



A LONG TIME COMING

Brewington Hardaway breaks through to the GM title.

BY **GM MAURICE ASHLEY**



IMAGINE WAITING 25 years to see a dream come true.

When I became the first African-American in history to attain the GM title, in 1999, the expectation was that there would be many more to quickly follow. It still boggles the mind that it took this long before another Black person here in the United States would replicate the feat. However, it finally came to pass last year in the form of Brewington Hardaway, a 15-year-old prodigy from the Bronx who never would have taken up chess in the first place if not for a funny twist of fate.

Brewington, now 16, is the youngest in a family of four. As luck would have it, his mother, Ikuko, enrolled one of his sisters for chess club when he was 5. Brew's parents decided that it would be easier to leave him in the chess club with his sister than take him home and then have to return to pick her up. "The story goes that my sister Noni signed up for chess, but didn't really like it," Brew remembered during our Zoom call. "But the cost was \$150, and my mom said that she had already spent the money, so my sister had to do it. If Noni had quit chess, I don't know if I would have ever played chess. Probably not."

While Noni would soon come to enjoy chess, eventually reaching the top 20 in the country for her age group among girls, the effect chess was having on her baby brother would lead to the discovery of a world-class talent.

"I just sat over in a corner of the room drawing and doing homework," Brew recalls. "Every so often, I would look up to watch the big screen with all the puzzles and see the kids playing, and I started to gain interest. I eventually asked how this game works, and ever since, I've been hooked."

Within about a month, the coach of the club, Chris Johnson, began to understand that the young boy wasn't an average kid.

"As a kindergartner, he beat everyone in the club, including the fourth graders," said Coach Johnson, an expert who now runs a citywide program in NYC called Project Pawn. "By the time he got to first grade, he started beating a few of the coaches too. He could barely tie his shoelaces!"

Johnson recalled the moment he knew Brewington was special: "I showed him a bunch of lines in the Sicilian, and then months later he still remembered everything. I never had to show him the same thing twice." At age 5, Brewington won the New York K-1 championship, and Johnson remembers that while "everyone else was

celebrating, he was still going over the games he had just played, still trying to improve."

'She thought I was lying'

Brew had a massive breakthrough just two years later when, at just 7 years old and rated 1537, he defeated IM Jay Bonin, a New York City legend.

"I played my only opening then — the Benko," Brewington recalls. (Johnson says that, coincidentally, they had just gone over the line a week before.) "I remember I hit Jay with a nice tactic and won two pieces, so he resigned. When I told my mom I'd won, she thought I was lying."

Coach Johnson remembers seeing a photo of the winning scoresheet that Ikuko had texted him: "I was shocked that he had beaten someone so strong so early on in his development, but I wasn't really surprised, if that makes sense. This is a kid who used to fall asleep at night at his laptop while going over chess. I told his mom that one day soon he would be a GM."

(In a curious twist of fate, Coach Johnson's very first coaches were Kasaun Henry, Charu

Robinson, and Daniel Gray, who were members of the Raging Rooks, a team I coached to a national championship title back in 1991).

One would have expected such a victory to motivate the youngster to work extremely hard to get even better. However, it was a few more years before he would take chess seriously. “Honestly, back then, I didn’t even study chess,” Brewington says with a smirk. “I just played for fun. I barely did anything outside of the school chess club — no openings, only puzzles. ... I didn’t even know what the IM title meant or even what

a FIDE rating was. ... I just played chess because I enjoyed it.”

Three years later, at age 10 and still not studying consistently, Brewington gained the title of national master, defeating Bonin once again as well as other highly rated players along the way. Even these results hadn’t yet been enough to spark the singular focus a young talent needs to get to the highest levels. That would come from another twist of fate, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone into lockdown, prompting him to pursue the game full-blast.

That was where he realized “I just loved to play. Whenever I saw a nice tactic, it made me happy. Something about all the different possibilities, cool tricks, positional ideas — it always made it interesting for sure.”

Setbacks and stepping up

Two years of secluded study plus work with a new coach, GM Gregory Kaidanov, saw a period of accelerated growth. Now he was tearing up the New York scene, and it was time to go outside of familiar territory to tournaments around the country.

