

KARSTEN MÜLLER/RAYMUND STOLZE

# G CHESS with HIKARU NAKAMURA

Progress in Chess

EDITION OLMS



This the very first book to focus exclusively on Hikaru Nakamura, the greatest American chess player since the legendary Robert James Fischer. The book features a prologue penned by Lubosh Kavalek, who was none other than Bobby's insider and supporter at the "match of the century" against Boris Spassky in 1972.

That up to now there have been no books on Hikaru Nakamura is nothing less than astonishing, given the fact that he is firmly established in the United States as the legitimate successor to the eleventh world champion, the great Robert James Fischer. At the very least, this has been the case since his sensational triumph at the traditional Wijk aan Zee chess festival on 30 January 2011 in Holland, where he finished ahead of reigning world champion Viswanathan Anand.

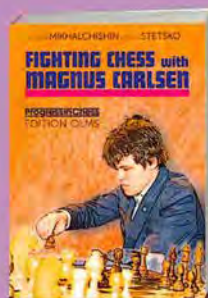
In this book, grandmaster Karsten Müller from Hamburg and chess journalist Raymond Stolze from Berlin document the 24-year-old's fascinating journey to the top of world chess. Interestingly, Hikaru was not a typical child prodigy, and at his first Junior World Championships didn't even make it onto the winners' podium. But he won a World Cup medal aged just 13 and since then he has been creating true miracles.

In ten chapters, the authors focus on the main reasons for the success of Nakamura, who, like arch-rival Magnus Carlsen, was coached for nearly a year by Garry Kasparov.

In addition to an exclusive interview, of special interest are contributions by prominent chess greats, such as three-time U.S. national champion Lubosh Kavalek. Kavalek has been following Hikaru's ascent to the summit of chess at close range. Which is why he is ideally placed to deliver a reliable verdict on this exceptional player. Many chess fans admire Hikaru Nakamura's furious attacking talent, and wish him all the best for a successful career.

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# **Progress in Chess**

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2012

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Karsten Müller  
Raymund Stolze

# FIGHTING CHESS WITH HIKARU NAKAMURA

An American Chess Career in the  
Footsteps of Bobby Fischer

Prologue by Lubosh Kavalek

Translated by Ian Adams  
and edited by Ken Neat

2012  
EDITION OLMS





## The authors:

**Karsten Müller** (born 1970), has played for Hamburg SK in the Bundesliga since 1988 and has twice taken third place in the German individual championships (1996 and 1997). A doctor of mathematics, he is an internationally recognised endgame expert, who not only writes mainly English language books on this subject but who also authors training DVDs for ChessBase and is responsible for the endgame columns in ChessBase Magazine as well as the internet site ChessCafe.com. In addition he is much appreciated as a successful coach of up-and-coming young players. For that reason in 2007 he was awarded the title of "Trainer of the Year" by the German Chess Federation.

**Raymund Stolze** (born 1945) wrote his first chess book *Umkämpfte Krone – Die Duelle der Schachweltmeister von Steinitz bis Kasparow* (*The fight for the throne – duels of chess world champions from Steinitz to Kasparov*), in the mid-1980s and it became a best-seller and went through several editions. A qualified economist, he himself was a very successful chess player. Thus, for example, in 1963 he was junior champion of East Berlin. A former editor-in-chief of the renowned Sportverlag Berlin, who developed and published a three-volume series of manuals with Alexander Koblencs, the former trainer of World Champion Mikhail Tal, since 2003 he has been responsible for the chess book section of EDITION OLMS.

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Willikonerstr. 10 · CH-8618 Oetwil a. S./Zürich, Switzerland  
E-mail: [info@edition-olms.com](mailto:info@edition-olms.com)  
Internet: [www.edition-olms.com](http://www.edition-olms.com)

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# About this book

*"To be really good in chess you must love the game."*

Robert James Fischer

**3<sup>rd</sup>** September 1972 is a truly historic date in the history of chess. For the first time there is an American chess world champion – Robert James Fischer. In the match of the century in Reykjavik in Iceland the 29-year-old never gave the Russian title defender Boris Spassky the slightest chance in his 12½–8½ victory. The challenger was even able to afford a loss in a game for which he did not appear, because his “chess technique bordered on the miraculous. He plays quite a simple game of chess, and of course he plays to win”, was the enthusiastic comment of the ex-world champion and then president of FIDE Max Euwe.

Four decades after the Icelandic saga of 1972 the same is being said increasingly often about Christopher Hikaru Nakamura. After his triumph in Wijk aan Zee, that Mecca of chess, at the Tata Steel Tournament 2011 he is well on his way to storming the approaches to the chess summit.

Who is this new American hope, who came to chess almost by chance at the age of seven, and how has this youngster now managed to be counted amongst the very best players in the world?

It comes as a great surprise that as yet there is not a single book about this legitimate successor to the legendary Robert James Fischer. So what we are presenting you with is an exciting chronicle of an extraordinary sporting career, documenting the

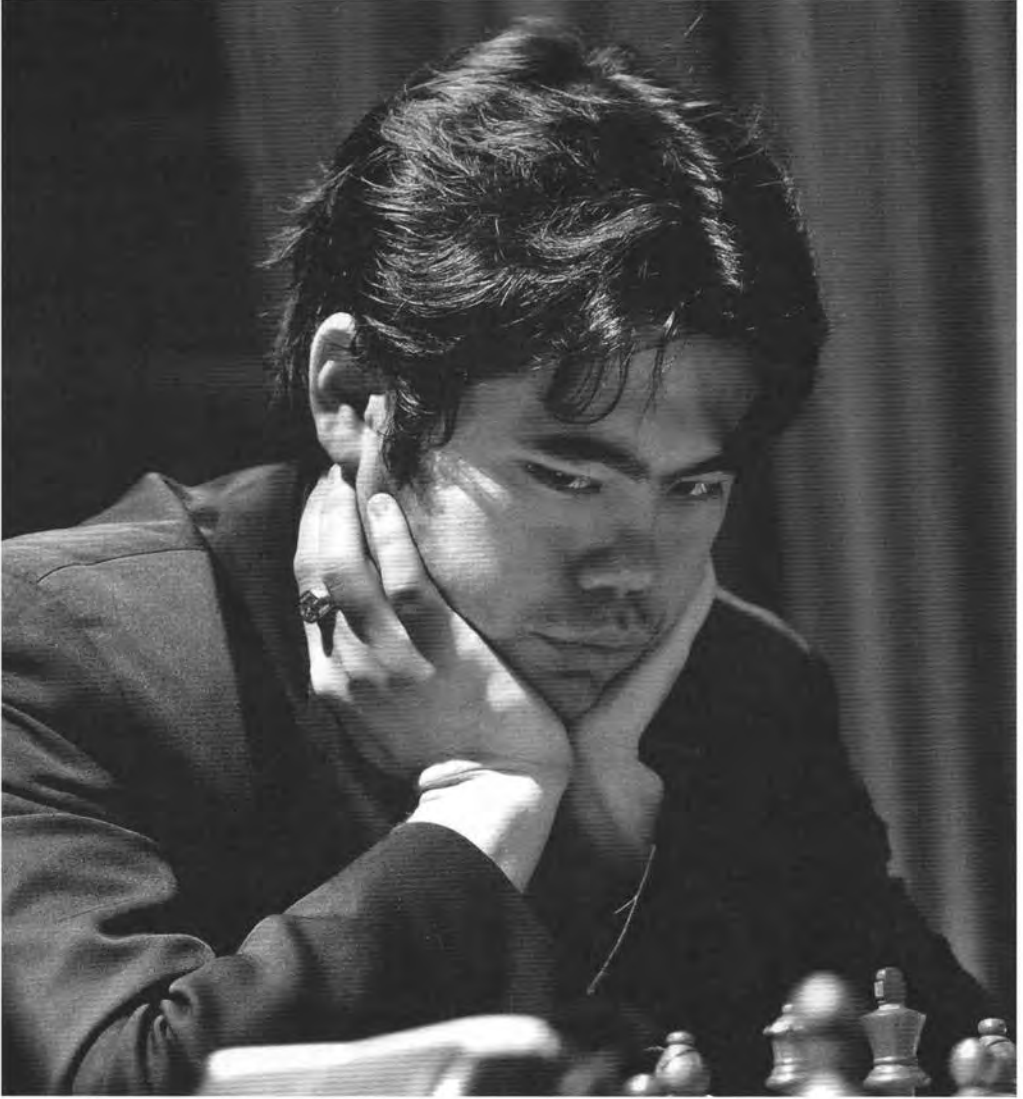
fascinating way in which the now 24-year-old has reached the very top of the chess world. The start and finish of this journey of discovery with Hikaru Nakamura, who at the age of two moved with his brother Asuka and their mother from Japan to the USA, is his magnificent victory in the traditional chess festival in the Netherlands in Wijk aan Zee in 2011. In it he sensationally stole the show from the then top four players in the FIDE world ranking list, Magnus Carlsen, Viswanathan Anand, Levon Aronian and Vladimir Kramnik.

It must be made absolutely clear, dear reader, that you should not be expecting a biography, because Hikaru Nakamura himself will certainly want to write that one day.

When in the spring of 2011 we began our research for this project, we placed our trust in the stable chess development of our “hero” – at that point, he was in any case in the world top ten for the first time. On the other hand, we could not have been predicted the totally amazing events which would follow, for example his training collaboration with Garry Kasparov, which was first reported in the autumn of the same year by the editor-in-chief of *New in Chess* Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, who published an interview by Macauley Peterson with Nakamura about the first nine months of his cooperation with the 13<sup>th</sup> world champion.<sup>1</sup>

Our own most important goal was to be as

<sup>1</sup> See *New in Chess* 7/2011, “The Spirit of Saint Louis”, pp.10-17



**At Wijk aan Zee in 2011 Hikaru Nakamura stole the show from the established world elite. He is considered the greatest American chess hope since Bobby Fischer.**



authentic as possible. However, this is easier said than done. For this reason, for example, at a very early stage we requested a prologue for this book from Lubomir Kavalek, who has been extremely well acquainted with the American chess scene since the 1970s and who has of course followed the rise of Nakamura with more than just a journalistic interest. Once you have read it, you will certainly agree that our choice of Lubosh, who was once promoted overnight from World Championship reporter in Reykjavik to the second of Bobby Fischer during the analysis of the adjourned 13th game, was an absolute piece of good fortune.<sup>2</sup> And of course we are extremely grateful to him, who like Hikaru is a three-time US champion, for his commitment and cooperation.

During our researches we discovered quite by chance that Bettina Trabert was the first German to meet Hikaru, on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1997 on Hawaii, when he was then a small nine-year-old boy taking the first steps on his career in chess. Her score sheet that we publish therefore becomes a document of inestimable value.

It was also quite clear that we were very keen to have an interview with Hikaru Nakamura for this book. But the all-important questions were: when and where? And once again chance came to our aid, since in July 2011 our much sought-after interviewee was in Dortmund for the Sparkassen Chess

Meeting. The problem of course was how to get an appointment during the tournament. And what if things were not working out for Nakamura as well as he imagined, as in fact happened? The solution was head press officer Georgios Souleidis, who not only went through our catalogue of questions during the conversation with Hikaru, but very professionally handled this dream interview. In addition, he also made contact with Kris Littlejohn, whom we have to thank for the interesting viewpoints of an extraordinary second.

It is a pleasure to mention some of the other comrades-in-arms, without whose prompt answers and suggestions our project could never have achieved the quality we were aiming for. To represent them, let us mention here the four times unofficial 'bullet' world champion Roland Schmalz and Martin Fischer, who gave us considerable help with the chapter "The gambler". The Budapest tournament organiser László Nagy helped us with some detailed facts about Nakamura's tournament results in Hungary.

Our very special thanks are due to the publisher Manfred Olms, who after the first book we wrote together, *Zaubern wie Schachweltmeister Michail Tal*, had complete confidence in this project, and we hope that we will once more prove him correct. We are however firmly convinced of this, not least because our editors, Arno Nickel and Ken Neat, are extremely thorough.

Hamburg and Hönnow/Berlin

Dr. Karsten Müller

Raymund Stolze

<sup>2</sup> For the cooperation between Lubomir Kavalek and Robert James Fischer, see in *KARL* 1/2012 the article „Eine tschechoslowakisch-amerikanische Biografie“, pp.39 and 40. [chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)



## PROLOGUE

# Hikaru's rise to the heights

BY LUBOSH KAVALEK

In the early summer of 2009 the US champion Hikaru Nakamura crossed the Atlantic and won his first important international all-play-all tournament in San Sebastián. Almost a hundred years previously, in 1911, the Cuban José Raúl Capablanca had undertaken the same journey in order to set his chess career on its real upward path in the same coastal town in the Basque country.

The similarities are amazing. Both of them were invited late on, both made a fast and furious start with five points out of six games and both scored a mere 50% in the final week. Whereas Capablanca was suffering from a high temperature, in the last three rounds Nakamura was simply unable to avoid draws. Thus Ruslan Ponomarev caught up with him, but Nakamura was able to decide the blitz chess play-off in his favour by 2-0. The 2009 Donostia<sup>1</sup> Chess Festival also went down in history as the worst tournament result for ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov. He ended up in last place.

Capablanca had been invited to the 1911 tournament despite the objections of Ossip Bernstein.<sup>2</sup> But the Cuban not only defeated him in the very first round but did so in such a brilliant manner that the game received a special prize from Baron Rothschild for the most beautiful one in the tournament. Capablanca came in first in a field consisting of the best players in the world. The only one missing was the German world champion. Ten years later he would defeat Emanuel Lasker in the World Championship match in Havana and earn for himself the much coveted world crown.

Will Hiraku Nakamura repeat this master stroke of Capablanca and become world champion in 2019 or even earlier? If he does, that would naturally be the crowning finish to an incredible story.

But in any case why should anyone consider Nakamura to be the king of the world of chess? Who is this self-confident, easy-going, upstanding young man who conveys the impression that chess is not very important for him, but who neverthe-

---

<sup>1</sup> Donostia is the Basque name for San Sebastián.

<sup>2</sup> Originally the only players invited were those who had won an international master level tournament in the previous decade or who had at least occupied fourth place on two occasions. The organisers made an exception only for the Cuban. The participants included e.g. Akiba Rubinstein, Frank Marshall, Aaron Nimzowitsch, Carl Schlechter and Siegbert Tarrasch.



less loves and lives this game which he learned when he was still a small boy?

Is he the nimble artist, the quickest chess player in the world? Is he the aggressive player we saw in his youth, who would mercilessly hunt down his opponent's king? Or is he the man with the first-rate backhand, the patient tiger with the sharp claws who beats off attacks and lies in wait for the fatal strike? Or is he the warrior who is in there for the long run with a marked will to win, who relentlessly transforms slight endgame advantages into victory? Is he a gambler or is he striving for steadiness?

Perhaps he embodies all of that and even much more...

For his great progress in his early years Hiraku can thank above all his step-father Sunil Weeramantry, a chess master from Sri Lanka, who lived with his family in Switzerland, before he moved to the States. It would be hard to overstate Sunil's role.

After I left my native country (Czechoslovakia) in August 1968, I was invited by Alois Nagler, the president of the Swiss Chess Federation, to take charge of the Swiss national team at the Chess Olympiad in Lugano. I did this job for the first week before the task was taken on by the legendary Estonian grandmaster Paul Keres. After the end of the Olympiad I was asked to look after some of the best young Swiss players. Sunil was also on that list, but we never met. His family lived in Geneva, where his father Lucien worked in the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), a human rights organisation. Sunil later became one of the best school chess trainers in the USA. His playing style is reflected in the motto: "Never retreat!" He

loved to storm inexorably forward and to sweep his opponents off the board with rousing attacks. It is no wonder that the young Hikaru appears to have inherited this aggressive style of Sunil's.

Nakamura improved quickly: in 1999 at the junior world championships for under-12s he was one of the players with the highest Elo rating and at the age of ten he had already earned the title of USCF Master. Shortly after turning twelve he defeated Oladapo Adu, a Nigerian international master who lives in the USA, in efficient and elegant style. In a sharp Najdorf Sicilian Hikaru broke through with a breath-taking knight and queen sacrifice. It was about this time too that the phase began in which he would gain 200 Elo points within the subsequent two years...

## GAME 1

**H. Nakamura – O. Adu**

Eastern Open, Washington, D.C. 1999  
*Sicilian Defence [B82]*

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e6  
5.♘c3 a6 6.f4 ♘c6 7.♙e3 ♘f6 8.♞f3 ♞c7  
9.0-0-0 ♙d7 10.g4!?**

Hiraku attacks immediately. Garry Kasparov also suggested the preparatory 10.♞g1.

**10...♘xd4 11.♙xd4 ♙c6**

Black takes fright at the idea of 11...e5!? 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.♞g3 ♙d6 14.♙e3 ♙c6, which is unclear according to Kasparov.

**12.♙xf6!?**

Hikaru is planning to work up pressure against the e6-pawn. White's game is developing well.

**12...gxf6 13.f5 ♙e7**



If 13...♖e7? 14.♙c4 b5 15.♙d5!, then Black either loses after 15...exd5 16.exd5 or comes under intense pressure after 15...♙xd5 16.exd5 e5 17.♘e4.

#### 14.♙c4!

This puts the bishop on the correct diagonal.

#### 14...b5 15.♙b3 b4 16.♘e2 e5 17.♘g3

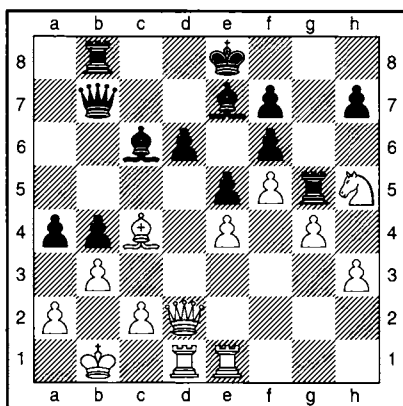
Preventing any counterplay for Black on the kingside.

#### 17...a5 18.♖b1 a4 19.♙c4 ♖c8 20.b3 ♖b7 21.♖e2 ♖b8 22.♗he1 ♗g8 23.h3 ♖d7 24.♖d2 ♗g5

This prevents 25.♖h6.

#### 25.♘h5 ♖b7?!

Black has problems in any case, but this queen move allows a pretty combination.



#### 26.♘xf6+!

This knight sacrifice rips the black position apart completely. Suddenly his king becomes open to attack.

#### 26...♙xf6 27.♖xd6 ♙e7

After 27...♙g7 28.h4 ♖xg4 29.f6 ♙h8 White has at his disposal the brilliant stroke of genius 30.♙a6!! – the black queen is overloaded and can no longer

protect e7, c6 and b8 simultaneously.

#### 28.♖xe5 f6

After 28...♙f8 29.h4 ♖xg4 30.♗g1 ♖xg1 31.♖xg1 ♙xh4 32.♖g7+ ♙e7 33.♖d1! White wins, for example: 33...♙e8 34.♖e5+ ♙f8 35.♖d6+ ♖e7 36.♖h6+ ♙g8 37.♗g1+, and he will go on to deliver mate.

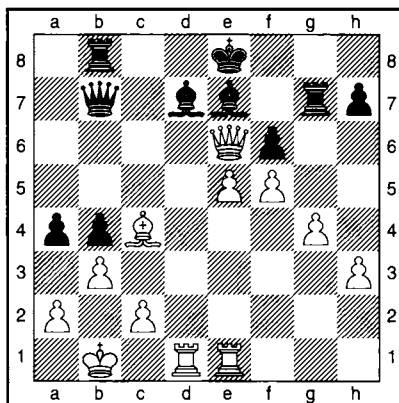
#### 29.♖e6 ♗g7

Prevents 30.♖f7 mate.

#### 30.e5!

An obvious pawn breakthrough, but White also had to see the pretty queen sacrifice which was linked to it.

#### 30...♙d7



#### 31.♖xf6!! ♙xf6

Willy-nilly Black must accept this sacrifice. The passive 31...♙f8 leads to a nice mate: 32.e6 ♙c6 33.♖f7+! ♖xf7 34.exf7#.

#### 32.exf6+ ♙f8 33.fxg7+ ♙xg7 34.♖e7+ ♙f6

If Black hides in the corner with 34...♙h8, then he has no counterplay and after 35.♖exd7 ♖c6 36.♖7d6 ♖c7 37.f6 he must look on helplessly as White decisively advances his kingside pawns.

#### 35.♖exd7



Of course White must avoid 35.♖dxd7?? ♖h1+ 36.♜b2 a3 mate.

**35...♜e4?!**

This hastens the end, but other queen moves do nothing to save Black in the long term, for example: 35...♜f3 36.h4 ♜c3 37.♜7d3 ♜e5 38.g5+ ♜g7 39.♜d7+ ♜f8 40.f6, and White has woven a mating net.

**36.g5+! ♜xg5**

Black loses his queen after 36...♜xf5 37.♜d3 or 36...♜e5 37.♜e7+.

**37.♜g1+**

White wins the queen after both 37...♜f6 38.♜f7+ ♜e5 39.♜e7+ and 37...♜f4 38.♜g4+.

**Black resigned.**

In March 2001 the 13-year-old Hikaru played on the junior board for the USA in their summit encounter with China. The script for the 21-19 victory for China was provided more than 2500 years ago by the philosopher Sun Tzu: “The opportunity to defeat our opponent is provided by the opponent himself.”<sup>3</sup> The US team threw Hikaru to the lions, in the form of the far more experienced and four years older Ni Hua. The Chinese player profited above all from the age difference and was the one to take the most points from the US team. He defeated Hikaru three times and only conceded one draw.

The match was staged on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the elegant Harbor Club with its splendid view over the skyline of Seattle, which surprisingly was still completely intact after a major earthquake on 28th February. This was the first time I had seen

Hikaru in action. After I had seen how he was battling unsuccessfully in a tricky variation of the English Attack in the Scheveningen System of the Sicilian, I wondered why a 13-year-old boy was following such a long and complicated book variation.

“Has he a trainer?” I asked his step-father. “No, he works on his own,” replied Sunil. “He just has the computer.” Later too Hikaru Nakamura worked more or less alone at perfecting his chess, because he found it difficult to find anyone whom he could trust completely.

The variation was obviously still too complicated for Hikaru. Ni Hua steered an almost error-free course through various swamps.

## GAME 2

**Ni Hua – H. Nakamura**

Match USA – China, Seattle 2001

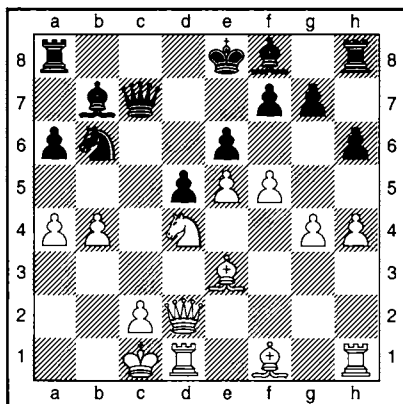
*Sicilian Defence [B80]*

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6  
5.♟c3 a6 6.♜e3 e6 7.f3 b5 8.g4 h6  
9.♜d2 ♜b7 10.0-0-0 ♟bd7 11.h4 b4  
12.♟a4 ♜a5 13.b3 ♟c5 14.a3 ♟xa4  
15.axb4 ♜c7 16.bxa4 d5 17.e5 ♟d7  
18.f4 ♟b6 19.f5!?

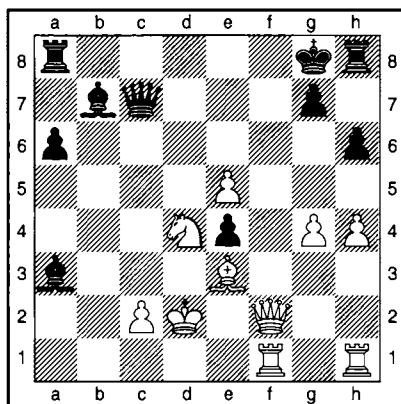
(see next diagram)

This is Alexander Grischuk's courageous attempt to open ways through to the black king at any price. The alternatives 19.a5 or 19.♜h3 seem to be less dangerous for Black.

<sup>3</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Penguin Classics, 2008 and other editions.



## 26. ♖xe4 dxe4



## 19... ♖xa4

In 2000 in the junior world under-14 championship in Spain, Nakamura was successful with 19... ♖c4, but his Icelandic opponent Dagur Arngrimsson did not reply 20. ♖e1!, which theory considers to be the best, but played 20. ♖xc4. The game continued 20... dxc4 21. ♖hf1 c3 22. ♖f2 ♖xb4 23. fxe6 0–0–0 24. e7 ♖xe7 25. ♖xf7 ♖d5 26. ♖f5+ ♖b8 27. ♖b3 ♖b7 28. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 29. ♖g6 ♖hf8 30. ♖xa6 ♖xf1+ 31. ♖xf1 ♖f8, and White resigned.

**20. fxe6 ♖c3 21. exf7+ ♖xf7 22. ♖d3 ♖xb4 23. ♖f2+**

The usual move is 23. ♖df1+, after which the black king can try to survive in the middle after 23... ♖e8, for example 24. ♖g6+ ♖d8 intending 25. ♖e6+ ♖d7 26. ♖xc7 ♖a3 mate.

**23... ♖g8 24. ♖df1 ♖a3+ 25. ♖d2 ♖e4+**

In the game Grischuk–Ibragimov, Batumi 1999, Black played 25... ♖b4, and after 26. ♖f5 ♖e4+ 27. ♖d1 ♖f8 28. ♖e6+ ♖h7 29. g5! White had a powerful attack, which he turned into a win: 29... ♖hg8 30. gxh6 g6 31. h5 ♖c8 32. hxg6+ ♖xg6 33. ♖xg6+ ♖xg6 34. ♖fg1+ ♖h7 35. ♖g7+, and Black resigned.

## 27. g5!?

An idea of Alexei Shirov. The plan is either to open the kingside with 28. gxh6 or to lock in the black king as well as his rook by means of 28. g6. It is an attempt to improve on the game Anand–Gelfand, Shenyang 2000, in which a draw was agreed after 27. ♖f5 ♖b4+ 28. ♖d1 ♖c4 29. ♖e6 (29. e6? is met by 29... ♖f8!) 29... ♖d5+ 30. ♖e2 ♖c4+ 31. ♖d1 ♖d5+ 32. ♖e2 ♖c4+.

## 27... ♖c8!?

An unfortunate novelty at that time. In the game Shirov–Anand, Sydney 2000, Black defended as follows: 27... ♖d5! 28. gxh6 ♖b2. But now White did not try the dangerous-looking 29. ♖d1! ♖a5 30. ♖f4! ♖xh6 31. ♖f5, since Black still has available a brilliant but narrow route to a draw: 31... ♖e6! 32. ♖xg7! ♖g6 33. ♖fg1 ♖d8! 34. ♖xg6 ♖c4+ 35. ♖d6 ♖xd6+ 36. exd6 ♖a1+ 37. ♖c1 ♖xc1 38. ♖xc1 ♖d4+ 39. ♖e1 ♖c3+, and White must allow a draw by 40. ♖d2 ♖g3+ 41. ♖f2 ♖c3+ 42. ♖d2 (but not 42. ♖d1 on account of 42... e3) 42... ♖g3+, especially since 40. ♖d1? fails to 40... e3! 41. ♖h2 ♖d4+



42.♖e1 ♜f4 with a win for Black.

This rapid game was played during the Summer Olympic Games – chess was then a demonstration sport – and ended in a draw as follows: 29.♖b1 ♙c3+ 30.♙c1 ♙xd4 31.♙xd4 e3 32.♜e3 ♙xh1 33.♖b6 ♖c8 34.♖b3+ ♜c4 35.hxg7 ♜xh4 36.♖b8 ♜xb3 37.♜xc8+ ♙xg7 38.cxb3 ♜xd4 39.♜c7+.

### 28.♜f5 ♜c3+

After the tricky 28...♜c4 White must not go in for 29.gxh6 ♜d8 or 29.e6 ♜f8. His best try consists of shutting the rook in by means of 29.g6!, for example 29...♜d8 30.♜f7+ ♜xf7 31.♜xf7, and White has, as it were, an extra rook in play; or 29...♜f8 30.♜e6+ ♜xe6 31.♜xf8+ ♙xf8 32.♙xe6+ ♙e7 33.♙xg7 with a big advantage.

If Black replies to 29.g6! with 29...♙d5, then 30.♜d7 does the job, for example: 30...♜c3+ 31.♙d1 ♜a1+ 32.♙e2 ♙c4+ 33.♙f2 ♜f8+ 34.♙g3, and now neither 34...♜c3 35.♜xf8+ ♙xf8 36.♙f4 ♜b4 37.♙c6 ♜a3 38.♜a1 ♜xa1 39.♙e7+ ♙xe7 40.♜c8+ ♙f8 41.♜xc4 mate nor 34...♜xf1 35.♜c8+ ♙f8 36.♜xc4+ is of any help.

29.♙d1 ♙d5 30.e6! ♜a1+ 31.♙e2 ♙c4+ 32.♙f2 ♜xf1+ 33.♜xf1 ♜f8 34.g6!

Black will now find it very difficult to free his king and his rook on h8. Of course, 34.♜xf8+ was also playable.

34...♜xf5+ 35.♙xf5 ♙xf1

Taking the exchange loses, but White should also win after 35...♙xe6 36.♙g3 ♙f8! 37.♙d4 ♙xf5 38.♜xf5+ ♙e8 39.♜f7!.

36.♙xf1 ♙f8 37.♙d4 ♜g8 38.c4 ♙e8 39.♙e2 ♜f8 40.♙xg7+ ♙e7 41.♙e3 ♜d8 42.♙xe4 a5

The little combination 42...♜xd4+ 43.♙xd4 ♙b2+ 44.♙d5 ♙xg7 does not work, because the black king-bishop team will be overrun by the three white pawns after 45.c5 a5 46.c6, e.g. 46...♙d8 47.♙c5 a4 48.♙b6 ♙e5 49.♙b7 ♙e7 50.c7 ♙xc7 51.g7 and wins.

43.c5 a4 44.♙e5 ♜g8 45.♙f5+ ♙d8 46.g7

Black can no longer stop the white king from invading.

**Black resigned.**

Although he lost this game, Nakamura demonstrated a positive side to his character: he appears to be fearless. He plunged head over heels into incalculable complications and experimented with “all or nothing openings”, as though he was wanting to tell us that in chess perhaps really everything is playable.

Grandmaster Nick De Firmian has played the Modern Benoni all his life, but Nakamura led him into the wild jungle of a variation which had first appeared in the early 1960s and only popped up again many decades later.

## GAME 3

**H. Nakamura – N. De Firmian**

Imre König Memorial Tournament,  
San Francisco 2002

*Modern Benoni Defence [A66]*

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♙c3 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.f4 ♙g7 8.e5

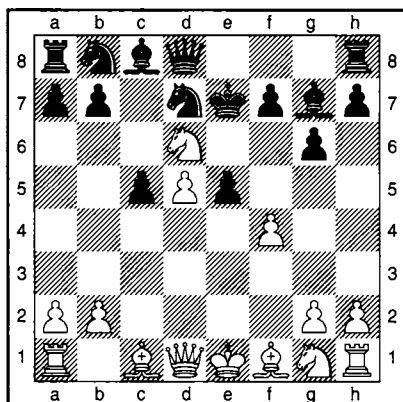
The very sharp Mikenas Variation in the Benoni, in which White immediately tries to exploit his advantage in space.



### 8...♖fd7 9.♗e4!?

This forces the black king out of his house. However, whether this is worth a pawn is questionable. Vlasdas Mikenas played 9.♗b5 with the same idea.

### 9...dxe5 10.♗d6+ ♔e7



10...♔f8 is worse, because it hinders the rook, for example: 11.♗f3 exf4 12.♗xf4 ♗f6 13.♗c4 ♖e7+ 14.♗e5 ♗g4 15.♖b3 ♗fd7 16.0-0 [1-0], Möhring–Jüttler, Correspondence, DDR 1962.

### 11.♗xc8+!

Almost 50 years ago, when the variation became popular, I mishandled it in the worst possible way against Jindrich Trapl in the Czechoslovakian Championship in Prague in 1963: 11.fxe5? ♗xe5 12.♗xc8+ ♖xc8 13.d6+ ♔f8 14.♗f3 ♖e6 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗e2 ♔g7 17.0-0 ♗c6 18.♗g4 ♖xd6, and Black is clearly better. I was lucky, however, since 19.♖b3 was answered by 19...♖c7? (19...♖hf8 20.♖xb7 ♖ab8 is the correct way) 20.♖xf7+! ♖xf7 21.♗h6+ ♔xh6 (after 21...♔g8 the move 22.♗e6 is decisive) 22.♖xf7, and I won in 39 moves.

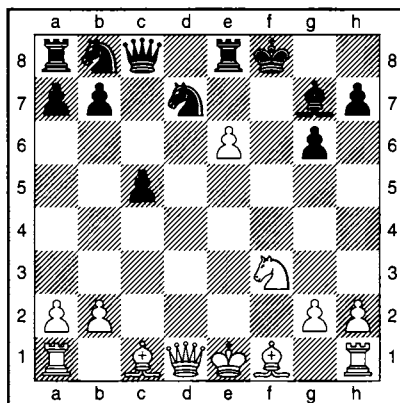
### 11...♖xc8 12.♗f3 ♖e8

John Nunn proposes 12...e4.

### 13.fxe5 ♗f8?!

Playing with fire. For some years now 13...♗xe5! 14.♗b5 ♗bd7 15.♗xe5 ♗f8 16.0-0 ♖xe5 17.♗f4 c4! 18.♖d4 ♖f5 has been considered equal, but De Firmian wants more.

### 14.e6! fxe6 15.dxe6!



Anatoly Vaisser's idea opens the position and increases the scope of the light-squared bishop.

### 15...♖xe6+ 16.♗e2 ♖e8

De Firmian decides to sacrifice the exchange, instead of sprinting into the corner with his king. After 16...♔g8 17.0-0 White has a strong initiative, for example: 17...c4 18.♗g5 (18.♖d5 ♗b6) 18...♖e5 19.♗g4 ♖c5+ 20.♔h1 ♗f8 21.♗f7 ♖e8 (but not 21...♖e7 on account of 22.♖d8!) 22.♗h6+ ♔h8 23.♖f3 ♖e7 (23...♗c6 24.♖f7!; 23...♖e7 24.♗g5!) 24.♖xf8+!! ♗xf8 25.♖xf8+ ♔g7 26.♖g8+ ♔f6 27.♗d2 with an extremely dangerous attack.

After 17...♗b6 18.♗g5 ♖e7 19.♗g4 ♗d4+ 20.♔h1 ♖e8 21.♖b3+ c4 22.♖h3 too, Suat Atalik and Alexei Yermolinsky prefer White, for example: 22...h5 23.♗e6+ ♔h8



(23...♔g7 24.♙f7!) 24.♙e3 ♘xb2 25.♖ab1  
♙g7 26.♙xb6 axb6 27.♙f7 ♖d7 (27...♖c6  
28.♖xb6! ♖xb6 29.♖c8+ winning) 28.♖bd1  
♖xh3 29.♖d8+ and then mate.

**17.0-0 ♖xe2 18.♗d4+ ♔g8 19.♗xe2 ♖c6  
20.♙d2**

20.♖b3+! ♔h8 21.♖xb7 ♖b8 22.♖xc6  
♖xe2 23.♙f4 would have been more  
accurate, when White will have no prob-  
lems winning.

**20...♗b6 21.♙c3 ♖d8 22.♖e1 ♗e5**

It was better to close the long diagonal  
with 22...♗d4!?

**23.♖h4 ♗d5**

This runs into a pin, but 23...♗a4 24.♖ad1!  
is even worse.

**24.♖ad1 ♖d7 25.♙xe5 ♖xe5 26.♗c3!  
♗f6**

After 26...♖e3+ 27.♔h1 ♙xc3 28.bxc3  
Black cannot play 28...♖xc3 because  
White wins as follows: 29.♖g4 ♗f6  
30.♖e6+ ♖f7 31.♖d7!.

**27.♖xd7 ♗xd7 28.♖d8+ ♗f8 29.♗d5  
♖d4+ 30.♔h1 h5 31.♗f6+ ♔h8?**

After 31...♙xf6 32.♖xf6 ♖xf6 33.♖xf6  
♔g7 34.♖d6 the rook will soon clear up the  
queenside pawns. However, White now  
even picks up a piece.

**32.♗d7! ♖c4 33.♖xf8+ ♔h7 34.h4 ♙xf8  
35.♗xf8+ ♔g8 36.♗d7+ ♔h7 37.♖e7+  
Black resigned.**

Too much was made of the fact that  
Hikaru beat Bobby Fischer's record as the  
youngest US grandmaster in history.  
Nakamura surpassed him by three months  
at the age of 15 in 2003. Bobby was also  
15 when he was awarded the title, but his  
fifth place at the Interzonal Tournament in  
Portoroz meant at the same time his

qualification for the Candidates Tourna-  
ment of 1959 and catapulted him amongst  
the nine best chess players in the world.  
Nobody has ever come even close to this  
leap in performance. Nakamura did not  
manage the leap into the top 10 of the  
FIDE world ranking list until January 2011  
at the age of 23.

Towards the end of 2004 things changed  
in Nakamura's life. That was the year in  
which he not only cleared the Elo hurdle of  
2600 points for the first time, but some-  
thing else happened which this time came  
to the attention of the wider public.

On my arrival from Europe at the John F.  
Kennedy Airport in the middle of Decem-  
ber 2004 the customs official, after notic-  
ing that I earned my living from chess, said  
to me: "The kid won it!" Previously the only  
person they talked about like that was  
Bobby Fischer. But this time it was about  
Hikaru Nakamura, the new champion of  
the USA. At 16 he was the youngest to win  
the title since Fischer had done so at 14.

Nevertheless, there are two further  
records held by Fischer which no one has  
broken till this day: Bobby contested eight  
US Championships and won all of them,  
and in 1963 he even triumphed with the  
perfect score of 11-0 ahead of such lumi-  
naries of American chess as Reshevsky,  
Evans, the Byrne brothers, Benkö and  
Bisguier.

On 9th December 2004 Nakamura  
turned 17 and started a match in Cuen-  
navaca, Mexico, against the 14-year-old  
Ukrainian child prodigy Sergey Karjakin.  
This time the age difference was in his  
favour and Nakamura won convincingly by  
4½-1½. In their first encounter – a Scotch  
Game – Hikaru demonstrated subtle  
positional ideas such as timely exchanges,



central outposts and a blockade on the weak squares.

## GAME 4

**H. Nakamura – S. Karjakin**

Challenge match, 1<sup>st</sup> game,  
Cuernavaca, Mexico 2004

*Scotch Game [C47]*

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗xd4  
♗f6 5.♗c3 ♖b4 6.♗xc6 bxc6 7.♖d3 d5  
8.exd5 0-0 9.0-0 cxd5 10.♖g5 c6  
11.♗a4!?

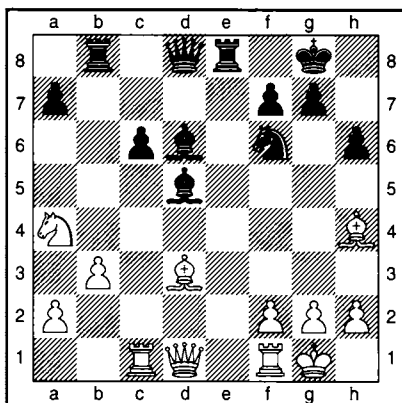
In conjunction with c2-c4 this gives White the more pleasant game. Although the advantage is not great, Black does not have an easy game.

11...h6 12.♖h4 ♗e8 13.c4 ♖d6 14.♖c1!?

A useful move, waiting to see what Black is intending to do with the c8-bishop.

14...♖b8 15.b3 ♖e6 16.cxd5 ♖xd5

After 16...cxd5 17.♗c5 ♖b4 18.♖g3 White fights for the dark squares, which secures him a slight initiative.



17.♖c4!

The powerful centralised black bishop on d5 must be exchanged.

17...♖f4 18.♖c3 ♖e5 19.♖c2 ♗d6  
20.♖xf6 ♖xf6 21.♖xd5 cxd5

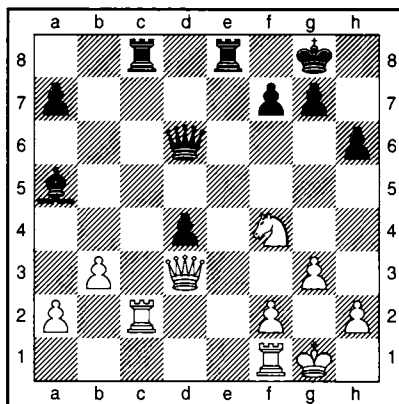
The situation is approximately level. White can blockade the d-pawn, but it is not easy to make any progress on the queenside.

22.♗c5 ♖e5 23.g3 ♖bc8 24.♗d3 ♖c3

The bishop controls a lot of important squares and neutralises the blockade by the knight.

25.♗f4 d4 26.♗d3 ♖a5?!

Black slowly concedes space. After 26...♖c5 27.♗e2 ♗f6 28.♖fc1 ♖ec8 White cannot penetrate the black position.



27.♖c4! ♖xc4 28.bxc4!

This exchange creates not only a dangerous passed pawn but also an outpost square on d5. The white pieces dominate the light squares, whereas the black d4-pawn merely resembles a useless piece of wood.

28...♗e5 29.♖b1 ♖c3

It was well worth considering the more active 29...♗e4 with the subsequent exchange of queens, which it is hard for White to avoid.



**30.♖b7 ♖e7 31.♖b5**

Nakamura begins pushing back the black forces.

**31...♗d6 32.♘d5 ♖e6 33.♖b7!**

White not only attacks the a7-pawn, but also casts an eye on f7. After he has forced Black into passivity, he will bring into the battle his main trump – the c-pawn. On the other hand, 33.♘xc3 dxc3 34.♗xc3 ♗d1+ 35.♔g2 ♖e1 is wrong, as Black obtains play against the white king.

**33...♖e8**

After 33...a6 34.♗f5 ♗f8 35.c5! the c-pawn starts its triumphal march, for example: 35...♗e8 36.c6.

**34.♗f3 ♖f8 35.♖xa7 ♖b4 36.♗f5 ♖c5 37.♖c7 ♖a3 38.c5 ♖xc5 39.♖xc5 g6 40.♘f6+ ♔g7 41.♘e4**

**Black resigned.**

Garry Kasparov's retirement from professional chess in March 2005 in Linares came as a shock to many players. When he heard about it, Hikaru Nakamura said that chess was now dead. But the 16-year-old US champion must have quickly changed his mind. In April at the traditional Foxwoods Open, a nine-round Swiss tournament in the Casino Eldorado in Connecticut, his pieces positively came to life and he won his first five games.

In round four Nakamura defeated the top-rated grandmaster Ilya Smirin from Israel in a dramatic game. Hikaru required only 22 moves to decide in his favour a theoretical duel in one of the sharpest variations of the Austrian Attack against the Pirc Defence. This victory over Smirin, one of the best prepared of grandmasters, must have enormously boosted Hikaru's

confidence when it came to playing sharp opening lines against strong opponents.

## GAME 5

**H. Nakamura – I. Smirin**

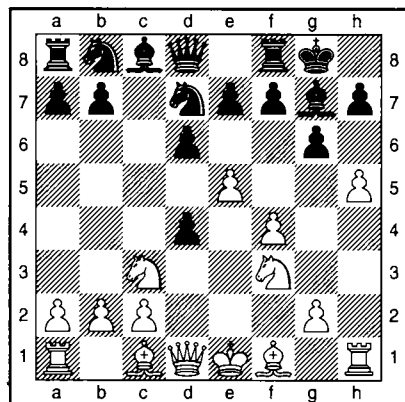
Foxwoods Open 2005

*Pirc Defence [B09]*

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.e5 ♘fd7 7.h4!**

An idea of the legendary David Bronstein, who explained it in one word: "Attack!" White does not worry about his centre being destroyed, as long as he can open the h-file for his major pieces.

**7...c5 8.h5! cxd4**

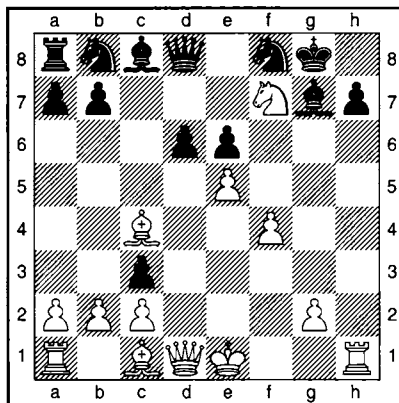


**9.hxg6!?**

Some theoreticians consider this knight sacrifice to be a mistake, but Nakamura has not been put off by that. In the stem game at the Chess Olympiad in Munich 1958 against the Argentinian Florentino Palmiotto, Bronstein now played 9.♗xd4 in the hope of being able to swing over to the h-file with his queen after 9...dxe5



10. ♖f2. The safest move here is 10...e4.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise the white attack can rapidly break through, as for example in the game Stein–Liberzon, Yerevan 1965: 10...e6 11.hxg6 fxg6 12. ♖g3 exf4 13. ♙xf4 ♖a5 14. ♙d2 ♜f6 15. ♙c4 ♜c6 16. 0-0-0 ♜c5 17. ♖h4 ♜h5 18. ♜e4 ♖b6 19. c3 ♜a5 20. ♙e2 h6 21. g4 ♜f4 22. ♙xf4 ♖xf4 23. ♖d8+ ♖f8 24. ♜f6+ ♙h8 25. ♖xh6+!, and Black resigned in view of 25... ♙xh6+ 26. ♖xh6+ ♙g7 27. ♖h7+ ♙xf6 28. ♖xf8 mate.



### 9...dxc3 10.gxf7+ ♖xf7 11. ♙c4!

Against Stuart Conquest in Reykjavik 1996 Bronstein chose the less precise 11. ♜g5? and had to lay down his arms after 11...cxb2 12. ♙xb2 ♖a5+ 13. c3 ♜xe5! 14. ♖b3 ♖c5 15. ♙e2 ♖e3 16. ♙c1 ♖g3+ 17. ♙d1 ♙g4 18. ♖e1 ♖d3+ 19. ♙d2 ♜c4. 11... ♜f8

The alternative 11...e6 appears better, since now both 12. ♙xe6 and 12. ♜g5 can be met with 12... ♜xe5!

### 12. ♜g5!

Hikaru goes for broke. White can already force a draw here with 12. ♙xf7+, as was demonstrated in the game Nadyrhanov–Tseshkovsky, Krasnodar 1999: 12... ♙xf7 13. ♜g5+ ♙g8 (13... ♙e8 14. ♖h5+ ♙d7 14. ♖f7! is worse for Black) 14. ♖h5 h6 15. ♖f7+ ♙h8 16. ♖b3 ♖a5 17. ♜f7+ ♙h7 18. ♜g5+ ♙h8 19. ♜f7+ ♙h7 20. ♜g5+, and White gives perpetual check.

### 12...e6 13. ♜xf7

### 13...cxb2?!

An unsuccessful attempt to improve on the main defence 13... ♙xf7 14. ♖h5+ ♙g8 15. ♙d3. Now 15... ♜bd7? is met by the decisive 16. ♙xh7+, and after 16... ♜xh7 17. ♖xh7+ ♙f8 18. ♖h8+! ♙xh8 19. ♖xh8+ ♙e7 20. exd6+ White wins.

Black must play 15...h6!? – intending 16. ♖h3 dxe5 17. ♖g3 e4 18. f5 ♖c7!. With his attack on the rook Black gains an important tempo for the defence, for example 19. ♖h4 exd3 20. ♙xh6 ♖e5+, and Black wins.

So what had Nakamura probably planned against 15...h6? I would guess 16. ♖h4!?, since after 16...dxe5 17. ♖g4 it is difficult for Black to organise his defence. Thus, for example, White remains in the driving seat after both 17... ♜c6 and 17... ♖c7 18. fxe5, and 17...e4 is met by 18. f5! exf5 (after 18...exd3 19. ♖xg7+ ♙xg7 20. ♙xh6+ White wins) 19. ♖xg7+! ♙xg7 20. ♙xh6+

<sup>4</sup> Instead of 10...e4 Palmiotto played 10...exf4, which cannot be recommended: 11.hxg6 hxg6 12. ♙xf4 ♜f6 13. ♖h4 ♖a5 14. ♜g5 ♙g4 15. ♙d3 ♜bd7 16. 0-0 ♙h5 17. ♖ae1 e5 18. ♙d2 ♖c5+ 19. ♙e3 ♖c6 20. ♙b5 ♖c7 21. ♙e2 ♙xe2 22. ♖xe2 ♖fc8 23. ♜ce4 ♙f8 24. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 25. ♖xf6 ♙xf6 26. ♜h7+ ♙e7 27. ♖xf6+ ♙e8 28. ♙d2 a5 29. ♖g7, and Black resigned.

♔g8 21.0-0-0! (this is the point!) 21...♙e6 (if 21...exd3 22.♖xd3, and Black can resign) 22.♙c4! cxb2+ 23.♔b1 ♖f6 (after 23...♖xd1+ comes 24.♖xd1 ♙xc4 25.♖d4 winning because of the threat of 26.♖g7 mate) 24.♙xe6+ ♗xe6 25.♖e8+ ♗f8 (or 25...♔h7 26.♖h1!) 26.♙xf8 ♖f7 27.♖c8 ♗d7 28.♖xa8 ♗xf8 29.♖xa7, and White should win..

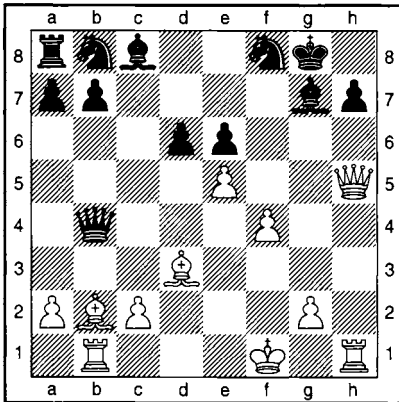
#### 14.♙xb2 ♖a5+

Smirin tries to prevent queenside castling, since after 14...♙xf7 15.♖h5+ ♔g8 White has 16.0-0-0 with decisive pressure.

#### 15.♙f1 ♙xf7 16.♖h5+ ♔g8

White wins after both 16...♙e7 17.exd6+ and also 16...♗g6 17.f5!.

#### 17.♙d3 ♖b4 18.♖b1!



#### 18...♙d7

Taking the pawn with 18...♖xf4+ loses, because it opens up lines against the black king, for example: 19.♙e2 h6 20.♖bf1 ♖g5 21.♖f7+ ♔h8 22.♙c1 ♖xe5+ 23.♙d1, and all five white pieces are taking aim at the black king, meaning that its fate is sealed.

#### 19.c4

Very strong play! White protects the ♖b1,

frees the ♙b2 and at the same time cuts the black queen off from the kingside.

#### 19...♖d2

19...h6 is met by 20.♖h3 and then 21.♖g3, after which White's attack can no longer be stopped and after 19...♗c6 he wins with 20.♖h3 ♗e7 21.exd6 ♙xb2 22.♙xh7+ ♔g7 23.♖g3+.

#### 20.♙xh7+ ♗xh7 21.♖xh7+ ♙f8 22.♖h4

There is nothing more that can be done against 23.♖g4.

**Black resigned.**

In 2006 Hiraku Nakamura played for the first time in the US Olympiad team. His incredible finish with three out of three secured for his team the bronze medals in Turin behind Armenia and China.

In his victory over the former European champion Bartłomiej Macieja from Poland his choice was a sharp pawn sacrifice in the Classical Variation of the French Defence, introduced into tournament praxis in the previous year by the Russian wizard Alexander Morozevich. The 18-year-old former US champion cranked up the pressure with every move, until it became unbearable for the Polish player. A well-timed counter-attack was becoming Nakamura's trademark.

## GAME 6

**B. Macieja – H. Nakamura**

Chess Olympiad, Turin 2006

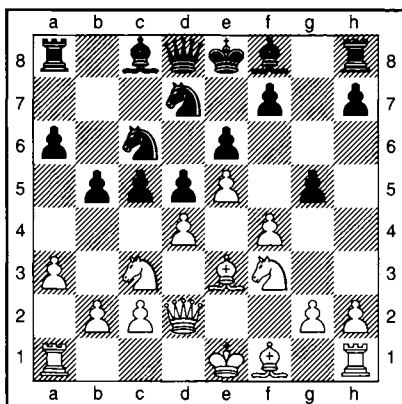
*French Defence [C11]*

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.e5 ♗fd7  
5.f4 c5 6.♗f3 ♗c6 7.♙e3 a6 8.♖d2 b5  
9.a3 g5?!

chesstouring.com



Morozevich's fantastic idea, which he conjured up over the board in a blindfold game the year before against Anand at the Melody Amber Tournament in Monaco. Black sacrifices a pawn in order to control the dark squares.



### 10. ♖xg5?!

Macieja takes the pawn and prepares to defend. Surrendering the centre by means of 10.fxf6 cxd4 11. ♖xd4 ♖cxe5 has, on the other hand, resulted in some excellent successes for White after 12. ♔d3!. For example, the game T. Kosintseva–Satonskih at the women's Chess Olympiad in Turin in 2006 ended with some real fireworks: 12... ♖xd3+ 13.cxd3 ♖e5 14.0-0 ♔g7 15. ♖ce2 ♖g4 16. ♖g3 ♔d6 17. ♖ae1 0-0 18. ♖h1 ♖xe3 19. ♖xe3 ♖b6 20. ♖f6! ♖xf6 21.gxf6 ♖h8 22. ♖h6 ♖g8 23. ♖f3 ♖b7 24. ♖g5 ♖xg5 25. ♖xg5 ♖g8 26. ♖e5 b4 27.d4 bxa3 28.bxa3 ♖c6 29. ♖d6 ♖a5 30. ♖xe6! fxe6 31. ♖e5 ♖xa3 32.f7+ ♖g7 33. ♖b8+, and Black resigned.

**10...cxd4 11. ♔xd4 ♖xd4 12. ♖xd4 ♔c5 13. ♖d2 ♖b6!?**

Black secures his domination on the dark squares and keeps the white king stuck in

the centre, since 14.0-0 fails to 14... ♔e3.

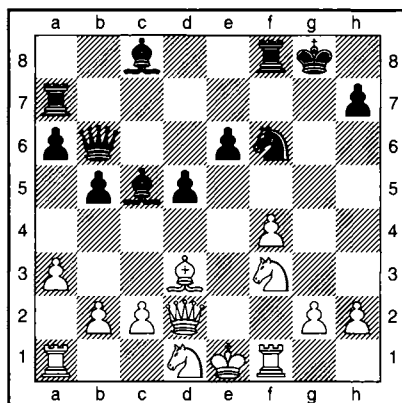
### 14. ♖d1 f6!

Nakamura opens the position for his bishops and rooks by undermining the centre.

### 15.exf6 ♖xf6 16. ♔d3 0-0 17. ♖f1 ♖a7!

The rook not only defends along the 7th rank, but at the same time strengthens the black offensive.

### 18. ♖f3



### 18... ♖g4!

Black decides the struggle for the e3-square. In addition the knight supports the opening of the position by means of 19...e5!.

### 19.g3 e5! 20.fxe5

After 20. ♖xe5 ♖e7 21. ♖e2 ♖xe5 22.fxe5 ♖xf1+ 23. ♖xf1 ♔h3+ 24. ♖e1 ♔d4 all the black pieces are participating in the attack.

### 20... ♖e3

20... ♖e7 is met by 21. ♔e2 and an attack on the d5-pawn.

### 21. ♖xe3 ♔xe3 22. ♖g2

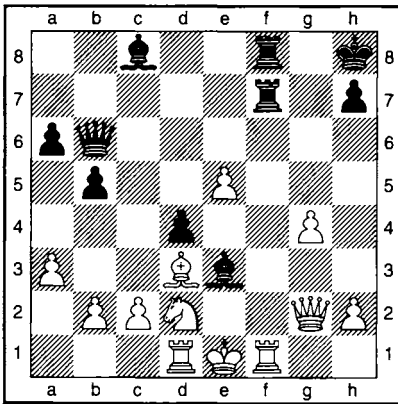
After 22. ♖e2 ♔h3 23. ♖h1 ♖af7 Black wins.

### 22... ♖af7 23.g4 ♖h8 24. ♔d1

White could have tried to sound the counter-attack with 24.g5, although Black then also retains the upper hand by 24...d4 25.g6 hxg6 26.♖d2 ♖xf1+ 27.♖xf1 ♜a5+ 28.b4 ♜c7 29.♖xe3 ♜c3+ 30.♜d2 ♜xa1+ 31.♖d1 ♖g7.

#### 24...d4 25.♖d2

After 25.♖e2 with 25...♖f4 Black can easily break the blockade: 26.h3 ♖b7 27.♖f5 ♜c6!, and the threat is 28...♖4xf5 29.gxf5 ♜xc2+.



#### 25...♖f2+

This wins the queen. However, it was even stronger to increase the pressure with 25...♜h6! 26.♖xf7 ♖xf7 27.♖f3 ♜f4 28.♖e2 ♖xg4.

#### 26.♖xf2 ♖xf2 27.♜xf2

27.♜g3 is met by 27...♜h6.

#### 27...♖xf2 28.♖xf2 ♜h6 29.♖f1?!

White should try to set up a fortress with 29.♖f3 ♖xg4 30.♖f1, in order to render a breakthrough by Black more difficult.

#### 29...♜h4+ 30.♖g3 ♖xg4 31.♖h1 ♜g5 32.♖f1 ♜f4+ 33.♖e1

After 33.♖g1 ♖h3 34.b4 (if 34.♖g3 then 34...♜e3 mates) 34...♜f3! Black wins.

#### 33...♜xe5+ 34.♖f2 ♜f4+ 35.♖e1 ♜c1+ 36.♖f2 ♖d1!

Clearing up the white queenside with 36...♜xb2 is also good.

#### 37.♖g3 ♜d2+

White also loses after 37...♜e3+ 38.♖g4 with the threat of 39...♖h3 mate.

#### 38.♖e2 ♖xc2 39.♖xc2 ♜xc2 40.♖c1 ♜f5+

After 41.♖e1 ♜e4 the passed d-pawn decides matters.

**White resigned.**

Nakamura kept on improving his position in the team. In Dresden in November 2008, when his team once again took the bronze medals, he was playing on board two, and two years later in Khanty-Mansiysk he finally made the move to top board.

One can be sure of doing something right when one is compared with great players. So there were echoes of Aaron Nimzowitsch when, in 2007, Hikaru defeated the Russian grandmaster Vladimir Epishin in Gibraltar.

In his iconoclastic manual *My System*, published in 1925, Aaron Nimzowitsch presents his game against Semyon Alapin as a wonderful example of a failed pawn grab. This brilliant game, played a hundred years ago, must have left a lasting impression on Hikaru Nakamura. In order to overcome Epishin, the former US champion sacrificed the same pawn as Nimzowitsch. This victory was not only Nakamura's best performance in the Gibtelecom Masters, but it also helped him to reach second place.

It is always a risky matter to snatch pawns, especially in the opening. Valuable



time is lost and nothing is done for the development of your own pieces. Nimzowitsch punishes Alapin for his greed with a powerful, storming attack.

But where and when was this friendly game played? According to some sources it was in the town of Alapin's birth Vilnius (Lithuania) in 1912; others suggest Nimzowitsch's home town Riga (Latvia) and 1913. It is also possible that it formed part of their post-mortem analysis in St. Petersburg in 1914.

### A. Nimzowitsch – S. Alapin

Russian Championship, Vilnius 1912<sup>5</sup>

*French Defence [C11]*

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.exd5 ♘xd5 5.♙f3 c5**

This variation was also tested in the St. Petersburg tournament of 1914, when Alapin played 5...♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♙e7 against Nimzowitsch and lost in 39 moves. Nimzowitsch, for his part, played 5...b6 with Black and defeated Alekhine in 75 moves.

**6.♘xd5 ♚xd5**

This exposes the queen. Black rejects 6...exd5 7.♙b5+! ♙d7 8.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 9.0-0 with advantage to White after both 9...♙e7 10.dxc5 ♘xc5 11.♙e3 and 9...c4 10.♖e1+ ♙e7 11.♚e2, since he has problems with castling.

**7.♙e3**

This combines development and attack. White is threatening 8.dxc5.

**7...cxd4 8.♘xd4 a6?!**

A waste of time! The phantom threat of

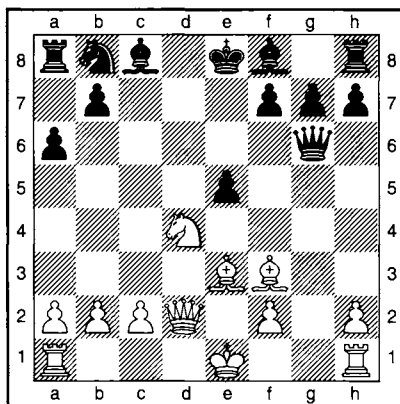
9.♘b5 is best met by 8...♘c6 9.♘b5 ♚e5, with good play.

**9.♙e2! ♚xg2?**

This pawn grab will soon have fatal consequences.

**10.♙f3 ♚g6 11.♚d2 e5**

If Black manages to drive the knight away from d4, then he can catch up in development, for example after 12.♘b3 ♘c6, but Nimzowitsch has no intention of cooperating.



**12.0-0!**

A brilliant knight sacrifice, which throws all the white forces into the attack.

**12...exd4 13.♙xd4**

White's lead in development is now too great.

**13...♘c6 14.♙f6!!**

A fantastic introduction to the final attack. The threat of 15.♚d8+ forces Black to take the bishop.

**14...♚xf6 15.♖he1+ ♙e7**

15...♙e6 runs into 16.♚d7 mate.

**16.♙xc6+ ♚f8**

<sup>5</sup> In this we are following *MegaBase 2012* published by ChessBase.

After 16...bxc6 then 17.♖d8 mates, and the attempt to control the back rank with 16...♙d7 17.♖xd7+ ♕f8 fails to 18.♖d8+! ♖xd8 19.♖xd8+ ♙xd8 20.♖e8 mate.

**17.♖d8+! ♙xd8 18.♖e8 mate.**

Nakamura was able to prepare his pawn sacrifice in the Paulsen Sicilian before the game. All he had to do was find Vladimir Epishin's 2005 game in a database.<sup>6</sup> The Russian took the pawn, and although afterwards he did not fall victim to a furious mating attack as Alapin had done, he had problems with his exposed queen.

## GAME 7

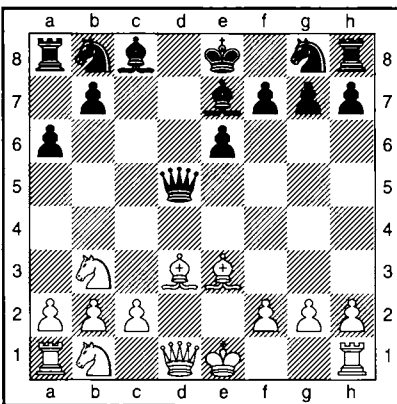
**H. Nakamura – V. Epishin**

Gibtelecom Masters, Gibraltar 2007

*Sicilian Defence [B42]*

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6  
5.♙d3 ♙c5 6.♘b3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 d5?!  
8.exd5 ♖xd5**

This was Epishin's move from the previous game which Nakamura had prepared for so well.



**9.♘c3!**

In the spirit of Nimzowitsch! Black is far behind in development – a well-known phenomenon in the Paulsen Sicilian – even if no pawn has been taken.

**9...♖xg2?**

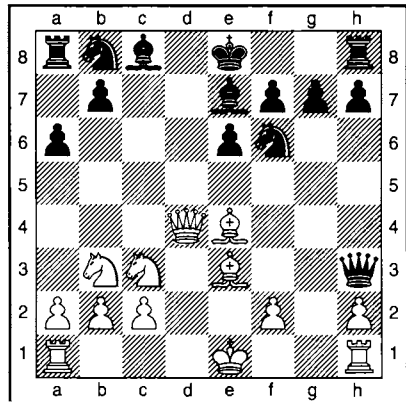
Like Alapin, Epishin takes the pawn and then gets into difficulties.

**10.♙e4 ♖h3 11.♖d4!**

Development with gain of tempo.

**11...♘f6**

After 11...♙f6 12.♖a4+ ♙d7 13.♖b4 Black cannot defend his queenside.



**12.0-0-0**

White completes his development and his pieces are radiating energy. Black has to worry about not only his queen, but also his king.

**12...♘bd7?!**

Black misses the chance to simplify by 12...♘xe4 13.♘xe4 (or 13.♖xe4) 13...0-0 with acceptable play.

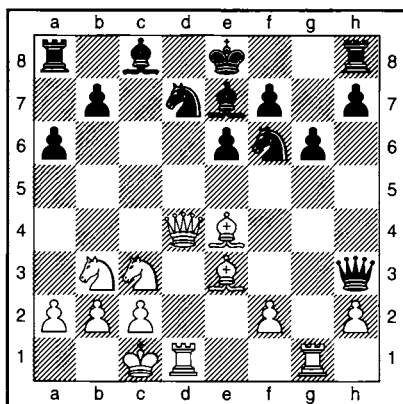
**13.♖hg1 g6?**

This loses immediately, but Black is in a

<sup>6</sup> S. Barrientos Chavarriaga – V. Epishin, Solsona Open, 2005 (drawn after 27 moves).



bad way in any case. If his king hides on the kingside with 13...0-0, then 14.♖g3 ♗h4 15.♘dg1 enables White to mount a dangerous attack, for example: 15...g6 16.♙xg6! ♗xd4 17.♙xh7+! ♔h8 18.♙xd4, and White should win.



14.♖g3 ♗h5 15.♙g5!

Drawing the net more tightly around the black queen.

15...h6 16.♙f3!

Forcing the black queen to take another pawn.

16...♗xh2

The queen sacrifice 16...♗xg5+ 17.♖xg5 hxg5 is not sufficient to hold the game in view of 18.♙e4.

17.♙e3!

This threatens 18.♖h1 winning the queen. On the other hand, the immediate 17.♖h1 ♗xh1+ 18.♙xh1 hxg5 would allow Black unnecessary counterplay.

17...e5

17...♙f8 is met by 18.♖h1.

18.♗a4 e4 19.♙xe4

But not 19.♖h1 on account of 19...♗xg3 20.fxg3 exf3.

19...♙xe4 20.♙xe4

Threatening 21.♙xb7! ♙xb7 22.♗xd7+ and wins.

20...♗h4

20...♗h5 21.♙xb7 ♗xd1+ 22.♙xd1 ♙xb7 23.♙c1.

21.♙c5!

White now wins material.

21...b5 22.♗d4

Everything is hanging...

22...♙f6 23.♗d5 ♙xc5

After 23...♖a7 White simply plays 24.♖h1 and wins.

24.♙xc5

And of course Epishin had no desire to see the mate which was looming.

**Black resigned.**

After becoming a grandmaster at 15 and winning the US championship at 16, Nakamura was considered the best American prodigy since Bobby Fischer. After he beat the Ukrainian grandmaster Sergey Karjakin in 2004, he was on cloud nine. His rise was steady, but not spectacular. In October 2008 Hikaru crossed the 2700 threshold. Karjakin, meantime, won the prestigious Corus tournament at the Dutch coastal town of Wijk an Zee in January 2009 ahead of Levon Aronian and was then invited to other elite tournaments. Nakamura, who was two years older, travelled around North America, playing in open tournaments instead of challenging the best in top-class events.

In April 2009 Nakamura took part in the Foxwoods Open and the Toronto Open, stumbling in both events. Somehow, Nakamura carelessly invited a furious attack by the Canadian IM Artiom Samsonkin in the Scheveningen Sicilian.



## GAME 8

**A. Samsonkin – H. Nakamura**

Toronto Open 2009

*Sicilian Defence [B43]*

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♘c3 a6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♖c7 6.♙d3 ♙e7 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.a4 b6**

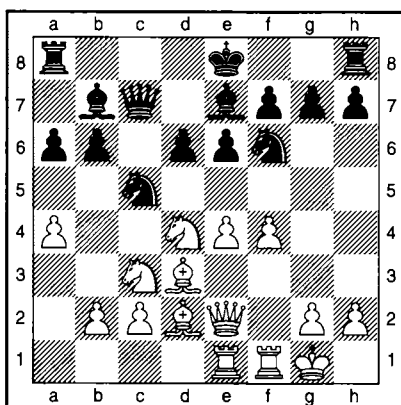
White would like to stop the advance of the black pawns on the queenside. Black could have driven away the central knight first with 8...♘c6, so as after 9.♘b3 to be able to play 9...b6 and thus prevent 10.a5.

**9.♚e2 d6**

After a transposition of moves the game has now reached the Scheveningen Variation of the Sicilian Defence.

**10.f4 ♙b7 11.♙d2 ♘bd7 12.♞ae1 ♘c5**

The flexibility of the Sicilian Defence is really impressive. White has done everything correctly and prepared the advance of his e-pawn. Nevertheless things are not going so well. For example 13.e5!? dxe5 14.fxe5 ♘xd3 15.cxd3 ♙c5 is advantageous for Black.



**13.b4!?**

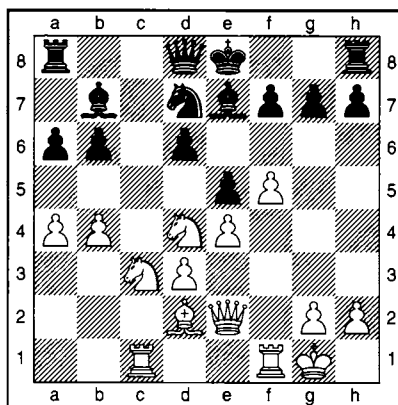
White chooses another plan, consolidates his centre and opens the c-file.

**13...♘xd3 14.cxd3 ♘d7**

Black is hoping to be able to beat off all attempts at an attack. The central advance 14...d5? would in any case backfire: 15.e5 ♘d7 16.f5!, and Black is in difficulties after both 16...♚xe5 17.♚f2 ♚f6 18.♘xe6! fxe6 19.♞xe6 ♚f7 20.♙g5 ♘f6 21.♞fe1 and also 16...♘xe5 17.fxe6!.

**15.♞c1 ♚d8 16.f5! e5?**

A blunder. Black should have tried 16...♙f6 17.♙e3 e5, although after 18.♘b3 0-0 19.♘d2, followed by 20.♘c4, he is pretty much on the defensive.



**17.♘e6!**

The knight sacrifice wins material by force and forces Black to his knees.

**17...fxe6 18.♚h5+ g6**

On 18...♙f8 19.fxe6+ it is mate after 20.♚f7.

**19.fxg6 ♘f6 20.g7+ ♚d7**

After 20...♘xh5 21.gxh8♚+ ♚d7 22.♚xh7 White wins.

**21.♚f7!**

This double attack, threatening to win



either the knight or the rook, is stronger than 21.gxh8♖.

**21...♖e8**

21...♖g8 is met by 22.♖xf6.

**22.gxh8♘**

This under-promotion is not the only way to win. After 22.♖xf6 ♖xf7 23.♖xf7 ♖hg8 24.♙g5 ♖ae8 25.♘d1 ♙a8 26.♘e3 Black hardly has a move left, for example: 26...♙d8 27.♙xe7+ ♖xe7 28.♖c7!, and White wins.

**22...♖xh8 23.♘e2**

The spectacular 23.♘b5!? was also possible, for example 23...axb5 24.♖c7+! ♙xc7 25.♖xe7+ ♘d7 26.♖c1+ ♙b8 (26...♙c6 28.axb5!) 27.♖xd6+ ♙a7 28.axb5 with the threat of 29.♖a1+.

**23...b5**

After 23...♖f8 24.♖c7+ ♙xc7 25.♖xe7+ ♙b8 26.♖xd6+, followed by 27.♙e3, White also wins.

**24.♙g5 ♖g8 25.♖xf6 ♖xg5 26.♖xe6+ ♙d8 27.♖c7! ♖e3+ 28.♙f1 ♙xc7 29.♖xe7+ ♙b6 30.♖xd6+ ♙a7 31.♖c7!**

With the threat of 32.♖xa6+! ♙xa6 33.♖a5 mate, against which Black has no satisfactory defence.

**Black resigned.**

In the final round in Toronto Nakamura came back into the tournament by defeating Michael Barron of Canada with a sharp exchange sacrifice in the Leningrad System of the Dutch Defence.

## GAME 9

**H. Nakamura – M. Barron**

Toronto Open 2009

*Dutch Defence [A85]*

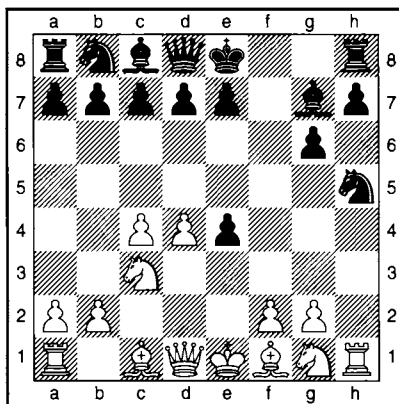
**1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.h4!?**

Bent Larsen, who very much liked to advance his rook pawns, would have strongly approved of this pile-driver of an attack.

**4...♙g7 5.h5! ♘xh5 6.e4!**

White is prepared to sacrifice the exchange so as to hunt down the black king, but he cannot do so at once since after 6.♖xh5 gxh5 7.e4 0-0! Black would be well placed.

**6...fxe4**



Defending with 6...e6 leads to disaster on account of 7.exf5 exf5 8.♖xh5! gxh5 9.♖xh5+ ♙f8 10.♘d5! with the threat of 11.♖xf5+ ♙g8 12.♙g5 ♖e8+ 13.♘e7+. In the game Krush–Esserman, played in the Berkeley Masters 2008, White had good compensation for the pawn after 6...♘f6 7.exf5 gxf5 8.♙g5 e6 9.♖d2 ♖e7 10.0-0-0

d6 11. ♖d5! and won in 23 moves: 11... ♜f7 12. ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 13. ♙e2 0-0 14. ♙xf6 ♜xf6 15. ♜f3 ♜g7 16. ♜h3 ♜f6 17. ♜dh1 f4 18. g4 fxg3 19. ♜xg3 ♜g6 20. ♙d3 ♜xg3 21. fxg3 ♜c6 22. ♜xh7 ♜f6 23. ♜h6 1-0.

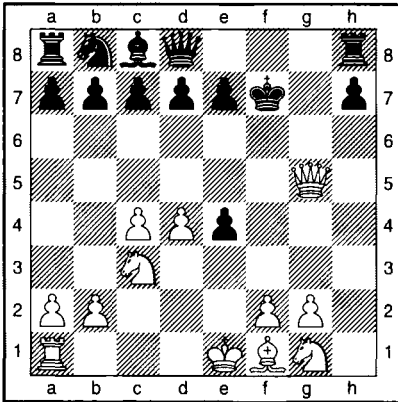
**7. ♜xh5! gxh5 8. ♜xh5+ ♙f8 9. ♙h6**

This swaps off the only active black piece.

**9... ♙xh6?!**

This simplifies White's task but Black himself has difficult days in front of him after 9...d6 10. ♜xe4.

**10. ♜xh6+ ♙g8 11. ♜g5+ ♙f7**



**12. ♜xe4**

Nakamura's novelty, which clears the way for the other pieces.

**12... ♜g8**

After 12...d6 13. ♙e2 ♜g8 14. ♙h5+ ♙f8 15. ♜f4+ ♙g7 16. ♜h4 ♙f8 17. ♜f3 the white pieces are ready to attack.

**13. ♜f4+ ♙e8 14. ♜xc7 ♜c6**

14... ♜a6 15. ♜e5 ♙d8 16. ♜g5 ♙e8 is met by 17. c5! ♜b4 18. ♙c4! ♜c6! 19. ♙f7+ ♙f8 20. ♜f4 ♜g7 21. 0-0-0 ♜f6 22. ♜g3 with the threat of 23. ♜xh7+.

**15. 0-0-0 ♜g6 16. ♜e1!**

Threatening 17. ♜d6+.

**16... ♙f7 17. d5 ♜b4**

After 17... ♜d4 18. ♜e5 ♜g7 19. ♜f4+ ♙g8 20. ♜e3! White breaks through, e.g. 20...e5 21. dxe6 ♜xe6 22. ♜f5 ♜f7 23. ♜f6+ ♙f8 24. ♜f3! with the threat of 25. ♜xd7+.

**18. ♜f3 d6 19. ♜eg5+ ♙g8 20. ♜d8+ ♙g7**

**21. ♜xe7+ ♙h6 22. ♜f7+! ♙h5**

22... ♜xf7 23. ♜xd6+ ♜g6 24. ♜f4+ ♙h5

25. ♜h4 mate.

**23. ♜e5+! dxe5**

Seeing 24. ♜h4# coming, **Black resigned.**

Wandering from one open tournament to another was not the way to go and, fortunately, Hikaru rapidly changed course. He won the 2009 US championship in May in Saint Louis and his victory in San Sebastián in July brought him onto the big chess stage. He at last began receiving invitations to elite tournaments. Before that happened, Hikaru won the Chess 960 (a variation of Fischer-random) world championship in Mainz in August, and he used his blitz skills to defeat his junior by three years Magnus Carlsen 3-1 in the final of the BNBank Blitz tournament in the Norwegian capital of Oslo.

Nakamura is really very fast, having honed his blitz skills on the Internet. The quicker the pace on the chessboard, the more he seems to enjoy playing. He is inventive and can set multi-move traps in seconds.

Carlsen began the match well. He won the first game and was well on his way to victory in the next, but blundered badly in a winning pawn endgame and even lost. This turned the match around. Nakamura won the third game, perhaps the best-played one in the whole match, and



Carlsen was unable to decide the final game in his favour.

The pawn sacrifice in the Grünfeld Defence in the third game had been analysed and played by four members of the US team that went to the Olympiad in Dresden the previous year. The position is difficult for a regular tournament game, but White's attacking chances give him good chances in a blitz game.

## GAME 10

**H. Nakamura – M. Carlsen**

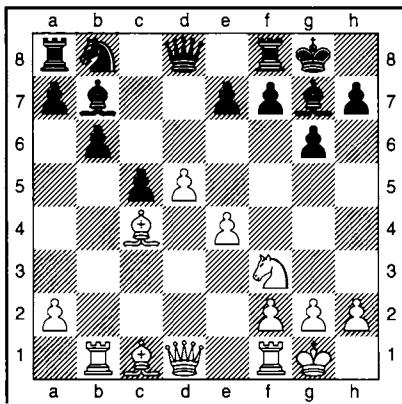
BNbank-Blitz Chess, Oslo 2009

*Grünfeld Defence [D85]*

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5  
5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗f3 c5 8.♖b1  
0-0 9.♗e2 b6 10.0-0 ♗b7 11.d5

This pawn sacrifice is an American speciality. White gains space and obtains attacking chances on the kingside.

11...♗xc3 12.♗c4 ♗g7



The most popular move, preparing an exchange of the light-squared bishops

with 13...♗a6. The alternative 12...♘d7 has lost its shine. In the game Akopian–Hilton, US Open 2009, Black chose 12...♗d6?!, and White won with a robust attack: 13.♗h6 ♗g7 14.e5 ♗xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♖e1 ♗d6 17.♗e2 ♖e8 18.♗b2 f6 19.♖e6 ♗xe6 20.dxe6 ♘c6 21.♖d1 ♖ad8 22.♖d7 ♗c8 23.♗xf6!! exf6 24.e7+, and Black resigned.

**13.e5!?**

Alexander Onischuk and Yury Shulman preferred to exchange the dark-squared bishops with 13.♗b2.

13...♗a6 14.♗d3 ♗xc4 15.♗xc4 ♘d7

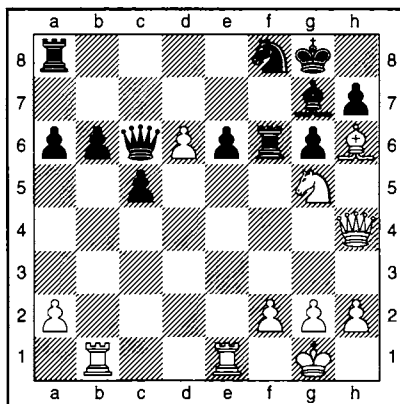
The other blockade with 15...♗d7 16.♗b2 e6 17.d6 ♘c6 creates a better impression.

16.♖e1 a6 17.♗h4 e6

17...f6 is met by 18.d6.

18.♗g5 ♗c7 19.d6! ♗c6 20.♗h6 f6  
21.exf6 ♖xf6 22.♘g5 ♗f8

Although Black has defended as well as possible here, he is still not out of the woods.



**23.d7!?**

In a blitz game this advance is very hard to meet. It is an amusing attempt to exchange the d-pawn for the b6-pawn.



However, it allows Black chances to equalise.

**23...♗xh6 24.♜xh6 ♜xd7?**

This gives Nakamura too much play. After 24...e5! 25.♞xe5 ♜xd7 16.♞be1 ♜d4! the black position is ok.

**25.♟e4 ♞f7 26.♞xb6**

Despite his extra pawn, Carlsen's position is full of holes and weak pawn islands. In addition, it is the more difficult one to play in a blitz game.

**26...c4 27.♜e3 ♜d3 28.♜c1 ♞d8 29.♞xa6 ♜d4?**

29...♞c7 was a more resilient defence.

**30.♞c6**

This wins a pawn while retaining the better pawn structure. Black is doomed to defeat.

**30...♜a7 31.♜xc4 ♞d4 32.♜c2 ♞a4 33.♞e2 ♜d4 34.h3 ♜a1+ 35.♟h2 ♜e5+ 36.♟g3 ♜f4 37.♞c8 ♟g7 38.♜c3+ ♟h6 39.f3 g5? 40.♞xf8!**

After 40...♞xf8 the move 41.♞xe6+ wins.

**Black resigned.**

The year 2010 was knocking at the door and Nakamura would soon be seen among the world's best players in elite tournaments such as London, Wijk aan Zee, Dortmund, Moscow, Bilbao and São Paulo.

In January 2011 he made it into the select company of the world's Top Ten rated players and in Wijk aan Zee he scored his greatest tournament victory thus far. Nakamura finished ahead of the world's four top-rated players. His spectacular win was immediately compared to Fischer's successes. In a contribution to the *New York Times*, Garry Kasparov wrote: "I think you can go back to Pillsbury at Hastings 1895 for an American tourna-

ment victory on a par with Nakamura's", and he added: "Fischer never won a tournament ahead of the world champion. He was second in Santa Monica."

Kasparov obviously meant "a reigning world champion", but it is not clear that he was right. He was referring to the Second Piatigorsky Cup played in Santa Monica in 1966 and won by Boris Spassky. The reigning world champion Tigran Petrosian shared sixth place with another American, Sammy Reshevsky. It was a double round-robin tournament or, if you wish, two single tournaments. In the first half Bobby scored 3½/9 and "avoided" the last place by a half point. In the second set of games Fischer produced one of his finest single tournament results, 7½/9, and finished just a half point behind Spassky.

It was the only tournament in which Fischer was able to compete against a reigning world champion. Things were different at chess olympiads, where he met three of them, drawing with Mikhail Tal in 1960 and with Mikhail Botvinnik in 1962, and losing to Spassky in 1970. Without Kasparov's "special condition", Fischer had many other better results. The 1962 Stockholm Interzonal comes immediately to mind, in which he scored an incredible 17½ points out of a possible 21 and finished 2½ points ahead of the Russians Efim Geller and Tigran Petrosian.

Although Pillsbury's and Nakamura's victories were formidable, they were unable to dominate the world's best players. On the contrary: Harry Nelson Pillsbury won the 1895 Hastings tournament with 16½ out of 21, ahead of Mikhail Chigorin on 16 and the World Champion Emanuel Lasker on 15½. In so doing, he lost to both of them, but beat the four tailenders.



Nakamura played similarly in Wijk aan Zee, beating the last four, but scoring minus one against the top four players in the world ranking list (a defeat against Carlsen and draws with Anand, Aronian and Kramnik).

Lately, Nakamura has been going through tournament roller-coasters, matching good results with setbacks. He may still follow in Capablanca's footsteps and become the world champion, but he has to stabilise his play...

\* \* \*



**Lubomir (Lubosh) Kavalek** was born in Prague in 1943. At the age of 19 he became the youngest national champion of Czechoslovakia (as it then was) and he repeated this success in 1968. After the suppression of the Prague Spring in August of the same year, he left his native land. At first he lived in West Germany, where he became a member of the Solingen SG and won numerous German team championship medals as well as that for the European Teams Cup in 1976. In 1970 he emigrated to the USA and was its national champion on three occasions (1972, 1973 and 1978). Kavalek took part in nine chess olympiads (twice for Czechoslovakia, seven times for the USA) and in so doing he won one gold and five bronze medals with the American team. In 1974 and 1980 the US grandmaster made it into

the top 10 of the FIDE world ranking list. He has also known great success as a trainer, a second and a tournament organiser. He was by the side of Robert Hübner in the latter's candidates match in 1983 against Vasily Smyslov and of Nigel Short on his way to the World Championship candidates final in 1992 against Anatoly Karpov. In 1979 he was one of the initiators of the Challenge Cup in Montreal, the first ever category XV FIDE tournament (Elo average 2624). In addition, in the 1980s Kavalek participated in the founding of the World Cup. Nowadays Lubosh's main professional activity is that of a journalist. After 23 years with the *Washington Post* his legendary chess column was stopped in 2010 on grounds of cost. At the moment he is working for the internet newspaper *The Huffington Post*.



