





# One Last **CHANCE**

WGM Jennifer Yu tells us how she finally won the U.S. Girls' Junior Championship in her last year of eligibility.

BY **WGM JENNIFER YU**



**T**HE 2022 U.S. GIRLS' JUNIOR Championship is always an event to watch. With more than \$20,000 in prizes, and a \$10,000 scholarship for the winner courtesy of the Dewain Barber Foundation and US Chess, there's always going to be surprises and entertainment. With a field of ten hungry juniors, this year lived up to expectations.

At age 20, this was my last opportunity to play in the Girls' Junior, and I felt like the grizzled veteran in the field. This year's tournament also presented a unique challenge — while I've been one of the favorites every year, and I've won the overall U.S. Women's Championship, I've never managed to take this title home. Often the Girls' Junior has been one of my worst tournaments of the year, due to poor form and the unpredictability of junior chess. This was my last shot, so I was eager to make it count.

Coming into the event, the usual suspects were definitely the favorites: FMs Thalia Cervantes Landeiro, Alice Lee, Rochelle Wu, Ruiyang Yan, and your author. As it turned out, however, most of the tournament consisted of this pack chasing darkhorse WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki.

I started the tournament slowly, drawing my first two games against two of the top players, Alice Lee and Thalia Cervantes Landeiro, despite being better in both of them. I wasn't happy about dropping half-points early, but I didn't think much of it — the early leaders usually slow down as the tournament goes on.



FM Rochelle Wu



WFM Gracy Prasanna



WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki

As it turned out, this was a mistake. Morris-Suzuki upset Rochelle Wu in round two, grabbing the sole lead at 2/2 and setting the tone for the rest of the event.

### KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, SÄMISCH VARIATION (E81)

FM Rochelle Wu (2292)  
WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki (2245)  
U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (2), St. Louis, 07.08.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. f3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nc3 0-0 6. Be3 c5 7. Nge2 Nc6 8. d5 Ne5 9. Ng3 h5 10. Be2 h4 11. Nf1 e6



**12. a4**  
Leaving theory. Perhaps this temporarily prevents the common ... b7-b5 idea, but as seen in the game, Black was still able to get the pawn push, opening the a-file and attacking White's weaknesses on the b-file.

Here 12. Nd2, 12. Bg5, and 12. f4 have all been tried for White, each with around 200 games in the database.

**12. ... exd5 13. cxd5**  
Attempting to keep the hole on d5 is futile: 13. Nxd5?! Nxd5 14. cxd5 (worse is 14. Qxd5? Be6 15. Qd2 when the c4-pawn is hanging and White's pieces are passive) 14. ... f5! The knight exchange frees black's f-pawn, allowing this push with devastating effects. After 15. Nd2 h3 16. g4 f4 17. Bf2 Black's pieces dominate the position and White will have to resort to a miserable defense for the rest of the game.

**13. ... h3**  
A clever idea, inserting a pawn on the third rank to inconvenience White's piece activity and create threats on the king. But it gives Wu a chance to create active counterplay.

**14. g3?!**  
The multi-purpose 14. g4! cuts off the h3-pawn from Black's other pieces and prepares to gain more space. This will allow White to

grab the initiative and kick the knights from their active squares. And unlike the game, the white knight now has access to the g3-square, i.e., 14. ... Re8 15. Ng3 preparing to castle with a comfortable position.

**14. ... a6**  
Preparing ... b7-b5.

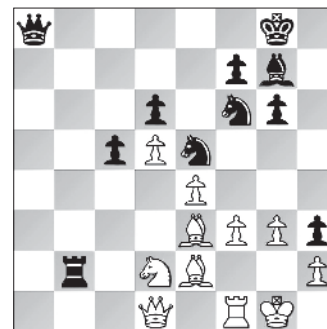
**15. Nd2 Bd7 16. 0-0**  
The common pawn push 16. a5 (to stop ... b7-b5 with *en passant*) isn't favorable in this position. Black can play 16. ... b5! anyway. After 17. axb6 *e.p.* Qxb6 the opening of the queenside allows Black easy play. The weak b2-pawn is a target, and Black always has the opportunity to open the a-file and gain a nice queenside pawn majority with ... Bd7-b5, where White will be practically forced to trade.

