

30

Grade-Level National Champions Crowned in Orlando

Parity prevails; only **five** of the 13 grade levels did not have co-champions.

BY "COACH JAY" STALLINGS



OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF decades, I have seen many future grandmasters cruise to victory at the National K-12 Grade Championships. Sometimes the rating of the top player in each section would

be 300-400 points above the second-ranked competitor.

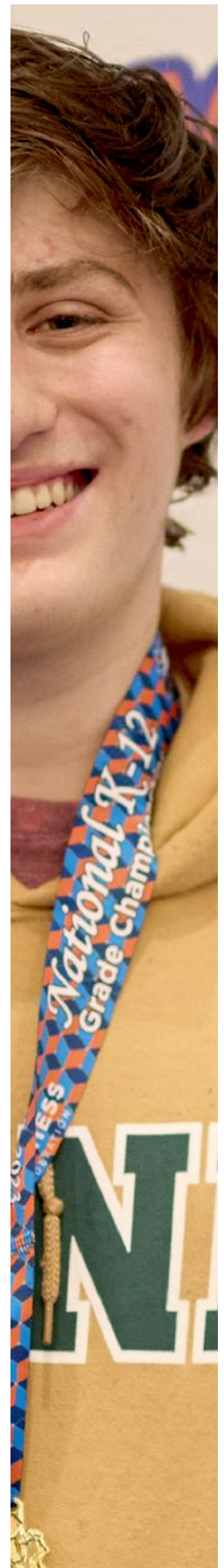
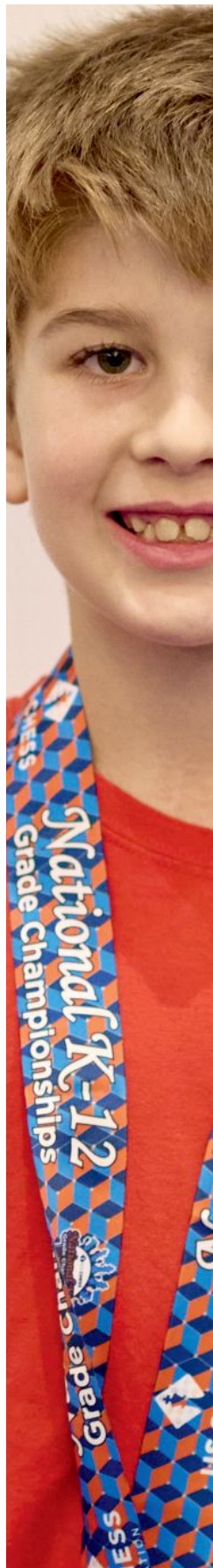
In the 2023 event, held from December 15-17 in Orlando, Florida, most sections did not have an elite player or group way above the others. Competition was *tough!* On the

top boards, there were over two dozen games in the final round in which both players were rated over 2000. And most sections had multiple champions crowned.

Perhaps only the fire marshal's limiting of players prevented a new attendance record in Orlando this year. There was a total of 2,405 players from 41 states (plus some from the territories and foreign countries), who played in 13 different sections. The largest section was the 277-player 5th Grade section. The kindergarten section was the smallest, with only 87 playing.



Left to right: Mehmet Ylianli, Sasha Schaefer, Kyle Wang, FM Eric Liu, and Avi Kaplan stood alone in their respective sections.



A STREAK, A BOLD PREDICTION, AND AN IMBALANCE IN STATE ATTENDANCE

Before making my cross-country trip to Orlando, several stories started to form:

- Nate Shuman, Gus Huston, and their team from Dalton would be vying to win their 10th straight National Grade Level Championship (it started in third grade, and they are now seniors!).
- Oak Park School from Gainesville, Florida looked like the favorite in a couple of the younger grades and their coach confirmed it. "I would be sorely surprised if we did not win the kindergarten section," Tim Tusing predicted. "And third grade is our strongest grade. It should be a lock."
- New York teams comprised over half of the total teams registered, but would they be able to dominate the final standings as in years past?

GRADE BY GRADE RESULTS 12TH GRADE

Co-Champions: IM Gus Huston (NY) and IM Max Lu (CT), 6½/7.

Team: Dalton (NY), 17 points.

IM Gus Huston (NY) and IM Max Lu (CT) drew their round six encounter and won their other games to finish where they started — at the top of the standings. Just a half-point back were Juan Pablo Lyon (FL) and Jessica Hyatt (NY).

