

U.S. Chess Titans, Caruana and Nakamura, Victorious in European Supertournaments

Two Conquerors

Fabiano Caruana claimed victory at the Superbet Classic in Romania, while at Norway Chess, it was Hikaru Nakamura who emerged as the champion, turning the tables on Caruana in a decisive final round.

By GM John Burke



▲ Fabiano Caruana Photo by Lennart Ootes

▲ Hikaru Nakamura Photo by Lennart Ootes

As

most of the elite events are nowadays shifting to quicker rates of play, it is quite a treat for American superstars to have won two out of three classical tournaments so far in 2023. With Tata Steel Masters now being a distant past in terms of classical events, the Superbet Classic in Romania in the first half of May was marked by Caruana's triumph. Fabi was close to repeating the same success at Norway Chess in early June – but fell only one game short of it, as Nakamura managed to steal the show there by defeating him in the very last round.

The two most recent elite classical tournaments – the Superbet Classic in Romania (May 6-14) and Norway Chess (May 29-June 9) were a joy to watch for American fans, as the former was won by Fabiano Caruana, and the latter by Hikaru Nakamura.



John Burke was the 2020 US Junior Champion. The young grandmaster from New Jersey had already stunned the chess world in 2015 by breaking the record as youngest player ever to surpass 2600+ ELO. John's most notable victories include the 2018 U.S. Masters, the 2018 New York International Championship, and the 2019 Washington International Open. In 2021 he shared first at the Cherry Blossom Classic in Dulles, VA, and also in the World Open in Philadelphia, PA.

Romania

The Superbet Classic held in Bucharest, capital of Romania, featured quite a strong field, including the newly crowned World Champion Ding Liren, the World Championship runner-up Ian Nepomniachtchi, and the young talent Alireza Firouzja.

Nevertheless, Caruana prevailed over all of them, winning the event without losing a single game. Not only that – he was never in any serious danger of losing.

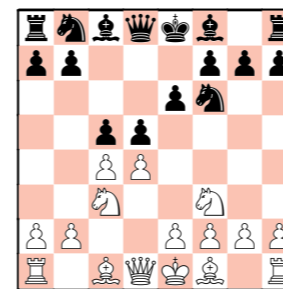
He won a complicated game against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in round 3, but the one that really attracted my attention was his positional victory in the very next round against Nepo.

D32

Fabiano Caruana	2764
Ian Nepomniachtchi	2795

Superbet Classic, Bucharest 2023

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 c5

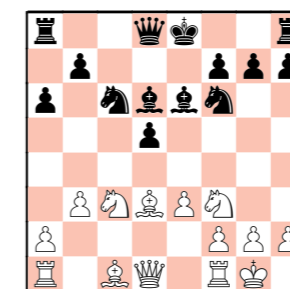


5.e3 As I mentioned in my previous article about the Ding – Nepo match (ACM #33, pp. 8-25), the line 5.cxd5 cxd4 6.♗xd4

exd5 is very popular for Black amongst elite players due to its solidity. After 7.e4 dxe4 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♘g5 ♗e6 10.♘xe6+ fxe6, this is a typical endgame that could arise, in which it is very difficult for White to prove an advantage.

5...♗c6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♗b5 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗d7 Black accepts the structural disadvantage of an isolated pawn, but everything else about his position is fine. His bishop will find a nice home on d6 and he has ideas of drumming up threats against White's king. Meanwhile, White's dark-squared bishop is stuck at home on c1. It will probably be deployed to b2 after White plays his pawn to b3.

9.0-0 ♗d6 10.♘f3 ♗e6 11.b3 a6 12.♗d3

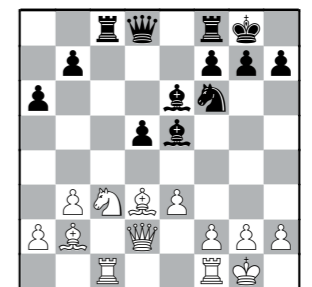


12...♗e5 This knight trade helps Black

in a few ways. First of all, it takes away a potential blockader of the d5 pawn, making it easier to push ...d5-d4 at some point. It also removes a defender of the kingside. Finally, it brings his bishop to e5, which is a fantastic square, pressuring both the h2 pawn and the c3 knight.

13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.♗b2 ♞c8 15.♞c1 0-0 16.f4 White blunts the diagonal and kicks the bishop away from its fantastic square, but the cost is that the e3 pawn is now weak.

Normally, White would prefer to keep his pawn on f2 with 16.♗d2, and prepare the trade of bishops by playing ♗e2, but he is not in time to prevent Black from getting rid of his weakness.



16...d4! 17.exd4 ♗xd4 18.♗a4 ♞f4 19.♗xf4 ♗xf4 and the position is totally equal.

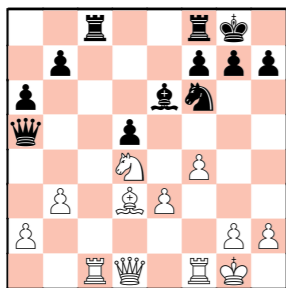
SUPERBET CHESS CLASSIC, Bucharest, Romania, May 6-16, 2023

Rk	Name	FED	Elo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts
1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2764		½	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	5½
2	Wesley SO	USA	2760	½		½	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	5
3	Richard RAPPORT	ROU	2745	½	½		½	½	1	½	½	½	½	5
4	Anish GIRI	NED	2768	½	½	½		½	½	½	1	½	½	5
5	Alireza FIROUZJA	FRA	2785	½	0	½	½		0	½	1	1	1	5
6	Jan-Krzysztof DUDA	POL	2724	½	½	0	½	1		½	½	½	½	4½
7	Maxime VACHIER-LAGRAVE	FRA	2741	0	½	½	½	½	½		½	1	½	4½
8	Liren DING	CHN	2788	½	½	½	0	0	½	½		½	1	4
9	Ian NEPOMNIACHTCHI	RUS	2795	0	½	½	½	0	½	0	½		1	3½
10	Bogdan-Daniel DEAC	ROU	2700	½	½	½	½	0	½	½	0	0		3

NORWAY CHESS, Stavanger, Norway, May 28 - Jun 9, 2023

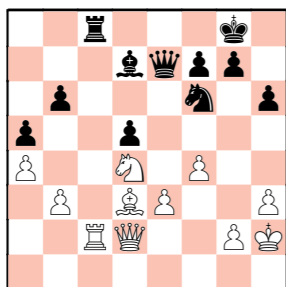
Rk	Name	Fed	Rtg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts
1	Hikaru NAKAMURA	USA	2775		3	3	1½	10	10	1½	1½	10	3	16½
2	Fabiano CARUANA	USA	2764	0		10	1½	1½	3	0	3	3	3	16
3	Dommaraju GUKESH	IND	2732	0	1½		1½	1½	10	1½	3	1½	3	14½
4	Anish GIRI	NED	2768	10	10	10		1½	10	1½	1½	1½	3	13
5	Wesley SO	USA	2760	1½	10	10	10		10	1½	10	3	1½	12½
6	Magnus CARLSEN	NOR	2853	1½	0	1½	1½	1½		1½	1½	10	1½	11½
7	Shakhriyar MAMEDYAROV	AZE	2738	10	3	10	10	10	10		0	1½	1½	11
8	Alireza FIROUZJA	FRA	2785	10	0	0	10	1½	10	3		3	0	10½
9	Nodirbek ABDUSATTOROV	UZB	2731	1½	0	10	10	0	1½	10	0		3	9
10	Aryan TARI	NOR	2642	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	3	0		6

