

# FAGERNES CHESS INTERATIONAL 2023

## THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

# 9



### GM Group

This year's GM group had a remarkable fighting spirit even in the last round. The first-board duel between GM Eduardas Rozentalis and GM Abhimanyu Puranik true enough was a safe and solid 17 moves draw, but all the three next boards within a few hours got a winner.

The 24 year old Turkish GM Vahap Sanal completed a great tournament by squeezing a win out of a long endgame against the 16 year old Indian IM Aditya Mittal. The strong Indian junior team had a disappointing day on the top boards, as 19 year old IM Koustav Chatterjee also wasted a GM norm chance by losing as black against Armenian GM Samvel Ter-Sahakyan. 29 year old and second rated Ter-Sahakyan however won this game well deserved following a crushing attack. Sanal and Puranik started up the tournament with four won games before a long internal draw in round five. Later both all of the time played on the top boards. Following this it feels very well deserved that they in the end shared the first and second prize with an outstanding 7.5/9, while Ter-Sahakyan finished an unshared third at 7.0/9. All three of them remained undefeated throughout the tournament, succeeding in playing very solidly while at the same time winning many games.



Ter-Sahakyan, Puranik and Sanal

First rated GM Sethuraman Sethuraman following a jumpy tournament after all became the best player from India, as he after winning his last round game against IM Linus Johansson reached 6.5/9 and shared the fourth and fifth prize with Rozentalis. The two remaining top seven prizes were shared between eight players all reaching 6.0/9. Best woman prize despite an uphill tournament was won by Polish GM Monika Socko, reaching 5.5/9 as she today won a tense five and a half hour final game as white against Indian WGM Pallathur Nandhidhaa. WGM Vantika Agrawal lost as black against GM Kaido Kulaots, but still won the money prize for best Elo performance among the female players.

Although Mittal and Chatterjee both missed the GM norm with the bitter half point, the title norm candidates all taken together had a fairly good last round. Norwegian IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen completed his second GM norm following a short and solid last round draw.

Keeping aside WGM Vantika Agrawal and FM Aksel Bu Kvaløy, as both had completed their IM- norms before losing in the last round, four other players reached the score needed to make an IM-norm. The junior team of India here had a great round as 16 year old WIM Savitha Shri Baskar, 18 year old FM Tanmay Chopra and 19 year old Sanket Chakravarty without too many problems got the draws needed for a norm. Today's biggest norm hero still was the 16 year old Israeli FM Benny Aizenberg: Winning a firework game as black against GM Raja Rithvik Rajavaram meant that Aizenberg not only scored his third IM norm, but also completed the title by passing 2400!

As Baskar also made her decisive third WGM-norm, the total number of title norms in this tournament was eight. Fairly illustrating for a field with a majority of teenagers, Kaasen aged 20 was the oldest among the successful title norm hunters. Headed by Rozentalis, the four veteran players however all reached a score above expected.

16 year old Norwegian Shazil Shehzad failed the IM-norm demand as he could not win a promising double rook endgame against Swedish GM Tiger Hillarp, but still can be congratulated as an FM as he passed 2300 after winning nearly 100 Elo points. 12 year old Sauat Nurgaliev of Kazakhstan also completed his FM-title, as he passed 2300 with a solid margin despite the last round loss.

The first board duel between Lithuanian **GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2504)** and Indian **GM Abhimanyu Puranik (2599)** made a safe positional start with a Sicilian Alapin, in which the queens were exchanged at d8 before 10 moves.

Black after exchanging the dark-squared bishops at e3 had slightly the better pawn structure and did fine with his active king

at e7. Draw agreed upon black's suggestion after 17 moves, as he had a slight initiative on the board while white had a solid position and half an hour extra on the clock.

23 year old Puranik passed his second Fagernes tournament also undefeated, and at 7.5/9 shared first prize with a performance of 2732. Rozentalis finishing fourth undefeated at 6.5/9 with a performance of 2614 arguably was an even more positive surprise.



**Rozentalis vs Puranik**

**GM Vahap Sanal (2582)** as white against **IM Aditya Mittal (2505)** made a slow start with 4.e3 in a Declined Queen's Gambit, locking in the bishop at c1 before black had played c6. Mittal in turn took a modest decision to exchange at c4, after which play more or less transposed into an Accepted Queen's Gambit. Black first was close to equal after



**Sanal vs Mittal**

exchanging off the queens at d1, but as he weakened his kingside with a f5–f4 advance white still was somewhat better after 26 moves. About to lose his pawn at f4, black went for complications with 27... Bxh4?!, but white had available 28.Rxc6! and soon won two minor pieces for rook and pawn with a big advantage. A further application for tactical complications from black resulted in a further loss of material, leaving white a piece up in the rooks and minor pieces endgame.

Winning this endgame after 53 moves, Sanal in short also reached 7.5/9 and won the tournament due to his higher Elo performance of 2758. Despite a disappointing start on the new chess year, Sanal following this great result at Fagernes is back around 2600.

16 year old Mittal was unlucky to get two black games in a row for the final rounds, and following this missed a GM-norm by half a point. Fortunately the norm was not needed as he is already qualified for the title, and a performance of 2561 still won him 7 more Elo points. In a remarkable illustration of this very international tournament, Mittal played opponents from nine different federations – Norway as the host federation by the way was not one of them.

**GM Samvel Ter-Sahakyan (2613)** meanwhile played for a win in a patient mood as white against **IM Koustav Chatterjee (2520)**, in a closed Ruy Lopez where no piece or pawn left the board for the first 14 moves. As white played 15.Nh4!? black made a dubious decision to go for a tactical 15... Nxe4?, as white within four moves had a very dangerous attack against the black king.

After white sacrificed a rook with 21.Rxh7+!, black had to return the queen for a knight to avoid mate. White following this had queen against rook and knight with a won position after 25 moves.

About to lose a rook or run into a mating attack, black stopped the clock only five moves later on. Ter-Sahakyan undefeated at 7.0/9 with a performance of 2641 made a great first tournament at Fagernes, although it only gave an unshared third place due to the even more memorable results of Puranik and Sanal.

Chatterjee like Mittal just missed the GM-norm as he lost his first game of the week as black in round 9. This of course was more painful as he was not safely qualified for the GM title yet. Chatterjee with a performance of 2597 still won 9.6 more Elo points. He can already now be congratulated with the GM title as he in Menorca immediately after Fagernes finished shared first at 7.0/9 with a performance close to 2700, scoring his final GM-norm with a half point overscore.



**GM Sethuraman Sethuraman (2639)** versus **IM Linus Johansson (2463)** was a closed Catalan in which black placed his bishop at d6, provoking white to play c5 with a queenside space advantage. Black by a b6 counterbreak soon exchanged the c5 pawn, although white in the meantime played e4 and e5 with a big space advantage. Black succeeded in exchanging queens, but white instead went for a queenside win as he kept an extra pawn at a5. White later spent some time on the clock but pushed the fast forward key on the board by cleaning the b-file. Black after 26 moves stopped the clock as he was about to lose a piece. Remarkably, if taking white's nasty knight with 26.--- Bxc8 black for a moment would have had all this six remaining pieces on his first rank, but was doomed to lose two of the within the next two moves. First rated Sethuraman lost two games and five Elo points on this Fagernes visit, but winning six games he in the end finished shared fourth and won a money prize. Producing only one draw within nine rounds, he won the highly inofficial prize of the hardest fighter on top ten. Johansson also had only one draw for nine rounds, and at 5.5/9 landed exactly on his expected score.



