

FAGERNES INTERNATIONAL AUTUMN 2023

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

9



GM Group

Slightly disappointing, but hardly too surprising, the first board duel between Estonian GM Kaido Kulaots and Azerbaijan GM Eltaj Safarli was drawn within the first hour – and so was the second board duel between Norwegian IM Elham Amar and Danish GM Mads Andersen.

Following this it was a given fact that the GM group was to end up with a group of players sharing the first place at 6,5/9, but still an open question whether four, five, six, seven or eight players were to share the top prizes equally. Boards 3–6 all had tight battles going on, with no outcome given, after three hours. GM Mitrabha Guha at that stage was ahead on board and clock as black in the sixth board Indian duel against FM Mohamd Anees Rabi, and went on to win the endgame one hour later. GM Ido Gorshtein of Israel after three hours apparently still had no advantage on board five, as white against solid Norwegian IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen. One hour later Gorshtein still had got the help needed to reach a pawn endgame. Top rated GM Robert Hovhannisyan of Armenia on the third board still fought on for a win, but after five tense hours had to accept a draw as black against the young Indian FM Harsh Suresh. Fourth rated GM Krishnan Sasikiran of India in the end also failed to win as black against the Ukraine-born Norwegian IM Semen Mitusov, although Sasikiran had two bishops for a rook and still was playing after six and a half hour.

Fagernes Autumn 2023 following this became the first GM group since 2016 in which no player reached 7,0/9, but instead no less than six players reached 6,5/9. First among equals here was 28 year old Mads Andersen, very well deserved finishing first due to his Elo performance of 2637 – ahead of Amar at 2611, Guha at 2605, Kulaots at 2604, Gorshtein at 2594 and Safarli at 2569.

An unshared first prize would have given 2000 Euros, while the shared 1.–6. place now gave each 900 Euros.

Sasikiran, Hovhannisyan, Mitusov and Suresh at 6,0/9 shared the remaining money prizes with Norwegian IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen, the latter winning confidently as white against FM André Gjestemoen-vonhirsch in his last round game. The remaining IM-norm candidates failed in the last round, hence Elham Amar's fifth GM-norm was the only title norm achieved in this tournament.



Mads Andersen

German WGM Josefine Heinemann won the best woman prize under slightly awkward circumstances as her opponent was unable to play the last round. Heinemann still won this prize very well deserved as she was a full point ahead of WGM Fiona Sieber, and would have had the much better Elo performance also in case of equal points.

Although this tournament in no way could repeat the title norm bonanza from the Easter tournament six months ago, many young players made a score far above their expectations. 16 year old Norwegian Sergey Eliseev following his last round win notably reached 5,0/9 with a performance of 2371, winning 126 Elo points and improving his Elo from 2083 to 2209.

12 year old Artyom Bogdanov also reached 5,0/9 as he won 52 Elo points and passed 2300 – qualifying for the FM title. The list of undefeated players after round 9 notably included GM Andersen, GM Gorshtein, GM Sasikiran, GM Hovhannisyan – and the new FM Bogdanov. Rohit Saravana Prakash of India although losing two games also reached 5,0/9, and after winning 62 more Elo points he is very likely soon to reach 2300. Scoring 4,5/9 in this strong field, 13 year old American Neeraj Harish and 13 year old Norwegian Evsuld Myagmarsuren left Fagernes with a gain of respectively 78 and 72 Elo points.

Despite their turbulent starting point, several of the young Israeli players also made a big plus out of this week in Norway: Itay Sitbon won 50 points and passed 2200, while Roe Pelech won 78 points and passed 2150. WFM Michelle Katkov had a performance close to the WIM-norm demand and is well back above 2100 after winning 35 points.

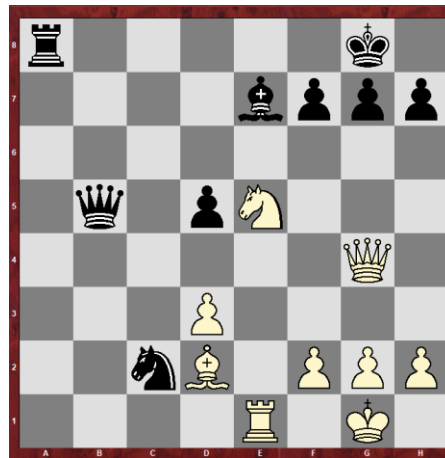
The first board duel between **GM Kaido Kulaots (2508)** and **GM Eltaj Safarli (2612)** was drawn within 14 moves and 30 minutes, following a well-known repetition of moves from a closed Ruy Lopez line. Kulaots several times has wasted promising prize chances at Fagernes by losing his last-round game, and following this he this time took a safe approach as white.



Kulaots vs Safarli

Second rated Safarli had a slow start following draws against much lower rated players in round 2 as well as round 3, and now at 6.0/8 he was well satisfied with a draw as black. 47 year old Kulaots won 13 Elo-points and continues his climb back, while 31 year old Safarli finished just below his expected score.

Second board duel between Norwegian **IM Elham Amar (2568)** and Danish **GM Mads Andersen (2606)** was a somewhat longer and more entertaining closed Ruy Lopez duel. The game apparently was in fire as white at move 26 sacrificed an exchange, but burned out within very few moves:



26.Nxf7! Nxe1 27.Qe6 Qb8! 28.Bxe1 Qf8 29.Nh6++ Kh8 30.Nf7+ and draw was agreed by a perpetual check. The game lasted only half an hour and both players appeared to be more or less inside a preparation in the final position.

Andersen was very satisfied with first place, as he has actually never won a Swiss tournament at this level before. Finishing half a point above expected score he won 5 more Elo points and increased his margin to the important 2600-barrier. Amar won 6,6 more Elo-points and his live rating following this is 2584, as he also won 9,6 points when finishing sixth in the World Junior Championships a few days before this tournament. Confirming a fifth GM-norm here actually had practical relevance for Amar, as his application for the GM title is in for decision and there are reportedly still some technical issues related to the title norm certificates from two of his earlier norms.

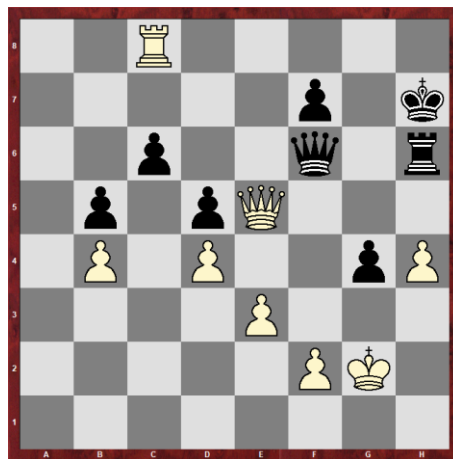


Amar vs Andersen

16 year old **FM Harsh Suresh (2336)** as white against top rated **GM Robert Hovhannisyan (2616)** went for a closed Catalan, and due his better light-squared bishop kept a positional edge after exchanging his c4-pawn at d5. Black however got a long-time asset in his pair of bishops, after white exchanged the dark-squared bishop for a knight at f6. White became too careful when exchanging the light-squared bishops as well, and black following this came better with some kingside attack in the remaining position with queen and one rook on each side. Suresh mobilized his heavy pieces for a counterattack, and after the first time control black found nothing better than forcing a draw by a repetition of checks.



