

Editor's note: We have gotten to know Andy Woodward these past few years through an interview (*Chess Life*, November 2022), analysis (*Chess Life*, February 2024), and features (*Chess Life Kids*, April 2024). His games are impressive indeed, and his talent is undeniable, but we've been even more impressed by his character and modesty in our interactions with him and his family.

With his result in the 2024 Jeddah Young Masters, Andy became — for a brief, shining moment, anyway! — the youngest grandmaster in the world. (GM Abhimanyu Mishra still holds the

record for the youngest GM ever.) His place was soon taken by the Turkish phenom Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus, who earned his third and final norm at the Grenke Open in April. This does not diminish Andy's achievement; rather, it just goes to underscore just how strong the bench is for young talent around the globe, and how strong the competition will be for the rest of us!

We're pleased to be able to bring you Andy's account of his trip to Saudi Arabia and his thoughts on earning the title, along with analysis of key games from the event.



THE GRANDMASTER (GM) TITLE is the highest a chess player can receive. Pursuing it is a long, grueling process that requires work, dedication, and persistence. To get the title, you must fulfill a few requirements:

A 2500 FIDE rating and three exceptional performances, for which you can get norms. To get each of those norms, a 2600 performance rating is needed, and

the tournament must meet a few necessary technical conditions.

I earned my first GM norm at the Hollywood Masters tournament in the fall of 2022. A year or so later, I got my second GM norm in Hungary. As luck would have it, I had surpassed the rating requirement at the SPICE Cup in December 2023, so I only needed one more norm. After many close encounters, I trusted that it was simply a matter of time.

In November of 2023, Chief TD and IA Laurent Freyd contacted me about the Young Masters tournament in Saudi Arabia. It was my first all-expense paid tournament, and I was excited to have the chance to gain my last norm. As the event drew closer, though, a feeling of unease crept in. Saudi Arabia was very far away, and we were worried about visa requirements and jet lag. But it was reassuring that the organizers seemed to be on top of everything. I appreciated

the conditions and their hospitality, and it was a tournament where I could play good games against some of the world's strongest young players.

So off to Saudi Arabia it was.

The journey was exhausting. Our flight was 19 hours long with a four-hour layover in Turkey. When my mom and I arrived in Jeddah, it was already 1:30 a.m. As a show of their hospitality, Freyd came to the airport to pick us up. Since we were the first to arrive, Freyd took a picture of us in front of an aquarium as a reference point for the later pickups. (See page 27 for the photo. ~ed.)

We finally checked into the hotel at 2 a.m. The hotel was located at the intersection of two major highways. We thought it might take a while to get used to the noise, but we later found out the noise didn't die down at all in the middle of the night. Soon enough, we also realized the extent of our jet lag. For about four days, I woke up multiple times a night and I couldn't fall back asleep. Finally, thinking that my poor sleep affected my performance, my mom insisted on changing our room to a quieter side of the hotel. It made a big difference! I was finally able to sleep through the night.

To my knowledge, most players arrived the day before the tournament started. The field also underwent a slight change. GM Bardiya Daneshvar from Iran could not come because of a visa problem, so FM Jaime Rey Martinez from Spain took his place.

The night before the tournament began, the organizers surprised us with a dinner in the desert. It was great fun as we got to dip our heads in the local culture and experience authentic Saudi food and coffee. The drawing of lots occurred after dinner, and I found out I had two blacks in the first two rounds. It was not encouraging, but I have learned not to be affected by the pairings as they are not in my control.

The next day, at the opening ceremony, people mingled around coffee, candies, and roses, and local talents sang and danced. One of the Saudi princes was supposed to come, but it turned out that he couldn't make it. I was in good spirits at the start of the tournament, and I was optimistic about the upcoming games.