The Dalton seniors completed their "decade of dominance," as their team won their grade level for the 10th consecutive year. Their total of 17 points out of a possible 21 landed them a full three points ahead of the second and third place teams: Success Academy HS Liberal Arts (NY) and Whitney Young HS (IL), which each tallied 14 points. Dalton's three-point margin of victory was equaled only by the Speyer second grade team.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

IM Maximillian Lu (2436)

IM Gus Huston (2481)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (6), Orlando, 12.17.2023



WHITE TO MOVE

25. Nxd4 Bf5!



GENEROUS GM GEORGIEV!

GM Vladimir Georgiev served as the guest GM with the usual trifecta: Simul, lectures, and All-Comers Blitz sessions. It was evident right from the start that GM Georgiev loved the game and enjoyed playing against any and all who asked. His giving nature seemed to spill onto the board during his extended simul.

SIMUL

GM Georgiev gave up some entertaining draws, while others... those he just handed out for free!

As games finished, eager chess fans pleaded to jump in and play on boards that were now clear, and, consistent with his generous spirit, GM Georgiev shrugged affirmatively. In one of these "bonus" games, he continued his casual draw-giving with a Legal's Mate-style queen sacrifice.

CONSUMATE SHOWMAN

GM Georgiev

Random player

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (simul), 2023



WHITE TO MOVE

7. Bxf7 Kd7 8. Be6+ Ke8 9. Bf7+, draw.

ALL-COMERS BLITZ

Later, GM Georgiev played blitz against all-comers, but the line was long, so he cut it in half by constantly playing two games at once for the entire two hours! Oh, and he gave five minute to three minute time odds on both boards! He truly is "the generous GM!"



With this move Gus finds a clever way to (in effect) offer a draw.

26. Nxf5 Qc5+ 27. Kh1 Nf2+, draw.

The knight will bounce back and forth between f2 and h3 for the repetition.

11TH GRADE

Champion: Avi Kaplan (IL), 6½/7.

Team: Columbia Grammar & Prep School (NY), 16 points.

IM Nico Chasin had been tied with others at 4½ at the start of the day, but gave up a draw to Avi (see “Misses that Mattered” for the game) and Avi’s final round opponent missed an equally difficult drawing line late, making Kaplan the deserving winner.

CGPS overtook Stuyvesant on the final day, finishing two full points ahead of the field.

10TH GRADE

Co-Champions: Marvin Gao (FL) and IM Bach Ngo (FL), 6/7.

Team: American Heritage (FL), 15½ points.

A final round draw between leaders Marvin Gao (FL) and IM Bach Ngo (FL) translated into a co-championship between the two Floridian masters. Their six points led to no fewer than six players at 5½ points.

9TH GRADE

Co-Champions: FM Brewington Hardaway (NY), Aiden Reiss (NY), and Erick Zhao (PA), 6/7.

Team: Columbia Grammar & Prep School (NY), 16 points.

FM Hardaway drew with Black in round seven against Aiden Reiss, leaving an opening that Erick Zhao seized. His final round win leveled him up with the former players at six points, giving us three 9th Grade co-champions.

SOONER OR LATER

[Aiden Reiss \(2260\)](#)

[Jerry Yao \(2004\)](#)

[2023 K-12 Grade Champs \(6\) Orlando, 12.17.2023](#)

(see diagram next page)

Aiden Reiss’s sixth round win put him on board one in the final round.

49. Re6 Rd8 50. Rh4?

White leaves no doubt with 50. Rxb4! axb4 51. d6 Rcc8 52. Kb3 g6 53. Kxb4 gxf5 54. Re7+ Kg6 55. Kc5 Kg5 56. d7 Rc7 57. Kd6.

BUGHOUSE AND BLITZ BUGHOUSE K-12

Columbia Grammar (NY) teammates FM Brewington Hardaway and IM Nico Chasin cruised to victory in the K-12 bughouse with a perfect score of 10/10, sweeping the two-game sets from five different opposing teams. It was not their first time playing bughouse, but it was their first time playing together. Nico matter-of-factly observed, “We were the two strongest players, together on a team. Yes, there’s often more to it in bughouse, but we played quickly, and...” Here Brewington interjected, “We dropped pawns on h6 a lot!”