**16. ... b5 17. axb5**  
Keeping the queenside closed with 17. b3 slows down Black's play.

**17. ... axb5 18. Rxa8?!**  
This exchange attempts to prevent ... Qd8-b6 after Nc3xb5 by deflecting the black queen, but it allows Black to gain control of the crucial a- and b-files.

Instead 18. Nxb5 has to be tried. After 18. ... Qb6 19. Nc3 Qxb2 20. Qc1 Qb4 Black has an obvious positional advantage due to her active pieces, but it's not so clear how to continue.

**18. ... Qxa8 19. Nxb5 Bxb5 20. Bxb5 Rb8 21. Be2 Rxb2**



Black is in complete control of the position and Morris-Suzuki flawlessly converts her positional advantage to a material one. This is facilitated by the h3-pawn that has become quite a thorn in White's side.

**22. f4 Qa3! 23. Bf2 Qb4**  
An amazing line is 23. ... Rxd2! 24. Qxd2 Qf3! 25. Bxf3 Nxf3+ 26. Kh1 Nxd2 and Black is winning all of White's central pawns.

**24. Be1 Nd3 25. Bxd3 Qd4+ 26. Rf2 Qxd3**  
White has no moves.

**27. Qf3 Qxf3 28. Rxf3 Ng4**

Even with the queen trade the white king is too weak!

**29. e5 dxe5 30. d6 e4! 31. d7 Bd4+! 32. Bf2 Bf6, White resigned.**

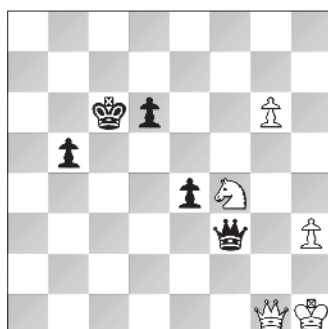
Morris-Suzuki continued her hot streak, winning the next two games to get to 4/4. I also began to heat up, and after four rounds, I was a point behind her at 3/4 along with Cervantes Landeiro. But this lead was precarious — already in round four it looked for a moment like WFM Gracy Prasanna might slow Morris-Suzuki down.

## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki (2245)

WFM Gracy Prasanna (2201)

U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (3), St. Louis, 07.09.2022



WHITE TO MOVE

**65. Qg2, Black resigned.**

Here Prasanna gave up, seeing that there was no way to stop the g-pawn from promoting. As it turns out, both sides missed a defense! The key is White's open king.

After 65. Qg2 Qxf4! 66. g7 Qc1+ 67. Qg1 Black may have run out of checks but that doesn't mean the game is over. The queen simply needs to find a better square to give checks! 67. ... Qh6! 68. g8=Q Qxh3+ Even with two queens, White can't stop Black's perpetual checks: 69. Qh2 Qf1+ 70. Qgg1 Qf3+ 71. Qhg2 Qh5+ 72. Q1h2 Qd1+ 73. Qgg1 Qf3+ with equality.

The three leaders all won in round five, as did Wu, who was in fourth place with three points. I wasn't too concerned with my place in the standings yet, as I was only trailing Morris-Suzuki by a point and I had yet to play her.

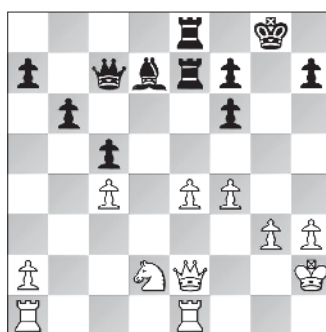
The situation got a lot more complicated in round six. I was paired against Wu, and despite having trouble with her in the past, I wasn't nervous, feeling that as long as I played "normal chess" and managed my time well, things would be fine. But after being sidetracked, I found myself in a strange position with horrid time pressure, and disaster struck.

## DISASTER

WGM Jennifer Yu (2378)

FM Rochelle Wu (2292)

U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (6), St. Louis, 07.13.2022



BLACK TO MOVE

I had seen this position in my analysis, but I miscalculated how tricky and unclear it would be. Rochelle has weak kingside pawns, but it's not easy for me to attack them, and she is currently putting a lot of pressure on my central pawn. Most importantly, she has the initiative. I was already in time trouble after burning through my time earlier, which was not great for dealing such a complex position.

