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# Niemann back at the board as FIDE delays report

**H**is \$100 million defamation lawsuit is in limbo, but young American GM Hans Moke Niemann is back to battling at the chessboard.

Barely six months ago, of course, the 19-year-old Niemann was at the center of a controversy that generated global headlines for the game,

when then-world champion Magnus Carlsen openly accused him of cheating after an upset loss at the prestigious Sinquefeld Cup tournament in St. Louis. Niemann subsequently filed his suit against Carlsen as well as the online giant Chess.com and U.S. GM Hikaru Nakamura, both of which also claimed Niemann had a record of cheating.

While the voluble, volatile Niemann has been lying relatively low since then, it was learned last week that FIDE, the global chess governing body, was abruptly postponing the planned release this month of its investigation of the entire affair, saying it did not want its findings to affect the legal battle. Niemann's lawyer told *The New York Times*, citing Chess.com's financial ties to FIDE, said the delay was a clear signal that the results of the probe are "highly favorable" to his client and "raises serious concerns that this scandal runs even deeper than anticipated."

While not getting many prestige tournament invitations, Niemann has had a burst of activity this spring, tying for first at a strong open event on the Spanish island of Minorca, tying for third in the Kazakhstan Chess Cup event organized in conjunction with the recent world championship match in Astana, and competing this week in a yet another open event in Baku, Azerbaijan.

At the chessboard, Niemann has (quietly) gone about justifying his now 2700-plus rating, holding his own with his grandmaster peers while usually beating the players he's supposed to beat. See, for example, his very professional win over rising Ukrainian GM Yuri Solodovnichenko at the Kazakhstan tournament.

In a Richter-Rauzer Sicilian,



Solodovnichenko-Niemann after 30. Nce4

Niemann takes risks as Black early with 8. Nf5 h5!? (leading to lively play against an opponent who likely would be happy with a draw; 8...Rg8 9. Qd2 Qa5 10. Ne3 0-0-0 was a quieter alternative) 9. Bb5 Qc7 10. Nd5 Qd8 11. Nc3 (an early peace offering; bad was 11. Nxf6+ exf6 12. Nxd6+? Bxd6 13. Qxd6 because of 13...Qa5+) a6. After 18. Rhf1 Be7, Black has a cramped but defensible position.

Forced to take active measures, White falters with 19. Rf3?! (more preparation was preferable with 19. Kbl Rdg8 20. Qd2) Bc8 20. Rg3 h4 21. Rg4 Bf8 22. Re1, and with his opponent's rooks now redeployed to inferior posts, Black strikes with 22...d5! 23. exd5 exf5! 24. Nxf5 Rh5! — the first of several awkward pins on White pieces. More pressure comes after 25. Rf1?! (better was the active 25. Rc4!, though Black retains an edge after the tricky 25...Qxh2 26. Qf3 Rxf5 27. Qxc8+ Rxc8 28. Qxf5 Qg3 29. Rd1 Qg5+ 30. Qxg5 fxe5, repairing his pawn structure) Qxh2 26. Rgf4 (the threat was 26...Bxf5 27. Rxf5 Bh6+ 28. Kdl Rxf5 29. Qxf5 h3!, when 30. gxh3?? allows 30...Qd2 mate) Qxg2 27. Nxh4 Qg5, with yet another unpleasant pin.

White's overloaded position tips over on 30. Nce4 (see diagram) Rxe4! 31. Qxe4 (also losing was 31. Nxe4 Qxf4+ 32. Rxf4 Rxd3 33. cxd3 Bh6, pinning and winning) Rxe3, and Black's two bishops far outweigh the underachieving White rooks, particularly when the queens come off the board.

By 40. Rg8 Bf5, the bishop pair dominate the board and Black has a winning game despite the near-equal material forces. In the end, the harried White king and the advancing Black f-pawn lead to White's capitulation after 47. a5 f3, with

lines such as 48. axb6 Bxb6 49. Rd6 Bd4+ 50. Kb3 f2 51. Rh3 Ke3, winning easily, on tap.

Speaking of the world championship match, both new champ GM Ding Liren of China and losing challenger GM Ian Nepomniachtchi were both in action, a remarkable rebound just a week after the end of their epic, draining world title match in Astana. Ding and Nepomniachtchi are in the 10-GM field at the Superbet Chess Classic in the Romanian capital of Bucharest.

The Russian had a slight edge for much of the game, but their Round 3 individual match-up Monday ended in a 54-move draw. Nepo shared the early lead in the tournament on the strength of a buce Round 2 win over young Romanian GM Bogdan-Daniel Deac.

Nepo's play against his lower-ranked opponent has the same taking-care-of-business vibe as Niemann's win over Solodovnichenko. Deac as White goes in for a tricky exchange sacrifice in this QGD line with 12. cxd5 exd5 13. Rxd5!? Nxc3 14. Qxc3 (bxc3 Ne7 15. Rh5 was also possible; White now gets a pawn for the exchange and some good piece activity, which Nepo later said should have been enough for a draw — with best play) Bb4 15. axb4 Qxd5 16. b5 Ne7 17. 0-0.

