



Another ruthless performance by Fabi and a notable debut for Mishra



Caruana clinches his third national title

Top-seed Fabiano Caruana convincingly won his third U.S. Championship with a 1½-point margin and undefeated. As usual, the national championship was replete with fighting chess, but what is particularly worth noting is the performance of the youngest player – 14-year-old Abhimanyu Mishra, who finished on a shared second place with eight decisive games out of 11!

By GM John Burke

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he 2023 U.S. Championship took place in St. Louis, and featured a field of experienced veterans and ambitious youngsters. From the former group we had Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Leinier Dominguez, Ray Robson, Levon Aronian, Sam Shankland, and Dariusz Swiercz. From the latter group we had Abhimanyu Mishra, Sam Seviaan, Hans Niemann, Jeffery Xiong, and Andrew Tang. The gap that divides “veteran” and “youngster” is getting smaller and smaller, and it seems weird to put the 29-year-old Robson in the first category, but considering

he became a grandmaster at the age of 14 and played his first U.S. Championship in 2007, it’s quite fair! It’s also crazy that Seviaan and Xiong are hardly inexperienced youngsters anymore, as they’ve both played this event countless times.

Caruana ended up defending his title quite smoothly, winning by a 1½-point margin – a true rarity at this level of competition. His 8/11 score was followed by three players with 6½ – Dominguez, So, and Mishra. The first two names are certainly no surprise, but Mishra had a great result in his U.S. Championship debut – definitely a positive sign for the world’s youngest grandmaster. He also had the most decisive games out of any player – 8(!), (5 wins, 3 losses) and 3 draws, while Dominguez and So both had their same customary score of 2 wins, 0 losses, and 9 draws.

Seviaan, Robson, and Niemann all had topsy-turvy events and ended up scoring 50%. Notably, Levon Aronian, who has been struggling with form as of late, had his second consecutive disappointment in the U.S. Championship, scoring minus one, just like last year.

Seven passed pawns!

The critical game that locked up Caruana’s victory occurred in round nine against Hans Niemann. Caruana was leading by a full point, but four people were tied for second right behind him – including his opponent. Niemann had the white pieces and certainly wanted to use his chance to catch up with the frontrunner.

C54

Hans Niemann	2667
Fabiano Caruana	2786

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 a5 6.0-0 d6 7.♞e1 ♗a7 I believe this trend of combining ...a5 with ...♗a7 in the Italian was started by Magnus Carlsen. For example, he played it in his World Championship match against Nepo. There are lots of small details and move order subtleties, but the basic point is that it serves as prophylaxis against d4 later, once Black plays ...♘e7.
8.♘bd2 0-0 9.h3 ♗e6 10.♗b5 ♘e7 11.d4 ♘g6



12.♗a4 It may look a bit mysterious to play this move before Black attacks the bishop with ...c6. However, playing 12.♘f1 immediately would give Black an extra option after 12...exd4 13.cxd4 d5 14.e5 ♘e4. If the knight was on d2, this option wouldn’t work for Black, which is why Hans decided to delay ♘f1.
12...♘h5 The typical plan in this line – the knight heads to f4, where it will be very



John Burke was the 2020 US Junior Champion. The young grandmaster from New Jersey had already stunned the chess world in 2015 by breaking the record as youngest player ever to surpass 2600+ ELO. John’s most notable victories include the 2018 U.S. Masters, the 2018 New York International Championship, and the 2019 Washington International Open. In 2021 he shared first at the Cherry Blossom Classic in Dulles, VA, and also in the World Open in Philadelphia, PA.

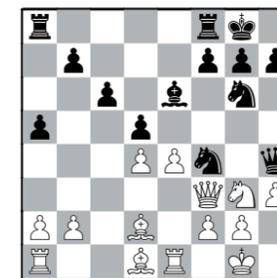
W.So 2772, Berlin 2022.



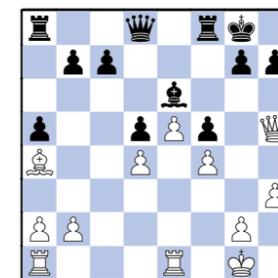
17...f6 An inaccuracy in reply. It’s nice to get the queen out with 17...♖h4! before playing ...f6 to open the f-file. Now Black’s attack has much more power. White doesn’t have ♘h5 ideas like in the game, relieving the pressure. There will constantly be ideas of sacrifices on h3 and g2, and White has to be very careful to not get blown off the board.
18.♗xf4 ♘xf4 19.♘h5! Now White gets to trade some pieces and Black’s attack is a thing of the past.
19...♘h5 20.♖xh5 f5 An interesting choice, keeping the e-file closed. Caruana didn’t want to play a slightly worse position with no chances of winning. After 20...fxe5 21.♗xe5 ♗f7, White has a slight but annoying advantage, thanks to his control of the e-file and potential play on the light squares.
21.f4

difficult to dislodge, as White can’t play g3 while his h-pawn is hanging.
13.♘f1 ♘hf4 14.♘g3 exd4 15.♘xd4 ♗xd4 16.cxd4 d5 17.e5?! The first new move, and not a good one.

There was a high-level game in this line last year in which White played 17.♖f3. Then followed 17...♖f6 18.♗d1 ♖h4 19.♗d2 c6



White has the bishop pair, but Black’s pieces are active and he has no weaknesses. Black eventually won in L. Dominguez 2752 -



