



Repeat Champions and Returning Players

Why the Amateur Team East keeps us coming back

BY FM ALISA MELEKHINA AND WFM LAURA SMITH

THE 2024 U.S. AMATEUR Team East (USATE) is one of the most anticipated events on the east coast chess calendar. Half reunion, half tournament, and 100% an experience like no other, USATE attracts players of every age and strength to the Hilton in Parsippany, New Jersey over President's Day weekend for three days of slow chess and general mayhem.

The main rule for the composition of USATE is that the average rating for the four players on a team must fall below 2200 US Chess. (Alternates are allowed, but only the

first four players figure into the average rating.) The 2024 edition boasted 330 teams and over 1,400 registered players. Indeed, hotel room blocks always sell out fast as some teams plan their trips months in advance.

Only one team finished with a perfect 6/6 score this year. True to their name, "Another Bacon, Egg, and Cheese *en Passant* Please" became repeat USATE champions. Major congratulations are in order to the returning team (in board order): IM Gus Huston, Nathaniel Shuman, Ryan Peterson, and Kevin Stern, whose first three boards were part of the winning 2023 team "Bacon, Egg,

and Chess *en Passant*."

We asked the four winners to annotate their favorite games from the event. Their games are as tasty as their namesake sandwiches.

SLAV DEFENSE, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D10)

Kevin Stern (1948)
Jane Stripunsky (1581)
Amateur Team East (4), Parsippany,
02.18.2024
Annotations by Kevin Stern

Left: It was victory for the second straight year for Peterson, Shuman, Huston, and Stern, flanked by parents and guardians.

1. c4 c6 2. Nc3 d5 3. cxd5 cxd5 4. d4 Nf6 5. Bf4 e6 6. e3 Bd6 7. Bxd6 Qxd6 8. Bd3 0-0 9. f4!?

Entering a Stonewall structure makes sense now that my dark-squared bishop is gone.

9. ... Nc6 10. Nf3 a6 11. 0-0 Ng4?



This move is so natural. Black wants to shut out the light-squared bishop with ... f7-f5, but White now has a tactic!

12. Bxh7+!! Kxh7

If 12. ... Kh8 13. Ne5 attacks the knight. After 13. ... Ngxe5 (much worse is 13. ... Nxe3?? 14. Qh5) 14. fxe5 the queen will slide to h5 with a winning position.

13. Ng5+ Kg8 14. Qxg4

Regaining the knight, leaving White a pawn up.

14. ... f6 15. Nf3?

Again, a natural move, but I had much better! After 15. Qh5!! fxe5 16. fxe5 the threat is g5-g6 and Qh5-h7 mate. Black cannot stop it without giving material back.

15. ... Ne7 16. Nh4 e5 17. f5

Locking out Black's pieces out. White also has a winning ending after 17. fxe5 Qxe5 18. Qxg7+ Kxg7 19. dxe5 fxe5.

17. ... e4?

I don't think that resolving the tension in the center while I am attacking is a good idea.

18. Qh5 Rf7 19. Ng6 Nxg6 20. fxe5 Rc7 21. Qh7+ Kf8 22. Qh8+ Ke7 23. Qxg7+ Ke8 24. Qg8+ Kd7 25. Nxd5 Rc2 26. Rxf6, Black resigned.

A clean victory that eventually won the match for our team.

LONDON SYSTEM, JOBAVA VARIATION (D00)

Adegboyega Adebayo (2345)

Nate Shuman (2193)

Amateur Team East (5), Parsippany,

02.19.2024

Annotations by Nate Shuman

1. d4 d5 2. Nc3 Bf5 3. Bf4 c6 4. e3 e6

5. Bd3 Bd6

Purposefully trying to create an imbalanced pawn structure to generate chances. I am also looking to stop White from breaking the position open with e3-e4, and also potentially plunking my knight there.

6. Bxf5 exf5 7. Qf3 g6 8. h3 Qc7

Perhaps stronger is 8. ... h5 to stop the g2-g4 break, despite it looking unnatural.

9. Nge2 Nd7 10. Bxd6 Qxd6 11. g4 fxg4

12. hxg4 0-0-0 13. 0-0-0 Ngf6 14. Nf4

White should have played 14. g5 Nh5 15. e4, trying to open the center while he can.

14. ... Qe7

Now e3-e4 is stopped.

15. g5 Ne4 16. Nxe4 dxe4 17. Qg4 Kb8

18. d5

White is creating chances, but my pieces are more active.

18. ... Ne5 19. Qg3 Ka8!



Moving away from the potential pin from the queen on g3.

20. Ne6! Nd3+!

I was careful to look for in-between moves here. White is better after 20. ... fxe6 21. Qxe5 cxd5 22. Rxd5.

I investigated 20. ... Nc4, but unfortunately it does not work: 21. Nxd8 Qb4 22. Rd4 Qxb2+ 23. Kd1 Qb1+ 24. Ke2 Qxc2+ (or 24. ... Qxh1 25. dxc6 bxc6 26. Nxc6 Qh5+ 27. Kf1 Qh1+ 28. Qg1 with a significant advantage) 25. Kf1 Rxd8 and White should win.

21. cxd3

If 21. Rxd3 exd3 22. Nc7+ Kb8 White has no strong moves for the knight, which necessitates a repetition with 23. Na6+ Ka8 24. Nc7+ Kb8.

21. ... fxe6 22. d6!

