

THE 2022

U.S. CHAMPIONS



HIPS

Caruana holds off “chess terrorists” to claim second U.S. title.

BY **GM AWONDER LIANG**



THE U.S. CHAMPIONSHIP. The moment I received the invitation in late July, I felt both excitement and nervousness. My main question: how

would I balance missing three weeks of school and playing in my most prestigious event of the year?

By now, everyone knows that the U.S. Championship has found a home in St. Louis, as has the new US Chess office, which we visited as part of the opening ceremony. As always, the team at the Saint Louis Chess Club ran a flawless event, with top-notch playing conditions in the beautiful Central West End of St. Louis. Such spectacular playing conditions leave me feeling additional pressure to elevate my playing level. This is *serious chess*.

Getting an invite like this is, for some of the top players in the field, just another Tuesday. It was a little different for me, and I knew there was a lot of work to be done. My most recent event was a sickening performance at the U.S. Juniors, dropping 17 rating points and committing numerous blunders in the process. And as a college student worried about grades, finding time to train during the quarter wouldn't be easy.

As the wildcard invite, it felt as if a gift had been bestowed upon me — and it was one that I didn't want to squander. But that nervousness kept creeping in. I had serious doubts about my ability to perform at a high level for 13 rounds — three weeks, my longest event ever — and while also keeping up with a full course load. My professors are understanding, but homework and class projects can't be put off for that long.

Ultimately, I settled on a strategy of play-

ing like a “chess terrorist.” Before you read too much into that, let me explain! In the 2020-21 Candidates tournament, facing the wily GM Alexander Grischuk, GM Anish Giri needed a win in the penultimate round with Black to catch leader GM Ian Nepomniachtchi. Giri lost in 51 moves.



GM Levon Aronian



GM Elshan Moradiabadi

Afterwards Grischuk described his strategy as follows: “My plan was to play like a terrorist, to terrorize him with a draw and if he goes for a worse position than I will play. That’s pretty much exactly what happened.”

There’s a very real sense in which this approach is antithetical to the spirit of the game, and overall, this attitude is certainly not something I subscribe to. But from a strict value perspective, borrowing this strategy exceeded all expectations. I was able to keep my games simple enough to avoid blunders, and my preparation, especially with the black pieces, was an incredible success.

The unfortunate truth is that results matter at the end of the day. Chess can be a cruel game: my opponents were punished for taking excessive risk again and again; meanwhile, I chickened away from playing for a win in advantageous positions several times in this event. To be rewarded in such a glorious manner for such exceptional pragmatism made me feel incredibly guilty... and yet, I would probably do it all over again. After all, it is the result that matters!

I began to put my plan into action with an extremely tame draw against the defending champion, GM Wesley So, with a game that had virtually no new moves.

FOUR KNIGHTS GAME (C47)

GM Awonder Liang (2697)
GM Wesley So (2845)
U.S. Championship (1), St. Louis,
10.05.2022

I’m always a little jittery for the first-round game of a tournament. Here I decided to play one of the safest lines in modern opening theory.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. d4 exd4
5. Nxd4 Bb4 6. Nxc6 bxc6 7. Bd3 0-0 8. 0-0 d5 9. Bd2 Bxc3 10. Bxc3 dxe4 11. Bxf6 Qxf6 12. Bxe4 Qxb2 13. Bxc6 Rb8 14. Rb1 Qxb1 15. Qxb1 Rxb1 16. Rxb1 Rd8 17. Bf3 Kf8 18. Rb8 Re8 19. h4



All of this has been seen before, with one of the notable games being So-Carlsen (Wijk aan Zee, 2020)! Needless to say, a player of So’s caliber held this position effortlessly.

19. ... Ba6 20. Rb4 Re1+ 21. Kh2 Re5 22. Ra4 Be2 23. Kg3 Bxf3 24. Kxf3 Rc5 25. Rxa7 Rc3+ 26. Ke2 Rxc2+ 27. Ke3 h5 28. g3 Ke7 29. a4 g6 30. Ra8 Rc3+ 31. Ke4 Rc2 32. Ke3 Rc3+ 33. Ke4 Rc2 34. Ke3, draw.

Next, disaster struck for me nearly immediately as I played rashly with the black pieces against GM Elshan Moradiabadi, looking for a sharp game. This is a risky gambit against any player, as everyone comes to the U.S. Championship extremely well prepared! This moment of lost objectivity convinced me to stick to my original, low-risk plan, keeping the positions as solid as possible.

RUY LOPEZ, ZAITSEV VARIATION (C92)

GM Elshan Moradiabadi (2627)
GM Awonder Liang (2697)
U.S. Championship (2), St. Louis,
10.06.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. c3 0-0 9. h3 Bb7 10. a4!?

Moradiabadi told me after the game that he had mixed up his preparation, instead planning to play a2-a4 after ... Rf8-e8.

10. ... Nb8 11. d3 Nbd7 12. Na3 c5

This move is fine, but probably a little too ambitious, as there is a weakening of the d5-square coming. A safer option was 12. ... c6 13. Nc2 Re8 14. Ne3 Bf8, with a good game ahead.

13. Bg5 Qb6?!

Telegraphed. The idea is to have ... c5-c4 and ... Nf6xe4 with a target on f2, but it is easily parried. Better was 13. ... Bc6 14. Nc2 h6.

14. Nc2 c4?!

Consistent, and also bad. After 14. ... h6 15. Bh4 g6 16. Ne3 Kg7 the queen is a bit odd on b6, but the position is basically safe for both sides.

15. dxc4 Nc5

(see diagram top of next column)

16. Bxf6! Bxf6 17. a5!

The key intermezzo, shutting down the a-file. Unfortunately, White’s control over the



d5-square is unavoidable now, with Nc2-e3, c4xb5, and Bb3-d5 or Ne3-d5 coming.

17. ... Qc7 18. Ne3 Nxb3

Better was 18. ... bxc4 19. Bxc4 Nxe4, when at least I'm not losing material.

19. Qxb3 Bxe4 20. cxb5 axb5 21. Qxb5 Bxf3 22. gxf3 Rfb8 23. Qc4 Qd7 24. b4

Around here I realized I was just dead lost, without any hint of counterplay after just 20 moves, and without posing any problems to my opponent either. Moradiabadi didn't convert the game in the most efficient manner, but the result was never in doubt.

24. ... e4 25. Nd5 Qxh3 26. Qxe4 Be5 27. f4 Bxc3 28. Re3 Qg4+ 29. Rg3 Qxg3+ 30. fxg3 Bxa1 31. Qd3 Bf6 32. a6 Bd8 33. b5 h6 34. Kg2 Bb6 35. f5 Bc5 36. f6 gxf6 37. Nxf6+ Kg7 38. Nd7 Re8 39. Qc3+ Kh7 40. Nf6+ Kg6 41. Nxe8 Rxe8 42. Qd3+ Kg7 43. Qf3 Re3 44. Qb7 Rb3 45. Qc6 Kg6 46. Kh3 Kg7 47. Qe8 Re3 48. Qc8 Ra3 49. Qg4+ Kf8 50. Qf4 Kg7 51. Kg4 Re3 52. Qa4 Re5 53. Qa5 Bf2 54. Qc3 Bc5 55. Qc4 Kf6 56. Kh3 Rh5+ 57. Kg2 Re5 58. Qg4 Re3 59. Qa4 Ba7 60. Qb4 Bc5 61. Qb2+, Black resigned.

With a nice win against GM Alex Lenderman in round three, followed by a solid draw against GM Sam Sevian in round four, my tournament was back on track. And then came my famous game against Levon...

