

INTRODUCING THE 2023 OREGON STATE CHAMPION

Wondergirl Zoey!

For years, Zoey has been dreaming of becoming the first girl to win the Oregon Closed Championship. In 2023, her dream finally came true, less than a month before her 15th birthday!

By WIM Zoey Tang

Hi everyone! I'm honored to be a newly-minted contributor to ACM. (The honor is mutual -Ed.) In this first article, I'd like to share my experience of winning the State Championship. The Closed is an annual invitational tournament of the strongest players in Oregon. I had played in previous editions, but this year was the first where I had realistic chances of winning it. My previous experience made winning all the more desirable, and it increased the pressure. Yet I had also learned how to prepare for these types of round-robins (not just opening preparation against specific opponents, but also general tactics and endgame training).

Seven nerve-wracking rounds later, I had achieved my dream of many years. By winning the tournament, I became the first female Oregon champion ever, as well as the youngest.

Yet my path there was far from smooth.



Zoey Tang is a 15-year-old WIM and FM residing in Portland, Oregon. She earned her Woman International Master title in 2022 after winning the North American Youth Chess Championship G18. Zoey is among the world's top female players for her age. In 2022, she founded a non-profit organization called Puddletown Chess. You can visit their website and read the many chess articles she wrote there at www.puddletownchess.org. Besides chess, Zoey loves playing the piano and reading.



▲ Winner's trophy for Zoey Tang handed over by TD Greg Markowski

D13	
Matt Zavortink	2308**
Zoey Tang	2228

Oregon Closed Championship, Portland 2023
(**All ratings in this article are USCF, not FIDE.)

The first game of the tournament. Luck of the draw had me playing all the tournament favorites in the first few rounds, so I wasn't expecting much. Take it one round at a time!

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c6 A weird way to transpose to the Slav Defense which hopefully confuses White players.

3.♗c3 Trying to avoid the Slav with 3.d5 doesn't work well after 3...cxd5 4.cxd5 ♜a5+ 5.♗c3 b5 and the c3 knight will get kicked around.

3...d5 4.cxd5 cxd5 The Exchange Slav. I had mainly prepared for Matt's London System, so I was sadly already out of preparation.

5.♗f4 ♗c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♗f3 Both players follow the typical setups. Gambits and interesting sidelines sadly happen less often in games at the National Master level. Because Black has developed enough pieces, there is little worry about 7.♜b3, the typical fear of QGD players. Black can respond with 7...♗a5 8.♜a4+ ♗d7 9.♜c2 e6, and play continues normally.

7...a6 This move aims to prevent the annoying pin with ♗b5. In hindsight, allowing ♗b5 is not the end of the world at all, given the symmetrical pawn structure. **7...e6 8.♗b5 ♗d7 9.♜a4 ♖c8 10.0-0 a6 11.♗xc6 ♖xc6 12.♖fc1 ♗e7=** would be



▲ Crater Lake National Park Oregon

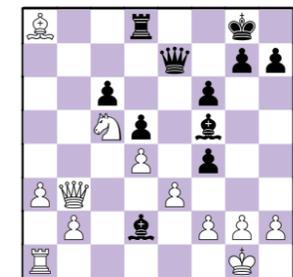
OREGON CLOSED CHAMPIONSHIP,
Portland, February 17-20, 2023
(8 players, round-robin)

- 1. Zoey TANG 6
- 2. Matt ZAVORTINK 5½
- 3. Wilson GIBBINS 4½
- 4. Nick RAPTIS 3½
- 5. Ryan RICHARDSON 3
- 6-7. Carl HAESSLER
Jason CIGAN 2
- 8. Austin TANG 1½

10.♜xb7?! ♗a5 11.♜c7 ♗xf4 12.♜xf4 ♖b8= Here Black has compensation in the form of the very weak b2 pawn and the bishop pair.

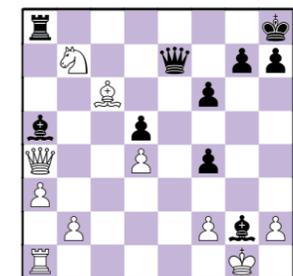
10.♗e5 One of the main ideas for White in the Exchange Slav is trading knights on c6, when Black is forced to recapture with a pawn. White's plan will be to play ♖c1 and target the backward c-pawn.

10...♜e7 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♗a4 ♗d7 Another common idea in the Exchange Slav is relocating the knight to better support the c5 square and a potential pawn thrust. Play will revolve around c5. **14.♖fc1 ♖fc8 15.a3** Removing a defender of c5.



