



# RECORDS & RIVALRIES

History was made at the 2022  
K-12 Grade Championships.

BY **FM SANDEEP SETHURAMAN**

PHOTOS BY **DAVID LLADA**





ONLINE CHESS has experienced a huge boom since 2020, but with the pandemic starting to wane, over-the-board chess is coming back

strong, too. The 2022 National K-12 Grade Championships, held from December 9-11 in National Harbor, Maryland, celebrated a triumphant return to in-person tournaments, setting a new record of 2,463 participants. This surpassed previous years by more than 600 players.

Hosted by US Chess at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, the conditions were exemplary. Knowledgeable tournament directors, a spacious tournament hall, and comfortable seating all contributed to the great atmosphere throughout the event. In addition, FM Gauri Shankar and WGM Sabina Foisor provided expert commentary and created more than a few memorable moments on Twitch.

While the organizers exceeded expectations, so did the players. With a field consisting of almost 30 masters and many more experts, the 2022 edition was one of the strongest national grade championships ever. New York and Florida had particularly strong representation, with almost 400 players from the Sunshine State and nearly 1,000 from the Empire State.

Scholastic events, especially national ones, are unique among Swiss tournaments. First, team awards inspire schools to field multiple players, and this is one way that scholastic chess grows.

Underrated players are another huge factor. In the first couple of rounds of the K-12s, upsets abounded despite huge rating differences. This is primarily due to scholastic players who don't have many rated tournament opportunities in their states; consequently, their ratings don't reflect their true playing strengths.

Playing as a top seed isn't easy. To win one of the top prizes, one needs to achieve an almost-perfect score, so avoiding dropped points against underrated players — who are very motivated to score an upset — is vital. A moment of inattention can easily determine who becomes a national champion, and who doesn't. An ill-advised draw can destroy a player's tie-break score, making it that much harder to climb to the top. A loss, meanwhile, almost entirely takes a player out of contention for first, so overpushing is a real concern.

Round four is usually when the top seeds start to clash as the pool of players with perfect scores starts to narrow. By the sixth round, there is usually only one player still on a perfect score.

This was my first national grade championship in almost eight years, so I had to re-adapt my mindset to the realities of scholastic chess. After surviving scares in the second and third rounds against Dominic Colombo and Jonathan Xu, I won a fairly smooth game against Nathaniel Shuman, a player who consistently overperforms in national scholastics. This left me in shared first place with FMs Gus Huston and Sharvesh Deviprasath. After getting completely outplayed by Huston, a lucky swindle saw me in clear first on 5/5 with two rounds to go.

The penultimate round saw me playing with the white pieces against the top seed, IM Maximillian Lu, who was on 4½/5 after giving up a draw in round two. Lu needed to win as Black to stay in contention for first place, which caused him to play more aggressively than he might have otherwise.

## QUEEN'S PAWN GAME (A50)

FM Sandeep Sethuraman (2462)

IM Maximillian Lu (2490)

2022 K-12 Nationals (6), National Harbor, 12.11.2022

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 b6 3. Nc3 Bb7 4. Qc2 d5  
5. cxd5 Nxd5 6. Nf3 e6 7. e4 Nxc3 8. bxc3  
Be7 9. Bb5+ c6 10. Bd3 c5

Both sides have gotten what they want in the opening: a solid but playable position.

### 11. 0-0?!

Perhaps too complacent, as engines revealed an interesting idea with 11. Bf4!?, primarily designed against 11. ... cxd4. Then 12. Bb5+! Bc6 13. Nxd4 Bd7 14. 0-0 0-0 15. Rad1 would leave Black with misplaced pieces and an underdeveloped queenside.

### 11. ... 0-0?!

A bit careless. Better would have been 11. ... cxd4 12. cxd4 and only then 12. ... 0-0, where White might try 13. Bb2 Nc6 14. a3 Rc8 15. Qe2 with a slight edge after both 15. ... Na5 and 15. ... Bf6.

### 12. d5!

Thematic, and already posing Black a difficult question: to take twice and risk a rook appearing on d1, or to leave a protected passed pawn on d5?

### 12. ... exd5 13. exd5



### 13. ... g6??

An extremely unfortunate oversight, but no relief was offered in 13. ... Qxd5 14. Re1! (14. Rd1? which was my plan during the game throws away the advantage after 14. ... Qh5 15. Be4 Bc6) 14. ... Qd7 15. Bxh7+ Kh8 16. Bf5! with an unstoppable attack.

