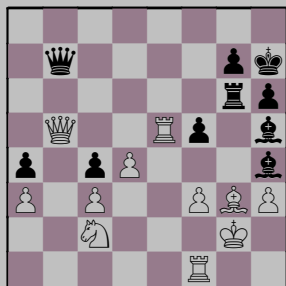


and partially because I knew this was my last chance.

38.♔xg2 ♖g6+ 39.♙g3 39.♔f2?? ♜xf3+ 40.♔e1 ♜d1+ 41.♔f2 ♜d2+ 42.♞e2 ♜xe2 mate.

39...♙h4 40.♜xb5

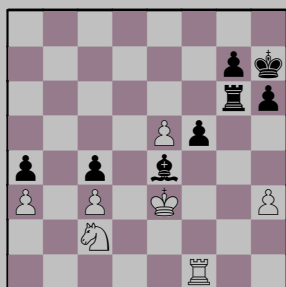


40...♙xf3+! The simplest continuation. 40...♞xg3+? 41.♔h2 ♙xf3 42.♜xb7 ♖g2+ 43.♔h1 ♙xb7 44.♘e3 ♖c2+ 45.♔g1 ♖xc3-+ is also winning, but it's not clear.

41.♔f2 41.♞xf3?? ♖xg3+ 42.♔h2 ♜xf3-+.

41...♙xg3+ 42.♔e3 ♙xe5 42...♞b6! Denying the trade of queens with tempo. White's king in the center will be too vulnerable.

43.♜xb7 ♙xb7 44.dxe5 ♙e4



At this point, we were both low on time, so I was pretty confident in my winning chances (despite the fact that Black is only up one pawn).

45.♘b4 ♖e6 46.♔d4 g5 47.♘d5 ♔g6 48.♞f2 ♖e8 49.♔xc4 ♖xe5 50.♘b6 ♙c6 51.♔d4 ♖e4+ 52.♔c5 ♙e8 53.♘c4 f4 54.♘d6 ♖e3 55.♘xe8 ♖xe8

The DGT transmission cut off after this, but it's a relatively simple win with the connected passers on the kingside (black can even sacrifice the rook for the c-pawn once the g- and f-pawns are pushed far enough). **Black won** My one-trick pony worked, though I certainly hope to avoid similar situations in the future!

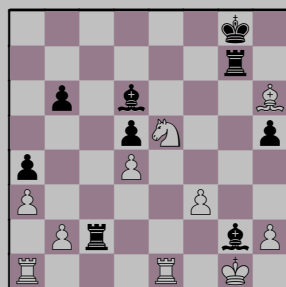
Another surprise occurred this round when Iris drew against fifth-seed (and eventual third-place finisher) WCM Angela Liu from an originally winning position. "Winning", of course, being the engine's

words; in reality it's hard to convert aggressive tactical positions without the ability to calculate thousands of moves per second.

This game and another draw in round seven ultimately cost Iris the title by half a point, but she still played some amazing chess along the way.

Chloe Gaw	1891
Iris Mou	2106

NAJ Girls' Championship, Dulles 2023



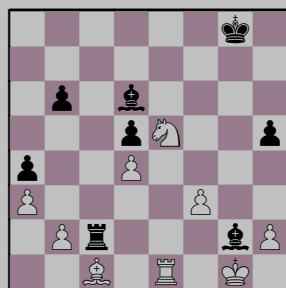
Iris had a great attacking game earlier, though, by this point, it has mostly dissipated. Chloe's ♙h6 move was a nice touch, as now it seems that Black's rook is forced off the critical g-file.

40...♞h7?! 40...♙xe5! Staying on the g-file (and maintaining threats of a discovered attack) is very important.

41.♞xe5 ♖g6 42.♙g5 ♙xf3? Yes, it is an opposite-colored bishop endgame, but there are still rooks on board. White's weak queenside pawns and Black's active rook should be enough to claim an advantage.