The next big breakthrough came at what many would consider a moment of personal failure: In the last round of the 2022 SPICE Cup, Brewington needed only a draw to secure an IM norm, he made a crucial mistake that cost him the game. However, instead of hanging his head in defeat, he was able to reframe it as a positive outcome.

“Losing the game was tough for sure,” he recalls. “I was not really happy, obviously. But at that point I realized that norms were possible. ... I hadn’t come close before. To get close like that was definitely motivational.”

That mindset helped catapult him at the beginning of 2023 when he scored two IM norms in back-to-back tournaments in New York. He also came agonizingly close to the 2400 rating required to secure the title by reaching a live rating of 2399.4! The third norm followed in July of that year at the World Open, but it would be November before the elusive 2400 rating would be finally achieved — at the U.S. Masters, in Charlotte, he gained 62 rating points, the IM title, and his first GM norm in one fell swoop.

With his confidence soaring, it now seemed like the wind was at his back. 2024 kicked off with a bang when, in his very first tournament of the year, he sprinted to a 5-0 start and coasted with four draws to finish with a 2668 performance rating, a half-point over the GM norm. However, the next several months saw only decent results, with a modest rating boost, and then a depressing setback at the U.S. Junior in St. Louis.

“I had three completely winning positions that ended in a loss and two draws,” he says.

Top: Brewington with Chris Johnson, his first coach. Bottom: Brewington with GM Gregory Kaidanov.



Courtesy of US Chess

“That was really tough for me. If I had won all those games I would have tied for first. I could see I had the middlegame strengths to make the GM title, but my conversion and focus needed to improve. In the critical moments, in time pressure; that’s when I stumbled. I realized that I had to try to not overthink things, to manage my time better and have more self-confidence.”

Those realizations stayed with him as he took aim at a summer tournament in Barcelona, Spain. After a modest start, he picked up steam and then found himself face to face with one more major obstacle to clear the last hurdle.

“It’s funny because in the second-to-last round, I thought I had to make a draw against a random 2330 to get my final norm,” he recalls. Instead, he ended up with Black against German GM Alexander Donchenko, who had a peak rating of 2684. “But I told myself that if I could draw a player of that level with Black, then I really deserve the title. I ended up playing a 99% accuracy game and got the draw.”

A little more than two months later, Brewington eclipsed the 2500 mark at the New York Fall GM Invitational, finishing with an undefeated 6 out of 9. In doing so, he cemented his place in history as the second (and by far the youngest) African American to secure the GM title. It was a relief to him and pure joy to those of us who had followed his quest. Though the journey seemed a bit drawn out, he actually secured his three IM and three GM norms in just 21 months.

Brewington credits Kaidanov for helping him navigate the twists and turns of the journey. (Coincidentally, Kaidanov was my coach when I attained the GM title as well.) As Brew put it, “The GM title was really all thanks to him. During all these ups and downs, he was really supportive. He let me know that bad things happen to everyone. He let me know I had all the tools I needed to become a top player. That was really good to hear.”

As for what it means to be an African American in a sport where there is so little representation, Brew, as he often does, put on a positive spin.

“I just see it as an opportunity to inspire kids from a similar background. There are not many others besides my good friend, Tani [IM Tani Adewumi]. I think there’s a lot of potential out there; we just need kids to have motivation and inspiration to reach their potential.”

What’s next?

With so much talent and a fairly rapid rise, he speaks about the future with a blend of high aspirations and pragmatic realism. His next stop: Get to 2600 in the next two years, before high school is over.

Brew through the years, L to R: first steps at the 2019 K-12 Grades, winning the 2022 Barber, and today at the Marshall Chess Club.

“I feel like I still have a lot to improve, of course. I don’t think my rating shows the work I’ve been putting in. ... I think over time if I keep working as I am, the rating will start to show. I’m just gonna keep training, then the results will come. I’m not too worried about it.”

As for one day becoming the World Champion, he simply replied: “Isn’t that everyone’s dream?”

Nowadays, he spends at least three to four hours a day working on openings, calculation training, and a bit of the endgame, while additionally using blitz to practice the opening lines he’s been learning. He balks at the idea of studying all day long like some of his peers.