2023 U.S. Championship, Saint Louis, MO, October 5-17, 2023																
Rk	Name	Elo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Pts	TPR
1	Fabiano CARUANA	2786		½	½	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	8	2848
2	Wesley SO	2753	½		½	1	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	6½	2741
3	Leinier DOMINGUEZ	2745	½	½		½	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	1	6½	2742
4	Abhimanyu MISHRA	2592	0	0	½		0	1	1	1	1	½	½	1	6½	2756
5	Hans NIEMANN	2667	0	½	½	1		1	0	1	0	½	½	½	5½	2684
6	Samuel SEVIAN	2698	½	½	½	0	0		1	½	½	½	½	1	5½	2681
7	Ray ROBSON	2699	½	0	½	0	1	0		½	½	1	1	½	5½	2681
8	Levon ARONIAN	2742	½	½	½	0	0	½	½		1	½	½	½	5	2641
9	Sam SHANKLAND	2698	½	½	0	0	1	½	½	0		½	½	½	4½	2616
10	Jeffery XIONG	2693	0	½	½	½	½	½	0	½	½		½	½	4½	2616
11	Dariusz SWIERCZ	2620	0	½	½	½	½	½	0	½	½	½		0	4	2586
12	Andrew TANG	2496	0	½	0	0	½	0	½	½	½	½	1		4	2597

Now the position is blocked, so we should examine the pawn breaks. Black will aim to play ...c5 and get his queenside pawns going. White will try to stop that from happening, and maybe, if things could go well, he could gradually prepare a kingside attack, including the move g2-g4. However, he should be very careful that such a move is well-prepared, otherwise it could backfire and his own king might get exposed.

21...♖e7 22.a3 Stopping ...♗b4, but it actually wasn't necessary.

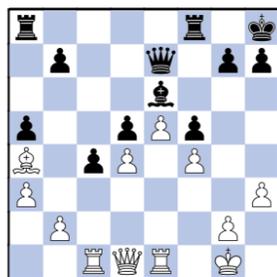
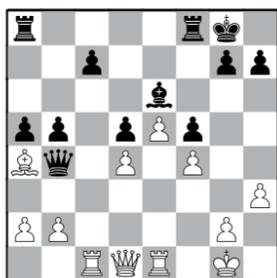
22.♖a1 is the most natural move, stopping ...c5, but surely both players thought that ...♗b4 was a dangerous threat for Black. 22...♗b4 (After 22...♖ac8 23.♗d1 c5 24.♗b3 Black's counterplay is completely contained. 24...cxd4 can be met with 25.♗b6 with a nice position for White.) 23.♗d1 b5



▲ Hans Niemann vs. Fabiano Caruana

Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club

24...♔h8



24.♖c6! A really nice detail that is hard to see from a few moves back. 24...bxa4 (24...♖fe8 25.♗b3 a4 26.♖xc6!+-; Or if 24...♗d7, then 25.♖xc7 when the bishop is hit again, so no time to take on a4.) 25.♖xe6 ♗xb2 26.♖e2! The a4 pawn is weak and isn't going away, so it's more important to expel the black queen first. (26.♗xa4 allows some dangerous counterplay after 26...♗d2 27.♖f1 ♖ab8) 26...♗c3 27.♔h2! Even though he's down a pawn, White is in great shape here. His rooks are active and ready to pick off Black's weak pawns, for example with ♖c2 and ♖xc7.

22...c5 23.♖ac1 c4 Black's pawns are beginning their march. The dream is to force ...b5-b4 through. If he accomplishes this, he will be doing very well.

24.♗d1 24.♔h2 b5 Here's a surprising trick - White's bishop gets trapped behind enemy lines. 25.♗xb5 a4 26.♗d1 ♗a7 27.♗c6 It turns out that White can save the piece, but Black still gets very active after 27...♖ab8 28.♗xa4 ♖xb2.

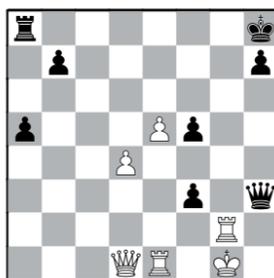
25.♗b5?! A slight mistake, but not an obvious one. 25.♖c3! is a really high-class move, shoring up the third rank in preparation for Black's attack on the g-file. 25...♖g8 (25...g5 26.fxg5 ♗xg5 27.♖f1 With the rook already on c3, White is much better equipped to deal with the attack.) 26.♖e2 ♖ab8 27.♗b5 Now White will prepare to play b2-b3 under good circumstances. Or, if Black plays ...g7-g5, he will switch his focus to the kingside. 25...g5! The attack is really quick, and White has to be careful.

26.b3? I understand the desire to include the b5 bishop in the defense, but there's just not enough time for this. In case of 26.fxg5 ♗xg5 27.♖c3 ♖g8 28.♖e2 f4, Black's moves come so easily - ...♖af8, ...♗h4, etc.

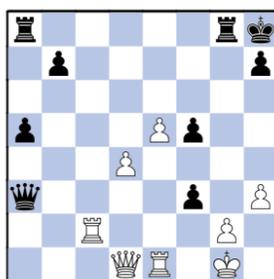
26.♖f1! was best for White, when after 26...♖g8 27.♖c3 gxf4 28.♖f2 Black doesn't have a breakthrough.

26...gxf4 27.bxc4 ♖g8 Black's agenda contains ...♖g3 and ...♖ag8 coming quickly. 28.♖c3 dxc4 29.♗xc4 ♗xc4 30.♖xc4 ♗xa3 31.♖c2 f3 31...♗xh3! would have

led to a beautiful win after 32.♖f2 ♖xg2+!! 33.♖xg2 f3

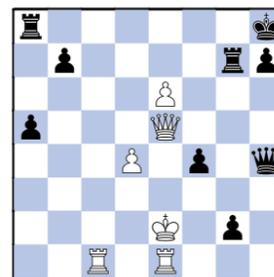


The rook can't leave the g-file because of ...♖g8+. 34.♖g5 (34.♗d2 The rook endgame is winning, but it's not totally obvious, since White has two connected passed pawns. 34...♗xg2+ 35.♗xg2 fxg2 36.d5 a4 37.d6 ♔g8 38.e6 ♔f8 39.♔xg2 a3 40.♔f3 a2 41.♖a1 ♖a6! Just in time. White loses by one tempo - he can't get his king to e5 in time. 42.♔f4 ♖xd6 43.♖xa2 ♖xe6+-) 34...♗h4 35.♗d2 f4.



