

FAGERNES CHESS INTERATIONAL 2023

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

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GM Group

Including 92 players from 25 different countries, this year's GM group by far is the biggest and most international we have seen in the history of the Fagernes chess tournaments. While the number of players above 2600 was higher in both tournaments of last year, and the number of players above 2500 was about the same in the Easter last year, the number of players rated above 2400 and above 2300 is much higher this year. Similarly we had more players with a GM title in the Easter tournament last year, but 12 GMs, 21 IMs, 3 WGMs and 2 WIMs provide a solid new record in the total number of titleholders. You know it is a truly strong Swiss with excellent chances for title norms, when you in the first round can find an IM at board 46 and players above 2300 on the lower rated side of the three top boards. While a median Elo above 2300 is remarkable, even more remarkable is a median age below 19 – as 56 out of 92 players in the top group still are junior players.

The GM group made a remarkably hard-fought start, as all 46 games still were in play after two and a half hour. Not unexpectedly many of the lower rated players at that stage had promising positions. Neither unexpectedly, a big majority of the higher rated players still won in the end. Players from the lower half still had two sensational wins and eight surprising draws at the end of the day. Remarkably, the last 20 boards had a total of zero draws.

First rated **GM Sethuraman Sethuraman (2639)** of India as white in a Sicilian battle against the unpredictable Norwegian junior **FM Saad Elmi (2321)** lagged some 20 minutes behind on the clock without much of an advantage on the board. White due to his pawn at e5 had a space advantage, although black had a nice knight square at d5. Sethuraman got some pressure as he could place an octopus knight on the d6 outpost and open the queenside. Following this Elmi anyway was in trouble when he just before 40 moves sacrificed an exchange and then resigned.



Sethuraman vs Elmi

IM David Cummings (2318) versus **GM Samvel Ter-Sahakyan (2613)** started up with a positional English opening. Black after 16 moves had balanced the chances on the board, while white instead had some 25 minutes more on the clock. The Canadian veteran IM Cummings fought on very well, exchanging down to a drawish endgame with rook, bishop and four pawns on each side.

Ter-Sahakyan almost came in danger of losing as he tried to win this endgame, and eventually had to sacrifice his bishop for white's passed a-pawn. The final endgame with rook, bishop and one kingside pawn against rook and three kingside pawns still was a rather safe draw.



Cummings vs Ter-Sahakyan

Polish **GM Bartosz Socko (2601)** and German junior **Johannes von Mettenheim (2317)** meanwhile discussed some Semi-Slav fianchetto opening line, in which black for good and for bad had his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain at f5. As white played 8.Nh4 to disturb the bishop, 8...dxc4? proved too greedy as white after 9.Nxf5 exf5 10.d5! soon could open the position with a decisive initiative. Socko later made efficient use of his chances and won decisive material within 27 moves.



Socko vs von Mettenheim

12 year old **CM Sauat Nugaliev (2286)** of Kazakhstan was thrilled to get white against **GM Abhimanyu Puranik (2599)** in the first round. The start was a rather slow and closed Ruy Lopez opening. Black due to his pair of bishops came slightly better after white exchanged his bishop for a knight at f6. While Nugaliev struggled to find any counterplay, Puranik in an inspired mood efficiently demonstrated how a kingside attack works out. Black had a winning attack before 30 moves and completed it with a mate at g2 in move 34.



Nugaliev vs Puranik

GM Vahap Sanal (2582) versus **Arhan Anand (2285)** was another duel between an experienced GM and a very talented teenager. The GM made a positional start with 3.Bb5+ in a Sicilian, and later got a space advantage due to his pawn at d5. White soon planted a knight at c4 and started a direct attack on black's isolated pawn at a5. Black soon lost a pawn following this, but still had reasonable drawing chances when he was one pawn down in the queen and equal-coloured bishops. Sanal finally decided the game as he within a few moves after the first time control succeeded in getting a decisive kingside attack.



