



14-year-old Alice Lee confirms her pre-tournament favorite status

BACK-TO-BACK TITLE FOR ALICE

IM Alice Lee was a clear favorite before the start of this year's U.S. Junior Girls' Championship. However, the tournament was no walk in the park for her due to a slow start, but the experience she has accumulated in playing strong tournaments proved crucial to her defense of the title. The runner-up, 15-year-old FM Rose Atwell, had an excellent tournament and showed her great potential for the years to come.

By WIM Zoey Tang

July had rolled in again, which meant – no, not fireworks, or high temperatures; it was time for the US National Championships, of course! Hosted as usual by the Saint Louis Chess Club, three round robins – Seniors, Juniors, and Girls – of talented American players battled it out over the board for fame and glory (there also happened to be hefty cash prizes).

In the Girls' Junior, top seed and defending champion IM Alice Lee led the field, which included many new faces. I had the opportunity to speak with Alice after the tournament. In her words, "[t]here's been a generation shift. This year's field was younger than the field in 2023 and significantly



SAINT LOUIS, MO

July 15-25, 2024

U.S. JUNIOR GIRLS' CHAMPIONSHIP
(10-player round-robin)

1. Alice LEE7
2. Rose ATWELL6½
3. Iris MOU5½
- 4-5. Yassamin EHSANI, Jasmine SU5
6. Rachael LI4
- 7-8. Zoey TANG, Megan PARAGUA3½
9. Omya VIDYARTHI3
10. Chloe GAW2



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.

younger than the field in 2022". Added to her experience playing in the "grown-up" Women's American Cup and Cairns Cup, Alice was a strong favorite to win.

BAD START MEANS NO BAD TOURNAMENT!

Yet the first two rounds saw her near the bottom of the pack, with a first-round loss to WIM Iris Mou and a draw against WFM Yassamin Ehsani. "I stopped thinking about winning the tournament, focusing more on winning each game individually," Alice shared. It was at this point that her experience showed. "I had a similar

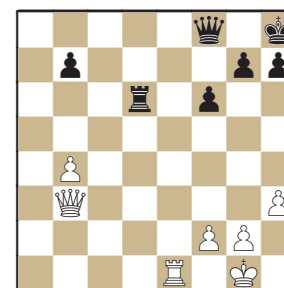
tournament in the 2023 U.S. Women's Championship where I started ½/3 but finished with 7½/11. I've learned to not let bad starts dictate the rest of the games."

ALICE WINS THE KEY MATCHUP

Indeed, she bounced back the very next game. Though nobody knew it at the time, the third-round game between Alice and FM Rose Atwell was crucial for the standings, especially with the first tiebreak being head-to-head.

Alice Lee	2371
Rose Atwell	2277

U.S. Girls Junior Championship, St. Louis 2024



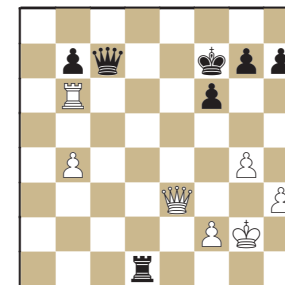
The position looks very equal; the structure is symmetrical and both sides' pieces are relatively well-placed. The only "difference" to speak of is White's slightly more advanced b-pawn. This will allow White to potentially attack Black's b7 pawn, since Black's pieces will be a bit more cramped trying to guard it. Potentially being the key word, of course; as the engine kindly reminds us, this position is just +0.07. Even the players' clocks only differ by 4 seconds, at nearly 16 minutes each.

▼ Rose Atwell



41. ♖a4 ♘d8 42. ♖b5 ♖f7 43. ♖b6 ♖d7 44. ♘e6 ♘g8 45. ♖e3 Both sides have been playing logical, relatively quick moves. 45... ♘f7 Rose correctly identifies that the king is better-placed here. It guards entry points along the e-file and chases White's rook away.

46. ♖b6 ♖c7 47. g4 ♘d1+ 48. ♘g2



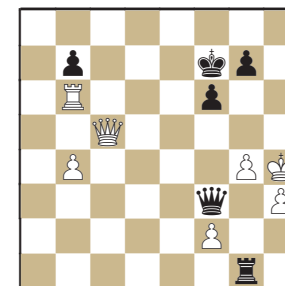
48... ♖d7?! Blundering a pawn to a fork.

48... ♘d6! forces a trade of rooks, since ♖b5 fails to ... ♖c6+. 49. ♘xd6 ♖xd6= With the rooks off, White has almost no chances to push. 50. ♖e4 doesn't work now because Black can simply play 50... b6 and White's queen is tied to the b4 pawn.

49. ♖e4 ♘d5 50. ♖xh7 ♘e5 Objectively, the position is still equal (how's White going to take advantage of the extra passed pawn?!), but the draw has gone from being relatively trivial to requiring precision.

51. ♖c2 ♖d5+ 52. ♘g3 ♘e1! Correctly trying to counterattack White's king.

53. ♖c5 ♘g1+ 54. ♘h4 ♖f3



Rose has demonstrated excellent defense thus far. Black's pieces are ideally placed, while White's king is in a precarious situation. The position looks poised to be a draw.

55. ♖h5+ At this point, Rose has 4 minutes, compared to Alice's 1.

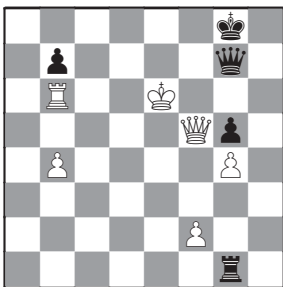
55... ♘e7?? Now the black king is too exposed. Whereas on f7 the king is at least somewhat sheltered by pawns, on e7 it's almost completely open. Critically, the king also no longer contributes to the kingside attack.

