

18-year-old Gukesh D becomes the youngest World Champion in the history of chess

Pain & Joy

THE 2024 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH BETWEEN DING LIREN AND GUKESH D WAS A THRILLING BATTLE, WITH PUNCHES FLYING IN EVERY DIRECTION! BOTH PLAYERS HAD MOMENTS OF DOMINANCE THROUGHOUT, BUT ULTIMATELY, EVERYTHING CAME DOWN TO THE WIRE. WHILE MANY ANTICIPATED TIE-BREAKS TO DETERMINE THE WINNER, THE FINAL CLASSICAL GAME DELIVERED A SURPRISING AND DECISIVE CONCLUSION.

By GM Vladimir Potkin

The chess world had been eagerly waiting for the World Championship match between reigning champion Ding Liren from China and his challenger Gukesh D from India. This match also brought together two distinct schools of chess: the Indian school, experiencing a remarkable boom with incredibly talented and strong “children of Vishy Anand,” and the Chinese school, known for its wisdom. The Women’s World Championship title has belonged to China for the past decade, and possession of the men’s crown has become the embodiment of a long-standing dream and the result of targeted chess development in the country.

After his match with Ian Nepomniachtchi, Ding Liren went through a crisis and no longer enjoyed chess as he once did. As a result, his performance declined.

▲ Photo FIDE / Eng Chin An

In contrast, Gukesh D soared into prominence like a bright comet. In 2024, Gukesh delivered incredible results at the Candidates Tournament in Toronto and on the top board at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, where he led the Indian team to a gold medal.

The intrigue of the match was heightened by the fact that, over the past two years at the traditional tournament in Wijk aan Zee, Ding Liren had defeated Gukesh with the black pieces on both occasions.

A large majority of chess experts unconditionally favored the young challenger, with many even foretelling an early victory for him. However, in my pre-match predictions, I was less categorical and expressed the opinion that the match could be decided at the very last moment, with a tie-break being a strong possibility.

By the last game, we had reached the culmination of this intense battle for the chess crown.

Exclusive
annotations by

GM Vladimir Potkin



Vladimir Potkin is a Russian grandmaster and a highly esteemed chess coach. The pinnacle of his playing career came in 2011 when he claimed victory at the European Individual Championship, achieving a peak FIDE rating of 2684 later that year. Praised by the legendary Mark Dvoretsky, Vladimir transitioned to coaching at an early stage in his career. As a coach, he worked with numerous top players, including Levon Aronian, Ian Nepomniachtchi, and Sergey Karjakin.

GAMES 1-6 A PESSIMIST AND AN OPTIMIST

From the very first game, Ding Liren demonstrated his decisive attitude. The reigning champion won the opening game largely due to psychological factors. Having previously been in the role of challenger during his match with Ian Nepomniachtchi, the Chinese grandmaster understood how immense the psychological pressure is in the early rounds, especially when the entire world is focused solely on the two players.

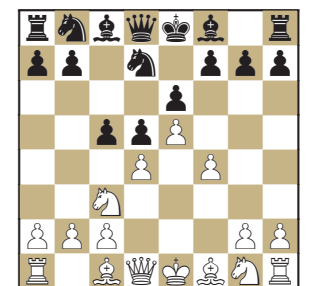
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Gukesh D	2783
Ding Liren	2728

Game 1, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

1.e4 e6 Ding opts for the French Defense, leading to more complex pawn structures. In the following games, he remained loyal to this opening as his only weapon against 1.e4. This fact brings us back to Mikhail Botvinnik, the only player who was employing it constantly in a World Championship match.

2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 ♗f6 4.e5 ♖fd7 5.f4 c5



6.♗ce2 Clearly, this was the second-best choice in practice. It was a signal from Team Gukesh that they would avoid a direct clash in main lines, instead opting for something less topical and possibly below the radar of the opposing team.

By far the most common option White can choose here is 6.♗f3 ♗c6 7.♗e3. Now after 7...a6 White can also try 8.♗e2. In this position I played an interesting game myself against Alexey Shirov at the World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk 2011. I managed not only to win the game, but also castled on move 32, just a move before my opponent’s resignation.

6...♗c6 7.c3 a5 Ding Liren spent

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH, Singapore, November 25 - December 12, 2024

Rk.	Name	Rtg	FED	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Pts
1	GUKESH D	2783	IND	0	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	0	½	1	7½
2	DING LIREN	2728	CHN	1	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	0	1	½	0	6½

▼ Photo FIDE / Maria Emelianova





20 minutes thinking to avoid any preparation and enter a game with a lower price-per-move.

8.♟f3 a4 9.♞e3 ♞e7



10.g4 A new move that Gukesh played very quickly. However, it's not necessarily strong, but rather unpleasant for the second player due to its psychological effect. 10.♟d2 appeared in the Duda-Caruana game in 2020. Since Duda was a sparring partner of Gukesh, it's easy to guess the connection in the game.

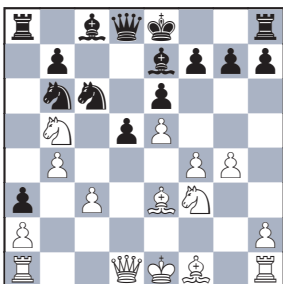
10...♞a5 Ding continues to play in the spirit of the position but was about 40 minutes behind on the clock at this point. The critical test would be 10...0-0 11.g5 b5 with direct counterplay.

11.♞g2 Despite having a good position, Gukesh lacked an intuitive feel for handling positions with a space advantage. White's light-squared bishop belongs on d3, and his other pieces should be developed in that spirit. I believe that Sasha Grischuk is the best player in positions with a space advantage, so I suggest studying his games.

11...a3 11...♟b6 was good enough to open the path for the so-called "bad French bishop."

12.b3 cxd4 13.b4 A good point, maintaining the initiative.

13...♞c7 14.♟exd4 ♟b6 15.0-0 Correct was 15.♟b5 ♞d8 16.♞f1 to reposition the bishop on its best square.



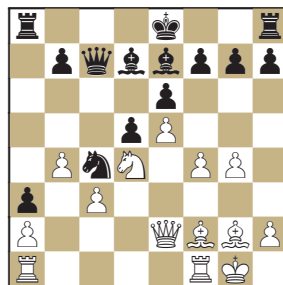
White is slightly better here, but an inquisitive mind might continue with the



pawn sacrifice 16...d4 17.♟fxd4 ♟d5, when the big game continues.

15...♟c4 16.♞f2 ♞d7 After this move the position is balanced.

17.♞e2 ♟xd4 18.♟xd4



18...♟b2 Starting with this move, Ding got an elixir of confidence and continued playing super-fast and with precision.

19.♞e3 ♞c8 20.♞ac1 White needed to try stabilizing the game with 20.♞e1 h5 21.g5 g6, although it's more comfortable to play with the black pieces.

20...♞c4 Black's queen enters on the weak squares.

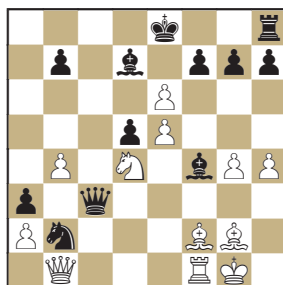
21.f5 ♞d3 22.♞e1 Gukesh missed that

after 22.♞f4, Black has the aggressive 22...g5, with a big advantage.

