

FAGERNES CHESS INTERATIONAL 2023

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

8



GM Group

23 year old Indian GM Abhimanyu Puranik still walks confidently arond on the Fagernes snow: **Winning within four hours as white against IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen, Puranik defended his position as the sole leader with an outstanding 7.0/8 and a tournament performance close to 2800!** Remarkably Puranik is still not guaranteed even a shared first prize, as the young Turk GM Vahap Sanal is at 6.5/8 after he today won a tense five-hour battle as black against Norwegian FM Frode Urkedal on the third board. Second board duel between Armenian GM Samvel Ter-Sahakyan and Indian IM Aditya Mittal due to a neat perpetual check ended up a tight three-hour draw, leaving both players to fight their round 9 for a top three prize from 6.0/8. Also in the challenger group at 6.0/8 is the young Indian IM Koustav Chatterjee and Lithuanian veteran GM Eduardas Rozentalis, as both succeeded in winning their games in another hard-fought round on the top boards.

While the Fagernes tournaments in 2021 and 2022 were somewhat unlucky to produce very few title norms despite excellent norm chances, this 2023 edition now might end up like a true title norm bonanza. Kaasen, Chatterjee and Mittal all needs «only» a draw tomorrow to score a GM norm. Regarding IM-norms we can already before the last round congratulate Norwegian FM Aksel Bu Kvaløy and Indian WGM Vantika Agrawal! 16 year WIM Savita Shri Baskar although losing today has completed her third WGM-norm, and in case of a draw or win in the last round she will also score her first IM norm at Fagernes. Two other young Indian lions, FM Tanmay Chopra and Sanket Chakravarty, also can reach their first IM-norm with a draw or win in the last round. So can the 16 year old Israelian star talent FM Benny Aizenberg, and in his case this will be his third and decisive norm. Indian WGM Pallathur Nandhidhaa and Norwegian teenager Shazil Shehzad also are still in the run for an IM-norm, although both following today's results will need a full point in the last round.

On today's first board, **GM Abhimanyu Puranik (2599)** and **IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2462)** started up with a symmetrical English fianchetto opening. White got a slight edge as the queenside opened and this increased as black allowed a tactical 18.c5! Black succeeded in cleaning up the queenside by exchanging the white c-pawn for his b-pawn, but still was in trouble as white had the much more active pieces. White kept up the pressure and ten moves later he by help of a small combination won two rooks for a queen. Black short of time fought on, but soon lost two kingside pawns and stopped the clock as he after 34 moves was about to lose a piece too.

Kaasen despite this loss still has a performance above 2600 and can make a GM norm with a draw as white against GM Bartosz Socko in round 9. Puranik at 7.0/8 has an outstanding performance, but still his lead is only half a point before the last round.



Puranik vs Kaasen

The second board duel between **GM Samvel Ter-Sahakyan (2613)** and **IM Aditya Mittal (2505)** in the meantime saw an open Catalan in which white played Qa4 and Qb5 to win back the pawn at c4. Quite a few more exchanges followed, and after 20 moves left an apparently balanced position with two rooks, knight and six pawns



Ter-Sahakyan vs Mittal

against two rooks, bishop and six pawns. White had a pressure against black's pawn at b6, and went on to win this pawn. Mittal however probably had his defence under control, coolly sacrificing his bishop at b7 to activate his rooks and force a draw by perpetual check along the seventh rank.

GM Frode Urkedal (2527) as white in a Slav against **GM Vahap Sanal (2582)** went for a solid positional line with 4.e3. White got the pair of bishops after Nh4–Nxg6 and established a queenside space advantage with 14.c5, although black soon got his kingside counterplay with e5 and e4. Both kings got a more risky life as black opened the kingside. White with his rook in the f-file and a queen at g6 appeared to have the better attack after 33 moves. White however lost control as he ran short of time and for some moves black was much better. Although black took a bishop at c3 in move 39 the position around move 41–42 still was highly unclear. 43.Rxe6? however turned out to be decisive blunder, as black thanks to the counterpunch 45... Rf1+! came a piece up instead of a queen down. Sanal too walks confidently around on the snow and at 6.5/8 is unshared second before the last round.



Urkedal vs Sanal

The young Indian duel between **IM Koustav Chatterjee (2520)** and **GM Raja Rithvik Rajavaram (2472)** was another Nimzo-Indian Rubinstein line, balanced on the board and clock after 19 moves. White had the traditional pair of bishops, but his hanging pawns at c4 and d4 made the position double-edged. The game suddenly turned in favour of white as he got the chance to open the position for his bishops with a tactical 26.d5! With both players under pressure on the clock, black immediately went astray with non-working tactical counterplay, leaving white a bishop up in the final position after 39 moves. Rajavaram fortunately already has got the GM title. Chatterjee now can complete his GM title tomorrow, although a draw as black against 2600-GM Ter Sahakyan under such pressure is a critical test.

