. ♜a3 ♞ With a safe
king, White can actually play for
something, claiming that Black's ♖a5
and ♕b6 gives him an edge. Even this
is roughly equal;

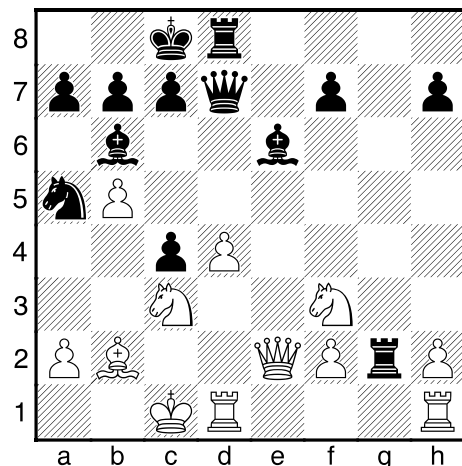
c) 15... ♜xg7 16. ♜he1 ♜gg8 17. ♜d2
surprisingly, our king is safer on c1
than g1, and our pieces finally look
respectable. ♕g5 could have made
the difference.

14... ♜xg7 15. 0-0-0

I remembered that the king is
supposed to castle long, just forgot
that the bishop belongs on g5. Here,
every tempo plays a gigantic role.
15. g3 ♜e8+.



15...♖xg2

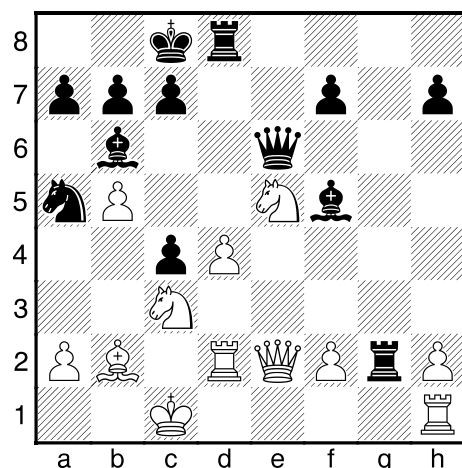


To give credit to Eddie, he played with confidence, not falling behind on time despite the opening surprise, and taking everything I gave him. Bluffing works a lot better in poker :(

16.♖d2 ♕f5

△16...f6!±.

17.♘e5 ♖e6



18.♘a4?

With suffering comes wisdom.

This game was a **cold shower** that showed just how much I still had to learn.

Another whammy of a move. The only good thing about it is that we defend d4. But the position is too urgent for such timid measures.

18.♖f3 ♕xd4 19.♖xg2 ♖xe5 20.♖g3 ♕d3 21.♖xe5 ♕xe5 22.♘d1 c3 23.♕xc3 ♘c4 24.♖xd3 ♖xd3 25.♕xe5 ♘xe5 26.♖e1 ♖d5 The smoke has cleared, but White's pawns are still struggling.

18.d5□ is White's best chance, but still not enough. It's also hard to consciously open up the bishop on b6. 18...♖e8 (18...♖h6? 19.♘xf7+-) 19.♖f3 ♖xe5! The key in all these lines for Black is to sac the exchange, and dominate with the vicious bishop pair. 20.♖xg2 ♕d3±.

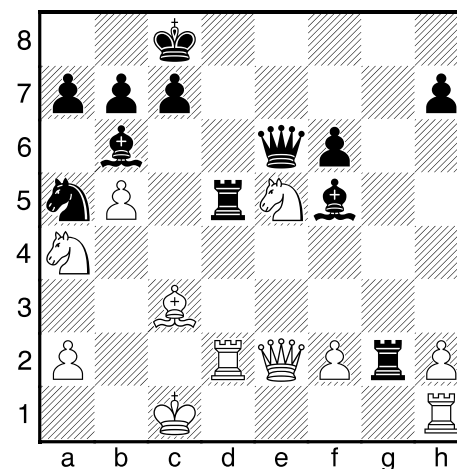
18...c3!?

18...f6! is even stronger 19.♘f3 ♖xe2 20.♖xe2 ♕g4 21.♘xb6+ axb6 22.♖e3 c6-+ *editor* – Black is up only a pawn, but White's minors are trash.

19.♕xc3 f6 20.d5

Not much else for White unfortunately. My king is not enjoying this opening of events.

20...♖xd5



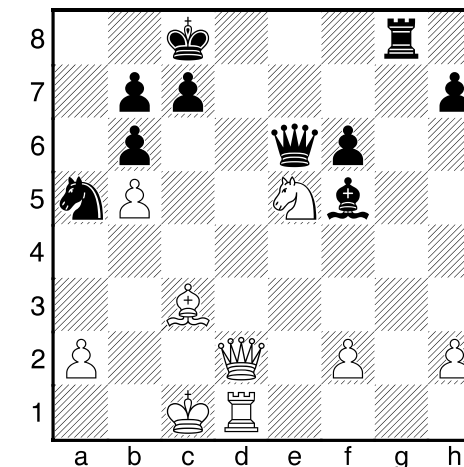
21.♖hd1

21.♖xd5 ♖xd5 22.♘f3 ♖e4 (22...♖xf2? 23.♘xb6+ axb6 24.♖xf2=) 23.♖xe4 ♕xe4 Maybe a better try, but still hopelessly miserable.

21...♖xd2 22.♖xd2 ♖g8

22...♕e3!! would win style points! 23.♖xe3 ♖xa2 24.♖d3 (24.♘d3 ♘b3#) 24...♖g1+ 25.♕e1 ♘b3+ 26.♘d1 fxe5 Black can sit back and marvel at their position.

23.♘xb6+ axb6



We're 'only' a pawn down, but that bishop on f5 is worth several pawns' advantage.

24.♘d3

24.♘f3 ♖e4-+;

24.♕xa5 ♖xe5 25.♕c3 ♖xb5-+ 26.♖b2 ♖c5 I stopped calculating here, since all that remains is a handshake.

24...♖d8

There's no way out of the pin.

25.♖e1 ♖c4 26.♘b2 ♖xd3

27.♖e8+ ♘d7 28.♖e1 ♕e6

With no more tricks to hope for, I resigned.

0-1

With suffering comes wisdom and this game was a cold shower that showed just how much I still had to learn. I went on to lose two more games, as well as 58 FIDE points. Yet the lessons learned here were necessary.

notes:**IM Mike Ivanov****Jaskolka, Tomasz (2188)
Ivanov, Mike (2319)****C08***Cracovia A Krakow (8.16),
03.01.2023*

I'd like to show this game to demonstrate the lows of every chess player's life.

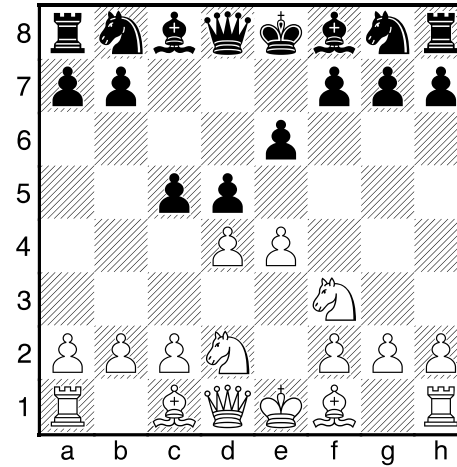
This tournament was in Krakow, Poland, which would be a lovely vacation if it wasn't such a horrible tourney for me. After barely drawing three lower-rated players in a row, New Year's Eve was ruined by an 8:30 AM game against the Austrian prodigy Lukas Dotzer, who is now a very strong IM but was then just 2100. Round 7 was another write-off, losing a much better position against a lower-rated player, which brings us to this game...

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5
4.♘gf3**

Petrosian got here first!**Pilgrimage Church
Lake Bled Slovenia**

*Tigran Petrosian & Fridrik Olafsson
both visited to pray for a win in their
game at the 1959 Bled Interzonal.*

*Characteristically, Petrosian anticipated the
threat, got there first, and won.*



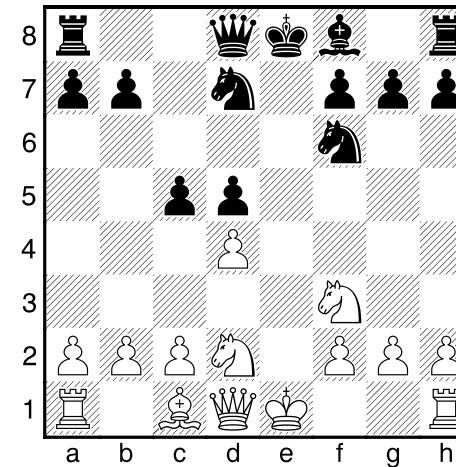
The most precise move-order, discouraging Black from the ...♞xd5 variation which is considered very solid for Black these days.

4...♘f6

4...♘c6 is also possible, but narrows Black's options. 5.exd5 ♞xd5 (5...exd5 6.♘b5 lines are holdable but very

passive for Black. 6...♘d6 7.dxc5 ♘xc5 8.0-0 ♞ge7 9.♞b3 ♘d6 a la [Karpov vs Korchnoi, 1974 Candidates](#).) 6.♘c4 ♞d7 7.dxc5 ♘xc5 8.♞e2 is a worse version of the Chistyakov French.

**5.exd5 exd5 6.♘b5+ ♘d7
7.♘xd7+ ♞bxd7**



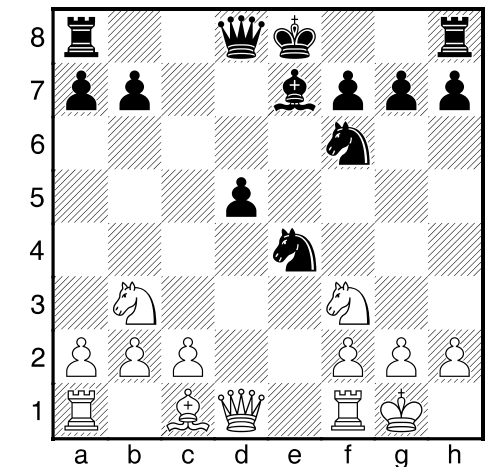
I had limited knowledge of this line, but he seemed uncertain too. I feel that the Tarrasch is great because of the variety of playable lines, which Black can experiment with. The problem is: White's always slightly better.

8.0-0 ♘e7

8...♘d6 9.♞e1+ would be problematic.

9.dxc5 ♞xc5 10.♞b3

10.♞e1 0-0 11.♞f1 can also be annoying, even if Black has remedies.

10...♞ce4

I did spend some time at home analyzing GM Sambuev's treatment of this line for Black, where these knights rotate to ever stronger squares.

11.♞fd4

11.♞bd4 ♘c5 12.♞f5 g6 13.♞g7+.

11...♞d7 12.♘f4

12.f3 is the main line, which leaves



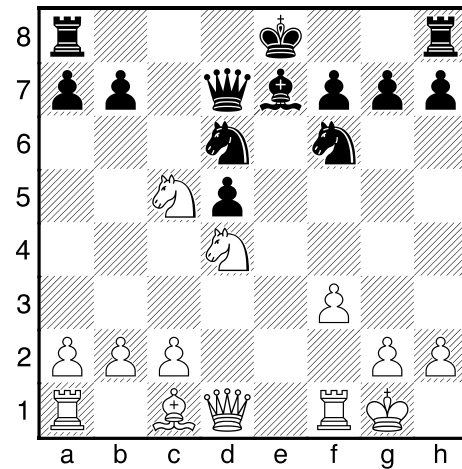


Chess Canada

Ivanov

White with a tiny symbolic advantage.
12...♘d6 13.♘c5

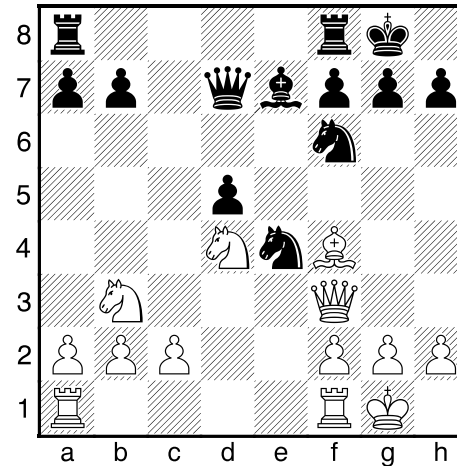
Analysis Diagram



13...♖c8 14.♘d3 0-0 15.♙e3 (15.b3 ♙d8 16.♙b2 ♙b6 17.♙h1 ♖e8 18.♗d2 ♘f5 19.♘xf5 ♗xf5= (0-1, 56) *Qin,Z (2316)-Sambuev,B (2750) Ottawa, Canada Day 2011.*) 15...♖e8 16.♙f2 ♙d8 (16...♘f5 17.♗d2 ♙d6 18.♖fe1 ♘xd4 19.♙xd4 ♗f5 20.♖xe8+ ♘xe8 as more pieces get traded, the outpost on d4 and weakness on d5 become more pronounced.) 17.♖e1 ♙b6 18.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 19.♗d2 ♖c8 20.♗b4 ♗d7 21.c3 ♘c4 22.♖e1± is a typical, slightly more pleasant for White, position in the Open Tarrasch.

13...♗c7 14.♘d3 0-0 15.b3± (15.♙g5 is also interesting. 15...♖fe8 16.c3 ♗d7 17.♖e1 h6 18.♙h4 ♘f5 19.♙f2 ♘xd4 20.♙xd4 ♙d6 21.♗d2±) 15...♖fe8 16.♙e3 ♖ac8 17.♖e1 ♙f8 18.♗d2 h6 19.♙h1 a6 20.a4 ♗d7 21.♙f4 ♖xe1+ 22.♖xe1 ♘de8 (22...♘f5?? 23.♘e5+-) 23.♗f2 ♙d6 24.♙c1 White's ♘s connect everything so well! 24...♘c7 25.g4 ♘e6 26.♘f5 ♙f8 27.♖e2 d4 28.♙b2 ♖d8 (1-0, 59) *Xiong,J (2660)-Vorontsov,P (2463), Dallas UT, 2016.*

12...0-0 13.♖f3



At this point it became clear that my opponent was improvising, which means I could become more ambitious.

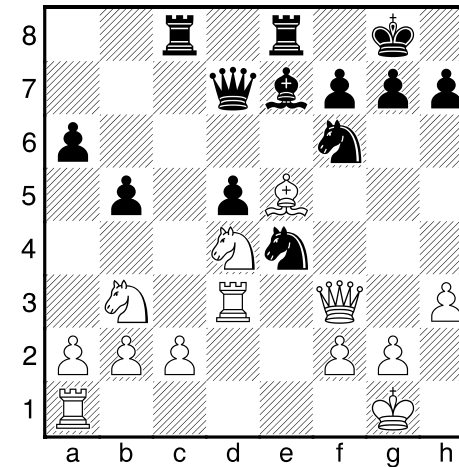
13...♖fe8
13...a5!?

14.h3 ♖ac8
15.♖fd1 a6
15...♙d8 16.a4 a5
17.c3 (17.♘b5 ♖xc2)
17...♙b6=.

16.♖d3 b5
17.♙e5?!

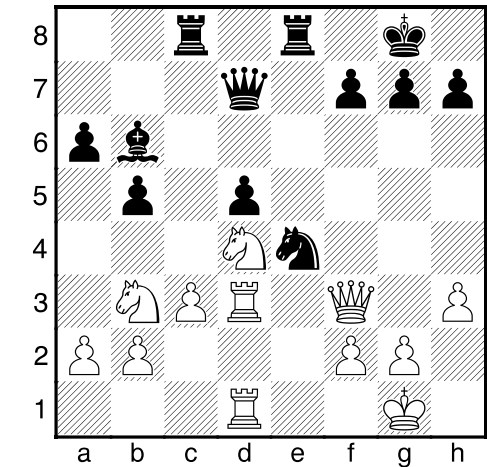
PubChess Road Trip

Adam Siegel
Mike Ivanov
Geordie Derraugh



White picks a strange trade, wasting time while allowing me to finish the ideal setup.

17...♙d8 18.♙xf6 ♘xf6
19.♖ad1 ♙b6 20.c3 ♘e4=



The white knights are now superfluous, while our pressure on f2 counteracts their pressure on d5.

21.♘c1
Trying to fix the knight, but I can start to take over now.

21...♖e5
21...a5 22.a3 b4 23.cxb4 axb4 24.axb4 ♗a4 25.♘ce2 ♗xb4. editor - in this line, White has blockaded the iso on d5, but that's the only thing his pieces are doing.

22.♖e3 ♖ce8 23.♘d3
Tomasz was clearly displeased at this point, acquiescing to an e-file isolani after not finding anything better.

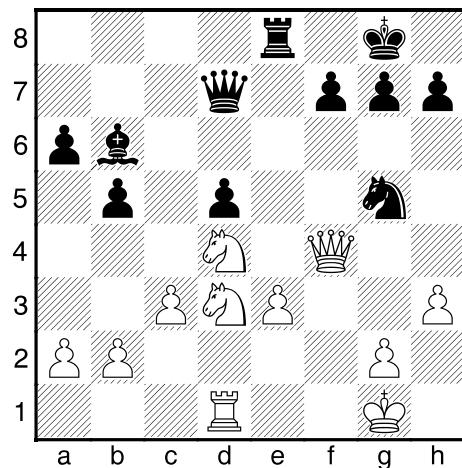
23...♘g5 24.♗f4 ♖xe3 25.fxe3

Mistakes rarely come alone
- Mike Ivanov



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Ivanov



25...h6

25...h6 26. g4 wasn't convincing.

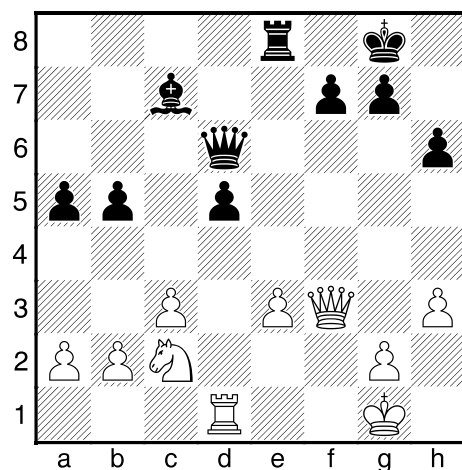
26. b4 a5 27. bc2

The knights are stuck on the merry-go-round, while we're taking over the dark squares.

27...c7 28. f5 d6 29. f3

29. f4 c5 30. f5 b4.

29...xf3+ 30. xf3



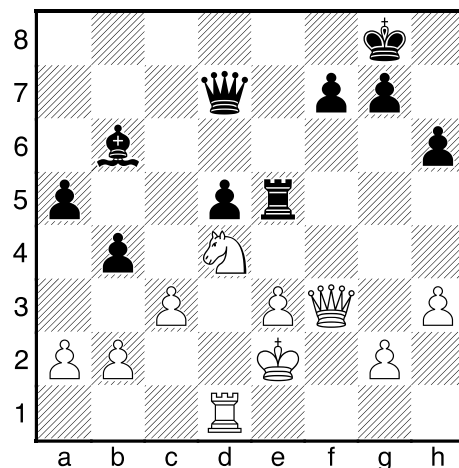
I was starting to get frustrated that there was no immediate win.

30...e5

30...h2+ 31. f2 e6 32. xd5 g6
33. a8+ h7 34. e4=;

30...e4! 31. f1 (31. xe4?? h2+-)
31...e5.

31. d4 d7 32. f2 b6
33. e2 b4



Black got everything they could dream of from the opening, and I was hoping to transform the positional edge into something tangible. Unfortunately, time-trouble reared its ugly head. We got 30 added minutes on move 40.

34. f4 e7

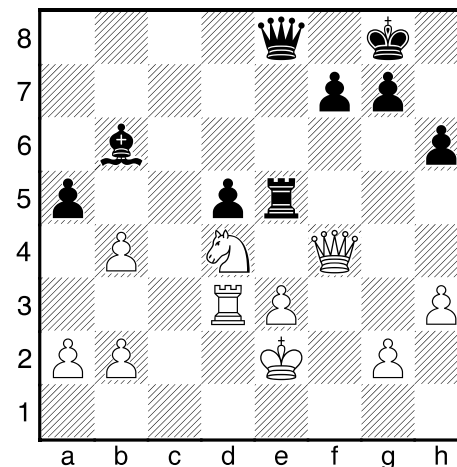
Slowly building up the pressure on the dark squares. This usually leads to blunders by the defender, which did indeed come.

35. d3

35. f5 xf5!? 36. xf5 xe3+ 37. f1 g1+ 38. e2 xg2+ 39. d3 g6
40. e5! (stops ...e4+ then e3+)

40...xh3+ 41. c2 g2+ 42. c1
(42. d2 e4+ 43. xe4 dxe4) 42...f2
should be good for Black, but still far from clear.

35...e8 36. cxb4??

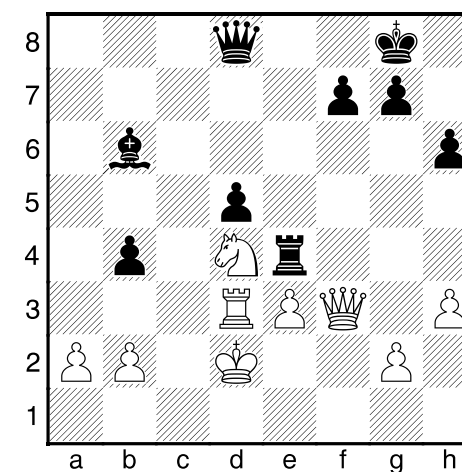


36...axb4??

"There is no remorse like the remorse of chess" – H.G.Wells.

I still had a minute and a half here, but I was so scared of using any more time, that the recapture was done automatically without thought. It was only when my hand touched the pawn, that I realized ...e4 just wins a piece for nothing at all.

37. d2 e4 38. g3 d8
39. f3



39...g6

Trying not to do anything committal before time control. With more time, I'd probably take on d4...

39...xd4 40. xd4 (40. exd4 a5-+)
40...a5! 41. xe4 (41. c2 xd4 42. exd4
xa2) 41...b3+ 42. e2 dxe4 43. xe4
bxa2-+.

40. c2 g5

We reach time control and finally take a breather. The situation is still good, but the regret of missing 36...e4 gnawed at me.

Tilt happens in classical chess too...

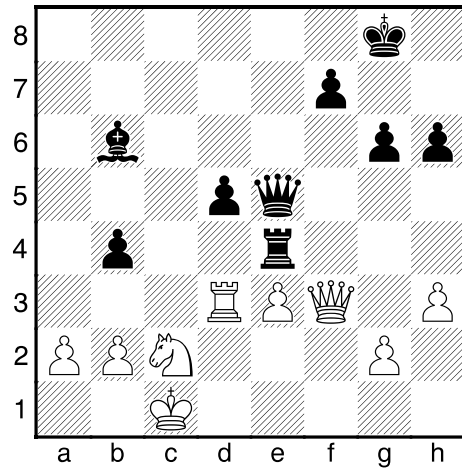
41. c1 e5

"There is no remorse like the remorse of chess"
- H.G.Wells.



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Ivanov



Trying to make "pretty" moves and pressure weaknesses, but White's position is surprisingly resilient.

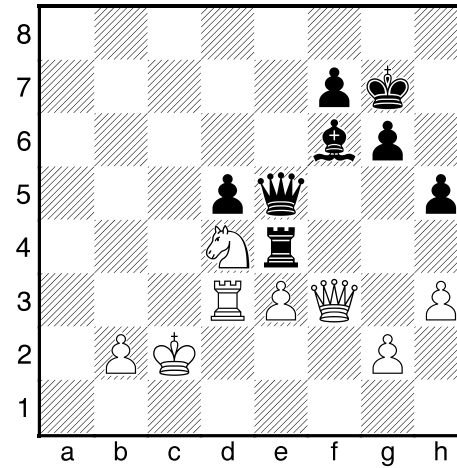
42.a3?!

This should only help open up the king. White should just bunker down instead.

42.♖f2 h5 43.♗d2 ♗f5 44.♗e2 (44.♗xd5? ♗f1+ 45.♗d1 ♗xg2-+) 44...♕c5 45.♗d2 ♗e6 46.♗d3 (46.♗d3?? d4!-+) 46...♕xe3 47.♗xe3 ♗xe3 48.♗xd5 ♗e1+ 49.♕c2 ♗a6 In a heavy-piece endgame, the difference in king safety should tell.

42...bxa3 43.♗xa3 ♕g7 44.♕b1 ♕d8 45.♗d3 ♕f6

46.♗d4 h5 47.♕c2



47...h4?

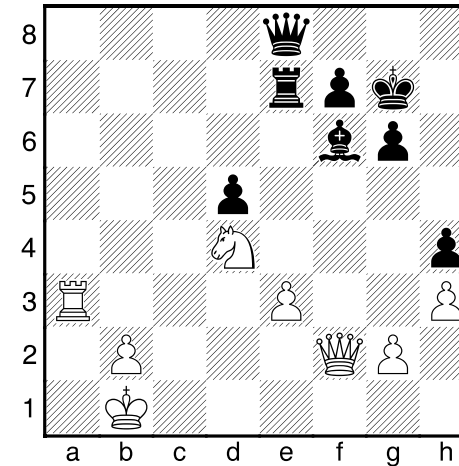
Another case of playing on autopilot. Sometimes it's better not to realize you've erred during the game, as this can actually take a toll on your remaining moves. Right after I let go of the pawn, I realized how strong 47...♕g5! was: the pin to d2 conveniently stops the ♕ from covering e3; Black wins the ♗e3 and White's position falls apart. So many missed chances!

48.♕b1

Here, I couldn't find anything direct so I continued to "massage" the position,

hoping that attacking e3 and b2 from different angles will eventually crack White.

48...♗e8 49.♗f2 ♗e7 50.♗a3



50...♗b7?

A complete failure in calculation. These positions with open kings require tactical acuity, and I was way too positional here.

For some reason, I had a mental block on taking his knight, thinking that since he can't move anyways, we should never trade him. A little concrete calculation proves this to be nonsense: 50...♕xd4! 51.exd4 ♗e1+ the most human and easiest

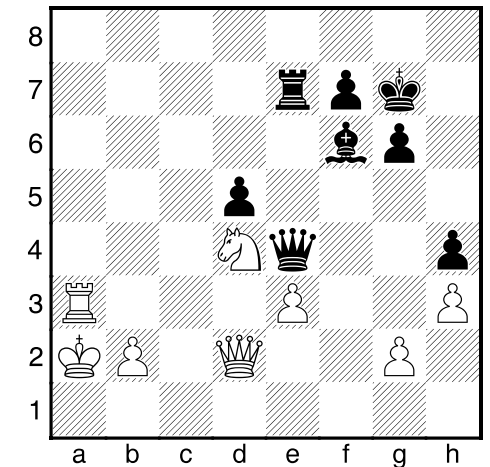
to find. (51...♗e2 52.♗f3 ♗e4+ is the most precise, yet it's far from obvious that Black wants a rook endgame. The margin of error is also smaller. 53.♗xe4 dxe4 54.b4 ♗xg2 55.b5 ♗g3!-+) 52.♕a2 ♗e4 53.♗d2 ♗b1+ 54.♕b3 ♗d1 55.♗f4 ♗d3+ 56.♕a2 ♗c4+ 57.♗b3 ♗xd4-+.

Always question your assumptions!

51.♕a2 ♗e4 52.♗d2 ♗c7

Dreaming of ...♕e7 where the rook might be guarding too much.

53.♗c3 ♗a7+ 54.♗a3 ♗e7



At this point I started to get frustrated that putting pieces on good squares wasn't enough to win this, and White wasn't blundering anything obvious.

55.♗d3 ♗e8 56.♗a3

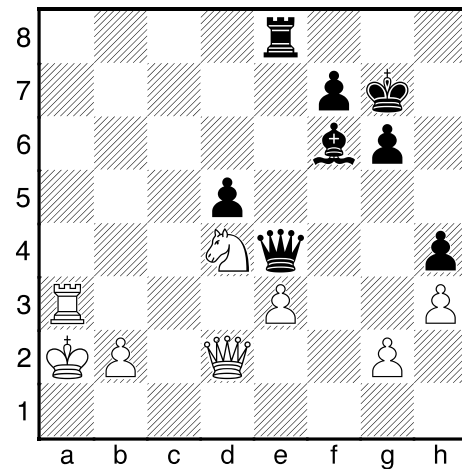
A rating loss like this would mean **another half-year of training, saving up for Europe, and going back to roll the dice again.**

I went outside on that **cold, Polish night**, found an empty street, and **screamed curses at the sky**, since there was no one to be angry at except myself.



Chess Canada

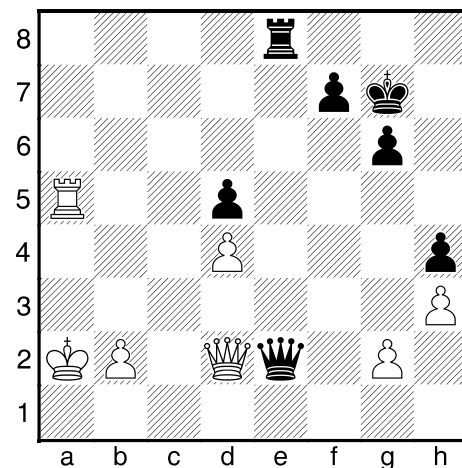
Ivanov



56...g5?

Wrong pressure point. Here, my earlier idea of ...e7 actually does something: 56...e7 57. a7 (57. b3?? a8+; 57. a4 g5+) 57...c5 58. a5 gxd4 59. exd4 e2

Analysis Diagram



Unbeknownst to me, all the rook endgames are winning since our deep freeze on the kingside is strong. 60. xe2 xe2 61. xd5 xg2 62. c5 g3 63. b4 xh3 64. b5 d3 65. b6 xd4 66. a3 h3 67. b7 h2 68. b8

d3+ 69. a2 h1 70. e5+ h7. The white king ran out of bricks. Not a forced line, but shows the difficulties White faces.

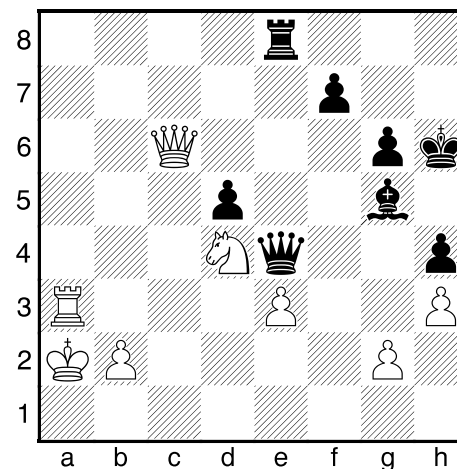
57. c3

I should go back with ...f6 but the stubborn part in me, paired with time trouble and frustration from all the earlier missed chances, leads into a death spiral.

57...h6

Playing with fire.

58. c6



58...e7?!

58...e3?? 59. xe3 xe3

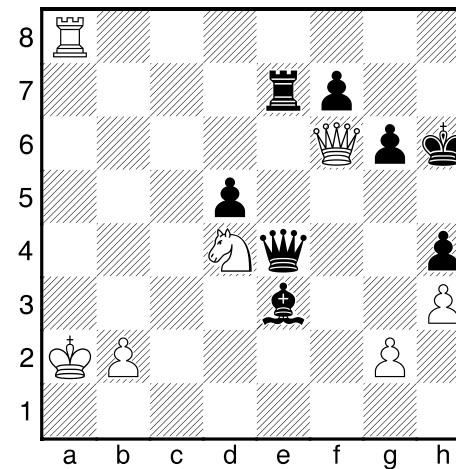
60. f5+- Nasty stuff.

58...g7! would be correct, but beyond a tilted player.

59. a8 xe3

This proved too tempting, since otherwise, why did I go for ...h6?

60. f6!



This was a cold shower, especially since I had a bit more than a minute left. The irony is that even this is better for Black, but my panicked mind was too negative to come up with the required resources.

60...e8

Capitulation, as I thought everything was losing.

With a bit more time and resilience 60...a7+! would be a game-changer: 61. xa7 xd4 62. xf7 xa7 63. xa7 xg2 Objectively drawish, but practically, Black is pressing.

Even 60...h5!? saves the game, but it requires an escape-artist:

61. f5! c4+ (61...gx5? 62. h8+ and mate.) 62. b1 f1+ 63. a2 c4+ 64. b1 f1+=;

61. h8+ h6 62. xh6+ xh6 63. h8+ g5 64. f3+ f5 65. d4+ f4 (65...g5 66. f3+=) 66. xh4+ e3 67. e1+ f4 or mate in 1 68. h4+=.

61. xe8

Even this is winning: 61. f5+ xf5 62. xh4+.

61...xe8 62. f5+

The shock of seeing mate in every line, coupled with the adrenaline from time trouble, made me slam the table in rage.

A rating loss like this would mean another half-year of training, saving up for Europe, and going back to roll the dice again.

I went outside on that cold, Polish night, **found an empty street, and screamed curses at the sky**, since there was no one to be angry at except myself. I got everything I wanted positionally, then my opponent gifted a million chances to convert this tactically, but I snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

After calming down, I realized that I would have to work on tactical conversion, as relying on intuition to stick my pieces on good squares wasn't going to cut it.

1-0

Sometimes it's better not to realize you've erred during the game, as this can actually take a toll on your remaining moves.

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov**Ivanov, Mike (2339)****Nijboer, Friso (2463)****B23***Maia Chess Open 2023 Porto (9.8),
02.09.2023*

This was the last round of the 2023 Maia Open, a great tournament in Porto, Portugal. I was also having a great tournament, drawing 3 GMs and staying undefeated until this point. A win would most likely get me another IM norm, while a draw would get some prize money.

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3

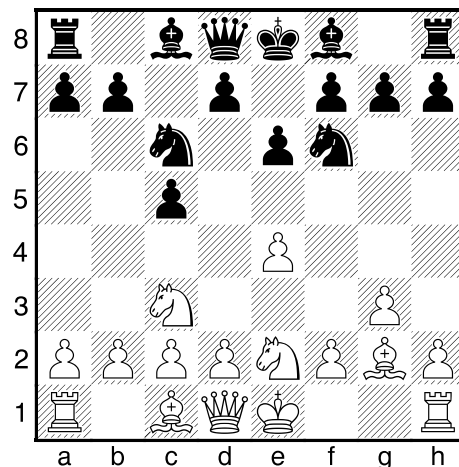
It may not seem like it, but this is my way of playing for the win. Friso is an experienced GM who's a fan of sharp chess. My job was to find a move order he would find uncomfortable, where I could attack without too much risk.

2...♘c6 3.♘ge2

3.g3 allows ...g6 which I was hoping to steer him away from. This move order still threatens d4, which players at his high level assume will be played.

3...e6

3...e5 4.♘d5±

4.g3 ♘f6 5.♙g2**5...d6**

5...d5 [Fischer-Spassky 1992](#) had a bunch of games along these lines, so I would be comfortable with these structures. 6.exd5 exd5 7.d4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♙g4 9.♘de2 ♙b4 10.h3 ♙xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♙f5 12.♖b1 is slightly more pleasant for White.

6.0-0 ♙d7 7.f4

Angling for a Closed Sicilian now. Black's plan here is less obvious than in the fianchetto setups.

7...♔b6

Perhaps 7...h5!? should be played, restraining further g4s and hoping for h4, ...hxd4 at the right point. With no central breaks, White also finds it hard to make progress.

8.d3 ♙e7

8... h5!?

9.h3

...♘g4 has to be stopped.

9...h5 10.♙e3

My chess friends like to make fun of me for playing severely down on material. Nonetheless, I think a strong player should have boundless optimism about saving pretty much any position. If you play something like this a hundred times, one time a miracle will happen.

...and not just saving any position

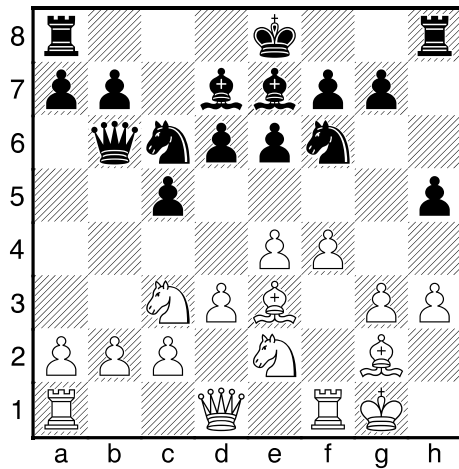
Here's Mike, optimistically grinding away on the good side of RB v Rp ending during the 2025 Canadian Blitz Championship. Everyone *knows* RB v R is a draw... *but...* first he won the pawn, and then he pushed the K to the edge... and then a miracle happened: 1-0.





Chess Canada

Ivanov



I could see he was uncomfortable here, not quite knowing what structure to go for. The opening can be considered a success, but conversion is key...

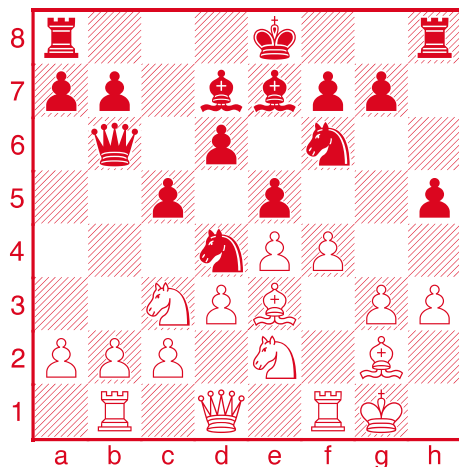
10...e5

10...d5! 11.e5 (11.exd5 exd5 12.♖xd5? ♕xd5 13.♕xd5 ♕xh3+) 11...d4 12.exf6 ♕xf6 13.♕f2 dxc3 14.bxc3 ♖a5=.

11.♖b1

Trying to make use of the awkward black queen. In general, e5, c5, and ♖b6 don't go well together.

11...♘d4



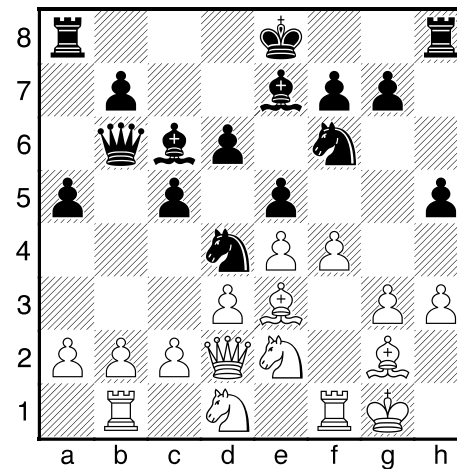
12.♕d2

Playing too much on zombie mode. White should have smelled a rat.

It's a real shame not finding this chance, presented on a silver platter: **12.b4!** 12...cxb4 (12...0-0 13.♖h2 Black can't really do much! 13...♖ac8 14.bxc5 ♖xc5 15.♖xb7 ♖c7 16.♖xc7 ♖xc7 17.♖d2±) 13.♘xd4 exd4 14.♕f2± is what I missed, maybe because the geometry is unusual. Black's pawns will fall one by one and White is already much better.

editor – 12.♖h2? gives Black a chance to grab the initiative with 12...h4 13.g4 ♕xg4!±.

12...a5 13.♘d1 ♕c6



14.♘c1

Typical Closed Sicilian theme, but here it provokes a crisis and lets Black get the activity he wants. The simpler c3! would have kept the initiative on our side.

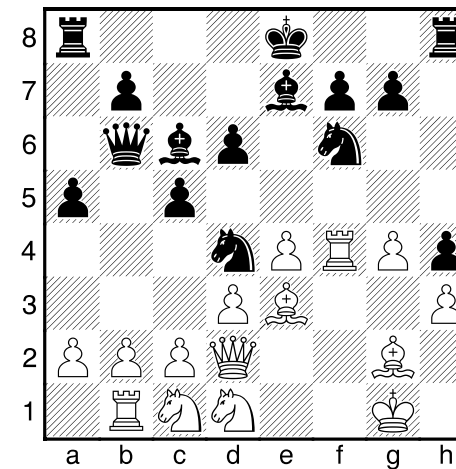
14.c3 ♘xe2+ 15.♖xe2 ♖c7 (15...0-0 16.c4 the battle between d5/d4 outposts is clearly in our favour, White is much better.) 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.c4 0-0 Now Black has a lot of weak pawns and squares to protect. 18.♘c3 ♖ad8 19.♘d5 ♕xd5 20.cxd5 b6 21.♖bc1 g6 22.d4!±.

14...h4

Black has to go forward, otherwise White's pawn armada will simply squeeze them off the board. 14...0-0 15.c3 ♘e6 16.f5 ♘c7 17.c4±.

15.g4 exf4 16.♖xf4

16.♕xf4 slightly more precise. The e3 square is needed for the knight.



16...d5

Now the play becomes both sharp and principled. Both sides are obliged into uncompromising moves.

16...0-0 17.g5 ♘d7 18.♖xh4 ♘e5 We both underestimated this for Black

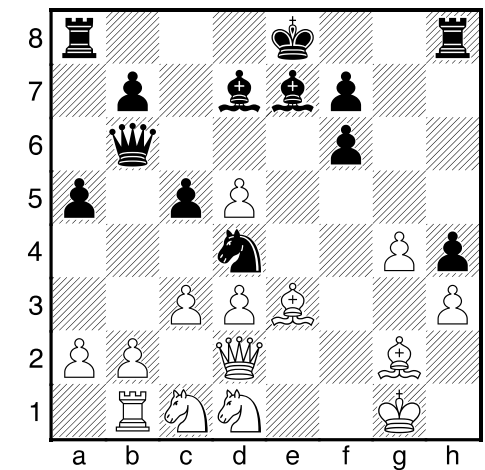
17.♖xf6!

Has to be done, otherwise our pieces are too late to the fight.

17...gxf6

17...♕xf6!? 18.exd5 ♕a4 19.b3 ♕d7 20.c3 ♘b5 21.a4 ♘d6 22.♘f2=. I'd prefer White, but both sides have equal chances.

18.exd5 ♕d7 19.c3



19...f5!?

This guy clearly likes to have fun. Perhaps the concept isn't fully sound (only Caissa knows), but my king is worried for the first time this game.

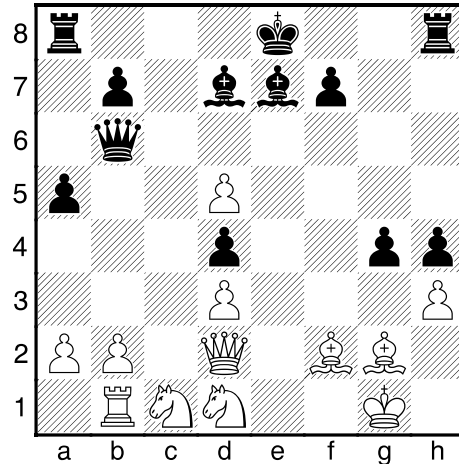
19...♘b5 20.a4 ♘d6 21.b4 axb4 22.cxb4 ♖xa4 23.♘b3 ♖xb4 24.♕xc5 ♖xb3 25.♕xb6 ♖xb1 26.♕c5 Another imbalanced equality that could have happened.

20.cxd4

We have to take up the challenge, for good or ill.



20...cxd4 21.♙f2 fxc4



22.♘b3?

I should have smelled that the white king needs another defender, and the white knight doesn't belong here.

22.♘e2 ♜g8 23.♙xd4 ♜g6 24.♘f4 ♜h6 25.♙e3 gxf3 26.♘xh3 ♜f6 27.♘df2 The smoke has cleared and White has two knights for a rook. Our king isn't the safest, but we shouldn't get mated at least.

22...♜g6 23.♙xd4

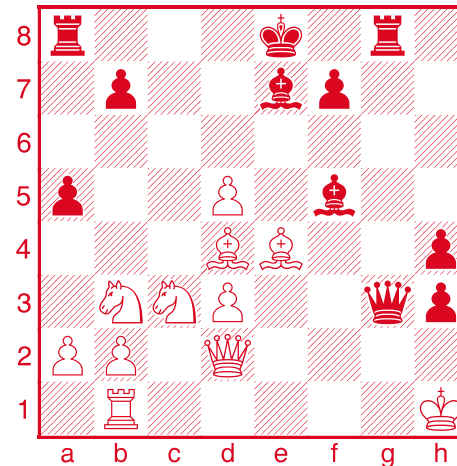
23.♙h1 Prophylaxis helps here! 23...gxf3 24.♙f3 ♙g4 Black has to keep producing threats. 25.♜f4 ♙xf3+ 26.♜xf3 ♜g8 27.♜xh3 With dynamic equality. 27...♜g5 28.♘xd4 ♜xd5+ 29.♜f3 (29.♘f3?? ♜g3+) 29...♜xf3+ 30.♘xf3.

23...♜g8 24.♙h1 gxf3
25.♙e4 ♙f5 26.♘c3

I've restored some coordination, but the kingside is still precarious.

26...♜g3

Threatening ...♜f3 after the bishops are traded.



Time for an only defensive move!

27.♜e2?

My calculation wasn't up to the task this game. I spent quite some time here, but everything looked scary... or maybe that was just my fear of Friso!

27.♜h2? ♙xe4+ 28.♘xe4 ♜f3+ #1;

27.♜g1? ♙xe4+ 28.♘xe4 ♜f3+ 29.♙h2 ♜xg1 30.♙xg1 f5+ 31.d6 fxe4 32.dxe7 ♜g3+ 33.♙h1 exd3 34.♜f2 ♜xf2 35.♙xf2 ♜c8 and this endgame should be winning; too many scary black pawns;

27.♜f1? ♙xe4+ 28.♘xe4 ♜g2+ ♙-+;

27.♜f2 covers all key squares, and goes into much more acceptable endgames: 27...♙xe4+ 28.dxe4 ♜g2+

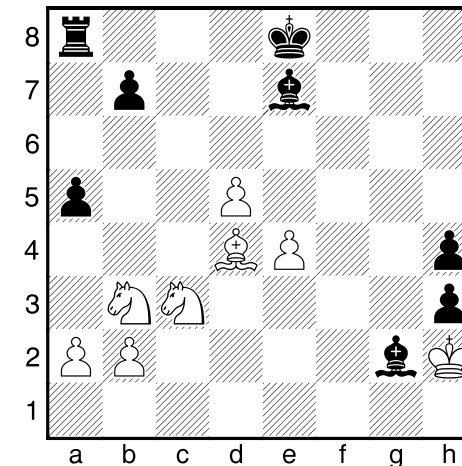
29.♜xg2 hxg2+ 30.♙h2 a4 31.♘d2 ♙g5 32.♘c4! (32.♘f3 ♙f4+ 33.♙g1 h3 White is struggling) 32...♙f4+ 33.♙h3! The king must walk a tightrope, but he can survive: 33...♜g3+ 34.♙xh4 ♜a6 35.d6 and somehow White is hanging on!

Would I have found it? Probably not...

27...♙g4 28.♜e3 f5!

This is the problem. Not sure what I hallucinated, now White is doomed.

29.♜g1 ♜xe3 30.♙xe3 fxe4 31.dxe4 ♙f3+ 32.♙h2 ♜xg1 33.♙xg1 ♙g2 34.♙d4



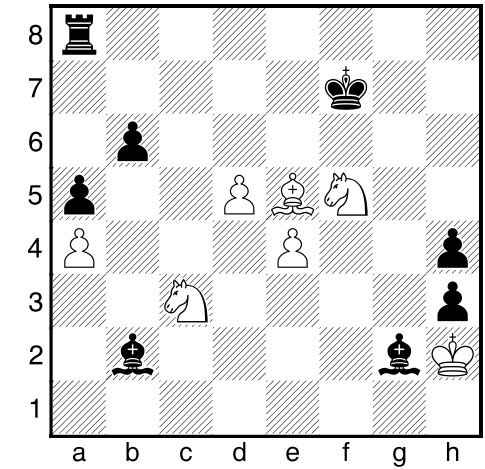
34...♙g5

34...0-0-0 With the rook coming to f8-f1-h1, White can resign with a clear conscience. 35.♘c5 ♜f8 36.♘d3 ♜f1 37.♘f2 ♙d6+ 38.e5 ♙xe5+ 39.♙xe5 ♜xf2+.

35.♙e5 ♙f7

I'm always a hair's length away from mate, while the knights aren't as pretty as they seem. If only those e4/d5 pawns were a little further...

36.♘d4 ♙c1 37.♘f5 ♙xb2 38.a4 b6?!



Here you can see the effect of time trouble as Friso had to make three moves to reach time control. Sadly, even fourth-rate moves are good enough to win here.

39.♙d4

Hoping for something like ...♙xc3, ♙xc3 ♙xe4?, ♘d6+! Hope springs eternal.

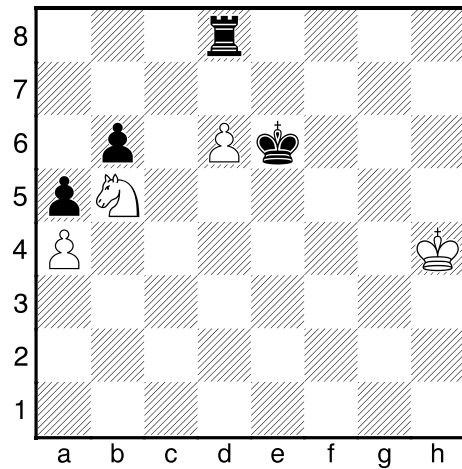
39...♜d8 40.♘b5 ♙xd4

Despite having seconds left to reach move 40, Friso manages to not blunder into any knight tricks, after which the pawns are doomed. If White could hold both pawns, it would be another story.

Never too late to mess up!



41. ♖fxd4 ♙xe4 42. d6 ♙d3
43. ♖xh3 ♙xb5 44. ♖xb5 ♙e6
45. ♖xh4



My chess friends like to make fun of me for playing severely down on material. Nonetheless, I think a strong player should have boundless optimism about saving pretty much any position. If you play something like this a hundred times, one time a miracle will happen. Just not this time :(

45... ♖xd6 46. ♖g4 ♖d1
47. ♖f3 ♖a1 48. ♖d4+ ♙d5
49. ♖b5 ♙c5!

Never too late to mess up!
49... ♖xa4?? 50. ♖c3+= ♙c4 51. ♖xa4
b5 52. ♙e3 ♙b4 (52... bxa4 53. ♖d2
♙b3 54. ♖c1 ♙a2 55. ♖c2= traps the black
♙, which blocks the pawns.) 53. ♖b6
♙c3 54. ♖d5+ ♙c4 55. ♖c7 b4
56. ♖d2 ♙b3 57. ♖c1 ♙a2 58. ♖b5 b3
59. ♖c3+ ♙a1 60. ♖a4=.

0-1

And so, all good things come to an end, including my hopes for this tournament. It hurt, especially since it's hard to come back down to earth after a streak of good results. No money, no norm, but at least a feeling that the game quality was good, and many ideas were tested.

As a silver lining, Friso was kind enough to buy me a drink after and analyze the game together, where we found some of the ways I could survive Black's attack. This type of loss was instrumental to figuring out what was still needed: better calculation in critical moments, not fearing ghosts, and keeping the initiative going!

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

**Ivanov, Mike (2364)
Diaz Reyes, Kyllian
(2012)**

A08

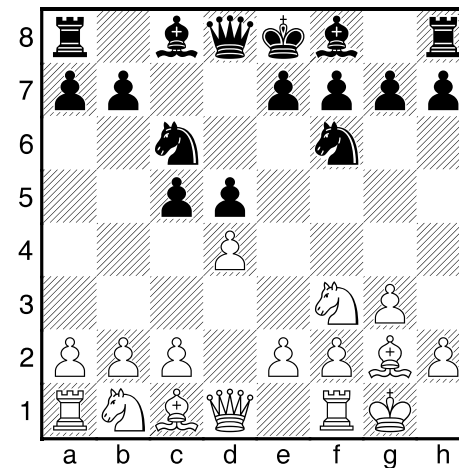
*6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(1.19), 2024*

I had arrived to the tournament the day before the first round, and realized to my dismay that the Airbnb I was staying at was an hour by tram from the playing hall. One wrong letter in the address made all the difference...

I decided to turn this into a positive by spending every commuting minute on calculation and openings. The calculation part worked wonders, while the first round opening wasn't as inspiring.....

Before the round started, there was confusion about the pairings, and I first shook hands with the wrong kid. Thankfully, the right one came along before I could start showing my opening prep.

1. ♖f3 d5 2. g3 ♖f6 3. ♙g2 c5
4. 0-0 ♖c6 5. d4

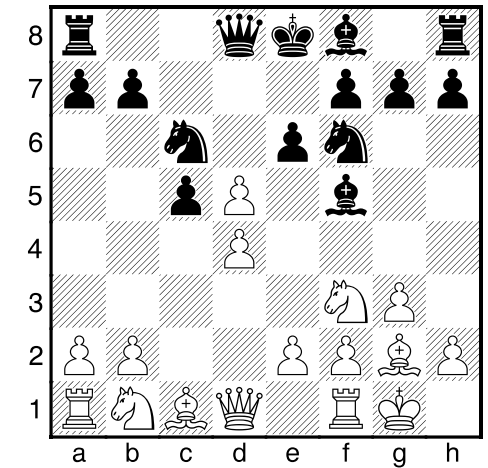


Hoping for a reversed Gruenfeld. The ♖f3+g3 repertoire usually works well against kids, who don't get as much practice here as they do against e4/d4.

5... ♙f5

I knew this, along with ... ♙g4, was not supposed to be good.... yet I couldn't remember why for the life of me, and had to spend half an hour on figuring out why.

6. c4 e6 7. cxd5



7... ♖xd5

These positions are all pleasant for White, as the bishop on f5 doesn't belong there in the isolated pawn structures: 7... exd5 8. ♙g5 ♙e7 (8... c4 9. b3±) 9. dxc5 ♙xc5 (9... 0-0 10. e3 ♙xc5 11. ♖c3 ♙e7 12. ♖d4 ♖xd4 13. ♙xd4 ♙e6 the bishop realizes where his home should have been. 14. ♖fd1±) 10. ♙xf6 gxf6 Super ugly for Black. (10... ♙xf6 11. ♙xd5 a pawn up for very little in return.)

8. ♖c3

Not a precise punishment. Now Black gets a playable position.

Very often in the Reti, ♖e5 going for these double e-pawns is incredibly strong. Including here: 8. ♖e5! ♖xe5 9. dxe5 ♙xb1 10. ♖xb1 ♙d7±.

8... ♖xc3 9. bxc3 ♙e4!

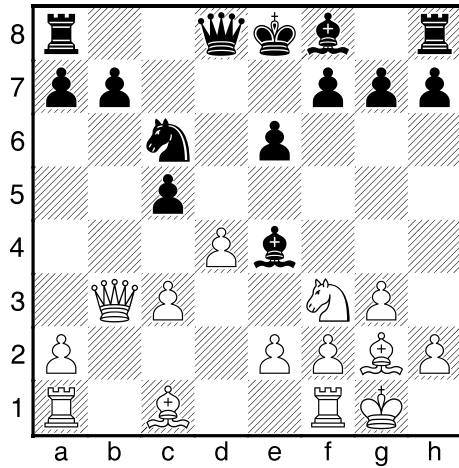
Practically equalizing.

10. ♙b3



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Trying to pose some problems, now that my dragon bishop has been neutralized.

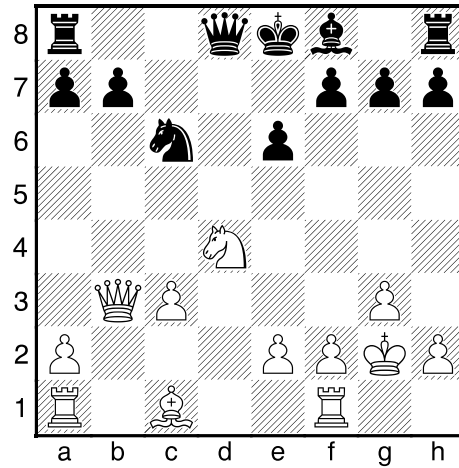
10...cxd4

10...♞a5!? 11.♞b5+ ♞c6 12.♞d3 ♞e7 13.e4 0-0 Black should be fine, despite the a5 knight.

11.♞xd4

11.♞xb7!? For some reason, I didn't take this seriously. The queen is feeling just fine, and Black's light-squares are becoming suspect. 11...♞b8 12.♞a6 dxc3 13.♞c4 ♞d5 14.♞xc3 ♞e7 15.♞f4 ♞f6 16.♞c5 ♞xa1 17.♞xb8 ♞f6 18.♞f4 where playing White is slightly more pleasant, but a drawish endgame should come soon.

11...♞xg2 12.♞xg2



12...♞d5+

Inaccurate. Now both sides have an isolani, but White is more ready to use the weaknesses.

12...♞c7 13.♞b5 ♞c8 14.♞a3±;

12...♞xd4 13.cxd4 ♞d5+ 14.♞xd5 exd5 15.♞f4±;

12...♞b6 was probably the best way to trade queens. The endgame is harmless. 13.♞a4 (13.♞xb6 axb6 14.♞b5 0-0-0) 13...♞a5 (13...♞c5 14.♞b3 ♞e7 15.♞e3 ♞c7 16.♞d4 ♞a5 17.♞xa5 ♞xa5 18.♞b5 0-0 19.♞xa7 ♞c4±) 14.♞xa5 (14.♞c4 ♞c5 15.♞b3 ♞b6 would be a funny repetition.) 14...♞xa5 15.♞b5 ♞d8! 16.♞xa7 ♞c5 17.♞b5 ♞e7. This endgame will be very hard to win, considering Black's activity.

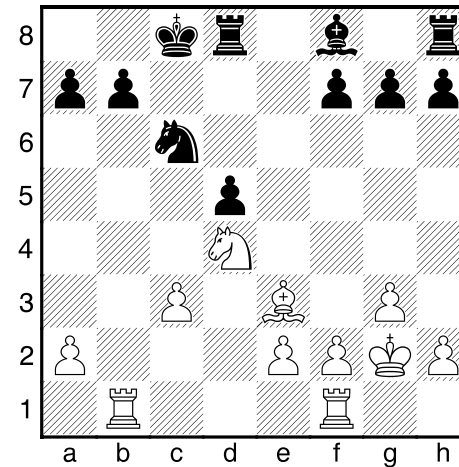
13.♞xd5 exd5 14.♞b1 14.♞e3!

14...0-0-0

I assumed this must be good for White, but it's a fleeting edge. If Black can get ♞d6, ♞d7, and ♞a5-c4 in, they

will have consolidated.

15.♞e3



15...♞a5?

15...a6?? 16.♞xc6 bxc6 17.♞b6±;

15...♞d7 After this, I couldn't see any concrete way to use my development, and thought I may have to start squeezing Black's weaknesses after ♞xc6. Thankfully my opponent had other ambitions. 16.♞xc6 bxc6 17.♞b3 (17.c4 d4 18.♞f4 ♞d6 19.♞xd6 ♞xd6 20.♞b3 ♞e8 This is a little too close to a drawn rook endgame for my liking.) 17...♞b7 (17...♞d6 I expected this to happen, where I'm enjoying the b-file but Black is one rook trade away from objectively holding a draw.) 18.♞xb7 ♞xb7 19.♞b1+ ♞a8.

16.♞b5

I'm not really sure what my opponent missed, perhaps he was just too entranced by that c4 outpost.

16...a6?

Mistakes rarely come alone. Perhaps

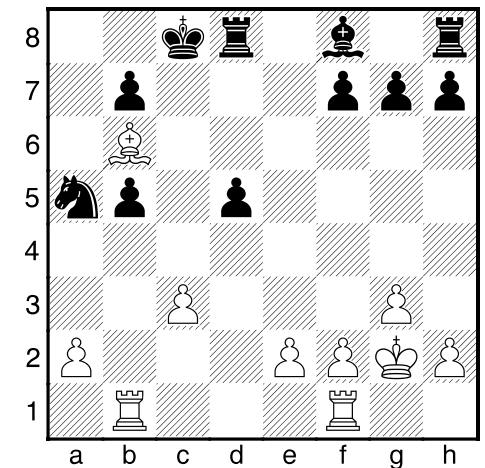
Kyllian was counting on ♞a7+ when things aren't so clear.

17.♞b6!

The only way to get a cleanly winning endgame.

17.♞a7+ ♞b8 18.♞b6 ♞d6 19.♞xa5 ♞xa7± with healthier pawns than in the game.

17...axb5



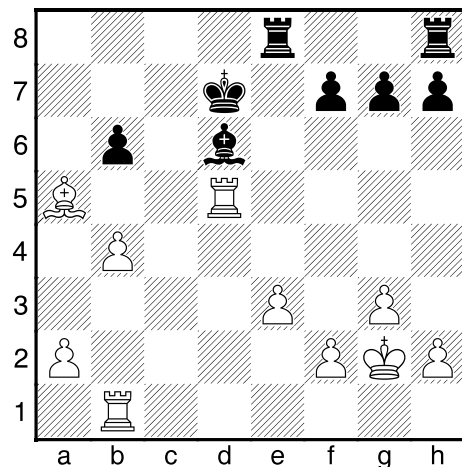
18.♞xa5

18.♞xd8 ♞xd8 19.♞xb5 b6 20.♞xb6 ♞c7 21.♞a6 should also be winning, but why complicate when life is already good?

18...♞e8 19.e3 b4 20.cxb4

The computer has no biases towards taking free pawns; it goes: 20.♞fd1 now Black's king is really precarious. 20...bxc3 21.♞xc3 ♞d8 22.♞dc1+-.

20...♞d6 21.♞fd1 ♞d7 22.♞xd5 b6



23.♖bd1

23.♙xb6 ♖c6 24.♖bd1 ♙xb4 25.♙d8 is an interesting way to attack too. The game was just simpler.

23...bxa5 24.♖xd6+

Black's biggest problem isn't the plethora of missing pawns, but the contrast in rook activity plus king safety.

24...♙e7 25.♖d7+ ♙e6

Black resigned.

Sometimes, lengthy thinks in such positions are a good encouragement for your opponent to get it over with, time permitting.

In the first round, you're still trying to feel the strength of your opponents and get into rhythm. This game showed that I was in good shape and didn't need to rely solely on opening advantages.

1-0

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

Kumar, Sanjit S (1908)

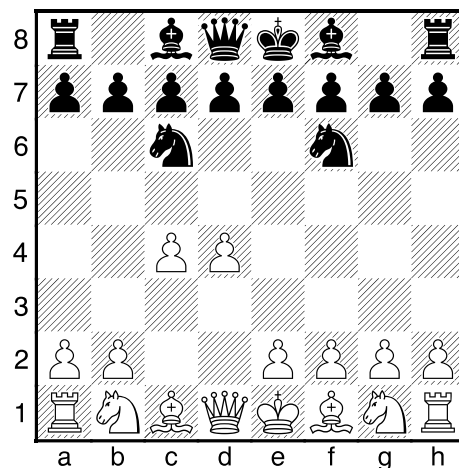
Ivanov, Mike (2364)

A50

*6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(2.19), 2024*

Going into round 2, you realize that the direction of your tournament rests on this game. A win will lead to playing up and fighting on the top boards, while a loss or a draw means you're stuck playing talented masters who are lower rated while you're not in your best form.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 ♘c6



Knights' Tango

When playing kids, one of the last advantages I can still claim is knowing more sidelines which they

haven't learned to refute yet! The resulting strange structures may also confuse them. The Knights' Tango is good when playing for the win, as it's provocative and often leads to closed centers.

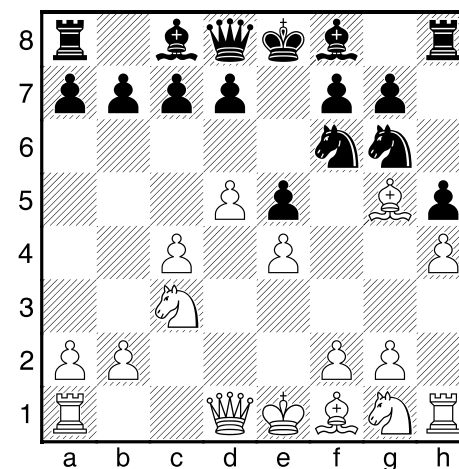
3.♘c3 e5 4.d5 ♘e7 5.e4

Once upon a time, IM Justin Sarkar played 5. h4 against me and won, although not without adventures: 5.h4 ♘f5 6.♙d3 ♘h6 7.♙g5±, Sarkar – Ivanov, 2015.

5...♘g6

This position is possible with colours reversed, where the h–push would also be a line.

6.h4 h5 7.♙g5



To be honest, I was already out of book here and improvising, although the idea of ♙g5-♙e2-g3-♙xh5 is standard.

7...♙c5

I was lucky that this works, as ...♙e7

seemed really passive to me: 7...♙e7 8.g3 d6 9.♙xf6 ♙xf6 10.♙e2 ♘f8 11.♙xh5±.

8.g3

8.♙e2 d6 9.♙xf6 ♙xf6 the attack on f2 saves the black h–pawn.

8...d6 9.♙h3 ♙xh3

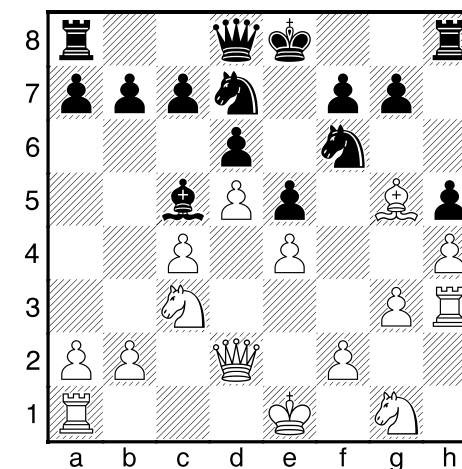
10.♙xh3?!

The rook will be misplaced here. 10.♙xh3 ♘f8 11.0-0 ♘h7 12.♙d2 ♙d4 13.♙e2 0-0±.

10...♘f8

The knight needs to find greener pastures.

11.♙d2 ♘8d7



editor – No wonder kids get confused playing against the Tango: Black has played five of his eleven moves with this one ♘ — ♘b8-c6-e7-g6-f8-d7 — just to land on a square it could have reached in one move! If this was one of Morphy's 1.e4 e5 open games, then Black would already have been



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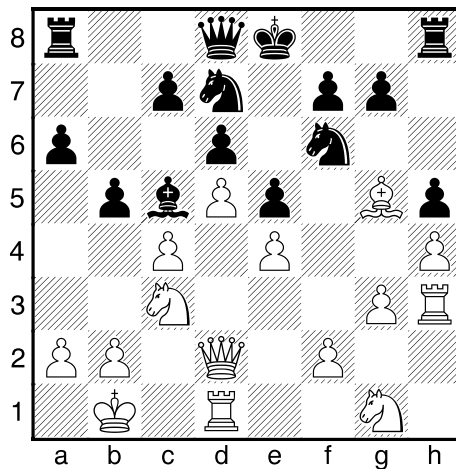
Ivanov

mated, but here Black is somehow on the slightly better side of equality (!?!). The answer, I suppose, is that Black has caught up in development and White's extra space is not an advantage with two pairs of minors gone.

12.0-0-0 a6

The position has stabilized for Black and now I can use the c4 pawn as a hook for my attack.

13.♖b1 b5



14.cxb5?!

Wrong treatment of the structure. Just like in the Saemisch King's Indian, White should allow Black to take on c4: 14.f3 bxc4 15.♖e2 ♖b6 16.♖h2 ♖b8 17.♖g2♭ Black is dictating terms but there's no clear road to victory.

14...axb5 15.f3

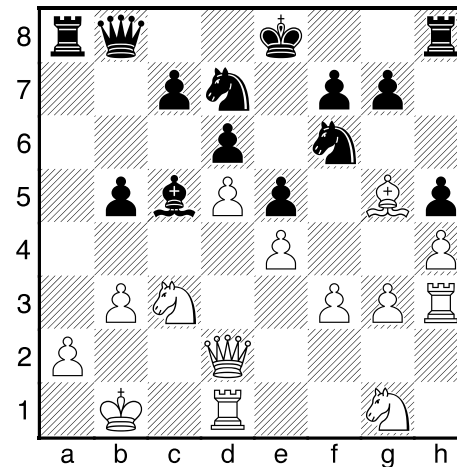
15.♖xb5 ♖b8 16.♖c3 ♖a7 17.♖e3 ♖xe4 18.♖xe4 ♖xa2+ 19.♖c2 ♖b8 20.♖b1 ♖a4+ 21.♖d3 ♖b3+ 22.♖c3 ♖d4 23.♖c1 ♖c5+ 24.♖e2 ♖c4+

25.♖d1 0-0 26.♖ge2 ♖d3 I won't pretend to have seen this over the board, but it shows the dangers White has to contend with if he's greedy.

15...♖b8?!

Inaccuracy which I was kicking myself over during the game. After 15...b4 Black creates threats a lot sooner, and White can't set up a barricade: 15...b4 16.♖ce2 ♖a6 17.♖c1 ♖a8 18.♖ge2 b3! 19.axb3 0-0 20.♖hh1 ♖b8♭.

16.b3



16...♖b6

16...b4!? 17.♖a4 ♖xa4! 18.bxa4 b3 I underestimated this during the game. 19.♖e2 0-0 20.♖a1 bxa2♭ 21.♖xa2? ♖b4 Black is already winning since the white pieces are too awkward to stop the onslaught of threats.

17.♖ge2 0-0

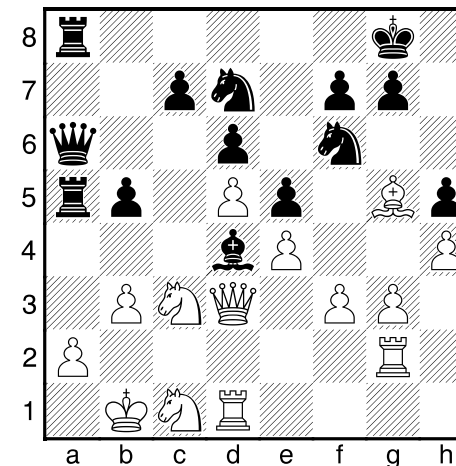
It's finally time to castle, since the danger is gone and we need the second rook.

18.♖d3 ♖a5

Starting to pile up. White's problem is that they're tied to passive defence with no real breakthrough on the kingside, hence no counterplay.

19.♖h2 ♖fa8 20.♖g2 ♖a6 21.♖c1 ♖d4

Making way for the knights to enter the party.



22.♖e3?

22.♖c2 ♖c5 23.♖e2 ♖fd7 24.b4♭ becomes a mess, but that's the best White can hope for at this point.

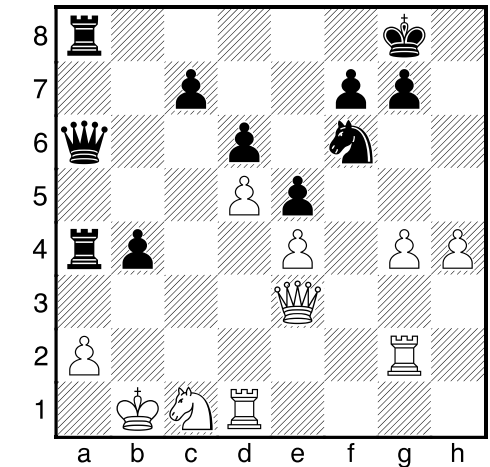
22...♖c5

This knight is important first and foremost to take away the a4 square from their knight. With the blockade gone, their castle crumbles.

23.♖d2 ♖xe3 24.♖xe3 b4 25.♖a4 ♖xa4 26.bxa4 ♖xa4 27.g4

Too little, too late.

27...hxcg4 28.fxcg4



28...b3

Some moves have to be played by hand, and this is one of them. As Tal once told Kasparov: "Garri, *first sacrifice, then think*".

29.♖xb3

29.axb3 ♖a1+ 30.♖c2 ♖a2+ 31.♖xa2 ♖xa2+ 32.♖c3 ♖xcg2+;

29.♖xb3 ♖xa2 30.♖xa2 ♖xa2+ 31.♖c1 ♖b8+.

29...♖xe4

The last attacker comes in to finish the show.

30.g5 ♖a3

White resigned.

Overall, a fairly clean game, with some attacking inaccuracies like ...♖b8. The hardest part was defusing h4 in the opening, as these positions can get bad really fast. With this win, I was ready to try more serious openings against more serious players.

0-1

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

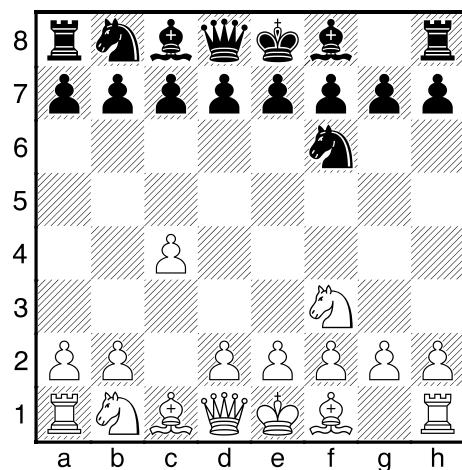
Ivanov, Mike (2364)
Ambartsumova, Karina
(2404)

**A13**

6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
 (3.4), 2024

Going into this game, I was approaching the 2400 mark, and my thoughts were already skewed by results and possible outcomes. This is clearly seen in the last part of the game, where nerves played a decisive role.

1.♖f3 ♘f6 2.c4

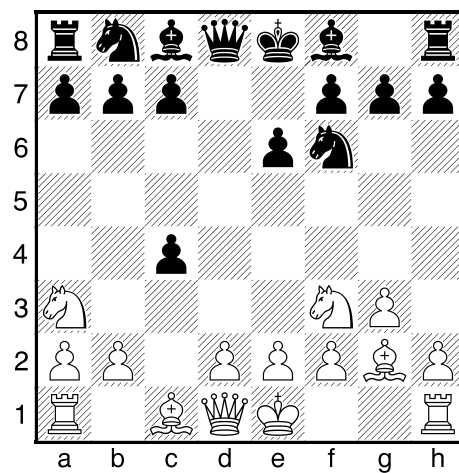


One perk of a 1.♖f3 repertoire is the flexibility with early move orders, making Benoni and Gruenfeld players uncomfortable. I usually play 2.g3 but this way I got to avoid symmetrical lines since Karina didn't play the symmetrical English.

2...e6

Before playing ...e6, Karina stared at me as if to say, you're not supposed to do that! She clearly wasn't expecting this line to happen.

3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♘a3!?



Another little surprise, counting on Black not knowing the line well. In a way it was a sort of bluff, as I'm hoping that Black believes me that taking the knight on a3 is scary for her. Karina spent over 15 minutes here, trying to decide what to do with this knight. Chess principles probably told her that taking was critical, but she seemed scared of my prep, as I was playing this for the first time. So she tried to play solidly, but this turned out to be simply passive.

5.♖a4+ ♘bd7 6.♖xc4 c5 is what most people study and what I wanted to avoid.

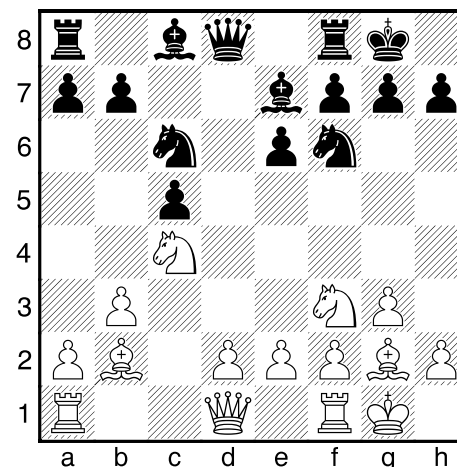
5...c5

5...♗xa3 6.bxa3 0-0 7.♗b2 ♘bd7 8.♖c2 c5 9.0-0 (9.♖xc4?! b5!?) 9...♖c7

10.♖ab1 (10.a4 b6=) 10...♖b8 11.♖xc4 b5 12.♖c2 ♗b7=.

6.♘xc4 ♘c6 7.b3 ♗e7 8.♗b2 0-0 9.0-0

9.d4!?

**9...♗d7?!**

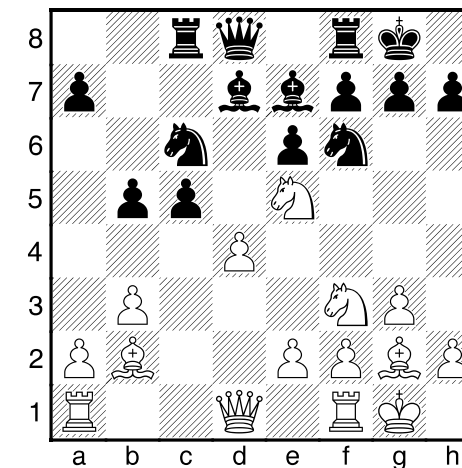
This is already an inaccurate move order, as Black doesn't get to develop properly. Not that the position is easy to play anyways, as Black will have to walk through hoops while developing. 9...♖c7 10.d4 ♗d8 is a much better try for Black.

10.d4

My first thought was 10.♗fe5, but if Black gets control over d4, even the bishop pair shouldn't scare her much. 10...♖c7 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♖c1 ♗fd8 Black is solid, with good chances of taking over the center entirely.

10...b5?!

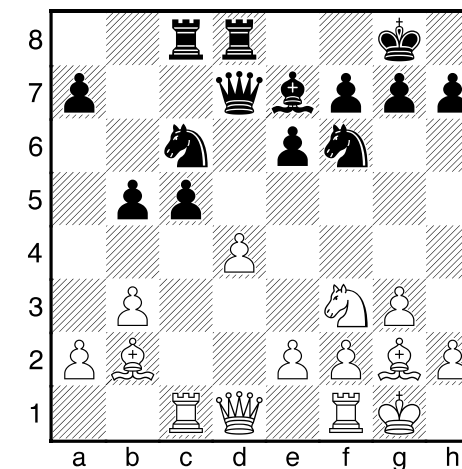
Black lashes out, but only ends up with more weaknesses. In passive positions, drastic attempts at activity shouldn't work.

