

# Doubled Over

Carlsen wins the World Rapid and Blitz titles – again – while the Women’s Rapid goes to a playoff and the Women’s Blitz sees a familiar winner.

BY **WGM JENNIFER YU**



**H**UNDREDS OF THE world’s best chess-players gathered once again between Christmas and New Year’s for the World Rapid and Blitz Championships.

The 2025 edition brought players to Doha, Qatar; even though futuristic skyscrapers towered over the desert horizon, for five days all eyes were on the tournament that crowns four world champions.

This was my third World Rapid and Blitz, and the atmosphere in Doha felt noticeably different. For one thing, players were required to stay in official hotels, and the Open and Women’s events were held in the same venue. That meant constantly running into world champions and top grandmasters throughout the day at breakfast, in hotel elevators, and on the shuttle ride to the playing hall. Over the board, clocks were slammed and adrenaline ran high, but minutes later, opponents could be found in the lounge relaxing, analyzing games, or joking with friends.

Speed chess thrives on volatility; blunders are inevitable in time scrambles and winning positions can collapse in seconds, and unlike in classical tournaments, there is almost no time to prepare between games. Losses must be processed not overnight but in minutes. Resilience is key in rapid chess. Momentum swings constantly, and the ability to reset mentally after a mistake becomes just as important as calculating moves. Even when the computer declares a position winning or losing, the reality over the board is far more complicated, and strong players can introduce complications and generate chances for their opponent to make mistakes. In that sense, players can often manufacture their own luck by continuing to pose practical problems.

The result is a tournament that reliably

produces some of the year's most dramatic moments, viral highlights, improbable comebacks, and controversies, from last year's infamous "jeansgate" to several unforgettable moments in Doha, many of which once again involved Magnus Carlsen, who took home both crowns. When the games finally began, the chaos of speed chess quickly lived up to its reputation.

## OPEN RAPID

Carlsen captured his sixth World Rapid Championship with a score of 10½/13, one point clear of GMs Vladislav Artemiev and Arjun Erigaisi, who claimed the silver and bronze medals on tiebreaks over American GMs Hans Niemann and Leinier Dominguez Perez. The tournament was played over three days at a time control of G/15 with a 10-second increment.

Carlsen ultimately dominated the event with the highest World Rapid score of his career, but not without obstacles.

After the first day, five players shared the lead with 4½/5: Carlsen, Erigaisi, Artemiev, Classical World Champion Gukesh Dommaraju and GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

On the second day, Artemiev defeated Erigaisi and Carlsen in successive rounds to take the sole lead with 6½/7. His victories illustrated the unpredictability and quick-turn that characterize rapid chess: Artemiev was in a dire situation against Erigaisi, down material and nearly 10 minutes behind on the clock, but as Erigaisi burned time searching for a clean conversion, Artemiev generated enough practical counterplay to turn the game around and win. Against Carlsen, Artemiev was again dangerously low on time by the middlegame. However, Carlsen blundered, immediately losing an Exchange and the game. The loss produced the event's first viral moment when Carlsen pushed away a camera in exasperation as he left the board.

Despite the setback and his visible frustration, Carlsen's resilience proved decisive, as he won every game until the last round. Meanwhile, Artemiev bogged down, drawing the remainder of his games. Safe draws against Vachier-Lagrave and GM Alexey Sarana in the remaining rounds of Day 2 left the door open for the chasing pack, and Niemann ended the second day on 7½/9 to share the lead with Artemiev, a half-point ahead of Carlsen, Sarana, the 14-year-old Turkish prodigy GM Yağiz Kaan Erdogmus (the youngest player to cross 2600 earlier

this year), and GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov. Abdusattorov had staged a strong comeback with three consecutive wins, including a victory over Gukesh, after a devastating Move 10 blunder the previous day — a reminder that mistakes happen but do not have to define a tournament performance.

