



THE **2 0 2 2**
Las Vegas
CHESS FESTIVAL
What happens in Vegas
... is a lot of chess!
BY JJ LANG

ALL PHOTOS: TIM HANKS



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between a tournament and a festival? The 2022 Las Vegas International Chess Festival

provided a straightforward answer to this riddle. During tournaments, players hope they have enough time to prep for the next round. But during festivals, players hope they have enough time to meet one of their favorite streamers, get their games analyzed by a grandmaster and, if they're lucky, grab a coffee before the next round.

Despite the drop in attendance for the National Open, this year's Festival felt like more of a festival thanks to decreased social distancing and increased planning time for the organizers to provide the participants with even more chess between their rounds of chess.

Russian IM and current Texas Tech undergraduate Semen Khanin finished at 7½/9 to take first place in the Open, ahead of a field including eight GMs and last year's champion, IM Arthur Guo. Khanin entered the last round tied with GMs Illia Nyzhnyk and Vladimir Akopian, but Akopian had requested a final-round bye, taking himself out of contention. Despite missing out on a chance for first, his fighting spirit was impressive all weekend, taking risks to fight for wins with Black.

ENGLISH OPENING (A26)

FM Mark Heimann (2486)

GM Vladimir Akopian (2709)

National Open (3), Las Vegas,
06.09.2022

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. e4 Nd4 7. Nce2 c5 8. Nxd4 cxd4 9. f4 exf4!?

Black chooses violence, creating problems for White right off the bat.

10. Bxf4 Ne7 11. Qa4+ Nc6 12. Qa3 Be5 13. Bd2 Bg4!?

Black's past two bishop moves have been highly provocative, and now White begins to drift.

14. Bh3?!



There was nothing wrong with the simple 14. Nf3 0-0 15. 0-0 Bg7 16. b4 with a standard English idea of queenside space-grabbing.

14. ... Qd7! 15. Bxg4?

Missing the power of Black's idea.

15. ... Qxg4 16. Qb3 0-0 17. Qd1 Bxg3+! 18. hxg3 Qxg3+ 19. Kf1 f5! 20. e5 Qxd3+ 21. Kg2 dxe5

A gorgeous position: White's exposed king stares down an entire army of pawns.

22. Nf3 e4 23. Ng5 f4

Those pawns are terrifying!

24. Rh3 f3+ 25. Kh1 e3 26. Nxf3 exd2 27. Ng5 Qxc4 28. Nxe7 Rae8 29. Qg4 Re1+ 30. Kh2 Qe2+, White resigned.

While GM Emilio Cordova Daza held Nyzhnyk to a final round draw, Khanin claimed clear first with a vicious attacking victory in the Carlsbad structure. The win over WIM Ashritha Eswaran mirrored his game with the defending champ:

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E49)

IM Semen Khanin (2607)

WIM Ashritha Eswaran (2366)

National Open (9), Las Vegas,
06.12.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 0-0 5. Bd3 d5 6. a3 Bxc3+ 7. bxc3 c5 8. cxd5 exd5 9. Ne2 Nc6 10. f3 Re8 11. 0-0 b6 12. Ra2

What is the point of this rook sortie? Check back in about six moves.

12. ... Bb7 13. g4

A fresh approach!

13. ... h6

While not bad, intuitively this is the move White was provoking.

Better was 13. ... Rc8 14. g5 Nd7 15. Ng3! White still has a nice position here, though, since the g-pawn is untouchable due to the threat of e3-e4.

14. Ng3 Qc8 15. h4 Nh7

Black could have neutralized one assailant with 15. ... Ba6 but 16. g5 Bxd3 17. Qxd3 hxg5 18. hxg5 Nh7 19. Rh2 is still lights-out.

16. g5 Qd8 17. f4

Without making any obvious positional errors, Black's position is reduced to passive defense, thoughts, and prayers at this point.