Lithuanian **GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2504)** as white against more than 40 year younger **Ukrainian IM Semen Mitusov (2412)** went for a classical Ruy Lopez exchange position. The queens were exchanged at d8 before 10 moves, leaving a fairly balanced position with rook, bishop, knight and seven pawns after 20 moves. Although black had been able to repair his pawn structure, white in the knight endgame had a slight edge due to his powerful knight at d5. Technical endgames has been among Rozentalis' aces throughout his long chess career, and the veteran succeeded in putting a lot of pressure on his young opponent in this version. As the queenside opened, white due his better pawn structure white got a clear advantage, and white's position turned winning as he after 40 moves could win black's isolated b-pawn and establish a passed queenside pawn.



Rozentalis vs Mitusov

Mitusov however fought on stubbornly to get counterplay against white's backward pawn at e4. After five hours he had got the help needed to reach a drawn endgame with knight and two kingside pawns against knight and two kingside pawns. Black however still balanced on the wire as white's king was much closer the kingside than black's. In a dramatic end after 59 moves white went for an elegant tactical 50.Nxg5!?, after which black with 20 minutes left on the clock resigned – as both 59.--fxg5? 60.f6 and 59.--- Nxg5 60.Kxf6 was obviously losing. 59.--- Nf2! followed by 60.--- Nxg4 however would have forced a knight and pawns versus knight endgame which, although it was not trivial, still could have saved a draw for black.

The duel between **WGM Vantika Agrawal (2407)** and **GM Sethuraman Sethuraman (2639)** some five hours earlier on started up as a Modern, but as black played Nf6 it transposed into a Classical King's Indian duel.

White here exchanged the light-squared bishop for a knight at a6, exchanged the d-pawns at e5, advanced her c-pawn to c5 and intervened on the d6 outpost with her queen. The remaining position after 20 moves gave white a clear plus due to her



Agrawal vs Sethuraman

d-file possession, space advantage and better pawn structure. White at that stage however had only some five minutes left against one hour on the clock. Black's f5–f4 advance on the kingside first gave him no counterplay, but the f4-pawn became useful and the position unclear as white afterwards gave up her pawn at e4 to win the black pawn at e5.

Although opposite-coloured bishops increased white's chances for a draw, black after 36 moves had advanced the pawn to f3 and taken over the initiative with rook, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side. White's decision to sacrifice a pawn to exchange the two minor pieces and sacrifice a pawn to activate her kingside pawn majority in the rook endgame was very understandable. It still proved insufficient, as black and his passed a-pawn won the race against white and her g-pawn in the sixth hour. Top rated Sethuraman has been playing shakily this tournament, but after all is in the run for the top five prizes before the final round. Agrawal burned a very promising chance for a GM-norm in this game, but has a performance well above 2500 and is guaranteed another IM norm.

The game between Polish **GM Bartosz Socko (2601)** and the young Armenian **IM Emin Ohanyan (2434)** was an Open Ruy Lopez with many early exchanges, leaving after 22 moves a balanced endgame with two rooks, bishop and four pawns on each side. White here had a light queenside pressure and black some chances on the kingside. Nothing of importance happened for the next moves and draw was by a fairly sound repetition after 32 moves.

GM Erik Blomqvist (2523) entered another Sicilian with 3.Bb5+ as white against **WIM Savitha Shri Baskar (2411)**. In this version black got the better pawn structure, as white had two b-pawns after the bishops was exchanged at b5. White however had pressure against black's pawn at a7 and after 20 moves he was slightly better with two rooks, two knights and six pawns left on each side. Black might have overlooked a tactical knight exchange maneuver a few moves later on, as white after this was obviously better due to his passed b-pawn and seventh rank control. The game was practically decided as white got in another tactical hit with 32.Ne6!, winning the key pawn at f7 with a mating attack against black's king at g8.



Blomqvist vs Baskar

WGM Pallathur Nandhidhaa (2362) as white against **IM Elham Abdulrauf (2519)** went for a Panno line in the Caro-Kann. White however here was unable to come up with any attack, and so black after exchanging two sets of minor pieces installed a knight on d5 with pleasant pressure against white's isolated pawn at d4. Due to white's passive pieces, the king at f7 was safe enough and sufficient to protect his backward pawn at e6. Black instructively intervened in the c-file, and by a tactical exchange forced off the queen and rook – leaving a double minor piece endgame in which both white's queenside pawns were doomed.

