

MY BEST MOVE

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I learned to play chess more than sixty years ago. For a few years I made marginal improvements, but when you swim most of your life in a sea of mediocrity, it can be hard to hold on to even the slightest gains. Regression is so easy.

For decades, with family and career obligations dominating my life, chess was pushed to the back burner. It then slid off it completely, disappearing out of focus.

Only after my retirement has chess taken center stage for me. I write and edit chess articles with respectable credibility, and my blog has won several national awards. But as for the game itself, I'm only a two-bit player.

In my 70s, I need to garner all my courage to face players younger than my grandchildren. An opponent of the caliber of GM Hikaru Nakamura would send shivers down my spine if I faced him over the board.

Is an online game any different?

One of my favorite chance encounters took place in 2021, when Nakamura sought to set a record for most bullet speedrun wins on *Chess.com*. Widely recognized for his phenomenal blitz skills, he is absolutely lethal with a mouse in his hand, and I felt so poorly prepared. It's no accident that his old online handle was Smallville — Hikaru is clearly from a different planet than the rest of us when it comes to fast chess.

His opponents were selected at random from players who had registered on the corporate sponsor's website; somehow, my name was chosen. If you played against Nakamura, what opening would you choose? Brazenly, I trotted out the "Bongcloud" opening that Nakamura has made so famous.

Although my best moves now are made only in online puzzles, I'll always be able to say that I once swiped the queen of a grandmaster.

THE BONGCLOUD (C25)

GM Hikaru Nakamura

Ray Linville

Chess.com Bullet Speedrun, 06.01.2021



"I'll always be able to say that I once swiped the queen of a grandmaster."

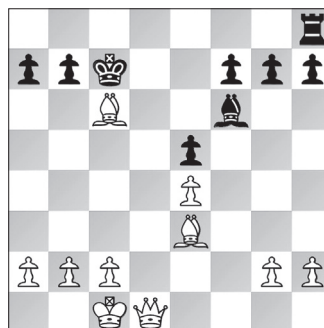
1. e4 e5 2. Nc3 Ke7

The Bongcloud, chosen by me not Nakamura!

3. f4 d6 4. Nf3 c6 5. fxe5 Bg4 6. d4 dxe5 7. d5 Bxf3 8. Qxf3 cxd5 9. Nxd5+ Ke8 10. Be3 Be7 11. O-O-O

I completely missed this move; otherwise, I would have moved my queen to avoid the discovered attack.

11. ... Nf6 12. Nxf6+ Bxf6 13. Rxd8+ Kxd8 14. Bc4 Nc6 15. Rd1+ Kc7 16. Bd5 Rad8 17. Bxc6 Rxd1+ 18. Qxd1



18. ... Rd8

MY BEST MOVE. Nakamura probably thought

that I would take his c6-bishop, but instead I moved the rook to attack his queen.

19. Qd3

An unfortunate premove, after which Hikaru admitted, "Whoops! I blundered."

19. ... Rxd3

Grabbing his queen with no hesitation!

20. cxd3 bxc6

Taking the pawn instead with the king would keep my pawn structure intact.

21. Bxa7 Be7 22. Be3 f6 23. Kc2 h6 24. g4 Bd6 25. h3 c5 26. Kb3 Kc6 27. Kc4 Bc7 28. b3 Bb6 29. a4 g5 30. b4 Ba7

Another mistake when 30. ... cxb4 is better.

31. b5+ Kc7 32. a5 Bb8 33. b6+ Kc6 34. Bxc5 Bd6 35. Bxd6 Kxd6 36. a6 Kc6 37. a7 Kb7 38. Kd5, Black lost on time.

In the end, Nakamura did set a record for victories, collecting 52 wins in 60 minutes. In none of the one-minute games was he ever in any trouble.

Well, except for one. ♠

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