17. ... Re6 18. Rg2 Kh8 19. Qh5 g6 20. Qf3 c4 21. Bc2 Qd6 22. f5 Re7 23. gxh6 Rg8 24. fxe6 fxe6 25. h5 Ng5 26. Qg4 gxh5





27. Qxg5!

A precise simplification!

27. ... Rxg5 28. Rf8+ Rg8 29. Rxg8+ Kxg8 30. Nf5+, Black resigned.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D35)

IM Semen Khanin (2607)

IM Arthur Guo (2504)

National Open (5), Las Vegas, 06.10.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Bg5 c6 6. e3 h6 7. Bh4 Be7 8. Bd3 0-0 9. Nge2 a5 10. 0-0 Na6 11. f3 Nc7 12. Rc1 Re8 13. Bb1



13. ... Ne6

The standard idea of trading pieces with less space, starting with 13. ... Nd7, was not much better: 14. Bxe7 Qxe7 15. e4 Nb6 16. b3 where the absence of one pair of bishops does not limit White's prospects in the least.

More drastic measures with 13. ... b5!? make 14. e4 unplayable due to 14. ... b4 15. e5 bxc3 16. exf6 Bxf6 17. Bxf6 Qxf6 18. bxc3 Ba6 where White has less than nothing. But if White resists the temptation to push e3-e4,

Black's long-term backwards c-pawn could pose problems.

14. e4 dxe4 15. fxe4 Nf8

More aggressive was going after the weak dark squares with 15. ... Ng4!? 16. Bxe7 Qxe7 17. e5 Rd8, but after 18. Qd3 White still enjoys a significant plus.

16. Qd3 Bg4 17. e5 Bxe2 18. Nxe2 Nd5 19. Bxe7 Qxe7 20. Rf3!

Bringing all the pieces to the party.

20. ... Rad8 21. Rcf1 c5

Capitulation.

22. Rxf7 Qxf7 23. Rxf7 Kxf7 24. a3 Kg8 25. Ba2 Kh8 26. Qe4 Nh7 27. Bxd5!

A nice simplification tactic.

27. ... Nf6 28. exf6 Rxe4 29. Bxe4 gxf6 30. dxc5 Rd7 31. b4 a4 32. b5 f5 33. Bf3 Kg7 34. c6 bxc6 35. bxc6 Rd2 36. c7 Rc2 37. Nd4, Black resigned.

While unable to defend his title, Guo still had a strong showing, finishing in a tie for fourth and winning the prize for the top U2500. Here he is demonstrating how resourceful higher-rated players can be when their kingside attack stalls.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B92)

IM Arthur Guo (2504)

Joshua Avila Rodriguez (2193)

National Open (2), Las Vegas, 06.09.2022

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be2 e5 7. Nb3 Be7 8. Qd3 Be6

Left: IM Arthur Guo. Right: Tournament winner IM Semem Khanian. Both photos are from their round five encounter.

9. Bd2 Nbd7 10. g4 Nc5?!

Closing off the c-file only helps White castle queenside, and Black never finds a use for the c-pawn.

Instead, 10. ... 0-0 11. g5 Ne8 12. h4 a5!? proves an interesting way to respond to White's flank attack in the center. Play continues 13. a4 (White can no longer play 13. f4 as now 13. ... a4 14. Nc1 exf4 15. Bxf4 f6 provides a textbook case of White's e4 pawn being weaker than Black's d6 pawn) 13. ... Nc7 14. Qg3 (The inclusion of ... a6-a5 and a2-a4 makes 14. f4 less effective, as now 14. ... Bxb3 forces 15. cxb3 Ne6 and Black gains control of the d4 square) 14. ... d5 15. exd5 Nxd5 16. 0-0-0 Nb4 with chances for both sides.

