Matthias Krallmann / Karsten Müller

Vincent Keymer



His Rise to the World Elite

Joachim Beyer Verlag

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JBV Chess Books

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Preface

I don't know how other chess coaches describe their first impression of a new student, but for me, eight-year-old Vincent, who seemed to be performing ever new "dances" with the pieces and his opponents, came as a complete shock.

Vincent Keymer promised great things. I'm not talking about the piano concerto I had the pleasure of hearing at his hometown Saulheim. Nor am I talking about his first IM norm in 2015, when he was the youngest player in the world ever to achieve an IM norm! Incidentally, chasing records was never part of his parents' plans. His father Christof, who is still his manager today, is a lecturer at the *Hanover University of Music*. His mother Heike plays cello in the orchestra in Mainz.

In "Focus 25/2015", I predicted that Vincent would become World Champion. Hopefully, he'll hold me to my word!

Vincent Keymer – why did he become the player he is today?

First of all, he has an incredible feel for the pieces. That is also why he is so strong at Freestyle.

Second, he has the support of his coach Peter Leko. The cooperation with Grenke, the chess club *SF Deizisau* and its chairman Sven Noppes, and the German Chess Federation (DSB) began with the World Junior Championship U20 in Italy in 2017, and the "Project World Elite" was born.

Third, he loves chess very much. When you enjoy what you do, the work is only half as hard.

The first successes soon followed. At the German Championship in Apolda in 2017, Vincent finished fourth behind the national team players. For me personally, the highlight was a draw at my birthday blitz tournament in Apolda Castle.

His other tournament victories and successes are very well documented in this book.

Magnus Carlsen must not be left out! Who is whose nemesis? *Karlsruhe 2019* came too early, and at the *2023 World Cup* Vincent unfortunately won only once, but *Weissenhaus 2025* showed the triumph of a "student" over his "teacher." All paths are open to Vincent.

May the Force be with you!

Bernd Vökler, April 2026

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the photographers Harald Fietz and Dariusz Gorzinski, who have captured Vincent's concentration and composure at the board. We would also like to thank the 'Joachim Beyer Verlag', under Robert Ullrich, for their reliable cooperation, as well as Thomas Beyer for the clear layout of the text and diagrams. Special thanks go to ChessBase for the idea of using QR codes in the book, allowing readers to follow the games digitally with ease.

We are also grateful to Vincent's father, Christof Keymer. He critically reviewed and refined the chapters on Vincent's biography and his coach Peter Leko.

Last but not least, we would like to thank national junior coach Bernd Vökler, who has known Vincent since his childhood, for writing the foreword.

Part 1

Vincent Keymer's Biography

Vincent Keymer was born in Mainz on November 15, 2004. He now lives in Vienna, having previously lived with his parents in Saulheim, a small town of 8,000 inhabitants south-west of Frankfurt. Saulheim's most famous resident is Niklas Kaul, the decathlete and World Championship gold medallist.

At the age of five, Vincent learned the rules of chess from his parents. His mother, Heike, is a cellist with the *State Philharmonic Orchestra* in Mainz. His father is concert pianist Christof Keymer, who also holds a lectureship in music at the University of Hanover. Vincent, too, was a very talented pianist who learned to play the piano at the age of four. He won first prize in a well-known German competition for young musicians (*Jugend musiziert*). His sister Cecilia has played the cello since the age of three. Vincent has since given up playing the piano.

Vincent first attracted attention in German chess circles when he became German U10 champion in 2013 and 2014. With the German U18 youth national team, he became European champion in 2015 and 2017. He completed the requirements for his IM title in 2017, becoming the youngest German International Master at the age of 13. This gives the impression that the early years of Vincent's chess career followed a smooth and trouble-free path. But that was by no means the case. At the *Accentus Young Masters* in Switzerland in 2016, he lost all nine games.



Vincent Keymer, Dresden ZMDI Open 2017

At that time, he was not yet playing with a focus to results. Above all, he wanted to play and try things out. Thus, in some games he sacrificed material for positional reasons. Against the superior tournament winner Matthias Blübaum, he obtained a better position and still lost. It is all the more remarkable that Vincent did not lose his enjoyment of chess after this setback.

Vincent's first coach was the Ukrainian Grandmaster Sergei Ovsejevitsch, who taught him the fundamentals of the Soviet chess school. Much of their training focused on the coordination of the pieces. Since November 2017, Peter Leko has been Vincent's coach. He accompanied Vincent for the first time to the World Youth Championship U20 in Italy. Leko was shocked by Vincent's poor opening repertoire with Black and worked with him to improve it.

In April 2018, Vincent won the prestigious *Grenke Chess Open* in Karlsruhe with the fantastic score of eight points from nine games. He achieved his first GM norm and qualified for the *Grenke Chess Classics*. He earned his second GM norm in Helsingør in July 2018 and his third at the *FIDE Grand Swiss* on the Isle of Man in October 2019. In February 2020, he was awarded the Grandmaster title at the age of 15.

In 2021, Vincent became European runner-up and finished fifth at the *FIDE Grand Swiss*. This qualified him for the *FIDE Grand Prix*, which was open to only 24 top players. He finished sixteenth.

In 2022, he won the *German Masters* by a one-point margin. He also became World Rapid runner-up behind Magnus Carlsen and ahead of Fabiano Caruana, who finished on the same score.