My first two rounds, unfortunately, went far out of my expectations. My first-round opponent, IM (and now GM) Yagiz Erdogmus, was a 12-year-old prodigy from Turkey. He had had several great tournaments recently, so I knew he was in good form. In our game, he surprised me on move two in the opening. I chose to play a line that

looked interesting to me. Unfortunately, I made a bad move immediately after that, overlooking my opponent's reply. I ended up losing that first game.

TROMPOWSKY OPENING (D00)

IM Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (2524)
IM Andy Woodward (2501)
Jeddah Young Masters (1), Jeddah,
01.24.2024

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bg5!?

The Trompowsky! I wasn't expecting this line.

2. ... d5 3. Nd2 g6 4. Bxf6 exf6 5. e3 Bd6 6. c4 dxc4 7. Bxc4 0-0 8. Ngf3



8. ... a6?!

A step in the wrong direction. Black should be playing on the kingside. A typical plan is ... c7-c6, ... f6-f5, ... Nb8-d7-f6, ... Kg8-g7, ... h7-h5, and ... Qd8-e7, when Black is doing fine. A sample line: 8. ... c6 9. 0-0 f5 10. Qc2 Nd7 11. Rfe1 Nf6 12. Rab1 Qe7 13. a3 Kg7.

9. 0-0 b5?!

This move makes Black's position even worse. White will now play on the queenside with extra weaknesses to target. The a5- and c5-squares are permanent weaknesses.

10. Bd3 Bb7 11. a4 bxa4?!

White is a bit better after 11. ... c6!? 12. Ne4 Be7.

12. Rxa4 c5 13. Be4!

I underestimated this move. White immediately takes control of the two open files in the center while Black's pieces are left undeveloped.

13. ... Ra7!

After 13. ... Qe7?! White has 14. Bxb7 Qxb7 15. Ne4!!, making use of the fact that Black can't take the knight. Why not? If 15. ... Qxe4 16. dxc5 Bxh2+ 17. Nxh2 Qe7 18. Qc2 with advantage.

14. Qc2 cxd4! 15. Rxd4 Qe7 16. Rd1 Rc8
17. Nc4 Bc5 18. Bxb7



Here, I made a terrible blunder.

18. ... Rxb7??

Black is fully equal after 18. ... Qxb7! 19. Rd5 Bf8.

19. Nd6! Rcc7 20. Nf5!, Black resigned.

Accurate until the end. Black can't take the knight! The line runs 20. Nf5 gxf5 21. Rd8+ Kg7 22. Nh4! and with Nh4xf5+ followed by Rd8-g8+ coming, I gave up.

My second-round opponent was a Russian prodigy, GM Volodar Murzin, the second



GM Andy Woodward

seed in this tournament. I equalized out of the opening but on moves 16 and 17, I blundered, giving him an early advantage which he converted into a win.

With this tough start, I felt my norm chance was going to fly by again this time. My mom told me to push the reset button and start a new tournament, which helped with my mindset. It was also at this point that we changed our hotel room to a quieter one.

The third round was the turning point in this tournament — I finally won a game against Argentine talent FM Faustino Oro. It felt good to have a change of fortune! I continued to win rounds four and five against GM Pranav Venkatesh and WGM Candela Belén Francisco Guecamburu, respectively. At the midpoint, I was at 3/5, and I needed to score 3/4 for a norm.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B88)

GM Pranav Venkatesh (2611)

IM Andy Woodward (2501)

Jeddah Young Masters (4), Jeddah, 01.26.2024

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6

Here my opponent went for Bobby Fischer's favorite variation.

6. Bc4!? e6 7. a4!?

White plays a sideline that has only been played about 1000 times according to the databases. The main line continues 7. Bb3 b5 8. 0-0 Be7 with lots of theory.

7. ... Bd7!?

I was not prepared against White's a-pawn push, so I decided to just develop normally.

8. 0-0 Nc6 9. Be3 Rc8 10. Qe2 Qc7 11. Ba2 Be7

Another path is 11. ... Ne5!? 12. f4 Nc4 13. Bxc4 Qxc4 14. Qf3 Be7 15. e5 Nd5 with equality.

