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ST. LOUIS

GM Fabiano Caruana and IM Carissa Yip take home the hardware at the 2023 U.S. Championship and Women's Championship.

BY **IM CARISSA YIP**

ADDITIONAL ANNOTATIONS BY **GM ABHIMANYU MISHRA**



he 2023 U.S. Championships were held from October 5-18 at the Saint Louis Chess Club, featuring 24 of

the top players in the country. This year was my sixth entry in the Women's Championship, and the field was immensely strong, headlined by rising stars FMs Alice Lee and Ruiyang Yan, top American woman GM Irina Krush, and IM Anna Zatonskih, who was fresh off a dominating Cairns Cup performance.

The Open Championship boasted a star-studded lineup of the best players not just in the U.S., but in the world. GMs Levon Aronian, Fabiano Caruana, Leinier Dominguez Perez, and Wesley So could all reasonably call themselves title hopefuls, while GMs Abhimanyu Mishra and Hans Niemann brought youth and excitement to the field.

I was not entirely feeling that excitement as I arrived in St. Louis. Two days prior, I was wrapping up the World Junior Girls U20 Championship in Mexico. The summer is my primary time for tournaments, but my last few events had been disappointing and lackluster. After a break in August, I returned to chess with back-to-back tournaments: the

World Junior Girls, and the U.S. Women's.

At first it seemed that everything was finally clicking in Mexico. I scored seven points in my first eight games, and I felt fully in-shape. But with a series of bad gametime decisions in rounds nine and 10, I managed to just salvage a co-champion finish. Worried that this would not bode well for my Women's performance, I approached the tournament with no small trepidation.

The opening ceremony and drawing of lots did little to reassure my nerves; my lot number guaranteed that my first three games were against my biggest competition for the title. Though I'd have the white pieces against defending champion WGM Jennifer Yu, I would be facing Krush and Lee with the black pieces.

I had a topsy-turvy game against Krush in round one, with mistakes in time trouble, but we reached move 40 with the position in my favor. Unfortunately, I was unable to find the correct finish, and we agreed to a draw in an endgame with bishops of opposite colors. In rounds two and three, I played nice attacking chess to win both games, even managing to surprise Yu in a sharp opening.

After this excellent start, my game plan was now to ensure that I didn't drop any full points. If I could stick to this strategy, I believed, I would have a very good shot at the title. And while I didn't know it at the time, the fourth round would end up being my most important game of the tournament.

With 2½/3, I faced off with my Olympiad teammate, WGM "Begim" Tokhirjonova, taking the white pieces. While I didn't want to get reckless, I was playing for a win, and looking for a fight. After a Scotch where we were both out of book quite early, I had an opportunity to gain an advantage in the complications.

SCOTCH GAME (C45)

IM Carissa Yip (2470)
WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova (2430)
U.S. Women's Championship (4), St. Louis, 10.08.2023

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6
5. Nxc6 bxc6 6. e5 Qe7 7. Qe2 Nd5 8. h4 a5
9. c4 Nb6 10. Nc3 Ba6 11. b3 0-0-0 12. Rh3
- f6 13. exf6 Qf7 14. Bb2 Re8 15. Re3 Bc5
16. Re4 Rxe4 17. Nxe4 Bb4+ 18. Kd1 gxf6
19. Qf3 Rf8 20. Kc2 d5 21. cxd5 Bxf1 22. Rxf1
- cxd5 23. Qf5+ Kb7 24. Ng3 Qe7 25. Qd3
- f5 26. f4 Rg8 27. Kb1 Qxh4 28. Nxf5 Qh2
29. g3 a4 30. a3 Bf8 31. bxa4 Qg2

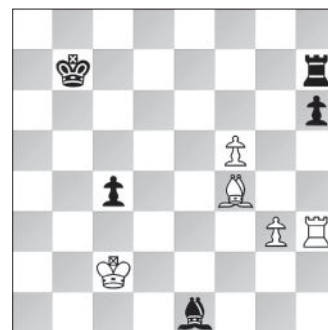


While I entered a slightly better endgame for White with the game continuation, I missed a much stronger move.

32. Rd1

While 32. Re1 does not at first glance look threatening, the point is that the rook will infiltrate on the eighth rank and render Black's pieces immobile. The black king is suddenly now very vulnerable. Some sample lines: (a) 32. ... Nxa4 33. Qb5+ Nb6 34. Re8 and White is completely winning here, as a3-a4-a5 is unstoppable. To wit: 34. ... Qh3 (alternatives: 34. ... Qd2 35. a4 Qd1+ 36. Ka2 Qxa4+ 37. Qxa4 Nxa4 38. Ba3 c5 39. Kb3 Nb6 40. Bxc5; 34. ... c6 35. Rb8+!!; 34. ... Bxa3 35. Rxc8 Qe4+ 36. Ka2 Bxb2 37. Nd6+ cxd6 38. Kxb2+- Qg2+ 39. Kc3 Qf3+ 40. Kd2 Qf2+ 41. Kd1 Qg1+ 42. Ke2 Qg2+ 43. Ke3 Qg1+ 44. Kf3 and the king runs) 35. Nd4 Qd7 36. Nc6 Qxc6 37. Rb8+ Kxb8 38. Qxc6. (b) 32. ... Nc4 is natural, but White has a string of brilliant moves to refute this: 33. Qb3+ Ka7 34. Bd4+ c5 35. Ka1!! Rg6 (35. ... cxd4 36. Rb1 wins for White) 36. Ne7!! is crushing, as it stops ... Rg6-b6.

- 32. ... Nxa4 33. Qxd5+ Qxd5 34. Rxd5 Bxa3 35. Ba1 Nb6 36. Rd2 Bb4 37. Rh2 Be1 38. Rh3 Nc4 39. Ng7 Ne3 40. Bd4 h6 41. f5 c5 42. Bxe3 Rxc7 43. Bf4 Rh7 44. Kc2 c4**



Another key position. White to play and win!

45. Kd1?

The bishop ending is holdable as the black



WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

Above: Yip and Tokhirjonova do battle at the board. Left: With hostilities ceased, a friendly post-game interview can take place.

king gets involved. The correct plan was to immediately start my pawn with 45. f6!. The point is that, instead of taking on h6 with one of our pieces, we want to get in g3-g4-g5 to win the pawn. But we must play f5-f6 first, as g3-g4 will be met with ... Rh7-g7. Play continues 45. ... Kc6 46. g4 Kd5 47. g5 Ke6 (47. ... Rf7 48. Rxb6) 48. g6 and the pawns will win the day after 48. ... Rh8 49. f7.