16...♙c7 17.♗e2 ♘b6 18.♙d4 ♙xd4
19.♗xd4 ♖a5



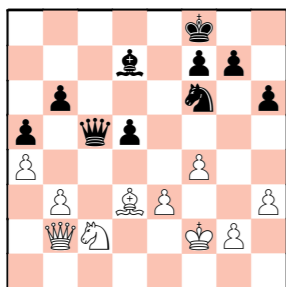
Both sides have weak pawns now, but at least White has managed to trade off the dark-squared bishop. His outpost on d4 cannot be attacked by the opponent's bishop, while Black's potential outpost on e4 is firmly controlled at the moment. We could say this gives White an optical edge, but in reality it's hard for him to make anything of this. The knight on d4 looks nice, but doesn't do much.

20.♖e2 ♜fe8 21.h3 ♙d7 22.♞xc8 ♞xc8
23.♖b2 ♖c5 24.a4 a5 25.♖d2 b6
26.♞b1 ♖a3 27.♗h2 h6 28.♞b2 ♖e7
29.♞c2



Both sides have been shuffling around with little change in the position, and Caruana decides that he wants to fight for control of the c-file.

29...♞c5 30.♗f3 ♞xc2 31.♙xc2 ♖c5
32.♙d3 ♗f8 33.♗d4 ♗g8 34.♗g1 ♗f8
35.♗f2 ♗e7 36.♖b2 ♗f8 37.♗c2



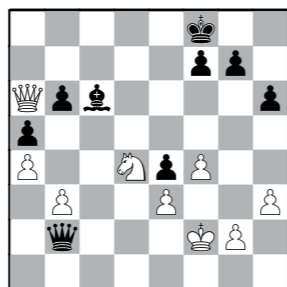
37...♗e4+ This move isn't objectively bad, but it clarifies the structure in a way that makes it easier for White to play. He

now has the imbalance of knight vs. bishop and no longer has to worry about the weak e4 square.

Upon 37...♖d6 I guess Nepo was concerned about some queen infiltration by White, but there's actually nothing to fear. 38.♖d4 ♗e7=

38.♙xe4 dxe4 39.♗d4 ♙c6 40.♖e2
Things can easily get tricky now. As Black, you see ideas of White's queen invading and it's easy to get frightened.

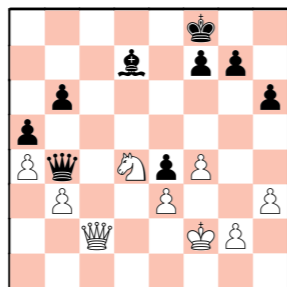
40...♖c3 41.♖a6 ♖d2+ 41...♖b2+!
would basically force a draw, since White can't find shelter for his king.



- A) Not 42.♗e2? ♖xb3 43.♖c8+ ♙e8 when Black is clearly better.
- B) 42.♖e2 ♖xe2+ 43.♗xe2 ♙d7 is equal.
- C) Critical is 42.♗g3 ♖d2! 43.♗xc6 ♖xe3+ 44.♗g4 g6! This is easy to miss from afar. Black's king will have a perfect shelter on g7, and White's king is very exposed. Black should have at least a draw here.

42.♗e2 ♖b4 43.♖c8+ ♙e8 44.♖c2
Now there are concrete problems. White has a simple plan of playing ♗d4 followed by ♖xe4.

44...♙d7 45.♗d4



45...f5? 45...♖e7 runs into 46.♖c7 winning. However, 45...♗g8! is an insane computer defense that gives Black the best drawing chances. He just gives up the pawn, but he gets his king out of Dodge and improves his bishop. 46.♖xe4 ♙e6 47.♖c2 ♙d5 48.♖c8+



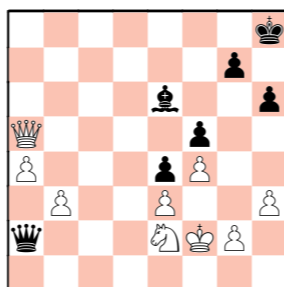
▲ Ian Nepomniachtchi Photo by Lennart Ootes

♖f8 The endgame without queens is fine for Black, because his bishop is so well-placed, targeting b3. (48...♗h7?? 49.♖f5+)

46.♖c7 Now Black's position is riddled with holes. It's well known that a queen and knight coordinate well together, because a knight is the only piece that can move in a way that a queen cannot.

46...♖d2+ 47.♗e2 ♙e6 48.♖xb6 ♗f7
49.♖d4 ♖a2 50.♖a7+ ♗g8 51.♖a8+ ♗h7 52.♖xa5 ♗h8 Some slight challenges remain, since Black's queen is active and White's knight is currently pinned.

53.♖d8+ ♗h7 54.♖a5 ♗h8



55.b4! Allowing ...♙c4 is a brave, but well-calculated decision.

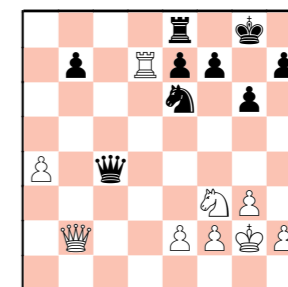
55...♙c4 56.♖d8+ ♗h7 57.♖d1 ♙b3
58.♖d7 ♙e6 59.♖b5 A nice queen maneuver – now ...♙c4 isn't possible at all, because ♖xf5 comes with check.

59...♗h8 59...♙c4 60.♖xf5+ ♗h8
61.♖g4+-.



Photo by Lennart Ootes

♖d5 25.♖c3 ♙a8 26.♖d3 ♖c5 27.♖d7 ♙e8 28.a4
♗c4 29.♗xc4 ♖xc4

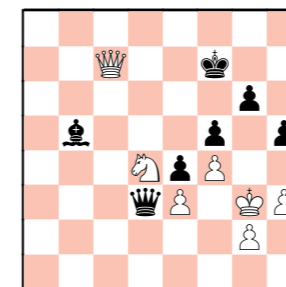


Caruana has been nurturing a slight advantage throughout the whole game, and can now choose between two favorable endgames.

30.♖b5 This gets the queens off the board and maintains White's dominant rook placement.

30.♖xb7 ♖xa4 (30...♗c5 fork doesn't work because of the counter-pin. 31.♞c7) 31.♞xe7 ♞xe7 32.♖xe7 White is a clear pawn up, but all the pawns are on the same side of the board, which helps the defender's drawing chances.