Correct was 55... ♘g8, when Black is still threatening ...g5 with almost-mate, so





White has to move the queen. Now, if, as in the game, White tries 56. ♖f5??, then Black is even winning! (56. ♖c5 ♜f7=) 56...g5+ (56... ♖xf5? holds [and is the more human option], now, since ♜xb7 won't come with check. 57.gxf5 ♜g5 58. ♜xb7 ♜xf5 59. ♜g3 ♜g5+ 60. ♜f3 ♜h5=) 57. ♜h5 ♖xb3+ 58. ♜g6 ♜h7+ 59. ♜xf6 ♜g7+ 60. ♜e6



All relatively natural moves so far, checking the king and forcing White's king into the open. Here, however, Black needs to find only move. 60...♜d1! All other moves lose. White's king is trapped in a cage, and Black's direct threat is ...♜d7-d8, forking the king and the rook. (60...♜e1+?? 61. ♜d5 ♜d1+ 62. ♜c4 ♜d4+ 63. ♜b5) 61. ♜b5 ♜h6+ 62. ♜f6 ♜d6+-+. To calculate the whole line from the beginning would be quite a feat, to say the least.

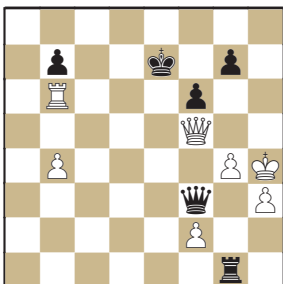
56. ♖c5+?? Repeating moves quickly to gain time. However, this allows Black to transpose back to the drawing line.

56. ♖f5 is the right way, as demonstrated later, but of course it's difficult to calculate accurately with only a minute left on the clock.

56. ♖b5, attacking b7, is also an option. White's king gets chased to h5, but it's perfectly fine!

56...♜f7 57. ♖h5+ ♜e7?? As mentioned above 57...♜g8 was correct.

58. ♖f5!



58... ♖g2 If instead 58... ♖xf5, the rook endgame is not any more hopeful after 59.gxf5 ♜d7 (59... ♜g5 60. ♜xb7+ ♜d6 61. ♜b5+-) 60. ♜xb7+ ♜c6 61. ♜e7!, threatening ♜e4-g4, and White is winning.

59. ♖e6+ Now the position is hopeless. 59... ♜f8 60. ♖c8+ ♜f7 61. ♜xb7+ ♖xb7 61... ♜g6 62. ♖f5+ ♜h6 63. ♖h5 mate. 62. ♖xb7+ ♜g6 63.f4 ♜h6 64.f5

Black resigned

From the highly symmetrical starting position, Alice managed to win a pawn. Yet Rose demonstrated solid defense, creating a strong counterattack. Chess is cruel in that one move can mess up your previous fifty moves worth of effort...

"Winning (this) crazy game helped my mentality a lot," said Alice. "Results from other games also went in my favor, so by the time I reached the rest day, I think I recovered from the difficult start."

Indeed, by the start of round seven only Alice and Rose were leading. Both played some great chess to get there, such as this attacking win by Alice in round six.

A TIMELY SWITCH TO ATTACK

A13

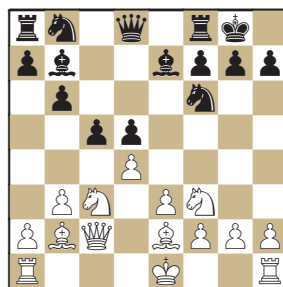
Omya Vidyarthi	2087
Alice Lee	2371

U.S. Girls Junior Championship, St. Louis 2024

1. ♜f3 d5 2.e3 ♜f6 3.c4 e6 4. ♜c3 ♜e7 Judging by the timestamps, both players are out of preparation by this point. White's setup (not committing the d- or e- center pawns) means that the game will usually be more scheme-based, and exact move order nuances won't matter much. Both sides will develop their pieces to natural squares.

5.b3 b6 6. ♜b2 6.cxd5, both on this move and the next, is a nice idea – if Black takes with the e-pawn, the bishop will be blocked if it chooses to fianchetto – which was the whole idea of ...b6. Meanwhile, ...♜xd5 means Black won't have as much center control.

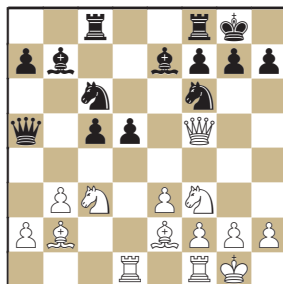
6...0-0 7. ♖c2 ♜b7 8. ♜e2 c5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.d4



10... ♜c6 Even though this move blocks the light-squared bishop, the knight puts pressure on the critical d4-c5 tension.

11.dxc5 bxc5 Black has a hanging pawn structure in the center, characterized by the semi-open c- and d-files, without Black's e- or b-pawns. Typically, the pawns are a bit weak, but Black has dynamic chances if ...d4 or ...c4 are timed well.

12.0-0 ♜c8 13. ♜ad1 ♖a5 14. ♖f5 A nice move which generates a big problem for Black to solve: how to defend the d5 pawn? Of course, not 14. ♜xd5?? ♜xd5 15. ♜xd5 ♜b4+-.



14...g6 Somewhat risky, as White's bishop on b2 is ideally placed to take advantage of the weakened diagonal.

The natural 14... ♜fd8 isn't the best, since White will be able to take advantage of the soft f7 pawn.

