



# Mixing it up in Mexico City!



## The 2023 World Junior and Girls Junior Championships

BY **IM ANDY WOODWARD**



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HE WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP is one of the most important events of the year, and its list of alumni is a who's who of modern chess. Four winners — GMs Boris Spassky, Anatoly Karpov, Garry Kasparov, and Viswanathan Anand

— have even gone on to win the world championship.

The 60th edition of the World Junior and the 39th running of the Girls Junior were held in Mexico City from September 20 through October 2, 2023, with 235 partici-

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pants representing 55 countries. Fourteen GMs and 30 IMs took part in the Open, while one IM, three WGMs, and 13 WIMs battled for top honors in the Girls section.

Team USA had six players make the trip to Mexico City. GM Hans Niemann was the ratings favorite in the Open section, while IMs Kirk Ghazarian, Josiah Stearman, and your author all had hopes of scoring upsets. IM Carissa Yip was the first seed in the Girls section, and she was joined by eight-year-old WCM Romi Milner. Some American university chess programs also sent players with coaches, including The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and the University of Missouri.

Other notable players were GMs Frederik Svane and Arseniy Nesterov in the Open, along with Canadian IM Shawn Rodrigue-Lemieux, the winner of the 2022 World Youth U18, and 14-year-old prodigy IM Shreyas Royal of England. Many eyes were also on 14-year-old WIM Miaoyi Lu from China in the Girls section, who has played some incredible games in recent months.

After hearing about this tournament through one of my chess friends in New Zealand, it seemed like a good opportunity for me. With Mexico City being just a three-hour flight from my home, this was an easy trip for an international tournament. The leisurely playing schedule, with most games played at a pace of one per day, was also attractive. And I was happy to see that my friend Shreyas Royal was registered to play too.

My ultimate goal for the event was to notch my third GM norm, but without a whole lot of time to prepare — I had to get ahead on my schoolwork to be able to play — I just wanted to play good games and gain experience.

My dad accompanied me on this trip, as we figured his ability to speak a bit of Spanish would be handy. A shuttle took us to the hotel after landing at the airport, and the first thing I saw in the hotel lobby was a “Welcome Juniors” sign with a life-sized chess board! Our hotel room was nice, but the wi-fi was cutting out and almost unusable. Thankfully the hotel was located next to a large mall, and a very kind hotel staff member helped us buy a local SIM card to hotspot my dad’s phone. The workaround was a bit klunky — my laptop wouldn’t connect, so I had to use my dad’s — but everything worked well enough in the end!

The opening ceremony took place on the morning of October 21. There were speeches and live entertainment from local musicians and dancers. Then, the moment of truth —

what color would the top players take in the first round? Top seeds Niemann and Yip came to the stage and were faced with two men in sombreros, who had white and black knights under their hats. Carissa went first, chose, and the man revealed a white knight. And Hans did the same!

The tournament started that afternoon. Early rounds are usually uneventful in major events; here, my first big challenge came when I took the black pieces against Niemann in round three. This was the second round of the day — the only day where we had two games — and the pairings didn’t come out until 40 minutes before the round. Without much time to prepare, and knowing that Hans plays so many different lines, I just looked through his recent games to feel him out. In our game he played an anti-Grünfeld line, which surprised me, but I had an interesting idea that I wanted to try, and it worked out well.

## ENGLISH OPENING (A15)

GM Hans Moke Niemann (2667)

IM Andy Woodward (2475)

World Junior Championship (3), Mexico City, 09.22.2023

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 e5

The engines tell us that this move is not enough to reach near equality, but I think it is a good practical try to stop White from getting a strong center.

5. Nxe5 0-0 6. Nf3 Re8

Putting pressure on the e4-pawn.

7. d3 d5!

The point of the pawn sacrifice, breaking White’s center down while activating both of Black’s bishops.

8. cxd5 Nxd5 9. Bd2

If 9. Nxd5 Qxd5 due to the pin.

9. ... Bg4 10. Be2 Nb4 11. Be3 Bxf3

12. gxf3 N8c6 13. h4

This move took me by surprise. I had only seen 13. a3 previously.