Sanal vs Anand



Ermitsch vs Urkedal

13 year old German **FM Magnus Ermitsch (2277)** and 29 year old Norwegian **GM Frode Urkedal (2527)** meanwhile discussed a double-edged Ruy Lopez, in which white had more center pawns and black the pair of bishops. White later played creatively as he sacrificed a pawn to establish an apparently threatening passed pawn at d6. Although the pawn remained disturbing, the GM with 1–2 extra pawns probably had it under reasonable control.

The game remained exciting until white short of time blundered a rook with

37.Rxc4?? – somehow overlooking that black could simply cash in the rook with 37.--- Qxc4, as 38.d8Q now would meet 38.--- Qf1 mate.

GM Erik Blomqvist (2523) versus **FM Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2266)** started up like a closed Ruy Lopez, but transformed into a rather Italian position under favourable circumstances for white, as black's isolated pawn at a6 first was weak and then just lost. This game went against the tide as the GM appeared likely to win within 30 moves and three hours, but in the end instead had to accept a draw after six hours and more than 90 moves. 14 year old Kvaløy efficiently used his chance to complicate with a knight sacrifice at d4, and after winning back the piece he fought on well with this passed d-pawn in the endgame.



Blomqvist vs Kvaløy

After five hours the position with rook, knight and three kingside pawns against rook, bishop and two kingside pawns appeared drawish, although Kvaløy still had to defend accurately. The rook endgame with two against one pawn first was close to winning for white due to black's weak pawn at g6, but Kvaløy convincingly demonstrated the draw in the final endgame with rook versus rook and f-pawn.

FM Sourath Biswas (2265) and **IM Koustav Chatterjee (2520)** unluckily had to play each other after travelling all the way from India together to stay in the same cabin at Fagernes.

The game was a Retian double fianchetto, in which white became a bit too passive. Black could play d4 with a sound initiative. The game was decided after only 22 moves as black trapped the white queen at a5.



Biswas vs Chatterjee

Norwegian **IM Elham Abdulrauf (2519)** as white against **CM Adithya Chullikkad (2259)** first hinted about a London-System, but then accelerated with c4. White later got a sound advantage as he had more center pawns and the pair of bishops.

18.e4? although consequent however was a bit too hasty, as black could get counterplay against the white pawns.

Black snatched a pawn at b2 with his queen and for some moves was better according to the computers, although white due to his more active pieces and center pawns had good practical compensation.

White later creatively reached a won position with a tactical d6-break, but failed to find the best continuation of the attack against the black king. As black in turned missed his chances to save the game, white in the sixth hour could promote his pawn at d8 with a decisive material win.



Abdulrauf vs Chullikkad



Skotheim vs Hillarp

Swedish **GM Tiger Hillarp (2513)** as black against Norwegian **CM Andreas Skotheim (2228)** went for one of his pet Modern lines, and was fine if not better after white exchanged the d-pawns at c5. After all the minor pieces had left, black kept an advantage as white's advanced pawn at a6 now was a weakness. After the queens were exchanged, the GM for some moves had a pawn more in the rook endgame. Chances still were about balanced as white now had too loose pawns, and it all dried out with a dead drawn rook endgame with two pawns on each side.



Mittal vs Oberoi

The teenager lions **IM Aditya Mittal (2505)** and **Shelev Oberoi (2226)** meanwhile discussed an Accepted Queen's Gambit in which black hung to his extra pawn at c4. It proved too greedy as white got a hardball initiative and soon won back the pawn at g7 with an ongoing attack. Black later apparently came up with some counterplay against the king at e1, but white probably had this very tactical game under control all of the time and was about a rook up in the final position after 25 moves.