**25. ... Bf5**

This initiates a tactical combination: the idea to win the h3-pawn by exploiting the weak e-pawn and d2-knight. I had spotted this idea a couple moves earlier, but thought that I had a simple defense.

**26. Qf3 Qd7 27. Rad1 Bxh3**

Looking at this position from afar, I assumed I could simply play 28. f5, trapping the bishop. But of course this doesn't work because the bishop can take on f5. I was pretty disgusted with myself for this simple oversight, as the bishop was untouchable on f5 just a move ago.

There was an exciting way to create counterplay and keep the position balanced. I had briefly looked at this, but discouraged and with the clock ticking away, I tried to

make my original idea work. This shows the importance of not letting what happens during the game affect your current moves!

**28. f5??**

Had I played 28. e5!, the game would still go on! With the knight ready to jump to the e4-square, Black's king is suddenly in danger. Now if (a) 28. ... Bg4 29. Ne4 Bxf3 30. Nxf6+ Kg7 31. Rxd7 Rxd7 32. Nxe8+ Kf8 33. Nd6 the position is equal. And if (b) 28. ... Bf5, preventing Nd2-e4, White plays 29. Qh5! preparing the knight jump and increasing pressure on Black's kingside: 29. ... Qe6 (29. ... Bg6 30. Ne4) 30. Ne4 Bxe4 31. Rxe4 and White's activity and the weak black king are more than enough compensation for the pawn.

**28. ... Bxf5 29. Qf4 Bg6 30. Nf3 Qe6 31.**

**Rd5 Bxe4 32. Nd2 f5 33. Nxe4 fxe4 34.**

**Rg5+ Kh8**

I have nothing; after some accurate play, Rochelle converted her extra material.

**35. Rh5 f6 36. Rd5 Rg7 37. Re3 Rg6 38.**

**Kg2 Qg4 39. Qc7 Rh6 40. Rd8 Qh3+ 41.**

**Kf2 Qh2+ 42. Ke1 Qg1+ 43. Kd2 Rh2+ 44.**

**Re2 e3+ 45. Kc3 Qc1+ 46. Kb3 Qb1+ 47.**

**Kc3 Qb4+ 48. Kd3 Qa3+, White resigned.**

With this loss I felt my title chances disappearing. Morris-Suzuki won against Yan, keeping her perfect at 6/6. Cervantes Landeiro also lost her game against Lee, meaning that we both trailed the leader by two points with just three rounds to go. Meanwhile Wu won to catch us in shared second place. The only consolation was that I was paired with Morris-Suzuki in round seven.

I knew early on that my game against Morris-Suzuki would be the most important game of my tournament. With a two-point lead heading into the final three rounds, it looked like she had pretty much wrapped the tournament up. My only chance lay in the pairings — she had yet to play either Cervantes Landeiro or myself, and both of us were still in the chase.

I knew the odds were slim that I could overtake her, but I never gave up hope, and I was eager for the game to begin as I enjoy playing in high-pressure situations!

Morris-Suzuki showed a very diverse repertoire in this tournament, so I had zero idea about what to expect when I sat down at the board. I really admired her fighting spirit, and I hoped that she would continue playing aggressively in our game as well. My biggest worry, being two points down,

playing with the Black pieces, and in a must-win situation, was that she would play for a draw. But based on what I had seen in St. Louis, this wouldn't be a problem. It looked like she was out to win every game, so I just needed to get a playable position and look for chances.

**QUEEN'S GAMBIT, SLAV DEFENSE (D17)**

**WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki (2245)**

**WGM Jennifer Yu (2378)**

**U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (7), St. Louis, 07.14.2022**

**1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. a4 Bf5 6. Ne5 Nbd7 7. Nxc4 Nb6**

Here I have played a lot of games with 7. ... Qc7 8. g3 e5 9. dxe5 Nxe5 10. Bf4 Nfd7 11. Bg2 where the lines are all quite forcing. I didn't want to walk into her prep, so I decided to play a line I had prepared for a different opponent over a year ago.

**8. Ne5 a5 9. f3**

(see diagram top of next column)

**9. ... Bd7?**

I played this move quickly, surprising the

The playoff was dramatic: Yu is devastated as she resigns to Cervantes Landeiro, who was not exempt from the stress of the moment.



commentators as the evaluation immediately plummets. This was a silly mistake on my part, as I messed up the move order of the line, giving White a positional advantage.

