



UNEXPECTED RESULTS IN AN UNEXPECTED OLYMPIAD



Photo: FIDE / Stev Bonhage

CHESS TITANOMACHY!

Just as in Greek mythology, the 44th Chess Olympiad held in Chennai, India, witnessed a surprising triumph of the Olympians (younger generations) over the Titans (older generation) as the podium was occupied by the 14th seeded Uzbekistan, 12th seeded Armenia and 11th seeded India 2. A series of unexpected results was also matched by the author of the following article, who was able to achieve his best personal Olympiad score after receiving a late invitation to participate in this magnificent event.

By GM Emilio Cordova

Although the 2022 Chess Olympiad was initially scheduled to be held in Moscow, Russia, due to well-known circumstances it was relocated in good time to Chennai, India.

Chennai proved to be one of the most colorful Olympiads in which I have ever participated – the level of efficiency, kindness, and concern of each member of the organization was truly wonderful. The way that India got everything ready in a short period of time was unbelievable and unprecedented – they really nailed it! Probably the fact that chess was created in

India all those years ago inspired them to fulfill this task.

Speaking of the unexpected, the podium was surprisingly taken by two teams formed mainly of teenagers – Uzbekistan and India 2, whose amazing performances made the chess world “vibe” with them. In fact, their achievements brought to mind Greek mythology – the “Titanomachy,” whose leaders, the “Titans”, were dethroned by the “Olympus gods” – the new and youngest ones. Of course we must mention that Uzbekistan and India 2 were each guided by a superb coach – GM Ivan Sokolov and GM Ramesh R.B. respectfully. These



OPEN

CHESS OLYMPIAD—OPEN, Chennai, India, July 29 – August 8, 2022

RK	NAME	+	=	-	TB1	TB2	TB3	TB4
1	Uzbekistan	8	3	0	19	435	33	154
2	Armenia	9	1	1	19	382,5	28,5	159
3	India 2	8	2	1	18	427,5	32,5	155
4	India 1	7	3	1	17	409	29	158
5	USA	7	3	1	17	352	26,5	157
6	Moldova	7	3	1	17	316,5	28,5	135
7	Azerbaijan	7	2	2	16	351,5	27,5	153
8	Hungary	7	2	2	16	341,5	28,5	139
9	Poland	6	4	1	16	322,5	27	141
10	Lithuania	7	2	2	16	297,0	27	132

11-24. Netherlands, Spain, France, England, Greece, Israel, Kazakhstan, Germany, Cuba, Serbia, Brazil, Montenegro, Austria, Peru 15, etc.

two led their teams to scale the glorious Olympus.

Some people like to say that “the best things in life happen unexpectedly.” This quote certainly applies perfectly to me personally, especially after my unexpected participation in this finest of Chess Olympiads. I’m saying unexpected because my participation wasn’t planned at all. Originally I hadn’t qualified for a spot in my national team, but due to several cancelations that followed, I eventually received an invitation – which I accepted gladly!

As it turned out, scoring 7 points from 10 games on board 1, with a rating performance of 2662, was my best Olympiad result so far (I hope to get even better results in the future) and proved to be another unexpected outcome to an unexpected Olympiad.

NO QUIET GAME

How to prepare against one of the most creative and unpredictable players in the world? I didn’t have an answer before this game, just like I don’t have an exact answer now. The only thing that I did was to have a good rest and double-check my opening repertoire.

DO2

Emilio Cordova	2533
Baador Jobava	2585

Round 10, Peru vs. Georgia

1.♠f3 In general for this Olympiad I had planned the Reti as my main weapon

with the white pieces. Therefore, preparing something different was not on my to-do list, since my opening knowledge was too limited, and I wasn’t eager to try something new.

1...d5 2.g3 ♘c6 I had this same position in one of the previous rounds against the genius leader of the Uzbek team – Nodirbek Abdusattorov. In that game I barely had the chance to do anything. However, I learned from my mistake, and I studied the opening more carefully – eventually coming up with better and clearer ideas about this whole setup.

3.d4 ♗f5 4.c4! I played this pretty quickly since I had studied the line before. I was quite confident that I would be able to remember at least the most important details. Moreover, I was eager to show my opponent that I was prepared and ready for a theoretical duel.

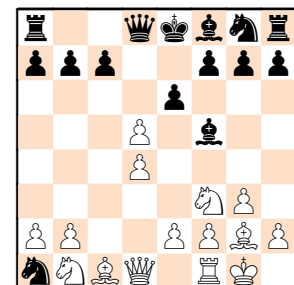
4...e6 5.♗g2 ♗b4+ When I saw this move over the board, I felt extremely confident, since I thought I would at least be playing a “quiet game.” However, I was very naive to think that way – there is no quiet game against a player such as Baador Jobava!

5...♗b4 is the most critical line, which was considered the most ambitious way to play as Black. I was expecting to see this over the board – in fact, knowing how creative Baador is, I had no doubts about that. 6.0-0! (6.♗a3 is the most “solid,” although still ambitious enough for White. Then, after 6...c6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♗d2 h5 9.♗xb4 ♗xb4 10.♖b3 ♖e7



Emilio Cordova is a Peruvian Grandmaster whose FIDE rating peaked at 2660 in December 2016. As a very talented junior, Emilio won several Pan-American championships: in 2001 U-10 with a perfect score, 9 out of 9, in 2002 U-12, in 2003 U-12 tied for first place with Fabiano Caruana. Cordova has represented Peru in seven chess Olympiads, from 2004–2022. In 2016, 2018 and 2022, he led the team, playing on top board. Cordova won the American Continental Championship held in El Salvador in 2016, and in 2017 he tied for first. Emilio has also been a member of the Webster Chess Team, and obtained several Pan-Am titles, winning an individual gold medal in 2019 as the best fourth board of the whole tournament. As a coach, Emilio has more than 14 years experience.

the position is unclear.) 6...♗c2 7.cxd5 (7.♗h4 is a less effective try, as after 7...♗xa1 8.♗xf5 exf5 9.♗c3, Black’s position is slightly preferable after both 9...♗f6 and 9...♖d7.) 7...♗xa1 (7...exd5? 8.♗h4+-)



A) 8.dxe6 I had in mind to play this in



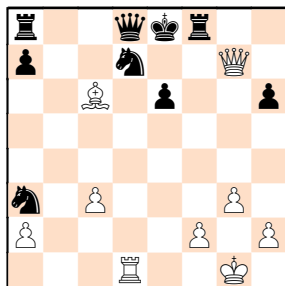
case I wasn't able to remember my notes.