11.♘ce5 ♖c8**12.♘xd7**

I get tempted by the bishop pair, which I wanted to take even on the last move. This gets an easy advantage to press, but dxc5 is more ambitious: 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♖c1 ♗b6 14.♖d6±.

12...♖xd7

12...♘xd7 13.d5 exd5 14.♖xd5 with a slight but steady edge.

13.♖c1 ♗fd8



Chess Canada

Ivanov

Once, GM Grischuk talked about terrorizing his opponents with draws. I get to terrorize Black with slightly better positions without much chance of losing.

14.dxc5

I happily go into the ensuing endgame: the $\Delta b5$ is weak, the bishop pair is about to come out, and Black has tactical problems with the back rank.

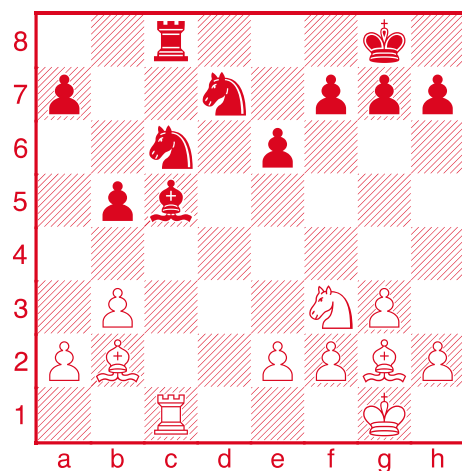
14... $\mathbb{W}$ xd1

Massive exchanges only help White here, but Black can't really avoid them: 14... $\mathbb{Q}$ xc5 15. $\mathbb{W}$ xd7 $\mathbb{Q}$ xd7 16. $\mathbb{R}$ fd1 $\mathbb{Q}$ e7 (16... $\mathbb{Q}$ b6 17. $\mathbb{Q}$ e1 $\pm$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}$ e1 $\mathbb{Q}$ b6 18. $\mathbb{R}$ xd8+ $\mathbb{Q}$ xd8 19. $\mathbb{R}$ xc8 $\mathbb{Q}$ xc8 Black seems to be hanging on by the hair of her chinny chin chin.

15. $\mathbb{R}$ fxd1 $\mathbb{R}$ xd1+ 16. $\mathbb{R}$ xd1 $\mathbb{Q}$ xc5 17. $\mathbb{R}$ c1

The real problem for Black: too many pieces on the c-file to untangle, and the b-pawn might become collateral damage.

17... $\mathbb{Q}$ d7



18. $\mathbb{Q}$ d4

A natural move but it lets Black get away with "just" a missing pawn. Something is rotten on the c-file, and White has a huge advantage after $\mathbb{Q}$ e1!

18. $\mathbb{Q}$ e1! is surprisingly strong. Black cannot unravel her pieces properly, with White clearing the bowling pins on the c-file while preparing to eat the weakened pawns. 18... $\mathbb{Q}$ e7 19. $\mathbb{Q}$ d3 $\mathbb{Q}$ d6 20. $\mathbb{R}$ xc8+ $\mathbb{Q}$ xc8 21. $\mathbb{Q}$ c6 (editor – if the b5 pawn was back on b6 this would be only $\pm$, now White goes up a pawn and keeps the B-pair, winning.) 21... $\mathbb{Q}$ b8 22. $\mathbb{Q}$ xb5 a6 23. $\mathbb{Q}$ c4 $\mathbb{Q}$ b6 24. $\mathbb{Q}$ e5 $\mathbb{Q}$ xc4 25.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}$ xe5 26. $\mathbb{Q}$ xe5 f6 27. $\mathbb{Q}$ d3+ with a technically winning endgame. The white king will come to a4/a5, and the black knight will be kicked out of guard-posts with trade threats.

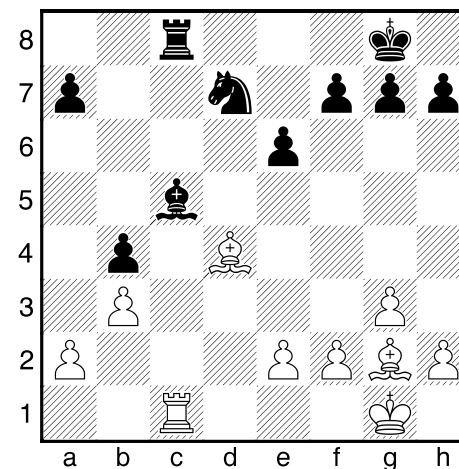
(editor – after 18. $\mathbb{Q}$ e1 b4 stops White playing b4, but 19. $\mathbb{Q}$ xc6 $\mathbb{R}$ xc6 20. $\mathbb{Q}$ d3 and $\mathbb{Q}$ d4 wins at least an exchange.)

18... $\mathbb{Q}$ xd4

18... $\mathbb{Q}$ e7 19. $\mathbb{Q}$ xb5+-;

18... $\mathbb{Q}$ xd4 19. $\mathbb{Q}$ xd4 $\mathbb{Q}$ db8 20. $\mathbb{Q}$ e5+-.

19. $\mathbb{Q}$ xd4 b4!

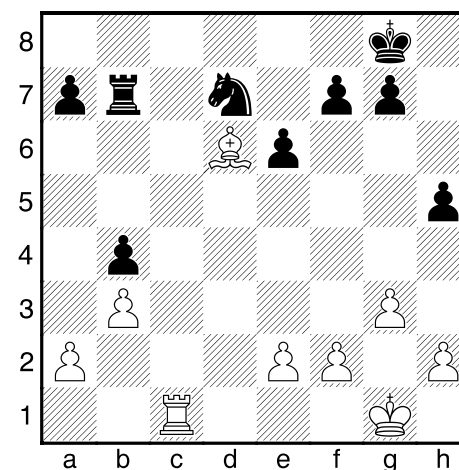


For some reason, I missed this from afar. Thankfully, Black's weakened back-rank nets us a pawn by force.

20. $\mathbb{Q}$ b7 $\mathbb{R}$ b8

20... $\mathbb{R}$ c7 21. $\mathbb{Q}$ a6 the threat of $\mathbb{Q}$ b5 terrorizes Black into giving up the a-pawn.

21. $\mathbb{Q}$ xc5 $\mathbb{R}$ xb7 22. $\mathbb{Q}$ d6 h5



23. $\mathbb{R}$ c4

We want to provoke a5 first, so we can eat it later.

23. $\mathbb{R}$ c8+ $\mathbb{Q}$ h7 24. $\mathbb{R}$ c7 $\mathbb{R}$ xc7 25. $\mathbb{Q}$ xc7 $\mathbb{Q}$ f6 26. $\mathbb{Q}$ d6 $\mathbb{Q}$ d5 27.e4 $\mathbb{Q}$ c3 28. $\mathbb{Q}$ xb4 $\mathbb{Q}$ xe4 would also be pleasant, but didn't seem convincing from afar.

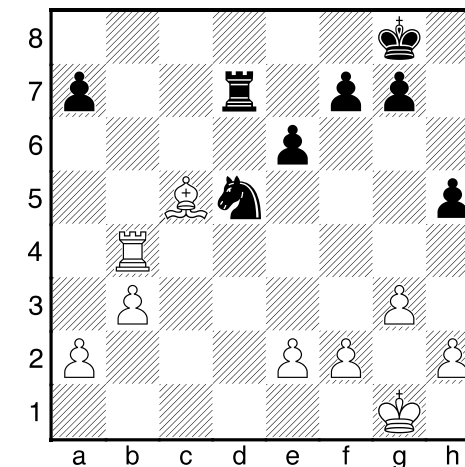
23... $\mathbb{Q}$ b6

23...a5 24. $\mathbb{R}$ c8+ $\mathbb{Q}$ h7 25. $\mathbb{R}$ c7!+-.

24. $\mathbb{R}$ xb4 $\mathbb{R}$ d7 25. $\mathbb{Q}$ c5

25. $\mathbb{Q}$ b8 was also interesting. 25... $\mathbb{R}$ d1+ (25... $\mathbb{R}$ b7 26. $\mathbb{Q}$ f4) 26. $\mathbb{Q}$ g2 $\mathbb{Q}$ d5 27. $\mathbb{R}$ a4 $\mathbb{Q}$ c3 28. $\mathbb{R}$ xa7.

25... $\mathbb{Q}$ d5



We reached a completely winning endgame. The black knight doesn't have stability, our bishop is strong, and the outside passer should decide. But these 2400s are stubborn and resourceful!

26. $\mathbb{R}$ d4

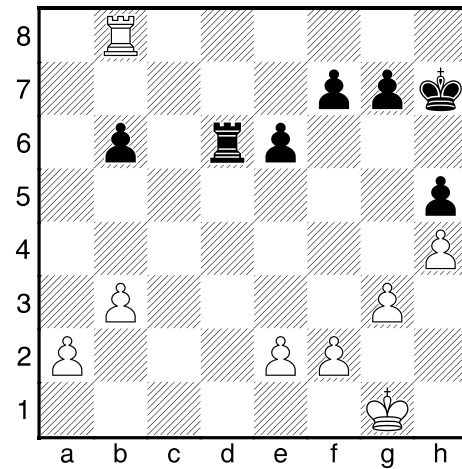
26. $\mathbb{R}$ b8+ $\mathbb{Q}$ h7 27. $\mathbb{R}$ a8 $\mathbb{Q}$ b6 28. $\mathbb{Q}$ xb6 axb6 29. $\mathbb{R}$ b8 $\mathbb{R}$ d6 30.h4+-.

Both players left with feelings of disgust from this game...



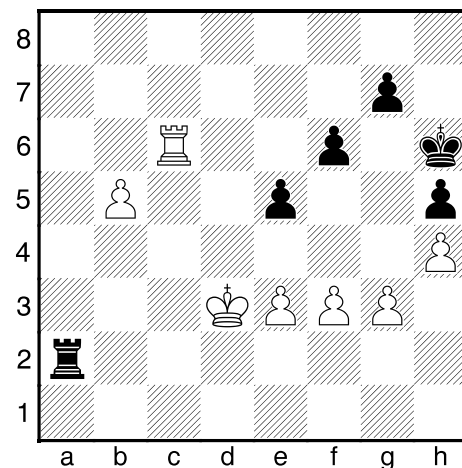
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Ivanov



From far away I thought Black still had chances to hold, but this is illusory. Black ends up in zugzwang sooner or later. 30...f6 31.♔g2 ♕g6 32.♕f3 ♖c6 33.♖b7 ♕h6 34.♕e4 ♕g6 35.a4 ♖d6 36.e3 No rush. 36...♕h6 37.b4 ♕g6 38.b5 ♕h6 39.♖c7 ♖d8 40.♖c6 ♖a8 41.♖xb6 (editor – the game line illustrates Black's helplessness, but White could also go up two pawns with 41.♖xe6 ♖xa4+ 42.♕f3 and ♖xb6.) 41...♖xa4+ 42.♕d3 e5 43.♖c6 ♖a2 44.f3

Analysis Diagram



The white king is more active than usual for such endgames, and Black's counterplay is miles away. The c6 rook does a good job of protecting the passer from the side. (editor – true, but in this precise position ♖c2 heading for b2 looks cleaner.) 44...♕g6 45.b6 ♖b2 46.♕c4 ♕f7 47.♕c5+-.

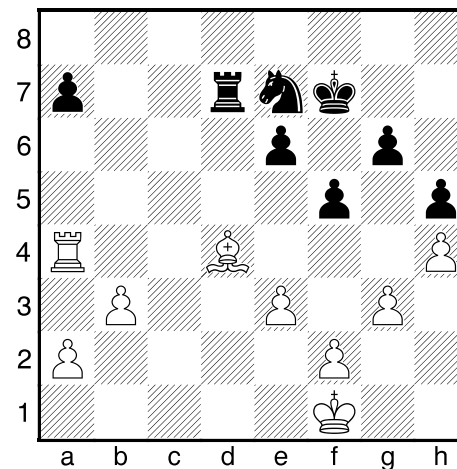
26...♖c7 27.♖c4 f5 28.♕d4

The bishop wants to clamp down on the dark squares.

28...♖d7 29.e3 ♘e7 30.h4

Fixing the pawn structure, with an inkling of ♕g2-f3-f4-e5 in the future.

30...♕f7 31.♕f1 g6 32.♖a4



A step in the wrong direction. White needs to keep the bishop on d4, the knight restrained, and the queenside pawns flexible. When satisfied, ensure the status quo remains.

32...♘c6 33.♕e2?

One mistake deserves another. In some dream world, I was hoping that

Black trades the knight and we get a winning rook endgame. Yet this permits Black to break their shackles and achieve piece activity.

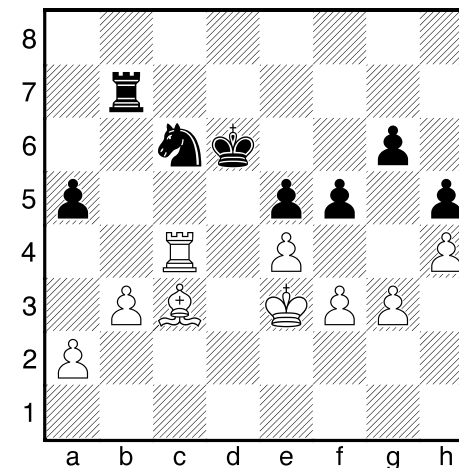
33.f4 maintains a stable hold over the position:

33...♕e7 34.♕c5+ ♕f7 35.♖a6 ♖c7 36.b4+- Black is completely paralyzed;

33...♘xd4 34.exd4 ♖c7 35.♖c4+-;

33...a5 34.♕c3 ♖d1+ 35.♕e2 ♖g1 36.♕xa5 ♖xg3 37.♕c3 ♖h3 38.b4+- the white pawns are simply faster.

33...e5 34.♕c3 ♕e6 35.♖c4 ♕d5 36.f3 ♖b7 37.e4+ ♕d6 38.♕e3 a5

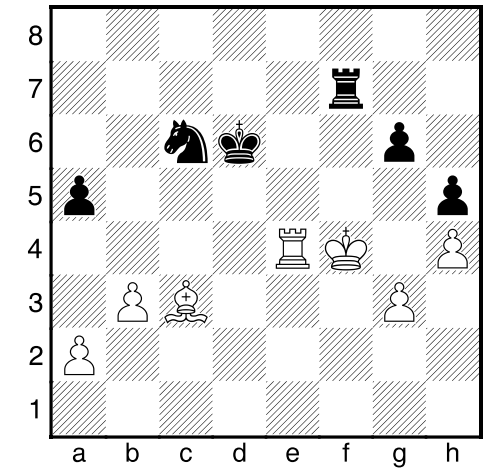


39.f4

White consolidated a bit, and wants to break through Black's wall to get to g6 someday.

39...exf4+ 40.♕xf4 fxe4

41.♖xe4 ♖f7+!?



Even though this move is losing objectively, it forces White to decide between two unclear moves in time pressure.

42.♕e3?

Now it becomes harder to break through. Around here, I had 3 minutes left. White is in risk-management mode, but should still play principled chess with: 42.♕g5 ♖f3 43.♕e1 ♘e5 I calculated this far, but vastly overestimated Black's chances. The knight is annoying on e5 but not eternal. 44.♕h6! ♕e6 (44...♕d5 45.♖a4) 45.♕xa5 ♕f5 46.♖f4+ ♖xf4 47.gxf4 ♘g4+ 48.♕g7 and White wins.

42...♖f5 43.♖f4 ♖c5 44.♕b2

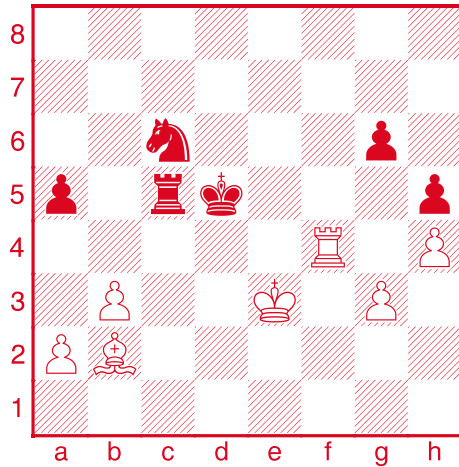
44.♕d3 is better to stop potential rook invasions and ...♘b4s 44...♖d5+ 45.♕e4 ♖c5 46.♖f6+ ♕e7 47.♖f3 ♖b5 48.♕d3 ♖c5 49.♖f4 ♖b5 50.♕c4 over time, White will squeeze Black away from the 5th rank.

44...♕d5



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Ivanov



45.♙a3??

A really awful move coming from a place of panic, throwing away any remaining advantage. Of course, it was based on fearing ...♖c2, and ...♖c3+ didn't even cross my mind. Such blunders are typical for time pressure, which doesn't make it feel any better.

45.♖c4 ♖xc4 (45...♖b5 46.♙c3+-)
46.bxc4+ ♙xc4 47.♙f4□ This is apparently winning, but when you're feeling chances slip away before your eyes, your confidence is shot, and pessimism clouds simple evaluations;

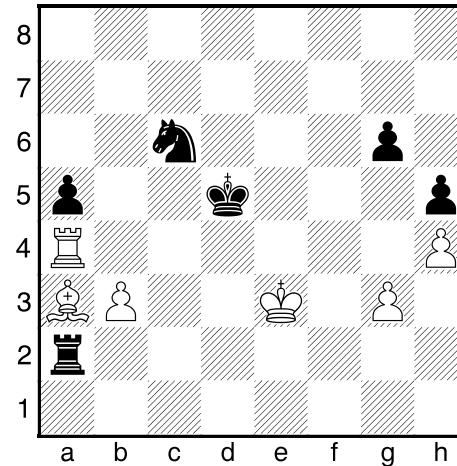
editor – White can actually ignore ...♖c2, but to *know* that you'd have to see all the way to the end of this line: 45.♖f6 ♖c2 46.♖f2 ♖xf2 47.♙xf2 ♖b4 threatening ...♖d3+ and a2, 48.♙c3□ ♖xa2 49.♙xa5□ ♖c1 50.b4□+-.

45...♖c3+

45...♖c2 46.♖c4? (46.♖f6! ♖xa2 47.♙f8+- not at all easy to judge that this is still winning.) 46...♖xa2! 47.♖c5+ ♙d6 48.♖xa5+ ♙e6□ 49.♖c5 ♙d6

50.♖xh5+ ♖xa3 51.♖b5 is only a fancy draw.

46.♙f2 ♖c2+ 47.♙e3 ♖xa2
48.♖a4



Realizing what a mess I made, it was fortunate that ♖a4 keeps everything together.

48...♖a1
48...♖g2 49.♙f4.

49.♙f4 ♖b1

And here Karina offered a draw which I accepted.

The game could have continued 49...♖b1 50.♙g5 ♖xb3 51.♙xg6 ♖xg3+ 52.♙xh5, where Black can sac the knight for my last pawn if needed.

Both players left with feelings of disgust from this game: her for allowing this lost endgame to begin with, and me for not finding the plethora of winning chances in the endgame. On the bright side, I felt in control for the entire game against a

higher-rated opponent, which gave me the confidence to play for the win in the next rounds.

1/2-1/2

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

Grieve, Harry (2479)
Ivanov, Mike (2364)

C18

6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(4.4), 2024

Going into this game, I noticed that my opponent played mainlines in 1.e4 without fail, going for principled variations where he was usually well prepared. This suited his aggressive style of play, but also helped me in this game as I knew exactly what was going to happen till move 10.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♙b4

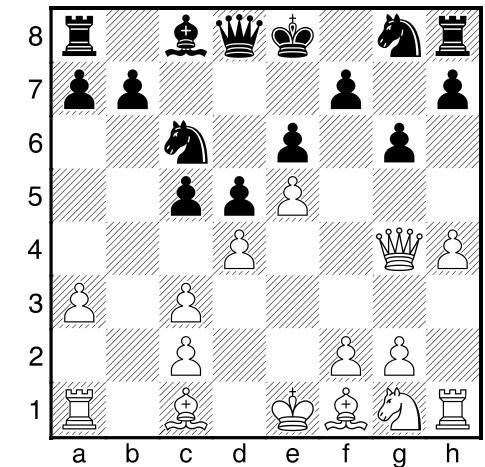
Considering I needed 20 points around here, some risk was called for. So time to whip out the Winawer!

4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♙xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♘c6 7.♖g4 g6

My French of choice for the last 3 years. Played by Carlsen, Rapport, and other strong GMs, it takes away the poisoned pawn Winawer dynamics where White can rely on their passed h-pawn. Any advantage is positional due to White's dark-square domination, while Black's king

is usually safe.

8.h4



8...♙d7!?

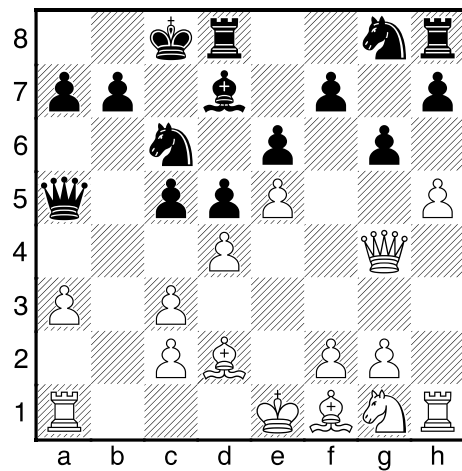
The sum of 6 months of work on this line. Instead of going for 8...h6, which is the mainline, we pull a conceptual switch allowing White to get h5 in.

I believe this is supposed to be the critical line: 8...h6 9.h5 g5 10.f4 f5 11.♖g3 ♖a5 12.♙d2 g4 13.dxc5, and although Carlsen made it work several times against Anand and Giri, I was less enthusiastic about my chances here with Harry.

8...♖a5 I played this a week before the game with Harry, and I was hoping he would be expecting this, which isn't as good. 9.♙d2 ♖a4 10.♙f3 ♙d7 11.♖f4 h6 12.dxc5 ♖xc2 13.♙d4 ♙xd4 14.cxd4 ♖e4+ 15.♖xe4 dxe4 16.♖b1 ♙c6 17.♙b5 ♙xb5 18.♖xb5 0-0-0= Fizer, M (2262)–**Ivanov, M** (2364) Olomouc, Czech Republic, 2024.



9.h5 ♔a5N 10.♙d2 0-0-0



11.hxg6?!

Arguably a mistake already. It makes more sense to keep the tension, and

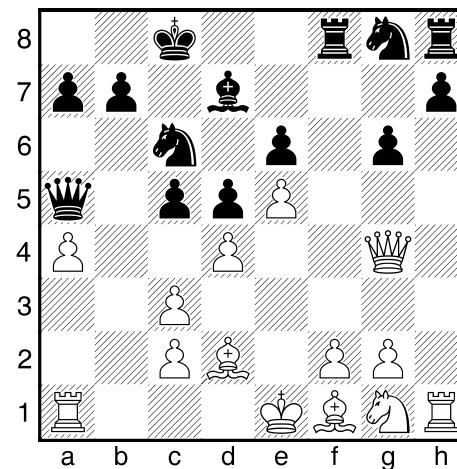
the pawn might be better off on h6 for White. Now my rooks gladly get into the game.

White should consider something else: 11.a4!? or 11.♘f3 ♖f8 12.♙d3 ♘ge7 13.h6 c4 14.♙e2 f6± which leads to interesting play which I hope other French lovers will get to try out.

11...fxg6 12.a4 ♖f8

**Also not distracted by the view:
2026 Women's Candidates winner**

IM Vaishali



In my notes, I had this position with pawns on h5 and f7. This could only be a better version, so I was already in punishment mode!

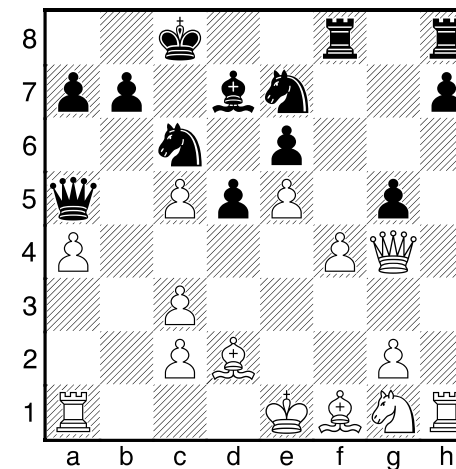
13.f4?!

Rarely is f4 a good move in the Winawer. Too many weak light squares, and too many lagging pieces!

13...♘ge7

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖b6 15.c3 ♖b2 16.♙d1 (16.♙d1!) 16...♘a5 For a long time I seriously considered going for this, being greedy and going for his a-pawn. But then I wisely decided that pawns mattered a lot less than initiative at this point.

14.dxc5 g5!



White has blemished his position with too many pawn moves, so it's my job to blow it open while their army's sleeping!

15.♙xg5

Allowing Black to take the center seems blasphemous, but it may be their best chance: 15.fxg5 ♘xe5 16.♙b4 ♖c7 (16...♙xb4 17.cxb4±) 17.0-0-0 Weirdly enough, White is fine. It seems like knights are worse at punishing lack of development than bishops in such positions.

15...♗hg8 16.♙h5

I was expecting 16.♙h6, which also looks fun. 16...♘f5 17.♙xh7 (17.♙h3 ♘g3 18.♙h2 ♗xf4 19.♙xf4 ♙xc3+-) 17...♘g3 18.♙h3 ♘xf1 19.♙xf1 ♘xe5 20.♙e1 ♘c4±.

**I like a view, but I like to sit
with my back turned to it.**

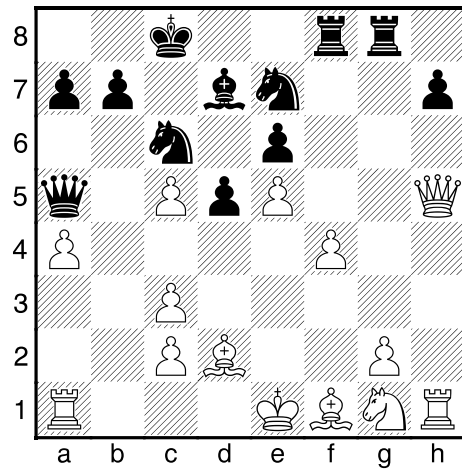
- Gertrude Stein

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Ivanov



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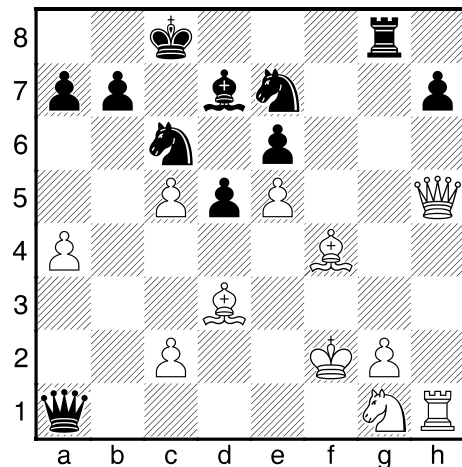
Ivanov



16...Rxf4!

Exclam for consistency. Black has no time to dilly-dally.

17. Qxf4 Rxc3+ 18. Qf2 Rxa1
19. Qd3



19...Qxa4

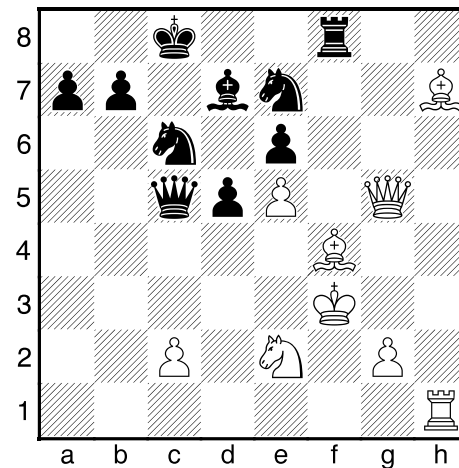
19...Rd4+ 20. Qe3 Rxe5 21. Rxe5
Qxe5 even good versions of Winawer
endgames are not that good, and I
wasn't confident about my ability to
win this.

Here I slowly realized that the winning plan was not just to attack the king. We want to steal all the weak pawns, while trying to cancel out their bishops, get our knights stable, and keep them passive thanks to their king.

20. Qe2 Rb4 21. Qxh7 Rxc5+
22. Qf3

Sad, but in losing positions all moves are losing. 22. Qf1 Rf8 23. Rh6 Rf7.

22...Rf8 23. Rh6

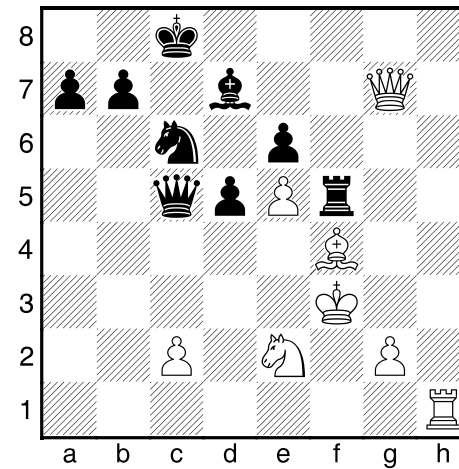


23...Rf8

23...d4! is also very strong, as ...Qd5 is coming, e5 is weak, and the light squares are accented;

23...Qd4+? 24. Qxd4 Rxd4 25. g3.
Thankfully I didn't go for this, after realizing that trading is in their favour.

24. Qxf5 Rxf5 25. Rh6



Up to here my play was natural and easy, I knew that I must be close to winning. Here however, ghosts crept at the corners of my variations, especially as time trouble approached. In my life, I have messed up enough of these "no-brainers" to know this would take utmost precision.

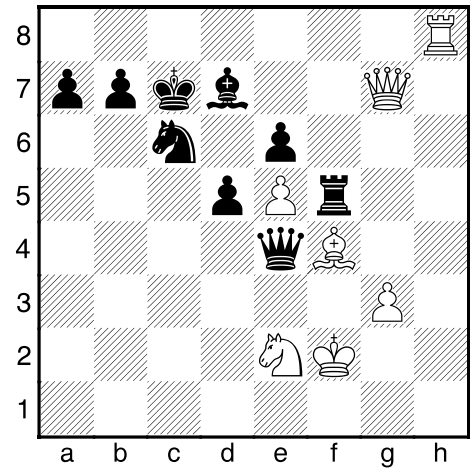
25...Rh6

Maybe the move I'm most proud of, even if it's just taking a free pawn. We ignore all their ghosts on the back rank, and focus on preparing our attack with ...Qe4. Rc1 is impossible at the moment, and our d4 pawn is putting on its running shoes.

26. Rh8+

26. Rh7 Qxe5+ 27. Qg3 Rxe2 28. Rh8+
Qc7 it's important to remember that the white rook can't be on h7 and h8 at the same time, otherwise I would be in big trouble!

26...Qc7 27. g3 Qe4+ 28. Qf2



28...Qe4+

Another move that took some nerves to dish out, especially since it took most of my remaining time. After analyzing with engines for a long time, I learned that in sharp positions with both sides attacking, captures are usually critical even if scary.

28...Qd4 29. Qxd4 Rxd4+ 30. Qg2∞
the computer assures us it's winning, but that's not obvious OTB.

28...d4 is what I wanted to play, but to my horror the lines weren't holding up. So I had to make ...Qxe5 work, or else...

The problem is that after 28...d4
29. Rh7 Qd5 (29...Qxe5 30. Rh7+)
30. g4! is scary. 30...d3 In for a penny, in for a pound. 31. gxf5 dxe2 32. fxe6 e1Q+
33. Qxe1 Qe4+ 34. Qd1 Qf3+ 35. Qe1
(35. Qc2 Qb4+! 36. Qd2 Qxf4+ 37. Qe1 Q=)
35...Qe4+ 36. Qf2 Qxf4+ 37. Qg2
Qe4+ 38. Qg3 Qe3+ 39. Qh2 Qxe5+
40. Qxe5+ Qxe5 41. exd7 Qxd7 White
may suffer, but should be a draw.

How much of this did I see? Only that g4 looked scary.

A year before, this game would have gone much differently...



Chess Canada

Ivanov

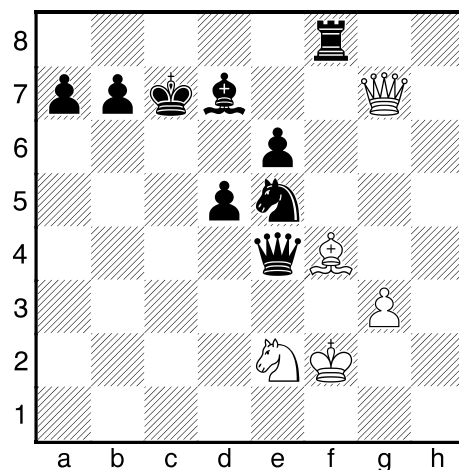
29. ♖f8 ♜h5

You can see the effect of fear and nerves at this point, as I was just looking for moves that don't lose.

30. ♜h8 ♜f5

Always repeat when you can!

31. ♖f8 ♜xf8

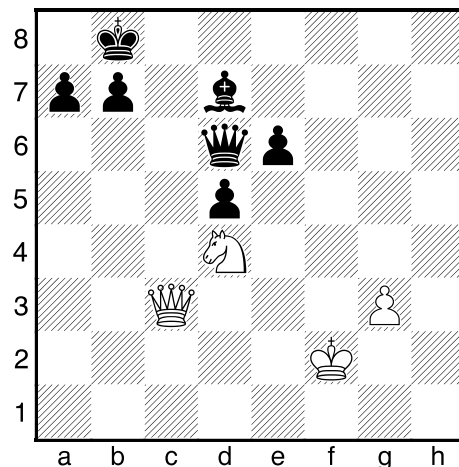


Finally, I convinced myself that the pin wasn't fatal, and avoiding the rook trade was the only way forward.

32. ♖xf8 ♔c6! 33. ♙xe5

I felt this was a mistake, since it kills the tension and allows me to calm down and regroup. Of course, everything else also loses; e.g. 33. ♔f1 ♖f3+ 34. ♔e1 ♖h1+ 35. ♔d2 ♘c4+ 36. ♔c3 ♖f3+ 37. ♔c2 ♖xe2+-.

33... ♖xe5 34. ♖b4 ♖d6 35. ♘d4+ ♔c7 36. ♖c3+ ♔b8



The king finds refuge and the rest is pretty trivial technique. Nonetheless, we were both physically shaking till the end.

37. g4

Here, my job is to find the most forcing win possible. All kinds of miracles can still happen, most of which I'd like to avoid.

37... ♖h2+

37... ♖f4+ 38. ♘f3 ♖xg4 39. ♖e5+ ♔c8 This wins, but not how you want to convert! 40. ♖h8+ ♔c7 41. ♖e5+ ♔b6 42. ♖d6+ ♔c6 43. ♖d8+ ♔a6-+.

38. ♔f1 ♖f4+ 39. ♘f3 d4 40. ♖a3 ♔c6 41. ♔f2 ♖xf3+ Time to liquidate.

42. ♖xf3 ♙xf3 43. ♔xf3 ♔c7 White resigns.

Overall, this is one of the better efforts from this tournament, and I'm happy that all stages went well. In the opening, I was able to use months

of preparation, in the middlegame, I chose the right plan with ...g5 and combining initiative with pawn grabbing. And in the endgame, I didn't chicken out from critical variations even when they looked scary.

A year before, this game would have gone much differently.

editor – readers who are interested in learning the French repertoire that helped him to his IM title — including this ...g6 line in the Winawer — can find it in Mike's "Ferocious French" course on [chessflow.org](https://www.chessflow.org):

<https://www.chessflow.org/store>

0-1

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

**Ivanov, Mike (2364)
Stefansson, Vignir
Vatnar (2526)**

A07

6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(5.1), 2024

Coming into this game, I finally got to the territory where a win would let me

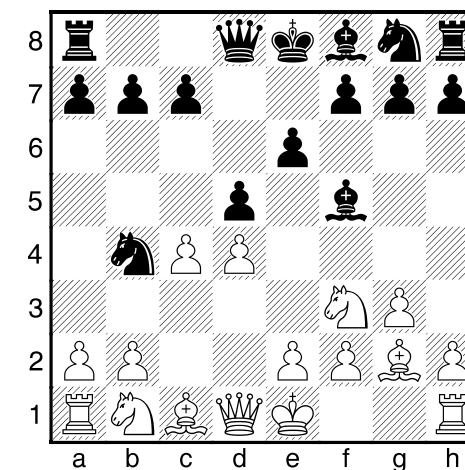
cross 2400 and get me to IM. I was tempted to go all out, but knew that Vignir was playing well and was still the heavy favourite in this game.

In the past, I made the mistake of playing for the win in such cases out of hubris and arrogance. Two painful years corrected this habit.

1. ♘f3 d5 2. g3 ♘c6

He hadn't played this line before, so I didn't have anything special, just general preparation from the previous year.

3. d4 ♙f5 4. c4 e6 5. ♙g2 ♘b4



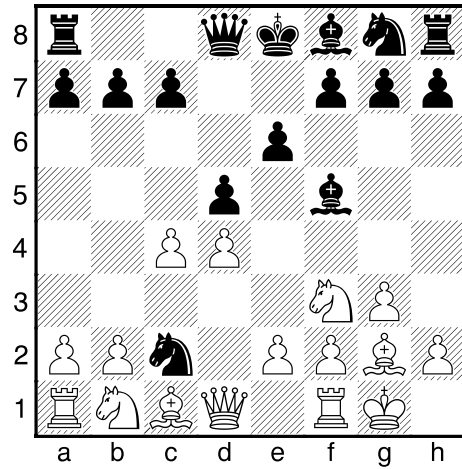
We get something similar to a Reverse Jobava London. In that opening, pushing c5 isn't supposed to be good theoretically, as ♘b5 ♘a6 would be in White's favour. Here however, White has more ambitious options than defending with ♘a3.

6. 0-0 ♘c2



Chess Canada

Ivanov



After the game, he told me that he hadn't expected the rook sac line, and looked at it the night before by accident. I wish I had more such accidents!

7.♘h4

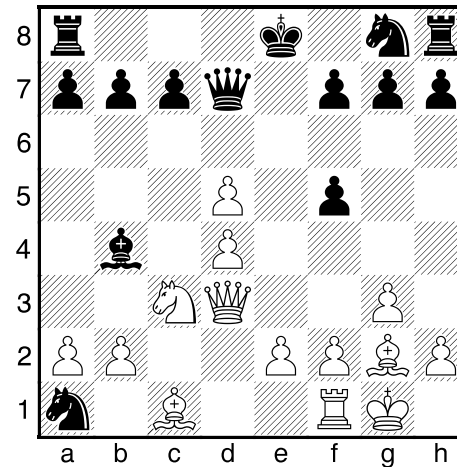
I knew that this and cxd5 were the two branches here, and ♘h4 felt more solid to me. It was already strange playing this variation against a strong GM, but I didn't have anything else for the occasion. Besides, sometimes you can confuse stronger players with complications.

7.cxd5 ♘xa1 8.dxe6 ♙xe6 (8...♙xb1 9.exf7+ ♗xf7 10.♘e5+ I couldn't remember how this went during this game, which influenced the decision to go for the "quieter" 7.♘h4) 9.♘c3 c6 10.♘g5 ♙e7 11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.e4 ♙b4 13.♙e3 ♘f6 14.♖e2 0-0 15.♙xa1. **Ivanov, M (2366)–Dorrance, A (2301) Summerside, Maritime oct 2025.** Ironically, both games were super sharp and both ended in draws.

7...♘xa1 8.♘xf5 exf5 9.♘c3 ♙d7 10.cxd5

Arguably more precise is 10.♘xd5!? c6 11.♘c3 ♙b4 12.♙d3 ♖d8 13.♙g5 ♘e7 14.♙xe7 ♙xe7 15.e3 0-0 16.♙xa1.

10...♙b4 11.♙d3



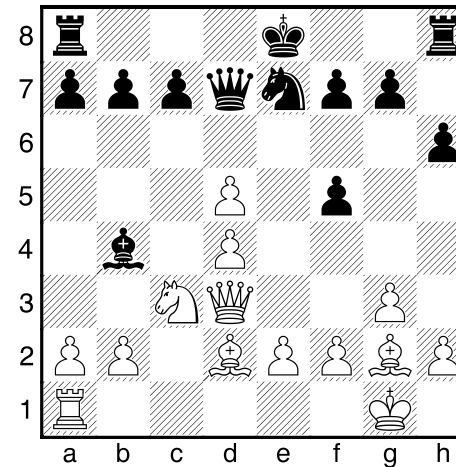
11...h6

He played this without looking at the board, eyeing the ceiling where his memory could clearly make out this position from the night before. So far we're following known waters, but he blitzed it out, while I wasted way too much time triple-checking that this was all playable.

11...♘f6?! 12.♙g5 ♙e7 where White still keeps some momentum;

11...♘e7 is also playable, with a slight advantage to Black.

12.♙d2 ♘e7 13.♙xa1

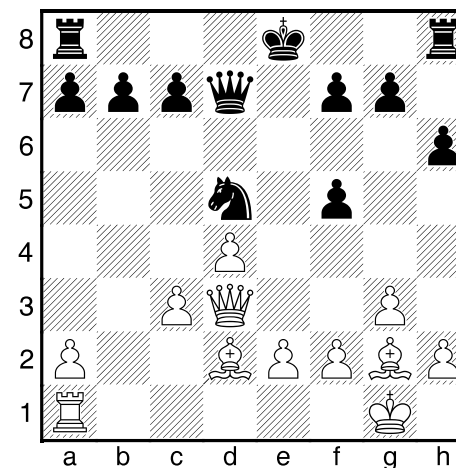


13...♙xc3

13...0-0! would be great for Black. 14.a3 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♘xd5 16.c4 ♘f6 17.♙xb7 ♖ab8 18.♙f3 ♖fe8.

Perhaps he messed up the move order, or perhaps he started thinking for himself at the wrong time. Now white gets another chance to seize the initiative.

14.bxc3 ♘xd5



Since he played this quickly, I believed him that c4 was bad for

some reason. Of course, it should be played for better or worse.

15.e4

A bit of wishful thinking since there was a childish part of me hoping for ...fxe4.

15.c4 ♘f6 (15...♘e7 16.♙xb7 ♖b8 17.♙g2 0-0 18.d5 ♖fe8 19.♙c3±) 16.♙b4! Now Black is really in trouble. (16.♙xb7 ♖b8 17.♙g2 0-0 was what I didn't like, even if it's actually equal.) 16...0-0 17.♖b1 c6 18.♙c5± b6 19.♙xb6! axb6 20.♙xb6 is Annihilation Time.

15...♘e7

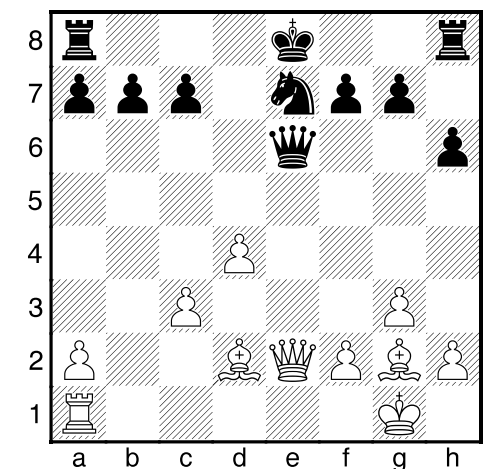
15...fxe4? 16.♙xe4+ ♘e7 17.♖e1 ♙f8 18.♙xb7+;

15...♘b6 16.exf5 0-0 17.f6±.

16.exf5

editor – I'd be tempted by 16.e5, but even with the ♙s it's hard to hold the center; e.g. 16...♖d8!? 17.♙xb7 c5 18.♙a6 0-0 19.♙e3 ♘c6!? or 19...f4!?

16...♙xf5 17.♙e2 ♙e6





Chess Canada

Ivanov

Looking at this from afar, I thought the endgame might be tenable with the bishop pair. Yet the longer I looked, the more I realized how much suffering awaited. So I changed course, thankfully.

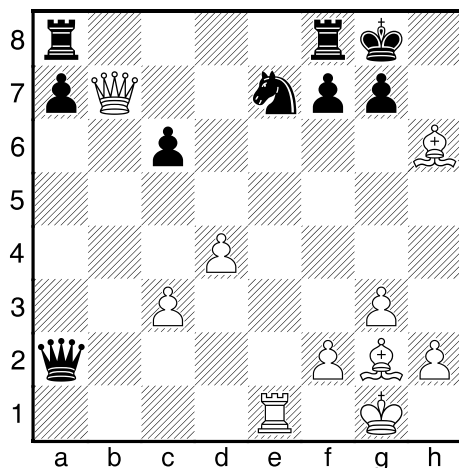
18. ♖b5+

18. ♖xe6 fxe6 19. ♕xb7 ♖b8 20. ♕e4 ♖b2 21. ♕e3 ♘d5 22. ♕g6+ ♔d7-+
With the b-file under their control, no bishop pair is stopping Black here.

18...c6 19. ♖xb7

Now, the play takes a forcing character, and I have no choice but to find the critical line. Black can't deviate either, as his own king is under assault.

19...0-0 20. ♖e1 ♖xa2 21. ♕xh6



21...gxf6

21... ♖ae8 22. ♕xg7 ♔xg7 23. ♖xe7 ♖a1+ 24. ♕f1 ♖xc3 25. ♖xa7 ♖xe7 (25... ♖f3!? may be a way to play for Black to play for the win, but White

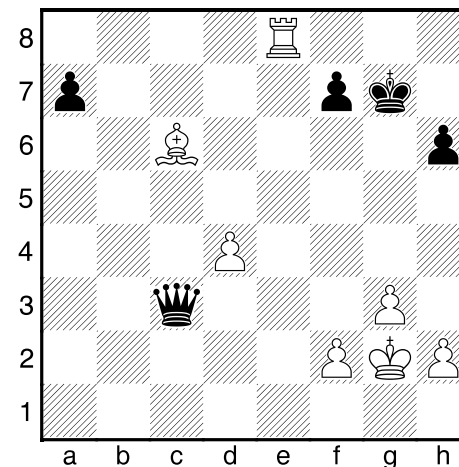
is holding objectively.) 26. ♖xe7 ♖xd4 27. ♖g5+ ♔h7 28. ♖f5+ ♔g8 29. ♕c4!=. Superb way to hold the black rook down. Let's pretend I found it :) 29... ♖xc4 30. ♖g5+= ♔h7 31. ♖h5+ ♔g7 32. ♖g5+=.

22. ♖xe7 ♖ae8

With the king open, and the pawns weak, Vignir has to go for trades.

23. ♖xe8 ♖xe8 24. ♖xe8+ ♔g7 25. ♕xc6 ♖a1+ 26. ♔g2 ♖xc3 27. d5

And here I offered a draw, thinking that it's finally a respectable time to do so. I was still nervous since the time situation wasn't great, Vignir was ahead by 30-60 minutes from the opening onward. The night before the first round, I had a chance to dine with the Icelandic delegation to Tenerife, and we got along well. Perhaps this influenced Vignir's decision to accept the draw here, and not torture me for another 100 moves like I would have done against someone lower-rated. Either way, I was grateful to come out of this crazy line alive.



After 27.d5 play might have continued:

27...a5 28. ♖e4 f5 29. ♖f4 with a fortress.

27... ♖b4, which is a tougher attempt, stopping White from the blockade on the 4th rank, yet even here, we have enough resources: 28. ♔f3 f5 29. ♔g2 a5 30. ♖e6 a4 31. d6 ♖c4 32. ♖e7+ (editor - 32.d7 ♖xe6 33.d8 ♖xc6+= also draws, but that a4 pawn would worry me.) 32... ♔f6 33. ♖c7 a3 34.d7 ♖d4 35. ♖c8 a2 36.d8 ♖+ ♖xd8 37. ♖xd8 a1 ♖ 38. ♕f3 with a different fortress.

1/2-1/2

I was **super nervous** going into this game, knowing if I won, I'd be an International Master. Countless adventures, close calls, and **heartbreaks**...

...this game could end it all.

notes:

88

IM Mike Ivanov

Garcia Padron, Jose
(2378)
Ivanov, Mike (2364)

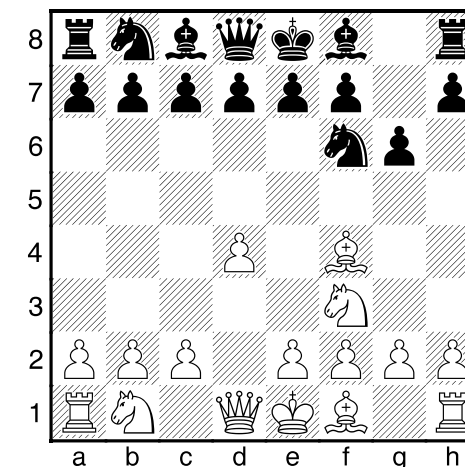
A48

6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(6.3), 2024

I was super nervous going into this game, knowing if I won, I'd be an International Master.

Just to explain why this mattered so much, I had spent the better part of the previous 5 years preparing and working towards this moment. Countless adventures, close calls, and heartbreaks led up to this game, which could end it all. Up to 10 minutes before the game, I was feverishly trying to review the lines that may come up, cursing myself for leaving this to the last minute.

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. d4 g6 3. ♕f4





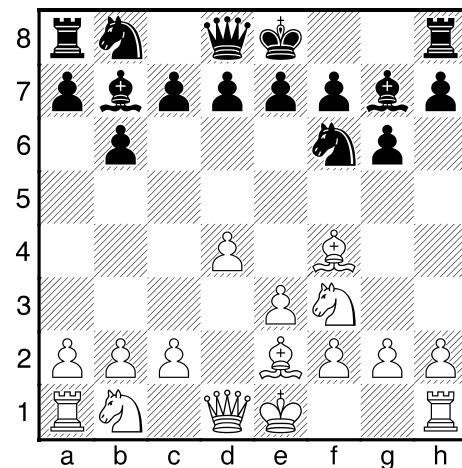
Chess Canada

Ivanov

My opening plan was: Double Fianchetto against the London, King's Indian against d4, and e5 against the English, all of which he played regularly.

The problem with experienced players is they have games in a whole bunch of systems, and even if he last played the Gligoric King's Indian in the 1990s, I still had to solve my problems there. Even walking to the board, I was horrified of him playing one of the lines I hadn't solved yet. Kids, do all your analysis at home and long in advance!

3...♗g7 4.e3 b6 5.♗e2 ♗b7



According to GM [Tiviakov](#) in his *Rock Solid Chess* book, the double fianchetto works great in this move order.

6.c4

Jose takes up the gauntlet and tries to punish my lack of space with the principled approach of taking the center. If he gets ♖c3 and ♜c2 in,

e4 is unavoidable where Black gets squeezed and my b7 bishop becomes a liability.

6...c5

Since I may not get another chance, I go for all possible pawn breaks that undermine the center. 6...d6 7.0-0 ♖bd7 8.♖c3 ♗e4 was also possible, of course.

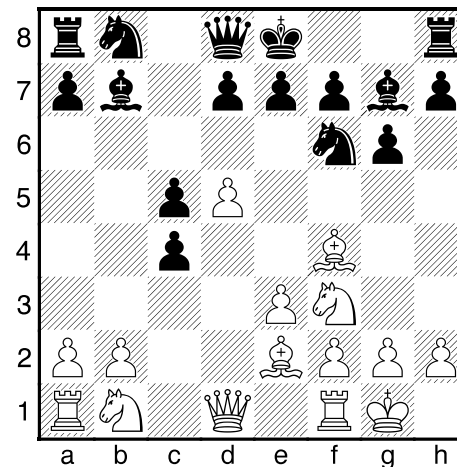
7.d5 b5

7...d6 8.♖c3 0-0 9.e4 White manages to consolidate the center, and Black gets a horrible Benoni.

8.0-0

8.cxb5 ♗xd5 9.♗e5 ♗xe5 10.♖xe5 ♜c7 11.♖c4 ♗f6 12.0-0 d5. The center takes priority over their queenside majority here.

8...bxc4



I never know what to do with these hanging c-pawns. Apparently it's better to keep the tension so that the

white knight doesn't get too comfy on c3, but I was too tense already.

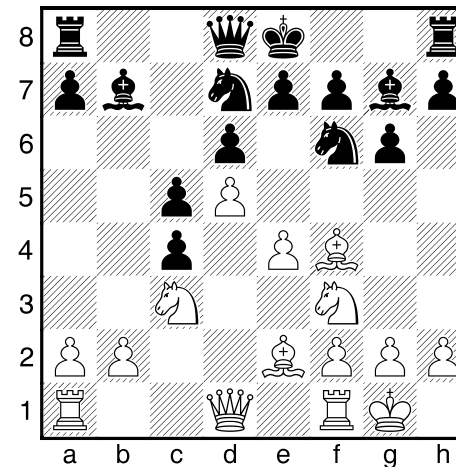
9.♖c3

9.d6 e6 10.♖c3 0-0 11.♜c1 I didn't know how to evaluate this either. Black's pieces find squares, but White has targets on the c-file and a potential e5 post.

9...d6

I wasn't going to tempt fate a second time, better to cover d6 forever.

10.e4 ♖bd7



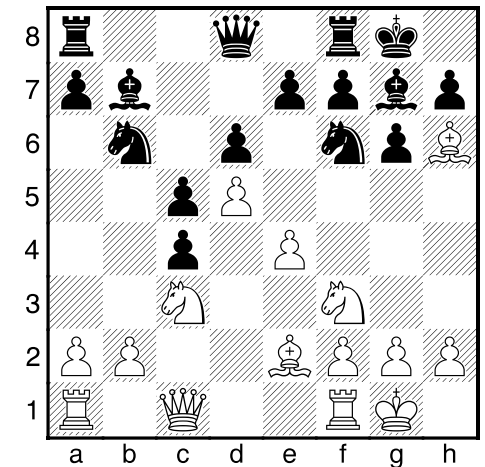
11.♜c1

This seemed unnatural at best. I get that Jose wants to get rid of the dragon bishop on g7 while keeping the d2 square for the knight. Yet this waste of time lets me keep the c-pawn while White doesn't fully get to reinforce their center. The remaining black pieces become respectable.

11.♗xc4 was the natural and best

path forward, where I still have too many pieces for the space available. If I can trade off two minor pieces, life would be swell. 11...0-0 12.h3 ♖b6 13.♗e2 ♜c8 14.♜d2 ♗a6 15.♜fe1 ♗xe2 16.♜xe2.

11...0-0 12.♗h6 ♖b6

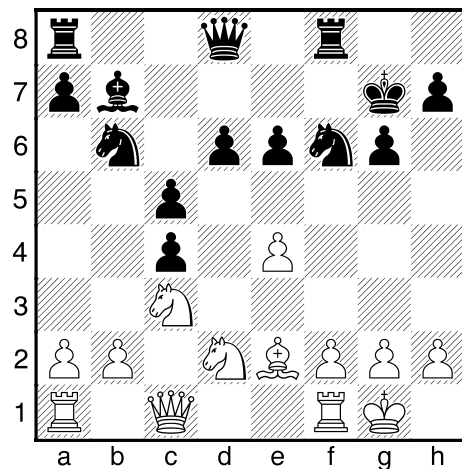


Even though there are cases where the c4 pawn is more of a nuisance than a strength like in the King's Indian Saemisch variation, here it's rapidly gaining in value, so let's keep it.

13.♗xg7 ♜xg7 14.♖d2

White wants to get both the pawn and the outpost, but all these pieces going backward is a surefire sign that we should be going forward.

14...e6! 15.dxe6 fxe6



With the bishop coming alive on b7, Black can say they solved all their opening problems.

16.e5?!

White probably realized that the pawn armada after ...d5 would be too formidable, and tries to break it up.

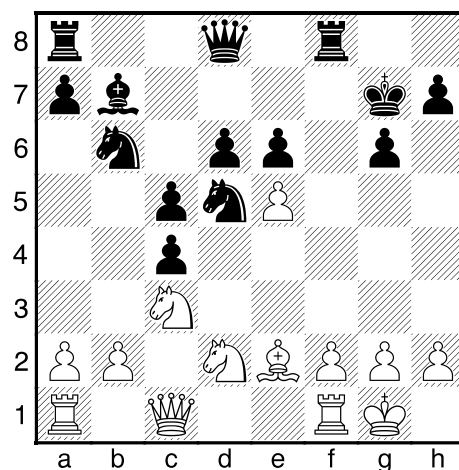
16. ♖xc4 ♘xe4 White has a hard time getting their pawn back, considering that e4 also needs protection.
17. ♘xe4 ♙xe4 18. ♖c3+ ♔g8 19. ♖e3 ♙d5 where the hanging pawns might be precarious, but the bishop on d5 makes them feel a lot more secure;

16. ♖d1 d5 17. ♖xc4 d4 18. ♘a5 ♙xe4 19. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 20. f3 (20. ♙f3? ♖xf3! naturally 21. gxf3 ♘g5) 20... ♖f6! Black is pressing, even if the position is objectively fine for White.

16...♘fd5

This is the problem with 16. e5 as a concept: White might break the pawns, but the black piece activity is becoming too much here. The f4 square, plus the long diagonal, the f-file for our rook, and the queen coming g5/h4 makes White's kingside a shooting range.

I knew that 16...dxe5 should also be good as Black is getting excellent piece play and the king is weak on g1, yet the double pawns gnawed at me: 17. ♘xc4 (17. ♙f3 ♙xf3 18. ♘xf3) 17... ♘xc4 18. ♙xc4 ♘g4 19. h3 ♘xf2 20. ♖xf2 ♖xf2 21. ♔xf2 ♖d4+ 22. ♔g3 ♖xc4-+.



17.♘ce4?

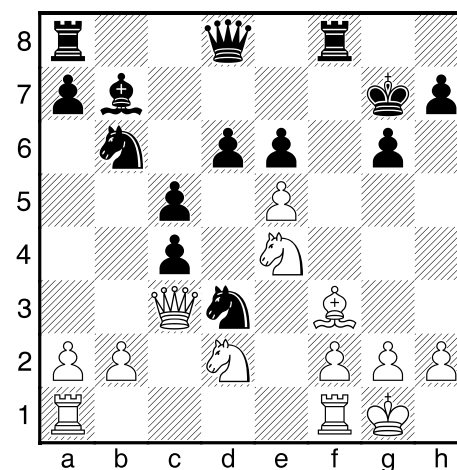
Allowing Black to run away with the initiative.

White should have gone for this, for better or worse: 17. exd6 ♘f4 18. ♙f3 ♘d3 19. ♖c2 ♖xf3 Black has to keep the attack going, but this isn't as devastating as in other variations. 20. ♘xf3 ♙xf3 21. gxf3 ♖xd6 22. ♖ad1 ♖f8.

17...♘f4

At this point I realized that there are very real winning chances with such vicious attackers.

18.♙f3 ♘d3 19.♖c3

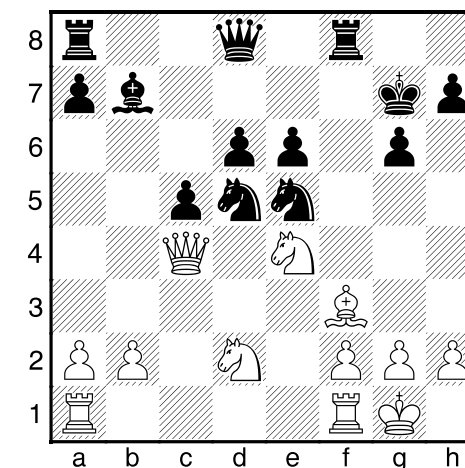


19...♘d5

19...d5 I thought this was good for me but unclear. In fact, it's killing: 20. ♘d6 ♙c6 21. ♘6xc4 ♖xf3! 22. ♘e3 ♘f4!-+ editor – I can't see it, so here's an essential but not obvious line: 23. ♖xc5 gets off the ♘e2+ fork and hits the loose ♙, so 23... ♖h3!!-+

Black ignores it! 24. gxh3 (Black was threatening the Anastasia mate: 24. ♖xc6? ♘e2+ 25. ♔h1 ♖xh2+ 26. ♔xh2 ♖h4#) 24... ♖c8 (24... ♙b7? 25. ♘g4=) 25. f3 (25. ♘f3 d4 26. ♘xd4 ♘xh3#) 25... d4 26. ♘g4 ♘xh3+ 27. ♔g2 ♙xf3+ 28. ♖xf3 ♖xc5-+.

20.♖xc4 ♘xe5



How could I resist such knights!

21.♖e2 ♖e7

A healthy move, which took me a while. There are so many tempting moves, it's important not to get carried away. Black supports all their weak spots, while connecting the rooks for the attack and preparing an eventual ...d5 by covering c5. On top of that, White can't unravel easily as their minor pieces are stuck!



Chess Canada

Ivanov

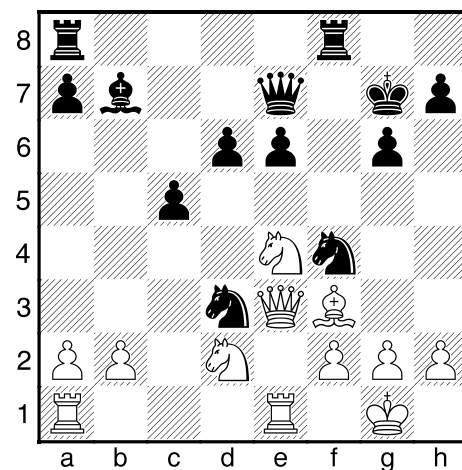
21...♘f4!? 22.♚e3;

21...♘xf3+ 22.♘xf3 ♘f4 23.♚e3
looked strong, but not forcing enough.

22.♞fe1

It's hard to suggest moves for White here. Now the problem is the queen is short on squares.

22...♘f4 23.♚e3 ♘ed3



Already we're winning an exchange, to add to the pawn we stole earlier.

24.g3

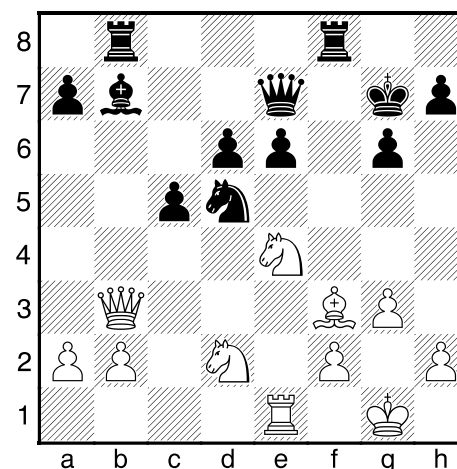
24.♞f1 d5 25.♘g3 d4. Poor queen. I was hoping for such a classy way to get the title!

24...♘xe1 25.♞xe1 ♘d5

26.♚b3

The attack paid us handsomely, but now the smoke has cleared. White finally manages to untangle, and I need to find a winning plan.

26...♞ab8



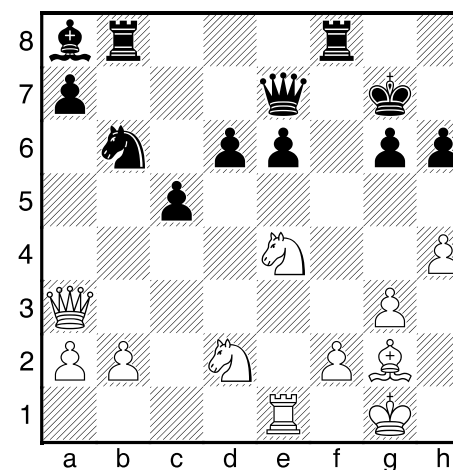
I have lost a lot of these winning positions, and couldn't believe my luck from the opening. So my thinking was, just play one move at a time that can't be bad. Avoid big risks and try not to blunder anything big.

27.♞g2 ♞a8 28.♚a3 ♘b6

You can start to see how Black is getting over-cautious, allowing White to get some activity. I was super-focused on stopping their threats and potential play like ♘c4, but this is unnecessarily passive.

♞28...♘b4 29.♚c3+ e5 30.a3 ♘c6 31.h4 ♘d4!-+ is the correct plan.

29.h4 h6



I spent that whole summer reading Tiviakov's *Rock Solid Chess*, and here I was following his spirit in playing ultra-safe first. I was hoping White's position would self-combust, but of course Black needs to find a way in eventually.

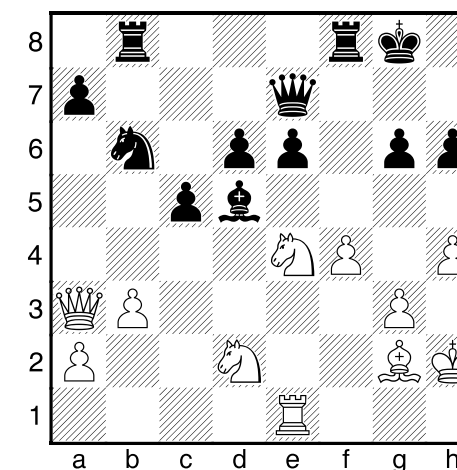
30.f4 ♞d5

The bishop stands dignified on this outpost, holding Black's camp together. It frees my queen for more important duties.

31.b3 ♞g8

I was having trouble conjuring a cohesive plan, but one-move threats like ♚b2 are easier to stop.

32.♞h2



32...♞bd8?

Missing a strong and fairly simple tactic. Sadly, I was still in anxious chicken mode, making sure that their pieces couldn't hurt anything. Otherwise, I'd find: 32...♞xf4! 33.gxf4 (33.♞e2 ♞f5 34.♚a6 ♞bf8-+ with the open f-file, Black should find a winning plan soon enough.) 33...♚xh4+ 34.♞h3 ♚xe1 35.♚xa7 ♞b7 36.♞xe6+ ♞h7! 37.♚a6 ♞xe4 38.♘xe4 ♚xe4-+.

33.♞h3 ♚g7 34.♚a5 ♞h8

Still being overcautious, but it's not easy to decide on any concrete action here.



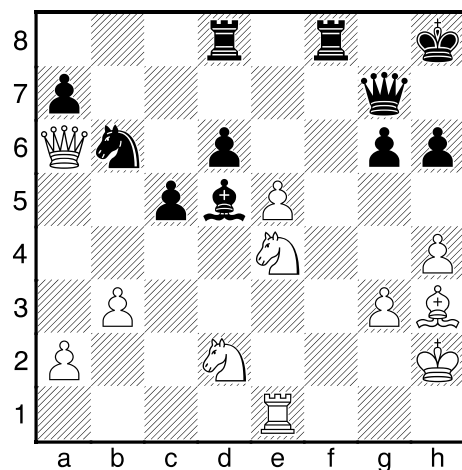
Chess Canada

Ivanov

35. ♖a6 e5

Since I can't really push ...c4, or move my bishop to play ...e5, the plan has to be connected to ...e5. At this point, any open file is a blessing for Black.

36. fxe5



36... dxe5

Apparently 36... ♗xe4 is more precise according to engine, since we can get at White's king quicker. Yet I wanted no risk at all here. 37. ♖xe4 ♖xe5 38. ♖xa7 ♖d5 39. ♗g2 ♖e7 40. ♖a5 ♖f5 41. ♖c3, the only way to stop the attack, but 41... ♖xc3 42. ♖xc3 ♖de8 with a winning endgame.

37. ♖e2

37. ♖xc5 ♖f2+-.

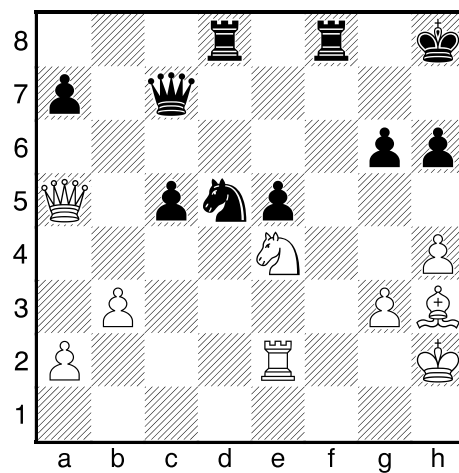
37... ♖c7

Incredibly, even this is tedious to convert as White covers all the key squares on the f-file. The gold is so close, yet so far!

38. ♖a5

We were approaching serious time trouble so I thought it's time to clarify things with some trades. Even though the bishop is pretty on d5.

38... ♗xe4 39. ♖xe4 ♖d5



40. ♖e1

40. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 41. ♖xc5 ♖c3 42. ♖xe5 ♖d2+ 43. ♖h1 ♖d1+ 44. ♖g2 ♖d2+ 45. ♖h1 ♖ff2+- Black's rooks on the second should suffice.

40... ♖f6

At this point I was so sick of that knight, a mere pawn seemed a small price to pay to remove it.

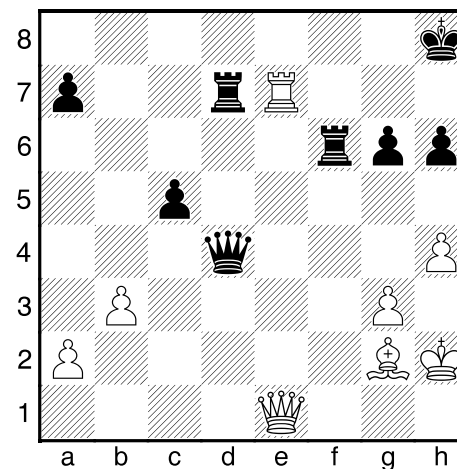
41. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 42. ♖xe5 ♖d6

Dreaming of a queen trade on d2.

43. ♗g2 ♖d4

When in doubt, centralize.

44. ♖e7 ♖d7



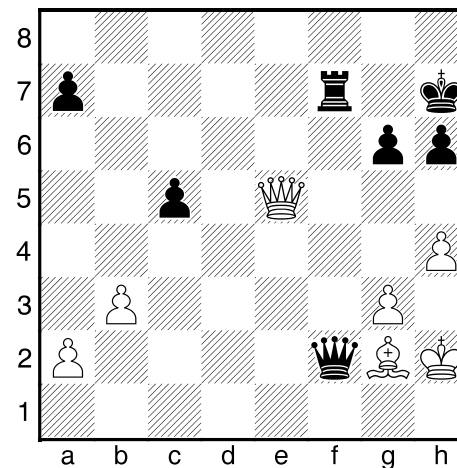
45. ♖e8+

45. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 46. ♖e3 would be tough for me to meet, as risky action is required. 46... g5 (46... ♖g7 47. ♖xc5 is dangerously close to a fortress for White.) 47. hxc5 hxc5 48. ♖xc5 ♖d6 winning, but not so easy in a practical game.

45... ♖g7 46. ♖e4 ♖f2

47. ♖e7+ ♖xe7 48. ♖xe7+ ♖f7

49. ♖e5+ ♖h7



Finally, the dust has settled and we reach an exchange up heavy-piece endgame. It helps that our queenside pawns are on the right colour, and their king ain't the best either. This should be a matter of technique, but I was already shaking under psychological and time pressure.

50. ♖d5

Everything is losing, but 50. h5!? is the scarier move to meet, 50... gxh5 51. ♖h3 ♖f6 (Never too late to mess things up: 51... ♖f5+?? 52. ♖xf5+ ♖xf5 53. ♗e4+-) 52. ♖xh5 ♖e6+ 53. ♖h2 ♖f5 54. ♖d1 ♖g5 55. ♗f3 ♖g7 56. ♖g2 ♖e5 57. ♖d7+ ♖h8 58. ♖d8+ ♖g8 59. ♖h4 ♖d6 eventually, White is tied down to g3, and Black can invade from the side.

50... h5!

After this, the safety margin is quite large and I can press forever.

51. ♖e6 ♖f5 52. ♖e8 ♖g7

If they have a light-square bishop, our king lives on dark squares.

53. ♖e3 ♖c7

At this point we were down to a minute each, and my goal was not to hang anything.

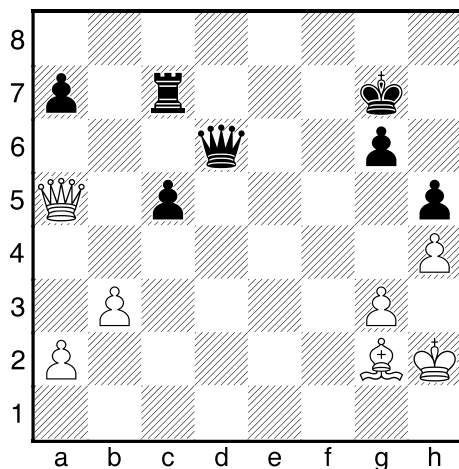
54. ♖c3+ ♖f6

Eventually I realized my target is g3, and we have to get our queen to d6, after which the rook crawls to the 3rd rank to finish the job.

55. ♖a5 ♖d6



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56. ♙b5

56. ♙c3+ would be tougher resistance against my plan, in which case I'd have to come up with new ideas like getting a queen to e7, rook to d4, then queen to e5, coming after h4 and g3 together.

56... ♖e7 57. ♙c4 ♖e3
Finally!

Hallelujah.

I felt no happiness at his handshake, that would come later. Instead there was a profound sense of relief.

I kept thinking about the Lord of the Rings scene where the ring is finally thrown into the fire, and Frodo looks at Sam to say, "It's gone. It's done".

The game itself wasn't ingenious, but I was able to come up with enough pressure on the kingside to win material, and then demonstrate enough technique/solidity to convert it.

This win also helped me get 2nd place in the final standings, but nothing compares to the title, which is the hardest project I've ever had to finish.

0-1

a profound sense of relief

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov
Ivanov, Mike (2364)
Pulvett Marin, Daniel
Eduardo (2482)

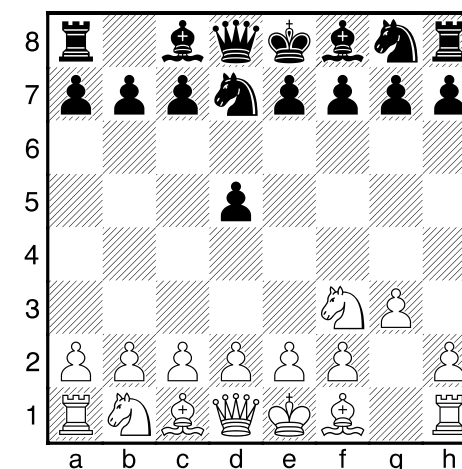
A07

6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(7.13), 2024

This game took place right after I got the title, so it wasn't the most combative, although still rich psychologically.

Tenerife has an artificial beach which I badly wanted to visit, but it would be irresponsible to go when every game had grand importance. So I was happy to finally go when it didn't matter anymore, on the morning of this game. Specific prep wouldn't have helped me anyways, since IM Pulvett hadn't played this 2... ♘d7 system before. Thankfully, general prep before the tournament helped a lot here.

1. ♘f3 d5 2. g3 ♘d7



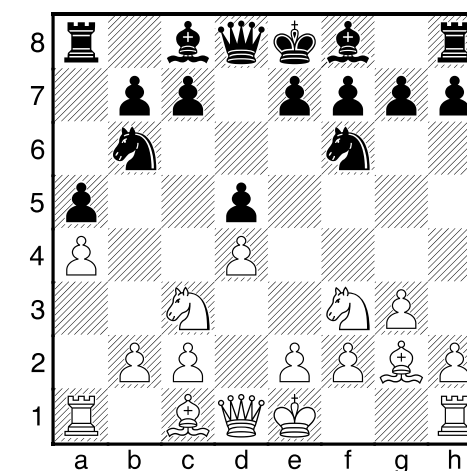
The point of this line is to avoid KIA setups as Black's threat of ... e5 forces White to play d4. The knight may not be the best on b6 but he does stop c4, and Black gets London-like play.

3.d4 ♘b6 4. ♘c3

In this system, White often wants to go for a quick e4, often with ♗d3 first.

4... ♗f5

Also interesting, and perhaps more precise is 4... ♘f6. The point is White will no longer have the ♘h4-g2 maneuver, so the bishop will be harder to harass. After 4... ♘f6 5. a4 a5 6. ♗g2: *Analysis Diagram*



6... ♗f5 7. ♘h4 ♗g4 8. h3 ♗h5 9. g4 ♗g6 10. ♘xg6 hxg6 11. g5 ♘h5 12. e4 e6 is similar to the game; I have the bishop pair as a theoretical advantage but Black is super solid and isn't planning on letting my bishops have any fun.

6... h6!? tries to avoid giving White any edge at all:



7.♔d3 g6 8.e4 dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♕f5
10.♘xf6+ exf6 11.♖e2+ ♔e7 12.♙e3
♘d5 Once again, Black should be
satisfied;

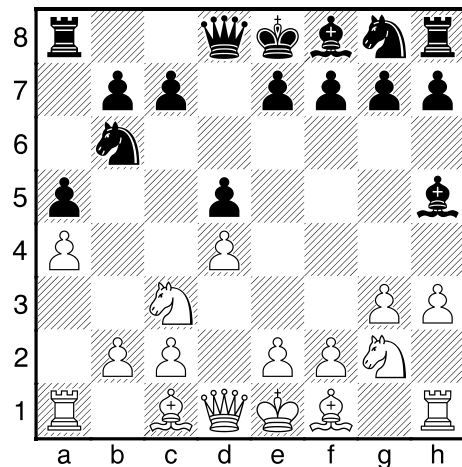
7.0-0 g6 (7...♙f5! *White can't even get
the bishop pair, so Black is swell here*)
8.♘e5 ♙g7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙b2 ♘g4
11.♘xg4 ♙xg4±;

7.b3!? 8.♙a3 e6 9.♙xf8 ♔xf8 10.♘e5
with a psychological edge thanks to
slight Black discoordination, but not
an objective advantage.

