

GM ILLIA NYZHNYK WINS IN THE CITY OF SIN

Where Las Vegas Luck rules!

As they say, “fortune favors the brave,” and quite often some luck is needed in order to win a game or even a tournament. Anyhow, it is only a small factor behind success in chess – if we compare it to some other games played in Las Vegas. No throwing dice here!



By GM Illia Nyzhnyk

Over the years, the National Open in Las Vegas has become one of my favorite events in which to play, and while I still remember it being a smallish 6-round event back in 2015, it has grown to house over 1000 players, turning it into one of the biggest open tournaments in the USA. This was made possible by the amazing dedication and perseverance of Alan and Janelle Losoff and their team, which made attendance at this event attractive for players of various strengths from all over the world. While I was lucky enough to win here a few times before, this time it was even more challenging as most of my games were a difficult over-four-hour grind, which quickly exhausted me.

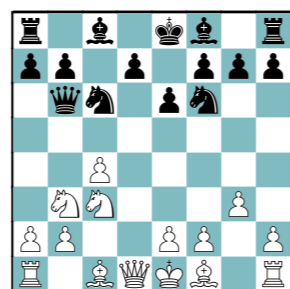
Immediately before the following game was played in round 5, I was lucky enough to make a quick draw with the black pieces against GM Zaven Andriasian, which gave me just enough time to rest and prepare for an inevitable long fight against the young and talented GM Andrew Hong.

A33

Illia Nyzhnyk	2641
Andrew Hong	2517

National Open, Las Vegas 2023

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗c6 5.♗c3 e6 6.g3!? I have previously tried 6.♗f4, but this move does not pose a serious threat against someone who knows a few precise moves from now on. I have previously had a game which went 6...d5 7.cxd5 ♗xd5 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♗d2



7...♗b4!? I'm not going to lie – this move



▲ Illia Nyzhnyk and tournament organizer Janelle Losoff

Photo by Tim Hanks

♗b4 10.♗xd5?! ♗xd2+ 11.♗xd2 cxd5 12.e4? Here I began trying too hard, but was able to heroically survive a few moves later! 12...dxe4 13.♗b4 ♗d7 14.♗xe4 and a draw was agreed in I.Nyzhnyk 2670 - B.Gledura 2628, Clayton 2021. 6...♗b6 7.♗b3

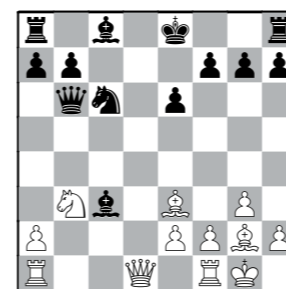
made me feel rather uneasy. I knew about the existence of this line, but had never really spent any significant time studying it.

7...♗e5 would have been more up my street, where I was armed with cloud engine analysis. This line can get crazy, but White seems to have reasonable results: 8.e4 ♗b4 9.♗e2 d6 10.f4 ♗c6 11.♗e3 ♗xc3+ 12.bxc3 ♗c7 13.♗g2 0-0 14.0-0 e5 15.f5 b6 16.g4± and White later won in S.Sevian 2690 - B.Bok 2615, Internet rapid 2023.

8.♗g2 I believe there is nothing better. At this point all I can do is just develop my pieces.

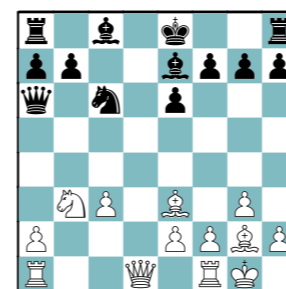
8...d5!? I was expecting this concrete decision while thinking about my previous move. Despite my being very ‘clingly’ when it comes to holding on to material, I quickly realized that the dynamics of this position

dictated a slightly different manner of play. 9.cxd5 ♗xd5 10.0-0! No time to waste! Exploiting the fact that Black has still not castled, I am implying that the pawn I am about to lose is not as important as the degree of initiative I will obtain as a result. 10...♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♗e7!? My opponent believed me and wisely decided to ignore the poisonous offering. 11...♗xc3?! 12.♗e3



A) Avoiding the trade altogether by 12...♗a6?? would lose immediately after 13.♗c1 ♗f6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♗c5 ♗b6 16.♗d6+-.

B) 12...♗d8 13.♗c1 ♗f6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♗xc6+ ♗d7 16.♗xa8 ♗xa8 17.♗c5± was what I calculated, and while I have no immediate material gain, it is incredibly difficult for Black to address his king safety, as well as bring his rook into play. 12.♗e3 ♗a6



13.♗d3 Even to this day, I am still not

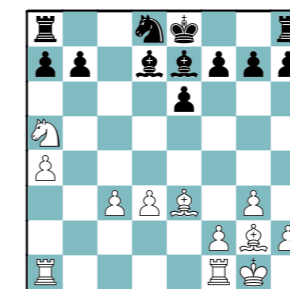


Born in Ukraine in 1996, Illia Nyzhnyk became a Grandmaster in 2011 before moving to the U.S. As a member of Webster University's SPICE program since 2014, he contributed to numerous championship victories. Illia also won several individual titles, including the 2020 Spice Cup Open and four World Opens. After obtaining his MBA in December 2021, he is now wholly dedicated to advancing his chess skills.

sure whether my decision to trade queens was correct. It is apparent that, even after castling, Black will face serious issues developing his queenside pieces, but I just could not see any concrete benefit for keeping pieces on the board.

