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At the start of both of the 2022 U.S. Championships, held in the Saint Louis Chess Club this fall, I was pretty sure they would give me enough material to fit into my ‘Magnificent 3’ column. It’s quite unrealistic to keep track of all chess events worldwide at any given period, so why not focus on a real treat, generously offering \$262,000 for 14 men in the field and \$162,000 for the 14 best U.S. women players? I take this opportunity to credit Rex Sinquefeld for his generosity.

The Championship did not let me down. Eventually I had a surfeit of nice games to choose from. The problem was not a lack of worthwhile games, but the abundance. Below I humbly offer you my selection.

ARONIAN GENERATES A SPARKLING BATTLE FROM THE LOSING SIDE

My first choice is the Aronian-Swiercz game played in Round 6. Although a renowned elite player for at least a decade, Levon Aronian is a newcomer to the U.S. chess stage. To my knowledge this was his first U.S. National Championship after switching from Armenia not too long ago. However his play often looked somewhat nervous on this occasion.

After four fighting draws at the start, Levon suddenly lost as Black to 19-year-old Awonder Liang. That must have been unsettling for him not only because he lost, but rather because of the way he lost. After relying on 1.e4 e5 at the highest level for decades, he suddenly got beaten by a youngster in the Scotch Gambit!

All in all, Aronian’s desire to bounce back in Round 6 as White was evident. He used an array of top-notch tricks to confuse his solid opponent – such as leaving his pawn on d2 in a Semi-Slav, rather than routinely placing it on d4, and a more than odd corner pawn advance h2-h3-h4, leaving his king in the center instead of castling and such like. Soon he spiced things up by giving up his corner pawn to Swiercz and bringing his rook into play via h3.

By GM Sarunas Sulskis

THE MAGNIFICENT 3

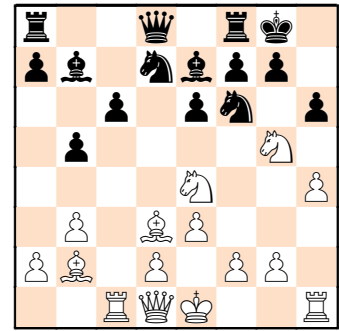
Remarkable Recent Games



GM Sarunas Sulskis is a nine-time champion of Lithuania, and a regular member of his country’s national team, most recently at the 2018 Chess Olympiad. As a teenager, he studied at the Botvinnik–Kasparov Chess Academy and later graduated from the Kaunas College of Management and Law. He qualified three times for the knock-out World Championship and his most notable results include an outright victory at the 2011 Guernsey International Chess Festival, a share of first prize at the 2019 Riga Technical University Open and a tied second place at the 2006 EU Individual Open. Sarunas is also a FIDE trainer and arbiter, writer and passionate chess promoter.



Swiercz wasn't too greedy: he gave the pawn back and even invested one more to consolidate his grip on Aronian's king, which had found itself confined to the middle of the board. Aronian kept refusing every opportunity to accept a repetition of moves, until he got struck by 26...♖f4+! Then, by the end of the second period of play, he found himself the exchange down with his position heading for a tragic end. Nevertheless, the ensuing ending was ripe for a sudden introduction of queens which undoubtedly meant lots of fun for the spectators.



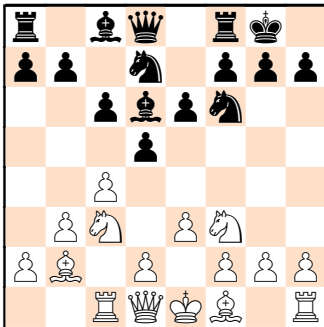
A11

Levon Aronian	2755
Dariusz Swiercz	2652

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2022

1.c4 e6 2.♖f3 d5 3.e3 ♗f6 4.♗c3 c6 I am tempted to call this a Semi-Slav Meran, but we are not there yet since the pawn remains on d2 instead of d4. As we will soon see, this is an intentional strategy by Aronian.

5.b3 ♗d6 6.♗b2 0-0 7.♞c1 ♖bd7



8.h3 This might already be an early novelty. On the one hand, Aronian is temporizing, wanting to bring his bishop to c4 in one go. On the other hand, he is trying to disturb Swiercz's peace of mind by a prospective g2-g4 thrust. His aggression manifests itself in the fact that he wants his long-range bishop on b2 to remain stubbornly directed against the enemy king.

8...dxc4 This might have been an uneasy decision for Swiercz. He concedes the center to White and helps him bring his bishop into play. On the direct 8...e5, however, 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.♗b5 ♗b8 11.♗a3 ♞e8 12.♞c2 is quite unpleasant.

9.♗xc4 Aronian displays a fighting

mood. On another day he might have also considered reinforcing his centre with 9.bxc4 e5 10.d3 ♗c5 11.♗e2.

9...b5 10.♗d3 Aronian keeps pointing his guns at Swiercz's king. On the eve of this game, badly struck down by the young Liang with a frivolous Scotch Gambit, Aronian needs revenge as much as he does his first win in the Championship in order to restore his shattered confidence.

10...♗b7 11.♗e4 ♗e7 12.h4! A decision which is both brave and unorthodox, but in my humble opinion spending two tempi to get the corner pawn to h4 is too great a luxury. Other solid options for White were 12.♞e2 and 12.0-0.

12...h6 13.♗fg5 A valiant advance indeed, but Black is not forced to accept this Greek gift.

13...c5! Leaving the b5 pawn unprotected, Swiercz responds by striking White in the center, exploiting the power of his bishop. It would be naive to take the knight on offer by 13...hxg5?? as after 14.hxg5 ♗xe4 15.♞h5 f6 16.g6 checkmate is imminent.