Three teams garnered eight points each. Finishing second, third, and fourth respectively were Nate Ziegler and Brian Bird (FL), Aaron Marian and Advait Nair (FL), and Chase Bellamy and Akshay Rajagopal (NC).

BLITZ K-12

FM Brewington Hardaway swept two games from IM Gus Huston in the sixth and final round of the K-12 Blitz tournament. At 11½/12, he finished a full point ahead of his bughouse partner, IM Nico Chasin. A third Columbia Grammar student made it a trio at the top as fifth grader WFM Megan Paragua was just a half-point behind Chasin. When asked if she was surprised by her result, she shrugged with a smile: “Not really. I finished third last year, too!” Nico told me that Paragua is very strong at blitz, adding with a smile, “I’m afraid of her.”

IM Max Lu and Will Moorhouse equaled Megan’s 10/12 score, earning the fourth and fifth spots, respectively.

Special mention for Texas freshman, Logan Shafer, who was the only player rated under 2000 (1984) to finish in the top 31 places — he earned his spot in 20th place. Tough field!

New York City’s Columbia Grammar scored 31½ points, giving them an impressive five-point margin of victory in the team standings. Dalton and Hunter (both NY) were second and third with 26½ points.

BLITZ K-6

Santhosh Ayyappan (NJ) took first on tie-breaks over Nehanraj Ramesh (IA) at 11/12. Five players finished 10/12 with tie-breaks landing them in this order: Tariq Yue, Kushagra Bhargava, and Oliver Rana, followed by the alliterative pair of Sivavishnu Srinivasan and Liam Liu.

PS77 Lower Lab (NY) won the team championship with 24½ points. Just one stalemate, perpetual, or maybe a dual flag drop behind was Speyer Legacy with 24 points.

Top: PS77 Lower Lab won the K-6 blitz. Middle: FM Brewington Hardaway. Bottom: Nehanraj Ramesh (L), Santhosh Ayyappan (R).





Saikaruyna Kesireddy



Erick Zhao



WHITE TO MOVE

50. ... Kg8 51. Rd4 Rd6?? 52. Rxb4! Rxe6
53. Rb8+ Re8 54. Rxe8+ Kf7 55. d6 Rxc6+
56. Bxc6 a4 57. d7, Black resigned.

CONVERSION

Erick Zhao (2441)
Saikaruyna Kesireddy (1901)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (7), Orlando,
12.17.2023

(see diagram top of next column)

36. Bxc5!

With this move, White indicates that he is confident that he can win the resulting bishops of opposite colors endgame. A brave decision, especially in a final round game!



WHITE TO MOVE

36. ... dxc5 37. Rxd7+ Kxd7 38. Bxf7 Kd6

It initially looks like Black could have put up more resistance with a setup that would prevent f3-f4 and also keep White's king from getting to the fifth rank, but after 38. ... g5 39. Kf2 Be5 40. Ke3 Bd4+ 41. Ke2 Be5 42. Kd3 Kc6 43. Kc4 h6 44. Bd5+ Kb6 45. Ba8 Ka7 we see an idea that reminds me of the fourth game of the Fischer – Taimanov match from 1971: 46. Kxc5!! and wins.

39. f4 Ke7 40. Bc4 a5 41. e5 g5 42. Kf2, Black resigned.

At first glance, Black's resignation looks premature, but looking ahead a few moves you can see that the e- and f-pawns will roll as White's king marches up the board.

8TH GRADE

Champion: FM Eric Liu (TX), 6½/7.
Team: Hunter College (NY), 15 points.

FM Eric Liu leapfrogged the previously unscathed Nikash Vemparala in this impressive Italian Pianissimo miniature to finish alone at the top.

GIUOCO PIANO (C54)

FM Eric Chang Liu (2377)
Nikash Vemparala (2232)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (7), Orlando,
12.17.2023

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d3 0-0 6. Nbd2 a6 7. 0-0 d6 8. Bb3 Ba7 9. h3 Be6 10. Bc2 Qd7 11. Re1 Rfe8 12. Nf1 d5 13. exd5 Bxd5 14. Ng3 h6 15. Nh4 Rad8 16. Nhf5

White has achieved exactly what he intended. From here, most tactical themes involve the knight sacrificing at either g7 or h6, as you will see!