FM Emerik Roulet-Dubonnet (2215) versus **GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2504)** was a Bogó-Indian in which the GM played too provocative with his bishop, as white could play e4 and e5 with more space and promising attacking chances. While the clock after 18 moves was balanced with about 40 minutes left for both players, black due to his weakened kingside and undeveloped queenside was in real trouble on the board. White definitely had a winning kingside attack around move 25–30, but first failed to find the decisive attacking plans and then blundered it all away with 32.Rh4??. The GM of course used his chance to win an exchange with 32... Qxh4 33.Nxh4 Bxc2, and soon had an extra piece in the minor piece endgame. Chess gentleman Rozentalis seen in retrospect considered his own middle game position «so lost» and felt his win had been undeserved. Winning a won and somewhat messy position against a GM however still is a hard test for most players below 2400.



Roulet-Dubonnet



Seo vs Lye

Swedish **IM Jung Min Seo (2500)** as white against Norwegian **CM Sverre Lye (2212)** hit nothing but air with an early Ng5-attack in an English fianchetto, after which black with the more active pieces was fine if not better.

After all the minor pieces were exchanged, the remaining position with queen, two rooks and six pawns on each side first appeared drawish. Black however now had the more airy king, and as Lye failed to find the right moves Seo soon demonstrated a winning attack in the fifth hour.



Shehzad vs Kulaots

16 year old Norwegian **Shazil Shehzad (2212)** as white in a Sicilian against Estonian **GM Kaido Kulaots (2494)** first went for a solid Maroczy pin, but then accelerated on the kingside with f4 and h4. It worked out fairly well, as white after 18 moves was some 20 minutes ahead on the clock with a better position on the board. Black remained under some pressure after all the minor pieces were exchanged. With both players running short of time for 40 moves, the GM blundered and gave his opponent a decisive attack. A pawn down with queen,

rook and three pawns against queen, rook and four pawns, Shehzad instead of playing on with a winning attack creatively sacrificed his rook to force a draw by perpetual check.

GM Raja Rithvik R (2472) versus **CM Juan Gomez Aguirre (2206)** was a rather tactical English opening line, in which three sets of minor pieces were exchanged within the first 13 moves. White reportedly first was better despite his slightly awkward king at e2, but after the queens too were exchanged the remaining endgame with rook, bishop and six pawns on each side after 23 moves was rather drawish. The bishop endgame with five pawns on each side probably was holdable. Black due to his isolated pawn at b5 however had a difficult defence at that stage, and not unexpectedly the GM got the help needed to force a won pawn endgame.



Gomez Aguirre

Board 16 between **CM Chinguun Bayaraa (2203)** and **IM Linus Johansson (2463)** was the first to be won by the lower rated player, following a nearly six-hour long struggle. White's sensational win was not expected after the Catalan opening, as black with his pair of bishops was slightly better around move 20–30. Trying to create winning chances, black however played much too loose as he after 40 moves allowed white to win a pawn at a5 and place at knight at c5. Although black had a disturbing pawn at b4, white with an extra passed pawn at a6 later was close to winning. Black's difficult defence definitely collapsed as white around move 70 was able to open a second front on the kingside.



Bayaraa vs Johansson



Kassen vs Pujari

IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2462) had a sound and patient Ruy Lopez win against **WIM Rucha Pujari (2195)**, as his extra pawn won decisive material in the rook and bishop endgame.

German **IM Jonas Hacker (2455)** as black against Norwegian **FM Mathias Unneland (2188)** had pressure all of the game, but Unneland still came close to a draw in the endgame. The final endgame was king, bishop and four kingside pawns against king, knight and four kingside pawns, but still instructively won by zugzwang as black had both the more active king and the better minor pieces.

IM Shete Sammed (2454) got a winning attack before 25 moves as white in a complex Sicilian line against the German veteran **Johannes Hentrich (2166)**. Black somehow survived the attack but had to give up an exchange for a pawn, and white later had the endgame under fair control.