Best would have been 13. ... h6, however, White would maintain a steady pull after the natural 14. c4 Bf6 15. Rb1 (better than the obvious 15. Bb2) 15. ... Re8 16. Bf4.

### 14. Bh6 Re8 15. Bb5 Nd7 16. Qa4

Undoubtedly overlooked during the game, this wins a clean Exchange.

### 16. ... Nf6

Of course 16. ... Bc8 17. Bc6 Rb8 18. Bf4 is hopeless for Black.

### 17. c4 a6 18. Bxe8 Nxe8

The position is completely winning, as the extra Exchange, coupled with the monster pawn on d5, stifle Black's pieces. But my opponent stays ever resilient, trying to find any way to stay in the race for first place.

### 19. Rfe1 Nd6 20. Ne5 Bf6 21. Rad1 b5!

Another thematic move, opening up the a8-rook, and undermining the d5-pawn, breathing life into the b7-bishop. The importance of the knight on d6 cannot be understated, as it is the perfect blockader.

### 22. cxb5 axb5 23. Qf4 Ra4

I had written this off during the game, thinking that any queen move would maintain a winning position. After Max played it, I began to realize there was a lack of great squares for my queen.

### 24. Qc1!

This square is definitely the best, as it both hits the c5-pawn while defending the h6-bishop in case of ... Nd6-f5. For example, a normal move like 24. Qf3 would allow complications after 24. ... Nf5 25. Bc1 (25.

Nc6!) 25. ... Nd4 and already I should give back the Exchange with 26. Rxd4 to maintain the advantage.

#### 24. ... Qc8 25. Nc6?!

More accurate were quiet moves such as 25. h3 or 25. f3, preventing any entry on g4, or even 25. Bg5 to offer a trade of dark-squared bishops and leaving the black king vulnerable.

#### 25. ... Nf5 26. Bg5 Rc4

During the game I was primarily concerned with 26. ... Bxg5 27. Qxg5 Bxc6 28. dxc6 Qxc6 29. Rd8+ Kg7 30. Ree8 f6 (also losing is 30. ... Nh6 31. Qe5+ Qf6 32. Rg8+ and White wins the queen) 31. Rg8+ Kf7 32. Rdf8+ Ke7, and here the natural 33. Rxf6 Qxf6 34. Re8+ Kxe8 35. Qxf6 Kd7! offers Black great drawing chances, but the calm 33. Qd2 is easily winning.



#### 27. Qxc4!

This move can't really be called a sacrifice, as White keeps a material advantage after the dust settles, but more pertinent is the difference in coordination. White's pieces are perfect: the f6-bishop controls the vital a1-h8 diagonal, the two rooks controlling the e- and d-files, and a knight on c6 that Black can't take without creating a deadly passer.

#### 27. ... bxc4 28. Bxf6 Bxc6 29. dxc6 Nd4 30. c7 Kf8 31. Re5!

A nice touch that effectively seals the game.

#### 31. ... Qxc7 32. Rxc5 Qb7 33. Rd5, Black resigned.

After this game, I extended my lead to a full point going into the last round. Despite some "creativity" in the opening, a not-uncommon trait in my recent games, I was able to hold a draw against Derek Clasby, a national master from New Jersey, to become the 11th grade national champion — one of 13 national champions crowned in this event.

Raghav Venkat, a national master from Florida, finished atop the 12th grade section

with 6½/7, enough for clear first. Also starting the final round with 6/6, Venkat made a draw to clinch the title after comfortably reaching an unlosable endgame as White.

Venkat had a very smooth tournament performance, as evidenced by his round two game against Dylan Slowik.

## GRÜNFELD DEFENSE, NEO-GRÜNFELD VARIATION (D76)

Dylan Lowik (1684)

Raghav Venkat (2349)

2022 K-12 Nationals (2), National Harbor, 12.09.2022

#### 1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. g3 Bg7 4. Bg2 0-0

This allows 4. ... d5 with a very solid position, but Venkat most likely wanted some imbalance in the game.

#### 5. c4 d5 6. 0-0 Nc6 7. cxd5 Nxd5 8. Nc3 Nb6 9. d5 Nb4

Played quickly, so it was probably preparation, but 9. ... Na5 is the mainline.

#### 10. e4 c6 11. a3

Another try is 11. Qb3 Na6 12. Be3 cxd5 13. Nxd5 Nxd5 14. exd5 Nc7 15. Nd4 with an edge, but the game continuation is perfectly fine as well.