The right move order is 9. ... Nfd7!, trading off the annoying knight: after 10. Nxd7 (if 10. e4 Nxe5 11. dxe5 Qxd1 and Black has traded some pieces in a cramped position) 10. ... Bxd7 we get to a more playable version of the game.

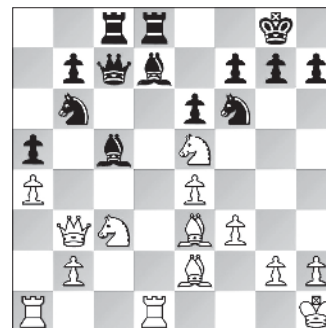
**10. e4 e6 11. Be3 Bb4 12. Be2 0-0 13. 0-0 Rc8 14. Qb3?!**

This allows me to get ... c6-c5, which helps increase my piece activity and breaks her strong bind in the center.

A move like 14. Nd3 discourages ... c6-c5 and if 14. ... Nc4 15. Bc1 c5 Black can get her pawn break in, but in return White gets the bishop pair. Black's lack of a dark-squared bishop will become quite uncomfortable in the next few moves. For example: 16. Nxc5 Bxc5 17. dxc5 Rxc5 18. b3 Ne5 19. Nb1 and Black has many weaknesses.

**14. ... c5 15. Rfd1 Qc7 16. Kh1 Rfd8 17. dxc5 Bxc5?!**

A slight inaccuracy. This allows a tactical idea, but I risked it as I wanted to keep the material balanced. After 17. ... Qxe5 18. cxb6 Nh5 Black has compensation for the pawn in her active pieces.



**18. Nxd7?!**

Correct is 18. Bf4! Nh5 19. Nxd7 Nxf4 and now White's key idea is 20. Nb5! Qxd7 (the point being that after 20. ... Qc6 21. Na7!) 21. Rxd7 Nxd7. Black has compensation for the queen, but objectively White is slightly better.

**18. ... Nbxd7 19. Nb5 Qe5**

In a must-win situation, I have to play actively and create opportunities.

**20. Bd2 b6**

A reluctant pawn push.

**21. Be1**



My opponent had the option to force a three-fold repetition with 21. Na7 Rc7 22. Nb5 Rcc8 (I would have had to try 22. ... Rc6 which puts my rook on a bad square and leaves me worse, but a draw wasn't an option here!) 23. Na7, but as I thought she was playing for a win, I believed she would avoid this line.

### 21. ... Nh5

This move discourages Be1-g3 and attempting to provoke some weaknesses in White's solid position.

### 22. g3 Qb8 23. f4 Nhf6 24. Bf3?!

With this natural move the tide begins to turn in my favor. Now I get the opportunity to fix the central pawn structure, making the white bishops passive. Alternatively, if 24. e5 Nd5 25. Qf3 with equality.

### 24. ... e5 25. f5



### 25. ... g5!

Another move that surprised the commentators! So what was my thinking process during the game? This looks positionally suspect as I'm willingly weakening my kingside. The key to the position is that Sophie has a simple idea of gaining space on the kingside with g3-g4-g5, exploiting my lack of kingside pieces and making use of her space advantage enforced by the f5-pawn. As we were both getting low on time, I didn't want to have to defend against an attack on my king, especially as time pressure favors the attacker.

By playing ... g7-g5, I prevent the kingside advance, and I can even start my own attack by pushing my pawns and limiting her light-squared bishop. The engine evaluation might be equal, but my initiative (and the psychology of forcing Sophie from attack to defense) gives me a practical advantage.

Another idea is 25. ... Bd4!? opening the c5-square for the knight because the bishop is untouchable for tactical reasons: 26. g4 (not 26. Nxd4? Nc5! 27. Qe3 exd4 28. Rxd4 Rxd4 29. Qxd4 Nb3!) 26. ... h6 27. h4 Nc5 28. Qc2 with rough equality.

26. Qd3 g4 27. Bg2 Kg7 28. Bd2 h6 29. Qe2 Nf8 30. Nc3 h5 31. Bg5 N8h7 32. Bh4 Rd4



### 33. Rxd4?

Initiating a forcing sequence that works in my favor. After 33. Rac1 the position is very complicated and the game goes on.

