

**Tata Steel  
Chess Tournament  
2021**

**Daniel Fernandez**

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# **Tata Steel Chess Tournament 2021**

**Daniel Fernandez**

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# Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
⊙	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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# Preface

Before you is the tournament book of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament 2021. The event that has been won in sensational fashion by the young Dutch grandmaster Jorden van Foreest. In a tiebreak in the third blitz game, he was just a bit faster of his compatriot Anish Giri. The barrage was necessary because both players very surprisingly ended with the wonderful score of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  out of 13 in joint first place. With this they had left behind, among others, World Champion Magnus Carlsen ( $7\frac{1}{2}$ ) and the number two in the world, Fabiano Caruana (8). An unprecedented achievement, because the tournament in Wijk aan Zee is sometimes called the "Wimbledon of chess" of the elite tournaments. After the last round, in which Van Foreest in a formidable way had left the Swede Nils Grandelius chanceless, it was waiting for the game between the Spaniard David Antón Guijarra and Anish Giri. Our compatriot was in a bad position, lost perhaps, but he managed to free himself from the tangled position and gain an important half point. It was decided beforehand that a tiebreak would be held, consisting of at least two blitz games. Should these result in a 1-1 score, an Armageddon game would be played. This turned out to be a nervous and blood-curdling fight, with the pieces flying around. In the end the younger of the two, Jorden van Foreest, emerged victorious and thus the young Groninger booked the greatest success of his still young career. Apart from the commotion in the Dutch seaside resort of Wijk aan Zee, where the tournament was held – under strict corona rules – the whole of the Netherlands rose to its feet when this great result became known. Hadn't we had to wait since 1985, when Jan Timman won the Hoogovens chess tournament, for a Dutch chess player to stand on the highest podium? And now it was even two players from this country who could dispute together who would take the highest honor.

That such a fine achievement should be immortalized, is beyond dispute. But who will pick up the gauntlet? We live in a volatile world where the Internet is dominant and when a tournament is over, the next one is already at the door. No time for reflection and historical awareness? Yet there was someone who had followed the tournament with great interest. The English grandmaster Daniel Fernandez, who also publishes for "ChessPublishing" came up with the idea of thoroughly examining all the games from this tournament. He did not take any chances in doing so. In addition to the various sources he found on the Internet, he of course used the strongest engines available at the moment. He also had engines in the cloud patiently calculate various positions. Together with his source research and his own insights, he has created a unique compilation of chess-technical material that is unprecedented. In doing so, Fernandez has painted a fantastic picture of the

opening variants that were on the board in this tournament. He has done a thorough research of the ins and outs of the various variants and placed them in a broader perspective. And it must be said that the organization was kind to him by providing an interesting field of players who gave it their all every round. This resulted in many nice confrontations with extremely interesting opening theory! That Fernandez did not get away with the middle game and the many fascinating endgames was clear from a first estimate of the amount of material when it had to be converted to the format of this book. Initially, we ended up with almost 900 pages! That is far too much and therefore drastic cuts had to be made. Hundreds of (analysis) diagrams have been dropped, small side notes are no longer in the book and sometimes – pain in the heart – the trees of variations had to be cut back. That only happened, by the way, when the ingenious structure became so extensive that it would be hard to follow for "mere mortals". It is being considered whether this can be made available digitally at a later date, and the moment that it is, we will of course put Fernandez's entire analytical work on offer!

In the production of this book, tournament director Jeroen van den Berg, in consultation with their main photographer, Jurriaan Hoefsmit, provided many photos. Jurriaan has taken more than 1000 pictures during the tournament and made his archive available to me completely free of charge. Of the selection that I was allowed to make, he sent me the photos in the highest possible resolution. Without these pictures the book would not have become what it is now and I am very grateful for that. Because the photos show us the palpable tension and the emotions of the players in top concentration. Hoefsmit did a fantastic job, which are now "immortalized" in this book!

The format of this tournament book is different from what you might expect. The author chose the highly original idea to group all chapters around all the white games of each player. Starting with the player who finished at the bottom of the final table, Grandmaster Alexander Donchenko. He came to the start as a late substitute and had to pay for that with the last place. Yet he showed several times that he is an excellent chess player. The games were thus delivered to yours truly, who was charged with the further production of the book.

Because a tournament book should also be a report of the events, it was decided to use the round reports that were presented daily on the Dutch chess news website, [www.schaaksite.nl](http://www.schaaksite.nl). Together with GM Dimitri Reinderman and webmaster Lennart Ootes, I am co-owner of this website, after the founder of this site, Kees Schrijvers, handed it over to us after 10 years.

A number of volunteers showed their willingness to make a report with chess technical notes, usually directly after a round – on the very same evening. On the site this chess technical commentary can be found (in Dutch) via a pgn-viewer. In order to be at the beck and call of the reader of this book, we provided all the links to these articles (see Appendix at the back).

We have deliberately chosen to keep the chess technical notes of these reporters very brief. The detailed analyses are elsewhere in the book. But because the reporter tells his story about the games, we could not avoid printing diagrams sometimes and adding the much-needed commentary. We think this will give the reader a good idea of the events per round. Therefore we would like to thank all these authors, IGM Dimitri Reinderman, FM Richard Vedder, Michel Hoetmer, Jasper Dekker and Ardi Pierik for kindly making their stories and chess technical comments available. At the same time I would also like to thank Andy Burnett for checking the translation of these reports from Dutch into English and the many useful comments he made in the process. It must be said that he did not plunge into Fernandez's intensive analyses. The Briton's use of language is above reproach. With this we think we have put together a monumental work and I conclude with the words of Fernandez himself, "I hope it has become something to be proud of!"

Herman Grooten, December 2021.



## Scandinavia on Top!

*(by Richard Vedder)*

**M**id-January! We are allowed to go to Wijk aan Zee again! That wonderful feeling after the traffic circle as you drive up the road with those chess pieces tied to the lampposts. The Mecca of chess is open again! With difficulty I manage to find a spot in the parking lot next to the Moriaan. In the Moriaan it is, as always, very crowded on Sunday afternoon and between the crowds I look for my spot where I can play my last game in the weekend quiz.

Unfortunately... this is not an excerpt from an article by Julius Bosma (*one of the columnists of [Schaaksite.nl](http://Schaaksite.nl) -ed.*), it was a piece of wishful thinking on my part. Your reporter is just sitting at home behind the laptop. Database and engine at hand. Behind me a bookcase full of chess books, who knows they might come in handy. And who knows, maybe the comments via the website will be useful. That was a bit disappointing yesterday. As a surprise, the organization has enlisted Daniel Naroditsky as a commentator. About ten years ago, he was a kid who, in typical American fashion, was hauled over the edge because he had written a book as a fourteen-year-old. Subsequently, it rained plagiarism accusations and when he also received chess lessons from my brother in Hoogeveen, there was not much appreciation left.

With that in mind, I was actually quite pleased with him. No lack of enthusiasm, he did voice impersonations of Garry Kasparov and Fabiano Caruana, but I did miss the anecdotes with which commentators like Leko and Seirawan always spice up their reports. He reported from the US. A pity, because it was still morning there, and he was in great need of coffee. In terms of chess technique, he did not have much support from his host, the apparently inevitable Fiona Steil-Antoni in this kind of tournament. Then again, there is choice in this area. Via Chess24 you can get commentary from Jan Gustafsson, Peter Leko and Tania Sachdev. That in itself is great, much more content, but lovely Tania shouldn't keep chattering through it. A terrible sound. That said... chess-wise it is a bit more content than Fiona's. And well, tomorrow is another normal working day. Then we'll follow the whole thing again without commentary. That is fine too. The most important thing is that chess is played well!

