

VIRGINIA CHESS

Newsletter

The bimonthly publication of the
Virginia Chess Federation

2021 - #5



Jason Morefield
2021 Virginia State Champion



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Virginia Chess is published six times per year by the Virginia Chess Federation. Membership benefits include a subscription to *Virginia Chess*. Send material for publication to the editor. Send dues, address changes, etc to Circulation.

The Virginia Chess Federation (VCF)



is a non-profit organization for the use of its members. Dues for regular adult membership are \$15/yr. Junior memberships (under age 18 at expiration) are \$8/yr. President: Anand Dommalapati, PO Box 223582, Chantilly,

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2021 Virginia State Championship

Jason Morefield & IM Praveen Balakrishnan scored 5-1 to tie for 1st at the Virginia “Closed” state tournament, held Sept 4-6 in Glen Allen. Morefield prevailed on tiebreak and thus becomes our 2021 Virginia State Chess Champion. Sudarshan Srinayer & Arnav Gupta shared 3rd place (and top Expert) half a point behind the co-leaders. Isaac Spence, Christian Carrasco & Ian Barruel split the class A prize.

Sean Beavers scored 5½ points to take clear 1st place, and the title Virginia Amateur Chess Champion, in the Under 1800 section. Kyle Zhuang & Thomas Randolph were equal 2nd/3rd half a point behind. Durai Murugesan’s 4-2 was good for undivided Top class C, while Venkatasai Peram, Jadon Gary & Sai Sista each tallied the same score *en route* to sharing top class D honors.

Siddhant Yamben banged out five straight wins to sweep the 5-round, 45-player Novice (under 1200) section, in the process raising his rating a whopping 275 points (890 to 1165). Steven Harrington’s 4½ points earned 2nd place. Ryan Wang & Seth Bright shared 3rd place. VCF Membership Secretary Georgia Chin was part of a 4-way tie for top Under 1100 that also included Adam Poole, Robert Belcher & Aidan Quirk. Maximilian Bao, Ted Ambrose & Himaja Sista divided top Under 800, while Murray Withrow & Maya Aravindan were the top Under 600 prizewinners.

The tournament drew a total of 124 players across its three sections, which seems like a good turnout during our slow post-pandemic re-emergence. Mike Hoffpauir organized the event on behalf of the VCF and Tina Schweiss served as Chief TD, assisted by Robert Jackson.

Anand Dommalapati was re-elected VCF President at the Federation’s annual business meeting. Robby Jackson & Aniket Sinkar were elected to the VCF Board of Directors.

The new champion ascended to the title in style, knocking off his two highest-rated rivals, including the defending champion. VIRGINIA CHESS is pleased to have Jason Morefield explain how that happened in his own words...



STATE CHAMPION FOR THE FIRST TIME!

by Jason Morefield

IHAVE PLAYED in the Virginia State Championships almost every year since I started playing chess in 2013. As the only tournament near my home, it was the one constant in an ever-changing tournament schedule. Wherever I ended up playing throughout the year, it was always certain that on Labor Day weekend I would participate in the Virginia ‘Closed’. It was my first-ever adult tournament, and it quickly grew to be one of my absolute favorites. After I won the Amateur title as an 11-year-old in 2014 (the year after I started playing!), I resolved that one day I would win the state championship.

I gradually improved my score as I became a stronger player overall, sometimes medaling at the finish, but always coming short of first place. Every year there was a pack of strong masters that stood in my way. Although I came closer every time I participated, the champion’s title remained ever so slightly out of reach.

Going into this year’s championship, I had not played in a ‘live’ over-the-board tournament for about eighteen months. However, this time away from the chessboard only served to increase my focus and drive to win. I knew the tournament was going to be intensely competitive—I had never beaten my two main rivals, former and defending state champions Balakrishnan and Miller—but I was psyched just to be able to play in-person once again.

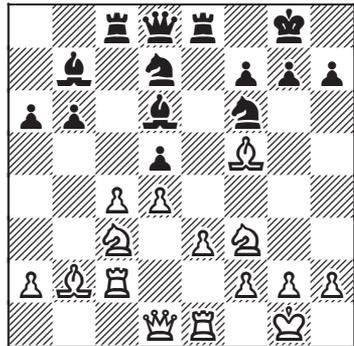




Jason Morefield - Praveen Balakrishnan Slav

Going into this game, I was in leading a group of players on 2½ out of 3 while Balakrishnan had a clean 3-0. If I wanted to keep my hopes of first place alive, I would need to pull off an almost 300-point upset—a draw would likely be not enough. And so we begin... **1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Nf3 Nbd7 6 Be2 Bd6 7 O-O O-O 8 b3 b6 9 Bb2 Bb7 10 Bd3** [Two rounds earlier, in this same position I played 10 Rc1. Although both moves are good, I personally prefer 10 Bd3 as the play is a lot more clear-cut afterwards. However, it's likely Balakrishnan prepared for 10 Rc1, as now he sank into thought for thirty minutes!] **10...Re8 11 Re1 c5** [And another twelve minutes here. Alternatives included 11...dxc4 12 bxc4 e5 13 Ne4. Eleven moves in and I'm still in theory, while he has less than half his time left (he arrived nine minutes late). Although the game has barely started—and such time expenditure was hardly unusual for Balakrishnan—this gave me a massive boost of confidence. A slightly more comfortable position and a large lead on the clock are both great things to have in must-win games.] **12 cxd5 exd5 13 Rc1 a6 14 Rc2** [This looks cryptic, but it's essentially just a waiting move. Rd2/e2 might be useful in the future, and so might Re1-c1. Since I don't have much to do yet I might as well make solid improving moves like these.] **14...Rc8 15 Bf5 c4** [This isn't technically a mistake, but the way he followed it up was. As the higher-rated player, with all else being equal, Balakrishnan benefits from the position remaining more complex. As played in the game, ...c4 hurts Black's pawn structure for an illusion of activity that never became a reality, but moreover it simplifies the position to something easier for White to play. The move would gain in strength after 15...g6 16 Bh3 c4 now that the bishop can't go to d3.] **16 bxc4** (diagram) **16...Rxc4?!**

The actual mistake. Both of us thought that 16...dxc4 was not worth much consideration, but Stockfish values it surprisingly highly. Why? Well, the explanation is a bit complicated. After 17 e4 g6 White has two main options. Strangely enough, the obvious one is worse.



