

NORTH AMERICAN JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS
IN VIRGINIA

CARISSA AND ZOEY CLAIM TITLES

It's no surprise to have top seeds finish the tournament with a victory. Still, winning the prestigious 2023 NAJ, was far from a walk in the park for Carissa Yip and Zoey Tang. After a shocking upset in the first round, Carissa was able to win all her remaining games (!), while Zoey needed to overcome serious challenges on the board – to eventually justify her reputation of a favorite.

By WIM Zoey Tang

A question, if you will: what is your favorite chess tournament? And not the one in which you won the biggest prize or gained the most rating, but the event that you come back to year after year just because it's enjoyable to play.

For me (and many players as well, I'm guessing), the answer at one point was the National K-12 Championships. Getting to travel (by plane!) someplace new, meeting chess-playing peers, and having a chance to play for those giant trophies?! Say no more.

Starting from the scholastic Girls' Nationals and aforementioned K-12 Nationals, many players eventually progress to the more "professional" junior tournaments like the North American Youth, Pan-American Championship, or World Cadets. Also, belonging in this realm of more serious junior tournaments is the North American Junior Championship, unique in the fact that it only has two sections – young (under the age of 20 by January 1 of the tournament year, usually) players of all age categories are lumped together into either the Open or Girls' section.

The reward of having to compete against more players is the more prestigious titles: by FIDE regulations, first place gets a (W)GM norm and the (W)IM title, while second and third places get a (W)IM norm and the (W)FM title.

This year's North American Junior was located at Dulles, VA. The organizing team of Capital Area Chess, led by IA/IO Anand Dommalapati, also host the annual Cherry Blossom Classic, a prestigious FIDE-rated Swiss Open tournament with GMs and talented players alike attending. Their experience showed in the details, with DGT boards, clipboards, and other such materials provided. It was very nice being able to focus on chess without worrying about distractions in the environment.

All photos by Paul Swaney



Carissa Yip and Zoey Tang

Zoey Tang is a 15-year-old WIM and FM residing in Portland, Oregon. She earned her Woman International Master title in 2022 after winning the North American Youth Chess Championship G18. Zoey is the first girl to have won the Oregon State Championship. In 2022, she founded a non-profit organization called Puddletown Chess. You can visit their website and read the many chess articles she wrote there at www.puddletownchess.org. Besides chess, Zoey loves playing the piano and reading.



▲ Playing hall

As usual, the competition was fierce. Multiple players had already obtained the highest direct title in their section, and they were in the contest just for first place and the norm it would give. Yet, their respective fights to the podium were not always successful – it turned out there were plenty of surprises in store.

At a glance

Number of players:
104 (Open), 32 (Girls)

Top seeds (Open):
IM Carissa Yip (2399), IM Evan Park (2358), FM Erick Zhao (2328)

Top seeds (Girls):
FM Zoey Tang (2284), WIM Iris Mou (2106), WCM Elena Zhang (2009)

THE JUNIOR OPEN

The standings in the Open section were shaken up as soon as round one, with top seed IM Carissa Yip (FIDE Elo 2399) losing to James Douglas Wright (1754), a shocking 645-point upset. Yet, Carissa showed what it meant to be resilient by winning eight games in a row (!!) with brilliant technique and precision.

The last round matchup of Xu vs. Yip was a high-stakes game – whoever won would get a GM norm. Drawing would likely favor Xu, since he had played stronger opponents (the drawback of Yip's first-round loss). Both sides gave their best in a game that was ultimately decided by a few critical moments.

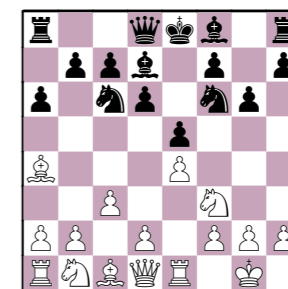
C79

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|-------------|------|
| Daniel Xu | 2255 |
| Carissa Yip | 2399 |

NAJ Open Championship, Dulles 2023

The all-important game, one that would determine who would get to walk away with a GM norm. Though pairings technically weren't posted until the morning of the round, predicting the pairings was simple enough and both sides probably prepared overnight.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 It seems fitting that the most important game of the tournament would be played in the positional Ruy Lopez, said to be a true test of a player's strength.
3...a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 d6 6.♞e1 ♙d7 7.c3 g6 Not the most common. Black aims to put pressure on the d4 square. The main line is **7...♙e7 8.d3 0-0 9.♗bd2 b5 10.♙c2 ♞e8±** etc.