**Sethuraman vs Johansson**

**IM Elham Abdulrauf (2519)** versus **GM Erik Blomqvist (2523)** was a Sicilian Taimanov line duel in which white both before and after a queen exchange had some kingside attack with pawns at f4 and g4. Black got a loose isolated pawn at c4, but the pair of bishops still gave him fair chances after 17 moves. Following sensible exchanges from both players, the game reached a dead opposite-coloured bishop endgame which was immediately buried after 27 moves. Still no GM-norm, but still a few more Elo points for 18 year old Abdulrauf at 6.0/9. Blomqvist at the same sum of points remained undefeated throughout nine rounds, but created too few winning chances to reach top five this time and finished just below his expected score.

**IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2462)** as white against **GM Bartosz Socko (2601)** entered a solid and Classical line in a Nimzo-Indian, in which the queens and two sets of minor pieces soon disappeared. White due to his better pawn structure still was very slightly better when he offered and got accepted a draw after 15 moves. Kaasen following his loss from round eight of course was very happy to complete his second GM norm with 6.0/9 and a performance of 2607. Socko probably was relieved to finish a disappointing tournament with a fairly solid result at 5.5/9. A performance below 2500 of course is never satisfying for a 2600-player, although Socko handled this set back as a true chess gentleman and praised organizers as well as opponents.



**Kaasen vs Socko**

**IM Moksh Amit Doshi (2397)** and **GM Frode Urkedal (2527)** discussed a positional Anti-Meran line in the Semi-Slav. White had a slight plus first due to the pair of bishops, and with queens, rooks and opposite-coloured bishops due to his attacking chances with pawns at e5 and f5. Black however had a long term asset in his passed pawn at c4. The game was agreed a draw after 32 moves as black would be slightly better in case of a queen exchange, while white could not easily avoid both a repetition and the black invitations for a queen exchange.

20 year old Doshi despite a slow start finished slightly above his expected score, while Urkedal also at 5.5/9 was very slightly below his.

Ukrainian **IM Semen Mitusov (2412)** as white in a Sicilian against Swedish **IM Jung Min Seo (2500)** today went for 2.Be2 and 3.f4. White's chances for a kingside attack halted as he accepted an early queen exchange as b3, after which black due to his better structure and pair of bishops did fine. White's pair of knights however was not inferior to black's pair of bishops in such a closed position, and the game slowly petered out with a draw early in the sixth hour.



**Mitusov vs Seo**

17 year old war refugee Mitusov although still waiting for his first GM-norm won 10 Elo points with a strong performance of 2485 this week. Seo remained undefeated, but winning only two games he lost a few Elo points and was never really in the run for his final GM norm.

**GM Kaido Kulaots (2494)** versus **WGM Vantika Agrawal (2407)** was a Sicilian Moscow variation with 3.Bb5+, reaching a Maroczy bind as white later played c4. White played f4 with a space advantage, but after exchanging two sets of minor pieces black due to his knight at c5 was close to equal. 23... d5? in this case however was a blunder, as white after a straightforward 24.exd5 exd5 25.b4! could take a sound pawn with 26.Rxd5. White later used the key square at e4 as a springboard for a kingside attack and before 40 moves won a knight. 47 year old Kulaots reached 6.0/9 and a small money prize following a strong spurt with 2.5/3, but still finished just below his expected score. 20 year old Agrawal on the other hand lost both her final games, but still scored another IM-norm and was a full point above her expected score.



**Kulaots vs Agrawal**

**GM Raja Rithvik Rajavaram (2472)** and **FM Benny Aizenberg (2366)** together blew up the c-, d- and e-pawns in this very Modern opening, leaving a very open and about equal position. White here lagged some 20 minutes behind on the clock and the pair of bishops was an asset for black. The position then suddenly exploded as black gave up his queen for bishop, knight, pawn and some attack against the airy white king at g1. Black's brave play was rewarded as white in a high voltage position lost the thread with 33.Qd6?, allowing black to win a rook for his knight and activate his bishops for a powerful attack against the white king. Rajavaram stopped the clock after 45 moves, as he was about to lose another piece and leave his loyal queen completely overworked. 16 year old Aizenberg following this creative win got a last round jackpot as he made his third IM- norm and won 37 Elo points, passing 2400 for the first time. Aizenberg following this can be congratulated as qualified for the IM-title. Rajavaram had a very solid result as undefeated at 5.0/7, but losing both this last games he still dropped a few Elo points.

Armenian **IM Emin Ohanyan (2434)** as white against Norwegian **FM Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2266)** first hinted of a London system, but then accelerated in the center with c4. Black obviously underestimated the dangers here as white after 23 moves was a pawn up with a dominating pair of bishops and a strong



**Ohanyan vs Kvaløy**

attack against black's weakened kingside. Ohanyan however had spent a lot of time on the clock and failed to find the best continuation afterwards. Black following this before 40 moves escaped into a rook endgame with two against three pawns – probably drawn due to white's weak pawn structure with two g-pawns. Although white soon won a second pawn, black's passed pawn at c3 combined with white's poor structure reportedly could have been sufficient for a draw after the time control. 42.--- c2? however here was a classical mistake, as white with his rook in an active position behind the pawn at c6 could now safely push his scattered kingside pawns forward.

No GM-norm this week, but a performance above 2500 still gave another solid plus result for 16-year old Ohanyan. 14-year old Kvaløy despite his last round loss reached a performance of 2502, and made his second IM-norm with half a point overscore in his so far best international result.



While Kvaløy needed only to show up for the game to make his second IM-norm today, his team mate **Shazil Shehzad (2212)** needed to defeat **GM Tiger Hillarp (2513)**. 16 year old Shehzad gave it a try and played for a win, with another Moscow Sicilian, transposing into a Maroczy bind. Black's decision to give up his pawn at d6 in exchange for the white pawn at e4 reportedly



**Shehzad vs Hillarp**

was dubious. As white missed the most critical continuation, his position with two rooks, bishop and five pawns against two rooks, knight and five pawns after 26 moves reportedly was fine.

The GM however was short of time at that stage, and due to white's two against one pawn majority on the queenside black still had some defence work to do. Exchanging off the minor pieces and then putting a rook behind white's passed pawn at a4 was dubious from a black point of view. It still worked out well as white found no way forward and accepted a draw by repetition in a double rook endgame which still was close to winning if white had found the best plan with 35.Re2 Re4 36.f3! Shehzad with a performance of 2431 failed the IM-norm, but at the same time won 98 new Elo points and qualified for the FM-title. His Elo gain by far was the biggest of this GM group. Hillarp on the other hand made a depressive result, finishing 39th with a performance just above 2300 and dropping below 2500 as he lost 20 Elo points.