18 Bxd7 Now **18...Qxd7 19 e5 Bb8! 20 exf6 Bxf3 21 gxf3 Rxe1+ 22 Qxe1 Qh3!** Black draws by perpetual check, either by ...Bxh2+ or, if White plays f4, ...Qg4+. I do not think either of us saw this line in the game, but in any case **18...Nxd7!** is better still. If Black is allowed to play ...b5 he will be slightly better. This too was not at all obvious during the game, so let me explain. Although White's center looks incredible, it's hard for him to do anything useful with it; whereas ...b5-b4 and ...c3 is a very dangerous plan Black can try. After **19 a4 Bb4 20 Nd2** the position remains complex, but White's game is a little more tricky to handle. If the game ever opens up, Black's bishop pair will be very dangerous.



18 *Bh3!* and now:

18...Nxe4 is not the computer's top choice, but it's the most natural move by a significant margin. 19 Rce2! f5 (19...Nef6) 20 d5! Forced, but it's enough. White opens the long diagonal towards Black's king, and Black must now be very accurate. 20...Nef6! 21 Rxe8+ Nxe8 22 g4! Ng7 23 gxf5 gxf5 24 Kh1! The computer continues to evaluate the position as equal, but most humans (me included) would simply call it "unclear". Even if Balakrishnan saw this variation, it's not something he wants to go for.

18...Bxe4 19 Rce2 forcing Black's hand. He must move the bishop but every square has a drawback. If 19...Bb7 20 Ne5 Re7 21 Nxd7 Nxd7 22 d5 f5! 23 Rxe7 Bxe7 24 g4! After this strange variation, Stockfish says White has just enough compensation for the pawn, and I'm inclined to agree. It seems difficult to play as Black and the extra pawn isn't really felt. The other important possible bishop move 19...Bxf3 leads into a minefield. 20 Rxe8+ Nxe8 21 Qxf3 Rb8 22 Qc6 Ndf6 23 Qxc4 b5! 24 Qb3 Bf8 Stockfish gives Black a slight edge.

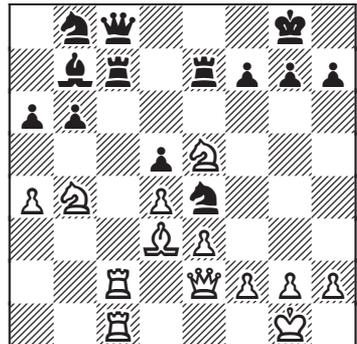
But I think you have to be a super-GM or cheating in order to go into such an absolute mess 16...dxc4 with only twenty minutes remaining on the clock. With the move actually played, we reenter the realm of normal chess, thankfully! My reply prevents ...b5 and I can claim a slight but enduring advantage.

17 a4 Rc7 18 Bd3 Nb8 19 Qe2 Nc6 20 Na2! [Preventing ...Nb4 as exchanging knights would leave the a6-pawn weak.] 20...Qc8 [Apparently Black can equalize with 20...Na5! but it is a tricky move to make work. 21 Ne5 (Black is also okay after 21 Rxc7 Qxc7 22 Bxa6?! Bxa6 23 Qxa6 Qc2 24 Qe2 Rc8. He'll probably win the pawn back on a4.) 21...Rxc2 22 Qxc2 Nc4! A crazy pawn sacrifice that resurrects Black's position. 23 Nxc4 dxc4 24 Bxc4 Qc7 25 h3 Black has enough compensation for the pawn.] 21 Rec1 Ree7 22 Ne5! Nb8 [Here White has a nice advantage and an important decision to make.] 23 Bc3! [Stockfish initially doesn't like this but the evaluation increases the more it thinks. This move opens up the possibility of Rb1, attacking b6, and prevents Black from exchanging his cramped pieces.] 23...Ne4?! [After 23...a5! Black no longer has to defend a6 but his position is still tricky. 24 Be1 Rxc2 25 Rxc2 Rc7 26 Rb2! I like White.] 24 Bb4 Bxb4 25 Nxb4 (diagram)

Black is under some pressure on the c-file and a6, but Praveen saw something...

25...Nc3?

If 25...Rxc2 26 Qxc2 Qxc2 27 Rxc2 White will be applying pressure well into the endgame. Losing the c-file like in this variation would be a massive blow for Black.





25...f6 is probably what Black wants to play (getting the knight out of the center) but it has a tactical refutation. 26 Nxd5! (there is a fallback option that gives White the advantage had 26 Nxd5 not worked out: 26 Bxe4 dxe4 27 Nc4) 26...Bxd5 27 Bxe4 The beginning of a tactical idea I was in the process of calculating when Balakrishnan made his move. White is up too much material after 27...Bxe4 28 Rxc7 Rxc7 29 Qa2+! Kf8 30 Qf7+!! Rxf7 31 Rxc8+ Ke7 32 Nxf7 and will win shortly.

As for the text move, I'm not sure whether he thought he was winning a pawn, but now I have more than one winning move. I chose the cleanest option.

26 Qg4! [After this, possibly my most important move in the tournament, Black cannot avoid losing material. 26 Qh5 and 26 Qf3 are both good as well but entirely unnecessary.] **26...Nd7 27 Nxd7 Rxd7 28 Rxc3! Rxc3 29 Rxc3 Qd8** [If 29...Qxc3 30 Qxd7—I don't have to worry about the back-rank mate because of Bf1—30...Qxb4 31 Qd8+ Qf8 32 Bxh7+! Why take a bishop when you can win a queen? Both of us saw this variation and Balakrishnan decided to play on longer, but the result was no longer in doubt.] **30 Bxa6 Bxa6 31 Nxa6 g6 32 h3 Kg7 33 Nb4 Qe8 34 Qf4 Qf8 35 Nd3 Qa8 36 Ne5 Ra7 37 Ng4 f5 38 Qe5+ Kg8 39 Nh6+ Kf8 40 Qh8+ Ke7 41 Qxh7+ Kd8 42 Qxg6 Rxa4 43 Qd6+ Ke8 44 Rc7 1-0**

With this win I moved to clear first place going into the final day. However, it wasn't over yet...