5.a4 a5

A week after this game, I lost to GM
Roland who tried foregoing ...a5,
which is definitely necessary for
Black: 5...♘f6 6.a5 ♘c4±.

6.♘h4 ♙g4 7.h3 ♙h5 8.♘g2!



This idea was still my preparation,
and poses some problems for Black.
White will at the least get to trade
the h5 bishop without weakening
the structure with g4, which makes
a huge difference compared to the

4...♘f6 lines.

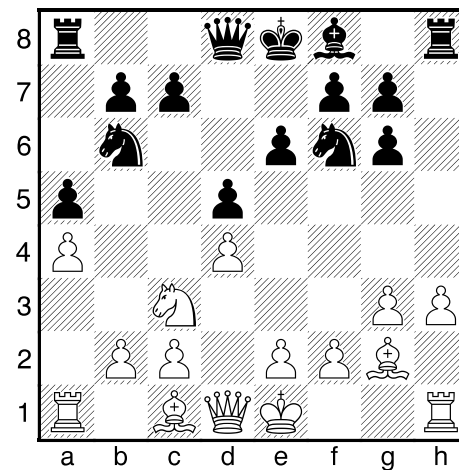
8...e6

I knew this game with the ♘g2 idea,
which told me White was already
comfortable here: 8...f5 9.g4! ♙g6
(9...fxg4 10.♘f4±) 10.♘f4 ♘f6 11.♘e6±
♖d7 12.♘b5! ♘f7 (12...♖c8 13.♘c5+)
13.♘bxc7+- **Banusz, T (2607)–Indjic, A
(2612) HUN–cht 2021–22.**

9.♘f4 ♙g6 10.♙g2

10.h4!? was also interesting. 10...♘f6
11.f3 ♙e7 12.h5 ♙f5 13.e4 dxe4 14.g4
g5 Becomes complete chaos. Equal
to the computer of course!

10...♘f6 11.♘xg6 hxg6



12.e4?!

This inaccuracy was played instantly
due to recklessness and over-
confidence. My opponent was
spending a lot of time here so I felt
like I could do no wrong...

Maintaining flexibility with 12.0-0 was
probably better: 12...♙b4 (12...♙e7

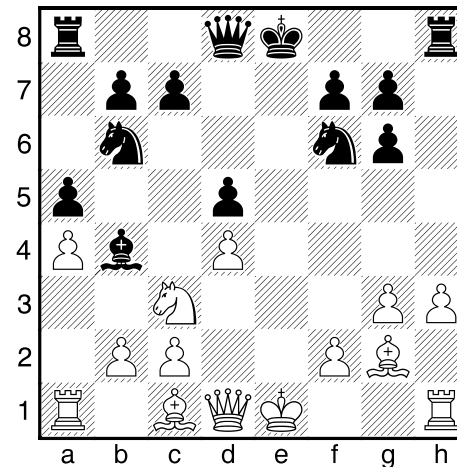
13.e4±) 13.♘b1!? 0-0 14.♘d2 ♖e8
15.c3 ♙d6 16.e4± White gets to play
the break on their terms this time.

12...♙b4 13.exd5

Only here I realized that the bishop
pair was a mythical advantage here,
and not a practical one. Time for
damage control.

13.e5 ♘e4 14.♖d3 ♖d7 15.0-0 ♘xc3
16.bxc3 ♙e7 turns into a good French
Winawer for Black, since the "French"
bishop has graduated to the dark
squares.

13...exd5



14.♖d3

A necessity to keep the pawn
structure decent.

14.0-0 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 0-0 16.♙g5
♖d6; with the blockade on c4 and e4,
Black is already preparing to press in
this middlegame.

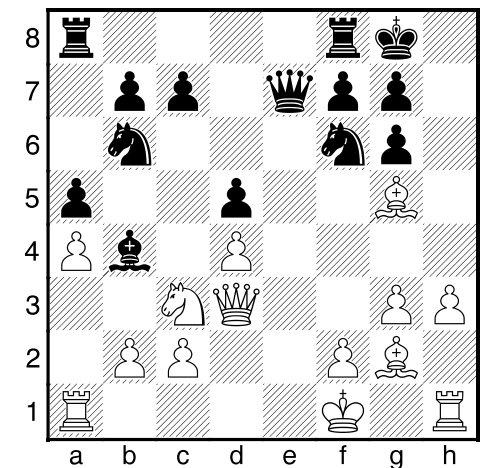
14...♖e7+ 15.♔f1

Another sad necessity. The good
news is Black can't really punish us,
as their knights are too far and we're
still solid. Here I realized I got nothing
out of the opening.

15.♙e3 ♘c4 16.0-0-0 c6 17.♙g5 0-0±
with the knight on c4, only Black can
be better.

15...0-0 16.♙g5

**Mr. Pulvett is one of the best visually
impaired players in the world**, as his
rating shows. Yet he burnt a lot of
time to reach this position, leaving
himself with only 20 minutes for the
rest of the game (time control was
90+30). From what I learned, time
trouble is the hardest phase for
visually impaired players, as keeping
track of the clock is a chore in itself.
I wasn't happy with the position
which I thought was around equal,
but still uncomfortable. Moreover, the
momentum was going Black's way. I
offered the draw, and my opponent
accepted after considering the time
situation/his winning chances.





The game might have continued...
16...♙xc3 17.♖xc3 ♖fe8 18.♙f3 ♗d7
19.♙xf6 (allowing ...♘e4 would not be
wise, as the knights start to dominate
my bishops) 19...gxf6 20.b3 ♘c8
21.♙g2 c6 22.♖ae1 ♘d6 Black is
rock solid.

Usually I'm not a fan of short draws,
but this game allowed me to release
some nervous energy and prepare
for the last games, which were highly
eventful.

1/2-1/2

notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

Ivanov, Mike (2364)

Sosa, Tomas (2515)

B23

*6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(8.2), 2024*

At this point in the tournament, the
title was obtained and the pressure
was gone. This let me play more
loosely and without worries of losing.

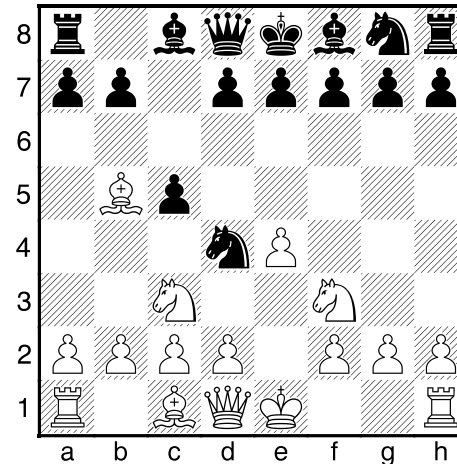
1.♘c3

This has been my beloved pet
opening for a while, and it's a great
way to get away from main lines.
I knew Tomas played everything
against 1.e4, so I wanted to keep him
at least a bit off balance.

1...c5 2.e4 ♘c6 3.♙b5

This line can transpose into the
Tiviakov Grand Prix after d6 f4, a
Rossolimo, or the ...♘d4 line we see
in the game.

3...♘d4 4.♘f3



4...g6

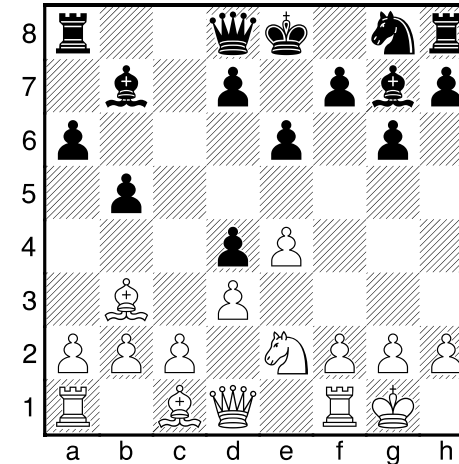
While many things are playable,
including ...g6 of course, this made
me slightly optimistic since it gives
White play unlike the 4...e6 line.
From here on in, I felt like Tomas was
improvising a little, playing by intuition
which was built on other Sicilian lines.
Yet this one has a distinct character.

4...e6 5.0-0 a6 6.♙d3 ♘c6 is
considered one of the most critical
lines for Black, where White struggles
to get an advantage.

5.♘xd4 cxd4 6.♘e2

This line is supposed to be fine for
Black objectively, yet still has some
poison. Black has to strike in the
center or queenside, before White's
kingside space becomes paramount.

**6...♙g7 7.0-0 a6 8.♙a4 b5
9.♙b3 ♙b7 10.d3 e6**



Up to here, everything makes sense.
Black blunts the bishop, and prepares
for ...♘e7. At some point, when better
developed, Black would like to go
...d5.

11.♖e1

The queen needs to join the party,
and this is as good a way as any.

11...♘e7 12.f3!?

This was the plan that caught Tomas
off guard. I want to scaffold the center
as much as possible, considering that
Black is doing everything possible to
break through e4, and open up the
bishops.

12.f4 is also possible, but allows a
timely ... f5 to hurt my pieces and
open up the bishop on b7. 12...0-0
13.♖g3 ♖b6 14.a4 f5↑

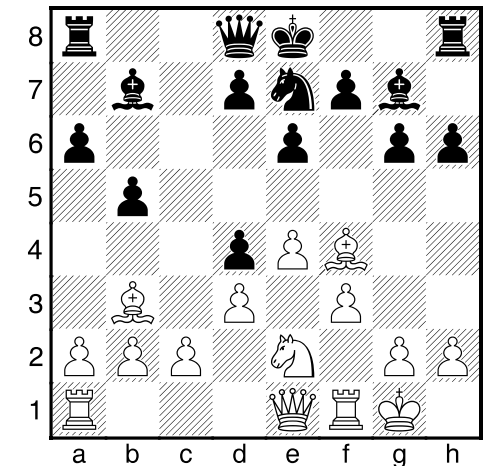
12...h6?!

A step in the wrong direction, which

gives me something to bite on.

12...0-0 13.♖h4 ♘c6 14.♙g5 f6
15.♙h6 f5 16.♙g5 ♖c7 was a more
logical way for Black to continue,
where any kingside attack is still far
off. Black maintains dynamic equality,
and has some eventual play on the
c-file and queenside.

13.♙f4



I hint at the d6 square, even if it's not
as scary for Black as it seems. ♖g3
and ♖d2 are also in the air, making
Black's weaknesses felt.

13...e5?!

Black takes a stab in the dark and
blocks my bishop, but this structure
will never be good as my bishop on
b3 will remain a shining beacon for
the rest of the game.

14.♙d2

The bishop is great here, eyeing all
the key diagonals.



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14...d5

The problem with this pawn on d5 is that it ties up Black's pieces forever, as they have to keep it in place, or else... The white bishop on b3 and rook on f1 would come alive if the d5 pawn ever captures e4.

15.♔h4

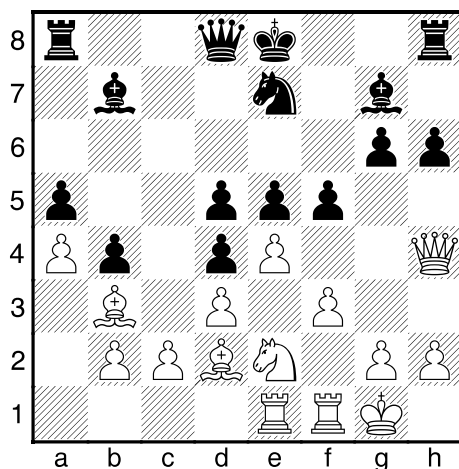
Making it hard for Tomas to castle. The problem for Black is they have no active counterplay, as ...g5 weakens the kingside irreparably. In the meantime, I can muster up my army at leisure.

15.f4! I should be more brave with opening the center, while his king is still stuck here. Yet it seemed a bit counter-intuitive to support the center with f3, and then break it with f4 right after.

15...♔d6?!

An inaccuracy, as is 15...h5 16.f4!±. Instead, 15...a5 was best, 16.a4 (16.a3!?) 16...b4 17.♖ae1 f5!

Analysis Diagram



Black has to take back the initiative, even if it looks daunting! Suddenly White's pieces might get crammed.

18.exf5 ♟xf5 19.♔h3 (19.♔f2 0-0) 19...♔d6 20.f4 e4 21.dxe4 dxe4 22.♟g3 ♟xg3 23.hxg3 Insane position where Black's exposed king is compensated by the delicious Black center and fine Fischer bishops.

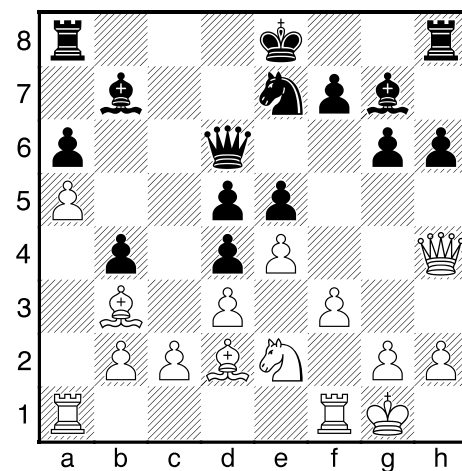
16.a4

The worst piece in my camp is the rook on a1, so before we take decisive action, let's enjoy the time to create more weaknesses. Black has no effective counterplay, so I'm not in a huge hurry.

16...b4

Otherwise, I would take on b5, trade rooks, and invade with the second rook on the a-file.

17.a5



We split up the best friends on a6 and b4, so we have more pawns to

eat for dessert. The black queen is hopelessly tied down now.

17...♞c6

Stopping ♖a4, which would win a pawn. Nonetheless, Black is out of meaningful counterplay here.

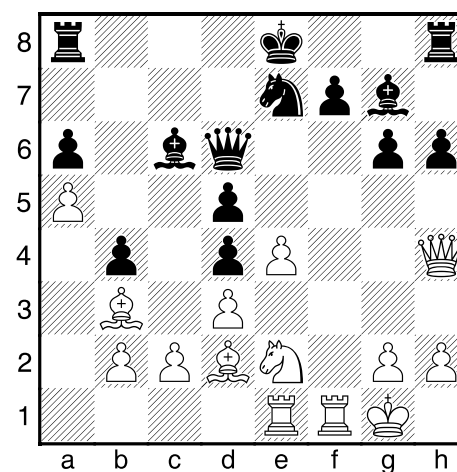
18.f4

About time! We need to use the moment while the black king can't castle, and our rooks are connected, which can't be said about the black rooks.

18...exf4 19.♞xf4 ♔d7 20.♞d2

The bishop reminds Black about their many weaknesses, while getting out of trouble's way as ...g5 was coming. By poking their targets, White gets the time to prepare for the final attack.

20...♔d6 21.♖ae1



No soldier left behind!

21...g5

Black fatally weakens the h5 and f5 squares. Not that they had anything better, as their king is going to be weak wherever he goes: 21...h5 22.♞g5 "Where do you think you're going?", says the bishop to the king :)

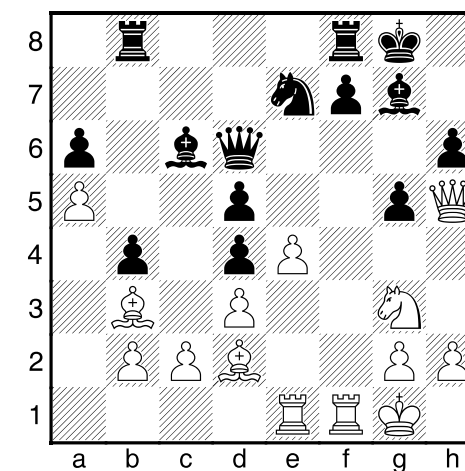
22.♔h5 0-0

Engines prefer to give up f7 with 22...0-0-0 marking this as +3, despite the equal material up to this point. That tells you something about Black's positional struggles.

23.♟g3

The knight creeps towards those juicy light squares.

23...♖ab8



24.exd5

At this point I had a long think, considering the many tempting options available to White: e5, ♟f5 followed by taking with rook or pawn, and simply ♖f2 came to mind. Yet I felt that we need to hurry before Black's



Chess Canada

Ivanov

pieces all get untangled or they trade the queens with ...♔g6. We need to explode the center!

24.e5 ♖g6 25.♔xg6 fxg6 was not at all clear to me, even if better for White;

24.♘f5 ♘xf5 25.♖xf5 (25.exf5 ♖f6 is the move I didn't like. I considered h4 here, but thought that there should be something simpler.) 25... dxe4 26.♖xf7? (♟26.♙xg5) 26...♖xf7 27.♔xf7+ ♚h8 28.dxe4 (28.♖f1 ♖f8) 28...d3 Miraculously, Black is no longer worse!

24...♙e8

Black realizes that taking on d5 is tactically busted, but this isn't much better:

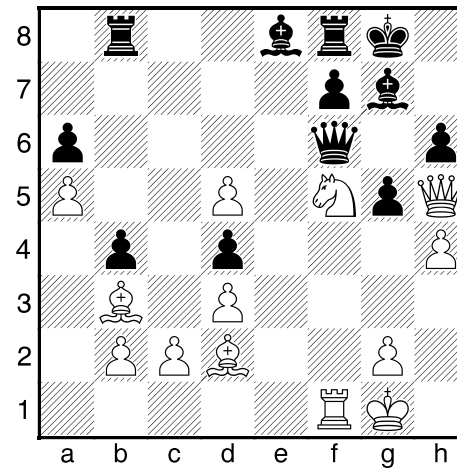
24...♘xd5 25.♘f5 ♖d7 26.♘xh6+-;

24...♙xd5 25.♖xe7! is a move that took me embarrassingly long to find. After seeing this variation it was much easier to sac the exchange in the game. 25...♙xb3 26.♘f5 ♖g6 27.♔xg6 fxg6 28.♖xg7+ ♚h8 29.♖xg6 with an extra piece

25.♖xe7!

Once our knight gets to f5, he will be worth at least the rook I'm giving away.

25...♔xe7 26.♘f5 ♖f6 27.h4!



We need to strike while the iron is hot. Black can't hold the kingside with those pieces.

27...♚h7

27...gxh4 28.♘xh6+-.

28.hxg5 ♖g6

Black dreams of trading queen or closing the h-file.

29.♖h2

We need to take on h6 with our knight, so if they take back with bishop, we have ♖f6. Eyeing that poor loose rook on b8 allows us the time to do so.

29...♖b7 30.♘xh6 f5

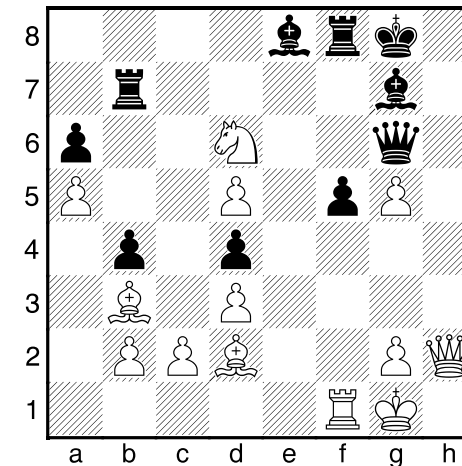
Desperate measures, but I still have to be careful.

31.♘f7+

Considering d6 is coming very soon, I realized the key here is to remove

their light-square bishop which will be too useful blocking on f7. Hence the knight goes to take care of business.

31...♔g8 32.♘d6



32...♖a7?!

32...♖d7 Was a better try for Black, but without the bishop, our checks will cost them at least a rook. 33.♘xe8 ♖xe8 34.d6+ ♚f8 35.♙a4 ♖ed8 36.g4 ♖f7 37.♙b3 ♖dd7 38.♙xf7.

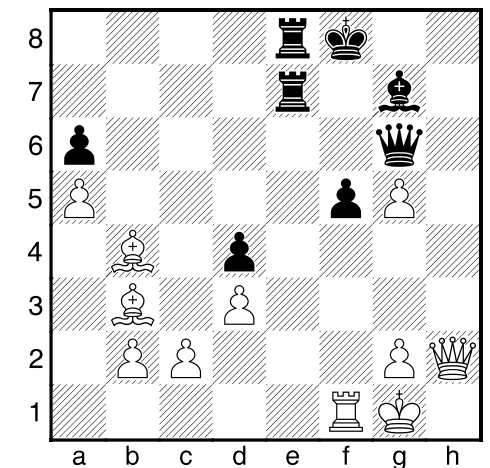
33.♘xe8 ♖xe8 34.d6+

Time for the sniper bishops to shine.

34...♚f8 35.d7!

We need open lines here, not pawns. Their king won't find refuge anywhere.

35...♖xd7 36.♙xb4+ ♖de7



Black is all tied up, with nowhere to go. We just need to help them with the Zugzwang.

37.♔f4

37.g4 was also tempting, but such positions should be enjoyed. :)

37...♙h8 38.♖e1

The king wanted to run away to g7, and we can't have that.

38...♙g7 39.g4

Finally, the little guy enters to finish the attack.

39...♔h7 40.♖xe7 ♖xe7 41.♔b8#

I was happy to win cleanly, which rarely happens against strong players. This also put me into contention for the first three places, which made the last round more exciting.

1-0



notes:

IM Mike Ivanov

Fiorito, Francisco (2416)
Ivanov, Mike (2364)

A15

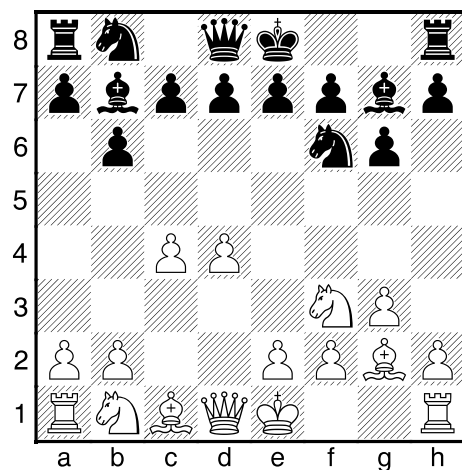
*6th San Cristobal Open A Tenerife
(9.2), 2024*

Going into the last round, I was happy with how things went, but the last game would be significant for the final standings. My goal was not to lose, and hopefully leave early enough that I could make my flight at 4 PM.

1.♘f3

My opponent played everything under the sun (which is becoming increasingly common these days) so my preparation was simple: 1.♘f3 ♘f6, 1.d4 ♘f6, 1.e4 e6, and 1.c4 e5.

1...♘f6 2.g3 b6 3.♙g2 ♙b7
4.c4 g6 5.d4 ♙g7

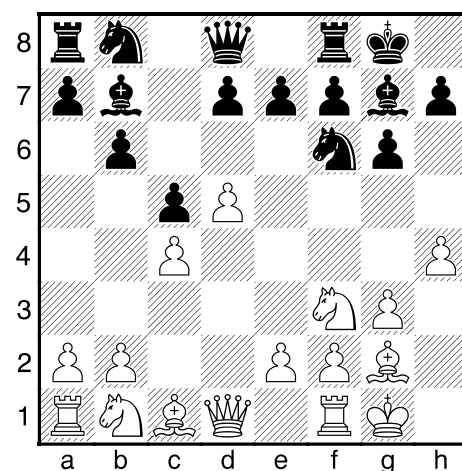


Thankfully these double-fianchetto setups are good against any g3 opening, along with anything that doesn't aim strictly for the center.

6.0-0 0-0 7.h4!?

I don't know if this was preparation, improvisation, or divine inspiration. The little logic behind it which I understand, is White wants to discourage Black from moving the f6 knight. If the pawn gets to h6, then the power of my g7 bishop will be cancelled out. That being said, it has more surprise value than any objective edge.

7...c5 8.d5



8...e6?

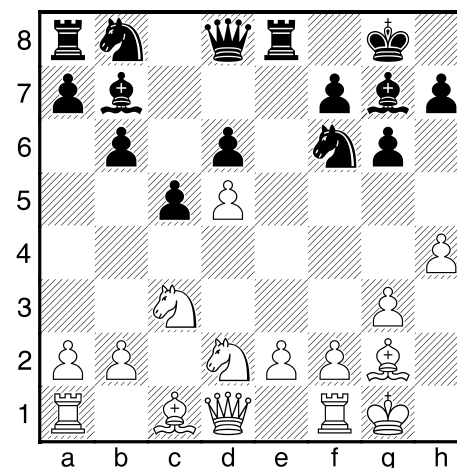
I miss the critical moment to challenge White's concept and show that h4 is a waste of time. After ...b5! this would have been a totally different ballgame. Interestingly, I felt that ...b5 was principled and correct, but thought that it would be the first thing he prepared, and a structure

I didn't understand. The Benoni is more my cup of tea, but here it turns out to be a bad one, since the b7 bishop has a hard time.

8...b5!:

9.♘c3 b4 10.♘a4 d6;
9.♘fd2 b4 10.a3 a5;
9.♙e1 bxc4 10.e4 d6;
9.cxb5 a6! 10.bxa6 ♙xd5†

9.♘c3 exd5 10.cxd5 ♙e8
11.♘d2 d6



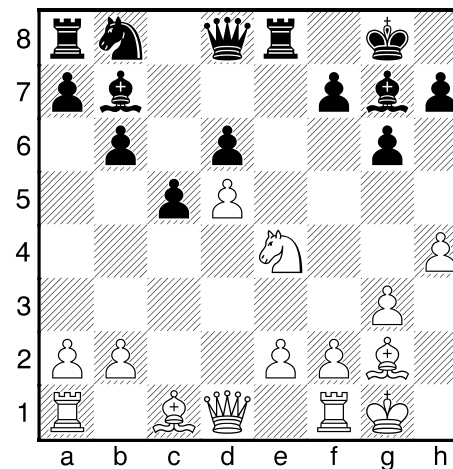
12.♘de4

12.♘c4 ♙a6 what I was hoping for, when we get something resembling a Fianchetto Benoni.

12...♘xe4 13.♘xe4

**San Cristóbal
de La Laguna**

*Canary Islands city hosts a
Norm Tournament in a UNESCO
World Heritage site!*



Really unpleasant. White suddenly has dreams of ♙f4/♙g5, and my dark squares are suffering. The b8 knight isn't enjoying himself either.

13...♘a6

13...f5 14.♘g5 ♘a6 15.e4 fxe4
16.♘xe4 ♘b4 17.♘g5 is still highly unpleasant for Black.

14.♙g5 f6

Around here, I knew it was going to be a tough game.

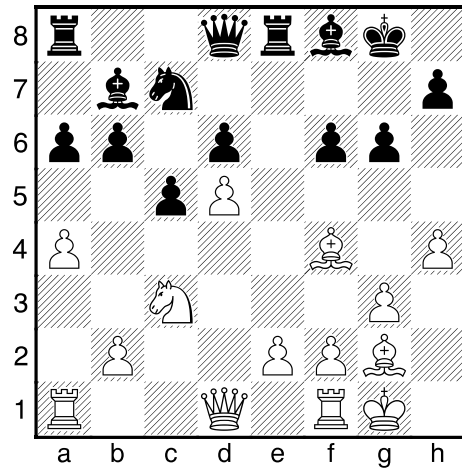
15.♙f4 ♙f8 16.♘c3 ♘c7
17.a4 a6





Chess Canada

Ivanov



18. ♖d3

18. ♖b3! basically wins a pawn by force, with insufficient compensation: 18... ♖b8 19. ♖xb6 ♘a8 20. ♖a5 ♖xb2 21. ♖ab1 ♖c2 22. ♖fc1 ♖xc1+ 23. ♖xc1± White doesn't have the extra pawn, but he's definitely in the driver's seat here.

18... ♕d7

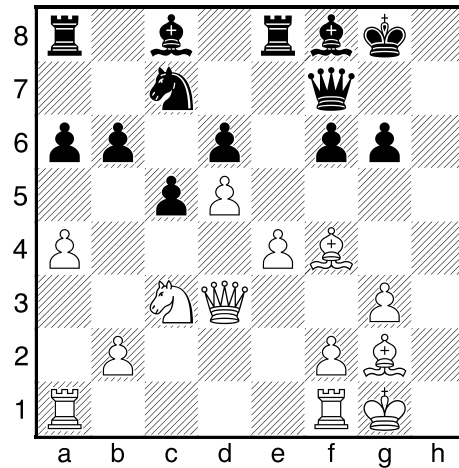
For some reason, when a queen tries to stop ...b5 in the Benoni, you're always supposed to play it anyway, without caring for material. I forgot this rule.

18... b5!?:

19. axb5 axb5 20. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 21. ♘xb5?! ♘xb5 22. ♖xb5 ♘a6 23. ♖b3 ♘xe2=;

19. h5 b4 20. hxc6 bxc3 21. gxh7+ ♔h8 22. bxc3 ♖e7 isn't pleasant for Black, but White has to prove they have more than enough for the piece.

19. h5 ♖f7 20. hxc6 hxc6 21. e4 ♘c8

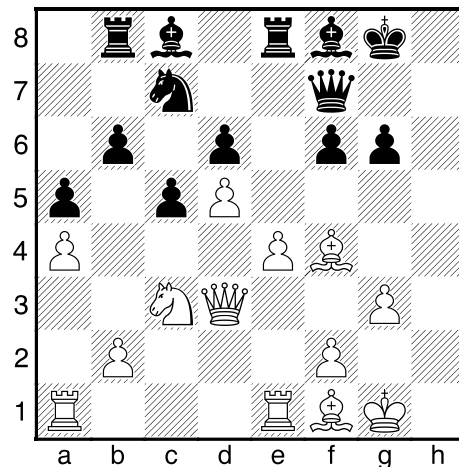


We've arrived at an interesting middlegame. My pieces are all ugly, but the structure is solid and White has nothing concrete.

22. ♖fb1 a5!

Exclamation mark for necessity. We can't allow them to open up files at the moment, plus the bishop on c8 will be happy to come out anywhere at this point.

23. ♖e1 ♖b8 24. ♘f1?!



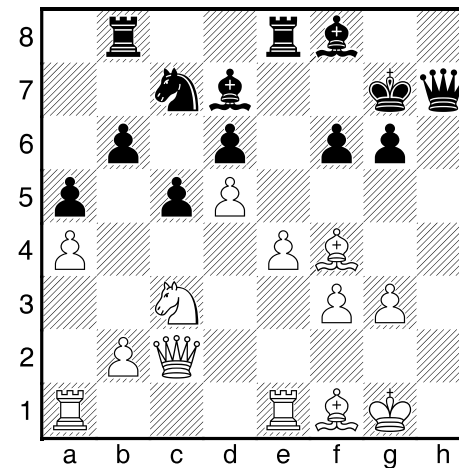
24... ♘d7

24... ♘a6! I talked myself out of this just because White played ♘f1 to stop it, but sometimes the best moves are the ones they thought they stopped. 25. ♖f3 ♘xf1 26. ♘xf1 b5± 27. axb5 ♘xb5 28. ♖xa5 ♘d4 with full compensation for Black.

25. ♖c2 ♖h7

25... g5!? This structure looked too weird to even consider, but is apparently the most promising. The pawns cover the dark squares, the d7 bishop covers the light squares, and the f8 bishop covers... the king. It might go 25... g5!? 26. ♘d2 ♖e7 27. ♘g2 ♖g6 28. f4 gxf4 29. ♘xf4 ♖h7∞.

26. f3 ♔g7?



A bit too caveman-like, breaking all coordination between the black pieces. The h-file was too tempting!

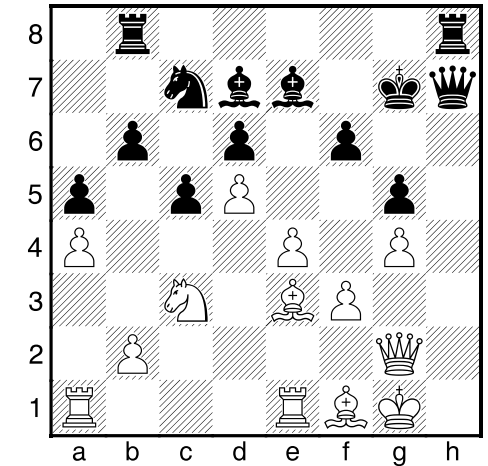
27. ♖d2?!

27. g4! ♘e7 28. ♖e2 ♖h8 29. ♖h2 ♖g8 30. ♘c4± the right plan to cancel out my "attack"

27... g5

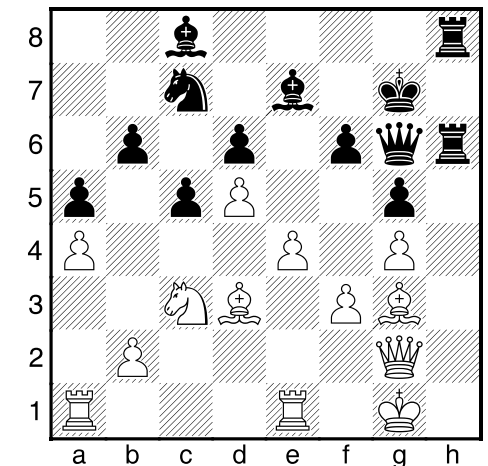
Finally hitting the right plan. Quite a unique pawn structure.

28. ♘e3 ♘e7 29. g4 ♖h8 30. ♖g2



White stopped the mate but their queen is tied down. This gives me enough time to consolidate.

30... ♖g6?! 31. ♘f2 ♖h6 32. ♘g3 ♖bh8 33. ♘d3 ♘c8





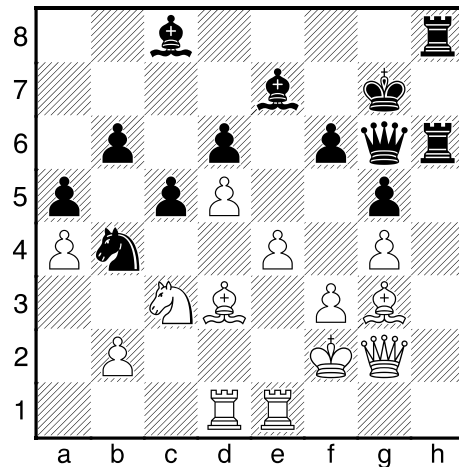
I'm not going to get ...b5 in anytime soon, so might as well fix the miserable knight.

34.♔f2?!

The start of a wrong plan. White had to use the weak squares in my camp!

34.♖d1! ♕f7 35.♖e3 ♘a6 36.♖ad1 ♘b4 37.♙b5 ♖h7 38.♔f2±. The knight on e3 is superb, the rooks are ready to be traded at the right moment, and ♘c4 is a looming threat.

34...♘a6 35.♖ad1 ♘b4

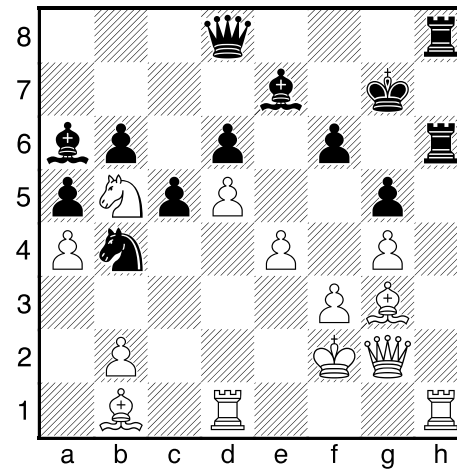


36.♙b1?!

The bishop looks scary but does nothing.

36.♙c4 ♘c2 37.♖h1 ♘d4 Surprisingly, the knight isn't that strong here and can easily be exchanged with ♘b5, leaving White with the edge. 38.♖xh6 ♖xh6 39.♖b5 ♘xb5 40.♙xb5±.

36...♖e8 37.♖b5 ♖d8 38.♖h1 ♙a6



39.♖xh6

Perhaps White's last chance to cause problems is 39.f4! gxf4 40.♙xf4 ♖h4 41.♖f3 ♙xb5 42.axb5 ♖e8 43.♖xh4 ♖xh4 44.♖g1 Black is suffering due to their weak pawns and weak king.

39...♖xh6 40.♖h1

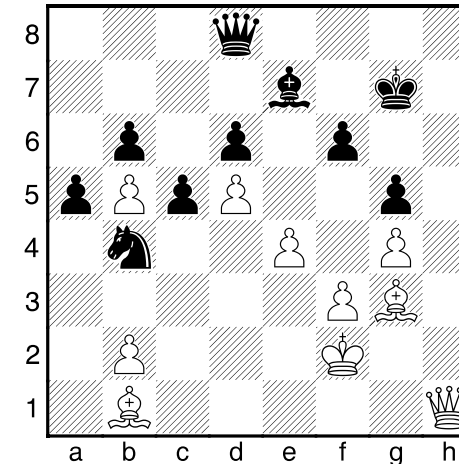
After a depressing defence the whole game and a whole lot of second-guessing, I was more than happy to liquidate.

40...♖xh1 41.♖xh1 ♙xb5 42.axb5

Here Francisco offered me a draw which I gladly took. After ...♖d7, Black is indeed fine as there aren't many breakthroughs. Pushing f4 is weaker without the rooks on.

He was sad that he didn't convert a clear edge, but had a tremendous tournament anyways, earning an IM norm. As for me, I was happy to finish **the best tournament of my life** without losing. Sometimes, that requires holding ugly positions, as this game showed.

Final Position



1/2-1/2

editor: As Mike said, it is never too late to mess up!

In the final position, Black's game actually hangs by a thread. In fact, Stockfish says Black has *only one* move to survive: 42...a4□. This took me a long time to (maybe) understand...

First, the simplest defensive tries lose to breakthroughs for the Bs and/or Queen:

42...♖e8 43.e5+-;
42...♖h8? 43.♖xh8+ ♔xh8 44.f4+-.

Second, ...♖d7 is the right idea: it attacks b5, and keeps an x-ray eye on d5 and g4 making it harder for White to safely break with e5 or f4.

But the immediate 42...♖d7 loses! Not to 42...♖d7 43.e5!? dxe5□ 44.♖h7+ ♔f8 45.♙g6 ♖xd5□=, which shows one point of keeping the ♖ hitting the d5 pawn.

But the immediate 42...♖d7 fails to the absurd 43.b3!!.

43...♖xb5? illustrates the point of b3: 44.e5!+- ♘d3+ 45.♔e3 here Black needs ...c4 to keep the diagonal shut, but that brave b3 pawn kills it. 45...♘xe5 46.♖h7+ ♔f8 47.♙xe5 fxe5 (47...♖xb3+ 48.♔f2+-) 48.♖f5+ ♔e8 49.♖c8+ ♔f7 50.♙h7+-.

Which is why Stockfish says Black has only one move (42...a4□) to survive: an essential Black defence depends on blocking the b1-h7 by taking on b5 with the ♖ and then going ...♘d3 and then ...c4, but this blocking maneuver fails if there's a white pawn on b3 fighting for c4. So, Black has to fight for future control of h7 by playing ...a4 immediately. 42...c4 also stops b3 and so is similar to ...a4, but it creates easier targets on c4 and b6.

After 42...♖d7 43.b3 ♖d8!? may be Black's best, but 44.f4! is close to winning: the ♙b1 fights for the kingside while dominating the ♘b4.

– editor

It's never too late to mess up!

Bonus Game

Hikaru Nakamura — World's #1 rated streamer (and FIDE #2) — needed 40 games to meet the activity requirement for the 2026 Candidates. He topped up by playing weekend Swisses across North America. Online drama junkies complained, but opponents and organizers loved it. Naka conceded only two draws in 22 games, this one in Fred McKim's 2025 Maritime Open...

Ivanov, Mike (2366)
Nakamura, Hikaru (2816)
B30

*Summerside Maritime op
 Summerside (3), 12.10.2025*

Notes based on Mike's YT vid:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goZDEuOoSQk>

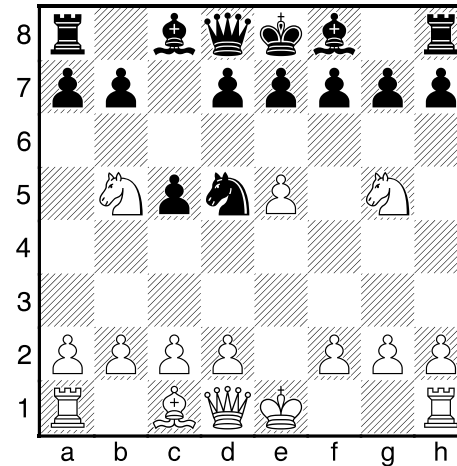
How to Draw Nakamura ;)

- 1) Keep it simple;
- 2) minimize counterplay;
- 3) get paired when your 2800+ opponent wants the game to end quickly so he can join an online prize-money tournament!

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5
 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4**

Two years before I had a game against a French GM that went 4...♙c7 5.0-0 ♘d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.♘d5 ♘xd5 8.exd5 ♙c5 with a fascinating position that might go 9.c4 a6 10.b4∞ which is much too complex to try against Hikaru.

**5.e5 ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5
 7.♘g5**



7...h6!?

MI: I had no idea this was possible. I knew about this Carlsen–Caruana game, and so thought ...f6 was the only move; at least it was the only move in the lichess database:
 7...f6 8.♘e4 f5 9.♘bc3 ♘xc3 10.♘xc3 d6 11.0-0 dxe5 12.♙e2 e6 13.♙xe5 ♙d6 14.♙e2 ♘e7 15.b3 0-0 16.♙b2∞, **Caruana–Carlsen**, Norway Chess Armageddon, Stavanger blitz, 2019. *[editor - MI did correctly remember the game, but had the players' names reversed.]*

8.♘e4=

12min on this move. There are other options, but I followed White's maneuvers from the Carlsen game.

8.♙h5? g6 9.♙f3 hxg5♠;

8.♙f3? hxg5 9.♙xd5 a6 10.♘c3♠
 White will be weak on the light squares.

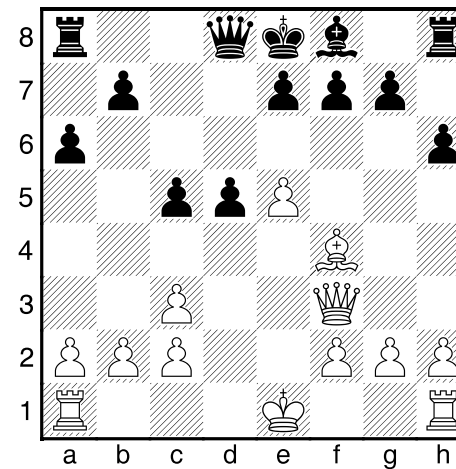
I had no idea this was possible:
 8.♘xf7! ♙xf7 9.♙f3+ ♘f6! 10.exf6 exf6 11.♙d5+± (11.♙h5+ g6

12.♙d5+=). I asked [Nakamura] about this line afterward, and he said he was OK with the draw.

**8...a6 9.♘bc3 ♘xc3 10.dxc3
 d6 11.♙f4**

11.exd6 exd6 12.0-0 d5 13.♘g3 ♘e7 14.♘h5 0-0 15.♙f3, getting closer, so that if 15... ♘e6?? 16.♙xh6+- **KABOOM!**

**11...♙f5 12.♙d5 ♘xe4
 13.♙xe4 d5□ 14.♙f3C**



I was pretty happy with this position. I didn't know how to play it, but I knew I should be fine for now.

14...e6

Otherwise White goes e5–e6!

15.c4

Keeps it as simple as possible, basically forcing an endgame. 15.h4 keeps it more interesting, with attacking ideas like against the French and Caro.

15...g5 16.♙d2

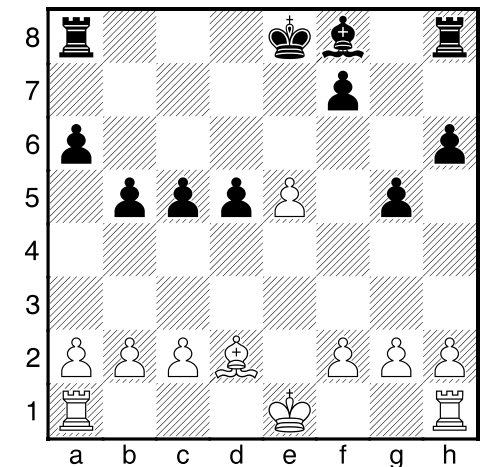
16.♙g3 looks bad to me, stuck behind e5, and allowing ...♙h6.

In his video review of the game, **Gotham Chess** (Levy Rozman) suggested this: 16.♙e3!? d4 17.♙d2 ♙c7, which looks good, but is more double-edged.

16...b5!? 17.cxd5

17.h4!

17...♙xd5 18.♙xd5 exd5



White should hold this, but the margin for error is miniscule: if I go even a little bit wrong then this is where things start to go downhill.

19.f4

19.a4 b4 20.c3 a5 looked like the kind of endgame Black could win.

19...gxf4 20.0-0

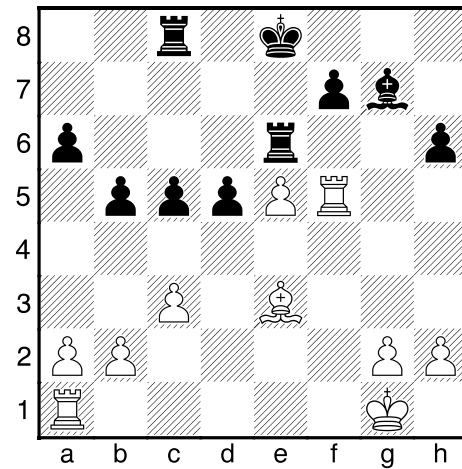
It took 25 min to figure out I had to castle here!



Chess Canada Ivanov

20...♖g8 21.♖xf4 ♖g6 22.c3

22...♙g7 23.♖f5 ♜e6 24.♙e3
♜c8



25.♖af1

25...♖c7 26.♖d1 ♘xe5
27.♖xd5 ♘xh2+=

decoying the ♖ to c7.

Hikaru offered a draw and, of course, I took it: it's a drawn rook endgame and I'm not about to outplay Hikaru in it. If he had been a 2200... maybe I would think about it.

 $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ 

photo: Fred McKim

work or play?
Yes!



links

Canada Chess Youth Club
<https://www.canadachess.ca/>

YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/@MasterChessCanada>

Best Stories in Chess
[https://www.amazon.ca/stores/Mike-Ivanov/author/B0FPKW233?](https://www.amazon.ca/stores/Mike-Ivanov/author/B0FPKW233?pf_rd_p=80000000-0000-4000-9000-000000000000)

The Petrosian Pilgrimage church prophylaxis story is on p.60-61.

Regan COVID rating lag study
<https://rjlipton.com/2023/08/04/should-these-quantities-be-linear/>



Imagine you have 1100+ games to select from: which do you choose to share?

I'm guessing it's not the long game where a dangerous attack is thwarted by clever defence, and the counter-attack that wins in a 153-move rook endgame.

Disproportionately, players remember and authors publish games with attacks that end in immediate tactical success.

This is good marketing in a world where the average attention span has fallen from 150 seconds in 2004 to 47 seconds in 2021.*

But even then, if you just sort the games by length, a lot of the short ones will be atrociously played or boringly drawn.

You might try tools like the "Beauty" rating in Chessbase, or Ed Schröder's "Best of Chess" app — *with adjustable parameters for King Attack, Material Sacrifice, and Game Length!* But both of those produce a lot of false positives.

You *could* just show Carlsen games... but that lane's crowded.

Suggestions?

- John Upper

*"The End of Reading Is Here," Rose Horowitz, July 8, 2026. To appear in *The Atlantic*.

Cites the book *Attention Span* by Gloria Mark, a UC Irvine psychologist/informatics researcher, saying that average attention on a screen was about 2.5 minutes in 2004, 75 seconds by 2012, and about 47 seconds around five years ago.

Hansima, Charitha (1788) Minano, John (1633)

A10

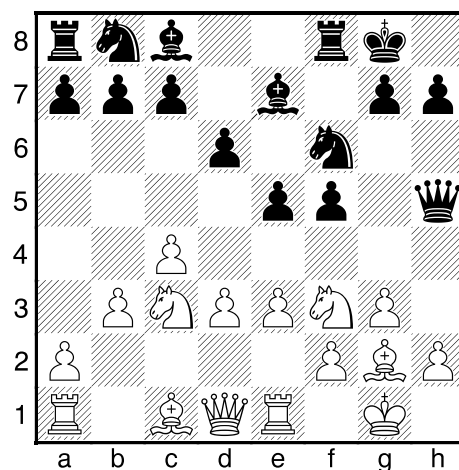
Winnipeg op U1800 Winnipeg CAN
(3.13), 04.01.2025

Notes: John Upper

The U1800 section of the **2025 Winnipeg Open** was shared by John Minano and Zelus Hui with 4.5/5, each gaining over 100 rating points in the process.

The following complex game was played by co-winner Minano.

1.c4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♔g2 e6
4.♘f3 ♕e7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.d3 d6
7.0-0 ♖e8 8.b3 ♗h5 9.♖e1 e5
10.e3



White plays a Reti, Black plays a

Classical Dutch with its standard kingside attacking queen maneuver.

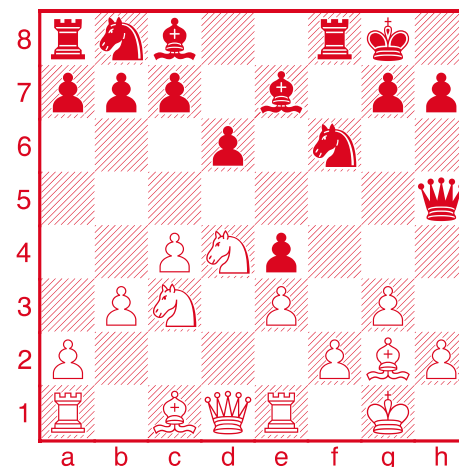
10...e4

The most direct: removing a kingside guard.

11.dxe4?!

♖11.♘d4 keeps the f-file closed — a good thing since the ♖f1 moved — and leaves a black pawn on f5, blocking the ♕c8 access to White's kingside.

11...fxe4 12.♘d4



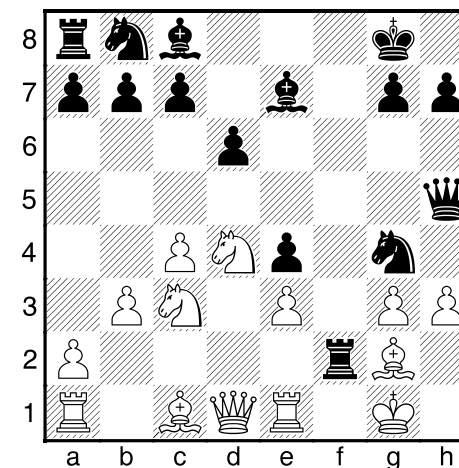
12...♘g4?

Forks h2 and f2, but the pin to the ♗h5 means Black will be forced to sac unsoundly.

♖12...♕g4 13.♖c2 ♘a6 (13...♕f3 14.♘xe4!± ♘xe4? (14...♕g2±) 15.♕xf3 ♖xf3 16.♖xe4 ♖f7 17.♖xb7+-) 14.♘xe4! c5! 15.f3!± (15.♘e2?? ♘b4+-; 15.♘b5?! ♘b4 16.♖d2 d5∞) 15...cxd4 16.fxg4 (16.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 ♖17.fxg4 ♘b4!±)

16...♘g4 17.h3 ♖xe3 18.♕xe3 dxe3 19.♖xe3± and after all the exchanges White has better structure.

13.h3 ♖xf2!



14.hxg4??

♖14.♘xe4! attacks f2, defends g3, leaves the ♘g4 *en prise* and pinned, and wins a pawn that was supporting Black's attack. 14...♖xg2+ 15.♖xg2+- ♘xe3+ 16.♕xe3 ♖xh3+ 17.♖g1+- the ♘e4 defends g3 and White's ♖ will clear the danger before Black's sleeping queenside wakes;

14.♘de2! looks odd to break the pin to the ♗h5, but it leaves the black pieces hanging, and adds the exchanging threat of ♖d5+, and wins too.

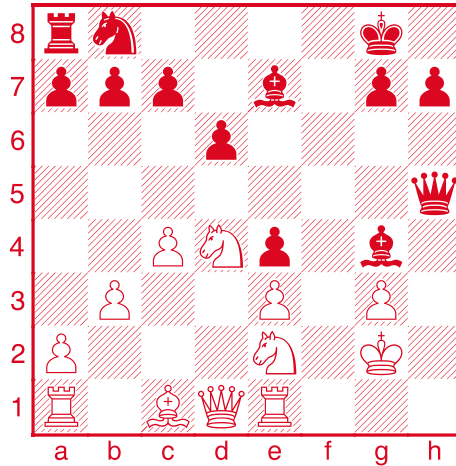
14...♖xg2+! 15.♖xg2 ♕xg4 ♖+

Black has a winning light-square attack. NB: the ♖f8 and ♕c8 only got into the game because White forced

...fxe4, opening a file and a diagonal.

16. ♖ce2!

Defending the ♖ and g3 is the best try. 16. ♖c2? drops g3 and Black crashes through: 16... ♖h3+ ♖-+. .



Is it easier to attack than defend?

Black is down a ♖ for ♖♖, but his last two moves created a huge initiative on the light squares. Now what?

16... ♖c6?

This makes perfect sense: developing the ♖, and freeing the ♖ to come to the f-file, and doing it with the threat to take on d4; how could there be a better move?

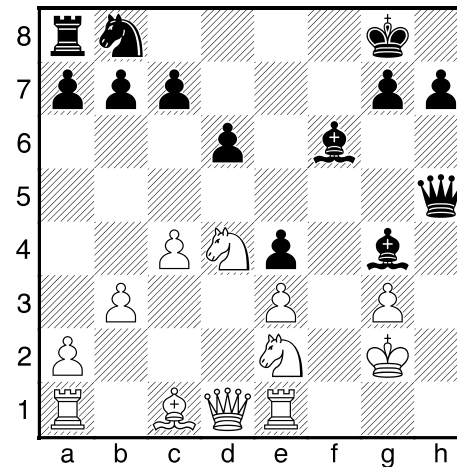
16... ♖f3+? 17. ♖xf3 ♖ exf3+ ♖ 18. ♖f2 fxe2 19. ♖d5+!±;

16... ♖h3+!? 17. ♖g1 Black wants to go ... ♖f3 and mate, but it doesn't work with the ♖d4 defending f3, e.g. 17... c5 is the most direct way to remove the guard of f3, but it only equalizes

if White finds a neat deflection—for-counterplay sac: (17... ♖f3? 18. ♖xf3 exf3 19. ♖d5+ ♖-+ and takes the f-pawn.) 18. ♖f5 ♖ ♖f3 ♖ (18... ♖xf5? 19. ♖d5+ ♖h8 (19... ♖f8 20. ♖f1+-) 20. ♖xb7 ♖-+) 19. ♖d5+ ♖ ♖h8 20. ♖f4 ♖ ♖h1+ 21. ♖f2 ♖h2+ 22. ♖f1=;

16... c5?! 17. ♖h1 ♖ ♖f3+ (17... ♖g5! 18. ♖xf3 exf3+ 19. ♖f2 fxe2 20. ♖d5+ ♖ ♖xd5 21. cxd5 ♖f6 22. ♖b1 ♖d7=;

16... ♖f6 ♖-+: Analysis Diagram



It's hard to imagine this is winning, especially when the more blunt ...c5 was only about equal, but it's true. Black threatens to remove the guard of f3, and if White deals with the threat to the ♖a1 then Black simply captures d4 and has time to reload his attack with the ♖b8 and ♖a8.

a) 17. ♖h1 ♖ ♖f3+ ♖-+ 18. ♖xf3 exf3+ ♖ 19. ♖f2 fxe2 ♖-+ the difference: after ...c5 White saves the game with ♖d5+, but here that would leave the ♖a1 hanging;

b) 17. ♖c2 ♖f3+-+;

c) 17. ♖f4 ♖xd1 18. ♖xh5 ♖xh5+-;

d) 17. ♖b1 is too slow 17... ♖xd4 removes the last guard of f3 and Black has time for reinforcements. (or 17... ♖h3+ and building with ... ♖c6 and ... ♖f8.) 18. exd4 ♖c6 19. ♖f4 and here several moves win (... ♖h3+, ... ♖f8), but the computer shows the best is: 19... e3!!-+;

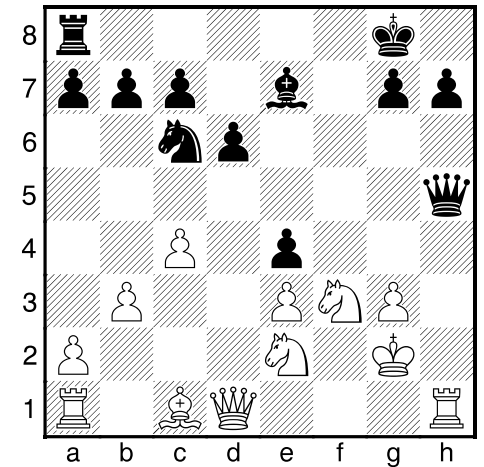
e) 17. ♖b2:

e1) 17... ♖f3+? 18. ♖xf3 exf3+ 19. ♖f2 fxe2 20. ♖xe2=;

e2) 17... c5? 18. ♖h1 ♖f3+? (18... ♖g5! 19. ♖e6!) 19. ♖xf3 ♖xf3+ 20. ♖h2 ♖xb2 21. ♖b1+- Black is up ♖♖ for the exchange, but is about to get ripped apart;

e3) 17... ♖xd4 ♖-+ 18. exd4 tries to create an escape route through e3, (18. ♖xd4 unpinning and threatening mate on g7, but 18... ♖f3+-+ mates first.) 18... ♖c6 here comes the ♖! 19. ♖h1 ♖f3+ 20. ♖f2 e3+!-+ or ... ♖xh1 and if ♖xh1 e3+ and Black wins.

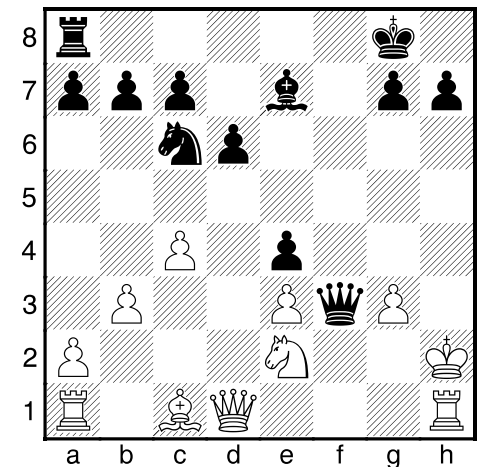
17. ♖h1 ♖ ♖f3+ 18. ♖xf3 ♖



18... ♖xf3+?

18... exf3+ ♖ 19. ♖f2 fxe2 20. ♖d5+ ♖ ♖xd5 21. cxd5 ♖b4 (Threat: ...e1=♖ then ... ♖c2.) 22. ♖xe2 is a complicated ending: Black is objectively a bit better, but the better player will win.

19. ♖h2+-



19... ♖e5

19... ♖f8 20. ♖f4 ♖-+;

19... ♖f2+ 20. ♖h3 and there's no





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perpetual: 20...♖f5+ 21.g4 ♖f3+
22.♘g3+-.

20.♖f1?±

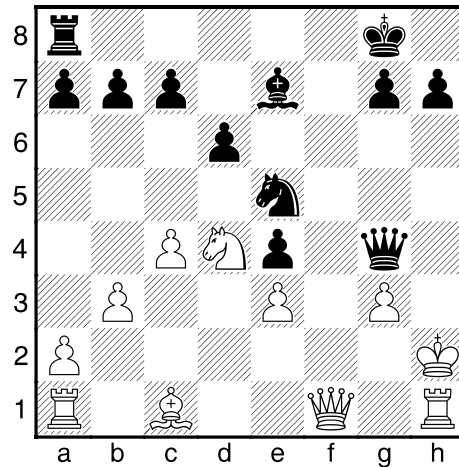
△20.♖f1□+- ♘g4+ (20...♖h5+ 21.♙g2+-)
21.♙g1□ (21.♙h3 ♘f2+±) 21...♘xe3
22.♖xf3 ♘xd1 23.♖f1+- up a ♖.

20...♖g4

20...♖h5+! 21.♙g2 ♖f3+□∞.

21.♘d4?

△21.♘f4 ♖f8 22.♙g2 g5 23.♖d1!±.



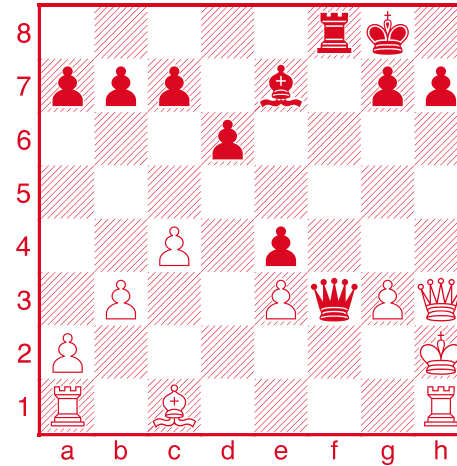
21...♖f8±

21...c5□+- 22.♖f5 (22.♘f5 ♘f3+-+) 22...
cxd4 the ♘e5 defends the ♖g4.

22.♖h3□ ♘f3+

22...c5 23.♖xg4□ ♘xg4+ 24.♙h3
(24.♙g2??? cxd4 25.exd4 ♖f2+ 26.♙g1 ♘f6+-)
24...♘f2+±.

23.♘xf3 ♖xf3=



24.♖g1??

White has only two moves to draw.

the simple one:

24.♖g2 ♖h5+ 25.♙g1 ♖d1+ 26.♙h2
♖h5+=;

the not-so-simple one:

24.♖e6+ ♖f7□= 25.♖g1 ♖h5+□
26.♖h3!? ♖f2+□ 27.♖g2 ♖xg2+□
28.♙xg2 ♖e2+□=

24...♖f6□+- 25.♖c8+ ♙f7
26.♖g2 ♖h6+ 27.♙g1 ♖d1+
28.♙f2 ♖f6+ 29.♖f5 ♖xf5#

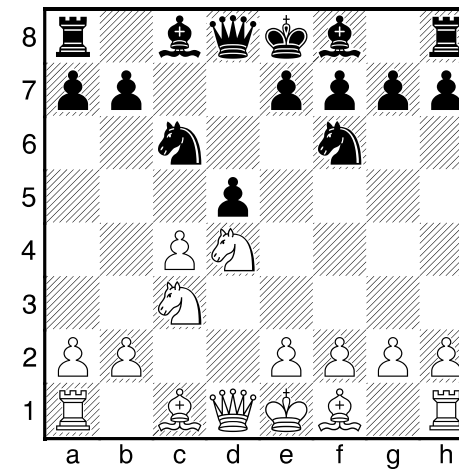
0-1

Ng, Gary (2362) Keleberda, Tymur (2388) A31

15th Calgary International Calgary
(2.3), 27.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♘c6
4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 d5



More usual and better-scoring are
...e6, ...g6 and even ...♖b6. The game
line is rare since White gets easy play
on the c-file, but there are computer-
approved pawn sacs for Black to liven
it up (see the next note and note to
Black's 8th).

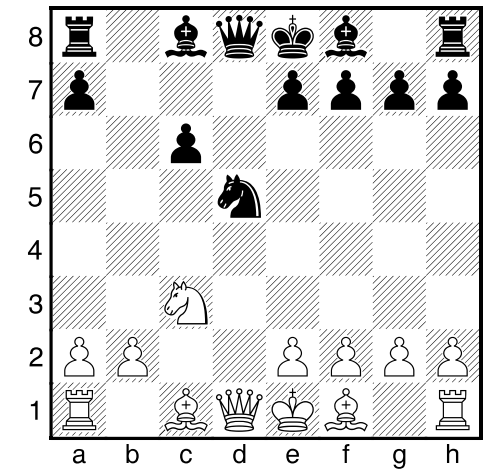
6.cxd5

A year later, Tymur faced a GM
opponent who produced a model
of how to play for the win against
Black's weakened c-file, playing the
computer's top moves until he had a

winning position:

6.♖a4 ♖b6 (6...e6!? is a pawn sac that
SF18 prefers.) 7.cxd5 ♖xd4 8.dxc6
♖xa4 9.♘xa4 (9.cxb7?? ♖c6+-) 9...bxc6
10.f3! e5 11.e4 ♘e6 12.♘e3 ♘b4+
13.♙f2 ♙e7 14.♘a6! ♘c8! 15.♘e2!±
♘e6 16.♖hc1 ♖hc8 17.a3 ♘d6 18.♖c3
♘e8 19.♖ac1+- [Zhou,J \(2591\)](#)–
[Keleberda,T \(2370\)](#), [SPICE Cup, 2025](#).

6...♘xd5 7.♘xc6 bxc6



8.♖a4

8.e4 ♘xc3 9.♖xd8+ ♙xd8 10.bxc3
e5=.

8.♘d2 is more common, but Black
has found ways to equalize:

8...e6 9.e4 ♘b6 10.♘e3 ♖xd1+
11.♙xd1! (so Black can't tie White
down with ...♘b4 and ...♘a4.) 11...
e5 12.♙c2 ♘e7 13.♘e2 0-0 14.♖hd1±
[Botvinnik,M–Flohr,S Training match, 1952](#).

8...e5:



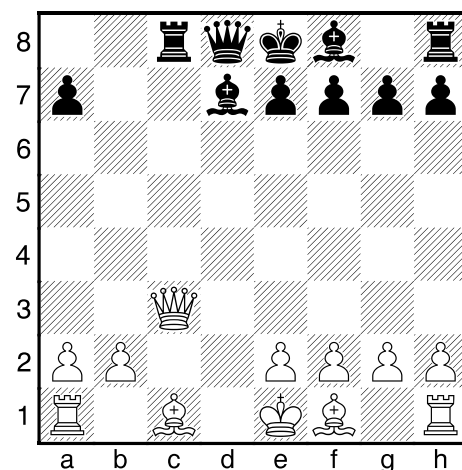
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9.g3 9...♖b8 10.♘a4 ♘b4= 11.a3
♙xd2+ 12.♗xd2 ♘b6 13.♗xd8+
♙xd8 14.0-0-0+ ♙e7 15.♘c5 ♘d7=
[Matlakov,M \(2608\)–Mamedov,R \(2659\) FIDE Grand Swiss, 2025.](#)

Even Ulf Andersson couldn't make anything out of this after 9.e4 ♘f6
10.♙e2 ♙c5 11.0-0 0-0 12.♗c2 ♙d4!=
13.♖ac1 ♙e6 14.b3 ♘d7 15.♘a4 ♗h4
16.♙f3 c5 17.♙e3 ♙xe3 18.fxe3 ♖fc8
19.♘c3 ♘f6 20.♗f2 ♗g5 21.♖fd1
[Andersson,U \(2640\)–Marzolo,C \(2378\) FRA–chT, France 2001.](#)

8...♙d7

8...♙xc3!? is a SF18-approved sac, which would have been a Novelty when this game was played. 9.♗xc6+ ♙d7 10.♗xc3 ♖c8 *Analysis Diagram*



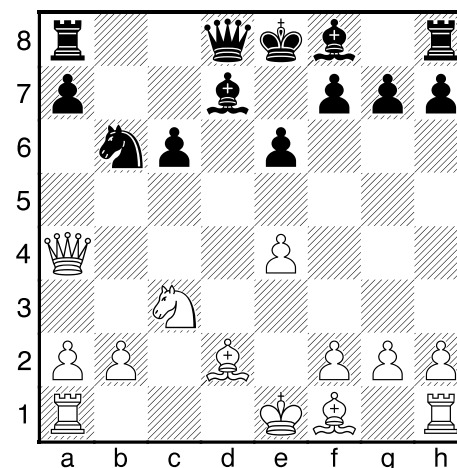
A pawn sac line to take White out of his positional–squeeze comfort zone!? Here are some lines which hint at the riches hidden within:

11.♗d4 e5!! 12.♗xe5+ ♙e7. Engines rate this as already better for Black, despite being two pawns down —

arguably an ideal result against someone who opts for a line that normally heads for pre-programmed maneuvering.

11.♗d3 e5 (♠11...♗b6! hits b2, supports ♙b5, maybe swings to f6, and keeps the long diagonal open so ...♙g7 can pressure White's queenside; 11...g5!? is a SF suggestion, so it's not quite as insane as it looks.) 12.♙d2 ♗b6 13.♗b3! ♗xb3?! 14.axb3 ♙c5 15.e3±
[Johansen,D \(2321\)–Leaver,K \(2070\) Oceania Zonal, 2025.](#)

9.♙d2 e6 10.e4 ♘b6



11.♗c2

11.♗a5!? is more active, and the structure means White should be happy with ♗ trades.

11...♙c5 12.♙d3 e5 13.0-0
♗e7 14.♘e2 0-0 15.♖ac1 ♙d6
16.♙e3 ♖ac8



Tymur Keleberda

became **Canada's newest International Master** when FIDE approved his application on April 2, 2026.

He earned his IM Norms at:

1. 2023 10–player RR at the Excelsior CC, Toronto,
2. 2024 North American Junior, Calgary (=2nd),
3. 2025 Maia Open, Portugal.

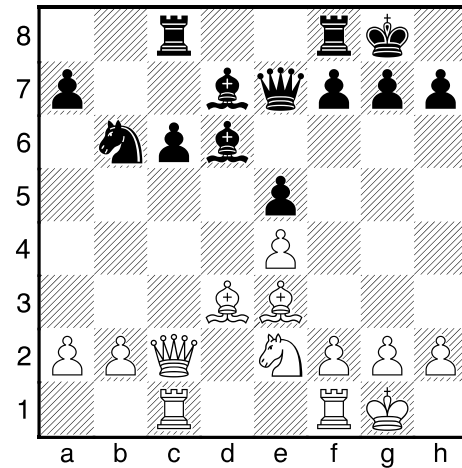
His peak published FIDE rating is below the minimum 2400, but he passed this (then dropped) during the 2025 Spice Cup.

He finished the **15th Calgary International** =2nd-4th — +4 =4 –1 — a point behind **GM Razvan Preotu**, who won with 7/9.

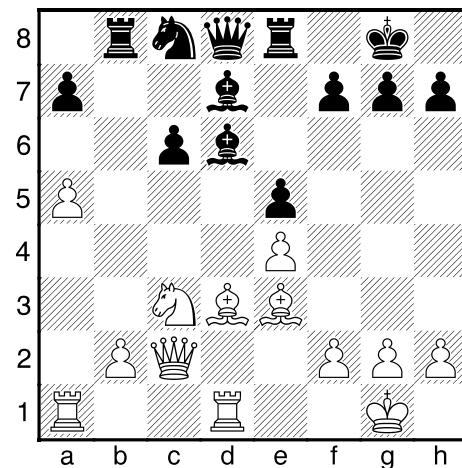
photo: Banff facebook



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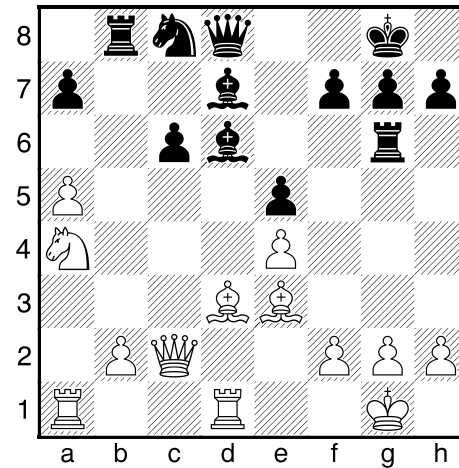


17.a4!? ♖b8 18.a5 ♘c8
19.♘c3 ♗d8 20.♖a1 ♖e8?!
21.♖fd1



Black's position is uncomfortable — less space and no clear plan — so he aims for kingside activity. The computer doesn't like it, but it's choice among evils.

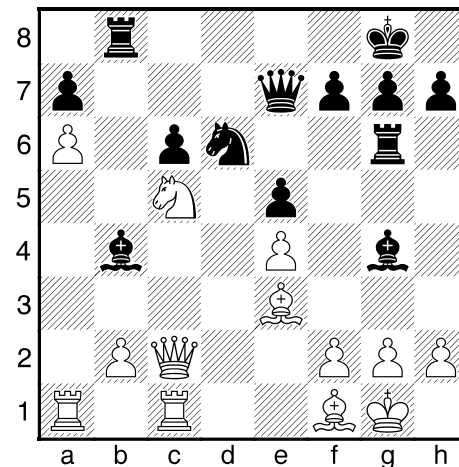
21...♖e6!? 22.♘a4 ♖g6



23.♙f1
23.♙c5?! ♙g4 24.♙e2 ♙xe2 25.♗xe2
♗xa5!?↗ (25...♗g5!?↗);

23.♘c5! ♙g4 24.♖d2!± ♙f3?! 25.♙f1+–

23...♙g4 24.♖dc1 ♙b4 25.a6
♗e7 26.♘c5 ♘d6



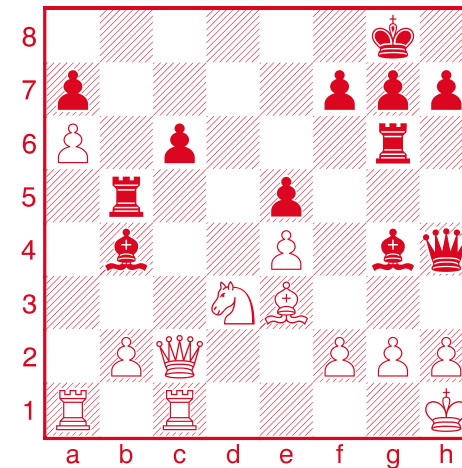
27.♙h1!
27.♘d3! forces exchanges that weaken Black's queenside: 27...♘xe4 28.♘xb4 (28.♖a4!) 28...♖xb4 29.♖a4! a strong move that's easy to overlook.

29...♖xa4 (29...♙f5 30.♖xb4 ♗xb4 31.♙xa7+–) 30.♗xa4 forking e4 and c6 30...♙f3 31.♖xc6+– material is still equal, but Black's pieces are too uncoordinated to survive.

27...♘b5 28.♙xb5?!
Prevents ...♘d4, but White will miss this light-square defender. ♘28.♖a4 ♘d4 29.♙xd4 exd4 30.♗b3±– only move to keep an advantage, but good enough to win the pinned ♙b4.

28...♖xb5?!
♘28...cxb5 29.♘d3 ♙d6 30.f3±.

29.♘d3 ♗h4!?
Black goes all in.



White has hopes of taking a7 and promoting the a-pawn, but Black's pieces hover menacingly on the kingside...

30.♘xb4??
30.f3±– activates the ♗ for lateral defence, and gains a tempo on the ♙g4. Black has nothing against ♙xa7 and the advance of the

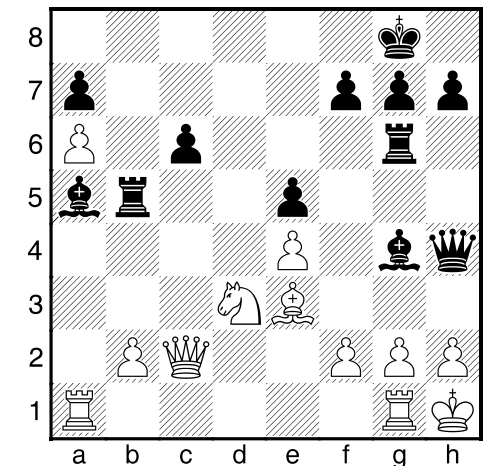
a-pawn. 30...♙xf3 (30...♙e6 31.♘xb4 ♖xb4 32.♙xa7+– White's a-pawn wins. 32...♖h6 33.♙g1+–) 31.gxf3 ♗h3 32.♗f2+–

Here is why the other tries are worse:

30.g3?? is obviously bad: 30...♙f3+ 31.♘g1 ♗h3 White's ♙ covers h6, so ...♗xh2+ doesn't work. 32.♘e1 ♙xe1+ mates next.

30.♙xa7? ♖h6 or ...♙h3 first 31.h3 ♙f3! 32.♙h2 ♗g4! 33.♖g1 ♙xg2+ #2.

30.♖g1!? defends the light squares without moving any pawns. 30...♙a5!
Analysis Diagram



The ♙ goes to b6 where it defends a7 and attacks e3. 31.f3!? the most forcing. (31.♙xa7?? ♖h6 32.h3 ♙xh3+–; 31.♖xa5!? ♖xa5 32.♗c3±) 31...♙b6± 32.♙f2! (32.♙xb6? ♖h6± 33.h3 ♙xh3± (33...♙xf3? 34.♘h2± ♖xb6=) 34.♖gc1 ♖xb6+–) 32...♙xf2 33.♗xf2 ♗xf2 34.♘xf2 ♙e6=.

30...♙f3±–
Suddenly White is busted.



31.♔g1

31.♖xc6 ♕xg2+□-+;

31.gxf3 ♖h3 32.♖g1 ♖xf3+ is the basic mating pattern behind ...♕f3.

31...♖xg2+ 32.♔f1 ♖g1+!
33.♔xg1 ♖h3□

0-1

Wiebe, Isaac (2223)
Anderson, Colin (2253)

A33

Winnipeg op Winnipeg CAN (5.1),
05.01.2025

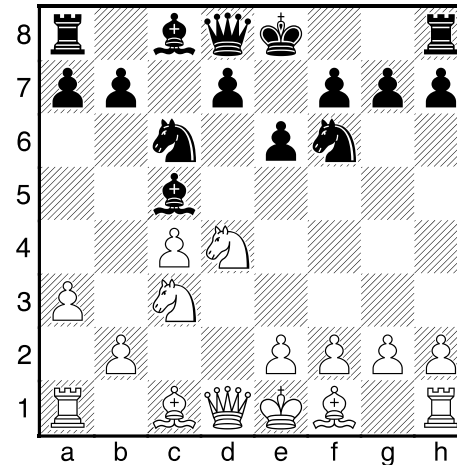
Notes: John Upper

The **2025 Winnipeg Open** ended in a 4-way tie at the top between Mark Klusa, Isaac Wiebe, Colin Anderson, and Gabriel Hamm. Here is the final round game from board 1, which is a good enough reason to look at it, but I actually chose it for two other reasons:

1) in a position which could arise from several different openings, White plays a very sharp and tricky attempt to refute Black's play, and IMO it would be very difficult for anyone to find their way through this OTB;

2) the ending has some crazy tactics and mating patterns I have never seen.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘c3 ♘c6
4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e6 6.a3
♕c5



7.♘db5?!