21.e4! I did not see this coming. White sacrifices a pawn to close the kingside lines. He will be able to target my trapped bishop without worrying about king safety. **21.♗xc6??** allows **21...fxe3 22.♗xd5+ ♗h8 23.fxe3 ♜xe3+ 24.♜xe3 ♗xe3+ 25.♗h1 ♗xd4=** and Black can be satisfied with the position.

21...♗xe4 22.♗xc6 ♗h8 23.♜d1 ♗a5 24.♗b7 ♖a8 25.♜a4 ♗xg2 During the game, I knew I was completely losing. I tried to create as much counterplay and chaos as possible, especially since I had a roughly 30-minute time advantage on the clock.



26.♗xa5?? 26.♗xg2?? ♜e4+ 27.♗g1 ♜g6+ 28.♗f1 ♜d3+ 29.♗g2 ♜e4+ 30.f3 ♜e2+ with perpetual check.

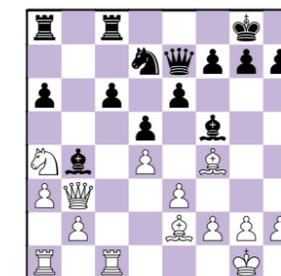
26.♗c5!+- is a key move, though not easy to find. White prevents ...♜e4,

the classical main line, but I have little experience with it.

8.♗e2 e6 9.♜b3



9...♗b4?! Natural, but not precise. I got confused with a different line. Matt told me after the game that **9...♗h5** was Black's only move, getting rid of the dark-squared bishop to guard the b7 pawn indirectly.



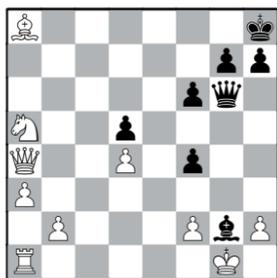
15...♗d2 This was my attempt to make the position tricky. After the natural **15...♗d6 16.♗xd6 ♜xd6 17.♖c3**, White prepares ♖ac1 and I didn't like how Black remains without chances to break the position.

16.♖c5!? An interesting idea, sacrificing the exchange to gain a monster knight. I was expecting **16.♖d1**, upon which I was planning **16...♗a5** and I could claim that I had forced his rook off the c-file.

16...♗xc5?! This move is not required. Technically I can take the rook at any time.

opens a discovered attack on the rook, and continues to put pressure on the both of Black's weak bishops. I thought that this was the best chance I would get. Losing but confusing!

26...♖b8?? Save the rook! I considered **26...♖e4** as well, but rejected it because of **27.♗xa8 ♗h3?? 28.♗xd5!+-** when White has back-rank mate ideas. However, I missed **27...♗g6!**



Now Black will have a perpetual check after **28.♗xd5 ♗f3+ 29.♔f1 ♖d3+ 30.♔g1 ♗g6+**.

27.♖c2 ♗e4 28.♖d2 g5 Defending the pawn in the way I thought would create the most chaos.

29.♗e1 ♖f7 30.b4?? This move guards the pawn, but White's king is now in danger.

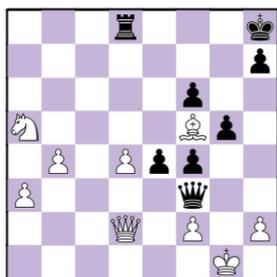
30...♗h5 The queen sneaks its way in.

31.♗xe4 Forced, or else Black has **...♗g4+** or **...♗f3**.

31...dxe4 32.♗d7 32.♗xe4 was a more natural move, picking up the pawn, though it does look risky. Black would have to continue with **32...♗g4+** (In the case of **32...f3??**, White can still defend with **33.♗f5+-**) **33.♔f1 (33.♔h1?? f3+-)** **33...♗h3+ (33...f3?? 34.♗e3!+-)** **34.♗g2 ♖xa3=**.

32...♗d8 33.♗f5?? In hindsight, **33.♗e6** was stronger, planning to meet **33...♗e8** with **34.d5**. Black would have to continue attacking without the rook. For example **33...♗f3 34.d5 e3 35.fxe3 fxe3 36.♗e1!** maintaining the balance.

33...♗f3 33...♗e8!+-, supporting **...e4-e3**, was the most precise move order. Black involves another piece in the attack.



▲ Front row (left to right): Nick Raptis, Wilson Gibbons, Carl Haessler, Zoey Tang, Austin Tang, Ryan Richardson. Back row (left to right): Jason Cigan, Matt Zavortink.

34.♗c4?? 34.♖c1 was again difficult to find. White threatens **♖c7** and prepares to potentially defend **34...e3** with **35.fxe3 fxe3 36.♗f1=**.