The final day of the Rapid began with a draw between co-leaders Artemiev and Niemann. Carlsen caught up to the leaders with a convincing win over Sarana, and a victory over Niemann in the following round then gave Carlsen the sole lead, while Artemiev's sequence of draws continued. Meanwhile, after drawing Abdusattorov and defeating Erigaisi, Erdogmus entered Round 12 just a half-point behind Carlsen, tied with Artemiev.

### RUY LOPEZ, BREYER DEFENSE (C95)

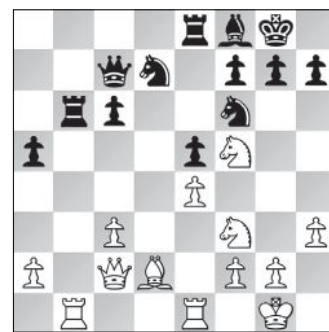
GM Yagiz Erdogmus (2446)

GM Magnus Carlsen (2824)

World Rapid Ch (12), Doha, 12.28.2025

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 0-0 8. c3 d6 9. h3 Nb8 10. d4 Nbd7 11. Nbd2 Bb7 12. Bc2 Re8 13. Nf1 Bf8 14. Ng3 a5 15. Bd3 b4 16. Bd2

c6 17. Nf5 bxc3 18. bxc3 Ba6 19. Bxa6 Rxa6 20. Qc2 Qc7 21. Rab1 Rb6 22. dxe5 dxe5



After a relatively normal opening and middlegame, Carlsen slowly outplays his prodigy opponent positionally by using the weakness of the dark squares.

23. c4?!

Attacking the a-pawn, but also permanently weakening the d4-square. Carlsen seizes the initiative by bringing his knight to c5 to attack the e4-pawn and force Erdogmus' pieces backwards. It's equal after 23. Be3 Rxb1 24. Rxb1 Nc5 25. Nd2.

23. ... Rxb1 24. Rxb1 Nc5 25. Ng3 Nfd7 26. Be3 g6 27. Nf1 Ne6



Our author WGM Jennifer Yu



GM Leinier Dominguez

Positioning the knight to jump to d4 and to put the bishop on c5.

**28. N1d2 Bc5 29. Bxc5 Ndxc5 30. Nb3 f6  
31. Nxc5 Nxc5 32. Nd2 a4**

An instructive move, preventing a challenge to the strong c5-knight with Nd2-b3.

**33. Nf1 Rd8 34. Ne3 Kg7**



**35. Qc1?!**

Erdogmus sacrifices his e-pawn in desperation to create play. But after 35. f3 Rd3 Erdogmus had a trick to maintain equality with 36. Kh2!, getting the king off the back rank and g1-a7 diagonal before Carlsen has a chance to infiltrate the d-file. Play could go 36. ... Qd6 (White's at least equal after 36. ... Rxe3?! 37. Qf2! Rd3 38. Qxc5 [or 37. ... Ra3?! 38. Qxc5 Rxa2 39. Rb6]) 37. Rd1.

**35. ... Nxe4 36. c5 h5**

White plans to double up on the b-file and infiltrate the seventh rank, so Carlsen creates *luft* for the king to escape to h6. But 36. ... Rd4! 37. Rb6 h5 was better, transposing to the game without allowing the possibility in the next note.

**37. Rb6**

Erdogmus had a chance to get his pawn back with a double attack: 37. Rb4! Rd4 38. Qb2 Rd2 (White's activity and Black's weak king is more than enough compensation for the pawn after 38. ... Qd8 39. Rb8 Qe7 40. Qb6) 39. Qc1 Rd4 40. Qb2.

**37. ... Rd4**

Defending the a4-pawn and stopping the previous idea.

**38. Ra6 Qb7 39. Rb6 Qd7 40. Qb2 Rd2  
41. Qb4**

Too many white pawns are hanging after 41. Rb7 Rxb2 42. Rxd7+ Kh6.

**41. ... Qd4!**

Escaping the seventh-rank pin threat and absolutely dominating the position.