Not objectively good, but very tricky; and it might be a good surprise weapon: since almost all top-level games continue ♘b3, this is almost unknown.

The most common continuation is 7.♘b3 ♕e7 8.e4 0-0 with a sort of Hedgehog, where Black has held up well enough.

Instead, after 7.♘b3 Black can keep the ♕ more active with 7...♕b6!?, when high-profile games continued:

8.e4 d5!N a Novelty Caruana used in a "must draw" World Cup game vs Anton Kovalyov: 9.exd5 exd5 10.c5 (10.cxd5 ♘g4!∞ is the point, since 11.dxc6?

♕xf2+ 12.♔e2 ♖e7+ 13.♔f3 0-0!♠) 10...♕c7 11.♕e2 0-0 12.♕e3 ♕e5= **Kovalyov,A–Caruana,F** FIDE World Cup, 2015.

8.♕f4 d5 9.c5 ♕c7 10.♕xc7 ♖xc7 11.♘b5 ♖e5 12.♘d6+ ♔e7 maybe hard to believe, but the octopus on d6 only gives White equality. 13.♖c1!= ♖d8 (13...♘e4∞ **Cummings**, in a 2016 chesspublishing.com Flank Openings survey.) 14.f4 ♖h5 15.e3 ♘e4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.♕e2 ♖h4+ 18.g3 ♖h3 19.♕f1 ♖h5 20.♕e2 ♖h3 21.♕f1 ♖h5 22.♕e2 ♖h3 **Erigaisi,A (2775)–Niemann,H (2725)** Tata Steel, 2026.

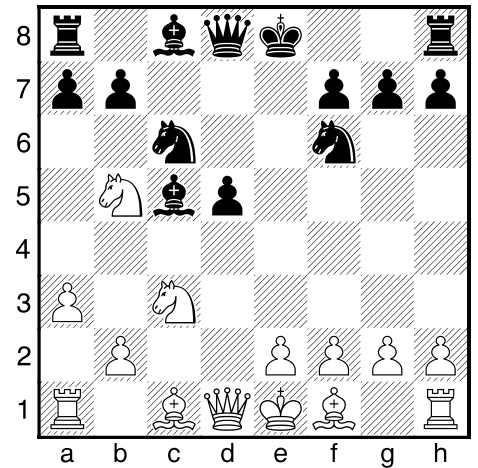
7...0-0

The only analysis of this I could find is in *The Benko Revisited (Thinkers, 2022)* by **Alexy Kovalchuk**. The fact that it comes in a book on the Benko (declined) shows how transpositional these positions are, which is another reason to expect opponents to be unfamiliar with them.

Kovalchuk's analysis is close to perfect, and goes 7...d5!:

8.♕f4 0-0 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♘c7 d4 11.♘a4 ♕d6 12.♕xd6□ ♖xd6 13.♘xa8 ♕f5♠ Kovalchuk, a line SF18 does not improve upon.

8.cxd5 exd5 **Opening Analysis**



Best seems to be 9.♕f4 0-0 10.♘c7 ♕f5♠ transposing into the line above, with a nearly winning bind and initiative for the exchange, according to SF18 and leela.

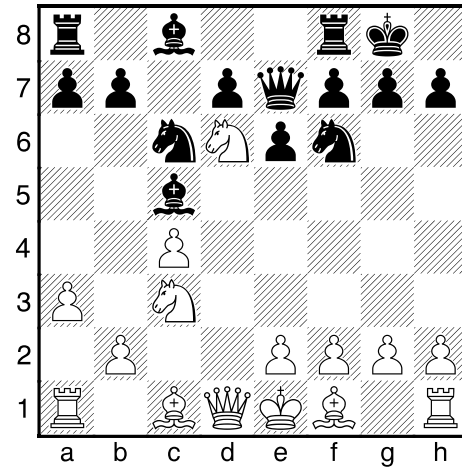
One key point of ...d5 is that the seemingly clever tactic 9.♘xd5? — hoping for 9...♘xd5? 10.♖xd5 — leads to disaster after 9...0-0 10.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 11.e3 ♖g6 (SF18 11...♖d8! 12.♖f3 ♘b4!!-+ would be a fun mirror image counterattack to win.) 12.♖d5 ♕b4+□-+ (12...♕b6 13.♕d3! ♕e6 14.♕xg6□ ♕xd5 15.♕c2 ♕xg2 16.♖g1 ♕d5♠ **Arcuti,D (2280)–Rambaldi,F (2547)** Wch U16 Porto Carras, 2015.) 13.♘c3 (13.axb4 ♘xb4 14.♖c4 ♘c2+-+ AK) 13...♖d8 14.♖a2 ♕e6 15.♖b1 ♕f5 16.♖a2 ♕xc3+ 17.bxc3 ♘e5 18.f4 ♘d3+-+ Kovalchuk (FWIW, 18...♕c2!! is the only, but unnecessary, improvement found by SF18 over Kovalchuk's analysis.).

8.b4

8.♘d6 ♖e7♠ *Analysis Diagram*



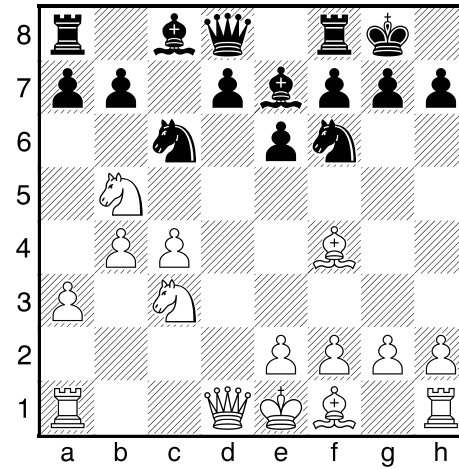
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White should hit the brakes with 9. ♖f4 e5 (9... ♖h5!? 10. ♖ce4) 10. ♖xc8 ♖axc8 11. ♖d2 slows down Black from blasting open the center, and 11. ♖g5? loses to ♖xf2+.

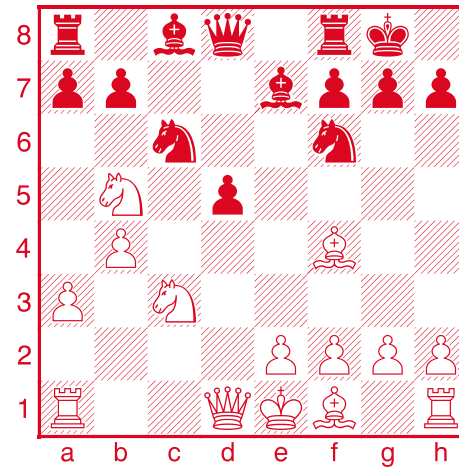
9. ♖xc8? ♖axc8 10. e3 d5 11. ♖e2 ♖fd8 White got nothing from his knight-hopping adventure, and Black's development lead is enough to win. 12. cxd5 exd5 13. ♖a4 d4!!+ 14. ♖xc5 dxe3 15. ♖d3 exf2+ 16. ♖f1 ♖e5 (16... ♖d4+) 17. ♖g5 h6 18. ♖h4 ♖d7 19. a4 ♖cd8 20. ♖a3 ♖c4 21. ♖xf2 White avoids mate, but the endgame is hopeless. 21... ♖xa3 22. ♖b3 ♖e4 23. ♖xa3 ♖xa3 24. bxa3 ♖xd3 25. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 26. ♖e1 ♖xa3 27. a5 ♖d6 28. ♖e2 ♖c4 **Kleinman, M** (2280) –Yang, D (2480) Washington op, 2013.

8... ♖e7 9. ♖f4
9. ♖d6 ♖e8 10. ♖f4 b6 11. e4 ♖xd6 12. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 13. ♖xd6 ♖f6 14. ♖c1 ♖e5 15. ♖e2= **Huebner, R–Ljubojevic, L** IBM Amsterdam, 1975 (15, 0-1).



White threatens ♖c7 then ♖d6 wins an exchange and keeps a bind. But Black beats this with...

9...d5! 10. cxd5 exd5



Bold ♖c7, or cowardly e3?

11. ♖c7?
This is the logical execution of the threat created by 7. ♖b5.

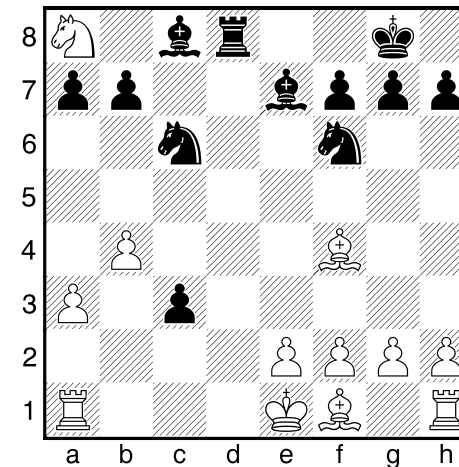
11. e3! = ♖e6 12. ♖e2 ♖c8 13. 0-0

a6 14. ♖d4 ♖xb4= 15. ♖b3! ♖c6 16. ♖xe6! fxe6 17. ♖xb7! ♖a5 18. ♖b2 ♖c4 19. ♖b7 ♖a5 20. ♖b2 ♖c4 21. ♖xc4 ♖xc4= **Martorelli, A** (2272) –Castaldo, F (2227) ITA–ch, Saint Vincent, 2000.

11...d4!
SF18 says 11...g5 is even better!? I'll let you figure out why.

12. ♖xa8
12. ♖3b5? ♖h5-+ or 12...a6-+.

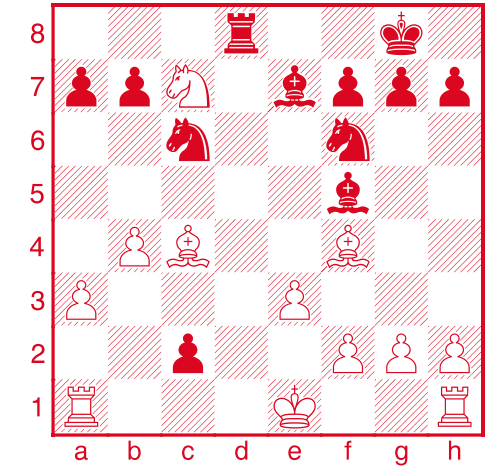
12...dxc3 13. ♖xd8 ♖xd8



White is up a whole exchange, but is way behind in development — playing without his ♖h1 and ♖a8 for the foreseeable future, and even if the ♖ can be saved, it will take at least a couple of moves before it can do anything — and the c3-pawn creates both tactical and long-term threats.

14. e3
14. ♖d1 ♖d5-+.

14... ♖f5 15. ♖c7 c2! 16. ♖c4



White is up a full exchange, but Black is ahead in development and has a potential game-winner on c2. White to move would mostly consolidate with f3 or 00; but it's Black to move, and he strikes with...

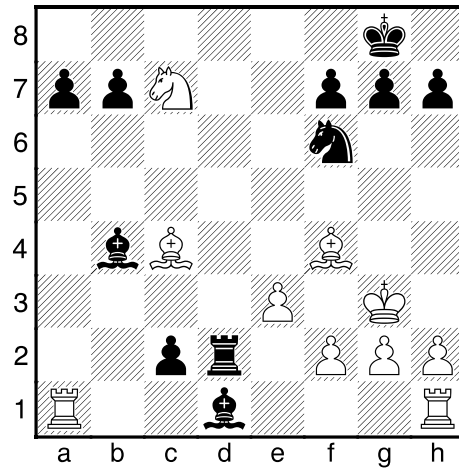
16... ♖xb4!!
Makes the most of his development so the ♖s can support his passer.

16... ♖h5?! 17. ♖d5 ♖xf4 18. exf4!?

16...a5! doesn't win a pawn, but also wins the game 17. b5 ♖b4-+ and ...♖d3 on either 00 or ♖e2.

17. axb4 ♖xb4+ 18. ♖e2
18. ♖f1 ♖d1+ 19. ♖e2 ♖d2+ would transpose, if Black can't find anything better.

18... ♖d2+ 19. ♖f3 ♖g4+ 20. ♖g3 ♖d1!



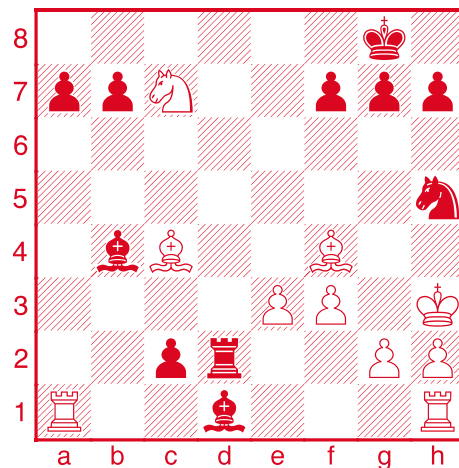
21.f3

21.♖xa7 doesn't create back rank threats, since Black has ...♙f8;

21.e4 hits the ♖ and tries to use the ♙f4 to stop promotion, but 21...♘xe4+ 22.♙h4 ♙e7+- is simple and even worse;

21.♙b3, hoping for ♖hxd1 winning, also fails to 21...♘e4+.

21...♘h5+ 22.♙h3



...♘xf4+, or ...♙c3-b2,
or does it make any difference?

22...♘xf4+?

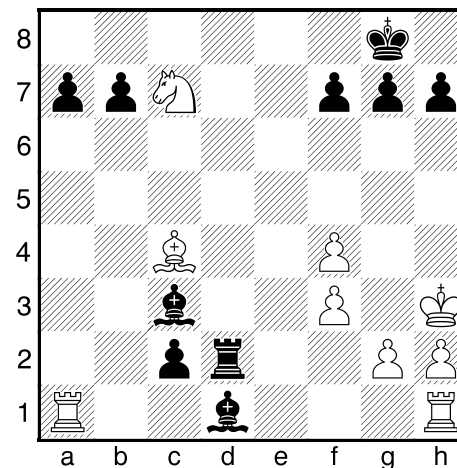
It does make a difference, and this gives White very unexpected and strong counterplay.

22...♙c3-+:

23.♖xa7 ♘xf4+ 24.exf4 g6 25.♖e1 ♖d8!+- is the simplest win; there's no way to stop ...c1=♖;

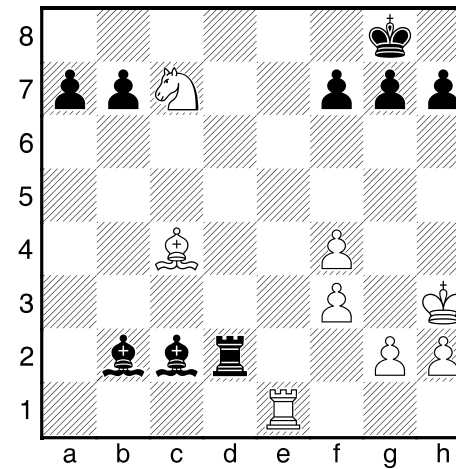
23.♖c1 ♙b2 24.♖xc2 ♙xc2+- White has no open files for the ♖, and so no active play at all. 25.g4 ♘xf4+ 26.exf4 ♖d1!+- forces off the ♖s and keeps two distant passers and two long-range ♙s.

23.exf4 ♙c3!



24.♖xa7?

24.♖c1 ♙b2 25.♖xc2 ♙xc2
26.♖e1 ♙c3+ Analysis Diagram



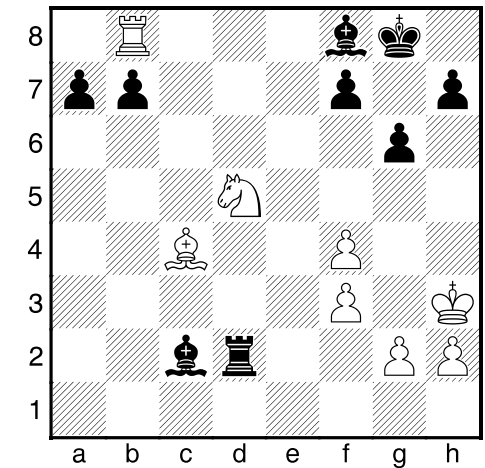
Unlike the variation at move 22, without ...♘xf4 White gets the open e-file for immediate counterplay, and Black can only just cope.

a) 26...♖d8?? 27.♖e2+-;

b) 26...g6 27.♖e8+ ♙ (27.♖e7?? ♖d7!! 28.♙xf7+ ♙f8 29.♖xd7 ♙f5+-) 27...♙g7 28.♖e7 ♖d7?? 29.♘e6+ shows the point of the check before occupying the 7th. 29...♙f6 30.♖xd7+- and ...♙f5+ does not fork the ♖;

c) 26...♙a3 27.♖e8+ ♙f8 28.♘d5 g6! 29.♖b8 ♙= only move since c8 isn't safe, and a8 won't hit f7 fast enough.

Analysis Diagram

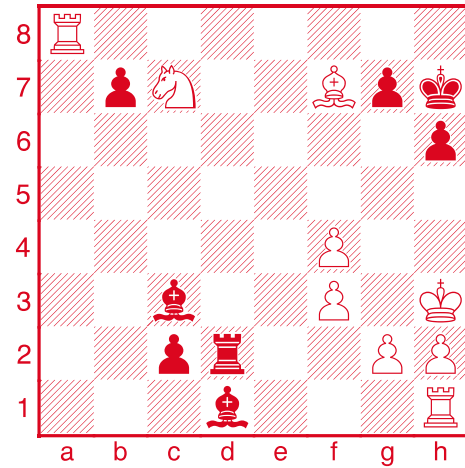


The variations that follow illustrate some of White's attacking opportunities, should Black try to hold the queenside pawns. 29...b6?? (♘29...b5!??) 30.♘f6+ ♙g7 31.♖b7!+- (threat ♖xf7 mating) 31...♙h8 32.♖xf7 ♙g7 33.♘e4 ♙+- White will win at least a pawn, and keep the more active ♖, ♙ and ♙, as well as connected passers; e.g. 33...♖d4 34.♖c7 ♙xe4 35.♖c8+ ♙f8 36.fxe4 ♙+- ♙g7 37.♖c7+! ♙h6 (37...♙h8 38.♙d5+-) 38.♙g8 ♙g7 39.g4+-.

24...h6?

24...g6+- or 24...g5+-.

25.♖a8+= ♙h7 26.♙xf7



...d7 or ...c1=♔ or something else?

26...g5!

This is a very tricky position, and this move creates some extra tricky tactics. It stops one of White's drawing mechanisms (with f5 and ♔g6/g8+), but it also allows White's f-pawn to join the attack.

26...♖d7?? leads to a long, multi-branching and winning ♔ hunt, the mainline of which goes: 27. ♔g8+ ♖g6 28. f5+ ♖g5 (28... ♔xf5 29. ♔e6+ ♔g6 30. ♔xd7 c1♔ 31. ♖f8!+- with material and safer ♔.) 29. ♔e6+ ♔xf5 30. ♖f8+ ♔e5 31. ♔c5 ♖c1=♔ 32. ♔xd7+ ♔d6 33. ♔b3!!+- what a move! The double attack wins the ♔d1 and saves the ♔d7.

Black's pieces are so inactive and badly coordinated that White has more than one way to create enough threats to draw after 26...c1=♔:

27. f5 is the simpler route to equality: 27... ♖xg2 ♖ guards g6 or decoys the white ♔ to its doom. 28. ♔g8+! ♔h8

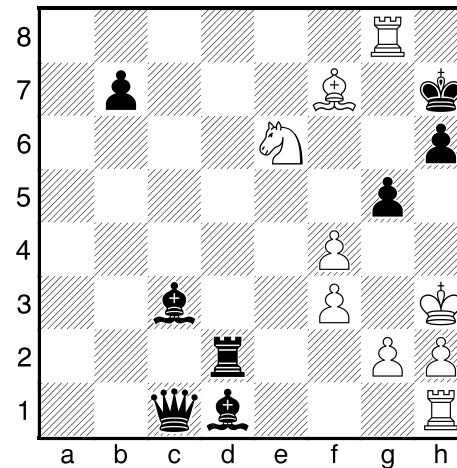
29. ♔f7+=.

27. ♔e6!? is a more complex line, with blunders at every turn, and what an ambitious/optimistic player would try:

a) 27...h5? 28. ♔g6+ ♔h6 29. ♔e6! and there's no defence to ♖h8#;

b) 27...g5? frees g7 and guards h8, but loses to the very weird 28. fxg6+ ♖g7 29. ♔e8+ ♔f8 30. ♖e1! ♖e2 31. ♔f6+ ♔e7 (31... ♔g7? 32. ♔h5#) 32. ♔d5+ ♔d7 33. ♖xd1!! ♖xd1 34. ♔xc3+- and the g-pawn promotes.;

c) 27...g5 28. ♖g8 Analysis Diagram



White obviously threatens ♔f8#.

28...g4+ ♖ is the saving move here and in several variations below. 29. fxg4 ♔b4 30. ♖g7+= forces a perp

It is the *only* saving move because White has *two* mating nets: one with ♔f8, the other uses the f-pawn to

get the ♔ to g5. So, while 28... ♔b4?? stops the ♔f8 mate, it gets caught in the second mating net: 29. fxg5+- (threat g6#) 29... ♖xg2! (29... hxg5 30. ♔xg5+ ♔h6 31. ♖g6+ ♔h5 32. g4#) 30. ♖g7+ ♖h8 31. ♖g6!+- and the only ways to stop ♖h6# are to give up the ♖ and leave the other pieces hanging.

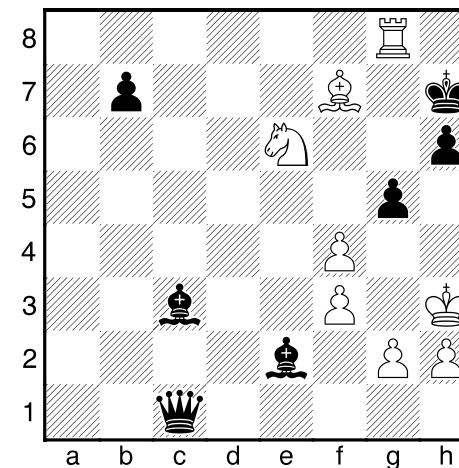
27.f5??

White has two good ways to play this: tactics to trade to a ♖♖ v ♖♖ ending with extra pawns, or go for mate and (at worst) give a perpetual:

The unclear ending comes after 27. ♖f8! (threatening ♔g8+) 27... ♔g7 28. ♔e6+ ♔f6 29. ♔g6+ ♔xe6 30. ♔xc2 ♔xc2=.

The one with the tricky mating nets starts with:

27. ♖e1! = (trying to use the file opened by the exchange on f4) 27... ♖e2 28. ♖xe2 ♔xe2 29. ♖g8 c1♔ 30. ♔e6 Analysis Diagram



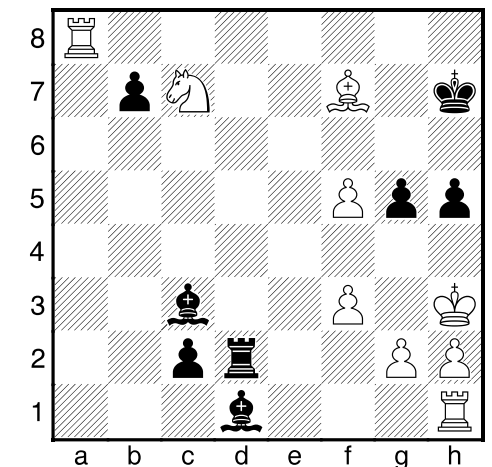
With similar ideas as in the previous diagram:

30... ♔b4? 31. ♖g7+ ♖h8 32. ♖g6! g4+ (32... ♔h7 33. fxg5+- hxg5 34. ♔xg5+ ♖xg5 35. ♖xg5+-) 33. ♔h4 ♖h7 34. ♔h5+- Black has to give the ♖ to stop ♖xh6#;

30...g4+ ♖ = is the same defence as above: a sac to prevent fxg5, and after 31. fxg4 ♔b4 White can play the ♖ perp here, or keep walking the tightrope with 32. g5 ♔d3 (guards g6 and threatens ... ♔g5+) 33. g6+ ♔xg6 34. ♖g7+ (34. ♖xg6 ♖c3+=) 34... ♔h8 35. ♖g8+=.

27...h5?

27...g4+ ♖+- 28. fxg4 c1♔ 29. ♔g6+ ♔g7 30. ♔e8+ ♔f8-+.



This is why people don't play chess anymore...

28. ♖e1??

... it's just too difficult.

28. ♔e6 ♖ =



28...c1=♔ 29.♖g8□ g4+ 30.♕h4□
♖d6 (30...♕f6+?? 31.♕xh5+- and ♕f8#.)
31.♘g5+ ♕h6 32.♕a2□= protecting
the ♖ from the only safe square on
the diagonal! White threatens a perp
with ♕f7-g5, and if Black stops that
with ...♖f6 White has ♖h8-g8=; and
although ...♕f6? pins the ♘, ♖g6# wins
the game. BTW, if White didn't have
the ♖h1, then ...♖xg5 would escape
the perpetuals and win on material;
with the ♖h1 in reserve, Black can't
afford that "defence".

28...g4+ 29.♕h4□ ♕h6 (29...♕f6+??
30.♕xh5+-) 30.♖g8□ ♕f6+ 31.♘g5
♕xg5+ 32.♖xg5 gxf3 (32...c1♔??
33.f6□+- closes the box and there's
no defence to ♖xh5#.) 33.♖g6+ ♕h7
34.f6= ♖d8 35.♖g7+ ♕h8 36.♕g6
c1♔□ (36...♖d4+? 37.♕h3!+-) 37.♖h7+
♕g8 38.♖g7+= with a perp.

28...♖e2□-+ 29.♕b3 g4+
30.♕h4 ♕xe1+ 31.♕xh5 c1♔
32.♕g8+ ♕g7 33.♘e8+ ♖xe8
34.♖xe8 ♖h6+ 35.♕xg4 ♖h4#

0-1

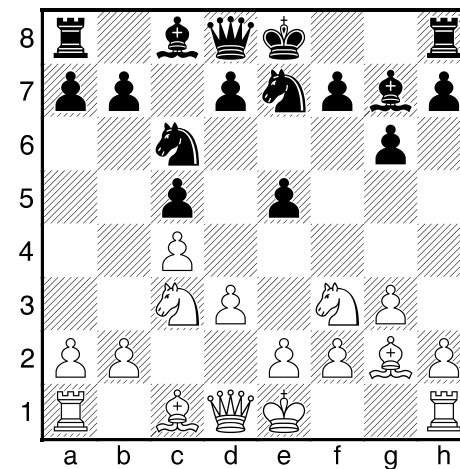
Doknjas, Neil (2382) Taylor, Ashton (2090)

A37

*New Year op Richmond CAN (4.4),
03.01.2025*

Notes: John Upper

1.♘f3 c5 2.g3 ♘c6 3.♕g2
e5 4.c4 g6 5.♘c3 ♕g7 6.d3
♘ge7



A very common structure that also
appears with colours reversed, when
it's called the Botvinnik system.

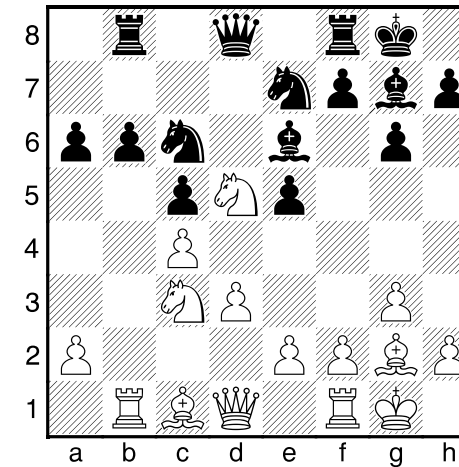
Black has a clamp on the center dark
squares, and typically aims for ...d5,
creating a comfortable Maroczy-
like structure. White typically aims
for queenside expansion (with b4)
and/or central piece play on the light
squares by moving the ♘f3 to e3, or
trading the DSB for a ♘ to control d5.

This game shows what happens
if Black rushes to play ...d5 in one
move.

7.♕d2

7.0-0 0-0 8.♘e1 ♖b8 9.♘c2 a6
10.♖b1 d6 11.b4 ♕e6 12.bxc5 dxc5
13.♘e3 b6 14.♘ed5±

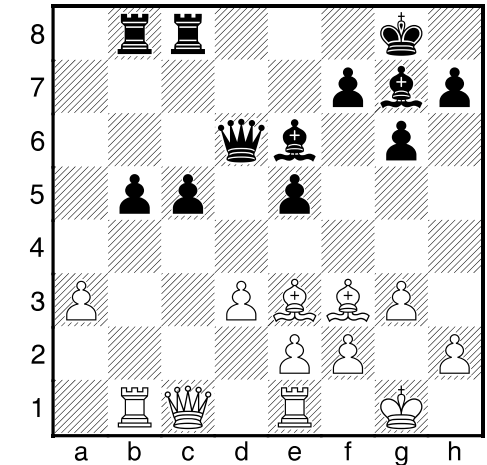
Karpov Game Diagram



This game is a nice illustration of
the relative importance
of opening prep vs
middlegame skill, and a
fine example of what made
[Karpov](#) such an odd World
Champion: he's a little
worse out of the opening,
he plays completely
normal-looking moves, his
opponent doesn't make
any obvious mistakes, but
10 moves later Karpov is
clearly winning:
14...♕d7!? (so ...♘xd5
won't get forked) 15.♕d2
♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♘e7

17.♖c1?! (♠17.♕g5 f6 18.♕d2 ♕e6
19.♘c3±) 17...♘xd5 18.♕xd5 ♕h3!=
19.♖e1 b5! 20.a3 ♖d6 21.♕f3 ♕e6
22.cxb5 axb5 23.♕e3?! ♖fc8-+

Analysis Diagram



The rest is a model conversion: Black
creates a passed pawn, supported
by his ♖s and ♕s. 24.♖d2 b4 25.axb4
cxb4 26.♕a7 ♖b5 the only safe
square, freed just in time by the pawn



Ashton Taylor
2026 Canadian Zonal, Montreal

push. 27.♖ec1 ♖xc1+ 28.♔xc1 b3
29.♔c6 ♔xc6 30.♙xc6 ♖a5 31.♙e3
♖a2 32.♙b5 b2 33.♙g2 e4 34.d4 ♙b3
[Barcza–Karpov, Caracas, 1970.](#)

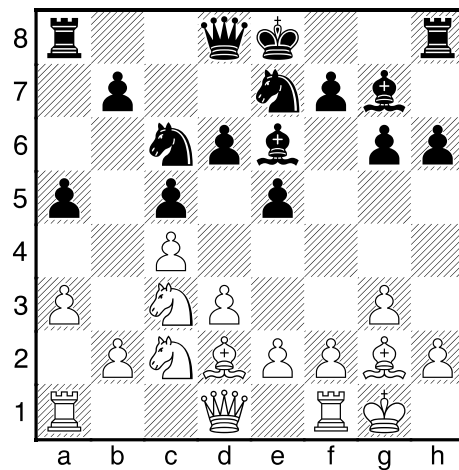
7...d5?

Right idea, wrong execution.

Unless White plays something very silly, Black will need to support d5 (and usually c5 too) before this push is safe.

7...d6 8.a3 h6 (8...b6 9.b4 ♙b7 10.b5 ♘d4
11.e4 ♔d7 12.0-0 0-0 13.a4± a5!? [Jobava,B \(2668\)–Duda,J \(2658\) EU–chT, 2015](#))
9.0-0 ♙e6 10.♘e1 a5 11.♘c2

Analysis Diagram

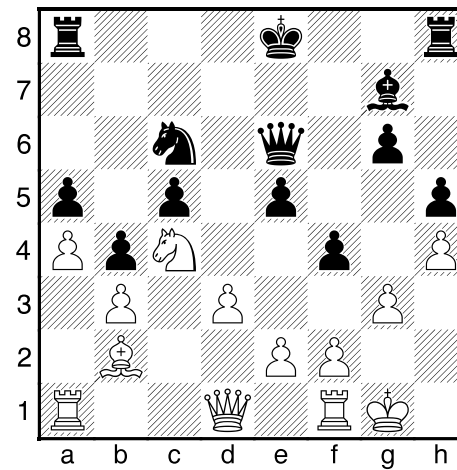


Typical Botvinnik System

Both sides have carried out their typical regroupings. White is ready to go b2-b4 or ♘e3-d5, and Black is in time to play... 11...d5! 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 (13.♘e3!) 13...♙xd5= 14.♙xd5 ♔xd5 15.♙c3 (15.♘e3 ♔e6 16.♖c1 b6 17.b4∞) 15...b5 16.♘e3 ♔e6 17.b3 h5!? 18.h4 (18.f4!? h4 19.f5±) 18...f5

19.a4 b4 20.♙b2 f4! 21. 21.♘c4

Wrong Wei Diagram



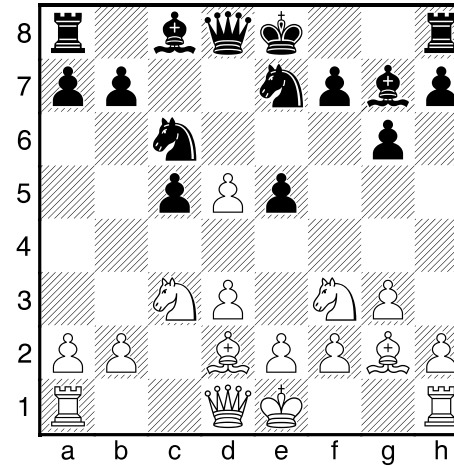
Two years before this game Wei Yi created one of the greatest king-hunt games of all time ([Wei–Bruzon, Danzhou, 2015](#)), so he was/is capable of terrific attacking chess. You might think his task here is considerably easier, if only because there is more than one way to win this. Instead, he misplays it.

a) 21...♔h3!± the most direct, though the necessary follow-up isn't at all easy to see 22.♘d6+ ♘d7□ (22...♙e7? exposes the ♔ to ♔c2xc5+.) 23.♘e4 ♙h6 24.♔c2 (24.♘xc5+ ♙e7+) 24...fxg3 25.♘xg3 ♙e3□+;

b) 21...0-0! is slower and simpler; after 22.♙h2 ♖ad8+ Black will smash through with ...♘d4 and ...e4;

c) Instead, he went 21...g5?? 22.e3!= fxg3 (22...♔h3∞) 23.fxg3 gxh4 24.♔f3!∞ Xu,X (2534)–[Wei,Y \(2732\) Asian Continental, 2017 \(1/2–1/2, 58\).](#)

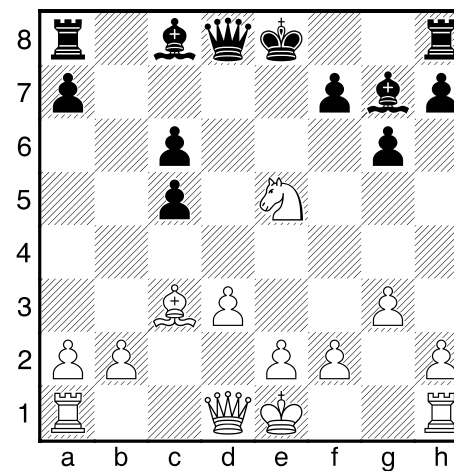
8.cxd5



8...♘xd5

8...♘b4 doesn't get the pawn back: 9.♔a4+ ♔d7 (9...♙d7 10.♔b3±) 10.♔xd7+ ♙xd7 11.♖c1 stops ♘c2+ and x-rays c5. 11...♖c8 12.♘e4+- forks c5 and d6.

9.♘xe5! ♘xc3 10.♙xc6+□ bxc6 11.♙xc3

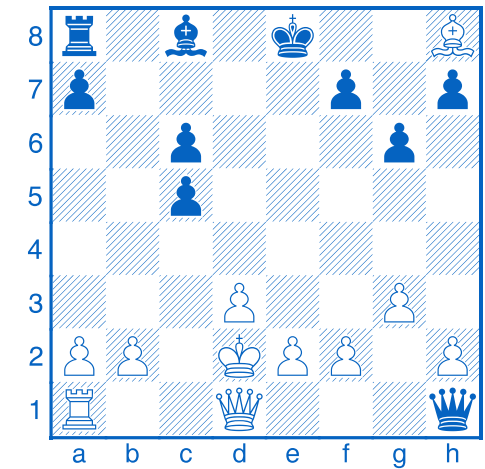


11...♙xe5

11...♔d5 12.e4±;

11...♙h3!? gives White choices, many of them good: 12.♔d2! (12.♔a4±; 12.f4!?±; 12.♘xc6?? not this one 12...♙xc3+ 13.bxc3 ♔d5+) 12...♙xe5 13.♔e3□+-.

12.♙xe5 ♔d5 13.♙xh8 ♔xh1+ 14.♔d2



Non-Critical Position
Take on d1 or h2?

14...♔xh2

After the game move material is equal, but Black's exposed ♔, bad pawns, and poorly placed ♔ make it a turkey shoot.

White is losing either way, so the only question is whether Black wants to test White's attacking calculation, or endgame technique. It seems to me the endgame decisions are trickier, if only because the game line comes with a big fat bullseye on the black ♔, which makes White's choices much clearer.

14...♔xd1+ is the computer's choice,





Chess Canada Across Canada

when **15.♖xd1 ♕e6!** poses White an immediate challenge: how to keep control in an opposite ♕ ending that you know you "should" be winning.

The ♕ threatens a2, but also to play ...c4, when dxc4 would let Black escape to a drawn opposite ♕ ending with ...♖d8+.

16.a3 0-0-0±;

16.♖c1 c4!?

16.b3?! a5 17.♖c1 a4 18.♖xc5 axb3 19.axb3 ♖a2+ here SF18 says White has only one clearly winning move: 20.♔e1!+- avoiding ...♕xb3-d1 Xe2;

All of which may suggest the best move: **16.♕f6!!** puts the ♕ on a safe square and prevents the ...♖d8+ idea mentioned above. 16...♕xa2 (16...c4?! 17.dxc4 ♕xc4 18.♔c3+- taking either a or e-pawn loses the ♕ to pins.) 17.♖c1 ♔d7 18.♖xc5 a5 19.♕c3 a4 20.♕b4!+- stops ...a3 and puts the ♕ on a good diagonal. This is winning, but White might struggle to prove it.

15.♖a4!+- ♔d7

15...♕d7 16.♖e4+ with ♖h1 being among the winning continuations. 16...♔d8 17.♕f6+ ♔c7 18.♖h1 ♖xf2.

16.♖f4! ♖h3 17.♖xf7+ ♔d6 18.f4 ♕e6 19.♕e5+ ♔d5 20.e4#

1-0

Adam, Rafael (2318) Sai, Krishna GV (2456)

A45

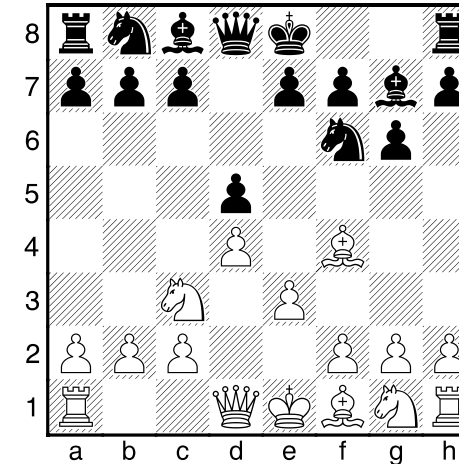
*Carnaval Quebec CAN (4),
21.02.2025*

Notes: John Upper

The **2025 Tournoi du Carnaval** (Sainte-Foy, PQ) ended in a 4-way tie at 4/5 between Neil Moses, IM Olivier Kenta Chiku-Ratte and the two players in this game, the only decisive encounter between the top four.



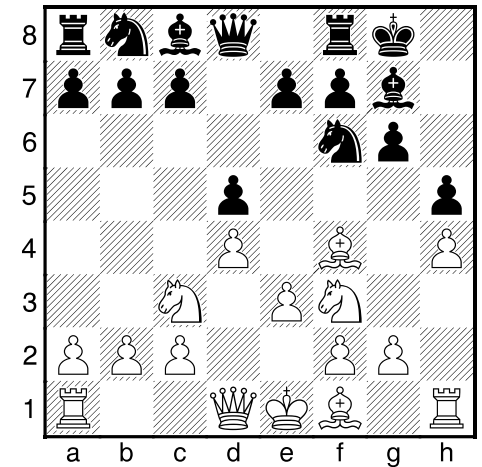
1.d4 ♘f6 2.♕f4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.e3 ♕g7



5.♘b5

5.♘f3 0-0 6.♘b5 ♘a6 7.♕e2 ♘h5 8.♕e5 f6 9.♕g3 c6 10.♘a3 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 e5 12.c4 e4 13.♘d2 ♘c7 14.♖b3 f5± White is playing a sort of reversed French, but with no pressure on the d5 pawn. [So,W \(2752\)–Firouzja,A \(2777\) Saint Louis Blitz, 2023.](#)

5.h4!? is the "Jobava–Prie"/Barry attack, and is played by GM Bortnyk a lot. It is 6x more often played than the game move, but it doesn't score particularly well at the top level anymore, even for Carlsen, after 5..h5 6.♘f3 0-0=: [Sample Games](#)



7.♘e5 c5 8.♖d2 ♕f5 9.f3 cxd4 10.exd4 ♘c6 11.♕b5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘d7= 13.♕xd7 ♖xd7 14.0-0-0 ♖ac8 15.♖xd5 ♖xc3! 16.♖xd7 ♖xc2+ 17.♔b1 ♖xg2+ 18.♖xf5 gxf5 19.♖d7 ♖c8= [Carlsen,M \(2837\)–Wei,Y \(2758\) Norway Chess Armageddon, 2025.](#)

7.♕e2 c5 8.dxc5 ♖a5 9.♘d2 ♖xc5 10.♘b3 ♖b6 11.a4 ♘c6 12.0-0 ♖d8 13.a5 a6 14.♕f3 ♕f5 15.♘d4 ♘xd4 16.exd4 ♖c8± Black's half-open c-file is more useful than White's half-open e-file. [Carlsen,M \(2833\)–Sindarov,J \(2707\) Titled Tuesday, 2025.](#)

5...♘a6 6.♘c3!?

SF18's top move! But only 0.00, of course.

6...♘h5

The principled move.

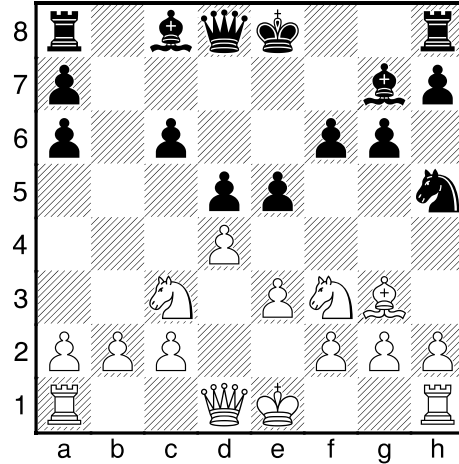
6...♘b8 7.♘b5 ♘a6 8.♘c3 ♘b8 is another modern "GM draw"; e.g. [Bortnyk–Sindarov, World Blitz Doha, 2025.](#)

**IM
Sai Krishna**



Chess Canada Across Canada

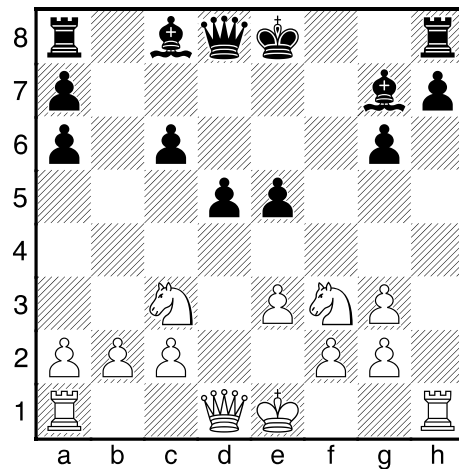
7.♔e5 f6 8.♔g3 c6 9.♔xa6
bxa6 10.♔f3 e5



11.dxe5 ♔xg3 12.hxg3

12.exf6 is tempting, but after
12...♔xh1 13.fxg7 ♔g8 14.♔d4!
probably not enough.

12...fxe5



13.e4!

Stopping ...e4, which would give
Black easy play, and initiating a tense
game of chicken in the center, seeing

who will crack first. The next few
notes show some of what the players
had to consider if the center shifts or
breaks up

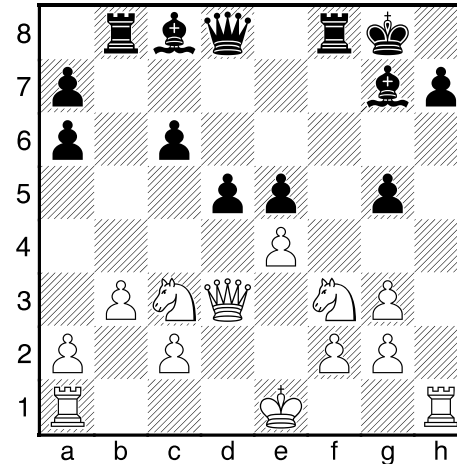
13...0-0

13...d4!? 14.♔a4 c5 15.c3 (15.♔xc5??
♔a5+-) 15...♔a5? (15...c4! 16.b3∞)
16.♔b3! Δ♔d7 17.♔d5□+- ♔c8
18.♔xe5+-.

14.♔d3

14.exd5?? e4 15.♔d4 (15.♔h4 ♔b6-+
Xf2, Xb2, Xe1; 15.♔xe4 ♔e8-+) 15...♔f6-
+ Xf2 and Xd4.

14...♔b8 15.b3 g5!?



16.♔d1

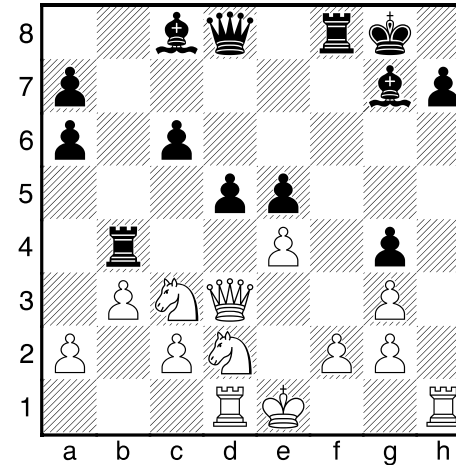
16.exd5!? Attacking h7 too! 16...e4
(16...♔f5 17.♔c4□ e4 18.♔d4 ♔a5∞
or 18...♔g6∞) 17.♔xe4□ cxd5 18.0-0-
0□ ♔f5 19.♔fxg5□∞;

16.0-0-0 g4 17.exd5! gxf3 18.♔xh7+
♔f7 19.♔h5+ ♔g8□ White has a
draw in hand, or can play for more
with 20.gxf3.

16...g4 17.♔d2

17.♔h4± SF18.

17...♔b4!?



Black keeps piling pressure on the
center; leaving White with choices
between variations which are
objectively about equal, but are
strategically very different.

FWIW, I would lose on time
somewhere around here. :)

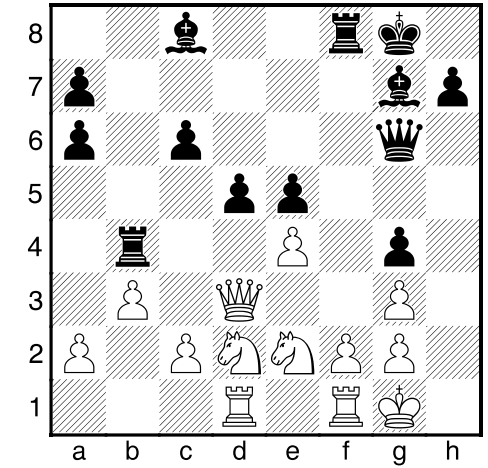
18.♔e2

White keeps his ♔s ready to jump
into any hole in the center, but none
appear.

18.a3 ♔d4 19.♔e2∞;

18.exd5 e4 19.♔dxe4 (19.♔cxe4 cxd5
20.♔c3∞) 19...♔f5 20.f3□∞.

18...♔f6 19.0-0 ♔g6



20.c4?

♔20.♔c3! keeps things tense.

A reasonable bail-out is 20.exd5!?
♔xd3 21.cxd3 cxd5 22.d4! exd4
23.♔f4± the ♔s should be worth
something, even if d5 falls.

20...d4!

If Black could play ...c5 White would
be suffocated.

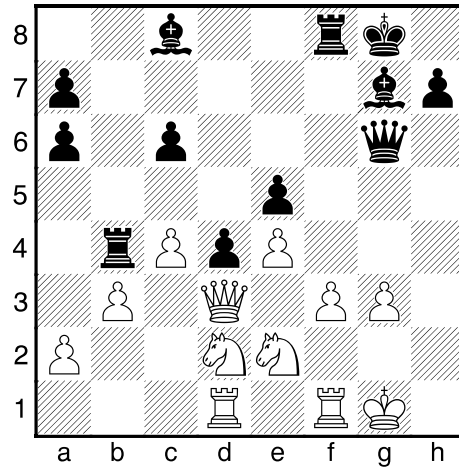
21.f4

Trying to break out immediately,
obviously very risky with his ♔ on the
g-file. 21.c5 stops ...c5 (and frees c4)
without triggering immediate chaos.

21...gxf3 22.gxf3



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22...h3

22...h6! 23.f4 xf4!-+.

**23.f2 h6 24.h2 e3+
25.h1 c8!?**

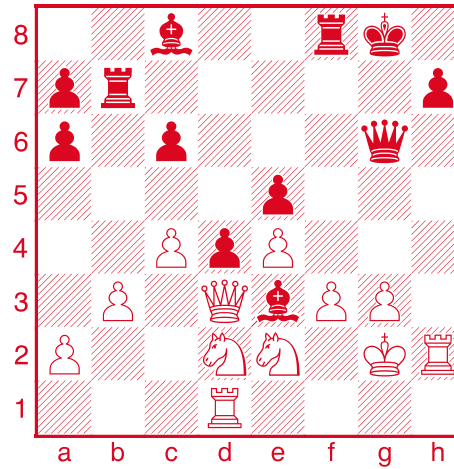
Or ...e6, both leaving the 7th rank clear so Black can bring the b4 across.

26.g2?

26.c5! so c4 can fork e3 and e5.

26...b7!-+

Brings back the only piece that isn't attacking the kingside... ..and sets a trap!



27.g1

27.f1 bf7! 28.xe3 (28.g1 xg1-+)
28...xf3-+.

27...xg3+!!

That must have been fun to play!

28.h1

28.xg3 g7+ 29.h4 f4+ 30.h5-
+ gets mated after ...d7/e6 and check. 30...e6-+.

28...g7 29.f1

29.e2 allows another "sac":
29...xh2+! 30.xh2 f6-+.

**29...xh2+! 30.xh2 f6
31.h3 h6**

0-1

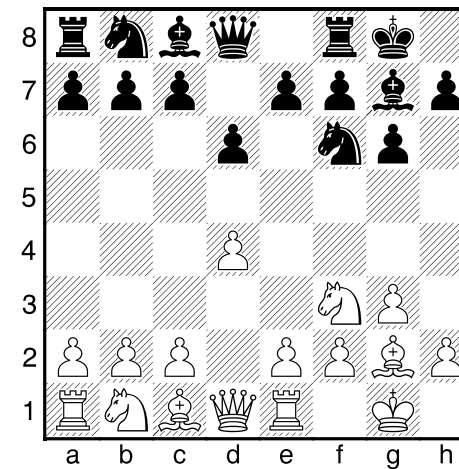
Malakar, Saarthak (2268) Plotkin, Mark (2490)

A49

*Hart House Holidays Open Toronto
(1.4), 21.12.2025*

Notes: John Upper

**1.d4 g6 2.f3 g7 3.g3 f6
4.g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.e1**



An anti-King's Indian played by technicians like [Ulf Andersson](#) and [Vladislav Artimiev](#). White usually plays e4 then a4-a5, waiting to see what Black does before committing the center pawns. It's not particularly aggressive, but that can be a problem for KID players, who want something to punch.

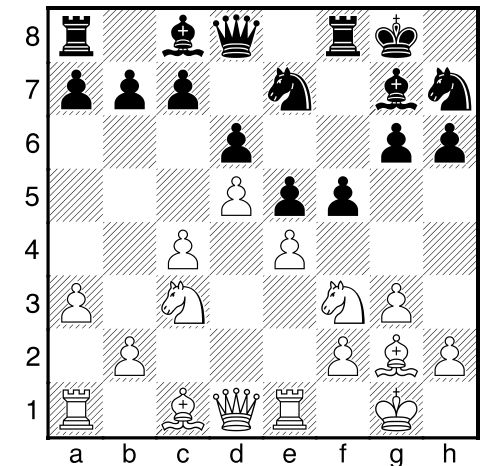
In the game, Black tempts White's pawns forward, and the game turns into something with the familiar KID opposite side pawn storms.

**6...c6!? 7.e4
7.d5!?:**

7...b4 8.e4 e5 9.d2 a6 (9...a5?!
10.a3 a6 11.b4± Xa6.) 10.c4 c5
11.c3 a5 [Stahlberg, G-Bronstein, D](#)
[Hoogovens, 1963](#);

7... a5 8.e4 c6 9.c3 g4 10.d3
d7 11.d2 (11.b4? does not win the
d: 11...cxd5!± 12.exd5 (12.bxa5 dxe4
13.xe4 c5-+) 12...xf3 (or 12...f5 or
12...c8) 13.xf3 (13.xf3 c8!) 13...c8
14.d2 c4-+) 11...e5 12.f1 b5!?
13.h3 d7 14.dxc6 axc6 15.xb5
b4 16.a3 f5?! 17.f4 fxe4 18.xe4
b6+ 19.h2 ac8∞ [Svane, R \(2609\)](#)
[-Erigaisi, A \(2775\)](#) Titled Tuesday,
2026.

**7...e5 8.d5 e7 9.c4 h6
10.c3 h7 11.a3 f5**



The game has turned into a kind of King's Indian, but g3/g2 and d4-d5 are unusual: after g2 White usually doesn't push the d4-pawn, leaving the center flexible and keeping a



Chess Canada Across Canada

space advantage while Black hops his ♖s around the dark squares looking for tricks.

Here, the center is closed and Black gets the KID-player's favourite kingside pawn storm, but the hook on g3 creates extra tactics on the f-file (Xf3, Xf2) which don't happen in a mainline Mar del Plata KID, where White has f3 and ♕e2 and Black aims for the pawn break with ...g5-g4. The result is that if White plays the standard MdP queenside pawnstorm — aiming to create a weakness on the queenside dark squares (d6, c7, b6) — Black's attack hits sooner than in the MdP. Even so, both sides have to play very precisely, or that extra tempo won't be enough.

12.b4

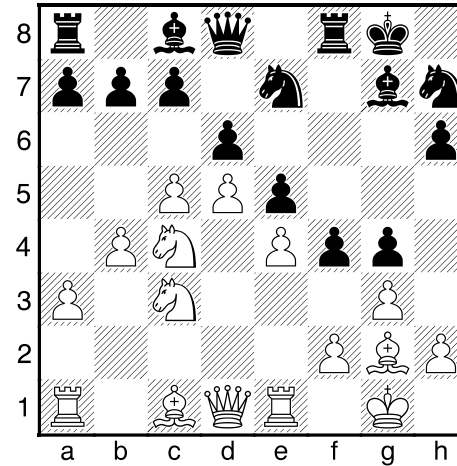
White doesn't have to prepare c5 — the x-ray pressure on e5 is enough.

This was White's last chance to turn the game into an open-center conflict. 12.c5!? f4 (12...dxc5?! 13.exf5 and ♖xe5 is a very good trade for White — Black's king will feel the draft.) 13.gxf4! this opens the long diagonal, but it gives White some central play before Black gets the chance to go ...g5, with the choice to attack the kingside with ...g4 or taking gxf4 and a piece attack. 13...exf4 now ...♗g4 or ...♗g5, eliminating the ♖ would secure a long-term plus, as the white minors would get stuck on the wrong side of the e4 pawn. 14.e5! ♗g4 ♗g4 Hard to evaluate, but the open center means Black won't have a free hand on the kingside.

12...f4 13.c5

13.gxf4 exf4 14.♗b2 ♗g4∞ (14...g5 15.e5!∞) 15.♖a4 ♖f7∞.

13...g5 14.♖d2 g4 15.♖c4



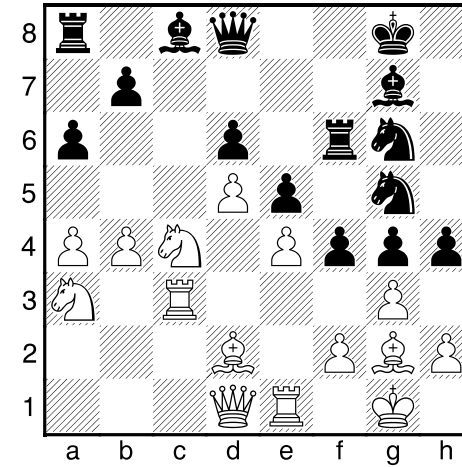
15...♗g6

15...f3? 16.♗f1 and all the play is on the queenside, where White has a KID-killing space advantage.

16.a4 ♗g5 17.cxd6 cxd6 18.♖b5 ♖f6 19.♗d2 h5 20.♖c1 a6 21.♖ba3 h4 22.♖c3

The ♖-lift is another standard MdP KID way to defend the kingside. Unfortunately for White, both f3 and f2 need defending, and doing that with ♖f1 would give Black the extra option to bury the ♗g2 with ...f3 or ...h3.

22.a5 ♗h6 23.♖b6?! (23.♖c2!?) 23...hxc3 24.fxg3 (24.♖xa8 gxf2+!-) 24...♖f3+ 25.♗xf3 gxf3 26.♗f2! (26.♖xa8? fxg3+) 26...♖b8 ♖f7.



The computers agree Black is winning, but opt for different lines.

22...♗h6

leela's top choice is the improving: 22...♗d7! with the positional threat of ...b5, wrecking White's queenside play. 23.a5 stops ...b5, but 23...♖c8 allows Black to trade the inert ♖a8 for the attacking/defending ♖c3; for example: 24.♖b6? ♖xc3 25.♗xc3 ♖f3+ 26.♗xf3 gxf3 27.g4 (27.♖xf3 fxg3+) 27...♗xg4 the queenside trades leave White with a much worse version of the game, with no queenside play.

Stockfish's top choice is the all-tactics plunge: 22...♖f3+! White won't survive long with the ♖f3, but taking it creates a winning discovered attack with ...fxg3:

23.♖xf3 gxf3 24.♗xf3 hxc3 25.fxg3 b5! a decoy and line-opening sac: either gains time by attacking a loose ♖b5, or adds the ♖a8 to the kingside attack from a2. 26.axb5

axb5 27.♖xb5 fxg3 (27...♖a2!?) 28.hxc3 ♗d7+ 29.♖bxd6 ♖h3+.

23.♗xf3 23...gxf3:

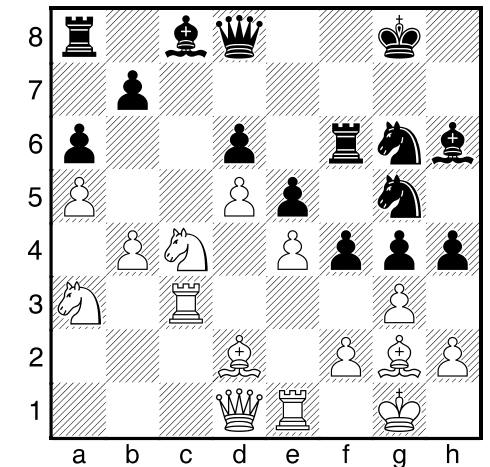
a) 24.♖xf3 fxg3+- and gxf2+;

b) 24.♖xf3 ♗g4 25.♖b3 doesn't help (25.gxf4 ♖xf4 26.♖b3 ♖e2+- and ...♗xf3.) 25...♗xf3 26.♖xf3 fxg3+-;

c) 24.gxf4 ♖xf4 25.♖xf3 ♖g6+ 26.♖h1 ♗g4 27.♖e3 ♖g5+-;

d) 24.g4! ♗xg4 25.h3!? ♗h5 and Black goes back to a methodical kingside build up: ...♖h8-f7, ...♖g6, and something gets to g5. 25...♗xh3 should win too, but after 26.♖xf3 ♗d7 27.♖h2 there's no mate for Black.

23.a5!



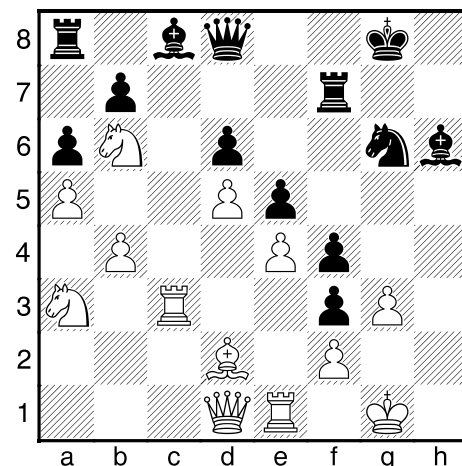
White to play, ♖b6 would be just in time...

23...♖f3+?



23...hxg3 24.hxg3 (24.fxg3 f3 and ...f2+.) 24...♖f7! clearing a path for the ♔. (24...f3? 25.♗b6 fxg2 26.♙xg5! ♙xg5∞) 25.♗b6 ♗f3+ 26.♙xf3 gxf3

Analysis Diagram



a) 27.g4 ♙xg4-+ or even 27...♔h4-+ wins;

b) 27.♙xf3 fxg3 28.♙xg3 ♙xd2 29.♙xg6+ ♖g7-+;

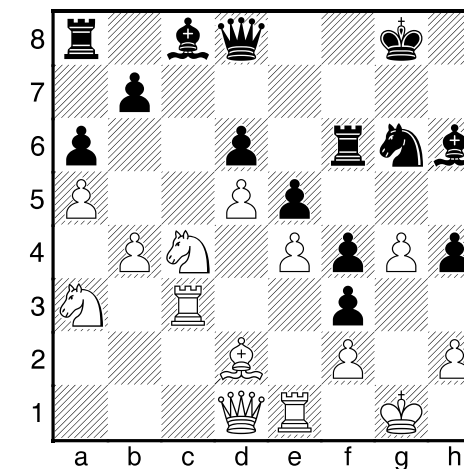
c) 27.♗xa8 ♙g4! White has no good defence to Black's ♙ invasion; here's one extravagant example: 28.♖c7 (28.♗b6 fxg3 29.♙xh6 ♔h4-+ #5) 28...♙g5 no thanks! 29.♖xf7 ♙h5 you can keep it. 30.♖f6 ♙h3 have another 31.♖xg6+ ♗f7 I'll even let you take a ♙, your choice!

24.♙xf3 gxf3 25.g4!!

**IM
Mark Plotkin**

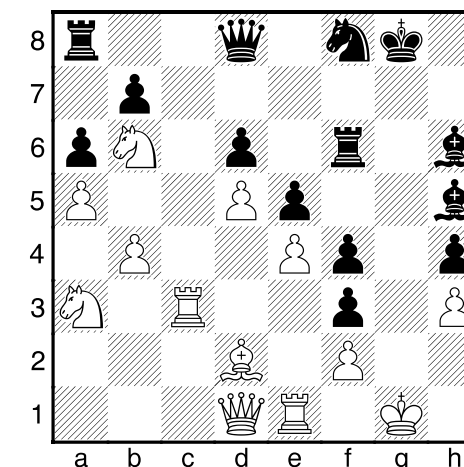


2025 Hart House Reading Week Open



Black's f3-pawn is a thorn, but (as shown above) taking it loses. Giving the g-pawn like this keeps both the f- and h-files closed, narrowing Black's attacking corridor to the g-file.

**25...♙xg4 26.h3!? ♙h5!
27.♗b6 ♗f8!?**



This next sequence is critical and precise from both players.

28.♙h2
28.♗xa8? ♖g6+ 29.♙h1 ♙g5 simplest

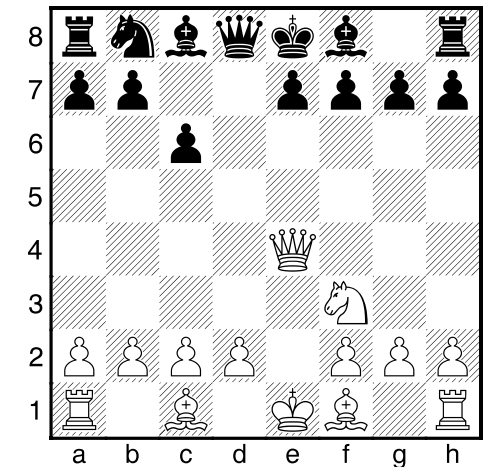
Chen, Yidong (2226) Sanderson, Tyler (1700)

B11

New Year op Richmond CAN (1.6),
02.01.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♘c3
dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6 5.♙e2
♘xe4 6.♙xe4



6...♘d7

Black has other ways to hit the ♙e4, but all score the usual 54% for White:

6...♙a5 and either ...♘f5 or ...♙f5;

6...♙d5 7.♙e3 ♘f5 or 7...♙e6.

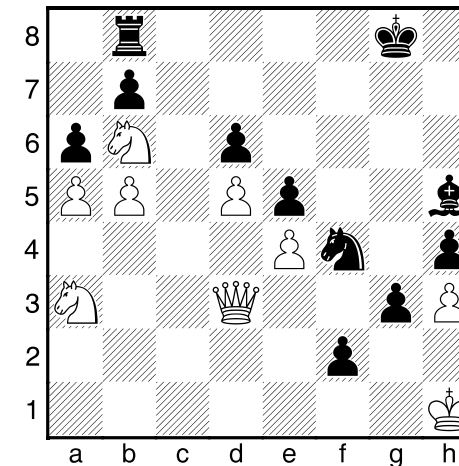
7.♘c4 ♘f6 8.♘e5 e6

8...♘xe4?? Oh no... the Queen...
9.♘xf7#

9.♙e2 b5

Black is down a ♙ for only ♘, but threatens the ♙ and if the ♙ moves then ♘h4 wins. This would be a really beautiful win... but there is one ludicrous but saving move: 35.♘d7!!= Xb8, Xf6, gives the ♙ back for two pawns!

34.♙h1 ♘xd2 35.♙a1 ♘xc3
36.♙xc3 f2 37.♙d3 ♘f4



Coordination worth a diagram.

0-1

Saarthak Malakar



(29...♙d7+) 30.♙g1 ♙g2+-+ trades the ♙a8 for the ♙e1, but gains a passer on g2.

28...♙g6 29.♙g1□

29.♘xa8? ♙g2+ 30.♙h1 ♙d7 31.♙xf3 ♙xf2!-+.

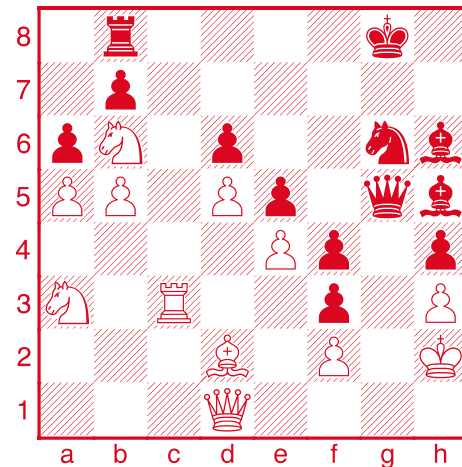
29...♙b8□

29...♙g3? 30.♘xa8+- and ♙f1 will hold h3/g2.

30.♙xg6+□

Black was threatening ...♙g3, when taking causes a suicidal pawn avalanche, while not taking gives Black time to bring up the cavalry (...♘h7-g5).

30...♘xg6 31.b5! ♙g5



32.♙g1?

White's first real mistake of the game, but it's a KID and if Black lands just one punch it's a KO.

32.♙h1? ♙g3+ 33.fxg3 fxg3+

34.♙g1 f2+□ 35.♙f1 ♘xd2 Is it over

yet? 36.♘d7!? NO: one more trick!
36...♘d1!! (36...♙g7!; 36...♙f7?? 37.♙f3+-)
37.♙d3!? one more trick? 37...♙c8□-+;

32.♙f1□∞ ♙g3+? Just to show this doesn't work here. (Instead, Black has to change gears and redeploy the minors (...♘h8-f7) and target e4.

32...♘h8∞) 33.♙h1□ ♙g2+ 34.♙xg2 fxg2+ 35.♙g1 the pin to the ♘h6 means g2-pawn can't be supported, and White will have time for f3 and ♙xg2 (not falling for 35.♙xg2?? f3+-), leaves White in charge in a terrible KID ending for Black.

32...♙g3+!!-+

Only move for the KO

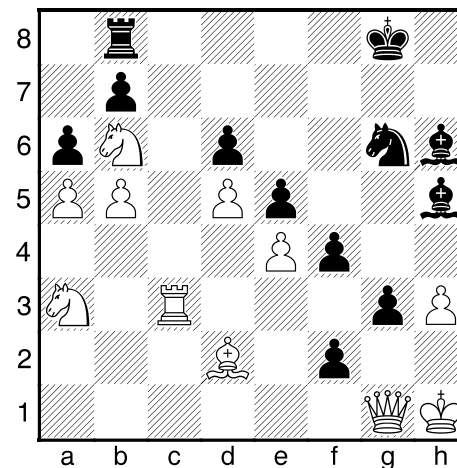
33.fxg3

33.♙h1 ♙xh3+ 34.♙h2 ♙g2+!

35.♙xg2 fxg2+ 36.♙g1 (36.♙xg2?? f3+-+)
36...♘e2!-+ with too many extra bits.

33...fxg3+□

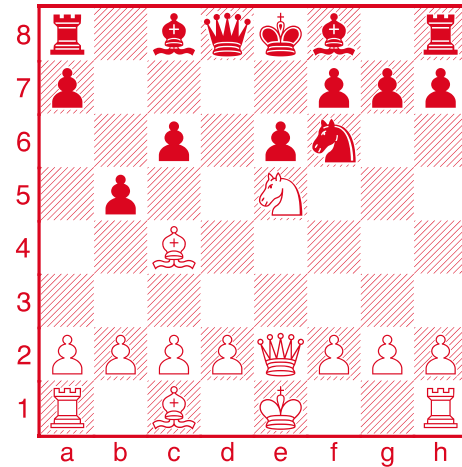
Here's a crazy line: the "artistic" 33...hxg3+? 34.♙h1 f2 Analysis Diagram





Chess Canada Across Canada

This has been the main move since Schandorff's 2021 Quality Chess book *Playing the Caro Kann*.



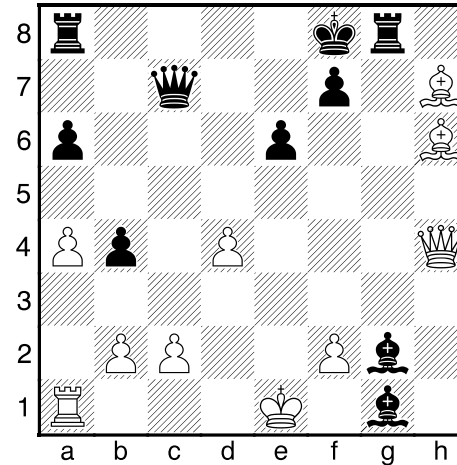
What happens if dxc6 ?

10. dxc6

10. dxc6 ? c7 ! Are the d and c both hanging? 11. d3 $\square$ Not both hanging, since the d is defended by the threat of xb5 , pinning any c6 . (11. xb5 ? a6 $\square$ pushing the c to an undefended square, a very common idea in these b5 -sac patterns. 12. a4 d7 $\square$ 13. c4 d5!+- and ... b6 . ($\leq 13... \text{c8}$ 14. xa6 $\bar{\text{c}}$ White will have three pawns for the d .) 11... a6 ! covering b5 threatens the d . (11... xc6?? 12. xb5+-) 12. d5 d6 $\bar{\text{c}}$ White has won a pawn, but Black's development is much better;

10. d3 is an equally popular continuation as the game move. The following game might not be the most theoretically relevant, but it has some very unusual and amusing piece play. 10... c7 11. a4 d6 12. dxc6 b4 13. d4 a6 14. d5 still 100+ games in

the Megabase from here... 14... e5 (14... $\text{b7!?$) 15. dxc6 f8 16. d5 dxc6 17. c7 b7 18. c4 (18.0-0 g8 19. f3 $\square$) 18... dxc6 ?! 19. g1 g8 20. dxc6 dxc6 21. d4 (21. d3! blocking ... xc2-e4 .) 21... dxc6 22. d6+
Analysis Diagram



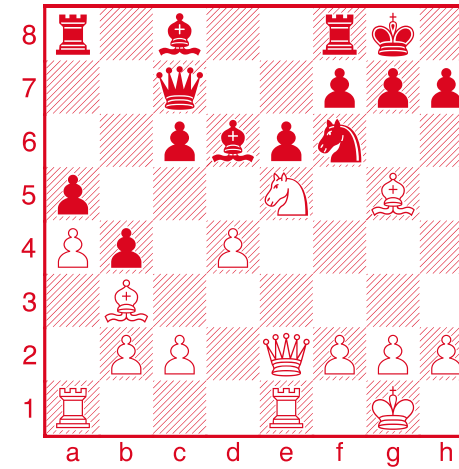
A weird position, but conceivably something today's players could reach in their opening prep. 22... e8 23. dxc6 xc2?? (23... h2 ∞) 24. c1 ? (24. f6+-) 24... e4+ $\square$ = 25. xe4 xe4 26. c7 g6 $\square$ 27. f4 trapping the g1 . 27... f8 28. dxc6 dxc6 29. f1 d8 30. e5 h2 31. dxc6 xd4= 32. c6 a5 33. a6 b3 34. xa5 e8 35. a6 f7 36. a7+ f6 37. a5 Lu, S (2616)–Amar, E (2482) Wch Rapid, 2025.

10... b7??

Move-orders matter.

10... c7 defends c6 and f7 . 11. d4 d6 12.0-0 a5 13. a4 b4 14. e1 0-0 15. g5

Analysis Diagram



... d5 or ... c5 ?

Almost anything — ... d5 , ... a6 , ... d7 — is better than the move played in the game [Nakamura, H \(2810\)–Firouzja, A \(2759\) London blitz, 2026](#), which continued: 15... c5?? 16. dxc5 ? 16... xc5 $\pm$.

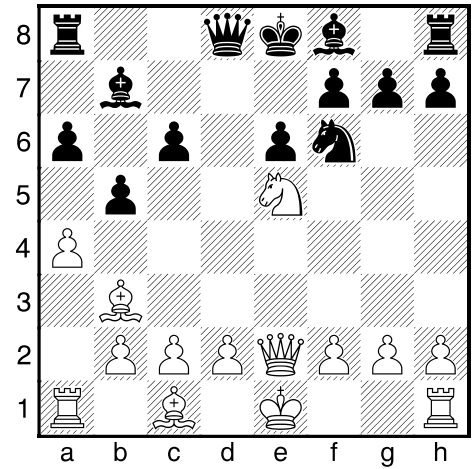
I'm sure after the game both players — two of the most tactically-alert ever — were kicking themselves after missing this: 16. dxc6+- gxf6 17. h5 $\square$ there's no good defence to the threat e3-g3 . 17... fxe5 (17... d8 18. g4+- ; 17... xe5 18. dxe5 c4 19. e3+- ; 17... e7 18. e3+-) 18. g5+ $\square$ h8 19. f6+ g8 20. e4+- .

11. a4 ?

$\square$ 11. dxc6+- xf7 12. xe6+ g6 13. f7+ f5 (13... h6 14. xb7+-) 14. e6+! (14. xb7+-) 14... e5 15. d4+! Gutman, G (2445)–Mnatsakanyan, A (2148) 1st Thursday blitz, 2026.

11... a6

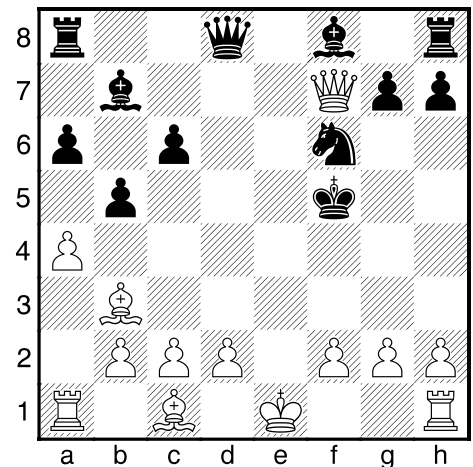
$\square$ 11... d5 $\pm$.



12. dxc6!+-

No second chance for you!

12... xf7 13. xe6+ g6 14. f7+ f5 15. e6+ g6 16. f7+ f5



17. xb7+-

Maybe a tiny second chance...?