□ Jorden van Foreest

■ Anish Giri

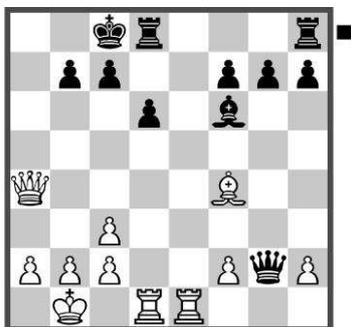
Game 14, page 704



*(photo by Harry Gielen)*

“For a report we will mainly focus on the Dutch participants and their games.” Thus the editors of [schaaksite.nl](http://schaaksite.nl). Lucky me! Just when it's my turn, the two Dutchmen are playing each other... Yes! Just shake hands. They just ignore all the rules... Hoho, calm down, this is an old photo of Harry Gielen, if I'm not mistaken taken during the

2017 NK rapid. Today's game could have ended in a draw after just twenty moves. Jordan still made an attempt, but the balance was not very seriously broken, though I would like to highlight a nice moment...



The position after 21.  $\text{Re1}$ . Would you take off that pawn on f2 with Black?

21...  $\text{Qc6}$

21...  $\text{Qxf2??}$  22.  $\text{Qa8+}$   $\text{Kd7}$  23.  $\text{Rxd6+}$   $\text{cxd6}$  24.  $\text{Qxb7\#}$ .

You saw it, right?

There are no Sofia-rules or other draw-disincentives. Apparently this is not necessary in Wijk aan Zee, because the games were once again fought to the bone. It was different when I followed this tournament as a boy: in the 1980s, if you had a tournament featuring Andersson, Ribli, Spassky and Sosonko, it was not uncommon for a few games to be finished quickly.

A spectacle was delivered by Alexander Donchenko and Fabiano Caruana.

□ Alexander Donchenko

■ Fabiano Caruana

Game 9, page 15

The last-minute German invite had included a Giri-Caruana game in his brief preparation, but Caruana deviated before Donchenko was allowed to show what he was up to. Donchenko went too far in his attacking drive and was countered hard. Still there were some nice tricks in it, even when it was already totally lost for the White player.

The commentators pride themselves on



Position after: 20. e6

not consulting an engine during the games. For those who doubt this, this move is proof. Shortly before Donchenko played it, Tania Sachdev suggested this

move. The computer immediately gives Black a winning advantage.

Later in the game, in the second diagram, Caruana played the really nice

**26... ♗a3!!**

The denouement! With which he decided the game.



Position after: 26. ♗b1

The leader after two rounds comes from Scandinavia. Yes, Magnus Carlsen is playing, but no, it is the Swede Nils Grandelius who is the only one with a perfect score after two rounds

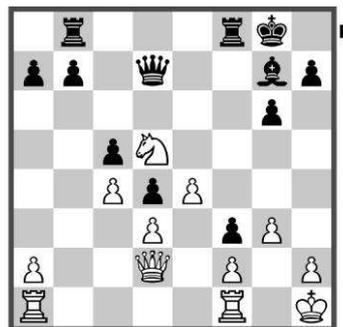
### □ Jan-Krzysztof Duda ■ Nils Grandelius

Game 10, page 238

Against Jan-Krzysztof Duda, he seemed to go like a knife through butter. In the post-game interview with Tom Bottema, he stated that he was lucky in that he got a structure on the board that he is familiar with. He found the advance 17.e4 remarkable because it allowed him to push through ...f4-f3. But he also could not think of something different White should have done there.

My conclusion is that Duda played much too weak an opening and thus asked for a beating. And he got it!

At the beginning of the day, Jan Gustafsson said about Nils Grandelius: "Nils is disturbingly happy most of the time". He will not have become less so today!



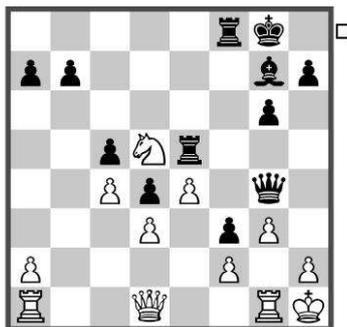
Position after: 22. ♘d5

Many a White player dreams of it, such a beautiful knight on d5, but it is of no use to him at all. Black quickly brings in some heavy pieces to smash the king of his opponent in a mating-attack.

**22... ♖be8 23. ♖g1 ♗g4 24. ♗d1 ♖e5**

The previous move is with the deadly plan of ...♔g4-h3xh2+ followed by ...♖h5 mate.

The defense Duda puts up will cost him that “beautiful” horse.



Position after: 24... ♖e5

### □ David Antón Guijarro ■ Magnus Carlsen

Game 8, page 120

Grandelius was not joined at the head by the world champion, although the Norwegian tried for a very long time. He didn't achieve very much after the opening but eventually managed to carve

out a pawn somewhere in the white position. In the end it turned out that he could not win. Please do not blame me for that – in the course of the afternoon my interest shifted to the games of Caruana and Grandelius...

There were also two Caro Kanns, on which I will not waste too many words.

### □ Maxime Vachier Lagrave ■ Alireza Firouzja

Game 13, page 70

Firouzja had a great start in Wijk aan Zee last year, but after his first zero a few more followed immediately. This time he was spared that suffering. After 15...♗d5 he has nothing to fear of.

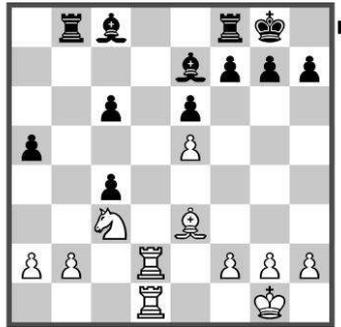


Position after: 15... ♗d5

□ Pentala Harikrishna  
 ■ Andrei Esipenko

Game 11, page 383

Tastes differ of course, but as far as I am concerned the duller game of this rather exciting round...

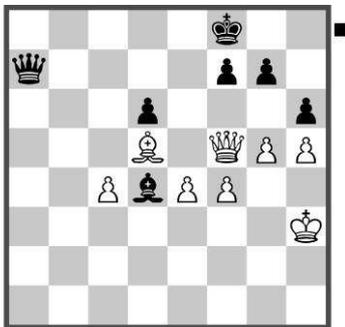


Position after: 19. ♖e3

□ Aryan Tari  
 ■ Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Game 12, page 328

Aryan Tari was eleven years old when he managed to hold your reporter to a draw in Bethune, France. A result I can now only dream of I'm afraid. Against Wojtaszek, he suddenly found a pawn in his lap, but he could not handle the unexpected opulence and the game ended in a draw after a long session. I have highlighted two remarkable moments in the endgame. The first one:

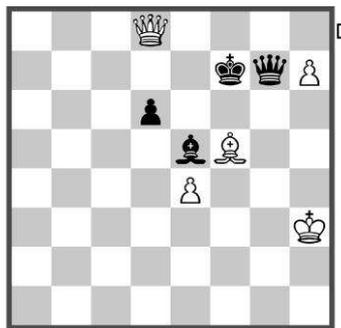


Position after: 44. g5

44... hxg5

44... g6 was a nice one here, with the tasty point that it's not White, but rather Black who wins after 45. hxg6? [♖c8+ is still a draw] 45... ♖a3+ 46. ♔g4 h5+ 47. ♔xh5 ♖f3+ 48. ♖g4 fxg6+ 49. ♔h4 ♕f2+.