# CHAPTER 1

## Wijk aan Zee

Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 1

In the *Dorpshuis de Moriaan* – the biggest sporting arena in the Dutch town of Wijk aan Zee, which lies approx. 20 kilometres from Amsterdam – this Saturday in January sees the start of the 73<sup>rd</sup> annual chess tournament which is being supported for the first time in its history by the Indian steel firm Tata Steel and which now also bears the name of the latter concern. For Dutch chess fans “De Moriaan” can be compared to “De Kuip” in Rotterdam for their football fans, and so the interest in the A-group of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament is particularly high. With its Elo average of 2740 it is a category XX event, and if proof were needed of the class of the event then there is the fact that the organisers have secured the participation of the top four in the FIDE ranking list in the form of Magnus Carlsen, World Champion Viswanathan Anand, Levon Aronian and Vladimir Kramnik. Also in the field of 14 grandmasters is 23-year-old Hikaru Nakamura, who with his Elo rating of 2751 occupies 10<sup>th</sup> place in the list of the best players in the world. The year before the young American had made a courageous entry into this chess Mecca and taken fifth place. In round 1 of the 73<sup>rd</sup> tournament he was about to face the stiffest of examinations at the hands of Alexander Grischuk (Elo 2773)...

### GAME 11

**H. Nakamura – A. Grischuk**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Queen's Gambit [D38]*

***Provoke sacrifices, take material  
and win!***

There is a back story to this encounter. For years the two opponents had been involved in a desperate blitz duel on the Internet Chess Club. Finally they met in a serious tournament game at the 5<sup>th</sup> Tal Memorial in November 2010, where Naka-

mura had a totally winning position which he let slip into a draw. Of course it had become for him a matter of honour and he announced that he would “smash Grischuk like a baby in the forthcoming word blitz championship”,<sup>1</sup> but he did not manage to do so. But this time the American was to gain more or less a “victory on demand” following the motto “provoke sacrifices, take material and win”!

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 d5  
5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 ♘bd7 7.e3 c5 8.dxc5  
♚a5 9.♞c1 ♙xc3+**

Since Black should continue to exert pressure against c3 at this point, 9...♞e4 is

<sup>1</sup> According to Dirk Poldauf in *SCHACH* 3/2011, pp. 8ff.

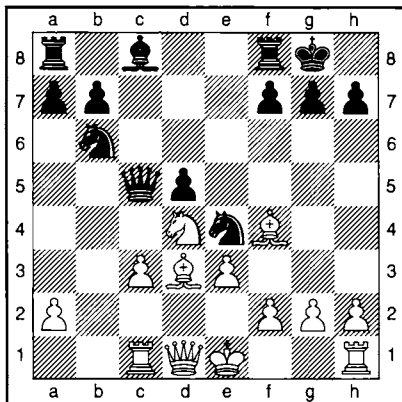


more the move which is indicated, although after it too White has good chances, for example after 10. ♖xd5 ♜xc3 11. bxc3 ♙xc3+ 12. ♔d1, as Vladimir Kramnik demonstrated against Ruslan Ponomarev in the 2009 Tal Memorial.

#### 10. bxc3 0-0 11. ♜d4 ♚xc5?!

11... ♜e4 looks more convincing: 12. ♙f4 ♜e8 13. f3 ♜exc5 14. ♔f2 ♜e5 with equality, Rogozenko–Sjugirov, Aix-les-Bains 2011. In his annotations *SCHACH* editor Dirk Poldauf quotes the game Potkin–Tomashovsky from the Russian Championship of 2010, of which Grischuk had been an eye-witness, “when Black swallowed up a pawn with 11... ♖xa2 12. ♙e2 ♚a3 13. ♜b5 ♚xc5 and did not choke on it, but rather went on to win the game with 14. ♙f4 ♜e8 15. 0-0 ♜b6 16. ♚d4 ♚xd4 17. cxd4 ♙xd7 18. ♜b1 ♙xb5 19. ♜xb5 ♜f6 etc.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 12. ♙d3 ♜e4 13. ♙f4 ♜b6



#### 14. ♚c2!?

Instead of simply castling, Nakamura chooses a more flexible plan, which sets Black more problems.

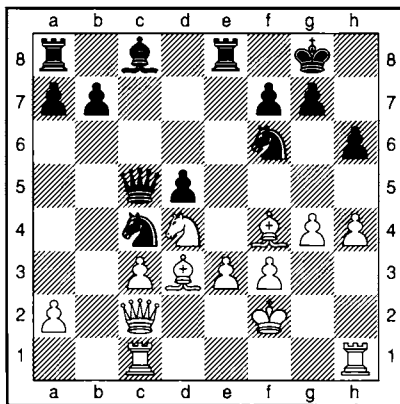
#### 14...h6

Now White gets a specific target for a possible pawn storm on the kingside, although the move cannot be criticised on objective grounds.

#### 15. f3 ♜f6 16. g4

With this Nakamura reveals his cards. His king will go to f2, so as to be able to quickly commit the major pieces to the attack after the opening of lines.

#### 16... ♜e8 17. ♔f2 ♜c4 18. h4



#### 18... ♙xg4?!

With only 25 minutes left on the clock, Grischuk decides on a very radical step. He sacrifices a piece and speculates on the draughty position of Nakamura's king. But the Russian will not obtain enough compensation. On the contrary, the white major pieces will be able to take advantage of the open files.

After 18... h5 19. g5 ♜d7 20. ♙xc4 dxc4 21. ♚a4, on the other hand, White has only a minimal advantage.

#### 19. ♙xc4 dxc4 20. fxg4 ♜xg4+ 21. ♔f3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 9

**♟e5+ 22.♙xe5 ♖xe5 23.♚f2 ♜ae8 24.♞h3 b5 25.♞g1 ♜e4 26.♞d1**

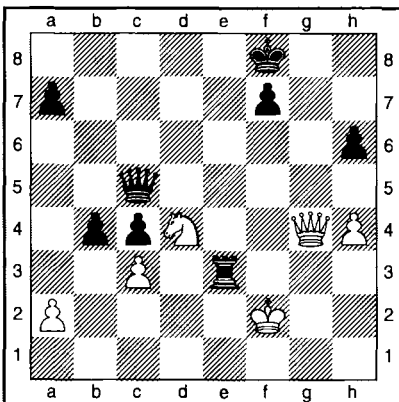
Nakamura brings all his forces into position for the attack.

**26...b4 27.♞f3?!**

27.♞f3 was more precise, because there is absolutely no way for Black to avoid the attack, for example: 27...♞xh4 28.♞xg7+ ♟xg7 29.♟f5+ ♟h8 30.♟xh4 bxc3 (after 30...♞e5 31.cxb4 ♞h2+ 32.♟g2 ♞g8 33.♞g1 too, White's advantage is clear) 31.♟f5+ .

**27...♞xe3?!**

The prophylactic 27...♟h8!? was well worth considering, though in the long run White should be able to impose himself after 28.♞g3 ♞g8 (28...g6 29.♞f3 ♞d6 30.♞g4 ♞xg4 31.♞xg4 bxc3 32.♞f4, and White is also better) 29.♞g2 ♞e5 30.♞g5±. But now Nakamura finds the decisive counter! **28.♞xg7+!! ♟xg7 29.♞g4+ ♟f8 30.♞xe3 ♞xe3**



Grischuk correctly seeks his salvation in a technical endgame. After 30...bxc3? 31.♞g3 the extra attacking potential would no doubt help Nakamura, who then has a formidable position.

**31.♟xe3 bxc3 32.♟e2?!**

32.♞f5 ♞e7+ 33.♟f3 ♞e1 34.♞c8+ ♟g7 35.♞xc4 was more accurate.

**32...♞e5+ 33.♟d1?!**

The more active 33.♟f3!? ♞d5+ 34.♞e4 centralises the white forces better.

**33...♞h2?**

The diagonal retreat 33...♞b8! enables a deeper invasion of white camp, so that the win after 34.♞e4 ♞b2 35.♞c2 ♞a1+ 36.♟e2 ♞b2 37.♟e3 is not yet totally cut and dried.

**34.♟e2 ♞d6+?!**

Once again 34...♞b8 was indicated, but here White already has quite a large advantage; for example: 35.♟xc3 ♞d8+ 36.♟c1 ♞d3 37.♟b1 h5 38.♞f4.

**35.♞d4 ♞xd4+**

35...♟e7 is met by 36.♟c2, so that Nakamura can capture on c3 in the most favourable fashion.

**36.♟xd4 ♟g7 37.♟c6 a6 38.♟b8 a5 39.a4 ♟f6**

After 39...f5 40.♟c6 f4 41.♟xa5 the white knight gets back in good time: 41...f3 42.♟xc4 f2 43.♟e3, and Black is lost.

**40.♟c6 ♟e6 41.♟xa5 ♟d5 42.♟c2**

**Black resigned.**

"It was a beautiful game, conducted with a steady hand by Nakamura," said grandmaster Ivan Sokolov, who commented on the day's games for an audience of several hundreds of chess fans in a marquee on the village commons. "Grischuk was cramped for space and saw no other way out than to sac a piece for two pawns after only 18 moves. It was an effort to obtain active play but he never got a chance. It



isn't often that Grischuk gets clobbered in such a way.”<sup>3</sup>

So Nakamura had managed to get the custom-made start he had hoped for, but in round 2 he was to come up against the Armenian Levon Aronian, now number 3 in

the world ranking list, who had shared victory in the afore-mentioned Tal Memorial (with Sergey Karjakin). Hikaru went through the said tournament without defeat (+1 =8 –0), but won only a single game against the exhausted Ukrainian Pavel Eljanov.

## Apprenticeship or the American way to success

*Life is like a box of chocolates,  
you never know what you will get.*

Forrest Gump

**Y**ou will certainly be asking just what this quotation from *Forrest Gump*, that wonderful 1994 film by Robert Zemeckis based on the novel of the same name by Winston Groom about a totally unusual human being, has to do with Hikaru Nakamura?

Well above all else coincidences have played a deciding role in the life of one who is at present the best American chess player since Robert James Fischer. There is also something coincidental about the fact that Forrest Gump, who in the film sits on a bench at a bus stop and tells his moving life story to some people who just happen to be waiting there. In the original book he plays chess in the evenings after his work in the cotton fields and in doing so demonstrates an incredible talent...

Hikaru Nakamura came into this world on a Wednesday in Hirakata City in the Japanese region of Osaka. It was 9<sup>th</sup> December 1987. His birth completed the little family, which included his older brother Asuka (born 4<sup>th</sup> February 1986). The surname gives it away: his father is Japanese, and his mother Carolyn, American.

When Hikaru was two his family emigrated to California. With hindsight that is the first far-reaching coincidence. In the land of the rising sun the dominating board game is Go and it was not only at that time that chess was a peripheral sport. When one compares the top ten players of different nationalities, Japan with its more than modest Elo average of 2203 occupies 92<sup>nd</sup> place out of 137 chess federations,

<sup>3</sup> As will be the case in future quotations in the diary notes for the Tata Steel Chess Tournament 2011, the source here is the appropriate report on each round on the internet site [www.tatasteelchess.com](http://www.tatasteelchess.com).



and at the chess Olympiad of 2010 in Khanty-Mansiysk it logically occupied 96<sup>th</sup> place in the open category among 148 participating teams. This is of course not surprising since the country does not have a single grandmaster and only one player has the IM title. The best active player born in 1987 occupied 22<sup>nd</sup> place in the national ranking list with an Elo rating of 2025.

According to such facts, Hikaru would presumably never have been able to make a name for himself in the world of chess if he had remained in the land of his birth, because the circumstances there are totally unsuitable for that to happen, although this is very surprising in view of the boom in chess in China since the 1990s. And even the fact that between 2000 and 2005 Bobby Fischer mainly lived in Japan has done nothing to change that.

So now we have the land of unlimited opportunities, where basketball, American football, ice-hockey, baseball, boxing and tennis set the standard for all things in sport. Chess is possible, but not necessarily so. In any case the conditions to enable talented up-and-coming young players to reach the top of the world game were pretty modest. The former idol of the "Cold War" days with the Soviets, Bobby Fischer, had long since left the country, was now much older and had been excluded from the US Chess Federation on account of his comments on the terrorist attack of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. At the chess Olympiads in 2000 in Istanbul and in 2002 in Bled, 26<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> places represented an all-time low. Not till Calvia in 2004 did the US team rise like a phoenix from the ashes. However, their 4<sup>th</sup> place was achieved with players whose origins all lie in the former Soviet Union: Alexander Onischuk (born

1975, Ukraine), Alexander Shabalov (1967, Latvia), Alexander Goldin (1964, Russia), Gregory Kaidanov (1959, Ukraine), Igor Novikov (1962, Ukraine) and Boris Gulko (born in 1947 in Erfurt, but Russian). Gata Kamsky (1974), their best player had however withdrawn from professional chess in 1996 in order to take up a stable profession. He successfully studied law in Brooklyn and had almost been forgotten about on the international scene when at the end of 2004 he began a brilliant comeback to professional chess. Possible work as a lawyer has of course been a good safety net for him...

For the Nakamura brothers, on the other hand, chance would determine their fate. One such was certainly that their mother Carolyn found a new partner in Sunil Weeramantry. The FIDE master from Sri Lanka was purely by chance a chess teacher, and moreover one of the best in the USA. Thus back in 1979 he developed for Hunter College Campus School in New York a chess program, in which chess is an obligatory subject for all pupils from the kindergarten through to the sixth grade. It is understandable that such a step-father can inspire children. And so it came as no surprise that first of all Asuka began to take a serious interest in the wonderful world of chess after being introduced to the fundamentals of the royal game in the spring of 1992 by a kindergarten friend. And successfully so, since in the same year Asuka won the first national championship for kindergarten children in Knoxville, Tennessee and to this day he holds the record of 41 victories in a row at the national school chess championships.

At the age of six, Hikaru was not yet taking part in competitive chess. The fact



that he even began to play is yet another act of chance. In August 1995 his brother and their step-father took part in the US Open (in the section for those below USCF-Elo 2400), which was won by Sunil and in which Asuka took 7<sup>th</sup> place out of 28 participants. Hikaru had accompanied the two of them to Concord. As is generally the case there is a common room where analysis took place. And that was precisely where the great adventure of chess started for him, because he played his first friendly games. And the effect was long-lasting. At the Junior Chess Congress East of the National School Chess Foundation, which took place from 24<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 1995 in Stanford, he made his debut in Section 4 and took 30<sup>th</sup> place out of 62 boys with 3 points from six games and received his first national rating of 684. At that time Asuka, who won Section 3 with 6 out of 6, had a rating of 1841. The two seemed to be worlds apart, and at the same time it was not certain that Hikaru would actually stick with chess.

There would be another coincidence, since in his brother's school chess team they were short of a fourth player, and thus in May 1995 at the age of seven years and five months Hikaru would finally make up his mind for chess. From then on he played in a lot of tournaments for young players without, however, any pressure on the part of Sunil Weeramantry. Quite the contrary, he left the boy complete freedom in the way he played, allowing him to try out whatever he wanted. In the case of Hikaru this seems to have been the correct motivation, especially since he was still clearly behind his brother in his level of performance. At that time Asuka was more successful, since he represented the USA

in the Under-10 class at the Junior World Championships in Spain in 1996. But the development of their ratings, which is a totally objective measure of levels, shows that the distance between them was shortening. The older brother had a USCF rating of 2048 on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1997, while Hikaru was on 1659.

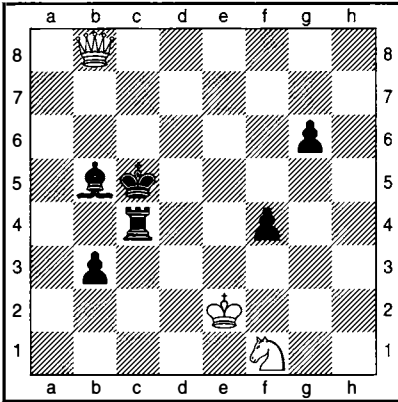
In April of the same year the Nakamura brothers attracted great attention at the Super Nationals Scholastic Chess Championships in Knoxville Tennessee, in which 13 sections saw more than 4200 players in the starting blocks. Both Asuka (6½/7) and Hikaru (7/7) won their sections – something never seen before.

As for Hikaru, he had become so strong in the Under-10 class, that the federation could do nothing other than nominate him for the Junior World Championships in Cannes. His result (29<sup>th</sup> place) is in no way a disappointment; what catches the eye above all is his uncompromising style: six wins, five defeats – he does not know the meaning of the word “draw”. But let us simply take a look at three examples of the first international appearance of the young American in his World Championship premiere...

Against the Mongolian player Ganzorig Erdene (born 1988), who is nowadays one of the top 10 players in his country (Elo 2316), the following position was reached after 50...♟c5.

**H. Nakamura – G. Erdene**

Junior World Under-10 Championship,  
Cannes 1997



How did the nine-year-old American now cold-bloodedly fend off the attack by his adversary?

**51. ♖d2!**

Nakamura finds the best move and the king remains in the firing range of the battery! 51. ♖d1 should also win in any case.

**51...b2**

51... ♖c3+ 52. ♖d1 ♖b4 53. ♖d6+ ♖a5 54. ♖d4 ♖d3 55. ♖xf4 b2 56. ♖c2 does not improve Black's situation either.

**52. ♖e5+ ♖c6 53. ♖e8+?**

The time had come to get out of the X-ray attack from the bishop with 53. ♖f2.

**53...♖c5 54. ♖xg6 ♖c3+?**

He misses the study-like draw with 54... ♖c2+ 55. ♖e1 ♖c1+ 56. ♖f2 b1 ♖ 57. ♖xb1 ♖f1+ 58. ♖g2 f3+ 59. ♖h2 ♖f2+ 60. ♖h1 ♖f1+ 61. ♖h2 ♖f2+, but who can criticise the nine-year-old Mongolian boy for that?

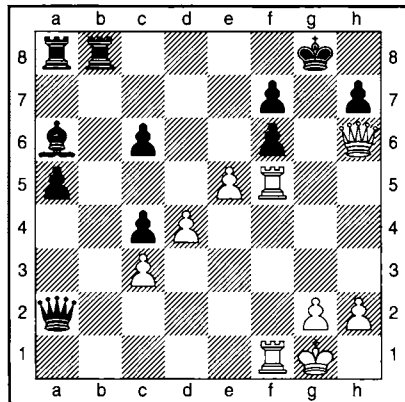
**55. ♖f2 ♖d3 56. ♖g5+ ♖b4 57. ♖xf4+ ♖a3 58. ♖d4 ♖b3 59. ♖a7+ ♖b4 60. ♖b6+ ♖b5 61. ♖d4+ ♖a3 62. ♖c5+ ♖b4 63. ♖b1+**

**♖b3 64. ♖c3+ ♖a2 65. ♖xb4 ♖xb1 66. ♖xb5 ♖c2 67. ♖c4+ ♖d2 68. ♖b3 ♖c1 69. ♖c3+ ♖b1 70. ♖e2 ♖a2 71. ♖a5+ ♖b1 72. ♖d3 ♖c1 73. ♖e1 mate.**

Against the Serb Stefan Djukic's Sicilian Defence Hikaru chose the set-up which was typical of this early phase for him: **1.e4 c5 2. ♖c3 e6 3.f4** and he coolly sacrificed a knight on move 24 for an attack on the king with **24. ♖f6+**. Things continued **24...gxf6 25. ♖h6**, and now it was up to Black to show by stubborn resistance that there was still perhaps half a point in it for him...

**H. Nakamura – S. Djukic**

Junior World Under-10 Championship,  
Cannes 1997



**25...♖a3?**

The text move is unfortunately a mistake, whereas the counter-attack with **25... ♖b2!** 26.g3 (26. ♖h3? ♖c8 27. ♖g3+ ♖h8 28.exf6 ♖xg2+ 29. ♖xg2 ♖xg2+ 30. ♖xg2 ♖xf5 31. ♖xf5 a4 even backfires) 26... ♖g2+ 27. ♖h1 ♖d2 28. ♖f4 ♖xh2+ 29. ♖xh2 ♖xh2+ 30. ♖xh2 ♖c8 31. ♖xf6 ♖e6 with



good drawing chances was forced, because Black's light-squared bishop is still holding its own house together.

**26.exf6 ♖f8 27.♖g5+ ♔h8 28.♖g7**

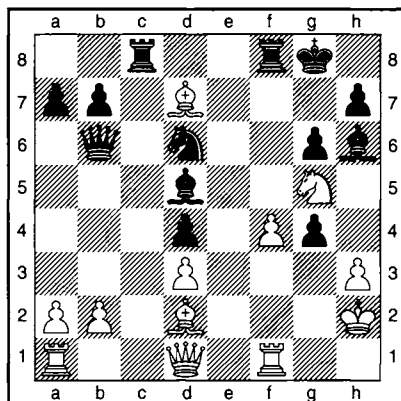
**Black resigned.**

Stefan Djukic is still playing chess, moreover, though as an amateur, because with an Elo rating of 2256 he ranks as number 307 among the active players in his country.

A year after the 1997 Junior World Championship in Cannes, David Baramidze (born 1988) emigrated to Germany with his family. As far as his further chess development is concerned, he was certainly fortunate to be supported at first by the Dortmund-Brackel club and for a time to be looked after personally by Grandmaster Michael Bezold, who from 2000 till 2002 was junior trainer for the German Chess Federation. Although David remained in the top 20 FIDE juniors world rankings (Under-20) until December 2006, he never quite managed the leap to the very top. Thus his second place in the 2004 Junior World Championship in the Under-16 class remains for the moment his greatest sporting success.

In Cannes in 1997 two fearless attacking players met in a Sicilian. In the position which arose after Nakamura's **23.♙d7** it was now up to David to show that his attack was the faster one! And as we shall see, the young Georgian who went on to take 4<sup>th</sup> place in the final table managed to do just that.

## H. Nakamura – D. Baramidze Junior World Under-10 Championship, Cannes 1997



**23...♙xc8!**

A white attacking piece is simply removed and in addition the exchange is sacrificed, but it will be regained with interest. 23...g3+ 24.♙xcg3 ♜c7 also sees Black with the upper hand.

**24.♙xc8 ♜xc8!**

Clearing the way for the queen.

**25.hxg4**

After 25.fxg5? Black has the counter 25...♙d6+ 26.♙f4 ♜xf4, winning.

**25...♙d6**

25...♙xf4+ wins on the spot, e.g. 26.♙xf4 ♜xf4 27.♜xf4 ♙xb2+ 28.♙g3 ♙g2+ 29.♙h4 ♙h2+ 30.♙g5 h6+ 31.♙xg6 ♙xf4 and then mate.

**26.♙g3 ♙h6 27.♙e1 ♙a6 28.♙e2 ♜d6 29.♙e5?**

This is too optimistic, but Black also wins after 29.♜fe1 g5 30.fxg5 ♜f3+ 31.♙h4 ♙g7 32.♜ac1 ♙xd3.

**29...♙xd3+ 30.♙h4 ♙xd2 31.♙xd5+ ♜f7 32.g5 ♙h2+ 33.♙g4 ♜f5 34.♙d8+ ♙f8 35.♙f3 ♙g3+ 36.♙e4 ♜e7+ 37.♙d5 ♜e3+**



38.♖xd4 ♜f5+ 39.♖c4 ♜e4+ 40.♖b5  
♜d4+ 41.♖c4 ♜c6+

**White resigned.**

On the USCF ratings list of December 1997 Hikaru had further closed the gap on Asuka and it now stood at 2019–2144, though the brothers hardly saw it as a duel, especially since they had not yet faced each other in a game.

Well, at the age of 10 Hikaru could hardly be characterised in the truest sense of the word as a child prodigy who astonishes the world of chess with his spectacular performances. In his article “Die Suche nach dem goldenen Kind”<sup>4</sup> (“The search for the golden child”) the former consultant for competitive sport among young German chess players Heinz Brunthaler considers this phenomenon. “An investigation of the career paths of world class players of the past and the present points to three types of prodigy:

- genuine prodigies, who at an early age played chess very well without special training and support;
- presumed prodigies, who are considered very talented but who have done an enormous amount of work on their own which has brought them to the top;
- children who have achieved top performances as a result of early intensive training.

Astonishingly, among the presumed prodigies is Bobby Fischer, whose talent was originally not so overwhelming, but who over a number of years devoured all he could find about chess and devoted

himself to the game with fantastic enthusiasm.”

In the spring of 2001, when this article was published, it is quite understandable that the author had not yet become aware of the boy in America, although his talent could no longer be overlooked, as the four years which followed the Junior World Championship in Cannes 1997 were to prove.

Just like Bobby Fischer, Hikaru owes his enormous leap in performance to the fact that he played chess independently, without the hard and guiding hand of a trainer. “When I started playing chess, I did not have any specific person as a model. Be that as it may, in 1995, shortly after I started to play chess, I watched the World Championship match between Kasparov and Anand which took place in the World Trade Center. Approximately around this time I began to emulate Kasparov”, recalled Hikaru in an interview, which he gave to the *Chess Chronicle* at the age of 17.<sup>5</sup> And in *New in Chess Magazine* he would name as the best chess player of all time Garry Kasparov.<sup>6</sup> At that time he could not have suspected that in 2011 he would train regularly with his idol for almost a year...

At the start his step-father was certainly a help, but as a coach the latter did not attempt, either with Asuka or with Hikaru, to bring about successes at the highest level, as Laszlo Polgar had undoubtedly managed in Hungary with his three daughters Zsuzsa, Zsafia and Judit. In his years of apprenticeship the “H-bomb”, as Naka-

<sup>4</sup> Heinz Brunthaler in: the culturally inclined chess magazine *KARL*, issue 4/2001, pp. 26-27

<sup>5</sup> The interview with Nakamura was conducted at the end of 2005 by Abdul Karim from *Chess Chronicle*.

<sup>6</sup> The column “Just Checking” in: *New in Chess Magazine* 8/2007, p. 106 [chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)



mura would later be called, was above all cast upon his own resources. There was no talent spotting and encouraging such as had been usual earlier in the Soviet Union, with its development centres for the young in the pioneer palaces run by top-class trainers or specialist chess schools – for example the one run by World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik in Moscow, which had as its most prominent students world champions Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov. And there was just as little opportunity to attend a school for elite sport stars, such as that afforded to the three years younger Norwegian Magnus Carlsen.

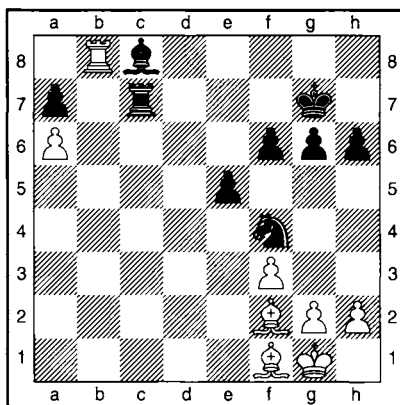
In the USA things are done in a different way, which can also lead to success, though that is not necessarily the case, because things can also later grind to a halt at a very high level. Quite certainly the *National Scholastic Chess Foundation* – in which Sunil Weeramantry has the role of executive director – is something like an engine for up-and-coming talent. From their very start the Nakamura brothers played under its aegis in numerous individual and team competitions, but they never received any special support. “Just do it!” is the challenge – and Hikaru rose to it, because he wanted to do so!

One great moment for him was 26<sup>th</sup> February 1998, when at the age of 10 years and 79 days he received from the US Chess Federation the title of national master, the youngest American chess player to have then done so. His record stood until 2008, almost a decade, when Nicholas Nip (10.3.1998) improved on it on by becoming a USCF Master at the age of nine years and eleven months, but since then no more has been heard of him in terms of top chess performances...

Hikaru, on the other hand, continued his apprenticeship, playing in tournament after tournament and representing the USA another four times in the Junior World Championships. His first appearance in the new Under-12 age grouping in Oropesa del Mar in Spain in 1998 – where Teimour Radjabov won the title – saw a pretty modest performance, finishing in 54<sup>th</sup> place with 5½ out of 11 games. But in the following year at the 14<sup>th</sup> championships, things improved, since he reached 13<sup>th</sup> place at the same venue – it would remain the same for the next two years. And it should not be overlooked that his feeling for tactics would come to the fore just at the right moment, as for example against the Indian player Sunil Rangarajan, where Hikaru with Black brought about a technically winning position with a little combination. The motif is White’s back rank weakness!

### S. Rangarajan – H. Nakamura

Junior World Under-12 Championship,  
Oropesa del Mar 1999



42...♙xa6!

42...♘e2+? 43.♙xe2 ♜c1+ 44.♙e1 ♜xe1+ 45.♙f2 ♜c1 46.g4 is by no means as con-



vincing as the game continuation, and after 42...♖c1?? 43.♙e3 the white position would be preferable.

**43.♙xa6 ♜c1+ 44.♙e1**

44.♙f1?? loses at once on account of 44...♜e2+ 45.♜h1 ♜xf1+ 46.♙g1 ♜xg1 mate.

**44...♜xe1+ 45.♜f2 ♜a1 46.♜b7+ ♜f8 47.♜xa7?**

Now White becomes too greedy. The active 47.♙c4 ♜c1 48.♙f1 ♜c2+ 49.♙g1 a5 50.♜a7 ♜c5 puts up more resistance.

**47...♜a2+ 48.♜f1 ♜xg2 49.♜a8+**

There is no salvation after 49.♜f7+ ♜xf7 50.♙c4+ ♜e7 51.♙xa2 ♜f4.

**49...♜e7 50.♜a7+ ♜d6 51.♜f7 ♜e3+ 52.♜g1 ♜e6 53.♜a7 ♜g2+ 54.♜h1 ♜c2**

One try here might be 54...♜f2!?

**55.♜g1 h5 56.♙d3?! ♜g2+ 57.♜h1 ♜d2 58.♜a6+ ♜e7 59.♜a7+ ♜d6 60.♜a6+ ♜c5 White resigned.**

A glance at Nakamura's opponents shows that almost all of them are now grandmasters, e.g. Viktor Laznicka (Czech Republic), Daniel Stellwagen (The Netherlands) Farhad Tahirov (Azerbaijan), Evgeny Romanov (Russia), the Under-12 world champion Wang Yue (China) and Sudanto Megaranto (Philippines). In the closing rounds 10 and 11 Hikaru lost to the two players from Asia, which cost him a medal. He drew with Evgeny Tomashevsky, who however had a lot of luck in the following game. The Russian, who in the final table led a group of players in sixth place on 7½ points, developed steadily in the years which followed. Thus in 2003 he won the bronze medal in the Under-16 world championship, and in the following year was runner up in the Under-18. The greatest individual

success so far for Tomashevsky, who is in the top 20 players in the FIDE world rating list, was in 2009 in Buvda (Montenegro) when he won the title of European Champion.

## GAME 12

**H. Nakamura – E. Tomashevsky**

Junior World Under-12 Championship,  
Oropesa del Mar 1999

*Trompowsky Attack [D00]*

**1.d4 ♜f6 2.♙g5 d5 3.♙xf6 gxf6 4.e3 c6 5.c4 e6 6.♜c3 f5 7.♙d3 ♙d6 8.♜c1 a6 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.g4!?**

Perhaps objectively speaking not the best in the long run but very aggressive. It is very hard to rein in White's initiative over the board.

**10...f4 11.e4 dxe4 12.♜xe4 ♜c6 13.♜f3 ♙e7 14.0–0 ♜g8 15.♜h1 ♙d7?**

This is too slow. Black had to take the pawn with 15...♜xg4.

**16.♜d2 ♜b8**

Now it is too late for 16...♜xg4, as can be seen from 17.♜g1 h5?! 18.h3 ♙b4 19.♜e2 ♜xg1+ 20.♜xg1 ♙f8 21.♜g8.

**17.a3?!**

When attacking, the pressure against one's opponent must be increased, so 17.g5 was indicated.

**17...♜xg4 18.h3?!**

18.♜c3 exerts more pressure.

**18...♜g6 19.♜c5 ♙xc5 20.♙xg6 ♙d6?**

After this the white attack becomes too strong. 20...hxg6 21.♜xc5 ♜d6 is still playable.

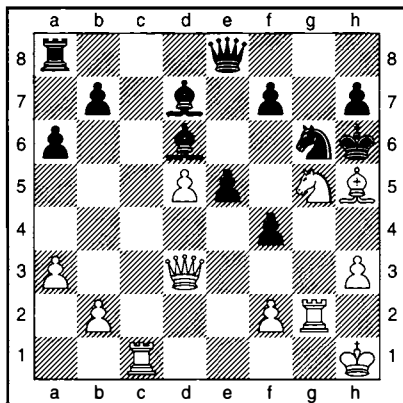
**21.♙h5 ♜e7 22.♙g5 ♜g6 23.d5! e5**



24. ♖fe1 ♔f8 25. ♕d3

25. ♖xh7+ ♔g7 26. ♖g5 ♕h8 27. ♕d1 is also good for White, but it unnecessarily allows Black some counterplay.

25... ♔g7 26. ♖g1 ♕e8 27. ♖g2 ♔h6?!



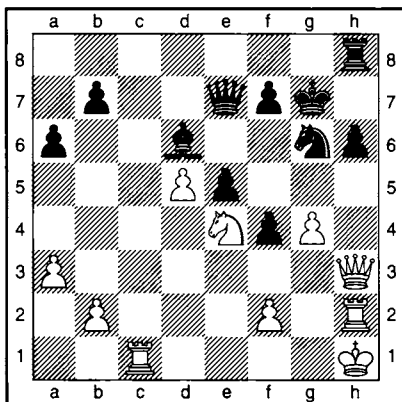
28. ♖g4!! ♖xg4?!

This opens up highways for the decisive attack, but in any case it is hard to suggest anything better.

29. hxg4 ♔g7

But not 29... ♖xg5? on account of 30. ♕f5+ ♔h6 31. ♕f6 ♕f8 32. ♖h2 mate.

30. ♖e4 ♕e7 31. ♖h2 h6 32. ♕h3 ♖h8



33. ♕h5

Unfortunately Nakamura misses the brilliant finish 33. ♖c8!! ♖xc8 34. ♕xh6+ ♔g8 35. g5 ♖c1+ 36. ♔g2 f3+ 37. ♖xf3 ♖c4 38. ♖f6+, but his move is also a strong one.

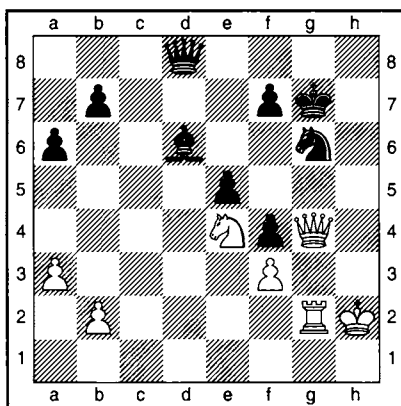
33... ♕d8 34. f3 ♕d7 35. ♕f5 ♕e7 36. ♖c3 ♕d8 37. g5

After 37. ♔g2!? ♕e7 38. ♖b3 b5 39. ♖c3 White is also superior.

37... hxg5 38. ♖xg5 ♖xh2+ 39. ♖xh2 ♕e7 40. ♖c2 ♕f6 41. ♕g4 ♖e7 42. ♖e4 ♕b6 43. ♖g2 ♕d8 44. d6?

What a pity. 44. ♖d2 leaves Black in a desperate position.

44... ♖xd6



45. ♖d2?

One inaccuracy is often followed by another. Now Black can escape the pin, so Hikaru should have continued the attack with 45. ♕h5 ♕e7 46. ♖g5.

45... ♕h8+ 46. ♔g1 ♖e7 47. ♕d7 ♕h4 48. ♖f2 ♕h5 49. ♖d6 ♖xd6 50. ♕xd6 ♕h4 51. ♕d5 ♕g3+ 52. ♔f1 ♕h3+ 53. ♖g2 ♕h1+ 54. ♔f2 ♕h4+ 55. ♔e2 ♕e7?!

55... ♕h1!? 56. ♕xe5+ ♔h7 57. ♕g5 ♕b1 does not change the fact that neither side

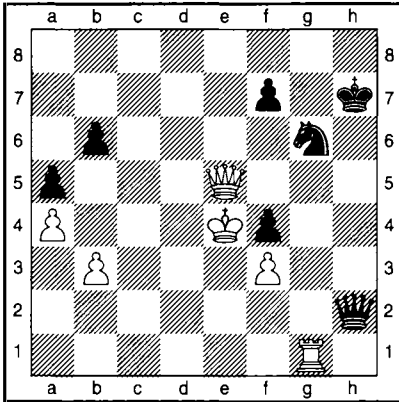


has an advantage.

**56.a4 b6 57.b3 a5 58.♖d3 ♜f6?! 59.♜d7?!**

An interesting try would be 59.♖c4!?

**59...♖f8 60.♖e4 ♖g7 61.♖g1 ♜h4 62.♜d6 ♜h5 63.♜c7 ♜h2 64.♜xe5+ ♖h7**



**65.♜d4?**

After the text move White has unnecessary problems. On the other hand, 65.♖xg6 ♜c2+ 66.♖xf4 fxc6 simply liquidates to a draw.

**65...♜e2+?**

Now Black goes wrong, but it does not cost him the game. The correct way was 65...♜c2+ 66.♖d5 ♖e7+ 67.♖d6 ♖f5+, and there is a high probability that it would have ended in a loss for Nakamura.

**66.♖f5 ♜e6+ 67.♖g5 ♜e7+ 68.♖f5 ♜e6+ 69.♖g5 ♜e7+ 70.♖g4**

**Draw agreed on White's proposal**

The Azerbaijani Farhad Tahirov, whom our young American here defeats in good attacking style, is an example of how a player can peak in early years – he got his grandmaster title in 2002, when he was 15 – but since then his chess career has not progressed any further.

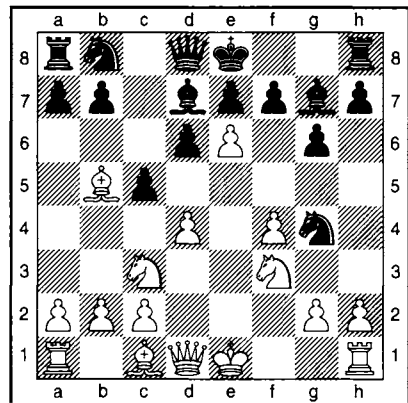
## GAME 13

**H. Nakamura – F. Tahirov**

Junior World Under-12 Championship,  
Oropesa del Mar 1999

*Pirc Defence [B09]*

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♖f6 3.♖c3 g6 4.f4 ♖g7  
5.♖f3 c5 6.♖b5+ ♖d7 7.e5 ♖g4 8.e6**



**8...♖xb5**

8...fxe6 9.♖g5 ♖xb5 10.♖xe6 ♖xd4 11.♖xd8 (11.♖xb5!?) 11...♖f2+ 12.♖d2 ♖e3+ is a known drawing variation.

**9.exf7+ ♖d7 10.♖xb5 ♜a5+ 11.♖c3 cxd4 12.♖xd4 ♖xd4 13.♜xd4 ♖c6 14.♜c4 ♜b6 15.♜e2 h5 16.h3 ♖f6?!**

16...♖h6 is played much more often. However, White is probably better then too.  
**17.♖d2 ♜af8 18.0-0 ♜xf7 19.♜he1 ♖d8?!**

19...♜hf8 20.g4 sees White with an advantage.

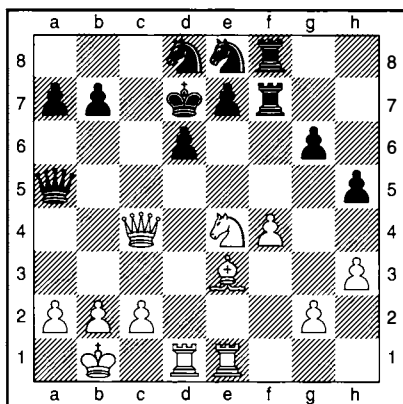
**20.♜d3 ♜g8 21.♖e3 ♜a5?! 22.♜c4! ♜gf8 23.♖b1 ♖e8?!**

23...♖c6 is more accurate.



## 24. ♖e4

In the middle the black king is a fine target for the white pieces, and so Nakamura sounds the decisive attack.

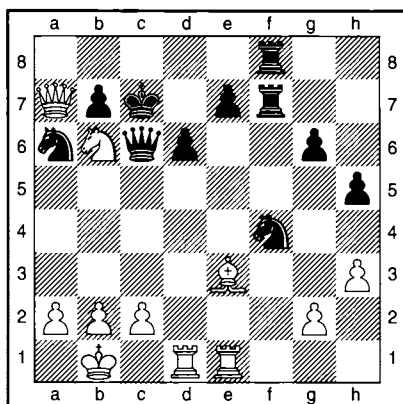


24... ♜c7 25. ♜a4+ ♜c6 26. ♖c5+ ♜c7  
27. ♜a5+ ♜c8 28. ♜xa7 ♖c7

If 28... dxc5?, then 29. ♜a8+ ♜c7 30. ♜xd8 mate.

29. ♖a4 ♖a6 30. ♜a8+ ♜c7 31. ♖b6?!  
31. ♖c3 is better: 31... ♖e6 32. ♜a7 ♖xf4?  
33. ♖xf4 ♜xf4 34. ♖d5+, and Black should be out of options.

31... ♖e6 32. ♜a7 ♖xf4



33. ♖a8+?

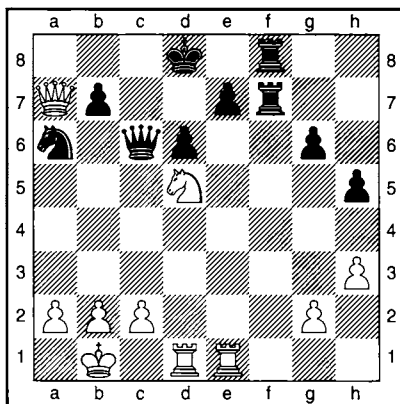
This check is superfluous, because 33. ♖xf4 ♜xb6 34. ♜xb6+ ♜xb6 35. ♖g5 turns out to be better.

## 33... ♜d7?

The bluff works, since Black misses the chance to set up a defensive line by means of 33... ♜xa8 34. ♜xa8 ♖xg2 35. ♜g8 ♖xe1 36. ♜xe1 ♜f3.

34. ♖xf4 ♜xf4 35. ♖b6+ ♜d8 36. ♖d5 ♜4f7?

And now Tahirov even runs into a combination, which of course Hikaru does not miss. 36... ♜f2 was required: 37. c3 (here 37. c4 e5 38. ♖c3 is just as good for White) 37... e5 38. ♜xe5 ♜b5 39. ♜a8+ ♜d7 40. ♜e7+ ♜c6 41. ♜xa6+ ♜xa6 42. ♖b4+, although all he is left with is hope.



## 37. ♖xe7!

Nakamura sweeps away the last pillar of the defence.

37... ♜xe7 38. ♜a8+ ♜d7

38... ♜c8 39. ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 40. ♜xe7 in no way changes the outcome of the game.

39. ♜xf8

**Black resigned.**



Tahirov's compatriot Teimour Radjabov, who took second place in 1997 in Cannes and first place in 1998 in Oropesa del Mar in the Under-10 age group, one year later made the jump up into the Under-18. A victory in the final round against the French player Laurent Fressinet, who became runner-up, would have brought him the gold medal, but he only managed 4<sup>th</sup> place – on the same number of points as the Cuban Lazáro Bruzón, his teammate Rasul Ibrahimov and the Spaniard Francisco Vallejo Pons, who later in 2000 won the World Championship crown in this age group.

Hikaru Nakamura's development, on the other hand, continued one step at a time, though the steps were becoming noticeably bigger. On the international stage he followed up the Under-12 with two Under-14 world championships. With fifth place in 2000 and then his first medal in the following year – a silver one – his years of apprenticeship were rapidly coming to an end. In the meantime his brother had severely limited his competitive chess activity, meaning that the brothers would face each other only one more time in a serious game. That happened at the Under-20 national championship in Tulsa, the second biggest town in the US state of Oklahoma, It was the end of July 2001. The younger brother decided things in his favour, as he majestically won the title with 7½ out of 9, whereas Asuka remained on tenth and last place with a mere two points. Here then is this game which is historically interesting and in which the difference in national ratings between the two was already a reflection of two completely different chess worlds (2464-2198).

### A. Nakamura – H. Nakamura

USA National Under-20 Championship,  
Tulsa 2001

*Pirc Defence [B06]*

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.f4 ♘c6  
5.♙e3 ♘f6 6.h3 0–0 7.♖d2 e5 8.♘f3 exd4  
9.♘xd4 ♘xd4 10.♙xd4 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4  
♙e8 12.0–0–0 ♙xe4 13.♙xg7 ♘xg7 14.♙d3  
♙e8 15.g4 ♙d7 16.f5 ♙e5 17.♙df1 f6  
18.h4 ♙e7 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.h5 g5 21.h6+  
♘h8 22.♙f2 ♙f8 23.♙xa7 ♙xg4 24.♙xb7  
♙e6 25.♙b4 ♙f7 26.a3 c5 27.♖d2 c4  
28.♙e2 c3 29.bxc3 ♙a7 30.♖d3 ♙b8  
31.♙xf6 ♙e3+ 32.♖d2 ♙xe2 33.♙xe2  
♙xe2 34.♙h5 ♙a2 35.♘d1 ♙g2 36.h7 ♙b1  
mate.

Seeded 10<sup>th</sup> for his fourth Junior World Championship, at the half-way mark everything seemed possible for Hikaru with his 5 out of 6, and even his draw in the next round against the Czech Jan Bernasek in no way spoiled his brilliant start. But then he met in Wang Yue a Chinese player who, with his Elo of 2440, was clearly stronger than Nakamura (on 2281) and who in the previous year had become Under-12 world champion. The rook ending in which the US boy sought salvation was one he could not hold and the dreams of a medal for the 12-year-old had burst. His strong final spurt with 2½/3 made no difference, since although at the end Hikaru had eight points, like the two Chinese players who took third and fourth places, Zhou WeiQi and Zhao Jun, his tie-break score was worse. In any case, his final round victory over the Dutch player Daniel Stellwagen, who had taken the World Championship silver in the Under-12, when they had drawn their game in round five, is well worth seeing.



## GAME 14

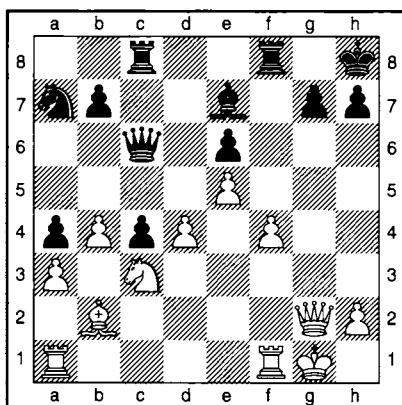
H. Nakamura – D. Stellwagen

Junior World Under-14 Championship,

Oropesa del Mar 2000

French Defence [C11]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7  
5.♞ce2 c5 6.c3 ♘c6 7.f4 ♕e7 8.♞f3 cxd4  
9.cxd4 f5 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♙d3 ♘b6 12.0-0  
♙d7 13.a3 a5 14.b3 a4 15.b4 ♘a7  
16.♞d2 ♚e8 17.♚e2 ♜c8 18.♙b2 ♚h8  
19.g4 fxg4 20.♚xg4 ♘c4 21.♞xc4 dxc4  
22.♙e4 ♙c6 23.♙xc6 ♚xc6 24.♚g2



**24...♚d7?**

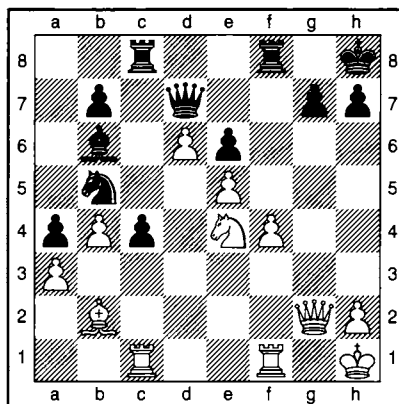
This is simply too slow. Stellwagen should bring his knight into play immediately with 24...♞b5, leading to unclear complications, e.g. 25.♚xc6 bxc6 26.♞xa4?! ♚a8 27.♞b6 c3 28.♙c1 ♚a7.

**25.d5! ♙d8 26.♜ac1 ♚f7?! 27.d6 ♚d7 28.♞e4 ♙b6+ 29.♙h1 ♞b5?!**

(see next diagram)

**30.♙c3?**

Missing the chance to storm the black stronghold at once, which comes about without problems after 30.f5 c3 (30...♜xf5?



Position after 29...♞b5?!

would be a mistake on account of 31.♜xf5 exf5 32.e6, and even prayer can no longer help Black) 31.♞xc3 ♞xc3 32.♜xc3.

**30...♜f5 31.♜f3 ♜cf8 32.♙d2 ♙d4 33.♜cf1?!**

Nakamura wrongly turns up his nose at the pawn: 33.♜xc4!? ♙xe5 34.♜d3 ♙f6 (after 34...♙xf4 35.♞c5 ♚f7 36.♜xf4 ♜xf4 37.♙xf4 ♚xf4 38.d7 too, White has a splendid position) 35.♜c5 with a clear plus for the first player.

**33...h6 34.♙e3 ♙xe3 35.♜xe3 ♜xf4 36.♜xf4 36.♜g1!? is an option.**

**36...♜xf4 37.♞c5 ♚f7 38.♜e1!**

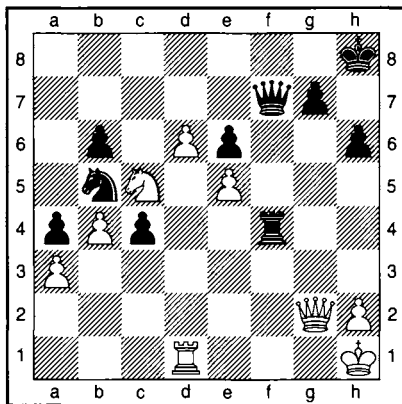
Necessary prophylaxis. There now began a wild battle in time-trouble.

**38...b6?**

38...♞d4! 39.d7 ♞c6 40.♜g1 ♜d4 41.♜f1 ♜f4 42.♜xf4 ♚xf4 43.♞xe6 ♚f7 44.♞c5 ♚f4, and Black has sufficient counterplay.

**39.♜d1?**

39.d7 ♜d4 40.♜f1 ♚g8 41.♞xe6 ♚xe6 (if 41...♜xd7?, then 42.♚g6 ♚a8+ 43.♙g1 ♙g8 44.♜f8+ ♚xf8 45.♞xf8 ♙xf8 46.♚xb6, and Black has nothing to laugh about) 42.♜f8+ ♙h7 43.♚c2+ g6 44.d8 ♚xd8 45.♜xd8 sees White with the upper hand.



### 39...♔g8?

A radical blunder, probably in extreme time-trouble. After 39...♔f2! 40.d7 ♖xg2 41.d8♗+ ♕h7 42.♗xg2 bxc5 43.♗h4 ♗f5 Black may even hold the better cards, but the situation remains complicated.

40.d7 ♔d4 41.♔xd4 ♕xd4 42.♕b7

**Black resigned.**

It is good that Hikaru did not get caught up in the “what would have happened if...?” question, but simply continued to work stubbornly on his chess. In the following year, when the best up-and-coming players in the world once again met in Oropesa del Mar to decide their champions, he had cranked up his Elo rating to 2466. That is an increase of 175 points in a single year. However, a direct comparison with his rival Magnus Carlsen shows that the Norwegian chess prodigy at the same age of almost 14 had already reached 2581.

The most important reason for that is certainly that, quite independently of his

extraordinary talent, he simply trained differently from Nakamura, although he only started to play chess seriously from the age of eight. For Magnus, reading relevant specialist literature – for example Kasparov’s series on his “great predecessors” – was an important factor. That was absolutely not the case for Hikaru. In an interview with chess journalist and author Howard Goldowsky just before the 2005 championships in San Diego he explained quite frankly: “Recently I have not picked up any chess books. I work exclusively with the computer.”

And in fact, according to Dr. Dirk Jordan, many of the representatives of this new generation owe the enormous progress in their playing strength to the rapidly developing exchange of information and the powerfully increased technical possibilities dependent on the ever-increasing spread of computers.<sup>7</sup> Thus the two authors Adrian Mikhalechishin and Oleg Stetsko chose as a title for the introduction to their *Fighting Chess with Magnus Carlsen* (Edition Olms 2012) “Magnus Carlsen – Hero of the computer age”.

Hikaru Nakamura explained in his interview with *Chess Chronicle* (December 2005) that the explosion in the number of grandmasters can clearly be attributed to computers, since every game is made accessible to everyone. “That makes it much easier to study the games of other players... I normally use the computer a lot. Basically I study the openings of my opponents. Apparently a lot of other players use this method. It works well.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Dirk Jordan, „Einige Bemerkungen zur Erkennung und Entwicklung von Talenten im Spitzenschach“, <http://karlonline.org/jordan>. [Some remarks on the discovery and development of talent in top-level chess]

<sup>8</sup> Cf. footnote 5, p. 43, on Nakamura’s interview with *Chess Chronicle*.



Garry Kasparov's warning about this one-sided tournament preparation is interesting in this respect: "Nowadays most young players only make moves in the anticipation of a mistake, just as an ice-hockey team pushes the puck into their opponents' zone in the hope that something will come out of it. The pure pragmatism of young players can be seen in many games."

Well, this results-orientated attitude is nowhere to be seen in the refreshing play of Hikaru, who scored his third IM norm in an open tournament in the Hungarian town of Eger in February 2001 and at the age of 13 years and two months became the youngest International Master in the USA, because he went for risks and did not change his combative style after losing a game. "Winning feels real good, but you can learn more from your losses. In a win you simply outplay the opponent or he makes a mistake and you do not. You definitely learn more from defeats, that is clear", was his reply to Howard Goldowsky's question "What affects you most? The positive feel after a win or annoyance after a bitter defeat?" And his step-father explained: "I think one must be ready to learn from defeats, or what then? Many players do not want to analyse a loss. I think that is in fact true. I agree with Hikaru that it is possible to learn a great deal from a defeat, if one is ready to take a critical look at it."

So at the Junior World Championships of 2001 his defeat at the hands of the future champion Viktor Erdős (Elo 2265!) did not throw him, although it was certainly more than annoying in view of the ratings gap of 200 points. But the Hungarian was playing the tournament of his life and that is something one just has to accept in sport.

Two rounds before the end everything seemed to be possible for Hikaru again. First he had to beat Borki Predojevic (Elo 2338). However, the young lad from Bosnia and Herzegovina had two European Championship titles to his credit: in 1999 in the Under-12 and in 2001 in the Under-14. Two years later he would become Under-16 World Champion, but then stagnate in the 2600s. Nakamura had some difficulty achieving this task, and then he was unable to win with Black against his old "client" Susanto Megaranto (Elo 2234) from the Philippines. In any case, Hikaru finished up with a World Championship silver medal, a place which exactly matched his seeding. All's well that ends well...

## GAME 15

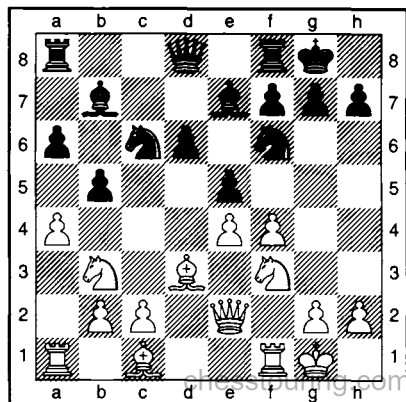
**H. Nakamura – B. Predojevic**

Junior World Under-14 Championship

Oropesa del Mar 2001

*Sicilian Defence [B42]*

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6  
5.♙d3 ♘f6 6.♘b3 ♘c6 7.f4 b5 8.0-0 ♙b7  
9.♚e2 ♙e7 10.♗1d2 d6 11.♗f3 e5 12.a4  
0-0!?





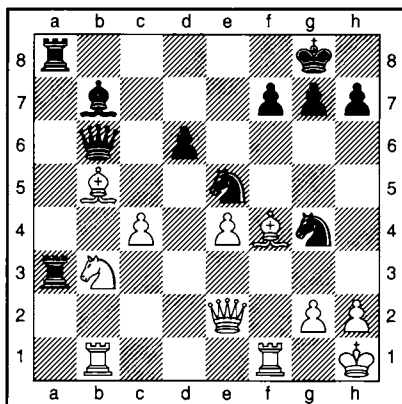
### 13. ♖e3

The acceptance of the pawn sacrifice by 13. axb5 axb5 14. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 15. ♖xb5 is met by 15... ♖xe4!, since after 16. ♖xe4?! the move 16... ♖b6+ wins back the piece with good play.

### 13... ♖g4 14. ♖d2 exf4 15. ♖xf4 ♖f6!?

Taking full control of the blockading square e5, so that Black cannot be worse.

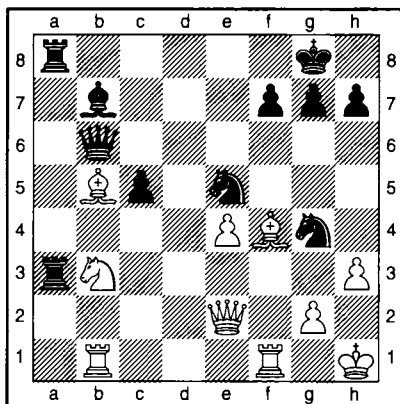
16. axb5 axb5 17. ♖ad1 ♖xb2 18. ♖xb5 ♖b6+ 19. ♖h1 ♖e5 20. ♖xe5 ♖cxe5 21. c4 ♖a3 22. ♖b1 ♖fa8?!



The way to equality is 22... ♖c6 23. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 24. c5 ♖fa8, because this deprives White of the potential for exerting pressure. 23. c5?!

A good idea, but Hikaru chooses the wrong move order to realise it. 23. h3 ♖f6 (after 23... ♖a2?! there follows 24. c5, and Black has problems) 24. c5 ♖c7 25. cxd6 ♖xd6 26. ♖b2 makes more of the running, e.g. 26... ♖b4 27. ♖xe5 ♖a2 28. ♖d4 ♖xb5 29. ♖xf6 ♖e2 30. ♖g1 ♖xe4 31. ♖b2 ♖xb2 32. ♖xb2 ♖d3 33. ♖e5 ♖xh3+ 34. ♖h2.

23... dxc5 24. h3



### 24... ♖g6!

Black solves the problem of the protection of his knights in tactical fashion.

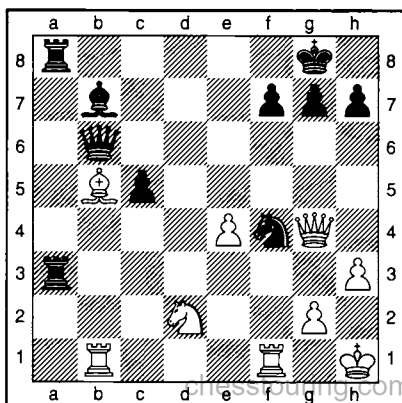
### 25. ♖d2?!

After 25. ♖c4 ♖e5 26. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 27. ♖d4 ♖d8 28. ♖e6 fxe6 29. ♖xe6+ ♖h8 30. ♖xb7 ♖a1 the chances for both sides are relatively even. On the other hand 25. hxg4? would not be playable for White on account of 25... ♖xf4 26. ♖xf4 ♖h6+.

### 25... ♖xf4?

Opens up highways for Hikaru. After 25... ♖f6! Black, on the other hand, is in no way worse off.

### 26. ♖xg4





## 26...♖e6?

Mistakes rarely occur in isolation. The surprising coup 26...♖h3!! was the final chance. Nevertheless White should also win through in the long run after 27.♞f5 (but not 27.gxh3?! on account of 27...♞h6 [27...♙c8?, on the other hand, is met by 28.♙c4] 28.♙d7 ♙a6, and White may stand better, but the situation is still rather complicated) 27...♞f8 28.♙c4 ♞c7 29.♞xf7+ ♞xf7 30.♞xf7 ♞xf7 31.♙xf7+ ♙xf7 32.♞xb7+ ♙e6 33.gxh3 ♞xh3+ 34.♙g2.

## 27.♖c4

27.♙e8 ♞c7 28.♙xf7+ ♙h8 29.♙xe6 is even better.

27...♞c7 28.♖xa3 ♞xa3 29.♙e8 ♖d8 30.♞bd1 ♙c8?! 31.♞f4 ♞xf4 32.♞xf4 g5 33.♞xd8 gxf4 34.♞xc8 f3 35.gxf3 ♞xf3 36.♙d7+

## Black resigned.

This 2001 Junior World Championship would be the last appearance of Hikaru Nakamura in junior tournaments. After four years at this level he had not only finally completed his apprenticeship, but he had also chosen the American way to success. Later he was never asked whether he would have done everything differently were he able to start all over again. For him, his way was probably the correct one...

In July 2004 his brother Asuka published an essay in the magazine *Chess Life*: “The positive influence of chess on my life”.

“Chess has been an integral part of my life since my memory can recall. It was my special talent, the one aspect of my character that clearly defined me as a person. As I grew older, I began to realize how much chess had given me. I had made many friends and acquaintances around the world, and I had gained national acclaim as the top scholastic player in the country.<sup>9</sup> By the time I began high school, I decided that I would spend more time teaching chess. I did not set out to make everyone a championship player - that requires a devotion greater than many young kids can summon. Instead, I wanted to spread the simple joy that the game of chess brings. The strategy, the thought process, the timeless art - these were the aspects of the game that I sought to bring to the kids I taught. (...)

I know I am not going to be the great chess player that my brother has become, nor the charismatic, eloquent chess teacher my stepfather has gained recognition for. I'm merely trying to spread my lifelong passion to others. And if the only thing I get is a toothy grin from a young face, that's okay. Sometimes winning doesn't mean everything.”

<sup>9</sup> Here there are two interesting facts which Stefan Löffler published in the column “ABC des Schulschachs” in *SCHACH* 6/2012, page 54: Since 1986 there has been in New York a school chess program *Chess in the Schools*, in which approximately 20,000 students take part every year. With its own program *First Move*, the *American Foundation for Chess* annually reaches 50,000 students in 26 states.



# ZWISCHEN ZÜGE

## Reminiscences of a chess game

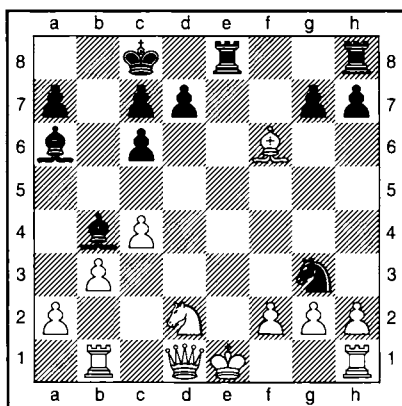
BY BETTINA TRABERT

**H. Nakamura – B. Traber**

Hawaii Open, Waikiki/Honolulu 1997

*Scotch Game [C45]*

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6  
5.♗xc6 bxc6 6.e5 ♖e7 7.♖e2 ♘d5 8.c4  
♙a6 9.♗d2 0-0-0 10.b3 f6 11.exf6 ♖xf6  
12.♖b1 ♙b4 13.♖d1 ♖de8+ 14.♙e2 ♗c3  
15.♙b2 ♗xe2 16.♙xf6 ♘g3+



**White resigned.**

I still remember this game well. It is always something special playing against a child, and for his nine years little Nakamura was already rather dangerous. Of course nobody suspected that one day he would

become so strong, and actually it was only a few years ago when looking through the database that I realised against whom I had been playing. The great stars must be spotted early, and nine or ten is usually early enough...

In this context I also remember the Junior World Championship in 1984 in Champigny-sur-Marne. In them a completely unknown young Indian boy played unbelievably quickly and nevertheless kept up with the then all-powerful Soviets. I remember working out what was on his name badge: Viswanathan Anand...

As far as the tournament in Hawaii is concerned, it took place in April 1997 in Waikiki near Honolulu and was organised by the American Eric Schiller, who also played in it. With Anthony Miles, who won it, Suat Atalik, Alex Yermolinsky, Alexander Baburin and Lev Psakhis, the Open was a relatively strong one. From today's point of view, the participants of interest include the future women's world champion Antoaneta Stefanova, who surprisingly took 5<sup>th</sup> place, and ten-year-old Arianne Caoili.

In the first round Hikaru, who was playing along with his brother Asuka and step-father Sunil Weeramantry, won his game with a nice attack. So I approached our game with some respect. He played relatively quickly



## Hawaii Chess Federation

(808) 262-5475

Official  
Score  
Sheet

Date: 4/1/97 Event: Hawaii Open

Round: 3 Board: Opening: 1

White: Nakamura

Rating:

Black: Traber

Rating:

| No. | White | Black | No. | White | Black |
|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| 1   | E4    | E5    | 31  |       |       |
| 2   | Sf3   | Sx6   | 32  |       |       |
| 3   | Qd4   | Qx4   | 33  |       |       |
| 4   | Sx4   | Sf6   | 34  |       |       |
| 5   | Sx6   | Lx6   | 35  |       |       |
| 6   | Q5    | De7   | 36  |       |       |
| 7   | De2   | Ce5   | 37  |       |       |
| 8   | C4    | Ld6   | 38  |       |       |
| 9   | Sd2   | O-O-O | 39  |       |       |
| 10  | L3    | f6    | 40  |       |       |
| 11  | Q5f6  | Qx1f6 | 41  |       |       |
| 12  | Tb7   | Lb4   | 42  |       |       |
| 13  | De4   | Tc7   | 43  |       |       |
| 14  | Ld7   | Sx3   | 44  |       |       |
| 15  | Lb2   | Sx4   | 45  |       |       |
| 16  | Lx6   | Sp3+  | 46  |       |       |
| 17  |       |       | 47  |       |       |
| 18  |       |       | 48  |       |       |
| 19  |       |       | 49  |       |       |
| 20  |       |       | 50  |       |       |
| 21  |       |       | 51  |       |       |
| 22  |       |       | 52  |       |       |
| 23  |       |       | 53  |       |       |
| 24  |       |       | 54  |       |       |
| 25  |       |       | 55  |       |       |
| 26  |       |       | 56  |       |       |
| 27  |       |       | 57  |       |       |
| 28  |       |       | 58  |       |       |
| 29  |       |       | 59  |       |       |
| 30  |       |       | 60  |       |       |

Circle Correct Result:

White Won Draw Black Won

Signature

Hikaru Nakamura

Signature

chesstouring.com



but with concentration. But things did not go as he wished and after the very early finish he appeared quite disappointed.

I cannot remember any joint analysis. However, two rounds later I lost to Hikaru's step-father and analysed the game with him for some time.

I had come to Hawaii after finishing my studies in ethnology, because I lived for a

long time in the USA. Distant corners of the planet have always interested me and an excursion to this chess tournament was a positive draw...

Ah well, I have actually managed to find the score-sheet for this remarkable encounter of 17<sup>th</sup> April 1997 with Hikaru Nakamura. At the bottom left you can see his childish signature... (see page 54)

\* \* \*



**Bettina Trabert** (born 1969), the first German woman to play a tournament game against Hikaru Nakamura, was numbered in the 1980s among the greatest up-and-coming hopes in West Germany. At the early age of 14 she took part in her first international tournament and in the Junior World Championships in 1984 gained an excellent fourth place in the Under-16 girls. The qualified ethnologist, who was awarded the WGM title by

FIDE in 2000, has represented Germany five times in chess Olympiads. Her greatest success with the team was their 6<sup>th</sup> place on her debut in Dubai 1986. The following year she won the zonal tournament for the Women's World Championship in Erlangen.

Nowadays Bettina Trabert has settled in Freiburg/Breisgau, where she lives with her family. At present her main link with chess is through her columns.



## CHAPTER 2

# Wijk aan Zee

Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 2

**S**uper-tournaments of 13 rounds plus three rest days are the absolute exception nowadays. From that standpoint we must hope that the tradition of Wijk aan Zee is preserved, for where else are there three whole chess weekends? But the thing that is nice compared to an Open played according to the Swiss System is that right from the drawing of lots players know whom they will meet on each day and with which colour. That makes specific preparation easier and allows games to be planned tactically.

What in January 2011 was known only to an absolutely intimate circle was that two months previously Hikaru Nakamura had had a secret conversation with Garry Kasparov in the Saint Louis Chess Club. After the close of the London Chess Classic on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010 at a private meal in Simpson's-in-the-Strand their cooperation was decided upon, financed by the American chess patron Rex Sinquefield.

"I knew right away that I would definitely take up the offer simply because there are certain times – certain opportunities you have in life just don't come around that often, and certainly having the opportunity to work with, at least what I consider to be, the greatest chess player ever, is sort of an opportunity you can't turn down", reminisced Nakamura in an exclusive interview with *New In Chess* (Volume 7/2011, page 10 ff.). One important pointer from the "master" for Hikaru was that in any case he had to change his all-or-nothing style if he wanted to continue successfully on his path to the top. It is not always about fighting down to the final bullet, but from time to time energy-saving draws are also a sensible alternative in super-tournaments...

## GAME 16

**L. Aronian – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Dutch Defence [A89]*

### ***Boldly applying the brakes...***

How does one play with Black against a super-grandmaster such as Levon Aronian, who shortly before had broken through the ultra-sound barrier of 2800 Elo points?

Well, Hikaru's plan was extremely simple. He gave up his favourite King's Indian Defence, with which he had put the Armenian under severe pressure two months before in Moscow. Instead he chose the Leningrad System of the Dutch Defence as his weapon against 1.d4.

This reminds one of a quote from the legendary David Bronstein: "I choose this opening depending on who my opponent of the moment is. If they are adversaries without any fire in their bellies and devoid

of fighting spirit, I take particular pleasure in playing the Dutch. Frequently they uselessly mark time whilst Black conjures up attacking chances on the kingside.” Mikhail Botvinnik too, as well as Vladimir Kramnik in his very young years, belonged to the fans of this opening.

As was to become clear, Nakamura’s choice was spot on, because he managed to put the breaks on his more fancied opponent without any problem.

**1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♟f6 3.♙g2 g6 4.♟f3 ♙g7 5.0–0 0–0 6.c4 d6 7.♟c3 ♟c6 8.d5 ♟a5**

Presumably Nakamura’s bold choice of opening came as a surprise to Aronian, who allowed the game to peter out really quickly to full equality. Hikaru once tried the main move 8...♟e5 in his game against Amon Simutowe, who was more than 200 Elo points weaker than him, at the 2007 108<sup>th</sup> US Open in Cherry Hill, but without success, since he lost in only 29 moves.

### 9.♟d2

A main alternative is 9.♞a4!? c5 10.dxc6 ♟xc6 11.♞d1, as played in the game Keres–Korchnoi, 20<sup>th</sup> USSR Championship, Moscow 1952. For the 21-year-old from Leningrad, who had Black, the “experiment” ended in a fiasco eleven moves later, although in his first appearance in the championship he would occupy a respectable sixth place: 11...♟a5 12.c5 ♙d7 13.♞a3 ♟e8 14.♙g5 ♙e6 15.cxd6 ♟xd6 16.♞xd6 ♞xd6 17.♞xa5 b6 18.♞a4 ♙d7 19.♞h4 ♙xc3 20.♙xe7 ♞e6 21.bxc3 ♞fe8 22.♟d4, and Black resigned. Korchnoi himself is supposed to have said about the Dutch Defence: “You can only play the Dutch against patzers.”

The comment of Bent Larsen, the great Danish fighter and winner, is a very pretty

one: “The Dutch brings out the ‘chicken’ in many players”; it can be found in the excellent opening monograph *Leningrad System* by grandmaster Stefan Kindermann.

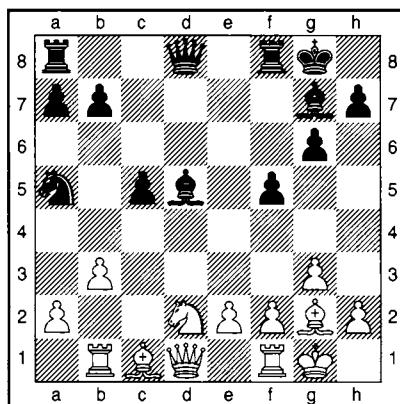
### 9...c5 10.♞b1

10.a3!? is probably slightly more venomous, because the freeing 10...e5? now fails to 11.b4.

### 10...e5 11.dxe6 ♙xe6 12.b3

Aronian even allows the advance of the d-pawn. But Black also has no great worries after 12.♟d5 ♟c6 13.♟f3 h6.

### 12...d5! 13.cxd5 ♟xd5 14.♟xd5 ♙xd5



### 15.♙a3

After this the game peters out completely. 15.e4!? would, on the other hand, certainly bring more tension into the position, e.g. 15...♙c6 (15...♙e6 16.♙a3 ♞c8 17.♞e2) 16.♞c2 b6 17.a3, and in each case White has a slight initiative.

### 15...♙xg2 16.♙xg2 ♟c6 17.♟f3

**Draw agreed on White’s proposal.**

On *Twitter* Nakamura commented on the draw as follows: “A very comforting draw” especially from the point of view of “concentrating on White against Shirov tomorrow”.



## Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2011, round 3

**D**rawing with Black and winning with White is a totally plausible strategy. Of course it is easier said than done. In this third round, in any case, the Dutch player Jan Smeets lost to Ruslan Ponomarev and Magnus Carlsen to Anish Giri (in both cases with White). The defeat of Smeets may have been expected, but the victory of the 16-year-old young Dutch star over the No.1 in the FIDE world rating list was something of a sensation, because it was all over in 22 moves. And the explanation that it was Carlsen's worst performance of the last two years did not help. The task of saving White's honour on that Monday now fell to Hikaru, who moreover was meeting in Alexei Shirov an uncompromising opponent. The previous year the player from Riga, who in view of the fantasy in his style is often seen as a successor to the chess magician Mikhail Tal, had astounded the chess world at the start: five victories in succession – but thereafter things did not go so well. They were followed by six draws and two losses, against Anand and, as it happened, Nakamura. And ten months later too, at the Tal Memorial in Moscow, the American had Black and in a lively Ruy Lopez was on the verge of victory over the older player. In the final position after 79 moves with otherwise only the bare kings he was ahead by a purely symbolic bishop.

### GAME 17

**H. Nakamura – A. Shirov**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Ruy Lopez [C78]*

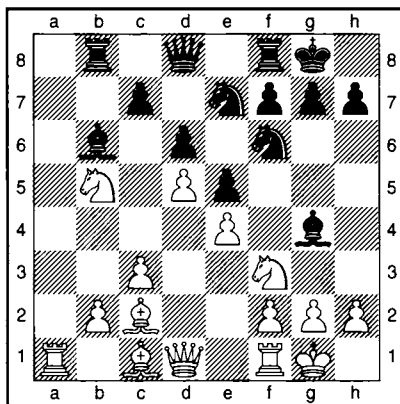
#### *Alexei's nightmares*

The question as to what Shirov would play as Black this time was answered on the very first move. He did not choose the sharp Sicilian Defence as he had done the year before, but he moved his king pawn two squares forward. So it was up to the American to put his stamp on the opening and it was a Ruy Lopez.

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 b5 6.♙b3 ♙c5**

The Tkachiev Variation, on which Shirov had even produced a *ChessBase Fritz-trainer DVD* in 2010, is his speciality.

**7.c3 d6 8.a4 ♖b8 9.d4 ♙b6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♘a3 0–0 12.♘xb5 ♙g4 13.d5 ♘e7 14.♙c2**



#### **14...♚d7!?**

We now have an exciting new plan. 14... ♚e8 is more frequently played, e.g. 15.c4 ♘xe4 16.♙xe4 f5 17.♙d3 e4 18.♙e2 exf3 19.♙xf3 ♔g6 ½–½ (Shirov–Ganguly, Edmonton 2005).

#### **15.♘a3 ♘exd5**

15...♔g6!?, the move played later, may be even more dangerous, e.g. 16.♙g5 (after 16.♚d3?! ♘h5 Black already had good

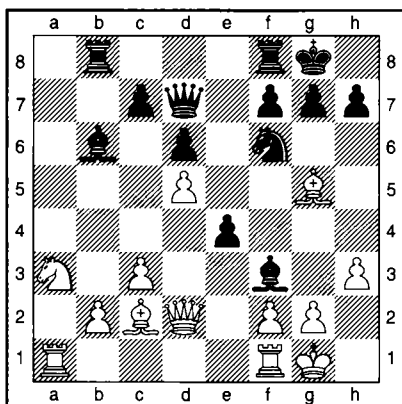


play in De Firmian–Aaron, Philadelphia 2011; 16.h3? backfires on account of 16...♙xh3 17.gxh3 ♖xh3 18.♘g5 ♜g3+ 19.♙h1 ♜h4+ 20.♙g2 ♘h5 21.♘h3 f5) 16...♙xe4 (16...♘h5? is thwarted by 17.h3 ♙xh3 18.♘h2 ♘g3 19.♞e1 f5 20.♘c4) 17.♙xe4 f5 18.♙c2 e4 with unclear complications.

**16.h3 ♙h5 17.exd5 e4 18.♙g5!**

This developing move is the correct reaction. On the other hand, 18.g4?! ♙xg4 19.♘e5 dxe5 20.hxg4 ♘xg4 21.♙xe4 f5 gives Black a very dangerous attack.

**18...♙xf3 19.♜d2**



**19...e3?!**

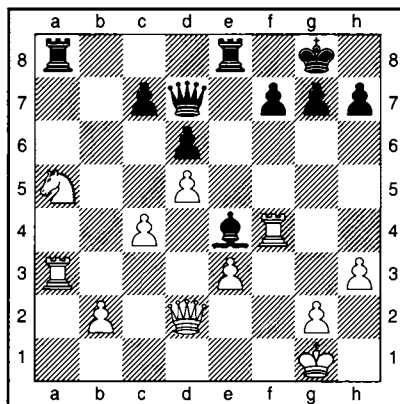
A very difficult decision. Probably the alternative 19...♜f5! was objectively better, e.g. 20.♙xf6 (20.♘c4 ♙e2 21.♜xe2 ♜xg5 22.♘xb6 ♜xb6 23.♙xe4 ♞e8 24.♜c2 ♘xe4 25.♜xe4 ♞bb8) 20...gxf6 21.♙h2 (after 21.gxf3 ♜xh3 22.♜f4 ♙h8 23.♜xf6+ ♙g8 Black has equality) 21...♜e5+ 22.g3 ♜g5 in each case with good counterplay for Black.

**20.♙xe3 ♙xe3 21.fxe3 ♙e4 22.♞xf6 ♙xc2 23.♞f4**

The unconventional 23.♘xc2!? gxf6 24.♘d4

also offers White certain winning chances.

**23...♙g6 24.♘c4 ♞a8 25.♘a5 ♞fe8 26.♞a3 ♙e4 27.c4**



**27...g5!**

Black has to become active and aggressive on the kingside, or else the extra white pawn will be decisive in the long term.

**28.♞f1 g4 29.h4 ♜e7 30.♜f2 ♙g6 31.b4?!**

This very committing move opens the second rank. Prophylaxis with 31.♘c6 ♜e4 32.♞c3 h5 33.♙h2 ♙h7 34.♞fc1 ♙g7 35.♙g3 offered better prospects of obtaining an advantage.

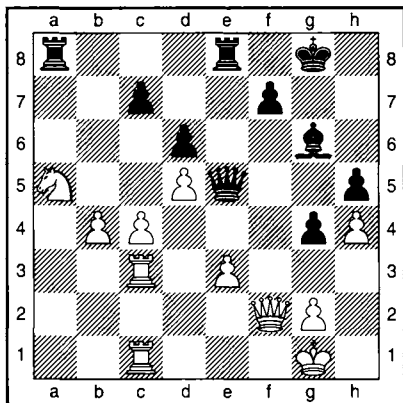
**31...h5 32.♞c3 ♜e5 33.♞b3 ♜e4 34.♞c3 ♜e5 35.♞fc1?**

Here Nakamura tries to extract too much from the position. It should be pointed out that 35.♜f6 is met by 35...♜g3! 36.e4 ♜e5 37.♜xe5 ♞xe5, and Black maintains the equilibrium.

(see next diagram)

**35...♙e4?**

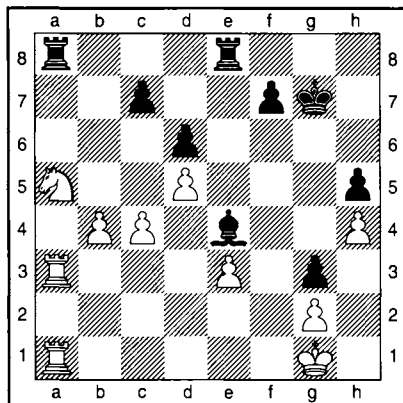
The bishop gets in the way here and the move can be criticised. Nevertheless, it is astonishing that Shirov did not seize the fleeting chance with 35...g3!, after which



Position after 35. Bf1?

Black gains a dangerous attack, e.g. 36. Wf4 (36. Wf3 Wg7 37. c5 Bxe4) 36... Wg7 37. Wxg3 Be4.

36. Wf4 g3 37. Wxe5 Bxe5 38. Ba3 Kg7 39. Bf1 Be8 40. Bf1



40... Be5?

In the long run this rook move turns out to be a waste of a tempo. After 40... Kg6 and then Be4, on the other hand, Black is in no way worse.

41. Bb3 Bxa3 42. Bxa3 Qxd5! 43. Qd2

43. cxd5? Bxe3 44. Qf1 Qg6 would be fatal on account of the eternal pin on the knight.

43... Qe6 44. e4 Qg4 45. Bxg3 f5 46. Be3 Be8 47. Qf2 Ba8!

Shirov activates his rook, which gives him good chances of a draw.

48. exf5 Ba2 49. Bd3 Qxf5 50. Bd5 Qe6 51. Bg5+ Qh6 52. Qe3 Ba3+?

This drives the white king in the direction it wanted to go anyway. 52... Ba4! on the other hand takes advantage of the moment when the king cannot yet get involved on the queenside, e.g. 53. Bb5 Ba3+ 54. Qd4 Bg3 55. Bb7 Bxg2 56. Qe4 c5+ 57. bxc5 dxc5+ 58. Qxc5 Bg4, and Black has nothing to fear.

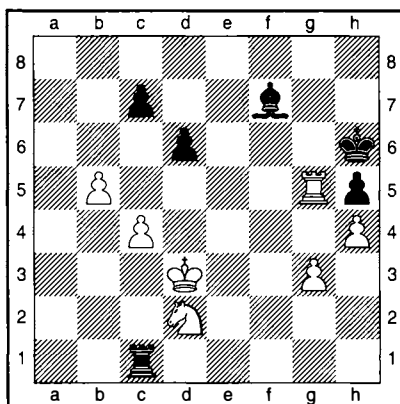
53. Qd4 Ba1

53... Ba2 54. Qc3 Ba3+ 55. Qb3 merely helps White's cause.

54. g3

54. c5 Ba2 55. Qf3 Bb2 56. cxd6 cxd6 57. b5±.

54... Bd1 55. Qc3 Bg1 56. b5 Bc1+ 57. Qd3 Qf7



58. Qb3!!

The only possibility of effectively activating the knight, which is going to become a nightmare for Alexei. 58. Qf3? is the wrong route on account of 58... Qg6+ 59. Qd4



**♖d1+ 60.♙e3 ♜d3+ 61.♙f4 ♜c3 62.♞d2 ♙f7.**

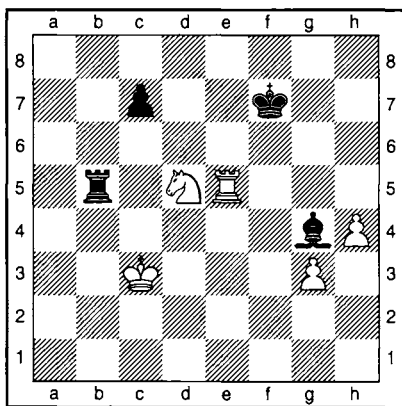
**58...♞d1+**

If 58...♙xc4+, then 59.♙d2 ♜f1 60.♞d4 (Atalik) 60...♞b1 61.♞f5+ ♙h7 62.♞xh5+ ♙g8 63.♞d4, and White is better.

**59.♙e2 ♞b1 60.♞d4 ♙xc4+ 61.♙d2 d5 62.♞f5+ ♙h7 63.♞xh5+ ♙g6 64.♞g5+ ♙f6 65.♞e3 ♞b2+ 66.♙d1 ♙e2+ 67.♙c1 ♞xb5 68.♙d2!**

68.♞xd5+? would now be a mistake on account of 68...♙f7 69.♞f5+ ♙e6 70.♞f2 ♞xd5 71.♞xe2+ ♙f5 72.♞e8 ♙g4 73.♞g8+ ♙h5 (Atalik), and Black can look to the future with satisfaction.

**68...♞b2+ 69.♙c3 ♞b5 70.♞xd5+ ♙f7 71.♞e5 ♙g4**



**72.♞e7+!**

Nakamura finds a precise tactical solution to the problem of the position.

**72...♙f8 73.♞e4 ♙f5**

Also after 73...♞xd5 74.♞xg4 ♞h5 75.♞c4 c5 (75...♞h7 is met by 76.♙d3, and White wins) 76.♞e4 White's advantage is more than clear.

**74.♞xc7 ♞c5+ 75.♞c4 ♞e5**

Nor is there salvation after 75...♞xc4+ on account of 76.♙xc4 ♙g7 77.♙d4 ♙g6 78.♙e5. Now White has everything under control and the rest is a matter of technique...

**76.♞f4 ♙e7 77.♙d4 ♞a5 78.♞d5+ ♙e6 79.♞c3 ♞a8 80.g4 ♙h7 81.♙e3 ♞c8 82.♞e2 ♙e5 83.♞a4 ♞b8 84.♞d4 ♞b1 85.♞a5+ ♙f6 86.♙f4 ♞f1+ 87.♞f3 ♙c2 88.♙g3 ♞b1 89.♞a6+ ♙g7 90.♞d4 ♙d3 91.♞d6 ♙f7 92.♙f4 ♞a1 93.h5**

**Black resigned.**

This game was not only the longest in the third round, but it also brought Hikaru for the second time the 500 euro prize for the best game of the day. Asked afterwards why the encounter had gone on for so long, he answered self-critically: "That was my own fault. For some reason half way through I began to play hesitantly, so that the game lasted seven hours rather than two."