In 2023, he managed to win a game against Magnus Carlsen at the World Cup, but was nevertheless eliminated in unfortunate circumstances. At the 2023 *FIDE Grand Swiss* on the Isle of Man, he finished fifth. With the German national team, Vincent won a silver medal at the European Team Championship in Budva, Montenegro.

In 2024, Vincent won the prestigious Rubinstein Memorial in Poland.

In 2025, Keymer won the *Chennai Grand Masters* in Vishy Anand's hometown, ahead of several Indian world-class players. Thanks to this tournament victory, he gained a large number of Elo points and broke into the world's top ten for the first time. In November 2025, Vincent was ranked fourth in the world.

At the World Championship, Vincent was one of the seconds of the winner, Dommaraju Gukesh. Vincent did not achieve his major goal in 2025. He failed in his attempts to qualify for the 2026 Candidates Tournament both at the *Grand Swiss* and at the World Cup.

Nevertheless, he had a highly successful year in 2025, establishing himself among the world elite. As a result, he received numerous invitations to top tournaments in 2026. He finished third in the *Tata Steel* tournament in the Netherlands, and fourth at the inaugural *Freestyle World Championship* in Germany.

He convincingly won the *Superbet Chess Classic Romania* in Bucharest. This was followed by a less successful performance at *Norway Chess* in Oslo, although he did manage to defeat World Champion Gukesh. We can certainly look forward to more good news from Vincent in the future.

Part 2

Peter Leko



*Peter Leko 2013**

The Hungarian Peter Leko was formerly an elite player who had his great moment in chess history in 2004, when he played a World Championship match against Vladimir Kramnik in Brissago, Switzerland. He was leading until the penultimate round of the match, but in the final game his opponent defeated him and thus retained his title.

In 2017, with the support of his sponsor *Grenke*, Peter Leko became Vincent Keymer's coach, a role he continues to this day. In an interview with the magazine *New in Chess* (8/2024), Vincent gave some insights into their collaboration. Peter Leko is involved in all decisions concerning Vincent's tournament schedule. Vincent does not want to play too many tournaments, and he needs time between them for recovery and preparation. Peter's extensive experience on the international tournament circuit helps them select the right events. Vincent says that Peter Leko is a very good adviser. At the beginning of their collaboration, he was even more important because Vincent did not know how to work on his chess. Peter Leko also showed him how to play against different types of players and different personalities. Naturally, Vincent also had no idea how to negotiate with organisers, because he did not know what terms and conditions were customary.

Peter Leko is a classical player who was formerly known for his high draw rate. Vincent, by contrast, is a more dynamic player with many decisive games to his name. Nevertheless, the two work very well together. Leko is involved in the opening choice for every classical game Vincent plays. They do not have regular training sessions, but they remain in regular contact with each other.

In an interview with *ChessBase India*, Vincent summed it up as follows: "Peter understands how I think. Our work is rarely spectacular, mostly very concrete. We don't work on miracles, but on structures. (…) He helps me trust my own decisions. (…) I simply want to play solidly in the long term and keep learning."

By now, sponsor Hendrik Büttner is financing coach Leko. Vincent is happy that he can continue on his path without pressure.

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Part 3

The victory at the Grenke Open 2018

Vincent Keymer was thirteen years old when he made his breakthrough in Karlsruhe at Easter 2018. Eight points from nine games in Europe's largest open tournament speak for themselves. Vincent conceded just two draws and won his last three rounds against Rainer Buhmann (Elo 2588), Gabor Papp (2604), and, in the final round with Black, world-class player Richard Rapport (2715). As a result, he qualified for the *Grenke Chess Classics* the following year. This tournament victory was undoubtedly one of the biggest sensations ever seen at a tournament in Germany.

Buhmann, Rainer (2588)
Keymer, Vincent (2403)

Grenke Open Karlsruhe
1 April 2018

Catalan Opening (E11)

Matthias Krallmann

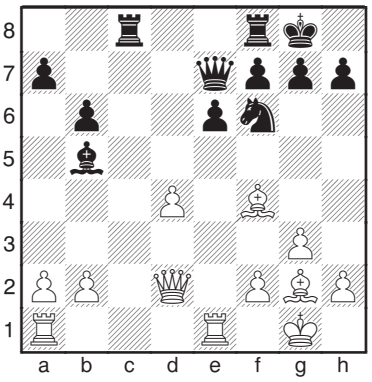
1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.g3 ♗b4+ 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♗f4 ♘bd7 9.♕c2 b6 10.♘bd2 ♗a6 11.e4 dxc4 12.♘xc4 ♘xe4 13.♖fe1 ♘ef6 14.♘fe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♖c8 16.♘xc6

16.♕a4 ♗b5 17.♕xa7 ♗b4 18.♖ed1 ♘d5 19.♗xd5 cxd5 20.a4 ♗e8 21.♖dc1 with an equal position.

16...♗b5 17.♘xe7+

17.d5 ♘xd5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 20.♕xh7+ ♔xh7 21.♖xe7 ♖c2 22.a4 ♗c6 with an equal endgame.

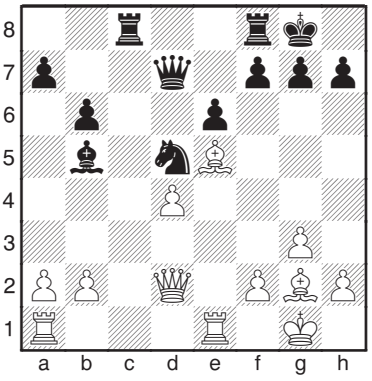
17...♕xe7 18.♕d2



18...♕d7

After 18...♖fd8 19.♖ac1 ♗c4 20.b3 ♗d5, Black's position is easier to play.