“I personally can’t see myself focusing for eight to 10 hours on chess. I like to do other things like going to the gym to be in shape and watching NBA basketball. That’s also important for tournaments. There’s other things in life to do other than chess. I try to be well-balanced, but when I work on chess, I try to be really focused and maximize the time I have.”



PHOTOS: ANA VIVAS (LEFT), MARK CIELINKOWSKI (CENTER), CAROLINE KING (RIGHT)

His second-place finish at the 2025 U.S. Junior, where he picked up a cool prize of \$11,000, would seem to suggest he's going in the right direction. With a busy tournament schedule, including events in the United Arab Emirates and invitations to play in the Icelandic league, it would seem he's well on the way to living the life of a young professional. Despite the challenges, or maybe because of them, he's excited to see what the future holds.

"I think the past few tournaments I've been trying to enjoy the journey a lot more. I think that's the most important thing: to enjoy the game and never give up. Anything is possible if you really put your mind to it. I'm looking forward to what's to come." ♠

Postscript: As referenced in Ashley's article, Hardaway travelled to the UAE in August for the Abu Dhabi Open and the Fujairah Global Masters. He scored a solid 6/9 in the Abu Dhabi Open but stormed to victory in the Blitz, lapping the field by a full point at 10/11.

This was followed by what he calls the "biggest tournament win of my career," a clear first-place finish with 7½/9 and a performance rating of nearly 2700 at the Fujairah Global Masters. Hardaway has annotated two games from that event in the game section accompanying this article.



Four Pivotal Games

ANNOTATED BY **GM BREWINGTON HARDAWAY**

RUY LOPEZ (C77)

IM Brewington Hardaway (2457)

GM Yasser Quesada Perez (2668)

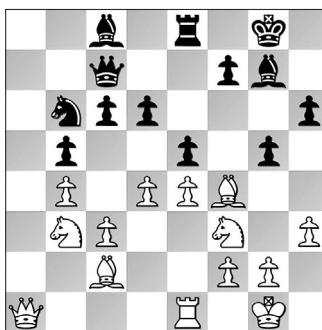
U.S. Masters (4), Charlotte, 11.24.2023

I went into this game on 2/3. I had a live FIDE rating of 2384 while my opponent was over 2500, so a win would get me over 2400 and give me the IM title (I already had four norms at this point).

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. d3 d6 6. c3 g6 7. 0-0 Bg7 8. Re1 0-0 9. h3 h6 10. Nbd2 Re8 11. d4 b5 12. Bc2 Bb7 13. a3 Nb8 14. b3 Nbd7 15. Bb2 c6 16. b4 Nh5 17. a4 Nf4 18. Nb3 Qc7 19. Na5 Bc8 20. axb5 axb5 21. Nb3?!

Looking back, I think I was just trying to simplify instead of playing the best moves. White would have a slight edge after the very logical 21. Bc1, aiming to get rid of the strong knight on f4.

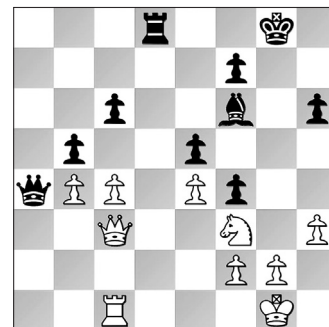
21. ... Rxa1 22. Qxa1 Nb6 23. Bc1 g5 24. Bxf4



24. ... gxf4?!

My opponent wanted to open the g-file, but it is very hard to achieve anything with it, and now his dark-squared bishop is shut out of the game.

25. dxe5 dxe5 26. Nc5 Bf6 27. Bb3 Nd7 28. Nxd7 Bxd7 29. Qa2 Be6 30. Rd1 Bxb3 31. Qxb3 Rd8 32. Rc1 Qa7 33. c4 Qa4 34. Qc3



AFTER 34. Qc3

34. ... c5!?

With 10 minutes left, this move was a shock. My opponent clearly wanted to muddy the waters, hoping I would make a mistake in time pressure.