Daniel Miller - Jason Morefield Sicilian

The defending champion was one of several players on 3 points hoping to catch me on 3½. Winning this game would place Miller tied for 1st going into the last round, while either a draw or loss would thwart his chances of claiming the state championship for the seventh(!) time. For me, a draw would result in a situation where I retained a significant

Fredericksburg Open

October 30-31

Country Inn & Suites South

5327 Jefferson Davis Hwy, Fredericksburg, VA 22408



5-SS, rd 1 G/75+10, rds 2-5 G/90 +10. In two sections: *Open* \$\$ 600-400-250 (all guaranteed), top X \$200, A \$180. *Under 1800* \$\$ 450-300-150 (all guaranteed), top U1500 \$140, U1200 \$130, Unrated \$100; Unrated winning a place prize limited to \$250. *Both* Rds 10-2-7, 10-3. EF \$80 thru 10/23, \$95 thereafter and on site. Register online www.vachess.org; on site 4-9 pm Fri 10/29 and 7-9:15 am Sat 10/30. Hotel \$79 + tax, must reserve by Oct 22, 540-898-1800 mention "the Chess Tournament." Blitz tournament Friday evening, Oct 29. Questions? Mike Hoffpauir, mhoffpauir@aol.com, 757-846-4805

A VCF Cup Event, 20 Grand Prix points, Junior Grand Prix



chance of capturing the title by winning with White in the last round. In short, Miller was in a must-win situation and I wasn't. **1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 cxd4 d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bc4 dxe5 8 Bxd5!** [A strange sideline of the Alapin that I had never seen before getting ready to play Miller, but it does have its merits. White sacrifices a pawn for a central initiative and piece activity.] **8...Qxd5 9 Nc3 Qd6 10 d5 Nd4!** [Giving the pawn back to catch up in development and prevent Nb5] **11 Nxd4 exd4 12 Qxd4 e5 13 Qd3!** [I expected 13 Qe3, preparing f4, but the move in the game is natural and relatively strong as well.] **13...Bd7 14 O-O Qg6!** [Getting ready to develop the bishop while gaining a tempo.] **15 Qxg6!** [For a must-win game, 15 Qe2 makes sense to keep more pieces on the board. However, I have this cool variation: 15...Bd6 16 f4 O-O 17 fxe5 Rfe8 18 Bf4 Bxe5! (a temporary piece sacrifice) 19 Bxe5 Qb6+ (Black can play 19...f6 right away, but repositioning the queen first is a little bit better) 20 Kh1 (Qf2 is also possible and similar) 20...f6 and I am winning the piece back with an advantage in activity. I imagine that he saw this line or something similar and wanted to avoid exchanging bishops.] **15...hxg6 16 Be3 f6** [I had other options but I liked this one. I stabilize the center and prepare to activate my pieces.] **17 Rac1** [After the game my opponent suggested 17 Rfc1 but I would have a strong response: 17...Rh4! 18 f3 Rc4 19 Ne4 Rac8 20 Rxc4 Rxc4 21 Bxa7 Rc2 White will not be a pawn up for long. Black's activity is fantastic and he already has an edge.] **17...b6 18 a4** *(diagram, next page)*



Northern Virginia Open

November 20-21, 2021

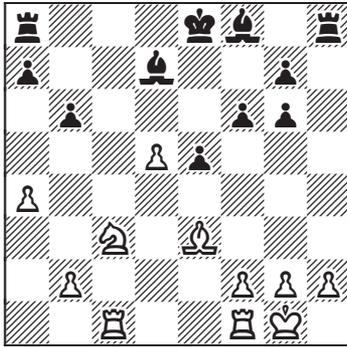
Marriott Washington-Dulles Airport

5020 Aviation Drive, Dulles Va

5-SS, rds 1-3 G/90 +30, rds 4-5 40/90, SD/30 +30. One section: \$\$ (b/80) \$1000-650-400-225-180, X \$165-82.50, A/Unr \$160-80), B \$155-77.50, C \$150-75, D \$140-70, U1200 \$130-65, Unrated \$45, unrated player winning a place prize limited to \$250. FIDE RATED, FIDE rules in effect. Player's late for their game by more than 30 minutes will be forfeited. Rds 9:30-2-7, 9:30-3:30. EF \$100 through Sat 11/13, \$115 beginning Sun 11/14 through Wed 11/17, \$125 thereafter and on-site. Reg online at www.vachess.org or onsite 4-9 pm Fri 11/19 or 7-8:45 am Sat 11/20. Hotel \$112 + taxes, must reserve by Oct 29, 703-471-9500 and mention "Virginia Chess Federation". FIDE-rated Blitz tournament on Friday evening, Nov 19. Questions? Mike Hoffpauir, mhoffpauir@aol.com, 757-846-4805

20 Grand Prix points

A VCF Cup Event, Heritage Event, Junior Grand Prix

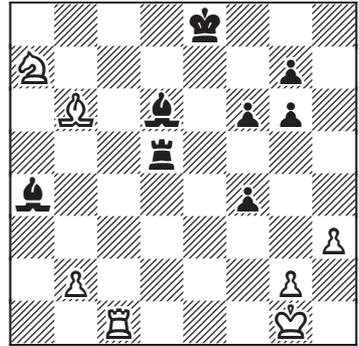


18...Rc8? [18...Rh4! would have been very strong: Black doesn't even need to care about the invasion on c7 because everything falls apart here! 19 f4 exf4 20 Bxf4 g5! Now if 21 Bg3 Rb4—the rook joins the fun and White is struggling: I rejected the variation on account of 21 g3 and I thought that after I moved my rook away things would be tricky, but I was wrong: 21...Rh5 22 Be3 g4! the rook joins the action yet again and Black would have a clear advantage thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn structure.] **19 Nb5 Rxc1 20 Rxc1 Rh4** [This put him in a very difficult position. If he allows the queenside pawns

to be liquidated, not only does he remain slightly worse but he loses any chance of ever winning.] **21 f4?** [So this does unbalance the game, but it does it in my favor!] **21...exf4 22 Bf2 Rh5 23 Nxa7 Rxd5 24 Bxb6** [Perhaps he was intending 24 b3, however 24...Bc5! wins as White's a7-knight cannot escape without allowing Black to trade into a winning endgame.] **24...Bxa4 25 h3 Bd6** (diagram)

The position may still look complex, but Black is completely winning. The b2-pawn and g2-pawns are both very weak, Black has far more active pieces, and White has no targets whatsoever to attack.

