



USA'S JON EDWARDS WINS THE ICCF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

# Human Champion of "Computer Chess"

Our Chess Tech columnist, Jon Edwards has become the third American to win the World Correspondence Chess Championship, repeating the success of his compatriots Hans Berliner (1965–1968) and Victor Palciauskas (1978–1984). He also becomes the 14<sup>th</sup> American to become a Correspondence Chess Grandmaster.

Jon Edwards shares the most recent chapter of his success story.

In *My Great Predecessors*, Garry Kasparov posits that every World Champion brings something new to the game. If that's also true for correspondence chess, my contribution is finding an effective interface between human reasoning and all that high-performance computing brings to the game. It is now clear, for example, that humans must not elevate their human prejudices by selecting sub-optimal opening choices. Playing a favorite, over-the-board defense with Black for me – the beloved Kan Sicilian – risks a loss in correspondence play. With White, the key today is selecting variations that lead to fixed pawn structures with the possibility of long-term maneuvering, even if the engine evaluation is the famous 0.00. To win at this level in correspondence chess, we are fighting against opponents and their human weaknesses, we are fighting against their computers which are not always as prescient as you might imagine, and we are fighting against our own machines, which do not always provide the clarity we expect from them.

Is it simply that the best computers prevailed here? I do indeed have very powerful machines, but the truthful answer is "no." In the most recent games below, the novelties and the long-term maneuvering were computer checked but human inspired and directed. Computers today are tactical monsters and positional masters, but they fall short in positions that involve long-term planning within fixed structures, especially at the transition from the opening to the middlegame.

Jon Edwards is the newly crowned World Correspondence Chess Champion living in Pennington, NJ. He also won the 10<sup>th</sup> US Championship. Jon has written more than 40 chess books, notably *The Chess Analyst* (1999), *Sacking the Citadel* (2010), and *ChessBase Complete* (2014), which has recently received its 2019 *Supplement Covering ChessBase 13, 14 & 15*. He is regular columnist for *Chess Life for Kids*. His web site, *Chess is Fun*, provides free chess instruction.

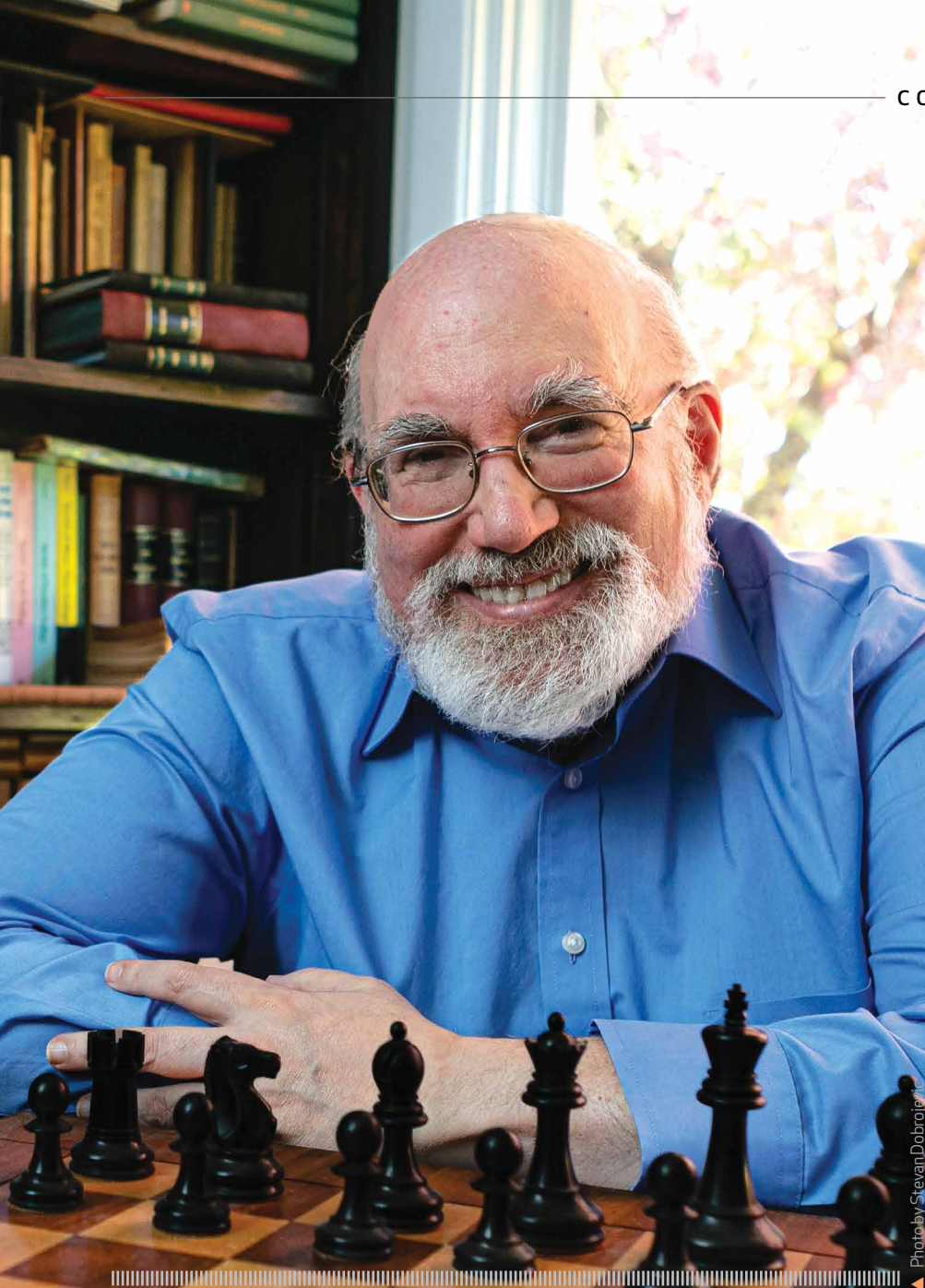


Photo by Stevan Dabrojević

### Classical World Champions' General Strategy

- Jose Raul Capablanca demonstrated that the key is not thinking about what move to play, but rather where pieces belong.
- Tigran Petrosian takes that approach to a new level, thinking about where all the pieces belong and what exchanges must occur, and in what order.
- Anatoly Karpov applied such thinking to specific opening structures.
- Magnus Carlsen, among many others, extends such thinking throughout the entire opening book.

The key today in correspondence chess is to apply Petrosian-like planning throughout the entire opening book with the aid of the machine, a willingness to squeeze every position patiently and methodically. Tal-like attacks and gambits are fun, but they are unlikely to prevail at this level of play.

And when a computer operating at depth offers multiple evaluations that narrowly compete, humans would be daft to accept arbitrarily the top choice. Far better, especially within fixed structures, to become familiar with every grandmaster game that ever reached that structural type and to press forward with a well-honed human plan.