IM Jung Min Seo (2500) versus **IM Moksh Amit Doshi (2397)** started up with a Queen's Gambit Ragozin variation, in which black placed his bishop at b4. White failed to come up with any advantage and accepted a draw offer in a balanced position after 18 moves.

Norwegian **FM Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2266)** as white against Estonian **GM Kaido Kulaots (2494)** went for a solid Maroczy set up against Kulaots' Accelerated Dragon. White due to the d5 outpost and the backward black pawn at d6 kept a slight advantage after exchanging two sets of minor pieces, although black in due time got some counterplay against white's backward pawn at c4. White was reported clearly better as he after 30 moves had won the pawn at d6 and at the same time forced an exchange of the queens. Black's strong blockade knight at c5 and a light pressure against the backward pawn at c4 however made it difficult for white to make any use of the extra pawn. Kvaløy after the first time control found nothing better than a repetition of moves. 14 year old Kvaløy should have won this game to save his chances for a sensational first GM norm. A draw on the other hand was enough to guarantee his second IM norm even before the start of the last round.



Kvaløy vs Kulaots
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

IM Linus Johansson (2463) and **IM Mohammad Fahad Rahman (2396)** meanwhile discussed a rare Slav exchange line with black's bishop at g7. Black first had no problems, but 16... Nc4?! although tricky probably asked too much from this position. Black despite loose pawns at c4 and f4 later proved able to keep the material balance, but the price became too high as white's disturbing pawn at f6 combined with an open g-file before move 30 gave white a decisive kingside attack. Johansson during mutual time pressure neatly decided the game as he could hide his own king at h4 and double his queen and rook in the g-file with the crushing threat of 42.Rg8+! Rxf7 43.Nxf7 mate (or the slightly less elegant 42.Nxf7+ Rxf7 43.Rg8 mate).

The young Israeli **FM Benny Aizenberg (2366)** first came slightly better from a closed Ruy Lopez opening duel as white against Indian **IM Shete Sammed (2454)**. Then white got a more or less winning attack as black after 22 moves too carelessly allowed a strong knight sacrifice at h6. Black avoided a direct mate by returning the knight, but white then had two more pawns with a winning attack.

FM Sambit Panda (2452) and **FM Jens Evang Ingebretsen (2345)** instead discussed an old Cambridge Springs line in a Queen's Gambit. Black snatched a pawn at a2 with his queen, but the queen following a tactical minor piece exchange later ended up in danger at e2. White creatively let the queen escape and take a pawn at e3 with check, as white wanted to start a direct attack against the black king at e8. Black after 26 moves had two extra passed queenside pawns, but his king at e8 was under fire and the opposite-coloured bishops here favoured white. Ingebretsen however defended well. Black got the help needed to return the pawns and reach a materially balanced endgame in which the opposite-coloured bishops guaranteed a draw despite white's passed pawn at d5.

FM Bennet Hagner (2354) versus **IM Hampus Sörensen (2448)** saw a rather closed Caro-Kann opening line, in which all the bishops and nothing one else were exchanged after 17 moves. White due to his e5-pawn had a space advantage on the kingside, and definitely got the advantage as he was also able to take over the c-file after exchanging one set of rooks. Both



Hagner vs Sörensen

players missed a complex win for white during time pressure just before 40 moves. After the time control white still had pressure on the dark squares, and sacrificed an exchange at f5 to go for a direct attack with his queen and pair of knights. Black however defended coolly and within a few moves forced white to force a draw by repetition of checks.

18 year old **FM Tanmay Chopra (2351)** in his tense run for an IM norm played bravely for a win as white against **GM Monika Socko (2440)**. Black won a pawn at e4 in this Queen's Gambit Vienna line, but although all the knights were exchanged, white due to his active bishops and rook in the d-file had a promising attack coming up against the black king at h8. Black offered back a pawn to exchange the queens, after which both players appeared fairly well satisfied to reach a drawish rook endgames with four pawns on each side.



Chopra vs Socko

IM Prranneth Vuppala (2437) versus **Johannes von Mettenheim (2317)** was a Caro-Kann Advance in which white first had a slight initiative and then after a queen exchange the slightly better pawn structure. White's pressure apparently increased as he in the rooks and minor piece endgame could put his rooks in the e-file and push the passed pawn ahead to e7. Black however proved able not only to block the passed pawn just in time, but also to exchange it. This left after the time control a drawish if still far from dead endgame with rook, knight and four pawns against rook, bishop and four pawns. Black's passed pawn at d4 was about to become dangerous and his fianchetto bishop at b7 had a great potential, hence white a few moves later decided to force a draw by repetition of checks.