32.e6? After this the kingside falls apart. 32.♖f2 ♖xg2+ (32...fxg2 33.♖f3) 33.♖xg2 fxg2 34.♗d2! ♗xh3 35.♗g5 White threatens a perpetual check, and it seems

like Black has no win here after 35...♖f8 36.e6 ♗h1+ 37.♔f2 ♗h2 38.♔f3! 32...fxg2 33.♖e2 ♗xh3 34.♖e5+ ♖g7 35.♖cc1 ♗h1+ 36.♔f2 ♗h4+ 37.♔e2 37.♔g1 f4+- 37...f4



How often do you see a position with seven passed pawns? Black's are far quicker, though, and his king is safer.

38.♖g1 ♗g4+ 39.♔d2 f3 40.♔e3 ♔g8 41.♖c2 ♖f8 42.♖f2 h5 43.♗d5 ♖e8 White resigned

When fire meets fire

While Caruana was the clear star of the event, let's take a look at some of the highlights of our second-place finishers. Wesley So is probably the hardest player

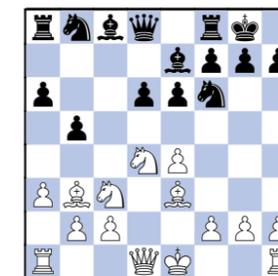
in the world to beat, although he usually draws a lot of games too, which can make it hard to rack up the margins required to win an event like this. However, I was very pleasantly surprised by Wesley's approach in his game against the fearsome junior Abhimanyu Mishra, as he played in a very aggressive style, choosing a sharp, risky variation as White in the Najdorf. I don't remember the last time Wesley played a game like this, and it produced excitement on the board.

B87

Wesley So	2753
Abhimanyu Mishra	2592

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6 5.♖c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗e3 This move is the latest fashion in the Fischer-Sozin Attack. White ends up aiming for a type of hybrid setup that incorporates elements of the English Attack (6.♗e3). 7...b5 8.♗b3 ♗e7 9.a3 0-0



10.♗e2 10.f3 ♗b7 11.♗d2 The queen doesn't belong on d2 in this setup, with the white bishop already on b3. Here's a sample variation showing why. 11...♖c6 12.0-0-0 ♖xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗c6! Black is already gearing up his attack with ...a5 and ...b4 coming. If White's queen were on e2, then ...a5 wouldn't be possible yet, as the b5 pawn would hang.

10...♗b7 11.f3 Compared to the standard English Attack, there are a few differences. The queen is on e2, not on d2, which would normally not work in the standard English Attack, but here White's bishop is already on b3, not stuck on f1, so it's not a problem. 11...♖c6 12.0-0-0 ♖a5 13.g4 ♖c8 White doesn't necessarily mind giving up this bishop, since after 13...♖xb3+ 14.cxb3, he will play ♖b1 next, and the pawns shield his king nicely. 14.♖b1 ♖d7 15.h4

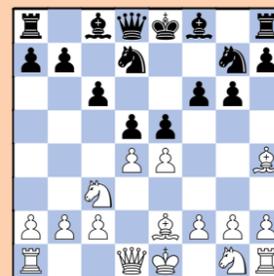


Fabiano Caruana	2786
Abhimanyu Mishra	2592



17.c5 ♖ce5 18.♖xe5 ♖xe5 19.f4 ♖d7 20.cxd6 exd6 21.f5! ♗g5 22.♖f4 ♖e5 23.♖bf1 ♖c5 24.♗e3 ♖f8 25.♗h3 ♖xd5 26.exd5 ♖e8 27.fxg6 fxg6 28.♗e3 White won on move 75

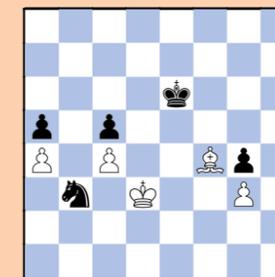
Andrew Tang	2496
Fabiano Caruana	2786



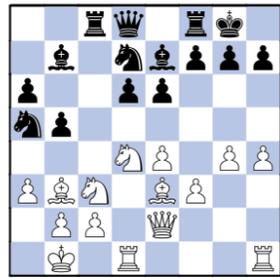
10...♗b6! 11.exd5 ♖f5 12.dxc6 bxc6 13.♖f3 ♗xb2 14.♖e4 ♖xh4 15.♖xh4 f5 16.♖b1 ♗xd4 17.♗xd4 exd4 18.♖d2 ♖b6 19.♖hf3 ♗e6 20.♖xd4 ♗xa2 21.♖c1 ♗h6 22.c4 0-0-0 23.♖4f3 ♖he8 24.♖c2

24...♖a4!! 25.h4 ♗g7 26.0-0 ♖c3 27.♗d1 a5 White resigned

Fabiano Caruana	2786
Dariusz Swiercz	2620



63...♔f5? 63...♖d4 64.♔e3± 64.♗e3 ♔e5 65.♗h6! ♔f5 66.♗g7 ♖c1+ 67.♔d2 ♖b3+ 68.♔e3 ♔g6 69.♗b2 ♔f5 70.♗c3 ♔g5 71.♔e4 ♔g6 72.♔f4 ♔h5 73.♔f5 ♖c1 74.♗xa5 ♖e2 75.♗c7 ♖d4+ 76.♔e4 ♖c6 77.♗d6 ♖a5 78.♔d5 ♔g6 79.♗xc5 ♔f5 80.♗b6 Black resigned

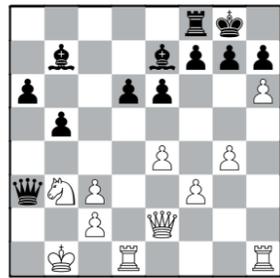


15...**Exc3!** An extremely thematic (and correct) sacrifice. 15...**De5** was another approach, aiming to plant a knight on c4. 16.**W**e1, stopping the exchange sacrifice and preparing to forward with the attack. It seems easier to play as White here – his play is simple, whereas it's not exactly clear how Black continues the attack.

