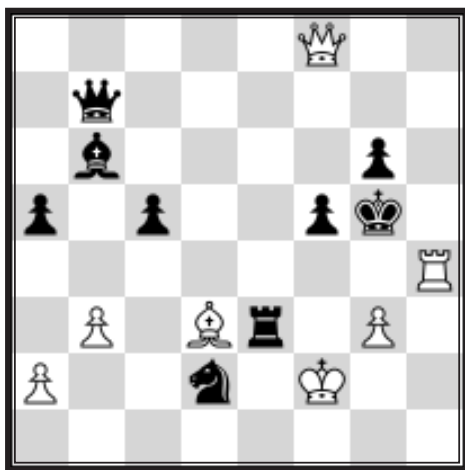


VIRGINIA CHESS

Newsletter

The bimonthly publication of the
Virginia Chess Federation

2026 - #2



NoVa High School Squad Win US Amateur Team East!

Full story inside

Kyle Zhuang - Roshan Idnani
Position after 44...Nxd2

Find the Mate! *Solution
on page 12*



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Newsletter

2026 - Issue #2

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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: Robert Jackson, 341

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Four Boards, One Result

Thomas Jefferson High School wins 2026 US Amateur Team East

by Kevin Su, with Kent Slate, Aarush Gupta & Kyle Zhuang

EVERY FEBRUARY, over President's Day weekend, more than 1,500 chess players descend upon Parsippany, New Jersey, for the United States Amateur Team East, also known as the World Amateur Team. The tournament is one of American chess's great traditions: a three-day, six-round team event where squads of four must average below 2200 USCF. This year, a team of four high-schoolers from Thomas Jefferson High School in Alexandria, Virginia, made the trip with hopes of a strong showing.

Our team, "Thomas Jefferson Checks & Balances" — a groan-worthy pun on both our school's Founding Father namesake and chess's own checks and imbalances — consisted of Kent Slate (2336) on Board 1, Kyle Zhuang (2283) on Board 2, myself (2232) on Board 3, and Aarush Gupta (1906) on Board 4. With a team average of 2183, we were among the top seeds of 336 teams.

Round 1 vs KEEP IT IN CHECK

Equipped with our matching outfits and bad pun, we were raring to go. Before the tournament began, we had a short discussion on match strategy in the first few rounds. Kent proposed that each of us should play for a win regardless of match situation, in order to maximize our tiebreak status, which turned out to be important later on...

Kevin Su - Thomas Holder Queen's Pawn Game

Notes by Kevin Su

Fresh off a physics test the previous day, I was really hoping for a smooth start to the tournament. Unfortunately, Thomas (rated 2059) turned out to be a much more difficult opponent than I expected. **1 d4 d5 2 Bf4 c5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e4 Nxe4 5 Nxe4 dxe4 6 dxc5 Qa5+ 7 Qd2 Qxc5 8 Ne2 e5 9 Be3?** [Too passive. In this line, White typically would like to castle and put the knight on either b5 or d5 before Black has a chance to play Rd8. As we'll see later, I don't get this opportunity if Black plays accurately. So castling with tempo was necessary either here or the previous move, eg 9 O-O-O

Nc6 10 Be3 Qb4 11 Nc3 Be6 12 a3 Qa5 13 Nxe4 ±] **9...Nc6 10 Be3 Qb4 11 Nc3 Be6 12 a3 Qa5 13 Nxe4 ± Qc7 10 O-O-O Be6 11 a3 Be7?! [Letting me off the hook. 11...Nc6! 12 Nc3 Rd8 13 Qe2 Rxd1+ 14 Qxd1 Be7 15 Nxe4 O-O Black would be well ahead in development with a comfortable advantage.] 12 Nc3 O-O 13 Nb5?** [Far too materialistic. I severely underestimated the game's continuation, thinking that an extra pawn and exchange would be too much for my opponent to overcome. 13 Nd5 was the only move to equalize in this position: 13...Bxd5 14 Qxd5 Rd8 15 Qxe4 Rxd1+



16 Kxd1 Nd7 17 Bd3] 13...Qc6 14 Nxa7 [Funnily enough, the engine says White's best option is to go back with the knight. 14 Nc3 a6 15 Nd5 Bd8 16 h3 f5 ♣] 14...Rxa7! 15 Bxa7 Qa4!



[A great find by my opponent. ...Bxa3 is the immediate threat, but the most

important point is that all of Black's pieces are harmonizing to attack the White king. Ideas like ...b5-b4 and ...Rc8 are coming, while my kingside remains undeveloped.]

16 Bxb8 Rxb8 17 c4?! [A reasonable try considering the already dire situation I was in, but this is thwarted by my opponent's next move.] 17...b5! 18 Qc2 [Obviously White cannot play 18 cxb5 because 18... Rc8+ 19 Kb1 Qb3 wins] 18...Qa8 19 g4 [hoping for 19...Bxg4?! 20 Bg2 Bxd1 21 Rxd1 f5 22 c5 when Black still has a winning advantage, but White has greater holding chances.] 19...bxc4 20 Bg2 c3! [The very accurate last nail in the coffin.] 21 Qxe4 Qa5 22 b4 Qxa3+ 23 Kc2 Qb3+ 24 Kd3 c2+ 25 Ke2 cxd1Q+ 26 Rxd1 Bc4+ 0-1 A tough loss but a commendable game by my opponent.

Despite a rough start for the author, my teammates picked up the slack.

Kent Slate - Mark Kogan French

Notes by Kent Slate

Our team arrived at the hotel in a scramble, filtering in one by one and searching through the noise for each other. With a rating average of 2183 out of a maximum 2200, we expected to coast through the early rounds. However, we were given anything but "easy pairings," for our first round we were matched against KEEP IT IN CHECK, rated 1955. We learned our pairing just minutes before the round, so our only preparation was motivating each other to build confidence that we could work it out at the board. I sat down on Board 1 opposite their top player, a young teenager named Mark Kogan. Almost completely starved of

useful information, I asked his rating. "1900," he said. Skeptical (that didn't add up with their team average), I pulled up his USCF profile during the grace period before the round and found he was solidly in the 2100s! Avoiding the first psychological pitfall my opponent set for me, and with (in all likelihood) neither of us having done any prep, I shelved the suspicion and fell back on my main repertoire: King's Pawn it was... 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 [The French! I was rather disappointed to see this choice, as most main lines lead to complex and incredibly sharp situations where a deficiency in preparation can prove lethal.] 3 Nd2



[With this in mind, I eventually opted for the Tarrasch - generally considered the more positional and “safe” option against the French, while still offering more flair for ambition than the Exchange.] **3...c5 4 Ngf3** [keeping the central tension and waiting for Black’s response] **4...cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nc6 6 Bb5 Bd7 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 Bd3 Bd6 9 Qe2 e5 10 O-O** [Up till this point, I had been vaguely following my old preparation. I knew the queen belonged on e2, the bishop on d3, and I was aware the knight would sometimes want to plant itself on c4 or on f3. Still, the specifics were fuzzy, so I settled on making an indisputably improving move by castling. However, castling was not the main move for reasons we’ll see in the game.] **10...Ne7 11 c4 d4**



I was familiar with the idea of **11 c4** to coax **11...d4**, weakening the light squares, then sacrificing the said pawn with **12 c5!** However, as I had prematurely included castling, I gave Black an additional tempo to include **Ne7**, and thus after **12 c5 Bxc5 13 Nc4!** I realized there exists **13...Ng6!** defending the e5 pawn comfortably, where the knight on g6 is an excellent piece. I

spent a lot of time looking for alternative options, including the interesting (and technically best!) continuation of **12 c5 Bxc5 13 Qh5! Ng6 14 f4!**, but I eventually discarded this as after **14...Qe7** I missed the strong **15 g3!** at the end holding everything together. White is down a pawn, but very active and preparing to exert further pressure on the center after **15...exf4 16 gxf4**. (Instead **15 f5!? Nf4 16 Rxf4 exf4** leads to an unclear and unbalanced position. I thought I could do better!)

