



A NEW WAVE OF TEENAGE GRANDMASTERS CONFIRM THAT THEIR TIME IS - NOW!

JUNIOR STARS

Rule The Stage!

The incredible performance of the youngsters at the 2022 Chess Olympiad can hardly be called a revelation - we've known about all these players for quite a while. Nevertheless, it was really amazing to see them all play so well in such a high-profile event, representing their respective countries. The Olympiad is one of the few chances some of these players get to play against the absolute world elite, and they rose to the challenge.



By GM John Burke

NODIRBEK ABDUSATTOROV

Let's start with the current World Rapid Champion and the leader of the gold medal winning Uzbek team. I think he shows a preference for sharp positions, and his opening repertoire is varied and aggressive. This is something you'll see in a lot of young players. It's a product of coming up through the open tournament circuit, where you need to rack up a lot of wins with both colors. To me, he embodies fighting spirit in chess. That's not to say the other players I'm going to mention lack this quality,

but Abdusattorov stands out. The way he never gives up is remarkable. The games that I present are good representations of this. He fights for every last winning chance in an equal position against Caruana, and then he fights for every last saving chance in a losing position against Gukesh.

DO2

Fabiano Caruana	2783
Nodirbek Abdusattorov	2688

Round 4, USA vs. Uzbekistan

1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 The London system is a rare choice by the top players in

classical games, but I suppose that Caruana was relying on the element of surprise, and wanted to conduct the opening on his terms.

2...♗f6 3.e3 c5 4.♗f3 ♖c6 5.♗bd2 cxd4 Black has many options here, but this one seeks to clarify the pawn structure immediately into something reminiscent of an Exchange Caro-Kann.

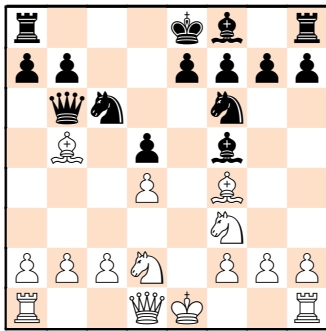
6.exd4 ♗f5 7.♗b5 The direct attempt, aiming to disrupt Black's life before he develops and castles safely. 7.c3 is the most common move, after which play tends to develop more slowly.

7...♞b6



U.S. TEAM WITHOUT YOUNGSTERS

Let's say a few words about a team which did not have any youngsters – the USA. Despite being the heavy rating favorite, all of the players apart from Wesley So performed below their usual level. Shockingly, Caruana and Aronian finished with 50%. Sometimes it happens that the favorites feel an extra burden, as everyone expects them to win. I don't know if that was the case here, but it's one possible factor. We should also realize that the young players are all underrated and still improving, so we shouldn't analyze things from a pure numbers perspective. I think if the U.S. had been able to score a match victory over one of their close rivals, such as Uzbekistan, India, or Armenia, it would have been a confidence boost and spurred them on to a great result, but unfortunately none of those matches went according to plan. Tying for 4th-6th is certainly not an awful result, but given the strength of the American squad, it feels like a disappointment.

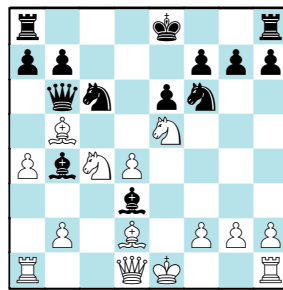


8.c4 No other move makes sense. White didn't play his bishop to b5 only to trade it away so cheaply.

8...dxc4 9.a4 White simply wants to take on c4 with the knight, forcing Black's queen back.

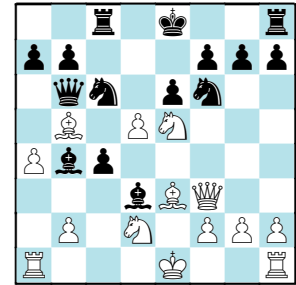
9...d3 A very logical move, defending the pawn and preventing White from castling. Note that Caruana's concept is strategically risky, as he is accepting an isolated queen's pawn. Even if he wins the c4 pawn back, material will still be equal and he will have a worse structure. Therefore, he must not let his opponent develop and then castle without forcing a concession. Unfortunately for Fabi, that's exactly what ends up happening.

10.dxe5 e6 11.f3? This isn't the correct follow-up. **11.dxc4** is simple and good, leading to a forced line where White can claim a slight edge. **11...b4+ 12.d2**



12...dxc4 13.dxc4 dxd2+ 14.fxd2 ♖c7 15.dxe5 0-0 16.dxc6 bxc6± Both sides have weak pawns, but the c6 pawn is probably a slightly bigger issue at the moment.

11...c8 12.d3 I'm not sure what Caruana intended here... or missed. **12.e3** is tempting, threatening d4-d5, but there is a brilliant reply. **12...b4!** **13.d5 (13.dxd3 cxd3 14.d5 dxd2+! 15.dxd2 ♖a5+ wins.)**



13...xb5! Amazing! I'm really



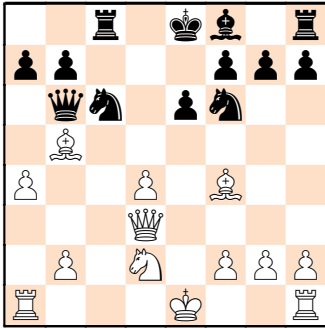
▼ Nodirbek Abdusattorov PHOTO: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

Country: Uzbekistan
 Year of birth: 2004
 Peak FIDE rating: 2713
 (September 2022)
 Board: 1
 Result: 8½ pts from 11 games
 Rating Performance: 2803

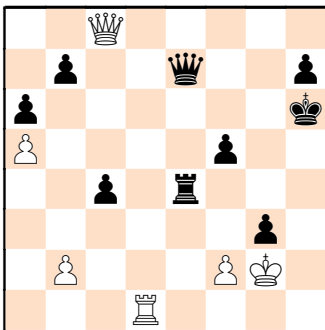


curious if either player saw this at the board. 14.axb5 ♖xe5 Black only has two pieces for the queen, but White's king is in heaps of trouble. 15.♖g3 ♖eg4 16.dxe6 0-0 Maybe White can survive with perfect play, but this is terrifying for any human.