11. Nxc5 dxc5 12. Qg3 0-0?! 13. 0-0-0 b5 14. g5 Nd7 15. f4 b4



16. Nd5!

Perhaps Black underestimated this move, but the d-pawn is dangerous after Black's ... d6xc5 transformation, and the bishop

makes a suboptimal blockader.

16. ... Bxd5 17. exd5 Bd6 18. f5 f6 19. Rhg1 Qe7 20. Qh4 fxe5

A better try was 20. ... e4! 21. g6 h6 22. Be3 Ne5 sacrificing the pawn for the new open lines. If 23. Qxe4 Black has 23. ... c4!? and the c-pawn is untouchable.

21. Rxc5 Nf6 22. Rdg1 Rf7 23. R5g2 Kh8 24. Bg5 Qf8 25. Rg3 Raa7 26. Rh3 h6 27. Bd2 a5 28. Rg6 Ng8 29. Bd3 Rf6 30. Qc4 Rxc6 31. fxc6 Nf6 32. Re3 Qe8 33. Bf5 e4! Seizing counterplay after shutting down White's kingside attack.

34. Re1



34. ... Re7?

Black overestimates the value of the e-pawn, giving up lines for the queen and pressure on the queenside.

Black had to seize the initiative on the queenside, now that the center had clari-

fied. Best was 34. ... a4! when it is difficult to suggest logical moves for White. If 35. Be3? Black has 35. ... Qe5 with the threat of ... a4-a3 and serious pressure.

35. Be3 Re5 36. Be6!

Now Black lacks coordination and White finishes the game off with ease.

36. ... Qxc6 37. Qa6 Bf8 38. Bf4 Rh5 39. d6 Qe8 40. Qc4 Qc6 41. Rd1 Qa8 42. d7 Be7 43. Bf7 Rh4 44. Bg3 Rg4 45. Qe6 Bd8 46. Be5 Rg5 47. h4 Rg2 48. Bxf6 gxf6 49. Qe8+ Kh7 50. Bd5, Black resigned.

Two surprise names joined the tie for the top U2500 prize: untitled Indian player Siddarth Meenakshi Sundaram and FM Sean Vibbert. Vibbert's last round upset with Black over GM Arman Mikaelyan was particularly impressive as it showed deep understanding of the position as well as a steely resolve to achieve victory.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E12)

GM Arman Mikaelyan (2594)
FM Sean Vibbert (2416)
National Open (9), Las Vegas,
06.12.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. a3 Bb7 5. Nc3 d5 6. cxd5 Nxd5 7. Qa4+ Qd7 8. Qc2 Nxc3 9. bxc3 Bxf3 10. gxf3 Nc6 11. e3 Na5 12. Bd3 c5 13. Rb1 c4

The opening has been a success for Black, who has fixed White's c3-pawn in return for only White's toothless bishop pair.

14. Be4 Rd8 15. f4 g6 16. Bb2 Nb3 17. Rd1 f5!?

Weakening the e6-pawn unnecessarily provides White with chances in the center, but only if White plays highly accurately.

18. Bf3 Bd6 19. h4 h5!?

Perhaps Black did not want to commit to this move before it was necessary, but at least the g6-pawn enjoys an extra defender compared to the game: 19. ... Kf7 20. h5 b5 21. Qe2 Qc7 and White's attack is still a far way off.

20. Rg1 Kf7

Brave, but necessary.



Left: GM Illia Nyzhnyk is one of America's best chess players; judging by this photo, he's not bad at poker either!

21. d5?!

More prudent was 21. Qe2, but after 21. ... b5 Black gets his desired counterplay.

21. ... e5 22. fxe5 Bxe5 23. d6 Kf6

Well, that's one way to avoid Bf3-d5+.

24. Bd5 Qxd6 25. f4



25. ... Bxf4! 26. Qg2

The bishop is untouchable since after 26. exf4 Black does not even need any fancy checks, and can simply play 26. ... Qxf4 27. Qf2 (what else?) 27. ... Qe5+ 28. Kf1 Rxd5.