13. ... Nd4

The most logical move, taking control of the dark squares.

14. Rc1

This is forced, as otherwise either (a) one of the black knights would end up on c2, or (b) White would have to give up his dark-squared bishop, which would be bad news for him.

We see more clearly why this is the case if we examine the position after 14. Bxd4? Qxd4 15. Qd2 Rad8 16. Rd1 h5. Here Black has complete control over the dark squares, whereas White has no counterplay. If he tries to go f3-f4-f5, it always runs into ... Bg7-h6.

14. ... Qd6?!

White is just slightly better after 14. ... Qd7 15. a3 Na6 16. b4 h5.

15. a3!

White needs to act fast, as Black is threatening ... Nd4xe2 followed by ... Ra8-d8, leaving the d3-pawn defenseless.



Woodward wonders how to proceed against Niemann.



GM Marc'Andria  
MaurizziWGM Candela  
Belen Francisco  
GuercamburuIM Shreyas  
Royal**15. ... Na6 16. f4 Rad8****17. b4!?**

A decent practical choice, forcing Black to make a decision.

The engine likes 17. h5 Nc5 18. Nb5!, a nice semi-tactic to gain the bishop pair and trade White's passive knight for Black's good one. After 18. ... Qb6 19. b4!, counter-attacking, the position looks really crazy, but White has enough to compensate for all of Black's attacks and gets a slight advantage.

Here's a sample continuation: 19. ... Nxe4! 20. dxe4 Nf3+ 21. Kf1 Rxd1+ 22. Rxd1 Qc6! (keeping an eye on the b5-knight) 23. Rh3! (attack and counter-attack!) 23. ... a6! 24. Na7 Nh2+ 25. Rxh2 Qxe4 26. Rh3. White has a rook, bishop, and knight for Black's queen and pawn, so "objectively" White should be almost winning. In this particular case, however, the white knight is offside on a7, so it is much closer to equal.

**17. ... c5!**

Now White has to make a decision. Should he push a pawn on the queenside, or in the center?

Note that 17. ... c6?! is too slow, as it allows White to block out the black bishop and control the center after 18. e5! Qe6 19. h5.

**18. e5!?**

The best practical move. After 18. b5?! Nc7 19. e5 Qe7 20. a4 f6 Black breaks White's center, achieving a slightly better position despite being down a pawn.

**18. ... Qe7!**

We see one of the points of White's previous move after 18. ... Qc6? 19. Ne4!, as the e4-square is cleared for the knight.

The move 18. ... Qe6? fails to 19. Bg4!, targeting Black's queen while improving the bishop's position and removing any ... Nd4xe2 threats. White is significantly better after 19. ... Qe7 20. Ne4 cxb4 21. Qa4!.

**19. b5**

White had to be careful to avoid 19. Ne4

cxb4 (a) 20. Nd6? Rxd6 21. exd6 Qxd6 with a winning position for Black. Still, if White finds the correct (b) 20. Qa4 Black should not try (b1) 20. ... Rd5?, which aims to play ... Na6-c5, but allows White initiative after 21. h5!. Instead (b2) 20. ... Nf5! is the right move.

**19. ... Nc7 20. Qa4****20. ... Qe6**

Here I calculated 20. ... Qd7 for a long time before realizing White could get what he wanted with 21. b6!, trading the queens. With White dealing with a weak king in the center, a queen trade is always near the top of the priority list. The position is equal after 21. ... axb6 (or 21. ... Qxa4 22. Nxa4 axb6 23. Nxb6 Nce6 24. h5) 22. Qxd7 Rxd7 23. h5.

Also equal is 20. ... h5 21. Qxa7 Nce6, and even 20. ... Nce6 straightaway.

**21. Bd1?**

Here 21. Qxa7?! is met with 21. ... Nxe2 and now:

(a) 22. Kxe2 Qg4+ 23. Kd2 (23. f3? Qg2+ 24. Bf2 Ne6 and Black is winning) 23. ... Ne6 gives Black the advantage, as White's king is very weak, and Black threatens all sorts of things, including ... Qg4-f5, ... Ne6xf4, and ... c5-c4.

