

## Our author and his compatriots find success at the Biel Chess Festival.

BY IM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO

**M**OST OF MY CHESS EXPERIENCE has come through participation in large American swisses. There are many positive aspects to these events, not least of which is that even the longest tournaments last only five days. However, there are also a few obvious downsides: two-round-a-day schedules leave little time for preparation, not to mention eating and sleeping, and playing conditions are often cramped and minimalistic.

I have sometimes felt that the chaotic nature of such events detracts from my chess, and I have long dreamed of participating in a longer tournament in which I could devote maximal concentration to preparation and play. This opportunity finally arose this year, when I had the chance to travel to Europe



# THE EUROPEAN

to compete in the 2023 Biel Chess Festival.

Biel/Bienne, as it is formally called, is a charming, peaceful Swiss town noted for being one of the centers of the Swiss watchmaking industry. Placed right on the border of the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland, it is as bilingual as a city gets — though it did leave me wishing that I had paid more attention in my high school French class. The appellation “festival” is not accidental. Besides the main attraction — an eight-player Super-GM tournament won by Vietnamese GM Le Quang Liem — the numerous side events included rapid and blitz tournaments, a simul with French GM Jules Moussard, and a combined chess





and poker competition. Upon arrival at the train station, I immediately was greeted by posters advertising the event. Judging by this and the extensive local press coverage, the chess festival is a true highlight for the city.

I competed in the Master's Tournament, limited to players with a FIDE rating of over 2050. Held from July 17-27, the tournament was ten rounds long (with one rest day) and was played with three time controls — 100 minutes for the first 40 moves, 50 minutes for the next 20 moves, and finally 15 minutes for the rest of the game, with a 30-second increment beginning on move 61. I had never played with such a lengthy time control before, though I did not get to enjoy the full experience — none of my games made it beyond 50 moves.

My journey to Biel was fairly uneventful, despite some minor adventures involving a delayed flight, microwaved sushi, a Cirque du Soleil juggler without a train ticket, and a few other minutiae that I will refrain from mentioning. To save costs (and assuage my constant desire for late-night blitz), I stayed with friends in an Airbnb only a short bus ride away from the venue.

This proved to be the correct decision: the ability to store and cook food made everything much easier. However, my insistence on cooking the same meal every day (chicken and pasta) resulted in near-nightly raids to an Italian restaurant called L'Osteria,

# N EXPERIENCE



home to the largest pizzas that I have ever seen. The only downside to our accommodations was the lack of air conditioning in the middle of a sweltering July. This initially posed some problems, as my enthusiasm for window-opening was swiftly extinguished by an equally enthusiastic horde of mosquitoes. However, we soon adjusted: the weather cooled down slightly, we obtained a fan that provided sufficient ventilation, and the mosquitoes found richer pastures elsewhere.

My tournament began unremarkably. Despite having the white pieces in round one, I failed to put any pressure on my opponent — Leonardo Vincenti, an 11-year-old from

Italy. Playing languidly and inattentively, I drew without much excitement. The result frustrated me: none of my tournaments this summer had gone to plan, and this game seemed to portend that Biel would be a continuation of the same. Thankfully, I was able to bounce back in round two:

## ENGLISH OPENING (A20)

Raphael Erne (2077)

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2401)

Biel Masters (2), Biel, 07.18.2023

1. c4 e5 2. g3 c6 3. Nf3 e4 4. Nd4 Nf6 5. Bg2 Qb6!?

A rare and double-edged line.

6. Nb3 a5 7. d3 a4 8. N3d2 Bc5 9. 0-0 e3  
10. fxex3 Bxe3+ 11. Kh1 Ng4 12. Ne4 0-0  
13. h3?



Correct is 13. Nbc3!

13. ... d5!

Black is already much better.

14. hxg4

No better is 14. c5 in view of 14. ... Qc7! 15. hxg4 Bxc1 16. Nf6+! gxf6 17. Qxc1 Bxg4 18. Rxf6 Qe5 with a clear advantage for Black.

14. ... dxe4 15. Bxe4 Bxg4 16. Bf3 Bh3 17. Bg2 Be6!

Trading light-squared-bishops would make White's king position more secure.

Incredibly, another game played on the same day reached this position. There, Black continued 17. ... Bxg2+ 18. Kxg2 Re8 in Sousa - Wadsworth, Stafford Wood Green, 2023, but could not convert his advantage.

