

Terrific Tani!

Adewumi Wins 2024 Cadet

BY **DANIAL WILSON**

ANNOTATIONS BY **FM TANITOLUWA ADEWUMI**



EIGHT OF THE top American chess players under 16 competed in the 2024 U.S. Cadet Championship for a \$10,000 scholarship sponsored by US Chess and the Dewain Barber Foundation as well as \$2,000 in place prizes. Wilson Chess and King Tournaments were the co-organizers, and the event was held June 20-23 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Lisle, Illinois, alongside the 2024 Chicago Summer Open and Blitz.

FM Tanitoluwa Adewumi dominated the Cadet, starting the event with the second-highest rating just behind last year's winner, FM Erick Zhao, and finishing undefeated with six points, two points ahead of IM Ryo Chen.

This is one of many great recent accomplishments for Tani: Not only did he win the \$10,000 scholarship and \$1,000 in cash, but he earned his final IM norm a few months ago and his FIDE rating is now only 14 points away from 2400, which will get him the title!

Tani and I sat down after the tournament to discuss his victory.

Dan: How did you feel during the weeks leading up to the tournament?

Tani: I felt confident. I was happy to be back because I wanted to redeem myself, as last year I got eighth place.

I am sure you are proud of your five wins and two draws. This was some of your best chess and much better than last year.

Yeah, I'm proud and would probably say so too.

Okay, the field is pretty tough, with an average rating of 2340, and all of you are young, talented players.

Had you faced all the cadets before this tournament?

No. I don't think I've played FM Ryan Sun. Maybe I have in Titled Tuesday. I don't think I've ever played FM Isaac Wang or FM Zoey Tang.

What did you do to prepare for this event, and was it any different from last year's tournament?

I would probably say so. Last year, I didn't prepare as well. Probably, what I did different was I really tried to break my opponents down to see how they played and tried to counter against that. I would say I really focused on each player. I would say not like an overall — I really went deep down to focus on each player. That was probably the difference in my preparation. I mean, I didn't know who I was playing as White or Black, so I just [prepared with] White and Black.

I know you had many issues with delayed flights the day of the tournament. How much did it affect you in round one?

I mean, it gave me some adrenaline, but it was a little taxing [and] annoying. But ... I told my dad, all I wanted was a cold shower when I got to the hotel. That was mostly what I needed, just the cold shower, because I already looked at everything I needed to look at way before the tournament started.

The 2024 Cadet Championships were held in conjunction with the 2024 Chicago Summer Open played in the same room. How was that experience? Were there any notable or memorable moments or interactions?

I know last year, right before my game, someone asked me to sign their score sheet. ... I know in the Summer Open and in the

Cadet this year right before my game, someone asked me to take a picture and sign an autograph, so I think that was pretty nice. It felt like an open tournament because of so many people. But it was much better than I expected because the noise level was actually perfect. It was like an open tournament but much quieter.

Do you think pairing the Cadet with an event like the Summer Open adds to the Cadet championship or takes away from it?

I think it adds, because it is the U.S. Cadet and it's a big tournament and it probably should be more spread out so more people can see the tournament. So, with the Chicago Summer Open, I think it adds to the Cadet.

Walk me through your thoughts as the tournament went on.

I felt quite confident, because basically, the first day was very weird because of the flight delays. So, I would say when I won my first game that gave me a lot of confidence. Because even with all the things that happened, I still managed to win. So, that gave me a lot of confidence and then I was like "Great, so I can start."

After winning your first three, you go into day three and you beat FM Isaac Wang, a first-time player at the Cadet, but then you had to play IM Ryo Chen, and that was a game that, if you won, you would have locked up the tournament. Did you know that at the time? And what was going through your head?

That was an insane game! It looks like he was winning in the opening. It wasn't that clear, and then it was very back and forth, but it was equal the whole time, which is insane. And then I was

winning in the end game at some point, but I missed that, and I was not losing, but much worse, and then we settled and found a draw. But yeah, what a great game.

Even after I drew, I think I had it locked up. But the way I thought of it the whole tournament, I just thought: "Play one game at a time." Because in the last game, many people just take a draw and you've won the tournament. I still wanted to win the game. I was playing every single game like I just started the tournament.

What was the very first thing you did after learning you had the tournament locked up?

I mean, I was happy. I celebrated but not like celebrating in a major way. I just hugged my dad and I was happy, called my mom and brother. I guess I just relaxed before my next game, because I knew I wanted to gain as many rating points as possible. So, I was like, "OK, I have Ryan with white,

so I could try to push for a win." So, I just thought about that and just played the next game until the tournament was fully over. Then, I actually celebrated.

Did you do anything special to celebrate?

Not really but maybe just everyone together, like I would say, enjoying the moment.

Do you have your eyes set on any university? Is there a university that you're already thinking "I would go there if I get accepted?"