26. ... Kg7!

More crafty defense!

27. exf4 Rhe8+ 28. Kf1 Qxf4+ 29. Qf2 Qe5 30. Qg2 Kh8

Patiently observing that White's bishop is pinned, due to mating threats on the e1-square.

31. Rh1 Rd6 32. a4 f4 33. Rh3 Rxd5, White resigned.

One near-upset from early in the tournament came when author and entrepreneur James Altucher missed a sharp blow in an Open Sicilian against Nyzhnyk. Thankfully, Altucher is a prominent member of the chess community on Twitter, so the rich possibilities in his position were immortalized despite not making it on the scoresheet.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, KAN VARIATION (B43)

James Altucher (2050)
GM Illia Nyzhnyk (2777)
National Open (3), Las Vegas,
06.09.2022

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 e6 3. Nf3 a6 4. d4 cxd4 5. Nxd4 Qc7 6. Bd3 b5 7. 0-0 Bb7 8. Qe2 Nf6 9. e5 Nd5 10. Nxd5 Bxd5 11. f4 g6 12. Be3 Nc6 13. c3 Nxd4 14. Bxd4 Bc5 15. Qe3 Be7 16. a4





Top, left: WGM Qiyu Zhou (L) and Rouyu Zhou (R). “Nemo” livestreamed all her games. Top, right: FM Ruiyang Yan. Middle: Popular Twitch personality Andrea Botez, whose games were all livestreamed on her channel. Bottom: GM Arman Mikaelyan.



16. ... 0-0?!

Black will consolidate shortly, but this position is on the brink of disaster for the GM.

It is hard to suggest an alternative, but luring White’s rook to a4 takes some of the sting out of the f4-f5 idea. Loose pieces drop off: after 16. ... bxa4 17. Rxa4 0-0, the point is that now 18. f5?! looks lost after 18. ... exf5 19. Rxf5 Qc6. But White has a miracle draw after 20. e6! Qxa4 (or 20. ... dxe6 21. Qh6 f6 22. Rxd5! Qxd5 23. Bxg6! hxg6 24. Qxg6+ Kh8 25. Qh6+) 21. exf7+ Rxf7 22. Qe5 Qd1+! 23. Rf1 Bf6! 24. Qxd5 Qxd3 25. Qxa8+ Kg7 with equality.

After 18. Raa1 Rfb8 White’s position should be pleasant, but at least Black has thwarted direct attacks on the king. Play might continue 19. b4 a5 20. b5 Bc4 with mutual chances.



17. Qh3

Here was Altucher’s chance: 17. f5!? exf5 (not 17. ... gxf5? 18. Rxf5 Kh8? 19. Rh5) 18. Rxf5! Rfe8 (18. ... gxf5?? 19. Qg3+ Kh8 20. e6+ f6 21. Qxc7) 19. Raf1 Be6 20. R5f3 and White has all the chances.

17. ... Qc6 18. Rae1 Bc5 19. Re3?!

White’s best chance was to close off the queenside with 19. a5 but since the kingside is stable, Black still fights for an advantage with 19. ... b4 20. Bxc5 Qxc5+ 21. Qe3 Qxe3+ 22. Rxe3 bxc3 23. bxc3 Rfc8.

19. ... Bxd4 20. cxd4 f5 21. exf6 e.p. Rxf6 22. Qh4 Raf8 23. axb5 axb5 24. Rh3 R8f7 25. Qg5?? Rxf4! 26. Re1 Qb6



27. Rhe3 Qxd4 28. h3 Rf2 29. Bf1 Rxb2, White resigned.

While players like Altucher managed to generate their own buzz, organizers made sure the fan favorites always had their games broadcast on DGT boards. WGM Qiyu Zhou, better known as “Nemo” or “AKANemsko” on her Twitch, was a fixture on the top boards, playing combative chess that doubled as great content for her popular stream. Her showdown against U.S. Girls’ Junior Championships fixture FM Ruiyang Yan was a hotly contested battle that doubled as a showcase of Yan’s growing strength.