30...♖xb5 31.axb5 ♗c5 31...♞b8!
Surprisingly enough, it was better to just ditch the pawn immediately and aim to expel White's rook as quickly as possible.



69...♗f8 69...♗g8 70.♖d8+ ♗f7 71.♖d5+
♗g7 72.♖e5+ ♗f7 73.♖e6+ ♗g7 74.♖e7+
♗h6 75.♗e6 ♖xe3+ 76.♗h2+-.

70.♖c5+ **Black resigned**, as he loses the bishop, and furthermore ♗xb5 will leave White's e3 pawn defended, ending all counterplay.

As good as Fabi's performance was, it could have been even better, had he not missed a great opportunity to beat Firouzja in round 6.

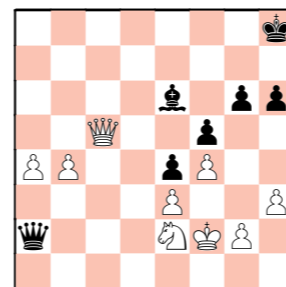
A11

Fabiano Caruana	2764
Alireza Firouzja	2785

Superbet Classic, Bucharest 2023

1.c4 c6 2.♗f3 d5 3.g3 g6 4.♖a4 dxc4 5.♖xc4
♙g7 6.d4 ♙e6 7.♖a4 ♙d5 8.♗bd2 ♗f6 9.♖c2
♖a5 10.♙g2 c5 11.0-0 cxd4 12.b4 ♖d8 13.♙b2
0-0 14.♙xd4 ♗c6 15.♙c3 ♞c8 16.♖b2 a5 17.bxa5
♗xa5 18.♞ac1 ♗h5 19.♙xg7 ♗xg7 20.♞xc8 ♖xc8
21.♞c1 ♖d8 22.♗e5 ♙xg2 23.♗xg2 ♗e6 24.♗df3

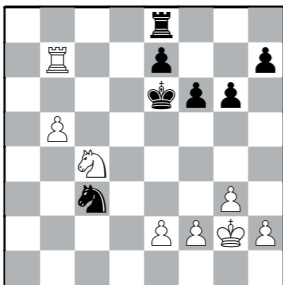
60.♖c5 g6



61.♗e1 Finally the pin is broken and the rest is easy.

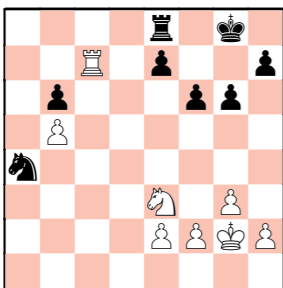
61...♗g8 62.♖d6 ♗f7 63.♖d2 ♖xa4
64.♗d4 ♙c4 65.♗f2 h5 66.♗g3 ♖a3
67.b5 ♖d3 68.♖c1 ♙xb5 69.♖c7+

showed, in which he gave up a pawn. Still, it was the best choice. 35.♖b7 (35.♜xb6 ♜d6) 35...♜c3 36.♖xb6 ♜f7 37.♖b7 ♜e6



It's not easy for White to make progress. For example, 38.b6 looks like the most natural move ever, but there's a trap. 38...♜b5! Now White's rook is stuck!

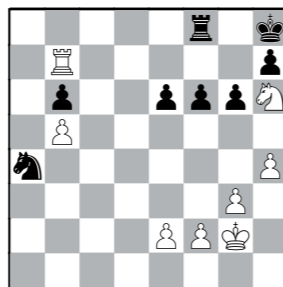
35.♜e3



35...e6? Finally, this should be the decisive mistake. Firouzja wanted to stop the knight from coming to d5, but the cure is worse than the disease. Now the seventh rank is completely open and White's rook dominates.

36.♖b7 ♖c8 37.♜g4 ♖f8 38.♜h6+ ♜h8 39.♜f7+ After 39.h4!+- White's rook and knight are ideally placed and Black is

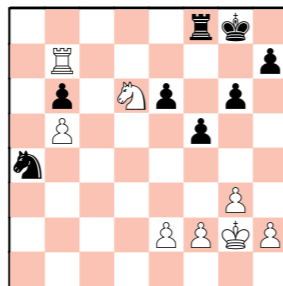
totally paralyzed.



Therefore, a slow expansion would be the best approach. White will play g4-g5, cementing his knight and closing a potential mating net around Black's king.

39...♜g8 40.♜d6?! Again, returning with ♜h6+ and maintaining the bind was the best approach.

40...f5 Black has gained some chances again, since his king has some room to breathe now.



41.♜c4? Presumably, this had been Caruana's plan all along, and it explains why he transferred his knight away from h6. He thought he was simply winning the b6 pawn, and the game with it, but he missed his opponent's defense.

41...♖f7 Oops. Tragically for White, this forces a draw on the spot, as not only does it save the b6 pawn, but it also forces a trade of rooks or a repetition.

42.♖b8+ ♖f8 43.♖b7 ♖f7 44.♖b8+ ♖f8 45.♖b7 Draw

A huge missed opportunity.

Norway

Norway Chess, held in Stavanger, is always one of the most exciting tournaments on the annual calendar, as it features some format changes that are unique to the top level. One such change is that the time control is two hours for all moves, with a 10-second increment only after move 40. This means that once you get low on time, you are practically playing a blitz game, as the difference between a 10-second increment and the usual 30-second increment is quite significant. The other change is that in the event of a draw in the classical game, the players play an Armageddon game with the same colors, with the winner earning 1½ points and the loser 1 point. If the game ends decisively in classical, the winner earns 3 points and the loser earns 0. This format increases the motivation to win in classical and thus encourages fighting chess.

This field was even more stacked than in Romania, as it featured the world's highest rated player, Magnus Carlsen, and some fearsome young talents – Dommaraju Gukesh from India, Nodirbek Abdusattorov from Kazakhstan, and the Iranian-French Alireza Firouzja again. But still, the Americans showed their stuff, and the tournament came down to a race between Caruana and Nakamura.

In the first eight classical games, Caruana won four and lost only one. He started off with a bang by beating Carlsen in round 1 – his first victory in classical over the Norwegian in eight years!

C11

Fabiano Caruana	2764
Magnus Carlsen	2853

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2023

1.e4 e6 The French Defense is a rare guest at the elite level, but it's certainly not a bad opening to use from time to time. Magnus has shown a willingness to trot it out occasionally.

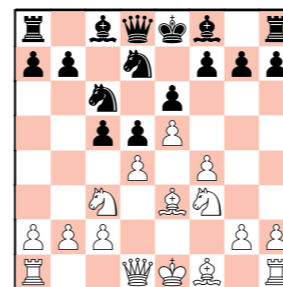


▲ Fabiano Caruana vs. Magnus Carlsen

Photo by Lennart Ootes

2.d4 d5 3.♜c3 ♜f6 3...♖b4 leads to the Winawer Variation, in which Black gives up his dark-squared bishop to damage White's pawn structure, and is generally considered risky for Black.