Andersen

FM Sambit Panda (2452) on the other hand got a long and thorny game as black against **Morten Andersen (2156)**. Black was fine if not better from this Reti opening, and after 38 moves the position with queen, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side was about equal. Panda however blundered as he overlooked a tricky 39.Nxd4!. Andersen efficiently used his chance to win a pawn and for a few moves had a won queen endgame on the board in the fifth hour. White however had to play very accurately to avoid a perpetual check, and as he did not the game was drawn by checks after 55 moves. The 62 year old underdog here of course still could be well satisfied to achieve a surprising draw against the 18 year old panda.

IM Hampus Sørensen (2448) had a light positional pressure as white against **Mahitosh Dey (2154)**, and in the fifth hour got the help needed to win a first drawish knight endgame with an extra pawn for white.

Norwegian junior **Max Dahl (2152)** and Polish **GM Monika Socko (2440)** meanwhile had a heated French discussion in which black for a while was a pawn up, but found her king in trouble in the queen and rook endgame. White had a winning attack for some moves just before the time control, but short of time he helpfully exchanged the rooks to reach a queen endgame with three versus two pawns. It soon turned out that black although a pawn down was closer to winning this due to her passed d-pawn. Max Dahl after missing a sensational win in this game hang on to a fairly convincing draw in the endgame.

The young English **IM Shreyas Royal (2439)** meanwhile also was reported in trouble as white against **Eivind Grunt Kreken (2144)**. Although a passed pawn down, Royal scraped a draw in the double minor piece endgame due to the opposite-coloured bishops. Black still was clearly better here when he after 81 moves allowed a threefold repetition.

IM Prraneeth Vuppala (2437) of India on the other hand early got the upper hand as black against Norwegian junior **Evsuld Myagmarsuren (2139)**, and due to his kingside attack won a sound piece before 30 moves.

The young Armenian **IM Emin Ohanyan (2434)** won an even more crushing attacking win in only 18 moves as white against **Shadi Sian (2137)**.

Monika Machlik (2136) of Norway versus **IM Zhen Yu Cyrus Low (2425)** of Singapore on the other hand was a tight four and a half hour battle. Low first was a sound pawn up in the endgame, but Machlik defended well under mutual time pressure and proved able to eliminate black's passed a-pawn with a dead drawn rook endgame to follow.



Machlik vs Low

The highly talented Austrian **FM Lukas Dotzer (2416)** had it all under control as white against **Manmay Chopra (2113)**. The 13 year old white player increased the positional pressure after the Ruy Lopez opening and before 30 moves landed in a won endgame with two minor pieces for a rook.

IM Semen Mitusov (2412) due to some unforeseen circumstances arrived some 20 minutes delayed for his black game against **Ben Samuel Groth Skaar (2103)**, but soon took over the initiative and just before 40 moves reached a winning position by an instructive exchange sacrifice at d3.

The French Winawer battle between **WIM Savitha Shri Baskar (2411)** and **Pankit Mota (2101)** for a while was very complex and double-edged: After 26 moves white had a passed pawn at h7 while black had one at a2. Both players made some mistakes during the following tactical complications. White's exchange sacrifice however was correct and after the first time control soon gave her an easily won endgame with two minor pieces for a rook.

Håkon Bentsen (2084) as white against **WGM Vantika Agrawal (2407)** went for a tactical piece exchange at e6 soon after the opening, but black soon had two pieces for a rook with a winning position.



Brynell vs Rosol

GM Stellan Brynell (2402) meanwhile had a patient working day win as white against **Alexander Rosol (2076)**. White got a positional grip in the middle game and due to his passed a-pawn had a safe win with an extra exchange in the endgame.

Saketh Pendagandham (2074) first was slightly better in a Scotch opening as white against **IM Kushagra Mohan (2400)**, but the position soon backfired in white's face following an over-ambitious e5-advance. Black within a few moves just won the pawn and later used his passed e-pawn to win the game in only 26 moves.