12...cxd3 13.♖xd3



13...a6 14.♖c4 ♗b4+ 15.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 16.♖xd2 ♖c7 17.♗xc6+ ♖xc6 We have the nightmare scenario I foreshadowed earlier – White just has a weak pawn and nothing to show for it, meaning he will suffer for the rest of the game. Let's skip ahead and see the critical moment later on.



Abdusattorov has been pressing the whole game, and Caruana finally makes the decisive error.

44.♖xf5? Obvious, but plays right into the opponent's hands. After 44.♗d7 ♖e8 45.♖xb7 the complications persist, but the position should be equal.

44...♖h4! This surprising rook transfer is the only way to win.

45.♖xg3 The threat of ...♖h2+ induced this move, but now White's king has no shelter.

45...♖h5 Caruana is forced to trade queens under highly unfavorable circumstances, losing the a5 pawn in the process.

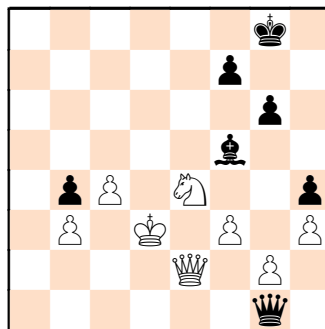
46.♖f4+ ♖g5+ 47.♖g4 ♖xg4+ 48.♖xg4 ♖g5+ 49.♖f4 ♖xa5... And Abdusattorov converted this with no problems. **White resigned**

The way he was able to deal with a surprise in the opening and completely refute his opponent's play is highly impressive.

In the following game, Abdusattorov demonstrated his fighting spirit against a player who was in incredible form at the Olympiad. Black was completely lost earlier, but he managed to equalize the game by this point. Still, he needs to win the game to draw the match, which seems like a tall order.

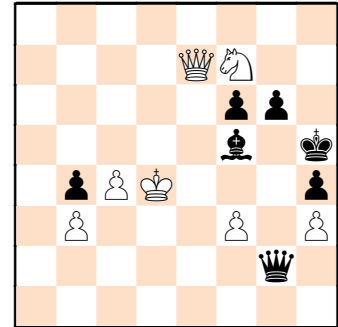
Dommaraju Gukesh	2684
Nodirbek Abdusattorov	2688

Round 10, India 2 vs. Uzbekistan



56...♖a7 57.♖e3 ♖a2 58.♖d4 ♖xg2 Both sides have their reasons to be hopeful. Queen and knight are often a very powerful combo, so White can try to create play against the enemy king. Also, he has a passed c-pawn which could become relevant. On the other hand, Black is about to take the h3 pawn and acquire a passer of his own. His bishop on f5 is very secure and guards the c8 square, meaning it will be difficult for White to promote his pawn.

59.♖g5 f6 60.♖e8+ ♖g7 61.♖e7+ ♖h6 62.♖f7+ ♖h5



63.♖c5? After this Black gets serious winning chances. It was the time to force the draw with 63.♖e3!. It's unclear if Gukesh miscalculated something in this line, or was still playing for a win. 63...g5 Only move to prevent mate, but now White's queen sneaks in another way. 64.♖e8 ♖d2+ 65.♖c5 ♖d7 66.♖h8+ ♖g6 67.♖g8+ ♖h5=.

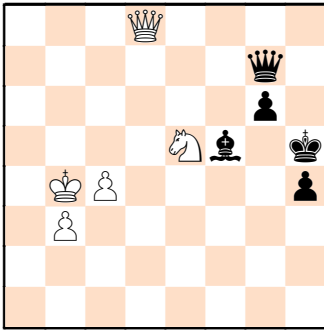
63...♖xf3 64.♖xf6 ♖e3+ 65.♖xb4 ♗xh3 Now Black's queen is perfectly placed, guarding all the key squares. If he's given a couple of moves to consolidate he will begin to shove the h-pawn forward.

66.♖e5 ♖d2+ 66...♗f5! is the correct move, but Nodirbek ends up getting another chance to reach this position later on.

67.♖b5 ♗d7+ 68.♖c5 68.♖xd7 was possible, but it's difficult to be completely sure about the assessment of this position. Queen endgames are notoriously difficult, even for the world's best. After 68...♖xd7+ 69.♖b6 h3 70.c5, here 70...h2 is not possible due to 71.♖e5+, so it seems like White is doing fine in this race.

68...♖e3+ 69.♖b4 ♗f5 We've transposed to the note from move 66. Now it's panic time for Gukesh. It's not clear how to create any threats against Black's king, and in the meantime he has a very simple plan of rushing his h-pawn down the board.

70.♖h8+ ♖h6 71.♖d8 ♖g7



72. ♖f3?? A blunder in a very difficult, although not yet lost position. 72. ♖d1+ ♗h6 73. ♖d6! is a difficult queen maneuver to understand, but White is now in position to start advancing his own passed pawn. 73...h3 74.c5 Note that 74...h2 fails to 75. ♖d2+. It's still an uphill struggle, but objectively White should hold.

72... ♖b7+

White resigned

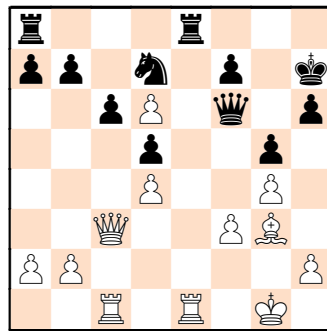
Such long range forks are easy to miss after a stressful five-hour game.

NODIRBEK YAKUBBOEV

I must say that I'm not super familiar with Yakubboev. Perhaps he's been overshadowed by Abdusattorov, who even shares the same first name. But Yakubboev's performance was every bit as crucial to the team's success, as he went through the event undefeated. All his wins looked literally effortless, and he was barely in danger in any of his draws. He reminds me of someone like Smyslov or Capablanca, who just followed plans to perfection without any apparent resistance from the opponent.

