



MEET ALICE LEE AND OTHER AMAZING U.S. GIRLS

# A NEW WAVE IS COMING

Start to finish, this year's edition of the U.S. Junior Girls' Championship was marked by one player only, as Alice Lee demonstrated incredible stamina and maturity in play, while other contestants all had their ups and downs. As always, a lot of fighting chess was on display, too.

By WIM Zoey Tang

**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 the first girl to have won the Oregon State Championship. 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](http://www.puddletownchess.org). Besides chess, Zoey loves playing the piano and reading.



U.S. GIRLS' JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP 2023, Saint Louis, MO, Jul 15-26, 2023															
Rk	Name	Title	Elo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts	TPR
1	Alice LEE	FM	2393	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	7½	2438
2	Ruiyang YAN	FM	2206	½		1	0	½	½	1	1	1	½	6	2311
3	Carissa YIP	IM	2369	0	0		1	1	1	½	½	1	½	5½	2248
4	Zoey TANG	FM	2290	0	1	0		½	1	1	½	½	1	5½	2256
5	Iris MOU	WIM	2214	½	½	0	½		0	½	½	1	1	4½	2185
6	Rochelle WU	FM	2253	½	½	0	0	1		½	½	½	½	4	2137
7	Shreya MANGALAM	WCM	1972	0	0	½	0	½	½		1	½	½	3½	2132
8	Kelsey LIU		1997	0	0	½	½	½	½	0		½	½	3	2084
9	Gracy PRASANNA	WFM	2012	0	0	0	½	0	½	½	½		1	3	2082
10	Rose ATWELL		2171	0	½	½	0	0	½	½	½	0		2½	2024

There's something very special about playing at the Saint Louis Chess Club. Competing on the same table-integrated DGT boards that were played on by the world's elite is a rare opportunity, and the many photographers present add to the feeling of prestige. Ten of the top U.S. girls, including myself, were invited to Saint Louis to play in the annual U.S. Girls' Junior Championship. The event was held concurrently with the U.S. Junior Championship and

the U.S. Senior Championship.

This year's Girls' Juniors had a tough field. Top talents like IM Carissa Yip and IM-elect Alice Lee were present, as were many familiars of the tournament. There were also "new" (experienced and talented, but playing the Closed for the first time) players who couldn't be underestimated. Personally, I liked my chances of doing significantly better than last year (we're not going to talk about that...), but more than that, I couldn't say.

## Alice Lee

The beginning of the tournament was peaceful enough. After three rounds, I was somewhat surprised to find myself in shared first place with Alice on 2½/3. Funnily enough, we were paired for the next round.

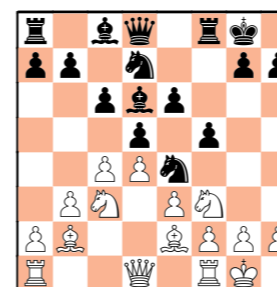
### D45

Alice Lee	2393
Zoey Tang	2290

U.S. Girls' Junior Championship, St Louis 2023

Heading into round 4, Alice and I were the only co-leaders. I wasn't too concerned about the result, as there were still many rounds to go and anyway, my goal was to play good chess rather than win first place.

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.♘c3 ♘bd7 6.♘e2 ♘d6** Trying to enter the normal Meran with 6...dxc4 usually doesn't work, because White's bishop is on e2 rather than d3, so this capture doesn't come with tempo. White therefore has the option to play 7.a4 ♘d6 8.♘d2 with a comfortable edge. **7.0-0-0 8.b3 ♘e4 9.♘b2 f5** A Stonewall-esque structure I had prepared before the game. This position is off-theory and provides Black with nice attacking chances.



**10.♖c1** White is preparing the thematic ♘a3 in order to trade off one of Black's key attackers – the bishop on d6. I underestimated the threat of this idea during the game. **10.♖c1 ♖f6 11.♖c2 g5** was the line I had prepared before the game.

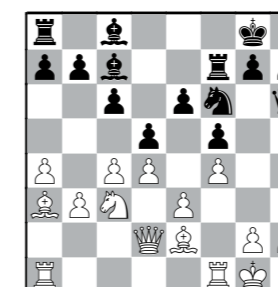
**10...♖f6** Here, 10...♖e7 is the more solid option, denying White the opportunity to play ♘a3. **11.♘b1 a5 12.♘a3 ♘b4** is just fine for Black.

**11.♘d2 ♖h6 12.f4** This nice mini-plan of White's prevents the kingside from being under too much pressure, as now the structure is more or less locked.

**12...g5?!** I thought I had enough attackers to make this risky move work, but unfortunately White has many opportunities to trade pieces.

In case of **12...♘d6?!** **13.♘dx4 fxe4 14.♘a3**, White would be significantly better.