#### 11. ... Na6 12. dxc6 bxc6 13. Qc2

Despite the 650+ point rating difference, White has a safe, low-risk edge.

#### 13. ... Nc5

You can't fault Venkat for playing this very natural move. Still, 13. ... Bg4 might have been a more challenging try when 14. h3 Bxf3 15. Bxf3 Nc7 with the idea of planting a knight on the d4-square and anchoring it with a pawn on c5 or e5.

#### 14. Rd1 Qc7 15. Be3 Ne6



So far White has played a perfect game, and his pieces show it. Black's position is riddled with holes on the queenside, and as long as

White maintains control of the d4-square, he should hold a clear edge.

#### 16. Rac1

Black's position might look innocuous, but ... Nb6-c4 is already a semi-threat, so the three best moves are prophylactic:

16. b3 Ba6 and now 17. Rac1 and White's position is picturesque.
- Similar is 16. Bf1 a5 17. Rac1 a4 18. Rd2 c5 19. Nd5.
- Perhaps most accurate is 16. Ne2!, because it also has a distinct threat — to place the knight on d4. Play continues 16. ... c5 17. Nf4 (moving to take advantage of the new hole on d5) 17. ... Nxf4 18. Bxf4 Qc6 19. a4 with a4-a5 possible. The b6-knight is offside, and White's position is generally more coordinated.

#### 16. ... Nc4!

Venkat doesn't need to be asked twice! Now White must part with his prized e3-bishop. A lazy move such as 16. ... Rd8 would again allow 17. b3 and the b6-knight remains a problem, e.g., 17. ... Rxd1+ 18. Rxd1 Nd7 19. Na4 with a strong advantage.

#### 17. Qe2

More daring might have been 17. Bd4 Nxd4 18. Nxd4 where White actually has a threat: 18. ... Rb8 (18. ... Rd8?? 19. Nxc6 and White should win) 19. Na4, taking advantage of the weak c5-square and the loose c4-knight. After 19. ... Ne5 20. f4:



Here (a) 20. ... Ng4 would also be acceptable if 21. e5 didn't exist. After 21. ... Ne3 22. Qxc6 all the tactics work for White, i.e., 22. ... Qxc6 23. Nxc6 Rb7 24. Rd8 with a tremendous advantage.

It's easy to see that (b) 20. ... Nd7? 21. Nxc6 is horrendous.

So Black has to fight fire with (c) 20. ... Bg4! 21. fxe5 Bxd1 22. Rxd1 Bxe5 23. Nxc6 (23. Nf3!? seems to blunder a pawn with 23. ... Bxb2! 24. Nxb2 Qb6+ but 25. Nd4 Qxb2 26. Qxb2 Rxb2 27. Nxc6 saves the day!) 23. ... Rfc8 and now 24. Rd5! is the best way to equalize (24. Rc1 leads to some difficulty after 24. ... Qd6 25. b4 Rc7 26. Bf1! the only

# THE 2022 NATIONAL K-12 GRADE CHAMPIONSHIPS





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way to survive 26. ... Bd4+ 27. Kh1 Be3 28. e5! and White is hanging on) 24. ... Qxc6 25. Qxc6 Rxc6 26. Rxe5 with an unbalanced but equal position.

### 17. ... Ba6 18. b3

Moves like 18. Nd5!? show the richness of the position: 18. ... cxd5 (also equal is 18. ... Qb7 19. Nb4 Nxe3 20. Qxe3 Bb5 21. e5 with a dynamically equal position) 19. exd5 Nd8 and a forced line with 20. b3 Nxe3 21. Qxa6 Qb6 22. Qxb6 axb6 23. fxe3 Rxa3 24. Nd4 Bxd4 25. exd4 Rxb3 26. Rc7 e6 27. d6 where White has plenty of compensation for the pawn.

### 18. ... Nxe3 19. Qxe3 Qb6 20. Na4?!

A bit weird, as allowing the destruction of the pawn structure was unnecessary. The natural 20. Qxb6 axb6 21. e5!, shutting down Black's monster g7-bishop, is mandatory: 21. ... Rfd8 22. a4 with only a slight advantage for Black.

### 20. ... Qxe3 21. fxe3

This is now a two-result position for Black.

### 21. ... Bb5 22. Nc5 Bb2?!

Including this move allows White to equalize.

The immediate 22. ... Nxc5 23. Rxc5 Rfd8 24. Rxd8+ Rxd8 25. Kf2 Rd1 would preserve the bishop pair and the practical chances for an advantage.

