IN THE ARENA

One of America's top GMs and teachers tests himself against the world's best in Qatar.

BY **GM GREGORY KAIDANOV**

Gregory
KAIDANOV
🇺🇸 GM 2554

Jorden
VAN FOREEST
GM 2707

WHEN I LEARNED THAT Magnus Carlsen was going to play in an open tournament in Doha, Qatar, I immediately marked those dates in my calendar. At first, there was no response from the organizers, and after some weeks, I gave up on the idea. However, and to my great pleasure, the invitation eventually came.

Generally speaking, I prefer to not play two tournaments in a row, but since I committed to the World Senior Team Championship earlier on, I had to face the reality of playing back-to-back tournaments with only 10 days in between. I know many professional grandmasters will laugh at me; today, it seems to be a common belief that 10 days between tournaments is a luxury! To prepare myself, I spent the time in between tournaments mostly solving calculation puzzles.

I knew the Qatar Masters would be very strong, but it was a pleasant surprise to find myself as the #35 seed with my FIDE rating of 2554. The top seeds, besides Carlsen, were GMs Hikaru Nakamura and Anish Giri. There was a huge Indian delegation, boasting 75 (!!) players out of total 158, including the young stars Gukesh, Erigaisi, and Nihal Sarin. The second largest contingent was from Uzbekistan, with 14 players. Both nations showed their strength and immense promise — six of the top eight finishers represented those two countries.

At 64, I was by far the oldest player in the field. As a matter of fact, there was just one other player over the age of 40! The average age of my opponents was 22, with Magnus being the oldest at the ancient age of 32!

Already the second round produced

a huge surprise: Carlsen lost to the little-known 23-year-old Kazakh GM, Alisher Suleymenov. And it wasn't just that he lost — it would be fair to say that Magnus got crushed.

Magnus himself admitted it in his tweet, adding, "This is not to accuse my opponent of anything, who played an amazing game and deserved to win, but honestly, as soon as I saw my opponent was wearing a watch early in the game, I lost my ability to concentrate. I did ask an arbiter during the game whether watches were allowed, and he clarified that smartwatches were banned, but not analog watches. This seems to be against FIDE rules for events of this stature."

This tweet created a lot of speculation and internet memes. People were accusing Alisher of cheating, despite the fact that Carlsen himself did not. Just as we saw after the famous game Niemann – Carlsen in St. Louis, the security in tournament hall increased starting with the third round.

Here I would like to share my own method of determining whether someone used a computer assistance. This method is neither scientific nor reliable. However, it helps me to form my own opinion on the subject.

Many of my students and friends know my love for "solitaire chess," which is also known as "guess a move." The idea is familiar to *Chess Life* readers, who have been playing "solitaire chess" with Bruce Pandolfini for many years now. I took the Suleymenov – Carlsen game and tried to guess the moves for White, starting from move 15. Unless otherwise noted, my moves were identical to Suleymenov's.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E12)
GM Alisher Suleymenov (2512)
GM Magnus Carlsen (2839)
Qatar Masters (2.1), 10.12.2023

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1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. a3 Ba6 5. Qc2 Bb7 6. Nc3 c5 7. e4 cxd4 8. Nxd4 Bc5 9. Nf3 Nc6 10. b4 Be7 11. Bb2 Qb8 12. Rd1 0-0 13. Be2 d6 14. 0-0 Rc8
I didn't like this move, because all Black's major pieces are now boxed in the corner, but the engine says it is OK.

15. Rfe1
My move 15. Qb1 was not worse.

15. ... Bf8?!
Playing every game for a win means that you have to take risks. Here Magnus tried

to maintain the tension and avoid trades, but in this particular situation, the strategy backfired. Instead 15. ... Ne5 is equal.

16. Bf1 Ne7?

Magnus played these two moves very quickly; he clearly didn't sense the danger in the position. White's advantage is manageable after 16. ... Ne5 or 16. ... Rd8.

17. Nb5!
I was attracted to the Exchange sacrifice beginning with 17. Rxd6?, but it does not work. After 17. ... Qxd6 18. e5 Qd7 19. exf6 gxf6 White has nothing.