22...♞g5 All Black's pieces engage with decisive effect.

23.♞c2 ♞c4 24.h4 ♞f4 25.♞b1 ♞xc3 Ding starts to take concrete measures.

26.♞xc3 ♞xc3 27.fxe6

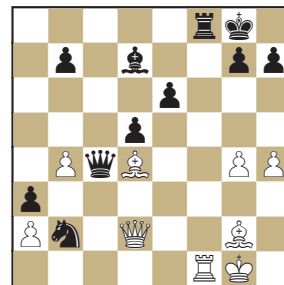


27...fxe6 Ding's only move in the game that can be judged critically. 27...♞xe6 was already winning, as after 28.♟e2 ♞xe5 29.♟xf4 ♞xf4 White has no counterplay.

28.♟e2 ♞xe5 29.♟xf4 ♞xf4 30.♞c2 Being low on time, Gukesh failed to spot the dynamic 30.♞c5 ♞xg4 31.♞c2 (But

not 31.♞xh7, because of 31...♞d4+!! 32.♞xd4 ♞xh7-+), when after the logical 31...♟c4 32.♞f2 ♟d8 33.♞b6+, the position remains wild.

30...♞c4 Now Black is in the driver's seat. **31.♞d2 0-0 32.♞d4**



32...♟d3! Another precise move by Ding.

33.♞e3 ♞xf1+ 34.♞xf1 e5 The e-pawn advances with crucial effect.

35.♞xe5 ♞xg4+ 36.♞g2 ♞f5 37.♞g3 ♞e4 38.♟h2 h6 39.♞h3 ♞d1 40.♞d6 ♞c2+ 41.♞g3 ♞xa2 42.♞e6+ ♟h8

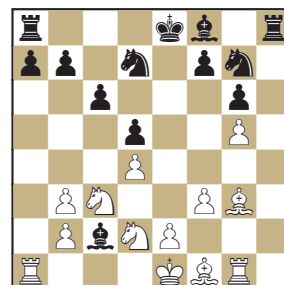
White resigned

The experienced Ding Liren proved to be a strong competitor and, right from the start, silenced many skeptics who did not believe in his success.

In Game 3 Gukesh came out with a complex fight against the rock-solid Carlsbad, which had been a safe haven for Ding in his match against Nepomniachtchi. Ding's reaction was good, but he was spending a lot of time...

Gukesh D	2783
Ding Liren	2728

Game 3, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024



Black's next decision ultimately decided the outcome of the game.

18...♞h5? Ding has great intuition, but here his sense of danger let him down.

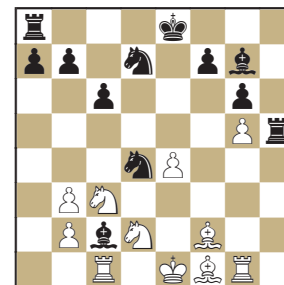
There was a safe choice with 18...♞f5, that he could have played instantly.

After, for example, 19.e4 ♞e6, Black has the more pleasant endgame.

18...♞e7 is even stronger but required strong nerves with the bishop on c2. After 19.e4 ♞xg5 20.exd5 ♟f5 21.♞f2 ♞xd2+ 22.♟xd2 ♞xb3, White is still the one fighting for a draw, which seems to be a likely logical final result.

19.e4 dxe4 Ding already had to find 19...♟e6! with practical chances to successfully defend after 20.♞c1 ♟xd4 21.♞f2 ♞c5. Still, after the brilliant 22.♞g2!, White has the advantage.

20.fxe4 ♟e6 21.♞c1 ♟xd4 22.♞f2 ♞g7



23.♟e2! A very precise move by Gukesh, that was missed by the World Champion.

23...♟xb3 24.♞xc2 ♟xd2 25.♟xd2 ♟e5 The last small chance for Black was 25...a5, hoping for some counterplay.

26.♟d4 The game is practically over after this move.

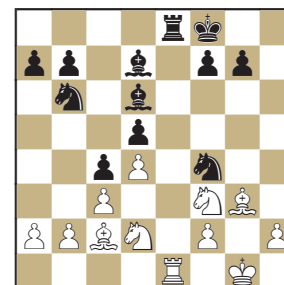
26...♞d8 27.♟e2 ♞h2 28.♞g2 a6 29.b3 ♞d7 30.♞cc1 ♟e7 31.♞cd1 ♟e8 32.♞g3 ♞h5 33.♟f3 ♟xf3 34.♟xf3 ♞d4 35.♞h1 ♞xg5 36.♞h3! f5 37.♞f4 ♞h5 and **Black lost on time** in a hopeless position.

The first half of the match featured a struggle between a pessimist and an optimist. Ding Liren often underestimated the advantages of his position and tried to reduce the game to a safe scenario, where a draw became the most likely result. This was the case in Game 2 and in Game 5, when Ding managed to outplay the young challenger in the endgame with enviable ease but subsequently lacked the energy to convert his advantage.

After a quiet draw in Game 4, Ding had good chances of fighting for another win in Games 5 and 6.

Gukesh D	2783
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Game 5, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

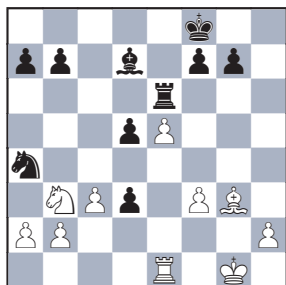


22.♟e5 Where most players would be seeking a safe harbor, Gukesh plays in a very active and ambitious style.

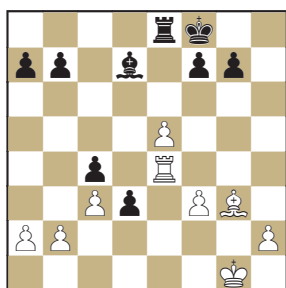




22...♙xe5 23.dxe5? 23.♞xe5 was correct in order to trade rooks after 23...♞xe5 24.dxe5. According to Magnus Carlsen, Gukesh could have been confused by 24...♞e2+ 25.♔f1 ♞c1. Here, however, White doesn't need to be greedy and can play for domination after 26.♙f4 (Not 26.a3 because of 26...♞a4!?) 26...♞xa2 27.♙e3. 23...♞d3! This strong move signals that it is Black playing for the win already. 24.♙xd3 cxd3 25.f3 Carlsen guessed that Gukesh's first intention was to play 25.b3, but then realized that after 25...♞c8 26.♞c1 d4! 27.c4 ♞d5! Black's pieces are creating winning power. 25...♞c4 More ambitious was 25...♞e6 26.♞b3 ♞a4.



- A) If 27.♞b1, then 27...♞b6!.
B) After 27.♞d1 ♞xb2 28.♞d2 ♞c4 29.♙xd3 ♞xe5 30.♞e3 ♞c4 31.♞xe6 ♙xe6, with knights on the board, it is always easier for Black to create winning chances.
26.♞xc4 dxc4 27.♞e4



27...♙c6? Ding chose the safest way. During the game Gukesh felt he would come under heavy pressure after 27...♙e6! 28.♞d4 ♞c8, when Black's king could march via g8 and h7 to g6, which would be sheer torture for White. 28.♞d4! White is now in good defensive mode. 28...♙xf3 29.♔f2 ♙c6 30.♙xc4 ♞d8 31.♞d4 ♙xd4 32.cxd4 ♙d5 33.b3 The smoke has cleared and the rivals soon agreed to a draw.