4.e5 ♜fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♜f3 ♜c6 7.♖e3 This can be considered the main line of the French, and tens of thousands of games have been played from here. Black has numerous approaches.



7...a6 This is a very logical and flexible approach, aiming to expand with ...b7-b5 before making further commitments.

7...cxd4 8.♜xd4 ♖b6 is a very direct variation, in which Black takes a "poisoned" b2 pawn while delaying his development. 7...♖e7 used to be more popular, just aiming to castle kingside immediately, but it's not as common nowadays.

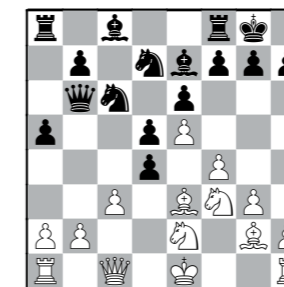
8.♜e2 Moving the knight out of the way of the incoming ...b5-b4, and preparing to solidify White's pawn chain with c2-c3.

8...♖b6 Attacking the b2 pawn and attempting to disrupt White's coordination.

8...b5 loses its bite with the knight no longer on c3. And after 9.c3 White has every reason to be happy here, since his pawn chain is quite compact and it will be hard for Black to break it down, leaving White with a nice long-term space advantage.

9.♖c1 ♖e7 10.c3 0-0 11.g3 White plans to develop his bishop to g2 or h3 and castle, and if he does so unhindered, he will have a clear advantage based on his extra space. However, he is still two full moves from doing that, so Black can and should try to fight against the pawn mass while he has the chance.

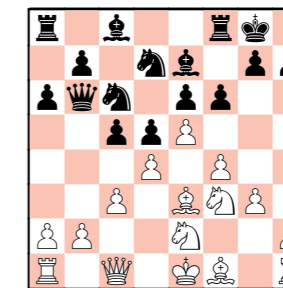
11...f6 11...a5 was played by Nepo, among others, and serves multiple purposes. One such purpose is that it gains space on the queenside, preventing b2-b4 by White in many instances. 12.♖g2 cxd4



A) 13.cxd4 ♖a6 is another purpose of the ...a7-a5 idea – Black now has this move available, targeting the e2 knight and making it hard for White to castle.

B) Upon 13.♜xd4 ♜c5 14.0-0 you'll notice that the a5 pawn does a very nice

job of preventing White from playing b4, which would dislodge the c5 knight.

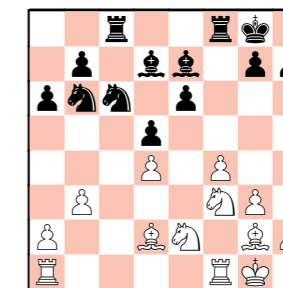


12.♖g2 12.♖h3 was White's other option, attacking the e6 pawn. The position may look closed for now, but it can easily explode at any moment, as shown in this correspondence game. 12...cxd4 13.♜xd4 ♜xe5! A speculative piece sacrifice. 14.fxe5 fxe5 15.♜b3 d4 16.♖g5 ♖xf3 17.♖xe7 ♖f7 18.♖a3 ♖c6 19.♖f1 ♖e4+ 20.♜d1 ♜f6 D.Stewart - P.Berthelot 2091, ICCF email 2020. White was able to keep his king safe and eventually won.

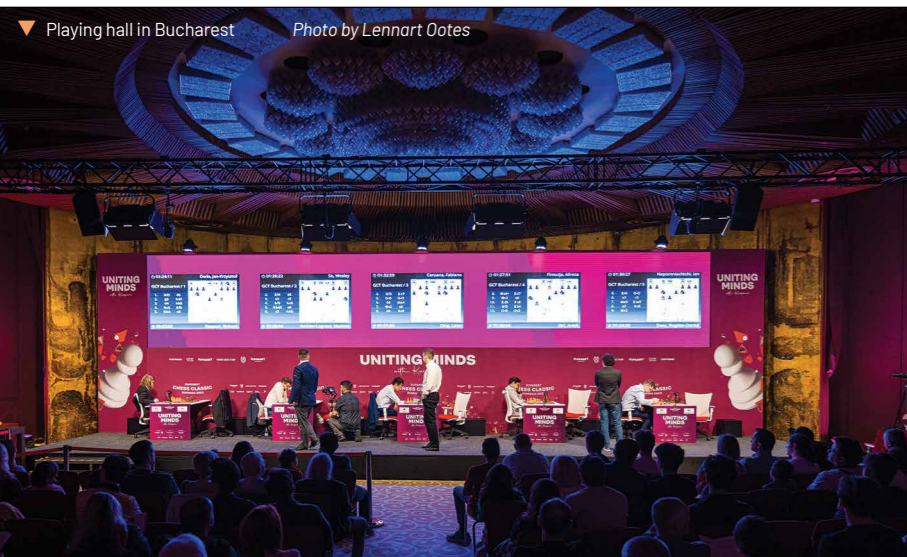
12...cxd4 13.cxd4 It's tempting to attack the e6 pawn with 13.♜xd4?, but White should be careful about letting the center explode with his king still in it. 13...fxe5 14.♜xe6 ♜c5! 15.♜xf8 ♜d3+ 16.♜f1 d4+ Black is breaking open the position, and the sacrificed rook on f8 is of little consequence.

13...♖a5+ 14.♜c3 ♜b6 15.exf6 ♖xf6 16.b3 ♖d7 17.0-0 White has managed to castle safely and retains a small edge. It's not a huge edge, since the hole on e5 is well-protected and the backward pawn on e6 is not a big deal at the moment, but it's still a long-term plus. Black's knight on b6 also seems a bit silly, since the b3 pawn controls its entry square on c4.

17...♖ac8 18.♖d2 ♖e7 19.♜e2 ♖xd2 20.♖xd2



20...♖c7 20...♖a3 strikes me as the move worthy of consideration. Such bishops can often be really annoying, preventing occupation of the c-file. 21.♖c1 ♖d6



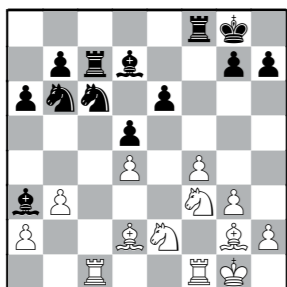
▼ Playing hall in Bucharest Photo by Lennart Ootes

Obviously Black does not want to trade off his good bishop. 22.♖b2? is an attempt to get the rook to c1 after all, but now the bishop is just staring at its own pawn on d4. After 22...♖b4!, Black has ideas in ...♙c2 and ...♗d3, and he is doing well.

21.♙ac1 Creating a sneaky threat of ♖a5.

21...♙fc8 This is the most natural way to deal with the threat, but it's slightly inaccurate.

21...♖a3



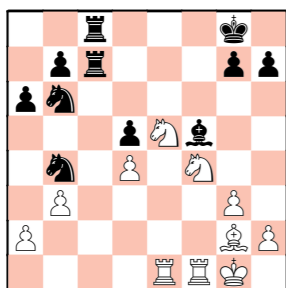
A) 22.♙c2 ♙fc8 23.f5? no longer works, since White's rook is loose on c2. Hence 23...♗xd4!.