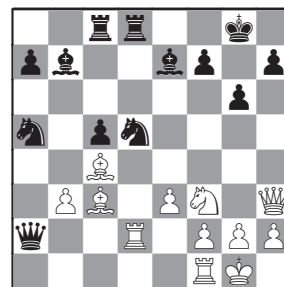
A) 15. ♜xd5 is interesting and direct. 15... ♜xd5 16. ♜c4! Once again, the f7 weakness is key. (But not 16. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 17. ♖xd5 ♖xa2 18. ♖d7 ♖xb3=) 16...g6 (After 16... ♜f6? 17. ♜g5±



Omya Vidyarthi



White's attack is crushing.) 17. ♖h3 ♖xa2 18. ♜d2 ♜a5 19. ♜c3



Here Black has an only move to not lose the game. 19... ♜xc3! 20. ♜xa2 ♜xa2 21. ♜xf7+! ♜xf7 22. ♖xh7+ ♜e6 23. ♖xg6+ ♜d7∞ and the position is approximately balanced. Black has a bunch of pieces for the queen, but the king is in quite a bit of danger.

B) 15. ♜g5 Black's knight on f6 is pinned to the aforementioned f7 pawn. 15...h6 16. ♜xd5! hxc5 17. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 18. ♜xf6 gxf6 19. ♖xf6± White will soon have three pawns for a piece, and Black's king is open.

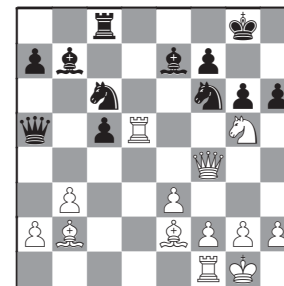
14... ♜cd8! Not the most intuitive, but this move lets the f8 rook carry out its more important duty, while guarding the d5 pawn without weakening the king. For example, 15. ♜xd5?! ♜xd5 16. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 17. ♖xd5 ♖xa2±.

15. ♖f4 ♜fd8?! Same problem as above. Once again, 15... ♜cd8± was a better positioning of Black's rooks.

15...d4 is also among the engine's top choices, but it's a sad imitation of the play Black usually gets from the hanging pawn structure. 16.exd4 cxd4 17. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 18. ♖xd4 ♖g5 19.g3 ♜c5 20. ♖a4 ♖f5 This looks promising, until White plays 21. ♖f4! and all Black can get is 21... ♖xf4

22.gxf4 ♜fe8± with a possibly holdable, but only winnable by White endgame.

16. ♜e5? Going for the safer plan of trading minor pieces to attack the pawns later. Instead, 16. ♜g5 and suddenly White's the one with great attacking chances! 16...h6 17. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 18. ♜xd5

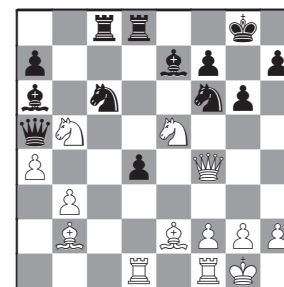


Weakness of f7 is still the problem... 18...hxc5 19. ♖xg5 ♖xa2 20. ♜xf6 ♖xe2 21.h4!± Black's position is just sad.

16...d4 Played after a 21-minute think. This break is, of course, very committal, but here it was the right decision.

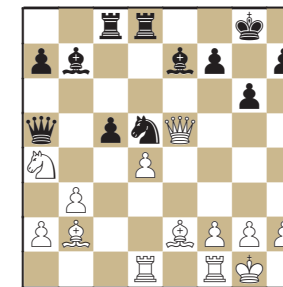
17. ♜a4 This is slightly less principled than ♜e4, when more minor pieces are traded. However, it poses practical problems via the pressure on c5.

17.exd4 was the most direct way, which reduces both sides' winning chances. Then, 17...cxd4 18. ♜b5 ♜a6! 19.a4



19... ♜xe5 20. ♖xe5 ♜d5 21. ♜xd4 ♜f6 22. ♖e4 ♜xb5 23. ♜xb5 ♜xd4 24. ♜xd4 ♜c3 25. ♜xd8+ ♖xd8 26. ♖e5 ♜xb5 27. ♖xb5 Almost all Black's moves in this sequence have been forced. After 27... ♜b8, only White can win, but it shouldn't be that difficult to hold as Black.

17... ♜xe5 18. ♖xe5 ♜d5 19.exd4

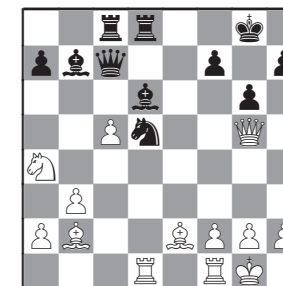


19... ♜d6?! The king is somewhat more airy after this. Better was 19... ♜f6, guarding the king. For example, 20. ♖g3 cxd4 21. ♜xd4 ♜e8=.

20. ♖g5 ♖c7? The threat of ... ♜xh2+ is too small. 20... ♜e7±, to once again guard the king, is best. However, it's hard to admit psychologically that one's previous move was bad.

21.g3?? Choosing to believe your opponent isn't always the best option, even if said opponent is one of the most accomplished young female players of the era! Both sides have committed to weakening g-pawn advances. The question is now who can clear her fianchettoed bishop first.

21.dxc5



A) 21... ♜xc5? 22. ♜xc5 ♖xc5 23. ♖e5 f6 24. ♖e6+ ♜f8 25. ♜xd5! is the prettiest way to win. After 25... ♖xd5 26. ♖xf6+ ♖f7 27. ♖h8+ ♖g8 28. ♖e5+- Black's king is completely open.