8.d4 ♙g7 9.♗bd2 ♘h5!? Judging by the timestamps, Carissa was out of theory by this point. Black's main plan in this structure is ...♗h5, though, typically it is played after castling.
10.♗f1 b5 11.♙c2 ♙g4?! A logical move, keeping with the plan of attacking



▲ Organisers: IA Greg Vaserstein, IA Hector Mejia, IA/IO Anand Dommalapati, NA Jeff Forbes and NA Brent Layer

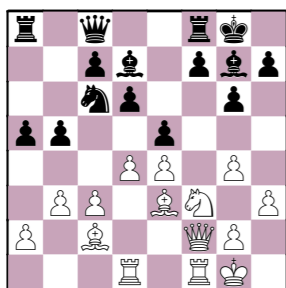
d4, but unfortunately White has a tactical resource here.

12.h3! Yip later admitted she didn't see this originally. Now Black is in trouble.

12...d7 Upon 12...xf3 13.xf3 exd4?? 14.e5 d5 15.g4+- Black's uncastled king comes back to haunt her.

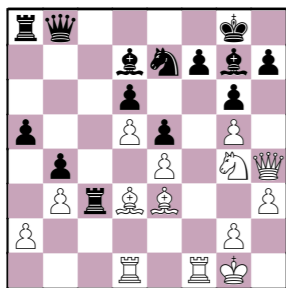
13.e3 0-0 14.d2 e8 A typical KID idea 14...f5?? does not (and will not) mix well here as the center is too open. After 15.exf5 gxf5 16.g5 c8 17.dxe5 xe5 18.h4+- White enjoys all the benefits.

15.a1 c8 16.g3 g3 17.fxg3 a5 18.b3 Clinical. White stops any ...c4. **18...c6 19.f1 a5 20.f2 f8 21.g4**



What makes this position difficult to play is the fact that there are no breaks. Black basically has to wait and see what her opponent will do.

21...b4 22.d5 e7 23.c4 e8 24.g5 b8 25.h4 c6 26.h2 cxd5 27.cxd5 c8 28.d3 c3 29.g4



29...xg4 30.hxg4?? Up until now, Xu's play has been impeccable, stopping counterplay and slowly expanding his position. Now, however, he misses Black's

North American Junior Open Championship
Dulles, VA, December 19-23, 2023
(9 rounds, 104 players)

- 1. Carissa YIP.....8
- 2. Erick ZHAO7½
- 3-4. Daniel XU (CAN), Nicholas VETTESSE (CAN).....7
- 5-8. Kent SLATE, Neil DOKNJAS (CAN), Miguel Angel MONTES OROZCO (MEX), Kagan UZ.....6½
- 9-11. Aaron Reeve MENDES (CAN), Pedro ESPINOSA, Naveen PRABHU.....6



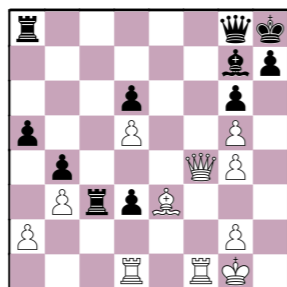
▲ Daniel Xu vs. Carissa Yip

key resource. Correct and strong was 30.xg4+-, controlling the e4 square.

30...d5! Perfect timing to break up White's absolute control of the position.

31.exd5 e4 The third-rank weaknesses are all lined up for Black to take.

32.f2 exd3 33.f7+ h8 34.f4 g8



35.d4 Perhaps 35.xd6 e8 (35...d8 36.e6 e8 37.xg8+ xg8 38.d6 d8=) 36.b6 e2 may look scary, but is, in fact, perfectly fine for Black. 37.f2 e5 38.d7 b8 39.h1=.

35...xd5 36.xg7+ xg7 37.de1 c7 A nice maneuver. Black takes the slightly useless rook and prepares to repurpose it on f7.

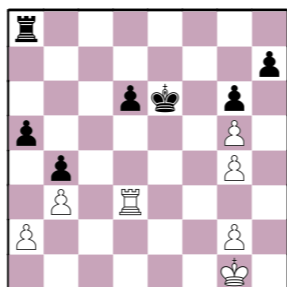
38.e4 f7



39.f7+?? Not the most precise way to go into an endgame. 39.d4 f4 (Or

39...e6 40.f7+ f7 41.f7+ x7 42.xd6=, when the d3 pawn will fall as well.) 40.xd5 xf1+ 41.xf1 Black's king is a few moves behind and White's king is a few moves ahead compared to the game, which will make all the difference.

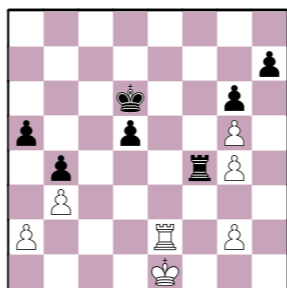
39...f7 40.f7+ x7 41.d4 e6 42.xd3



Material is technically equal, but there's a big difference in quality between 1) Black's d-pawn and White's tripled g-pawns, and 2) the respective kings' positions.

