Friendly match Dublin vs. New Jersey, by GM Alex Baburin

On Sunday, December 27th, a team of our students played a friendly match on 14 boards vs. the International Chess Academy from New Jersey, USA. For most of the players, this was their first ever international match. The players ranged from very young players, who only recently took up chess, to ICA's Gary Leschinsky, a 13-year-old who is just a few points shy of a National Master title.

Each player faced their respective opponent twice, once with each colour. As the match began, the players were ushered into their own private room to play their opponents. There was also a spectator arena for parents to watch the games and hear my commentary on the ongoing matches. Although it was just a friendly match, many of the students were excited to have new faces from across the world to play against and to socialize with. The U.S team won the match with a score of 19.5 – 8.5.

The match finished with an impromptu 'Questions and Answer' session, during which I answered numerous questions and also asked the players on how they work on their chess. While the opportunities to gain valuable tournament experience are limited at present, young players can improve their game in many ways: by reading books, taking classes, watching instructional videos and analysing their own games. Several students mentioned the platform called Twitch. Gary (U.S), and Christopher (Ireland) stated their favourites to watch were IM Eric Rosen and GM Hikaru Nakamura.

With almost everything chess related shifting to a virtual landscape, it's comforting to know that the options the students have turned to have not halted their skill development! Keep your eye on these players, it certainly won't be the last time you hear of them!
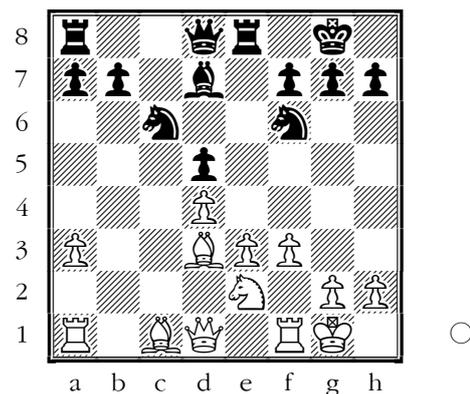
There were several well-played games in the match, and I would like to show the most interesting of them here.

**Gary Leschinsky –
Christopher Woods** 27.12.2020
The Nimzo-Indian Defence; E49

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.f3 d5 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.e3 cxd4?!
This exchange reduced Black's options. The most popular moves are 8...0–0 and 8...♕c7. Notably, 8...c4 is a reasonable alternative.
9.cxd4 0–0 10.♗d3 ♖e8 11.♘e2 ♘c6 12.0–0 ♗d7?! *(D)*

13.g4! I like this move, which clearly show that Gary knows something about this system and White's plans in it.
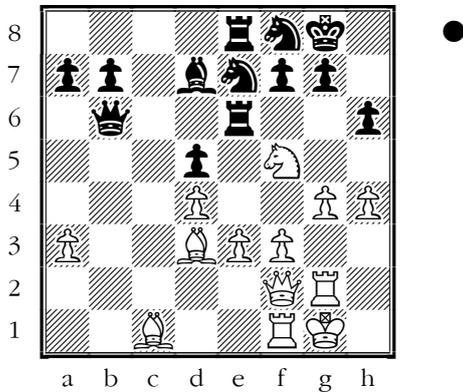**13...h6 14.♘g3**
14.h4!? ♖c8 15.♘f4.
14...♕b6?! △14...♘a5.
15.♖a2!? ♖e6 16.♖g2 ♖ae8 17.♘f5 ♘h7 18.h4 White had another, rather unexpected

opportunity – 18.♖b2! ♕c7 19.♔b3, winning a pawn.

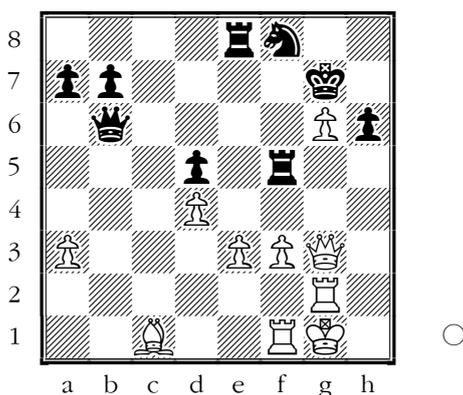**18...♘e7 19.♕c2 ♘f8 20.♕f2 (D)**

20...♘xf5?