Nodirbek Yakubboev	2620
Matthias Bluebaum	2673

Round 8, Uzbekistan vs. Germany

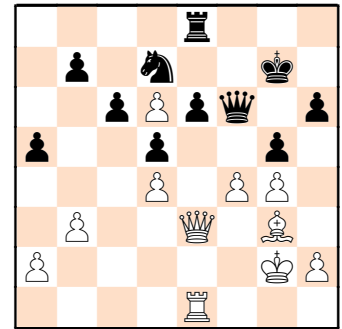


White has obtained a substantial advantage, with a strong d6 pawn, but how to convert it into something tangible? Black's weak king is the key here – it's a matter of time before a pawn lever comes into play, with either f4 or h4.

26. ♗g2 ♖b6 26... ♖f8 Sending the knight to g6 is the most obvious plan to my eyes, but it runs into a problem. 27. ♖e5! The rook lands on a dominant outpost, and won't be forced to move anytime soon. 27... ♖g6 28. ♖d3 ♗g8 29. ♖ce1 ♗xe5 30.dxe5 I'd barely even call this an exchange "sacrifice," since White's position is so clearly dominant. White will play ♖f5 and h4, opening the kingside and winning the game.

27.b3 a5 28. ♖c2 The e-file is the only open file on the board, and White will soon gain control of it, adding to his list of advantages.

28... ♖d7 29. ♖ce2 ♖e6 30. ♖d3+ ♗g7 31. ♖xe6 fxe6 32. ♖e3 ♖e8 33.f4



Finally, we have a pawn break, which has been on the cards for a while. The plan now is to open lines on the kingside and infiltrate on the dark squares.

33... gxf4 34. ♗xf4 ♖g6 35.h3 h5 36. ♗e5+ ♗h7 37.g5 I would be slightly hesitant to do this, as it kills the pawn tension, and I'd rather leave open the option of taking on h5 at the right moment. 37. ♖g3 seems most natural, with gxh5 on the way if allowed.

37... ♗g8 38. ♗g3 ♗h7 38...b6! looks like the last chance for

Country: Uzbekistan
 Year of birth: 2002
 Peak FIDE rating: 2663
 (October 2022)
 Board: 2
 Result: 8 pts from 11 games
 Rating Performance: 2759



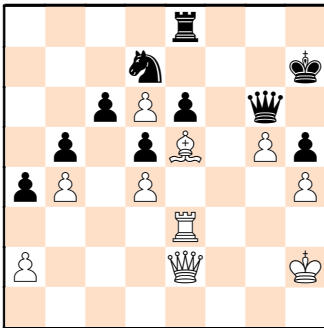
PHOTO: FIDE / Lenmart Ootes



Black, followed by a timely ...c6-c5, trying to break up the bind along the dark squares.

39.h4 ♖g8 40.♖e2 ♖g7 41.♗h2 ♗g8 42.♖d2 ♖a8 43.♖e3 a4 You could argue that this is impatient and makes White's task easier, but it's hard to blame Bluebaum. No one enjoys sitting still and watching an opponent slowly improve their position.

44.b4 b5 45.♖e2 ♖e8 46.♗e5 ♗h7



47.♗f6! Now the e6 pawn will fall shortly.

47...♖f7 47...♗xf6 48.gxf6 ♖xf6 49.♖xh5+ winning.

48.♗e7 ♖f4+ 49.♗h3 ♗g8 50.♖xe6 ♗f8 51.♖f6 ♖c1 52.♖f3

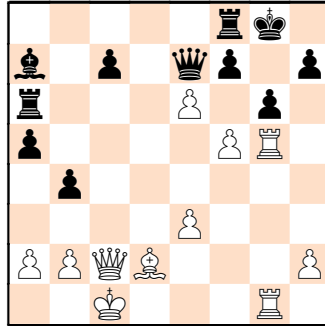
Black resigned

DOMMARAJU GUKESH

Gukesh was arguably the biggest individual story from the Olympiad. He won his first eight games in a row! Then he suffered the unfortunate accident against Abdusattorov, but his performance was still wonderful overall. I think he's a pretty universal player, as you'll see from the two games I've chosen. One is a direct attack, and one is a great maneuvering battle. He's extremely well disciplined, and always plays according to the demands of the position. He won't go on the offensive unless he's convinced that the position dictates it.

Dommaraju Gukesh	2684
Gabriel Sargissian	2698

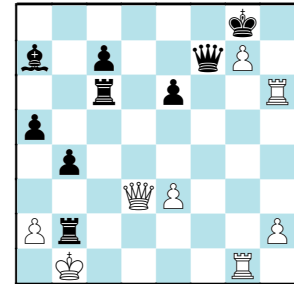
Round 6, India 2 vs. Armenia



Black is under a terrible attack, but he can still survive if he finds the best move here.

23...♗h8? It's so natural to get the king off the g-file, but first priority should have been dealing with the e6 pawn.

23...fxe6! 24.fxg6 h6 Black appears to be okay here. 25.♖h5 ♖f2 26.g7 ♖f7 Stopping the threat of ♖h7+! This move also threatens ...♖f1+. 27.♖d3 ♖xd2! (27...♖d6 28.♖xh6+-) 28.♖xh6 ♖c6+ 29.♗b1 ♖xb2+