The game line is winning of course, but SF18 rates 17. e6+! as more than +3 better! The point is that after 17... e5 18.0-0 White keeps an

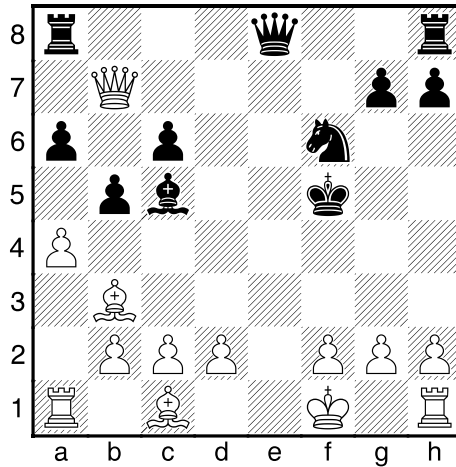
attack that will cost Black more than a piece; e.g. after 18...♖e7 19.d4+♙+.

17...♞e8+!

17...♞e7+ saves the ♔, but it's a 2-pawn-down endgame. It's the top choice of SF18, but the game line is the only sane choice for a human: White not only can go wrong here, but has to find some only moves in the game line.

18.♔f1 ♕c5

Threat ...♖a7.

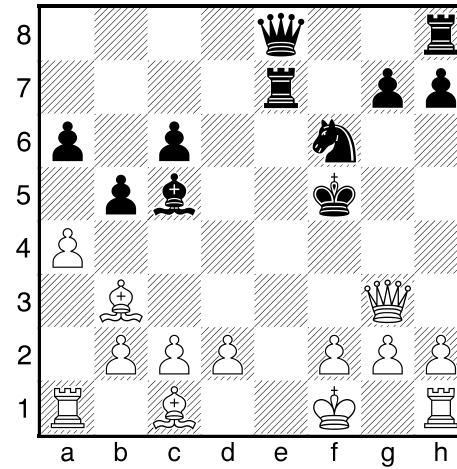


19.♞c7!

19.♞f7? saves the ♞, but 19...♞xf7 20.♕xf7 ♖hf8 21.♕b3 ♜g4 with full comp;

19.♞xg7! looks like asking for trouble, but the ♕ covers g8, and 19...♖f8 20.d4! hits the ♕ and threatens ♞g5#.

19...♖a7 20.♞g3 ♖e7



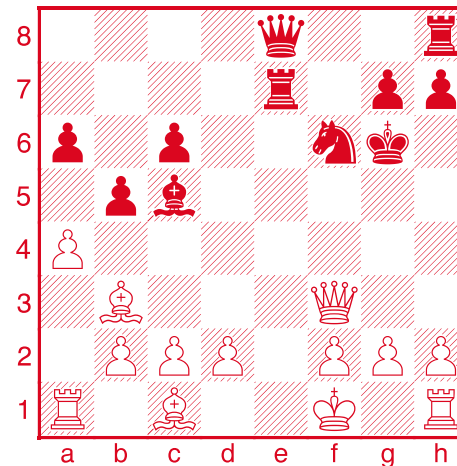
How do you defend the back rank?

21.♞f3+

21.f3?? guards e1, but 21...♜h5♙+ removes the guard: 22.♞g4+ ♔f6 23.g3 ♖e1+ 24.♔g2 ♞e2+ 25.♔h3 ♖xh1+ White doesn't have a safe check.

21...♔g6 22.♞g3+ ♔f5 23.♞f3+ ♔g6

FWIW, if Black could teleport the ♔ to b6 he'd be winning.



24.g4♙+-

Makes an escape square for the ♔, and enables ♞f5+.

24.♞d1?? ♕xf2♙+- 25.♔xf2 ♜e4+ 26.♔g1 ♜g5!+- or 26...♜f2!?-+;

24.g3? ♕xf2♙∞ tanking the ♕ loses! 25.♔xf2?? (25.♞xf2 ♜g4+) 25...♖f8 If ♞f5+ was safe it would win. 26.♞d3+ ♔h6 (26...♜e4+! simpler.) 27.♖f1 ♜g4+ 28.♔g1 ♖e1!+- or 28...♞h5+.

24...♖e5 25.d4! ♕xd4 26.♕f4! ♖f8 27.♕xe5 ♞xe5 28.♞f5+!

Enough second chances for you!

1-0

Lecompte, Christian
(1275)

Laplane, Germain (1212)

B13

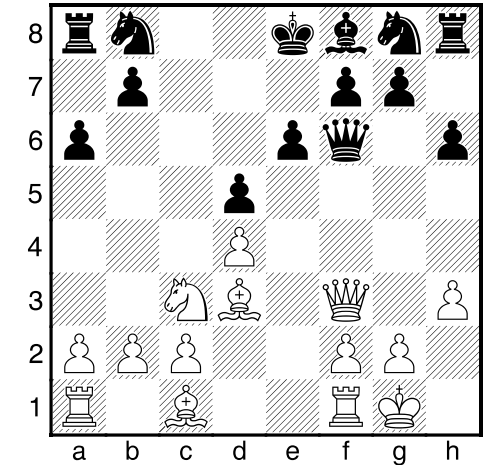
Verseau U1400 Chambly CAN
(1.10), 12.02.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5
4.♜f3 a6 5.♕e2 h6 6.0-0 ♕f5
7.♕d3
7.c4C.

7...♕g4
7...♕xd3=.

8.h3 ♕xf3 9.♞xf3 e6 10.♜c3
♞f6!?



To an experienced player ...♞f6 "feels" wrong — that's the natural square for the ♜g8, it leaves squares on the queenside undefended, "knights before queens"... etc., but ...♞f6 is actually not much worse than the computer's top choice (♜c6).

11.♞g3!

Keeps the ♞s on and eyes the abandoned queenside dark squares.

11...♞xd4?

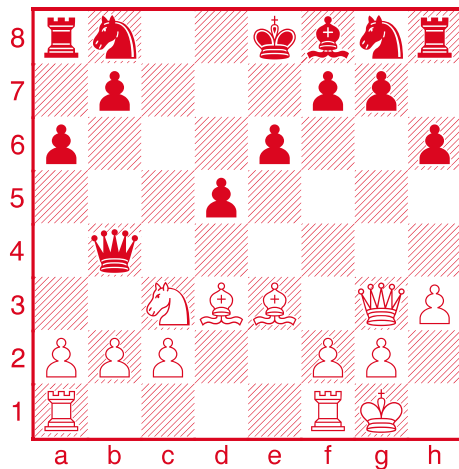
This move *is* bad, for all the reasons the beginner books tell us: pawn grabbing with the ♞ in the opening, neglecting development, not getting castled...But while those general principles will help you choose candidate moves, they won't help you choose between them when the position is on a knife edge, as this one is now...

12.♕e3! ♞b4





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White is way ahead in development, and the black ♔ is in the center, so, as you might expect, White has a forced win. However, the winning margin is only one move wide (so to speak), and the game would be equal if Black had even a single tempo to develop either ♘.

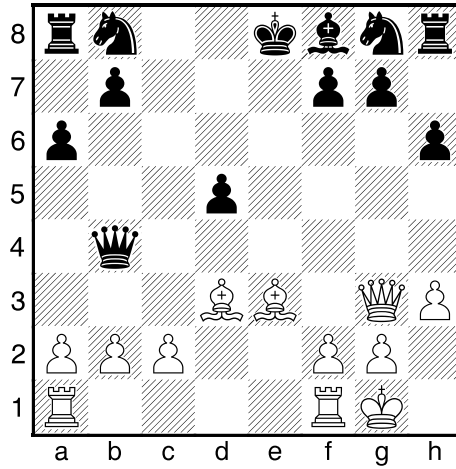
13. ♖c7±

2nd best, almost -2 worse than the best move:

13. ♘xd5!!

On general principles I would expect this to work, and some of the basic tactics are easy enough to see — (13...♙d6 14. ♖xg7+-; 13...♗d6 14. ♘c7+-) — but the Devil is in the details, and (to me) the fact that the next move is so strong that it wins is not obvious. What comes after 13...exd5?

Analysis Diagram



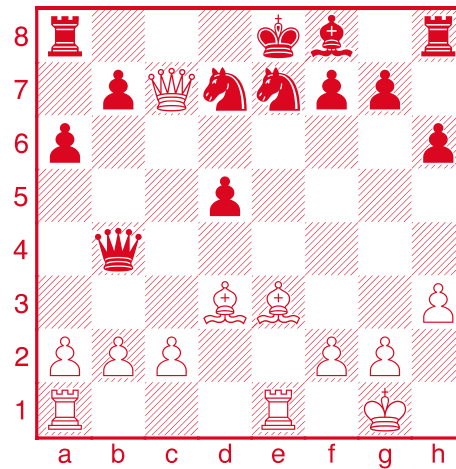
14. ♖fe1! I know it's easy to underestimate how powerful this threatened discovered check is because my default eval is "Black must have some way out of this"... but there isn't one if White plays perfectly:

a) 14...♙e7? 15. ♖xg7 ♙f6 16. ♙d4+ or 16. ♙c5+ win for White;

b) 14...♙d8 15. c4 (or chase the ♗ and then go c4) 15...♘f6! 16. a3! is that an obvious candidate move? SF18 rates it as +3 better than the 2nd best move!?

c) 14...♘e7 15. ♖c7 threatening ♙c5 then ♖c8# is an obvious candidate move, and it does win, but only if after 15...♘d7 ...you solve this...

Analysis Diagram



16. ♙a7!!

OK, that's a preposterous "only move"! Obviously, ...♖xa7 allows a back rank mate, but why even consider ♙a7? The point — I think — is to pin the ♘e7 so White will have time to bump the ♖ from defending b7, and then win the queenside pawns to make squares for the ♙s to attack the stranded ♔. When you wrap your head around that — Black's kingside is buried and so a winning attack on the queenside means winning everywhere — the main variation (with 15.c3 or 15.a3) makes more sense: the black ♖ is the only thing holding the queenside together, so bumping it will make the queenside collapse. On almost any Black move after 16. ♙a7 White continues c3 or a3 and then starts taking things on the queenside.

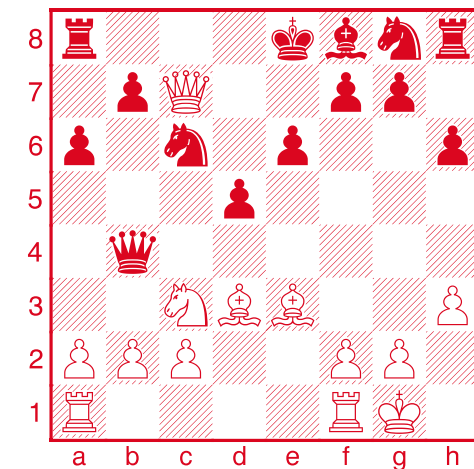
HOW IS THIS EASIER THAN DEFENDING?

INSERT EXPLANATION HERE...

THIS SPACE LEFT BLANK

13...♘c6?

Allows a pretty tactic. 13...♘d7 does not save it, but does threaten ...d4.



14. ♙b6±

Misses a nice interference tactic.

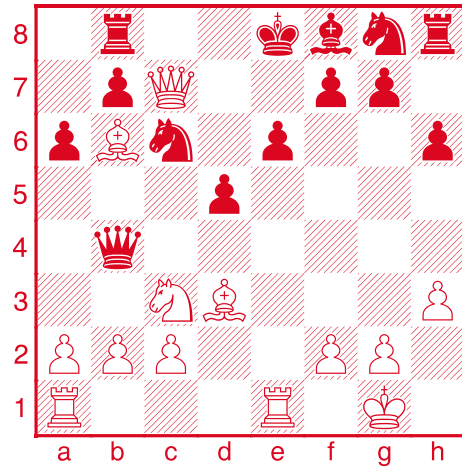
14. ♙b5□+- threatens ♙xc6 and blocks the defence of b7 14...axb5 15. ♖xb7+-.

14...♖b8

Defends b7 and threatens to trap the ♖ with ...♙d6.

15. ♖fe1

Not 15. ♙xa6?? ♙d6□+-; but 15. ♘xd5! was still winning.



Did White miss something, or did Black?

15...♙d6?

Black could have saved himself with 15...♙d6 16.♙xd6 ♙xd6 17.♙xd5±.

The game move would trap the ♙ and win the game, except White can (and must) play...

16.♙xe6+ ♖+- fxe6

16...♙e7 saves the ♙, but 17.♙xc6 wins the game.

17.♙g6+

1-0

Kot, Emanuel (2237) Roussikh, Maxim (2137)

B15

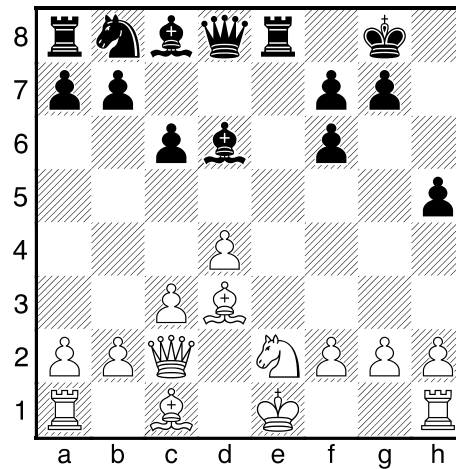
*Ottawa Winter op Ottawa CAN
(5.10), 19.01.2025*

Notes: John Upper

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4
4.♙xe4 ♙f6**

This move has recently been far more popular than the older 4... ♙f5.

**5.♙xf6+ exf6 6.c3 ♙d6
7.♙d3 0-0 8.♙c2 ♖e8+ 9.♙e2
h5!**



If you don't play either side of the Caro, this move will probably look crazy. In fact, it's been the main move since 2018, with thousands of games, and played by super-GMs like [Carlsen](#), [Nakamura](#), [Caruana](#), [So](#), and [MVL](#) — although most of those were played in online blitz!?

The basic idea is simply to avoid immediately losing the h-pawn, and pushing it to h5 is at least as good as the alternatives: Black can kick away any piece on g3, and can (if necessary) play ...g6 without hanging

the h6-pawn. While defending h7 with 9...g6 gives White simple play with 10.h4, though that is playable too — as are 9...h6 and the odd-looking sac 9...f5!?, which Gukesh played regularly before becoming World Champion.

It's not clear what White's best try is. A classical strategy would be to trade pieces and win an endgame with the mobile majority; but, somehow, that doesn't seem to work today as it did 100 years ago for Capablanca.



the undefeated Emanuel Kot

2025 North American U18 Champion Kingston, ON
2026 WYCC U18 =1st Montesilvano, Italy

Rawdon PQ native scored an undefeated +6 =3 -0 at the NAYCC and +7 =4 -0 in Italy.

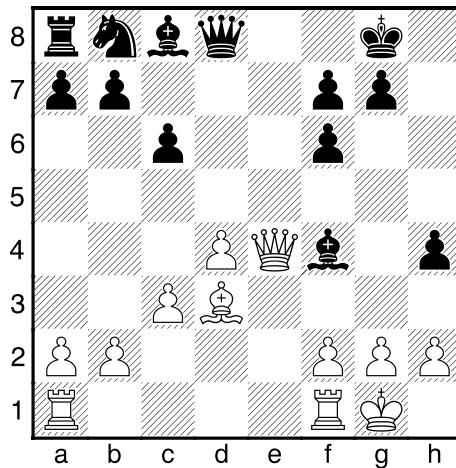


10.0-0

Castling long is OK too: 10.♔e3 ♘d7 11.0-0-0 ♘f8 12.♕b1 ♔e6 13.c4 ♖c8 14.a3 ♘g6 15.♘c3 (15.c5? wins a pawn, but loses the light squares and the game 15...♙c7 16.♙xg6? fxg6 17.♗xg6 ♗d5+) 15...♘f4 16.♙h7+ ♕h8 17.♙xf4 ♙xf4 18.♙f5 g6 19.♙xe6 ♖xe6= [Grishuk,A](#) (2736)–[Daneshvar,B](#) (2577) [World Cup, 2023](#).

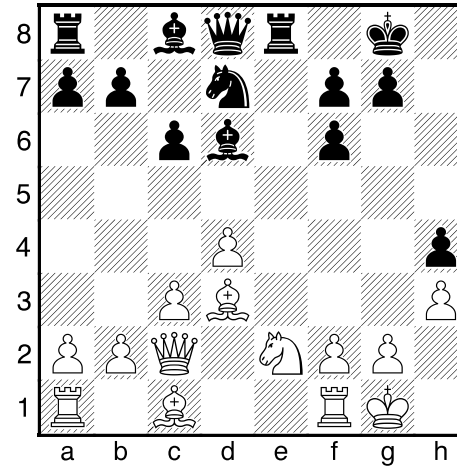
10...h4 11.h3

White can also trade the "bad B" exploiting a tactic that comes up more than once: 11.♙f4!? ♖xe2? (11...♘a6!) 12.♗xe2 ♙xf4 13.♗e4 *Analysis Diagram*



The double-attack on f4 and h7 wins: 13...♙h6 (13...♙d6 14.♗h7+ ♘f8 15.♖ae1 ♙e6 16.♗h8+ ♕e7 17.♖xe6!+-) 14.♗h7+ ♕f8 15.♖ae1 the ♖f1 is perfect right where it is 15...♙e6 16.f4 ♕f5 17.♙xf5+- ♗f6 18.♙xe6 fxe6 19.f5+-.

11...♘d7

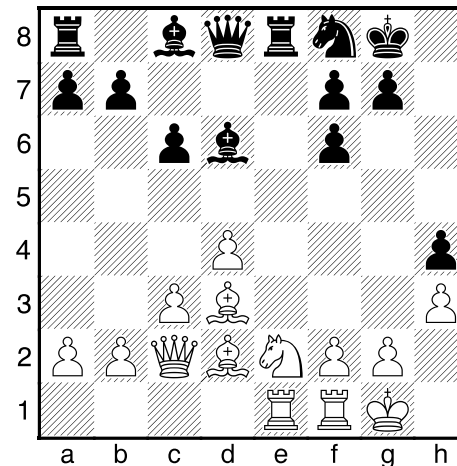


12.♙d2

12.♙d2 ♘f8 (12...♖xe2?? is the same blunder we saw above 13.♗xe2 ♙xf4 14.♗e4+-) 13.♗d2 ♘g6 14.♙xd6 ♗xd6 15.♖fe1 ♙e6 16.c4 ♖ad8 17.♖ad1 White has more space and a mobile queenside majority, but SF18 rates this 0.00 on any of ...♖e7, ...a6, or ...f5. [Anand,V](#) (2743)–[Gukesh,D](#) (2754) [Mumbai rapid, 2025](#).

12...♘f8 13.♖ae1

Aiming for f4-f5.

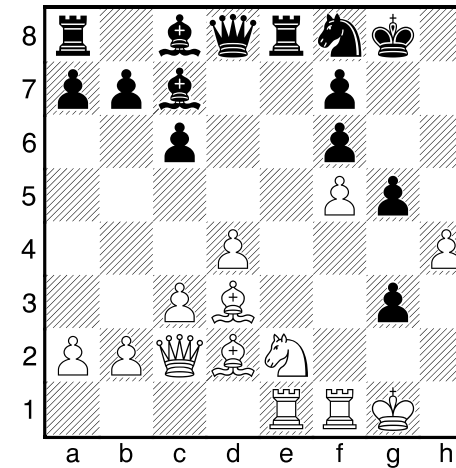


13...g6

So that if f4 Black has ...f5!?, preventing the exciting attack we see in the next note.

13...♙c7!? an ambitious move. The computer rates this and ...g6 about the same, but you might need to play like a computer to cope with the resulting complications. 14.f4! g6 15.f5! g5 ♕ 16.g3!? hxg3 17.h4!?∞

Analysis Diagram

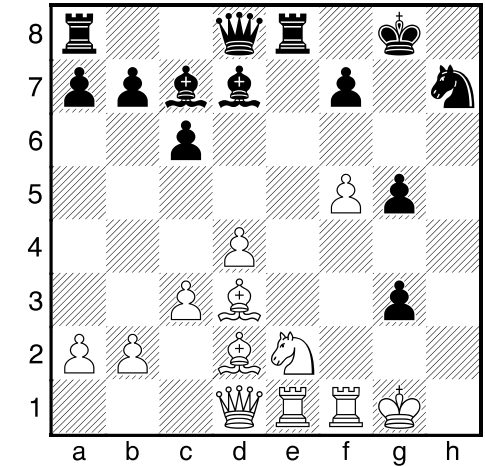


17...♘h7

"This is probably how Black should do things to maintain winning chances, and now there's the pawn sacrifice 17...c5!? 18.dxc5 b6∞ opening lots of lines for Black's major pieces." – [Daniel Fernandez](#), chesspub.com

18.♗d1 ♙d7 19.hxg5 fxg5

Analysis Diagram



No, not another "boring Caro".

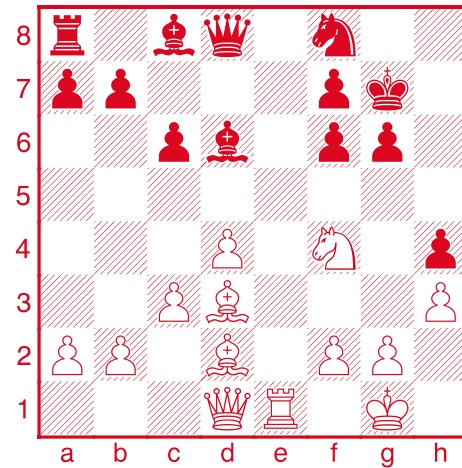
FYI, [IM Jovanka Houska](#), the Black player in this game, has published well-reviewed books and DVDs on the Caro, so she's no mere 2300+ IM who has stumbled into deep prep.

20.♘xg3! ♙xg3 21.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 22.f6 ♕ g4 ♕ Blocking White's ♗. White is down a piece but has full comp and more than one way to play this. 23.♗c2 (23.♙g2!?; 23.♙c1!?) 23...♘f8 (23...♘xf6 24.♖xf6 ♙h4∞) 24.♙c1 ♙h4?? (24...♙e6 25.♗d2 ♘g6 ♕) 25.♗h2 ♕+- ♙xf6 26.♖xf6 ♗e1+ 27.♖f1 ♗e7 28.♗h6 (threat ♙g5-f6) 28...♘g6 29.♙xg6 fxg6 30.♗xg6+ ♗g7 31.♗d6 ♕ (threats: ♙h6 or ♖f6-g6) 31...♗h7 32.♙h6! (threat: ♖f8 mating.) 32...♙f5 33.♗f6!+- (hits the ♙ which is pinned to the mate on f8. Black hopes for a perpetual, but it's not there.) 33...♗c7 34.♖xf5 ♗g3+ 35.♙f1 ♗h3+ 36.♙e2 ♖e8+ 37.♙d2 [Grieve,H](#) (2384)–[Houska,J](#) (2358) 4NCL, 2021.

14.♘f4 ♖xe1 15.♖xe1 ♕g7



16. ♖d1

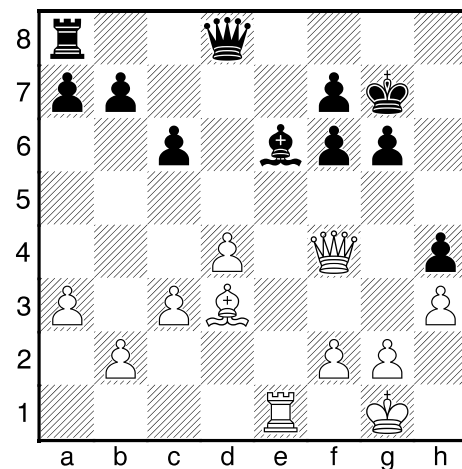


... ♖c7 or ... ♘e6?

16... ♖c7??

Losing, though neither player sees it yet...

⬜16... ♘e6 17. ♖c1 (17. ♘h5+ fails when Black has ... ♖h8 defending the h-file.) 17... ♙xf4 18. ♙xf4 ♘xf4 19. ♖xf4 ♙e6 20. a3 *Analysis Diagram*

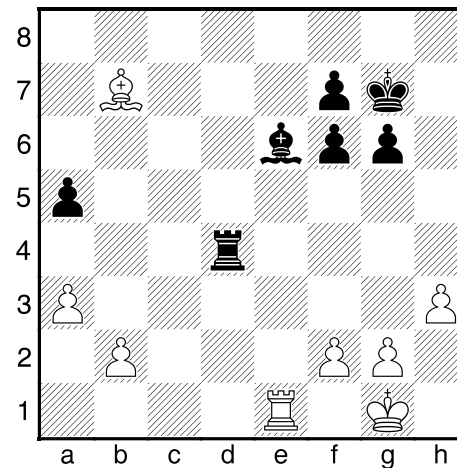


Black doesn't have to give up h4:

20... f5 21. ♖e5+ ♖f6 22. ♖c7 ♖e8= the only way to defend is with tricks: 23. ♖xb7?? ♙c8-+.

20... c5!? 21. ♖xh4 cxd4 22. ♖xd4 (≤22. cxd4 ♖b6= 23. d5 ♙xd5 24. ♙c4 ♙xc4 25. ♖xc4 ♖xb2 26. ♖e7 ♖f8 27. a4 a6 28. g3 b5 29. axb5 axb5 30. ♖d5 ♖c1+ 31. ♙g2 ♖c4 32. ♖xc4 bxc4 33. ♖c7 [Sokolovsky, Y \(2519\)–Rozen, E \(2478\) EU-Cup, 2024.](#)) 22... ♖xd4 23. cxd4 ♖d8 24. ♙e4 ♖xd4! (24... b6? 25. d5 ♙xd5? 26. ♖d1+-) 25. ♙xb7 a5

Analysis Diagram



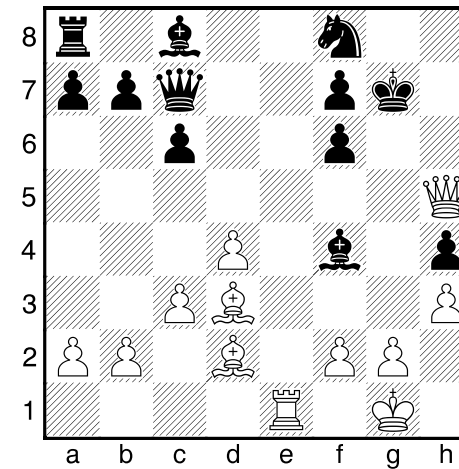
30 years ago annotators would say "with good winning chances"; but today we see that SF18 says 0.00 on 10 different continuations. OTOH, I'm old, and this is a pawn-up ending with same ♙s, so I'll go with the human/leela eval: ±/±.

17. ♖f3!±

The analysis notes below are dense because I believe it is easy to *think* we understand a summary like "White is attacking a broken kingside with 4 pieces and Black defending with 3",

it is another to actually know that you can find all the only moves to win this winning attack.

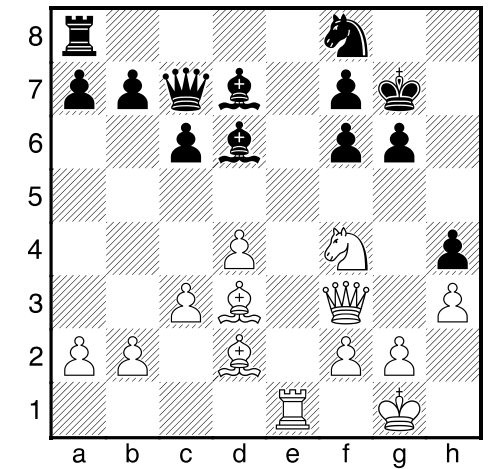
17. ♘h5+!!+- gxh5 18. ♖xh5 ♙f4 Not the only defensive try, but very testing, and the real solution to the previous **Critical Position** comes here: *Analysis Diagram*



19. ♖e8? isn't good, but shows how strong White's position is, since 19... ♙xd2 20. ♖c5 ♘e6 21. ♖h5 ♙h6 22. ♖h8 ♙xh8 23. ♖xh6+= is still a draw.

19. ♖e4 ♘g6 (19... ♙xd2 20. ♖xh4 ♘g6 21. ♙xg6+- with skewers along the 7th or 8th.) 20. ♖xf4 ♘xf4 21. ♖h7+ ♙f8 22. ♖h6+ ♙e7 23. ♙xf4+- is obviously "with comp", but SF18 says +3 (and climbing the longer it analyzes). One illustration: 23... ♖b6 24. ♖h8 ♖xb2? 25. ♙c7 and now death on the dark squares is obvious... even to me.

17... ♙d7??



Gives White a second chance.

18. c4?

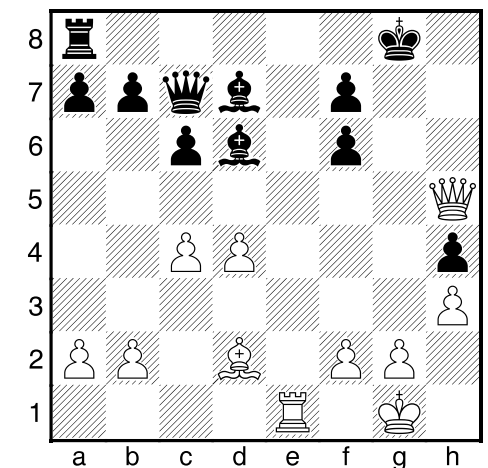
⬜18. ♘h5+- gxh5 19. ♖xh5 White has such an overwhelming attack that even 20. ♖e7 wins. I'll leave it for readers to explore the attacking options for themselves.

18... ♘h7

Third strike...

⬜18... ♙xf4.

19. ♘h5+!!+- gxh5 20. ♙xh7 ♙xh7 21. ♖xh5+ ♙g8





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22. ♖e4

22. ♖h6? ♕f8! (or 22... ♖c8!) 23. ♖xf8

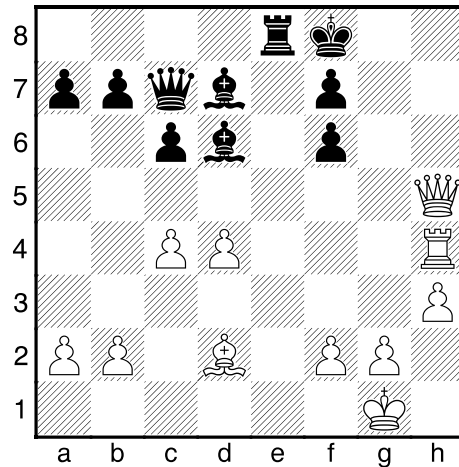
♜xf8 24. ♖xh4 (24. ♖e4?? ♖e8! ♜

Black has a back rank mate threat, so White must allow the ♖ trade.) 24... ♖e8 25. ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 26. ♖xf6∞ with a lot of pawns.

22... ♖e8 23. ♖xh4?

23. ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 24. ♖g4+ ♖f8 (24... ♖h8? 25. ♖h6 mates) 25. c5! ♕h2+ 26. ♖h1 ♕d7 27. ♖xh4+- White traps the ♕h2 and should win.

23... ♖f8□∞



24. c5! ♕h2+

As in previous lines, this is the only way to save the ♕ without blocking the king's escape square on e7, but it leaves the ♕ and ♖ tied up and at risk.

25. ♖h1 ♕e6?

25... ♖b8□ freeing c7 for the ♕.

26. ♖e4□+-

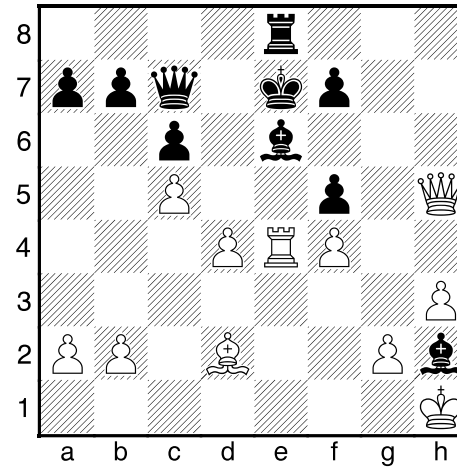
Pinning the ♕ to the e7 escape

square, and preparing to round up the ♕h2.

26... ♖e7 27. f4!

Threatening both ♕s!

27... f5



I assume both players were in terrible time trouble here...

28. ♖h4+??

28... ♖xf5+-.

28... ♖d7□ 29. ♖e5 f6??

29... ♖d8 30. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 31. ♖xh2 f6! 32. ♖e1 ♕xa2=.

30. ♖xf6

1-0

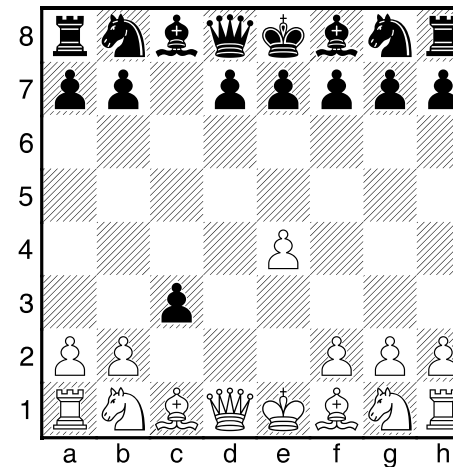
Boissinot, Claude (1431) Bergeron, Nicolas (1676)

B21

Montcalm 6 2024-25 Quebec CAN
(3), 10.04.2025

Notes: John Upper

1. e4 c5 2. d4 cxd4 3. c3 dxc3

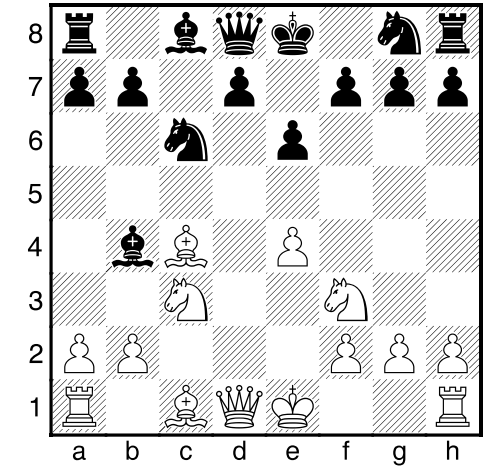


The Morra Gambit... *accepted!*

White gives up a center pawn for faster development and access to the c-file, which both combats Black's typical Sicilian play on the c-file and gives Black long-term problems finding a good square for the ♖, which will never be safe on c7. Computers prefer Black, but defusing White's long-term initiative isn't everyone's idea of a good time.

I used to think it was strange that so many Sicilian players complain when White plays the "boring" Alapin (2.c3), but then choose to transpose to an Alapin with 3... ♖f6 rather than play a more exciting Morra. Now I think what they want is not "boring" or "exciting" openings, but any opening their opponent *doesn't* want.

4. ♖xc3 ♖c6 5. ♖f3 e6 6. ♕c4 ♕b4!?



One of Black's many decent options. It can leave the dark squares weak, but can help equalize with a quick ...d5.

7. ♖e2

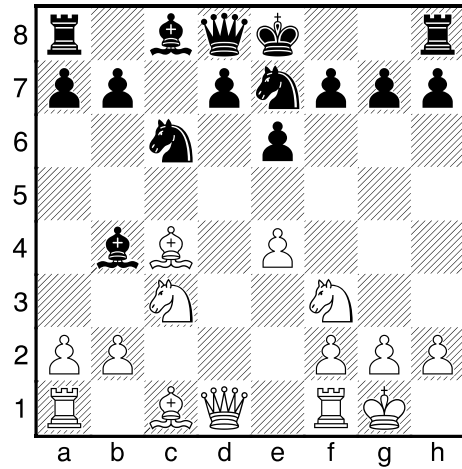
Stops ...d5 for now and heads for the standard Morra setup: ♖e2, ♕c1-somewhere, ♖fd1, ♖ac1.

White has also tried to attack this setup by keeping the ♖ on the d-file to fight for d6. 7.0-0 ♖ge7

Analysis Diagram



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Now 8.♖e2 could transpose back to the game and White's standard Morra development. Here are two games with GM **Razvan Preotu** as Black. In both, White tries to immediately attack the dark squares exposed by ...e6 and ...♗b4.

a) 8.e5!? d5= (8...♗g6!? 9.♗g5 ♖a5 10.♗b5 a6 SF18 prefers Black, but this is probably not a position you want against Nakamura.) 9.exd6 ♖xd6 10.♗b5 ♖xd1 11.♖xd1 0-0 12.♗c7 ♖b8 13.♗f4 ♗g6 14.♗g3 e5 15.a3 ♗a5 ♖ Nakamura, H (2736)– Preotu, R (2487) Titled Tuesday, 2021.

b) 8.♗b5 0-0 (8...d5! 9.exd5 exd5 10.♗xd5 ♗xd5 11.♖xd5 0-0 Black has the ♗-pair on an open board.) 9.a3! d5 10.axb4 dxc4 11.♗d6?! (11.♖xd8! ♖xd8 12.♗c7 ♖b8 13.b5 ♗b4±) 11...♗xb4 12.e5 ♗f5! 13.♗f4? ♗d3+- 14.♗g3 ♗xd6 15.exd6 b5+- Obregon Rivero, J (2463)–Preotu, R (2497) 3rd Thursday, 2026.

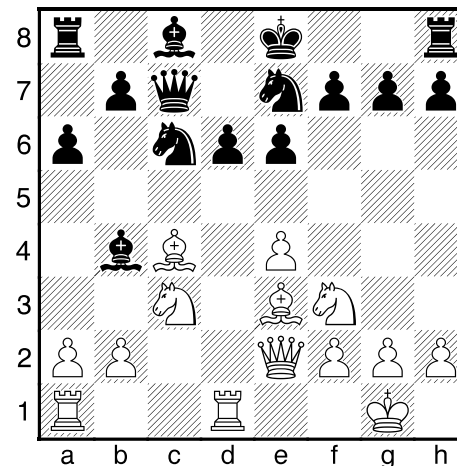
c) IM **Marc Esserman** is the leading

advocate for the Morra — having scored a miniature win over van Wely, and cowing even Anand into declining with 3... ♗f6 — and wrote the best book on it. Here is what he wrote about his recommendation here 8.♖c2±:

"I am convinced that this original positional approach is best. The queen slides to c2, when White readies to meet Black's unavoidable ...d5 break with ♗d3, fully coordinating the queen and bishop. On ...♗xc3, White may recapture with ♖xc3, keeping the pawn structure whole, or even bxc3 with the queen's rook sliding to b1, depending on circumstance. Lastly, White's king's rook will take up its natural post on d1."

– Esserman,
Mayhem in the Morra.

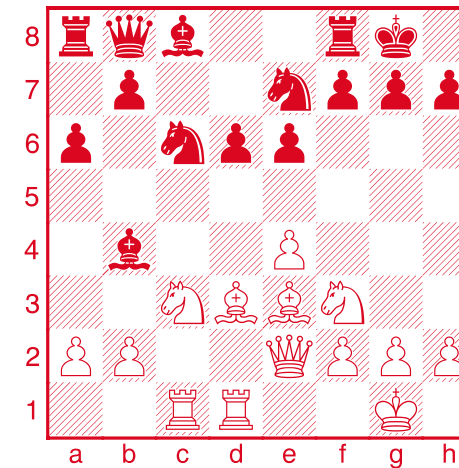
7...♗ge7 8.0-0 a6 9.♖d1 d6
10.♗e3 ♖c7



Black's ♖ will be a tactical target for

the white rooks. Putting it on b8, as happens in the game, does not work out well. Maybe he should leave it on d8 for now (where it stays in contact with the kingside dark squares) and play ...♗d7, unpinning the d-pawn, connecting the majors, and possibly saving a tempo with ...♖d8-b8 in one move, if necessary!?

11.♖ac1± 0-0 12.♗d3 ♖b8?

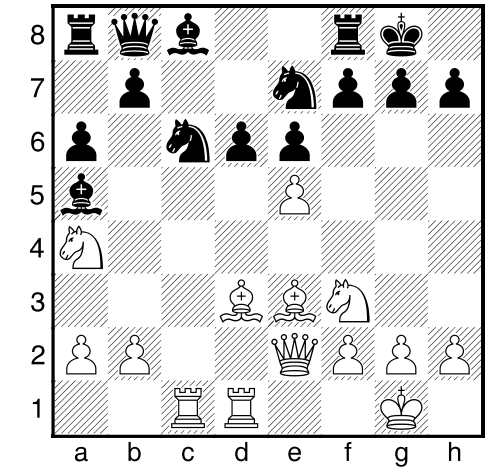


Does e5 and ♗xh7+ work, or is there anything better?

13.e5!
Very strong.

The computer shows that even stronger was 13.♗a4!! which looks like it's heading to the wrong side of the board if you're about to launch a kingside attack. It works because it creates queenside threats which both uncoordinate Black and enable White to use the ♗e3. The queenside threat is to establish a suffocating bind with ♗b6. 13...♗a5 is the only move to guard b6, and it also prepares ...b5,

but now White has a better version of the kingside attack we see in the game: 14.e5! *Analysis Diagram*



a) 14...dxe5 15.♗xh7+- with a standard Greek Gift win: Black can't get additional defenders to h7. 15...♖xh7 16.♗g5+ ♖g6 17.♖g4+-;

b) 14...♗xe5 To trade off the attacking ♗f3. 15.♗xe5 dxe5 16.♗xh7+! (16.♗c5! transposing.) 16...♖xh7 17.♗c5!+- hits the ♗e7, clears the 3rd rank for a ♖ lift, and may even come back to the kingside with ♗d6 (tempo on ♖) and ♗xe5;

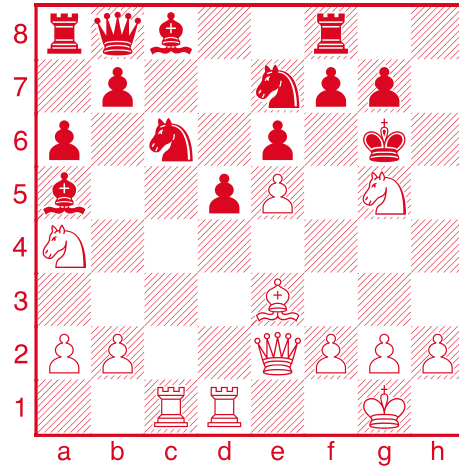
c) 14...d5!? also loses, but requires much more ingenuity from White: 15.♗xh7+ ♖xh7 16.♗g5+ ♖g6





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Analysis Diagram



17. ♖g4? shows why White has to eliminate one of the ♘s: 17... ♘xe5 18. ♖h3 ♘f5 19. ♕f4 ♘∞.

17. ♖xc6!! trades a non-attacker for a ready defender 17... ♘xc6 18. ♕f4 ♘+- defends e5 and the X-ray to the ♖ means Black can't block checks on the ♗b1-h7 with ...f5 (*en passant wins the ♖*), so it's now or never. 18...f5! stops checks from c2 or d3 while the e5 pawn is pinned to the ♕. Black hopes to defend with ...♕d8 and ...♖h8. 19. ♖d3 ♘+- and ♖g3 or ♖h3, depending on which defence Black tries.

13... ♘xe5 14. ♕xh7+!?

14. ♘xe5 dxe5 15. ♖g4 don't overlook the tempo on the loose ♕b4!
15... ♕xc3 16. ♕xh7+!→.

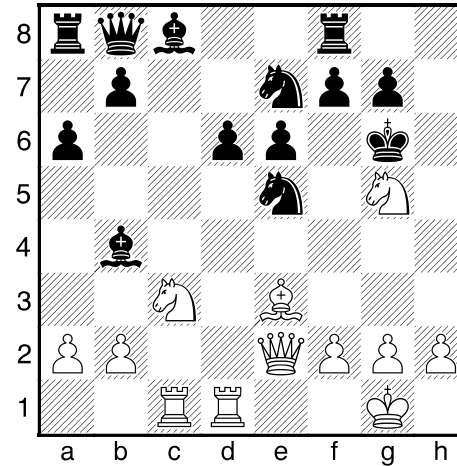
14... ♖h8??

Nooooo... !

This just hands over the point.

Black has to go 14... ♖xh7 15. ♘g5+

♖g6 ♘ Analysis Diagram



White's attack continues, but there's no win; e.g. 16.f4 f6 17.fxe5 fxg5 18. ♖g4 ♕xc3∞.

15. ♘xe5!

15. ♘g5 g6 16. ♘ce4+- or 16. ♖d4+-.

15... dxe5

15... ♖xh7 16. ♖h5+ ♖g8 and White has an overwhelming position without even being down a piece.

16. ♖h5 ♕xc3 17. ♕g6+

Black still can't defend h7.

1-0

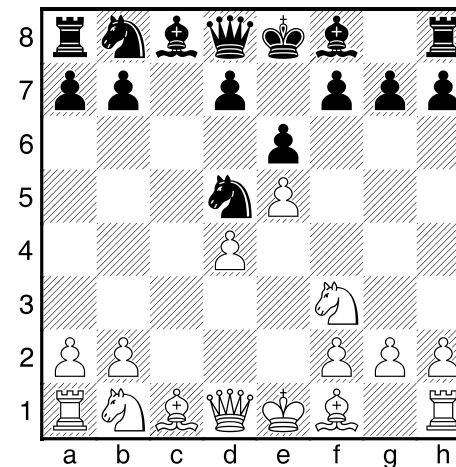
Rainfray, Arnaud (2484) Vallieres, David (1865)

B22

Carnaval Quebec CAN (4),
23.02.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5
4. ♘f3 e6 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4



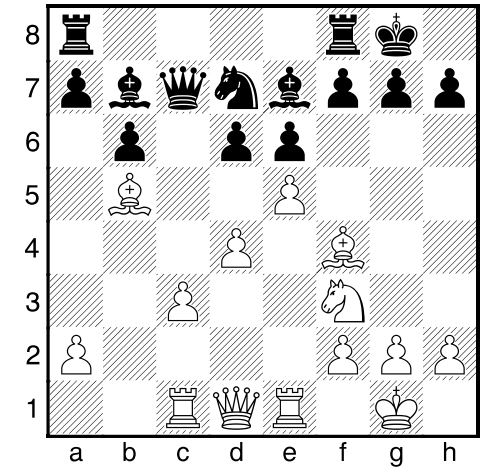
6...b6

6...d6 is 2x more common, but both moves score equally well.

7. ♘c3 ♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♕b7

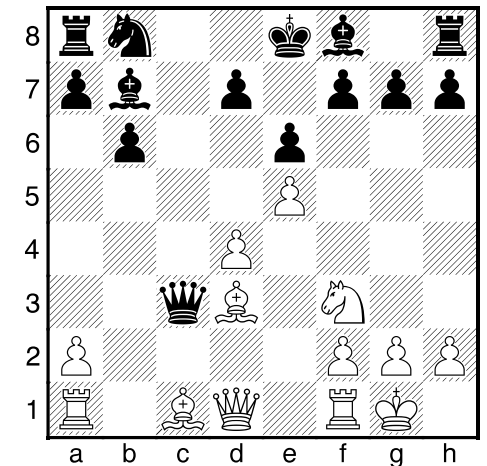
8... ♖c7 9. ♕b5 ♕b7 10.0-0 ♕e7 11. ♕f4 0-0 12. ♖c1 d6. Here and on the next move White can blast open the center before the black ♖s are out, but Black can cope: 13. ♖e1 (13.d5 dxe5! 14. ♕xe5 ♕d6 15. ♕xd6 ♖xd6 16.dxe6 ♖xe6=) 13... ♘d7

Analysis Diagram



White can ignite some crazy complications here — Black is OK, but it's tricky: 14.d5!? (14. ♖e2?! dxe5 15. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16. ♕xe5 ♕d6= Van Foreest,J (2714)–Hansen,E (2606) Oslo Esports Cup, 2022.) 14...exd5 (14... ♕xd5?? 15.exd6 ♕xd6 16. ♕xd6 ♖xd6 17.c4+-) 15.c4! d4! 16.c5!? (16. ♖xd4 ♘xe5 17. ♘xe5 ♕f6!=; 16. ♕xd7 ♖xd7 17.exd6 ♕f6!∞) 16...bxc5 (16... ♘xc5?! 17. ♘xd4↑; 16...dxc5?? 17. ♘xd4+-) 17. ♖xd4∞ or 17.e6!?

9. ♕d3 ♖c7 10.0-0!? ♖xc3





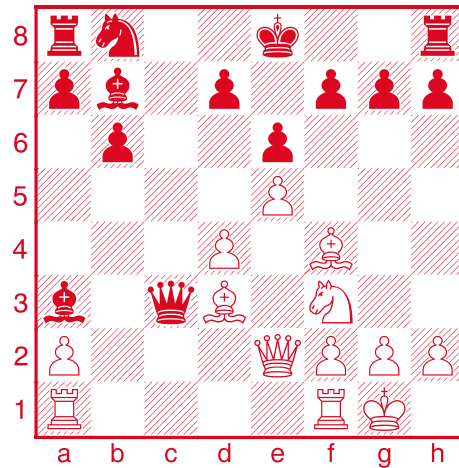
11. ♔f4

11. ♖b1 ♕e7 12. ♖b3 ♖c7 13. ♘g5 ♔d5!
14. ♖b2∞ (14. ♖h5!?) 14... ♕xg5 15. ♕xg5
♘c6 16. ♖g4± Huerga Leache, M
(2450)–Granda Zuniga, J (2688)
Atarrabia rapid, 2016.

11... ♕a3

Developing and stopping ♖c1.

12. ♖e2

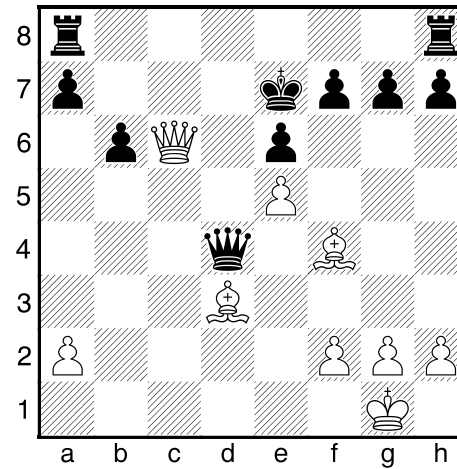


What happens on ... ♕xf3?

12... ♖c6

12... ♕xf3? loses, but it's tricky:
13. ♖xf3 ♘c6 (13... ♖c6 14. ♕e4+-)
14. ♖ac1!! ♕xc1 15. ♖xc1 ♖xd4
16. ♖xc6 is trickier than it looks at first:
16... dxc6 17. ♖xc6+ ♕e7

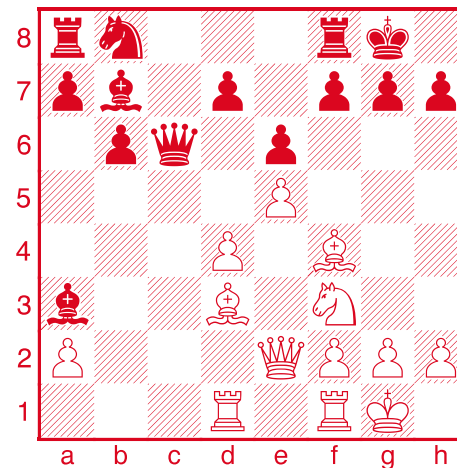
Analysis Diagram



White has more than one way to finish the job: 18. ♕g5+ (18. ♖b7+ ♖d7 19. ♕g5+ ♖f6 20. exf6+ gxf6 21. ♕xf6+ ♕d6 22. ♖e4!+- if Black had a ♖ developed (e8 or c8) he'd be fine; here the ♕s slice him apart.) 18... f6 19. exf6+ gxf6 there's no escape on g6. 20. ♖c7+ ♖+- wins the ♖ or mates, or both: 20... ♖d7 21. ♕xf6+ ♕e8 22. ♕b5+-.

13. ♖ad1 0-0?

△13... h6 would avoid immediate annihilation, though White still has more than enough for the pawn.



14. d5!+-

Blocking the diagonal kills Black's development, leaving a completely one-sided game where White owns the kingside.

While not as strong as the game move, 14. ♕b1 threatening ♖d3 (forking h7 and a3) is good too: Black will have to move some kingside pawns to avoid mate, and White can put his minor pieces in the resulting holes.

14... ♖a4

14... ♖xd5? 15. ♕xh7+- is one obvious point;

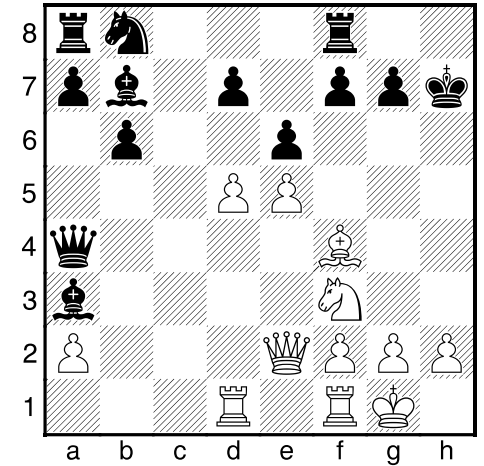
14... exd5:

15. ♕xh7+? ♕xh7 16. ♖d3± forks ♕a3, but lets Black off too easy;

15. ♘g5 g6 16. ♖g4 h5 17. ♖g3 is also winning: White can aim to smash through with ♖fe1, e5-e6, and ♘xe6;

15. ♘d4! all White's pieces (except the ♖f1) have unrestricted access to Black's doomed ♕, leaving White with a "build-your-own-adventure" choice of winning attacks. Essentially, White can now sac any minor piece for a kingside pawn and win. 15... ♖c5 16. ♕xh7+ (or 16. ♘f5 g6 17. ♕g5+-) 16... ♕xh7 17. ♖h5+ ♕g8 18. ♖d3 (or 18. ♕g5 and ♕f6 may be simpler.) 18... f6 19. ♖g3 ♖xd4 20. ♖xg7+ ♕xg7 21. ♕h6+- discovered check wins the ♖, then White goes back to mating.

15. ♕xh7+ ♕xh7



16. ♖d4 ♕b4

16... ♕a6 17. ♖e4+.

17. ♘g5+ ♕g8 18. ♖d3

18. ♖h5 allows Black to prolong the agony with 18... ♖c2 19. ♖e4! ♖xe4 20. ♘xe4 and ♘f6+.

18... f5 19. exf6 ♖xf6 20. ♖h7+ ♕f8 21. ♖h8+ ♕e7 22. d6+ ♕xd6 23. ♕xd6#

1-0

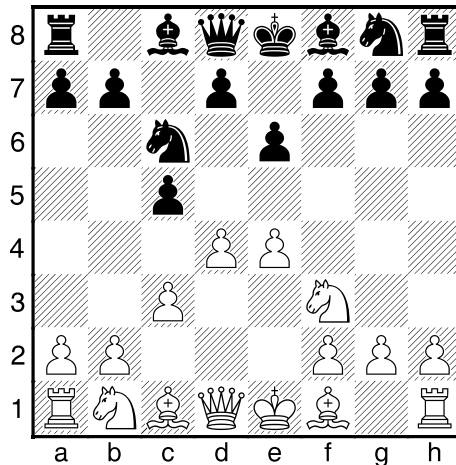
Huxley, Zachary (1500) Auger, Bertrand (1883)

B22

Montcalm 4 2024-25 Quebec CAN
(1), 09.01.2025

Notes: John Upper

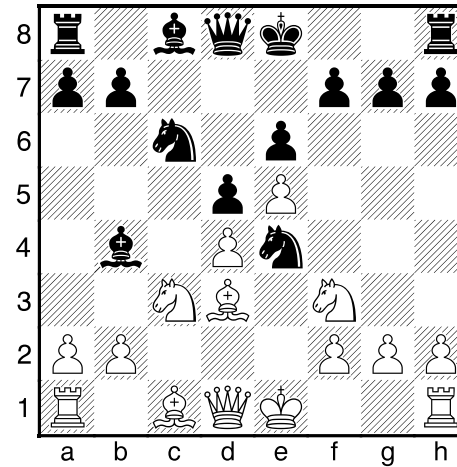
1.e4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c3 ♘c6
4.d4



4...cxd4

This frees c3 for the ♘. More commonly Black goes: 4...d5 5.exd5 (5.e5 transposes to a French Advance.) 5...exd5 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 with a balanced IQP middlegame.

5.cxd4 ♙b4+ 6.♘c3 ♘f6
7.♙d3 d5 8.e5 ♘e4

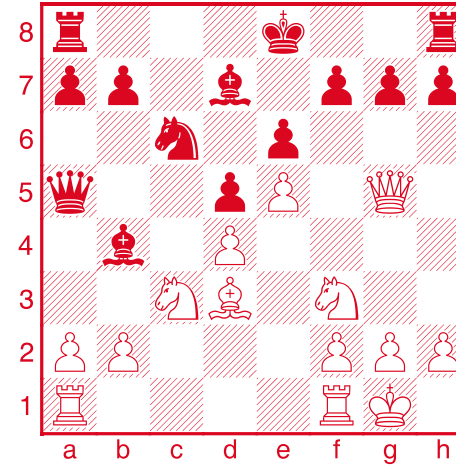


9.♙d2

♞9.0-0 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♙xc3 11.♖b1
Black has an extra pawn (on b7) but White is way up in development and threatens ♙a3. And 11...♙xd4? only makes things worse: 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♕g4+- White immediately recovers one pawn and Black's dark-square weaknesses are fatal.

9...♘xd2 10.♕xd2 ♕a5 11.0-0 ♙d7 12.♕g5!

Attacks g7 and stops Black from castling long... though that is something Black should avoid, since White would have a strong initiative on the c-file with queenside pawn pushes.



What to do about g7?

12...0-0?

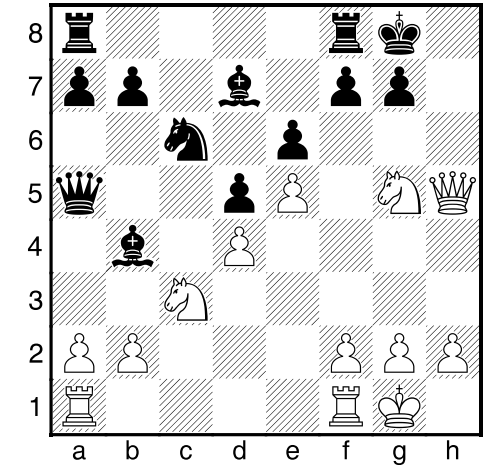
♞12...g6 creates ugly holes, but tenacious: planning to return the ♙b4 to defend the kingside dark squares. If now 13.♕f6 0-0! and ...♕d8;

♞12...♕f8 shuts in the ♙h8, but White has no quick breakthrough;

12...♙f8?! 13.♘b5!± preparing ...♘d6+ in response to ...h6 keeps up the pressure on the dark squares;

12...♙xc3!? hopes for counterplay. 13.♕xg7 0-0-0 14.bxc3 ♕xc3 15.♙fd1 Material is equal, but Black's ♙ is much worse and his ♙ is less safe. SF18 says +1.6.

13.♙xh7+!+- ♙xh7 14.♕h5+ ♙g8 15.♘g5



15...♙fd8

Blocks an escape route, allowing a forced mate.

15...♙fc8 still loses, but requires more accuracy from White: 16.♕xf7+ ♙h8 17.♕g6 ♙g8 18.♙ad1! preparing ♙d3-f3. If ...♙e8, White mates the ♙ on d8 with a series of checks ending ♘xe6#.

16.♕xf7+ ♙h8 17.♕h5+ ♙g8 18.♕h7+ ♙f8 19.♕h8+
And ♕xg7-f7#.

1-0



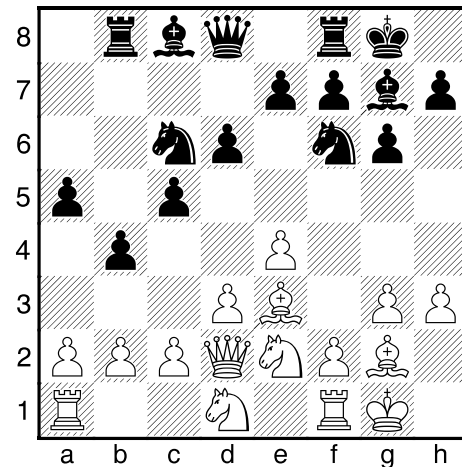
Barko, Maxim (1910) Ghnatios, Ralph (1910)

B26

Mercredi 2025.04 'C' Montreal (2),
09.04.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘ge2
g6 4.g3 ♕g7 5.♕g2 ♘f6 6.0-0
d6 7.d3 0-0 8.h3 ♖b8 9.♕e3
b5 10.♔d2 b4 11.♘d1 a5



A standard position in the Closed Sicilian. All 32 pieces remain on and none of the pawns are blocked, so there are options for both sides, and it's not the sort of position where you have to worry about deep computer prep.

Typically, White presses on the kingside — often with g4 and f5 — while Black plays on the queenside — often with ...♘d4 & ...cxd4 with

play against c2. About half the games continue from here with ♕h6 to remove the ♕g7 which both defends the king and attacks the long diagonal; the other half continue as this game does...

12.f4

Threatening e4-e5, with a double attack on the ♗s.

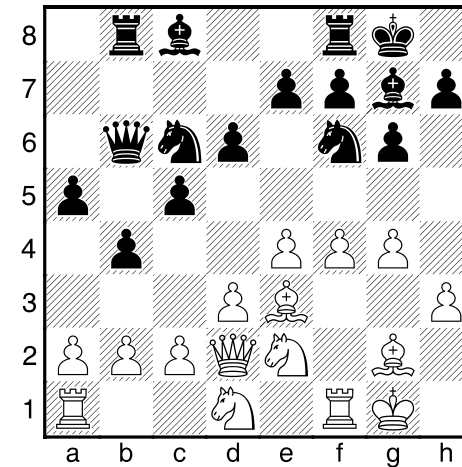
12...♔b6!?

It looks weird to line up the ♔ with the ♕e3, but it supports ...♘d4 and the computer rates it about the same as the more common 12...♘d7:

13.h4 ♕a6 14.h5 gxh5! 15.♖b1 ♔h8
16.♘f2 ♖g8 ♖ worth remembering:
Black can use open files on the
kingside too! 17.♘h3 ♘d4 18.♘g5
♗f8 19.e5 h6 20.♘e4 ♘f5 ♖ [Ghaem Maghami,E \(2579\)–Najer,E \(2681\) Bundesliga, 2009.](#)

13.g4 a4 14.♖b1 ♘d4 15.g5 ♕a6
16.h4 ♗c8 17.b3 f5 18.♕xd4 cxd4
19.♘f2 ♘c5 20.exf5 ♗xf5 21.♕h3=
[Bacrot,A \(2387\)–Wei,Y \(2722\) PRO League rapid, 2023.](#)

13.g4

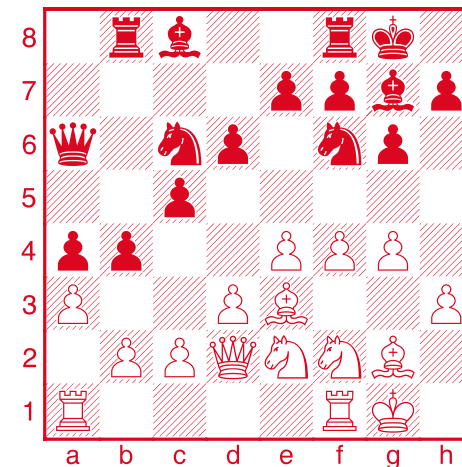


13...a4

13...♘e8 14.f5 ♘d4 15.♘f4 ♘c7
16.♘d5 ♘xd5 17.exd5 a4 (17...gxf5!
18.c3 ♘b5) 18.c3 bxc3 19.bxc3 ♘b5
20.♖b1 ♗a7 21.♕h6 → [Blatny,P \(2415\) –Buckmire,R \(2280\) Oakham, 1986.](#)

14.a3 ♗a6 15.♘f2

♘15.f5!±.



What happens if ...♘xe4!?

15...♘xe4?

Objectively bad, but interesting.

Black's idea is to accelerate his queenside attack and turn his a- and b-pawns into passers. But doing so requires giving up his two best kingside defenders (♘f6 and ♕g7). As always, the ♔ is the biggest prize, but can White get to it in time?

BTW, the computer prefers Black after 15...♘d7 which is a slower but less expensive way to open the ♕g7's diagonal;

Another computer-approved counter-punch is the weird-looking 15...h5! which breaks the general principles of not making pawn moves around your king and not on the side where your opponent is attacking... but follows the dynamic style of using pawns to punch holes for your minor pieces. It also threatens to win the g-pawn, so White has to do something. 16.f5 (16.g5 ♘xe4! ♖ compared to the lines below, the white ♘g5 helps Black by blocking White's pieces!) 16...hxg4 17.hxg4 ♘e5 18.g5 (18.♕h6) 18...♘fg4

16.♘xe4

Activating both the ♘ and the ♖f1 for a kingside attack is the only refutation.

16.dxe4? ♕xb2 17.axb4 allows the ♗a5 to support the passer, but stops Black from getting two passed a-pawns. (17.♖ab1?! bxa3 ♖ followed by ...a2 or ...♗a5 and ...♕a6.) 17...cxb4 (17...a3 18.bxc5; 17...♕xa1 18.b5! ♖) 18.♖ab1.

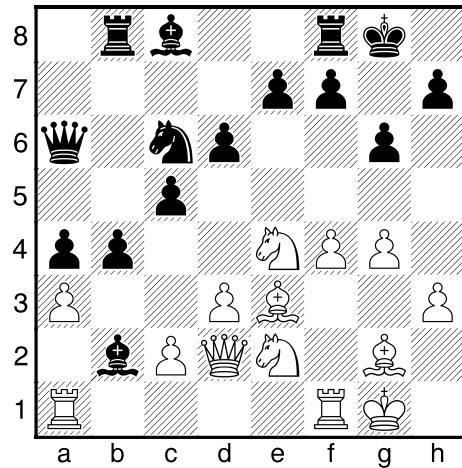
16...♕xb2





Chess Canada

Across Canada



17.f5!+-

Not the only winning move (♖ab1 and then f5 wins) but the most direct. The push to f5 opens the c1-h6 diagonal for White's ♖ and ♘ for a dark-square attack on the black ♗, an attack which gets stronger if Black trades a dark-square bishop for a ♖ which is many moves away from attacking those dark squares.

Even if Black manages to block the dark squares with pawns — f6 and g5 — White can sac a minor piece to break through and still have enough to finish the attack.

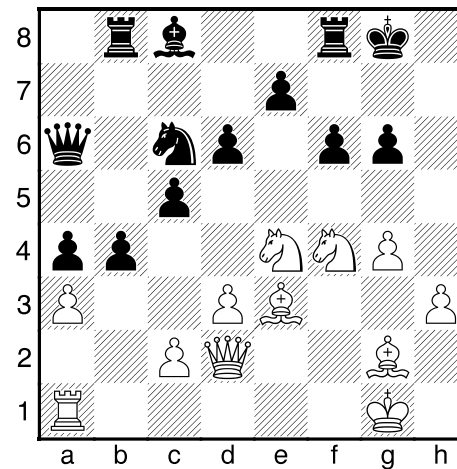
17...bxa3

17...f6 tries to shore up the kingside while possibly keeping the DSB for defence. If Black had one more move here, then ...gxf5 or ...♗xa1 would be unclear, which shows how close-to-working ...♗xe4 was. But with White to move there is more than one way to win; the one that most closely overlaps with the variations below begins: 18.fxf6 hxf6 19.♗f4+- which is similar to the Analysis Diagram

below;

17...♗xa1 18.♖xa1 f6 (18...gxf5 19.♗h6 threats to the ♖ and ♖g5+ and mate. One end might be: 19...f6 20.♗xf8 ♗xf8 21.♖h6+ ♗g8 22.♗xf6+ exf6 23.♗d5+ #2.) 19.fxf6 hxf6 20.♗f4

Analysis Diagram



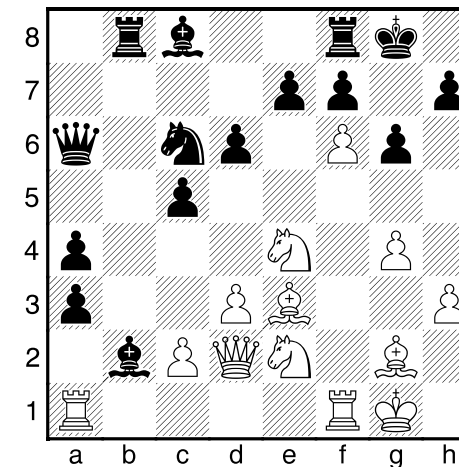
Strong players or those with a lot of practice attacking will probably be able to "feel" that White has a winning attack. For everyone else, here are some illustrative lines showing how that attack works:

a) 20...g5 21.♗h5+- and ♗xg5 to break through the dark squares;

b) 20...♗h7 21.♖f2 threat: ♖h5 then ♗xg6 to make ♖h5+ possible. 21...g5 22.♗h5 ♗e6 and there are several piece sacs to break through the dark squares 23.♗xg5+- (or 23.♗hxf6+-) 23...fxg5 24.♗xg5+ ♗g6 25.♗e4+! forces mate (25.♖h4+- wins too.) 25...♗xg5 26.h4+ ♗xg4 27.♖g3+ ♗xh5 28.♖g5#;

c) 20...♗e5 adds a defender 21.axb4 plays to remove the new defender 21...cxb4 22.d4 ♗c4 23.♖f2 ♗xe3 24.♖xe3 Abstractly, it might seem like a good deal for Black to trade the ♗e5 for the white DSB; in fact, it helps White in two ways: it increases White's ratio of attackers to defenders, and removing the ♗ clears the path for the white ♖. 24...♗g7 25.♗xf6 (or 25.♗g5) 25...exf6 (25...♗xf6 26.♖e4!+-) 26.♖e4 ♗f5 27.♖e7+ ♗f7 28.♖g5 ♗f6 29.♗h5+-.

18.f6!



18...♗e6

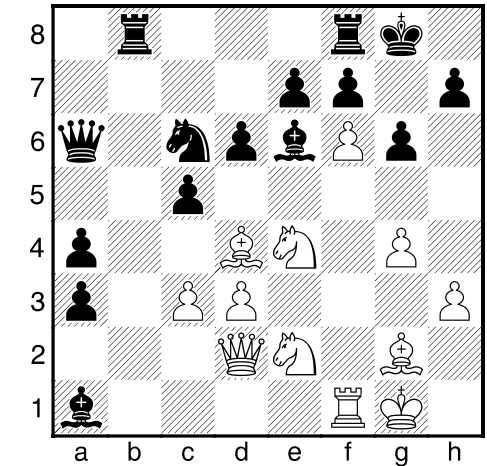
18...exf6 19.c3!+- cuts off the ♗ and leaves almost all the white pieces in the attack;

18...♗xf6 gives White a choice of wins, including a different exchange sac: 19.♖xf6 exf6 20.♗xf6+ ♗h8 21.♗d4! ♗g7 22.♗h5+ #3.

19.c3! ♗xa1 20.♗d4!

Line clearing for ♖h6. White's ♗, ♗, ♖,

and ♗ all fight for f6.



20...♗h8

20...♗xd4 21.♖h6 (21.♗xd4? ♗xc3 22.♗xc3? exf6+-) 21...♗xe2+ 22.♗h2+-

21.♖h6 ♗g8 22.♗g5

1-0

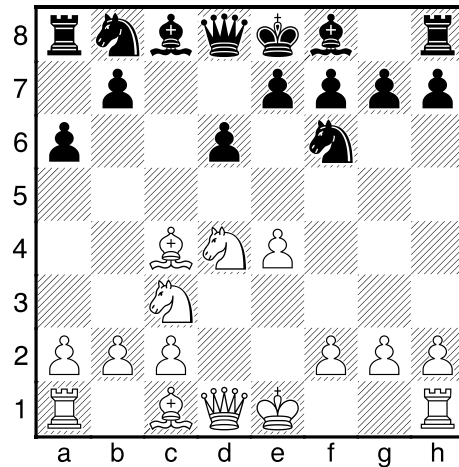
Plotkin, Mark (2474)
Singh Dhaliwal, Jaipreet
(2240)

B86

Hart House Reading Week Toronto
(1), 15.02.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙c4



The Fischer–Sozin Attack

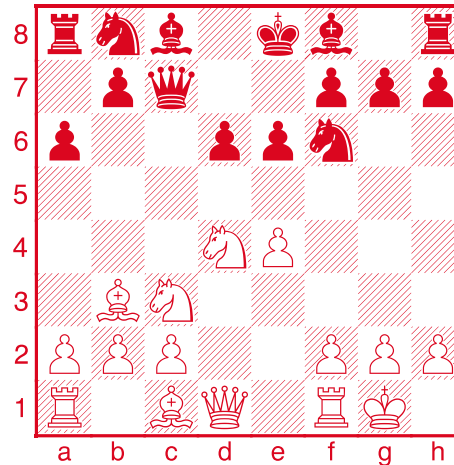
Not nearly as popular as when Fischer was winning with it 60 years ago, but attacking players like Short and Topalov had success with it by creating wild games against Kasparov 30 years ago, and it is still trotted out regularly by top players in an attempt to find something/anything against the Najdorf.

6...e6 7.0-0

7.♙b3 is by far the most common move, when Black has a variety of moves that score well: ...b5, ...♗bd7, ...♗c6, ...♙e7; here's a recent example from two of the world's best-prepared GMs:

7.♙b3 b5 8.a3 ♙e7 9.♗f3 threatening e5 9...♗c7 so Black can counter e5 with ...♙b7. 10.♗g3 ♗c6 11.♗xc6 ♗xc6 12.0-0 ♗h5 13.♗d3 ♗f6= [Praggnanandhaa,R \(2758\)–Giri,A \(2760\) Tata Steel, 2026](#).

7...♗c7 8.♙b3



8...♗bd7?!

This is bad, but even with best play from White it is not a clear cut loss; and given how complex the play is after the sac on e6, it might even be a worthwhile gamble for players on the Black side!?

By far the most common move is 8...♙e7; e.g. 8...♙e7 9.♙e3 0-0 10.f4 as in: [Mutyalapati,M \(2174\)–Blakely,M \(2079\) Scarborough CC, 2025](#).

9.♙xe6!

The obvious try, and the *only* move that Stockfish 18 says gives White a plus.

Remarkably, this gets played only about 20% of the time, with GMs and IMs regularly opting for f2-f4 or ♙g5 instead!? From a practical point of view that might be a sensible choice — avoiding diving head-first into a high-risk game of "find-the-only-move" — especially if you're worried the opponent has reviewed his prep more recently than you. OTOH, isn't this cut-and-thrust exactly what White wants when opting for both an Open Sicilian *and* the Sozin Attack?



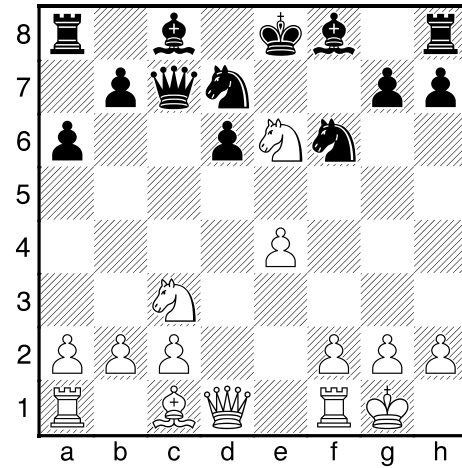
Jaipreet Singh Dhaliwal

Provocative game vs dangerous attacker





9...fxe6 10.♘xe6



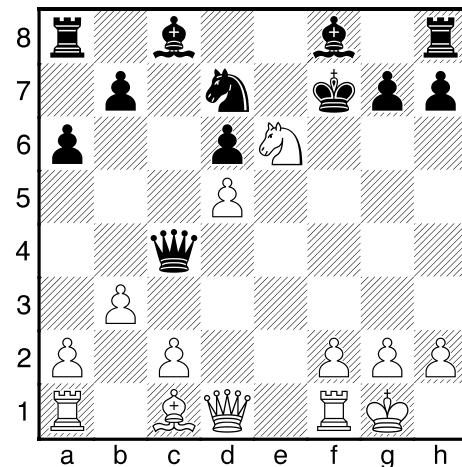
10...♔b8!

The ♔ has to defend c7 and every other move leaves it more exposed, allowing White tactics and accelerated development by attacking it.

10...♔a5? 11.♘d5+- or ♘d2 with a winning initiative;

10...♔c4?! 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.exd5 ♘f7! 13.b3 ♘ (13.♔f3+?? ♘f6+)

Analysis Diagram



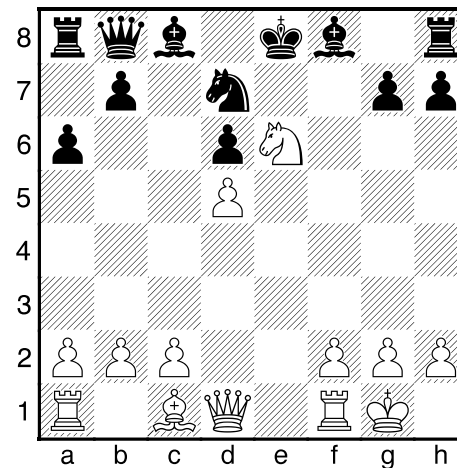
13...♔h4 14.♘g5 ♔e4 (14...♔b4 15.♔f3+) 15.♔e1 ♔g6 16.♔e3+-;

13...♔c3 14.♘e3 ♘f6 15.♘d4 ♔a5 16.♘xf6!:

16...gxf6 17.♔h5+ ♔g8 18.♔g4+ ♘f7 19.♔ae1+- ♔xd5? 20.♘d8# is pretty and memorable, with four black pieces still on their starting squares;

16...♘xe6 17.dxe6+ ♔xf6 18.♔f3+? (White had played astonishingly accurately, especially considering this was a blitz game, but now goes wrong. ♘18.♔e1!+-) 18...♔f5 ♘ 19.♔xb7 ♘e7 ♘f7 **Kraiouckine,N** (2218)–Bach,N (2231) Titled Tuesday, 2023.