18. Bxe3

Perhaps preferable is 18. Nc3, where one idea is 18. ... Nd7!? 19. Nxa4 Qd4 20. Nc3 Bg4! with an initiative.

18. ... Qxe3 19. Qe1 Nd7 20. Qf2 Qe5 21. Nd2 Nf6!

Denying White's knight the e4-square. This is stronger than 21. ... Qxb2 22. Ne4, which gives White unnecessary counterplay.

22. Qf4?

Relatively best was 22. Nf3, though Black's position is overwhelming after 22. ... Qh5+ 23. Kg1 Ng4 24. Qb6 Rae8 25. Rae1 Qh6.

22. ... Qxe2

Now Black's task is easy.

23. Rae1 Qxd3 24. Bf3 Rad8 25. Ne4 Nxe4  
26. Bxe4 Qxc4 27. a3 Rd4 28. Qf3

Or 28. Rc1 Qe2.

28. ... f5, White resigned.

This game was probably the first moment in which I felt the difference between playing one and two rounds in a single day. Playing two rounds in a day significantly limits the amount of time for preparation. In many cases, one effectively enters a game blind, without any knowledge of the opponent's strengths and weaknesses, nor any specific preparation. Without the opportunity to refresh one's memory before the game, it is difficult to play long theoretical variations with confidence — there is always the fear that you will forget something. Occasionally, I have even avoided playing novelties over the board because I could not remember the details of my analyses! Here, on the other hand, I was able to prepare a variation with my opponent's specific style in mind and essentially won the game out of the opening.

In round three, I faced the experienced Hungarian GM Viktor Erdos as White. This game was more difficult to prepare for; I checked about five or six different variations, but still expected to be surprised. This was indeed the case, but some faint memories of old analysis enabled me to reach a pleasant endgame out of the opening. Erdos soon got into time pressure; I began to feel optimistic, but failed to make the most out of my chances. My opponent set up a line of defense that I could not break, and the game was drawn.

Unfortunately, this was the beginning of a four-game drawing spell. All these games had their excitement and could easily have finished decisively — and not necessarily favorably. I saved bad positions against Teimur Toktomushev of Ukraine and newly-minted American IM Gus Huston, missed some chances against Xinyang Nie of China, and suddenly found myself with an unimpressive 3½ points out of six games.

At this point, it was undisputable that I had less energy than at the beginning of the

tournament: my thinking lacked clarity and alertness. Completely unexpectedly, however, I began to win games! My streak began in round seven. Playing the solid Swedish IM Richard Wessman, I was once again able to benefit from good home preparation:

## SLAV DEFENSE, GELLER GAMBIT (D15)

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2401)

IM Richard Wessman (2410)

Biel Masters (7), Biel, 07.24.2023

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. Be2 e6 7. a4!?

This rare idea was introduced on a high level only two years ago, and it seemed that my opponent was not ready for it.

7. ... b4 8. e5 bxc3 9. exf6 cxb2 10. fxg7



10. ... Bxg7!?

A practical choice — Black accepts a position with a worse pawn structure and a weaker king, but hopes to at least avoid White's preparation.

I was a bit concerned that my opponent would go for the critical line 10. ... bxa1=Q, mostly because I did not see a second queen anywhere near our board! The position becomes very complicated and requires precise knowledge from Black: 11. gxh8=Q Qa5+ 12. Nd2! c3 13. 0-0 cxd2 14. Bxd2 Qxd1 15. Rxd1 and here Black defends only with 15. ... Qf5!! (15. ... Qxa4? was played in the stem game of Gelfand – Movsesian, FIDE Grand Swiss, 2021. Now 16. Bh5! Qb5 17. d5! cxd5 18. Qg8 Qb7 19. Rc1 Na6 20. h3!! leaves Black in near-zugzwang, as first pointed out by Bojkov, I believe) 16. d5 Qg6!, where the theory stretches on for many more moves.

11. Bxb2 Qa5+?

However, this is a real mistake.

Correct is 11. ... c5!, where Black may hope to equalize. It is critical for Black to counterattack in the center as quickly as possible. The key tactical point is that after

12. Bxc4 0-0 13. 0-0 Nc6 14. Ba3?! Nxd4! 15. Bxc5 Bb7!! Black is fine.

### 12. Nd2!

Most likely, my opponent just missed this move. Now it transpires that the queen has nothing to do on a5.