42...d5 43.f2 c8 Preparing to enter on c2 or c3.

44.e3+ d6 45.e2 f8+ 46.e1 f4



Black's kingside pawns are falling. The rest, as they say, is a matter of technique.

47.d2 xg4 48.d3 xg5 49.f2 g3+ 50.d4 g4+ 51.d3 h5



▲ Carissa Yip

52.f6+ e5 53.a6 g3+ 54.e2 xg2+ 55.f3 xa2 56.xg6 a3 57.g5+ d4 58.xh5 xb3+ 59.e2 b2+ 60.d1 a4 61.h4+ c5 62.c1 g2 63.b1 d4 64.h8 b3 65.c8+ b4 66.b8+ a3 67.c1 b2+

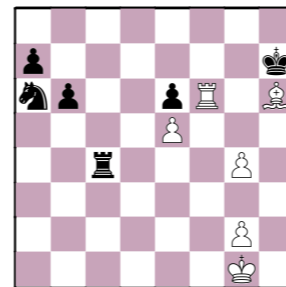
White resigned

This victory meant that besides an incredible eight-game winning streak, Yip also won her first GM norm (of the three required for the title). Xu placed third, while FM Erick Zhao jumped to second place after a last-round victory. Both received an IM norm.

After her first-round upset, Carissa was on fire – winning one game after another. However, it wasn't an easy ride at all, although her final score may suggest so. Persistence is one of her greatest virtues, as can be seen in this round 6 encounter.

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| Carissa Yip | 2399 |
| Neil Doknjas | 2255 |

NAJ Open Championship, Dulles 2023



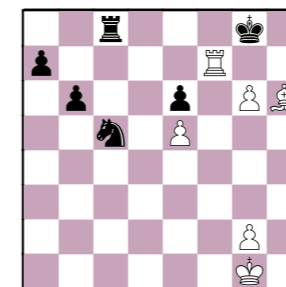
Yip had been winning earlier in the game, but tough resistance by Doknjas had allowed him to equalize. White's passed

g-pawn is powerful, but the slightly vulnerable h6 bishop and the threat of the connected passed pawns should be enough to hold.

47.g5 c7?? It is critical that the rook stays behind the passed pawn. For example, 47...c5 48.f8 g4.

48.f8 White removes the h6 bishop so that g6+ is possible. **48.xe6??** Creating a new, perfectly-blockaded passed pawn is not nearly as important as pushing the one you already have. 48...c5 49.f6 e4 50.e6! (50.f4 c5= White has no way to continue to support the passed pawns.) 50...c1+ 51.h2 e1 Once again, behind the passed pawn!

48...c5 49.g6+ g8 50.h6 Though it looks like the king successfully blockades the g-pawn, Black's king is vulnerable with the pawn and bishop trapping it in place. **50...c8 51.f7!**



51...d8 52.g7+ h8 53.xa7 White is simply dominating the seventh rank.

53...e4 54.g7+ g8 55.f6 xf6 56.exf6 Passed pawns on the sixth; Black's position is hopeless.

56...f8 57.g7+ h8 58.h7+

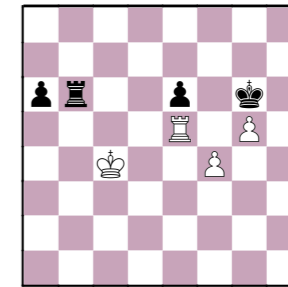
Black resigned

A nice demonstration by Yip that an equal evaluation doesn't mean a drawn game! Even one mistake in an equal (not necessarily balanced) position can be enough to change the result.

By the start of round eight, Yip's yet-unbroken winning streak, plus some minor upsets elsewhere, meant that she had, in fact, climbed back into a three-way tie for first with FMs Daniel Xu and Aaron Mendes Reeve (current Youth Speed Chess Champion, and only eleven years old!). This turned into a two-way tie after the round, with great chess and some good luck on Xu's part.

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| Daniel Xu | 2255 |
| Aaron Mendes Reeve | 2328 |

NAJ Open Championship, Dulles 2023



FMs Daniel Xu and Aaron Mendes Reeve were two of the three leaders tied at 6/7 entering the round, and they showed their skill in a good, balanced positional game. They reached this equal rook ending (it was still equal beforehand, but my endgame annotation skills are not at those of Mr. Fishbein's).