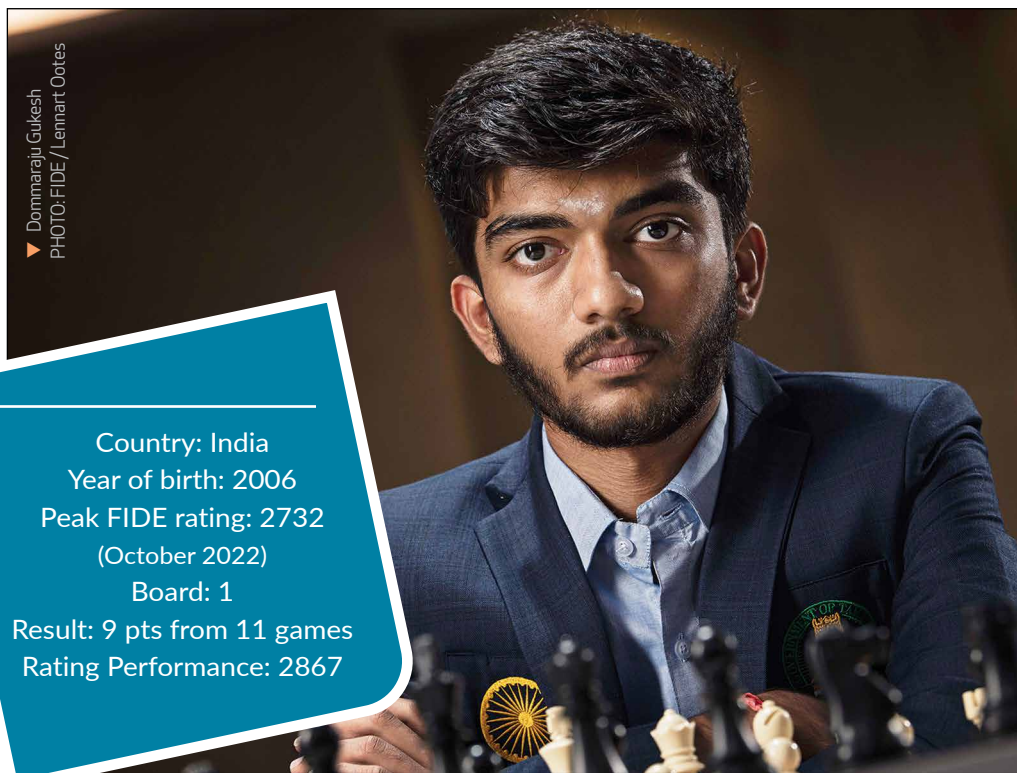


The rook is untouchable because of ...♖f2+, although that's far from obvious at a glance!

A) Let's dive deeper into this forced sequence: 30.♗xb2 ♖f2+ 31.♗b3 a4+ 32.♗xb4 ♖b2+ 33.♖b3 ♖d2+ 34.♗a3 ♖d6+ 35.♗b2 ♖e5+ 36.♗a3 ♖c5+ 37.♗b2 a3+ 38.♖xa3 ♖e5+ 39.♗b1 ♖e4+ 40.♗b2 ♗d4+! 41.exd4 ♖xd4+ What a line!

B) So at the end of the madness we have a perpetual check. 30.♗a1 30...♖xa2+ 31.♗b1 ♖b2+=.

24.♗b1! White needs to put his king on b1 before attempting 24.exf7 ♗xe3. Now the problem for Black is that ...fxe6 can never be played. In the meantime White's king is safe and exf7 becomes a real threat.



Dommaraju Gukesh
PHOTO: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

Country: India
 Year of birth: 2006
 Peak FIDE rating: 2732
 (October 2022)
 Board: 1
 Result: 9 pts from 11 games
 Rating Performance: 2867

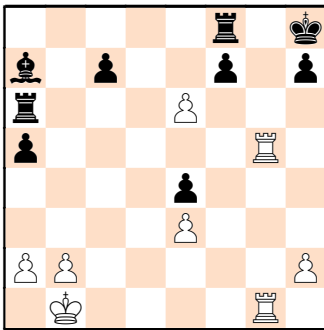


24...gxf5 Or 24...fxe6 25.fxg6 h6 26.g7+ winning.

25.♙xb4! A great clearance move, as ♜g2 comes with deadly effect even at the cost of a full piece.

25...♞xb4 25...axb4 would lead to something similar to the game. 26.♜g2 ♜d8 27.e7! ♜d3+ 28.♜c2 ♜xc2+ 29.♙xc2 ♜e8 30.♜g8+ ♜xg8 31.♜xg8+ ♙xg8 32.e8♜+ winning.

26.♜g2 ♜e4+ 27.♜xe4 fxe4



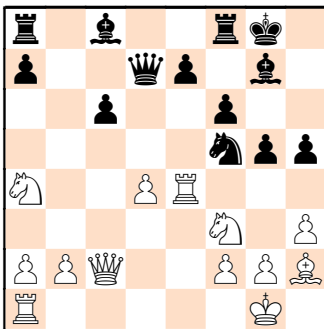
The queens are traded, but White has one last point.

28.e7 28.exf7?? It's never too late to blunder! 28...♜g6-+.

28...♜e8 29.♜g8+ ♜xg8 30.♜xg8+ ♙xg8 31.e8♜+ The rest is easy and White won shortly.

Fabiano Caruana	2783
Dommaraju Gukesh	2684

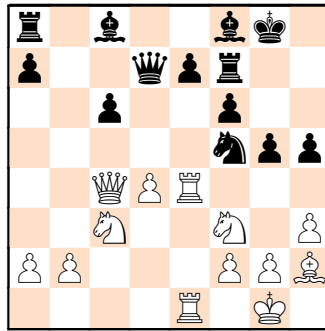
Round 8, USA vs. India 2



The position is extremely strategically complex, but Gukesh hits on a really nice redeployment here.

19...♜f7! The idea is to play ...♙g7-f8, and eventually ...e7-e6, improving the scope of the bishop. Also the f7 rook could slide to g7 or h7 eventually, to aid a kingside attack.

20.♜ae1 ♙f8 21.♜e2 ♜d5 22.♙c3 ♜d7 23.♜c4



23...♜b7! Finally ...e7-e6 is ready to be played. Black can also consider offering a queen trade under the right circumstances.

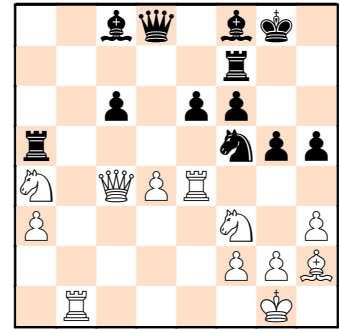
24.b4 It's not easy to suggest useful improving moves for White, but this pawn turns out to be a headache later for White. It gives a nice "hook" for Black to use to pry open the a-file. I wonder if meeting 24.♙a4 with 24...♞b5 was Gukesh's idea. Then, 25.♜c2 ♙h6 is rather a surprising move, but ...♙c8-f5 is an annoying threat to face.