Well, "Naka" had made a good start in Wijk aan Zee. With his 2½ points the American occupied first place, half a point ahead of Anand, Giri and the 20-year-old Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi (born 1990), who had totally surprisingly become 2010 European Champion in Rijeka...



# The magic of openings

## A) Developing a repertoire

Perhaps at the start of the career of any successful professional chess player, one of the most important pre-conditions is to acquire the ability to work independently, with the analysis of his or her own games and the study of the classics being of fundamental importance. Starting from a certain level of performance, a considerable part of the available time in training is taken up by the study of openings. But in practical terms how can one set about this?

Naturally there are a great variety of methods for acquiring an opening repertoire. And it should also be clear that it is a very individual business in which everyone has his own principles. There are no patented recipes!

"I have to admit that I have never been fascinated by opening research and therefore I do not feel particularly confident here. But to avoid this topic altogether is not possible – the opening plays too important a role in modern chess",<sup>1</sup> wrote Mark Dvoretsky, one of the best trainers in the world.

"The mastery of a player in the initial stage of the game is made up of many factors – and not merely a good knowledge of opening theory. Incidentally, to say 'good knowledge of theory' is easy, whereas to achieve it is difficult. Numerous problems immediately arise.

"What are the principles of building an

opening repertoire, how broad should it be, and which systems accord best with your style of play?

"How to cope with the enormous and ever-increasing volume of opening information?

"Required here is not only a purely technical, but also a creative treatment of the information – objective evaluation and understanding of book recommendations, old and recently played games, the search for effective novelties and so on. And when at a tournament we are preparing for the next game, it is very important, on the basis of a rapid acquaintance with the opponent's play, to be able to guess which opening will be the most unpleasant for him.

"However well prepared we are, sooner or later our 'book' knowledge will end and we will have to act independently. This can happen even at the very start of the game – after all, our opponent has the right at any moment to deviate from familiar paths. And here it is immediately revealed to what extent the two players have a mastery of the general principles of opening play, which of them understands more deeply the strategic and tactical ideas of the resulting position, and to what extent they are ready to solve the new problems facing them."<sup>2</sup>

As for Hikaru Nakamura, as a child he began with the completely normal move for

<sup>1-2</sup> Mark Dvoretsky, *School of Chess Excellence 4 Opening Developments*, Zürich 2003, Edition Olms, p. 9.



White 1.e4, then early on he also tried out 1.d4, and nowadays he is, as it were, ambidextrous. In the computer age this is probably imperative, so as not to be simply predictable. With Black he began by meeting 1.e4 with very ambitious, highly theoretical opening systems such as the Sicilian Najdorf Variation and the Dragon Variation, and 1.d4 with the King's Indian, all of which aim for dynamic counterplay. There is no disputing the fact that his bold and inventive choice of openings suits his character. It is not for nothing that the King's Indian has remained his great love till this day.

In 2004, in an interview with Howard Goldowsky, his step-father Sunil Weeramantry described his training plan as follows:

"I think one of the things I tried to do was to let him play whatever it was he wanted to play. Now, if you look at Hikaru's games, he's a pretty versatile player in terms of what he can play, either as White or as Black. And I've tried to encourage him to explore on his own, and to play what he wants to play when he feels like playing it. I mean, I used to say, 'Don't worry if you play a bad game and you look stupid.' You know, this is the only way you can really progress. It's bad if you get set into a particular mode or format early on, and you don't want to break out of it."<sup>3</sup>

However, Hikaru's opening preparation tended, as he himself said, for a long time to be one of his Achilles' heels, when it is

compared with that of world-class players. He tried out a lot of things and went more for breadth than for depth, which, however, also gave him the advantage of being very unpredictable. In his experimental phase he even chose exotica such as 1.e4 c5 2.♖h5 (in which he received a painful lesson from Andrei Volokitin in Lausanne in 2005) and 1.e4 e5 2.♖h5.<sup>4</sup>

This changed, however, under the influence of Kris Littlejohn. The emphasis was then set above all on tried and trusted main lines together with new computer-checked ideas and each game was prepared for meticulously. There was a new leap in performance as a result of the cooperation with Garry Kasparov and access to the latter's legendary database, which first fully came to fruition in Wijk aan Zee 2011 and helped the young US grandmaster to a triumphant success. At the hour of victory Nakamura euphorically announced: "I now play more serious chess. No more 2.♖h5, no more crazy openings for me. My results have improved. Hopefully, I can keep it going. I hope to break 2800 by the end of this year."<sup>5</sup>

As far as this dream was concerned, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 Hikaru took 12<sup>th</sup> place in the FIDE world rating list with an Elo score of 2759. The route to breaking through the "sound barrier" of 2800 still lay in the distance...

Nevertheless it is unmistakable that the work with Garry Kasparov, which gave Nakamura a much greater level of self-

<sup>3</sup> The interview was published on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2004 on *ChessCafe.com* under the heading "A Conversation with Hikaru Nakamura and his stepfather, Sunil Weeramantry".

<sup>4</sup> He even wrote an article on the (in)famous Parham attack, which he tried out in 2005 at the Sigeman Tournament, in: J. Bosch, *Schach ohne Scheuklappen, Band 7*, pp.138-142.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from the daily report of the website *www.tatasteel.com* for the tournament in Wijk aan Zee 2011.



confidence in Wijk aan Zee (“I felt good during the whole tournament and that was the reason why I won the tournament.”<sup>6</sup>), had a very positive effect, above all on his opening preparation.

Magnus Carlsen, who worked intensively for a whole year with Garry – face-to-face meetings, regular conversations on Skype, joint analysis and games against each other – made the following comments on this subject: “He showed me his methods for working on the opening and I am thankful to him for that. Thanks to him I have made progress in this area.”<sup>7</sup> And Kasparov commented on this in an interview with *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper: “I helped Magnus with something which he did not have: opening preparation, a systematic

way of working, a sharper playing style.”<sup>8</sup>

It can be assumed that Hikaru also profited from this, not least when one considers his professional approach in training. But let him express it in his own words: “When you look at chess these days, the advantages that players get in the games – the windows of opportunity – are so much smaller, just because so many openings aren’t playable or are considered to be very drawish nowadays...”<sup>9</sup>

One visible result in Nakamura’s play is that he varies his openings a lot with both colours and after his separation from Kasparov he works out a route map for every game with the help of his second Kris Littlejohn; in other words, he is working independently in a more self-aware fashion.

## B) His score in the openings

According to *ChessBase Mega Database* 2012 Hikaru has played 713 games with White with a score of 68%. 330 1.e4 and 257 1.d4, which says a lot about his versatility. The next most frequent move is 1.c4, with which he has started 64 times. His score is especially impressive against the Sicilian with 72.7%. So, for example, he has only conceded a single draw against the Dragon Variation. Against the main openings things look as follows:

### White with 1.e4

Against the Najdorf Variation Hikaru always played 6.♗e3 till 2007 and since then mainly 6.♗g5, which is nowadays regarded as critical. Against 1...e5 he prefers the Ruy Lopez and the Scotch, though the latter occurred for the last time in 2009. In the Ruy Lopez he normally allows the Marshall Attack. He has not yet lost against it, but also his wins have been rare.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Magnus Carlsen in an interview with Evgeny Atarov for the Russian website *ChessPro*, at the end of 2011; published in German on the *ChessBase* homepage on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012 .

<sup>8</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 8th January 2011

<sup>9</sup> *New In Chess Magazine*, 7/2011, p.14



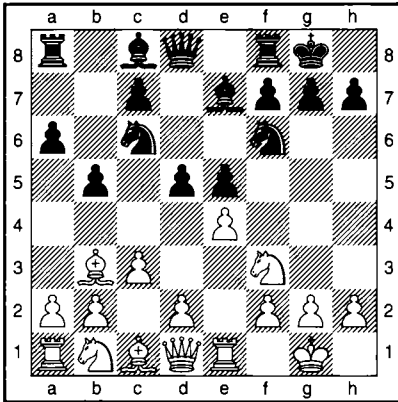
## GAME 18

**H. Nakamura – M. Adams**

London Chess Classic, London 2010

*Ruy Lopez [C89]*

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6  
5.0–0 ♗e7 6.♝e1 b5 7.♗b3 0–0 8.c3 d5!?



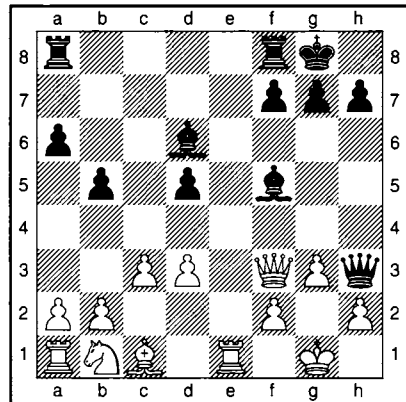
Adams is one of the main protagonists of the Marshall Attack, which was first employed by the legendary American Frank James Marshall at the double-round New York tournament in the autumn of 1918 against future world champion José Raúl Capablanca. The Cuban boldly accepted the invitation to enter the extremely sharp variation which arose from it. “The lust of battle had been aroused within me. I felt that my judgement and skill were being challenged by a player who had every reason to fear both, but who wanted to take advantage of the element of surprise and of the fact of my being unfamiliar with a thing to which he had devoted many a night

of toil and hard work. I considered the position then and decided that I was in honour bound, so to speak, to take the pawn and accept the challenge...”, are the words of the Cuban, whose defence found over the board at that encounter is today still reckoned to be the best.<sup>10</sup>

9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♝xe5 c6  
12.♝e1 ♗d6 13.d3

13.d4 is the classical main variation.

13...♗f5 14.♝f3 ♖h4 15.g3 ♖h3 16.♗xd5  
cxd5



**17.a4!?**

Surprisingly, here this typical move is a novelty, which is meant to set Adams problems at the board.

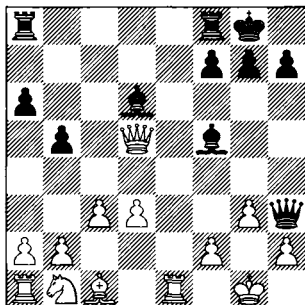
After 17.♗f4 the line 17...♗g4! 18.♝g2 ♗xf4 19.♝xh3 ♗xh3 20.gxf4 d4 21.♘d2 ♝fd8 22.c4 ♝d6<sup>11</sup> gives Black sufficient counterplay.

17.♝xd5! is and probably remains the critical test of the black system.

(see next diagram)

<sup>10</sup> J. R. Capablanca, *My Chess Career*, Bell 1920, p.181.

<sup>11</sup> Mihail Marin in *ChessBase Magazin 140*; abbreviated to *CBM*.



Analysis diagram

17...♖ad8 18.♔g2 ♚h5!? (the endgame after 18...♗xg2+ 19.♔xg2 ♕xd3 20.♕e3 from Shirov–Karjakin, Khanty-Mansyisk 2007, results in a somewhat depressing but probably tenable position for Black) 19.♕e3 ♕h3 (19...♕xd3 20.♖d2 b4!? from the correspondence game Odehnal–Zacek, 1998, is the alternative) 20.♗h1 f5 21.♕b6 ♖d7 22.♗d5+ ♕h8 23.♖d2 ♕xg3 24.♗xd7 ♕f4, and despite the big material deficit Black had certain compensation in Sutovsky–Jakovenko, Poikovsky 2008.

### 17...♖ae8

Mihail Marin's suggestion 17...b4!? 18.♗xd5 ♖ad8 looks very playable despite the two missing pawns.

### 18.♕d2!

Ugly but forced. This is one of the points of Hikaru's novelty.

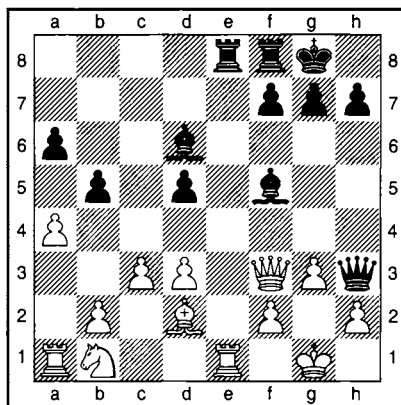
(see next diagram)

### 18...♕g4 19.♗xd5 ♖d8 20.d4

20.axb5 axb5 21.♗c6 is the alternative, but after 21...♖c8 22.♗g2 ♗h5 Black gets his typical counterplay on the light squares.

### 20...b4

20...♕xg3 21.♗g2 ♕c7 22.♗xh3 ♕xh3 23.axb5 axb5 24.♖a6! gives White a slightly improved version of the ending compared to that in the game. (Marin)



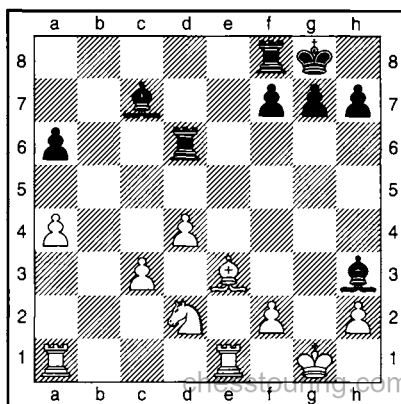
Position after 18.♕d2!

### 21.♕e3?!

After this Black can open up the white king position. Marin's suggestion 21.♗c6! is critical, e.g. 21...a5 22.cxb4 (22.♕g5 is met by 22...♖c8 23.♗d5 bxc3 24.bxc3 ♕b8) 22...axb4 23.♕e3 ♖c8 (23...f5!?) 24.♗g2 ♗h5 25.♖d2 ♕h3 26.♗f3 ♕g4 27.♗b7 ♖c2 28.b3 ♕e6, and in both cases Black has a certain amount of compensation.

### 21...bxc3 22.bxc3 ♕xg3 23.♗g2 ♕c7 24.♗xh3 ♕xh3 25.♖d2 ♖d6

The black bishop pair now gave Adams sufficient compensation for the pawn in the typical style of the Marshall Attack.





26.♖h1 ♔a5 27.♞ac1 ♕e6 28.♙f4 ♜c6  
 29.♞e3 ♞d8 30.♙g2 h6 31.♜e4 ♙d5  
 32.f3 ♜c4 33.♜c5 ♙b6 34.♜xa6 ♙xd4  
 35.♞d3 ♙f6 36.♜b4 ♙b7 37.♞xd8+ ♙xd8  
 38.♞d1 ♔a5 39.♙d2 g5 40.h3 ♜c5 41.♞e1  
 ♞f5 42.♞e3 h5 43.♜c2 ♙f8 44.♜d4 ♞d5  
 45.♙c1 ♙b6 46.♙a3+ ♙g7 47.♞e7 ♙xd4  
 48.♞xb7 ♙xc3 49.♙c1 ♙g6 50.♞b5 ♞xb5  
 51.axb5 ♙d4 52.♙d2 ♙b6 53.♙e1 ♙f5  
 54.♙f2 ♙xf2 55.♙xf2 ♙e6 56.f4 f6 57.b6  
 ♙d7 58.♙f3 ♙c6 59.fxg5 fxg5 60.♙e4  
 ♙xb6 61.♙f5 g4 62.hxg4 hxg4 63.♙xg4  
 ½–½

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chess Classic in London, Hikaru showed that he is always good for a surprise, when in the final round against Adams he unpacked the King's Gambit. The experiment worked well and secured second place for Nakamura ahead of his long-time rival Magnus Carlsen.

### H. Nakamura – M. Adams

London Chess Classic, London 2011

*King's Gambit [C36]*

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♜f3 d5 4.exd5 ♜f6  
 5.♙c4 ♜xd5 6.0–0 ♙e6 7.♙b3 c5 8.♖h1  
 ♜c6 9.d4 c4 10.♙a4 ♙d6 11.b3 c3  
 12.♞d3 0–0 13.♙xc6 bxc6 14.♜xc3 ♞e8  
 15.♜xd5 ♙xd5 16.c4 ♙e4 17.♞c3 a5  
 18.a3 f6 19.♙b2 ♞a7 20.♞ad1 ♞ae7  
 21.b4 axb4 22.axb4 ♖h8 23.♞b3 ♞b7  
 24.♙c3 ♞b8 25.b5 cxb5 26.c5 b4 27.♙d2  
 ♙f8 28.♞de1 g5 29.♞c4 g4 30.♜h4 f3  
 31.d5 fxg2+ 32.♜xg2 ♙f3 33.♙g1 ♜c8  
 34.c6 ♞b5 35.♜f4 ♙c5+ 36.♙e3 ♙xe3+  
 37.♞xe3 ♞b6 38.♞fe1 b3 39.♞c3 ♞f8  
 40.♜e6 b2 41.c7 1–0

Against 1...e6 2.d4 d5 he has already tried 3.♜c3, 3.♜d2 and 3.e5, the latter, however, for the last time in 2007. He

varies the two knight moves according to his opponent, but 3.♜c3 is clearly his main weapon. From his score, it appears that the French is in any case not a bad choice against Hikaru. He has not yet won with 3.♜d2 and in the 3.♜c3 ♙b4 variation he has “only” scored 53.6%.

Against the Caro-Kann (1.e4 c6) after 2.d4 d5 he plays both 3.e5 and 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♙d3 or 4.c4, with the critical 3.e5 probably being his main weapon and also the one he scores best with.

Of other lines, the good score for Black after 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♜f6 3.♜c3 e5 is worth noting, but these are mainly blitz and rapid games which also do not make it into the Mega Database.

### White with 1.d4

After 1.d4, presumably under the influence of Kasparov, when facing the Nimzo-Indian Defence 1...♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♜c3 ♙b4 he has turned away from his old variations 4.e3 and 4.♞c2 in favour of 4.♜f3 c5 5.g3. However, he has not had a good score with it. Thus, for example, Vladimir Kramnik was able to draw the teeth from it in Dortmund 2011:

## GAME 19

### H. Nakamura – V. Kramnik

Sparkassen Chess Meeting,  
Dortmund 2011

*Nimzo-Indian Defence [E20]*

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♜c3 ♙b4 4.♜f3 c5  
 5.g3

“As expected. Since Hikaru began to work with Kasparov, this has become his main

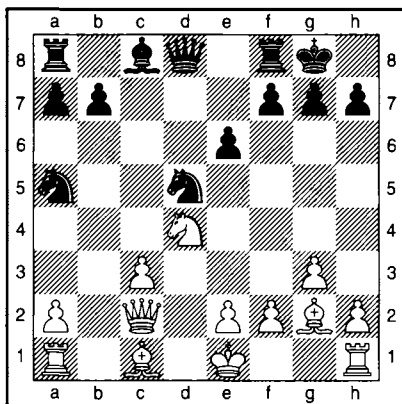


weapon against the Nimzo-Indian”, remarked Kramnik in *CBM* 144.

**5...cxd4 6.♖xd4 0–0 7.♗g2 d5 8.♜b3**

“Almost forgotten these days, but in the 1980s this continuation was employed several times by Kasparov. At present 8.cxd5 ♖xd5 9.♜b3 is fashionable.” (Kramnik)

**8...♗xc3+ 9.bxc3 ♖c6 10.cxd5 ♖a5 11.♜c2 ♖xd5**



## 12.0–0

Presumably one of the fruits of his cooperation with Kasparov, who in his day continued 12.♜d3: 12...♜c7! (12...♗d7?! was advantageous for White after 13.c4 ♖e7 14.0–0 ♜c8 15.♖b3 ♖xc4 16.♗xb7 ♜c7 17.♗a6 on account of his bishops, Kasparov–Karpov, World Championship match London/Leningrad 1986) 13.0–0 ♗d7 14.e4 ♖b6 15.f4 e5 16.fxe5 ♖ac4, and Black has equalised, Kasparov–Suba, Olympiad, Dubai 1986.

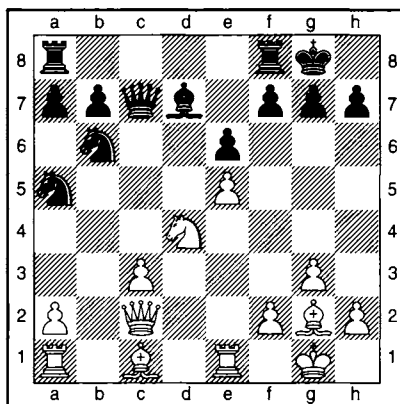
**12...♜c7 13.♜e1**

But this is very slow. Kramnik suggests the pawn sacrifice 13.e4 ♖xc3 14.♗b2 ♖b5 15.♜xc7 ♖xc7 and considers the situation to be drawish.

**13...♗d7**

13...♖xc3? 14.♗d2 and 13...♜xc3? 14.♜xc3 ♖xc3 15.♗d2 fail because of the hanging knights.

**14.e4 ♖b6 15.e5**



**15...♗a4!**

Only now did Nakamura begin to think for a longer time. In spite of the white bishop pair – in return for which Black has two mobile knights on the edge of the board – the position appears to be more or less balanced.

**16.♜d3 ♜c4 17.♜f3**

According to Kramnik 17.♜xc4! ♖bxc4 18.♜b1 ♜ab8 19.f4 is the critical variation, but one in which Black should also be able to hold.

**17...♖c6 18.♜e4**

Nakamura thought for a full hour about this rook move. Later in an interview for the magazine *SCHACH* he self-critically recognised that was one of the reasons why he lost the game: “I had looked at this position with the computer and remembered that 16...♜c4 had not been its recommendation. I was very shocked not to be able to find an advantage. Thinking about it for an hour was probably a bit impractical. But such things do happen.” (Issue 9/2011, p. 23)

**18...♖xd4 19.♜xd4 ♗c6!**

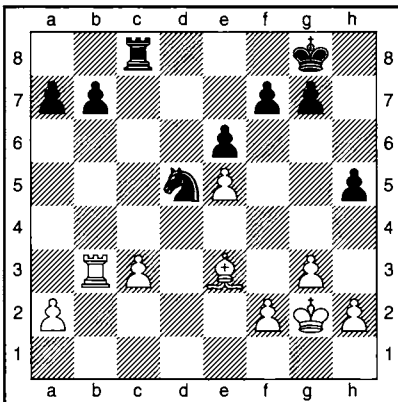


The solution to the problem of the position; the game should now actually end in a draw.

**20. ♖xc4 ♙xf3 21. ♜c7 ♙xg2 22. ♔xg2 ♜ab8 23. ♜b1 ♜fc8 24. ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 25. ♜b3 25. ♙e3!?** leads by force to a draw: **25... ♜xc3 26. ♙xb6 axb6 27. ♜xb6 ♜c7** (Kramnik).

Hikaru also mentioned this in the aforementioned interview for *SCHACH*: “Yes, I could have forced the draw. I really no longer know exactly what I wanted at that point in time. Perhaps I wanted to win. And then I wanted too much and paid the price for not having taken the draw. Vladimir’s technique was very precise.”

**25... h5 26. ♙e3 ♖d5**



**27. ♙d4?**

27. ♙xa7 still leads to a draw.

**27... b6!**

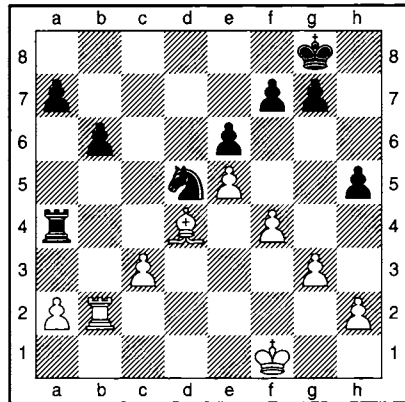
Now the white bishop is being dominated.

**28. f4?!**

The endgame rule, never to put a pawn on a square of the same colour as your own bishop without necessity, is of course well known to Nakamura, but in this specific case he appears simply to have forgotten it

for some inexplicable reason.

**28... ♜c4 29. ♙f1?! ♜a4 30. ♜b2**



**30... ♙h7!**

And the penetration of Kramnik’s king, which will rapidly make for f5, decides the game:

**31. ♙f2 ♙g6 32. ♜c2 ♜a3 33. h3 b5 34. ♜b2 a6 35. ♜c2 ♙f5 36. ♙f3 b4 37. g4+ hxg4+ 38. hxg4+ ♙g6 39. ♙e4 bxc3 40. ♜h2 ♜a4 41. ♜f2 a5 42. ♙d3 c2 43. f5+ ♙g5 44. ♙b2 ♖b4+ 45. ♙c3 ♜xa2 46. ♜f1 ♙xg4 47. fxe6 fxe6**

**White resigned.**

In addition to his main weapon 3. ♖c3, Hikaru also plays 3. ♖f3 and against the Queen’s Indian either the Petrosian Variation 4. a3 or 4. g3.

Hikaru has the very good score of 71.9% against his own favourite opening, the King’s Indian. However, recently it has no longer been seen against him at the highest level.

Against the Grünfeld Defence 1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♖c3 d5 since 2008 he has replied only 4. ♖f3 or 4. cxd5, which can probably be seen as his main weapon. However, at the Tal Memorial Tournament



in Moscow 2011 he suffered a painful defeat with it at the hands of Peter Svidler.

Hikaru goes into the Anti-Moscow Variation against the Queen's Gambit. With it he managed, for example, to notch up a beautiful victory over Jan Smeets in Wijk aan Zee 2011 (see Chapter 6, page 126). These unbalanced fighting situations suit him well.

### Black against 1.e4

His main weapon is the Sicilian, above all the Najdorf Variation, followed by 1...e5. Here against top-class players he recently tested with some success the sustainability of the "Berlin Wall" in reply to the Ruy Lopez, until things finally went wrong against Vassily Ivanchuk.

## GAME 20

**V. Anand – H. Nakamura**

Grand Slam Final,  
São Paulo/Bilbao 2011  
*Ruy Lopez [C67]*

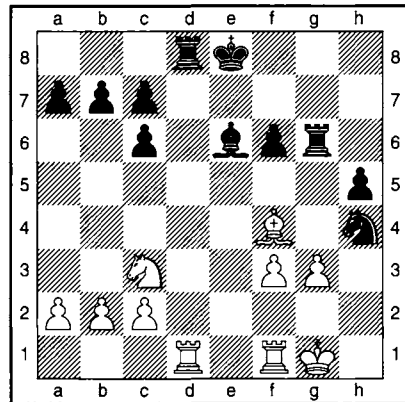
World Champion Anand could not achieve much against the Berlin Wall in the following two games...

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♗xd8 9.♗c3 ♙e8 10.h3 h5 11.♙f4 ♙e7 12.♖ad1 ♙e6 13.♗g5 ♖h6 14.g3 ♙xg5 15.♙xg5 ♖g6 16.h4 f6 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♙f4 ♗xh4 19.f3 ♖d8

(see next diagram)

### 20.♖xd8+

This novelty by the world champion does not change much. The white advantage is only minimal and can hardly be measured.



Position after 19...♖d8

Nor does 20.♙f2 bring much more, as can be seen from the game Motylov – Malakhov, Olginka 2011: 20...♖xd1 21.♗xd1 ♗f5 22.♖h1 ♙xa2 23.♖xh5, and the point was shared.

**20...♙xd8 21.♙f2 ♗f5 22.♖h1 ♗g7 23.♙d2**

In *CBM 145* Romain Édouard gives the amazing 23.b3!? ♙f5 24.♗d1! but also shows how Black can defend: 24...♙e6 (but not 24...♙xc2? on account of 25.♗e3 ♙f5 26.♗g2!, and now it is White who is in charge...) 25.♙c1 b6 26.♗e3 ♙f7 27.♗g2 ♗e8 28.♗f4 ♖g5.

**23...♙f5 24.♗d1 ♙xc2 25.♗e3 ♙d3 26.♗g2 ♗e6 27.♖xh5 ♖g7 28.♙c3 ♙e7 29.♖h6 ♖f7 30.g4 ♙b1 31.a3 f5 32.g5!? ♗xg5 33.♗f4 ♙e8 34.♖g6 ♗h7 35.♖g8+ ♖f8 36.♖g7 ♖f7**

**Draw.**

"Thanks to Kramnik I was able to play something as obscure as the 'Berlin Wall' and get an easy draw against the world champion", was Nakamura's conclusion on this game.

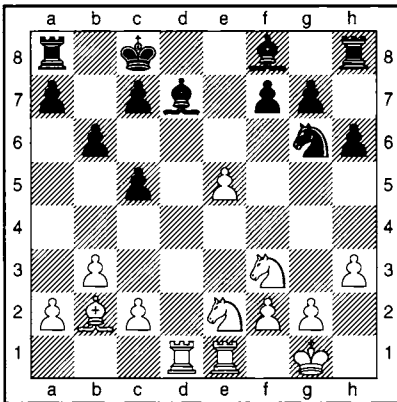
## GAME 21

V. Anand – H. Nakamura

London Chess Classic, London 2010

*Ruy Lopez [C67]*

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0–0  
 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5  
 8.♚xd8+ ♚xd8 9.♘c3 ♙d7 10.h3 h6  
 11.b3 ♚c8 12.♙b2 b6 13.♖ad1 ♘e7  
 14.♗fe1 c5 15.♘e2 ♘g6



### 16.h4?!

This weakens the light squares, on which White is in any case somewhat under-equipped. 16.♘g3!? ♙e6 17.♘h5 ♖g8 18.g4 ♙e7 is more resilient, according to Leonid Kritz in *CBM* 140.

### 16...♙e7?!

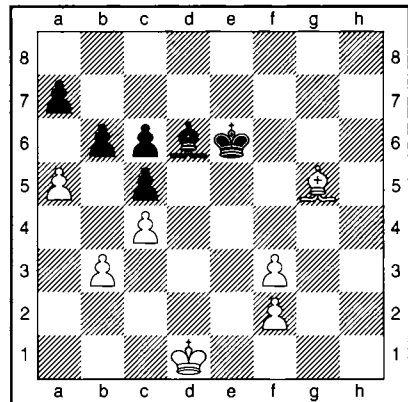
A novelty, but the main variation 16...♙g4! is quite all right for Black: 17.♘h2 ♙xe2 18.♖xe2 ♘h4 19.♖e4 ♙e7 20.g3 ♘g6 21.e6 f5 22.♖ee1 ♖g8, and Kritz even accords Black a slight advantage. After the following move, on the other hand, White gets a slightly superior endgame.

17.e6!? ♙xe6 18.h5! ♘h4 19.♘f4 ♘xf3+

20.gxf3 ♙d6 21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♖xe6 ♗f8  
 23.♙xg7 ♗f5 24.♖e8+ ♚b7 25.♖xa8  
 ♚xa8 26.♙xh6 ♗xh5 27.♙e3 ♚b7 28.c4  
 ♚c6 29.♚g2 ♗h2+ 30.♚f1 ♗h1+ 31.♙e2  
 ♖xd1 32.♚xd1

According to Kritz this endgame is now really easy for Black to hold: “The black king comes to f5, Black plays a6–c6–b5, exchanges a pawn, and afterwards can even give up the c5-pawn – the white king will not be able to invade the black position.”

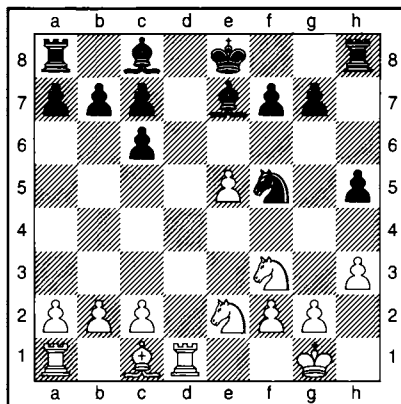
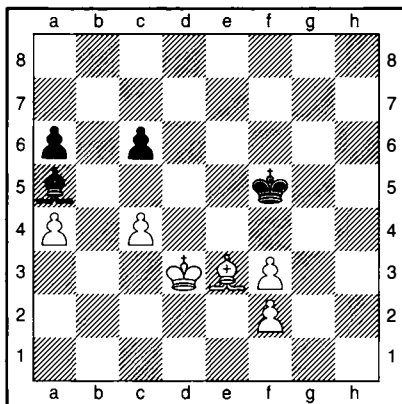
32...♚d7 33.♙g5 ♙e6 34.a4 c6 35.a5!?



### 35...bxa5!

In what follows Nakamura demonstrates his resilience in the endgame and makes a completely correct decision. On the other hand, according to Kritz 35...♚f5?? would have been a mistake on account of 36.♙d8 bxa5 37.♙xa5 ♚f4 38.♙e2, and “if the pawns are left on b3 and c4, the ending is lost. If, on the other hand, they are on a4 and c4, then it is a draw”.

36.♚c2 a4! 37.bxa4 ♚f5 38.♙e3 a6  
 39.♚d3 ♙e7 40.♙e2 ♙f8 41.♚f1 ♙e7  
 42.♚g2 ♙d6 43.♚h3 ♙e7 44.♚g3 ♙f6!  
 45.♙xc5 ♙d8 46.♙e3 ♙e7 47.♚g2 ♙d8  
 48.♚f1 ♙c7 49.♙e2 ♙d8 50.♚d3 ♙a5



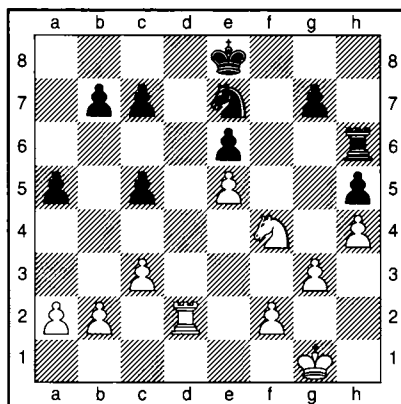
The black fortress simply cannot be stormed, though White did not realise the senselessness of trying to do so till 24 moves later.

51.♔d4 ♙b6+ 52.♔d3 ♙a5 53.♙a7 ♙e1  
54.♙b6 ♙f4 55.♙e3+ ♙e5 56.♙c5 ♙f4  
57.♙e2 ♙a5 58.♙a7 ♙f5 59.♙e3 ♙e1  
60.♙b6 ♙c3 61.♙c7 ♙e1 62.♙d6 ♙c3  
63.f4 ♙e1 64.♙e5 ♙a5 65.♙d4 ♙b4  
66.♙e5 ♙c5+ 67.♙d4 ♙b4 68.♙a7 ♙c3  
69.♙d3 ♙e1 70.♙e3 ♙a5 71.♙d4 ♙b6+  
72.♙c3 ♙a5+ 73.♙d3 ♙c7 74.♙d4 Draw.

12...♙d7?!

Hikaru's plan which follows looks a little slow. 12...♙e6 is the main variation.

13.♙g5 ♙d8 14.♙f4 ♙c8 15.♙xd8+ ♙xd8  
16.♙d1+ ♙e8 17.g3 ♙h7 18.♙xe7 ♙xe7  
19.♙g5 ♙h6 20.h4 c5 21.c3 a5 22.♙d2  
♙e6 23.♙gxe6 fxe6



## GAME 22

V. Ivanchuk – H. Nakamura

Torneo di Capodanno,

Reggio Emilia 2012

Ruy Lopez [C67]

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0  
♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5  
8.♙xd8+ ♙xd8 9.♘c3 ♙e8 10.h3 h5  
11.♙d1 ♙e7 12.♘e2

(see next diagram)

"The specialists in the Berlin Wall are well aware which endings are drawn and which are dangerous for them. I am not sure whether I have already seen this endgame: ♙ + ♘ against ♙ + ♘.

"Nakamura defends well in the subsequent phase of the game, but Ivanchuk's play can

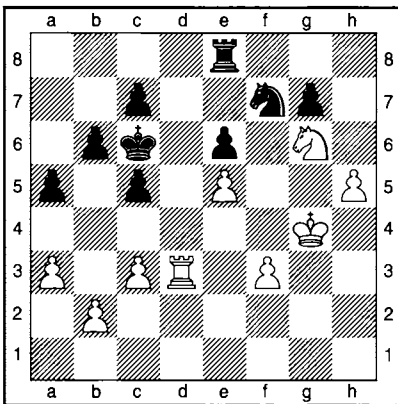
be improved upon in at least two ways, as Rainer Knaak has found out", according to Mihail Marin in *CBM* 146.

In an ending with rook and knight versus rook and knight a slight initiative is often important, so Black's task should be very difficult.

**24. ♖g2 ♜c6 25. ♞e2 ♜d8 26. ♖h3**

The idea 26. ♖f3 ♜f7 27. ♞e1 ♖e7 28. ♖e4 is more relentless, according to Rainer Knaak.

**26... ♜f7 27. ♞e3 ♖d7 28. f3 b6 29. a3 ♖c6 30. g4 hxg4+ 31. ♖xg4 ♖d7 32. h5 ♞h8 33. ♞d3+ ♖c6 34. ♜g6 ♞e8**



### 35.f4?

This deprives White of the important manoeuvring square f4. 35. a4 ♜h6+ (if 35... ♞b8?, then after 36. ♜e7+ ♖b7 37. f4 ♞e8 38. ♞d7 Black has nothing to be happy about...) 36. ♖f4 ♜f7 37. ♞d2 ♜h6 38. ♖e4 ♜f5 39. ♞g2 ♖d7 40. ♜f4 ♞e7 41. ♜xe6! ♜d6+ (but not 41... ♖xe6? on account of 42. ♞g6+) 42. exd6 ♞xe6+ 43. ♖d3 ♞xd6+ 44. ♖c4 with good winning chances according to Rainer Knaak.

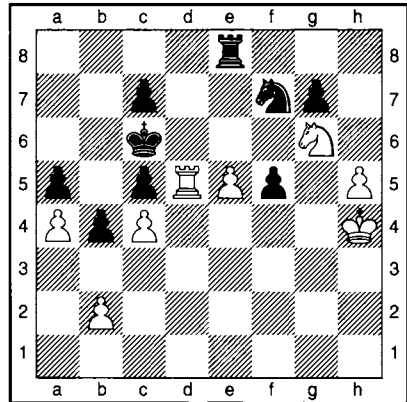
**35... b5 36. a4 ♜h6+ 37. ♖g5 ♜f7+ 38. ♖h4 b4?!**

38... bxa4!? gives Black more counterplay.

**39. c4 ♜h6 40. ♖g5 ♜f7+ 41. ♖g4 ♜h6+ 42. ♖h4 ♜f7?**

Black is only apparently in zugzwang, since 42... ♖b7! is playable, whilst 43. ♞d7 can again be met by 43... ♖c6 (Marin).

**43. f5! exf5 44. ♞d5**



### 44...b3?

Nakamura now falls prey to nerves, since in the long run this merely weakens the b-pawn. He had to try 44... ♜d8 45. ♖g5 ♜e6+ 46. ♖xf5 ♜d4+ 47. ♖e4 (Marin), which leaves him with some practical drawing chances.

**45. ♖g3 ♜g5 46. ♖f4 ♜e6+ 47. ♖xf5 ♜d4+ 48. ♖e4 ♜e6 49. ♞d3 ♜g5+ 50. ♖e3 ♜e6 51. ♞xb3 ♜d4 52. ♞d3 ♞b8 53. b3!**

(see next diagram)

The final point. Now there is no more that Black can do.

### 53...♖d7

After both 53... ♞xb3 54. ♞xb3 ♜xb3 55. ♜f8! ♜d4 56. ♖f4 (Marin) and 53... ♜xb3? 54. ♜e7+! it's all over for Black...



## 22...♖a4!

Nakamura forces the liquidation to a level ending.

23.♜xb5+ axb5 24.a3 ♔d7 25.♙f2 ♖c8  
26.♜cd1 f5 27.♙e2 ♜g8 28.♙d3 h5  
29.♞de1 h4 30.♙f2 ♙f6 31.♞h1 ♜h8  
Draw.

## Black against 1.d4

Hikaru's favourite opening, the King's Indian Defence, with which he has so far

scored a strong 59.3%, will be treated separately in Chapter 9.

The Grünfeld Defence, the Leningrad System in the Dutch Defence (see for example against Aronian in Wijk aan Zee 2011, Chapter 2, page 56) and 1...d5 are also part of his repertoire, in which he earlier made use of the Slav Defence and at present has gone over to the Orthodox Queen's Gambit (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 or 2...dxc4).

## C) Best novelties

Nakamura has put his stamp on whole systems such as the King's Indian, as you will be able to see in Chapter 9. Here we shall take a look at two specific innovations, which show that "the main source of the fascination of chess lies in the richness of the ideas", as Mark Dvoretsky aptly puts it.

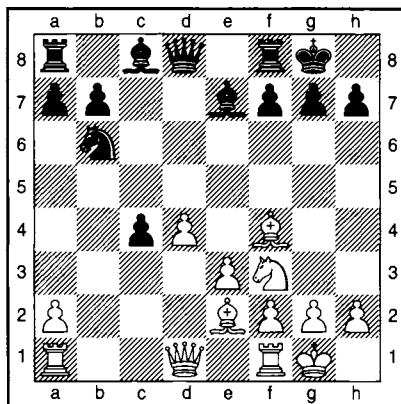
In any case, both with Black in a Queen's Gambit (10...c4!) against the Russian Nikita Vitiugov, and against the English player David Howell with White in a Grünfeld Defence (16.b3), Nakamura convincingly demonstrates the creative way in which he plays and understands chess.

10.dxc5!? ♜xc5 11.♙e5 forces Black into the isolated queen's pawn structure.

## 10...c4!

A fascinating novelty, with which Hikaru fundamentally changes the structure. What he has realised is that his pawn majority on the queenside will become dangerous. After 10...a6 11.dxc5 ♜xc5 12.♙e5 on the other hand, White can hang on firmly to a slight plus.

## 11.b3 ♜b6 12.bxc4 dxc4



## GAME 25

N. Vitiugov – H. Nakamura

Torneo di Capodanno,

Reggio Emilia 2011

Queen's Gambit [D37]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♙e7 4.♞f3 ♞f6  
5.♙f4 0-0 6.e3 ♞bd7 7.♙e2 c5 8.cxd5  
♞xd5 9.♞xd5 exd5 10.0-0

The critical question goes: is the c4-pawn a trump card or a dead loss? Here it looks



17.♖e4 his king would have had problems finding a secure position (according to Marin in *CBM* 135).

15.♘ec3 ♖b7 16.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 17.♘d5 ♖c8 18.c3 ♗xd5! 19.♗xd5

Now 19.exd5?! can no longer be recommended, since even the pawn sacrifice 19...b4 20.c4 e4!? (20...0-0 is the normal continuation) 21.♗xe4+ ♗e5 22.♗d3 f6 23.♗b1 0-0 is well worth considering so as to activate the bishop.

19...♗b6 20.♗d3 ♖c6 21.a3 ♗e7 22.♗b1 h5 23.♗e2 h4 24.♗d1 ♗f2 25.♗e2 ♗xe2 26.♗xe2 ♖b8 27.♖hd1 ♗g5 28.♗c2 ♗f4 29.h3 ♗e3 30.♖1d3 ♗f4 31.♖d1 ♗e3 32.♖1d3 ♗f4 33.♖f3 ♖c5 34.♖fd3

Draw.

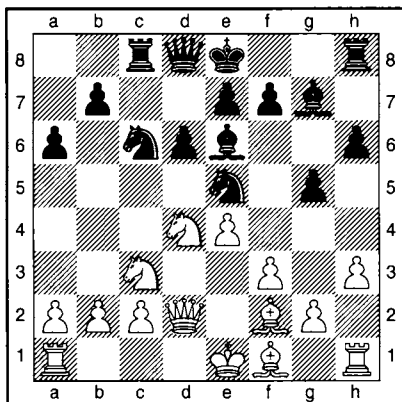
## GAME 24

S. Karjakin – H. Nakamura

Kings Tournament, Bazna 2011

*Sicilian Defence [B90]*

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 ♘g4 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♗g3 ♗g7 10.h3 ♘e5 11.f3 ♘bc6 12.♗f2 ♗e6 13.♗d2 ♖c8



14.♘d5

"A new move, but it did not surprise the American GM", remarked Dorian Rogozenco in *CBM* 143.

14.0-0-0 is the most frequently played, e.g. 14...♗a5 15.♘b3 ♗c7 16.♗b1 ♖a5 17.♗d4 ♘ac6 18.♗e3 ♖a5 19.♘d5 ♗xd5 20.♘xa5 ♗c4 21.♗xc4 ♘xc4 22.♘xc4 ♗xc4 23.♗f2 ♗e5, and Black has equalised, Leko-Gelfand, blindfold, Monte Carlo 2007.

14...♘xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd5 16.exd5 ♗c7

"All the previous moves were played at blitz tempo by Nakamura." (Rogozenco)

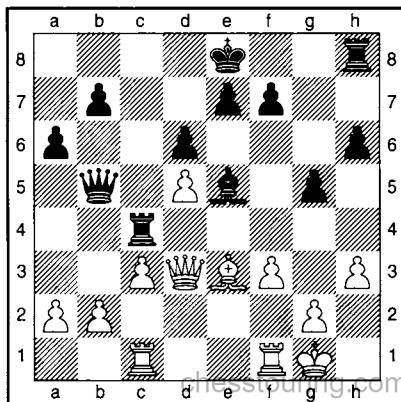
17.c3

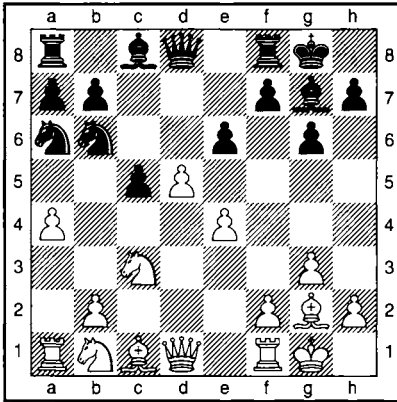
17.c4 is met by 17...♘xc4 18.♗xc4 ♗xd4! 19.♗xd4 ♗xc4! 20.♗xh8+ ♗d7, since 21.♗xh6?? even backfires: 21...♗d3 22.♗xg5 ♖c2. The right move is 21.♗h7. "This variation was still part of Hikaru's home preparation. That is really very impressive!" (Rogozenco).

17...♗a5 18.♗e3 ♘c4 19.♗xc4 ♖xc4 20.0-0 ♗e5!

Strong prophylaxis, whilst 20...0-0? would have allowed 21.f4, which White would have liked.

21.♗d3 ♗b5 22.♖ac1

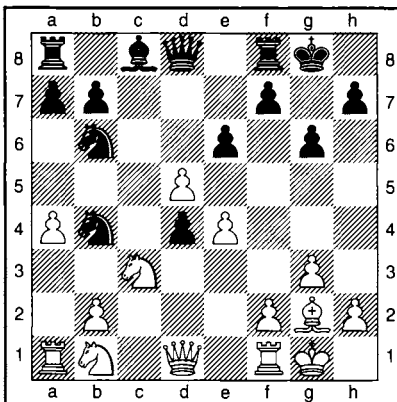




### 11...♞b4

Kasparov introduced this idea during his blitz match against Karpov in September 2009 in Valencia. So it may be that Hikaru's approach is based on Garry's database. The old main variation goes 11...exd5 12.exd5 ♙f5, and now, according to Krasenkow in *CBM 140*, the relatively new 13.g4 is very dangerous for Black.

### 12.♙e3 ♙d4 13.♙xd4 cxd4



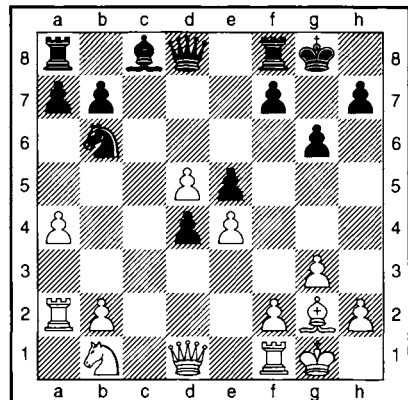
### 14.♞a2

14.♞b5!? was tested in the following blitz games, in which in each case White was only able to achieve a minimal advantage:

14...e5 (14...exd5 15.a5 ♞c4 16.exd5 ♙d7 17.♞5a3 ♜xa5 18.♜xd4 ♞d5 19.♞d2 ♜b6 20.♜xb6 axb6 21.♞dc4 ♞xc4 22.♞xc4 ♙b5 23.♞xb6 ♙xf1 24.♞xa8 ♙xg2 25.♙xg2 ♞xd5 ½–½, Karpov–Kasparov, Blitz match, 8<sup>th</sup> game, Valencia 2009) 15.a5 ♙d7 16.♞1a3, Karpov–Carlsen, FIDE Blitz World Championship, Moscow 2009, and instead of the passive 16...♞c8? Magnus should have played the active 16...♞c4. It is known that he too was trained by Kasparov for a year starting from March 2009 and supported by, amongst others, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

### 14...♞xa2 15.♜xa2 e5

But not 15...exd5?, since it is met by the strong 16.a5!, and Black would have serious problems.

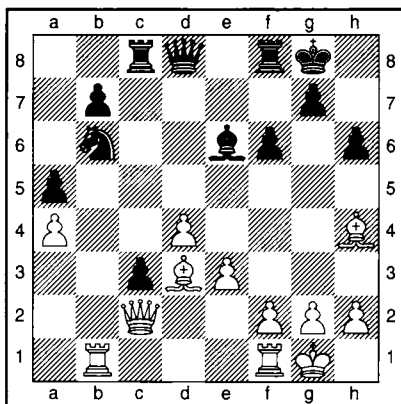


### 16.b3!

A strong novelty which leaves the knight on b6 looking stupid and which cements the slight advantage for White. 16.♞d2 a5 17.♜b3 ♜d6, on the other hand, achieved nothing for White in the fourth game of the Karpov–Kasparov blitz match, Valencia 2009. On the contrary White lost the thread and later the game too...

more like an ace of trumps, because in the long run it is not easy to blockade it firmly. So even for computer programs the evaluation of this position is a problem. And that is exactly what Hikaru is striving for with his dynamic style.

13. ♖c2 ♕e6 14. ♖ab1 ♜c8 15. a4 a5  
16. ♗g5 ♙xg5 17. ♙xg5 f6 18. ♙h4 c3  
19. ♙d3 h6



## 20. ♙b5?

After this it is hard to control the c-pawn. In *CBM 146* Michal Krasenkow suggests 20. ♖fc1 ♗d5 21. ♖xb7 ♗b4 22. ♖b1 ♖d5 23. ♙e4 ♖a2, after which the position is approximately level.

20... ♗d5 21. ♖e4 ♖d6?!

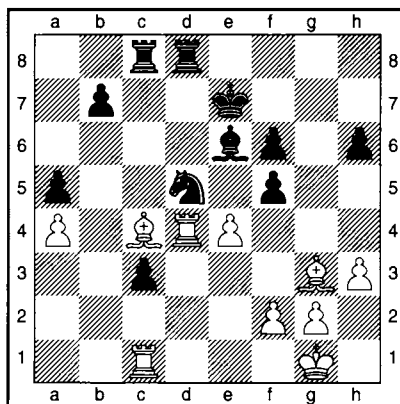
21... ♖e7 is more accurate.

22. ♙g3 ♖e7 23. ♖bc1 ♗b4 24. d5?!

This pawn sacrifice is too radical. But in any case Black is already clearly better.

24... ♗xd5 25. ♖fd1 ♖fd8 26. ♖d4 f5 27. ♖e5 ♖f6 28. ♖xf6 gxf6 29. h3 ♗f7 30. ♙c4 ♗e7 31. e4?!

Also after 31. ♗h2 c2! 32. ♖xc2 ♗b4 33. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 34. ♙xe6 ♗xc2 35. ♙xf5 ♖d2 36. ♙e4 ♗b4 37. ♙xb7 ♖a2 Black's advantage is obvious (Krasenkow).



## 31... ♗f4!

A little combination which, thanks to his queenside passed pawns, presents Hikaru with a winning endgame. Thus his opening idea has triumphed all along the line.

32. ♖xd8 ♖xc4! 33. ♙xf4 ♗xd8 34. exf5

Another, just as hopeless, attempt to save the game for White is 34. ♙e3 ♗e7 35. ♙b6 c2 36. ♙xa5 ♖xa4 37. ♙c3 ♙b3 38. exf5 b5 39. ♗f1 b4 40. ♙d4 ♖a5.

34... ♙xf5 35. ♙e3

He also loses after 35. ♙xh6 c2 36. g4 ♙h7 37. ♙g7 ♗e7 38. ♗f1 ♖xa4.

35... c2 36. g4 ♙e4 37. ♙b6+ ♗d7 38. ♙xa5 ♖d4

White resigned.

# GAME 26

H. Nakamura – D. Howell

London Chess Classic, London 2010

Grünfeld Defence [D72]

1. d4 ♗f6 2. c4 g6 3. g3 ♙g7 4. ♙g2 d5  
5. cxd5 ♗xd5 6. e4 ♗b6 7. ♗e2 0-0 8. 0-0  
c5 9. d5 e6 10. ♗ec3 ♗a6 11. a4



## ZWISCHEN ZÜGE

### As Hikaru Nakamura's second

BY KRIS LITTLEJOHN

I guess you would say I first “met” Hikaru in 2004. We first met not face to face, but on the Internet Chess Club (*ICC*). Although he was only a little over 2600 FIDE at the time, clearly a promising junior player, Hikaru was already a major star in online chess. At the time, I was in my last year of university, and had quit tournament chess years before after hitting a plateau at ~1800 Elo. Though I had given up chess as any kind of serious hobby in favor of concentrating on school, I still regularly played blitz casually on the *ICC*.

We met online through a mutual friend, Jason Doss, who at that time was a sort of unofficial liaison between *ICC* administrators and strong titled players. Always looking to try something different, Hikaru had taken an interest in the chess variants bughouse and crazyhouse. Jason and I, quite strong players at these variants, taught him the theory and more advanced concepts, which he devoured almost instantly. At the time it was somewhat disheartening to see that Hikaru had mastered in a couple of days what had taken us years, but it was through

playing bughouse and crazyhouse that we became friends.

#### First collaborations

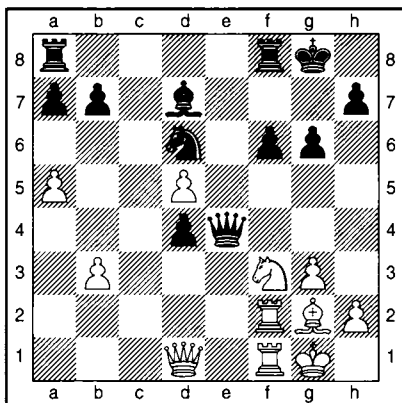
It is perhaps important to rewind the story somewhat to explain how it was Hikaru and I came to really work together.

I had always been interested in computer chess ever since I started playing. Even before I played chess at all, by the time I was eleven years old I was building my own computers in an effort to save a bit of money and more importantly, squeeze every last drop of performance out of them. When I did begin to play tournament chess in high school in 1997, the biggest story in the chess world was Kasparov's rematch with the IBM supercomputer *Deep Blue*.<sup>1</sup> This fascinated me at the time – not because of the result, or the controversies, or even the interesting games – but because of the idea of chess being a test of computing power. I dreamed of some day having a computer as powerful as that. So, I quickly bought *Rebel 9*, the strongest engine I could find at the time, downloaded the free engine *Crafty*, and

<sup>1</sup> In February 1996 in Philadelphia Kasparov won his first match against *Deep Blue* by 4-2, losing one game, winning three and drawing twice. After that *IBM* set up a computer with even stronger hardware and improved the chess program considerably. The version of *Deep Blue* in May 1997 was able to calculate 200 million positions per second and it won the return match by 3½-2½. This was the first time in chess history that a computer had defeated the reigning world champion in a classical match. In 2004 there appeared a documentary film about the match by Vikram Jayanti entitled *Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine*.



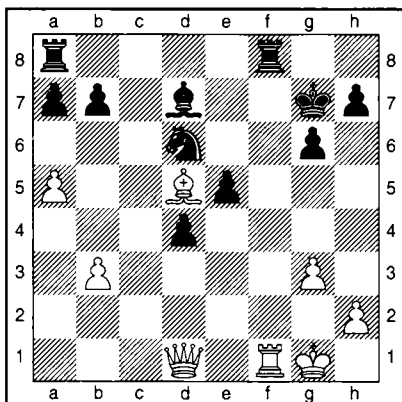
16...♙d7 17.f4 f6 18.♖af2 ♚e7 19.a5 ♜c8  
20.fxe5 ♚xe5 21.♞d2 ♞d6 22.♞f3! ♚xe4



### 23.♞e2!

Hikaru sets out to attack! According to Krasenkow 23.♞xd4 ♚e3! 24.♞e1 ♚c3 should be defensible for Black on account of the strong blockading knight.

23...♚xd5 24.♞e5 ♚xe5 25.♞xe5 fxe5  
26.♙d5+ ♙g7



### 27.a6?

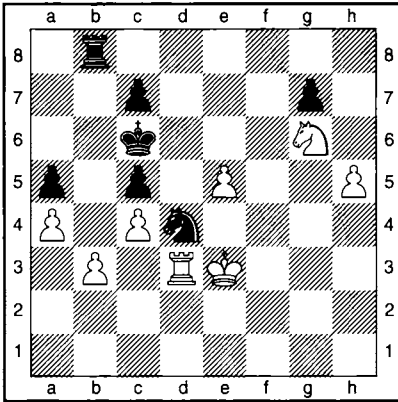
After this Black can construct an impregnable fortress. 27.♞xf8 ♞xf8 28.♚c1 offered better chances, because Black cannot set

up a viable fortress, e.g. 28...d3 (28...♙c6 29.♙xc6 bxc6 30.♚xc6) 29.♚c3 ♞f7 (29...♙f5 30.♚xe5+ ♞f6 31.♚d4) 30.♚xd3 ♞g5 31.h4 ♞h3+ 32.♙g2 in each case with practical winning chances.

27...♙c6! 28.♞xf8 ♞xf8 29.♚e1 ♙xd5  
30.♚xe5+ ♞f6 31.♚xd5 bxa6 32.♚xd4 h5  
33.♚xa7+ ♞f7 34.h4 ♙g8 35.♚e7 ♙g7  
36.b4 ♞f5 37.♚c7 ♞f6 38.♙g2 ♙g8  
39.♚c8+ ♙g7 40.♚c7 ♙g8 41.♚c8+ ♙g7  
42.♚c7

**Draw.**

These last two examples are an impressive demonstration of how in the opening phase of a chess game there are still unsuspected opportunities for new ideas. And that should come as no surprise. In the game against Nikita Vitiugov alone, in which Nakamura surprised him with the novelty 10...c4!, purely mathematically there are  $10^{15}$  possible positions, which hopefully tells us that computers will be unable to completely calculate the game of chess to a finish in the near future.



Position after 53.b3!

54.♔e4 c6 55.♘h4 ♔e6 56.♖g3 ♕f7  
57.♘f5 ♘e6 58.♗d3 ♘g5+ 59.♕f4 ♘e6+  
60.♕g4 ♘d4 61.♘xd4 cxd4 62.♗xd4  
♗xb3 63.♗d7+ ♔e6 64.♗xg7 ♗b4 65.h6  
♗xc4+ 66.♕h5 ♗c1 67.♗g4

**Black resigned.**

In the Najdorf Sicilian Nakamura still often goes his own way and he does well thanks to his experience in the Sicilian dating back to his earliest years. In this connection the parallels with Robert James Fischer are interesting. Bobby was an ardent fan of the Sicilian Defence with Black, as shown by his 122 games with it. However, in his active period he was just as keen a student of it with White, as can be seen from his 113 games. It is most certainly a great advantage to be able to play both sides of an opening, since in this way you are able to recognise better both its strengths and its weaknesses.

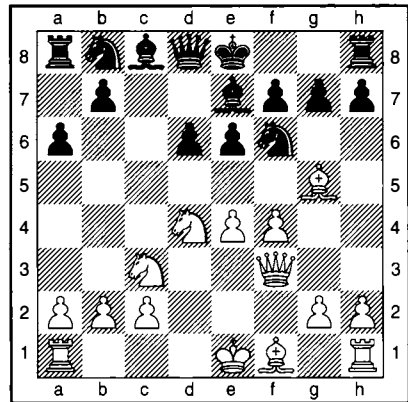
## GAME 23

**J. Smeets – H. Nakamura**

Corus-Festival (A), Wijk aan Zee 2010

*Sicilian Defence [B98]*

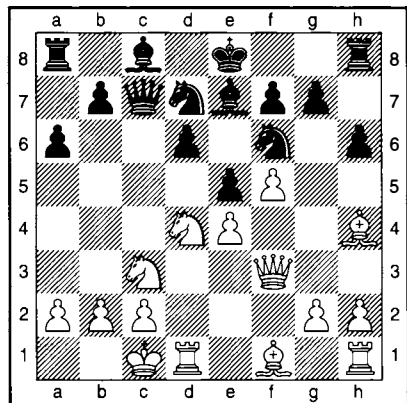
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6  
5.♘c3 a6 6.♙g5 e6 7.f4 ♘e7 8.♗f3



8...h6!?

This scores better than the much more frequently played 8...♗c7.

9.♙h4 ♗c7 10.0-0-0 ♘bd7 11.f5 e5



12.♘de2!?

A rare move but not without its venom, to which Hikaru has the antidote. 12.♘b3 is the main variation.

12...b5 13.♙xf6 ♘xf6 14.♘d5 ♗c5!

Hikaru displays his sense of danger. After 14...♘xd5?! 15.exd5 ♙b7 16.♘g3 0-0



registered a computer playing account on the ICC. From that time forward, I maintained a computer account at or near the top of the rating lists.

At that time the chess engines had few parameters that could be changed to improve playing strength. To upgrade the speed of my computers any more often than I did already would have cost more money than I had. So, the only thing left for me to try to improve my computer's playing strength was to tweak the opening book. I tried lots of different openings, and found that against humans especially, offbeat ones often worked the best. In fact, the first time my computer achieved the top spot on the ICC rating list was when a strong GM tried over and over, in vain, to punish the opening 1.g4.

Now, fast forward back to 2005. As I mentioned, Hikaru was always looking to try something different, and this applied heavily to his opening choices. At some point, Hikaru learned that as a junior, our friend Jason played the sequence 1.e4 e5 2.♖h5?! almost until he was a master, and that there was actually some rudimentary theory behind the opening beyond attempting to checkmate on the 4<sup>th</sup> move. The outrageous idea of playing this opening at the 2600+ level appealed to Hikaru and so Jason agreed to show him the theory behind it that he remembered from his youth. To fill in the gaps Hikaru enlisted the help of me and my computer.

When Hikaru played 2.♖h5 against GM Sasikiran, though he eventually lost the

game, he actually got a sizeable opening advantage,<sup>2</sup> so it did nothing to deter him from seeking out new paths in opening theory. To this end he would periodically contact me to help him work on his pet projects, and since I found both working with a strong GM and exploring new openings quite enjoyable, I was happy to oblige. We worked on many (mostly ridiculous) openings, such as 1.e4 d6 2.d4 f5?!, with which he beat GM Perelshteyn at the HB Global Chess Challenge in 2005, where incidentally, we first met in person.

As an interesting side effect, some of the work we were doing had apparently somehow rubbed off on me. When I graduated from university in 2005, I decided to try out tournament play again, just for fun. I would have sworn that I had not improved at all since quitting competitive chess in high school, but if so then miraculously everybody else had gotten much worse! In a few months I had gained 400 Elo points, and so while still a very bad player by any rational measurement, in the chess deprived United States I had qualified for the pseudo-respectable national master title. Having been surprised to achieve even this, and knowing that I had started my chess career much too late to have any real ambitions as a player, I promptly retired again from competition.

Skip ahead to 2007. Hikaru had taken a brief hiatus from professional chess to try university life, but either finding it disagreeable or perhaps just unable to resist the call

<sup>2</sup> Hikaru played the well known and infamous 2.♖h5 in round 7 of the Sigeman Open in Copenhagen/Malmö 2005. Nakamura also experimented further in 2005 with 2.♖h5, for example on the server *Playchess.com* on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2005. In the final of the 'Champion's Challenge' against Anton Filipow, to whom he lost by 2-3, he played it in all his three games as White, in which the first six moves were identical: 1.e4 e5 2.♖h5 ♘c6 3.♙c4 g6 4.♖f3 ♘f6 5.♘e2 ♙g7 6.d3 (see Hikaru Nakamura, "Not playing for Scholar's mate", Chapter 17, *Schach ohne Scheuklappen*, vol. 7, pp. 138-142, *New in Chess* 2007).



of the chess pieces he returned to high level chess at the Casino de Barcelona tournament. Perhaps seeking new inspiration after his time off, he decided to offer me my first real job at preparing his openings. Though I was doing the work remotely, communicating with him online from home, we seemed to work well together. I knew that at this level rubbish openings such as we had looked at before together would not work, so I prepared only solid mainstream lines. It worked like a charm, and he finished in clear first with 7/9 points. He finished the tournament with only one loss, when he decided to go against my advice and play the King's Indian as Black against the bottom seed in the seventh round, already a point and a half ahead of the field. It was perhaps that loss as much as anything that convinced him we should keep working together. I worked with him remotely again for the Cap d'Agde rapid tournament in 2008 which he won ahead of Ivanchuk, Carlsen, Radjabov and others.

In 2009, I travelled with him to a tournament for the first time at the U.S. Championship in St. Louis. Since it was in the country, travel costs were low, making it an easy experiment. He won this too, and since then to the present in 2011, with only a couple of exceptions, I have accompanied him to all major tournaments, other than team events.

### **A second's duties**

As Hikaru's second, I have many responsibilities that contribute towards a simple goal: preparing him to have the best chance of winning each game and tournament. Some of these responsibilities may seem trivial but they can still be quite important, such as helping him keep to a proper schedule of working, eating, relaxing, and sleeping during a tournament. I also try to keep non game-related concerns from distracting him, so if for example he needs some item from

the supermarket, I will go during his game and get it for him, so the schedule of the tournament routine stays intact. All in all, my role can range from personal assistant, to travel agent, to psychologist, to tech support.

The primary duty, of course, is opening preparation. Before a tournament begins, weeks or months in advance, I will come up with an opening plan for each game. Since Hikaru's repertoire includes virtually every opening under the sun, I have a great deal of freedom in trying to tailor individual openings for each opponent, but as is often the case, extra freedom requires more work. His wider repertoire means more choices which must be considered and narrowed down. Often during a tournament, the plan can change because of tournament standings, unexpected new lines being introduced by opponents, or just mood and intuition. When this happens, I'll sometimes have to prepare something entirely new in a matter of hours, which is always risky and challenging, but has gotten somewhat easier over time as we have built up a larger and larger base of knowledge. Fortunately in chess, nothing is wasted since perhaps tomorrow we will dredge up an idea or novelty prepared for a different opponent years before.

### **Computers in chess preparation**

Many people have noted that, as a player, I am probably the weakest second of any strong grandmaster, let alone a top ten player. What makes it possible for me to do what I do has to do with chess engines, both their tremendous playing strength, and my strange path of chess development. Both Hikaru and I derived a large portion of our chess learning from computers, but with different paths. Where Hikaru was able to use the computer as a sparring partner and even a kind of role model to strive to emulate



during a game, I formed a sort of symbiotic relationship with my engines.

Every chess player has different strengths and weaknesses. Some of my biggest weaknesses are accurate calculation of variations, and performance under pressure. In blindfold chess I am useless. Of course those things don't matter at all in a setting where a 3000+ Elo machine can calculate for you and there is no clock ticking away your time. What I have developed instead is a strong positional sense, combinatoric intuition, a knack for knowing when the computer is wrong in its evaluation, and a practicality about what positions are playable for a human.

This isn't to say that I don't ever have difficulties, but when I do the solution is simple. If I am unsure about a position, I can simply ask Hikaru for his opinion, since in the end he will be the one sitting over the board with it.

### Going forward

As Hikaru has progressed from a 2650 player when we began working seriously together, to a top ten player today, we have faced new challenges. What works spectacularly against a 2600 may be unsuitable against a 2800, and these are things that

have sometimes been learned the hard way. Top players today are much more sophisticated than in the past, both in their play and their preparation. With the improving strength of computers helping to iron out our knowledge, there are fewer fundamental breakthroughs that can change the evaluation of known positions in a radical way. Many amateurs analyze positions at home and find strong novelties in mainstream openings and wonder why they don't see them played by strong players, but the answer is simple: everyone at the top already has found them with their own computers, and so their opponents won't play in to the line in the first place. Today the emphasis is more on finding nuances that can be exploited in move orders, and new ideas which, while perhaps not an objective improvement over an old line, can still provide a practical problem that an opponent has to solve over the board.

All of it boils down to the continuing evolution of chess. New methods of preparation and younger, savvier players create new challenges. As Hikaru continues to improve, I personally look forward to helping him overcome the new challenges, and hopefully helping him reach the ultimate goal of World Champion.

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**Kristoffer "Kris" Littlejohn** (born 1983) is a graduate of the Technical University of Texas in Dallas, which is distinguished by its numerous computer freaks and by the lack of a football team. His profession is the building of computer systems, advising small firms on computer networks and teaching chess. Littlejohn grew up in a family which had four times as many computers as there were family members. Thus, his mother Debra Littlejohn Shinder is an ab-

solute IT expert, who, for example, works as developer, technology adviser and trainer. She has written several books about computer operating systems and networks and in February 2010 also wrote a remarkable blog entry on "The role of computers in planning chess strategy" ([www.techrepublic.com](http://www.techrepublic.com)). Kris Littlejohn's first contact with Hikaru was in 2005; two years later he began to work for him seriously and successfully as a second.



## CHAPTER 3

# Wijk aan Zee

Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 4

Today Nakamura is up against Anish Giri. For the 16-year-old this tournament is also an examination of a special sort. The previous year the new child prodigy had been the clear victor of the B-Group ahead of the German No.1 Arkadij Naiditsch, thus securing the invitation to the A-group. Giri will finish on 50%, gaining almost 11 Elo points and taking him to a position close to the sound barrier of 2700, which above all leads to a considerable increase in his self-confidence. This means the final breakthrough into the world elite for this son of a Nepalese hydrologist and a Russian mother. Born in St. Petersburg, Giri, like Hikaru, first took up chess at the age of seven, which is very late according to today's standards. He became a grandmaster at the early age of 14 years, seven months and two days, after scoring his third and final GM norm on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009 in Wijk aan Zee in the C-Group. At that time he was still playing for Russia, but in our age of globalisation early changes are totally normal. So now Anish is already the chess idol of the Dutch – and for his American adversary an opponent who needs to be taken most seriously.

## GAME 27

**A. Giri – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Nimzo-Indian Defence [E20]*

**Rook endings are always drawn**

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♘f3 cxd4  
5.♗xd4 ♙b4+ 6.♗c3 ♗e4 7.♚d3 ♗xc3  
8.bxc3 ♙e7 9.♗b5 ♗c6 10.♙f4 e5 11.♙c1  
0-0 12.♙g2 d6!?

This is a novelty compared with 12...b6?!  
13.0-0 ♙b7 14.♚d1 ♗a5 15.♙xb7 ♗xb7  
16.♚xd7 ♗c5 17.♚xd8 ♚fxd8 18.♙e3 with  
advantage for White in the game Aronian-

Karjakin, Moscow 2010. In Monaco 2011  
Karjakin tried 12...♗a5 against Anand, but  
after 13.0-0 d6 14.♙a3 ♙e6 15.♗xd6  
♙xd6 16.♚xd6 ♚e8 17.c5 ♗c4 18.♚xd8  
♚exd8 19.♙c1 ♚ac8 20.♙xb7 ♚xc5 21.♚e1  
h6 22.♙a6 ♚d6 23.♙xc4 the game ended  
in a draw.

**13.♙a3 ♚a5 14.0-0 ♚d8?**

After this passive move White obtains an  
enduring initiative. 14...♙e6 15.♙xd6 ♚fd8  
16.c5 ♚d7 17.c4 a6 18.♗c3 ♚ad8, on the  
other hand, keeps the game more or less  
level, because White has to concede the  
open d-file to Black.

**15.♙b4! ♚b6**

15...♗xb4 16.cxb4 ♚xb4? fails to 17.♗c7



**♖b8?** 18.♘d5, and White has an excellent position.

### 16.a4!

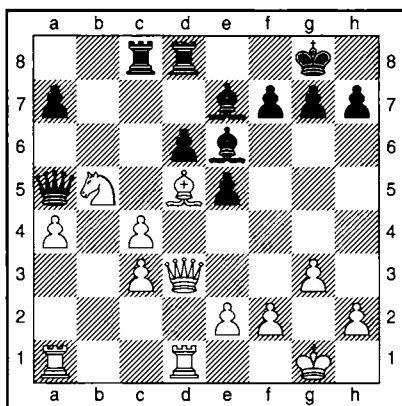
Giri bets on his strategic light-squared initiative, whereas 16.♙xd6?! ♙xd6 17.♘xd6 ♘a5 18.♞fd1 ♙e6 allows Black good play for the pawn.

### 16...♘a5

16...♘xb4 17.cxb4 a6?? fails to 18.a5, since after it things become pretty unpleasant for Black.

**17.♞fd1 ♙e6 18.♙xa5 ♜xa5 19.♙xb7 ♞ab8 20.♙d5 ♞bc8?!**

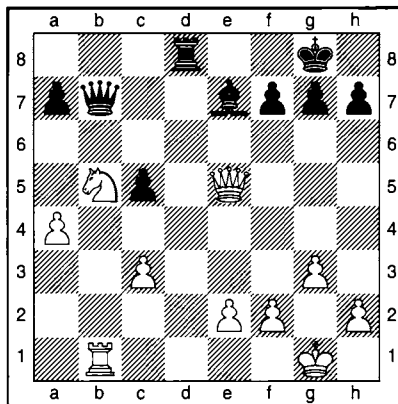
This gives White a tactical option. But the black position is in any case extremely uncomfortable.



### 21.♞f3?!

Anish should have played 21.♙xe6 here, since after 21...fxe6 22.♞e4 ♞a6 (22...♞b6 23.♞g4 ♙f7 24.♞h5+ ♙g8 25.♞h3 ♙f7 26.♞db1 ♞c5 27.♞xh7 a6 28.♘a3 is no better) 23.♞g4 ♙f7 (23...d5 24.cxd5 exd5 25.♞f5 ♙f6 26.e4±) 24.♞d3 ♞c5 25.♞ad1 the black position is already problematic.

**21...♙xd5 22.♞xd5 ♞a6 23.♞e4 ♞c6 24.c5 ♞xc5 25.♞xc5 dxc5 26.♞xe5 ♞b7 27.♞b1**



### 27...♙f6?

This pawn sacrifice is over-optimistic. However, White is also in the driving seat after 27...♞d7 28.♞c7 ♞e6 29.c4.

### 28.♞f5?

Giri does not dare to take the pawn, though that would unquestionably be the best way: 28.♞xc5 ♞e4 (if 28...a6, there is the strong rejoinder 29.♘a3) 29.♞c1 ♞xe2 (but not 29...♞xa4 on account of 30.♘a7) 30.♘a7 h5 31.♘c6 ♞d2 32.♞f5 h4 33.♘d4.

### 28...♞c6 29.♘a7 ♞xa4 30.♞xc5

Now White completely opens up the position. 30.♘b5!? would represent another plan.

### 30...♞a2 31.♞e1 ♞d2 32.♙f1?!

32.♞f1 ♞xe2 33.♘c6 ♞e8 34.♘b4 gives White better practical chances on account of the passed c-pawn.

### 32...♙xc3 33.♞b1 ♙d4?!

Of course this position is not simple for Black, who must display his mastery of the art of defence. 33...♞c2 34.♞e1 ♞d2 35.♞b1 ♞c2 36.♞b6 ♙f6 is more active, since after it we cannot see how White can make any progress.

### 34.♞e7



34. ♖c4 is parried by 34... ♙xa7 35. ♖b7 ♖d5.

34... ♙xa7 35. ♖xa7 ♖d5 36. ♙g1 ♖a8 37. ♖xa8

On account of the high drawing tendency of rook endings, 37. ♖b6 was worth considering, to avoid the exchange of queens.

37... ♖xa8 38. ♖b5!?

White prevents the standard set-up f7–g6–h5.

38... f6

38... g6 can be met by 39. g4.

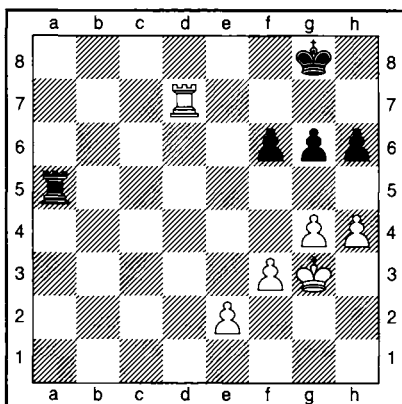
39. h4 ♖e8 40. ♙f1 g6 41. g4 ♖e4 42. f3 ♖a4 43. ♖b8+ ♙g7 44. ♖b7+ ♙g8

At first glance the black set-up looks suspect, but Nakamura resourcefully manages to achieve relief in time.

45. ♙f2

If 45. g5, then 45... ♖xh4 46. gxf6 ♖f4, and Black can breathe again.

45... ♖a5 46. ♙g3 h6 47. ♖d7



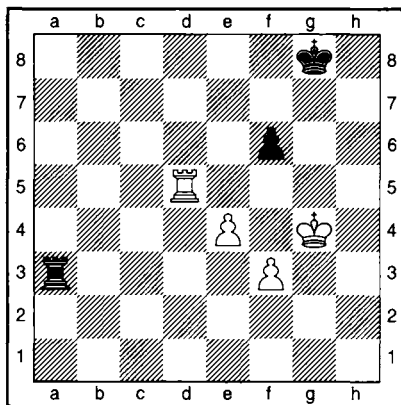
47... h5!

The relief following an exchange of pawns is important, because in rook endings purely passive defence often leads to disaster.

48. gxh5

After 48. e4 hxg4 49. fxg4 g5 50. hxg5 (50. h5 ♖a3+) 50... ♖xg5 51. ♖d5 ♖g6 52. ♙f4 ♙f7 the ending should also be tenable for Black.

48... ♖xh5 49. e4 g5 50. hxg5 ♖xg5+ 51. ♙f4 ♖a5 52. ♖c7 ♙f8 53. ♖d7 ♙g8 54. ♖d5 ♖a3! 55. ♙g4



55... ♖e3!

The white pawns are paralysed.

56. ♖d7 ♙f8 57. ♖a7 ♙g8 58. f4

White can no longer make any progress with normal methods. So Giri uses a sledgehammer approach.

58... ♖xe4 59. ♙f5 ♖e8 60. ♙g6

After 60. ♙xf6 White's activity is also insufficient: 60... ♖f8+ 61. ♙g5 (61. ♙g6 ♖xf4 62. ♖a8+ ♖f8 also promises the first player no advantage) 61... ♖b8 62. f5 ♖b6 leads to the famous Philidor position (White: ♙g5, ♖a7, f5; Black: ♙f8, ♖b6). After 63. f6 ♖b1 White has no protection against the checks.

60... f5 61. ♖g7+ ♙h8 62. ♖h7+ ♙g8 63. ♖g7+ ♙h8 64. ♖f7 ♙g8 65. ♖xf5 ♖e7!? 66. ♖g5 ♖f7



Even 66...♖g7+?! is playable in view of 67.♟f6 ♟h8!! 68.♖xg7 stalemate.

### 67.♟h6+

If White now plays 67.f5, then Black simply liquidates to the pawn ending, because after 67...♖g7+ 68.♟f6 ♖xg5 69.♟xg5 the king move 69...♟g7 defends the key squares: 70.f6+ ♟f7 71.♟f5 ♟f8!, and the game ends peacefully.

### 67...♟f8 68.f5 ♖f6+ 69.♟h5 ♟f7

### Draw agreed on Black's proposal

Anish Giri, who according to his trainer Vladimir Chuchelov was able in this tournament to match the world elite psychologically, but still had to work on his physical form, would face and pass his final examination in the penultimate round. At the end of it World Champion Viswanathan Anand could count himself more than lucky to have saved the draw. Mr. "Tata Steel Chess" must have been completely amazed that right from the word go Anish set out to play for a win with Black.

Nakamura too paid due respect to the youngster even before their encounter: "Yeah, Anish is in fact a very strong player. I have only beaten him once: in the blitz tiebreak of the 'Experience vs. Rising Stars' match in Amsterdam last year." From 12<sup>th</sup> till 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2010 a team of "old hands" (Boris Gelfand, Peter Svidler, Peter Heine Nielsen, Loek van Wely and Ljubomir Ljubojevic) played in the *Hotel Krasnopolsky* against a world select team of "young bloods" (Hikaru Nakamura, Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Anish Giri and David Howell). The generation of the "computer kids" won narrowly by 26-24. The highest scorer among the young stars was rewarded with an invitation to the final Melody Amber tournament. Since Hikaru and Anish both scored six points out of ten games, the ticket to the rapid and blindfold event in Monaco had to be decided in a blitz duel. The American defeated the young Dutch player, but the latter was then also invited by the organisers.

## Flying high with endgame skills

In their book *Fighting Chess with Magnus Carlsen* the authors Adrian Mikhalchishin and Oleg Stetsko try to demonstrate the outstanding qualities of the young Norwegian star through his games. Since in their opinion it is impossible to do justice to the many aspects of his skill in the framework of one book, they have, as pointed out in their introduction, specifically limited them-

selves to one aspect of his creative activity, "a very important indicator of playing strength – the ability to play the endgame, which has invariably distinguished the great champions of the past... At the present time his technique of converting an advantage resembles that of Fischer, and it rarely misfires – an indication of the serious work he has done."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Mikhalchischin & O. Stetsko, *Fighting chess with Magnus Carlsen*, Zürich 2012, p.15



We know of course that in their schooling of young chess players many trainers lay great emphasis on the learning of numerous opening systems and the rules which proceed from these to the subsequent middlegames. "The endgame is always allotted very little time", wrote Mikhail Shereshevsky, who in 1976 was the second of International Master Mark Dvoretsky at the 44<sup>th</sup> USSR Championship (First League). "Some trainers give their pupils only the most elementary conceptions of the endgame, assuming that with the general development of a player his mastery of endgame play will also rise. Others demonstrate long and complex analyses from reference books, although the probability of such positions being repeated in a practical game is slight. It is evident that both approaches are a long way from the truth: the mastery of a player is directly dependent not so much upon his amount of theoretical knowledge, as upon his understanding of the general principles of conducting chess endings."<sup>2</sup>

In this connection it is also interesting to read the opinion of the two grandmasters Grigory Levenfish and Vasily Smyslov, who back in 1957 produced a remarkable book on this subject: *Rook Endings*. "Any correct method of teaching chess also demands first of all the study of simple positions with a small number of pieces and pawns on the board. Studying endgames acquaints the beginner with the specific properties of the pieces and pawns and with the way they interact. The study of endings ought, therefore, to precede the analysis of openings

and complicated middlegame positions", was what the authors wrote in their preface. This point was unconditionally shared in his work by the Leningrad trainer of young players Vladimir Zak (1913–1994). For him the chess development of children up to the age of ten consisted of 90% endgame training. And his successes proved him correct, since Boris Spassky, Viktor Korchnoi and Gennady Sosonko are among his best known students.

As for the cooperation between Shereshevsky and Dvoretsky, the following episode is interesting; it occurred during the First League tournament in Minsk 1976 when Dvoretsky's game against Mark Taimanov was adjourned. "In one of the lines of analysis a rook ending with f- and h-pawns was reached. Dvoretsky referred to a book on rook endings, and began studying the appropriate chapter. I was surprised: after all, Dvoretsky is a great expert on the endgame. To my question he replied that he knew the basic principles of playing such endings, but did not even attempt to remember lengthy concrete analyses. Later during the tournament we frequently discussed the question of how to study the endgame. Dvoretsky considers it essential to know the classics, to analyse complicated practical rather than theoretical endings, and to find general rules and principles of play in complex endings. And in theoretical endings it is sufficient to know whether the ending is won or drawn, and to have a rough impression of the plan of play", wrote Shereshevsky in his volume *Endgame Strategy*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. I. Shereshevsky, *Endgame Strategy*, Oxford 1985, p.ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.ix.



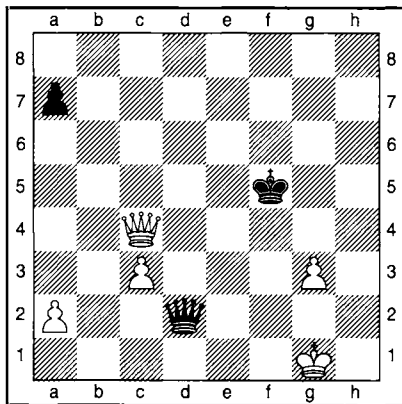
When we asked about his everyday training routine, Nakamura replied: "It is usually openings training, but sometime I take a look at a few endings from the Dvoretsky book. All in all I can say that I invest more than 80% of the time in openings."<sup>6</sup>

Probably as far as the endings are concerned this is a slight exaggeration. Hikaru has often demonstrated his mastery of technical endgames and his knowledge of the contents of Mark Dvoretsky's excellent *Endgame Manual*. But the best thing to do is to take a look at some practical examples, because they prove quite forcefully that his rise can be quite substantially traced back to his strength in the endgame!

## A) Pawn endings

### A1) The double move of the a-pawn

**H. Nakamura – J. Benjamin**  
World Open, Philadelphia 2005



Despite the two extra pawns, the queen ending would not be so easy to win, were it not for the following immediate liquidation

to a pawn ending, as White favourably exchanges queens.

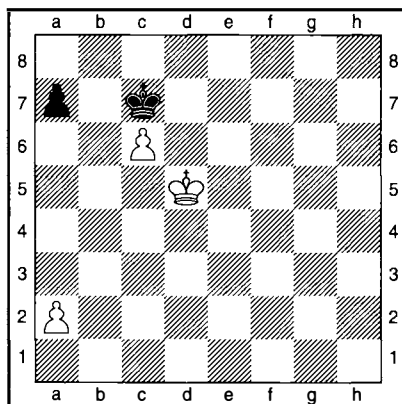
#### 54. ♖f4+!

After 54. ♖f4?! Black does not play 54... ♜xa2?, but 54... ♜c1+ 55. ♔g2 ♜a3, because he could otherwise resign on account of 55. ♖f2+.