13.a4!? might have been slightly better. For example, 13...0-0 14.a5 ♗d8 15.♗c2 ♗d7 16.♗fb1± and surprisingly, Black cannot do much to further improve his position while maintaining the weak b7 pawn.

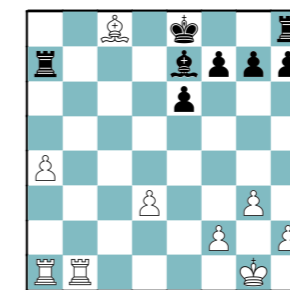
13...♗xd3 14.exd3 ♗d7 15.a4 ♗d8? I was extremely surprised to see this move, as it did not look sound at all. Black's idea is obvious – trading after ...♗c6. However, Black falls one move short. 16.♗a5!



16...♗c8 Trying 16...♗c6 now would have excited me a lot, as I love the bishop pair! Upon 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.a5 ♗d7 19.♗fb1+-, Black has a bunch of passive pieces which have no prospects for any improvement.

17.♗xb7?! I spent a good portion of my time here trying to calculate the endgame that eventually arose in the game. Little did I know that there was no need to calculate it!

17.♗xa7! would have allowed me to avoid the unnecessary hustle, as I manage to avoid the opposite-colored bishops endgame: 17...♗xc3 18.♗fb1! ♗c8 19.♗e3 ♗xd3 20.♗xb7 ♗xb7 21.♗xb7+- and the passed a-pawn cannot be stopped. 17...♗xb7 18.♗xb7 ♗xc3 19.♗xa7 ♗c7 20.♗fb1 ♗c8! Without this Black would have been doomed already. 21.♗xc8 ♗xa7

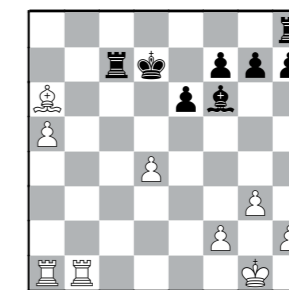


22.a5 I foresaw this position in my head while calculating all of the pawn captures. I strongly believed that if I could manage to “encapsulate” the black rook on a7 by playing a6, followed by ♗b7, I would easily win, because Black will be playing virtually a rook down. However, this plan was way harder to implement than I thought.



▲ Andrew Hong Photo St.Louis Chess Club

22...♗c7 23.♗c1? 23.♗a6! is the engine solution that I did not pay much attention to during the game, as it was not helping me achieve the desired ♗b7+♗a6 piece formation. 23...♗d7 24.d4 ♗f6

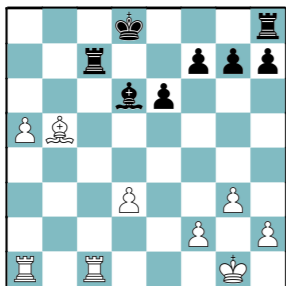


25.♗a4 and Black gets into a sort of a zugzwang, where the best move is actually to misplace his rook on a7. 25...♗a7 26.♗b7+-.

23...♗d8 24.♗a6 ♗d6?! I was not quite sure how I would react to 24...♗f6, as now after 25.♗ab1 ♗xc1+ 26.♗xc1 ♗e7 27.♗b7 ♗d8 28.a6 ♗d4±, Black's bishop gets to control a7. I strongly believe that this position can no longer be won, as I do not have enough resources to realise the a6-a7 push. Despite that, I am sure that I would maintain some practical chances,

as both my opponent and I were in a time scramble.

25.♙b5? It was not too late to go back to the correct idea of restricting the black bishop with d3-d4: 25.♞cb1! ♖e7 26.d4!+-.



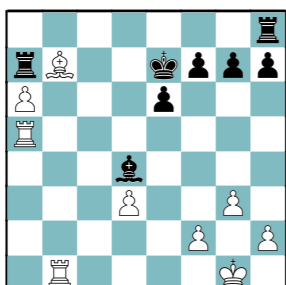
25...♗e7?? The reason I am giving this move a double question mark is because this was the point of no return for Black. As we established earlier, if Black's rook ever gets trapped on a7 it is likely going to be game over, and this move leads exactly to that.

25...♙e5! should have been played, allowing the black bishop to move onto the a7-g1 diagonal. 26.♞xc7 ♗xc7 27.♞c1+ ♗d6 28.a6 ♞b8 29.♙c6 ♙d4±.

26.a6! Finally the rook has no choice but to go to a7, otherwise I will promote my pawn.

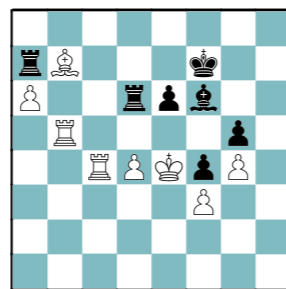
26...♞a7 26...♞a8 27.♞xc7+ ♙xc7 28.♙c6 ♞a7 29.♙b7+- would have been worse, as now Black can move only his bishop, with no counterplay whatsoever.

