

# FAGERNES CHESS INTERNATIONAL 2021

## THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

# 1



### GM Group

First round in this year's GM group was a remarkably hard-fought one, in which not a single game was finished after two and a half hours. In the end 26 out of 32 games got a winner. The players from the top half of the rating list according to the statistics around 23.30 convincingly had defeated the players from the second half 28–4, with all eleven Grandmasters winning their games. Still this was a bitter end for the lower rated team of opponents, as many more of them along the road had wasted very promising chances for a surprise draw or even a sensational win.

It should not be hidden that the last ten days before this year's Fagernes International were demanding for the organizer. Both the two top rated 2600-GMs from India had to withdraw due to problems related to travel restrictions that proved impossible to solve in time – despite the efforts of the players as well as the tournament organizer and the Norwegian chess federation.

One WGM from Serbia as well as one IM and one FM from the United States for the same reason also had to cancel their long time planned travel to Norway. About ten other players, including five IMs between 2450 and 2500, had to withdraw for different reasons related to illness, working situation etc. The organizer following all those setbacks is very satisfied with a total of 132 players, and to find 11 GMs, 9 IMs and 14 FMs among the 68 players in the GM group. As this group includes a total of 30 foreign players, spread out across 12 different chess federations, chances for international title norms still will be excellent. Although the oldest player is 63 and the age gap a notable 50 years, a minor majority of the players are now born in this century.

The first board FM Volker Seifert (2246) of Germany vs GM Vahap Sanal (2585) of Turkey started up like a Pirc with 3.f3, but developed into some kind of King's Indian Sämisch in which black had his bishop at e7 instead of g7. After the e-pawns were exchanged white due to his d5-pawn had a pleasant edge in a Benoni-like position. Seifert however spent more than 80 minutes for his first 17 moves, and the position became double-edged after he bravely advanced his pawn to d6. As the pawn reached d7 a few moves later on white appeared close to winning, although black succeeded getting some counterplay by sacrificing a pawn at e4.



Seifert vs Sanal

Although he gave back the pawn and allowed black to start up a passed a-pawn, white with his dominant pawn on d7 still was reported winning by the computer analysis around move 35. Running short of time for 40 moves (despite the organizer's generous time limits), Seifert however made a decisive mistake as he allowed black to regroup his rook with 36.--- Ra6! and 37.--- Ra7! – protecting the black a-pawn from behind while attacking white's key pawn at d7. Top rated Vahap Sanal efficiently used his chance to turn the table all around in the final moves before the time control, and had a decisive attack within a few moves afterwards.

GM Frode Urkedal (2564) as white against 16 year old FM Mathias Unneland (2228) soon accelerated on the kingside with h4–h5–h6 in an otherwise positional King's Indian duel. Chances around move 16–20 were about balanced as white held a space advantage in the center and the better pawn structure, while black had the pair of bishops and some chances on the kingside.



**Urkedal vs Unneland**

Unneland bravely entered the boxing ring, and after establishing a space advantage on the kingside he was reported close to winning early in the fourth hour. Urkedal also considered his position very shaky at this stage. The position still was demanding to handle for both players, and black overplayed his hand as he sacrificed an exchange on d6. The position for sure still was interesting afterwards, but white now had the easier position to play and soon moved further ahead. Unneland after 41 moves resigned in an endgame position where he could still fight on, although white probably was winning then.



**Nikolic vs Persson**

The Swedish duel between Vladan Nikolic (2216) and GM Tiger Hillarp Persson (2521) was a real Benoni, in which black sacrificed an exchange with 12.--- Rxf4! to get one pawn, the pair of bishops and a better pawn structure. A tense struggle followed as black advanced his queenside pawn majority while white went for a kingside attack. The GM demonstrated a superior understanding of this position as he after 30 moves had established two connected passed pawns at a4 and b3, while white

still had no threats on the kingside. Black won a piece a few moves later on.