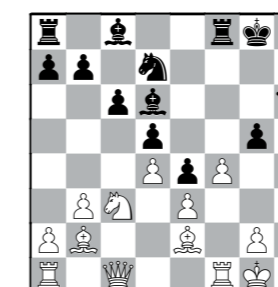
Depriving White of the chance to take on e4, **12...♘xd2!** also displaces White's queen so that ♘a3 is delayed. While the knight looked prettier on e4, Black can always replace it with the other knight via f6. **13.♖xd2 ♘f6 14.a4 (14.♖f3 g5 15.♖h3 ♖g7 16.fxg5 ♖xg5 17.♖f1 ♘d7=** Black has enough time to swing the light-squared bishop over, a typical Stonewall maneuver.) **14...♖f7 15.♘a3 ♘c7**



**16.♖e1 g5 17.g3?! ♖g7 18.♘h1 ♘d7=.** This would be the more stable way to approach the attack by activating all the pieces before playing the committal pawn moves.

**13.♘dx4 fxe4?** Missing a nice tactic. **13...dx4** was necessary, when after **14.g3 gxf4 15.exf4 ♘f6 16.♘a3 ♘xa3 17.♖xa3 ♖f7** Black shouldn't be in any danger.

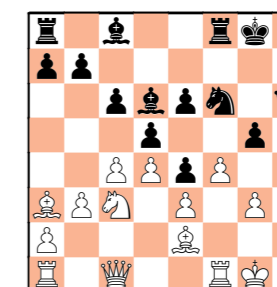
**14.g3?** Alice played this instantly, which came as quite a relief to me. I was vaguely concerned about **14.cxd5**, but figured that I could deal with it if it came. Principally, this move looks illogical, which is presumably why Alice didn't spend much time considering it. **14...exd5**



**15.♘xe4! dx4 16.♖c4+ ♘g7 17.d5+** Unleashing the monster dark-squared bishop. **17...♘f6 18.dxc6 gxf4 19.♖ad1+-.** White's attack will crash through, but this line is by no means easy to calculate from afar.

**14...♘f6** To play on the safe side, Black should start with **14...gxf4**, using the bishop for the last time to force White to

take with a pawn. **15.gxf4 ♘h8=.** **15.♘a3** Trading off Black's best attacker, rendering the kingside attack basically useless.

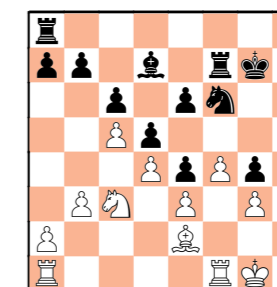


**15...♘a3?!** Black can't afford to invite the opponent's queen forward. **15...♘e8!** was best, when after **16.♘xd6 ♘xd6 17.fxg5 ♖xg5 18.♖xf8+ ♘xf8 19.♖d2** White is very slightly better.

**16.♖xa3 ♘d7 17.♖d6** Taking advantage of Black's weak dark squares.

**17...♖f7 18.♖e5 g4 19.♖g5+ ♖g7 20.c5 h6 20...h5!?** would have saved me a tempo compared to the game.

**21.♖xg7+ ♘xg7** During the game, I thought this endgame was worse for me. In reality, even though White's queenside expansion looks fearsome, it doesn't result in much. Still, at this point White is playing for two results.



**22.b4 h5 23.b5 h4?** Missing a chance to trade off the dumb light-squared bishop. **23...cxb5 24.♘xb5 b6!** The threat against the c5 pawn is enough to prevent White from avoiding the trade. After **25.♘d7**

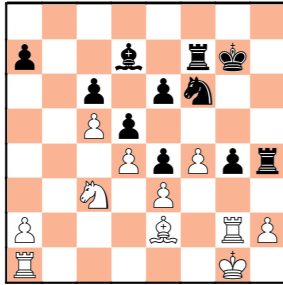


♞xd7 26.♞ac1 ♞c8 Black is no worse by any means.

24.bxc6 bxc6?! 24...♞xc6 would prevent White from utilizing the b-file.

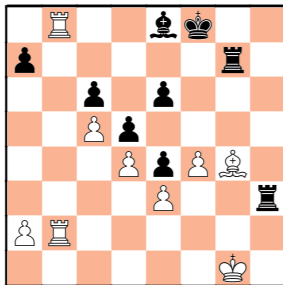
25.gxh4 Correctly assessing that the h2 weakness can easily be protected.

25...♞h8 26.♞f2 ♞xh4 27.♞g2



27...♞f8 27...e5! is the engine-backed idea to open the light-squared bishop, even at the cost of a pawn. This just shows how sad my position is... 28.fxe5 (28.dxe5 ♞h5 29.♞d1 d4) 28...♞h7 29.h3 ♞xh3 30.♞xg4 ♞xg4 31.♞xg4+ ♞f8±.