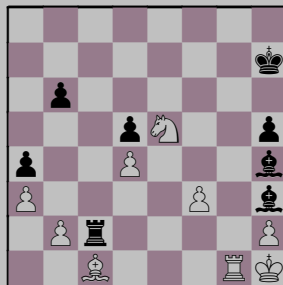
41.♞ac1 ♖hc7 42.♞xc2 ♖xc2 With the position simplified further and the threat to the king neutralized, White looks well on the way to equality.

43.♙c1? Too greedy. The bishop is much less active after this move, and it wastes a much-needed tempo. 43.♞c1 ♖xb2 44.♞c6 Counterattack! 44...♙xa3 45.♞c7=.



43...♙e7? 43...♙h3! threatening ...♞g2+ was more powerful. After 44.♔h1 h4 45.♞g1+ ♔h7?, all of White's pieces are restricted.

44.♞d1 ♙h3! 45.♔h1 45.♘d3! A cute defensive maneuver. 45...♙h4 46.♘f4? 45...♙h4 46.♞g1+ ♔h7



47.♘f7?? Aiming to counterattack, which is usually the right idea, but unfortunately not so in this position. White's pieces are not in place while Black's bishop pair is already breathing down the king's neck. 47.♘d3, once again guarding f2 and preparing ♘f4, would be equal.

47...♙f2 48.♘g5+ ♔g6 Looks scary, but Black's bishop is attacking the rook.

49.♞d1 49.♘h3+ ♙xg1-+.

49...♞xc1! 50.♞xc1 ♔xg5 51.♞c3 ♔f4 52.b3 axb3 53.♞xb3 ♙xd4 54.♞d3 ♙e3 55.♞b3 ♔xf3 56.♞b2 d4 57.a4 d3 58.a5 ♙f2 **White resigned**

Another example of persistence and waiting for the right moment to strike by Iris, typical of her games in this tournament. The king can be attacked even in the endgame! This game propelled Iris to an impressive 7½/9 score.

North American Junior Girls' Championship
Dulles, VA, December 19-23, 2023
(9 rounds, 32 players)

1. Zoey TANG	8
2. Iris MOU	7½
3-5. Angela LIU, Julia TSUKERMAN (CAN), Aasa Dommalapati	6
6-7. Jenny ZHU, April Yunwei ZHONG (CAN)	5½
8-12. Chloe GAW, Jwalanthi RAM, Cindy QIAO (CAN), Lilian WANG, Sophie LI	5

In the end, the podium finishers closely reflected the starting ranks: myself in first (WGM norm!), Iris in second (not winning any additional titles/norms, having already obtained the WIM norm), and Angela in third (direct WFM title and WIM norm). But clearly, the specific games were much more complicated than the results suggested.



Interview with **Carissa Yip**

By Zoey Tang

■ **Hi Carissa, welcome! You've had an amazing year so far, notably winning both the U.S. Women's Championship and the North American Junior. Did you do anything special or change anything in your training routine to achieve this?**

Honestly, not really. I feel like I've been doing sort of the same thing that I usually do and it clicked together pretty well for the U.S. Women's. But one change that I made is that, while I usually don't really spend that much time on chess during school, U.S. Women's was right at the beginning of the school year for me. I was skipping a few weeks of school there and I was coming off a summer filled with chess tournaments. Right before the tournament, literally days before the tournament started, I finished up another tournament in Mexico (the World Junior Girls') and that really helped me warm up and shake off some of the rust. When you haven't really been playing for a while, you tend to blunder a lot more and just play worse overall. So, that was a big thing for me. I also did well in that tournament and I was pretty proud of my play, so I had more confidence going into U.S. Women's.

■ **I was following your games during the World Junior; you did really well! Going more into the North American Junior, the tournament that just finished. This was your last year playing because of the age cutoff. Did that influence your mentality at all going into the tournament?**

It's definitely my last year to play a ton of junior tournaments, so it's a little bittersweet. This is the first time that I've played North American Junior actually, and I think knowing it was my last year didn't really change much. I usually go into every tournament really hoping to win it, and this was the same.

■ **You mentioned that you wanted to win the tournament. But obviously it**

was really steamrolling. I fought my way back towards the top of the standings, and then I felt a lot better because I knew that the tournament was still in my hands. I was probably going to have to beat the tournament leaders at that point, but it was under my control.