A1) 8...♙xb1?? is met by 9.exf7+ ♗xf7 10.♘e5+ ♗f6 (10...♗e7 11.♙xb7+-) 11.♙g5+ winning immediately.

A2) 8...fxe6 9.e4 (9.♙f4!?) 9...♙xe4 10.♘c3 will transpose to the main line [see under **B**].

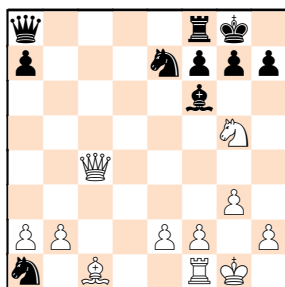
A3) 8...♙xe6 9.♘c3 (9.♘g5 ♙c8 10.♘c3 h6 11.♘f3 c6 is also a playable line in which White has enough compensation.) 9...c6 10.♙d3

A3a) 10...h6 11.e4 ♙b4 12.d5 ♙xc3 13.bxc3 leads to an interesting and almost forced line – 13...cxd5 14.♙a3 dxe4 15.♙xe4 ♘f6 16.♙xb7 ♘c2 The beginning of a series of only moves. (After 16...♙b8? 17.♙a6 White is slightly better.) 17.♘d4 ♘xa3 (17...♘xd4? 18.cxd4+-) 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.♙xg7 ♙f8 20.♙c6+ ♘d7 21.♙d1



21...♙f7 Another only move. 22.♙h8+ ♙f8 23.♙g7 ♙f7 24.♙xh6 ♙f6 25.♙xf6 ♙xf6 26.♙xd7 Although a full rook down, White's threats are strong enough to provide him with half a point after Black's best defense. 26...♙c8 27.♙c7+ ♘d8 28.♙d7+ ♘e8=.

A3b) 10...♙b4 is an equally solid alternative for Black. Then, after 11.♘g5 ♙c8 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♙c4 ♙xc3 14.dxc6 0-0 15.cxb7 ♙xb7 16.♙xb7 ♙f6 17.♙xa8 ♙xa8



▲ Peru vs. Uzbekistan with Cordova–Abdusattorov on board 1.

Photo: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

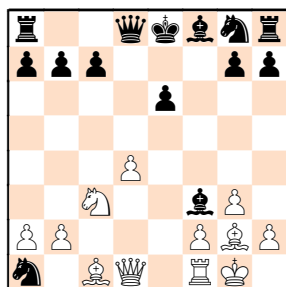
A3b1) 18.♙f4

A3b11) 18...♙xb2?? 19.♙d6 ♙b7 20.♙d3 White is winning both after 20...♘g6 21.♙xf8 ♘xf8 22.♙b1, or 20...g6 21.♙b1.

A3b12) Correct is 18...h6 19.♘e4 ♙xb2 20.♙b1 ♙c8 21.♙b4 ♘d5 22.♙xb2 ♘xf4 23.f3 ♙c2 24.♙b8+ ♙xb8 25.♙xb8+ ♘h7 26.gxf4=.

A3b2) 18.♘e4 ♘d5 19.♙d1 ♙c8=.

B) 8.e4! is the critical move that needs to be remembered. 8...♙xe4 9.dxe6 fxe6 10.♘c3 ♙xf3



B1) 11.♙xf3 White is down a whole rook, however his huge initiative, in terms of a much better development and the vulnerable enemy king, provides him with massive compensation. 11...♙d7 (11...♘f6 12.♙xb7 ♙b8 13.♙c6+ ♘f7 14.♙e3∞; 11...c6? 12.♙g4! e5 13.♙e1 ♘f6 14.♙xe5+ ♙e7 15.♙e6 ♙b6 16.♘e4 ♙f8 17.♘c5 ♙d8 18.♙c4! and White is dominant.) 12.♙xb7

B1a) If 12...♙d8?, then after 13.♙g5 White is clearly better after both 13...♙e7 14.♙f3 ♘c2 15.♙c6 ♘xd4 16.♙xd7+ ♙xd7 17.♙a8+ ♙d8

18.♙xa7 ♙xg5 19.♙xc7 and 13...♘e7 14.♙f3.

B1b) 12...♙b8

B1b1) 13.♙g2 ♘f6 14.♙h3 (14.♙e3 ♙b4 15.♘e4∞) 14...♙b6 15.♙e3 c5 16.dxc5 ♙xd1 17.♙xd1 ♙xb2 18.♙xe6 (Or 18.c6 ♙b4 19.c7 ♘e7 20.♘b5 ♙c2 21.♙xa1, when White is playing for two results.) 18...♘c2 19.c6∞ The c-pawn is worth at least a full piece!

B1b2) Or 13.♙a6 ♘f6 14.♙c4 ♙e7 15.♙e1 ♙b6 16.♘a4 (Another possible line is 16.b3 0-0 17.♘a4 ♙c6 18.♙b2 ♙b4 19.♙e2 ♘xb3 20.♙xb3 with compensation.) 16...♙c6 17.♙b5 0-0 18.♘c3 ♙b8 19.♙xc6 ♙xc6 20.d5 with mutual chances.

B2) 11.♙xf3 is another interesting idea. After 11...c6 (11...♘f6 12.♙xb7 ♙b8 13.♙xa7∞) 12.♙e1 this line is very concrete. I wasn't expecting to remember everything, but I knew White at least should be able to get a playable position, and that's what I aimed for. For example, 12...♘c2 13.♙xe6+ ♘e7 14.♙g4 ♙xd4 15.♙e4 ♘f7 16.♙f4 with excellent compensation for White.

6.♙d2 ♘ge7 7.0-0 0-0 8.a3 ♙xd2 9.♘bd2 a5 10.♙c1 h6 11.♙e1 Up to this point, I was trying to form a Catalan structure with which I'm more familiar. In addition, the fact that the Catalan is known for its sound positional approach made this setup very attractive for me.

11...♙b8 12.e3!? Here it wasn't entirely clear to me how exactly I should



▲ A detail from the playing hall.