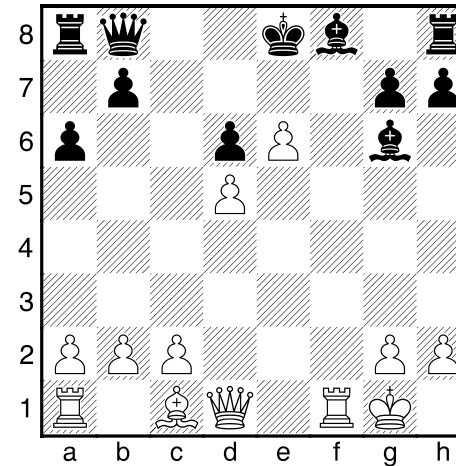
11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.exd5±



12...♘f6

A GM played this: 12...♘e5? 13.f4 ♘xe6! (13...♘c4 14.♔h5+ g6 15.♔e2+- and the loose ♘c4, or b3 and f5 are among White's crushing threats.) 14.fxe5 ♘f7 15.e6 ♘g6

Analysis Diagram



The two players in this game were a GM as Black and an improving young IM who got his GM title the next year. This was long time-control game and both are strong players, but they both make serious mistakes around here, and later in the all-major piece section of the game. My guess is that they had both used so much time between moves 10-20 that they didn't have enough to play 20-30 at nearly their full strength.

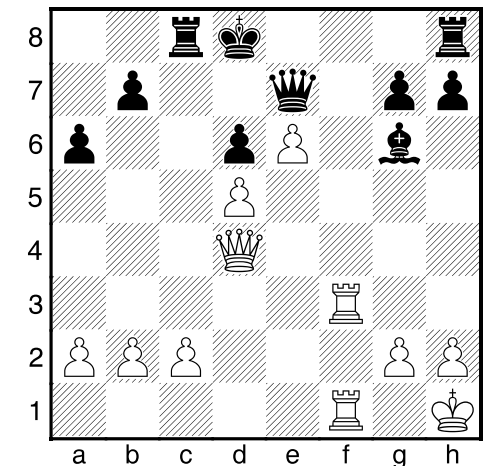
I mention that because it shows how non-automatic are the positions after this early middlegame sac, and explains why there are so many notes here.

Is attacking easier than defending?

16.♘g5 is the first candidate move anyone would consider: it finishes developing, it prevents queenside castling, and it make e6-e7 a tactical threat; what could be wrong with that? In fact, it actually reduces White's advantage. (♘16.♘e3 threatens to entomb Black's queenside with

♘b6, stops ♔a7+ to enable ♘d4 or ♔d4 with a bind on both sides, and prepares c2-c4-c5 which would give White two central passers, and (unlike ♘g5) it keeps the DSB on the board which will help create a winning attack if Black ever castles long.) 16...♘e7? (♘16...♔c7∞ not to take on c2 — which collapses after ♔d1-moves and taking the c-file — but to prepare ...♘e7, and if ♘e7 ♔xe7 Black can safely castle long.) 17.♘xe7 ♔xe7 18.♔h1! (18.♔d4?? ♔a7♘+-) 18...♔c7 19.♔d4! ♔d8 (19...♘e8 hopes for ...♔f8 20.e7!+- no ...♔f8 for you!) 20.♔f3!+- ♔c8 21.♔af1! ♔e7

Analysis Diagram



White has a crushing bind that SF18 rates at +4.5, but soon both players make terrible blunders that swing the eval wildly.

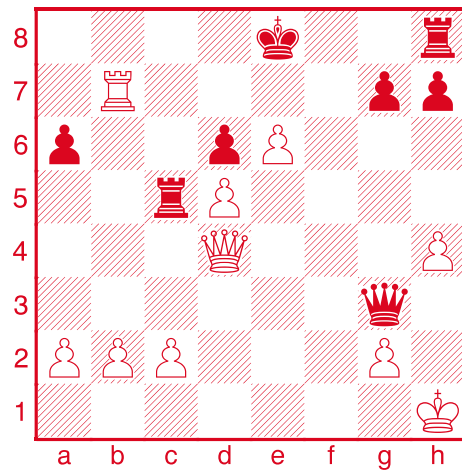
22.♔f7?? White rushes again, but improving moves and pressure were much better, and more than enough. (♘22.c4 saves the c-pawn and prepares c4-c5. 22...♔c7 23.h3 makes the back rank safe so White can



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attack with both ♖s... What can Black do?) 22...♙xf7 23.♖xf7 ♖g5 White's back rank leaves him no time for ♖b6xd6. 24.h4 ♖g3= Saving the ♖ and defending d6 and tying the white ♖ to perpetual threats with ♖e1-h4. 25.♖d7+ (25.♖xg7 ♖e1+ 26.♙h2 ♖c7= (26...♖e5+=)) 25...♙e8 26.♖xb7 Threatens ♖a4+ then e7+ and promoting with a discovered check. 26...♖c5?? (26...♖xc2?? 27.♖a4+ ♖#3; 26...♙f8=)

Analysis Diagram

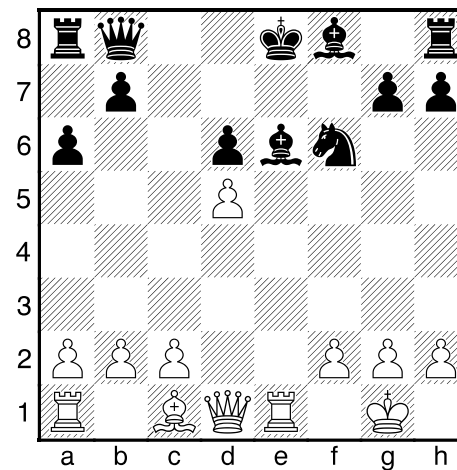


a) 27.♖b8+? wins a ♖, but Black's threats and newly released ♙ save the game: 27...♙e7 28.♖xh8 ♖xc2= White has options here, but it is essential to correctly judge this long forcing line: 29.♖a7+ ♙f6 30.♖f7+ ♙e5 31.♖h5+ ♙d4 32.♖d1+ ♙e5 33.♖xc2 ♖e1+ 34.♙h2 ♖xh4+=;

b) 27.♖a4+ ♖+- only move that wins. 27...♖b5 stops mate, but loses to the pretty (27...♙f8? 28.♖f7+ and ♖e8#.) 28.♖b8+ ♖+- ♙e7 29.♖xh8 ♖e1+ 30.♙h2 ♖e5+ 31.♙h3 ♖+-;

c) The game actually continued with a blunder... and then perfect play: 27.♖b3?? ♖e1+ ♖ 28.♙h2 ♖b5! Suddenly, both sides are playing perfectly! (28...♖xd5? 29.♖f4! (29.♖xd5? ♖xh4+=) 29...♖e5 Saves the ♙ but loses the endgame. 30.♖b8+ ♖ First, so Black won't have ...♖d5-d8! 30...♙e7 31.♖xe5 dxe5 32.♖xh8± e4!? 33.g4 ♖+- White's ♙ stops the e-pawn and his ♖ will create at least one outside passer.) 29.♖g3 ♖b4= (29...♖b7 30.♖a4+-) 30.c4 ♖b7 31.c5 ♖b4! Again! Preventing ♖a4+. 32.♖xg7 ♖xh4+ 33.♖h3 ♖xh3+ 34.♙xh3 ♖h1+ 35.♙g3 ♖e1+ 36.♙h3 Lin,C (2468)–Gabuzyan,H (2578) Albena, 2015.

13.♖e1 ♙xe6



14.♖xe6+?!

△14.♙g5 ♙e7 15.♖xe6 ♖f8 (15...♙f7?? 16.♖e2! ♙d8 17.♖e1! is Golizadeh–Dao, in a note below.) 16.♙xf6 ♖xf6 17.♖h5+± and xh7.

14...♙f7! 15.♙g5!

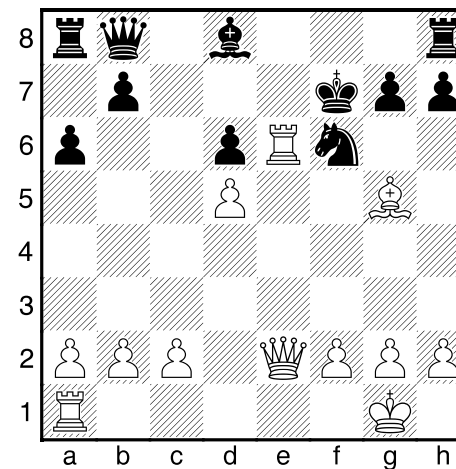
Threatens ♙xf6 then ♖h5+.

15...♙e7?

Develops and defends f6 so Black can use the g-pawn against ♖h5; but it's a target on the e-file.

△15...♖c7 prepares ...♖e8 and defends the 7th rank against sacs; e.g. 16.♙xf6 not the only move, but critical (16.♖xf6+? gxf6 17.♖h5+ ♙g7? (17...♙g8+-) 18.♙xf6+ ♙xf6 19.♖f3+= Black can't run to the e-file so White has a perp.) 16...gxf6 17.♖h5+ ♙g8 18.♖ae1↑ h6 19.♖xf6 ♖h7 ♖ I would not enjoy this position as Black, though the SF and leela rate it about the same as the starting position!?

16.♖e2!+- ♙d8

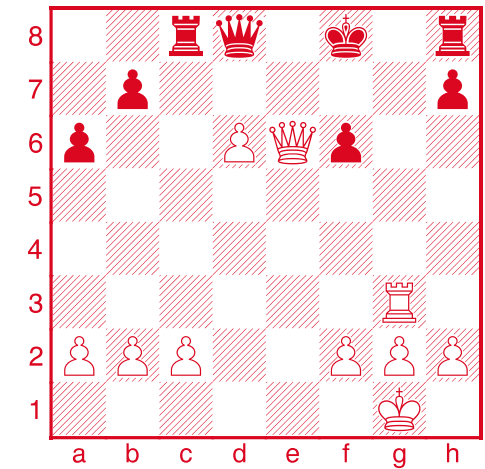


17.♙f4!±

17.♖e1!+- is the Golizadeh–Dao game mentioned above. 17...♖c7 18.♖xf6+!! (18.♙xf6 also wins, though (to me) the winning maneuvers are less natural.) 18...♙xf6 19.♖e6+ ♙g6 20.♙xf6 ♖c8! (20...gxf6 21.♖e3 ♖+-) 21.♖e7 ♙gxf6 22.♖e3 ♖e8 23.♖xd6! ♖d8 24.♖g3+ ♙f7

25.♖e6+ ♙f8 26.d6 ♖c8

Analysis Diagram



♖f3 or ♖g4 or does it matter?

27.♖g4! transposes to move 30.

27.♖f3?? was played:

it allowed Black to escape with 27...♖c7 ♖ adding a necessary defender by exploiting the pin to the back rank mate. The bad position of the ♖h8 and exposed ♙ compensate for the extra ♖, and require both players to be accurate to avoid losing: 28.♖xf6+ ♙g7 29.h4! ♖xf6 (29...♖d7?? 30.♖f3 ♖+-) 30.♖g4+ ♙f7 31.dxc7 ♖e6 32.♖h5+ ♙e7 33.♖c5+ ♙f7 (33...♙d7?? 34.♖d4+-) 34.♖h5+ ♖=;

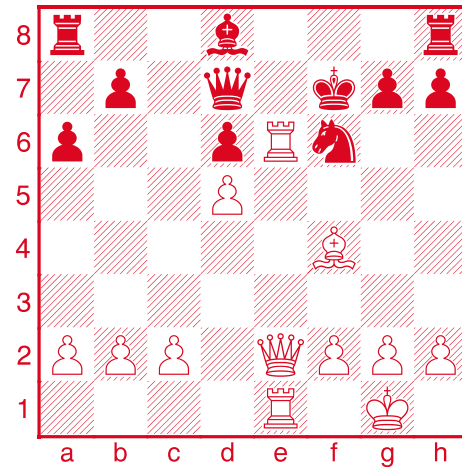
Instead, players traded blunders with: 27...♙g7?? 28.♖g3+ ♙f8 29.♖g4! correcting his mistake at move 27. 29...♙f7! 30.♖g7+ ♙e6 31.♖e3+ ♙xd6 32.♖d3+ ♙c6 33.♖xd8 ♖hxd8 34.♖xf6+ ♙c7 35.♖f4+ ♙b6 36.♖e3+ ♙c7 37.h4 Golizadeh,A (2481)–Dao,T (2520) Olympiad, Khanty–Mansiysk, 2010.



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17...♔c8 18.♖e1 ♔d7



19.♖xd6??

Wins a pawn but allows Black to break the bind.

△19.♖xd6 ♖e8 (19...♘xd5?? 20.♗h5+ wins the ♘.) 20.c4± White has a terrific bind and his center pawns are almost ready to roll. Importantly, unlike the game line, Black can't trade off the ♖e6 due to the position of the ♔ and ♗;

White can also win with a direct attack on the ♘:

△19.g4+- and if ...h6 g4!. 19...♘xd5 20.♖xd6+-;

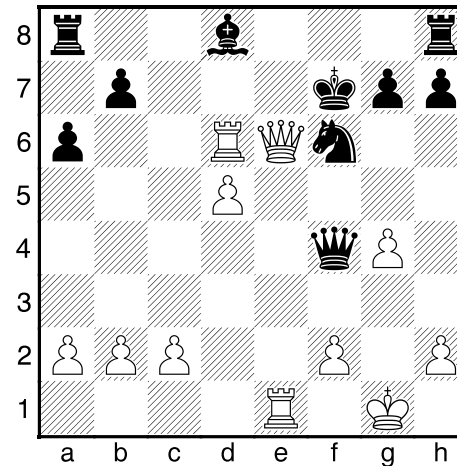
△19.♗d3+- threat: ♗f5 and ♖xf6+ 19...♖f8 20.♖xd6+-.

19...♗f5□ 20.♖g3?

20.♗e6+?! ♗xe6 21.dxe6+ ♔g6 22.e7? ♖e8-+;

20.g4! ♗xf4 (20...♗xg4+ 21.♗xg4 ♘xg4 22.♖d7+∞ and takes b7.) 21.♗e6+□

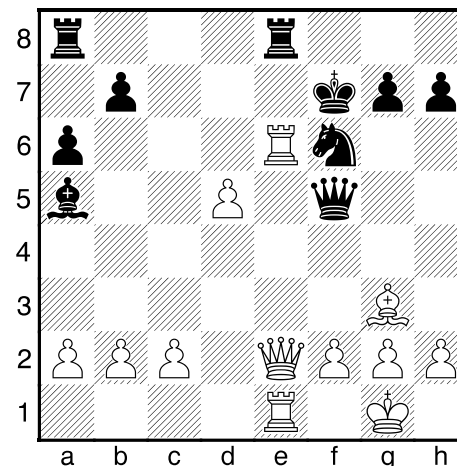
Analysis Diagram



21...♖g6□ (21...♖f8? 22.♖xd8+-) 22.♖e4□ the computer shows us even more very-hard-to-imagine tactics: the basic idea is to perpetual the ♗, which has to stay in contact with f5. 22...♗f3 23.♖e3□ ♗d1+ 24.♖g2□ ♗xc2□ defending f5. 25.♖d7! threat ♗f7+ 25...♖f8! 26.♖e2 ♗b1 27.♖e1= perpetualing the ♗.

20...♖e8!-+ 21.♖e6 ♖a5!

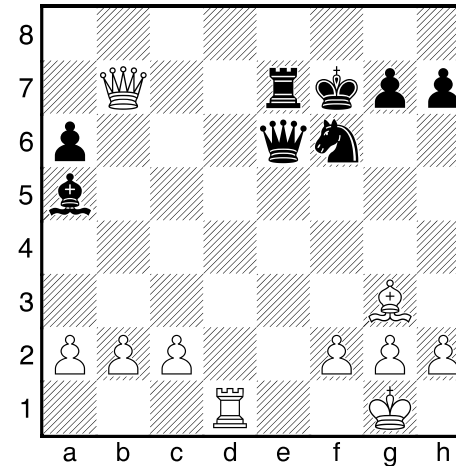
connects the ♖s and gains a tempo on e1.



22.♖d1 ♖xe6 23.dxe6+ ♗xe6 24.♗f3 ♖e8!

Gives the b7 pawn to simplify.

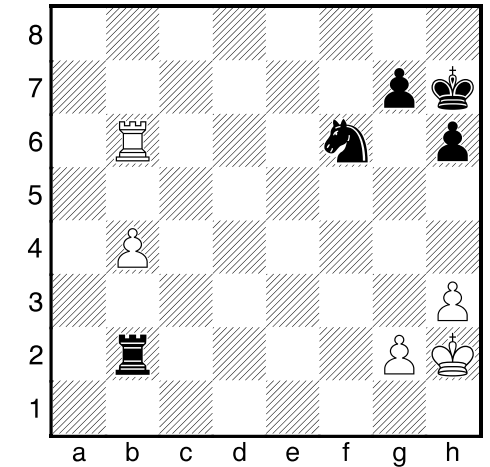
25.♗xb7+ ♖e7



26.♗b3

Saves the ♗ and stops the back rank mate by pinning the ♗e6, but Black's play shows why this endgame is hopeless.

26...♗xb3 27.axb3 ♖e2 28.♖c1 ♘e4 29.♖f1 ♖d2 30.♖a1 ♖d8 31.♖xa6 ♖xc2 32.♖a7+ ♖g6 33.♖e5 ♖f6 34.♖xf6 ♖xf2+ 35.♖g1 ♖xf6 36.♖b7 ♖c6 37.h3 ♖c2 38.♖b4 ♘f6 39.♖b6 ♖xb2 40.b4 ♖f7 41.♖b7+ ♖g6 42.♖b6 h6 43.♖h2 ♖h7



The ♘ will hop over to attack the b-pawn until White can't save it, so White gives it up now but can't create any stalemate tricks.

44.♖d6 ♖xb4 45.♖d2 ♖b3 46.♖e2 ♖g6 47.♖a2 h5 48.♖c2 ♖d3 49.♖e2 ♖f5 50.♖f2+ ♖g5 51.♖e2 ♖d5 52.♖e7 g6 53.♖e2 ♖d3 54.♖e5+ ♖f4 55.♖a5 ♖d2 56.♖a1 h4 57.♖a6 ♖g5 58.♖a5+ ♘d5 59.♖h1 ♖h6 60.♖a4 ♖h5 61.♖a5 g5 62.♖a3 ♖e2 63.♖a1 ♘e3 64.♖g1 ♖d2 65.g4+ hxg3 66.♖xg3 ♖d1+

0-1

**Mutyalapati, Modith
Aaroh (2234)
Blakely, Matt (2079)**

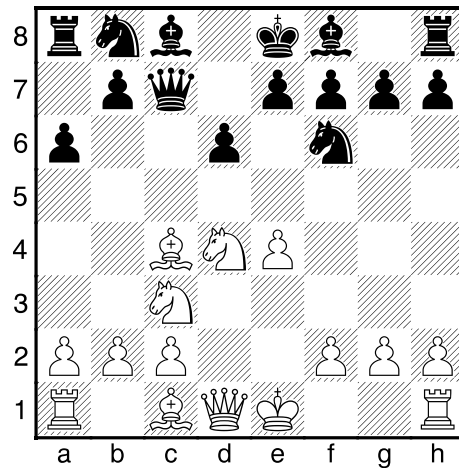
B87

Scarborough CC Winter Swiss
Toronto CAN (7.5), 10.04.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♖c4
The Fischer–Sozin Attack (again)

6...♔c7!?



The second choice of SF18. Its only plus is that it is much less common than ...e6 and ...b5, both of which score a little better. The downsides are that Black has to take extra care against sacs on e6 or b5, which gain speed with the extra hit on the ♖c7.

7.♖b3 e6 8.0-0 ♖e7

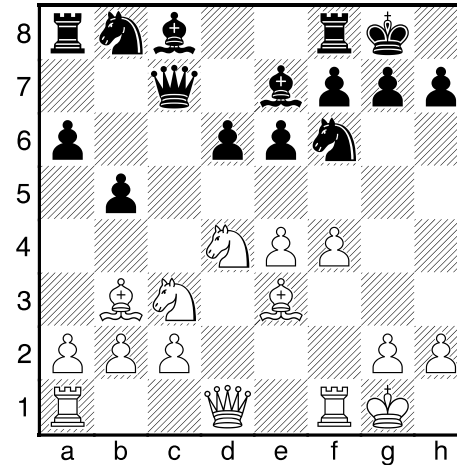
For 8...♗bd7?! 9.♖xe6! see: [Plotkin–](#)

[Singh](#), above.

9.♖e3 0-0 10.f4

10.g4!? is almost never played, but it's the only move leela and SF18 rate as giving White even a small advantage.

10...b5



11.f5

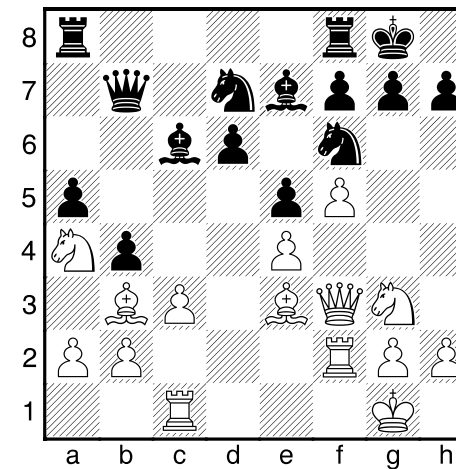
This is the classic Sozin strategy: attack e6 hard enough to force Black to play ...e5, weakening d5 and bringing the LSB into the game. However, practice showed that this is not enough to give White an advantage: pressure on e4 and queenside space are long-term pluses for Black. (see: [Soltis–Dzindzi](#) in the next note for an example).

11.a3 looks slow, but it secures the ♗c3. 11...♗bd7 12.♖xe6? tempting, but bad; ♞12.f5 e5∞. After 12...fxe6 13.♗xe6 ♖c6 14.♗xf8 ♖xf8 White has ♖♖♖ for ♗♗, but Black has the B–pair and excellent play on the light

squares. SF18 & leela both rates it as more than –2 for Black.

11...e5

11...b4! kicking the ♗ before ...e5 makes the d5 square available. The next sequence is accurate and simple enough to need no comment... 12.♗a4 e5 13.♗e2 ♗bd7 14.♗g3 ♖b7 15.c3 a5 (15...♗xe4?) 16.♖c1 ♖b8 (SF18 16...♖c6! 17.cxb4 axb4 18.♖d5 ♖a6 19.♖c2 ♖b8!?) 17.♖f3 ♖c6 18.♖f2?! (18.cxb4 ♖b5 19.bxa5!?) 18...♖b7
Analysis Diagram



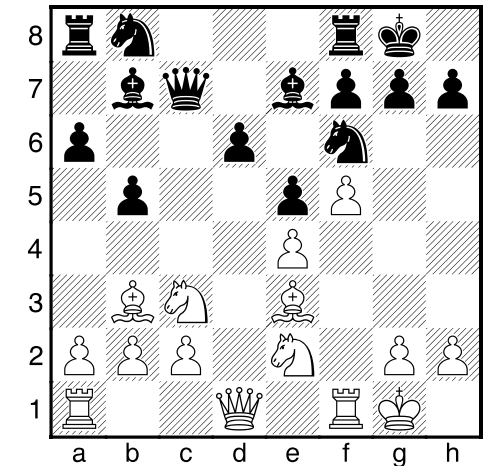
A Model set-up for Black

The computer finds no improvements for White since 11. f5 b4! that would significantly change the eval; and this is exactly the sort of position Black hopes for. Black's piece control over d5 and pressure on e4 have prevented White from using d5 or squashing Black with a kingside pawn storm. Instead, White goes for c–file counterplay that Black mishandles. 19.♖fc2 ♗xe4 20.cxb4 ♗c3! 21.♖f2 ♖xa4 22.♖xc3 ♖xb3 23.♖c7

♖b5 24.axb3 axb4?! (♞24...♖d8?) 25.f6! ♖xf6 26.♗f5 ♖a6 27.♖g3 g6 28.♗h6+ ♖g7 29.♗g4?? (29.♖h3 ♖d8 30.♗xf7=) 29...♖d8!–+ The game was eventually drawn after mutual blunders. 30.♖h6+ ♖g8 31.♖xf8 ♖xc7 32.♖e7 ♖c6 33.♖a1 ♖c5+ 34.♖f1 ♖a6 35.♖d1 ♖c2 36.♖f3 f5 37.♖d5+ ♖g7 38.♗e3 ♖c6?? (38...♖xb2 39.♖e6 ♖a2+) 39.♖e6 ♖d5 40.♖xd5 ♖xd5 41.♗xd5 ♖e6?? 42.♖xb4+– SF says this is +5.5. [Soltis,A \(2400\)–Dzindzichashvili,R \(2530\) US Open, Boston 1988.](#)

12.♗de2 ♖b7

12...♗g4?? 13.♗d5+–.



13.♗d5

Here's a Fischer simul game, showing how a great player handles this position on autopilot — principled positional chess — removing the guards of d5 so he can occupy it with a minor piece. His simul opponent allows him to do that, and nearly equalizes anyway. 13.♗g3 ♗bd7 (Here, and on the next few moves, the computer slightly prefers Black after

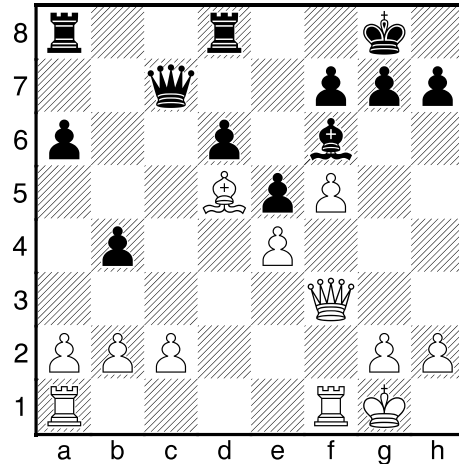




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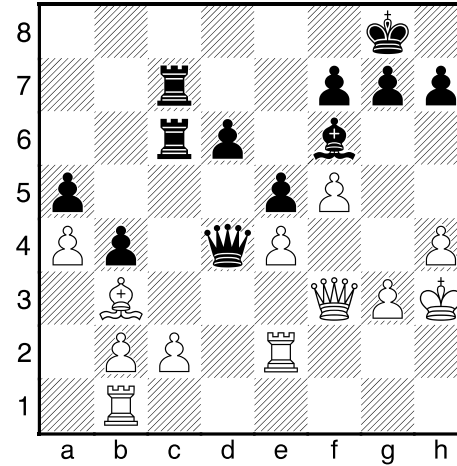
13...b4! as above, the idea is to stop White occupying d5 with a minor piece.)
14. ♖h5 ♗xh5 15. ♕xh5 ♗f6 16. ♕f3
♜fd8 (♟16...b4 17. ♗d5 ♗xd5 18. exd5 a5) ♜
17. ♗g5 b4? (17...d5!=) 18. ♗xf6! ♗xf6
19. ♗d5 ♗xd5 20. ♗xd5±

Fischer Simul Diagram



Black allowed White to get everything he wanted: the kingside space and ♗d5 give White the potential for a strong kingside attack, and Fischer shows how to stop Black's attempts at queenside counterplay. 20...♗ac8 21. ♜f2 ♗a7 22. ♗h1 ♗d4 23. ♜b1! Saves the b-pawn. 23...♜c7 24. ♗e2! Frees the ♗. 24...♗dc8 25. ♗b3 a5 26. g3 ♗a7 27. a3! (or 27.c4 or 27.a4!) 27...♜b8 (27...bxa3 looks like a better way to fight against a strategic squish, but SF18 rates it winning on either recapture.) 28. a4! Ends all Black queenside play. 28...♜c8 29. ♕f3 ♜ac7 30. ♗b3 ♜c6 31. ♗g2 ♜8c7 32. h4 ♜c8 33. ♗h3 ♜8c7

Bobby Fischer Diagram!

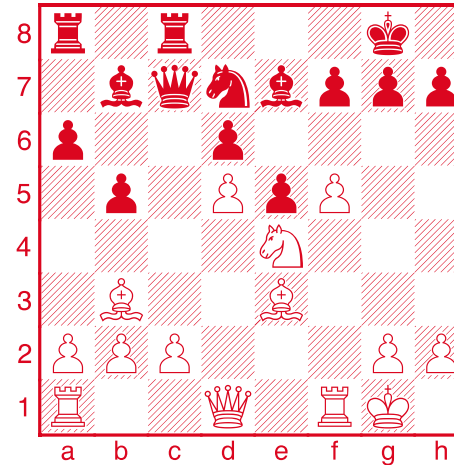


A Model Position for White

Black missed a few chances to equalize and White now has a dream position against the Najdorf: good minor vs terrible DSB, mobile kingside pawns storm vs... nothing.

What could possibly go wrong...?
34. ♜g2 (♟34. ♕g2+- and pushing the g-pawn.) 34...h6. Now White should go 35. ♗d1 ♗a7 (35...♕xb2? 36. c4!+- traps the ♕.) 36. g4+- when ♜c3 doesn't work now that White can block with 37. bxc3 ♜xc3 38. ♗d3+- . Instead, Fischer blundered with the strategically correct 35. g4??, and Black played 35...♜c3+- . Random tactics trump great strategy. 36. bxc3 ♜xc3 37. ♕xc3 ♕xc3+ 38. ♜g3 ♕d2 (38...♕c6 39. g5) 39. ♜bg1 ♕e2 (39...♗xh4!!) 40. ♗d5 ♗f8 41. ♜3g2 ♕f3+ 42. ♜g3 ♕e2 ½-½ in Fischer-Sacks, A Fischer tour sim 1964.

13...♗xd5 14. exd5 ♗d7
15. ♗g3 ♜fc8 16. ♗e4



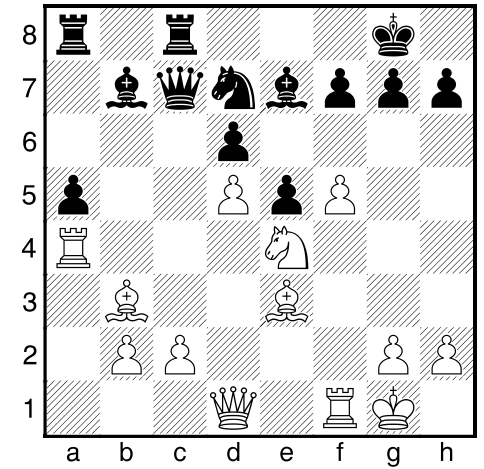
White might try to launch an attack with f5-f6. What should Black do: block with ...♗f6 or ...f6, anticipate it with ...♗f8, ignore it and go for queenside play with ...a5?

16...♗f8??

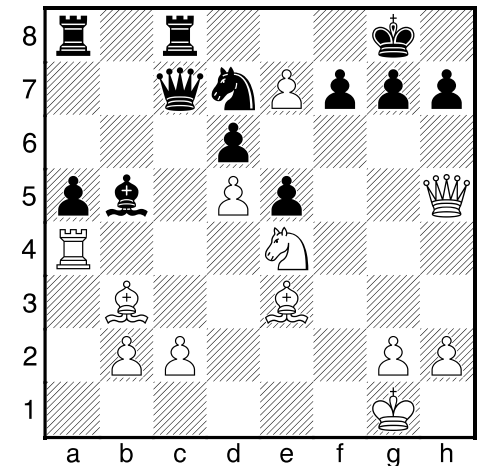
16...♗f6! 17. ♗xf6+ ♗xf6∞;

16...f6? 17. ♜f3!± and major piece attacks on g7 or h7. Black can defend only one kingside pawn with a minor piece on f8, and White has two minor pieces ready to sac;

16...a5!? 17. a4!∞ (17.f6? doesn't work, but it's not trivial: 17...♗xf6 18. ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 19. ♜xf6 a4!± and Black ends up with a better pawn structure; e.g. 20. ♕g4!? axb3 21. ♗h6 g6 22. cxb3 ♗xd5) 17...bxa4 18. ♜xa4 Analysis Diagram



The ♜a4 is ready to swing to the kingside; in fact, if it was White's move now then f5-f6 would win. Here is one go-for-broke line with best play and a few illustrative blunders: 18...♗a6 19. f6!? ♗xf6 20. fe7 ♗b5 21. ♕h5! Analysis Diagram



a) 21...♗xa4?? 22. ♗g5+-;

b) 21...h6? 22. ♗xh6! gxh6 23. ♕xh6 ♗xa4 24. ♗g5 ♕c5+ 25. ♗h1 ♕xc2!! 26. ♗xc2 ♗xc2±;

Random tactics beat great strategy.



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c) 21...♖e8 22.♘g5 ♘f6 23.♙xf7+ ♘h8 24.♖h4 ♙xe7 ♘c4 ♘d7 26.♙g6 ♘g8! 27.♘h7 ♙f7 ♘∞ with continuing excitement;

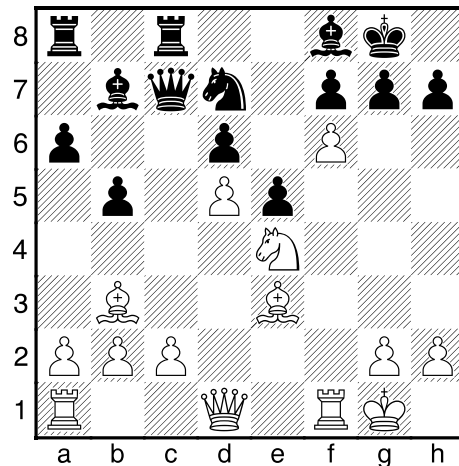
d) 21...g6:

22.♙h6!? ♘xa4 23.♘g5? is one move too slow (23.♘xa4! ♙c4 ♘h4 ♘∞) 23...♙b6+ 24.♘f1 (24.♘h1 ♙d4+ the back rank and loose ♘e4 end White's attack.) 24...♘b5+ 25.c4 ♖xc4 ♘-+ cool;

22.♙h4 f5 (22...♘a4?? 23.♘f6+ ♘xf6 24.♙xf6+- and ♘h6 mates) 23.♘f6+ ♘xf6 24.♙xf6 ♖e8∞ (24...f4? 25.♖xf4!+-) 25.♙e6+ ♘g7 26.♘g5 ♘xa4 27.♙f6+ ♘g8 28.♙e6+=.

17.f6!±

17.♙h5!+- and ♖f3-h3 also wins.



17...♘xf6?

This lets White win in Puzzle Rush style.

♞17...g6 is more tenacious, but

perilously close to lost. White can continue with h4-h5, or arrange pieces with ♙g4-h4, ♘h6, ♖ad1 when there is only darkness in Black's future.

18.♖xf6! gxf6 19.♘xf6+ ♘g7
19...♘h8 20.♙h5 h6 21.♘h6 #2.

20.♙g4+ ♘xf6 21.♙g5#

1-0



Lattafi, Youcef (1994) Mendes, Aaron Reeve (2415)

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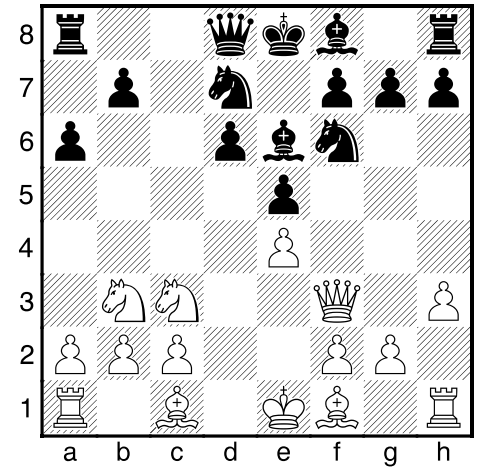
Ottawa Winter op Ottawa CAN (1.5),
17.01.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4
cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3
a6 6.h3 e5 7.♘b3 ♘e6
8.♙f3!? ♘bd7
8...d5?! 9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♘c4C.

IM Aaron Reeve Mendes

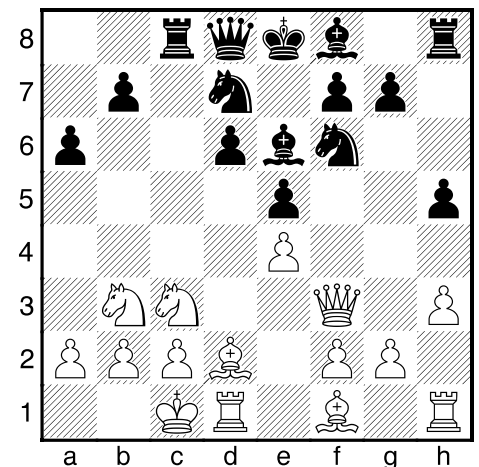
12-year-old Aaron Reeve Mendes won the 2024 North American U18 Championship in Virginia, to become **Canada's youngest-ever International Master!**



9.♘d2!?

♘e3 would transpose to something closer to a main line. ♘d2 looks less active, although it can help control a5 and b4, and supporting the ♘c3 reduces Black's queenside play; e.g. 9.♘e3 ♖c8 10.0-0-0?! ♖xc3! ♙c7 (11...b5!?N idea: ...♙a8, hitting e4, supporting ...d5, and maybe ...a5.) 12.♘b1 ♘e7 13.g4 h6 14.♖g1 ♙xc3 15.♖g3 ♙c6! ♙ Preotu,R (2475)-Sarana,A (2685) Titled Tuesday, 2023. 0-1

9...♖c8 10.0-0-0 h5!?





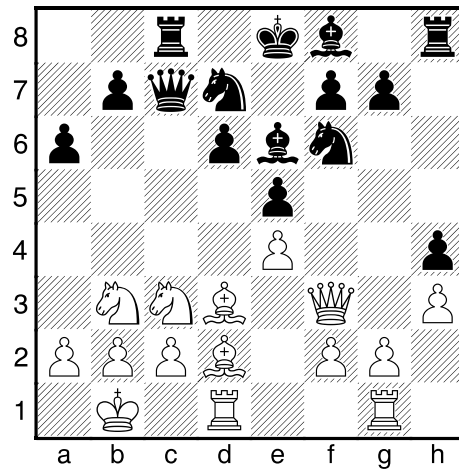
Chess Canada Across Canada

50 years ago ...h5 would have been dismissed as a waste of time and unnecessarily weakening the kingside. Today it's a standard restraining move in a variety of Sicilians. Here, and on some of the next few moves, computers opt for a Dragadorf with ...g6 — which allows ...g7 and supports ...h5 if White ever gets in g4-g5.

11. ♖g1

11. ♖b1 ♖c7 12. ♕d3 b5 13. ♘d5 ♖b7 14. ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 15. ♖e3 ♕e7 16. f4± h4 17. ♖hf1 ♘h5 18. f5 ♕d7 19. ♘a5 ♖c7 20. ♕b4 ♘f4 21. ♖xf4!? exf4 22. ♖xf4 ♖h6 (22...d5 23.e5!) 23. ♘b3 ♖b6?? 24.e5!+- makes the most of the ♕b4 and the ♕e8. 24...a5 (24...dxe5?? 25. ♖xe5+- wins the ♕e7.) 25. ♘xa5 ♖c5 26.f6!+- [Henriquez Villagra,C \(2592\)–Sarana,A \(2691\) Titled Tuesday, 2025.](#)

11...h4 12. ♖b1 ♖c7 13. ♕d3



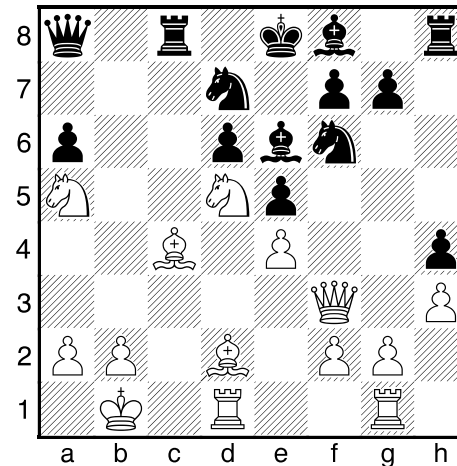
13...b5

13... ♘b6= 14.g4 hxg3 15. ♖xg3 ♘c4= 16. ♕xc4 ♖xc4 17. ♕g5 ♘h5 18. ♖gg1 g6∞ Aliavdin,N (2336)–Tschernatsch,J (2300) Oberliga Ost., 2024.

14. ♘d5 ♖b7 15. ♘a5 ♖a8 16.c4!

Supports the ♘ and prepares to fight on the queenside.

16...bxc4 17. ♕xc4



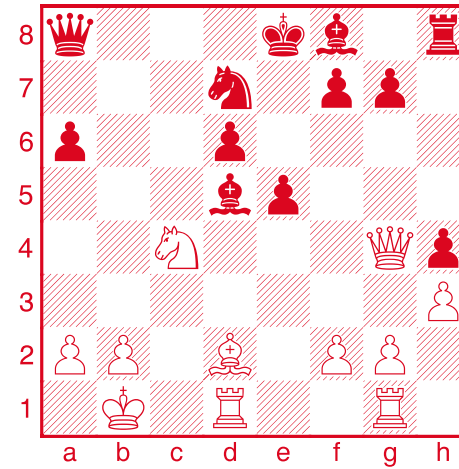
White threatens to pile up on d6 with ♕b4 (9. ♕d2!?), and exchanges on d5 will support ♘a5-c6, so...

17...♖xc4!!

Gets a pawn and the center for the exchange.

18. ♘xc4 ♘xd5 19.exd5 ♕xd5 20. ♖g4!?

20. ♖e2!? ♕xg2 21. ♖xg2!? ♖xg2 22. ♕b4∞.



...♘f6 or ...♕e6, or do they transpose?

20...♘f6??

They do not transpose.

△20...♕e6:

21. ♘xd6+?? this wins in the game but loses here because ♖xg7 won't fork the ♖ and ♘. 21...♕xd6 22. ♖xg7 ♖f8 saves the ♖... though Black could instead force mate starting with ...♖e4+;

21. ♖e2 ♖b8= (21...♕e7? 22. ♕b4+-; 21...♖c6 22. ♖c1↑)

21. ♘xd6+ ♖+-

Exploits the overloaded ♕f8, now that the ♘f6 is a target after ♖xg7.

21. ♖e2 ♕e6 (21...♕xg2!∞) 22. ♕b4 ♖e4+ ♖ 23. ♖xe4 ♘xe4 24. ♖ge1 f5!±.

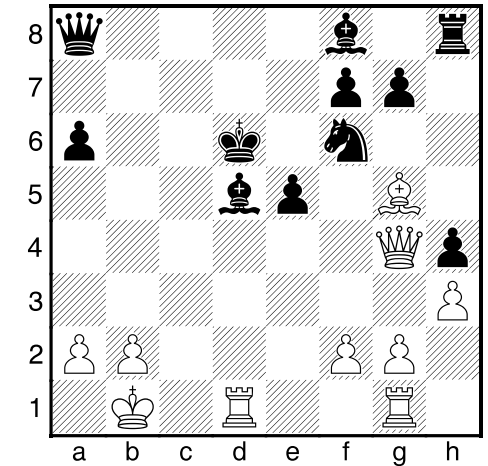
21...♕e7

21...♕xd6 22. ♖xg7 ♖e7 23. ♕g5 ♖+-

22. ♕g5!

22. ♘f5+ also wins 22...♕e6 23. ♘xg7+- and ♕ check.

22...♕xd6



23. ♕xf6 ♖ gxf6 24. ♖xd5+! ♕xd5

24... ♖xd5 25. ♖d1+- Black's pawns are too loose to hope for a fortress.

25. ♖f3+ e4 26. ♖f5+ ♕c4 27. ♖c1+ ♕d3 28. ♖c3+

28. ♖d7+ is quicker, but not more winning.

28...♕e2 29. ♖g4+ ♕d2 30. ♖e3 ♖c6 31. ♖e2#

1-0

Preotu, Razvan (2475) Keleberda, Tymur (2296)

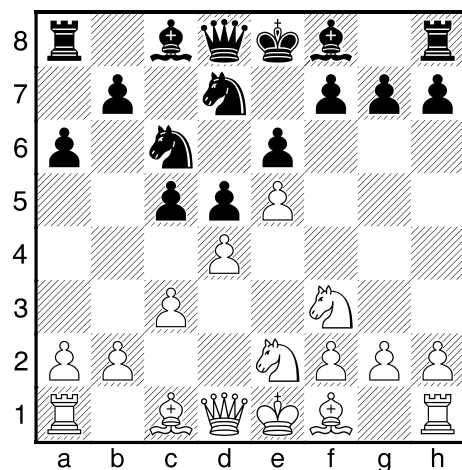
C00

15th Calgary International Calgary
(3.1), 27.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

GM Razvan Preotu won the 15th Calgary International with 7/9; a full point ahead of (then) FM Tymur Keleberda, GM Vladimir Georgiev (both of whom he beat), and FM John Doknjas, who beat him.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 a6!? 3.♘f3 d5
4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.♘e2
c5 7.c3 ♘c6



Nakamura has played this online a few times as Black, always via the more trollish 1.e4 a6. It's similar to the French Steinitz, where White would have played f2-f4 and it would be Black's move. That difference

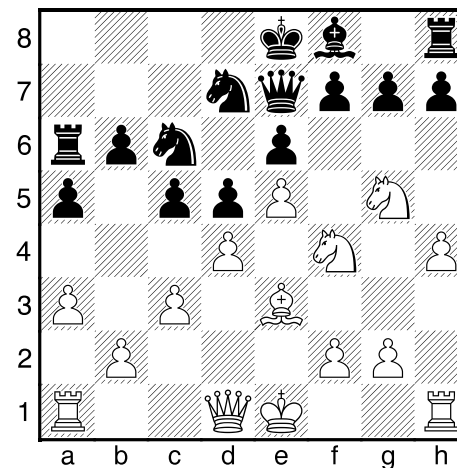
changes the strategies a lot — particularly about White's kingside piece play and whether Black should go for ...f6. It also affects the computer eval: SF18 and leela both rate *this* position as more favourable for White than the equivalent one with f4 from the Steinitz.

8.g3

8.♘f4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♖a5+ 10.♙d2
♙b4 11.h4 g6 12.a3 ♙xd2+ 13.♖xd2
♖xd2+ 14.♙xd2 This is the sort of position French players have nightmares about, and a few moves later Naka went nuts trying to break out... but he's tricky and resilient and drew. [Dominguez Perez,L \(2749\)–Nakamura,H \(2789\) Titled Tuesday, 2024.](#)

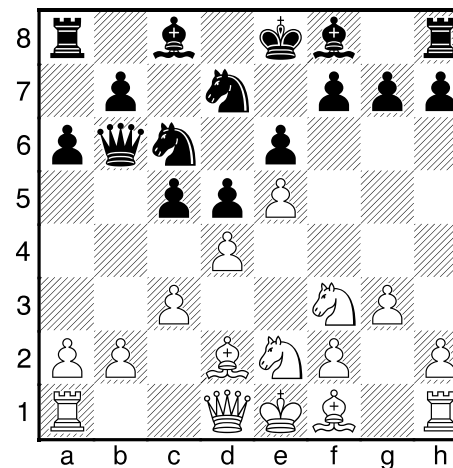
8.a3!? a5 9.♘f4 b6 10.h4 ♙a6
11.♙xa6 ♖xa6 12.♘g5± ♖e7 (12...h6?
13.♘gxe6) 13.♙e3:

Analysis Diagram



A diagram to show one way for White to make the most of having the pawn back on f2 rather than f4. 13...a4 14.♖d3 (14.♘xh7!) 14...♖a5 15.♘xh7 g6 16.♘xf8+- Kamsky blundered on move 40 to only draw. [Kamsky,G \(2616\)–Nakamura,H \(2795\) Titled Tuesday, 2024.](#)

8...♖a5 9.♙d2 ♖b6



10.♙g2!?

Not necessary, and maybe premature, since there are several lines where the ♙ is better on h3.

A year later, one of Tymur's opponents was less enterprising, though still better after the less generous 10.♖b1! cxd4 11.cxd4 f6 12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♙g2 (13.♙h3!) 13...♙e7 14.0-0 0-0± Illinca,F (2440)–[Keleberda,T \(2265\) Seville, 2025.](#)



The Calgary Chess Club continues to create Norm-worthy tournaments with foreign GMs and strong Canadians! The 15th edition was won by GM Razvan Preotu, with GM Vladimir Georgiev (MKD) and FMs Tymur Keleberda & John Doknjas 1 point back.

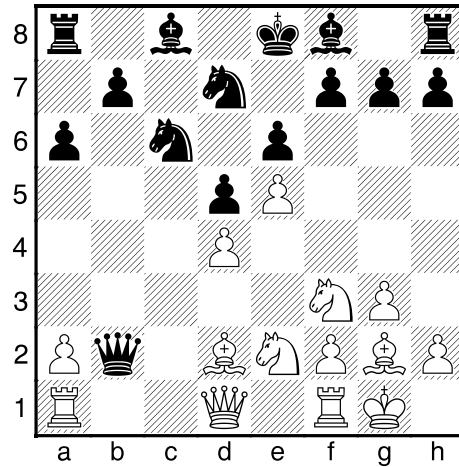
15th Calgary International
December 26–30, 2024

photo: CCC facebook





10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♔xb2
12.0-0



12...♔a3

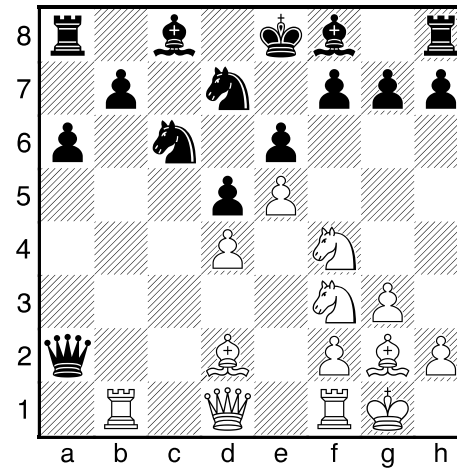
12...b5?? 13.a3!
traps the ♔, since
13...b4 14.♔a4+-;

12...♔b6 13.h4±
with a typical
"poison pawn"
trade: White has a
lot of development
and space in return
for that extra pawn
sitting way back on
b7.

13.♔b1?!

Computers like
offering the a-pawn
too: 13.♔b1! ♔xa2
14.♔f4

Analysis Diagram



14...h6 stops ♔g5, but 15.♔e1 with
threats to trap the ♔ with ♔e3, ♔a1,
♔f1. 15...♔a3 16.♔h3+- threats
include ♔e3 and ♔xd5.

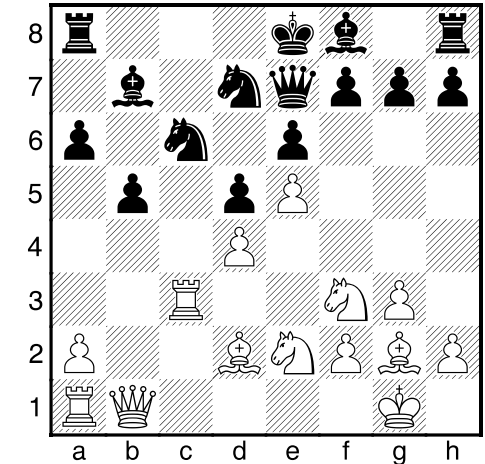
14...♔a3 15.♔g5! to take twice on e6,
and 15...♔xd4? saves e6 but loses
the ♔ after 16.♔c1+-.

13...b5

13...♔b4! is anathema to French
players — who see this pointy-
headed piece as the only thing
between them and a horrific Dark
Square Death — but the computers
say it equalizes!?

You might want to test this against
a computer if you play either side of
these French positions to see how
they handle both sides.

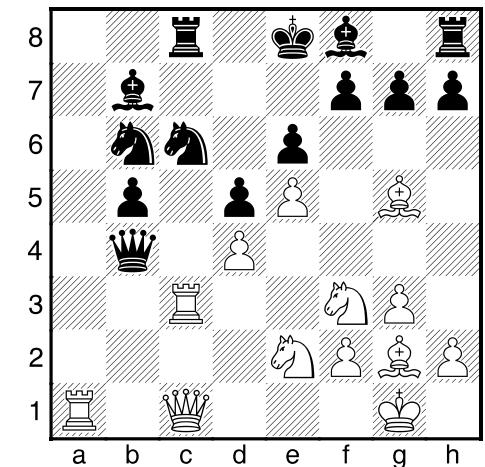
14.♔c1 ♔b7 15.♔c3 ♔e7



16.♔g5?!

16.♔g5! h6? 17.♔xe6! and either way
Black takes it, then ♔f4 and White
smashes the center with another sac;
e.g. 17...fxe6 18.♔f4 ♔f7 19.♔xd5!!+-.

16...♔b4 17.♔c1 ♔c8
18.a4!∞ ♔b6 19.axb5 axb5



20.♔d1?!

Threatens to trap the ♔ with ♔b3 and
♔d2, but there's an escape.



Round 5

Jinghui Bai v
GM Komarov
(draw)

FM Keleberda v
Anand Chandra
(draw)

GM Georgiev v
GM Preotu
(0-1)

15th Calgary International

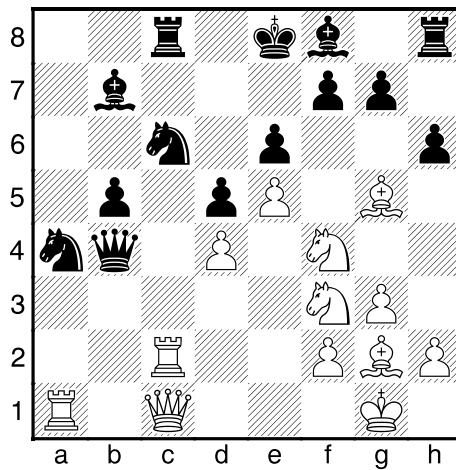
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Across Canada



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The computer suggests this highly tactical, full-board sacrificial line that brings in all White's pieces: $\triangleleft 20.\text{♞f4}$ ♞a4! (White threatens to trap the ♞ , so $20\dots\text{h6?}$ $21.\text{♞d3+}$; $20\dots\text{♞xd4?}$ $21.\text{♞xc8+}$ ♞xc8 $22.\text{♞c7+}$ with a winning invasion.) $21.\text{♞c2}$ White threatens to continue improving his minors with ♞h5 and ♞f1 , and if $21\dots\text{h6!}$

Analysis Diagram



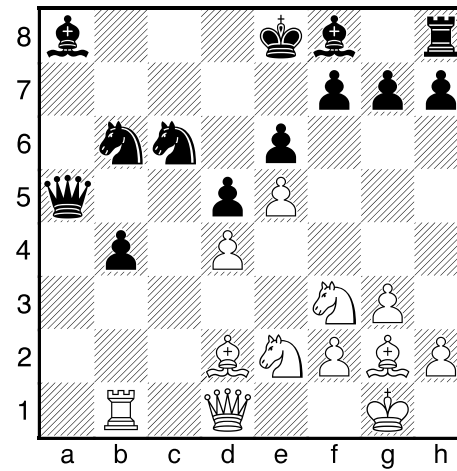
$22.\text{♞d3}\infty$ ♞b3 $23.\text{♞e3!}$ $\text{♞xd3}\square$ $24.\text{♞f1}$ who would see how strong this is from a distance? $24\dots\text{♞b3}$ ($24\dots\text{♞e4}$ $25.\text{♞xb5+}$) $25.\text{♞b1}$ ♞a3! $26.\text{♞xb3}$ ♞xc1 $27.\text{♞xc1}$ $\text{♞a6}\infty$.

$22.\text{♞xd5!}$ exd5 $23.\text{♞h3!}$ ♞c7 $24.\text{♞f4!}$ g5 $25.\text{♞d2}$ ♞b3 $26.\text{♞f1!}$ ↑ again, saccing a piece then leaving the ♞f3 in take to break through the queenside.

$20\dots\text{♞a8}\square\infty$

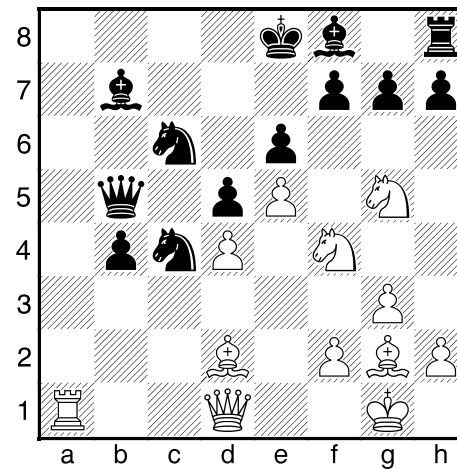
The white ♞ can't guard a1 and b3 from d1.

$21.\text{♞xa8+}$ ♞xa8 $22.\text{♞b3}$ ♞a5 $23.\text{♞d2}$ b4 $24.\text{♞b1}$



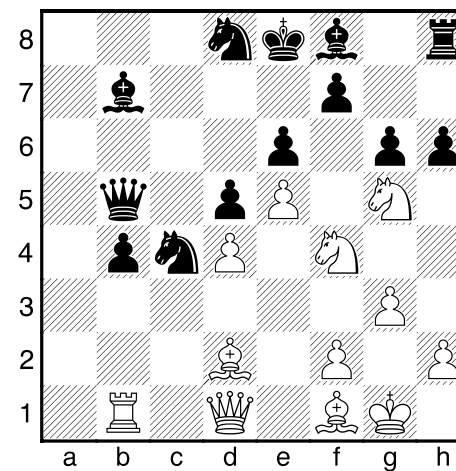
Black has managed to hold his extra pawn while keeping his ♞ out of immediate danger. He's still behind in development and neither of his ♞s is particularly good, but a pawn is a pawn.

$24\dots\text{♞b7}$ $25.\text{♞a1}$ ♞b5 $26.\text{♞f4}$ ♞c4 $27.\text{♞g5}$



$27\dots\text{♞d8}$ $28.\text{♞f1}$ g6 $28\dots\text{♞e7!}$ $29.\text{♞h5}$ h6 $30.\text{♞xg7+}\infty$.

$29.\text{♞b1}$ h6?!



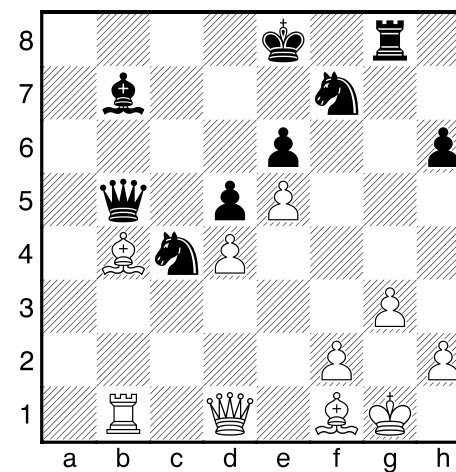
$30.\text{♞xf7!}$

$30.\text{♞e4!?}$ dxe4 $31.\text{♞b3}$ ♞d5 $32.\text{♞c1}\infty$.

$30\dots\text{♞xf7?}$

$30\dots\text{♞xf7}\square$ $31.\text{♞d3!}$ ($31.\text{♞g4}$ ♞g8 $32.\text{♞d3}$) $31\dots\text{♞g8}\square$ $32.\text{♞xg6}$ ♞b6 unpins the ♞ ($32\dots\text{♞xg6?}$ $33.\text{♞h5+}$) $33.\text{♞xf8}$ $\text{♞xd2}\square$ $34.\text{♞d7}\pm$.

$31.\text{♞xg6}$ ♞g8 $32.\text{♞xf8!}$ ♞xf8 $33.\text{♞xb4}$ ♞g8



$34.\text{♞c5?!}$

Natural — it puts the ♞ on a safe(ish) square (so long as $\dots\text{♞xe5}$ doesn't

work), defends d4, gains a tempo on the ♞ — but not best.

$\triangleleft 34.\text{♞e7!}$ ♞d7 $35.\text{♞f6+}$ followed by ♞e2 (maybe to h5) and major piece play on the queenside, which Black cannot stifle with $\dots\text{♞d8}$.

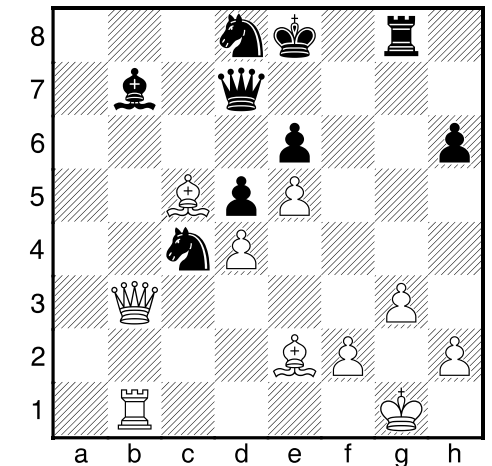
$34\dots\text{♞d7}\square$

$34\dots\text{♞c6?}$ $35.\text{♞f3+}$ threatens ♞f6 , when threats of mate on e7 and ♞xb7 with ♞xe6 will win.

$35.\text{♞b3}$ $\text{♞d8}\square$

Not an option with a white ♞f6 .

$36.\text{♞e2}$



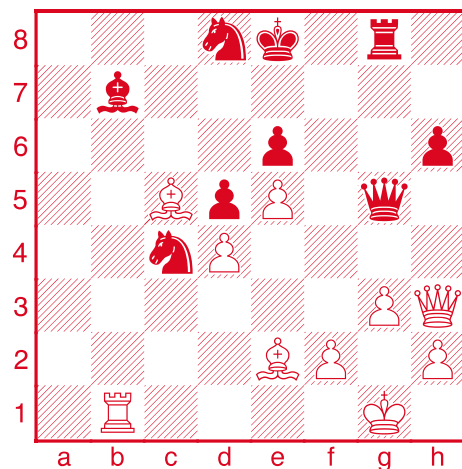
$36\dots\text{♞f7?}$

$36\dots\text{♞f7}\rightleftharpoons$.

$37.\text{♞f3+?}$

$\triangleleft 37.\text{♞c2+}$ also threatens to invade on h7, but leaves f3 open for ♞b3-f3-f6 .

$37\dots\text{♞e8}$ $38.\text{♞f6}$ ♞g7 $39.\text{♞h4}$ ♞g5! $40.\text{♞h3}$



White threatens Rxb7 then Wxe6 .

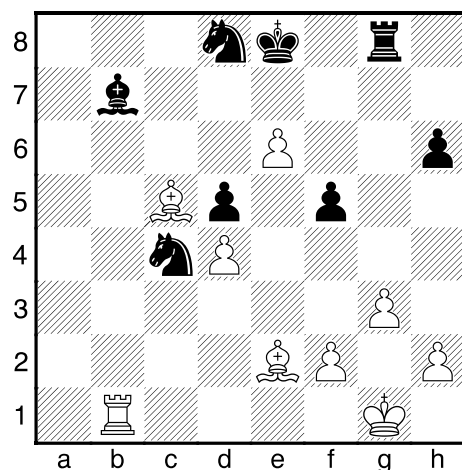
40... Wf5??

Forces exchanges by forking the W and R , but...

40... Rg6?? 41. Wh5+- ;

40... Wc6= and 40... Wd7= keep the game going.

41. Wxf5 exf5 42.e6 $\square$ +-

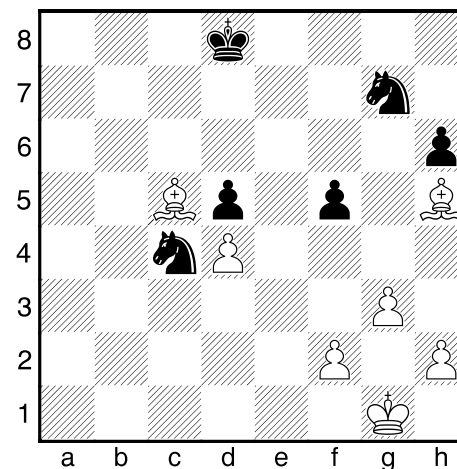


Yup, that's a mating net! Easy to see when you get here, but if you've spent the last two hours thinking of the d4-e5 pawn wedge as a permanent feature of this French middlegame, then you might have been blind to it just a move ago.

42... Nxe6 43. Rxb7 Rg7

43... Nxc5 frees the Q , but 44.dxc5 at the cost of a winning passer.

44. Wh5+ Qd8 45. Rxc7 Nxc7



Even without the extra N the Q 's are too much to handle.

**46. Qf7 Qd7 47. Qxd5 Nd6
48. Qg2 Nge8 49. Qb3 Nf6
50. Qc2 Nde4 51. Qf8 h5 52.f3
 Nd6 53. Qh3 f4 54. Qxd6
 Qxd6 55. Qb3 fxc3 56.hxc3
 Ne8 57. Qh4 Nc7 58. Qc4**

1-0

Rematch!

**Preetu v
Keleberda**

2025 Canadian
Closed, Toronto

Tymur won this
game to start with
4/4.



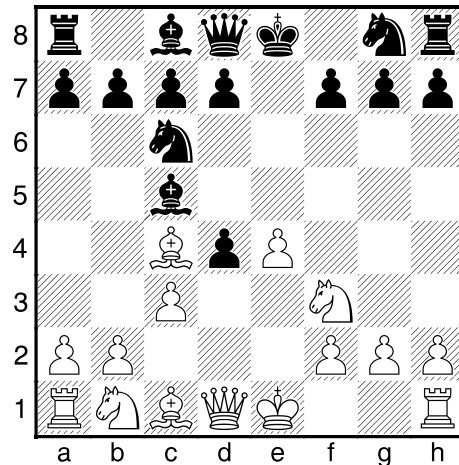
Berube, Max (2035)
Robichaud, Louis (2061)

C44

Pere Noel Montreal CAN (4.13),
 29.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4
 exd4 4.♙c4 ♙c5 5.c3



5...dxc3!?

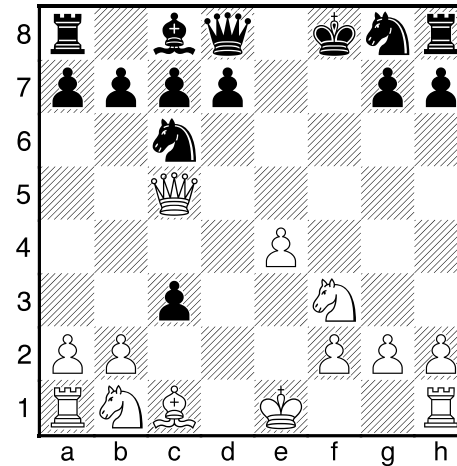
At higher levels this would deserve a "?" or at least a "?!". — which is what [Gawain Jones](#) gives it in volume 2 of his *Coffeehouse Repertoire* book. But White's path to a clear plus isn't so wide, and many U2300 players would likely go wrong fast.

Transposing to an Italian is the professional choice: 5...♘f6 6.e5 (6.cxd4 ♙b4+=) 6...d5! 7.♙b5 ♘e4 8.cxd4 ♙b6 9.♘c3 with thousands of games going back over a century;

e.g. 9...0-0 10.♙e3 f5 11.exf6 ♘xf6= [Steinitz,W-Lasker,E World Ch. 1894](#).

6.♙xf7+ ♔xf7 7.♙d5+ ♔f8
 7...♙e8!? can transpose, but gives White a chance to go wrong: 8.♙h5+! (≤8.♙xc5 ♙e7! 9.♙e3 d5 10.♘xc3!±) 8...♔f8! (8...g6? 9.♙xc5±) 9.♙xc5+ transposing.

8.♙xc5+



8...♙e7

8...d6 9.♙c4 ♘f6 (9...♙g4 10.♘xc3 ♙xf3 11.gxf3 ♙f6 12.f4 ♙f7 13.♙b5 ♘d4 14.♙d3!± [Sveshnikov,E \(2515\)-Kupreichik,V \(2480\) Christmas Congress 1984/85](#).) 10.♘xc3 ♙e7 11.0-0 h6 12.♙f4 ♙f7 13.♙d3 ♙g4 14.♘d4 ♙e6 15.♘xe6+ ♙xe6 16.♙fe1± [Hebert,J-Babb,J CAN-ch U20, 1975-76](#).

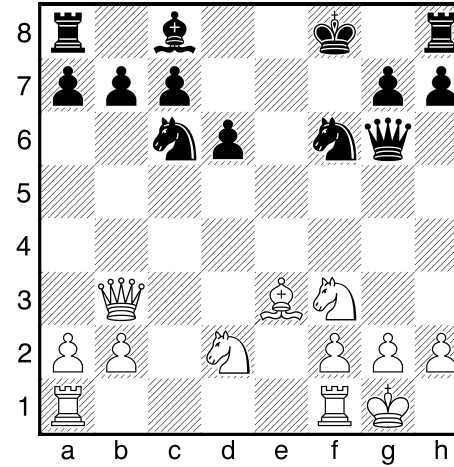
9.♙xc3?!

And White does go wrong!

♠9.♙xe7+ ♘gxe7 10.♘xc3 a6 11.0-0 d6 12.h3 h6 13.♙e3 ♔f7 14.♙fd1 ♙e6 15.♙ac1 ♙ac8± [Ravi,T \(2336\)-Sasikiran,K \(2525\) IND-ch Nagpur, 1999](#);

♠9.♙e3! d5 (9...cxb2?! 10.♙xb2 ♙b4+ 11.♙c3±) 10.exd5 ♙xe3+ 11.fxe3 ♘b4 12.0-0 ♘xd5 (12...♘c2?? 13.♘d4+ ♘f6 14.♘xc2+-) 13.♘xc3♠.

9...♙xe4+ 10.♙e3 ♘f6 11.0-0 d6 12.♘bd2 ♙g6 13.♙b3



13...♙f7!±

13...♙h3?? 14.♘h4! ♙g4 15.♙xb7+-.

14.♙a3 h6 15.♘d4 ♘xd4
 15...♔g8!

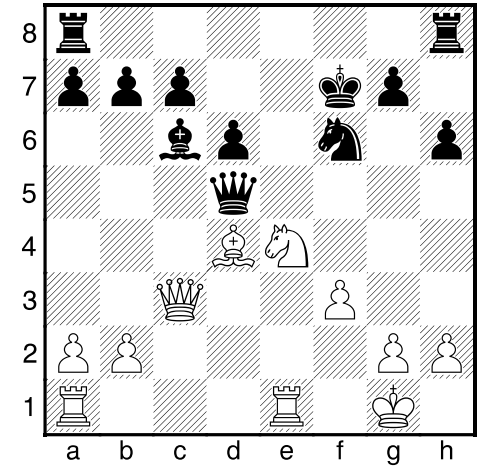
16.♙xd4 ♙d7 17.♙fe1 ♙c6 18.f3

18.♘f3!?! threatening ♘e5.

18...♙d5?!

Is Black inviting White to take on f6?

19.♙c3! ♔f7?! 20.♘e4!±



20...♙f5 21.♘xf6 gxf6 22.♙e3 ♙ae8 23.♙ae1 ♙xe3 24.♙xe3 a6 25.a3 h5 26.♙c4+ ♙d5 27.♙c3 ♙f5 28.♙c4+ ♙d5 29.♙c3 ♙h6 30.♙e2 f5 31.♙f2 ♙e6 32.♙xe6 ♔xe6



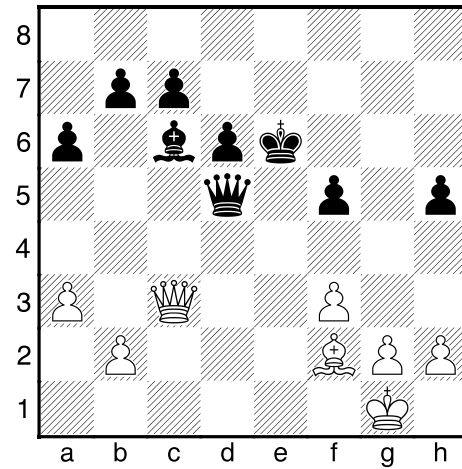
Max Berube

2026 Canadian Zonal
 Montreal

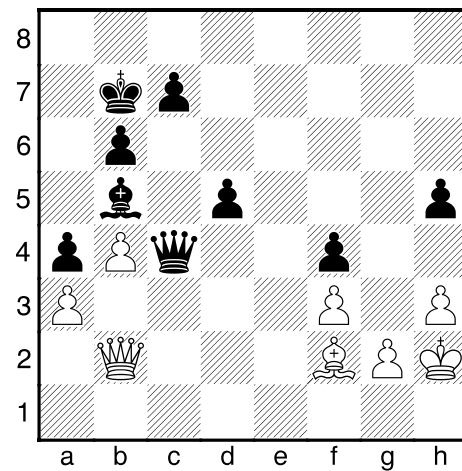




Chess Canada Across Canada



33.♞e3+ ♔d7 34.h3 ♞f7 35.♙h4
b6 36.b4 ♔c8 37.♞c3 ♔b7
38.♙f2 ♙b5 39.♞d4 ♞c4 40.♞e3
f4 41.♞d2 d5 42.♞b2 a5 43.♔h2
a4!♞



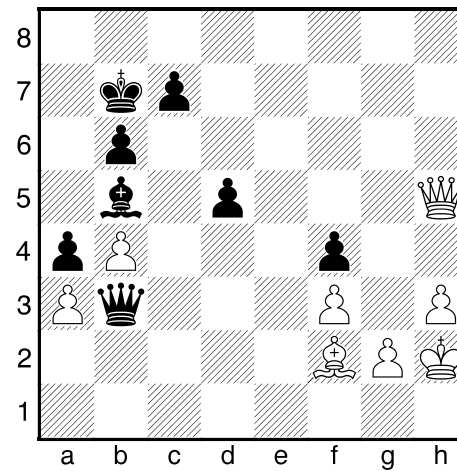
With queens off Black wins, despite the opposite ♙s: Black gets a central passer with ...c5 while White is stuck with weak pawns on both sides. This means Black can bully the white ♞ around, which is uncomfortable but not necessarily losing.

44.♞e5?!

Better was to play for the blockade: ♞44.♙d4∞ c5 Black can break the dark square blockade, but only at the cost of exposing his ♔ (44...♞b3 45.♞c1□=) 45.bxc5 bxc5 46.♙f6 d4 (46...♔b6?? 47.♙d8+- yipes!) 47.♞b1! aiming for h7, 47...♞d3 48.♞e1 ♞e2 49.♞a5♞.

44...♞b3 45.♞xh5?

45.♙h4 ♞xa3 46.♙d8 ♞c1 47.♞xd5+ ♙c6 48.♞xh5□♞ (48.♞f7?? ♙xf3□-+).



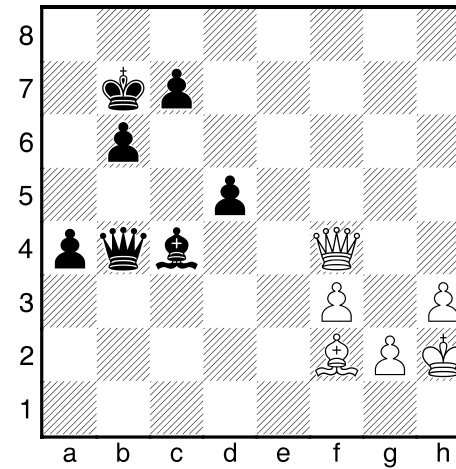
45...♙c4□-+

Opposite ♙s and pawn races on opposite sides, and White is just a move too slow!

46.♞e5

46.♙d4 ♞xa3□ 47.♞f7 ♞xb4□ 48.♙e5 ♞c5□-+ just in time.

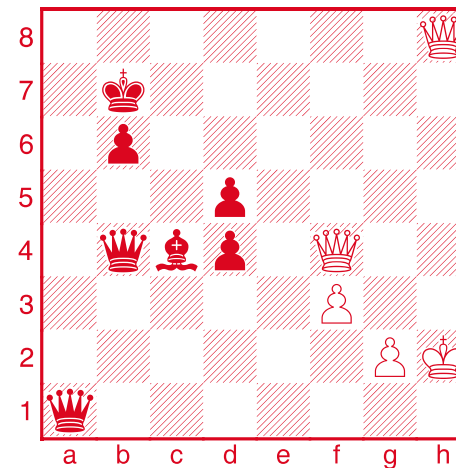
46...♞xa3 47.♞xf4 ♞xb4



48.h4

48.♙g3 ♞e7-+.

48...a3 49.h5 a2 50.♙d4
c5 51.h6 cxd4 52.h7 a1♞
53.h8♞



First check wins?

53...♞e7??

Natural, but losing.

a) 53...♞a8?? 54.♞f7+□+- and takes a8;

b) 53...♞aa3? 54.♞fb8+□ ♔a6
55.♞a8+ ♔b5 56.♞he8+ and ♞c6#;

c) 53...♞ae1? connects the ♞s, but loses to a precise series of checks: 54.♞fb8+□ ♔c6 55.♞hc8+ ♔b5 56.♞d7+□ ♔a5 57.♞a8+□ ♙a6 58.♞axd5+□ (58.♞dxd5+? ♞c5□=) 58...♞b5 (58...♞c5 59.♞a2+□ ♔b4 60.♞da4+ #1) 59.♞a2+□ ♔b4 60.♞xd4+ (60.♞b2+ also wins.) 60...♞c4□ 61.♞xb6+ ♞b5 62.♞aa5+!+- skewering e1;

Black's only winning moves are to clear b4 for the ♔ and to connect the ♞s;

d) 53...♞be1!-+ connects the ♞s and aims for immediate counterchecks. White has to do something immediately, but the checks run out quickly: 54.♞f7+ ♔a6 55.♞a8+ ♔b5 56.♞d7+ ♔b4 57.♞d6+ ♔c3-+;

e) 53...♞bb2!? looks strange, but wins too: 54.♞d6 ♔a6□ 55.♞c6 ♔a5□ 56.♞ha8+ ♔b4-+;

f) 53...♞ba3? also connects the ♞s and frees b4, but it's so inactive that White gets an extra tempo to attack: 54.♞hb8+□ ♔a6 55.♞fc7□ There's no way to defend b6 without losing a ♞! Luckily, Black can sac a ♞ to force perpetual: 55...♞h1+ (or 55...♞g1+ 56.♔xg1 ♞e3+ 57.♔h1) 56.♔xh1 ♞c1+ 57.♔h2 ♞h6+ 58.♔g3 ♞g5+=.