Hovhannisyan vs Suresh

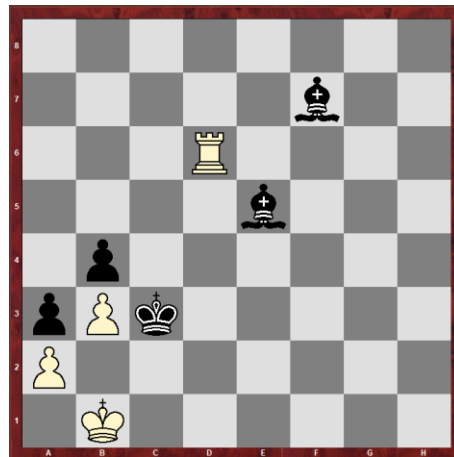


47.--- Qf3+ 48.Kg1 Qd1+ 49.Kg2 Qf3+ ½-½

Hovhannisyan was never really in danger of losing a game in this tournament, but struggling too hard to win games he ended up with 5,5/8 plus a requested walk over draw. Shared 7.–11. prize and a performance of 2523 of course was a disappointment for player number 1. Suresh had a slow start with three draws against much lower rated opponents, but still reached 6,0/9 with a performance of 2429 – winning some 23 new Elo points. Already having completed the 2400 demand, he was understandably still disappointed not to make an IM-norm out of his strong spurt.

IM Semen Mitusov (2468) as white against **GM Krishnan Sasikiran (2595)** jumped on the attacking train by castling long in a Sicilian Najdorf. After white exchanged his dark-squared bishop for a knight at f6, white later had the better pawn structure while black had a pair of bishops. Following a queen exchange, black got the upper hand after opening the center with a powerful d5-break. The game remained a tight battle and white just before the time control took over the initiative as black's bishop at g7 was still passive. Sasikiran at move 37 gave up an exchange for a pawn to activate his bishops and get a kingside pawn majority. Black succeeded in establishing a passed f-pawn with a won position, but white fought on well and successfully sacrificed material back for the pawn.

Following this the players after 71 moves had reached an endgame with one rook plus pawns at a2 and b3 against two bishops plus pawns at a3 and b4. Black first had a study-like win, but this was almost impossible to find over the board. Later black had great difficulties making progress, as his light-squared bishop would not get out from a2 if he took the white anchor pawn. Mitusov defended stubbornly and at move 122 could claim a draw.

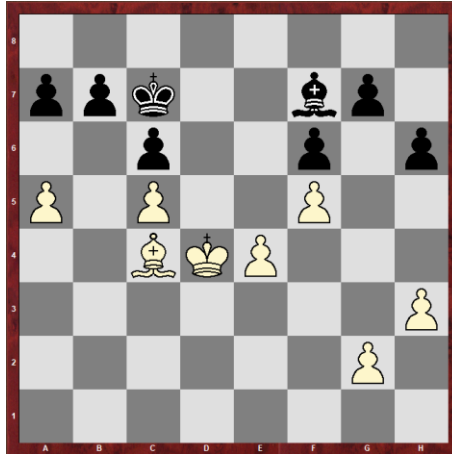


Remarkably the IM here marked move 71 at his scoresheet and obviously waited for his chance to demand a draw following the 50 moves rule, while the much more experienced GM apparently had not considered this danger at all and was taken by surprise when the draw claim arrived. The position at that stage had been a draw for 30 moves or so. Sasikiran failed to win the game, but his understandable try to win still prolonged the game and delayed the prizegiving with some 45 minutes. The nightmare scenario hit the organizer, as the longest game of the tournament came in the last round. The game finally finished after 6 hours and 40 minutes, 50 minutes after the second last game. The prizegiving started 10 minutes later on and the bus with the players left «only» some 40 minutes delayed. Sasikiran had a very promising start with 3,5/4, but later somehow ended up with five draws in a row. Both players at 6,0/9 won a small money prize with a performance just around their expected.

The fifth-board duel between **GM Ido Gorshtein (2512)** and **IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2343)** saw a Slav opening duel, in which white kept a very slight edge through a steam of exchanges. So far undefeated Vestby-Ellingsen for a long while defended by sound means, and after 29 moves he had reached a drawish endgame with queen, one bishop and six pawns on each side. Accepting the invitation for a queen exchange at c5 however was too helpful, and exchanging the bishops at c4 later was a fatal misunderstanding:



Gorshtein vs Vestby-Ellingsen



Black had to try 36... Be8! or 36... Bh5! with a borderline bishop endgame, as white's pawn majority on the kingside here gave him a won pawn endgame: 36... Bxc4? 37.Kxc4 b5+?! 38.cxb6 e.p. axb6 39.a6! b5+ 40.Kc5 b4 41.Kxb4 Kb6 42.e5 fxe5 43.g4 Kxa6 44.h4 Kb6 45.g5 hxg5 46.hxg5 c5+ 47.Kc3 Kc6 48.f6 gxf6 49.g6! 1-0

Gorshtein with a tiny one tempo margin joined the shared first club at 6,5/9, and won 11 more Elo points with a strong performance of 2594. Vestby-Ellingsen had a pole out in the last game and lost his first game for this tournament, but 5,5/9 still was slightly above his expected score.

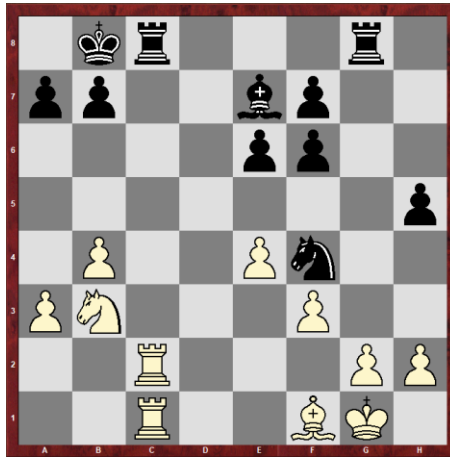
Sixth board was a Young Indian duel between **FM Mohamed Anees Rabi (2309)** and **GM Mitrabha Guha (2512)**. It started up like a Benoni, in which white first had a positional advantage. Black and his pair of bishops gradually took over the initiative, and white's center pawn at d5 became more loose than black's pawn at d6. As white came under double pressure on the clock and board, black efficiently used his chance



Guha vs Rabi

to get a decisive initiative following a tactical queen exchange just before 40 moves. Black's passed pawn at c5 escorted by the bishops later soon decided in the minor pieces endgame. 22 year old Guha following a brilliant start with 4,5/5 slowed down in the second half of the tournament. Hitting back with a full point in the last round he still finished third with a performance just above 2600, adding some 12 more points to his Elo. 20 year old Rabi despite this last round set back finished half a point above his expected score, winning 11 more Elo points with a tournament performance of 2352.