(b) 22. Nxe2! Qd5! and now:

(b1) 23. 0-0?! Qf3 24. Qxc5! (24. Ng3 Rxd3 25. Qxc5? Ne6 wins for Black) 24. ... Qxe2 25. Qxc7 Qg4+ peters out to a draw.

(b2) 23. Rg1 Nxb5?!. This looks like a natural human move, but it turns out that Black puts his knight in a precarious position after 24. Qxc5 Qxd3 25. a4 Na3 26. Qc3! White successfully trades queens and remains a pawn up. Instead the correct 23. ... Ne6 is equal.

The best try was probably 21. h5 g5! (not 21. ... Nxe2?! 22. Kxe2! Qg4+ 23. Kd2! Nd5 24. hxg6 hxg6 25. Rhg1 Qe6 26. Ne4 b6 27. Ng5 Qf5 28. Qe4 with a White advantage) 22. fxg5! Bxe5 23. Qc4 b6 24. a4 when we reach an unclear position.

**21. ... Qf5**

Targeting the d3-pawn.



## 22. Qc4?!

Human, all too human, but not the best. Instead White should have played 22. Ne2! Qxd3 23. Bxd4 Rxd4! 24. Qb3 (24. Nxd4? Qe4+ wins) 24. ... Ne6 25. Qxd3 Rxd3. Black will soon win one or two of the white pawns, and probably later the game, but this remained the best practical chance for White to survive.

## 22. ... Bh6!

With the f4-pawn in the crosshairs.

## 23. Ne4



The best/only chance for White to try to keep the game going.

## 23. ... Bxf4!

I calculated 23. ... Nd5?! for awhile, before realizing that White could keep practical

chances with the temporary queen sacrifice 24. Qxd5! Rxd5 25. Bg4 Qxf4! (25. ... Rxe5? 26. Bxf5 Rxf5 27. Ng3! Rf6 28. Ne4 Rb6 29. Nxc5 Rxb5 30. Ne4 and White is back in the game) 26. Bxf4 Bxf4 27. Nf6+ Kh8! 28. Nxd5 Bxc1 29. f4 h5 30. Bh3. While Black will be a pawn up after nabbing the a3-pawn, White has decent holding chances.

## 24. Nf6+ Kg7 25. Nxe8+ Rxe8 26. Qxc5 Ncx5?!

Giving White more chances; now Hans finds the resource I missed.

More precise was 26. ... Nce6! as it deprives White of the necessary time to castle. Black is winning after 27. Qd5 (or 27. Qc4 Qxe5 28. Rh3 Qf5) 27. ... Bxe3 28. fxe3 Qxd3.

## 27. 0-0!

In the middle of a storm, and on move 27!, White finally gets his king to safety. Now he has chances to hold the draw.

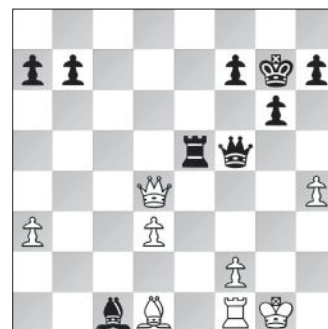
## 27. ... Rxe5 28. Bxd4 Nxd4 29. Qxd4 Bxc1

(see diagram top of next column)

Black is up a pawn, and has a much safer king. Is it enough to win?

## 30. Re1

Not 30. f4?? Be3+.



## 30. ... Bf4 31. Re4 Qf6!

I was very lucky to have this resource, unpinning the rook, to keep control of the position.

## 32. h5

It may look like White has decent drawing chances after 32. Rxf4!? Re1+ 33. Kg2 Qxd4 34. Rxd4 Rxd1 35. Rd7 a5, having entered a rook and pawn endgame down just one pawn, but White's pawns are split and very weak. Black should win this in the long run.

## 32. ... Rg5+ 33. Kf1 Be5

(see diagram next page)

King safety is often a determining factor in opposite-colored bishop middlegames. This is why I decided to keep the queens on the board — to keep the attacking opportunities alive.

The eventual Girls champion diffuses the tension before round eight.