27.♙c6 ♙e5 28.♞a5 ♙b2 29.♞b1 ♙d4 30.♙b7



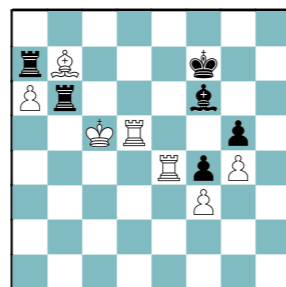
It took me quite a while to win this position, as Black is relatively solid despite the fact that he is playing a rook down. Fortunately for me, I can take things in my own sweet time without having to worry about much coming from Black's side.

30...♞d8 31.♞c1 ♞d7 32.♞b5 ♞d6 33.♗f1 ♗d7 34.♗e2 f5 35.♞c4 ♙f6 36.♙c8+ ♗e8 37.♙b7 ♗f7 38.♞a4 ♙d4 39.♞bb4 ♙b6 40.d4 g5 41.f3 h5 42.h3 ♗e8 43.g4 hxg4 44.hxg4 f4 45.♗d3 ♙d8 46.♗e4 ♙f6 47.♞b5 ♗f7 48.♞ab4 ♙d8 49.♞c4 ♙f6



50.d5 Eventually I was ready to make the final breakthrough, after which my king will make its way to the a7 rook.

50...♗g6 51.dxe6 ♞xe6+ 52.♗d5 ♞e5+ 53.♗c6 ♞e6+ 54.♗c5 ♙e7+ 55.♗d5 ♗f7 56.♞e4 ♙d6+ 57.♗c4 ♙f6 58.♞d5 ♞b6 59.♗c5



59...♞xb7 Black's final attempt to survive, but it is futile, as even the pawn endgame will be winning for me if I were to trade off all of the pieces.

60.axb7 ♞xb7 61.♗c6 ♞b3 62.♞d7+ ♗f8 63.♞a4 ♙e7 64.♞a8+ ♗f7 65.♞aa7 ♞xf3 An example of the pawn ending I was referring to may be seen in 65...♞e3 66.♞xe7+ ♞xe7 67.♞xe7+ ♗xe7 68.♗d5 ♗f6 69.♗d6+-.

66.♞xe7+ ♗f6 67.♞f7+ ♗g6 68.♞fd7 ♞c3+ 69.♗d5 ♞d3+ 70.♗c4

Black resigned

This was by far one of the longest and toughest games I played during this event, but fortunately it went my way.

As soon as I won my round 5 game, I was immediately welcomed with what I like to call an "automatic" pairing – myself as Black versus the tournament's top-seeded player, GM Hans Niemann. My strategy for this game was to stay safe, and take my chances if I ever got any.

D30

Hans Niemann	2695
Illia Nyzhnyk	2641

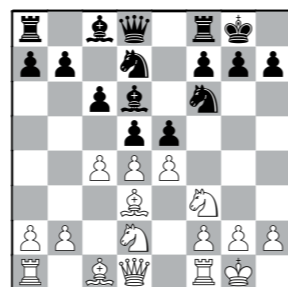
National Open, Las Vegas 2023

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.e3 e6 The Semi-Slav is a rather rare occurrence

in my opening repertoire, but knowing how predictable I am playing against this particular line, I believed that a change was definitely warranted.

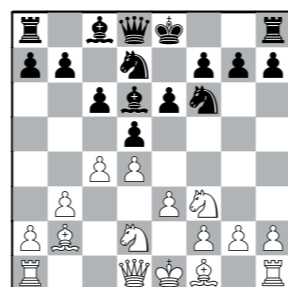
4...♙f5 marked one of my latest loses against 4.e3 5.♗c3 e6 6.♗h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♙d2 ♙e7 9.♗xg6 hxg6 10.♞c2 ♗bd7 11.0-0-0 a6 12.♗b1 dxc4 13.♙xc4 c5 14.g4 cxd4?! 15.exd4 ♗b6 16.♙b3 ♞c8 17.♞d3 Here I realized that something went wrong, but it was already a bit too late, and I did not manage to survive against a superior opponent - White won in S.Vidit S. 2724 - I.Nyzhnyk 2687, Saint Louis 2022.

5.♗bd2 ♗bd7 6.b3!? This came as a surprise. I was ready for 6.♙d3, when I had prepared 6...♙d6 7.0-0-0 8.e4 e5!



9.cxd5 cxd5 10.exd5 exd4 11.♗xd4 ♗b6, following the game which continued 12.♗f5 ♗bxd5 13.♗xd6 ♞xd6 14.♗c4 ♞c7 15.h3 ♞d8 16.♞f3 b6 17.♙g5 ♙b7 where Black was totally fine, with the game ending in a draw in H.Nakamura 2749 - J.K.Duda 2731 Saint Louis blitz 2019.

6...♙d6 7.♙b2 Here, I was still in the mindset that I have to break through with ...e5, no matter what, but it is hard to do that when White plays this move order.