**42. Rb7+ Kh6 43. Qc4 Qxc4 44. Nxc4 Rxa2  
45. Nd6 Nxd6 46. cxd6 Rd2 47. d7 a3 48.  
Ra7 h4 49. Rxa3 Rxd7 50. Rc3 Rd1+ 51.  
Kh2 Rd6 52. Rc4 Kg5, White resigned.**

Carlsen's victory effectively won the tournament: Entering the final round he led with 10/12, a full point ahead of Artemiev and Niemann, while a pack of nine players followed on 8½.

A rather peaceful final round ensued. Carlsen safely drew GM Anish Giri to secure the title with 10½, while Artemiev drew GM Wesley So and Niemann drew Vachier-Lagrave, leaving both on 9½. This meant players from the pack could reach the podium with a final-round victory and favorable tiebreaks. Erigaisi defeated GM Alexandr Shimanov while Dominguez beat Erdogmus, allowing both players to join the four-way tie for second place. On tiebreaks, Artemiev secured his second World Rapid silver medal, while Erigaisi claimed his first World Rapid medal with bronze.

## WOMEN'S RAPID

GM Aleksandra Goryachkina, GM Zhu Jiner, and defending champion GM Humpy Koneru all finished with 8½/11, with Goryachkina and Zhu advancing on tiebreaks to a blitz playoff and Goryachkina capturing the title. Her victory felt quite fitting for a tournament in which she steadily climbed the standings — proof that even in rapid chess, slow and steady can sometimes win the race.

Zhu won all four games on the first day to take the lead but drew all three games on Day 2. After Round 6, a remarkable 16 players were clustered between 4½ and 5 points. The leaderboard became a push-and-pull for the rest of the day: Small groups of players would break ahead with wins while others drew, only for the chasing pack to catch up later.

Going into the last day, Zhu and Humpy shared the lead with 6½/8, while 10 players sat just a half-point behind. Many draws on the top boards were eventful, with several players once again showing resilience to escape difficult positions and remain in the title race. Goryachkina, for instance, narrowly held against Humpy in the final round of the day, while Humpy herself had earlier turned a lost position against IM Yana Zhapova into a win.

Goryachkina, Zhu, and Humpy entered the final round tied for first with 8/10, but



GM Magnus Carlsen



GM Aleksandra Goryachkina

as all three leaders had already played, the final pairings left the outcome completely uncertain.

## PIRC DEFENSE (B07)

**GM Aleksandra Goryachkina (2505)**  
**WIM Bat-Erdene Mungunzul (2288)**  
**World Women's Rapid Ch (10), Doha, 12.28.2025**

**1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 a6**  
**5. Nf3 b5 6. e5 Ng4**

This is a rare line; at this point there are only seven games from this position, three of which are Goryachkina's! She completely dominates here with the crushing space advantage granted by Black's dubious opening choice.

### 7. Ng5

A strong idea, especially the way Goryachkina follows it up, immediately launching an attack.

**7. ... f6 8. Qf3 c6**



### 9. e6!

A killer move, securing the f7-square and preventing the black pieces from developing.

### 9. ... Nh6

Defending f7 and threatening to capture the white knight. If 9. ... Nxe3 10. fxe3 Qa5 11. Nf7; of course 9. ... fxg5?? 10. Qf7 is checkmate.

### 10. h4! Bg7

If 10. ... fxg5 11. hxg5 Nf5 (11. ... Bxe6 12. gxh6 and Black cannot develop the kingside, while White will soon have all her pieces out to attack) 12. d5 White is positionally winning and will soon get the piece back.

**11. Bd3 fxg5 12. hxg5 Bxe6 13. gxh6 Bf6**  
**14. Ne4**

Removing the dark-squared bishop, which is crucial to the defense of the king.