28.♞d1 ♞g7 29.♞f2 After the prophylaxis is finished, all that is left is to invade the b-file. 29...♞e8 30.♞b1 ♞h5 31.♞b8+ ♞e8 32.♞d1 ♞hh7 33.♞xg4 ♞xg4 34.♞xg4 ♞b7 35.♞b2 ♞bg7 36.h3 ♞xh3 I saw the follow-up tactic, but what other option did I have?



37.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 38.♞b8+ ♞f7 39.♞b7+ ♞f6 40.♞xg7 ♞xe3 41.♞f2 ♞a3 42.♞c7 ♞xa2+ 43.♞g3 ♞a3+ 44.♞h4 ♞a6 45.♞h5 e5 46.♞f7+ Black resigned

After mishandling my feisty opening choice, I got into a worse position where my key attackers got traded off. Alice chose to go into an endgame where only she was pushing, and showcased very nice (annoying to me during the game) technique and prophylaxis to capitalize on my inaccuracies. A painful game, but definitely one from which I learned a lot.

# INTERVIEW WITH ALICE LEE



## ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE AT THE AGE OF 13!

By WIM Zoey Tang

During the 2023 U.S. Open in Grand Rapids, MI, I had the fortunate opportunity to talk with Alice about her recent accomplishments, routines, and more.

**Hi Alice, great to have you here! First of all, congratulations on achieving the IM title! How does it feel to have achieved such a prestigious title, especially since you broke the record for the youngest American-born female to do so?**

Yeah, it feels really good. It was something that I'd been working on for the past one and a half years, so being able to achieve it is really nice, and I'm really

happy that throughout the process I was able to improve.

**How do you feel about breaking the record?**

It feels great, especially since Carissa [previous record-holder -ZT] is one of the best players and I've looked up to her for so long. But for me, I wasn't thinking too much about the record, because if you give yourself a certain timeframe that might put too much pressure on you. I'm happy that I was able to break the record, but overall it wasn't my main focus.

**You had many successes in a row recently. Congrats on**

**winning the U.S. Girls' Junior Championship right after getting your IM title, with even a round to spare!**

**You've attended this event previously; how has your experience been, and was this time around any different?**

I think I got last place three years ago. And then two years ago, I got 3½/9. Last year I didn't do too badly, I got 5½/9, but this year I think it was very different because I had the experience. I played in the event two times in-person previously, and once online. Of course, the players at the U.S. Girls' Junior Championship are all pretty strong, but it helps to have prior experience. I was actually one of the more experienced players this year, which was really nice. I definitely wasn't expecting to win with a round to spare, I thought it'd probably go to tiebreaks if I won it at all.

**So, you talked about experience. One unique aspect of the Juniors is the one-round-per-day format. How does this impact your tournament routine?**

For a lot of the two-rounds-per-day tournaments, especially norm tournaments, you have to do a lot of preparation beforehand. Before the Junior Girls' I actually didn't have much time to prepare because I played in a tournament that ended a few days before this one started. So, playing one round per day was really good for me. I was able to do preparation between rounds, since there was so much free time. Sometimes two rounds a day is just too much!

**Moving on to general questions, what does a**

**typical non-tournament day look like for you?**

I guess it depends on the day, but I try to spend time on chess each day, around 2-3 hours. It also depends, for example, on recent tournaments. After I got back from the Junior Girls' I had two weeks of online school classes to catch up on, so recently I've been trying to catch up and finish the homework. But normally, I try to spend some time on chess and it's generally about keeping up the consistency.

**You'll be going to high school soon, right?**

Yes, I'll be starting high school in September.

**Do you anticipate having to change your schedule to accommodate more homework? High school's traditionally more busy.**

I feel like in the past few years, in middle school, the teachers were really nice about letting me make up the work afterward, if I had a lot of tournaments. I think for high school, I'd have to do all the work ahead of time, which might impact how I play during the tournament if I'm worrying about schoolwork. Overall I'll still try to maintain being able to do chess and also school.

**Could you elaborate on that? When you're working at home, how will you balance school and chess when there's more homework? Will you cut back on chess or will you cut back on sleep?**

That's a good question. Usually in the summer I get a lot more sleep than I do during the school year, probably 30-60 minutes more. I'll try not to cut back on sleep because sleep is important! So I'll probably have to cut back more on chess, though I'll try to maintain a consistent schedule.

**What activities do you enjoy besides chess?**

I enjoy doing contest math, although now that I'm doing so much chess it's a bit harder. But I've done that since 6<sup>th</sup>

grade and it's just something that I really enjoy. I also enjoy reading and writing. I actually got two cats a few months ago, so I like just spending time with my cats. And that can also be more like doing work, so that's a plus. But mainly I spend a lot of time on chess.

**I've heard that you run a mile a day.**

Yeah, I still do that. I try to do that especially during tournaments, actually. Like, the hotel we stayed at during the Junior Girls' had a really nice gym, so I went there every day. But, yeah, I think it's just a healthy habit, especially for chess players. Physical shape is pretty important as well.

