

Auckland Chess 2025



Club Champion Leo Baker

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We have compiled all the games and puzzles into a lichess study:

<https://lichess.org/study/AFE5L1VC>

Introduction

Back when I was attending Auckland Chess Centre as a teen, Ewen and former Club Captain Edward Tanoi used to write a weekly roundup of games. Upon returning as an adult, I was saddened to hear that this had stopped but thought putting together a book was a good way to celebrate club culture. Hence, Auckland Chess 2025!

The year started with Chess Congress being held locally, with many members from the club attending. FM Alphaeus Ang picked up third at the NZ Chess Champs, and Daqi Mao and Leo Baker were part of the group (of five) that earned the under 2100-rated grade prize.

In the Major Open, Alex Pan shared first alongside North Shore veteran Ceferino Isaac. Additionally, Sai Vivan Karthikeya Somaraju picked up third place, and Yanshuo Pei and Jerome Tao jointly won the under 1700 grade prize.

Finally, in the Rapid Champs, Alphaeus and Daqi shared the NZ Champs alongside Wellington IM Russell Dive. Overall, a great effort from the club members.

Straight after Congress, many of our players earned titles after a strong showing at the Oceania Zonals in Melbourne early this year. These efforts are celebrated in the Title Achievements chapter later in the book.

The Auckland Chess Association Interclubs were a mixed bag for us. Usually, we dominate across all sections. This year, while we won the A-Grade and B-Grade, we were beaten by Summit in the Juniors and in the Blitz. Nonetheless, thank you to all those who volunteered their weekends to represent us – I'm sure we'll win them back next year!

Our Monday nights have continued to run at capacity. As a result, we have also been running weekend tournaments. This year, we trialled the idea of a 'Double Weekender', tournaments running across two weekends for a total of eight games, run at 90+30 to make up for the shortened length of the Monday night games (now typically 60+30).

Fun fact, you will actually play more games playing the weekenders than the Monday nights, so these are highly recommended.

Additionally, we launched an Adult Improvers Night this year, consistently getting around 10 adults each Tuesday night and working through instructive lessons such as Yusupov's 'Build Your Chess' and Silman's 'Complete Endgame Course'. This goes alongside our Juniors Night run by Alex Huang to ensure all members have access to improvement opportunities.

The club championship was one of the strongest we've had in many years, with 11 players entering with a FIDE rating exceeding 1900. The results came down to the final round. Alphaeus, who has been our longtime club champ, yielded the title to CM Leo Baker.

Many thanks to the club organisers, particularly Keong Ang, Timothy Ha, and Bruce Wheeler for making the club happen each week. It often feels like magic but is actually quite hard work. Also, my personal thanks to Ewen Green and Jack McConnell for assisting with the Adult Improvers Night.

In putting together this book, I would also like to thank Timothy, Jack, and Ewen for their contributions, game input, and editing suggestions. I would also like to thank Leo Baker, Cohen Young, Justin Wang, Sophia Feng, Luna Xu, and Luna Lu for submitting articles. However, all mistakes are mine.

I hope you enjoy this book!
Brogan Powlesland

Symbols

+	Check	?	Blunder
#	Checkmate	!	A strong move
O-O	Castles Kingside	!?	An interesting move
O-O-O	Castles Queenside	?!	A dubious move
±	White Advantage	∓	Black Advantage

Results

Summer Cup

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	7/7
2 nd Markis Tew	6/7

Autumn Cup

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	6.5/7
2 nd Yanbo Jin	5.5/7
2 nd Preeyansh Roul	5.5/7

Autumn Rapid

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	6/6
2 nd Huankai (Eden) Xu	5/6

Winter Cup

1 st Markis Tew	7.5/9
1 st Yanbo Jin	7.5/9

Club Championship

1 st CM Leo Baker	7.5/9
2 nd CM Hao Tang	7/9
2 nd CM Cohen Young	7/9

Spring Cup

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	7/7
2 nd FM Daqi Mao	5.5/7

Waitangi Weekender

1 st Saptorshi Gupta	5/6
1 st Leo Baker	5/6

March Double Weekender

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	7.5/8
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ANZAC Weekender

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	6/6
2 nd Yanbo Jin	5/6
2 nd Sai Vivan Karthikeya	
Somaraju	5/6

May Double Weekender

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	8/8
2 nd Preeyansh Roul	6/8

July Double Weekender

1 st Timothy Ha	6.5/8
1 st Sai Vivan Karthikeya	
Somaraju	6.5/8

August Double Weekender

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	6/8
1 st FM Daqi Mao	6/8
1 st Yanbo Jin	6/8
1 st Malcolm Crack	6/8

Merv Morrison Memorial

1 st FM Alphaeus Ang	5.5/6
U1800 1 st Aidan Prince	4.5/6

Game of the Year

Game of the Year was a hard-fought title this year. With such a strong club championship, we knew that there were going to be many good contenders.

To decide on which game would get the illustrious title, we put together a blind panel¹ of Ewen Green, Bruce Wheeler, Jack McConnell, and Timothy Ha, and I got a casting vote in the event of a tie. All nominated games were from the Club Championship and were high quality. The scores were very close.

This year's Game of the Year went to CM Leo Baker, for his Round 4 game against David Zhu. In this stunning game, Leo combined brave sacrifices with an impressive array of intermezzos.

An honourable mention goes to CM Cohen Young for his Round 9 game against FM Alphaeus Ang. An upset win against Alphaeus is always noteworthy, and Cohen had to carefully convert this.

The other honourable mention goes again to CM Leo Baker for his Round 9 game against Preeyansh Roul. This near miniature included startling sacrifices for a game so short.

¹ Alas, a blind panel does not mean a group of inscrutable players who walk into furniture, each other, and occasionally a fork. In this case, six candidate games were shortlisted, with identifying information removed before being sent to the panel members. Each panel member was given one '2' vote for their game of the year, and up to three '1' votes for honourable mentions. The game with the highest total score received the title, with a 0.1 casting vote available in the event of a tie.

David Zhu (1945) – CM Leo Baker (2088)
ACC Club Championship (2025), Round 3
Annotated by Leo Baker

- 1. d4 Nf6**
- 2. c4 e6**
- 3. g3 d5**
- 4. Nf3 dxc4**
- 5. Qa4+**

A sort of tame sideline. As far as I know Qa4+ works better from English move orders without whites pawn already on d4

- 5... Nbd7**
- 6. Bg2 a6**
- 7. Qxc4 b5 [Diagram]**



8. Qc2

Already a mistake, after which black gets a dream position.

8. Qc6 was better, after which 8...Rb8 9. Bf4 and black can sacrifice a pawn with 9...Bb4+ or play 9...Nd5 10. Bg5 Be7 11. Bxe7

Qxe7 reaching a position with a lot of games.

- 8... Bb7**
- 9. Bf4 9. c5**

Now White's queen will have to move against after an eventual ...Rc8. Black is much better.

- 10. dxc5 Bxc5**
- 11. O-O Rc8**
- 12. Qd3 O-O**
- 13. Nbd2 Qb6**
- 14. e4 [Diagram]**



A mistake which decisively weakens the f2 pawn. White may have overlooked my next move

14... Ng4

With the point that the knight on d7 is not free due to ...Rfd8

15. Qxd7 Rfd8
16. Bc7 Bxf2+
17. Kh1 Qxc7

Actually what I did here was very stupid, somehow I didn't even see that ...Rxd7 is possible. It is pretty obvious that it is better, since it reaches a very similar position but with the bishop on b6 instead of f2.

18. Qxc7 Rxc7
19. h3 Be3
20. hxg4 Bxd2
21. Rad1 Rc2

Instead, after 21...Rcd7 22. Ne5 is annoying and might provoke a repetition of moves.

22. Rf2 Rc1
23. Rxc1 Bxc1
24. Rc2 Rc8
25. Rxc8+ Bxc8 [Diagram]

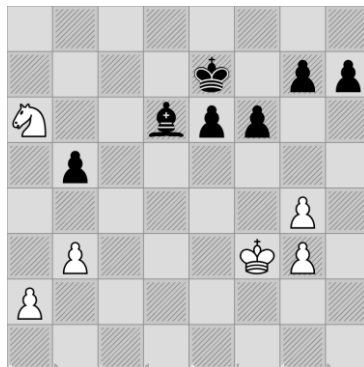


Now Black has the bishop pair and an extra pawn and the rest of the game is an easy win

26. b3 Be3
27. Ne5 Kf8
28. Bf3 Bb7
29. Kg2 Bd4
30. Nd3 f6
31. e5

Of course, I had foreseen that the following sequence is possible.

31... Bxf3+
32. Kxf3 Bxe5
33. Nc5 Ke7
34. Nxa6 Bd6 0-1 [Diagram]



Trapping the knight on a6 - White can only save it with b4 and Nc5, where I can take with a winning pawn ending. Therefore White resigned.

Honourable Mentions

FM Alphaeus Ang (2380) – CM Cohen Young (2001)

ACC Club Championship (2025), Round 9

Annotated by Cohen Young

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 e6
3. Nf3 d5
4. Nc3 dxc4
5. e4

The game continued with 5. e3 a6
6. a4 b6 7. Bxc4 in an earlier game I had against Alphaeus this year. I lost after getting a slightly better position with black from the opening.

- 5... Bb4
6. Bg5

Therefore I expected him to switch things up, so this is the line I expected.