62.e1 And... **White won?** It wasn't a DGT error in move or result transmission, as Xu later confirmed. Turns out, in this still-complicated position where Reeve had only one minute left, he ran out of time. Flagging is very rare in classical chess, and it was unlucky for Reeve that it happened in this important game.

White's last move is logical, creating a threat of c5 to win the pawn. Upon closer inspection, however, Black has many ways to defend. 62...f5 Reinforcing e6. (62...a5 is unnecessarily complicated, though this is still a theoretical draw after 63.c5 a6 64.b5 d6 65.xa5 f5.) 63.c5 b8 64.e5+ xf4 65.xe6 xg5 66.xa6=

THE JUNIOR GIRLS

There was less drama early on in the Girls' section, with the top two seeds remaining undefeated until round 4. Then came the all-important match up, where I had the black pieces.

| | |
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| B51 | |
| Iris Mou | 2106 |
| Zoey Tang | 2284 |

NAJ Girls' Championship, Dulles 2023

Normally (assuming everyone performs according to their rating), the most-anticipated clash of the tournament between the first and second seeds doesn't happen until late in the rounds. Due to the small size of the Girls' section, though, I



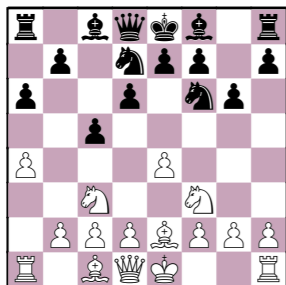
was paired against second-seed Iris Mou as early as the fourth round.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♙b5+ The Moscow Attack, apparently. I've been calling it the Anti-Sicilian this whole time. It's generally considered more positional than the regular Open Sicilian. I knew Iris played both, which is a good strategy at high levels. Two openings means double the preparation for your opponents...

3...♗d7 My own two-opening weapon. The text generally gives a more complex middlegame (more pieces on the board, after all), at the cost of losing some central space.

3...♗d7 4.♙xd7+ ♖xd7 5.0-0 ♗f6 6.♗e2 e6 7.c3 ♗c6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♗e4 11.♗bd2 ♗xd2 12.♙xd2 ♙e7 was how our previous encounter just a few months ago continued. That game we played at the U.S. Junior Girls' Championship in Saint Louis, and it ended in a draw.

4.a4 ♗g6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙e2 g6 Not the most common setup, but it does make sense. Black fianchettoes the bishop to better control d4.



7.a5 A typical plan. White aims to make ...b7-b6 more difficult. The closed center justifies the non-developing opening move.

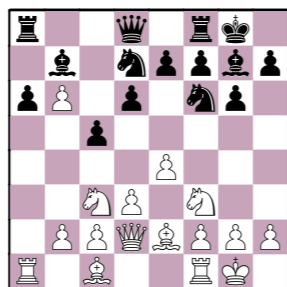
7...b5 8.axb6 ♙b7 Black has two nice fianchettoed bishops, but White has

▼ Iris Mou vs. Zoey Tang



control over the semi-open a-file. Overall, a balanced position where strategy will matter more.

9.d3 ♙g7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♗d2!? A very interesting plan, but also not the top engine recommendation, so very good for throwing people off their preparation. Instead of going for the typical ♗d2/f4 plans, White maneuvers the queen in place to h4 first.



11...♗xb6 I later regretted not playing 11...♗xb6. The knight on d7 is a good defender of the e5 square, and the queen can exert some pressure over b2. If White follows the plan in the game with moves like 12.♗f4 a5 13.♗h4 ♙c6 14.b3, the difference is clear: Black doesn't have to waste any moves defending! 14...♗fb8 15.♙h6 a4 16.bxa4 ♗b2 17.♙d2 ♗xc2=.

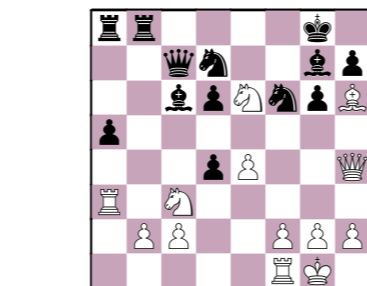
12.♗f4 a5 Continuing the queenside attack along the h8-a1 diagonal. 13.♗h4 ♗c7 14.♙a3 To be honest, I wasn't completely sure what the purpose of this move was. It clears the rook off the diagonal, not that I could actually achieve anything there.

14...♗fb8 15.♙h6 ♗bd7?! Migrating back to the kingside to defend. This move is slow, though. Also moving pieces off the b-file by 15...♙c6, to potentially attack b2, but waiting until the last moment to reinforce the king. 16.♗g5 a4 17.f4 ♗bd7=.