■ **Did you know before the last round that you were in a must win situation? Because if you drew, your tiebreaks would have been bad.**

I knew that. My tiebreaks were really bad compared to everyone else's because of my first round loss. So it was a must win situation for me, but I felt pretty good about it. It's sort of like the whole tournament banks on me beating a 2200 as Black and I was like, okay, there's been worse odds before, so hopefully it'll be okay.

■ **But then the way that first game progressed, you got a much worse position out of the opening. What was your thought process at that time? I think I got into my head**

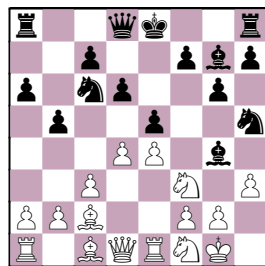
Matured as a Player, and as a Person

was much more difficult after you lost your first round, which was a big upset. How did you feel after losing that first round, and how did you bounce back?

During that first round, I feel like I was super in my head and I was spending a lot of time on very simple moves. I was like "maybe there's something more complicated or more challenging for my opponent here," that sort of thing, and I ended up really low on time. Once the position got critical I didn't have the time to handle it and navigate it. As for how I bounced back, right after the game I was just really

done. I thought, man, I might as well withdraw from this tournament because I have no chances of winning now; there's no point and clearly I'm really out of shape and I don't want to lose more rating. But then I was like no, I can't withdraw after round one, it's too much. But if I lose another game I'm out. That was my mentality. I really wanted to just regain some rating from the tournament. I wasn't super focused on winning by then, but it just so happened that I kept winning my games. And then going into the last day, I realized, oh okay, there's a pretty good shot, I guess, because no one at the top

again in the opening and I played this really dumb sort of a ...♙g4-d7 thing; I hadn't calculated it properly. I got a little confused, because usually White wants to play h3, and I thought that ♘bd2, as what happened in the game, was a little early. So, I tried to figure out a way to punish it, because the point is after ...♙g4, there's annoying stuff going on with the d4 pawn and all that. But, I forgot that with this whole ...♙g4, if White just plays h3, I can't really go after the free pawn, because of these sort of ideas with e5 and such. I'm sure you don't remember the specifics of the game, but maybe it'll help.

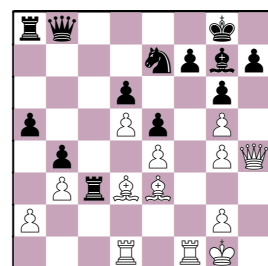
**■ I have a general idea of what happened.**

And so it was just bad, because I lost a tempo. White gets in a really useful move, h3. Another thing is White gets extra time to play moves like ♖e3 and ♗d2, and then that pretty much forces either an exchange of the dark square bishops or gaining critical space on the king side, which is really bad for Black. And usually, without these extra tempi, Black has time to sort of shore up the kingside. They play ...h6, ...♗h7, they could generate an attack on the queenside faster, that sort of thing. So, the tempo is really critical. Maybe not as critical as in a really sharp opening, but, definitely, still in the Ruy Lopez. I was not pleased with my position, because it was super hard for me to generate play and I felt I sort of had to wait around for white to make a plan and then figure out how to react to that. Obviously, White has a really good position, but he also has to figure out how to convert it into some sort of attack, and I think he was doing pretty well. But I also felt that if the position opened up, I would eventually have my chance, and that did end up happening.

■ So from what I'm hearing, it's all very logical — analyzing the position and evaluating it for what it was. Did result-oriented thoughts like "oh, I have to win this game, but, then, I have this worse position" ever enter your mind during the game?

Yeah, for sure. After the opening I was kind of like, "oh, I really hope I don't lose, and if I draw, I guess that's not ideal", but the tie breaks are based off of how your previous opponents score, right? So, I

thought maybe, even if I draw, maybe all of my opponents will win their games, all maybe my tie breaks will suddenly, miraculously, become really good, so it's not hopeless. Basically, I knew that I just couldn't lose.