GM Andrea Stella (2447) versus **GM Frode Urkedal (2519)** was a positional Queen's Gambit duel, in which white kept a slight initiative after exchanging the c- and d-pawns. Following an early queen exchange the chances remained roughly balanced, as white had the better pawn structure and black the pair of bishops. Black first gave up his pair of bishops to reach a drawish rooks and minor pieces endgame with opposite-coloured bishops, and then elegantly offered a draw by sacrificing his rook:



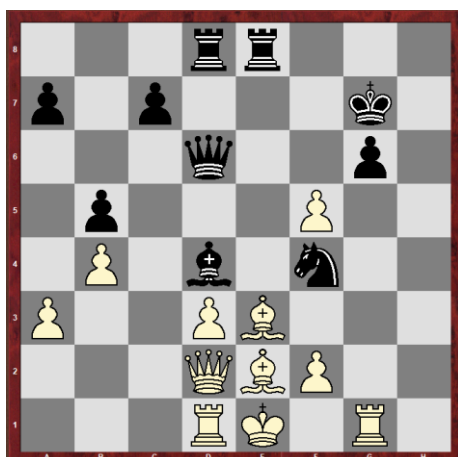
27.--- Rxc2 was expected when black lifted the rook from c8. Urkedal instead played 27.--- Rc3 – and then the two GMs immediately agreed a draw due to 28.Rxc3 Nh3+ 29.Kh1 Nf2+ 30.Kg1 Nh3+ with a perpetual.

Urkedal arrived delayed from an intense European Club Cup and according to himself ran out of energy midway at Fagernes. As he won his first three games, 5,0/8 still won him one more Elo point. Our new Italian chessfriend Stella had a slow start with 1,0/3, and following this had all his first eight opponents rated below 2300. 5,5/9 for him under such circumstances gave a disappointing performance of 2284, losing 15,5 Elo points. It should be mentioned that Stella handled the results like a great sportman, praising his opponents and keeping his good Italian humour all the way.

The young Norwegian duel between **IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2469)** and **FM Andre Gjestemoen-VonHirsch (2327)** saw an English Opening almost immediately taking a dramatic turn, as black within the first five moves had sacrificed his pawn at e5 for loose compensation. Black first had some compensation due to white's inferior pawn structure, but white had a pair of bishops and his king at e1 remained fairly safe. White before move 20 took over the initiative with a h4–h5 bayonet attack, but then invited black into the game by giving up his pawn at f4. Black however lagged far behind on the clock and asked for too much when sacrificing an exchange:



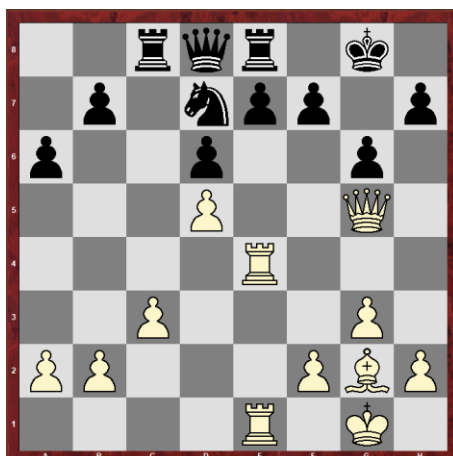
Kaasen vs Gjestemoen-VonHirsch



26.--- Rxe3? 27.fxe3 Re8 28.exd4! Qxd4 29.Rg4! g5 30.Qxf4 Qxf4 31.Rxf4 gxf4 32.Kf2 1-0

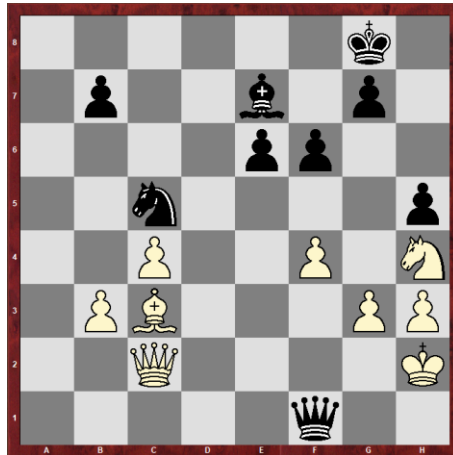
21 year old Kaasen following his pole-out loss against Amar in round 3 was never on schedule for his third GM-norm, but still in the run until losing against Andersen in round 8. Repairing with a sound last round win, he reached shared seventh prize and a score just above his expected. 19 year old Gjestemoen-vonhirsch has been busy with his studies for a long while, but following a slow start with 1,0/3 he improved and at 5,0/9 landed just around his expected score.

IM Ludvig Carlsson (2356) and **IM Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2458)** both played fast in a Sicilian O’Kelly line, and after 18 moves had reached a balanced position with queen, two rooks, one bishop and seven pawns against queen, two rooks, knight and seven pawns.



18.--- e5! invited a queen exchange under favourable terms for black, hence white instead creatively sacrificed the queen for rook and knight with 19.dxe6 e.p.! Qxg5 20.exd7 Ref8 21.dxc8Q Rxc8. But then a draw upon white’s suggestion suddenly was agreed four moves later on, in a roughly balanced but still highly interesting position with two rooks, one bishop and six pawns against queen, one rook and six pawns. 5,5/9 was just around expected score for 20 year old Carlsson. 15 year old Kvaløy at 5,0/9 with a performance of 2314 had a set back following a period with very strong results – including a GM-norm in Norway Chess Open four months ago.

16 year old Indian **FM Ritvik Krishnan (2176)** as white against the 17 year old Israeli **IM Yahli Sokolovsky (2447)** started up with a fairly balanced Reti opening. Following sound exchanges from both players, the position with queen, one bishop, one knight and six pawns on each side after 27 moves appeared drawish. Eight moves later the computer programs still gave the position as about equal, but white had less time left on the clock and due to his more open king also the much more difficult position to handle.



White had an uphill walk when he blundered with 39.Bb4?, losing decisive material after 39.--- Nd3! as 40.Bxe7 Nf2 41.g3 Qh1+ 42.Kg3 Ne4+ forces white to give up his queen. White instead tried 40.Bd2, but resigned after 40.--- Bc5 with decisive threats against the lone white king. Despite this last round win, Sokolovsky at 5,5 with a performance of 2325 had a result well below his average. Krishnan at 3,5/8, plus a walk over win, on the other hand could be very well satisfied and won 46 Elo points for a performance close to 2300.