B) 22.♖a5 ♖xc1 23.♙xc1 ♗xa5 24.♙xc7 ♙c8 25.♙xc8+ ♖xc8 doesn't look fun for Black with his weak e6 pawn and bad bishop, but with rooks off the board he should probably be able to grovel and hold the draw in the long run.

22.f5 White's dark-squared bishop can actually come in from a different direction. The threat is ♖f4. Now things get really dangerous for Black.

22...♖a3! After 22...♗b4 23.♙xc7 ♙xc7 Black has control of the c-file and things may look fine, but White's pieces now come flooding in. 24.fxe6 ♖xe6 25.♗f4 White will start to gang up on the d5 pawn. 25...♖f5 (25...♖f7 26.♗e5) 26.♗h4.

23.♙c1 ♖b4 24.♖xb4 ♗xb4 25.fxe6 ♖xe6 26.♗f4 ♖f5 27.♗e5



▲ Magnus Carlsen Photo by Lennart Ootes

CARLSEN'S STRUGGLE

Finally, a result which surprised everyone was that of Magnus Carlsen. After losing to Caruana in the first round of the Norway Chess, he drew the rest of his classical games. To be fair, he did go 7/8 in the Armageddons, but still, this was an uncharacteristically poor performance. To put it in perspective, it was the first time he had gone without a victory in a classical tournament in 16 years, when he would have been a teenager. It was also only his third minus score in a classical tournament in the last 13 years. Interestingly, those other minus scores both took place at Norway Chess – in 2015 and 2017. For some reason he seems to struggle on his home turf.

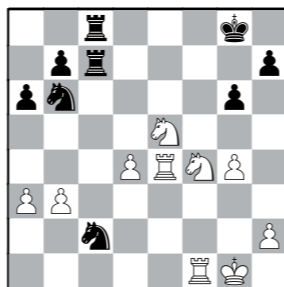
I get the impression that Magnus' motivation in classical chess is waning. With 2900 so far away and the World Championship title having been surrendered, I'm not sure he's willing to put in the intense opening preparation that is needed at that level. He's already spoken numerous times of the frustration of preparing for classical chess, where the engines reign supreme and it's so hard to get an advantage from the opening. There's not much more left for him to accomplish that he hasn't already done, so I think he just wants to enjoy the game. If he finds the motivation for classical chess again and puts in the effort, I think he is still the best player in the world by far, despite this recent poor showing. In contrast to classical, he still seems to have a love for speed chess, in which he is still completely dominant.

In fact, about a month after this tournament, he dominated the Croatia Rapid and Blitz event, including scoring an unprecedented 9/9 on one of the days in blitz against the best players in the world. So overall, I would say that there's no reason to overreact to him having one bad tournament, especially since he has a history of performing badly at this particular event. I'm sure he'll rebound, like he always does.

Black's control of the c-file looks nice, but it doesn't really bring him much, as the game has shifted toward the center. The d5 pawn is what's important, and all of White's pieces are perfectly coordinated. For starters, ♗xd5 is a threat, uncovering an attack on the f5 bishop.

27...g6 28.g4 If 28.a3 then 28...♗c2. Then White's rook is attacked so he doesn't have time to take the d5 pawn, and Black barely hangs on.

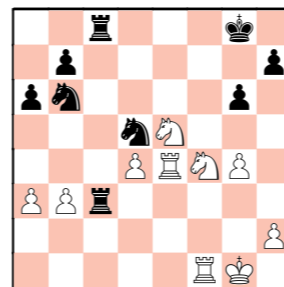
28...♖e4 29.♖xe4 dxe4 30.a3 ♗4d5 30...♗c2! looks like a jab at nothing, but it would have given Black great chances to save the game. 31.♙xe4



31...♙e7! Here's the whole point – as it is actually not easy to prevent ...♗xd4. Then could follow 32.♙c1 ♗xa3 (Not 32...♗xd4?? 33.♙xc8+ ♗xc8 34.♙xd4 ♙xe5 35.♙d8+--) 33.♙xc8+ ♗xc8 34.♗d5 ♙e6=.

31.♙xe4 ♙c3? I assume Magnus missed the next move, after which everything collapses.

31...♗xf4 32.♙exf4 ♗d5 33.♙4f3 ♙c3 is still far from easy for White. He's a pawn up, but Black is so active, and his passed pawn is firmly blockaded.



32.♗d7! A really, really nice move, totally breaking Black's coordination. This is the type of move which is easy to overlook, as you often don't consider moves which place pieces on squares that are defended.

32...♙xb3? A further mistake, ending the game instantly.

32...♗xf4 33.♗f6+ ♖g7 34.♙exf4 Now Black's blockade has been broken and White has activity with his rooks, so it's a completely different story than before. If 34...♙xb3? then 35.♙e4 and the rook will invade on e7.

Trading rooks by 32...♙c1 may have been the best chance, but it still looks hopeless. After 33.♗xb6 ♗xb6 34.♙xc1 ♙xc1+ 35.♖f2 White is a clean pawn up and should win.

33.♗xd5 ♗xd5 34.♙e5 The knight can't stay on d5, meaning the f6 square will be available to White's knight and the e7 square will be available for his rook. In other words, the floodgates will open and Black's king will be hunted down.

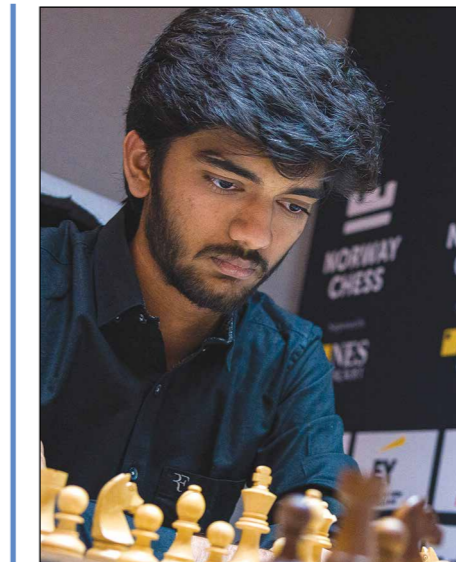
34...♗c3 34...♙b5 35.♙xd5 ♙xd5 36.♗f6+-- Or 34...♗e3 35.♗f6+ ♖f7 (35...♖h8 36.♙e7) 36.♙xe3 ♙xe3 37.♗d5+--.

35.♗f6+ Black just resigned rather than drag out the agony. White has multiple good paths now.

35.♗f6+ ♖f7 36.♗d5+ ♖g7 37.♙e7+ ♖g8 (37...♖h6 38.♗f6+--) 38.♗f6+ ♖f8 39.♙fe1+-- This seems like the most human line to me. ♗xh7+ is coming and White remains completely dominant.