12 f4!?

I eventually opted for this after about a 20 minute think. I recognized that it was probably not the best move because of the reply **12...c5!**, which solidifies the central pawns. However, I would argue that it was a good practical decision. I was already out of book - my opponent had blitzed every move up to this point - so it was logical to play something offbeat to disrupt his theory. Additionally, Black cannot stop me from closing the position with **f5**, which keeps more pieces on the board, and the situation less obvious. Complications were good since, as Board 1 with White against a lower-rated opponent, I needed to win. I also spotted **b4** ideas against **...c5**, crashing open the center, which I thought looked especially tricky. Perhaps most importantly, the obvious “refutation” of the text move - winning my opponent the exchange - I evaluated to be chiefly in my favor!

12...Ng6? [The move I was hoping for, and he plays it] **13 f5! Nf4 14 Rxf4! exf4 15 e5** [There is nothing concrete quite yet, but White is breaking through with the central pawns and will soon be able to deploy the



pieces to beautiful supporting squares.] **15... Bc7 16 Nf3 O-O 17 Qe4 f6** [Forcing the central junction forward, but this allows me to dominate the light squares.] **18 e6 Re8 19 c5!** [A purely positional concept, and a moment I am incredibly proud of! I am in no rush to play Bxf4, and the text move shuts down any possibility of Black activating their light squared bishop in the near future. It will be remain stuck behind the c6 pawn.] **19...g5!?** [The Engine scoffs at this move, but I thought it was an incredibly good practical decision as it throws a wrench in my easy plan to dominate the light squares and slowly improve after Bxf4.] **20 Nxd4?** [Too slow. The d4 pawn posed little threat to me, and I could've dealt with it later. 20 h4! is the Engine's suggestion. 20...h6 21 Bd2 Bc8 22 hxg5 hxg5 23 g3! fxg3 24 Qg4 and I am crashing through, but this is not easy to foresee.] **20...Re7!** [Black wants to activate his light squared bishop via ...Be8-Bh5] **21 Bc4 Be8 22 Bd2 Be5 23 Bc3 Qc7 24 Rd1 Rd8 25 Rd3** [With all my pieces developed, the question became: what next? After Black secured ...f4 with ...g5 and activated his bishop, there were

no glaring weaknesses to target. I identified the dark squared bishop trade as the main strategic goal, eliminating his counterplay on that color complex. However, forcing the exchange without conceding something in return wasn't straightforward. I figured a safe way to start would be a consolidating approach, Rd3 followed by Kf1 to tidy up a bit before committing to expansion. Only then might I consider advancing on the queenside and, once the position allowed, engineering the dark-squared bishop trade under safer circumstances.] **25...g4!?** [A double-edged move, and one I initially believed to be a blessing. Had my opponent simply done nothing, exploiting the closed nature of the position and the absence of obvious weaknesses, things may well have been more difficult for me. And yet, while the advance did weaken f4, Black was seeking active counterplay, looking to create a pawn break and liberate his pieces. As the game demonstrated, the complications resulting from this ambitious move became incredibly tricky to navigate. What I'd expected was 25...a5 stopping queenside expansion, with a slower game after, eg, 26 Kf1 Kg7 ±] **26**

UPCOMING EVENTS

13th Cherry Blossom Classic !!!

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Executive Conference and Training Center, Sterling, VA 20166

Thu May 21st - May 25th 2026

5th Skyline Open (Details coming soon)

Washington Dulles Airport Marriott Hotel, Dulles, Virginia

Friday, October 9, 2026 - Monday, October 12, 2026



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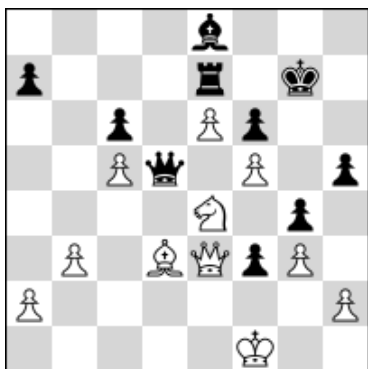


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Kf1 h5 27 b3 Kh8?! [27...Kh7! was a more active square for the king that avoids the dark-squared bishop's diagonal] **28 Ne2?** [The wrong execution of the right plan. 28 Qe1! would have been an incredibly strong multipurpose move, threatening Ba5 with tempo, preparing to recapture on c3, all while discouraging h4. 28...Qb7 29 Nc2! Bxc3 30 Qxc3 — same trade, but Black cannot defend the f6 pawn in time! — 30...Rxd3 31 Qxf6+! *Zwischenzug* 31...Kg8 32 Bxd3 +- Another reason why it was important for Black to put his King on h7!] **28...Bxc3?** [Playing into our hands. 28...Rxd3! was the right move. 29 Qxd3 h4 ∞ With the Queen no longer on e4, we are unable to trade the dark square bishops on our terms, and now Black's ...g4-h5 expanse suddenly makes sense.] **29 Nxc3 Rxd3 30 Bxd3 f3! 31 g3!** [We give Black the protected passed pawn, but the position must remain closed.] **31...Qd8 32 Qe3?!** [It was critical to activate my king as soon as possible, where it can assist as an endgame piece. 32 Kf2! Rh7 33 Ke3! and if 33...h4 34 Qxg4 +- because the king on e3 defends Bd3] **32...Kg7?** [A missed opportunity. 32...Rh7! would have been tough to meet, preparing ...h4] **33 Ne4** [Preparing a tricky idea (or so I thought!)] **33...Qd5**



34 Nc3

I had to stomach not playing 34 Nxf6, which on the surface appeared to win on the spot. However, after 34...Kxf6 35 Qh6+ Black has the beautiful 34...Bg6!!, which disrupts my geometry. (But not 35...Ke5?? 36 Qh8+! my idea - a beautiful mate! 36...Rg7 37 Qxg7 *mate*) After 35...Bg6!! 36 Qxg6+ Ke5 there is mate no longer, and I would have to find a long and difficult sequence of forcing moves for equality. My opponent admitted afterwards that he thought 34 Nxf6 was game over. He'd missed this concept - but better safe than sorry!

34...Qe5??

Having overlooked the ...Bg6!! resource, he was spooked by the prospect of repeating the position 34...Qd8 35 Ne4 when I'd have another 'opportunity' to go Nxf6(?). So, he resorted to a nuclear solution. But even down the exchange, the connected passed pawns combined with the total domination of my knight and bishop on the light squares proves to be simply too much. Had he played 34...Qd8, what actually could have followed was 35 Kf2! h4 36 Bc4 Black's light square bishop is thoroughly trapped, and his queen has no immediate infiltration squares. White's slow, improving moves should prove decisive.

35 Qxe5 fxe5 36 Ne4! Kh6 37 Bc4 [preparing f6] **37...Bg6** [My connected passers are too strong, so Black concedes a full piece.] **38 fxg6 Kxg6 39 b4!** [Creating a queenside passed pawn proves decisive. With the pawn on e6 a constant thorn in Black's side, he simply cannot address everything.] **39...Kf5 40 Nd6+ Kf6 41 Kf2** [Black's rook is



helpless without any open files.] **41... Rh7 42 a4 a6 43 Ne4+ Kf5 44 Ke3 Re7 45 Nd6+ Kf6 46 Nc8 Re8 47 Na7 a5 48 bxa5 e4 49 Nxc6 Rc8 50 e7 h4 51 a6 hxg3 52 hxg3 Rh8 53 a7 Ra8 54 Bd5 Kg7 55 Nd8 1-0** And with that beautiful finish, Black resigned! It was a valiant fight after the exchange sacrifice,

and credit where it is due: my young opponent made it incredibly difficult to execute my plans at every turn. But in the end, his chances to create counterplay and activate his pieces were not taken. As a result, his position remained passive, and after a few concessions he was squeezed with no way to untangle.