The game between Norwegian **GM Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen (2434)** and Israeli surprise man **Itay Sitbon (2163)** was among the spectator's favourites today, as black could make a very surprising IM-norm if winning. The game however became more or less one way driven following the English opening. White won the pair of bishops within the first five moves, and following an early queen exchange his bishops and kingside attack gave him pleasant pressure. Without the queens, white safely could castle long and double his rook in the g-file, reaching a won position before 25 moves. Black's search for tactical counterplay was understandable, but still turned out to lose a piece. The remaining endgame with bishop and three pawns versus three pawns after 40 moves was a trivial win for white. Aged 44 and playing his first title tournament for five years, Ringdal Hansen obviously was rusty from the start of this comeback. He still produced highly exciting games almost every round, scoring only one draw, and at 5,5/9 he in the end had a fairly strong performance of 2365 – losing «only» 7 Elo points. 21 year old Sitbon sensationally was ahead of schedule for an IM-norm with 4,0/6. Despite 0,5/3 for the final rounds, he reached a strong performance of 2387 and won 50 more Elo points – passing the 2200 barrier with a safe margin.

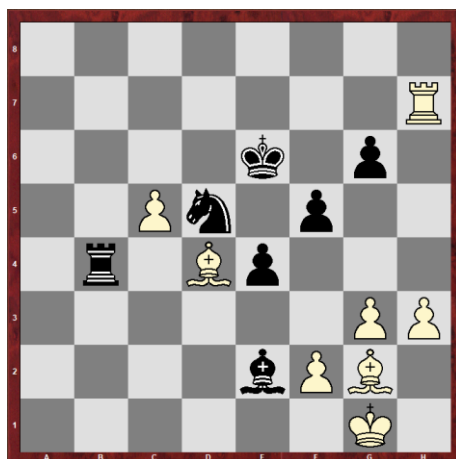


Hansen vs Sitbon

Norwegian **FM Shazil Shehzad (2296)** as white in the teenager duel against Israeli **FM Yuval Yaniv (2382)** first went for a Retian double fianchetto. Black blew up his own queenside pawns to get counterplay, and white due to an extra b-pawn was reported better for some moves. White gave back the extra pawn to exchange queens, and after 27 moves had reached a balanced position with one rook, two bishops and four pawns against one rook, one bishop, one knight and four pawns. Black creatively sacrificed his pawn at h7 to activate his remaining pieces, and was rewarded as white chose the wrong square for his bishop:



Shehzad vs Yaniv



32.Bh8! now was forced, but remarkably difficult to find. Instead 32.Be3? suddenly gave black a decisive attack after 32... Rb1+ 33.Kh2 Nxe3 34.fxe3 Bf3!, threatening 35... Rb2! Black won the passed pawn race after 36.Bxf3 exf3 37.c6 f2 38.c7 Rh1+! 39.Kxh1 f1Q+, and consequently the game some 11 moves later on.

18 year old Yaniv following his first-round draw was never in the run for an IM-norm and had a mediocre performance at 3,0/6. The young Israeli still reached a performance of 2316 and lost «only» 13 Elo points following a strong spurt with 2,5/3. 17 year old Shazil as usual played many interesting games, and despite the last round loss landed just below his expected score.

Polish **FM Jacek Szwed (2376)** unfortunately became ill during the night before last round, and consequently his German opponent **WGM Josefine Heinemann (2296)** got a walk over win. Szwed cramped following a promising start with 2,5/3, but 4,5/8 still gave him a performance of 2300. Heinemann at 4,5/8, plus a last round walk over win, very well deserved got an unshared best woman prize for a performance of 2392 – winning her 22 more Elo points.

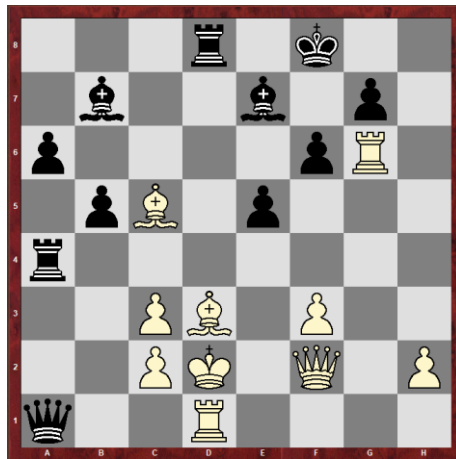
CM Neeraj Harish (2076)
versus **IM John Paul Wallace**
(2365) was a Sicilian

Taimanov line in which white after castling long first had an initiative, but black definitely took over after he was allowed to disrupt white's queenside pawn structure by exchanging a knight at c3. Black proved his own king safe at f8 and instructively transported his

rook around to the queenside with a decisive attack following 22.--- Rh4! and 23.--- Ra4! He later finished off the game with an elegant (if not hard to spot) tactical blow:



Harish vs Wallace



26.--- Rxd3+! 27.cxd3 Ra2+ 28.Ke1 Qxc3+ 29.Kf1 Rxf2+ 30.Bxf2 Bxf3 0-1

Wallace had a fairly shaky tournament with only one drawn game, but following this nice last round win he still left with 3 more Elo points. 13 year old Harish at 4,0/8, plus a requested walk over draw, made a performance of 2268 and won a remarkable 78 Elo points on his first tournament in Norway.

Artyom Bogdanov (2270) versus **IM Erik Hedman (2326)** was a positional Sicilian with 3.b3.

White due to his pawn at e5 first had a space advantage, but black soon hit back with the d5-break and nothing but fairly sound exchanges followed. A draw was agreed upon black's suggestion after 24 moves, as the players were about to exchange queens and enter a too balanced endgame with one rook, one bishop and six pawns on each side.

12 year old Bogdanov following an expected first round win somehow ended up with a draw in all his eight remaining games. All of the draws however came against higher rated opponents. Following this he won no less than 52 points with a performance of 2375 – passing 2300 with a big margin and qualifying for the FM title!

47 year old Swedish chess gentleman Hedman recovered somewhat in the second half of this tournament. 5,0/9 with a performance of 2212 still was about one point below his expected score.

German **WGM Fiona Sieber (2305)** and Norwegian junior champion **Eivind Grunt Kreken (2237)** discussed a Bishop's Opening with 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4.

Black appeared to have the better preparation and came better after exchanging the bishop for a knight with Na5 and Nxc4. Chances were about balanced after 17 moves, although black's pair of bishops still gave him the better long term perspectives. White defended actively, and following tactical exchanges she after 30 moves had won a pawn to play with one rook, one knight and four pawns against one rook, one bishop and three pawns. Black's more active pieces and pressure against white's backward pawn at a3 balanced the chances. With both players running short of time, black made a good decision when establishing an advanced passed pawn at b3. Black instructively increased the pressure after winning back his deficit pawn at a4, and after 50 moves could force a rook endgame in which his passed pawn was decisive.