17. ... Ne8?

The ceremonial first move of the Suleymenov – Carlsen game.

Black could limit the damage with 17. … Ng6 18. Bxf6 gxf6 19. Qd3 when White has a significant advantage. Instead White's attack blossoms.

18. Ng5! Ng6 19. e5 d5 20. Qb3 Be7 21. Nxf7

I guessed 21. cxd5 with the same idea. It works as well: 21. … Bxd5 22. Rxd5 exd5 (after *22. … Bxg5 23. Rd7 Nf8 24. Rdd1* White still has a huge advantage) 23. Nxf7 transposes to the game.

21. … Kxf7 22. cxd5 Bxd5 23. Rxd5 exd5 24. Qxd5+ Kf8 25. Nd4 Nf4 26. Qf3 Kg8 27. Qxf4 Qb7 28. Nf5 b5 29. Bxb5

My move 29. Nd6 is also winning. Indeed, White's position is so good that many paths lead to Rome.

GM Jorden van Foreest

GM Alisher Suleymenov

29. … Bf8 30. Bc4+ Kh8 31. Nh6, Black resigned.

As you can see from my annotations, I guessed correctly all the key moves for White, spending about 30 minutes for moves 15 through 31. What this means, at least to me, is that the moves are not that hard to find for a grandmaster.

After two rounds I had 2/2, and I caught myself thinking (somewhat bittersweetly) "This is the last time in my life that I am ahead of Magnus Carlsen in tournament standings!" Indeed, I lost in round three to the 17-year-old GM Javokhir Sindarov, while Magnus won. But after round seven I found myself a half-point ahead of Magnus. It was in that round that I played this game, which received some attention on the internet.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT, SEMI-SLAV MERAN (D47)
GM Gregory Kaidanov (2554)
GM Jorden van Foreest (2707)
Qatar Masters (7.8), 10.18.2023

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 d5 4. e3 e6 5. Nf3 Be7

This is a little bit unusual. Normally Black plays 5. … Nbd7, and while I knew that Jorden had played 5. … Be7 in the past, I didn't look at it before the game. There were many problems in other openings that required more attention!

6. Bd3

One of the ideas of 5. … Be7 is that in case of 6. Qc2 the black knight might find a better square than d7, as can be seen in the following variation: 6. … 0-0 7. b3 dxc4 8. bxc4 c5 9. Be2 Nc6 with equality.

6. … dxc4 7. Bxc4 b5 8. Bd3 b4 9. Ne4 Nbd7

Now the game transposes to "normal" Meran variations, though I did not remember much of the theory.

10. Nxf6+ Nxf6 11. e4 Bb7 12. 0-0 0-0 13. e5 Nd7

Up to this point I just played moves that made sense to me. But here I had the oddest flashback in my mind! What I realized was that if I played 14. Be4, we would transpose into Polugaevsky – Mednis (Riga iz, 1979).

Memory is a very strange thing. Sometimes you can't remember the lines you looked at right before the game, and sometimes, like in this case, you recall what you saw in a chess magazine 44 years ago!

14. Be4 Qb6?

I was surprised, and on high alert. I knew that this was the move Mednis played, but since I hadn't looked at the game since then, I was not sure as to its evaluation. What if Jorden had analyzed this position with an engine and overturned the old theory?

I am sure Jorden had 14. … Rb8 on his computer, but just could not remember it. Now Black would equalize without many problems. What follows is just a sample line, as the moves are not forced: 15. Qc2 h6 16. Be3 Qc7 and White cannot prevent Black from playing … c6-c5. Even if White wins a pawn, Black wins it back, e.g., 17. Rac1 c5 18. Bxb7 Qxb7 19. dxc5 Bxc5 20. Bxc5 Rfc8 with equality.

15. Bg5 Bxg5?

The Polugaevsky – Mednis game went 15. … Rfe8 16. Bxe7 Rxe7 17. Qc2 (stronger is *17. Rc1! Rc8 18. Qd2 Ba6* as in Zugic – Novikov, Montreal 2004) 17. … h6 18. a3 b3 19. Qc3 c5 20. Bxb7 Qxb7 21. dxc5 Rc8 22. Qb4 Nxc5 23. Rac1 and now Mednis could have had equality with 23. … Qb6!.