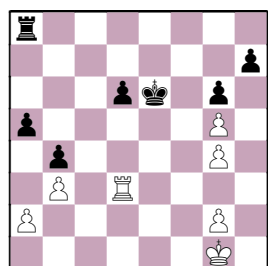


Then the critical moment when I got my shot in was when I had this ...♗xd5, I believe, piece sacrifice. And I spent a long time on

I'm not Magnus, obviously, but it was a hopeful thought that was keeping me going. If Magnus can win this, I can, too.

this move and part of it was because I was thinking about this whole draw thing, like you were saying, because I could sort of see what ended up happening in the game. White has a variety of options, of course, but the position ends up simplified a bit and it's probably equal. White has some ways to get into a drawn rook endgame from what I saw in my calculations, and so I thought, okay, this is a draw, assuming best play from White. It was kind of my best shot regardless, because otherwise I'm just not doing super well in the position. It turned out okay for me because I don't think my opponent Daniel found the best continuation. The problem in the endgame is that material's equal, but White's pawn structure is really bad on the kingside, and I have a passed center pawn. These were sort of the lines

that were going through my mind — White's extra pawn is in one of the tripled pawns on the king side while my extra pawn is a passer in the center, so I thought I would still have good chances there.



Basically, it was out in the open. I didn't want to have to do my best just to hold on and not lose. This format, with no second time control, means that nothing is ever really clear. So, I was feeling okay about everything. Even after the opening I was trying to keep my cool because I thought, you know what, Magnus would still win this position. I'm not Magnus, obviously, but it was a hopeful thought that was keeping me going. If Magnus can win this, I can, too.

Instead of worrying that my rating is the same as it's always been, I feel like I've matured as a player, as a person. I've been able to make better objective decisions over the board and these sorts of things.

■ This victory earned you your first GM norm. How does it feel to achieve this important milestone, and how will you continue from here?

It didn't really sink in fully until later, but it feels really good. I've been an IM for a while — the last four or five years now. It's actually kind of funny, because I've gone into a lot of slumps before. They lasted two, three

years and then my rating would be rising again. But I feel like as I got older, and maybe also as a consequence of COVID sort of freezing time (at least for me), it's still weird to think about because I'm like, "wow, back in 2019 I was the same rating I am now. So what has really changed in my chess? Have I really improved?"

Having sort of an external boost of a GM norm is very motivating. It is a big milestone for me and it makes me reflect back on my progress as a chess player in a bit more of a positive light. Instead of worrying that my rating is the same as it's always been, I feel like I've matured as a player, as a person. I've been able to make better objective decisions over the board and these sorts of things. And maybe it's not reflecting in my rating, but, for example, this whole losing the first round and then being able to bounce back is a big deal for me. A few years ago, I don't think I would have really been able to do that.

■ Moving on to general questions. What does a typical day look like for you?

Typically I'm off at school and college. I'm studying computer science and I'm also hoping to get a degree in comparative literature or philosophy. I'll wake up around 10 or 11. My roommate and I are kind of late risers, and also I'm not a super big morning person. I brush my teeth, take a shower, whatever, and then my friends and I go to lunch together at the dining hall. After lunch, I usually have a couple classes. I'll go to my classes and then maybe on my way to the class or on my way back from class, I'll get myself a little sweet treat from the coffee shop, because a girl always needs her sweet treat, as you know, Zoey. And then, this will be around mid-afternoon, late afternoon, depending on the day, because of my class schedule. I'll start doing some work in either my room or out in a common room with some friends. Dinner, more work until the evening. My friends

and I sometimes have movie nights or such, or just hang out in someone's room together and we all chat. I do a bit more work, and then my roomie and I sometimes have some girl talk before bed. You know how it is, a little gossip session, and then we go to bed and then do it all over again. Also, after classes or after dinner, we have a little bus around campus that takes us around Palo Alto and you know I'm a little sweet treat gal. So, I like to go to Trader Joe's. We have a little plaza with Trader Joe's and all of these cute little shops and bakeries. I like to go there and get my groceries for the week. Sometimes I like to go to Target. You know I love Target.