14.♞f3 ♗xe4 15.♗xe4 ♗xe4 16.♞xe4 Aronian now forces his opponent to capture a pawn and subsequently allow his corner rook into a dangerous pursuit of the black king. 16.♗xe4 f5 17.♞g3 e5 18.♗c3 was a calmer alternative, but completely alien to Aronian's mood that afternoon.

16...♗xg5 16...g6?? would have led to Black's instant collapse after 17.♗xe6!

17.hxg5 ♞xg5 18.♞h3 Creating a deadly yet transparent threat of ♞h3-g3xg7.

▼ Dariusz Swiercz PHOTO: Lennart Ootes

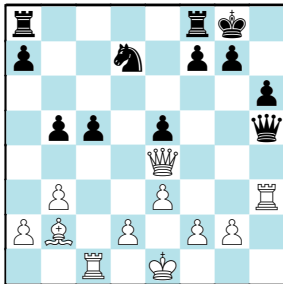




Swiercz responds by muzzling the enemy bishop.

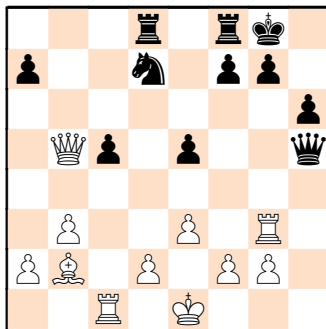
18...e5! 19.♠g3 ♖h5 Ensuring that the white monarch will never find peace, once Aronian decentralizes his queen in pursuit of the lost pawn. However, isn't Swiercz's move a tacit offer of a draw?

20.♖c6 I missed a good part of the post-game interviews, therefore cannot really say what was on Swiercz's mind if Aronian had chosen 20.♠h3.



- A) No way should Black go for the disastrous 20...f5??. And not due to 21.♖d5+, when 21...♗f7 parries White's threats, but because of 21.♖xa8! winning material and the game.
- B) On the other hand 20...♗g6 compromises Black's structure after 21.♖xg6 fxe6 22.e4 which makes me quite sceptical about Swiercz's alleged intention to spurn the draw that way.
- C) Finally, 20...♗g5 21.♠g3 is just a reasonable repetition for White, being a pawn down.

20...♠ad8 21.♖xb5



Aronian has regained a pawn, but lost the dominant position of his queen for one outside the centre. The black queen

patrols on h5, forcing White to remain on high alert for hours to come.

21...♗f6 The knight jump to e4 is now a big threat.

22.♖c6 22.d3 would have made a ♗b5-f1 defense obsolete. Aronian might have actually been worried by the funny line 22...♗h1+ 23.♔d2 (23.♔e2 ♗h5+) 23...♗e4+ 24.♔c2 ♗xg3 25.♠xh1 ♗xh1.

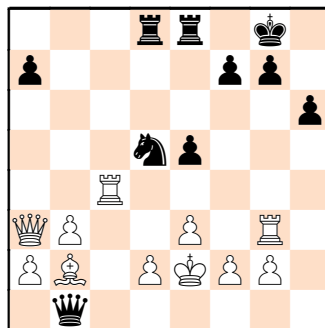
22...♗d5 23.♖xc5 ♠fe8! Here it's White who is a pawn up, but fortunes are now reversed on the other front whereby the white king is stuck in the center under the fire of enemy rooks. A prospective ...♗d5-f4! thrust is a big safety issue for White.

24.♠c4? Aronian starts cracking under self-imposed pressure. Now the black queen is going to enter his rear and it will get hot! I guess he would have been better off trying to repeat the position with 24.♠h3 ♗g4 25.♠g3 This time I am less sure if Swiercz would have acquiesced to repeating moves, but on 25...♗h4 (25...♗e4 26.♖c4) 26.♖c4 (26.♠h3 ♗e4) 26...♗f4 White can actually close his eyes and grab that knight 27.exf4 exf4+ (27...♗h1+ 28.♔e2 exf4+ 29.♔f3 ♗h5+ 30.♠g4) 28.♔d1 no matter what the danger.

24...♗h1+ 25.♔e2 ♖b1! Now things are terribly shaky for White.

26.♖a3 This move on the edge of the board signals the emergency White is facing. On 26.♠c2 Swiercz gets things done fast with the trademark 26...♗f4+! 27.exf4 exf4+ winning.

And on 26.♗c3 you can get a flavor of Black's ongoing attack by 26...♗xc3+ 27.♠xc3 ♠xd2+!! 28.♔xd2 ♠d8+ 29.♔e2 ♖d1 mate.



26...♗f4+! The whole of Black's counterattacking strategy hinges on this picturesque thrust. The black rooks offer beautiful rear support for the attack.

27.♠xf4! 27.exf4? exf4+ is already curtains.

27...♖d3+ Not 27...exf4?? of course, due to 28.♠xg7+ ♔h8 29.♠xf7+ ♔g8 30.♠g7+ and White wins easily.

28.♔f3 ♖d5+ I think 28...♗xd2 was possible, but I suspect Swiercz was too nervous to play such a calm move in the heat of the battle. He might have been concerned about 29.♠xg7+ ♔xg7 30.♔g3.

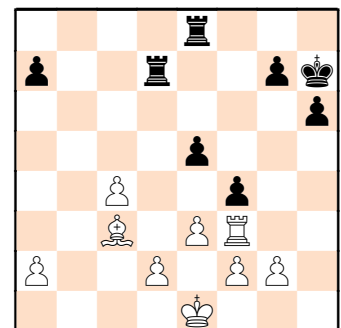
29.♠e4 On 29.e4 ♗xd2 the white king is exposed to a lethal attack, whereas after 29.♔g4 Black safely picks up the rook and wins with 29...exf4.