**34. Qxa7**

Even if White had not taken the pawn, Black would still have had a great position after something like 34. Qe3 gxh5 35. f4 Bd6.

**34. ... b6!**

I suspect this is what Hans missed. Black cuts the white queen off on the g1-a7 diagonal, and now Black is ready to attack with ... Be5-d4 or even ... Be5-h2, threatening ... Rg5-g1+.

**35. Qa8!?**

Setting one last trap.

**35. ... gxh5**

Avoiding 35. ... Bd4?? 36. h6+! Kxh6 37. Qf8+ Qg7 38. Rh4+ Rh5 39. Qxg7+ Bxg7 40. Bxh5, winning for White.



IM Carissa Yip

**36. Re3 Bh2!**

The final touch, enforcing ... Rg5-g1+ followed by ... Qf6-b2+ and then grabbing the bishop on d1.

**37. Re8 Rg1+ 38. Ke2 Kh6?!**

The engine's way of winning is 38. ... Qb2+ 39. Kf3 Kh6!, but it looks risky to the human eye. If 40. Qc6+ Rg6.

**39. Bc2?!**

Getting low on time, White errs, although the best move loses as well: 39. d4! Qxd4 40. Qc6+ Kg7! (40. ... Rg6? 41. Qe4 gives White hope) and Black should win.

**39. ... Qc3 40. Rc8**

Now it is mate by force.

**40. ... Re1+ 41. Kf3 Qf6+ 42. Kg2 Rg1+, White resigned.**

As you can see in the game, Hans had a chance to draw, but he decided to enter into a slightly worse position hoping to make something out of it. I have been in this situation several times, so I completely understand his decision. Hans bounced back in the remainder of the tournament and finished strong, an unfortunate final round loss to Nesterov tempering his result.

The win over Niemann was the highlight of my event, but after that, its trajectory changed. In the fourth round I was paired with the eventual winner of the tournament, 16-year-old GM Marc'Andria Maurizzi from France. Accompanied by his coach, Marc'Andria had great preparation in our game, secured a strong position after move 20, and ground me down in the endgame. After his victory over me, Maurizzi continued to stay at the top of the leaderboard, becoming one of the youngest players ever to win the World Junior title. Here's one of his best games from the tournament.

**RUY LOPEZ (C70)**

GM Marc'Andria Maurizzi (2555)

GM Ivan Schitco (2514)

World Junior Championship (9), Mexico City, 09.29.2023

**1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Bc5!?**

The fourth most common move. More popular are 4. ... Nf6, 4. ... d6, and 4. ... b5.

**5. 0-0 Nge7**

Once again, the fourth most common move! Black is trying to get White out of book and just play chess. It turns out that Maurizzi

has a pocket full of ideas, even when he is caught by surprise.

**6. c3 Ng6 7. d4 Ba7 8. Bg5 f6 9. Be3 d6!?**

A very rare move, and apparently a specialty of the young Indian IM Aradhya Garg! With six games prior to this game (three by Aradhya!) compared to the 164 with 9. ... 0-0, this was definitely not expected.

**10. d5?!**

Not the best move, but worth a try. Better was 10. Nbd2 0-0 11. Re1 followed by a normal game.

**10. ... Bxe3?!**

Necessary was 10. ... b5!, as Black can't allow White to have so much play so fast. Things are equal after 11. Bxa7 (or 11. dxc6 bxa4! 12. Bxa7 Rxa7 13. Qxa4 Bg4) 11. ... Nxa7 12. Bc2 0-0.

**11. dxc6 b5 12. fxe3 bxa4 13. Qxa4 0-0****14. c4!**

This is the only move to snatch the advantage. White's next moves are Nc3-d5 and b2-b3 if necessary.

**14. ... f5 15. Nc3!**

Here 15. exf5?! looks normal, undoubling the pawns, but it's a mistake. Black has an edge after 15. ... Bxf5 16. Nc3 Bd3!.

**15. ... fxe4 16. Nd2!**

Stronger than 16. Nxe4?! Bf5 17. Nfd2 Rb8 which looks equal to me.

**16. ... Bf5 17. Ndxe4 Qh4 18. c5**

Not the only possibility, but this was (I suspect) played with White's next move in mind.