34...e3 Black is tactically winning now. **35.fxe3 fxe3 36.♗xe3 ♗e8** Now White is forced to lose a minor piece.

37.♗g4 ♖xe3+ 38.♖xe3 ♗xe3 39.a4 ♗e4 White's pawns are all falling.

40.♗f3 ♗xd4 41.b5 ♗xa4 42.b6 ♗b4 43.b7 ♔g7 44.♔f2 f5 45.♔e3 g4 46.♗c6 f4+ 47.♔d3 f3 48.♔e3 ♔f6 49.h3 h5 50.hxg4 hxg4 51.♔f2 ♗b2+ 52.♔g3 ♔g5 **White resigned**

After obtaining a slightly worse position out of the opening, Matt played a nice exchange sacrifice that left my pieces lacking space. In semi-desperation, I started ignoring material and throwing pieces at his king. In the end, his one slow move made in time pressure allowed me to turn the tables. I learned the importance of saving every move in tactical positions, and I was glad to have survived the tactical melee. All in all, this was a very exciting game with a lucky result for me. It was a great start of the tournament.

D17

Jason Cigan	2205
Zoey Tang	2228

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Going into the fourth round, I was 3/3 against the top seeds of the tournament. Jason was actually my last opponent who

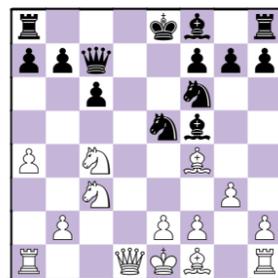
had previously won the Oregon Closed.

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♗c3 I was rather hoping that Jason would play the Exchange Slav again so that I could practice implementing the new line I had learned: **4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♗f4 ♗f5 7.e3 a6 8.♗e2 e6 9.♖b3 ♗h5**. Both Jason and I are tactical players, so I was looking forward to this type of position.

4...dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♗e5 This is the more tactical option; White attacks c4 immediately and puts the knight on an offensive square.

The main line is **6.e3**, upon which a dry position is reached after **6...e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0-0 0-0**.

6...♗bd7 7.♗xc4 ♖c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♗xe5 10.♗f4 This pin looks dangerous for Black, but the knight can be reinforced.



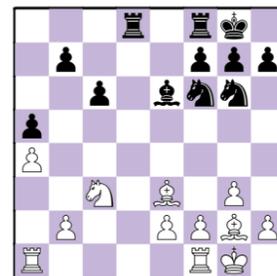
10...♗d8?! 10...♗fd7 is the only move, but I wanted to play something new to try my luck. I am fine with taking risks, trying tricky ideas that I can always make up later. Even though this approach backfired in both these games, I still

believe the benefits outweigh the risks. Pulling the opponent out of their comfort zone is often the best way to beat them. If **11.♗g2**, then **11...g5 12.♗e3 gxf4 13.♗xf5 0-0-0∞** with an unbalanced position.

11.♖c1 ♗d6 12.♗xd6+ ♖xd6 13.♗g2 0-0 14.0-0 Facing White's bishop pair, Black is slightly worse here. I started to regret my decision because I didn't know what to do here.

14...♖e6?! Not really supporting ...♗h3 ideas, because the e5 knight is too weak. **14...♗fe8 15.♗d1 ♖c5** is better for White. **15.♖e3 ♗g6 16.♖xe6** After **16.♖xa7? ♗xf4 17.gxf4**, with the e5 knight out of danger, now **17...♗h3∞** is possible.

16...♗xe6 17.♗e3 a5



18.♗g5? A bit slow. Black's doubled pawns won't matter much. After the best **18.♗b6 ♗a8 19.f4 ♗e7 20.e4** Black's pieces are poorly coordinated.

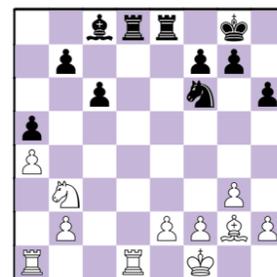
18...♗e5 19.♗e4 ♗ed7 Looks ugly, but it defends sufficiently.

20.♗fd1 h6 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♗c5 ♗c8?! 22...♗xd1+ 23.♗xd1 ♗b8± is more accurate, more securely guarding the queenside.

23.♔f1? My opponent found the best **23.♗b3±** only on the next move.

23...♗fe8? Correct was **23...b6 24.♗d3 c5**, solidifying the queenside with an approximately equal position.

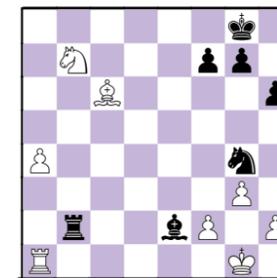
24.♗b3 Oops. Now the a5 pawn is lost by force.



