

FAGERNES CHESS INTERNATIONAL 2025

THE LAHLUM ROUND REPORT

7



GM Group

The first board duel between sixth-rated GM Raja Rithvik R and second-rated GM Diptayan Ghosh today was a fairly safe 21-move draw. The next two boards however both got a winner: Fourth-rated GM Frode Urkedal got his sweet revenge by winning a great attacking game as white against ninth-rated GM Ameet Ghasi, and fifth-rated GM Rinat Jumabayev hit back with a patient long win as white against IM Moksh Doshi.

First-rated GM Gergely Kántor is lurking just behind the top boards, but despite some advantage the solid Hungarian had to accept a draw as black against Norwegian IM Semen Mitusov today. Fifth board's duel between GM Denis Makhnev and IM Arystanbek Urazayev not unexpectedly became a short and safe draw. Sixth board on the other hand saw a big surprise, as Norwegian FM Eivind Grunt Kreken won a great attacking game against the solid Lithuanian veteran GM Eduardas Rozentalis!

The two next boards both had long borderline endgames today. Swede IM Linus Johansson after more than six hours had to accept a draw against English IM Jonah B. Willow, while Hungarian IM Balázs Csonka after five hours succeeded in winning against the highly talented 15-year-old IM Lukas Dotzer.

Following all this GM Urkedal and GM Jumabayev are sharing the lead with an outstanding 5,5/7 and performances close to 2700, with GM Raja, IM Csonka, GM Ghosh and FM Kreken wheeling just half a point behind. The tournament winner for sure can be found among these players – with Ghosh versus Urkedal, Jumabayev versus Csonka and Raja versus Kreken coming up as the top board pairing for the second last round.

28 year old Balázs Csonka is now the frontrunner among the GM norm candidates, needing «only» 1,5/2 more. Doshi and Johansson lagged further behind schedule for a GM-norm following today's results, but did not lose the holy grail entirely out of sight – as both might reach it if winning their two last games.

18-year-old Norwegian FM Eivind Grunt Kreken following today's win has a norm performance above 2500 and is the obvious frontrunner among players without a GM or IM title – needing 0,5/2 for his second IM norm and 2.0/2 for a sensational first GM norm.

17-year-old Norwegian FM Sergey Eliseev today won a candidate duel against FM Sondre Melaa, and probably will score his first IM-norm in case of 1,5/2 for round 8 and 9. The situation is the same for the 16-year-old English CM Indy Southcott-Moyers, as he today won an attacking game as white against IM Erik Hedman.

Norwegian FM Jacob Templen Grave and Scottish FM Rishi Vijayakumar need a strong spurt, but might still score an IM-norm if winning both their final games.

The Indian duel between **GM Raja Rithvik R (2538)** and **GM Diptayan Ghosh (2573)** on board one started up with a closed old Ruy Lopez variation, played by Bogoljubov about three generations ago.

The center gradually opened with 10.--- exd4, 13.--- c5 and 15.--- cxd4. White was half an hour ahead on the clock and probably still in his preparation when starting up a kingside offensive with 16.h3 and 17.g4. Then white however spent a lot of time for the next four moves without finding any active plan, and a draw was agreed upon white's suggestion at move 21.



Rithvik vs Ghosh

GM Ameet Ghasi (2502) won a great attacking game as white against **GM Frode Urkedal (2550)** in the final round of the last Fagernes tournament – when Ghasi completed his GM title.

Today Urkedal got his chance to play for revenge with the white pieces. Facing an expected King’s Indian challenge, he went for a positional Makogonov variation with 5.h3, but soon accelerated with 7.d5 and 8.f4. White came better from the preparation stage



Urkedal vs Ghasi

here, as he after 11 moves was ahead on the clock with a space advantage on the board. Black very understandably wanted counterplay, but 14.--- Qc7?! and 15.--- e6? still was a too loose plan – as white within two moves won the key pawn at d6. Following 21.f5! Urkedal had this under firm control as he was a pawn up with the pair of bishops, the safer king and some 45 minutes extra on the clock. Ghasi following this anyway was lost when he allowed a nice tactical finish:



26.--- Qxe5?! 27.Rxg7+ Qxg7 28.Bb3+ Kh7 29.Qh5+ Qh6 30.Qf7+ Qg7 31.Bc2+ and black stopped the clock. Urkedal got a great revenge today, although Ghasi for sure much preferred to win their first game – when the whole GM-title was at stake.

GM Rinat Jumabayev (2549) as white against **IM Moksh Doshi (2369)** took a patient English start with 3.e3 and 5.b3. White spent 18 minutes for his move 8, and then left theory with an unexpected 8.Na4?! Black went for b5-b4 and held an initiative in the early middle game, but white equalized after redeveloping his knight via c3 and b1 to d2. Exchanging the strong light-squared fianchetto bishop for a knight with 27.--- Bxe4? was a positional mistake and somewhat a turning point in this game, as white's pair of bishops later always gave him the better long term perspectives. Jumabayev was happy to exchange queens, as he after the first time control had all the active possibilities with rook, two bishops and seven pawns against rook, bishop, knight and seven pawns.