An extremely sharp move by my opponent; however, he missed the next move which would have given him a slight advantage.

22. ... Rxd6 23. dxe4

The right way was 23. Qe5! Rhd8 24. dxe4 Rxd1+ 25. Rxd1 Rxd1+ 26. Kxd1 with a minimal endgame advantage for White.

23. ... e5 24. Rxd6 Qxd6 25. Rd1 Qe6

26. Kb1 Rf8 27. Qf3 Qc8 28. Qg3 Qe6

A draw was very good for my team at this point, so I was offering a repetition.

29. Qf3 Qc8 30. Qe2 a6

Creating *luft* for my king, thereby freeing my rook from its post on the back rank.

31. Rf1 Qe6 32. f4 exf4 33. exf4 Rd8 34. a3

Rd4 35. Re1 Qd6

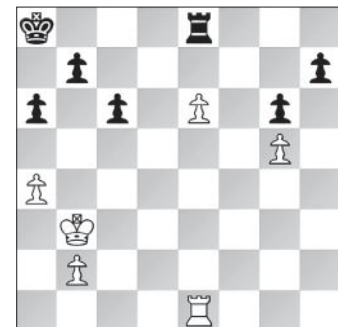
Tempting my opponent to push his e-pawn.

36. e5 Qe6 37. Qe3

Also equal is 37. Rd1 Qf5+ 38. Ka1 Rxd1+ 39. Qxd1 Qxf4 40. e6 Qxg5 41. Qd6 Qc1+.

37. ... Qf5+ 38. Ka2 Qxf4 39. Qxf4 Rxf4

40. e6 Rf8 41. a4 Re8 42. Kb3



Here my opponent offered me a draw. At this point in the match, we were up 1½-½, and our fourth board had a very drawish rook endgame. Rather than accept the draw immediately, and because I was up on time, I decided to stall for 30 minutes to see how his match would play out. If he ended up losing, I would try to go for the win. If he drew, I would accept the draw offer and we would win the match 2½-1½. After 30 minutes, my teammate ended up winning his game, giving us the match victory. Now, with nothing to lose, I tried to go for the win...

42. ... Kb8 43. Kb4 Kc7 44. Re3 Kd6

45. Ka5 Kc7

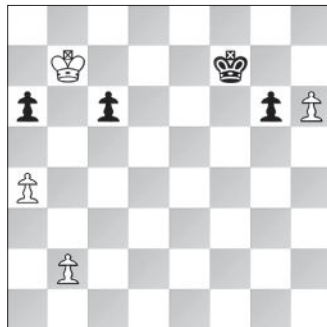
Hoping for anything other than the game continuation, so that I could check him with ... b7-b6+, as Ka5xa6 gets checkmated by ... Rd8-a8.

46. Kb4 Kd6 47. Ka5

Now it's a pawn race.

47. ... Rxe6 48. Rxe6+ Kxe6 49. Kb6 h5

50. gxh6 e.p. Kf7 51. Kxb7



51. ... a5

After 51. ... g5 52. Kxa6 g4 53. Kb7 g3 54. a5 g2 55. a6 g1=Q 56. a7 the c6-pawn stops any checks. So I played the game continuation, which I thought was winning. In fact, I missed White's saving idea, which was to run their king back to the other side of the board!

52. Kxc6!!

I thought that I was "in time" after 52. Kb6 g5 53. Kxa5 g4 54. Kb6 g3 55. a5 g2 56. a6 g1=Q+, but this is a win for Black!

52. ... g5 53. Kd5 Kg6 54. Ke4 Kxh6 55. b4 axb4 56. a5

The white king is the perfect distance between the two pawns. Now I had to find the draw.

56. ... b3 57. Kd3 g4 58. a6 b2!

White also holds after 58. ... g3 59. a7 b2! (59. ... g2? 60. a8=Q g1=Q 61. Qh8+ Kg6 62. Qg8+ wins the queen) 60. Kc2 g2!.

59. Kc2 b1=Q+!

Now the game will end in a draw.

60. Kxb1 g3 61. a7 g2 62. a8=Q g1=Q+, draw.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT ACCEPTED (D26)

Ryan Peterson (2200)

Murodjon Shadiev (2004)

Amateur Team East (5), Parsippany, 02.19.2024

Annotations by Ryan Peterson

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. e3 a6

5. Bxc4 e6 6. 0-0 b5

Less popular than the solid ... c7-c5, Black seeks to create a more dynamic position with fast development.

7. Bd3 Bb7 8. a4 b4 9. Nbd2 c5 10. Qe2

Nbd7 11. Nc4 Qc7 12. Rd1 Be7 13. e4

A very important pawn push. The goal is to advance the e-pawn one more square, taking space, and gaining control of the d6- and f6-squares.

13. ... cxd4 14. e5

Worse is 14. Nxd4? Nc5.

14. ... Nd5

After 14. ... Bxf3? 15. Qxf3 Nd5 16. Qg3 Black does keep the pawn, but the knight is ready to jump into the d6-square, and White has kingside pressure.

15. Nxd4 Nc5



16. Bc2

Left: The traditional round three matchup between West Point and Annapolis gave this year's bragging rights to the Cadets.

I missed the incredible 16. Nd6+! Bxd6 17. exd6 Qxd6 18. Nf5! Qf8 19. Bb5+! Nd7 (or 19. ... axb5 20. Qxb5+ Kd8 21. Be3) 20. Bf4 with tremendous pressure.

