

Summer 2025

RANK & FILE

Magazine of the Southern California Chess Federation



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts

FM Eduard Hakobyan (left) wins 45th Lina Grumette Memorial Day Classic, and GM Vladimir Akopian (right) wins 2025 Invitational State Championship.

Article continues on page 5

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DEADLINE FOR THE Fall 2025 ISSUE IS:

December 30, 2025.

UPCOMING SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EVENTS

Aug. 29 - Sept. 1

SoCal Open

More information at

<https://onlineregistration.cc/ACA/SoCalOpen2025>

Sept. 20 - 21

Chess For Cure SOCAL Open

More information at

<https://www.kingregistration.com/event/chessforcuresocal25>

Oct. 24 - 26

San Diego Open

See description on p.22

Nov. 7 - 9

Los Angeles Open

More information at www.chesstour.com

Nov. 24 - 30

American Open

See description on p.23

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Clawitter

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Summer is the season of national championships. Southern California players showcased their talents by participating in key events. GM Vladimir Akopian, our new state champion, attempted to retain his national title at the Senior Championship in Saint Louis in July. He came up short in the playoff games after a first-place three-way tie with GM Alex Shabalov and the ultimate winner, GM Alex Fishbein. GM Kirk Ghazarian and FM Rose Atwell competed for the Junior and Girls titles, respectively.

The SoCal team at the National Tournament of State Champions held in Middleton, Wisconsin, alongside the US

Open, won 3rd place among 53 participating teams. FM Isaac Wang and GM Melik Khachiyan tied for third in their respective sections: the Denker and the Irwin. The accolades did not stop at the chessboard there. At the USCF awards ceremony, Coach Jay Stallings received the Dan Heisman Award for Excellence in Chess Instruction, and GM Melik Khachiyan received the Outstanding Team Achievement Award for his role as the coach of the US Women's Olympiad Team.

University High School of Irvine grabbed 5th place at the World Schools Team Championship held in Alexandria, Virginia the first week of August. The team was

aided by an impressive performance from Tori Porat, who won a silver medal on board 3. A group of SoCal youngsters participated in the 2025 North American Youth Chess Championships in Kingston, Ontario. FM Julian Colville placed first in the U16 section, earning his first IM norm.

Finally, the Board would like to thank all the contributors to this issue. Special appreciation goes to IM Robert Shlyakhtenko, who not only annotated games from his win at the PSW open, but also showcased our 2025 Southern California State Championship in his contribution to the August issue of *Chess Life*. Check it out!

Sincerely,
The SCCF Board



The Hakobyan Sweep Memorial Day Weekend

By CM Ala'a-Addin Moussa and Chris Roberts

2025 Invitational State Championship

Early this year, the SCCF board had a major decision to make: whether to organize the 2025 Invitational State Championship or skip it due to budgetary constraints. However, with the huge success of the 2024 Invitational State Championship held at the Temecula chess club in June last year, and covered in detail in the Rank & File 2024 Summer issue, most of the board members voted to go ahead and hold it in conjunction with the annual Lina Grumette Memorial Day Classic in Van Nuys at the end of May.

The decision proved fruitful. Our membership stepped up and raised over \$12,000 in donations (that varied from \$5 to a few thousand per donation) which completely covered the prize fund. The turnout was also extremely pleasing as all seven

top-rated SoCal players accepted the invitation to compete with the 2024 State Open Champion FM Rostomyan, completing the strongest field ever in SCCF history. This field of six GMs, one IM, and one hard-to-beat FM boasted an average rating of 2554 USCF and 2486 FIDE.

Just like last year, the championship was fiercely contested and ended up in a tie for first place between GM Vladimir Akopian and GM Arman Mikaelyan with 4.5 points from 7 rounds. The tie break favored GM Akopian, who landed the state title and the trophy. IA Randy Hough ran the event as the FIDE arbiter while Chris Roberts set up the DGT boards, ran the live broadcast on chess.com and lichess.org, and took pictures.

Round 1: The first round of the state championship produced one decisive

result. GM Baryshpolets won against IM Shlyakhtenko after the latter reacted to 13. f4 poorly by sacrificing a knight and missing the correct continuation of 13...Nh5 and 14...g5.

GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2571)

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2442)

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship (1), 1-0

Annotated by WFM Angela Liu

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. g3 Be7
5. Bg2 O-O 6. O-O a5 7. Nc3 c6 8. b3
b6 9. Bb2 Ba6 10. Nd2 b5 11. c5 Nbd7
12. h3 Qc7 13. f4?



2025 Invitational State Championship Final Standings

No.	Player	USCF Rtg	FIDE Rtg	1 VA	2 AB	3 CA	4 KG	5 AM	6 RS	7 BT	8 MR	Total	Place
1	GM Vladimir Akopian	2667	2595		½	1	1	½	½	½	½	4.5	1st (tied); \$2,250+title+trophy
2	GM Andrey Baryshpolets	2635	2571	½		0	0	0	1	½	½	2.5	8th; \$250
3	GM "JJ" Ali Marandi	2593	2523	0	1		0	½	½	½	½	3.0	5th-7th (tied); \$750
4	GM Kirk Ghazarian	2571	2508	0	1	1		½	½	½	½	4.0	3rd; \$1,500
5	GM Arman Mikaelyan	2573	2492	½	1	½	½		½	1	½	4.5	1st (tied); \$2,250
6	IM Robert Shlyakhtenko	2532	2442	½	0	½	½	½		½	½	3.0	5th-7th (tied); \$750
7	GM Bachuluun Tsegmed	2484	2430	½	½	½	½	0	½		½	3.0	5th-7th (tied); \$750
8	FM Mikayel Rostomyan	2378	2325	½	½	½	½	½	½	½		3.5	4th; \$1,200

13...e5?? (13...b4 14. Na4 Nh5 15. Rf3 g5) 14. fxe5 Nxe5 15. dxe5 Qxe5 16. Kh2 Nh5 17. Qe1 Bh4 18. Rf3 d4 19. Nce4 f5 20. Nd6 Qxc5 21. Nxf5 Rxf5 22. gxh4 Raf8 23. Qf2 Qe5+ 24. Kg1 Nf4



25. Rxf4 Rxf4 26. Nf3 Qe7 27. Bxd4 Re8 28. Re1 h6 29. Bc5 Qf6 30. e3 Rf5 31. e4 Rh5 32. e5 Qg6 33. Kh2 Bc8 34. Bd6 c5 35. Qxc5 Bb7 36. Qxb5 Qf7 37. Rf1 Rf5



38. Ng5 Qg6 39. Rxf5 Bxg2 40. h5 Qxh5 41. Qc4+ Black resigns. 1-0

Defending champion GM Ali Marandi missed his opportunity to storm FM Rostomyan's King with 16. Bxh6 and had to settle for a draw.

GM "JJ" Ali Marandi (2523)

FM Mikayel Rostomyan (2325)

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship (1), ½-½

Annotated by WFM Angela Liu

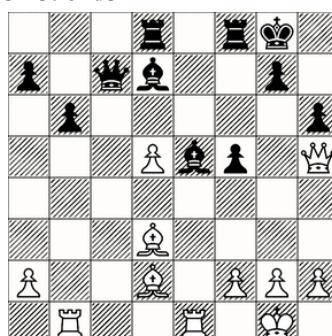
1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. c3 Nf6 4. e5 Nd5 5. d4 cxd4 6. cxd4 d6 7. Bc4 Nc6 8. O-O Be7 9. Re1 O-O 10. Bd2 Qb6 11. Nc3 Nxc3 12. bxc3 Bd7 13. exd6 Bxd6 14. Ng5 h6 15. Ne4 Be7?



16. Rb1?

(16. Bxh6! gxh6 17. Qg4+ Kh8 (17...Kh7 18. Nf6+ Bxf6 19. Bd3+ 19...Kh8 20. Qe4 +-) 18. Qh5 Kh7 19. Re3 +-)

16...Qc7 17. Bd3 f5 18. Ng3 Bd6 19. Qh5 Ne7 20. c4 b6 21. Ne2 e5 22. dxe5 Bxe5 23. Nc3 Rad8 24. Nd5 Nxd5 25. cxd5



25...Be8 26. Qh4 Bf6 27. Qh3 Bd7 28. Bb4 Rfe8 29. Rxe8+ Rxe8 30. Bxf5 Bxf5 31. Qxf5 Qc4 32. Re1 Rxe1+ 33. Bxe1 Qxa2 34. Qe6+ Kh8 35. Qe8+ Kh7 36. Qe4+ Kg8 37. Qe8+ Kh7 38. Qe4+ Kg8 ½-½



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
FM Mikayel Rostomyan at 2025 Invitational State Championship



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM "JJ" Ali Marandi at 2025 Invitational State Championship

Round 2: GM Baryshpolets was once again involved in the only decisive result of the 2nd round of the state championship, albeit on the losing end. He was tactically outplayed by GM Mikaelyan in a Ruy Lopez.

GM Arman Mikaelyan (2492)

GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2571)

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship (2), 1-0

Annotated by GM Arman Mikaelyan

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. O-O Be7 6. d3 d6 7. c3 O-O 8. Re1 Re8 9. Nbd2 Bf8 10. Nf1 g6 11. Bg5 h6 12. Bh4 Bg7 13. Ne3 b5 14. Bc2 Qd7 15. a4 Bb7 16. b4 Ne7 17. Bb3 Nh5 18. Qc2 Nf4 19. Bg3 c5 20. axb5 axb5 21. Rxa8 Rxa8 22. h3 cxb4 23. cxb4 Nc6 24. Bxf4 Nxb4 25. Qd2 exf4

I've played against Andrey a couple of times, and he's always been a tough opponent for me. This game is one of my favorites—not just from this tournament, but overall.

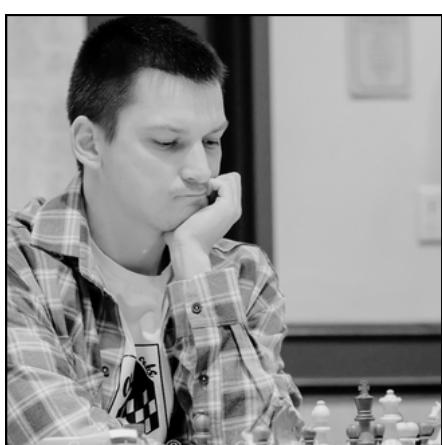


Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Andrey Baryshpolets at 2025 Invitational State Championship



26. Ng4 I could've taken the knight, but then I wouldn't have had any real chances to attack his king. That's why I brought my knight closer instead. 26...Na6??

(26...h5 was the best decision, since my knight later became a real headache for the Black king. 27. Qxb4 hxg4 28. hxg4 Rc8)

27. d4 Restricting the knight. 27...g5?? (27...h5 was the last chance to deal with the knight, but after 28. Ng5, the follow-up wasn't easy to figure out. 28...Qe7 29. Qxf4 Rf8 30. Bxf7+ Kh8 31. Nh2 Bxd4)

28. e5 It's hard to believe, but the position is already lost due to White's active pieces and the misplaced knight on a6. 28...Nc7 (28...Bxf3 29. e6 +) 29. Qd3 Bxf3



To be honest, my first intention was to capture the knight. But after about ten minutes of thought, I saw a beautiful combination that would lead to a win.