17 year old Kreken due to this last round win continues his progress from this year, reaching 5,5/9 and winning some 9 more Elo points. Now an experienced titleholder at age 23, Sieber remains very uneven in her tournament performances. In this one 4,0/8, plus a requested walk over draw, was two full points below expected with a performance just above 2100.



Kreken vs Sieber

Kush Devnani (2221) versus **IM Frode Elsness (2466)** saw a slightly provocative Queen's Gambit with 3... a6?! from the IM. White transposed into a Catalan Opening and kept a slight queenside pressure. Black however was well ahead on the clock, and following a badly timed 24.Nc5? he took over the initiative on the board. Before move 40 black picked up a pawn and entered a rook endgame.

White's active rook however made winning attempts very difficult. Elsness in the fifth hour spent a lot of time and tried to sacrifice back the pawn, but finding no way forward he finally offered a draw with 2 minutes against almost 20 minutes on the clock after 72 moves. 4,5/9 and a performance of 2212 for 21 year old Devnani was just around expected, following a tournament with ups and downs. Elsness never recovered from a disastrous start with 1,0/4, and 4,5/9 here was a disappointing performance below 2200 – losing some 30 Elo points. Having celebrated his 50th anniversary a few months ago, he still won an unshared best veteran prize.



Devnani vs Elsness



Sherman vs Skotheim

CM Andreas Skotheim (2211) and **FM Reem Sherman (2299)** discussed a French Advance with 6.a3, in which black castled long. The open b-file apparently first gave white promising attacking chances, although black following 18.--- f6 and 19.--- fxe5 had enough counterplay and gradually took over the initiative. White's all the more obvious problem was that his queenside «attack» hit into an overprotected pawn at b7, while black with a center advantage and a strong knight at e4 gave him promising attacking chances on the kingside.

White's pair of bishops in this case did not help him much, as his dark-squared bishop at g3 was rather lame. Black at move 33 could exchange the bishop and start a decisive kingside attack with his heavy pieces. Skotheim due to this fourth lost game finished about half a point below his expected score, with a tournament performance of 2178. Sherman at 5,0/9 had a for him mediocre performance of 2230 and lost some 17 Elo points, but his very stressing travel to the tournament definitely should be taken into account here.



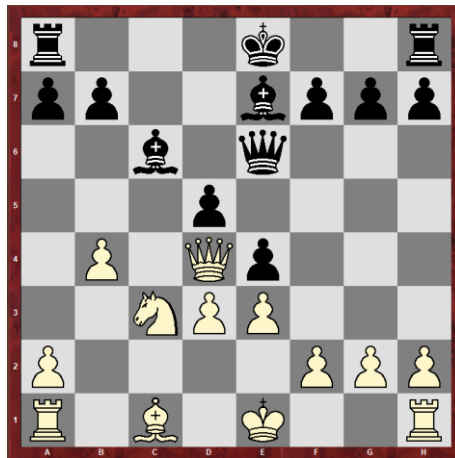
Vagman vs Myagmarsuren

The young teenager duel between **FM Roy Vagman (2294)** and **Evsuld Myagmarsuren (2107)** was a positional Sicilian Moscow duel, leading to a Maroczy Bind in which black due to his pair of bishops was fine if not better. Due to his bishops and queenside pawn majority, black had pleasant pressure with queen, two bishops and six pawns against queen, bishop, knight and six pawns after 27 moves. Vagman by creative tactics came up with counterplay against the black king, and following tactical exchanges the players after the first time control landed in a

drawn queen endgame. 15 year old Israeli Vagman also had a demanding road into this tournament, and following this should be proud of his 4,5/9 with a performance of 2312 – winning exactly the 6 Elo points needed for him to become a 2300-player again. 13 year old Myagmarsuren recovered from a very disappointing result in the European Youth Championships, as he despite a slow start with 0,5/3 reached 4,5/9 with a performance of 2263 – winning 72 Elo points.

FM Emerik Våpenstad Roulet-Dubonnet (2164) versus **FM Aniruddha Deshpande (2284)** was a tense Benoni Fianchetto duel, in which white first had a center advantage. Black and his bishops gradually took over the initiative as the position opened. As white ran seriously short of time in a crumbling position, black demonstrated a winning kingside attack and won by mate after 43 moves. Roulet-Dubonnet aged 19 remains very uneven, but 4,0/9 with a performance of 2257 here won back 21 Elo points. Deshpande at 5,0/0 with a performance of 2385 continued his strong results from this year, winning 25 out of the 116 Elo points needed to complete his IM title.

The Norwegian teenager duel between **Kim Roger Hansen Westrum (2243)** and **Sergey Eliseev (2083)** started up with an English Opening in which black due to his center pawns and pair of bishops was clearly better. Then white somehow overlooked that his queens had too few squares:



14. Bb2?? Bf6! 15. Qc5 b6 16. Nb5 bxc5 17. Nc7+ Ke7 18. Nxe6 Bxb2 19. Rb1 Bc3+ – and black due to his two extra bishops won the game very safely.

16 year old Eliseev at 5,0/9 with a performance of 2371 won 126 Elo points, by a wide margin more than any other player in this GM group. Westrum on the other hand had a sensational start, drawing top rated GM Robert Hovhannisyan in the first round, but in the end had a minus result with 4,0/9 and a performance just below 2200. It should be taken into account that Westrum has won a lot of Elo during the last few months, and following this now has a much more difficult starting point with his expected score.

CM Chinguun Bayaraa (2206) versus **Rohit Saravana Prakash (2226)** in short was a Symmetrical English Fianchetto in which white became much too passive, inviting black first to take over the initiative and then to win a backward white pawn at b3. White in desperation tried to complicate by a piece sacrifice, but stopped the clock after 29 moves as black had an extra bishop plus a decisive attack. 16 year old Prakash following this win joined the 5,0/9 community with a performance of 2367, moving close to the 2300 barrier after winning 62 more points at Fagernes. 17 year old Bayaraa at 4,0/9 dropped below his expected score due to this disappointing last round game, but still reached a fairly sound 2186-performance.



Bayaraa vs Prakash



Øksendal vs Wartiovaara

Martin Øksendal (2123) versus **FM Oliver Wartiovaara (2321)** was another junior duel, starting up with a Classical French. The game took an interesting turn as black soon after the opening forced himself to sacrifice a piece for three pawns with a tactical 11... Nxb4!? White came slightly better when he succeeded in blocking black's four against one pawn majority on the queenside with his pieces. The passed pawns at b3 and c4 however limited white's pieces a lot, and a draw upon white's suggestion was agreed in a balanced position after 37 moves.

15 year old Øksendal at 4,0/9 following a jumpy tournament landed on a very slight plus result, while our new Finn chessfriend Wartiovaara at 4,0/9 had a definitely disappointing performance below 2100.