16. ... Qe6

My databases have not seen this move, and despite the result maybe they should!

DALTON (NY) SENIORS COMPLETE THEIR "DECADE OF DOMINANCE!"

In 2014, the 3rd grade team from Dalton won the national title. The next year, those same young players did it again. As the years went by, the national grade level titles continued to accumulate for this same group, without a single gap year.

Nate Shuman scored at least 5½ points (out of 7) in each of those years, earning three national champion titles. IM Gus Huston earned four national champion titles, including a shared title this year. Veda Safranek was also there every year. Pippa Lee missed only the online version in 2020. Julia Miyasaka made it to eight out of the 10 years. Ryan Peterson joined the team for the final four years. Along the way, others were also there as part of this history-making team.

David MacEnulty acted as lead coach until he retired a few years ago. Now, WIM Beatriz Marinello runs the program.



Fun fact: The average rating of the four team members who attended every in-person year from 3rd grade to 12th grade went from 1539 to 1969.

17. d4 Qc8?

I'd prefer 17. ... e4, cutting off the bishop that supported the invading knight. After 18. Ne3 (stronger is 18. f3) 18. ... Bxa2! 19. b3? Nxd4! 20. cxd4 Bxd4 21. Rxa2 Bxe3 play looks imbalanced and fun for both sides!

18. Bxh6!! gxh6

Putting up a bit more of a fight is 18. ... g6 19. Bg5 Qe6 but White is still winning.

19. Qd2 Re6 20. Qxh6 Ne8



Now it's White to move and mate in five. (Don't move until you see it!)

21. Ne7+ Nxe7

White will now execute a textbook "bishop

back-out mate." (I also call it a "Yates Mate" after a famous Alekhine - Yates win by the underdog in 1923).

22. Bh7+ Kh8 23. Bg6+, Black resigned.

Sometimes this thematic retreat guards the f7/f2 escape square. Sometimes it supports a mate there, and sometimes it blocks attacks against the queen on the 6th/3rd rank. Here it does two out of three jobs. Nice!

7TH GRADE

Co-Champions: Aditeya Das (NY), Bobby Qian (NJ), Andrew Jiang (GA), Vihaan Saxena (NJ), and Alexander Sukhiashvili (NJ), 6/7.

Team: Milburn HS (NJ), 17 points.

A statistically improbable situation occurred on Sunday afternoon when a total of 14 (!) players found themselves knotted at the top of the standings heading into the final round of the 7th Grade section. Perhaps just as improbable was the fact that six of the 14 players were from the great state of New Jersey!

A draw would not be enough to finish as a co-champion, so there were a lot of hard-fought games in that final round. In the end, five of the seven critical games ended with a decisive result.

PASSERS

Andrew Jiang (2314)

David Zhang (1834)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando, 12.16.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

24. ... Rxb5?

Unfortunately we must call this a mistake even though it looks like White's next move simply loses a pawn.

Better was the simple 24. ... Kf8, activating the king.

25. axb5 Be7?

Black does not see the zinger coming.

THE GIRLS ROOM

The most happening spot outside the tournament hall was definitely the Girls Room. A tandem simul by GM Irina Krush and WIM Carolina Blanco in the late morning, pizza for the teen girls at lunch time, and a

live chess game in the afternoon were part of the ongoing activities.

The Altons (Krista and Arthur) continued to bring their positive energy and encouraging words, while Kimberly Doo greeted with a smile and was quick with a camera. Many girls consider the Girls Room the highlight of the weekend.



26. b6!

Here is the point of White's previous move.

26. ... Rb8

The originally-planned move 26. ... Bxc5 would have been destroyed by 27. b7!.

27. Bxa5 Nf4+ 28. Ke3 Bg5 29. Rc4 Rd8 30. Rxf4!

Nice simplification. At first glance, you might think that White did not see that he would not net Black's bishop, but the connected passers are the only important story line here.

30. ... e5 31. b7 Bxf4+ 32. Ke2 Rb8 33. c6 e4 34. Nb5 exf3+ 35. Kxf3 Be5 36. Bc7, Black resigned.

6TH GRADE

Champion: Kyle Wang (TX), 7/7.

Team: Collegiate School (NY), 15 points.