In this position I sat down and took my time to think. I knew that there was no way to calculate everything perfectly, but I wanted to make sure that this "Greek gift" sacrifice at least didn't lose for me!

16. Bxh7+ Kxh7 17. Nxg5+ Kg6

Looking back at *Informant* 28, Byrne and Mednis recommend this line, calling the position "unclear." There is no such word in today's chess!

18. Qg4 f5 19. Qg3

The computer suggests 19. Qh4 instead, and the difference is found only with reference to the placement of the rook. To understand why this should be preferred is extremely difficult, but after 19. … Rh8 20. Qg3 c5 21. Rad1 cxd4 22. Nxe6+ Kf7 23. Nxd4 we begin to recognize Stockfish's "reasons." With a rook on f8, Black has … Kf7-g8 here, and without it we play Nd4xf5. It looks like a

typical computer line, which we can understand after the game, but have no chance to find at the board.

19. ... Qxd4?

Played relatively quickly. Black wants to play ... Qd4-g4 when the White attack is gone.

Instead the best defense is 19. ... c5. I was going to play 20. dxc5 Nxc5 and I was not sure whether to play Ra1-c1 or Ng5xe6+ next. The engine says both moves win.

The computer's top choice is 20. ... Qc6, which I have to admit that I did not consider. Fortunately White still has a big advantage after 21. Nxe6+ Kf7 22. Nd4 Qxg2+ 23. Qxg2 Bxg2 24. e6+ Ke7 25. Rfc1!!. True, I am not sure I would find this last move, but in any event White is still much better after 25. Kxg2.

20. Ne4+
And now it became clear that Jorden missed something, because he sank into a long think here. Note that 20. Rad1? Qg4 21. Qxg4 fxg4 22. Rxd7 Bc8 completely ruins the position for White.

20. ... Kh7 21. Qh4+!
Maybe he was expecting 21. Qh3+ Kg6 22. Qg3+ with a draw? I have to admit that from far away I also saw this line, and only when we got closer did I find 21. Qh4+.

21. ... Kg6
Or 21. ... Kg8 22. Nf6+.

22. Qg5+ Kf7 23. Rad1 Qxe5 24. Rxd7+ Kg8 25. Rxb7
And the knight on e4 cannot be taken.

25. ... Qxb2 26. Nc5 Rf7 27. Rxf7 Kxf7 28. Rd1 Qe5 29. Rd7+ Kg8 30. h4 Re8 31. Qg6, Black resigned.

As the lowest-rated player in my point group, I was paired against Carlsen in round eight. Needless to say, I was very excited.

LONDON SYSTEM (D02)
GM Magnus Carlsen (2839)
GM Gregory Kaidanov (2554)
Qatar Masters (8.1), 10.19.2023

1. d4 d5 2. Bf4
One of many openings in Magnus' repertoire.

2. ... c5 3. e3 Nc6 4. c3
I spent a few minutes here, because I was debating which system to play.

4. ... Nf6 5. Nd2 e6 6. Ngf3 cxd4 7. exd4 Nh5 8. Be3 Bd6 9. Bd3 Nf4 10. Bxf4 Bxf4 11. 0-0 0-0 12. Re1 Bd7 13. Nb3 b6 14. Qe2 g6 15. a4 f6 16. Bb5 Qc7 17. a5 Rae8
Up to this point Magnus was playing very quickly. After the game I asked him whether the moves were all theory. With a smile, he answered, "This is all more less standard."

18. g3
This was the first move Magnus really thought about, spending 11 minutes.

18. ... Bh6
After the game Magnus told me he thought 18. ... Bd6 was better. I felt that I needed to control the c1-square, not allowing the white rook to land there. As so often happens, the difference between the two moves is miniscule, with the engine preferring the game continuation by the slimmest of margins.