RUY LOPEZ (C84)

FM Ruiyang Yan (2335)
WGM Qiyu Zhou (2173)
National Open (6), Las Vegas,
06.11.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. d3 b5 6. Bb3 Be7 7. 0-0 0-0 8. Nc3 d6 9. a3 Bg4 10. Be3 Qd7 11. h3 Be6 12. Nd5 h6 13. c3 Na5 14. Ba2 Rab8 15. b4 Nb7 16. Nxf6+ Bxf6 17. d4 Qe7 18. d5 Bd7 19. c4 c5 20. dxc6 e.p. Bxc6 21. cxb5 Bxb5 22. Re1 Nd8 23. Qd2 Ne6 24. Red1 Ba4 25. Rdc1 Rfc8 26. Bc4 Rc6 27. Bd5 Rcc8 28. Qd3 Bb5 29. Qd1 Qd7

An enterprising way to win the bishop pair could be 29. ... Nf4!? when the point is that now 30. a4 leads to an inferior position after (best is 30. Bxf4) 30. ... Rxc1 31. Rxc1 (not 31. Bxc1 Be2) 31. ... Nxd5! 32. exd5 Bd7 where both of Black’s bishops enjoy enough freedom to compensate for the threat of White’s outside passer.

30. Rxc8+ Rxc8 31. a4 Bc4 32. Rc1 Bxd5 33. Rxc8+ Qxc8 34. Qxd5 Qb8 35. b5

Now Black’s inactive pieces struggle to catch the queenside pawns, but White’s task is not so simple either.

35. ... axb5 36. axb5 Bd8 37. Qc6 Qc7 38. Qe8+ Kh7 39. b6 Qb7 40. Qb5 Nc5



41. Bxc5

White missed a trick with 41. Nxe5! Qxb6 42. Qxb6 Bxb6 43. Nxf7. White understandably did not want to give up the b-pawn, but gaining two pawns for it would leave her with all the winning chances.

41. ... dxc5 42. Qxc5 Qxe4?

Black loses sight of what’s important, perhaps missing one detail in the resulting forced sequence.

Apparently Black can achieve a fortress with 42. ... f6!! and it is unclear how White progresses after, say, 43. Nd2 Bxb6.

43. Qb5 Qb7 44. Qd3+ e4 45. Qxd8 exf3 46. Qc7 Qe4 47. gxf3 Qxf3 48. b7 Qd1+ 49. Kh2, Black resigned.

With more DGT boards than previous years, organizers chose to put the top board of each class section, as well as popular Twitch streamer Andrea Botez, on the broadcast. Streams of Botez’s games each topped 150,000 views and showcased just how good she has gotten. Her last-round win over this author’s friend and in-state rival showed the remarkable energy and an adventurous spirit her fans have come to expect.

LONDON SYSTEM (D00)

Andrea Botez (1933)
Nicholas Lacroix (2082)
National Open U2100 (9), Las Vegas,
06.12.2022

1. d4 d5 2. Bf4 Nf6 3. e3 c5 4. Nd2 Nc6 5. Ngf3 cxd4 6. exd4 Bf5 7. c3 a6 8. h3 e6 9. Nh4 Bg6 10. Nxg6 hxg6 11. Bd3 Bd6 12. Bg5 Qc7 13. Qf3 Be7 14. Nb3 0-0 15. 0-0 b5 16. a3 Qb6 17. Qe2 Rfb8



18. Bxg6!?

Hard to resist!

More principled was 18. Rae1! as Black lacks any good ways to stop White’s threat, so there is time to bring another piece into the game first. Perhaps Black could try 18.

... Nd8 19. Nd2 but with Black’s knight on d8, White has even more time to keep improving her position at Black’s expense.

