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GM Jon Edwards

32nd World Correspondence Chess Champion

Interviewed by Maurice Carter

I am pleased to be able to conduct an interview with Jon. He is only the third American to win the Championship, the other two were Hans Berliner 5th, and Vytas Palciauskas 10th. I want to thank Jon for giving us some insights into what it took to win the Championship.

MC: Can you please provide us with a little on your background?

JE: Raised in West Hempstead, NY and then Acton MA. Started playing tournament chess around New England. I went to Princeton University (AB 1975) where I was President of the Chess Club for three years, and then off to Michigan State University (MA, PHD 1988) in African Economic History. I left academia to work at BYTE Magazine in New Hampshire, where I started playing chess again. Then I went back to Princeton University where I was AVP for Computing and Information Technology for 14 years, and then Coordinator of Institutional Communication for 10 more years. Along the way, I ran for local office and won two terms on our Township Committee, and even served as Mayor of Hopewell NJ, for a year. Those six years represented another break in my chess. I retired in 2010 to teach chess and to play correspondence chess full time.



GM Jon Edwards

MC: How did you first become acquainted with chess?

JE: I was taught first by my father but with key lessons from my great Uncle Joseph Platz, who was taught by Lasker. I got mono in 4th grade, and to cheer me up, my dad bought me my first chess book, *Great Moments in Modern Chess* by Reuben Fine. A week later, he asked how I was doing with the book, and was impressed when I responded that I had finished it. He didn't believe me at first until I stated telling him about all the games in the book. After that, he bought me another chess book every week.

MC: Most people start with over the board chess (OTB). Were you an active OTB player?

JE: As a teenager, I lived for the next tournament, and I had decent early results, reaching expert by my college days. I didn't play for 10 years in graduate school and in fact, my wife Cheryl and I got married without her knowing that I played!

MC: How were your results playing OTB chess?

JE: Decent, but I was no prodigy. I just loved the game. After I won the US Correspondence Championship in 1997, I bragged to a fellow Princeton grad that I must have been the first Princeton grad to win a US Championship. To my chagrin, I learned that Edgar McCormick '37 had won the US Amateur Title. So, I played in the US Amateur and tied for first, making me, I think, the only player to win a US Championship in both OTB and in Correspondence. I started playing correspondence chess in American Postal Chess Tournaments (APCT) purely to help improve my OTB play. It did that, but correspondence chess soon became a passion unto itself. When Cheryl and I started a family, I wanted

Continued on page 89

GM Jon Edwards
Continued from front cover

to be a good dad, so I started playing correspondence chess in order to play and stay home at the same time.

MC: *Do you still play OTB chess, or now it is only correspondence?*

JE: The pandemic interrupted my occasional OTB play. I was a regular at the yearly US Amateur Team East. The same team for more than 20 years. Our team will be playing again in February, and they are threatening to name our team "World Champion on Board 2." During the World Final, I would not have played OTB even had there been no pandemic. The Final and the lead up to it was totally consuming – 12-hour days for years.

MC: *With devoting so much time, did you have a system to follow to get the most efficient use of your time?*

JE: Very interesting question! In many middlegames and endgames, I use Chessbase to find similar positions – playing through these to crystallize the main ideas. The process itself is amazingly efficient. In the old days, I used to take informants off the shelf, serially hunting for relevant material. Now electronic searches take just seconds. I maintain a database of all the articles that have ever appeared in the *New in Chess Yearbooks*, so I can find relevant articles instantly. My Informant database is always up to date. The inefficient part these days is hunting through my library for annotations of key games, but I must confess, I enjoy that inefficient part of the process very much.

MC: *How did you learn about correspondence chess and what organizations have you played in?*

JE: In high school, and early on in college, I subscribed to *Chess Review*, and I played in their Golden Knights. I still have the amazing records I kept of each game. After Graduate School, I participated in a chess auction at a tournament in Boston, and two APCT championship sections came up for bid. I won them both and I was off and running. I won the APCT title four times before I finally made the transition to the ICCF.