16.**bxc3** **Db6** 17.**h5** **Dac4** 18.**Exc4** **Dxc4** 19.**Ec1** Wesley was still in his prep here, which is understandable, as all Black's moves have been very logical so far. Now Mishra commits his first mistake.

19...**d5?** It's tempting to open up the e7 bishop, but this is certainly not the right time to do it, with White's rook opposing Black's queen on the d-file.

19...**Wa5** was the best move, and the position remains insanely complicated. Here's a sample line. 20.**Db3** **Dxa3+** 21.**Exa3** (Or 21.**ca2** **Wa4** 22.**Exa3** **d5** with excellent compensation for Black.) 21...**Wxa3** 22.**h6**

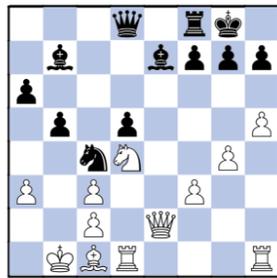


22...**b4!** (After 22...**g6?**! 23.**W**e3 **Ec8** 24.**E**d3, the hole on g7 and the constant back-rank mating ideas will end up bugging Black.) 23.**c4** (Not 23.**h**xg7?? **bxc3**+) 23...**cf6** 24.**D**d4 **b3** 25.**cbx3** **Exd4** 26.**Exd4** **Wxb3+** 27.**W**b2 **Wxf3** Black gets sufficient counterplay by hitting the rook on h1. These were far from the only moves for both sides, but it shows how Black must play energetically in order to maintain the dynamic equilibrium.

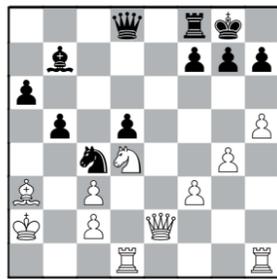
20.**exd5** **exd5** 20...**Exd5** 21.**Dc6!** This tactic illustrates why the ...**d5** break was premature. 21...**Wc7** 22.**Dxe7+** **Wxe7** 23.**Exd5+-**.



▲ Wesley So Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club



21.**ca2?** Returning the favor. 21.**Ede1** **Exa3** (21...**Ed6** 22.**g5**) 22.**h6!** It's critical to provoke weaknesses around the opponent's king. 22...**g6** 23.**Exa3** **Dxa3+** 24.**ca1** **Dc4** 25.**W**e7 **Wa5** 26.**Db3** **Wxc3** 27.**Wxb7** Black's queen and knight look scary, but there's actually nothing to fear as White's knight successfully safeguards his own king. 27...**Wb2+** 28.**cd1** **Wb1+** 29.**dc1** **Db2+** 30.**ce2** **Wxc2+** 31.**cf1+-**. 21...**Ed6?** 21...**Exa3!** It was now or never. 22.**Exa3**

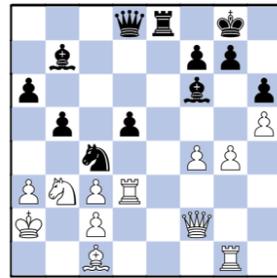


22...**Ee8!** If White moves the queen away, then Black has ...**Wa5**, so he has to give it up. (Not 22...**Wa5?** because of 23.**W**e7+-.) 23.**Wxe8+** **Wxe8** 24.**Ehe1** **Wd8** This

material imbalance is difficult to evaluate for sure, but it seems like Black is fine here. White's weak king should provide Black with sufficient play. All things considered, I think it's clear that Black is in huge trouble if he doesn't try this. Sometimes you should go for the throat even if you're not 100% sure how to evaluate the ensuing position.

22.**Db3** Now White's king is quite secure, and the b3 knight does an admirable job of guarding the key a5 square. Now it's really just a matter of time before White either executes his kingside pawn storm, or trades down to a favorable endgame and uses the power of his rooks.

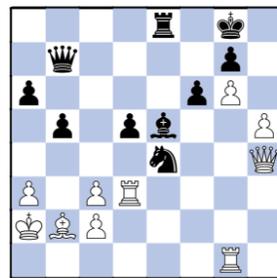
22...**Ee8** 23.**Wf2** **h6** 24.**Ehg1** **Ec5** 25.**E**d3 **Ec6** 26.**f4** The nice thing for White is that his moves are easy.



The objective evaluation of a position like this matters a lot less than the practical elements. The reason that this is practically so nice for White is that his plans are so straightforward. He's just attacking on the kingside with obvious moves – **Eg1**, **f4**, **g5** – what could be more natural than that?

26...**Dd6** 27.**g5** **h**xg5 28.**f**xg5 **Ec5** 29.**Dc5** **W**e7 30.**g6** **f6** The g6 pawn is a huge thorn for Black's king, just like the h6 pawn was in some of the variations we looked at earlier in this game. There are always back-rank mates to look out for, and White has the h6-break at his disposal whenever he wants it.

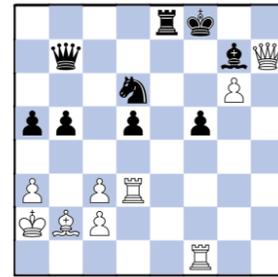
31.**Dxb7** **Wxb7** 32.**cb2** **D**e4 33.**W**h4



33...**a5** 33...**b4** was a last-gasp try, but White has numerous good ways to finish

things off. 34.**cb4** **Exb2** 35.**Exb2** **a5** 36.**h6** **axb4** 37.**ca1** **bxa3** 38.**E**b1 **W**e7 39.**h**xg7 **W**xg7 40.**E**h3 **f5+** 41.**c3** **Dxc3** 42.**W**h7+-.

34.**h6** **f5** 35.**h**xg7 **Exg7** 36.**W**h7+ **cf8** 37.**E**f1 **D**d6



38.**c4!** Finally including the b2-bishop in the game, after so much waiting.

38...**bxc4** 39.**Exg7+** **W**xg7 40.**E**xd5 **E**e6 41.**E**dx5+ **D**xf5 42.**E**xf5+ **E**f6 43.**W**h4 The king and pawn endgame is as winning as they come, but Wesley wants to deliver checkmate.