The second moment is:



Position after: 60... ♔f7

White played 61. ♖g8+ which was answered by ♔e7 Of course not 61... ♖xg8?? because of 62. ♕e6+! +-.

So we have one leader, our Dutch compatriots can both be satisfied, and we can conclude that the fighting spirit of the participants is just fine.

## Maxime Vachier Lagrave



Maxime Vachier Lagrave (photo © Tata Steel/Jurriaan Hoefsmit)

## Maxime's Personal Results

White	Elo W	Black	Elo B	Result	Moves	ECO	Date	Round
Harikrishna,P	2732	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	½-½	64	B90	16.01.2021	1
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Firouzja,A	2749	½-½	35	B12	17.01.2021	2
Esipenko,A	2677	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	½-½	33	B53	18.01.2021	3
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Anton Guijarro,D	2679	½-½	80	C89	19.01.2021	4
Grandelius,N	2663	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	1-0	35	B97	21.01.2021	5
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Tari,A	2625	½-½	26	D78	22.01.2021	6
Caruana,F	2823	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	1-0	37	B97	23.01.2021	7
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Van Foreest,J	2671	½-½	32	C78	24.01.2021	8
Giri,A	2764	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	1-0	70	B90	26.01.2021	9
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Donchenko,A	2668	1-0	65	B12	27.01.2021	10
Wojtaszek,R	2705	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	½-½	45	D82	29.01.2021	11
Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	Duda,J	2743	½-½	76	C42	30.01.2021	12
Carlsen,M	2862	Vachier Lagrave,M	2784	1-0	40	D85	31.01.2021	13

## Round 2

♁ Vachier Lagrave, Maxime (2784)  
 ♚ Firouzja, Alireza (2749)  
 ♁ Tata Steel 2021

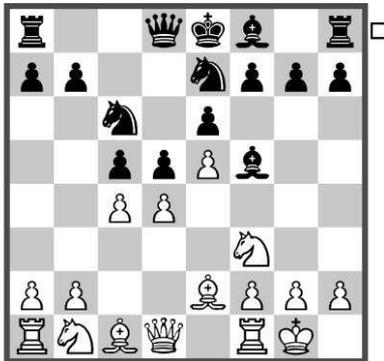
1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 ♘f5 4. ♘f3 e6 5.  
 ♙e2 ♘e7 6. 0-0

6. c3 ♘g6 7. 0-0 is seen in Tari, A –  
 Firouzja, A from round 4.

6... c5

6... ♘d7 7. ♘bd2 h6 is most common,  
 and the time may not be too far away  
 when we consider the text as clearly in-  
 ferior.

7. c4 ♘bc6



Position after: 7... ♘bc6

8. dxc5

8. ♘a3 is also sometimes played, but  
 Black obtains reasonable play after se-

veral moves, including the dominant 8...  
 a6 9. dxc5 d4 when the inclusions seem  
 beneficial for Black.

8... dxc4

8... d4 doesn't seem to equalise either.  
 9. ♙b3!

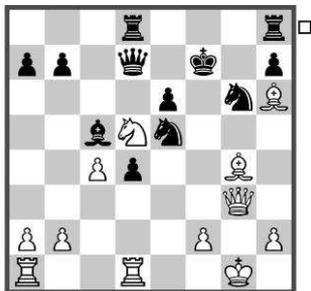


Position after: 9. ♙b3!

According to our very latest analysis  
 from ChessPublishing, Black simply  
 lacks an adequate answer here, and not  
 for lack of trying enough alternatives.  
 [9. ♙a4?! ♘g6 10. ♙d1 d3 and White  
 actually has to show some accuracy to  
 avoid being worse.]

A) 9... ♙d7 10. ♙d1 ♘g6 leads to a  
 mess. 11. ♘c3 f6!? [11... ♙xc5 12.  
 ♙b5± Nijboer, F – L'Ami, E Boxtel 2011]  
 12. exf6 gxf6 13. ♘d5! [Second-best is  
 possibly 13. ♙a4!?, but by quite some  
 margin.] 13... ♙f7 14. g4! Now the fol-  
 lowing line seems almost forced, and af-  
 ter Black's 19th I concluded equality in  
 my 2018 book, without even consider-  
 ing the move that was later analysed al-  
 most to a forced win for White by Justin  
 Tan. 14... ♙xg4 15. ♘g5+ fxg5 16.

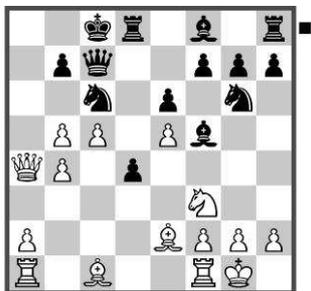
♙xg4 ♘ce5 17. ♙xg5! ♙xc5 18.  
♚g3!?! ♚af8! 19. ♙h6 ♚d8!



Position after: 19... ♚d8!

20. ♚d3!! [20. b4!?!] 20... ♘xg4 21.  
♚f3+ ♙g8 22. ♚xg4 exd5 23. ♚f5  
dxc4 [23... d3 24. cxd5+!] 24. ♚e1+–

**B)** 9... ♚c7?! 10. ♘a3 a6 11. ♚a4 0-0-0?! [11... ♚d8!?! is better, but not enough. 12. b4 ♘g6 13. ♙d1! ♚d7 14. ♘c2 ♙xc2 15. ♙xc2 d3 16. ♙d1± The two bishops are starting to become a powerful force. Grischuk – Lupulescu, Warsaw 2013] 12. b4 ♘g6 13. ♘b5!! axb5 14. cxb5



Position after: 14. cxb5

14... ♙c2!? [After 14... d3 15. b6 dxe2 16. bxc7 exf1=♚+ 17. ♙xf1 ♙xc7 18. b5 ♙d3+ 19. ♙e1 ♙xc5 20. bxc6±

White should win with some care.] 15.  
♚xc2 d3 16. b6!!



Position after: 16. b6!!

16... dxc2 [16... ♚b8 17. ♙xd3 ♘xb4 18. ♚a4 ♘xd3 19. ♙e3 ♘gxe5 20. ♘xe5 ♚xe5 21. c6+–] 17. bxc7 ♙xc7 18. a3+– Baglan, E – Zor, A Kemer 2018

**C)** 9... ♚c8 10. ♚d1 ♘g6 11. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12. ♚xd4 ♙xc5



Position after: 12... ♙xc5

13. ♚d1 [13. ♚a4+ ♚c6 14. ♚xc6+ bxc6 15. ♚d1 ♘xe5= Harikrishna, P – Dreev, A Budva 2019] 13... 0-0 14. ♘c3 ♘xe5 [14... ♚c7?? 15. g4; 14... ♚c6! 15. ♘b5!N Still a novelty at time of print. White threatens ♘d4 and it seems the bishop-pair and slightly

more fluent development will assure them an advantage.] 15. ♖f4 ♗g6 16. ♘d6↑

D) 9... ♗g6?! 10. ♖xb7



Position after: 10. ♖xb7

10... ♖c8 [10... ♖c8? 11. ♘d1! ♖c7 12. ♖a6 ♖c8 Karjakin, S – Grischuk, A Beijing 2011 and here best is possibly just 13. ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 14. a3 ♘xc5 15. b4± with a handy initiative.] 11. ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 12. a3 a5 [12... ♘xc5 13. b4 ♘e7 14. c5±] 13. b4! axb4 14. axb4