29...f5 30.♗c3 An indication that White is fighting a losing battle. Nevertheless 30.♖b4 fxe4+ 31.♔e2 ♖d3+ 32.♔e1 ♖b1+ 33.♔e2 ♗xb2-+ offers no respite.

30...♖xe4+ 31.♔e2 f4 32.♠f3 ♖d3+ 33.♔e1 ♖b1+ Time and again Swiercz grabs his chance to edge closer to the second time control by a repetition of moves. Relieved of the hassle of a time scramble, converting the advantage of the exchange shouldn't be a big deal.

34.♔e2 ♖d3+ 35.♔e1 ♠d7 36.♖a4 ♖b1+ 37.♔e2 ♖d3+ 38.♔e1 ♔h7 39.♖c4 White still has a pawn for the loss of the exchange – Aronian's glimmer of hope of fighting back.

39...♖xc4 40.bxc4



40...g5 Not only advancing his kingside



pawn majority, but funny enough, trying to trap the white rook.

41.♖h3 41.g3?? allows Black to trap White's rook in two ways – 41...g4 or 41...e4.

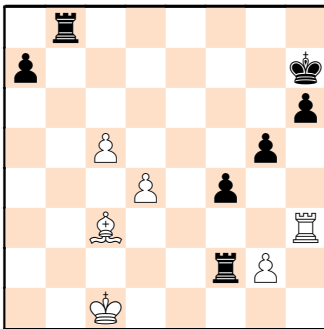
41...♞c7 42.d3 ♞c6 42...e4 43.♔d2 offers White some hope.

43.exf4 Leaving the a2 pawn to its fate in a desperate bid to get two connected pawns in the center. Perhaps Aronian rejected 43.a4 because of 43...e4 44.♔d2 exd3 45.♔xd3 ♞d8+ 46.♙d4 ♞a6 47.exf4 ♞ad6-+.

43...exf4+ 44.♔d1 ♞a6 This must be a decisive maneuver as the rook not only hits the corner pawn but subsequently the whole second rank. In connection with the advanced pawn on f4 and the semi-advanced one on g5, this should secure a win for Swiercz. Aronian nevertheless keeps fighting like a wounded lion.

45.d4! ♞xa2 46.c5 ♞b8 I guess there are quite a few winning ways. For example, 46...♞xf2 47.d5 g4 48.♞d3 ♞xg2 49.d6 f3 50.♙d4 (50.d7 f2-+) 50...f2 51.♙xf2 ♞xf2 52.d7 ♞b8 53.♔e1 ♞c2-+.

47.♔c1 ♞xf2



There's rich booty to be had on the second rank. Watch out nevertheless, as Aronian's pawns are now sure to rush forward.

48.d5! g4 49.♞h1 On 49.♞d3 f3 50.gxf3 ♞xf3 51.♞xf3 gxf3 52.♙d4 ♔g6 53.d6 ♞b4 54.♙f2 ♔f7 there's not much hope for White.

49...g3 50.c6 f3! Engaging in a pawn race which Swiercz is bound to win



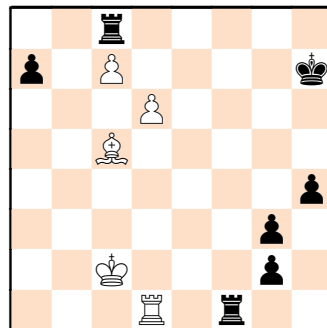
– thanks to his active rook cutting the white king off from the second rank. An attempt to get to the rear of the advancing pawns by 50...♞b5? might have run into 51.♙d4! ♞xd5 52.c7 and now it's White who is winning.

51.c7! 51.gxf3 g2 52.♞d1 ♞f1 53.♙d4 ♞b1+ 54.♔xb1 ♞xd1+ 55.♔c2 ♞xd4-+.

51...♞c8 52.d6 fxe2 53.♞d1 ♞f1 54.♙d4 h5 The blockading attempt 54...♔g6 should also win – 55.♔d2 (55.♔c2 ♔f7) 55...♞f7 56.♙xa7 ♞xc7 57.dxc7 ♞xc7 58.♙g1 ♞d7+ 59.♔e2 ♞xd1 60.♔xd1 ♔f5 61.♔e2 ♔e4 and the h-pawn rolls on unhindered to h2.

55.♔c2 On 55.♔d2 Black plays 55...♞f7 56.♙xa7 h4.

55...h4 56.♙c5! Aronian makes a desperate yet spectacular attempt at interference on the c-file.



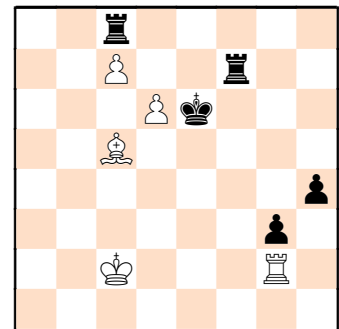
56...♞f5 Swiercz's fatigue can be sensed at the end of this extraordinary game. Instead, he should have kept pushing his terrific pawns with 56...h3, when 57.d7 is met by 57...g1♖! 58.dxc8♖ (58.♙xg1 ♞xc7+) 58...♖xc5+ 59.♔b3 ♞f3+ with a mate to follow.

57.♙xa7 ♔g6 Again, 57...h3 58.♙b6 h2 59.d7 ♞ff8 doesn't compromise Black's win.

58.♙b6 ♞f7 59.♞d2 As 59.d7 runs into a nice liquidation by 59...♞xc7+ 60.♙xc7 ♞xd7 61.♞xd7 g1♖-+.

59...♔f5 Swiercz displays a remarkably humble approach, swapping his pride on g2 for the sake of a blockade. However he didn't need to, provided that on 59...h3 60.♞d3 he finds the nice interference motif 60...♞f2+! 61.♙xf2 gxf2 winning.

