

BATTLE OF THE STATES – 2023 U.S. NATIONALS INVITATIONALS

16-year-old Ruiyang Yan Wins Haring Tournament of Girls' Champions

By WIM Zoey Tang

After the U.S. Junior Girls' where she finished as runner-up, FM Ruiyang Yan clinched the title at the Haring Tournament - confirming that she is one of the best junior female players in the U.S.

The annual U.S. Nationals Invitationals, held this year in Grand Rapids, MI, concurrently with the U.S. Open, consists of five sections: the Rockefeller (elementary school), Barber (middle school), Denker (high school), Haring (girls), and Irwin (seniors). Each of the benefactors from whom the sections derived their names has contributed immensely to chess (especially junior chess). According to a story told every year at the opening ceremony (usually by Dewain Barber, US Chess Dean of Scholastic Chess), the tournament started with a simple phone call from GM Arnold Denker: "I want to do something for the kids." From this, the GM Arnold Denker National Tournament of High School State Champions was born. Later, the Dewain Barber National Tournament of Middle School State Champions, WIM Ruth Haring National Tournament of Girls' State Champions, John T. Irwin National Tournament of Senior Champions, and the John D. Rockefeller III National Tournament of Elementary School State Champions were added.

The unique format pits state champions, the winners of their state's respective qualifiers, against each other. While some strong players are eliminated without having the chance to even enter the tournament, many still remain for a tough battle.

While the chance to represent our country on the Olympiad team is out of reach for the majority of us, the annual U.S. Nationals Invitationals gives scholastic players the chance to feel the same honor, albeit on a smaller scale – the Denker and Haring champions qualify for the World Youth (Cadet) Championship and the U.S. Junior Closed Championship. Staring at the rows of vinyl chess boards, one might be surprised to see miniature state flags beside them as well. With so many colors and patterns, the Invitationals give off the same vibe as many professional tournaments.

The front of the tournament hall resembles an elite event even more, with the vinyl boards and plastic pieces replaced by DGT sets. There, the top players of each section battle it out on a broadcast for all to see.

Knocked down from board one of the Haring for the first time after a draw against sixth-seed Asha Kumar, the eventual winner FM Ruiyang Yan scored an important victory to bounce back to the top of the standings in round 4.

2023 U.S. NATIONALS INVITATIONALS
Final Standings - 2023 Haring
6 rounds (45 players)

1	Ruiyang YAN	.....5½
2-3	Jwalanthi RAM, Megan PARAGUA	.....5
4-5	Esther JOU, Chance NGUYEN	.....4½
6-12	Asha KUMAR, Elizabeth BRADDY, Celina ZHOU, Nastassja MATUS, Lily DENG, Zoe ZELNER, Sunny ZHANG	.....4

B70

Ruiyang Yan	2356
Celina Zhou	1808

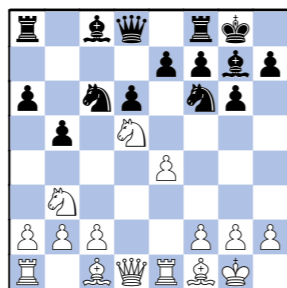
Grand Rapids 2023
Notes by Ruiyang Yan

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 This is an interesting move that avoids a lot of theory in the Sveshnikov.

3...g6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♙g7 6.♘b3!?

Again I decided to stay away from main theory in the ♙e3 line.

6...♘f6 7.♙e2 d6 8.0-0 0-0 9.♙e1 With a very simple idea of playing ♙f1 and ♘d5. 9...♙g5 is the other, more aggressive option. 9...a6 10.♙f1 b5 11.♘d5



11...♘d5 Even though Black has a slightly higher score in this line, I don't like this move as it weakens the e7 pawn for my rook and gives White a lot of options to play with on the queenside (e.g. a4, ♘d4-c6 ideas). More playable options are 11...♙b7 and 11...♘d7.

12.exd5 ♘e5 13.h3 Preventing ...♘g4 in case I play f2-f4. Also, it avoids any back rank shenanigans in the future.

13...♙e8 14.a4 bxa4?! With this decision, Black weakens her queenside too much.

However, the queenside tensions ensure open lines. 15...♘c4 (Not 15...bxa4?? due to 16.f4+- oops) 16.b3 ♘b6 17.axb5 axb5 18.♙xa8 ♙xa8 19.♘xb5 ♘xd5=.

15.♙xa4 ♘d7 After 15...♘d7?! 16.♙xa6 (16.♙a3 ♙b5) 16...♙xa6 17.♙xa6 ♙b6, White is probably better, but this is a much better way to play for Black.