■ So where does chess come into this?

The chess fits in kind of depending on the day. I teach lessons, so this is mostly where chess comes into play. I do a couple lessons, a few hours a week or so. They're either small-group or 1-on-1 lessons, and if anyone is interested they can email me at carissa.yipchess@gmail.com.

■ How does college coursework compare to high school coursework?

I went to a pretty academically rigorous high school and an important point of it was it's supposed to be good preparation for college, which I feel like it was. A major thing about college for me is that you get to be really in control of your own schedule. So right now I've been mostly taking afternoon classes. And another thing is you don't have to stick to a super rigid curriculum. At my high school we had this list of subjects that we had to take, while in college it's a lot more flexible, so I can take a ton of fun electives. Next quarter I'm taking this Asian-American autobiography writing workshop, which is super exciting. I'm also taking a game theory course. There's a lot more freedom and sort of figuring out where you want to invest your time and energy into. I think overall, the coursework is more high-level

American Chess Magazine team had the pleasure to be there when Carissa achieved one of her earliest international successes — sharing first in the U12 Girls' Section at the 2015 World Youth Championship in Greece (together with today's Women's Candidate Nurgul Salimova from Bulgaria, who had better tie-breaks then). Here is Carissa with a special gift — Chess Informant 125. Did you know that the ACM team was running the Informant from 2010 till the end of 2017?



and challenging. But it takes up less time than high school, if that makes sense, because in high school you're taking so many classes at once. In high school you're spending your entire day from 7 am to 3 pm in class, whereas in college the average course load is probably around four or five classes. I'm taking maybe a few hours of classes each day.

■ How does this apply when you're traveling or taking time off for tournaments?

This is a great question. In high school, the administration at my school was really strict about not taking more than five days off during the school year. So when I played the U.S. Women's — I think twice in my four years of high school — I had to appeal to the board of

Fine, I'll learn this King's Indian, but I'm telling you it doesn't look good. Now it's my main opening.

trustees. It was a long process and they had to grant special exceptions. And then the U.S. Women's would be the only tournament that I could play in the year, because I was using up my five days plus extra. That was a big thing for me in high school because I wasn't able to play that much during the school year.

In college there's definitely a lot more flexibility. For example, I missed almost four weeks of school in the beginning of my school year because I was playing World Junior Girls and the U.S. Women's. And it was

okay, because I was taking classes where lectures were recorded and homework was assigned online and sent in remotely. I just had to let my teachers know and they were super chill, and that was sort of all you really have to do in college. You just have to let your teachers know and work it out with the professor, but you don't need to actually go to the administration or a board of trustees. So it's definitely a lot easier in that sense, the increase in freedom.

You can excel in chess and also go to school and have an academic career.

■ Do you plan to pursue chess professionally?

Definitely still thinking on that one. I'm not super sure, but I definitely want to achieve my grandmaster title. Probably I won't ever really quit chess, but I'm not sure if it will be my main career.

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

Good question. When I was first starting out, there was not much support, especially systemically, for girls in chess. But definitely, in the last decade or so, there's been more awareness and trying to get female players into the game. For example, we have US Chess' Women in Chess initiative, which was headed by Jen Shahade, and I think that's made huge strides in the game. When I was checking these stats a year or two ago, the female membership in

USCF has jumped drastically, like doubled in size or even more, and obviously such a huge part in that is due to initiatives like these. It's really important to get more women players in the game.

Another thing is that once we do have more female players in the game, we have to make sure that it's a safe and welcoming environment for them. In the last year or so, we've had a ton of controversies; we've had a lot of things come to light. I feel that chess in particular is more backwards than the regular world, more sexist and misogynistic overall, because it really is like a boys club. We know the normal world is already backwards, but I feel like chess in particular is definitely so, and part of this is how chess has this aura around it of being a very intellectual game. And I don't think it's true at all, because being a grandmaster does not automatically make you a smart person. I'm an IM, but I'm not a particularly smart person, you know what I mean?