43...**ce7** 43...**E**xf5 44.**W**d8 mate. 44.**W**e4+ **cf8** 45.**W**d4 **ce7** 46.**E**e5+

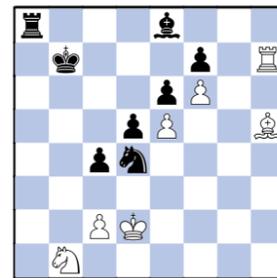
Black resigned

Extraordinary material imbalance

The other standout performer, 2023 U.S. Junior Champion Abhimanyu Mishra from New Jersey, entertained us practically every round. Even when he fell into difficulties, he showed tremendous fighting spirit. Here's an example of his alertness, snatching a win from an equal position.

Sam Shankland 2698
Abhimanyu Mishra 2592

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023



Shankland has been pressing all game, but



▲ Abhimanyu Mishra Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club

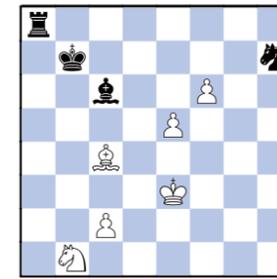
resilient defense by Mishra has enabled him to survive the danger.

63.**Exf7** A terrible blunder.

63...**Df3+**! A very easy move to overlook. 64.**ce3** **D**g5 This fork wins material, but it's not over yet.

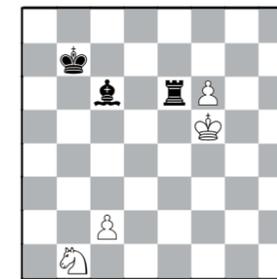
65.**Exe6+** **D**xh7 66.**Exd5+** **Ec6**

67.**Exc4** This very unusual material imbalance is still tricky to convert, since White's e5 and f6 pawns are far advanced.

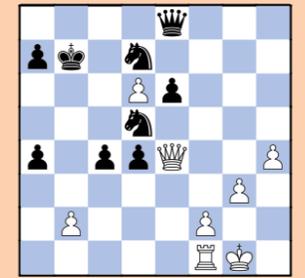


67...**Df8?** Based on the point that e6 is impossible...or is it? Black's best was 67...**Ea5** 68.**cd4** **cc7+-**.

68.**Dd2** 68.e6! Amazingly, this move draws. 68...**Dxe6** 69.**Exe6** **E**e8 70.**cf4** **E**xe6 71.**cf5**



Ray Robson 2699
Abhimanyu Mishra 2592



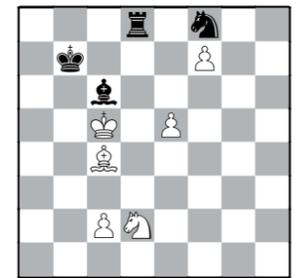
32...**W**h8!! 33.**E**d1 **D**e5! 34.**d7** **D**xd7 35.**W**xd4 **W**xd4 36.**E**xd4 **a3** 37.**bxa3** **c3** 38.**E**d1 **D**c5! 39.**h5** **D**d3 40.**h6** **c2** 41.**E**f1 **D**f6 42.**g4** **D**h7 43.**cg2** **c1** **W** 44.**E**xc1 **D**xc1 45.**f4** **cc6** 46.**cf3** **cd5** 47.**g5** **D**f8 48.**cg4** **D**d3 49.**f5** **D**e5+ 50.**cf4** **D**fg6+ 51.**f**xg6 **D**xg6+ 52.**cg4** **ce4** 53.**a4** **a5** 54.**h7** **ce5** 55.**ch5** **cf5** 56.**ch6** **e5**

White resigned



his pieces and stop the f-pawn. 71...**E**e1 72.**f7** **Ed5** (72...**E**xb1 73.**cf6=**; 72...**E**f1+ 73.**ce6=**) 73.**f8** **W**f1+ 74.**ce5** **E**xf8 75.**Exd5=**.

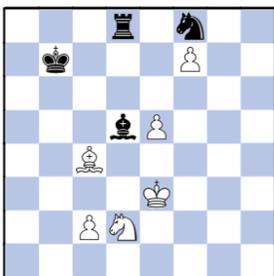
68...**Dd7** 69.**cd4** **E**d8 70.**f7** **D**f8+ 71.**ce3** 71.**cc5!** would've been a nice practical try, setting a beautiful trap.



71...**Ed7!** The only winning move, stopping e6. (71...**E**xd2? 72.e6 **D**xh6+ 73.**Exe6** **E**d8 74.**Ed7!**! What an incredible interference tactic! The king now reaches

Find the continuation on Page 16 ▶▶▶

d6 and e7. 74...♙xd7 75.♚d6 ♙e8+ 76.♚e7=) 72.♚d6 ♜g6! Again, the only move. 73.♜b3 ♙g4+ 74.♚c5 ♜xe5+-, 71...♙d5



Now the bishops will be traded, White's king is far back, and everything is under control.

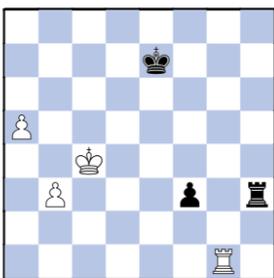
72.♙xd5+ ♞xd5 73.♜f3 ♚c7 74.♚e4 ♞c5 75.♚f5 ♚d7 76.♚f6 ♞c6+ 77.♚g7 ♚e7 78.♜h4 ♜e6+ 79.♚g6 ♜d8+ 80.♚g7 ♜xf7 **White resigned**

Another tricky rook endgame

Similar to Wesley So, Leinier Dominguez seemingly followed the approach of "stay unbeaten and pick up a few points here and there." One such point came in a rook endgame against Shankland, in which the defensive task was apparently too difficult for the man who recently published a book on theoretical rook endgames. Irony aside, it's worth pointing out that this specific type of rook endgame is so difficult in practical play. It comes down to specific details and concrete factors, and is less about general principles or knowledge.