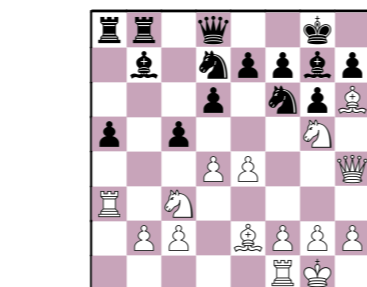
16.♗g5 ♗d8 16...♙c6 was the more

natural defensive move, but I had no doubt that Iris would play 17.d4 which is technically a bad move (not that I knew that during the game), but it looks difficult to defend. 17...cxd4 18.♙c4 e6 19.♙xe6 fxe6 20.♗xe6

20...♗a7 21.♙xg7 dxc3 22.♙xf6 ♗xf6 23.♗xf6 cxb2? Amazingly, material is equal (everything was hanging!), but Black's b-pawn and White's fizzled-out attack are clearly incomparable.



17.d4



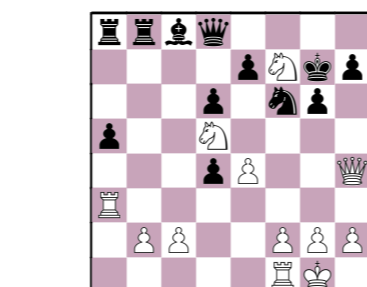
17...cxd4?! Too confident in my calculations. 17...♙xh6! 18.♗xh6 cxd4 19.♙c4 ♗f8! 20.♙xf7+ ♗h8+- Black gives back a pawn, but White has too many weaknesses. The hanging queen, hanging knight, and vulnerable bishop mean that White is bound to lose material.

18.♙c4 ♗e5 19.♙xg7 I missed this simple move amid White's many tempting options.

19.♙xf7+?? ♗xf7 20.♙xg7 (20.♗e6 ♗c8 21.♗xg7 ♗xh6 22.♗xh6 dxc3+-) 20...♗xg5!;

19.♗e6?? fxe6 20.♙xe6+ ♗h8+- doesn't lead to anything for White.

19...♗xg7 20.♙xf7 Threatening ♗e6+. 20...♙c8 21.♗d5 ♗xf7 22.♗xf7



▲ Zoey Tang

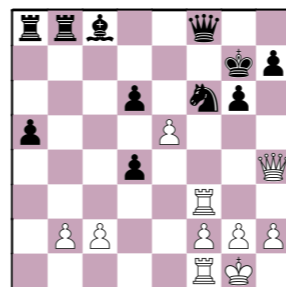
The critical moment. Should I take the material and run, or should I play in a more stable manner?

22...♗f8?! 22...♗xf7! 23.♗xf6 exf6 24.♗xh7+ ♗e8 25.♗xg6+ ♗d7 26.♗f5+ ♗c7 27.♗d5 ♙d7 28.♗xd4 ♙c6 29.♗f3 ♙b4 30.c4 ♗b7= was apparently the correct continuation, though it looks highly unnatural.

23.♗xd6! The brave and correct way to play. After 23.♗g5?! h6 24.♗f3 e5= Black has an endgame that can be pushed forever.

23...♗xd5 23...exd6?? 24.♗f3+-.

24.♗f3 ♗f6 25.e5 exd6?? 25...♙g4 Black should give back the extra piece as the kingside is not defensible otherwise. 26.♗f4 (26.exf6+ exf6 27.♗xg4 ♗xd6=) 26...♙a6! 27.exf6+ (27.♗e4?! ♙f5) 27...exf6 28.♗c4 h5±



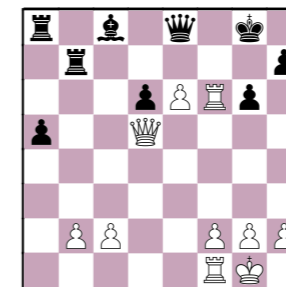
26.♗xf6?? 26.exf6+! Not the most natural continuation, but the incredibly powerful passed f-pawn will be more valuable than the rook's activity. 26...♗h8 27.♙e1 ♙b7 28.♙e7 ♗xe7 29.fxe7 ♙xf3 30.gxf3+- White's pawns are untouchable because of the threat of the queen + pawn duo on the kingside.

26...♙e8 27.e6 This looks winning as

well, but fortunately I have a defense.

27...♙b7 27...♙xe6?? 28.♙e1+- The rooks will wreak havoc on the kingside.

28.♗xd4 ♗g8 29.♗d5

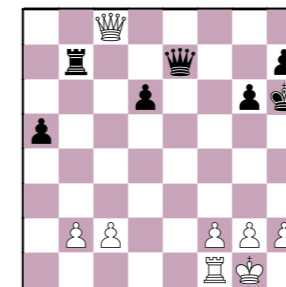


I had a moment of panic here, since the threat of e7+ followed by ♗f8 is very strong and I can't blockade it due to the weakness of my rooks. Luckily I have a resource.