MC: *You won the 10th United States Correspondence Chess Championship, besides winning the 32rd World Correspondence Chess Championship. Have you had any good results in other top events?*

JE: You bet! I won the 8th North American Invitational with a huge score, but I missed out on norms because there were only 5 non-US players in the event. Still, that got me into my first 3/4 final, where sadly I finished in the middle of the field. My opening choices still reflected my OTB perspectives. When retired from Princeton, I entered a World semi-final section and by finishing second, I qualified for the Candidates. My second-place result there got me into the final. Along the way, I played in the prestigious Spanish masters and came in first, including a neat win over Evgeny Lobanov, then the reigning Russian correspondence champion. And I have played in two Correspondence Chess Olympiad Finals. Our team this year has clinched a medal, which apart from all the pride, seeds us into the next Final Round!

MC: *As the current World Champion, do you get a slot in the next World Championship that comes available, or only a slot in the 3/4 stage?*

JE: I received my invitation to the WF-33 just two days after winning the WF-32, I decided rather quickly to postpone my defense to WF-34, but happily, the US will be well represented by two of my Olympiad team members, Jon Ostriker and Dan Fleetwood.

MC: *In the past, how high did you reach in the qualifying stages of earlier World Championships?*

JE: The WF-32 was my first trip to the Final, and my second attempt in the cycle. The first 3/4 Final came in the aftermath of my North American triumph.

MC: *When you qualified for the 32nd World Championship, what did you do to prepare for this event? Did you have some overall plan of action to follow?*

JE: I played over every game that my opponents had ever played in correspondence and OTB. I charted out where games were likely to go, and I prepared new ideas for all. These were

all great players, with no warts in their opening repertoires. Generally, with Black, I sought to find the quickest and cleanest path to a draw. In that I succeeded, with eight uneventful draws. With White, I sought variations that preserved material within a fixed structure, much like the Ruy but avoiding drawing variations like the Berlin Defense and the Marshall Gambit. I settled on the Vienna Glek (1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3. g3) and took my Russian opponent Osipov through a 119-move odyssey.

MC: *Now that you have reached the top in correspondence chess, what are your future plans?*

JE: I will keep playing correspondence chess. I have 11 games in motion in the strong Kurt Stein Memorial. In two years, my health willing, I will try to defend my World Title, and along the way, I expect to enter the next Candidates tournament, to see if I can keep qualifying for the Final round. One of the nice perks of becoming World Champion are the invitations that I know I will receive. That's just cool!

MC: *You started playing correspondence chess with the postcard, and now the mode is server play. Much has changed. Server play is all the rage, along with chess engines, databases etc. Overall, how do you feel about this? Has it hurt correspondence chess or not?*

JE: I still have all my postcards and, as an active philatelist, I adore how postal rates changed during play. I have a cool collection of stamps used on nearly every postal card type dating back to the 1880's. The servers save on postage and eliminate any possible dishonesty regarding when people receive their moves. As for engines and databases, the result is amazingly clean play and a huge challenge. Wins are much harder to find but bring on much euphoria. My game against Osipov is a nice demonstration of how humans are far better than machines at long term planning within fixed structures. I believe that it's still possible to win precisely because the computers remain miserable planners. In those positions, the databases are the key, reviewing games in similar structures has become very important.

MC: You are a serious book collector and chess author. Earlier days, books played a very useful resource for the correspondence chess player. Do you still think that books are a useful tool?

JE: Absolutely. When I identify important games, it sure is important to turn to the library to find the players' original notes. When I turned to Glek variation of the Vienna, the databases were not enough. The line is both old and new and it was a delight to track down original annotations.

MC: What books do you feel had the most impact on your development into a strong player?

JE: What a cool question! As I mentioned, when I was in fourth grade, I came down with mono. To help pass the time, my dad bought me my first chess book, Reuben Fine's *Great Moments in Modern Chess*, and he came back a week later and found, to his amazement, that I had read the whole thing. I had to stay in bed for 6 months so my dad asked what he could get me to make the time less boring.

"Chess books, please" I answered

So, he kept buying me chess books, and he seemed to have the good sense to buy me game collections. The next book was *1000 Best Short Games of Chess*, and then a book by Reinfeld on the Transition to the Endgame. The key was not so much what books he bought... but the fact that I read them!