■ No, I don't. (laughs)

There's so much to be learned in life besides chess. And chess is not really a marker of intelligence in any way, though I guess nothing honestly on its own is. Anyway, we have this sort of the context of how chess exists in the world, like oh, it's this really intellectual and high brow game. And then we have women chess players who, if we look at the ratings, the highest rated female chess players are nowhere near close to Magnus Carlsen. This



isn't because of some sort of inherent difference between men and women, but there are people who say that there is.

We know Nigel Short has said crazy stuff about women in chess, like our brains are just hardwired differently, and there are people who agree with him. It's kind of scary to think about, because this is a viewpoint that one person can say out loud and other people will also verbally agree with, out on Twitter or in the world to their friends. It's scary that someone could think something like this and then share it with the world and also have support for it. But with this context, it just makes it so much easier for someone to say something like, wow, the highest-rated woman player is nowhere near the highest-rated male player, in this game that is known to require incredible amounts of intelligence, and this must be because women simply aren't as smart as men.

I just feel this facet emphasizes an underlying misogyny in our world already, it allows it to come aboveground under the pretense of truthsaying, and this is partially why sexism runs rampant more so in chess. People are like, look at the facts, look at the rating lists, and they allow it to skew their perception of women and ability when really that's not what is at question here, I mean, numbers or discrete data points are never enough to describe a complex issue. But we can look at the number of women in chess versus the number of men, see how this would obviously affect the number of women who make it to grandmaster or even further beyond that. And we can think about the kind of culture and community that is developed as a result. This disparity affects younger girls in the game, at an age when chess is also a social activity, and even as they grow older and become more serious about the game, would they really want to give up so much of their life to a chess world that might not really support them?

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

Definitely the first people I'm going to say are my parents, who've supported me since the beginning. My dad takes me to all of my tournaments and such, and he's played a huge role in my training, as well as in my development as a chess player. Even now he still gives me advice about the game.

I would also say my coaches over the years. I haven't really had a coach for a few years now. I've worked with people on and off, but one influential coach was GM Andriy Vovk. He was my coach for many years, and he recommended me to play the King's Indian. When he showed it to me, I was like, "yeah, I don't know if I really like that. It looks kind of weird." My dad said, "Carissa, you never want to try new things, this is the problem." And I said "Fine, I'll learn this Kings Indian, but I'm telling you it doesn't look good." Now it's my main opening, so that's kind of a funny story.

I have another silly story along these same lines. I feel like there were quite a few people who have inadvertently told me which opening to play off-handedly when I was

like eight or something, I was just like, okay, I'll take your advice, because why not? And I still play the opening to this day. For example, one of the lines that I like playing against the Najdorf is this 6.♗g5 variation. It's the main line, but White has a ton of different lines to play against the Najdorf, and this is the main one that I've utilized for ten years maybe. I was at my local chess club and I played a Najdorf game. I think I lost, clearly didn't know the theory, and, while I was analyzing the game, there's this 1900 there and he said, "oh, if you want to get a really sharp game, the sharpest, most dangerous line in the Najdorf, play this ♗g5 move." I was like, okay, and then that's what I ended up playing for the next 10 years.

Other influential people include, obviously, people I've looked up to. I remember when I was first starting out super young, this is around when Hou Yifan was winning the women's world championship and I was like, that's so sick because she's 18 or whatever, and becoming the world women's champion, and then she ended up going to Oxford and becoming a professor too. It's really cool, because it shows that you can have both. You can excel in chess and also go to school

and have an academic career. Also, other great women players like Judit Polgar and Susan Polgar.

Jennifer Shahade has been big for women's chess in the United States overall, so I have to give her a shoutout. Who else? This is going to sound kind of silly. Irina Krush and Anna Zatonskih and Tatev Abrahamyan, all these players that I looked up to when I was younger, were influential to me as well. My favorite tournament to watch was always the U.S. Women's Championship. I would run home after school and sit in front of the broadcast, and I would be watching all the commentators talk about the game and be super excited about the tournament overall. They're the great American women players in the last few decades, so they're also big inspirations to me.