White could also try 18. Ng3!? Bd3 19. Rxf8+ Rxf8 20. Qa5!, with a double attack, threatening both the c7-pawn and Qa5-d5+, nabbing the bishop. Black has to play 20. ... Rf7!, defending against both threats. After 21. c5 d5! 22. Nxd5 Qd8! 23. Nc3 h5! anything could happen.



The best move is 18. Qc2!, self-pinning the knight to the queen, but this also stabilizes the position. Now b2-b3, Rf1-f2, and Ra1-f1 are in the air. White is a bit better after 18. ... Ne7 19. Qe2! Nxc6 (or 19. ... Bxe4 20. g3) 20. Ng3 Be6 21. Nd5! Bxd5 22. cxd5 Ne7 23. e4 Ng6 24. Qc2 Nf4 25. Nf5 Qg5 26. Rf3 Rf7 27. Raf1 Raf8 28. Kh1.

**18. ... d5**



**19. Nd6!!**

A stunning knight sacrifice, crashing through the position!

**19. ... Qxa4**

Black must be careful. Here 19. ... cxd6 20. Qxh4 Nxh4 21. cxd6 is lights out, as the pawns supported by the rooks and knight are too strong.

**20. Nxa4 Bd3?!**

Here 20. ... cxd6? is met by the cute intermediate move 21. Nb6!, and White should win after 21. ... dxc5 (or 21. ... Rab8 22. c7 Rb7 23. cxd6 Rxb6 24. Rxf5) 22. Nxa8 Rxa8 23. Rxf5.

The right move is 20. ... Be6!, and again White has 21. Nb6!!, similar to the game. Here White is a bit better after 21. ... Rab8 22. Nd7 Rxf1+ 23. Rxf1 Ra8.

**21. Nb6!!**

A picturesque position, isn't it? The two white knights and the rook on f1 are all hanging!

**21. ... Bxf1 22. Nxa8 Rxa8 23. Rxf1**



Now the position has calmed down a lot, and it is much easier to show how White has the advantage. He is up a pawn, and his opponent's king is cut off.

**23. ... Rd8?**

Here 23. ... d4!? 24. exd4 exd4 25. Re1 d3 26. Nc4 may give the best chances to hold. Naturally 23. ... cxd6 24. cxd6 is unplayable for Black, but

**24. b4!!**

A very easy move to miss, showing Maurizzi's full strength. White consolidates his extra c6-pawn, and proceeds to make use of its full potential.

**24. ... Ne7 25. Rf7! Nxc6 26. Rxc7 Nxb4**



**27. Rb7?!**

Correct is 27. Nf5! d4 28. exd4 exd4 29. c6! Kf8 30. a3!. This is a pretty move, kicking the knight away from its attack on the c6-pawn. White wins after 30. ... d3 31. axb4 d2 32. Ne3 Re8 (32. ... d1=Q+ 33. Nxd1 Rxd1+ 34. Kf2 is an easy win) 33. Nd1! Re1+ 34. Kf2 Rxd1 35. Ke2 Rb1 36. Kxd2 Rxb4 37. Kd3.

**27. ... a5 28. a3?**

Losing all the advantage. It was again more accurate to play 28. Nf5 d4 29. exd4 exd4 30. a3!, hitting the b4-knight and pushing it to an uncomfortable position.

**28. ... Nd3?**

Returning the favor. Black had to cover the c7-square with 28. ... Na6! 29. Nf5 Nxc5 30. Rxc7+ Kh8 31. Ra7 Nb3 when Black's disadvantage is manageable.

**29. c6! Nc5**

Or 29. ... Rxd6 30. Rb8+ Kf7 31. c7 Rc6 32. c8=Q Rxc8 33. Rxc8 and wins.

**30. Rb6!?**



WCM Romi Milner



The key round seven matchup between Yip and WIM Miaoyi Lu.

Here 30. Ra7 Ne6 31. Nf7 was probably easiest.

**30. ... Ne6 31. Nb5 Rc8 32. c7! Nxc7 33. Rc6**

The black knight is pinned, so he has to give up the Exchange.