### 23. Rc2 Nxc5 24. Rxb2 Rad8 25. Rxd8

Plugging the d-file with 25. Rd4! would equalize: 25. ... Ne6 26. Rxd8 Rxd8 27. Rd2 and the e6-knight is misplaced, giving White a crucial tempo.

### 25. ... Rxd8 26. Nd4?

Now Black gets a serious edge. 26. Rd2 Rxd2 27. Nxd2 Nd7 28. Nf3 Kg7 29. e5 c5 is unpleasant, but at this point it was time to cut losses.

### 26. ... e5 27. Nxb5 Rd1+ 28. Bf1 cxb5 29. Kg2 a6



### 30. b4?

Too passive.

The active path was the only way to fight for the draw: 30. a4! bxa4 (30. ... b4 31. Rc2 Nxe4 32. Rc8+! (Not 32. Bxa6? Rd2+ 33. Rxd2 Nxd2 34. Bd3 Nxb3 and Black is up a pawn with good winning chances) 32. ... Kg7 33. Bxa6 Rd2+ 34. Kg1 f5 35. Rb8 and White should hold with active play) 31. bxa4 Nxa4 32. Rc2! Accurate, restricting the knight on a4 (32. Ra2?! Nc3) 32. ... a5 33. Ra2 Nc5 34. Rxa5 Nxe4 35. Rxe5 and White should hold comfortably.

### 30. ... Nxe4 31. a4 Nc3?!

This almost allows White back into the game.

The correct 31. ... bxa4! was natural and very easily winning. For example, 32. Ra2 (if 32. Bc4 Rd2+ 33. Rxd2 Nxd2 34. Bd5 a3 35. Kf2 Nb1 36. Ke1 Nc3 White can't stop the pawn) 32. ... Rd2+ is hopeless.

### 32. axb5 axb5 33. Rb3 Rc1 34. Ra3 Kg7

### 35. Ra5 Rb1 36. Bxb5 Rxb4 37. Be8

37. Bc6! is best, trying to defend the weak white king, but Black should win after 37. ... Rb2+ 38. Kg1 f6 39. Ra7+ Kh6.

### 37. ... Rb2+ 38. Kh3 e4 39. Rc5 Nd1

It's smooth sailing from here.

### 40. Rc4 f5 41. Rc7+ Kh6 42. Bf7 Nxe3 43. g4 Nf1, White resigned.

Despite not winning his section and "only" finishing in third place behind two IMs, Toshinori Underwood might well have had the best showing in the whole event. Playing in the 10th grade championship, Underwood was the last player in his section with a perfect score, going into the final round with 6/6 before succumbing to IM Nico Chasin in a marathon of a game. This allowed Chasin to leapfrog him in the standings and tie for first with IM Eddy Tian at 6½/7.

Here is Underwood's beautiful sixth-round win against Yogeshwar Yemahandram, which cemented his successful tournament and contributed to his 100+ rating jump from 2040 to 2148.

## SICILIAN DEFENSE, CLOSED VARIATION (B24)

Toshinori Underwood (2040)

Yogeshwar Yemahandram (2118)

2022 K-12 Nationals (6), National Harbor, 12.11.2022

### 1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 e6 3. Nge2 Nc6 4. g3 a6 5.

### Bg2 Nf6 6. 0-0 Be7 7. a4 0-0 8. d3 Rb8

So far both sides have played logically, and

White aims to expand on the kingside and launch an attack on the black king. Meanwhile, Black is preparing ... b7-b5 and queenside expansion.

### 9. f4



### 9. ... d5!

The classical reply to an attack on the flank is to push in the center, and that is exactly what Black does with this move. A flank alternative such as 9. ... b5 would give White free rein with 10. e5 Ne8 11. Bxc6 dxc6 12. Be3 with a ruined pawn structure and passive pieces for Black.

### 10. e5

A double-edged decision: closing down the center and leaving White's g2-bishop biting on a granite d5-pawn may not be the best idea, but it does grab central space and forces Black to take pieces away from the kingside defense.

### 10. ... Nd7 11. Kh1 Qc7 12. Ng1 Nd4?!

A bit premature, as the knight looks very nice, but it can be dislodged with White's next move.

### 13. Nce2

Classy, trading off Black's most active piece. Another idea was 13. a5 to hinder the ... b7-b5 advance.