Although returning the piece might not have been necessary from a black point of view, it still proved enough to win. Both players spent some 40 minutes on the first six moves after the time control, but black had several winning plans by then and neatly decided with an accurate 46.--- Bh3+! – after which white following a few minutes of consideration suddenly resigned.

GM Erik Blomqvist (2518) as white against Norwegian junior Jacob Templen Grave (2202) went for a patient Reti double fianchetto, but soon accelerated by g4 and f4 in the early middle game.

White anyway was somewhat better when black in search for queenside counterplay sacrificed a pawn for some air on b5.

White cashed in the pawn, then accelerated with a kingside attack, and very elegantly smashed through with 32.Rxh7! – sacrificing his queen with mate to follow after 32.--- RxQe7 33.Rh8.



**Blomqvist vs Grave**

17 year old Andre Gjestemoen von-Hirsch (2192) and 45 year old GM Kaido Kulaots (2511) meanwhile discussed a positional Sicilian line in which white came clearly ahead on the clock, while black came slightly better on the board as his c-file pressure was more promising than white's d-file pressure. Reportedly black played inaccurately after accurately sacrificing an exchange on e3, but he anyway kept a promising initiative. Black went on to develop a decisive attack against the white king within a few moves after the first time control.



**Gjestemoen von-Hirsch vs Kulaots**



**Greenfeld**

already ran out of steam after 25 moves.

57 year old GM Alon Greenfeld (2509) and 60 year old Morten Andersen (2182) on the other hand investigated a tactically loaded Queen's Gambit line with an early Bb4, in which black made a strange decision when taking back a piece on f6 with his queen instead of the g-pawn.

The GM instructively opened the lines against black's king on e8 with d5, after which white soon had a winning attack. Black creatively sacrificed a piece for counterplay on the kingside, but resigned as his counterattack

Curiously, Andersen remarked to his opponent that «last time we met was 45 years ago». Greenfeld was unable to remember that game or the outcome, but learning that he was black he concluded it should have been a loss – as he still remembered to have lost all his black games in the mentioned tournament!

GM Titas Stremavicius (2487) of Lithuania in his first game at Fagernes got the black pieces against Norwegian FM Ward Altarbosh (2177), and played hard for a win with an ambitious Dutch Leningrad set up. Stremavicius probably was among the GMs later having the game under reasonable control tonight, as he went from a sound pawn up in the middle game to a sound bishop up in the queen and bishop endgame.



Altarbosh and Miezis

Latvian GM Normunds Miezis (2467) on the other hand had a tense five-hour struggle as white against the young Italian lion Ilya Bin-Suhayl (2168). Black had the better pawn structure and probably was fine from this English opening, although white had something to play for due to his pair of bishops. Having succeeded exchanging one of the bishops black probably still had a healthy position around move 25. The GM also on this board demonstrated the better understanding during mutual time pressure before 40 moves. After the time control he had a close to winning attack with queen, bishop, knight and five pawns left on each side.

16 year old Mathias Lind Schouten (2166) after winning some 250 ELO points the last two months played hardball chess as white in a Classical Evans Gambit against IM Frode Elsness (2465). White first sacrificed a pawn on b4 and then a bishop on f7.

Although black's king looked a bit airy, the experienced IM did hang on to the extra piece while competing his development, winning in just 20 moves.



Schouten vs Elsness

Swedish IM Jung Min Seo (2456) remained seated some two hours longer in a closed Ruy Lopez battle against Andreas Skotheim (2146). As the position finally opened it was in favour of white during mutual time pressure. Skotheim however again was in the game when he blundered with a tricky 38.--- Ne4? – overlooking an even more tricky 38.Ne6! with a shortly winning attack for white.

The very promising 13 year old German Bennet Hagner (2133) as white against Icelandic GM Gudmundur Kjartansson (2433) first got a slight edge from a Caro-Kann opening, but black found the better squares for his pieces in the middle game. Both players reportedly played a bit inaccurately around the queen exchange at move 34. After white missed his final chance to mess up the position with 36.e6!, black soon came two pawns up with a trivial endgame win after the time control.