**What do you think of the current environment for female chess players?**

For me, growing up as a female chess player, I feel like the environment has been pretty nice to me. However, I know the ratio of females to males playing chess is like 1:8 or something similar. So, obviously it's harder to go to some chess tournaments and be one of the few females playing, but I think overall, I'm hoping that, especially as the popularity of chess increases, the amount of females playing chess will also increase.

### DON'T PUSH YOUR KID TOO HARD

**What specific advice do you have for parents of young female chess players?**

For young female chess players, I'd probably say just to enjoy the game and keep going and don't be discouraged. For parents, I would probably say, don't push your kid too hard to do the game. Just like, let them genuinely enjoy it and just support them throughout their chess journey.

**Who have been some of the influential people along your chess journey, and what was their particular contribution?**

There were definitely a lot of people who helped me so far with my chess journey, including my coaches. I started with GM Dmitry Gurevich. He helped me from when I was seven to when I was ten. And that really helped me with my improvement. And also my current coaches, who I won't name exactly, but they've been really helpful, really supportive throughout my entire journey. My parents and my family, and many female role models - Judit Polgar, Hou Yifan, and just strong players in general. I look at their games and I go, "oh I should try to do as well as them," but of course it's very hard. And, in general, I have a lot of people to thank for my chess journey and also just the people I play in really tough tournaments have been really helpful for me.

**What role do your parents play in your chess right now?**

My mom is usually the one who travels with me, so I'm really grateful for her, because she takes time off of work just to go to chess games with me. So, I think that's one really supporting role. And also during chess games, she gets food and covers the basic things so I won't be too exhausted before the game. And also, I study chess sometimes with my mom watching over, and I think that's pretty helpful because you don't always study with your coach and also you don't always study by yourself. So having somebody to study with you is pretty good to have. Even if their level is much lower, it's still really great to have somebody to just keep you on task. I think the main role that my parents have is traveling with me to chess tournaments. I think that that's like a really big role on their part, to have to cut off time from work and put in a lot of work while I go to play in chess tournaments.

**You mentioned the importance of having a coach or at least some sort of mentor figure when studying**

**chess. What should parents look for in choosing a coach if it's clear that their child will want a coach?**

I'm not really sure. For my coaches, I just contacted some people who are pretty strong and asked them whether they'd be willing to coach me, and they accepted. So I think there's a lot of great chess coaches out there, and mainly you can look at what they play in general and how their style would suit you, in order to be able to get a good coach who suits your style in general. But there are so many great coaches out there that even if you just ask a really strong player to be your coach, they might just accept you and you can improve from there.

**One last question. You said in an interview that your advice for girls starting to play chess was to enjoy the game and not worry about losses, which is very good advice. What are other ways for girls to enjoy the game?**

I would say instead of just being in tournaments in general, there's actually a lot of really good all-girls events that I went to and I had a lot of fun just being surrounded by a super supportive female environment. For example, I think the All-Girls Nationals has been a tournament that I played in multiple times. Starting when I was seven, I played it for a few years. And that was a really fun tournament; I think it's usually in April in Chicago. And also, there's the Susan Polgar Foundation Girls' Invitational event, that's also really great. It's a really strong tournament and in general a super fun one to play in. I think there's also some all girls camps and there's also chess camps for kids in general. Making sure that you have fun with chess is really important as well. Instead of just playing in tournaments and studying, having fun is really good for any chess player.

**Thank you for all your insightful advice, Alice! You're welcome. Thanks.**



# Ruiyang Yan

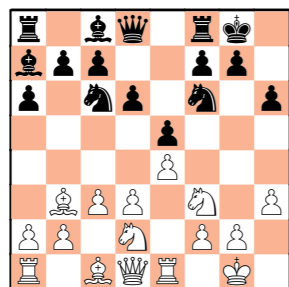
The second half of the tournament was one full of comebacks, upsets, and turmoil in the standings for everyone but Alice. First, FM Ruiyang Yan achieved an important victory on her way to finishing with 6/9 despite a slow start of 1½/4 including a loss against yours truly, but what can I say? Ruiyang played better than me against the rest of the opposition.

## C54

Ruiyang Yan	2206
Carissa Yip	2369

U.S. Girls' Junior Championship, St. Louis 2023  
Notes by Ruiyang Yan

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 I don't usually adopt this line but it has very similar ideas to others I used to play and I wanted to try something more random.  
3...♙c5 4.0-0 ♟f6 5.d3 d6 6.c3 a6 7.♙e1 ♙a7 8.♙b3 0-0 9.h3 h6 10.♟bd2



10...♟h5 I wasn't expecting this. I'm pretty sure 10...♙e8 11.♟f1 ♙e6 12.♙c2 d5 13.exd5 ♙xd5 14.♟g3 was the position I had prepared for.