26 Nc8 Be5 27 b4 Rd2 28 Bf2 Rb2 29 Nb6 Rxb4 30 Nd5 [The endgame 30 Nxa4 Rxa4 was hopeless for White. Black can exchange rooks whenever he feels like it with ...Ra1 and just be two pawns up.] **30...Rb2 31 Nc3 Bc6 32 Re1** [32 Nd1 doesn't win a piece; far from it, 32...Rd2! One funny variation is 33 Rxc6 Rxd1+ 34 Kh2 f3+ 35 Bg3 f2! where Black doesn't even have to play an endgame to win.] **32...Kf7 33 Ne2 g5 34 Nc1 Bb5! 35 Rd1 Rb1! 0-1** The knight on c1 is completely dominated and will be lost in a few moves.



After that win, I needed only a draw against Sudarshan Sriniaiyer to secure shared 1st place. He offered a draw after 14 moves in a slightly worse Exchange Slav structure—a win for my preparation, if not a win on the board. With that I secured the title of Virginia State Chess Champion!

I'd like to thank everyone who participated in or organized this event for helping make this tournament as safe and competitive as it was. It was a blast, and I look forward to defending my title next year!





Peripatetic Aleksey Bashtavenko is back with another tale of nomadic chess adventure seasoned with philosophical musing. As always, opinions herein are the author's own...—ed

My Pyrrhic Victories in Spain

by Aleksey Bashtavenko

“The Baroque is an assertion of stability, a refusal to give way, glorification of obstinacy, an affirmation of belief, an indictment of change as an illusion, a reiteration of faith in things as they are, a rejection of the lure of things as they could be; the Baroque is the mode of a hedgehog.” —Claudio Veliz

MY PREVIOUS TOURNAMENT in Spain left me pondering why the event was held in the town of Coín rather than in Seville or in Malaga. I was even more perplexed as to why it was held in a baroque mansion instead of a more practical and a more prosaic facility such as a hotel or restaurant. As troubling as those peculiarities may have been, what has truly left me speechless was how the electricity was out for the first round and the tournament organizer changed the starting time of the second round with no notice. I could not help but think that if they could afford to host the event in such a lofty edifice, and the impeccably dressed tournament director projected an image of unimpeachable professionalism, the very least I could expect was that the event would run like a swiss watch. Needless to say, I had to temper my expectations, but I could not have anticipated what the next event held in store for me.

When I arrived in Salobreña for the championship of Andalusia, the same overdressed tournament director gazed upon me with a passive look of familiarity, but nonetheless informed me that I had a bye for round 1 because I had no FIDE rating. Befuddled I explained that I had played in the tournament that he himself hosted in Coín, months prior. The implication seemed clear and obvious: as his previous event was FIDE rated, it stood to reason that I must have had a FIDE rating. We examined the situation in greater detail and it emerged that although I had correctly filled out my registration form, the director was not

2021-22 State Scholastic & College Championships

The tournament returns to over-the-board play—no qualification events or online play like last year. It looks like the weekend of March 5-6, 2022, will be our event dates. The event location is very likely to be in Virginia Beach. Details coming soon. We are very strongly considering an Online Scholastic Team Tournament as well, probably in January 2022. Watch www.vachess.org for information. The idea is for schools to form and enter 4-player teams. Schools can enter more than one team. Teams will be seeded based on the average rating of all players on the team. To calculate average ratings for teams with true Unrated players, we probably will assign the unrated players a rating based using the formula “Grade in school X 100” with 400 being the lowest possible assigned rating. We will clarify the formula we’ll use in the event rules. This tournament *will not* replace our annual over-the-board state scholastic championships.



able to distinguish between my middle and last names. This misconception led him to two conclusions: that I had no FIDE rating and that I could be registered as a Spanish player.

Upon discovering that I was in fact a foreign player with a FIDE rating, he raised the question of whether I was eligible to compete in the championship of Andalusia! While acknowledging that I had received a bye for round 1 in error, the directors needed more time to address the question of my eligibility. After several hours of deliberation and communication with the executives of the Spanish chess federation, the director concluded that I would be allowed to play, but I would not be eligible to win a prize.

The next morning, I woke up to an anxious knocking on my door. Disheveled and discombobulated, I opened the door. I heard a familiar voice in a distinctive English accent with a subtle undertone of Spanish cadence. *"We have to go, the round started in 5 minutes!"* Snapping out of my dreamless sleep, I saw Eduardo, an Anglo-Spanish young man who traveled with me from Malaga to Salobreña. *"Como, como, como? Que está pasando ahora?!"*, I retorted in wild shock, hardly realizing that I was mixing languages. *"Pareja changed the round times again. We are starting round two-and-a-half an hour early again, just like in Coin!"* he explained in a sardonic monotone, flashing an insidious English grin. *"Ehh, Pareja de que? Pareja de hecho? Pareja de matrimonio, pareja de negocios?"*, now fully awake, I giped at the organizer's name: Francisco Jesus Pareja. I arrived at the tournament hall ten minutes late, only to discover that my opponent was also caught unaware by this last minute change.