### 12. ... Ba6

Here 12. ... c3 is ineffective because of 13. Nc4!.

### 13. Ra3!?

I knew that 13. Rc1 would give me a stable advantage, but decided to play more ambitiously. This move continues to set new problems for Black — now he must worry about a possible rook transfer to g3.

### 13. ... Bf8!?

The most logical move. After 13. ... c3 14. Bxc3 Bxe2 15. Qxe2 Qd5 16. 0-0 Nd7 17. Nc4 is unpleasant for Black; his king has no safe home.

### 14. 0-0! Rg8?

For better or for worse, Black had to accept the Exchange sacrifice: 14. ... Bxa3 15. Bxa3 c3! (15. ... Nd7 16. Ne4 0-0-0 17. Nd6+ Kc7 18. Nxf7 is bad) 16. Bxa6 Nxa6 17. Nc4 Qd5 18. Nd6+ Ke7! and while White maintains a strong initiative, at least Black has some extra material to play with.

### 15. Rc3!

A difficult move. It seems illogical to place the rook on the c-file when it could have gone there in one move (13. Rc1), but now the circumstances are very different. The moves ... Bg7-f8 and ... Rh8-g8 significantly worsened Black's position, since now his king cannot castle kingside.

### 15. ... Nd7 16. Nxc4 Bxc4 17. Rxc4 Qd5 18. g3 Nb6?



BLACK TO MOVE

A blunder, but the position was very bad in any case.

After 18. ... Rb8 19. Bc1!? Black cannot defend his weaknesses for very long: White will defend (or move) the rook on c4 and then play Be2-f3.

### 19. Rxc6!

Black's position collapses on the light squares.

### 19. ... Qxc6 20. Bb5 Qxb5 21. axb5 Rg5

### 22. Qf3 Rc8 23. Ra1 Rxb5 24. Rxa7 Nd7

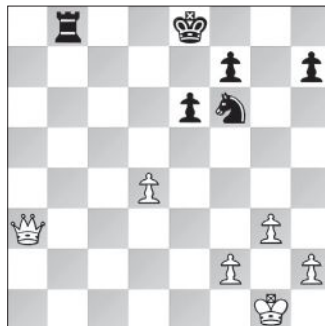
### 25. Ba3?

This and the next move are very careless. By simplifying the position, White gives Black some chances to create a fortress. The simplest path to victory was 25. Rxd7 Kxd7 26. Qxf7+ Be7 27. Ba3 Re8 28. Qxh7 Kd8 29. Bc1.

### 25. ... Bxa3 26. Ra8?! Rxa8 27. Qxa8+ Rb8

Most resilient was 27. ... Ke7! 28. Qxa3+ Kf6 when Black threatens set up an impregnable blockade after ... Kf6-g7 and ... Rb5-d5. Thankfully, White is in just time: 29. Qd3! Rf5 30. d5! (30. g4? Rg5! 31. h3 h5 32. f4 Rd5 is equal) 30. ... exd5 31. g4 Rg5 32. h3 and White has a won position.

### 28. Qxa3 Nf6



If Black was able to bring his king to g7 and put his rook on d5, his position would become holdable. Thus:

### 29. d5!

By far the most accurate. White breaks the blockade.

### 29. ... Nxd5

Or 29. ... exd5 30. Qd6.

### 30. Qa1!

The key tactical point. Black will lose the h7-pawn.

### 30. ... Rd8 31. Qh8+ Ke7 32. Qxh7

The rest is simple.

### 32. ... Nf6 33. Qh4 e5 34. Qb4+ Ke6 35.

### Kg2 Rd4 36. Qb3+ Nd5 37. h4 Kf5 38. Qf3+ Kg6 39. h5+ Kg7 40. Qf5, Black resigned.

In round eight, I was paired against IM Shawn Rodrigue-Lemieux, one of Canada's biggest young stars. He is best known for a record-shattering result in a Charlotte norm event last year, winning all nine of his games. I played Shawn once before, in the 2019 North American Youth Championship, and remember being completely demolished despite having the white pieces. So, I took this game especially seriously, managing to win in a complex game.