If New Jersey made an impact in the 7th Grade section, it was the Lone Star State that gave notice to the Union in the 6th Grade section. Top-ranked Kyle Wang won all seven of his games, with fellow Texan Srikar Kandikayala as the official runner-up, but tied with four others a full point behind Kyle. The others at 6/7 were

Anmay Chaudhury (GA), Jagadeeshwar Sri-dhar (VA), Vijay Anandh (TX), and Ishaan Rajendran (NY).

SICILIAN DEFENSE (B94)

Kyle Wang (2078)

Yuze Luke Ji (1952)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (7), Orlando, 12.17.2023

Board one. Round seven. A title on the line. Nerves? Black overlooks a "biggie" on the 10th move of the game and White closed it out nicely from there.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bg5 Nbd7 7. Bc4 b5 8. Bd5 Nxd5 9. Nxd5 Bb7 10. 0-0 h6??



11. Ne6! Bxd5

A quick death would have been the punishment if the knight had been captured. 11. ... fxe6?? 12. Qh5+ g6 13. Qxg6 mate.

12. Nxd8 hxg5 13. Qxd5 ...

Black resigned on move 37.

5TH GRADE

Co-Champions: Tariq Yu (PA), WFM Megan Paragua (NY), Kyle Dong (NJ), Yuvraj Sawhney (CA), Glenn Zhang (CA), Derek Zhang (NY), and Phineas Weingarten (NY), 6/7.

Team: Speyer (NY), 16 points.

DIAGONALS

Alan Chen (1943)

Tariq Yue (2047)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando, 12.16.2023

(see diagram top of next column)

In round five, eventual co-champion Tariq Yu finished his game quickly with a nice two-move tactic.

55. ... d4+! 56. Kxd4, and White resigned.

Naturally White foresaw 56. ... Bf6+ 57. Kc4 Qb5 mate, while no better was 56. Qxd4+ Bf6.

OAK HALL SCHOOL – HOW DO THEY DO IT?

Coach Tim Tusing predicted “almost certain” team wins in the Kindergarten and 3rd Grade sections, and suspected that they would take 1st Grade as well. Nailed it.

Oak Hall School, the only non-New York team to finish in the Top 10 in each of the five sections from Kindergarten through 4th Grade, finished on top in three of those sections. Only Speyer (NY) matched their three national team titles.

How does a school in Gainesville, Florida compete with schools with long chess traditions that have titled players as coaches?

It all comes down to hard work and dedication leading up to the tournaments, and a determination to play your best once at the event.

During the school year, Coach Tusing hosts nightly online tournaments for his students at Oak Hall. Attendance ranges from five or six players to as many as

20. On Saturdays, he offers several tournaments. During the school week, he reviews the students' online games in their classrooms. This gives near instant feedback on how they could improve their play.

In the team room at Nationals, Coach Tusing connects with every student. Assistant Coach Kevin Sevilla is there to review games as well. In a seven-minute speech before one of the later rounds, Coach Tusing told his students, “Your eyes are your

windows to your brain. Open them so you can use your brain! If you don't, you are going to lose.”

AMAZING ACCOMPLISHMENT!

In the 3rd Grade section, Oak Hall's top three players combined for 14 wins and seven draws. They did not lose a single game out of their 21 games played! What are the chances of that?





BLACK TO MOVE

LPDO

Samuel Nemiroff (1840)

WFM Megan Althea Paragua (2173)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (4), Orlando, 12.16.2023



WHITE TO MOVE

After Black's 28. ... Rxd4, another 5th Grade co-champion, Megan Paragua, benefitted from an oversight by White.

29. Rxb5?? Rxd1 30. Nxd1 Ba6!

Call it a *zwischenzug*, an intermezzo, or simply an in-between move, but the result is the same — a free piece for the young WFM.

31. Rxa5 Rxd1 32. Rxa6 Rxb1 33. Ra7 Rb4 34. a4 Rxe4 35. a5 Ra4 36. a6 Kh7 37. Rf7 Ng6 38. a7 h5 39. Kg1 Ra2 40. Kf1 e5 41. Ke1 e4 42. Kf1 e3, White resigned.

4TH GRADE

Co-Champions: Linxi Zhu (NY) and Santhosh Ayyappan (NJ), 6½/7.

Team: Speyer (NY), 16½ points.

US Chess Experts Linxi Zhu (NY) and Santhosh Ayyappan (NJ) drew their round six encounter but beat everyone else.