Kyle and Aarush also won their games, giving us the match 3-1.

Rounds 2 & 3

Against lower-rated opponents in rounds 2 and 3, we won our matches relatively smoothly with 3-1 and 4-0 scores, respectively. There were no particularly dramatic games to report, but we were slowly building the strong tiebreaks that Kent had mentioned before the tournament.

Round 4 vs Dean of Chess

On Sunday evening, we were paired against our first 2100+ opponent, the formidable Dean of Chess. Their lineup featured IM Dean Ippolito (the Dean?), NM Roshan Idnani, NM Taran Idnani, and Colin Stewart, a class B player.

On Board 4, Aarush faced Colin Stewart and unleashed a ferocious kingside attack in a Vienna Game.

Aarush Gupta - Colin Stewart Vienna

Notes by Aarush Gupta

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bc5 5 d3 O-O 6 Nge2 a6 7 O-O d6 8 h3 Be6 9 Kh2 Nd4?! [A peculiar move from my opponent. With the g3 setup in the Vienna, one of my primary ideas would be to form an expansion (starting with the move f4) on the kingside, and try brewing up a potent attack with thoughtful piece coordination. With this move, my opponent releases partial control of the center (especially on the d4 and e5 squares), and that makes my f4 pawn push significantly more effective. 9...d5 is the right move, challenging the

center and adding complexity to the position. After 10 f4 exf4 11 Nxf4 d4 Black starts to equalize because of his flexibility, eg the availability of the e5 square for the knight.] **10 Nxd4 Bxd4 11 Ne2 ±** [An alternative here was to play 11 f4 exf4 12 gxf4 g6 13 f5 but I think the placement of the knight on g3 was more proactive.] **11...Ba7 12 f4** [I immediately seize the opportunity to make this push, and question my opponent: enable significant piece activity with a trade, or permit me to play f5 to have a strong pawn structure and an open c1-h6 diagonal.]



12...Ne8?! [A questionable move. It is safe to assume that my opponent was trying to prophylactically alleviate potential pressure on that knight after, for example, 12...Bd7 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 Bg5? but in that case there would be 14...Ng4+! and Black is simply better. 12...exf4 13 Nxf4 c6 was indicated, to keep the position more simple, in spite of Black having slightly less space. For instance, 14 Bd2 Nd7 15 c3 Qc7 16 d4 Bc4] **13 f5 Bd7 14 g4 f6 15 h4 Bc6 16 c4!** [clamping down against ...d5, limiting counterplay] **16...b5 17 b3 Bb7 18 Ng3 c6 ±** [Black seeks to set up compensation in the center for my aggression on the flank. However, it would not be fast enough, as my g-pawn quickly races up the file. With the assistance of my queen with Qh5 and the long diagonal of my dark-squared bishop, the Black king is easily harassed with mating threats around the corner. There is no opportunity for

counterplay yet.] **19 g5 Kh8??** [This was not the correct way of addressing White's threats, and was a losing blunder. Now, g6 is extremely powerful because regardless of Black's move, Qh5 is crushing, and Black simply has no defensive resources. 19...fxg5 20 hxg5 g6 21 Qg4 was a more stubborn defense, although it's clear White has great attacking chances.] **20 g6! ±** [It didn't take me long to see that my opponent's move was not optimal.] **20...h6** [20...hxg6 21 fxg6 loses on the spot with forced mate after Qh5+] **21 Qh5 Qd7?!** [The vacancy of d7 was important for a quick rook maneuver with ...Rd8-Rd7, which would serve as a protective reinforcement against my Bxh6 sacrifice. So, for example, 21...Qc7 22 Bxh6 gxh6 23 Qxh6+ Kg8 24 Nh5 Rd8 25 Rf3 Rd7] **22 Bf3?!** [During the game, I obviously considered the bishop sacrifice on h6. I looked at 22 Bxh6!! gxh6

US Chess 2026 Scholar-Chessplayer Award

Congratulations to 11th grader **Ananya Ananth**, from Aldie, who is among this year's recipients of the prestigious US Chess Scholar-Chessplayer Award. The Scholar-Chessplayer Awards recognize and encourage outstanding high school juniors and seniors who promote a positive image of chess while excelling in academics and leadership.

In a note to Ananya's parents, former VCF President Anand Dommalapati wrote, "I am so proud of your daughter and you both as parents. I have seen her grow as a chess player from a very young age playing at events in the DMV — it's very touching to see one of our own Virginian's receive this award!!!!"



23 Qxh6+ Kg8 24 Nh5 but after a move like 24...Bd4 I couldn't see what was next. I missed 25 Rf3!! If then 25...Rc8 26 Rg3 Rc7 27 g7. And crazily enough, 25...Bxa1 leads to forced mate after 26 Rg3 and with any move, let's say 26...Bd4 27 g7 Rf7 28 Qh8mate. So White wins.] **22...Rd8**



23 a3?!

This served as preparation for the bishop sacrifice. My opponent was not very convinced about my attack, as we both missed the Rf3 idea after the sacrifice, but my plan was subtle. I wanted a rook as reinforcement on the g-file for when I perform the g7 push, so that Black can't stop mating threats like Qh8 without losing a significant amount of material. Since I can't play Rg1 as Black snipes it with his bishop on a7, I played to activate my other rook.

For all that, 23 Bxh6!! Still could have been played at once, even though I can't follow up Rf3 because my light-squared bishop now occupies that square. The sacrifice works anyway because 23...gxh6 24 Qxh6+ Kg8 25 Nh5 Qc7 26 a4 bxc4 27 bxc4 Rd7 28 Ra2 d5 29 g7?! Nxg7 30 Rg2! an idea quite similar to what happens in the game.

23...Qe7 24 Ra2 d5 25 Rg2 bxc4 [Trying to break apart my center, but I am ready to pounce.] **26 Bxh6!!** [Finally! My opponent has obviously anticipated this for a while, so we blitz out the next 3 moves.] **26...gxh6 27 Qxh6+ Kg8 28 g7 Nxg7 29 Nh5 Rf7 30 Rxc7+!** [a strong finisher to this game, with a brutal idea to follow] **30...Rxc7 31 Nxf6+! Qxf6** [Black has no better option. If his king tries to run, 31...Kf8 32 Qh8+ Kf7 33 Bh5+ Kxf6 34 Qh6+ Rg6 35 Qxg6mate, or 31...Kf7 32 Bh5+ Rg6 33 Qxg6+ Kf8 34 Qg8mate] **32 Qxf6 Re8 33 bxc4 dxc4 34 dxc4 Bc5 35 Bh5 Be7 36 Qe6+ Kf8 37 f6 Rh7 38 fxe7+ Kg7 39 Qf7+ Kh8 40 Qf8+ Rxf8 41 exf8Qmate 1-0** A good attacking victory for me, and a much needed point for our team to win the match! My teammates were each fighting very close battles by the time my game finished, and a quick point on the last board ended up being pivotal.





On my board 3, I misevaluated a tricky endgame and lost, putting us at 1-1 in the match. Fortunately, Kent was already wrapping things up on Board 1 against Ippolito.