30. Nf6+!! Bxf6 31. exf6 d5

(31...Bh5 32. Re7 Qc6 33. Rxf7 Bxf7 34. Qg6+ Kf8 35. Qxf7#) (31...Bd5 32. Bc2 +)

32. Bc2! Thanks to this 'Ruy Lopez' bishop, White is winning. 32...Be4 33. Rxe4!



33...Kf8 (33...dxe4 34. Qxe4 Ra1+ 35. Kh2 Kf8 36. Qh7 Checkmate is inevitable.) 34. Re7 Qc6 35. Rxf7+ Kxf7 36. Qh7+ White wins. 1-0



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Arman Mikaelyan at 2025
Invitational State Championship

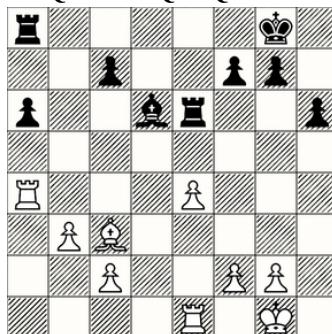
Round 3: GM Akopian joined GM Mikaelyan in the lead with 2 points from 3 rounds after grinding out a win in a rook endgame vs. last year's state champion GM Ali Marandi.



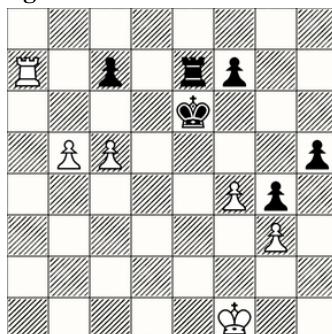
Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Vladimir Akopian at 2025
Invitational State Championship

GM Vladimir Akopian (2595)
GM "JJ" Ali Marandi (2523)
2025 SoCal Invitational State
Championship (3), 1-0
Annotated by WFM Angela Liu

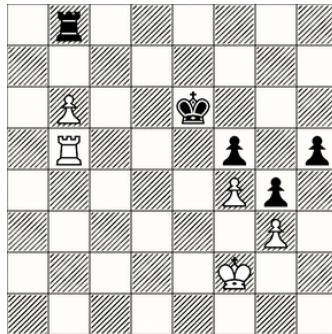
1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. O-O Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 O-O 8. a4 d5 9. axb5 dxe4 10. bxc6 exf3 11. Qxf3 e4 12. Qe2 Bd6 13. h3 Re8 14. Nc3 Re5 15. Ra4 Bxh3 16. Nxe4 Bg4 17. Qe3 Bf5 18. d3 Nxe4 19. dxe4 Be6 20. Bxe6 Rxe6 21. Qd3 h6 22. b3 Qe8 23. Bb2 Qxc6 24. Qc3 Qxc3 25. Bxc3



25...Rae8 26. Kf1 Be5 27. Bxe5 Rxe5 28. Rxa6 Rxe4 29. Rxe4 Rxe4 30. Ra8+ Kh7 31. Ra7 Re7 32. c4 Kg6 33. b4 Kf6 34. b5 h5 35. c5 g5 36. g3 Ke6 37. f4 g4??



38. Kf2? (38. f5! Kf6 (38...Kxf5 b6+)) 39. Kf2(+) 38...f5= 39. b6 cxb6 40. cxb6 Re8? 41. Ra5 Rb8? 42. Rb5 +



42...Kd7 43. Ke3 Kc6 44. Rxf5 Kxb6
 45. Rxh5 Kc6 46. f5 Rb4 47. Rh6+ Kd5
 48. Re6 Ra4 49. Re8 1-0

Round 4: Reigning state champion GM Ali Marandi recovered from his round 3 loss by overpowering GM Baryshpolets in a Morphy style storming of the King, the only decisive result in round 4.

GM "JJ" Ali Marandi (2523)

GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2571)
 2025 SoCal Invitational State
 Championship (4), 1-0
Annotated by GM JJ Ali Marandi

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Bf4 c5 4. e3 Nc6
 5. Nbd2 Qb6 6. dxc5 Qxb2 7. Rb1 Qc3
 8. Bb5 8...Bd7?!! (8...e6) (8...g6) 9. O-O
 e6



10. Ba4?

(10. Bd3 Na5 (10...e5?? 11. Rb3 Qxc5 12. Nxe5+-) 11. e4 Qxc5 12. e5± (12. Ne5±))
 (10. Nb3? Bxc5 11. Nxc5 Qxc5 12. Bd3 (12. c4 dxc4 13. Bd6 Qd5±) 12...b6±)



10...Bxc5?!

(10...b6! 11. cxb6 axb6 12. Rxb6 Rxa4)

10...Nc6! 11. Bxd7+ Nxd7 12. e4



12...Bxc5 13. exd5 O-O (13...exd5 14. Ne5! Nf6 15. Rb3 Qa5 16. Bg5 Ne6 17. Bxf6 gxf6 18. Nxf7! Rf8 (18...Kxf7 19. Qh5+ Kf8 20. Qf5 Qd8 21. Qxe6+-) 19. Qe2! Rxf7 20. Qxe6+ Kf8 21. Nf3 Re8 22. Qh3 Qxa2 23. Qh6+ Kg8 24. Nh4 Rg7 25. Nf5 Rg6 26. Rg3 Rg3 27. hxg3 Bf8 28. Qxf6 Qxc2 29. Qg5+ Kh8∞) 14. Ne4 Qc4) 11. Rxb7



11...Bb6?? (11...O-O? 12. Rxd7! Nxd7 13. Bxc6 Bxe3 14. Bxa8 Bxf4 15. Bb7 Nc5 16. Bc6±) (11...Nb8! 12. Bxb8 Bxa4 13. Be5 Qa5 14. Nb3 Bxb3 15. cxb3 Qa6 16. Rc7 Bd6 17. Bxd6 Qxd6 18. Qc2±)

12. Bd6! Nb8 (12...Na5 13. Rxd7! Nxd7 14. Ne5 O-O-O (14...Rd8 15. Qh5 g6 16. Qg5+-) 15. Nxf7+-) 13. Ne5! (13. Bxb8?? Bxa4 14. Bd6 Nd7±) 13...Bxa4 (13...Qc8 14. Rxd7! Nbd7 15. Qf3+-)



14. Re7+ Kd8 15. Nxf7+ Kc8 16. Be5!
 (16. Nxf8+-) 16...Qb4 17. Nd6+ Kd8
18. Rxf7 Nbd7 19. a3! Qxa3
 (19...Qa5 20. Nb7++-)
 (19...Qc5 20. Nb7++-)
20. N2c4! dxc4 (20...Qb4 21. Nf7+ Kc8 22. Ncd6+ Kc7 23. Nxh8+-) 21. **Bxf6+ Kc7** (21...Nxf6 22. Nxc4+)



22. Be5! Qc5 (22...Kd8 23. Qf3 Rb8 24. Qf6+! Kc7 (24...Nxf6 25. Bxf6#))
25. Nxc4+ Kb7 (25...Kc8 26. Rxd7+-)
 26. Nxa3+-) 23. **Nb5+ Black resigns.**
1-0 (23. Nb5+ Kb7 24. Qxd7+ Ka6 25. Ra1+-)

Round 5: GM Mikaelyan and GM Ghazarian threw caution to the wind and were rewarded by beating GM Tsegmed and GM Ali Marandi respectively.



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
**GM Arman Mikaelyan at 2025
 Invitational State Championship**

GM Arman Mikaelyan (2492)
GM Bachuluun Tsegmed (2430)
2025 SoCal Invitational State
Championship (5), 1-0
Annotated by WFM Angela Liu

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Bg5 Be7
5. e3 h6 6. Bxf6 Bxf6 7. Qc2 O-O 8. h4
c5 9. g4 cxd4 10. g5 dxе3

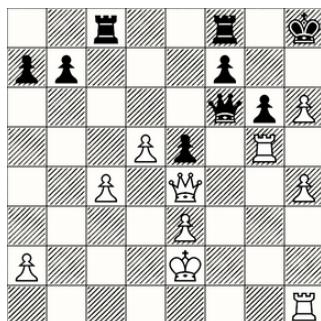


11. fxe3 Be7 12. gxh6



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
Mikaelyan vs Tsegmed at 12. gxh6

12...Bb4+ 13. Nc3 Bxc3+ 14. bxc3 g6
15. Bd3 Qf6 16. Ke2 e5 17. cxd5 Bg4
18. Be4 Nd7 19. Rg1 Bxf3+ 20. Bxf3
Nc5 21. Be4 Kh8 22. c4 Rac8 23. Rg5
Nxe4? (23...Qa6) 24. Qxe4±



24...Qa6 25. Rc1 Qxa2+ 26. Rc2 Qa1
27. Qxe5+ Qxe5 28. Rxe5+ Rc7 29.
d6 Rd7 30. c5 Re8 31. Rd2 Kh7 32. Re7
Rcd8 33. Rxd7 Rxd7 34. e4 Kxh6 35.
e5 Kh5 36. Kf3 Kxh4 37. Kf4 Kh3 38.
Kg5 Kg3 39. Kf6 Kf4 40. e6 fxe6 41.
Kxe6 Rd8 42. d7 Ke3 43. Ke7 1-0

GM Kirk Ghazarian (2508)
GM "JJ" Ali Marandi (2523)
2025 SoCal Invitational State
Championship (5), 1-0
Annotated by GM Kirk Ghazarian

My prior four games ended peacefully before this, despite all of them being long, tense struggles. I was eager to continue playing creative chess and play a decisive game in this tournament. 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 h6 5. g3 Bd6 6. a3?! This move appears abstruse, since the intention of this pawn move remains ambiguous. The hidden point behind this waiting move is revealed a move later. 6...O-O 7. g4!



White strikes on the kingside now that Black has committed to castling. It's a rare idea that was previously only played twice in OTB games, with White winning both. This steers the game into murky waters.



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
**GM Kirk Ghazarian at 2025
Invitational State Championship**

7...Ne4! My experienced opponent declines this pawn sacrifice correctly, with Ne4 being the best response to White's aggressive play. (7...Nxg4? This greedy move would be a mistake, allowing White a huge initiative. 8. c5 Be7 9. Rg1 h5 (9...Nf6 10. Bxh6+-) 10. h3 Nf6 11. Bh6 Ne8 12. e4+-



White is already winning because of his huge initiative.) 8. Qd3 c5?! Black sacrifices a pawn for the initiative, adding more oil to the fire! (Before breaking open the center on White's uncastled king, Black could have included the following exchange 8...Nxc3 9. Qxc3 and now 9...c5 10. dxc5 Bxc5 11. g5 hxg5 12. Bxg5 f6 13. Bd2 Nc6 14. Rg1∞ remains tremendously complicated. The position is roughly balanced and I slightly prefer White, but this is an entirely 3-result game.) 9. Nxe4 dxe4 10. Qxe4 cxd4 11. Nxd4?!



This natural move secures a material advantage but allows black to gain momentum with his pieces. (11. g5! This intermediate move is stronger than recapturing the central pawn. White's attack becomes quite powerful. 11...Nc6 12. gxh6 g6 (12...f5 13. Qc2 g6 14. Rg1+-) 13. Rg1

13...Kh7 14. Bg5±) 11...Nc6 12. Bd2 Nxd4 13. Qxd4 e5 14. Qe4 Bd7



Black has full compensation for the pawn due to White's uncastled king and weakened kingside (due to the g4 pawn). Now White needs to be careful not to succumb to Black's lead in development. 15. Rg1 This move was forced, since Black threatened to win material with Bc6. 15...Bc6 16. Qf5 g6 17. Qc2 Bc5 18. Rg3 Qf6 19. e3 Rfd8 20. Bc3 Qe6? This is a normal move that maintains the tension, but the queen is tactically vulnerable here due to an invisible resource... (20...a5! This move was stronger, and it's not clear how White can improve his position. Black has full compensation for his missing pawn.) 21. h4?! I miss a beautiful sacrifice which my opponent allows on the following turn. 21...a6!?