Opening of the g-file makes White's attack even more dangerous. It was a good moment to reduce White's attacking potential by playing 20...♗b5!. Remember, exchanging pieces is one of the key defensive ideas!

21.gxf5 ♖f6 22.♕g3 g6 23.fxg6 fxg6 24.h5 ♔g7?
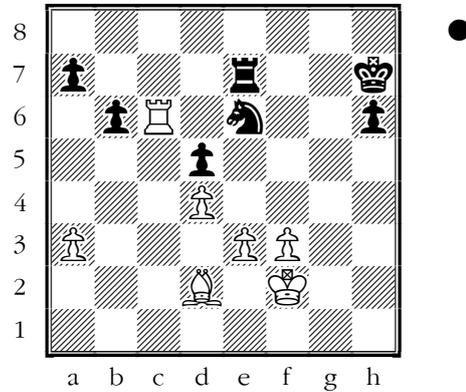
24...♗f5 25.♗xf5 ♖xf5 26.♕h3 ♖g5∞.

25.hxg6+– ♗f5 26.♗xf5 ♖xf5 (D)

27.♖b2?!

White had a win, albeit not an easy one – 27.e4! ♕xd4+ 28.♖gf2 dxe4?? 29.♗b2 or 27...dxe4 28.fxe4 ♖xf1+ 29.♔xf1 ♖xe4 30.♕f3 ♖e7 31.♗xh6+ ♔xh6 32.♕xf8+ ♖g7 33.♕h8+.

27...♕c6 28.♔f2 ♖g5 29.♔h3 ♖xg6 30.♕f5 b6 31.♗d2 ♕e6 32.♕xe6 ♖gxe6?! △32...♘xe6 **33.♖c2! ♔h7 34.♖c7+ ♖6e7 35.♖fc1 ♘e6 36.♖xe7+ ♖xe7 37.♖c6 (D)**

37...♔g7?

In chess pieces have to work, so Black had to play 37...♘g5!, targeting the f3–pawn – 38.♔e2 ♖f7 39.♖d6 ♘xf3 40.♖xd5 ♘xd2 41.♔xd2 ♔g6=.

38.♗b4! ♘d8

Or 38...♖e8 39.♖d6+–.

39.♖d6 ♘f7 40.♖xd5 ♖c7 41.e4 ♖c2+ 42.♔e3 ♔f6 43.♖d7 h5 44.d5 h4 45.♗e7+ ♔e5 46.f4#

Pranav Karthikeyan – Nicholas Karpenko 27.12.2020
The Caro-Kann Defence; B12

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3
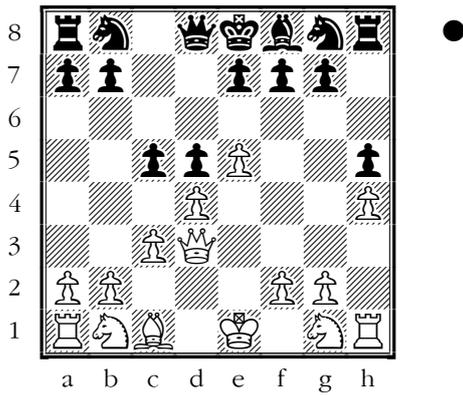
4.dxc5!? is more challenging for Black.

4...♗f5 5.h4

This move does not create a credible threat to the f5–bishop. I think White confused two systems here – after 3...♗f5 4.h4!? makes sense. But the inclusion of ...c6–c5 and c2–c3 changes that.