Dean Ippolito - Kent Slate King's Indian

Notes by Kent Slate

A daunting matchup to say the least — board 1 against International Master Dean Ippolito, from the “Dean of Chess.” I discovered with a quick Google search that he once held a simultaneous exhibition across more than 100 boards. Suffice to say, this was hardly a class I could choose to skip! However, as board one, I had a job at hand, and I anticipated that my result against Dean might be critical in our match. In preparing, I found that Dean is a solid, methodical player who excels at grinding down opponents when they follow the well-trodden path. I had seen enough of these games to know that playing into his comfort zone was a losing proposition. So I took a different approach. Instead of following the usual lines, I searched for an opening that would throw a wrench into White’s typical plans - create some annoying imbalances, introduce practical problems, and make his grinding task as difficult as possible. **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 d6 5 Nc3 O-O 6 Nf3 Bf5** [The setup I had anticipated - and this was my idea. 6...Bf5 puts an immediate stop to White’s usual plan of expanding with e4, while also preparing the follow-up ...Ne4, trading my f6 knight for his c3 knight to firmly plant my bishop on e4, which would put his dream of e4 to rest for the foreseeable future.] **7 Nh4** [My bishop is annoying on f5, so he kicks it.] **7...Bc8 8 Nf3** [But in forcing the bishop’s retreat, his knight finds itself stranded on h4. To continue development naturally, it

too must fall back to its natural home on f3. But the moment it does, my bishop returns to f5 - and we are right back where we started.] **8...Bf5 9 Nh4 Bc8** [Of course, if he repeats with 10 Nf3, a draw would be an excellent result for me and my team. I’m ‘playing up’ in this game while my teammates are ‘playing down’, so repetition is far from an attractive option for the Dean of Chess. I assessed that he had two reasonable (yet unappealing) choices: either concede by allowing Ne4, or castle with the knight still offside on h4 and try to justify its misplacement with something ambitious like f4. Either way, he’d be walking into the chaotic, imbalanced struggle that was anything but comfortable territory for a player of his style.] **10 O-O** [He effectively declines my draw offer. Note that had he followed through with 10 Nf3, I wouldn’t have been obliged to repeat with 10...Bf5. I could have continued fighting for imbalances with the main move 10...Nc6. Then 11 O-O Bf5 transposes to what occurred in the game, but it’s noteworthy that if now 12 Nh4! the knight on c6 would make it possible for my bishop to withdraw to d7! In any case, I would’ve spent some time considering whether or not to play on based on the circumstances in the other boards in the match.] **10...Nc6 11 Nf3 Bf5 12 Ne1 e5?** [Not the best way to play. 12 Ne1 prepared e4 with tempo, so I’m effectively gifting him two free moves d5 and e4. Given White’s passive last move,



it was more principled to keep my central options open instead of committing to ...e5 and closing the position so early. ...e5 is generally a good idea if after d5 the knight on c6 can plant itself on d4 – but here it can't as White still has the annoying e3 available. I am marking 12...e5 a mistake not because it is an objectively losing way to play, but because it flipped the dynamics to White's favor. The better approach 12...Qd7! would prepare to meet e4 with ...Bh3, trading off the light-squared bishops – after all, the bishop on f5 is clearly inferior to its counterpart on g2.] **13 d5 Ne7** [The engine also likes 13...Na5, but going for queenside plans does not make much sense with my pawn already on e5.] **14 e4 Bg4 15 f3 Bd7 16 Be3 Ne8** [Now we have a situation resembling a normal Kings Indian, but down a few tempi. White wants to bring his pieces to the queenside and start expanding ASAP!] **17 Nd3 c5!?** [Not the engine's top choice, but in my opinion a great practical try! Had I sat around and done nothing, natural moves like b4-c5 would have cleaned through my queenside. By playing ...c5 I close the center, and force White to either abandon the queenside plans for the time being and try to pressurize the center, or to open the center with 18 dxc5, which favors White's more active pieces but also frees my backwards d6 pawn.] **18 dxc6** [The engine prefers 18 Qd2! to be active in the fight against the center by preparing the f3-f4 push. 18...f5 19 f4! exf4 20 Nxf4 ± Black is severely undeveloped and there are too many light squared weaknesses in his camp.] **18...bxc6 19 Qd2 Be6 20 b3 d5!?** [A risky try, but a necessary one in this difficult situation.

I wanted to free my undeveloped pieces and open the center as quickly as possible; otherwise, my opponent would dominate with his grinding style. I didn't calculate deeply when I made this move, but I felt that even if there were something concrete in White's favor, the position would remain unclear. With the d5 pawn threatening ...dxc4 and ...d4, White might have to speculatively sacrifice the pawn, or perhaps even a full piece. Sure enough, my opponent spent almost 40 minutes on the following sequence of moves!]



21 exd5?!

The move I somewhat expected, but it is not correct. White needed to keep the central tension.

I was a bit concerned on how I would respond to 21 Nc5?!, as the only reply 21...d4 leads to a long forcing sequence which I was finding difficult to evaluate. 22 Nxe6 fxe6 23 Bg5 dxc3 24 Qxd8 Rxd8 25 Bxe7 Rd3! (defending the essential c3 pawn) 26 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 27 Rxd1 Bh6! (threatening 28...c2) 28 f4 Rf7 29 Bb4 c2 30 Rc1 exf4 When the dust settles, equality – because White must give up his f-pawn to stop the c-pawn!



However, the engine recommends 21 Na4! as much better for White. At the cost of the c4 pawn, this knight sidesteps ...d4 and seeks maximum activity on c5. 21... dxc4 22 bxc4 Bxc4 23 Rfd1! This is the key idea! We're simply too undeveloped, and our extra isolated c6 pawn is meaningless if White controls all the important squares. 23...Bxd3 24 Qxd3 Qxd3 25 Rxd3 Nf6 (of course not 25...Nc7?? Rd7) 26 Nc5 Rfd8 27 Rxd8+ Rxd8 28 a4 ± We are still up a full pawn, but White has the bishop pair and we cannot free our pieces.

21...cxd5 22 Nc5 Nf6 [I considered 22...d4 but I didn't want to speculatively calculate a long, forcing sequence {*which does not win material* – 22...d4 23 Nxe6 fxe6 24 Bg5 dxc3? 25 Qxd8 Rxd8 26 Bxe7 —ed} while I had a massive time advantage.] **23 cxd5 Bxd5!** [Giving up the bishop pair is necessary to prevent White from damaging my structure with Nxe6. but White's bishops can quickly become targets for my knights!] **24 Nxd5 Qxd5 25 Qe2 Nf5! 26 f4 e4 27 Rfd1 Qc6** [I completely underestimated the interesting try 27...Nxe3! White gets a queen for a rook and bishop but my activity may easily become overwhelming. 28 Rxd5 Nfxd5 29 Rc1! (otherwise Black takes over the c-file) 29...Rac8 30 Bxe4 Bd4! 31 b4! Nxb4 32 a3 Nbd5 33 Nb3! Rxc1+ 34 Nxc1 Nc3 35 Qd3 Bb6 36 Bf3! Even after all the dust settles, it is still very unclear. No human not named Carlsen could find all of this with less than 10 minutes on their clock!] **28 Rac1 Nxe3 29 Qxe3** [I assume my opponent was calculating 29 Nxe4! but he didn't have enough time to work through the complications 29...Qb6 30 Rd6! Qb4

31 Nxf6+ Bxf6 32 Rxf6 Rae8 I have a lot of activity to compensate for the pawn.] **29...Qb6 30 h3 Rad8 31 Rxd8 Rxd8 32 Kh2 a5 33 a3** [My opponent had less than three minutes remaining to reach move 40, at which point we would receive an additional 30 minutes. I decided to spend time on my own clock here to find a sequence of moves I could blitz out to leave him with as little time as possible to react.] **33...Re8! 34 Rc4 Nd5?! 35 Qe2?** [After 35 Qd2! I can't defend my knight and pawn at once. 35...e3 36 Qxd5 e2 37 Re4! Rxe4 38 Qxe4 Qxc5 39 Qxe2 =] **35...f5 36 b4 axb4 37 axb4 Nxb4?** [37...Kh8! was better to sidestep any ideas on the diagonal] **38 Nd7?** [After 38 Qd1! my pieces are surprisingly uncoordinated and I can't regroup them effectively.] **38... Qd6 39 Nc5 Rb8! 40 Bf1** [Making the time control with mere seconds to spare. However, my full extra protected passed pawn should prove decisive.] **40...Nc6 41 Rc2 Nd4 42 Qc4+ Kh8 43 Ra2 Nf3+ 44 Kh1 Nd2 45 Qa6 Qd5 46 Qa7 Rd8 47 Be2 h5 48 Qb6 e3+ 49 Kh2 Nf3+ 50 Kh1** [Black also wins if 50 Bxf3 Qxa2+ 51 Bg2 Rd2] **50...Ne1+ 0-1** A difficult game won through practical decisionmaking rather than complete precision. However, chess is (hopefully) played against flesh and blood in tournament settings, not silicon, so the value of practical decisions should not be denigrated. I was happy that my initial strategy paid off; I avoided settling for familiar situations that would make my opponent's grinding task easy. Instead I steered towards complicated territory, which allowed me to play on his clock. In the end, I had successfully made the Dean's List of Victories!