12. f4 0-0 13. Kh1

A typical move, getting the king off of the a7-g1 diagonal.

13. ... Nxd4 14. Bxd4 e5 15. Be3 Be6!

Challenging the a2-bishop, which dominates Black's position. This also tries to punish White's aggressive f2-f4 play by punching back in the center.

16. Bb3 Bc4!

Both needed and strong, forcing the bishop trade and helping target the weak white pawns.

17. Bxc4 Qxc4 18. Qf3?!



During the game I was thinking more about 18. Qd3, and I wasn't fully sure how to continue. Black should be fine after 18. ... Rfe8.

18. ... d5!

Black needs to create counterplay before White crushes him positionally with f4xe5, ... d6xe5, and then Be3-g5.

19. fxe5

Black is much better after 19. exd5?! e4 20. Qd1 Bb4!, and can claim a solid edge as well after 19. Nxd5 Nxd5 20. exd5 e4 21. Qd1 Rfd8.

19. ... Nxe4 20. Ne2 Bc5?!

Naturally 20. ... Qxc2?? is too greedy after 21. Rac1! Qd3 22. Rxc8 Rxc8 23. Qxf7+ Kh8 24. Qxe7 when White is up a piece, and his pieces are untouchable due to the back-rank issues for Black.

The engine's top choice is 20. ... f6!, and I considered it at the board. But after 21. e6 I missed the correct 21. ... Ng5! 22. Bxg5 (22. Qf2 Nxe6 is nice for Black) 22. ... fxg5 23. Qe3 (or 23. Qd3 Rxf1+ 24. Rxf1 Qxc2) 23. ... Qxc2 and Black is doing very well.

21. c3 Rce8 22. b3

Trying to create counter-chances against the black king. Unfortunately, Black can secure a winning advantage with the right set of forcing moves.



22. ... Qxb3!

White's bluff would have paid off after 22. ... Qd3?! 23. Bd4! Qxf3 24. gxf3 Bxd4 25. Nxd4 Nxc3 26. Rfc1 Rc8 27. Rc2 b5 when the position is equal.

23. Bxc5 Nxc5 24. Nd4 Qc4

Keeping the d5-pawn protected while targeting White's weak pawns.

25. Nf5 Ne4!

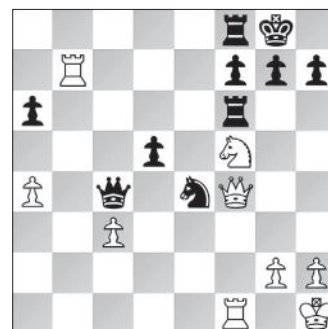
This is the move you need to see before playing 21. ... Rce8. It controls all of White's counter-chances while continuing to target the weak white pawns.

26. Rab1

Not 26. Qg4?? Nf2+! 27. Rxf2 Qxg4.

26. ... Rxe5 27. Qf4 Re6 28. Rxb7 Rf6!

Pinning White's pieces along the f-file. Now Black is easily winning.



29. Rf3 g6 30. Rb4 Qa2!

It's true that 30. ... Qc5 also wins, but the ride is not as smooth. A sample line runs 31. Qe5 Nf2+ 32. Rxf2 Qxf2 33. Rf4 Qxf4 34. Qxf4 Rxf5 35. Qc1 Rc8 with a winning position.

31. Ne7+ Kg7 32. Qc1 Nf2+ 33. Kg1 Nd3!

Forking the queen and rook. Now the game is over.

34. Qd1

If 34. Rxd3? Qf2+ 35. Kh1 Qf1+ 36. Qxf1, then 36. ... Rxf1 mate.

34. ... Rxf3 35. gxf3 Qf2+ 36. Kh1 Nxb4 37. cxb4 Re8, White resigned.

The white queen will be lost.