5...h5? Black should have opted for 5...e6 6.g4 ♗e4 7.f3 ♗xb1 8.♖xb1 ♘c6.
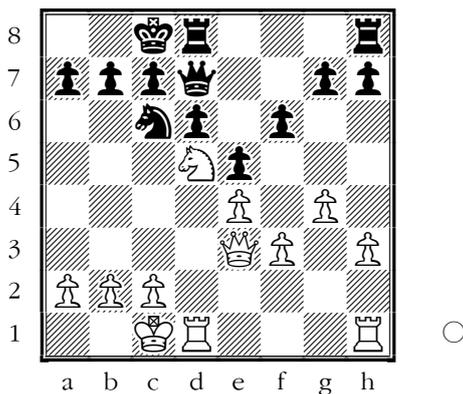
6.♗d3 ♗xd3 7.♕xd3 (D)

7...a6? Waste of time. After 7...e6 8.♘f3 ♞c6 9.0–0 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♞ge7 11.♗g5 White would have only a small advantage.

8.e6! f6??

I'd say that Black played this dreadful move quickly. Taking the pawn is bad – 8...fxe6? 9.♕g6+ ♚d7 10.♘f3 ♞c6 11.♘g5+–, so 8...♕c8 9.exf7+ ♚xf7 had to be tried.

9.♕g6 #

George Stack – Matthew Deamer, 27.12.2020

White does not have enough play for a pawn and so I was impressed by George's creative play: **17.♖d3!? ♕e6 18.♖a3 a6 19.♖d1 h5 20.♖dd3**

George certainly know what the Rook Lift is!

20...hxg4 21.fxg4 ♚b8?
21...♞d4!.

22.♖db3 ♚c8 23.♘xc7? A bit

impatient, White should have prepared that by playing 23.♕d3!+–

23...♕xc7? Missing 23...♕c4! 24.♘d5 ♕f1+ 25.♚d2 ♕g2+=

24.♕b6+ ♚d7 25.♕xb7+ ♚e8 26.♕xc6+ ♚e7 27.♖b7+ ♖d7 28.♖xd7+ ♕xd7 29.♕xa6 ♕c7 30.♖b3 ♕c5 31.♕f1 ♕d4 32.♖b7+ ♚e6 33.♕f5 #
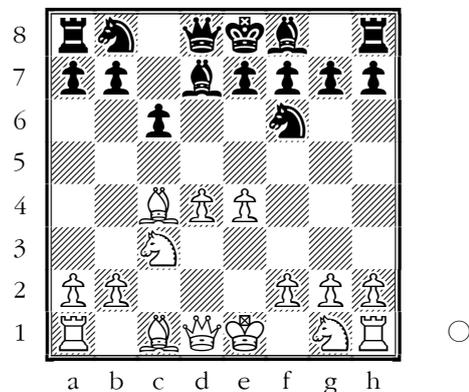
Mark Kogan – Mia Wang
27.12.2020

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 dxc4 4.e4 ♞f6?!

Black had two better options – 4...b5, trying to keep the c4-pawn and 4...e5, attacking the pawn centre at once. If Black is not familiar with the opening nuances, it is best not give up the centre with ...d5xc4.
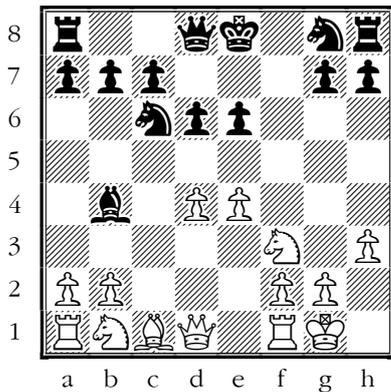
5.♗xc4 ♗d7?? (D)

This is **not** a developing move! In fact, it's not even a waste of time – this move actually makes Black's position worse! Black had other options: 5...e5, 5...g6 and 5...b5. White would have an edge in all these lines, but after 5...♗d7?? White is just winning!

6.♗e3? Too slow!