Photo: FIDE/Mark Livshitz

18. ♖c2, White has the better pawn structure and a really strong bishop on g2 with a lot of targets.) 16. ♘c3 ♖a7 17.f4 Honestly, this whole plan of a kingside pawn storm by f2-f4 and g3-g4 didn't enter my mind during the game, although, after analyzing it, I find it very reasonable since it makes sense to play against the bishop on h7, while gaining more space in the process. For example, 17... ♖b8 18.g4 ♘d7 19.f5± provides White with a huge positional advantage.

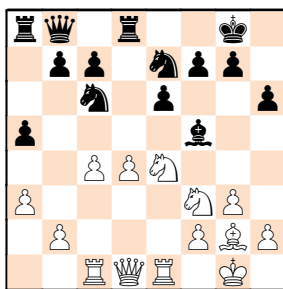
15... ♖d8 16. ♖h5?! This was my idea behind moving the knight to h4. Still it wasn't too late for 16. ♖b1, but once I had made the decision to play my rook to c5, it wasn't connected with any idea of rerouting this knight. Instead, I was trying to push forward, just like Bobby Fischer in his prime. Most of all, I didn't want to disappoint my opponent.

16...g5? I didn't see this one coming – in fact it never crossed my mind at all. At first I even wondered if I had missed something. However, I took a deep breath and started to calculate, thinking that ...g5 was an invitation to a fight – a “gladiatorial fight”!

Objectivity also shouldn't be denied as 16... ♖a5! was what I considered to be the only move for Black, and it seems like my engine approves of that. 17. ♖xa5 (17. ♖ec1 would retain the tension.) 17... ♖xa5 18.e4 Moving forward like Fischer, I thought that at least by creating this threat I would be able to scare my opponent a bit – since Jobava is well-known as a highly creative attacker, and not really as a defender. 18...c6 19.e5 I stopped my calculation and judgement here, believing that White should at least have the initiative. 19... ♖f8 A counter-intuitive move suggested by engines. Once again silicon minds show that there is nothing to fear when you calculate well, which definitely was not the case with me here. Then 20. ♗h3 b5∞. However 19... ♖e8 is another interesting move – of course suggested by every chess player's best friend “Mr. Engine.” Such quiet moves are not usually in the focus of human consideration – well, not mine certainly – but after 20.e6 f6 21. ♗h3 b5 22. ♖f1, at least visually, I think I would rather choose to play as White.

continue. Thus I decided to reinforce my position a bit more – my general idea was to avoid any line that could potentially provide my opponent with a chance to generate a chaotic position.

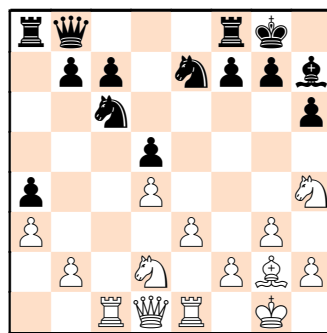
12.e4! was my first intention. However, since Baadur played his queen to b8 almost instantly, it made me doubt my approach and evaluation of the possible emerging setup. 12...dxe4 13. ♘xe4 ♖d8 (Weaker for Black is 13... ♗xe4 14. ♖xe4 ♖d8 15. ♖e2 ♖g6 16. ♖d1 with a clear advantage for White.)



This was the position that I had calculated from afar, and where I wasn't so sure about my chances, since I thought that my d4 pawn could be considered a weakness. However, that assessment was not really accurate, as after 14. ♘c3 a4 15.h3 ♖a7 16.g4 ♗h7 17.d5± White's position is quite pleasant, although I have to admit that I did not even consider any of this. Then again, after 14... ♗g4 15.d5±, I stopped my calculation without evaluating the resulting positions which clearly show how well-coordinated my pieces are. Also after 14... ♖a7 15.d5!± White's advantage is not in any doubt.

12...a4 13. ♘h4!? The beginning of an intrepid journey – which I felt in the mood to embark upon. Since Jobava holds a chess reputation of being an uncompromising fighter with an unusual style, I didn't want to disappoint my opponent by opting for solid positional moves all the time.

13... ♗h7 14.cxd5 exd5



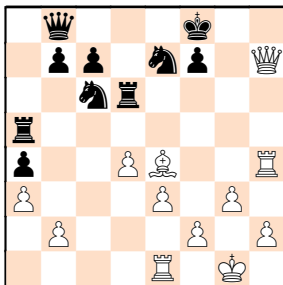
15. ♖c5!? Having played this move, I wasn't aware of what was about to come – I was just making moves that could annoy my opponent, while maintaining some pressure on his position.

Objectively speaking, 15. ♖b1! was the best move – and the one I considered at first glance in this position. Since Black has too many weaknesses on the queenside, this knight retreat looks reasonable. However, I felt attracted to a more romantic approach. 15... ♖a5 (After 15... ♖d8 16. ♘c3 White has a very pleasant position with pressure on Black's weak pawns on a4 and d5. If 15... ♗xb1 16. ♖xb1 ♖d8 17. ♖c1 ♖d7



17.e4! I love gladiator movies, and everything related to the Colosseum. Moving away from a fight was not in my head that day. By playing ...g5 Jobava invited me to display some creativity.

17.♟hf3 is certainly not in the spirit of the position, as after 17...♙g7 Black would seize the initiative due to the awkward placement of the white queen. 17.♞xh6 was definitely the first move that crossed my mind, although I wasn't really able to assess the position accurately. It made sense that the white queen could whisper in the black king's ear, or at least to say "Hello"! 17...gxh4 18.♞e4 When you are attacking it is important to bring all your pieces to the battlefield. 18...dxe4 (18...♙xe4 19.♙xe4 dxe4 20.♞h5 ♞g6 21.♞h7+ ♙f8 22.♞f5!+- was the idea that I failed to calculate accurately.) 19.♞h5 ♞a5 20.♞xh4 ♞d6 21.♞xh7+ ♙f8 22.♙xe4



I evaluated this to be good for White, but I wasn't certain how good. I only knew that it could at least be another interesting alternative. For example, 22...♞g5 23.♞c1 ♞d8 24.♞c4 ♞g7 25.♞h5 ♞d5 26.♞xa4+-.

17.♞e4! follows the fashion of 17.♞h6, and in fact transposes to the same position after 17...dxe4 18.♞xh6 gxh4 19.♞h5 ♞a5 20.♞xh7+ ♙f8 21.♞xh4.

17...gxh4 18.exd5 b6 I was trying to calculate one move at a time, without trying to get into long and messy lines, since I considered the position too complicated for my liking. Nevertheless I was really enjoying every moment of playing such a chaotic game.