- 6... c5
7. Bxc4 cxd4
8. Nxd4 Qa5
9. Bd2 Qc5
10. Bb5+ Bd7
11. Nb3 Qe7
12. Bd3 Nc6
13. a3 Bd6
14. Be3 [Diagram]

This was the first move I was out of theory



14... a6

14... O-O 15. Nb5 I was worried about Alphaeus playing this idea with Bc5 to come next if I move my bishop, but I didn't think of the resource I have here 15... Bb8 16. Bc5 ±
15... Ne5 16. Nxd6 Qxd6 17. Bc2 Qxd1+ 18. Rxd1 Ba4 ♠

15.O-O O-O

16. f4

I was familiar with this idea with the bishop still being on d2, but not on e3

16... e5

seems more or less forced.

17. f5 [Diagram]



Here I realised my position can get very bad very quickly. My immediate thought was to sacrifice a pawn with Nd4, and I couldn't think of any other ways to justify my position, and through my prep I knew more or less that I shouldn't be much worse here. The compensation for the pawn lies in my opponent's weak king, weak dark squares, and bad pawn structure, which are all related to each other in this position.

17... Nd4

18. Nxd4 exd4

19. Bxd4 Bc6

Important to note 19... Bxh2+?? does not work. 20. Kxh2 Qd6+ 21. e5

19... Bc5 The one game that reached this position Tkachiev-Gelfand 1997 continued like this. I considered this and thought it

should be okay but I did not want to exchange off my powerful dark squared bishop because it was important for an attack

20. h3?!

This move I couldn't really understand. From my perspective it helped me by weakening his own dark squares. I guess he was avoiding Bxh2+ tricks and supporting g4. Just seems far too weakening to me.

20... Rad8

21. Qc2?! Bc7

Simple move. Threatens both Rxd4 and Qd6

22. Nd5??

Essentially the game losing blunder. 22. Bxf6 is the only move that doesn't lose immediately, but giving up the dark squared bishop with such weak dark squares is very unintuitive, and still leaves white with a pretty miserable position.

22... Nxd5

22... Bxd5 23. exd5 Rxd5 This is the safest way to play, where I will still play Qd6 next and have a winning position.

23. exd5

Careful! 23... Rxd5 24. f6 +-

23... Qd6

24. Rf3

24. dxc6 can win for black in a variety of ways, including 24... Qxd4+ 25. Rf2 Qxd3

24... Bxd5

25. f6 [Diagram]



Careful!

25... g6

This looks scary with white having ideas of Qd2-Qh6-Qg7#, but in reality white doesn't have the time to do that.

Important not to play 25... Bxf3

26. Bxh7+ Kh8 27. fxg7#

26. Bc5 Qh2+

from this point forward I didn't spend much time on any moves and I knew I was going to win the game.

27. Kf1 Bxf3

28. gxf3

28. Bxf8 Qh1+ 29. Kf2 Qxg2+

28... Qh1+

29. Kf2 Qxa1

30. Bxf8 Bb6+

31. Bc5 Bxc5+

32. Qxc5 Qxb2+

32... Rxd3 33. Qc8+ Rd8 34.

Qxd8#

33. Ke3 Qxf6

No way to blunder checkmate now.

34. Be4 b6

35. Qc4 Qg5+

36. f4 Qc5+

37. Qxc5 bxc5

38. Bd3 a5

39. Bc4 Kf8

40. Bb5 Ke7

41. Bc4 f6

42. Bb5 Rd1

43. Ke4 Kd6

44. Kf3 Kd5 0-1

CM Leo Baker (2103) – Preeyansh Roul (1994)
ACC Club Championship (2025), Round 9
Annotated by Leo Baker

This was a fun game.

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 e6
3. Nc3 Bb4
4. e3 O-O
5. Bd3 c5
6. Ne2 cxd4
7. exd4 d5
8. cxd5 exd5
9. O-O h6
10. a3 Be7 [Diagram]



I think this was the end of what I knew concretely. I remembered there is a plan here to play with Be3, h3, Ng3, and Qf3, in some order, and then White's position is good, but of course I managed to choose the worst possible way to do it and quickly found myself in some trouble.

11. Ng3 Nc6
12. Be3 Bg4

I'm not going to say why I didn't like Qd2 because it is too embarrassing.

13. f3 Be6
14. Bc2 Na5
15. Qd3

Played in 2 minutes and allowing Black to play the very obvious follow-up ...Nc4 after which for some reason I started thinking for ages.

- 15... Nc4 [Diagram]



16. Bc1

Played after more than 30 minutes thinking, so obviously something has gone very wrong. However, I came to the conclusion that my position is not so bad. One idea I liked was to play Nce2 and Nef4, after which it seemed like I could start doing some stuff on Black's light squares, in particular then ...g6 (which annoyed me in the other line) is not viable. White has another idea that we will see in the game.

I was relying on 16. Nh5, only to realise that after 16... g6 I am probably just completely losing (which the engine confirms). I pretty much have to take on f6 after which ...Bf5, ...Nxe3, ...Nxb2 are all threats and my position pretty much falls apart.

16... Rc8

17. Re1 Re8

18. Nh5 [Diagram]



18... Kf8

allowing me to undeservedly win the game. 18... g6 was a good move here as 19. Rxe6 is pretty much forced, and it was what I was relying on 19... Nxh5

20. Bxh6 Rc6! White managed to take the h6 pawn while avoiding Bf5, and even got the bishop pair, but the rest of the position sucks, now Black can start attacking White's king. For example 21. Rxc6 bxc6 22. Rb1 Bg5 is dead lost for white.

Alternatively 20. Rxc6+ fxg6 21. Qxc6+ Ng7 22. Bxh6 Bf6 Black keeps things together, although white is not objectively lost yet after 23. Kh1

18... Rc6 is also not a bad move and Black's position stays together.

19. Nxg7 Kxg7

20. Rxe6 [Diagram]



to be honest I was not even sure if this works, though I think Black should've definitely accepted the sacrifice and force me to prove something.

20... fxe6 21. Qg6+ Kh8 22. Qxh6+ Kg8 23. Qg6+ Kh8 24. Bg5 is all forced.

Now 24... Ne4 loses to 25. Nxe4 dxe4 and 26. Qxe4 is checkmate immediately.

24... Qc7 25. Re1 is very strong. Here Black is very tied down, and I can just basically take on f6 and restore approximate material equality whenever I want. Rxe6 attacking f6 again is also a threat, so 25... Bd8 and now 26. Nxd5 was what I came up with analysing the game afterwards, which is winning although the engine just wants to go 26. Bxf6+ Bxf6 27. Qxf6+ Qg7 28. Qh4+ Kg8 29. Ba4! which is kind of hard to see but pretty funny. White will

take on e6 and now even be up material.

24... Qd7 white has at least Ba4 winning an exchange, or 25. Re1 as after 25... Rf8 26. Rxe6 Rc6 27. Rxc6 bxc6 28. Nxd5! cxd5 29. Bf5 which wins the queen since otherwise Qh6+ and Be6+ wins. Actually even 29... Qxf5 30. Qxf5 doesn't seem like the easiest win ever, but it is more than enough to be objectively winning for white.

The good thing is that I didn't have to prove all of this with 14 mins on my clock otherwise maybe things could've gotten very messy.

20... Bd6

21. Bxh6+ 1-0

here Black resigned because
21... Kxh6 leads to mate
22. Qh7+ Kg5
23. h4+ Kf4
24. Ne2#

otherwise after
21... Kg8 22. Rxf6 is a free piece

Significant Upsets

The prize for the best upset this year goes to Matthias for his win over CM Cohen Young, with a rating difference of 441. It serves as a reminder to all strong players that they need to be aware of their opponents' tactics, and ensure that they've calculated every check, capture, and threat before moving.

Another notable upset came from Preeyansh Roul beating FM Alphaeus Ang in Round 8 of the Club Championship, with a rating difference of 386. This was an example of ensuring that you're taking advantage of your opponent's unsound tactics, even those coming from an intimidating FM.

The other upset we've decided to show come from Jacob Barry beating Sai, with a rating difference of 349. Jacob's game shows how quickly well-placed pieces can move to attack a poor defended king.

All three of these are exemplary games that the players should be proud of.

Matthias Van der Maas (1589) – CM Cohen Young (2030)
Club Championship (2025), Round 1
Annotated by Jack McConnell

1. e4 c5
2. Nf3 d6
3. d4 cxd4
4. Nxd4 Nf6
5. Nc3 Nc6
6. Bc4 Qb6
7. Nxc6

Though there is nothing particularly wrong with this move the exchange is definitely something Black hopes to prove. The more normal move is 7.Nb3 keeping pieces on the board, blocking the b-file, and hoping to exploit the queen on b6 at a later point.

- 7... bxc6
8. O-O g6
9. Rb1

This is a very cautious move in a position where White should be playing for the attack. Far more energetic was 9.Be3! Qxb2 10. Bd4 e5 11. Rb1 Qa3 12. Rb3 Qa5 13. Be3 For the pawn White has provoked some weaknesses and gained a huge lead in development.

- 9... Bg7
10. Be3 Qc7
11. h3 O-O

12. Bd4 [Diagram]



Opposing the dragon bishop in hopes of an exchange.

12... e5

Black bites, obscuring the long diagonal to prevent the exchange. This is not necessarily an issue if the central majority can be advanced, but Black is accepting some risk which the more solid 12...Bb7 would have avoided.