After 6.♕b3! e6 7.♕xb7 the game would be over soon, though he eventually won anyway.
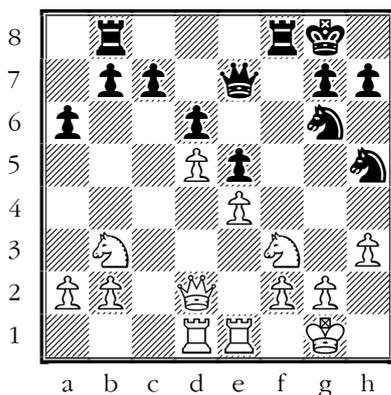
Most young players need to slow down as they often miss great opportunities, including some rather simple ones. The following game is a case in point:

Dusan Waters – Elizabeth Soldatenkov 27.12.2020

Black's last move was 9...♗c5–b4 (9...♗b6 had to be played). With the black king still in the centre and his bishop now loose, it should not be too hard a winning line: 10.d5! exd5 11.exd5 ♘ce7 12.♕a4+.

Instead of playing 10.d5!, White hesitated with **10.♗d2** and later got into difficulties:
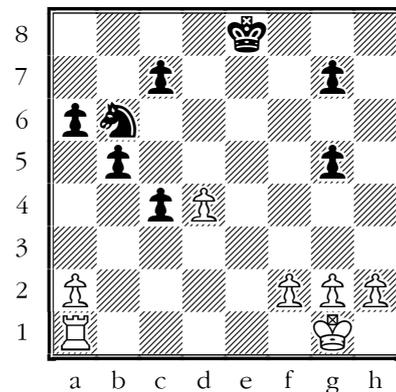

"The side who possesses an advantage must attack, otherwise he risks losing that advantage. The best way to come up with a plan for an effective attack is to identify a weakness in opponent's position and to exploit it." – William Steinitz.

Here the main object of Black's attack is the white king. First, Black could open up its position: 20...♖xf3! 21.gxf3. Then one of his knight can occupy a great outpost on f4: 21...♘gf4! and White is doomed: 22.♔h2 ♕h4 or 22.♔f1 ♕g5 23.♖e3 ♕g2+ 24.♔e1 ♕g1 #

Instead, the game went **20...h6? 21.♕e3** and Black eventually won only after mutual mistakes.

Most young players struggle in the endgame and this match was no exception. I spotted three interesting endings:

Yannick Woods – Sidharth Krishnan 27.12.2020

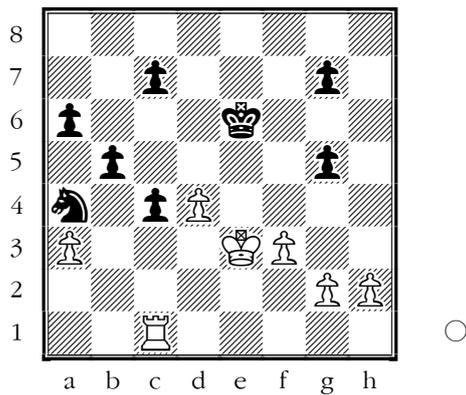**29.f3** It was time to bring in the king – 29.♔f1 ♘d5 30.♔e2 ♔e7 31.♔d2 ♔d6 32.♖e1 b4∞

29...♘a4?! Usually knights are better off in the centre. Of course, there are exceptions, but this is not one of them. So, Black should have opted for 29...♘d5!.

30.a3 This move only helps Black to get passed pawns. It was better to play 30.♔f2.

30...♘c3 31.♔f2 ♔f7 32.♖c1 32.♔e3!.

32...♘a4? Black is again decentralising the knight... △32...♘d5

33.♔e3 ♚e6 (D)

[chess diagram]

In such positions the white king should be used in defence, while the rook should attack the enemy pawn. Therefore White should play 34.♔d2 ♚d5 35.♖e1 ♚xd4 36.♖e4+ ♚d5 37.♖g4+−.

34.f4? ♚f5?
△34...gxf4+ 35.♔xf4 ♚d5 36.♔e3 a5 37.♖f1 ♞c3.
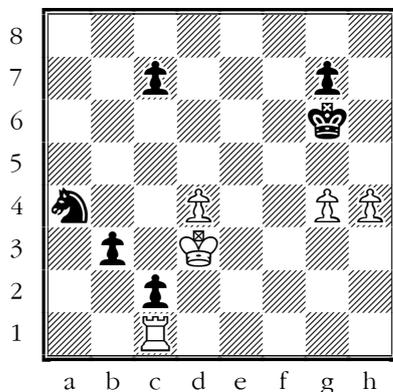
35.fxg5 ♚xg5 36.♔f3?
I don't get this move. After 36.d5! White should win easily.