I was expecting 18...♙g6! and, to be honest, I wasn't too sure how to proceed afterwards. I remember what was going through my mind was, "Okay, if he goes for it, I will think and maybe I will find the best move, or maybe not. In any case, I will enjoy the game – we only

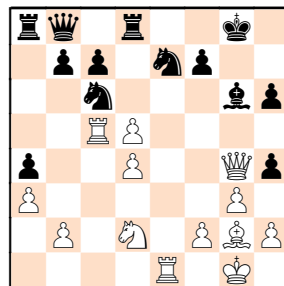


▲ Emilio Cordova

Photo: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

live once!" 19.♞g4! was what I planned. (If 19.♞xh4, then after 19...♞f5! the position would become a huge mess.)

didn't really care about the result here – I was just trying to create something artistic.



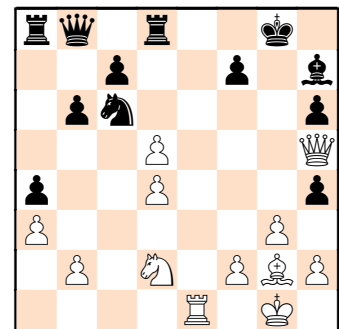
A) 19...h5 20.♞g5! My thoughts were "All Black's pieces are under tremendous pressure, and his kingside is kind of empty, which will make the black king a perfect target." (20.♞f4 is another line that I also considered.)

B) 19...hxg3 20.hxg3 ♞c8 21.♞xc8 ♞axc8 22.dxc6 ♞xc6 23.d5 ♞b8 24.♞ec1 c6 25.♞5c4 ♙f8 26.♞f1 ♙f5 27.dxc6 ♞xc6 28.♞xa4 is clearly better for White.

My original idea against 18...b7-b6 was to play 19.♞c3, and then I thought that at least I should be able to regain the sacrificed piece. I wasn't really sure how exactly to do that, but I felt that there had to be a way – which led me to playing my next move.

19.♞xc6! While I was calculating this, I couldn't conceal my emotion and happiness of playing such an interesting game. I remember pretty well that I

19...♞xc6 I also clearly remember the incredulous expression on the face of the captain of Georgia's team – maybe it was hard for him to believe that someone like me could find such "chaotic and unexpected" moves.



20.♙e4!! The winning blow. I was trying for so long to put a piece on the e4 square – especially the knight – but I wasn't able to find the correct way. And then, after a long spell of thinking, I was finally able to find it and I said to myself "Eureka"!

20...♞e8 Jobava played this after long reflection.

After 20...♙xe4 21.♞xe4, the cavalry finally enters the main stage. I thought to myself: "There is no way that a lonely king should survive against my queen and knight and, if it does, then I

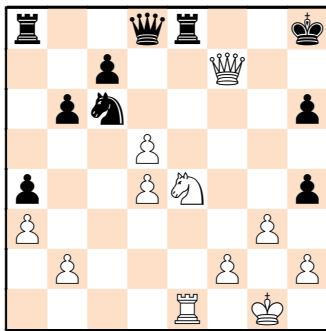


should revise my understanding of chess or else switch to playing checkers.” If, for example, 21...♔g7, then 22.♖g4+ ♕h8 23.♗xh4 ♕h7 24.♜f6+ ♔g7 25.♜h5+ ♕h7 26.♗e4+ ♕h8 27.♜f6 ♔g7 28.♗h7+ ♕xf6 29.♗xh6+ and the powerful duo works perfectly well! Of course I didn’t calculate all this in advance, but I trusted my intuition that there was something in the air as the feeling was so strong.

21.♗xh7+ ♕xh7 22.♜e4 All roads lead to... the e4 square! The key to the 19.♗xc6 idea relies on a series of intermediate moves that support White’s initiative.

22...♗d8 Preventing ♜f6+.

23.♗xf7+ ♕h8



Once again precise calculation was required. In the worst case scenario I realized that I should be able to get into a better endgame. At the same time I didn’t want to lose momentum, therefore I was willing to give “all of me” – as in the John Legend song.

24.♗g6! During my calculation, when I found this move I knew that I would win. It happened when I decided to drink more water and take a healthy pause – together with a prolonged and deep breath in order to calm my nerves.

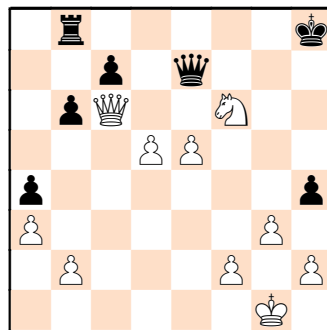
24...♗e7 25.♗xh6+ ♔f6! was another rook sacrifice that I considered. I wanted to play it, but I was unable to assess the position correctly, and I didn’t want to spoil my advantage. 25...♗xe1+ 26.♔g2 ♗xf6 27.♗xf6+ ♕h7 28.♗f7+ ♕h8 29.dxc6. For me this endgame wasn’t so clear – I knew I stood better, but still wasn’t convinced. Now that I’m

looking at this position away from a competitive setting, I see that White has an undoubted advantage.

25...♗h7 26.♗xc6 Reaching this point in the game, my main concern was not to allow my opponent even the slightest activity. The good news was that the rook on a8 was under attack, which made me really happy since I knew that here he would not be able to bounce back.

26...♗b8 27.♜f6 ♗e7 28.♗e5 I was no longer looking for checkmate – instead, I was trying to consolidate my advantage.

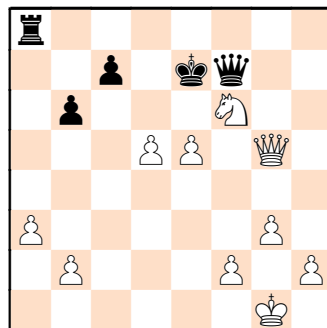
28...♗xe5 29.dxe5 ♗e7



30.♜d7 ♗c8 31.♗h6+ ♗h7 32.♗f6+ ♔g8 33.♗e6+ ♔g7 34.♗e7+ ♕h8 35.♗f6+ ♔g8 36.♗g5+ A lot of checks to reach the first time control. Once we got there I was confident that any chance of shedding my advantage would be greatly reduced.

36...♗g7 37.♜f6+ ♔f8 38.♗xh4 ♔f7 39.♗xa4 ♗d8 40.♗f4 Not much to say about this position – I think Jobava was playing on through inertia, not willing to let his team down so soon.