Estonian **CM Dion Krivenko (2234)** as white against **WFM Ronit Levitan (2114)** today made an unusual start with 1.Nc3 and 2.Nf3, although the position later transposed into some close relative of a King's Indian Attack. White established a center pawn at e5 and marched his h-pawn to h5, but black had her thematic counterplay with 13... f6. The game however turned in favour of white as black after 14.exf6 strangely gave up the key pawn at e6 with 14... Nxf6? instead of the natural 14... Rxf6. Krivenko used his chance to sacrifice a bishop at h6 the very next move, and soon demonstrated an overwhelming attack:



24.Ng4! Nf7 25.Nxf6+ Rxf6 26.Rxg7+! – and black's only chance to stop 26... Qxg7 27.Re8+ Qf8 28.Rxf8 mate was to stop the clock and replace the pieces to their initial positions. Krivenko repaired much with this last round win, although his 4,5/9 still gave slightly disappointing performance of 2204. Levitan at 3,5/9 with a performance 2097 also was marginally below her expected score. Both players had a hard-fought tournament, drawing only one out of nine games.

The Indian duel between **Akhilesh Nagare (2076)** and **WGM Varshini Velavan (2217)** started up like a Catalan, but transposed into a Dutch Stonewall as black placed a knight at e4 and played f5. Black did fine after finding a fairly active position at a6 for her troublesome light-squared bishop, and gradually came better after white sacrificed two pawns for a short term initiative. Black made the better tactical calculations as white ran short of time, and after the first time control her passed a-pawn soon won heavy material. 25 year old Nagare «castled long» with score 0-0-0 for his last three rounds, but as he had nine higher rated opponents his 3,5/9 still qualified for a big plus with a performance of 2223 and 31 new Elo points. The older Velavan sister, now aged 25, on the other hand spent too much time and wasted too many chances earlier in this tournament. Although winning her two final games with style, she at 4,5/9 had a disappointing performance of 2147.

Mathias Lind Schouten (2147) versus **Rishi Vijayakumar (2096)** was a lively Queen’s Gambit in which both players castled long. Black playing with one rook, two bishops and four pawns against one rook, two knights and four pawns got some advantage, but still had a long road to winning chances when he short of time on the clock accepted a draw at move 36. In this case black could be well satisfied and white very well satisfied with the final score of 4,0/9. 18 year old Schouten had a performance of 2239 and won almost 40 new Elo points, while eleven year old Vijayakumar with a performance of 2117 won 8 more points and passed 2100 for the first time.



Schouten vs Vijayakumar



Katkov vs Gudbrandsen

FM Gustav Gudbrandsen (2275) versus **WFM Michelle Katkov (2071)** saw a Scotch opening leading to – nothing but a lot of exchanges. White offered a draw while taking a pawn with 19.Rxa7, realizing that he would soon have to return the pawn with a dead drawn rook and bishop endgame to follow. Aged 59 Gudbrandsen in this comeback made a very promising start with 2,0/3, but losing four out of his next five games he in the end had a disappointing score of 3,5/9 and a performance of 2144 – losing 31 Elo points. The only player not surprised

by this collapse apparently was Gudbrandsen himself, as he despite an ambitious playing style is very humble about his own playing strength. 19 year old Katkov was unlucky not to get enough heavy titleholders to fight for a WIM-norm in the two final rounds, but could be well satisfied with 4,0/9 and a performance of 2223. Winning 35 Elo points she is back above 2100, but the norm question is most important here as Katkov has already completed the Elo-demand of 2200 for her WIM-title.



Arsenie vs Welling

Cristian Arsenie (2091) and **IM Gerard Welling (2244)** discussed an Italian Opening in which many minor pieces left early. White after 18 moves accepted an invitation to a queen exchange and afterwards apparently had a safe endgame with two rooks, one bishop and seven pawns against two rooks, one knight and seven pawns. Black however got the help needed to weaken white's queenside pawns, while white failed to come up with any disturbing counterplay. As black had won a pawn at a2 and established a two against one pawn majority on the

queenside, he was anyway much better in the rook and minor piece endgame when white after 45 moves blundered another pawn and resigned. Aged 64, Welling despite this nice final shot at 4,0/9 had a disappointing performance of 2111 and continues his slow fall towards the 2200-barrier. 13 year old Arsenie despite a difficult start had a plus result within reach before the last round, but following this fourth lost game he landed just below his expected score with 3,0/9 and a performance of 2065.



Lohia vs Hort

The duel between **CM Sohum Lohia (2177)** and **Max Hort (1952)** started up like a French Tarrasch in which white appeared to have the much better preparation, as his pair of bishops and better pawn structure gave a very pleasant pressure in this isolated queen's pawn position. Sacrificing an exchange at f3 might well have been black's best try to escape from this burning cockpit. It still proved insufficient for survival as white kept the more active pieces, and in the final position after 32 moves had a sound rook extra in the remaining queen and

rooks position. 14 year old Lohia achieved two nice wins in the final rounds, but it was still too little and too late to save his tournament – ending with 4,0/9 and a performance just above 2100. 28 year old Hort had a low expected score in this field, playing only opponents rated at least 120 points above himself. His 3,0/8, plus a requested walk over loss for round 8, following this gave a performance of 2090 and 24 more Elo points.

CM Joel Paul Ganta (2169) in the morning informed the arbiters that he felt unfit to play, and following this his last round opponent **Rindhya Velavan (1852)** got a walk over win. Ganta following his sensational start with 2,5/3 was in the IM-norm run until the last two rounds, and for his first 8 games had an average of 2373 for his opponents. 3,0/8 following this still was a performance of 2286 and qualified for 17 Elo points. Rindhya played only much higher rated opponents and so 3,0/8 also for her was well above expected – leaving a performance of 2161 and 37 new Elo points.

Shadi Sian (2146) versus **Max Moe Pedersen (2064)** saw a Queen's Gambit Exchange line in which black had no problems after exchanging the dark-squared bishops and putting his light-squared bishop in an active position at f5. As none of the players wanted to exchange the light-squared bishops later on, they instead shared the point and exchanged the scoresheets after 19 moves.



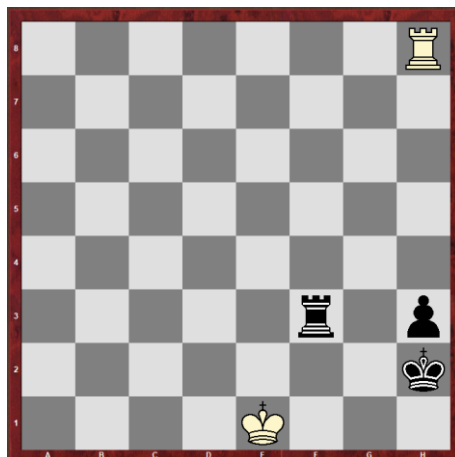
Sian vs Pedersen

16 year old Sian lost only two games in this tournament, but failed to win any game, and 3,5/9 following this was a disappointing performance of 2054. 19 year old Pedersen in his first GM group recovered somewhat from a slow start with 1,0/5, but 3,5/9 in the end still was a performance below 2000.