16. ... 0-0-0 17. a5?

This move fixes the pawn structure, but doesn't do much more.

17. ... Kb8 18. Nb3 g5 19. Nxc5 Bxc5 20. Be4!

The only move for White to maintain an advantage. It is necessary to counter the b7-bishop. If Black gets the opportunity to play ... f7-f5, the b7-bishop would terrorize the kingside. For example: 20. Bd2 f5 21. exf6 e.p. Nxf6.

20. ... Nc3?



Attempting to win the bishop pair fails tactically.

21. Rxd8+ Qxd8 22. bxc3 Bxe4 23. Bxg5 Qd3

Worse is 23. ... Qxg5 24. Qxe4, while White also keeps the advantage after 23. ... Bd3 24. Qf3 Qd5 25. Qf6! Rg8 26. Nb6.

24. Qxd3 Bxd3 25. cxb4

A key intermezzo.

25. ... Bxb4 26. Nd6 Bg6 27. Bf6

I wanted to play 27. Nxf7 Rc8 (or 27. ... Bxf7 28. Rb1) but missed the key idea 28. Nd8! Bc3 29. Rd1 Bxe5 30. Nxe6 with an excellent position.

27. ... Rg8 28. h4 Kc7 29. Ra4 Rb8

Any White advantage has evaporated in these last few moves. Black's bishops are very strong, and there are no clear targets in his position.

30. Be7 Kc6 31. Ra1 Kd5 32. Rd1+

Setting up a checkmating trap that, with just seconds on his clock, Black unfortunately falls into.

32. ... Kxe5? 33. g3 Bh5?? 34. f4, mate.



SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B57)

Roger Zhang (2245)

IM Gus Huston (2450)

Amateur Team East (2), Parsippany, 02.17.2024

Annotations by IM Gus Huston

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bc4 Qb6

One of a few options in this position. Both 6. ... Bd7 and 6. ... e6 are also very playable, but I decided to pull out a less mainstream line. The idea is to push the knight back to the b3-square, where it occupies the space that the bishop would ideally like to occupy.

7. Nb3 e6 8. Be3

Black does lose a tempo by allowing the queen to be attacked, but in return disrupts the coordination between White's pieces.

8. ... Qc7 9. Be2 a6 10. Qd2

A slight inaccuracy. Usually White should not allow Black to gain space with ... b7-b5, and plays a2-a4 to prevent this. In this case, Black usually elects to play ... b7-b6 and ... Bc8-b7, potentially using the weak b4-square in the future.

10. ... b5 11. a3 Bb7 12. f4 Be7 13. Bf3 Rc8 14. 0-0 0-0



15. Nd4

This move looks natural, but is actually a grave positional mistake. The knight lacks prospects after my next move.

15. ... Na5!

Taking advantage of the weak c4-square. Compare the knights on a5 and d4!

16. Qf2 Nc4 17. Bc1

Allowing the trade of the dark-squared bishop would cripple White's position in the long run.

17. ... Rfd8

Preparing ... d6-d5. Pushing the d-pawn immediately is an option, but there is no need to rush.

18. Kh1 Bf8

White doesn't have a clear plan, so Black can continue to make small improvements until the time is right to break with ... d6-d5.

19. Nde2 d5

The time has come!

20. exd5 exd5

It may look strange to self-inflict an isolated pawn, but it keeps more pieces on the board than after 20. ... Nxd5 21. Nxd5 Bxd5 22. Bxd5 Rxd5. White's position is cramped, so keeping pieces on the board favors Black.

21. b3 Bc5 22. Qg3 Nd6 23. Bb2 d4

24. Bxb7 Qxb7 25. Nd1 Nf5 26. Qd3 Ne3

27. Nxe3 dxe3 28. Qf5



28. ... Qe4

Slightly more precise is 28. ... Ne4, but here Black already has a winning advantage.

29. Qg5 h6 30. Qg3 Qf5

Here 30. ... Be7 is also interesting, as it protects the knight, attacks the c2-pawn, and threatens ... Rd8-d2.

31. Qf3 Ne4 32. Ng3 Nxe3+ 33. Qxe3 g6

34. Qh4 h5 35. Rfe1 Qe4

More forceful is 35. ... Rd2 36. Bc1 Bd4! 37. Rb1 Rxe2!!, but the game continuation works too.

36. Qf6 Bd4 37. Bxd4 Rxd4

(see diagram next page)

After trading off White's most active piece, the b2-bishop, Black has an easy game with the centralized queen, the passed pawn, and active rooks.

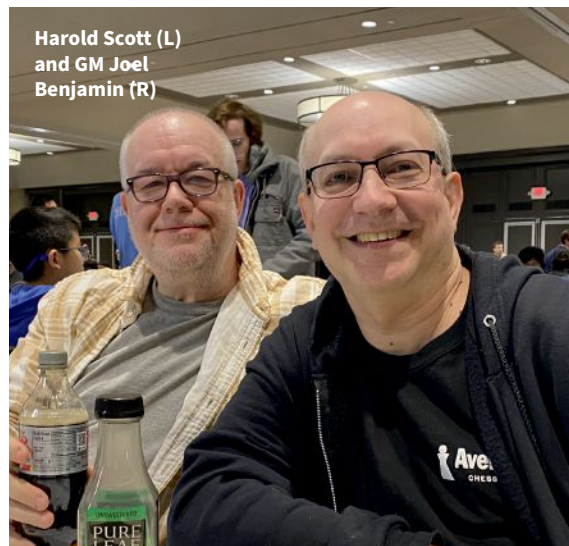
38. f5



WFM Megan Paragua



WFM Laura Smith (L) and FM Alisa Melekhina (R)



Harold Scott (L) and GM Joel Benjamin (R)



POSITION AFTER 37. ... Rxd4

A desperate attempt at counterplay.