Aleksey Bashtavenko - Tomas Guardia

King's Indian

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 g6 4 e4 Bg7 5 Nf3 O-O 6 Be2 e5 7 O-O Nc6 8 d5 Ne7
9 Ne1 Ne8 10 Be3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 Bf2 g5 13 a4 Ng6 14 a5 a6 15 c5 Rf7 16 cxd6
cxd6 17 Na4 Nf6 18 Nb6 Rb8 19 Nxc8 Rxc8 20 Bb6 Qd7 21 Nd3 Bf8 22 Nf2
Rg7 23 h3 h5 24 Rc1 Nh4 25 Rxc8 Qxc8 26 Qc1 Qe8 27 Qc2 g4 28 fxg4 hxg4
29 Nxg4 Qg6 30 Nxf6+ Qxf6 31 Bg4 Qg6 32 g3 fxg3 33 Be6+ Kh7 34 Rxf8 g2
35 Bd8 Qg3 36 Qf2 Qh2+ 37 Kxh2 g1Q+ 38 Qxg1 Rxc1 1-0

The game went into my favorite opening, the Mar del Plata variation of the King's Indian Defense. Rapidly compensating for the missing time on my clock, I played the first 14 moves almost instantly. I was relieved to see 13...Ng6 instead of the prophylactic 13...a5 to slow down White's raucous queen's side initiative. As I proceeded with my plan to open up the queen's side with c4-c5xd6, I was even happier to see 14...a6, which allowed me to target the vital b6 square with Na4! The hanging pawn on a5 is poisoned because after ...Qxa5 Black's queen would be trapped by Nb6!

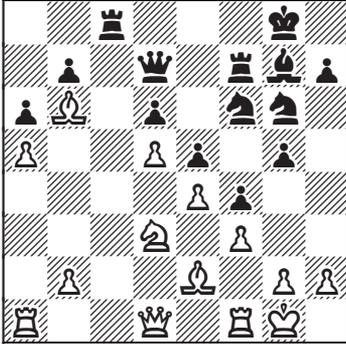
David Zofchak Memorial - Dec 11-12, 2021

Hyatt Place, Va Beach Town Center. Virginia Beach. Keep an eye on www.vachess.org for full details. Hotel special chess rate will be \$85/\$95 for a single-linking or 2 queen beds respectively, cut-off date to reserve room Friday, Nov 26.



Forsaking the forbidden fruit, Black continued his thematic kingside play with 17... Nf6. After eliminating his most dangerous piece, the light-squared bishop, I followed through with 20 Bb6, tempoing the queen, staking claim to c7 and most importantly, clearing f2 for my knight, which allows me to overprotect the bottleneck square on g4.

After 21 Nd3, Black had to play ...g4 immediately: it was now or never! (*diagram*)



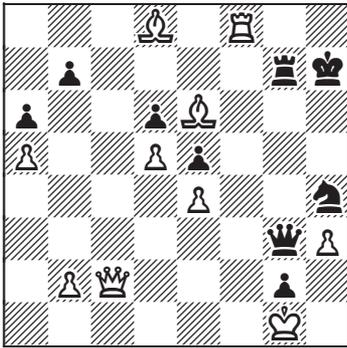
Black's kingside attack hinges on conquering the vital square g4. He could have laid claim to it with 21...g4 and after 22 Nf2 g3 preserves his initiative. Play might have continued 21...g4 22 Nf2 g3 23 Nh3 Nh5 24 Ng5 gxh2+ 25 Kxh2 Rf6 26 Rf2 Nh4 27 Bf1 Rg6 28 Ne6 In this hypothetical position, White has a strong knight on d6, but Black maintains pressure on g2. Despite missing the vital light-squared bishop, he can continue his attack. In PLAY THE KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, Joe Gallagher advises that Black should generally

refrain from playing ...g4 prematurely; however, he must push that "panic button" if White's initiative on the other flank proves to be too rapid, as is often the case when white manages to capture Black's light-squared bishop. In the event White locks up the kingside by answering ...g3 with h3, the bishop must be sacrificed there! When that will be no longer possible, the need for a rapid ...g4 becomes urgent.

Instead, my opponent opted for passive defense of the weakest link in his pawn chain with 21...Bf8, which was unnecessary because d6 had not been under attack at that point. To the move's credit, it vacated g7 for his rook, but this maneuver proved too slow. After 22 Nf2 Rg7 23 h3 h5, there is still no breakthrough on g4 and the position after the 23rd move illustrates Nimzowitsch's principle of prophylaxis and overprotection. I controlled the critical g4 square with pawns on f3 and h3, a knight on f2, a bishop on e2 and a queen on d1, effectively thwarting Black's attack plans.

I continued with a straightforward exchange of the heavy pieces on the c-file. Black opted for ...Nh4, looking for the sacrifice on g2. Consolidating my control of the c-file with Qc2 left Black no sensible option besides a desperate bid for ...g4. After 28 fxg4 hxg4 29 Nxg4 Qg6 his control of the g-file seems meritless. I played 30 Nf6, eliminating another attacker, and consolidated my control of the g-file with 31 Bg4.

Despite White's comprehensive strategic triumph, Black still cherished the hopes of destabilizing the position by undermining g3 with ...f3 or ...Nxg2. My 32 g3 thwarted these plans, locking the file. But 35 Bd8 was an inaccuracy—I could have forced a checkmate after 35 Qc8—and this gave my opponent a final roll of the dice. One last hope of swindling his way out of a dismal position... (*diagram, next page*)



Had I now played 36 Bxh4, retribution would have come in the form 36...Qh2+! 37 Kxh2 g1Qmate! Realizing the seriousness of the situation, I thought for a good 15 minutes, finally satisfying myself that 36 Qf2 forced the exchange of all heavy pieces.

My opponent resigned graciously, thanking me for a fascinating game. Free-spirited and dynamic, the middle-aged Tomas Guardia fashioned a Tarzan-style haircut and quipped about how it has always been his dream to leave Spain, as there

are far too many burdensome regulations and convoluted bureaucratic proceedings. He even went so far as to say that each time he crossed the border into France, he felt a certain levity and liberty that he had never experienced in his home country.