I held a lucky draw in round six against Polish IM Jan Klimkowski. I was worse throughout most of the game, but fortunately, he blundered right at the end. This was followed by a very long and tiring endgame versus Polish IM Jakub Seemann, which I was able to win with some precise moves.



QUEEN'S GAMBIT ACCEPTED (D20)

IM Andy Woodward (2501)

IM Jakub Seemann (2439)

Jeddah Young Masters (7), Jeddah, 01.28.2024

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. e4 b5 4. a4 c6
5. axb5 cxb5 6. Nc3 Qb6



A new, trendy line. Here, I decided to go for a less risky approach to the position.

7. b3

The alternative was 7. Nd5!? Qb7 8. Bf4 e5 9. Bxe5 Nd7 10. Bf4 Ngf6 11. Nc7+ Kd8 12. Nxa8 Qxe4+ 13. Ne2 Qxa8 14. f3 Nd5 with chances for both sides.

7. ... e6 8. bxc4 Bb4 9. Bd2 bxc4

Avoiding 9. ... Qxd4? 10. Nf3 Qc5 11. Nxb5 with a great position for White.

10. Bxc4 Ne7 11. Nge2 0-0 12. 0-0 a5

13. Na4 Qc6 14. Bd3 Ba6 15. Rc1 Bxd3?!

A brave decision, creating a material imbalance. Black is closer to a draw after 15. ... Qe8 16. Nb6 Ra7.

16. Rxc6 Nbx6 17. Bxb4?!

Even stronger was 17. Nb6! Rad8 18. Bf4! Bxe2 19. Qxe2 Nxd4 20. Qc4 with a serious edge.

17. ... Bxe2 18. Qxe2 axb4 19. Nb6 Rad8
20. d5 exd5 21. e5



21. ... Kh8?!

Even now, I'm not sure I understand the idea behind this move.

After the correct 21. ... d4! 22. Rd1 d3 23. Rxd3 Nxe5 the knight is immune due to back-rank threats, and I don't think White can ultimately win. The b-pawn will be secure and a persistent thorn in White's side.

22. f4 Rfe8?!

Black equalizes with 22. ... f6! 23. e6 Rd6! 24. Nd7 Ra8! 25. g4 d4!, although of course it's very complex.

23. Qd3 Rb8 24. Nd7 Rb7 25. Nc5 Ra7

26. Qd2 Rb8 27. Rb1 Rba8 28. Qd1

The engine only gives White a slight advantage, but from a human perspective, I think White is doing very well!

28. ... Ra2 29. Nb7?! R8a3?!

Black could have gotten right back into the game with 29. ... Nf5!. After 30. Qxd5 Ra1 31. Rxa1 Rxa1+ 32. Kf2 Rf1+! 33. Ke2 Ncd4+ 34. Kd3 Rd1+ 35. Ke4 Re1+ 36. Kd3 Rd1+ White must take the draw.

30. Nd6! Kg8?



The damage is limited after 30. ... h6! 31. Nxf7+ Kh7 when White is just a little better.

31. Qh5! g6 32. Qg5 Ra1 33. Rxa1 Rxa1+

34. Kf2 Ra8 35. Qf6 Rf8 36. Ke1!

Since Black's pieces are tied up, White brings the king over to deal with the pawns.

36. ... b3 37. Kd2 d4 38. e6?

The win was clearer with 38. Nc4! Ra8 39. e6 fxe6 40. Qxe6+ Kg7 41. Ne5.

38. ... fxe6 39. Qxe6+ Kg7 40. f5!

I think 40. Qxb3 Rxf4 is also good, but the text is stronger.

40. ... gxf5 41. Qxb3

We were both down to five or so minutes here, and because there was no second time control, White is practically winning. A queen is a queen!

41. ... Kf6 42. Nc4 Rg8 43. Qh3 Ke6 44. g3 Kd5 45. Nb6+ Kc5 46. Na4+ Kb4 47. Nb2 Ra8 48. Qf1 Kc5 49. Nd3+ Kd6 50. Qf4+ Kd5 51. Nb4+!?