This is going to again sound really cheesy, but the friends I've had in chess. Chess is such a hard game mentally. When you lose, it hits you hard, harder than you expect, and sometimes you're like, oh my gosh, I should just quit. I don't want to deal with this sort of pressure anymore, that sort of thing. So it's also important to have a lot of sources of emotional support and people who can understand how you feel.

■ **Probably this goes for all parents of chess players, but just to be supportive and not overwhelm or pressure them.**

If Nigel Short can say something sexist and get open support for it, then there are even more who agree silently. Anyway, this is all really to say that there has been so much work done to get more women in the game, to make chess an inclusive and welcoming

space. It's extremely important work. But also this is something that each one of us in the chess community should all reflect upon, grapple with, hopefully really care about, but that work isn't finished, and I don't think it will be for a while.

■ **For sure. Last question: given the misogyny in chess that you mentioned, what specific advice do you have for parents of young female chess players?**

Probably this goes for all parents of chess players, but just to be supportive and not overwhelm or pressure them. My parents never put pressure on me, they always made it

clear that whenever I wanted to quit, I could just quit. That chess was an activity of my choice, and if it no longer as fun or I just didn't want to play anymore, I could just stop. And being a chess player is hard, but I do think it's even more difficult to be a girl in chess. For parents of female chess players, I think it's important for them to understand that kids can still be affected by these sorts of issues in ways they might not see or comprehend, and support and love is more important than ever.

■ **Thank you for your time and insightful advice!**
Of course. ■

2023 SPICE CUP: AN EYE-OPENING JOURNEY

13-YEAR-OLD TEXAN PRODIGY BECOMES NEW AMERICAN GM

THE NEXT BOBBY FISCHER? MEET ANDY WOODWARD!



▲ GM-elect Andy Woodward receives the winner's trophy from Webster Team Coach GM Le Quang Liem. Photo by Anastasia Wyzywany

FM Nathan Resika has performed roles in 7 languages in opera houses throughout the United States. He has performed Don Giovanni, Leporello, Figaro, King Philip, and most other leading bass roles with full orchestra, in Costume, numerous times with well-known companies. In 2015 he was one of eight finalists out of 150 singers in the New Jersey Verismo Opera Competition. He made his Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium solo debut as Bass Soloist in Beethoven's Mass in C in 2018. Throughout the pandemic he sang recitals with Pianist Alexandra Beliakovich (Beauty and the Bass) and will share some classic songs from some of those concerts as well as new additions to his repertoire.



▲ 1960-born Nathan Resika at the SPICE Cup

From my perspective as a senior coach, it's not often that a talent like this comes along – a future star in the world of chess. His name is Andy Woodward, a 13-year-old chess prodigy from Texas. He won the tournament with a grace and ease that belies his young age, marking him as one to watch in the years to come.

■ By FM Nathan Resika

Upon learning that I'd be honored for contributions to the combined fields of music and chess in the "Sound Moves" exhibit at the World Chess Hall of Fame last year, I wanted to visit it, as well as play in a Saint Louis Tournament, for the first time ever, at some point during the year. The opportunity finally presented itself shortly before Christmas, when I was invited by a friend to visit as well as play in the SPICE Cup at Webster University. This tournament was a nine-round Swiss Open event for players at least 2200 USCF or 2000 FIDE, and titled players. As an FM, I was given a nice deal on entry, which was a pleasant surprise.

Six grandmasters took part at this year's SPICE Cup: top seeded Armenian Aram Hakobyan, then Illia Nyzhnyk and teen-GM Christopher Yoo, alongside heavy hitters Yasser Quesada Perez, Harsha Bharathakoti, and Praveen Balakrishnan. In total, there were also 11 IMs, 13 FMs, 1 WGM, 1 WIM and 1 WFM.

Surprisingly, the event was won by 13-year-old Andy Woodward, an IM from Texas! Andy played very confident

and fearless chess throughout. His impressive score of 5 wins and 4 draws included wins over favorites – GM Hakobyan and GM Yoo. His result would have been a GM-norm if not for rules on the percentage of foreign players he played. He may very well be the, or one of the, next U.S. superstars, along with Abhimanyu Mishra, who was originally scheduled to play here, but eventually ended up not participating.