So many people have congratulated me on this win at this point that I've started to feel guilty. This is my last chance to correct

the record! I managed to catch Levon on an off-tournament and whilst he was in a fighting mood — a dangerous combination. In nine of 10 games, we probably would have agreed to a quick draw, but fortunately for me, he gave me the chance to create something beautiful.

SCOTCH GAMBIT (C44)

**GM Awonder Liang (2697)
GM Levon Aronian (2830)
U.S. Championship (5), St. Louis,
10.09.2022**

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Bc4

An opening choice inspired by Professor Nick Polson of the University of Chicago Business School! Nick was kind enough to make the trip down to St. Louis, and he pushed me for the better half of an hour to play a gambit against Aronian. Even after the game, I couldn't believe my luck!

4. ... Bc5 5. Ng5 Nh6 6. Nxf7 Nxf7 7. Bxf7+ Kxf7 8. Qh5+ g6 9. Qxc5 d5 10. c3 dxe4 11. 0-0



A well-known line from the 1800s. Unbeknownst to me, Mamedov had tried this against Anand just a few days before this game! Here, Aronian keeps things complicated.

11. ... Re8

Instead 11. ... Qd6 12. Qxd6 cxd6 13. cxd4 Nxd4 14. Nc3 Bg4 15. Nxe4 Nc2 16. Nxd6+

Above: more Niemann-centric drama when Sam Sevian “beheads” Hans Niemann’s king in round 12. (He was trying to fix the crown.)

promises fairly easy equality for Black, with all the pieces coming off the board. Levon said afterwards that he knew this line, which makes it very hard to take any credit for this victory.

12. cxd4 Qxd4 13. Qg5 Nb4?

The knight more or less belongs here, but the timing of this move allows a hidden resource for White.

The position after 13. ... Bf5 14. Nc3 Nb4 15. Be3 Qf6 16. Qg3 is still difficult for Black from a practical perspective, as he is saddled with long term weaknesses.

14. Bd2!

The idea is that White prepares Bd2-c3, rather than Nb1-c3. This is only possible because the b4-knight hangs in many lines, and now Black has to spend another tempo dealing with the Bd2-c3 threat.

14. ... Qd6?

Faced with a tough position, Aronian slips again. He should have played 14. ... Kg8 15. Bc3 Qd6 16. Na3 when White has the initiative.

My guess is that he thought there was no difference between 14. ... Qd6 and 14. ... Kg8, but again I switch tack:

15. Nc3!

White goes back to putting a knight on c3! This move is not intuitive, but now there is a massive threat of Nc3-b5, forcing Black to burn another critical tempo. His whole position falls apart now.

15. ... c6

A sad move — Black would much rather get his king to safety, but there is no time. Alternatives: (a) 15. ... Nd3 16. Qh4! and with Nc3xe4 and Bd2-c3 coming, Black is toast. Unfortunately, the b4-knight will be hang-

ing for another move. (b) White wins after 15. ... Re5 16. Nb5! Rxc5 17. Nxd6+ cxd6 18. Bxc5. (c) After 15. ... Qf6 16. Qg3 c6 17. a3 Nd5 18. Nxd5 cxd5 19. Rac1! Black is far too weak on the dark squares.

16. Rad1 Bf5?

A third mistake, after which there is no saving the game. It was clearly an off-day for Levon, whose enterprising chess was not rewarded in this case.

More resilient was 16. ... Qe7 17. Qh6 Kg8 18. Nxe4 Nd5 19. Nc3 Bg4 20. f3, although with long-term kingside weaknesses, the position remains difficult.

17. g4!

The most natural move, simply kicking the bishop back.

17. ... h6 18. Qh4 Bc8 19. Bxh6 Nd3 20. Bg5 Qe5 21. f3!

The last important move. With all five white pieces attacking, Black has little chance.

21. ... Rh8 22. fxe4+ Kg8 23. Bh6 Qd4+ 24. Kh1 Be6 25. Qg5 Bf7 26. Rxf7 Rxh6 27. Rxd3 Qxd3 28. Qf6 Rxh2+ 29. Kxh2 Qd2+ 30. Kg1 Qc1+ 31. Kf2 Qh6 32. g5, Black resigned.

With 3/5 and a win against one of the top players in the world, I entered the first rest day on cloud nine. Meanwhile, GM Fabiano Caruana had taken an early lead with +2 after five rounds, and he picked up where he left off after the rest day with two more wins. I found his victory against Lenderman quite instructive in the way Fabi developed a long-lasting initiative after gambiting a pawn in the opening. I am hesitant to give any more credit to the DeepMind team, but I can say that this game feels very much in the spirit of modern chess!

SLAV DEFENSE (D11)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2828)
GM Aleksandr Lenderman (2603)
U.S. Championship (7), St. Louis,
10.12.2022

1. c4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Qc2 dxc4 5. e4!?

An interesting gambit. Caruana said in his post-game interview that he'd drawn inspiration from a game with Firouzja in this line. In round three I had tried the more solid 5. Qxc4 against Lenderman.

5. ... b5 6. b3 cxb3 7. axb3 e6 8. Bd3 a6?! Very natural, but somewhat passive. Instead,

How I defeated GM Wesley So!

BY GM CHRISTOPHER YOO



GM Christopher Yoo explains his key victory over one of the world's best.

GM Awonder Liang wasn't the only junior player with a breakout performance at the 2022 U.S. Championship. In his first appearance in the event, GM Christopher Yoo scored a respectable 5½/13, with draws against Aronian, Caruana, and Robson, and a statement victory over GM Wesley So in round two. Here are Yoo's notes to that game, exclusively for *Chess Life*.

PETROFF DEFENSE (C42)

GM Wesley So (2845)
GM Christopher Yoo (2655)
U.S. Championship (2) St. Louis,
10.06.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6

A surprise for So. The Petroff is very solid, and I hadn't played it much before this game.

3. Nxe5 d6 4. Nf3 Nxe4 5. d4 d5 6. Bd3 Bd6 7. 0-0 0-0 8. c4 c6 9. Re1 Bf5 10. Qb3
An ambitious path forward, keeping the pieces on the board. 10. Nc3 is more tame: 10. ... Nxc3 11. bxc3 Bxd3 12. Qxd3 dxc4 13. Qxc4 Nd7 with an equal position.

10. ... Qd7 11. c5 Bc7 12. Qc2 Na6 13. a3 Bg6

Going for ... f7-f5, to cement the knight on e4.

14. Nc3 f5 15. Ne2 Bh5 16. Ng3 Bg6 17. Ne2 Bh5 18. Ng3 Bg6 19. b4

Avoiding the repetition, and rightfully so, as White is a bit better due to my misplaced a6-knight.

19. ... Rae8 20. Bb2

Better was 20. Ne5, forcing me to give up the bishop pair with 20. ... Bxe5 21. dxe5.

20. ... Re6?!

Trying to attack, but it's a bit unsound. I should have played 20. ... Qe7! 21. Ne5 Qh4 with equality.

21. Ne2!

Preparing Nf3-e5 followed by Ne2-f4 in some cases.

21. ... Qe7 22. Ne5 f4

I think this is the best practical option, but So can repulse the attack if he is accurate.

23. Nxc6 Rxc6 24. f3 Qh4 25. Nc3 Rh6



White now has a critical decision to make: should he allow ... Qh4xh2+, calling the bluff, or should he play h2-h3 and making sure he isn't mated? It turns out that my attack was in fact a bluff, but he overestimated my chances.