I don't know if I'll get accepted into Harvard, but if I do, I think I'm gonna go to Harvard.

What advice would you give young players between grades three and eight, with ratings between 1000 and 1500, who look at your games, look up to you, and want to be the best chess player they can be?

I would say puzzles are very important. They really stimulate

the brain and thinking. But you also have to be determined, because you have to know that you want to get better at chess, and you want to just keep going.

I think there's this Thomas Edison quote: "I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that don't work." After you play a game, don't be discouraged. If you lose, you just have to keep going. Let's say you lose to the four-move checkmate. You really didn't lose the game; you just found how you won't lose another game because of the four-move checkmate. If you lose to a pin, try your best not to get into bad pins. I would say just keep working at it and then don't get discouraged if you lose, and [look at] a lot of puzzles and review your games.

Below: The 2024 U.S. Cadet Championship players, along with IA Bill Buklis (third from left) and FA Danial Wilson (far right).



PHOTOS: COURTESY DANIAL WILSON (GROUP), ADEWUMI FAMILY (WINNER)

Very good advice. I'm hoping many of the young players who read this will heed that advice. Maybe they'll listen to some of their coaches when they tell them to do their puzzles. Thank you, Tani, for taking the time for this interview. My last question: When you want to step away from chess, what is another activity you really enjoy?

I play a lot of basketball. I'm actually good at it, I'd say. I also enjoy relaxing watching movies or TV shows.



Two from Tani

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ROSSOLIMO VARIATION (B31)

FM Tanitoluwa Adewumi (2448)

IM Eric Chang Liu (2446)

U.S. Cadet Ch (2), Lisle, 06.21.2024

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 g6 4. Bxc6 bxc6

The main move in this position is 4. ... dxc6, but Black's choice is completely fine. White just has to know what he is doing, or he can end up worse.

5. 0-0 Bg7 6. Re1 Qc7 7. h3 d6 8. c3
Preparing for d2-d4.

8. ... Nf6 9. d4 cxd4 10. cxd4

I have completed my center!

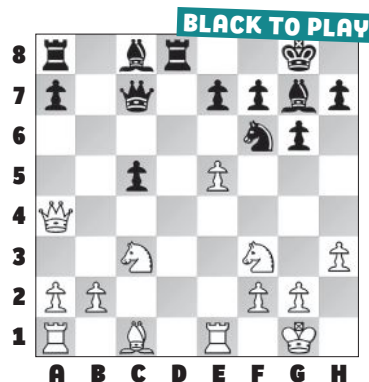
10. ... 0-0 11. Nc3 c5

Black found a very good, dynamic move to open the center.

12. e5

After 12. dxc5 Qxc5 13. e5 dxe5 14. Rxe5 Qc7 15. Bf4 White's position might look active and menacing, but things are equal.

12. ... dxe5 13. dxe5 Rd8 14. Qa4



Exploiting the knight's lack of squares.

14. ... Nh5

Other moves are much worse. If (a) 14. ... Bd7?? 15. Qh4; (b) 14. ... Nd7?? is met by 15. Nd5 Qb7 16. Nxe7+; (c) after 14. ... Ne8? it's hard for Black to move his knight; and (d) 14. ... Nd5?? loses to 15. Nxd5 Rxd5 16. Qe8+ Bf8 17. Ng5 e6 18. Nxh7.

15. Be3

Trying to win the trapped knight can backfire. After 15. g4 Bb7 16. Re4 (16. Ne4 f5 is slightly better for Black) 16. ... Qd7 17. Qxd7 Rxd7 18. gxh5 Bxe4 19. Nxe4 Rd1+ 20. Kg2 Bh6 21. Nfg5 gxh5 the position is way too complicated.

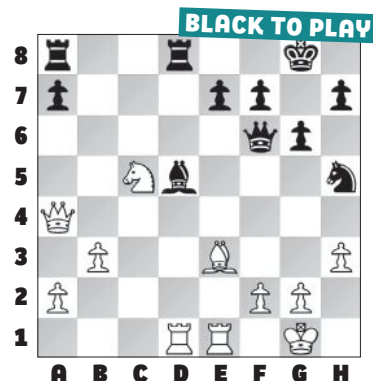
15. ... Bb7

After 15. ... Bxe5 I thought 16. Nb5 (16. Nxe5! Qxe5 17. Bh6!) Qb8 17. Bxc5 is good for White.

16. Ne4 Bxe5

Maybe Black could have tried 16. ... c4 17. Rac1 Bd5 (not 17. ... Bxe4? 18. Rxc4 with a double attack) 18. Ned2 Qb7 19. Rc2 with chances for both sides.