Those early books formed a solid foundation. Later Larsen's *Selected Games* was really important, and then Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*. I discovered Capablanca's *Games* through Golombek and then everything I could find about Petrosian. In later years... *New in Chess Yearbooks*, *Informants*, and LOTs of biographies. I have read everything by Purdy... that sure helped too! It's hard to be specific because I have a very large chess library, and I'm always reading something.

MC: How large of a chess library do you have?

JE: Well more than 5,000 chess books, but I stopped counting ages ago. My chess stamp collection is also huge, very likely the largest in the world. I am President of COSSU, the Chess-on-Stamp Study Unit and Editor of its quarterly publication, the *Chesstamp Review*. I organized my WF32 vacation time around my need to get each issue to the printer. Your readers are all entitled to a free issue if they request it. Email me at Jedwards.chess@gmail.com

MC: What are your main areas of interest in collecting?

JE: Tournament books, endgames including studies, correspondence literature, biographies, and periodicals. The *Chesstamp* collection is virtually complete, with all issues, covers, autographs, proofs, printing errors etc. My oldest *Chesstamp* items date back to the Civil War. Both collections are more than 50 years in the making.

MC: Who are your favorite chess authors?

JE: Cecil Purdy, Harry Golombek, Bent Larsen, Andy Soltis, Alexey Shirov, Jan Timman.

MC: What are your favorite chess magazines?

JE: *Chess World* was awesome! Today, of course, *New in Chess*, the *American Chess Magazine*, and *Chess Life* is improving. The *Informants* capture my full attention when they arrive, and I really miss the *New in Chess Yearbooks*.

MC: Do you have any correspondence chess books that you think are well written and can recommend?

JE: The most inspiring correspondence chess book for me was Grigory Sana-koev's *World Champion at the Third Attempt*. Talk about great play and perseverance! Apart from that everything by Cecil Purdy and Tim Harding.

MC: A question I like to ask players, what would be the 10 chess books you would want if marooned on a desert Island?

JE: *Python Strategy* - Petrosian, *Fire on Board* - Shirov, *My 60 Memorable Games* - Fischer, *Black is Ok* - Adorjan,

A Knat may Drink - Hinton, *The Games of Petrosian* - Shekhtman, *Grandmaster Preparation* - Polugaevsky, *The Joy of Chess* - Hesse, *Larsen's Selected Games* - Larsen, *Capablanca's 100 Best Games* - Golombek, *Soviet Chess* - Soltis. Oops that's 11.

MC: No its 13! Shirov and Shekhtman have two volumes each.

MC: As a chess author, how many books have you written? Do you write for different magazines too?

JE: 44 books if you include my dalliance with the Kindle. *The Chess Analyst* and *Sacking the Citadel* are my best. I write "Chess Tech," a regular column for the *American Chess Magazine*. I used to write an instructional column for *Chess Life for Kids*.

MC: I have your book: *The Chess Analyst*. It has many of your early postal games. Any plans for a follow up book?

JE: Good idea. No time for that now, but it is on my to-do list.

MC: Who are your chess idols?

JE: Use to be Capablanca. Now its Petrosian. Every aspiring player should review the end of Joppen - Petrosian, Belgrade 1954.

MC: Can you offer some advice to players that can help them improve their play and perhaps get better results in their events?

JE: Petrosian is the key. Play over his games. He effortlessly defeated so many fine players, who had no idea what they did wrong. His main contribution: Thinking not about what move to play, but rather about where all the pieces need to be, in what order, with what exchanges, often within relatively fixed pawn structures. It's marvelous to watch.

MC: There are some areas that perhaps you could offer your thoughts on. 1. Game load, how many games do you feel is a good number to be playing at one time? 2. With server play, moves come at a faster tempo. We see many opponents that like to play "fast food" correspondence chess. Within a short time after you send your move, they reply. Any thoughts on how to handle this issue?