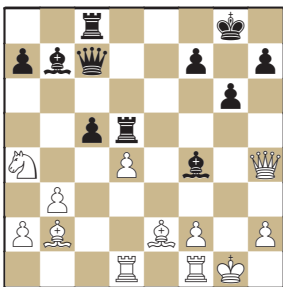
B) 21... ♜xh2+ 22. ♜h1 ♜f4 23. ♖h4 ♜e5 24. ♜xe5 ♖xe5 25. ♜f3+- White is up a pawn for nothing, and Black's pieces on the open files will be harassed for a few moves yet.

21... ♜f4! Black takes the initiative! 22.gxf4?! Okay, now you should believe your opponent... The most natural way to



protect from the threat is 22.♔g4. Then, Black's 22...f5 looks very scary, but White can accept doubled f-pawns. After all, Black's king is very weak along the a1-h8 diagonal. 23.d5! fxc4 24.gxf4 ♖f8 25.♖fe1=.

22...♔xf4 23.♖h4 ♜d5! Black's pieces are beautifully coordinated.



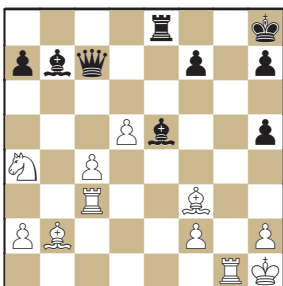
24.♜d3 Even if White gives up the exchange on g3, she will still be up material.

24...♜e8 Involving the last piece into the attack.

25.♔f3? It's much easier to mess up when under attack. After 25.♖c3 ♜g5+ 26.♜g3 cxd4 27.♔c4 ♜ White has to give up the extra material to defend. Still hard to play, though.

25.♜g3 was one of White's key defensive resources. Giving up the exchange is preferable to giving up on h2. 25...♜g5+ 26.♔h1 c4 27.♜c3 ♜h5 28.♖xh5 Forced.

28...gxh5 29.♜g1+ ♔h8 30.d5 ♔e5 31.bxc4



31...♖d7?? Letting White's stranded a4 knight into the game, and with tempo, too.

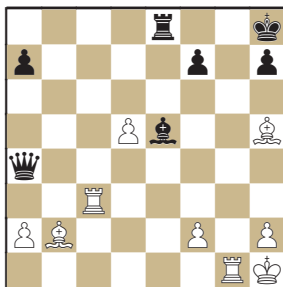
Only after 31...f6 Black is threatening ...♔xc3. Then, after 32.♜b3 ♔xb2 33.♖xb2 h4++, Black should convert this endgame relatively easily with good technique, given her extra material.

32.♔xh5? This move sets a nice trap, but Black doesn't have to fall into it. 32.♖c5 ♖h3 33.♜g2 ♖c8! Only move! White was threatening ♜e3, and still might, for example after 34.♔xh5 ♖xc5?? 35.♜e3!+-.

32...♔xd5+?! After 32...♖xa4?? 33.♔xf7+- suddenly White is winning! The rook can't run away because of ♜cg3.

Though it looks ugly, 32...♜f8! threatens ...♔xc3 by supporting ...f6 to block the resulting ♔xc3+, while keeping ...♖xa4 threats alive and guarding the f7 pawn. 33.♖c5 ♖f5.

33.cxd5 ♖xa4



34.♔xf7?? The final mistake. 34.♜a3 ♖f4 35.♔xe5+ ♜xe5 36.♜ag3 ♜e8 37.♔g2=.

34...♖e4+ Getting rid of any last counterchances. 34...♖f4 is still winning – forking h2 and f7 – as after 35.♜cg3 Black has 35...♖xf7 36.♜g8+ ♖xg8!+-.

35.♜g2 ♖e1+ 36.♜g1 ♖xf2 Again, Black forks h2 and f7.

37.♜c8 ♖xh2

White resigned Without opening theory, the game quickly reached an interesting middlegame with an imbalanced pawn structure. Omya played actively and it worked; her attack was winning at one point. Yet Alice kept her cool and pounced at her first chance, eventually winning a sharp attacking game. Who knew such complications could result from the normally relatively peaceful 1.♖f3!

Interview with Alice Lee

ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE ALREADY BEFORE 15!

What did you feel and how did you adjust your mentality after losing the first round?

I wasn't upset after losing the first round – I knew it would be a long tournament, so one game would not be the deciding factor. However, I did get more nervous after drawing the second round, because it's much more difficult to recover after two tough games in a tournament of nine rounds. At that point, I stopped thinking about winning the tournament, focusing more on winning each game individually. Winning the third round after a crazy game helped my mentality a lot. Results from other games also went in my favor, so by the time I reached the rest day, I think I recovered from the difficult start.

When you're one of the top seeds and everyone has high expectations for you, how do you deal with not-ideal starts?

Experience helps. I had a similar tournament in the 2023 U.S. Women's Championship where I started 1/2/3 but finished with 7 1/2/11. I've learned to not let bad starts dictate the rest of the games. As a chess player, sometimes being forgetful can be a useful trait. It's easy to get caught up with a bad game (or series of games), but remembering that the next game is a new game – so it will not go the same way – is both true and useful for mentality. For this tournament, I did know there were high expectations. However, after the first couple of rounds, I shifted my own expectations from thinking about nine rounds to thinking about one round at a time.

How do you feel this year's Girls' field compared to previous years?

There's been a generation shift. This year's field was younger than the field in 2023 and significantly younger than the field in 2022. All of the players are quite good, and very fighting. Playing as one of the veterans instead of against the veterans was different. But the experience I garnered from previous years was useful. Almost all the girls will be playing in this tournament for many years to come. It will be interesting as the players will get stronger, and so will the event.