19.♗e5 ♘d5





Peter Leko, Vincent Keymer, Andreas Heimann, Karlsruhe Grenke Chess Open 2018

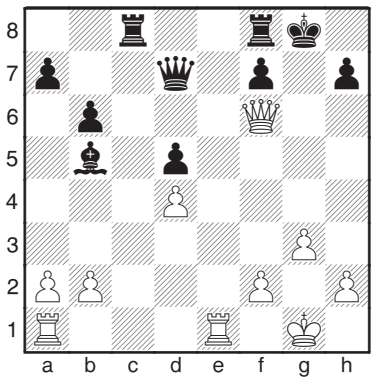
20.♗xg7!

Black takes the opportunity to force a draw by perpetual check. At least, that is how it appears.

20...♔xg7 21.♗xd5 exd5

After 21...♕xd5 22.♖e5 ♕f3 23.♕g5+ ♔h8 24.♖xb5, White has an extra pawn.

22.♕g5+ ♔h8 23.♕f6+ ♔g8



24.♖e5??

A complete blackout!

24.♕g5+ would have led to a draw by repetition.

24...♗d3!

Of course, Vincent takes this opportunity. It is very difficult to win a tournament without a bit of luck. He handles the technical part without any problems.

25.h4 ♖c6 26.♕g5+ ♖g6 27.♖xd5 ♕c6 28.♖c1 ♖xg5 29.♖xg5+ ♕g6 30.♖c7 a5 31.♖c6 b5 32.b3 ♕xg5 33.hxg5 ♖e8 34.♖a6 ♖e1+ 35.♔g2 ♗e4+ 36.f3 ♖e2+ 37.♔f1 ♗d3 38.♔g1 ♖xa2 0-1

Rapport, Richard (2715)
Keymer, Vincent (2403)

Grenke Open Karlsruhe
2 April 2018

Queen's Gambit (D54)

Matthias Krallmann

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 h6 6.♗h4 0-0 7.♖c1 ♘bd7 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗d3 c6 10.♗g3 ♖e8 11.h3 ♗b4 12.♘f3 ♘e4 13.♗f4 c5 14.0-0 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♘b6?!

This is inaccurate. Vincent comes under pressure as a result, but defends well.

After 15…c4 16.♗b1 ♘f8 17.♘e5 f6 18.♘g4 h5 19.f3 hxg4 20.fxe4 gxh3, Black has sufficient counterplay.

16.♘e5 f6 17.♘g4 c4 18.♗b1 h5 19.♘h2

19.♘h6+ gxh6 20.♕xh5 ♖e7 21.f3 ♘g5 22.h4 ♘e6 23.♗xh6 ♕e8 24.♗g6 ♕c6 25.f4 White has three pawns for a knight. The chances are equal.

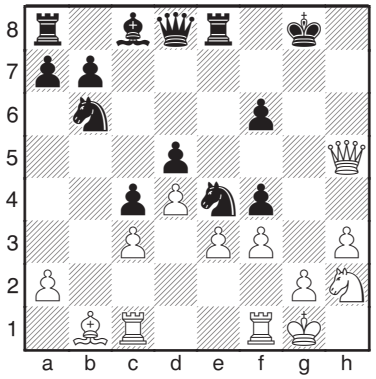
19...g5 20.♕xh5

20.f3 ♘xc3 21.♖xc3 gxf4 22.exf4 f5 23.♖e1 ♖xe1+ 24.♕xe1 ♕f6 25.♕e8+ ♔g7 26.♖e3 ♗d7 27.♕xh5 c3 28.♕g5+ ♕xg5 29.fxg5 ♖e8 Thanks to the strong passed pawn on c3, Black has equal chances.

20...gxf4 21.f3



Vincent Keymer, Berlin Bundesliga 2018 – Lasker-Blitz

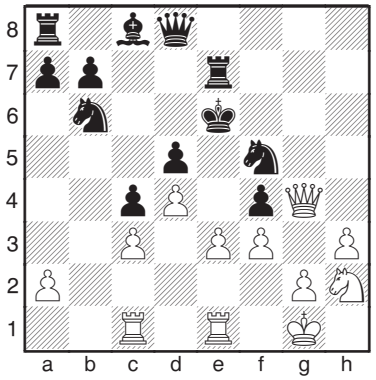


21...♘d6?!

After this inaccuracy, Rapport gains the advantage.

After 21...♘g3 22.♕h7+ ♔f8 23.♖fe1 f5, Black is o.k.

22.♕h7+ ♔f8 23.♕h6+ ♔e7 24.♕g7+ ♔e6 25.♖fe1 ♖e7 26.♕g4+ f5 27.♗xf5+ ♘xf5



Rapport gives one check too many. He drives Vincent's king into the safe zone on the queenside. Activating the e-pawn and the rook on the e-file would have given White the better game.

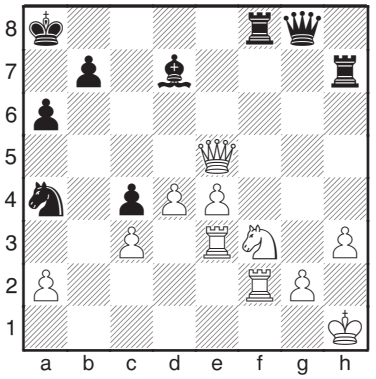
28.♕g6+?