16.♘a5 ♘b6 17.♙a3 ♙c7 18.c4 ♙d7 19.b4 e6 20.dxe6 20...♙f4! exd5 21.c5+-.

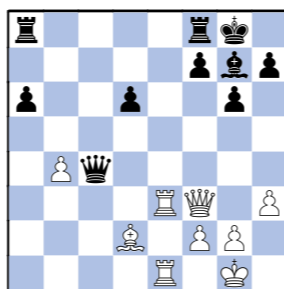
20...♙xe6 Black got her pieces out eventually, but she has too many weak pawns.

21.♙ae3 ♙ec8 22.♙f3 ♙f8 23.♙d2!?

This move is setting up a nice little trap my opponent ended up falling into.

23...♙xc4? Upon 23...♙ac8 24.♙c1, White is still better on account of Black's weak d6 and a6 pawns.

24.♘xc4 ♘xc4 25.♙xc4 ♙xc4



26.♙xa8! ♙xa8 27.♙e8+ ♙f8 No better is 27...♙xe8 28.♙xe8+ ♙f8 29.♙h6 with unavoidable checkmate.

28.♙xa8 ♙d5 29.♙xf8+! ♘g7 29...♘xf8 30.♙h6+ ♘g8 31.♙e8 mate.

30.♙e3 ♙b5 31.♙d8 ♙xb4 32.♙d1 a5 33.♙8xd6 Black resigned

Ruiyang chose a slightly offbeat line, but it was one that made sense and allowed for steady positional play (as opposed to the blood and brute calculation of most opposite-side castling Sicilians). Black was not able to set her pieces up effectively, and White quickly got an advantage by crashing through on the queenside. The cute final trap was a nice demonstration of Ruiyang's tactical prowess. Overall, a clean game!

This win, followed by clean victories over the eventual second-place Jwalanthi Ram and second-seed Esther Jou, brought Ruiyang into clear first place with an undefeated 5½/6 score. A great performance, especially coming after a second-place finish at the U.S. Girls Junior Championship.

Interview with Ruiyang Yan

ENJOYING CHESS WITHOUT PRESSURE!

I talked with Ruiyang about her view on the Junior Closed vs the Invitationals, her opinions about female chess, and more.

■ Hi Ruiyang, welcome. Congrats on taking second place at the US Girls Junior Championship! How has your experience been at this tournament, and was this time around any different?

As usual, the venue at the Saint Louis Chess Club was really nice. There's not much change except I played better than last year, obviously. But it's always nice to play with new, different people every year at the US Junior Girls.

■ Could you elaborate more on your experience, especially previous times?

The Juniors is a very widely broadcasted event, so they have very big accommodations and the venue, the hotels, and the city in general are all very nice. Playing chess there is a very enjoyable experience, especially with the one game per day format, which gives plenty of time to rest.

■ Also, congrats on winning the Haring right after the U.S. Junior Girls! This is another event that you attend annually. What do you think of the tournament?

This event is really different compared to the Juniors. It changes every year to different locations. And it's always nice to play in a new city, a new state, and just go explore. It's also cool to play with people from different states who are the best in their state. It's kind of different from the Juniors because Juniors are the best overall, but this is the best from each state, which is a very nice experience.

■ What do you think of all-girls tournaments in general?

They're very good for promoting girls' chess; they're a very good motivator. For me, one of my first girls' tournaments was the all girls tournament in Chicago a long time ago. I showed myself that I could play like and I could beat other girls my age, you know? Especially because as a girl, in some tournaments you're surrounded by boys who are 10 years older than you or something. It's very motivating to play and interact with a bunch of other girls who also enjoy chess and see that you're not really alone in your pursuits.

■ You touched on this in your previous answer, but what do you think of the current environment for female chess players?

I think it's certainly improved over the years. I remember back in 2018, 2019, I would be

like the only girl at chess tournaments. But nowadays I feel like so many new faces, younger girls are getting to try and they're all very talented of course. Especially the big tournaments, there are so many new talented girls, like you, Zoey Tang.

■ Wow, thank you. I'm flattered.

The environment is still improving but obviously could do better. We can always include more girls.

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

Honestly for parents, I would just advise them to not put too much pressure onto your daughter and just try to encourage them more. I know it's really easy to get discouraged during tournaments, and there's a lot of internalized misogyny toward female chess players, so it's really easy to get affected by the environment around you. So I would advise parents to encourage their child and help them grow into a better chess player.