JE: Game load? Keep it low! A maxi-

mum of 20 games at the same time – 12 is better! It is really hard to sustain the right load because there is obvious pressure to play more. The World Final and the Olympiad were going on at the same time, and frankly, that was just too much for me. I wanted to write more but I did not have the time. The pandemic, of course, reduced the stress because there was quite literally nothing else to do! Almost none of my opponents play quickly, and the ones who do run a high risk of making input errors. Two of my opponents played quickly in the Final. One of those games ended quickly, but I never permitted their pace to affect mine. The key game against Osipov was case in point. He did make almost all his moves within a day. I was ready for most of his responses, and more importantly, by the end at least, I was devoting one of my two machines just to that game whether he moved or not. I simply took 5 days a move, on average, and I repeated the position twice to gain time on my clock. Apart from that, one key tip for all correspondence players: Turn off the TV!

MC: *Can you provide us with a game and why it was selected?*

JE: I select Edwards - Osipov, a 119-move marathon, because it showed off most clearly that the decisions in a game with a fixed structure cannot be made by an engine. The planning is way too deep, and the engine evaluations were off-the-mark on most moves. I am still sad I did not find a win there, but I am still looking for it.

**ECO: C26
Vienna**

Notes by Jon Edwards

White: Edwards, Jon (2529)

Black: Osipov, Sergey Adolfovich (2499)

ICCF World Final

Before play started, I estimated that the winner would need a +2 or +3 score. I selected solid openings with Black to aim for draws in those games. I played two Queen's Indians and two Nimzo Indians against d4, and the Sveshnikov against 1.e4. All eight games ended quickly, peacefully, and without my

having to confront any meaningful new ideas. To have a chance to win the tournament, I would therefore need to win two or three games with white. At first, I prepared to open with 1.d4, but I could not find anything playable against the semi-Slav, a popular defense used by many of my players in this tournament. I spent days reviewing everything I could find there, but Black's defensive resources consistently held up. I instead opened with 1.e4 in every game with white. Two of the games involved the super solid ...h5 line against my Be3 Najdorf Sicilian. You'll achieve considerable chess fame if you find a compelling line there for white. I continue to hunt for it! I faced 1...e5 in the other 6 games. Three were Petrov's. One was a Berlin Ruy. In the other two, to avoid these solid systems, I tried a line in the Vienna Opening, the Glek variation, which has the merit of keeping all the pieces on the board. This is one of those two games.

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3

A move that was very well prepared. I am trying to reach positions akin to the King's Gambit Declined. The Bishop's Opening has one variation that provides Black with full equality and so, here we are in Vienna.

2...Nf6

There are other moves, but they all leave white with a playable advantage.

3.g3

3. Bc4 leads, of course, to the famous Frankenstein-Dracula variation in which Black, outfitted with a strong machine, is fully fine. 3. g3 is the Glek Variation, which has the merit of permitting me to play chess with all my pieces. A number of strong players have tried this line from time to time. There's an old Spassky win that provides the main idea. White will complete the fianchetto, castle kingside, play h3 and tuck the king on h2, and then charge forward with f4-f5. The idea is riskless, well matched to the needs of correspondence play, and frankly, quite appealing.

3...Bc5

The main alternative is ...d5 which I am now testing in the Kurt Stein Memorial. Theory is not well developed and there are plenty of interesting ideas for White in that line thanks in part to that lovely, very active light-squared bishop.

4.Bg2 O-O 5.Nge2

The main attraction of the Vienna is to avoid Nf3 so that f4 can be more quickly played.

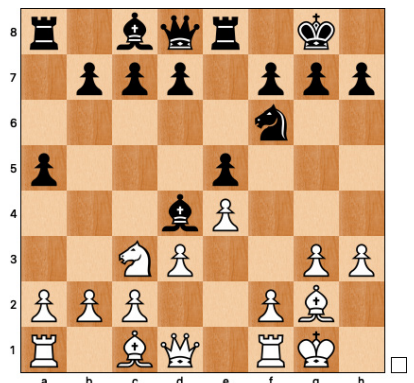
5...Nc6 6.O-O a5!?

Unexpected. He wants to preserve the bishop and stake a claim on the queenside, but this may be slightly inaccurate. It's certainly not critical. ...a6, ...d6, and ...Re8 are more commonly played here.