3RD GRADE

Champion: Sasha Schaefer (NY), 6½/7.

Team: Oak Hall (FL), 17½ points.



The first move in Chen - Yue is about to be played.

Sasha Schaefer defeated co-leader Advik Manchanda on board one in the final round so there would be no need to even discuss the tie-break systems. Oak Hall's team championship was a no-doubter as their margin of victory was 2½ points over the next closest team.

2ND GRADE

Co-Champions: Sriansh Katta (NC) and Samanyu Alluri (MA), 6½/7.

Team: Speyer (NY), 16½ points.

Sriansh Katta and Samanyu Alluri each defeated higher-rated players in the final round.

Speyer's three-point margin of victory in 2nd Grade tied with the Dalton 12th Grade team for the largest among the sections.

1ST GRADE

Co-Champions: Darren Wu (NY) and Mustafa Muhammad (NC), 6½/7.

Team: Oak Hall (FL), 14 points.

Darren Wu and Mustafa Muhammad drew their final round encounter after having won their first six games.

KINDERGARTEN

Champion: Mehmet Yilani (OH), 7/7.

Team: Oak Hall (FL), 14½ points.

Pre-tournament favorite Mehmet Yilani (OH) swept the Kindergarten section to earn the title of 2023 National K-12 Grade Kindergarten Chess Champion. Matthew Wang (CA) and Luke Larochelle (RI) tallied six points each to finish in shared second and third place.

Huge thanks to the staff and volunteers who worked so hard during this holiday

season to bring cheer to over 2,400 young chess players!

MISSED MOVES!

While reviewing over 100 games, and with the engine constantly sharing its non-subjective evaluations, your author stumbled across some fun moves that were NOT played.

Sometimes the "misses" would not have changed the final result of the game, but in others, it most certainly would have added at least a half-point to the score of the "misser." Let's take a look at eight positions — four where the miss didn't matter, and four where it did.

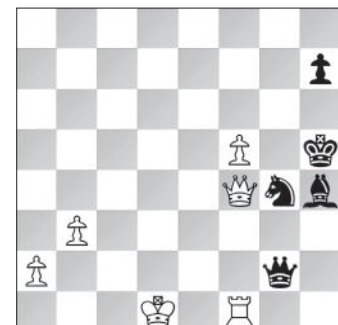
MISSED, BUT NO MATTER

NO HARM

Erick Zhao (2441)

FM Brewington Hardaway (2457)

2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando, 12.16.2023



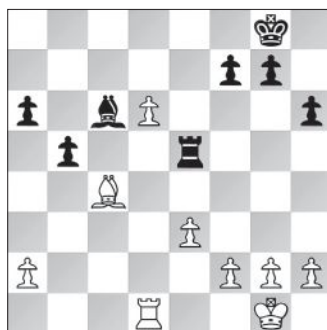
BLACK TO MOVE



Black eventually won this game, BUT he played over 30 more moves to do it. (White resigned on move 107.) Black played **73. ... Ne3+** instead of **73. ... Bg5!** and now White must give up the queen, the rook, or be mated.

NO FOUL

WFM Megan Althea Paragua (2173)
Mason Li (1980)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando,
12.16.2023



WHITE TO MOVE

White actually won this game by resignation after just six more moves, but Black could have put up more resistance. White played **27. Bb3** which could be answered with an activation of the black king (this did not happen!) instead of **27. Bd5! Bd7 28. e4 Kf8 29. f4 Re8** (blocking Black's king from helping out) **30. Rc1**, etc.

NO WORRIES

Advik Manchanda (1695)
Sasha Schaefer (1754)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (7), Orlando,
12.17.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

Black was victorious after 37 more moves and some inaccurate moves by White. Here Black played the automatic recapture **38. ... fxg4?** instead of **38. ... Re4!** winning either the g-pawn or the resulting pawn race after the exchange of rooks. After **39. Rxe4 fxe4 40. Kg3 Kb6** Black promotes in time to stop White from doing so.