Photo: Lemarr Oates

games. Just don't put too much pressure on yourself. Enjoy the experience. It doesn't really matter if you're winning or losing. The most important part is to enjoy the experience, because if you don't enjoy it then it's just going to be very painful if you really want to improve because you're going to have to spend hours on chess to improve.

■ Like lots of chess players, you played lots of tournaments back-to-back this summer. How do you handle the stress of this busy schedule?

During the tournament and in between tournaments I just try to relax myself. I watch YouTube, I go hang out with friends, and such. And then I just try to relax myself and try not to put too much pressure or think about the results too much.

■ Moving on to general questions, what does a typical day look like for you?

On an average school day, I get out of school at 3 or 4 or something. And then if I can I will try to take a nap, but this is very unlikely to happen. After I get home I either do homework or I play random blitz games online. So let's just say I do homework, right? That usually takes a few hours, like three, four hours maybe and then I will spend time on blitz and doing tactics problems. I just try to stay sharp during the school year because I'm usually very busy with homework and tests.

■ How do you balance your high school workload and chess? Lots of homework.

Well, I try my best. The most important thing for me is to do a lot of tactics every day and stay tactically sharp. I don't always get to study chess, though; some days are just too busy.

■ What activities do you enjoy besides chess?

There are a few hobbies I enjoyed, but I don't actually do them anymore. I used to read a lot, but not much anymore. Yeah, I'm busy.

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

I've had many coaches throughout the years. One coach I had really influenced my earliest style because they showed a lot of Karpov and Petrosian (the world champion!) games. They really kind of influenced my sense for positional play. You can see it in my games throughout the years. That was a pretty big influence, especially my earlier years, when I was a wee little child. And then we have GM Joel Benjamin who was my coach for a year, who also really influenced that positional style.

■ Thank you for your time and advice, Ruiyang!

Thanks for having me here.

BATTLE OF THE STATES – 2023 U.S. NATIONALS INVITATIONALS

Arthur Guo wins Denker with perfect score

By WIM Zoey Tang

Similarly to Ruiyang Yan, after finishing on a shared second at the U.S. Junior Championship, GM-elect Arthur Guo cruised to his victory at the Barber Tournament by winning all his games.

Arthur's impressive 6/6 score belied the sharp games it took to get there. The race wasn't finished even at the very last round, with Arthur leading by only a half-point over the eventual third-place finisher IM-elect Gus Huston.

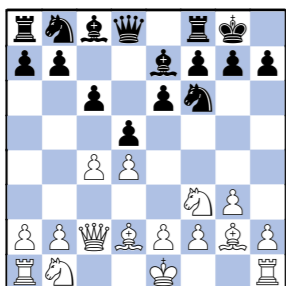
E11

Gus Huston	2439
Arthur Guo	2517

Grand Rapids 2023
Notes by Arthur Guo

This final round had taken an unusual importance as not only would I clinch the Denker for the second year in a row, it would be a nice way to finish off a very productive summer for me. Before the Invitationals, I had achieved the most out of six back-to-back tournaments across Europe and the USA, earning my Grandmaster title and placing a close second at the Junior Closed in the process. I was determined to end my remarkable journey on a high note. In the way was newly minted IM Gus Huston, whom I've had trouble playing against several times at Nationals. However, the tournament situation played in my favor. Entering this game, I had the sole lead with 5/5 with my opponent half a point behind. If anything, I knew that my opponent was thinking of snatching the first place prize, so I would use that to my advantage.

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 d5 4.g3 The first surprise. My opponent has, as of recently, leaned toward d4 more often than not, but has never deployed the Catalan.
4...♟b4+ 5.♟d2 ♟e7 6.♟g2 c6 7.♟c2 0-0



2023 U.S. NATIONALS INVITATIONALS

Final Standings – 2023 Denker 6 rounds (50 players)

1 Arthur GUO	.....6
2 Maximilian LU	.....5
3-5 Gus HUSTON, Sharvesh DEVIPRASATH, Terry LUO	.....4½
6-13 Vishnu VANAPALLI, Levon HE, Evan PARK, Nicolas DE LA COLINA, Rohit GUHA, Luke YE, Jason WANG, Hersh SINGH	.....4

Final Standings – 2023 Barber 6 rounds (49 players)

1-3 Erick ZHAO, Brewington HARDAWAY, Jasmine SU	.....5
4-7 Eric FENG, Ronen WILSON, Henry DENG, Sihan TAO	.....4½
8-12 Yiding LU, Andrew JIANG, Anjaneya RAO, Austin TANG, Vaibhav KALPAKA	.....4