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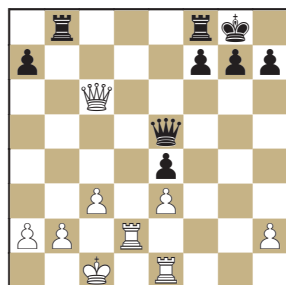
33...♔e7 34.♔e3 ♔e6 35.♙xd3 g6 36.♔c3 a6 37.♙d3 ♔f5 38.♔e3 ♔e6 39.♙d3 ♔f5 40.♔e3 ♔e6 Draw

How can one not recall the motto of many Soviet grandmasters: "With youngsters – to the endgame!"

In Game 6, we witnessed an amazing concept from Gukesh's team, when Ding was about to agree a draw in a more favorable position, but this was refused.

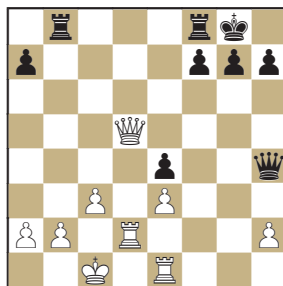
Ding Liren	2728
Gukesh D	2783

Game 6, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

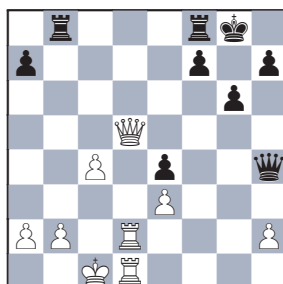


22.♞d5 Ding played very quickly in the opening, and most likely he knew that Black has enough counterplay. 22...♞e7 23.♞d6 ♞g5 24.♞d5 ♞e7 25.♞d6 ♞g5 26.♞d5 The World Champion was ready for a draw and almost everyone expected a handshake. But not Gukesh!

26...♞h4



To decline a draw offer with an equal score in the match and continue playing on in a worse position? The world was truly surprised! Only after the match did the wise coach of the young champion, Grzegorz Gajewski, reveal his strategy: it was all part of the match plan. Team Gukesh wanted to keep playing and apply as much pressure as they could. 27.♞ed1 g6 28.♞e5? The idea of advancing the c-pawn could be dangerous for Black. 28.c4! is probably the only good move for White.

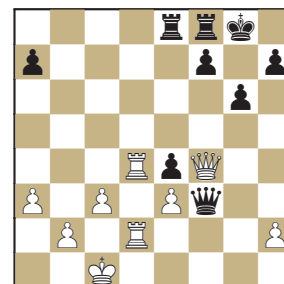


Black needs to meet it with 28...♞h3!,



▲ Photo FIDE / Eng Chin An

when after the direct 29.♞xe4 ♞be8 30.♞d4 ♞xe3, a long defense awaits him in the endgame. 28...♞be8 29.♞g3 ♞h5 30.♞f4 ♞a5 31.a3 ♞b5 32.♞d4 ♞e2! Gukesh is doing a good job to save the game. 33.♞1d2 ♞f3



34.♔c2 Ding should have kept the queens on the board with 34.♞g5, aiming to gain an edge after 34...♔g7 35.♞d7!. 34...♞xf4 35.exf4 f5 Now it's equal. 36.h4 e3 37.♞e2 ♞e7 38.♔d3 ♞fe8 39.h5 gxh5 40.♞d5 h4 41.♞xf5 ♞d7+ 42.♔c2 ♔g7 43.♞g2+ Forcing Black to agree to a peaceful resolution. 43...♔h8 44.♞e2 ♔g7 45.♞g2+ ♔h8 46.♞e2 ♔g7 Draw

Gukesh was willing to sacrifice the advantages of his position to wear down the reigning champion. Such a decision was bold and carried the risk of backfiring on the challenger. However, winners are not judged and taking risks is always a noble endeavor.

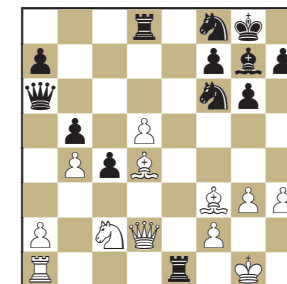
GAMES 7-10 MISSED CHANCES

Games 7 and 8 provided scoring opportunities for both players, while Games 9 and 10 provided calm before the storm.

Game 7 was one of the most striking creative achievements in Gukesh's opening preparation. The earlier mentioned, Vincent Keymer, introduced a fresh idea in the Grunfeld Defense with the move 7.♞e1, enabling the challenger to develop a very strong initiative in this game. However, it was Ding's walk on a tightrope that could have backfired badly.

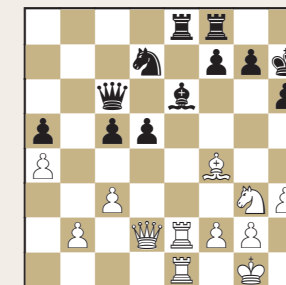
Gukesh D	2783
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Game 7, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024



22.♞xe1 ♞xa2 Ding's choice is a very dangerous one.

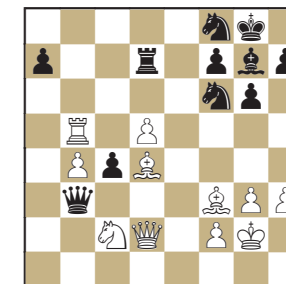
It reminds me of the game Caruana – Ding from Stavanger 2024, when the World Champion grabbed a pawn on move 24, but then succumbed to a hurricane attack on the kingside.



24...♞xa4 25.♞f5 ♞c6?? 25...♞g8 ♞d6 ♞ef8 27.♞d3+ ♔h8 28.♙g3+ 26.♞xg7!+- ♔xg7 27.♙xh6+ ♔h7 28.♙xf8 ♞xf8 29.♞g5 ♞e8 30.c4 ♞b8 31.♞xe6 1-0

In both cases, grabbing a pawn is a possible choice, but Black's price-per-move immediately becomes very high. Viktor Korchnoi had a similar approach and often captured pawns despite the increasing danger.

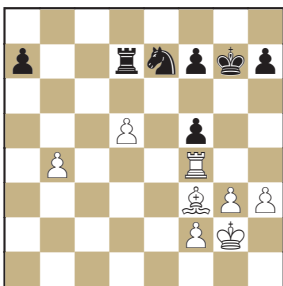
22...♞e8 was slightly worse, but solid for Black after 23.a3 ♞xe1+ 24.♞xe1 ♞c8. 23.♞a1 ♞b3 High price-per-move strategy required Ding to find the only way, starting with the concrete 23...c3! when after 24.♞d3 (24.♙xc3 ♞c4!) 24...♞b3 25.♞a3 ♞c4, the endgame is fine for Black. 24.♞a3 ♞b1+ 25.♔g2 Now White dominates with his active pieces. 25...♞d7 The best defense was 25...♞d6. However, upon 26.♙xa7 ♙xd4 27.♞xd4 ♞e8 28.♞xb5 ♞d3 Black still faces an uneasy defense after 29.♞c1. 26.♞a5 ♞b3 27.♞a3 ♞b1 28.♞a5 ♞b3 29.♙xb5 White is virtually winning here.