After 28.e4, two variations arise:

– 28...dxe4 29.fxe4 ♔d6 30.♕xf4+ ♔c6 31.exf5 ♕d6 32.♕f2 Given his three connected passed pawns, White has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed piece.

– 28...♔d6 29.♕xf4+ ♔c6 30.exf5 ♕d6 31.♕g5 ♖f7 32.♖e5 ♗d7 33.♘g4 ♖af8 34.♘e3 ♕a3 35.♖c2 ♔c7 36.♕f4 ♔c8 37.g4 ♗a4 38.♖e2 ♕xc3 39.g5 White's passed pawns are dangerous.

28...♔d7 29.♕xf5+ ♔c6 30.♕xf4 ♗e6 31.e4 ♕g8 32.♕h6 ♔c7 33.♔h1 ♖f8 34.♖e2 ♖h7 35.♕d2 ♔b8 36.♖ce1 dxe4 37.fxe4 ♗d7 38.♖f2 ♖e8 39.♕f4+ ♔a8 40.♘f3 ♖f8 41.♕h2 ♘a4 42.♖e3 a6 43.♕e5?



Black has managed to bring his king to safety and activate all his pieces.

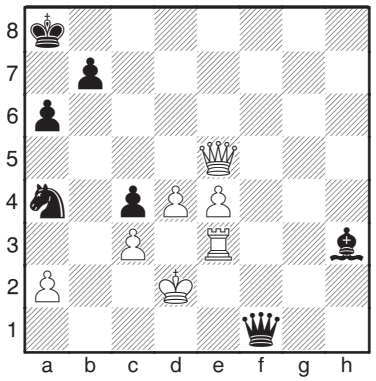
43...♗xh3!

With this strong move, Vincent had to foresee a quiet move.

44.♔g1

44.gxh3 ♖xh3+ 45.♖h2 ♖g3! 46.♕d5 ♕g4 47.a3 ♖gxf3 and Black wins.

44...♖g7 45.♘h4 ♖xf2 46.♔xf2 ♖xg2+ 47.♘xg2 ♕xg2+ 48.♔e1 ♕f1+ 49.♔d2



49...♗g4!

The decisive finesse!

50.♕e8+ ♔a7 51.♕xa4 ♕f2+ 0-1

Part 4

European Championship Runner-Up 2021

Vincent's first major international success in the adult category was the second place at the 2021 European Championship in Reykjavik. He scored 8½ points from 11 games, achieving a rating performance of 2751. He thus added 23 rating points to his still relatively modest Elo rating of 2602 at the time. The winner, somewhat surprisingly, was Anton Demchenko. In the penultimate round, Vincent had a winning position against the Russian, but Demchenko managed to escape with a draw. Vincent made up for it by beating Italy's Daniele Vocaturo in the final round, propelling himself into the silver-medal position.

Navara, David (2675)
Keymer, Vincent (2602)

EU-ch Reykjavik, 2 September 2021

English Opening (A29)

Matthias Krallmann

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.g3 ♗b4 5.♘d5 e4 6.♘h4 0-0 7.♗g2 d6 8.♘xb4 ♘xb4 9.a3 ♘a6 10.d3 exd3 11.♕xd3 ♘c5 12.♕c2 a5 13.b3 a4 14.b4 ♘b3 15.♖b1 c5 16.bxc5 dxc5 17.0-0 ♗g4 18.♗e3 ♕c8 19.♖fd1 ♖a6 20.f3 ♗e6 21.g4

After 21.♗f1 ♘a5 22.♕c3 ♗xc4 23.g4, White has compensation for the pawn deficit.

21...♖e8 22.♕c3 h6 23.♗f2 ♘d4 24.♗xd4?!

This weakens White's dark squares.

Better was 24.♗f1 ♖c6 25.h3 h5 26.e3 with equality.

24...cxd4 25.♖xd4 ♖c6 26.♕b4 g5 27.♘f5 ♗xf5 28.gxf5 ♖xe2 29.♗f1 ♖e3

29...♖a2 30.♖bd1 ♕c7 31.f4 ♕b6 32.♕xb6 ♖xb6 33.fxg5 hxg5 34.c5

– 34...♖bb2 35.♖xa4 ♔g7 36.h4 g4 37.♖b4 ♖c2 38.♖c4=

– 34...♖c6 35.♖d6 ♔g7 36.♖xc6 bxc6 37.♗g2, and White should be able to hold on narrowly.

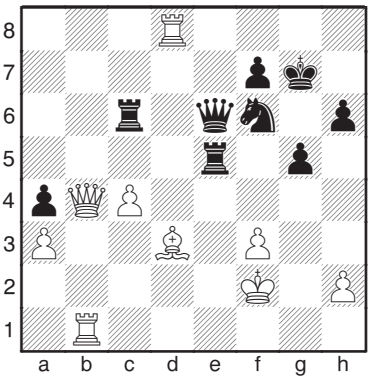
30.♔f2 ♖e5 31.♕xb7?

31.♗d3 b6 32.h4 g4 33.fxg4 ♕c7 with equal chances.

31...♕xf5 32.♗d3 ♕e6 33.♖d8+?

33.♕b8+ ♔g7 34.h3 is more tenacious.