In round nine, I faced a new challenge: the Cuban GM Luis Ernesto Quesada Perez. It seemed that my luck had run out: shortly after the opening, I made a near-decisive error, which my opponent dutifully punished. However, the position remained sharp; in such cases, all it takes is one mistake to lose...

## NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE, SÄMISCH VARIATION (E24)

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2401)

GM Luis Ernesto Quesada Perez (2553)

Biel Masters (9), Biel, 07.26.2023



IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. a3 Bxc3+ 5. bxc3 b6 6. f3 Nc6 7. e4 d6**  
An uncommon move order.

**8. Bd3 Na5 9. Bg5**  
Here 9. f4 also deserves consideration.

**9. ... h6 10. Bh4 Ba6 11. f4 Qd7 12. e5 Ng8**  
The first new move for me. I tend to think 12. ... Nh7 is best. There are two advantages to placing the knight on h7. First, the knight comes to g6 via the f8-square, so White cannot trade it off as in the game. Second, Black's castling is not impeded.

**13. Qe2**  
Also good was 13. Qf3!?

**13. ... Ne7**  
Here 13. ... d5 is worse. After 14. cxd5 Bxd3 15. Qxd3 Qxd5 16. Nf3 we reach a position where Black would really prefer the knight on h7 rather than g8! For example, after 16. ... Ne7 17. Bxe7! Kxe7 18. 0-0 White is better, as Black's blockade on the light squares does not look convincing. (Not 18. f5 Qc4!)

**14. Nf3**  
Black's plan is to eventually modify the structure with ... d6-d5, after which White's dark-squared bishop would be bad. White should have taken the opportunity to trade it with 14. Bxe7! Qxe7 15. Nf3 0-0-0!. The queenside is clearly the safest place for Black's king. White should not be better here.



IM Nico Chasin

**14. ... Ng6!**



I saw this move when I played 14. Nf3, but I should have taken it much more seriously.

**15. 0-0?**  
A blunder: I assumed that Black had to take on either f4 or h4 immediately. Here 15. Bxg6? fxg6 16. Qe4 0-0 is not an option. Instead 15. Bg3 was necessary.

**15. ... d5!**  
Here I immediately realized that the position was bad. 15. ... Nxf4? loses to 16. Qe4, while 15. ... Nxh4? also makes no sense, positionally or tactically.

**16. cxd5**  
I think this is the best practical chance. The other options lead to statically bad positions with no hope of counterplay.

**16. ... Nxf4 17. Qe4 Bxd3**  
Now 17. ... Nxd3? 18. dxe6 gives White an overpowering attack. The quickest execution is 18. ... Qc6 19. d5! Qc5+ (19. ... Qxc3 20. d6!) 20. Nd4 0-0 21. e7 Rfe8 22. e6 and wins.

**18. Qxf4 Bxf1**  
The most convincing solution was 18. ... Qxd5! when Black might play (a) 19. Nd2 Bxf1 20. Rxf1 Rf8! 21. Ne4 when White is threatening Bh4-f6, but after the accurate 21. ... f5! 22. exf6 *e.p.* 0-0-0 Black's advantage is decisive.

The alternatives are no better: (b) 19. Ng5? is the equivalent of firing a blank: after 19. ... hxg5 20. Qxf7+ Kd8 White has absolutely nothing, while after (c) 19. Rf2 Black has several good moves here, but the simplest is 19. ... Bf5! when Black is ready to play ... g7-g5 and castle queenside, after which White has no way to drum up any compensation.

**19. dxe6 fxe6!**  
Much weaker is 19. ... Qxe6?! 20. Rxf1, as White has a potentially mobile center in this version. After 20. ... g5 (20. ... 0-0? 21.

Bf6! gxf6 22. exf6 Kh7 23. Ng5+, with mate coming, is an important point) 21. Bxg5! hxg5 22. Nxc5 Qd5 (or 22. ... Qg6 23. Qf3!) 23. Qf5! the position is not at all clear. Because of Black's weak king, it is difficult for the second player to consolidate his position, and White can take his time bringing in the reserves.

**20. Rxf1**



The critical moment of the game. White is down an Exchange and his light squares are extremely weak. His only hope lies in the weak black king, which so far has not found safe haven.

**20. ... g5?**  
After this weakening move, the position turns around completely. There is only one refutation; after thinking for half an hour, I found it.