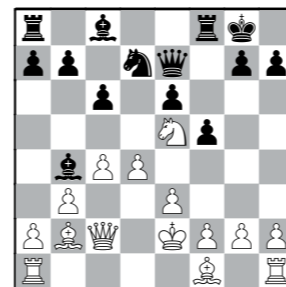


7...♞e7 7...♗e4!? was tried by Spanish GM David Anton Guijarro, and knowing how my game went from this point on, I really like the idea which allows me to save a tempo by not playing ...♞e7. 8.♙d3 f5 9.0-0 ♞f6 10.a4 a5 11.♞a2 ♙b4∞ Black later won in L.Livaic 2569 - D.A.Guijarro 2685, Vrnjacka Banja 2023.

8.♗e5 ♗e4 If truth be told, immediately

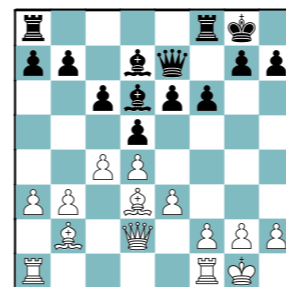
after I played my knight to e4, I felt a cold shower pouring down my back.

9.a3 was played by Hans, which is safe, but effective in the long run. 9.♗e4!? was the move I did not calculate sufficiently, and which results in me losing a pawn. Luckily: 9...dxe4 10.♞g4 ♙b4+ 11.♗e2 0-0 12.♞xe4 f5 13.♞c2



13...♗e5 14.dxe5 ♞d8 15.♞d1 ♞xd1 16.♗xd1 a5, and although White is still objectively better, it is hard to think of any advantage that his extra pawn on e5 provides.

9...0-0 10.♙d3 ♗xd2 11.♞xd2 f6 12.♗xd7 ♙xd7 13.0-0



13...f5?! This was clearly me trying to be way too safe. I figured that since both of us have bishops here, closing down the position will render them useless. What I did not realize was that, unlike me, White has some attractive possibilities to threaten breakthroughs. Everything what followed is me desperately trying to make sure that my opponent does not "open things up".

13...♙e8 14.e4 (or 14.♞c2 ♗h8 15.e4 ♙g6=) 14...♙g6= would have been totally fine for Black.

14.♙c3! Hans is doing the right thing in the spirit of the Stonewall Dutch structure that we have here. Threatening to trade the dark-squared bishops, he forced me to play on the queenside – the side I'd much rather avoid, as it is where he will likely advance his pawns shortly.

14...b6 15.b4 This advance is now more powerful, as I have created not one, but two hooks – both the c6 and b6 pawns that can now be undermined.

15.♙b4?! can now be comfortably met

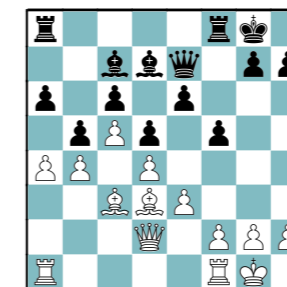


▲ Hans Niemann Photo St. Louis Chess Club

with 15...c5 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.♙c3 ♙c6 18.cxd5 ♙xd5 19.♙c4 ♙xc4 20.bxc4 ♞fd8 with a relatively even game, though I will always be the underdog due to my bishop being blocked by the c5 pawn.

15...b5 This was my plan all along – keep things as closed as possible. To be completely honest, I must have underestimated White's capabilities. Regardless, this position would have likely appeared with a different move order had I tried to avoid it.

16.c5 ♙c7 17.a4 a6



18.f4 During the game, I felt this was premature, but it is difficult to offer a better option for White, as I might otherwise get some possibilities for counterplay against the h2 pawn.

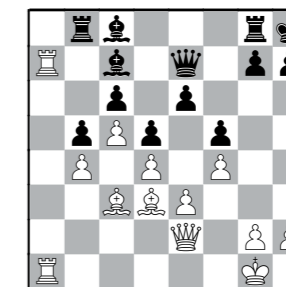
18...♗h8 In light of no better options, I decided to construct a "scary" formation on the g-file, but I was very well aware of the fact that any changes in the pawn structure will likely benefit White more than me, as these will open a new front for active operations.

19.♞a2 ♞g8 20.♞fa1 ♞ab8 I needed to make sure that the invasion on the a-file does not happen, so I came up with a sort of a fortress.

21.axb5 axb5 22.♞a7 ♙c8 Covering most squares on the a-file that could have been used by White.

23.h4? I was extremely excited to see Hans play this move, as it first looked like it would allow me to close things down on the kingside completely. While I was not wrong in my original judgement, it was not as simple as I originally anticipated.

By simply keeping options open with 23.♞e2! my opponent could have asked a simple question "What's next?", and I would have likely ended up speechless...

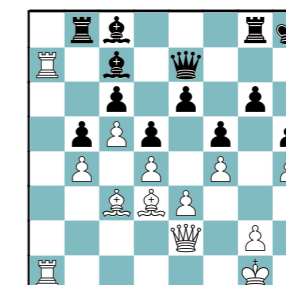


A) ...because playing 23...g5 would have likely been suicidal after 24.fxg5 ♞xg5 25.♙e1+-, when White's threats are too much to deal with.