40...♔e7 41.♗f5 ♗f7 42.♗g5 ♗a8



43.♜d7+ I couldn’t resist playing this move – plus objectively speaking it must be White’s best.

43...♔e8 44.e6 ♗f3 45.♗g8+ ♔e7 46.♗xa8 **Black resigned**

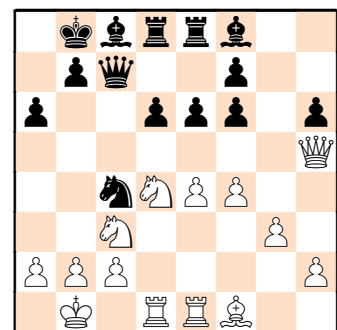
For me, this was one of my most interesting and most beautiful victories. Of course, it is nowhere close to perfection, but at least it was full of entertainment and drama with Jobava fighting back as the true fighter he is. I have to admit that I have always admired his capacity to create something unique on the chessboard. Therefore, for me it was a pleasure to play against a player like him, and in the end I was immensely satisfied with this win.

AN UNEXPECTED BISHOP PENDULUM

Entering the eighth round, the performance of the Peruvian team was considered unexpected – as was mine. Peruvian players tend to be very unpredictable and our previous Olympiad performances have been very inconsistent.

Surya Shekhar Ganguly	2605
Emilio Cordova	2533

Round 8, India 3 vs. Peru



Reaching this position I felt Black was by no means worse. Nevertheless I knew that I should do something quickly or I would get positionally crushed – since White’s position looks pretty solid and healthy it is easy to understand why.

20...d5! Often in this type of structure ...d5 is the best way for Black to solve his problems. However, the cost of allowing

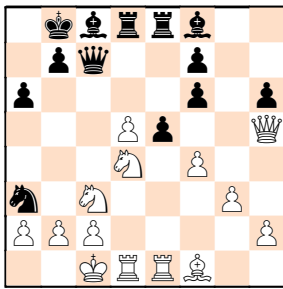


this idea to prevail is going to be a pawn, but I thought “I’m playing the Sicilian, what else could I expect!”

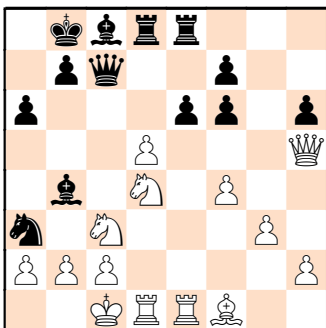
21.exd5 ♖a3+ A leap of faith!

22.♔c1 Somewhere around here I had the impression that I should have something. However, I was low on time, and my opponent was putting a lot of pressure on me by playing his moves very quickly – which made me feel very nervous when making my decisions.

22...♙b4? With my last move, I thought I could at least make my opponent think a little more and thereby gain some time for myself to breathe easy. However, this was not the best move which in fact was 22...e5!



Despite noticing this move in my calculations, I wasn’t able to sum up all the lines. Thus, before going for this pawn thrust, I thought I should improve my bishop first. However, sometimes a chess player needs to make very concrete decisions, and of course, no human calculates better than an engine. 23.fxe5 fxe5 24.♗b3 ♙e7! 25.♞xh6 ♖g8 is a sample line resulting in obvious compensation for Black. Of course, I wasn’t able to travel this far in my calculation during the game.

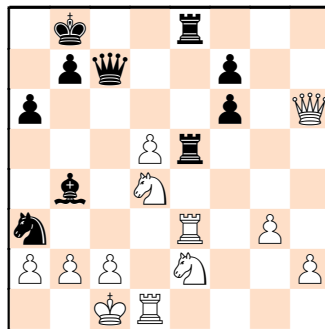


23.♙e3 e5 This version made more sense to me, since I felt that at least I had gained a tempo – but, of course I was wrong.

24.fxe5 ♙xe5 25.♞xh6? Quickly played by my opponent. I remember calculating 25.♞f3! ♙g4 26.♞xg4 ♙xe3 with a feeling of optimism. However, once again I was wrong, my poor bishop on b4 is loose, and can be easily captured. 27.♗c6+! So long bishop.

25...♙g4 26.♙e2 ♙xe2? I saw 26...♗c4!, however, my evaluation was not at the level the position demanded. After 27.♙xc4 ♙xd1 28.♗c6+ (28.♙b3? ♙h5! is what I missed.) 28...bxc6 29.♗xd1 is unclear.

27.♗c6+ ♙de8 I thought: “This is my last chance, I should try my best here.” Although I knew that I had previously done something wrong.

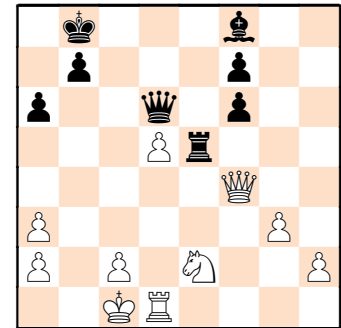


28.bxa3? Once again played quickly. I was expecting 28.d6!! but was hoping that I should be able to generate enough counterplay. To be honest I felt I was probably worse, but not losing, while the engine is not so optimistic about my judgement: 28...♙xd6 (I considered 28...♞d7 as the main line, and then 29.bxa3 ♙xe3 30.axb4 My evaluation, my human brain, was telling me that this is good for White, but by no means decisive. Of course, once again the engine hates me for considering that approach.) 29.♙xe5 fxe5 30.♗c6+ ♞xc6 31.♞xd6+! And here comes the boom with check! 31...♞xd6 32.♙xd6+- I don’t really know if my opponent missed the check on d6, or if he was simply overconfident about his position.

28...♙f8! Once I played this move I knew that I would survive no matter what! Based on my opponent’s behavior, I have the feeling that this is the move he missed – the bishop was moving like a pendulum!

29.♗c6+ ♞xc6 A simple decision. 29...bxc6? loses to 30.♙b3+! ♔c8 (Or 30...♔a8 31.♞f4+-) 31.♞h3+ winning.

30.♞f4 ♗d6 31.♙xe5 ♙xe5



32.♞c4?? 32.♗d4! was necessary, when after 32...♞xa3+ 33.♔b1 ♙d6 34.♞d2 prolongs the fight with unclear consequences.