Position after: 14. axb4

14... ♗xb4 [14... d3?! 15. ♘d1 ♗xb4 16. ♘a4+ ♗d8 17. h3 h5 18. ♗c3 ♘xc5 19. ♖b1±] 15. ♗xd4 ♘d3 [15... ♘xc5 16. ♗xf5 exf5 17. ♖a5±

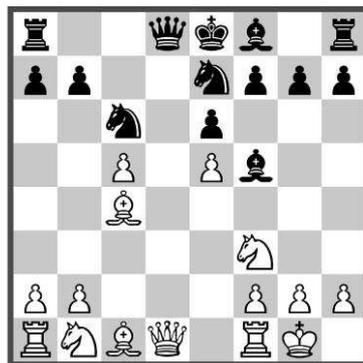
Kosteniuk, A – Bulmaga, I Astana 2013] 16. ♘xd3 ♗xd3 17. ♘a3



Position after: 17. ♘a3

I've not been able to find any convincing line for Black here, in spite of White's horrific structure. 17... ♗dxe5 [17... ♘xc5 18. ♘xc5 ♗xc5 19. f4 0-0 20. g3± keeps the pawn.] 18. ♗d2 ♖d8 19. ♗f3±

9. ♘xc4

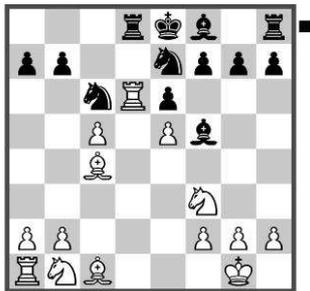


Position after: 9. ♘xc4

9... ♗g6

The most flexible move, since White is probably not about to dodge the queen trade anyway.

9... ♖xd1 10. ♜xd1 unprotects the c7-square and leaves White with some options of playing ♜d6 as an annoying exchange sacrifice. 10... ♜d8 [10... ♙g4?! 11. ♘c3 ♘g6 12. ♚b5±; 10... ♘g6 is simply a worse version than Black got in the game: 11. ♙e3 ♘gxe5 12. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13. ♙b5+ ♘c6 14. ♘a3± with a significant lead in development and a clear plan of using the d6-square.] 11. ♜d6!



Position after: 11. ♜d6!

11... ♙g4 [11... ♘d5 12. ♙xd5 exd5 13. ♜xd8+ ♘xd8 14. ♙e3±] 12. ♘bd2 ♘d5 [12... ♘g6 13. b4!?!→] 13. ♙b5 ♙xd6 14. exd6± Black's pieces are sufficiently passive that White actually has more than enough compensation here.

10. ♙e3 ♙e7 11. ♙b5

After 11. ♘c3! Black is really in some trouble. 11... 0-0 [11... ♖xd1 12. ♜axd1 0-0 13. ♜d7; 11... ♘gxe5 12. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13. ♖a4+±] 12. ♙e2 ♖b8 [12... ♖a5 13. ♘b5 ♘gxe5 14. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15. a3 ♜fd8 16. ♙d4± White's pieces look tactically vulnerable, but this is something of an illusion as when b4

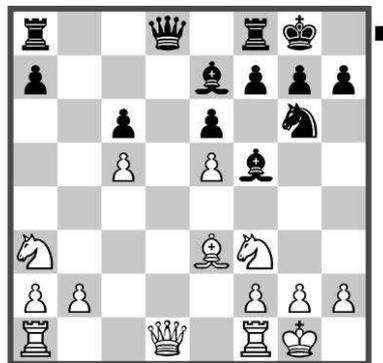
comes next, Black will be the one facing problems.] 13. ♖a4! Threatening simply g4 and the f5-bishop will have nowhere to run. [13. ♘d2 ♜d8 14. f4 ♘d4∞ Kasimdzhanov, R – Nisipeanu, L Baku 2016] 13... ♘cxe5 [13... ♘gxe5 14. ♜ad1



Position after: 14. ♜ad1

with slight ongoing pressure. 14... ♘g4 15. ♙f4 ♙c2?! 16. ♖c4 e5 17. ♜d2 exf4 18. ♜xc2± Burg, T – Hiltunen, R ICCF email 2014] 14. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 [14... ♖xe5 15. g4!±] 15. ♜ad1 ♖e8 16. ♖f4 f6 17. ♘b5↑

11... 0-0 12. ♙xc6 bxc6 13. ♘a3



Position after: 13. ♘a3

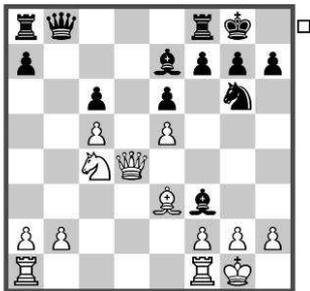
13... ♖b8

13... ♙e4 14. ♘c4 ♚d5!±

14. ♘c4 ♙e4 15. ♘d6

White opts out of doubled-pawn scenarios, though maybe accepting them was a good way to get somewhere.

After 15. ♚d4 ♙xf3



Position after: 15... ♙xf3

16. ♗xf3± the onus is very much on Black to prove compensation.

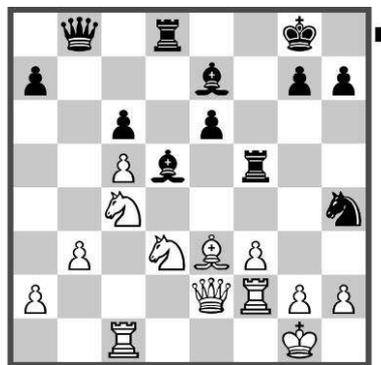
15... ♙d5 16. b3 f6 17. exf6 ♙xf6?

After this Black ends up in a worse position. They soon retreat the bishop to e7 and bring the rook out anyway, indicating that this capture was a mistake. By playing 17... ♗xf6! Black could have assured themselves of adequate counterplay on the kingside. 18. ♘d2 ♘h4! 19. f3 [19. g3?! ♘f3+ 20. ♘xf3 ♗xf3 21. ♘c4 ♚e8→] 19... ♗g6 20. ♗f2 ♘f5!±

18. ♗c1

18. ♘g5!± is an interesting alternative to moving the rook. White simply wants to play ♚h5 and attack on the kingside. 18... ♘h4! 19. ♚h5 ♙xg5 20. ♚xg5 ♘xg2 Black seems to have enough play here in spite of their disjointed pieces. After some only moves we reach a position where it's not clear who is attacking. 21. ♙d4 ♚c7 22. f4 h6 23. ♚g4 ♚e7 24. ♗f2 h5 25. ♚g3 ♘h4 26. ♙e5 ♘h7∞

18... ♚b4 19. ♘c4 ♙e7 20. ♘e1 ♗ad8 21. ♚e2 ♚b8 22. ♘d3 ♗f5 23. f3 ♘h4 24. ♗f2

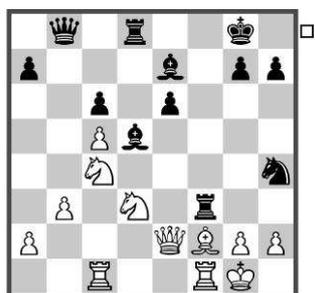


Position after: 24. ♗f2

There is nothing wrong with this, retaining an extra pawn and keeping a close grip on the kingside.

My computer indicates that the very strongest move was 24. ♙f2! in order to seal the g-file shut and increase the pressure on Black's dark squares. Most likely White noticed the possibility of some sacrifice on f3 and thus rejected

this line. In the cold light of day it emerges that 24... ♖xf3 really doesn't work.



Position after: 24... ♖xf3

25. ♔xh4! ♖xf1+ 26. ♖xf1 ♔xh4 27. ♘f4 ♖f8 28. ♘xd5 ♖xf1+ [28... exd5 29. ♚e6+ ♔h8 30. ♘d6+–] 29. ♔xf1 ♚f8+ 30. ♚f3 cxd5 This is an essentially forced line which leads to a won ending for White. Play around with the position after 31. ♚xf8+ ♔xf8 32. ♘a5+– a little bit, and one sees that a knight on c6 is an admirable companion for the queenside majority.

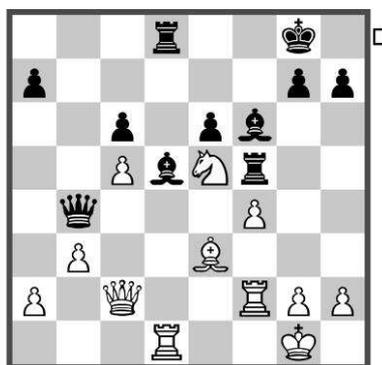
24... ♔h8

In particular, the ability to play 24... ♖df8 25. ♖cf1?! is reassuring from a human point of view- eliminating all risk of being abruptly mated.

25. f4 ♘g6

Alireza sounds the retreat and challenges his opponent to come up with a winning plan. Luckily for him, this is actually somewhat complicated in the absence of any obvious way to trade the d5-bishop.

26. ♘ce5 ♘xe5 27. ♘xe5 ♚b4 28. ♚c2 ♔g8 29. ♖d1 ♔f6



Position after: 29... ♔f6

30. ♘c4?!

Throwing away the winning chances. White still had a fairly large advantage in case of 30. ♔d4± or even 30. ♘g4, retaining the grip.

30... ♔xc4 31. bxc4 ♖xd1+ 32. ♚xd1 ♔e7! 33. ♚b3 ♚e1+ 34. ♖f1 ♚xe3+ 35. ♚xe3 ♔xc5

Draw offered.

As Black I might have wondered whether 35... ♔xc5 might lead to some rook endings where there might even be some potential to play for a win. It turns out that with a (relatively) counter-intuitive pawn sacrifice, White can snuff out the danger.

(see analysis diagram next page)

A) 36. ♚f2 ♔f7 37. g3 ♔xf2+ 38. ♖xf2 ♖a5 indeed offers Black a little

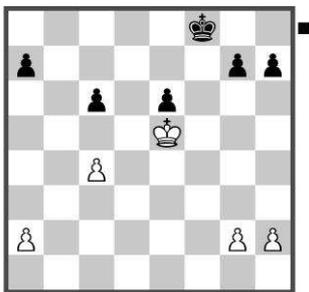


Position after: 35... ♗xc5

something to work with. The king can come into f5 and the rook can hassle White's queenside pawns.

**B)** 36. ♔xc5 ♖xc5 37. ♖c1 ♔f7 38. ♔f2 ♖a5 39. ♖c2 ♖a3 is very similar. Black's king can get active more easily than its opposite number.

**C)** 36. ♔f2! ♖xf4+ 37. ♔g3 ♗xe3 38. ♖xf4 ♗xf4+ 39. ♔xf4 ♔f8 40. ♔e5



Position after: 40. ♔e5

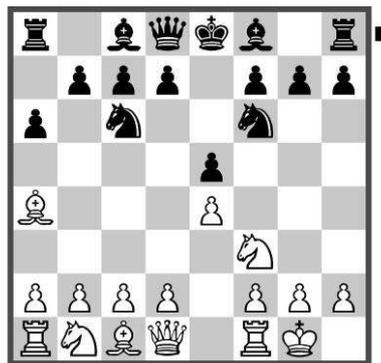
It transpires that Black cannot do anything constructive in this pawn ending in spite of the extra pawn! 40... ♔e7 41. c5 ♔d7 42. ♔f4 ♔e7 43. ♔e5=

½-½

## Round 4

♟ Vachier Lagrave, Maxime (2784)  
♜ Antón Guijarro, David (2679)  
♁ Tata Steel 2021

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗b5 a6 4. ♗a4 ♘f6 5. 0-0



Position after: 5. 0-0

5... ♗e7

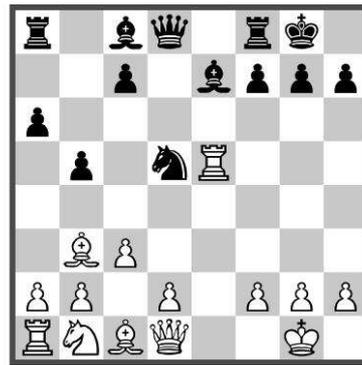
Considering the peculiar statistics of this tournament, Black choosing the main move is actually something of a mini-surprise!

5... ♗c5 is discussed later on in this chapter in Vachier Lagrave, M-Van Foreest, J, and other games elsewhere in the book. The third most-common move 5... ♘xe4 is seeing a tiny resurgence and could become 'the next Arkhangelsk' for the 2-3 years after this book is printed, but doubtless David was put off playing it by his loss in a

precedent game just weeks before the main event: 6. d4 b5 7. ♖b3 d5 8. dxe5 ♗e6



Position after: 8... ♗e6



Position after: 11. ♖xe5

9. ♜e2!? ♗e7 10. ♘bd2 ♘c5 11. c3 0-0 12. ♜d1 ♜d7 13. ♗c2 ♗f5 14. ♘f1 ♗xc2 15. ♜xc2 Black still has a couple of issues to solve, and in this game didn't manage to do so. Vachier Lagrave, M – Antón Guijarro, D INT 2020

**6. ♖e1 b5 7. ♗b3 0-0**

If Black doesn't want to threaten the Marshall Gambit, but wants a handier reply to 8.a4, then 7... d6 is the right order.

**8. c3**

None of the other games in this tournament featured an offer to play the Marshall. David duly obliges.

8... d5 9. exd5 ♘xd5 10. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 11. ♖xe5

**11... c6**

**A)** The original game, played over a century ago now, saw 11... ♘f6 12. ♜e1 ♗d6 13. h3!?± with insufficient compensation for the pawn. Capablanca, J – Marshall, F New York 1918.

**B)** 11... ♗b7 is a third alternative which gets some attention every so often, and was recently tried by Aronian. 12. d4 [12. ♜f3!? ♗d6 13. ♗xd5 c6 14. ♜e1 cxd5 15. d4 with a slightly less favourable two-bishops position than usual] 12... ♗f6 13. ♜e1 ♜e8



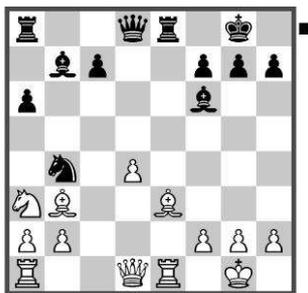
Position after: 13... ♜e8

Reaching a critical juncture where White may have an advantage but nothing especially conclusive:

**B1)** 14. ♖e3?! could have been met in Ivanchuk, V – Aronian, L Leuven 2017 by the direct 14... ♗xe3 15. fxe3 ♕g5! when only Black can be better.

**B2)** 14. ♖d2 ♜xe1+ 15. ♚xe1 ♚d7 [15... b4!?] 16. ♗a3 ♜e8 17. ♚f1 ♗e7 18. ♜e1 c5= Grigoriants, S – Aronian, L Caleta 2018

**B3)** 14. ♗a3!? b4 15. cxb4 [15. ♗c4 bxc3 16. ♗e5 ♚d6= Castro Cruz, J – Franke, H ICCF email 2015] 15... ♗xb4 16. ♕e3



Position after: 16. ♕e3

16... ♗d5 [16... a5?! threatens ...a4 in some lines, but generally ends up looking speculative, e.g. 17. ♗b5!N a4?! 18. ♕xa4 ♚d5 19. f3 ♜xe3 20. ♜xe3 ♕c6 21. ♗xc7±] 17. ♗c4 ♗xe3 18. fxe3 Hutman, M – Preussner, M ICCF email 2017, and now 18... a5 looks more or less fine for Black.

12. ♜e1 ♕d6 13. d3



Position after: 13. d3

When I was studying this line under the tutelage of GM Boris Alterman, we spent many hours looking at the variation 13. d4 ♚h4 14. g3 ♚h3 15. ♜e4 for White, and probably it is one of the better ones for avoiding move repetitions. 15... g5! 16. ♚f1 ♚h5 17. ♗d2 ♕f5 18. f3

13... ♚h4!?

Nowadays this move is relatively rarely seen at the top level. However, it has the advantage of being forcing and so White won't get to just work with a small nibble forever.

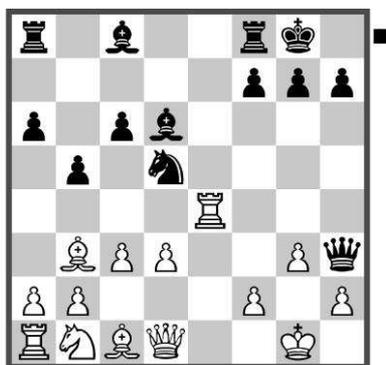
After 13... ♕f5 14. ♚f3 most people play ...♚h4 here, finding the insertion of ...♕f5 and ♚f3 to be in Black's favour. But this is by no means forced.

**A)** 14... ♕g6 15. g3 ♚d7 16. ♗d2 ♜ae8 17. ♜xe8 ♜xe8 18. ♗e4±

**B)** 14... ♖e8 15. ♜xe8+ ♚xe8 16. ♞d2 ♚e1+ 17. ♞f1 ♙g6 18. g3± It seems quite safe to award White a plus here. White plans ♙d1 and ♙d2 to unravel, and Black hasn't demonstrated any special ideas. Saric, I – Adams, M INT 2020

**C)** 14... ♚h4 15. g3 ♚h3 16. ♙e3 ♙xd3 17. ♞d2 ♚f5 18. ♙d4 This has still been played close to 100 times, and in general Black faces a relatively long struggle to neutralise very slight pressure. Vachier Lagrave, M – Aroonian, L Sharjah 2017.

14. g3 ♚h3 15. ♜e4



Position after: 15. ♜e4

15... ♚f5

The most common move.

**A)** 15... ♚d7?! prepares ...f5 in a way that won't get trapped, but the move is a bit slow. 16. ♞d2 ♚h8 [Exactly the same is 16... f5 17. ♜e1 ♚h8 transposing.; The main line is 16... ♙b7, when

bizarrely nobody has played 17. ♚g4!N, a strong offer of a queen trade that makes Black really work for compensation.] 17. ♜e1 f5 and here in his notes to Kotronias, V – Sokolov, I Caleta 2009, Victor Mikhalevski notes the possibility of 18. d4!± since the pawn has fulfilled its role on d3 and the threat of ♞f3-e5 now gains in importance.

**B)** My engine prefers 15... ♞f6 16. ♜h4



Position after: 16. ♜h4

16... ♚f5, which also saw a recent test in Tata Steel: 17. ♙c2 [17. ♞d2 g5!? Not the only move. 18. ♜h6 ♞g4 19. ♞e4 ♞xh6 20. ♞xd6 ♚g6∞ and here White should probably have taken on c8, Anand, V – Shirov, A Mainz 2004.] 17... ♚g6 [17... ♜e8 18. d4 ♚e6 19. ♞d2± Ivanov, O – Balashov, Y Moscow 2015] 18. ♞d2 ♙g4 19. ♞f3 ♜ad8 20. ♚g2 ♜fe8 21. a4 h6 22. axb5 axb5= Duda, J – Giri, A Wijk aan Zee 2020

16. ♞d2 ♚g6

This is the queen's usual post in such lines.

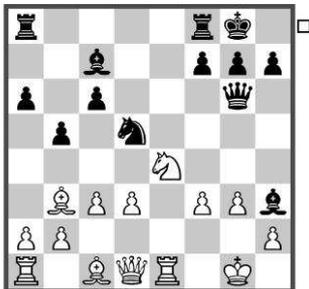
**17. ♖f3**

An uncommon move, after which White isn't likely to develop any opening advantage.



Position after: 17. ♖f3

**A)** 17. ♖e1 is perhaps overly prophylactic, and now Black doesn't need to develop either bishop or knight to f5. 17... ♗g4 18. f3 ♗h3 [18... ♗f5 19. ♖e4! is not so easy for Black.] 19. ♖e4 ♗c7



Position after: 19... ♗c7

20. ♗e3 Here, in Svidler, P – Adams, M Groningen 1997, perhaps strongest was 20... a5! to keep ...f5 in reserve for a moment when it will have real impact.

**B)** 17. a4 is worth investigating. I have fleshed out some lines White could follow, but as this isn't an opening book, trust at your peril! 17... f5!?



Position after: 17... f5!?

[17... ♗f5 18. axb5 axb5 19. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 20. ♖e1 ♗xd3 21. ♖f3± Black has regained the pawn, but some co-ordination problems remain.] 18. ♖d4!? Setting up tactics based on ♖xd5. [After 18. ♖e1, interesting is 18... bxa4 19. ♖xa4 f4 20. ♖e4 ♗c7 with pressure along the b- and f-files.] 18... ♖h8 [18... f4?! 19. ♖e4 bxa4 20. ♖xd5 cxd5 21. ♗xd5+ ♗e6 22. ♗xa8 ♗b3 23. ♖e2 ♖xa8 24. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 25. ♗xf4±; 18... ♗e6? 19. axb5 axb5 20. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 21. c4+; 18... ♖b8 19. axb5 ♖xb5 20. ♖h4± The position remains very concrete, but the activity of White's pieces is greater than in the main line.] 19. axb5 f4 20. ♖e4

**B1)** 20... fxg3 21. hxg3 ♗e5 22. ♖da4 ♗g4 23. ♖f1 ♖ae8!? This looks most critical. [23... cxb5 24. ♗xd5 bxa4 25. ♗xa8 ♖xa8 26. ♖xa4± Black easily has compensation for one pawn, but not two.; 23... ♖h5?! allows 24.

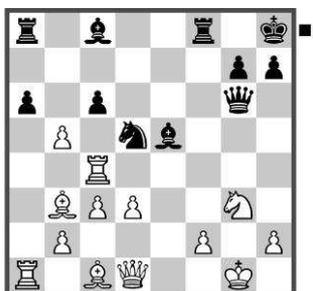
♔g2!± followed by ♖h2, and White doesn't get mated.] 24. bxa6 ♖h5



Position after: 24... ♖h5

25. ♗g5! [25. ♖g2 ♗xg3!!∞] 25... ♘e3 [25... ♗f3 26. ♗h4± and White's defensive efforts look very harmonious.] 26. fxe3 ♖xf1+ 27. ♖xf1 ♗xg3 28. ♘xg3 ♖xg5 29. ♖e4±

**B2)** 20... ♗e5 21. ♖c4 fxg3 [21... ♗g4 22. ♖xc6 ♖h5 23. ♖e1±] 22. ♘xg3



Position after: 22. ♘xg3

White's kingside pawns have been shattered in exchange for the second sacrificed pawn. However, I was unable to find a really good continuation of the attack in spite of its obvious

practical value. 22... ♘f6!? [22... axb5 23. ♖xa8 bxc4 24. dxc4 ♘b6 25. ♖a5 ♗g4 26. ♖e1 ♗xg3 27. hxg3 ♗f3 28. ♗d1±; 22... ♖f7 23. ♖e2 cxb5 24. ♖e4 ♗d6 25. ♗xd5! ♖xd5 26. ♖d4±] 23. ♖xc6 ♗g4 24. ♖f1 ♗xg3 25. fxg3 ♖h5 26. ♗f4±

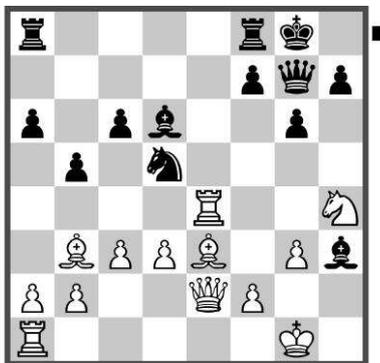
17... ♗g4! 18. h3 ♗xh3 19. ♘h4 ♖f6 20. ♖h5 g6 21. ♖e2N

After the 21. ♖g5 of Jobava, B – Sammour Hasbun, J INT 2008, Black has many acceptable choices. The most Marshallian of them seems to be 21... ♖xg5 22. ♗xg5 a5= with good play on the queenside.

21... ♖g7

The computer spits out the thematic 21... g5 22. ♘f3 ♘f4!? when Black may end up with a usual Marshall-type attack without having sacrificed a pawn.

22. ♗e3



Position after: 22. ♗e3

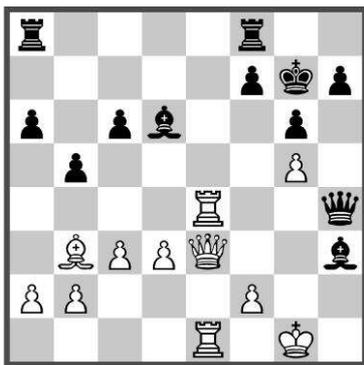
Completing development. No obvious task was suggested for the c1-bishop, so MVL offers to trade it for Black's knight.

22... ♞xe3 23. ♔xe3 ♜f6 24. ♖e1 ♔g7

One thing I was constantly struck by in this analysis of the Marshall was how frequently 24... a5 seems to be a good idea for Black. In this case, White is in some danger of simply winding up on the wrong end of a bishop-pair position.  
25. g4!?

A concrete operation to remove one of Black's bishops.

25... ♗xh4 26. g5

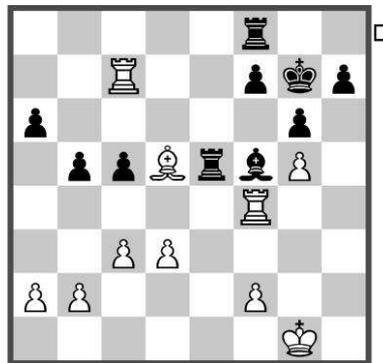


Position after: 26. g5

26... ♞f4

A less natural solution is 26... ♗h5!? 27. ♞d1 ♞g4 28. ♞xg4 ♗h2+ 29. ♔f1 f5!↗ when perhaps Black has slightly the more appreciable chances of an attack on the enemy king.

27. ♗xf4 ♗xf4 28. ♖xf4 ♞f5 29. ♞e7 c5 30. ♞d5 ♖ae8 31. ♖c7 ♞e5



Position after: 31... ♞e5

The immediate 31... ♞e2= looks more natural to me.

32. c4!?

Tactically defending the d3-pawn, but the defence relies on the rook staying on c7 and so White doesn't yet threaten to take on c5.

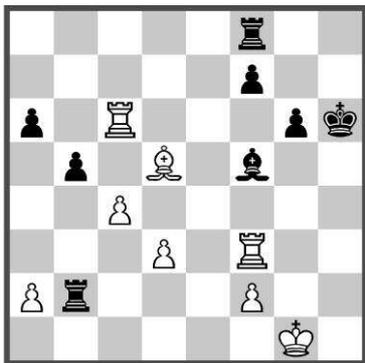
32... h6 33. gxh6+ ♔xh6 34. ♖f3!?

A line like 34. ♞xf7 ♖e1+ 35. ♔g2 ♞xd3↗ can hardly be that good for White.

34... ♞e2

Perhaps more conventionally 'correct' was 34... ♞g4 35. ♖xf7 ♖xf7 36. ♞xf7 ♞f5 on the basis that White can't defend the d3-pawn, but this would be a hard operation to foresee in the final moves of the time-control.

35. ♖xc5 ♜xb2 36. ♜c6!



Position after: 36. ♜c6!

Threatening ♜xa6 and ♜xf5, and so picking up a pawn. It is not the healthiest pawn, however, and Black has full compensation.

36... ♔g5 37. ♜xa6 bxc4 38. ♙xc4 ♜b1+ 39. ♔g2 ♙c8

Mobilising the kingside pawns.

40. ♜a5+ f5 41. ♜g3+ ♔f6 42. d4 ♜c1 43. ♙e2 ♜e1 44. ♙a6 f4 45. ♜f3 ♙f5!?

There seems to be no problem with defending the pawn either: 45... ♜e4. 45... g5 46. ♙xc8 ♜xc8 47. ♜b3 leaves Black with some chance of being mated, and so it isn't surprising Black didn't go for this. The computer doesn't see a problem, and simply recommends 47... g4 48. ♜b6+ ♜e6 49. ♜xe6+ ♔xe6=

46. ♜xf4!?

After great labours White has managed to accumulate a second pawn, but Black is unfazed because there will be decent compensation in the form of piece coordination and pressure against White's king. If White releases the self-pin with 46. ♙b7 then Black obtains some real pressure against White's king (46... g5↑).

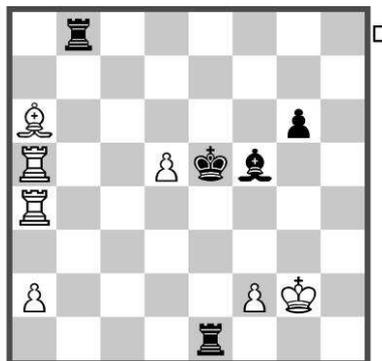
46... ♜a8

Black has tactical threats along the a-file, such as ... ♜e6.

47. d5

The less direct 47. ♜f3 ♜e7 48. ♜fa3 ♜ea7 doesn't solve the a-file problems since Black will still have ... ♙c8 in many positions.

47... ♔e5 48. ♜fa4 ♜b8



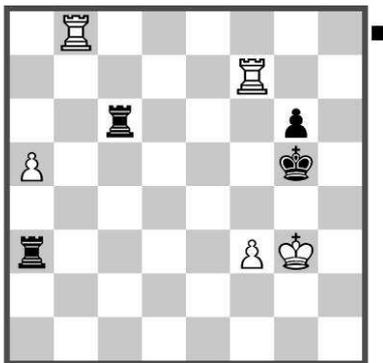
Position after: 48... ♜b8

Intending ... ♜b2/b1 and ... ♙e4+. White hastens to take some pieces off.

49. d6+ ♔xd6 50. ♕d3! ♕xd3 51. ♖d4+ ♔e6 52. ♖xd3 ♖b6 53. ♖g3 ♔f6 54. ♖f3+ ♔g7=

Technically White has an extra pawn here, but it is deeply unlikely to count for anything as long as Black plays actively and keeps two pairs of rooks. This David does, and duly makes his draw.

55. ♖a7+ ♔h6 56. ♖h3+ ♔g5 57. ♖f7 ♖e2 58. ♖a3 ♖c2 59. ♔g3 ♖b1 60. ♔g2 ♖b6 61. ♖a5+ ♔h6 62. ♖a8 ♔g5 63. a4 ♖a2 64. ♖a5+ ♔h6 65. ♖f4 ♖c6 66. ♖h4+ ♔g7 67. ♔g3 ♖a3+ 68. f3 ♖d6 69. ♖a7+ ♔f6 70. ♖b4 ♔g5 71. ♖a8 ♖c6 72. a5 ♔h6 73. ♖h4+ ♔g5 74. ♖f4 ♖d6 75. ♖f7 ♖c6 76. ♖b8



Position after: 76. ♖b8

76... ♖a6 77. ♖b6 ♖3xa5 78. f4+ ♔h6 79. ♖bb7 g5 80. ♔g4

½-½

## Round 6

♟ Vachier Lagrave, Maxime (2784)  
♜ Tari, Aryan (2625)  
♠ Tata Steel 2021

1. ♘f3 d5 2. g3 g6 3. ♖g2 ♖g7 4. d4 ♘f6 5. 0-0 0-0 6. c4 c6



Position after: 6... c6

7. ♖b3

A) After 7. ♘c3 the consensus is that Black can and should take: 7... dxc4 8. e4 [8. ♘e5?! ♘g4!≠] 8... b5 9. ♖e2 b4!? 10. ♘d1 a5∞ Vinchev, S – Kuiper, J ICCF email 2016

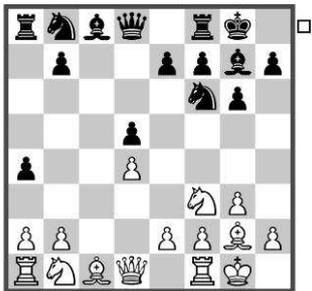
B) A while ago I studied the 'boring' line 7. cxd5 cxd5 8. ♘c3 and came to the conclusion that 8... e6 was the most reliable response.

7... a5

This is rather provoked by White's last. Black will be happy to play a Grunfeld structure, provided he can have some extra space on the queenside.

### 8. ♖f4

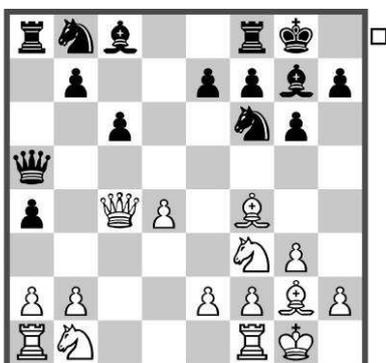
White can try and play 8. cxd5 here and claim that the b5-square is somehow a weakness, but it probably won't work: 8... a4 9. ♖d1 cxd5



Position after: 9... cxd5

10. ♘c3 ♖a5 11. ♙d2 ♘c6 12. e3 ♖a6= Svidler, P – Ding, L INT 2020

8... a4 9. ♖b4 dxc4 10. ♖xc4 ♖a5



Position after: 10... ♖a5

Black can (but doesn't need to) invite some imbalance by playing a move like 10... ♙g4!? with the idea of ...♘fd7 and ...♙xf3.

### 11. ♘a3

**A)** It is also not hard for White to drift into a tough position, with this little space on the queenside: 11. h3 ♙e6 12. ♖c1 ♜d8 13. ♘a3 ♘a6 14. ♙e5 ♘b4= Dreev, A – Corrales Jimenez, F INT 2019

**B)** The engine recommends 11. ♘c3 ♘d5 12. ♙d2 to build some tension in the centre, but this doesn't give White an advantage either.

### 11... ♙e6!

Black exploits the (slight) disadvantage of White's last move and heads straight for the central light squares.

12. ♖c1 ♙d5 13. ♜e1 ♘bd7



Position after: 13... ♘bd7



The game against Tari (photo © Tata Steel/Jurriaan Hoefsmit)

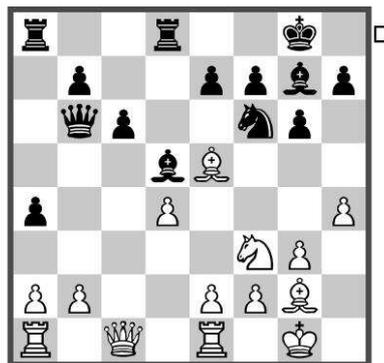
Black completes development and claims the better side of equality.

14. ♘c4 ♙a7 15. ♘ce5!

It is hard to suggest a really constructive plan for White, and there is also the potential idea of ...♙xf3 and ...♙xd4 to think about. So simplifying the position is probably a good impulse.

After the passive 15... e3 Black could formulate a plan based on pushing the b-, c-, or e-pawn, or even none of them. The best move right now seems to be 15... c5!? ♜, thinking about leaving White with n IQP.

15... ♘xe5 16. ♙xe5 ♙b6 17. h4 ♖fd8



Position after: 17... ♖fd8

18. ♙f1?!

White is somehow playing for an advantage, and so tries to move the bishop away in preparation for playing ♘d2 and eventually e4.

More objective was something like 18. e3!? followed by ♘d2, and if White desperately wants to inject some imbalance then maybe later there will be a useful opportunity for playing ♙xf6.

18... ♘e4!

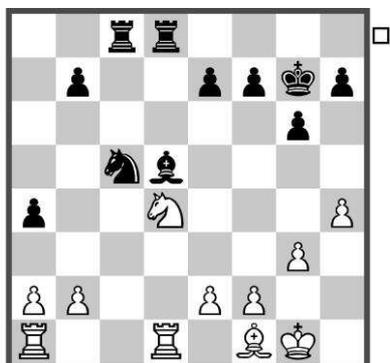
It turns out that concretely White may struggle to play ♘d2 after all.

19. ♙xg7 ♚xg7 20. ♖d1 c5

Black still plays 'for equality' and seals in the half-point rather than being ambitious just yet.

A number of interesting plans suggest themselves for Black here, for instance 20... ♘d6!? and ... ♘b5, to hit the weak d4-pawn.

21. dxc5 ♚xc5 22. ♚xc5 ♘xc5 23. ♘d4 ♖ac8



Position after: 23... ♖ac8

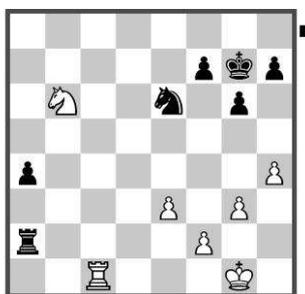
24. ♘c2

24. ♘b5!? followed by ♘c3 is completely dead level.

24... e5 25. ♘b4 ♙e6 26. e3 ♙g4

White has more or less solved their opening problems (!) and so this is a reasonable place for Black to offer a draw.

A possible continuation was 26... ♙g4 27. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 28. ♖c1 b6 29. ♘c6 ♖d2 30. ♘xe5 ♙e6! 31. ♙c4 ♖xb2 32. ♙xe6 ♘xe6 33. ♘c4 ♖xa2 34. ♘xb6



Position after: 34. ♘xb6

34... h5 with a nominal plus for Black.

½-½