60.♞xg2 ♔e6 61.♙c5



61...♞fxc7! Dealing a final blow to the White's mighty fixture on the kingside. That said, there were plenty of other winning moves, such as 61...♔d5 or 61...♔d7, etc.

62.dxc7 ♞xc7 63.♔d3 ♞xc5 64.♔e4 ♞c4+ 65.♔f3 ♔f5 66.♞a2 ♞f4+ 67.♔g2 ♔g4 68.♔h1 ♞d4 68...h3 was more straightforward: 69.♞a1 g2+ 70.♔h2 (70.♔g1 ♔g3 71.♞a3+ ♞f3) 70...♞f1 71.♞xf1 with two nice underpromotions to choose from: 71...gxf1♙ or 71...gxf1♘+.

69.♞a1 h3 70.♞b1 ♔f3 I can literally sense Swiercz enormous exhaustion at the end. The direct 70...h2 71.♔g2 ♞d2+ 72.♔h1 ♔h3 is even easier.

71.♞b3+ ♔f2 72.♞b2+ ♔e3 73.♞b1 ♔e2 **White resigned** ■



THE MAGNIFICENT 3

Remarkable Recent Games

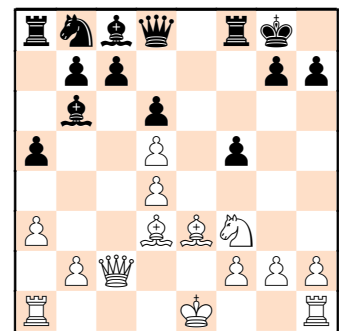
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By GM Sarunas Sulskis

A CORNERED QUEEN MEETS HER FATE

We continue with a game between Sam Shankland and Christopher Yoo played in Round 9, or to put it in another way – Teacher versus Pupil. The pupil delivers a surprise first by 13...f4?!, voluntarily giving up a pawn on h7, but in return impinging on White's right to castle. Quite a dubious reward, as soon Shankland demonstrates by playing 18.h4!, not only bringing his corner rook into play, but also threatening a direct attack on an already weakened black king. Addressing this safety problem, the teenage pupil gradually transfers his queen on h6 to keep the dangerous advancing h-pawn at bay. Then, however, Shankland puts her under lock and key with 25.♖eg1 which, despite White's numerous pawn weaknesses and king wandering in the middle of the board, effectively seals the fate of the game.



A21

Sam Shankland	2712
Christopher Yoo	2563

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2022

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♗b4 3.♘d5 a5 4.♘f3 d6 5.e3 ♘f6 6.a3 ♘xd5 7.cxd5 ♗c5 8.d4 exd4 9.exd4 ♗b6 This type of English Opening has lately featured in

some high-profile games. Black's pawn structure at this point looks more intact, but White builds his strategy on keeping the black bishop on b6 out of the action. In addition, the black kingside is oddly crammed with minor pieces for such an early stage of the game.

10.♗g5 f6 11.♗e3 0-0 12.♗d3 f5 13.♞c2

13...f4?! A daring novelty, at least in OTB chess. Don't ask me whether it has already been tested online as, to be honest, I don't bother looking in that direction. The game Ding Liren 2811 - Y.You 2763, Khanty Mansiysk 2019, saw a sacrifice of another, less valuable pawn. 13...♘d7 14.♗xf5 ♘f6 15.♗d3 h6 16.♘h4 ♘xd5 17.♗h7+ ♖h8 18.♘g6+ ♖xh7 19.♘xf8+ ♖g8 20.♘g6



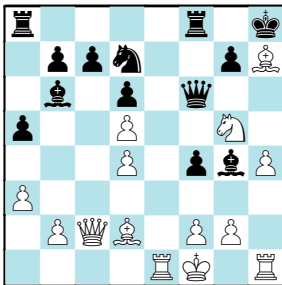
$\mathbb{W}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{K}e6$, whereupon Black had compensation for the loss of the exchange, but eventually lost the game.

14. $\mathbb{K}xh7+$ $\mathbb{K}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{K}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e7+$ In this way the youngest participant in the 2022 U.S. Championship deprives his teacher of the right to castle. Was it worth the pawn? When I see Shankland's king's rook lined up against the enemy king, I have my doubts about Black's investment.

16. $\mathbb{K}f1$ $\mathbb{K}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{K}e1$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 18.h4! Here we go! Shankland launches his corner rook into the hunt.

18... $\mathbb{K}d7$ Bringing up the pieces is mandatory. 18... $\mathbb{K}xf3$ 19.gxf3 $\mathbb{W}xd4?$ does White a favor in terms of clearing the long diagonal for his bishop and loses quickly after 20. $\mathbb{K}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{K}g1$ $\mathbb{K}d4$ 22. $\mathbb{K}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ (22... $\mathbb{W}c4+$ 23. $\mathbb{K}d3+-$) 23. $\mathbb{K}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 24. $\mathbb{K}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h3+$ 25. $\mathbb{K}e2$.

19.h5 Shankland creates the deadly threat of $\mathbb{K}f3$ -h4-g6+, which however is easy to repel. Whether weaker or stronger I myself could hardly have resisted 19. $\mathbb{K}g5$.



Let me introduce you to some sample lines here:

- A) 19... $\mathbb{K}xd4$ runs into 20. $\mathbb{K}e6$.
 B) 19... $\mathbb{K}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{K}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{K}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{K}e6$ f3 23.g4 $\mathbb{K}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{K}h3$ and I prefer White.
 C) 19... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 20. $\mathbb{K}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{K}xg7+$ $\mathbb{K}xg7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{K}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}h6$ and White has a very strong attack.
 D) 19... $\mathbb{K}ae8$ 20. $\mathbb{K}e6$!?