Has playing in prestigious events such as the American Cup and the Cairns' Cup influenced your mentality about smaller tournaments (including the Girls' Junior)?

The work done during the other tournaments (especially the Cairns' Cup) was helpful

ROSE KEEPS CALM IN THE STORM

Not to be outdone, Rose won with a nice bit of calculation the very next round. Going into this game, Rose and Alice were tied at 4/6, half a point ahead of the rest of the field. Everything was still very much up for grabs, so winning games (as opposed to making safe draws) was important.



▲ Alice Lee

overall. For example, I still had unused ideas that I was able to transfer over to some of the tournaments afterward, including the Girls' Junior. I do think the Girls' Junior is prestigious – it is a national championship – but the main difference is there are higher expectations. Still, being able to play in high-pressure situations is a skill that I've gained through playing in difficult tournaments. I think at this point, having a good mindset is just as important (if not more) than having good opening prep (although both are important in the modern era).

What are your goals from here?

I'm hoping in the next couple of years to achieve the GM title. I will be playing in strong tournaments that give me chances for norms. It will definitely be tedious and difficult, but that is the main goal I have. Still, improving by playing and studying is the most important thing for me right now because there's no other way and no other shortcuts to success.

Do you plan to pursue chess professionally? If not, what role do you see chess playing in your life?

Regardless of whether I choose to pursue chess professionally, I would like it to be a part of my life. I want to go to college and explore other skills I might integrate with chess. There are a lot of fields that could be interconnected with chess. Especially as AI becomes more prevalent, many jobs will likely be around that, and it could be used (as it already is) to make a significant impact on chess. For now, I'd like to see where chess takes me in the next 2-3 years before I decide.

DO2

Yassamin Ehsani	2083
Rose Atwell	2277

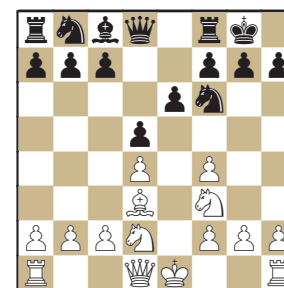
U.S. Girls Junior Championship, St. Louis 2024
Notes by Rose Atwell

1.d4 d5 2.♔f4 Not the most combative first moves, but don't worry, it gets interesting later!

2...♖f6 3.e3 e6 4.♖f3 ♔d6 This is a simple set-up designed to neutralize the London bishop.

5.♖bd2 Other moves for White are ♔xd6 or ♔g3. (White invites the structure with the doubled f-pawns, claiming that it isn't necessary to use a move to avoid it –Zoey Tang.)

5...♔xf4 6.exf4 0-0 7.♔d3



7...b6 White has a strong outpost on e5. With this move I want to exchange the

light-squared bishops, so as to neutralize her potential kingside attack.

8.♖e2 a5 9.0-0 ♔a6 10.♔xa6 ♖xa6 11.♖e5 c5 12.c3 ♖c7 My knight was a bit offside on a6, so I reroute it to a better square. I could also have played ...♖b8, so that the knight can go to c6 or d7 later.

13.♜ac1 ♖d6 14.g3 ♜f8 15.h4 ♖ce8 16.g4 My opponent is playing ambitiously, but my king is defended quite well.

16...♖d7



17.♖df3 (Here's a sample line to demonstrate what happens if White goes all-in on the kingside pawn storm. 17.h5 ♜c7 18.g5 cxd4 Opening a line on the queenside to force a few trades. 19.cxd4 ♜ac8 20.♜xc7 ♖xc7 21.g6? ♖xe5 22.fxe5 hxc6 23.hxc6 ♖c2! ♜ And suddenly it turns out that White's pieces are not active enough to continue the attack! –Zoey Tang)

17...♖f8 It doesn't hurt to have another defender close to my king.

18.♖e3 f6 The e6 pawn is well protected, so I can afford to touch the f-pawn.

19.♖d3 c4! This space-gaining plan on the queenside is the most promising.

20.♖de1 ♖d7 Preparing to reroute the knight via d6.

21.♖g2 ♖d6 22.♖d2?! This feels a bit slow and premature. Perhaps it was better to start with h5. (22.h5 ♖e4?! is nothing to be afraid of for White, as she has 23.♖d2 (only now!) with tempo –Zoey Tang).

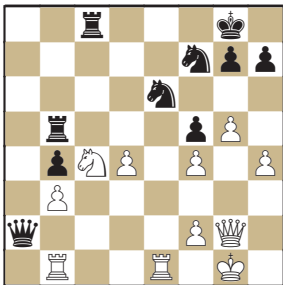
22...b5 23.♖f3



23...f5! Blocking White's play on the kingside, so I have free rein on the opposite wing.



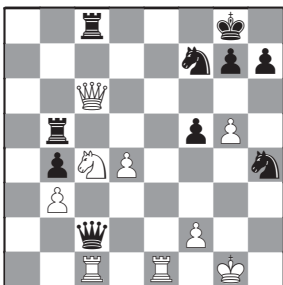
24.g5?! This just lets me achieve what I want. Again, h5 was to be preferred. For example, 24.h5 b4 25.♖fe1 ♗f7 26.gxf5 ♜xf5 27.♜e3. 24...b4 25.♜e3 ♖ab8 26.♖b1 ♗a4 27.cxb4? Even though her position was already very difficult, this is not going to help. 27...axb4 28.♜xd5 exd5 29.♗xd5+ ♜f7 30.♜xc4 ♖b5 I am objectively winning, but at this phase of the game nerves started to show. A bit more precise was 30...♖d8 31.♗xf5 ♖xd4 32.b3 ♗xa2. 31.♗g2 ♗xa2 32.b3 ♜e6 33.♖fe1