That left everything riding on Kyle's game against NM Roshan Idnani on Board 2, which turned out to be wild.

Kyle Zhuang - Roshan Idnani Caro Kann

Notes by Kyle Zhuang

This was probably the craziest game I've ever played over the board. **1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Nf3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Nf6 5 Qe2 Bf5 6 d3 Bxe4** [I didn't really like his decision of handing me the bishop pair for no reason, but it worked out fine in the game.] **7 dxe4 e5 8 g3** [8 Nxe5 would have lost to ...Qa5+] **8...Nbd7 9 Bg2 Bc5 10 O-O O-O 11 b3 Re8 12 Bb2 Qc7 13 h3 Rad8 14 Rad1 Bd6 15 Rfe1 Nc5 16 Nh2 Ne6** [I didn't really like my position, but I had faith that my two bishops would eventually become active and generate counterplay.] **17 Ng4 Nxg4 18 Qxg4 Bc5 19 c3** [I temporarily stop any pieces from going to d4, but I block in my bishop and am forced to reposition it.] **19...a5 20 Bc1 b5 21 Bf1** [It looks bad to bring both bishops back to their starting squares, but my c1 bishop has an open diagonal, and the f1 bishop can transfer to c4 whenever Black plays ...b4] **21...g6 22 h4 Qa7 23 Qf3 b4 24 Bb2 bxc3 25 Bxc3 Nd4 26 Qg2** [In hindsight I should have taken the knight and accepted the worse side of an opposite colored bishop middlegame.] **26...Rd6 27 Bc4 Rf6 28 Rf1 Kh8** [I had no idea what his intention was with this move; it just walks into more trouble along the a1-h8 diagonal.] **29 Kh1 Rd6 30 f4 f6 31 Rd3 Bb6 32 Qd2 c5 33 Kg2 Kg7 34 h5 Qb7** [I'd completely overlooked this move, and suddenly I thought I was losing.] **35 Qe3 exf4 36 Rxf4 f5** [Luckily for me, my opponent missed 36...g5! forcing my rook to maroon itself on g4. That situation

must be bad because the computer doesn't even move the rook, instead spitting out an absurd line that goes 37 h6+ Kxh6 38 Qf3 sacrificing the queen out of nowhere.] **37 hxg6 hxg6 38 Rh4 Rxe4** [Now the fun starts.] **39 Qh6+ Kf6 40 Qf8+ Kg5**



41 Bd2+ [This works, but the quiet move 41 Kf1! was a lot simpler, hiding from the Black queen] **41...Re3+ 42 Kg1** [42 Bd5 also wins. The idea is that after 42...Qxd5, my rook sees the queen when his knight gives a check. For instance, 43 Kg1 Nf3+ 44 Kf2 and Black has to give up the queen after 44...Qxd3 45 Bxe3+] **42...Nf3+ 43 Kf2 Rxd3 44 Bxd3??** [Now the computer sees the position as even after 44...Nxh4 45.Bxe3+ Kg4 46.Be2+ Kh3 47.gxh4 c4!] **44...Nxd2**

{Front Cover Quiz}

45 Kxe3

I missed an insane combination with 45 Rh5+!! and no matter what Black plays, he gets mated. 45...gxh5 allows



46 Qxf5; 45...Kxh5 loses to 46 Qh8+ and Qh4; and the crowing line, 45...Kg4 runs into 46 Bxf5+! Kxh5 47 Bg4+! Kxg4 48 Qf4+ and Qh4mate

45...c4+ 46 Kxd2 cxd3 47 Qh6+ Kf6 48 Qf8+ ½-½ By now Kent and Aarush had won, so I was happy to make a draw to win the match.

The match ended in our favor. We headed into Monday morning with a perfect 4-0 score.

Round 5 vs UChicago Goes East

After a close call in round 4 but an overall successful day, we were distressed Monday morning to find that we had been paired on Board 1 against UChicago Goes East. Their lineup consisted of GM Awonder Liang (2784), GM Praveen Balakrishnan (2561), IM Kapil Chandran (2447), and, last but not least, Alexander Gordon (145).

While their team's posted average was 1983, someone on the organizers' side had made the executive decision to move UChicago's team to the top seed by adjusting their team rating to 2199. This unfortunately meant that we were their next victims in the pairings. Faced against a seemingly unbeatable top three, our only strategy was to look for any opportunities to score, hoping to tie the match through a win or two draws on the top boards and a presumed victory on Board 4.

Kent put up a valiant effort on Board 1 against Awonder, but...

Awonder Liang - Kent Slate **Sicilian**

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d3 Nc6 4 g3 d6 5 Bg2 e5 6 O-O g6 7 Bg5 Qd7 8 c3 Bg7 9 a3 Nge7 10 b4 a6 11 Qc1 O-O 12 Bh6 Qd8 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Qb2 b5 15 d4 c4 16 a4 Bg4 17 d5 Na7 18 axb5 axb5 19 Ra5 Qd7 20 Qa2 Rfb8 21 Na3 Rb7 22 Ra1 Rc8 23 Qd2 Rcc7 24 Nh4 Nec8 25 Qe3 Nb6 26 Rf1 Qe8 27 f4 Bd7 28 Nf3 Nac8 29 h4 f6 30 h5 Ra7 31 hxg6 hxg6 32 Kf2 Rxa5 33 bxa5 Na4 34 Rh1 exf4 35 gxf4 Nc5 36 Nd4 Nd3+ 37 Kg1 f5 [37...Qg8] 38 Ne6+ Bxe6 39 Qd4+ 1-0

On my board, I faced Kapil Chandran in a Dutch Defense with the Black pieces.