45. ... Bf2 46. Rh2 Bd4 47. Rxh6 Rxh6 48. Bxh6 Kc6 49. g4 Kd5 50. Kc2 Ke4 51. Bd2 Kf3 52. Bc3 Kxg4 53. Bxd4 Kxf5 54. Kc3 Ke4 55. Kxc4, draw.

I wasn't too fazed by this missed half-point; I should have been able to find the winning move, but still, with 3/4 Begim and I were the only leaders. Having already played most of the highest-rated players in the tournament, surely I'd be able to jump forward and take the lead over the next few rounds.

Unfortunately, this turned out to be an extremely optimistic assessment. After the rest day, I won a nice game against WGM Tatev Abrahamyan.

KING'S INDIAN, SEMI-AVERBAKH VARIATION (E73)

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2370)
IM Carissa Yip (2470)
U.S. Women's Championship (5), St. Louis, 10.10.2023

1. d4

An opening surprise, as Tatev has until very recently favored 1. e4. I expected her to have some very good prep against my King's Indian, but I felt that my structural understanding of the opening should lend me an advantage regardless if I could somehow deviate from theory.

1. ... Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 0-0 5. Be2 d6 6. Be3

A line that has grown increasingly popular in recent times. Instead of allowing Black the classic kingside attack against White's pawn race on the queenside, White seeks to develop quick kingside play of their own with h2-h4 and g2-g4.

6. ... e5

I think this is best, although 6. ... c5 is also viable. The point is that after d4-d5, Black gets the c5-square.

7. d5 Na6 8. h4 Nc5 9. Qc2 h5

A bit of a concession, as White now gets the nice g5-square for either the knight or bishop. But it had the intended effect of getting White out of theory. Now Black focuses on the queenside after defending the kingside.

The main line is 9. ... c6 10. h5 cxd5 11. cxd5 Qa5 12. h6 Bh8 13. f3 Nh5 and it's just a game, though White's h6-pawn is quite annoying.

10. f3 a5

Black's plan is to open up the queenside with ... c7-c6 soon, finish development with ... Bc8-d7, and resolve the tension in the center with ... c6xd5 when it can be followed up with an immediate ... b7-b5.

11. Nh3 c6 12. Nf2 Bd7 13. g4

A bit hasty. Instead of exchanging off Black's sole active piece with 13. Nd3 would have been best.

13. ... cxd5 14. cxd5



14. ... a4

The point of this move was to open the a5-square for the queen, where I could play for ... b7-b5 as well as ... a4-a3 and ... Rf8-c8 to pressure the knight on c3. White definitely doesn't want to castle to either side, so Black has to figure out a way to take advantage of the king in the center.

15. Bg5

White wants to break the standstill on the kingside, so the intent is to take on f6 and then h5. But this is already a bit misguided; now White's dark squares will be weak, and her attack too slow.

Probably closing the kingside with 15. g5 is best, playing for a pure space advantage. But this is a hard plan to get behind, as all dynamic potential is killed on the attacking front. After 15. ... Ne8 the knight reroutes and will make itself useful on the queenside.

15. ... Qa5

The immediate 15. ... b5 push was already possible. Taking the pawn leads to complications which favor Black:

(a) 16. Nxb5? is met by 16. ... Bxb5 17. Bxb5 Qa5+.

(b) 16. Bxb5 Bxb5 17. Nxb5 hxg4 18. fxg4 Qa5+ 19. Nc3 a3 with initiative on the queenside. Moving the b-pawn leads to a tactic on e4; for example, 20. b3 Nfxe4 21. Nfxe4 Nxe4 22. Qxe4 Qxc3+ with a tremendous advantage.

(c) 16. gxh5 b4 17. Ncd1 b3 18. Qc3 bxa2 19. hxg6 fxc6 20. Rxa2 Qe8 and here, despite being down a pawn and with limited pawn cover for the king, Black is doing very well. There are ideas of ... Nc5-b3-d4, as well as ... Nf6-h5-f4. Meanwhile, White's pieces are awkwardly placed, especially the knights on f2 and d1.

16. Qd2 Rfc8

Black could also have continued with the attack on the queenside via 16. ... b5, resolving to allow White a kingside pawn in exchange for the two bishops and full control over the dark squares. After 17. Bxf6 Bxf6 18. gxh5 Kg7 19. hxg6 fxc6 20. h5 Rh8 the king is perfectly safe. It is difficult to get the a1-rook into the game, and even then, Black has all the entry squares covered.

17. Bxf6 Bxf6 18. gxh5 a3

(see diagram top of next column)

19. Rb1?

A mistake.

The only move that now keeps the balance is 19. b4!!, i.e., 19. ... Qxb4 20. Rb1 Qa5



21. hxg6 fxc6 22. h5 Na4 23. Nxa4 Qxd2+ 24. Kxd2 Bxa4.

Even worse is 19. b3?? Nxb3 20. axb3 Qxc3 21. Qxc3 Rxc3.

19. ... axb2 20. Rxb2 gxh5!

The white queen cannot immediately join the attack, as the c3-knight would hang (as we see in the game). Black's next move will be ... Kg8-h7, when the king is safe as the bishop pair covers the holes in Black's position and the rooks will play on the g-file. The white king is vulnerable in the center, and the black pieces are more active. Already, Black is winning.

21. Qh6?

A move borne of desperation, and played in time trouble.

21. ... Qxc3+ 22. Kf1 Bg7 23. Rg1 Bg4!

This is a hammer-blow, blocking the g-file. White doesn't have time to take as the queen is hanging, and with White's attack paused, Black will have time to grab material while also defending the king.

24. Qg5 f6 25. Qg6 Qxb2 26. Nxc4 hxg4 27. Rxc4 Rc7

Killing off the final bits of the White attack.

28. h5 Nd3, White resigned.

The idea is 29. Bxd3 (or 29. h6 Rc1+ 30. Kg2 Qxe2+) 29. ... Rc1 mate.

But Begim also won a nice game, and we both continued in this fashion for four days. I would return to my hotel room with a win and the hope that this would be the day I grabbed the sole lead. And every day I watched Begim play spectacular chess to also earn victories. This meant that after eight rounds, and heading into the second rest day, we were both at 7/8, a full two points ahead of Krush and Alice Lee, who had bounced back after a shaky start with four straight wins.

Meanwhile, in the Open section, Abhimanyu Mishra was also showing his quality.

He jumped into an early lead in round three with a very nice victory over GM Ray Robson.

CATALAN OPENING, OPEN VARIATION (E01)

GM Ray Robson (2776)

GM Abhimanyu Mishra (2677)

U.S. Championship (3), St. Louis, 10.07.2023

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 e6 5. g3 dxc4 6. Bg2 Nbd7 7. 0-0 b5 8. e4 Bb7 9. e5 Nd5 10. Ng5 h6

This is the main line, allowing the piece sacrifice. Nothing else is better, as White will get a strong initiative if the knight can stay on g5 unopposed.