7.h3 Re8 8.d3 Nd4 9.Nxd4

OK, the first exchange. To succeed here, White wants to preserve as much material as possible, but I can stomach one trade.

9...Bxd4



10.Nb5

Creative on my part. Let's get a pawn to c4 to discourage Black's counterplay on the queenside and in the center. Computers are not thrilled with this idea, but in my view, winning in correspondence chess with any consistency requires a stable structure and the ability to maneuver accurately with many pieces on the board.

10...Bb6 11.c4

He can always kick the knight back to c3, where it wants to be anyway, but a c6-pawn creates additional long-term weaknesses in the structure.

11...h6

He is trying hard to limit the scope of what can become a very powerful, dark-squared bishop. Of course, with most of the material left on the board, this push is committal. One of White's main ideas, after all, is to press forward on the kingside with a pawn rush.

12.Nc3

Black's potential counterplay with ...d5 or even b5 is now unlikely. We can buckle our belts. This will be a long struggle, exactly what I wanted.

12...d6 13.Kh2

These moves are part of the usual plan in the Glek and don't need computer confirmation, but it's the World Final so the runs were long. When the engines disagree with the plan, as happens often enough, the humans should step in and reevaluate the plan or proceed. The idea here is straight forward. I want to play f4-f5 and a pawn rush against his castled king. Black has no apparent counterplay.

13...Bd4 14.f4 Bd7

This is supposed to be Black's good bishop, but it has nowhere useful to post. At least without a pawn on c6, the bishop gains some scope on the queenside.

15.Ne2 Bc5

After this tempo loss, I concluded that this game was my best shot for a win in the Final. I wound up devoting thousands of hours to the game, a great many 12-hour days, trying to find the most accurate path forward.

16.Qc2

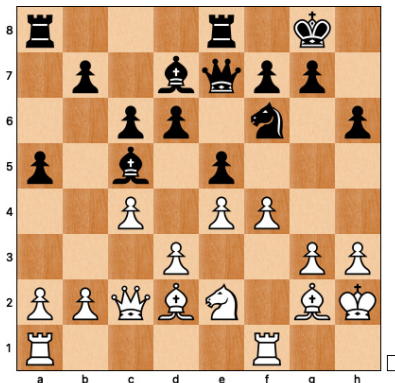
Simple development, aiming to activate the queen's rook.

92

16...c6

He plays it anyway. As a young player, I devoured Larsen's Best Games. He talked about similar positions, albeit with an open d-file, in which Black must worry about the long-term weakness of the d6 pawn. My progress depends in part on making sure that he cannot break with either ...b5 or ...d5. Let's start by turning him into a bystander of the plan.

17.Bd2 Qe7



18.Rac1!?

Activating the queen's rook on the c-file in order to firmly prevent a ... d5 break. But this may be my only error in the entire game. If instead a3 or Rad1, white will retain the dark-squared bishop to aid the kingside attack. I did agonize over the decision, and I was persuaded by the plan that I outline below. But I cannot help but note that the following plans, as impressive as they are, would have been substantially aided by the addition of white's dark-squared bishop. On Rad1!?, which the computers reject at high depth, White can retain the dark-squared bishop after ...Bb4 with Bc1.

18...Bb4

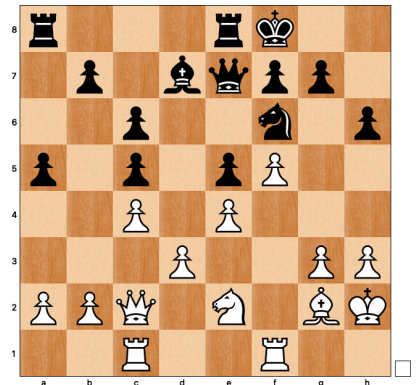
Black succeeds in getting the dark-squared bishops off the board, his second minor piece exchange.

19.Be3 Bc5 20.Bxc5 dxc5 21.f5

I had seen all this coming, and I had the following complex plan in mind. I was sure that I could still win this

even without the dark-squared bishop. Black has no counterplay, and now the kingside can begin its advance.

21...Kf8



His saving grace. White can indeed press forward with the usual pawn-led advance on the kingside, but Black's king won't be there.