26. h3

After 26. Nxe4! dxe4 27. Bxe4 Qxh2+ 28. Kf1 Bd8 29. d5 it turns out that ... Qh2-h1+ is not a problem, as White can escape with Ke2-Kd3.

26. ... Ng5 27. Qf2

This gave me an interesting tactical possibility, but I wanted to keep the queens on the board.

27. ... Qh5!?

Worth considering was 27. ... Qxh3 28. gxh3 Nxh3+ 29. Kg2 Nxf2 30. Kxf2 Rh2+ 31. Kf1 Rxb2 32. Re7 with an unclear position. I thought White had compensation for the pawns due to the active rook and coordinated pieces.

28. b5 Nb8 29. a4 Bd8

Getting the bishop off the lackluster c7-square, where it was being blocked by the f4-pawn. It can also go to f6 or h4 in the future. Meanwhile, it's tough to find a good plan for White.

30. Re2 Qf7

With threats of ... Rh6xh3 or ... Ng5xh3+.



31. Kf1?

He needed to control the h3-square to make it harder to sacrifice.

Correct was 31. Qf1! preventing both sacrifices on h3. The position is equal after 31. ... Ne6 32. Nd1 Bf6 33. Qf2 Bh4 34. Qf1 Bf6.

31. ... Nd7 32. a5



32. ... Nxh3!

Breaking through! I had to act fast before he got his queenside counterplay. With this move I have serious initiative with my rook and queen attacking on the h-file.

33. gxh3 Rxh3 34. Qg2 Qh5 35. Rf2 Rg3

36. Qh2 Rh3 37. Qg2 Re8!

Avoiding the repetition! I felt like my pieces were more than strong enough to play for the win, despite not being able to calculate one at this point.

38. Ne2 Re3 39. Ra3 Rh1+?

A bit of a miss from me in time trouble. Here 39. ... Bxa5! would have won on the spot. After 40. Rxa5 Rxf3! the attack is simply

Left: Christopher Yoo explodes with joy at the closing ceremony festivities. Above: Yoo lurks as Wesley So thinks.

too strong: 41. Nxf4 Rh1+ 42. Ke2 Rxf4+ and Black is crushing.

40. Ng1 Nf6?

Once again I had 40. ... Bxa5! but overlooked it due to time pressure: 41. Be2 Rxa3 42. Bxa3 Nf6 and Black should win.

41. Bc1 Qh4!

Sacrificing an Exchange, but with good reason — ... Nf6-h5-g3+ is very powerful.

42. Bxe3 fxe3 43. Bxh7+ Qxh7 44. Rxe3 Bc7 45. Re7??

The final mistake. There was a saving move, but it was admittedly very difficult to find: after 45. Rb3!! Rh2 46. Qg5 Rxf2+ 47. Kxf2 Qc2+ 48. Ne2 Qxb3 49. Qf5 Bxa5 50. b6 White somehow has a perpetual check here. This is a bit hard to believe, but it's a very nice resource.

45. ... Qb1+ 46. Re1 Qd3+ 47. Rfe2 Rh2 48. Qg5 Nh5, White resigned.

White cannot stop ... Nh5-g3+. Winning against Wesley So (and with Black) is a huge achievement for me, and I am even happier to have done it in a chaotic fashion! ♠

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Black could have uncorked a surprising sequence.

With 8. ... a5! Black takes advantage of White's surprising awkwardness: 9. Nc3 (9. 0-0 Na6 10. Qxc6+ Bd7 11. Qc2 Nb4 12. Qe2 Nxd3 13. Qxd3 Be7 was equal in Carlsen – Harikrishna, *chess24.com* 2022) 9. ... Na6 10. Qe2 Bb4! 11. Bd2 e5! 12. Nxe5 Qxd4 13. Nxc6 Qxc3 14. Bxc3 Bxc3+ 15. Kd1 Bxa1 with good compensation for the missing queen. Of course, without having analyzed this line at home, it would be nearly impossible to reach this position.

9. 0-0 Be7 10. Nc3 Bb7 11. Rd1 h6 12. Qe2!

A good regrouping; the queen heads to the g4-square in many lines.

12. h3 was played in the aforementioned Firouzja game. Black took over after 12. ... Nbd7 13. Be3 Rc8 14. e5 Nd5 15. Nxd5 cxd5 16. Qd2 Nb8 17. b4 Rc4!. (Firouzja – Caruana, *chess24.com* 2020)

12. ... Nbd7 13. e5 Nd5 14. Nxd5 cxd5 15. Ne1 Qb6 16. Qg4 g6



Time to take stock. White is down a pawn on the queenside, but Black's kingside will

be eternally weak, especially on the dark squares. Black's pieces are also quite passive. However, outside of Bd3xg6, which appears speculative, it is difficult to see a clear breakthrough.

17. Bd2?!

A step in the wrong direction. In complicated positions, even the top guys can make mistakes!

17. h4! was both natural and strong. Black should initiate counterplay on the queenside anyway – for lack of a better move! 17. ... a5 (17. ... Nb8 18. Be3 Nc6 tries to provoke b3-b4, but it is much too slow: 19. Bxg6! fxxg6 20. Qxe6 and White crashes through) 18. Be3 b4 19. Rdc1 Ba6 20. g3 with a similar structure to the game, but where White doesn't waste a tempo.

17. ... b4 18. Be3 a5 19. Qe2 Kf8 20. g3 Ba6 21. h4 h5 22. Nf3 Kg7 23. Bg5!

Black has finally managed to connect his rooks, but the long-term problems on the kingside endure.

23. ... Rhe8 24. Rdc1 Bxd3 25. Qxd3 Bxg5 26. Nxxg5



26. ... Rac8?

Lenderman's first real mistake of the game. Although this move appears to contest the c-file, in fact, after Qd3-f3, Black is forced to play ... Rc8xc1 and then defend the f7-pawn. Instead, it was better to go after the terrible g5-knight, but even then, Black is just barely holding on.

Preferable was 26. ... Nf8! 27. Qf3 Qb7 and Black holds, although White has some dangerous tries: 28. g4!? (28. Qf6+ Kg8 29. Rc5 Nh7 30. Nxxh7 Kxxh7 is equal) 28. ... hxxg4 29. Qf6+ (29. Qxxg4 Nh7 30. Kg2 Qe7 31. Rc5 Rh8 and it appears that Black's king is safe enough) 29. ... Kg8 30. h5 Qe7 31. Rc7 Qxf6 32. exf6 Nh7 33. Nxf7 gxh5 34. Nh6+ Kh8 with equality.

27. Kg2

A devilish idea: now Qd3-f3 cannot be met with ... Rc8xc1 as there is no check!

27. ... f6 28. exf6+ Nxxf6 29. Qe2 Kg8?

The decisive mistake. The game still could have been saved by a well-timed exchange of pieces: 29. ... Ne4! 30. Nxe4 dxe4 31. Qxe4 Rc3 32. Rxc3 bxc3 33. Qe5+ Kg8 34. Rxa5 Rc8! and White will probably have to go for perpetual check soon, e.g. 35. Qf6 (35. Ra7 Qxxa7 36. Qxe6+ Kg7 37. Qxc8 Qxd4 is equal) 35. ... Qxa5 36. Qxxg6+.

30. Rxc8 Rxc8 31. Rxa5!

A nasty detail. Now all of White's pieces start crashing through, and material loss is inevitable. A testament to how difficult it is

Left: Robson and So exit the playing hall after their game. Right: Liang stares down Caruana after plunking down 3. ... Nxe4.



to play these guys! All it takes is one mistake, and the game can end just like that.