29...♙ab8! 29...♙e7?? runs into 30.♗xa8+-. Also, 29...♗e7?? 30.♗f7 ♗xe6 31.♗xe6 ♙xe6 32.♙b7+- is winning for White. If 29...♙aa7??, then 30.e7+ ♗g7 31.♗f8 ♗xe7 32.♙xc8+- and Black's king is too weak in a major-piece endgame (recipe for disaster!).

30.e7+ ♗g7 31.♗f8 I was relieved when Iris played this move, as it signaled an imminent transition. 31.♗d4 ♗xe7 32.♙xd6+ ♗f7 33.♙d8 ♙e4± leads to an attacking position difficult to evaluate, where White is down a piece and doesn't have a concrete continuation.

31...♗xe7 32.♗g8+ ♗h6 33.♙xc8 ♙xc8 34.♗xc8 My king is still weak and I have still given up my extra bishop, but I managed to trade off a pair of rooks.



34...♙xb2 35.♗c3 ♗e5 36.♗h3+ ♗g7 37.♗d7+ ♗g8 38.♗d8+ ♗g7 39.♗d7+ ♗g8 40.♗d8+ ♗g7 Draw agreed.

A creative attacking idea by Iris early on in the game led the momentum to be completely in her favor. I had a few chances to simplify into a good/winning endgame (fruits of my brilliant defense, no doubt), but after failing to find them, Iris kept attacking without fear. Later, though, she missed her main tactical chances, and I managed to hold

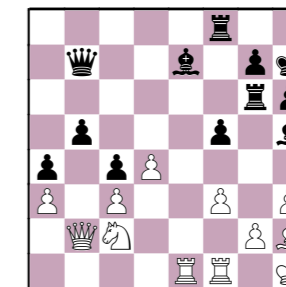
on. Even though this wasn't the best result standings-wise, I was happy with what I got.

Seeing that "only" five rounds remained, I did a quick calculation of my winning chances: while it was improbable, I fully expected Iris and I to both win all our last rounds. In that case, it would all come down to a battle of tiebreaks. With the first tiebreak being head-to-head and the second being some computational gibberish relating to the opponents' results, I could only hope for the best and take things one round at a time.

The next critical moment came in round six, when I managed to win a crazy game.

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| Sahana Aravindakshan | 1964 |
| Zoey Tang | 2284 |

NAJ Girls' Championship, Dulles 2023



Black currently has the bishop pair, but the board remains relatively closed. The kingside mass of pieces looks scary, but actually White has more than enough defenders. What's the bishop on h5 even doing? Still, this was an improvement from before, where my opponent missed a few chances to seize the initiative with ♗e3-d5 ideas.

36...♙ff6?! I had less time than my opponent and I regretted how I went all-in on the kingside. This was my last trick. Better was 36...f4 controlling e3 and locking White's bishop out of play. After, for example, 37.♙e5 ♙g5 38.♗c1 ♙g6=, the bishop sees the light of day!

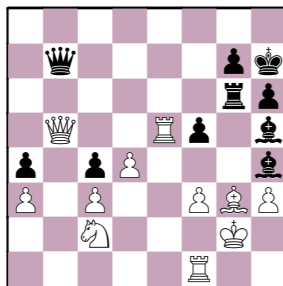
37.♙e5?? My opponent played this move relatively quickly, a very pleasant surprise. Then again, it's unexpected that White's kingside went from perfectly fine to indefensible in one move. A simple move like 37.♗b4±, allowing the queen to guard g2, puts Black back under pressure again.

37...♙xg2! I spent only 4 minutes on this sacrifice, partially because I had little time left, partially because I felt it had to work,

and partially because I knew this was my last chance.

38.♔xg2 ♖g6+ 39.♙g3 39.♔f2?? ♜xf3+ 40.♔e1 ♜d1+ 41.♔f2 ♜d2+ 42.♞e2 ♜xe2 mate.

39...♙h4 40.♜xb5

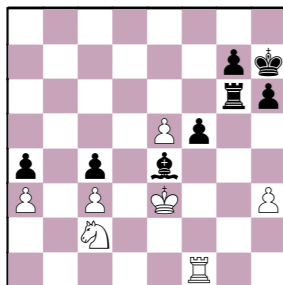


40...♙xf3+! The simplest continuation. 40...♞xg3+? 41.♔h2 ♙xf3 42.♜xb7 ♖g2+ 43.♔h1 ♙xb7 44.♔e3 ♖c2+ 45.♔g1 ♖xc3-+ is also winning, but it's not clear.