The dark squares are weak after 10. ... Be7 11. Qh5 Bxg5 12. Bxg5.

White is also quite happy after 10. ... Nxc3 11. bxc3 Nb6 12. Ne4, as the center is shored up with the exchange of knights. Meanwhile, Black has trouble developing his pieces; if the bishop moves to e7, then Qd1-g4 will be unpleasant, and h2-h4-h5 is coming. It's hard to come up with a very good plan for Black. Here ... c6-c5 is hard to get in, especially after White plants the queen on g4 and stares down the g7-pawn.

11. Nxe6

Here 11. Nge4 is also an option, if White doesn't want to play the piece sacrifice. It has been a bit trendy recently, although I think Black feels a lot better about the position with the c3- and d5-knights on the board and the b-file still closed.

11. ... fxe6 12. Qh5+ Ke7 13. Ne4

Threatening mate after Ne4-d6 comes; Black rushes to defend.

13. ... Qe8 14. Bg5+ hxg5 15. Qxh8 Kd8

16. Nxc5 Qe7 17. Qh5 Kc7 18. Qg6



Both players have been blitzing the top opening and engine lines to this point. Now Mishra takes his first think of the game.



Robson and Mishra plumb the depths of the position.

18. ... Re8

With the intention of bringing the king to safety and manually castling queenside.

19. a4 Kb8 20. Ra3 Nc7!

The best move for Black. White has ideas of taking on d5, forcing ... e6xd5 and leaving the sixth rank opened up to the queen. For example, if Black tries to shore up the queenside with ... a7-a6, White's attack suddenly becomes very strong: 20. ... a6 21. axb5 cxb5 22. Bxd5 exd5 (oor 22. ... Bxd5 23. Rxa6) 23. Rfa1 and Black cannot stop Ra3xa6.

21. Rf3

After Robson's first think of the game, he swings the rook around to the kingside. If Black does nothing, White's plan is to push the h-pawn as far as possible, drop the knight onto d6 to force the dark-squared bishop off the board, and then pick up the g7-pawn. Another idea is to play Ng5-h7, with the same intention to exchange off the dark-squared bishop, thereby weakening the g7-pawn. Black must be precise with his defense.

21. ... bxa4

A typical idea to pick up the pawn after the rook has left; Black will be able to hang on to it for quite a while, thanks to ... Nd7-b6. Despite the atypical implementation, Black closes up the a- and b-files with this capture.

22. h4 Qd8

Here 22. ... Qb4 was equally good, and slightly more active. But it is very double-edged, as the queen can't take on b2 quite yet, and this leaves the kingside at the mercy of White's pieces. Play continues 23. Rf7 (23. Nh7? c5!) 23. ... Re7 24. Rf4 (now White wants Ng5-h7) 24. ... c5! (24. ... Qxb2?? doesn't work because now White's other rook gets into the game:

25. Rb1 Qa2 26. Bxc6 and White is winning) and Black gets the key pawn break in. After 25. Bxb7 Qxb7



POSITION AFTER 25. ... Qxb7

we have a sharp position. If Black can coordinate and activate his minor pieces, then he is doing well; if White can win the g7-pawn, then he is very happy as well. If both sides can achieve their plans, then the position will become extremely complex and double-edged.

A sample line is: 26. dxc5 Re8 27. Nf7 Bxc5 28. Qxg7 Nd5 29. Rxc4 Qxb2 30. Rxa4 Qe2 White's knight is a bit misplaced on f7, while Black is stopping h4-h5. Both kings are facing weaknesses; White can't take advantage of the passed pawns on the kingside because of them, and meanwhile Black's pieces must stay around the queenside/center because of open files in front of Black's king. It's extremely complicated, with much play for both sides.

23. Rf7

Note that 23. Nh7 immediately doesn't work because Black's 23. ... c5 comes with tempo on White's rook.

23. ... Re7 24. Rf4

Now Ng5-h7 is properly threatened, and will be played if Black tries to repeat.

24. ... Qe8 25. Qh7

If 25. Qxe8+ Black is happy trading into an endgame and getting one of White's most dangerous pieces off the board. Now White can still try to go after the g-pawn, but Black's pieces can activate themselves quickly: 25. ... Rxe8 (forced; the d7-knight is freed from defending the bishop) 26. Ra1 (26. Rc1 Nb6) 26. ... Nb6 27. Rf7 g6 28. Rf6 c5! giving up the g-pawn to play this pawn break at the optimal moment, i.e., 29. dxc5 Bxc5 30. Rxc6 Bd4 with a great position for Black.

25. ... g6 26. Rf7?

The wrong way to block the attack.

After the correct 26. Nf7!! White has a solid advantage. The point is that Black's plan in the game, with ... c6-c5 to free his position, no longer works thanks to the knight's jump to d6 after exchanging bishops. With that main break taken care of, White will continue with taking on g6 and then pushing the h-pawn. It is difficult for Black to coordinate his pieces, especially with the knight on f7 restricting the queen and rook.

For example: 26. ... Nb6 (best, activating the knight) (26. ... c5?! 27. Bxb7 Kxb7 28. Qxg6) 27. Qxg6 Nbd5 28. Bxd5!! (28. Rf3 Nb5 29. Rd1 c3)



POSITION AFTER 28. Bxd5

This is the only move to keep an advantage. Otherwise, Black's knights grow quite annoying: 28. ... Nxd5 29. Rf3 c5 30. Qg8 and the break does not come in time, while Nf7-d6 is unstoppable. Black is losing material. Play will continue after ... Nd5-c7, but Black is definitely not pleased.

26. ... c5

Black's key break!

27. Bxb7 Kxb7 28. Qxg6

White must give up the d-pawn, as taking on c5 is not possible. White would be happy if it were the knight on f7 instead, ready to hop into d6 as well as threatening d4xc5 (as the e5-pawn is now defended). But with the rook instead, Black can carry on with the counterplay in the center.

Note that 28. dxc5? fails to 28. ... Nxe5.

28. ... Rxf7

Here 28. ... cxd4 lets White back into the game with 29. Qe4+.

29. Nxf7 cxd4

Already, Black is quite happy. White's active rook has been traded for Black's passive one, and the d4-pawn has been picked up! It proves very difficult for White to actually pick the central pawns off.

30. Qe4+

If 30. Rd1 d3 31. Qe4+ Nd5 32. Ng5 N7b6 and Black is cruising.

30. ... Nd5



31. Nd6+?!

Another inaccuracy, though once again it is not quite clear at first glance how the alternative is better. Mishra seizes upon the opportunity to simplify a bit and let the knights dominate the board.