#### 54... ♜xf4 55. gxf4 ♔xf4 56. ♔f2

Because the white pawn is still on a2, the game is now an easy win for Hikaru.

56... ♔e4 57. ♔e2 ♔d5 58. ♔d3 ♔c5 59. c4 ♔c6 60. ♔d4 ♔d6 61. c5+ ♔c7 62. ♔d5 ♔d7 63. c6+ ♔c7



#### 64. ♔c5!

The a-pawn definitely must stay on its starting square, in order to win the duel of the reserve moves. 64.a3?, on the other hand, gives away half a point: 64... ♔d8 65. ♔d6 ♔c8 66. c7 a6! 67. ♔c6 a5 68. ♔b6 a4=; 64.a4? ♔c8 65. ♔d6 ♔d8 66.a5 ♔c8 67.c7 a6, and Black holds the draw.

#### 64... ♔c8 65. ♔d6 ♔d8 66. c7+ ♔c8 67. ♔c6

Now White wins because his a-pawn still has both options:

<sup>6</sup> See Nakamura interview, pp. 129-139 in this book



67...a6

Nor does 67...a5 68.a3 a4 69.♔d6 ♖b7 70.♔d7 change the outcome for Black.

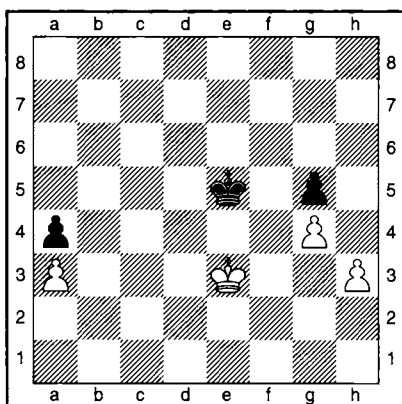
68.♔d6 a5 69.a4

**Black resigned.**

## A2) Triangulation

**H. Nakamura – S. Karjakin**

Match, 5<sup>th</sup> game, Cuernavaca/Mexico 2004



46.♔f2!?

Hikaru shows that he understands this ending.

46...♔f6?!

After this Black immediately ends up in zugzwang. 46...♔e6 puts up more stubborn resistance, but it will be broken by a manoeuvre involving triangulation: 47.♔g2 ♔e5 (47...♔f6 48.♔g3 ♔g6 49.♔f3 ♔f6 50.♔e4 ♔e6 51.♔d4 ♔d6 52.♔c4 ♔e5 53.♔b4 ♔f4 54.♔xa4 ♔g3 55.♔b3 ♔xh3 56.a4 ♔xg4 57.a5, and White wins) 48.♔f3 ♔d4 (48...♔f6 does not help on account of 49.♔e4) 49.♔g3 (the over-hasty 49.h4? gxh4 50.g5 ♔e5 51.♔g4 h3 52.♔xh3 ♔f5 53.♔h4 ♔g6 would only be a draw) 49...♔c3 50.h4 gxh4+ 51.♔h2! (the h-

pawn must be kept, since after 51.♔xh4? ♔b3 52.g5 ♔xa3 53.g6 ♔b2 54.g7 a3 55.g8 ♔a2 the white king is outside of the winning zone a5–d5–d4–e4–e1) 51...♔b3 (51...♔d4 52.♔h3 ♔e5 53.♔xh4 ♔f6 54.♔h5 offers no consolation to Black either) 52.g5 ♔xa3 53.g6 ♔b2 54.g7 a3 55.g8 ♔a2 56.♔g7+ ♔b1 57.♔g1+ ♔b2 58.♔d4+ ♔b1 59.♔b4+ ♔c2 60.♔a3 ♔b1 61.♔b3+ ♔a1 62.♔c2, and now the h-pawn proves Black's undoing: 62...h3 63.♔c1#.

47.♔g3! ♔e6 48.h4 gxh4+

After 48...♔f6 49.h5 the protected passed pawn is decisive.

49.♔xh4 ♔f6 50.♔h5 ♔g7 51.♔g5

Hikaru's king has reached a key square.

51...♔h7 52.♔f6 ♔h6 53.g5+ ♔h7 54.♔f7 ♔h8 55.♔g6

Karjakin now terminated his resistance in view of 55...♔g8 56.♔h6! ♔h8 57.g6 ♔g8 58.g7 ♔f7 59.♔h7.

**Black resigned.**

## B) Rook endings

### B1) Defence

**A. Baburin – H. Nakamura**

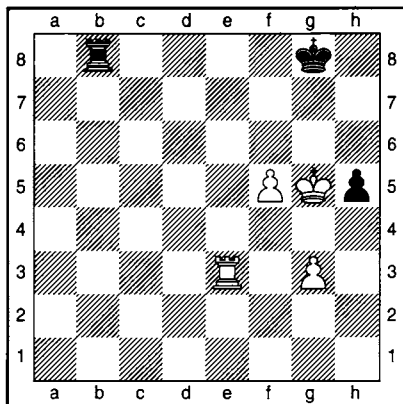
Imre König Memorial, San Francisco 2002

By careful defence it is often possible to save many valuable half points in unfavourable rook endings. Still only 14 years old, Hikaru managed to save this lost position against the experienced grandmaster Alexander Baburin:

(see next diagram)

82...♔f7!?

[chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

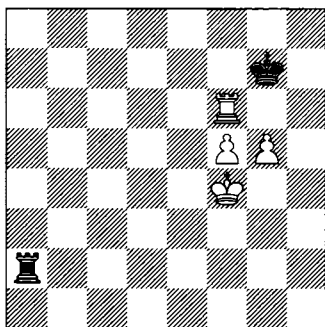


A good attempt to cause the white monarch problems in finding a place to hide. 82... ♖b5?! 83. ♖f3 makes it simpler for White.

**83. ♖xh5**

83. ♖a3!?, intending 83... ♖g8+ 84. ♖xh5 ♖f6 85. ♖a6+ ♖xf5 86. g4+ ♖f4 (86... ♖xg4 87. ♖a5++-) 87. ♖f6+ ♖e5 88. g5+-, keeps the rook more active.

In the aforementioned book by Levenfish and Smyslov *Rook Endings* (p. 68, position 104) the following study by Genrikh Kasparian can be found. Just as in our game, White is two pawns up, one of them a knight's pawn, the other a bishop's pawn. Here too there are some drawing positions, if, as in this case, it is Black to move!



Analysis diagram

Unlike in positions with a rook's pawn and knight's pawn, on h5 the white king here has a refuge against horizontal checks. So these do not achieve anything for Black. In spite of this, the second player can still hold the draw.

**1... ♖f2+ 2. ♖e3 ♖g2 3. ♖g6+ ♖f7 4. ♖f3 ♖g1 5. ♖e4 ♖g2 6. ♖d5 ♖g1 7. ♖d6 ♖g2 8. ♖d7 ♖g1 9. ♖f6+ ♖g7**

White is now forced into a pawn sacrifice, or else he will not be able to shake off the pressure from the black rook.

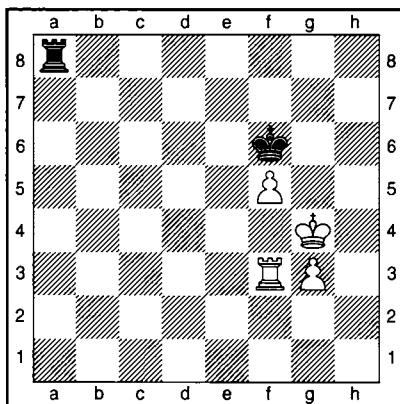
**10. ♖d6 ♖xg5 11. ♖e6 ♖g1 12. ♖e7**

Pointless is 12. f6+ ♖g6 13. ♖e7 ♖f1 with a draw.

**12... ♖f1 13. ♖g6+ ♖h7 14. ♖f6 ♖a1**, and Black holds the draw.

Now let us return to the game:

**83... ♖f6 84. ♖f3 ♖g8!? 85. ♖h4 ♖h8+ 86. ♖g4 ♖a8 87. ♖h4 ♖h8+ 88. ♖g4 ♖a8**



**89. ♖f4?**

After this Black achieves an impregnable fortress. It was not yet too late to activate the rook with 89. ♖b3: 89... ♖a4+ 90. ♖h5 ♖xf5 91. ♖f3+ ♖e6 92. g4 ♖a8 93. g5, and White wins.



89...♖g8+ 90.♔f3 ♜a8 91.g4 ♔g5

Now the king has occupied the hole in the pawn chain – and things can go no further.

92.♞e4

92.f6?? would even totally backfire on account of 92...♞a3+.

92...♞a3+ 93.♔e2

After 93.♞e3 ♞a4 94.♞e6 ♞f4+ too, there is no way for White to make any progress.

93...♞b3 94.♔f2 ♞a3 95.♔g2 ♞b3 96.♔f2

♞a3 97.♔e2 ♞b3 98.♞d4 ♞a3 99.♞b4 ♞c3

100.♞e4 ♞a3 101.♔f2 ♞b3 102.♞e3 ♞b2+

103.♔f3 ♞b4 104.♞e8 ♞f4+ 105.♔e3

♞xg4 106.♞g8+ ♔xf5 107.♞xg4 ♔xg4

Draw.

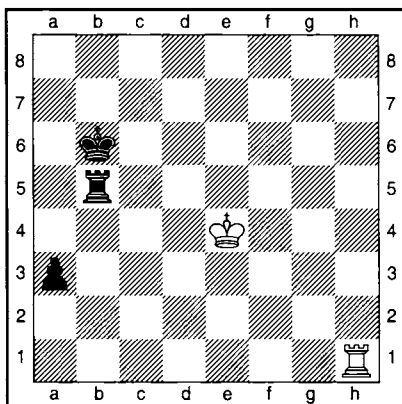
## B2) Technique in rook endings

### B21) Cutting off the king

Cutting off the opposing king with your own rook is one of the typical winning techniques.

**E. Jelling – H. Nakamura**

European Teams Cup, Ohrid 2009



77...♞b3!

This horizontal barrier is extremely effective, because the white king is now trapped

in no-man's-land. But not 77...a2? 78.♞a1 ♞a5 (after 78...♞b2 79.♔d3 ♔b5 80.♔c3 ♞h2 81.♔b3 the position is level) 79.♔d3 ♔c5 80.♔c3 ♞a3+ 81.♔b2 ♔b4 82.♞xa2, and a win is no longer possible, or 77...♔a5? 78.♔d3 ♞c5 (this barrier along the c-file is not nearly so effective on account of 79.♞h8 ♔b4 80.♞a8).

78.♔d4 a2!

Indispensable precision, since 78...♔b5? would only be a draw on account of 79.♞h8.

79.♞a1 ♞a3 80.♔c4 ♔a5!

A fatal bodycheck.

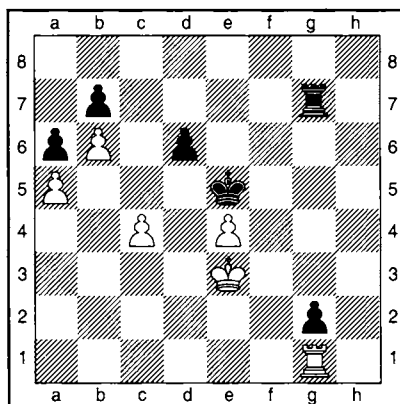
81.♔c5 ♞a4

White resigned.

### B22) The rook belongs behind the passed pawn

**M. L. Fierro Baquero – H. Nakamura**

Kings vs. Queens 960 [rapid],  
Saint Louis 2011



For this rule it is important to know that it is totally unimportant whether the passed pawn is your own or your opponent's. In the present game Black is winning despite the



material equality, because his rook is radiating much more power. Hikaru won with a typical zugzwang...

### 100...♖g8 101.♔f3

101.♔d3 no longer saves White either on account of 101...♔f4.

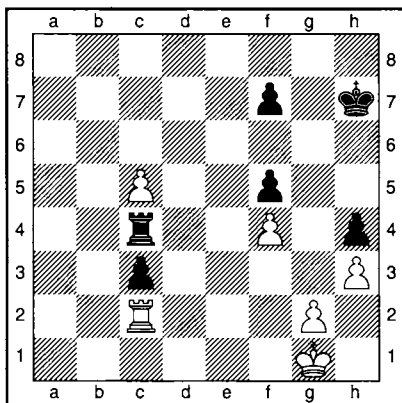
### 101...♔d4

In view of 102.♔f2 (after 102.♖xg2 ♖xg2 103.♔xg2 ♔xe4 104.♔g3 ♔d4 105.♔f4 ♔xc4 106.♔f5 ♔b5 107.♔e6 ♔xa5 108.♔xd6 ♔xb6 the lights are also extinguished for White) 102...♔xc4 103.♖c1+ ♔b5 104.♔g1 ♔xa5 105.♖b1 ♖g4+ Martha Fierro Baquero no longer has any chance of a draw.

**White resigned.**

### M. Socko – H. Nakamura

Santo Domingo Open 2003

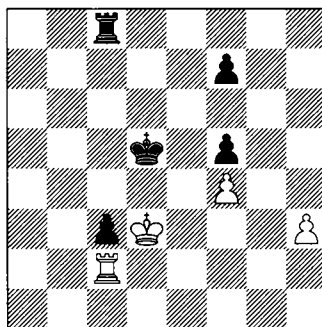


### 56...♔g6!

In this specific case the activation of the king is more important than the crude winning of the white c-pawn, which in any case cannot run away. If, however, Black plays 56...♖xc5?, White obtains good drawing chances with 57.♔f2.

### 57.c6

57.♔f2 also clearly loses: 57...♖xf4+ 58.♔e3 ♖c4 59.♔d3 ♖xc5 60.♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 61.♔xc3 ♔g5+-. But 57.g3!? was more resilient: 57...♖xc5 58.♔f2 ♖c8 59.♔f3 (after 59.gxh4 ♔h5 60.♔g3 ♖c7 61.♔f3 ♔xh4 62.♔g2 ♖c8 63.♔h2 ♖c6 64.♔g2 ♖g6+ 65.♔h2 ♖g3 it is also all over) 59...hxg3 60.♔xg3 ♔f6 61.♔f3 ♔e6 62.♔e3 ♔d5 63.♔d3



Analysis diagram

Now Black wins by invading with his rook: 63...♖g8 64.♔h2 ♖g3+ 65.♔c2 ♔c4 66.h4 ♖g1 67.h5 ♖a1 68.♔h3 ♖a2+ 69.♔b1 ♖g2 70.h6 ♔b3 71.♔h1 ♖b2+ 72.♔c1 ♖a2 73.♔b1 c2+ 74.♔c1 ♖a1+ 75.♔d2 ♖xh1.

### 57...♔f6 58.g3

A despairing attempt to get some counterplay, but it is doomed to failure on account of the passive white blockading rook. However, White is lost, e.g. 58.c7 ♔e6 59.♔f2 ♔d5 60.♔e3 ♖xc7 61.♔d3 ♖c8 (a typical zugzwang technique) 62.♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 63.♔xc3 ♔e4 64.♔d2 ♔xf4 65.♔e2 ♔g3 66.♔f1 f4 67.♔g1 f3 68.gxf3 ♔xf3.

### 58...hxg3 59.♔g2

59.h4 does not help either: 59...♖xc6 60.h5 ♖c8 61.h6 (61.♔g2 ♔e6 62.♔xg3 ♔d5 63.♔h4 ♔e4 64.♔g5 ♔d3 65.♖c1 c2 66.♔xf5 ♖c5+ 67.♔g4 ♔d2 ends up with



the same result for White) 61...♔g6 62.♔g2 ♕xh6 63.♔xg3 ♕g7 64.♕f2 ♕f6 65.♔e3 ♖c4 66.♔d3 ♖xf4 67.♔xc3 ♖e4, and the cutting off of the king is decisive.

59...♔e6 60.♔xg3 ♔d5 61.h4 ♖xc6 62.h5 ♔c4 63.♔h4 ♔b3 64.♖c1 ♔b2 65.♖h1 c2 66.♔g5 c1♖ 67.♖xc1 ♔xc1 68.♔xf5 ♔d2 69.♔g5 ♔e3 70.f5 ♔e4 71.h6 ♖xh6

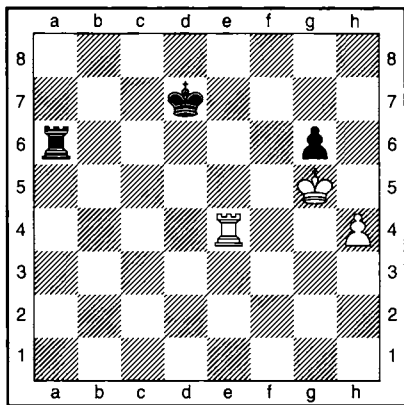
**White resigned.**

## B23) The king must be activated

In rook endings activity is often of decisive importance, and this applies not only to the major piece, but also to the king. If your game has reached an endgame and you are looking for a plan, then on no account forget your king!

**H. Nakamura – S. Andriasian**

Dos Hermanas Internet [blitz], ICC 2008



Normally one should not analyse blitz games, but in view of Hikaru's outstanding skill in this field we gladly make an exception:

**66.♔h6**

The position is and remains drawn, but this plan is hard to counter.

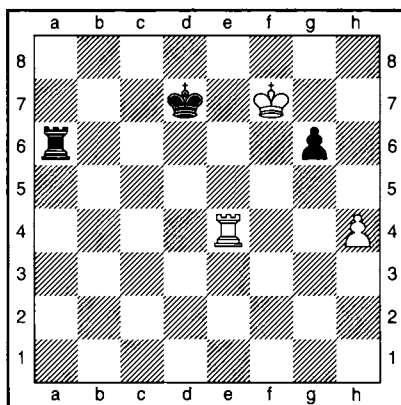
**66...♖b6**

Black can only wait and must not be over-hasty. Thus the offer to exchange rooks fails to 66...♖e6?? 67.♖xe6 ♔xe6 68.♔xg6 ♔e7 69.♔g7!.

**67.♔g7 ♖a6 68.♖g4 ♔e8 69.♖e4+**

Of course, 69.♖xg6?! hardly holds any promise of success on account of 69...♖xg6+ 70.♔xg6 ♔f8, and the point is shared.

**69...♔d7 70.♔f7**



**70...g5?**

Hikaru's plan now becomes effective, because the Armenian Sawen Andriasian, two years younger than him, who was European under-16 champion in 2005 and in the following year won the under-18 world championship title in Yerevan, now succumbs to panic. Against 70...♖d6, on the other hand, there is no way to win, e.g. 71.♖g4 ♖d1 72.♖xg6 ♖h1 73.♖g4 ♖f1+ 74.♔g7 ♔e7 75.♖e4+ ♔d7 76.h5 ♖g1+ 77.♔f6 ♖f1+ 78.♔g5 ♖g1+ 79.♖g4 ♖xg4+ 80.♔xg4 ♔e7 81.♔g5 ♔f7.

**71.hxg5 ♖a5 72.g6 ♖f5+ 73.♔g8 ♖f1 74.g7 ♖h1 75.♖e2 ♖f1 76.♖h2 ♖h1**

A final blitz trick, but Hikaru thwarts it:

**77.♖xh1**

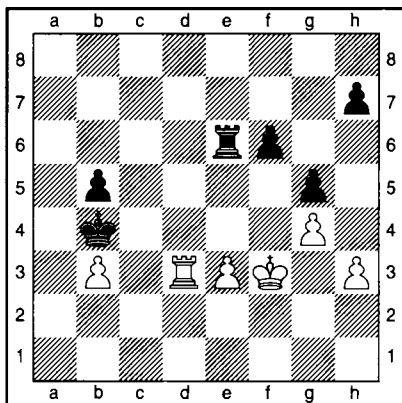
**Black resigned.**



In the following blitz game Hikaru's king also pushes forward irresistibly...

**M. Leon Hoyos – H. Nakamura**

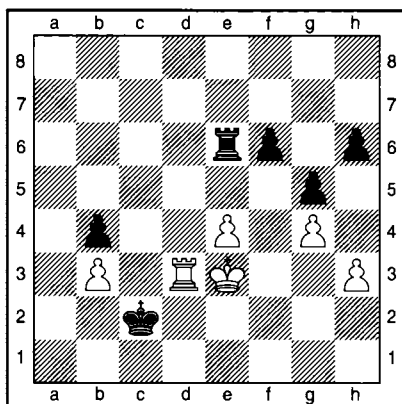
Dos Hermanas Internet [blitz], ICC 2007



**55...♔a3! 56.e4 b4 57.♕e3 h6 58.♕f3 ♕b2 59.♕e3**

After 59.h4 the black rook decisively penetrates the white position: 59...♖c6 60.hxg5 hxg5 61.e5 ♖c3 62.♖xc3 bxc3 63.e6 c2 64.e7 c1♗ 65.e8♗ ♗f4+.

**59...♕c2**



And now White is in a deadly zugzwang.

**60.♖d8 ♕xb3 61.♕d3 ♕b2 62.♖b8 b3 63.♖b7 ♕a2 64.♕c3 ♖c6+ 65.♕d2 b2**

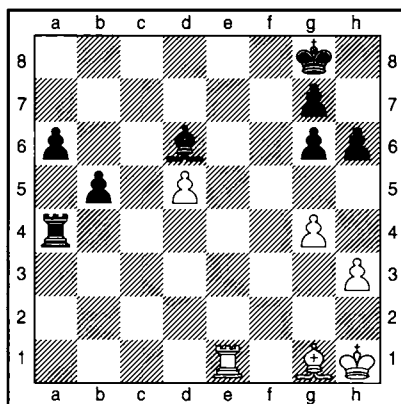
**66.♖a7+ ♕b1 67.♖a4 ♖d6+ 68.♕c3 ♕c1**  
**White resigned.**

### C) Calculation

Hikaru has a lot of energy and he calculates well, which often helps him in the endgame, as in the following two examples.

**N. Short – H. Nakamura**

Corus Festival (A), Wijk aan Zee 2010



**40...b4! 41.♖e6**

The alternative variations 41.♕h2 ♕xh2 42.♕xh2 ♕f7 43.d6 ♖a2+ 44.♕g3 ♖d2 45.♖b1 a5 46.♖a1 ♖d5 and 41.♖e4 b3 42.♖xa4 b2 also give Black the clearly superior position.

**41...b3 42.♖xd6 ♖b4!**

The point. Now Short can stop the b-pawn only at the cost of great sacrifices.

**43.♖d8+**

Black also has a decisive advantage after 43.♕d4 ♖xd4 44.♖b6 ♖d3 45.d6 ♕f7 (Ftacnik in *CBM* 135).

**43...♕h7**

**White resigned.**

The situation after 44.♕d4 ♖xd4 45.♖b8 ♖d3 46.d6 a5 47.d7 a4 48.d8♗ ♖xd8

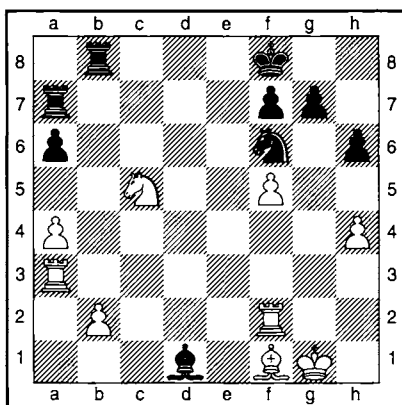


49.♙xd8 b2 50.♖b8 a3 is too depressing for Short.

In the following game – played in the first round of the US Championship which Nakamura won for the second time after 2004 – Hikaru also calculated everything exactly.

### H. Nakamura – A. Shabalov

USA Championship, Saint Louis 2009



#### 33.♘xa6!

The winning move, because the black bishop cannot intervene in the defence in time.

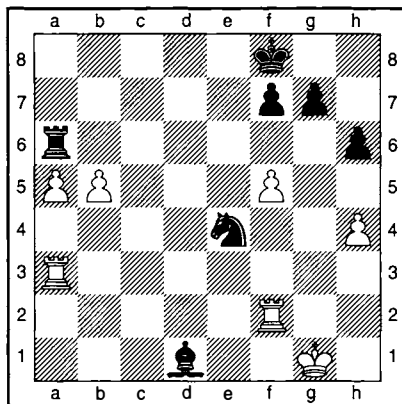
**33...♖b6 34.b4 ♗bxa6 35.♙xa6 ♖xa6 36.a5**

Although Black is not at a material disadvantage, he nevertheless collapses because his pieces are completely uncoordinated and so the advance of the two white pawns on the queenside is unstoppable. The black bishop especially plays the part of a tragic hero.

#### 36...♗e4

36...♖a7 37.b5 ♘d7 38.♖b2 ♘c5 39.b6 ♗d7 40.a6 ♘xa6 41.♖xa6 is a futile attempt to save the game.

#### 37.b5!



#### 37...♖d6

After other moves too, there is no way of holding the game for Alexander Shabalov, e.g. 37...♘xf2 38.bxa6 ♙c2 39.a7 ♙e4 40.♙xf2 or 37...♖a8 38.b6 ♖b8 39.a6 ♖xb6 40.a7.

#### 38.a6 ♘xf2

38...♖d8 39.a7 ♖a8 40.b6 ♘c5 41.♖d2 ♙g4 42.♖d5 ♘b7 43.♖d7 ♘c5 44.b7 ♘xb7 45.♖xb7 ♙xf5 46.♖b8+.

#### 39.a7 ♘h3+ 40.♖xh3

After 40...♖d8 41.b6 ♙g4 42.♖a3 the white pawns run through to promote.

**Black resigned.**

Since it is known that practice is the criterion of truth, we have selected four examples on this theme as a little test for you, which, as you solve them, will enable you to check your endgame technique against that of Hikaru Nakamura, and hopefully you will be able to improve it at the same time. But now it is your move!

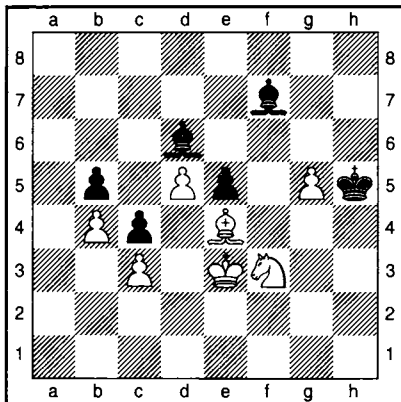
Firstly another important suggestion: begin with an evaluation of each position and make sure that you write down your thoughts. This is a professional approach and is guaranteed to pay off for you sooner or later...

# ZWISCHEN ZÜGE – ENDGAME TEST

1

**A knight goes walkabout**

H. Nakamura – L.-D. Nisipeanu  
Kings Tournament, Medias 2011

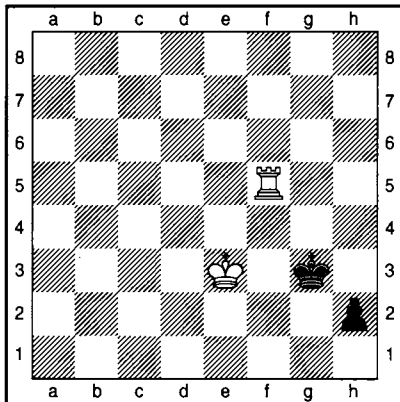


How did Hikaru break open the black stronghold?

2

**The knight in the corner**

H. Nakamura – M. Wahls  
Mallorca Trophy [blitz], playchess.com 2004

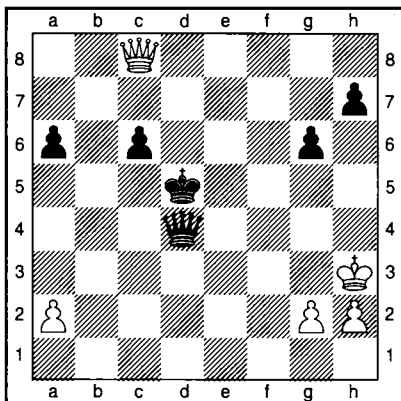


How does the rook win against the pawn?

3

**Liquidated...**

R. Ponomarev – H. Nakamura  
1st match game, Saint Louis 2011

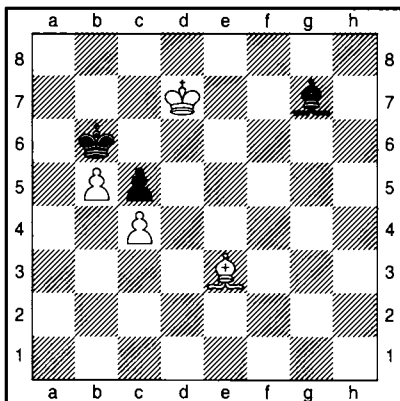


How did Hikaru realise his advantage?

4

**By the back door**

H. Nakamura – S. Kudrin  
Western States Open, Reno 2004



How did Hikaru storm the black position?



## CHAPTER 4

# Wijk aan Zee

Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 5

A tournament such as Wijk aan Zee, justifiably called the “Wimbledon of chess”, can afford the luxury of three rest days. On this first day, after four games Hikaru is surprisingly in first place with 3 points. But it is well known that the next opponent is always the most dangerous one. And between now and the second planned pause, rounds 5 till 8 will see the US player face a strong quartet consisting of ex-FIDE world champion Ruslan Ponomarev, the two local heroes Erwin L’Ami and Jan Smeets, and finally Magnus Carlsen. It is far from certain that after this Hikaru will still be sharing top place with World Champion Anand, especially since initially all he can manage against “Pono” is a shaky draw, whereas the Indian champion defeats Jan Smeets and goes into the lead with 4 out of 5, as the seeding predicts...

## GAME 28

**H. Nakamura – R. Ponomarev**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Nimzo-Indian Defence [E20]*

### ***Salvation painstakingly achieved***

The question is: what is the best set-up with which to combat the Nimzo-Indian Defence? Someone who has demonstrated this in practice in numerous World Championship struggles against his long-standing opponent Anatoly Karpov is Garry Kasparov. And the cooperation with him is certainly one key to Nakamura’s successful play in this tournament. In their first training session immediately before the Tata Steel Tournament the two of them dealt in particular with this opening and the

system with 4.♘f3. In the previously mentioned interview in *New in Chess*, Nakamura remarked: But I think, still, having all the work – having access to Garry’s database certainly – it still gives me somewhat of an edge to at least know that I’m playing the best possible openings.”

And yet the most intensive training, and the new theoretical knowledge which went with it, is only one side of the coin, because in chess the real criterion of truth is practical play. The fact that Nakamura finally, painstakingly reached the haven of a draw is unquestionably the positive message to be taken from this game.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 c5  
5.g3 ♘c6 6.♙g2 ♘e4 7.♙d2 ♘xd2  
8.♙xd2 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♙b6 10.♘c2 ♙e7  
11.0–0 0–0 12.♙ab1 d6 13.b4 ♙d8 14.♙h1  
14.♘e3! looks more natural, especially



since 14...♔d7? can then be met advantageously with 15.b5 ♖e5 16.♗cd5.

**14...♔d7 15.♗e3 ♕f8 16.b5 ♖a5 17.f4 ♖c7 18.♖fc1 ♗ac8 19.♗e4?!**

This allows Black to stabilise the position, after which the bishop pair will prove to be a long-term trump. So continuing to follow a light-squared strategy by means of 19.f5!? b6 20.♖d3 is more logical.

**19...b6 20.♖c2 h6 21.♖f1 f5 22.♗f2 g6 23.♗d3 ♕g7 24.♖fc1 ♕e8 25.♗d1 ♖e7 26.♖b4 ♖c7 27.e4 fxe4 28.♔xe4 ♖f6**

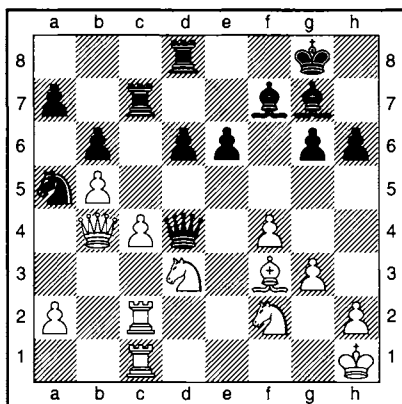
28...♔d4!? would certainly be an interesting try.

**29.♔f3 ♕f7 30.♗1f2?**

30.♖e1 g5 31.♖e2 ♖d4 32.♗e3 gives a more harmonious set-up of the pieces.

**30...♖d4!**

Ponomarev picks up the gauntlet.



**31.♗e5 ♔xe5**

Ponomarev chooses the simple solution, which secures him an unmistakable advantage. 31...dxe5 32.♖d1 exf4 33.♖xd4 ♖xd4 34.♖d2 ♖dxc4 35.♖d6 is complicated and better suits Nakamura, who loves tactical complications and virtually provokes them

when the opportunity presents itself.

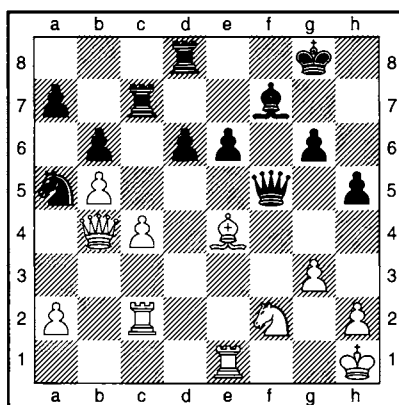
**32.fxe5 ♖xe5 33.♗g4 ♖g7 34.♖d1?!**

34.♖d2 g5 35.♗g1 ♕g6 36.♖c3 establishes a better defensive position.

**34...h5 35.♗f2 ♖e5**

The immediate advance 35...d5!? also comes strongly into consideration, for example: 36.c5 ♖f6 37.♗g2 ♖e7.

**36.♖e1 ♖d4 37.♖d1 ♖e5 38.♖e1 ♖f5 39.♔e4**



**39...♖c5?**

The key moment. With the text move Ponomarev loosens his control of the kingside too much. After 39...♖f6, on the other hand, White does not have enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

**40.♖b2 ♖g5 41.♔d3 e5 42.♗e4 ♖e7 43.♖f1 ♗g7**

And the game was agreed drawn, since after 44.♖c1 ♔xc4 45.♔xc4 ♖xc4 46.♗g5 ♖f8 47.♖xf8 ♗xf8 48.♖f2+ ♗e8 49.♖d2 White now has sufficient compensation – but no more than that!



# The tactical pro

**T**actics win games! – You will certainly have a constant reminder of this in your own games. “The ability to find combinations, to spot tactical motifs as quickly as possible and to calculate variations correctly counts amongst the most important abilities of all good players. They may have mastered openings brilliantly, they may know all about middlegame plans and may also have assimilated the fundamentals of the endgame – yet if they cannot calculate correctly they will not get far.

Also in a quite special way the productive age of any player can be measured against his tactical competence, because the older they become the less accurately they calculate and the more they rely on experience and intuition, with the result that performance inevitably declines,”<sup>1</sup> according to Michal Konopka, for many years coach of the Czech national team. What is also interesting is his conclusion that an excellent tactician need not necessarily be a player who loves to attack or even an aggressive one. Konopka, whose best known protégé was Viktor Láznicka (born in 1988) and who was a second to David Navara (born in 1985) for his debut in Wijk aan Zee in 2007, strongly advises that constant tactical training is necessary.

In this connection it is important to remember Mark Dvoretsky’s conclusion that tactics play no less a role in the endgame than in the middlegame, though their character is different.

The tactical pro is characterised above all by his creativity at the board. In the words of Alexei Shirov: “When you are playing a tournament game and the clock is ticking, you tend to choose moves according to your general knowledge of the game and your pre-established method of logical thinking. However, sometimes you need to go beyond your usual frames, to escape the confines of your knowledge and think less rationally. You are still strictly limited within the constraints imposed by the rules of chess, but you can’t absorb the whole game, it’s too big, so you end up using your associative intuition. And sometimes a brilliant – and mathematically correct! – solution is the result.”<sup>2</sup>

Shirov provided an incredible example from tournament praxis. So allow us to invite you to take part in an experiment!

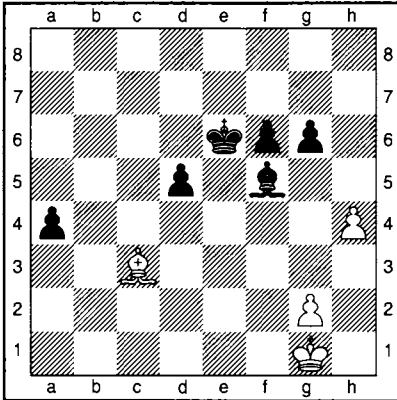
As a first step you should set up the following position on your chessboard, and then ask yourself the question how Black, whose move it is, should proceed in order to win the game, which at first sight appears to be impossible. We too, as Alexei did several years previously, asked *Fritz* – and you will perhaps not believe it: in this specific case the tactical solution was too much for our “electronic second”. Of course we can assume that it knows the basic principles of the treatment of complicated endings such as the centralisation of the king. But how can that really be possible in this specific position? How can

<sup>1</sup> M. Konopka, „Etwas zur Taktik“ in: issue 1/2007 of culturally oriented chess magazine *KARL* Frankfurt/M. 2007, pp.14-19.

<sup>2</sup> Alexei Shirov, *Fire on Board, Part II*, Everyman 2005, p.16.

Black actually land the great blow, which was at that time hailed as a stroke of genius in the magazine *SCHACH*?

**V. Topalov – A. Shirov**  
Linares 1998



Position after 47.♔g1

“The position seemed rather simple since, apart from the kings, only two minor pieces were left on the board. However, simplicity may often be misleading. I came to realise that any ordinary solution would lead to a draw, as is often the case with opposite-coloured bishops. All the same, I had two extra pawns and felt that there should be something to be done!”, was how Shirov described the situation. Well, our faithful *Fritz* suggests the normal move 47...♙e4, which however does not win, as you can see for yourself. So what is the key move? **47...♙h3!!**

“What is this? Black is simply chucking

away his bishop? Something is wrong with the diagram, there must have been something on h3! My first thoughts ran along these lines when I came across the diagram position in a Spanish newspaper during my train journey from Madrid to Linares”, wrote Dirk Poldauf in issue 3/ 1998 of *SCHACH*. And he continued: “Yet things may not be so strange! Shirov has never suffered from any lack of creativity; so he probably saw the text move as being a logical one: after all, the white pawns are doubled, the black king is threatening to penetrate the white position with gain of tempo, and from there it will coordinate the advance of the two passed pawns.”

The furious finale was equally forced.

**48.gxh3 ♙f5 49.♔f2 ♙e4 50.♙xf6 d4**

Only now does *Fritz* recognise the message the bells had rung out for White – SOS, but the white ship will sink in very few seconds...

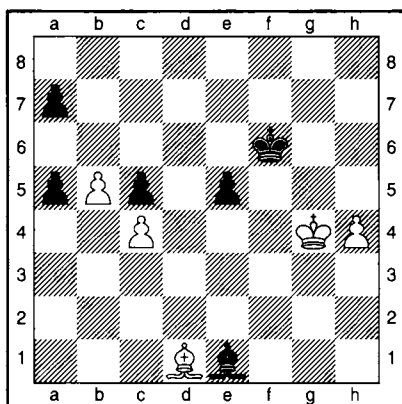
**51.♙e7 ♔d3 52.♙c5 ♔c4 53.♙e7 ♔b3**  
**White resigned.**

Naturally you will ask: how did Alexei Shirov reach this brilliant solution, the sacrifice of his bishop in order to gain the decisive tempi for the king march? What was the role played by his combinative vision?<sup>3</sup>

It is the experiences mentioned at the start which needed to be called upon at the decisive moment. In this case it was the following position from a game, which Shirov had lost to Ulf Andersson seven years previously!

<sup>3</sup> This is defined by Mark Dvoretsky in his manual *School of Chess Excellence 2 – Tactical Play* as “the ability to quickly discover latent tactical ideas – far from obvious strong moves, usually involving sacrifices”. Edition Olms, 2002 p.10.

**A. Shirov – U. Andersson**  
Biel 1991



Position after 44.♔xg4

**44...♙xh4!**

A surprising “cudgel” found by the Swedish player, which enables him to centralise his king in decisive fashion so that the black passed pawns turn into an insoluble problem for Alexei.

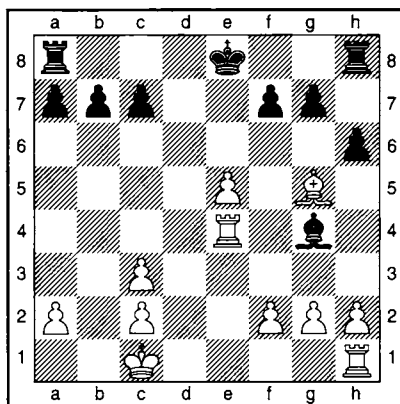
As for *Fritz*, it finds the text move quite quickly, but it takes some time to evaluate it and further moves so as to see behind the horizon of the bishop sacrifice – but to the best of our knowledge, fortunately things continue like that in human chess too...

**45.♔xh4 ♕f5 46.♔g3 ♕e4 47.♔f2 ♔d3  
48.♔e1 ♕xc4 49.♔d2 ♕b4 50.♔c2 e4  
51.♙g4 a4 52.♙f5 e3 53.♙e6 c4**

**White resigned.**

In the aforementioned issue of *SCHACH* Dirk Poldauf quotes a further example from Shirov's games, in which this tactical motif played a role, even though his opponent Jan Timman lost the game which had been played shortly beforehand.

**A. Shirov – J. Timman**  
Wijk aan Zee 1998



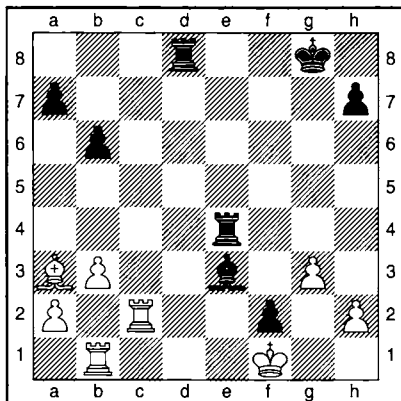
Position after 14.♖xe4

Timman surprised Shirov with 14...♙h3!

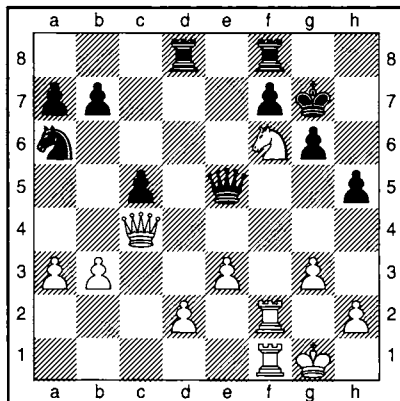
It is not known whether the then ten-year-old Hikaru was aware of Shirov's elegant solution to a “simple positional problem” against Veselin Topalov. In any case we can assume that Nakamura too is continuously mentally filing away such examples from tournament praxis and above all from his own games, so as to find the correct tactical idea. The fact that he plays innumerable bullet and blitz chess games will unquestionably help him to establish himself as a genuine tactical pro. And it can be quite simple motifs which lead to a tactical solution, as the next two examples demonstrate....

**B. Gelfand – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),  
Wijk aan Zee 2012

**H. Nakamura – D. Navara**

Tata Steel Chess (A),  
Wijk aan Zee 2012



Position after 24...h5?

In this case the motif is pawn promotion and Boris Gelfand, the 2012 challenger for the chess crown, made it extremely simple for Hikaru notch up the point with his final mistake **35.♞c6–c2??**. Next came **35...♞e4–d4**, and White immediately resigned.

As Martin Breutigam pointed out in his chess column in *Tagesspiegel* (29<sup>th</sup> January 2012), after this little sidestep there is no longer any sensible way to parry the powerful threat of **36...♞d1+**, e.g. **36.♖e2 ♞d1! 37.♞xd1 ♞xd1 38.♞c8+ ♖g7 39.♞f8 ♞e1+ 40.♖d3 f1♚ 41.♞xf1 ♞xf1 42.♖xe3 ♞h1 43.h4 ♞h2** and then **...♞xa2** with an easy win.

One round previously Hikaru gave himself the chance of a typical knight sacrifice against David Navara, and in such cases the chess samurai is merciless!

Your first glance at the diagram will probably have convinced you that moving the black h-pawn two squares forward cannot be a good idea here. Of course a tactical pro like Nakamura does not miss such opportunities, especially since all his major pieces are already directed at the weak point f7. Now all he has to do is divert the black queen...

**25.♘xh5+!**

Like it or not, Black must now take the cheeky steed with his queen, because otherwise everything falls apart. But even then there is no way to ward off the terrible fate which awaits him.

**25...♙xh5 26.♞xf7+ ♞xf7 27.♞xf7+ ♖h6 28.♞f4+ g5 29.♞f6+ ♞g6 30.♞f1 ♞h5 31.♞xb7 c4 32.♞f6+ ♞g6 33.♞xd8 ♞b1+ 34.♖f2**

**Black resigned.**

“Chess is 99% tactics!”, was the bon mot of Richard Teichmann (1868–1925), who was in fact peacefully inclined. The German chess master may only have won a single important tournament,<sup>4</sup> but he was very difficult to beat. The frequent fifth place finishes which enabled him to win the last prize earned him the nickname “Richard V”.

But since you, dear reader, are of course not worried about mere prize money but wish to play chess successfully, we can at once reassure you that tactics do not have to remain in any way top secret. The key to success is diligent training. You will find more than enough exercises in the relevant books and treatises. And in order to acquire tactical finesses, composed studies are particularly useful.

But of course there is nothing better than your own games... You should simply look over those from the last three years for tactical models and motifs and then store these in a card index, or even better with the help of a computer. Just by carrying out these “post-mortems” within a short time

you will clearly improve your tactical ability and also the results you obtain in your games.

In parallel with this you should of course soak up hints from the games of the top players. So we shall offer you four positions of Hikaru Nakamura’s; their level of difficulty varies and they all come from a single decade.

To make it somewhat simpler for you, there is a code word in each of the headings – as was the case in the endgame test – and it gives you a practical hint.

In addition, try to simulate real match conditions, so use a chess clock (even an alarm clock will suffice!), set yourself a time limit and only then start to solve the task.

And something else: on no account must you move the pieces about aimlessly. Even in training the “touch-move” rule applies.

Finally, you absolutely must write down what you thought, because you will notice how this method – which stores important thoughts in your sub-conscious – will improve your ability in a lasting fashion.

But now, at last, it is your move!

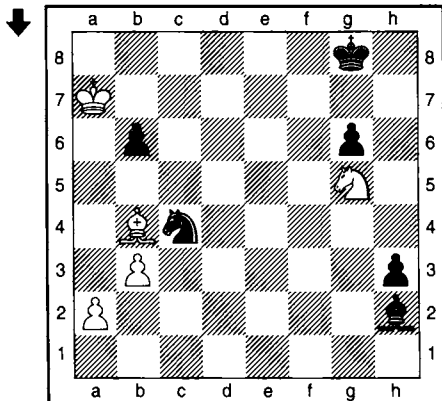
<sup>4</sup> The event in question was the second Karlsbad Tournament of 1911. By a margin of one point, Richard Teichmann relegated to second and third places Carl Schlechter and Akiba Rubinstein, both of whom he also defeated. He was also victorious over Aaron Nimzowitsch (6th) and the 18-year-old Alexander Alekhine (8th).

# ZWISCHEN ZÜGE – TACTICS TEST

1

Clearance

A. Karpov – H. Nakamura  
CCAS Trophée, Cap d'Agde 2008

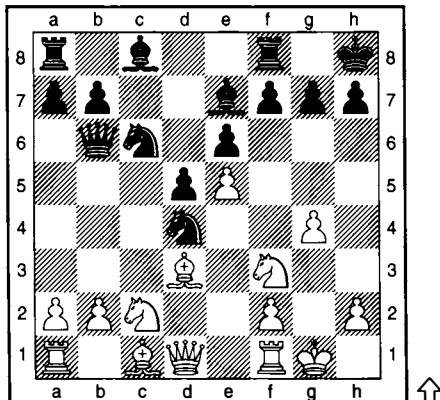


How did Hikaru beat ex-world champion Karpov?

2

Pinning

H. Nakamura – B. Miller  
Bermuda Open, Southampton 2003

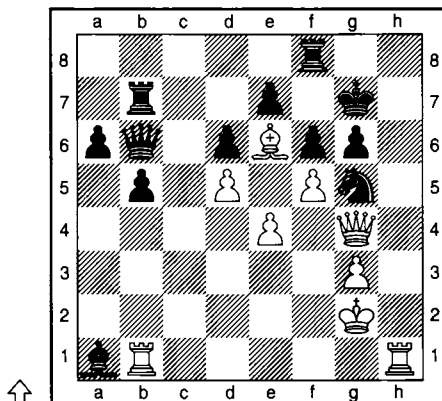


How did Hikaru punish 12...♟f5xd4?

3

Intermediate move

H. Nakamura – K. Lie  
Gjovik Aker CC [rapid], Gjovik 2009

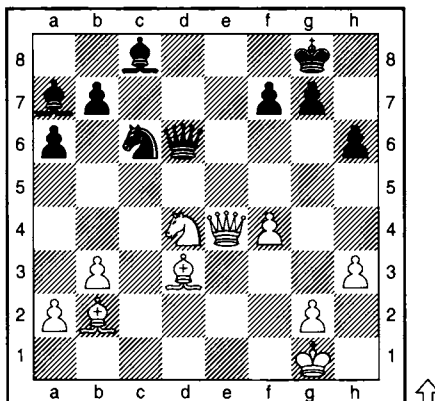


Has Hikaru anything better than 34. ♖xa1?

4

Exposed king

H. Nakamura – D. Fridman  
Canarias en Red [blitz], *playchess.com* 2004



How did Hikaru exploit the exposed state of the king?



## Chapter 5

# Wijk aan Zee

Friday, 21st January 2011, Round 6

**W**ijk aan Zee offers the best up-and-coming Dutch players a unique platform for achieving greater glory. For a good two weeks they have the chance to make a name for themselves by outstanding performances against world-class players from abroad, so long as they are amongst the “royalty” of Group A. This year, in the form of Anish Giri and the two 25-year-olds, Jan Smeets and Erwin L’Ami, the hosts have come up with a trio of young chess “musketeers”. To be sure, there are always high expectations which have to be met. Looking ahead, as far as the final results are concerned, only Anish Giri will be able to feel fully satisfied – and not only because he catches Magnus Carlsen on the “wrong foot” and inflicts a stinging defeat on him. For L’Ami (Elo 2638), who meets Nakamura in round 6, and Smeets (Elo 2662) will finish with 4½ each in places 12 and 13. Only Alexei Shirov, who is completely out of form, will score half a point less and thus earn the “wooden spoon” for coming in last. The fact that Erwin L’Ami, who in 2009/2010 was in Veselin Topalov’s team of seconds – including for the World Championship match against Viswanathan Anand – performs less well than expected, might be traced back to the fact that he is simply trying too hard, and frequently leaves the board empty-handed because he will not manage to win any of his 13 games...

### GAME 29

**E. L’Ami – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Nimzo-Indian Defence [E32]*

#### ***Light-square strategy***

How do you set out a game against a clearly weaker opponent – and especially with Black? Well, if necessary a cat can sit for hours in front of a mouse-hole waiting for the correct moment to catch its prey with a single bound, and to hang on to it mercilessly with its claws before killing it with a final bite.

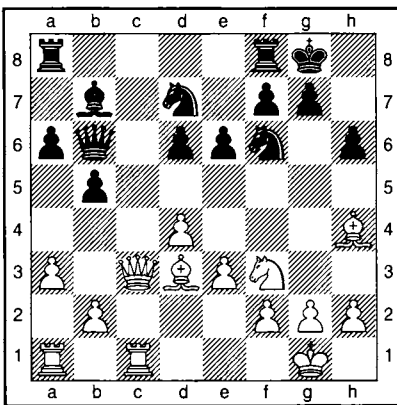
In the present game Nakamura has to deal with the popular 4.♖c2 system. The idea behind this system “consists in avoiding doubled pawns in the event of an exchange on c3 and exerting active influence on the e4-square, around which the struggle in the Nimzo-Indian Defence is often conducted. But the system also has its problems. The early development of the queen slows down the mobilisation of the minor pieces, and in addition its position on the c-file is frequently insecure. In some variations it also becomes notable that the d4-pawn is unprotected”, is how Mark Taimanov explained the characteristics of the opening and the action plans which are derived

from it.<sup>1</sup> However, the pawn sacrifice 6... b5!?, which Nakamura comes up with two moves later, was unknown till then.<sup>2</sup> The American started from the point of view that L'Ami would not be wanting to take any risks after his catastrophic defeat at the hands of Carlsen on the previous day. Nevertheless, in his own words, he himself did not harbour any ambitions of winning either.

**1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♗b4 4.♚c2 0-0 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.♚xc3 b5!?**

A popular pawn sacrifice at the top level. White has still not found a favourable way to hang on to the gambit pawn indefinitely and so he often chooses the advantage of the bishop pair, as L'Ami did in the present game.

**7.cxb5 c6 8.♗g5 cxb5 9.e3 ♗b7 10.♖f3 h6 11.♗h4 a6 12.♗d3 d6 13.0-0 ♖bd7 14.♖fc1 ♚b6**



**15.♚c7**

After 15.♗g3 ♖h5 16.♚c7 ♖xg3 17.♚xd7 ♖h5 18.♚c7 ♚xc7 19.♖xc7 ♖ab8 20.♖ac1

♖f6 21.♖d2 ♖fc8 White had only a very slight advantage in the encounter Wang Yue – Mamedyarov, Baku 2008.

**15...♖fc8 16.♚xb6 ♖xb6 17.♗g3?**

This is probably a key position in this game. Nakamura offered a draw before White's move, but his opponent declined.

"He felt we should play on, and, well, somehow I ended up winning," the American said after the game.

As we shall see, now in fact it is Black who gains an enduring advantage. On the other hand, 17.♖d2 is slightly better for White.

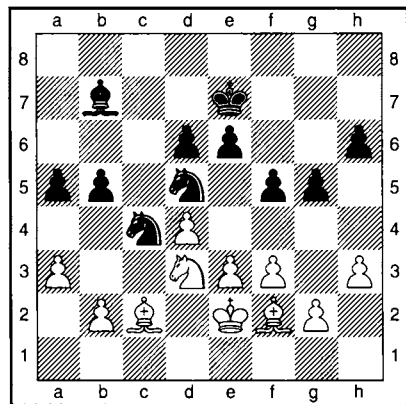
**17...♖xc1+ 18.♖xc1 ♖c8 19.♖xc8+ ♖xc8 20.h3 ♖e4 21.♗h2 ♖f8 22.♖e1?!**

Relieving the pressure with 22.♗xe4 ♗xe4 23.♖d2 is preferable.

**22...♖d2 23.f3 f5!**

Black's strategy on the light squares is now very effective.

**24.♖c2 ♗e7 25.♗f2 ♖b6 26.♗e2 ♖b3 27.♖b4 ♖a5 28.♗c2 ♖ac4 29.♖d3 a5 30.♗g3 ♖d5 31.♗f2 g5**



<sup>1</sup> M. Taimanov, *Nimzowitsch-Indisch*, Moderne Eröffnungstheorie Bd.12, Sportverlag Berlin 1983, p.132

<sup>2</sup> 6...b5!? was successfully introduced into tournament praxis by Alvis Vitolins in a preliminary round of the Russian Championship in 1982 in Severodonetsk against Viktor Gavrikov.



### 32.g4?!

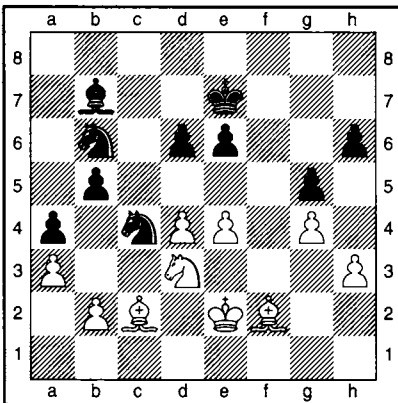
This was the Dutch player's final opportunity to apply the brakes with 32.♖b3 a4 33.♙xc4, e.g. 33...bxc4 34.♘e1 ♙a6 35.♙d2 c3+ 36.bxc3 ♘b6 37.c4 ♘xc4+ 38.♙c3 ♘xa3 39.♙b4 ♘b1 40.♙xa4 ♘c3+ 41.♙b3 ♘d5 42.h4, and White should be able to hang on.

Grandmaster Ian Rogers later remarked: "At the start of the endgame Nakamura offered a draw, since he had respect for the opposing bishop pair. White relied on the said pair and declined the offer, but in what followed he made no progress, whereas Nakamura unobtrusively brought his pawns into position."<sup>3</sup>

### 32...a4!

Touching on a painful spot. "The main threat is 33...b4! 34.♙xa4 (34.axb4 ♘xb2! 35.♘xb2 a3) 34...♘xb2!", again according to Rogers.

### 33.e4 fxe4 34.fxe4 ♘db6

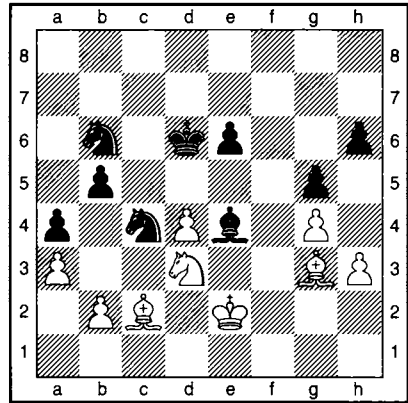


### 35.e5?

White's play is very naïve. L'Ami now opens up the light-squared routes along

which Black will invade. 35.d5! was his final chance to perhaps reach a safe haven: 35...♘d7 36.♙d4 exd5 37.exd5 ♙xd5 38.♘b4 ♙g2 39.♙f2 ♙b7 (after 39...♙xh3? 40.♙g3 ♙f1 41.♙f2 the king can pursue the bishop eternally) 40.♙f5, and thanks to his active bishops White certainly does not yet have to give in.

### 35...♙e4 36.exd6+ ♙xd6 37.♙g3+



### 37...♙e7!

Nakamura cleverly hides his king. On the other hand, 37...♙d5? would be a mistake because Black then runs straight into a perpetual check: 38.♘b4+ ♙xd4 39.♙f2+ ♙e5 40.♙g3+ ♙d4 41.♙f2+.

### 38.♙d1?

This loses on the spot, but the white position could hardly be saved, as is shown by the variations 38.♙e5 ♘d5 39.♙e1 ♘de3 40.♙b1 ♘xe5 41.dxe5 ♘c4 and 38.♙b8 ♘d5 39.♙a7 ♙xd3+ 40.♙xd3 ♘xb2+.

### 38...♙xd3 39.♙xd3 ♘xb2+ 40.♙e2

The curtain also falls after 40.♙c2 ♘2c4 41.♙e4 ♘xa3+ 42.♙c3 ♘d5+ 43.♙xd5

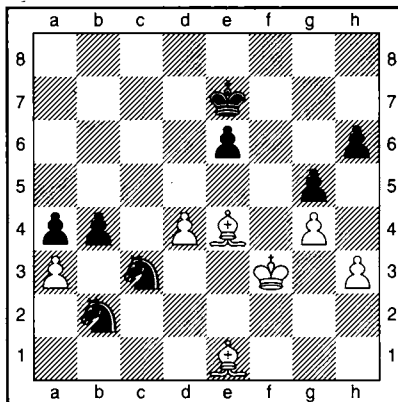
<sup>3</sup> Schach-Magazin 64, March 2011, p.6.

exd5 44.♔b4 ♖c2+ 45.♔c3 ♜e3...

40...♜d5 41.♙e4 ♜c3+ 42.♔f3 b4 43.♙e1

The finish of this game inspired Dr. Helmut Pfleger to set an exercise in his weekly chess column for *DIE ZEIT* (magazine supplement 26.4.2011). His question to his readers was: "With which fine move did Nakamura as Black demonstrate the powerlessness of the bishop pair compared to the cavalry, leaving one of his queenside pawns to make the running?"

(see next diagram)



43...♜bd1!

That is what it is really all about, since after 44.axb4 a3 the black rook pawn runs through, whilst 44.♙xc3 ♜xc3 45.♙d3 bxa3 46.♙xc4 a2 47.♙xa2 ♜xa2 costs the bishop, and the remaining a-pawn decides the day.

**White resigned.**

What is interesting about this victory for Nakamura is that it is not in fact easy to point to any particular mistake which cost his opponent the game. But it is clear that Erwin L'Ami spoiled his position with his superficial play between moves 20 and 30, and that is also proof of the growing class of the American, his ability to lead his opponent astray and finish him off in the most refined manner.

## No victory without a struggle – In Bobby Fischer's footsteps

*"I keep fighting as long as my opponent can go wrong."*

Dr. Emanuel Lasker

*"I do not want you to tell me who I should be.  
I have the freedom to be anyone I want to be."*

Muhammad Ali

**A** good story is always one which catches us by surprise. It was 31<sup>st</sup> December 1997, a Wednesday. In the venerable Marshall Chess Club, a two-storey building on 23 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street New York, chess was of course being played on that New Year's Eve. The main focus of interest was a game between Hikaru Nakamura with a USCF rating of 2019

and the experienced 42-year-old International Master Jay Bonin. Things should have been clear. But, though just ten years old, the boy surprisingly decided the game in his favour with his 36<sup>th</sup> move, after being in a clearly worse position. In so doing, on this last day of the year he went into the record books as the youngest US chess player to defeat an international master.

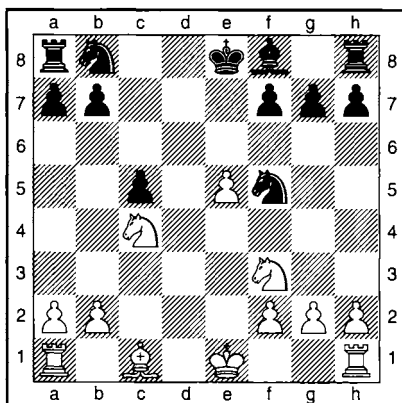
## GAME 30

H. Nakamura – J. Bonin

New York 1997

*French Defence [C02]*

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♖b6 5.♟f3  
♟d7 6.♟e2 ♟b5 7.c4 ♟xc4 8.♟xc4 dxc4  
9.d5 exd5 10.♖xd5 ♟e7 11.♖xc4 ♖a6  
12.♟a3 ♖xc4 13.♟xc4 ♟f5



### 14.a4

A novelty compared with the earlier 14.♟f4 ♟c6 15.0-0-0 ♟fd4 16.♖he1?! ♟e7 17.♟d6+ ♟xd6 18.exd6+ ♟d7 19.♟e5+ ♟xe5 20.♟xe5 ♟e6 21.♟xg7 ♖hg8 22.♟e5 ♖xg2 23.♟g3 f5 24.♖xe6 ♟xe6 25.♖e1+ ♟d5?! (after 25...♟d7 26.♖e7+ ♟c6

27.♖c7+ ♟b6 Black could play for a win) 26.♟d1+ ♟c6 27.d7 f4 (after 27...♖xg3 28.fxg3 ♖d8 there is nothing on) 28.♟h4 ♖xh2 29.d8♖ ♖xd8 30.♟xd8 ♖xf2 31.♖h1 f3 32.♟h4 ♖e2 33.♖f1 ♖e4 34.♟f2 ½-½, Weeramantry–Bonin, Philadelphia 1992.

14...♟c6 15.0-0 h6?!

15...♟e7 is more accurate.

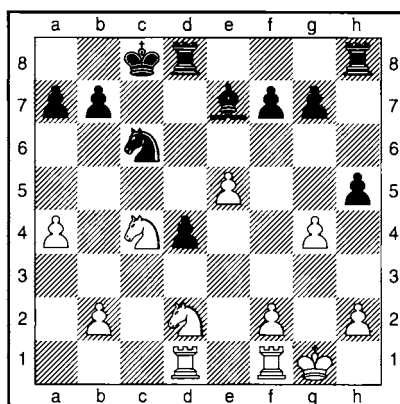
16.♟e3?!

16.♟d1 ♟e7 17.b3 ♖d8 18.♟b2 would have made Black's development considerably more difficult.

16...0-0-0 17.♖ad1 ♟e7 18.g4 ♟fd4

The alternative for Black was to exchange with 18...♖xd1!? 19.♖xd1 ♟xe3 20.♟xe3 ♖d8 and then to take over the initiative with his queenside pawn majority.

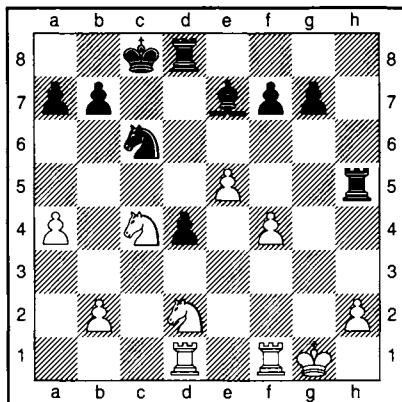
19.♟xd4 cxd4 20.♟fd2 h5



### 21.gxh5?

After this the white pawns are badly split up, and what will probably be more important is the fact that Hikaru's king is rather exposed. The active 21.♟e4!?, intending to reply to 21...hxg4 with 22.♟ed6+ ♟xd6 23.♟xd6+ ♖xd6 24.exd6 ♟d7 25.f3, promised White more counterplay.

21...♖xh5 22.f4

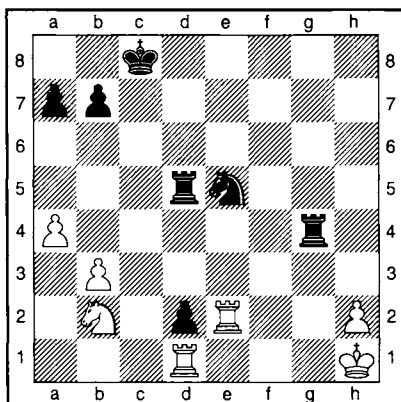
**22...f6**

The even more radical plan of 22...g5!? was also well worth considering.

**23.♟f3 g5 24.exf6 ♙xf6 25.fxg5 ♙xg5 26.♟xg5 ♙xg5+ 27.♚h1 d3 28.b3 ♜e5 29.♟b2?**

This retreat is too passive. The rook ending after 29.♟f4 ♚c7 30.h4 ♜h5 31.♚g1 ♟xc4 32.♞xc4+ ♚b6 33.♟f2 should be tenable.

**29...♙g4 30.♞fe1 ♜d5 31.♞e3 d2 32.♞e2**

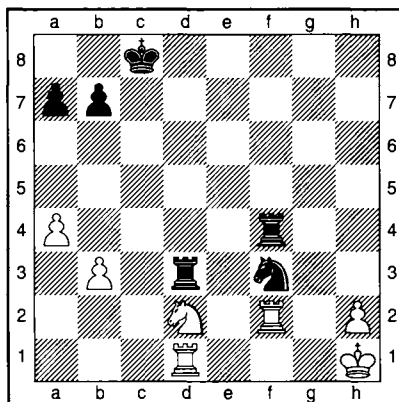
**32...♟f3?**

Bonin's first step down the wrong path. After 32...♙g4, on the other hand, Black could retain good chances of a win, e.g. 33.♚g2 (33.h3 ♚c7 34.♚g2 ♟d3 35.♟xd3

♞xd3 36.h4 ♚b6 37.b4 a5) 33...♚c7 34.♟f2 ♚c6 35.♟e3 ♟g4+ 36.♟f3 ♜h5 37.♟g3 ♟e5 38.h3 ♞g5+ 39.♟f2 ♞f4+ 40.♟e3 ♞f3+ 41.♟xd2 ♞xb3.

**33.♞f2 ♞f4**

33...♞f5 34.♟c4 ♞fg5 35.♞xf3 ♞g1+ 36.♞xg1 ♞xg1+ 37.♟xg1 d1♚+ 38.♟g2 was certainly a better practical try, although the white fortress can probably not be taken by storm.

**34.♟c4 ♞d3 35.♟xd2****35...♞fd4??**

Probably in extreme time-trouble, Bonin now loses the thread in the confusion over the pin. After 35...♚d7 36.♞df1 ♟xd2 37.♞xf4 ♟xf1 38.♞xf1 ♞xb3, on the other hand, the rook ending should finish as a draw.

**36.♞c1+**

**Black resigned.**

Compared to Robert James Fischer at a comparable age, Nakamura did not have the same sort of success. When the latter was twelve, he took part in the US Amateur Championship (Lake Mohegan, New York). This tournament included his first recorded game; in it Bobby conceded a draw with



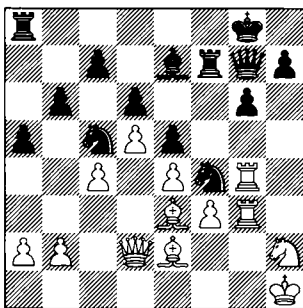
Black to a certain Albert Humphrey, although he was clearly better. It was a King's Indian!

### A. Humphrey – R. J. Fischer

US Amateur Championship,  
Lake Mohegan, New York 1955

*King's Indian Defence [E90]*

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.♗f3 0–0  
5.e4 d6 6.h3 ♘bd7 7.♙e3 e5 8.d5 a5  
9.♙e2 b6 10.0–0 ♘e8 11.♚c2 ♘c5  
12.♘h2 f5 13.f3 f4 14.♙f2 ♚g5 15.♙h1  
♙d7 16.♚g1 ♘f6 17.g4? fxg3 18.♚xg3  
♚h6 19.♘d1? ♘h5 20.♚g1 ♙xh3 21.♙e3  
♘f4 22.♘f2 ♙f6 23.♚g3 ♙d7 24.♘fg4  
♙xg4 25.♚xg4 ♚g7 26.♚ag1 ♙e7 27.♚d2  
♚f7 28.♚1g3?



28...♚af8?!

Here Black has no problems winning after 28...h5! 29.♚xf4 exf4 30.♙xf4 ♙f6.

29.♙xf4 ♚xf4 30.♚h3 ♚f7 31.♚gg3 ♙h4  
32.♚g4 ♙f2 33.♙d1, and White offered a draw, which Black accepted.

Fischer's performance in the US Junior Championship, which followed in July in Lincoln, Nebraska, also did not arouse any suspicion that four years later Bobby would qualify for the Candidates Tournament for the world championship. 20<sup>th</sup> place out of 25 participants with 5/10 (+2 = 6 – 2) was rather modest, as was his first official national rating of 1830.

Hikaru, on the other hand, after his New Year's Eve victory in 1997 over Jay Bonin, who is still an active player, once again hit the headlines on 5<sup>th</sup> April. At the age of ten years and 117 days he defeated Arthur Bisguier (born 1929) and till this day he remains the youngest American chess player to have taken the scalp of a grand-master.<sup>4</sup> In the May issue of the magazine *Chess Life* there is a photo on the cover of the boy with the headline: "Hikaru Nakamura the Youngest Master Ever!"

## GAME 31

### A. Bisguier – H. Nakamura

Somerset ACN Action Swiss,  
New Jersey 1998

*King's Indian Defence [E70]*

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7

Even then the King's Indian was Hikaru's favourite opening.

4.e4 d6 5.♙g5 0–0 6.f4 c5 7.d5 b5

Hikaru chooses to transpose into the Volga Gambit.

<sup>4</sup> Nakamura did not lose this US record till 29<sup>th</sup> September 2002 when it went to Fabiano Caruana, who at the age of 10 years and 61 days in a USCF tournament in the Marshall Chess Club defeated Grandmaster Aleksander Wojtkiewicz, who died on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006 aged only 43. Caruana, who was born in Miami but has since played for Italy, joined the top 10 of the world ranking list for the first time in March 2012.

**8.cxb5 a6 9.bxa6 ♗xa6 10.♗xa6 ♜xa6  
11.♞f3 ♜b6 12.♜b1?!**

The whole white set-up is not quite right, but this finally goes too far. 12.♜e2 is indicated.

**12...c4 13.♜e2?! ♜fc8?!**

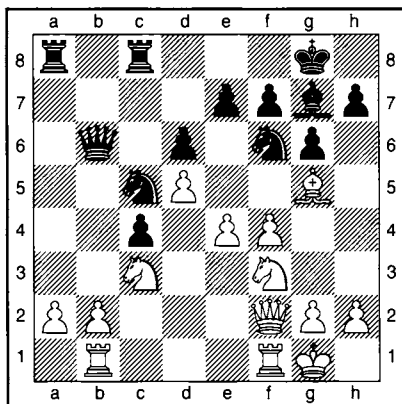
Somewhat slow. The direct 13...♞b4 14.♞d2 ♞d3+ 15.♞f1 ♜d4 exerts more pressure.

**14.♜f2?**

14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.e5 ♗g7 16.♜f2 limits the damage.

**14...♞c5 15.0–0**

Bisguier castles into catastrophe, but it was already hard to advise anything better.



**15...♞g4!**

With his killer instinct Hikaru does not miss this:

**16.♜e2 ♞xe4+ 17.♞h1 ♞gf2+ 18.♞g1  
♞h3+ 19.♞h1 ♞ef2+ 20.♜xf2 ♞xf2+  
21.♞g1 ♞e4+**

**White resigned.**

As for Robert James Fischer, he lost his first encounter with the American chess legend Arthur Bisguier at the Rosenwald Trophy in October 1956 in New York – he

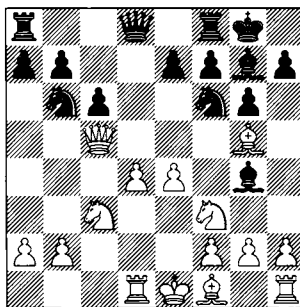
was already 13. And also his ninth place with 4½ points from 11 games did not exactly create a storm of enthusiasm. He also lost his first meeting with the chess “titan” Samuel Reshevsky. And yet that is the tournament in which the young American played “the game of the century”, as Hans Kmoch would call his game against International Master Donald Byrne in *Chess Review*, a game marked by incredible clarity and brilliance.

### D. Byrne – R. J. Fischer

Rosenwald Trophy, New York 1956

*Grünfeld Defence [D97]*

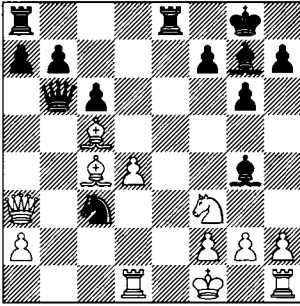
**1.♞f3 ♞f6 2.c4 g6 3.♞c3 ♗g7 4.d4 0–0  
5.♗f4 d5 6.♜b3 dxc4 7.♜xc4 c6 8.e4  
♞bd7 9.♞d1 ♞b6 10.♜c5 ♗g4 11.♗g5?**



**11...♞a4!!**

This hammer blow lays bare three weaknesses in White's set-up: the insecure position of his king, the weak pawn on e4 and the vulnerable bishop on g5. Perhaps at this point the game is already essentially lost; in any case Donald Byrne's position is more than suspect...

**12.♜a3 ♞xc3 13.bxc3 ♞xe4 14.♗xe7  
♜b6 15.♗c4 ♞xc3 16.♗c5 ♜fe8+ 17.♞f1**



### 17...♙e6!!

"It is well known that in a tactical struggle Fischer usually strives to refute his opponent's ideas with interposed moves", was the comment of Yury Averbakh, who recalled the impression the game had made on him at the time: "After looking at it I was convinced that the boy was devilishly talented."<sup>5</sup>

18.♙xb6 ♜xc4+ 19.♙g1 ♞e2+ 20.♙f1 ♞xd4+ 21.♙g1 ♞e2+ 22.♙f1 ♞c3+ 23.♙g1 axb6 24.♙b4 ♜a4 25.♙xb6 ♞xd1 26.h3 ♜xa2 27.♙h2 ♞xf2 28.♜e1 ♜xe1 29.♙d8+ ♙f8 30.♞xe1 ♙d5 31.♞f3 ♞e4 32.♙b8 b5 33.h4 h5 34.♞e5 ♙g7 35.♙g1 ♙c5+ 36.♙f1 ♞g3+ 37.♙e1 ♙b4+ 38.♙d1 ♙b3+ 39.♙c1 ♞e2+ 40.♙b1 ♞c3+ 41.♙c1 ♜c2 mate.

Actually, the only astonishing thing is that Fischer did not include it in his *My 60 Memorable Games*, although many years later he described it as the best game in his career. The following year 1957 saw the 12 decisive months in which Bobby embarked on one of the greatest chess careers of all times. At the turn of the year (17<sup>th</sup> December 1957 to 7<sup>th</sup> January 1958) he won the national championship undefeated with 10½ points from 13 games and qualified for the first time for an interzonal tournament, in which he shared 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> places in late

summer in Portoroz in Yugoslavia. He was then 15 and finally a grandmaster.

His designated successor, as Nakamura is seen by many and not only in the USA, in the strictest sense of the term earned his first national title on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2004 in San Diego, as can be seen from the dramatic last-round game against Ildar Ibragimov. He had to defeat the latter so as to reach the subsequent rapid play-off against Alexander Stripunsky, who was twice his age. However, he gave him no chance and won the title as well as the prize money of \$25,000.

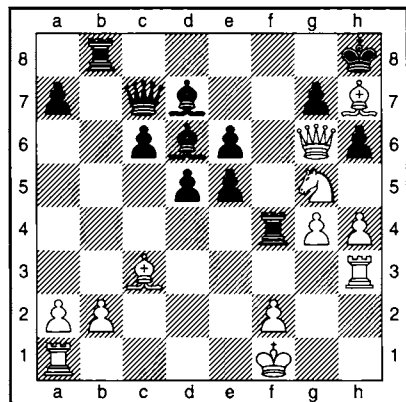
## GAME 32

H. Nakamura – I. Ibragimov

USA National Championship,  
San Diego 2004

*French Defence [C02]*

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♞c6 5.♞f3 ♞ge7 6.♞a3 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♞f5 8.♞c2 ♙b6 12.♙d2 0–0 13.h4 f6! 14.g4 ♞fxd4!? 15.♞cxd4 fxe5 16.♞xc6 bxc6 17.♙c3!? ♙d6 18.♞h3 ♜ab8 19.♙d3 ♙c7 20.♞g5 h6!? 21.♙h7 ♞h8 22.♙c2 ♜f4 23.♙g6?

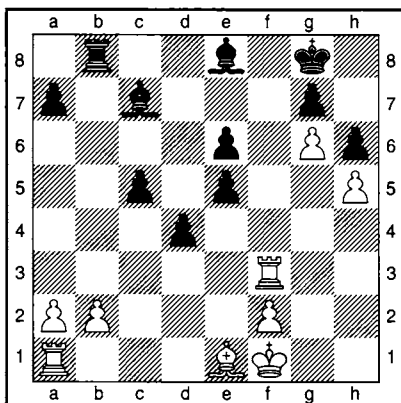


<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Garry Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors Part IV*, Everyman 2004, pp.212/213

“Nakamura is playing high-stakes poker, since after 23.♔g8 ♖xg8 24.♜h7+ ♕f8 25.♜h8+ ♕e7 26.♜xg7+ ♕e8 he could not see a way to win”<sup>6</sup>, wrote Grandmaster Larry Christiansen.

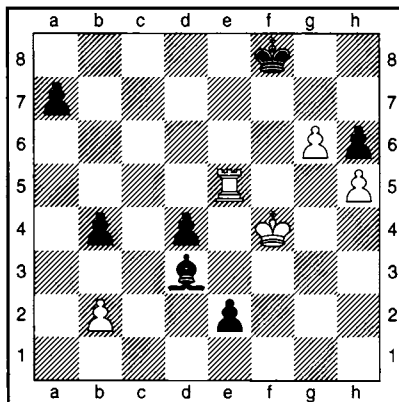
**23...♜f6!? 24.♜f7+♜xf7 25.♜xf7 ♖xh7 26.g5 ♕e8 27.g6+ ♖h8 28.♜xc7 ♕xc7 29.h5 d4 30.♜f3 ♖g8 31.♕e1 c5**

According to Christiansen, although White is the exchange up he is now objectively lost, since he still has to stop the powerful black pawn roller, “but he battles on undaunted”.



**32.♜c1 ♕d6 33.♜b3!? ♜xb3 34.axb3 ♕b5+ 35.♖g2 ♖f8 36.f3! ♕d3 37.♕g3 ♖e7 38.b4!? cxb4 39.♜c8 e4! 40.Rg8! ♕xg3 41.♜xg7+ ♖f8 42.♜f7+ ♖g8 43.♖xg3 e3 44.♜d7 e5 45.f4 exf4+ 46.♖xf4 e2 47.♜e7 ♖f8 48.♜e5**

The duel between rook and bishop rests on a knife edge and Black could now have turned things in his favour...

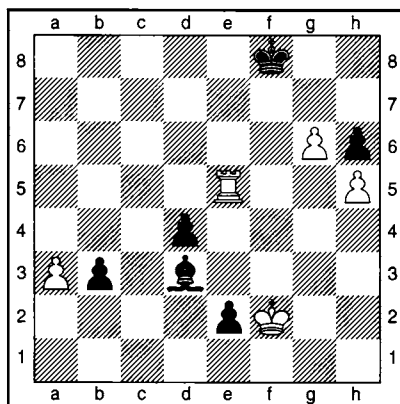


### 48...a5??

Lev Psakhis, who annotated this decisive game in detail, attached two question marks to this move, because Ibragimov gives away an easy win which would have been possible for him after 48...♕b5! 49.♖f5 d3 50.♖f6 ♕a4!! (but not 50...d2?? on account of 51.g7+ ♖g8 52.♜xb5) 51.♜e7 e1♜ 52.♜xe1 d2.<sup>7</sup> But now Nakamura's fighting spirit reaps dividends...

**49.♖f3 a4 50.♖f2 a3 51.bxa3 b3**

If 51...bxa3, then 52.♜a5 is decisive.



### 52.g7+!

The decisive “stirring up of a hornet’s nest”, which turns the tables in favour of White.

<sup>6</sup> SCHACH issue 1/2005, p.52

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from CBM 145.



**52...♟xg7 53.♞e7+ ♟f6 54.♞b7 ♟c4**

After 54...♟c2 there is a win with 55.♟xe2.

**55.♞b4 ♟f7**

55...b2 56.♞xb2 ♞xb2 d3 57.♟e1 is just as painful for Black.

**56.a4**

After 56.♟xe2 Ibragimov could also have stopped the clocks.

**56...d3 57.a5 ♟xh5**

57...♟e5 58.a6 ♟xh5 59.b5+ ♟d4 60.♞xh5, and White triumphs (L. Psakhis, *CBM* 145).

**58.♟e1!**

But not 58.♞b6+? ♟e5! 59.♞b5+ ♟d4 60.♞xh5 b2 61.♞b5 ♟c3 62.a6 ♟c2! 63.♞xb2+! ♟xb2 64.a7 d2 65.♟xe2 ♟c2 66.a8♖ d1♖+ 67.♟f2, and the point would have to be shared, like it or not (Psakhis).

**58...♟e5 59.a6!**

Precision is required right till the end! The greedy 59.♞b5+? ♟d4 60.♞xh5 fails to 60...b2 61.♞b5 ♟c3 62.a6 ♟c2 63.♞c5+ (63.♞xb2+ ♟xb2 64.♟d2 e1♖+ 65.♟xe1 ♟c2 66.a7 d2+ 67.♟f2 d1♖ 68.a8♖ does not do anything to change the peaceful outcome) 63...♟c3 64.♞b5+ ♟c2 (Psakhis). **59...♟f3 60.a7 h5 61.♞xb3 ♟d4 62.♞b8 h4** 62...♟c6 is no alternative for Black on account of 63.♟d2.

**63.♞d8+ ♟c3**

63...♟e3 64.♞e8+ ♟e4 65.♞xe4+ ♟xe4 66.a8♖+, and White has achieved his goal.

**64.♞c8+ ♟d4 65.♟d2!**

Strong prophylaxis. It was not too late to spoil all his efforts with 65.a8♖?? ♟xa8 66.♞xa8 ♟e3 and a draw.

**65...h3 66.a8♖ Black resigned.**

If one compares the development of the two at this point in time, it is clearly to the advantage of Robert James Fischer, and the question remains: can Hikaru really catch up this lead of almost three years, although experts such as New Yorker Larry Christiansen testified that after this first title win he also displayed maturity away from the board. "He is characterised by a phenomenal feeling for tactics and his enormous powers of calculation. Together with improved technique and rapidly growing theoretical knowledge he definitely has the potential to develop into a 2700 player", was the judgement of the US grandmaster.<sup>8</sup>

However, it should also not be overlooked that previously the US boy was one of the revelations in the FIDE World Championship in Tripoli in June/July 2004. "Motivation and self-discipline are highly developed in him", was what step-father Sunil Weeramantry then commented on the reasons for this explosion in his performance.<sup>9</sup> And the high-school student, who was being home-educated by his mother, when asked about his future in chess said to Dirk Poldauf: "I would like to reach a rating of above 2700. Whether I will set out on a professional chess career depends on how far I can improve in the next few years. After all, I am only just sixteen."<sup>10</sup>

Well, in any case Hikaru reached the last 16, when his first run at the chess crown ended with his ½-1½ defeat in his mini-match against Michael Adams. The English player, on the other hand, made it through to the final, where the outsider Rustam Kasimdzhanov from Uzbekistan had the better of it by 4½-3½. Luck also plays its

<sup>8</sup> *SCHACH*, issue 1/2005, p.50. On the cover is: „Hikaru Nakamura auf den Spuren Fischers?“ (Hikaru Nakamura in Fisher's footsteps?).

<sup>9-10</sup> *SCHACH*, issue 8 /2004, pp.45/46

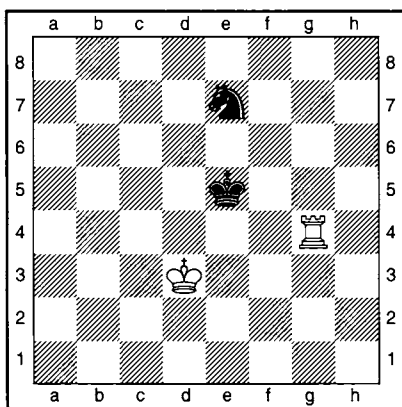
part! For both of these players this remains until the present day the best result of their chess career.