13. Be3 Bb7
14. Bb3

Withdrawing the bishop prevents any later ...d5 advance from coming with tempo.

14... Rfd8

The difference between this and 14...Rad8 might seem small, but the game continuation highlights a rather stark difference.

15. f4

Correctly identifying the f7-pawn as the weakest point in Black's position.

15... d5

16. fxe5 Nh5

A reasonable move which creates the preconditions for later disaster. Black is fine after 16...dxe4.

17. exd5 Bxe5? [Diagram]



The significance of this mistake was probably disguised by the fact Black has threats of their own, with ...Bxh2+ and ...Ng3 a major idea.

18. Rxf7

A bolt of lightning. Black might have expected the more forgiving move order 18.d6 which though good for White gives some hope to the defending side after 18...Rxd6. After the text move there is little Black can do to survive.

18... Qxf7

19. d6 Rxd6

20. Bxf7+ Kxf7

With the surplus material and Black's king weak the road is paved for White's conversion.

21. Qe2 Re6

22. Qc4 Rae8

23. Rf1+ Kg8

24. Bh6 Ng7

25. Bxg7 Kxg7

26. Ne4 R6e7

27. Ng5 Rf8

This ends the game directly, but the kingside was falling regardless as 27...Bf6 loses to 28. Nxh7.

28. Ne6+ 1-0

Preeyansh Roul (1994) – FM Alphaeus Ang (2380)
ACC Club Championship (2025), Round 8
Annotated by Brogan Powlesland

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 g6
3. Nc3 Bg7
4. e4 d6
5. Nf3 O-O
6. Be2 e5
7. Be3 [Diagram] Na6



This is an Alphaeus Game, so of course we have a King's Indian on the board. White is aiming for a space advantage, while Black will get good attacking opportunities.

8. O-O Qe8

Qe8 is a thematic move in the KID. There are two main ideas. This approach means that black can play Ng4 then f5 straight away, without having to worry about Bg5. Additionally, after exf5 and

gxf5, the queen can support the attack by going to g6 or h5.

Therefore, White's next move, 9. h3 is quite practical.

9. h3 exd4
10. Bxd4 Nxe4?

A rare blunder from Alphaeus, which White exploits.

11. Bxg7 Kxg7
12. Qd4+ Nf6
13. Nd5! [Diagram] Qd8



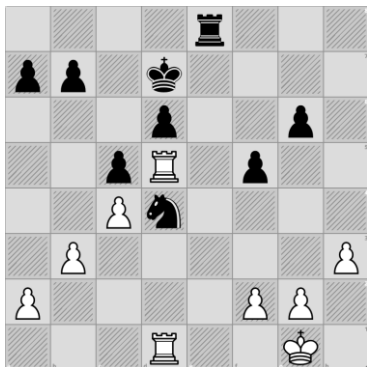
Ouch! That pin is annoying! Astonishing to me, but this position has been reached before! Miles – Anand (1990). Anand resigned soon after this.

14. Ng5! Be6

15. Nxf6 Qxf6
16. Qxf6+ Kxf6
17. Nxh7+ Ke7
18. Nxf8 Rxf8

White picks up an exchange for correctly dealing with Black's earlier greed.

19. b3 Nb4
20. Bf3 Rb6
21. Be4 f5
22. Bf3 Nc2
23. Rad1 c5
24. Bd5 Bxd5
25. Rxd5 Nd4
26. Re1+ Kd7
27. Rd1 Re8 [Diagram]



28. R1xd4 cxd4

White gives back the exchange for a pawn and to extricate a mostly trapped rook.

There is a much better plan here, starting with 28. b4! and black must play b6 to keep the rook trapped. After exchanging, White's non-trapped rook has a lot more manoeuvrability.

Nonetheless, black's pawns are weak and white is happy

29. Rxd4 Re1+
30. Kh2 b6
31. Rd2 g5?!

g5 is the inaccuracy white has been waiting for. The rest is just a matter of conversion.

32. Rd5 Ke6
33. g4 fxg4
34. hxg4 Re2
35. Kg3 Rxa2
36. Rxg5 Rb2
37. Rb5 Kf6
38. f4 Rb1
39. g5+ Kg6
40. Rd5 Kh5
41. Rxd6 Rxb3+
42. Kf2 Kg4
43. Rf6 Rf3+
44. Ke2 Rg3
45. g6 Kh5
46. f5 Kh6
47. Rf7 a5
48. Kf2 Rg4
49. Kf3 Kh5
50. Rh7+ Kg5
51. g7 Kxf5
52. Rh5+ 1-0

Sai Vivan Karthikeya Somaraju (1909) – Jacob Barry (1560)
Autumn Cup (2025), Round 2
Annotated by Jacob Barry

This is probably my best game of 2025. Here is an example of how I beat someone 400 points above me by getting him to walk into a losing combination.

- 1. d4 Nf6**
- 2. c4 e6**
- 3. Nc3 Bb4**
- 4. e3 O-O**
- 5. Bd3 d5**
- 6. cxd5 exd5**

The most aggressive move. White, opens Black's e-file up in exchange for getting play in the centre.

- 7. Ne2 Re8**
- 8. O-O b6**

A deviation from opening. Allows the bishop to fianchetto, or move to a6 and allows c5 to be played.

- 9. Qc2 Bd6?!**

Moves the queen and bishop onto a powerful diagonal and aims at h7. Black's move is passive. 9... Ba6 attacks a strong piece.

- 10. f3?! c5**

Far too slow. Gives Black the chance to create a powerful pawn break and gain initiative.

- 11. Bb5 Bd7**

Offers to trade off an active bishop.

- 12. Bxd7 Nbx d7**

12... Qxd7 13. Ng3 Nc6 allows Black to move his knight to a powerful square.

- 13. Qb3 c4**

13... Qb8 14. Nxd5 Bxh2+ 15. Kh1 cxd4 and Black has a favorable position.

- 14. Qc2 Qc7**
- 15. g3?!**

Creates a mild positional weakness. Black has enough pieces on the kingside where this will be exploited.

- 15... a6**
- 16. e4?! dxe4**

This allows Black to attack the centre, which is what he was already planning.

17. fxe4 Qc6!? [Diagram]



A psychological trap. This is an unassuming move which allows White to go horribly wrong by trying to win a piece. White is already under immense pressure here, and takes the bait.

17... b5 is the best move here. It wasn't played because e5 actually does work here. 18. e5 Nxe5 19. Rxf6 gxf6 20. Nd5

18. e5?? Nxe5!

Catastrophic. White's position crumbles.

19. dxe5?? Bc5+ [Diagram]



Loses quickly. Takes a powerful diagonal and forces White to return material.

20. Rf2 Bxf2+

Weakens the king.

21. Kxf2 Ng4+

22. Kg1 Qc5+

23. Kg2 Qf2+

24. Kh3 h5

24... Qf3 is technically better.

25. Kh4 Qxh2+

26. Kg5 Rxe5+ 0-1

Checkmate is coming. White resigned here due to:

27. Qf5 Rxf5+

28. Kxf5 Qf2+

29. Nf4 Re8

30. Kg5 Qxg3

31. Nd3 Nf2+

32. Kxh5 Qg4#

Best Games: 1600 - 1800

The 1600 to 1800 bracket is a shy group of players – they know they're not at the 2000 rated level, and because their games often aren't perfect, they're reluctant to submit them.

But these games deserve recognition too. An empty book isn't much fun, so we scoured the club games to find a few worth showing.

Alex Pan is one of my heroes of 2025. He jointly won the NZ Major Open, and also came to the club's rescue for the B-Grade Interclubs, picking up the best Board 3 award for his score of 3.5/4. In the presented game from the Club Champs, Alex channelled his inner Tal for a strong attack.

Martin Zhou's game against Hunter in the Club Champs was also a masterclass in knowing when to defend, when to attack, and when to do both. Slowly, he put his pawns and pieces on the right squares, leaving Hunter with less and less to do.

Finally, one benefit to putting this book together is that I'm allowed to shamelessly put in one game of my own. My game against Richard Liu shows one approach to punishing suspicious openings with principled play.

Annie Yue (1702) – Alexander Hanrui Pan (1746)
Club Championship (2025), Round 9
Annotated by Brogan

1. e4 c6
2. d4 d5
3. exd5 cxd5
4. Nf3 Nf6

John Nunn once wrote that the exchange Caro “almost always leads to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack after c4, unless white plays 4.Bd3.” While Nf3 is rare at the master’s level, it is commonly played at the club level, and Magnus and Kramnik have both played this with success.

5. Be2?! e6

The bishop ideally belongs on d3, or maybe b5. White shouldn’t fear black playing Bg5.

6. O-O Bd6
7. Bg5 Nbd7
8. Nc3 a6

8. c3 leads to a Carlsbad structure, while 8. c4 leads to quite an ambitious IQP after 8... dxc4. 8. Nc3 is a little strange as 8... a6 is a move that black wants to play anyway, but it’s not clear where the knight is going.

9. a4 O-O
10. Re1 Qc7
11. h3 b6
12. Na2 Ne4! [Diagram]



With Ne4, it’s clear that Black is starting to drive. Black has a clear plan with Bb7 and a centre land grab happening soon. White’s plan is less clear.

13. Be3 Bb7
14. Bd3 Rae8
15. Qe2 f6
16. Rac1 e5!? [Diagram]



The engine suggests that e5 is inaccurate but let's ignore that for a minute. Black has successfully thrown the gauntlet and said "I'm challenging you for centre!".