Vuppala vs von Mettenheim

IM Zhen Yu Cyrus Low (2425) versus **Shazil Shehzad (2212)** was an Italian game in which white tried to play safe, while black played h6 and g5 on the kingside and sacrificed a pawn at c6 to activate his pieces. Sacrificing a knight at c3 appeared a bit heavy, but the outcome still became a complex position with queen, two rooks, bishop and three pawns against queen, rook, two bishops and five pawns. White made a good decision to exchange one of the black bishops and soon won one of the black queenside pawns. Black's passed pawn at a4 still saved him a rather safe draw in the endgame with rook, bishop and three pawns versus two rooks and two pawns.

CM Sauat Nurgaliev (2286) as white in a Sicilian Taimanov line against **FM Lukas Dotzer (2416)** played for a win with a kingside attack. When offered the chance, he still sacrificed a rook at g7 to force a draw by repetition within 25 moves. While 13 year old Dotzer got a pole-out tournament following a promising start, 12 year old Nurgaliev following a great first tournament at Fagernes was still in the run for an IM norm after round 8. The computer pairings for round 9 in this case however was extremely unlucky for the young title norm candidate as he needed a last round opponent with an ELO of at least 2399 to make an IM norm in case of a last round win – but instead got one at 2398 ...

The Swedish duel between **IM Erik Hedman (2323)** and **GM Stellan Brynell (2402)** made a fresh start with a Scandinavian opening in which white castled long. Following an early queen exchange the game was drawn upon white's suggestion after 13 moves, when white due to his pair of bishops had a very slight edge.

IM Kushagra Mohan (2400) and **Sanket Chakravarty (2327)** made a lively start, with a Sicilian game in which black after 13 moves had sacrificed a piece for one pawn to leave white's king in thin air at e2. Black reportedly was wrong to hit in with his bishop at b2 later on. White in turn found nothing better than tactical exchanges, resulting after 28 moves in an endgame with rook, bishop and three pawns against rook and six pawns. As black was helpful in exchanging his rook, the remaining endgame after 35 moves appeared close to winning for white. Black however succeeded in activating his pawn mass in the center, as white took a too long road around with his king to pick up the black pawn at a5. Black following this could activate his king and eliminate the remaining white pawns. Chakravarty following this somewhat shaky draw is in the run for his first IM-norm and can make it with a draw as white against FM Sambit Panda in the last round.



Mohan vs Chakravarty

GM Tiger Hillarp (2513) as white against **FM Saad Elmi (2321)** made a slow start with 1.e3. After realizing the d4 break he took back with the queen at d4 and then transported her around to h4. Black had some problems arranging his pieces in this uncommon position, and white got some attacking chances which increased as black weakened his kingside with 16...g6? White later picked up two pawns with an ongoing attack. Sacrificing a knight for some more pawns somehow should not be necessary in this position, but it still was enough to win the endgame.

IM Jonas Hacker (2455) as white in a Caro-Kann against **IM David Cummings (2318)** went for a rather patient set up with 2.Nf3 and 3.d3, and then accepted a queen exchange at d1. The players went almost directly to a rather symmetric endgame with two rooks, bishop and seven pawns on each side. This of course was drawish, although white had a space advantage and kept a slight initiative all into the bishop endgame. White in a slightly better position made a big decision when inviting a bishop exchange with 67.Bf6!? Cummings coolly exchanged the bishop and soon showed the pawn endgame to be a fortress draw despite white's protected passed pawn at f6.



Hacker vs Cummings

The generation duel between 59 year old **Johannes Hentrich (2166)** and 16 year old **FM Edvin Trost (2398)** made a relatively slow and long start, as a Caro-Kann in which white exchanged his knight at f6 to disrupt the black kingside pawn structure. Chances remained about balanced when white at move 23 exchanged his knight for black's light-squared bishop at g6, leaving an apparently drawish position with queen, two bishops and seven pawns against queen, bishop, knight and seven pawns. White even had the best pawn structure, as black unusually had two g-pawns and two f-pawns. Hentrich however made his own situation difficult when he decided not to exchange his light-squared bishop for the black knight at e6. White's weakened kingside with pawns at h3 and g4 gave black a strong knight square at f4. After white too easily gave up the h3-pawn, he soon drifted into a lost minor piece endgame.