24...e6 25.♜b1 ♜d7 The queen goes right back to where it came from, but the idea is straightforward – Black is getting the queen off the b-file in preparation for the move ...a7-a5.

26.♜be1 ♜b7 27.♜b1 ♜d7 28.a3 Perhaps the match situation affected Caruana's decision to reject the draw. None of his teammates had particularly inspiring positions at this point, and in the end, two of them drew and one of them lost, so even a draw would have meant that the USA would lose the match.

28...a5 Now Black's position is just perfect. His "weak" pawns on e6 and c6 can't really be attacked, and White's lack of a light-squared bishop is very much felt. The bishop on h2 isn't doing much – it controls the diagonal, but otherwise it's just sitting there as a relative spectator.

29.♙a4 ♜d8 30.bxa5 ♜xa5



31.♙c5? After this it's completely hopeless. Upon 31.♜c2 Black is slightly better, but it's not at all clear how to continue. For example, the a3 pawn is not free, as 31...♙xa3 is met by 32.♜b8! This pin is a real headache.

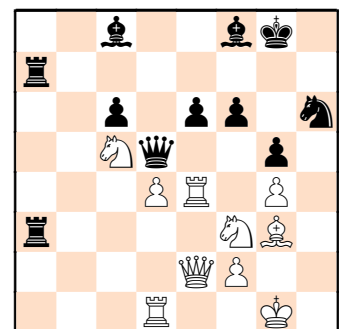
31...♜d5! Now the queen is completely unassailable, and dominates the board. Note that White's knight on c5 looks nice, but it would really rather be on c3, robbing Black's queen of the d5 square.

32.♜e2 32.♜xd5 cxd5 33.♜e1 ♙xc5-+

32...♜xa3 Now Black is up a pawn and retains the dominant features of his position. The final stage of the game will come in the form of a mating attack.

33.♜d1 ♜fa7 34.g4 Creating luft with tempo is understandable, but this further weakens White's king. 34.♙xe6 is met by 34...♜a1-+.

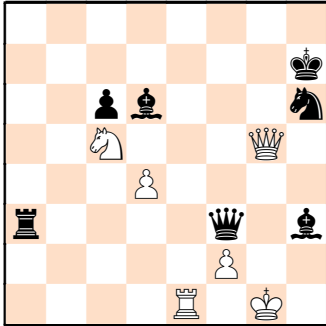
34...hxg4 35.hxg4 ♙h6 36.♙g3



36...e5! Remember when I said that White would love to have a light-squared bishop? Now we see it in action – Black's c8 bishop suddenly springs to life.



37. ♖xe5 fxe5 38. ♜xe5 ♙xg4 39. ♚d2 ♜f3 40. ♜xg5+ ♜g7 41. ♜e1 ♙h3 42. ♙d6 ♙xd6 43. ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 44. ♜g5+ ♜h7



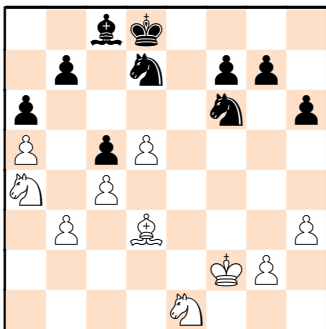
45. ♜e4 ♜xe4 A nice move to finish the game – the queen is immune due to back rank mate. **White resigned**

ARJUN ERIGAISSI

I'm not going to lie, it's a struggle for me to pin down Arjun's style. Is it a cop-out to say that his style is... winning? He always comes with a slight twist in the opening. He pretty much never blunders any tactics, and outfoxes his opponent somehow. The game I chose is so impressive, because it's against Leinier Dominguez, a player who loses very rarely – and in this game he loses without any obvious mistake!

Arjun Erigaisi	2689
Leinier Dominguez	2754

Round 11, India 1 vs. USA



The endgame is clearly fantastic for White, but it's one thing to achieve this



PHOTO: FIDE/Lemart Ootes

Arjun Erigaisi

Country: India
Year of birth: 2003
Peak FIDE rating: 2728
(October 2022)
Board: 3
Result: 8½ pts from 11 games
Rating Performance: 2767

position, and another to convert it into a win. Black is tied down to the defense of the c5 pawn, and a timely b3-b4 break should work wonders. Arjun makes it look easy.

30... ♗g6 30... ♜c7! might have been the most resilient, but White is not obliged to follow the same plan as in the game.

A) 31. ♙f5 b5! This is the only try, sacrificing a pawn. 32. axb6+ ♖xb6 Black is happy to trade his useless bishop for White's knight. 33. ♙xc8 ♖xa4 34. ♙xa6 ♖c3 and it's not over yet.

B) 31. ♙c2 ♜d6 32. ♖d3 ♖e4+! Here's the difference – at least Black can free his d7 knight. 33. ♜e3 ♖df6 and there's still some work to do.

C) 31. g4! is probably best – preparing ♙f5 without allowing the ...b7-b5 resource, as the bishop will now be defended.

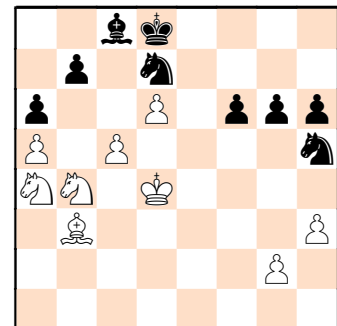
31. ♜e3 ♜e7 32. ♙c2 The knight belongs on d3, pressuring c5 and controlling b4.

32... ♜d6 33. ♖d3 Note Black's bishop is as good as dead. Also his knight on d7 is stuck guarding c5, and as long as that's the case, his bishop is stuck as well.

33... ♖g8 34. b4! White's pieces are in their ideal places, so it's time to make the breakthrough.