19. axb6 axb6 20. c4 dxc4
This was still OK, but Stockfish says I could ignore the c-pawn. At the board I didn't want to allow c4-c5. The alternative 20. ... Kh8 21. c5 e5 is equal according to the machine.

21. Qxc4 Qd6
I considered 21. ... Rc8 but I wasn't sure about 22. d5. Things are equal after 22. ... exd5 23. Qxd5+ Kh8 24. Ra4 Rfe8.

22. Ra6 Rb8

23. Nc5!

GM Magnus Carlsen

This was a complete shock, so it took me awhile to find my next move.

23. ... Nxd4!
Forced.

24. Nxd4 Qxc5 25. Ra7!
And this is another move I missed. At first I thought I was completely lost, but seeing that Magnus remained at the board (he usually walks around quite a bit) gave me a hint that perhaps there was something to find.

25. ... Rbd8!
Burning lots of time, but I correctly landed on another "only move."

26. b4! Qxc4 27. Bxc4

27. ... Rfe8?!
Right after the game Magnus told me about the magnificent 27. ... b5!!. If I had seen his plan with b4-b5, I might have found it, but to see 28. b5! was hard for me.

Peter Leko approached me at the closing ceremony and praised Magnus' play in our game, specifically noting that 28. b5! was a great move, one that was hard to anticipate at the board. This made me feel better.

After 27. ... b5!!, play continues 28. Bb3 (or *28. Bxe6+ Bxe6 29. Nxe6 Rfe8 30. Ra6*) 28. ... Rfe8 with equality in both cases.

28. b5 Bc8 29. Nc6 Rd6 30. Rc7 Bd7??
Played with just a few minutes on the clock.

I considered the necessary 30. ... Kh8!! but as I didn't see his next move, I thought that the bishop shift was fine. After 31. Ra1 Rd7 32. Rxc8 Rxc8 33. Bxe6 Rcd8 34. Bxd7 Rxd7 35. Ra8+ Kg7 36. Rb8 Bc1 37. Rxb6 Ba3 Black has good drawing chances.

31. Ra1!
Strong. I saw this only after making my move!

31. ... Bf8 32. Raa7 Bxc6 33. bxc6 Rd1+ 34. Kg2 Rc1 35. Ra4?!
Even better was 35. Bb5 Rc5 36. Ba6.

35. ... b5 36. Bxb5 Rc5 37. Bc4?!
More precise is 37. Rb4!.

37. ... Bd6?
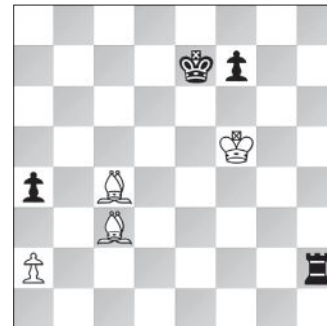Black's last chance was 37. ... f5!! although the task is still difficult, especially against a world champion.

38. Rb7 Kh8 39. Bxe6 Re7 40. Rxe7 Bxe7 41. Ra8+ Kg7 42. Ra7 Rxc6 43. Rxe7+ Kf8 44. Rf7+, Black resigned.

While I lost this game, I felt good about my play. In the last round I beat Vaishali, who at this point had already secured her third and final GM norm. Since Magnus drew the Indian GM Puranik, we ending up tying for ninth place with 12 other players, which was a great result for me, and a terrible result for him!

Before the last round the impressive young GM Arjun Erigaisi was leading with 6½/8, and he played Black against another elite talent, GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov. Arjun was under a lot of pressure the whole game, but in the end, when the worst seemed over, tragedy struck.

UNFORCED ERROR
GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov (2716)
GM Arjun Erigaisi (2712)
Qatar Masters (9.3), 10.20.2023

BLACK TO MOVE

48. ... Rh4??
Here any reasonable move would draw the game, allowing Erigaisi to tie with Yakubboev for first place. However...