Exchanging the knight for white's dark-squared bishop to reach an opposite-coloured bishop endgame obviously was a natural plan for black here, 47.--- Nd4? still was a decisive mistake, as white after 48.Bxd4 cxd4 49.Rc6 soon won a pawn with a decisive initiative in the endgame. White had all the more active pieces here, and the opposite-coloured bishops did not help black that much as one set of rooks were still on the board.

Jumabayev immediately came back on track after yesterday's loss and shares first place with Urkedal. Doshi has done very well despite losing this difficult black game, and might still score a GM-norm if able to win his two remaining games.

IM Semen Mitusov (2459) and **GM Gergely Kántor (2578)** both spent some time from their Four Knights Opening, in a slightly strange variation where black at move 4 places his dark-squared bishop at d6 – ahead of a pawn at d7. Black still came slightly better, as white gave up his dark-squared bishop for a knight at f6. Kántor was trying to increase his dark-square dominance when the game suddenly turned tactical:



17.f3 Bg5 18.Bxf7+?! Kxf7 19.fxg4+ Kg8 and a tense struggle followed. Black kept the better pawn structure into the endgame with rook, bishop and five pawns against rook, knight and five pawns. Mitusov however defended well, and after the time control he even came closer to winning chances due to his more active king. Draw was agreed by repetition after 53 moves. 19 year old Mitusov following this draw is out of the run for a GM-norm, but still in the run for a top five prize.



Makhnev vs Urazayev

Fifth board was a Kazakhstani duel between **GM Denis Makhnev (2537)** and **IM Arystanbek Urazayev (2467)**, which was agreed a draw by a much too well known repetition in a closed Catalan after 13 moves and within 13 minutes. The outcome came not unexpected as the players are friends and travel companions of close to equal strength.

Understandable as it was, this short draw still was Urazayev's final goodbye to GM-norm chances for this tournament. Both players following this rest day can continue their fight for a top five prize.

FM Eivind Grunt Kreken (2326) and **GM Eduardas Rozentalis (2481)** entered a Caro-Kann in which black following 3.Nc3 went for the rare Gurgenzidze system with 3... g6, 4... Bg7 and 5... f6. Both players spent some time for the first 12 moves, while white due to his pawn at e5 and better development kept an advantage after castling long. The GM then made a blunder by allowing a strong piece sacrifice – and the young FM immediately accepted the challenge:



13... Nh6 14.Bxd5! cxd5 15.Nxd5 Qb8 16.Rhe1 and black's king already was in hot water. Rozentalis found nothing better than 16... b5 17.Qf3 Nf7 18.Nc7+ Qxc7 19.Qxa8 Nd8 20.Qd5, when white had restored the material balance and kept a powerful attack. Kreken around move 29 was under two minutes on the clock, but continued his inspired play on the board. A few moves later the so far unemployed h-pawn was ready to decide the game:



34.h4! Rxc4 35.Rxe5 Qd6 36.Ree1 Qf6 37.h5 and black stopped the clock. Kreken following this great game is half a point ahead of schedule for an IM norm, and sensationally still inside the run for a GM norm.



Willow vs Johansson

IM Jonah B. Willow (2471)

yesterday was black in a French, but today played white in the same opening against **IM Linus Johansson (2392)**.

White went for an ambitious and tense Advance variation. Computers considered white's position slightly better as he after 15 moves had picked up a black pawn at a5. Johansson however had spent almost no time so far, and obviously was in his preparation. Black had some compensation due to his pair of

bishops and dark-square dominance, and white to win the pawn had weakened his kingside by 12.g4!?.

Lagging almost one hour behind on the clock, white gave back the pawn with 19.f4?! Bxf4 20.Rf2 – leaving black slightly better in a materially balanced position. Black after that was happy to exchange the queens as well, as he after 35 moves had a pleasant pressure in the endgame with rook, bishop and four pawns against rook, knight and four pawns. White gave up his two h-pawns to get rid of black's b-pawn, leaving a borderline endgame with rook, knight and two pawns against rook, bishop and three pawns. This appeared drawish as white first defended very well and succeeded in exchanging two of the pawns. As the last black pawn reached g3 at move 54, Willow took the emergency exit and sacrificed his knight on the pawn.

Both players spent some time in the remaining rook and bishop versus rook endgame, and this by a wide margin became the last game to finish this round. Willow however knew (or found) the technique to defend and his king was still fairly safe when the endgame reached the 50-move rule at move 104. For unknown reasons Willow continued two more moves before demanding the draw. Johansson could have had fairly good chances for a GM-norm if winning this game, but might still reach his much wanted GM-title if winning both his remaining games. Willow has a lower average of opponents and needed a win in round 7 to keep any GM-norm chances alive.