31. ... Re8 32. Ra6 Qxd4 33. Rxe6 Rf8 34. Qc2 Ne4 35. Rxg6+

White cleans up the kingside.

35. ... Kh8 36. Rh6+ Kg8 37. Nxe4 dxe4 38. Rxh5 Qf6 39. Rg5+ Kh8 40. Qe2 Qf3+ 41. Qxf3 exf3+ 42. Kh3 Rc8 43. Rg4 Rc2 44. Rxb4 Rxf2 45. Kg4 Rf1 46. Rb7 Kg8 47. b4 Kh8 48. b5 Kg8 49. b6 Kh8 50. Rb8+ Kg7 51. b7, Black resigned.

What I really enjoyed about this game was the concept of long-term compensation for the pawn. It wasn't until nearly 20 moves later that the material balance was restored! Meanwhile Black was under great pressure until he finally cracked.

With this win, Fabiano moved to 5½/7, a clear point lead against the field. But GM Ray Robson did his best to keep pace, stringing together win after win, including an absolutely crushing victory over Wesley So.

NIMZO INDIAN DEFENSE (E50)

GM Ray Robson (2770)

GM Wesley So (2845)

U.S. Championship (7), St. Louis, 10.12.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 0-0 5. Nf3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 d6

So plays a relatively rare line, looking for imbalances as Black. Robson responds with the most critical reply.

7. Bd3 e5 8. e4! Re8 9. 0-0 exd4 10. cxd4 Nxe4 11. Re1 Nf6 12. Rxe8+ Qxe8

Just like Caruana, Robson sacrifices a pawn for dynamic compensation. White has a slight lead in development, as well as the bishop pair, although it is not at all clear how to continue the attack.

13. h3!

Very sophisticated! White keeps options of Bc1-b2 and Bd3-b5 open and plays a generally useful move. After 13. Bg5 Nbd7 14. Qc2 Qf8 15. Re1 h6 16. Bh4 b6 Black is able to finish his development.

13. ... Nbd7

For now, Black has to play it safe. Worse is 13. ... d5 14. Bg5 Nbd7 15. Qc2 h6 16. Re1 Qf8 17. Bh4 and with all White's pieces developed, the pressure is unbearable.

14. Qc2 b6

Better was 14. ... Qd8! avoiding the Ra1-e1 idea. But given White's resources in this position, I doubt we'll see this repeated at top levels: 15. Bb2 d5 16. Re1 Nf8 17. Ba3 Ng6. This looks safe for Black, but White's possibilities are far from exhausted. After 18. Ng5 Bd7 19. cxd5 (19. Nxf7!?) 19. ... Nxd5 20. h4 Qf6 21. Qb3 (21. Re5!?) 21. ... Nb6 22. Re3 (22. Nxf7) the engine gives the dreaded triple zeros here, but it feels nearly impossible to play over the board.

15. Bb2 Bb7

After 15. ... Qf8 16. d5 Nc5 17. Re1 Bd7 18. Ng5 Nxd3 19. Qxd3 h6 20. Bxf6 hxg5 21. Be7 Qc8 22. Bxg5 White keeps good pressure.

16. d5 Qf8 17. g4! h6 18. Kh2!

Not the hasty 18. g5? hxg5 19. Nng5 Qe7 when Black prepares ... Nd7-f8 or ... Kg8-f8, and it is remarkably hard to break through.



18. ... c6?

Believe it or not, this is already the decisive mistake.

The engine gives 18. ... b5!! 19. g5 (19. Bf5) 19. ... bxc4! (19. ... hxg5 20. Nng5 bxc4 21. Bh7+ Kh8 22. Bf5 Ne5 23. f4 would be very similar to the game) when the key difference is that Black avoids Bd3-h7+. Play gets very complicated, but here are some sketches:

■ (a) 20. Bf5 hxg5 21. Nng5 g6!! 22. Bxd7 (22. Rg1 Bxd5 23. Nh7 Kxh7 24. Bxg6+ Kh8 25. Qf5 Qg7 26. Bh5 Qh6 27. Bg6 is equal) 22. ... Nxd7 23. Qxc4 Qe7!! and Black hangs on, i.e., 24. Qh4 (24. Rg1 Ne5 25. Qb3 (25. Qh4? f6 and Black is winning!) 25. ... Ba6 26. f4 Nd3 27. Ne6 Kh7 28. Qc3 fxe6) 24. ... f6 25. Ne6 Qh7 26. Qg3 Qh5 27. Rg1 Kf7 28. Nxc7 Rh8 29. Nb5 Bxd5 30. Nxd6+ Ke7 31. Re1+ Be6.

■ (b) 20. gxf6 cxd3 21. Qxd3 Ne5 (21. ... Nxf6? 22. Bxf6 gxf6 23. Rg1+ Kh8 24. Qf5 and wins) 22. Nxe5 (worse is 22. Bxe5 dxe5 23. Rg1 e4!) 22. ... dxe5 23. Rg1 g5 24. Bc1 (24. h4 Qb4 25. hxg5 Qh4+) 24. ... e4.

■ (c) 20. Qxc4 Bxd5 21. Qh4 Bxf3 22. gxf6 d5 23. Rg1 Qd6+ 24. Rg3 Re8 25. fxf7 Be4! 26. Bxe4 dxe4 27. Bc1 Qf6 and White is struggling to find a knock-out blow.

Another idea is 18. ... Re8 19. g5 hxg5 20. Rg1 b5 21. Nng5 Qe7 22. Bh7+ Kh8 23. Bf5 Qe2 and White has compensation but no clear win.

19. g5 hxg5 20. Nng5 cxd5 21. Bh7+!!

The key resource: the black king is stuck in the killzone now. Black lives after 21. Bf5 g6! 22. Bxg6 fxf6 23. Qxg6+ Qg7 24. Qf5 Rf8.

21. ... Kh8 22. Bf5 Ne5

Or 22. ... g6 23. Bxd7.

23. f4! Ng6 24. Bxf6 gxf6 25. Nxf7+ Qxf7 26. Bxg6!

Black is just dead in the water here.

26. ... Qe7 27. Qf2 f5 28. Rg1 Rg8 29. Rg5 Rg7 30. Qh4+ Kg8

An ingenious defensive idea — Black builds a shield for his king, but it is just not enough.

31. Qh5 Bc8 32. cxd5 a5 33. Qh6 b5 34. Bh7+ Kf8 35. Rg2!, Black resigned.

Threatening the unstoppable Bh7xf5 and Qh6-h8. A flawless game by Ray that left him within an inch of the lead!

With five rounds to go, it looked like it was going to be an ultra-tight finish for first. However, while the Women's Championship culminated with an absolute bloodbath, the Open Championship was relatively tame. Both Caruana and Robson finished with clean five draws to complete the event. My round nine draw with Caruana was interesting, and for more than just the opening.

PETROFF DEFENSE (C42)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2828)

GM A wonder Liang (2697)

U.S. Championship (9), St. Louis, 10.14.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Nxe5 Nxe4!?

(see diagram next page)

An opening that I probably won't repeat, but this was a highly entertaining move to essay over the board — probably one that Caruana hadn't seen since he was six! The latest analysis suggests it may be objectively sound, but the ensuing endgames tend to be



rather depressing. However, against Fabiano's opening prowess, I was satisfied to reach a slightly worse yet survivable endgame.