22. Qf5!! This seemingly impossible move gives White a winning position. With the queens being exchanged off, Black's compensation for the pawn evaporates completely. 22...Re8 (22...gxf5 23. gxf5+ Kh7 24. fxe6 fxe6 25. Bxe5+-)

(Trying to preserve the queen proves futile after 22...Qe7 23. Qxe5 Qxe5 24. Bxe5+-)

23. Qxe6 Rxe6 24. O-O-O



Now White is winning since Black is a pawn down without compensation. I converted this handily. 24...Bf8 25. g5 hxg5 26. h5 b5 27. Be2 bxc4 28. Bxc4 Re8 29. Kb1 Rab8 30. Ka2 Bb5 31. Rg4 e4 32. Bd5 Be2



33. Rh4 Bg7 (33...Bxd1?? 34. Rh8#) 34. Rdh1 Bxc3 35. bxc3 Bh5 36. Rxe4 Rec8 37. Re4 Rd8 38. Rd4 Rxd5 39. Rxd5 Bf3 40. Rhd1 Black resigns. 1-0

Black resigned since taking either rook simplifies the position into a losing rook endgame two pawns down.

Round 6: GM Akopian regained the lead after methodically grinding down GM Ghazarian in the last game to finish in round 6. GM Mikaelyan settled for a quick 17 move draw against FM Rostomyan who drew all his games in the championship.

GM Vladimir Akopian (2595)

GM Kirk Ghazarian (2508)

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship (6), 1-0

Annotated by WFM Angela Liu

1. Nf3 d5 2. b3 c5 3. e3 a6 4. c4 d4 5. exd4 cxd4 6. g3 Nc6 7. Bg2 e5 8. O-O

8...Bd6 9. Re1 Nge7 10. a3 a5 11. d3 O-O 12. Nbd2 Rb8



13. c5 Bxc5 14. Nxe5 Nxe5 15. Rxe5 Bd6 16. Re1 Bc7 17. Qh5 Nf5 18. Ne4 b6 19. Bd2 Ne7 20. Ng5 h6 21. Nf3 Ba6 22. Re4



22...Qd5? 23. Qxd5 Nxd5 24. Rxd4± Rbd8 25. Rc1 Bb8 26. Ne1 Ne7 27. Be3?!(27. Rxd8 Rxd8 28. Be3) Bd6 28. Ra4 Rb8 29. Bf4 Rfd8 30. Bxd6 Rxd6 31. Re4 Nc6 32. Re3 Nd4 33. b4

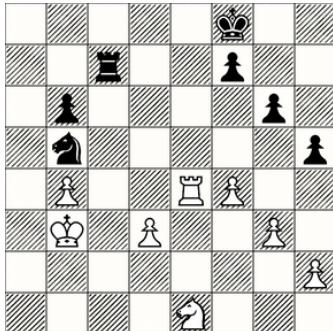


Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Vladimir Akopian

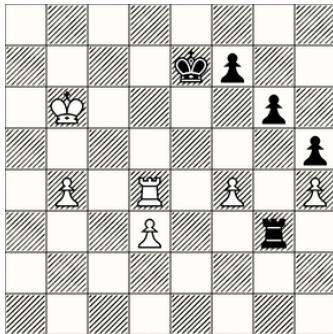


Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Akopian (right) vs GM Ghazarian (left)

33...axb4 34. axb4 Rbd8 35. Rc7 Nb5 36. Rce7 Kf8 37. Bb7 Bxb7 38. Rxb7 R8d7 39. Rxd7 Rxd7 40. Re4 Nd4 41. f4 h5 42. Kf2 g6 43. Ke3 Nf5+ 44. Kd2 Nd4 45. Kc3 Nb5+ 46. Kb3 Rc7



47. Rc4 Ra7? 48. Nc2 Ke7? 49. Nd4 Nxd4+ 50. Rxd4+ Ra1 51. Kc4 Ra2 52. h4 Rg2 53. Kb5 Rxg3 54. Kxb6



54...Rg4 55. b5 Rxh4 56. Kc7 Rh1 57. b6 Rb1 58. b7 f6 59. Re4+ Black resigns. 1-0



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
GM Vladimir Akopian wins 2025 Invitational State Championship

Round 7: The result of the last game to finish in the championship, GM Ghazarian beating GM Baryshpolets

in a highly complicated game, meant the tie break using Sonneborn-Berger System favored GM Akopian who was crowned as the 2025 State Champion.

GM Kirk Ghazarian (2508)

GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2571)

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship (7), 1-0

Annotated by GM Kirk Ghazarian

This was played in the final round, and I was eager to bounce back after losing to the eventual tournament winner (Vladimir Akopian) in the previous round. 1. c4 e6 2. g3 d5 3. Bg2 d4 4. Nf3 Nc6 5. O-O Bc5 6. d3 Nge7 7. Nbd2 a5 8. Nb3 Ba7 9. a4 Qd6 10. Bd2 Bc5 11. Nxc5 Qxc5 12. e3 Nf5 13. e4 Nfe7 14. Ne1 O-O 15. Nc2 Ra6 16. Rb1 Rb6 17. b3



So far, the position remains closed, but White has an easy plan with a future kingside expansion involving f4-g4-h4. It's difficult for Black to come up with a plan in this position. 17...Bd7 18. Qe1 Ra8 19. f4 f6 20. Qf2 Be8 21. Bc1 Rd8 22. Ba3 Nb4 23. Nxb4 axb4 24. Bc1 Ne6 25. Bd2 Nb8 26. g4 Na6 27. Qg3



White continues to build up his position in preparation for the oncoming attack. 27...Bd7 28. Kh1 Nb8 29. Rf2 Qe7 30. Re1 Be8 31. h4 Nd7 32. Kh2 c6 33. Bh3 Bf7 34. Rg2 Kh8 35. Qf3? A mistake. White could already proceed with his attack. (35. g5 was strongest) 35...Ra6 36. Kh1? b5!



A strong pawn sacrifice by my opponent. He breaks free from his passive position and starts making threats. 37. axb5 cxb5 38. cxb5 Ra3 39. Rb1 Qc5 40. g5 f5 41. h5 Qc2? Black plays very aggressively, but White's attack becomes too strong. (It was more prudent to play 41...Qxb5! 42. g6 Be8 43. gxh7 Nf6 44. h6 g6∞ despite Black's position seeming risky, it's actually quite solid due to the pawn shelter around Black's king. The position objectively remains unclear.)

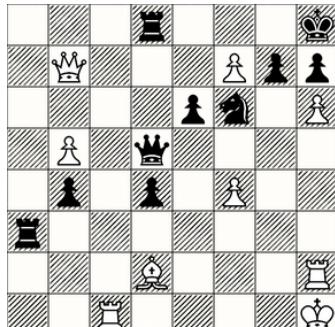
42. Rc1 Qxb3



43. g6! Breaking open the kingside. 43...fxe4 44. Qxe4 Nf6 (44...Qxd3 45. Qxd3 Rxd3 46. gxf7 Rxh3+ 47. Rh2 Rf3 48. Bxb4 Rxf4 49. Be7 Ra8 50. Rhc2+ White has unstoppable threats.)

45. Qb7! The final bit of calculation required to convert this winning initiative. 45...Qxd3 46. gxf7 Qxh3+ 47. Rh2 Qb3 (47...Qf3+ 48. Qxf3

Rxf3 49. Bxb4+-) 48. h6! Qd5+



(48...gxh6 49. Qe7+-) 49. Rg2!! A geometrically pleasing move. White blocks a check to his king with a rook, leaving his queen en prise. 49...Qh5+ (49...Qxb7 50. hxg7# A beautiful pawn checkmate!) (49...Rh3+ This spite check changes nothing on account of 50. Kg1 Rxh6 (50...Qxb7 51. hxg7#) 51. f8=Q+ Rxf8 52. Qxg7#) 50. Kg1 Qxh6 51. Qe7 Raa8 52. f5 1-0 Black resigned since he must move the queen, allowing checkmate in two following: f8=Q+ Rxf8 Qxg7#



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts

2025 SoCal Invitational State Championship Players.

From left to right: GM Baryshpolets, FM Rostomyan, GM Akopian, GM Ghazarian, IM Shlyakhtenko, GM Ali Marandi, GM Tsegmed, and GM Mikaelyan.

2025 Memorial Day Classic

Eduard Hakobyan, GM Akopian's eldest son, won clear first the 45th edition of the Lina Grumette Memorial Day Classic. He will be seeded into the 2026 invitational state championship. A complete list of prize winners appears on the right.

Memorial Day Classic Prize Winners

Section	#	Name	Score	Prize
Open	1st	Eduard Hakobyan	5½	\$1700+trophy+qualification to 2026 State Invitational
	2nd - 3rd	FM Julian Colville FM Michael Casella	5	\$800 each
	4th - 10th	FM Tommy Wen IM Jack Peters Gabriel Sam Ashwin Damaraju	4½	\$175 each
	BU2250	FM Benjamin Tang WFM Jenny Qi Ike Miller	4½	\$216.67 each
U2000	1st - 3rd	Sangeeta Dhingra Eric Feng Benjamin Bankhead	5	\$750 each
	4th - 5th	Cody Oldham Aditya Panikkath	4½	\$150 each
U1800	1st	Aryan Ali	6	\$1,200
	2nd	Brandon You	4½	\$700
	3rd - 8th	Miller Zhang Victor Yi Ryan Kim Joseph Mcatee Andrew You Wade Greiten	4	\$108 each
U1600	1st - 2nd	Vihaan Nelakurthy Ziwei Xiao	5	\$950 each
	3rd - 4th	Derek Han Wenyi Yang	4½	\$325 each
U1400	1st	Sophia Sizova	5½	\$1,200
	2nd - 3rd	Noah Blackwell David Avagyan	5	\$525 each
	4th - 5th	Danny Kharaev Andrew Chen	4½	\$150 each
U1200	1st	Mathew Tom	6	\$1,000
	2nd	Hongyi Li	5	\$900
	3rd	Richard Degeryan	4½	\$475
	4th - 10th	Powel Vartanian Justin Zhou Victoria Vermesh Max Xu Taylor Liu	4	\$102.14 each
	4th - 10th	Ayaan Dave Juan Scarda	4	\$82.14 each

Eduard annotates his round 5 win over FM Colville:

FM Eduard Hakobyan (2428)

FM Julian Colville (2340)

45th Lina Grumette MDC (5), 1-0
Annotated by FM Eduard Hakobyan

Following a draw in round four, I had 3.5/4 going into this round, while Julian was leading the tournament with a perfect score of 4/4. Essentially, it was a must-win situation for me if I wanted to stay in the fight for first place. **1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. b3!?** (avoiding the main lines) **3...b6 4. c4 Bb7 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bb2 Nf6 7. Be2 Qb8 8. d4 cxd4 9. Nxd4 Nxd4 10. Qxd4 Bc5**



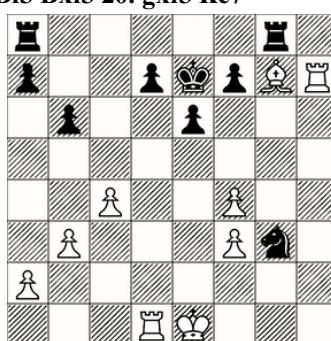
11. Qd3 Qe5!? (I was expecting 11...Qf4 12. Qg3 Qxg3 13. hxg3 transposing into the game) **12. Qg3** (However now, 12. Bf3! was stronger, and after 12...d5 13. cxd5 exd5 14. Qb5+ Nd7 White can castle either way) **12...Qxg3 13. hxg3 Bd4** (13...Nxe4 14. Nxe4 Bxe4 leads into an equal middlegame)