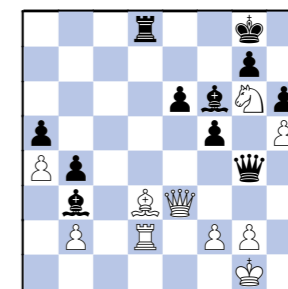


▲ Hikaru Nakamura Photo by Lennart Ootes



▲ Dommaraju Gukesh Photo by Lennart Ootes

18.♙ac1 ♙b8 19.♖b1 ♖d5 20.♗e5 ♙b7 21.♖d3 ♙a8 22.♖f4 f5 23.♗f3 ♖d8 24.♙e1 ♗b3 25.♙c2 ♖b6 26.♙e5 ♙ac8 27.♙xc8 ♙xc8 28.♙e2 ♙a8 29.♙e3 ♙c6 30.♖e5 ♙d7 31.♗g5 ♗a5 32.h4 ♗c6 33.♙c1 ♗xe5 34.♙xe5 h6 35.♗h3 ♙c8 36.♙e1 a5 37.♖b5 ♙c7 38.♙e3 ♙d6 39.♖d3 ♖a2 40.♗f4 ♖xd4 41.♙d2 ♖e5 42.♗g6 ♖f6 43.♙e2 ♙d4 44.♙d1 ♖b3 45.♙d2 ♙d8 46.h5 ♙g4 47.♙e3



Nakamura took a much different path in Stavanger – in the first eight classical games he “only” won two, but he didn't lose any. His game against Gukesh was smooth except for one moment, but that moment could have been fateful.

D40

Dommaraju Gukesh	2732
Hikaru Nakamura	2775

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2023

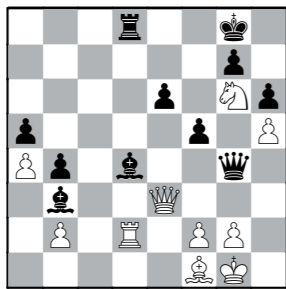
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 c5 4.e3 ♗f6 5.♗f3 ♗c6 6.a3 dxc4 7.♙xc4 a6 8.0-0 b5 9.♖d3 ♖b7 10.♙e1 ♙c7 11.♙e2 ♙d8 12.♙d1 cxd4 13.exd4 ♖e7 14.a4 b4 15.♗e4 ♗xe4 16.♙xe4 0-0 17.♖e3 ♗a5

Nakamura has played an exemplary game so far, but both players are very low on the clock, and the unique time control means they'll have to practically play blitz for the rest of the game, which means anything is still possible.

47...♖d4?? This was pretty much the only way to blunder, walking straight into a pin after White moves his bishop, revealing the d2 rook.

48.♖e2?? The most natural move, and the right idea, but it actually misses the boat! The reason is very subtle.

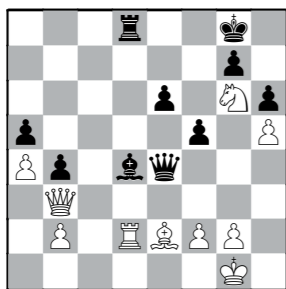
48.♖f1!! is very difficult to play, since 48.♖e2 attacks the queen, while this move does not.



The point is that Black is simply frozen in this pin and has no good way to rectify it. He also has to deal with the threat of ♖xb3. Here are some example variations:
A) 48...♗xe3 49.♞xd8+ ♔f7 50.♞f8 mate.
B) 48...♗a2 49.b3+-.
C) 48...♞xh5 49.♔f4!+-.
D) 48...♗xa4 49.♞xe6+ ♔h7 50.♔e7+-.
 White doesn't have an instant knockout, but Black's king is very unsafe, and ♔d3 is coming. He also still has to deal with the d-file pin and lacks coordination, meaning he should lose in the long run.

48...♞e4! This is the move that saves Black, and in fact wins the game.

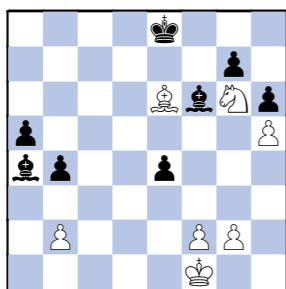
49.♞xe4 If 49.♞xb3



49...♗xf2+ Now we see the difference – if the bishop was on f1 instead of e2, this tactic would never work. 50.♔xf2 ♞xd2+-.

49...fxe4 50.♔f1 Or 50.♔e7+ ♔f7 51.♔c6 ♗xf2+ winning.

50...♗f6 51.♞xd8+ ♗xd8 52.♔e5 ♗xa4 53.♗c4 ♔f8 54.♗xe6 ♗f6 55.♔g6+ ♔e8



Nakamura is now a pawn up with the bishop pair and a dominating position, and he went on to win easily.

56.b3 ♗b5+ 57.♔e1 ♗c3+ 58.♔d1 ♗d4 59.♗d5 ♗xf2 60.♗xe4 ♗d4 61.♗d5 ♔d7 62.♔h4 ♔d6 63.♗g8 ♗d7 64.♗f7 ♗f6 65.♔f3 ♗c6 66.♗g6 ♗d5 67.♔c2 ♗c3 68.♗f5 ♔e7 69.♗g6 ♔f6 70.♗d3 ♗f7 71.g4 ♗e6

White resigned

Naka's game against Tari was a great example of how a strong player can outplay their opponent seemingly out of nothing.

C27

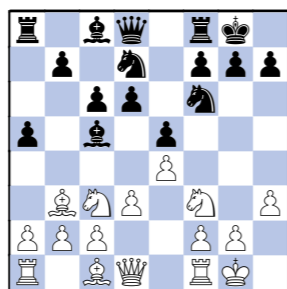
Hikaru Nakamura	2775
Aryan Tari	2642

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 Nakamura is known to employ The Bishop's Opening a lot in online games, and here he decides to trot it out in classical too. It avoids a lot of solid, theoretical openings, such as the Petroff and the Berlin.

2...♔f6 3.d3 ♗c5 4.♔c3 4.♔f3 would have transposed back into the Italian, while this move takes the game into independent territory.

4...c6 5.♗b3 d6 6.h3 0-0 7.♔f3 a5 8.0-0 ♔bd7



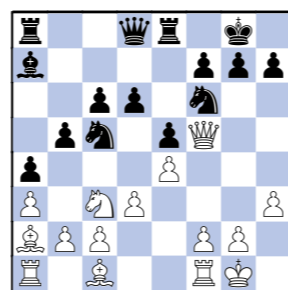
In contrast to normal Italian positions, in which White has a pawn on c3 and can try to push for d4 at some point, his plans are different here. He can try to relocate the knight to g3 via e2 at some point. There are also ideas of ♔h4-f5. Finally, ♔h1 followed by ♔h2, trying to push f4, is always something to look out for.

9.a3 b5 10.♗a2 a4 11.♔h4 ♗a7 I like this move a lot, preparing ...♔c5, freeing up the c8 bishop to take the white knight if it lands on f5, as well as preparing to redirect the black knight to e6.