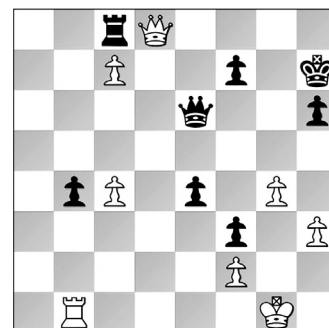
35. bxc5 b4 36. Qa1 Qc6?!

Not the best, since it allows my queen to infiltrate.

37. Qa7 Qxe4 38. Qb6 Qf5 39. c6 e4 40. c7 Rc8 41. Nd4 Bxd4 42. Qxd4 Kh7 43. Qd5 Kg6 44. Qd6+ Kh7 45. Qd5

I'd be happy with a draw, since it is very balanced and I am low on time.

45. ... Qg6 46. Qd8 f3 47. g4 Qe6 48. Rb1



48. ... e3?

The engine says that Black is still OK, but my opponent must have missed my next move. Suddenly I am the one pushing for the win!

49. Qd3+!

Retreating moves are always important, and hard to spot.

49. ... f5?

This loses on the spot. My opponent simply panicked, I would assume, because he went from trying to press on the board and clock to suddenly needing to shift into defensive mode.

I'm up a pawn after 49. ... Kg8 50. Qxe3 Qd6 51. Qxf3 Rxc7, but Black should hold this.

50. Qxe3 Qxe3 51. fxe3 Rxc7 52. Rxb4 fxg4 53. hxg4 Kg6 54. Kf2 Rc6 55. Kxf3 Rf6+ 56. Kg3 Rc6 57. Kf4 Rc5 58. e4 Rc8 59. e5 Rf8+ 60. Ke4 Kg5 61. Rb7 Rf4+ 62. Kd5 Kxg4 63. Rg7+ Kf3 64. e6 Ke3 65. Rg3+ Kf2 66. Rh3, Black resigned.

I was jubilant after this game. I had had a live FIDE rating of 2399.4 in February 2023, but I didn't hit 2400 until this game, played in November. I also ended up earning my first GM norm in this event, which ended a very memorable month for me — I gained a whopping 112 points after starting the month at 2323, my lowest point in a year. This just shows the ups and downs of chess, but resilience and determination always prevail.

ENGLISH OPENING (A28)

GM Paulius Pultinevicius (2596)

IM Brewington Hardaway (2471)

Sants Open (7), Barcelona, 08.29.2024

I came into this game with 5/6 after beating four lower-rated players and drawing two higher-rated players; with four rounds left I was on good pace for a norm.

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. e4 Bc5

I also could have played 4. ... Bb4, but based on the tournament situation I wanted a sharper game.

5. Nxe5 Nxe5 6. d4 Bb4 7. dxe5 Nxe4 8. Qf3 Nxc3 9. bxc3 Ba5 10. Bf4 0-0 11. 0-0-0 Rb8 12. Qe3 Qe7 13. Kb2 b5

Again I played the more aggressive option. The main alternative is 13. ... Bb6.

14. c5

It's unclear after 14. cxb5 Re8 15. Qxa7 Ba6, and it can be analyzed further, but since the white queen is away from the defense of the king, in most lines Black will go for ... Ba5xc3+ followed by some queen checks and a perpetual.

14. ... b4 15. c4 b3!?

I remembered seeing this idea in some games and decided to go for it. After something like 15. ... Re8?! 16. Kb3 my bishop on a5 is shut out of the game.

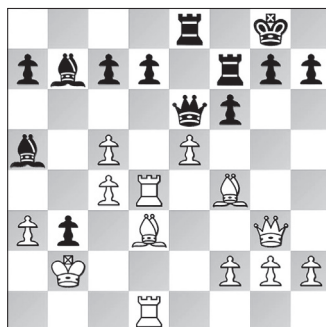
16. a3

Not 16. axb3?! Bb4.

16. ... Qe6 17. Rd4 Bb7 18. Bd3 f6 19. Qg3 Rbe8 20. Rd1?

The engine says this is a mistake, but the idea is clear: 21. Rxd7 is a big threat.

20. ... Rf7?