11.♟f1 ♟f4? This allowed me to play against her dark-squared bishop, which I was very happy about during the game. I expected 11...♙f6 here. (Black is threatening to play ...♙g6, and this move is also supporting ...♟f4 since the queen can take back in case of ♙xf4. - Zoey Tang)

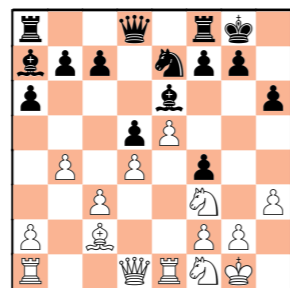
12.♙xf4 exf4 13.d4 ♟e7 Planning ...♟g6 and ...♙f6.

14.e5 d5 15.♙c2 Indirectly stopping ...♟g6, due to e5-e6 motif.

15...♙e6 16.b4! During the game I was a little paranoid of Black playing ...c5. Thus b2-b4 was probably unnecessary, but is a nice prophylactic move to further lock in



the a7 bishop.

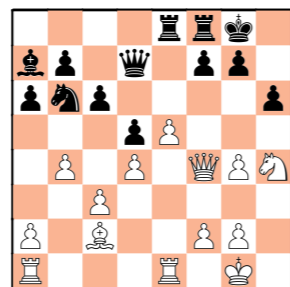


16...♙d7 17.♟h4 ♙ae8 18.♟h2 My plan was to go after the weak f4 pawn.

18...c6 19.♟g4 19...♙f3 could also work, but I didn't like 19...f5 20.exf6 ♙xf6. This should still be good for White, but I had no reason to allow it.

19...♙xg4 20.hxg4 Now the pawn supports ♟f5 ideas.

20...♟c8 21.♙f3 ♟b6 22.♙xf4



22...f6 The rest is a very simple win, but still requires a little precision. 22...g5 runs into 23.♙f6 gxf4 (23...♙e6 24.♙f5+-) 24.♙xh6 f5 25.exf6+-.

23.♟g6 fxe5 24.♟xf8 ♙xf8 25.♙xe5 25.♙h7+ ♟xh7 26.♙xf8+-

25...♙xg4 26.♙e6+ ♙xe6 27.♙xe6 ♟c8 28.♙ae1 ♙b8 29.♙e8 g5 30.g3 ♟d6 31.♙xf8+ ♟xf8 32.♙e6 ♟b5 33.♙xh6 ♙c7 34.♙h7 ♙d6 35.♙xb7 ♟xc3 36.a4 ♟a2 37.b5 axb5 38.a5 ♟b4 39.♙g6 ♙e7 40.♙a7 c5 41.a6 ♟c6 42.♙c7

Black resigned

After an opening slip-up from her opponent, Ruiyang was able to continually exert pressure through her center space. She stopped any ideas of her opponent's counterplay and was able to convert with good technique. A crucial game that propelled Ruiyang to second place, ahead of Carissa and yours truly...

My second half was significantly less rosy, with another loss against Carissa and two draws after unfavorable openings. Tying for third is by no means a bad result, but I was hoping for better given the standings up until as far as round 7.

On her part, Alice widened her lead during the last few rounds, winning game after game with immaculate technique and only conceding three (!) draws the whole tournament. A dominating performance with one of the highest scores in recent years.

Meanwhile, the new players to the tournament were battling it out fiercely against their more experienced opponents, even in the last rounds where energy among non-podium prospectors is traditionally low.

## E20

Rochelle Wu	2253
Kelsey Liu	1997

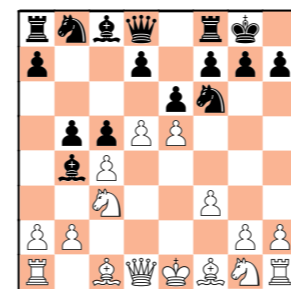
U.S. Girls' Junior Championship, St. Louis 2023  
Notes by Kelsey Liu

In round 8, I was playing Rochelle Wu, who already had many achievements since a young age. This would be my first time playing her, but I saw her at many tournaments before, playing on the top boards. I hadn't won a single game before this round and I wasn't expecting anything here as I was Black against one of the pre-tournament rating favorites.

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♙b4 4.f3 My only prep was against 4.♙c2, but this deviation showed that she anticipated my opening choice and prepared another line against me. The risk of entering positions comfortable for your opponent, with preparation in mind, is that they might deviate first - that's why it's ideal to spring your surprise as early as possible.

4...c5 I just played what I knew.

5.d5 b5 6.e4 0-0 7.e5 Here, I spent an entire 15 minutes thinking about the position.



7...exd5 I ended up going for a more active/dynamic continuation because her king was still in the center with only a minimal development. Logically speaking, those are some red flags... But this is apparently still some obscure theory.

The simple retreat 7...♟e8 is the main line, when after 8.f4 exd5 9.cxd5 d6 10.♟f3 it can get dangerous for Black because of White's space advantage. I didn't review any of these lines, so I was hesitant to go in that direction.

8.exf6 d4 9.a3 Without this key move, material is equal and Black is ahead in all other aspects of the game.