4. Qe2 Qe7 5. Qxe4 d6 6. d4 dxe5 7. dxe5 Nc6 8. Bb5!?

Not the critical try, but over the board it is difficult to assess. Theory prefers 8. Nc3 Qxe5 9. Qxe5+ Nxe5 10. Nb5 and White has serious pressure here, although I had prepared a decent amount.

8. ... Bd7 9. Nc3 0-0-0 10. Bf4 Qb4 11. 0-0-0 Qxe4 12. Nxe4 Nxe5 13. Bxd7+ Nxd7 14. Ng5 Be7!

The critical trick, after which Black equalizes: I'm able to defend f7 with tactics. Against almost anyone else I would expect the game to end in the next 10 moves, but the nervous-

ness of playing the former world championship challenger caused me to go almost immediately astray.

15. h4!

A very good practical try, keeping the pieces on the board.

After 15. Nxf7 Rdf8 16. Nxb8 Rxf4 17. Rhe1 Kd8 18. Re6 Rf8 19. Ng6 hxg6 20. Rxf6 Bf6 the endgame looks a little dangerous, but Black equalizes with accurate play: 21. h4 Kc8 22. h5 Ne5 23. Rg3 Nc4 24. c3 Be5 25. Rgd3 Bd6 26. f3 g6!. Here it will be very difficult to make progress on the kingside, and Black can always harass White's queen-side pawns.

15. ... Bxg5?

Trying to simplify too early, and missing a key tactical resource.

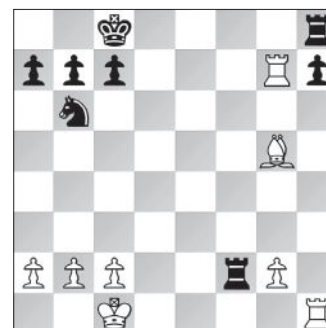
The alternative 15. ... Nc5! is the safest, trading a pair of rooks. Both pawns are immune: 16. Rxd8+ Rxd8 17. Re1 (17. Nxb7? Ne6 18. Re1 Bxb4 and the h7-knight is trapped) 17. ... Bf6 18. b3 Rd5 19. g3 h6 20. Nxf7 Rf5 21. Re8+, and a draw was agreed in Ilyasov-Rashitov, ICCF 2012.

16. hxg5 f6 17. Rde1! fxg5 18. Bxg5 Rdf8 19. Re7 Nb6!

The only defensive try for Black: now I

avoid the mating ideas on the back rank. Of course 19. ... Rxf2? 20. Rxh7! was a cold shower, when White will clean up on the seventh rank.

20. Rxf7 Rxf2



At this point I was trying to calculate whether Black was fine or in trouble. Then I realized it was completely futile: if White has a win here, Caruana was sure to find it; if not, then I would most likely hold a draw. With this in mind, I went for a relaxing walk and let Fabi do the hard work at the board!

21. Bh4 Rff8 22. Be7 Re8 23. Rhxh7 Rxh7 24. Rxh7 Nd5?

I had seen a draw with a pawn-down rook endgame, but I wanted to find something

2022 U.S. Championship

ST. LOUIS, OCTOBER 5-20, 2022

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1	GM Fabiano Caruana	2828	*	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	8½/13
2	GM Ray Robson	2770	½	*	½	½	½	1	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	8/13
3	GM Awonder Liang	2697	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	½	1	0	7½/13
4	GM Leinier Dominguez Perez	2814	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	7½/13
5	GM Jeffery Xiong	2773	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	7/13
6	GM Wesley So	2845	½	0	½	½	½	*	1	½	½	½	½	0	1	1	7/13
7	GM Sam Shankland	2790	½	½	½	½	½	0	*	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	7/13
8	GM Samuel Sevian	2762	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	1	½	½	1	7/13
9	GM Hans Niemann	2776	0	0	½	½	½	½	½	1	*	½	0	1	1	1	7/13
10	GM Levon Aronian	2830	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	½	1	6/13
11	GM Dariusz Swiercz	2730	0	½	0	½	½	½	½	0	1	1	*	0	½	½	5½/13
12	GM Christopher Yoo	2655	½	½	½	0	0	1	0	½	0	½	1	*	0	1	5½/13
13	GM Aleksandr Lenderman	2603	0	½	0	½	½	0	½	½	0	½	½	1	*	1	5½/13
14	GM Elshan Moradiabadi	2627	0	0	1	0	½	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	*	2/13

more immediate. Fortunately, I wasn't punished for my error, but this impulsive decision could have cost me dearly!

The draw is in hand after 24. ... Rg8 25. Rh2 Nd5 26. Bh4 Ne3 27. g3 Nf5 28. Rf2 Nxh4 29. gxh4 Rg1+ 30. Kd2 Rh1 31. Rf4 Rh2+ 32. Ke3 b5.

25. Bg5 Re2 26. Rh2

Black has no clear continuation here, and White kicks the rook out of the second rank.

26. ... b5 27. Kd1 Re4 28. Bd2 Kd7 29. g3 Rg4 30. Rh3 a5 31. Ke2 Nb4 32. Bf4?

After the correct 32. Rh7+! Kc6 33. Bf4 Nd5 34. Kf3 White would have a technical win.

32. ... Rg7 33. Rh5 Kc6 34. a4?

Fortunately, time trouble saved me in this game. Now White trades too many queen-side pawns, and I felt relatively safe again. After 34. c3 Nxa2 35. Kd3 a4 36. Kc2 b4 37. Ra5! White collects the house on the queenside.

34. ... bxa4 35. Rxa5 Nxc2 36. Rxa4 Kd5 37. Kd3 Ne1+ 38. Kc3 Ng2 39. Ra5+ Ke4 40. Ra4+ Kd5 41. Ra5+ Ke4 42. Rg5 Rd7 43. Bd2 Rd3+ 44. Kc2 Ne3+ 45. Kc1 Nf5 46. g4 Nd4 47. Bc3 c5 48. Kb1 c4 49. Bxd4 Kxd4 50. Rg8 Rd1+ 51. Ka2 Ke5 52. Re8+ Kf4 53. Re2 Rc1 54. Ka3 Kxg4 55. Kb4 Kf5 56. Kc5 Kf6 57. Kd4 Kf5 58. Kc5 Kf6 59. Kd5 Kf7 60. Kd6 Rd1+ 61. Kc5 Rc1 62. Kb4 Kf6 63. Re3 Rc2 64. Ka3 Kf5 65. Rc3 Rxc3+ 66. bxc3 Ke6 67. Kb4 Kd6 68. Kxc4 Kc6 69. Kd4 Kd6 70. c4 Kc6 71. c5 Kc7 72. Kd5 Kd7 73. c6+ Kc7 74. Kc5 Kc8 75. Kb6 Kb8 76. c7+ Kc8 77. Kc6, draw.

In the end, Fabiano kept his half-point lead to take the title with a solid 8½/13. Robson finished a half-point behind in second, while I tied for third place at 7½ along with GM Lenier Dominguez Perez.

A hearty congratulations to Caruana, who had an absolutely clinical tournament victory! Every year, the U.S. Championship continues to get stronger, not only by absolute strength, but also in terms of the level of preparation required to succeed. The U.S. Championship is undoubtedly the most difficult national championship to win — a testament to the strength and depth of contemporary American chess. ♣

For more games and analysis from the 2022 U.S. Championship, check out the **Chess Life Online** archives at uschess.org/clo.

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER

Yu defeats Krush in memorable Armageddon showdown to earn second Women's title.

BY WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN



THE STORY OF THE 2022 U.S. Women's Chess Championship had all the drama and intrigue one could hope for: a tight race, lots of

twists and turns, and a nail-biting finish.