24...♗g4 25.♗xd8 ♗xd8 26.♗xa5 ♗d2 Black is worse. Even though I'm forking his pawns, White will always win one pawn more than Black.

27.♗xb7 ♗xe2+ 28.♔g1 Although **28.♔e1?! ♗xb2 29.♗xc6? ♗g4** is evaluated as equal by the engine, it looks rather risky for White.

28...♗xb2 29.♗xc6 ♗g4



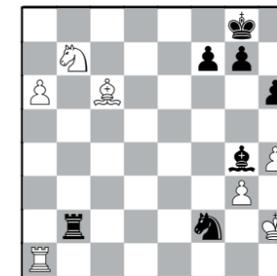
30.a5? A bit rushed. White didn't realize that his king was in danger. **30.♗h1!** is an advanced defensive move which makes **...♗xf2** ineffective. I didn't see this. **30...♗d3** (After **30...♗xf2?? 31.♔xf2 ♗a6+ 32.♔e3 ♗xb7 33.♗xb7 ♗xb7 34.a5 ♗a7 35.a6+-** White's king is faster than its counterpart.) **31.♗c5 ♗xf2 32.♗xd3 ♗xd3 33.a5±** Black will have to hold this endgame after she sacrifices the knight for the pawn, which is forced, as unfortunately, the knight vs. the passed rook pawn is always the hardest.

30...♗xf2 31.a6 The most challenging line, forcing Black to find the best sequence. **31.♔xf2?! ♗b5+ 32.♔e3 ♗xc6=** is a sad endgame for Black, but defensible.

31...♗h3+ 32.♗h1 ♗f2+ 33.♔g2 Avoiding perpetual check.

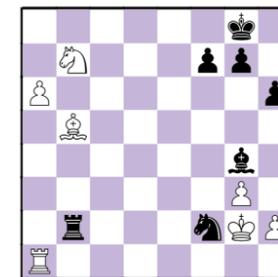
33...♗g4 34.♗b5?? A brave decision to fight for the win, but White's king is too weak. It is psychologically impossible for White to go into **34.a7 ♗h3+ 35.♔f1 (35.♔h1 ♗f2+ 36.♔g1 ♗h3+=)** **35...♗f2+ 36.♔e1 ♗e2+ 37.♔f1=**, since the initial position looked completely winning. (**37.♔d1?? ♗f2+ 38.♔c1 ♗d3+ 39.♔d1 ♗xh2+ 40.♗f3 ♗xf3** mate.)

34.h4 was the move that I was worried about. It seems to avoid perpetual after **34...♗h3+ 35.♗h1 ♗f2+ 36.♗h2**



36...♗h3+?? (Instead, **36...♗e4+ 37.♔g1 ♗f3!** is enough to hold the position, as

bishop vs passed rook pawn is fine.) **37.♗g2!+-**.

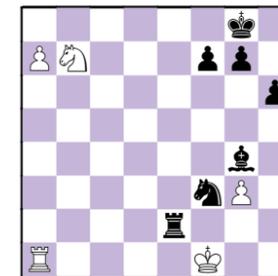


34...♗d3+! It took me quite a while to find this maneuver. Black has many tempting options that don't work. After **34...♗h3+?? 35.♔f1 ♗f2+?? 36.♔e1+-** Black no longer has **...♗e2+**, which was the point of **♗b5**. **34...♗e4+?? 35.♔g1 ♗g5** Same idea as **...♗d3+**, but here White has **36.♗c6!**= defending.

34...♗d1+?? 35.♔g1 ♗f3 36.♗f1 White defends, and **36...♗xb7** is not possible because of **37.♗xd1+-** and the passed pawn is simply too strong.

35.♔g1 ♗e5 White has no defense against **...♗f3+** followed by **...♗h3** mate.

36.♗e2 ♗xe2 37.a7 ♗f3+ 38.♔f1 ♗xh2+ 39.♔g1 ♗f3+ 40.♔f1



40...♗d2! 41.a8♖+ ♔h7 White resigned as **...♗h3** mate is unstoppable. After my failed opening experiment, I managed to equalize and obtain a defensible endgame. Unfortunately, I blundered a pawn away without compensation. Luckily, my remaining few pieces managed to work harmoniously to catch the king in a mating net. Another topsy-turvy game!

I also had many other interesting games, but only so much space to write them all in... The Oregon Closed exposed me to a wider spectrum of openings. While I learned much from them afterward, during the games I got worse positions. My mentality of "always create complications" served me well, generating counterplay and swindling a few games. I was lucky to win the tournament, and I am proud of my results.