Hentrich - Trost

The Catalan opening chosen by **WGM Teodora Injac (2391)** today did not give her much as white against **Håkon Bentsen (2088)**. Bentsen chose a solid closed set up and white's center pawns did not give her much after exchanging two sets of minor pieces. After white accepted to exchange the queens too, black was closer to an edge around move 25–40. White however creatively sacrificed a pawn at g5 to activate her pieces. Black's decision to sacrifice back the pawn here proved dubious, as white's more active pieces and better pawn structure soon gave her a decisive advantage in the rook and knight endgame. Injac as usual spent a lot of time and after 65 moves had only a few minutes left on the clock, but her fast running a-pawn at this stage made the winning maneuver rather elementary on the board.



Injac vs Bentsen

IM John-Paul Wallace (2384) versus **CM Chinguun Bayaraa (2203)** made a delayed and unfortunate start, as Wallace was the only player not aware that round 8 would start one hour earlier at 13.00. Walking outside with his recently arrived wife while the other players indoor made their opening moves, the Australian IM arrived some 50 minutes delayed and rather shocked. The opening still qualified as a success from a white point of view, as black after 1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 helpfully transposed into some kind of dubious Grünfeld in which black's pawn at e5 locked in his dark-squared bishop and gave white a strong passed pawn at d5. Black in the fourth hour had a hard time defending and remarkably now was slightly behind on the clock. White's delayed start still might have been decisive for the outcome as he with a few hours left on the clock allowed an interesting knight sacrifice with 33.--- Nxe4!.

Wallace's open king forced him to exchange the queens, leaving after 44 moves a complex position with rook, bishop and two pawns against rook and six pawns. Black's pawn armada for some moves gave him the better chances. The IM with two against one minute left on the clock after 62 moves still could sacrifice back his bishop to force a dead drawn rook endgame.

FM Alexander Øye-Strømberg (2329) and **Morten Andersen (2154)** discussed a Sicilian Kalashnikov, in which six of the eight minor pieces left before 15 moves. The remaining position with queen, two rooks, knight and seven pawns against queen, two rooks, bishop and seven pawns first was fine for black. Creative Øye-Strømberg however soon saw his chance to start tactical pawn exchanges and established a passed pawn at d5. Black's try for a tactical piece exchange was less impressive, as white soon came a pawn up with a winning advantage in a double rook endgame. Black following this anyway was lost when his tricky 40... Rxd5+? turned out to trick away one of his own rooks.



Øye-Strømberg vs Andersen

The teenager duel between **CM Juan Gomez Aguirre (2206)** and **Arhan Chethan Anand (2285)** was a Sicilian Alapin duel in which white answered 5... cxd4 with 6.Qxd4, leaving black with a center majority and white with the more active pieces. The position after 20 moves was double-edged as black due to his pawns at d5 and e5 was about to establish a notable space advantage, while his king at f7 was less secure than the white king at c1. Sacrificing a knight at e5 still was too lose from a white point of view. To get three pawns for the piece, white had to exchange off the queens, and after 40 moves the question was only whether white could scrape a draw by exchanging all the remaining pawns in an unusual endgame with two bishops and four pawns against two bishops, knight and two pawns. Black proved able to save his last queenside pawn while eliminating all the white pawns. White stopped the clock instead of sacrificing his last piece with 57.Bxb4, as this with his king stuck at a2 would lead to a forced mate within three more moves.



Gomez Aguirre vs Anand

The duel between 12 year old Norwegian **Evsuld Myagmarsuren (2139)** and 13 year old German **FM Magnus Ermitsch (2277)** saw a Sicilian opening with 2... a6, in which the strong knight outposts at d5 and f5 soon gave white a strong initiative after the light-squared bishops were exchanged. White had a close to winning advantage as he at move 19 could pick up a pawn at d6, but invited black into



Myagmarsuren vs Ermitsch
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

the ring again as he afterwards became too eager to exchange off the queens. Black in turn allowed a nice exchange sacrifice, after which white's passed queenside pawns soon forced black to return the exchange and fight on in a lost rook endgame.

39.f4! was an elegant move to cut the defence line between black's isolated pawn at g4 and his rook at a4, as 39... gxf3 e.p.? would now lose a rook after 40.Rxa4. Myagmarsuren later had no problems winning the rook endgame with two against zero kingside pawns, and heads for another solid plus result.

The Indian duel between **Pankit Mota (2101)** and **FM Sourath Biswas (2265)** was a Caro-Kann with 1.e4 c6 2.c4 d5, soon leading to a position with white defending two hanging center pawns at d4 and e3. Black due to his active pair of bishops soon got a promising attack here. As the kingside opened, white following an exchange sacrifice got some counterplay against the black king. Black however was a sound



Mota vs Biswas

exchange up after the queens left. With the white king stuck at h2, black after the first time control soon demonstrated a winning plan by doubling his rooks on the eight rank.