B) Not playing ...g5 is basically waiting for White to prepare and break through with g2-g4 himself, which did not seem very appealing either. For example, 23...♙b7 24.♙e1±.

23...h5! Closing the kingside down completely. However, White still has one trick up his sleeve...

24.♞e2 g6

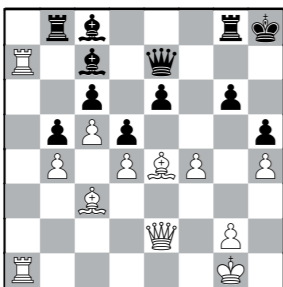


25.e4!? Once again, my original judgement of this move was deceptive. At first, I thought that I could just capture on e4 and win a pawn, but upon closer inspection I realized that any captures I make will only benefit White.

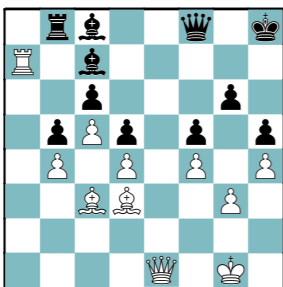
25...♞g7 Fortunately for me, I have this simple way of maintaining the formation. After this Hans tried to make progress for a few more moves, but eventually realized that my position is too solid, and the game ended in a draw. 25...dxe4?? is punished by 26.d5+ ♗h7 27.d6+-.



While 25...fxe4? runs into 26.♗xe4!



- A) 26...dxe4?? 27.d5+--;
 - B) 26...e5 27.dxe5 dxe4 28.e6+ ♖h7 29.♗xe4+-.
 - C) 26...♗g7 27.♗d3 ♗f6 (27...♗xh4?? 28.♗xc7 ♗xc7 29.♗e5+-) 28.g3±.
- 26.exd5 exd5 Now I felt like drying out after getting out of the water.
27.♗f2 ♗f8 28.g3 ♗e7 29.♗e1 ♗xe1+ 30.♗xe1



30...♗d8 31.♗a2 ♖g7 32.♗e2 ♗e7 33.♖f2 ♗b7 34.♗a7 ♗d8 35.♗a1 ♗c7 36.♗f3 ♗c8 37.♗e1 ♗a8 Draw

It so happened that this was my last long game of the tournament. While my 7th round game was a quick draw, in round 8 I experienced what is known as “winner’s luck.”



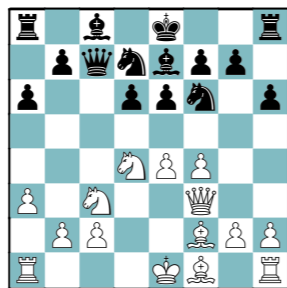
B96

Fidel Corrales	2509
Illia Nyzhnyk	2641

National Open, Las Vegas 2023

Come round 8, and it was a long way to tie for 1st. Facing my past teammate and good friend, GM Fidel Corrales, I decided to go all out with the black pieces, choosing a sharp line of the Najdorf variation.

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 h6 8.♗h4 ♗b6 9.a3 ♗e7 10.♗f2 ♗c7 11.♗f3 ♗bd7



Here Fidel made an unfortunate misstep. 12.g4? 12.0-0-0!? should be played first, ensuring White’s king safety. Then, after 12...b5 13.g4 ♗b7 14.h4 ♗c5 15.♗d3 ♗xd3+ 16.♗xd3 d5 17.e5 ♗e4 18.♗hd1 ♗c8 19.♗e1 ♗c5 20.♗ce2, White ended up winning this double-edged position in A.Fier 2604 - R.Quintiliano Pinto 2509, Internet blitz 2023.

12...g5! One of the most natural reactions to White’s g4-h4-g5 maneuver. This move forces White’s f4 pawn away, ensuring access to the e5 outpost for my knight. Luckily for me, this move is also backed up by a nice tactical opportunity that only exists due to the white king’s unsafe placement.

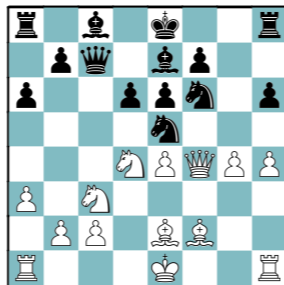
13.h4?! 13.0-0-0 gxf4 14.♖b1 ♗e5 15.♗xf4 ♗exg4 16.♗b3! was still playable

NATIONAL OPEN, Las Vegas, NV
June 14–18, 2023, (9 rounds, 150 players)

- 1-4. Illia NYZHNYK (UKR), Vasif DURARBAYLI (AZE), Yaser QUESADA (CUB), Mikhail Antipov (FID) **7**
- 5-14. Hans NIEMANN, Zaven ANDRIASIAN (ARM), Semen KHANIN (FID), Emilio CORDOVA (PER), Viktor MATVIISHEN (UKR), Andrew HONG, Fidel CORRALES JIMENEZ, Daniel H FERNANDEZ (ENG), Justin WANG, Ezra CHAMBERS **6½**
- 15-21. Brandon JACOBSON, Jianchao ZHOU (CHN), Arman MIKAELIAN (ARM), Sam SCHMAKEL, Kostya KAVUTSKIY, Denes BOROS (HUN), Richard BITOON (PHI) **6**, etc.