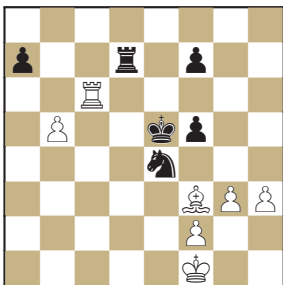
29...♞d3 30.♞f4 Stronger was 30.♙e3! offering the trade on White's terms! Then,



after 30...♗xd2 31.♙xd2 ♖e8 32.♖a5 ♜d6 33.♙e3 ♜c8 34.♙g4 f5 35.♙e2 ♜b6 36.♖a6, White is winning easily.
30...♗xc2 31.♙xf6 ♗f5 32.♗xf5 32.♙g5! Again, it was better for White to impose his own conditions on a queen trade.
32...gxf5 33.♙xg7 Retaining the bishop pair with 33.♙g5! was again stronger. Possibly, Gukesh was impatient to reach the first time control a pawn up and then take it from there.
33...♙xg7 34.♖c5 ♜g6 35.♖xc4 ♜e5 36.♙d4 ♜c6! 37.♖f4 ♜e7! Black has managed to stabilize his position with good chances of a draw.



38.b5 ♙f6 39.♙d4 h6 40.♙f1 ♙e5 Rock solid was 40...♜c8!.
41.♙h4 ♜xd5 42.♙xh6 ♜c3 43.♖c6 ♜e4



44.♙e1 Gukesh lacked precision here. 44.h4! was very direct, increasing his winning prospects. Knowing how the game unfolded, this could have been White's last chance to squeeze out a win.
44...f6 From this moment on, Ding started to defend really well as was admitted by Magnus Carlsen in his post-game commentary.
45.h4 ♙d3! Just in time!
46.♙d1 This endgame is practically equal. Gukesh later admitted having missed ...♙h3 in a key line.
46...f4 47.gxf4+ ♙xf4 48.♙c2 48.♖c4 runs into 48...♙h3!, an important nuance missed by Gukesh.
48...♙d5 49.♖c4 f5 Gukesh kept pushing for a win, but Ding was solid as a rock.
50.♙b4 ♙f3 51.♙d1+ ♙g2 52.♙b3 ♖e5



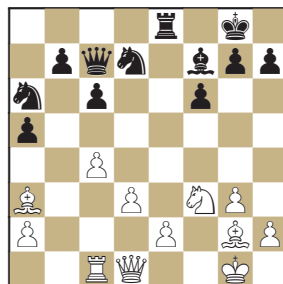
53.f4 ♖e7 54.♖e3 ♙h7 55.h5 ♜f6 56.♖e5 ♜xh5 57.♖xf5 ♜g3 58.♖f8 ♙b7 59.♙a4 ♙f3 60.f5 ♙f4 61.f6 ♜e4 62.♙c2 ♜d6 63.♙d8 ♙e5 64.♙b3 ♜f7 65.♙d5+ ♙xf6 66.♙d2 ♙b6 67.♙c4 ♙d6 68.♙c3 ♖xd5 69.♙xd5 ♜d6 70.♙b4 ♜xb5 71.♙xb5 a6+ 72.♙xa6 Draw

Ding demonstrated incredible composure in defense and saved a difficult game, largely thanks to his strong feel for the endgame. Despite the challenges, he displayed his best fighting qualities, gathering all his strength to make a comeback after earlier setbacks.

The champion came very close to building on his success in Game 8, but in positions with a broken dynamic balance, Gukesh managed to find a path to salvation.

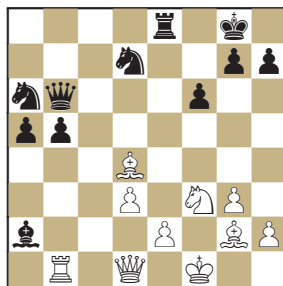
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Game 8, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024



22.♙b1 Ding just missed the strongest

reply by his opponent. After 22.♙b2 White is clearly better.
22...b5! 23.cxb5 ♗b6+ 24.♙f1 cxb5 Now Black is very active and ready to further advance his pawns.
25.♙b2 Things went out of Ding's control and he was just making active moves. 25.♗d2 was necessary to keep the pawn alive.
25...♙xa2 26.♙d4



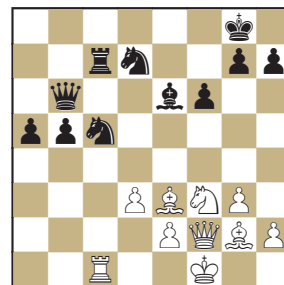
26...♜ac5 Gukesh saw the correct 26...♜dc5!, but failed to correctly assess the following sequence. After 27.♖c1 ♙d5 28.♖c2 ♖c8, White can't take advantage of the pin and his position is simply lost.
27.♖c1 ♙b3 27...♙d5 was a safer option.
28.♗e1! This deep move by Ding came as a big surprise to Gukesh. We witnessed clearly the psychological duel between the players. Although Ding missed the key move 21...b5, he did not panic. He continued to play with confidence, forcing Gukesh to make moves that might have seemed artificial

over the board. Clearly, the initiative was now on the World Champion's side. A pure battle of nerves!

28...♙e6 Around this point Gukesh started to go seriously wrong, and the evaluation bar swung completely in Ding's favor.

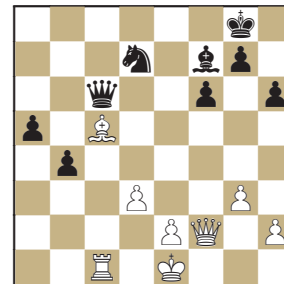
28...a4 would have kept the balance, when, in case of the direct 29.♗b4 ♜a6 30.♗xb3+ axb3 31.♙xb6 ♜xb6 32.♙b1, the endgame is equal.

29.♗f2 ♖c8 30.♙e3! This fine positional move vacates the d4 square for White's pawn and knight.
30...♖c7



31.♙d4 31.♙e1 was another fantastic positional move. White's idea is to follow up with ♙f4 and d3-d4, with a winning position.
31...♙f7 32.♜c6 Ding opts for concrete play.
32...♖xc6 33.♙xc6 ♗xc6 34.♙xc5 h6 White still has a significant advantage, but over the board, it was not easy to maintain control with an unsafe king position.

35.♙e1 b4



36.♗d4 Rather impatient. The queen may need to find better squares after securing the position of the king. 36.♙d2! was the correct move order, as the white king belongs here anyway, importantly protecting the rook on c1.

36...♙e5 37.♙d2 ♗g2 38.♗f2 ♗d5 39.♗d4 ♗g2 40.♗f2 ♗d5 41.♗d4 ♗a2+ 42.♖c2 ♗e6 43.♗d8+ ♙h7 44.♗xa5 b3 45.♖c1 ♗d5 46.♗b4 ♗g2 47.♗e4+ ♗xe4 48.dxe4 b2 49.♙b1 ♙a2 50.♖xb2 ♜c4+ 51.♙c3 ♜xb2 Draw

Games 9 and 10 of the match turned out to be correct grandmaster games, which allowed the opponents to take a short time-out before the final segment.