I instantly just thought I had to protect the d-pawn, but apparently the best way to continue was 20. ... fxe5 21. Rxd7 Qf6 22. Be3 Bc6 when White has some compensation for the Exchange, but Black is objectively better.

21. Rd5??

I remember being totally shocked when he played this move. At first, I thought I had to take the Exchange (which is not good), but then I looked at my options and realized that I was much better, if not winning, after what I played in the game.

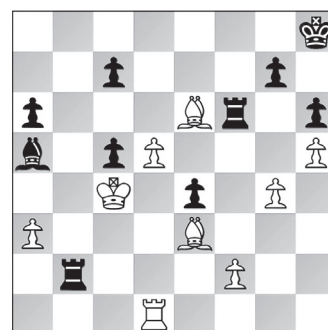
21. ... fxe5!

Very simple, but very effective. My opponent probably wanted me to play 21. ... Bxd5? 22. cxd5 Qe7 23. Qh3, when Black has to be precise just to survive: 23. ... Bc3+!! 24. Kxc3 Qxc5+ is the only way to equality.

22. Be3

Not 22. Rxe5 Qf6 and Black is winning.

22. ... e4 23. Be2 Bxd5 24. cxd5 Qf5 25. h4 Kh8 26. Qg5 d6 27. Bg4 Qf6+ 28. Qxf6 Rxf6 29. Kxb3 dxc5 30. Kc4 h6 31. h5 Rb8 32. Be6 Rb2 33. g4 a6?



Here the nerves got to me and I made a pretty terrible move.

34. Bf5

I was thinking that after 34. Bxc5 Rc2+ he couldn't play 35. Kb5, but apparently after 34. Kxc5 Rc2+ 35. Kd4 is equal for White. It's still very complex, but they've survived the worst. Fortunately, my opponent was also in time pressure and made the final error.

34. ... Rc2+ 35. Kb3 Rc3+ 36. Ka4 Bb6 37. Bf4 Rd3 38. Rxd3 exd3 39. Bd2 c6, White resigned.



Brewington studies the competition at the 2025 U.S. Junior

After this crucial win, I had 6/7 and drew GMs Gergely Kantor and Alexander Donchenko to secure my final norm! This game changed me as a player: Now I felt that I could fight against these strong GMs in sharp, complex games, even with the black pieces, and come out victorious.

SLAV DEFENSE, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D14)

GM Vitaly Sivuk (2495)

GM Brewington Hardaway (2499)

Fujairah Global (6), UAE, 08.29.2025

Going into this game I was on 4½/5 and my opponent was perfect at 5/5. Victory here would be key for my chances to win the tournament.

1. Nf3 c5

My opponent tends to prefer more solid positions to grind down his opponents, so I hoped to transpose into a sharp Sicilian.

2. c3

No luck! This is already a bit of a surprise, so I had to spend some time to decide what path to take.

2. ... d5 3. d4 cxd4 4. cxd4 Nc6 5. Nc3 Nf6

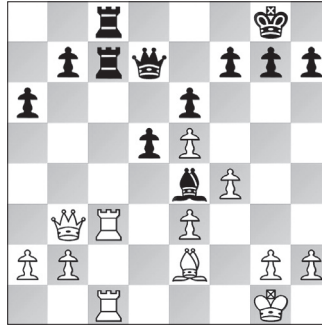
And so we transpose into an Exchange Slav, which is well known to not give many winning chances to either side. My thinking

was that because I am not a Slav player, he probably didn't expect me to go into this.

6. Bf4 Bf5 7. e3 a6!?

Objectively this is not best, but if I played 7. ... e6 White would have a few ways to essentially force a draw: 8. Bd3 Bxd3 9. Qxd3 Bd6 10. Bxd6 Qxd6 is pretty uninspiring.