The knight is immune because of the skewer.

51. ... Kc4

Not 51. ... Nxb4? 52. Qf3+!

52. Nc2?

This slip could have been costly. White had to find 52. Na6!! Ra7 53. Qf1+ Kd5 54. h4.

52. ... Ra5?

Whew! With 52. ... Kc5 Black keeps control over the d6-square, and should hold.

53. Qd6! Rd5 54. Qe6 Kc5 55. Ne1 Kb6 56. Nd3 Ra5 57. h4 h5 58. Nf4

White picks up the h5-pawn. Now the rest is a matter of technique.

58. ... Kc5 59. Qb3 Rb5 60. Qa3+ Kc4 61. Nxb5 Rb3 62. Qa6+ Kc5 63. Nf4 Rb2+ 64. Kc1 Rh2 65. Qa3+ Kc4 66. Qd6 Rh1+ 67. Kd2 Rh2+ 68. Ke1 Rh1+ 69. Kf2 Rh2+ 70. Kf3 Rb2 71. Qe6+ Kb5 72. Nd3 Rd2 73. Qb3+ Ka5 74. Kf4 Rh2 75. Kg5 Re2 76. Nb2 Nb4 77. Qa4+, Black resigned.

In the penultimate round, I had Black against FM Jaime Rey Martinez. I knew I had to win for a good chance at a norm, so I summoned all my fighting spirit. I couldn't help but regret starting 0/2, but I tried to put it out of my mind — luckily I still had chances. And indeed, he made some crucial mistakes which led to my victory.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B90)

FM Jaime Rey Martinez (2342)

IM Andy Woodward (2501)

Jeddah Young Masters (8), Jeddah, 01.29.2024

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Rg1!?

An interesting sideline in the Najdorf. I was prepared because he had played it before online a few times!

6. ... b5!?

A more aggressive approach. The main line is 6. ... e5 7. Nb3 Be6 8. g4 d5 9. exd5 Nxd5 10. Nxd5 Qxd5 11. Qxd5 Bxd5 12. Be3 with a slightly more pleasant endgame for White.

7. a4 b4 8. Nd5 Nxd5 9. exd5 Bb7 10. Bc4 Nd7**11. a5?!**

FM Jaime Rey
Martinez

IM Andy
Woodward

Stronger would be 11. Qe2! as a bit of hidden prophylaxis against ... Nd7-b6. For example, if 11. ... Nb6!? 12. Bb5+! axb5 13. Qxb5+ Qd7 (not 13. ... Nd7?? 14. Qxb7) 14. Qxb6 g6 15. b3 Bg7 16. Bb2 0-0 17. 0-0-0 Rfc8 Black is equal despite being a pawn down.

11. ... Qc7! 12. Qe2 g6! 13. Bg5

Preventing Black from developing the dark-squared bishop.

13. ... h6! 14. Bh4 Nc5?

The right move was 14. ... Rc8! when White has to be careful. If 15. Bxa6? Bxa6 16. Qxa6 Bg7 17. Nc6 Nb8 18. Nxb8 Qxb8 and Black is completely winning despite being down the pawn. White's queenside pawns are very weak, while Black will castle and activate his final piece. So the best move is 15. Nc6! Bxc6 16. dxc6 Qxc6 17. Bxa6 Rb8! 18. Bc4 g5! 19. Bg3 Bg7! when Black is better.

15. f4?

We both saw 15. Bf6! but misevaluated it. White dislocates the rook and prevents Black from fluently completing development, e.g., 15. ... Rg8 16. 0-0-0 0-0-0 17. Bh4 with a slight edge.

15. ... Bg7 16. Bf2 0-0 17. f5 Ne4!

Making use of the fact that the c4-bishop is hanging, Black improves the position of his knight.

18. Be3

Things fall apart after 18. Qxe4?? Qxc4.