WFM Valentina Verbin (2085) versus **Roe Pelech (2087)** was a Sicilian Taimanov duel in which white came up with nothing but some exchanges, allowing black gradually to take over the initiative. Black eventually won a pawn when entering the rook endgame. Verbin for a long time afterwards defended very well, forcing off all the queenside pawns to reach a well-known drawn position with rook and two kingside pawns against rook and three kingside pawns. Temporarily giving up a second pawn here was fine, as white after 57 moves had reached a drawn endgame with rook versus rook and h-pawn. Running short of time Verbin made things a bit difficult by allowing her king to be cut off along the f-file, and then the final mistake came:



Verbin vs Pelech



69.Rg8! Rg3 70.Rf8 Kg2 71. Rf2+ Kh1 still was a draw, although no longer a trivial one.

Instead 69.Ke2? Kg2 70.Rh7 Rg3 71.Rf7 h2 72.Rf2+ Kh3 73.Rf1 Rg1 lost a key tempo and the game. 17 year old Israeli Peelech was in the IM-norm run for the first five rounds, but then lost three games in a row. Following a last round pole-in he still had a very satisfying result with 4,0/9 and a performance of 2271 – winning 78 points. 21 year Verbin made many strong moves but blundered too much in this tournament, and her 2,5/9 following this lost 16 Elo points.



Aamodt vs Gomez Aguirre

Peder Aamodt (2047) versus **CM Juan Gomez Aguirre (2065)** was a closed Ruy Lopez duel, in which white kept a slight initiative. The rook and knight endgame after 28 moves was somewhat better for white, as his knight at f5 was superior to black's knight at f6. Redirecting the knight to d5 for an exchange was no ambitious plan in this situation, and realizing that white immediately accepted a draw in the remaining rook endgame with seven pawns on each side.

16 year old Aamodt wasted some chances but at 3,0/9 won 10 more Elo points.

16 year old Aguirre failed to win any more games after his sensation first round win against WGM Sieber, but 3,0/9 with a performance of 2095 still qualifies as a small step forward following some disappointing tournaments recently.



Kasi vs Strømhaug

The Young Indian **Krithigga Kasi (1989)** as white against the even younger Norwegian **Kristoffer Wang Strømhaug (1946)** went for an English Fianchetto line, but played it too passively after both players castled long. Black exchanged his more active minor pieces to pick up a loose white pawn at h5, and due to his extra pawn he had a clear advantage when offering a draw in the queen and rooks position after 32 moves. Both players here recovered somewhat from a difficult start, as Kasi lost all her first four games and Strømhaug his first three. 2,5/8 with performances of

1923 and 1922 in the end was slightly below expected for both.

65 year old **FM Richard Bjerke (2074)** and 15 year old **Indy Southcott-Moyers (2022)** from 1.Nf3 transposed into a Slav Opening line, in which white won back the pawn at c4 and kept a slight initiative. Black however got the help needed to exchange all dangers, reaching a rather closed minor piece endgame which was agreed a draw after 32 moves. Bjerke made many strong moves from a strategical point of view, but blundered a bit too much. He lost some 30 Elo points more following 2,5/8 with a performance of 1933. Soutcott-Moyers after his first tournament in Norway could be fairly well satisfied with 3,0/9 and a performance of 2067, winning 19 more Elo points.



Bjerke vs Southcott-Moyers

Finally, **Rune Kleiven Rynning (1712)** versus **Ask Amundsen (1956)** was a Symmetrical English with a lot of early exchanges, leaving after 23 moves an endgame with rook, bishop and four pawns on each side. The opposite-coloured bishops here voted for a draw, although black's passed pawn at b5 still gave him an edge. Allowing black to play b4 and b3 was a mistake from white, as he afterwards had to give up a pawn. Probably white still had a fortress draw, but his defence now was difficult and black after 40 moves had succeeded in opening the kingside with a won position. Inviting a rook exchange with 45.--- Ra2? in this situation was a strange mistake from black. As white considered the opposite- coloured bishops too dangerous to be tested, he instead lost the rook and bishop endgame a few moves later on. 18 year old Amundsen had a pole-out tournament until the last round pole-in.



Rynning vs Amundsen

2,0/8, plus a walk over draw, gave him a disappointing performance of 1869 – losing some 38 more Elo points. 32 year old Rynning as the lowest rated player in this field scored only 0,5/8, plus a walk over draw for round 1, but hopefully still learned a lot from his many strong opponents. Fairly typical for such a situation Rynning had a draw or win within reach in about half of the games, but spent too much time and failed to complete his games.

Open Group

The **Open Group** also made a slightly disappointing start today: The first board duel between **Sigurd Kittilsen (1807)** and **Trond Thorgersen (2106)** after 13 moves and 25 minutes was agreed a draw upon black's suggestion. The draw offer came very suddenly in a probably balanced but double-edged and unpredictable position. White in this Caro-Kann main line had castled long and sacrificed a pawn to open the kingside against black's king, but after entering the attacking train he immediately accepted the offer to jump off. Second board duel between **Ståle Sending (1951)** and **Terje Lund (2008)** had been agreed a draw upon white's suggestion after six moves.

First rated Thorgersen and second rated Lund obviously were satisfied to share the first and second place at 7,0/9. Highly originally the veteran prize in this group also was shared between the two first players, as Lund is aged 52 and Thorgersen 61. Lund well deserved ended up number 1 in the final list, as he had not only the better Buchholz, but also the better Elo performance with 2045 against 2010. Thorgersen following this actually lost a few Elo points upon this shared first prize, despite winning five games and losing none. Lund had a lot of work to do in between the games and understandably requested one walk over draw during the double-round day, hence his actual score was 6,5/8. The top two players dominated the tournament and also were the only undefeated players.