8. Be2 e6 9. Ne5 Nxe5 10. Bxe5 Bd6 11. 0-0 0-0 12. Rc1 Rc8 13. Qb3 Rc7 14. f4 Bxe5 15. dxe5 Ne4 16. Nxe4 Bxe4 17. Rc3 Qd7 18. Rfc1 Rfc8



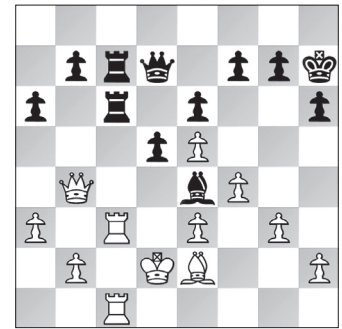
19. Kf2

Playing for tricks with 19. Qxb7?? does not work as I have 19. ... Rxc3!.

19. ... h6

Here I felt the game was just going to be a draw, but I played on to see what his ambitions were.

20. Qb4 Rc6 21. g3 R8c7 22. Ke1 Qc8 23. Kd2 Qd7 24. a3 Kh7



25. Qd6!?

At the board I was annoyed and thought I had blundered when this move was played. I saw this idea previously, but got lazy and forgot he could play it here. Luckily Black is still doing fine.

25. ... Rxd6 26. Rxc7 Qd8 27. exd6 d4!

I think this my opponent missed this.

He likely expected 27. ... Qxd6, but this is not great for Black: 28. Rxf7 Bg6 29. Rxb7 d4 30. Rcc7 dxe3+ 31. Kxe3 and the engine says I could maybe hold this, but Black would have to be super precise.

28. d7 Bc6 29. R1xc6 bxc6 30. Rb7

It might seem like my queen is stuck stopping the pawn, but I had a plan.

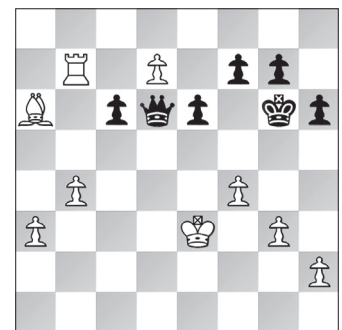
30. ... Qa5+ 31. b4 dxe3+ 32. Kxe3 Qd5 33. Bc4

Trying to decoy my queen away from the d-pawn.

33. ... Qd6!

Definitely not 33. ... Qd1? 34. Bd3+.

34. Bxa6 Kg6



At this point I felt the tide was shifting. Before White had no risk, but suddenly all three results are possible.

35. Bd3+ Kf6 36. a4 e5 37. fxe5+ Qxe5+



Deep in thought at the Fujairah Global Masters

38. Kd2 Qb2+ 39. Bc2?

This was not a great move, but I failed to see the winning idea.

39. ... Qd4+?

After the correct 39. ... Ke7! I forgot that I have a huge threat in ... c6-c5 when I'm practically winning!

40. Ke2?

The final mistake. He had to retreat the bishop with 40. Bd3 when it would likely have been a draw. For example: 40. ... Ke7 41. a5 Qb2+ 42. Ke3 c5 43. a6 cxb4 44. d8=Q+ Kxd8 45. a7 Qc1+ and I would have to force a repetition because the a-pawn is too strong.

40. ... Ke7!

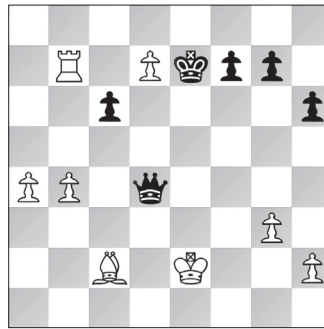
(see diagram top of next column)

Now my queen is finally free from defending that pawn!

41. a5 Qe5+ 42. Kd2 c5!

Now we see why 40. Bd3 was necessary!

43. Bd3



POSITION AFTER 40. ... Ke7

After 43. a6 I have 43. ... Qd6+ and the a-pawn falls.

43. ... Qb2+ 44. Ke3 Qd4+ 45. Ke2 c4 46. Bc2 c3 47. Bd3 Qe5+ 48. Kf3 Qd5+ 49. Be4 Qxb7!!

A pretty finish. My c-pawn will be one tempo faster than his a-pawn.

50. Bxb7 c2, White resigned.

Sometimes you cannot force your way into a better position with black, but instead you have to be patient and wait for your chances, even if the position looks dry and drawish.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED (D55)

IM Jimmy Jubin (2464)

GM Brewington Hardaway (2499)

Fujairah Global (8), UAE, 08.31.2025

I faced off with a young Indian IM in Round 8. We both were on 6/7, and with black I decided to play solidly. Fortunately, chances came and I took over the game.