White has two choices – they can ignore this and go pawngrabbing with Bxa6, or they play c4, saying "I accept your challenge – pistols at dawn".

17. Bxa6 exd4

18. Nxd4 Bh2+

19. Kf1 Ng3+!? [Diagram]



Youtuber agadmator would call this a "Tal Move" while technically unsound, this sacrifice seems to have come from nowhere and is difficult to refute over the board.

20. fxe3 Rxe3

Always sac the exchange!

21. Qxe3 Bxa6+

22. Kf2 Nc5

23. Nc3 f5

24. Qf3? [Diagram] Bxg3+



Qf3 is where white starts to crack, and black decides that they haven't sacrificed enough yet. Qf4 is a more practical approach, offering to give a mere pawn back to deescalate.

Bxg3 is black's most practical try. The engine prefers Ne4+, but it is not clear what compensation Black has after 25. Nxe4 dxe4 26. Qf4. Why not 25... fxe4, pinning the queen with a revealed attack? Because 26. Qxf1! Kxf1 and 27. Ne6 winning the house.

25. Qxg3 Ne4+

26. Rxe4?? fxe4+

Unfortunately, the fatal blunder. After 26. Nxe4 fxe4+ 27. Nf3 Qc5+ 28. Re3, all of white's pieces are pinned, but white is surviving.

27. Nf3 e3+ 0-1

White is losing their queen, so chooses to resign.

Hunter Po'e-Tofaeono (1820) – Martin Zhou (1618)
Club Championship (2025), Round 5
Annotated by Brogan

1. c4 Nf6
2. g3 g6
3. Bg2 Bg7
4. Nc3 O-O
5. Nf3 c6
6. d4 d5
7. O-O dxc4 [Diagram]



So we have our structure – very imbalanced. White will have a strong centre, but black has an extra queenside pawn.

My master's database shows that this position has occurred at least 320 times before, from a mix of Slavs, KIDs, and English Openings, with quite a few games above the 2600 level.

8. e4 h6?!

8... h6 is a novelty, but unfortunately an inaccuracy. b5 and a5 should be strong contenders to strengthen the queenside. Bg4 is also worth considering so black to trade off their bad bishop and prevent white's Ne5 ambitions.

9. Ne5 Be6
10. Be3 Nbd7
11. Nxd7?! Qxd7

In hindsight, Be3 probably wasn't as good as f4, allowing white to claim huge amounts of space on the kingside and start to think about f5 ideas.

However, given that you've allowed black to play Nbd7, you now have to work out what to do. 11. Nxd7 I am not a fan of. This gives black too much development. However, 11. h3 is well worth your attention! after 11... Nxe5 12. dxe5 Qxd1 13. Raxd1 Nh7 14. f4 White has cramped black's kingside.

12. f3 Rfd8
13. Ne2 b5
14. a4 a6

Black will be starting to think that they've gotten away with it. They are a clean pawn up, with a strong queenside, although White does have the centre to show for it.

15. Qd2 Kh7

16. Ra3 Bh3

Ra3 is an interesting idea. White posits that if they can own the A file by doubling rooks, then Black queenside advantage won't be as strong.

17. Rfa1 Bxg2

18. Kxg2 e5! [Diagram]

However, Black determines that they can ignore this threat, opting to instead trade off their bad bishop before striking back at White's centre.



While this position looks okay at first glance, White is actually busted.

White cannot take on e5, cannot advance to d5, and all three of the ways to capture back after exd4 are a disaster.

19. Qc3 exd4

20. Qxd4 Nd5!

Amazing! Martin is about to show us why this move is so great, so I won't wax lyrical. What's astonishing is how bad the other captures-backs are. 20. Nxd4 or Bxd4 gets hit with Nxe4! attacking the white queen as well as the capturing d4 piece.

21. e5 Nxe3+

22. Qxe3 b4

23. R3a2 b3

24. Ra3 Bf8

What a trap! From here, the rest is just beautiful conversion.

25. Qf4 Bxa3

26. bxa3 Kg8

27. Qxc4 Qd3

28. Qxd3 Rxd3

29. Rb1 c5

30. Kf2 c4

31. f4 Rb8

32. a5 c3

33. Nc1 c2

34. Rb2 Rd1 0-1

Brogan Powlesland (1634) – Richard Liu (1837)
Winter Cup (2025), Round 8
Annotated by Brogan

1. c4 b6

2. d4 Bb7

These b6 Bb7 / b3 Bb2 openings have become relatively common at ACC.

3. Nc3 e6

4. f3 f5

5. e3!? Nf6

5. e3 isn't as strong as the much more active e4, directly challenging the dubious f5 push. However, I figured that an old man like me would have better chances keeping the position closed.

6. Bd3 Be7

7. Nge2 O-O

8. O-O c5

8... c5 is very forcing! Your opinion on this move depends on whether you think white can play d5. If White can play d5 and hold the centre, black is close to busted. If d5 cannot hold, then white is in trouble.

9. d5 Nh5

10. e4 Bd6

11. f4 exd5 [Diagram]

f4 shuts down black's possible kingside play. While not the most precise move, this approach is quite practical. 11. Nb5! is much stronger, so long as white has calculated that there is no danger after 11. Nb5 Bxh2 12. Kxh2 Qh4+ 13. Kg1 f4.



The position after exd5 is extremely rich and is well worth considering. 12. e5! asks black to either concede a bishop retreat, or to proceed with the daring 12... d4. While white should be without fear and play 13. Nd5! it is tough to concede black a passed pawn on d4.

12. cxd5! is also extremely strong, leaving the d-pawn isolated after 12... fxe4 13. Nxe4, but White has strong play after 13... Qe7

14. N2c3. All of White's pieces are on good squares while Black feels cramped.

In the end, I opted for 12. Nxd5 – not as strong as the other options, but aiming to get active knights.

12. Nxd5 fxe4?!

Forcing my bishop to the two strongest light-diagonals.

13. Bxe4 Kh8

Avoiding any tricks on the loose bishop. 13... Nc6 or Bc6 are better, but moving the king along reduces calculation as we both head towards time trouble.

14. Nec3 [Diagram] g6



14... g6 must have been a hard move for Richard to play, instead of the aggressive Qh4. In our post-game analysis, we both saw 14... Qh4 15. Nc7!? with white having great moves including

Qxd6 (note the loose f8 rook), Bxb7, and Nxb8. Stockfish is deeply unimpressed by our tactics and instead suggests 14... Qh4 15. Bf3! arguing that the knight on h5 has no place to go (the knight exchanges on f4 and f6 both favour white).

15. Nb5 Be7

16. Nbc7 Bxd5

17. Bxd5 Qxc7

18. Bxa8 Bf6

Finally cashing in on my superior position – black cannot avoid active play for 18 moves without consequence.

19. f5 Bd4+

20. Kh1 Qe5

Bd4+ was a nice reminder from Richard that there's still a game on. In this position, an obvious move like 21. fxc6 throws away the game to Rxf1 22. Qxf1 Ng3+! 23. hxc3 Qh5# This mate threat needs to be checked each move.

21. Bh6 Rxf5

22. Rxf5 Qxf5

23. Qf3 Nc6

Richard hoped that I might double take on c6, forgetting about Ng3+.

24. Bxc6 dxc6

25. Re1 Be5

26. Qxf5 1-0

Best Games: Under 1600

Most of our players are under 1600, so I thought it was important that there was a section dedicated to showcasing these games.

Games at this rating level may not always be the most accurate, but they're often the most exciting. These games capture the spirit of chess, being full of bold attacks and creative tactics. It's important to celebrate these games because they show genuine passion for chess.

In this section, we chose to showcase two games, one on the upper side of the rating bracket and one of the lower side:

Virginia Milne – Nahuel Lino Serron

Virginia showed attacking prowess well beyond her rating, taking down a higher-rated player who had their own attack going in this game. She demonstrated when to build the attack, how and when to defend, and how to execute her own breakthrough.

Darryn Goble – John McClory

Darryn showed how to use pawn breaks alongside his pieces to break through the enemy camp.²

² The author must admit a small conflict of interest – Darryn is a student of mine. If anyone takes issue with this blatant display of nepotism, they're more than welcome to write Auckland Chess 2026.

Virginia Milne (1493) – Nahuel Lino Serron (1628)
Autumn Cup (2025), Round 2
Annotated by Jack McConnell

- 1. e4 e5**
- 2. Nf3 Nc6**
- 3. Bc4 Bc5**
- 4. d3 Nf6**
- 5. Bg5**

A modern and aggressive way to handle the Italian, this provokes Black into expanding with ...h6 and ...g5.

5... Be7

This is a fairly logical way to meet the early Bg5 system. Though Black loses a tempo moving their bishop twice in the opening, they limit White's play against the pinned knight and expect to gain the time back when ...h6 and ...g5 forces the bishop to retreat.

- 6. Nc3 d6**
- 7. Qd2 Na5**

This second double-move of a piece is more extravagant than the first, and it may have been better for Black to stick to the plan and hunt down the dark-squared bishop with 7...h6.

8. O-O-O

An inspired decision which leads the game into rare territory.

8... c6

Though it may earlier have been Black's intention to capture the bishop, they now realise that a pawn on c6 will prove useful for White, binding the centre and disrupting a flank attack. Shifting to play with ...c6 and ..b5 is logical with the bishop and knight as well as the king targets for the advance.