9.fxg7 ♙e8+ only helps Black. The extra pawn gobbled on g7 does not matter in the grand scheme of things because of



# Kelsey Liu

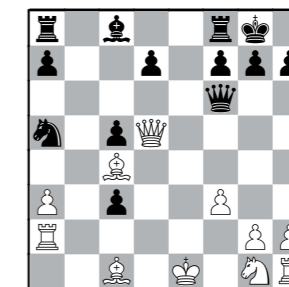
development. 13...c2 14.♙a2 ♙b7 15.♙d2 (15.♙xb7 ♙d4+ 16.♟g3 ♙e5+ 17.♟h3 ♙h5+ 18.♟g3 ♙e5+ is already a forced draw.) 15...bxc4 16.♙xc2 d5=.

B) 13.♟e2 b4= Engines scream that this position is equal, but it seems so hard to evaluate!?

12...bxc4 For the piece, Black now has tripled pawns in the middle of the board. As ridiculous as they look, the march of the d-pawn will be a fearsome threat to behold.

13.f4? This was played after my opponent's first pause in the game, but it felt wrong to me because White has no development. However, with it White threatens ♙xc4 as then ...♙h4+ would not fork the bishop. Moreover, the knight can now develop to the more appealing f3 square.

Better was 13.♙d5 ♟c6 14.♙xc4 ♟xa5



A) 15.♙xa8 ♟c6?? (15...♙a6+) 16.♙b5 ♙a6 17.♙xc6 dxc6 18.♙xa6 ended in a draw on move 58 in S.Volkov 2577 - D.Gordievsky 2422, Moscow 2012.

B) 15.♙d3 and Black's pawns have less potential to be dangerous. However, I guess 13.♙d5 is a precarious move to make with zero minor piece development.

13...♙a6 (Kelsey maintains the tension and prepares to push the d-pawn in the near future. Meanwhile, deprived of c4, it is difficult for White to develop her light-squared bishop. -Zoey Tang)

I was seriously considering 13...♙b7 because the position felt like something would happen soon. For example, 14.♙xc4 d5 leads to an interesting line that could arise: 15.♙b3 (15.♙d3 ♟c6) 15...♙e7+ 16.♙e2 dxc4 17.♙xe7 cxb3 18.♙xb7 b2 19.♙xb2 cxb2 20.♙xb2 ♟c6+.

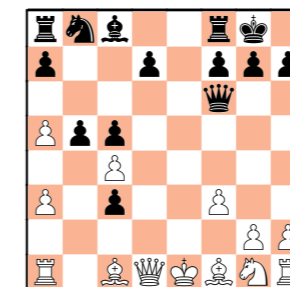
14.♟f3 ♙d8?! This is not accurate because it continuously allows ♙d5.

After 14...♟c6, White cannot take

White's lack of king safety.

9...♙a5 10.b4 The typical way to break the pin.

10...dxc3 11.bxa5 ♙xf6 This recapture comes with the added threat of ...c3-c2, to which White must respond and give Black another tempo.



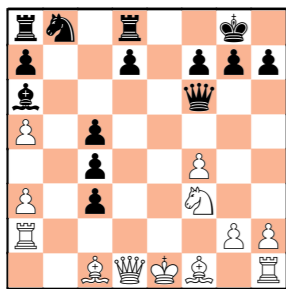
12.♙a2 This was played extremely quickly and here Rochelle still had 1 hour and 33 minutes on the clock, showing that this was still probably within her knowledge. However, I think this may have been a bluff as it was the most natural move (because it guards the vital second rank and could swing to e2 to protect the king), although not approved by the engine. There was still one game in the database played between Volkov and Gordievsky in 2012, but that game later followed the engine recommendation with the vital 12.♙d5.

12.♙d5 is the only move that maintains equality, which is already a red flag for the white pieces. 12...♙e8+

A) 13.♟f2 is now a possibility thanks to the pawn on f3, and does not get in the way of the kingside minor pieces'



15. ♖xd7 due to 15... ♜fd8 16. ♗g4 ♞ab8, because Black has too many threats – the power of activity!  
17. ♙e2 ♞b2!–+.



15. ♙e3?? 15. ♗d5 is still necessary for White. 15... ♘c6 16. ♙xc4 (Not 16. ♙xc5?? d5 17. ♙e2 d4 18. ♙xc4 ♙xc4 19. ♗xc4 d3–+ when Black’s pawns are really scary when they hold hands and march down the board together.) Trying to preserve material with 16... ♘e7, allows 17. ♗d3 ♙xc4 18. ♗xc4 d5 19. ♙xc5 d4 20. 0-0 d3 21. ♜af2= and White is here in time to coordinate her pieces, compared to previous variations.