The right move is 31. Ng5, bringing the knight back in order to properly attack the d4-pawn. In the game, Robson tries this same idea, but there is a nice tactical refutation that holds on to all the pawns in

the center. Here, that same tactic is no longer viable. Though the line is still good for Black, it does lead to a complex and unclear endgame — not at all clear to human eyes.

Now after 31. ... Bc5 32. Nf3 Qh5!! is key, eyeing the d1-square. This will prove important in some critical lines, such as after White plays Rf1-c1 here: 33. g4 (33. Nxd4 Bxd4 34. Qxd4 Nxe5; 33. Rc1 d3 34. Rxc4 Nxe5!! this is the point of 32. ... Qh5; the knight is untouchable, because Black has control over the queening square) 33. ... Qh6 34. Nxd4 Qf4!! 35. Qxf4 Nxf4 36. Nf3 a3. Black needed to find a lot of good moves to reach this position, and he is definitely pressing. But the game is not quite over yet; White still has two connected passers on the kingside, and Black will have to fight for the full point.

31. ... Bxd6 32. exd6 Qh8

Black holds on to the pawn via the long diagonal!

33. Rd1 Ne5

The point: if White takes on d4 with any piece, it will be met with ... Ne5-f3+. White cannot stop Black's next move, ... Ne5-c6, which defends the d4 pawn.

34. d7

Most forcing, and therefore necessary to explore, is 34. f4. After 34. ... Nc6 35. Qxe6 Nb6 White's passers are coming, but Black has his own as well; further, the knights prove effective in stopping White's pawns.

Now 36. f5 a3 (36. ... Qe5 is better and simpler) wins, though it does require a bit of calculation. The tactics work out for Black; for example: 37. bxa3 c3 38. f6 c2 39. Rc1 d3 40. Qe3 Qh7 41. f7 Nc4! and while White can promote, ... d3-d2 is coming: 42. Qf4 d2 43. Qxd2 Nxd2 44. f8=Q Nb3 with a winning position.

34. ... Nxd7?!



Surprisingly, this very natural move is an inaccuracy. Black is totally winning after 34. ... Kc7!. Black needs the knight on c6,

and so would rather retake the pawn with another piece.

35. Qxd4?

Returning the favor. The endgame is lost for White.

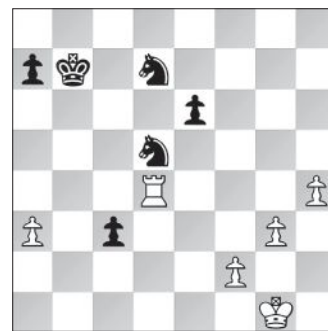
After 35. Kg2 Black no longer has ... Nd7-e5-f3+ tactics. After 35. ... Nc5? (35. ... a5! 36. Qxd4 Qxd4 37. Rxd4 a3! keeps the win in hand) 36. Qxd4 Qxd4 37. Rxd4 we reach a position that resembles the game, but now the tactics no longer work because the knight is on c5 instead of d7.

The alternative 35. Rxd4 is also much better than entering the endgame; White retains chances, and Black must play precisely to retain the advantage: 35. ... Nc5 (or 35. ... N7b6 36. Rd2 a3 37. bxa3 c3 38. Rc2 when White is holding on, and Black cannot push the pawn any further) 36. Qg4 Kb6! (if 36. ... c3 37. bxc3 a3 38. Qd1 Nxc3 the game is unclear, as White has many hidden resources, including the surprising 39. Rd7+!) Black defends the c5-knight, so after Rd4xc4 the queen is allowed to take on b2. Now after 37. h5 (37. Rxc4 Qxb2) 37. ... c3 38. bxc3 a3 39. Rd2 Qxc3 40. Qd1 the game continues. Both sides' passers are very quick.

35. ... Qxd4 36. Rxd4 a3 37. bxa3

Of course 37. Rxc4? loses on the spot to 37. ... axb2.

37. ... c3



White will be forced to give up the rook in exchange for this pawn. The kingside pawns are neither fast nor strong enough to provide effective counterplay.

38. Rd1

Alternatives are no better: (a) 38. Rc4 Ne5 39. Rc5 Kb6 40. Rc8 Nc6 and Black wins. (b) 38. Re4 Nc5 (38. ... c2?? 39. Rc4 flips the script) 39. Re2 Nb3 40. h5 (40. Kg2 Nd4 41. Re1 c2 42. Rc1 Nf6) 40. ... Nd4 41. Re1 c2 and Black is winning.

38. ... Nc5 39. h5 Nd3

Since the knight is untouchable, promotion is imminent.

40. h6 c2 41. Rf1 Nf6

Black's knights are effective at stopping the pawns.

42. g4 Nh7 43. Kg2 c1=Q 44. Rxc1 Nxc1 45. f4 Kc6 46. Kf3 Kd5 47. g5 Nf8 48. Kg4 Nd3 49. f5 Ne5+ 50. Kf4 Nfg6+

A nice sacrifice to get rid of all complications.

51. fxc6 Nxc6+ 52. Kg4 Ke4 53. a4 a5 54. h7 Ke5 55. Kh5 Kf5 56. Kh6 e5, White resigned.

However, after Abhi's misstep against Niemann in round four, Fabiano Caruana seized the lead and never relinquished it. With consecutive wins in round three through five, "Fabi," at 5½/8, was a full point ahead of four players — Dominguez Perez, Mishra, Niemann, and So — coming out of the rest day, and faced off with Niemann in a must-win (for Hans) round nine battle.

GIUOCO PIANO (C54)

GM Hans Moke Niemann (2732)
GM Fabiano Caruana (2861)
U.S. Championship (9), St. Louis, 10.15.2023

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. d3 Bc5 5. c3 a5 6. 0-0 d6 7. Re1 Ba7 8. Nbd2 0-0 9. h3 Be6 10. Bb5

With this move, White seeks to take advantage of the hole on b5 to force a quick d3-d4. Meanwhile, Black will try to drop a piece on the f4-square.

10. ... Ne7 11. d4 Ng6 12. Ba4

Prophylaxis against a coming ... c7-c6. Also viable is 12. Nf1.

12. ... Nh5 13. Nf1 Nhf4 14. Ng3 exd4 15. Nxd4

The alternative 15. cxd4 d5 16. e5 f6 results in nearly the same position as in the game, but Black keeps the dark-squared bishop, which may prove dangerous in the long run. White is better exchanging it off.

15. ... Bxd4 16. cxd4

Also reasonable is 16. Qxd4 Qg5 (16. ... Nxc2 is interesting if Black feels frisky: 17. Kxc2 Nh4+ 18. Kh1 Nf3 19. Qe3 Nxe1 20. Qxe1 Qh4 is slightly better for White), securing the hold on the dark squares and opening up d8 for the rook. Black has plans of a quick ... d6-d5. Black's piece coordination is actually quite good, despite the pin of the knight to queen, as White has no good way to take advantage of this. 17. Qd1 Rad8 18. Qf3 d5 and Black is generating good play; for instance: 19. e5? f6!.