18. ... Rac8! 19. Bd3 Nc3!

Picking up a pawn, while weakening White's position.

20. Qg4

If 20. bxc3 Qxc3+ 21. Kf2 Bxd4 with a tremendous position.

20. ... Nxd5?



I missed a nice intermediate move with 20. ... h5! — it prevents the tactical resource that

my opponent found on the next move. Black is winning after 21. Qg5 Nxd5 22. fxc6 Nxe3 23. gxf7+ Rxf7 24. Qxe3 Qc5.

21. Bxh6! Nf6?

This lets White back into the game. I should have just taken the bishop:

21. ... Bxh6 22.

fxg6 Bg7 23. gxf7+

Rxf7 24. Ne6 Nf6!

25. Bh7+ Kxh7 26.

Qh3+ Kg8 27. Nxc7

Rxc7 and with three pieces for the queen, Black remains in the driver's seat.

22. Qh4?!

White is fully equal after 22. Qf4! e5 23. fxe6 fxe6 e.p. 24. Bxg7 Qxg7 25. Qxd6 Qh6.

22. ... Bxh6?!

More precise was 22. ... Qc5! 23. fxc6 Qe5+ 24. Ne2 (not 24. Kd1? Be4 25. gxf7+ Kxf7 26. Nf3 Qxb2 and Black is winning) 24. ... fxc6 with an edge for Black.

23. Qxh6 Qc5



24. Ne2?

After 24. fxc6! Qxd4 25. 0-0-0?! is met by 25. ... Qg4! 26. Rgf1 fxc6 27. Bxg6 (27. Rf4 Qh5) 27. ... Be4!. But we both underestimated 25. Rf1! when White holds in all lines. Two examples: 25. ... Qxb2 (or 25. ... Qe5+ 26. Kd2 Qh5 27. gxf7+ Rxf7 28. Rxf6! Rxc2+ 29. Kxc2 Qc5+ 30. Kd2 Rxf6 31. Qh7+ Kf8 32. Re1 Qg5+ with wild equality) 26. Rxf6! Qxa1+ 27. Ke2 Qe5+ 28. Kd1 Qa1+ 29. Ke2 is a perpetual.

24. ... Ng4!

Shifting the knight from f6 to e5 is a big improvement. Now the position is winning again.

25. Qh4 Ne5 26. fxc6 fxc6 27. Qg3 Kg7



28. 0-0-0 Rf2 29. Rge1 Rxg2 30. Qh3 Rxh2 31. Qg3 Rg2 32. Qh3 Bf3 33. Nd4 Qxd4 34. Qxc8 Bxd1 35. Kxd1 Qf4 36. Re2 Rg1+, White resigned.

And here he resigned in view of 36. ... Rg1+ 37. Re1 Qc1+! 38. Kxc1 Rxe1+ 39. Kd2 Nf3 mate.

In the last round, I had the white pieces against the top seed GM Raunak Sadhwani. At this point, I "just" needed a draw. Now the psychological factor set in. Before this tournament, I had had several tournaments in which I almost got the norms. My nerves manifested themselves — what if I were a half-point short again? Should I play for a win, maximizing my chances, or try to secure the norm with a draw?

In the end I decided to prepare as much as possible to play for a win, but I would offer an early draw in case my opponent was fine with a draw. If he rejected my draw offer, I would get the draw out of my mind early on and switch to play for a win.

Sitting down at the board, I felt pretty confident after my preparation, but I offered a draw on move nine as per the plan. To my surprise, he accepted! A sense of relief took over me. The final GM norm was mine!

As the shock that I was finally a grandmaster set in, my mom took me to the Red Sea. My grandpa had wanted me to dip my toes in its waters, and I was excited to see it in person. After going back to the hotel, I had a couple of short interviews with a European chess magazine and *ChessKid.com*. In hindsight, I'm extremely thankful I achieved my last norm in late January. It allowed me to withdraw from a tournament two weeks later to spend some time with my grandparents. My grandpa passed away unexpectedly two days later, making our time together even more precious.