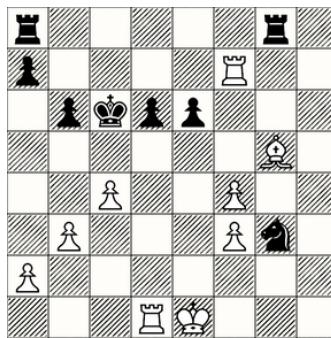
14. Rd1 I considered this a strong option, but underestimated my opponent's next move. (A simple 14. f3 keeps the advantage)

14...Be5! The idea is to provoke 15.f4 and weaken my pawn structure. (The immediate 14...Bxc3+ 15. Bxc3 Bxe4 16. f3 Bc6 17. g4! would give me a huge compensation for the pawn) **15. f4** Going for it anyway. (15. g4! was another option) **15...Bxc3+ 16. Bxc3 Nxe4 17. Bxg7 Rg8 18. Rxh7 Nxg3**

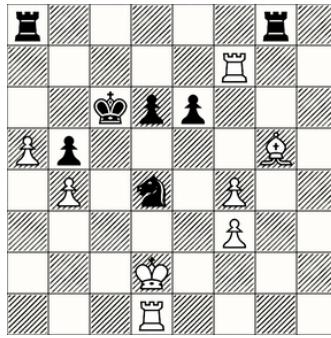
19. Bf3 Bxf3 20. gxf3 Ke7



21. Bh6! d6? Not a bad move per se, but it gives White some chances. (Instead, Black could play 21...Nf5 22. Bg5+ Ke8 followed by 23...d6, and White has no clear way to improve his position) **22. Bg5+ Kd7 23. Rxf7+ Ke6**

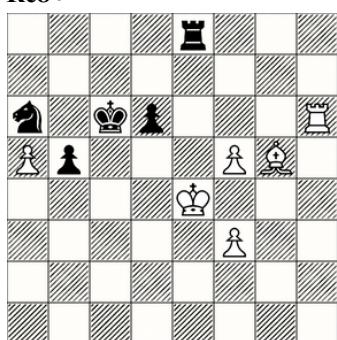


The position is close to equal, but Black needs to be careful. **24. b4 a6 25. a4 Nf5 26. Kd2! b5 27. cxb5+ axb5 28. a5! Nd4?**

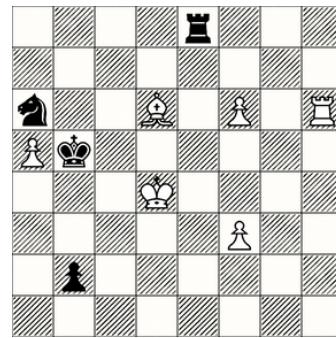


Now Black is lost. **29. Ke3!**

(If White plays for mate with 29. Kd3 Nxf3 30. Ke4? Black escapes after Rxg5! 31. Rc1+ Rc5 32. bxc5 Nd2+) **29...Nc2+ 30. Ke4 Na3! 31. Rh1 Rh8 32. Rxh8 Rxh8 33. Re7 Nc2 34. Rxe6** (34. Bf6! Rh1 35. Bc3 would have been easier) **34...Nxb4 35. f5 Na6 36. Rh6 Re8+**



37. Kd4? We were only three moves away from the second time control, so I decided to keep an eye on the b-pawn rather than take any risks. (However, White should apparently stick to his pawn with 37. Kf4! and win after Nc5 38. f6 b4 39. f7 Rf8 40. Rh7 b3 41. Bf6) **37...b4?** (If Black had played 37...Nc5! 38. Bf4 Rd8 39. f6 Rf8 40. Kc3 b4+! the game was close to a draw) **38. Bf4! Kb5 39. f6 b3 40. Bxd6 b2**



41. f7! Rd8 (41...Re1 42. Ba3!) **42. f8=Q b1=Q** (42...Rxf8 43. Bxf8 b1=Q 44. Rb6+ skewering the queen) **43. Qxd8** Black can only hope for a perpetual, but the king easily gets away. **43...Qb2+ 44. Ke4 Qe2+ 45. Kf5 Qxf3+ 46. Bf4 Nc5 47. Rb6+ Kc4 48. Qg8+ Kc3 49. Qg3** Black resigns. **1-0**

The Best Games from 2025 Pacific Southwest Open

By Chuck Ensey, IM Jack Peters, and IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

225 players attended this 4th of July weekend tournament at the Orange County Airport Hilton, a great turnout that allowed the published prize fund of \$18,000 to be increased to \$20,000. There were six sections with about 30 players in each section, except for U2000 and U1800 which had about 50 players each. Jim Harrell directed the tournament with assistance from Sindu Baradhan and Jake Nemeth.

There were 9 rounds over 3 days, with each day having a longer time control than the previous day. Three byes were allowed for those who didn't want to play on Friday July 4th where the three games were G/45 d10 at 10AM, 1PM and 4 PM, so there was plenty of time to enjoy the fireworks that night. Saturday had four games at G/60 d10 and Sunday had just two games at G/120 d10. The idea is that the early games usually have bigger rating differentials so those games might go faster, while the more important games towards the end that decide the winners might require more time for thought.

The other somewhat unusual feature of this event was the top section (Elite) was restricted to players rated 2000 or more. The other sections also had a "play-up" fee of \$100 if the player was below certain levels (1900 for the U2200, 1700 for the U2000, 1400 for U1800 and 1000 for U1400). This money raised more revenue so we could increase the prize fund and helped pay for the ballroom rental.

The central location of this event in Irvine is nice as it is closer to San

Diego than many other LA locations, but it is still fairly easy for many LA players to attend. The ballroom was spacious along with the skittles room and TD room. Scoresheets and pencils were provided but not chess equipment, although we had sets, clocks and scorebooks for sale if needed. The attendance has increased every year for this event, so we plan to be back next year with a \$20,000 guaranteed prize fund.

Here are the winners of each section.

Elite: 1st Place IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (8), \$2,000. 2nd/3rd Place FM Sihan Tao and NM Sarthak Gattani (6), \$1,200 each. 4th Place IM Keaton Kiewra (5½), \$500. 1st/2nd U2200 FM Benjamin Tang and NM Felix Guo (5½), \$500 each. 5th/6th Place FM Michael Casella, NM Ashwin Damaraju, NM Arjun Damaraju, and Amudan Mangudi (5), \$125 each.

U2200: 1st Place Sabarish Kailasam, Francis Ordanza, and Manu Prasad (6½), \$833 each. 4th Place WFM Tsegmed Munkchuluun, Shreyas Sakharkar, and Howard Wang (6), \$66 each.

U2000: 1st Place Martin Leung (7½) \$1,200; 2nd Place Jackson Scamehorn (7), \$900. 3rd/4th Place Linus Eisenberg and Emon Bayrooti (6½), \$300 each.

U1800: 1st Place Nicholas Scarda (7½), \$1,200. 2nd Place Alex Xiong (7), \$900.

U1400: 1st Place Bryan Chao (8), \$800. 2nd Place Roy Huang (6½), \$600.

The U1000 section had several

provisional players, so the biggest prize went to 3rd Place James Kased (6½) for \$800.

See the SCCF website or my Facebook page for other winners at this event.

The Best Game Prize went to Michael Taylor for \$100, 2nd Best was Jackson Scamehorn (\$75) and 3rd was Sarthak Gattani (\$25).

IM Jack Peters annotated their games here.

Best Games: First Place (\$100)

Michael Taylor (1965)

Dave Gomboc (1911)

2025 Pacific Southwest U2000 (3), 1-0

Annotated by IM Jack Peters

1. Nh3? A horrible move, useful only for its undeniable shock value. 1...e5

2. f4 d5 3. g3 Bd6? (Black can snatch a pawn by 3...Bxh3 4. Bxh3 exf4, although White gets a little compensation from 5. d4 fxe3 6. hxe3) (The simplest answer is 3...e4)

4. fxe5 Bxe5 5. d4 Bd6 6. Qd3 Qf6 7. Ne3 c6?



(Black's last chance to get close to equality is 7...Ne6 8. Nxd5 Qxd4)

8. e4 dxe4 Stockfish recommends the miserable 8...Bb4 9. Bd2 Qd8. We must reluctantly credit White for his choice of 1. Nh3. He would never have reached such an overwhelming position with a “normal” opening. **9. Nxe4 Qc7 10. Bg5 f6 11. 0-0-0** White correctly offers a piece to accelerate his attack against Black’s un-castled King. (Possibly stronger, though, is 11. Bg2 fxg5 12. 0-0 Kd8 13. Rae1, activating both Rooks.) **11...fxg5 12. Re1??** (White’s attack becomes unstoppable after 12. Nh5g5 Bb4 13. d5 or 12. Bg2 Nf6 13. Nxd6+ Qxd6 14. Rhe1+ Kd8 15. Nxe5 Rf8 16. d5) **12...Kd8 13. d5??** (White should continue his attack by 13. Nh5g5. Then 13...Bb4 14. c3 h6 pushes White back. However, Black cannot solve the problem of hiding his King. He’s still suffering after 15. Nf3 Bf5 16. Ne5 Nf6 17. Bg2).



13...Bxh3?? (Missing the refutation 13...Nf6! 14. dxc6 (White cannot stand 14. Nh5g5? cxd5) 14...Nxe4 15. Rxe4 Qf6. Apparently White has nothing better than 16. cxb7 Bxb7 17. Bg2 Nd7 18. Rf1 Qg6 19. Rd1 h6 20. Qxd6 Qxd6 21. Rxd6 Bxe4 22. Bxe4 Rc8, when Black emerges with a material advantage and all the winning chances.) **14. dxc6 Nxc6 15. Bxh3 Kc7** Black has nearly escaped. In fact, only one move favors White.



16. Nc3! Crushing. Black cannot defend against the threats of 17. Nd5+ and 17. Nb5+. **Qd8** (If 16...Ne5 17. Nb5+ Kc6, White wins with 18. Bg2+ Kd7 19. Qb3 Nf6 20. Nxd6 Qxd6 21. Rd1) **17. Nb5+ Kb6 18. Nxd6 a6** Allowing a King hunt. Alternatives fail too. **19. Qb3+ Kc7 20. Qxb7+ Kxd6 21. Re6+ Kc5 22. Rxc6+ Kd4 23. Rd1+ Ke3 24. Re6+ Kf2 25. Qg2# 1-0** White won the tournament’s best game prize for this effort.

Second Place (\$75)

Second prize went to Jackson Scamehorn for his win over Ryan Lu. After 27 moves, this position arose:

Jackson Scamehorn (1868)

Ryan Lu (1738)

2025 Pacific Southwest U2000 (2), 1-0

Annotated by IM Jack Peters



28. Bc1! Bc6 29. Ng6+ Nxe6 30. fxe6 Opening the f-file for attack. Black should run with 30...Ke7. **30...Qe7?** **31. axb5 Bxb5 32. Bd2?!** (Stronger is 32. Bxh6!, anticipating 32...gxh6 33. Raf1 or 32...Rh8 33. Rxf6+ Qxf6 34. Raf1 Qxf1+ 35. Bxf1 Rxh6 36. Qf5+ Kg8 37. Qe6+ Kh8 38. Qxd6) **32...Bc7?!** Again, the King must leave by 32...Ke8. **33. Raf1 Ke8** Too late! **34. Bxh6! Rh8** The critical variation. After 34...gxh6 35. Rxf6, Black must yield too much material. Possible is 35...Kd8 36. Qxh6 Be8 37. Rf8 Rxf8 38. Rxf8 Bd6 39. g7, soon promoting the g-pawn. **35. Rxf6!** (Both players foresaw that 35...Rxh6 36. Rf8+

would cost Black his rook at a8 by 36...Kd7 37. Qg4+ Kc6 38. Rxa8 or 36...Qxf8 37. Rxf8+ Kxf8 38. Qf5+ Ke7 39. Qf7+ Kd6 40. Qd5+ Ke7 41. Qxa8) (Black can prolong the game, hopelessly, by 35...gxh6 36. g7+ Kd7. A convincing answer is 37. Qf5+ Qe6 38. gxh8Q Rxh8 39. Bg7, picking off the f-pawn.) **35...Bd7 36. Rf7 Qe6 37. Rxe7** (Good enough, but 37. Bg5! forces checkmate.) **37...Kd8** (White dismisses 37...Rg8 by 38. Rxe8 Qxe8 39. Rf8+ Qxf8 40. g7+) **38. Bg5+ Kc8 39. Qxh8+** and White stopped recording but went on to win.