9. a3 b5

10. Ba2 O-O [Diagram]



Now that Black is castled the White forces have an address and the race begins to checkmate on opposite sides. Black's king may actually have been safer in the centre of the board.

11. h4

Beginning the race.

11... Be6

12. Kb1 Bxa2+

13. Nxa2 c5

The disposition of the remaining Black minor pieces makes their attack quite slow, one knight is in front of the a-pawn and the bishop is behind d- and c-pawns. Furthermore, the most obvious point of attack b4 is covered several times over by the White pieces.

14. h5

The White attacking plan on the other hand moves as quickly as the h-pawn can march itself down the board. The bishop is already pressuring a defender of Black's kingside and the knight will soon migrate to f5.

14... Nc6

15. Nc3 Qb6

This is too slow. Black must accept White's invitation to strike, even at the cost of a pawn. The best move is 15... b4 16. axb4 cxb4. It is also possible to capture with the knight, but the pawn recapture succeeds in opening more lines. 17. Bxf6 bxc3 18. Qxc3 Rc8 19. Bxe7 Qxe7 Black is down a pawn, but there is enough

compensation now for equality as both the White queen and king are targets.

16. Nh4

This is natural but it gives Black another opportunity to play b4 with tempo. There was a more direct option in 16. Bxf6 eliminating the defender of f6. White will follow up with Nd5 and h5-h6.

16... Nd4

Passing up another opportunity to play ...b4 and undefending e7. Now White's ideas work well.

17. Ne2 a5

Black's last chance was to withdraw the knight to e6 and go fully on the defensive.

18. Nxd4 cxd4

19. Nf5 Qc7

20. f4

Opening the f-file to dial up the pressure on f6.

20...Kh8

20... Bd8 Attempting to preserve the dark-squared bishop loses abruptly. 21. fxe5 dxe5 22. Nxg7 Kxg7 23. Bh6+

21. fxe5 dxe5

22. Nxe7 Qxe7

23. Rdf1

Now the pile up on f6 and White's ability to weaken the Black defenses even further with h6 wins material.

23... Rfb8

24. h6 Rb6

25. hxg7+ Kg8

Black is unable to recapture the pawn. 25... Kxg7 26. Bxf6+ Rxf6 27. Qg5+

26. Rh6 Raa6

27. Rfh1

This is one of the more elegant ways to win, switching from

winning a piece to mating attack. It was also possible to play 27. Qf2 as ...Nxe4 is nothing to fear, because the Black queen cannot abandon f7.

27... Qb7

28. Bxf6 Rxf6

29. Rxh7 Rg6

30. Rh8+ Kxg7

31. R1h7+ Kf6

The Black king will only run so far.

32. Qf2+ Ke6

33. Qf5+ Kd6

34. Rxf7 Qxf7

35. Qxf7 1-0

Darryn Goble (1462) – John McClory (1026)
Summer Cup (2025), Round 3
Annotated by Brogan

- 1. d4 e6**
- 2. e3 d6**
- 3. Bd3 b6**
- 4. f3 g6**
- 5. c3 Bd7**
- 6. Na3 a6**
- 7. f4 d5**

So white has gone for a stonewall structure and black has put a solid pawn on d5. Black has also prepared space to fianchetto both bishops, although the light-squared bishop is on d7.

8. Nf3 Nc6?!

The first inaccuracy, but not a major one. Black should keep the option to play c5 open rather than put a knight in front of it.

9. b4 b5

10. O-O h6?!

h6 is an unnecessary bunny ear – the f3 knight is going to e5, not g5. Better would be to play Nf6 to take advantage of the knight outpost on e4. Darryn is putting all of his pieces on the right squares to get an attack slowly moving... although the a3 knight is a little suspect...

11. Bd2 Bg7

12. Be1 Bf6

This funny bishop zigzag is common in a few similar openings like the Dutch.

13. Ne5 Nxe5

14. fxe5 Bg5

White is more than happy to open the f-file.

15. Qf3 Qe7 [Diagram]



16. e4!? c6

White moves to open the game up with e4. White's pieces are on good attacking squares, while black is defending their uncastled king and their weak f7 pawn. The knight on g8 and rook on h8 are not moving in a hurry.

The other move worth considering is 16. h4! which makes black decide whether they're going to lose a piece or allow white's queen to infiltrate on f7.

IE, 16. h4 Bxh4 17. Bxh4 Qxh4
18. Qxf7+ Kd8+-

17. Rd1 Rh7

18. Bd2 f5

f5 is unfortunately a panic move. While an attack looks imminent, the best thing to do is ask what white is actually threatening.

18... a5 seeking queenside play is worth considering. 18... Bxd2
19. Rxd2 Qg5 starts to let the black pieces out of jail, although white still has the advantage.

19. exf6 Bxf6

20. e5! Bg5

21. Bxg6+ Kd8

Ouch! In just a few moves, Darryn has infiltrated and is starting to collect.

22. Bxh7 Kc7

23. Bxg8 Rxg8

24. Qf7 Qxf7

25. Rxf7 Bxd2

26. Rxd2 h5

Darryn just needs to convert.

27. Rdf2 h4

28. h3 Rg3

29. R2f3 Rxf3

White kills all counterplay with R2f3.

30. gxf3 Kd8

31. Rh7 Be8

32. Rxh4 Bg6

33. Rh6 Bf5

34. f4 Ke7

35. Kh2 Kf7

36. Rf6+ Kg7

37. h4 Kh7

38. Kg3 Kg7

39. h5 Kh7

40. Kh4 Kg7

41. Kg5 Bh3

42. f5 exf5

43. Rxf5 Bg2

Black cannot play Bxf5 and ask their king to defend against the two passed pawns.

44. e6 Be4

45. e7 Bxf5

46. e8=Q Bd3

47. Qxc6 Kh7

48. Qf6 1-0

h6 and Qg7# will soon follow.

Title Achievements

2025 was a strong year for title achievements among our players. The Oceania Zonal Championships, held in Melbourne, drew a solid contingent from our club who made the trip across the Tasman.

One of the key attractions of the Zonals is the opportunity to earn direct titles, official FIDE titles awarded for strong performances, although a few players also had rights to claim from 2023's Zonal.

For example, while the Candidate Master (CM) title usually requires a rating of 2200, players could earn it at the Oceania Zonals by scoring 4.5 out of 9 games and holding a rating of at least 2000.

This year, we are congratulating the following players for their title achievements:

Daqi Mao	FM
Isabelle Ning	WFM
Leo Baker	CM
Justin Wang	CM
Markis Tew	CM
Sarah Sun	WCM
Emily Gan	WCM
Sophia Feng	WCM
Luna Xu (2024)	WCM
Luna Lu (2024)	WCM

Curating this book, we offered each player the opportunity to submit their story and an important game on their journey. Justin, Sophia, Luna Xu and Luna Lu were kind enough to submit articles.

Justin Wang – Path to CM

Achieving the title is one of the most significant things I have ever accomplished. It took 6 years of dedication and locking in, and it paid off. It was all worth it, and I enjoyed every step along the way. I got my conditional title at the 2023 Oceania Zonals in Melbourne, scoring 5/9. Letting me unlock the title at 2000.

My parents have supported me for 6 years since I started learning chess just so I can chase my goals using that as a stepping stone. But at the end of the day, it is your own will to continue and better yourself.

I think my best game has to be against Joshua Langford in the Arie Nijman Memorial.

Justin Zhide Wang (2007) - Joshua Langford (1890) Arie Nijman Memorial (2025), Round 6 Annotated by Brogan

- 1. d4 d5**
- 2. Bf4 c5**
- 3. e3 cxd4**
- 4. exd4 Nc6**
- 5. c3 e6**

So we have a London System on the board. 5... e6 is not a common move here, with both Bf5 and Nf6 being more common, but e6 surely must be solid.

- 6. Nf3 Nge7**
- 7. Bd3 f6**
- 8. O-O g5!? [Diagram]**

Very ambitious! White has strong development, while Black is attempting to claim all the space.

Before coming to the sacrifices that are practically being screamed for, we should rule out some obvious candidate moves. 9. Bg3 is practically asking to be hit with 9... h5 and getting rolled over on the kingside.

9. Be3 or 9. Bd2 are reasonable retreats, but black will get good play with 9... Bg7, and eventually play for both the centre and the kingside.

So of course, Justin must choose between 9. Nxg5 or 9. Bxg5. Stockfish, in its infinite wisdom, prefers 9. Bxg5, noting that you can get three pawns back pretty quickly for the piece. For example, 9. Bxg5 fxc5 10. Nxg5 Rg8 11. Nxf7 – black has serious kingside issues and no material advantage to show for it.

But 9. Nxg5 must also be taken seriously, and Justin shows why!

9. Nxg5 fxc5

10. Qh5+ Kd7

The black king is going to hide on the queenside...

11. Bxg5 Bg7

12. Nd2 Qe8

13. Qe2 Kd8

Justin, of course, cannot swap queens. Qh3 is worthy of consideration, keeping the queen squarely pointed at the king, but Qe2 also keeps strong pressure.

Kd8 eventually needs to be played to let black's queenside pieces out, but black is making no threats.

14. f4?! h6

Well, if black won't make threats, Justin will claim that he can just roll over them...

15. Bh4 Qf7

Black is slowly unwinding. Now they just need to get their light-squared bishop out... somehow.