Here 20. ... Qf7? also fails to address the problems of the position in a satisfactory manner. The black king is not completely safe on the kingside either, e.g., 21. Qg4 0-0 22. Nd2 Qd7 23. Rf6! with an unclear position.

The right way to consolidate was 20. ... Qd5!. Black centralizes the queen, but the real point is that Black's king now has a path to safety: the strategic threat is ... Kd7-c8-b7. White cannot really stop this, and therefore his position is bad; for instance: 21. Nd2 Kd7 22. Qg4 g5 23. Ne4 Kc8! with a clear advantage for Black.

**21. Nxc5!**  
Now 21. Qe4? loses to 21. ... Qd5 followed by the above-mentioned king maneuver, while 21. Qf6? Rf8 22. Qg6+ Qf7 also misses the win.

The best White has is 23. Qxh6 gxh4 24. Nd2 Qe7 25. Rxf8+ Qxf8 26. Qxe6+ Kd8 27. Ne4! with continuing complications.

**21. ... hxg5**  
It was too late to turn back with 21. ... 0-0-0 in view of 22. Nf7 Rdf8 23. Qe4!.

## 22. Qf6!

Note that 22. Qxg5? loses to 22. ... Qh7!

## 22. ... Rg8



## 23. Bxg5!

This move was the most difficult for me to see, but eventually I realized that Black is simply lost here. His pieces are paralyzed; he must not only defend against immediate threats such as Qf6-f3 and Qf6-h6, but also against slow plans such as h4-h5-h6.

## 23. ... Rc8

The best attempt was 23. ... Nc6, trying to prepare ... Nc6-d8 followed by ... Qd7-f7. However, White has a nice path to victory: 24. Qf3! Rh8 25. h4! and the h-pawn begins its march. After 25. ... Rc8 26. h5 Nd8 (there is nothing else to try) now there follows 27. Bxd8! Rxd8 28. Qg4! and Black must give up his queen to avoid mate.

## 24. Qh6!

The most precise.

## 24. ... Qd5

The only move.

## 25. Rf7!

The key point. Black's king is cut off on the back rank.

## 25. ... Nc6

Here my opponent offered me a draw.

## 26. Rh7!, Black resigned.

... and here he resigned! Mate is inevitable.

Another nice feature of the festival was the Beauty Prizes awarded after each round. My game against Quesada won one of the prizes for round nine, and I was happy to join the commentary team to share my thoughts about the game.

With 6½/9, I was now in shared third. As it turned out, even a win would not be enough for a GM norm, so I could just play chess without any pressure. My opponent,

GM Liu Yan from China, had started excellently — winning his first four games — but lost momentum in the second half.

The final round began with a small surprise. As the Grandmaster Tournament had concluded on the previous day, the stage was left free for the top four games in the Master's section — including mine. The conditions felt a bit surreal: behind the stage, there was access to a private bathroom, another room with various refreshments, and a path leading to a terrace outside. However, the course of the game meant that I didn't have a chance to make use of all this; playing Black, I reached a drawish endgame out of the opening and peace negotiations broke out soon after.

When all the dust had settled, I found myself in an eight-way tie for third place, but just outside of the prize money due to tiebreaks. GM Bu Xiangzhi won the tournament with 8/10 points; GM Aryan Chopra was close behind with 7½ points. All in all, I was pleased with my performance, though, as usual, the result did not come without luck.

It would be unjust to write only about my own tournament and not mention the successes of the other American players.

IM Nico Chasin had an excellent result. He showed remarkable consistency against lower-rated players, drew tournament winner Bu as Black, and then won this lovely game in the final round to finish in a tie for third (sixth on tiebreaks):

## PRECISION

IM Nico Chasin (2455)

IM A Ra Harikrishnan (2406)

Biel Masters (10), Biel, 07.27.2023



WHITE TO MOVE

Here Nico calculates precisely and soon obtains a winning position.

17. Rf3! Bxc4 18. Rfc3! Bd5 19. e4 Qb6+

20. Rc5 e5

A better try was 20. ... Bb7! 21. Qxg4 Nd7 22. Bh6 g6 23. Bxf8 Rxf8 24. a5 Qxb4 with advantage to White.

## 21. exd5 exf4 22. Qxg4 Na6

Certainly 22. ... a5!? was more resilient.

## 23. Qxf4

The rest is simple. The rook on c5 is essentially untouchable; Black could not hope to survive against connected passed pawns.