### 33. ... exd4 34. e5?

Relatively best was 34. Nd1 Nd7 with an edge for Black.

### 34. ... dxc3 35. exf6+ Nxf6 36. bxc3

When I played 32. ... Rd4, I evaluated this position as being much better for me. White's dark-squared bishop is misplaced and while the light-squared bishop looks active, it's actually useless. White's king can easily come under attack and, if I quickly mobilize my pieces, I can pick up one of the weak c3- or f5-pawns.

### 36. ... Re8 37. Qd2 Be3 38. Qd3 Qd8 39. Qb5

Black has a significant advantage after 39. Qxd8 Rxd8 40. Re1 Rd3.

### 39. ... Bc5 40. h3 gxh3 41. Bxh3 Re3 42. Qf1 Rxc3

Picking up the first pawn; the rest of the game was smooth.

### 43. Qf4 Be3 44. Qe5 Bd4 45. Qf4 Rc2 46. Rf1 Qd5+ 47. Qf3 Qxf3+ 48. Rxf3 Ra2 49. Rf4 Rxa4 50. g4 hxg4 51. Bxg4 Ra1+ 52. Kg2 Rg1+ 53. Kh2 Nxc4+ 54. Kh3 Bf6, White resigned.

While this tightened up the leaderboard, the fact still remained that Morris-Suzuki had a full point lead over both me and Cervantes Landeiro heading into round eight. All three of us won, while Wu drew against Lee, removing her from the hunt for second place.

The sensation of the round was Morris-Suzuki's quick victory over WFM Anne-Marie Velea, where the game was practically over after eight moves! Catalan players (with either color) should study this game.

## QUEEN'S GAMBIT, CATALAN OPENING (E06)

WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki (2245)

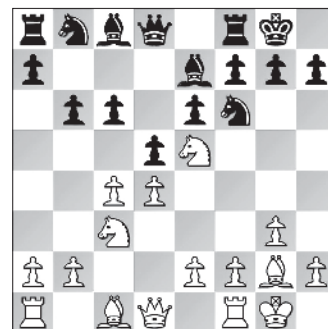
WFM Anne-Marie Velea (2151)

U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (8), St. Louis, 07.15.2022

### 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Be7 4. g3 Nf6 5. Bg2 0-0 6. 0-0 c6 7. Nc3

Here 7. Qc2 and 7. Nbd2 have traditionally been preferred, but modern players are trying this move with good results.

### 7. ... b6 8. Ne5



### 8. ... Nfd7??

Correct is 8. ... Ba6 9. Bf4 Nfd7 with a normal game, while Rose Atwell tried 8. ... Bb7 9. e4 dxc4 10. Nxc4 Ba6 11. b3 Nbd7 12. Bf4 b5! against Sophie in the 2022 WIM Ruth Haring National Tournament of Girls State Champions just a few weeks later.

### 9. cxd5! cxd5 10. Nxd5

With the open, unopposed diagonal, Black is losing the a8-rook.

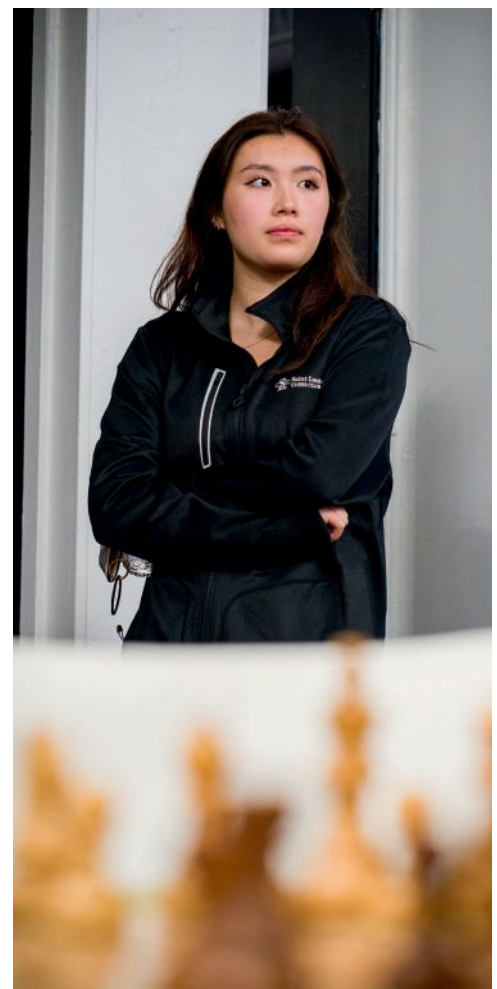
### 10. ... Nxe5 11. dxe5 Bb7 12. Nf6+ gxf6 13. Bxb7 Nc6 14. Bxc6

Here Sophie used the material advantage to great effect, winning quickly.