**Sanket Chakravarty (2327)** versus **FM Sambit Panda (2452)** was a Classical French duel, drawn by a well known repetition after 15 moves. White's lack of ambitions in this final white game of course was very understandable, taking into account that a draw was sufficient for his first IM norm. Chakravarty's tournament performance true enough was «only» 2444 following this draw, but he still had a perfectly safe IM norm as his much lower-rated first-round opponent for the norm performance can count for 2050 – increasing his average with 14 points.

Chakravarty won 29 Elo points with this result. Winning some 27 points more as he missed the IM-norm with half a point in the following Menorca tournament, 19 year old Chakravarty now returns to India as a hot IM candidate. 18 year old Panda struggled too hard to win games in his first Fagernes tournament and finished with a performance just above 2300, but fortunately he is anyway qualified for the IM title.

Swedish **IM Hampus Sörensen (2448)** and Serbian **WGM Teodora Injac (2391)** discussed a closed Catalan in which black went for 4... Bb4+ and then after 5.Bd2 replied with 5... Be7!? White won the pair of bishops after intervening at c6 with his knight, although black took over the open c-file and was perfectly fine after 20 moves. White however later got a slight pressure against black's advanced pawn at b4 and her fixed backward pawn at a6.



**Sörensen vs Injac**

Both players missed a nice tactical 30.e4!, which could have given white a decisive advantage as black would have to give up her key pawn at a6. White still kept a pressure, which turned into a winning advantage as black short of time instead lost her b4 pawn a few moves later on. The queen and knight endgame after the first time control following this was winning for white, although black shortened the game by trapping her own knight at e2. 19 year old Sörensen following this win finished just above expected score in his first tournament at Fagernes, while Injac following this loss dropped just below.

**GM Monika Socko (2440)** versus **WGM Pallathur Nandhidhaa (2362)** was a tight five and a half hour chess queen battle, which turned out to be decisive for the best woman prize. Socko as white in a Nimzo-Indian honoured the legendary Polish world star Akiba Rubinstein by playing his line with 4.e3. Here however this brought white nothing but a lot of exchanges. As white had two isolated b-pawns, black if anyone was better with queen, rook, bishop, knight and six pawns on each side after 20 moves. Although white got some counterplay in the d-file after



**Socko vs Nandhidhaa**

exchanging the final pair of knights as well, chances were in balance after 30 moves. Running short of time for 40 moves, Nandhidhaa however overlooked a cold shower 36.Bxe6! which won a pawn for white. Black despite her time shortage defended well and creatively with 40... Bxh3!?

To avoid a perpetual check white had to give up several pawns, leading after 52 moves to a balanced if still lively position with queen, bishop and two pawns against queen and five pawns. Exchanging the queens here looked risky from a black point of view due to her weak pawns and white's more active king. According to the computers this still should have been sufficient for a draw. The critical moment came after 61. Bxh5, when white had bishop and two pawns against three pawns. Now 61... a4! 62.Bd1 g4 still would have forced an exchange of the remaining white pawns. 61... g4? on the other hand turned out to be the wrong move order due to 62.hxg4 a4 63.gxf5! a3 66.Ke5 a2 67.f6+ Kd8 68.Kd6 with the threat of 69.e7+. Socko made a very efficient use of this last chance, and following an uphill tournament after all became the only woman player at 5.5/9 – winning alone the best woman prize of 350 Euros. Nandhidhaa was not too sad about the lost IM-norm as she reportedly has five such norms already. Losing this game left her without any prize, although she still won five more Elo points.



**IM Mohammad Fahad Rahman (2396)** of Bangladesh and **IM Prraneeth Vuppala (2437)** of India discussed a rare Ragozin line of a Queen's Gambit, in which black first equalized and then came better as white weakened his position with an overambitious 15.f4?! Black for some moves had a pleasant pressure against white's backward pawn at e3. White proved able to exchange this following a tactical e4-break, after which the endgame with two rooks, bishop and five pawns on each side was drawish. Both players fought on to the bitter end of this tournament, but a draw finally was agreed after 51 moves as the players were about to run out of pawns in the rook endgame. Rahman following this landed as expected. 16 year old Vuppala disappointedly lost some 12 Elo point in his first Fagernes tournament. No way losing his optimism, he within the next seven days won back 17 Elo-points when finishing only half a point behind a GM norm in the Menorca tournament.

**FM Jens Evang Ingebretsen (2345)** versus **IM Zhen Yu Cyrus Low (2425)** started up with 1.c4, but transposed into some relative of Grünfeld-Indian as white later pushed the d-pawn forward to d4. Black found sound positions for his pieces with a bishop at d5 and knight at c4. Following this white's plan of a kingside attack turned out to be over-ambitious, and black was clearly better as he after 24 moves had redirected his knight to f5. Now 25.Rxg6+? would have worked out very well if black had taken the rook, but as he instead found the cunning 25.--- Kh7!, black soon could pick up the rook and then evacuate his king to d7. Low as the only Singapore representative in our tournament had many exciting tactical games, but in the end landed exactly on his expected score with 5.5/9. 19 year old Ingebretsen was never really in the for his third IM-norm this tournament, but despite this last round loss he at 4.5/9 reached a solid performance of 2317.



**Ingebretsen vs Low**

13 year old Austrian **FM Lukas Dotzer (2416)** and 14 year old German **FM Bennet Hagner (2354)** not unexpectedly entered a long Sicilian Najdorf duel. Black appeared to have the better preparation here, as he following an early queen exchange took over the initiative. As black had difficulties finding any active plan in a double-edged position, white came better after occupying the c6 outpost with his knight and kicking away black's knight from c5 with 30.b4. Dotzer however in turn lost the thread as he ran seriously short of time, helpfully opening the center and kingside for an intervention from the black pieces.



**Dotzer vs Hagner**  
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

After the time control black following this had a dangerous attack against the white king, and he soon won decisive material.

Hagner at 5.5/9 after all won a few Elo points following this last round result, while Dotzer after winning his first two games had a pole-out tournament. Playing for a win in long and hard-fought games almost every round, this remarkable young chess fighter still contributed a lot to the entertainment of the tournament.

**WIM Savtiha Shri Baskar (2411)** versus **IM Erik Hedman (2323)**

was an apparently lively Sicilian Kan duel, turning messy as white gave up her pawn at e4 for a black pawn at g7. Then a draw suddenly was agreed after 18 moves, upon white's suggestion.

Hedman understandably was satisfied to get a draw as black against a higher rated player with some 25 minutes less on the clock, and Baskar very



**Baskar**

**(Photo: Anniken Vestby)**

understandably was eager to confirm her first IM-norm. 16 year old Baskar at 5.0/9 shared the best woman second prize and at 2466 made her best 9-round title tournament so far. Feelings still were a bit mixed following her fantastic start with 3.0/3. For sure this young chess queen has potential for a GM norm already this year. 47 year old Hedman apparently had some kind of reaction after completing his IM title a few years ago, but won back a few more Elo points with a performance of 2333 this week.