## 23. ... Rad8 24. a5 Qxb4 25. Qxb4 Nxb4

26. Rb5 Nd3 27. Rc3 Ne5 28. Rb7 f5 29.

Rcc7, Black resigned.

Gus Huston had a busy July, earning the IM title after two exceptional performances at the World Open and Charlotte Super Swiss. He followed this with another solid result in Biel, finishing with 5½/10 and adding 11 more points to his rating.

IM Eric Rosen had a tough start, but found his footing in the second half of the tournament, scoring several nice technical wins to end with 5½/10.

Despite playing up in nine out of the 10 rounds, Gabriel Eidelman finished on an even score, gained 80 rating points, and secured his FM title in the process. The result was far from a fluke; in fact, Gabriel was unlucky in several games and could easily have finished higher in the crosstable. Here is one example of his play; note the ease with which he gains a winning position against his higher-rated opponent.

## KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, SÄMISCH VARIATION (E81)

Gabriel Eidelman (2204)

IM Read Samadov (2482)

Biel Masters (1), Biel, 07.17.2023

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. f3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be3 0-0 7. Nge2 Nbd7 8. Qd2 b5

A line that has been popularized by GM Alexander Grischuk.

## 9. h4

Black has excellent compensation after 9. cxb5 axb5 10. Nxb5 c6 11. Nbc3 e5.

## 9. ... Nb6?!

A surprising mistake; perhaps Samadov did not have much experience in this variation. Black cannot allow the white pawn to reach h5.

## 10. Ng3

Also possible is the thematic 10. Nf4.



GM Aryan Chopra



GM Bu Xiangzhi



IM Eric Rosen

**10. ... c6?!**

Highly suspicious. The whole point of Black's prior play is to do without this move. Both captures on c4 deserved consideration.

**11. h5 Re8?**



In the face of the attack, Black panics and makes another passive move. Once again 11. ... Nxc4 was better, aiming to seek counterplay on the b-file after 12. Bxc4 bxc4 13. Bh6 Qb6!?

**12. hxg6 hxg6**

Here 12. ... fxc6 runs into 13. e5! (otherwise Black would play ... e7-e5 himself) 13. ... Nfd7 14. Bh6 Bh8 15. 0-0-0, with a strong initiative.

**13. 0-0-0 b4**

The closing of the queenside means the end of Black's counterplay.

**14. Nb1 a5 15. Be2**

A bit too cautious. The direct 15. Bh6! Bh8 16. Nf5! was stronger.

**15. ... Qc7**

The computer notes that 15. ... Nh7! is the only defense, with a two-fold idea: now ... e7-e5 or ... c6-c5 are on the cards, while the h-file can be successfully blocked with ... Nd7-f8.

**16. Bh6 Bh8**



With simple and confident play, Gabriel has

built up a decisive attack straight out of the opening. Here he had a direct win:

**17. Nf5!?**

Gabriel saw the crushing 17. Bf8!!, but was concerned about 17. ... Nh5! (17. ... Rxf8 18. Rxb8+! Kxb8 19. Qh6+ Kg8 20. Rh1 is simply mate) 18. Nxh5 Rxf8 19. Qh6 Rd8, where no knockout blow seems apparent. However, White can continue with 20. f4!, and Black cannot prevent the opening of more lines after f4-f5. For example, 20. ... gxf5 (20. ... e6 21. e5!) 21. Rxh5 Bf6 22. Rdh1 loses, since Black cannot prevent Rh5-g5+.

**17. ... Bxf5 18. exf5 e5 19. Bd3 e4 20. fxe4 Nxe4 21. Qf4 Qe7**

White's position is still good, but Black managed to confuse things in Gabriel's time pressure:

**22. Rhe1**

The clearest solution was 22. Nd2! Nxd2 23. fxc6! Ne4 24. g7.

**22. ... d5 23. fxc6 fxc6 24. Nd2 g5 25. Bxc5**



As Black's main problem is his weak king, keeping queens on the board with 25. Qg4! makes sense.

**25. ... Qxg5 26. Rxe4 Qxf4 27. Rxf4 Re3 28. Rg4+ Bg7 29. Kc2 a4 30. c5 Nd7 31. Nf3**

Now 31. Nf1! would effectively transfer the knight to the f5 square. But such nuances are hard to see with little time.