Third Place (\$25)

In the third prize game, White gained a pawn by an exchanging combination at move 10 and converted that advantage into a win.

NM Sarthak Gattani (2215)

Justin Lee (2047)

2025 Pacific Southwest Open (1), 1-0

Annotated by IM Jack Peters

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. e3 e6 5. Nf3 Nbd7 6. Bd2 a6 7. a4 Bb4 8. Bd3 0-0 9. 0-0 Re8?



10. Nxd5! Nxd5 11. cxd5 Bxd2 12. dxc6 Ba5 13. cxd7 Bxd7 14. Ne5 g6 15. Qf3 f5 16. Qxb7 Re7 17. Qf3 Bc7 18. Bc4 Rb8 19. b3 Bxe5 20. dxe5 Rb6 21. Rfd1 Qc7 22. Qf4 Kg7 23. h4 h6 24. Rd6 Kh7 25. Qd4 Rc6 26. Rd1 Bc8 27. Rxc6 Qxc6 28. Qd6 Rc7 29. Qxc6 Rxc6 30. Rd6 Rxd6 31. exd6 Kg7 32. Bxa6 Black resigns. 1-0

2025 PSWO winner IM Robert Shlyakhtenko shares two of his games.

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2529)

Emmanuel Dentchouk (2134)

2025 Pacific Southwest Open (1), 1-0

Annotated by IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Bg5 Be7 6. e3 c6 7. Bd3 Nbd7

8. h3 a5 9. Qc2 Nh5 In my opinion, this does not work well in conjunction with Black's previous move. The point is that Black often needs to castle queenside in the ...Nh5 lines, but this becomes an unlikely prospect now that ...a5 has been played. **10. Bxe4**



The most ambitious. If Black castles kingside, then White can easily begin an attack here. **12...Ng7 13. Kb1 Nb6** (13...O-O may be better. White gains an advantage only with 14. Nf4!, waiting for Black to declare his intentions. (For instance, 14...b5 is strongly met by 15. e4!) (whereas on 14...Nf6 White plays 15. g4)) **14. g4** Preventing ...Bf5, which would allow Black the favourable exchange of light-squared bishops. **14...h5!?** A very ambitious move. Now Black is more or less committed to keeping his king in the center. **15. Nf4** (15. e4 was a good alternative; after 15...dxe4 16. Bxe4 Be6 17. f3!? White has a stable advantage, due to his safer king.) **15...g5 16. Nfe2!?** White doesn't sense the urgency required by the position and is content to have provoked the weakening move ...g5. (Instead, White

should open the center immediately: 16. Nxf5! Nxf5 17. gxh5 Rxh5 18. e4 dxe4 19. Bxe4 Be6 20. Rxe1! followed by d4-d5.) **16...Bd7** (16...hxg4 17. hxg4 Rxh1 18. Rxh1 Bxg4? (18...Kd8! followed by ...Ne8 keeps Black in the game.) 19. Nxd5! Nxd5 (19...cxd5 20. Bb5+!) 20. Rh8+ Kd7 21. Rxa8 Nb4 22. Qb3 Nxd3 23. Rb8!- and White wins.) **17. e4 dxe4**



18...Be6!? Wasting a tempo. (18...hxg4! Black should take the chance to simplify the position and bring his king to safety. After 19. hxg4 Rxh1 20. Rxh1 O-O-O 21. d5 White maintains a small initiative, but Black's position has its pluses as well.)

19. f4!? Given the short time control (G/45), I was unable to calculate the variations precisely and played on instinct. Unfortunately, this heavy-handed approach to the position loses most of the advantage. (19. d5! was strongest; after cxd5 20. Bxd5 Nxd5 21. Nxd5 Bxd5 22. Rxd5 White realizes the idea of 16.Nfe2: the weaknesses created by ...g6-g5 make Black's defense very difficult. hxg4? only makes matters worse in view of 23. Rc1! (threatening Qc8+) Ne6 24. hxg4 With a decisive advantage.) **19...hxg4 20. d5** (20. f5! was stronger, intending Bc4 21. d5! cxd5 22. hxg4 Rxh1 23. Bxh1 With domination.) **20...cxd5 21. Bd3** White has sacrificed two pawns and is about to lose a third; he maintains good attacking chances, but objectively Black holds the balance in multiple ways.

However, it turned out that playing this irrational position with little time left was much easier as White than as Black.



21...gxh3 (21...Rxh3 is more sturdy; after 22. Nd4 gxf4 23. Qf2 Black parries the assault with Nd7 24. Qxf4 Qf6! 25. Nxe6 Nxe6 26. Qxg4 Rxh1 27. Rxh1 O-O-O 28. Nxd5 Qe5=) **22. f4xg5** Opening more lines. **22...Qxg5!?** Leaving the queenside undefended. (22...Nc4! followed by queenside castling would solve Black's issues for the moment.)



23. Nb5! O-O? The decisive mistake; Black's king is very weak here. (Black had to give back part of the material with 23...Rc8! 24. Nd6+ Ke7! 25. Nxc8+ Rxc8 26. Qb3 Qe3! with mutual chances.) **24. Rg1 Qe5 25. Nbd4!?** Now the best, but sufficient. Black cannot parry White's numerous attacking ideas, such as Qd2-Qh6. **25...Bd7 26. Bh7+ Kh8 27. Bf5!** The most precise way to finish the game. **27...h2** (27...Bxf5 28. Qxf5! wins.) (27...Kg8 28. Rxh3 Rfc8 29. Qd3 Kf8 30. Rh8+ Ke7 31. Qa3+! also does not help Black. Qd6 32. Qe3+ also does not help Black.) **28. Rg2 Kg8 29. Rgxf2 Nxf5 30. Rg2+ 1-0**

IM Robert Shlyakhtenko (2529)

FM Sihan Tao (2306)

2025 Pacific Southwest Open (8), 1-0

Annotated by IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

I thought this game was a good example of how to pose an opponent practical problems in an objectively equal position. **1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. f3 d5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 c6 7. e3** In recent years, 7.e4 has been trending, but I wanted to avoid a theoretical battle. **7...O-O 8. Bd3 b6 9. Ne2 Ba6 10. e4!?**



Over-the-board inspiration. White has long-term compensation for the pawn owing to his superiority on the dark-squares. (I knew that 10. cxd5! Bxd3 11. Qxd3 cxd5 12. e4 Nc6 was the theoretical continuation, where White can play in several ways, but during the game I felt that Black's task would be too simple here.) **10...Bxc4 11. Bg5 Bxd3 12. Qxd3 Qc7** Black doesn't fear the doubling of his pawns, since White's pieces are not well-positioned to attack them. **13. O-O Nbd7?!** The knight is passively placed on d7. (13...Ne8! is the best setup for Black. After 14. e5 (14. Rae1 f6! 15. Bf4 Nd6 is fine for Black, who has now covered his weaknesses on the dark squares. The straightforward 16. e5 fxe5 17. Bxe5 Nd7 18. Bg3 Rfe8 19. Nf4 Nf8 doesn't give White anything.) 14...c5! the other knight comes to c6, and Black can meet 15. f4 with f5!) **14. e5 Ne8** White has a promising attacking setup, but he must choose his plan carefully. My next few moves are all

somewhat inaccurate.



15. Qe3 Prophylaxis against ...f6. (However, 15. Rae1! was a more expedient way of attaining the same goal. Next, White will try to create a hook on the kingside with h2-h4.) (I should also note that 15. Be7? never works in view of Nxe5!) **15...Kh8 16. Nf4** A natural move, but now White cannot play h2-h4 without trapping his own bishop. **16...c5 17. Qe1?!** White transfers his queen to h4, but this plan is questionable. It's not for nothing that Philidor once called pawns the "soul of chess." With pure piece play, White will never be able to develop a kingside attack, as Black has not made any weaknesses on this side of the board. **17...Rc8 18. Qh4 b5?!** Weakening the c5-square. (18...Rg8! Followed by ...Nf8 would repel the attack, and the advantage would pass to Black.) **19. Be7 Rg8**



20. Nd3! Switching to positional measures. Now White either provokes the closing of the queenside, which is favorable to him, or the move ...cxd4, which gives White the c5-square. **20...c4** (After 20...cxd4 21. cxd4, I expected Qb6 (21...Qa5 22. Qf4! f6

23. Qg4 lets White pose some problems.) 22. Nc5 Nxc5 23. Bxc5 Qb7 24. Rfb1 Qd7! with an unclear position. White certainly has enough compensation for the pawn, but probably not more. (24...Nc7? 25. Qe7!) **21. Nf4 21...Nxe5?** Probably a miscalculation; there was no need for such drastic measures. (I expected 21...Nf8! 22. Nh3 Ng6 where White must choose how to force a draw. The flashy way is 23. Qxh7+! (and the boring way is 23. Ng5 h6! 24. Nxf7+ Kh7 25. Ng5+)) **22. dxe5 Qxe5 23. Nh3!** Maybe my opponent missed this backward move. White gets out of ...g7-g5 ideas and creates a threat of his own. (23. Rae1 Qxc3 24. Rxe6? is one of the lines that Black may have hoped for; it seems that White is winning, but after g5! the tables have turned.) **23...f6 24. Qe1!** The simplest. The endgame is winning for White, as Black's pawns are easily blockaded.



24...Qxe1 25. Rfxe1 Rc6 26. Bb4 Nc7 27. f4 Re8 28. Nf2 Kg8 29. Ng4 Na6 30. Ne3 Nc5 (or 30...Kf7 31. Nc2 followed by Nd4.) **31. Nxd5! Kf7 32. Bxc5 Rxc5 33. Ne3 Rd8 34. a4 a6 35. axb5 axb5 36. Ra7+ Kg6 37. Nc2?!** Rd3 38. Nd4 Rxc3 39. Nxe6 Rc6 40. Rxg7+ Kh6 41. Rb7 Rd3 42. Nf8 Kh5 43. h3! Black cannot escape mate for long. 1-0



Photo courtesy of Chris Roberts
IM Robert Shlyakhtenko

SCCF team wins third place at the National Tournament of State Champions

By CM Ala'a-Addin Moussa, IM Isaac Wang, NM Esther Jou, and GM Melikset Khachiyan

For the second year in a row, the SCCF team at the National Tournament of State Champions fell short by 0.5 points of winning first place, landing third place on a tie break with a cumulative 21 points.

The NTOSC runs annually alongside the US Open. Each US state (NorCal and SoCal are split) selects one representative for each section:

- **Rockefeller** National Tournament of Elementary School State Champions
- **Barber** National Tournament of Middle School State Champions
- **Haring** National Tournament of Girls State Champions
- **Denker** National Tournament of High School State Champions
- **Irwin** National Tournament of Senior State Champions

This year, the NTOSC was held in Middleton, Wisconsin from June 28th to 31st.

IM Isaac Wang, who played the Denker High School championship, was the only team member to get on the podium by winning 3rd place on a tiebreak, earning \$300 cash prize, a \$3000 scholarship, and a \$500 special prize for the best result U16 age.



Photo courtesy of David Llada
IM Isaac Wang wins 3rd place at 2025 Denker High School Championship.