This year's tournament featured an increased player pool, moving from 12 to 14 competitors, and the largest prize fund in the event's history. A total of \$154,000 was at stake, with first place earning a cool \$40,000 — a substantial \$15,000 increase from the previous year. The expansion of the field allowed for an interesting mix of experience and youth, with the notable absence of the defending champion IM Carissa Yip, who declined her invitation due to university obligations. Several of our top young talents made their debut this year: FM Alice Lee, FM Ruiyang Yan, FM Rochelle Wu, and WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki.

This 13-round tournament was the longest one I have ever played in. To prepare myself, I thought of the tournament like it was a marathon, one that would require stamina and good nerves. Luckily, we had two rest days to help with our pacing: one each after the fifth and 10th rounds. These two days off divided the grueling tournament into three portions and made it more manageable. As for the nerves part of the equation, I have struggled there in the past, and alas, this year was no exception.

From the get-go, the tournament was a close race between GM Irina Krush and WGM Jennifer Yu. While several players — such as WIM Megan Lee, FM Alice Lee and your author — saw ourselves on top of the standings at different points of the event, Irina and Jennifer were more consistent in

their fight for the title.

Yu is a volatile player, and she can be very dangerous when she goes on a hot streak. Case in point: she won the 2019 US Women's Championship with a phenomenal score of 10½/11. Here she started off with two wins but I was able to stop her winning streak in round three.

GIUOCO PIANO (C54)

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2408)

WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)

U.S. Women's Championship (3), St. Louis, 10.07.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6

I was expecting a Petroff, but Yu is versatile in the opening.

3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d3 h6

There are so many move orders in the Italian that it's difficult to explain all the intricacies!

6. 0-0 d6 7. Re1 0-0 8. h3 a6 9. Bb3 Re8 10. Nbd2 Be6 11. Bc2 Ba7

We have ended up in a common tabiya.

12. Nf1 d5

While White maneuvers the knight to the kingside and builds an attack there, it's the right time for Black to challenge the center.

13. exd5

I had played 13. Qe2 many times before but decided to play something new this time.

13. ... Bxd5 14. Ng3 Nh7

Uncommon, and only played a few times previously. More common is 14. ... Qd7 15. Nh4 Rad8 16. Nh5 with an unclear position.

15. Qe2

This move felt awkward to me during the game. I think 15. Be3, challenging the bishop, seems like a logical way of handling this position.

15. ... Qd7 16. Nh4 Be6 17. Qh5 Nf6 18. Qf3 Bd5

We were both spending quite a bit of time on these moves — perhaps an indication that neither of us were quite sure how to handle this position.

19. Ne4 Nh7 20. Qh5 Ne7 21. Be3



21. ... f5?!

More accurate is 21. ... Bxe3 22. Rxe3 f5. During the game I was also considering the anti-positional recapture 22. fxe3 Bxe4 23. dxe4. I thought my strong light-squared bishop and the open f-file gave me enough compensation for the weak pawn structure, but the engines disagree.

22. Bxa7 Rxa7??

This leads to tactical problems for Black, as the e8-rook is now loose.

After 22. ... fxe4 23. Bc5 exd3 24. Bxd3 White is doing well due to her bishop pair and superior pawn structure.

23. Nc5 Qc6 24. Rxe5 Nf6 25. Qe2 Qxc5 26. Re1

Now I will simply win the piece back and remain a pawn up.

26. ... g5

A bit of a desperate attempt.

27. Nxf5 Nxf5 28. Rxe8+ Nxe8 29. Qxe8+

Qf8 30. Qg6+ Ng7 31. d4

Black's extra piece is irrelevant.

31. ... Ra8 32. Qxh6 Qf4

I missed this move, and panicked a bit. I thought the game was over, but suddenly she has a threat of ... Qf4-d2.



33. Bh7+?

Correct was 33. Qh7+ Kf7 (33. ... Kf8 34. Qh8+ Bg8 35. Bb3 and White wins) 34. Bg6+ Kf6 (or 34. ... Kf8 35. Qh8+ Bg8 36. Re3) 35. Bd3 and White is in the driver's seat.

33. ... Kf8 34. Bd3 Bf7??

Returning the favor.

With 34. ... Re8 things get very complicated: 35. Rxe8+ Kxe8 36. Qxg7 Qc1+ 37. Bf1 (37. Kh2 Qf4+ will lead to a perpetual) 37. ... Bc4 38. Qxc7 Qxf1+ 39. Kh2 and suddenly matters aren't so clear, even with all the extra pawns!

35. Qh8+ Bg8 36. Bc4 Qf7 37. Bxf7 Kxf7 38. Qh6, Black resigned.

After this loss, Yu went on to win her next two games to take a half-point lead over Krush, Lee, and your author.

Irina has won the U.S. Women's Championship eight times, and she is actively trying to earn 10 titles. Her start in this year's event was slower, with three draws followed by two wins. The second of those wins was against last year's second place finisher, WGM Gulrukhbegim "Begim" Tokhirjonova, in a nice Sicilian.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, RICHTER-RAUZER VARIATION (B62)

WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova (2420)

GM Irina Krush (2515)

U.S. Women's Championship (5), St. Louis, 10.09.2022

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bg5



WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

Challenging Krush in her long-standing favorite Sicilian, the Richter-Rauzer!

6. ... e6 7. Qd3 Bd7 8. Be2

It's not necessary to develop this bishop here. More standard is 8. 0-0-0 a6 9. f4 Be7 10. Nf3.

8. ... a6 9. f4 Be7 10. 0-0-0 b5 11. Bf3 Rc8 12. Nxc6 Bxc6 13. a3

This is always a difficult move to make in opposite-side castled positions, as it creates a hook and makes Black's ... b5-b4 move a lot scarier.

13. ... 0-0 14. g4 Qc7 15. h4 a5

White's attacking chances are nebulous, while Black is ready to break through with ... b5-b4.

16. Ne2

I think it was necessary to change the course of the game with something like 16. e5, as "normal" moves will lead to a disaster. Play could continue 16. ... dxe5 17. Bxc6 Qxc6 18. fxe5 b4 19. exf6 gxf6 20. Bh6 bxc3 21. Bxf8 cxb2+ 22. Kb1 Bxf8 with an unclear position.

16. ... b4 17. Nd4 Bd7 18. axb4 axb4



19. Rhe1

Optically, it looks like White has put her pieces on very natural squares, but the attack against White's threadbare king is coming very fast here.

19. ... h6 20. Rh1 e5 21. Nf5 Bxf5 22. Bxf6 Bxf6 23. exf5 exf4

Opposite-colored bishops are very dangerous during attacks as they cannot be tamed by their absent counterparts.

24. Rh2 Qa7 25. Qb3 Rfe8 26. Re2 Re3 27. Rxe3 fxe3 28. Kb1 Bxh4

Grabbing another pawn.

29. Rxd6 Qe7 30. Qd3 Bf6 31. Rd5 Re8

Now White also has to worry about the passed e-pawn.

32. Be2 Ra8 33. Rb5 Qa7 34. c3 bxc3 35. Qd5 cxb2 36. Bc4 Qa1+ 37. Kc2 Qc1+, White resigned.

A smooth victory for Krush.

After five rounds it was time for a much-needed rest day, and then back to work. Unfortunately, the middle portion of the tournament was a complete disaster for me, with three losses in a row putting an end to my dream of finally winning the title.