32...♞xa3+ When I captured this pawn I wasn’t aware that I was winning. I only knew that this capture comes with a check, and that I would be gaining 30 more seconds on my clock.

33.♔b1 ♙xe2 With only one minute remaining I was able to calculate precisely, and I found the right sequence.

34.d6 34.♞xe2 ♞b4+ 35.♔a1 (If 35.♔c1, then once again the bishop check 35...♙h6+ is decisive, as after 36.♙d2 ♞c3 it is game over.) 35...♞c3+ 36.♔b1 ♙a3 with mate to follow.

34...♙e6 35.♞c7+ ♔a7 36.d7 ♙e7 37.♔a1 ♙c6 **White resigned**

This was a game full of mistakes, more from my side of course, but a win is a win, and I was really happy about that. In fact, this victory gave me enough confidence for the coming rounds, which helped me to trust more in my ability to create and navigate through chaotic positions.

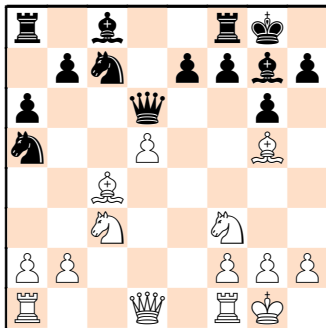


THE "GOLDEN" GAME

Jahongir Vakhidov was the oldest and the most experienced player among the young rising stars from Uzbekistan. His outstanding performance played a great part in enabling the Uzbeki team to score a historic Olympiad victory, especially in the last round when it was his win that clinched the gold medal. So here's the game that decided the overall winner in the Open section.

Max Warmerdam	2610
Jahongir Vakhidov	2564

Round 11, Netherlands vs. Uzbekistan



This is the first critical moment in the game. It was important for White to find resources that could help him maintain the initiative, especially in a position that was so open and dynamic.

14. ♖a4? White fails on the first test, as here he surrenders his bishop pair, along with the d5 pawn. It was necessary to sacrifice the d5 pawn in order to maintain the initiative. After the correct 14. ♕e2! there could follow 14... ♗xc3 (If 14... b5, then after 15. ♖d2 ♕b7 16. ♖fe1, there is no way that White can be worse here, especially when all his pieces are active.) 15. bxc3 ♜xd5 16. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 17. ♖xd5 ♖xe2 18. ♖xa5 ♖b5 with mutual chances and a lot of play ahead.

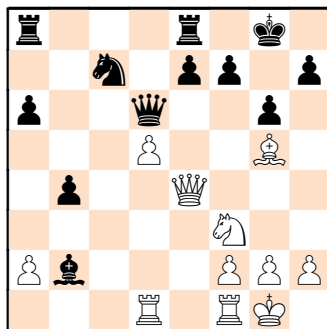
14... ♜xc4 15. ♖xc4 b5! 15... ♗xc3 16. bxc3 ♜xd5 Of course, this is exactly the type of position where an engine is fearless – a pawn is a pawn. However, from a human perspective, this capture is not so attractive since Black will have the uneasy task of protecting his weak dark squares.



▲ Olympic champions – Uzbekistan team. Left to right: Nodirbek Yakubboev, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Javokhir Sindarov, Jakhongir Vakhidov (sitting). Photo: FIDE/Steve Bonhage

16. ♖e4 ♗e8 17. ♗ad1 ♕f5 18. ♖h4 b4 Once again the engine insists on going for 18... ♗xc3 19. bxc3 ♜xd5, which I'm not so sure about since again, with all the dark squares weakened, it would be scary to play this position as Black.

19. ♜e4 ♗xe4 20. ♖xe4 ♗xb2



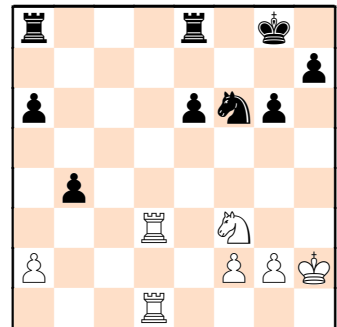
Black has won a pawn. Nevertheless due to the strong d5 pawn White has sufficient counterplay.

21. ♖fe1? 21. ♗f4 ♖c5 22. ♗xc7 ♖xc7 23. ♖xb4 looks equal.

21... ♗c3! Now Black is just in time to coordinate all his pieces! And, together with that, Vakhidov was little by little increasing his advantage.

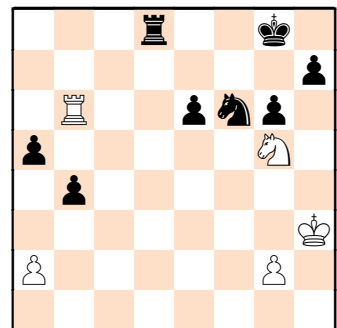
22. ♗e3 f6 23. ♖h4 ♜xd5 24. ♗ed3 e6 25. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 26. ♖xf6 ♖xh2+

27. ♗xh2 ♜xf6



Finally Vakhidov has managed to reach this position in which he didn't have any problems converting his advantage.

28. ♗d6 ♜e4 29. ♗b6 ♜xf2 30. ♗d7 ♜g4+ 31. ♗h3 ♜f6 32. ♗dd6 a5 33. ♜g5 ♗ad8 34. ♗xd8 ♗xd8





Once a pair of rooks has been traded, Black will have virtually zero problems converting his advantage, since any chances of counterplay by White will gradually vanish.

35.♖xe6 ♖d3+ 36.g3 ♗h5 37.♔h4 ♗g7 38.♖a6 ♗f5+ 39.♔g4 ♖xg3+ 40.♔f4 ♖e3 41.♖xa5 ♖e7 42.♖b5 h6 43.♖b8+ ♔g7 44.♗f3 ♗e3 45.♔g3 ♖e4 46.♖b7+ ♔f6 47.♖b6+ ♔f7 48.♖b7+ ♔e8 49.♗d2 ♖d4 50.♗b3 ♗f5+ 51.♔f3 ♖c4 52.♗d2 ♖d4 53.♗e4 g5 The g-pawn now becomes an unstoppable force.

54.♗c5 g4+ 55.♔e2 g3 56.♔f3 ♖c4 57.♗e6 ♖c3+ 58.♔f4 g2 59.♗g7+ ♔d8 60.♖b8+ ♔d7 **White resigned**

With this important victory, Vakhidov secured the gold medal for his country, the powerful young team from Uzbekistan.