GAMES 11-13 ONE KNOCKDOWN EACH

In Game 11, Gukesh's team put everything on the line to force Ding into a creative position as early as possible, after which taking too much time on his moves proved to be fatal, as Ding lost by blundering a piece.

Unfortunately for Ding's fans, his poor time management was one of the key factors that determined the outcome in Games 3 and 11, where the Chinese grandmaster played with the black pieces. While Ding Liren successfully solved the opening problems prepared by Gukesh's team, the real issue lay elsewhere.

It is well-known that when you overwork your brain at any point (in Game 11, Ding spent over an hour on the first five moves!), it can shut down or demand rest when you need to maintain peak concentration. This overwork led to frustrating and costly blunders in these games, which, of course, also occurred under the immense pressure exerted by the young and energetic Gukesh.

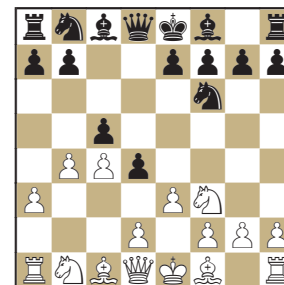
A09

Gukesh D	2783
Ding Liren	2728

Game 11, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

1.♙f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 It was obvious that Gukesh's task was to pose questions for Ding at a very early stage of the game whenever possible.

3...c5 4.e3 ♜f6 5.a3 This idea was prepared by team Gukesh only the night before the game.



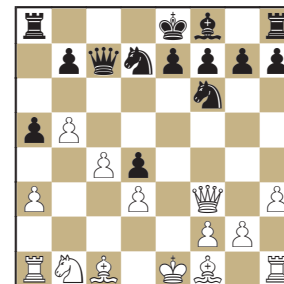
5...♙g4 Ding surprised Gukesh by deviating from the main line but spent over an hour on his first five moves!

It was clear that Ding didn't want to put his knight on the rim after the principled 5...♜c6 6.b5 ♜a5. From the positional point of view 5...a5 6.b5 g6! was a nice solution. Then, after 7.♙b2 e5! 8.♜xe5 ♙g7 offers Black extremely active play for a price of a mere pawn, but all this must have been studied with a microscope by team Gukesh before the game.

6.exd4 cxd4 7.h3 ♙xf3 8.♗xf3 White has come out of the opening successfully.

8...♗c7 9.d3 This is not in the spirit of the position. White must open up a diagonal for his bishop with 9.c5!, fighting for an opening advantage.

9...a5! 10.b5 ♜bd7 Ding is now playing against a Benoni formation in a good positional manner.



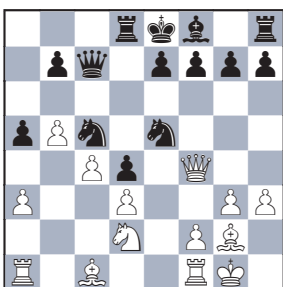


11.g3! By now, both opponents had the same amount of time on their clocks. However, Gukesh came up with the only playable option.

11...♖c5 12.♗g2 ♜fd7 Regrouping the knights. Of course not the greedy 12...♜b3, because of 13.♖xb7! ♖xb7 14.♗xb7 ♗a7 15.♗c6+ ♜d7 16.♗b2 ♜xa1 17.♗xa1 e5 18.♜d1 with the upper hand.

13.0-0 ♜e5 14.♖f4 ♗d8 Up to here Ding has played very accurately.

15.♗d1 Objectively, White had to play 15.♜d2!



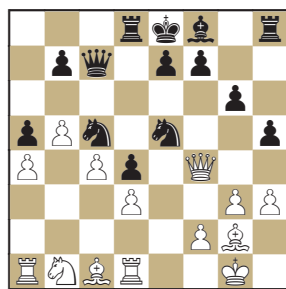
15...e6 (15...♜cxd3 16.♖e4!) 16.b6 ♖b8 17.♗b1 maintaining sharp play.

15...g6 We saw that Ding likes to fianchetto his bishop with the white pieces, but here he fails to punish Gukesh's early run with the queen.

Much stronger was 15...e6, when ...♗d6 is coming next with huge effect! 16.b6 ♖d6! 17.♜d2 ♜exd3 18.♖xd6 ♗xd6 19.♗b1 ♜e7 with a great advantage for Black in the endgame.

16.a4 h5

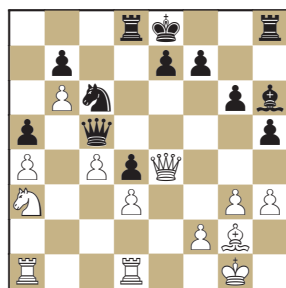
Photo FIDE / Maria Emelianova



17.b6! ♖d6 Ding wants to follow up with ...♗h6!.

18.♗a3! Gukesh is just in time to attack the knight and gain the initiative.

18...♗h6 19.♗xc5 ♖xc5 20.♖e4 ♜c6 21.♜a3 It was unfortunate for Ding that he lacked energy after his hard work on the early moves, and now started to go wrong.



21...♗d7? After 21...0-0! 22.♗db1 ♜b4 23.♖xb7 ♗b8 24.♖c7 ♖xb6, Black would remain in the game.

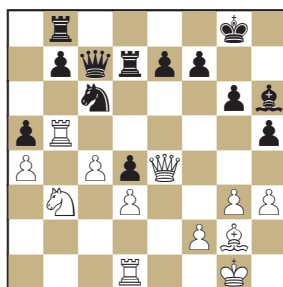
22.♜c2 A good practical choice. Super strong was 22.♖e2!, aiming to meet ♖xb6 (22...0-0 23.♗db1!) with 23.♗db1, and after 23...♖d8 24.♗xb7! is the point, when White has a clear edge.

22...♖xb6 23.♗ab1 ♖c7 24.♗b5 White has a very attractive position with easy play.

24...0-0 25.♜a1 Both players were running low on the clock with less than 15 minutes remaining for each. Better was 25.♗db1 ♗b8 and now 26.h4, with the idea of g3-g4.

25...♗b8 25...♗d6 was very solid. After 26.♗db1 ♗b8 all Black's pieces are protected, which is especially important when in time trouble.

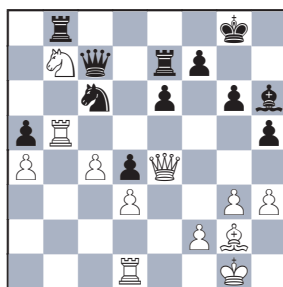
26.♜b3 Now it's practically bad for Black.



26...e6 26...♗d6! was still necessary.

27.♜c5! ♗e7 28.♗db1 Gukesh was already putting pressure on his opponent's clock.

However, stronger was 28.♜xb7! which shouldn't have been that hard to find.



There are no easy solutions for Black here.

A) 28...♜b4 29.♖xd4 ♗d7 30.♖b6 ♖xb6 31.♗xb6 ♗xd3 32.♗xd3 ♜xd3 33.♗b5 is already close to winning;

B) whereas 28...♗xb7 29.♖xc6 ♖xc6 30.♗xc6 is just bad.