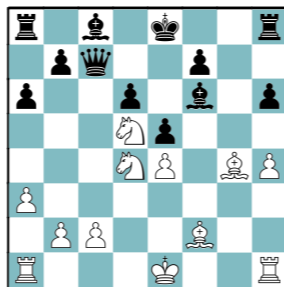
for White, although Black is even slightly better here.

13...gxf4 14.♗e2 ♗e5 15.♗xf4



15...♗exg4! Freeing the e5 square for my pawn. Black is clearly better.

16.♗xg4 e5 17.♗xf6!? ♗xf6 18.♗d5

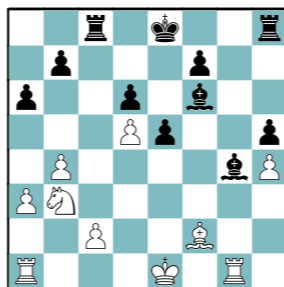


18...♗a5+! This is precisely why the white king should be hidden away on c1 at this moment.

If only I had to play 18...♗d8?, then White would be doing okay after 19.♗f5 ♗g8 20.♗b6, regaining most of his material and maintaining control over key central squares. 20...♗xg4 This is all forced. 21.♗xd8 ♗xd8 22.♗xd6+ ♖f8 23.♗e3 ♗xh4 24.♗e2=.

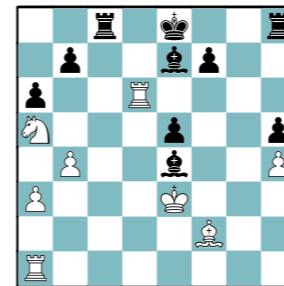
19.b4 ♗xd5! No need to hang on to the queen – this trade allows me to come out on top with an extra pawn, as well as a far superior position.

20.exd5 ♗xg4 21.♗g1 h5 22.♗b3 ♗c8



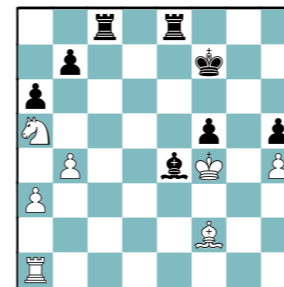
My position is completely winning due to White’s multiple weaknesses, pawn deficit, and my strong bishop pair.

23.♗d2 ♗f3 24.c4 ♗xc4 25.♗a5 ♗c8 The rest was simple.
26.♗g3 ♗xd5 27.♗d3 ♗e4 28.♗xd6 ♗e7 29.♗e3



29...f5! 29...♗xd6 30.♗xe4 b5 was also possible, but the text offers White virtually no counterplay.

30.♗b6 ♗d8 31.♗e6+ ♖f7 32.♗xe5 ♗f6 33.♖f4 ♗xe5+ 34.♗xe5 ♗he8+ 35.♖f4

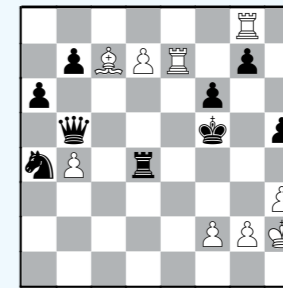


35...♗c3 36.♗e3 b6 White resigned

However, I was not the only winner who experienced this amazing phenomenon, and thus I would like to demonstrate to you, fellow readers, a few snippets from some of the tournament winners’ games, in which luck played a major role on the ensuing result.

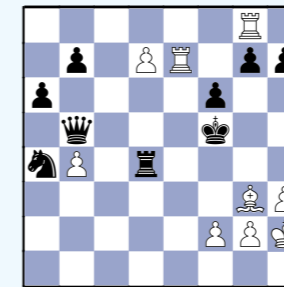


Often times, an intermediate move that looks useful is actually actively harming your position, just like it happened in the following game of Mikhail Antipov, one of the co-winners of the event.

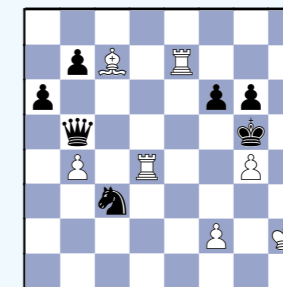


Mikhail Antipov	2583
Robert Shlyakhtenko	2427

National Open, Las Vegas 2023



- A) Then, 38.d8♗ ♗xd8 39.♗xd8 g5 40.f3 ♗c4 should be tenable for Black. It is hard to say who plays for a win here.
 - B) Or 38.f3 h4 39.d8♗ ♗xd8 40.♗xd8 ♗c3 41.♗xg7 ♗xb4 42.♗g4 ♗c5 43.♗f4+ ♖g6 44.♗g4+ ♖f5=.
- 38.d8♗ 38.g4+!? ♖g5 39.♗xh7+-.
38...♗xd8 39.♗xd8 h5 40.♗d4 ♗c3 41.g4+ hxg4 42.hxg4+ ♖g5



37.♗c7? Honestly, it is hard to blame Mikhail for this move – having a chance to checkmate someone with a pawn is always exciting, and the idea is obvious – to clear a path for White’s g4 pawn. However, the counter to this threat is rather simple, and White only suffers from having his bishop on c7. 37.d8♗ was natural and good enough for a winning advantage.