38. ... Rxc2 39. Qg5 e2 40. fxxg6 fxxg6 41. h3 Rd3

The easiest way to force a queen trade and go into a winning double rook endgame.

42. Kh2 Rd5 43. Qf6 Qe5+ 44. Qxe5 Rxe5 45. Kg3 Rf5

With the King cut off and the rooks doomed to passivity, Black can activate the King easily.

46. Kh4 Kg7 47. g4 g5+ 48. Kxh5

The alternative isn't much better: 48. Kg3 h4+ 49. Kg2 Rf4 and wins.

48. ... Re5, White resigned.

This game sealed our victory, allowing us to move on to round three unblemished.

While our team, "Started from Fritz 5.32, Now We're Here," was in the running for top mixed doubles, we faltered the last two rounds and the honors went to GM Magesh Panchanathan's team, "CKQ Alpha Dogs," also consisting of WIM Michelle Prince, FM Arvind Jayaraman, and Charithra Arvind.

Chess aside, the real competition is over the best team name and best costumes. While our name was more nostalgic to our team, the most popular entries tend to be chess puns or a pop culture reference. Scanning the pre-entry list, a few personal stand-outs were "ChessGPT Charlatan" — simple and nice GenAI callback — and "Team Say It With Ya Chess," a pun on "say it with your chest," which is a trendy way to be proud. They ultimately won best parent/child team.

Among the best-name candidates ultimately selected were "Travis and Taylor What's the Endgame?," which we also appreciated, and Shaun Smith's musically-inspired "Caro-Kann My Wayward Son." In the end, GM Joel Benjamin's "B-E-N-K-O and Benko was his Name O" prevailed.

While it wasn't our personal favorite, we were definitely humming that B-I-N-G-O tune on the car ride back — it does have staying power. The win must also have resonated with GM Benjamin, who was the only perfect 6/6 score for board one. His team ultimately finished in a solid 14th place with 5/6, while also winning the U2100 class prize.

The best costume award went to "King Smarty Gras and his Court," who were costumed for a Mardi Gras celebration, complete with instruments that they played! (And played well, we might add.) This was perhaps a bit of an upset, as the crowd certainly enjoyed seeing "Barbie and her Three Kens" on the stage!

REFLECTIONS

Both of your authors have not played much tournament chess in recent years by design. So what beckoned us to come out of our own semi-retirements and spend a long President's Day holiday weekend playing six classical time control games?

ALISA:

Pulling up at the Hilton Parsippany for the Amateur Team East and stepping out into the crisp New Jersey winter felt like going back in time. Inside, we were greeted by the usual flurry of kids scurrying to find their teams and boards, frantically followed by their parents with packed lunches and extra chess sets. I had a flashback to hunting for unoccupied corners to camp out and eat lunch in between rounds with my dad — then, my guardian; this year, for the first time, my teammate!

From outside the large, familiar tournament hall I could already hear organizer Steve Doyle's

booming voice. The giveaways were already underway: chess prizes for "the first person to the mic" with a \$50 bill, a Pennsylvania library card, or a New York state quarter.

As we were finding our table and figuring out which end was the first board, I saw familiar faces from "back in the day." Locals from New Jersey and Pennsylvania, some whom I would regularly play in state championships, were coming out of chess semi-retirement for this one-of-a-kind chess festival. When my first-round opponent played 1. b3 against me, I smiled to myself. Notwithstanding my last-minute cramming for my Black repertoire the night prior (where I did not go over 1. b3), I remembered that everyone was here for the same purpose. Chess theory was secondary to the camaraderie and nostalgia.

Our team came together almost overnight. My longtime partner, GM-elect Raja Panjwani, was looking for a non-FIDE rated tournament as practice before playing in Europe. Not being familiar with the U.S. phenomenon that is the USATE, he forwarded the tournament link in passing and asked if I had heard of it before.

Had I ever! I informed him that this wasn't just any "amateur" tournament; this is *the* top team competition in the U.S. (and perhaps the world!). I had a fleeting thought to have my dad, who is now around 1800, join our team. Surprisingly, everyone was on board! Still, we needed to find a third board who would make us competitive.

Fortunately, my old friend (and World Youth teammate) Laura Smith agreed to play, making our average team



Above: FM Alisa Melekhina with her father, Aleksandr, at this year's tournament. Left: The subjects in the early 'aughts.

rating 2182 and a contender for a top Mixed Doubles team. Given how far all of us had come together, Team “Started from Fritz 5.32, Now We’re Here” was born.

I surprised myself by finishing with 5/6. The last time I played in this event was in 2014, exactly 10 years prior. I was in a different place in my chess and legal careers back then. For this tournament, I came in with a fresh perspective, focusing on the team aspect and putting the individualistic chess tendencies aside. I found new elements of chess to enjoy. It made me appreciate unplugging from the “real world” and diving into this celebration of chess, even if only for a few days.