22.Ng1

The actual details within this plan are annoyingly niggling. The knight will eventually head towards c3, but first, it needs to reach c2 in order to threaten b4.

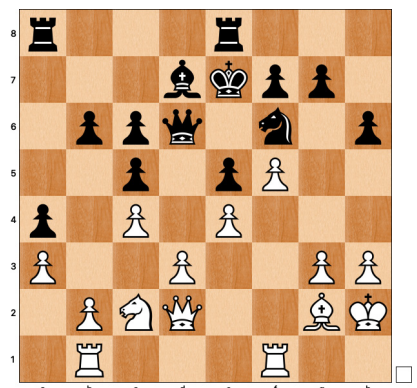
22...Qd6 23.Nf3 Nh7 24.Rcd1 Ng5 25.Ne1 Nh7

Effectively offering a draw by repetition, in which I have no interest.

26.Qd2 Ke7 27.Nc2 b6 28.a3 Nf6 29.Rb1

Initializing the b4-break.

29...a4



Black prevents the pawn break, but

the pawn on a4 is now the target. I began to implement an idea that few over-the-board players and no computers would consider or attempt. Without permitting any counterplay anywhere on the board, I need to reposition my pieces within this structure to force black to defend the a4-pawn with b6-b5. Simply put, to accomplish this task, I will need the white knight on c3, the bishop on c2, and the queen on d1. The obvious constraint: I must carry out this redeployment within 50 moves or face a draw, and I must make sure that when he advances the b-pawn, he cannot trap my Bc2 with b5-b4-b3. Osipov is fully aware of what I am trying to do here and tries throughout the next very long sequence to present small problems that I must confront along the way. If he can delay long enough, he avoids any possibility of a successful white initiative.

30.Ne1 Reb8

Throughout the next long sequence, most of Black's moves threaten nothing. The engines rate the position as 0.30 or thereabouts, and every candidate move, white and black, has the same evaluation.

31.Rf2 Be8 32.Bf1 Nd7 33.Nf3 f6

And the 50-move rule is now in motion. I kept careful track of the number on a white board in my chess study, the war room.

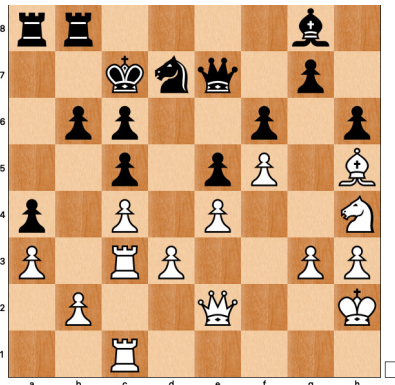
34.Qe1 Kd8 35.Rc2 Kc7 36.Be2 Bf7 37.Qf2 Qe7 38.Qe3 Rh8 39.Rbc1 Kb7 40.Nh4 Nf8 41.Rc3 Kc7 42.Bf3 Nd7 43.Qe2 Rhb8 44.Bh5

A cool step along the way. I invite the trade of my bad, light-squared bishop for his good one.

44...Bg8

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He declines the trade, partly perhaps to keep the 50-move rule clock running, but his "good bishop" is now deprived of any meaningful scope or the ability to transfer to the queenside.

45.R3c2 Nf8 46.Ng2 Nd7 47.Ne3 Kd8 48.Rd2 Kc7 49.Qe1 Qd6 50.Ng2 Rd8 51.Nh4 Nf8 52.Nf3

During all this glacial maneuvering, the first shock of the tournament occurred. One of the players inputted the wrong move, instantly hanging a piece and the game. In all my experiences, such things happen to others. In this case, I was the beneficiary. A free point in the World Final changed everything! I was suddenly halfway to my +2 goal, and a win here would surely lock in the championship. There would be no letup in my approach to this game!

52...Kb7 53.Rdd1 Kc7 54.Rc3

Osipov posted a win against one of the German competitors. Osipov had played well, and the game achieved notoriety, but his opponent had played a dubious line in the Benoni. Sadly, I had been paired with Black against this same person and had already banked my draw, an extremely easy game because my opponent appeared to be unaware that I had played the same defense twice before. All this meant that Osipov and I were both +1, and this game took on even more importance. A win here and my tie-breaks would be awesome, defeating someone who had a win!