1 (TX)	Singh, Siddharth (2329) 5.5 Shen, Yangyang (1988) 4.5 IM Liu, Eric Chang (2451) 4.5 Manchanda, Advik (2044) 4.0 Elliott, Scott Alan (2024) 3.0	21.5
2 (CA-N)	WIM Vidyaarthi, Omya (2161) 5.0 IM Taylor, Timothy W (2283) 4.5 IM Li, Eric Yuhan (2448) 4.0 Liu, Liam (2075) 4.0 Gu, Suyuan (2124) 3.5	21.0
3 (CA-S)	FM Wang, Isaac (2478) 4.5 GM Khachiyan, Melikset (2470) 4.5 Jou, Esther (2173) 4.0 FM Tang, Benjamin (2247) 4.0 Wang, Jacob S (2016) 4.0	21.0
4 (NY)	FM Zhu, Linxi (2383) 5.0 FM Paragua, Megan Althea (2294) IM Putnam, Liam Henry (2562) 5.0 Goodrich, Elliott (2213) 4.0 Goodman, Michael K (1900) 2.0	21.0
5 (NC)	Wu, Andrew (2288) 5.0 FM Vanapalli, Vishnu (2419) 4.5 Chen, Celine (1849) 4.0 Hoshor, Mark T (2224) 4.0 Yan, Isabella (1800) 3.5	21.0

Isaac Wang, GM Melikset Khachiyan, the Irwin representative, and Esther Jou, the Haring representative, share a few of their games.

IM Evan Park (2524)

IM Isaac Wang (2472)

2025 Denker Invitational (4), ½-½

Annotated by IM Isaac Wang

1. e4 e5 This move was already a huge surprise to my opponent as previously I had only been playing the Najdorf Sicilian. The reason I rejected the Najdorf is because White has so many options on move 6, and I wanted to limit my prep. I had some ideas against both the Spanish and Italian, which my opponent was playing all

the time. **2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Bc5 6. Bxc6 dxc6 7. h3 Qe7 8. d3 Nd7 9. Be3 Bd6 10. O-O O-O**



We got a very normal position, but I wasn't so familiar with the middle game ideas. I mainly focused on playing by intuition. **11. Nd2 b5 12. a4 Bb7 13. Qg4 Rae8 14. Nb3 Qe6?** I can't remember why I decided to offer a trade of queens. This is a huge positional mistake because an endgame is extremely pleasant for White. Black's pieces are not doing much and play is quite limited. White can slowly improve. I should have tried to go for g6 then f5. (14...Kh8 15. Ne2 g6 16. Ng3 f6 17. Qh4 Rf7 18. Ne2 Qf8 19. f3 f5=) **15. Na5 Ba8**



16. Rfb1? (16. Qxe6 Rxe6 17. f3 I would have hated playing this position. White has clear plans, and all I can do is wait. The engine gives around +0.7, but it's so difficult to play Black for a human. 17...h5 18. Nb3 Bb7 19. Kf2 f6 20. Ke2 Kf7

21. Nb1 Rb8 22. N1d2 Ree8 23. Rfc1±) 16...Qe7 I realized I should keep queens on the board and go for the g6-f5 idea that I mentioned earlier.
17. Ne2 Kh8 18. Ng3 g6 19. h4 h5?? (19...Nc5 20. h5 Ne6 21. Qh3! Nf4 22. Qh2 Kg8 23. Nb3 f5=)

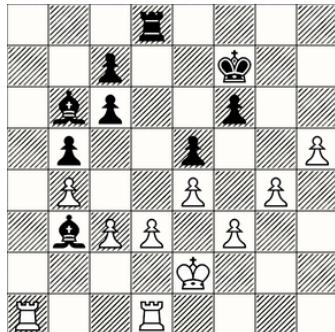


20. Nxh5?? I think my opponent's aggressive playing style may have been the reason why he did not think positionally and try to trade queens. (20. Qg5! Qe6 21. Nb3 Be7 22. Qh6+ Kg8 23. Nd2 b4 24. Nf3 Qf6! 25. Bg5 Qg7 26. Qxg7+ Kxg7 27. Bxe7 Rxe7 28. Ne2±) 20...gxh5 21. Qxh5+ Kg8
22. Qg4+ Kh8 23. Qh5+ Kg8 24. Bh6 My opponent was very ambitious and decided to go for the win. The imbalance is quite strange so I couldn't figure out what the evaluation roughly was. The engine gives equal but I thought my position may have been slightly easier to play.
24...f6 25. Bxf8 Nxf8



26. Nb3?? (26. b4 Ne6 27. Qg6+ Kh8 28. c4 Nf4 29. Qh6+ Kg8 30. c5 Qf8 31. Qxf8+ Bxf8 32. g3 Ne6 33. Kg2=) 26...Bb7?? (26...b4 This move was an idea in so many positions later in the game. I think the point is that White's rooks are limited, and I will go c5 next

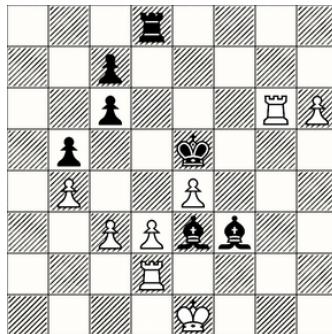
to open up my bishop. 27. c3 c5 28. Na5 Ne6 29. Qg6+ Kf8 30. Qh6+ Qg7 31. Qxg7+ Kxg7 32. g3 Bf8±) 27. **Re1??** (27. Na5 Ba8 28. b4=) 27...Qf7!
28. Qxf7+ Kxf7 29. Na5 Ba8 30. Nb3 Bb7 31. c3 Ne6 32. g3 32...Ne5?? (32...b4 33. Na5 Ba8 34. Nc4 Bf8 35. Red1 c5±) 33. Nxc5 Bxc5 34. **Red1??** (34. b4 Bb6 35. Kg2 Rd8 36. Red1=) 34...Bc8?? (34...b4 35. Kf1 Bc8 36. f3 Be6 37. Ke2 Rb8 38. g4 Bf8±) 35. **Kg2??** (35. b4 Bb6 36. Kg2 Be6 37. axb5 axb5 38. f3 Rd8 39. Kf1 c5=) 35...Bb6?? (35...b4 36. Rac1 b3 37. f3 Be6 38. d4 Bd6 39. g4 Rh8 40. h5 a5±) 36. **f3??** (36. b4 Be6 37. axb5 axb5 38. f3=) 36...Rd8?? (36...a5 37. b4 axb4 38. cxb4 Rd8 39. axb5 cxb5 40. g4 Rd4±) 37. **b4** We both should have played b4 so many times earlier, but both of us probably did not fully understand the ideas. 37...Be6 38. axb5 axb5 39. **Kf1 Rg8 40. g4 Rh8 41. h5 Rd8 42. Ke2 Bb3**



Around this position I was feeling a lot of pressure and started making passive decisions. I should have played c5 to try and gain space instead of just waiting for him to slowly improve.



43. Rd2 Ba4? (43...Be6 44. Ra6 c5 45. bxc5 Bxc5 46. Rb2 Rb8 47. Kd2 Ke7=) 44. **f4! Bb3??** (44...c5 45. bxc5 Bxc5 46. fxe5 fxe5 47. Rf1+ Kg7 48. Ra2! (48. Rf5?! I was worried about this, but I guess I have some insane b4 idea. 48...b4 49. cxb4 Bxb4 50. Rb2 Bd6±) 48...Bb3 49. Rb2 Be6 50. Rxb5 Bd6± My bishops are strong, so it's not so simple for White to push pawns.) 45. **Rf1 Be6 46. fxe5 Bxg4+ 47. Ke1 Ke6 48. Rxf6+?** (48. Rf4! f5 49. d4+- If he locks my dark squared bishop, the game is easily over.) 48...Kxe5 Around here, my opponent started getting nervous as he got below a minute. I had around 3 minutes and was trying everything I could to pull the draw. 49. **Rg6 Bf3!** 50. **h6 Be3??** This is a horrible blunder. (50...Ra8 51. d4+ Kf4! 52. Kf2 Bxe4 53. Rg3! Rh8 54. Rh3 Bf5 55. Rh1 Ra8+- This is extremely tricky. White's still winning, but it's so difficult.)



51. Rf2! Rf8 The funny thing is that in this position during the game I still thought I was doing okay, probably a little worse but fighting hard and creating complications. However, Rf1 would have just ended all my play. Luckily my opponent and I had a moment of mutual blindness. 52. **Rxf3??** White panicked under time pressure and blundered. (52. **Rf1**) 52...Rxf3 53. **Ke2 Rh3 54. Rxc6 Bxh6 55. Rxc7 Rh2+ 56. Kf3 Rh3+ 57. Ke2 Rh2+ 58. Kf3 Rh3+ ½-½** Overall it was a crazy game. So many complications and strange imbalances. We both made some positional and

tactical errors. Somehow it fizzled out to a draw.

SoCal Haring Representative NM Esther Jou shares two of her wins.

Diya Balamurugan (1724)

NM Esther Jou (2096)

2025 Haring Invitational (1), 0-1

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Be7 6. Be2 O-O 7. Nf3 dxc4 8. Bxc4 a6 9. h3 b5 10. Bb3 Bb7 11. a3 Nbd7 12. O-O c5 13. dxc5 Qc7 14. Be3 Nxc5 15. Bc2 Rad8 16. Qe2 Nd5 17. Nxd5 Bxd5 18. Rac1 Be4 19. Qe1 Qb7 20. Bxc5 Bxc5 21. Qe5 Bxf1 22. Rxf1 Qd5 23. Qg3 Rfe8 24. Ng5 h6 25. Nf3 Re2 26. Rd1 Qxd1+ 27. Bxd1 Bxf2+ 28. Qxf2 Rxd1+ 29. Qf1 Rxf1+ 30. Kxf1 Rxb2 31. Kg1 Rb3 32. Kh2 Rxa3 33. Kg3 b4 34. Kf2 Rxf3+ 35. Kxf3 b3 36. Ke3 b2 37. Kd2 b1=Q 38. Ke2 Qb3 39. Kf2 a5 40. Ke2 a4 41. Kf2 a3 42. Ke2 a2 43. Kf2 a1=Q 44. Ke2 Qc2+ 45. Ke3 Qac3+ 46. Kf4 Qa4+ 47. Kf5 g6# 0-1

NM Esther Jou (2096)

Aarna Nitin (1901)

2025 Haring Invitational (2), 1-0

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Ndb5 Bc5 7. Nd6+ Ke7 8. Bf4 e5 9. Nf5+ Kf8 10. Bg5 d6 11. Bc4 h6 12. Bxf6 Qxf6 13. Nd5 Qg5 14. Nfe3 Be6 15. O-O Ne7 16. Kh1 Nxd5 17. Nxd5 Rc8 18. Qd3 Bxd5 19. Qxd5 Rc7 20. Rad1 h5 21. f4 Qe7 22. fxe5 Rh6 23. Rf5 dxe5 24. Rxf7+ Qxf7 25. Qd8+ Qe8 26. Qxc7 Be7 27. Qxe5 Rf6 28. Qd5 Qf7 29. Qxf7+ Rxf7 30. Bxf7 Kxf7 31. Rd7 Ke6 32. Rxe7+ Kxe7 33. Kg1 Ke6 34. Kf2 Ke5 35. Ke3 g5 36. c4 a5 37. b3 b6 38. a3 Ke6 39. Kd4 Kd6 40. b4 axb4 41. axb4 h4 42. h3 Ke6 43. e5 Kf5 44. Kd5 Kf4 45. e6 Kg3 46. e7 Kxg2 47. e8=Q Kxh3 48. Qe3+ Kh2 49. Qxg5 h3 50. Ke4 b5 51. Kf3 Black resigns. 1-0

GM Melikset Khachiyan (2470)

NM Carl A Haessler (2213)

2025 Irwin Invitational (4), 1-0
Annotated by Melikset Khachiyan

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Nf3 e6 5.