It's true that Uzbekistan's victory was rather unexpected, however, after the first five rounds, it was clear they were a serious team – hungry for glory, with young and determined players. What is more, among my team members from Peru, we nicknamed the Uzbekistan players the “androids” of the Olympiad. In fact, when we faced them, they crushed us. After that we knew that they were implacable and would surely be fighting for a medal at least. In other words, their astonishing final result was not totally unexpected for me, especially after seeing first hand the determination of these amazing players.

A SHINING LIGHT

The performance of the USA team was completely unexpected by the chess world. I can say that almost no one saw what was coming – after all, they fielded the strongest team with elite players on each board. Therefore to think they would not finish on the podium seemed out of the question. However this was the Olympiad of unexpected happenings and so unexpectedly the USA did indeed finish without a medal, with most of its players underperforming. However, there was one player who stood out – the one and only Wesley

So, whose performance was by far the best in the USA team.

B11

Wesley So	2773
Hrant Melkumyan	2634

Round 7, USA vs. Armenia

1.e4 Wesley is known for his versatile approach to the openings – he can play almost anything, and of course it is most likely that he will do well whatever he chooses.

1...c6 2.♗c3 It's very hard to describe this move as a sideline. Anyway, since it's not the most frequently played line, it's fair enough to describe it as a “sideline”. Recently, quite a number of elite players had opted for this approach, due to the huge progress in opening theory of other Caro variations. I guess it feels better to test your opponent's understanding instead of his memory.

2...d5 3.♗f3 The idea of this system for White is to wait for Black's decision, before constructing his own pawn formation.

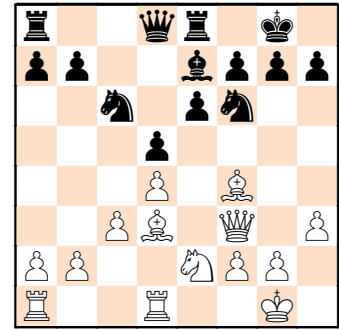
3...♗g4 4.h3 ♗xf3 5.♖xf3 e6 The most solid approach.

6.♗e2 White has obtained a small edge due to his bishop pair, and in return, Black has a very solid setup. This variation has been played thousands of times.

6...♗c5 7.0-0 ♗d7 8.exd5 cxd5 Another interesting option would have been to recapture 8...exd5, since that would have maintained a symmetrical structure, which in general tends to benefit more the knights due to their short range. Nevertheless after 9.♖e1+ ♗e7 10.♗a4 ♗d6 11.d4 0-0 12.♗d3 ♗g6 13.g3 I believe White's position is rather easier to play.

9.♖d1 ♗gf6 10.d4 ♗e7 11.♗d3 0-0 12.♗f4 ♗b8 A standard maneuver in similar types of positions. However, I can imagine that Wesley was quite satisfied with such a position which entails no risk and retains great prospects for maneuvering.

13.♗e2 ♗c6 14.c3 ♖e8



15.♖e1 Wesley is known for his correct and mostly classical approach. His level of understanding is really exquisite, and seeing him make odd moves is very unlikely to happen.

15...g6?! The problem with ...g7-g6 is that now White will have a clear target. Better was 15...♗d6 since it was necessary to find a way to trade one of White's bishops, since the bishop pair working together tends to be very strong. After 16.♗g5 h6 17.♗h4 ♖c8 18.♖ad1 ♗e7 White is of course slightly better, but Black has a solid position without obvious weaknesses.

16.♗g3 ♗d7 Black is very coherent with his plan – he intends ...e6-e5 at any cost.

17.♖e3 Probably this is one of the most beautiful games from the Olympiad, so I don't really want to spoil the fun by including computer lines. Instead, I want you to enjoy the way Wesley began to create his masterpiece – just like Michelangelo!

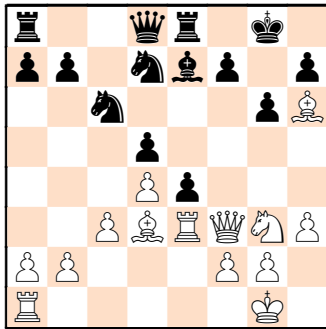
17...e5 18.♗h6!? It's funny how most of the time dubious moves have helped to create masterpieces in chess. This shows that perfect games, without any mistakes, could make us overlook a masterpiece like this. Therefore, dear readers, do not constrain yourself, let your imagination run free and speak for itself.

18.dxe5 ♗c5 19.e6! An intermezzo! 19...fxe6 20.♖e2±.

18...e4?? 18...♗f8!! I apologize, but it's my duty sometimes to spoil the fun in honor of the truth. This bishop move



could have saved Black, and probably would have given him the advantage. The point is that after 19.♔xf8 e4! is a powerful intermezzo! Now after 20.♖d1 ♗xf8 Black is clearly better in view of the coming advance of his f-pawn.

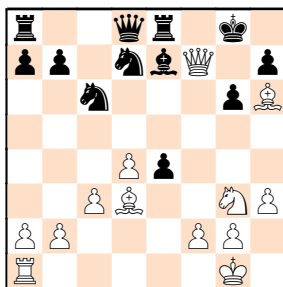


However, thanks to this mistake, White was able to create one of the most beautiful lines that could have been played, but weren't. In fact, the beauty of this game depends on seeing the lines that weren't played, but had to be foreseen beforehand.

19.♗xe4!! Wesley the artist starts to carve his masterpiece.

19...♟f8 With this move Black admits that there is nothing else to be done.

19...dxe4 would illustrate the whole beauty of this game. 20.♖xf7+!! A spectacular blow drawing out the black king from his safe haven!

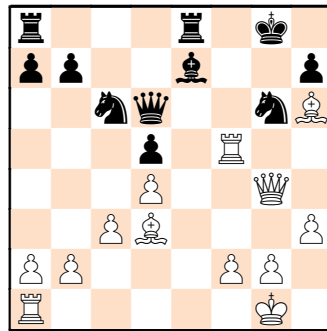


20...♟xf7 21.♔c4+ ♟f6 22.♞xe4+ ♟f5 23.g4+ Boom! The pawn hits and carves the marble – bringing the masterpiece to life. 23...♟e4 24.♗e1+ The curtain comes down, the masterpiece has been completed: 24...♟f3 25.♔d5 is a highly enjoyable checkmate!