The Hungarian-Austrian duel between **IM Balázs Csonka (2459)** and **IM Lukas Dotzer (2453)** of course started up with the Vienna line of Queen's Gambit. Black here snatched a pawn at c4, but obviously still in a preparation gave it back at b5. Chances were about equal as black at move 12 realized the c5-break. A long deadlock between the white pawn at d4 and the black pawn at c5 finally was broken with 18.dxc5, leading to balanced but loaded position. Both players spent much time here. Csonka was down at five minutes and Dotzer at eight minutes when the advanced tactics came:



Csonka vs Dotzer



24.--- Qe4? 25.Ndc6! Bxc6 26.Nxc6 Qxc6 27.Bxc5 Bc7 28.Rxd8 Bxd8 and now 29.Bxc4! would have won a pawn with a decisive advantage, due to white's two connected passed pawns. White instead went for 29.Bg2? and black found his escape with 29.--- Qa4! Offering a queen exchange after 30.Qd2 Qd7? however was a mistake, as the remaining double minor piece endgame was a borderline between a win for white and a draw. Both players spent much time for first moves after time control, and the decisive point came with nine minutes against three minutes on the clock at move 45:



Active or passive defence is a dilemma in many worse endgames ...

Now was the time to build a fortress in this one, as it is still would not have been easy for white to make progress with his extra pawn after 45.--- Nd7! 46.Bxe6 Nf8 47.Kf5 Kc5.

Dotzer instead went active with 45.--- Nd3?, and Csonka instructively won after 46.Bxe6 Nxf2+ 47.Kf5 Kc5 48.Kg6 Kd6 49.Bf5 Nd1 50.Kxg7 Ne3 51.Bd3 Ng4 52.Be2 Nxh2?!

53.Kxh6 followed by 54.Kh5 55.Kh4 56.Kh3. Dotzer is definitely out as a GM-norm candidate after losing his second game, while undefeated Csonka after winning this tight game needs «only» 1,5/2,

IM Aradhya Garg (2387) versus **IM Tor Fredrik Kaasen (2472)** started up with a Queen's Gambit declined, soon leaving the traditional main lines as black went for an early queenside fianchetto with 5.--- b6?! White became too aggressive trying to punish it:



8.e4? Nxe4 9.Nxe4 Qe7! 10.Ng5 h6 11.Qh3 dxe4 and black was a pawn up with a winning position, with white lacking squares for his remaining knight. As white finally found a plan to exchange the knight, black was ready with a more powerful counter-plan:



19.Nxe4 Bxe4 20.f3 Rxd2+! 21.Kxd2 Qd8+ 22.Ke2 Qd3+ 23.Kf2 Bd4+ 24.Kg3 Be5+ 25.Kf2 Qd4+ 26.Re3 Qxb2+ 27.Re2 Qd4+ 28.Re3 Bf5+ and black soon was a piece up.

FM Adharsh K (2317) and **GM Kaido Kulatos (2510)** discussed a Caro-Kann Advance in which black came 15 minutes ahead on the clock. After exchanging one set of knights plus the light-squared bishops, black was fine if not better on the board. The GM after 17 moves was happy to force a queen exchange, although he ended up with two isolated b-pawns. It soon turned out that white had no plan to make progress on the queenside, while black could use his half-open c-file and also mobilize his center pawns for a direct attack. Kulaots again spent much time and was down to seconds on the clock after 35 moves, but still made the better tactical calculations from a winning position:



36.Ref2 dxc2! 37.Rxf6+ Kg7 38.Nd4 Nxb2! 39.Ne6+ Kh7 40.Nxc7 Rxc7 41.Rf7+ Kg8! 0-1

The Norwegian teenage-star duel of **IM Aksel Bu Kvaløy (2481)** vs **FM Evsuld Myagmarsuren (2305)** started up with a rather slow and positional Slav, opening as black went for 7... c5 followed by 10... cxd4 and 11... dxc4. The hanging pawns position here favoured white, as he was well ahead with his piece development. Weakening the kingside with 15... g6? was a more or less decisive mistake, and Kvaløy in an inspired mood smashed through with an attack on the dark kingside squares within a few more moves.



Kvaløy vs Myagmarsuren



18.d5! exd5 19.Qh6 Qc7 20.cxd5 Bg4 21.Rc1 Qd7 22.Ne5 and white soon was a piece up with an ongoing attack.



Hillarp vs Fiskaaen

GM Tiger Hillarp (2462) and FM Martin Holten Fiskaaen (2283)

had an exciting game in the last round of last year's last Fagernes tournament, when Fiskaaen after five tense hours saved a draw and scored his first IM-norm. In their game today the Tiger remarkably spent almost 55 minutes for his first 10 moves, even when this line of a King's Indian Attack was well known at least until 10.Nh4!?