**14. ... Bd5 15. Nxf6+ exf6 16. Qg3 Kd7**  
 Not 16. ... 0-0? 17. Bxg6!

### 17. 0-0

Goryachkina's plan is simple but crushing: develop all her pieces and attack the king stuck in the center.

**17. ... Kc7 18. b3 Bf7 19. c4 Kb7 20. d5**



Undermining the defense of the b5-pawn and opening up a path for White's dark-squared bishop. Goryachkina's following moves are natural and strong, wrapping up the game without giving Mungunzul a chance to breathe.

**20. ... c5 21. cxb5 Qb6 22. a4 Bxd5 23. Rfd1 Rd8 24. a5 Qc7 25. bxa6+ Ka7 26. b4 Nd7 27. b5 Bb3 28. Rdb1, Black resigned.**

The final round produced one of the most dramatic finishes of the championships. Although all three leaders ultimately drew their games, each encounter contained missed winning chances that could have decided the title outright.

Zhu appeared to be on the verge of victory after winning a pawn and obtaining a dominant position against GM Tan Zhongyi, but Tan sacrificed more material to generate counterplay and ultimately held despite being down two pieces at one point. Humpy also came agonizingly close to winning the tournament outright against IM Savitha Shri, but one inaccuracy in a winning opposite-colored bishop endgame allowed Shri to hold. IM Ekaterina Atalik outplayed Goryachkina in an endgame but grabbed a pawn too early, allowing Goryachkina's pieces to activate.

The playoff between Goryachkina and Zhu consisted of two 3+2 blitz games. In the first game, Goryachkina outplayed Zhu positionally in a Ruy Lopez, converting her advantage with excellent technique. Facing elimination, Zhu needed to win the second game but was unable to generate real chances. Goryachkina forced a perpetual

in a winning endgame to wrap up her first Women's World Rapid Championship title.

## OPEN BLITZ

Carlsen defeated Abdusattorov to win the World Blitz Championship, securing his ninth Blitz title and 20th world championship across all formats. It's also the fifth time he has won both the Rapid and Blitz titles in the same year, further cementing his reputation as chess's GOAT. Abdusattorov took home silver while Erigaisi and U.S. Champion GM Fabiano Caruana shared bronze.

The blitz championship is essentially two tournaments in one: a 19-round Swiss (3+2) followed by a four-player knockout of four-game matches. With only four qualification spots, down from eight the previous year, the last Swiss rounds became especially tense.

The blitz proved far more turbulent than the Rapid: The standout performer of the Swiss was Erigaisi, while, after blunders and forfeits, Carlsen was in a must-win situation simply to qualify for the knockout.

As expected, the early rounds were full of surprises. GM Jorden van Foreest began the tournament with six consecutive wins, defeating both GM Alireza Firouzja and Erigaisi, who blundered a rook in one move.



GM Levon Aronian and friends

Erigaisi quickly recovered and went on to score key victories over Carlsen and Abdusattorov, emerging as one of the leaders. Abdusattorov rebounded from an early upset with an impressive 6½/7 run to join the lead for a time, and Vachier-Lagrave also recovered from an early blunder to surge into contention.

While these players built momentum, one of the tournament's most viral moments came in Carlsen's game against Erigaisi: With only seconds on the clock, Carlsen's queen slipped from his hand and flew off the board, causing him to lose on time. The bizarre finish quickly circulated across social media, especially after Carlsen slammed the table in frustration. Just a few rounds later, Carlsen blundered an entire rook in a pawn-up endgame against Caruana. When the dust settled after the first day, Erigaisi, Vachier-Lagrave, and Caruana shared the lead with 10/13, while Carlsen stayed in striking distance with 9.

The following day brought even more drama for Carlsen. Against GM Haik Martirosyan, he knocked pieces over while scrambling and paused the clock before adjusting them, an infraction that resulted in a forfeit. At that point, Carlsen's chances of reaching the knockout appeared precarious. More troubling was the simplicity of his mistakes, which can be especially frustrating

and psychologically difficult to recover from.