37...g6?? A much needed stroke of luck for White, as Black does not react properly. Black’s king is no longer able to survive White’s decisive attack:

37...h5! was needed, preventing g2-g4 once and for all.

43.♗f4+ ♖xg4 44.♗d2+ ♖f5 45.♗f4+ ♖g5 46.♗c4+ Next comes ♗c5+, winning the queen and finishing the game.

Black resigned.

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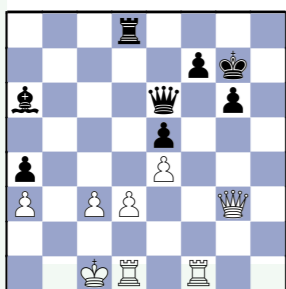




In round 8, a good friend of mine, GM Vasif Durarbayli, was trailing the leaders by half a point and was in a must-win situation.

Sam Schmakel	2416
Vasif Durarbayli	2627

National Open Las Vegas 2023



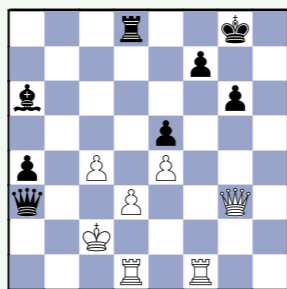
The following position was reached, where it is hard to tell who is fighting for a win. While Vasif had a correct idea about having to defend his kingside, his chosen 35...g8?? did not help very much. As a

matter of fact, it made things worse, as now the black king can no longer escape a checkmating net in some of the lines.

36.c4? The first error in a series of mistakes made by Vasif's opponent. Once again, it is hard to criticize White, as Sam was playing on increment at this point.

36.♖h4! was the right way to go, when White can ignore everything except for the h-file. 36...♗d6 37.♟f3 ♖xa3+ 38.♔d2 ♗b2+ 39.♔e3 ♗b6+ 40.♔e2 ♗b2+ 41.♟d2+-. There are no more checks and now the black king is doomed.

36...♗d6 37.♔c2 ♗xa3

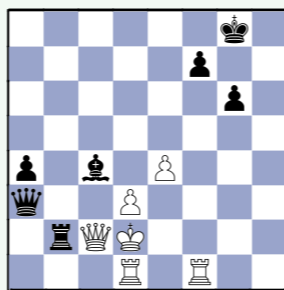


38.♗xe5?? It was not too late to play

38.♗f2 ♗b3+ 39.♔c1 which allows White to use his queen as a shield against checks. Although the engine claims that White is out of the woods here, practically this position is likely much easier to play with Black: 39...♟d7 40.♗c2 ♗b4∞.

38...♟xc4! An Important tactic that finally breaches the white king's position. The rest is simple.

39.♗c3 ♗a2+ 40.♔c1 ♟b8 41.♗c2 ♗a3+ 42.♔d2 ♟b2



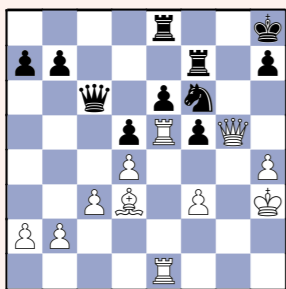
43.dxc4 ♗b4+ 44.♔c1 ♟xc2+ 45.♔xc2 ♗xc4+ 46.♔d2 ♗d4+ 47.♔e2 ♗xe4+ 48.♔d2 g5 49.♟f2 ♔g7 White resigned

Probably one of the luckiest "guesses" I have ever seen was made by GM Yasser Quesada. Yasser has taken a total of three half-point byes, including a bye in the last round. This is the game he played in round 8, when he was basically in a must-win situation, as he was not going to play the last round.



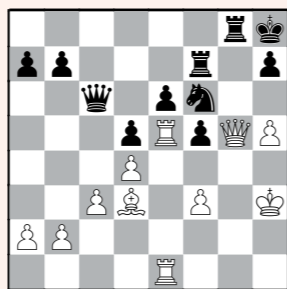
Yasser Quesada	2609
Viktor Matviishen	2538

National Open, Las Vegas 2023



At this point, Yasser decided to further advance his h-pawn gaining more space from Black, and played **36.h5?**, to which his opponent replied with **36...♗d7?** This response is a passive acceptance of the fact that Black's position is in generic trouble.

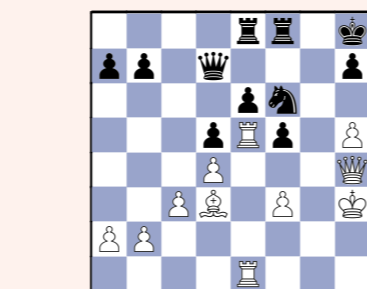
36...♟g8! All of a sudden, Black was availed this amazing opportunity to exploit the white king's unsafe position as well as the overextended h5 pawn, to go for counterplay.