CARO-KANN DEFENSE, ADVANCE VARIATION (B12)

FM Alisa Melekhina (2274)

Essig Rouven (1967)

Amateur Team East (2), Parsippany, 02.17.2024

Annotations by FM Alisa Melekhina

I shook off the pre-tournament jitters after a five-hour first round victory. In round two, I found myself playing against an opponent Raja had recently faced at the National Chess Congress. I knew going in that my opponent was an accomplished physics professor and had recently taken to chess.

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5

The more common move is 3. ... Bf5. The idea behind 3. ... c5 is similar to that in Advanced French structures, which tend to transpose: to undermine the e5-pawn and get activity around the c5-square. However, I don’t find these lines particularly challenging for White because at the end of the day, Black is down a tempo (compared to playing the French and playing ... c7-c5 immediately) in an already potentially cramped opening.

4. dxc5 e6 5. Be3 Nd7 6. Bb5

Challenging Black to untangle.

6. ... Ne7 7. Nf3

So far, White’s development has been simple and intuitive.

7. ... Nc6 8. c4

(see diagram top of next column)

I spent more time calculating this move than I would have liked to admit. Here c2-c4 is a typical idea to undermine Black’s center before he can consolidate. Now the onus



is on Black to sift through the numerous captures available.

8. ... Nxc5

I think 8. ... Bxc5 is the best option, going for either an isolated pawn or sacrificing the pawn altogether to regain development and space. Interestingly, the computer analyzes to an unclear / equal position despite White being a clear pawn up.

To wit: 9. cxd5 (or 9. Bxc5 Nxc5 10. cxd5 exd5 11. Nc3 0-0 12. Qxd5 Qb6 13. 0-0 Bg4 with compensation) 9. ... exd5 10. Qxd5 Bxe3 11. fxe3 0-0 12. Bxc6 bxc6 13. Qxc6 Rb8 14. Nbd2 Rxb2 15. Qc3 Rb5 with compensation for the pawn.

9. cxd5 exd5 10. Nc3 a6 11. Be2

While I would prefer to not lose further time, here 11. Bxc6+ bxc6 would merely reinforce Black’s center.

11. ... Be6 12. 0-0 Ne4?!

This is not an obviously bad move, but it is the beginning of the end. The opening has been a success for White, with quick and active development and a clear target on d5. Black cannot afford to lose any more time, and should consolidate as soon as possible with ... Bf8-e7 and ... 0-0.

13. Na4 b5?

While allowing Na4-b6 would be uncomfortable, Black again had the opportunity to consolidate with 13. ... Be7. After 13. ... b5, there are too many weaknesses in Black’s position.

14. Rc1! Rc8

White is winning after 14. ... bxa4 15. Rxc6.

15. Nb6 Rc7 16. a4

(see diagram top of next column)

This is the key to unlocking this position, as the b5-pawn is one of the few elements still holding things together.

16. ... Na7



Here 16. ... bxa4 17. Qxa4 only makes matters worse.

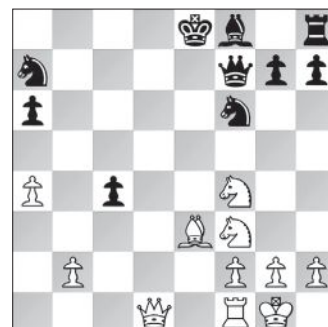
17. Rxc7 Qxc7 18. Nxd5

The pawn falls in an ideal scenario.

18. ... Qb7 19. Nf4 Bc4 20. Bxc4 bxc4 21. e6

Even more precise per the computer was 21. Bxa7 Qxa7 22. Qd5! Nc5 23. e6 fxe6 24. Nxe6 Nxe6 25. Qxe6+ Qe7 26. Qxa6. But I saw no drawback to striking with 21. e6 while the black king was stuck in the center.

21. ... Nf6 22. exf7+ Qxf7



23. Re1

White’s last piece is developed with flair.

23. ... Nc6 24. Bc5+ Be7 25. Ng5, Black resigned.

A possible finish would have been: 25. Ng5 Qf8 26. Bxe7 Nxe7 27. Nfe6 Qg8 28. Qd8 mate. Our team ended up winning the match 3-1, giving us a strong finish to the first day.

LAURA:

I started playing this event for the first time when I was eight years old. The World Youth was blood, sweat, and tears — mostly sweat and tears! —but also a lot of fun with new friends from across the globe. The World Open was about money prizes, and whispered scandals of who cheated. (Back then it was collusion, not computers.) Saturdays at the Marshall were a staple in my chess career, but nothing I’ve found compares to USATE.

The Amateur Team East was my favorite. It was the tournament with costumes, team names, bughouse all-day-everyday, and nonstop chess with friends and family. My dad and I played on the same team at least once.

I stopped playing chess competitively when I went to college in 2006. There was not much of a chess scene in Binghamton, New York, though I did find my way to one through a friend who saw a local posting for a chess club. I played. And I did not win. (No, it doesn't still bother me!)

Flash forward: I met my now-husband, Shaun Smith, and while dating him, I got back into the chess scene. As a mom of four-year-old twins and a six-year-old, I can't remember my chess days in my current life. Instead of tactics puzzles, it's cooking, meals, the dishes, doing laundry, more snacks, and schlepping to taekwondo, ballet, and art... all with the hopes of surviving until Friday. But I remember going to the USATE after my first "retirement" from the chess world, and it always felt like home even after years away from the game.

I realized that I missed chess. I remember Shaun showing me some easy openings that would get me by after a long absence from the board. While I felt the rust in my game, I also remembered the joys of sitting across a board and feeling the trivialities of life dissolve into the world of 64 squares.