54...Kb7 55.Qf2 Kc7 56.Rcc1 Kb7 57.Kg2 Qc7 58.Rc3 Qd6 59.Rb1 Kc7 60.Ng1

The knight finally commences its journey towards c3.

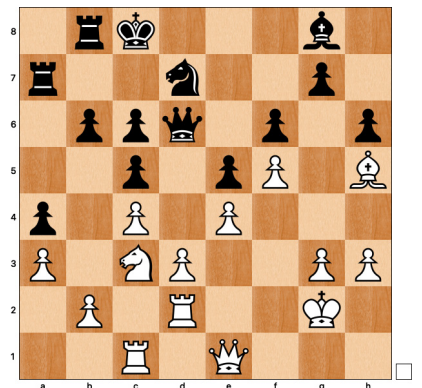
60...Qe7 61.Kh2

I was getting very excited about my chances in this game. I had minimized his play against my d-pawn. He dares not open the kingside. My pieces now have a path to their desired squares in this first phase, and I knew that I could carry out my plan within the constraints of 50-move rule.

61...Nd7 62.Qe3 Qd6 63.Rd1 Ra7 64.Kg2 Raa8 65.Rcc1 Qe7 66.Rd2 Qd6 67.Ne2 Rdb8 68.Qf2 Kb7 69.Nc3

The knight finally reaches c3, beginning the pressure on the a4-pawn.

69...Kc8 70.Qe1 Ra7



71.Bd1

Now the bishop joins the party. We have now made 38 moves without a pawn move or a capture.

71...b5

Finally, the first pawn advance since move 33.

72.Bh5

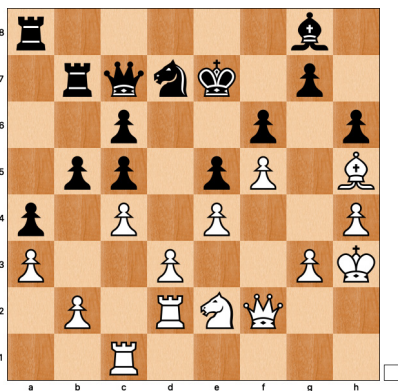
The bishop resumes its most active perch immediately to keep Black's bishop bottled up. The next step in the plan has multiple possibilities, but the main idea involves threatening an exchange on b5 in order to pressure the c-file. I want to force or encourage black to play b5-b4 and then to b3, when White has a winning plan with a king walk to a1 or b1, doubling the rooks on

the g-file, and then pushing the g-pawn forward. The computers still do not see such plans, but humans can do so quite quickly. The computer is useful indeed in confirming that the ideal position is winning for white. I repeatedly used the computer to evaluate different piece placements iteratively within the structure.

72...Kc7

There's a kind of helplessness to Black's moves. He has no meaningful way to make progress and so, he is left to parry every threat and possibility while I progress with my glacially slow plan.

73.Qd1 Kc8 74.Qe1 Kd8 75.h4 Rab7 76.Kh3 Ke7 77.Ne2 Qc7 78.Qf2 Ra8



Amidst my building efforts to impel him to advance the b5-pawn, a very tempting tactic emerged.

79.cxb5 cxb5

If 79...Rxb5? 80.Nc3 ±

80.d4 Qd6

If 80...exd4? 81.Rxd4 ±

81.d5 c4

Black's "good bishop" is now permanently buried, white has a protected passer in the center, and there are all sorts of promising possibilities for the posting of white's pieces. Imagine, for example, maneuvering the knight to b4 and c6, securing the king on the queenside, and blasting open the kingside with support from white's major

pieces. Even white's light-squared bishop will gain a role in that scenario.

82.Rc3 Nc5 83.Qf3 Qd7

A huge think now. He now threatens to break on the kingside with g5 and attempt to seal the structure. I can avoid the pawn advance by retreating my king, but even after ...g5, I can still reorient my pieces for an eventual h4 break. The computer evaluations are simply worthless through here.