34... ♙xb4 35. ♜d4 Note how effective the clamp of White's a5 pawn is. Black can never play ...b7-b6 to protect the c5 square.

35... ♖gf6 36. ♖xb4 ♖h5 37. c5+ ♜c7 38. ♙b3 f6 39. d6+ ♜d8



40. c6 There are many ways to win, but breaking up Black's pawn structure is simple enough.



40...bxc6 41.♖xc6+ ♕e8 42.♖b6 ♖xb6 After 42...♗b7 43.♗a4 Black is totally pinned and will probably resign soon.

43.axb6 ♗d7 44.♖e7 ♗b7 45.♗c5 ♖f4 The knight finally returns, but it's far too late.

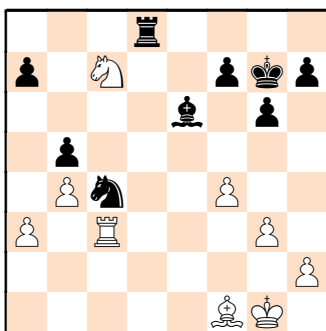
46.♗a4+ ♗d8 47.♗c6 ♖e6+ 48.♗d5 ♖f4+ 49.♗c4 **Black resigned** in view of 49...♗xc6 50.♖xc6+ ♗c8 51.d7+ ♗xd7 52.b7.

NIHAL SARIN

Nihal is an absolute positional grinder. If you give him any weakness to latch on to, it's all but over. He's also a monster at speed chess, so he plays very well in time trouble. I'd say that one problem he has is that his risk-averse style, while very effective against players as strong or stronger than him, is not quite as effective against weaker players. I remember some open tournaments in which he drew a few games against players much lower rated than him. I think he's just in the process of adapting his style, though, so if his Olympiad performance is anything to go by, this won't be a problem for long.

Nihal Sarin	2651
Matthias Bluebaum	2673

Round 11, India 2 vs. Germany



Nihal was winning before, but now Bluebaum has a chance to get back in the game. His b5 pawn and e6 bishop are both hit. What to do?

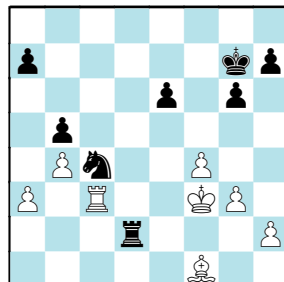


▲ Nihal Sarin PHOTO: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

Country: India
 Year of birth: 2004
 Peak FIDE rating: 2677
 (September 2022)
 Board: 2
 Result: 7½ pts from 10 games
 Rating Performance: 2774

36...♗f5? 36...♗d1! is the only way, threatening ...♖d2.

A) 37.♖xe6+ fxe6 38.♗f2 ♗d2+ 39.♗f3



39...♗f6! is a key subtlety, keeping the rook on d2. (39...♗xh2? fails to 40.♗xc4 bxc4 41.♗xc4, when White has serious winning chances with

♗c7 or ♗c5-a5 coming next.) 40.♗xc4 bxc4 41.♗xc4 ♗d3+ This check is now possible thanks to the strong 39th move. 42.♗e4 ♗xa3 is equal.

B) Or 37.♗f2 ♗d2+ 38.♗e1 ♗a2! Now the pressure on the a3 pawn, combined with threats of perpetual check, secures the draw. 39.♖xb5 ♗a1+ 40.♗f2 ♗a2+ 41.♗g1 ♗a1=.

37.♖xb5 ♗d1 This was Bluebaum's idea, and it's rather clever. The knight on c4 is immune, but now White has time to step out of the pin, having already collected an extra pawn.

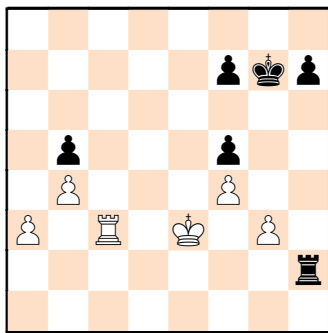
38.♗f2! 38.♗xc4 ♗d3 39.♗c5 ♗xf1+ 40.♗g2 ♗a1.

38...♖d2 Watch out for ...♖e4+.

39.♗d3 Maybe this is the move Black missed from afar. Now everything is under control and White should be able to win with his queenside pawns.

39...a6 40.♗xf5 The most direct way, leading by force to a winning rook endgame.

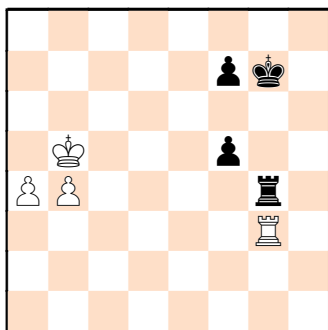
40...gxf5 41.♗e2 ♗h1 42.♗xd2 ♗xh2+ 43.♗e3 axb5



44.♔d4 There are two reasons why this is hopeless for Black – White’s king activity is great, and Black’s pawn structure is awful – his doubled f-pawns are going nowhere fast.

44...h5 45.♔c5 ♖h3 46.♔xb5 h4 Black gets his pawn far down the board, but White’s rook easily deals with it. In the meantime White has two pawns, and two is better than one!

47.a4 hxg3 48.♖c1 ♖h4 49.♖g1 ♖xf4 50.♖xg3+ ♖g4



51.♖f3 It’s a small detail, but it’s worth noting that this move is the most accurate, giving Black no chances at all. Here’s an example of how White could actually still blow the game, with a series of bad but plausible moves. **51.♖a3 ♖g5 52.a5 f4+ 53.♔b6 ♖g6+ 54.♔b7 ♖g3!** The idea of ...♖b3 is the saving grace! Well, it doesn’t actually save the game, but it sure makes White nervous, I’d imagine. **55.♖a4 f3 56.b5 f2 57.♖f4 ♖g5 58.b6 ♖xa5 59.♖xf2** It’s still winning for White, but why let it get this close?

51...f4 52.a5 Black is about six tempi down from where he needs to be (just a rough estimate).