The knight soon was exchanged for a black bishop, and white after 20

moves had got two bishops for two knights. The pawn at g5 weakened white's kingside a lot, and black had enough counterplay to keep the position dynamically balanced. 21.--- Nc4? however was a misunderstood plan, and white came better following a classical center push with 22.e4! and 24.e5. The GM around move 28 was better, but he had only two minutes left on the clock – and the position on the board was no way safe as all the pawns ahead his king had ran forward. A tense fight intensified as both players were short of time before move 40... White's attack appeared to be more dangerous, but



Fiskaaen found a good counterattack plan: 38.--- gxf5! 39.Qxh5 Qxb3 40.Bxf5 Qe3+ 41.Kh1 g6 42.Bxg6 fxg6 43.Qxg6+ Kf8 44.Qh6+ Kg8 45.Qg6+ Kf8 – and the big question was whether white had something more than a repetition of checks.



The GM went for 46.Rf1+ Nf2+, but now should have chosen 47.Kg1! Rf7 48.Qh6+ Kg8 49.Qg6+ with a draw. Instead 47.Kg2? Qh3+ 48.Kxf2 Rf7+ forced white to give up the queen with 49.Qxf7+ Kxf7 50.Bg3, after which only black could have chances for a full point. The FM however parked his king on the wrong square with 50.--- Kg6? and the GM scraped a draw with 51.Rc1! Qf5+ 52.Kg2 Qe4+ 53.Kh3 Kh5 54.Rf1 a4 55.Rf6! Fiskaen to keep the IM-norm hope alive this time needed a win against Hillarp, but has a solid plus result following the draw.



Fagernes on the day of round 7. Photo: Weeg.no

English **IM Yang-Fan Zhou (2418)** and Scottish **FM Rishi Vijayakumar (2317)** had a rather long and closed Italian discussion. With a symmetrical center, black took space on the kingside with h6 followed by g5. The first exchange came after 14 moves, as black exchanged his knight for white's dark-squared bishop at g3. White kept a slight initiative while exchanging two sets of minor pieces. Vijayakumar again went for active counterplay, and at move 23 sacrificed a pawn at b7 to create counterplay against the white king. A tight struggle followed during mutual time pressure, as black's kingside pressure gave him about enough compensation for the pawn. The decisive moment came in a truly complex position at move 40:



40.--- Rfg4! 41.Qh3+ Kg8 42.Rh2 would have been highly unclear. 40.--- e3? apparently was very strong, but white following a long consideration at move 41 found a truly impressive solution with 41.gxf4! Rxc2+ 42.Rxc2 e2 43.Re1! – as black's king cannot escape the h-file after 43.--- exf1Q+ 44.Rxf1 followed by 45.Rf3. The game concluded 43.--- Bxd4+ 44.Kh1! Bf2 45.Rxe2 Qh6+ 46.Rh2 Bh4 47.Rxh4 Qxh4 48.Rh2 1-0

Yang-Fan is in the run for a moneyprize following this win, while 13 year old Vijayakumar still can make an IM norm if winning his two remaining games.

Norwegian **IM Mads Vestby-Ellingsen (2398)** and Latvian **GM Normunds Miezis (2409)** today started up with a Sicilian Kan variation, transposing into a Maroczy Bind with a rather aggressive 8.f4!? and 10.f5 from white. After both players had castled short, the position settled with a white space advantage, partially due to his pawn at f5 and partially due to the d5 outpost. The position remained rather static and a draw was agreed by a fairly sound repetition after 22 moves.

Peder Marcus Aamodt (2242) as white against **IM Svyatoslav Bazakutsa (2474)** took a slow start with 1.d4 2.Nf3 and 3.Nbd2, but then accelerated with 4.e4. The position was approximately balanced after 10 moves, although white had spent one hour on the clock. White however blundered it all away when taking back at pawn at move 11 – after spending less than one minute:



11.Nxe4 Nxe4 12.Bxg7 Kxg7 13.Qxe4 Qc3+ 14.Ke2 is slightly stressful to the white king, but fully playable. White's idea instead was 11.Bxe4?? Nxe4 12.Bxg7 Kxg7?? 13.Nxe4 followed by 14.0-0. Bazakutsa needed less than one minute to improve the variation with 12... Nxd2! and after 13.Bxf8 Nxf3+ 14.Qxf3 Qe5+! 15.Kd2 Kxf8 he had a winning position with two minor pieces for a rook. Black won after 26 moves without any further worries.

The young Norwegianina duel between **FM Sondre Melaa (2344)** and **FM Sergey Eliseev (2226)** was a key game for the IM-norm chances of both players. This Queen's Gambit became rather unhortodox as black inserted a provocative 3... a6?!, still leading to equal chances as white after 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Qb3 allowed 6... c5 and 7... c4. The position after 14 moves was rather closed, although black with a pair of bishops and a queenside pawn majority was already better. Black kept a slight advantage into the queen and bishop endgame, suddenly increasing to more or less winning as white destroyed his own pawn structure when entering this endgame:



32.Qxf4 might still hold, while the game continuation 32...exf4? b3 33.Bh3 Qe8 34.Bf1 Qe6! 35.Qxe6 fxe6 gave black a fairly easy win in the bishop endgame. Melaa cannot any longer reach an IM-norm, while 1,5/2 now probably is sufficient to give Eliseev his first norm.