Leinier Dominguez 2745
Sam Shankland 2698

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023



63...♞h4+ 63...f2? doesn't work with Black's king too far away. 64.♞f1 ♞f3 65.a6 Black's king isn't able to catch the a-



▲ Ray Robson Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club

pawn, so he must backtrack with the rook. 65...♞f8 66.a7 ♞a8 67.♞xf2 ♞xa7 68.b4 ♚d6 69.♚b5+-.

I like 63...♚d7 more, not driving White's king further up the board. 64.b4 (64.♞g7+ ♚e6! Important, not allowing White's rook to get behind the f-pawn.) 64...f2 65.♞f1 ♞f3 Now this is an easy draw, since Black's king is within range of the pawns.

64.♚b5 ♞h5+ Still fine, but making it tricky. 64...♚d7 would have drawn in a similar manner as the previous variation.

65.♚b6 ♞h4? Finally giving away the draw. 65...♚d8! was the only move. 66.a6 (66.♞g8+ ♚e7) 66...♞h6+ 67.♚b7 ♞h7+ 68.♚b8 f2 69.♞f1 ♞h3 Black will trade his f-pawn for the b-pawn, resulting in a drawn endgame, as White's king gets stuck in front of his own a-pawn.

66.a6 66.♚c7 also wins, "shouldering" Black's king and preparing a6. 66...♞b4 67.♞e1+ ♚f6 68.♞b1 f2 69.♞f1 ♞xb3 70.♞xf2+ ♚e6 71.♞c2 ♞a3 72.♞c6+ ♚d5 73.a6+-.

66...♞b4+ 67.♚a5 ♞xb3 67...f2 68.♞a1 ♞e4 69.♞f1+-.

68.♞a1! A really nice finesse, preventing ...♞a3+. Black has no good defense against a7. 68...f2 69.a7 f1♞ 70.♞xf1 ♞a3+ 71.♚b6 ♞b3+ 72.♚c5! White's king isn't forced to hide on a8 - there's a trick here.

72...♞a3 73.♞h1 Black's king is on the worst square - the pawn cannot be taken because of ♞h7+. **Black resigned** in view of this sample variation: 73.♞h1 ♚e6 74.♞h7 ♞a1 75.♚b6 ♞b1+ 76.♚c7 ♞a1 77.♚b8 ♞b1+ 78.♞b7+-.

A sudden king chase

Another game that caught my eye was Ray Robson's win against Xiong, scored in his typical tactical style. Jeffery was coming off a long hiatus from classical chess (his last major event was the same tournament last year). Perhaps that element of rust was the reason for his disappointing result.

Ray Robson 2699
Jeffery Xiong 2693

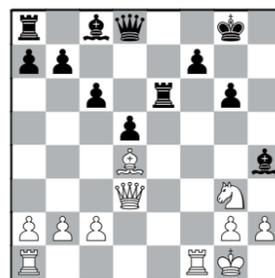
U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023



Here, Ray could take a slow approach and enjoy a slightly better position, based on Black's weakened kingside. However, he decides to go for the throat.

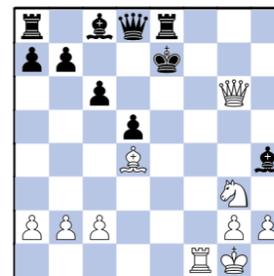
15.f5!? Although Black is okay if he defends well, this is a decent practical try for White, as the path to safety is riddled with pitfalls.

15...♞xe5 16.fxg6 hxg6 17.♙d4 ♞e8 There's an argument for playing 17...♞e6, taking the sting out of the ♞xf7 sacrifice.



18.♞f3 (18.♞xf7?? doesn't work now, as after 18...♚xf7 19.♞f1+ ♚g8, the g6 pawn is defended and Black is winning easily.) 18...♚d7 19.♞af1 ♙e8 20.♜f5! A dangerous sacrifice. 20...gx5 21.♞xf5 White has threats like ♞f4-g4, but Black has a key move to deflect the d4 bishop. 21...c5! (21...♞g5?? 22.♞g3+-) 22.♞g4+ ♞g5 23.♞xe6 White bails out with a pretty perpetual check. 23...fxe6 24.♞f8+ ♚h7 25.♞h8+ ♚g6 26.♞g8+ ♚h5 27.♞h8+ ♞h6 (27...♚g4?? 28.h3+ ♚g3 29.♞f3#) 28.g4+

♚g6 29.♞g8+ ♚h7 30.♞h8+ ♚g6=. 18.♞xf7! This sacrifice was the whole point of White's 15.f5 idea. 18...♚xf7 19.♞f1+ ♚e7 20.♞xg6



White is threatening ♞f7 mate, when there's only one good way to stop it!

20...♙e6? This loses by force. 20...♚d7! The king has to run! White has no more than a draw here. 21.♞f7+ ♞e7 (Upon 21...♙e7?? 22.♜f5+- is just overwhelming for Black, as ♞d6 is a deadly mate threat.) 22.♜f5 (22.♞f5+ ♚d6 also gives White no more than a draw.) 22...♞xf7 23.♞xf7+ ♙e7 24.♙c5 ♞f8 25.♞h7 ♚e8 26.♜xe7

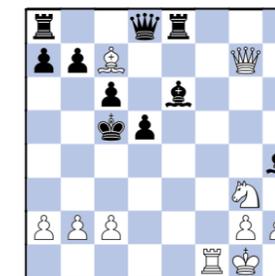


White has won a piece back, but his knight is now awkwardly placed on e7, giving the opponent enough time to coordinate a perpetual check. 26...♞f4

▼ Hans Niemann Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club



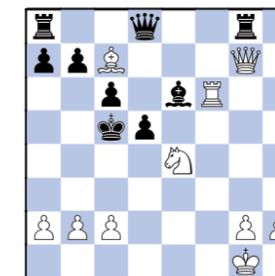
27.♜xc8 ♞c1+ 28.♚f2 ♞f4+ 29.♚g1 (If the king goes to the e-file 29.♚e2, then Black can cover the mate threat on e7 with tempo. 29...♞e5+ 30.♚d1 ♞xc8 31.♞g8+ ♚d7 32.♞f7+ ♚d8=) 29...♞c1+ A complicated line to be sure, and not at all easy to see in advance. 21.♞g7+ ♚d6 22.♙e5+ ♚c5 23.♙d4+ ♚d6 24.♙e5+ ♚c5 25.♙c7!