### 14. ... Rc8 15. Qa4 Kh8 16. Bf4 f5 17. Rfd1 Qc7 18. Rac1 Qb8 19. Rd7 Rc7 20. Rxe7 Rxe7 21. Bg5 Rc7 22. Bf6+ Kg8 23. Qf4, Black resigned.

With both Cervantes Landeiro and your author a point off the leader at 6/8, we were both in must-win situations going into the final round. All eyes were on the match-up between Cervantes Landeiro and Morris-Suzuki, as their game would determine whether or not we'd go to a playoff. With the situation completely out of my control, I tried to focus on my game while also mentally preparing myself for rapid and blitz tiebreaks.



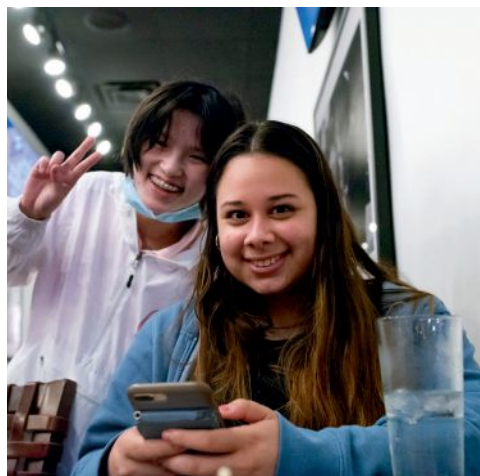


**M**ORE SO THAN ANY OTHER high-level event in American chess, the U.S. Junior, Girls' Junior, and Senior Championships consistently provide exciting moments, both on and off the board.

Is it the co-mingling of youth and experience? The evident camaraderie between the players? The simple joy of playing chess? Whatever it might be, these photos give a behind-the-scenes glimpse of competition and friendship at the highest levels.

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All photos courtesy of the Saint Louis Chess Club and its talented photographers, including Bryan Adams, Austin Fuller, Crystal Fuller, and Lennart Ootes.

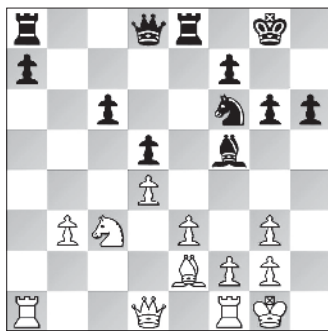




**QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED,  
EXCHANGE VARIATION (D35)**

FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro (2339)  
WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki (2245)  
U.S. Girls' Junior Championship (9), St.  
Louis, 07.16.2022

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. cxd5 exd5  
5. Bg5 c6 6. e3 Bd6 7. Bd3 0-0 8. Qc2 h6  
9. Bh4 Re8 10. Nf3 Be6 11. Ne5 c5 12.  
0-0 Nc6 13. Nxc6 bxc6 14. Bg3 c4 15. Be2  
Bxg3 16. hxg3 g6 17. b3 Bf5 18. Qd1 cxb3  
19. axb3

**19. ... h5?!**

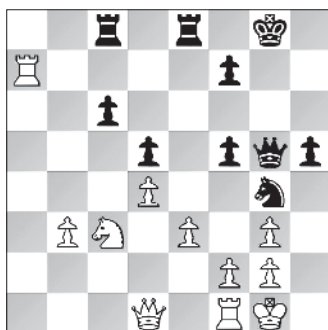
Allowing Cervantes Landeiro to get the rook to a6 was a mistake. White now puts sustained pressure on Black's fractured queenside pawns.

After the correct 19. ... a5 the a-pawn is defended by both the rook and queen, and there's no Ra1-a6. It's not so clear how White should continue on the queenside; meanwhile, Black can play ... h6-h5 and launch a kingside attack as in the game.