16. Nf3 Bd7

Bd7 is unfortunately a blunder, even though it looks like black's only plan. Justin precisely shows why with the nasty 17. Ne5!

It turns out the only saving move is very difficult to find 16... Bf6! which asks Justin a hard question about his dark-squared bishop and provides an excellent square for black's queen on g7.

17. Ne5! Nxe5

18. fxe5 Qe8

The kingside is now open, with immediate threats on black's queen.

19. Qg4 Qg8??

Qg8 is unfortunately losing – the only move to stay in the game is the very sad looking 19... Bf8.

20. Bxe7+ Kxe7

21. Qh4+ 1-0

Black stops the clock and offers their hand. White has completely broken through. 21... Ke8 will be met by 22. Bg6, with checkmate soon following. 21... Bf6 fails to 22. Qxf6, followed by Bg6.

Sophia Feng – Path to WCM

I first started taking chess seriously in Year 4 when I got my first coach and began playing in ChessPower tournaments. Before that, in Year 1, I used to skip the lunchtime chess sessions and run to the playground instead. One of the hardest parts of my journey has definitely been motivation. Sometimes chess gets boring, and sometimes I am just lazy and do not feel like doing puzzles or learning new openings. After every bad tournament, I always tell myself I will go home, analyse all my games, and train harder, but I never actually do it.

What helped me improve the most was doing lots of puzzles, blind tactics, and playing many online games, especially 3+2 and bullet. When I earned the WCM title, I felt really proud because I had worked hard preparing for the tournament. My current goal is to train consistently and build up the motivation to keep improving.

Sophia Feng (1746) – Hannah Sayce (1851) Oceania Zonals Melbourne (2025), Round 7 Annotated by Sophia Feng

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 e6
3. Nc3 Bb4
4. e3 O-O
5. Bd3 b6
6. Nge2 Bb7
7. O-O d5
8. cxd5 exd5
9. a3 Bd6
10. Ng3 Re8
11. b4 c6
12. Bb2 a5
13. b5 c5
14. Qf3 Nbd7
15. Rac1 Rc8

I was comfortable with this position, normal development.

16. Nf5 Bf8
17. g4 c4
18. Bb1 g6
19. Ng3 Qe7
20. h3 Bg7
21. Rfe1 Ne4
22. Ngxe4 dxe4
23. Qg2 h6
24. Red1 Nf6
25. Ba2 Nd5
26. Qf1 Qh4 [Diagram]



Here my position looks slightly worse at first sight - black is more active, controls more space, my pieces feel cramped and both my bishops were blocked. But I focused on attacking the c4 pawn.

- 27. Ne2 Kh7
- 28. Bxc4 f5
- 29. Qg2 Rf8
- 30. Qg3 Qg5
- 31. gxf5 Qxf5 [Diagram]



I felt I was slightly better because I was up a pawn and my pieces are more active than before.

- 32. Bxd5 Bxd5
- 33. Nf4 Bb3
- 34. Rxc8 Rxc8
- 35. Rc1 Rxc1+
- 36. Bxc1 Bf8
- 37. Ne2 Qxb5
- 38. Qc7+ Bg7
- 39. Nf4 Qg5+
- 40. Kh2 Qh4
- 41. Qxb6 Qxf2+ [Diagram]



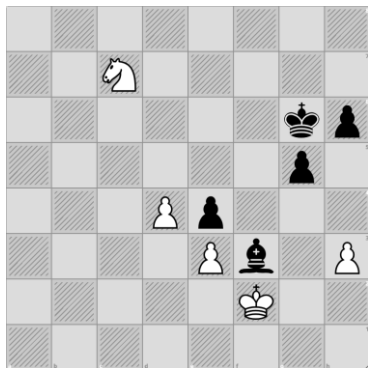
Here I realised I had miscalculated and started to panic. We both had a few minutes left.

- 42. Ng2 Bd1
- 43. Qb2 Be2
- 44. Qc2 Bf8
- 45. Qc7+ Bg7
- 46. Qg3 Qf1
- 47. Qe1 Qf3
- 48. Qg3 Qf6

49. Nf4 Bf3
 50. Bd2 Bf8
 51. Bxa5 g5
 52. Nd5 Qc6
 53. Qc7+

I managed to hold the position!

53... Qxc7+
 54. Nxc7 Bxa3
 55. Kg3 Bd6+
 56. Kf2 Kg6
 57. Nb5 Bh2
 58. Bc7 Bxc7
 59. Nxc7 [Diagram]



I felt this position was close to equal, but slightly easier for me to play. I had a connected passed pawn, and in this position I preferred my knight over the bishop because the knight could put pressure on black's kingside pawns.

59... Kf6
 60. Ne8+ Ke6
 61. Nc7+ Kd7
 62. Nb5 Kc6
 63. Nc3 h5
 64. Kg3 Kb6
 65. Nd5+ Kb5
 66. Nf6 Kc4
 67. Nh7 Kd3
 68. Kf2 g4

Missed h4, I took immediately.

69. hxcg4 Bxcg4
 70. Nf6 Bd1
 71. d5 Ba4
 72. d6 h4
 73. d7 Bxd7
 74. Nxd7 h3
 75. Ne5+ Kd2
 76. Ng4 Kd3
 77. Kg3 Ke2
 78. Kxh3 Kf3
 79. Kh4 Kg2
 80. Kg5 Kg3
 81. Ne5 Kh3
 82. Kf4 Kh4
 83. Kxe4 Kg5
 84. Kd5 Kf6
 85. Nc6 Kf7
 86. e4 Ke8
 87. e5 Kf7
 88. Kd6 Kf8
 89. Kd7 1-0

Luna Xu – Path to WCM

Earning my first title was an unforgettable milestone, but the road to it was anything but smooth. It tested me in ways I never expected and unfolded so differently from how I'd imagined - filled with moments of unfair play, especially in international tournaments, and painful losses in crucial games. Yet every setback made the achievement all the more meaningful.

Every time I lost a crucial game, I realised that if I had just put in a little more time and effort, things could have been much easier down the road. But I let some of those chances slip away - lessons that still stay with me.

Achieving it was one of the greatest moments of my life - a constant reminder to keep working hard, because there are always more goals ahead waiting to be achieved.

Luna Yuexiu Xu (1692) - Daianna Anthuane Cusi Sarasi (1430) FIDE World School Chess Championships (2024), Round 2 Annotated by Luna Xu

- 1. e4 e5**
- 2. Nf3 Nc6**
- 3. Nc3 Nf6**
- 4. Bb5 Bc5**
- 5. Nxe5 Bxf2+?**

This move isn't really good because it's giving up the bishop pair and giving white more space, white's king shouldn't be much of a trouble because there can be Rf1-Kg1 and white's king will be safe.

The better variation is equal
5... Nxe5 6. d4 a6 7. Be2 Bd6

8. dxe5 Bxe5 9. Bg5 h6 10. Bxf6
where black has the double
bishops and white has more
space.

- 6. Kxf2 Nxe5**
- 7. Rf1?**

I shouldn't really have played this
move because I forgot my king
could be attacked after 7... Nfg4+
Kg1 Qh4 and there should be
repetition or draw I think.

- 7... h6?**

This is a mistake because this allows white to play d4 and after Neg4+ there won't be Qh4 because it's not the f6-Knight. And even if there is Qh4, white can play h3 next.

8. d4 Ng6

White is fine after either
8... Neg4+ 9. Kg1 or 8... Nfg4+
9. Kg1 Qh4

9. Kg1 O-O

10. Qf3 c6

11. e5?!

After this, she can play 11... Nh7 and after 12. Bd3, there is d6 getting rid of my strongest pawn that is provoked by advancing too far and at the same time after we exchange, my d4 pawn is visibly a weakness to target. I should have played 11. Bd3 immediately as if now d6 I can play 12. h3 with threats of Bxh6 coming.

If something like 12... Nd7 is played then I can move my pieces easily to the kingside and attack her. Plan: Ne2-Nf4-Bd2-Qg3-Rf3-Ref1 and then maybe e5 or h4-h5 annoying the g6 Knight

11... Nh7

12. Bd3 Nh4?? [Diagram]



This immediately loses to Qg3 and my attack cannot be stopped with my threat of Ne4-Nd6 attacking the unstable f7 pawn with the possibility of sacrificing the rook later. I also kind of don't understand why my opponent played this move, it doesn't do anything much apart from helping me improve my position. I think 12... d6 might still be better.

13. Qg3 Kh8

14. Ne4 Ng6

15. Nd6 Qe7

16. Rxf7 Rxf7

17. Qxg6 Ng5

18. Bxg5 Qxg5

19. Qh7# 1-0

Luna Lu – Path to WCM

I started playing chess when I was eight years old, and from the beginning, I enjoyed both the challenges and the creativity of the game. By the age of 10, I won the silver medal at the Asian Youth Championships 2023. This result helped me earn the Woman Candidate Master (WCM) title, and I also reached a rating over 1800, which officially confirmed the title.

For me, enjoying chess has always been the most important thing. Learning chess has allowed me to meet many people, make new friends, and even travel the world, which is really cool!

I've attached one of my games against Kristina Zavivaeva, which I believe was a significant step on my journey.

Xiahan Luna Lu (1458) – Kristina Zavivaeva (1465) **Asian Youth Chess Championships 2023, Round 8** **Annotated by Brogan**

- 1. d4 Nf6**
- 2. c4 e5**
- 3. dxe5 Ng4**
- 4. Nf3 Bc5**
- 5. e3 Nc6**

A Budapest Gambit! Black is aiming for rapid development, while White will claim that you can't just go around gambiting important centre pawns.