I took a break from chess to recover from the sickness I caught on the trip back from Saudi Arabia. (I also had to catch up with my schoolwork!) I had a disappointing performance in the Spring Classic at the Saint Louis Chess Club in April, but that was OK. As one of my coaches reminded me, "We are here for both the good times and the bad moments." Learning to control emotions and nerves during the ups and downs is a big part of the chess journey.

It took me one and a half years to fulfill all the GM title requirements after I became an IM. As a norm hunter, I flew to all kinds of norm tournaments at least once a month with my mom most of the time, leaving my father and sister at home. It was not easy. Illnesses, travel difficulties, and stress remained obstacles in the journey. Yet nothing compares to the joy of making new friends or embarking on a new adventure. My perseverance paid off after 190 chess tournaments over seven years.

Ultimately, my chess journey is not one I have taken alone. I am thankful for the support of my parents. They have played a big role, taking me to tournaments and backing me mentally and financially. I am grateful for the support and help my coaches (special shout out to GM Yaroslav Zhrebukh!) provided throughout the journey. I would also like to thank GM Hikaru Nakamura for his support — he sponsored extra chess lessons for half a year. This generosity motivated me immensely, and as I get older, I hope I'll be able to impact the next generation of upcoming players as he did for me.

I have often thought of Galatians 6:9 on

this journey: "Do not be weary in doing good, for in due time you will reap the harvest." It takes work and persistence, but confidence is the most important. For everyone on the journey to becoming a GM, I wish you the best of success!

Postscript: *Since these words were written, Andy rebounded with a strong showing at the 2024 Summer Classic hosted by the Saint Louis Chess Club. He scored 6½/9 in the B Group to share first place with GM Steven Zierk, who won the blitz playoff. We asked Andy if he had annotated any of his games from the event, and here's what he sent. Enjoy. ~ed.*

CATALAN OPENING (E11)

GM Andy Woodward (2580)

GM Akshat Chandra (2556)

**Summer Classic B (3), St. Louis,
05.30.2024**

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. Bg2 Bb4+ 5. Bd2 Be7 6. Nf3 0-0 7. 0-0 Nbd7 8. Qc2 c6 9. Rc1 a5 10. a4 h6



11. Na3!?

An interesting idea, preventing Black from developing with ... b7-b6.

11. ... Ne4 12. Be3 b6?!

I'm not sure about this move. I was more definitely familiar with positions that included ... f7-f5, like 12. ... f5 13. Ne1 Bf6 14. f3 Nd6 15. Nd3 when White is a bit better.

13. cxd5 cxd5 14. Nb5 Ba6 15. Qb3 Nd6?!

This move helps me get what I want with a tempo. Instead I was considering 15. ... Bb4!, preparing to take on b5 followed by ... Ne4-d6. I was planning on 16. Bf4!? (16. Qd1 Rc8 is equal) but then Black has counterplay with 16. ... g5! 17. Bc7 Qf6.

16. Bf4 Bxb5 17. axb5 g5!



Black needs to act fast, as otherwise White will have a decisive advantage.

18. Bd2?!

The engine doesn't like this move, but I think it's an interesting practical choice.



**The blitz playoff
between GM Steven
Zierk and GM Andy
Woodward**

White keeps the bishop with a specific idea in mind. I should also note that Black had 26 minutes here to my 109!

The engine choice is 18. Bxd6! Bxd6 19. Rc6 Nf6 20. Rac1, and with the c-file and Black's weak king, White has a great position.

18. ... Nc4 19. Rxc4!?

I spent 23 minutes on this move calculating the consequences of the sacrifice. Practically it is very interesting, especially as Black was low on the clock.

Other ideas include 19. Be1 Rc8 20. Rc2 Nf6 21. Rac1 Qd7 and now 22. Ne5 (22. Qa4? Nxb2) 22. ... Nxe5 23. dxe5 Ng4 24. Bc3 Bc5, and 19. e4!?