The WF32 crosstable on page 10 illustrates quickly how hard it has become to win a correspondence game at the very highest level. In ICCF play, computer use is legal and indeed, necessary to compete effectively. As proof, I note that Russian players, amid international sanctions and embargoes, are today unable to obtain high performance computing. For that reason, primarily, the Russians just finished well out of medal contention near the bottom of the Correspondence Chess Olympiad. And partly for that reason, I quite handily defeated the reigning Russian champion in the recent Spanish Masters, a strong international event.

The prevalence of draws at this level owes to many factors. All of the players here have access to high performance computing and almost all of the players know how to make the most of available the chess tools. Most players at this level have cleaned up their opening repertoires to eliminate sub-optimal opening choices. And when opening edges are achieved, though novelties or experience, these folks know how to defend!

I got very lucky in the Final, with a narrow win by tiebreaker, but the truth is, you can't win it if you're not in it. I worked hard for more than decade just to qualify. Along the way, I learned that the requirements for competing effectively in this endeavor were rapidly changing. It was insufficient to rely upon the analysis of older engines. There are new, neural net engines, there are new tools, and there is a range of amazing databases. The best players today are strong chess players who also know how to assemble and maintain high performance computing environments that are specifically purposed to chess. I have two servers that provide mammoth processing capable of evaluating nearly 100 million positions a second. And both machines have enough memory to store the large endgame tablebases. Why two



machines? With 16 games going on at the same time, the load requires both, and perish the thought that you have only a single machine that fails.

Still, with all that processing power, the machines are nowhere near powerful enough to make the moves! I offer several examples in this article, but the key is that the best correspondence chess players today do not turn over the move making authority to their computers because the computers do not offer perfect clarity in every position. In my game against Lobanov, computers (and humans for that matter) both missed 12.♙d3 because it appears, even at high engine depth, to lose a piece. The computer maintains that opinion for days. It is possible, indeed likely, that they are programmed to avoid lines that appear during the early analysis to be totally losing. Interestingly, the computers verify the winning lines when you re-start them later in the variations. When forced to evaluate the consequences of the piece sacrifice, only then does the computer wake up say, yes indeed, a good idea.

That need for perseverance occurred repeated throughout these last few years. Casual observers who insist that they can draw correspondence chess players by running Stockfish on their laptops have created a fantasy as if to dismiss all of correspondence chess in a sentence. Were it so simple, let them prove it. The reason for the high

number of draws is not simply because modern GMs have Stockfish. Rather, it is because every correspondence GM has become acquainted with the complexities of the human-computer interface and the need for a mammoth investment in human time.

Within that context, I look here at several interesting positions that occurred in my quest to become World Champion.

I suggest that a human who understands the power and role of the machine can overcome the machine. Notably, when seeking an advantage with the white pieces, correspondence players should select opening variations that avoid long-forced sequences and theoretical simplifications that give opponents a computer-verifiable path to equality. They should aim instead to keep up enough material on the board to preserve an initiative; and they should aim for fixed pawn structures in which White, with the small but tangible advantage of the first move, can pursue long-term maneuvers to press that advantage forward with annoying patience and precision.

My win in the semi-final round against Trygve Hagen, and my win in the Candidates against Arild Haugen were early keys. The first was a strategic gem with glacial planning within a fixed pawn structure. The second had an opening novelty and a wild melee that will please all readers.

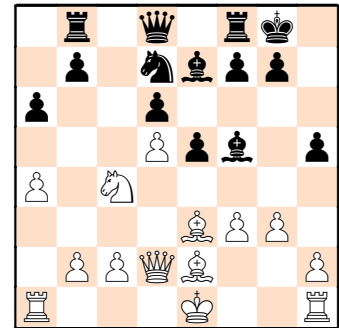
## THE SEMI-FINALS

### B90

Jon Edwards	2503
Trygve Hagen	2404

ICCF WCCC38 SF07, 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3 cxd4 5.♗xd4 a6 6.♙e3 e5 7.♗b3 ♙e6 8.f3 h5 9.♚d2 ♗bd7 10.♗d5 ♗xd5 11.exd5 ♙f5 12.♗a5 ♚b8 13.a4 ♙e7 14.♗c4 0-0 15.♙e2 ♙h4+ 16.g3 ♙e7

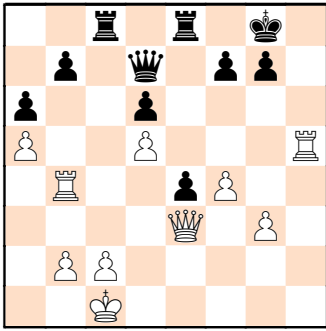


The variation is a familiar one, and players on the white side customarily choose from one of three ideas: castling kingside, castling queenside, or leaving the king in the center. I uncorked a fourth and completely new idea, with a4-a5, ♚a4-b4, and walking the king to c1. White's positional control over b6 and the queenside, and the activity of the king permitted the queenside majority to advance successfully. The computer becomes a tool to test such ideas, rather than the finder of the ideas.

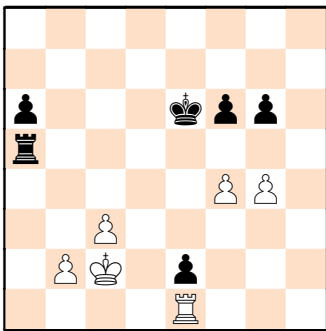
Engines very much like this new idea but only when forced to view the variations at much later stages – yet another example of how the decision-making for individual moves should not be left to the machine.

17.a5 ♚c8 18.♚a4! ♚c7 19.♚b4 ♚e8 20.♗d1 ♗f6 21.♙b6 ♚c8 22.♗c1 e4 23.♗e3 ♚d7 24.f4 ♙d8 25.♗xd8 ♚fxd8 26.h3! ♙xh3 27.♙d1 ♙g4 28.♙xg4 ♗xg4 29.♚xh5 ♗xe3 30.♚xe3 ♚e8

WC32/final, World Championship 32 Final			TD Pheby, Ian M. (IA)																	Score	Wins	SB
Category 11			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17			
1	USA	SIM	Jon EDWARDS	2525	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	9	2	68.25
2	FRA	GM	Michel LECROQ	2568	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	9	2	68
3	CFR	SIM	Sergey OSIPOV	2499	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	9	2	68
4	POR	GM	Horacio NETO	2567	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	9	2	68
5	GER	SIM	Rainer ZAJONTZ	2500	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
6	TUR	GM	Murat AKDAG	2574	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
7	ISL	GM	Dadi Orn JONSSON	2559	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
8	AUT	SIM	Manuel MENDL	2537	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
9	GER	IM	Stefan ULBIG	2416	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
10	CFB	SIM	Boris BLITSKO	2509	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
11	CFR	SIM	Andrey NEKHAEV	2455	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8½	1	64.5
12	CZE	SIM	Miroslav MICHALEK	2480	0	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8	1	60.25
13	GER	GM	Reinhard MOLL	2554	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8	0	64
14	CFR	GM	Andrey KOCHMASOV	2554	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	8	0	64
15	GER	SIM	Thomas SCHWETLICK	2470	½	0	0	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	7½	1	56
16	POR	GM	Francisco PESSOA	2524	½	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	7½	0	59.75
17	GER	SIM	Steffen BOCK	2562	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	½	1½	0	11.75	