CM Adithya Chullikkad (2259) versus **CM Sverre Lye (2212)** was a tactical Sicilian Sveshnikov line, in which black despite his pair of bishops soon was in trouble due to his exposed king at e8. As black went for tactical counterplay with 17... e4?! 18.0-0 Bxc3 19.Rac1 Qf6, white reportedly could have got a winning attack by a difficult 20.Bxe4!! Instead 20.Be2? proved too slow, and black within a few moves could exchange down



Chullikkad vs Lye

to a drawish endgame with two rooks, bishop and five pawns on each side. As white accepted a loose passed pawn at c6 and soon lost this pawn in the bishop endgame, black was a sound pawn up when accepting a draw by repetition after 47 moves.

Shadi Sian (2137) versus **CM Andreas Skotheim (2228)** via 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 b6 transposed into some kind of Queen's Indian. The position suddenly turned into a structural nightmare for white as he very strangely played 14.gxf3? instead of the fairly sound 14.Nxf3. As black failed to find the best continuation afterwards white for some moves had an advantage according to the computers, but the double f-pawns weakened his pawn



Sian vs Skotheim

structure and made the king at e2 much too open. Although white was a pawn up with queen, two rooks and five pawns against queen, two rooks and four pawns after 25 moves, he still had the much more difficult position to play. As black exchanged one of the rooks at c1, 28.Qxc1? true enough was a blunder allowing 28... Rd3! with a winning attack. The correct 38.Rxc1 Qxh2+ however would have left white with a very difficult position to defend after returning the pawn.

Norwegian junior **Peder Marcus Aamodt (2022)** and American junior **Shelev Oberoi (2226)** also started up with 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 b6, although this game soon transposed into a more regular Queen's Indian. White after 20 moves had exchanged two knights for two bishops and due to his pawn at d5 had a space advantage. Still black due to his strong knight at c5 and chances for a kingside attack had the easier position to play. As black later was allowed to exchange one of his knight for white's dark-squared bishop at f4, black due to his better structure and safer king had a close to winning advantage. Black short of time however made some mistakes and allowed white to exchange the queens before 40 moves. The remaining endgame with rook, bishop and three pawns against rook, knight and three pawns was drawish. Entering an endgame with rook versus rook and d-pawn later should not have been necessary from a white point of view. Aamodt more or less confidently maneuvered his king in a safe position in front of black's remaining pawn and then demonstrated how a third rank defence in a rook endgame works out. Oberoi tends to play his games all out and this by far was the longest game of this round, although white after 111 moves finally got his well-deserved half point.



Aamodt vs Oberoi

Valentina Verbin (2071) versus **FM Emerik Roulet-Dubonnet (2215)** was another Classical Sicilian attacking race, in which white castled long and black short. White here first came ahead after 13.e5 followed by 15.f5 and 16.fxe6, establishing a backward black pawn at e6 as a promising attacking target. With both players spending a lot of time Verbin however played too slowly afterwards, allowing black to move the e-pawn forward and take over the initiative. 23.--- Nd7?? instead of 23.--- Ne4! in turn was an outright blunder from black, after which Verbin efficiently used her chance to win a full piece with 24.Qe7! Nb6 25.Rd6. The rest was only transport, and black of course was totally lost when he after 34 demonstratively blundered a mate on the first rank with 34.--- Be8? 35.Rxe8. Verbin following this win had a performance above 2250 before the last round, but still unfortunately had no chances for a WIM-norm because she had met too few heavy titleholders.



Verbin vs Roulet-Dubonnet

WIM Rucha Pujari (2195) as white against **Martin Øksendal (2060)** started up with 1.d4, but later went for a slow double fianchetto. The game later reached a somewhat Dutch-like landscape with about equal chances. With all 16 pawns still on the board white placed a knight at e5 which black exchanged and black put a knight at e4 which white exchanged. Left after 26 moves was an approximately balanced position with queen, two rooks, bishop and five pawns on each side. This was agreed a draw upon white's suggestion after 28 moves.



Pujari vs Øksendal

FM Mathias Unneland (2188) and **Vetle Bjørge Strand (2026)** investigated a rather boring English fianchetto line, looking all the more like a Grünfeld exchange line after 13.cxd5 cxd5. The players used the open c-file to exchange all the heavy pieces, after which a draw was agreed in a much too balanced double minor piece endgame after 22 moves.