### 13. ... Nxe2 14. Qxe2 b5 15. Nf3 d4?

This opens up the diagonal for the g2-bishop. Better would have been 15. ... bxa4 16. Rxa4 a5 17. b3 c4 18. bxc4 Nb6 19. Rxa5 dxc4 20. d4, when both 20. ... Nd5 and 20. ... Bb7 give satisfactory compensation for the pawn.

### 16. axb5 axb5

(see diagram page 39)

### 17. f5!

A thematic move that rips apart Black's position.

## FABI'S FIRST NATIONALS

By Laurel Aronian

Every kindergarten player is a first timer at the K-12 Grade National Championships. But even though most of the kindergarteners' feet didn't reach the floor, these up-and-comers knew a national championship was at stake. Among the precocious competitors was the son of one of the most well-known ambassadors for women's chess: Fabian (or Fabi) Meiom, whose mother is WGM Jennifer Shahade.

Shahade, a two-time United States woman's champion, has attended the K-12 grade nationals for years, juggling her roles as Women's Program Director for US Chess, Girls Club facilitator, commentator, and instructor. This year, for the first time, Shahade added chess parent to her multiple roles. For many attendees, Shahade-the-chess-mom was unexpected: In Fabi's first round, his opponent's parent exclaimed, "You look a lot like Jennifer Shahade!"

According to Shahade, "It was a great time. I didn't expect Fabian to love it as much as he did! ... I've been in all angles of chess,

the coach, the champion player, the team player, the individual player, the writer, the author, the fundraiser, and the commentator. So I've worn all these hats, but this was the first time I was a chess mom."

The tournament takes place in a smaller playing hall, where kindergarteners' parents, teams, and coaches surrounded the children pre-round. Only three of the 76 kindergarten participants — Fabi among them — were not registered in a team for the event. But even though he didn't come with a club or a team, Fabi had an elite squad cheering for him: his mother, father Daniel Meiom, chess influencer Jonathan Corbblah, "Funmaster" Mike (Klein) of *Chesskid.com*, WIM Carolina Blanco, WGM Sabina Foisor, and GM Elshan Moradiabadi.

Throughout his rounds, Fabi received the pros' high-fives and good-luck wishes. Along with the friends he came with, Fabi also left with new pals, including his second-round opponent! He elaborated on the win: "The one where ... I beat the big kid." Shahade filled in the details: "He beat a kid from Dalton [NYC], I think. And he was very excited because they also were talking during the game and they became friends, right?" "Yes!" Fabi exclaimed. Jennifer further explained, "I think he was proud of that game because his opponent was maybe a better player

because he had more experience, but Fabian was trying really, really hard."

Fabi also was thrilled by the attractions at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center. The hotel boasted exciting winter-themed activities, including ice bumper cars, skating, and musical performances. Fabi especially loved the hotel's "ice sliding" activity, exclaiming, "It was going so fast!" He also enjoyed Maryland's food offerings, celebrating his seven well-played matches with a Chicken McNugget Happy Meal.

After his successful nationals, Fabi went home to Philadelphia and on to his next tournament — clinching a trophy in a win versus a fourth grader! Shahade said, "... that was really cool for me too, because a lot of the girls that I coach were there, so I was able to help Fabian and also help them — so it was really sweet."

I asked Fabi what the most challenging part of the tournament was. His response: "Nothing!" Even after the game he lost, Shahade said, "He came out smiling." When Shahade asked Fabi why he was smiling, he exclaimed, "Because it was fun!"

Stay tuned as Fabi Meiom's and WGM Jennifer Shahade's fascinating chess story continues!

“  
It was a great time. I didn't expect Fabian to love it as much as he did.”

~WGM Jennifer Shahade,  
two-time United States women's champion, US Chess Women's Program Director, Ladies Knight podcast host, author, coach, and chess mom





**17. ... exf5**

Necessary, as f5-f6 was a real threat, e.g., 17. ... c4 18. f6 gxf6 19. Bh6 f5 20. g4! would let in the white pieces with decisive effect.

**18. Bf4**

Natural and good, but 18. e6 was even better as 18. ... Nf6 (18. ... fxe6 19. Qxe6+ Rf7 20. Bf4 Qb6 21. Qa2!! and Black's position falls apart) 19. Ng5 Bd6 20. Nxf7 is very hard to play as Black.

**18. ... Nb6!**

Black finds a great defense in a very tough position; nevertheless, even stronger would have been 18. ... Qb6 as prophylaxis against 19. e6.