Final Standings – 2023 Rockefeller 6 rounds (51 players)

1-3 John ABRAHAM, Andrew JING, Harshin JAGIRAPU	.....5
4-8 Aiden LIU, Harvey HANKE, Vijay ANANDH, Mason LI, Anmay CHAUDHURY	.....4½
9-10 Bryan LIN, Glenn ZHANG	.....4

8.h4!?! Another interesting decision by my opponent, but I wasn't startled. As of three years ago, the computer has showed us that moving the rook pawn forward is often very useful in a myriad of positions. Frequently, in these closed Catalans, h4 is the top move of the engine. I must say, however, I was a bit surprised my opponent played it so early. 8.0-0 ♟bd7 9.♟d1 is the topical mainline.

8...♟bd7 9.♟c3!?! The traditional Catalan way of spicing things up.

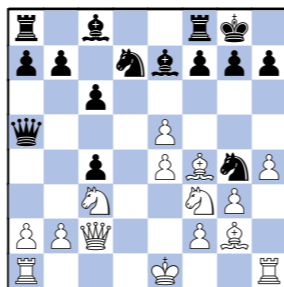
9...dxc4 Only natural. During the game, I felt certain this was the logical continuation, especially when many positions come to mind where White has already achieved a comfortable position from the opening before committing the knight to c3.

10.e4? A sign of lack of understanding of the opening. Often Black has the theme of ...e6-e5 in response to White's central advancement. In this case, it works perfectly, with the white king still in the center. 10.♟d1 was best and it's a game.

10...e5! 11.dxe5 ♟g4 12.♟f4 ♟a5?

Impulsive. As natural as regaining the pawn is, this move gives way most of Black's advantage.

12...♟c5! was by far the best continuation. A decisive advantage as Black's queenside majority is lethal and the future knight jump to d3 will restrict every White's piece. 13.0-0 b5 14.♟ad1 ♟b6-+.



13.e6? Missing a resource, my opponent returns the favor. After 13.0-0 ♟dxe5 14.♟xe5 ♟xe5 15.♟d5!, White equalizes.

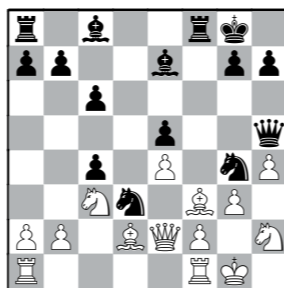
13...fxe6?! Not precise. 13...♟c5 was best. 14.exf7+ ♟xf7 15.0-0 ♟d3-+ and White's position is a mess.

14.♟e2 ♟c5?! Most natural, but not the most accurate. 14...b5! In hindsight, this is the move that would have squashed any complications.

The point is that ...e5 is unstoppable and Black can unravel all his pieces to the most optimal squares. 15.0-0 e5 16.♟d2 ♟b6-+ with ...♟c5 and ...♟df6 coming.

15.0-0 ♟d3 16.♟d2 ♟c7? Another indecisive choice. My opponent thought a lot before his last move but I couldn't fully grapple with the best plan to execute my advantage. Looking a bit further would have led me to a swifter conversion.

16...♟h5! is an unnatural move, walking straight into a pin. However, after 17.♟h2 e5 18.♟f3

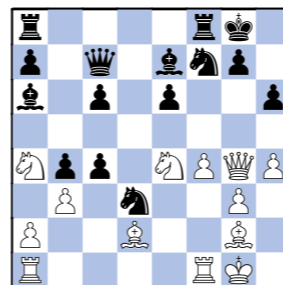


18...♟xf3! is the point, although not easy to see from afar. 19.♟xf3 ♟e6-+ and Black's attack is beyond devastating.

17.e5 A good practical choice to muddy the waters.

17...♟gxe5 18.♟g5 h6 19.♟ge4 b5 20.f4 ♟f7 21.b3 b4 22.♟a4 ♟a6 Very natural, but a bit concerning during the

game, as I am moving a crucial defender of my king to the other side of the board. 23.♟g4



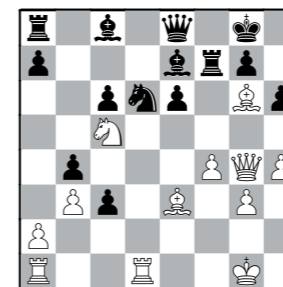
23...♟d7?? Looks natural, but is a huge blunder.