Meanwhile, Erigaisi continued his dominant run, with four victories and two draws to finish the Swiss with 15/19, a full point ahead of the field. Caruana followed with 14, earning the second qualification spot.

Despite his earlier mishaps, Carlsen surged at the finish with four consecutive wins followed by a final-round draw against Abdusattorov to secure the third qualifying spot with 13½/19. Six players ultimately finished on 13/19: GMs Abdusattorov, Vachier-Lagrave, Wesley So, Nihal Sarin, 19-year-old Denis Lazavik, and Maxim Matlakov. Abdusattorov secured the final qualifying spot on tiebreaks.

### KNOCKOUT

The Swiss standings determined the pairings: Erigaisi (1) faced Abdusattorov (4) while Caruana (2) played Carlsen (3). Other than that, every player's slate was wiped clean.

Despite Erigaisi's dominant Swiss performance, Abdusattorov controlled the match from the start. In the other semifinal, Carlsen and Caruana began with two fighting draws. Carlsen then outplayed Caruana in a complex endgame to take the lead before winning the final game with a powerful attacking performance, winning the match 3-1.

### SICILIAN DEFENSE (B50)

**GM Magnus Carlsen (2881)**

**GM Fabiano Caruana (2751)**

**World Blitz Ch semifinal (4), 12.30.2025**

- 1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. d3 Nc6
- 5. 0-0 e6 6. a4 Be7 7. Bb3 Na5 8. Ba2 0-0
- 9. Nbd2 b6 10. Re1 Ba6 11. Nf1 Rc8 12. c3
- d5 13. e5 Nd7 14. Ng3 d4

Caruana offers an interesting sacrifice to activate his pieces and undermine White's center pawns. If 15. cxd4 Bb7 stopping d4-d5. Now if 16. dxc5 Bxf3 17. Qxf3 Nc6! Black has good compensation with control of the center.

15. h4!



A creative idea by Carlsen to launch a king-side attack out of seemingly nowhere. This



anchors the g5-square for the white pieces and can create weaknesses in Black's kingside with h4-h5-h6.

#### 15. ... Nc6

15. ... Bxh4? loses a piece to 16. b4! followed by 17. b5.

#### 16. Re4

Defending the h4-pawn and preparing to develop the queen while possibly swinging the rook over to the kingside.

#### 16. ... Bb7 17. Qe2 Kh8 18. Bd2 a6 19. Re1 b5

Carlsen's space advantage has become apparent over the last few moves, and after developing all his pieces, he is ready to act.

#### 20. Ng5! h6



Caruana prevents one threat but allows a different tactical sequence.

If Black fails to respond to the threat with something like 20. ... bxa4, Carlsen's threat was 21. Nxh7! Kxh7 22. Qh5+ Kg8 23. Rg4 with a mating attack: 23. ... Ncxe5 24. Rxg7+! Kxg7 25. Qh6+ Kg8 26. Rxe5! Nxe5 27. Nh5!. A good demonstration of why developing all your pieces before attacking is necessary!

Exchanging the strong knight with 20. ... Bxg5 does not solve Black's problems, since it offers another concession by opening up the h-file: 21. hxg5 Qc7 22. Rh4 Ncxe5 23. Qh5.

#### 21. Nxf7+! Rxf7 22. Bxe6 Ncxe5

If 22. ... Rf8? Black's king is too weak after 23. Bxh6! gxh6 24. Qh5.

#### 23. Rxe5 Nxe5 24. Bxf7 Bf6

After 24. ... Nxf7 25. Qxe7 Qd5 26. f3 Black does not have enough counterplay and White is up a solid pawn with active pieces.

#### 25. Be6 Rc6 26. Bf5 Bc8 27. cxd4

27. f4 also wins: 27. ... Bxf5 28. fxe5 Bxh4 29. Nxf5 Bxe1 30. Bxe1.