A sample variation is 18. ... Qb6 19. e6 fxe6 20. Rfe1! (after 20. Bxb8 Nxb8 21. Rfe1 Bf6 Black's two pawns and solid structure more provide enough compensation for the Exchange) 20. ... Rb7 21. Qxe6+ Qxe6 22. Rxe6 Nb6 23. Re2 Nd5 24. Ne5! and White maintains slightly better chances.

**19. e6 Bd6**



**20. Ng5!**

Far from the most obvious move, but clearly stronger than 20. Bxd6 Qxd6 21. Qe5 Qxe5 22. exf7+! Kxf7 23. Nxe5+ Kf6 24. Nc6 Ra8 where Black is able to hold the position.

**20. ... g6??**

There was only one move to keep Black in the game: 20. ... Bxf4! 21. exf7+ Rxf7! 22. Nxf7! Be3! 23. Ng5! Qd7 and for now White

cannot infiltrate into the black camp. All of this is incredibly difficult to find over the board.

**21. exf7+ Kg7 22. Ra7!**

A killer blow that Black overlooked when playing 20. ... g6. A move such as 22. Rg1 would offer a better position, but no clear breakthrough, after 22. ... Bxf4 23. gxf4 h6 24. Ne6+ Bxe6 25. Qxe6 Rxf7.

**22. ... Qd8 23. Be5+ Bxe5 24. Qxe5+ Kh6 25. Qxb8**

The computer coldly suggests 25. h4!, but Underwood chooses the human continuation.

**25. ... Kxg5 26. Re1 Nd5 27. Bxd5 Qxd5+ 28. Kg1 Kf6 29. Qc7 Rxf7 30. Qxf7+ Qxf7 31. Rxf7+ Kxf7 32. Re5**

After liquidating into an endgame, White wins with very nice technique.

**32. ... Bd7 33. Rxc5 Ke6 34. Kf2 Kd6 35. b4 Bc6 36. c3 dxc3 37. Rxc3 Bd7 38. Rc5 Bc6 39. Ke3 Bd7 40. h4 h6 41. Kd4 Ke6 42. Rc7 Kd6 43. Ra7 Be8 44. Rh7 h5 45. Ra7, Black resigned.**

In the ninth-grade section the top two seeds, IM Evan Park and Rohan Padhye, tied for first with Michael Guan, who, despite his 1993 rating, conceded only two draws to finish with 6/7. Park started with 5/5 to jump ahead as the sole leader but drew his final two games against Padhye and Guan to finish on 6/7. Padhye, meanwhile, came from behind after being held to a draw by Kevin Li in round four to also finish on 6/7.

Here is the round six encounter between Park and Padhye, a game where Park was pushing as White but was unable to break through Padhye's stubborn defense.

**GIUOCO PIANO (C50)**

**IM Evan Park (2417)**  
**Rohan Padhye (2243)**  
**2022 K-12 Nationals (5), National Harbor, 12.11.2022**

**1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 d6 4. d3 Na5**

Padhye deviates from well-trodden lines. This is a strong indication that he is playing ambitiously, despite facing an IM with the black pieces. Quite admirable!

**5. Nc3**

Trying to keep the bishop is also a critical try 5. Bd5 c6 6. Bxf7+!? (6. Bb3 would render 5. Bd5 pointless) 6. ... Kxf7 7. Ng5+ Ke8 8. b4 Be7 (8. ... Nf6 9. bxa5 Qxa5+ 10. Nd2 Be7 11.

0-0 h6 12. Ngf3 leads to a double-edged game) 9. Bd2! Nf6 (9. ... Bxg5? 10. Qh5+) 10. bxa5 h6 11. Nf3 Kf7 12. 0-0 and Black has the bishop pair and the open f-file as compensation for the a5-pawn, which, despite being doubled, fixes a weakness on b7.

**5. ... Nxc4 6. dxc4 f5!?**

Solidity with 6. ... Nf6 7. 0-0 Be7 8. Qe2 0-0 9. a4 c6 was also possible, but again Padhye chooses a more combative move. I think it is safe to assume that he was still in his preparation.

**7. Bg5 Be7 8. Bxe7 Nxe7 9. Qd2**



**9. ... f4?**

A serious error as starting a kingside push before White castles is ill-advised.

More principled was 9. ... 0-0 and if 10. 0-0 (the more cautious 10. 0-0-0 fxe4 11. Ng5 Bf5 12. Ngxe4 b6 13. b3 Qd7 14. Rhf1 would be the lesser evil) only then 10. ... f4 11. h3 g5!. Opening lines is worth a pawn, and Black's king will be perfectly safe on h8 mainly due to the closed center.