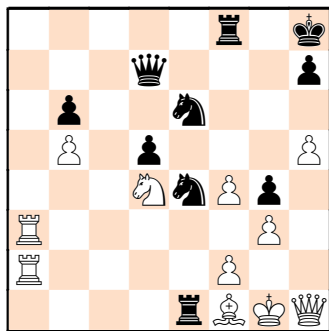
52...♔f6 53.a6 ♔e5 54.a7 ♖g8 55.♖a3
Black resigned



Pragg, as many call him due to a “tongue-breaking” pronunciation of his full name, has been making some headlines lately for his excellent performance in online rapid tournaments, including the FTX Crypto Cup, in which he finished second and beat Magnus Carlsen in a match. He’s very universal and always well prepared in the opening. His only loss in the Olympiad was to the Spaniard Jaime Santos Latasa, where he cracked after sustained pressure in an endgame. But, he won five games, two of which were absolutely huge for his team – against Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. I’m showing a game from the former match, which is one of the best arguments for chess as a sport that I’ve seen.

Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa	2648
Vasif Durarbayli	2638

Round 9, India 2 vs. Azerbaijan



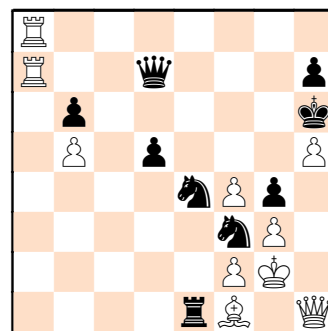
This game was absolutely nuts, and I could write a whole article on it alone. By winning it, Pragg was able to save the match, which ended in a 2-2 score. There were many mistakes, which is understandable given the severe time pressure, complexity of the position, and the stressful circumstances.

49.♖a8 49.♗xe6 ♖xe6 50.h6! is a straightforward win, since White will always be able to get his queen out if he needs to, and Black is severely restricted by back rank mate ideas.

49...♗xd4! 50.♖xf8+ ♔g7 51.♖fa8 ♗f3+ 51...♔h6! Black should retain the flexibility of his position by keeping his knight on d4. **52.♖2a7**

Now this flat out loses for White. **52...♖e6 53.♖h8 ♖xf1+! 54.♔xf1 ♗d2+ 55.♔g1 ♖e1+ 56.♔g2 ♖e4+ 57.♔g1 ♗4f3+ 58.♔g2 ♗e1+ 59.♔h2 ♗df3+** with checkmate to follow. What a knightmare!

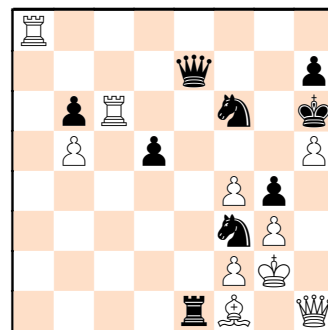
52.♔g2 ♔h6 53.♖c2 53.♖2a7! wins now.



Somehow White’s two rooks get the job done without any assistance from the queen or bishop. **53...♖f5** (Or **53...♖e6 54.♖h8 ♗f6 55.♗d3! ♖xh1 56.♖hxh7+ ♗xh7 57.♖xh7 mate.**) **54.♖b8! (54.♖h8??** is pointless here, as the h7 pawn is already defended. **54...♗ed2 55.♖hxh7+ ♖xh7 56.♖xh7+ ♔xh7+-) 54...♖e6 55.♖bb7+-.**

53...♖e7 How do we evaluate such a position? White is “down a queen!” Black’s pieces look amazing, but how to actually infiltrate? I have no idea! No human can play this position properly. As Black I would look to find a way to remove my e4 knight and replace it with my queen.

54.♖c6+ ♗f6



55.♖a3? A moment of panic, as ...♖e4



▲ Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa PHOTO: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

Country: India
 Year of birth: 2005
 Peak FIDE rating: 2687
 (October 2022)
 Board: 3
 Result: 6½ pts from 9 games
 Rating Performance: 2767

Now ...d2 doesn't work because of d3+! This little detail means that the stronghold of the pawn on g4 and knight on f3 is broken, and White is fully back in the game.

59...d4 This is so natural, but it fails to a hidden detail.

59...b3 is basically a waiting move, and is not easy to understand. Black will probably play ...d2 next, if allowed. 60.g6 (60.h3 d2 61.e2 xe2 62.g7+ xg7 63.g4+ f8 64.xe2 e4 should be a draw.) 60...d2 Now there's no d3+. 61.h4 f3+ 62.h3 xf1 63.xh6+ xh6 64.f6+ h7 65.f7+ h8 66.f8+=.

60.g6! e7 60...d2 was the resource Black was counting on, but it turns out that the move 59...d4 opened the long diagonal for White's queen! 61.h3!+- In a shocking turn of events, the queen that has been dormant the whole game will deliver a deadly check on b7.

61.d3! Now it's over.

61...a3 61...xh1 62.e6+-.

62.e6+ xd3 63.xe1 xe1+ 64.xe1 xb5 65.e4+ g8 66.g6+ I was stressed just watching this game, so I can hardly imagine how the players felt. Pragg's nerves were really impressive at the end.

VINCENT KEYMER

Keymer probably has the most mature style out of all the players I've talked about. He tends to play quiet openings and knows them very well. None of this is surprising, given that the great Peter Leko is his trainer. I also think he had the first supertournament experience out of all the youngsters, having played in the 2019 GRENKE Chess Classic against Carlsen, Caruana, MVL, Anand, Aronian, and more.

was a scary threat, so White covers the f3 square, preventing a bunch of mating nets, but this transforms the position heavily in Black's favor.

55.a6?? is an example of what Pragg was probably afraid of. 55...e4 56.xf6+ g7 57.fxb6 White has his own mating net coming, so it's easy to stop here and think that White is winning, but no! 57...h4+ (But not 57...d2+?? 58.h2 xf1+ 59.xf1 xf1 60.b7+ f8 61.a8+ e8 62.xe8+ xe8+-) 58.h2 xh1+ Trading queens! Maybe it's just me, but I think this is really easy to miss. Maybe it's obvious once you get here, but this is the sort of detail you could easily overlook from a few moves back. You don't normally consider queen trades when you're trying to checkmate someone. 59.xh1 xf1+ 60.h2 f3+ 61.g2 g1 mate.