Hagner vs Kjartansson

IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2432) as white against Sondre Melaa (2117) got an edge from a positional Italian opening, but black recovered following some tactical exchanges and appeared healthy around move 22–26.

28.--- Bxh6? followed by 29.--- Rf5? however turned out to be a bankruptcy plan, and black resigned after white demonstrated why by a thunderbolt 30.Rxe5!.



Kaasen vs Melaa (front) and Øye-Strømberg vs Brynell (back)

15 year old and highly talented Alexander Øye-Strømberg (2111) was fine if not slightly better from the Queen's Indian opening against GM Stellan Brynell (2431), but later spent much time without finding any good plan in a complex middle game.

Brynell after the game was «not too impressed by my own play». Having installed a strong knight outpost on d3, the very experienced GM anyway was better when the talented junior due to time shortage overlooked a knight fork on e1, blundering his queen after 30 moves.

Irish FM Conor Murphy (2428) actually arrived Fagernes as an IM in disguise, waiting to get his title officially confirmed from FIDE after strong results for the last months. Apparently he first had a promising pressure as white against Sigurd Grøver (2105). Having sacrificed a pawn to exchange queens, the Norwegian succeeded getting some counterplay due to his pair of bishops.

White kept his extra pawn for about 50 moves, but black probably had the draw under control after he succeeded in removing white's last queenside pawn and reach an opposite coloured bishop endgame.



**Efroimsky vs Bjerke**

FM Richard Bjerke (2102) versus IM Marsel Efroimsky (2417) was a positional Sicilian battle which appeared drawish following an early queen exchange, although black still had slightly the better pawn structure.

The endgame with rook, bishop and five pawns on each side after 35 moves probably should still be drawish, but black then had reached a three against two pawn majority on the kingside. Getting the help needed to win a pawn just before 40 moves, she after five hours won the endgame rather convincingly.

IM Robert Baskin (2398) versus Christian Grundekjøn (2102) was the first draw and first surprise of this tournament. The IM could hardly be satisfied about that, as he had the better position from the opening and was two pawns up with a close to winning position in the middle game.

Although white had returned one of the pawns, he due to his passed pawn on a6 was clearly winning after 26 moves. The finish still was a remarkably elegant trick from black, sacrificing first a bishop and then his queen to force a draw by repetition of checks with his rook and bishop.



**Baskin vs Grundekjøn**

The Lithuanian FM Karolis Juksta (2397) as black against Håkon Bentsen (2088) efficiently equalized from the opening, raised an initiative in the middle game and exchanged off the queens to reach a rooks and minor piece endgame in which he had all the better pieces. Black soon demonstrated the endgame to be just winning, as white's pawn at a2 was fatally weak and black's passed a-pawn was decisive afterwards.

20 year old German IM Julian Martin (2396) probably did not get much from the opening as white against 17 year old Norwegian Emerik Våpenstad Roulet-Dubonnet (2084), following a French Tarrasch duel in which queens were exchanged after 12 moves. White still had only a slight initiative until black, too eager to exchange more pieces, ended up blundering one with 26.--- Nc6?? – overlooking that 27.b3! trapped the black bishop at a4.

The teenage duel between Pijus Greicius (2080) and IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2375) on the other hand was a tight six-hour battle. White probably was slightly better before he overlooked a tactical 28.--- Ne4+!, although Vestby-Ellingsen in turn missed the critical (and very difficult) continuation with 29.--- Nxc3!!.

The endgame with rook, knight and four pawns on each side after this appeared very drawish. Although black finally won a pawn after five hours, his chances to win the game with rook, knight and e-pawn versus rook and knight appeared slim at best. Although short of time the IM played stubborn on for a win. He was rewarded as white after nearly six hours stumbled into a pin and lost his knight without eliminating black's final pawn.