The queen is ready to swing back to c3 with a mating attack.

25...♙f6! The best defense - dragging White's rook to f6 as interference.

26.♞xf6 ♞g8 Upon 26...♞d7 27.♞f7!, the rook clears a path for the queen. 27...♞xf7 28.♞c3+ ♚b5 29.a4+ ♚xa4 30.♞b3 mate. 27.♜e4+! The only winning move, and one that Ray surely saw well in advance.



27...♚b5 27...dxe4 28.♞f5+!! ♙xf5

29.♞c3+ ♚d5 30.♞e5+ ♚c4 31.b3+ ♚b4 32.♞a5 mate. 28.a4+ ♚b4 28...♚xa4 29.♜c3+ ♚b4 30.♞f4+-.

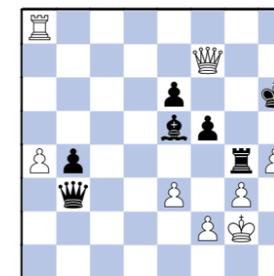
29.♞h6 Now that Black's king is on a dark square, White's queen can swing back and deliver mate, starting with ♞d2+. **Black** has to give up his queen, so he **resigned**.

A walk on thin ice

Whatever you think about the polarizing Hans Niemann, there's no denying that his games are among the most interesting to watch of any player. After struggling early on against Sam Sevia, he turned things around when his opponent couldn't find his way through the complications.

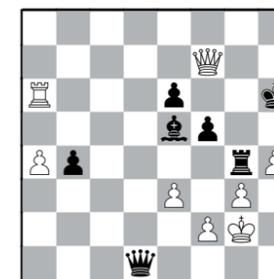
Sam Sevia 2698
Hans Niemann 2667

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023



The game has been very exciting so far (as games by both these players often are). White is pinning his hopes in creating threats against Black's king, but it's not that easy. The dark-squared bishop does a tremendous defensive job. White has only one way to save the game here, and it's far from easy.

55.♞f8+? 55.♞a6? is an obvious move, but it walks into a forced mate. 55...♞d5+ 56.♚g1 ♞d1+ 57.♚g2 (57.♚h2? ♞xh4+ 58.♚g2 ♞h1 mate.)

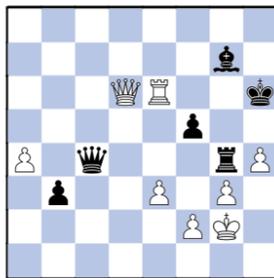


57... $\text{R}xg3+$! 58.fxg3 $\text{W}e2+$ 59. $\text{c}h3$ $\text{W}g4+$ 60. $\text{c}g2$ $\text{W}xg3+$ 61. $\text{c}f1$ $\text{W}f3+$ 62. $\text{c}g1$ $\text{W}xe3+$ 63. $\text{c}f1$ $\text{W}f3+$ 64. $\text{c}g1$ $\text{d}d4+$ 65. $\text{c}h2$ $\text{W}f2+$ 66. $\text{c}h3$ $\text{W}f1+$ 67. $\text{c}g3$ $\text{e}e5$ mate.

55. $\text{a}a5!$ was best, preventing the ... $\text{W}d1-d5$ maneuver. Black has nothing better than to force a draw with 55... $\text{c}xg3$ (55... $\text{c}g7??$ would be a grave mistake, as after 56. $\text{R}xf5$, White sneakily takes advantage of black queen's poor placement. Now Black even loses! 56... $\text{R}g6$ 57.h5+-) 56.fxg3 $\text{R}xg3+$ 57. $\text{c}xg3$ $\text{W}xe3+$ 58. $\text{c}g2$ $\text{W}e2+=$.

55... $\text{c}g7$ Now Black's pieces are fully coordinated, and it's only a matter of using his strong b-pawn to march down the board.

56. $\text{W}d6$ $\text{W}c4$ 57. $\text{R}e8$ b3 58. $\text{R}xe6+$



58... $\text{c}h7!$ 58... $\text{c}h5?$ 59. $\text{W}e7$ $\text{R}g6$ 60. $\text{R}b6!$ =.

59. $\text{W}d7$ b2 60. $\text{R}b6$ $\text{W}e4+$ 61.f3 $\text{W}c2+$ 62. $\text{c}h3$ b1 W 63. $\text{R}xb1$ $\text{W}xb1$ 64.fxg4 $\text{W}h1$ A pretty mate! 0-1

Mutual blindness

Finally, I have to give a shoutout to Andrew Tang, who experienced the highs and lows that come with such a strong tournament. He was the lowest seed by over 100 points, having qualified by winning the U.S. Open. He works as a Quantitative trader for Susquehanna International Group, so he doesn't really play chess professionally.

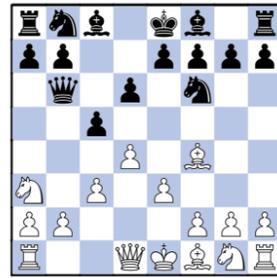
Chess fans should understand that nerves are very real, especially in the first round of a tournament for a newcomer, so the following case of mutual blindness is understandable.

A45

Andrew Tang	2496
Sam Shankland	2698

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023

1.d4 $\text{d}f6$ 2. $\text{e}f4$ c5 3.e3 $\text{W}b6$ 4. $\text{d}a3$ d6 5.c3??



The b2 pawn is poisoned in lots of similar positions, but not here!

5...g6?? Shankland trusts his opponent and misses his chance. The rest of the game was fairly well-played and ended in a draw.