To me, USATE also goes hand-in-hand with New York's Chess in the Schools (CIS), which sends students to the tournament annually. Shaun serves as CIS's Director of Programs. He attended USATE both as a player and as the leader of 53 college-bound high school students and 23 CIS alumni. A non-profit that fosters the intellectual and social development of low-income youth in New York City through chess education, CIS graciously covers all expenses for its students to play, with many thanks to donations from its supporters.

CIS has chosen to send students to the USATE because it is a very meaningful competition. Many CIS alumni play along with current students, sharing experiences and first-hand reflections on colleges and building professional careers. This year, CIS alumnus Lamel McBryde was on the second-place team, "International Alliance!"

While I scored a reasonable 3½/6, the real value of my tournament was the trip down memory lane. Playing at USATE feels so refreshing for a chess player. Without the focus on money prizes, it's about the chess and the friendships. Well, the com-

petition is very much there, but it's in a more honor-driven way, with the focus on team and family-bonding. It was wonderful to see the tournament foster old and new friendships, as well as inspire opportunities and connections for CIS students and alumni.



We would both like to thank the tournament staff and organizers, especially Mr. E. Steven Doyle, who has tirelessly directed this tournament for 49 years and attended 50. We will be back, and this time, very soon.

ADDITIONAL GAMES

GIUOCO PIANO, DUBOV VARIATION (C54)

Dan Bock (1932)
Santhosh Ayyappan (2128)
Amateur Team East (6), Parsippany, 02.19.2024
Annotations by Dan Bock

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d4 exd4 6. b4

The Dubov Gambit, named after GM Daniil Dubov, who used it to defeat GM Sergey Karjakin in the 2020 Russian Championship. I have found that it's very rare for players to be prepared to face this.

6. ... Bb6 7. e5 d5 8. exf6 dxc4 9. Qe2+ Be6 10. b5 Na5 11. fxg7 Rg8 12. cxd4 Bxd4

Black grabs a pawn, but is going to regret not having a dark-squared bishop.

13. Nxd4 Qxd4 14. Bb2 Qd3



I got this exact position in a tournament game less than two months before this one. In that game, I played 15. Qxd3, and while I did go on to win, I had to fight off some queenside counterplay for Black. Now I get to show off a bit of my homework.

15. Bf6

The engine thinks White is winning. Of course, I have to prove it at the board and without silicon reassurance!

15. ... Qf5 16. Qf3 Qxf3 17. gxf3

With big plans for my rook, I am very happy about the opening of the g-file.

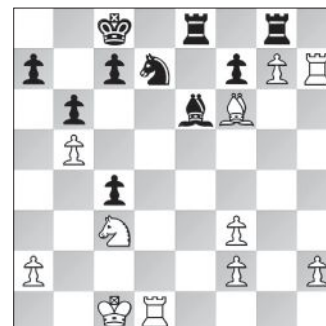
17. ... Kd7 18. Nc3 Rae8 19. 0-0-0 Kc8

Black has gained a certain amount of king safety. But his h7-pawn is weak, his knight is out of the game, and his rooks are tied down by the presence of the white pawn on g7, which is invulnerable for the foreseeable future.

20. Rhg1

I had a lot of good options to choose from here. I could have gone with a plan of maneuvering the knight to f6 or h6. I played 20. Rhg1 because Rg1-g5-h5xh7 looks unstoppable (if ... Be6-f5 then Nc3-d5 threatening Nd5-e7+), and because it could also potentially support a Nc3-e4-f6 plan by protecting the g7-pawn.

20. ... b6 21. Rg5 Nb7 22. Rh5 Nc5 23. Rxh7 Nd7



White has spent the past four moves winning an important pawn and threatening to infiltrate with the rook all the way to the back rank. Black has spent the past four moves getting his knight to d7.

24. Bd4

I spent 20 minutes on this move, because I really didn't want to retreat the bishop from the amazing f6 square, and it felt like the right time for an Exchange sacrifice. But I calculated 24. Rxd7 Kxd7 25. Ne4 Bf5 26. Rh8 Ke6 and decided I'd have to retreat the bishop anyway, so the sacrifice wouldn't get me anything I didn't already have. Of course White is still winning here after 27. Rh6! but the path is much harder.

24. ... Bf5

Now that the f-pawn is unblocked, I expected 24. ... f6 now or on the next few moves.

25. Rh8

Black is in a bind. Neither rook can move!

25. ... Bd3 26. h4

Commencing the final winning plan.

26. ... Nc5 27. Nd5

Threatening Nd5-e7+.

27. ... Kd8 28. h5

I thought that 28. Nf6 was a slip after 28. ... Rxh8, but White can calmly play 29. Bxc5 bxc5 30. Nxe8 Rxe8 31. h5 and the pawns will race home.

28. ... Be2

It's not hard to find the right moves from here on out.

29. h6 Nd3+ 30. Kd2 Bxd1 31. Rxc8 Rxc8

32. h7 Re8 33. g8=Q Rxc8 34. hxg8=Q+ Kd7 35. Kxd1 f5 36. Qf7+, Black resigned.

KONSTANTINOPOLSKY OPENING (C44)

Andrew Ardito (2224)

Todd Bryant (2228)

Amateur Team East (5), Parsippany,
02.19.2024

Annotations by Todd Bryant

1. e4 e5

This was only my second time playing 1. ... e5 over the board! My opponent showed some disappointment, as he had clearly prepared for my usual Sicilian.