FM Mahitosh Dey (2154) versus **Jonas Hodneland Rasmussen (1976)** was an apparently slow and safe Italian, accelerating as black around move 10–13 was too careless when opening the position. Although three sets of minor pieces were exchanged, white after 14.0-0-0 had both a space advantage and an initiative. Castling long probably still was an overreaction from a black point of view, as white could intervene on a7 with his queen and soon had a strong attack. Later white in short picked up two pawns and established a passed d-pawn which won a rook well before 40 moves.



Dey vs Rasmussen

Ben Samuel Groth Skaar (2103) and **Max Dahl (2152)** made a highly original start with some kind of declined Scandinavian opening after 1.e4 d5 2.Nc3. The players later reached a fairly balanced position resembling all the more a Caro-Kann. White due to his slightly better pawn structure and more active pieces suddenly was better in the rook and knight endgame, although black should be able to defend. With Dahl again running seriously short of time white for one move had a chance to win the knight with 36.d6! As Skaar with a lot of time on the clock played too fast, he missed that chance. Following this the players soon found themselves in a drawn pawn endgame.



Skaar vs Dahl

Monika Machlik (2136) needed a win as black against **Amadeus Hestvik Evenshaug (1930)** to keep her WIM-norm chances alive, and happily entered an attacking race as white castled long in a Caro-Kann. Black reportedly first had promising chances on the queenside, although white in the early fourth hour had succeeded in consolidating his king position at b5 and taken a pawn at h5 with his queen. With both players short of time white however started to move his pieces backwards. Black soon could take over the initiative as she opened the a-file for her rook with a5–a4 and opened the long diagonal for her bishop at g7 by forcing a tactical exchange of white's key pawn at d4. Black following this had a winning attack after 40 moves. Machlik as usual spent some 30 minutes for moves 41–45, but this time found the best moves and efficiently completed her attack against the white king at c1.



Machlik vs Evenshaug

25 year old Norwegian Monika Machlik after winning this game still was in the run for her third WIM-norm, but she needed in round 9 to defeat a GM, IM, WGM or WIM with an ELO of at least 2359. Unfortunately but not unexpectedly this turned out to be impossible, as the pairings for round 9 gave her an opponent just above 2200 without any of these titles.

Philip Rosol (2010) versus **IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2387)** was a Benkö Gambit in which white for some moves kept a slight initiative after black won back the pawn at b6. White however was too helpful by exchanging first the light-squared bishop at e6 and then the queens at d5, as black due to his better pawn structure and queenside pressure was better in the remaining position with two rooks, knight and six pawns against two rooks, bishop and six pawns. 28.Rxa4? although weakening further the pawn structure still could have given white fair chances for a draw, while the chosen 28.b4? after 28.--- a3! soon lost a pawn with a won endgame for black.

The teenager duel between **Manmay Chora (2113)** and **Sigurd Lye (1980)** saw another Sicilian with 3.Bb5+. In this version white kept the bishop with Ba4–Bc2 and held an initiative with some chances for a kingside attack.

14.f4? however was too weakening and offered black a lot of counterplay. Black in turn became too

greedy when snatching a pawn with 27.--- Nxe4?,

as white within a few moves won an exchange and reached a won endgame with queen, rook and five pawns against queen, bishop and five pawns. Sacrificing back an exchange later should not have been necessary from a white point of view. White however still was a pawn up in the queen endgame, with winning chances until he around move 52 overlooked or underestimated black's plan to exchange the queens and enter a drawn pawn endgame.



Chora vs Lye

Another teenager duel between Norwegian **Martin Holten Fiskaaen (2040)** and Maltesian **CM Jack Mizzi (2049)** saw another closed Catalan duel. In this one white accepted an inferior pawn structure by inviting a queen exchange at a3, although the pair of bishops still gave him a plus. 23.--- Ne4? blundered a pawn due to 24.Bxe4 Bxe4 25.Nc5. As white instead allowed black to exchange the knight for the dark-squared bishop at d2, the position for some moves was about balanced. Black later struggled with his passive light-squared bishop inside the pawn chain. As he finally succeeded in activating the bishop the endgame with bishop, knight and five pawns in each camp after 50 moves appeared drawish. Black however again became too passive, and following this white in the sixth hour could force an exchange of the bishops and then pick up various weak black pawns with his knight.

Michael Ermitsch (2047) versus **Sindre Ytrestøyl (1987)** was a Caro-Kann in which white's f4–f5 attack first did not give him much. As black hesitated to long with his king, white however still could pick up a pawn at f7 with a clear advantage after 20 moves. White for somewhat mysterious reasons decided to give back the pawn at a2, after which an approximately balanced position with queen, rook, knight and five pawns on each side was drawn upon white's suggestion after 33 moves.