D1) 20... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{K}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c4+$ 22. $\mathbb{K}d3$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ and now White delivers a beautiful checkmate in four moves after 23. $\mathbb{K}h6+$ $\mathbb{K}g8$ 24. $\mathbb{K}h7+$ $\mathbb{K}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{K}g8+!!$ with mate to follow.

D2) Instead, Black can play 20... $\mathbb{K}e6$ 21.dxe6 $\mathbb{K}xe6$ when although White



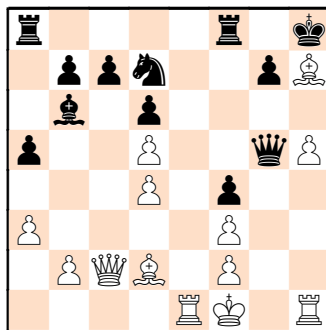
▲ Sam Shankland vs. Christopher Yoo

PHOTO: Lennart Ootes

seems to win beautifully with 22. $\mathbb{K}g8?$, after 22... $\mathbb{W}g6!$ it is Black who has the last laugh.

19... $\mathbb{K}xf3$ 20.gxf3 $\mathbb{W}g5$ Hardly the best. Did Christopher intend to target the d5 pawn? At any rate, soon his queen will find itself stuck offside on h6 with no clear way of returning. However 20... $\mathbb{W}xd4?$? crosses a red line after 21. $\mathbb{K}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 22.h6+-.

20... $\mathbb{K}ae8$ was the last chance to bring in the rook before the pathway to e8 was closed for good. 21. $\mathbb{K}xe8$ $\mathbb{K}xe8$ 22. $\mathbb{K}g6$ (22. $\mathbb{K}f5$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{K}xf4$ $\mathbb{K}xd4$ 24. $\mathbb{K}g3\infty$) 22... $\mathbb{K}e7$ (22... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{K}c3$) 23.h6 $\mathbb{K}xd4$ 24.hxg7+ $\mathbb{K}xg7$ 25. $\mathbb{K}h7+$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{K}h5$ $\mathbb{K}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{K}f5$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 28. $\mathbb{K}xf4$ → .



21. $\mathbb{K}g6!$ A multi-purpose move. First of all, the bishop shouldn't cover the enemy king from his own rook. Next, it's very important to deny access on e8 to any black rook. And third, much less visibly, the bishop grants the h5 square

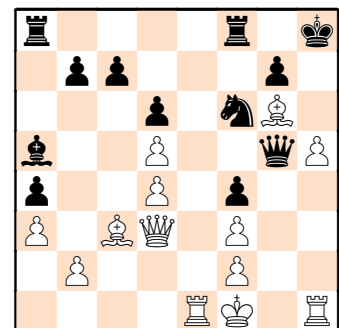
to his own rook.

21... $\mathbb{K}f6$ On 21... $\mathbb{K}xd4$ the third least noticeable function of the g6 bishop manifests itself powerfully. 22.h6!

- A) 22... $\mathbb{K}e5$ 23.hxg7+ $\mathbb{K}xg7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xc7+$ $\mathbb{K}xg6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{K}f6$ 26. $\mathbb{K}h6+$ $\mathbb{K}g6$ 27. $\mathbb{K}xg6+$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 28. $\mathbb{K}e6+$ is complete annihilation.
 B) 22... $\mathbb{K}f6$ 23.hxg7+ $\mathbb{K}xg7$ 24. $\mathbb{K}e7+$ winning.
 C) 22...gxh6 23. $\mathbb{K}h5!$ and Black can safely throw in the towel.

22. $\mathbb{W}d3$ a4 Picking up the pawn on d5 either way is lethal for Black. 22... $\mathbb{K}xd5$ 23.h6 gxh6 24. $\mathbb{K}h5+-$; or 22... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 23.h6 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 24.hxg7+ $\mathbb{K}xg7$ 25. $\mathbb{K}e7+$ $\mathbb{K}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{K}f7+-$.

23. $\mathbb{K}c3$ $\mathbb{K}a5$



24. $\mathbb{K}e2!$ Having taken the e8 square under lock and key, Shankland re-establishes communication between



his rooks. The deadly threat is now 25.h6 gxh6 26.♖eg1!

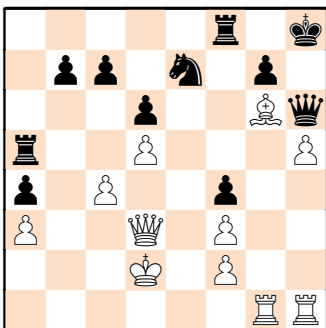
24...♖h6 Yoo parries his coach's threat safely. However, from now on his queen is in a miserable state on the edge of the board and gradually Shankland takes full advantage of this situation. On 24...♗xc3 25.bxc3 ♖xd5 he may have been seriously concerned with 26.c4 ♖a5 (26...♖g5 27.h6 gxh6 28.♖eg1+-) 27.h6 gxh6 28.♖xh6+ ♔g7 29.♖hh1 and with access to e8 still barred to his rooks, Black struggles against the attack.

25.♖eg1 Making sure the black queen doesn't easily get out of her predicament. On the other hand, Shankland is well aware that swapping the bishop for rook on g6 may change the prison sentence for the black queen to direct execution. What a chilling prospect for a teenager to grapple with!

25...♗xc3 It took me quite some time to figure out what was on Shankland's mind after 25...♗xd5. After a few unsuccessful rounds I concluded that 26.♗e4 may be the best. The rook is ready to slam the queen on g6. 26...♗xc3+ 27.bxc3 ♖f6 (27...♖ae8 28.♖g6 ♖h7 29.♔f1+-) 28.♖b1 →.