41.♔f2 41.♞xf3?? ♖xg3+ 42.♔h2 ♜xf3-+.

41...♞xg3+ 42.♔e3 ♙xe5 42...♞b6! Denying the trade of queens with tempo. White's king in the center will be too vulnerable.

43.♜xb7 ♙xb7 44.dxe5 ♙e4



At this point, we were both low on time, so I was pretty confident in my winning chances (despite the fact that Black is only up one pawn).

45.♔b4 ♖e6 46.♔d4 g5 47.♔d5 ♔g6 48.♞f2 ♖e8 49.♔xc4 ♖xe5 50.♔b6 ♙c6 51.♔d4 ♖e4+ 52.♔c5 ♙e8 53.♔c4 f4 54.♔d6 ♖e3 55.♔xe8 ♖xe8

The DGT transmission cut off after this, but it's a relatively simple win with the connected passers on the kingside (black can even sacrifice the rook for the c-pawn once the g- and f-pawns are pushed far enough). **Black won** My one-trick pony worked, though I certainly hope to avoid similar situations in the future!

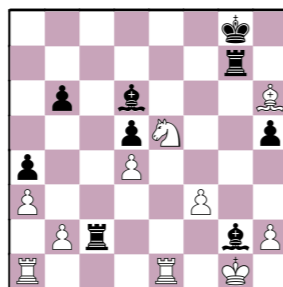
Another surprise occurred this round when Iris drew against fifth-seed (and eventual third-place finisher) WCM Angela Liu from an originally winning position. "Winning", of course, being the engine's

words; in reality it's hard to convert aggressive tactical positions without the ability to calculate thousands of moves per second.

This game and another draw in round seven ultimately cost Iris the title by half a point, but she still played some amazing chess along the way.

| | |
|-----------|------|
| Chloe Gaw | 1891 |
| Iris Mou | 2106 |

NAJ Girls' Championship, Dulles 2023



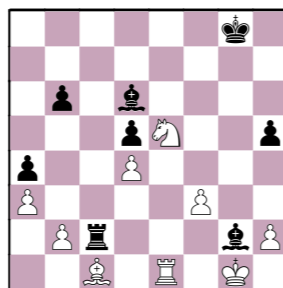
Iris had a great attacking game earlier, though, by this point, it has mostly dissipated. Chloe's ♙h6 move was a nice touch, as now it seems that Black's rook is forced off the critical g-file.

40...♞h7?! 40...♙xe5! Staying on the g-file (and maintaining threats of a discovered attack) is very important. 41.♖xe5 ♖g6 42.♙g5 ♙xf3? Yes, it is an opposite-colored bishop endgame, but there are still rooks on board. White's weak queenside pawns and Black's active rook should be enough to claim an advantage.

41.♞ac1 ♖hc7 42.♖xc2 ♖xc2 With the position simplified further and the threat to the king neutralized, White looks well on the way to equality.

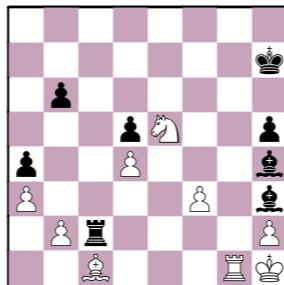
43.♙c1? Too greedy. The bishop is much less active after this move, and it wastes a much-needed tempo. 43.♞c1 ♖xb2 44.♞c6 Counterattack! 44...♙xa3 45.♞c7=.

43...♙e7? 43...♙h3! threatening ...♞g2+ was more powerful. After 44.♔h1 h4 45.♞g1+ ♔h7?, all of White's pieces are restricted.



43...♙e7? 43...♙h3! threatening ...♞g2+ was more powerful. After 44.♔h1 h4 45.♞g1+ ♔h7?, all of White's pieces are restricted.

44.♞d1 ♙h3! 45.♔h1 45.♔d3! A cute defensive maneuver. 45...♙h4 46.♔f4? 45...♙h4 46.♞g1+ ♔h7



47.♔f7?? Aiming to counterattack, which is usually the right idea, but unfortunately not so in this position. White's pieces are not in place while Black's bishop pair is already breathing down the king's neck. 47.♔d3, once again guarding f2 and preparing ♔f4, would be equal.

47...♙f2 48.♔g5+ ♔g6 Looks scary, but Black's bishop is attacking the rook.

49.♞d1 49.♔xh3+ ♙xg1-+.