54. ♔h8+
or 54. ♔f8, transposing.

54... ♖c6 55. ♔h6+ ♚
Easy to overlook, but fatal.

55... ♖b5
55... ♖d7 56. ♔b7+ checks will win the ♖e7 and mate.

56. ♔hxb6+ ♖a4 57. ♔a8+

1-0

Emil Soberov



photo: Maxim Vasic fb

Soberov, Emil (2240) Bahmani, Amir Mohammad (2356)

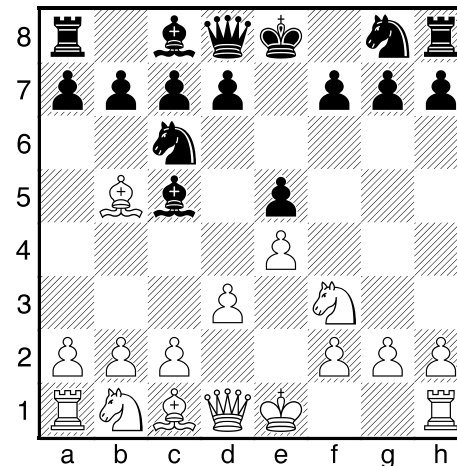
C48

Alberta Closed Calgary (2.3),
29.03.2025

Notes: John Upper

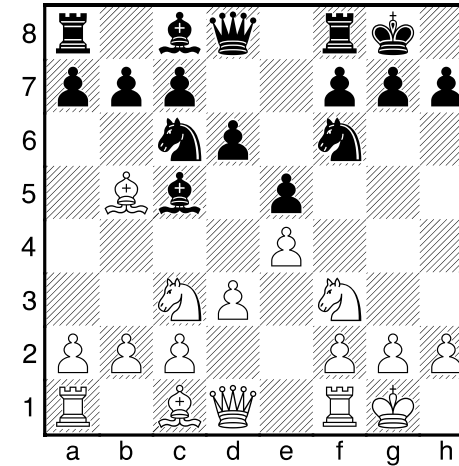
Amir Bahmani finished clear 2nd in the **2025 Alberta Closed**, losing to winner Tymur Keleberda, but winning his other four games, including this one, which features a very enterprising sac on move 12.

1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5
♙c5 4.d3



Not a Morphy or Alekhine move — 3.c3 — and now Black no longer has to prep for a quick d2-d4, with or without ♘xe5. It's slow, but not objectively worse.

4... ♘f6 5. ♘c3 d6 6.0-0 0-0

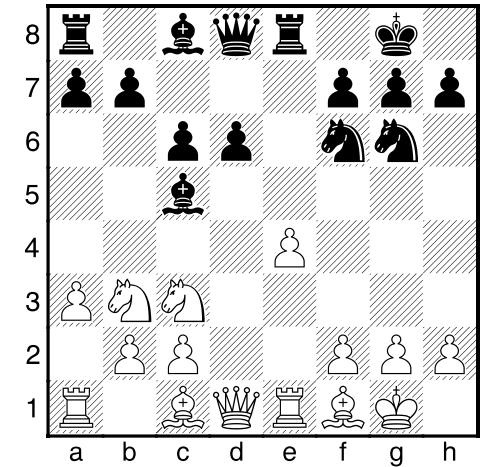


Black would like to play ... ♘e7-g6 and ... c6. White usually stops this with ♘a4 (getting the ♙ pair) or ♙xc6. Historically, the most common move here has been 7. ♙g5, but it's no longer played at the top level because after 7...h6 8. ♙h4 ♘d4! is considered to be better for Black.

7.a3?!
More slow play.

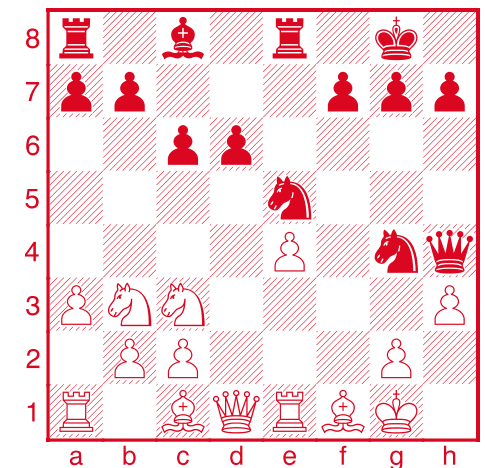
7... ♘e7
The position is almost symmetrical, but a standard way to play for the center (...c6) will gain time off the ♙b5. The computer already prefers Black.

8.d4 exd4 9. ♘xd4 ♘g6
10. ♖e1 c6 11. ♙f1 ♖e8
12. ♘b3



12... ♙xf2+!!
The computer prefers Black after 12... ♙g4 but the game line is vastly more entertaining!

13. ♙xf2 ♘g4+ 14. ♙g1 ♚
♙h4 15.h3 ♘6e5 ♚
15... ♔f2+? 16. ♙h1 ♙g3 17.hxg4
♙xg4 18. ♖e3+- (Bonus style-points
for finding 18. ♘e2 ♔f2 19. ♔d4! ♔xe1
20. ♙g5+- trapping the ♔.) 18... ♔h4+
19. ♖h3 ♚+-.



White to play and... ?



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If you think that there's no way ♔xf2 was anything more than coffee-house nonsense then you're in for a surprise.

The sac is not winning, but White is under serious pressure. From a practical point of view it's even worse: there is more than one way to keep the balance, but nothing that gives an advantage — which could mess with your head if you keep analyzing in a vain search for a refutation.

16. ♖e2??

This prevents the repetitions with ... ♖f2+, but doesn't defend h2 and doesn't give the ♔ a way out.

a) 16. ♔f4?? hangs the ♔ 16... ♖f2+--;

b) 16. ♖xd6?? trying to defend h2 does worse than just losing the ♖ 16... ♖g3 17. hxg4 ♘f3+ does more than win the ♖: 18. ♔h1 ♖h4+ 19. ♖h2 ♖xh2#;

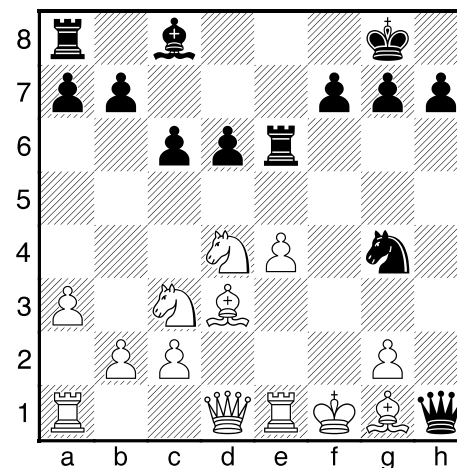
c) 16. hxg4? ♘xg4 17. ♖xd6 Black has a draw in hand with ... ♖f2-h4, but wins with: 17... ♔e5!! (17... ♖xe1? 18. ♖f4±; 17... ♖f2+ 18. ♔h1 ♖xe1? 19. ♔g5±) 18. ♔f4 ♔h5 (18... ♖f2+ just changes the move order.) 19. ♔h2 ♖f2+ 20. ♔g3+-) 20. ♔h1 ♖xh2+ 21. ♖xh2 ♘xh2 22. ♔xh2 ♖xc2+- White is materially up for now, but soon will lose pawns and have no good squares for his ♗s;

d) 16. ♘d4! ♖g3 17. hxg4 ♘xg4 18. ♘f3

♖f2+ 19. ♔h1 ♔e5 20. ♔f4 ♔h5+ 21. ♔h2 ♖g3 22. ♔g1 23. ♘xh2 (22... ♖f2+= is still a draw, whenever Black wants.) 23. ♘xh2 ♖xh2+ 24. ♔f2 ♔g5=;

e) 16. ♔e3! like the game move this also stops ... ♖f2 tactics, but leaving e2 unblocked is a big difference. 16... ♖g3 17. hxg4 ♘xg4 18. ♔d3 creating an escape route for the ♔. 18... ♔e6! (18... ♘e3? 19. ♖f3±+; 18... ♖h2+? 19. ♔f1 ♖h1+ 20. ♔g1±- another point of ♔e3.) 19. ♘d4! ♖h2+ 20. ♔f1 ♖h1+ 21. ♔g1

Analysis Diagram



It still looks ugly, but the computer finally prefers White here.

What annotation should 12... ♔xf2 get?

Stockfish, which calculates like a computer, rates it as a mistake.

"!?" is the obvious but insipid choice, as it hardly suggests the calculating burden inflicted by it.

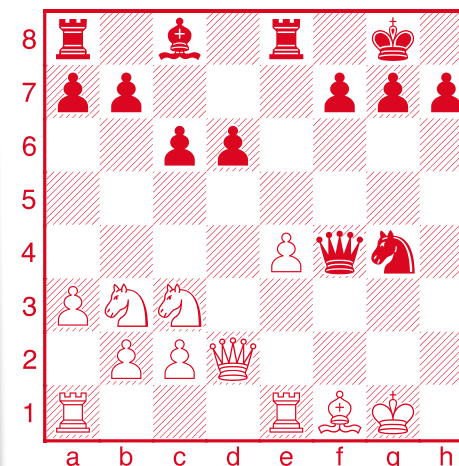
21... ♔f6+?? 22. ♘f3? (22. ♘f5±+)
22... ♖xf3+ 23. ♖xf3 (23. gxf3?? ♖h3+
24. ♔e2 ♖g2+ 25. ♔f2 ♖xf2#) 23... ♘h2+∞;
21... ♔g6 22. ♘f5! ♘h2+ 23. ♔e2
♖xg2+ 24. ♔f2! (24. ♔e3?! ♔xf5 25. ♔xh2!
♔g4 26. ♔e2! ♖h3+±) 24... ♖f3+ 25. ♔d2
♖xf2+ 26. ♔c1 Black has three pawns for the piece, but they are a very long way from being useful and White is about to enjoy a very long initiative.

Black is now objectively worse, but proving that required best play from White for 14 moves, including finding several "only moves" from tempting choices. OTOH, it also required best play from Black so as to not toss away all his chances, and is it fair to assume this is harder to find than White's best moves?

16... ♖g3±+ 17. hxg4 ♘xg4 18. ♔f4

It was this or ♖xg4: the ♔ can't run and nothing else defends h2.

18... ♖xf4 19. g3 ♖xg3+ 20. ♖g2 ♖f4!? 21. ♖d2!



21... ♖f6?

21... ♖g3+±+ this check is the obvious way to keep the ♖s on, but it's the next move that matters:

22. ♔g2 is too compliant, and the obvious 22... ♔e6+ to cut the ♔ with ... ♖f6, and if White guards f6 with 23. e5!? Black wins with 23... ♔h6! threat ... ♔h1!;

22. ♖g2 is the obvious and more challenging defence, leaving Black with only one move to win:

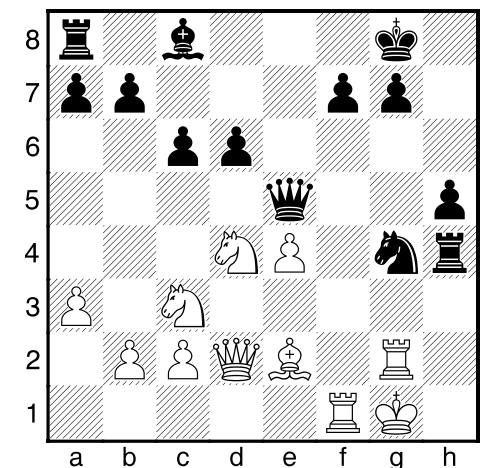
22... ♖h4? 23. ♘d4±= stops ... ♔e6 and enables ♘f3.

22... ♖f4? would win, but

23. ♖d2 ♖g3+ allows a draw claim with 24. ♖g2.

22... ♖e5±+ the point: luring the ♖ to the g-file gives ... ♔e6-g6 an extra high-value target.

22. ♔e2!= ♔e5 23. ♔g2 ♔h5 24. ♔e2 ♔h4 25. ♘d4 h5? 26. ♔f1+- ♖e5





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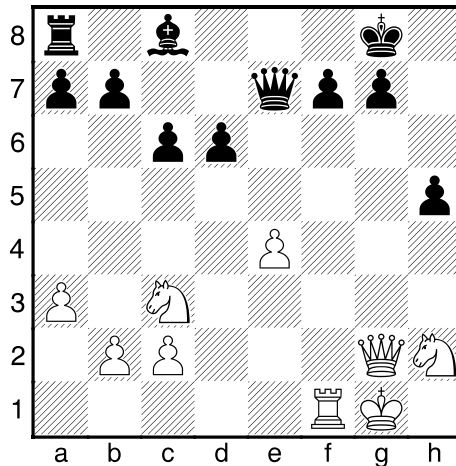
27. ♔xg4?!±

27. ♔c4+; or 27. ♘f3 ♖c5+
28. ♘d4□+.

27... ♖xg4 28. ♘f3

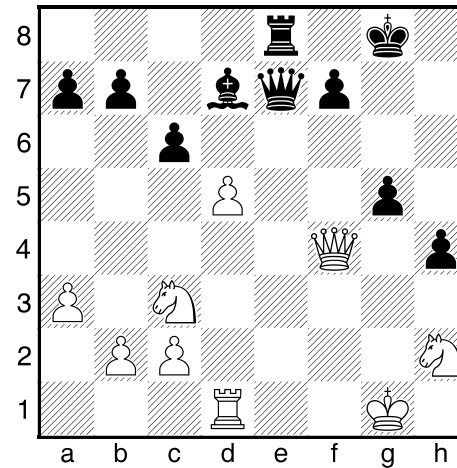
28. ♖xg4? ♔xg4≡;
28. ♘f5!± ♖c5+.

**28... ♖e7 29. ♘h2 ♖xg2+
30. ♖xg2**



With Black's only ♖ way over on a8
White's ♔ is safe enough, and it's
now a ♘v ♔ imbalance.

**30... ♔d7 31. ♖g3 ♖e8 32. ♖d1
d5 33. exd5 h4 34. ♖f4 g5?**

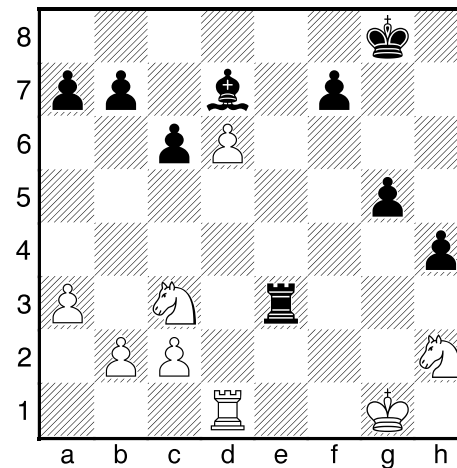


The computer says this is bad, but
it requires White to find a sequence
of not-so-obvious only moves in the
next note to exploit.

35. ♖d4±

35. d6□+ ♖e3+ the most challenging
(35... gxf4 36. dxe7 ♖xe7 37. ♔f2 Black's
kingside trio are too degraded to
survive.) 36. ♖xe3 ♖xe3

Analysis Diagram



37. ♔f2? is too slow, now ... ♖e6≡ and
...f6 leaves White no clear targets.

37. ♖d4!! wins! A star move: stopping
...g4 and supporting a possible ♘e4
to harass the pawns and restrain the
♖.

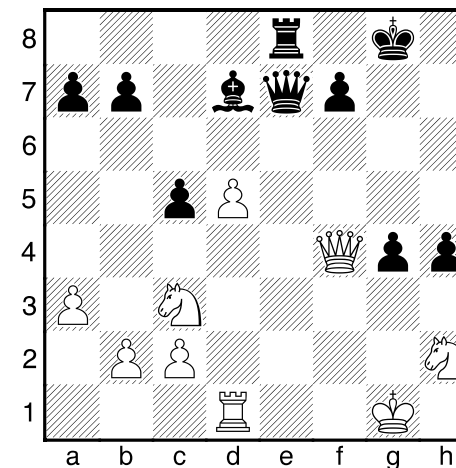
After 37. ♖d4:

a) Black is one tempo too slow to
consolidate with ...f6 and ...♔f7: 37...
f6 38. ♘e4! attacking f6 and semi-
trapping the ♖. 38... ♔f7 39. ♔f2+
- ♖h3 40. ♘f3 ♖h1 (40... g4 41. ♘fg5+-)
41. ♘c5+;

b) 37... ♖g3+? is worse 38. ♔f2 g4
39. ♘e4+;

c) 37... f5 38. ♔f2□ ♖e6 39. ♘f3□ ♖g6
40. ♘e5 ♖g7 and one straightforward
way to win is to help the d-pawn
41. ♘xd7 ♖xd7 42. ♘a4 b6 43. c4+-.

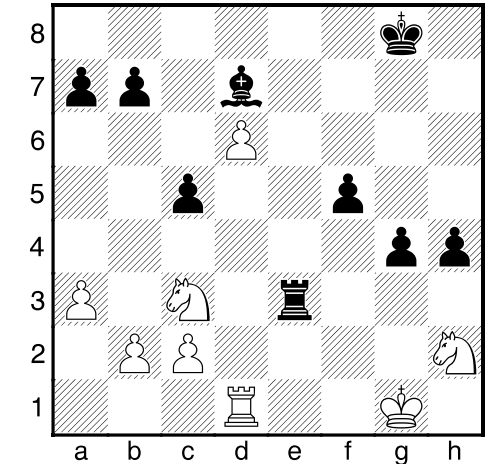
35... c5 36. ♖f2 g4 37. ♖f4



37... f5?

▷37... ♖e5≡ and ▷37... ♖e3+ 38. ♖xe3
♖xe3 39. ♔f2 ♖e5=.

**38. d6!+- ♖e3+ 39. ♖xe3
♖xe3**



Queens are off and the mating
attacks are over, but this wildly
unbalanced position is at least as
difficult as the complications triggered
by ... ♔xf2. One difficulty comes from
the absence of familiar patterns
to help select candidate moves. A
second difficulty comes from when
this position appeared: after a long
complex middlegame, the players are
both tired and short of time.

Keep that in mind as you weave
through the forest of "?"s

40. ♘f1?

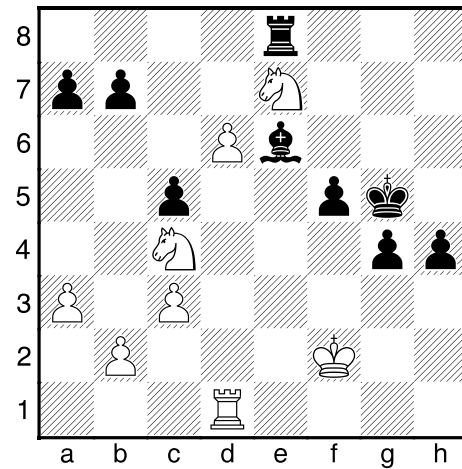
40. ♘d5□ forking the ♖ and
threatening to win the ♔ with ♘f6+,
e.g. 40... ♖e6 41. ♘e7+ ♔f7 42. ♘xf5
and the black pawns drop. 42... g3
43. ♘f3□+-.

**40... ♖e8 41. ♔f2 ♔f7 42. ♘d5
♖e4 43. c3 ♔g6 44. ♘d2 ♖e8
45. ♘e7+ ♔g5 46. ♘c4 ♔e6**



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47. ♖e5

47.d7 leads to a sequence that looks like it was composed: 47...♖d8□ saves the game only because c6 is covered. 48.♗e5□ h3□ 49.♖d6 ♗f6□ 50.♗7g6□ Defending the ♗s and threatening ♗g3 then ♗f4+-, which is an easy tactic to miss. 50...h2□ 51.♗g2□ g3□= 0.00. How can White untangle the ♗s while the ♖ prevents ...♗d5+?

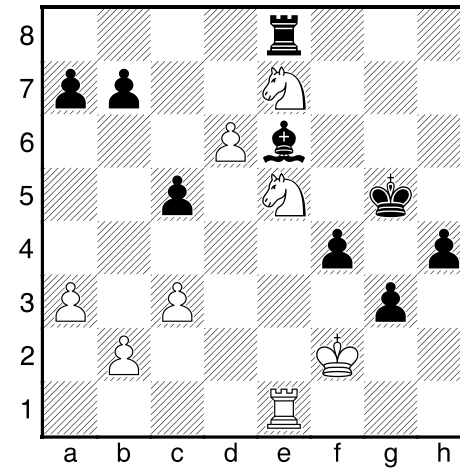
47...f4?

□47...♖d8=.

48. ♖e1?

48.d7! leads to something similar to what we saw in the note at move 47, but with the black pawns more vulnerable, a difference that costs the game: 48...♖d8 49.♖d6! ♗f6 50.♗7g6□ g3+ (50...b5 51.♗xg4+! (51.♗e2 h3) 51...♗xg6 52.♖xe6+ ♗f5 53.♖e8□ ♖xd7 54.♗f3□+-) 51.♗f3□ h3 52.♗xf4! ♗xe5 53.♖xe6++-.

48...g3+



49. ♗f3??

49.♗g1□= h3 50.♗f3+ ♗g4 51.♗e5+=.

49...h3?

49...♖d8□-+ 50.d7 ♖xd7!! 51.♗xd7 ♗g4+□ 52.♗e4 (52.♗g2 f3+) 52...♗xd7-+ down a ♖ for ♗♗♗, but they're advanced and supported by the ♗ and ♗.

50.b4?

50.c4□=.

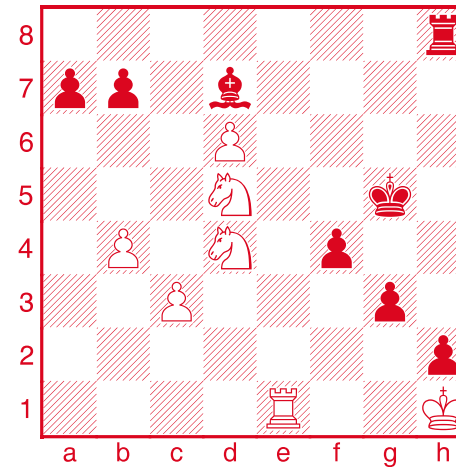
50...cxb4 51.axb4 h2?

51...♖d8□-+.

52. ♗g2□ ♖h8 53. ♗f3+ ♗f6

54. ♗d4 ♗h3+ 55. ♗h1 ♗d7

56. ♗d5+ ♗g5□=



Attack with ♖e5+ or defend with ♗f3?

57. ♖e5+??

Taking the ♖ off the back rank fatally gives Black an additional tactic: ...g2+ then ...h1=♖.

White had several ways to keep the balance, including ♗g2 and:

57.♗f3+ ♗f5□ (57...♗g4?? 58.♗e5+ ♗h3 59.♗xf4+□+-) 58.c4 (58.♖e5+?? ♗g4 59.♗e1 ♗c6 60.d7 ♗xd5+ 61.♖xd5 f3□-+) 58...♖h6 59.c5. A tough position to judge. There are blunders at every branch, but the computer insists it's equal; e.g. 59...a6 (59...♗c6?? 60.♗e7+□ ♗g4 61.♗xc6□ ♗xf3 62.♗e5+! ♗f2 63.♗d3+□+- (63.♗g4+?? ♗xe1 64.♗xh6 ♗f1-+) 63...♗f3 64.♗xf4! ♗xf4 65.d7□+-) 60.♗d4+ (60.♗b6?? ♗c6-+) 60...♗g5 with an absurdly perfectly balanced position.

57...♗g4□-+ 58. ♗f6+

58.♖e1 ♖h5! setting up ...♗h3. 59.c4 (59.♗f6+ ♗h3-+) 59...♖xd5! 60.cxd5 ♗h3 61.♖e2 ♗g4□-+ e.g. 62.d7 (62.♖d2 f3-+) 62...♗xe2 63.d8♖ g2#.

58...♗h3 59. ♖g5 f3! 60. ♗xf3 ♗c6□

0-1

Marchand, Calix (2237) Fillmore, Louis (1881)

D00

Bluenose op Halifax CAN (3),
22.02.2025

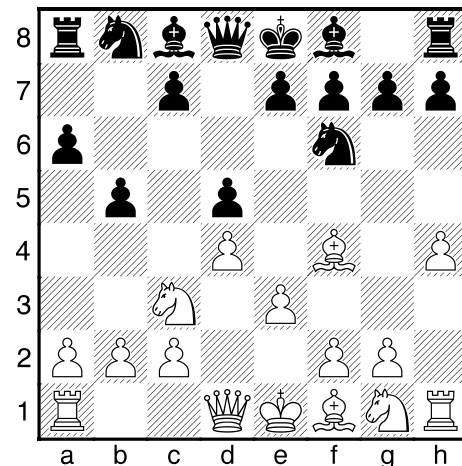
Notes: John Upper

Calix Marchand won the **2025 Bluenose Open** with a perfect 5/5.

This was the start of a very busy and successful year for the Halifax native: in 2025 he competed in **176 CFC-rated games over 25 events and earned the FM title.**

At the NAYCC in Kingston he defeated the leader in the final round to tie for first in the U14 and won on TB, securing a direct FM title!

1.d4 ♠f6 **2.♠c3** d5 **3.♠f4** a6
4.e3 b5!? **5.h4!?**



Black's quick queenside expansion

has scored well against the Jobava. White's h4 is not the most common, but makes good sense: Black is not going to castle long, so the h-pawn push anticipates a future attack.

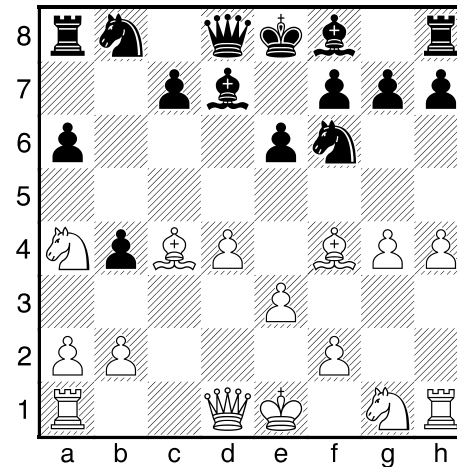
5...e6

5...h5 6.♠f3± e6 7.♠d3 (7.a4! b4 8.♠e2±) 7...♠b7 8.♠e2 c5 9.c3!±
Erigaisi,A (2628)–Carlsen,M (2834)
Wch Rapid Almaty, 2022.

6.g4 b4!=

6...♠b4 7.g5 ♠e4 8.♠ge2± **Erigaisi,A (2777)–Povshednyi,I (2291)** Titled Tuesday, 2025.

7.♠a4 ♠d7 **8.c4** dxc4
9.♠xc4



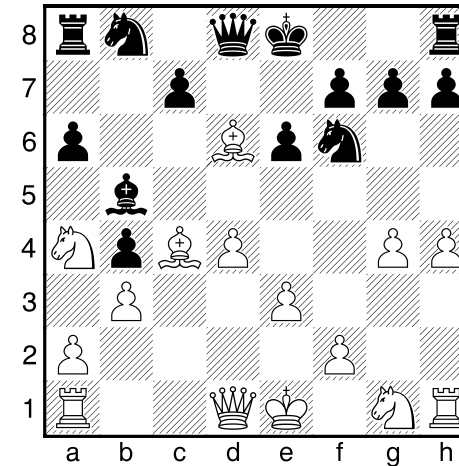
9...♠b5!!=

Nice. Taking on b5 would hit the ♠a4 and open the a-file for Black. Not taking lets Black fight for the light squares and gets some space to complete development.

In the Mordor championship later that

year, the GM playing Black did worse with: 9...♠c6 10.♠f3 ♠xg4 11.h5 ♠d6 12.♠g1 ♠xf4 13.♠xg4 ♠h6 14.♠e5±
Vetokhin,S (2569)–Malakhov,V (2643) RUS–ch Moscow, 2025.

10.b3 ♠d6 **11.♠xd6**



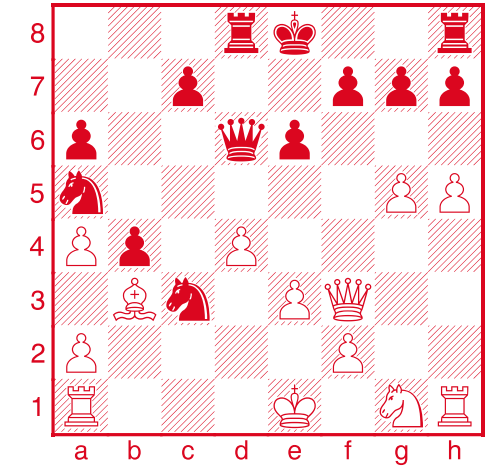
11...♠xd6

11...cxd6 looks good, though I can see why someone might not like the look of the doubled d-pawns after 12.g5 ♠d5 13.♠xd5 exd5 But SF18 rates this as a bit better for Black, since White probably shouldn't take d5 with the ♠ 14.♠f3 ♠c6!∞ 15.♠xd5? ♠e7! and ...♠c6 or ...♠c8-c2 give Black a lot for the pawn.

12.g5 ♠d5 **13.♠e2** ♠xa4
14.bxa4 ♠c3 **15.♠f3** ♠c6
16.♠b3 ♠d8 **17.h5** ♠a5

Very unbalanced: White and Black attack on opposite sides while both ♠s sit where they started. SF18 says 0.00 on White's top 4 moves. 17...♠xd4? doesn't work 18.exd4 ♠xd4 19.♠e2! (19.♠f1+- is simpler.)

19...♠xe2 20.♠d1□+.-.



What happens if White pushes g6 or h6?

18.g6!?

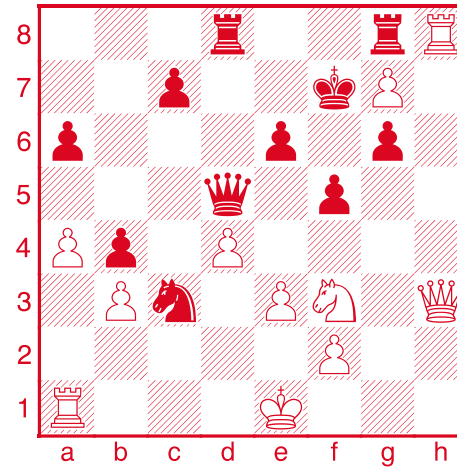
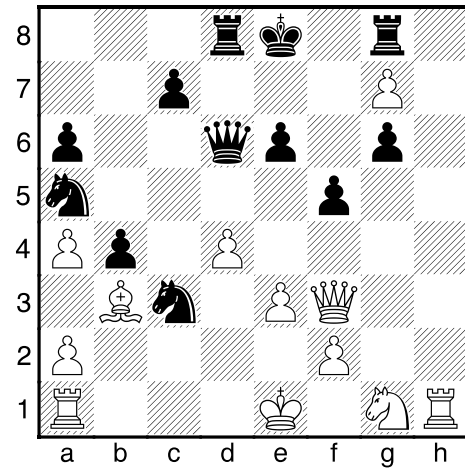
SF18 rates it 0.00 after g6, h6, and ♠e2, but the game move challenges Black to find some non-standard moves.

18.h6!? ♠xb3 19.hxg7 ♠g8 20.axb3 (20.♠xh7?? ♠xd4□+.) 20...♠xg7 21.♠e2 (21.♠f6? ♠g6± (or 21...♠d5!!)) 21...c5∞.

18...0-0??

♠18...hxg6! 19.hxg6 looks bad, but Black is OK 19...♠f8□∞ e.g. 20.♠h8!? ♠e7;

♠18...f5 19.h6!? gotta be ready for this one too! 19...hxg6□ 20.hxg7 ♠g8□∞ *Analysis Diagram*



24...Kxg7? doesn't get mated, but any check to keep the h-file and White's continuing attack wins.

24...Rhx8 saves the game! It's hard to imagine this move in advance, but you'd probably find it by process of elimination if you got to this position. OTOH, getting to this position might require you to see this as a saving possibility. 25.gxh8 Rhx8 26.Rhx8 Rxf3 and White can live long, but not prosper, with his two majors so

far from offering aide or comfort to the K. 27.Kf1! only draws. 27.Kb8!! would be winning, but it's not legal.

19.gxh7+ Kxh7
19...Kh8 20.h6+-.

20.h6+-

A lower-rated player might feel like he's being pushed off the board here; but the computer isn't lower-rated than anyone/anything, and it says this is equal; e.g. 21.Rh8 the most direct. (21.Kg2 hits g6 and frees a square for Qf3-e5. 21...Qxb3!? (21...Qf7??? 22.Qf3+-; 21...Rgx7 is simpler.) 22.Qxg6+ Kd7 23.axb3 Qc8) 21...Qf7 (21...Qd7!?) 22.Kh3 defends h8 and threatens Qf3-e5 22...Qxb3 enables Black to get play against the white K on the light squares. (22...Rgx7? 23.Qf3) 23.axb3 (23.Qf3? Qxa1 24.Qe5+ Kxe5+- due to the mate on d1.) 23...Kd5! 24.Qf3

Analysis Diagram

Calix Marchand

**2025 North American
Youth Championship
Kingston**

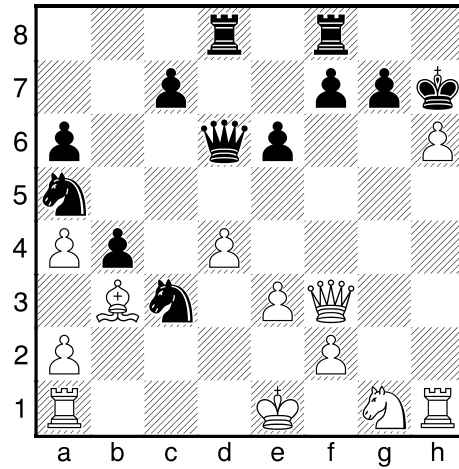
*Lost this final round game to NAYCC blitz
champ FM Stephen Willy, but won the NAYCC
U14 on TB to get a direct FM title.*

Calix also won the 2025 Canadian Open blitz.





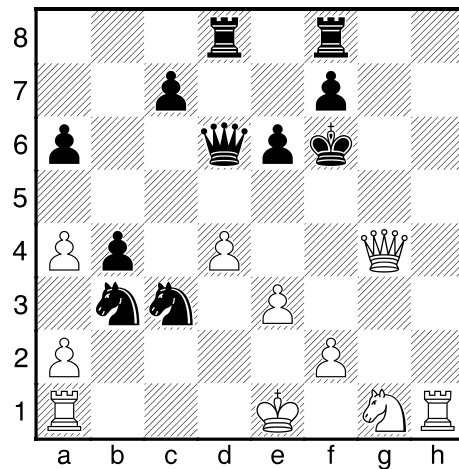
Chess Canada Across Canada



20...Nxb3

20...g6 21. Bf6 Q+ Rg8 22. Bxf7+-.

21.hxg7+ Qxg7 22.Qg4+ Qf6



White's position is winning, but winning the game still requires finding several "only moves".

Which he does...

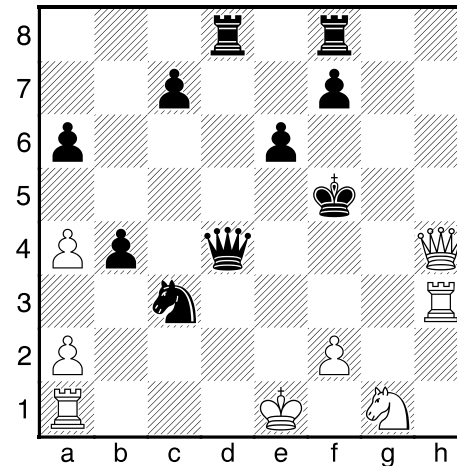
23.Qh4+ Q

Keeps the Q on the wrong side of his pawn fence. 23.axb3? Qe7=.

23...Qf5 24.Bh3! Nxd4!

Stops Bf3 and creates an escape square on e5; a good try, but it's not enough.

25.exd4 Qxd4



26.Bf3+ Q

26.Nf3?? Qd1+ 27.Bxd1 Bxd1# it could happen.

26...Qe5 27.Qg3+ Q

27.Qg3+ Qd5 28.Bd3 wins the Q.

1-0

Shi, Evan (1731) Dionne, Frederick (1302)

D00

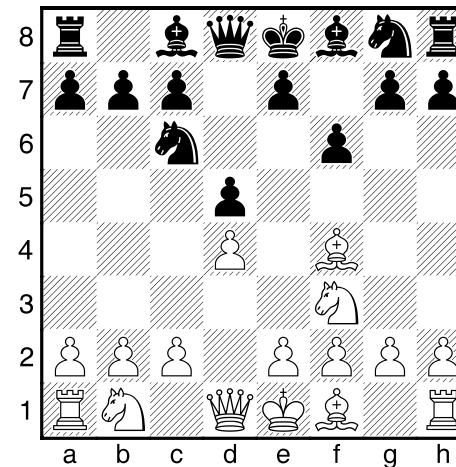
Ste-Foy CC '4' Sainte-Foy CAN (3),
03.03.2025

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 d5 2.Qg5 f6

The best-scoring move against the "pseudo-Trompowsky"

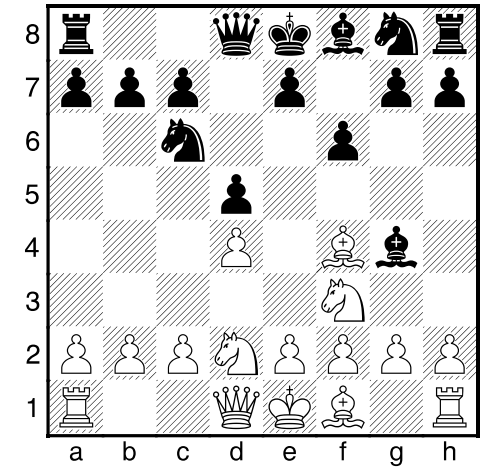
3.Qf4 Nc6! 4.Nf3



4...Qg4

4...g5! 5.Qg3∞ is the computer's choice, but you have to assume that anyone who plays the pseudo-Tromp with White will have much more experience than Black with this very non-standard pawn structure.

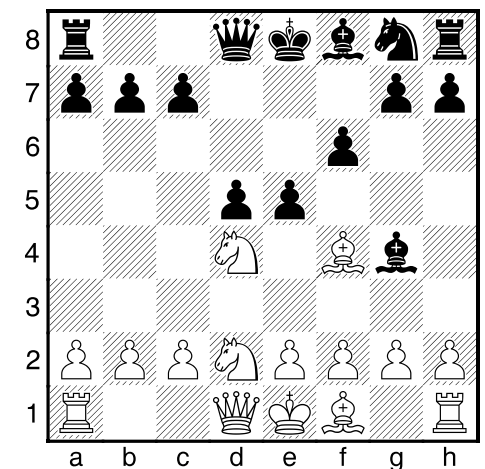
5.Nbd2



The oldest game in Megabase was from the **1975 Canadian Championship**: 5.Qg3 avoiding the ...Nxd4 fork trick we see in the main game, 5...e5 6.dxe5 Qxf3 7.exf3 Nxe5! 8.Qe2 Qd6 9.0-0 Ne7± **Coudari,C-Berry,J, Calgary 1975.**

Most GM-games get this position from a London with *White* to move — having saved a tempo on Qc1-f4 instead of Qc1-g5-f4. That extra tempo makes a difference, which Black tries to exploit right away:

5...Nxd4!? 6.Nxd4 e5





Chess Canada Across Canada

7.f3!?

7.h3! has the same idea as f2-f3 — nudging the ♗g4 so ♕e6 is possible — but does so without blocking the f3 square.

After 7.h3:

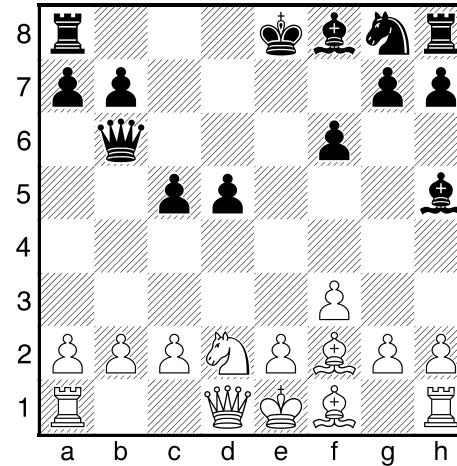
7...♗d7? controls e6 and gets the piece back, but White gets a huge development and structural advantage after 8.e4!! e.g. 8...dxe4 9.♖xe4! exf4 10.♗f3! and 0-0 with a winning advantage. Black can't escape with 10...c5 11.♖b5 ♗a5+ 12.b4!!+-;

7...♗h5! 8.♖e6!? (8.♖2b3 c6∞ is SF18's top line.) 8...♗e7 9.♖xf8 exf4 10.♖xh7 ♗xh7 11.c3 0-0-0?! (♖11...g5 defends f4 and improves the ♗h7.) 12.♗a4! ♖b8 13.♗xf4 g5 14.♗d4∞ Hoffmann,A (2185)–Yagupov,I (2232) Titled Tuesday, 2024.

7...♗h5 8.♗e3

8.♖e6 doesn't lose, but after something like 8...♗e7 9.♖xf8 exf4 10.♖xh7 ♗xh7 it's hard to imagine how White can comfortably develop with the black f4-pawn cramping the kingside. Trying to clear it away now with 11.g3? ♗e5! just makes things worse.

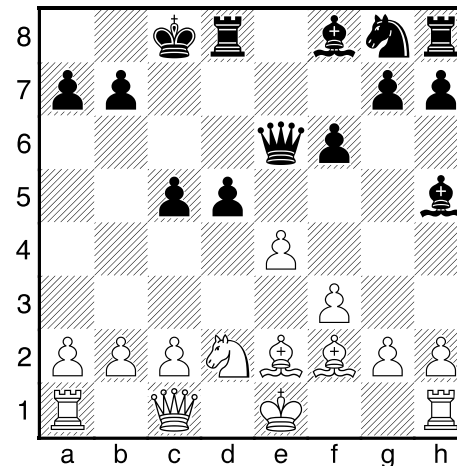
8...exd4 9.♗xd4 c5 10.♗f2 ♗b6



11.♗c1

♖11.e4 dxe4 12.♖xe4 Black can't exploit the d-file or White's slightly exposed ♖: 12...♖d8 (12...f5 13.♗d5!+- hits all the weak spots and prepares for 0-0 12...♗b4+ 13.c3 ♗xb2 14.♗a4+-) 13.♗d3! (13.♗e2+-) 13...♗a5+ unpinning the c-pawn. 14.♖c3! c4 15.♗e2+- unpins the ♗ and wins c4, with a material and development advantage.

11...0-0-0 12.e4 ♗e6 13.♗e2



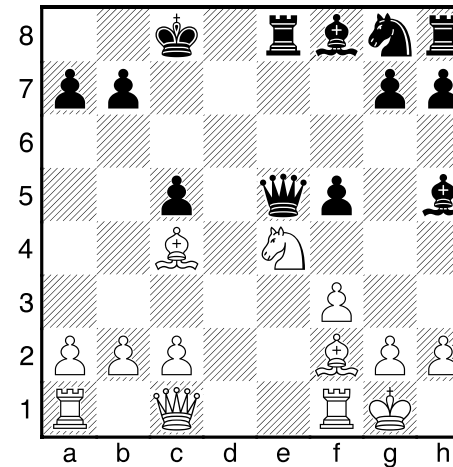
13...♗e8?

If Black could replace ...c5 with ...♗d6 he would be better. But the weakened dark squares and slower development make a big difference, and SF rates this a losing blunder, preferring to sac c5 for development with: 13...♖e7! 14.♗xc5 ♖g6! (14...♖c6±) 15.♗xf8 ♗hxf8! ♖16.g4 dxe4 17.♖xe4 f5!+-.

14.0-0 dxe4

14...♖e7 15.♗xc5± or 15.b4!!.

15.♗c4! ♗e5 16.♖xe4 f5



17.♗g3!!

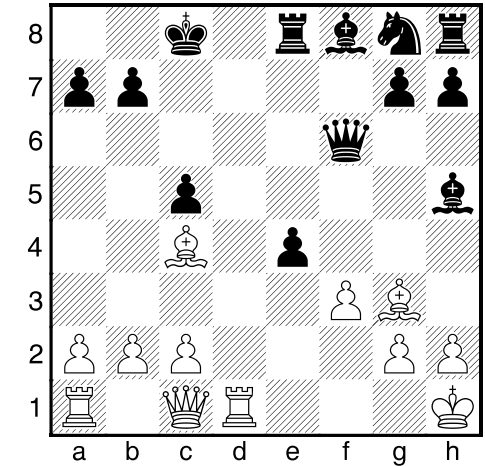
A piece sac to own the dark squares.

17...♗d4+ 18.♖h1 fxe4

18...♗xc4? 19.♗f4+- ♖e7 20.♖d6+ simply wins the ♗; or you could settle for #5 beginning with ♗b8+.

19.♖d1! ♗f6

19...♗xc4 20.♗f4±+- there's no good way to defend c7 and b8.



20.♗b5!

20.♗d2 also wins, e.g. 20...♖d8 21.♗e6+!

20...♖e6

20...♖d8 stops mate, but trading one of Black's few active pieces doesn't save the game: White is down a piece but is still attacking with everything, while the black ♖ and ♖ are useless. 21.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 (21...♖xd8 22.♗d2+ ♗d4 23.♗a5+-) 22.♗f4 ♗d6 There are no good ways to defend b8 and c7, so Black offers to buy off the attack with a piece (22...♗d6 23.♗f5+) 23.♗f5+! no sale! 23...♖b8 24.♖d1±+-.

21.♗d7+ ♖d8 22.♗xe6+ ♖e7 23.♗b3 ♗xf3

If ...♗c5 were legal, White could still go ♖f1.

24.gxf3 ♗xf3+ 25.♖g1 g6 26.♖f1 ♗g4 27.♗d2

1-0

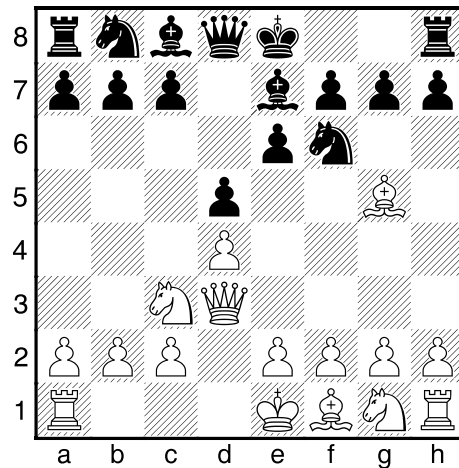
Savard, Alexandre (1731) Gagne, Louis (1213)

D00

Montcalm 4 2024-25 Quebec CAN
(1), 09.01.2025

Notes: John Upper

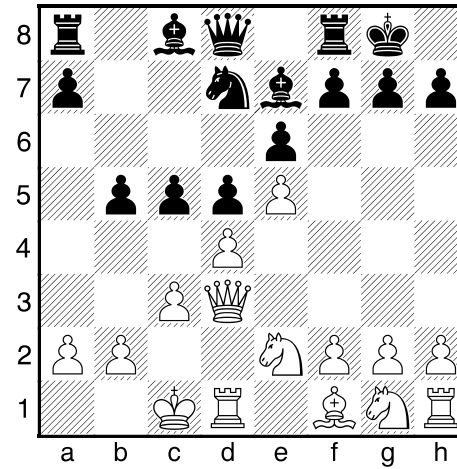
1.d4 e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♙d3 ♘f6
4.♙g5 ♙e7



White could have transposed to a French sideline with e2-e4 on any of the previous moves, with an even game. I'm surprised to see that computers already clearly prefer Black: SF18 - .5, and leela - .35.

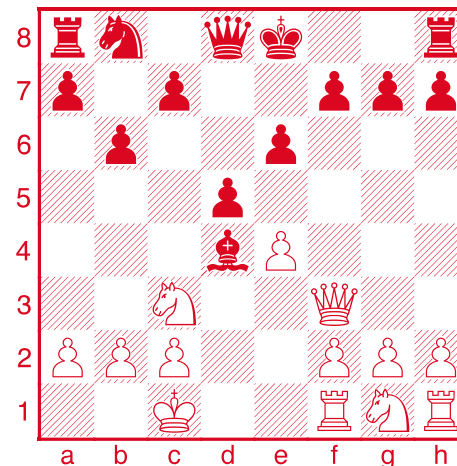
5.0-0-0 b6

5...♘bd7! 6.♙xf6 ♘xf6 7.e4 0-0!
Correctly judging the relative safety
of the two kings. 8.e5 ♘d7 9.♘ce2 c5
10.c3 b5!-+ *Analysis Diagram*



Black's play here is a model of how
to destroy White's vulnerable 000.
11.♘f3 (11.♙xb5 ♙b8 is even quicker.)
11...b4 12.♘f4 ♙a5 (12...c4) 13.♙b1
♙b8 14.c4!? ♙a6 15.♙c2 dxc4
16.♙xc4 ♙xc4 17.♙xc4 ♘b6 18.♙c2
c4 19.♙d2 ♙fc8 20.h4 b3 21.axb3
cxb3 22.♙xb3 ♘c4 Barria Zuniga,D
(2341)-Bluebaum,M (2670) Titled
Tuesday, 2021.

6.♙xf6!= ♙xf6 7.e4 ♙a6
8.♙f3 ♙xf1 9.♙xf1 ♙xd4

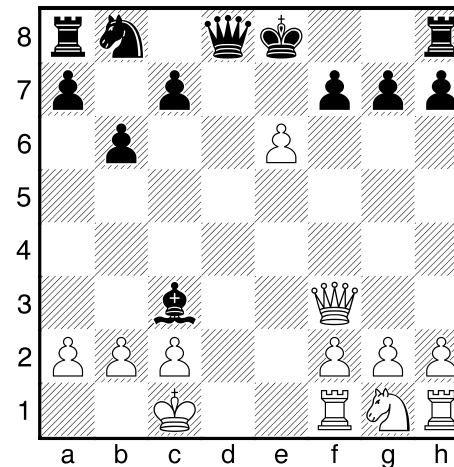


What happens if 10.exd5 ♙xc3?

10.exd5 ♙xc3! 11.dxe6??

Threatens mate on f7 and hits the
♙a8. It looks winning... but it loses!

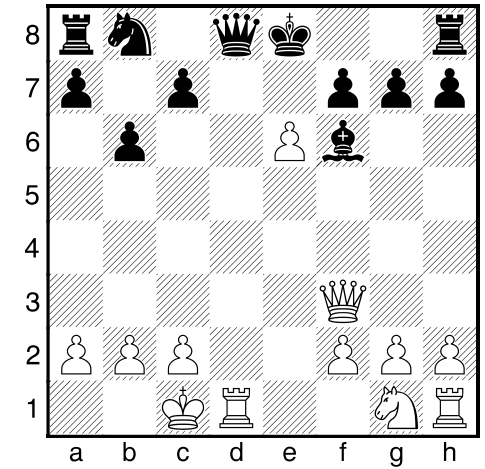
11.♙xc3 ♙xd5 12.♙xg7 ♙f8= it's not
quite over: White can make threats,
but they just burn out to equality:
13.♙d1 ♙xa2= (13...♙c6? leaves
Black too far behind to catch up; e.g.
14.♘f3 ♘d7 15.♙d2 0-0-0 16.♙hd1+- with
immediate threats on d7 and h7 and no
counterplay for Black.) 14.♙d8+ ♙xd8
15.♙xf8+ ♙d7 16.♙xf7+ ♙c8=.



11...♙f6?

11...♙g5+♙-+ and we would see a
500+ point upset! 12.♙b1 ♙b5+-
threatening mate on b2 and the ♙f1
and freeing d8 for the ♙, so 13.♙xf7+
doesn't help 13...♙d8 14.e7+ ♙c8=

12.♙d1



White is winning and gave Black no
more chances.

12.♙xa8 wins too, though I can
understand that 12...♙xb2+!?
13.♙xb2 ♙d4+ looks like it might be
trouble; though White can still choose
between 14.♙b3 and 14.c3, both
winning.

12...♙e7

12...♙xb2+!? 13.♙b1♙+-, not
13.♙xb2? ♙f6+± this check stops the
mate and saves the ♙.

13.♙xa8 0-0 14.exf7+-
♙xf7 15.♙d5+ ♙g6 16.♘f3
h6 17.♙he1 ♙b4 18.c3 ♙d8
19.cxb4 ♙xd5 20.♙xd5 c6
21.♙d6 ♘a6 22.a3 ♘c7
23.♙xc6 ♘d5 24.g3 ♙h5
25.h3 ♘e7 26.♙xf6 gxf6
27.♙xe7

1-0





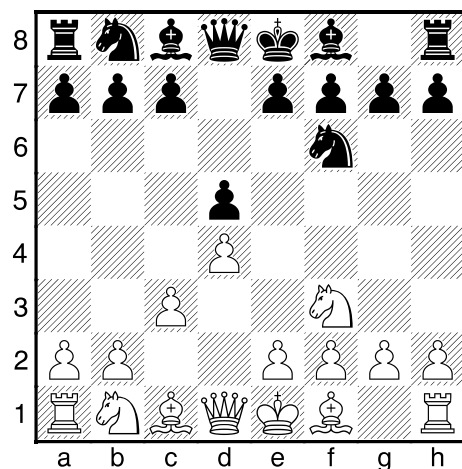
Wang, Derek (2223) Jaferian, Koosha (2348)

D02

RA December op Ottawa CAN (2.4),
07.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c3



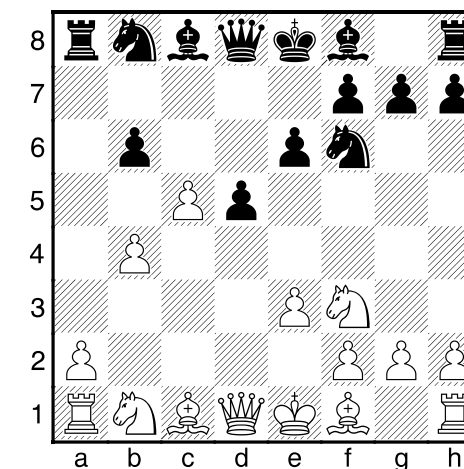
This was recommended by the prolific IM [Cyrus Lakdawala](#) in his book *Play the London System* (Everyman, 2011), where he said it was "Our refutation of Black's refutation!". The idea is to avoid equalizing lines where Black goes ...c5 and ...♖b6 and can play ...c4 against ♖b3 (since ♖xb6 axb6 is both strong and easy to play for Black).

It looks timid, but even if Black plays the most aggressive line — as Koosha does here — it scores no worse than the London.



156

3...c5 4.dxc5 e6 5.b4 a5 6.e3
axb4 7.cxb4 b6[∞]



Reversed Noteboom

8.♗b5+

The main move and best-scoring:
White prepares to castle and forces
off a pair of minors, expecting that
Black's center will be less useful.

**8...♗d7 9.♗xd7+ ♘bxd7
10.a4**

10.c6? ♗xb4+ this check is why Black
must hurry to break White's pawns;
10.0-0 bxc5 11.b5 transposes.

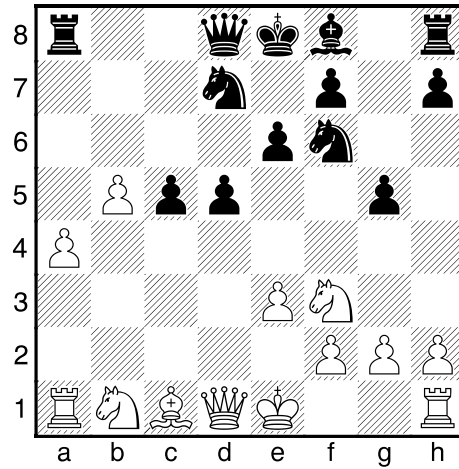
10...bxc5 11.b5 g5!

**FM
Koosha Jaferian**

**2026 Canadian Zonal
Montreal**



Chess Canada Across Canada



A computer-approved move first played by [Wesley So](#) in 2021, recently enough that all previous books on the London/Colle systems do not mention it.

Obviously, the idea is to dislodge the ♖f3, which might serve as a prelude to a kingside attack, but will definitely reduce White's control over d4 and leave his remaining minor pieces congested and in the path of Black's center pawns.

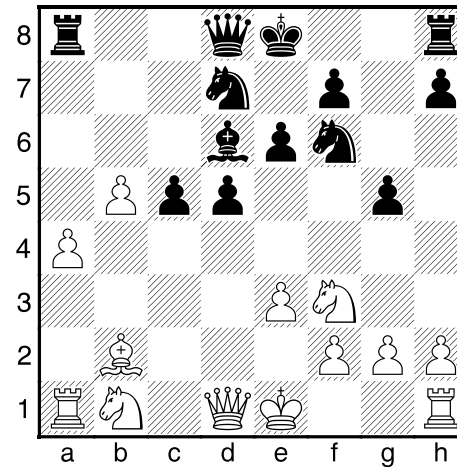
11...♙d6 is natural and has long been the main move (as is ♙d3 in the Noteboom proper): the ♙ points at the opponent's ♖ and can go to c7 to restrict the queenside passers. Typically, Black castles short and tries to push in the center, with either ...c4 or ...e5, while White tries to make it to an endgame and be prepared to counter ...e5 with e3-e4.

12.♙b2

12.♙xg5? ♖g8 gets g2 and leaves the White ♖ with no long-term home.

12...♙d6

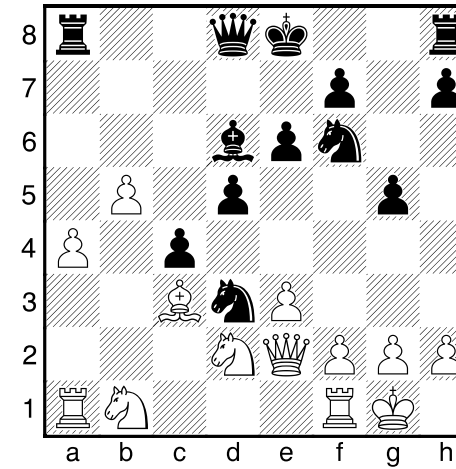
12...g4?! 13.♙e5 ♙xe5 14.♙xe5 ♙d6 15.♙xd6?! (♙15.♙b2 White keeps two minors, which may be ideal for restraining Black's center, and since Black can't support the center if he goes ...e5 he is still tied down to the ♙f6.) 15...♙xd6 16.0-0 ♙e7 17.♙d2 c4 18.♙c2 ♖hc8 19.a5 ♙c5!∞ [Aravindh,C \(2711\)](#)–[Sarana,A \(2661\)](#) EU-Cup, Rhodes 2025.



13.♙fd2

13.♙e2 g4 14.♙fd2 ♙b8 15.e4 ♙e5!? 16.♙c3? 0-0! 17.g3 c4! threatens to roll White with ...d4 18.exd5? exd5-+ 19.0-0 d4?! (♙19...♖e8-+) 20.♙ce4 (20.♙d5!! gives a piece for two pawns by creating tactics with ♙e7-c6.) 20...c3 21.♙xf6+ ♙xf6 22.♙a3 ♖e8-+ [Bluebaum,M \(2660\)](#)–[Preotu,R \(2483\)](#) ChessKid blitz, 2023.

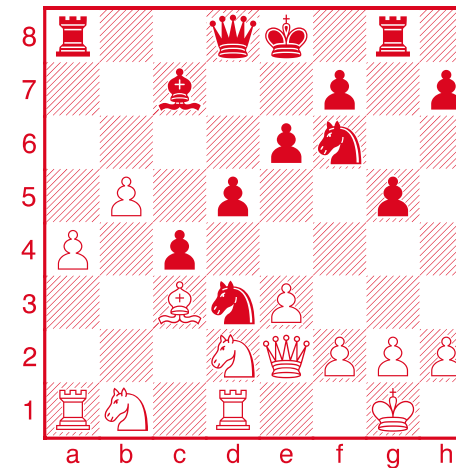
13...♙e5 14.♙e2 c4 15.0-0 ♙d3 16.♙c3



16...♙c7

16...♙b8 enables ...♙c7, which can be tactically useful in some lines, but softens the queenside dark-square blockade.

17.♖d1 ♖g8?



Stockfish hates Black's last move — rating it -2 worse than its top choice, the hard-to-play 17...0-0!∞ — but it's bad only if White plays one move...

18.♙f3?

Not this one.

18.♙a3□ doesn't just develop the ♙ and connect the ♖s, it threatens ♙axc4, destroying Black's center and leaving him — at best — with badly coordinated pieces and an exposed ♖. Black has options, none of them good:

a) 18...♖xa4 grabs a pawn, but now we see White's real threat: 19.♙axc4 ♖xa1 20.♙xa1□ Keeps the ♖ x-ray on the ♙d8. 20...dxc4 21.♙xc4+- the ♙d3 drops and Black's center is gone;

b) 18...♙d6 is a one move threat. with a one move defence: 19.g3+- the ♙f6 hangs and the ♙ is still on the d-file;

c) 18...♙e7 gets the ♙ off the line of the ♖ while defending the ♙f6, but weakens the piece blockade of the queenside passers. 19.♙axc4! dxc4 20.♙xc4 ♙c5 21.b6+-;

d) 18...♙c5 19.♙axc4! (19.♙dxc4!?) 19...dxc4 20.♙xc4 ♙fd7 (20...♙e7 21.b6 transposes to the previous variation.) 21.a5+-;

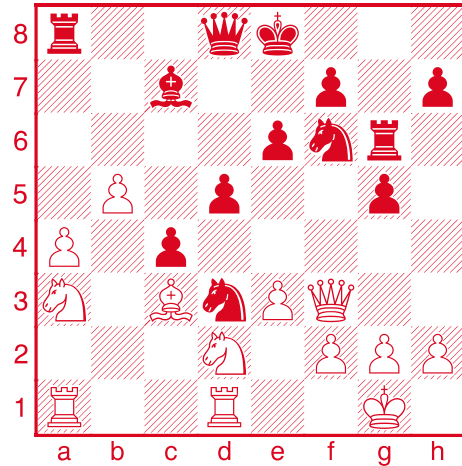
e) 18...♙e4!? 19.♙xe4□ dxe4 20.♙xc4 ♙xh2+ keeps material equality, but with terrible coordination 21.♙xh2 ♙c7+ 22.♙g1 (22.♙e5! ♙xe5 23.♙xe5+-) 22...♙xc4 23.♙d4 ♖xa4?! (23...e5 24.♙g4!!) 24.♖xa4 ♙xa4 25.♖a1+-.



Chess Canada Across Canada

18...♖g6
Defends ♖f6, and... !?

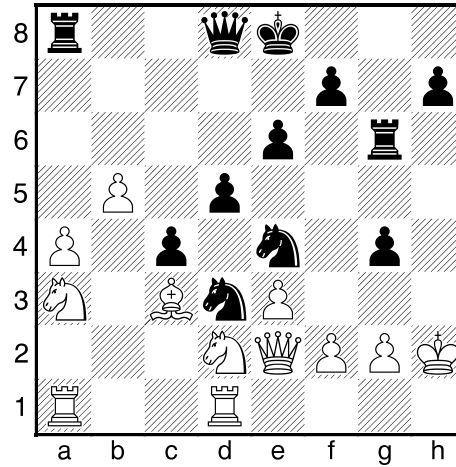
19.♘a3?
One move ago this was winning.
Now it loses! (Hint: it leaves the ♔c3
undefended.) ♞19.♙e2♞.



19...g4!-+
19...♖xa4?! 20.♘axc4 ♖xa1 21.♔xa1
keeping the ♖d1 for the pin, 21...dxc4
22.♘xc4 ♙d5□∞ one forcing line
goes: 23.♔xf6 ♙xc4 24.♙a8+ ♔d7
25.♖xd3+ ♙xd3 26.♙c6+ ♔c8
27.♙a8+ ♔d7 28.♙c6+=;

19...♔xh2+ also wins, but the lines
are less direct: 20.♔xh2 g4 21.♔xf6
(21.♙g3 ♘h5-+ is a very unusual ♙
trap.) 21...gxf3□ 22.♔xd8 ♖xg2+□
23.♔h3 ♘xf2+□-+ and ...♘xd1 with a
winning endgame.

20.♙e2 ♔xh2+! 21.♔xh2
♘e4



The undefended ♔c3 and the fork
on e2/d1 gives Black a tempo for
...♙h4+. It's hopeless, so White lets
him play it out to mate:

22.♘xe4 ♙h4+ 23.♔g1 ♖h6
24.♘g3 ♙h2+ 25.♔f1 ♙h1+
26.♘xh1 ♖xh1#

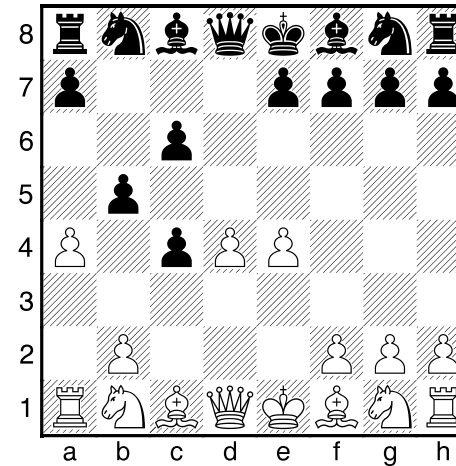
0-1

Haessel, Dale (2060)
Wu, Nathan (2119)

D20
Banff op Banff (5.10), 11.11.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 b5
4.a4 c6



Black is up a pawn but has played
only queenside pawn moves. White
usually plays to crack the queenside
structure on b5 with the ♔f1.

5.b3
Black's response is the reason this
is almost never played by the top
players. Both ♔c3 and axb5 are more
usual, and score better.

5.axb5 cxb5 6.♘c3 a6!? was an
enterprising sac (6...♙b6 7.♙h5!?)
7.♘xb5 axb5 8.♖xa8 ♔b7 9.♖a2
e6 (9...♔xe4? 10.b3±) 10.f3 (10.♘e2!
♔xe4 11.b3±) 10...♘c6 11.♘e2 ♔b4+
12.♔d2= **Hambleton,A (2446)**–
Ganguly,S (2625) Edmonton, 2015.

5...e5! 6.dxe5

**in case not everyone
is Gertrude Stein...**

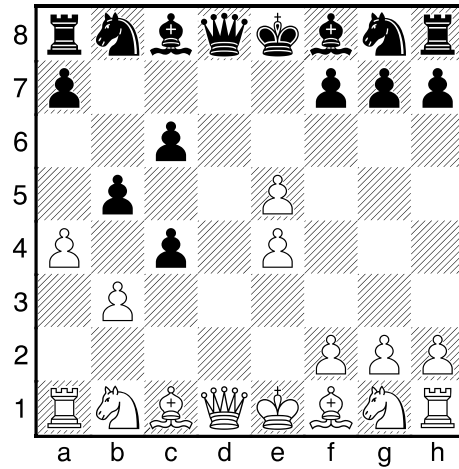
... maybe rotate the tables 90 degrees?



Banff Open
the room with The View



Chess Canada Across Canada



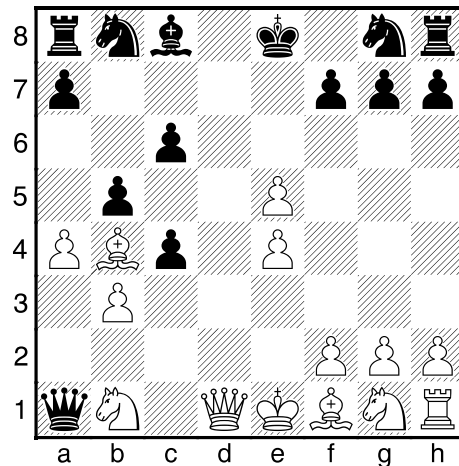
6...♙b4+!

6...♙xd1+ 7.♙xd1 ♘d7 8.♙b2 ♘c5
9.♘d2= Siddeley, H (1923)–Wu, N
(2083) CAN–ch Toronto, 2025.

7.♙d2 ♙d4?!

Forks a1 and e4 and threatens ...c3, but it forces White to play a good exchange "sac" which grabs the dark-squares and increases his development advantage.

8.♙xb4! ♙xa1



9.e6?

Opens the long diagonal so ♙c3 is a threat, and attacks some squares around the black ♙ if the pawn survives.

9.♘f3 ♙± develops and defends e5. 9...♙g4 (9...♙b2 hopes to escape with ...♙xb3, but 10.♘d4!+- locks her down and keeps a huge development and space advantage.) 10.♙e2 ♙xf3 11.♙xf3 ♙xe5 12.0-0 White is down a pawn and an exchange, but way ahead in development; at 23 ply SF18 rates this +2 on multiple continuations.

9...f6

Blocks the c3–g7 diagonal, but the surviving e6–pawn is now an attacker.

Black can hope for more with 9...♘f6 when the game line fails 10.♙d6?? ♙xb1+ 11.♙e2 ♙xe4+ 12.♙d2 ♙xe6+-.

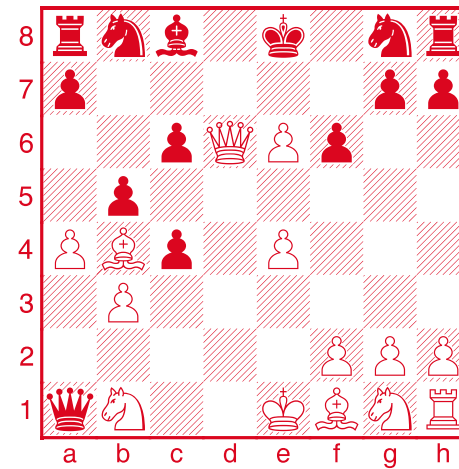
Instead, after 9...♘f6 White does better with 10.exf7+ ♙xf7 11.♘f3 ♙e8∞;

Fascinatingly — *if you like chess* — the computer says Black can give up both g7 and the ♖h8 with: 9...♙xe6!? 10.♙c3 ♙a2 11.♙xg7 ♘d7 12.♙xh8 0-0-0∞ Black is down a piece and has no way to trap the ♙f8, but SF18 says 0.00, Leela slightly prefers White after ♙c1.

10.♙d6

The mate threat on f8 keeps a draw in hand.

White can try for more with 10.♘f3 ♙xe6 11.♘d4!C.



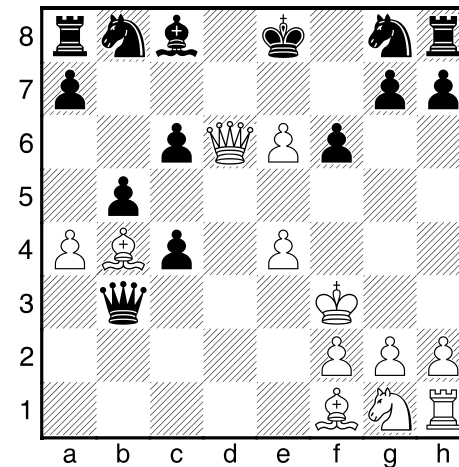
Can the white ♙ escape the checks by running up the board?

10...♙xb1+ ♙= 11.♙d2 ♙

11.♙e2?? ♙xe4+ 12.♙d1 ♙d5+-.

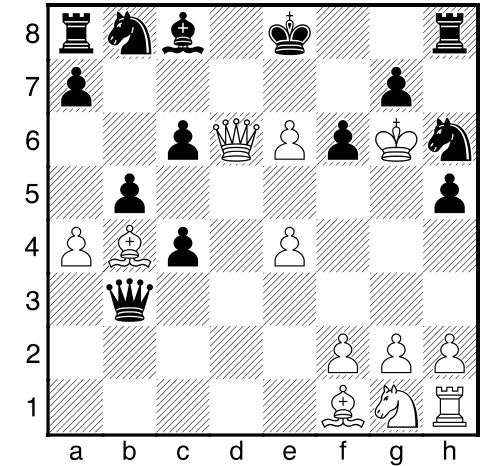
11...♙b2+ 12.♙d1 ♙=

The answer is "no"; the ♙ cannot escape: 12.♙e1? loses, but the win is not at all trivial: 12...♙c1+ ♙ 13.♙e2 ♙c2+ ♙ 14.♙f3 or ...♙xe4+ defends. 14...♙xb3+! *Analysis Diagram*



15.♙f4 g5+ 16.♙f5 ♘d7!! stops mate on f8, and defends f6 so Black threatens ...♘h6#, and if 17.exd7+ ♙xd7+ is a winning check.

15.♙g4 h5+ ♙ 16.♙f5 ♘h6+ (16...g6+ is similar.) 17.♙g6 *Analysis Diagram*



Safe at last...?

17...♙xb4 ♙ 18.♙xb4 ♙xe6 ♙+-.

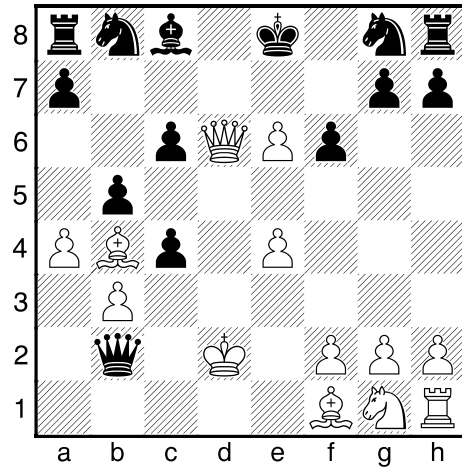
No, actually, not safe at all!

In several of the variations you have to evaluate a position like this. Material is about level, but the white ♙ has no way back — so Black is in no hurry — and Black has another ♘ and ♙ to create a mating net; e.g. 19.♙xg7 ♙g8+ (even 19...♘g4 wins!) 20.♙xf6 (20.♙xh6 ♙f7 and ...♙h8 mates.) 20...♘d7+ 21.♙xe6 ♙g6#.

12...♙b1+ 13.♙d2 ♙b2+



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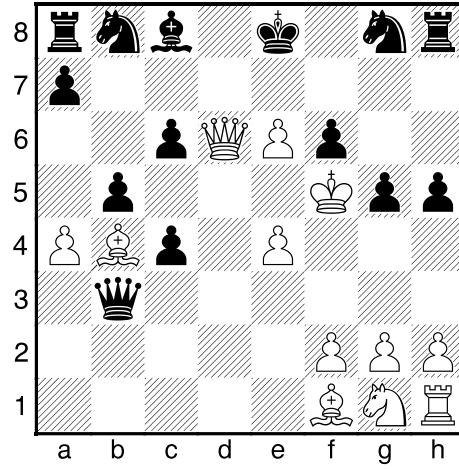


It's equal, but the white ♖ decides to go for a stroll...

Clearly I have been watching too much bullet chess, since my first suspicion was that Black let his clock run down to 5 seconds before making this last move and this induced White to gamble... but the timestamps on the lichess feed show otherwise: both sides were using their time to try to figure out this mess.

14. ♖e3?? c5?

14... ♖xb3+ ♖-+ 15. ♖f4 (15. ♖d2 c3+ ♖ 16. ♖xc3 ♖xe6-+) 15... g5+ 16. ♖g4 (16. ♖f5 ♖d7!! stops mate on f8, defends f6 so Black threatens ... ♖h6#, and transposes to the note at move 12.) 16... h5+ 17. ♖f5 Analysis Diagram



17... ♖d7? doesn't work now that Black's h-pawn has given up control of g6. 18. ♖g6 ♖-+ (not 18. exd7+? ♖xd7+ 19. ♖g6 0-0-0-+ e.g. 20. ♖a5 ♖e8-+);



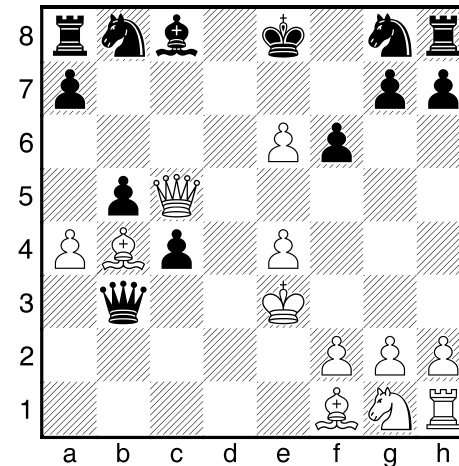
photo: Banff facebook

17... ♖xb4 ♖-+ 18. ♖xb4 ♖a6 (18... ♖h6 is similar.) 19. ♖d6 (19. ♖d2 ♖h6 (19... ♖xe6+! 20. ♖xe6 ♖c5-+ and ♖ checks win the ♖.) 20. e5 ♖e7+ 21. ♖e4 ♖c5+ 22. ♖f3 ♖xe6-+) 19... ♖h6 ♖ White can choose to save his king or queen, but not both. 20. e5 saves the king (20. ♖xc6+ makes ... ♖e7+ deadlier. 20... ♖f8 21. ♖xa8 saves the queen, but 21... ♖e7#) 20... ♖e7+ 21. ♖e4 ♖xe6! 22. ♖xe6 f5-+.

15. ♖xc5 ♖=

15. ♖xc5?? allows Black to force off the ♖s after 15... ♖c3-+.

15... ♖xb3+ ♖



16. ♖d4??

16. ♖d2 ♖= and one side or the other will have to give a perpetual.