23...♟d6! was the cleanest and what I was considering for a long time, but didn't have the guts to play. 24.♟xe6+ The pawn is nothing as the king sidesteps and Black's pieces are no longer hindered by the e6 pawn. 24...♟h8 25.♟g6 ♟ad8-+ Finally, all Black's pieces have come to life.

24.♟e3 c3 25.♟h2?? During the game I thought this was very natural: the king sidesteps from any possible checks and forces Black to make a move. Thankfully, I had foreseen a very elegant way to end the game.

25.♟fd1! was the only saving move, although difficult to commit to as the rook willingly let's Black's passed c-pawn move to the second rank.

25...♟e8 (25...c2?! simply loses the pawn after 26.♟d2±) 26.♟ec5 White's only hope is to trade off the monster knight on d3. 26...♟xc5 27.♟xc5 ♟c8 28.♟e4 ♟d6 29.♟g6 ♟f7

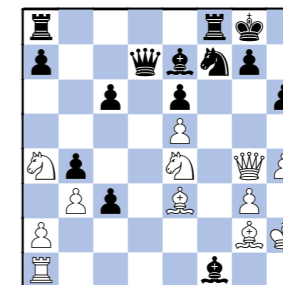


30.♟xe6 (30.♟f3 probably would have put more pressure on a human in a real game. It seems as though Black holds on after 30...e5 31.♟f2 exf4 32.♟xf7+ ♟xf7 33.♟xc6 fxg3 34.♟xg3 ♟b7) 30...♟f8 31.♟xd6 ♟xd6 32.f5 ♟e7 33.♟xf7+ ♟xf7 34.♟d1 ♟f8 35.♟d8 ♟b7 36.♟xa8 ♟xa8= and the dust settles to equality.

25...♟de5! Once on the board, I took a

deep breath as the final outcome was never in doubt from here on.

26.fxe5 ♟xf1



27.♟xf1 27.♟f6+ doesn't work, because of 27...♟xf6 28.exf6 ♟e5-+.

27.♟ac5 looks as though White crashes through, but Black has a cheeky intermediate move. 27...♟xe5-+.

27...♟xe5 28.♟xf8+ ♟xf8 29.♟h5 ♟f5 30.♟e2 ♟d3 31.♟xd3 ♟xd3 32.♟axc3 bxc3 33.♟xc3 ♟c5 34.♟d2 ♟b4 35.♟g1 ♟f2 36.a3 ♟c5

White resigned

And with this win I achieved a perfect 6/6 score in the Denker, capping off an exhausting but undoubtedly unforgettable summer for me!

Interview with Arthur Guo

ON TOP OF A SERIES OF SUMMER ADVENTURES – DAD ORGANIZED, SON DELIVERED!

Arthur shared his impressions on his busy, but very specific summer, as he played seven back-to-back tournaments(!) – crossing the 2500 Elo mark, completing requirements for his GM title, coming second at the U.S. Junior Championship and winning the Denker tournament of High School champions. He also revealed his future plans, and more...

■ Congrats on achieving the GM title! How does it feel to achieve what I assume was one of your lifelong goals?

It feels good. It was definitely a relief when I finally got it. I started chess when I was like six and a half years old and I've always wanted to be a grandmaster. And honestly, before this summer it didn't really look like I would get it because I was only around 2450. I still had to make a big jump. And this summer, it kind of just came together. The first tournament I played in Europe was good, and then the second one was also good, and then so on. So, yeah, it's definitely a relief. I'm very happy.

■ Did you change anything in your training routine in order to achieve this jump?

Honestly, I was so busy with school junior year. I put off chess for a whole year because I had other extracurriculars, and then the

month leading up to summer I had tons of exams. I'm actually really surprised; I spent a lot of time in my sophomore year on chess, and the results weren't that great, but junior year was basically the opposite. So I didn't really do anything special per se, but I guess I handled the games and preparation more maturely. I think that contributed to my rapid growth this summer.

■ Your summer was filled with achievements. Besides achieving GM, congratulations on winning the Denker [National Tournament of High School Champions] for the second year in a row! How has your experience been at this tournament over the years?

It's been good. The Denker Invitational is always kind of nice because there are a few strong players that you know really well and who also are your friends, so to come out on top is always a good thing for your confidence.

■ The format of the Denker is pretty unique because the champion of every state gets to go to the invitational. What do you think of it?

I think it's like a great tradition, especially for high schoolers. I remember going to the Barber in middle school and also enjoying it as well. It's great to have a closed invitational for not just the strong players, but also the other players that represent the best of their state.

■ What are your goals now that you've reached GM?

I don't really have any (laughs). I mean, I played four tournaments