Now 12. Nxc5! is risky, as Black quickly develops a threatening initiative with (more cautious is 12. c5, although Black maintains slightly better chances after 12. ... g4! 13. hxc4 Bxc4 14. Rfd1 Bxf3 15. gxf3 dxc5 16. Qe2 Qc8 17. Qc4+ Rf7) 12. ... Kh8 13. Nf3 Qe8 (transferring the queen into the attack) 14. Kh1 Qh5 15. Nh2 f3! and Black destroys the king's defenses.

**10. c5!**

Undermining the pawn chain and creating a weakness on d6.

**10. ... Bg4 11. cxd6**

Even more accurate was 11. 0-0-0! and there is no satisfactory way to defend the pawn. After 11. ... 0-0 (grabbing the pawn with 11. ... dxc5? 12. Qxd8+ Rxd8 13. Rxd8+ Kxd8 14. Nxe5 is no good) 12. cxd6 Qxd6 13. Qxd6 cxd6 14. Rxd6 Bxf3 15. gxf3 Rad8 16. Rxd8 Rxd8 17. Nd5! Black has no compensation for the pawn.



**11. ... Qxd6 12. Qxd6 cxd6 13. 0-0-0**

A bit slow; now Black has survived the worst of it.

The best try was 13. Nb5! Bxf3 (perhaps more stubborn is 13. ... Rd8!? 14. Nxa7 0-0 15. Nb5 d5!? but White maintains an edge with accurate play after 16. Nxe5 Bh5 17. Nd4! taking advantage of some tactics) 14. gxf3 Kd7 15. 0-0-0 Nc8 16. Rhg1 g6 17. Rd3 and the contrast between the white and black pieces leaves quite an impression!

**13. ... Bxf3 14. gxf3 Rd8 15. Rd2 Nc8 16. Rhd1 a6?!**

Again too slow — Nc3-b5 wasn't a real threat as the d6-pawn can easily be defended. After 16. ... 0-0 17. Nb5 Rf6 Black has no issues.

**17. Nd5 0-0****18. a4!**

A classy idea, planning to fix Black's queenside pawns with a4-a5.

**18. ... Rde8 19. a5?!**

White carries out his plan, but Black has his own threats.

Better was 19. b4! Re6 20. Kb2 Rh6 21. Rd3 Rxh2? (21. ... Re8 would hold on a bit longer, but there is the devastating 22. h4!! Rxh4 23. Rg1! Kf8 [23. ... Rh6 24. Rc3] 24. Rc3 Ne7 25. Rc7 and Black is paralyzed) and now 22. Rc3. This is a very deep idea, and truthfully, one that is very tough to spot during a game. Black is dead lost.

For example, if 22. ... Kh8 (22. ... Rxf2? 23. Rxc8 Rxc8 24. Ne7+) 23. Rc7 Rxf2 24. Rxb7 Rxf3 25. b5 axb5 26. axb5 and we see the power of 19. b4 - the white passer is deadly.

**19. ... Re6!**

Padhye realizes that he has only one source of counterplay: the vulnerable h2-pawn. Despite Black's passive knight and weak queenside pawns, this is enough to hold.

Note that 19. ... Kf7? fails to 20. Nb6! Nxb6 21. axb6 Re6 22. Rxd6 leaving White a clear pawn up.

**20. Nb6 Nxb6**

Even stronger was 20. ... Rh6! 21. Nxc8 Rxc8

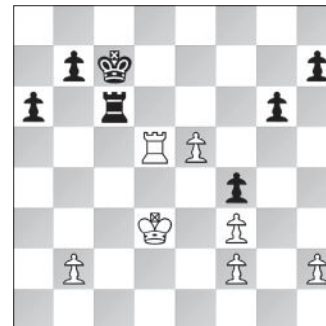
22. Rxd6 Rxh2 Padhye probably didn't like 23. Rd8+ Rxd8 24. Rxd8+ Kf7 25. Rd7+ but after 25. ... Kg6! (25. ... Kf6?! also works, but requires more of Black) 26. Rxb7 Rh1+ 27. Kd2 h5 28. Rb6+ Kh7 we see the point of 25. ... Kg6. White must be careful here!

**21. axb6 Rd8 22. c4**

More testing was 22. b4! but after 22. ... Kf8 23. Kb2 Rc8 24. Rxd6 Rc6 25. Rd8+ Re8 Black holds.