26.bxc3 ♗xd5 27.c4 I don't think White needs to hurry anywhere. I myself would have unhurriedly proceeded with 27.♔d2 and after, for example 27...♖a5, continue with 28.♖e4 ♖b5 29.c4 ♔f6 30.♖e7+-.

27...♗e7 28.♔d2 ♖a5 29.d5 Shankland wants to cut off the black rook, but the pawns may now come into close contact. Another way of dealing with the position was 29.♖e4 ♗c6 (29...♗g8 30.♖xb7) 30.♔c3 ♖g5 31.♖e1.



29...♖c5 Too slow. After 29...b5 I looked at several ways of treating the position, but managed full control only by copying Shankland's idea. 30.♖e2 (30.cxb5; 30.♖c3) 30...♗g8 31.♗c2 bxc4 32.♖g6 ♖xd5+ 33.♔c1 ♖h7 34.h6! (34.♖e6 ♖d3) 34...gxh6 35.♖e6 ♖e5 36.♖xg8+! ♖xg8 37.♖f6+ winning.

29...c6!?

A) White can also enter a fascinating line 30.dxc6 ♗xc6 31.♖xd6!? at his own risk. 31...♖d8 (31...♖aa8, unfortunately, breaks the spell. 32.♔c3) and now 32.♖xd8+!! ♗xd8 33.♖e1 ♗e6 34.♖xe6 ♖a8 35.♖he1 ♖g8 36.♖e8+-.

B) 30.♖e2 ♗xd5 (30...♗g8 31.♗c2 ♖f6 32.♖e4) 31.cxd5 ♖xd5+ 32.♔c1 ♖e5 33.♖d1 ♖d5 34.♖xa4.

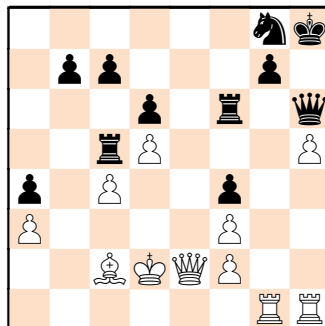
30.♖e2 Shankland starts a decisive regrouping of forces. Why not 30.♖e4 I hear you ask? Well, it turns out the queen must give way to the bishop to drop back to either d3 or c2, and only then go to e4, forming a deadly battery along the b1-h7 diagonal. That said, the main motif remains to vacate g6 for his own rook. Black would then respond with 30...♗g8 as in the game.

30...♗g8 The desperate 30...♗xd5 31.cxd5 ♖xd5+ doesn't really offer any relief, for example after 32.♔c1 ♖e5 33.♖d1 b5 34.♔b1 ♖b8 35.♔a1 b4 36.♖xa4 bxa3 37.♖a7.

Or 30...♗c8 31.♗d3 ♖f6 32.♖e4 ♖b2+ 33.♗c2 ♔g8 34.h6+-.

31.♗c2! And now Yoo faces the direct threat of ♖g1-g6.

31...♖f6 There's no escape by 31...♖f6 32.♖e4+-.



32.♖f1! A beautiful little move which



BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS!

THE BLOG OF
GRANDMASTER ALEX COLOVIC

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

is by no means obvious, even though it's pretty clear that the queen protects the rook on h1 in preparation for ♖g6 ♖xg6, hxg6. But why f1, not e1? Well, it turns out the queen will still protect c4!

32...b5 Yoo concedes his queen will be gone in a minute. There's no escape from the cage. 32...♗e7 is dealt with the same trump card 33.♖g6! ♗xg6 34.hxg6+-.

33.♖g6! bxc4 34.♔c1 Shankland is in no rush to free the trapped queen from her predicament.

34...♖f8 35.♖xh6+ ♗xh6 36.♖g2 ♔g8 37.♖g6 c6 38.♖g1

Black resigned



3



Jennifer Yu PHOTO: Crystal Fuller

THE MAGNIFICENT 3

Remarkable Recent Games

By GM Sarunas Sulskis

MEGAN LEE STORMS THE BARRICADES AT AN EARLY STAGE OF A LAST-ROUND GAME

There were many spectacular, passionate, fascinating games in the Ladies section of the U.S. Championship. They deserve more than mere one game in this column for their outstanding efforts. But since somehow the nickname “Disrespect Championship” stuck to the 2022 edition, I fear to be criticized by U.S. men if I present more games by women than those of their male counterparts...

And so let's proceed with a last-round encounter between Alice Lee and her namesake Megan Lee. Although I do not know them personally, to avoid confusion I will mostly refer to them as Megan and Alice. I sincerely hope this captivating game will serve as a symbol of the passion and effort that players in the 2022 U.S. Women's Championship put into their games - much to the joy and entertainment of spectators.

Megan's desire to win this crucial last-round game, despite having the black pieces, manifested itself early on. Consider the sequence 7...f5!, 10...g5!, 12...h5!. By this stage it was clear she was going all out for a win against her 13-year-old gifted opponent. There is no question that money prizes were a strong motivator and therefore my appreciation again goes to Rex Sinquefield.

To abandon development and neglect one's own castling, especially when playing Black, is normally considered a strategy bound for self-destruction. Not this time around though. Stunned by the enormous determination displayed by her opponent, Alice delayed her counteroffensive measures until the point when the mighty rolling waves of Black's attack had already swallowed a good part of her king's residence.

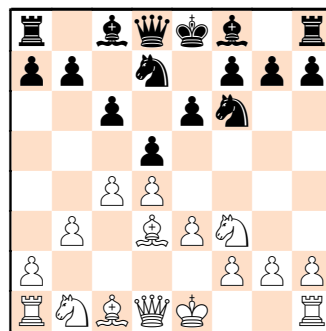
D30

Alice Lee	2263
Megan Lee	2226

U.S. Women's Championship, Saint Louis 2022

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 The official name for this opening is Queen's Gambit Declined, but I tend to refer to it as Semi-Slav Meran. One slightly unusual feature of this setup is the absence of a white knight on c3. As we will soon see, this triggers an offbeat strategy by Megan, determined to make the best of her chances against a 13-year-old opponent in the last, decisive round of the Championship.

6.♙d3



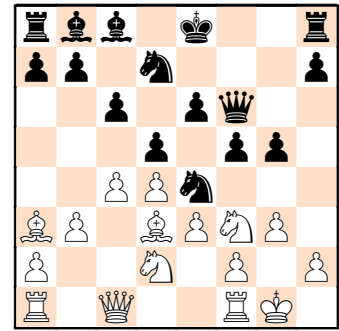
I seriously doubt whether Megan would have dared to continue her risky strategy after the conventional 6.♘c3.



* Jennifer Yu clinched the title by winning an Armageddon game vs. Irina Krush with the black pieces, after the rapid playoff ended in a 1–1 score.

U.S. WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP, Saint Louis, October 4–20, 2022

Rk	Name	Elo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Pts	TPR
1	Irina KRUSH	2432		1	1	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	9	2422
2	Jennifer YU *	2297	0		1	1	0	½	0	1	1	1	1	1	½	1	9	2433
3	Thalia CERVANTES	2272	0	0		½	1	½	1	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	8	2380
4	Ruiyang YAN	2220	½	0	½		½	½	1	½	½	0	1	½	1	1	7½	2354
5	Tatev ABRAHAMYAN	2308	½	1	0	½		½	½	0	½	1	½	1	1	0	7	2320
6	Alice LEE	2263	½	½	½	½	½		0	1	½	0	½	½	1	1	7	2323
7	Megan LEE	2226	½	1	0	0	½	1		0	0	1	0	1	1	1	7	2326
8	Gulrukhbegim TOKHIRJONOVA	2336	0	0	0	½	1	0	1		½	1	1	0	½	1	6½	2289
9	Anna ZATONSKIY	2368	½	0	½	½	½	½	1	½		½	½	½	½	0	6	2257
10	Rochelle WU	2317	½	0	½	1	0	1	0	0	½		0	1	½	1	6	2261
11	Sophie MORRIS-SUZUKI	2126	½	0	½	0	½	½	1	0	½	1		0	0	1	5½	2248
12	Sabina-Francesca FOISOR	2203	½	0	0	½	0	½	0	1	½	0	1		½	0	4½	2189
13	Nazi PAIKIDZE	2354	0	½	½	0	0	0	0	½	½	½	1	½		½	4½	2177
14	Ashritha ESWARAN	2365	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	½		3½	2111



12...h5! Here comes the second mighty wave of attack against Alice's king. All of a sudden, without blinking an eye, the black rook is fully engaged in the action!

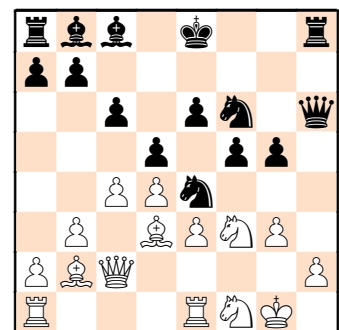
13.♞e1 h4! 14.♘f1 ♖h6 With several of her pieces stuck on the queenside, it's obvious that Megan is burning all bridges behind her for the sake of her furious attack.

15.♙b2 Admitting the failure of her positional strategy.

15...♘df6 With fresh resources still on the way, Black's attack is already reaching boiling point.

16.♞c2 hxg3 The first capture in the game will soon set the white kingside ablaze.

17.fxg3



17...♗xg3! Here we go! The front line has finally been breached. The damage has been done and White will hardly survive despite Alice's best efforts.

18.cxd5 The tactical operation is apparently based on 18.♗xg3 ♗xg3 19.hxg3 ♖h1+ 20.♔f2 ♘g4+ 21.♔e2 ♞g2+ 22.♔d1 ♞xf3+ and Black's attack remains in top gear.

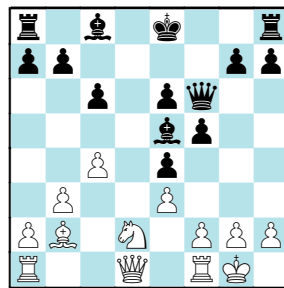
6...♗e4!? Here we are! Megan Lee is at the very inception of her bold strategy. At this point young Alice could have hardly predicted that in just a few moves she would have to combat the huge waves of Black's attack rolling towards her king...

7.♗bd2 f5! Building up her attack in strict order, Megan first establishes an outpost in the enemy camp.

8.0-0 ♙d6 9.♙b2 ♞f6!? As beautiful as it is risky. It's obvious by this stage that something else than mere castling is on Megan's mind. That said, the move serves the very sound purpose of controlling the e5 square. If Alice had managed to get her knight there, fortunes could be reversed in a minute!

10.♞c1!? Alice goes for a well-known swap of dark-squared bishops without sensing the dark clouds gathering over her king. Control of the e5 square is key, as it determines whether Black's strategy will flourish or fail miserably.

I think she could have essayed a pre-emptive tactical strike on Megan by 10.♙xe4!? dxe4 (10...fxe4 11.♗e5 ♗xe5?? 12.dxe5 ♙xe5 13.♞h5+-) 11.♗e5 ♗xe5 12.dxe5 (12.♗xe4 looks sweet, but runs into the incredible desperado riposte 12...♗f3+! 13.♞xf3 fx4 winning.) 12...♙xe5



A) 13.♞h5+ g6 14.♗xe4! ♞g7 (14...♞e7 15.♞e2) 15.♗d6+ ♔d7 16.♞d1 when 16...♙xb2? falls short against 17.♗xf5+.

B) 13.♗xe4 is also interesting. Then, 13...♙xh2+ (13...fxe4 14.♞h5+) 14.♔xh2 ♞xb2 15.♗d6+ ♔e7 16.f4 ♗d8 17.c5 leaves Black with no good prospects.

10...g5! Heralding the first wave of an all-out attack on the white king!

11.♙a3? Strictly following her positionally sound plan, but at the same time losing her grip on the key e5 square.

11...♙b8! An aesthetically profound move. The bishop must be preserved both for attack and control of the key e5 square.

12.g3

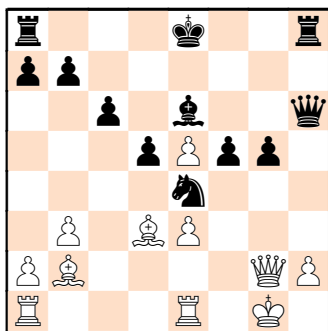


18...♖xf1 19.♙xf1 exd5 Black will still need to bring up her queenside pieces, so the game keeps going. But fortune favors the brave. Even the pawn exchange on d5 suits Megan, making her task of engaging her light-squared bishop easier.

20.♗g2 ♖e4! Black never loses her stronghold on e4!

21.♙d3 ♙e6 22.♖e5 After a huge delay, Alice finally also enters the center. But Megan manages to turn even this intervention in her favor by subsequently bringing her last undeveloped queenside pieces into play.

22...♙xe5 23.dxe5



23...0-0-0! Well done! By now all Black's pieces act in full harmony.

24.♙d4 ♖b8 25.b4 ♗f8 This is not really a retreat. Megan is just reinforcing her attack by making way for her rook to approach White decisively via h4.

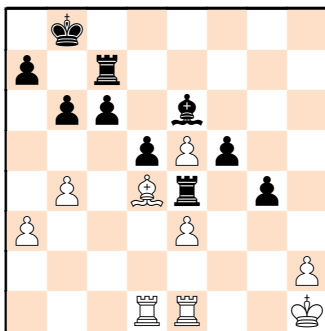
26.♗ab1 ♖h4! 27.♖h1 ♖g4 28.♗c2 ♗c8 29.♙xe4 29.b5 can be met by both 29...c5 and 29...cxb5.

29...♗xe4 30.♗c5 A furious attack by her senior opponent has shaken Alice to such an extent that she is willing to trade queens herself and play the ending a pawn down. Not bad news for Megan, who by this stage may well have felt sudden fatigue setting in thanks to her previous amazing attacking efforts.

30...b6 31.♗xf8 ♗xf8 32.♗bd1 Black can now catch her breath. She's a pawn up in a much better position. Meanwhile Alice retains a faint hope of drawing, based on opposite-color bishops.

32...♗c8 33.♗g1 g4 34.♗ge1 ♗c7 No need to hurry.

35.a3 On 35.♗c1 the ...f5-f4 break is intended.

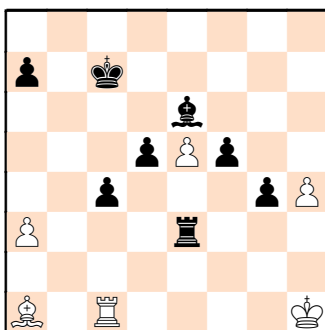


35...c5! The pawns must march forward and bring a few thousand dollars into Megan's bank account!

36.bxc5 bxc5 37.♙b2 ♗b7 38.♙a1 ♗b3! White is fully dominated all over the board.

39.♗b1 ♗exe3 With the fall of a second pawn all Alice's hopes of survival are essentially dashed on the rocks. Yet it's never too late to resign and she keeps on struggling.

40.♗ec1 ♗xb1 41.♗xb1+ ♖c7 42.♗c1 c4 43.h4



43...f4! Black could have captured the third pawn in two ways, but instead Megan, true to her spirit, wants to overwhelm her opponent with a pawn avalanche on the kingside.

44.♙d4 ♗xa3 45.h5 ♗h3+ 46.♖g1 ♙f5 Never too greedy, ever committed to the king hunt. ...♗xh5 will nevertheless follow.

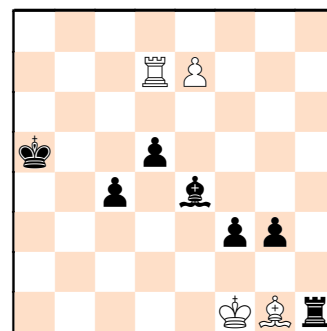


▲ Megan Lee

PHOTO: Lennart Ootes

47.♗a1 ♗xh5 48.♗xa7+ ♖c6 49.♗a6+ ♖b5 50.♗b6+ ♖a5 51.e6 ♗h7 52.♗d6 ♙e4 53.♗d7 g3 54.♖f1 54.♗xh7 ♙xh7 55.e7 ♙g6 56.♙e5 is wiser, but doesn't offer any tangible salvation after 56...♖b4 57.♙xf4 d4 58.♙xg3 c3 59.♖f2 ♖b3.

54...f3 55.e7 ♗h1+ 56.♙g1



56...♗xg1+ The most sensible way to wrap up the game. White doesn't get a chance to promote her pawn. At this stage everything was winning, for example 56...♙d3+ 57.♖e1 f2+ 58.♖d2 fxg1 ♗.

Or 56...f2 but then Alice would at least have gotten some dubious satisfaction in queening her pawn.

57.♖xg1 f2+ 58.♖f1 ♙d3+ 59.♖g2 f1 ♗+ 60.♖xg3 ♗e1+ **White resigned**

So Megan Lee's wonderful attacking spirit prevailed and deservedly netted her a few thousand dollars of prize money. ■