This conversation led me to reflect on a book I read recently concerning the cultural differences between English and Spanish speaking communities, *THE NEW WORLD OF THE GOTHIC FOX: CULTURE AND ECONOMY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH AMERICA*, by Claudio Veliz. The author maintains that the cultural differences between the two communities are best thought of in terms of the distinction between a hedgehog and a fox. The “baroque



Near Salobreña, after the tournament...



hedgehog” represents Spanish culture. It is single-minded, ornate, rigid and opulent. Baroque art is replete with exquisite aesthetic beauty, emotional exuberance and attention to sensuous detail. Guided by this mentality, the Spanish have constructed stunning architecture and produced phenomenal works of art that inspire awe from tourists across the world. Nonetheless, this approach has obvious limitations. The sublime and the profound are often emphasized at the expense of the prosaic and the banal. Spaniards often dwell upon the lofty aspects of an activity while forgetting to take care of the basic details, such as making sure the electricity is on, or keeping to a consistent schedule.

I finally understood why I had such a frustrating experience at the baroque castle in Coin and why the attendant at the Salobrena hotel refused to serve coffee in the middle of the afternoon. *“Tengo que irme a la siesta. ¿Ves a estas personas en la mesa de allí? ¡Ellos están bebiendo cerveza como si no hubiera mañana! ¡Si te vendo algo ahora, será imposible que se vayan porque seguirán pidiendo más bebidas!”* Nonplussed and flustered, I gazed at him with bewildered fascination, as if he were the alien from HITCHIKER’S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY who stood in the middle of a road with a bouquet of flowers trying to pay homage to the automobile. Indeed, this is Spain in its purest form: so terrible that the hotel is full of paying customers in the middle of the afternoon, is it not?! The siesta is sacred!

Juan Fernandez - Aleksey Bashtavenko

Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 Bb4 8 Bd2 O-O 9 O-O d5 10 Re1 d4 11 Ne2 Bxd2 12 Qxd2 c5 13 f4 Ng4 14 h3 Ne3 15 b3 exf4 16 Nxf4 Qg5 17 Qf2 Bb7 18 Rxe3 dxe3 19 Qxe3 Rfe8 20 Rf1 Qe5 21 Bc4 Re7 22 Nd5 Bxd5 23 Bxd5 Qxd5 0-1

My third round game merits only a limited discussion. White opted for a weak variation against the Sicilian Sveshnikov; 6 Nxc6 instead of Ndb5 allows Black to equalize immediately. After 9...d5 the position was already promising. As a general rule in the Sveshnikov, if Black is able to play ...d5 unpunished, it is a safe bet that he has achieved dynamic equality at the very least. After 14 Ne3 I felt confident White’s position would collapse sooner or later. Having lost his patience, my opponent resorted to an exchange sacrifice 18 Rxe3 and the game ended with an elementary tactic shortly thereafter.

Fabio Alarcon - Aleksey Bashtavenko

London System

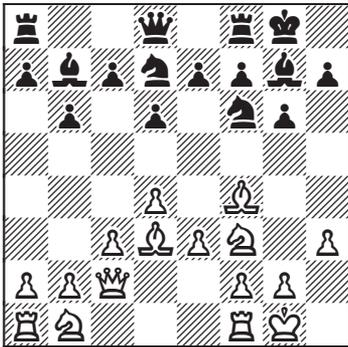
1 d4 Nf6 2 Bf4 d6 3 Nf3 Nbd7 4 e3 g6 5 h3 Bg7 6 Bd3 O-O 7 O-O b6 8 c3 Bb7 9 Qc2 c5 10 Nbd2 Qc7 11 Rfe1 Bc6 12 e4 e5 13 Bh2 Rfd8 14 d5 Bb7 15 c4 Ne8 16 g4 Bh6 17 Rab1 f6 18 Bg3 Bc8 19 Kh1 Nf8 20 a4 Bxd2 21 Qxd2 Qg7 22 Nh2 Bd7 23 f4 Bxa4 24 g5 Rab8 25 fxe5 fxe5 26 Ng4 Qe7 27 Nh6+ Kg7 28 Rf1 1-0

Round 4 got off to a rough start. Noticing that my opponent played the London system, I opted for a King’s Indian set-up with the pawn structure h7-g6-f7-e7-d6-c5-b6-a6. My



purpose was to control e4 in a hypermodern fashion, with pieces rather than pawns. Black intends to play Nf6, Bb7, followed by Bc6, Qc7 and Qb7. Thus controlling e4 with three pieces, he will be able to plant a knight with Ne4 and reinforce its presence with Ndf6. The usual move order for pursuing this plan would be Nf6, g6, Bg7, 0-0, d6, b6 and c5. The purpose of this is to not only control e4 in the future, but to also blunt the London bishop by ensuring that it “bites on granite” on d6. For this reason, ...b6 must be played before ...c5, denying White any opportunity to liberate the bishop with a timely dxc5.

Instead of playing this move order, I opted for an early d6 and Nbd7, anticipating that White might transpose to the Pirc Defense with 3 Nc3. By playing ...Nbd7 early, I let White get in Bd3 followed by Qc2—overprotecting the vital e4 square! A change in a strategic orientation was called for: I had to play for either the ...e5 or ...c5 pawn break.



Instead of my 9...c5, 9...e5 would have been preferable. After a series of exchanges, 9...e5 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5 Bxg2 Black achieves dynamic equality with 12...Qd5, attacking the bishop and threatening mate on g2. That leaves White little choice but to play 13 f4, whereupon Black can follow up with 13...Rad8, asserting control over the center. While Black would be down a pawn, his presence on the a8-h1 diagonal and the ability to target the d-file offer adequate compensation. Moreover, White's backward pawn on e3 can be subjected to a systematic attack.

White convincingly refuted my actual choice. He achieved 12 e4 and by move 15 he commanded a considerable advantage in the center and I was struggling to find counterplay. My 15...Ne8 was in hopes of using the ...f5 pawn break, but the immediate 16 g4 thwarted that. I attempted to alleviate the woes of my cramped position, but White remained firmly in control of the situation. 23...Bxa4 was an avaricious error—it would have been better to contest White's control of the king's side by 23...exf4. I underestimated White's prospects of a decisive king's side attack.