▲ Aryan Tari Photo by Lennart Ootes

12.♞f3 ♔c5 13.♔f5 ♗xf5 14.♞xf5 ♞e8

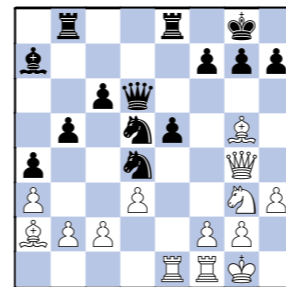


All things considered, Black should be satisfied with the outcome of the opening. He's gained some nice queenside space and has no weaknesses. The only fear is that White's bishop on a2 could become an unopposed monster if the position opens up in the future, especially if White pushes f2-f4 under favorable conditions.

15.♗d2 ♔e6 16.♔e2 d5! Very nice, gaining space and blunting the a2 bishop.

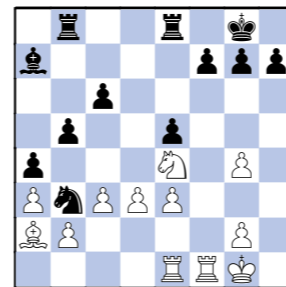
17.exd5 ♔xd5 17...cxd5! was somewhat stronger. It's always difficult to judge such recaptures, since it's hard to say whether the center pawns will prove to be strong or vulnerable. In this particular position, White can't really target them largely due to his clumsy knight on e2. Right now it's only getting in the way, and it only serves the purpose of preventing Black from playing ...♔d4. In the meantime Black will consolidate his position with ...♞c8 and ...♗b8 and maintain a slight edge.

18.♞ae1 ♔d6 19.♞g4 ♞ad8 20.♔g3 ♔d4 21.♗g5 ♞b8 21...f6 looks a bit scary, opening the diagonal, but it works concretely. **22.♔e4 ♔d7 23.♗xf6 ♞xg4 24.hxg4 gxf6 25.♔xf6+ ♔f7 26.♔xe8 ♞xe8 27.c3 ♔b3 28.♗xb3 axb3 29.g3.** These types of unbalanced endgames are tough to judge. Here White has two pawns and a rook for two minor pieces. Black's pawns are somewhat weak but they're not easy to pick off, and White will struggle to create a passed pawn, so it's approximately equal.



22...♗e3! Now White is getting somewhere. The pin is really annoying, and if ...♔xe3 ever happens Black will have to worry about the f7 pawn.

22...♞g6 23.c3 ♔xe3 24.fxe3 ♔b3 25.♔e4 ♞xg4 26.hxg4

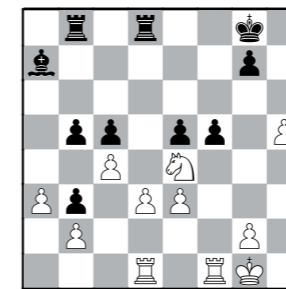


26...c5?? As surprising as it may seem, this move basically loses the game straight away by allowing White to favorably clarify the pawn structure.

26...♞bd8! 27.d4 In contrast to the game continuation, White can no longer fix the pawn structure, and Black's bishop is not blocked. The position is still equal.

27.♗xb3 axb3 28.c4 Now Black's bishop is stuck behind its own pawns, while White's knight on e4 is unassailable. Such positions, in addition to being objectively good for White, are also easy to play for the first player, as there is little to no counterplay to be concerned about.

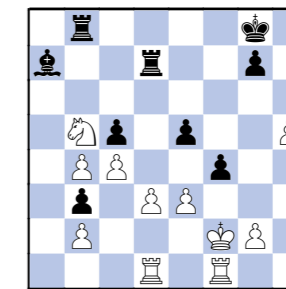
28...♞ed8 29.♞d1 ♞d7 Maybe 29...h5 was the last try, attempting to undermine the e4 knight's position. **30.gxh5 f5**



This is the trick – if ♞xf5, then bxc4 is possible. **31.♔c3 b4 32.♔d5 bxa3 33.bxa3** It still looks hopeless though.

30.♔f2 h5 Tari does it now, but he's just down a tempo, and White's king comes to e2 quickly, defending the only target – the d3 pawn.

31.gxh5 f5 32.♔c3 b4 33.♔b5 f4 34.axb4



34...♗b6 Black has to keep the bishop alive, but he's down material and White's pawns will start to roll in the center. The rest is pretty straightforward.

35.exf4 cxb4+ 36.♔f3 exf4 37.d4 ♞bd8 38.♞d3 ♞c8 39.♞c1 ♞d5 40.c5 ♞g5 41.♔d6 ♞c6 42.cxb6 Black resigned, as 42...♞xc1 falls for 43.b7+-.



▲ Hikaru Nakamura vs. Fabiano Caruana Photo by Lennart Ootes

The script for the last round was perfectly set. Nakamura was trailing Caruana, and as luck would have it, they were playing each other. Only a win in the classical game would enable Hikaru to snatch first place for himself.

C58

Hikaru Nakamura	2775
Fabiano Caruana	2764

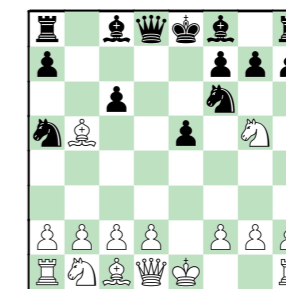
Norway Chess, Stavanger 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♔f3 ♔c6 3.♗c4 ♔f6 4.♔g5 In a must-win situation, Nakamura decides to go for the sharpest possible line. There are pros and cons to this decision. On the one hand, the positions that arise are very concrete, and one mistake by either player can have huge consequences. On the other hand, the forcing nature of the play can

potentially favor Caruana, as his moves may be forced and obvious, especially since the opening has been so well-explored.

4...d5 There are other speculative options like the Traxler with 4...♗c5, but modern engines have shown us that this is pretty much the only sound reply for Black.

5.exd5 ♔a5 6.♗b5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6



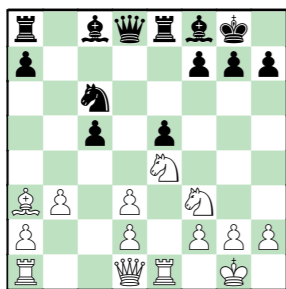
8.♔d3 This is the mainline for White nowadays, preparing to meet ...h7-h6 with ♖e4.

8.♙e2 used to be the most popular move, and it's not bad by any means, but Black has a number of good ways to develop freely, so it's not to everyone's taste to play this position for White. 8...h6 9.♖h3 Interestingly enough, this strange knight placement was pioneered by Steinitz, and later taken up by Fischer, so it can't be that bad!

8...♖d5 9.♖f3 10.♙d6 10.0-0 ♖f4 Black rushes to take the bishop and ruin White's pawn structure before he has the chance to secure it with ♗e1 followed by ♙f1.