But what obviously links Nakamura and Fischer at this point in time are their unbounded love of chess and their exemplary fighting qualities, as Hikaru logically follows the advice of his father: "Play, fight and never make short draws!"

From time to time, however, this can provoke some displeasure in an opponent. For example, in the B-tournament in Wijk aan Zee 2004 after his 122<sup>nd</sup> move Hikaru with White reached the following dead drawn ending against the Chinese woman player Zhu Chen:

### H. Nakamura – Zhu Chen

Corus-Festival (B), Wijk aan Zee 2004



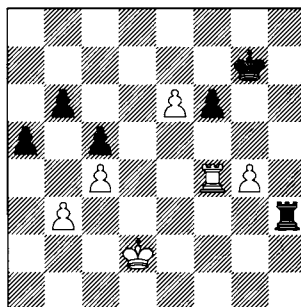
The knight is known to be the king's best friend! But now another 60 moves were played, because, as Sunil Weeramantry sought to explain, his step-son had the feeling that his opponent would not choose the optimal defence.

As for this will-to-win at almost any price, we have selected two examples involving Bobby Fischer. The first comes from the Candidates Tournament of 1959, in which

Bent Larsen, who was then Fischer's second, had to analyse the latter's adjourned position against Pal Benkö all through the night, although it was obviously drawn. But Bobby wanted at all costs to squeeze a win out of the rook ending with three pawns against two which would inevitably come about. It really was a case of love's labour's lost...

### P. Benkö – R. J. Fischer

Candidates Tournament,  
17<sup>th</sup> round, Zagreb 1959



### 52.g5!

Benkö reached his goal with this move: the pawns on the kingside disappear from the board, and the players reach the drawn ending of 3 v. 2 pawns on the queenside, which had been found in his night-time analysis by Larsen. But Fischer is after all Fischer, and so he played on...

**52...fxg5 53.e7 ♖h8 54.♗f5 g4 55.♖g5+ ♜f7 56.♗xg4 ♜xe7 57.♗g7+ ♜d6 58.♗g6+ ♜c7 59.♜c3 ♜b7 60.♗f6 ♜a6 61.♗g6 ♗h3+ 62.♜b2 a4 63.bxa4 ♜a5 64.♗f6**, and Fischer accepted the draw.

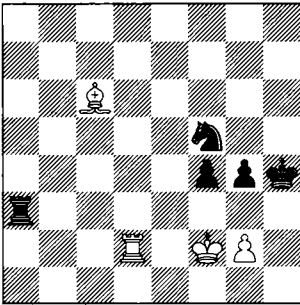
His torturing of Canadian Daniel Abraham Yanofsky at the Interzonal Tournament of 1962 was even more merciless, until after Fischer's move **102...♗f5?! (102...♗c4**



103.♖c2 ♘e5 is much more powerful!), his opponent made a decisive mistake:

### D. A. Yanofsky – R. J. Fischer

Interzonal Tournament, round 12,  
Stockholm 1962



If White wants to retain real chances of a draw, he must now play 103.♙e4, since the black knight cannot simply go to d4.

103.♖b2? ♖a1 104.♖b4 ♖a2+ 105.♙e1 ♙g3 106.♖b3+ ♘e3 107.♙e4 ♙h2 108.♖b4 ♘xg2+ 109.♙xg2 ♙xg2 110.♖xf4 g3 111.♖g4 ♙f3 112.♖g8 ♖a1+, and White resigned.

As for the Stockholm Interzonal Tournament (27<sup>th</sup> January till 6<sup>th</sup> March 1962), Robert James Fischer then wrote a piece of chess history. With his 2½ points lead (17½ out of 22, including 13 wins and no defeats!) the “prodigy from Brooklyn” proved his absolute world class three days before his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and qualified for the second time in succession for the Candidates Tournament. “At last a chess player appeared in the West who broke through the magic circle of Russian grandmasters and won an important international tournament”, was what Garry Kasparov quoted from a news-

paper.<sup>11</sup> And yet Robert James Fischer, who played every game with total dedication, and not just those which had led to his greatest success so far in the Swedish capital, would need more than a decade to make it to the title of world champion.

Hikaru's appearance 49 years later in Wijk aan Zee reminds us of Fischer's performance in Stockholm – with just one difference. Nakamura, the new hope of American chess, was already 23, four years older than his former idol.

What is typical for both of them on their way to the world peak is that they basically managed to do so without a coach, which, however, is a normal occurrence in the peripheral sport that chess is in the USA. Whenever German A-trainer Bernd Rosen complains in the magazine *Jugendschach* that he was only able to give ten-minute phone calls to prepare his 17-year-old protégé Jens Kotainy for the next round in the German Championships in March 2002 – “he would then have to do the specific preparation on his own”<sup>12</sup> – this would not have provoked a wry smile from Robert James Fischer, but rather a total lack of comprehension. For example, for the “Match of the century” in Reykjavik his chess preparation was largely done on his own. Only Larry Evans had some input. What became famous was his “red book” containing all the games which Boris Spassky had played until then. The Soviets, on the other hand, in preparation for the historic World Championship match set up a consultative committee, with as members ex-world champions Botvinnik, Smyslov, Petrosian and Tal as well as grandmasters Averbakh, Korchnoi, Keres and Kotov. In addition, the

<sup>11</sup> Garry Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors Part IV*, Everyman 2004, p.291.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from *Jugendschach* 05/2012, p.4



leading players in the country were required to send in a written evaluation of Fischer's playing style. They used all possible means to prevent the American from conquering the chess crown. However, the fact that such efforts were made was above all related to the fact that chess was then a continuation of the "Cold War" by other means.

Since the 1990s much has changed as far as the political climate is concerned. And that is the only reason why it was possible for Hikaru Nakamura to start serious cooperation with Garry Kasparov (which lasted barely a year) in the greatest of secrecy, immediately before the tournament in Wijk aan Zee in 2011.

In an exclusive interview with Macauley Peterson, Hikaru spoke for the first time about the first nine months of this unusual cooperation. If you read between the lines, you gain a sense of the tense relationship between the teacher and his student.

"I think one of the big differences between Garry and myself is that he views chess sort of like, you have to find the best move, period. There's no room for taking chances. Whereas I think I'm a little bit more practical, where there's some openings or certain ideas which, objectively, they might not be the absolute best ideas, but it's sort of where if you play it – if your opponent finds the absolute best moves – sure it's equal, it'll probably be a draw. But if they don't you probably will get an advantage. I think at the end of the day what matters is that it is my decision – I'm the one playing the game – if the result is good and I've found the right moves and I've played well, generally there's not a problem..." reflected Nakamura, who self-critically admits that at

the Sparkassen Chess Meeting in Dortmund in July 2011 for example, in the first game against Vladimir Kramnik he followed an idea which finally backfired. "Kramnik found a viable way to master the problems, and I gave the game away. Kasparov knew that things were level, but – although it sounds somewhat pessimistic – nowadays games are won by mistakes on the part of your opponent. If, on the other hand, he keeps on finding the correct moves with the correct ideas, then you won't be able to win – things are as simple as that."<sup>13</sup>

It is also very interesting to hear Nakamura's opinions about his second of many years, Kris Littlejohn, who extremely suddenly found himself in a complicated and tense situation: "I noticed with Kris generally his thought process – the opening ideas he came up with – tended to be on par with Garry. In fact I actually found that he reached the same conclusion, only a little bit quicker [at least with regard to overall opening choice, if not a specific variation – M.P.]. That, maybe more than anything, sort of convinced me that I should keep Kris on, because it shows that he's not completely out in the woods. He knows what he is doing. If Kris could actually remember what he prepares, he would easily be a GM – probably a weak GM, but I think he would be a GM. His problems are not coming up with ideas or being able to play them. His problems are that he can't actually remember what he prepares. I just feel having a second set of eyes – having someone who I trust – trying to come up with these little extra ideas and refine it is still very helpful. Garry can give me the ideas but Garry's not able to put in the same sort of work that Kris is able to do for me."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13-14</sup> Quoted from the interview by Macauley Peterson with Hikaru Nakamura, which was included by Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam in his article "The Spirit of Saint Louis" in *New in Chess* 7/2011, pp. 10-17.



It comes as no surprise that this partnership of convenience with Kasparov broke up during the Tal Memorial in Moscow in November 2011. The diametrically opposed opinions were almost bound to cause irreconcilable tension between the 48-year-old ex-world champion and the young American of half his age. When one gets down to it, these reflect also a conflict between generations – authoritarian behaviour on one side and on the other the exuberance of youth which does not take things over-seriously, which wants to test itself and to take its own decisions...

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> London Chess Classic in December 2011 on *chessbase.com* Nakamura made the following comments about the end of his cooperation with Garry Kasparov: “No, like I said, his strength was in openings. You look at middlegames or endgames and I’m quite convinced there are other players who are better than he was, but he was able to get advantages out of the openings so that was his main strength, and when he wasn’t able to do that, that’s why he lost his title to Kramnik.”<sup>15</sup>

But when some time had passed Hikaru’s summing up became more objective and more accurate:

“It’s just very difficult to perform when you have someone who is very demanding and really everything you do is never good enough. You don’t get the pat on the back, instead you have that 800-pound gorilla, to use the American expression, who is just hanging on your back... Kris and I communicate very well and are very much in sync, whereas with Garry I feel we were never really on the same page.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, concerning his work with Garry Kasparov, it is interesting to hear what the No.1 in the world ranking list, Magnus Carlsen, has to say, based on his own experience. After the Tal Memorial 2011 he said in an interview: “He helped me to better understand a whole series of types of positions. It was clear that he knew a lot more than I did... It was sometimes difficult to keep up with the speed and depth of his analysis, but we were mostly on the same wavelength. What can I say: it was a unique experience for me.”<sup>17</sup>

And there are also Carlsen’s comments on the end of his cooperation with the ex-world champion, whom he considers a fantastic chess player – “I have never seen anyone who has such a marked feeling for the dynamics of complex positions...” – which are telling: “Everything has its time... Kasparov and I separated on completely friendly terms without anyone having to feel he was being attacked, I believe that it was also interesting for him. (...) Nobody knows what would have happened if we had continued to work together. From today’s point of view I consider that bringing the work to an end was the correct step.”<sup>18</sup>

As already mentioned, Robert James Fischer never had a strong partner by his side. In the impressive documentary film *Bobby Fischer against the World* by the American film-maker Liz Garbus he says at one point in an interview why that was the case: “Chess is my other self!” That explains everything...

It was only for the 1972 World Championship match that Bobby actually had a personal second in William Lombardy. But

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from *SCHACH* 1/2012, p.30.

<sup>16</sup> *New in Chess* 1/2012, p.11.

<sup>17-18</sup> *www.chesspro.ru*. Quoted from the German language summary at the end of 2011.

the former junior world champion of 1957 was more probably a psychological move in the thriller that was Reykjavik. Lombardy not only shone in the Students World Championship of 1960 in Leningrad, where he scored 12/13 on first board, but he also defeated Boris Spassky, which Bobby Fischer had not yet managed to do.

In the adjourned and highly dramatic 13<sup>th</sup> game, in which Spassky was a pawn down but was exerting strong pressure, there was a disagreement between Fischer and Lombardy. The second was more or less sacked, and Lubomir Kavalek taken on during the night by telephone. "When I was reporting on the 1972 World Championship match in Reykjavik, I went bowling with Bobby. He drove me in his inimitable driving style to the bowling alley which was 60 km. away. Because he drove incredibly slowly we took almost two hours to get there. That evening I suggested to him that he could phone me if he required help in the analysis of his adjourned games", wrote Kavalek about his surprising cooperation with Robert James Fischer.<sup>19</sup>

There are also common factors in the playing style of Fischer and Nakamura, who are both characterised by an extremely self-assured appearance. The greatest of these is that they both hate defensive positions and show great skill in hanging on to the initiative, and, when possible, play in uncompromising style for an attack. Thus, for example, in their games with Black they give preference to the Sicilian and the King's Indian Defence. These two exceptional players certainly differ, in that in his heyday the eleventh chess world champion played endings almost unerringly, and in

every phase of the game he always evaluated the situation totally rationally. There is still something of the hidden romantic in Nakamura, who can then also fail brilliantly with the motto "all or nothing" on his lips, without however falling apart.

It should also be mentioned that Robert James Fischer was a fantastic blitz player – as is Hikaru (see Chapter 8). Thus in June 1958 the 15-year-old Bobby travelled with his sister Joan to Moscow, where he went to the Central Chess Club in Gogol Boulevard, to play blitz there from morning till night for two whole weeks. The training match against World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik, who politely declined, never happened. Twelve years later, the more mature American pretender to the World Championship throne showed that he was in a class of his own in the first unofficial blitz world championship in Herceg Novi on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1970 in a double round-robin. His 19 points from 22 games left second-placed ex-world champion Mikhail Tal trailing by 4½ points; he lost only one single game against Viktor Korchnoi, who took 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

As for the quality of Bobby's games, let us give the word to ex-world champion Tigran Petrosian: "In my opinion, Fischer plays blitz in the same manner as in serious games: quickly, confidently and practically faultlessly. During the entire tournament he didn't leave a single pawn en prise! And at the same time we blundered knights and bishops galore. Fischer avoided tactical complications, but in some games he employed theoretical novelties, which a more cautious player would have kept for serious events."<sup>20</sup>

It is very difficult to compare the playing

<sup>19</sup> KARL 1/2012, p.40.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Garry Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors Part IV*. Everyman 2004, p.343.



strengths of Robert James Fischer and Hikaru Nakamura. As is well known, the eleventh world champion played a dominating role between 1970 and 1972, that is four decades ago. If we take the Elo rating as an objective criterion, in 1971 Fischer headed the very first FIDE world rating list of the top 100 with a rating of 2760, followed at a clear distance by Boris Spassky (2690) who in turn was ahead of Viktor Korchnoi (2670). In the following year Bobby reached his highest Elo rating of 2785, followed by ex-world champion Spassky (2660) and Tigran Petrosian (2645). From 1973 till 1975 the eleventh world champion also sat in solitary splendour on 2780, clearly ahead of his new and immediate pursuer Anatoly Karpov, who was working his way up via 2660, 2700 and then 2705.

Hikaru Nakamura, who on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012 was rated 7<sup>th</sup> in the world, reached his highest Elo rating of 2778, which mathematically may be only 7 points behind Fischer's career best, but in his day the latter was the only champion to break through the 2700 barrier, whereas nowadays there are 45 players who have done so, including Magnus Carlsen (2837) and Levon Aronian (2816), who have even broken the sound barrier of 2800. Such inflation of performances was not foreseen when Elo ratings were introduced.

One compromise would be to measure the ratings in relation to the very first list of 1971, in order to indicate actual ratings by means of a simple calculation. The top 10 in such an "eternal ratings list" would then come in the following order: 1. Robert

James Fischer 2787, 2. Garry Kasparov 2759, 3. Anatoly Karpov 2722, 4. Mikhail Tal 2700, 5. Viswanathan Anand 2699, 6. Vladimir Kramnik 2699, 7. Viktor Korchnoi 2692, 8. Boris Spassky 2690, 9. Veselin Topalov 2683, 10. Vassily Ivanchuk 2682. Magnus Carlsen would only occupy 11<sup>th</sup> place with 2668, whilst Hikaru Nakamura does not even make it into the best 50.<sup>21</sup>

Well, that is just playing with numbers, and we would do better to stick to the facts. It is known that Nakamura gained the grandmaster title 106 days earlier than Fischer – another record which in turn was taken from him by Fabiano Caruana.<sup>22</sup>

After his first national title, Hikaru repeated his success in May 2009 in Saint Louis with a result of 7 out of 9. This time there was even a prize of \$35,000 for the champion, plus a \$5,000 bonus for a non-shared first place. His explosive final spurt of three successive victories was a deciding factor in this success. "Nakamura played in his usual self-assured fashion, won the decisive encounters and came well prepared to all his games. His final round miniature against Josh Friedel was the icing on an impressive cake (with a performance rating of 2807)", wrote Macauley Peterson.<sup>23</sup>

#### H. Nakamura – J. Friedel

USA National Championship,  
Saint Louis 2009

*Two Knights Defence [C58]*

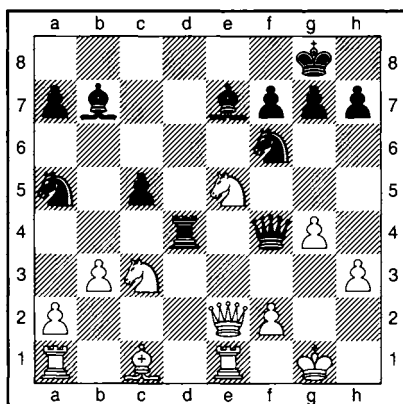
**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.♘g5 d5  
5.exd5 ♘a5 6.♙b5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6  
8.♙d3 ♙e7 9.♘c3 0–0 10.0–0 ♖b8 11.h3**

<sup>21</sup> See <http://caissa.info>

<sup>22</sup> Fabiao Caruana (born 30<sup>th</sup> June 1992) received the GM title in 2007 at the age of 14 years, 11 months and 20 days.

<sup>23</sup> See *SCHACH* 6/2009, p.32

c5 12.b3 ♖b4 13.♞e1 ♙b7 14.♙a3 ♜f4  
15.g3 ♜d4 16.♘f3 ♜xd3 17.cxd3 ♜xd3  
18.♘xe5 ♜f5 19.g4 ♜f4 20.d4 ♜d8 21.♜e2  
♜xd4 22.♙c1 **Black resigned** – here is the  
final position.



When, the day after the prize-giving ceremony, Macauley Peterson congratulated Nakamura on his second title, the now 21-year-old played down his performance and drily replied: “Only another seven till I catch up with Fischer!”<sup>24</sup>

In an interview with *Chess Chronicle* after winning his first US Championship, when he also became the youngest title-holder since Fischer, Hikaru came up with the very modest: “Well, firstly Fischer not only won it at 14, but also every time he took part; and at the age of 20 he achieved a perfect score. My performance pales into insignificance compared with that.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, he also came out with an interesting self-confident comment in an interview with the organisers of the 54<sup>th</sup> Torneo di

Capodonno in Reggio Emilia at the turn of the year 2011/12. “Regarding the country you grew up in, you certainly want to win the national championship. Certainly I hope to win it a few more times during my career, but right now there are more important things to focus on. Certainly, I would like to find my place in the top ten, and beyond that I certainly have aspirations and some dreams of becoming world champion. For that reason, my eyes are on more important goals than the US Championship.”<sup>26</sup>

This did not prevent Hikaru Nakamura from once more throwing his hat into the ring in May 2012. Perhaps also because at the moment chess is exciting for him and he can take the opportunity to be the person he wants to be, and Robert James Fischer is a challenge for him.

To be sure, in the strong round-robin in Saint Louis he did not manage to equal the legendary best score of the eleventh world champion, the 11/11 he achieved in the US Championship at the turn of 1963/64 – a special prize of \$64,000 was on offer for that feat. But his third title win with 8½/11, also without defeat, is very commendable. Especially since he won the all-deciding game in round 10 against Gata Kamsky in the inimitable endgame style of Bobby Fischer. The final phase, in which he returns his extra exchange, so as to then dominate with his rook + bishop (Fischer’s favourite piece!) the opposing rook + knight, is well worth seeing.

(see next diagram)

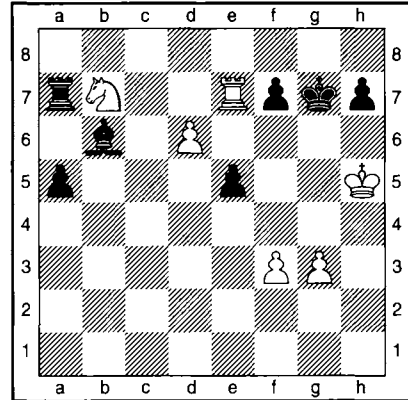
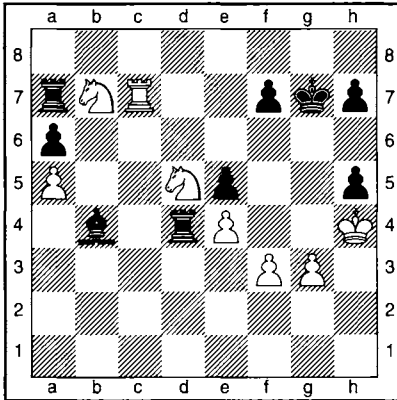
<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.34

<sup>25</sup> See interview for *Chess Chronicle*, December 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Video interview on the homepage of the 54<sup>th</sup> Torneo di Capodonno in Reggio Emilia 2011/12



**G. Kamsky – H. Nakamura**  
**USA National Championship,**  
**Saint Louis 2012**



For a start, it must be pointed out that Hikaru absolutely had to win this decisive game, because his opponent, who after 2010 and 2011 had a real chance of a hat trick of national titles, was half a point ahead at this moment. But with unbelievably strong nerves he overcame this pressure and took his chance...

**41. ♖xh5 ♜xd5**

The only way! Hikaru strongly and deliberately liquidates to an ending. His resulting passed a-pawn will now be the decisive trump. Such endgames with rook + bishop versus rook + knight, in which the side with the bishop is better, are also called “Fischer endgames”.

**42. exd5 ♖xa5 43. ♜e7 ♖b6 44. d6 a5**

(see next diagram)

**45. ♖g5?**

This makes it relatively easy for Hikaru, because his a-pawn simply runs through. However, there was equally no salvation after the alternatives. Neither 45. ♖d8 ♖f8!

46. ♜xa7 ♖xa7 47. ♖c6 [47. d7 ♖b6 48. ♖c6 a4 49. ♖h6 (after 49. d8 ♜+ ♖xd8 50. ♖xd8 a3 the lame white steed can no longer catch the black a-pawn) 49...a3 50. ♖b4 ♖e7 51. ♖xh7 (51. ♖d5+ is met simply by 51... ♖xd7 52. ♖xb6+ ♖e6) 51...f5, and the situation is hopeless for Kamsky] 47...♖b6 48. ♖xe5 a4 49. ♖c4 ♖c5 50. d7 ♖e7 51. ♖g5 a3 nor 45. d7 ♖f6 46. ♜e8 ♜xb7 47. d8 ♜+ ♖xd8 48. ♜xd8 ♜a7 can save White from defeat.

**45...a4 46. ♖f5 a3 47. ♖d8 a2 48. ♖e6+ ♖h6 49. ♖g5 a1 ♜ 50. ♖xf7+ ♖g7 White resigned.**

In the 3/2011 issue of *SCHACH* the headline was “Wijk aan Zee remains the measure of all things” and in addition in white script on a black background “Nakamura in Bobby Fischer’s footsteps”. In spite of his successes, Hikaru still speaks of him with the greatest respect (“I think every chess player should read Fischer’s *My 60 Memorable Games!*”<sup>27</sup>), although he never met the eleventh world champion. It is probably the struggling and winning which unconsciously links the two of them. But a good story is one which surprises us all.

<sup>27</sup> See interview for *Chess Chronicle*, December 2005



## Chapter 6

# Wijk aan Zee

**Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011, Round 7**

**O**n this Saturday Nakamura is sitting opposite Jan Smeets, reigning national champion of The Netherlands and the third player from the host nation. Reason enough for us to take a look at the traces left on world chess by a numerically small but nevertheless great chess playing nation.

"We have been playing chess in Holland since the 14<sup>th</sup> century!" proudly said the mayor of Leeuwarden at the ceremonial reception in the town hall on the occasion of the Candidates Tournament of 1956. "This is proved by the 700-year-old chess pieces found during excavations in our town." And in fact there is remarkable evidence of the interest in chess in the kingdom of The Netherlands.

There is, for example, the chess player Elias Stein (1748–1812) who gave his name to an opening, which later became known as the Dutch Defence. In 1889 there was the first international master tournament to be held on Dutch soil, in which Amos Burn took first place in Amsterdam ahead of the future world champion Emanuel Lasker. In 1935 Dr. Max Euwe was the sensational Dutch winner of the world championship title against Alexander Alekhine. The first president of FIDE, Alexander Rueb (1882–1959), also came from The Netherlands. Proof of the place in chess occupied by this nation can be found in important events such as the legendary AVRO Tournament in 1938, the first part of the match tournament for the world championship in The Hague in 1948, the Chess Olympiad in 1954 and also the traditional tournaments in Amsterdam, Tilburg, Beverwijk and of course Wijk aan Zee. After Euwe, it has produced numerous other world-class players and famous chess authors, of whom the greatest fame has been achieved by Jan Hein Donner and Jan Timman. A great role in the propagation of chess in this country and in the support of talent is being played nowadays by the Max Euwe Centre founded in 1986 and the "Max Euwe" chess academy. Also the collection of more than 18,000 volumes in the Royal Dutch Library in The Hague makes a valuable contribution to the development of chess culture.

This short digression must have made it clear that chess is more than a mere board game in The Netherlands. It is part of the culture. As far as the Tata Steel Chess Tournament is concerned, the new Indian sponsors have guaranteed its continuation until 2013. And then the 75<sup>th</sup> jubilee of this unique chess festival will be celebrated in Wijk aan Zee.

But, back to the Nakamura vs. Smeets encounter, which was for Hikaru, according to his own words, one of the most important in this tournament after the games against Carlsen and Anand. "I had to try and maximize my chances by winning this one..."



## GAME 33

**H. Nakamura – J. Smeets**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Queen's Gambit [D44]*

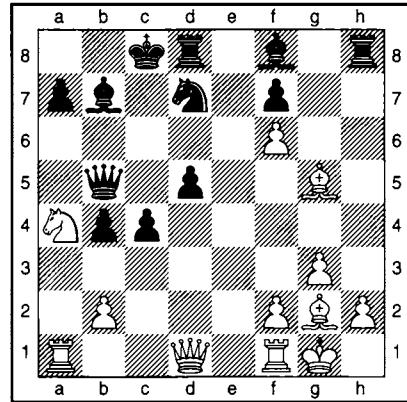
### *The second's finest hour*

Concerning the preparation for this meeting, Nakamura and his second Kris Littlejohn paid very close attention to the first round victory of Jan Smeets with White over Alexei Shirov, and they noticed that the preparation for that Ruy Lopez bore all the hallmarks of Jan Gustafsson. Hikaru had every reason to pay attention to Jan Smeets' second, because he suffered one of the worst defeats of his career with White in an Austrian Bundesliga game in 2008/09 against the German grandmaster in a Semi-Slav, and that after only 22 moves. For that reason alone this game against Smeets was something special.

"I resolved with my second Kris Littlejohn that we were going to bust his preparation at all cost. As this game shows, being a strong GM does not mean you understand all the nuances of variations which engines come up with when you need to let them think!", said the American in *New In Chess* (issue 2/2011, pp. 17-19).

And so it arrived, the hour of the second, who had cooked up in his analysis laboratory 20.♖d2!? in the razor-sharp Botvinnik Variation...

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♙c3 e6  
5.♙g5 dxc4 6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.♙h4 g5  
9.♙xg5 hxg5 10.♙xg5 ♘bd7 11.g3 ♙b7  
12.♙g2 ♖b6 13.exf6 c5 14.d5 0-0-0  
15.0-0 b4 16.♙a4 ♖b5 17.a3 exd5  
18.axb4 cxb4



### 19.♙f4

A relatively rarely-played move, but it has brought White some good results.

19.♙e3 is the main variation.

### 19...♙h6 20.♖d2!?

The novelty prepared by Nakamura and his second Kris Littlejohn, compared with 20.♙d6 ♙f8 21.♙e7 ♖e8 22.♖d4 ♙xe7 23.fxe7 ♗h6 24.b3 ♖xe7 25.♖fc1 ♘e5 26.♘c5 c3 27.♖xa7 ♘c6 28.♖g4+ ♗he6! 29.♘xe6 fxe6 which led to good chances of equality for Black in Giri–Smeets in round 2.

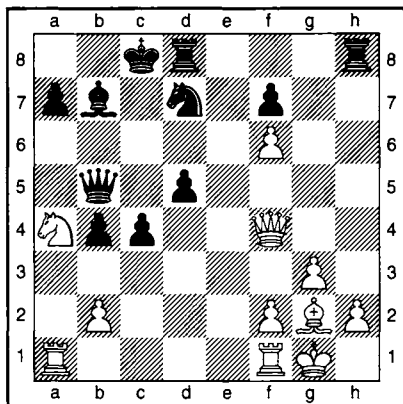
"It is very hard to evaluate this position correctly. After looking at this the night before the game, I felt that it was just too easy for Black to play. If I was a computer, I would happily go for this line, though!", according to Nakamura.

### 20...♙xf4 21.♖xf4

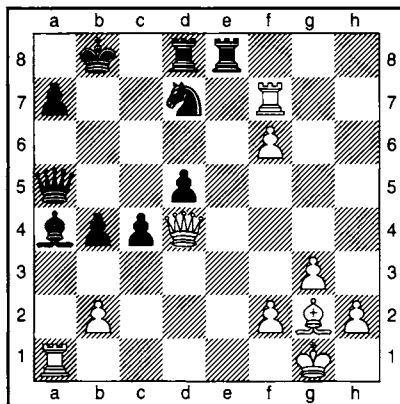
(see next diagram)

### 21...♙c6?

While taking a shower ten minutes before the round Nakamura had noticed the problem of the white approach. 21...♘c5? 22.♘xc5 ♖xc5 23.♖fe1 ♙d7 from Zahar-



Position after 21. ♖xf4



tsov–Michalczak, Guben 2011 is also wrong on account of 24.h4, but 21...d4!! gives Black equality, e.g. 22. ♖c3 ♖e5 23. ♕xb7+ ♖xb7 24. ♖f3+ ♖b8 25. ♖d5 ♖h5 (Nakamura).

### 22. ♖d4?!

22. ♖fe1! is preferable, because the queen is already active, for example: 22... ♖b8 23. ♖d4 ♖c7 (but not 23... ♖de8 on account of 24. ♖c5!) 24. ♖e7 ♖a5 25. b3! (Nakamura).

### 22... ♖b8?

Smeets too should occupy the e-file, to prevent the white rook from invading via e7: 22... ♖de8! 23. ♖fc1 [23. ♖xa7?! allows Black good counterplay after 23...d4! 24. ♖xd4 ♕xg2 25. ♕xg2 ♖c6+ 26. f3 ♖e2+ 27. ♖f2 ♖xf2+ 28. ♖xf2 ♖h6 (Krasenkow)] 23... ♖h6 24.h4 (Nakamura) with lasting pressure, though not as strong as in the game.

### 23. ♖fe1 ♖he8 24. ♖e7

24. ♖f4+!? ♖c8 25. ♖e7 (Krasenkow) is slightly more accurate and leaves White with an advantage.

### 24... ♖a5 25. ♖xf7 ♕xa4

### 26. ♕xd5?

This gives Smeets the opportunity to unpin immediately. Nakamura, who was in time-trouble here, should set his biggest trump – the h-pawn – in motion at once, so 26.h4! for example: 26... ♖e5 27. ♖e7 ♖d3 28. ♖xe8 ♖xe8 29. f7 ♖f8 30. ♖xa4 ♖xa4 31. ♖g7 ♖xf7 32. ♖xf7 ♖xb2 33.h5, and Black has reason to be afraid...

### 26... ♖c5!

The text move came as a surprise to Nakamura, since when he took on d5 with the bishop he had only reckoned on 26... ♖e5? 27. ♖b7+ ♖c8 28. ♖xa4 ♖xd5 29. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 30. ♖bxa7.

### 27. ♖f4+ ♖e5 28. ♕e4 ♖d7!

28... ♕d7?! 29. ♖g7 ♖c7 30. ♕g2±.

### 29. ♖g7 ♕b5 30. ♖xd7

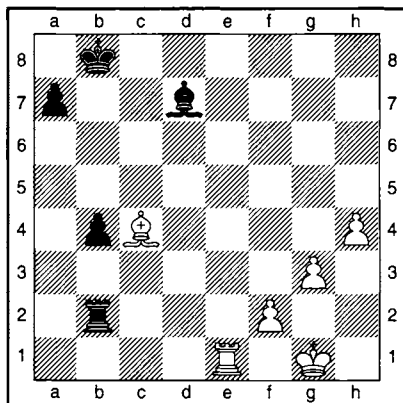
Black should also be able to keep his head above water after 30. ♖a5, e.g. 30... ♖c7 31. f7 ♖f8 32. ♖xa7+ (32. ♖g5 ♖e7 33. ♖xa7+ ♖xa7 34. ♖xe5 ♖exf7 35. ♖e7+ ♖d8 36. ♖xa7 ♖xf4 37. gxh4 ♖xf4) 32... ♖b6 33. ♖xd7 ♕xd7 34. ♖f6+ ♕c6 35. ♕xc6 ♖xc6 36. ♖g8 c3 37. ♖xf8 ♖xf8.

### 30... ♕xd7 31. ♕g6 ♖f8 32. ♖e1 ♖d6 33. ♖xe5 ♖xf6?!



33...♙xe5!? 34.♖xe5 ♜xf6 35.♙e4 ♙c6 brings out the potential of the black pawns more clearly.

34.♙xd6+ ♜xd6 35.♙f7 ♜d2 36.♙xc4 ♜xb2 37.h4



37...♙g4?

In pawn races like this everything depends on speed. So Black should bet on his own passed pawns with 37...a5 38.h5 ♜c2 39.♙d3 ♜c6 (Krasenkow).

Nakamura gives 37...♜c2 38.♙d3 ♜c3 39.♙g6 a5 40.h5 ♜c6!, and thinks that only White would have winning chances, but the position is “tricky” for both sides.

38.♙g2 a5 39.♜e5 ♜c2

But not 39...a4? on account of 40.h5, and it is hard to offer Black any good advice.

40.♜b5+

Also possible here is 40.♙f7!?

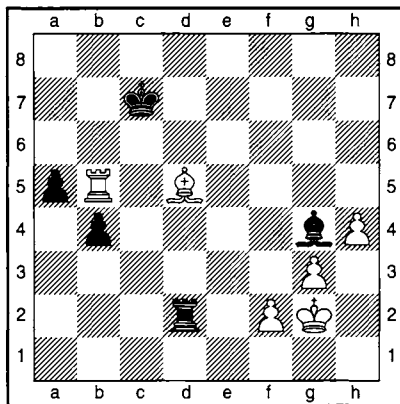
40...♙c7 41.♙d5 ♜d2

(see next diagram)

42.♙f7

“After this move the ending is a question of technique”, according to Nakamura.

42...♙d7



Position after 41...♜d2

After 42...♜d7 43.♜xa5 ♙b6 44.♜g5 ♜xf7 45.♜xg4 ♙c5 46.h5 b3 47.♜h4 b2 48.♜h1 ♙d4 49.♜b1 ♙c3 50.g4 ♜h7 51.f4 ♙c2 52.♜xb2+ ♙xb2 53.♙f3 ♙c3 54.♙e4 it comes down to almost the same won ending as in the game with three pawns against a rook.

43.♜xa5 ♙c6+ 44.♙f1 ♙f3 45.♜a1 ♙d6 46.♙b3 ♜d3?!

After this White can quickly “unscramble” his position. 46...♜b2 is more tenacious, but in the long run it should also not suffice for a draw.

47.♜b1! ♙c5 48.♙e1 ♙b5 49.♙d1 ♙xd1

49...♙c4 50.♙e2 ♙xe2 51.♙xe2 is no better.

50.♜xd1 ♜c3

After 50...♜xd1+ 51.♙xd1 ♙a4 52.♙c2 ♙a3 53.♙b1 only White can win.

51.h5 b3 52.♙d2 ♜c8

52..♜c2+ 53.♙e3 b2 54.♜b1 also does promise Smeets salvation.

53.♜c1 ♜f8 54.f4 ♙b4

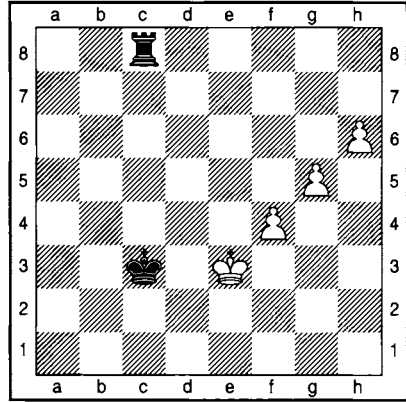
A long and painful death for Black would be the result of the variation 54...♜g8!? 55.h6 ♜xg3 56.♜h1 ♜g8 57.h7 ♜h8 58.♙c3 ♙c5

59.♙xb3 ♖d5 60.♙c3 ♖e4 61.♖h4 ♙f5  
62.♙d4 ♙f6 63.♙e4 ♖e8+ 64.♙f3 ♖h8  
65.♙g4 ♙g6 66.f5+ ♙f6 67.♖h6+ ♙g7  
68.♙g5 ♙f7 69.♖a6.

55.♖h1 ♙a3 56.♙e3 b2 57.g4 ♖c8 58.♖b1  
♙a2 59.♖xb2+ ♙xb2 60.h6 ♙c3 61.g5  
**Black resigned.**

Black has a rook against three pawns, but the latter are unstoppable: 61...♖e8+ 62.♙f3 ♖h8 63.♙e4 ♙c4 64.f5 ♙c5 65.f6 ♙d6 66.♙f5 ♙d7 67.g6 (Nakamura).

And his final comment on this game in *New In Chess* went: "Although our middlegame play was far from perfect, such messes are commonplace in the Botvinnik, and it makes for really exciting



Final Position after 61.g5

games like this one, which readers and fans alike will enjoy!"

## "I never give up and always try to win"

Hikaru Nakamura in an exclusive interview

**W**hen your brother Asuka and your step-father Sunil Weeramantry took part in the US Open in Concord, California, in August 1994, you accompanied the two of them and then in the common-room more or less by chance played your first friendly games. Your step-father must certainly have been pleased to see that. What did he then have to do to get you enthusiastic about chess and what part did he play in your early development?

The first thing is that my brother (he started playing when he was five, that was when I was three) was actually competing a lot in scholas-

tic chess tournaments in the US and my step-father is actually a very prominent chess coach in the New York area. It's actually a combination because both he and my brother were competing a lot when I was growing up. I was just around chess growing up. I was certainly not a strong player when I began in fact. One of the great little tidbits about my first chess tournament is that I lost all the games that I played. But my step-father certainly knows how to motivate kids to at least get interested in chess if not actually to try and become really strong at it. He really encouraged me to play as



much as I could. Without him I would never have become so good.

**How did your mother Carolyn, influence your chess development – she is after all a teacher...?**

If she could pursue her real passion she would be a musician. She had a major in music, maybe music appreciation. I would not say that she is a teacher, but when she came back to the States she did become a teacher for a few years, because obviously as a single mother with two kids you have to make ends meet. She certainly has a unique background. In terms of chess, I cannot really say that she has motivated me. In any case she did not try to put pressure on me to either play chess or not play chess. There are a lot of parents who will put a lot of pressure on their children because they think that their child will be the next world champion or the next really strong player. My parents simply did not do that. They just let me pursue it. It's all about the background, the way they were. Of course that helped me a lot.

**Your brother Asuka played in three junior world championships, but then stopped playing chess. How did his decision affect you? Did you also consider quitting chess?**

He had the problem which every chess player at some level comes across. He was a very talented junior. He played in the world youths in 96 in Menorca. In that tournament he played several players who have become well-known grandmasters. He lost e.g. to Radjabov. He also played against Boris Grachev and Vugar Gashimov.<sup>1</sup> So he was up against young players who have since become very strong grandmasters. One problem for him

was in any case that he became good very quickly, but he hit this wall where he didn't progress. At eleven or twelve he had an Elo rating of approximately 2100–2150, so he was very close to master level. However, he could not get past that. His decision to stop also had something to do with the fact that he was always the strongest player for his age in the USA, till I passed him. You cannot say that there was rivalry, but when you are passed by your own brother, you can certainly lose some interest.

I also thought a lot about stopping chess. I even stopped for a short time when I went to university for six months. When you go to university, it is very hard to study chess. In fact I did not study chess for pretty much all those six months. When you play chess it is very difficult for two reasons. Firstly, unlike a lot of other sports it is very hard to make a living, unless you are right near the top of the game. The second reason is that you are seeing the same people over and over again, you travel to a lot of the same places. That can become very repetitive and it is very much in human nature that you want to explore, you want to see what else is out there. It was a combination of both of those factors as to why I quit the first time. But I haven't considered it since then.

**What role has the fact that you are American played for your chess development?**

That is a tough question. If I had not grown up within the American chess culture, I would certainly not be the same sort of player I am today. Perhaps I would not even be playing chess at all. So it has been very beneficial, certainly. Unlike a lot of other players I am

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<sup>1</sup> The Under-10 World Championship was won in 1996 in Cala Galdana on Menorca by the Indian Pentala Harikrishna ahead of Vugar Gashimov and Teimour Radjabov; Boris Grachev won the title in 1995 in São Lourenço/Brazil.

much more noticeable simply because there are not many strong players from the US, whereas say I came from Russia. You have so many really talented and really strong players that it is hard to distinguish one from the other. Just look at Kramnik, Karjakin or Grischuk! They are all just really, really strong players. It is also very frustrating when you see these players like Magnus Carlsen or Levon Aronian. People who in their countries are really superstars, they are heroes. When I go back to the US, I am essentially just an ordinary citizen, I am not anything special. It is quite difficult sometimes to reconcile that with the fact that these other really strong players get so much attention in their own countries.

**In the USA sport is dominated by the “big four” – baseball, American football, ice-hockey and basketball – followed by golf and tennis. Chess is not popular – like in Germany. So why did you stick with it?**

It is what I was best at. I got the master title when I was ten years old. From that point onwards I wanted to see just how far I could go with chess. It is just one of those things: when you keep progressing, you keep going up in the rankings. You just would like to see where it goes. I think that is more than anything why I kept playing.

**Which role models did you have in chess as a child, whom did you want to follow, who impressed you?**

I would have to say Kasparov by far. He is the player that I most followed. I remember the years from 1999 to 2001, I would always be on the internet watching the games – especially the ones from Wijk aan Zee and Linares. When you see someone who is so dominant at the top of their field, then it is hard not to want to be like that. The other player, though obviously I never had the chance to see him play, would be

Bobby Fischer. Without him there would pretty much be no chess culture in the USA. At least I don't think so.

**Has your love of the King's Indian something to do with Kasparov?**

It was long, long before my time that he played it. Was it not Kramnik, who pretty much made him quit playing the King's Indian? No, I think that it is simply to do with me liking to play attacking chess. The other thing that I find incredibly unique about the King's Indian as opposed to just about every other opening is that computers consistently get it wrong. In many games which I won, the computers said that I was completely lost, when in fact I was completely winning. The King's Indian requires a lot of human intuition, your ability to calculate and play, while eliminating the effect that computers have on modern day chess.

**Which chess books did you read and which would you recommend?**

I have not really read any books from start to finish. I read some books on Nimzowitsch, on his style, many, many years ago, and of course also Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*. But beyond some basic stuff I just generally have not read books. I grew up with the computer. And when you have all that knowledge at your finger-tips, then the usefulness of a lot of books just ceases to have practical value.

**In the first phase of your career you played in four junior world championships, coming fourth in 2001 in the Under-14 in Oropesa del Mar. Afterwards you did not participate. Why?**

I also got second one of these years. Yes, around that time all the top junior players were competing, players like Harikrishna or Radjabov. But shortly thereafter almost all the top

junior players stopped playing. In fact it has continued even now. You don't see the highest ranking juniors in their age-groups playing. There is no particular value in playing against weaker young players, not like playing in major events – I think that is the reason why I and a lot of others stopped playing.

**You did not belong to the chess prodigies. How did you manage to reach the top 10 in the world?**

I think for me it has always been about work, it's been about proving people wrong. Growing up I spent a large portion of my time playing blitz chess on the internet. And a lot of people thought I was a really good blitz player but that I would never be such a strong classical chess player. I think that trying to prove all these people wrong certainly has been a very large motivating factor for me.

**Bobby Fischer once said: "To be really good in chess you must love the game." How important is this in your opinion?**

To a certain extent that is true. But having said that, I am not sure that is the case any more. With all the information out there on the internet and technology, I not sure that you actually have to love it and put in the same amount of work as people like Fischer did back when there were no computers and everything had to be done by hand. You didn't have databases, so it was all on pieces of paper. Then you had to pour your whole heart and soul into chess. I certainly like the game but I would not go so far as to say I love the game. Of course you have to have a passion for it, but if you know what you are doing, if you play a lot and you work hard you do not necessarily have to put everything into the game the way you did in the past.

**In your spare time do you actually follow other sports?**

On and off I follow pretty much all the major sports in the US, basketball, baseball, American football and hockey. Right now I am much more into ice-hockey. The great thing about sports much like chess is that you watch the games and the best team or the best player does not always win. That's what makes it really great, watching it, rooting for someone. It's just a really enjoyable relaxing activity.

**You are often compared to the 11<sup>th</sup> world champion Fischer, as you became the youngest American grandmaster, taking away his record (on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2003 at the age of 15 years and 79 days – Bobby was exactly 106 days older)! What did this mean to you, how did Fischer inspire you?**

It is like the question about prodigies. I was never compared to the European prodigies. From the time I was very young a lot of people have compared me to Fischer. Of course that is inevitable any time you have really strong junior players coming out of the US, it will happen simply because he is really the only strong American player ever in the chess world, at least in modern times. It is more the fact when you see the people who were around during that time, the American chess players who still are actually around, to see them hoping for a return to those days is probably what inspires me more than Fischer himself and what he did inspired me.

**When did you notice that you could get to the very top?**

Yes, when was the first super-tournament? It was probably in 2009 when I had a really good run. Because prior to that I had been around 2700 for about a year, a year and a half and I hadn't really been going anywhere. First when I won the American championship very convincingly and when I also won a very strong round-robin in San Sebastian; then I knew that

I had a chance. It would have to be around then, 2009 early 2010 when I started playing some really strong players and realised that I could hold my own.

**Which character traits must a world class player have?**

You certainly have to be very strong mentally. When things are not going right it is very easy to just throw it all away and not care any more. You also have to be serious about chess. You have to put in a lot of effort into preparing, making sure that you are ready to play the game. You also have to really hate losing as well. If you look at all the strong players, especially the top players – they always will find the best defence even when they are losing. That is extremely important, more so than even the other two traits.

**Do you think that a world class player has to be a little egoistic?**

Yes, somewhat. You certainly have to have a lot of confidence that you are going to beat the other players. If not, it has a certain effect. You do not go with the same mind-set or approach. In terms of confidence, yes, but I do not know if that means you have a huge ego. Certainly some of the world champions such like Kasparov especially had very big egos. They thought they were just better than everyone else. Some players do, some don't. You look at Anand... in my view he does not have that much of an ego. It all depends on the person.

**Have you friends within the world-class players, or do you talk to others regularly?**

I'll talk to them, but I would not say that I am friends with them. That is perhaps to do with the background of growing up with chess in the US. Even in the US a lot of the very strong players I would play against were Russians. Certainly, I don't have anything against Russians, certainly as a whole they are the best

chess players in the world by far. When you are competing against them and trying to beat them, then it is naturally hard to become friends with them. For that reason I have gone my own way.

**For which of the present top players do you have particular respect?**

In terms of results, I would probably have to say when I play against Magnus Carlsen. I do the worst against him right now and right now he is certainly the best player when it comes to just winning games. At the same time there is Kramnik, though for other reasons. I have a lot of respect for him. He is the person who beat Kasparov in a World Championship match. Another player could hardly have done that, including Anand in my opinion. In terms of play it is certainly Magnus. In terms of raw class and the ability to stay near the top it would have to be Kramnik as well.

**You first played in the world championship in Tripoli in 2004. How important was that for you?**

It was important because it was the first time I played against really strong players and had a good result. I had played against lower 2600 and a lot of 2500 grandmasters and done well. But in Tripoli, reaching the fourth round in the match format before losing to Michael Adams... That was the first time that I knew I had a chance at least to be near the top. Prior to that I had had good results but nothing was really that surprising, but even in that match I shouldn't perhaps have lost the way that I did. So that was a very important tournament for my overall development!

**After the 2004 World Championship you were asked about your future in chess and you replied that you wanted to reach an Elo rating of over 2700, but whether you would take it up as a professional career would depend on**

**how far you could improve in the years which followed. What do you think about that now?**

It is much in line with what I thought then. It is not enough to be one of the best players in the USA. As soon as you become an adult you have to make a living. I would probably be of the same opinion today.

**Your step-father Sunil Weeramantry recommends: “Play, fight and never make a short draw!” Why basically do you follow this and play fighting chess?**

It’s my general philosophy. When you are playing chess or doing anything for that matter, I don’t see the point in making draws. You only have so many games you are going to play in your life. Obviously, there are certain times when it makes sense to draw games, for example to win tournaments. But when you get down to it, you are also trying to create a work of art for the spectators. Ultimately they too do not want to see draws. As professionals we owe it to them to play games to the end, to play fighting chess instead of drawing games.

**How do you deal with defeats?**

That really depends on the game. There are several categories. Firstly if you prepare something badly, you forget something and you just lose without ever being in the game – those games are probably the worst. If you lose a game you want to be able to say that your opponent outplayed you. If you play a game when you are never in the game, where just from the start you are much worse and you really can’t do much, that is really frustrating. Games when your opponent plays very well and you just get outplayed, I don’t mind so much those sorts of losses, because there was not much you can do. You just got outplayed. Then you just move on to the next game.

**How important is motivation and discipline for chess training?**

I think it is very important. You have to be very motivated to play well in tournaments. If you are not motivated, then what’s the point? Why are you playing chess at all? I have always been very motivated, more so by the fact that a lot of people never really thought that I was going to get to where I have in chess and really just proving them wrong...

**Lately you have been playing much more in Europe. Why?**

I think that the best competition is in Europe, the best players are in Europe. To improve you have to keep on playing against better players. In the US there still are some good players, there are a few very strong tournaments, but in terms of trying to reach the top and becoming the best then you have to play against the best to get there. That’s why I think that every tournament I play now is in Europe.

**It also became somewhat more natural since you have invitations...**

It really started for me in 2008 when I started playing in Europe more, because I started playing in leagues in addition to a few open tournaments. Since then it has really just continued, I have kept on playing in Europe.

**In which leagues?**

I started in the French league in 2008, in the year after that in the Spanish one too and in the Austrian.

**In Europe playing for a club is often very important for chess professionals. Many players play in many leagues like the German Bundesliga. How is the situation in the USA? Do you play for a club?**

No, there is nothing even resembling that in the US. That is one of the great, great things about European chess. There are a lot of professional and semi-professional players who



compete in these leagues and who can make a living. In the US it is, as in many other things, “All or nothing”. You either win everything and life is great or else you don’t win anything. That’s the capitalist way. It is great that these leagues exist in Europe. All these really strong chess players are competing and when you have access to that level of competition it is a lot easier to improve.

**How do you explain that you like bullet so much?**

That is more just from growing up with chess in New York more than anything. There are a lot of strong blitz players in New York. I was just naturally exposed to a lot of blitz and rapid chess when I was younger. So I became addicted to blitz chess. I have always been naturally good at it.

**Do you still play bullet?**

Yes. I played bullet the other night. I was actually playing before I played my game yesterday. I do not only play on the ICC, but since 2008 I have also played a lot on Playchess. I have played a lot on both those sites. It is fun. However, the problem for me now is that it is very different: when I play a classical game of chess I am always trying to find the best move. When you are playing a quicker game, you cannot afford to use a lot of time trying to find the best move. You have to make moves based on instinct and intuition as opposed to calculation. It is not the same for me now as it used to be, but it is still quite fun to play.

**At the end of July 2009 in Mainz you became for the moment the last Chess960 rapid chess world champion. You beat Levon Aronian in the final. What do you think about Chess960?**

It is probably the future of chess. I like it a lot. I had some great results in Mainz. The thing

about Chess960 comes down to the two competing theories regarding chess right now. On the one side people are saying that chess is all about preparation, it’s all about work with computers away from the board. Then you have the second group of people who think that chess should be more about your skill. And when you play Chess 960, there isn’t the amount of theory, you can’t really prepare for it. And so by virtue of that it seems that the best player **should** win the game of chess. It’s more about your actual talent as opposed to your ability to simply prepare. I think I fall into that second category where if I could play chess without everyone being able to prepare at all, I would enjoy it a lot more.

**It is surprising that a world-class player like you has no coach. You work with Kris Littlejohn and you are satisfied. Why?**

I think that at least in the past you had to work with a very strong coach. Now, however, with the rise of computers especially, I think it is more about ideas than anything. If you have someone like Kris who is master level (2400) or a GM, they can both input moves on the computer, it doesn’t matter in that regard. What he has the ability to do... even though he is not a very strong player... he has a very good understanding of chess. There are a lot of players I know who are a lot weaker than I am but who happen to know a lot more opening theory. But the difference is they cannot put everything together. It is not easy because you have to calculate very well, you have to not feel any pressure. A lot of people feel a bit of uneasiness or pressure and they can make a mistake. It is a matter of putting all the pieces together. Obviously he can’t do that when he plays. But in terms of his ability to understand the computer’s evaluations, he is much better than almost anyone else I know. The major



good example is my game against Jan Smeets in Wijk aan Zee.<sup>2</sup> We played a very theoretical line of the Botvinnik System of the Slav Defence. It was about move 19 – I don't remember exactly. Jan Smeets and his second Jan Gustafsson had looked at all the computer choices, but in the game I actually played the third highest computer move as opposed to playing the first one. So it is not all about just hitting the "space-bar" and following the computer's suggestions right to the end of the variation. In this game I must admit that it was not my idea which I played. It came from Kris, and that speaks volumes about what he is able to do.

**How do you train chess each day? How many hours do you spend on chess? What about training openings and endings?**

I don't actually train every day. It depends. Especially now more so than in the past there are long periods of time when I do not play. For instance I played a tournament in Wijk aan Zee, then I played in Monaco, but my next serious classical tournament was in June. So that is almost five months without chess. When I have these really long periods, I won't study every day. Generally about two, two and a half weeks before a tournament I start studying, probably about 4 to 5 hours per day.

**And how is the relation between openings and other things?**

It is almost all about openings, but sometimes I will look at the Dvoretsky book on endgames. It is probably about 85 to 90 percent on openings and 15 percent on endgames.

**Do you play against the computer from time to time? Would you recommend this?**

Yes, I used to. It has gone full circle. After all

I grew up with computers. When I had approx. 2300–2400 Elo, I played against *Fritz*. I think at that time it was *Fritz* 4. I would still lose the vast majority of the games, probably 80 to 85 percent. But of course there were also one or two games in which I managed to beat the computer on its strongest setting. Whereas now it does not matter who you are. You lose every game, end of story! If you do not put the computer on its highest setting, then it can be very beneficial. For me nowadays it is more about using the computer for analysis as opposed to actually playing it, because there is so much more that can be gained from that. If you play a computer you lose every game. It is very hard to be serious about chess when that happens. No one likes losing, and since you are going to lose every game no matter what you do, it is just kind of silly.

**What about the influence of computers in general? Would it be better to make do without them altogether?**

It has taken away a lot of the creativity in chess. You don't see the amazing novelties in the openings that you did before they were around. At the same time because of computers the quality of the games is a lot higher. So it's also much more interesting in some ways. It's a little bit of both, I think.

**Once you said that chess is about ideas and not about playing strength. How do you interpret that?**

It comes back to the same thing as not working with a strong grandmaster. If someone can come up with an idea, then it is the idea which counts. He does not have to play the game. It is like in my game against Jan Smeets. Kris Littlejohn came up with the idea. If he had

<sup>2</sup> See Game 33, p. 126

to play the game he would lose every time. He comes up with the idea and I am the one who has to play the game. I am able to put all the pieces together. You do not have to come up with the idea. Other people can just mention it in passing...!

### **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

Fighting ability is my strength, not giving up and always trying to play for a win. Even when I am losing I try to find the best defence. Certainly I much prefer tactical positions with a lot of possibilities. My main weakness is probably that my preparation in the openings isn't as good as some of the other top players and certain endgames I don't play particularly inspiringly.

### **How would you characterise your style?**

Very tactical. I like playing open positions with a lot of space.

Robert Desjarlais wrote in his book *Counterplay*: "Nakamura's education in chess has been decidedly non-classical. Much of what he absorbed about chess early on came not from studying the instructional games of the great masters, but from spending hours upon hours analysing and contesting positions on a computer." What do you think about that? Did you only play or also solve combinations, do endgame training, etc.? What would you recommend to talented young players?

Yes, chess has really evolved. That is a very accurate portrayal of my youth, I did spend a lot of time playing on the internet. The thing about these sites you use is that it is not just playing against humans. There are a lot of training programs on them that you can use for endgames, middlegames, tactics. Everyone's approach has somewhat changed now, in terms of the junior players. It is simply no longer the same game it was 25-30 years ago,

not with the technology.

### **Do you give chess training, on the web or "over the board"?**

I have sometimes done it, but not so much in recent years. I am a professional player now and you have to be very serious about it. That is actually one of the problems with American chess right now. You have quite a few of these really strong players like Alexander Onischuk or Yury Shulman, who are very strong players but who also coach chess quite a bit on the side. But you can see that when they compete in tournaments and have what I would say are bad results. It shows in their play, just because they are teaching all the time. It's great to help players to improve and to get them to a very strong level, but they are not at that level yet. At the same time when you are teaching weaker players it can affect your own ability. You teach kids that there are rules you should not break and that starts to get into your own head and you start thinking like that, instead of the way the way you normally would about a game.

**Your way to the top was typically American, not like in Russia where you have state support. How do you explain it then that you made it to the top?**

It is just a matter of keeping on playing, seeing where it will go and never accepting that it isn't possible. Once you accept that something isn't possible, then you never will get there.

**Once you named Kasparov as your idol. Why? Was he the strongest player of all time?**

Yes, in terms of the level of play Kasparov was far and away the strongest player. Certainly the openings, the preparation that went into games before he was around was very different from what it is now. You have to credit him with the opening revolution, where everyone puts so much time into their open-



ings. It is absolutely the most important thing in chess right now. Before him it was important of course. Anatoly Karpov of course also knew his openings well, but many of the games he won were very much in a positional style where he would outplay opponents in middle-games and endgames. Kasparov on the other hand won a lot of games based on his opening preparation alone. He really changed the game. For 20 years he was number one in the world. This hasn't happened since then. He is definitely the best player in terms of what he has done for the game. At the same time Bobby Fischer is the player who brought the game to the public and made it popular the way no one else has.

**A milestone in your career is your victory in Wijk aan Zee this year. What did you feel after this triumph?**

I had come close to winning a lot of elite tournaments prior to that. Of course it was great to win that tournament especially, since it is one of the most prestigious tournaments in the world. But it really wasn't all that different to me. Towards the end of the tournament I felt a lot more pressure than I had ever felt before in any tournament. But it is still chess, you still have to go on with the same approach, the same thought process and just play the game! Of course it is great to win, but it didn't change the world for me.

**Are you afraid of dropping out of the top ten before you reach the very top spot?**

I do not know. It is all about playing good chess, isn't it?! The main thing for me is to see what happens. Anyone can have a couple of very bad results and slip out of the top ten considering how many strong players there are at the top. If you play well, you hope that things happen and if they don't they don't. That's all you can do. You can't control whether your

opponent makes good moves or bad moves. You just have to focus on your own moves, your own games.

**Do you think that you can become world champion and break Fischer's record again? You would still have six years for that.**

It is possible. I don't know. Either I will or I won't. It will be very clear in the next year or two whatever happens.

**But is this a goal for you?**

Yes, it would certainly be nice but right now it is not the main thing. The main thing is just playing well, because I am playing against the absolute top players now as opposed to just very strong players and when you play against the absolute top players it's very different. First of all it is much harder to beat them, and secondly you also have to play very precisely not to lose against them sometimes. I'll worry about becoming world champion as I get closer to the top.

**Which are your main rivals on the road to the top?**

Magnus Carlsen for sure, but also Sergei Karjakin and probably also Levon Aronian. These are probably the three players I consider my most serious competition.

**Which World Championship mode is the best in your opinion?**

The old candidates format with matches, certainly longer matches than in Kazan. Six game matches are a bit of a joke. I think just longer matches and there has to be a better qualification cycle.

**Which are your ten best games and why?**

Ten best games? Yes, there is this game against Krasenkow in Spain in 2007, when I sacrificed a queen for pretty much a pawn and maybe a knight. That is definitely one of the highlights. My King's Indian over Gelfand also

belongs in here, also my win against Beliavsky in the King's Indian. (*At this point Hikaru has a long think....*) And even if the quality of the game was not particularly high, my win against Vladimir Kramnik in London last year was very important for me. That was the first game I won against a really strong player who had been at the top before. Winning that game was very important because it is a matter of proving to yourself that you can beat these guys.

**At the moment you are a chess pro. Once you mentioned you might want to study law or psychology.<sup>3</sup> What about your plans for the future?**

I am surprised I said that. Those would not be my interests now. You have to make a living

and it's not easy as a professional chess player. If I had a choice now... and I do quite a bit in that area already... I would probably do something with finance.

**Why did you move to Saint Louis?<sup>4</sup>**

I moved there because there is a chess club and Scholastic Center in St. Louis. They hold the US Championship there every year and they also have a lot of scholastic activities for kids in the area. Considering the lack of interest in chess in general, to have a place in the US where chess is valued is very good for chess in America. Trying to be a part of it, considering my role in the American chess world, certainly trying to help improve things is very important to me!

\* \* \*



**Georgios Souleidis** (born 1972) is an international chess master and a renowned chess journalist. He became known through his work as the editor for the German chess Bundesliga and his chess blog [<http://entwicklungsvorsprung.de>]. He is responsible for press relations at the biggest German chess

tournaments, such as the international Neckar Open, the LGA-Open or the Sparkassen Chess Meeting. The interview with Hikaru Nakamura was undertaken by Georgios Souleidis by arrangement with the authors during the 39<sup>th</sup> staging of the strongest German grandmaster tournament in Dortmund in July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect there is an interesting statement by Nakamura, who actually took six months out from chess in 2006 and studied for one semester at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, though he was hardly enthused by it: "With chess, it doesn't matter what background you are, what age you are — everyone is equal. With college, I couldn't quite get used to the fact that, to paraphrase *Animal Farm*, it feels like some people are more equal than others." (*Riverfront Times*, Saint Louis, issue of 21st July 2011)

<sup>4</sup> In Saint Louis an important chapter in the history of chess was written between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February 1886. Four of the total of 20 games (rounds 6 to 9) of the first "official" World Championship match took place here – other venues were New York and New Orleans. After his 10-5 success over Johannes Hermann Zukertort (the first to win ten games took the match) Wilhelm Steinitz was recognised as the first world chess champion.



## Chapter 7

# Wijk aan Zee

**Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2011, Round 8**

**S**undays also can sometimes be cruel! And that is the case for Hikaru Nakamura too, at least on this 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2011. On the billing in the *Dorpshuis de Moriaan* in Wijk aan Zee is the keenly-awaited duel between the title defender Magnus Carlsen and the sole leader from the USA with his 5½ points. The “Mozart of chess”, as he was once called by Lubomir Kavalek in the *Washington Post*, is already trailing by 1½ points after round 7 and has only reached ‘+1’, a modest score for him. This clarifies the lines the duel must follow: Carlsen absolutely has to win this prestigious game, so as to be once more in contention for tournament victory!

However, a glance at the statistics shows that even with White this is no foregone conclusion. So far the pair have met a total of five times. There have been four draws. However, in their latest encounter in the London Chess Classic in December 2010 Hikaru Nakamura had to lay down his arms. The question for him today is: when you have such a lead, which strategy should you employ in an important game, when all you really need to do is share the point? And is it actually possible to gain a draw on demand?

Probably the best illustration of such a situation is the final game of the fourth World Championship match between the champion Garry Kasparov and his challenger Anatoly Karpov in Seville 1987. Surprisingly, the title holder was losing 11-12 and he absolutely had to win the 24<sup>th</sup> game in order to retain his chess crown. However, anyone who thought he would attack come hell or high water was mistaken. Kasparov came up with a psychological trick: he deliberately avoided the exchange of blows which he knew his opponent was expecting, and instead he decided in this decisive game to adopt a peaceful, but flexible set-up. This cost Karpov a lot of thinking time right in the opening. To that was added the enormous nervous tension of simply avoiding making a mistake. In extreme time-trouble – Karpov had only two minutes left for his final ten moves – Kasparov then set him a nasty trap. Karpov did not see what was perhaps the only possible way to a draw, lost a pawn and in the adjourned game was unable to find an effective defence. For Garry Kasparov this may perhaps have been the most important win in his chess career...

Certainly this game in Wijk aan Zee was not of such enormous significance as to outdo the drama of the Seville game. Even if he were to lose, Nakamura would have enough chances to put this behind him in the five rounds which were to follow.

It is obvious that there is a burning rivalry between the Norwegian, who has long been the idol of chess fans, and the combative US star. And a remark by Nakamura, that Magnus suited him as an opponent, will have tended to be a motivating factor for the latter, rather than something which affected his self-confidence. At the end of January 2012 (after the 74<sup>th</sup> Wijk aan Zee) the sobering result for Hikaru would be  $-4 = 7$ .

## GAME 34

**M. Carlsen – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Sicilian Defence [B92]*

### *Hara-kiri*

In the three previous games with White against his rival, Magnus Carlsen opened with 1.♘f3 (Biel 2005), 1.d4 and 1.c4 (London 2009 and 2010). The last encounter was the only one the American lost, when he brought out his Dutch Defence. But today Carlsen opens with the king's pawn.

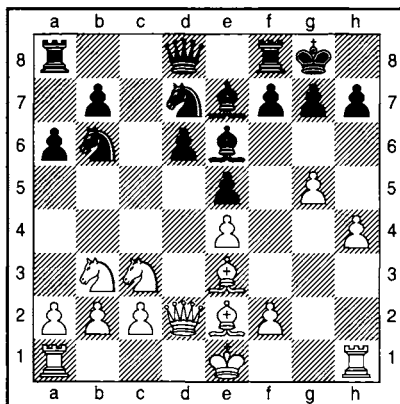
**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙e2 e5 7.♘b3 ♙e7 8.♙e3 0-0**

8...♙e6 is the main variation.

**9.g4! ♙e6**

“Around here the surprised Nakamura started thinking”, remarked Igor Stohl. The fact is that the line with 9.g4 in the Najdorf Sicilian is extremely rare nowadays. It can be seen from Nakamura's play that he is not so familiar with the resulting positions. Probably that was precisely Carlsen's cunning intention.

**10.g5 ♘fd7 11.h4 ♘b6 12.♙d2 ♘8d7**



**13.f4!?**

A strong novelty, which immediately puts Black under pressure. Up till then only 13.0-0-0 had been tried. Nevertheless with good results for White. The idea of the text move is that after the exchange on f4 White will bring his b3-knight back into play via d4, for it then to take an active part in White's attack on the king from f5.

**13...exf4 14.♙xf4 ♘e5 15.0-0-0 ♖c8 16.♙b1 ♙c7**

16...♘bc4!?! would be worth a try.

**17.h5 ♙fe8?**

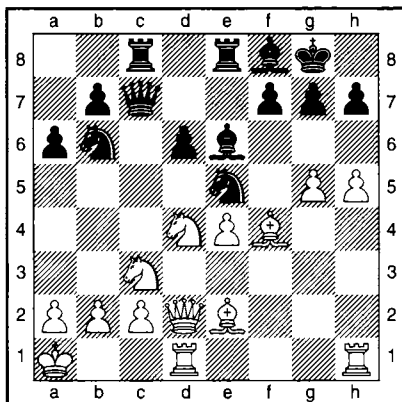
This is too slow and is probably, as some commentators think, already the decisive error! Nakamura should immediately sound the counter-attack with 17...♘bc4!?, for example: 18.♙xc4 ♘xc4 19.♙d3 ♘a3+ 20.♙c1 ♙c4 (Stohl), and the white attack does not get going quite so quickly as it does in the game.

**18.♙a1!**

A very nice prophylactic move. The immediate 18.♘d4? would on the other hand even backfire in view of 18...♘bc4 19.♙e1 ♙b6 20.♙c1?? ♘a3+ 21.♙a1 ♘c6.



18...♙f8 19.♘d4



19...♚c5?

After the game Nakamura suggested 19...g6?, but White wins immediately with 20.hxg6 hxg6 21.♙xe5 dxex5 22.♘xe6 ♗xe6 (22...fxe6 is strongly met by 23.♚e3) 23.♙g4 ♗d6 24.♚h2 ♗xd1+ 25.♘xd1 (Stohl). 19...♙bc4! 20.♙xc4 ♘xc4 21.♚d3 ♚a5 22.g6 h6 is an improved version of the game. However, even in this case the white attack looks very promising.

20.g6! ♘ec4

20...fxg6 21.hxg6 h6 22.♘xe6 ♗xe6 23.♙xe5 dxex5 (23...♗xe5? would be a mistake on account of 24.♚f4 ♚c7 25.♙g4 ♗b8 26.♗df1, and White's position is clearly superior) 24.♙g4 (Stohl), and in this case too Carlsen's position is preferable.

21.♙xc4 ♘xc4 22.♚d3 fxg6?!

This opens too many highways for the white attack. In any case, even after the better 22...h6 the black position does not inspire a great deal of confidence.

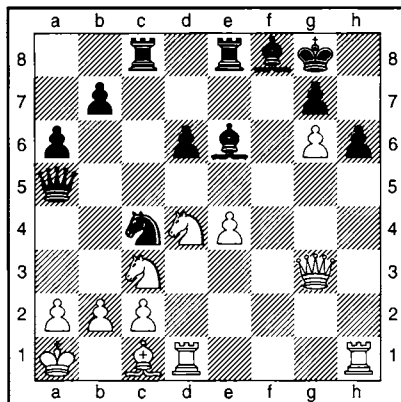
23.hxg6 h6 24.♚g3 ♚b6

24...♘xb2? 25.♙xb2 ♙e7 26.♘b3+–.

25.♙c1 ♚a5?!

This finally turns out to be too slow. But the

alternatives are also unconvincing, e.g. 25...♘e5 26.♘d5 ♙xd5 27.exd6 (Stohl). After 25...d5?! 26.♘xd5 ♙xd5 27.exd5 ♙d6 28.♚g4 ♙e5 29.c3 ♙xd4 30.♗xd4 ♘e5 31.♚f5 ♚xg6 32.♚xg6 ♘xg6 33.♗g1 ♘e5 34.♙xh6 things are even clearer for Carlsen.



26.♗df1!

This takes a bit longer than 26.♘xe6 ♗xe6 27.♘d5, which also gives White a winning position. But "better a bird in the hand...", thinks Carlsen...

26...♘e5

In *SCHACH-MAGAZIN* 64 (March 2011, p.7) the Australian grandmaster Ian Rogers points out here: "Nakamura had ridden out the first, rather obvious wave of the attack, but his queen got out of position."

There is also the instructive analysis by grandmaster Igor Stohl: 26...♘xb2? 27.♘xe6 ♚xc3 (27...♗xc3 is met by 28.♚f2) 28.♚xc3 ♗xc3 29.♙xb2, and Black has his hands full; things are similar after 26...♚e5 27.♚f2 ♚c5 28.♗hg1 ♙h8 29.♙xh6 gxh6 30.g7+ ♙xg7 31.♗xg7 ♗f8 32.♚xf8+.

27.♘d5

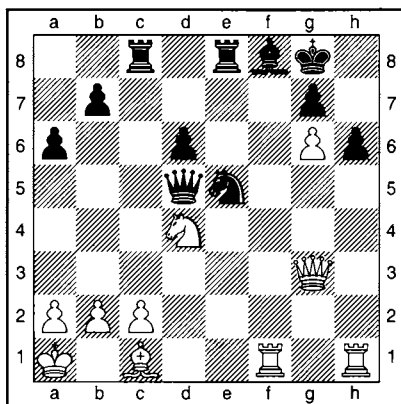
Let us give the word back to Ian Rogers,

who awarded an exclamation mark to the text move: "The threat is a combination along the lines of 28.♖xe6 ♜xe6 29.♞h3 ♜ce8 30.♙xh6! gxh6 31.♞xf8+ ♚xf8 (31...♞xf8 32.♞xe6+ etc.) 32.♞xh6+ and mate, because the black king cannot slip away via e7 since the knight on d5 is preventing that. So the annoying knight must be got rid of."

### 27...♙xd5 28.exd5 ♞xd5?

This runs straight into a powerful hammer blow or, as Dirk Poldauf appositely calls it in his annotations for *SCHACH*, a wrecking operation, after which either the h- or the g-file is opened. "For Carlsen mere child's play, for the likes of us the win remains equally effective and instructive." (*SCHACH* 3/2011, page 24) So let us take a look at it together...

28...♞c4 provides more of a defence, but should not be enough in the long run, as can be seen from the following variation: 29.♖e6 ♜g4 30.♞f2 ♞xg6 31.♙xh6 ♞xd5 (but not 31...gxh6? on account of 32.♞hg1) 32.♖c7 ♞c5 33.♞xc5 dxc5 34.♖xe8 gxh6 35.♖f6+.



### 29.♙xh6!!

With this resounding bishop sacrifice

Carlsen opens the floodgates for the attack which breaks through.

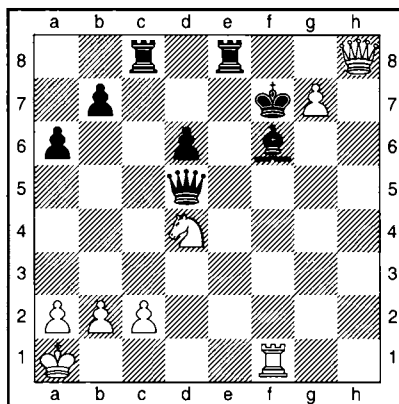
### 29...gxh6

Mate follows after 29...♞xd4 30.♙e3 ♞e4 31.♞h8+ ♚xh8 32.♞h3+ ♚g8 33.♞h7 mate.

### 30.g7 ♙e7

30...♙xg7 31.♖f5 ♜c7 32.♖xh6+ ♚h7 (if 32...♚h8, then 33.♖f7++ ♚g8 34.♞h8 mate) 33.♖g4+ ♚g8 34.♖f6+ (Stohl) does not change the outcome of the game.

31.♞xh6 ♖f7 32.♞g6 ♖xh6 33.♞xh6 ♙f6 34.♞h8+ ♚f7



### 35.g8♞+!

The tempting 35.♞xf6+? is met by 35...♙e7.

35...♞xg8 36.♞xf6+ ♚e8 37.♞e1+

And in view of 37...♙d7 38.♞e7 mate, Nakamura had to accept his only defeat in this high-class game.

**Black resigned.**

"That's more like it," Carlsen twittered after the game, and he told reporters: "I am really very happy. This is what I needed badly ... after the stupid draw I handed in yesterday."



In the press centre he commented that in his opinion Hikaru's Sicilian was the wrong strategy in terms of tournament tactics. Especially since the previous year Nakamura had criticised Alexei Shirov for exactly the same thing, when, leading by 5½ out of 6 he had also chosen the Sicilian against him – and lost.

As was so aptly said by Borussia Dortmund's successful football trainer Jürgen Klopp: "You cannot learn about experience. You have to acquire it."<sup>1</sup> Hikaru Nakamura acquired it on that Sunday in January 2011.

Magnus Carlsen will have been additionally pleased by the fact this 8<sup>th</sup> round game also earned for him the prize for the best game of the day. As far as the situation on

the leader board was concerned, everything had opened up for him again. Nakamura, who was left on 5½, was caught by Anand after his draw with Levon Aronian. But behind the two leaders lurked Carlsen, the French player Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Aronian and ex-world champion Vladimir Kramnik – a strong quartet on 5 points each. Apart from Aronian and Carlsen, Nakamura still had to play against the other two, as well as Anand. And in round 9, after the second rest day, it was precisely the Indian world champion who was waiting for him. Pessimists among Hikaru's fans were even predicting that their man was now facing a double loss. But it is not only in fairy tales that you should not count your chickens before they are hatched....

## The sky's the limit

*"If you want to run, then run a mile.  
But if you want a new life,  
then run a marathon."*

Emil Zátopek

**T**he way to the chess summit can be compared to a marathon – and in this case too there is no guarantee that the goal will be reached. Yes, even a sudden crash can never be excluded. It is sufficient to recall the Russian Andrei Sokolov (born 1963), whose rise in the early 1980s was breath-taking: junior world champion in Copenhagen in 1982, USSR national champion in 1984, and third in both the Interzonal Tournament in Biel 1985 and the Candidates Tournament in Montpellier the same year. Then in the quarter-finals of the Candidates matches a clear 6-2 victory over Rafael Vaganian and in the semi-finals a fortunate but deserved 7½-6½ success against Artur Yusupov. The tempo of the 24-year-old was breath-taking, because there was only one single hurdle remaining between the

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jürgen Klopp: *DER SPIEGEL* (Number 11/12. March 2012)



new Soviet chess star and a World Championship match against Garry Kasparov. But the tactically gifted Andrei Sokolov failed this last challenge, which bore the name of Anatoly Karpov, by a rather clear-cut  $3\frac{1}{2}$ - $7\frac{1}{2}$ , without actually winning a single game. Third in the world rating list with an Elo of 2645 (the same as Yusupov) behind Kasparov (2735) and Karpov (2710), he later plunged down to earth like a comet in the Candidates matches in Saint John in Canada, losing in the first round against local grandmaster Kevin Spraggett in the rapid-play tie-break. After that he played no further part in the battle for the chess crown. He was only a miler and no marathon runner.

Continuous progress is not always guaranteed – Hikaru Nakamura has also had to experience this. And at present one rival appears to be too strong for him: Magnus Carlsen. Even at the American's greatest triumph in Wijk aan Zee 2011, the Norwegian, three years his junior, demonstrated in impressive fashion where his present limits are, by inflicting his one and only defeat in the tournament, as can be seen from the extensively annotated game in the first part of this chapter. Of a total of 15 serious games against the leader of the world ranking list since their first meeting in Biel in 2005, Hikaru has not managed to notch up a single victory. There is no other top 10 player<sup>2</sup> against whom he has so far had to pay so dearly, as can be seen from the following survey (which includes the 40<sup>th</sup> chess olympiad in Istanbul 2012):

|                         |    |    |     |    |
|-------------------------|----|----|-----|----|
| 1. M. Carlsen (NOR)     | 15 | +0 | =10 | -5 |
| 2. L. Aronian (ARM)     | 5  | +2 | =2  | -1 |
| 3. V. Kramnik (RUS)     | 11 | +3 | =6  | -2 |
| 4. T. Radjabov (AZE)    | 1  | +0 | =1  | -0 |
| 6. V. Anand (IND)       | 6  | +1 | =5  | -0 |
| 7. S. Karjakin (RUS)    | 15 | +5 | =8  | -2 |
| 8. F. Caruana (ITA)     | 5  | +1 | =4  | -0 |
| 9. V. Ivanchuk (UKR)    | 9  | +1 | =4  | -4 |
| 10. A. Morozevich (RUS) | 2  | +0 | =1  | -1 |

If we take as our criterion the previous two years, a statistical evaluation by *ChessBase*<sup>3</sup> shows that in the top tournaments of 2010 (player of the year was Levon Aronian with a performance rating of 2817 over 50 games in six competitions) the strongest newcomer was Hikaru Nakamura in 8<sup>th</sup> place (2776/57/6).

Ahead of him in addition to Levon Aronian were Magnus Carlsen (2815/54/6), Viswanathan Anand (2813/48/5), Alexander Grischuk (Russia/2806/41/5), Sergei Karjakin (2787/49/5), Shakhriyar Mamedyarov (Azerbaijan/2786/57/6) and Vladimir Kramnik (2778/60/7).

In the *ChessBase* rankings for 2011<sup>4</sup> Evgeny Tomashevsky (Russia/2808/22/3) in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, European champion Vladimir Potkin (Russia/2777/24/3) in 8<sup>th</sup> and Vugar Gashimov (Azerbaijan/2771/37/4) at number 10 are three new players to make it into the top 10. Nakamura now comes 9<sup>th</sup> with a performance rating of 2771 from 60 games in six top tournaments.

These results indicate that Hikaru Nakamura has reached the world elite and

<sup>2</sup> FIDE world ranking list as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012; Hikaru Nakamura occupied 5<sup>th</sup> place.

<sup>3</sup> See *ChessBase Magazine* 140, p.8, without blitz and rapid chess, as well as at least 2 tournaments

<sup>4</sup> See *ChessBase Magazine* 146, p.9



maintained his position in it in 2011. And yet the American can not have been happy with the following twelve months, especially after his success in Wijk aan Zee. And that was also the view of his “critical travelling companion” Vladimir Kramnik as expressed in an interview for *New in Chess*.<sup>5</sup> And the ex-world champion suggests from his point of view a possible cause for it:

“In Wijk aan Zee he was showing very good chess and it seemed to me that he was really getting to the top-five. Maybe I am wrong, but it seems to me that he and Garry were just not the right match. Chess-wise Garry gave him a lot, of course...”

Besides all the positive things which Garry can give on the chess board, it was probably not working on a human level. This sometimes happens. And you could see, after they broke up Hikaru started to do better immediately (laughs). That sounds like a joke, but it’s true.”

Nakamura’s own conclusion about the year 2011 which was decisively marked by his cooperation with Garry Kasparov, is also instructive:

“I feel that many of my decisions this year have been wrong. Not playing the US Championship on his advice, not playing the FIDE World Cup, also a mistake.”<sup>6</sup>

In the long run, as far as the conflict with his “over-powerful” teacher is concerned, the following aspect is particularly important:

“One thing with Garry, and I think it is due in a large part to his Soviet training, he’ll

never quite understand that you have to be able to criticize constructively. When you have someone who is always on your case and it’s never good enough no matter how you win a game, it just brings you down, you lose confidence. And as a chess player you have to be confident, you have to believe in yourself.”<sup>7</sup>

As far as not taking part in the World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk in western Siberia is concerned, that was quite certainly the biggest mistake on the way to the chess crown. After all, at the knockout spectacular from 28<sup>th</sup> August to 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011 with 128 participants, there were at stake three places in the Candidates Tournament, which is due to take place in March 2013. The two Russians Peter Svidler and Alexander Grischuk and veteran player Vassily Ivanchuk seized this opportunity, whereas Gata Kamsky, the best American, was eliminated in the last sixteen.

As for the way the World Cup was played, Nakamura already found it problematic earlier. “Firstly a match of only two games does not necessarily show who the better player is; anybody can be lucky in one game. Then in the second game there is a whole heap of pressure on whoever lost the first one. I remember that Anand once lost his first game against a 2300 player.”<sup>8</sup> Of course he won the second game with Black, but the pressure which is put on you in this situation is very strong. It is very, very difficult to win the second encounter after you have lost the first one. The players

<sup>5</sup> *New in Chess* 1/2012, pp.38/39

<sup>6</sup> *New in Chess* 1/2012, p.18

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> It was in the 1st round of the Knockout World Championship 2001 against Olivier Touzane (Elo 2368); in the rapid tie-break Anand went on to win 1½-½.

make it into the tie-breaks, but then it is all about blitzkrieg and rapid fire, and about who manages to blunder and who does not blunder. That is simply not good for the quality of the chess. Quality, I think, is more important than quantity.<sup>9</sup>

Hikaru himself suffered this painful experience in November 2005 in round 1 against the Indian player Surya Shekhar Ganguly. After a defeat in the first game he was forced to risk everything – and he lost a second time.

To be sure, two back doors were open for Nakamura when he decided against the “lottery” of the World Cup. Places 1 to 3 in the FIDE world rating list on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 would also have secured qualification. However, that would only have been possible with outstanding tournament victories in the Grand Slam finals, the Tal Memorial, the London Chess Classic and last but not least probably in Reggio Emilia too.

The second option lay in the hands of his sponsor Rex Sinquefeld. He would have had to make efforts to have the Candidates Tournament staged in Saint Louis, which of course would not have been cheap. Whoever hosts this high-level tournament has at his disposal a wildcard entry for a local grandmaster with an Elo rating of at least 2700.

We are not aware why Rex Sinquefeld, who along with his wife Jeanne founded the Chess Club and the Scholastic Center in Saint Louis and sponsors both establishments, did not become active in this case. It might well be that the breakdown of the

cooperation between Hikaru and Garry Kasparov put him off the idea of taking on such a financial risk, since what counts above all for an American businessman is success. It seemed rather unlikely that at that point in time Nakamura could have guaranteed emerging from the Candidates Tournament as victor and thus earning the right to challenge the old and new world champion Viswanathan Anand. And finally FIDE's decision in such a tendering process is also not easy to calculate. In the past the highest bidder has not always seen his offer accepted.

Well, in any case Nakamura passionately tried all he could in the aforementioned super-tournaments to achieve the impossible through his own efforts – but in vain. It might have been expected that he would programme in a break after the tournament victory in Wijk aan Zee. The final staging of the Melody Amber in Monaco in March with blindfold and rapid chess, (won by Levon Aronian), was for Hikaru, like all the top players, more of a great chess spectacle, in which he would certainly have aimed for more than 10½ points from 22 games (blindfold 5, rapid chess 5½) and 6<sup>th</sup> place.

Nakamura probably kept a distant eye on the candidates matches for the world championship in Kazan, which in May produced the unexpected victor Boris Gelfand. And he will have also noticed that the World Championship challenger was already over 40. Born in Belorussia (in 1968), he emigrated to Israel in 1998 and is known both for his extraordinarily good chess and also mental and physical prepa-

<sup>9</sup> See interview in *Chess Chronicle*, December 2005



ration. And he also has that sound self-confidence which is indispensable for top performances, not only in chess.