**GM Stellan Brynell (2402)** and **FM Tanmay Chopra (2351)** made six rather positional moves each in a delayed Sicilian Alapin, and then upon black's suggestion agreed a draw. 18 year old Chopra obviously was very happy to secure his first IM norm with this black draw, reaching 5.0/9 with a performance of 2453. Winning 26 more Elo points, he also moved much closer to the 2400 border. Never a fan of morning rounds, now 60 year old Brynell had no chances for a money prize and was satisfied to leave Fagernes with a few more Elo points.

**Johannes von Mettenheim (2317)** as white in a Dutch Leningrad against **IM Kushagra Mohan (2400)** chose a fianchetto line as his weapon. As black failed to come up with any really dangerous attack on the kingside, white first got a positional queenside pressure and then won a pawn. White due to his queenside pawn majority appeared close to winning with queen, rook, bishop and five pawns against queen, rook, bishop and four pawns after 33 moves. Running short of time, white however allowed black to create a lot of counterplay with a tactical 34... f3! A tense struggle followed in the fifth hour as white succeeded in consolidating his position with two extra pawns. His search for an attack however failed as black's acrobat king via h5 and f4 joined his attacking forces.

Von Mettenheim returned two of his three extra pawns to exchange queens, after which black due to his active pieces played for a win with rook, bishop and two pawns against rook, bishop and three pawns. After 75 moves the remaining endgame with rook, bishop and one pawn on each side of course was a draw, although black's running h-pawn gave him the much better practical chances. As white again running short of time accepted to trade the bishops, the remaining rook endgame soon resulted in a rook versus pawn endgame which was winning for black with a one tempo margin. Mohan however chose the wrong plan, wasted his extra tempo and allowed black to escape into a drawn endgame with knight against rook after the saving 98.f8N+! (while instead 98.f8Q?? would have been refuted by 98.--- Rc8 mate). Mohan played on for 12 moves more but then sportily offered a draw not to delay the prize giving further – as his young opponent obviously knew very well how to defend such a position with knight on f8 and king on e8 against rook and king. Aged 14, von Mettenheim despite a slow start succeeded in making a small plus out of this. 18 year old Mohan with a performance of 2404 made an average result for his high level.

The young lions **FM Edvin Trost (2398)** and **CM Sauat Nurgaliev (2286)** for sure both before the tournament had a good hope to make an IM-norm out of this. Trost was considered the stronger candidate before the tournament, following a remarkable 8.0/9 in the Swedish League. Nurgaliev however had been the stronger candidate during the tournament, and in the bitter end would have had norm chances if playing a last-round opponent with 2399 instead



**Trost vs Nurgaliev**

of 2398. The players still made a hard-fought last round battle out of this King's Indian fianchetto, reaching a Maroczy-like landscape. White here first had a slight pressure against black's backward pawn at d6, and then picked up white's a-pawn with a straightforward 19.Bb6 and 21.Bxa5. Black came up with some counterplay and still had some hope for a draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops. As black was about to run short of time for 40 moves white however efficiently used his chance to increase the pressure with a tactical 33.e5!?, soon winning a second pawn after a dubious 33.--- d5? Trost later had it all under control and by strong attacking moves he won heavy material after the first time control.

No IM-norm but still a new title for 12 year old Sauat, as he following this result is at 2325 and well qualified for the FM-title. Trost was never really in the run for an IM-norm after more or less sensationally losing his first round game. Scoring 5.5/9 with only one draw, he despite winning his last three games lost 11,6 Elo points with a performance of 2330. During the following tournament in Menorca, Trost however won back all the Elo and passed the 2400 border, although finishing at 2399 and failing the IM norm with half a point. He remains a very hot IM candidate and one of the most promising Swedish juniors.



**Arhan Chethan Anand (2285)** and **IM Jonas Hacker (2455)** meanwhile discussed a positional Queen's Gambit line with Bf4. The conclusion became that black had no problems after exchanging the c- and d-pawns, although all the more pieces left the board. After 33 moves the players had reached a drawish endgame with queen, bishops and six pawns on each side.

As white accepted to exchange the queens as well, the remaining bishop endgame was dangerous for him due to black's more active king. Hacker towards the end of a disappointing tournament however failed to test the critical plans here, and offered a draw after 55 moves. 14 year old Arhan Anand with a performance of 2265 finished half a point below expected in his first Fagernes tournament, but still introduced himself as a very talented young teenager. Hacker won his first two games but later had nightmare results, and with a performance of 2280 he finished two points below expected. The 27 year old German IM before leaving Fagernes sportily praised the organizers as well as his opponents, blaming no one but himself for the disappointing performance.



**Anand vs Hacker**

**IM Shete Sammed (2454)** versus **Evsuld Myagmarsuren (2139)** was a Sicilian Najdorf duel in which white got a pleasant queenside pressure, much due to black's too advanced pawn at b3. White's position objectively was more or less winning after he picked up the pawn just before 20 moves, although he still had to watch out for black's thematic kingside counterplay. Shete finished off this game in a great style as he after picking up a second pawn at d6 sacrificed an exchange at f6. Black soon had to pay back the exchange, after which white's passed c- and d-pawns were absolutely

decisive in the remaining queen and rook position. 23 year old Shete Sammed apparently was more fascinated by the snow than his games during his first tournament at Fagernes. Still fighting many long games to the bitter end on the board, he had only lower rated opponents and in the end finished at 5.0/9 with a performance of 2333. 12 year old Myagmarsuren despite this last round set back could be proud of his 4.0/9, and a performance of 2237 gave him 42 new Elo points. Noteworthy, both players here completed their nine rounds without a draw.



**Sammed vs Myagmarsuren**

**FM Sourath Biswas (2265)** as white against **IM John-Paul Wallace (2384)** first hinted of a London system with 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4, but soon played c4 and transposed into some kind of Benoni-like position. Circumstances soon turned out to be favourable for white, as he after placing one knight on c6 and the other at b5 soon got crushing pressure against black's backward key pawn at d6.



**Biswas**  
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

Black tried to achieve counterplay by pseudo-sacrificing a knight at e6, but resigned as he after 33 moves was an exchange down in a wrecked position. For 18 year old Biswas, this Norwegian chess adventure was also his first tournament ever in Europe. Following a slow start he repaired much by winning the last three games, and in the end finished just below his expected score. Biswas continued his progress from the last rounds at Fagernes during the following Menorca tournament, and all taken together made a solid plus out of the travel. Wallace was never close to his amazing play from the GM norm in Kragerø two months ago, but still had a sound and average result at 3,5/7. Finishing with 0.5/2 against two lower rated opponents, he ended up more than a full point below expected.

**CM Andreas Skotheim (2228)** versus **FM Alexander Øye-Strømberg (2329)** was a closed Ruy Lopez duel in which white kept a slight edge after exchanging two sets of minor pieces. White after 19 moves was slightly better, but still happy to settle for a draw and solid plus result. 23 year old Skotheim made a solid plus with a performance of 2294, while still 17 year old Øye-Strømberg some weeks after his first IM norm of course could not be satisfied with a performance just below 2200. His always creative chess still contributed a lot to the tournament.