CM Kim Roger Hansen Westrum (2193) and **FM Gunnar Lund (2341)** discussed a modest and positional Sicilian Moscow line with 3.Bb5+ Bd7 4.Bxd7+. 10.e5?! without a light-squared bishop here was overambitious from white, as black could immediately activate his pieces and got s strong square at d5. Lund following a queen exchange could soon pick up the loose pawn at e5, while keeping the more active pieces. Black forced a safely won knight endgame before 40 moves.

FM Jacob Templen Grave (2337) versus **William Alexander Olsen (2188)** was another duel between two talented young Norwegians –

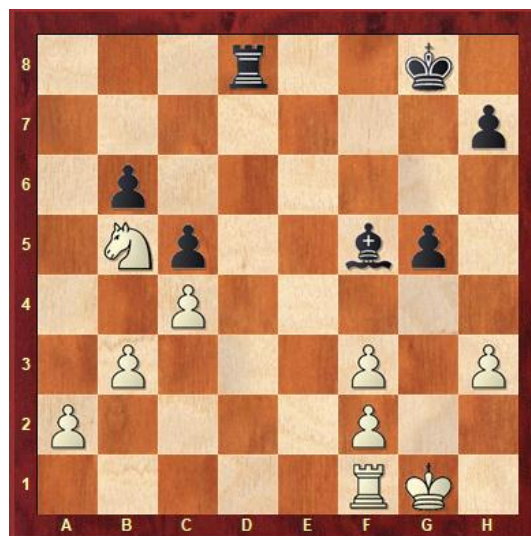
and another positional Sicilian duel. This one was a Rossolimo in which white after exchanging his bishop for a knight at c6 got a slight structural advantage.

White still did not have much of an advantage before black made a serious misunderstanding with 18.--- Nf4?, opening the position in favour of white's pieces after

19.Nxf4 exf4 20.e5! fxe5 21.Nf3 followed by 22.Nxe5. Olsen later sacrificed a pawn to get counterplay, and was back in the game – until he having got 40 minutes more on the clock suddenly lost sight in the remaining rook and minor piece endgame:



Grave vs Olsen



41.--- Rd2?! 42.Nc3 Bxh3 43.Re1 and now 43.--- g4!? still could have offered some chances, while 43.--- Kf7?? 44.Ne4 was the end of everything for this game. Grave after this win is still in the IM-norm run, although he needs two more won games against high-rated opponents.

CM Indy Southcott-Moyers (2227) and **IM Erik Hedman (2276)** started up with a Classical Queen's Indian variation, in which pawns at d4 and e4 gave white a pleasant plus. Indy needed a win to fight for an IM-norm, and went for it as he created a passed d-pawn and pushed it forwards with 15.d5 and 17.d6. Black around move 20-25 had the situation under fair control, blocking white's passed pawn with a solid knight at d7. White however had pressure and black the more difficult choices to make:



Computers give this as equal as they find nothing for white after 28.--- Bd4! 29.Qh7 Nf6. Black obviously still has to take care, and white suddenly got a winning advantage following 28.--- Bxe7? 29.dxe7+ Kxe7 30.Qg6 Qd5 31.Qxg7+ Kd8 as the h6-pawn too is falling. The IM missed the one chance he later got to save a difficult position.

16-year-old Southcott-Moyers is close to 2300 following this win, and 1,5/2 for the final rounds probably will be sufficient for an IM-norm.

Norwegian teenagers **Isak Vinh Brattgjerd (2202)** and **FM Nicolai Østensen (2260)** entered a Ruy Lopez, which immediately accelerated with the aggressive 3.--- f5?! White declined the challenge with 4.d3 and chances were about equal, with both players spending much time for the first 12-15 moves. Black accepted two isolated c-pawns as white at move 11 could exchange his bishop for a knight at c6. Black's pair of bishops approximately compensated for his inferior structure in a half open position. White still had fair chances until he suddenly forgot that moving a knight away from the center might lose control over key squares in the middle of the board ...



17.Na4?? Rd8
 18.Qg3 Be2!
 19.Bg5 Nxe4!
 20.Qh4 Nxg5
 21.Nxb6 Bxf1 and black won decisive material.