16. ... d5



17. e5

The only other move that has been played in this position is 17. Qf3, when Black has a choice of nice moves, but simplest is 17. ... Qh4 when e4-e5 will always be met with ... f7-f6. The rooks will come to d8 and e8 (once the light-squared bishop's diagonal is blocked). Black is pretty happy.

17. ... f6

Allowing White to simplify a bit, while also maintaining the space advantage with the pawn on e5.

It appears that 17. ... Qh4 stronger. It stops Ng3-h5 first, before playing ... f7-f6 on Black's terms, after which the half-open f-file will be very good for a kingside attack. Without this simplification available, White is not very happy.

18. Bxf4 Nxf4 19. Nh5 Nhx5 20. Qxh5

All forced.

20. ... f5?!

Refusing the immediate simplification. While this may not have been objectively best, it does mean there are more dynamical possibilities in the air.

After 20. ... fxe5 21. Rxe5 Bf7 22. Qe2 there's definitely still play left, but White will have the e-file and especially the e5-square. It will be hard for White to lose this position.

21. f4 Qe7 22. a3 c5 23. Rac1 c4

White is better after 23. ... cxd4 24. Qd1.

24. Qd1 Kh8 25. Bb5?!

Below: Niemann and Caruana offer contrasting models of board posture during their critical round nine encounter.



PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / C. FULLER



White probably completely missed Black's next move. If White had time to get in b2-b3 without any intervention on Black's end, then he would be better with the strong center, better bishop, open-file, and clear weaknesses to play against. But Black has a surprise up his sleeve!

White needed to prepare for Black's idea with 25. Rc3 g5 26. fxc5 Qxc5 27. Rf1 Rg8 28. Rf2 and White is in time to defend everything. With the attack at a standstill, White is very happy indeed.

25. ... g5!

An unusual idea, but an incredible move! Black is opening up his king, destroying his pawn structure, etc., but somehow, he has enough initiative on the kingside to keep White on his toes. Despite the lack of minor pieces, the attack proves dangerous!

26. b3

White correctly recognizes that taking on g5 is not best, but that means that the pieces should be readying for defense — there is not much time for aggression.

After 26. fxc5 Qxc5 27. Rc3 (on 27. Rf1 Rg8 28. Rf2 f4 29. Kh1 f3 the white kingside will not hold together for long) is important! The third-rank will be crucial to Black's attack, either with some ... f5-f4-f3 push or some ... Be6xh3 tricks. The queenside rook swinging around will take care of those problems: 27. ... Rg8 28. Re2 f4 29. Ba4 Qh6 30. Qf1 (30. Kh1 Bg4) 30. ... Raf8 31. Kh2 Bf5!. And now the bishop prepares to jump into d3 or e4, provoking White's light squared bishop to return. Black has a dominating position.

26. ... gxf4 27. bxc4 Rg8

Again, at first glance, it does not seem that this position is particularly good for Black. But White has a very hard time defending. The g-file proves to be a particular source of trouble because White's light-squared bishop is so far away; were it on f3, it would be a different story.

28. Rc3?

The only move to hold the balance is 28. Rf1 as the pawn cannot be allowed to come to f3, lest the kingside ecosystem be poisoned: 28. ... Rg3 (after 28. ... Qxa3 29. Rf3 Qb2 30. Rf2 Qa3 neither side has more than a repetition) 29. Rf3 Rag8 30. Rc2 Qh4 and while Black is pressing, White can hold with careful play.

28. ... dxc4

Taking the opportunity to win a pawn.

29. Bxc4

Not 29. d5? Qc5+.

29. ... Bxc4 30. Rxc4 Qxa3

Now Black is winning and perfectly placed to initiate some shenanigans on the third rank. For instance, ... f4-f3 is coming while the h3-pawn is hanging. It is very hard for White to deal with both threats.

31. Rc2



31. ... f3?!

Inaccurate.

Picking up a clean pawn with 31. ... Qxh3 was best, thanks to a tactical idea: 32. Rf2 (if 32. Rf1 Qe3+ 33. Rcf2 Rad8 a third pawn is falling) 32. ... Rxc2+!! This move looks crazy, but it works! After recapturing, White's rook has to stay on the g-file to stop ... Ra8-g8 and mate, but there are too few safe squares available on the g-file for the rook, so Black wins it back! 33. Rxc2 f3 34. Rg5 (34. Ra2 Rg8+ 35. Kf2 Rg2+ 36. Ke3 f2+ and mate soon) 34. ... Qh4 35. Qd2 f4. Now the rook is trapped. If it leaves the g-file, mate is incoming.

32. e6?!

Returning the favor.

Required was 32. Rf2 which may feel like a waste of time, but White has to be ready to defend the h3-pawn once g2 falls. After 32. ... fxc2 33. Rf3 Qb4 34. e6 White's kingside is stabilized and he can start pushing central pawns. This is enough for equality.

32. ... fxc2

Now h3 is hanging, and the position is nearly impossible to defend.

33. Qe2

If 33. Qh5 Qd3, while; 33. Rxc2 is not possible, because White is out of defenders after 33. ... Rxc2+ 34. Kxc2 Rg8+ and wins.

33. ... Qxh3 34. Qe5+ Rg7 35. Rcc1 Qh1+ 36. Kf2 Qh4+ 37. Ke2 f4

A second passer comes in to further harass White's king.

38. Rg1 Qg4+ 39. Kd2 f3 40. Ke3 Kg8 41. Rc2 Rf8 42. Rf2 h5 43. Qd5 Re8, White resigned.

With this win, Fabi defeated one of his closest opponents for the title, and stayed a full point ahead of the field. But while the day went well for our eventual Open champion, I suffered a bit of a setback. Begim found a nice shot to exploit an opening mistake by FM Ruiyang Yan, but I could not convert a better position against IM Nazi Paikidze. With these results, Begim pulled ahead to take a half-point lead with two rounds to spare.

My confidence crumbled. I trudged back to my hotel room in despair, ruing all the decisions I'd made that led me to this point in life, and flopping on my bed like a dead fish. But the tournament wasn't over — there were still two rounds to go, and I could not act like I'd lost when things were not quite done yet. To pull myself together, I tried to take my mind off chess for the night. I binge-watched some TV, did some homework (which did not help my mood), and ordered boba with my dad (which did boost my spirits!).