2. Nf3 Nc6 3. g3

But he sends anti-preparation back over the net. Now we both are out of book. I had prepared for some sharp Italians.

3. ... Nf6 4. d3 Bc5

The other path to equality begins with 4. ... d5.

5. Bg2 d6 6. 0-0 a5

Gaining space, restricting b2-b4, and creating a refuge for the bishop.

7. c3 Ba7

This retreat wasn't really necessary yet, and now the bishop gets needled by Nb1-a3-b5. With 7. ... 0-0 we transpose back into a number of high-level games.

8. Na3 0-0 9. Nb5 Bb6 10. Qc2 Ne7

A common repositioning in 1. ... e5 structures, sending the knight to the kingside and preparing ... c7-c6. But here, the knight on g6 is restricted by the pawn on g3.

11. Bg5 Ng6 12. d4 Qe7 13. Nd2 Bd7 14. dxe5?! Qxe5

Now Black picks up the two bishops.

15. Bxf6 Qxf6 16. a4



16. ... c6?!

Totally overlooking White's tactics, although fortunately I am still okay.

Better was 16. ... Ne5, improving the knight and preparing to expand on the kingside with something like 17. Rae1 h5.

17. Nc4 Bc5 18. Nbx d6

Oops. I hadn't seen this at all. White is trying to snatch a pawn with a skewer on the d-file. Luckily, I took a think here and was able to find some counterpunches.

18. ... Bxd6 19. Rad1

I thought 19. Qd3 was his best choice was. I intended 19. ... Bc5 (19. ... Bg4! is even better, i.e., 20. Qxd6 Be2 21. Qxf6 gxf6 22. Nb6 Bxf1 23. Bxf1 Rad8 and compensation is an open question) 20. Qxd7 Ne5 21. Nxe5 Qxe5 22. Rad1 with advantage to White.

After 19. Qd1 Be6! 20. Nxd6 Rfd8 the pin is very hard to deal with.

19. ... Bc5 20. Rxd7 Qe6

This was my point — a fork at the end of the line. But White still has a strong resource we both discounted!

21. Qd3?

With the strong 21. Rd4! Bxd4 22. cxd4 White's monster center is good compensation for the Exchange.

21. ... b5

Now this wins a piece, as if the knight moves, ... Ng6-e5 will pick up a rook.

22. axb5 cxb5 23. Rd5 bxc4 24. Qxc4



Time to take stock. We're up a piece, and Stockfish is screaming that Black is crushing. But I think this position is not so easy to win. Why? White has two pawns. Our g6-knight isn't useful yet, and won't be for a long time. White has a clear idea of rolling the f- and e- pawns; this isn't so easy to resist.



Dan Bock



Todd Bryant

And White can also eventually make a passed queenside pawn!

24. ... Be7?!

Already a little off. This allows f2-f4 and gets in the way of my knight. The correct 24. ... Bb6 restrains f2-f4 and allows ... Ng6-e7-c6.



25.
f4 Qb6+ 26. Kh1 Rfc8 27. Qe2
Rab8 28. Rd2 Rd8 29. Rfd1
Rxd2 30. Rxd2 Rd8 31. e5 Rxd2
32. Qxd2

We've traded more material and it's still -3 per Stockfish, but it's certainly not over yet! White is ready to move forward, and it's hard to find even a slow maneuver that meaningfully attacks something in White's position.

32. ... Nf8

The metal friend suggests 32. ... Bf8 33. h4 Ne7 34. Be4 h5 35. Kg2 g6, intending the gradual untangling ... Kg8-g7 and ... Ne7-g8 with a very gradual untangling. I don't find this very obvious at all.

33. Be4 g6 34. Kg2 Qc5

Nearing time control, I start to shuffle.

35. h4 h5 36. Bd5 Kg7 37. Qd3 Qc8?!

The engine thinks this is

Center: Team spirit is always a huge component of the Amateur Team East. Here are some of the competitors for best gimmick.

fine, but to me, this shuffle makes things a little worse. Now White gets an unpleasant battery against the weak pawn. The stronger 37. ... Ne6 resisted this idea.

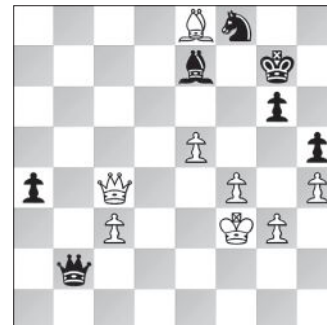
38. Qb5 Qd8 39. Qc4

I was not thrilled to be trading pawns a move before time control.

39. ... Qb6 40. Bxf7 Qxb2+

Time control reached!

41. Kf3 a4 42. Be8



The dust has settled. We're out of time pressure, but a big check is looming on f7 and there is only one way for Black to maintain a winning advantage.

42. ... Qb3?

The only move was 42. ... Qb7+!

43. Kf2! (43. Bc6 Qc8 44. Qxa4 Qh3! was the more difficult point: ... Be7xh4 is threatened, as well as many checks against White's king) 43. ... a3 and the checks gets nowhere: 44. Qf7+ Kh8 45. f5 a2! 46. Qxa2 Bc5+ with a queen skewer incoming.