The tournament remained a close battle between Krush and Yu, except for round eight, when Megan Lee briefly took the lead after defeating Yu in a pretty one-sided affair. However, Jennifer quickly recovered with two wins in a row to retake the lead.

The big showdown was set for the penultimate round, when Krush and Yu finally faced off. At this point, Jennifer was half a point ahead of Irina and a full point ahead of FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro, whom she was set to play in the final round. It is very rare in a round robin that the chips fall as they did here, giving the leader total control of her fate. A win in round 12 would basically secure the championship for Yu.

It was a tense battle until disaster struck.

WHOOPIE

WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)
GM Irina Krush (2515)
U.S. Women's Championship (12), St. Louis, 10.18.2022



WHITE TO MOVE

Spoiler alert: this won't be the last time we see a bishop donation in this event!

More seriously, Yu completely hallucinated here and forgot that after capturing the bishop, the black queen still defends the e8-rook.

31. Ba4??

Instead 31. h5! (which she was planning on playing) is quite strong, posing some serious questions to Black. The opposite-colored

bishops, as we saw in the previous game, favor White as the black king is weaker. Things look disastrous for Black after 31. ... gxh5 32. Qxh5.

31. ... Qxa4 32. Qf7+ Kh8

The game is over.



WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova



GM Irina Krush

33. h5 gxh5 34. Rf5 Bd4 35. Rg5 Qc2+ 36. Kh3 Qe4 37. Rxh5 Qh1+ 38. Kg4 Re4+, White resigned.

This set the stage for a memorable final round, with Yu and Cervantes Landeiro — both trailing Krush by a half-point — paired against one another. Thalia had a remarkable showing in the second half of the tournament, winning five games in a row beginning with her victory over me in round eight. Having the white pieces against her closest rival in the final round was the best-case scenario for her.

Now Irina had the fate of her tournament in her hands: a win against her long-time rival IM Anna Zatonskih would have sealed the deal. Irina had the upper hand throughout the game but couldn't manage to squeeze out a win, while Yu bested Cervantes Landeiro in a rook endgame.

SQUEEZE

FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro (2362)
WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)
U.S. Women's Championship (13), St. Louis, 10.19.2022

(see diagram top of next column)

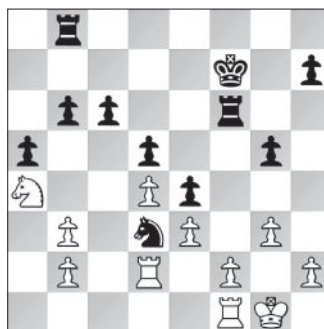
Black is doing really well due to the strong knight and better structure, but now she goes on to dominate the board.

27. ... Rf3 28. Rc2 Nb4 29. Rd2 Ke7

The king marches to the queenside to defend the b6-pawn and free the b8-rook.



FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro



BLACK TO MOVE

30. Rc1 Kd6 31. Rf1

White doesn't have any active ideas, and marks time. One of her rooks will always be tied down, defending the weak f2-pawn.

31. ... Kc7 32. Nc3 Rbf8 33. Ne2 h5 34. Kg2 c5

Playing on both sides of the board.

35. h4

A decision perhaps borne of impatience, but the weakness on h4 will prove crucial.

35. ... gxh4 36. gxh4 Rg8+ 37. Ng3

Played to activate the knight, but unfortunately for White, the h5-pawn will never become a problem for Black.

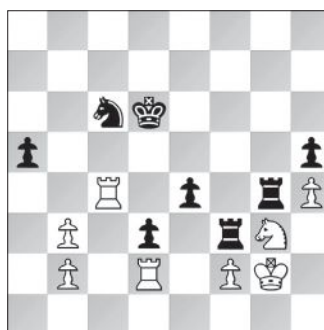
37. ... Rg4 38. Rh1 Kd6 39. dxc5+ bxc5 40. Ra1 Nc6

Here Yu passed up the winning 40. ... Nd3! 41. Rxd3 Rfxg3+! 42. fxxg3 exd3 43. Rxa5 Rb4.

41. Rc1 d4

I think 41. ... Ne7 with the threat of either ... Ne7-f5 or ... Ne7-g6, attacking the h4-pawn and the g3-knight, is much stronger.

42. exd4 cxd4 43. Rc4 d3



44. Ra4

Now 44. Rxe4 doesn't work because of 44. ... Rfxg3+ 45. fxxg3 Rxe4 and Black wins.

44. ... Ne5

The game will end quickly once the knight arrives on the kingside.

45. Rxa5 Ng6 46. Ra6+ Kc7 47. Ra4 Nxh4+ 48. Kh3 Nf5

Black collects another pawn, and the passed e- and d-pawns will be unstoppable.

49. Rc4+ Kd6 50. Kh2 Nxxg3 51. fxxg3 Kd5 52. Ra4 Rxxg3 53. Ra5+ Kd4 54. Rxh5 Ke3 55. Rd1 Ke2 56. Ra1 d2 57. Rh4 e3, White resigned.

After the loss against Krush, Yu felt as though she did not deserve another chance at the title. But she managed to keep her cool, did what she had to do without stressing about Irina's game, and fate granted her another chance at the title. It was time for another day of chess, and a rapid and blitz playoff, to determine the winner.

THE PLAYOFFS

I watched the playoffs live with Begim, GM Fabiano Caruana, and GM Maurice Ashley outside of the commentary studio. While there was nothing at stake for us, our emotions were running high as we watched the drama unfold. Maurice had taken the year off from his commentary duties, but he couldn't help but go into commentator mode and provide some entertainment for the three of us!

The format of the tiebreak was two games of G/10+5, a much faster time control than in previous years. I thought Krush would be a heavy favorite in this situation given her experience, but the faster time control turned out to favor Yu, who had just contested a playoff in the U.S. Girls' Junior!

Jennifer took the first game by keeping things imbalanced and taking Irina out of her comfort zone.

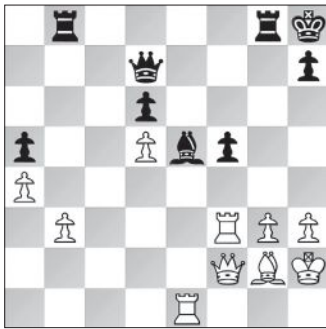
TIME PRESSURE

WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)
GM Irina Krush (2515)
U.S. Women's Championship Playoff (1), St. Louis, 10.20.2022

(see diagram top of next column)

38. Rxe5!

With just 15 seconds on her clock, Yu makes the correct decision to sacrifice the Exchange and get rid of Black's annoying dark-squared bishop.



WHITE TO MOVE

38. ... dxe5 39. Rxf5 Rxb3?

Krush immediately errs, but it is difficult to manage this position with no time on the clock.

Best was 39. ... Qg7 as Black needs to be ready for the Rf5-f7 threat. Here 40. Rf7 Rg7f8 keeps the position very unclear.

40. Rf7 Qd6 41. Be4 Rg7 42. Rf8+ Rg8 43. Rf7 Rg7 44. Rf8+ Rg8



45. Qf7

Now mate is unstoppable!

45. ... Qxf8

After 45. ... Rb2+ 46. Kh1 Black runs out of checks as the b1-square is covered by the bishop.

46. Qxh7, mate.

The victory meant that Yu only needed a draw to clinch the title. But Krush had the white pieces and, this time, the better nerves. Once again, the game was resolved in a time scramble.

MORE TIME PRESSURE

GM Irina Krush (2515)
WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)
U.S. Women's Championship Playoff (2), St. Louis, 10.20.2022



BLACK TO MOVE

35. ... Nc4??