Ludvig Carlsson (2374) versus Lauris Perkampus (2076) was another hard-fought junior duel, in which white had very little from a rather lame English opening. Black's decision to sacrifice an exchange was brave, but probably dubious, as white first was closer to something with two rooks and five pawns against rook, knight and six pawns. Perkampus however found useful squares for his knight later on. After white sacrificed a second pawn, black was better when a draw was suddenly agreed after 51 moves. Having only a few minutes left for the game, Perkampus understandably was satisfied to draw a much higher rated players as black. Carlsson by the way had made three IM-norms recently, but to get the IM-title he still must reach 2400.

Emils Mierins (2057) versus IM Erlend Mikalsen (2373) was an open Sicilian with 4.Qxd4, in which black sacrificed an exchange following a tactical exchange of the queens. Chances appeared about balanced as black played with a pair of bishops and an extra pawn for the exchange. Having activated his pair of knights white appeared better for some moves, until it dried out with a repetition of moves after the first time control.



Mikalsen vs Mierins

German IM Christian Köpke (2346) and Norwegian Christian Tunge (2044) meanwhile discussed a rather closed Sicilian line in which black got a sound position, while white due to his pair of bishops kept a slight edge after an early queen exchange.

Exchanging one of the bishops was a long term improvement from a black point of view, although white due to his better minor piece and his queenside majority still had the easier position to play with two rooks, bishop and six pawns against two rooks, knight and six pawns.

This game also was decided in favour of the higher rated player under mutual time pressure.

Black then failed to find any active plan, while white instructively first advanced his queenside pawns and then undermined black's kingside pawns.

Unpredictable Norwegian FM Elham Abdlauf (2334) made an inspiring start by winning another teenager duel as black against Max Dahl (2041). Black got a pleasant initiative after white played too much like a pancake in an English opening. While white later spent all his time without finding any good plan, black instructively mobilized his pieces for an attack against the white king stuck on e1. Black might well have had something better than winning white's queen for rook, bishop and pawn, as white had to defend a cramped position with almost no time left on the clock from move 30. As white still struggled with his coordination, black playing with machine gun speed had no problems winning the endgame.

FM Theodor Kenneskog (2309) versus Sergey Eliseev (2041) was another tense Sicilian battle, in which white successfully sacrificed his d5-pawn to develop a strong initiative.

Eliseev defended creatively by sacrificing pawns to open the queenside against white's king, and the position appeared drawish after white felt forced to give up his queen for two rooks.

White however demonstrated the much better handling of the final endgame with rook, bishop and five pawns against queen and three pawns, and by instructive means succeeded promoting his passed a-pawn after 53 moves.



Lund and Fossum

Terje Lund (2024) versus FM Noam Vitenberg (2305) was a modern Queen's Gambit line in which black clearly had the better opening preparation, and greedily captured white's bishop on e5 after 12 moves. White first succeeded getting three pawns and some air for the piece. After black succeeded in exchanging off the

queens, he had few problems winning the remaining endgame with two rook, one bishop and four pawns against two rooks and seven pawns.



FM Øystein Bøyum Fossum (2302) versus Valentina Verbin (2023) was an English fianchetto duel in which white got a positional grip from the opening, soon turning into a dangerous attack after black fatally weakened her kingside with 13...g5?.

Bøyum Fossum in an inspired mood smashed through by sacrificing an exchange on e6 at move 25 and won by attack well before 40 moves. One queen for two rooks in this game turned out to be just winning for white, due to black's way too open king.

Jonas Hodneland Rasmussen (1995) versus FM Fredrik Lindh (2296) was a Grünfeld Indian duel which first was expected to become one of the shortest games tonight, as white helpfully opened the position to give black a dangerous initiative in the early middle game.

Black probably had something better than winning an exchange, as white due to his pair of bishops got some counterplay after queens were exchanged. Rasmussen later had to exchange one of the bishops, but fought on well in the endgame with rook and bishop versus two rooks.