This game concluded play for the evening, and I headed down to the pool area that was outside of the tournament hall. I witnessed several chess players congregating at the bar, while a wedding was celebrated nearby. As I joined the other players, the waiter informed us that the bar would be closing in the next few minutes. This caught even the Spanish players by surprise; none of us could fathom why the bar would close at 7pm on a Saturday night in a hotel full of chess players and wedding guests.

I recalled how earlier that day Tomas recounted the relief he felt upon crossing into France from Spain. Perhaps some things never change. Ernest Hemingway had the



same sensation over a century ago. “*You can never tell whether a Spanish waiter will thank you... I hated to leave France. Life was so simple in France. I felt I was a fool to be going back into Spain. In Spain you could not tell about anything.*” (THE SUN ALSO RISES, p185).

THE NEXT DAY Pareja invited the chess players to have lunch in the cafeteria nearby. Of course it turned out there was some scheduling conflict. We waited over an hour before we could eat, while the staff scrambled to serve fast-food style meals. Meanwhile, Pareja announced that he had decided to *add another round to the tournament*. His body language exuded insouciant comfort, as if he saw absolutely no problems. Apparently, this change had officially taken place over a day ago, but half the assistant tournament directors were not aware of it, to say nothing of the majority of the players. As we wolfed down the makeshift meal, we hoped the director would show a modicum of common sense by allowing the next round to start later. But no—the clocks were started on the dot and players were expected to return to their boards immediately.

Alekset Bashtavenko - Raul Mendijabel Slav

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Bf5 4 Qb3 Qb6 5 Qxb6 axb6 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 Nxd5 Na6 8 e3 e6 9 Bxa6 exd5 10 Bxb7 Ra7 11 Bc6+ Bd7 12 Bxd5 Nf6 13 Bf3 1-0

For all that, my game was almost disappointingly easy. My opponent must have been more rattled by the chaotic state of affairs that I was. He fell into an elementary opening trap (instead of 3...Bf5, simply 3...Nf6 is perfectly viable) allowing me to win a pawn immediately, and threatening the fork Nc7+ besides. A loss of major material seemed inevitable. Black resigned shortly thereafter.

Aleksey Bashtavenko - Juan Rojas King's Indian

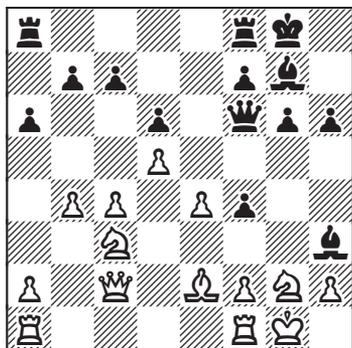
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 O-O 6 Be2 e5 7 O-O Nbd7 8 Qc2 a6 9 d5 Nh5 10 g3 Ndf6 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 b4 Bg4 14 Ne1 Bh3 15 Ng2 Nf4 16 gxf4 exf4 17 f3 Qxc3 18 Qxc3 Bxc3 19 Rab1 b5 20 Rfc1 Bd4+ 21 Kh1 Bxg2+ 22 Kxg2 Rfc8 23 Rc2 c5 24 dxc6 Rxc6 25 Rd2 Be3 26 cxb5 axb5 27 Rdb2 Rb6 28 Rd1 Kf8 29 Rd5 Rab8 30 Rc2 g5 31 Kh3 Kg7 32 Kg4 Kg6 33 Bd3 h5+ 34 Kh3 Kh6 35 Rc7 g4+ 36 fxg4 hxg4+ 37 Kxg4 Kg7 38 Rf5 Rf8 39 Bxb5 d5 40 Rxd5 Rg6+ 41 Kf3 Rh8 42 Rdd7 Rh3+ 43 Ke2 Rxh2+ 44 Kd3 Rd2+ 45 Kc3 Rxd7 46 Rxd7 f3 47 Bc4 Rf6 48 e5 Rc6 49 Rxf7+ Kg6 50 Rxf3 1-0

Round 6 was my most eventful game of the tournament. I not only got to play my favorite opening, but prevailed in a closely contested struggle that lasted for over four hours. Lured by the idea of playing a position similar to the Mar del Plata variation, I closed the center with 9 d5. It would have been better to open it with 9 dxe5 because White's presence in the center was stronger and Black's move 8...a6 was too slow. As a general rule, slow moves on the flank need to be punished with rapid play in the center.



12 Bxf6 was also an error because it ceded control of the dark squares on which Black later organized his attack. Instead of the whole Bg5 foray, it would have been entirely appropriate to launch queenside expansion with a4, or even b4 with the intent of preparing the c5 break. Even after 11 Bg5 a simple retreat with Bd2 would have been a better reaction to 11...h6

After this misplaced exchange, Black has clearly equalized and stood poised for a promising kingside attack. 14 Nd2 would have been more flexible than 14 Ne1, as 14...Bh3 forced me to play the awkward looking 15 Ng2. Black immediately punished my inaccuracy with 16...Nf4! sacrificing to open the g-file. (*diagram*)



I pondered this situation for over 20 minutes and couldn't find anything better than 17 f3, after which the game is Black's to win. Remarkably, I could have salvaged the position with 17 e5!, sacrificing a pawn for the sake of planting a strong knight on e4. Play could have continued as follows: 17 e5 Qg5 18 Bf3 Bxe5 19 Ne4 White is down a pawn but Black's attack has been stopped dead in its tracks. White is ready for the crucial c5 and his excellent knight on e4 is a force to be reckoned with. Black could then try his luck with 19...Qe7

in which case, the play may continue 20 Rae1 (continuing to fight for the center) f5 (dislodging White's knight) 21 Nd2 Qf6 22 Be2 (preparing f3 to defend along the 2nd rank) Qg5 23 Bf3 Qf6—and a draw by repetition was a possibility. If Black declines to force a draw, White will likely seize the advantage with an immediate c5 break.