The next morning, I attempted to do some preparation for round 10. I would be lying if I said I wasn't still affected at the board by what had happened the day before. I was hyperconscious that my tournament depended on winning the next two rounds, and that Begim was facing off with Irina just a few feet away. Fortunately, the emotions all faded to the background as the game started, especially as Anna surprised me immediately in the opening.

PIRC DEFENSE, BY TRANSPOSITION (B07)

IM Anna Zatonskih (2433)

IM Carissa Yip (2470)

U.S. Women's Championship (10), St. Louis, 10.16.2023



IM Carissa Yip

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. Nbd2

This was already a surprise to me, although of course it is a solid option. White wants an immediate e2-e4. Since my King's Indian setup had been serving me well, I decided to utilize it one last time.

3. ... Bg7

If Black plays 3. ... d5, the idea is 4. b4 Bg7 5. e3 with a stronghold over the queenside dark squares. Typically, Black retaliates with a quick ... a7-a5 or ... c7-c5, but I wasn't in the mood for slow chess that day!

4. e4 d6 5. Bd3 0-0 6. 0-0 Nc6 7. c3 e5 8. dxe5 Nxe5

Another option is 8. ... dxe5, keeping more pieces on the board. But the knight on c6 is a bit awkwardly placed, and it's typically a good idea to get it exchanged off if possible.

9. Nxe5 dxe5

The position is solid for both sides. Black will need to take some risks to induce some concessions from White.

10. Nc4 Nh5 11. g3 Qe7 12. Qe2 h6

A waiting move, aiming to see how White plans to deploy her pieces.

13. a4 a5 14. Rd1 Nf6

Now that the knight is no longer useful on h5 (with the f4-square being defended), a re-route is needed, either to c5 (via d7), or to h7 followed by the ... f7-f5 push.

15. b3 Re8 16. Ba3 Qe6 17. Rab1 Qh3

Trying to convince White to move some more pawns in front of her king.

18. f3 h5 19. Qf2 Bh6??



This allows White a very nice shot.

20. Bf1

The point of the previous move is that 20. Ne3 is not viable due to some tactics on h4, i.e., 20. ... h4 21. g4? Bxg4 22. Nxg4 Nxg4 23. fxg4 Be3.

But Anna and I both missed 20. Qc5!! when all of the pawns are hanging, and Black has no way to cover e5 or c7. To make matters worse, there's no play on the king-side. Play continues 20. ... c6 (20. ... h4 21. Bf1) 21. Nd6 Rf8 22. Bf1 Qe6 23. Nc4 (23. Bc4 is also very good, winning material) and White is clearly in the driver's seat. Pawns are hanging, and with ... c7-c6 provoked, Black has made significant weakness on the queenside for White's pieces to take advantage of.

20. ... Qe6 21. Ne3

Here again 21. Qc5 would have been very good, as Black is forced to enter into a bad endgame. After 21. ... Qc6 22. Qxc6 bxc6 White is the one playing for the win, but it must be said that despite Black's pawn structure, it's not hopeless. White has no way to attack the doubled pawns, and at least the pawns cover the central d5- and d6-squares.



IM Anna Zatonskih



Lee, Yan, and Eswaran (L to R) enjoy blitz at the closing ceremony.

PHOTOS: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES (YIP, ZATONSKIH), SLCC / C. FULLER (BLITZ GAME)

21. ... h4

Here, I think Anna panicked with her next move. Though things are getting a little scary, with ideas of taking on g3 and some sort of doubling on the h-file, White will be okay if she just leaves her kingside pawns where they are and focuses instead on queenside expansion. Here c3-c4-c5 is both typical and good for White in this position.

22. gxh4?!

The engine does not fully reject this move, but in practical terms, it gives Black something substantial to play against. The dark squares (such as f4) are weakened. Black will soon be loading up on the h-file and focusing on winning back the h-pawn. Here Anna was already getting low on time in a position that is extremely hard to defend as a human.

22. ... Kg7



23. Ng2

The best move to fight for an advantage is 23. Bc4 Qh3 24. Bc1 (24. Bf1? Nxe4!) as White absolutely needs to exchange off the dark-squared bishops. The h6-bishop is far more useful for Black than the bishop on a3. After 24. ... Rh8 25. Ng2 Bxc1 26. Rbxc1 White is doing all right with another pair of minor pieces off the board. It is difficult for Black to pick up the h4-pawn, and the f4-outpost is nicely covered by the knight — Black does not want to exchange the knights and have to take back on f4 with a pawn. Of course Black would love it if the bishop were on h3 right now, but it's impossible for the queen to go to any other square.

23. ... Nh5 24. Bb5

Here the same plan of exchanging the bishops with 24. Bc1 no longer works as well, because the black queen is much better placed and therefore lends itself to superior

coordination with the pieces. For instance: 24. ... Bxc1 25. Rdx1 Qf6 followed by ... Bc8-h3, removing White's last defender of the dark squares.

24. ... Rh8 25. Bc4

Black is placing the pieces where they want to be without resistance.

25. ... Qf6

Now ... Bc8-h3 or ... Nh5-f4 are real threats, with the h4-pawn dropping soon.

26. Qc5

White goes for her last shot at activity amidst time trouble, lest she wait and just get steam-rolled on the kingside. Unfortunately (for her!) the tactics do not work out.

26. ... Bh3 27. Qe7 Qxf3

The white kingside is falling apart, with all of Black's pieces involved.

28. Qxe5+ Kh7 29. Bf1 Nf4 30. Rd2

The knight is untouchable: if 30. Nxf4 Bxf4, threatening the queen and mate on e3.

30. ... Bxg2 31. Rxc2

Or 31. Bxg2 Qe3+ 32. Rf2 Qxf2+!

31. ... Nh3+ 32. Kh1 Be3

Getting the last minor piece into the attack. White cannot defend against the upcoming deadly discovered check.

33. Qxc7 Nf2+ 34. Kg1 Nd1+, White resigned.

It wasn't my best game; I gave Anna chances to seize a big advantage in exchange for active play on the kingside. But she ended up missing them, and the risk paid off — I'd managed to generate an attack on her king and win the game. Now, all I could do was watch Begim's game.

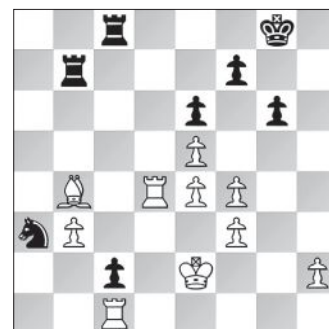
Irina was in extremely good form, and Begim was defending for the majority of the game. But while Irina's position was very good, it did seem Begim would be able to hold. And then...

JUST THE RULES

GM Irina Krush (2513)

WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova (2430)

U.S. Women's Championship (10), 10.16.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

46. ... Nb1 47. Kd3 Na3 48. Ke3 Nb1 49. Kd3 Na3



Right: The tension is palpable during the critical game between Tokhirjonova and Krush.