49. Bf6+, Black resigned.

So it was two Uzbek grandmasters named Nodirbek who tied for first place with 7/9. GM Nodirbek Yakubboev, 21, won the tiebreak to take home the first-place trophy. Considering their countryman, GM Javokhir Sindarov, was among the six players to tie for third with 6½/9, the tournament must be seen as a huge success for Uzbek chess. Here is one final game, a nice effort from the tournament winner.

"Hey, isn't this that Twitch streamer guy? Let's get a picture!"

QUEEN'S GAMBIT, ACCEPTED (D24)
GM Nodirbek Yakubboev (2616)
GM Baskaran Adhiban (2551)
Qatar Masters (5.8), 10.15.2023

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 d5 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 Nd5 7. Nxb5 Nb6 8. Be2 Be7 9. 0-0 Nc6 10. Be3 Rb8 11. Nc3 0-0 12. a3 Bb7 13. Qc2 Na5 14. Rad1 h6 15. Nd2 Qd7 16. Nde4 Nd5 17. Bd2
After 17. Bf3 White would be on the better side of equality.

17. ... Rfd8 18. Na4?!
Better is 18. Rfe1 Nb3 19. Bxh6! gxh6 20. Bxc4 Nxc3 21. bxc3 Bd5! 22. Bd3 when White has compensation in a complex position.

18. ... Nb3 19. Qxc4 Nxd4
More precise is 19. ... Bc6! with a slight edge.

20. Qxd4 Nf4 21. Nf6+
If 21. Qxd7?! Nxe2+ 22. Kh1 Rxd7 23. Nec5 Rd5 and White cannot win the knight on e2.

21. ... Bxf6 22. Qxf4 Bg5 23. Qc4
The position is equal after 23. Qg3 Bxd2.

23. ... Bxd2 24. Nc5

24. ... Qc8?
Looking at the move times from the broadcast, Adhiban spent more than 20 minutes on this move. As it often happens, such long thoughts can result in a mistake. The reason? Before making a move you feel tired and confused. Sometimes you can't even remember all the variations you looked at!
   Better is 24. ... Qe7 with equality.

25. h4!
A very good prophylactic move. The black bishop can no longer retreat to g5. Less impressive is 25. Qc2?! Bg5 when Black is fully equal.

25. ... Ba5

Forced; otherwise White will play b2-b4 and the bishop will be trapped. If 25. ... Bd5? 26. Qc2 Ba5 27. Ba6.

26. Rxd8+ Qxd8 27. Nxb7 Rxb7 28. Rd1 Qe7??
This loses by force, but by now Adhiban did not have much time. The queen has to stay on the back rank: after 28. ... Qf8! Black has very good chances to equalize.

29. Qa6 Rxb2

(see diagram top of next column)

30. Qc8+
White's position is so winning that there are alternatives. 30. Bd3 wins, as does 30. Qxa5 Rxe2 31. Qb5! and, suddenly, the rook is trapped: 31. ... Rc2 (similar is *31. ... Re4 32. Qb8+ Kh7 33. Qb1*) 32. Qb8+ Kh7 33. Qb1.

30. ... Kh7 31. Bd3+ g6 32. Bxg6+! Kxg6
Or 32. ... fxg6 33. Rd7.

33. Qg8+ Kf5
The alternative 33. ... Kh5 is met by 34. Rd4!.

34. Qh7+ Kxe5 35. Qg7+, Black resigned.
Black resigned in view of 35. ... Qf6 36. f4+ Kf5 37. g4+ and he loses the queen. ◆

GM Gregory Kaidanov

2023 QATAR MASTERS AT A GLANCE
OCTOBER 11-20, 2023 | DOHA, QATAR

1st-2nd: GMs Nodirbek Yakubboev, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, 7/9. **3rd-8th:** GMs S.L. Narayanan, Javokhir Sindarov, Hikaru Nakamura, Arjun Erigaisi, Parham Maghsoodloo, Gukesh D, 6½. 158 players.

OTHER AMERICANS:
GMs Gregory Kaidanov, Grigory Oparin, 6/9. GM Akshat Chandra, IM Eric Rosen, 5. IM Aleksandr Ostrovskiy, 4½. IM Josiah Stearman, 3. FM Jeevan Karamsetty, 2½.

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