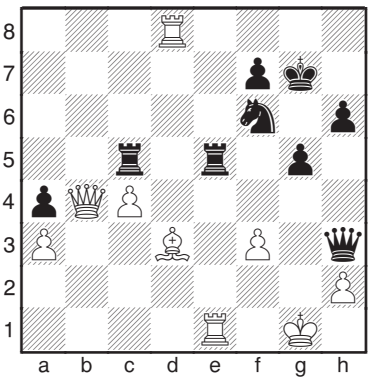
33...♔g7 34.♕b4



34...♖cc5

34...♘d7! 35.c5 ♘xc5 36.♗f1 ♘d7 37.♖b2 ♖f5 38.♗e2 ♖f4 39.♕d2 ♕h3 with a winning attack on the king.

35.♖e1 ♕h3! 36.♔g1



36...g4!

Black conducts the final attack against the white king very energetically.

37.♖xe5 gxf3! 38.♔f2 ♕xh2+ 39.♔xf3 ♕xe5 40.♕b8 ♕a1?

On move 40, Vincent makes a serious mistake that could have cost him half a point.

Correct was 40...♕h5+ 41.♔e3 ♕g5+ 42.♔d4 ♖a5 43.♖h8 ♕g1+ 44.♔c3 ♕c1+ 45.♔d4 ♕xa3, and Black wins.

41.♕d6

Part 13

Biggest Tournament Victory at the Chennai Grand Masters 2025

Chennai, formerly known as Madras, is the birthplace of the 15th World Champion Vishy Anand, the 18th World Champion Gukesh, and top player Praggnanandhaa. It was here, of all places, that Vincent achieved his greatest success to date. The tournament in the six-million-strong city seemed tailor-made for India's strongest player, Arjun Erigaisi (Elo 2776), his compatriot Vidit Santosh Gujrathi (2720), or Dutchman Anish Giri (2748), the strongest foreign player in the field. It had an average Elo rating of 2700 and was classified as Category XVIII. But things turned out differently.

Vincent got off to a flying start with three wins against the Indians Nihal Sarin (2692), Venkatesh Pranav (2597), and Karthikeyan Murali (2658). He then drew with the nominally stronger players Giri and Erigaisi, who would go on to finish second and third. Two more victories, against the two Americans Awonder Liang (2696) and Ray Robson (2687), and two draws against Dutchman Jorden van Foreest (2697) and India's Vidit Santosh Gujrathi brought Vincent to the incredible score of seven points from nine games. This corresponded to a rating performance of 2917. Vincent thus gained 21 Elo points and broke into the world's top ten for the first time. As he left his competitors in this tournament a full two points behind, the Indian press celebrated the German enthusiastically.

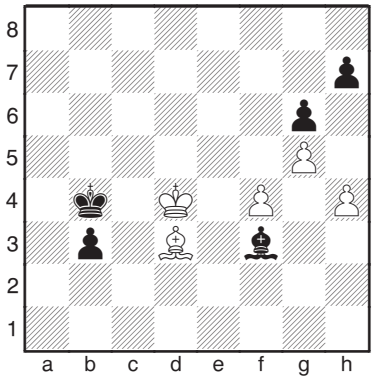
Keymer, Vincent (2730)
Van Foreest, Jorden (2697)

Chennai Masters, 14 August 2025

King's Indian (E62)

Karsten Müller

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.d4 d6 6.♘c3 ♗f5 7.♘h4 ♗c8 8.0-0 e5 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.h3 exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 c6 13.♕h4 ♘d7 14.♗g5 f6 15.♗h6 f5 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♖ad1 ♘f6 19.♖d4 ♗e6 20.♖fd1 ♖d7 21.e4 fxe4 22.♖xd6 ♖xd6 23.♖xd6 ♗xc4 24.♘xe4 ♘xe4 25.♖d7+ ♔f6 26.♗xe4 ♖e8 27.f3 ♖e7 28.♖xe7 ♔xe7 29.a3 ♔d6 30.♔f2 b5 31.b4 c5 32.♔e3 ♗d5 33.♗c2 ♔c6 34.f4 ♔b6 35.g4 a5 36.bxa5+ ♔xa5 37.h4 b4 38.axb4+ cxb4 39.♔d4 b3 40.♗d3 ♗f3 41.g5 ♔b4



In the endgame, the defence often has to be conducted actively.

42.f5!

The first of many only moves in defence.

42...gxf5 43.♗xf5 ♗d1 44.g6!

Another only move.

44.♗e6? fails to 44...b2 45.♗f5 ♔b3 46.♗e6+ ♔c2 47.♗f5+ ♔d2−+.
(Luis Engel)

44...hxg6 45.♗xg6 b2 46.♗b1! ♗h5 47.♗c2!

Again the only move, as ♔b3 must be prevented.

For example, 47.♗e4? fails to 47...♔b3 48.♗d5+ ♔c2 49.♗e4+ ♔c1 50.♔c3 ♗f7 51.♗d3 ♗a2 52.h5 ♗b1 53.♗xb1 ♔xb1 54.h6 ♔a2 55.h7 b1♕ 56.h8♕ ♕b2+ −+.

47...♗e2 48.♗b1 ♔b3

This puts White in a kind of zugzwang, but there is still a defence.

49.♔e3! ♗g4 50.♔d2!

50.♔f4? ♗d1−+

50...♗h5 51.♗c2+ ♔a2 52.♗d3 ♔a1 53.♗c2 ♗f7 54.♗d3 ♗c4

The last attempt, but Vincent Keymer is not going to fall for it, of course.

55.♗c2

But not 55.♗xc4?? b1♕−+.

55...♗a2 56.h5

Now White arrives just in time.

56...♗b1 57.♗xb1 ♔xb1 58.h6 ♔a2 59.h7 ½-½

A fantastic defensive performance by Vincent Keymer!

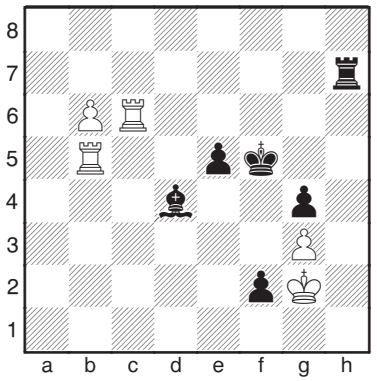
Keymer, Vincent (2730)
Sarin, Nihal (2692)

Chennai Masters, 7 August 2025

Grünfeld Defence (D91)

Karsten Müller

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗g5 c5 6.dxc5 ♗e6 7.♘d4 ♘c6 8.♘xe6 fxe6 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♕d2 ♖f8 12.♖d1 ♗d4 13.e3 ♗xc5 14.a3 d4 15.b4 ♗b6 16.♗h6 dxe3 17.♕xd8+ ♘xd8 18.♗b5+ ♘c6 19.♗xc6+ bxc6 20.♗xf8 exf2+ 21.♔e2 ♔xf8 22.♖c1 ♔g7 23.♖xc6 ♖f8 24.a4 ♗d4 25.♖b1 ♖b8 26.♖c4 e5 27.♖c7+ ♔h6 28.h4 ♔h5 29.♖xh7+ ♔g4 30.♖g7 ♖b6 31.b5 ♖d6 32.a5 ♔xh4 33.♖c7 g5 34.♖c6 ♖d7 35.b6 axb6 36.axb6 ♖b7 37.♖b3 g4 38.♖d6 ♗c5 39.♖g6 ♔h5 40.♖c6 ♗d4 41.♖d6 ♗c5 42.♖e6 ♗d4 43.g3 ♔g5 44.♖d6 ♗c5 45.♖c6 ♗d4 46.♖b1 ♔f5 47.♔f1 ♔g5 48.♔g2 ♔f5 49.♖b5 ♖h7



Passed-pawn races can be very sharp.

50.♖c7!

Keymer cleverly outplays Black.

The hasty 50.b7?? fails to 50...♖h2+ 51.♔xh2 f1♕ 52.b8♕ ♕h3#.

50...♖h8 51.b7 ♗a7

51...♖h1 52.♖f7+ +−

52.♖c8 and **1-0** in view of 52...♖h1 53.♖f8+ ♔e4 54.♔xh1+−.

Keymer, Vincent (2730)
Murali, Karthikeyan (2658)

Chennai Masters, 9 August 2025

Sicilian (B45)

Matthias Krallmann

Vincent annotated this game for *New in Chess* (7/2025). Having made an excellent start with 2 out of 2, he wanted to play a fighting game. He expected his opponent to play the Sicilian. Vincent only started playing 1.e4 in the summer of 2024.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘f6 6.♗f4 d6 7.♗b5

Vincent had already tested this move in Prague that summer.

7...♗d7 8.♘xc6 ♗xc6

8...bxc6 9.♗a4 e5 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♕d3 a5 was played in Abdusattorov – Praggnanandhaa, Samarkand 2025.

9.♕d3 a6 10.♗xc6+ bxc6 11.0-0-0 d5

Part 26

The victory at the Grenke Freestyle Open in Karlsruhe 2026

For only the second time, a Freestyle tournament was held over Easter in the southern German city. At last year's inaugural event, Magnus Carlsen dominated with an incredible nine points from nine games. This year, the convincing winner was Vincent Keymer, who won the first six rounds and drew the last three. Thus, he finished on 7.5 points, the same as Frenchman Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, but had the better tiebreak score.

Embedded in a chess festival with more than 3,000 participants, the A-group of the Freestyle tournament was the most attractive event thanks to its prize fund of more than € 200,000. More than 300 players tried to wrest the first prize of € 60,000 from top favourite Magnus Carlsen. The best-known among them were former World Championship runner-up Ian Nepomniachtchi, Uzbekistan's "player of the moment" Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Poland's Jan-Krzysztof Duda, and the three Americans Levon Aronian, Hans Moke Niemann, and Leinier Dominguez Perez. With Matthias Blübaum simultaneously competing in the Candidates Tournament, Germany's hopes rested solely on Vincent Keymer.

In the first round on Thursday, Vincent had no trouble defeating Sonja Bluhm (2207), a player in the Women's Bundesliga. On Friday morning, Vincent had to face another woman, a very unusual occurrence in his chess career. Lela Javakhishvili (2431) put up resistance but was unable to fend off a mating attack. On Friday evening, Vincent had to call on the assistance of the chess goddess for the first time. His opponent, former German national team player Georg Meier (2612), luckily for Vincent, walked into a mating net in a drawn position. After the game, Vincent's coach Peter Leko claimed that he had been on the verge of a heart attack during the game.

On Saturday, however, Vincent scored two clear victories against two strong opponents. In his game against Volodar Murcin (2650), all the pieces were initially positioned as in traditional chess, except that the queen and king had switched places. Vincent had already analyzed this starting position once before. After the game, he said in an interview, "I was glad when my opponent played 1.e4." – Vincent knew that 1...e5 was not a good response here, so he replied with 1...d5 and ultimately won convincingly. He sacrificed a pawn, his bishop pair dominated, and he trapped a wandering knight.

In the afternoon round, too, the game was almost traditional chess. Only the rook and knight on the a- and b-files had switched places. Vincent's opponent, Nodirbek Yakubboev (2686), tried to take him out of familiar positional territory with an early queen sortie. But this attempt only cost him time, and he was no longer able to castle. Following classical principles, Vincent opened up the position and dispatched the king stranded in the center. After five rounds, Hans Moke Niemann and Vincent led the

standings with a perfect score. Magnus Carlsen followed, along with several other pursuers, half a point behind.

On Sunday morning, Vincent played against Niemann with Black. In an equal position, Niemann dropped an exchange, and Vincent scored an easy point. His opponent in the afternoon was a different caliber. Magnus Carlsen (2888) put Vincent under pressure despite having the black pieces. Fortunately, however, the world No. 1 overlooked a winning liquidation, and Vincent escaped with a draw. The German thus remained half a point ahead of his pursuers.

On Monday morning, Vincent could even afford to draw once again, this time with White against Alexey Sarana (2702). A win would have been possible, though. Shortly before the end of the game, Vincent missed a forced mate in six. In the final round, Vincent faced Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (2700) with Black. As expected, not much happened in this game. The players agreed to an early draw and finished the tournament on 7.5 points each.

Afterwards, they waited anxiously to see whether Magnus Carlsen would win his final-round game and thus catch up with them. But Carlsen's opponent, India's Aryan Chopra, held the draw. Magnus thus finished third and led the group of players on seven points. The remaining places were taken by Nepomniachtchi, Sarana, Duda, Mendonca, Abdusattorov, and Chopra. Vincent finished first, thereby securing the first qualifying spot for next year's Freestyle World Championship.



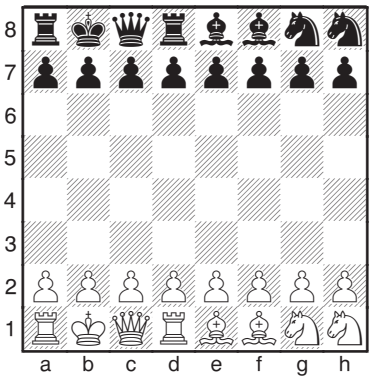
Vincent Keymer, Karlsruhe (Grenke Chess Festival) 2026

In the first round, Vincent Keymer won convincingly.

Keymer, Vincent (2776)
Bluhm, Sonja Maria (2207)

Grenke Freestyle Chess Open
2 April 2026

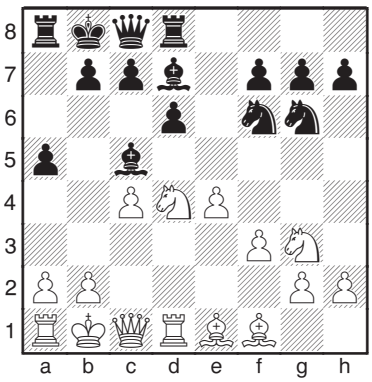
Karsten Müller



1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.♖xd4 ♘g6 4.♘g3 ♘f6 5.c4 ♗c5?!

As the bishop will run into problems, 5...a5 is more precise.

6.♖d1 a5 7.♘1e2 d6 8.f3 ♗d7 9.♘d4

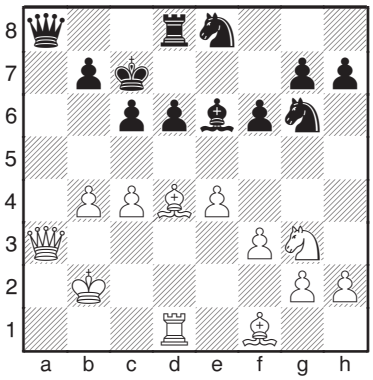


9...♘e8?

This is too artificial.

9...♘e5 is only slightly better for White.

10.♗c3 f6 11.♕d2 a4 12.b4 axb3 13.axb3 ♖xa1+ 14.♔xa1 c6 15.♕a2 ♔c7 16.b4 ♗b6 17.♔b2 ♗e6 18.♕a3 ♗xd4 19.♗xd4 ♕a8



20.♗a7!

An important move. White should keep the queens and the attack.

20...♔d7 21.♘f5?!

21.♖a1!?+- looks more natural.

21...♗xf5 22.exf5 ♘e7 23.♖a1?!

23.b5 exerts more pressure.

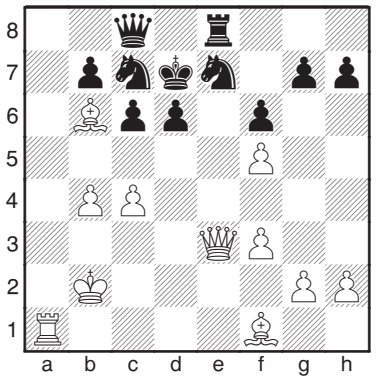
23...♘c7 24.♕e3 ♕c8?!

24...♘c8 25.♗d4 ♕b8 was more tenacious.

25.♗b6

25.g4!?+–

25...♖e8

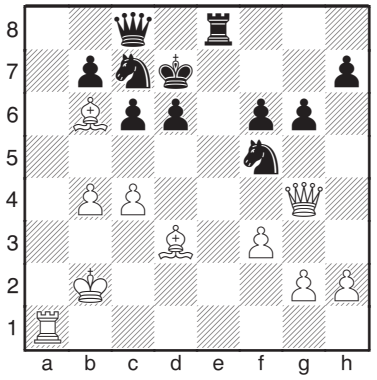


26.♕d4?