White early noted a plan to scrape a draw by a kingside fortress after exchanging all the queenside pawns. After five hours black was playing with rook and two kingside pawns against bishop and one pawn, but still had difficulties winning due to his two h-pawns.

As white even lost his final pawn the endgame was lost for a while, but black had difficulties to overcome white's stubborn defence in a close to fortress situation, with rook and two h-pawns against a bishop controlling the key h2 square. Although struggling to find a winning plan with a few minutes left on the clock, black's decision to offer a draw after 96 moves still was strange, as he was close to winning with no risk whatsoever of losing.



Tenold vs Kvaløy (front) and Rasmussen vs Lindh (back)

The teenager duel between Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2275) and Andreas Tenold (1995) on the other hand was an intensive three-hour game, by tactical means going almost directly from a Sicilian opening to an endgame with queen and four pawns against two rooks and three pawns. Although white had a passed pawn, black due to his well-coordinated pair of rooks had no problems controlling the pawn and assuring himself a surprise draw.



Sørensen vs Ingebretsen

be exciting to see if he can continue on a 2400-level this year.

Simen Sørensen (1975) and FM Jens Evang Ingebretsen (2274) instead entered a rather closed Slav opening line, in which black found the better squares for his pieces when the position opened.

Ingebretsen in an inspired mood increased his advantage by pseudo-sacrificing a knight on h3 early in the middle game, and later smashed through on the kingside to mate his opponent at move 40.

Ingebretsen finished half a point behind an IM norm last year, and it will

Tobias Lang Nilsen (2271) has won a lot of ELO in the last two months, but did not get much advantage from the Caro-Kann opening as white against Brede Andre Hagen (1973) today. Although white had a slightly better pawn structure, the endgame with two rooks, one bishop and seven pawns on each side after 16 moves was considered drawish – and so was the endgame with two rooks and seven pawns on each side after 30 moves.

Although white had a slight initiative in the rook endgame, black had reasonable control until he opened the position for white's pieces with a badly timed 35... f4?. Lang Nilsen instructively used his chance to open the queenside afterwards, and his passed new c-pawn decided within a few moves after the time control.

16 year old Kim Roger Hansen Westrum (1945) got his place in the GM group only one hour before the start, but became the only player from the lower half to win his game. Playing white against FM Trygve Dahl (2249) he got a slight space advantage from an English fianchetto opening line.

Although the middle game later was complex, black's search for counterplay later turned out to weaken his own king more than his opponent's.

Low rated Westrum was one out of very few players from the lower half today making efficient use of his chances, pushing his passed pawn to e7 and winning decisive material well before 40 moves.

Shazil Shehzad (2249) versus Afras Mansoor (1931) was a hard-fought duel between two young lions (and cousins). Shazil has had by far the better form so far this autumn and also got the better start from a closed Ruy Lopez opening. Black's decision to sacrifice a bishop on h3 was creative, but still proved insufficient. White coolly returned the piece to exchange queens and reach a totally won rook and minor pieces endgame with three extra pawns.

GM Vitalij Kunin (2547), Gustav Törngren (2197) and Andreas Skrede Hausken (1936) are also in this GM group, but for various very understandable reasons will start the tournament from round two with a walk over draw from round one.

Following this, 14 year old Sverre Lye (1858) as the lowest rated player in the field, had to take a walk over win in the first round. Lye qualified for this GM group by winning the Open in 2020, and it will be exciting to see whether he can continue his strong play from last year in this much harder field.

The 18 year old WIM-candidate Thyra Kvendseth (1939) was intending to start the tournament from round two, but late Sunday evening had to withdraw due to temporary but still ongoing illness.

Meanwhile Andreas Skrede Hausken won his first round game in the Open, but immediately accepted an offer for promotion to the GM group for the remaining eight rounds. Following this we luckily will have no walk over in the second round, with 68 players in the GM group and 64 in the Open.