28...♖c8 28...♜b4! was the way to continue in a worse position.

29.♖xc6! **Black resigned**

Ultimately Ding blundered under the huge pressure that Gukesh created from the first moves of this game.

Despite all the difficulties, Ding Liren displayed his best fighting qualities. After setbacks, he gathered all his strength and made a strong comeback in the match. His victory in Game 12 was a tremendous



Photo FIDE / Eng Chin An

achievement. In this game, the Champion played flawlessly, prompting many to talk about the return of the former Ding – when, in terms of playing strength, he was very close to Carlsen.

A13

Ding Liren	2728
Gukesh D	2783

Game 12, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

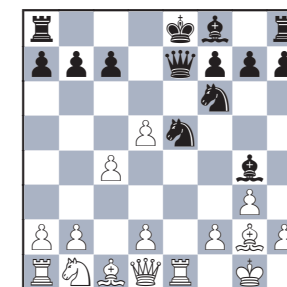
1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♜f6 4.♜f3 Ding employs his lifelong weapon and transitions into Catalan-style positions. 4...d4 5.0-0 ♜c6 Interestingly, Gukesh adopts the same setup that Magnus Carlsen used against Ian Nepomniachtchi in their Dubai match.

It should be noted that not only the 20-year-old Keymer but also his coach, Hungarian GM Peter Leko, influenced the preparation of Gukesh's team. While it remains unclear whether Peter participated in the challenger's preparation directly, his indirect influence is undeniable due to the encyclopedic knowledge he has imparted to his student over the years.

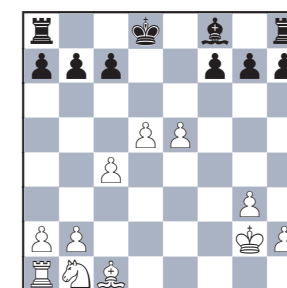
On this note, I would like to emphasize that Peter Leko is one of the greatest professionals in his field. His ability to organize complex concepts and convey information with precision is unparalleled. I was fortunate to work alongside him in the same team, first

with Alexander Grischuk and later with Ian Nepomniachtchi.

6.e3 ♗e7 6...e5 was the principled choice by Keymer in his game against Andrey Esipenko from the Grand Swiss the year before. Then followed 7.exd4 e4 8.d5 exf3 9.♖xf3 ♜e5 10.♗e1 ♖e7 11.♖d1 ♗g4!



The next sequence is forced and is best play for both sides: 12.f3 ♗xf3 13.♖a4+ ♜d8 14.d4 ♗xg2! 15.♗xe5 ♖d7 16.♖xd7+ ♜xd7 17.♜xg2 ♜xe5 18.dxe5

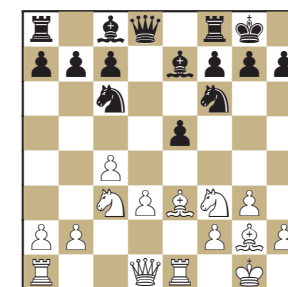


A) Vincent played 18...f6, when after 19.e6 c6 20.♗f4 Black got into trouble and later lost on move 55 in

A.Esipenko 2683 - V.Keymer 2717, Douglas 2023.

B) Arjun Erigaisi improved Black's play with 18...c6, and after 19.♜c3 cxd5 20.cxd5, failed with 20...♜d7?! (20...♗c8!∞ was a great option for Black.). when White could have reacted quickly and gained the advantage with 21.♗e3!, whereas the game saw 21.♜e4 ♗c8 with initiative for Black, who later won the game on move 38 in M.Muradli 2588 - A.Erigaisi 2801, New York 2024.

C) 18...♜d7! is even more precise. 7.d3 dxe3 8.♗xe3 e5 9.♜c3 0-0 10.♗e1



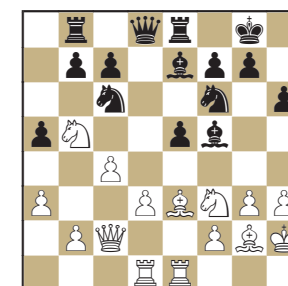
10...h6 This move was criticized by Gajewski. Correct was 10...♗e6!.

11.a3 Ding considered 11.d4 exd4 12.♜xd4 ♜xd4 13.♖xd4 c6 14.♖xd8 ♗xd8 15.♗c5 ♗e8, but it was harmless for Black.

11...a5 12.h3 ♗e6 13.♜h2 This setup was played by Ding in style! White controls the key squares and exerts pressure all over the board.

13...♗b8 There was no need for this prophylaxis. 13...♖d7 was mentioned by Ding. Then, after 14.♖d2 (Upon 14.♖b3 Ding rightly considered 14...a4! to be inconvenient for White.) 14...♗ad8 15.♗ad1 ♗fe8 16.♖c1 ♖c8 17.♜b5!, White exerts pressure, but Black is solid. 14.♖c2 ♗e8 15.♜b5 With his pieces placed in active positions, White's game is much easier to play.

15...♗f5 16.♗ad1



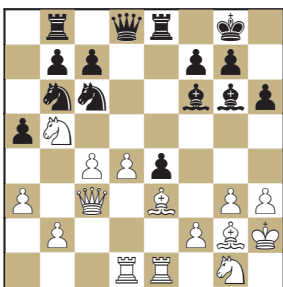


16...d7 Gukesh starts to regroup his pieces without need. 16...f8 was the move that comes to mind. Then, after 17.c3 c8 18.d2 a4, White is a bit better, but Black remains solid.

17.♞d2! ♟g6 Upon 17...c5 18.d4 d3 19.d5 dxe1 20.♞xe1 d4 21.dfxd4 exd4 22.dxd4 ♟g6 23.♞xa5, White has the upper hand with superior compensation for the exchange. Nevertheless it was possible to fight on here by 23...♟g5 24.♟xg5 hxg5 25.♞d2 ♟e4.

18.d4 e4 19.dg1 Now it's strategically bad for Black.

19...db6 20.♞c3 ♟f6



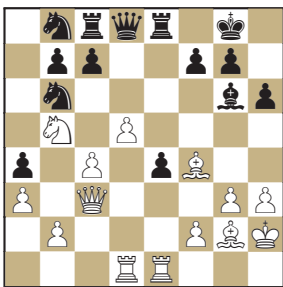
21.♞c2 Ding is very good at subtle maneuvering.

21...a4 22.dxe2 ♟g5 Gukesh is no longer able to withstand the pressure here. 22...da5 23.c5 dxc4 24.dfx4 ♟f5 25.♟f1 was already bad for Black, although not immediately lost.

23.dfx4! Ding played this with great confidence.

23...♟fx4 23...♟h7 was bad due to 24.c5!.

24.♟fx4 ♞c8 25.♞c3 db8 26.d5 This phase of the game Ding played automatically and was just unstoppable.

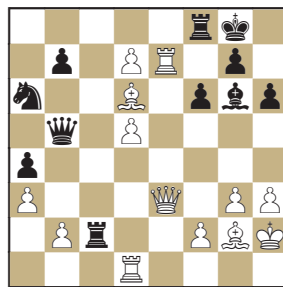


26...♞d7 27.d6! c5 28.dxc7 Basically, the game was already decided at this point.