In the actual game, Black won back his material with 17...Qxc3 and seized control of the dark squares. But then his 19...b5 was an inaccuracy; it allowed me to achieve a critical breakthrough with c5, contesting the dark squares. 21...Bxg2 was also an error because Black forfeits the bishop pair, exchanges a strong piece for a dismal knight, and even helps centralize White's king for the endgame. And finally, with 23...c5 Black completes throwing away the advantage by allowing White to assert his presence on the queenside. On move 25 I could have fully equalized by contesting the c-file with 25 Rbc1.

33 h4 was called for, fracturing Black's pawns. Despite my inaccurate 33 Bd3, I managed to equalize as I lay claim to the 7th rank with 35 Rc7. After 36 fxg4 hxg4, White's improved king even gave me an advantage. Still, Black could have preserved drawing chances with 37...Rg8+

He got yet another chance after 42...Rh3+, but he did not find the correct follow-up. After of 43 Ke2 instead of taking h2 with check, 43...Rg2+! would have been more compelling. White's only correct defense would have been the counterintuitive Ke1. In the game continuation I survived a series of checks and the resulting position was easy to convert.



For the final round I was playing on board 2 in a fairly empty tournament hall. Clearly, most participants already had plans to check out of the hotel earlier that day. Many had even bought bus tickets to return home. (Salobreña, like Coín, was a mere small town and most of the players lived near the larger cities such as Granada, Malaga, Seville and Cordoba, all of which were a substantial distance away.)

Villanueva Santi - Aleksey Bashtavenko
London System

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 Bf4 d6 4 h3 Bg7 5 e3 O-O 6 Be2 b6 7 O-O Bb7 8 c3 c5 9 Nbd2 Qc7 10 Qc2 cxd4 11 exd4 Bc6 12 Rfe1 Qb7 13 Bh2 Ne4 14 Ba6 Nxa6 15 Nxe4 Rac8 16 Qe2 Bxe4 17 Qxe4 Qxe4 18 Rxe4 Bf6 19 Rae1 b5 20 a3 Nb8 21 h4 a5 22 g4 Nc6?? 23 d5 Ne5 24 Nxe5 dxe5 25 g5 Bg7 26 Bxe5 Rfd8 27 Rd1 Bf8 28 Bf4 Rc5 29 Red4 Bg7 30 R4d2 Rc4 31 Bg3 ½-½

For the second time my opponent opened with the London system. However, unlike in round 4, I opted for the correct move order. Also, White developed his light squared bishop to e2 instead of d3, neglecting to fight for e4 immediately. My opening worked out exactly as I had hoped! I played ...Bc6, followed by ...Qb7 and ...Ne4!

White responded in a dubious manner, 14 Ba6, but after the ensuing exchange I lacked a clear understanding of how that improved my position. The natural developmental move 16...Nc7 would have been much stronger than my pointless exchange 16...Bxe4.

19...b5 initiated a minority attack. After the provocative 21 h4 the reply 21...h5 was called for. Instead, I disregarded White's action and continued with my play on the other flank. Even after 22 g4, I could have preserved my e7 pawn 22...d5. The resulting position after 22...Nc6? was decidedly advantageous for White. He could have thwarted the minority attack with 28 a4; instead, my opponent allowed me to play ...Rc4 and ...b5, thereby ensuring that the spoils were shared.

So I finished the event with 5½ out of 7, just half a point shy of 1st place. Even if I had won the final round, I would have been unlikely to win the tournament because I received a bye for round 1, and it would have been a pyrrhic victory in any case as I was not eligible for a prize.

In Coín, I received my first taste of a European tournament under rather peculiar circumstances and in a baroque setting. Now this Salobreña event had been as replete in aesthetic qualities as the tournament in Coín, but even more lacking with respect to basic tournament functionality.

HEMINGWAY'S PROTAGONIST in THE SUN ALSO RISES, Jacob Barnes, expressed admiration for the authenticity of the Spaniards, in sharp contrast with his American expatriate peers whom he saw as flippant if not altogether degenerate. This manifested in the expatriates' tendency to dress casually,



communicate in an informal manner, and live hedonistically. While all this could be seen as a weakness, the flip side is that they were ingenious and adaptable people.

Hemingway's writings defined an entire generation. To this day, the central characters of *THE SUN ALSO RISES* are known as the "lost generation". The Strauss-Howe generational theory suggests that the archetypes constituting American generations are cyclical. Generation X represents the same archetype that defined Hemingway's lost generation. This archetype is known as the nomad, which represents the "adaptive" generation that emerged in American history at a time of extreme uncertainty, such as the prequel to the civil war, the roaring 20s, Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" deregulation era of the late 70s-early 80s.

That theory has always made a great deal of sense to me. It explained why I have always identified with Generation X much more than I did with my own age cohort, the so called Millennials.

The key traits of the lost generation stood in sharp contrast to those of the Spanish "baroque hedgehog": inflexible, stuck in their ways, and fiercely resistant to influence from other cultures. The same can be said for Generation X: they are resourceful, adaptable, resilient, and always happy to abide by the adage of "when life throws you lemons, make lemonade". I have noticed many similar traits among the British and the Northern European Generation X expatriates who have made my time in the Iberian peninsula much easier than it otherwise might have been.

I left the USA disillusioned with the negative traits of the latest lost generation; I have worked and socialized with them extensively. For better or for worse, Generation X has shaped my identity. That is a fact of life I could only have appreciated after I had expatriated. For all its flaws, the Anglo-American Generation X gets things done in a simple and unpretentious manner.

Mike Hoffpauir could have flaunted his credentials in the faces of the players whose event he was directing, as if that were a license to shirk his basic responsibilities as director of the tournament. Instead, he dressed casually and conveyed a non-nonsense competence at every stage of each event. There was absolutely no room for confusion, misunderstanding, or last-minute changes. As "lost" as the generation of my next-elders may be, the Iberian hedgehog has much to learn from them. Unfortunately, this life lesson will always fall on deaf ears in Spain. From the inquisition to France and Pedro Sanchez, resistance to change and staunch opposition to pragmatism that is associated with the Protestant Anglo-American heritage has always been a hallmark of Spanish culture.



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