**20. Ra6 Rc8?**

It seems odd to give the a-pawn for free. Morris-Suzuki gets some kingside play in return, but the pawn sacrifice seems unnecessary.

With 20. ... Qc7 21. Qc1 Re6 everything is defended, and it will take White some time to organize pressure on the queenside while Black commences kingside action.

**21. Rxa7 Ng4 22. Bd3 Qg5 23. Bxf5 gxf5!**

Morris-Suzuki correctly breaks a fundamental rule, doubling her pawns. While this weakens Black's kingside structure, it also allows the opportunity for counterplay by using the open g- and h-files to attack the white king. Now Black is threatening ... Ng4xe3 and winning a potential knight on c3, forcing Cervantes Landeiro to respond. She also needs to find ways to defend the looming kingside attack.

Note that 23. ... Qxf5? is a mistake. After 24. Qf3 any queen trade is favorable for White, and after 24. ... Qe6 25. Na4 White is comfortable and up a healthy pawn.

**24. Nb1 Ra8??**

As tempting as it might be to grab the open a-file, this goes against the nature and urgency of the position. Morris-Suzuki has many long-term weaknesses because of her weak pawn structure. As she is still down a pawn, she needs to act immediately to keep her compensation.

Her last few moves all were aimed towards the king, so the best continuation would have been to follow through on this idea and create a pawn break: 24. ... h4 25. Qf3 hxg3 26. Qxg3 and here the only current defender of the white king is the queen, so if Black brings in another attacker, White will be in an uncomfortable situation.

Black's best is 26. ... Re6! 27. Nd2 Rh6 28. Nf3 Qh5. Now the threats to the king are too strong, so White is forced to return the extra pawn. 29. Qh3 Qxh3 30. gxh3 Rxh3 is equal.

**25. Rxa8 Rxa8**

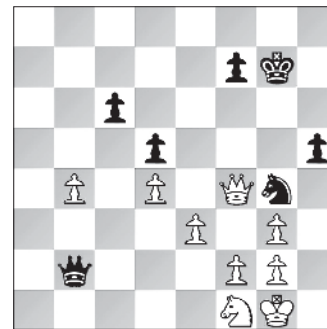
Now Cervantes Landeiro has time to bring in her knight, allowing her to defend against the kingside threats.

**26. Nd2 Ra2 27. Nf3 Qe7 28. Qb1 Qa3 29. Qxf5 Ra1 30. Nh2??**

This rook trade puts the knight on a passive square, giving Black enough counterplay against the f2-weakness to hold. The knight on f1 will have a tough time returning to the game.

Here 30. Qxh5?? immediately gives up any hope of advantage: 30. ... Rxf1+ 31. Kxf1 Qa6+ 32. Ke1 Qa1+ 33. Ke2 Qa6+ 34. Ke1 Qa1+ is a draw.

The correct 30. Ne1 isn't very intuitive, but it keeps White's advantage by keeping the rooks on the board while the f1-rook defends the f2-square. Black's kingside is now up for grabs. White also has the option to return the queen to the queenside to hold the position together. A sample line is 30. ... Qb2 (not 30. ... Qxb3? 31. Qxh5) 31. Qc2 with a significant advantage for White.

**30. ... Rxf1+ 31. Nxf1 Qb2 32. b4 Kg7 33. Qf4**

Morris-Suzuki's pieces are all placed on their best squares, tying Cervantes Landeiro completely down. White is still up material, but she can't do anything due to the threat on f2. If Black can prevent a break that would White's pieces to escape their bind, she would have the draw and the tournament victory.

**33. ... Kg6?**

The wrong square for the king — moving to f8 or g8 holds. Now Thalia has a chance to break open the position and play for the win.

**34. e4!**

Sacrificing one pawn, completely worth escaping Black's bind. The pawn capture on e4 allows the queen to capture with check, taking advantage of the poor placement of the black king.

**34. ... Qxd4**

If 34. ... dxe4 35. Qxe4+ Kg7 36. Qf4 is nearly winning.

**35. exd5 Qxd5 36. f3 Nf6 37. Ne3 Qe6 38. Qd4 Nd5?**

The final mistake. Now Thalia converts flawlessly.

After 38. ... Ng8 Black is worse, but she can hang on for a while, particularly as queen endgames are tricky.