**33. ... Nxb5 34. Rxc8+ Kf7 35. a4!**

Putting the final nail in the coffin. The black knight is dominated by White's rook.

**35. ... Nd6 36. Rc5 Ke6 37. Rxa5, Black resigned.**

Maurizzi showcased great understanding of the position, and proved that he is a well-deserving champion.

I returned to form in round five, defeating Peruvian IM Saul Rodriques Flores Daniel

Quillas in a complicated struggle where both sides could easily have gone wrong. Then came the rest day, which was much needed! Most players went on a tour organized by the event staff, but my friend Shreyas and I decided to stay put and try to recharge our batteries.

Unfortunately my tournament started going downhill when play resumed. A loss to UTRGV's IM Gleb Dubin, followed by two draws in rounds seven and eight, dropped me down the crosstable. Then came a win and a loss, followed by a final round pairing with another UTRGV member, Turkish IM Ekin Baris Ozenir. I got a slightly better position out of the opening against Ozenir, but I spent too much time doing so, and I wasn't able to convert my advantage with the time that remained.

The tournament ended sooner than I wanted, but I was happy to attend the closing ceremony with both old and new friends. The ceremonial fire was lit once more, and the winners were crowned. I ended up blitzing the night away with Shreyas!

Maurizzi was the deserving winner in the Open section, edging out GMs Nesterov, Luka Budisavljevic (who plays for the Missouri chess team), and Mamikon Gharibyan on tiebreaks. All four players scored an excellent 8½/11.

First prize in the Girls section went to Argentinean WGM Candela Belen Francisco Guecamburu. Starting as the second seed, Francisco Guecamburu benefitted from better tiebreaks to take the title over Yip and WGM Beloslava Krasteva (another Mizzou player!), all of whom also finished with 8½/11. While Yip was (as she reported in the January issue) a bit disappointed in her performance in Mexico City, it did get her in fine shape to win the U.S. Women's Championship just days later! Here's one of her best games from the World Girls Junior, her round seven win over Switzerland's WIM Sofiia Hryzlova.

**FRENCH DEFENSE, TARRASCH VARIATION (C07)**

IM Carissa Yip (2372)  
WIM Sofiia Hryzlova (2215)  
World Girls Junior (7), Mexico City,  
09.27.2023

**1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nd2 c5 4. exd5 Qxd5 5. Ngf3 cxd4 6. Bc4 Qd6 7. 0-0 Nf6 8. Re1!?**

An interesting sideline, played much less often than the mainline beginning with 8. Nb3.

**8. ... Nc6 9. Nb3 Be7**

Not the most popular, but it has been played by Duda and Kamsky, and it leads to unique positions.

**10. Nbx4 Nxd4 11. Nxd4 0-0**



**12. Bd3!?**

Interesting, and rare. The point is Black can't take the knight on d4 due to the discovery with Bd3xh7+. In the meantime, White is freeing his knight to go to f3 without worrying about the queens being traded.

More often seen is 12. c3 Qc7 13. Bb3 with a typical, equal position.

**12. ... a6 13. Nf3 Rd8 14. Ne5 Bd7 15. Qf3!?**

This is a decent practical choice, but I think there was a slightly better way for White to proceed: 15. b3, with the idea of Bc1-b2, Qd1-e2, and Ra1-d1 and a pleasant position. A sample line is 15. ... Bc6 16. Bb2 Rac8 17. Qe2.

**15. ... Bc6 16. Nxc6 bxc6!?**

It was important to recapture with 16. ... Qxc6!. Taking with the queen was correct because White must now trade queens to create a weakness in the position, but simplifying the position gives Black more chances to draw against a higher-rated opponent.

**17. Bf4 Qd5 18. Qe2!**

Avoiding the queen trade. White has the two bishops, so she can use it to attack the opponent's king.

**18. ... a5 19. Be5 Nd7**



IM Andy Woodward

PHOTO: COURTESY FIDE / DAVID LLADA



**20. Bc7!**

A nice move, levering the black rook off of the d-file before retreating. This creates a small weakness in Black's camp.