Kapil Chandran - Kevin Su **Dutch**

Notes by Kevin Su

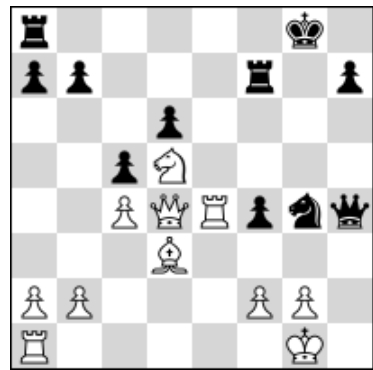
1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 g6 3 c4 Bg7 4 Nc3 f5?! [An odd move order to reach the Dutch Defense, but I felt the King's Indian wasn't the best choice against an opponent much higher rated than me.] 5 e4! [Taking advantage of Black's knight not yet being developed.] 5...Nf6 6 Bd3 O-O 7 exf5

gxf5 8 d5?! [The idea is to mitigate ...e5 by taking en passant, but it was better to prevent it altogether: 8 O-O Nc6 9 Re1 e6 10 h3 Re8 11 d5 ±] 8...e5 9 dxe6 Bxe6 10 Nd4 Qd7 11 O-O Nc6 12 Nxe6 Qxe6 13 Re1 Qd7 14 Bg5 Ng4 15 Qd2?! [It's best to first remove Black's knight from



g4, which becomes a problem later in the game, with 15 h3 Nge5 16 f4 Nxd3 17 Qxd3 Rae8 18 Nd5 ± White has a superior pawn structure and slightly more space, so he shouldn't be too worried about losing the bishop pair.] **15...Bd4!** [Although Stockfish is largely indifferent between ...Bd4 and a host of other moves, as a practical matter I think this maneuver to put pressure on the kingside was very effective.] **16 Bh4 Qg7 17 Nd5 Rf7** [Perhaps realizing something had gone amiss out of the opening, my opponent took a long think before deciding on...] **18 Bf1?** [... and I can only speculate what his idea was. Perhaps he intended to overprotect the g2 pawn before the upcoming attack, but this turns out not to be too useful since h2 and f2 are the main targets. 18 Kh1, stopping any ideas of ...Ne5-Nf3+ or ...Bxf2+, was a stronger prophylactic move, eg 18...f4 19 Re4 Qh6 20 Bg3! =] **18...f4!** [Because of all the forcing threats in this position, I found it relatively easy to calculate a concrete winning line. On the other hand, my opponent had to consider a variety of Black's attacking options and find defensive resources for each, which certainly put a strain on his clock.] **19 Re4 Qh6** [The obvious move, and good enough for a significant advantage. However, it would be remiss of me to not mention 19...Raf8, the top engine line. The idea is to prevent Ne7+! down the line. 20 c5 dxc5 21 h3 Nge5 22 Kh1 Ng6 23 Bg5 Be5 and White would have

to make significant concessions to prevent checkmate or the loss of his bishop.] **20 h3 Qxh4 21 hxg4 Ne5! 22 Qxd4??** [The losing mistake. It's likely that my opponent missed the game's continuation. Neither of us found 22 Ne7+!!, the only saving move. 22...Rxe7 23 Rxd4 Rf8 (23...Nxg4? 24 Qxf4) 24 Rxf4! Nxg4 25 Rxf8+ Kxf8 26 Qf4+! (protecting both h2 and f2 with check) 26...Rf7 27 Qg3 ≠ An incredible resource to keep the game going. Black has nothing better than to transition to a better ending. During the game, I thought 22 Rxd4 was White's best try, but this still loses relatively trivially after 22...Nxg4 23 Bd3 Qh2+ 24 Kf1 Qh1+ 25 Ke2 f3+! 26 gxf3 Qxf3+ 27 Ke1 Re8+] **22...Nxg4 23 Bd3 c5!**



White's queen must abandon the critical f2 pawn

24 Ne7+ Rxe7 25 Qd5+ Rf7 26 Rae1 Qxf2+ 27 Kh1 Qh4+ 28 Kg1 f3! 29 Re8+ Rxe8 30 Rxe8+ Kg7 31 gxf3 Qf2+ 0-1 Overall, a nice attacking win and my personal highest rated scalp to date.

With this the score reached 2-1 in our favor and it was up to Kyle to clinch the match on Board 2 against former Virginia state champion Praveen Balakrishnan. Funnily enough, Praveen was formerly a TJ student himself (and really should've been playing for us).



Kyle Zhuang - Praveen Balakrishnan Ruy Lopez

Notes by Kyle Zhuang

This was kind of a funny matchup, as Praveen was formerly a TJ student himself. **1 e4 e5** [I've seen Praveen play the Sicilian almost exclusively, so this was already a surprise.] **2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 d6 6 O-O** [Not a serious mistake, but Black now gets the bishop pair for free.] **6... b5 7 Bb3 Na5 8 Nc3 Be7 9 Re1 O-O 10 h3 h6 11 Be3 Re8 12 Ne2 Bf8 13 Ng3 Bb7 14 Nh2** [Here it was pretty clear that his plan was to open the position with ...d5, so I considered playing 14 c4 to prevent it. The game could have gone 14...bxc4 15 Ba4! and after the rook moves I have 16 Rc1 to win the pawn back because 16...cxd3 runs into 17 b4 trapping the knight. I didn't know how to evaluate that, so I went with 14 Nh2 instead, planning Ng4, a thematic idea in the Ruy Lopez.] **14...Nxb3 15 axb3 d5 16 Ng4 dxe4 17 Nxf6+ Qxf6 18 dxe4 a5 19 Qe2 Qc6 20 h4?** [Until now the game had remained relatively balanced, but this move allows a nice resource, which Praveen spotted instantly.] **20... f5!** [Taking the pawn either way loses: 21

exf5 allows 21...Qxg2 mate, while 21 Nxf5 runs into 21...Qxe4, forking the knight and threatening mate on g2. Now my pieces are forced back, and my position becomes very cramped.] **21 Bc1 f4 22 Nf1 Bc5 23 Nh2 Bb6 24 Nf3 Ba6 25 c3 b4 26 c4 Rad8 27 Rd1** [Not the greatest move, but I hoped to create complications with Praveen getting low on time. At this point he only had 13 minutes, while I had 23.] **27...Rxd1+** [This seemed forced, as I was planning to put my rook on d5, where it controls a lot of squares and is supported by two pawns, but Praveen spent 7 minutes—over half his time—deciding on the rook exchange.] **28 Qxd1 Qxe4** [Objectively still winning, but now my queen is activated.] **29 Qd7 Ra8??** [29...Kf8 was needed to hold onto his advantage.] **30 c5! Bxc5 31 Rxa5! Bc8! 32 Qe8+?!** [With Kevin and Aarush having won their games, I decided to simplify for a draw. The best line for me was 32 Rxa8 Qxa8 33 Qxc7, where I win Black's pawns.] **32...Bf8 33 Rxa8 Qxa8 34 Nxe5 Qe4 35 Qf7+ Kh7 36 Qxf8 Qxe5 1/2-1/2**

Pulling off the upset (but not really, since we technically outrated them by 200 points), we advanced to the final round with a 5-0 score.

Round 6 vs Check Republic

With four teams on 5/5 and even more looming half a point behind, it seemed that we would have to play for a win to clinch the tournament. We were paired against Check Republic, whose team composition was very similar to ours, with three masters under 2400 and a class A player on Board 4. Based on the last few years' results at USATE, it seems that more balanced lineups like these may be a better recipe for success than more top-heavy teams with multiple IMs and GMs—but that may just be because teams like ours are much more common.



Arriving at the tournament hall a fashionable five minutes late, we weren't too surprised to find that not a single one of our opponents had arrived, likely engaging in some last-minute preparation. What was perhaps a bit more alarming was the blistering 85-degree heat (or so it felt) that we were forced to play in for the first half of the round. With the tournament on the line, each of us dutifully toughed it out between numerous water breaks, and fortunately, the venue eventually cooled down.