28...♞f8 29.♟xe4 dxc6 30.♟g2 ♞cd8 31.d5 dxd5 32.cxd5 db8 33.♞xc5 ♞c8 34.♞d4 da6 35.♞e7 ♞b5 36.d7 ♞c4 37.♞e3 ♞c2 38.♟d6 f6



▲ Photo FIDE / Eng Chin An



GAME 14 DING'S LAST DANCE

The final game of the World Championship match, when the scores were level, will always have a significant impact, not only on the match itself but also on chess history. When Veselin Topalov had the white pieces against Vishy Anand in their 2010 match in Sofia, he pressed hard to avoid tie-breaks at any cost and forgot his sense of danger, ultimately losing the game and the match.

On the other hand, Magnus Carlsen, who has always disliked frequent draws, chose to make a quick draw in the final classical game against Sergey Karjakin in New York 2016. This decision surprised our team, but Magnus' strategy was clear. He saved his energy for the tie-breaks, reducing the tension by ensuring the outcome would not hinge on a single encounter but rather on a mini-match of four rapid games.

Historical context provides valuable insights, but players always choose their strategies based on their state of mind during the match. After the match, Gukesh revealed that, for most of the time, he was afraid of failing to meet the high expectations of his followers back home in India. As we will see later, during Game 12, the possibility of becoming World Champion disrupted his usual thought processes.

Gukesh had an important conversation with his long-time coach, Polish GM

39.♞xg7+! A final blow by Ding and Black resigned here.

This game highlights how inspired Ding was to make such an important comeback! In an interview for Chinese media, GM Ni Hua commented that Game 12 was the best one Ding had played in the past two years.

On the other hand, I believe Gukesh may have been too excited the night before and could not sleep well, as the goal of becoming World Champion felt within reach.

How can one not recall the phrase Rocky said to his son: "It doesn't matter how hard you hit; the main thing is how you take a hit." In Game 13 Gukesh put significant pressure on the French Defense essayed by the World Champion. At one point, his advantage was nearly decisive, but the Chinese grandmaster demonstrated great composure in defense. Despite being under such intense pressure, he did not flinch and held firm.

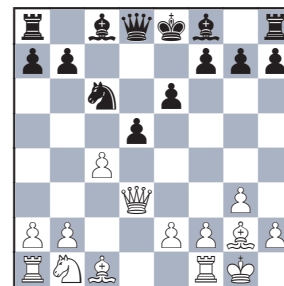


6.dxd4 dge7 This rare move came as a surprise. 6...c5 was Praggnanandhaa's choice, one that might have inspired his compatriot.

7.c4 7.dxb3 is another typical reaction when White keeps more pieces on the board and tends to strike in the center on the next move.

7...dxd4 8.♞xd4 dxc6 9.♞d1 A very accurate practical decision by the World Champion.

9.♞d3 was played by American GM Sam Shankland during the 2024 World Blitz Championship in New York just few weeks after this game.



Grzegorz Gajewski (a member of the Anand team when the Indian legend was the reigning World Champion), during which he shared his fears after the game. The experienced Gajewski (whom Gukesh fondly calls "Gaju") planted an idea in the young player's mind: that the match had already been exciting and Ding Liren was fighting at his best, so Gukesh should not be afraid of any outcome. It is interesting that Gukesh confided his deepest concerns not to his psychologist, Paddy Upton, but to his trusted ally, Gaju.

During the World Championship match in Astana, Ding Liren pushed hard in the final game against Ian Nepomniachtchi and was on the brink of defeat. However, Game 12 in Singapore was a decisive and powerful win for Ding. The reigning World Champion seemed prepared to replicate that scenario, but he was not aware that Gukesh's state of mind had already been stabilized.

Gukesh approached this final classical game like a samurai warrior.

D02

Ding Liren	2728
Gukesh D	2783

Game 14, World Championship Match, Singapore 2024

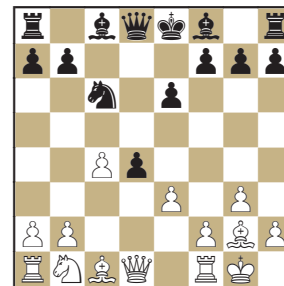
1.dfx3 d5 2.g3 In critical moments Ding Liren remains true to his guns and opts for his pet setup with a fianchetto.

2...c5 3.♟g2 dxc6 4.d4 e6 5.0-0 cxd4

A) Ding might have also been aware of the very concrete 9...dxe5!?, when after, for example, 10.♞c2 dxc4 11.e4 ♟e7 12.dxc3 d4 13.♞d1 0-0 14.dxb5 dxe5 15.♟f4 ♟f6 16.♟xe5! (16.dxd4 ♟d7 is solid for Black.) 16...♟xe5 17.♞c5 ♟b8 18.e5 a6 19.dxd6 ♟a7 20.♞a3, White has strong compensation for a pawn.

B) 9...d4 10.a3 a5 11.e3 c5 (11...e5!? 12.exd4 exd4 13.♞e1+ ♟e7 14.dxd2 leads to a position where White has a lot of activity.) 12.exd4 exd4 13.♞d1 e5 14.♞e2 (White might try 14.♟e3 next time, when after 14...♟g4 15.♞d2 ♞d7 16.dxc3 0-0 17.♞e1, the position is still full of life after 17...♞ad8.) 14...0-0 15.dxc3 ♟e6 16.dxb5 ♞d7 was very unclear, but Shankland managed to win on move 82 in S.Shankland 2672 - W.So 2747, New York 2024.

9...d4 10.e3



10...c5!N Previously Black played here 10...e5, when after 11.exd4 exd4 12.♞e1+ ♟e7 13.♟g5 ♟e6? (13...f6! was necessary and after 14.♟f4 0-0 15.♞h5, White would gain an initiative which is unpleasant for Black.) 14.♟xe7 ♞xe7 15.♟xc6+ bxc6 16.♞xd4 0-0 17.dxc3, White was a clear pawn up in G.Sarakauskas 2388 - J.Willow 2395, England 2022, which eventually ended in a draw on move 66.

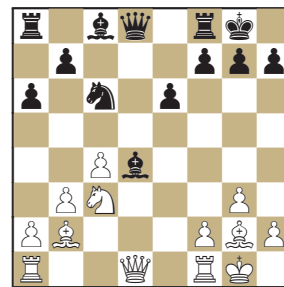
11.exd4 Here I like 11.a3!?. Now, if Black enters an endgame after 11...dxe3 12.fxe3 ♞xd1 13.♞xd1 a5 14.b3, then White has very nicely placed active bishops and a good square for his knight in the center, despite changes in the pawn structure.

11...cxd4 12.dxc3 0-0 13.dxb5 From this moment it is clear that Ding is trying to force matters.

13...db6 13...e5! was simple and strong here.

14.b3 14.♞e2 was very good for White who intends to play ♞d1 next. For example, 14...e5 15.♞d1! ♞f6 16.♟e3 dxd4 17.dxd4 exd4 18.♟f4 ♟e6 19.♞ac1, with a very pleasant position for White and practically playing for two results.