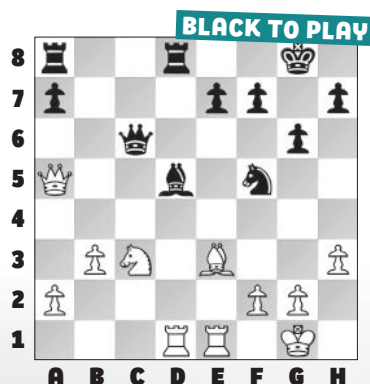
17. Nxe5 Qxe5 18. Nxc5 Bd5 19. b3 Qf6 20. Rad1



Now I have an advantage because my pieces are better.

20. ... Ng7 21. Qa5! Nf5 22. Ne4 Qc6
Black loses after 22. ... Bxe4 23. Rxd8+ Rxd8 24. Qxd8+ Kg7.

23. Nc3



The pin is causing a lot of pressure.

23. ... Nxe3??

A mistake. I think my opponent missed my 25th move. After the stronger 23. ... e6 24. Bg5 Rd7 25. Bf6 White is in control of the position.

24. fxe3 e6 25. e4

Now the bishop is trapped.

25. ... Rdc8 26. Re3 Bxb3 27. axb3 Rab8 28. Qxa7 Rxb3 29. Nd5 Qc2 30. Rf1 Rf8

Even worse is 30. ... exd5 31.

Qxf7+ Kh8 32. Rxb3 Qxb3

33. Qf6+ Kg8 34. Qe6+ Kg7 35. Qxc8.

31. Nf6+ Kg7 32. Rxb3 Qxb3 33. Qd4, Black resigned.

FOUR KNIGHTS GAME (C49)

FM Tanitoluwa
Adewumi (2448)
FM Ryan Sun (2372)
U.S. Cadet Ch (7),
Lisle, 06.23.2024

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bb5

I decided I wanted to play a positional game, and the Four Knights allows this.

4. ... Bb4 5. 0-0 0-0

If Black tries to grab the e-pawn with 5. ... Bxc3 6. bxc3 Nxe4 (6. ... 0-0 7. Re1 d6 8. d4 leaves White ahead) White gets a great position after 7. Re1 Nd6 8. Bxc6 dxc6 9. Rxe5+ Be6 10. Ng5 0-0 11. Qh5 h6 12. Nxe6 fxe6 13. Rxe6.

6. Bxc6 dxc6 7. d3

My position is solid, while Black's pawn structure is damaged.

7. ... Nd7 8. Ne2 Re8



9. Ne1

This is not the best move in the position, but I knew that f2-f4 could be annoying, and that my opponent might make mistakes trying to stop it.

9. ... Bc5

Already Black is concerned with stopping my pawn break.

10. Kh1 Nf6

This also prevents f2-f4, but Black has lost a lot of his most natural plans, including ... Nf6-d7-f8.

11. Bg5

If 11. f4? Nxe4 is great for Black.

11. ... Qd6

During the game I looked at 11. ... h6 12. Bh4 (12. Be3 is equal) 12. ... g5 13. Bg3 Nh5 which felt dangerous.

12. h3 h6 13. Be3 Bxe3 14. fxe3 c5 15. Nc3

(see diagram top of next column)

15. ... Bd7

After 15. ... c4!? 16. dxc4 Qc6 17. Qd3 I am up a pawn but Black definitely has compensation.



BLACK TO PLAY



POSITION AFTER 15. Nc3

16. Nf3 Bc6?! 17. Nh4 g6 18. Qf3 Kg7 19. Qg3 Nh5

WHITE TO PLAY



20. Qg4!

Putting Black into semi-zugzwang!
It's also true that White also has an advantage after 20. Nf5+ Kh7 21. Qh4 Qd8.

20. ... Qd7

White is much better after 20. ... Bd7 21. Qf3 Nf6 22. Qxf6+ Qxf6 23. Rxf6 Kxf6 24. Nd5+ Kg7 25. Nxc7 c4 26. Nxa8, while I have a lot of pressure after 20. ... Qe6 21. Rf5 Nf6 22. Qg3.

21. Rf5!

Another really nice move. Black would be back in the game after 21. Nf5+ Kh7 22. Rf3 Ng7 23. Nxg7 Qxg4 24. Nxe8 Qc8.

21. ... Kh7

If 21. ... Nf6 22. Qg3 is strong.

22. Raf1 gxf5

This is the best move, but Black is losing anyway.

23. Qxh5 Qe6 24. Rxf5 Re7 25. Nd5 Bxd5 26. exd5

BLACK TO PLAY



26. ... Qd6

If 26. ... Qxd5 27. Rf6 White wins.

27. Rxf7+ Kg8 28. Rf3 e4 29. Rf4 Re5
This allows White a forced mate.

30. Qf7+ Kh8 31. Ng6+ Qxg6 32.

Qxg6, Black resigned.

Now it's mate in four: 32. ... Re7 (or else White takes the seventh rank) 33. Qxh6+ Kg8 34. Rg4+ Kf7 35. Qg6+ Kf8 36. Qg8 mate. ♠



The Adewumi family at home in New York.