Nakamura, who in the same month was gaining match experience in Saint Louis in a duel with Ruslan Ponomarev, which he won 3½-2½, was understandably eager to finally confirm the brilliance of his performance in Wijk aan Zee. And in June (11<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>) he had his first real opportunity to do so in the Kings Tournament in Bazna in Romania. With Magnus Carlsen, Sergei Karjakin, Teimour Radjabov and Vassily Ivanchuk as well as the top local player Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu, this double round-robin event reached FIDE Category XXI (Elo average 2757). However, his result of 4½/10 (+1 =7 -2) was sobering for the current No.8 in the world ranking list, especially the ease with which his “nemesis” Carlsen once more defeated him. “Making the difficult look easy is one of the marks of genius!”, was what preceded the comments on the game in *SCHACH*.<sup>10</sup>

After suffering his second defeat in the final round at the hands of Ivanchuk, the frustrated American wrote on *Twitter*: “I managed to turn a mediocre result into a complete disaster with a few well-timed blunders. The time has come to concentrate on the World Series of Poker”, was the quote Leontxo García took up in his report for *SCHACH*.<sup>11</sup>

Whether Hikaru actually wandered off into the camp of the poker players for a short time has never been made clear, although Kelsey Whipple reported that early in July 2011 he is supposed to have

taken part in the opening round of the World Series of Poker under his first Christian name of Chris.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it could perhaps be true that after his unexpected collapse in Bazna he decided to give the World Cup a miss. In any case, apart from Carlsen, who as No.1 in the world ranking list did not have to worry about his place in the next Candidates Tournament, the other four rivals were there among the 128, and Ivanchuk secured the third qualifying place in the match for third place against Ruslan Ponomarev with a score of 2½-1½.

The organisers of the 39<sup>th</sup> Dortmund Sparkassen Chess Meeting will of course have welcomed the American’s withdrawal from the World Cup. Thus in July, in addition to their regular guest Vladimir Kramnik, who celebrated his tenth victory on the stage of the theatre, they would be able to engage a real “chess samurai”, whose play is characterised by fight and risk. Once more the result 4½/10 (+2 =5 -3 and second last place) must have been a sobering one. And things could have even been relatively worse, had not ex-world champion Kramnik, on his “home” ground, made a surprising knight sacrifice in the last round, which looked very promising from a practical point of view. But since tournament victory was already secured, in playing to the gallery the Russian over-estimated his position and lost this really entertaining game.

It was clear to Hikaru that his adventure in Dortmund would not be without its consequences on the world rating list – a

<sup>10</sup> See *SCHACH* 7/2011, p.46

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.48

<sup>12</sup> *Riverfront Times*, Saint Louis, issue of 21st July 2011.

plunge to 12<sup>th</sup> place with an Elo rating of 2753, which would make the leap to 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the remaining top tournaments all but impossible.

Well, the Grand Slam final in São Paulo and Bilbao (26<sup>th</sup> September to 11<sup>th</sup> October) with its 3<sup>rd</sup> place behind Carlsen and Ivanchuk was something along the lines of a rehabilitation – in particular, the win against Levon Aronian and the two draws with Magnus Carlsen must have been greeted with some joy by Hikaru, but 5/10 (+2 =6 –2) meant only a relative improvement.

And the next collapse came immediately after that in November in Moscow at the 6<sup>th</sup> Tal Memorial: 10<sup>th</sup> place, in other words last, with 3/9 including three defeats (Carlsen, Ivanchuk, Svidler) and not a single win. Even the most pessimistic would never have expected that things would get so bad. Out of the ten decisive games, Hikaru was involved in three of them and in the negative sense.

In this connection, Vladimir Barsky, who among other things was Alexander Morozovich's second, drew some interesting conclusions in his report for *SCHACH*: "Only rarely was a win the result of one of the players logically and mercilessly outplaying another. Generally speaking, it was more a case of the loser over-estimating his chances because he too was striving for victory and opened himself up in the heat of battle and overlooked a powerful blow. This also makes it clear that psychological stability is becoming increasingly important in modern chess. Who can sit his

opponent out? Who can take more pressure? Who keeps a clear head at the decisive moment? These are the factors that are becoming ever more important!"<sup>13</sup>

In top-level sport, mental trainers have long since ceased to be the exception. As described by Thomas Baschab, who is one of the most consulted experts in Germany and whose help is used in particular by Bundesliga football professionals, their task consists of being active in many areas: "The basic condition is the attitude. How does the person consider the sport? How hard-working is he? How disciplined? How self-critical? Those who have failings there have no hope of making a career."<sup>14</sup>

"Enormous talents can fail because during the good times they let things slip", according to Baschab, whose theory is: "Mental training is one of many components needed by sportsmen and women, in addition to talent, strength, training and motivation."

In this respect the 3<sup>rd</sup> London Chess Classic in December with its +3 result was certainly a positive turn of events for Nakamura and a clear warning along the lines of: "folks, you'll have to reckon with me again!" However, the reason for his second place behind Kramnik, but ahead of Carlsen, was a rather fortunate win over the English player Michael Adams, who was in really bad form with his 1½/8. "In this encounter the American turned to the King's Gambit, which is a rare guest in tournaments of this category. This choice strengthened the impression made in his game against Anand. However, it should

<sup>13</sup> *SCHACH* 1/2012, p.45

<sup>14</sup> *Sportmagazin kicker*, 30/2012, pp.76/77



not be overlooked that Nakamura has suffered a relapse and has once again become the 'chess street fighter' he preferred to be before the start of his cooperation with Kasparov", according to *SCHACH* reporter Dirk Poldauf.<sup>15</sup>

And unfortunately this "fighting chess" was also continued in Reggio Emilia in Italy. When half-way through Nakamura reached 4/5, and then also won against the Russian Nikita Vitiugov and drew with Fabiano Caruana, he began to stake everything in the following three games – and the result was a series of three unnecessary defeats, such as the following one against Alexander Morozevich, who is once again back among the world elite after a lengthy creative pause.

## GAME 35

**H. Nakamura – A. Morozevich**

54<sup>th</sup> Torneo di Capodanno,

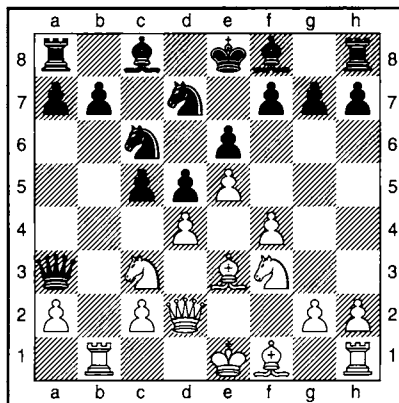
Reggio Emilia 2012

*French Defence [C11]*

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6.♙f3 ♚b6 7.♙e3 ♘c6 8.♚d2?!**

Whoever plays this pawn sacrifice needs to know exactly what he is doing, especially against an opponent of the calibre of Morozevich. This made Hikaru's choice here very dubious, as will become clear. The main variation here is 8.♘a4.

**8...♚xb2 9.♙b1 ♚a3**



### 10.f5?

This opening up of the position backfires, because it is not possible to make rapid enough use of White's lead in development. Moreover, it is not clear whether White can even still hope for sufficient compensation. For example, after 10.♘b5 ♚xa2 11.♙c1 in Ragger – Andreikin, Gaziantep 2008, Black coolly played 11...♙b8, when White can prevent him from castling with 12.♘c7+ ♘d8 13.♘b5, but is nevertheless two pawns behind.

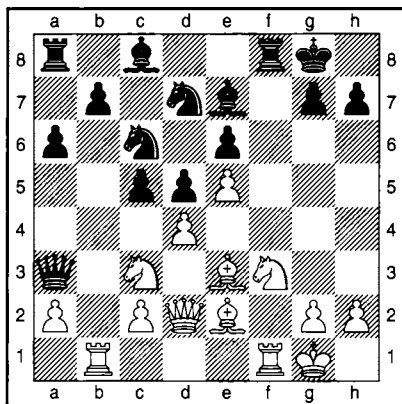
The most usual move at this point is 10.♙e2, but after 10...a6 11.0–0 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♙xd4 ♙c5 14.♙h1 ♙xd4 15.♚xd4 ♚c5 Black can feel happy. 10.♙b3 gave the German team an important victory on their way to winning the European Team Championship: 10...♚a5 11.dxc5?! a6 12.♙e2 ♙xc5 13.f5? ♙xe3 14.♙xe3 ♘c5 15.♙b5 axb5 16.♚xc5 ♚a3+, and later 0–1 in Rombaldoni–Buhmann, Porto Carras 2011.

### 10...a6 11.fxex6?!

White reveals his cards too soon and limits his options. 11.♙e2 ♙e7 12.0–0 offered somewhat more compensation, but in the long run it should not be enough.

<sup>15</sup> *SCHACH* 1/2012, p.31

12.♙e2 ♘e7 13.0-0 0-0



Black has consolidated well and is simply a pawn up. So "Moro" has no problems, despite his bad French bishop and the associated lag in development.

14.♙h1 cxd4 15.♘xd4?!

15.♙xd4 is the lesser evil, but there is also no doubting Black's advantage.

15...♘dxе5 16.♖b3 ♜xf1+ 17.♙xf1 ♚d6  
 18.♘xc6 ♘xc6 19.♘a4 b5 20.♘b6 ♜b8  
 21.♙f4 e5 22.♘xc8 ♜xc8 23.♙g3 ♚e6  
 24.♖b1 e4 25.a4 bxa4 26.♙xa6 ♜f8 27.c3  
 a3 28.♙e2 ♙d6 29.♙h4 ♜b8 30.♖xb8+  
 ♙xb8 31.♚a2 ♚d6 32.♙g3 ♚c5

**White resigned.**

And against the young star Anish Giri, who made a classic bad start with 1/4 but then took himself in hand and finished by catapulting himself into first place, he got an unpleasant surprise with White.

## GAME 36

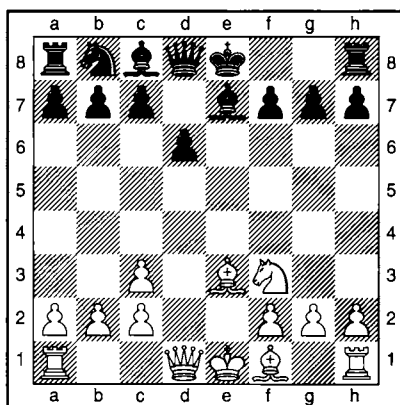
**H. Nakamura – A. Giri**

54<sup>th</sup> Torneo di Capodanno,

Reggio Emilia 2012

*Petroff Defence [C42]*

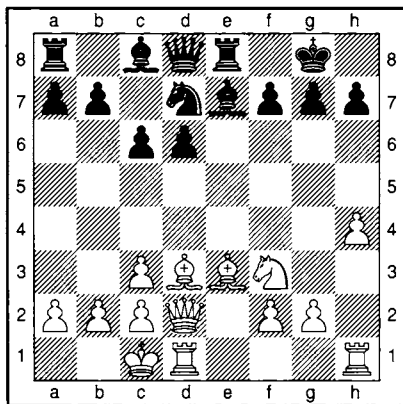
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4  
 5.♘c3 ♘xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3



7...♘d7!?

"Till this game I almost exclusively went for long castling (after ...♘c6). In fact there are two types of Petroff players, ones that castle short and others that castle long. While big guys like Kramnik and Gelfand belong to the first category, I previously belonged to the second, accompanied by Chinese experts, Wang Yue and Li Chao. Usually my 'team' made draws after some suffering and Kramnik with Gelfand were having more exciting times, but occasionally got mated. After having carefully checked that Black is not getting mated (at least not by force), I decided to try to play with fire as well", according to Anish Giri in *CBM 146*.

8.♚d2 0-0 9.0-0-0 c6 10.h4 ♜e8 11.♙d3



### 11...d5!?

"A new move and a new idea. Previously Black has played ...♖a5 and ...♗f6, both of them were played by none less than Kramnik, but after both of them, Black didn't fully solve his problems it seemed to me. I decided to wait with deciding where to put my knight, as besides f6 it has an interesting career on c5 as well as on f8." (Giri)

### 12.♗g5?!

"Hikaru decided that there is no difference and that he can mate me by the usual scheme. Obviously now I use the flexibility of my knight " (Giri)

**12...♗f8! 13.h5 ♕f6 14.♗f3 ♕g4 15.♖de1 ♕xf3 16.gxf3**

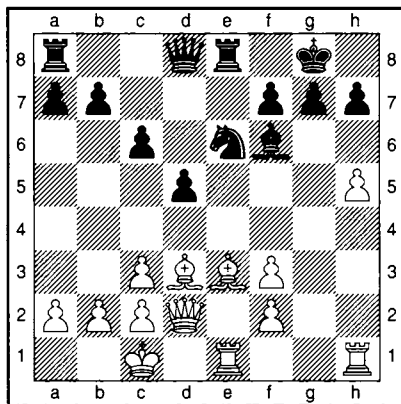
Hikaru offered a draw, thereby admitting that the opening had not gone perfectly.

**16...♗e6**

(see next diagram)

### 17.f4?!

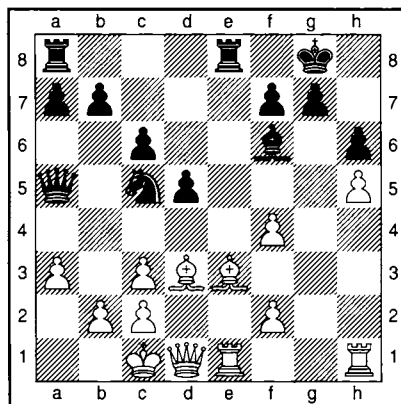
"A very ugly move to me, played with a visible confidence. Hikaru was probably trying to regain that psychological advantage that he had given me one move ago by offering a draw." (Giri)



Position after 16...♗e6

According to Giri, 17.h6 g6 18.f4, intending f5, is an improved version of Hikaru's idea, since White gets rid of his doubled pawns: 18...♗d8 19.f5 ♗c5, and the position should be level.

**17...h6! 18.a3 ♖a5 19.♗d1 ♗c5**



### 20.♕f5?!

Too optimistic. 20.♖hg1 looks more natural.

**20...♗a4 21.♖d3 ♗c5!?**

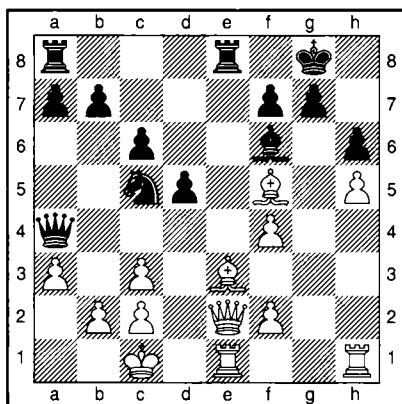
Anish Giri takes no risks, although after 21...♗xc3 22.♕d2 d4 the position is also advantageous for Black.

**22. ♖d1 ♜b5?!**

This runs into an incredible counter, whereas 22... ♖e4!, intending 23. ♖d4 ♖xd4 24. ♜xd4 ♜c7! (Giri), gives Black a slight but lasting advantage.

**23. ♜e2?!**

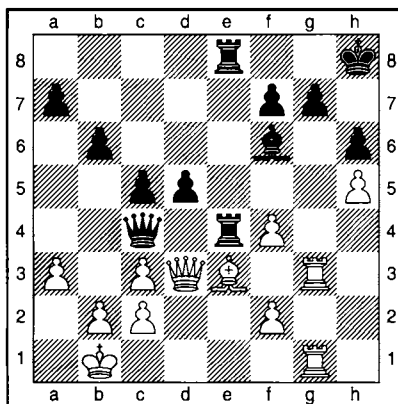
Here both players missed the brilliant 23. ♖d4!! intending 23... ♖a4? 24. b3 ♖xc3 25. ♖xf6!! ♖xd1 26. ♜eg1 ♖f8 27. ♜xg7 ♜e6 28. ♖xe6 fxe6 29. ♜hg1 and then mate (Giri).

**23... ♜a4****24. ♜d1?!**

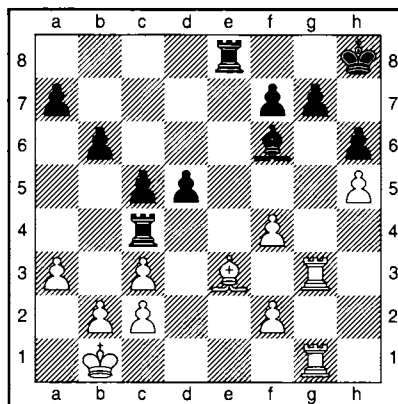
24. ♜hg1 ♖e4 25. ♜g4 – intending 25... ♖xc3?! 26. ♖d3 ♖e4 27. ♜f5 – would have been more precise, according to Giri.

24... ♖e4 25. ♖xe4 ♜xe4 26. ♜hg1 ♜ae8 27. ♜g3 ♖h8 28. ♜eg1 ♜c4 29. ♖b1 c5 30. ♜d3 b6

(see next diagram)

**31. ♜xc4?!**

The first step in the wrong direction. The immediate 31. ♖d1!? is more prudent.

**31... ♜xc4!****32. ♖d1?**

This runs straight into a very strong exchange sacrifice. 32. ♖d2 ♜ce4 33. ♖c1 was the lesser evil.

**32...d4! 33.cxd4 cxd4 34.b3 dxe3! 35.bxc4 exf2**

The passed f-pawn will decide the day, because it condemns White to passivity.

**36. ♜f3 ♜e1 37. ♖c1 ♖d4 38.c3 ♖e3+ 39. ♖c2 f5!**



Now Black is simply threatening g7–g6, creating the next passed pawn and the end draws nigh...

**40.a4 a5 41.c5 ♖xc5**

**White resigned.**

The pause to “lick his wounds” and to revive after Reggio Emilia was very short for Hikaru, who did after all finish third. The chess festival in Wijk aan Zee was calling, and the title defender was in special demand. Although this time Hikaru did not steal the show on his own, he could be quite content with his 7½/13 (+3 =9 –1), which meant 6<sup>th</sup> place, since no one was expecting him to repeat his triumph of twelve months previously. Nevertheless, his only defeat in round 2 to tournament winner Levon Aronian indicated what probably still stood between him and absolute world class.

## GAME 37

**L. Aronian – H. Nakamura**

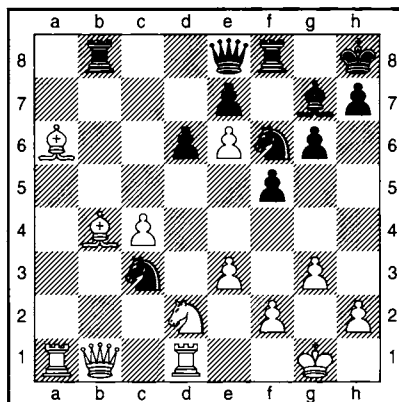
Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2012

*Dutch Defence [A88]*

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♖g2 g6 4.♗f3 ♖g7  
5.0–0 0–0 6.c4 d6 7.♗c3 c6 8.♞b3 ♔h8  
9.♞d1 ♗a6 10.♞a3 ♗c7 11.d5 c5 12.b4  
cxb4 13.♞xb4 ♗a6 14.♞b1 ♖d7 15.♗b5  
♞c8 16.♗d2 ♞b6 17.e3 ♗c5 18.a4 ♞a5  
19.♖a3 a6 20.♖b4 ♞d8 21.♗d4 ♗xa4  
22.♗e6 ♖xe6 23.dxe6 ♞e8 24.♖xb7 ♞b8  
25.♖xa6 ♗c3

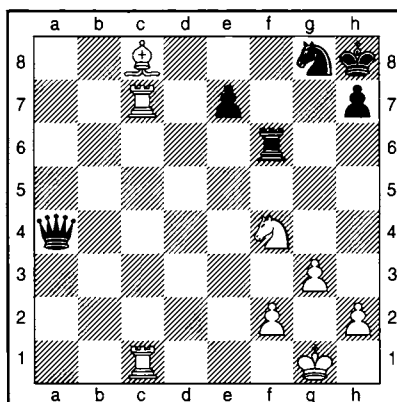
(see next diagram)



**26.♖xc3**

One can hardly believe that Nakamura could have worked out all the consequences of this far-sighted queen sacrifice by his opponent. And Aronian too must have taken an intuitive decision to go for it, reminding one of that chess magician Mikhail Tal.

26...♞xb1 27.♞dxb1 g5 28.♞b7 ♗g8  
29.♖xg7+ ♔xg7 30.♞b5 ♞g6 31.c5 dxc5  
32.♞xc5 ♞xe6 33.♗f3 ♞d6 34.♗d4 ♔h8  
35.♞c6 ♞d7 36.♞ac1 f4 37.♖c8 ♞a7  
38.♗e6 ♖f6 39.exf4 gxf4 40.♞c7 ♞a4  
41.♗xf4



Aronian's army is cooperating well. When-

ever a queen has to fight against a lot of pieces, what is important is whether or not it has targets.

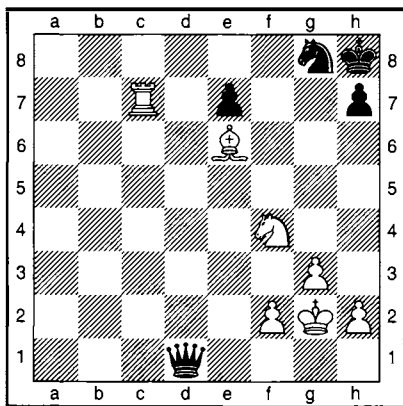
#### 41...♖d6!?

Nakamura must exchange pieces, in order to reduce the strength of Aronian's forces and create targets for his queen. In my opinion, Baburin's suggestion of 41...♖xf4?! 42.gxf4 ♖xf4 is too radical. The queen may gain more options, but in the long run the cost is too high since the white rooks will obtain possibilities after 43.♙b7 ♖f6 44.h3 (Karsten Müller).

#### 42.♙e6 ♖d1+!

Nakamura exchanges rooks to relieve his position. After 42...♙g7? White can avoid the exchange of rooks by 43.♙d5 and regroup under the cover of his bishop, e.g. 43...♖b4 44.h4 h6 45.h5 ♖b2 46.♙g2 ♖e5 47.♖c5 ♖f6 48.♙f3 ♖d4 49.♖c7 ♙f7 50.♖e1 ♖d7 51.♖xd7 ♖xd7 52.♖g6, and White's domination is obvious.

#### 43.♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 44.♙g2



#### 44...♖f6

44...♙g7 was the alternative. Black can probably hold on, e.g. 45.♙d5 (45.♙xg8 ♙xg8 46.♖xe7 is interesting; the advan-

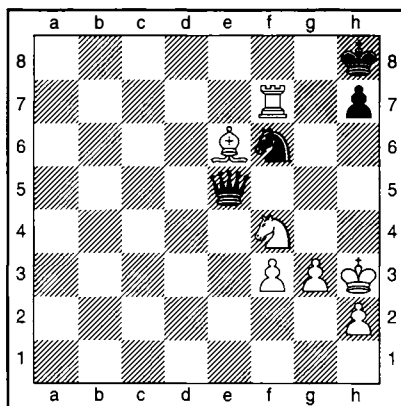
tage of the pawn sacrifice is that White no longer has a real attack and the black queen can now act with all the freedom of a fish in water) 45...♖e1 46.♖e6+ ♙g6, but in both cases Black is still faced with an unpleasant and tedious defence.

#### 45.♖xe7 ♖e1 46.♖f7 ♖e4+ 47.f3 ♖d4

47...♖e5!?, in order to meet 48.♙h3?! with 48...♖h5! and thus reduce the pressure by the exchange of knights, was suggested by Baburin in *Chess Today* 4086.

#### 48.♙h3 ♖e5?

48...♖b2 49.♙c4 ♖c3 50.♙d3 ♙g8 was Hikaru's last real chance to put up any serious resistance.



#### 49.♙h4!

The white king joins the attack with decisive effect.

#### 49...♖d4 50.♙g4!

But not 50.♙g5? on account of 50...♖g8!.

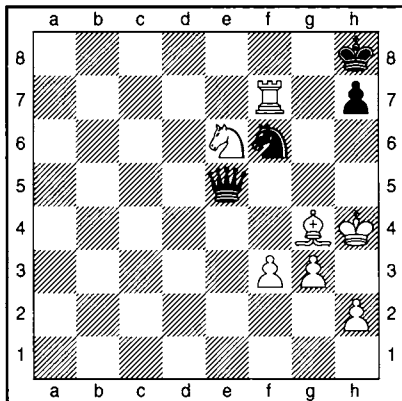
#### 50...♖e5

50...♖d6 does not help in the long run either, e.g. 51.♙f5 ♖d5 52.♖e6 ♖e7 53.♙h5 h6 54.♙g4 ♙g8 55.♖f8+ ♙h7 56.f4 ♖d5+ 57.f5 ♖c6 58.♖f7+ ♙g8 59.♖g7+ ♙h8 60.♖g6. On the other hand,



50...♖xg4? loses immediately on account of 51.♚f8+ ♜g7 52.♜e6+

51.♜e6!



The knight is like a keystone in a lovely piece of architecture. It closes the ring of white pieces and Nakamura can simply do nothing against it.

51...h6

51...h5 is refuted by 52.♜f4 ♜g8 53.♜e6 ♜xe6 54.♜xe6 ♜xf7 55.♜f4+ and 51...♜xg4?? by 52.♚f8 mate.

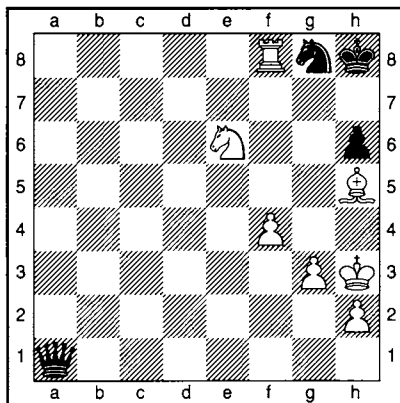
52.♚f8+ ♜g8

52...♜h7? fails to 53.f4 (Baburin) 53...♜c3?! 54.♜f5 mate.

53.f4 ♜b2 54.♜h3 ♜a1?!

54...♜b5 is more tenacious but also not sufficient, e.g. 55.f5 h5 56.♜xh5 ♜h7 57.♜h4 ♜b4+ 58.♜g4 Nh6 59.h3 ♜b1 60.♚f6 ♜xg4 61.♜xg4 ♜d3 62.♜g5+ ♜g7 63.♚f7+ ♜g8 64.♜h4, and Black can resign.

55.♜h5!



Aronian closes the last mesh of a finely woven net. The game is over.

55...♜h7 56.♚f7+ ♜h8 57.♜g6 ♜f6 58.♚f8+ ♜g8 59.♜f7

59...♜h7 is now met by 60.♚xg8 ♜f1+ 61.♜h4, and nothing works any more!

**Black resigned.**

2012 could be a really decisive year in the chess career of Hikaru Nakamura. And not only because he will be the oldest of the “young stars”. Yes, he can still step out of the shadow of Robert James Fischer and one day become world champion, which is his declared goal as he self-assuredly admits: “Absolutely! Yes! Why else should someone with an Elo of over 2700 be playing chess?”, was his reply to the Italian journalist Janis Nissi in August 2010 in Amsterdam, when she asked about his ambitions.<sup>16</sup> As far as this challenge is concerned, nothing has changed for Hikaru Nakamura since then – quite the contrary.

Well, time will tell whether the sky will in fact be reached...

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from *SCHACH* 10/2010, pp.14/15

## Chapter 8

# Wijk aan Zee

**Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 9**

In 1947 Wolfgang Borchert, the most admonitory and perhaps the most authentic voice of the young post-war German writers, published a volume of nineteen short stories under the title of “An diesem Dienstag” (“This Tuesday”). There are two Tuesdays during the tournament in Wijk aan Zee and the ninth round is to be played on this one, the last one in January, after which the state of the leader board should become clear.

Among the top players, Kramnik defeats L'Ami and Aronian beats Shirov, whilst Carlsen cannot manage more than a draw against the hitherto undefeated Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and he appears to be almost out of the running. But of course everyone's eyes are mainly on the encounter between the top two on the leader board, who have drawn strength from their second rest day. The question is: will things be decided in advance today in the game between Hikaru Nakamura and Viswanathan Anand? The 41-year-old Indian world champion clearly has experience in his favour, and it makes hardly any difference to him which colour he has, because no other world-class player is better able than he is to prepare for any opponent. His lightning start with 4/5 has been specific proof that the “Madras tiger” is in excellent form. And, after all, the *Dorpshuis de Moriaan* is practically his own chess “living room”. No one has won the Hoogovens/Corus/Tata-Steel chess tournament as often as “Vishy”: five victories (three of them shared), and 70 successive games without defeat. In this connection, it must be mentioned that Anand was among the winners (together with Predrag Nikolic, Zoltan Ribli and Gyula Sax) on his very first appearance. But what weight should be accorded nowadays to records from the past, when there is a new generation of players?

The managers of Tata Steel appreciate the sporting successes of their compatriot, but that is another story. However, the main thing for young players is that this extremely high-level event should continue to appear in the annual calendar. How seriously the biggest Indian conglomerate (they also own, for example, Air India) is committed to Wijk aan Zee can be seen from their guarantee that it will continue until 2013. However, for the fifth biggest steel producer in the world, the annual cost of running the tournament with its Open and three top-class groups of 14 players each, with appearance money, prize fund and running expenses, comes to an estimated half a million euros. But one might think that it is money well spent in Europe as a logical marketing exercise, especially since it gives them certain rights when it comes to inviting participants. Thus in the 74<sup>th</sup> event, the victor of the B group, Pentala Harikrishna, is also from India, as are three starters in the C



group. Such super-tournaments are quite impossible without heavyweight sponsors, as can be seen from the examples of Linares and also Mainz, which may have possibly disappeared for ever.

But let us now turn to this fantastic pairing on this final Tuesday in January...

## GAME 38

**H. Nakamura – V. Anand**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Queen's Indian Defence [E13]*

### *The art of defence*

As for the sub-heading: there was probably no player in the whole history of chess who was such a perfect master of the art of defence as Tigran Petrosian. In his best years each of his defeats was hailed as a sensation. "For this truly legendary impregnability he was nicknamed 'iron Tigran', although on account of his very distinctive 'passive' style it was hard to associate his name with the proud conquerors of the chess throne",<sup>1</sup> was the description of the ninth world champion by Garry Kasparov. "Meanwhile, Petrosian had a complete mastery of the art of creating harmonious positions, full of life, where behind the apparent absence of dynamics was concealed a colossal internal energy (the slightest changes being immediately taken into account in the general strategy, which was not always understandable to the opponent)."<sup>2</sup>

Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian (1929–1984) had this to say about his way of playing

chess: "Yes, perhaps I like defending more than attacking, but who has demonstrated that defence is a less risky and dangerous occupation than attack? And are there so few games that have found their way into the treasury of chess thanks to virtuoso defence? What I value more than anything in chess is logic. I am firmly convinced that in chess there is nothing accidental. This is my credo. I believe only in logical, 'correct' play."<sup>3</sup>

As you will see, for a long time the young American is well and truly under pressure in his key game against the favourite – although it would be going too far to say that he had his back against the wall. But in this situation he shows that he is almost a "student of Petrosian". And so he manages to work his way out of the difficult situation, because he is a master of the "art of defence".

**1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♗f3 b6 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙h4 g5 7.♙g3 ♗e4 8.♚c2 ♙b7 9.e3 d6 10.♙d3 ♙xc3+ 11.bxc3 f5 12.d5**

Nakamura immediately takes the bull by the horns, as otherwise the superior black structure will be decisive in the long term.

**12...♗a6 13.h4?!**

A rather questionable novelty and the cause of White's forthcoming difficulties, since he does not have time for such activity on the kingside. After 13.♙xe4 fxe4 14.♚xe4 ♚f6 Black had enough compensation in Wang Yue–Adams, Baku 2008, and so White really has to go for the main variation 13.♗d4 ♗ac5. In any case the world champion was certainly unimpressed by Nakamura's experiment.

<sup>1-3</sup> Garry Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors Part III*, Everyman 2004, p.7.

13...♖f6! 14.♙xe4 fxe4 15.♗xe4 ♜xc3+ 16.♙e2 ♜c5 17.♗g6+ ♙e7!

The black king is absolutely safe – unlike the white one.

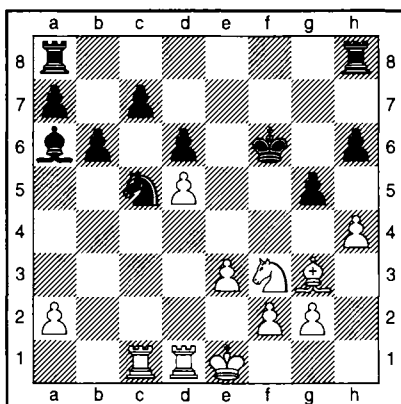
18.♖ac1

But not 18.hxg5?, since after 18...♗xc4+ 19.♙d1 ♗xd5+ 20.♙e1 ♖ag8 21.♗f6+ ♙e8 22.gxh6 ♜e4 23.♗b2 ♗a5+ 24.♙e2 ♖h7 Black already has a clear advantage.

18...♗f6 19.♗xf6+ ♙xf6 20.♖hd1 exd5

Anand opens both the attacking diagonal a6–f1 and the c-file. 20...♖ae8!? 21.dxe6 ♜xe6 was the alternative.

21.cxd5 ♙a6+ 22.♙e1



22...♖ae8

After 22...♜d3+!? 23.♖xd3 ♙xd3 24.♖xc7 White is very active, only a few pawns are left as winning potential, and the “dead” bishop on g3 has been resuscitated. Nevertheless, after 24...♖hd8 Black has practical winning chances. The prophylactic 22...♖h7 was also well worth considering.

23.♖c3 ♖e4 24.♖d4 ♖he8

After 24...♖xd4 25.exd4 ♖e8+ White should manage to defend successfully with 26.♙e5+ ♙g6 27.dxc5 g4 28.♖e3 gxf3 29.♙h2 ♖xe3+ 30.fxe3 fxe3 31.cxd6 cxd6

32.♙f2, since an advantage for Anand is no longer apparent. But the immediate 24...♙f5!? deserved serious consideration.

25.♖a3 ♙c8?!

After this the play totally peters out. After 25...♙f5, on the other hand, the world champion could still have exerted some pressure.

26.hxg5+ hxg5 27.♖xa7 ♖8e7 28.♙f1 ♙g4 29.♜d2 ♖xd4

29...♙e2+?! is parried by 30.♙g1.

30.exd4 ♜d3 31.f3 ♙f5 32.a3 ♜f4 33.♙xf4 gxf4

33...♙d3+ 34.♙f2 ♖e2+ 35.♙g1 gxf4 36.♜e4+ is a vain attempt to win.

34.♜e4+!

Now White secures the liquidation to a rook ending and finally a draw.

34...♙xe4 35.fxe4 ♖xe4 36.♖xc7 ♖xd4 37.♖c6 ♙e5 38.♖xb6 ♖d1+ 39.♙e2 ♖a1 40.♖b3 ♙xd5 41.g3

**Draw agreed on White's proposal.**

And now let us give the word to the protagonists, who on the homepage of the Tata Steel Tournament expressed themselves as follows:

“I was clearly better after the opening,” said Anand, who quickly transposed into an endgame while maintaining his advantage. “And it was clearly very unpleasant for White because his bishop was much worse than mine. At the same time, however, I had to do something pretty fast because such an advantage clearly doesn’t last forever. But, although I had a feeling I was close, I couldn’t find anything. Still, a draw is not a bad result, considering I had Black.”

Nakamura’s comment echoed Anand’s. “I think I was a little bit worse out of the opening. It wasn’t the sort of game I wanted



to play at all but, fortunately, Vishy was unable to come up with anything concrete. I must admit it wasn't my most exciting game of the tournament but I'm pretty happy I drew and didn't lose again."

The results of this ninth round left four players at the top – Nakamura, Anand, Kramnik and Aronian – with six points each. So, with four rounds still to play nothing had yet been decided...

### Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 10

It can be said that up to round 10 the main surprise of this tournament has been the French player Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (born 1990), who recently has been powerfully pushing up into the world elite. Just one month older than the comet-like Magnus Carlsen, he was even more successful as a junior. Thus in 2009 in Porto Madryn he became junior world champion, after six and eight years previously being runner-up in the Under-14 and third in the Under-12 championships in Oropesa del Mar in Spain, when he emphatically made the world aware of his talent. Also his increase in performance as mirrored in his Elo development is impressive. In October 2000 he first entered the FIDE lists with a rating of 2186. In April 2005 he broke through the 2500 barrier (2525) and at the age of 14 years and four months he gained the grandmaster title. Other noteworthy stations in his ascension are October 2007, when he reached 2634 Elo points and exactly twelve months later, when he leapt over the final hurdle to stand at 2716. The fact that at this very highest of all levels he has not made any more leaps in performance must certainly be only a temporary business. Everything comes in good time...

As for his encounter with Hikaru Nakamura, in this case it was a portentous one. At the first great tournament victory of the American in San Sebastián in July 2009 he was also a participant, and their Elo scores of 2710 compared to 2703 were on much the same level. Maxime lost a Sicilian, but since then there has not been a serious game between them. In any case their Elo ratings have not drifted too far apart in that time with 2751 to 2710. So Maxime has a good chance, especially since up till now he has shown that he can keep up with the big boys and is so far undefeated. He will finish on a shared 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> place with ex-world champion Vladimir Kramnik with three wins and only one loss.

## GAME 39

**H. Nakamura – M. Vachier-Lagrave**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Grünfeld Defence [D87]*

***The knight opens the way***

Which opening should one choose with White against a renowned expert on the

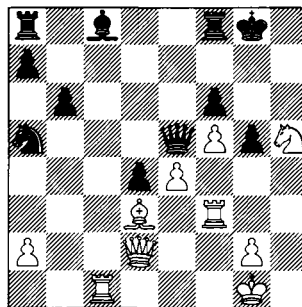
Grünfeld Defence? Well, Nakamura decides on a direct challenge, which above all means preparatory work for his second Kris Littlejohn. An important clue in the considerations of how to make an impression on Maxime, who has been playing for Mülheim Nord 1931 in the German Bundesliga since 2007/08, is the game Gelfand–Kamsky from Bazna 2009. In it White decided on 13. ♖g5!? and was slightly better after 13... ♟d7 14. ♖h6 ♜xh6?!

15. ♖xh6 f6 16. f4 ♖g7 17. ♖h4. A further argument for this principled choice of opening is that Vachier-Lagrave played exactly that variation up till the twelfth move in round 4 against Shirov, and so it would be the American who would choose the moment to spring a surprise. A tournament game is not like in a match, where there is usually a continual discussion of opening ideas. Remember, for example, the important role played by the Seville Variation of the Grünfeld Defence in the 1987 World Championship match between Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov after the moves 1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♖c3 d5 4. cxd5 ♖xd5 5. e4 ♖xc3 6. bxc3 ♖g7 7. ♖c4 c5 8. ♖e2 ♖c6 9. ♖e3 0–0 10. 0–0 ♖g4 11. f3 ♖a5 12. ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 13. fxc4 ♖xf1+ 14. ♖xf1 ♖d6, in which Karpov twice tried the pawn advance 15. e5 (5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> games), before changing in the 11<sup>th</sup> game to 15. ♖g1; to this day both of these are still the main moves. **1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♖c3 d5 4. cxd5 ♖xd5 5. e4 ♖xc3 6. bxc3 ♖g7 7. ♖c4 c5 8. ♖e2 ♖c6 9. ♖e3 0–0 10. 0–0 ♖g4 11. ♖d3 b6 12. ♖d2 e5 13. ♖g5!?**

A clever “move” in both senses of the word, Vachier-Lagrave is taken away from the plan which had worked so well against Shirov in round 4: 13. ♖h6 cxd4 14. cxd4. Here 14. ♖xg7 would have followed in the footsteps of the famous 1<sup>st</sup> game of the World Championship match between challenger Topalov and title defender Anand: 14... ♖xg7 15. cxd4 exd4 16. ♖ac1 ♖d6 17. f4 f6 18. f5 ♖e5 19. ♖f4 g5 20. ♖h5+ ♖g8 21. h4 h6 22. hxcg5 hxcg5 23. ♖f3

(see next diagram)

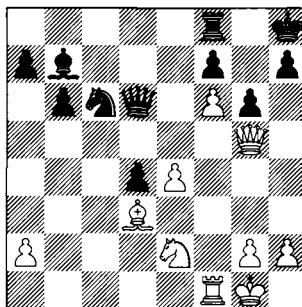
23... ♖f7? Anand mixes up the move order from his preparation (the correct way is



Position after 23. ♖f3

23... ♖d7). 24. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 25. ♖h3 ♖g8 26. ♖h6+ ♖f7 27. ♖h7+ ♖e8 28. ♖cc7 ♖d8 29. ♖b5 ♖xe4 30. ♖xc8+ 1–0 Topalov–Anand, Sofia 2010. What is interesting is “Vishy” Anand’s self-critical remark that in his preparation he had “senselessly wasted three hours” trying to prove an advantage for Black. Did this have an impact on the young French player?

14... exd4 15. ♖ac1 ♖b7 16. ♖xg7 ♖xg7 17. f4 ♖c8 18. f5 ♖xc1 19. ♖xc1 ♖c6 20. f6+ ♖h8 21. ♖g5 ♖d6



22. ♖g3? (22. ♖f4 is critical, according to Vachier-Lagrave) 22... ♖g8! 23. ♖c4 ♖e5 24. ♖b3 d3 25. h3 ♖a6 26. ♖f4 d2 27. ♖h2 ♖c5 28. h4 ♖d3 29. e5 ♖xf4 30. ♖e4 ♖e6 31. ♖xe6 ♖c6 32. ♖xf7 d1 ♖ 0–1 Shirov–Vachier-Lagrave, Wijk aan Zee 2011.

**13... ♖d7 14. ♖h6 ♖b7**



If Maxime Vachier-Lagrave continues as in his game against Shirov with 14...cxd4 15.♗xg7 ♖xg7 16.cxd4 exd4 17.f4, then we can see the difference. The black queen is worse placed on d7, because it now exerts less control over the dark squares. According to Nakamura White could now swing his rook via f4 to h4, since the advanced f6-pawn is no longer being attacked by the black queen from d8. It is in fact a fine distinction and shows the meaning of specific preparation at the highest of levels. This was precisely the reason why Hikaru and Kris had also gone deeply into the Gelfand–Kamsky game and looked for possible resources!

### 15.♗xg7 ♖xg7 16.d5!

The correct way to continue with the pressure. In the game Leitao–Sutovsky from the 7<sup>th</sup> world team championships, Bursa 2010, here White played 16.f4?, which Black met energetically with 15...f5!. After that White had to hit the brakes with an exchange sacrifice and he finally saved the game by perpetual check: 17.d5 fxe4 18.♗xe4 ♖c4 19.♗d3 ♗a4 20.f5 ♖d6 21.♖g3 ♗a6 22.♗e3 ♗xf1 23.♖xf1 ♖f6 24.♖e1 ♖af8 25.fxg6 hxg6 26.h3 ♗xa2 27.♖e2 ♗c4 28.♗g5 ♖h8 29.♖f2 ♖xe4 30.♖xe4 ♖xf2 31.♗xe5+ ♗h7 32.♗e7+ ♗h6 33.♗g5+ g7 34.♗e5+ ♗h7 35.♗e7+ ♗h6 36.♗g5+ ½–½

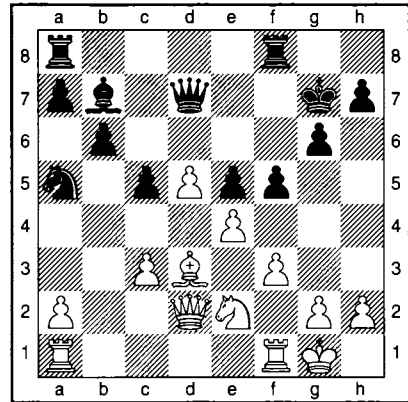
### 16...f5 17.f3

Unfortunately the capture on f5 is impossible, since after 17.exf5 ♗xd5 18.f3 c4 White loses a piece.

(see next diagram)

### 17...♖f7?

In retrospect a bad error in calculation by the French player. Black should instead shut up shop with 17...c4 18.♗c2 f4, for



Position after 17.f3

example: 19.g3 g5 20.gxf4 gxf4 21.♗h1 ♗h8 22.♖g1 ♗h3 23.♖d4! (Nakamura), and then follow the advice of IM Dirk Poldauf, who suggested 23...♖g8 with unclear play.

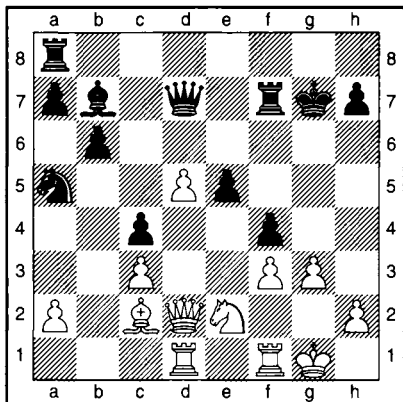
### 18.exf5 c4?

Black fails to spot Nakamura's remarkable tactical idea, linked to the capture on f5. Having his a5-knight out of play is now a big handicap. Vachier–Lagrave had actually planned 18...♗xd5 19.fxg6 ♖d7? (19...hxg6 is the lesser evil), but to his horror he now saw that after 20.♗e3 ♗xd3 21.♗xe5+ he cannot take on g6 on account of the fork on f4. But 21...♗g8 does not solve Black's problems either, as can be seen from 22.♗e6+ ♗h8 23.♖f4 ♗d6 24.g7+ ♗xg7 25.♖ad1 ♗xd1 (25...♗xe6 is no better: 26.♖xe6+ ♗f6 27.♖xd7 ♗xe6 28.♖xh7) 26.♖h5+ ♗f8 27.♗f6+ ♗g8 28.♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 29.♖f2 ♖d7 30.♗g5+ ♗f8 31.♗h6+ ♗e7 32.♗f6+ ♗e8 33.♗e6+ ♖d8 34.♖f6.

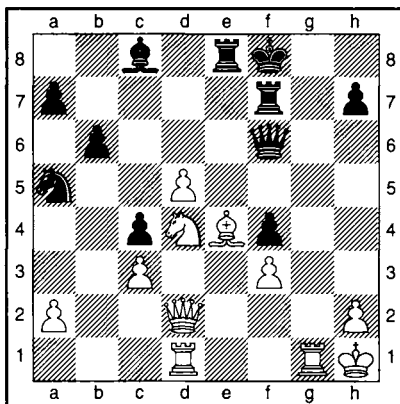
### 19.♗c2 gxf5

19...♗xd5?! is met by 20.♗g5 ♗c5+ 21.♖f2 ♗e7 22.♗g3 ♖f6 23.f4 with an advantage for White.

### 20.♖ad1 f4?! 21.g3!



d5–d6, they are not actually lightened. But the text move accelerates his downfall.



### 27. ♖e6+

The knight opens the way for the long-range pieces.

### 27... ♗xe6 28. dxe6 ♜xe6

Things look just as sad for Black after 28... ♗xe6 29. ♗d5 ♗d6 30. ♖g8+ ♗xg8 31. ♗xf7+ ♗xf7 32. ♗xd6.

### 29. ♗d5 ♗h3 30. ♗xf7 ♗xf3+ 31. ♖g2 ♗xf7 32. ♗d7+ ♗f6 33. ♗g7+

**Black resigned.**

“I’m happy to be retied for first again”, Nakamura said when asked how he rated his chances. “There are still three rounds to go and I am taking it one game at a time. But I think I’ve got good chances if I keep playing the way I did today.”

In fact after this 10<sup>th</sup> round the ever-combative American has alongside him only Viswanathan Anand, who effortlessly defeated Alexei Shirov. Lurking behind this duo, now on seven points, are Aronian and Kramnik each with 6½. Magnus Carlsen, on the other hand, has to say goodbye to his title defence, since he went down to Ian Nepomniachtchi in a high-class game. And the latter will be Hikaru’s next opponent – with White.

### 21... ♗d6?!

After this Nakamura gets a strong attack. Countering by 21... ♗h8 22. gxf4 ♗h3 23. ♗h1 ♖g8 24. ♖g1 ♗h5 25. fxe5 ♗xe5 offered better chances of fishing in troubled waters, especially as after 26. ♗d4 ♗xd4 27. ♖xd4 there is the move 27... ♗a6, intending to move the knight away from its off-side position via b7. White would have a very good ending after 21... ♖g8 22. gxf4 ♗h8+ 23. ♗h1 ♗h3 24. ♖f2 ♗h4 25. ♗e3! exf4 26. ♗d4+ ♗f6 27. ♖g2.

### 22. gxf4 exf4 23. ♗h1!

“Nakamura has outplayed his opponent: the g-file is open, the bishop is aiming at h7, and the knight and queen can invade the black position via d4. In contrast, Black’s minor pieces are wasting away and the f4-pawn is weak”, according to Dirk Poldauf, who annotated for *SCHACH* (3/2011, p.8 ff.) three of Nakamura’s six wins (against Grischuk and Vachier-Lagrave, as well as the one from round 11 against Ian Nepomniachtchi), in order to analyse the American’s style of play.

### 23... ♖e8?! 24. ♖g1+ ♗f8 25. ♗e4 ♗c8 26. ♖d4 ♗f6

It is obvious that Black is in great difficulties and after 26... ♖ee7 27. ♖b5, followed by



# The Gambler

*"When I approach the playing room and am still two rooms away,  
I almost get cramps as soon as I can hear the clinking  
of money being thrown on the table..."*

Fyodor M. Dostoevsky

It is not difficult to recognise that here the narrator is describing not the imminent thrill of a chess tournament hall, but rather the magic attraction of a roulette table in a casino, which he knew so well. In 1865 he lost his travel money at roulette in the casino in Wiesbaden. A year later, in only 26 days, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky transformed the experience of his own addiction to gambling into the novel *The Gambler*.

Of course, chess is not a game of chance; it is not luck which decides success, rather the result is decisively influenced by our ability. But which of you has never experienced that almost eerie silence during a blitz tournament, which is disturbed only by the clicks when the clocks are pressed or from time to time by the noisy placing of pieces on the boards? But no sooner has the last round finished, than this fascination loses its magic again. It is as though a light switch has been turned on in the darkness...

And yet the potential for addiction cannot be denied. "For chess players, chess servers can soon become the equivalent of

a 24-hour bar with free beer for alcoholics", wrote Roland Schmaltz in his interesting article "What you always wanted to know, but never dared to ask" about playing chess on the internet.<sup>4</sup>

This man knows what he is talking about. In any case, under his handle of "Hawkeye", he has four times become unofficial world bullet champion<sup>5</sup> and is a legend on the net. Without him Hikaru Nakamura would have missed out on a decisive impetus to his motivation, as he admitted at the age of 18 in an interview during the chess festival in Biel in 2005: "In the meanwhile I have been almost exclusively playing bullet chess. And doing so first of all to prove that I am better than your Hawkeye, in fact exclusively for that reason."<sup>6</sup>

As for the online activities of Roland Schmaltz, over the years this professional computer specialist, who started by studying economics in Mannheim, has played around 100,000 games on various chess servers. "I let my studies drop on account of internet chess. I am simply too lazy to get down to things properly and at that point I

<sup>4</sup> SCHACH 2/2004, pp.44-51.

<sup>5</sup> All the title matches were played under the knockout format over 10 games with one minute per player, and the winner in the final had to score more than 10 points. Schmaltz, who has been a grandmaster in over the board chess since 2001, won four times in succession: 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

<sup>6</sup> See SCHACH 9/2005, pp.66/67.

became a victim of the highly addictive nature of internet chess.”<sup>7</sup>

One has to be pretty strong to withstand the continual temptation to play, which is constantly kept up by the ever-present online availability 24 hours a day. Of course one-minute bullet chess can be played on proper boards, but all the cunning tricks which become possible on the internet in the hectic fight against time, where tenths of a second are important, such as “pre-moves” (moving before your opponent has replied) are then out of the question. The thrill which you knowingly seek is almost completely missing. In extreme time pressure, real chaos is unavoidable, as the pieces are moved on the board. The bits of wood often unintentionally never reach their intended squares and it is not unusual for illegal moves to slip in as well.

It is understandable that prominent chess players, in spite of their frequently warlike user names – Nakamura is registered under “Smallville” on the Internet Chess Club (ICC)<sup>8</sup> and under “Star Wars” on the *playchess.com* server<sup>9</sup> – cannot forever enjoy the desired advantage of anonymity. Thus Hikaru alias Smallville is also duly mentioned in the book published in English by Roland Schmaltz in 2004 *The Complete Chess Server Guide*: “Already has a killer chess reputation at the age of 15.”<sup>10</sup>

In the interview for this book Nakamura

states that he grew up with blitz and rapid chess and also talks about his love for bullet chess. Since in classical chess he always tries to find the best move, whereas one can no longer afford this luxury in a rapid game, he may have a problem. And so, in view of the ambition which Hikaru has to win every possible game, internet chess is increasingly becoming simply an amusement for him.

This evaluation is also shared by Martin Fischer, who is the main tournament director and principal arbiter on the *playchess* server: “The main use of bullet is that, when you fancy it, it is fun. And after all that is the reason why we play chess. I think that it is unlikely to have a positive effect on playing strength outside of bullet chess itself. Bullet is superficial chess, the continuous stress liberates adrenalin and certainly leads to potential addiction. At the same time this feeling has an influence on the capacity for thinking and the susceptibility to the charm of solving chess problems. Any effects on pattern recognition, which is scarcely a factor on account of the extremely short reaction times, are certainly secondary. Bullet is fun if you like it, no more than that. If you want to improve, you would be better spending the two minutes that a bullet game lasts on solving a combination”, he explained in answer to our question.

<sup>7</sup> Interview on <http://de.pokerstrategy.com> on 21.2.2009.

<sup>8</sup> The website of the American chess server can be found at [www.chessclub.com](http://www.chessclub.com). An actual case of addiction on the ICC, which has existed since 1995, is an anonymous player with the pseudonym “A6648”, who since 1996 has completed the incredible number of more than 558,000 games, of which 240,000 in bullet chess alone.

<sup>9</sup> On the ChessBase server (Hamburg) [www.playchess.com](http://www.playchess.com) (German name [schach.de](http://schach.de)), which went online in October 2001 there are more than 220,000 registered members. So far over 50,000 tournaments and also 600 million games have been played. (As of June 2012)

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 9 *Famous People Who Play Chess on the Internet*, p.110.



And Roland Schmaltz, who has gained so much experience as a world class internet player, had the following comment about its usefulness: “Bullet is simply the rattling off of learned structures, motifs and theory combined with rapid mouse skills.”<sup>11</sup> For him a one-minute bullet game is actually the blindman’s buff version of chess or a mouse-race, in which the regular rules are respected. “In the very last seconds of a bullet game it tends to be more important to make your move in tenths of a second rather than to find a good move.”<sup>12</sup>

In this connection there remains another feature of bullet chess which requires some more explanation. These are the so-called “pre-moves”, which are also possible in a game against a normal chess program. You already execute a move on your own board before your opponent’s answer has arrived; this is what caused Roland Schmaltz to come up with his original analogy with blindman’s buff. “Pre-moves of course contribute in a high degree to the speed, but on the other hand they are often the cause of horrible blunders. Because the move you enter in advance does not always fit in with the one your opponent plays! So you should do without pre-moves, especially in the opening.”

There is a striking example of this which actually happened in correspondence chess, of all things, with a suggested follow-up move: after 1.d4 Black played 1...g6 and offered the additional move: “On

any 2<sup>nd</sup> move, 2...♙g7.” White did not miss out on this opportunity: 2.♙h6! ♙g7 3.♙xg7 and added for his part an ironic possible follow-up, which this time worked: on any 3<sup>rd</sup> move, 4.♙xh8.”<sup>13</sup>

“Pre-moving is in any case an advantage when you have an advantage in material, because you can then simply run the game down via pre-moves and even five seconds are enough to deliver mate”, was the answer to our question to Hamburg grandmaster Niclas Huschenbeth, who plays on the *Fritz* server.

In his book *Bullet Chess – One Minute to Mate*, written by Nakamura in conjunction with FIDE Master Bruce Harper, there is even a special chapter on this subject “Pre-moving Blunders”.<sup>14</sup>

Nakamura, who according to Vugar Gashimov “is something like a god in the ICC”<sup>15</sup>, believes that in bullet chess you have to follow your instinct or your intuition.<sup>16</sup> And that is something he has done on both servers with great success over the years. On *playchess* he has played a total of 1869 bullet games, winning 1532, losing 262 and drawing 75.

One of his favourite clients was the French grandmaster Anthony Wirig, against whom he scored 131 points out of 146. Against Hawkeye Roland Schmaltz the score is 16½/27.

On the *ICC*, where between 16<sup>th</sup> October 2001 and 13<sup>th</sup> May 2011 (almost a decade

<sup>11</sup> See Footnote 4

<sup>12</sup> *SCHACH* 2/2004, p.50

<sup>13</sup> Fritz Baumbach, *52-54-STOP - Fernschach – Tips und Tricks vom Weltmeister*, Berlin 1991, p.58

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 5, pp.56-68

<sup>15</sup> See *SCHACH* 7/2008, p.24

<sup>16</sup> See exclusive interview, p.135

of active play), he played a total of 4029 bullet games (+3093 =153 –783). Nakamura's highest Elo ratings are also interesting: 3402 on *playchess* and 3168 on the *ICC*. However ratings on different servers are not really directly comparable; in each case the rating protocols are very different.

Unfortunately we cannot publish any bullet games by Hikaru Nakamura ("The Smallville phenomenon escapes normal human understanding", according to Yasser Seirawan), because there is a legal problem. You see, one must have the consent of at least one of the players, and in this case we would not consider it right to get that from the players alone. Also in the book of his which we mentioned even usernames are not given and the players are simply referred to by Elo ratings.

The authors set out "Eight golden bullet rules", which are too interesting for us to deprive you of them:<sup>17</sup>

1. Winning on time is as honorable as winning on the board.
2. Time is money.
3. Post-mortems are for losers.
4. The initiative is crucial in bullet.
5. If you're winning, don't pick a fight.
6. If you're losing, fight on!
7. When the position is balanced, play quickly and consistently.
8. Have fun.

And the two of them even have their thoughts about etiquette. Certainly the most profound is: "Since bullet is supposed to be fun, it's difficult to understand why some people get upset about it. [...] Don't get mad when you lose. Mistakes are

part of bullet - be glad you can contribute."<sup>18</sup>

As to the question they ask themselves, i.e. whether bullet is still chess, the duo of authors Nakamura & Harper reply unanimously: "Of course not!" But it is also more than mucking about or time-wasting. "It rather demands the capacity to react to changes at lightning speed and to be able to solve problems in fractions of a second", according to Roland Schmaltz, whose "Immortal game" (in his own words) we really must show you, though, as he says, "Unfortunately I was sitting on the wrong side of the board..." So that you can form an objective judgement we have deliberately added no annotations! The German's opponent was the Israeli GM Ronen Har-Zwi, whose handle in the Internet Chess Club is "Indiana-Jones". His highest *ICC* ratings were 3215 in blitz and 2947 in bullet chess (compared to Hawkeye's 3359 and 3074).

In over-the-board chess the most important success of the Israeli grandmaster was the world under-16 junior championship title in 1992 in Duisburg (ahead of Peter Svidler and Daniel Fridman).

### R. Schmaltz – R. Har-Zwi

ICC – Bullet game, 03.07.2001

*Vienna Game [C26]*

1.e4 ♘c6 2.♘c3 e5 3.g3 ♙c5 4.♙g2 ♘f6  
 5.♘ge2 d6 6.h3 ♙b6 7.0–0 0–0 8.♙h2  
 ♚e8 9.f4 exf4 10.gxf4 ♘g4+ 11.♙g3 ♘f2  
 12.♙xf2 ♚h4+ 13.♙xh4 ♙xf2+ 14.♘g3  
 ♚e6 15.♙g4 ♘d4 16.f5 ♙g6+ 17.♙f4 ♙xg3  
 18.♙f1 g5+ 19.fxg6 ♘e6+ 20.♙f5 ♘g7+

<sup>17</sup> H. Nakamura/B. Harper, *Bullet Chess – One Minute to Mate*, Chapter 20, pp.245-246.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.246



21. ♖f6 ♖xg6+ 22. ♖e7 ♖e6+ 23. ♖d8 ♖b6  
24. ♖d5 ♖e8#

As well as his passion for bullet chess, Nakamura has of course also demonstrated his extraordinary class in blitz on the internet. It is known that he made the acquaintance of his second Kris Littlejohn on the *ICC* server.<sup>19</sup> Here too Hikaru's level is gigantic: his highest Elo rating was an incredible 3750 points on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009 (the comparable value on *playchess* was 3420). Out of 15,306 rated games during his membership he won 7503, lost 6320 and had 1483 draws.

As to the question whether frequent blitz play to this extent is not harmful to playing strength, in July 2005 in an interview Hikaru frankly admitted, however: "Bullet or blitz games are good for understanding tactics, but generally speaking bad for your chess."<sup>20</sup>

And despite the reservations expressed by the then 17-year-old, it must have been attractive to play blitz not only in the *ICC*, but also on the *Fritz* server. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 and 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010 Nakamura played 5906 games.<sup>21</sup> Among them he had the upper hand against Garry Kasparov (time limit 4 minutes +1 second or 5 minutes +1 second) by 13-10. Against Michael Adams the score was 14½-7½, he led Alexander Grischuk 21-17, against Shakhriyar Mamedyarov by as much as 28½-10½,

and he had a clear lead over his compatriot Yasser Seirawan of 39½-26½. It was only against Magnus Carlsen that he drew the short straw by the close margin 10-11.

The fact that Carlsen and he play even blitz chess at the very highest level can be seen from the game chosen and annotated by Lubosh Kavalek in the prologue, namely the final of the BNbank blitz Chess in Oslo 2009<sup>22</sup>. However, Nakamura will not have such good memories of his only FIDE world championship in November 2009 in Moscow, because 4<sup>th</sup> place behind Levon Aronian, Teimour Radjabov and Magnus Carlsen may be remarkable, but it is hardly the measure of things for the uncompromising attacking player that he is. More like it was the 1<sup>st</sup> place in the 11<sup>th</sup> Dos Hermanas blitz tournament, played in March 2010 online in the Internet Chess Club with a thinking time of 3 minutes per game.<sup>23</sup> In the final Smallville (Nakamura) had a 3½-1½ victory over MEGAYARICK (GM Jaroslav Sinchenko). Our example comes from the round involving the last 32 players. YaakovN (Yaacov Norowitz), who on the *ICC* reached a highest rating of 3419 (7<sup>th</sup> May 2010) had just played 43. ♖d1 when the tactician started his irresistible mating attack.

(see next diagram)

<sup>19</sup> See Zwischenzüge "Hikaru Nakamura's second", p. 80.

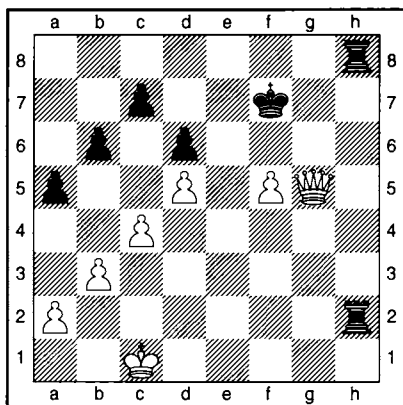
<sup>20</sup> *SCHACH* 9/2005, p. 67

<sup>21</sup> "On the ChessBase server, blitz includes all games with 180 seconds or more (3+10) and ends at 900 seconds for the whole game, that is 15 minutes", according to main tournament director Martin Fischer.

<sup>22</sup> See Prologue, Game 10, pp. 30/31

<sup>23</sup> For the report and games, see on the internet: <http://www.chessclub.com/aktivitites/doshermanas2010/>

**YaacovN** [Y. Norowitz] – **Smallville** [H. Nakamura]  
11<sup>th</sup> Dos Hermanas blitz tourn., ICC, 19.3.2010



**43...♖g8!**

The rook does a little dance before being allowed into the attack:

**44.♚e3 ♜e8! 45.♚g3 ♜ee2 46.♚g6+ ♜f8!**

**46...♜e7? 47.f6+ ♜d7 48.♚g4+ is a draw.**

**47.♚f6+ ♜e8 48.♚g6+ ♜d7**

Hikaru's king can now head for safety:

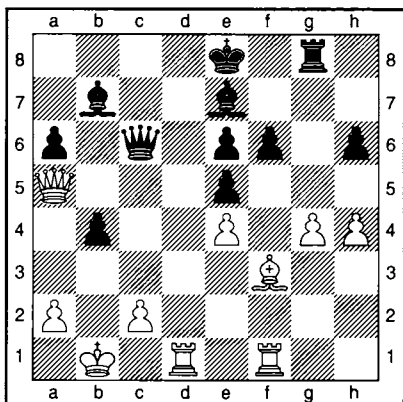
**49.♚f7+ ♜c8 50.♚g8+ ♜b7 51.♚g1 ♜xa2**

**52.♜b1 ♜hb2+ 53.♜c1 ♜a1+.**

**White resigned.**

**H. Nakamura – R. Ponomarev**

Playoff, 1<sup>st</sup> Game, San Sebastián 2009



Hikaru also showed himself to be absolutely on the ball with his tactics against Ruslan Ponomarev. It is wonderful to see how in the first of two play-off games with White he opens the floodgates – and Black is left totally exposed. In the second play-off game Nakamura was also victorious.

**32.g5! hxg5 33.♚xe5**

Very spectacular. However, **33.♜h5+ ♜f8**

**34.♚xe5 ♜g7 35.♚g3** also wins.

**33...♜f7?!**

The alternatives are **33...fxe5? 34.♜h5+ ♜g6 35.♜xg6** mate and **33...♜h8 34.♚g3 ♚c3 (34...♜xh4 35.e5 ♚c3 36.exf6 ♜xf6 37.♚b8+ ♜c8 38.♜c6+ ♚xc6 39.♜xf6, and the white tsunami can no longer be stopped) 35.hxg5 ♜xe4 36.♚g2 ♜g6 37.♜c6+ ♜f7 38.♜d7 f5 39.♜a4** with a clear advantage.

**34.♚g3 g4?! 35.♜xg4 ♚c5?!**

**35...♜g7 36.♜g1 ♜f8 37.♚f4** also loses.

**36.♜xe6+**

If **36...♜xe6**, White mates: **37.♚xg8+ ♜e5**

**38.♜f5+ ♜xe4 39.♚g4+ ♜e3 40.♜d3.**

**Black resigned.**

The organisers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Tal Memorial in Moscow had a very special idea for the drawing of lots: on the previous evening the 10 participants played a blitz tournament. The final classification on that 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012 would then decide the starting numbers, with Carlsen, Aronian, Kramnik, Radjabov and Nakamura the top 5 in the live-ratings list. For Hikaru this event must have meant more than quiet satisfaction, because blitz happens to be one of his passions. But once more Moscow would not turn out to be a specially happy hunting ground for him, because at the end of the blitz, with two defeats at the hands of the



FIDE blitz world champion Alexander Gri-schuk (winner of the premiere in 2006) and Levon Aronian (2010), his score of 5/9 was only good enough for 6<sup>th</sup> place, and in the classical chess Nakamura finished only eighth.

Regarding Levon Aronian. He had a really great moment against the Armenian in the final of the Chess960 rapid world championship in Mainz at the end of July 2009. Nakamura had previously proved that he is an excellent rapid player at the traditional rapid Cup in Cap d'Agde in France in November, where he defeated Vassily Ivanchuk in the final by 1½-½. But of course that was not in Chess960. This chess variant, which was first developed by world champion Robert James Fischer and later modified, was introduced to the world for the first time on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1996 in Buenos Aires. The intention was to accord more importance to the creativity and talent of the player. After all, who could possibly develop comprehensive new opening theory for the 960 different possible starting positions, even though, with the exception for changes involving castling, the usual rules were retained? Although this is not excluded in the long term, most positional fundamentals, the techniques and the tactical procedures as well as the whole realm of the endgame remain more or less unchanged.

In any case, in an exclusive interview for this book, Nakamura had very positive comments on Chess960 and he sees this chess variant as perhaps being the future of the game, because it is no longer of decisive importance how well one is prepared for one's opponent nor how many variations one has learned by rote.<sup>24</sup>

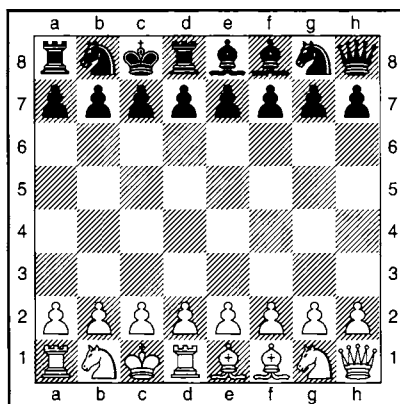
At the 7<sup>th</sup> and last but one world championships, which from 2001 to 2009 have always been one of the high points of the

Chess Classic in Mainz, things did not go so smoothly for Nakamura with his two games in the preliminary round in the form of chess propagated by Bobby. He started with two defeats at the hands of Sergei Movsesian and title defender Levon Aronian. As IM Dirk Poldauf reported for *SCHACH* "Smallville spent a part of the night in a blitz match on the Internet Chess Club, in which he destroyed his colleague in the national team Varuzhan Akobian by 17½-1½ in front of 250 spectators."<sup>25</sup> From then on the American had sufficiently warmed up and on the next day he won three games in succession. In the final on 30<sup>th</sup> July he then won the first three encounters – the fourth game ended in a draw – and became world champion in Chess960. "Aronian simply could not handle this Nakamura, who was playing chess from a different universe", according to Dirk Poldauf.<sup>26</sup> But, form your own opinion because here is the decisive third game...

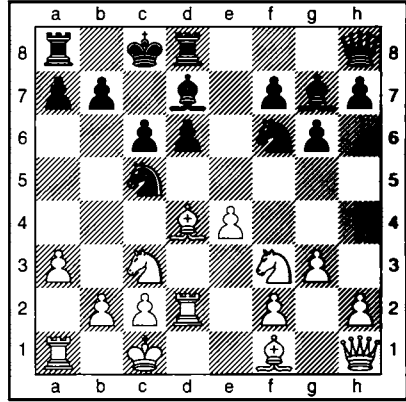
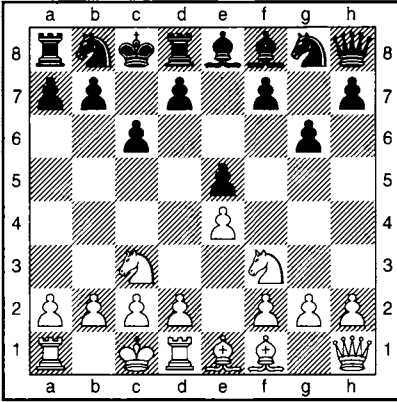
### H. Nakamura – L. Aronian

Chess960 rapid chess world champion-ship, finals, Mainz 30.07.2009

*Starting position 666*



1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 c6?!



Position after 11...♖f6?

This looks slightly artificial. White can easily get in d2–d4 and Black has problems with the ♖b8 and the ♕e8.

**4.g3 d6 5.d4 ♕d7 6.♖d3**

As Dirk Poldauf says: “In Chess960, after castling the king and rook always end up as they would in normal chess, i.e. here the white ♖a1 simply leaps over the king which is already on c1”.

**♖a6 7.a3 ♕h6+ 8.♕d2 ♕g7 9.♕e3**

9.dxe5!? was somewhat more resolute: 9...dxe5 10.♕e3 ♖h6 11.h3 f5 12.0–0–0.

**9...exd4 10.♕xd4 ♖c5 11.♖d2 ♖f6?**

After this the black position looks a bit toothless. 11.f5 12.exf5 ♕xf5 13.0–0–0 ♖c7 creates more counterplay.

(see next diagram)

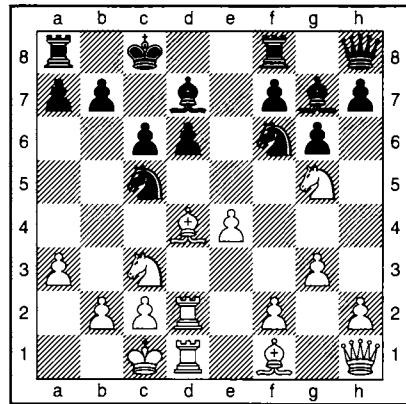
**12.♖g5!**

Hikaru creates an Achilles’ heel for Aronian – and it really hurts.

**12...♖f8**

After 12...0–0 13.e5 ♖d5 14.♖xd5 cxd5 15.♗xd5± the position of the black queen on h8 is really remarkable.

**13.0–0–0**



**13...0–0–0?**

This Fischer castling leads to disaster. 13...♖e6 was the lesser evil, although after 14.e5 ♖xd4 15.exf6 ♕xf6 16.♖ge4 ♖f5

<sup>24</sup> See page 135. It must be pointed out that the starting position for the pieces on the back rank – the pawns remain in the usual position – is drawn by lot immediately before each round. One of the possible 960 positions is the normal starting position (position 518).

<sup>25</sup> See *SCHACH* 9/2009, pp.20-21

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.21



17.♖xf6 ♜xf6 18.♗e4 ♜e7 19.g4! White has a clear advantage. 19.♗xd6+? can be parried by 19...♗xd6 20.♞xd6 0–0–0.

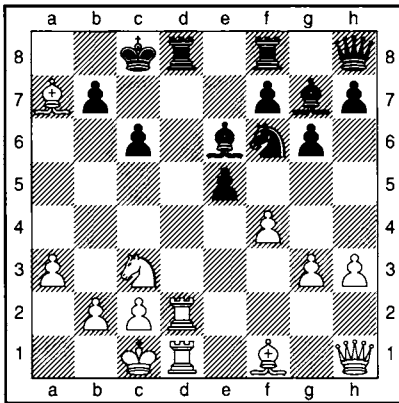
#### 14.e5!

The decisive undermining. “Black falls apart in the middle of the board. The rook rapidly eats its way through to the black king.”<sup>27</sup>

#### 14...♖g4 15.f4 ♗e6 16.♗xe6 ♖xe6 17.h3

The immediate 17.♖xa7 also leads to a win.

#### 17...♗xe5 18.♖xa7 ♗f6?!



#### 19.♖a6!!

A powerful thunderclap which forces its way through, since Black cannot bring defenders to the queenside quickly enough. The *SCHACH* reporter at the tournament remarked here: “According to information from the computer specialists among the organisers, Nakamura hammered out this blow on the board faster than the operating programs could have shown it to him.”

#### 19...e4

19...bxa6? is met by 20.♜xc6 mate, but 19...♗d5 20.♜g1 bxa6 21.♗xd5 cxd5 22.♜b6 ♖d7 23.♞xd5+ is just as hopeless.

#### 20.♜g1! ♞xd2

20...♗d7 also does not save him on account of 21.♞xd7 ♞xd7 22.♜b6 ♞xd1+ 23.♗xd1 bxa6 24.♜xc6+ ♖d8 25.♖b6+ ♖e7 26.♜c7+ ♖d7 27.♖c5+ ♖e8 28.♜b8+ ♖c8 29.♜xc8 mate.

#### 21.♖xb7+ ♖xb7 22.♜b6+

It is quite understandable that Aronian had no desire to be mated as follows: 22...♖a8 (22...♖c8 23.♜xc6+ ♖d8 24.♖b6+ ♖e7 25.♖c5+ ♖d8 26.♞xd2+ ♗d5 27.♞xd5+ ♖xd5 28.♖b6+ ♖e7 29.♗xd5 mate) 23.♜xc6+ ♖xa7 24.♗b5+ ♖b8 25.♜b6+ ♖c8 26.♜c7 mate.

#### Black resigned.

Nakamura was in fact due to defend his Chess960 World Championship title<sup>28</sup> in 2011 in Mainz. But unfortunately the optimism of tournament director Hans-Walter Schmitt regarding the future of this traditional tournament burst like a soap bubble. The 18<sup>th</sup> event in 2011 did not take place, because the economic conditions were not there to continue a tournament of this enormous size, which always represented a bridge between chess for the masses and for the elite.

Since his “coronation” in Mainz the American has never again taken part in an officially organised Chess960 competition. In the Internet Chess Club it can be seen from Smallville’s statistics that Hikaru achieved his best rating on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010 with 2480, with the total showing merely 82 games, of which he won 75, with only three defeats and four draws. Everything has a beginning and an end even for that passionate player Nakamura, for whom the game and life really form a magical unity.

<sup>27</sup> Dirk Poldauf, *ibid*, p.22

<sup>28</sup> The title of “world champion” in Chess960 was never officially awarded by FIDE. However, the latter organisation raised no objections to the match in Mainz which was billed as the World Championship.

# ZWISCHEN ZÜGE

## 1:58 – Nakamura plays blitz

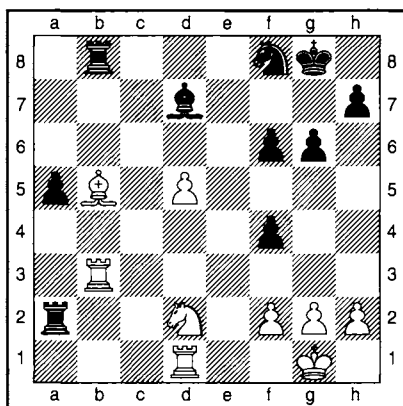
**Dramatis personæ:** two chess players

**White:** Varushan Akobian

**Black:** Hikaru Nakamura

**Location:** Board 1 of the National Open Blitz Championship 2007, round 5

Taken from a video on YouTube<sup>1</sup>



The players are sitting at the board showing the utmost concentration. Akobian is leaning on his elbows, his hands folded in front of his mouth. Nakamura looks less tense, his arms are folded in front of the board, on which the eyes of both of them are completely concentrated. After roughly four seconds Akobian will make his first move; he takes the black bishop on d7 and presses the clock.

### 1. xd7

Since Akobian's white bishop is not exactly on d7, Nakamura pushes it to its correct

place and immediately re-immerses himself in the position. He has apparently found his reply, but then he lets his right hand drop so as to continue to think. His fingers claw together, a short glance at the clock which is running mercilessly, a raising of his eyebrows signals pure tension, suddenly a grimace crosses his face, his hand goes mechanically under his chin and then falls back on to the table, another look at the clock while his opponent finds a new sitting posture. Now he too has his arms folded in front of him. Finally, after an eternity (17 seconds) Nakamura makes up his mind to move...

### 1... xb3 2. xb3 xd7 3. g3

Both of them quickly trot out these moves, but now Hikaru pauses. His right hand plays with the captured pieces. Like a vulture descending on its prey, his right hand then swoops down on Akobian's g-pawn and immediately presses the clock. On the linked video clock 32 seconds have elapsed. In the background one can hear the merciless ticking of the clocks and the click when pieces are moved, with Akobian

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZo8O-p9qy4>. Up till 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012 the video had seen 146,558 hits.



using both hands, one to take a piece and then quickly the left hand to press the clock. This is common practice and is in fact also allowed.

**3...fxg3 4.hxg3 a4 5.♘d4**

0:35 – Hikaru wants to reply at once, but then he backs away from that. His demeanour points to extreme tension: the elbow of his left arm is folded on the table, his right hand is in front of his mouth and his eyes are staring intently at the board. “What should I do?” is what he appears to be thinking desperately. Then, as though steered by some ghostly agency, his playing arm hovers over his rook on a2, and he gently moves it by a single square.

**5...♖b2 6.♗a1 ♖b4 7.♘c2 ♗e4 8.♘e3 ♕f7 9.♗c1 ♕e7 10.♖c6**

The unfaltering tempo of the play of the two “fighting cocks” gives us the impression that they know what they are doing. Akobian remains true to himself with his provocatively uncertain placing of his pieces. His rook is not clearly on c6. But that does not bother Nakamura, he shoves his f-pawn forward and demonstrates a self-confident will to win. We are in for some blitz chess...

**10...f5 11.♗a6**

In his haste Akobian sees his c6-rook drop from his hand, and he places it safely on a6 at the second attempt. The plastic pieces are obviously too light, and Nakamura sometimes drops them too. Shortly after that Akobian’s left hand dives into the camp of captured pieces next to Nakamura, so as to fish out in advance a white queen, which he then juggles with in his hands, although his passed pawn is still only on d5. A common psychological trick, to intimidate the opponent... As though moved by magic, Hikaru’s hand also reaches for a new

queen and he stares at his opponent as though he means to hypnotise him. – “You can’t threaten me!” he may be thinking. Akobian, on the other hand, does not look at his opponent but stares at the board, whereupon Nakamura puts the black queen down with a clicking sound on his left-hand side so as then to make his next move quite calmly.

**11...f4 12.d6+ ♕e6**

Things become hectic at this point, since the black king briefly stumbles but does not fall over.

**13.gxf4 ♖xf4**

1:05 – Now suddenly Nakamura practically crosses his hands so as to take the white f-pawn with his rook. You hear coming out of his mouth, almost involuntarily as though for self-motivation, the short encouragement: “Let’s go!”

**14.♕g2 h5**

The black h-pawn has been pushed too vigorously; it falls over and almost tumbles off the board. It is straightened up with his left hand, after which Nakamura presses the clock a second time for safety’s sake. His opponent is not put off by this, because he too is having to struggle with the same vagaries of the equipment. Even if it hardly looks comprehensible to the spectators, serious and highly concentrated chess is being played here. Collateral damage on the board is purely a side issue, especially since there is no arbiter close by, though probably one would be unable to see things as quickly as the two are moving and acting.

**15.♕g3 g5 18.♗a5 h4+ 19.♕g2 ♘e5**

Of course the white king is not clearly on the g2-square and is touching h2, but that does not particularly bother Nakamura, since at last there is an opportunity to bring

back to life the “sleeping knight” on d7. Obviously a success, since Akobian takes some time here, as though completely astonished that Black still has a steed. Then he pushes his d-pawn another square forward – just one left before he can promote, and if we look closely at the board it is already scratching at the door of d8!

#### 19.d7 ♖d4

1:19 – Nakamura is suddenly calm personified. The f-rook is moved almost expressively to d4, so as not to let White start anything. It looks as though his right hand is almost screwing it into the board. After that the clock is pressed just as gently. Akobian's time is running again. He immediately moves his passed pawn to the back rank without however replacing it with a new queen.

#### 20.d8 ♖xd8

Of course the intruder is captured by Naka's rook, but that happens in a rather uncontrolled manner and in any case his left hand must hurry to his aid whilst the right one is ready to hit the clock...

#### 21.♖xa4 ♖f8

Yet again a black rook moves across to f8 to stand by its man. Things are hectic once

again, which is a signal that both of them now have only a little time left – unfortunately we cannot make out exactly how much. So the black king falls over before safely reaching the d5-square, and even on d4 it starts to wobble threateningly. However, this hardly bothers the players. Perhaps such high-level blitz chess puts them as it were in a trance-like condition, so that they simply become immersed in another world – and we spectators can only look on and wonder.

The time-trouble battle irresistibly reaches its climax...

22.♖g4 ♖d3 22.♖e4 ♔d5 23.♖e3 ♖f4+  
24.♔g1 ♔d4 25.♖e7 ♖h3+ 26.♔g2 ♖f4+  
27.♔g1 ♖d3 28.♖e3 ♖xf2 29.♖c2 + ♔d3  
30.♖e1+ ♔d2 31.♖g2 ♖g4 32.♖d7+ ♔e2  
33.♖e7+ ♔f3 34.♖e1+ ♔g3

1:46 – after his final move Nakamura briefly and unmistakeably points to the clock. Akobian's time has run out – it's all over! In any case his position is lost. Without any reaction the pros start to collect the pieces, in order – still at blitz speed – to again set up the starting position. With one single difference – this time the white pieces are on Nakamura's side.



## Chapter 9

# Wijk aan Zee

**Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 11**

**T**here is always another series of grandmasters born in a “golden year”. You will certainly remember immediately the legendary year of 1951 – Ulf Andersson, Anatoly Karpov, Zoltán Ribli, Gyula Sax, Jan Timman, Eugenio Torre and Rafael Vaganian – what great names who have left their mark on the history of chess!

Looking at the current top-class field in Wijk aan Zee, we immediately think of 1990, since it is represented by Magnus Carlsen, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ian Nepomniachtchi, three of the strongest of the ‘wild bunch’. Although at present the 20-year-old Russian is not in the top ten of the FIDE world rating list – with his Elo rating of 2733 he is in 15<sup>th</sup> place – the continuous improvement in his performances hints that there is still a lot to come. Ian, who grew up in an intellectual, literature-loving family in the town of Bryansk, which is almost 400 kilometres from Moscow, gained numerous titles in junior chess: European under-10 (2000) and under-12 champion (2001, 2002) as well as world under-12 champion (2002) and under-16 runner-up (2005). Despite this, he did not gain the grandmaster title until the age of 17, and he demonstrated his prowess a year later in February 2008 with his victory in the Aeroflot Open in Moscow. This success simultaneously secured him an invitation to the Dortmund Sparkassen Chess Meeting, in which he shared second place. Shortly after that he won the Chess Classic in Mainz, which at that time was the world’s biggest Open. Finally, in March 2010 at the age of 19 in Rijeka in Slovenia he added the title of European champion to all this, and in December 2010 the boy from Bryansk became champion of Russia for the first time after a play-off against Sergey Karjakin.

It comes as no surprise that the good and bad are so intermingled in a young player. “Piercing ideas followed by gross blunders”, was how Dirk Poldauf aptly described the appearance of Ian among the big boys. “What he will have left us with after this tournament are a few bold ideas and an impeccably played victory over Carlsen...” (*SCHACH* 3/2011, p.36)

In any case, this Friday nobody in the *Dorpshuis de Moriaan* was interested in the fact that Nepomniachtchi had previously blundered away a rook against Aronian, but the chess fans were keen to see what would be the result of the Russia–USA duel, and in particular whether Hikaru Nakamura could manage to continue his mid-tournament spurt at the top of the table...