14...a6 15.dxc3 dxd4 16.♟b2 16.♞c2 was a bit more flexible, when after 16...e5 17.♟e3, White will follow up with ♞ad1.



16...e5! 17.♞d2 ♟e6 Black could prevent White from playing dxd5 by means of 17...♞a5.

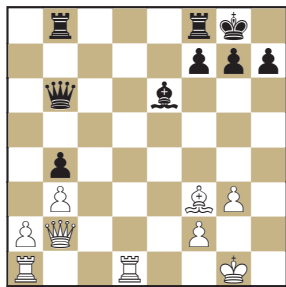
18.dxd5 b5 19.cxb5 19.♟xd4 dxd4 20.f4! was more in the spirit of the position, aiming to keep the knight in the center for as long as possible. Then, after 20...bxc4 21.bxc4 ♞c8 22.♞ac1, White has an easy game.

19...axb5 20.dfx4 Maybe somewhere around here Ding decided to force events and opt for a drawish position.

20...exf4 21.♟xc6 ♟xb2 22.♞xb2



♖b8 23.♗fd1 ♜b6 24.♙f3 fxg3
25.hxg3 b4

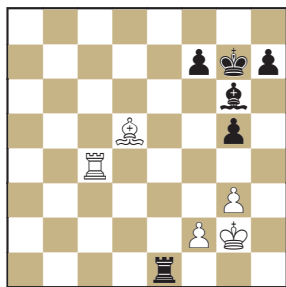


This position is just equal, and Black might only be psychologically more confident, since White has lost any opening advantage.

26.a4 This move was strongly criticized by Ian Nepomniachtchi during the game. He even predicted that it might be a very bad sign for Ding's prospects. 26.♙d5 or 26.♗d4 were both logical ways to proceed.

26...bxa3 27.♗xa3 g6 28.♜d4 ♜b5 29.b4 Ding just goes for a familiar drawish position, one he seemed sure to hold.

29...♜xb4 30.♜xb4 ♗xb4 31.♗a8 ♗xa8 32.♙xa8 g5 33.♙d5 ♙f5 Gukesh just keeps playing on, which is a signature of the young generation. **34.♗c1 ♙g7 35.♗c7 ♙g6 36.♗c4 ♗b1+ 37.♙g2 ♗e1**



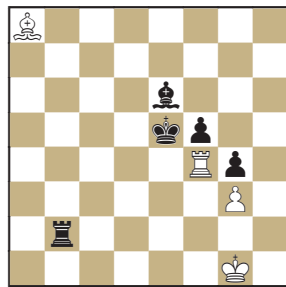
38.♗b4 Here 38.g4!? seems like a good defensive option, blocking the pawns.

38...h5 39.♗a4 ♗e5 40.♙f3 ♙h6 41.♙g1 ♗e6 42.♗c4 The next part of the game can be played in different ways, but Ding was doing completely fine and I suggest we skip the next few moves and jump to the critical moment of the game.

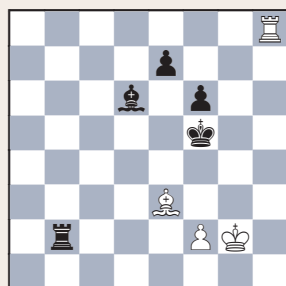
42...g4 43.♙d5 ♗d6 44.♙b7 ♙g5 45.f3 f5 46.fxg4 hxg4 47.♗b4 ♙f7 48.♙f2 ♗d2+ 49.♙g1 ♙f6 50.♗b6+ ♙g5 51.♗b4 ♙e6 52.♗a4 ♗b2 53.♙a8 If Ding knew that his

bishop in the corner might be the reason for his loss, he would have preferred any other square for it. Of course, 53.♙g2 was closer to the king and seemingly safer.

53...♙f6 54.♗f4 ♙e5



Before showing the next move a logical thought crossed my mind that might have had an influence on Ding's defense here. The World Champion led the Chinese team at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest just two months before defending his title in Singapore. In the match against Vietnam he had a very similar position with a rook, bishop and a pawn against rook, bishop and two pawns. He lost that game mainly because he was in too much of a hurry trying to exchange the bishops, and his opponent, GM Liem Quang Le, exploited this to perfection and converted to a win.



Position after 39 moves in Ding-Le, Chess Olympiad, Budapest 2024.

Ding's main conclusion after the game was that he should have probably tried to exchange rooks, but not bishops. His next move had a disastrous effect in this critical moment of this match.

55.♗f2?? Here comes the biggest shock for the entire chess world (Gukesh included), as Ding is just



▲ Photo FIDE / Eric Rosen

losing this position instantly.

It was again easy to hold after 55.♙g2, when only after 55...♙d7, White plays 56.♗f2. Here, following 56...♗b3, the best defense for White would be to regroup his rook and king by means of 57.♗d2 ♙e6 58.♙f2, with a completely safe position.

55...♗xf2 56.♙xf2 ♙d5 This is the point, Gukesh realized that he would be winning the pawn ending.

57.♙xd5 ♙xd5 58.♙e3 ♙e5 White resigned because if 59.♙d3 then 59...f4, but he could set a final trap here with 60.♙e2, when the correct way for Black is 60...f3+! (but not 60...fxg3 61.♙f1!=) After 61.♙e3 Black sacrifices the pawn with 61...f2 62.♙xf2, gaining the opposition by 62...♙d4 63.♙e2 ♙e4, and deciding the game.

The chess world was expecting the match to continue with tie-breaks. The huge mistake made by Ding highlights the immense tension in World Championship matches. I take this opportunity to congratulate the new World Champion, Gukesh D, and his team on their great achievement. Big kudos also to Ding Liren and his team for their excellent chess and fighting spirit throughout the match, against all the odds. ■



Interview with GM Vladimir Potkin, The Gatekeeper of the Russian Chess School

The Coach of the Greats

AS THE HEAD COACH FOR SERGEJ KARJAKIN AND IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI IN THEIR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCHES AGAINST MAGNUS CARLSEN, 2011 EUROPEAN CHAMPION VLADIMIR POTKIN SHARES EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS FROM HIS COACHING CAREER. HE REVEALS THE ART OF MATCH PREPARATION, THE EVOLVING ROLE OF CHESS ENGINES, AND HIS PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE GAME.

■ By Dusan Kronic



● How would you sum up the Gukesh-Ding match?

Nothing less of what I expected before the match had started. It was an intense battle that went down to the wire and seemed destined for tie-breaks. However, a couple of Ding's dubious decisions in Game 14 proved decisive. Despite his young age, Gukesh remained solid and deservedly claimed victory.

● You started your coaching career as a very young man and remain so as an active chess player. Can you share some details of how this happened?

When I was 17, I enrolled in the University of Physical Culture and Sports and moved to Moscow. I studied alongside Sasha Grischuk and Aleksandra Kosteniuk. Sasha and I often played a lot of blitz games during breaks at the university. During this time, I was also pursuing pedagogical education, studying subjects applicable to various sports. While focusing on improving my chess, I supported my student budget by giving lessons to talented kids.

One of the most memorable moments came from Mark Dvoretsky, one of the world's greatest chess coaches. He once shared a piece of wisdom with me, saying that I had a natural aptitude for coaching – a quality he noted was rare among his students.