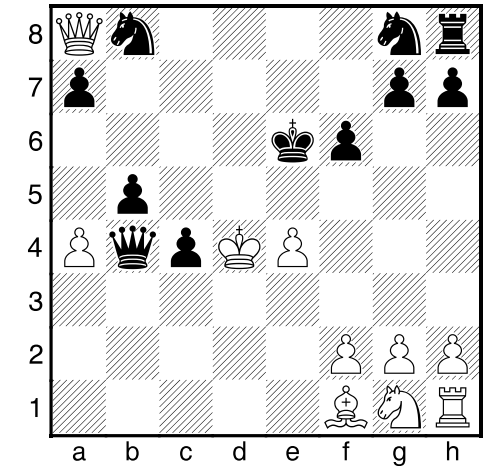
16... ♖xb4!-+

Oops!

17. ♖xc8+

17. ♖xb4 ♖c6-+.

17... ♖e7 18. ♖b7+ ♖xe6 19. ♖xa8



19... ♖d2+! 20. ♖c5 ♖e5

is the recorded move, but it must be a DGT error: stopping the clock *then* setting the ♖s on e5 and d4 tells the DGT software the game ended 0-1, but you have to stop the clock first!

Black has more than one quick way to mate:

20... ♖a6+ 21. ♖xb5 ♖b4+ and ... ♖b6#;

20... ♖d7+ 21. ♖c6 (21. ♖xb5 ♖b2+ 22. ♖xc4 ♖e5+ 23. ♖c5 ♖b6#) 21... ♖d6+ 22. ♖xb5 ♖c5+ 23. ♖a6 ♖b6#

0-1

Nathan Wu
Banff Open

Keleberda, Tymur (2445) Khodjimатов, Sherzod (2289)

D51

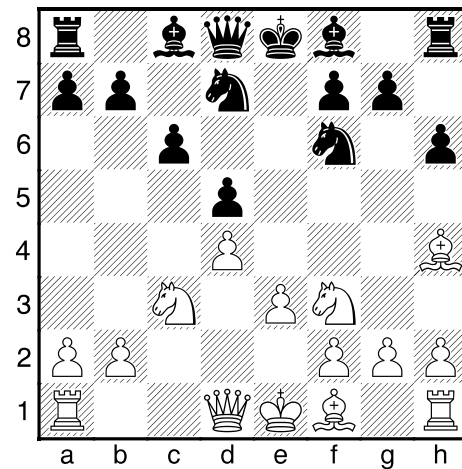
Alberta Closed Calgary (2.1),
29.03.2025

Notes: John Upper

Here is another of Tymur Keleberda's games; this one from the **2025 Alberta Closed**, a 6-player RR which he won with a perfect 5/5.

<https://www.chess.ca/en/ratings/t/?id=202505001&p=177565>

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.d4 ♘f6
4.♘c3 ♘bd7 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙h4
c6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.e3



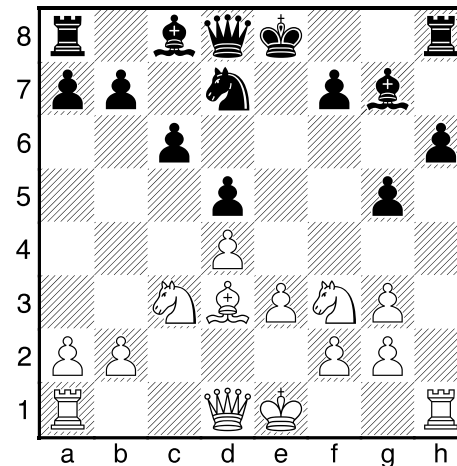
This position had been played for almost a century before anyone tried this next idea — a risky-looking

pawn expansion to grab the ♗-pair, similar to a Ragozin without ...♗b4 — but it's now Black's most popular continuation. It leads to non-standard pawn structures with Black having the option to castle either way.

8...g5!?

8...♗e7 is still perfectly playable:
9.♗d3 0-0 10.0-0 ♖e8 11.♖c1 ♘e4!
12.♗xe7 ♗xe7 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♘d2
♘f6= is a 100-year-old QGD
tabiya; this one from [Tartakower,S-Spielmann,R Baden-Baden, 1925](#).

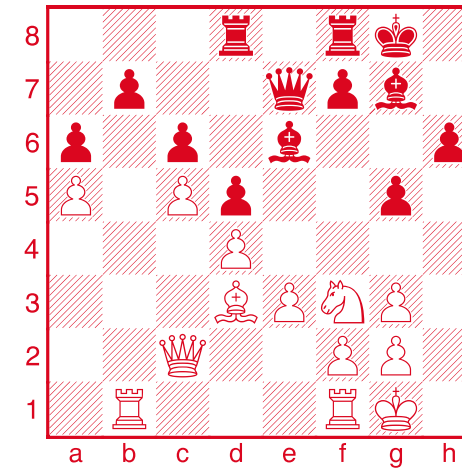
9.♙g3 ♘h5 10.♗d3 ♘xg3
11.hxg3 ♙g7



12.♖c2

Here's a very high-profile game in this line between the two leaders of the 2024 Toronto Candidates: 12.0-0 ♘b6 13.♖c2 0-0 14.b4 ♗e7 15.♖ab1 ♗e6 16.a4 ♘d7 17.a5 a6 18.♘a4 ♖ad8 19.♘c5 ♘xc5 20.bxc5

Analysis Diagram



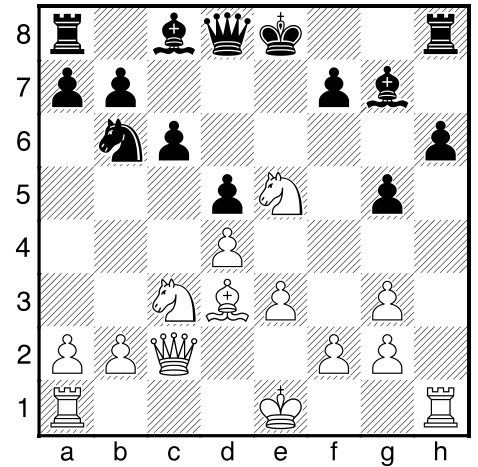
20...f5□

It is strategically critical to prevent White from playing ♗f5, which would do three things:

- 1) to block and prevent any possible kingside pawn-breaking counterplay by Black with ...f5-f4;
- 2) to guarantee being able to trade Black's best defender of b7, while now any White attack on b7 can be met with ...♗c8;
- 3) to play the strategically desirable g3-g4, fixing the h6 pawn.

21.♖c3 ♖f7 22.♖b4 ♗c7 23.♖b2 ♖e8 24.♘e5 ♗xe5 25.dxe5 h5= stops g4. Black played a perp after the ♖s and ♗s were traded on f5. [Gukesh,D \(2743\)-Caruana,F \(2803\) Candidates, Toronto 2024](#).

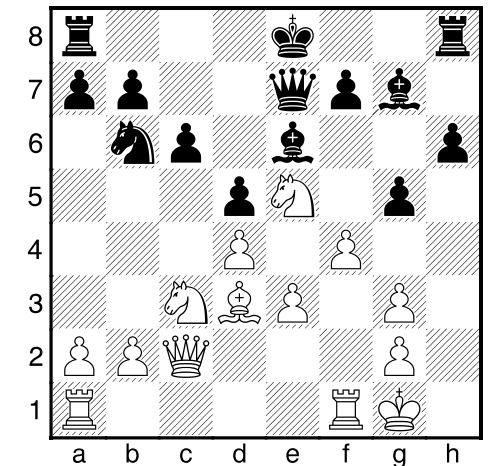
12...♘b6 13.♘e5



13...♗e7

13...♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♗e7 15.f4 Checkers, anyone? 15...♙g4 16.♘e2 0-0-0 17.0-0-0 ♖b8 18.♖b1 f6! 19.exf6 ♗xf6 Drygalov,S (2473)-[Sjugirov,S \(2665\) Wch Blitz Moscow 2019](#).

14.f4 ♗e6 15.0-0

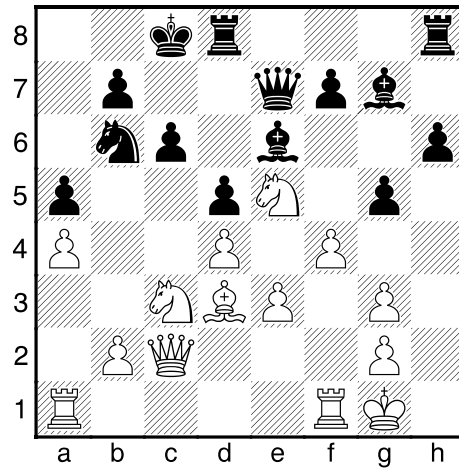


15...0-0

SF18 rates this as a big mistake, preferring both 15...♗xe5 16.fxe5 h5±, and 15...0-0-0!? which looks to me

like it's almost asking to get mated.
For instance, one example of the
danger is: 16.a4 a5?

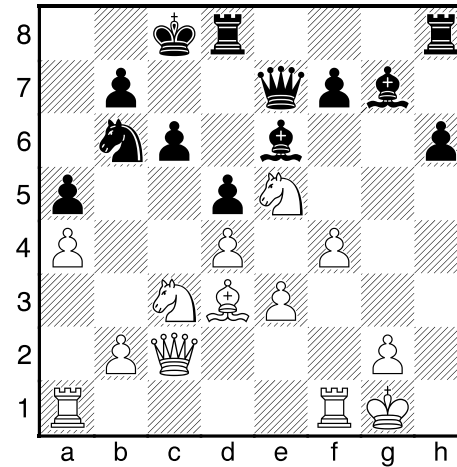
Analysis Diagram



SF already sees a winning attack:

17.f5!+- gains a tempo on the ♕ and keeps the g-file closed. 17...♕d7 18.f6! (18.b4!? ♕xe5!± is not quite as good for White.) 18...♕xf6 19.♖xf6 a pawn and exchange sac to keep the ♖e5 in the attack. 19...♗xf6 20.b4 (20.♖f1? ♗e7 21.♖xf7 ♗b4) 20...axb4 21.a5 ♖c4 22.a6! a position it evaluates as +4.5! 22...bxc3 23.axb7+ down a ♖ but +5.6;

Instead, after 15...0-0-0 16.a4 SF18 finds enough counterplay along the g-file with 16...gxf4! 17.gxf4 (17.a5 ♖c4) 17...a5 *Analysis Diagram*

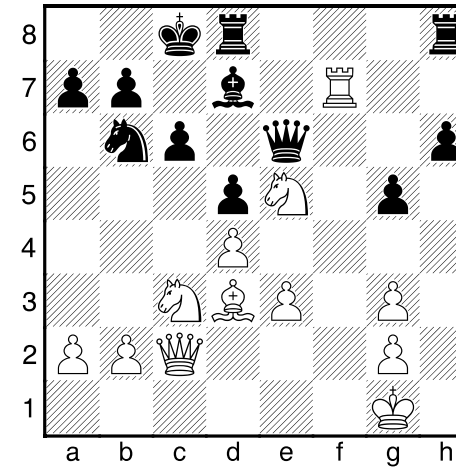


White has options, but the sac with f5-f6 that worked above, does not work here as Black's counterattack hits first. Instead, White might try this: 18.♖b5!? (18.f5?! ♕d7 19.f6?

illustrates Black's counterplay: 19...♕xf6 20.♖xf6 ♗xf6 21.b4 ♖hg8+- (21...axb4 22.a5) 22.bxa5 ♕h3 23.♕f1 ♖c4+-) 18...♕b8?? (18...♕xe5+-) 19.♗xc6+- e.g. 19...♖c4 20.♕xc4 ♕xe5 21.♗b6+-;

If 15...0-0-0 White can keep the g-file closed with 16.f5 but it undermines the ♖e5, a problem SF solves with an exchange sac: 16...♕d7 17.f6! ♕xf6 18.♖xf6! ♗xf6 19.♖f1 ♗e6 20.♖xf7 (20.♖xf7? will get the exchange back, but leave White with terrible pawns and an exposed ♖.)

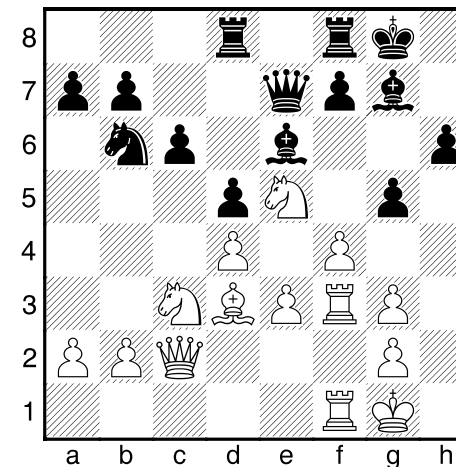
Analysis Diagram



White's down an exchange, but leela and SF18 rate it as around equal: the better player will win. Black has three moves to deal with the immediate threat of ♕f5:

20...♕b8 21.♖a4+-;
20...♖hf8 21.♕f5+;
20...♖df8 21.♕f5 ♗xf7+.

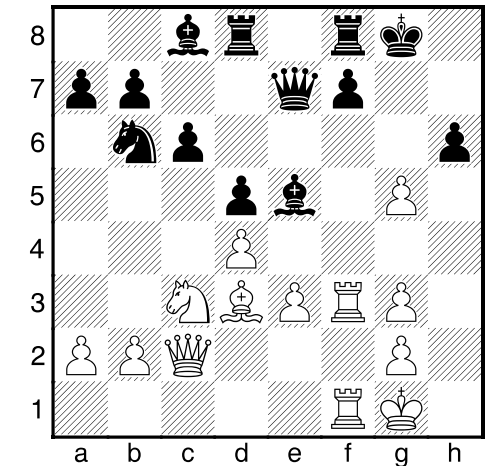
16.♖f3 ♖ad8 17.♖af1



17...♕c8

17...g4 18.♖3f2 threatens f5-f6. 18...♕c8 19.♕h7+ ♖h8 20.♕f5 h5 21.♕xc8 ♖xc8 22.♗f5 ♖g8! 23.♗xh5 f5+- White has won a pawn but the ♗ is very awkwardly placed, and extracting it will probably cost the ♖e5 outpost; e.g. 24.♖g6? ♗f7 25.♗g5 ♖d6 26.♖e5 ♗e8+.

18.fxg5 ♕xe5



19.gxh6?

Objectively bad, but it gives White very dangerous attacking chances — even though the computer shows Black has several equally good choices over the next few moves.

Paradox of Choice!?

19.dxe5+ ♗xg5 looks like a ragged mess, but there are squares between those busted pawns; e.g. 20.♗f2 ♕e6 21.♕f5+.

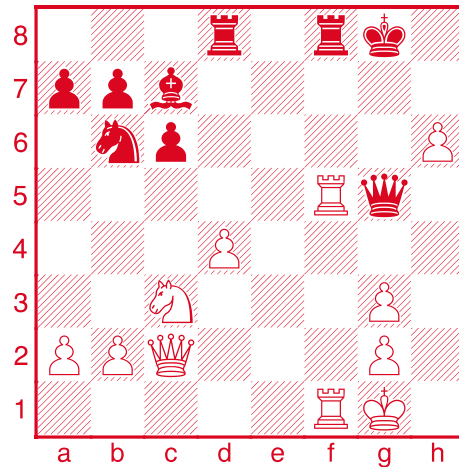


Chess Canada Across Canada

19...♔c7+ 20.e4 dxe4
21.♘xe4 f5
or 21...♘d5+.

22.♘c3 ♔g5
or 22...♖d6+.

23.♙xf5 ♙xf5 24.♖xf5



Defend with ...♖xh6?
Attack with ...♖xg3?
Something else ...?

24...♖xg3??

The most aggressive-looking move turns a win into a loss.

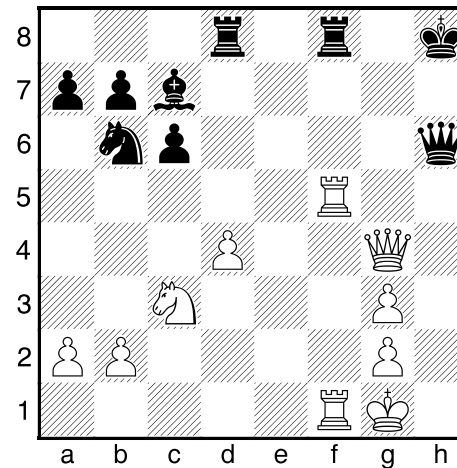
The simplest win is: 24...♖e3+
25.♖f2 ♙xg3?? (25...♙h8+; 25...♖xd4+)
26.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 27.♖g6+ #1.

If you did not find that, there are other wins, both much more intricate and requiring fine evaluations.

The h6-pawn is a dilemma: leave it on the board and it might win in an attack, take it and White might

win down the h-file. Those are general considerations, but the choice between them comes down to calculation.

24...♖xh6 also wins, but Black is still walking through a minefield: 25.♖e4 threat ♖g4+ and ♖h5, 25...♙h8 (25...♙c4? is the only other move that doesn't lose 26.♖g4+ ♙h8 27.♖h5 ♖xf1+ 28.♙h2 ♖d6! 29.♙e4 with a mess.) 26.♖g4 Analysis Diagram



Black has two ways to win from here:

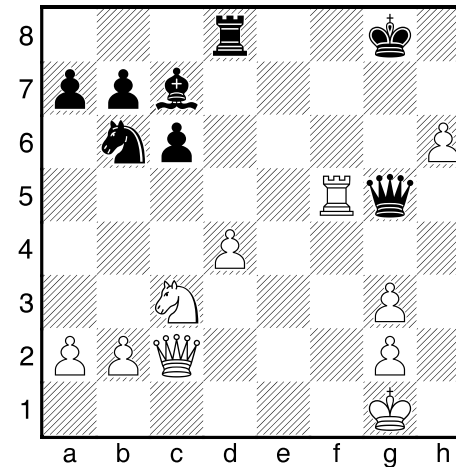
26...♖g8!+ looks like it simply kills White's hopes, but Black is not out of the woods yet... 27.♖d1!? still hoping for ♖h5. (27.♖e2 ♖de8!+) 27...♖e3+!
28.♙h1 ♖g6+ Would you find this, the only winning move? (28...♖g5? 29.♖f3 ♖=) 29.♖h5+ ♙g7? (29...♙g8+ ♖=) 30.♖e1 ♖= ♖xg3 31.♖e7+ ♙f8 (31...♙g8?? 32.♖h8++) 32.♖e2 ♖=;

26...♙d5 wins with a different defensive idea: make a small counter-sac which stops the opponent's attack and lets you win

with your extra material: 27.♖h5 ♖xf1+ 28.♙h2 ♖xh5!+ White gets some checks, but Black's extra material against White's exposed ♙ makes this a win too.

From the **Critical Position diagram** above:

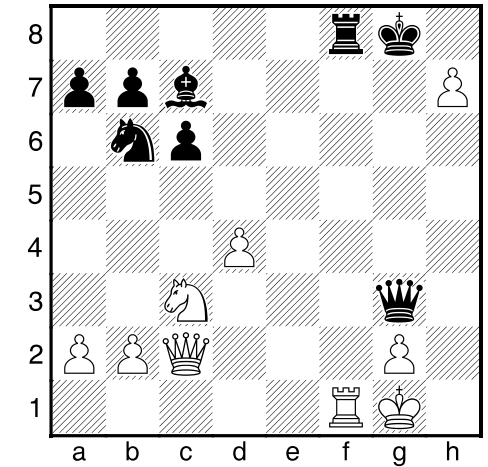
24...♖xf5 trades one defender for one attacker, and leaves White in control of the f-file, but Black wins if he finds... 25.♖xf5 (25.♖xf5 ♖xf5+ White has three pawns for the piece, but the only place they're going is back into the box.) Analysis Diagram



25...♖e3+ ♖-+ other tries allow White to attack on the g- and h-files:
26.♙f1 (26.♙h1 ♖xg3+ or ...♖xh6 first.) 26...♖e8+ (26...♙c4 27.♖f2 ♖xh6+; 26...♖f8?? 27.h7+-);

25...♖xh6? 26.♖e4 ♖d7 (26...♖f8? 27.♖g4+ ♙h7 28.♖h5+-; 26...♙h8? is too slow 27.♖f3!+- and ♖h5.) 27.♖e8+ ♙g7 28.♖h5!+-.

25.♖xf8+ ♖+- ♖xf8 26.h7+ ♖



The "steeplechase" motif.

26...♙g7 27.♖xf8 ♖h2+
27...♖e1+ 28.♖f1 ♖e3+ 29.♖f2 is a hopeless ending.

28.♙f1 ♙xf8
28...♖h1+ 29.♙e2 ♖xg2+ 30.♖f2+-.

29.♖g6 ♙c4 30.♖f6+! ♙e8

<https://www.chess.ca/en/ratings/t/?id=202505001&p=177565>

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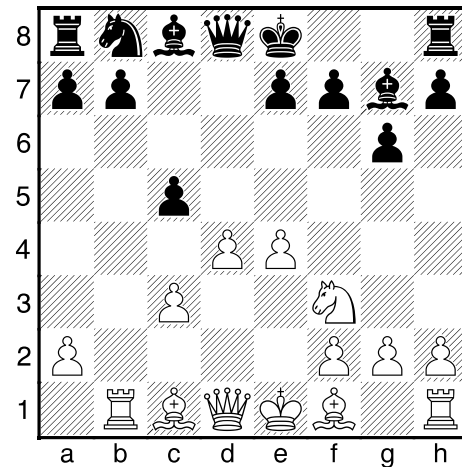
Zhang, Yitian (1824) Jiang, Barron Jiyu (1993)

D85

Pere Noel Montreal CAN (5.15),
30.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5
4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3
6.bxc3 ♙g7 7.♘f3 c5 8.♖b1



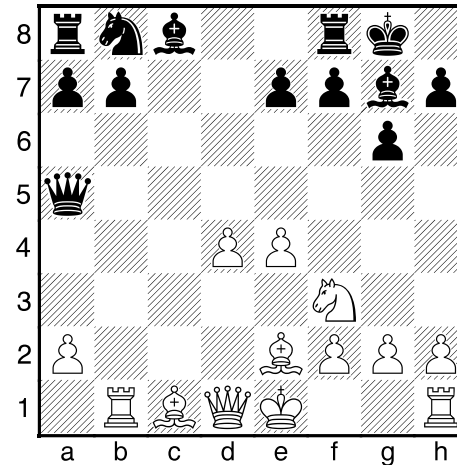
8...♘c6?!

I couldn't find a single player over 2600 who didn't play 8...0-0 here. OTOH, there are down-sides of continuing this way if you are a much higher-rated player who wants to create chances as Black:

1) the resulting positions are extremely well-tested so you can expect even a much lower-rated opponent to know what to do;

2) some of those lines lead to forced draws or bad positions. 9.♙e2 cxd4 (9...♘d7!? resupplying the kingside from f6.) 10.cxd4 ♖a5+

Analysis Diagram



Drawing with the Grunfeld

There are over 2500 games from this position in the Chessbase 2026 Megabase, including 100s from 2600+ players.

Black is fine, but (unfortunately for Black) White has the choice of a safe ending with ♖d2 or an interesting (but very well-explored) gambit with ♙d2:

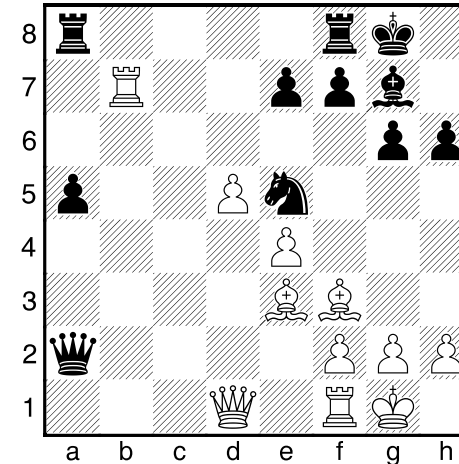
Safe Ending:

11.♖d2 ♖xd2+ 12.♙xd2 b6 13.0-0 makes it hard for Black to create any chances. 13...♙b7 14.♙d3 e6 15.♙f4 ♖d8 16.♙g5 ♖c8 17.♖fe1 ♘d7= [Harikrishna,P \(2707\)–Navara,D \(2657\) POL–chT, 2025.](#)

Well-explored Gambit:

11.♙d2 ♖xa2 12.0-0 ♙g4 (12...b6 13.♖c1 ♙b7 14.♙c4 ♖a4 15.♙b5 ♖a2 16.♙c4= is one of the forced draws.) 13.♙g5 h6 14.♙e3 ♘c6 15.d5 ♙xf3 16.♙xf3 ♘e5 17.♖xb7 a5

Analysis Diagram



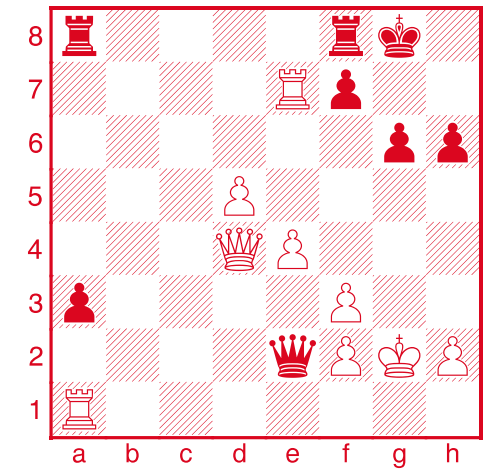
White gets the pawn back, but Black has counterplay with the passed a-pawn and kingside perpetuals.

18.♙c5 a4 19.♙xe7 ♖fb8 20.♖xb8+ ♖xb8 21.d6 ♖e6! 22.♖xa4 ♘xf3+ 23.gxf3 ♖h3! 24.♖a5 ♖xf3 25.♖d5 ♖g4+ [Van Wely,L \(2643\)–Svidler,P \(2689\) Biel, 2000.](#)

18.♖xe7 a4 19.♙d4 ♘xf3+ 20.gxf3 ♙xd4 21.♖xd4= ♖e2 (21...a3 22.d6 ♖e2 23.♙g2 a2 24.♖a1 ♖ab8 25.d7 ♖b1 26.d8 ♖ ♖f1+ 27.♙g3 ♖g1+ 28.♙h3 ♖f1+ 29.♙g3 ♖g1+ [Kramnik,V \(2802\)–Svidler,P \(2695\) Zuerich, 2001.](#))

22.♙g2 a3 23.♖a1

Analysis Diagram



Passed pawns must be pushed...?

Not this time: 23...♖b2! 24.♖xb2 axb2 25.♖b1 ♖fb8 26.d6 ♖ Black should easily draw the ♖4v♖3;

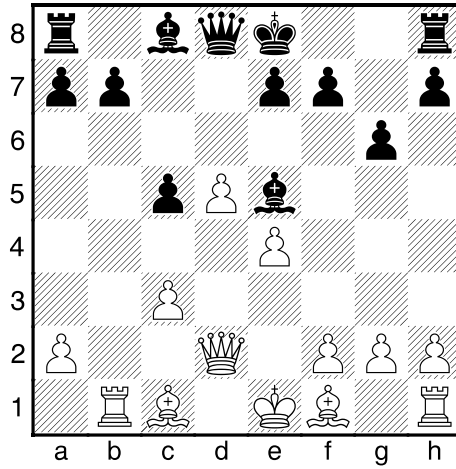
23...a2?? Auto-pilot? 24.d6? White is also on auto-pilot. (24.♖a7 ♖+ wins the a-pawn without allowing kingside counterplay.) 24...♖ab8= 25.♖c7 ♖b3 26.♖c3 ♖= with the usual kingside counterplay for a draw. 26...♖b2 27.♖c4 ♖e2 28.♖c3 ♖b2 29.♖c4 ♖e2 30.♖c3 ♖b2 [Vazquez Igarza,R \(2574\)–Hansen,E \(2614\) ESP–chT, 2017.](#)

9.d5 ♘e5 10.♘xe5 ♙xe5
11.♖d2



Chess Canada

Across Canada



11...♔a5?!

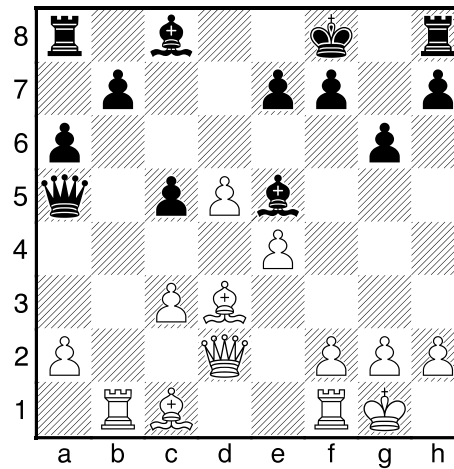
Threatens to win a pawn — 12.c4?? ♕c3+ — and it's consistent with the Grunfeld's usual counterattack—the dark-diagonal strategy, but White turns out to be more than capable of giving a pawn for the attack.

△11...0-0 12.f4 ♕c7 13.♕c4 e6 14.0-0 b6 15.e5 exd5 16.♕xd5 ♕f5 17.♖b3 ♕e6 18.c4 ♖e7 19.♕b2 ♖ad8 20.f5 gxf5 21.♖h6 f4 22.♖xf4 ♖h8 23.♖g3 f6 24.exf6 **Lesiege, A (2513)–Basque, R Montreal, 2004.**

12.♕b5+! ♖f8 13.0-0

13.♖b3! a6 14.♕e2 b5 15.f4 ♕g7 16.0-0± ♕d7 17.♖a3 ♖b6 18.c4 b4 19.♖d3 ♕c3 20.♖xc3! bxc3 21.♖xc3+- **Pein, M (2435)–James, D (2225) 4NCL, 1997.**

13...a6 14.♕d3



14...♕xc3

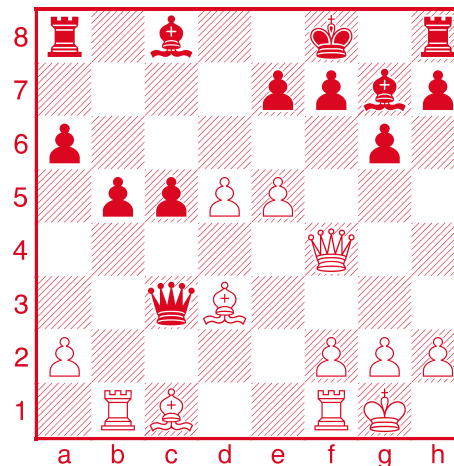
14...♖xc3 15.♖e2!± and Black will lose another couple of moves bringing the ♖ to safety.

15.♖h6+!? ♕g7 16.♖f4 b5

△16...♖d8 eyes d5 without fearing a skewer from e4 to a8. 17.♕e3 ♖d6!±;

16...♖xa2? grabs a pawn and also eyes d5, but 17.♖c7! threatens mate and more.

17.e5!± ♖c3



White is up a pawn, but is getting forked on d3 and e5....

18.e6!±

Saves the e5 pawn with a mate threat, and opens the line for a ♖c7 invasion.

18...f6

a) 18...♕f6 19.♕b2 ♖xd3 20.♕xf6 exf6 21.♖xf6+- threatens mate and the ♖;

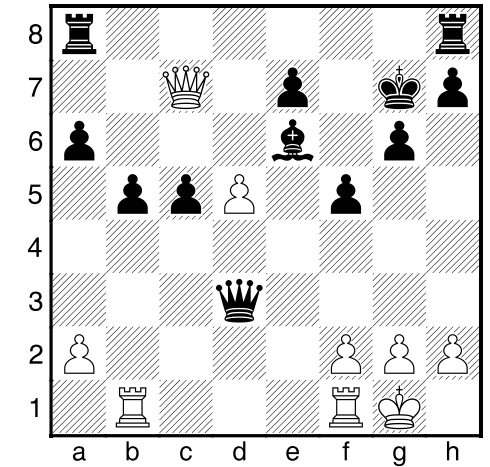
b) 18...♖f6 19.♖c7 fxe6 makes an escape square for the ♖ on f7, but White has more than one way to win this: 20.♕b2 piles on the pressure. (20.d6! exd6 21.♖c6+- wins the ♖a8 for a handful of pawns.) 20...♖g5!? (20...e5 defends the ♖ and even threatens to win with ...♖d6!, but 21.f4!+- blows everything open, and (importantly) on ...♖d6 exf5+ wins the ♖.) 21.d6 ♕xb2 22.♕e4!+- I find it fascinating — and a bit unnerving — that even a position as overwhelmingly strong as White's here can turn entirely on something as tricky as an intermediate move to win an exchange;

c) 18...f5! this doesn't save Black, but it does take away the e4 square, which (as we just saw) is critical in one other variation. White has at least two winning continuations, which lead to completely different kinds of games. After 18...f5!:

c1) 19.♕xf5! allows Black to "escape" to a terrible ending: 19...♖e5! (19...gxf5 20.♕b2+-) 20.♕e4+!

♖xf4 21.♕xf4+- . Material is equal and Black isn't getting attacked anymore, but White has a huge lead in development and can play to crack open lines with a4;

c2) 19.♖c7 keeps up the attack, 19...♕xe6 20.♕b2! ♖xd3 21.♕xg7+ ♖xg7 *Analysis Diagram*



22.♖e5+ ♖ (22.dxe6?? ♖d6+-) 22...♖h6!? 23.♖b3!+- everything else loses! Once again: a "crushing" position comes down to finding an in-between-only-move. 23...♖e4 24.♖h3+ ♖g5 25.f4+ ♖g4. White "should" be winning, right?

Can you find the win?*

19.♖c7!

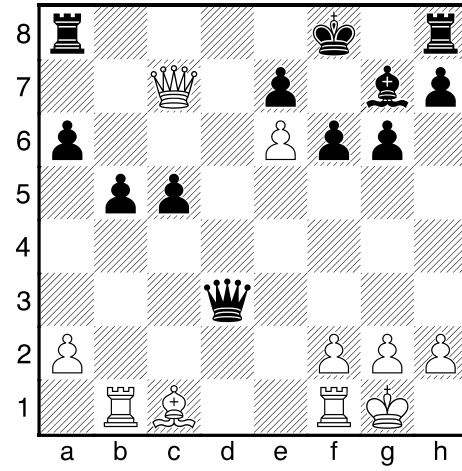
Another mate threat.

*Answer: One way is ♖h6!, aiming for h3+ and ♖f3. Could you have spotted it back at move 20? Or is it enough to "feel" it's there?



Chess Canada Across Canada

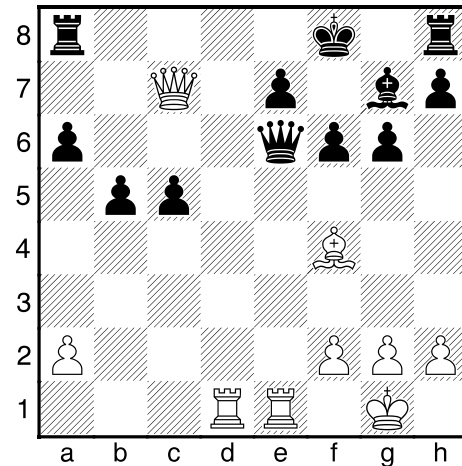
19...♙xe6! 20.dxe6 ♔xd3



21.♙f4□+.

Connecting the ♖s and stopping ...♙d6. 21.♙e3? ♙d6=.

21...♙d5 22.♖bd1 ♙xe6
23.♖fe1



Materially, White is down three pawns; but every single white piece is on its dream square and every black piece is either inactive or vulnerable.

23...♙f7 24.♖d7

Only moves are no longer necessary:
24.♖xe7 ♙xe7 25.♙d6+.

24...♖e8 25.♙d6

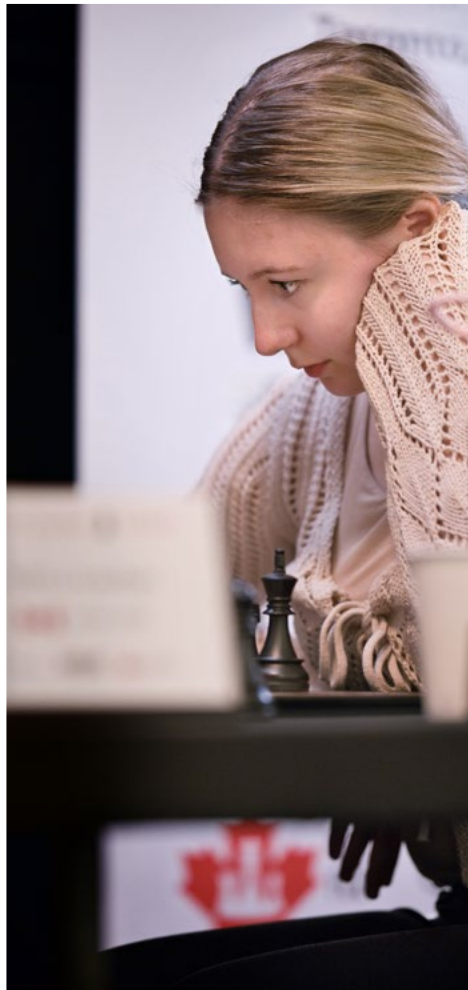
Forking e7 and c5. ;-)

25...♙xa2 26.♖exe7 ♖xe7

There are no back rank issues for
White 26...♙b1+ 27.♖e1+ with check.

27.♖d8+ ♔f7 28.♙xe7#

1-0



Svitlana Demchenko

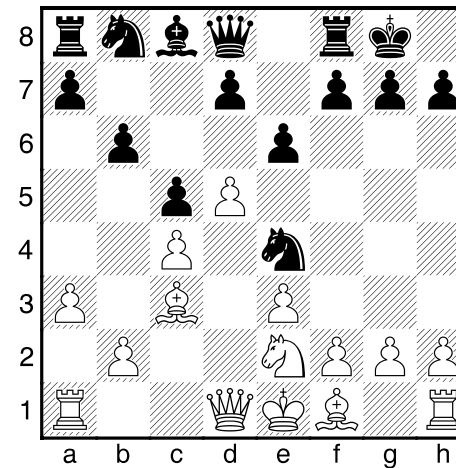
Demchenko, Svitlana (2336) Berube, Max (1990)

E46

RA December op Ottawa CAN (2.7),
07.12.2024

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4
4.e3 0-0 5.♙d2 c5 6.a3 ♙xc3
7.♙xc3 ♘e4 8.♘e2 b6 9.d5!



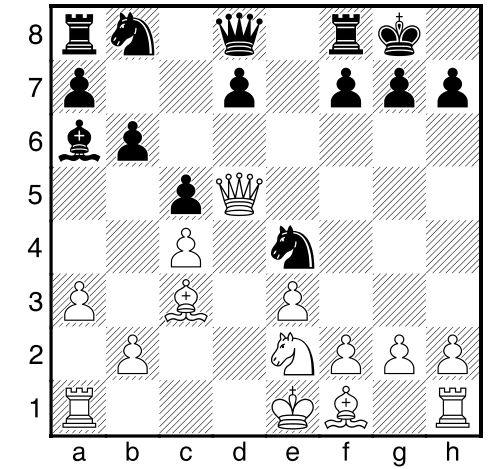
A very modern position — a Benoni and Nimzo mix — with no examples before 2019, but a lot of top-level games during the pandemic.

9...♙a6 10.b3

Defends c4 and threatens to save the DSB with ♙b2!±.

10.f3 ♘xc3 11.♘xc3 ♙xc4! 12.♙xc4
♙h4+ 13.g3 ♙xc4= 14.h4! Carlsen,M
-Tari,A FIDE World Cup, 2023;

10.♙d3 has been played a lot by
2026 Candidate Matthias Bluebaum.
Black does well with 10...exd5!
11.♙xd5 Analysis Diagram



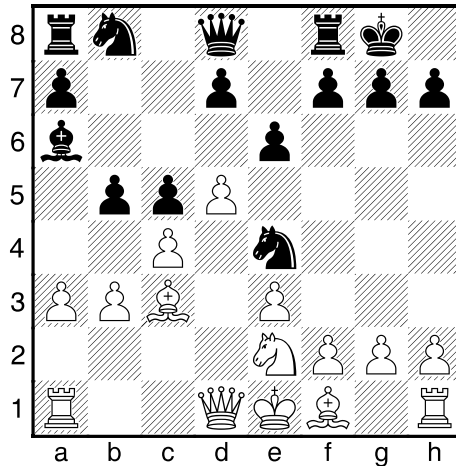
White forks e4 and a8, but Black has 11...♙e7! 12.b3 (12.♙xa8?? ♘c6 traps the ♙, and after 13.♙xf8+ ♔xf8 materially White is up ♖v ♙, but so far behind in development that SF18 rates it -3.5.) 12...♖e8! This and the remainder of the game follows 2022 analysis by John Emms from the ChessPublishing.com site. 13.♙b2 ♘xf2! 14.♔xf2 ♙xe3+ 15.♔e1 ♙xb3 16.♙d2 ♙xc4 17.♔f2!= d5 18.♖d1! ♘c6 (18...d4?? 19.♘xd4+-) 19.♘c1 ♙a4 20.♙xc4 dxc4= White has survived Black's excellent prep and chose to pull the chute with 21.♙xg7 ♔xg7 22.♙g5+ ♔h8 23.♙f6+ ♔g8 24.♙g5+ ♔h8 25.♙f6+ Bluebaum,M (2670)-Nihal,S (2684) World-chT, 2023.

10...♘xc3?!

Eliminating the ♙ before White can save it with ♙b2 is a good idea — if it were White to move then ♙b2 would be ± — but Black's position requires

much more dynamic play, and this exchange makes White's game easy by speeding her development and clamping down on b5 and d5.

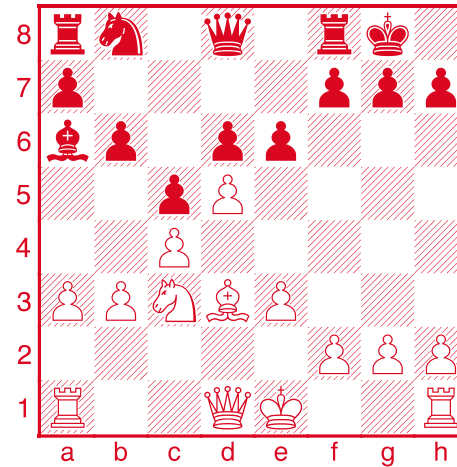
△10...b5∞ Opening Analysis



White can save the DSB with 11.cxb5?N ♟xb5 12.♟b2∞ but now Black has 12...♟a5+!?= when the tactically complex critical line works better for Black: 13.b4 (△13.♟c3 ♟xf1) 13...cxb4 14.♟d4! bxa3+ 15.♟c3 ♟b6□+ (15...axb2? 16.♟xa5 ♟xc3 17.♟xb5□ ♟xb5 18.♟xb2 a6□+) 16.♟xa3! ♟xd4□ 17.exd4 ♟xf1 18.♟xf1 and Black gets a favourable endgame with passed a-pawn and good ♟ vs mediocre ♟; e.g. 18...♟xc3 (18...♟f6!) 19.♟xc3 exd5 20.♟a5□+.

11.♟c2 exd5 12.cxd5 ♟xc3 13.♟xc3 (13.♟xc3 b4=) 13...d6 14.♟g3 ♟d7 15.♟e2 ♟f6 16.♟d2= Nakamura,H (2794)–Praggnanandhaa,R (2747) Norway Chess, 2024.

11.♟xc3± d6 12.♟d3



...e5 or ...♟d7 or ...exd5

12...e5?

Bad B vs Good B

Again, Black opts for slow play.

If Black's ♟ was still on c8 this would be a good move — able to support ...f5 and play vs White's "bad" B. But sitting on a6 when the white ♟c3 stops ...b5 it generates no threats and leaves the kingside light squares weak.

Statically, Black's central position is pretty good: LSB and stable pawns on dark squares. But White's direct play never allows Black to stabilize, and the potentially bad ♟d3 turns out to be a star. White's following play in the game gives an excellent lesson in how to exploit this.

12...exd5!? gives White a choice of good games:

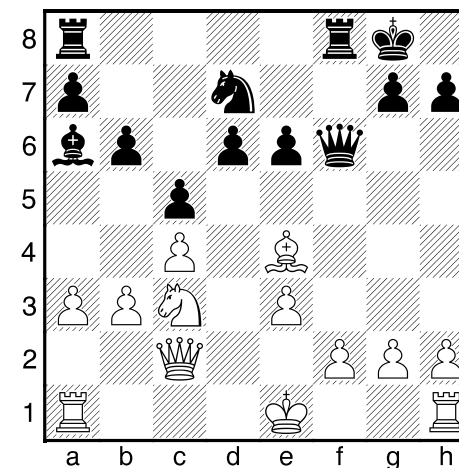
13.♟xd5± is a no-frills advantage:

Black has no comp for the d-file weaknesses.

13.♟h5! is much more complex, but it's best if White sees her way through it...g6 14.♟xd5! ♟f6! (14...♟c7 doesn't trap the ♟: 15.♟xa8 ♟c6 16.♟d5□+- hits the ♟ and threatens ♟xc6.) 15.0-0! ♟xc3 16.♟fc1□+- (16.♟ac1? costs a tempo on the ♟f1, which allows Black to get too many pawns for the exchange 16...♟xb3 17.♟c2 ♟xc4 18.♟xa8 ♟e6) 16...♟xb3 17.♟c2□+- ♟xc4 18.♟xa8+- If we stop here and count we see Black is ahead ♟♟♟ for ♟; but now White threatens both ♟xg6 and (even better) ♟xa7 with strong pressure against the Black queenside.

Black's best is the sharp 12...♟d7! where it's important to see that after 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.♟e4 the double attack on a8 and d6 does not win due to 14...♟f6!± (hitting f2 and c3) 15.♟c2 (defending f2 and c3)

Analysis Diagram



A wild position and lots of chances

for Black, so long as he continues to crank the dynamics to 11. The computer's top line continues: 15...d5! 16.cxd5 ♟e5! 17.0-0-0 (17.dxe6? ♟d3+± overloading the ♟.) 17...c4∞.

13.♟c2

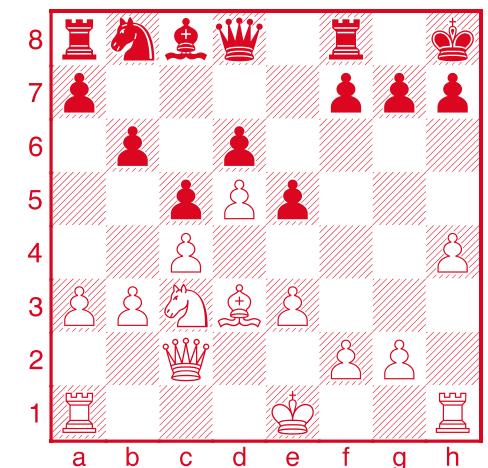
13.g4!? SF18.

13...♟h8

Daring White to take on h7. 13...g6 14.h4± with a simple and strong attack.

14.h4!± ♟c8

14...h6 saves the h7 pawn, but not the game. 15.g4→ exploits the ♟ being on the same file as the ♟. 15...♟c8 16.g5 (16.f3±) 16...h5 (16...hxc5? 17.hxc5+ ♟g8 18.♟h7+ ♟h8 19.♟g8+ ♟xc8 20.♟h7# is Puzzle Rush.) 17.♟e2 ♟g4 (17...g6 18.♟d1+- and ♟xh5) 18.♟xg4 (18.f3!?) 18...hxc4+- the g4 pawn is doomed and White could even win by trading ♟s and putting her ♟ on e4.



What happens if ♟xh7?



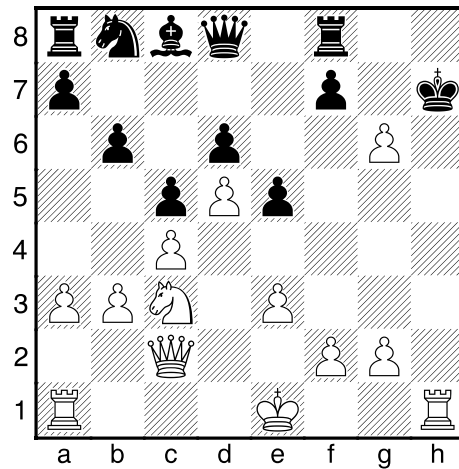
15. ♖xh7! g6 16.h5 ♖+/-

16. ♖xg6? nets three (or 4) pawns for the ♖, but Black fights on: 16...fxg6 17. ♖xg6 ♖f5! (17... ♖f6? 18. ♖h5+ ♖g7 19. ♖e4±) 18. ♖h6+ ♖h7 19. ♖e4 ♖d7∞ with tactics protecting d6.

16... ♖xh7

Challenges White to finish the attack.... which she does. 16...g5 is the computer's choice, but it's obviously hopeless.

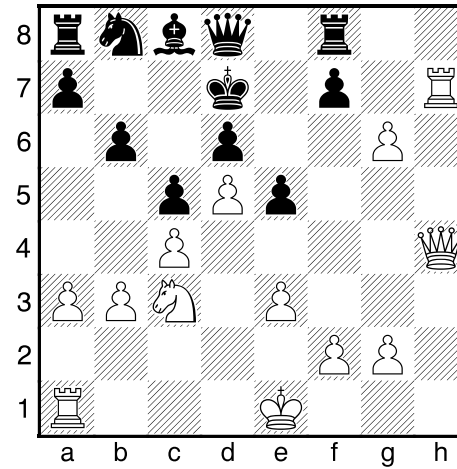
17.hxg6+



17... ♖g7

17... ♖g8 18.g7! ♖xg7 19. ♖h7+ ♖f6 20. ♖h4+ is similar to the game.

18. ♖h7+! ♖f6 19. ♖e4! ♖e7
20. ♖h4+ ♖d7



21.g7! ♖xh4

21... ♖g8 22. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23. ♖h8+/-.

22.gxf8 ♖+ ♖

Don't see that every day.

22... ♖e7 23. ♖xh4

I wouldn't have been able to resist 23. ♖g6+, which works too.

23... ♖f5

23... ♖xf8 24. ♖h8+ skewers ♖c8.

24.e4 ♖d7 25. ♖xd7 ♖xd7
26. ♖d2

1-0

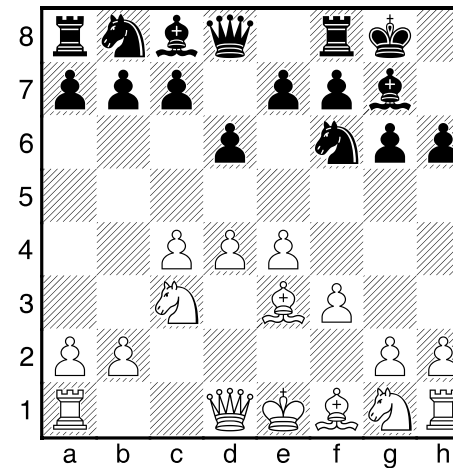
Tu, Liam (1819) Guo, Biaobiao Boyong (1895)

E81

*British Columbia op Burnaby CAN
(5.13), 17.02.2025*

Notes: John Upper

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.f3 ♖g7
4.e4 d6 5. ♖c3 0-0 6. ♖g5 h6
7. ♖e3



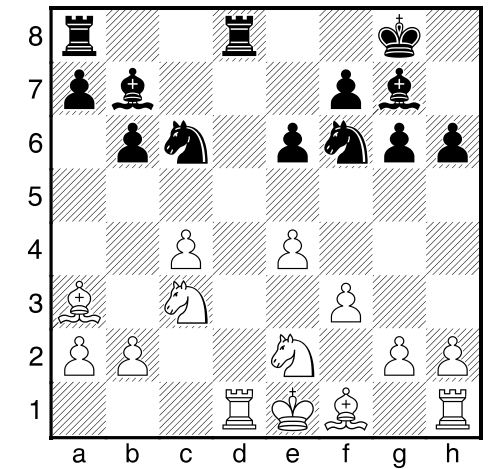
7...e5!?

White gets an advantage after this, but it's not losing, and it keeps more fight in the game than the GM equalizer ...c7-c5:

7...c5 is a known equalizer, but that's not why most people play the KID. 8.dxc5 (If White wants a fight he can head for a Benoni with 8.d5 e6!) 8... dxc5 9. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 10. ♖xc5 ♖c6 11. ♖ge2 b6 12. ♖a3 (12. ♖e3? ♖b4±)

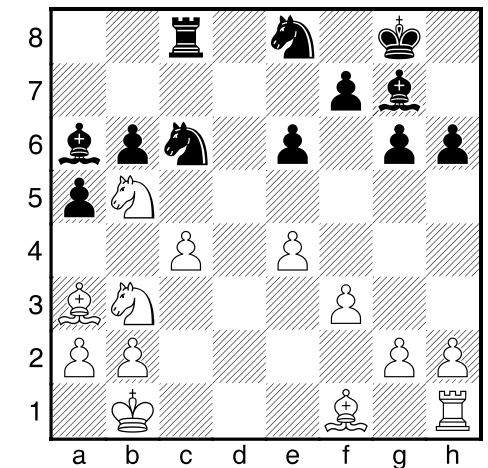
12...e6 13. ♖d1 ♖b7=

Sample Game



The computer rates the top 5 lines here as all 0.00. I'll include the rest because it's a model of how Black gets counterplay vs White's "overextended" c-pawn, and the final repetition tactic is cute: 14. ♖b5 ♖e8 15. ♖c1 ♖xd1+ 16. ♖xd1 ♖c8 17. ♖b3 a5 18. ♖c2 ♖a6 19. ♖b1

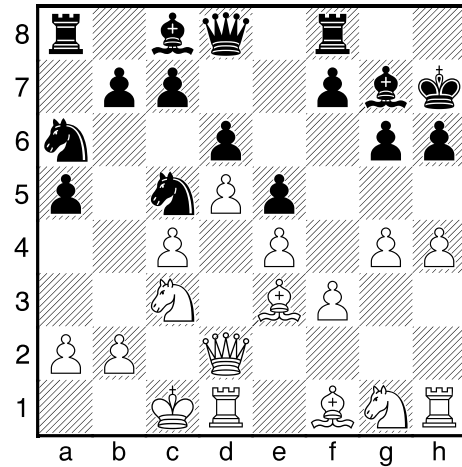
Sample Game (cont.)



The following is pretty much forced:
19...a4 20. ♖c1 ♖a5 21.b3 axb3

22. axb3 ♖xb5 23. cxb5 ♜xb3!
 24. ♜xb3 ♜c3 25. ♖a2 ♜c2+ 26. ♖b1
 ♜c3 27. ♖a2 ♜c2+ [Salov, V \(2715\)–](#)
[Kamsky, G \(2710\) Candidates, 1995.](#)

8.d5 a5 9. ♖d2 ♜h7 10. 0-0-0
 ♜a6 11.g4 ♜d7 12.h4 ♜dc5

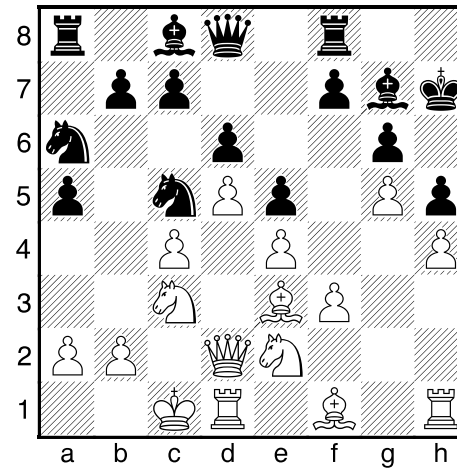


13.g5?!

Maybe a positional misevaluation, thinking that after ...f5 and gxf6 the half-open g-file will be better for White than the half-open f-file.

Instead, White should improve pieces with ♖b1 or ♜ge2-g3 before choosing a pawn break: e.g. 13. ♜ge2 ♜b4 14. ♜xc5! or ♖b1, (*but not* 14. ♜g3?? ♜xa2+! ♖ wins a pawn by threatening ...♜b3+.) 14...dxc5 15.a3 ♜a6 16. ♜g3 ♜f6?! 17. ♜d3! (17.g5!) 17...♜xh4?? 18. ♜xh4 ♜xh4 19. ♜h1 ♜xg3 20. ♜xh6+ mates.

13...h5! 14. ♜ge2



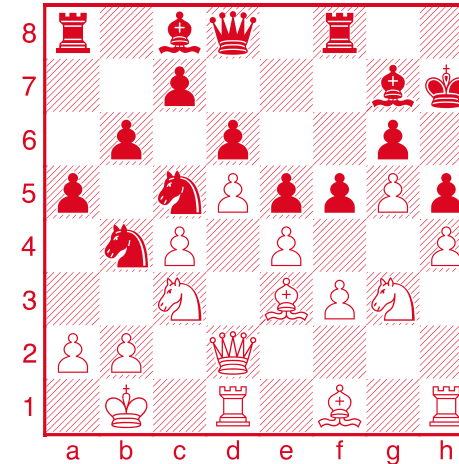
14...b6?!

SF18 rates this as a nearly -1 error worse than both ...♜d7 and ...a5, which it rates as about equal. The problem, I think, is that now Black will never be able to challenge the center with ...c6 (and possibly ...b5), since dxc6 would make d5 a very strong outpost. This means Black's only break will be with the f-pawn, and knowing this allows White to prepare against it.

15. ♜g3 ♜b4 16. ♜g2

Continuing with the idea of play on the g-file? Instead, ♖b1 dodges ...♜xa2+♜b3+, and keeps the ♜ lined up to control the dark squares when they open up: 16. ♖b1 f5?

Analysis Diagram

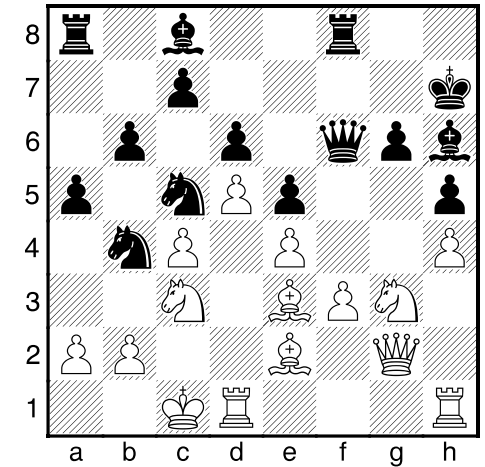


Black has just played ...f7-f5. This thematic KID break is bad here if White makes the right trades that grab the e4 outpost. 17. exf5 (17. gxf6? ♜xf6 18. ♜e2 ♜f8 and ...♜h6.) 17...♜xf5+ (17...gxf5 just hangs h5.) 18. ♜xf5 ♜xf5 19. ♜xc5! (19. ♜h3±) 19... bxc5 20.a3 ♜a6 21. ♜d3+- Black's ♜a6 and ♜g7 are both terrible and the pressure on the b1-h7 diagonal (including the loose h5-pawn) will require a sac to blunt.

16...f5 17.gxf6?

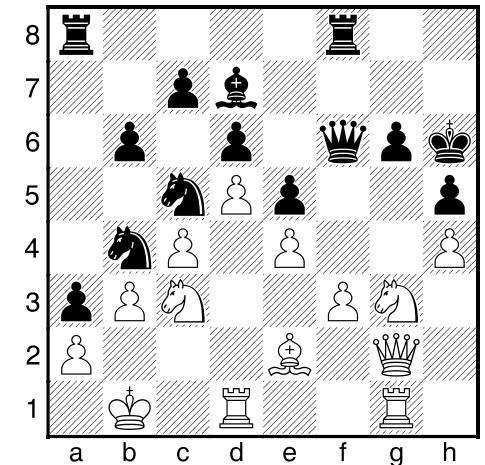
As in the previous note, White should play the "anti-positional" trade of his good DSB in return for excellent play on the light squares: 17. ♜xc5! or exf5 then ♜xc5, grabbing the e4 square and leaving the ♜b4 and ♜g7 with no future.

17...♜xf6! ♖ 18. ♜e2 ♜h6!



The only good diagonal for the DSBs, and White no longer controls it.

**19. ♜xh6 ♜xh6 20. ♜b1 a4
 21. ♜hg1 a3 22. b3 ♜d7**



The queenside structure — W: pawns a2, b3, c4; vs B: pawn a3, ♜b4, ♜c5 — is almost a priyome in the KID, the most famous example being [Reshevsky – Bronstein, Zurich 1953](#). It gives Black long-term pressure with threats of ...♜xb3.



23. ♖h1?!

23. ♖b5!? since 23... ♗xb5 24. cxb5± traps the ♖b4;

23. ♖f1 heading to c2 to trade the ♖b4. 23... ♗e8 24. ♖g5+ ♖xg5 25. hxc5+ (25. ♖xc5?? ♖f4+) 25... ♖g7 26. ♖e3= there are no open files for the ♖s and both ♗s are terrible. Black has a passed pawn, but I can't imagine a realistic way to support it.

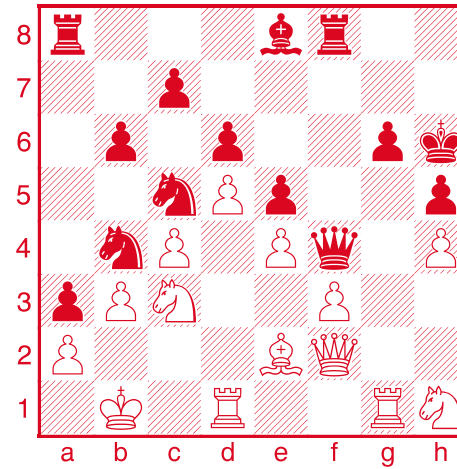
23... ♗e8

23... ♖g8! 24. ♖g5+ ♖xg5 25. hxc5+ ♖g7 and it's still difficult for White to unscramble; e.g. 26. ♖f2 ♖gf8 27. ♖g3 hoping to trade one of the ♗s, 27... ♖f7 28. ♖d3? ♖cxd3 29. ♗xd3 h4!-+ wins f3 next, and one of the minors on the 3rd rank one move later.

24. ♖f2?

This gives up the option to trade ♖s with ♖g5+, and Black immediately exploits this to invade.

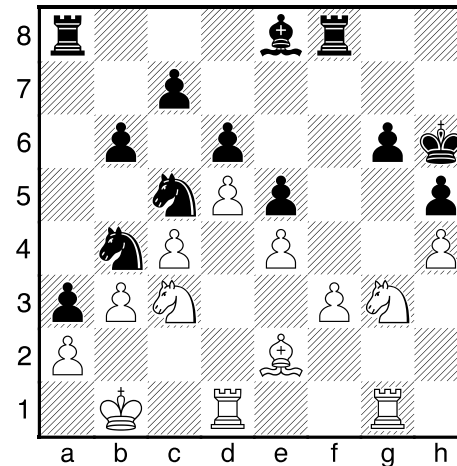
24. ♖b5 attacking c7 reduces Black's freedom.

24... ♖f4!**25. ♖g2?**

25. ♖g2 ♖xh4±;

25. ♖g3 is definitely the better practical choice: it won't save the game, but requires a different set of skills from Black. 25... ♖xg3! (25... ♖e3 26. ♖g5+ ♖f7) 26. ♖xg3 (♖xg3 is similar)

Analysis Diagram



To me it's not obvious what's going on here. White's ♗ and ♖c3 currently neutralize Black's pressure on a2 and b3; the backward pawns on f3 and g6

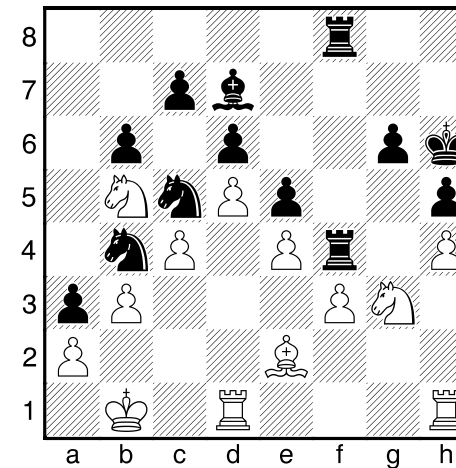
are theoretically weak, but both are defended by ♗s that don't seem to have any hope of a more active life anyway.

In fact, SF18 rates Black as winning based on plans involving exchange sacs on f3, which would undermine both the ♖c3 and ♗e4, and the exposed ♗ will force White to defend both the back rank and the 2nd rank; and if White somehow manages all that, Black can create an outside passer with ...g5. By Stockfish's reckoning, that's more than White can manage.

Here are some illustrative lines:

26... ♖f4!? (the computer's choice is to use tactics to transfer the ♖ to f4 with: 26... ♖cd3! since 27. ♗xd3 ♖xf3-+ gets the piece back and breaks through.) 27. ♖h1 ♗d7 28. ♖b5 ♖af8!

Analysis Diagram



The most direct, and an excellent illustration of the long-term power of Black's queenside pressure.

29. ♖xc7 ♖xf3 30. ♖df1!? (30. ♗xf3 ♖xf3 31. ♖hg1 ♖f2-+ is mating; White can't allow a black ♖ to the 2nd.) 30... ♖xf1+ 31. ♖xf1 ♖xf1+ 32. ♗xf1 g5! 33. hxc5+ ♗xc5-+ every single black piece — including the ♗ — is better than its white counterpart, all of which are comically inept at stopping the h-pawn.

29. ♖h2! guards the 2nd rank, so if Black wants to break through it will be a real exchange sac 29... ♖xf3 30. ♗xf3 ♖xf3 31. ♖g1 ♗xb5 32. cxb5 ♖bd3 is +2; White will lose e4 or h4 before being able to create any counterplay, so long as Black doesn't fall for 33. ♖f5+!! gxf5? (33... ♗h7-+) 34. ♖hg2=.

25... ♖xb3!!-+ 26. ♖gg1

26. axb3 a2+ ♖ 27. ♗b2 gives Black a fancy finale (27. ♖xa2 ♖xa2 is obviously hopeless — Black goes ... ♗f7 and ... ♖fa8 and White resigns.) 27... ♖d2+! 28. ♖xd2 a1 ♖#.

26... ♖d2+ 27. ♖xd2 ♖xd2
Fox, meet henhouse.

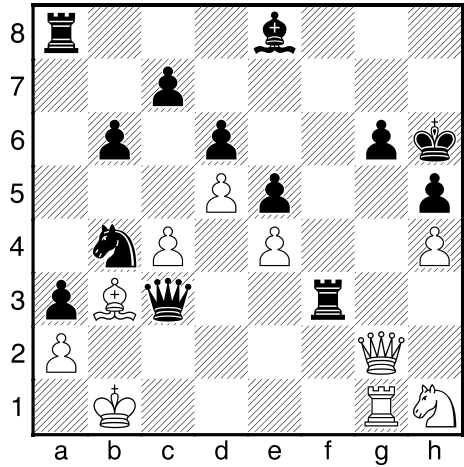
28. ♗d1 ♖d3+ 29. ♗c2 ♖xc3
30. ♗b3 ♖xf3 31. ♖g2





Chess Canada

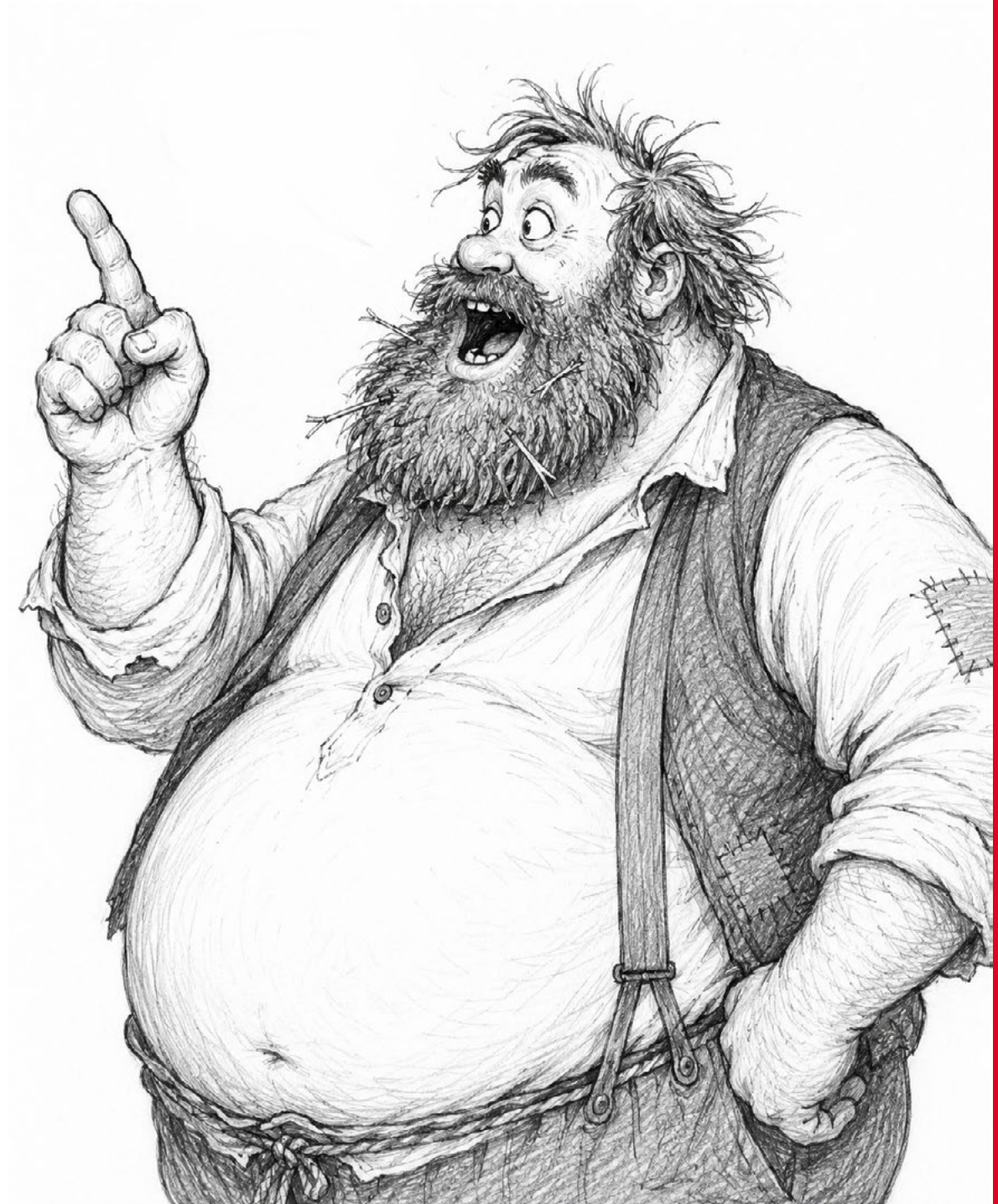
Across Canada



31...♔d3+ 32.♙a1 ♔d4+
33.♙b1 ♖xb3+!

0-1

You're an orphan,
Harry!



Appendix: is Attacking easier than Defending?

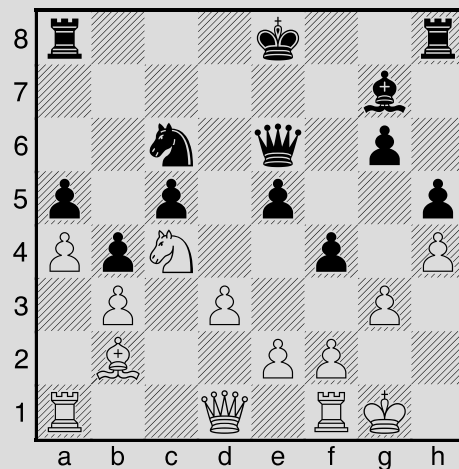


by John Upper



In annotating games for *Chess Canada* I see plenty of good and bad moves, but I have not noticed a pattern where defenders make more frequent or serious mistakes than attackers. Defensive blunders *do* end the game more quickly, but not more frequently.

Attackers and defenders both make blunders — chess is hard & people aren't perfect — but the mistakes seem pretty evenly shared on both sides of the board, and even up and down the rating list, as the mishandled attack from 2700 Wei Yi showed.



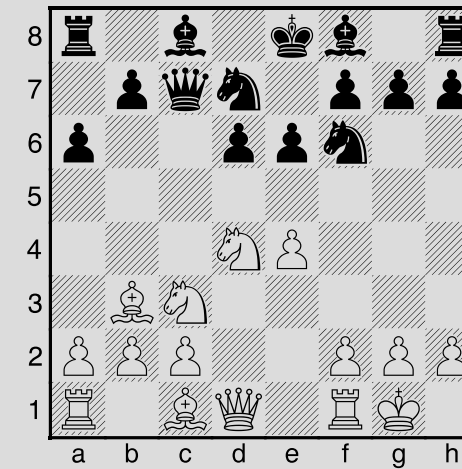
How would a 2700 attacking genius continue as Black?
(see p.113)

If anything, I find far more blunders in endgames than middlegames, as a look at the Critical Positions in any issue should confirm.

In this issue I discovered that in the diagram on the right, many titled players do not take on e6, despite it being both a clear strategic aim in the Sozin, *and* the computer's clear top choice. I can't believe modern players as White or Black wouldn't know this before reaching this position, and if attacking really *is* easier than defending, why don't they take?

This is my attempt to explain this.

- editor



Would you take on e6?
(see p.133)

TL; DR

The cliché that "attacking is easier than defending" is not supported by the computational structure of chess. Instead, it largely reflects:

- playing from a superior position
- chess pedagogy
- storytelling bias

The true practical value of the initiative is not that it makes the position easier, but that it allows a player to choose the kind of problems that will decide the game.

1. In Modern Chess, Attacking Usually Begins from the Better Position

The "Lasker Story" is that Steinitz overturned the Romantic view that brilliant attacks win by force of genius. Instead, attacks should arise from accumulated advantages. Lasker summarized this idea:

"Don't attack unless you have some tangible superiority..."
- *Common Sense in Chess*

"Let attack as well as defence be on the highest level, they will hold each other in balance."
- *New York Evening Post*, 1909

Fischer expressed the same principle:

"As usual, tactics flow from a positionally superior game."
- *M60MG* (g1, 18.Nxh7)

Similarly, claims such as "the attacker can afford inaccuracies" are really claims about playing a better position with a larger margin for error.

2. The Tree of Variations Is Shared

Objectively, the search problem is symmetric. Both players calculate the same position:

- same board,
- same legal moves,
- same tactical consequences,
- same thicket of variations.

The attacker and defender explore the same thicket of variations from opposite sides.

Even "only moves" do not increase the defender's burden, they only reduce local branching. If defensive resources are difficult to find, they are equally difficult for the attacker to anticipate before committing to the attack.

Nothing about the objective search problem changes merely because one player is called "the attacker."



Chess Canada Hammer'n Nail

3. Chess Education Favours Attack

Beginners learn named attacking patterns:

- Anastasia's Mate
- Arabian Mate
- Boden's Mate
- Epaulette Mate
- Smothered Mate
- Greek Gift
- Alekhine's Gun

Defensive ideas are taught far more abstractly:

- return the material
- simplification
- active defence
- fortress
- prophylaxis

Attacking patterns are easier to catalogue, visualize, and teach, producing a lasting educational bias.

4. Chess Literature Over-Represents Successful Attacks

Published games overwhelmingly feature:

- spectacular sacrifices,
- tactical finishes,
- short decisive games.

Successful defenses often become long technical wins and are much less memorable.

Even when an attack is objectively unsound, the refutation is frequently buried in the notes rather than becoming the story itself.

5. Storytelling Bias: We Remember the Hammer

Human beings naturally tell stories about agents: protagonists who take the initiative, pursue a goal, and change the course of events. The reactive character is rarely remembered as the hero (McKee, *Story*).

Chess games are remembered the same way:

The attacker becomes the protagonist: the player who sacrifices, introduces the novelty, or launches the attack.

The defender becomes the supporting character, even when the defense is equally brilliant.

If the attack succeeds, the attacker is celebrated.

If the attack fails, the story is still usually about the attacker—*"the sacrifice was unsound"*—rather than about the defender's resourcefulness.

This narrative bias helps explain why attacking has such a prominent place in chess culture: we naturally associate initiative with agency and importance, and repeated exposure to it makes us over-estimate its importance.

6. Comparative Advantage!?

Maybe Tal, Alekhine, Kasparov, and Shirov did not attack because attacking is easier!? They were

among the greatest calculators ever, and their sacrifices created tactical complexity which rewarded their superiority *as calculators*.

Conversely, other apex calculators (Kortchnoi and Fischer) often chose to accept dangerous material—not because they liked defending—but because they believed complex defensive positions also favored their superior calculation.

Both approaches achieve the same objective: positions where one's comparative problem-solving advantage is greatest.

Conclusion

The answer to the original question is **no**: attacking is not intrinsically easier than defending. From a computational standpoint, the two players confront the same position and explore the same thicket of variations. From a psychological standpoint, attacking may be fun and defending may be uncomfortable, but this is due to the superiority/inferiority of the position, not the task of finding the best move.

The initiative is valuable not because it enables one to attack, but because it can be used to steer the game to your strengths. Sacrificing for attack is a particularly dramatic way of **trading initiative for a computationally difficult position**: maximize sustained complexity by converting a

strategically understandable position into one that demands rapid, precise tactical calculation under uncertainty.

The important distinction is not attack vs defence, but between skills required: **search-intensive vs evaluation-intensive**. Some positions reward long-term positional judgment, strategic planning, and evaluative heuristics; others reward deep visualization and the accurate navigation of dense trees of variations. But search-intensive positions don't favour the attacker, they favour the stronger searcher, whichever side of the board they sit on.

Attacking heroes knew this: Tal (*allegedly!*?) said "You must take your opponent into a deep, dark forest where $2+2=5$, and the path leading out is only wide enough for one." But so did provocative defenders like Kortchnoi, who could calculate his way out of almost any dark forest.

Tal pays material. Kortchnoi pays king safety, development, or initiative. But they're both paying for the same thing: a comparative problem-solving advantage in the complex positions they create.

Tal was a hammer and Kortchnoi was a nail, a rusty nail who said:

"Hit me."

Kortchnoi: 27 (+12 =30 -6)
Tal: 21