33...♜xf4?? The wrong pawn to capture! 33...♜xd4 would not have left much hope for White. (The point is that if White tries to go for the same ♖a1-c1 repetition, b3 is hanging since there is no way to guard it with tempo (♗f3, as in the game) first. -Zoey Tang)

34.♗f3 Suddenly, there is a huge problem. If the knight moves anywhere there is ♖a1 ♗c2, ♖ac1 with a repetition! 34...♜g6 35.♖a1 ♗c2 36.♖ac1 ♜xh4?! Unable to acquiesce to a draw, I went for this objectively dubious move. Of course best was to play ...♗a2 and leave the tournament hall in a state of depression. 37.♗g3? (Maintaining the defense of the b3 pawn is less important than preventing Black from playing ...f4 (opening the b5 rook and the c2 queen) with tempo. -Zoey Tang)

37.♗c6!! This amazing resource turns the tables!

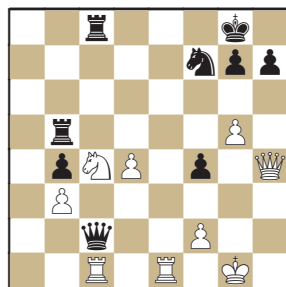


Suddenly I am the one fighting for a draw after 37...♖bb8 38.♖e8+! ♖xe8 39.♖xc2±.



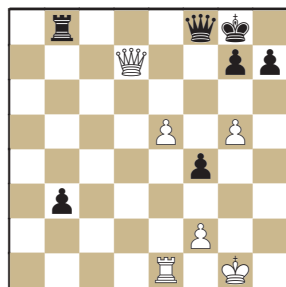
▲ Yassamin Ehsani

37...f4! Only move to keep the advantage! 38.♗xh4



38...♗xb3? ...after which I immediately give up the advantage, again.

The only move to keep the advantage was 38...♗f5!. White is worse due to her severely weakened king. (In major piece endgames, king safety often matters more than material, though it doesn't always look that way during the game! -Zoey Tang) 39.♜e5 ♖f8 40.♗g4 ♜xe5 41.dxe5 ♗f7 42.♖c8 The race begins: which passed pawn will prevail? 42...b3 43.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 44.♗d7 ♖b8



45.e6? Position was equal before this move, here is a sample line: 45.♗d5+ ♜h8 46.e6 b2 47.e7 ♗xe7 48.♖xe7 b1♗+ 49.♜h2 ♗g6=.

45...♗f5! Preventing the e-pawn from advancing, and combining threats to her king as well. (Only move! -Zoey Tang)

46.♖c1? ♗xg5+?? Comedy of errors due to time pressure. (This is one such moment where the changed time control of 120+30 rather than 90+30 with a 30 minute sudden death really showed... many endgames in this tournament were played with much less time on the clock than usual for both players. -Zoey Tang)

46...h6 or 46...h5 also, was fine. This is to make an escape square for the king. 47.♖c8+ ♖xc8 48.♗xc8+ ♜h7 The game is practically finished as Black's pawn will promote, while the e6 pawn is still pinned. 47.♜f1 ♗d8 48.♗f7+ ♜h8 49.♖c7?? After 49.e7 ♗e8 50.♗xf4 b2 51.♖b1, neither side can make progress.

49...♗d1+ 50.♜g2 ♗g4+ (A nice bit of geometry. Now the queen guards g7. -Zoey Tang)

51.♜f1 51.♜h2 f3!-+.

51...b2 White resigned

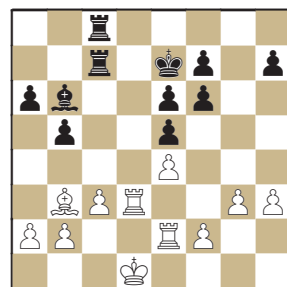
A crazy game for sure! Rose demonstrated her technique and steadily built an advantage against a scary-looking attack. Yet Yassamin's sacrifice, though objectively bad, combined with time pressure, led to the player with the better nerves ultimately winning.

ALICE FINISHES ON A HIGH NOTE

Despite Rose holding a losing position against newcomer Jasmine Su to a draw in the penultimate round, a win by Alice against yours truly put her in a very favorable tournament situation: a draw in the final round would give her victory, since she already beat Rose in their head-to-head encounter. Eventually, Alice finished off her tournament nicely.

Megan Paragua	2041
Alice Lee	2371

U.S. Girls Junior Championship, St. Louis 2024



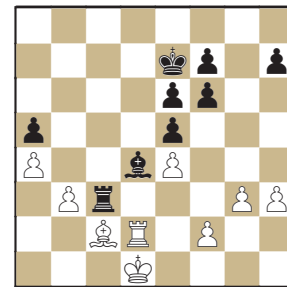
▲ Megan Paragua

Well, this looks somewhat familiar... it's another "dead equal" endgame. Opposite-colored bishops and no passed pawns for either side, but Alice proves she has many tricks up her sleeve.

24.a4!? Not a bad move, but it does give Black more chances to poke at White's structure. 24.a3 a5 25.♜e1 ♜c5 26.♜f1= Not easy for a human to play, of course. Nobody likes shuffling around and waiting for the opponent to concoct a plan.

24...b4 25.c4 Not 25.cxb4? ♖c1+ 26.♜d2 ♖b1, when White is in trouble. Alternatively, White could hold with 25.♖c2 f5 26.exf5 e4 27.♖dd2 bxc3 28.bxc3 exf5 29.g4!=.