6. Nd4 d6

Nd4 is interesting – black can take the pawn back with Ngxe5, after which white should have a small advantage once Nc3. Black has a

slight edge in development, while white is catching-up and has a strong c-pawn. 6... d6 is more thematically a Budapest-style move, pushing an even stronger development advantage.

7. Nxc6 bxc6

8. exd6 cxd6

If you're going to be greedy and hang onto the pawn, this is the way to do it. Trade off the potential attackers make the developing player make concessions.

Black had a hard decision on how to react to 8. exd6. Qf6 is very

tempting – picking up a tempo on the f2 mating square.

Bxd6 is also tempting, as black will now struggle to make progress with the bishop currently hitting on e3 granite, but this is a hard move to play as the pressure on e3 also helps to prevent white's f4 ambitions. I'm not too convinced by cxd6, but perhaps the position is already bad.

9. Be2 Ne5

Be2 is inaccurate as Qh4 asks some hard questions. For example, what is white's king safety plan? Unfortunately not played, and white makes good progress.

10. Nc3 O-O

11. Ne4 Bb4+

12. Bd2 Bxd2+

With the swapping of the dark-squared bishops, it becomes clear that black has no compensation for the pawn.

13. Qxd2 d5

14. cxd5 cxd5

Very dangerous. Is black actually ready to open the centre, and leave themselves with an isolated queen's pawn?

15. Nc3 Bb7

16. Qd4 Re8

17. O-O Qd6

18. Nb5 Qe7

19. Rac1 Nc6 [Diagram]



Luna has now castled and finished her development. White has few weaknesses, while black has dark-squared problems on the queenside that Luna is doing a great job of exploiting. Clearly white is in the driver's seat.

20. Qf4 Rad8

21. Rfd1 d4

22. Nxd4 Nxd4

23. Rxd4 Rc8

Yeah, nah... We can't just go around sacrificing our IQP with no plan. My guess is that black didn't see that the white queen was guarding d4 when they sacrificed the pawn. For example, 23. Rxd4 Rxd4 24. exd4 would be catastrophic due to leaving the e2

bishop unprotected, but white would of course play 24. Qxd4.

- 24. Rcd1 Bc6**
- 25. Bg4 Rb8**
- 26. Bd7 Bxd7**
- 27. Rxd7 Qf8**

OUCH! White is making good progress against black's defences.

- 28. Qd4 a5**
- 29. h3 Rb4**

Very wise to create luft when you're about to send your rooks into enemy territory.

- 30. Qc3 h6**
- 31. Qc7 a4**
- 32. Rd8 Kh7**

Luna can now cash in her material advantage for a strong attack against the black king.

- 33. R1d7 Rxb2**
- 34. Rxe8 Qxe8**
- 35. Rxf7 Qg8**
- 36. a3 Ra2**
- 37. Qe7 Ra1+**
- 38. Kh2 Qb8+**
- 39. g3 Qb2**

Notice how White's rook is guarding f2 and attacking g7. Fantastic aggressive defence.

- 40. Qe4+ Kg8**
- 41. Qe8+ Kh7**
- 42. Rf8 g5**

g5 is a desperate try, but it's hard to find any other defence to Rh8.

- 43. Qf7+ Qg7**
- 44. Qf5+ Qg6**
- 45. Rf7+ Kh8**
- 46. Qxg6 1-0**

Black is a queen down and mate will soon follow.

Puzzles

The next few pages represent one-move points in time of games that we've played over 2025. Ewen, Timothy, Jack and I have gone through the scripts (and thank you to the few players who continuously sent their games in!) to post them on lichess. Concurrently, I've also been running a script over the games to identify potential puzzles.

These puzzles are moments where a single move could have made all the difference where the right idea would have yielded a significant advantage. They're split into a few rough categories:

Opening Advantage

Middle Game Tactics

Late Middle Game Tactics

Endgames

Have a go at calculating the best move before peeking at the answer. They're also part of the lichess study: [Auckland Chess 2025](#)

Opening Advantage



Tai, Ethan - Peoples, Bobby
Summer Cup Round 5
White to Move (O1)



Po'e-Tofaeono, Hunter - Arun, Swarun
Summer Cup Round 1
White to Move (O2)



Pan, Alexander - Nagorski, Alex
Club Championship Round 6
Black to Move (O3)



Steiner, Michael - Dann, Huw
Club Championship Round 3
White to Move (O4)



Epa, Yehara Yethmini – Hwang, Ryan
Summer Cup Round 5
White to Move (O5)



Wang, Johnny – McConnell, Jack
Club Championship Round 1
Black to Move (O6)



Smith, Jeremy – Zhou, Adele
Club Championship Round 4
White to Move (O7)



Holland, David – Tang, Kevin
Autumn Cup Round 4
Black to Move (O8)

Middle Game Tactics



Lu, Luna – Milne, Virginia,
Autumn Cup Round 4
White to Move (M1)



Pan, Alexander – Yuan, Hong
B-Grade Interclubs, Round 4
White to Move (M2)



Guo, Anne – Saunders, Dean
Club Championship Round 4
White to Move (M3)



Yeh, Ryan – Guo, Benjamin
Autumn Cup Round 5
Black to Move (M4)



Liu, Richard – Sun Sarah
Club Championship Round 6
Black to Move (M5)



Smith, Jeremy – Gu, Isaac
Autumn Cup Round 3
White to Move (M6)



Tang, Hao – Mao, Daqi
Club Championship Round 3
White to Move (M7)

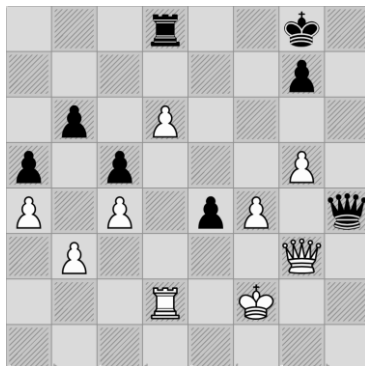


Zhang, Lucas Boyu – Young, Cohen
Club Championship Round 3
White to Move (M8)

Late Middle Game Tactics



Jin, Yanbo – Tao, Junqing Jerome
Autumn Cup Round 3
Black to Move (L1)



Hettiarachchi, Kisara – Wang, Justin
Summer Cup Round 3
Black to Move (L2)



Braganza, Nadia – Powlesland, Brogan
Waitangi Weekender Round 2
Black to Move (L3)



Ha, Timothy – Peoples, Bobby
Autumn Cup Round 3
White to Move (L4)



Fabay, Jenre Angelo – Ma, Roy
Club Championship Round 1
White to Move (L5)



Mao, Daqi – Po'e-Tofaeono, Grayson
Club Championship Round 5
White to Move (L6)

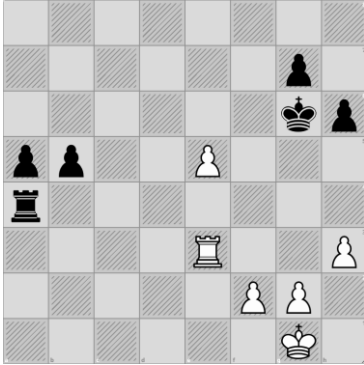


Tew, Markis – Tang, Hao
Club Championship Round 5
Black to Move (L7)

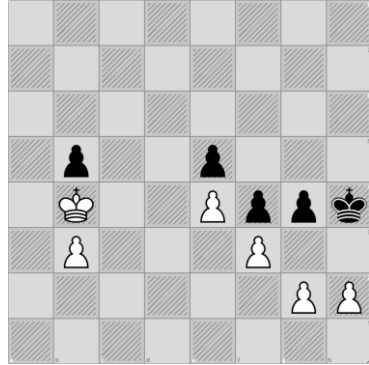


Feng, Sophia – Hwang, Ryan
Club Championship Round 6
White to Move (L8)

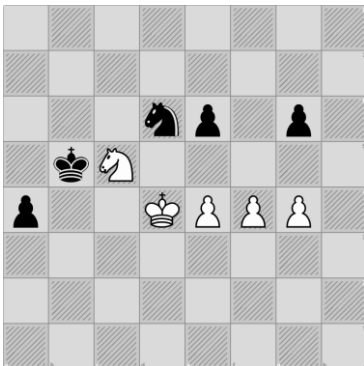
Endgames



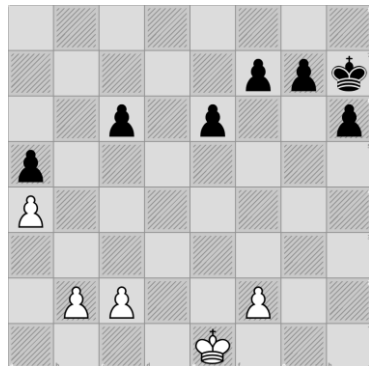
Nguyen, Kane - Sun, Sarah
Summer Cup Round 1
White to Move (E1)



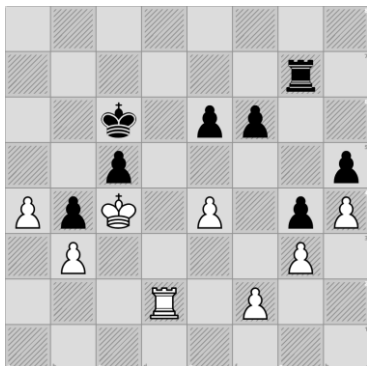
Feng, Sophia - Yuan, Hong
Summer Cup Round 5
White to Move (E2)



Feng, Sophia - Baker, Leo
Summer Cup Round 7
White to Move (E3)



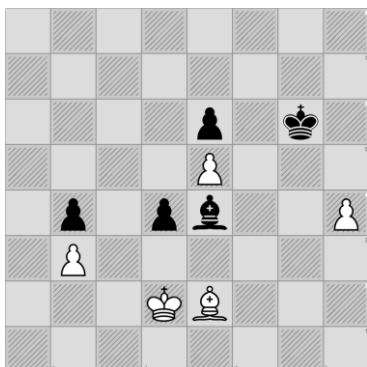
Xu, Eden - Preeyansh, Roul
Autumn Cup Round 3
Black to Move (E4)



Nagorski, Alex - Feng, Sophia
Autumn Cup Round 4
White to Move (E5)



Kirschbaum, Asher - Zhou, Martin
Club Championship Round 3
White to Move (E6)



Dooley, Max - Hwang, Ryan
Club Championship Round 4
White to Move (E7)



Pei, Yanshuo - Fang, Maximilian
Summer Cup Round 3
White to Move (E8)

Answers

Opening Advantage

01: Bxf3! Qxf3 Nxd5 - You're a clean pawn up with good activity.