**IM David Cummings (2318)** and **Valentina Verbin (2071)** discussed an English Four Knights system in which white pseudo-sacrificed a knight at e5 in move 5. After this all the knights left the board before 10 moves, leaving an approximately balanced position in which white's more active pieces just about compensated for his inferior structure with two isolated c-pawns. Both players spent just above half an hour for the first 15 moves and then agreed a draw in a roughly balanced position still known from opening theory.

62 year old Cummings made seven draws and in the end landed about as expected at 4.5/9. Notably, the Canadian veteran started up with a draw against three GMs and his tournament performance of 2378 put him first among equals in the always big group at 4.5/9.

Valentina Verbin, a 20 year old Moldavian (living in Norway due to her very close relations with a Norwegian IM whom made a GM norm this tournament), was among the surprising faces at 4.5/9. This was her so far best result from a title tournament, with a performance of 2259.

Verbin's result obviously is not a WIM norm following the current FIDE title rules. One can however easily argue that this is unfair and demonstrates a weakness in these rules. Verbin's performance was above the 2250 required for a WIM norm. The title rules demands opponents from three different countries; she played opponents from seven different countries. The title rules demands five opponents with a qualifying title; she played six. The final hurdle here is the demand for «heavy titleholders»:



**Verbin**

**(Photo: Anniken Vestby from round 8)**

To make a WIM-norm you must play three opponents with title GM, IM, WGM and WIM. IM Cummings was the only opponent Verbin had with one of these titles, and following this her result does not qualify as a WIM-norm. Verbin instead played five players with the FM title. If two of them instead had a WIM title, then her result would have been a WIM norm. This of course all would have been fair enough if a WIM title had been more difficult to achieve than the FM title. But the opposite actually is a case: You need an Elo of 2300 to become a FM, compared to only 2200 for a WIM title. True enough to become a WIM you also need three title norms, but as the norm performance demand here is only 2250, the demand for an Elo of 2200 is almost universally considered the main challenge for that title. Three of the FMs Verbin played against by the way had an Elo above 2350. I have for a long time considered it dubious not to allow the FM title to count on the heavy title demand for WIM norms. Verbin not getting a norm for this result definitely strenghtens my worries about this situation. With the current rules, a very strong Swiss tournament like this actually can reduce the chances for WIM norm candidates, as you can (again illustrated by this case) reach a performance of 2250 while playing on the lower half of the boards. Anyway: Valentina Verbin can be congratulated for a very good result and accelerated her patient progress as she now crossed 2100 for the first time. If reaching 2200, she will hopefully leave at least three WIM norms along the road.

**CM Chinguun Bayaraa (2203) and FM Saad Elmi (2321)** today discussed an Open Catalan. Elmi appeared to have prepared the better arguments, as black soon came ahead on the clock as well as on the board. White here spent too much time to win back the pawn at c4. Black in the meantime established a space advantage on the queenside and put his light-squared bishop in an active position at a6. White's apparently active knight at c4 here did not give him much as black could play 17.--- Nb6 followed by 18.--- Nxc4, leaving black with the more active pieces and a passed pawn at b4.



**Elmi**

**(Photo: Anniken Vestby)**



Allowing white to exchange the dark-squared bishops at d4 here was a good decision, as black's apparently loose new pawn at d4 soon became dangerous. Black's position turned winning as he soon afterwards won white's pawn at c4. As Bayaraa was running seriously short of time in a wrecked position, he blundered a piece after 33 moves and stopped the clock instead of making his move 37. 4.5/9 with a performance of 2323 was exactly as expected for still unpredictable Elmi, following a turbulent tournament with four won and four lost games. Despite this disappointing last round game, Bayaraa at 4.0/9 with a performance of 2303 won 46 more Elo points and prolonged his remarkable progress in 2023.

**Morten Andersen (2156)** versus **CM Adithya Chullikkad (2259)** was an English fianchetto in which black equalized without any pressure, and then established a small space advantage with e5–e4. Black after exchanging one set of knight plus the light-squared bishops was slightly better when offering a draw after 19 moves, although white's position was solid. 62 year old Andersen was the oldest player in this GM group but still made a sensational first half, with two draws against GMs and 1,5/2 against two young FMs with an average around 2400. Although the second half with 1.0/4 was only about average, 3.5/8 with a performance of 2337 still won him 34 new Elo points. Chullikkad was slightly above expected all through his tournament and at 4.0/9 lost some Elo, but a performance of 2189 still no way was bad for 14 year old.

**CM Sverre Lye (2212)** versus **Peder Marcus Aamodt (2022)** was a closed and rather dry Ruy Lopez duel, in which black's kingside initiative gave him the better practical chances after three sets of minor pieces were exchanged. White however defended well by exchanging off the rooks in the open f-file, and then in the queen and knight endgame sacrificed his knight to force a perpetual check. Sverre Lye following



**Lye vs Aamodt**

strong results earlier this year had a set back and finished almost a full point below expected here. Aamodt following an average first half of the tournament made a very good second half, and a performance of 2191 brought him 74 new Elo points. We will probably hear much more from both these ambitious teenagers soon.

American **Shelev Oberoi (2226)** often goes his own ways from the opening, and today went for a Bishop's opening with 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 as white in a teenage duel against **FM Mahitosh Dey (2154)**. It worked out fairly well as white kept an initiative after exchanging three sets of minor pieces, and eventually could pick up a pawn at b7 with his queen. Although black achieved some counterplay on the kingside, white after 21 moves was better with queen, two rooks and seven pawns against queen, two rooks and six pawns. After 30 moves black however had taken over the driving seat as his pawns at e4 and f4 made life demanding for white. With both players running short of time, 31.Qxf4? was a blunder which suddenly gave black a decisive attack after a tactical 31.--- Rxd2! Black in turn missed an instant win with 32.--- Rf7!, after which the position was unclear for a few moves. 34.Rh3? however was a second blunder from white, after which an elegant 34.--- Rg1+! 35.Rxd2 e3+ immediately forced a surrender.

Oberoi for a long time did fine in his first Fagernes tournament, but following a stumbling 0.5/3 in the end he lost about 15 Elo points. Dey to the contrary had a strong spurt with 2.5/3 and following this won some 15 points.

**Håkon Bentsen (2088)** versus **Johannes Hentrich (2166)** was a Sicilian Najdorf duel in which both players castled short. Black after 20 moves had two bishops against two knights, but chances still were about balanced as white had a sound knight outpost at d5 and some pressure against the backward pawn at d6. Both players appeared more eager to start the travel back home than to win this final game, which after one hour and 24 moves was drawn by a fairly sound repetition.



**Bentsen vs Hentrich**

59 year old Hentrich had some ups and downs, but left Fagernes with an average performance

and a memorable win against an IM. Our good old Norwegian friend Bentsen turned his tide from last year, and is well back above 2100 after scoring 4.0/8 with a performance of 2238 this year.