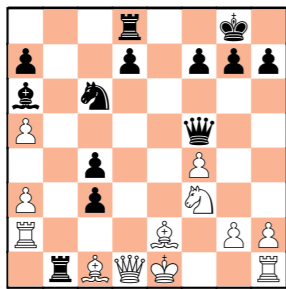
15... ♘c6 I had wanted to play 15... ♗e7, but was concerned about the engagement of the a2 rook back into the game upon 16. ♜e2 d5 17. ♙d4 ♗c7 18. ♙e5.

16. ♙xc5 16. ♗d5! was the lesser evil, although after 16... ♞ab8 17. ♘f2 ♞b2+ 18. ♞xb2 cxb2 19. ♙e2 ♘e7 Black’s position is clearly better, but with a lot of play ahead.

16... ♞ab8 17. ♙e2 ♗f5 Now I threaten both ... ♗xc5 and ... ♞b1.

18. ♙e3 The other way to defend against dual threats was 18. ♙b4 d5 19. ♗c1 d4 20. 0-0 ♘xb4 21. axb4 ♞xb4. I will eventually win back a piece as White must sacrifice one to prevent the pawns from steamrolling. 22. ♘d4 ♞xd4 23. ♗xc3 ♗c5–+.

18... ♞b1 19. ♙c1 (While the engine claims Black is completely winning, the pressure of a real game makes finding the best moves very difficult. -Zoey Tang)



19...d5?! I think this was a crucial inaccuracy on my part because it allowed

more options for my opponent to fight back.

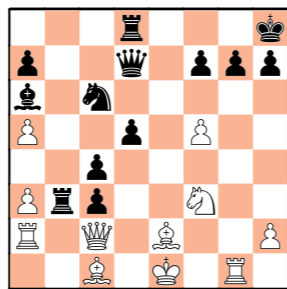
19... ♗c5! is the most clinical, preventing White from castling and sacrifices that later happened in the game. Again, the position felt like I had to hurry as a piece was sacrificed, but in reality White is completely tied down and the march of the d-pawn cannot be stopped anyways. To be clinical in these kinds of positions, one must first observe if their plan is stoppable within their opponent’s concrete moves before feeling the intuitive need to hurry. 20. ♗c2 is simply met by 20... ♞db8 21. ♗xc3 d5. Black’s king is completely safe while its counterpart faces peril.

20.g4! Although this move is not necessarily approved by the engine, I think it deserves an exclamation mark because it poses the most practical challenges. I was also on the brink of facing time pressure and faced a dilemma. Clearly such a pawn push, while the king is wide open, should be punished. However, if I take, it will open up the g-file and my own king faces some danger. On the other hand, if I don’t capture then I allowed such a move for free! What a scam!

20... ♗xg4 I ended up making the right decision, but at the cost of 14 minutes from my remaining 25. When your opponent is cornered, they become the scariest as they find crazy resources. You try to navigate accurately, but end up with even more practical problems.

21. ♗c2 ♞b3 21... ♞db8 may have been better because it keeps the c1 bishop pinned. 22. ♗xc3 d4 23. ♘xd4 ♗xf4!

22. ♞g1 ♗d7 23.f5 ♘h8



24. ♞xg7 Wow. Rochelle had a couple minutes more than me at this point and used up most of it to come up with this resource. I hadn’t even considered it while she was pondering over her move.

24... ♘g7 25.f6+ ♘xf6 The point is that if I try to hide my king with 25... ♘h8, then 26. ♘g5+– comes with deadly effect.

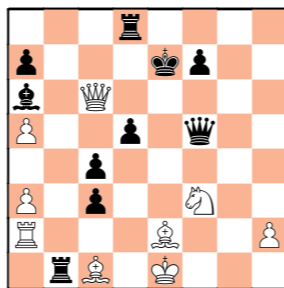
26. ♗xh7 ♗f5 27. ♗h6+ The sacrifice was unsound and it turns out that I am

completely winning here, but I must make the critical decision at the crossroads between ... ♗g6 and ... ♘e7 with only seconds left on my clock.

27... ♘e7? Unfortunately, I made the wrong choice.

27... ♗g6 was the only move. Then, after 28. ♙g5+ ♘e6 29. ♗h3+ (29. ♗xg6+ fxg6 30. ♙xd8 ♘xd8–+) 29... ♘d6, my king is able to escape to c5 where checks on the diagonal can be blocked by ...d5-d4! 30. ♙xd8 ♘xd8–+.

28. ♗xc6 ♞b1 This was what I was banking on when I allowed my opponent to take on c6.



29. ♙d1!! A cold shower describes this feeling perfectly. Now the a2 rook that arrived on the rank 17 moves earlier is finally invited to the party.

29... ♞d6 30. ♙g5+? At this point we were both in huge time pressure.

30. ♗c5!! was a quiet move to win the game. In many positions it feels that every move must be a check or a forcing one. However, sometimes lethal quiet moves are the best way to increase your advantage. 30... ♞xc1 31. ♜e2+ ♘d7 32. ♗xa7+–.