84.Nc1

The knight prevents any incursion with Nb3 or Nd3, and steers the knight towards the b4-hole. Another win is posted, this time by LeCroq of France over Schwetich, who had also lost to Osipov. Schwetick has strangely hung a mate in an otherwise even position. Clearly the chess gods were with me because, while LeCroq also now had two wins, both he and Osipov now had tie breakers hurt by the fact that both had defeated the same person! With the outcome of this game still uncertain, I suddenly had the best tie breaker. If all 40 remaining games were to end in a draw, I would now win the tournament outright even without a win in this game. But I never felt comfortable, knowing that anyone's additional win would crunch my chances.

84...g5 85.Na2 Bh7 86.Kh2 Bg8 87.Kg1

There are lines where white's king belongs on the queenside as prelude to the rooks relocating to the h-file. Meanwhile, white's king can cut off black's queen from any entry squares on the kingside.

87...Kd6 88.Bg6 Rbb8 89.Rh2 Qa7

90.Kf1 Nd3 91.Nc1 Nc5 92.Na2

Russia attacked the Ukraine around this time, and the ICCF soon thereafter required all Russians to play under a neutral flag. I forwarded my move with a message of peace. Osipov, a former Cosmonaut, did not respond.

92...Nd3

The repetition will puzzle readers. It's a correspondence game, after all. But I was relatively low on time, and this gains time on the clock. And psychologically, we both now know that I am playing to win and that he is happy to draw.

93.Nc1

Sadly, the lines with Nb4 Nxb4 axb4 offer no winning chances.

93...Nc5 94.Qe3 Nb3 95.Qe1 Qd4 96.Bh5 Rc8 97.Nxb3 axb3 98.Rd2 Qa7 99.Rd1 Bf7 100.Be2

Finally reaching move 100 and avoiding the bishop exchange. There are still plenty of ideas, but they now depend upon an aggressive role on the queenside for white's bishop.

100...Be8 101.g4

Played so very reluctantly. There were so many lines in which white's king or queen could infiltrate via g4 and h5. My hopes are dwindling, relying now on infiltration down the h-file and a well-timed a4.

101...Bd7 102.Kg2 Qc5 103.Rh3 Ra4 104.hxg5 hxg5 105.Rh6 Rf8 106.Qc3 b4

Necessary, but good enough to draw.

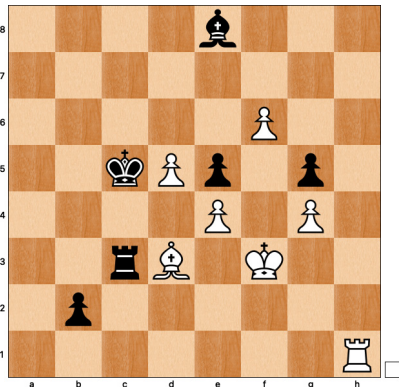
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107.axb4 Qxb4 108.Qxb4+ Rxb4 109. Kf3 Ra4 110.Rc1 Ra2 111.Rxc4 Rxb2 112.Rb4 Rc8 113.Rb6+ Kc5 114.Rhxf6 Rh8 115.Rh6 Rxh6 116.Rxh6

A pawn ahead, which looks great on the board but sadly not on the scoresheet.

116...Rc2 117.Rh1 b2 118.f6 Be8 119.Bd3 Rc3 1/2 - 1/2



Offering a draw. Over-the-board, play would go on. The position remains complex and the lines quite fun. Readers should test their own mettle here. One of the lines even involves two promotions followed by a quick perpetual check. But we faced a clear path to a draw, and by now, there were only two games left in motion. The simplest finish is 120.Ke2 Rc1 121.Rd1 Kd4 122.Bb1+ Kc3 123.Rd3+ Kb4 124. Rd1 1/2-1/2

The tournament did indeed end with 47 consecutive draws, leaving me in first place with the best tie breaker! Surely, I missed a win here somewhere. That will continue to haunt me, the desire for an extra dose of legitimacy, but ultimately it does not matter! Happily, the collusion in mid-tournament did not determine the winner. Finally, after more than two years of 12-hour chess days, I can put my feet up, enjoy the engraved silver platter, and buy a lottery ticket!

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