While Sweden's veteran GM Stellan Brynell had a promising start on the tournament, their junior star **FM Edvin Trost (2398)** got a nightmare start in this IM norm hunt as he lost as white against **Valentina Verbin (2071)**. Verbin however won this attacking battle very well deserved, first getting the dominating pieces and then winning decisive material within 30 moves.

The game between **Martin Øksendal (2060)** and **IM Moksh Amit Doshi (2397)** curiously saw the first mate of this GM group. White first was better, but black gradually took over the initiative and after 32 moves exchanged a promising attack for an also promising endgame with rook, knight and five pawns against rook, bishop and five pawns. Black's more active rook combined with an octopus knight at the d3 outpost still gave black a dangerous attack, and white's king at g3 stumbled into a mate after 40 moves.

IM Mohammad Fahad Rahman (2396) of Bangladesh was one out of many players from Asia playing his first game in Norway tonight. Handling the white pieces against **CM Jack Mizzi (2049)**, Rahman chose a Bf4 set up against Queen's Gambit and got a promising initiative. White had a sound plus thanks to his pair of bishops in the middle game, and soon reached a winning position after black gave up his queen for a rook and bishop. Mizzi, the first player of Malta ever to play chess at Fagernes, fought on but was unable to save the game as white's queen was much superior to black's rook and knight in an open endgame.

Michael Ermitsch (2047) versus **WGM Teodora Injac (2383)** was a tense Sicilian duel for two hours. But after three hours it was all over as white just collapsed with a dubious pawn sacrifice followed by an even more dubious piece sacrifice.



Vestby-Ellingsen vs Fiskaaen

IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2387) on the other hand had to play six hours to defeat **Martin Holten Fiskaaen (2040)**, but the rook endgame with 1–2 extra pawns for white still was under control for the patient young IM. Two hours earlier on the queen and rook endgame with six pawns on each side probably should have been a draw, but white's more active pieces and queenside pawn majority made it difficult for black.

Vetle Bjørge Strand (2026) versus **IM John Paul Wallace (2384)** was another Sicilian Maroczy duel in which the talented junior first had a space advantage, but the IM proved able to transport his pieces around from the queenside to get a decisive attack against the weakened white kingside well before 40 moves.

Israeli **FM Benny Aizenberg (2367)** as white against **Peder Marcus Aamodt (2022)** in a classical Ruy Lopez game first got a sound pressure, and then won a queenside pawn with a decisive advantage. Aamodt survived into a position with queen, rook, bishop and three pawns against queen, rook, knight and four pawns, but white's extra was a passed c-pawn which decided the game early in the fifth hour.

Philip Rosol (2010) and **WGM Pallathur Nandhidhaa (2362)** had a tense King's Indian struggle in which material and chances were about balanced after an early queen exchange. Play for a while circled around white's loose passed pawn at d6, but white's pair of bishops kept him in the game until he at move 29 blundered one of the bishops.

The junior duel between **FM Bennet Hagner (2354)** and **Sindre Ytrestøyl (1987)** saw a Caro-Kann opening in which white soon got a strong initiative. White was a sound piece up with rook, bishop, knight and four kingside pawns against rook, knight and four kingside pawns after 30 moves. Ytrestøyl fought on some 30 moves more hoping to reach the not trivial endgame with king, bishop and knight against king, but Hagner probably had the full point under control all of the time.

Sigurd Lye (1980) versus **FM Tanmay Chopra (2351)** was a junior duel in which black demonstrated the better understanding, as his queenside attack here soon proved much more dangerous than white's kingside attack. After the queens were exchanged black's pieces were dominating in the endgame, and white anyway was lost when he blundered an exchange and resigned after 45 moves.

FM Jens Evang Ingebretsen (2345) and **Jonas Hodneland Rasmussen (1976)** discussed an English opening in which white soon snatched a pawn at c6. Black's active rooks and the c-file still gave him some chances until he at move 30 blundered an exchange.