FM Ethan Pang (2257) versus **Ben Samuel Groth Skaar (2167)** saw another positional Sicilian Rossolimo duel, although in this case white did not exchange the bishop at c6. As black instead gave up his light-squared bishop for a knight at f3, white after 15 moves had a pair of bishops plus a center advantage. Pang again spent much time, and lagged some 40 minutes behind on the clock. Exchanging the bishop here could have been a useful plan for black, but if so Skaar became much too careless when realizing it:



15.--- Bf8?? came after a ten-minute consideration, but still was a blunder which white called within two minutes with 16.Bxc6! bxc6 17.Rb7. Black avoided a direct material loss with 17.--- Be7, but 18.g4 Rb8 19.Rfb1 Rxb7 20.Rxb7 left black's pieces paralyzed. Black in desperation tried to free himself with 20.--- f5?, but then lost material after 21.exf6 Bxf6 22.g5 Be7 23.Bxe7 Rxe7 24. Qf6.

Per Fredrik Holand (2070) as white in a Sicilian against **GM Erik Blomqvist (2475)** took a safe path with 2.Nf3, 3.g3 and 4.exd5. The queens soon were exchanged at e2, after which black equalized without any problems. White on the other hand had no problems, and after 22 moves the players had reached a balanced position with rook, bishop, knight and five pawns for each player. Black held a light pressure, but white had excellent chances for a draw until he suddenly ran into a highly unpleasant pin.



30.Rg1?? Rg8! 31.Rg2 Bh3 and the GM efficiently cashed in material and a full point.

Louis Khoo-Thwe (2118) and **FM Martin Øksendal (2250)** started up with a good old Steinitz line in a Classical French. White after 13 moves was some 50 minutes ahead on the clock. Black however had spent the time fairly well, as he after exchanging the dark-squared bishops plus one set of knights was fine if not better on the board. White found nothing better than exchanging some more, reaching after 22 moves a rook endgame in which black had a pleasant pressure. Øksendal however failed to test the critical plans here, and Khoo-Thwe hepled by his opponents time pressure escaped first into a rook endgame fortress and then into a drawn pawn endgame.

CM Andreas Skotheim (2229) and **Morten Andersen (2200)** today investigated the rare old Cozio defence with 3.--- Nge7 in a Ruy Lopez. Black got the help needed to exchange all the center pawns, leaving after 17 moves a position with two rooks, bishop, knight and six pawns for each player. Computers gave this as equal, although white due to his better development had a slight pressure and more margin for mistakes. Draw agreed upon white's suggestion after 21 moves, as black defended convincingly.

14 year old **David Mindestrømmen Simonsen (2034)** and 13 year old **IM Eshaan Hebbar (2175)** started up with a Pirc, in which white very aggressively went for a kingside pawn storm with 4.h4, 5.h5, 6.g4 and 7.g5 – including a pawn sacrifice at h5. White placed his own king at f2 and had reasonable compensation for the pawn due to his space advantage. Giving up his light-squared bishop for a knight with 19.--- Bxf3 reportedly was fine from a black point of view, but 20.--- e5? was a positional mistake as 21.f5! left the black bishop at g7 somewhat isolated. Hebbar was under pressure following this, but found a good (if boring) defence plan as he put seven pawns on dark squares – blocking everything but the h-file. Black after 35 moves had succeeded in exchanging the queens as well as all the rooks, and the remaining minor pieces endgame turned out to be a bankbox draw.



Gandrud in round 1 (Foto: Anniken Vestby)

FM Vegar Koi Gandrud (2273) versus **CM Nikolay Den Roover (2004)** started up with a rather slow Zukertort opening, but soon accelerated as white snatched a testimony pawn with 15.Qb5 and 17.Qxb7. It worked out fairly well for white as he had completed his development, and after taking the pawn could force a queen exchange by retreating the queen to b3.

Black's pair of bishops and active rooks still gave him some compensation with two rooks, two bishops and five pawns against two rooks, bishop, knight and six pawns. White's advantage increased as black later was too helpful exchanging pieces. White however also made some mistakes in the final endgame with knight versus bishop, and black several times had a draw within reach in the final version with knight, d- and e-pawn versus bishop and g-pawn. Gandrud finally won this after 63 moves, but it was too late and too little to save any IM-norm chances.

Sivert Schanche Tørfoss (2141) versus **Andreas Skrede Hausken (2002)** started up with a symmetrical English opening and had balanced chances from the opening. After 25 moves both players had queen, two rooks, knight, bishop and five pawns; play circled around black's passed and isolated pawn at b5. The pawn turned out to be a weakness more than an asset, and as white directed his pieces to active pieces black suddenly had a hard time saving his pieces:



30.Rc2! Rbb8 31.Nc6 Ra8 32.Na7! Nd5 33.Bxd5 Rxc2 34.Bxa8 won decisive material.

Sigurd Kittilsen (2010) had enough of long Sicilian theory discussions for a while, and as black against **WFM Valentina Verbin (2113)** he instead went for a rather short Caro-Kann theory discussion.

White chose an exchange line, and much due to her strong knight square at e5 held a sound positional advantage after exchanging the dark-squared bishops plus one set of knights.

19.--- f5?! weakened the black kingside too much, as he already had a pawn at h6. 24.g5! instructively confronted the pawn at h6 and opened the h-file for a decisive attack from white. Verbin later used her chances efficiently and after 33 moves was a fairly sound rook up.