55.g8 How did Pragg miss this extremely obvious move? (I'm kidding). Now ...e4 is stopped and Black will probably "bail out" with a draw. 55...e6 56.xe6 xe6 57.a8 e1+ 58.g1 f3+.

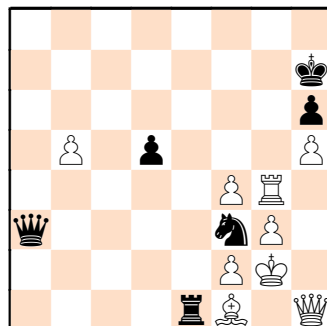
55...xa3 Oh yeah, the rook was hanging. I doubt Pragg missed that, but the problem is White has only one rook

to play with. Seriously, that's all he's got! The rest of the pieces are stuck.

56.xf6+ g7 57.xb6 h6 A very calm and strong move, shutting the door on White's queen once and for all. This should be the end, but nerves surely played a role in the conclusion of this game.

58.g6+ h7? 58...f7! was the final detail Black needed to see. Now the king is not in "checking distance" from White's bishop. 59.xg4 d2+-.

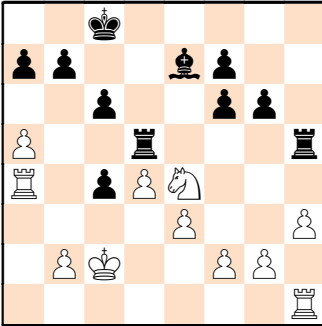
59.xg4





Vincent Keymer	2686
Avital Boruchovsky	2551

Round 10, Germany vs. Israel

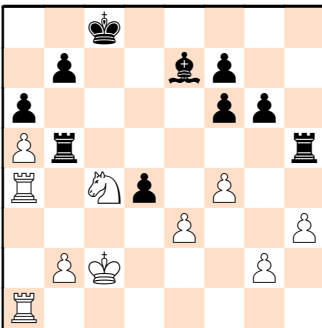


I thought this was a pretty nice positional display by Keymer. Black has played a somewhat suspect opening and is now saddled with a weak c4 pawn. White would like to pick it off, but his own a5 pawn is under fire, so it's not a cakewalk.

21. ♞ha1 a6 21... ♙d8 If Black's king was on b8, this would work, but it fails here. 22. ♞xc4 ♞xa5 23. ♞xa5 ♞xa5 24. ♜d6+ ♝c7 25. ♜xf7 ♙e7 26. ♜h8! g5 27. ♜g6 ♙d6 28. e4+- White will play g3, f4, and shove his pawns forward.

22. f4! Now there's really no defense against ♜d2 . However, going after the pawn immediately with 22. ♜d2? would be naive as 22... ♞dg5 is exactly what Black is playing for. 23. ♞g1 ♞xh3 .

22... ♞b5 23. ♜d2 c5 24. ♜xc4 cxd4



25. ♜b6+! Impressive accuracy. White wants to take on d4 with the rook, not the pawn, even if this means temporarily allowing Black material equality.

25... ♝b8 26. ♞xd4 ♞hc5+ 27. ♞c4

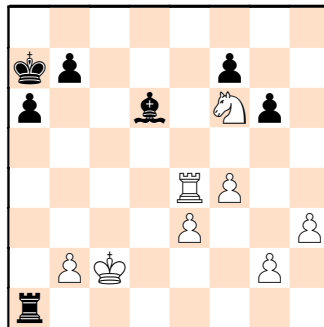


▲ Vincent Keymer PHOTO: FIDE/Lennart Ootes

$\text{♞xa5 28. ♞xa5 ♞xa5}$ Black has gotten his pawn back, but his rook is quite wayward at the moment.

29. ♜d7+ ♝a7 30. ♞e4 ♙d6 30... ♙d8 31. ♞e8+- .

31. ♜xf6 ♞a1



32. ♞e8! The point here is that White is preparing ♜e4 , centralizing the knight on an ideal square. Then he can go after Black's f7 pawn.

32... ♞g1 33. g4 ♞g2+ 34. ♝b1?! This gave Black a chance to survive.

34. ♝c3! ♞g3 Allowing this move is not easy, but it turns out White can afford to lose the h3 pawn. 35. ♜d5! (Not 35. $\text{♜e4?? ♞xe3+ 36. ♝d4 ♙xf4}$) 35... ♞xh3 36. g5! White will play ♞d8 and ♞d7 with a dominant position.

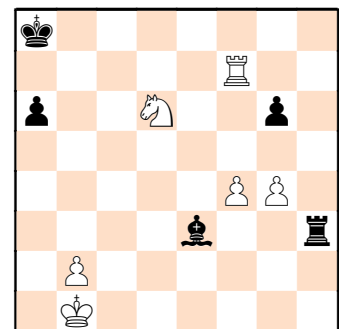
34... ♞h2 35. ♜e4 ♙c7 35... ♙b4! The

Country: Germany
Year of birth: 2004
Peak FIDE rating: 2700
(October 2022)

Board: 1
Result: 6 pts from 8 games
Rating Performance: 2766

bishop needs to go here to stop ♞e7 . 36. ♜g5 f6 37. ♜e4 f5 38. gxf5 gxf5 39. ♜g3 ♞xh3 40. ♜xf5 a5± White's pawns take a while to get going.

36. ♞e7 ♙b6 37. ♜d6 ♙c5 38. ♞xb7+ ♝a8 39. ♞d7 ♙xe3 40. ♞xf7 ♞xh3



Black's bishop and rook won't be able to coordinate effectively here, and the win is straightforward now.

41. ♜c4 ♙d4 42. ♞d7 ♙c5 43. ♞d5 ♙g1 44. ♜e5 ♞h4 45. ♞d6 ♙e3 46. ♞xa6+ ♝b7 47. ♞a4 With two extra pawns, White won easily in a few moves. ■