#### 27. ... Bxf5

If 27. ... cxd4 28. f4! the black knight cannot move due to the back-rank mate, and the endgame is winning for White after 28. ... Bxf5 29. fxe5 Bxh4 30. Nxf5 Bxe1 31. Bxe1 as the minor pieces dominate the rook. Meanwhile, if 27. ... Qxd4 28. Bc3 followed by taking on e5.

#### 28. dxe5 Bxd3 29. Qf3

The c6-rook and f6-bishop are attacked, and White wins a full piece.

#### 29. ... Re6 30. exf6 Rxf6 31. Qe3 Rf8 32.

#### axb5 axb5 33. Bc3 Kh7 34. Qxc5 Rf7 35.

#### Rd1 Rd7 36. Qe3 Rd5 37. Nh5 Rxh5 38.

#### Qxd3+, Black resigned.

The final began with a bang when Carlsen pushed aggressively in an equal endgame and almost hung a knight as he grabbed his rook. Forced to defend with the rook by the touch-move rule, he was left in a losing position that Abdusattorov converted. Carlsen recovered immediately by winning a drawn knight endgame, creating chances from seemingly nothing. After a precise draw in Game 3, Abdusattorov cracked under mounting pressure and severe time trouble in the last game, allowing Carlsen to secure both the match and the championship.

## WOMEN'S BLITZ

Similar to the Open, the tournament used a 15-round Swiss format, with the top four players advancing to a knockout stage, won by GM Bibisara Assaubayeva over GM Anna Muzychuk 2½-1½ in the final.

After the first day, 19-year-old Dutch IM Eline Roebers led the field with 8½/10, closing the day with six consecutive wins, including a victory over newly crowned Women's Rapid Champion Goryachkina. Roebers' performance was not entirely surprising: Earlier in the year she had achieved the highest-ever women's blitz rating on *Chess.com*.

Close behind were Goryachkina, WIM Umida Omonova, and GM Antoaneta Stefanova on 8/10. IM Song Yuxin and Assaubayeva were on 7½, while Muzychuk, GM Valentina Gunina, and IM Leya Garifullina were among a large group on 7.

The second day consisted of five rounds, and after nearly every one, a new leader emerged: Assaubayeva defeated Roebers, surging into the sole lead during a run of six consecutive wins; then Gunina, herself riding a seven-game winning streak, defeated

her to take over the tournament lead with 11/14 heading into the final round.

Meanwhile, GM Zhu Jiner had one of the most impressive comebacks of the tournament. After scoring 6/10 on the first day, she won all her games on the second day, including a crucial victory over Roebers in the penultimate round. That result left both players on 10/14, chasing the leaders alongside Stefanova, Song, Muzychuk, and Garifullina. With the top eight players paired against each other, the final round was guaranteed to be an entertaining showdown.

Zhu continued her surge by defeating Song, while Roebers took down Garifullina, bringing them to 11/15. Assaubayeva joined them on 11 after escaping from a losing position to draw against Stefanova.

Gunina obtained a winning position against Muzychuk — she was up a full piece and even declined a draw offer that would have guaranteed qualification. But she blundered under time pressure and lost, allowing Muzychuk to catch up with 11. Assaubayeva, Muzychuk, Roebers, and Zhu advanced to the knockout as Gunina finished a mere half a tiebreak point short.

## KNOCKOUT

Assaubayeva quickly put the turbulence of the Swiss behind her and dominated the knockout stage. She defeated Zhu in the semifinal 3-0, controlling the match from start to finish and also securing the final Women's Candidates spot through the FIDE Women's Events series.

Muzychuk won the other semifinal against Roebers, 2½-1½, winning the last game with an excellent attack.





GM Wesley So

The final began with three tense draws; everything came down to the final game.