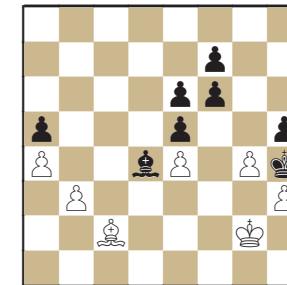
25...♜d4 26.♜a2 b3!? Using up this option immediately. Black could have tried to squeeze for longer. 26...h5 27.♜e1 h4= would ask more questions. 27.♖xb3 ♖xc4 28.♖b7+ ♖4c7 29.♖xc7+ ♖xc7 30.♜b1 ♖c4 31.b3 ♖c3 32.♜c2 a5 33.♜d2



33...♖f3 34.♜e1 ♖c3 35.♜d1 ♜d6 36.♖d3! White opts to trade into a pure opposite-colored bishop endgame, which are notoriously drawish even with material imbalances of a couple pawns. 36.♜e1 was another option, claiming Black's king

march won't do anything. 36...♜c5 37.♜e2 ♜b4 38.♜d1= Waiting around is generally a risky decision, though. As former world champion Magnus Carlsen once stated, "I don't believe in fortresses".

Fast forward to the key moment of this game. Previously, the rooks got traded and Alice has tried to achieve something by bringing her king to c3. However, she concluded that her king needs to support potential ...h5 and ...f5 breaks, so she swiftly switched to this idea.



61.♜d1?? Only one more difficult move was needed for White to save the draw. 61.♜f3! was the only way. It seems like h3 is hanging, but then, after gxh5, Black wouldn't be able to stop White's

passed pawn. It's now a simpler draw after 61...hxg4+ (61...♜g5 62.♜b1= The point is that White's bishop can't leave its critical duty of defending f5.) 62.hxg4 ♜g5 63.♜d3= Black has used up one of her only two pawn breaks, and ...f5 won't change things much.

61...hxg4 62.hxg4 ♜g5 63.♜g3 f5 If the bishop was on c2, this wouldn't be a threat. Here, however, Black gets connected passed pawns.

64.♜f3 fxex4 65.♜xe4 f5 66.gxf5 exf5 67.♜c6 e4 68.♜g2 ♜f4 69.♜d7 ♜e5 70.♜f1 f4 71.♜c6 f3 72.♜b5 e3 Black even has the correctly-colored rook passed pawn. 73.♜a6 ♜c3 White resigned

Grinding out another win from a seemingly drawn endgame! Of course, this wasn't strictly necessary, with the favorable tiebreak situation and all, but it showcased Alice's class brilliantly. Strong players can often win equal endgames by finding and using every last little trick.

A last-round win by Rose secured her second place, while third place was taken by WIM Iris Mou, with a respectable 5½/9 score.

Interview with Rose Atwell

MOTIVATED BY BEATING BOYS AT CHESS

Welcome, Rose! You've scored a couple of major achievements already this year, earning the FIDE Master title, playing (and winning!) a Kids versus Stars match, and of course, finishing second in this year's Girls Junior Championships. What's been your secret to success?

Well, this might sound dumb, but I work hard. I study a lot.

Of course. Anything specific that you did this year?

This year I tried not to get discouraged even when things are not going so well. Of course I've had a few bad tournaments, for example the World Open didn't go so well for me. But I just have to keep working at it. Keep trying to improve.

Going into the eighth round of this year's Girls' Juniors, you were tied for first place. Did that influence your thought process in any way?

I tried not to think about it too much, otherwise I would've had a nervous

breakdown (laughs). I just took it one game at a time.

Speaking of that eighth round, you managed to keep your tournament-winning chances alive by holding a completely locked position to a draw. How'd you manage to keep your cool?

Well, I didn't really do much. She made a weird decision and let me hold a draw. I got really lucky in that tournament.

Like many chess players, you played lots of tournaments back-to-back this year. How do you maintain your form with this busy schedule? And also, how do you handle the school/homework end of things? Because a lot of these tournaments were during the school year.

I'm homeschooled, so it provides me with more flexibility. I don't need to catch up on homework or stuff. So I have a very flexible schedule.



How do you maintain your chess form between all these tournaments in a row?

I play some training games online. I think that helps. I'm working on chess between tournaments. It's not like I'm just not working at all between tournaments. Yeah, mostly training games.

Let's start from the beginning now. How did you start playing chess?

I think I watched my dad playing on chess.com and then I got interested. And so I started playing, too – and I liked it. Also, I started going to a club near my house, and I liked to beat all the boys at the club. I wanted to keep getting better than them, so I think it motivated me.

What I'm hearing is one part of the reason why you like playing chess is because you get to beat people (laughs). Anything else?

Chess is really beautiful, and it develops your thinking skills. It's also helpful for real life situations.

Who have been some of the influential people along your chess journey, and what was their particular contribution?

I've had a lot of coaches.

You don't have to name them. I'm just asking in general.

I have some favorite players; Judit Polgar, Anatoly Karpov, and such. I feel like my style maybe is more like Karpov.

How have your parents helped your chess journey?

Well, my dad drives me to tournaments, and my mom pays for my tournaments (laughs). And of course my parents support me emotionally.

Are your parents supportive of how far you decide to take your chess career?

Yeah, mostly. They are supportive.

What does it mean to you to be one of the nation's best young female chess players?

It feels really great. And it feels nice because sometimes I go to these open tournaments and a ten-year-old girl will come up to me like, I was watching you

at the Junior Girls'. And it's such a nice feeling. Like, yes, I'm an inspiration.

What advice do you have to the young players who look up to you as a role model and inspiration?