NO PROBLEMS

Marvin Gao (2306)
Kalia Wang (1810)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (2), Orlando,
12.15.2023



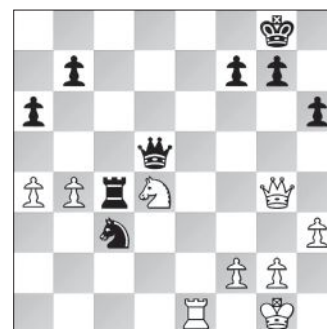
WHITE TO MOVE

Here White played **29. Re2** with a winning game. The engine's choice seems superficial until an innocuous-looking pawn push reveals the evil nature of this continuation: **29. Re8!** (threatening 30. Qxf8+) **29. ... Qd6 30. Qxd6 Nxd6 31. Rxb8 Rxb8** and now **32. h3!!** with 33. Be5 coming, and all lines win big for White.

THE MISS MATTERED

REGRETS

Abigail Zhou (1701)
Samanyu Alluri (1651)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (7), Orlando,
12.17.2023



WHITE TO MOVE

This game continued **28. Re8+ Kh7 29. Qf5+ Qxf5 30. Nxf5 Rxb4** and Black won on the 54th move of this final round showdown. If found, White's clever resource would have led play into a very equal-looking endgame: **28. Nf5!**, threatening mate and the fork on

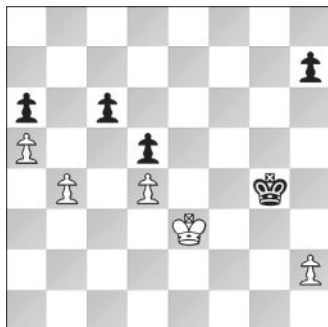
DID YOU SEE THIS?

In a somewhat reversed symmetrical statistic, there were **five** co-champions in the 7th Grade section, while **seven** co-champions shared the 5th Grade title!

the e7-square. A likely line: **28. ... Rxc4 29. Ne7+ Kf8 30. Nxd5 Rc4** with equality.

IF ONLY

Alexander Sukhiashvili (1785)
Bobby Qian (2131)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (6), Orlando,
12.17.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

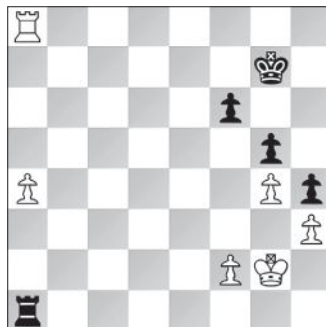
Here Black was likely low on time and blundered away the win with **39. ... Kh3??**. The game finished **40. Kf4 Kxh2 41. Ke5 Kg3 42. b5 cxb5 43. Kxd5 h5 44. Kc5 h4 45. d5 h3 46. d6** with a draw on move 61. Winning



rather easily was **39. ... h6!** and Black would have outflanked or outraced White.

NO TAKEBACKS

IM Bach Ngo (2446)
William Wu (2144)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando,
12.16.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

This is a very common pattern that requires vastly different winning/drawing plans depending on the kingside pawn structure. Now after **42. ... Ra3** White skillfully won by leaving the a7-square open and getting his king to b5 via b1. Black's king missed his opportunity to sprint for the f4-square with **42. ... Kf7** followed by ... Kf7-e6-e5-f4, changing the game into a three pawn versus two pawn situation on the kingside. White's king is as useful as an icpick in a desert.

BAD GEOMETRY

IM Nico Chasin (2514)
Avi Kaplan (2306)
2023 K-12 Grade Champs (5), Orlando,
12.16.2023

SCENES WE'VE SEEN

During round two, a teary-eyed girl asked me what time it was as she approached the exit. She was holding her completed scoresheet, so I knew exactly what was going on. "It's 5:25," I replied, to which she groaned as she turned slowly back towards the room full of players. It hurt me to tell her, but I said, "Sorry, I know your coach will be upset that you're out so soon, but you'll do better next round. ... Unfortunately, you can't stay in here." Bigger groan. Slumped shoulders. Slow walk out the door.



WHITE TO MOVE

White's defensive task looks impossible. If Black's rook is captured, ... Qd2xe2 threatens mate at f1 and h2. White played **36. Qb5 Ra2 37. Qd7 Qh6** and a draw was agreed. White had a geometric-looking win with **36. Rxc7+! Kxc7 37. Qb7+!!** and Black's king has to cooperate one way or another, i.e., **37. ... Kh6 38. Qxa8 Qxe2 39. Qh8+ Kg5 40. Qh3** and the white king is safe, while the passed d-pawn decides matters. ♠



Paparazzi would be at the K-12 Grades — who knew?!