Ingebretsen vs Rasmussen

Creative **FM Alexander Øye-Strømberg (2328)** has had a promising start on the new chess year, and made his first IM norm in France a few weeks ago. He got a promising start on the search for a second norm at Fagernes as he got a decisive initiative within 10 moves as black against **Jiahao Eric Ji (1959)**. As white went for a rather desperate kingside attack, black after 22 moves had two extra pieces and a totally won position.

Sanket Chakravarty (2327) versus **Ask Amundsen (1937)** was an English duel which first turned in favour of white as he won the black pawn at e5. Black then had no compensation, but later succeeded in balancing the chances by advancing his passed pawn to c2. Although white remained a pawn up the game was exciting until black at move 40 too bravely placed his king at e7 instead of g8. Later white need only four moves to demonstrate a winning attack.

Finally, board 46 between Norwegian junior **Amadeus Hestvik Evenshaug (1930)** and Swedish **IM Erik Hedman (2323)** was another positionally complex Sicilian duel. This one soon went in favour of black, as white helpfully exchanged down to a rooks and minor pieces endgame in which his two isolated double pawns gave black a decisive advantage.

Open Group

The Open compared to earlier years has a nice group of players below 1500, but fewer player rated above 1700. The organizer hardly can be satisfied with 44 players here, compared to 59 from the Easter tournament and 55 from the Autumn tournament last year.

This year's Open started up with the talented junior Linus Sandstad as the only player rated above 1900, and five more players above 1800. Among these second rated Jon Arne Stokhaug did not play the first round, and will start up his tournament in round three with 1.0/2 from two walk-over draws.



Dybvik vs Sandstad

As usual in such in Open group, many games were decided early and most of the top rated players won their games without too many problems. The big exception was the two first boards, which saw two hard-fought four-hour games.

Top rated **Linus Sandstad (1912)** remained laidback and only about equal for two and a half hours as black against **Bjørn Noralf Dybvik (1403)**, but efficiently used his chance to decide by attack when he finally got the chance.

Rafe Rehman (1824) and **Sara Gilsdottir (1422)** on the second board had a fascinating six-hour struggle, in which the Sicilian middle game was in dynamic balance or slightly better for black most of the time. White was better in the rook endgame and for some moves was winning in an exciting passed pawn race. Both players however had only a few minutes left to handle a complicated position. Gilsdottir fought on very well and her passed h3-pawn became as dangerous as white's passed a7-pawn. Black following this could have reached a won position when a draw was agreed by repetition.

The top rated player won all the other games on the top ten, but the lower boards saw some more surprising results. **Ida Lahlum (1628)** versus **Bilguun Bayaraa (1267)** was the first queen duel of this group, and was a fairly sound five hours draw. White had a slight pressure first on the kingside and then on the queenside, but black defended well in a rather closed position and exchanged it all down to a rather closed knight endgame.

12 year old **Mikael Ruud (1266)** as white against **Elma Selvik (1623)** showed no respect and sacrificed material for an open kingside attack. The attack first was dubious, but as black failed to find the best defence she had to give up her queen for a rook with a totally lost position. Selvik however fought on well and got the help needed to counterattack the white king with her pair of rooks. Ruud forced himself to give back the queen, and although white still was a pawn up in the rook endgame, the conclusion after five hours became a dead drawn pawn endgame.



Ruud vs Selvik

Unrated 15 year old Joakim Hellesøy got a draw within half an hour as white against **Kazim Yilmaz (1516)**, as Yilmaz in his comeback exchanged down to a drawish endgame and accepted a repetition before 20 moves.

Unpredictable but very capable 12 year old **Alina Shehzad (1251)** winning as black against **Sigurd Lauvås Gaure (1616)** became the only player from the lower half to win her game in the first round of the Open.

The game was an exciting Sicilian battle in which white castled long and black short. Black proved able to bolt her kingside while starting up a counterattack against the white king, and anyway was two pawns up with a winning position when white sacrificed two rooks for a few checks.



Gaure vs Shehzad

Photos by Tom Eriksen