02: d4! If Bb6, then d5! You're picking up a piece for the pawn. This is a common opening fork where you can continuously get tempi by hitting pieces.

03: No prize for finding 6... g6, but well done if you saw 7. Nxc6 being met by 7... Nf6! 8. Qe2 was played in game, clearly allowing 8... hxc6. However, if 8. Qh4 instead, black has a powerful exchange sacrifice with 8... hxc6! White is free to play 9. Qxh8 picking up the rook, but notice how white's queen is now on a side quest, while black's queen is making some serious threats.

04: This position still appears in grandmaster games today, where 5. dxe5 is simply catastrophic for black – there's no good way to take back. If 5... Nxe5 (the most played), then 6. Nxe5 dxe5, and white must play 7. Qh5! avoiding the queen trade and forking f7 and e5. If 5... dxe5 then 6. Qd5! and black must make serious concessions to avoid the mate on f7.

05: 7. Nd5! and black has serious dark-square issues on the queenside. 7... e6 is the most common move in the lichess (2000+) database, which is met by the nasty 8. Nxc6 and 9. Bb6

06: c5 is the only good way to defend the knight. The tempting Qc5 is met by the devastating Ne4³, requiring black to abandon the defence of the knight.

07: The brave 8. Qb3! could be played here, putting a huge amount of pressure on f7. If Black fights back with 8... Na5, then 9. Bxf7+ Ke7 10. Nd5+ Kxf7 11. Nxe5 Ke8 and 12. Qg3! White is a piece down, but black is not long for this world. The calmer defence of 8... Qe7 falls to 9. Nb5!

08: 10... Nf3!! Amazing move! b2 is not sufficiently defended against the mating threat. If 11. Nc5 then 11... Bxb2 and Black is picking up the white queen.

³ Hat-tip to CM Bill Forster, who has previously pointed out that in situations where pieces are under an absolute pin, you need not write notation highlighting that they could move to that square. IE, this move should be notated as Ne4 and not Nde4 as the c3 knight legally cannot move to e4.

Middle Game Tactics

M1: Rfe1! The black knight is now pinned. Note that if Rce1, black is now winning after Nxf1!

M2: Imagine my surprising seeing my interclubs teammate play Nxf7!
Black cannot play Rxf7 due to backrank issues.

M3: Bf5! is beautiful interference. The black rook is trapped. If Qb8, then Bxe6 and white is *at least* winning 2 pawns, if not more.

M4: 15... Nd4! Is there anything that isn't attacked by this move? Firstly, I dare you to try and defend the e2 pawn. 16. Re1? b5!
16. Qd1 was played in game, but Bxg2 17. Bxg2 b5 18. Rb4 a5 19. Rb1 Qd5!
and black is firmly in the driver's seat.

M5: Bg4! Black's pieces are too well placed and white will soon be mated.

M6: This may win my puzzle of the year competition!
31. Bxh7+! Kxh7 32. Qh5 Kg8 33. Bxg7!! Kxg7, and just in case we haven't sacrificed enough, 34. Nf5+!!! After 34... exf5 35. Rxe7 puts too much pressure on f7. 35... Ne5 drops the black queen, while 35... Rf8 loses to another sacrifice after 36. Qh6+ Kg8 37. g6! Amazing puzzle.

M7: Very difficult to continue this attack. 27. Qg3 was played, but black escapes most complications after Kh1 28. h5 Rg8! Now black is pushing.

27. Qh5 Kg7 28. Nf4! hitting the black queen. Black is losing something here – a sample variation is Qf6 29. Qg4+ Kh6 30. Ne6 Qg6 31. Qxg6+ Kxg6 32 h5+ picking up the black knight.

M8: This is an extremely rich position – it's hard to believe that there's only one route to advantage for white. The only move that does is the trick is 24. Bf3!

If 24... Qa2, then White can pick up the knight with 25. Bxe4 Rad8 26. c3!

If 24... Rad8, then 25. b3! and black has lost most of their attack.

If 24... Kg8 to get out of the way of the white rook and to create room for black's dark squared bishop (which is perilously close to being trapped), then 25. h6! Bh8 26. Nf2 and black is cooked.

Late Middle Game Tactics

L1: LPDO – Loose Pieces Drop Off!

Rfxe5! and white cannot take the rook without hanging the d2 rook.

L2: e3! The black king is over-worked, defending both the pawn advance (and d2 rook) as well as the queen.

L3: Qh4! White does not have a sufficient response to Rf2. Qc3 for example is met by Rf2 and Qg4.

L4: This is a defensive tactic, which white had to have calculated before allowing this position. 23. Qh4+ Kg8 24. Be6+ Rf7 25. Bxf7+. If Kf8 (played) then Bxd5 and white will simplify with Qf4+. Otherwise, Kxf7 Qf4+ or Qxf7 Qf4.

L5: Rxe7 is a very cool exchange sacrifice! After Rg6+ Kh7, white can play Re6+ winning the rook back.

L6: We need to practice a little bit of Reciprocal Thinking here.

We would like to play Nxg6, but black is fine after the position arising from 30. Nxg6+ Qxg6 31. Rxf5+ Nf7 32. Rbf1 R3e7 – white cannot break through.

But if 30. h4! first, then the variation is quite different 30. h4 Qf6 31. Nxg6+ Qxg6 32. Rxf5+ Nf7 33. Rbf1 R3e7, and white has the amazing 34. h5! forcing black's queen to abandon the defence of f7.

L7: After Nxe3, black has no better than equality 47... Nxe3+ 48. Rxe3 Rxf1 49. Rxe4+ Kf5 50. Re3 =

Instead, 47... Nd4+! 48. exd4 Rxf1 49. Re3 Kf5 50. d5 Ke5 51. Kd2 Kd4 and black has a winning rook endgame.

L8: Full kudos to Sophia Feng for finding this over the board, likely in time trouble. e6! The full game continuation was 53. e6! Bb6+ 54. Kf1 Qh3+ 55. Ke1 Rg6 56. e7 Re6 57. e8=Q+ Rxe8 58. Qxe8+

Other options don't do much better. My favourite line is what happens if you take the pawn 53... fxe6 54. Qe5+ Kh7 55. Ne7+ Kh6 56. Nxg8#

Endgames

E1: e6 and that pawn is promoting!

E2: fxg4 and white cannot breakthrough fast enough.
Kxb5 leads to a draw as white is one tempo too slow.

E3: Nxa4! This beautiful move pushes the king to the side of the board and white will be able to promote.

E4: Accuracy is key! While black has a huge material advantage, if white can play b4, white will promote first. So c5! to prevent b4.

E5: Rd8! Infiltrating behind black's pieces. It's surprisingly hard for black to defend this, as Rc8 picks up the c5 pawn and Rh8 picks up the h5 pawn.

E6: Qb4! Is must play here. Rc1 aiming to promote drops the d2 pawn. If black tries to move the white queen (R8c4, for example), white just needs to stay connected to the d2 pawn.

E7: Very difficult to calculate. The key here is that the bishops need to be traded, and white needs to distract black with a shiny h-pawn.

56. Bd3 Kf5 57. h5 Bxd3 58. Kxd3 Kxe5 59. h6 Kf6 60. Kxd4 Kg6 61. Ke5 Kxh6 62. Kxe6

White has enough time to pick up the b4 pawn and promote.

E8: The hardest puzzle in this collection by far! 44. a4 is must play and is the only path to maintaining a draw. The idea is that we want to play b4 and try to promote on a8 – we at least need to pretend to threaten this.

There are a couple of tries for black – let's try 44... Bf8 to prevent any b4 ambitions. 45. Kf5 Bd6, and 46. b4! White may actually be able to promote. Equal, declares stockfish, confidently.

Hang on, hang on, what about 44... Kf7, activating the king. Okay, 45. b4 axb4 46. a5! Bf8 47. a6 Bc5 is the only way to prevent white from promoting. Who is begging who for a draw??

Seriously, put this position on the board and try it out. It's harder than you think to make progress as black.



Photo Credit to NZ Chess News and Auckland Chess