18. ... fxg6 19. Qxe6+ Kh7 20. Bxf6

A braver soul than your commentator would “commit to the bit” and not even bother chasing the d5-pawn. After 20. f4 Re8 21. f5 Bf8 22. Qf7 Black has to find the clever 22. ... Ne5! to survive.

20. ... Bxf6 21. Qxd5 a5?!

Black’s desire to open up the queenside, where he is strongest, is logical, but his pieces needed to get to the kingside faster!

I prefer 21. ... Ne7 22. Qe4 Qc6 23. Qg4 Nf5 where it is harder to see how White cracks Black’s kingside, meaning that now Black can start thinking about ... a6-a5.

22. Nc5 Rd8 23. Qf3



23. ... b4?

Black miscalculates in a rush to clarify the position.

24. axb4 axb4 25. Rxa8 Rxa8 26. Nd7!

Likely the point that Black missed when he pushed ... b5-b4: the queen is tied down to the knight and cannot cover the bishop.

26. ... Qc7 27. Nxf6+ gxf6 28. Qxf6 bxc3 29.

bxc3 Rc8 30. Re1 Qg7 31. Qg5 Rf8 32. Re4 Botez has conducted her attack beautifully to this point, not weakening her pawns unnecessarily while ramping up the pressure on the weakened black king.

32. ... Rf5 33. Qe3 Rf7?

Black could have forced White to prove it in the endgame, but likely this would have only delayed the inevitable: 33. ... Qf7 34. Rh4+ Rh5 35. Rxh5+ gxh5 36. Qe4+ Qg6 37. Qxg6+ Kxg6.

34. Rh4+ Kg8 35. Qe8+ Qf8 36. Qxc6 Kg7 37. Rg4 Rf6 38. Qc7+ Kg8 39. Qg3 Qe8 40. f4 Qe4 41. h4 Kf7 42. Kh2 Ke6 43. Rg5 Kf7 44. f5 gxf5 45. Qc7+ Kf8 46. Qd8+ Kf7 47.

Qg8+ Ke7 48. Rg7+ Kd6 49. Qd8+ Ke6 50. Re7, mate.

The presence of high-quality games at the class level provided a wellspring of instructional material. Here, Yuqi Wang clinched the U1900 section in a closed, tense, and volatile game that illustrates the distinction between “slow” and “too slow.”

GIUOCO PIANO (C50)

Yuqi Wang (1892)
Jose Abarca Cerda (1808)
National Open U1900 (9), Las Vegas, 06.12.2022

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Be7 4. 0-0 d6 5. h3 Nf6 6. d3 h6 7. Nbd2 0-0 8. c3 Na5 9. Bb5 Bd7 10. Bxd7 Qxd7 11. Re1 c5 12. Nf1 Rfe8 13. Ng3 Bf8 14. Nh4 Kh7 15. Qf3 Ng8 16. Nhf5 Qe6 17. Ne3 Nc6 18. Ngf1 Nce7 19. g4 g6 20. Ng3 Rac8 21. Bd2 Rc7 22. Kg2 Bg7 23. Rh1 Rd8 24. c4 Nc6 25. Nd5 Rcd7 26. Be3 Nce7 27. h4 Nxd5 28. cxd5 Qf6 29. Qe2 Qe7 30. g5 Rf8 31. h5 Qe8 32. gxh6 Bf6 33. Rag1 g5

(see diagram top of next column)

34. Kf1

White missed 34. Qf3!. Because Black is unable to capture on h6 with the knight, the f5-square is vulnerable for White’s ensuing attack.

34. ... Nxh6 35. Qd2 Rg8 36. Ne2

After White missed a couple more opportunities, Black has consolidated and we are now in for the long haul.



36. ... Qd8 37. Rh3 Be7 38. Rf3 f6

Both sides overlooked a precise way for Black to relieve their cramps by forcing some trades: 38. ... g4! 39. Rfg3 Bg5.