Once again, the lower-rated player has to be active to stay in the game, and once again he can't pass the test against world-class technique. Deac does find a nice resource after 22. Qa5 b6!? (stronger may have been 22...g5 23. Bh2 Rd7, as 24. Qxa7? is bad because of 24...Nh4 25. Qa4 Nxf3+ 26. gxf3 Qxh3) 23. Qxa7 g5 24. Bh2 Nh4 25. Bb7! (Bc6? Rxc6! 26. bxc6 Qe4 27. f3 Qc2 28. Rf2 Rd1+ 29. Rf1 Qxg2 mate), and now on the tricky 25...Rd7?!, White has 26. Bxc8! 26. Qe4 — eyeing mate on g2 — 27. Bb7! Rxb7 28. Qb8+ Kh7 29. f3 Qc2 30. Rf2 Qd1+ 31. Rf1, and Black dare not stop checking as moves like 31... Qd7?? allow 32. Be5! Ng6 33. Bd4.

Nepo, who relies strongly on intuition and common sense over brute calculation at the board, said later getting two rooks on the second rank had to lead to something good for Black, and his judgment was borne out as White falters in

time pressure. First 28. b4?! (b3 Rc2 29. Qal+ f6 30. Qa4 and the White queen can get to the kingside to help defend) gums up White's position, and that's followed by 30. Kh1 Rdd2 31. Bg3? (just losing; remarkably, 31. Qa7!, setting up some nasty discovered checks, keeps White in the game; e.g. 31...Ra2 32. Qb8 Rxf2 33. Rg1 Rab2 34. Bc6, and if 34...Rxb4 35. Rall, it's White suddenly on the attack) Nf5! (doing decisive damage to White's kingside) 32. Bc6 (Qa7 is no longer good after 32...Rd7 33. Qb8 Nxe3+ 34. fxe3 Qe5 35. Qa8 Qxb5) Ra2 33. Qb1 h5 34. Qe4 Qxe4 35. Bxe4 Nxe3+ 36. fxe3 — White has two pawns for the exchange but the Black rooks have a stranglehold on the position.

White concedes after 44. Ra8+ Ke7, as there's no hope in lines such as 45. Re8+ Kf7 46. Bf3 Rel+ 47. Kh2 Rbb1 48. g3 Rb2+ 49. Bg2 Kxe8.

## Solodovnichenko-Niemann, Kazakhstan Chess Cup 2023, Astana, Kazakhstan, April 2023

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Bg5 Bd7 7. Bxf6 gxf6 8. Nf5 h5 9. Bb5 Qc7 10. Nd5 Qd8 11. Nc3 a6 12. Bxc6 Bxc6 13. Qd3 e6 14. Nd4 Bd7 15. f4 Qc7 16. f5 0-0-0 17. 0-0-0 Kb8 18. Rhf1 Be7 19. Rf3 Bc8 20. Rg3 h4 21. Rg4 Bf8 22. Re1 d5 23. exd5 exf5 24. Nxf5 Rh5 25. Rf1 Qxh2 26. Rgf4 Qxg2 27. Nxh4 Qg5 28. Nf5 Re8 29. Ng3 Rh3 30. Nce4 Rxe4 31. Qxe4 Rxe3 32. Kb1 Bd6 33. R4f2 f5 34. Qe8 Qe3 35. Qxe3 Rxe3 36. Rg2 f4 37. Rg8 Kc7 38. Rg7 Re7 39. Kc1 Be5 40. Rg8 Bf5 41. Kd2 Bd4 42. c4 Be3+ 43. Kc3 Kd6 44. b4 Ke5 45. Rd8 b6 46. a4 Ke4 47. a5 f3 White resigns

## Deac-Nepomniachtchi, Superbet Chess Classic, Bucharest, Romania, May 2023

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4 0-0 6. e3 c5 7. dxc5 Bxc5 8. a3 Nc6 9. Qc2 Qa5 10. Rd1 h6 11. Be2 Ne4 12. cxd5 exd5 13. Rxd5 Nxc3 14. Qxc3 Bb4 15. axb4 Qxd5 16. b5 Ne7 17. 0-0 Be6 18. Nd4 Nf5 19. Nxe6 Qxe6 20. h3 Rfd8 21. Bf3 Rac8 22. Qa5 b6 23. Qxa7 g5 24. Bh2 Nh4 25. Bb7 Rc2 26. Qa4 Rc4 27. Qa6 Kg7 28. b4 Rc2 29. Qa1+ f6 30. Kh1 Rdd2 31. Bg3 Nf5 32. Bc6 Ra2 33. Qb1 h5 34. Qe4 Qxe4 35. Bxe4 Nxe3+ 36. fxe3 Rab2 37. Bf3 Kh6 38. g4 h4 39. Bc6 Kg7 40. Kh2 Rxb4 41. Ra1 Re2 42. Kg1 Rbb2 43. Ra7+ Kf8 44. Ra8+ Ke7 White resigns

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