17 year old **Ask Amundsen (1937)** as white against 12 year old **Jiahao Eric Ji (1959)** started up as a rare French with 3.Bd3, but black apparently knew what to do and had no problems equalizing. Draw was agreed by a sound repetition after 21 moves.

Eivind Grunt Kreken (2144) and **Alexander Rosol (2076)** started up with a Pirc but transposed into some kind of Philidor position, with a pleasant initiative for white. Weakening the kingside with g5 here clearly was not recommendable from a black point of view, as white within a few moves picked up the g5-pawn with a winning attack.

White and his dominating pieces soon could pick up another pawn at d6, and went on to win more heavy material before 40 moves.



Kreken vs Rosol

Linus Sandstad (1912) versus **Saketh Pedagandham (2074)** was a closed Catalan in which black did perfectly fine after exchanging one set of minor pieces plus the light-squared bishops. Exchanging the dark-squared bishop for a knight at c3 probably was to overdo it, as white later got a pleasant pressure against black's hanging pawns at c5 and d5.

Black still was in the game until a much too risky 26... Qxb3?, leaving his queen trapped at a3 within five more moves.



Sandstad vs Pedagandham

Open Group

The Open saw another sudden change on the top boards today, as 13 year old **Rafe Rehman (1824)**, won a tight middle game battle against 66 year old **Tim Spanton (1806)**. White in the fourth hour managed to open the queenside and win decisive material.



Rehman vs Spanton

The second board duel between **Rune Kleiven Rynning (1681)** and **Dag Arild Andersen (1776)** became a double-edged tactical battle as white with 18.g4? invited the black knight to jump into g3. 18.-- Nfh4! actually would have given black the better kingside attack, and even after sacrificing an exchange at f3, black for many moves was better. The knight at g3 however had no retreat squares, and both players reportedly believed the position was better for white. Under mutual time pressure in the fourth hour white finally picked up the knight and came a full rook up with an obviously winning position.



Rynning vs Andersen

Meanwhile even another player registered for the top three run as the 30 year old Oslo school teacher **Sondre Stai (1722)** turned a dubious opening into a 27-move win as black against **Sigurd Lauvås Gaure (1616)**. White here became too eager to snatch a pawn at h7, and after coolly picking up the piece at g6 black soon turned the open kingside lines against white's king.

On the fourth board Norwegian **Eivind Jiabao Ji (1704)** as white against Mongolian **Bayaraa Bilguun (1267)** won a more or less one way driven attacking race, leading to a won pawn endgame after the time control.

Eivind Reigstad (1594) on the fifth board won a more shaky attacking battle as white against **Ida Lahlum (1628)**. Black here missed some chances along the road, but white still won well deserved as he was better most of the time and in the final moves after the first time control won massive material.

The position of first rated **Jon Arne Stokhaug (1843)** as white against **Erlend Entner (1571)** notably went from dubious and material down to winning with much material up between move 25 and move 30, although this full point still was too little and too late for Stokhaug if we talk about the top three prizes.

Most games on the lower board had an expected outcome. Eleven year old **Henrik Nome (1073)** however again demonstrated himself to be strongly underrated, and today won as black in a fascination generation duel against almost 60 years older **Terje Lie (1330)**.

Notably the first nine boards and all but three of the 21 games in the Open got a winner today. The final game of the round still was an exciting six hours endgame draw between **Elma Selvik (1623)** and **Sara Gilsdottir (1422)**. In a complex endgame with rooks and opposite-coloured bishops, Elma under mutual time pressure played very well as she forced her opponent to give up the bishop for the two connected passed pawns. As Elma with bishop and two queenside pawns against three kingside pawns much too carelessly exchanged off one of her pawns, Sara could save a draw due to the well known defence with king versus light-squared bishop and h-pawn. Following this we can expect a tight run for the best woman prize in the last round, as Ida Lahlum and Bilguun Bayaraa at 4.5/8 are leading just ahead of Selvik and Gilsdottir at 4.0.

No way to forget we expect a thriller finish for the top three prizes in the Open as Rehman, Stai and Rynning are now sharing the lead at 6.0/8, only half a point ahead of Reigstad, Spanton and Jiabao. Final top board pairings coming up for round 9 are Stai white against Rehman, Reigstad white against Rynning and Spanton white against Ji.



Round 8
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

3 photos by Anniken Vestby (credited) and the rest by Tom Eriksen