**22. ... Kf7 23. Kb1 Rc8 24. Rxd6 Rxc4 25. Rd7+ Re7 26. R1d5 Rc6 27. Rxe7+ Kxe7 28. Rxe5+ Kd7 29. Rf5 Rf6 30. Rg5 g6 31. Rd5+ Kc6 32. Kc2 Kxb6 33. e5 Rc6+ 34. Kd3 Kc7**

Now 34. ... Rc1! was clearer, when White has nothing after 35. Ke4 Rc4+ 36. Kd3 Rc1.

**35. b3**

The final try was 35. Rd4!, and it would require Black to find 35. ... a5!! (not 35. ... Rc1? 36. Ke4 Rc2 37. b4 Rxf2 38. h4 Rh2 39. e6 Re2+ 40. Kd5 and the e-pawn runs) to survive — good luck with that in time trouble! Play might continue 36. Rxf4 Rb6 37. Rf7+ Kd8 38. Rxh7 Rxb2 39. f4 a4 40. Rh8+ Kc7 41. Ra8 b5 and Black manages to hold.

**35. ... Rb6 36. Kc4 Rc6+ 37. Kd4 Rb6 38. Kc4 Rc6+ 39. Kd3 Rb6, draw.**

Space does not permit me to comment on games from other grade sections, but there was plenty of exciting chess everywhere you looked. Check out the April issue of *Chess Life Kids* for a few more annotated games from some of our younger champions.

History was made at National Harbor — how often can you say that?! — and it was a true pleasure to be part of a record-breaking tournament! ♠

## 2022 K-12 GRADE CHAMPIONSHIPS AT A GLANCE

DECEMBER 9-11, 2022 | NATIONAL HARBOR, MD

**INDIVIDUAL WINNERS:**

**GRADE 12:** Raghav Venkat (FL), 6½/7. **GRADE 11:** FM Sandeep Sethuraman (AZ), 6½. **GRADE 10:** IM Eddy Tian (NJ), FM Nico Chasin (NY), 6½. **GRADE 9:** IM Evan Park (PA), Rohan Padhye (OH), Michael Xukun Guan (FL), 6. **GRADE 8:** Brewington Hardaway (NY), 6½. **GRADE 7:** Eric Liu (TX), 6½. **GRADE 6:** Andrew Jiang (GA), 6½. **GRADE 5:** Roshan Sethuraman (AZ), 6½. **GRADE 4:** Kyle Qiyu Dong (NY), 6½. **GRADE 3:** Ted Wang (WA), Shawn Xu (MA), 6½. **GRADE 2:** Alice Shen (NY), 7. **GRADE 1:** Sriansh Katta (NC), 7. **KINDERGARTEN:** Mihai Holcomb (FL), Alex Sedlock (NC), Darren Wu (NY), Daniel Zhu (CAN), Jack Zhang (NC), 6. **K-12 BLITZ:** Brayan Angel Amaya (FL), 11. **K-6 BLITZ:** Kyle Zhuang (VA), Linxi Zhu (NY), 11. **BUGHOUSE:** FM Nico Chasin and FM Gus Huston (NY), 9.

**TEAM WINNERS:**

**GRADE 12:** Columbia Grammar & Prep (NY), Thomas Jefferson HS (VA), 15½. **GRADE 11:** Dalton (NY), 16½. **GRADE 10:** Thomas Jefferson HS (VA), Columbia Grammar & Prep (NY), 16. **GRADE 9:** American Heritage School (FL), Stuyvesant HS (NY), 15½. **GRADE 8:** Success Academy Hudson Yards (NY), 15½. **GRADE 7:** Hunter College Campus School (NY), 14. **GRADE 6:** Millburn Middle School (NJ), 16½. **GRADE 5:** Hunter College Campus School (NY), P.S. 10 (NY), 14. **GRADE 4:** Speyer Legacy School (NY), 15. **GRADE 3:** Speyer Legacy School (NY), 17. **GRADE 2:** Oak Hall (FL), 17. **GRADE 1:** Speyer Legacy School (NY), 16. **KINDERGARTEN:** Oak Hall (FL), 14½. **K-12 BLITZ:** Dalton (NY), 30½. **K-6 BLITZ:** Success Academy Midtown West (NY), 23½.

See our online coverage for all the winners' photos: [new.uschess.org/news/2022-k-12-grade-championships-results](https://new.uschess.org/news/2022-k-12-grade-championships-results)