Be2 Ne7 6. Be3 Nd7 7. Qd2 h6 After quite a strange opening choice by Black, I have decided to stay aggressive and launch a full scale attack on the kingside. 8. O-O-O a6 9. h4 b5 10. a3 Bb7 11. h5 g5 12. Nh2 f5 To be honest, this move came to me as an absolute surprise. But after some time, I simply realized I have an interesting way to punish Black. 13. f4 (13. d5 exd5 14. exf5 (14. exd5 Nf6)) 13...g4



14. Nxg4!! fxg4 15. Bxg4 Nf6?

(15...Nf8 was the only move. It surprised me when the opponent played 15...Nf6 fairly quickly.) 16. Bxe6 Nxe4 17. Nxe4 Bxe4 18. d5! ↑



White completely controls the center, and black king will never find a safe shelter. 18...Nf5 19. Bf2 Qf6 20. c3 Kf8 (20...b4) 21. Qe2 (21. g4) 21...Bxg2 22. Rhg1 Bxd5 23. Rxd5 Ne7 24. Qg4 Re8 25. Bh4 1-0



Photo courtesy of David Llada

GM Melikset Khachiyan (right) winning his final round of the Irwin

SoCal Connections

The SoCal Connections highlights SCCF members and their accomplishments each season. From young to old, master to novice, tactical to strategic, all players can participate in SoCal Connections by filling out this online form at: <https://forms.gle/5cyPaTFw3C4xHQ7p6>

FM Julian Colville

Julian is a FIDE Master from LA. He learned chess at five and played his first rated tournament at the LA Chess Club, and over the years he has played at Santa Monica Bay, San Gabriel Valley, ICEA, and San Diego Chess Club. Colville is also featured on the Spring 2025 R&F Issue as both a SCCF election candidate and the winner of the 32nd Annual Western Class.

What is your best chess achievement?

Winning the 2023 North American Youth Chess Championship U14 in Mexico City (Editor's note: with a nearly perfect score of 8.5/9!).



Photo courtesy of Dedian Guo
FM Julian Colville at 2023 North American Youth Chess Championship

What advice would you give to other aspiring chess players?

Always keep playing. You may not feel like you are getting anywhere, but eventually you will break through the next barrier. The most important thing is to never give up.

Best Game: Austin Jin (2010) vs. FM Julian Colville (2268), 2025.06.04

2025 National Open (1), 0-1

1 4 5 2 3 17 2 17 2

1. e4 c5 2. c3 d5 3. exd5 Qxd5 4. d4 Nc6 5. Nf3 Bf5 6. Be3 Nf6 7. Nbd2?? cxd4 8. Bc4



8...dxe3! 9. Bxd5 exd2+ 10. Qxd2 O-O-O 11. Qf4 Rxd5± 12. c4 Ra5 13. O-O Be4 14. c5 Rxc5 15. Qe3 e6 16. Nd4 Bd6 17. h3 Re5



18. Nxc6 Bxc6 19. Qg3 Rd5 20. Qh4 Rh5 21. Qc4 Rg5 22. g3 Bc5 23. Kh2



23...Ng4+!! 24. Qxg4 Rxg4 25. hxg4 h5 26. g5 h4 27. g4 h3 28. f4 Bd6 29. Rad1 Bc7 30. Rde1 Rd8 31. Kxh3 Rd3+ 32. Kh2 Rd2+ 33. Kg3 Rg2+ 34. Kh3 Rxb2 0-1

NM Craig Clawitter

Craig Clawitter is an Original Life Master (2024) and National Master (2007). He's been competing in SCCF tournaments since 2000 and coaching chess in Orange County and online since 2001.

Coming from a sports background, something not always typical for chess players, he bring a unique perspective to both playing, teaching and promoting the game. Clawitter's always exploring ways to make chess more engaging, accessible, and even cooperative.

These days, he works full-time as a chess teacher/trainer, active tournament player (most recently at the Pacific Coast Blitz Tournament on 8/9/2025), and top blogger on [Chess.com](https://www.chess.com/@user/username).

You can find more about him at:
nmCraigClawitter.weebly.com

Clawitter's blogs:

chess.com/blog/NMChessToImpress



NM Craig Clawitter

What is your best chess achievement?

Either representing SoCal in the 2002 High School Denker Championships or participating in the SCCF State Invitational Championship six times.

What advice would you give to other aspiring chess players?

If you're an improving chess player, stop putting so much pressure on yourself! Rating increases come in chunks rather than just a continuous straight line up. Decline all the draw offers, give yourself the grace to mess up and eventually you will be much stronger for it.

Best game: FM Harutyun Akopyan (2271) vs NM Craig Clawitter (2206), 2011.05.13

3rd Metropolitan FIDE Qualifier, 0-1

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. c3 Qb6 5. Nf3 Nc6 6. a3?! Ironically this is what I play as White against the French now. **6...Nh6 7. b4** Black is forced to release the tension in the center, but in order to do so White has fallen behind in development. **7...cxd4 8. cxd4 Nf5 9. Bb2 Bd7 10. g4 Nh6 11. h3 f6 12. Bd3 fxe5 13. dxe5 Nf7 14. Nbd2 (14. O-O Be7 15. Nbd2 O-O) 14...Be7 15. Nb3?**



Kind of cool that my game is the game quoted in French books as the way to play against 15. Nb3? (15. O-O! a6 16. Kg2 O-O 17. Qc2 h6±) **15...O-O?!** (15...a5! Is also good straight away and actually might be even better than 0-0. 16. b5 a4!!

17. bxc6? bxc6 18. Nbd4 Qxb2-+) 16. O-O (16. Rc1? Nfxe5!! 17. Bxe5 Nxe5 18. Nxe5?? Qxf2#)

Black would like to play **16...a5!** but it looks terrible because of b5. (16...Rac8?? 17. Qd2! a5? 18. b5 a4 19. bxc6 bxc6 20. Nc1±) (16...Ng5?? 17. Nxg5 Bxg5 18. Nc5±) However, after **17. b5**, Black has **17...a4!!**



Instead of backing down, Black amps up the pressure through a precise counterstrike! (17...Na7? 18. a4 Nc8 19. Bd4+- White is taking over the board.) **18. bxc6 bxc6!** Black will win back the material due to the pin on the white knight on b3. (18...axb3?? 19. cxd7-+) (18...Bxc6? 19. Bd4! Qxb3 20. Qe2!+- 21. Rfb1 is only avoidable by huge material loss. 21...Bb5 (20...Rad8 21. Rfb1) 21. Bxb5 (21. Rfb1?? Qxd3-+ (or 21...Bxd3 22. Rxb3 Bxe2-+))) **19. Bxh7+?**



Ultimately, too tricky. (19. Bd4!? Qxb3 20. Qe2 Qb7 Compare with the 18...Bxc6? line. 21. Rab1 Qc8 22. Qc2 g6 (22...c5? 23. Bxh7+ Kh8 24. Be3 Rb8 25. Qg6 Rxb1 26. Rxb1 Be8 27. Qh5 Nh6 28. Bg6 Bxg6 29. Qxg6 Rxf3 30. Bxh6 Bf8! (30...gxh6? 31. Qxh6+ 31...Kg8 32. Qg6+ Kf8 33. Qh5 Qc7? (33...Kg8! 34. Qg6+ Kf8 35. Qh5) 34. Qh8+ Kf7 35. Rb8+- Rb3 (35...Qxb8 36. Qxb8 Rxh3 37. Kg2 Rxa3 38. Qh8 Rb3 39. Qh5+ Kg7 40. g5 a3 41. g6 a2 42. Qh7+ Kf8 43. Qf7#) 36. Qg8# (36. Qh7#) 31. Kg2 Rb3±) 23. Bc5 (23. Bxg6? hxg6 24. Qxg6+ Kh8 25. Qh5+ Kg7! 26. Nh4 Bxh4! 27. Qxh4 Qd8-+) 23...Bxc5 24. Qxc5 Qc7 25. Rfe1 Ra5±) **19...Kxh7 20. Qc2+**



(20. Qd3+ Kg8 21. Nbd4 Qxb2! 22. Rfb1 Was a line that I was worried about because it seemingly traps Black's Queen. Can you find the tactics that I eventually saw, and gave me the confidence to go down this line?



22...Nxe5!! 23. Nxe5 Qxf2+ Black saves his Queen, comes out up two pawns, and still has a strong attack to boot! 24. Kh1 Rf4! (I actually intended to play 24...Bd6± and I stopped my analysis here, but I was wrong. "Long variation, wrong variation," as Bent Larsen famously quipped. 25. Rf1! (25. Nxd7?? Qh2#) 25...Qb2 26. Rfb1 Qf2 27. Rf1) 25. Nxd7 Rxd4 26. Qg6 Qf3+ 27. Kg1

Qg3+ 28. Kh1 Rd2 29. Qxe6+ Kh8-+) 20...Kh8 21. Nc1 c5 22. Rb1 Rab8 23. Nd3 Qb3!



24. Qe2 (24. Qxb3? Rxb3 25. Nfe1 Rfb8 26. Rd1 Rxb2 27. Nxb2 Rxb2 28. Nf3 (28. Nd3 Rb3-+) 28...Bb5 29. Rfe1 Be2 30. Rb1 Rxb1 31. Rxb1 Bxf3 32. Rb7 d4 33. Rxe7 d3 34. Rxf7 d2 35. Rxf3 d1=Q+-+ Black gives up all of their minor pieces to promote their pawn and easily win the Queen vs. Rook endgame.) 24...Bb5 25. Rfd1 c4 26. Nc1?!



(26. Nd4?! White's best try. 26...cxd3! 27. Qd2 (27. Nxb3? dxe2-+) 27...Qc4 28. Rbc1 Ng5! 29. Rxc4 Bxc4 30. Kg2 Ne4-+) 26...c3!! 27. Qe1 (27. Nxb3? Bxe2-+) 27...Qc2! With a nasty double attack--Bb2 by the c3-pawn & Rb1 by the Black Queen.



28. Nd4 Qxb1 29. Bxc3 Qg6 Black gets their Queen out of dodge, defends the e6-pawn and plays simple chess when up by +2 points. Because of this, White saw no reason to continue the game and threw in the towel. **0-1**

IM John Bryant

John Bryant is a familiar face on the R&F, winning big-name tournaments like the 2024 American Open and 2025 Dreaming King Open. He's played chess for 25 years, starting from age 8, and he received the International Master title in 2013.

What is your best chess achievement?

Winning the US Open in 2012 and participating in the 2013 US Championship. My best rating performance was 2nd at the 2012 North American Open.

What advice would you give to other aspiring chess players?

Think about how chess skills can help you in life. Resourcefulness and thinking ahead will help you in any career endeavors. Also, enjoy the social aspect of chess. You can connect with other bright minds in the chess world. Don't focus all-in on chess unless you're an uber prodigy with world championship potential, and even if that's you, you can probably change the world in other domains.