**39. Nxd5 cxd5 40. b5 Qd6 41. Kh2 f6 42. b6 Qb8 43. Qc5 h4 44. Qc7 Qh8 45. b7 Qh6 46. g4 h3 47. Qc2+ Kg7 48. b8=Q hxg2+ 49. Kxg2, Black resigned.**

With Cervantes Landeiro's crucial win, combined with my victory over Velea, three players tied for first place with seven points, ensuring there would be extra chess! We didn't have much time to prepare for the playoff, so after two weeks of play, it really came down to spotting tricks and tactics in the faster time controls.

Having finished a little before Cervantes Landeiro and Morris-Suzuki's game ended,

I went back to my hotel room, took a nap, and drank a cup of coffee. I knew my competitors played a lot more online blitz than I did, so I needed to be alert.

The first playoff format was a rapid round robin with a time control of G/10;d2. In the event of another tie, a second round robin would be played, with a faster time control of G/3;d2. The game order was based on tie-break standings, so I took White against Morris-Suzuki first, while Cervantes Landeiro waited. Then Cervantes Landeiro would get White against me, and finally, Morris-Suzuki would play White against Cervantes Landeiro.

I won a messy game against Morris-Suzuki amidst time pressure, and I definitely felt a small bit of relief – for the first time in the tournament, winning first place was in my control, but I had to defeat Cervantes Landeiro first.

The opening went well enough against Thalia. I won a pawn but she had compensation. After some accurate moves, Cervantes Landeiro got a positional advantage and it became difficult to defend. With the inevitable time pressure, I cracked, losing on time.

Relief suddenly became dejection. After so many miracles were required just to get to the playoffs, the result was once again out of my hands. But Morris-Suzuki came through, converting a positional edge into an endgame win. Time for another playoff!

For this round, the pairings were the same, but with colors reversed. I learned my lesson from the previous games, and worked to play more quickly. After some

tactics, I defeated Morris-Suzuki, leaving me a win away from my goal. Not stressing and moving fast, I took the full point against Cervantes Landeiro as well. With these two wins, it was mission accomplished. I was the 2022 U.S. Girls' Junior Champion!

This tournament had a bit of everything,

including a six-game winning streak by Morris-Suzuki and two nerve-wracking playoffs! I have such great respect for my competitors, who fought tooth and nail and showed so much spirit over nearly two weeks. Their vigor and energetic play shows the great promise of women's chess in America. ♠

## 2022 U.S. Girls Junior Championship Blitz Playoff

ST. LOUIS, JULY 16, 2022

			1	2	3	
1	<b>WGM Jennifer Yu</b>	1993	*	1	1	2/2
2	<b>FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro</b>	2054	0	*	U	0/1
3	<b>WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki</b>	1841	0	U	*	0/1

## 2022 U.S. Girls Junior Championship Rapid Playoff

ST. LOUIS, JULY 16, 2022

			1	2	3	
1	<b>FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro</b>	1993	*	0	1	1/2
2	<b>WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki</b>	2054	1	*	0	1/2
3	<b>WGM Jennifer Yu</b>	1841	0	1	*	1/2

## 2022 U.S. Girls Junior Championship

ST. LOUIS, JULY 6-16, 2022

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	<b>FM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro</b>	2339	*	½	1	½	0	1	1	1	1	1	7/9
2	<b>WGM Jennifer Yu</b>	2378	½	*	1	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	7/9
3	<b>WFM Sophie Morris-Suzuki</b>	2245	0	0	*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7/9
4	<b>FM Rochelle Wu</b>	2292	½	1	0	*	½	½	1	1	1	1	6½/9
5	<b>FM Alice Lee</b>	2361	1	½	0	½	*	0	½	1	1	1	5½/9
6	<b>FM Ruiyang Yan</b>	2338	0	0	0	½	1	*	½	0	½	1	3½/9
7	<b>WIM Ellen Wang</b>	2217	0	0	0	0	½	½	*	0	1	½	2½/9
8	<b>WFM Zoey Tang</b>	2252	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	0	½	2½/9
9	<b>WFM Gracy Prasanna</b>	2201	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	1	*	1	2½/9
10	<b>WFM Anne-Marie Velea</b>	2151	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	*	1/9