49...♖xc1! 50.♖xc1 ♔xg5 51.♞c3 ♔f4 52.b3 axb3 53.♖xb3 ♙xd4 54.♞d3 ♙e3 55.♖b3 ♔xf3 56.♖b2 d4 57.a4 d3 58.a5 ♙f2 **White resigned**

Another example of persistence and waiting for the right moment to strike by Iris, typical of her games in this tournament. The king can be attacked even in the endgame! This game propelled Iris to an impressive 7½/9 score.

North American Junior Girls' Championship
Dulles, VA, December 19-23, 2023
(9 rounds, 32 players)

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Zoey TANG | 8 |
| 2. Iris MOU | 7½ |
| 3-5. Angela LIU, Julia TSUKERMAN (CAN), Aasa Dommalapati | 6 |
| 6-7. Jenny ZHU, April Yunwei ZHONG (CAN) | 5½ |
| 8-12. Chloe GAW, Jwalanthi RAM, Cindy QIAO (CAN), Lilian WANG, Sophie LI | 5 |

In the end, the podium finishers closely reflected the starting ranks: myself in first (WGM norm!), Iris in second (not winning any additional titles/norms, having already obtained the WIM norm), and Angela in third (direct WFM title and WIM norm). But clearly, the specific games were much more complicated than the results suggested.



Interview with **Carissa Yip**

By Zoey Tang

■ **Hi Carissa, welcome! You've had an amazing year so far, notably winning both the U.S. Women's Championship and the North American Junior. Did you do anything special or change anything in your training routine to achieve this?**

Honestly, not really. I feel like I've been doing sort of the same thing that I usually do and it clicked together pretty well for the U.S. Women's. But one change that I made is that, while I usually don't really spend that much time on chess during school, U.S. Women's was right at the beginning of the school year for me. I was skipping a few weeks of school there and I was coming off a summer filled with chess tournaments. Right before the tournament, literally days before the tournament started, I finished up another tournament in Mexico (the World Junior Girls') and that really helped me warm up and shake off some of the rust. When you haven't really been playing for a while, you tend to blunder a lot more and just play worse overall. So, that was a big thing for me. I also did well in that tournament and I was pretty proud of my play, so I had more confidence going into U.S. Women's.

■ **I was following your games during the World Junior; you did really well! Going more into the North American Junior, the tournament that just finished. This was your last year playing because of the age cutoff. Did that influence your mentality at all going into the tournament?**

It's definitely my last year to play a ton of junior tournaments, so it's a little bittersweet. This is the first time that I've played North American Junior actually, and I think knowing it was my last year didn't really change much. I usually go into every tournament really hoping to win it, and this was the same.

■ **You mentioned that you wanted to win the tournament. But obviously it**

was really steamrolling. I fought my way back towards the top of the standings, and then I felt a lot better because I knew that the tournament was still in my hands. I was probably going to have to beat the tournament leaders at that point, but it was under my control.

■ **Did you know before the last round that you were in a must win situation? Because if you drew, your tiebreaks would have been bad.**

I knew that. My tiebreaks were really bad compared to everyone else's because of my first round loss. So it was a must win situation for me, but I felt pretty good about it. It's sort of like the whole tournament banks on me beating a 2200 as Black and I was like, okay, there's been worse odds before, so hopefully it'll be okay.

■ **But then the way that first game progressed, you got a much worse position out of the opening. What was your thought process at that time? I think I got into my head**

Matured as a Player, and as a Person

was much more difficult after you lost your first round, which was a big upset. How did you feel after losing that first round, and how did you bounce back?

During that first round, I feel like I was super in my head and I was spending a lot of time on very simple moves. I was like "maybe there's something more complicated or more challenging for my opponent here," that sort of thing, and I ended up really low on time. Once the position got critical I didn't have the time to handle it and navigate it. As for how I bounced back, right after the game I was just really

done. I thought, man, I might as well withdraw from this tournament because I have no chances of winning now; there's no point and clearly I'm really out of shape and I don't want to lose more rating. But then I was like no, I can't withdraw after round one, it's too much. But if I lose another game I'm out. That was my mentality. I really wanted to just regain some rating from the tournament. I wasn't super focused on winning by then, but it just so happened that I kept winning my games. And then going into the last day, I realized, oh okay, there's a pretty good shot, I guess, because no one at the top

again in the opening and I played this really dumb sort of a ...♙g4-d7 thing; I hadn't calculated it properly. I got a little confused, because usually White wants to play h3, and I thought that ♔bd2, as what happened in the game, was a little early. So, I tried to figure out a way to punish it, because the point is after ...♙g4, there's annoying stuff going on with the d4 pawn and all that. But, I forgot that with this whole ...♙g4, if White just plays h3, I can't really go after the free pawn, because of these sort of ideas with e5 and such. I'm sure you don't remember the specifics of the game, but maybe it'll help.