**31. ... Nf6 32. Rh4**

Much stronger was 32. Rg6!, aiming at the c6-pawn.

**32. ... Ne4**

Black has sufficient activity for the missing pawn; the game was later drawn.

**33. Bxe4 dxe4 34. Ne5 Bxe5 35. dxe5 Re8 36. Rh6 Rg3 37. Rd2 Rxe5 38. Rxc6 Reg5 39. Rc8+ Kf7 40. Rc7+ Ke6 41. Rc6+ Ke5 42. Rb6 e3 43. Re2 Rxc2 44. Kd3 Rxe2 45. Kxe2 Rg2+**

**46. Kxe3 Rxb2 47. Kd3 Rxa2 48. Rxb4 Kd5 49. Kc3 Kxc5 50. Rh4 a3 51. Kb3 Ra1 52. Ra4 Kb5 53. Rxa3 Rxa3+ 54. Kxa3, draw.**

Also with 5/10 was IM Alex Costello. He had the most dramatic tournament out of all of us: in 10 rounds, he only made two draws! Here is his round seven game:

## FIGHTING CHESS

**IM Alexander Costello (2224)**

**Valentin Moritz Collin (2132)**

**Biel Masters (7), Biel, 07.24.2023**



WHITE TO MOVE

### 16. f4!

This is an excellent move from all points of view: White prevents ... f5-f4, restricts the g6-knight, and makes use of his unopposed dark-squared bishop.

### 16. ... Qc7 17. Bb2 exf4 18. Nh5!?

Here 18. exf4! may have been even stronger, with the idea of 18. ... Nxf4 19. Bxg7! Kxg7 20. Rxf4.

### 18. ... fxe3 19. Nxc7 Qd6

The only move.

### 20. d4!

Alex continues to play with great energy.

### 20. ... cxd4 21. Bxd4 f4?



Forced was 21. ... Qxd4!, sacrificing the

Exchange but stopping the attack. After 22. Nxe6 Qe5 23. Nxf8 Rxf8 Black has decent compensation.

### 22. Rad1?

I think 22. Qe4! was better. After 22. ... Rfe8 White does not have to capture the Exchange immediately; the improving move 23. Rad1! gives him a clear advantage.

### 22. ... Qe7 23. Qe4 Bf5?

Under constant pressure for the last few moves, Black collapses. He had to find 23. ... Nde5!! 24. Bxe5 Bc8 when, thanks to the pin, Black regains the piece and has a fine position.

### 24. Nxf5! Qg5

Not 24. ... Qxe4 25. Nh6 mate.

### 25. Qe6+ Rf7 26. Nd6, Black resigned.

Finally, WFM Yassi Ehsani gained 30 rating points, playing a number of exciting games along the way. The following moment from her win against FM Magnus Ermitsch was particularly instructive:

## TIMELY PUSH

**WFM Yassamin Ehsani (2106)**

**FM Magnus Ermitsch (2232)**

**Biel Masters (2), Biel, 07.18.2023**



WHITE TO MOVE

Black's position looks solid: after trading dark-squared bishops, he will be ready to counterattack in the center with ... c6-c5. However, White found an ingenious solution:

### 17. Bxa3 Qxa3 18. g4!!

The black queen is misplaced for the moment, and White rushes to take advantage.

### 18. ... Qe7

After 18. ... c5? White wins with 19. g5!.

### 19. g5 hxg5

Here 19. ... Nh7? fails to 20. Bxh7+ Kxh7 21. g6+, while 19. ... Nd7 allows White to continue improving the position of her pieces with 20. Re3!?

### 20. Nxg5 g6 21. Nh7!?

Good enough, but 21. Re3! Kg7 22. Bxg6!! was even stronger. Black loses in all variations.

### 21. ... Kg7 22. Nxf8 Rxf8 23. Re3 Rh8 24.

**Qf4 Qd8 25. Rae1 Rh5 26. Re5 Qd6 27.**

**Be2 Rh8 28. c5 Qe7 29. Bc4 Bc8 30. b4 b5**

**31. Bb3 a5 32. a3 axb4 33. axb4 Qa7 34.**

**R5e3 Rh5, Black resigned.**

All in all, the Biel Chess Festival was an unforgettable experience, and I was very fortunate that it became possible. I hope that this first venture into Europe will not be my last. ♠



WFM Yassamin Ehsani



IM Alexander Costello