With a mere five seconds left on the clock,

Yu moves the wrong knight. On the broadcast video, we can see her hesitating after grabbing the piece, as she realizes that there is no good square for it to land on.

Black keeps the advantage after 35. ... Nbc6, challenging the d4-bishop and trying to either force its exchange or chase it off the a1-h8 diagonal. For instance: 36. Be3 Nd3 37. Bxh6 Rxe1+ 38. Rxe1 Nd4 and Black is cruising.

36. Rxe8+ Bxe8 37. Bh8

Now the necessity of neutralizing the bishop becomes clear.

37. ... f6 38. Qxf6 Qf7 39. Qc3 Bb5 40. Rd1 Nc6 41. Bf6 Qe6 42. Re1 Qd7 43. h4 Nd2 44. Be5 Nxe5 45. Qxe5 Nc4 46. Qf6 Qf7 47. Qd8+ Kg7

The final blunder, losing immediately.

The only way to keep the game going is 47. ... Qf8 as Re1-e8 is not possible. The computer evaluates the position as completely lost for Black, but anything could have happened in the time scramble.

48. Re7, Black resigned.

This result meant that the championship title would be decided in an Armageddon game. After winning the coin toss, Yu chose to play Black, which gave her draw odds but

Below: Dr. Jeanne Sinuefield rings the bell to signal that the rapid playoff between Yu and Krush is underway.



PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES



just four minutes on the clock against Irina's five. One more key point: there would be no increment until move 60.

I was a bit surprised by Jennifer's choice. Both of the games were decided decisively thus far, and a one-minute advantage is quite significant with so little time.

I was more surprised by the way the game unfolded. Here's how history was made.

KING'S INDIAN ATTACK (A07)

GM Irina Krush (2515)

WGM Jennifer Yu (2407)

U.S. Women's Championship Playoff (3), St. Louis, 10.20.2022

1. Nf3 d5 2. g3 g6 3. Bg2 Bg7 4. 0-0 e5 5. d3 Ne7 6. Nbd2 0-0 7. e4 d4 8. Ne1 Nbc6 9. f4



9. ... Bg4??

Yu thought she had a knight on f6, and didn't realize that this move leaves her bishop *en prise*. Instinctively she tried to take the move back, only to realize that she had let go of the piece.

10. Qxg4

With an extra piece and an extra minute on the clock, the commentators were ready to call the game for Krush, but Yu soldiered on.

Right: It's not all hard work at the U.S. Championships. Here Wesley So analyzes with Alex Lenderman as friends look on.

10. ... f5 11. Qe2 Qd7 12. Nef3 Rae8 13. fxe5 Nxe5 14. Nxe5 Bxe5 15. exf5 Nxf5 16. Ne4 b6 17. Bd2 c5 18. Rf2 Re7 19. Raf1 Rfe8 20. Bh3 Rf7 21. g4 Nd6 22. Nxd6



22. ... Bxh2+

An opportunity presents itself.

23. Kxh2 Qxd6+ 24. Kh1 Rxe2 25. Rxe2

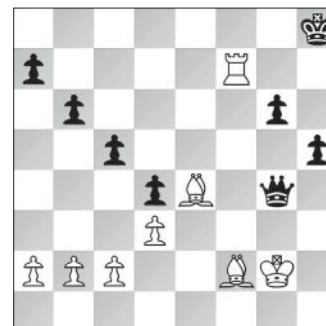
Objectively, the position is lost for Black, but now at least things are murky. Black has a queen, and the white king is exposed. And Yu was a minute ahead on the clock.

25. ... Qd5+ 26. Kg1 Rxf1+ 27. Bxf1 Qf3 28. g5 Qg4+ 29. Rg2 Qd1 30. Bf4 Qf3 31. Rf2 Qg4+ 32. Bg2 Qd1+ 33. Kh2 Qe1 34. Bd5+ Kg7 35. Bg3 Qe8 36. Kg2 h5 37. Rf7+ Kh8 38. Kf1 Qe3 39. Rf8+ Kg7 40. Rf7+ Kh8 41. Bf2 Qc1+ 42. Be1 Qxg5

It's important to recall here that there was

no increment in this Armageddon game until move 60. With just five seconds left on the clock, and 18 moves until the increment kicked in, Krush was in dire straits.

43. Be4 Qg4 44. Bf2 Qd1+ 45. Kg2 Qg4+



Krush played the illegal move 46. Kg1, leaving her king in check, and a sign that her nerves had completely given up. Yu correctly made the claim and had one minute added to her clock, while Krush had to make 14 moves in two seconds to get to move 60 and the two-second increment — a physically impossible task.

46. Kh2 Kg8 47. Rf3 h4, White lost on time.

Now came the inevitable — Krush ran out of time, and Jennifer Yu added a second national title to her future 2022 "Year in Review."



PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER



Above: A hung bishop on g4. An illegal move in time pressure. A gracious resignation. An elated Jennifer Yu is our new champion!

What an incredible game! Even the unflappable GM Yasser Seirawan was shocked: “I can’t believe what I just saw,” he exclaimed on the livestream after the handshake.

For her part, the newly crowned champion was sheepish after her victory: “I just want to apologize for how bad that game was,” was her initial comment to GM Cristian Chirila during the post-game interview.

So what about that bishop blunder? Jennifer explained how she mentally convinced herself to keep fighting. “There is no way I



lose a U.S. Championship because I hung a bishop against Irina twice,” she said.

Later, during her interview with Caruana and Chirila on the “C-Squared Podcast,” she elaborated on this decision. The general consensus on the internet that she should have resigned surprised her. She never considered that as an option — it was a quick game that would be over soon and she had

nothing to lose at that point.

Perhaps our new two-time champion put it best right after her Armageddon victory: “It’s kind of crazy that two and a half weeks of work comes down to a few seconds, but I guess that’s chess.” Congratulations to her, and thanks to everyone at the Saint Louis Chess Club for hosting another fantastic U.S. Women’s Championship! ♠

2022 U.S. Women’s Championship

SAINT LOUIS, OCTOBER 5-20, 2022

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1	GM Irina Krush	2515	*	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	9/13
2	WGM Jennifer Yu	2407	0	*	1	1	0	½	0	1	1	1	1	1	½	1	9/13
3	FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro	2362	0	0	*	½	1	½	1	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	8/13
4	FM Ruiyang Yan	2333	½	0	½	*	½	½	1	½	½	0	1	½	1	1	7½/13
5	WGM Tatev Abrahamyan	2408	½	1	0	½	*	½	½	0	½	1	½	1	1	0	7/13
6	FM Alice Lee	2373	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	1	½	0	½	½	1	1	7/13
7	WIM Megan Lee	2332	½	1	0	0	½	1	*	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	7/13
8	WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova	2420	0	0	0	½	1	0	1	*	½	1	1	0	½	1	6½/13
9	IM Anna Zatonskih	2420	½	0	½	½	½	½	1	½	*	½	½	½	½	0	6/13
10	FM Rochelle Wu	2350	½	0	½	1	0	1	0	0	½	*	0	1	½	1	6/13
11	WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki	2289	½	0	½	0	½	½	1	0	½	1	*	0	0	1	5½/13
12	WGM Sabina Foisor	2311	½	0	0	½	0	½	0	1	½	0	1	*	½	0	4½/13
13	IM Nazi Paikidze	2433	0	½	½	0	0	0	0	½	½	½	1	½	*	½	4½/13
14	FM Ashritha Eswaran	2400	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	½	*	3½/13

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