Instead of claiming the draw and calling the arbiter, Begim played the repetition on the board, invalidating her claim. Not interested in the peace offering, Irina spurned the repetition and was soon rewarded for her bravery.

50. f5 Nb5?

Dropping a second pawn, and soon, the game. Instead Black would have held with 50. ... Rcb8 51. Bxa3 Rxb3+ 52. Kxc2 Rxa3 due to the active rooks.

51. Rxc2 Re8

Black also loses after 51. ... Rxc2 52. Rd8+ Kh7 53. fxc6+ Kxg6 54. Kxc2.

52. Rdc4 exf5 53. Rc8 fxe4+ 54. Kxe4 Nc3+ 55. R2xc3 Rxb4+ 56. R3c4 Rxc8 57. Rxb4 Rc2 58. h4 Kg7 59. Rc4 Rb2 60. b4 Rb3 61. f4 Kh6 62. Kd5 Kh5 63. Kc6 Kxh4 64. b5 Kg4 65. b6 Kf5 66. b7 Rb1 67. Kc7 g5 68. fxg5 Kxg5 69. b8=Q Rxb8 70. Kxb8 Kf5 71. Rc5, Black resigned.

From being half a point behind to half a point ahead, I was feeling good about my chances. There was only one game left, and I needed just a draw to secure at least a playoff. Yet, even with this knowledge, when I sat down at the board for the last game of the tournament, I found that I didn't really feel like a draw. I wanted to win outright.

Ruiyang played excellently; we entered a rook endgame in which I was pressing, but she found all the right defenses. My time ticked down as I tried to break through the position. We reached a position where I had two connected passers, while she had one passed pawn and two rooks on the second rank. I could have taken this pawn, but this would have allowed Ruiyang to force a draw. And here is one of my worst mistakes as a player: with four minutes left on my clock, instead of taking a repetition, I made a decisive blunder and lost.

RAMPAGING ROOKS

IM Carissa Yip (2470)
FM Ruiyang Yan (2351)
U.S. Women's Championship (11),
10.17.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

48. ... Rf2 49. c5

Allowing Black to get the doubled rooks on the second in order to push my pawns.

49. ... Ra7 50. b4 Raa2 51. Rb3 e4 52. Rd1 e3 53. Re1 Rad2

I'd seen this position in my calculations; Black is just in time to advance her passer one more square, while also stopping my connected pawns.

54. c6

Naturally 54. Rbx3 would allow Black a perpetual.

54. ... e2 55. Kc1 Rd6

Here is the critical moment.

56. b5??

Here 56. Kc2 would have just led to a simple draw, as White will be picking up the e2-pawn shortly, i.e., 56. ... Rxc6+ 57. Kd2 Rd6+ 58. Rd3.

56. ... Rf1 57. Rg3+ Kf6

I had planned 57. ... Kf8 58. Rg1 expecting 58. ... Rdf6. But once I played 58. b5, I suddenly noticed Black had 58. ... Rd1+ and the rook is untouchable!

58. Rf3+ Rxf3 59. Rxe2 Rc3+ 60. Kb1 Rb3+, White resigned.

Black picks up the pawns or forces a rook exchange, and it's time to resign.



Yip keeps tabs on her competitors after her round ten game.

PHOTO: COURTESY SLCC / OOTES

Usually, I do want to win, but sometimes I don't quite know when to accept that a game is a draw. At the 2023 U.S. Girls' Junior, I couldn't make the right gametime decision to take a draw instead of playing for a win against Alice. I overpressed at the World Junior Girls when I should've taken a draw, and it cost me the title. And here, again, the same mistake was costing me another title.

But I accepted this turn of events: the mistake was all mine. Perhaps I didn't deserve to be the U.S. Women's Champion if I couldn't make the right calls when it came down to it. I signed the scoresheets, took a glance at Begim's position, and started my lonely trek back to the hotel.

I was numb on the walk, already beginning to accept what had happened. The sky was a dreary gray; I fiddled my fingers and wondered how I would tell my parents. I passed by my favorite cupcake store and briefly contemplated a pick-me-up, but decided I was too sad for it. I thought about the last glimpse of Begim and Jennifer's position, in which things looked fairly complex... but quickly I banished the thought: it was out of my hands now.

Back in the room, my dad gave me a hug and settled in to watch the rest of Begim's game. I found it too nerve-wracking, and spent some time sitting on my bed to contemplate my life's mistakes for the second time that tournament.

It was in the middle of this riveting activity that I received a phone call from an unknown number. "A spam caller... not today, sir," I thought, immediately declining the call. Seconds later, my phone resumed its ringing. "Guys, please, I am busy spiraling and thinking of every little mistake I have ever made that has led me to this sadness."

I hit the red "decline" button again. There was a brief pause of peace, and then my phone started buzzing with an explosion of text messages. "You're going to be the U.S. Women's Champion" shot to the top of my notifications.

Words really cannot adequately describe the emotional turbulence during this tournament. So many ups and downs, mistakes, and blunders came from both sides of my games, but it had ultimately come down to this: somehow, I had won the tournament.

I did end up getting that cupcake after all. And it was as good as you can imagine.

Fabi won the U.S. Championship with a round to spare — not that shocking, given his playing strength and already-legendary career. The big surprise was second place, which was shared between Wesley So, Leinier Dominguez Perez, and... Abhi-

many Mishra! Picking up steam in the last stretch of the tournament, Abhi scored three points out of his last four games to complete a tremendous performance at his first U.S. Championship. Here's his critical final round win over Aronian, with his own annotations.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E61)

GM Abhimanyu Mishra (2677)

GM Levon Aronian (2818)

U.S. Championship (11), St. Louis, 10.17.2023

Annotations by GM Abhimanyu Mishra

In this game, I was playing against one of the legends of the game. I was looking forward to a complicated fight!

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. g3 Bg7 4. Bg2 0-0 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. e3

There are many move order subtleties in the King's Indian. Here the main idea is to play Nf1-e2 to keep the g2-bishop open.

6. ... d6 7. Nge2 e5 8. d5 Ne7 9. b3!?

Not committing to e3-e4. The plan of this setup is to instead potentially push f2-f4.

9. ... Nd7

This move is quite common in these KID positions. The idea is to play ... f7-f5 next.

10. Bb2 f5



11. f4!?

An interesting positional decision. Black wanted to play ... e5-e4 to restrict the g2-bishop, and I am allowing it. My purpose for putting the pawn on f4 is to prevent Black from accessing the e5-square. I judged that my g2-bishop would not be bad forever, as I could always play Bg2-f1-e2 at some point in the future.