30...f6 31. ♜e2+ Now everything is forced. 31... ♞e6 32. ♗c7+ ♘e8 33. ♗c6+ ♘e7 34. ♗c7+ ♘e8 35. ♗c6+ ♘e7 36. ♗c7+ ♘e8

Draw

A bit of an anticlimatic finish to a crazy game going back and forth, but an acceptable result after being on the brink of losing! This tournament was such a unique and fun experience and I’m extremely grateful to have been invited to this prestigious event. I gained a great deal of experience and am determined to keep improving.



NOTABLE ENDINGS FROM 2023 TOURNAMENT PLAY

# A Slow Squeeze

As we turn the page to 2024, let’s look back at some of the best endings of the past year. Of course, many great and intriguing endings are played every day; these are just ones that happened to catch my eye. The relative strength of the players and importance of the game was a factor in my selection, but there are also some problem-like ideas here.



Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1968, Alex Fishbein relocated to the United States in 1979. Mentored by Vladimir Zak, who previously coached Boris Spassky and Viktor Korchnoi, Fishbein swiftly built a strong chess foundation. By 14, he was a master, and he climbed the ranks to become an IM in 1988 and a GM in 1992 after an international victory in Norway. In 1985, Fishbein championed the first Denker Tournament of High School Champions, setting off a string of achievements at home and abroad. Even while pursuing a career in finance, he remained an active competitor into the 2000s, appearing in four U.S. Championships.

We begin with the last-round win by Vidit Gujrathi which gave him clear first in the Grand Swiss and qualification into the Candidates’ Tournament.

D27

Vidit Gujrathi	2715
Alexandr Predke	2661

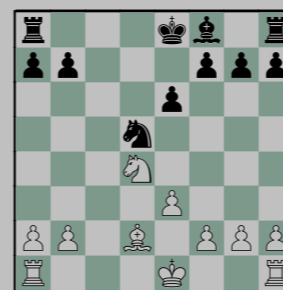
FIDE Grand Swiss, Douglas 2023

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5. ♙xc4 a6 6. 0-0 c5 7.dxc5



7... ♙xc5 We discussed in ACM 24 the advantages and drawbacks of keeping the king in the center in a queenless middlegame. If the monarch sits on a square vulnerable to attack by the enemy bishop, it’s a drawback.

For me, this situation is reminiscent of the following famous comment by Nimzovich in *My System* to this position from his game with Tarrasch (Breslau 1925):



“This position, for all its apparent harmlessness, is full of poison. White is threatening to take over the c-file; moreover, he has at his disposal a convenient square for his king (e2), whereas this is true for Black only to a limited extent (see the note to the 17<sup>th</sup> move). In such positions the defender has to play with extreme care.”

Returning to our game, I prefer trading on d1 and castling for Black (the ACM 24 article has more details on that), but of course both options are viable.

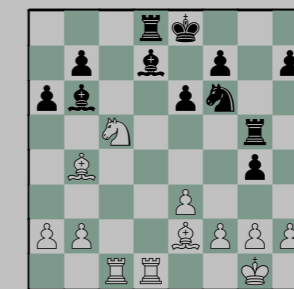
8. ♗xd8+ ♘xd8 9. ♙e2 ♘e7 10. ♘bd2 ♙d7 11. ♘b3 ♙b6 12. ♙d2 ♘c6 13. ♙c3 ♞hg8 14. ♜fd1 ♞ad8 15. ♞ac1 g5 16. ♘fd4



16... ♘xd4 Allowing the white bishop a diagonal leading to the black king. 16... ♘d5 was another option.

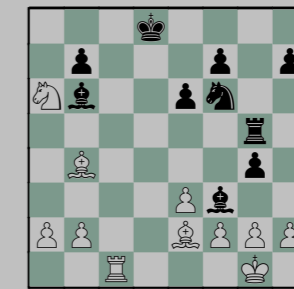
17. ♙b4+ ♘e8 18. ♘xd4 g4 The idea of expanding on the kingside is essentially correct (in the aforementioned article, we also discussed pawn play on the flanks as an advantage of keeping the king in the center), but Black should have prefaced it with a centralizing and defensive 18... ♘d5, for example: 19. ♙a3 g4 20. ♘f5 exf5 21. ♞xd5 ♙e6 and Black is OK (although it’s not immediately obvious, as the rook seems offside).

19. ♘b3! ♞g5 20. ♘c5!



Now Black faces real problems. Rather than giving White control of the dark squares, he decides to sacrifice a pawn.

20... ♙c6 21. ♘xa6 ♘d7 He might have missed that after 21... ♙f3!? 22. ♞xd8+ ♘xd8,



White has 23.h4!! ♞g8 (Or 23... ♙xe2 24.hxg5 ♘d5 25. ♙c5 with an advantage.) 24. ♙d1!! and if 24... bxa6 25.gxf3 gxf3+ 26. ♘f1 ♘g4 27. ♙xf3, White is a pawn up as his pawn can no longer be captured on h2.