Kevin Su - Sameer Mujumdar French

Notes by Kevin Su

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5 9 Qd2 O-O 10 g3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 a6 12 Bh3 Bxd4 13 Qxd4 Qb6 [With both of our teams on 5-0 scores, my opponent opted to stay solid and enter this seemingly innocuous endgame. The alternative was 13...b5 14 O-O Rb8 15 Ne2 b4 16 Qe3 a5 17 Nd4 Qb6 I think White is slightly preferable here, but we're still playing for three results.] **14 O-O-O** [14 Qxb6 forcing the knight to an inferior square, is slightly more accurate. 14...Nxb6 15 O-O-O Bd7 16 b3 Rac8 17 Ne2 Rc7 18 Nd4 g6 19 Kb2 Nc8 20 a4 ± Achieving the typical setup in this endgame. White's queenside is solid and he has a lot of time to prepare a pawn push on the kingside.] **14...Qxd4 15 Rxd4 Nb8 16 Re1 Nc6 17 Rd2 Rd8 18 Na4 b5 19 Nc5 Ra7** [After some maneuvering, we reach a critical moment in the game. It looks like White's knight is about to be removed from its outpost on c5, and the only way to keep it there is by the committal a3 or c3 and then b4.] **20 c3** [20 a3?! was less accurate on account of 20...a5 21 Bf1 b4 22 Bb5 bxa3 23 Bxc6 axb2+ 24 Kxb2 Rc7 = It's turned into a mess, but White doesn't have enough pawns left to warrant an advantage.] **20...Na5 21 b4?! [21 Bf1**

Rc7 22 b4 transposes to the game] **21... Rc7** [21...Nc4! would have been a bigger issue than I imagined because after 22 Rd4 a5 23 Kb1 axb4 24 cxb4 Bd7 25 Bf1 Rb8 the bishop can't take on c4 as I intended.] **22 Bf1 Rxc5??** [This sacrifice was accompanied with a draw offer, but there turned out to be many more complications than my opponent anticipated. Meanwhile, 22...Nc6 23 Kc2 Nb8 24 a4 bxa4 25 Nxa4 (or 25 Ra1 a5! 26 Rxa4 axb4 27 cxb4 Nd7 =) 25...Nd7 26 Kd3 Kf8 27 Kd4 looks like White has made a bit of progress, but objectively this should still have been a draw.] **23 bxc5 Nb7?** [Blitzed out, but it turns out winning the pawn this way doesn't come without concession. Better holding chances lay in 23...Bd7 24 g4 Rc8 25 f5 Nb7 26 Bd3 Nxc5 27 Bc2 h6 ±] **24 c6 Na5 25 a4!** [immediately opening up the queenside for White's rooks] **25...bxa4** [25...Nb3+? would have been a mistake because the e5 and c6 pawns trap Black's pieces. 26 Kc2 Nxd2 27 Kxd2 bxa4 28 Ra1 f6 29 Rxa4 Kf7 30 Ke3 White's king is unstoppable.] **26 Ra2 Nb3+?! [It's already losing, but this idea to protect the a-pawns allows my rooks to take advantage of the open b-file. The best try was 26... Nxc6 to get rid of the passed c-pawn. 27 Rxa4 h6 28 Kd2 Rd7 29 Rb1 g6 30 Bxa6**



Bxa6 31 Rxa6 Ne7 and White still needs to demonstrate some good technique to win.] 27 Kc2 Nc5 28 Rb1 Kf8 29 Rb8 Ke7 30 Rab2 Nb3 31 Rb6 d4 32 Bxa6

Bxa6 33 Rxa6 d3+ 34 Kd1 Nc5 35 Ra7+ Ke8 36 Rbb7! Ne4 37 Re7+ Kf8 38 Rxf7+ Kg8 39 Rxc7+ Kf8 40 Raf7+ Ke8 41 Rg8+ Kxf7 42 Rxd8 1-0

Meanwhile, Kent lost a dynamic battle against FM William Graif on Board 1, so the match was tied at 1-1 while we awaited the results of Kyle and Aarush's games. Kyle ultimately drew a balanced game on Board 2. After Kyle's draw, with Aarush's position not looking great, the author is a little ashamed to admit that he decided to take a break from watching to go eat his dinner. This turned out to be a mistake, not for the team, but for me personally, because I nearly missed the most important game of the tournament.

Matthew Tripodi - Aarush Gupta Ruy Lopez

Notes by Aarush Gupta

Big nerves going into this game! The final round of the tournament, two teams with perfect scores going head to head. This was quite the memorable game, and you will soon see why. 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 O-O b5 6 Bb3 Bc5 7 d3 h6!? [Slightly unusual, generally Black would play 7...d6 8 c3 h6] 8 c3 d6 [We reached this anyways, but White could have switched it up with an idea like 8 a4, which could have made grounds less familiar.] 9 Nbd2 O-O 10 Re1 Ne7 11 Nf1 Ng6 12 Ng3 Bb6 13 a4 Rb8 [All basic preparation up until now, my opponent and I practically blitzed out our moves. This is quite an orthodox position, and it is balanced as well. Here, however, my opponent takes a few minutes to think, and plays...] 14 d4 [...which gets some action going in the center. I thought about several ways to continue, like 14...Re8 or 14...c5. Taking a step back to think about our team's situation at this point, I glanced over to see Kyle and Kevin's boards both looking pretty equal, but Kent's position

quite dubious. This meant I play here for a win!] 14...Bg4! [I wanted to start creating imbalances in the position here, which Stockfish likes. It activates my final minor piece and my position hardly has a weakness.] 15 axb5?! [Removing pressure from the queenside gives me more freedom to gain an edge, as my pieces (particularly the comparison between our dark-squared bishops) are superior.] 15...axb5 16 Qd3 Re8 17 d5 Qd7 [anticipating h3] 18 Bc2 [18 h3 Bxh3!! 19 gxh3 Qxh3 20 Be3 Bxe3 21 Rxe3 Ng4 22 Re1?? Nh4 23 Nxh4 Qh2+ 24 Kf1 Qxf2mate was a possibility] 18...Qc8?! [I shifted my queen a square for two reasons, Firstly, I had to be tactically careful, as if my b-pawn moves out of the way for any reason, Ba4 is a lurking move. Secondly, if White plays that makes h3 possible, I want the d7 square open for my bishop.] 19 Bd1 Nf4! [An important find, realizing I get good control of the dark-square complex in the center.]

{Diagram next page}



20 Bxf4 exf4 21 Nf1 Nd7?! [Trying to make a d7-e5 maneuver with my knight wasn't accurate. The better move 21... Ra8 kills off White's more active rook, which became an issue later into the game.] **22 N1d2** [22 Qxb5 loses because of 22...Bxf2+] **22...f5?** [Dynamic but also positionally mistaken; I didn't spend enough time on this. I should have thought it through to more deeply evaluate the ramifications of the coming series of trades. At the end, White regains momentum and my edge in activity starts to fall apart. 22...Qd8 was the better move, keeping my pawn structure firm and seeking to improve the remaining pieces after 23 h3 Bxf3 24 Nxf3 Qf6] **23 h3 Bxf3 24 Bxf3 fxe4 25 Bxe4 Ne5 26 Qc2 Qd8** [I still thought that I was doing slightly better here, contrary to the engine's opinion.] **27 Nf3 Qf6 28 Nxe5 Rxe5** = [Symmetrical pawn fronts, opposite-colored bishops — the only imbalance was time: we were 12 moves away from sudden death and I had 15 minutes versus my opponent's 25.] **29 Bf3 h5?** [I played this to stop Bg5-Be6 but I overlooked something very basic. I knew that if 30 Rxe5 dxe5 was not an option since the

pawn on h5 is hanging, so 30...Qxe5, but there I missed the fact that the g6 square is left unguarded...] **30 Rxe5 Qxe5**