43. Qc7?

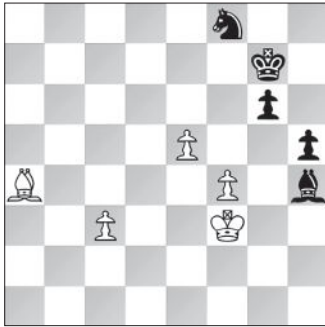
With 43. Qxa4! Qxc3+ 44. Kg2 Qd2+ 45. Kh3 Black will never be able to make progress, despite the extra piece.

43. ... Qd5+ 44. Ke2

Qg2+ 45. Kd1 Qf1+ 46. Kd2 Qf2+ 47. Kd1 Qc5! 48. Qxc5!

I actually thought trading queens was impossible, but White still has ways to resist.

48. ... Bxc5 49. Bxa4 Bf2 50. Ke2 Bxg3 51. Kf3 Bxh4



52. f5!

An excellent practical choice. Black is still winning here, but he will have to hold onto his remaining pawn and restrain White's passers carefully. Nearing time pressure again, I promptly fail to do that.

52. ... gxf5

Here 52. ... Kh6 is favored by the computer, but 53. f6 was very scary to allow. I also felt the position after 52. ... g5 53. f6+ Kh6 was one I could even lose in a scramble.

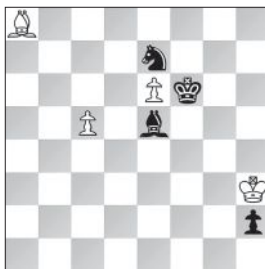
53. Kf4 Be1 54. c4 h4 55. Kxf5 h3 56. Bc6

So far so good!

56. ... Bb4?

Played with a minute on the clock; now, all winning chances are gone.

So how does Black win here? We begin: 56. ... h2 57. e6 Ng6 58. Ba8 Ne7+ 59. Kg4 Bc3 60. Kh3 Be5 61. c5 Kf6



POSITION AFTER 61. ... Kf6

With the bishop supporting the h2-pawn and restraining the c-pawn, we can carefully scoop the white pawns and steer toward bishop and knight versus king: 62. Kg2 Kxe6 63. Kh3 Nf5 64. Bh1 Nd4 65. Bb7 Nb3 66. Bh1 Nxc5 67. Kg2 Nd3 68. Kf1 Kf5 69. Ke2 Nf4+ 70. Kf3 Nh3 71. Bg2 Kg5 72. Bh1 Bf4 73. Bg2 Kh4 74. Bh1 Bg3 75. Bg2 Nf2 76. Ke2 h1=Q 77. Bxh1 Nxh1 and now all Black has to do is convert one of the longest bishop and knight versus king positions possible! It's mate in 3!

57. Kg4 h2 58. Kg3 Kg6 59. Kxh2 Kf5 60. Bd5 Kxe5, draw.

Black can make no progress whatsoever. ♣



2024 AMATEUR TEAM EAST AT A GLANCE

FEBRUARY 17-19, 2024 | PARSIPPANY, NY

WINNERS

1ST. Another Bacon, Egg, and Cheese en Passant Please (IM Gus Huston, Nate Shuman, Ryan Peterson, Kevin Stern). **2ND.** International alliance (IM Joshua Colas, Tyrell Harriott, Lamel McBryde, Kyle Cheung). **3RD.** Your worst knightmare (Ansh Shah, Sameer Mujumdar, Kamran Rawshani, Aleksey Sergeev). **4TH.** Blitzerland (Daniel Girsh, Roman Rychkov, Max Farberov, Alan Stolyarov). **5TH.** Brighton Chess (Tobias Rizzo, Sam Luger, John Luger, Henry Swing).

CLASS PRIZES

U2100: B-E-N-K-O and Benko was his name O. **U2000:** Kenilworth CC. **U1900:** Gambiteers. **U1800:** U.S. Military Academy 1. **U1700:** Chickmates. **U1600:** Keep it in Check (ICA). **U1500:** Chess Mates 2. **U1400:** Rook'n'rollers. **U1300:** KQC Mixed Generation. **U1200:** Deez Knights. **U1000:** Dean Of Chess Kings.

THE TOPS

TOP COLLEGE TEAM: Carnegie Mellon A. **TOP HS TEAM (GRADES 9-12 SAME SCHOOL):** It's Time to Resign. **TOP MIDDLE SCHOOL:** Board Wizards. **TOP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:** Spring Hill. **TOP TWO SCHOLASTIC TEAMS:** People Against the London System, Let Those Boys Rook. **TOP MIXED DOUBLES:** CKQ Alpha Dogs. **TOP SENIORS:** The Price is Right. **TOP MILITARY:** U.S. Naval Academy. **TOP COMPANY TEAM:** Kramnik's Math Advisors (US Chess). **TOP COACHES:** NYCA Coaches A. **TOP FEMALE TEAM:** Queen's Gambit. **TOP FAMILY:** Grandpa Knows Best. **TOP FUTURE:** Wicked Smaht. **TOP MILITARY COLLEGE:** U.S. Military Academy 1. **TOP PARENT/CHILD:** Team Say It With Ya Chess.

STATE WINNERS

CT: We Got Out Of Perpetual Belicheck. **DE:** Mac & Chess Mate Lover. **MA:** Ajab. **NJ:** Your Worst Knightmare. **NY (BENJAMIN AWARD):** Another Bacon, Egg, and Cheese en Passant Please. **PA:** Tata Steal Your Queen. **VA:** People Against the London System.