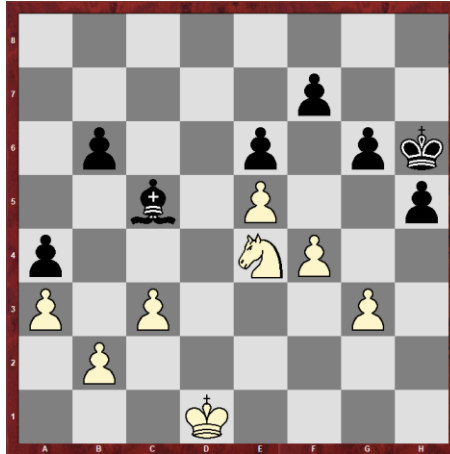
Lien, Lund and Thorgersen
(Photo: Tom Eriksen)

While third-rated Sending gave up his chances for a top three place when offering a draw in the last round, Kittilsen following his fast start with 4,0/5 had very strong Buchholz and still could end up in third place. Third place here was very important, less because it was the last money prize than because it was the last ticket for the next GM-group. 30 year old Kittilsen to stay in third place however needed first a draw in the third board game between **Sebastian Lien (1706)** and **Benjamin Spagnoli (1752)** – and second also a draw or a win for white



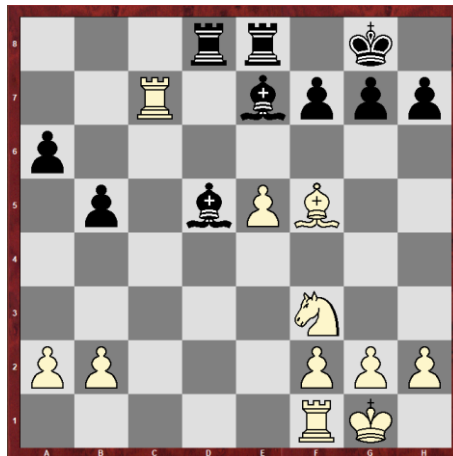
Lien vs Spagnoli

in the fourth board junior duel between **Fredrik Elsness (1634)** and **Elias Rustan (1625)**. In the latter game Rustan after 38 moves in an interesting minor piece endgame was ahead on the board, but behind on the clock:



38.--- h4! put pressure on white, as 39.gxh4?! Be3 followed by 40.--- Bxf4 is leaves white and his knight struggling for a draw. 39.Nxc5!/? probably would have saved a draw for white after the critical continuation 39.--- hxg3! 40.Ke2 bxc5 41.Kf3. 15 year old Rustan instead blundered with 39.--- bxc5?!, after which white immediately demonstrated the pawn endgame win with 40.gxh4 Kh5 41.b4! Eleven year old Elsness following this made a performance of 1824 and won 95 Elo points – more than any other player in the Open Group.

The key game between Lien and Spagnoli in the meantime had started up like a positional Semi-Slav duel, in which white kept a pressure and eventually won a pawn. As the queens disappeared after 24 moves, white had two rooks, one bishop, one knight and six pawns versus two rooks, two bishops and five pawns.



Black probably made a dubious decision as he instead of keeping the pair of bishops 24.--- Bb4, or forcing opposite coloured bishops with 24.--- Bxf3, started to exchange the queenside pawns with 24.-- Bxa2? Following this black soon had forced himself into a borderline endgame with rook, bishop and three kingside pawns against rook, knight and four kingside pawns. Black first defended well and after 40 moves had reached an objectively drawn rook endgame with g- and h-pawns versus e-, g- and h-pawns. Computer programs considered this position a safe draw, as white's extra passed pawn is too close to the remaining kingside pawns. White of course still had all the remaining possibilities here, and got the help needed to activate his king and escort in the passed e-pawn.

Following this Sebastian Lien became the only player at 6,5/9, winning an unshared third prize and securing his place in the next GM-group. The 20 year old Bergen player was a bit lucky as he won drawish endgames in both his final rounds. Lien however was rewarded for fighting all the way in and following many long games also reached the third highest performance with 1929 – winning 55 more Elo points. Following this it was hard to argue that his promotion at the end of the day was not well deserved.

In the shadows on the fifth board, still inspired **Tor Wetle Hoem (1874)** gambited a Scandinavian pawn in the opening and won a very convincing 25-move attacking game as black against **Ole Martin Wiig (1697)**.

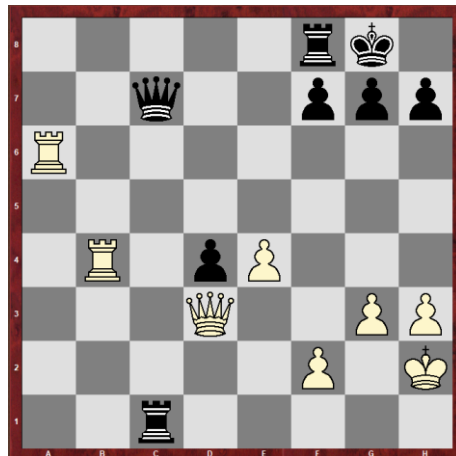
The generation duel between 71 year old **Ole Smeby (1844)** and 15 year old **Daniel Vollheim (1396)** on the sixth board was a hard-fought draw, ending with a repetition of checks after the first time control. The group of players at 6,0/9 following this included Kittilsen in fourth place, Hoem fifth, Sending sixth and Elsness seventh.



Bayaraa vs Levitan

Seventh board was a final for the best woman prize, which 15 year old Mongolian **Bilguun Bayaraa (1746)** won convincingly as white against 12 year old Israeli **Liel Levitan (1425)**. Bayaraa following this reached 5,5/9 and won the best woman prize unshared, although her score still was almost one point below expected. The younger Levitan sister at 4,5/9 on the other hand was more than two full points above her expected score, and brought home 93 more Elo-points.

The eight board duel between 14 year old **Even Huneide Hetland (1900)** and 89 year old **Aage Mella (1635)** was a remarkable generation duel which got a sensational outcome:



Black invited a queen exchange with 29.--- Qc3 – with a very likely draw to follow after the straightforward 30.Qxc3 dxc3 31.Rc4. Unwilling to accept a drawish double rook endgame, the young lion instead played 30.Qxd4?? – hoping to save an extra pawn for the endgame after 30.--- Qxd4 31.Rxd4. The wise old man studied the position for a couple of minutes, but then instead went for 30.--- Qe1! – after which white immediately realized the decisive threats against his king and stopped the clock. A few weeks before his 90th anniversary, Mella once more danced a slow foxtrot among the young wolves. The super veteran made a very solid result with 4,0/7 plus two walk over draws, almost defending his Elo following the surprising last-round win. Unpredictable Hetland had a nightmare week with way too many blunders, but handled the disappointing results like a great sportman and for sure he will soon demonstrate his great potential again.

Round 9 (also) saw surprisingly few surprising results on the lower boards. Twelve year old **Alina Shehzad (1363)** by winning her last round game however reached 4,5/9 and added some 77 new Elo points. The youngest female players overall did very good results in this group. Eleven year old **Sophie Damiano (1373)** finished her tournament with a fairly sound 25-move draw against **Sigmund Ellingsrud (1797)**, and noted another big plus with 48 won Elo points. Keeping aside the two short top board draws, the Open had a remarkable fighting spirit even in the last round – as 11 out of the remaining 15 games got a winner.

To end on a happy note: We congratulate the prize winners also in the Open Group and hope to meet many of the participants from both groups again for our next Fagernes tournament – now confirmed for March 24 to March 31 2024!

Photos by Anniken Vestby except for one picture by Tom Eriksen on page 21.