20.♗f4 f5 21.♞xf5 With so many pieces breathing down the black king's

neck, it's logical that cracking a pawn shield by multiple captures on f5 is the way to go.

21...gxf5 22.♗xf5 ♖d6 23.♗g4+ ♟g6



White has a lot of different blows which will secure him a full point, however Wesley the artist prefers to go with the most romantic and effective approach.

24.♗xd5! ♖f6 After 24...♖xd5 25.♔xg6 Black has to give up a lot of material to avert mate.

25.g3 ♔f8 26.♗f5 ♖e7 27.♔c4+ ♟h8 28.♔g5 The curtain has fallen, the masterpiece has been revealed, and the artist Wesley has concluded his oeuvre.

Black resigned

Wesley's performance was outstanding (7/10), however the same cannot be said for the rest of the USA team. It's very hard to explain the inexplicable – why did this powerful team fail to finish on the podium? If I had to find a logical explanation for this, I would say that maybe some unexpected games and results led to the team having doubts about their overall form. Maybe even that the whole team did not fully get together as one unit. Of course this is just speculation on my part, as different factors could have affected the performance of the team. However, what I'm certain of is that the USA will surely improve their performance and fight for the gold medal next time. Maybe then they will dare to include at least one young player aged 18-28, who is hungry for uncompromising fights when representing his country.

OPEN	BOARD 1					
	RK	NAME	TEAM	TPR	PTS.	GAMES
	1	DOMMARAJU GUKESH	IND2	2867	9	11
	2	NODIRBEK ABDUSATTOROV	UZB	2803	8½	11
	3	MAGNUS CARLSEN	NOR	2803	7½	9
	BOARD 2					
	RK	NAME	TEAM	TPR	PTS.	GAMES
	1	NIHAL SARIN	IND2	2774	7½	10
	2	NIKOLAOS THEODOROU	GRE	2764	7½	9
	3	NODIRBEK YAKUBBOEV	UZB	2759	8	11
	BOARD 3					
	RK	NAME	TEAM	TPR	PTS.	GAMES
	1	DAVID HOWELL	ENG	2898	7½	8
	2	ARJUN ERIGAIISI	IND1	2767	8½	11
	3	R. PRAGGNANANDHAA	IND2	2767	6½	9
BOARD 4						
RK	NAME	TEAM	TPR	PTS.	GAMES	
1	JAKHONGIR VAKHIDOV	UZB	2813	6½	8	
2	PAULIUS PULTINEVICIUS	LTU	2787	8½	10	
3	JAIIME SANTOS LATASA	SPA	2729	8	10	
BOARD 5						
RK	NAME	TEAM	TPR	PTS.	GAMES	
1	MATEUSZ BARTEL	POL	2778	8½	10	
2	ROBERT HOVHANNISYAN	ARM	2679	8	11	
3	VOLODYMYR ONYSHCHUK	UKR	2642	7	9	



UNEXPECTED AND UNEXPLAINED MISTAKES

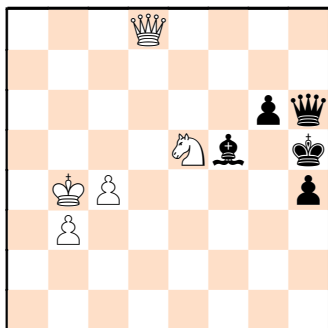
Unexplained moments with unpredictable results plague chess tournaments. As chess players, we must learn to embrace these painful moments. So how to explain the inexplicable? How to understand that elite players do make mistakes just like beginners do? It is definitely very difficult to explain these errors logically. What is clear is that nerves play a determining role – these psychological aspects often break us as players.

Dommaraju Gukesh 2684

Nodirbek Abdusattorov 2688

Round 10, India 2 vs. Uzbekistan

The long awaited duel had arrived, and no one wanted to miss a single detail of this ultimate battle between India 2 and Uzbekistan. Both teams had stolen the heart of the chess public, and every chess fan around the world was eager to see the outcome of what promised to be a titanic struggle. In fact I nicknamed it “the battle of the androids” since both teams had played amazingly well, so I couldn’t find a better name.



71...♔g7 Abdusattorov has defended fiercely against the enduring pressure that Gukesh had placed him under. In fact most of the game was like watching a boxing match between Ali and Frazier, where one side was punching and punching and the other was holding with every inch of his being.

72.♕f3?? Finally, the unexplainable happens, Abdusattorov’s fierce defense pays off, and Gukesh, the hero of India, makes a terrible blunder, which at first



▲ Gukesh after a horrible blunder against Abdusattorov.

Photo: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

was very heartbreaking to see. The pain on his face even made me feel sad about the outcome of the game.

72...♖b7+

White resigned

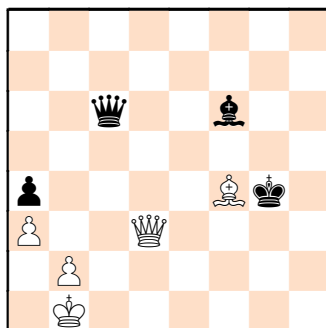
On the other side of the coin, Abdusattorov couldn’t conceal his happiness and joy, he was truly aware of the miracle he had performed. Abdusattorov was an amazing leader of his team – there can be no doubt about how good this amazing player will become.

A FATAL “PRE-MOVE”

Sam Shankland 2720

Robert Hovhannisyan 2591

Round 7, USA vs. Armenia



Sam Shankland has defended extremely

well, bearing in mind that his position, during the middlegame in particular, was really difficult. He knew that drawing such an important game would give his team an important victory, in a match where the stakes were very high.

89...♕xf4 90.b3 ♖g2 Here unfortunately the unexplainable happened – Shankland made a pre-move by touching his king, thinking that his opponent had played **90...♗h1+**. However, great and upsetting was Sam’s surprise when he realized that the queen had landed on g2, and that he would be forced to move his king anyway - leaving him in a hopeless position. So **White resigned**.

Once again the unexplainable happened, and after this tragic accident, the USA team couldn’t bring the whole match home. As an example, what would have happened if Shankland had decided to keep on playing: **90.♔c1 ♗b2+ 91.♔d1 ♗xb3+**, with a completely winning endgame for Black.

I hope this is just the beginning of seeing India as the main host of such important events. For sure it will become a center for chess and a country with a huge number of GMs. I have to say that I felt a sense of sorrow when saying goodbye to Chennai but I hope – and know – this will not be the last time I play in India. ■