Round 1

# Open Group

ELO-differences as usual were bigger in the Open group, including two players above 2000 as well as a handful of players below 1200. The favourites got the full point in eleven out of the top twelve games, with the top four boards all decided yearly.

First rated Egmond-Gabriel Dulman (2065) probably was slightly worse from a provocative Alekhine defence as black against Amanda Mai Irgens Eiding (1639).

In the middle game black soon created counterplay against white's center and well before 40 moves he got a decisive kingside attack.



Eiding vs Dulman

The second rated player is highly promising Estonian junior Dion Krivenko (2045), switching his registration from GM group to Open due to a busy tournament schedule this autumn. Handling the white stones against Askild Skovgaard Brønmo (1637) in his first round, 15 year old Krivenko got an initiative from the Sicilian opening. He later established a promising attack and anyway was winning when black after 26 moves blundered his queen to a knight fork.

Third rated from the start of the first round was the promising junior Andreas Skrede Hausken (1936). He actually was in trouble for a moment as black against Erik Grindbakken (1632), after placing his queen in a pin on the diagonal h4-d8. Grindbakken however chose the wrong plan when exchanging off his bishop on f6 to snatch a pawn at d6, and black within a few more moves had a mating attack running on the kingside. Hausken after this win left the Open as he got a delayed chance to enter the GM group.

The notable group of young lions in the Open also includes 15 year old Heine Johannessen (1930), who first exchanged queens and then got a decisive attack due to his center pawns and more active pieces as white against our recurring Swedish chessfriend Gusztav Lang (1629).

Fifth board meeting between Torgeir Bø (1613) and Bjørn Robert Unhjem (1924) instructively illustrated how black can get a decisive attack early if white castles long and is too eager to attack from the opening.



**Evenshaug vs Kittelsen**

end up with a worthless h-pawn and dark squared bishop.

Sixth board meeting between Sigurd Kittilsen (1881) and Amadeus Hestvik Evenshaug (1609) on the other hand was the surprise draw on the top boards, and this came fair enough following a tight five hours battle. White missed the one chance he got to create winning chances early in the bishop endgame. After white sacrificed his bishop in a last desperate try to break the lockdown, black according to the computer programs was clearly better in the final position.

That however made no sense as black would

Remarkably enough a second surprise draw came in a jumpy junior duel between David Hellesøy (1500) and Sigurd Lye (1821) on board twelve.

Hellesøy sacrificed a loose pawn on b4 in a Sicilian opening and first had insufficient compensation, but then got a winning attack for some moves before it dried out with a repetition in a balanced position after 30 moves.



**Hellesøy vs Lye**

Maximilian Lystad (1767) against Lukas Dominik Gåsland (1413) also was a surprising junior duel draw, as the higher rated player came much better in the early middle game and still had sound pressure with two rooks, knight and seven pawns left on each side after 25 moves.

Gåsland however defended well and suddenly was a pawn up with a clear advantage after white with poor timing exchanged down to a rook endgame. Gåsland in his turn failed to realize the won, but still very difficult, endgame with rook, e- and g-pawn versus rook.

The sensational game win instead came in an entertaining attacking battle between the adults Lars Thormod Haugen (1756) and Håvard Skotheim (1326). White had a promising start as he won two bishops for rook and pawn in the early middle game, but black was more awake in the decisive moments and efficiently won the queen by a tactical Rxe5+! a few moves later on.

The last board tonight also became one of the last to finish, as the unrated ten year old David Mindestrømmen Simonsen for five hours played very well against Live Jørgensen Skigelstrand (1649). 17 year old Live still succeeded to win the bishop endgame with an extra pawn.

The organizer makes a new Fagernes record by transmitting 50 games live this year, hence spectators out there for the eight remaining rounds can follow top 16 games from the Open in addition to all games from the GM group. A lot of excitement will follow as we move on to round two Monday afternoon.

***All photos by Tom Eriksen***