31 Qe2?! [31 Qg6! would have turned the tide of the game. White attacks h5 (and defending it is not feasible). More generally, his queen has massive superiority over my other pieces. This position could easily transform into a disaster.] **31...Qxe2 32 Bxe2 g6** [completely equal once again] **33 b4 Kg7 34 Bxb5! Bd4** The alternative was 34...Bxf2+! but I chose the text because 35 Kxf2 Rxb5 36 Ra7 Rxd5 37 Rxc7+ felt less clear. I thought I would still hold a draw, but it was higher risk.] **35 cxd4 Rxb5 36 Ra7 Kf6 37 Rxc7 Rxb4** [I go for this instead, where White might be up a pawn but for me personally, holding a draw felt slightly easier.] **38 Rd7 Rb6 39 f3 g5 40 Kf2 h4** [Sudden death time is now in play, and things started getting twisty very soon!] **41 Ke2** [I believed this was a draw, but the position was slightly worrisome in that I didn't have leeway to be even slightly inaccurate. At this point Kent and Kevin were done with their games and the match stood at 1-1. Kyle's position was also drawn.] **41...Rb2+ 42 Kd3 Rb3+?!** [This is where chaos



begins. My move felt reasonable during the game, but in hindsight it would have been simpler to just play 42...Rxc2! 43 Rxd6+ Ke7 44 Re6+ Kd7 when progress from either side seems limited. If White shifts towards advancing his own pawns, Black's rooks can chop off the pawns on the kingside and get their own passers.] **43 Kc4 Rb6?!** [It started to kick in that I made the wrong choice a move earlier and I had to find an escape.] **44 Kc3 Kf5??** +- [I could not see what to play and this seemed the best option. I thought I'd found a fortress where White's pieces could not get past the barrier my rook and king form. According to the computer, 44...Ra6 was best, but then I expected 45 Kc4 Rb6? (the miss in my thinking was 45...Ra4+ 46 Kd3 Ra3+ 47 Kc4 Ra4+ 48 Kb5 Rxd4 49 Rxd6+ Ke7) 46 Kd3 which I thought was worse anyways.] **45 Rc7 Rb1 46 Rd7 Rb6 47 Rf7+! Kg6 48 Rc7! Rb1 49 Rc6! Rg1 50 Rxd6+!** [After this I knew I was losing. The position differs from what it could have been had I played 42. ...Rxc2 earlier in that my king gets cut off from White's passed pawns.] **50... Kf7 51 Re6 Rxc2 52 Re5 Ra2 53 d6 Ra6 54 Rxc5 Rxd6 55 Rh5 Ra6** [The final try! After the complex calculations that both sides had to perform in the rook endgame, it boiled down to us both having

less than a minute. I'm completely lost, but I can go for a swindle...] **56 Rxc4 Ra3+ 57 Kb4??** [And it what happens! The match score stood at 1½-1½ and we have the last ongoing game in the vast ballroom. Tons of spectators clustered around. My teammates stood anxiously nearby as my time ticked down. When 57 Kb4 appeared on the board, I felt a bit of shock. I realized White can't do anything with just the d4 pawn. It's like the Philidor position. It began to dawn on my team and I that we were about to become champions of USATE 2026! The right way for my opponent to have played was 57 Kc4 Rxf3 and now 58 Kd5 Kf6 59 Ke4 White can attack my last pawn!] **57...Rxf3 58 Kc5 Ke6 59 d5+ Kd7 60 Rh7+ Kd8 61 Kd6 Ke8 62 Rh6** [10 seconds left for my opponent!] **62...Rg3** [5 seconds left for me!] **63 Rf6 f3 64 Kc6 Rxc3 65 d6 f2 66 d7+ Ke7 67 Rxf2** {*It's worth noting that the try 67 Re6+? Kxe6 68 d8Q (intending 68... f1Q?? 69 Qe8+ Kf6 70 Qf8+ and wins) loses 67...Rc3+! -ed*} **68 Kd5 Kxd7 ½-½** At the end there we each had 3 seconds left, both of us shaking as the delay was our only lifeline. My opponent puts forth his hand and says "Draw?" Certainly one of the most memorable games I have ever played, a 'heat of the moment' such as I had never experienced so intensely.

Conclusion

Five teams tied on 5½ out of 6. Although the tournament directors emphatically announced that there would be no 'co-champions' ("*Save that for scholastic events!*") they had every team pose pictures while we awaited the tiebreaker calculations. Only during our drive home did we learn we'd taken the Denis Barry Award, the top prize.

Aristotle once suggested that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Although no one on our team scored over 4½ individually, we collectively finished a full point higher than any one player's result. At the same time, none of us scored below 4 points. When it mattered most, each of us came through with a clutch performance.

We'll return next year, hopefully with an even worse pun in our name.



Arlington – Army/Navy Inter-club Match

by Adam Chrisney

An inter-club chess match between the Arlington Chess Club (ACC) and the Army Navy Club (ANC) was held at the Army Navy Club's building in downtown Washington, DC on March 7, 2026. The Army-Navy Club is one of those classic private, social club venues found in most big cities. In DC, similar clubs would be the Metropolitan Club, the Cosmos Club and the University Club.

For the match, each team fielded 12 players to include a couple of National Masters, and on down to beginners and everyone in between. To keep the match competitive, players were generally paired with opponents of similar rating. Though the final score was lopsided, everyone played strong and most games were close until the final moves.

Final Match Results: ACC 9 - ANC 3. Generally, the clubs split results on the top 6 boards with ACC pulling away in the intermediate and beginner games. Both clubs are "jones-ing" for a rematch.

Jeffrey Song - Sam Stolpe Ragozin

Notes by Adam Chrisney

The last game to finish was resolved with both players in time trouble (G/60 +10), with others crowded around to watch the mayhem. **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 Qa4+ Nc6 6 e3 Bd7 7 Qc2 O-O 8 Bd2 Re8 9 Rd1 Qe7 10 a3 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Ne4** [With this move Black gets a slightly less optimal position. Stockfish18 would rather see queenside prep by ...a6 or ...Rab8] **12 c5 Rad8?! [An ...e5 break is the only move that does not drop back to an equal position.] 13 b4 a6 14 Bb2 f6 [14...f5 right away is better.] 15 Bd3 f5 16 O-O g5 17 Ne1 g4 18 Kh1?! [Another drop back to an equal position, but this time by White.] 18 ... Qg5 19 f3 [Interestingly, Stockfish kept suggesting incremental improvements using potential pawn breaks (...e5 or ...f4) for Black from moves 12-16 rather than the moves chosen. Conversely, White pushes a pawn break on moves 19-20. Also recommended a couple of times in the same period is Black moving his king's rook to f8.] 19 ... Nf6 20 e4 dxe4 21 fxe4 f4? [With both players headed into time trouble, this move alone results in over a 2 pawn swing in the computer's evaluation.] 22 Qf2 [Either switching diagonals for White's queen's bishop, or attacking the f-pawn diagonally with the queen, would be recommended.] 22 ... Nh5 [Again, not optimal with ...e5 preferred to stop White's e-pawn advance, and/or trading pawns/pieces to take the teeth out of White's two long-diagonal attacking bishops.] 23 d5 exd5 24 exd5 g3?! [Costs Black another 'pawn' in**



the evaluation compared to blocking ...Ne5. This knight never has the chance to being useful or even move before the end. 25 Nf3 Qh6 26 Qc2 gxf2 27 Bxf7+ Kf8 28 Qg6 Ng3+? About this point, both players were in severe time trouble, with only seconds left for each (plus the 10-second increment). This was the last chance for Black to equalize by trading queens. {diagram}

29 Qxg3! fxg3? [Allowing mate, although the alternatives are also losing eventually.] 30 Ne5+ Kg7 31 Rf7+ Kh8 32 Ng6mate 1-0



Personal & General

From the Editor



My missive last issue questioning the future of the print version of VIRGINIA CHESS attracted numerous responses. At some point, if I receive additional feedback, I may compose a summary and further commentary on the subject. For now, suffice it to say that opinions are mixed. Some respondents see immeasurable value in the 'push notification' provided by physically placing something from the VCF into chess players' mailboxes. Others may acknowledge that, but then they sigh and say, "alas, the future is digital..."

In any event, my complaints (yeah, I know I insisted I "wasn't complaining") about support in the form of material for publication got refuted for this issue at least. Big thanks to state champion Kevin Su and his teammates for basically filling an entire extra-pages issue. I even have more material I can use in the future. (Thank you, Jerry, I'll get the Tarjan piece in next issue, I promise!)



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