There is also a bit of background to this game: almost three years earlier (28<sup>th</sup> February

– 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007) the two opponents played a blitz match. Of the 20 games, which are to be found in the *Big Database*, Nakamura won 14 and lost 5, with just a single draw. The Caro-Kann Defence did not appear in any of them. But this time things would be different in normal chess...

## GAME 40

### I. Nepomniachtchi – H. Nakamura

Tata Steel Chess (A), Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Caro-Kann Defence [B12]*

*They that sow the wind,  
shall reap the whirlwind*

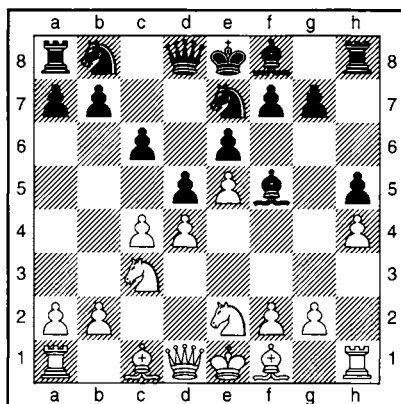
After his disaster with the Najdorf Sicilian in round 8 against Carlsen, it was not surprising that Nakamura turned to another opening. In his preparations for this game with Kris Littlejohn, he employed the last rest day in taking a good look at the Russian's opening repertoire – and of course betting on the fact that he would as usual open with the king's pawn. Only later, in the course of the year, would Ian more frequently try out closed openings.

After 1.e4 his choice this time was 1...c6 – the Caro-Kann, the “defence of world champions”! This plan was first mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1880s Simon Winawer occasionally employed it. Since then the defence has enjoyed a majestic development and has occupied an important place in the repertoires of world champions Capablanca, Botvinnik, Petrosian and Karpov.

When you take into account the fact that Hikaru was systematically ripped apart in the Caro-Kann in August 2010 at the “Rising Stars vs. Experience” match in Amsterdam by Peter Svidler, at first sight

his choice of opening appears risky, especially since Nepomniachtchi certainly knew this game. But chess is all about work, and in the meantime Hikaru & Kris had done their homework thoroughly. So, once more – “we can do it!”.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♟f5 4.h4 h5 5.c4 e6  
6.♘c3 ♞e7 7.♞ge2



### 7...♟g4!?N

Nakamura probably found this strong innovation in Karpov's annotations in *Informant* 68 to his game against Adams in Tilburg 1996 (p. 78, game 107). Dirk Poldauf, who was an eye-witness to the event, was in any case enthusiastic and thus in *SCHACH* he made a really euphoric comment on this unexpected bishop move: “A fantastic idea. Black sacrifices a tempo to entice the white f-pawn to f3. Because the latter is badly placed there for at least two reasons: firstly, White can no longer attack the h5-pawn from e2 with his bishop, and secondly it gets in the way of the king's rook being lifted over to the queenside via h3.” (*SCHACH* 3/2011, p.13)

On the other hand, 7...dxc4 8.♞g3 ♟g6 9.♟g5 ♜b6 10.♜d2 ♜b4 11.a3 ♜b3 12.♞ge4 (here Adams played 12.♞c1)

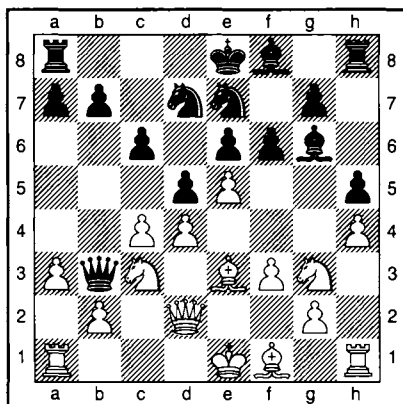


12...♘d5 13.♙h3!, Svidler–Nakamura, Amsterdam 2010, was less pleasant for Black. That is how Hikaru sees things too: “Certainly not a game I plan on talking about or ever mentioning again.” (*New In Chess* 2/2011, p.19)

8.f3 ♘f5 9.♘g3 ♙g6 10.♙g5 ♚b6 11.♚d2 ♘d7 12.a3?!

White has been following Svidler so far, but the text move was also a surprise for Nakamura.

12...f6 13.♙e3 ♚b3!



14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♚xd5!

This is clearly more aggressive than 15...cxd5 16.♘e2 ♚c8 17.♚c1 ♚xc1+ 18.♘xc1 ♚c2, which leads to approximate equality.

16.♚c1?!

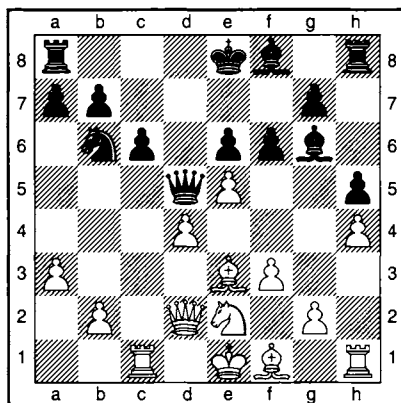
16.♘e4 is more in line with White's intention of rapidly building up the pressure, e.g. 16...fxe5 (16...♙xe4 17.fxe4 ♚xe4 18.♙d3 ♚g4 19.0-0) 17.0-0-0 0-0-0 18.♚c2 and in each case he has a definite, slightly dangerous initiative for the pawn.

16...♘b6 17.♘e2!?

Nepomniachtchi goes for broke and sacrifices a pawn, since 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♙d3 ♙xd3 19.♚xd3 0-0-0 is equally unpleas-

ant for him.

Nakamura's dry comment on this was: “That was not enough for him, apparently. People may say I'm an aggressive player but it was clear 'Nepo' was the one out for a kill today.”



17...fxe5 18.dxe5 ♚xe5! 19.♙d4?!

Objectively this is going too far, but from practical considerations the white choice is understandable, since after 19.♙f2 ♚d8 20.♚c3 ♚xc3 21.♘xc3 ♙e7 the most he can hope for is a draw. Typical Naka! He does not know the meaning of fear! He rejected the exchange of queens, because after 18...♚xd2+ 19.♙xd2 0-0-0 20.♘f4 ♙f5 White has no problems, once again according to Dirk Poldauf.

19...♚c7 20.♚g5 ♙f5 21.g4?!

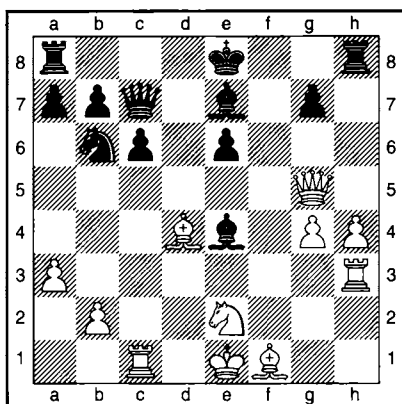
Logical but not good. In any case, it is already hard to know what to do, since 21.♘g3?! ♙e7 22.♚xg7 0-0-0+ also gives Black a powerful initiative. They that sow the wind, shall reap the whirlwind...

21...hxc4 22.fxc4 ♙e4?

“Right idea - wrong order”, was Nakamura's judgement. Black would do better to play 22...♙e7 23.♚xg7 ♙h7 24.♚g8+ ♙d7

25. ♖xb6 ♜xg8 26. ♖xc7 ♖e4.

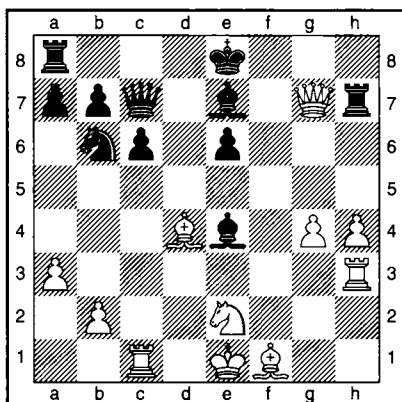
23. ♜h3 ♖e7



24. ♜xg7?

"A serious mistake", commented Nakamura in *New In Chess* on the text move. He was of the opinion that 24. ♜e3 ♖d5 25. h5 ♖d6 26. ♜g5! is preferable, because thanks to the queens White is clearly able to develop more pressure and the position would then only be rather unclear. Now in any case Black is clearly better, because White will lose an important pawn after the exchange of queens. Ian had not anticipated the next move...

24... ♜h7!



25. ♜e5

Things get much worse for White after 25. ♖xb6? ♖xh4+! or 25. ♜g8+? ♖d7 26. ♖xb6 ♜xg8 27. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 28. g5 ♖f5 29. ♜h1 ♖xg5 (Nakamura).

25... ♜xe5 26. ♖xe5 ♖xh4+ 27. ♖g3 ♖d7 28. ♖d4?

Presumably a tactical oversight. Both 28. ♖c7 ♖g6 29. ♖g2 ♖g5 30. ♜xh7 ♖xh7 31. ♜c4 and 28. ♖f4 ♖f3 29. g5 ♖g4 30. g6 ♜h5 31. ♜h2 ♖xg3+ 32. ♖xg3 ♜xh2 33. ♖xh2 offered better practical chances.

28... ♖f3!

"Everything quickly falls apart for Ian", according to Nakamura.

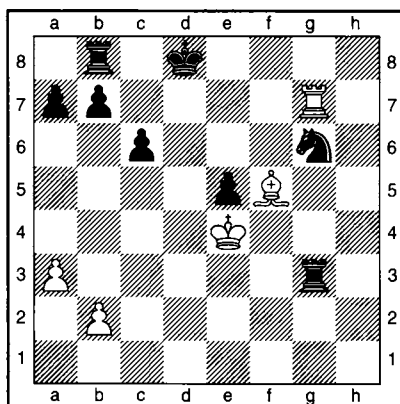
29. g5

29. ♖e2 changes nothing on account of 29... ♖g2.

29... ♖g4 30. g6 ♜h6 31. ♜xh4 ♜xh4 32. ♜c3 ♖f3 33. ♜xf3

If 33. g7, then 33... ♖e7.

33... ♖xd4 34. ♖h3 ♖e5 35. ♜f6 ♖d3+ 36. ♖e2 ♖f4+ 37. ♖e3 e5 38. ♜f7 ♖d3+ 39. ♖e4 ♜xg3 40. ♖d7+ ♖d8 41. ♖f5 ♖xg6 42. ♜g7 ♜b8!



As Nakamura points out in his annotations for *New in Chess*, there is also a win here



after 42... ♖g5 43. ♖g8+ ♘c7 44. ♖xa8 ♜e7 45. ♙h3 ♖g3, but he did not want to go into any more complications, but rather gather in the point safely.

**43.b4 b5 44. ♙xg6 ♖g5**

**White resigned.**

For this performance the American justifiably received the extra prize of 500 euros for the best game of the round. This was already the third such award for him in this tournament and it is a true tribute to his combative attitude to the game. The word “fear” is not in his vocabulary...

“I’m happy with the result,” Nakamura said. “I played very well today, but there’s

two rounds left and I’m not quite there yet. I play (Russia’s Vladimir) Kramnik on Saturday and he is a former world champion and all that. But I’m not concerned: I’m on form and I’ll have White.”

Well, the situation remained exciting, because this was a black Friday for Kramnik, who once again lost to Magnus Carlsen. Anand could not have been satisfied with his draw against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, nor could Levon Aronian, who shared the point with Ruslan Ponomarev.

Before the final two rounds at the weekend the leader board looked like this: 1. Nakamura 8, 2. Anand 7½, 3. Aronian 7, 4-5. Carlsen and Kramnik 6½.

### Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 12

**W**hat a special feeling it must be to reach your goal through unaided efforts! Nakamura’s starting situation on the final days in Wijk aan Zee can perhaps be compared to that of a climber just before he storms the summit of an 8,000 metre peak. The mountain is calling! And yet it is precisely during this last stage that even more prudence is called for, so as not to lose your balance and fall.

In the history of chess there are numerous examples of just how difficult this final step can be – and of how the climber fails. Perhaps the most tragic one, with all the legends surrounding it, is that of the “cunning” David Bronstein. On move 35 with Black in the 23<sup>rd</sup> game of the World Championship match against the champion Mikhail Botvinnik, the challenger came up with the unfortunate idea (in view of his 11½-10½ lead) of winning a pawn, so as to decide his duel with the patriarch of Soviet chess before the final game. But thanks to

a burst of energy and a good portion of luck, Botvinnik – since after his weak sealed move he no longer believed in a successful defence of his title – still managed to wrest from his opponent the necessary victory. David Ionovich was so completely shattered after giving away the draw that in the final 24<sup>th</sup> game he was simply unable to seek the uncompromising struggle necessary to wrest back control of the match in his favour.

On this Saturday the 8,000 metre peak we spoke of at the start took the form of the ex-world champion Vladimir Kramnik, who was the opponent of the “little Japanese tank” (Boris Spassky). In his career the 35-year-old Russian had won just about everything that could be won in chess, including of course Wijk aan Zee (1998 along with Viswanathan Anand). After his defeat with White on the previous day at the hands of Magnus Carlsen, his 1½ point deficit meant that he had missed the boat,

but of course there was no question of him giving anything away. You could feel the tension in the *Dorpshuis de Moriaan*, because at the same time Anand would be fighting against Giri...

## GAME 41

**H. Nakamura – V. Kramnik**

Tata Steel Chess (A), Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Ruy Lopez [C67]*

### *Cleverly neutralised*

There were objective reasons for Hikaru approaching this game with sound self-confidence. A month before, with the black pieces, he inflicted on the ex-world champion his only defeat in the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Chess Classic – and he himself lost only to Carlsen. And at the 5<sup>th</sup> Tal Memorial in November 2010 he had no reason to be dissatisfied with a draw against Petroff specialist Kramnik, as the course of the game shows:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4  
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♕e7 7.♕e3 0–0  
8.♖d2 ♗d7 9.0–0–0 ♖e8 (this is actually  
Gelfand's favourite variation) 10.h4 c6  
11.♕d3 ♗f6 12.♖de1 d5 13.♕d4 c5  
14.♕xf6 ♕xf6 15.♖f4 ♕e6 16.♗g5 g6  
17.♕b5 ♖f8 18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♖xe6 ♕xc3  
20.♖g4 ♕g7 21.h5! (the energetic text  
move must have surprised Black, but what  
else should Nakamura play?) 21...c4  
22.hxg6 h6 23.♖d1 (23.♖he1! is certainly  
better, since there is now the threat of ♖e7;  
here 23...a6 would be a mistake on  
account of 24.♕e8) 23...♖a5 24.♖xd5  
♖xa2 25.♕xc4 ♖xb2+ 26.♗d1 ♗h8 27.f3  
a5 28.♖d7 (28.♖e4 would have caused

problems for Black) 28...a4 (here the  
engines see a clear advantage for White –  
but their judgement of the position is totally  
unemotional, it is not important for them...) 29.♖h4 (the doubling of rooks on the  
seventh rank with 29.♖ee7 seems more  
logical) 29...♖b1+ 30.♗d2 ♖b4+ 31.♗d1  
(the double rook ending after 31.♗e2 b5  
32.♖xg7 ♖xc4+ 33.♖xc4 bxc4 34.♖h7+ is  
unwinnable for White despite the extra  
pawn, since Kramnik has his passed a-  
pawn as a permanent threat) 31...♖b1+  
32.♗d2 ♖b4+ 33.♗d1 ♖b1+, and a draw  
by a threefold repetition of the position.

In view of such a safe sharing of the point, the Nakamura-Littlejohn team must have thought of trying this Russian roulette again. But on the other, Kramnik would not have allowed another such temporary dropping of his guard, and, as we shall see, he renounced his tried and tested Petroff Defence and invited the American to a Ruy Lopez. The fact that Nakamura did not hesitate for long was understandable, as was his decision to neutralise his famous opponent so cleverly. After half an hour it was all over, but a half point is a half point – the storming of the peak was put off for a day and was still possible. Especially since Anand had great difficulty escaping with a draw against Anish Giri, who was really up for it in this game and ready to show the world champion what he was capable of. But, short of time in a double rook ending, he missed an easy winning move, and Vishy, who had been under pressure throughout the game, retained his chances of tournament victory.

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♕b5 ♗f6 4.0–0  
♗xe4 5.♖e1

With this choice Nakamura indicates that he is agreeable to a draw against the ultra-



solid Kramnik. He deliberately avoids (after 5.d4) the latter's Berlin Defence, with which Kramnik had been successful in many battles – in particular this was the opening that guaranteed his winning of the world chess crown from Garry Kasparov in London in 2000, where the 16-game match concluded 8½-6½ in his favour. 5.d4 ♖d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♖xd8+ ♜xd8 is the principled line and there are undoubtedly more possibilities in the resulting well-known ending. In any case, in four World Championship games with White, Garry could not find a way to break through the Berlin Wall.

5...♖d6 6.♗xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♗xe5 8.♖xe5 0-0 9.d4 ♗f6 10.♞e1 ♞e8 11.c3 ♞xe1 12.♖xe1 ♗f5 13.♗d3 d5 14.♗f4 c6

15.♖d2 ♖h4 16.♖e2 ♗f5 17.♗xf5 ♖xf5 18.♖f3 ♖e7 19.♞e1

At this point, in round 10, Jan Smeets played 19.♖d3 against Kramnik, but after 19...♖h4 20.♖xh4 ♗xh4 21.g3 ♗f6 the point was also shared.

19...♖xe2 20.♖xe2

### Draw agreed on White's proposal

"No comment," Kramnik told reporters afterwards.

"Ask him" said Nakamura, explaining that he "had the choice to take a risk or not and decided: why take the risk?"

"Tomorrow, I have Black against Wang Hao. At least, he's not Kramnik. So I'll have some chances in the final round."

## Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Round 13

Is 13 perhaps Hikaru's favourite number? Well, after this Sunday he could at least give serious thought to the matter. In any case, the way things fall in the final round is simple: all he has to do is not lose – and should Anand not defeat Nepomniachtchi, then he has climbed this peak on the way to fame.

This all sounds simple and not very dramatic, but it is really playing with numbers, leaving chance and the main actors in this performance totally out of the equation. There can hardly be any other sport in which a single error can be so brutally decisive as regards victory and defeat, as it is in chess. It is sufficient to remember the first World Championship match between Anatoly Karpov and his challenger Garry Kasparov in 1984/85. Trailing by 0-5, Kasparov found himself facing final elimination in the 31<sup>st</sup> game on

7<sup>th</sup> December 1984, since after two hours' play Karpov was a pawn up with a clear positional advantage. But the proximity of the goal suddenly had a paralysing effect on the play of the champion, who up till then had been supremely dominant. He got into time-trouble and was unable to win the game. A drama, which would be repeated in the 41<sup>st</sup> game. One single move by Karpov again threw away the win. Mind you, it was astonishing how the 21-year-old Garry, with his back to the wall, took advantage of the moment and closed the gap to 3-5, until 15<sup>th</sup> February 1985, when the FIDE officials brought to an end this chess marathon without a winner after 161 days.

As far as decision in the final round is concerned, the Hungarian Tibor Flórián has published a book with a similar title. In it the international master gives advice on preparation and examples of game tactics,

including a chapter with the title “A half point lead”.<sup>1</sup> Flórián investigates the situation in which a fortunate player with a half point lead comes up against a weaker participant in the final round. This is the situation Nakamura finds himself in on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2011, faced with the Chinese player Wang Hao. The 21-year-old grandmaster from the Middle Kingdom has made a respectable score up till now and his tactical talent is no secret. Since he is in no way involved in the tournament finish, he will be able to play in totally uninhibited fashion. This makes him very dangerous because he appears to have nothing to lose. Against him Hikaru will try to achieve an active position and best of all to aim for a draw from a position of strength or, if circumstances demand it, to play for a win with Black. The latter could well be the case if Anand should win as Black against his Russian opponent.

## GAME 42

**Wang Hao – H. Nakamura**

Tata Steel Chess (A),

Wijk aan Zee 2011

*Benoni Defence [A62]*

***Reaching a happy ending with  
“the son of my sorrow”***

Nakamura makes the appropriate choice of the Benoni Defence, which he reaches by transposition. The Modern Benoni<sup>2</sup> is quite a rare guest in major tournaments. Black takes certain risks, but this opening has one uncontested advantage – it takes the opponent away from the usual paths and

opens up opportunities for creative, non-stereotyped play.

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♙g7 4.♙g2 c5 5.d5 d6 6.♘c3 0–0 7.♙f3 e6 8.0–0 exd5 9.cxd5 ♖e8**

By transposition we have reached a basic position of the Benoni Defence. On account of the asymmetrical pawn structure, both sides can play for a win, and that was also precisely Nakamura's plan, since if Anand were to win he too would have to score the full point.

**10.a4 a6 11.♗e1**

Wang Hao chooses a side variation. 11.♘d2 and 11.♙f4 are the main continuations.

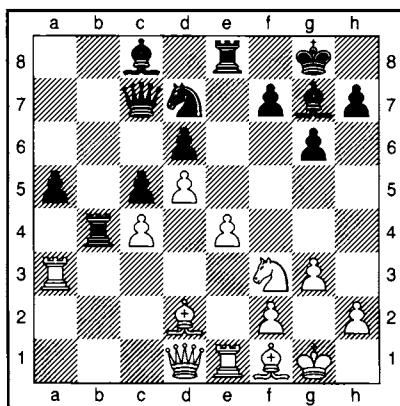
**11...♘e4!**

Nakamura radically stops the planned central advance.

**12.♗a3**

12.♘xe4 ♗xe4 13.♘d2 is met by 13...♗b4, and the position is equal.

**12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♘d7 14.c4 ♖b8 15.a5 b5 16.axb6 ♗xb6 17.♙f4 ♚c7 18.e4 ♖b4 19.♙f1 a5 20.♙d2**



<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the German edition *Entscheidung in der Schlußrunde*, Stuttgart 1987.

<sup>2</sup> The name Ben Oni comes from the Hebrew and means *The son of my sorrow*.



## 20...♖e5!?

For the Benoni this is a typical exchange sacrifice which secures dynamic play for Black. Quite in the spirit of Petrosian or, to choose a more modern example, Topalov!

## 21.♗xe5 ♕xe5 22.♙c3

22.♙xb4?! cxb4 23.♖a4 bxa3 24.♖xe8+ ♔g7 25.♖a4 ♙b2 would be dangerous for White.

## 22...♙d7

The black position has more potential because the white light-squared bishop does not have good prospects. However, **Nakamura offered a draw**, because it was starting to look as if Anand would not win his game, and Wang Hao accepted the offer. All's well that ends well!

Nakamura was in his hotel room watching his rival's game on the Internet. "It was totally unexpected to see it ending in a draw," he told the press. "I was sort of jumping up and down around the room. I was so happy. Winning a tournament is always nice but winning an elite tournament like this is something completely different. I cannot remember the last time an American won a major tournament. I hope my victory will make for greater interest in chess back home in the States."

And a special tournament report in *New In Chess* printed the following statement by Nakamura, whose first place brought him a cheque for 10,000 euros:

"Now that I have finally won a major tournament ahead of all the other top players in the world, I guess that everyone realizes that I am a potential threat to the European dominance of chess..."

Fortune favours the bold! In the 16 days of Wijk aan Zee the 23-year-old American, whom Boris Spassky had described in a telephone interview with *ChessBase* during the tournament as a "little Japanese tank", impressively demonstrated to the world of chess that he was now ready to follow in the footsteps of Bobby Fischer. But unlike Nakamura and most world champions in classical chess<sup>3</sup>, the latter never appeared on the list of victors of Wijk aan Zee, because he did not even once take part.<sup>4</sup>

The anything but quiet American Hikaru Nakamura is the first US grandmaster since Walter Browne and Yasser Seirawan, who shared first place in 1980, to triumph in this Mecca of chess in The Netherlands. This is something of which he can be really proud. But success, especially one like this, also creates expectations for the future.

<sup>3</sup> These include Max Euwe, Mikhail Botvinnik, Mikhail Tal, Tigran Petrosian, Boris Spassky, Anatoly Karpov, Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kramnik and Viswanathan Anand.

<sup>4</sup> When asked why Fischer had never taken part in the Wijk aan Zee tournament, previous tournament director Piet Zwart replied on 18.1.2008, one day after Fischer's death: "The answer is quite simple. At that time we did not have the necessary financial means. We could not pay the sort of fees which Fischer demanded. In addition there were his extravagant wishes concerning playing conditions. For that reason nothing ever came of a visit to Wijk aan Zee by Fischer. It is certainly a shame, but there is nothing we can do to change it now." (D. Kohlmeyer, "Fischer in Wijk", *ChessBase* homepage. 19.1.2008)

## Tata Steel Chess A

Wijk aan Zee, 14<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2011

| Cat. 20 (2740) |                         |     |      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | Pts. | Perf. |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|------|-------|
| 1.             | Nakamura, Hikaru        | USA | 2751 | * | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 9    | 2880  |
| 2.             | Anand, Viswanathan      | IND | 2810 | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1  | ½  | ½  | 1  | 1  | 8½   | 2844  |
| 3.             | Carlsen, Magnus         | NOR | 2814 | 1 | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1  | ½  | 1  | 1  | ½  | 8    | 2821  |
| 4.             | Aronian, Levon          | ARM | 2805 | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½  | 1  | ½  | ½  | 1  | 8    | 2821  |
| 5.             | Kramnik, Vladimir       | RUS | 2784 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½  | ½  | 1  | ½  | 1  | 7½   | 2793  |
| 6.             | Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime | FRA | 2715 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½  | ½  | ½  | 1  | 1  | 7½   | 2798  |
| 7.             | Giri, Anish             | NED | 2686 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | 0 | 1  | ½  | ½  | ½  | ½  | 6½   | 2744  |
| 8.             | Ponomarev, Ruslan       | UKR | 2744 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 0  | 1  | ½  | 1  | ½  | 6½   | 2739  |
| 9.             | Nepomniachtchi, Ian     | RUS | 2733 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | * | 1  | ½  | ½  | 0  | ½  | 6    | 2711  |
| 10.            | Wang, Hao               | CHN | 2731 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | 0 | *  | 1  | 1  | ½  | ½  | 6    | 2711  |
| 11.            | Grischuk, Alexander     | RUS | 2773 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0  | *  | ½  | 1  | 0  | 4½   | 2627  |
| 12.            | L'Ami, Erwin            | NED | 2628 | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0  | ½  | *  | ½  | ½  | 4½   | 2638  |
| 13.            | Smeets, Jan             | NED | 2662 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½  | 0  | ½  | *  | 1  | 4½   | 2635  |
| 14.            | Shirov, Alexei          | ESP | 2722 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½  | 1  | ½  | 0  | *  | 4    | 2600  |

## Progressive Table

| Round 1-13                 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|----------------------------|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Nakamura, Hikaru        | 1 | 1½ | 2½ | 3  | 3½ | 4½ | 5½ | 5½ | 6  | 7  | 8  | 8½ | 9  |
| 2. Anand, Viswanathan      | 1 | 1½ | 2  | 3  | 4  | 4½ | 5  | 5½ | 6  | 7  | 7½ | 8  | 8½ |
| 3. Carlsen, Magnus         | ½ | 1  | 1  | 1½ | 2½ | 3½ | 4  | 5  | 5½ | 5½ | 6½ | 7½ | 8  |
| 4. Aronian, Levon          | ½ | 1  | 1½ | 2½ | 3  | 3½ | 4½ | 5  | 6  | 6½ | 7  | 7½ | 8  |
| 5. Kramnik, Vladimir       | ½ | 1  | 1½ | 2  | 2½ | 3½ | 4½ | 5  | 6  | 6½ | 6½ | 7  | 7½ |
| 6. Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime | ½ | 1  | 1½ | 2½ | 3  | 3½ | 4  | 5  | 5½ | 5½ | 6  | 7  | 7½ |
| 7. Giri, Anish             | ½ | 1  | 2  | 2½ | 3  | 3  | 3  | 4  | 4½ | 5  | 5½ | 6  | 6½ |
| 8. Ponomarev, Ruslan       | 0 | ½  | 1½ | 2  | 2½ | 3  | 3½ | 4  | 4  | 5  | 5½ | 6  | 6½ |
| 9. Nepomniachtchi, Ian     | ½ | 1½ | 2  | 2  | 2½ | 3½ | 4  | 4½ | 4½ | 5½ | 5½ | 5½ | 6  |
| 10. Wang, Hao              | ½ | ½  | 1  | 1  | 2  | 2½ | 3  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 5½ | 5½ | 6  |
| 11. Grischuk, Alexander    | 0 | ½  | 1  | 1½ | 1½ | 2  | 2  | 2  | 2½ | 2½ | 3  | 4  | 4½ |
| 12. L'Ami, Erwin           | ½ | 1  | 1½ | 2  | 2  | 2  | 2½ | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3½ | 4  | 4½ |
| 13. Smeets, Jan            | 1 | 1½ | 1½ | 2  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 3  | 3½ | 4  | 4  | 4½ |
| 14. Shirov, Alexei         | 0 | ½  | ½  | ½  | 1  | 1  | 1½ | 2½ | 2½ | 2½ | 3  | 3½ | 4  |



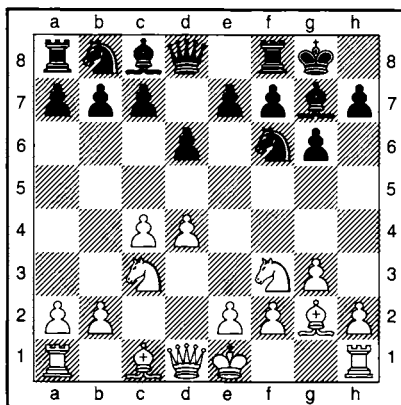
# His great love the King's Indian – a short repertoire à la Nakamura

**“W**hen you play the Classical King's Indian, the game is never going to be perfect. You don't know if your moves are correct and the computer's moves aren't always correct either. That's one of the things I love in the King's Indian, that in many cases the computer gives evaluations and then when you run through the lines it turns out that you're right and the computer is wrong. It's probably the only opening, where the computer can be completely wrong and humans can be completely right. The player who comes up with the best plan wins”, is how Hikaru Nakamura explains his “love” of the King's Indian in *New in Chess Magazine* (1/2012).

He has been faithful to this defence for more than a decade, and that is anything but by chance. One decisive reason for this must have been that Sunil Weeramantry also has the King's Indian in his repertoire. In his 1993 book *Best Lessons Of A Chess Coach* (the co-author was Ed Eusebi) the second lesson with the title “A Wonderful Knight” contains one of Nakamura's step-father's own games, played in the US amateur team championships in the summer of 1992 against Larry Pugh. And of course Weeramantry chose the King's Indian Defence. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.g3 0–0 5.♙g2 d6 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♙g4 led to exactly the same variation as Hikaru chose six years later at the junior world championship in Cannes against Artem Ijin, and to which he would remain faithful despite a defeat. So in what follows we would like to show you how his King's Indian repertoire has developed over time!

## 1.d4

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.g3 0–0  
5.♙g2 d6 6.d4



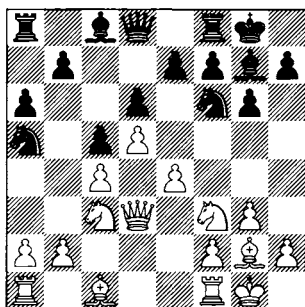
Against the **Fianchetto Variation** Hikaru chooses the Panno System: 6...♘c6 7.0–0 Or 7.d5 ♘a5 8.♘d2 c5 9.0–0 a6 10.♖c2 ♜b8 11.b3 b5 12.♙b2 e5 13.♞ab1 (13.dxe6 fxe6 14.cxb5 axb5 15.♘ce4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♙xb2 17.♖xb2 ♙b7 is the most usual sequence and should be approximately level) 13...♘h5 14.♖d3 ♙h6 15.♞fd1 f5 16.e3 ♙d7, and Black has no problems, Alvarez Marquez–Nakamura, Caribbean Open, Port of Spain 1999.

7...a6 (as mentioned earlier, at the start of his career Hikaru also played 7...♙g4 here – a continuation attributed to the Russian Vladimir Simagin. In the game against Artem Ijin things continued: 8.h3 ♙xg4

9. ♖xf3 ♜d7 10. e3 e5, and whereas Weeramantry's opponent now played 11. ♞e2, Hikaru had to deal with 11. d5) 8. b3

a) 8. h3 ♜b8 9. ♙e3 e6 (a rare move, but one which does not score badly; 9...b5 is the main variation) 10. ♛d2 b5 11. cxb5 axb5 12. ♙h6 b4 13. ♙xg7 ♜xg7 14. ♜d1 ♙b7 15. ♜e3 ♛d7 16. ♜fc1 ♜fc8, and the position is balanced, Andrianov–Nakamura, Reno 2003;

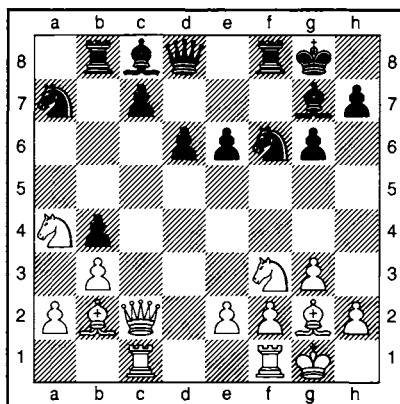
b) 8. d5 ♙a5 9. ♜d2 [9. ♛d3 c5 10. e4



Analysis diagram

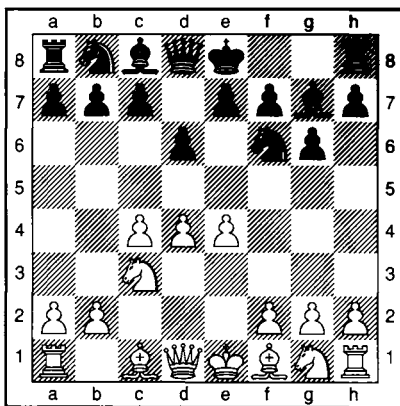
10...b5 (really risky and typical Nakamura; the main variation is 10...♜b8) 11. cxb5 axb5 12. ♜xb5 ♙a6 13. a4 ♛b6 with definite compensation, Kleiman–Nakamura, rapid, New York 2004] 9...c5 10. ♜b1 ♜b8 11. b3 b5 12. ♙b2 ♙h6 13. ♙a1 ♙f5 14. e4 ♙g4 15. f3 ♙e3+ 16. ♙h1 ♙d7 17. cxb5 axb5, and Black has equality, Aronian–Nakamura, Tal Memorial Tournament, Moscow 2010; 8...♜b8 9. ♙b2 (after 9. ♜d5 ♜h5 10. ♙b2 e6 11. ♜f4 ♜xf4 12. gxf4 b5 13. ♙c3 ♙b7 White has no advantage, Fridman–Nakamura, Bermuda 2003) 9...b5 10. cxb5 axb5 11. ♜c1 [11. ♛c2 e6?! (11...♜b4 is the main variation) 12. e4 ♙d7 13. e5 ♜b4 14. ♛d2 ♜fd5 15. ♜e4, and White was slightly better, Miton–Nakamura, rapid, New York 2004] 11...b4 12. ♜a4 ♜a7 13. d5 e5

14. dxe6 fxe6 15. ♛c2



15...c5? (15...♜b5 is preferable) 16. ♜fd1 ♛e7 17. ♜xd6, and Black has serious problems, Aronian–Nakamura, FIDE Blitz World Championship, Moscow 2010.

1...♜f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♜c3 ♙g7 4. e4 d6



5. ♜f3

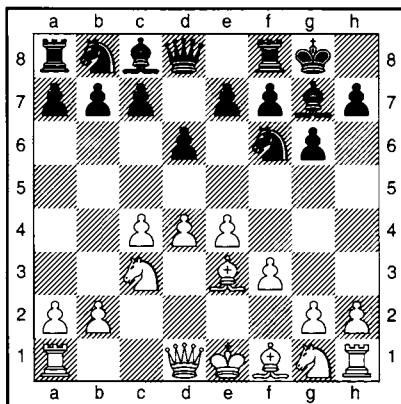
5. ♜ge2 0–0 6. ♜g3 e5 7. d5 h5 8. ♙g5 ♛e8! 9. ♙e2 ♜h7 10. ♙e3 h4 11. ♜f1 f5 12. exf5 gxf5 13. f4 a5 14. ♜d2 ♜a6 does not bring White any advantage, Kaposztas–Nakamura, Budapest 2000;

Against the **Averbakh Variation** 5. ♙e2 0–0 6. ♙g5 Hikaru transposes with 6...c5 7. d5

a6 8.♖c1 ♖a5 9.♙d2 e6 into a Benoni structure: 10.♙d3 exd5 11.exd5 ♘bd7 12.f4 Taylor–Nakamura, Financial Concept Open, North Bay 1999, and now 12...♗d8! 13.♘ge2 b5 14.cxb5 ♘b6 would have been advisable.

Against the **Four Pawns Attack** 5.f4 0–0 6.♘f3 Hikaru also plays 6...c5 and heads in the direction of a Benoni Defence: 7.dxc5 (here the question is what does Hikaru play against 7.d5? Does he try 7...e6 seeking a way to a Benoni, or does he strive for a transposition to the Volga Gambit with 7...b5 ?) 7...♗a5 8.♙d3 ♗xc5 9.♗e2 ♘c6 10.♙e3 ♖a5 11.0–0 ♙g4 12.♖ac1 ♘d7 13.♗f2 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 ♘c5 15.♙b1 ♘a4 16.♘xa4 ♖xa4 17.♖h1 e6 18.h4 ♘e7 19.h5 ♗b4 with good play for Black, as can be seen from the game Arencibia Rodriguez–Nakamura, Linares 2002;

Against the **Sämisch Variation** 5.f3 0–0 6.♙e3

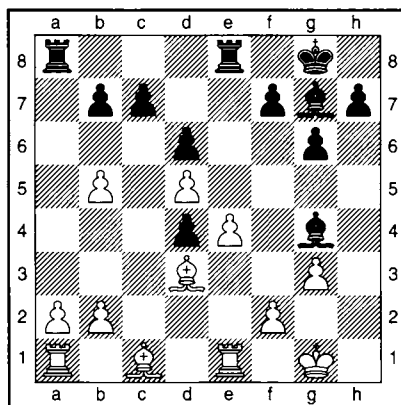


Nakamura chooses the well-known pawn sacrifice 6...c5, in order to become active straight away. (previously he also employed 6...e5) 7.dxc5 (7.♘ge2 ♘c6 8.dxc5 dxc5 9.♗xd8 ♗xd8 10.♙xc5 ♘d7 11.♙e3 ♘de5 12.♘c1 ♘b4 with good compensation in

Privman–Nakamura, rapid, New York 2003) 7...dxc5 8.♗xd8 ♗xd8 9.♙xc5 ♘c6 10.♘d5 e6 11.♘e7+ ♘xe7 12.♙xe7 ♗d7 13.♙a3 b6 14.♘h3 ♙a6 15.e5 ♘e8 16.f4 f6 with good compensation in Karpov–Nakamura, rapid, Cap d'Agde 2008;

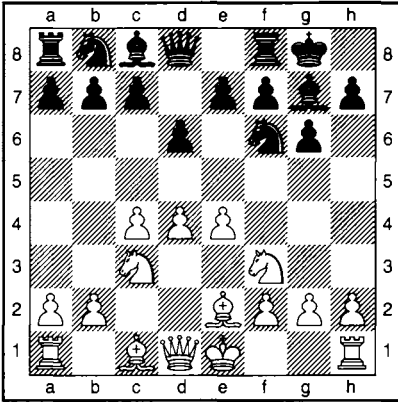
5.h3 0–0 6.♙g5 ♘a6 7.♘f3 ♗e8 8.g3 e5 9.d5 ♘c5 10.♘d2 a5 and Black has equality, Miljkovic–Nakamura, blitz, *playchess.com* 2004;

5.♙d3 0–0 6.♘ge2 ♘c6 7.0–0 e5 8.d5 ♘d4 9.♘xd4 [9.♘b5 c5 (this is Nakamura's move. 9...♗e8 is played more frequently) 10.♘bxd4 exd4 11.f3 ♘d7 12.f4 ♘f6 13.h3 b5 (Hikaru likes transposing to the Volga Gambit like this) 14.cxb5 a6 with sharp play, Miton–Nakamura, rapid, New York 2004] 9...exd4 10.♘b5 ♗e8 11.♗e1 ♘g4 12.h3 a6 13.hxg4 axb5 14.cxb5 ♗h4 15.g3 ♗xg4 16.♗xg4 ♙xg4



17.♙f4 (an interesting novelty by Aronian, but one which Hikaru combats well; 17.♖g2 is critical) 17...♙f3 18.b6 g5! 19.♙xg5 ♗e5 20.♙h4 cxb6, and the black bishop on f3 compensates for the weaknesses, Aronian–Nakamura, Melody Amber, rapid, Monte Carlo 2011.

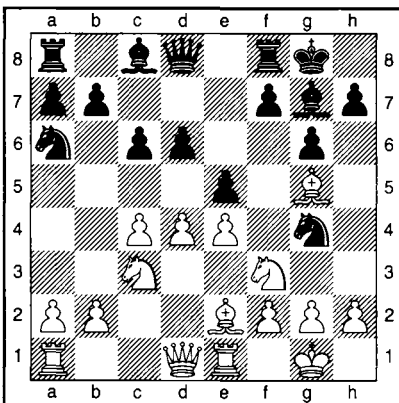
5...0–0 6.♙e2



### 6...e5

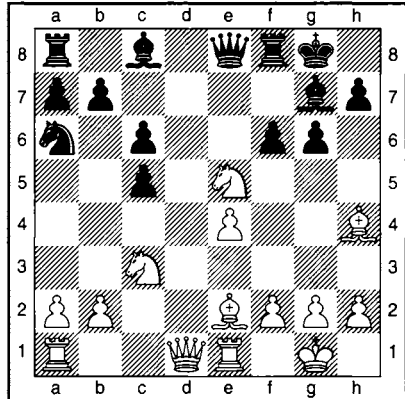
This remains Hikaru's main weapon. But he has also experimented here:

6...♖a6 7.0-0 e5 8.♞e1 (8.♙g5?! h6 9.♙h4 g5 10.dxe5 ♘h5 11.♙g3 ♘xg3 12.hxg3 dxe5 13.♞xd8 ♞xd8 14.♞fd1 ♙e6 15.♘h2 ♘b4 16.♘d5 ♘c2 17.♞ac1 ♘d4 18.♙f1 ♞d7, and Black was already slightly better in Kreiman–Nakamura, Connecticut 2003) 8...c6 (previously Hikaru also played 8...♙g4, e.g. in Alekseev–Nakamura, Santo Domingo 2003. In general, however, he appears to have distanced himself somewhat from the ♙g4-systems) 9.♙e3 ♘g4 10.♙g5



This position was twice discussed in the

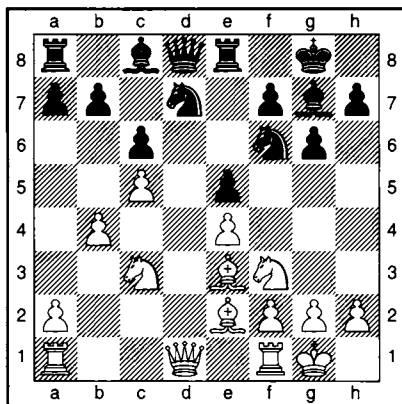
match against Ruslan Ponomarev in St. Louis 2011: 10...f6 (10...♞c7 11.h3 exd4 12.♘xd4 ♞b6 13.♙xg4 ♙xg4 14.hxg4 ♙xd4 15.♙e3 ♙xe3 16.♞xe3 ♘c5 with equality, Ponomarev–Nakamura, 5<sup>th</sup> match game, Saint Louis 2011) 11.♙h4 ♞e8 12.c5 dxc5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5



14...fxe5?! (Hikaru goes all out and accepts a position which is rather full of holes. On the other hand, after 14...♞xe5 15.♙xa6 bxa6 16.♞a4 f5 17.♞xc6 ♞b8 18.exf5 ♞xf5 Gavrilov–Shimanov, Moscow 2011, the position is almost level) 15.♙xa6 bxa6 16.♞d6 (16.♘a4!?) 16...c4 17.♞ad1 with a slight plus for White, Ponomarev–Nakamura, 3<sup>rd</sup> match game Saint Louis 2011; 6...♘bd7 7.♙e3 (7.0-0 e5 8.♞e1 c6 9.♙f1 a5 10.♞b1 ♞e8 11.d5 ♘c5 12.b3 ♙d7 with equality, Finegold–Nakamura, US Open, Cherry Hill 2007) 7...e5 8.0-0 ♞e8 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.b4 c6 11.c5

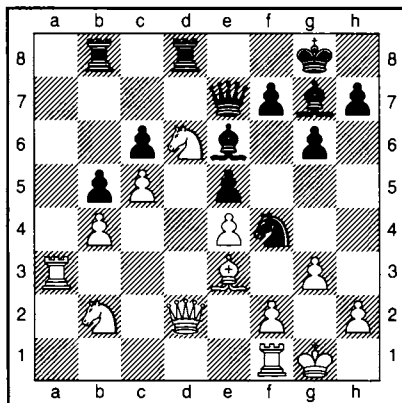
(see next diagram)

11...♘h5!? (a novelty by Nakamura, who often employs this knight manoeuvre; White may be slightly better, but the position is not an easy one to play) 12.♘d2 ♘f4 13.♘c4 ♘xe2+ 14.♞xe2 ♞e7 15.♞ab1



Position after 11.c5

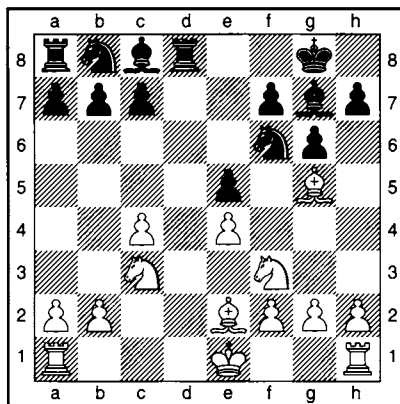
♖f8 16. ♖d6 ♜d8 17. ♖a4 ♖e6 18. ♖b2 b5  
 19. a4 a6 20. ♜a1 ♜b8 21. axb5 axb5 22. ♜a3  
 (Romain Edouard suggests 22. ♖d3!?)  
 22... ♖f4 23. ♜d2 ♖e6 24. g3



24... ♖h5?!, and now in Vallejo Pons-  
 Nakamura, World Cup Final, São Paulo/  
 Bilbao 2011, Black should have forced a  
 draw with 24... ♖h3+ 25. ♖g2 ♖f4+! 26. ♖h1  
 (after 26. gxf4 the move 26... ♜h4 equal-  
 ises) 26... ♖h3 (Édouard).

### 7.0-0

7. dxe5 dxe5 8. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 9. ♖g5



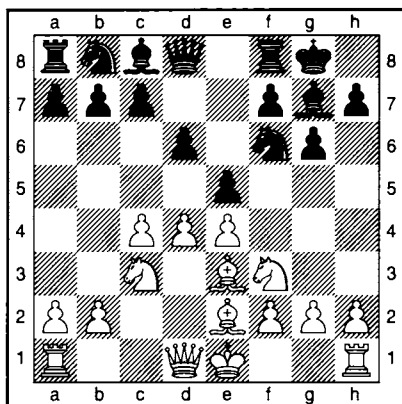
9... ♖bd7 (9... ♜e8 is by far the most  
 frequently played move, but the alterna-  
 tives are well worth considering; thus  
 King's Indian expert Victor Bologan recom-  
 mends 9... ♜f8!?) 10. 0-0 ♜f8 11. ♖d5 c6  
 12. ♖e7+ ♖h8 13. ♖e3! ♜e8 14. ♖xc8  
 ♜axc8 15. g4 ♖f8 16. ♖d2 ♖e6 17. g5 ♖d7  
 18. ♖b3 (18. ♖g4 is the alternative) 18... ♜c7  
 19. ♖g4 ♖f8 20. ♖xe6 ♜xe6 21. ♖d3 c5,  
 and White was somewhat better in Roussel  
 Roozmon–Nakamura, World Open, Phila-  
 delphia 2006, but the black position is not  
 easy to break down. Now 22. ♜hd1! would  
 have been more accurate than 22. ♖d2 as  
 in the game, when 22... f5 followed.

7. d5 a5 8. ♖g5 h6 9. ♖e3 ♖g4 10. ♖c1 f5  
 11. exf5 gxf5 12. g3 ♖a6, and Black has  
 equality, Wolski–Nakamura, Hawaii Open,  
 Honolulu 1997;

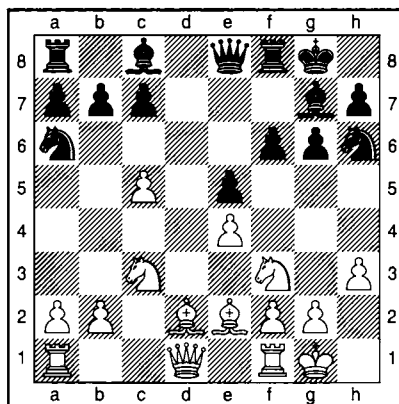
7. ♖e3

(see next diagram)

7... ♖g4 [here too Hikaru has an alternative  
 up his sleeve: 7... ♖a6 8. 0-0 (8. d5 ♖g4  
 9. ♖g5 f6 10. ♖h4 h5 11. ♖d2 ♖d7 12. h3  
 ♖h6 13. g4 hxg4 14. hxg4 ♜e7 15. ♖f1 ♖f7  
 16. ♖e3 ♖h6 17. ♖d3 ♖g7 18. ♜e2 ♜h8



Position after 7.♙e3



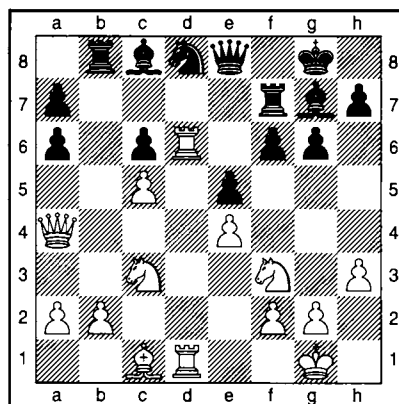
Position after 13.c5!?

19.0–0–0 c5 20.a3 ♖c7 21.♙b1 a6 22.f3 b5 with counterplay for Black, Volkov–Nakamura, FIDE World Championship, 1<sup>st</sup> round, Tripoli 2004) 8...♖g4 9.♙g5 ♚e8 10.dxe5 (10.h3 f6 11.♙c1 ♖h6 12.♞e1 c6 – 12...♖f7 is the main variation – 13.♙f1 ♖f7 14.♞b1 ♚e7 15.b4 ♖c7 16.b5 c5, and neither side has an advantage, Markus–Nakamura, blitz, *playchess.com* 2005) 10...dxe5 11.h3 (11.♖d2 f6 12.♙h4 ♖h6 13.f3 c6 14.♙f2 ♙e6 15.a3 ♖f7 16.b4 ♙h6 17.♖b3 ♚e7 18.♚c2 ♞fd8 19.♞fd1 was slightly better for White in Gustafsson–Nakamura, blitz, *playchess.com* 2004; after 11.♚c1 c6 12.♞d1 f6 13.♙d2 f5 14.h3 ♖f6 15.exf5 ♙xf5 16.♙h6 ♙xh6 17.♚xh6 too, a slight advantage for White can be discerned, as in Carlsen–Nakamura, rapid, Gjovik 2009) 11...f6 12.♙d2 ♖h6 13.c5!?

(see next diagram)

An extremely dangerous pawn sacrifice. It would now be very risky to play 13...c6 (a more solid move is 13...♖xc5: 14.♚c1 ♖f7 15.♖d5 ♖e6 16.♖xc7 ♖xc7 17.♚xc7 ♖d8 18.♞fc1 and White was minimally better in

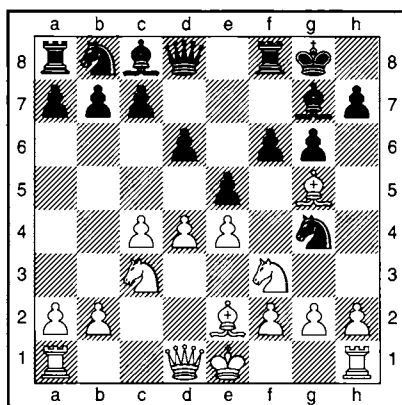
Volkov–Nakamura, FIDE World Championship 1<sup>st</sup> round, Tripoli 2004, but the black position is not easy to breach) 14.♙xa6 bxa6 15.♚a4 ♖f7 16.♞ad1 ♞b8 17.♙c1 ♖d8 18.♞d6 ♞f7 19.♞fd1



Hikaru has had this position twice. Engines, however, consider it better for White and here they could be correct: 19...♙e6 (after 19...♖b7, which was played in Gustafsson–Nakamura, blitz, *playchess.com* 2004, even 20.♞xc6 ♙d7 21.♞xd7 ♚xd7 22.♚xa6 is very interesting from White's point of view) 20.♙e3 a5 21.♞d3 ♖b7 22.♚c2 ♙f8 23.♖a4 g5 24.♖d2 ♞g7

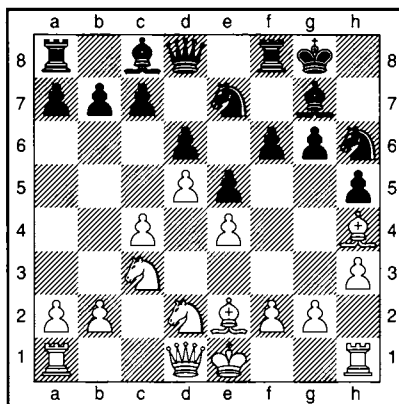
25.♖f1 ♜d8 26.♜g3 ♜gd7 27.b3 ♜xd3  
28.♜xd3 ♜xd3 29.♞xd3 ♙c8 30.♙h2 h5  
31.♜f5 and White is better, Shabalov–  
Nakamura, Foxwoods Open, Mashantucket  
2004. Nevertheless, this game ended in a  
draw, as follows: 31...♞d7 32.♞c4+ ♞e6  
33.♞c3 h4 34.♙c1 ♞d7 35.♙a3 ♞h7  
36.♞c4+ ♞f7 37.♜d6 ♙xd6 38.cxd6 ♞xc4  
39.bxc4 c5 40.d7.

8.♙g5 f6

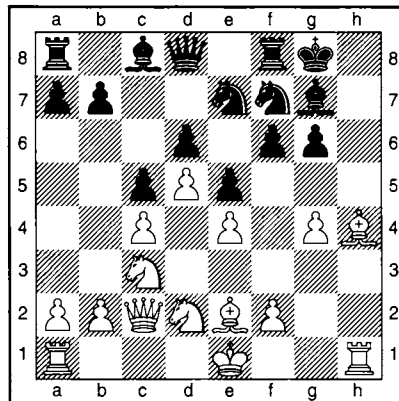


9.♙h4 [on two occasions against 9.♙c1  
Hikaru was unable to achieve complete  
equality: 9...♜c6 10.h3 ♜h6 11.♙e3 ♜f7  
12.0–0 (12.d5 ♜e7 13.♜d2 f5 14.f3 c5  
15.g4, Yu Mingyuan–Nakamura, Budapest  
2000) 12...f5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♞xd8 ♜cxd8  
15.♜d5 fxe4 16.♜d2 ♜e6 17.♜xe4 ♜f4  
18.♙f3 ♜xd5 19.cxd5, Bhat–Nakamura,  
rapid, Mainz 2008] 9...♜c6 10.d5 ♜e7  
11.♜d2 h5 12.h3 ♜h6

(see next diagram)



13.g4 (13.f3 c5 14.g4 hxg4 15.hxg4 ♜f7  
16.♙d3 ♙d7 17.♞e2 ♜c8 18.♙f2 ♙h6  
19.♙e3 ♙xe3 20.♞xe3 ♙g7 21.0–0–0  
♞h8 was almost equal in Bacrot–Nakamura,  
Spanish team championship, Sestao 2010)  
13...hxg4 14.hxg4 ♜f7 15.♞c2 c5



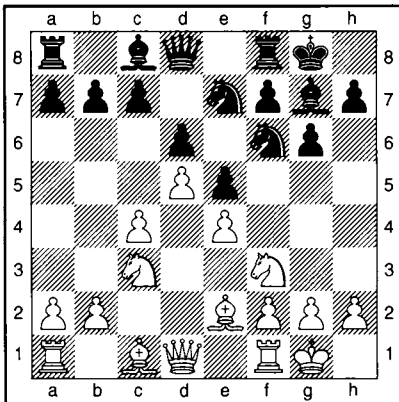
Hikaru likes this set-up, followed by a6 and  
then b5, for example: 16.0–0–0 a6 17.♞h2  
♙d7 18.♞dh1 b5 19.♙b1 ♞b8 20.♙g3  
♞c8 21.f3 ♞b7 22.♙a1 ♞c7 23.f4 ♞fb8  
24.fxe5?! (in *CBM* 138 Michal Krasenkov  
suggests here 24.f5!?) 24...dxe5 25.♜d1  
♜c8 26.♜e3 (26.♙f2!? – Krasenkov) 26...  
♜cd6 27.♙h4 bxc4 28.♜dxc4 ♙b5 29.♞b1  
♙xc4 30.♜xc4 ♜xc4 31.♙xc4 ♜d6 32.♙e1

♖d7 33. ♙e2 c4 34. ♙c3 g5 35. ♜hh1 ♜e8  
36. ♙f3 ♜b5 37. ♜a4 ♜c8 38. ♜hc1 ♙f8  
39. ♙e1 ♜d6 40. ♜xe8 ♜xe8 ½–½ Gelfand–  
Nakamura, NH Hotels, Amsterdam 2010.

### 7... ♜c6 8.d5

8. ♙e3 exd4 (this exchange is strategically risky, so probably the main variation 8... ♜g4 should nowadays be Hikaru's choice) 9. ♜xd4 ♜e8 10. f3 ♜h5 11. f4 (11. ♜d2!? is critical) 11... ♜f6 12. ♜xc6 bxc6 13. ♙f3 ♜b8 14. b3 ♜g4 15. ♙d4 ♜e3 16. ♙xe3 ♙xc3 17. ♜c1 ♙g7 18. ♜d2 with a slight advantage for White in Hebert–Nakamura, Financial Concept Open, North Bay 1999; 8. dxe5 dxe5 9. ♙g5 ♜xd1 10. ♜fxd1 ♙g4 11. h3 ♙xf3 12. ♙xf3 ♜d4 13. ♜d5 ♜xd5 14. cxd5 f5 15. ♙f1 ♜f7 16. ♜ac1 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 ♙f8 18. ♜d3 ♙d6 19. ♙e3 ♜f5 20. ♙d2 and the bishops gave White a slight plus in Ponomarev–Nakamura, Sparkassen Chess Meeting, Dortmund 2011.

### 8... ♜e7



### 9. ♜d2

A) 9. b4 ♜h5. Nowadays this is Hikaru's main weapon against the Bayonet Attack. Previously he also employed 9... a5, but he

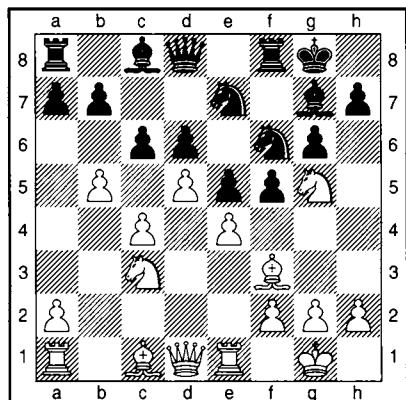
has turned away from that.

On the other hand, not long ago he brought 9... ♜e8 up for discussion, possibly to avoid Gata Kamsky's preparation: 10. a4 f5 11. a5 ♜f6 12. ♙g5 ♜h5 13. ♜d2 ♜f4 14. c5 h6 15. ♙xf4 exf4 16. ♜c1 fxe4 17. ♜dx4 ♜f5 18. ♜e1, and now, according to Yermolinsky, instead of 18... ♙e5?! the move 18... ♜d4 was indicated in Kamsky–Nakamura, USA National Championship, Saint Louis 2010; 10. ♜e1

a) 10. c5 ♜f4 11. a4 (11. ♙xf4 exf4 12. ♜c1 is the main variation; 11. ♙c4 ♙g4 12. ♜e1 g5 13. h3 ♙h5 14. ♙xf4?! exf4 15. ♜d3 ♜g6 was more pleasant for Black in Nepomniachtchi–Nakamura, blitz, *playchess.com* 2007) 11... f5 12. ♙c4 fxe4 13. ♜xe4 h6 14. ♜e1 ♙g4 15. ♜a3 g5 16. h3 ♙h5 17. ♙xf4 ♜xf4 18. g3 ♜f8 19. a5 ♙h8 20. ♙g2 ♜b8 21. ♜d2 b6 22. axb6 axb6 with equality, Kramnik–Nakamura, Dortmund 2011;

b) We do not know what Hikaru has up his sleeve against 10. g3. After 10... f5 11. ♜g5 ♜f6 12. f3 does he prefer one of the two main options, 12... c6 and 12... f4, or has he his own interpretation?

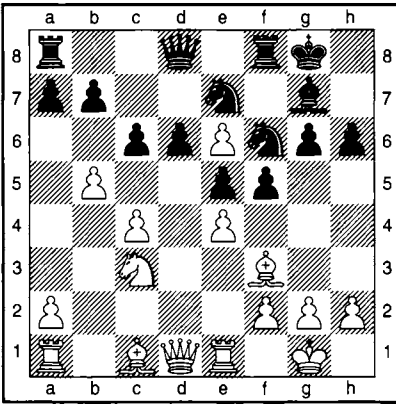
10... f5 11. ♜g5 ♜f6 12. ♙f3 c6 13. b5



“The problem with this move is clear: Black



has at his disposal a well-known drawish variation. But at the start of this game my opponent looked even physically so up for it that he convinced me. He would never go for a draw!" (Yannick Pelletier in *CBM 108*)  
 13...h6 14.♖e6 ♗xe6 15.dxe6



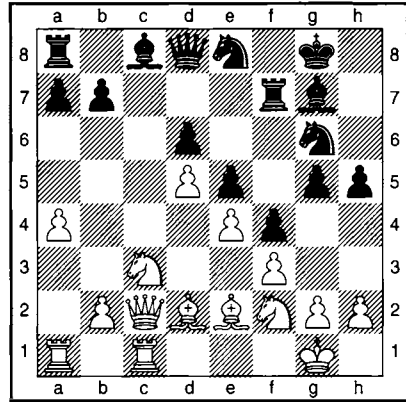
15...♖a5?! (Hikaru aims very high; 15...fxe4 16.♖xe4 ♖xe4 17.♗xe4 d5 18.cxd5 cxd5 19.♗a3 dxe4 20.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 21.♗xe7 ♖e8 22.♗c5 ♖xe6 "leads to the aforementioned drawn ending", according to Pelletier) 16.♗b2 fxe4 17.♖xe4 ♖xe4 18.♖xe4 d5 19.cxd5 cxd5 20.♖xe5! (a typical and strong exchange sacrifice) 20...♗xe5 21.♗xe5 ♖xb5?! 22.♖b1 ♖c6 23.♗a1 ♖f4 24.g3! ♖c4 25.♖d2 ♖c5 26.♗f6 g5?! 27.♖xb7 ♖c1+ 28.♗g2 ♖c4 29.♖e2 ♖xe2 30.♗xe2 ♖f5 31.♗g4, 1–0, Pelletier–Nakamura, Biel 2005;

**B)** 9.♖e1 ♖d7 10.♗e3 [10.♖d3 f5 11.♗d2 ♖f6 12.f3 f4 13.c5 g5 14.cxd6 cxd6 15.♖f2 ♖g6 16.♖c2 ♖f7 17.♖fc1 ♖e8 18.a4 h5

(see next diagram)

19.♖cd1

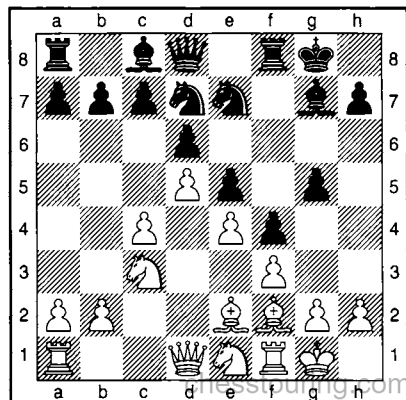
("White has no waterproof method of preventing the impending kingside attack



Position after 18...h5

by Black. His superiority on the queenside should help him to tie down some of the enemy pieces. Aronian's novelty is sensible, as the knight may help his king," was the comment by Lubomir Ftacnik in *CBM 134*)

19...♗f8 20.♖a3 a6 21.♖c3 ♗d7 22.♖a5 b6 23.♖b4 ♖g7 24.♖ac3 ♖h4 25.h3 ♗e7 26.♗e1, and now in Aronian–Nakamura, World Team Championship, Bursa 2010, the typical advance 26...g4 should have followed. However, instead Hikaru played the passive 26...♖b8] 10...f5 11.f3 f4 12.♗f2 g5

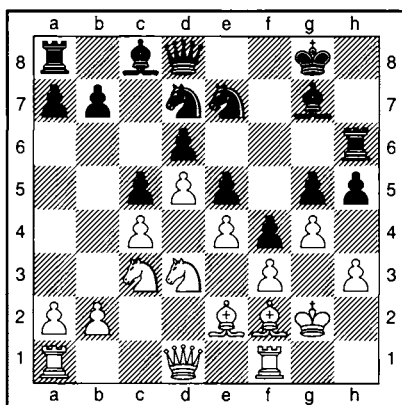


13.♘d3

**a)** 13.g4 h5 14.h3 ♖f6

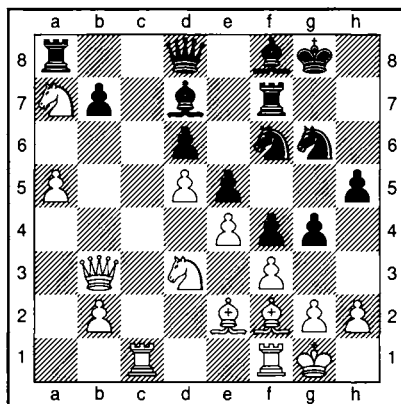
("This rather closed position has not attracted the attention of strong players in the past. Nakamura has his own ideas about the King's Indian Defence, so his choice of the line could make a difference", was the appreciative judgement of Ftacnik in *CBM* 142).

15.♘d3 ♖h6 16.♗g2 c5



Hikaru's novelty. He likes playing the King's Indian with ...c7–c5. 17.dxc6 ♘xc6 18.c5!? White must seek counterplay quickly, before the black advance on the kingside becomes too threatening: 18...dxc5 19.♘xc5 ♘d4 (19...♘xc5!?) 20.♗c4+ ♖h7 21.♘b3 and now 21...♘b6! 22.♗d3 ♗e6 with equality should have followed (Ftacnik) instead of 21...♘f6? as in Ponomarev–Nakamura, 1<sup>st</sup> match game, Saint Louis 2011.

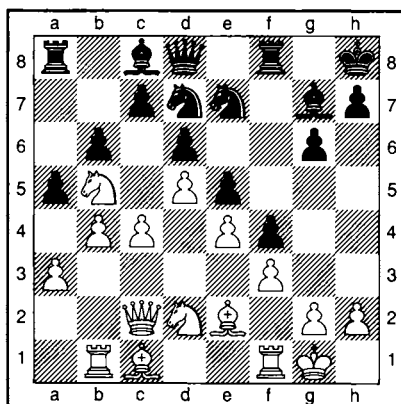
**b)** Against the most frequently played 13.a4 it is not clear exactly how Hikaru will continue. However, Kasparov's database must have had a lot on this subject; 13...♗f6 14.c5 ♘g6 15.♖c1 ♖f7 16.a4 ♗f8 (16...h5 17.a5 g4 is the main variation) 17.a5 h5 18.cxd6 cxd6 19.♘b5 g4 20.♘xa7 ♗d7 21.♖b3



21...g3 (the typical way of getting counterplay. Now after 22.♗b6 instead of 22...♖e7? as in Meier–Nakamura, Dortmund 2011, 22...gxh2+ 23.♗h1 should have been played, according to Georg Meier).

**9...♗e8**

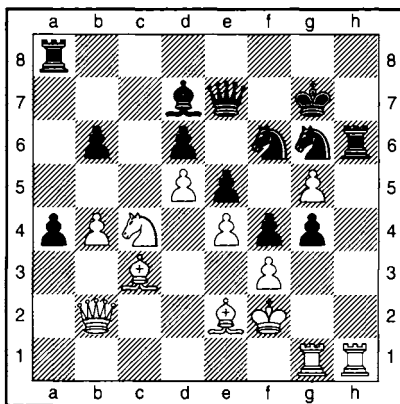
9...a5 is Hikaru's alternative: 10.a3 ♖h8 (10...c5 11.♖b1 ♗e8 12.b4 axb4 13.axb4 b6 14.bxc5 bxc5 15.♘b3 f5 16.f3 f4 17.♗d2 ♗d7 18.♖a1 g5 19.♘b5, and White was better in Vaganian–Nakamura, Barcelona 2007, because his play on the queenside quickly picks up speed) 11.♖b1 ♗d7 12.b4 f5 13.f3 f4 14.♘b5 b6 15.♖c2



15...a4!? ("A curious idea. Instead of



opening the a-file for White, Black prevents a3–a4 and ♖c1–a3. The a4-pawn can be captured but that will take a lot of time,” was Michal Krasenkow’s opinion on this move in *CBM 142*) 16.♖d1 g5 17.g4 h5 18.h3 ♜f6 19.♙b2 ♜h6 20.♙g2 ♜g6 21.♜h1 ♙f8 22.♙f2 ♜f6 23.c5! dxc5 24.♜c4 ♙d6 25.♙c3?! (25.h4! is critical for Black) 25...♙g7 26.♜b2 (26.h4!?) 26...cxb4 27.axb4 ♜e7 28.♜bg1? ♙d7 29.♜bxd6 cxd6 30.h4 hxg4 31.hxg5

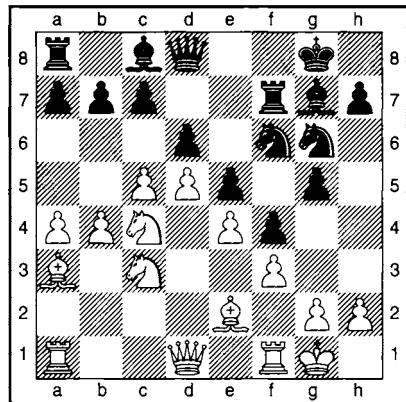


31...♜xe4+! (now Hikaru strikes!) 32.fxe4 ♜xh1 33.♜xh1 f3 34.♜xb6 g3+! 35.♙xf3 ♜f8+ 36.♙e3 ♜xg5+ 37.♙d3 ♙b5+ 38.♙c2 ♜f2 39.♙d2 ♜xe2 40.♜c3 g2 41.♜g1 a3 42.♙c1 ♜xd2 43.♜xd2 a2 44.♙c2 ♜xd2+ 45.♙xd2 ♙f1 0–1 Kramnik–Nakamura, rapid, Melody Amber, Monte Carlo 2011.

#### 10.b4 f5 11.c5 ♜f6 12.f3

12.a4 f4 13.♜c4 g5 14.♙a3 g4 (typical Hikaru – he always presses boldly forward; 14...♜g6 is the alternative) 15.cxd6 cxd6 16.b5 ♜e8 17.♙xg4 ♜c7 18.♙e2 f3 19.b6 axb6 20.♜b5 fxe2 21.♜xe2 ♜d8 22.♜bxd6 ♜xd6 23.♙xd6, and now instead of 23...♜f7? in Kramnik–Nakamura, Olympiad, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, the move 23...♜e8 would have been more accurate).

#### 12...f4 13.♜c4 g5 14.a4 ♜g6 15.♙a3 ♜f7



#### 16.b5

For 16.a5 see Beliavsky–Nakamura, Amsterdam 2009, Chapter 10, p. 203.

#### 16...dxc5 17.♙xc5 h5 18.a5 g4 19.b6 g3

And the attacks roll forward on both sides as in Gelfand–Nakamura, World Team Championship, Bursa 2010, see Chapter 10, p. 201.

As this short King’s Indian repertoire of Nakamura impressively demonstrates, over his chess career Hikaru has not only fought successfully for his place in the world elite, but has also developed this defence into one of his most dangerous weapons. His countless bullet, blitz and rapid chess games on the internet must have played a large part in this process of development.

And a role was perhaps played by the fact that his great model Robert James Fischer also unconditionally trusted the King’s Indian with Black. In his statistics we find 109 games in which the eleventh world champion chose this defence, which was introduced into tournament praxis by Louis Paulsen. And it is certainly no coincidence that the first recorded game of Bobby

Fischer – played in the US Amateur Championships in May 1955 – was also a King's Indian.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1990s the King's Indian Defence was enriched with numerous new ideas by Garry Kasparov and it experienced a renaissance, after for a long period when other Indian openings such as the Queen's Indian, the Nimzo-Indian and the Grünfeld Defence attracted much more attention. During his barely one year of cooperation with the 13<sup>th</sup> world champion, Nakamura must certainly have gained some valuable ideas in the King's Indian. Alongside

Hikaru, the six months older Azerbaijani Teimour Radjabov (born 12<sup>th</sup> March 1987) is probably today's most ardent and innovative fan of the King's Indian at the very highest level. Other world-class players who in the last 20 years have at least for a time had the King's Indian in their repertoire are Victor Bologan, Boris Gelfand, Alexander Grischuk, Vassily Ivanchuk, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Alexander Morozovich (almost solely in rapid chess), Sergei Movsesian, John Nunn, Judit Polgar, Alexei Shirov, Ilja Smirin, Peter Svidler, Veselin Topalov and Loek van Wely.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Karsten Müller, *Bobby Fischer – The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion*, Russell Enterprises, Inc., Milford, CT USA, 2009, p.35



## CHAPTER 10

# Hikaru Nakamura's best games

**W**e happily admit that we were sorely tempted to give 'memorable' as well as 'best' games as the title to this chapter. And there is a good reason for this. In 1969 Robert James Fischer published his collection of games under the title *My 60 Memorable Games*.<sup>5</sup> The games, which appeared with brilliant introductory comments by grandmaster Larry Evans, were all played between 1957 and 1967. The final one was from the Interzonal Tournament in Sousse against Leonid Stein. At that point the future world champion was just 24, as by chance was Hikaru Nakamura in the year of his breakthrough in Wijk aan Zee! When in July 2011 in Dortmund we asked our hero about his top 10 games, his answer was the slightly shocked: "Ten games?"

Well, "memorable" and "best" games are of course not the same thing... At that time Hikaru mentioned at least the games against Michal Krasenkow, Boris Gelfand, Alexander Beliavsky and Vladimir Kramnik, in that order. After a thorough search we have added one more game to that quartet, with an important criterion for its choice being that, as in the case of Robert James Fischer, it would contain something "memorable and exciting".

For Hikaru Nakamura's five best games that we intend to show you, that which Anatoly Karpov wrote in another context about the beauty of chess is equally valid: "It is based on the subtlest of nuances, behind which are hidden deeply important rules and inexhaustible possibilities. Thus something new can always be taken from every game. This eternal freshness of chess is what we find so truly beautiful about it."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the ex-world champion met the then 22-year-old American in 2009 in San Sebastián in the tournament mentioned in the Prologue by Lubosh Kavalek – and lost...

## GAME 43

**M. Krasenkow – H. Nakamura**

Casino Tournament, Barcelona 2007

*Réti Opening [A14]*

***A brilliant queen sacrifice***

In 2007 the 19-year-old Hikaru was No.3 in the USA behind Gata Kamsky and Alexander Onischuk. But if he wanted to improve further he really had to cross "The Pond" and go to Europe to take part in tournaments there. In the autumn of 2007 that step was taken. In October Nakamura took

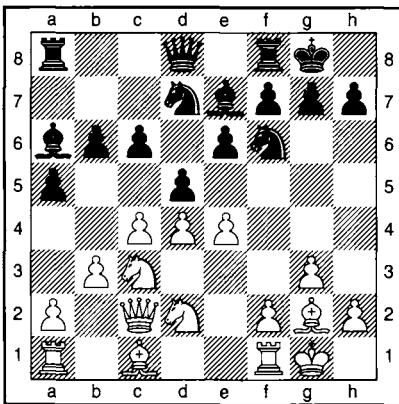
<sup>1</sup> Published by Simon & Schuster, New York. Rights to the German edition were secured by the Kurt Rattmann Verlag in Hamburg, where in 1970 the first edition appeared with the title *Meine 60 denkwürdigen Partien*; many more would follow it.

<sup>2</sup> I. Linder: *Faszinierendes Schach*, Sportverlag Berlin 1986, p.259

part in the Corsica Open in Bastia – a rapid tournament with 10 minutes thinking time each plus an increment of three seconds per move – which he won, defeating Rustam Kasimdzhanov 1½-½ in the final. He had previously stopped off in Barcelona, where he won a FIDE category XV (Elo average 2607) all-play-all tournament, a point ahead of the Cuban Pérez Dominguez (Elo 2683). At the time Hikaru chose and annotated for *New in Chess* Vol. 8/2007 his encounter with Michal Krasenkow, one of the best Polish (formerly Russian) grandmasters, on account of the brilliant queen sacrifice. Allow yourself be enchanted, since at the time the winner said euphorically that it was the best game he had ever played.

**1.♟f3 ♞f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 a5 7.♞c3 c6 8.d4 ♞bd7 9.♚c2 b6 10.e4 ♙a6 11.♞d2?!**

White may have managed a few good results with this set-up, but Nakamura shows that it is in fact rather artificial. The alternative 11.e5 ♞e8 12.♞e2 ♚c8 13...♚d1 ♞c7 is preferable.



**11...c5!**

Nakamura immediately picks up the gaunt-

let with this novelty and boldly seizes the initiative. 11...♚c8 did not appeal to him, as can be seen from the rapid game Renet–Bronstein, Oviedo 1992, which he justifiably quotes:

12.♚e1 c5 13.dxc5 d4 14.♞a4 ♞xc5 15.♙xc5 ♙xc5 16.♚d3 e5 17.♙h3 ♚b8 18.♞f3 ♚e8 19.♙g5 b5 20.♞d2 ♙b4 21.♚ed1 h6 22.♙xf6 ♚xf6 23.♚ac1 ♙c3 24.♙d7 bxc4 25.bxc4 ♚ed8 26.♙b5 (1–0).

**12.exd5**

After 12.dxc5?! d4 13.♞b5 ♙xc5 14.e5 Black happily gives up the exchange: 14...♞xe5 15.♙xa8 ♚xa8 (Ftacnik in *CBM* 121) with good compensation.

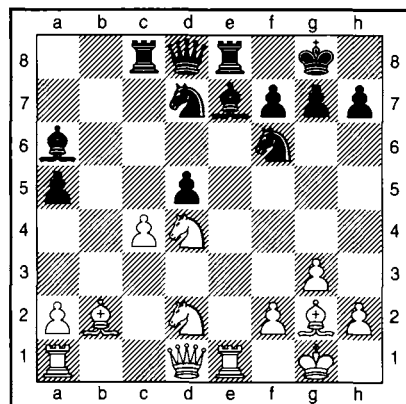
**12...cxd4 13.♞b5 exd5**

13...♙xb5? 14.dxe6! plays into White's hands.

**14.♞xd4 ♚c8 15.♚e1 b5 16.♙b2 ♚e8 17.♚d1?**

White does not have time for this retreat. 17.♙c3 bxc4 18.bxc4 ♙xc4 19.♞xc4 ♚xc4 20.♚d2 would have limited the damage.

**17...bxc4 18.bxc4**



**18...♚b6!**

A strong intermediate move, the point of which is still lying hidden beyond the



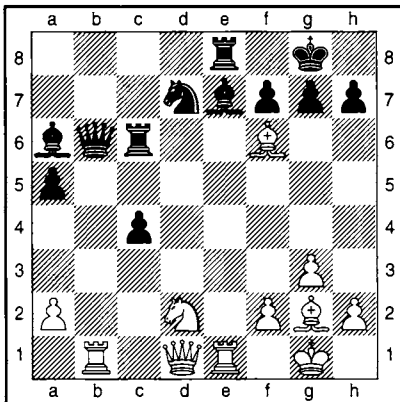
horizon. Accepting the pawn sacrifice at once with 18...♙xc4?! 19.♘xc4 ♖xc4 20.♙f5 ♙c5 21.♚d2 allows White good compensation, and 18...dxc4? 19.♙c6 backfires.

**19.♖b1 dxc4! 20.♙c6?**

This runs into an incredible counter. 20.♙c3 ♚c5 was the lesser evil.

**20...♖xc6 21.♙xf6?!**

From the practical point of view 21.♖xe7!? was preferable, but in the long run the black rooks should also retain the upper hand after 21...♖xe7 22.♙xf6 (22.♙a3 c3 23.♖xb6 cxd2 24.♖xa6 ♖c1 25.♖a8+ ♙f8 26.♙f3 ♖xd1+ 27.♙xd1 ♖e1+ 28.♙g2 ♙6d7, and White has nothing more to laugh about) 22...♙xf6 23.♖xb6 ♖xb6.



**21...♚xf2+!!**

An incredible queen sacrifice, apparently out of nowhere.

**22.♙xf2**

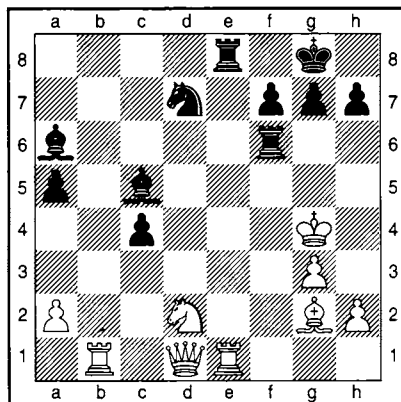
Black also has a decisive advantage after 22.♙h1 ♚xf6 23.♙xc6 ♚xc6+ 24.♚f3 ♚c8.

**22...♙c5+ 23.♙f3**

Krasenkow's king tries in vain to flee. However, there is no longer any way of

saving the game, e.g. 23.♙f1 c3+! (but not 23...♖xf6+?? on account of 24.♙f3 c3+ 25.♙g2, and the wrong side wins!) 24.♖e2 c2-+; or 23.♙d4 ♙xd4+ 24.♙f3 ♖f6+ 25.♙g4 ♙e5+ 26.♙g5 ♙c8 (Ftacnik).

**23...♖xf6+ 24.♙g4**



**24...♙e5+!**

Nakamura brings all his pieces into the attack. The fantastic coordination of his rooks and bishops is impressive.

**25.♙g5**

25.♖xe5 ♙c8+! 26.♖f5 ♙xf5+ 27.♙h4 ♖h6+ 28.♙g5 ♙c8 29.♙f4 g5+ 30.♙xg5 (30.♙f3 ♖f6#) 30...♙e3#.

**25...♖g6+ 26.♙h5**

26.♙f4 ♙d3+ 27.♙f3 ♖f6+ 28.♙g4 ♙c8+ 29.♙h4 ♖xe1 30.♚xe1 ♖h6+ 31.♙g5 f6#.

**26...f6 27.♖xe5 ♖xe5+ 28.♙h4 ♙c8!**

And now there is no escape from Nakamura's mating net: 29.g4 (29.♙d5+ ♖xd5 30.g4 ♖d3 is equally hopeless for White) 29...♙f2+ 30.♙h3 ♖h6 mate.

**White resigned**

## GAME 44

**B. Gelfand – H. Nakamura**

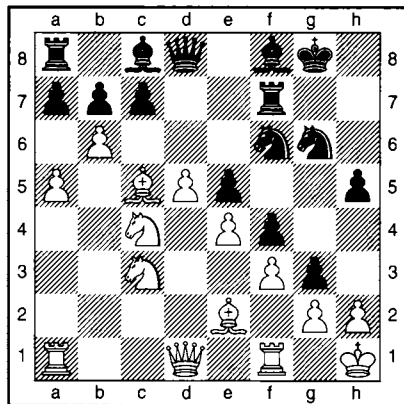
7<sup>th</sup> World Team Championship, Bursa 2010  
*King's Indian Defence [E97]*

### Like a hurricane

“The *Chess Informant* represents the first attempt in the application to chess of modern scientific methods in the endeavour to study more efficiently the trends in World Chess. All games showing particular beauty and innovations in Openings Theory and general concepts find a place in this publication’, was the claim made by the editors in the very first volume in 1966. By the fourth issue a new section had been introduced: “The ten best games from the previous volume”, which was intended to bring out more clearly the creative element in chess. For their jury, to which a selection of 30 games was submitted, the editors were able to call on grandmasters Max Euwe, Yuri Averbakh, Gedeon Barcza, Erich Eliskases, Vasja Pirc, Lev Polugaevsky, Lothar Schmid and Petar Trifunovic. The method was extremely simple and has remained the same till the present day. The members of the jury vote by allocating points to each individual game – with a maximum score of 10. The total which each game achieves decides its placing among the ten best performances. The first winner was the game Fischer–Stein from the Interzonal Tournament in Sousse with 58 points out of a possible 80, though it did not receive the highest mark from any of the jurors. In Bobby’s best-seller *My 60 Memorable Games* it is the final game, annotated under the heading “When champions meet”. In *Chess Informant* 109, for his game against Boris Gelfand, Nakamura received

from the jury (Alexander Beliavsky, Larry Christiansen, Mikhail Gurevich, Aleksandar Matanovic, Adrian Mikhalechishin, Zoltán Ribli, Jonathan Speelman and Jan Timman) the second highest number of votes, only six points (55 to 61) behind the first-placed World Championship brilliancy from Sofia between Topalov and Anand.