**20. ... Rdc8 21. Be4!?**

Another intermediate move. I'm not sure if it is objectively best, but it does force the black queen to an awkward square.

White is also better after 21. Bg3.

**21. ... Qc5 22. Bg3 Nf6 23. Bf3 Bd6 24. Bxd6 Qxd6 25. Rad1 Qc5 26. Qe5!?**

This lets go of the pawn, and the advantage. I don't know if it was an oversight or a sacrifice, but best was to play 26. c3 a4 27. a3 and stabilize the position.

**26. ... Qxc2 27. Rc1 Qa4 28. a3 h6 29. h3**

Black is a pawn up, but it's starting to get hard to find productive moves. What she would like to do at the proper moment is to sacrifice back the pawn and gain enough counterplay to equalize. Easier said than done, of course!

**29. ... Nd5**

Now White plays a series of forcing moves that lead to a winning advantage.

Black's clearest path to equality was 29. ... Ra6! with the positional threat of ... Ra6-b6 followed by ... Rc8-b8.

**30. Re4 Qb3 31. Rg4!**

Taking aim at the weak king.

**31. ... g6**



**32. Be4**

Now White is hitting the g6-pawn, forcing Black to make another decision.

I suspect Carissa calculated the interesting candidate move 32. Rxc6+!?, but it only leads to a draw after 32. ... fxc6 33. Qxe6+ Kg7 34. Be4! Qxb2 35. Qxc6+ Kf8 36. Qxc6+ Qg7 37. Qd6+ Ne7 (37. ... Qe7 38. Qh6+) 38. Rc5 when White has nothing more than a repetition.

**32. ... Ne7 33. Rg3 Qb8 34. Qf6 Qd6 35. Rcc3!**

Preparing to go Rc3-d3, or even Rc3-f3, targeting the f7-pawn.

**35. ... Rc7 36. Rcd3 Nd5?**



Black cracks under the pressure. It was necessary to sit and be patient with 36. ... Qc5 37. Rc3 Qd6.

**37. Rxd5!!**

The beginning of a winning combination.

**37. ... cxd5**

Naturally 37. ... exd5?? drops the queen.

**38. Bxg6!**

Ripping open Black's king cover. The bishop cannot be taken because it is checkmate by force:

**38. ... Rc1+?**

If 38. ... fxc6? 39. Rxc6+ Kh7 40. Rxc6+ Kg8 41. Rh8 mate, and if 38. ... Qxc3? 39. fxc3 fxc6 40. Qxc6+ Rg7 41. Qxc6+ Kh7 42. Qxd5 White picks up too many pawns, and with them, the game.

The only try was 38. ... Kf8! but after finding a few only moves, White gets a clearly better position: 39. Bxf7 Rxf7 40. Qh8+ Ke7

41. Qxa8 Qc5 42. Qb7+! Kf8 43. Qb8+! Ke7 44. Kh2!.

**39. Kh2 fxc6 40. Qxc6+ Kf8 41. Qxh6+ Ke7 42. Qg7+**

I think 42. Qxc1 was also good enough.

**42. ... Ke8 43. Qg8+ Kd7 44. Qxa8**

White is up two pawns, with a much safer king, so the game is pretty much over.

**44. ... Qc7 45. Qf8 Kc6 46. Qe8+ Kd6 47. Re3 Rc2 48. Qxe6+ Kc5+ 49. Re5, Black resigned.**

A beautiful showcase of attacking chess by the once and reigning U.S. Women's Champion!

I didn't play as many good games as I had hoped for, but I was able to spend lots of time with my chess friends. That, for me, is the best part of my tournament experience: eating, laughing, and taking walks together is a highlight for me. My Dad also enjoyed getting to know some of the players, coaches, and event organizers.

I once saw this quote somewhere: "Life is not a competition, but a journey to become the best version of you." The experience of playing against some best juniors in the world inspired me to continue my journey towards becoming a better chess player. I'm thankful for this opportunity, and I hope to play the World Junior again someday! ♠

You can read archival copies of "My Best Move" on [uschess.org](http://uschess.org), click on "Chess Life Magazine," and then "Archives."



It's not all stressful! Royal (L) and Woodward (R) play blitz.