Verbin in round 1
(Foto: Anniken Vestby)

Victor Lilliehöök (1993) against **Daniel Arvola (2088)** on the other hand saw another Sicilian Najdorf duel, slowing down a bit as both players following some hesitation castled short at move 17. White had two isolated c-pawns, but still came better due to his pair of bishops. Black was well inside the ring until he went for the much too slow 17.--- Bb7?, leaving white time for 18.f5! and 19.Bf4 with a dangerous attack. White's position was considered more or less winning as he following this could win an exchange with 21.Bd6 and 22.Bxf8. Arvola and his queen however fought on creatively, and succeeded in finding some counterplay against the white king. After 35 moves the position was rather messy, with both players under pressure on the clock.



35.Re2 Qf4 and now 36.Kg1! was the correct way to stop the mating threat at f1, although white would have a hard time to avoid a draw after 36.--- g3!

White instead went for 35.Re1?, and now 35...g3! is even more unpleasant for white – one possible line is 37.hxg3 Qf3+ 38.Kg1 Qxg3+ 39.Kf1 d4! and white will have a tough time to defend. The game instead went 36...d4? 37.Qe5 Qf3+ 38.Kg1 Bb7 39.Qg3 Qh1+ 40.Kf2 Qd5 41.Re3 Qh1 42.Re1 and then was drawn by repetition.

CM Ashwath Kaushik (1958) versus **Eirik Berget (2041)** saw a rather tame Queen’s Pawn opening, in which the light-squared bishops were exchanged within the first ten moves. The position with an isolated black queen’s pawn at d5 later was slightly better for white, much due to his fine fianchetto bishop at b2. The situation however changed as white weakened his dark kingside squares with 17.h3 and 19.f3?!, after which black three moves later suddenly had a queen at h2 and some attacking chances against the white king at f2. As black soon retreated the queen, while still won a pawn at d5 with a clear advantage. Black’s decision to sacrifice an exchange upon white’s d5-knight was dubious from a computer point of view, but from a human perspective white had a rather open king and many worries about the dark squares.

Kaushik still was an exchange and pawn up with a winning position when he made his move 40, with a few seconds left on the clock. After a ten minutes consideration, he however became too tricky with his move 41:



41.f4? Qf5! 42.Qf3 Re3! 43.Rxe3 Qxb1+ 44.Re1 Qb5+ 45.Qe2 Qc5 and black got enough checks and threats to scrape a draw by repetition a few moves later on.

Lars Tormod Haugen (1988) and **Kristoffer Wang Strømhaug (2020)** entered a modern Sicilian line in which the queens and all the knights were exchanged within the first 15 moves. Black had a slightly weakened pawn structure and a slightly awkward king at e7, hence white with the more active pieces kept a pleasant pressure with two rooks, two bishops and six pawns left for each player. Sacrificing an exchange to activate the bishops here did not help black for long, as white soon could force an exchange of his remaining bishop. After 30 moves the endgame with two rooks and five pawns against rook, bishop and five pawns was a fairly safe win, as white had two connected passed pawns on the queenside.

The Norwegian teenager duel between **Pantham Kaewpitakkun (2026)** and **Nikolai Olsen Wernberg (1893)** tested a closed Sicilian line in which both players started up with many prepared moves. Black apparently had the longest preparation and came ahead on the clock, but white due to the open d-file and d5 outpost kept a pleasant pressure after exchanging all the minor pieces within the first 18 moves. Exchanging the rooks was a natural plan for black, but 21.--- Rxd5? still was a strategical mistake as white after 22.exd5 got a protected passed pawn in the queen endgame. White efficiently cashed in a pawn soon afterwards. Black threw in the scoresheets after 34 moves, as white had a safe king at g2 and was a passed pawn up.

Finally, on board 33, **Benjamin Halvorsen (1966)** as white in a closed Sicilian against **Amund Pihl Strand (1914)** sacrificed a pawn at c3 and had about enough compensation due to his pair of bishops and the strong outpost at d5. White soon started a direct kingside attack with 16.f4 and 17.f5 followed by h4-g4, and gradually came much better as black failed to come up with any counterplay. Black's decision to sacrifice an exchange with 21.--- Rxc3? was dubious, but still gave him some disturbing activity with 22.--- d5! and 23.--- d4. For a few moves the position on the board was rather messy. Strand however had less than two minutes left on the clock after 28 moves, and Halvorsen efficiently used the chance when he saw a weakening of the black kingside:



30.--- f6? 31.Bd1! Nf8?! 32.Bb3+ Kh8 33.Qc4 Nd7 34.Rxe8+ Qxe8 35.Rc8 1-0

Lukas Dominik Gåsland (1994) got a bye this round, but was observed playing blitz in the evening and will be back in the main tournament for round 8.