Norwegian **Monika Machlik (2136)** and Spanish **CM Juan Gomez Aguirre (2206)** discussed a Closed Catalan in which black and his pair of bishops did fine after exchanging two sets of minor pieces. White's center pawn at d4 later was a target more than an asset. Under mutual pressure on the clock, white however just before 40 moves succeeded in exchanging the d4 pawn for black's pawn at c6. The queen and bishop endgame following this was level. Machlik spent nearly 20 minutes on her move 41, although black still offered a draw in his next move.



**Gomez Aguirre vs Machlik**  
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

Machlik due to her two against one queenside majority was closer to something in the final position, but still her open king made winning attempts difficult. 25 year old Machlik lost her final WIM norm chance following the pairings for round 9, but 4.0/9 with a performance of 2189 still brought her some 12 points closer to the 2200 barrier. 14 year old Aguirre had pole out with 0/5 against higher rated opponents this tournament, and although scoring 3,5/4 against the lower rated his performance of 2140 of course was a temporary set back.

**IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2387)** and **Ben Samuel Groth Skaar (2103)** started up with a Slav opening, but soon transposed into a Sem-Slav and then into a Queen's Gambit. White first had a small queenside advantage, but after exchanging queens black came up with enough counterplay to balance the chances. The rook and knight endgame after 30 moves was slightly better for black due to his better pawn structure and queenside majority. White following this pulled the brake, exchanged off the rooks and offered a draw after 32 moves. Skaar aged 15 has made remarkable progress the last year. In his first GM-group he recovered from a slow start with 1.0/4 and at 3.5/9 in the made a sound plus of 14 Elo points. Vestby-Ellingsen after fighting for a GM-norm in Oslo last week had a nightmare tournament at Fagernes, and 3.5/9 with a performance of 2118 can lose 30 Elo points when you start up close to 2400.



**Skaar vs Vestby-Ellingsen**  
**(Photo: Anniken Vestby)**

**FM Magnus Ermitsch (2277)** versus **Pankit Mota (2101)** saw a Scandinavian Opening with a Portuguese Gambit, in which black sacrificed a pawn at c6 for loose compensation. As white attacked the black queen at d5 with 10.c4, 10.--- Qh5? was a blunder, as black's queenside was just falling apart after 11.Qa4! Black later sacrificed an exchange, but resigned after 24 moves as he was about to lose more material. 13 year old Ermitsch junior made a promising start at 2.0/3, but losing three games in a row during rounds 4–6 he still finished nearly a point below expected at 4.0/9.



**Ermitsch**

The average quality of his moves for sure qualified for more, but short of time more or less the whole week he made too many time trouble mistakes. Mota on the contrary first improved much after a slow start with 0.0/2 and 1.0/4, but losing all his three final games he still had a slightly disappointing performance of 2082 and lost a few Elo points.



The highly talented Norwegian teenagers **FM Eriik Roulet-Dubonnet (2215)** and **Martin Holten Fiskaaen (2040)** discussed an English fianchetto line in which black established a center advantage with an ambitious e5–e4. After an early queen exchange white kept a sound pressure, first due to his pair of bishops and then due to his better pawn structure. Although black had two backward f-pawns, the rather closed rook and bishop endgame with seven pawns on each side still should be drawish after 30 moves. A dry struggle followed for the next three hours. White had the possibility to open the queenside with a minority attack, and finally used this chance with 78.b5!? Black obviously made a wise decision when exchanging the a-pawns with 78.--- axb5 79.axb5, but 79.-- b6? was a strategical mistake as black later had a hard time defending both his b-pawn and h-pawn. Patient Roulet-Dubonnet after 101 moves had successfully picked up both these pawns. Still having the best pawn structure he later had a safe win in the rook endgame. Lasting 118 moves this became the longest game of last round on the board, but still it lasted «only» some five and a half hour as both players had much time left on the clock. Roulet-Dubonnet following this long win succeeded in avoiding a draw in all nine rounds, but 4.0/9 with a performance of 2155 still was below expectations. Fiskaaen at 3.0/9 also did without draws following many hard-fought games. Despite this last round set back he was just around his expected score after playing higher-rated opponents in eight out of nine rounds.



**Roulet-Dubonnet vs Fiskaaen**

**Vetle Bjørge Strand (2026)** versus **WIM Rucha Pujari (2195)** was a good old Ruy Lopez Morphy line in which black played fast and white very fast. Black offered a draw while sacrificing a pawn with 13.--- b3. White decided to accept the draw offer instead of accepting the pawn sacrifice. 15 year old Strand had nine opponents rated at least 125 points above himself, and 3.5/9 following this was a very good result winning him 55 Elo points. Pujari on the other hand had four lower-rated opponents, and hardly could be satisfied with 3.5/9 and a performance of 2141. Her preparations for this tournament hardly was the best as she was unlucky to get her visa and travel confirmed less than 72 hours before round 1. Fortunately she appeared to enjoy the tournament a lot despite the mediocre result.



**Strand vs Pujari**

**Max Dahl (2152)** and **FM Mathias Unneland (2188)** ended up with a draw, which was not unexpected following the ratings and results so far. It came however after a remarkably hard-fought last-round game. Creative Unneland as black in a Modern opening took a provocative approach with a6 and b6. After establishing a space advantage with e5, white castled long with promising attacking



**Dahl vs Unneland**

chances. Sacrificing a pawn at f6 hardly was necessary from a white point of view. Despite the fact that three sets of minor pieces were exchanged, white kept a lot of compensation due to the loose black kingside. The greedy 18.--- Ng8?, trying to save the pawns at f6 and h6, was too passive and gave white a winning attack. Running short of time Max Dahl however failed to find the accurate continuations afterwards. Black following this could give up his queen for a rook and knight. After 35 moves the endgame with queen and four pawns against rook, knight and five pawns was double-edged. Dahl still bravely left a repetition to play for a win, but this brought him to the brink of disaster as black's passed pawn at e3 in the fifth hour was more dangerous than the white pawn at h5. Black now left the repetition for a few moves, but although short of time again Dahl succeeded in finding a perpetual check against the airy black king. Unpredictable Dahl met seven title holders and had an average close to 2300 on his opponents. He struggled to win games this tournament, winning only the one in which his opponent forgot the clock and lost on time in an unclear position. On the other hand this 17 year old lost only against three much higher rated opponents, and 3,5/9 following this gave him a solid Elo plus with a performance just below 2200. One year older Unneland struggled even more to win games, and 3.5/9 here lost some 30 Elo points more as he following a slow start had seven lower rated opponents.

**Martin Øksendal (2060)** against **Shadi Sian (2137)** was a team mate last round duel, but still became a tense attacking battle. The start was another messy Sicilian duel, this one a Richter-Rauzer variation in which white invited to an attacking race by castling long. Black hesitated for a while but then decided to castle long. This however left white first with the better attacking chances, and then following a queen exchange with the less weak pawns and the much better minor piece with two rooks, knight and five pawns against two rooks, bishop and five pawns. Øksendal made efficient use of his chances here, and anyway was two pawns up with a won position when Sian after the first time control blundered a bishop and resigned.