Best game: GM Ray Robson (2620) vs. IM John Bryant (2442), 2013.05.04
2013 US Championship (2), 0-1

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nxc6 bxc6 6. e5 Qe7 7. Qe2 Nd5 8. Nd2 Rb8 9. c4 Ba6 10. b3 Qb4 11. Bb2 Nc3 12. Qe3 Na4 13. a3 Qa5 14. b4 Qb6 15. Qxb6 axb6 16. Bc1 d6

17. f4 dxe5 18. fxe5 g6 19. Bd3 Bg7 20. Nf3 f5 21. Bc2 Nc3 22. Bb2 Ne4 (23...c5 24. 0-0 Bb7 25. Bc2 0-0 26. Rfd1 Rbd8 27. Ba4 Ra8 28. Bd7 Rfd8 29. g4 fxg4 30. Bxg4 Kf8 31. bxc5 Nxc5 32. Ng5 h6 33. Ne6+ Nxe6 34. Bxe6 Bf3 35. Rxd8+ Rxd8 36. Bd5 Bxd5 37. Rd1 c6 38. cxd5 cxd5 39. a4 Ke7)



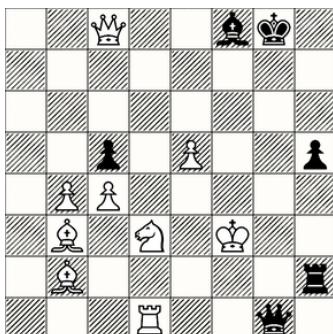
24. Ke2 0-0 25. Rhd1 g5 26. a4 g4 27. Ne1 Rde8 28. Nd3 c5 29. a5 f4 30. axb6 f3+ 31. Kf1 Bb7 32. Ra7 (32. Nxc5 g3 33. hgx3 Nxc5 34. bxc5 Bxe5 35. Bxe5 fxg2+ 36. Kg1 Rxe5= 37. g4 Rxc5 38. Ra7 Bf3 39. b7 Re5 40. Rb1 Rfe8 41. Kf2 Be4 42. Bc2 Bxb7 43. Raxb7 Re2+) 32...g3 33. gxf3 Rxf3+ 34. Kg2 Ref8 35. Rxb7 (35. Bd4)



35...h5?? I played okay up to this point and Re3 makes a draw, but this move is a blunder... that won me the game! (35...Re3= 36. Kh1 (36. hgx3 Rg3+ 37. Kh2 Rff3=) 36...Re2 37. hgx3 Nf2+ 38. Nxf2 Rxf2=) **36. bxc7 Re3 37. Rb8** When he played this I immediately realized it was mate in 20. When he reached for his rook, the number "20" just kept blinking in my



mind's eye. (37. Rb6) 37...Re2+ 38. Kh1 Rxh2+ 39. Kg1 Ng5 40. Rxf8+ Bxf8 41. Kf1 Nf3 42. c8Q g2+ 43. Ke2 g1Q+ 44. Kxf3



44...Qg2+ 45. Ke3 Qg3+ 46. Ke4 Rh4+ 47. Kf5 (47. Nf4 This slightly prolongs the game.) 47...Qf3+ 48. Kg6 Rg4+ 49. Qxg4 Qf7+ 50. Kg5 Be7+ 51. Kh6+ hxg4 0-1



Photo courtesy of James Woodward
IM John Bryant

GM Michael Brown

GM Michael Brown was born and raised in Orange County, CA, and learned chess at the age of 6. More than 20 years later, he still loves the game and can trace much of his success in the chess world to the SoCal chess community, from his fellow peers to his coaches.

What is your best chess achievement?

I made the Grandmaster title shortly after graduating college, and this remains my best chess accomplishment to date. In terms of my best chess performances, I won the 2015 SCCF Championship and had the pleasure to represent the US in several World Youth chess tournaments.

What advice would you give to other aspiring chess players?

My advice would be generally not to lose sight of what first attracted you to the game. For me, I was reading books detailing the brilliancies of chess titans from past eras (e.g., Kasparov, Korchnoi, Fischer) and fell in love with the art behind chess, and have made sure to keep this in mind even when I was playing competitively.

Chess can also generally be a great way to make friends and to develop skills outside the classroom/workplace that can aide you in your other day-to-day work. Concentration, ability to visualize problems mentally, and calculation are all useful skills in many jobs. And some of my best friends to this day remain my former colleagues and peers from the chess world, whose advice and friendships I deeply value.

Best game: GM Yu Yangyi (2737) vs. IM Michael Brown (2418), 2016.05.27

25th Annual Chicago Open (2), 0-1

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. O-O Be7 6. d3 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. a3 O-O 9. Nc3 Nb8 10. Re1 c6 11. Ne2 Nbd7 12. Ng3 Nc5 13. Ba2 Be6 14. b4 Bxa2 15. Rxa2 Ne6 16. a4 d5 17. Bd2 dxe4 18. dx4 Nd7 19. Nf5 Bf6 20. Be3 Qc7 21. Nd2 a5 22. Qg4 Kh8 23. axb5 axb4 24. Rxa8 Rxa8 25. bxc6 Qxc6 26. Rc1 Ra2 27. Qd1 g6 28. Nh6 Kg7

29. Ng4 Bg5 30. Bxg5 Nxg5 31. h4 Ne6 32. h5 Nd4 33. h6+ Kf8 34. Ne3 Nf6 35. Rb1 Nxe4 36. Nxe4 Qxe4 37. Rxb4 Qh4 38. Rb8+ Ke7 39. Rb7+ Kf8 40. Rb8+ Ke7 41. Rb1 Qxh6 42. Qe1 Qh5 43. Nd5+ Kf8 44. Nf6 Qf5 45. Rb8+ Kg7 46. Ne8+ Kh6 47. Qe3+ Qf4 48. Qxf4+ exf4 49. Rb7 f5 50. Nf6 Rxc2 51. Rxh7+ Kg5 52. Rf7 Rc1+ 53. Kh2 Rf1 54. Nh7+ Kh6 55. Nf8 Rxf2 56. Rh7+ Kg5 57. Rg7 Nf3+ 58. Kh3 Ne5 59. Re7 Ng4 60. Re6 Rf1 0-1



Photo courtesy of Maria Emelianova
GM Michael Brown

NM Robert Hurdle

NM Robert Hurdle is a National Master that has been playing chess since the 1970s. He was the winner of the California High School Championship in 1972 (at the age of 14), winner of the Student Chess Club Championship in 1976, and master since January 1979 (adjusted retroactively in 1980, due to the rating system being down for most of 1978/1979).

What's your best chess achievement?

My career highlight was playing board one on the team that won the USATW in 1999. My best individual highlight was scoring 9-3 at the 563 player US Open in Chicago in 1979, beating master James Thinnsen in the final round. I tied for 11th-19th and ended up splitting the 2nd/3rd Expert prizes for a prize check of \$50. My story about chess in Southern California comes from a different tournament.

When the Reseda Chess Club was active and vibrant in the early 1970s, some weekend chess tournaments were sponsored. Often a group of chess players from Santa Barbara would come down to the tournament, and Nick de Firmian was present several times. At the close of one tournament in 1974, I was talking to the Santa Barbara group (at their car) in the parking lot at Reseda Park. One of the guys stated that 3.5-2.5 in the Open section was better than 4-2 in the under-1800 section, and I agreed. I was then informed that I was going to be awarded the Junior trophy for 4-2 (in the under-1800 section), but that Nick had scored 3.5-2.5 in the Open section. The Junior trophy should have been only for the best score in the Open section. I told them to wait for me to come back. I got the Junior trophy from the tournament director and turned it over to the Santa Barbara group, wishing them a safe journey home.

Seven years later at the Pacific Southwest Open, after the pairings were up, I mentioned to Nick de Firmian that I was paired as Black against Duckworth, and asked what I should do against The Spike (1. g4). De Firmian said that I should play 1...e5, then 2...d5, and at some point play f5 to open the f-file for attack. The game did not work out exactly as planned, but is one of my most memorable games. It should be noted

that Duckworth had not yet attained the rating of master, so I was the higher rated player at the time.

What advice would you give to other aspiring chess players?

Study the book "500 Master Games" by Tartakower and Du Mont to get some historical background. Also Fischer's "My Sixty Memorable Games" is fantastic.

Best Game: William Duckworth vs. NM Robert Hurdle, 1981.07.02

1981 Pacific Southwest Open, 0-1

1. g4 e5 2. d3 d5 3. h3 f5 4. Bg2 fxg4 5. hxg4 Bxg4 6. c4 Nf6 7. cxd5 Bc5 8. Qb3 Nbd7 9. d6 cxd6 10. Nc3 Bd4 11. Bg5 Nc5 12. Qc4 Rc8 13. Bxf6 Qxf6 14. Nf3 Bxc3+ 15. bxc3 Be6 16. Qb5+ Bd7 17. Qc4 b5 18. Qh4

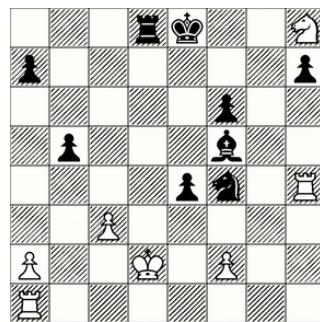


The fight has been over whether Black will be allowed to castle. (Here, 18. Qd5 loses to 18...Bc6) 18...e4 Qc3 is threatened. 19. Qxf6 gxf6 20. Nh4 exd3 21. exd3 Nxd3+ 22. Kd2 Nf4 23. Be4 d5 24. Ng6 dxe4 (Now, 24...Nxd6 25. Bg6+ Ke7 26. Rxh7+ Rxh7 27. Bxh7 Black might be winning, but it is just one pawn and looks like a lot of work.) 25. Nxh8

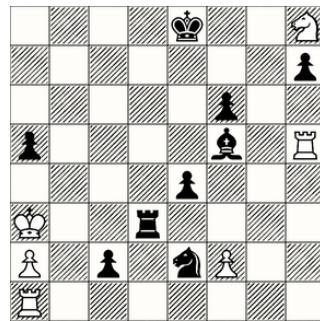


(If 25. Nxf4, Black is up two pawns, so this seems forced.) 25...Bf5! The knight is trapped. The black knight watches over the h5 square, so for now the bishop cannot be harassed.

26. Rh4 (White cannot dislodge the knight with his king, because after 26. Ke3 Rxc3+ 27. Kxf4 Rf3#) (To me, it seems like 26. a4 is best, trying to create chaos. Black may have to try 26...b4 (26...Ke7 27. axb5 Rxh8 28. Rxa7+ does not look pleasant for Black.) 27. cxb4 and then 27...Ke7) The move White tried in the game (hoping to chase off the knight, so that the bishop can be harassed) allows Black a ferocious attack. 26...Rd8+



27. Kc1 (If 27. Ke3 Rd3+ 28. Kxf4 Rf3#) (27. Kc2 e3+ 28. Kb2 e2 29. Rxf4 Rd1 30. Rf3 e1=Q 31. Re3+ Qxe3 32. fxe3 Rxa1 33. Kxa1 h5 and Black's pawn is unstoppable.) 27...Ne2+ 28. Kb2 Rd2+ 29. Kb3 a5 30. c4 Rd3+ 31. Kb2 bxc4 32. Rh5 c3+ 33. Ka3 c2+



34. Ka4 (Or, as pointed out by Duckworth (and seen by me) 34. Kb2 Rd2 35. Ka3 (35. Rc1 Nxc1 36. Kxc1 Rxf2-+) 35...c1=Q 36. Rxc1 Nxc1 37. Rxf5 Rxa2#) 34...Rd1 35. Rhh1 Rxa1 0-1 (36. Rxa1 c1=Q 37. Rxc1 Nxc1 38. a3 Nd3 leaves no doubt.)



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7 PM Fri, 11 AM & 5 PM Sat, 10 AM & 3:30 PM Sun
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Entry Fees:

\$110 Early Bird Rate if received by 9/15

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GMs, WGMs, IMs & WIMs play for free,
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One half-point bye is OK if booked at least 1 hour before the round; but
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Info: Chuck Ensey at (858) 432-8006, or see www.sandiegochessclub.org

Hotel: \$219, plus 12.7% tax if booked by 9/24, call 1-800-321-2211.

Book early, the rooms often sell out before 9/24.

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