39. Ng3 Rg7 40. Nf5 Nxf5 41. Rxf5

Finally, White gains control of a key square.

41. ... Rc7 42. Qd1 Kh6 43. Qg4 Qg8 44. Rf3 Bd8 45. Rfg3 Qf7 46. Qd1

And yet, at this point, White elects to concede their one positional trump.



46. ... Qe8

The position was screaming for 46. ... f5!. Perhaps Black intuited that weakening the

g5-pawn would be an issue after 47. exf5 Qxf5?! (and overlooked that after 47. ... Qxd5! Black has sufficient counterplay in the center).

47. a4 b5 48. axb5 Rb7 49. R1g2 Qxb5 50. f4 exf4 51. Bxf4 Qd7 52. Kg1 Qe7 53. Kh1 Qf8 54. Bd2 Rxb2??

The sort of mistake one makes after having to defend an unpleasant kingside for many, many moves. After 54. ... f5! Black could again take the upper hand.

55. Bxg5+ fxg5 56. Rxb2 Qf6 57. Rbg2 Qd4 58. Rf3 c4 59. Qf1 c3 60. Rf8 Be7 61. Rh8+ Rh7 62. Rxh7+ Kxh7 63. Qf5+ Kg7 64. h6+ Kg8 65. Qg6+ Kd8 69. Qxd6+ Kc8 70. Qc6+ Kb8 71. d6 Bd8 72. Qb5+ Ka8 73. Qd5+ Qxd5 74. exd5 Bf6 75. d7, Black resigned.

Speaking of learning, there was something comforting about knowing that GM Ben Finegold was around to answer any lingering questions. Several players I met made it a point to show him all of their games. One of my students was pleased to show me that, after, letting a theoretically drawn endgame slip away, he still remembered everything Finegold taught him about short-side defense and the Philidor position.

Other popular names popping up throughout the weekend included IM Eric Rosen, who scored 28½/30 in a well-attended simul, and a surprise appearance from ChessBrah GM Aman Hambleton, who showed up a round late to the Walter Browne Memorial Blitz yet still managed to tie for first with IMs Alexander Katz and Yaacov Norowitz.

Another inventive way to bring the Twitch boom to “IRL” chess was an in-person Battle of the Streamers, where Finegold and Rosen

Left and below: behind the scenes at the “Battle of the Streamers” with IM Eric Rosen (in black) and GM Ben Finegold (in red).



each recruited four players to compete in head-to-head blitz matches broadcast live with commentary on Twitch. Things got heated once Karen Boyd decided to play for Team Rosen. Oh no, Ben's wife!

The best-attended side event, though, was a Q&A session and meet-and-greet with Andrea Botez. A diverse cross-section of players came to hear her open up about the highs and lows of streaming, and many players, including several younger women, shared that they felt more comfortable registering in their first over-the-board tournament because they knew Botez would be playing.

This inclusive spirit was highlighted by the annual U.S. Women's Open, featuring a three-way tie for first with 4½/5 between Badamkhand Norovsambuu of Mongolia, Sandhya Goli of India, and Carissa Zheng from Maryland. With eight foreign federations represented, this tournament was a fantastic two days of spirited chess best exemplified by the last round battle for first between Norovsambuu and her countrywoman Saikhanchimeg Tsogtsaikhan.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, CLASSICAL VARIATION (E94)

Badamkhand Norovsambuu (2078)
Saikhanchimeg Tsogtsaikhan (2087)
U.S. Women's Open (5), Las Vegas, 06.09.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Be2 Nbd7 7. 0-0 e5 8. d5 Ne8 9. Qc2 h6 10. b4 f5 11. Ba3 f4 12. c5 g5 13. Nd2 Ndf6 14. f3 g4 15. Rfc1?!

Best was preventing ... g4-g3 with 15. fxg4 Nxc4 16. Nd1! since Black's attack has evaporated and White can turn to the queenside.