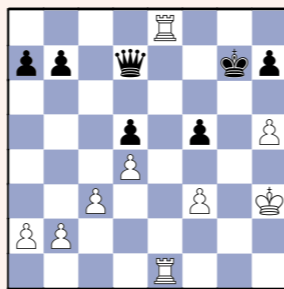
A) 37.♗h6?? is met by 37...♗c7+-, and funnily enough, White is in zugzwang, unable to move.

B) 37.♗h4! ♗c7!? 38.h6 (Not 38.♟xe6?? ♔xh5!-+ when White will get checkmated.) 38...♟ff8! 39.♟xe6 ♔e4!! 40.fxe4 ♟g4 41.♗f2 dxe4∞ and Black would have successfully managed to muddy the water to an extent where White has to be the one saving himself.

37.♗h4 ♟ff8? 37...♟ef8 would have given Black a slight chance for survival. 38.h6 a6 Making good use of the fact that White has a hard time capturing on e6, as there are always ...♔e4 ideas. 39.a4±.



38.♟xf5!! exf5 39.♗xf6+ ♟xf6 40.♟xe8+ ♟f8 41.♟xf8+ ♔g7 42.♟fe8 Two rooks were rather too strong to parry.



42...♗b5 43.♟e7+ ♔f8 44.♟e2 ♗d3 45.♔g3 b5 46.♔f4 h6 47.♟e8+ ♔f7 48.♟e7+ ♔f6 49.♟e6+ ♔f7 50.♟e7+ ♔f8 51.♔e5 ♗e3+ 52.♔d6 ♗xf3 53.♔d7 f4 54.♟xh6 ♗h3+ 55.♔d8 ♔g8 56.♟g6+ ♔h8 57.♟f6 ♔g8 58.h6 ♗h4 59.h7+ Black resigned

My First GM-Scalp? Well...Almost!

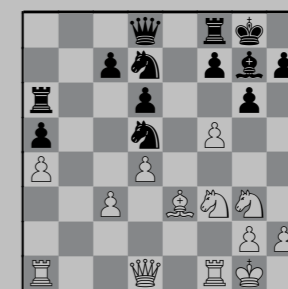
By WIM Zoey Tang



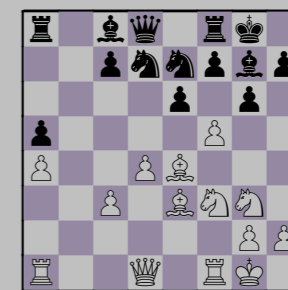
After Oregon State Championship (Pages 40-43) Zoey's competitive summer season started in late May, first with Chicago Open where she scored 5/9, losing only to GM Zhou Jianchao. Then, in June she played in the National Open in Las Vegas, where she scored a solid 50%. -Ed.

my opponent would be more forthcoming in the center, pushing for an early ...c7-c5. **9.c3 bxc3 10.bxc3 ♔e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♟e3** Both sides complete their normal development. White is visually better because of his central control and more actively-placed pieces. Black hopes to undermine the center with a well-timed ...c5, ...e5, or possibly even ...f5 break.

12...a5 13.♔g3 d5 After my last move, I was expecting 13...♟a6 14.♟xa6 ♟xa6 15.f5 exf5 16.exf5 ♔d5



17.♟g5 ♗a8 18.♟c1± I wasn't expecting much to come out of the kingside attack because of Black's many defenders, but I knew it was the correct direction. **14.f5!** Trying to crash through on the kingside while Black's pieces are still on their original squares on the queenside. **14...dxe4 15.♟xe4**



The opening revamp I did after the Oregon Closed helped the next game I'm presenting here. I got a better, not just acceptable position out of the opening (despite not having time to do a thorough preparation). My grandmaster opponent's powerful calculation worked against him, leading him to play an unsound sacrifice. Unfortunately, I was too tempted by the material, missing the chance for an even more winning position. The resulting chances slipped through my fingers, though it was definitely still an up-and-down game. Sadly I missed my chances for my first OTB win against a GM...

this case, although I had not anticipated the Modern Defense, I didn't mind playing against it. The Modern gives up central space and White usually gets a nice position from the start.

2.e4 ♟g7 3.♔c3 This move blocks the c-pawn, but it allows White to safely push the f-pawn without fear of overextending.

3...a6 4.f4 b5 5.♔f3 d6 White doesn't have to worry about moves like 5...b4?. Early on Black is moving too many pawns and not developing enough pieces. After something like 6.♔a4 ♟b7 7.♔c5±, White is already much better.

6.♟d3 ♔d7

B06

Zoey Tang	2270
Arman Mikaelyan	2604

National Open, Las Vegas 2023

I started with 2/2 against slightly lower-rated players, so I was looking forward to playing the first grandmaster of my tournament.

1.d4 g6 Grandmasters are notoriously difficult to prepare against, given that their opening repertoire is so wide. Add the 15-minute walk from the hotel room to the playing hall, on top of the famously late-posted "American pairings," and I didn't have much time to prepare. However, in



7.a4 7.e5 is the main line, as I discovered after the game. It aims to deprive Black's knight from developing naturally to the f6 square. 7...c5 8.♟e4 ♟b8 9.0-0 b4 10.♔a4±. **7...b4 8.♔e2 e6** A bit strange. I thought