Play a lot of chess to get better. And like I said, don't get discouraged, and work hard. Not really some deep secrets, but that's all I've got.

Along that vein, what advice do you have



▼ Rose Atwell

for the parents of young female chess players specifically?

If your daughter gets discouraged, try to build up her confidence and don't let her stop playing chess just because she had one frustrating tournament. Because she's going to improve if she works more at it. I know a lot of girls around our age stop playing chess; they just start thinking about college and stuff. They should keep playing.

What do you think of the current environment for female chess players? You touched on it earlier, how there's not that many female players, especially because many quit earlier on.

Well, it's definitely better than it used to be, but it still needs some more improvement, I think.

Circling back to female players' parents. Recently, there's been a lot of new things coming to light about sexual misconduct in the chess world. What advice do you have for the parents who might be concerned about letting their daughter play chess, concerned about their safety?

I've heard about that. I think they're trying to take some measures against that, they're training tournament directors to know how to handle those cases. Nothing of that sort has ever happened to me, though.

Moving on to some more general questions, what activities do you enjoy besides chess?

I like to read, I like to exercise, especially running. I like to garden, and to play with my little brothers.

What are your chess goals from here?

Becoming a GM. There's the Cairns' Chess Queens Award now (laughs). [note: the recently-announced Cairns' Chess Queens Award will award \$100,000 to the next five female US players to obtain the GM title]

Nice. Expanding that, actually, what do you think of women's titles? You know, WFM, WIM, etc. You don't have a female title, which I found interesting.

I personally would rather be an FM than WIM, even though I am eligible for WIM. Perhaps if I were eligible for WGM I would register for that, but currently I'm thinking I will just try to make IM next. Women's titles I think are useful for motivating more women and girls in chess, though.

What role do you see chess playing in your life in the future?

Well, I definitely want to have a chess-related job. Either just make my whole living playing chess, or if I do go to college and have a more normal job, then at least go to a college with a chess team.

Thank you for your time, Rose!

Thanks for having me here. ■

2nd THE MAGNIFICENT 3 REMARKABLE RECENT GAMES

By GM Sarunas Sulskis

CHRISTOPHER YOO HAS THE ENEMY QUEEN IN THE BAG

The top gun and the ultimate 2024 U.S. Junior Champion, Christopher Woojin Yoo, got off to a flying start in Round 1 when he beat Arthur Guo in style, despite playing with the black pieces.

After failing to impress Black with his slow opening play in the Caro-Kann Exchange Variation, Guo seems to regain part of his ambitions with 19.♗c2, when setting up a menacing battery with ♖d1-d3 looks imminent. Indeed, the battery emerges shortly, but Yoo is just in time to obstruct it with his rook on e4. Retreating his queen with 22.♖d1, Guo attempts to scare off the rook from e4 by his c2 bishop, with a possible repetition of moves coming. However at this critical juncture Yoo displays his strength of character and doesn't budge.

Guo continues to harbor his hopes by a deep advance of his queen to h7 to chase the black king and, rather surprisingly, mercies the enemy rook. Soon Yoo's defiance of the threats is vindicated, since he switches his rook on h4 to reinforce his attack on the enemy king. When on move 25 Guo restores his bishop+queen battery, Yoo has already eroded the white king's guard to a great extent. Having suffered a major positional pounding, Guo at last counterattacks Yoo's king desperately by 29.♖h7+ and 30.♖h8+, oblivious to the reality that his queen has just gone to her deathbed.



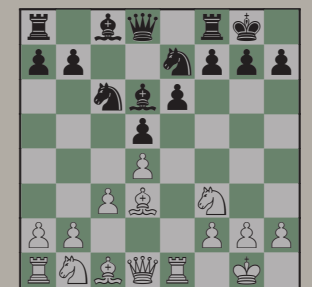
▲ Christopher Yoo

B13

Arthur Guo	2529
Christopher Yoo	2607

U.S. Junior Championship, St Louis 2024

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♗d3 ♖c6 5.c3 e6!? Seemingly the latest Caro-Kann Exchange fad. Just a decade ago this move, which buries the black light-squared bishop under the pawns, would be regarded as opening illiteracy. 5...♖c7; 5...♗f6; 5...g6; and even 5...e5 were considered "more literate" than the text. 6.♗f3 ♗d6 7.0-0 ♗ge7 8.♖e1 0-0



9.h3?! With the black bishop dug in on c8, I fail to appreciate this timid move. The reference game R.Mamedov 2650 - V.Artemiev 2761, Poikovsky 2019, featured 9.♗g5 g6 10.♗f3 ♗f5 11.♗bd2 ♖e8 12.♗f1, which altogether makes more sense to me.

9...h6 No more incoming ♗f3-g5!

9...f6, preparing an ...e6-e5-e4 center break is the core of Black's strategy, which explains why he has left his bishop behind on c8. However Christopher Yoo read his opponent's mind well as White was obviously waiting in anticipation of meeting it first with a 10.c4 break.

10.a4 ♖c7 11.♗a3 a6 12.♗c2 f6 The timing to get ready for the ...e6-e5 break is so much better now!

13.♗e3 ♗d7 No rush. The rooks need to be connected first. A rushed 13...e5? would have run into a nice tactical shot after 14.dxe5 fxe5 15.♗xd5! ♗xd5 16.♗c4, with a big advantage for White. 14.c4?! Apparently, it has been hard for Guo to come up with any other sensible middlegame plan so he attempts a center break. Yet, in conjunction with the pawn on a4, it just feels awkward. Imagine now how much better off this pawn would be on a3...

I prefer 14.b4 e5 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 (15...fxe5 can still be well met with 16.♗xd5!)