15. ... Rf7

As hinted above, Black should have considered the thematic 15. ... g3! 16. h3 Nh7 17. Kf1 Qh4 with the stock sac on h3 coming.

16. Nf1 h5 17. Qd1 Bh6 18. Rc2 Rg7 19. Qe1 gxf3 20. Bxf3 Ng4 21. h3



Right: Badamkhand Norovsambuu takes home the U.S. Women's Open trophy on tie-breaks over Sandhya Goli and Carissa Zheng.

21. ... Ne3

A remarkable idea for Black is 21. ... Bg5!! 22. hxg4 hxg4 23. Bd1 g3 24. Bf3 Qf6 and the pressure on the open h-file provide more than enough compensation for the material.

22. Nxe3 fxe3 23. Kh1 Bf4 24. Bc1 Bg3 25. Qf1 Qg5 26. Nd1 Bf4 27. Qe1 Bg3 28. Qf1 Bf4 29. Qe1 e2 30. Nc3?



White had to anticipate Black's thematic shot with 30. Nf2!

30. ... Nf6

It's now or never: correct was 30. ... Bxh3! 31. Rxe2 (not 31. gxh3?? Qg1+) 31. ... Bd7 with more of an attack on the white monarch.

31. Bxf4 exf4 32. Rxe2 Bd7 33. e5!

And now it's White's turn to show off the dynamics of her position.

33. ... dxe5 34. Rxe5 Qg6 35. c6 bxc6 36. dxc6 Bf5 37. Nd5 Nxd5 38. Bxd5+ Kh8 39. Qe2 Rd8 40. Re1 Rf8 41. Re8 Rxe8 42. Qxe8+ Kh7 43. Qxg6+ Bxg6 44. Rf1 Bf7 45. Be4+ Bg6 46. Rxf4 Re7 47. Bf3 Re1+ 48. Kh2 Ra1 49. Bd5 Rd1 50. Bf3 Rd2 51.



a4 Kh6 52. b5 Kg5 53. Rf8 Rd4 54. a5 Rb4 55. Rb8 Bd3 56. Rb7 Rxb5 57. Rxa7 h4 58. Rxc7 Rxa5 59. Rg7+ Kf6 60. Rg4 Rc5 61. Rxh4, Black resigned.

While last year's event was marked by providing one of the first chances for casual players to interact with each other post-lockdown, this year's festivities allowed players to strengthen bonds not just with each other, but with several pillars of chess culture. Hopefully, in future years, even more players will come out to meet some of their online favorites as the organizers continue to find inventive ways to tie streaming culture into "slow" chess. ♠

2022 LAS VEGAS CHESS FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE

JUNE 8-12, 2022 | LAS VEGAS, NV

NATIONAL OPEN: 1st: IM Semen Khanin, 7½/9. 2nd-3rd: GMs Illia Nyzhnyk, Vladimir Akopian, 7. 4th-7th: GM Emilio Cordova Daza, IM Arthur Guo, FM Sean Vibbert, Siddarth Meenakshi Sundaram, 6½. **U2300:** 1st-4th: FM Don Ngo-Tan, Gordon McNeill Jr, Mike Zaloznyy, Brandon Xie, Nathaniel Zhang, 5½/7. **U2100:** Armen Andranigian, 6½. **U1900:** Yuqi Wang, 6½/7. **U1700:** Eusy Ancheta, 6½/7. **U1500:** Edwin Ma, 6½/7. **U1300:** Dann Merriman, 7/7. **WOMEN'S OPEN:** 1st-3rd: Badamkhand Norovsambuu, Carissa Zheng, Sandhya Goli, 4½/5. **WALTER BROWNE BLITZ, OPEN:** 1st-3rd: GM Aman Hambleton, IMs Alexander Katz, Yaacov Norowitz, 9½/12. **WALTER BROWNE BLITZ, U1900:** Stephen Willy, 10½/12.