19. ... dxc4 20. Qxc4 Rc8 21. Qd3 Qc7

Black is trying to take control over the c-file and trade queens on either c4 or c2. Therefore I try to prevent it!

22. Rc1 Qxc1+!

The only resource for Black.

The alternative 22. ... Qd6? is bad as White puts a major piece on c6: 23. Rc6! Rxc6 24. bxc6 and if 24. ... Qxc6? 25. Nxc5! when the dual threats of Qd3-h7 mate and Bg2xc6 can't both be defended.

23. Bxc1 Rxc1+ 24. Bf1

(see diagram top of next column)

24. ... g4!

This move does open up the black king, but again Black must act quickly before White consolidates.



POSITION AFTER 24. Bf1

25. Nd2 Rfc8!?

My opponent defended quite well up to this point.

The easiest way to keep equality was via a tactical resource: 25. ... Rd8! 26. Nb3!? (the engine recommends the inhuman 26. h4!? when Black keeps equality with 26. ... gxh3 e.p. 27. Kh2 Bg5 28. f4 Ne5!! 29. fxe5 Bxd2 30. Bxh3 Bg5 31. Bg4) 26. ... Nc5! 27. Nxc5 bxc5! 28. Qe3 Bg5 is equal.

26. d5



26. ... exd5??

An unfortunate oversight. Better was 26. ... Nf8!? 27. Qd4 h5!, defending the g4-pawn. Black holds on after 28. Qxb6 R8c2! 29. d6 Bg5! 30. Ne4 Rxe2!! 31. Nxc5 Ree1 32. Kg2 Rxf1 33. f4.

27. Qf5!

This move was hard to foresee. White doesn't have to take the pawn, but instead, he can push back all of Black's pieces.

27. ... Nf6 28. Nb3! R1c7 29. Nd4! Kg7 30. Qe5!

Centralizing the queen, and opening the f5-square for the knight.

30. ... Bc5?

Still losing, but of greater resistance, was 30. ... Bf8!? 31. Nf5+ Kg6 32. Ne3.

31. Nf5+! Kg6 32. Nh4+ Kg7 33. e3!

To bring the bishop to d3.

33. ... Bf8 34. Nf5+!

It's true that 34. Bd3?! is good for the win, but White needs to see a resource. Play continues 34. ... Rc1+ 35. Kg2 Rd1 36. Nf5+ Kg8! 37. Qxf6 Rcc1 38. Ne7+! Bxe7 39. Bh7+!! Kxh7 40. Qxf7+ Kh8 41. Qe8+ Kg7 42. Qxe7+ Kg6 43. Qe6+ when White picks up the g4-pawn and wins the game.

34. ... Kg6 35. Bd3 Rc1+ 36. Kg2, Black resigned.

All kinds of knight checks are threatened, and Black's king can't get off the diagonal, so Black threw in the towel. ♠

Jeddah Young Masters

JEDDAH, JANUARY 24-30, 2024

| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|----|--|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|------|
| 1 | IM Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus | 2524 | * | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6½/9 |
| 2 | GM Volodar Murzin | 2635 | 1 | * | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 6/9 |
| 3 | GM Raunak Sadhwani | 2654 | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6/9 |
| 4 | IM Andy Woodward | 2501 | 0 | 0 | ½ | * | 1 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6/9 |
| 5 | IM Jakub Seemann | 2439 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | * | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5/9 |
| 6 | GM Pranav V | 2611 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5/9 |
| 7 | IM Jan Klimkowski | 2531 | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 4½/9 |
| 8 | FM Jaime Rey Martinez | 2342 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | ½ | * | 0 | 1 | 2½/9 |
| 9 | WGM Candela Belén Francisco Guecamburu | 2295 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | * | ½ | 2/9 |
| 10 | FM Faustino Oro | 2357 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | 1½/9 |