Open Group

The **Open** had a relatively short and intense round on the top five boards: All of them had finished within three and a half hours, and all but one had got a winner. The exception was the first board duel between **Sondre Stai (1786)** and **Isai Sivaparan (1944)**, which was agreed a draw after 32 moves. Stai should be well satisfied about that, partly as 13 year old Sivaparan might be his main challenger for the first price, and partly as black still had a slight pressure. White never had much of an advantage in this first round game, but on the other hand he was never really close to losing.

65 year old **Karim Ali (1876)** as white on the second board got a strong initiative from the opening in the veteran duel against **Guttorm Andersen (1842)**, and won by a crushing attack:



21.e5! Qx5 22.Bxc6+ Ke7 23.b5+ Nc5 24.Bxc5+ Bxc5 25.Bxa8 Rxa8 26.Qf3 Rf8 27.Rad1 f4 28.Rd7+ 1-0



Stai vs Sivaparan



Ali vs Andersen

Second rated teenager **Tomas Engkvist (1969)** steams upward, and following another dubious opening soon accelerated his pieces for an attack as black against **Abishan Arulmaran (1858)**.



15.h4? g6! 16.Qe2 gxf5 17.exf5 Qxh4 18.f6 Nf5 19.Rf3 Ng3 20.Qe1? Qh1+ 21.Kf2 Ne4+ 0-1

Fourth board saw another talented player from the North of Norway, 20 year old **Thobias Gotaas Hansen (1805)**, hitting back with an impressive win against so far solid **Vidar Kopperud (1778)**. This was a Sicilian duel reminiscent of a Classical King's Indian race: White's queenside attack accelerated and won decisive material, as black failed to come up with any real counterattack on the kingside.

Fifth board for three hours was a tense Sicilian duel between **Christian Neukamm (1776)** and **Even Jørstad Andersen (1681)**, but then was abruptly decided as Andersen blundered a knight and immediately resigned. 54 year old medical doctor Neukamm so far has not been seen much outside his local chess club in Sarpsborg, but has an impressive tournament performance well above 1900 in his first Fagernes tournament.

32 year old teacher Sondre Stai remains the only undefeated player in the Open and at an excellent 6.0/7 keeps his unshared lead, but he is now only half a point ahead of Ali.

The bigger group at 5,0 points in current performance order includes Hansen, Neukamm, Engkvist and Sivaparan. Stai for round 8 will get another tough test as black against second rated and rather unpredictable Engkvist, while Ali gets white against Sivaparan and Neukamm white against Hansen.

Most of the lower boards in the Open again had expected results. One noteworthy surprise however was **Catherine Jørgensen (1609)** hitting back from a lost position to take the full point against **Rune Kleiven Rynning (1776)**. Usually solid Rynning dominated the first part of the game, but running short of time in a still tactical position he gradually lost control. Catherine with a few minutes more left on the clock efficiently used her chances:



39.Ne5! Nf2? 40.Nd7! Qa7? 41.Qe8+ Kg7? 42.Qf8+ Kh7 43.Nf6 mate!

Catherine following this win is the favourite for the best woman prize.

Marie Vatneødegård (1538) however also used her chance efficiently when **Morten Smedsrud (1699)** blundered a piece in a complex game. Jørgensen is at 4,0/7, one point ahead of Vatneødegård.

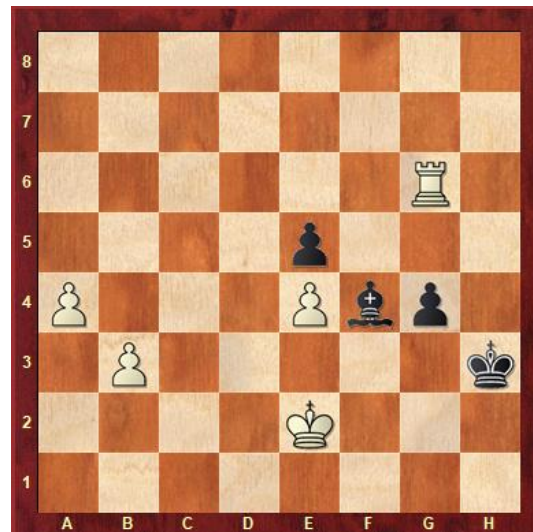


Jørgensen vs Rynning



Lysen vs Gilsdottir

Top rated woman participant **Sara Gilsdottir (1739)** meanwhile lost a long and difficult endgame against the strongly underrated 11 year old **Terje Kevin Lysen (1667)**. The final moves here saw an instructive passed pawn race:



57.a5 g3 58.a6 g2 and now 59.Rxg2 Kxg2 60.a7 was one winning solution. Talented Terje found the more advanced 59.a7 Bg3 60.a8Q g1Q 61.Qh8+! Kg2 62.Rxg3+ Kxg3 63.Qg7+ Kh2 64.Qxg1+ Kxg1 65.b4 1-0

Photos by Tom Eriksen except as noted in captions.