31. ♖g1 g6 32. ♜h1 ♕f5 33. ♖d4 f6  
34. ♜xb7 e3 35. c3 e2 36. ♜e1 ♜c5  
37. g4 ♖e4 38. ♖xe4 ♜xe4 39. ♜b6  
♜xa5 40. ♜xd6 ♜f7 41. ♜c2 ♜e7  
42. ♜e6+ ♜xe6 43. dxe6 ♜xe6



44. b4 ♜a2+ 45. ♜d3 ♜d7 46. ♜xe2  
♜a1 47. f5 ♜g1 48. ♜e4 gxf5 49. gxf5  
♜d1+ 50. ♜c4 ♜f1 51. ♜e6 ♜f4+  
52. ♜b3 a5 53. ♜xf6 Black resigned

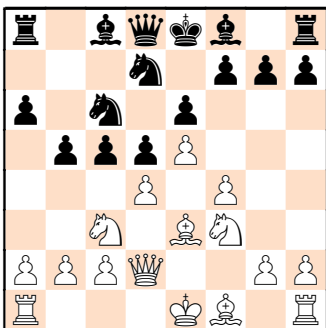
## THE CANDIDATES

### C11

Jon Edwards	2518
Arild Haugen	2435

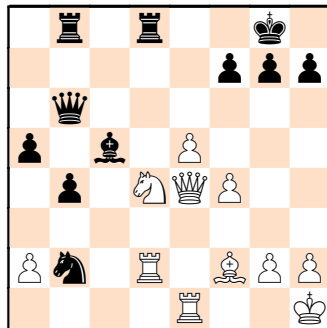
ICCF WCCC36 CT01, 2016

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4. e5 ♘fd7  
5. f4 c5 6. ♘f3 ♘c6 7. ♙e3 a6 8. ♖d2 b5

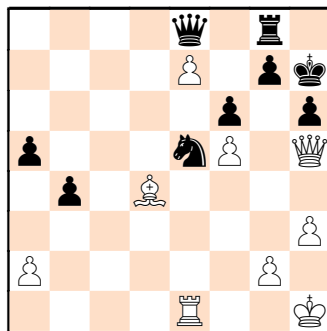


In this main line of the French, White normally plays 9.a3, the engines' favorite move, but I noted that Haugen had previously responded to 9.♘d1 with 9...b4 10.♙d2 ♖b6, and so I carefully prepared 10.c3 a5!? 11.c4 dxc4 12.d5! I am still yet not winning there, but the lines provide active play with enough piece play to have a chance to prevail. The win here propelled me into the Final Round.

9. ♘d1 b4 10. ♙e2 ♖b6 11. c3 a5!?  
12. c4 dxc4 13. d5! exd5 14. ♖xd5 ♙e7  
15. ♙f2 c3 16. bxc3 ♙b7 17. ♖b3 ♙a6  
18. ♖c2 0-0 19. 0-0 ♙xe2 20. ♖xe2  
♖a6 21. c4 ♜fd8 22. ♖e4 ♘d4 23. ♘e3  
♘b6 24. ♘d4 cxd4 25. ♘f5 ♙f8  
26. ♘xd4 ♘xc4 27. ♜fe1 ♙c5 28. ♜ad1  
♘b2 29. ♙d2 ♖b6 30. ♜h1 ♜ab8



31. ♙g1! ♘c4 32. ♙d3 ♙xd4 33. ♙xd4  
♖b7 34. ♖e2 ♖d7 35. ♙dd1 ♜dc8  
36. ♙c5 ♖b5 37. ♙g1 ♜e8 38. ♜c1  
♜bc8 39. f5 f6 40. e6 h6 41. ♜ed1 ♖e5  
42. ♖f3 ♖b8 43. ♖h5 ♘e5 44. ♙d4  
♜h7 45. h3 ♜xc1 46. ♜xc1 ♜d8 47. e7  
♜g8 48. ♜e1 ♖e8



49. ♖h4! g5 50. fxc6+ ♖xc6 51. ♜e2  
♜e8 52. ♙c5 ♖b1+ 53. ♜h2 ♖f5  
54. ♙d6 ♖e6 55. ♖e4+ ♜g7 56. ♙d2  
h5 57. ♙d4 ♜c8 58. ♙xe5 ♖xe7  
58...fxe5 59. ♙d8+—

59. ♙d5 fxe5 60. ♜xe5 ♖d6 61. ♖e3 ♜c6  
62. ♖g5+ ♖g6 63. ♖e7+ ♖f7 64. ♜g5+  
♜g6 65. ♖xf7+ ♜xf7 66. ♜xa5 ♜h6  
67. ♜a7+ ♜g8 68. ♜b7 ♜a6 69. ♜xb4  
♜xa2 70. ♜b5 Black resigned

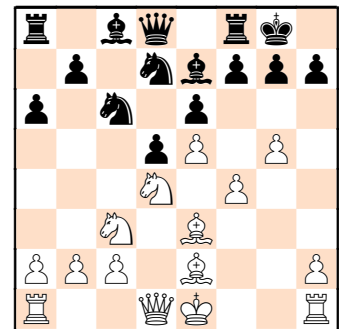
Along the way, I won the prestigious Spanish Masters in part by defeating Evgeny Lobanov, then the reigning Russian correspondence champion. This game appeared in *New in Chess Yearbook 129* with extensive notes from Erwin I'Ami. Suffice it to say, the game involved an important opening novelty that computers and humans long missed.

### B84

Jon Edwards	2528
Evgeny Lobanov	2512

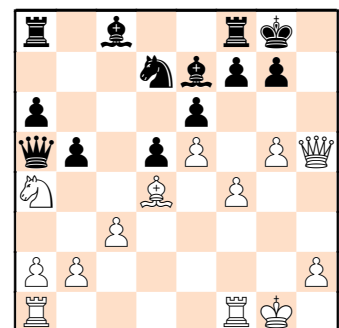
Spanish Masters MG2-A, 2017

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4  
♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♙e3 e6 7. ♙e2 ♙e7  
8. f4 0-0 9. g4 d5 10. e5 ♘fd7 11. g5 ♘c6



Another game in which I prepared the novelty well before the games started. Computers and humans have long rejected 12.♙d3!! because 12...♖b6 13. ♘a4 ♖a5+ 14. c3 ♘xd4 15. ♙xd4 b5 traps the knight on a4. Happily, after that sequence, White has 16. ♙xh7+ winning by force!