**1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗f3 0–0 6.♙e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♗e7 9.♗d2 ♗e8 10.b4 f5 11.c5 ♗f6 12.f3 f4 13.♗c4 g5 14.a4 ♗g6 15.♙a3 ♖f7 16.b5 dxc5 17.♙xc5 h5 18.a5 g4 19.b6 g3 20.♙h1 ♙f8**



The main continuation. Ognjen Cvitan scored a nice victory with the trap 20...♗h7 21.d6 ♖h4 22.♙g1 ♙h3!? 23.bxc7?? (23.gxh3! refutes the black plan: 23...♖xh3 24.♖f2 gxf2 25.♙xf2±; 23.♖e1? ♙xg2+ 24.♙xg2 ♖h3+ 25.♙xh3 ♗g5+ 26.♙g2 ♗h4+ 27.♙f1 g2+ 28.♙f2 ♗h3#) 23...♙xg2+! 24.♙xg2 ♖h3+!! 25.♙xh3 ♗g5+ 26.♙g2 ♗h4+. White resigned on account of 27.♙h1 g2 mate, Ftacnik–Cvitan, Bundesliga 1997.

### 21.d6

Gelfand's novelty. In older games we find the continuation 21.♙g1, for example:



21...♖h4 22.♞e1?! ♜xg2 23.♙xg2 ♞g7  
24.♜xe5? gxf2+ 25.♙h1 ♜xe4 0–1,  
Roozmon–P.Charbonneau, Montreal 2008.

### 21...axb6 22.♙g1

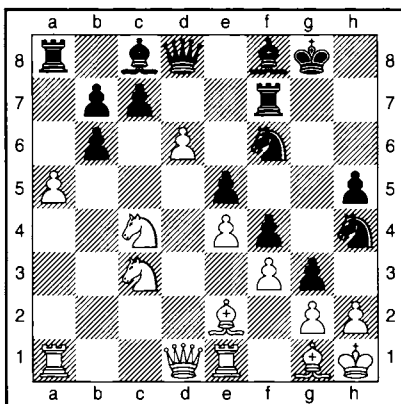
22.axb6? ♞xa1 23.♞xa1 cxd6 allows Black  
too strong an attack, for example: 24.♞d1  
(24.♙g1 gxf2 25.♙h2 h4) 24...♜g4!!  
25.fxf4 ♞h4 26.♙g1 hxf4 27.♜e3 gxf2  
28.♙h2 g3 29.♜f1 ♙e6 (Ftacnik).

### 22...♜h4!?

Nakamura goes for broke and plays logi-  
cally for an attack on the king. 22...gxf2  
23.♙h2 bxa5 24.dxc7 ♞xd1 25.♞fxd1  
♞xc7 26.♜b5, on the other hand, gives  
White good play for the two sacrificed  
pawns and does not fit in with the black  
attack.

### 23.♞e1

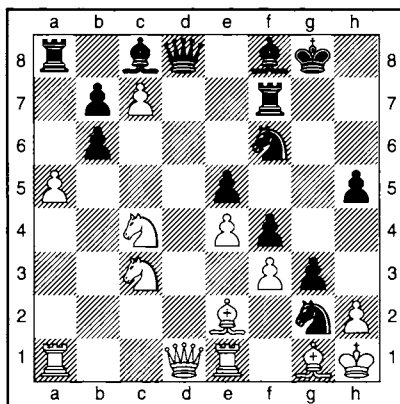
23.♜xe5? is a mistake on account of  
23...♙h3!, but 23.hxf3!? was well worth  
considering. In any case Black retains  
counterplay after 23...fxg3 24.♙e3 cxd6  
(but not 24...♙h3? on account of 25.♞g1  
♞c8 26.♙f1 with an advantage for White)  
25.♙g5 ♜g6, e.g. 26.f4 ♙e7 27.fxe5 ♜g4  
28.♞xf7 ♙xf7 29.♙xg4 hxf4 30.♜xd6+  
♙g7 31.♙f6+ ♙xf6 32.exf6+ ♙h7, and the  
position is balanced.



### 23...♜xg2! 24.dxc7?

This runs into a powerful storm, which turns  
into a fatal hurricane for White...

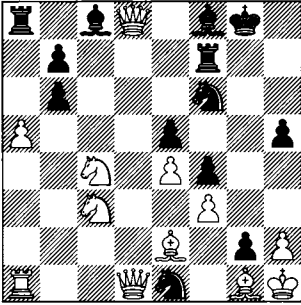
24.♙xg2! is forced, after which White can  
probably just survive, as shown by Lubomir  
Ftacnik in *CBM* 134: 24...♞g7 25.dxc7  
(25.♜xe5 gxf2+ 26.♙h2 ♜g4+ 27.fxf4  
♞h4+ 28.♙g2 hxf4 29.♞d5+ ♙h7 30.♙d4,  
and Black has nothing better than per-  
petual check by 30...♞h3+ 31.♙g1 ♞g3+)  
25...gxf2+ 26.♙h1!! (after 26.♙h2? ♜g4+  
27.fxf4 ♞h4+ 28.♙g2 hxf4 29.♞d5+ ♞f7  
30.♙xb6 (30.♜xe5? ♞h3+ 31.♙f2 g3+  
32.♙f3 ♞h1#) 30...f3+ 31.♙f1 ♙e6  
32.♞xe6 ♞h3+ 33.♙f2 g3+ 34.♙e3 ♞xe6  
White has surely been administered the  
last rights) 26...hxf1♞+ 27.♞xg1 ♞xc7  
28.axb6 ♞xa1 29.bxc7 ♞xd1 30.♙xd1  
♞xg1+ 31.♙xg1 ♜e8, and the storm has  
abated.



### 24...♜xe1! 25.♞xe1

25.cxd8♞? fails to the wonderful 25...g2  
mate. What a mating pattern!

(see next diagram)



Analysis diagram after 25.cxd8? g2#

**25...g2+!**

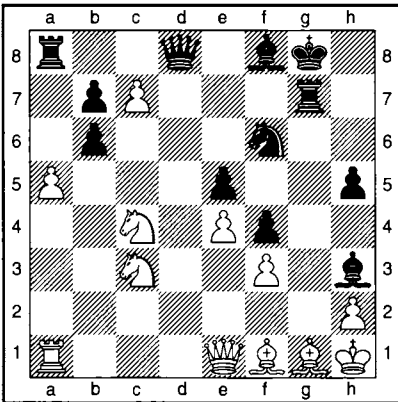
Nakamura logically opens attacking lines.

**26.♔xf2 ♚g7+ 27.♔h1**

27.♔f2? ♔c5+ 28.♔f1 ♚xc7 mate.

**27...♔h3 28.♔f1**

28.♚f2 ♚d4 29.♚d1 ♚xf2 30.♔xf2 ♔g2+ 31.♔g1 ♔xf3+ 32.♔f1 ♔xe2+ 33.♔xe2 ♚xc7 also does not save White, and after 28.cxd8? he is simply mated: 28...♔g2#.

**28...♚d3!!**

A powerful thunderclap, which announces White's demise. Moreover, for four moves Hikaru's queen on d8 had been taboo for the white pawn on c7.

**29.♔xe5**

If the ♔f1 moves, White is mated: 29.♔xd3?

♔g2# or 29.♔xh3? ♚xf3+ 30.♔g2 ♚xc7#.

**29...♔xf1 30.♚xf1**

30.♔xd3? ♔g2#.

**30...♚xc3 31.♚c1**

Boris did not feel like playing on after 31.♔d3 ♚xc7, since, being a knight down, the rest would be pretty hopeless for him.

**31...♚xe5 32.c8 ♚xc8 33.♚xc8 ♚e6**

**White resigned**

And finally, it should be pointed out that in Bursa Nakamura not only played brilliantly against Gelfand, but he also scored the best result on board 1 with 6 out of 8 and thus achieved the best rating performance of 2851 points. And he required only 30 minutes thinking time for this masterpiece. We say "hats off to him"!

## GAME 45

**A. Beliavsky – H. Nakamura**

Match Experience – Youth, Amsterdam 2009

*King's Indian Defence [E97]*

### *A deadly pawn fork*

Here we must first of all pay tribute to Joop van Oosterom, whom we have to thank for twenty Melody Amber tournaments between 1992 and 2011 in his adopted country, Monaco. The twice world correspondence chess champion (18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> championships) and sponsor from The Netherlands, who finished a respectable seventh in the first junior world championship of 1955 in Antwerp, which was won by Boris Spassky, has always shown himself to be open to new ideas. And so he also supports the NH-tournament, in which a team of experienced grandmasters puts to the test the "rising stars", of whom the winner earns the right to take part in the



next Melody Amber Tournament. In August 2009, in the luxurious five-star Krasnapolsky Hotel in the centre of Amsterdam, this interesting confrontation saw youth represented by the two Dutch players Jan Smeets (Elo 2632) and Daniel Stellwagen (2630), the USA-born Italian Fabiano Caruana (2670), the 15-year-old runner-up in the women's world championship Hou Yifan (2584) from China and Hikaru Nakamura (2710). However, partly due to illness Hikaru did not live up to the high expectations, scoring only 3½ points from 10 games. To no small extent, his negative result was responsible for the 22½-27½ defeat of the youth team. However, in round 3 on 22<sup>nd</sup> August he showed what he was capable of with his fantastic King's Indian triumph over Alexander Beliavsky. In the choice of the ten best games, he was to finish second in *Chess Informant* 107, only one point behind Vladimir Kramnik (50 to 51).

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♙e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘d2 ♘e8 10.b4 f5 11.c5 ♘f6 12.f3 f4 13.♘c4 g5 14.a4 ♘g6 15.♙a3 ♖f7 16.a5**  
16.b5 is much more frequently played, for example in the previous game Gelfand–Nakamura.

**16...h5 17.b5 dxc5 18.b6!?**

This very ambitious advance is a new idea of the Ukrainian player Beliavsky, who in the 1980s was amongst the best players in the world. Since 1996 he has been playing for Slovenia.

**18...g4**

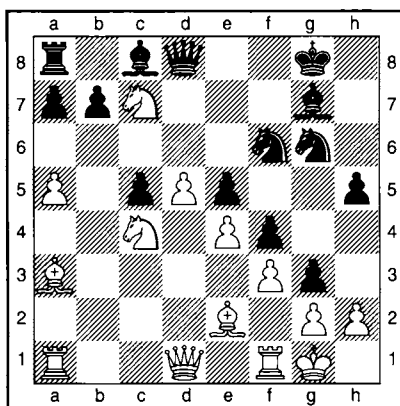
As usual, Nakamura goes for broke. 18...♙f8 was the alternative.

**19.bxc7 ♖xc7 20.♘b5 g3!!**

"The prelude to the black sacrificial dance. Active play is required; if Black brings his rook to safety with 20...♖f7, after 21.♘bd6 White exchanges the most important black attacking piece, the ♙c8, and obtains an overwhelming advantage."<sup>3</sup>

**21.♘xc7**

The next day Beliavsky described this capture on c7 as the decisive mistake. But what else should or could he have played? In his analysis for *Chess Informant* 106/2007 (game 168) he gives 21.h3 ♙xh3 22.gxh3 (22.♞b3!?) 22...♞c8 23.♘xc7 ♞xh3 24.♖f2 gxf2+ 25.♙xf2 ♞g3+ 26.♙f1 ♘xe4 27.fxe4 ♞h3+ 28.♙e1 ♞c3+ 29.♞d2 ♞xa1+ 30.♙d1 ♖b8 31.♙xc5 with advantage for White.



**21...♘xe4!!**

The point of Black's idea.

**22.♘e6?!**

Only 22.fxe4! offers any prospect of riding out the black storm and finally emerging from the turbulence with an advantage:

<sup>3</sup> According to Peter Doggers from The Netherlands in his game annotations for *SCHACH* Vol. 10/2009, p.37

22...♖h4 23.h3 ♙xh3 24.gxh3 ♜xh3 25.♜f2 gxf2+ 26.♙xf2 ♜g3+ (but not 26...♙f6? 27.♖h1 ♙h4+ 28.♙g1, and White is in control) 27.♙f1, and Black cannot really capitalise on his attack, e.g. 27...♖h3+ (27...f3 28.♙xa8 fxe2+ 29.♙xe2 ♙f4+ 30.♙d2 ♜d3+ 31.♙c1 ♜xc4+ 32.♜c2 ♙d3+ 33.♙b1 ♜xe4 34.d6) 28.♙e1 ♜c3+ 29.♜d2 ♜xa1+ 30.♙d1, and in each case White is clearly better.

After 22.♜c2?! the line 22...♖h4 23.h3 ♙xh3 24.gxh3 ♙g5 gives Black enough of an attack in return for the material, e.g. 25.♙xc5 (25.♙xg6? would be a mistake on account of 25...♙xh3+ 26.♙g2 ♙g1!!) 25...♜xh3 26.♙d1 ♙h4 27.♜a2 ♜c8 28.d6 e4 with a complicated position, in which the chances should be equal. Of course, the greedy 22.♙xa8?? really backfires after 22...♖h4 23.h3 ♙xh3 24.gxh3 ♜xh3.

### 22...♙xe6 23.dxe6

23.fxe4? ♖h4 24.h3 ♙xh3 25.gxh3 ♜xh3 26.♜f2 gxf2+ 27.♙xf2 ♜g3+ 28.♙f1 f3 29.♙xf3 ♜f8 30.♙d2 ♙h4 leaves Black with a clear advantage.

### 23...gxh2+!

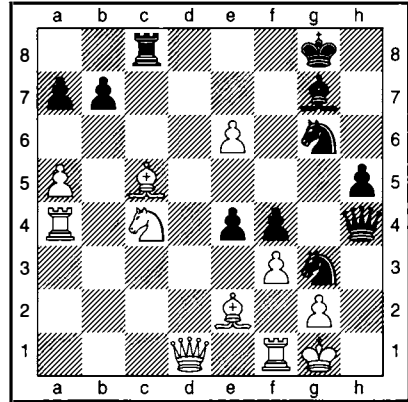
Black must tackle the white king straight away, since after 23...♖h4? White can secure his position and Black is simply a rook down: 24.h3 ♙g5 25.♜a2 ♙xh3+ 26.gxh3 ♜xh3 27.♙d3.

### 24.♙xh2 ♖h4+ 25.♙g1 ♙g3 26.♙xc5 e4 27.♜a4 ♜c8

Nakamura continues in his typical style and is not put off by any risk. He had two alternatives, which more or less end in a forced draw:

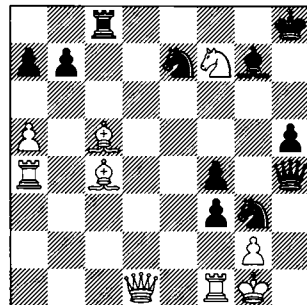
27...♜d8 28.e7 ♜xd1 29.e8♖+ ♙h7 30.♜xd1 ♙xe2+ 31.♙f1 ♙g3+ 32.♙f2 e3+ 33.♙xe3 ♙e4+ 34.♙g1 ♜f2+ 35.♙h1 ♖h4+;

27...♖g5 28.♙xa7 b5 29.♜a2 ♜xa7 30.♙d6 ♜xa5 31.♙xe4 ♙d4+ 32.♜xd4 ♜xa2 33.♙f6+ ♙f8 34.♙h7+ ♙g8.



### 28.♙xa7?

Beliavsky does not have time for this pawn grab. Instead he should have sought salvation in counterplay by 28.e7!, which leads to incredible complications, e.g. 28...♙xe7 (28...e3? fails to 29.♙xe3, but 28...exf3!? is a genuine alternative: 29.♙xf3 ♙xe7 30.♙xa7 b5 31.♜b4 bxc4 32.♜e1 ♙c3 33.♜b1 ♖h1+ 34.♙f2 ♖h4, and Black can probably hang on in view of the insecure white king) 29.♙d6 exf3 30.♙c4+ ♙h8 31.♙f7+.





And now comes the incredible king move 31...♔g8!! [if 31...♔h7?, then 32.♙d3+ ♖g6 (after 32...♜ef5 33.♜xf3 ♜xc5 34.♜xf4 ♜xf4 35.♜xf4 ♔g6 36.♜d6 ♜e2+ 37.♙xe2 ♜xd6 38.♜f3 Black is also worse) 33.♜xf3 ♜xc5 34.♙xg6+ ♔xg6 35.♜d3+ ♜f5 36.♜axf4 and White is better] 32.♜e5+ ♔h8 33.♜xf3 ♜h1+ 34.♔f2 ♜e4+ 35.♔e1 ♙c3+ (35...♜xg2 36.♙d4 ♜g3+ 37.♙f2 ♙c3+ 38.♔e2 ♜g2 39.♙e6 ♜g3+ 40.♔d3 ♜c6) 36.♜d2 ♜h4+ 37.♙f2 ♜xf2 38.♜xf2 ♜d8 39.♙a2 ♜f5, and in each case Black has dangerous counterplay.

**28...b5!!**

The straw which breaks the camel's back.

**29.♜b4**

In *Chess Informant* Beliavsky gives the variation 29.♜a3 bxc4 30.fxe4 ♜h1+ 31.♔f2 ♜xe4+ 32.♔e1 ♜h4+ 33.♙f2 ♜e7 with a decisive advantage for Black, which is clear after 34.♜a4 ♜d6. 29.fxe4 can be met by either 29...♜h1+ 30.♔f2 ♜xe4+ 31.♔f3 ♜h4 32.♙d3 ♜c3, or 29...bxa4 30.e5 f3 31.♜xf3 ♜xe2+ 32.♜xe2 ♜xc4. This does not change the evaluation. The en passant capture 29.axb6? shows the point of the pawn fork: 29...♙d4+ 30.♜xd4 ♜xe2#.

**29...bxc4 30.♙xc4**

30.♜xc4 ♜d8 31.♜xe4 ♜xd1 32.♜xd1 ♙f6 also does not promise salvation.

**30...♜h1+ 31.♔f2 e3+ 32.♙xe3 fxe3+ 33.♔xe3**

If 33.♔xg3?, then 33...♜h4 mate.

**33...♜xf1+ 34.♙xf1**

34.♜xf1 ♜h4 35.e7+ ♔h8.

**34...♜g1+**

And this was enough for AI – he had no desire to witness 35.♔e2 ♜c3 36.♜d2 ♜c5.

**White resigned.**

As far as the state of health of the victor on that 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2009 is concerned, he must have been feeling wretched.

"Nakamura was asked afterwards to explain on the demo board to the admiring spectators what had happened, but he had to excuse himself because he felt too unwell. He had even twice been sick during the game. He would not recover properly before the end of the tournament and even had to consult a doctor on two occasions," according to eye-witness Peter Doggers, who is responsible for the internet portal [www.chessvibes.com](http://www.chessvibes.com).

## GAME 46

**V. Kramnik – H. Nakamura**

2<sup>nd</sup> London Chess Classic, London 2010

*Nimzo-Indian Defence [E20]*

### *Cold-blooded defence*

From time to time the nicest birthday presents are the ones you give yourself. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009, his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Hikaru Nakamura took that opportunity for the first time at the London Chess Classic, which since that year has always taken place at the same time and which marks a real high point of the international tournament calendar. However, at the inaugural event in the Olympia Congress Centre, things did not work out as desired against Michael Adams, as he found himself a pawn down in a rook ending, and after seven hours' play only the two kings were left standing. A defeat at the hands of English player Luke McShane and six draws – including against the newly-nominated No.1 in the world ranking list Magnus Carlsen and against ex-world champion Vladimir Kramnik – did not represent his dream result in this FIDE category

XVIII tournament (Elo average 2696).

But things were fine 12 months later when on his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday Nakamura won on demand over Kramnik thanks to his cold-blooded defence, and compared to the previous year he improved his placing in the final classification to fourth. Hikaru's fighting spirit could only have been spurred on by his previous unfortunate defeat to the Russian at the Corus Chess Festival in Wijk aan Zee in January 2010. But see for yourself!

1.♟f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♙b4 4.g3 c5  
5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.d4 ♙xc3 8.bxc3  
♚e7

Nakamura points out in his comments in *New In Chess* (1/2011, pp.27-29), that he thought about this move for roughly 30 minutes, because he saw several alternatives – including 8...♚a5 and 8...♞c6 – none of which satisfied him.

### 9.dxc5

9.♙f4 is played more often and is probably slightly more resilient. Nakamura gives the following variation: 9...♞d8 10.♚b3 ♞bd7 11.♞fd1 ♞e8 12.♞h4 e5 13.♞f5 ♚e6 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♙h3 exf4 16.♞h6+ gxh6 17.♙xe6 ♞xe6 18.gxf4. “The Computers like this, but no human in their right mind would play it.”

9...dxc5 10.♞e5 ♚c7 11.♙f4 ♞h5

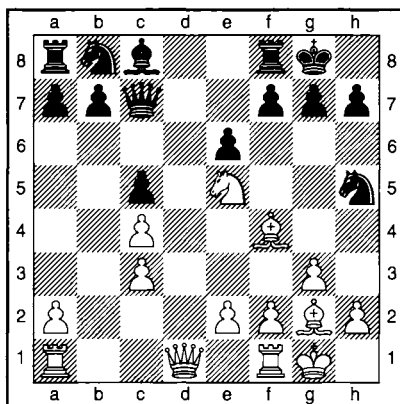
(see next diagram)

### 12.♚d2?

Kramnik is over-optimistic and wants to punish Hikaru straight away. 12.e3 ♞xf4 13.exf4 with a slight advantage was probably not enough for him, but it is nevertheless preferable.

### 12...g5!

Hikaru boldly picks up the gauntlet.



Position after 11...♞h5

### 13.♙xg5

13.♞g6?! is parried by 13...gxf4 14.♞xf8 ♙xf8 15.♞ad1 ♞d7.

### 13...♚xe5 14.♞ad1?!

The alternatives 14.g4!? ♞g7 15.♙d8 ♞c6 16.f4 ♞xd8 17.♚xd8+ ♞xd8 18.fxe5 ♙d7 and 14.♙e7 ♞e8 15.♙d6 ♚f6 16.♞ab1 ♚g6 17.♙xc5 ♞c6 may represent a lesser evil, but are in no way what Kramnik wants.

14...f6 15.♙h6 ♞g7 16.♙f4 ♚h5 17.♙d6 ♞e8 18.♚f4?!

Kramnik's plan is unconvincing. In any case it is hard to see anything better.

### 18...♞d7 19.g4 ♚f7 20.♞d3?!

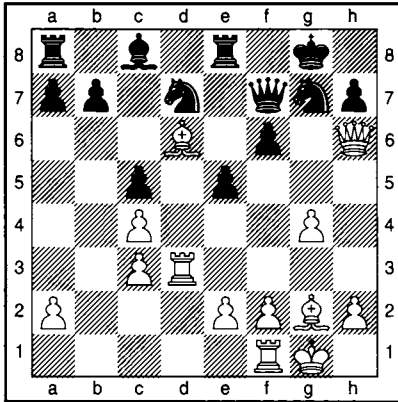
20.♚g3 makes it harder for Black to adopt a defensive set-up and poses him more practical problems, but it should not be sufficient in the long run either.

### 20...e5 21.♚h6

(see next diagram)

### 21...♚g6!

The text move again costs Black a lot of thinking time, but the investment is worth it, as the course of the game indicates. Without the queens, White's two pawns are insufficient compensation for the piece.



Position after 21. ♔h6

However, in the post-mortem analysis Nakamura slightly regretted not having played the obvious continuation 21... ♖e6 22. ♖h3 ♖b6 23. ♖f4 ♖xf4 24. ♖xf4 exf4 25. ♖xf4 ♖xe2, "which is easily winning, as White has no attack".

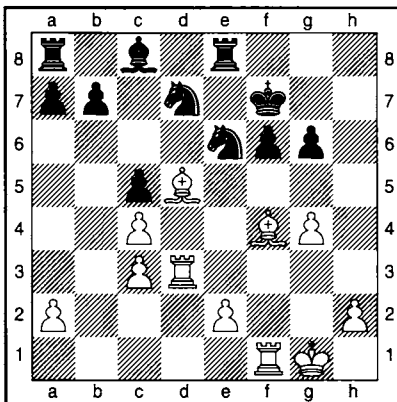
### 22. ♖xg6 hxg6 23. ♖e4

23. ♖d5+ ♖e6 24. ♖f4 ♖b6 25. fxe5 fxe5 26. ♖f6 ♖xd5 27. ♖xd5 b6 28. ♖xe5 ♖g7 29. g5 ♖d8 and Black wins.

### 23... ♖f7 24. ♖f4

24. ♖b1 is met by 24... ♖b6 25. ♖xc5 ♖e6 26. ♖xb6 axb6 27. ♖d2 ♖d8.

### 24... exf4 25. ♖d5+ ♖e6 26. ♖xf4



But not 26. ♖xf4? on account of 26... ♖b6 and Black wins easily.

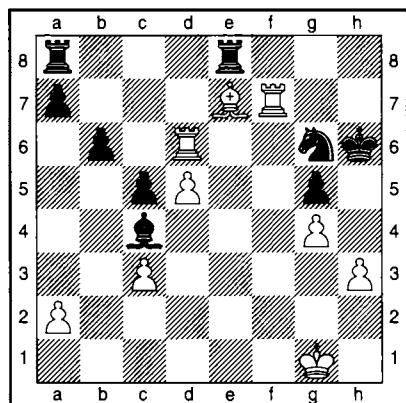
### 26... ♖b6

Hikaru self-critically attaches a question mark to this move, because it allows the black king's stronghold to be opened up, but in fact he easily copes with the problems. However, 26... ♖g7! the defence suggested by the computer, is objectively stronger: 27. ♖e3 (after 27. ♖xb7 ♖xf4 28. ♖xf4 ♖b8 29. ♖xc8 ♖e5 30. ♖d6 ♖b1+ 31. ♖g2 ♖xc8 32. ♖xf6 ♖b2 the white pawn islands decide the struggle in Black's favour) 27... g5 (Nakamura points out the following win for Black: 27... ♖b6 28. g5 f5 29. ♖e5+ ♖f7 30. ♖h3 ♖xd5 31. ♖h7+ ♖g7! 32. ♖xg7+ ♖e6) 28. ♖g3 ♖b6 29. ♖e4 ♖xd5 30. cxd5 ♖c7 31. ♖xe8 ♖xe8.

### 27. ♖e5 ♖xd5 28. cxd5 ♖f8 29. ♖xf6+ ♖g8 30. ♖d6 ♖g7 31. ♖f4 g5 32. ♖f2 b6 33. ♖df3 ♖g6 34. ♖f7+ ♖h6 35. h3

35. ♖2f6? is met by 35... ♖xg4 36. e4 ♖e2+.

### 35... ♖a6! 36. ♖2f6 ♖xe2 37. ♖e7 ♖c4 38. ♖d6

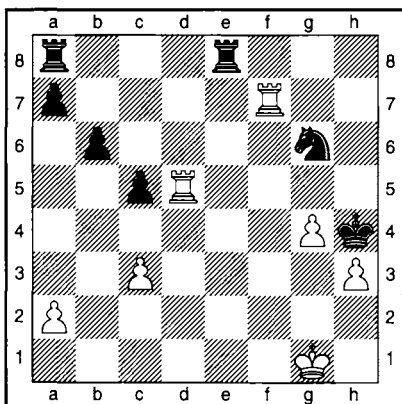


### 38... ♖xd5

Since his thinking time is running low, Hikaru frees himself from the bind in a

radical way. The win will become difficult, however, because there is not much potential left on the board. Instead Black should immediately break through on the queenside in order to create a passed pawn: 38...b5! 39.♔f2 a5, e.g. 40.♔g3 (40.h4 ♖xe7 41.♖xe7 gxf4 42.♗ee6 ♕d3 is no better) 40...♕d3 41.♖c6 c4 42.a3 b4 43.axb4 a4–+. On the other hand, 38...♕xa2? would be too greedy: 39.♕f6 ♖g8 40.♗dd7 ♜f8 41.♗d6 ♔g6 42.♖b7 ♕xd5 43.♕e7+ ♕e6 44.♕xf8 ♖gxf8 45.♖xe6+ ♖f6 46.♗ee7, and White has too much counterplay.

39.♕xg5+ ♔xg5 40.♖xd5+ ♔h4



41.♖f3?

Too passive and according to Nakamura a mistake. The only remaining practical chances were promised by 41.♔g2 ♖e2+ (41...♖e5? fails to 42.♖xe5 ♜xe5 43.♖f5 ♜xg4 44.♖f4 ♖g8 45.hxg4 ♖xg4+ 46.♔f3, and White can rejoice) 42.♔f3 ♖e5 43.♖h7+ ♔g5 44.h4+ ♔f6 45.♗d6+ ♖e6 46.g5+ ♔e5 47.♖xe6+ ♔xe6 48.h5 ♜e7.

41...♖e5!

This rips apart the mating net.

42.♖xe5 ♜xe5 43.♖f5 ♜d3 44.♔h2 ♖h8 White's play has been stopped and the rest is a matter of technique.

45.a4 ♖h6 46.♔g2 a5 47.♔f3 ♜b2 48.♔f4 ♜xa4 49.c4 ♜c3 50.♔e3 a4 51.♔d3 ♜d1 52.♖f8 ♔xh3 53.g5 ♗d6+ 54.♔e4 ♔g4

Now 55.♔e5 is hopeless on account of the reply 55...♖g6.

**White resigned.**

After this "birthday present" Hikaru Nakamura was mighty proud of having defeated a world champion. As we know, he would repeat this one year later – this time on 6<sup>th</sup> December – when Viswanathan Anand was the chosen "victim". With his "provocative set-up" (in the words of Dirk Poldauf) in a King's Indian he forced the reigning champion into "play and fight mode (for which Anand turned out to be unprepared)".<sup>4</sup> The idea of this series being continued in 2012 cannot be ruled out.

## GAME 47

**V. Anand – H. Nakamura**

3<sup>rd</sup> London Classic, London 2011

*King's Indian Defence [E97]*

**Hacker Neo sends his regards...**

At the start of this chapter we indicated how problematic the choosing of best games can be. As criteria one might turn to, for example, originality, aesthetic impression, the correctness of a cascade of sacrifices – greetings from Tal! –, new ideas and the level of the players. Well, we took as our guideline Robert James Fischer, who in his day was influenced in the choice of his 60 favourites by whether they contained something memorable and exciting.

<sup>4</sup> Dirk Poldauf in *SCHACH* Vol. 1/2012, p.31



It was quite special that at the 3<sup>rd</sup> London Classic it just happened to be Viswanathan Anand whom Hikaru Nakamura met on St. Nicholas' day.<sup>5</sup> After the American had more or less collapsed the day before in round 3 against Magnus Carlsen, his fighting spirit was of course stirred up to contest the game against the Indian world champion come hell or high water. Just as the hacker Neo, in the cult science fiction film *Matrix*, does in the big finale when faced with an overwhelming number of agents, when his simple "No" stops the hail of bullets in mid-air.

As for the choice of opening in this "battle of London", Hikaru explains it as follows: "Vishy is not a natural d4 player and has only picked it up since his World Championship match against Vladimir Kramnik in 2008. I have seen many descriptions of this game, and one stuck out in particular. GM Naiditsch reckoned that me playing the King's Indian against Anand was something akin to a samurai running at a machine gun with a sword. However, as in this game, if, like Neo, you can dodge the bullets, then you'll probably emerge victorious at the end of the day."<sup>6</sup>

**1.d4 ♠f6 2.c4 g6 3.♠c3 ♠g7 4.e4 d6 5.♠f3 0–0 6.♠e2 e5 7.0–0 ♠c6 8.d5 ♠e7 9.b4 ♠e8 10.c5 f5 11.♠d2 ♠f6 12.a4 g5**

At the board Nakamura decides to deviate from his game against Kramnik in round 4 of the 2010 Olympiad, to avoid running into Vishy's preparation. That game went 12...f4

13.♠c4 g5 14.♠a3 g4 15.cxd6 cxd6 16.b5 ♠e8 17.♠xg4 ♠c7 18.♠e2 f3 19.b6 axb6 20.♠b5 fxe2 21.♠xe2 ♠d8 22.♠bxd6 ♠xd6 23.♠xd6 ♠f7 (23...♠e8!? – Nakamura) 24.♠xe5 ♠g6 25.♠xg7 ♠f4 26.♠e3 ♠g5 27.g3 ♠xg7 28.♠xb6 ♠g4 29.♠xa8 ♠e2+ 30.♠g2 ♠f3+ 31.♠xf3 ♠xf3 32.♠xf3 ♠d4+ 33.♠g2 ♠f8 34.♠fe1 ♠xa8.

As *SCHACH* editor-in-chief Raj Tischbierek points out in his comments on this game, Nakamura later said on his *Twitter* account that he was winning after 34...♠c2.

34...♠c2 35.♠c7 ♠b4! 36.♠eb1 ♠xe4+ 37.♠g1 ♠d4 (37...♠xa1 38.♠xa1 with advantage for White) 38.♠xb7 ♠f3+ 39.♠f1 ♠d2+ with equality, according to Shipov.

In response to this Shipov variation Nakamura tweeted: "...Amateurs with Rybka... I couldn't care less."<sup>7</sup>

35.♠ed1 ♠c2 36.♠ac1 ♠xa4 37.d6 ♠xe4+ 38.♠g1 ♠d4 39.d7 ♠f3+ 40.♠f1 ♠xh2+ 41.♠g1 ♠f3+ ½–½, Kramnik–Nakamura, Olympiad, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

In *New in Chess* Nakamura explained the choice of the text move as follows: "A relatively new try which I decided to go for over the board. I had briefly looked at this line while on vacation in Canada during my summer holidays. I could not remember what the correct order/idea was, so I simply played the moves that felt most natural. (Warning! Not a recommended method)."<sup>8</sup>

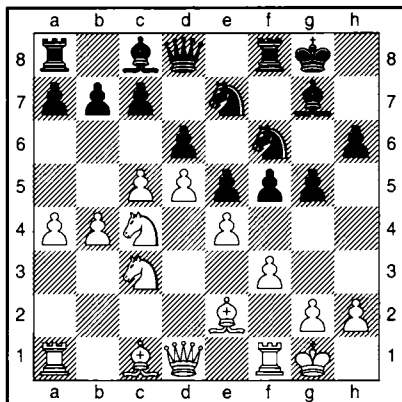
**13.♠c4 h6 14.f3**

<sup>5</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> December, St. Nicholas' day, German children receive early Christmas presents – Translator's note.

<sup>6</sup> *New in Chess* 1/2012, p.24

<sup>7</sup> *SCHACH* 11/2010, p.16

<sup>8</sup> *New In Chess* 1/2012, p.24



### 14...f4?

"A very committal move. I play poker (not a pro...) and this is essentially the all-in-move", according to Nakamura, who evaluates 14...♖g6 15.♙e3 ♘f4 16.♚c2 fxe4 17.fxe4 a6 as better for White.

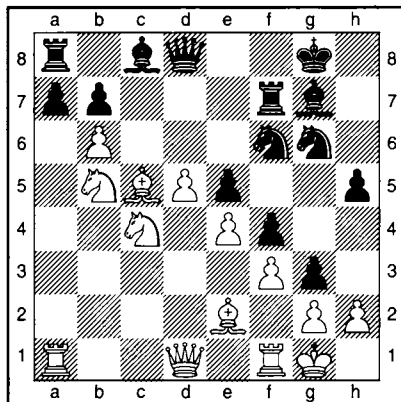
In his comments, *SCHACH* editor Dirk Poldauf evaluates the text move as objectively bad, because compared to the usual variations it loses a tempo and virtually presents it to the world champion. "So 14...♖g6 intending ♖g6-f4 should be preferred. All this was of course known to the King's Indian specialist Nakamura. But it was this plan, only just on the edge of the possible, that he saw as his best chance against the world champion,"<sup>9</sup> concluded Poldauf.

15.♙a3 ♖g6 16.b5 dxc5 17.♙xc5 ♖f7  
18.a5 h5 19.b6 g4 20.♗b5 cxb6 21.axb6  
g3

(see next diagram)

### 22.♙h1

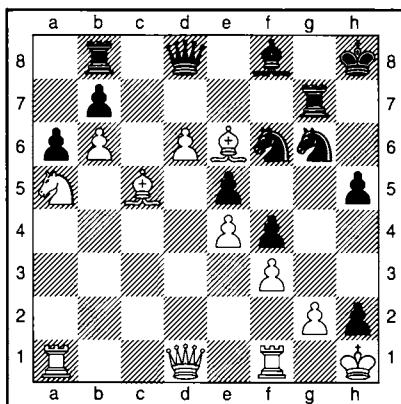
This safety move (the g1-square is cleared for the ♙c5 for defensive purposes) is not



Position after 21...g3

bad, since with it White anticipates a threatened knight sacrifice on e4 (d5), clearing the way for the black queen to h4. But according to Nakamura the computer variation 22.bxa7! ♖d7 23.♙b4 ♖b6 24.♚a2!! ♚h4 25.h3 ♙xh3 26.gxh3 ♚xh3 27.♙d3 ♖h4 28.♖xb6 g2 29.♖xa8 is more forceful.

22...♙f8 23.d6 a6 24.♖c7 ♖b8 25.♖a5  
♙h8 26.♙c4 ♖g7 27.♖e6 ♙xe6 28.♙xe6  
gxh2



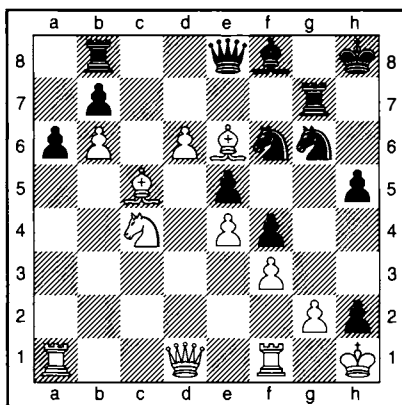
### 29.♖c4?

<sup>9</sup> *SCHACH* 1/2012, p.16

This relieves the potential pressure and there will soon be problems with the protection of the white minor pieces. After 29.♙h3, on the other hand, it is not clear how Black should pursue the attack and Anand would then have had a comfortable position.

**29...♜e8**

"An unexpected tactical motif", commented Nakamura.



**30.♙d5?!**

Vishy played this move very quickly. But after it the position is scarcely tenable for a human player, on account of the lack of defenders on the kingside. Nakamura's suggestion 30.♙h3 ♜b5 (with a double attack on ♙c5 and ♖c4) 31.d7 ♜xd7 32.♙xf8 ♜gxf8 33.♜d5 ♜g6 34.♜ab1 ♜xd5 35.exd5 is easier to play and therefore preferable.

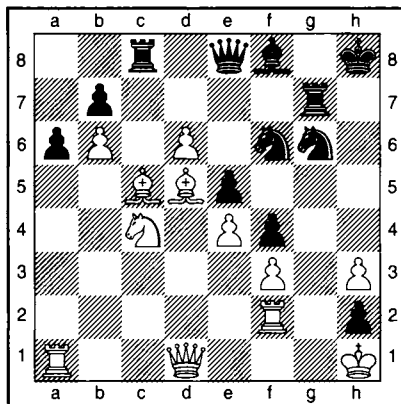
**30...h4 31.♜f2?**

According to the computer 31.♜a5 h3 32.gxh3 ♜c8 (32...♜h4 33.♜e1; 32...♜h5 33.♜xh2 ♜h4 34.♜g1) 33.♜e1 was the last real defensive chance for Anand.

**31...h3!**

The battering ram is knocking at the gate.

**32.gxh3 ♜c8**



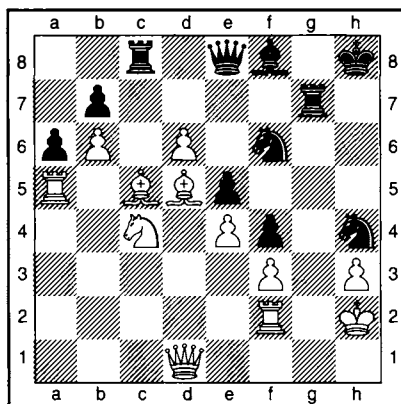
**33.♜a5?**

After this White runs out of defenders on the kingside. The relieving operation 33.d7 ♜xd7 34.♙xf8 ♜xd5 35.exd5 ♜xc4 36.♙a3 ♜d4 was the best practical chance, but of course there is no doubting Black's advantage.

**33...♜h4**

A computer is in its element in tactical waters. Here Houdini "finds" 33...♜d7 34.♙b4 ♜e7!!, and White can simply resign. Not human, but true.

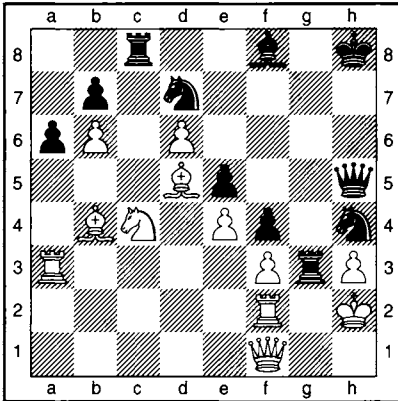
**34.♜xh2**



**34...♜d7?!**

Once more the computer discovers a

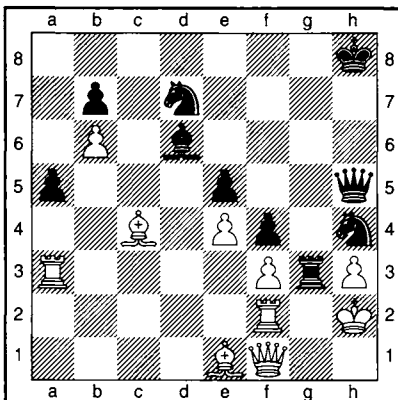
quicker way to win: 34...♖xd5! 35.exd5  
♖g3 36.♗e2 ♗g6 37.♗f1 ♕xd6 38.♖xd6  
♖g8 39.♖a1 ♖g2 (Nakamura).  
35.♕b4 ♖g3 36.♗f1 ♗h5 37.♖a3



### 37...a5?

A calculation mistake in a complicated position. After 37...♖xb6! 38.♕e6 (but not 38.♖c3 on account of 38...♖xd5 39.exd5 ♗g8) 38...♖xc4 39.♕xc4 Hikaru missed the key move 39...♕xd6!: 40.♕f7 (40.♕xd6 ♖xc4 41.♖d3 ♖e3 42.♖xe3 ♖g2!! 43.♗xg2 ♖xg2+ 44.♖xg2 fxe3, and White is lost) 40...♗xf7 41.♕xd6 ♖c4 42.♖d3 a5, and Black is on the way to victory (Nakamura).

38.♕e1 ♖xc4 39.♕xc4 ♕xd6



### 40.♖xa5?

White has no time for this. 40.♖d3! had to be played: 40...♕c5 41.♕e6! ♖f6 42.♖c2 ♖g1 43.♗e2 ♗g5 44.♕g4 ♖xg4+ 45.fxg4 ♖g2+ 46.♗xg2 ♖xg2 47.♕xg2 (after 47.♕f2 ♖e1 48.♕xe1 ♕d4 49.♕f2 ♕g8 the situation is approximately level – Karsten Müller) 48...♗g6 49.♖d8+ ♗g7 49.♖xc5 ♗xe4+ 50.♕f1 ♗h1+ 51.♕e2 ♗e4+ 52.♕d1 ♗f3+ 53.♕c2 ♗e4+ 54.♕d1 ♗f3+ with a draw by perpetual check, as Nakamura pointed out when commenting on the text move: “Vishy’s blunder. It is incredibly hard to fault him, as the drawing variation requires several ‘only moves’, which a computer finds instantly but which do not come intuitively to the human brain.”

### 40...♕c5 41.♕e2

41.♖xc5 ♖xc5 42.♕e2 ♖b3 43.♕d1 ♖d4 44.♕h1 ♖hxf3 45.♖xf3 ♖xf3 46.♕xf3 ♖xf3, and the white position is hopeless.

### 41...♕xb6 42.♖b5 ♕d4?

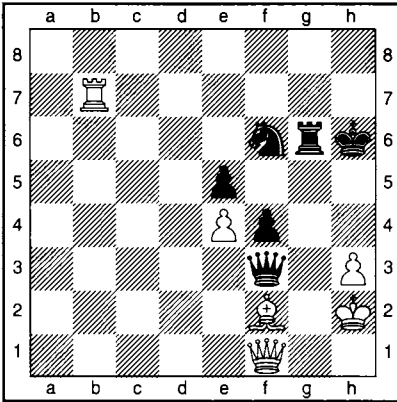
Over-refined. The direct route to the goal is 42...♕xf2 43.♕xf2 ♖xf3+ 44.♕xf3 ♗xf3, as Nakamura later demonstrates in the game after a transposition of moves.

### 43.♕d1?

Anand does not take advantage of this fresh inaccuracy. 43.♖d5! was the final chance to put up some more resistance. However in the long run Black should get there after 43...♖f6 44.♖d8+ ♗h7 45.♖d6 ♗h6 46.♖xd4 exd4 47.♕d1 ♖g2 48.♗xg2 ♖xg2+ 49.♖xg2 ♗h5.

43...♕xf2 44.♕xf2 ♖xf3+ 45.♕xf3 ♗xf3 46.♖b1 ♖g6 47.♖xb7 ♖f6 48.♖b8+ ♗h7 49.♖b7+ ♗h6

After 50.♖b6 ♖xe4 51.♖xg6+ ♗xg6 52.♗g1+ ♗h5 53.♕b6 ♖g5 54.♗g2 ♖d1 it is finally all over for White and so Anand capitulated.



### White resigned.

"I had already known for a few moves that I would beat the World Champion, but once he resigned I had to take several deep breaths to just enjoy the moment", was the final comment of the overjoyed victor. At that fateful moment did he also rise up like Hacker Neo, who looked over the human masses on the street in the concluding scene of *Matrix*, before then rising up into the skies? Sometimes one would really like to be able to fly...

While researching the best games of Hikaru Nakamura, who himself pointed out four to us<sup>10</sup>, we came across an interesting general survey put together by the Californian Timothy Glenn Forney ([www.chess-games.com](http://www.chess-games.com)). A few years ago he made a list of the 300 "best" chess games of all time (up to 2007), basing himself on publications and recommendations by Andrew Soltis, John Nunn, Tim Krabbé and others. 14 games in his list came from his compatriot Hikaru Nakamura. We suggest

that you play through the twelve which have not been included in full in this volume and where the names of his opponents are to some extent less well known. Nakamura managed to win almost half of them by clever and far-sighted endgame (!) play. This is also the reason why we devoted a special chapter with some practical exercises to this absolute strength in the American's game. And here are the top games of Hikaru Nakamura in the order selected by Forney:

- *H. Nakamura – J. W. Loyte*, 102<sup>nd</sup> US Open, Boston 2001
- *H. Nakamura – A. Shabalov*, Foxwoods Open, Mashantucket 2005
- *G. Sagalchik – H. Nakamura*, American Continental, Buenos Aires 2003
- *H. Nakamura – S. Muhammad*, USA Nat. Championship, San Diego 2004
- *M. L. Hoyos – H. Nakamura*, Young Masters, Cuernavaca/Mexico 2006
- *H. Nakamura – I. Cheparinov*, Young Masters, Cuernavaca/Mexico 2006
- *H. Nakamura – T. H. Persson*, 13<sup>th</sup> Sigeman Open, Malmö/Copenh. 2005
- *A. Stripunsky – H. Nakamura*, USA Nat. Championship, Stillwater 2007
- *H. Nakamura – S. Karjakin*, 5<sup>th</sup> match game, Cuernavaca/Mexico 2004
- *J. Friedel – H. Nakamura*, USA Nat. Championship, Stillwater 2007
- *H. Nakamura – Y. Pelletier*, Grandmaster tournament, Biel 2005
- *H. Nakamura – J. F. Poyatos*, Casino tournament, Barcelona 2007

<sup>10</sup> We have added the win over Viswanathan Anand. Additionally, we nominated amongst the top ten games the following: H. Nakamura – L. van Wely, Corus-Festival [A], Wijk aan Zee 2010; H. Nakamura – K. Sasikiran, 7<sup>th</sup> World Team Championship, Bursa 2010; H. Nakamura – W. Browne, Imre König Memorial, San Francisco 2002; H. Nakamura – L. Aronian, Grand Slam Final, São Paulo/Bilbao 2011, H. Nakamura – A. Lesiege, Bermuda [A] 2002.

# EPILOGUE

*"It is difficult to make predictions,  
especially about the future."*

Mark Twain

**O**f course it is more of a hypothetical question, whether, should he have the opportunity to live his life again, Hikaru Nakamura would take different decisions. But it is perhaps a good thing that such time machines do not (yet) exist.

As far as his future career is concerned, the next four or five years may well decide what will be his place in the history of American chess, whether he will take his place in the national Hall of Chess Fame alongside greats such as Harry Nelson Pillsbury, Frank Marshall and Samuel Reshevsky, or even be mentioned in the same breath as Paul Charles Morphy and Robert James Fischer.

For the present everything appears to be possible, although Mark Twain, who also played chess as a hobby, as he proved during a sea voyage with the 17-year-old daughter of a stinking rich *New York Sun* magnate, did not make too many predictions about the future, as can be seen from his witty comment above. And in fact who, for example, before 2008 would have seriously thought that Barack Obama would be elected as the first coloured US President, with his inspiring slogan "Yes, we can!".

Yes, Hikaru Nakamura can! There is a very real chance of him winning the chess crown – but he could also fail, which would be no disgrace, since there are in the world of chess these "eternal runners-up" such

as Mikhail Chigorin, Paul Keres, David Bronstein or Viktor Korchnoi. They could not make that final step to the very summit of chess. And that is without even mentioning Akiba Rubinstein or Aaron Nimzowitsch, who never even had the chance to contest the title of world champion.

And perhaps it is necessary to have that inevitable good fortune which supposedly favours the brave, to actually achieve a sporting goal such as world champion.

However, that depends on whether Hikaru Nakamura makes logical use of the chances offered to him and does not let them slip, as when in August/September 2011 he opted out of the FIDE World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk for inexplicable reasons. And he did so, even though there were three places up for grabs in the Candidates Tournament, which should now in all probability take place in London in March 2013.

Perhaps Hikaru was secretly hoping that Rex Sinquerfield, who had arranged the deal with Garry Kasparov and in particular had financed it, would bring the Candidates Tournament to Saint Louis. According to the invitation to tender for it, the host would have a wild-card for a player with an Elo rating of over 2700 points. But unfortunately Nakamura lost this "game of poker" – if that is what it was.

There is no doubt that the 24-year-old still has enough time to achieve his greatest sporting goal, if one takes a look at



the world ranking list of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1997, i.e. the year in which the little boy from the US started to revolutionise the chess world. 15 years later Viswanathan Anand (then No.2 behind Garry Kasparov / born 1969), Vladimir Kramnik (4/1975), Vassily Ivanchuk (5/1969), Veselin Topalov (6/1975), Gata Kamsky (7/1974) and Boris Gelfand (8/1968) are still absolutely world-class players, and even Alexei Shirov (9/1972) and Nigel Short (9/1965) continue to set standards in top-level chess. The only ones to have disappeared, on grounds of age, from this top ten of 15 years ago are ex-world champion Garry Kasparov (1/1963) who has retired and Anatoly Karpov (3/1951). The “wild bunch” such as Carlsen (1990), Radjabov (1987), Nakamura (1987), Karjakin (1990) and Caruana (1992), to name only the most prominent quintet among them, may well have been making emphatic claims for the lead, but they have not yet managed to displace the older generation. So at the next Candidates Tournament in 2013 only the “boy wonder” from Norway will be there (on account of his place as No.1 on the world ranking list), along with Teimour Radjabov as a wild-card entry, to face up to the “experienced strategists” Vladimir Kramnik, Vassily Ivanchuk, Boris Gelfand, Peter Svidler, Alexander Grischuk and Levon Aronian.

Boris Gelfand, who in May 2012 at the age of 43 made it through for the first time to challenge reigning world champion Anand, and unfortunately lost to him in Moscow only in the rapid tie-break by 1½-2½, offered a plausible explanation for this at a press conference in Tel Aviv before

their World Championship match: “I think it is also one of the advantages of our generation, one of the reasons why our generation is still doing well, is that we learned to play on a good basis. And then we learned how to use computers in our favour, while a lot of young players know only how to use the computer and don’t have a good basis. Instead of thinking a lot of people are used to press a button and see what the computer will say.”<sup>1</sup> As regards Robert James Fischer, with whom Nakamura (his designated successor) is increasingly often compared, it is highly unlikely that Hikaru will, like Bobby, regularly disappear from the scene and take breaks from chess. He himself knows best that, on the other hand, he will have to become more consistent at the very top level. And from that point of view his convincing victory at the USA National Championship in May 2012 in Saint Louis with 8½/11 was a demonstration of both his playing and mental strength. The increasing differences with Garry, who apparently would accept absolutely no dissent in their cooperation, and in doing so significantly obstructed him, appear finally to have been overcome. “When you have someone who is always on your case and it’s never good enough no matter how you win a game, it just brings you down, you lose confidence. And as a chess player you have to be confident, you have to believe in yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

Vladimir Kramnik, who has closely observed Nakamura’s rise to the top of world chess, has a very realistic view of the separation of Hikaru from Kasparov – not only did he win the World Championship

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *New in Chess* 3/2012, p.7

<sup>2</sup> *New in Chess* 1/2012, p.18

match against him in London in 2000, but he was also once in his team of seconds: "Maybe at some point it became a burden to him. Maybe he got too tense. I don't know who is to be blamed, it just happens sometimes."<sup>3</sup>

One prediction which Kramnik hazarded after the Wijk aan Zee chess festival in 2010 has been realised: Nakamura, who since then has played almost exclusively in Europe and regularly against the best in the world, not only catapulted himself into the top ten in the following twelve months, but on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012 he was for the first time with a live Elo-rating of 2782.6 in 5<sup>th</sup> place of the world ranking list.<sup>4</sup>

His self-confidence, which is also reflected in the fact that he is not afraid of defeats, has remained intact over the years and has perhaps become even stronger. Nakamura, who does not have a coaching team, which is however typical of the chess culture of the USA, still places his trust in his second Kris Littlejohn: "To have ideas you do not have to be a grandmaster. Even someone with an Elo of only 1500 can have good ideas, which a stronger player – me for example – can make use of in a game. It is about ideas and not about playing strength..."<sup>5</sup>

Well, in the near future more than enough opportunities will be opening up for Hikaru Nakamura. One is quite certainly the new FIDE Grand Prix cycle of 2012/13. The two best players from the six tournaments in the series (London, Tashkent,

Lisbon, Madrid, Berlin and Paris), of which four events are counted for each of the participants, will be given a coveted place in the Candidates Tournament in 2014. And for the American super-grandmaster that would be the first step on the way to achieving his ultimate goal of one day becoming world champion, and before his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday thereby finally emerge from the great shadow of Bobby Fischer.

Hikaru is unquestionably motivated enough for this. He always wants to win – sometimes also at any cost – and to show his opponents that he is the better player. "I would simply like to play good chess and hope that things turn out in my favour [...] I would like to play creatively and enjoy my chess. Sometime that works, sometimes it doesn't. It is also important to me that chess fans enjoy my games, and that is a reason for me to play chess. [...]", he put on record in the Reggio Emilia tournament in Italy at the turn of the year 2011/12.<sup>6</sup>

And last but not least, he must probably be prepared to make changes in his playing style in order to be able to write his name into history as the 15<sup>th</sup> chess world champion up to now since 1886. For him this is perhaps the most important but also the most difficult challenge, in order to achieve the miracle that Bobby Fischer once managed.

As far as that icon of American chess is concerned, Nakamura would in no way like to become like him: "Having a gift, being so great at chess. It's really nice, but also the

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp.28/39

<sup>4</sup> See Live Chess Ratings at <http://www.2700chess.com/>

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with the Italian journalist Janis Nissi in *SCHACH* 10/2010, p.15

<sup>6</sup> The conversation was published as a video on the tournament homepage:

[http://www.ippogrifoscacchi.it/tornei\\_capodanno/54/index.htm](http://www.ippogrifoscacchi.it/tornei_capodanno/54/index.htm)

chance to inspire kids in the U.S. to get into chess. Hopefully some of them will become really strong. I feel that it's part of my role now to be a role model for kids. It motivates me to be better at chess and to be better as a person every day", according to Nakamura in his hour of victory in Wijk aan Zee 2011.<sup>7</sup>

So the question is not whether Hikaru Nakamura will be the next Bobby Fischer. "Whatever he's doing, I'd like him to be really happy," said his mother Carolyn Weeramantry, adding prophetically: "I don't think he'll be playing chess forever. I also don't think he'll ever just quit chess."<sup>8</sup>

In any case her younger son has chosen a clear path for himself. And he is perhaps encouraged in living his dream by the fact that, for example, today's greatest stars in world sport, such as the twice German Formula 1 world champion Sebastián Vettel and the three-times world footballer of the year Lionel Messi were, like him, born in that year of giants, 1987. In the apposite words of the former First Lady of the USA, Eleanor Roosevelt: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams..."

P.S. It may well be that this snapshot in time from 31.08.2012 will only represent a footnote in the chronicles of chess history. But on that final Friday in August, in the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the Olympiad in Istanbul, Hikaru Nakamura won with White against the Indian player Krishnan Sasikiran, who with an Elo rating of 2707 is certainly no chess lightweight. But it was not the actual win that was important. At a time when he was fifth in the world rating list, Nakamura was in fact setting a new American record for the best ever Elo rating, even if at first this was only valid on the Live Chess Ratings site. He had replaced his compatriot Robert James Fischer, who in July 1972 scored his highest ever Elo rating of 2785.<sup>9</sup>

As the internet site [www.2700chess.com](http://www.2700chess.com) announced, Hikaru had achieved exactly 2786.3 Elo points. However, when Fischer posted his best ever rating he was already 29, so Nakamura still has almost five years to press forward into totally uncharted waters...

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<sup>7</sup> *New In Chess* 3/2011, p.14

<sup>8</sup> In an article by Keiley Whipple "Hikaru Nakamura is the next Bobby Fischer...", *Riverfront Times*, Saint Louis, 21st July 2011

<sup>9</sup> Bobby's "Elo world record" remained unequalled until January 1990. It was only then that the honour was granted to the reigning champion Garry Kasparov to be the first player in the world to improve on that score by reaching exactly 2800.

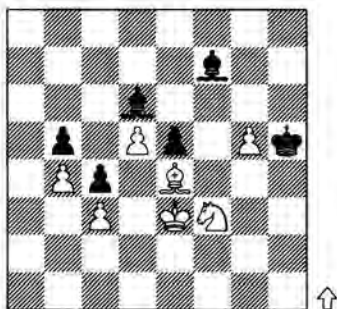
# SOLUTIONS

## Endgame test

(see page 97)

### 1 A knight goes walkabout

H. Nakamura – L.-D. Nisipeanu  
Kings Tournament, Medias 2011



*How did Hikaru break open the black stronghold?*

**66.g6!**

This simple pawn move is Nakamura's skeleton key to unlocking the black fortress.

**66...♙g6**

66...♙g8 does not help since the bishop is then dominated, e.g. 67.♘h2 ♙e7 68.♙f3 ♙h4 69.♘g4 ♙e7 (69...♙e1 70.♘f6+) 70.♘e3 ♙f6 71.♘c2, and the b5-pawn falls first, followed by Black's entire house of cards.

**67.♙xg6+ ♜xg6 68.♙e4 ♙f6 69.♘d2!**

The point. The knight will travel via d2–b1–a3 to win the b5-pawn.

**69...♙f8 70.♘b1 ♙h6 71.♘a3 ♙c1 72.♘xb5 ♙d2 73.♘d6 ♙xc3 74.b5 ♙e7 75.♘xc4 ♙e1**

Black also cannot escape his fate with 75...♙f6, since there follows 76.b6 ♙d4 77.b7 ♙a7 78.♘xe5.

**76.♙xe5 ♙g3+**

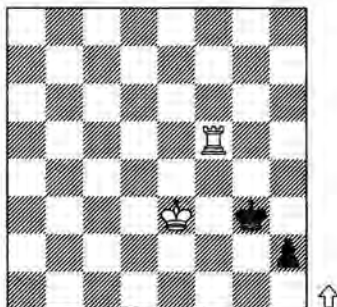
76...♙c3+ 77.♙e4 ♙e1 78.b6 ♙d7 79.♙d4 ♙f2+ 80.♙c3 ♙c8 81.♙b4 ♙b7 82.♙b5 with an equally sad ending for Black.

**77.♙d4 ♙f2+ 78.♙c3**

And in view of 78...♙d7 79.♙b4 ♙e1+ 80.♙a4 ♙c7 81.b6+ ♙b7 82.♙b5 Black resigned. 1-0

### 2 The knight in the corner

H. Nakamura – M. Wahls  
Mallorca Trophy [blitz], playchess.com 2004



*How does the rook win against the pawn?*

Of course, mating threats are required to put Black in zugzwang...

**81.♙g5+!**

A deadly intermediate check! On the other hand 81.♙h5? ♙g2 82.♙g5+ ♙h1 (or 82...♙f1) and 81.♙f1? ♙g2 both give away the win.

**81...♙h3**

81...♙h4 82.♙g8 h1♖ 83.♙h8+.

**82.♙f2!**

The point, forcing Black to promote his rook pawn to a knight in the corner (even if it doesn't suffice for a draw!).



**82...h1♖+**

Black also loses after 82...h1♚ 83.♖h5+ ♕g4 84.♖xh1 or 82...♕h4 83.♖g8 ♕h3 84.♖h8+.

**83.♕f3 ♕h2**

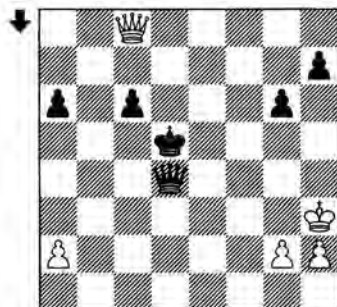
If 83...♕h4, then 84.♖g8.

**84.♖g8** and Black resigned. **1-0**

### 3

### Liquidated...

**R. Ponomarev – H. Nakamura**  
1<sup>st</sup> match game, Saint Louis 2011



*How did Hikaru realise his advantage?*

In queen endings there are in principle a few important criteria to be taken into account. These include: whose move it is, the safety of the king, passed pawns and threats of perpetual check. As for the specific position from the match between ex-FIDE world champion Ruslan Ponomarev and Hikaru Nakamura, the US grandmaster playing Black has an extra pawn which in addition is even a passed pawn. So for him there is only one strategic plan which needs to be examined: how can he transform the material advantage into a won pawn ending?

**41...♚e3+!**

This forces the exchange of queens, which puts an end to White's chances of holding the

game. After 41...♚d3+? 42.♕h4 ♚e4+ 43.g4 Nakamura would also be better, but the queen check is not nearly as good for Black as the game continuation.

**42.♕h4**

If 42.g3, then 42...♚e6 is decisive, as pointed out by Ftacnik in *CBM* 143.

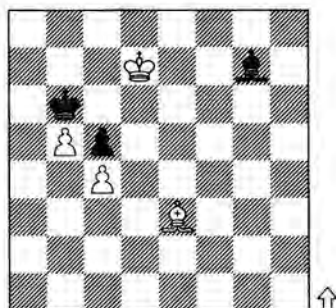
**42...♚e7+ 43.♕g3 ♚g5+**

In view of 44.Kh3 ♚f5+ Ponomarev resigned. **0-1**

### 4

### By the back door

**H. Nakamura – S. Kudrin**  
Western States Open, Reno 2004



*How did Hikaru storm the black position?*

The heading "By the back door" was our decisive tip, and of course Hikaru did not pass up the invitation...

**79.♕c8!**

The king forces its way in from behind. On the other hand, both 79.♕d6? ♕d4 and 79.♕f4? ♕b7 80.♕d6 ♕d4 would be wrong, because Black then simply closes the doors and there is no longer a win.

**79...♕e5 80.♕g5 ♕a5 81.♕d8+ ♕b4 82.b6 ♕xc4 83.b7 ♕d3 84.♕c7 ♕xc7 85.♕xc7 c4 86.b8♚ c3 87.♕c6 c2 88.♚f4**, and Black resigned. **1-0**

# Tactics test

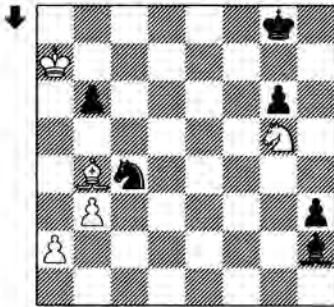
(see page 105)

## 1

### Clearance

A. Karpov – H. Nakamura

CCAS Trophée, Cap d'Agde 2008



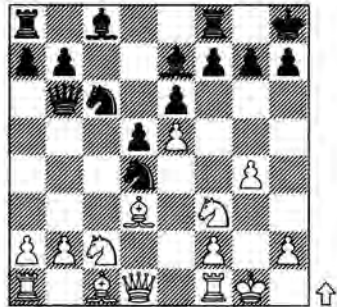
How did Hikaru beat ex-world champion Karpov?

## 2

### Pinning

H. Nakamura – B. Miller

Bermuda Open, Southampton 2003



How did Hikaru punish 12...♘f5xd4?

Clearance sacrifices are a popular tactical motif. And on this specific occasion ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov is the victim:

**36...♙b8+!**

After this the h-pawn has the marshal's baton in its knapsack!

**37.♙xb8 h2 38.bxc4 h1♚**, and White resigned. 0-1

Pins belong to the typical array of tactical motifs along with forks, discovered attacks and skewers, and in this position it was a pin which Hikaru used to punish Black's greedy pawn grab with 12...♘f5xd4:

**13.♘fxd4 ♘xd4?**

After the text move he goes down without a fight. 13...♘xe5 14.♙e2 ♙d7 15.♙e3, on the other hand, puts up more resistance.

**14.♙e3 ♙c5 15.b4! ♙xb4**

If 15...♘xc2, then 16.♙xc5 ♚d8 17.♚xc2, and Black has his back to the wall.

**16.♘xd4 ♙c5 17.♚b1 ♚c7 18.♚c2 b6 19.♘b3 ♙b7 20.♘xc5 bxc5 21.♚xc5 ♚d7 22.♚d6**, and Black decided he had seen enough... 1-0



3

### Intermediate move

H. Nakamura – K. Lie

Gjovik Aker CC [rapid], Gjovik 2009



Has Hikaru anything better than 34.♖xa1?

We must admit that the intermediate move you are looking for is really a “higher class” piece of tactics and is often enough overlooked. Not by Hikaru, though, who found something better than 34.♖xa1 here:

**34.♜h4!**

A genuinely destructive zwischenzug. After the automatic 34.♖xa1? ♜d4 Black would have a clear advantage.

Black can still defend against 34.fxg6? with 34...♜e3 35.♖be1 ♜xe1 36.♖xe1 ♔d4 37.♖h1 ♖bb8=.

Lie admitted defeat on account of 34...♔xe6 35.♜h7 mate. 1–0

4

### Exposed king

H. Nakamura – D. Fridman

Canarias en Red [blitz], playchess.com 2004



How did Hikaru exploit the exposed state of the king?

We have deliberately saved for the end of this tactical test a magical example of Hikaru Nakamura's art. We are absolutely certain that the inventor of “la petite combinaison”, José Raúl Capablanca, would definitely have enjoyed this one. Once again everything happens at lightning speed and you will certainly pluck the little combination out of the hat just as inventively as Nakamura did to stun Daniel Fridman:

**27.♜e8+!**

On the other hand, 27.♜h7+? backfires: 27...♔f8 28.♜h8+ ♔e7 29.♜xc8 ♔xd4+.

**27...♜f8 28.♔h7+ ♔xh7 29.♜xf8 ♔xd4 30.♜xc8**

And Fridman resigned, because his discovered checks with the knight achieve nothing. 1–0

# Important Tournaments, Matches and Team Competitions

## 1. Tournaments

We have deliberately not included the results of numerous national junior and open tournaments as well as those of countless blitz and rapid chess duels in which Hikaru Nakamura participated not least on the internet, since the reader will not find such statistics particularly meaningful. However, from the yearly increase of his activities in Europe it is possible to deduce that there is absolutely no other way for him to reach the very top than by taking part in such high level chess events. Nevertheless that also requires of the young American grandmaster excellent performances so as to continue receiving the much-desired invitations to the elite tournaments.

| Event                                            | Place | Points/Games | + | = | - |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------|---|---|---|
| <b>1997</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| SuperNationals: School Championships, Knoxville  | 1     | 7 out of 7   | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Junior World U10 Championship, Cannes            | 29    | 6 out of 11  | 6 | 0 | 5 |
| Hawaii Open, Honolulu                            | 49–51 | 3 out of 8   | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| <b>1998</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| Junior World U12 Championship, Oropesa del Mar   | 54    | 5½ out of 11 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| <b>1999</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| Junior World U12 Championship, Oropesa del Mar   | 13    | 7 out of 11  | 6 | 2 | 3 |
| <b>2000</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| Esther Elekes Memorial (IM Tournament), Budapest | 4     | 6½ out of 11 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| World Open, Philadelphia                         | 31–46 | 5½ out of 9  | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| First Saturday (IM Tournament), Budapest         | 6     | 6 out of 11  | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Junior World U14 Championship, Oropesa del Mar   | 5     | 8 out of 11  | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| <b>2001</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| Europe Chess, Eger                               | 1     | 7½ out of 9  | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| Bled Open                                        | 12–20 | 6 out of 9   | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| Mayor's Cup, New York                            | 10    | 2 out of 9   | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| US U20 Open, Tulsa                               | 1     | 7½ out of 9  | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| Junior World U14 Championship, Oropesa del Mar   | 2     | 8½ out of 11 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| <b>2002</b>                                      |       |              |   |   |   |
| Bermuda A Tournament                             | 1–3   | 6 out of 9   | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| First Saturday (GM Tournament), Budapest         | 2–3   | 8½ out of 13 | 8 | 1 | 4 |
| Chicago Open                                     | 15    | 5 out of 7   | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Imre König Memorial, San Francisco               | 5     | 5 out of 9   | 3 | 4 | 2 |



| Event                                         | Place | Points/Games | +  | = | - |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|--------------|----|---|---|
| <b>2003</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| US Championship, Seattle                      | 9–17  | 5½ out of 9  | 3  | 5 | 1 |
| Bermuda B Tournament                          | 2     | 7½ out of 11 | 6  | 3 | 2 |
| Santo Domingo Open                            | 10–14 | 7 out of 10  | 6  | 2 | 2 |
| Pamplona Cerrado                              | 5–6   | 3 out of 7   | 2  | 2 | 3 |
| <b>2004</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| International Tournament, Wijk aan Zee (B)    | 4     | 7½ out of 13 | 5  | 5 | 3 |
| Reykjavik Open                                | 23    | 5 out of 9   | 3  | 4 | 2 |
| Foxwoods Open, Mashantucket                   | 5–9   | 6½ out of 9  | 4  | 5 | 0 |
| Santo Domingo Open                            | 1     | 8 out of 10  | 6  | 4 | 0 |
| Western States Open, Reno                     | 1     | 5½ out of 6  | 5  | 1 | 0 |
| US Championship, San Diego                    | 1–2   | 7 out of 9   | 5  | 4 | 0 |
| <i>Rapid-playoff v. Stripunsky</i>            |       | 2 out of 2   | 2  | 0 | 0 |
| <b>2005</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| Gibraltar Masters                             | 6–10  | 7 out of 10  | 5  | 4 | 1 |
| Sigeman Turnier, Tournament, Malmö/Copenhagen | 3     | 6 out of 9   | 4  | 4 | 1 |
| World Open, Philadelphia                      | 3–6   | 7 out of 9   | 5  | 4 | 0 |
| International Chess Festival, Biel            | 4     | 4½ out of 10 | 2  | 5 | 3 |
| 6th Young Masters, Lausanne                   | 2     | 4½ out of 8  | 4  | 1 | 3 |
| Stepanakert (A)                               | 2–3   | 5½ out of 9  | 3  | 5 | 1 |
| <b>2006</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| Cuernavaca/Mexico                             | 3     | 6 out of 9   | 4  | 4 | 1 |
| US Championship, Group A                      | 4     | 6 out of 9   | 5  | 2 | 2 |
| Foxwoods Open, Mashantucket                   | 49–60 | 4½ out of 9  | 4  | 1 | 4 |
| World Open, Philadelphia                      | 10–19 | 6½ out of 9  | 6  | 1 | 2 |
| <b>2007</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| Gibraltar Masters                             | 2–4   | 7 out of 9   | 6  | 2 | 1 |
| US Championship, Stillwater                   | 10–16 | 5 out of 9   | 4  | 2 | 3 |
| Las Vegas National Open                       | 1     | 5½ out of 6  | 5  | 1 | 0 |
| US Open, Cherry Hill                          | 8–18  | 7 out of 9   | 5  | 2 | 1 |
| Miami Open                                    | 1–8   | 6½ out of 9  | 4  | 5 | 0 |
| Casino Tournament, Barcelona                  | 1     | 7 out of 9   | 6  | 2 | 1 |
| <b>2008</b>                                   |       |              |    |   |   |
| Gibraltar Masters                             | 1–2   | 8 out of 10  | 7  | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Blitz-playoff v. Bu Xiangzhi</i>           |       | 2 out of 2   | 2  | 0 | 0 |
| FiNet-Open Chess960 (rapid), Mainz            | 1–3   | 9 out of 11  | 8  | 2 | 1 |
| Ordix-Open (rapid), Mainz                     | 6     | 9 out of 11  | 8  | 2 | 1 |
| Montréal                                      | 2–4   | 5½ out of 9  | 3  | 5 | 1 |
| Internationales Turnier, Cap d'Agde (rapid)   | 1     | 13 out of 17 | 10 | 6 | 1 |
| <i>Final v. Ivanchuk</i>                      |       | 1½ out of 2  | 1  | 1 | 0 |

| Event                                           | Place | Points/Games  | +  | =  | -  |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------|----|----|----|
| <b>2009</b>                                     |       |               |    |    |    |
| Aker International, Gjovik (rapid)              | 3     | 5½ out of 8   | 5  | 1  | 2  |
| Gibraltar Masters                               | 3–6   | 7½ out of 10  | 7  | 1  | 2  |
| US Championship, Saint Louis                    | 1     | 7 out of 9    | 5  | 4  | 0  |
| Donestria Chess, San Sebastián                  | 1     | 6½ out of 9   | 4  | 5  | 0  |
| Ordix-Open (rapid), Mainz                       | 8     | 8½ out of 11  | 8  | 1  | 2  |
| Rising Stars v. Experience, Amsterdam           |       | 3½ out of 10  | 1  | 5  | 4  |
| Chess Classic, London                           | 7     | 6 out of 7*   | 0  | 6  | 1  |
| <b>2010</b>                                     |       |               |    |    |    |
| International Tournament, Wijk aan Zee (A)      | 5     | 7½ out of 13  | 4  | 7  | 2  |
| US Championship, Saint Louis: Preliminary       | 2     | 8 out of 7**  | 3  | 4  | 0  |
| US Championship, Saint Louis: Final             | 3     | 1 out of 3    | 0  | 2  | 1  |
| Rising Stars v. Experience, Amsterdam           |       | 6 out of 10   | 4  | 4  | 2  |
| <i>Blitz-playoff v. Giri</i>                    |       | 2 out of 2    | 2  | 0  | 0  |
| Tal Memorial, Moscow                            | 4–6   | 5 out of 9    | 1  | 8  | 0  |
| FIDE Blitz World Championship, Moscow           | 4–5   | 21½ out of 38 | 18 | 5  | 15 |
| National Chess Open                             | 3     | 5 out of 7    | 3  | 4  | 0  |
| Chess Classic, London                           | 4     | 10 out of 7*  | 2  | 4  | 1  |
| <b>2011</b>                                     |       |               |    |    |    |
| International Tournament, Wijk aan Zee (A)      | 1     | 9 out of 13   | 6  | 6  | 1  |
| Melody Amber, Monaco                            | 6     | 10½ out of 22 | 5  | 11 | 6  |
| Kings Tournament, Medias                        | 4     | 4½ out of 10  | 1  | 7  | 2  |
| Sparkassen Chess Meeting, Dortmund              | 5     | 4½ out of 10  | 2  | 5  | 3  |
| US Open, Orlando                                | 1–8   | 7½ out of 9   | 6  | 3  | 0  |
| Grand Slam Final, São Paulo/Bilbao              | 3     | 12 out of 10* | 2  | 6  | 2  |
| Tal Memorial, Moscow                            | 10    | 3 out of 9    | 0  | 6  | 3  |
| Chess Classic, London                           | 2     | 15 out of 8*  | 4  | 3  | 1  |
| Torneo di Capodanno, Reggio Emilia              | 3     | 15 out of 10* | 4  | 3  | 3  |
| <b>2012</b>                                     |       |               |    |    |    |
| International Tournament, Wijk aan Zee (A)      | 6     | 7½ out of 13  | 3  | 9  | 1  |
| Grand Pacific Open, Victoria/Canada             | 1     | 6 out of 6    | 6  | 0  | 0  |
| US Championship, Saint Louis                    | 1     | 8½ out of 11  | 6  | 5  | 0  |
| Tal Memorial, Moscow                            | 9     | 4 out of 9    | 1  | 6  | 2  |
| International Chess Festival, Biel              | 3     | 16 out of 10* | 4  | 4  | 2  |
| FIDE Grand Prix 2012/13, 1st Tournament, London | 12    | 4 out of 11   | 2  | 4  | 5  |

\* In these tournaments three points were awarded for a win and a single point for a draw.

\*\* In the preliminary round of the US national championship of 2010 two points were awarded for a win and one for a draw.



| Event | Points/Games | + | = | - |
|-------|--------------|---|---|---|
|-------|--------------|---|---|---|

## 2. Matches

### FIDE Knock-out World Championship\*\*\* 2004 in Tripolis

|                                                |      |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------------------|------|---|---|---|
| Nakamura v. Volkov (1 <sup>st</sup> Round)     | 3-1  | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Nakamura v. Alexandrov (2 <sup>nd</sup> Round) | 1½-½ | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Nakamura v. Lastin (3 <sup>rd</sup> Round)     | 1½-½ | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Nakamura v. Adams (4 <sup>th</sup> round)      | ½-1½ | 0 | 1 | 1 |

### FIDE World Cup\*\*\* 2005 Khanty Mansiysk

|                                             |      |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------------|------|---|---|---|
| Nakamura v. Ganguly (1 <sup>st</sup> Round) | ½-1½ | 0 | 1 | 1 |
|---------------------------------------------|------|---|---|---|

### Chess960-Rapid World Championship 2009, Mainz, Prel. Round

|                             |            |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------|------------|---|---|---|
| Nakamura v. Aronian (Final) | 4 out of 6 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
|                             | 3½-½       | 3 | 1 | 0 |

### Other Matches

|                                         |        |    |   |   |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|----|---|---|
| Nakamura v. Karjakin 2004 (classical)   | 4½-1½  | 4  | 1 | 1 |
| Nakamura v. Nepomniachtchi 2007 (blitz) | 14½-5½ | 14 | 1 | 5 |
| Nakamura v. Ponomarev 2011 (classical)  | 3½-2½  | 2  | 3 | 1 |
| Nakamura v. Ponomarev 2011 (rapid)      | 3-1    | 2  | 2 | 0 |

## 3. Team Events

|                               |             |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|
| Olympiad, Turin 2006, Board 3 | 7 out of 11 | 4 | 6 | 1 |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|

|                                 |              |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|
| Olympiad, Dresden 2008, Board 2 | 6½ out of 11 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|

|                                         |             |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|
| Olympiad, Khanty Mansiysk 2010, Board 1 | 6 out of 10 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|

|                                  |            |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|
| Olympiad, Istanbul 2012, Board 1 | 6 out of 9 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
|----------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|

|                                              |            |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|
| World Team Championship, Bursa 2010, Board 1 | 6 out of 8 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|

### European Club Cup, Ohrid 2009

|                                       |            |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|
| for Hussek Chess Club Vienna, Board 1 | 5 out of 7 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|

|                            |            |   |   |   |
|----------------------------|------------|---|---|---|
| Japan League 2007, Board 1 | 7 out of 7 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
|----------------------------|------------|---|---|---|

### Austrian Bundesliga 2008/09

|                                       |              |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|
| for Hussek Chess Club Vienna, Board 1 | 5½ out of 11 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|

A complete listing of all the tournaments in Hikaru Nakamura's chess career in the USA can be found on the internet site of the US federation under::

[http://main.uschess.org/assets/msa\\_joomla/XtblMain.php?199704246590-12650706](http://main.uschess.org/assets/msa_joomla/XtblMain.php?199704246590-12650706)

Clicking on Nakamura's name and then "Tournament History" shows you all of the player's US tournaments with his rating performance, in the case of Hikaru starting from 1995.

\*\*\* When giving the overall result of these matches which regularly went beyond two games, the scores from the tiebreaks (rapid and blitz chess) have also always been taken into account.

## Rating development and world ranking of Hikaru Nakamura (born 09.12.1987)

| Year/Month  | ELO  | Place (Top 100) | Year/Month  | ELO  | Place (Top 100) |
|-------------|------|-----------------|-------------|------|-----------------|
| <b>2000</b> |      |                 | <b>2007</b> |      |                 |
| January     | 2261 | -               | January     | 2651 | 53              |
| July        | 2281 | -               | April       | 2663 | 38              |
| October     | 2356 | -               | July        | 2647 | 70              |
|             |      |                 | October     | 2648 | 61              |
| <b>2001</b> |      |                 | <b>2008</b> |      |                 |
| January     | 2364 | -               | January     | 2670 | 46              |
| April       | 2428 | -               | April       | 2686 | 34              |
| July        | 2452 | -               | July        | 2697 | 31              |
| October     | 2466 | -               | October     | 2704 | 30              |
| <b>2002</b> |      |                 | <b>2009</b> |      |                 |
| January     | 2430 | -               | January     | 2699 | 32              |
| April       | 2465 | -               | April       | 2701 | 30              |
| July        | 2494 | -               | July        | 2710 | 26              |
| October     | 2504 | -               | September   | 2735 | 16              |
|             |      |                 | November    | 2715 | 24              |
| <b>2003</b> |      |                 | <b>2010</b> |      |                 |
| January     | 2520 | -               | January     | 2708 | 27              |
| April       | 2561 | -               | March       | 2735 | 17              |
| July        | 2568 | -               | May         | 2733 | 18              |
| October     | 2565 | -               | July        | 2729 | 19              |
| <b>2004</b> |      |                 | September   | 2733 | 15              |
| January     | 2571 | -               | November    | 2741 | 14              |
| April       | 2580 | -               |             |      |                 |
| July        | 2601 | -               | <b>2011</b> |      |                 |
| October     | 2620 | 83              | January     | 2751 | 10              |
| <b>2005</b> |      |                 | March       | 2774 | 8               |
| January     | 2613 | 100             | May         | 2774 | 8               |
| April       | 2657 | 43              | July        | 2766 | 10              |
| July        | 2650 | 45              | September   | 2753 | 12              |
| October     | 2662 | 42              | November    | 2758 | 10              |
| <b>2006</b> |      |                 | <b>2012</b> |      |                 |
| January     | 2644 | 65              | January     | 2759 | 12              |
| April       | 2664 | 41              | March       | 2771 | 6               |
| July        | 2632 | 79              | May         | 2775 | 7               |
| October     | 2640 | 69              | July        | 2778 | 7               |
|             |      |                 | September   | 2783 | 5               |

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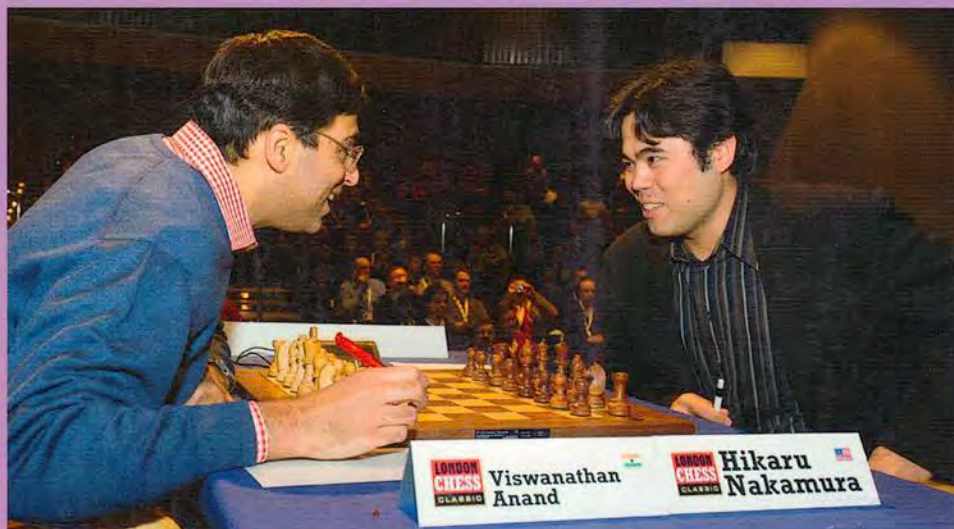
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In addition, for their analysis of games and positions the authors made use of the following programs:

- ChessBase 10 and 11*
- Fritz 12 and 13*
- Deep Rybka 4*
- Nalimov's Tablebases with five and six pieces*

The sources of quotations taken from articles on various websites are listed in the footnotes; where it makes sense and was possible the internet addresses are given!



## Hikaru Nakamura: A chess career in the footsteps of Bobby Fischer

This is the very first book to focus exclusively on Hikaru Nakamura, the greatest American chess player since the legendary Robert James Fischer. The book features a prologue penned by Lubosh Kavalek, who was none other than Bobby's insider and supporter at the "match of the century" against Boris Spassky in 1972.

In ten chapters, the authors focus on the main reasons for the success of Nakamura, who, like arch-rival Magnus Carlsen, was coached for nearly a year by Garry Kasparov.

In addition to an exclusive interview, of special interest are contributions by prominent chess greats, such as three-time U.S. national champion Lubosh Kavalek. Kavalek has been following Hikaru's ascent to the summit of chess at close range. Which is why he is ideally placed to deliver a reliable verdict on this exceptional player. Many chess fans admire Hikaru Nakamura's furious attacking talent, and wish him all the best for a successful career.

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