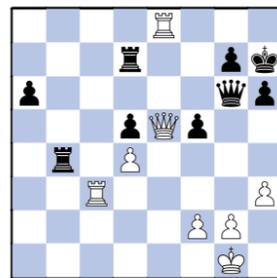
5... $\text{W}xb2$ 6. $\text{d}b5$ This is usually the idea, with potential threats of trapping Black's queen, along with $\text{d}c7+$. Here, however, the crucial problem is that the second rank is open. 6... $\text{d}e4!$ Threatening mate in one, as well as ... $\text{d}xc3$. 7. $\text{e}e2$ $\text{d}xc3$ 8. $\text{d}xc3$ $\text{W}xc3++$.

A Tang bang!

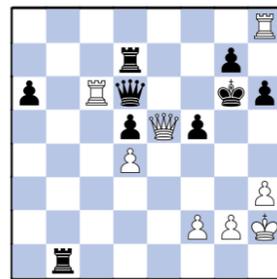
Nevertheless, although he suffered a few losses along the way, he conjured up what I would call the most beautiful combination of the entire event.

Andrew Tang	2496
Dariusz Swiercz	2620

U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2023



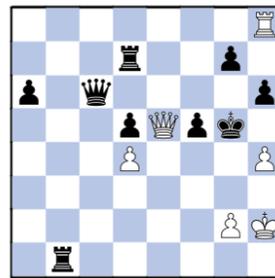
46. $\text{R}cc8!$ At first glance this looks like a mistake, allowing Black to force a queen trade. 46... $\text{R}b1+$ 47. $\text{c}h2$ $\text{W}d6$ 48. $\text{R}h8+$ $\text{c}g6$ 49. $\text{R}c6!$



▲ Andrew Tang Photo: Saint Louis Chess Club

This was the whole point. White ends up with a mating attack.

49... $\text{W}xc6$ 50. $\text{W}e8+$ $\text{c}g5$ 51.f4+! $\text{c}xf4$ 52. $\text{W}e5+$ $\text{c}g5$ 53.h4+!



53... $\text{c}xh4$ 53... $\text{c}g6$ 54. $\text{W}e8+$ $\text{c}f6$ 55. $\text{R}f8++$.

54. $\text{W}f4+$ $\text{c}h5$ 55. $\text{W}xf5+$ g5 56. $\text{W}h3+$ $\text{c}g6$ 57. $\text{R}xh6+$ Black resigned

So that's a wrap on the U.S. Championship! It actually reminds me of the annual Tata Steel tournament, in that it always brings together a diverse field in terms of age and rating. That seems to be a rarity in classical events these days, so it's always nice to see. Overall, Caruana's performance was a very good sign for him, continuing his return to form and setting himself on a nice trajectory heading into 2024, with the all-important Candidates Tournament looming in April. ■

MIZZOU STUDENT LUKA BUDISAVLJEVIC CLAIMS BRONZE AT THE WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP

A Medal-Winning Odyssey From Missouri to Mexico

University of Missouri (Mizzou) sophomore Luka Budisavljevic, a 19-year-old Serbian Grandmaster, delivered a remarkable performance at the World Juniors in Mexico City. He achieved a joint first place, ultimately securing the bronze medal after tie-breaks.

■ By GM Luka Budisavljevic

The last time anyone from my home country Serbia won a medal at the World Juniors' was 30 years ago (representing former Yugoslavia GM Igor Miladinovic won gold in 1993, whereas the first World Junior Champion was Bora Ivkov in 1951-Ed.). As soon as I found out that it's going to be held in late September in Mexico City, I understood that this is a huge opportunity for me to make history. I'm currently studying in Missouri, so Mexico is as close as it could possibly get to me, as well as for others coming from the United States. I was looking forward to the event, and had my eyes on the goal from the very beginning.

The tournament was very interesting, as various players shared the top standings during the event. French Grandmaster Maurizzi emerged as the sole leader with his 9th-round victory, but my victory over GM Avila Pavas in round 10 meant that our last-round matchup, as the only two players with 8 points on a shared first, would decide the title. The game ended in a draw, which allowed Maurizzi to gain the title due to superior tiebreaks, while I brought my country its first World Juniors medal of this century.

Luka Budisavljevic became Serbia's youngest ever grandmaster at the age of 16. He was U8 European Champion in rapid chess, silver medallist at the U18 European Youth Rapid Championship and bronze medallist at the U18 European Blitz Championship. Luka also has an exceptional talent for mathematics and physics, having won numerous awards at national competitions. Currently Luka is a sophomore at the University of Missouri (MIZZOU), pursuing Business studies, with a major in Finance, and also a member of their A chess team.



C76

Santiago Avila Pavas	2510
Luka Budisavljevic	2492

Mexico City 2023

With two rounds to go the situation was looking promising for me. French GM Maurizzi was the sole leader with 7½ points, while my opponent and I were among the four players trailing with 7 points. This meant that scoring 1½ points from the last two games would most likely bring me to a shared first place, and almost guarantee a medal. I understood that this game was a big chance for me, but I wasn't going to burn any bridges as I was expecting to get the white pieces in the last round, which would allow me to strike more easily.

1.e4 e5 My first move choice already caught my opponent off guard, as to date I had previously opted for 1...e5 only a few times in my career. 2. $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3. $\text{e}b5$ a6 4. $\text{e}a4$ d6 This was my first time ever to play this line and I immediately showed that I was ready for a

fight. This line usually leads to complicated positions where most of the pieces remain on the board for quite a while.

5.0-0 $\text{e}d7$ 6.c3 g6 7.d4 $\text{e}g7$ My opponent was playing the most logical moves, and we have now reached the main position in this line.

8. $\text{e}e3$ $\text{d}f6$ 9. $\text{d}bd2$ 0-0 10.h3 Already my opponent had used up some time on the clock, while up to now I had obviously been blitzing out my moves. However here I paused for the first time. It wasn't easy to come up with a plan until White had clarified the center. Thus, I opted for a move that would be useful in most future situations.

10...h6 11. $\text{R}e1$ $\text{R}e8$ 12. $\text{e}c2$