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Be7

5. e3 h6 6. Bh4 0-0 7. Nf3 Nbd7 8. Qc2 c5

This is the most common move, but I think he was surprised as I usually play ... c7-c6 heading for the triangle setup.

9. Rd1 cxd4 10. Nxd4 Qa5 11. Nb3 Qc7

12. Bg3 Qc6

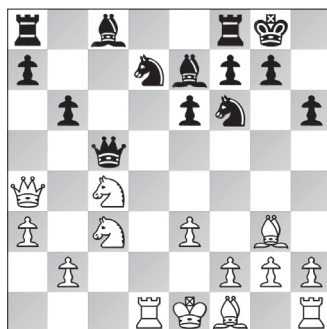
I thought White might try to force a draw based on the tournament situation and his norm chances, but thankfully he tried to fight.

13. a3

13. Nd4 Qc5 14. Nb3 Qc6 is probably going to be a repetition.



13. ... dxc4 14. Na5 Qc5 15. Nxc4 b6 16. Qa4



16. ... e5



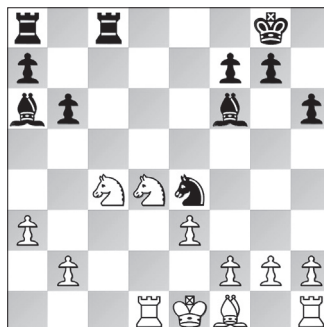
The champion!

After 16. ... Bb7!? we would reach an imbalanced position where White has three pieces for the queen after 17. Rxd7 b5 (17. ... Bc6?? 18. Rc7) 18. Rxe7 bxa4 19. Rxb7. During the game I wasn't sure how to evaluate this position; of course the engine gives triple zeros!

17. Qb5 Qxb5 18. Nxb5 Ne4 19. Bxe5 Nxe5 20. Nxe5 Bf6

Giving up a pawn, but I can't be worse with such active pieces.

21. Nc4 Ba6 22. Nd4 Rfc8



23. Nd2

23. Nd6 is interesting, but it doesn't lead to much for White after 23. ... Bxf1 24. Nxc8 Bxg2 25. Rg1 Bh3 26. f3 Ng5 27. Nd6 Bxd4 28. Rg5 hxg5 29. Rxd4 and this endgame should be balanced.

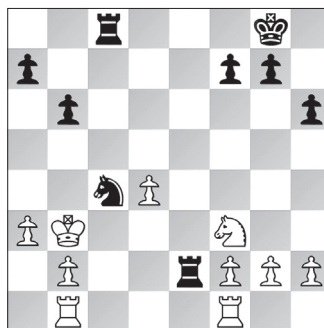
23. ... Bxf1 24. Rxf1 Bxd4 25. exd4 Nd6

The only way to keep fighting. 25. ... Re8 26. Nxe4 Rxe4+ 27. Kd2 Rxd4+ is lifeless.

26. Nf3?!

The first small mistake.

26. ... Re8+ 27. Kd2 Nc4+ 28. Kc3 Rac8 29. Kb3 Re2 30. Rb1



30. ... Na5+?!

A missed opportunity. 30. ... b5 is most precise. Black is in no rush as White's pieces are all defending on the back rank.

31. Ka2 Rcc2 32. d5 Nc4 33. Rfc1

At the board I thought 33. Kb3 was annoying, and that I'd likely have to force the perpetual with 33. ... Na5+ 34. Ka2 Nc4.

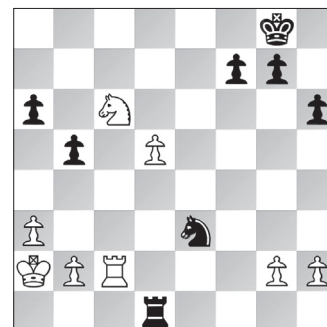
33. ... Rxc1 34. Rxc1 b5!

Avoiding 34. ... Rxb2+?? 35. