Vladimir Tukmakov

Think Like a Human

How the Young Chess Generation Fights and Wins

New In Chess 2026

Contents

Explanation of Symbols 4
Introduction 5

Chapter 1 Alireza Firouzja: Inspiration and Unpredictability 13
Chapter 2 Dommaraju Gukesh: A Champion Before His Time 59
Chapter 3 Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa: Balanced and Universal . . 111
Chapter 4 Arjun Erigaisi: Creativity and Passion 157
Chapter 5 Vincent Keymer: Composure and Stability 201
Chapter 6 Hans Moke Niemann: Boundless Self-Belief. 243
Chapter 7 Javokhir Sindarov: Simplicity and Harmony 285
Chapter 8 Nodirbek Abdusattorov: Intellect and Character 327
Chapter 9 Overall Conclusion 371

Index of names 375

Introduction

Chess is an individual game. Every accomplished chess player follows their own path – one that may sometimes intersect with the problems and difficulties faced by other great players, yet remains entirely distinct and, in some ways, unique. This applies to everyone, regardless of their talent or rating. All the more remarkable, then, is a phenomenon that occurs surprisingly often: several exceptionally gifted talents emerging at the same time, and often even in the same country.

Previous generations of players

The strongest chess players from the generation that was born before the Second World War were, for the most part, representatives of a single country – the Soviet Union. One generation succeeded another, yet the dominance of the so-called Soviet chess school endured. It was built on professionalism and extraordinarily intense domestic competition.

The war years and the immediate post-war period were remarkably sparse in producing outstanding chess talents. In essence, the 1940s gave the world only one truly great name – but what a name it was: Bobby Fischer! The American genius took on the entire Soviet chess machine single-handedly – and emerged victorious.

In the early 1970s, a remarkable group of players burst onto the scene: Alexander Beliavsky, Rafael Vaganian, Oleg Romanishin, Jan Timman, Henrique Mecking, Ulf Andersson, Zoltan Ribli. This generation was no longer as homogeneous as its predecessors. But while the presence of several Soviet players in this group was hardly surprising, the fierce competition within the Soviet bloc constantly produced new talents. The emergence of Mecking from Brazil – a country with virtually no significant chess tradition at the time – can scarcely be described as anything other than accidental. Yet even among such vivid and entirely different personalities, Anatoly Karpov stood apart, his extraordinary talent preventing the other representatives of this generation from fully realizing their potential.

History repeated itself when the brilliant careers of Artur Yusupov, Nigel Short and Valery Salov were completely overshadowed by the towering figure of Garry Kasparov.

The closing years of the 1980s marked the arrival of Viswanathan Anand, Boris Gelfand and Vasyl Ivanchuk on the chess stage. Completely different in their chess styles, they not only played an active role in the struggle for the World Championship, but also introduced new trends in the development of chess itself.

The next generation was exceptionally rich in outstanding talent. Alexei Shirov, Gata Kamsky, Vladimir Kramnik, Veselin Topalov, Alexander Morozevich and Peter Svidler formed one of the most glittering generations in chess history, distinguished not only by the sheer number of elite players it produced, but also by the remarkable diversity of their styles and personalities. We should also add Judit Polgar to this list, without question the greatest female player of all time.

An already crowded field of outstanding talent was further strengthened by the emergence of Levon Aronian, Alexander Grischuk, Ruslan Ponomariov, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Teimour Radjabov and Hikaru Nakamura.

Outstanding chess players born in the 1990s virtually turned the contest for the World Championship into an internal affair of their own generation. Fabiano Caruana, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Sergey Karjakin, Ding Liren, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Anish Giri and Wesley So are our contemporaries to varying degrees, but all still at the height of their powers. And we have not yet mentioned Magnus Carlsen, probably the strongest chess player of all time, who graciously relinquished his title without ceasing to be the universally acknowledged leader of world chess.

It was precisely this generation that marked the arrival of a new era in chess. Unlike their predecessors, for most of them the computer almost completely replaced the book. The machine became not merely an assistant and a guide in searching for the necessary information, but also an authority in analysing games and choosing opening repertoires. At the same time, engines had not yet reached the level where they could be trusted unconditionally. Of course, they greatly expanded the understanding of chess, yet there were still areas left for human genius. It is no coincidence that the players mentioned remain such vivid individual personalities. Even without knowing their names, it is difficult to confuse the playing styles of Ian Nepomniachtchi and Anish Giri, Ding Liren and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So.

Generation Z, to which this book is devoted, is likewise extremely numerous and remarkably strong. Despite their youth, they already boast a World Champion among their ranks. Yet, unlike their older colleagues and rivals born in the 1990s, they are far more difficult to distinguish by stylistic characteristics. They are extraordinarily strong, competitive and universal players, but at the same time they have far more in common with one another than they have differences. And there is a simple explanation for this.

The pursuit of perfection

The development of pre-computer chess can, if one wishes, be summed up in this one phrase: the pursuit of perfection.

Naturally, this approach found its clearest expression in opening preparation. Unexpected ideas combined with painstaking analysis provided a significant

advantage over the romantics, who believed they could solve all their problems at the board. Garry Kasparov perfected this method as no one before him had done.

It should not be forgotten that tournaments in the second half of the twentieth century were fundamentally different from those of today. Professionals competed under a time control of two and a half hours for the first forty moves, after which games were adjourned. Special days were set aside for the resumption of unfinished games, and dozens of hours were often devoted to analysing adjourned positions.

The need to delve deeply into the subtleties of a wide range of endgames undoubtedly contributed to a higher level of endgame mastery. The advent of computers brought significant changes to tournament regulations. Games now had to be completed in a single session, making the struggle more dynamic and intense. However, these changes have undoubtedly had a negative impact on the endgame skills of the modern elite.

As recently as the first decade of this century, differences in the quality of the computers available to players could still provide a tangible advantage, particularly for those who preferred sharp, calculation-intensive positions. Veselin Topalov's team, for example, would dig deeply into highly tactical forced variations, sometimes uncovering truly astonishing resources. Viswanathan Anand and his assistants adopted a broadly similar opening strategy in his World Championship Match against Vladimir Kramnik.



The author of this book supervising Team Ukraine

The extraordinary increase in the strength of modern chess engines has effectively eliminated such advantages. The reality today is that it is virtually impossible for White to obtain an objective opening advantage, while Black can neutralize White's initiative in almost any opening system. In a sense, perfection has already been reached, and the 'draw death' of chess predicted more than a century ago by José Raúl Capablanca has become a reality.

For the time being, however, this is true only in the realm of machine play.

The new generation

The fundamental difference between Generation Z and the generations that came before lies in the fact that they all effectively belong to a single school – regardless of geography or nationality – a school in which *the main mentor is the chess engine*. Its authority is unquestioned, and its judgement is not subject to doubt. Today's young players have grown up with this principle, absorbing it not with their mother's milk, but through engines that kept improving before their own eyes, leaving ever fewer opportunities for forming an independent opinion that differs from that of the Master.

This applies equally to the game itself and to preparation. The strength and computing power of modern chess programs make it possible to identify the critical moments of a game and deliver an unequivocal verdict within seconds. In terms of preparation, the range of opening variations considered playable in practice has expanded enormously, even bringing back openings that were discarded long ago. At sufficient depth, a strong engine can even hold positions that appear extremely dangerous on the surface, and all these investigations – utterly unmanageable for previous generations – are now carried out with remarkable speed. In preparing for a game, the main objective has long ceased to be obtaining an advantage. What matters far more is to surprise the opponent, forcing them as early as possible to solve problems independently at the board.

There are many parallels to be found between different one-on-one sports. Chess is often compared to tennis. In both disciplines, the overall standard of play has risen dramatically in recent years. In chess, computers are largely responsible for this development, whereas in tennis the trend has been driven by advances in training and recovery technologies. As a result, the importance of the serve in tennis has increased significantly. And it is not merely a question of power, but of quality as well. A high-quality serve not only yields additional points directly, but also helps conserve energy for the rallies that follow.

In chess, the situation is quite the opposite. The chess equivalent of the serve – the opening – has largely lost its former importance: modern engines have levelled the playing field for everyone. The outcome of the struggle is usually decided at later stages of the game. Nevertheless, most players still devote a great deal of time to opening preparation, although both its nature and its purpose have changed dramatically. The goal now is to secure a convenient and comfortable platform from which to continue the battle in the middlegame. If, at the same time, the

resulting positions are somewhat unpleasant for the opponent, the preparation can be considered a complete success.

The COVID-19 pandemic from roughly March 2020 to May 2023 also had an enormous impact on the formation of Generation Z. The social restrictions associated with this scourge dramatically accelerated the growth of online chess. The number of these tournaments increased exponentially. At the same time, they evolved from a hobby into fully professional work, since the prize funds were equal to – and sometimes even exceeded – those of traditional tournaments. For a vast number of young chess players, the need to travel constantly from one tournament to another disappeared, as did the need for their parents to find the financial resources for such travel. As a result, chess became even more democratic. Not to mention that *practical play – the main driving force behind the improvement of a young chess player – became available in virtually unlimited quantities*.

In this respect, the recommendation of the patriarch of Soviet chess, Mikhail Botvinnik, to play no more than fifty games a year – a debatable idea even in his own time – now seems like a laughable anachronism. Of course, Botvinnik meant classical games. Blitz chess, in his opinion, caused almost irreparable harm to the development of a chess player. In our era, however, professionals – whose numbers have grown immeasurably – play thousands of games each year. Of course, the overwhelming majority of these games are played online in rapid formats, but the possibility of quick and highly qualified computer analysis inevitably transforms quantity into quality.

Virtually all the chess players discussed in this book, with hardly any exceptions, are travelling along the same road, using the same methods for improvement. Their similarity is therefore quite understandable. What may seem more surprising is their *differences*. The most obvious explanation is that every human being possesses a unique individuality, which inevitably manifests itself in any creative activity. No matter how automated the work may become, the human factor remains unavoidable.

Yet, in relation to modern chess there is another, less obvious explanation for the differences in playing styles and approaches that still persist among young chess players. Besides the computer, an absolute and unquestionable authority, they also have a human one:

Magnus Carlsen

Of course, even a multiple World Champion is not flawless. He periodically makes mistakes, and sometimes quite serious ones. Neither at the board nor in everyday life is anything human alien to him. At the same time, Carlsen remains widely recognized as the strongest chess player in the world, and this is an extremely important example of how one can win while remaining true to oneself. His key difference from the new generation is that he experienced earlier times – freer and

more creative ones. At the same time, he managed to adapt brilliantly to the new reality, combining an unattainable level of perfection with pragmatism. Magnus Carlsen and his unique approach to the game serve as a kind of living bridge of continuity from earlier chess to the modern era. Every encounter with Magnus becomes a tremendous test and an invaluable lesson for any young talent, defining their current place on the path toward perfection.

But no one has power over time. Competition within the chess elite is incredibly strong, and staying at the very top is becoming increasingly difficult even for such an outstanding player as Carlsen – all the more so because his motivation is fading, and it is evident that he now works on chess less than before. The disappointing results he produced at Norway Chess 2026 and then at the World Rapid and Blitz Team Championship in Hong Kong merely reinforced this impression.

Who will take his place? Will the leaders keep changing, or will there emerge a player capable of dominating in the same way as his predecessor?

The protagonists

Now is the right time to move on to the actual subject of our story. There are many strong and bright young chess players in the world today. In order to prevent this study from turning into a multi-volume saga, certain limitations had to be introduced. This book includes only those chess players who were born in the current millennium. By this criterion, even such an outstanding talent and Candidates Tournament participant as Wei Yi did not make the list, not to mention many others. Another requirement was a rating of 2700+, maintained over a sufficiently long period of time. Therefore, the Candidates Tournament participant Andrey Esipenko was not included in the book. Due to inconsistent results, Nihal Sarin and Parham Maghsoodloo are also absent. Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus is still too young, although his undoubtedly outstanding talent is likely to be fully revealed soon.

As a result, the protagonists of our story are still very young – the 'oldest' among them were born in 2003. Thus, the field has been reduced to eight young, talented and ambitious candidates. Beyond their youth and exceptional talent, they share a healthy sense of ambition and an uncompromising fighting spirit. However, the emphasis will be placed on what sets them apart. Their stylistic characteristics, sporting profiles and individual prospects will be discussed in detail in separate chapters.

Yet this book is about more than that. By becoming better acquainted with the outstanding young talents of our era and the obstacles they have had to overcome, every chess player can find inspiration for his or her own path of development. Their experiences can help improve not only one's chess strength, but also one's understanding of oneself as an individual.

And now, let us begin the journey!


Scheerberg

CHAPTER 7

Javokhir Sindarov

Simplicity and Harmony

Born 8 December 2005

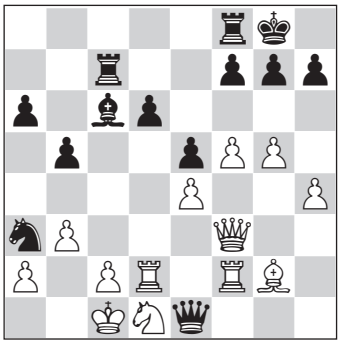
For people far removed from the chess world, the victory of the young Uzbek grandmaster Javokhir Sindarov in the Candidates Tournament – and with such an enormous margin – came as a real sensation. Who is he? Where did he come from?

For experts, however, the only surprise was his absolute domination of the tournament and the superb quality of his play. Even before the event, many had already mentioned his name as one of the dark horses of the competition.

Javokhir Sindarov was a true prodigy – he became a grandmaster at the age of 12 years and 10 months, making him one of the youngest grandmasters in chess history. This fact alone does not guarantee a place among the chess elite, but it is certainly evidence of tremendous natural talent.

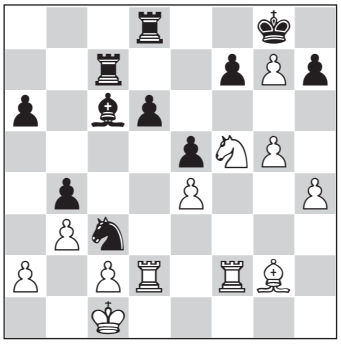
He made headlines again a few years later by defeating the already-rising star and one of the main favourites of the World Cup in Krasnaya Polyana 2021, Alireza Firouzja. In fact, the match could have been decided already in the classical portion. With the black pieces, Javokhir Sindarov secured a draw, and in the second game the following position arose:

Game 154
□ **Javokhir Sindarov** 2558
■ **Alireza Firouzja** 2759
FIDE World Cup, Krasnaya Polyana 2021



31.♕e3
White has a dominant position and could have continued to build up the pressure by 31.f6 ♖fc8 32.h5 ♗d7 33.fxg7 ♗e6 34.g6. Black has no real answer to this simple plan. But Sindarov chooses to avoid even the slightest risk.

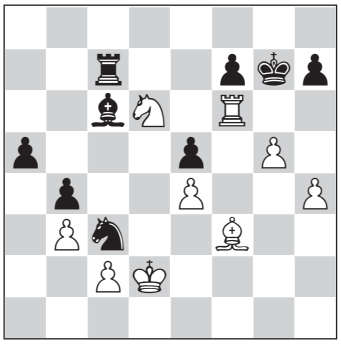
31...♕xe3 32.♘xe3 b4 33.f6 ♘b5 34.fxg7 ♖d8 35.♘f5 ♘c3



36.♖xd6

Enough to win, but 36.♘xd6 was even stronger. After 36...♖cd7 (36...♘xa2+ is also losing after 37.♔b2 ♘c3 38.h5) 37.♖f6, Black is completely helpless.

36...♖xd6 37.♘xd6 ♔xg7 38.♖f6 ♘xa2+ 39.♔d2 ♘c3 40.♗f3 a5



41.♔e3

The natural continuation. However, 41.h5 a4 42.h6+ ♔f8 43.bxa4 ♗xa4 (with the idea ...b4-b3; if 43...♘xa4 then 44.♗h5) 44.♘f5 ♔e8 45.♖b6 would have won more quickly.

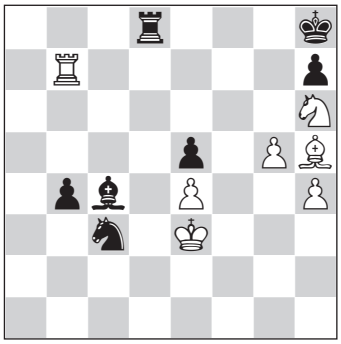
41...a4 42.bxa4 ♗xa4 43.♗h5 ♖d7 44.♘f5+ ♔f8 45.♖b6 ♖d8 46.♖b7 ♗xc2 47.♖xf7+ ♔g8 48.♘h6+ ♔h8 49.♖a7 ♗b3

49...♖d3+ 50.♔f2 ♘xe4+ 51.♔g2 ♖g3+ 52.♔h2 ♖a3 53.♖b7 ♖a8 54.g6 was also losing.

50.♖b7

50.♗f7! ♘d1+ 51.♔f3 ♗c2 52.♗c4 ♖f8+ 53.♘f7+ ♔g8 54.♔g3 was a quicker win.

50...♗c4



51.♖xb4?

This misses the win. After 51.♘f7+! ♗xf7 52.♗xf7 ♘d1+ 53.♔f3 the advance of the g- and h-pawns decides the game.

The remainder of the game is less relevant to our theme and is therefore given without comment.

51...♖d3+ 52.♔f2 ♘xe4+ 53.♔g1 ♘d6 54.♖b8+ ♔g7 55.♖d8 ♗e6 56.♗g4 ♖g3+ 57.♔f1 ♖xg4 58.♖xd6 ♖f4+ 59.♔g2 ♗c4 60.♔g3 ♗e2 61.♖e6 ♗h5 62.♖xe5 ♖f3+ 63.♔g2 ♖f8 64.♖e7+ ♔g6 65.♖e6+ ♔g7 66.♖e3 ♔g6 67.♔g3 ♗d1 68.♖d3 ♗e2 69.♖d2 ♗h5 70.♖d6+ ♔g7 71.♖d7+ ♔g6 72.♘g4 ♗xg4 73.♔xg4 h5+ 74.♔g3 ♖a8 75.♖d6+ ♔g7 76.♖d4 ♖a6 77.♔f4 ♔g6 78.♖e4 ♖b6 79.♖a4 ♖e6 80.♖c4 ♖a6 81.♔e5 ♖a1 82.♖f4 ♖e1+ 83.♔d6 ♔g7 84.♔d5 ♔g6 85.♖f6+ ♔g7 86.♖h6 ♖a1 87.♖xh5 ♖a6 88.♔e4 ♖b6 89.♖h6 ♖xh6 90.gxh6+ ♔xh6 91.♔f4 ♔h5 92.♔g3 ♔h6 93.♔g4 ♔g6 94.h5+ ♔h6 95.♔h4 ♔g7 96.♔g5 ♔h7 97.h6 ♔h8 98.♔g6 ♔g8 99.h7+ ♔h8 100.♔h6

Draw agreed. A miraculous escape by Alireza Firouzja!

It seemed that such a painful missed opportunity should have psychologically broken the inexperienced teenager, especially since even then Firouzja was considered one of the strongest players in the world in rapid and blitz formats. But Sindarov proved to be every bit the equal of the favourite in rapid chess and then scored a convincing victory in blitz.

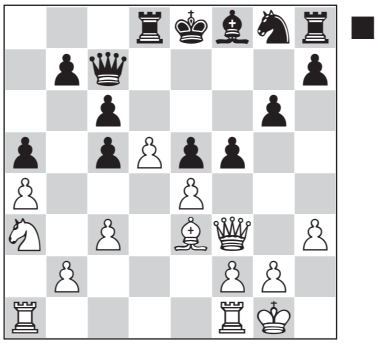
Sindarov's run in that World Cup ended in the fourth round, but by then many had already taken notice of the gifted young talent.

In the following years, Javokhir Sindarov progressed in sudden leaps. The COVID pandemic certainly contributed to this. Traditional over-the-board tournaments were held infrequently, so the accumulation of skill took place in countless online games, unnoticed by the outside world, until another breakthrough suddenly occurred.

From the beginning, the young grandmaster's play attracted attention because of its universality. Javokhir combined strong theoretical knowledge with a remarkably mature understanding of chess for his age.

But his greatest strength revealed itself in complex, dynamic positions. Excellent calculation speed, coupled with resourcefulness and fighting spirit, consistently brought him impressive results.

Game 155
□ **Javokhir Sindarov** 2609
■ **Dommaraju Gukesh** 2659
Sharjah Masters 2022



14...fxe4

Black's lag in development could prove decisive, so Gukesh's attempt to compensate with material gains is quite understandable. However, in this case White retains a clear advantage with no real compensation.

After 14...f4 15.♗d2 ♘f6 16.♕e2, Black is also worse.

15.♕g3!

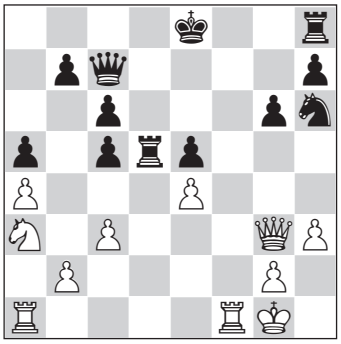
Entirely unconvincing was 15.♕xe4 cxd5 16.♕h4 ♗g7, but 15.d6!? ♗xd6 16.♕xe4 ♘f6 17.♕c4 ♕f7 18.♗g5! deserved consideration.

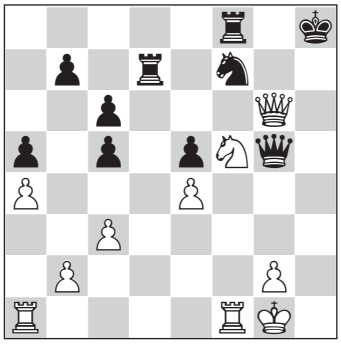
15...♖xd5

A forced capture, as 15...cxd5 16.♘b5 ♕b8 17.f3! would have left Black in a hopeless position.

16.f3! ♗h6 17.♗xh6 ♘xh6 18.fxe4

White has restored material equality while retaining a clear positional advantage.





18...♖d7 19.♘c4 ♘f7 20.h4 0-0 21.h5 ♔g7 22.♘e3 ♕d8

Material loss was inevitable. After 22...♘h6, there follows the decisive 23.♖xf8 ♔xf8 24.hxg6.

23.♘f5+ ♔h8 24.hxg6 hxg6 25.♕xg6 ♕g5

26.♘e7!

26.♕e6 was also good, but the spectacular move in the game quickly decides the issue.

26...♕xe7 27.♖f5 ♘g5 28.♖xg5 ♕g7 29.♖h5+ ♔g8 30.♕e6+ ♖ff7 31.♖f1 ♔f8 32.♖hf5 1-0

The sensational victory of the Uzbek team at the 44th Chess Olympiad was of enormous importance, both for Sindarov personally and for Uzbek chess as a whole. Javokhir played a major role in that historic success.

Game 156 Caro-Kann Defence

□	**Javokhir Sindarov**	2629
■	**Arjun Erigaisi**	2689

Chennai Olympiad 2022

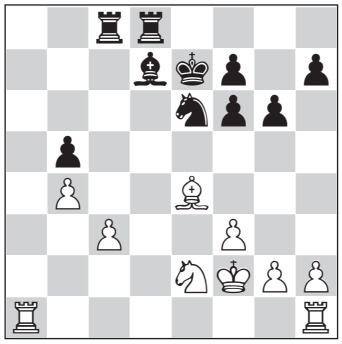
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6 5.♘xf6+ exf6 6.♗c4 ♗d6 7.♕e2+ ♕e7 8.♕xe7+ ♔xe7



A well-known position in which Black has usually had little trouble. It is instructive to see how a very young player outplayed his older and more experienced opponent.

9.♗d3 ♘a6 10.a3 b5 11.♘e2 ♘c7 12.♗f4 ♗xf4 13.♘xf4 ♘e6 14.♘e2! ♖d8 15.c3 c5 16.♗e4 ♖b8 17.dxc5 ♘xc5 18.♗c2 ♘e6 19.♖d1 ♗d7 20.f3 a5 21.b4 axb4 22.axb4 ♖a8 23.♔f2 g6 24.♗e4 ♖ac8 25.♖a1

Here Black makes the first questionable decision.

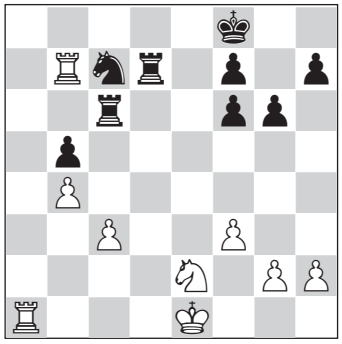


25...♗c6
It would have been better to keep the bishops.

26.♗xc6 ♖xc6 27.♖a7+ ♔f8 28.♖ha1 ♘c7 29.♖b7
Gradually, White's advantage begins to take on concrete form.

29...♖d2?!
Pseudo-activity, leading to even greater problems. 29...h5 would have been far more useful.

30.♔e1 ♖d7



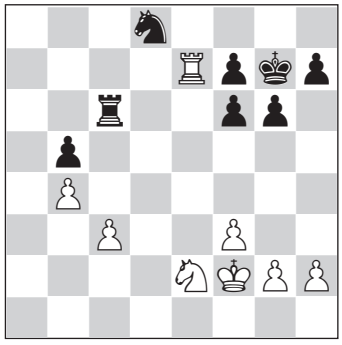
31.♖d1! ♖e7
After 31...♔e8 Black would be down a pawn: 32.♖xd7 ♔xd7 33.♘d4 ♔c8 34.♘xc6 ♔xb7 35.♘d8+ ♔c8 36.♘xf7, and White is winning in the resulting knight and pawn endgame.

32.♔f2
The white king would have been far more effective on d2.

Therefore, 32.♖d8+! ♔g7 33.♔d2 (or 32...♖e8 33.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 34.♔d2) was considerably stronger. In this case, the b5-pawn would inevitably be lost, and the outcome of the game would be decided by the passed pawns on the b- and c-files.

32...♔g7 33.♖d8 ♘e6?
33...f5 was a much better choice.

34.♖xe7 ♘xd8

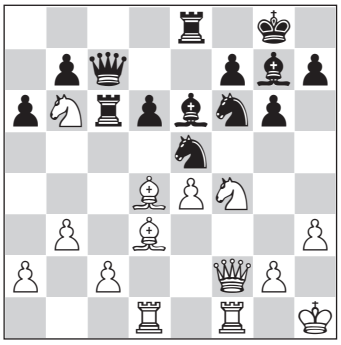


35.♘d4?
35.♖d7 ♘e6 36.♖b7 ♘c7 37.♔e3 would have captured the b5-pawn. One can hardly guess what Sindarov was thinking.

35...♖xc3 36.♖d7 ♖c8 37.♘xb5 ♖c2+ 38.♔g3 ♘c6 39.♘d6 ♘xb4 40.♘e8+
40.♖xf7+ ♔g8 41.♖xf6 ♘d5 42.♖e6 ♖xg2+ also yielded nothing.

40...♔f8 41.♘xf6 h5 42.♘h7+ ♔e8 43.♘f6+ ♔f8 44.♘e4 ♘c6 45.♘g5 ♘e7 46.♘h7+ ♔e8 47.♘f6+ ♔f8 48.♘h7+ ♔e8 49.♘f6+
Draw agreed.

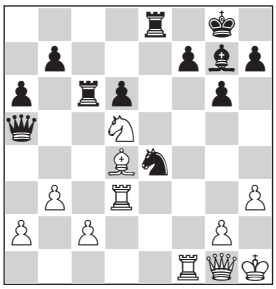
Game 157
□ **Javokhir Sindarov** 2629
■ **Samvel Ter Sahakyan** 2625
Chennai Olympiad 2022



A position of dynamic equilibrium has arisen on the board.

21.♕g1!?
An interesting prophylactic move, as 21...♘xd3 22.cxd3 ♘xe4 was threatened. 21.♘xe6 accomplishes nothing after 21...fxe6 22.♗xe5 dxe5 23.♘c4 b5.

21...♕e7?!
Black still had to continue 21...♘xd3! 22.♖xd3 (22.cxd3?! ♘xe4 23.dxe4 ♗xd4 24.♖xd4 ♕xb6 is the main idea) 22...♘xe4 23.♘bd5 ♗xd5 24.♘xd5 ♕a5.



analysis diagram

After 25.c4, White still retains sufficient compensation for the pawn, but Black has little to complain about either.

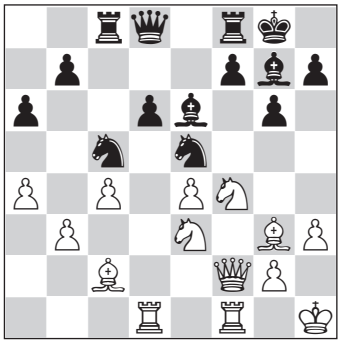
22.c4 ♘fd7 23.♘bd5 ♕h4 24.♗f2 ♕g5 25.♗e3 ♕h4 26.♗f2 ♕h6
Another path was 26...♕g5 27.♗b1.

27.♗g3
27.♗e2 would have been stronger, as it cuts off Black's counterplay with ...♘xd3.

27...♕g5?
27...g5! 28.♘e2 ♘xd3 29.♖xd3 ♘c5 30.♖e3 ♖cc8 31.♗xd6 ♗xd5 32.♗xc5 ♗xe4 would have evened out the chances.

28.♕f2 ♕d8 29.a4
Black has no counterplay, and his position is steadily worsening.

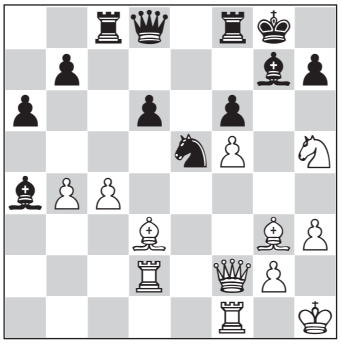
29...♖c8 30.♗c2 ♖f8 31.♘e3 ♘c5



32.♘f5!
A strike that finally gives White the upper hand.

32...gxf5 33.exf5 ♗d7 34.♘h5
34.♖xd6 was also powerful.

34...f6 35.b4 ♘cd3 36.♗xd3 ♗xa4 37.♖d2



Material equality has been restored, but White's attack continues unabated.

37...♗h6 38.♗f4 ♗xf4 39.♘xf4 ♖f7 40.c5 ♘xd3 41.♖xd3 ♗c6 42.♖xd6 ♕f8 43.♘e6 ♕h6 44.♖fd1 ♖e8 45.♔h2 ♖fe7 46.♖1d4 ♔h8 47.♖h4 ♕c1 48.♕d4 ♖f7 49.♖d8
Black resigned.

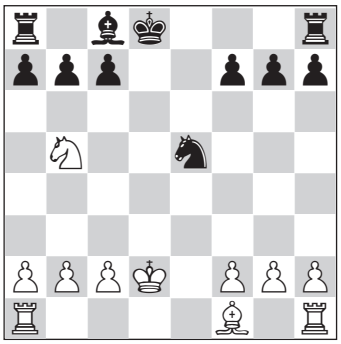
A strong performance at the Olympiad, followed shortly afterwards by success at the Abu Dhabi Open, brought Javokhir Sindarov a significant rating gain.

Most of the following year unfolded according to a similar pattern: unremarkable results in the relatively few tournaments he played, combined with constant work that remained invisible to outsiders. Only from time to time did the effects of that work become apparent.

Game 158 Petroff Defence
□ **Javokhir Sindarov** 2661
■ **Shakhriyar Mamedyarov** 2738
Tashkent 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 ♘xe4
In the pre-computer era, this move was considered a typical beginner's mistake; nowadays, it is nearly the most forced way to secure a draw.

4.♕e2 ♕e7 5.♕xe4 d6 6.d4 dxe5 7.dxe5 ♘c6 8.♘c3 ♕xe5 9.♕xe5+ ♘xe5 10.♘b5 ♗b4+ 11.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 12.♔xd2 ♔d8



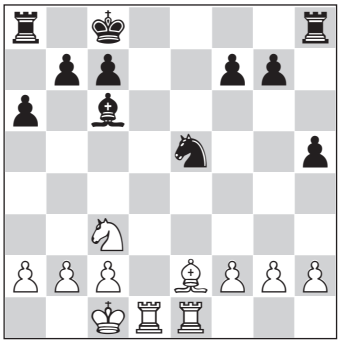
13.♖d1
13.♖e1 offered better prospects.

13...♗d7 14.♔c1 ♔c8
The source of the subsequent troubles. 14...c6 15.♘d6 ♔c7 fully levelled the position.

15.♗e2 a6 16.♘c3 ♗c6?
A significant error. 16...c6 or 16...♖e8 were clearly both better choices.

17.♖he1
The rooks' lack of coordination leaves Black in an awkward position.

17...h5?!
More tenacious was 17...g5, preventing 18.f4.



18.h4

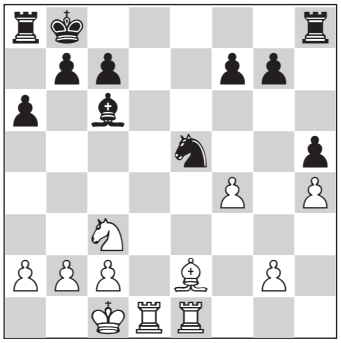
A reflex action. 18.f4! ♘g6 (18...♘g4 19.♗f3! ♘xh2 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♖e7 is bad for Black) 19.g3 would have made White's edge even greater.

18...♔b8

18...♗xg2 19.♖g1 ♗c6 20.♖xg7 ♔b8 was the better choice.

19.f4

19.♘d5! was even stronger.

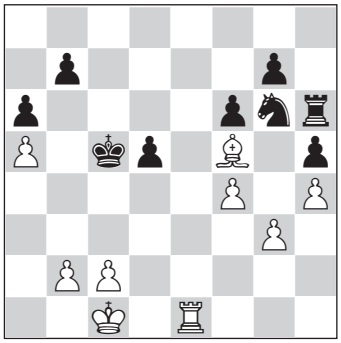


19...♘g6?

The game is now lost. The correct continuation was 19...♘g4 20.♗xg4 hxg4 21.g3 ♔a7 22.♖e7 ♖hf8.

Sindarov now converted the game with great confidence, giving his opponent no chance at all.

20.g3 ♔a7 21.♗c4 f6 22.♗f7 ♖h6 23.♗d5! ♗e8 24.♖e3 ♖h8 25.♗f3 ♖c8 26.a4 c6 27.♘e4 ♖c7 28.♘d6 ♗f7 29.♘xf7 ♖xf7 30.a5 ♔b8 31.♖de1 ♖ff8 32.♗e2 ♖d8 33.♗d3 ♖h6 34.♖e8 ♔c7 35.♗f5 ♖d5 36.♖c8+ ♔d6 37.♖d8+ ♔c5 38.♖xd5+ cxd5



39.♖e8 ♔d6 40.♖e6+ ♔c7 41.♔d2 ♔d8 42.♖d6+ ♔e8 43.♗c8 ♘e7 44.♗xb7 ♖g6 45.♗xa6 ♖xg3 46.♗b5+

Black resigned.

At the 2023 World Cup, Javokhir Sindarov managed to defeat Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, but in the fourth round he lost to Arjun Erigaisi.

The end of the year also did not bring any major victories – Javokhir was still not fully ready for them – but consistently solid performances allowed him to cross the 2700 rating mark for the first time.