15 year old Øksendal despite a slow start in his first GM group reached 4.0/9 with a performance of 2165, winning 46 more Elo points. Sian's 3.0/9 looks worse than it was, as he had 3.0/6 and in the end still made a performance above 2100.



**Ji vs Kreken**

**Jiahao Eric Ji (1959)** versus **Eivind Grunt Kreken (2144)** was another Norwegian teenager duel and another long Sicilian duel. This one was a Kalashnikov variation in which white reportedly was slightly better after exchanging two sets of minor pieces, although black with a well timed d5-break took over the initiative before move 20. 24.Rfa1? later was a blunder, allowing black a decisive seventh rank rook intervention with 24.--- Rd2! As both players had to watch out for a weak first rank, black missed the first neat tactical win afterwards. He still kept a strong initiative

and white's position was much more difficult to handle with both players running low on the clock. Less time on the clock with a more difficult position on the board hardly ever is a good combination for a white player, and black in the end could win a rook in a Capablanca-inspired style with 31.--- Qb2!

12 year old Ji at 2.5/9 still reached his expected score. Still unpredictable Kreken at 3.5/9 was more than one point below his expected score, as he had lower rated opponents for the six final rounds. Winning his two final games still limited the damage a lot.



**Rasmussen vs Chopra**

**Jonas Hodneland Rasmussen (1976)** as white in a King's Indian against **Manmay Chopra (2113)** again went for a positional fianchetto set up. White established a space advantage with d5 and reportedly first had the better chances, winning the pair of bishops after intervening on the e6 outpost with his knight. White's loose pawn at e6 however made the position double-edged, and the weakening 20.g4?! gave black enough counterplay on the kingside. After 25 moves the remaining position with two rooks, bishop, knight and five pawns on each side appeared drawish, although black

now had taken over the initiative and opposited-coloured bishops here could favour the attacking player. As white succeeded in exchanging the knights and one set of rooks, the opposite-coloured bishops voted for a draw with rook, bishop and three pawns on each side after 40 moves. Black still played on for a win with his passed d-pawn and was rewarded as white became much too careless. The apparently not dangerous d-pawn reached d2 at move 47 and won decisive material within five more moves.

The younger Chopra brother had his first win in the last round, and although this helped a lot he at 3.5/9 had a disappointing performance just above 2000 in his first Fagernes tournament. Hodneland Rasmussen still is losing too many tight long games like this one, but 2,5/9 with a performance of 2015 still brought him 5 points closer to the 2000 barrier.



**Sigurd Lye (1980)** versus **Michael Ermitsch (2047)** was a Sicilian Taimanov line in which both players castled long. White first apparently went for a win by snatching a testimony pawn at g7 with his queen, but then after 22 moves accepted a draw by repetition. Both players had a hard time winning games here. 3.0/9 still gained a sound 12 rating points for Sigurd Lye, while Ermitsch senior with the same sum of points and about the same performance lost some 14 rating points.

**Sindre Ytrestøyl (1987)** and **Amadeus Hestvik Evenshaug (1930)** started up with 1.c4, but later transposed into a Queen's Gambit Exchange line. White here bravely castled long to go for a kingside pawn storm with g4-h4-g5. Exchanging the queens afterwards looked a bit tame from a white point of view, but reportedly was fine. If so white however became too careful when exchanging pieces afterwards. Black in the endgame with rook, bishop and seven pawns against rook, knight and seven pawns could close down the position and keep some counterplay against white's attacking pawn at g6. With only a few minutes left on the clock for both players, draw was agreed by a sensible repetition after 34 moves.

16 year old Evenshaug was the lowest rated player in the field, and so 3.0/9 in the first week of April won back some 28 of the points he had lost in March. Also 16 year old Ytrestøyl won back 10 of his lost points and is close to pass the 2000 barrier again.

The teenager duel between **CM Jack Mizzi (2049)** and **Linus Sandstad (1912)** was a half-open Catalan, in which black had no problems equalizing after exchanging the c- and d-pawns. White held a slight initiative after exchanging the queens and light-squared bishops, but still accepted a draw offer after 40 minutes and 15 moves. 15 year old Sandstad got a difficult



**Mizzi vs Sandstad**

starting point here, entering the GM-group from round 3 and then losing both his first games. Scoring 2.0/5 from the rest he still won some 9 Elo points for his 2.0/7 in the GM-group. Sandstad additionally gained 12 points for his 2.0/2 in the Open group, and so his first week at Fagernes after all was fairly successful. Jack Mizzi never recovered fully after losing all his first three games, and so 2,5/9 in his case was one and a half point below his expected score. Still it was a happy surprise to see Malta represented for the first time in our tournament.

**Ask Amundsen (1937)** versus **Philip Rosol (2010)** was another Sicilian Taimanov attacking race, in which white castled long while black kept his king waiting at e8. Instructively black here had the pair of bishops, but as white was far ahead in development he still made a good decision to open the position with a tactical 15.f5! Castling short at move 19 was too late from a black point of view, as white now won a piece and within a few moves demonstrated a winning kingside attack. Nothing would work for Austria and the talented Rosol brothers this tournament, but 2.0/9 for the younger brother still was only about one point below his expected score. Philip Rosol was the youngest among four players still aged 12 in this very young GM-group, and we expect to hear much more about him within the next few years. 17 year old As Amundsen lost his first five games, and although 2.5/3 in the end helped a lot he finished almost half a point below his expected score.



**Amundsen vs Rosol**

Finally, **Alexander Rosol (2076)** and **Saketh Pedagandham (2074)** discussed a Four Knights opening in which black entered dubious tactical complications with 14... Bxc3?! Although black was able to keep the material balance, white soon got a clear advantage as he had the better pawn structure plus a pair of bishops and the overall more active pieces. 19... Re8? reportedly was a mistake as the rook exchange left white's queen and bishops with a more or less winning dominance. Strangely white however accepted a draw in this position. The older Rosol brother in short had a nightmare tournament, finishing at 1.5/8 with a performance of 1855. Pedagandham also played below his usual standard and additionally wasted too many chances, hence 2.0/9 in the end was more than two points below his expected score.



**Rosol vs Pedagandham**  
(Photo: Anniken Vestby)

## Open Group

In the Open, the key first board game between **Sondre Stai (1722)** and **Rafe Rehman (1824)** made a slightly original Sicilian start with 1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 g6 3.d4, but later reached a Dragon-like attacking race as white castled long and black short. White's decision to sacrifice his pawn at f3 reportedly first was dubious, but still gave a strong attack as white got the chance to hit in with a powerful 21.e5! This ambitious white e5-pawn via d6 continued to e7, and at move 31 it could in triumph promote at e8! Why black allowed the pawn to promote remains mysterious, but white anyway was totally winning at that stage.



Stai vs Rehman

Second board between **Erlend Reigstad (1594)** and **Rune Kleiven Rynning (1681)** saw a more positional Sicilian Najdorf duel, turning in favour of black as he after 21 moves could pick up white's all the more weak pawn at d5. Although white had a pair of bishops, black still was better when he after 25 moves first creatively sacrificed back a pawn and then immediately accepted a draw offer. A lecturer in science by profession, Rynning at this stage obviously had calculated that a draw gave him a 100 % chance for top three.