11.♖c3 ♖xd3 12.cxd3 0-0 All this has been played many times before. White's d-pawns look terrible on the surface, but they control some central squares, and an extra pawn is an extra pawn, after all. He may be able to liquidate the weakness by playing d4 at some point. Black does have the bishop pair, but his knight on a5 is out of the game for now. He would like to play ...c5 and ...♖c6 to reactivate it, but that would potentially leave his c5 pawn as a weakness.

13.b3 ♗e8 14.♗e1 c5 15.♙a3 ♖c6 16.♖e4 ♙f8 The c5 pawn is immune for various tactical reasons.



17.♗c1 17.♙xc5 f5! 18.♙xf8 fxe4. Or 17.♖xc5 ♙g4! and Black has various ideas of ...♗a5 and ...♖d4 coming up. For example, the natural 18.h3 fails completely here, due to 18...♙xf3 19.♗xf3 ♖d4 20.♗d1 ♖b5! 21.♙b4 a5 22.♖b7 ♗c7 23.♙xf8 ♗xf8-+.

17...f5?? The first new move of the game, and unfortunately, a completely losing one. Caruana must have mixed up his preparation.

17...♖b4 is the correct way to save the c5 pawn. 18.♙xb4 cxb4 White has tried both ♖c5 and ♖g3 here, and the theme remains the same in each - White has

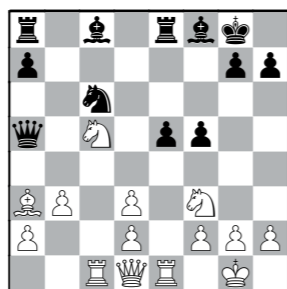


▲ Left to right: Wesley So, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Aryan Tari, Fabiano Caruana, Anish Giri, Hikaru Nakamura, Magnus Carlsen, Alireza Firouzja and Dommaraju Gukesh. Photo by Lennart Ootes

a material plus, but Black has enough compensation in the form of his bishop pair in an open position.

18.♖xc5! Correctly calling the bluff. The only move you have to be concerned with as White is 18...♗a5, which appears to win material and was surely Caruana's intention.

18...♗d5 However, on closer inspection, White has a brilliant reply to 18...♗a5.

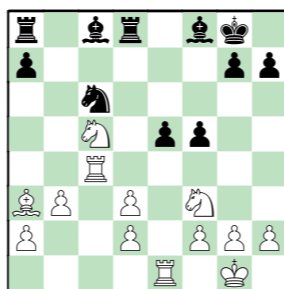


19.♖g5! Very unexpected, since White apparently ignores the action on the queenside and launches an unprovoked attack on the other side of the board, as ♗h5 is basically impossible to stop. Here are some variations to demonstrate this. 19...♗xa3 (19...h6 20.♗h5+-; 19...g6

20.♗f3!+-) 20.♗h5 h6 21.♗xe8 hxg5 22.♗xc6+-.

19.♗c2 Now, Black is two pawns down, and White's c5 knight is excellent, completely dominating the position and preventing Black from developing any counterplay.

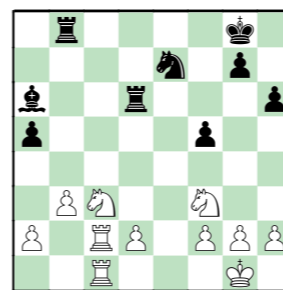
19...♗d8 20.♗c4 ♗xc4 21.♗xc4



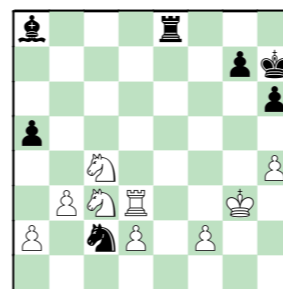
The queens come off the board and White retains a winning advantage. To be honest, not much of note happened for the rest of the game. The only way that Black could turn things around is if Nakamura commits a grave error, and he didn't, as he steadily maintained his advantage until the end.

21...♗d5 22.♗ec1 ♙d6 23.♙b2 ♖e7 24.♗4c2 ♗b8 25.d4 exd4 26.♖xd4 a5

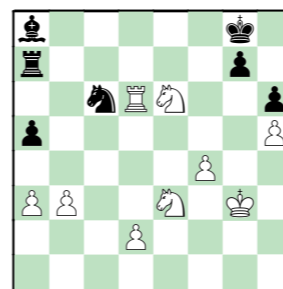
27.♖f3 h6 28.♖a4 ♙a6 29.♖c3 ♗c5 30.♙a3 ♗c6 31.♙xd6 ♗xd6



32.♖a4 ♖d5 33.♗c6 ♗xc6 34.♗xc6 ♖b4 35.♗d6 ♙b7 36.♖c3 ♗e8 37.h4 f4 38.♗d4 ♗f8 39.♖e5 ♗e8 40.♖c4 f3 41.gxf3 ♙xf3 42.♖h2 ♖c2 43.♗d3 ♙a8 44.♖g3 ♖h7



45.♖e3 ♖b4 46.♗d6 ♖c6 47.♖cd5 ♗f8 48.♖c7 ♙b7 49.♖e6 ♗f7 50.f4 ♙a8 51.h5 ♗a7 52.a3 ♖g8



53.f5 ♗e7 54.♖f4 ♗a7 55.d4
Black resigned

Even though this loss must have hurt for Caruana, he can still look back at the tournament as a positive result, since he won the most classical games of any participant and showed a generally high level.

As for Nakamura, it must have been a great feeling to win the tournament without a loss in classical. He's performed well in every classical tournament he's played since returning from his semi-hiatus as a streamer in February of 2022, increasing his rating from 2736 to 2787 since then, which is a remarkable achievement at that level. ■



▲ Raphael Clemente, Sherryl Muriente (West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority) and Pete Tamburro

ACM Visits West Palm Beach

By Pete Tamburro, Senior Editor
Photos by Gail V. Haines

Sometimes you just have to meet people. When we had our feature story on two unlikely guys, Josh and Franklin, creating a chess park, it not only became obvious that they should get recognition for what they have accomplished, but that an in-person presentation would be good PR for them rather than just mailing it to them.

Their PR guy, Tony Thiessen, rose to the occasion. I drove 1350 miles to do my part and showed up at the appointed time. Franklin and Josh greeted me warmly. I played a little chess. Then the TV camera crews showed up. The Florida magazine photographer showed up. It was a happening!

I got interviewed by two TV stations, which gave it decent airtime. The story carried to a regional radio station. The magazine did a piece on it. Quite literally, millions of people got to see, hear or read about it. My 15 minutes of fame!

But it was also their 15 minutes - Josh and Franklin, West Palm Beach and the Downtown Development Authority. I got to meet the government people who ran with the ball from their end - and it was at least a half-dozen of them. It just goes to show the combination of a town, individually motivated chess players, and their PR mover and shaker together put forth a perfect team effort.

The tips in issue 33 on how to do it plus the orchestrated event all demonstrated how chess can be promoted. The Fern Street Chess Park is a welcoming place, so if you're in the neighborhood... ■



▲ Pete Tamburro, Josh Koehler and Franklin Rivers