### ENGLISH OPENING (A22)

GM Bibisara Assaubayeva (2428)  
GM Anna Muzychuk (2397)  
World Women's Blitz Ch Final (4),  
Doha, 12.30.2025

1. Nf3 c5 2. c4 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. g3 d5  
5. cxd5 Nxd5 6. Bg2 Nxc3 7. bxc3 e5 8. 0-0  
Be7 9. d3 0-0 10. Rb1 Qc7 11. Nd2 Rb8  
12. Nc4 Be6 13. Qa4 f6 14. Ne3  
A standard idea to maneuver the knight to the d5-hole with support from c3-c4.

14. ... Rfd8 15. Re1  
Assaubayeva may have wanted to avoid 15. c4 Nd4 16. Re1 b5 17. cxb5 Qd7.

15. ... Bf8  
An interesting way to counter Assaubayeva's plan is with 15. ... a6 16. Bd2 (or 16. c4 Nb4 17. a3 b5 18. Qd1 Nc6 when Black gets ... b7-b5 in anyway and has a much better version of the game) 16. ... b5! 17. Qxa6 Rb6 18. Qa3 c4 19. Qb2 cxd3 with an active, playable position for both sides.

16. c4 Bd7 17. Nd5 Qd6 18. Qa3 b6 19. Bd2 Rbc8 20. h4



White begins her kingside attack, an especially strong idea with the short time control. Black struggles to defend and Assaubayeva quickly plays strong, natural moves to provoke weaknesses.

20. ... Bg4 21. Ne3 Bd7 22. h5 Kh8 23. Nd5 Bg4 24. h6 g6?! 25. Ne3?!

White could play 25. f4! opening up the f-file and the dark squares to break through Black's defenses. If 25. ... Rd7 26. fxe5 Qxe5 27. Bf4 Qe6 28. Qb2 with lots of pressure. Assaubayeva may have wanted to avoid this because of the scary-looking complications of 25. f4! Bxh6 26. fxe5 Qf8 27. Bxh6 Qxh6 28. exf6 Nd4 29. Qb2 Rxd5 30. Bxd5 Qe3+

31. Kg2, but the white king is defended and White will soon kick out the black queen and enjoy a material advantage: 31. ... Bxe2 32. f7 Qxd3 (32. ... Rf8 33. Qc1 Qxd3 34. Qf4) 33. Rbd1!.

25. ... Be6?!

Both players missed that the knight cuts off the defense of the h6-pawn, and so 25. ... Bxh6 26. Bxc6 Qxc6 27. Qxa7 Rd6 equalizes.

26. Nd5 Bg4 27. Be3 Rd7 28. Qa4 Nd4 29. Bxd4

Better was 29. f3! Bf5 30. g4 Be6 31. Nxf6 grabbing a pawn.

29. ... exd4 30. e3 Bxh6 31. exd4 cxd4 32. Re4 Bf5

Missing 32. ... f5 to activate the bishop: 33. Rxd4 Bg7 34. c5 bxc5 35. Rc4 and Black is slightly better.

33. Rxd4 Qe5 34. Rh4 Bg7?!



Black needs to defend actively with 34. ... Bg5. Assaubayeva punishes this retreat by neutralizing the strong f5-bishop, after which she can improve the rest of her pieces. This is the moment where she grabs the steering wheel and never lets go.

35. Be4! Rcd8 36. Bxf5 Qxf5 37. Re4  
Taking over the e-file.

37. ... h5 38. Rbe1 Qf3 39. R1e3 Qf5 40. Qc6  
Look at what has happened in the last five moves. Assaubayeva has put her pieces on all the best squares, and it is difficult for Muzychuk to find a move. The d5-knight dominates the center.

40. ... Kh7 41. Kg2 Rd6 42. Qc7 R6d7 43. Qc6 Rd6 44. Qa4 R6d7 45. Re7 Kh6 46. Rf3 Qg5 47. Rxd7, Black resigned.

This is Assaubayeva's third World Women's Blitz title, at only 21 years of age. Muzychuk finished with silver, while Zhu and Roebbers took bronze. ♠



GM Hans Niemann



IM Carissa Yip