36...a5 37.g3 c3 38.h4+?! ♚f5?
38...♚g6!

39.g4+ ♚g6 40.♔f4? The white king had to fight against the enemy passed pawns – 40.♔e4 b4 41.axb4 axb4 42.♔d3.

40...b4 41.axb4 axb4 42.♔e3! b3 43.♔d3 c2 (D)

[chess diagram]

44.♖xc2?? There was no reason to be so desperate! 44.♖e1! c5 45.dxc5 ♞xc5+ 46.♔d2+−.

44...bxc2 and Black won 36 moves later.
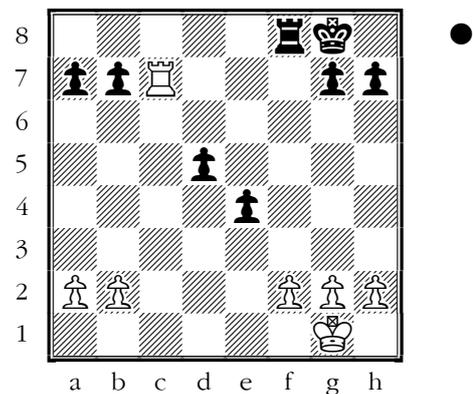
Bobby Qian – Ben Sheahan
27.12.2020

[chess diagram]

White should be able to hold this endgame, but he got an unexpected present: **41...♚c6??** I bet Black played this move very quickly... In fact, time management was one area in which the US team was stronger. **42.♖xd8 ♞f5 43.♖f8 ♞d4+ 44.♔c3** and White won 30 moves later.

Gavin Sheahan – Aaron Shefter, 27.12.2020

[chess diagram]

24...♖d8?
Black had a better move at his disposal – 24...d4! "Passed pawns must be pushed!". The point is that after 25.♔f1 the rook on f8 is still useful – 25...e3 26.f3 ♖d8 27.♔e1 ♚f8. After 25.♖xb7 ♖c8 Black is winning.
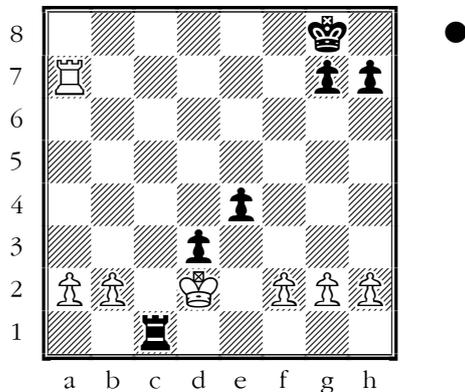
25.♔f1 d4 26.♖xb7?
This pawn is more or less irrelevant at present. It was time

to improve position of the white king – 26.♔e1 d3 27.♖e7 ♖d4 28.b3 ♖b4 29.♔d2 a5 30.♖d7.

26...d3 27.♔e1 ♖c8! 28.♖xa7 ♖c1+ 29.♔d2 (D)

29...♖c2+? This natural–looking move isn't best. Black would win after 29...♖f1! 30.♔e3 ♖e1+ 31.♔d2 ♖e2+ 32.♔d1 ♖xf2 33.♖e7 ♖xg2 34.♖xe4 ♖xb2–+.

30.♔d1?
Usually one should keep his king active, so White should play 30.♔e3!, for example: 30...♖e2+ 31.♔f4 ♖xf2+ 32.♔xe4 ♖xg2 33.♔xd3 ♖xb2 34.h4 ♖h2 35.♖a4!=.

30...♖xf2–+ 31.b4
White should have tried 31.♖e7 ♖xg2 32.b4, though after 32... ♖xa2 33.h3 ♖e2! 34.b5 ♔f8 35.♖e5 ♔f7 Black is winning.

31...e3 32.♖e7 ♖f1#

I hope to organise more friendly matches in the near future. Most likely, our next match will be against one of chess schools in Russia – stay tuned!