Top: Yip versus Yan. Middle and bottom: Mishra's signature win against Aronian.





11. ... e4 12. Nd4 Nf6

White's position is better statically with more space. Black should have tried to change the character of the game immediately.

The critical test of White's plans was 12. ... Nc5!, trying to open the game. Here 13. Bf1! is needed to prevent ... Nc5-d3. After 13. ... c6!? 14. b4 the piece sacrifice with 14. ... cxd5! had to be foreseen. Now 15. bxc5?! (15. Nxd5 is safer, with a complex game ahead) 15. ... dxc5 16. Nb3 d4 gives Black a huge pawn center! The engine claims White is fine if he gives back the pieces, but I don't think this is what White should aim for.

Left: GM Sam Shankland handed out his new book to his fellow participants. Below: everyone signed Alice Lee's copy!



13. 0-0 c5 14. dxc6 e.p. bxc6 15. Qd2 a6

Preparing ... c6-c5. Here 15. ... c5 immediately failed due to 16. Ndb5 hitting the d6-pawn.

16. Rfd1 Qc7

Now 16. ... c5 17. Nde2 is not optimal for as Black has to play ... Nf6-e8 to defend the d6-square.

17. Nde2

I liked this solution as I improve my structure. The alternative 17. b4!? c5 18. bxc5 dxc5 19. Nb3 Be6 20. Bf1 looks a bit strange, but it has a point: the c5-pawn is quite weak after Nc3-a4.

17. ... Rd8 18. c5! Ne8 19. Na4

Trading off the g7-bishop, a key defender of Black's king.

19. ... Bxb2 20. Qxb2 Nd5 21. Qc1

Reserving the d4-square for the knight.

21. ... Nef6 22. Nd4 Ng4 23. Nb6!

The point. White does not passively defend e3.

23. ... Nxb6 24. cxb6 Qxb6 25. h3



25. ... Nf6?

Aronian desperately needed to get rid of my d4-knight. Correct therefore was 25. ... c5! 26. hxg4 cxd4 27. Rxd4 d5 with a complicated game where White is to be slightly preferred.

26. Qxc6 Qxc6 27. Nxc6 Rd7 28. Rac1

This endgame is very unpleasant for Black, as my pieces are better coordinated and I have the better pawn structure.

28. ... Bb7 29. Na5!

Keeping the weak a6-pawn in place.

29. ... d5 30. Bf1

At last, improving the limited bishop.

30. ... Kf7 31. b4 Rg8!?

An interesting attempt to change the character of the game, but here it is too late.

2023 U.S. CHAMPIONSHIPS AT A GLANCE

OCTOBER 5-17, 2023 | ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

OPEN

1st: GM Fabiano Caruana, 8/11. **2nd-4th:** GMs Wesley So, Leinier Dominguez Perez, Abhimanyu Mishra, 6½. **5th-7th:** GMs Hans Moke Niemann, Samuel Sevian, Ray Robson, 5½. **8th:** GM Levon Aronian, 5. **9th-10th:** GMs Sam Shankland, Jeffery Xiong, 4½. **11th-12th:** GMs Dariusz Swiercz, Andrew Tang, 4.

WOMEN

1st: IM Carissa Yip, 8½/11. **2nd:** WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova, 8. **3rd:** FM Alice Lee, 7½. **4th:** WGM Tatev Abrahamyan, 7. **5th:** GM Irina Krush, 6½. **6th:** IM Nazi Paikidze, 5½. **7th:** FM Ruiyang Yan, 5. **8th-9th:** WGM Jennifer Yu, IM Anna Zatonskih, 4½. **10th:** WGM Atousa Pourkashiyani, 3½. **11th:** FM Ashritha Eswaran, 3. **12th:** WGM Thalia Cervantes Landeiro, 2½.

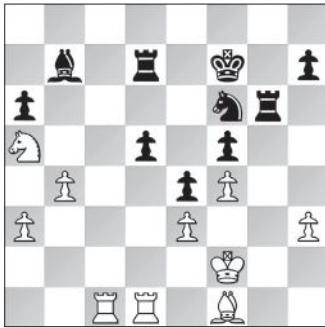
For complete results and additional photos, visit uschesschamps.com.

32. Kf2 g5 33. a3

Good enough, threatening Na5xb7 and Bf1xa6 as the b4-pawn does not hang.

I considered 33. Nb3 immediately, but I did not want to allow 33. ... h5 34. Nd4 h4 when it seems that Black is creating counterplay. Naturally the engine laughs and gives 35. Be2!!, claiming Black is completely busted!

33. ... gxf4 34. gxf4 Rg6



35. Nb3!

Bringing the knight to d4, where it pressures f5.

The direct 35. Nxb7 Rxb7 36. Bxa6 Ra7 (36. ... Ng4+ 37. hxg4 Rxa6 38. Rxd5 also works) 37. b5 is winning in the long run, but I didn't want to give up my knight for such a dead bishop.

35. ... Rh6

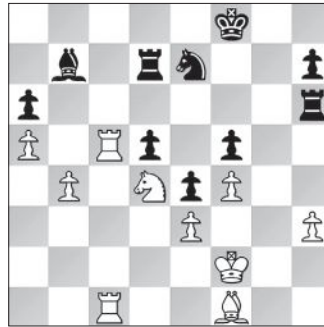
This position reminds me of a quote: "In a bad position, all moves are bad!"

36. Nd4 Rh5 37. Rc5 Ng8 38. Rdc1 Ne7

39. a4

Slowly preparing a breakthrough.

39. ... Rh6 40. a5 Kf8



41. b5

Time to strike!

41. ... axb5

42. Bxb5

Rdd6 43. Rc7

Ba6 44. Bxa6

Rxa6 45.

Rb1, Black resigned.

After 45. ... R x h 3 the black pieces are too un-coordinated

to prevent 46. Rb8+ Kf7 47. Rbb7 Rh2+ 48. Kg3 Rah6 49. Rxe7+ with the end being near.

Similarly, Alice Lee demonstrated incredible mental fortitude. After a bad start, she scored seven points out of the remaining eight games to finish in clear third for the Women's Championship. Both Abhi and Alice had extremely impressive tournaments, and I look forward to watching this next generation's — am I allowed to say that at age 20? — chess careers progress even further!

In conclusion, I want to express my gratitude for the people who supported me along the way to this title: my coaches, my friends, my family. Thanks to them all. And, of course, my sincerest thanks to the Saint Louis Chess Club, Rex and Dr. Jeanne Sinuefield, and everyone who makes this tournament possible. I feel extremely lucky and honored to be the 2023 winner — the list of U.S. Women's Champions is full of incredibly inspiring players, and I am humbled to be a part of such a heritage. ♡