Reigstad vs Rynning

The third board generation duel between **Tim Spanton (1806)** and **Jiabao Eivind Ji (1704)** was a long French Winawer duel, in which white first had the better attacking chances and then a promising dark-square dominance. Eleven year old Ji however defended very well and before 40 moves escaped into a drawn bishop endgame.

On the fourth board a tight Caro-Kann battle between **Dag Andersen (1776)** and **Jon Arne Stokhaug (1843)** ended abruptly after three hours, as white sacrificed his rook to force a draw by perpetual check.

Fifth board duel between **Karim Ali (1773)** and **Sigurd Kittilsen (1822)** around the same time had reached a drawish rooks and minor piece endgame, but white efficiently used his chance to win a piece as black short of time blundered in move 39.



Winning his two last games, Oslo teacher Sondre Stai from the Stjernen chess club also won an unshared first prize at 7.0/9. Following a rather slow start with 2.5/4 he apparently came from nowhere when winning all the three final games. The eight rated player winning an unshared first prize of course is a surprise. Stai however has been improving for several years and was in the run for a promotion to the GM group when finishing fourth last year. His first prize now was well deserved as he also had the best Elo performance. It cannot however be denied that the Open had a less hard competition this year, as a performance of 1808 was sufficient for the first prize. To illustrate this point, Stai himself had a performance of 1889 when finishing fourth last year.

Tenth rated Rune Kleiven Rynning finishing unshared second at 6.5/9 also of course was a surprise. This also was well deserved in a longer run: Rynning played his eight Fagernes Open in a row and has had gradually improving results. Curiously the first and second prize winners, although living in different parts of Norway, knew each other long before their first chess tournaments. They first met during science studies in Trondheim about ten years ago.

Despite a rather slow start, the British veteran and chess gentleman Tim Spanton ended up first among equals with the best Buchholz among six players at 6.0/9 – ahead of Reigstad, Ali, Gåsland, Rehman and Ji. Third and fourth prizes were shared equally between these six players, while Spanton won the best veteran prize for players above 60 unshared. Spanton although losing a few points of Elo had the second best performance of the Open, and following this his prize and promotion was well deserved. Reigstad was best player below 1600, with a performance of 1724. Winning 35 points he notably had by far the biggest Elo gain among the top ten players.



**Spanton, Rynning and Stai**

The Open at Fagernes has been dominated by underrated junior players for several years. Notably, although this year's Open also included quite a few underrated coming stars, top five players in the end were remarkably experienced: Stai is 30, Rynning 31, Spanton 66, Reigstad 22 and Ali 63. Entering the next GM group obviously will be a big challenge for the top three players here, but hopefully also a very exciting and interesting one.

13 year old Rafe Rehman demonstrated his potential before losing the top board game in the final round, and for sure is a talent to follow for later tournaments.

Top rated **Jon Arne Stokhaug (1843)** remarkably was the only player in this group not to lose a game, but still finished just outside of top ten with 5.5 points in the final list. Stokhaug gave himself a slow start as he arrived only in the evening of the second day. Starting up his tournament with two walk over draws, he after the arrival also had too many draws in a row before winning in round 7 and 8. A performance below 1600 of course was a disappointment, which he however handled instructively. The start rocket of this group was third rated **Sigurd Kittilsen (1822)**. While the first half of his tournament worked out brilliantly with 3.0/3 and 3.5/4, Kittilsen wasted too many chances in the second half. The final score of 5.0/9 following this was a full point below his expected score.

The fight for the best woman prize was decided on board seven and eight today. The 15 year old Mongolian surprise girl **Bilguun Bayaraa (1267)** here got a dream start as her opponent **David Hellesøy (1606)** went for a much too loose rook sacrifice at h8 immediately after the opening. Bayaraa's sweet dream however turned into a nightmare as she afterwards failed to evacuate her king from e1 to f2 in time. Following this black after 25 moves suddenly had one piece and three pawns for the rook. Hellesøy and his passed pawns later won this endgame convincingly.

46 year old **Ida Lahlum (1628)** in the meantime never succeeded in converting her sound positional pressure as white against **Jan Ove Odden (1551)**.

As other games had developed, a safe draw for her however was enough for an unshared best woman prize at 5.0/9.

Curiously Ida Lahlum and Bilguun Bayaraa started up their tournament with a tight five hours draw against each other, and then had a tight run for the best woman prize for the remaining eight rounds.

Bayaraa despite losing her two final games still won 99 more Elo points at Fagernes and had the best Elo performance among the woman players in the Open. For sure she still is heavily underrated at 1366.



**Lahlum**

11 year old **Henrik Nome (1073)** became today's surprise man on the lower board, improving from a lost to a won position within a few minutes in the fourth hour as black against **Sara Gilsdottir (1422)**. A highly talented but still inexperienced tournament player, Gilsdottir here made a classical mistake as she first spent too much time in a won position and then blundered it all away as she ran short of time. Nome arrived one round delayed, but scoring 4.5/8 with a performance above 1600 he still won 149 Elo points – more than any other participant in the GM group or Open. Gilsdottir despite this hard last round set back also made a solid plus and aged 29 she is definitely still underrated.

The organizers were very well satisfied with each one of the present players in the Open, but we can hardly be satisfied with 44 participants here. For comparison our four Opens during the demanding pandemy years 2020–2022 all had at least 55 players, and the two Opens before the pandemy back in 2018 and 2019 each had 76. As the GM group made a solid new record with 92 players, Fagernes International 2023 still in total was our biggest and by far most global tournament so far.

Nowadays, unfortunately it is rather common situation that an international title tournament has some 20–30 players less in the last round compared to the first round. Now the Fagernes tournament this year we remarkably had the same number of clocks to start for the last round compared to the first round. (True enough one player in the Open due to illness never arrived to start his last round game; the number of present players following this was 134 in the first round and 133 in the last round). The number of participants along the road had been reduced only from 136 to 135, and the one player missing had to withdraw for very understandable health reasons. We hope this reflects that a big majority of our players enjoyed the tournament and that they are likely to play more tournaments in Norway. A declaration about our plans and next move as an organizer will follow within a few weeks, although there is no secret we much hope there will be another Fagernes tournament around the same quality not later than Easter 2023.

As the chief organizer and chief arbiter I will spend the second last sentence of this last round report again to thank FIDE for a very welcome financial support and the office of the Norwegian Chess Federation for their practical help. Then I will spend the last sentence to thank the four other hard working and efficient organizers – IA Tom Eriksen, IA Henrik Sjøl and FA Øyvind Bentsen for their patient work as arbiters, including the live transmission of 59 games each round, and IM Eirik T. Gullaksen at [www.bergensjakk.no](http://www.bergensjakk.no) for his great job with the tournament webpage!



**8 photos by Anniken Vestby (as credited) and the rest by Tom Eriksen**