This is too optimistic.

After the solid 26.♕d3, White should win in the long run.

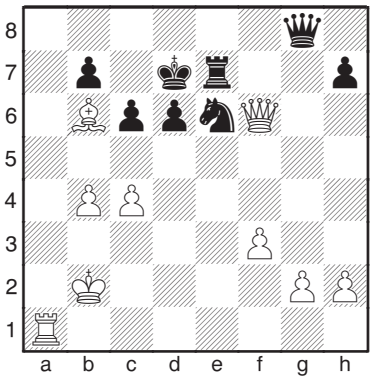
26...♘xf5 27.♕g4 g6 28.♗d3



28...♘e6?

28...♔d8!! holds everything together.

29.♗xf5 gxf5 30.♕xf5 ♖e7 31.♕xf6 ♕g8



32.g3?

Here Vincent misses 32.♖a7! ♕xg2+ (32...♕c8 33.♕f5+−) 33.♔a3 ♕g7 34.♕xe7+ ♕xe7 35.♖xb7+ +−

32...♘g7?

32...♕g5! offered good drawing chances.

33.♖a7! ♕c8 34.f4 ♘e8 35.♕f5+ ♖e6 36.♕xh7+ 1-0



Vincent Keymer, Karlsruhe (Grenke Chess Festival) 2026

About the authors



FM Matthias Krallmann (*1962) became an A-level coach of the German Chess Federation in 1999. After many years working as a teacher of German and history and as a part-time chess coach, he spent seven years as a full-time chess coach at Werder Bremen. From 2007 to 2017, he coached Matthias Blübaum. They remained in contact even after that period. Their collaboration resulted in the book *Chess Training with Matthias Blübaum – His Way to the title European Champion* (Blübaum/Müller/Krallmann), published by Joachim Beyer Verlag in 2022, and *Europameister Matthias Blübaum – Sein Weg zum Kandidatenturnier* (*European Champion Matthias Blübaum – His Way to the Candidates Tournament* (Müller/Krallmann), published in 2025. His strongest student at present is IM Hussain Besou.



GM Dr. Karsten Müller was born on November 23rd, 1970 in Hamburg. He studied mathematics and received his doctorate in 2002. From 1988 to 2015 he played for the 'Hamburger SK' in the German 'Bundesliga' and in 1998 he was awarded the title of Grandmaster.

The busy and globally recognized endgame expert was named 'Trainer of the Year' in 2007 by the German Chess Federation.

He is the author (or co–author) of the following highly esteemed works:

– Secrets of Pawn Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, Everyman/GAMBIT 2000)
– Fundamental Chess Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, GAMBIT 2001)
– Danish Dynamite (with Martin Voigt, Russell 2003)
– Chess Cafe Puzzle Book: Test and Improve Your Tactical Vision (Russell 2004)

– How to Play Chess Endgames (with Wolfgang Pajeken, GAMBIT 2008)
– Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 2: Test and Improve Your Positional Intuition (Russell 2008)
– Bobby Fischer, The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion (Russell 2009)
– Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 3: Test and Improve Your Defensive Skill! (with Merijn van Delft, Russell 2010)
– Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 4: Mastering the positional principles (with Alexander Markgraf, Russell 2012)
– The Magic Tactics of Mikhail Tal: Learn from the Legend (with Raymund Stolze, Edition Olms 2012)
– Fighting chess with Hikaru Nakamura (with Raymund Stolze, Edition Olms 2013)
– The slow (but venomous) Italian (with Georgios Souleidis, New in Chess 2016)
– The Magic of Chess Tactics 2 (with C.D. Meyer, Russell 2017)

His excellent series of ChessBase–DVDs Chess endgames 1–14 also attracted attention.

Müller's popular column Endgame Corner was published at 'www.ChessCafe.com' from January 2001 until 2015, and his column Endgames is published in ChessBase Magazine since 2006.

To date, numerous of his books have been published by JBV Chess Books (Joachim Beyer Verlag) – a total of 32 in German and the following titles also in English:

Magical Endgames (2020, together with Claus Dieter Meyer)

The Human Factor in Chess (2020, together with Luis Engel)

The Best Endgames of the World Champions Vol 1 – From Steinitz to Tal (2021)

The Best Endgames of the World Champions Vol 2 – From Petrosian to Carlsen (2021)

World Chess Championship 2021 (2022)
(together with Jerzy Konikowski and Uwe Bekemann)

The Best Combinations of the World Champions Vol 1 – From Steinitz to Tal (2022)
(together with Jerzy Konikowski)

The Best Combinations of the World Champions Vol 2 – From Petrosian to Carlsen (2022) (together with Jerzy Konikowski)

Bobby Fischer 60 Best Games (2022)

Chess Training with Matthias Blübaum (2022)
(together with Matthias Blübaum and Matthias Krallmann)

Typical Sicilian, Effective Middlegame Training (2023)

The Human Factor in Chess – The Testbook (2023)
(together with Luis Engel and Makan Rafiee)

Karsten Müller – Attack (2023)

Magnus Carlsen – The Chess DNA of a Genius (2023)

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Typical Grünfeld Defence, Main line with 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3, Effective Middlegame Training (2026)

Vincent Keymer, His Rise to the World Elite (2026)