My favorite line was: 16...♜xh7 17. ♖h5+ ♜g8 18. 0-0





18...g6 (18...♖xa4 19.♜f3 g6 20.♜h6 ♜e8 21.♜h3+-; or even 18...bxa4 19.♜f3 ♘xe5 20.fxe5 ♙xg5 21.♜xg5 a3 22.♔h1 axb2 23.♜xg7+ ♔xg7 24.♜g1+ ♔h6 25.♜h3 mate.) 19.♜h4 ♜e8 20.♜f3 ♙f8 21.♜h3 ♙g7 22.f5 gxf5 23.♘b6 ♘xb6 24.♙c5+- Cutting off the escape square with mate on h7 to follow.

The lines are beautiful, but once again the engines failed to find 12.♙d3!! and confirmed the accuracy of the line when forced to evaluate the position after 16.♙xh7+ and then, only at very high depth.

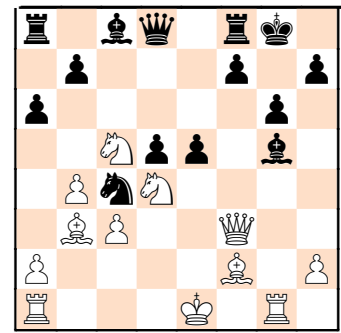
**12.♙d3!! ♜b6 13.♘a4 ♜a5+ 14.c3** It was clear to Lobanov only now that he could not survive after 14...♘xd4 15.♙xd4 b5 because the 16.♙xh7! sacrifice works.

Although he played this opening variation often, his computer had never seen that the sacrifice of the ♘a4 is winning for White. In the position after 12.♙d3, the computer sees the trapping

of the ♘a4 but not the follow up, and seems inclined not to examine the line at high depth, having concluded that other lines were more critical. But when the computer is forced to look at the 16.♙xh7 sacrifice, it says “Aha!” and suddenly provides corroboration that White is indeed winning. Therein lies some of the excitement of the computer-human interface, the need for the human to insist that the computer examine lines which look superficially bad in greater depth. In fairness to the machine, many strong humans also dismissed 12.♙d3 as losing for White.

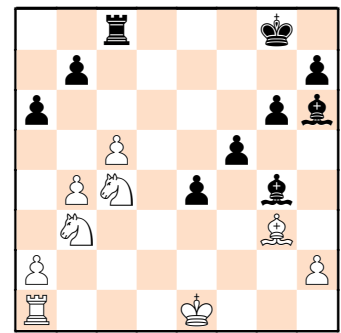
**14...♘cxe5** There is nothing better. Lobanov, therefore had to find another path forward. He quickly learned, however, that the alternatives also fare poorly.

**15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♙c2 ♘c4 17.♙f2 ♙d7 18.b4 ♜d8 19.♘c5 ♙xg5 20.♜f3 ♙c8 21.♜g1 g6 22.♙b3 e5**

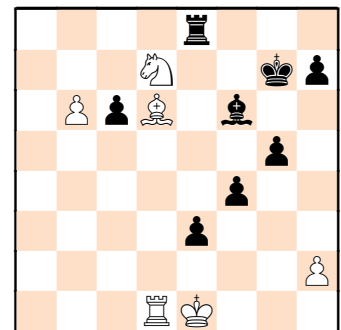


**23.♘c2! 23.♘e2?! ♙d2+ 24.♔d1 b6**

**23...♘d2 24.♜xd5 ♘xb3 25.♜xd8 ♜xd8 26.♘xb3 ♙f4 27.♙g3 ♙h6 28.♙h4 ♜d3 29.♜g3 ♜xg3 30.♙xg3 ♙f5 31.♘a3 ♜c8 32.c4 ♙g4 33.c5 e4 34.♘c4 f5**



**35.♙d6! f4 36.♘e5 ♙h3 37.a4 ♙g7 38.♘d2 g5 39.♘d4 ♜a8 40.♜d1 ♙f6 41.♘b6 ♜e8 42.♘bd7 ♔g7 43.b5 axb5 44.axb5 e3 45.c6 bxc6 46.b6 ♙xd7 47.♘xd7**



**47...♙c3+ 48.♔e2 f3+ 49.♔xf3 e2 50.♜g1 e1 ♜ 51.♜xe1 ♙xe1 52.b7 ♔f7 53.b8 ♜ ♜xb8 54.♘xb8 ♔e6 55.♙a3 c5 55...♔d5 56.♔g4 c5 57.♘d7 c4 58.♘f6+ ♔d4 59.♘xh7 c3 60.♘xg5+-**

**56.♙xc5**

**Black resigned**

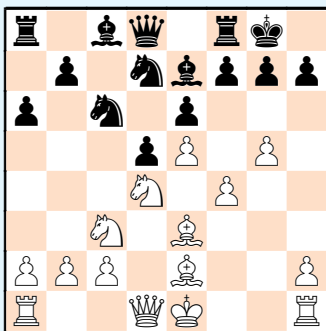
## Sacking the Citadel

So, how is it that I am so well attuned to the potential success or failure to that ♙h7 sacrifice?

The answer undoubtedly owes in part to the fact that I wrote a rather lengthy book about that sacrifice – *Sacking the Citadel: The History, Theory and Practice of the Classic Bishop Sacrifice* (Russell Enterprises: 2011).

It's by far my best book and so, I hope readers will check it out, especially Chapter 5.

Again, here's the position after move 11 from the game against Lobanov.



Interestingly enough, Vishy Anand

reached the same position soon after this game ended and after it appeared in the ICCF Game Archive and yet, he played 12.♜d2. I have always thought of Anand as the most prepared player in any sport at any time and yet here, he had failed to do his homework.

The engine's inability to find 12.♙d3 is very interesting. Players who simply make the move that the computer recommends will not find ♙d3, a move that I liked well before the game started. Strong correspondence players all come to understand the need for iterative use of engines, testing even rejected lines at critical points, all part of the human-computer interaction required to succeed at the highest levels in correspondence chess. There's still a role for humanity here!

The extreme care exhibited by strong correspondence players helps to explain why the ICCF Game Archive, (which is available for free at <https://www.iccf.com>) remains the single most important chess database. The ICCF posts new games there at the end of every month, and players are well advised to study every win among those new games.



## DEFENDING WITH BLACK IN THE FINAL

I look at the critical positions in three of my games with Black in which the computer was permitted to find the draw. In these games, the computer does indeed play a major role, precisely because my opponents picked lines in which the computer easily finds a clear and reasonably quick path to equality, either a perpetual or the computer's famous and unbending 0.00 evaluation.

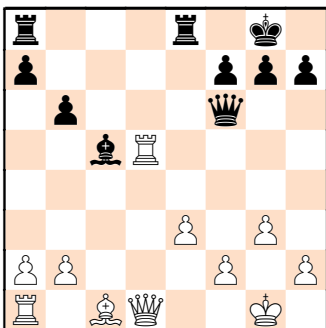
### E15

Thomas Schwetlick	2470
Jon Edwards	2525

ICCF WC32 Final, 2020

This game represents my opponent's failure in his pre-match preparation. White selects a well-analyzed line that I had played with Black three times before, all draws. The line is forcing, with only two difficult decisions for Black, playing 12...0-0 (not 12...g6) and finding the simplification with 14...d4!, which I had already played twice before. By the time my opponent varied, with 23...b1, the engines all agree that Black has full compensation for White's extra pawn and a clear path to a draw. The unlucky thing about this game is that I received Black against Schwetlick, who defended sub-optimally in the final with Black and lost a game.

1.d4 d6 2.c4 e6 3.f3 b6 4.g3 a6 5.c2 c5 6.d5 exd5 7.cxd5 b7 8.g2 dxd5 9.0-0 d6 10.d1 e7 11.a4 d6 12.h4 0-0 13.f5 d5 14.d3 d4 15.dxd4 cxd4 16.xd4 c5 17.a4 c8 18.dxd5 dxd5 19.xd5 dxd5 20.xd5 e6 21.d1 fe8 22.e3 f6



23.b1 ad8 24.b4 dxd5 25.cxd5 d8 26.b2 dxd5 27.fxf6 e3 28.fxe3 gxf6 29.b2 d3 30.f2 f5 31.f3 Draw

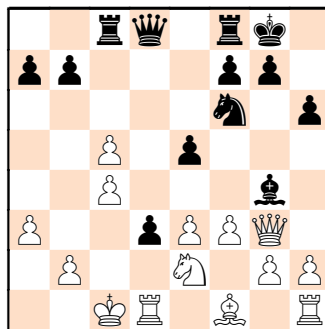
### E36

Francisco Pessoa	2524
Jon Edwards	2525

ICCF WC32 Final, 2020

This game involves a highly theoretical line, with relatively new theory. The game is transparently complex and pleasing to review. With Black, I again avoided a prolonged positional battle by selected a very long and sharp, forcing sequence with 8...d4 and several exchanges that reduce to endgames in which White has no winning chances. The middlegame looks complex and yields positions that would be attractive in over-the-board play, but once again, White has early on given Black a clear path to a computer-aided draw.

1.d4 d6 2.c4 e6 3.d3 b4 4.c2 0-0 5.a3 dxc3+ 6.xc3 d5 7.g5 c5 8.dxc5 d4 9.f3 d7 10.e3 h6 11.fxf6 dxf6 12.0-0-0 e5 13.d2 g4 14.g3 d3 15.f3 c8



16.fxg4 The complexity of the line has attracted much international attention. For example: 16.d3 e4 17.fxg4 dxc5 18.h4 dxc4 19.g5 dxc3+ 20.bxc3 c8 21.d2 g4 22.f4 f5 23.h3 c4 24.dxd3 d8 25.e2 exd3+ 26.f3 a2 27.g3 e2 28.f3 xe3 29.hh1 hxg5 30.hxg5 xg5 31.f4 xf4+ 32.fxf4 f2 33.fxf5 dxh1 34.xh1 c8 35.c1 d2 36.d1 dxc3 37.dxd2 xa3 38.g4 a5+ 39.g6 a6+ 40.f5 f6+ 41.e5 a5 42.g5 a6 43.f5 a4 44.g6 a8 0-1 C.Dai 2363 - Wei Yi 2752, Shao Xing 2022.

16...dxc5 17.e4 dx4 18.xd3 g5+

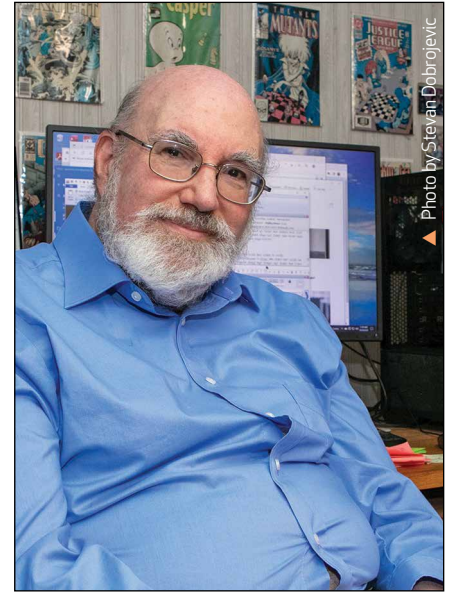


Photo by Stevan Dobrojevic

19.b1 f2 20.c2 dxd1 21.xd1 dxc4 22.g3 d4 23.b3 xg4 24.d3 d7 25.c2 d2 26.c1 c8 27.f3 b5 28.h4 a5 29.f5 f8 30.d3 d4 31.b7 c5 32.f1 f6 33.f5 d8 34.g6 d2d7 35.f3 b4 36.c1 b5 37.axb4 axb4 38.h5 b3 39.c6 xc6 40.dxc6 d2 41.c3 e2 42.xb3 e1+ 43.c2 e2+ 44.b1 e1+ 45.c2 e2+ 46.b1 e1+ 47.c2 Draw

Another game in which I had considerable experience was against a very strong correspondence player, Michel LeCroq, who aimed to exploit my experience in a Sveshnikov Sicilian. In his 2018 World Championship match against the American challenger Fabiano Caruana, Magnus Carlsen played 14...e4 and nearly lost. Alpha Zero suggested in real time that 14...f4 was an improvement. I tested the 14...f4 line at that time and extensively since, and I am convinced that Black equalizes fully.

LeCroq sought to confuse matters with a clever move order starting with 10.d2, which encourages engines and some players to insert an early ...a6. But that kicking of the knight only accelerates the knight's redeployment via a3 to c4 after which White can mount a long-term positional bind on b6. Much care was required here to transpose back to the conventional lines that normally start with 10.e2 0-0 11.0-0 d7 12.d2 f5. By move 14, the game had transposed back to the main line and its



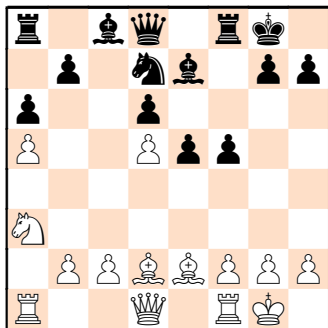
analysis. LeCroq varied finally on move 25, but the draw was already locked in.

**B33**

Michel Lecroq	2568
Jon Edwards	2525

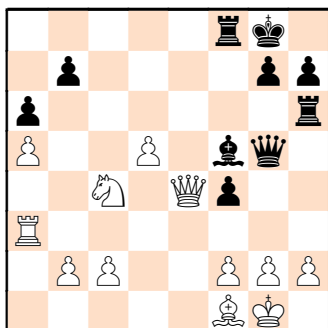
ICCF WC32 Final, 2020

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♘d5 ♘xd5 8.exd5 ♘b8 9.a4 ♗e7 10.♗d2 0-0 11.a5 ♘d7 12.♗e2 f5 13.0-0 a6 14.♘a3



14...f4 14...e4 15.♘c4 ♘e5 16.♘b6 ♖b8 17.f4 exf3 18.♗xf3 g5 19.c4 f4 20.♗c3 ♗f5 21.c5 ♘xf3+ 22.♖xf3 dxc5 23.♗ad1 ♗d6 24.h3 ♖e8 25.♘c4 ♖g6 26.♘xd6 ♖xd6 27.h4 gxh4 28.♖xf4 ♖xf4 29.♖xf4 h5 30.♗e1 ♗g4 31.♖f6 ♖xf6 32.♗xf6 ♘f7 33.♗xh4 ♖e8 34.♖f1+ ♘g8 35.♖f6 ♖e2 36.♖g6+ ♘f8 37.d6 ♖d2 38.♖g5 ½-½ F.Caruana 2832 - M.Carlsen 2835, London 2018.

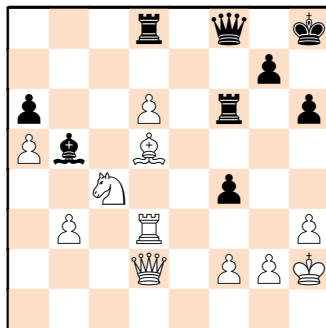
15.♘c4 ♖f6 16.♗b4 ♖h6 17.♖e1 ♗f8 18.♖a3 ♖g5 19.♗f1 ♘f6 20.♗xd6 e4 21.♗xf8 ♗g4 22.♖d4 ♖xf8 23.♖xe4 ♘xe4 24.♖xe4 ♗f5



25.♖d4 25.♖e2 ♖g6 26.♖e7 ♖e8 27.♖xb7 ♖h5 28.h3 ♖f6 29.♖b4 ♖d1 30.♘e5 ♗xc2 31.♘d3 ♗xd3 32.♖xd3

♖c1 33.♖c3 ♖d1 34.♖d3 (34.♖c4 ♖e1 35.d6+ ♘f8 36.♖xa6 ♖xd6 37.♖c8+ ♖d8 38.♖xd8+ ½-½ C.Siefring 2501 - J.Edwards 2526, ICCF email 2018.) 34...♖c1 35.♖c3 ½-½ J.Pecka 2419 - J.Edwards 2530, ICCF email 2020.

25...♗xc2 26.♖c3 ♗f5 27.d6 ♖f6 28.♖d5+ ♖f7 29.♖d2 ♖d8 30.h3 ♖f6 31.♗e2 ♘h8 32.♗f3 ♖f8 33.♗xb7 ♗e6 34.♗d5 ♗d7 35.b3 ♗b5 36.♖d3 h6 37.♘h2



37...f3! 38.♗xf3 ♗xc4 39.bxc4 ♖xd6 40.♖xd6 ♖xd6+ 41.♖xd6 ♖xd6 42.♗d5 ♖f6 43.♘g3 g5 44.f3 ♘g7 45.♘f2 ♘f8 46.♘e3 ♘e7 47.♘d4 ♘d7 48.g3 ♖f8 49.♗b7 ♘c7 50.♗e4 ♘d7 51.♘e5 ♖b8 52.f4 gxf4 53.gxf4 ♖b3 54.f5 ♖a3 55.c5 ♖xa5 56.♘d5 ♘e7 57.f6+ ♘xf6 Draw

## PLAYING WITH WHITE IN THE FINAL

The most important and interesting game in the event, for me at least, was my 119-move odyssey against Sergey Adolfovich Osipov from Russia. Review the game and draw your own conclusions about the health of correspondence chess. For me, it remains a supreme and worthy challenge, and an activity whose noble investigations continue to shape the over-the-board game at its highest levels.

In my preparation, I combed the opening book in search of advantages that I could press. I found nothing convincing after 1.d4 against my opponents' opening repertoires. My favorite 1.e4 fared no better in the preparation. These players got to the final for good reasons. In the earlier rounds, I was able to exploit my opponents' sub-optimal opening choices,

but the players in the Final all defended with solid defenses in which White's chances were minimal in every line. I reasoned that I would only need a plus one or plus two score, and so I settled on new opening ideas that aimed to stress my opponents' approaches. Sadly, I found nothing meaningful against three Petrovs and one Berlin, but then again, neither did anyone else in the field.

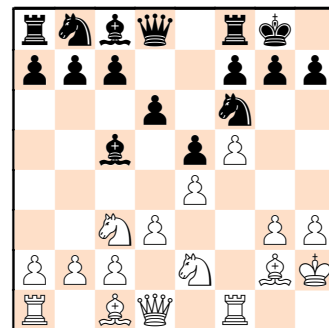
To avoid such well-honed and drawish theory, I tried something very different in two games. My Russian opponent, Osipov, had met the Glek Variation in the Vienna Opening once before with 3...♗c5, enabling some lengthy preparation, and that game became an early candidate for a victory. In another game in the Final, I also got to try out an interesting idea against 3...d5!?

### Transpositions in the Glek Variation

Many books discuss the Glek Variation only in the context of the Four Knights Game: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.g3.

By reaching the Glek Variation out of the Vienna, White avoids the inclusion of the ♘f3, ...♘c6 move pair and indeed, there are lines within the Glek Variation, as in my game against Osipov, where the white king's knight more profitably develops first to e2, notably to assist f2-f4. I therefore conclude that the Vienna move order is more accurate.

Having played through every Glek I could find, in databases, online, and in print, the idea after 1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗c5 is to reach the following structure with White:





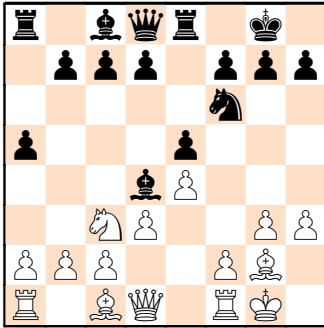
This ideal position is winning for White, but obviously, Black has something to say about all this.

## C26

Jon Edwards	2525
Sergey Osipov	2499

ICCF WC32 Final, 2020

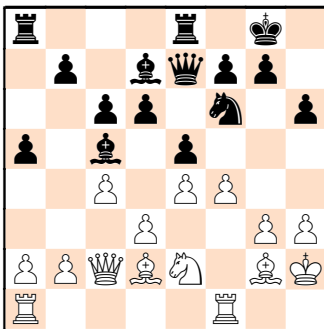
1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♙c5 4.♙g2 0-0 5.♘ge2 ♘c6 6.0-0 a5 7.h3 ♞e8 8.d3 ♘d4 9.♘xd4 ♙xd4



The computers sure do not like the move that I played here, but it is necessary for the long-term plan.

10.♘b5 I played this move not simply to gain time against the bishop, but rather as critical to establish a familiar Maroczy-like bind. Black will not likely be able to break with either ...b5 or ...d5, giving White time for the patient maneuvering that follows.

10...♙b6 11.c4 h6 12.♘c3 d6 13.♙h2 ♙d4 14.f4 ♙d7 15.♘e2 ♙c5 16.♞c2 c6 17.♙d2 ♞e7



Black played his last move with the idea of supporting the bishop on c5 after potential ...d5 break.



## Want More Chess Challenges? Consider Correspondence Chess!

Correspondence Chess League of America (CCLA) has been providing rated correspondence play for American players since 1909. It offers a wide range of events for all, from beginners to master class. CCLA offers both server play and, for those who prefer a slower pace, postal chess. Members must elect Traditional Chess for engine-free play, or Advanced Chess which permits use of chess engines. A proven statistical system monitors all games to ensure there is no engine use in Traditional events.

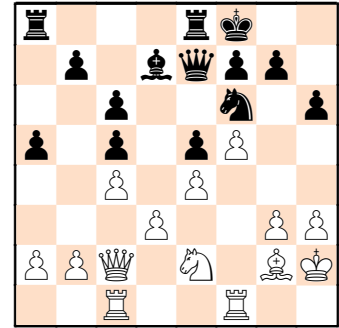
There are many reasons to play correspondence chess. To name just a few.

1. The high cost for entry fees, travel, lodging and meals for over the board events, often with limited availability. With correspondence chess, you can play 24/7. It's easy to fit CCLA events into your life style.
2. With ample time limits, players can overall improve their skills: gain deeper understanding of openings, refine their technique in both the middle and end games and improve their planning, strategy and tactics.

Membership in CCLA includes the quarterly publication – The Chess Correspondent. Entry fees to events are very low cost. Besides the magazine, CCLA's web site is updated regularly. Membership dues are \$20/year with printed magazine, or \$12/year for e-zine (PDF by email.) To join visit <https://serverchess.com>, payments via PayPal, or mail to: CCLA, 1154 Dayton Drive, Galesburg, IL 61401-1313.

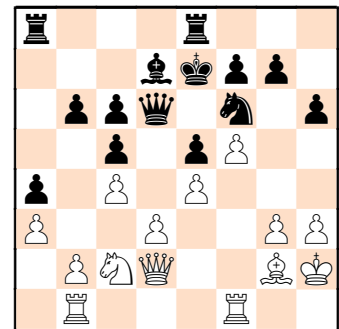
18.♞ac1 Such early rook moves are often inaccurate, and I agonized over this one, but I felt that I had no choice but to prevent ...d5. If instead 18.♞ad1, with the idea of preserving the dark-squared bishop upon 18...♙b4 19.♙c1, that pesky 18...d5 break is there. Sadly, all this means that Black will now get his second minor piece exchange, vastly complicating the winning effort.

18...♙b4 19.♙e3 ♙c5 20.♙xc5 dxc5 21.f5 ♙f8



White was primed to advance on the kingside, but Black makes clear after 21...♙f8 that his king will soon be headed towards the center and queenside. The computer is simply of no help here, offering the same evaluations on more than ten candidate moves. Fortunately, humans can figure this out! The first step is to threaten the b-pawn break with a rook on b1, and knight on c2, perhaps the queen on d2, and the pawn on a3.

22.♘g1 ♞d6 23.♘f3 ♘h7 24.♞cd1 ♘g5 25.♘e1 ♘h7 26.♞d2 ♙e7 27.♘c2 b6 28.a3 ♘f6 29.♞b1 a4



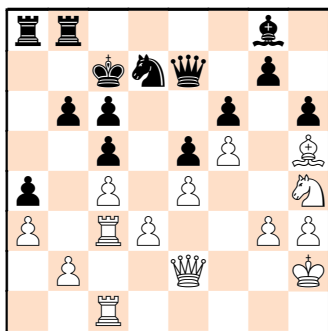
White's plan has forced Black to play 29...a4, the end of an important phase. The next step, which can take more than





40 moves, is to force Black to advance the b6 pawn to b5. Note that Black has no meaningful counterplay anywhere on the board and must simply try to parry or delay White's ideas. I note again that the computer cannot fashion or assess this plan. Throughout this sequence, the engine's many candidate moves all had the same evaluation from low to high depth. I performed the runs, on every move taking five days or more, but actual implementation here is human, and frankly so, too was Osipov's amazing defense.

30. ♖e1 ♜eb8 31. ♞f2 ♙e8 32. ♙f1 ♘d7 33. ♘f3 f6 34. ♚e1 ♗d8 35. ♞c2 ♜c7 36. ♙e2 ♙f7 37. ♞f2 ♚e7 38. ♞e3 ♞h8 39. ♞bc1 ♗b7 40. ♘h4 ♘f8 41. ♞c3 ♜c7 42. ♙f3 ♘d7 43. ♞e2 ♞hb8 44. ♙h5 ♙g8



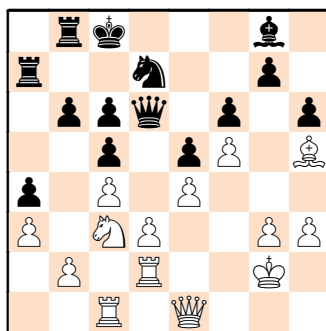
I have posted my bad, light-squared bishop on the most active square to which it has access, and Black has declined the trade. His bishop on g8 hardly has much scope, but it technically remains the good bishop in the position, and he keeps the 50-move clock running. To make him advance his b-pawn more, I need my knight on c3, the bishop on c2 or d1, and perhaps the queen on d1. The engines do not see this plan, and evaluate every move as equivalent to many other moves. On every move in the following sequence, more than a dozen moves still share the same engine evaluation.

45. ♞3c2 ♘f8 46. ♘g2 ♘d7 47. ♘e3 ♗d8 48. ♞d2 ♜c7 49. ♞e1 ♚d6 50. ♘g2 ♞d8 51. ♘h4 ♘f8 52. ♘f3 ♗b7 53. ♞dd1 ♜c7 54. ♞c3 ♗b7 55. ♞f2 ♜c7 56. ♞cc1 ♗b7 57. ♙g2 ♚c7 58. ♞c3 ♚d6 59. ♞b1 ♜c7 60. ♘g1 ♚e7 61. ♗h2 ♘d7 62. ♞e3



Jon Edwards with his wife

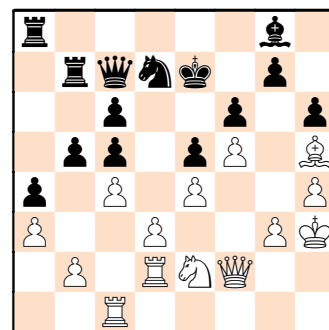
♚d6 63. ♞d1 ♞a7 64. ♙g2 ♞aa8 65. ♞cc1 ♚e7 66. ♞d2 ♚d6 67. ♘e2 ♞db8 68. ♞f2 ♗b7 69. ♘c3 ♜c8 70. ♞e1 ♞a7



Finally, I get to play my bishop to d1 and watch as ...b6-b5 resets the 50-move clock. The key now, within this fixed structure, is to try to compel the further advance of the b-pawn to b3. If that happens, I have a trivial winning plan. Move the king to a1 or b1, double the rooks on g1 and g3, advance the kingside pawns to g4 and h4, and redeploy the knight to h3 or f3. Then, g4-g5 breaks through successfully no matter what defense Black assembles or where Black hides his king. The computer does not find this plan, but it is helpful in determining iteratively the

optimal location for each piece within the changing structure.

71. ♙d1 b5 72. ♙h5 ♜c7 73. ♚d1 ♜c8 74. ♞e1 ♗d8 75. h4 ♞ab7 76. ♗h3 ♜e7 77. ♘e2 ♚c7 78. ♞f2 ♞a8



I have been slowly redeploying, maintaining pressure down the c-file and building towards potential exchange sacrifice threats on c5, all in an effort to compel ...b5-b4. But here, one of my potential ideas can be implemented, i.e. 79.cxb5 followed by 80.d4. The idea is compelling because his queen and king are awkwardly placed, and I was suddenly able to transform the pawn structure with d3-d4-d5 with a protected passer and with even more constraint upon Black's light-square bishop.



## MY TOP 10 LIST

### How to Excel at Correspondence Chess

(Are you ready to become a Correspondence Chess GM?)

You can certainly get started and succeed in correspondence chess without meeting all ten items on this list. I started out 40 years ago just trying to improve my over-the-board play. While it helped, I simply got hooked on correspondence chess for its own sake. I think that I only met only two items on this list when I started, but I still had a lot of fun.

10. Be sure you really love chess. Correspondence chess is thoroughly addicting and all consuming. Are you really willing to put in hours-long stretches in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening? Through pandemics, basement floods, and the other vagaries of life?
9. Don't be wedded to your over-the-board preferences and chess passions. The openings that you have loved for decades are unlikely to pass muster in this age of 10-million game databases and neural-net engines. Sub-optimal openings lose games and championships.
8. Don't run away from data. Play through tons of games, even in openings in which you have no personal experience, and familiarize yourself with the opening repertoires and strategic approaches of strong GMs. Key ideas can come from magazines, from books, from recent tournaments, and even from long-forgotten sources.
7. Trust but verify your instincts. Don't put all of your faith in the engines, because they really are wrong from time to time, especially during the transition from the opening into the middlegame. They calculate tactics magnificently, but they are imperfect, long-term planners. It's far more important to play through hundreds of games in similar structures than simply to accept the machine's immediate recommendations. And, of course, learn from your mistakes. We all make them, try not to make the same mistakes over and over.
6. Get a degree in Computer Science, or at very least acquire a good deal of computing experience. For example, modern neural-net engines require a top-of-the-line NVIDIA graphics card and considerable expertise to fine tune and to get them to work well.
5. Get lucky in the stock market, inherit gobs of money, or win the lottery. Chess at this level is expensive and not lucrative. Even if you buck the odds and succeed, there's no path to meaningful compensation. You need a powerful server or two, ChessBase, many databases, a TableBase installed in massive memory and a decent-to-excellent chess library. When you identify a key game, it's awesome to be able to locate the players' original annotations. Want a cheaper pastime? Play golf!
4. Retire! There's no way to pursue chess at this level and hold down a job. Perhaps that's why correspondence chess players seem to peak in their late 60s.
3. Turn off the TV. You should believe that the chess is far more important, and there's nothing useful to watch on television anyway. Be prepared to put in an immense amount of time in these games. You will have a month to review ALL of your opponents' games before play starts. Find their weakness and their own sub-optimal opening choices before you make your first move.
2. Install an in-home generator and several top-of-the line uninterruptible power supplies. Here in rural NJ, our power and internet go off from time to time, and that would otherwise spell disaster for my frequent days-long engine runs.
1. Pick a patient partner. My wife, Cheryl, lets me do my chess without pestering or prodding. Given the number of hours involved, that's the most remarkable thing on this list!

79.cxb5 cxb5 80.d4 ♖d6 81.d5 c4  
Once again, White has many options for promising piece placement, notably b4 and c6 for the knight, and if the queenside can be sealed, a king migration to the queenside, and a redeployment of the rooks to the g-file in preparation for the g5 break.

There is still a tangible edge for White here, but I was unable to win the game. The good news is that I did not need the win to finish first, but this still feels like the one that got away. If you feel compelled to find an improvement, you clearly have been bitten by the allure of correspondence chess.

82.♠c3 ♘c5 83.♞f3 ♞d7 84.♘c1 g5 85.♘a2 ♗h7 86.♘h2 ♗g8 87.♘g1 ♘d6 88.♗g6 ♞bb8 89.♞h2 ♞a7 90.♘f1 ♘d3 91.♘c1 ♘c5 92.♘a2 ♘d3 93.♘c1 ♘c5 94.♞e3 ♘b3 95.♞e1 ♞d4 96.♗h5 ♠c8 97.♘xb3 axb3 98.♞d2 ♞a7 99.♞d1 ♗f7 100.♗e2 ♗e8 101.g4 ♗d7 102.♘g2 ♞c5 103.♞h3 ♞a4 104.hxg5 hxg5 105.♞h6 ♞f8 106.♞c3 b4 107.axb4 ♞xb4 108.♞xb4+ ♞xb4 109.♘f3 ♞a4 110.♠c1 ♞a2 111.♞xc4 ♞xb2 112.♞b4 ♠c8 113.♞b6+ ♘c5 114.♞hxf6 ♞h8 115.♞h6 ♞xb6 116.♞xb6 ♠c2 117.♞h1 b2 118.f6 ♗e8 119.♗d3 ♠c3 Draw

Immediately after the final result was posted – the 38<sup>th</sup> consecutive draw in the tournament – I learned that I had finally eked out first place in the 32<sup>nd</sup> World Correspondence Chess Championship. It was Saturday, October 8 at 7 AM, but there was no time to celebrate. I had chess classes to teach for hours, and so I missed the real-time flood of congratulatory messages from the ICCF, from friends, and from family. By the time I was ready to start responding, folks were already beginning to ponder why anyone would still be playing correspondence chess in this age of high-performance computing and neural net engines?

I hope that this article helps to place such questions within a more informed context and to steer the discussion towards a more useful consideration of the still fascinating future for correspondence chess. ■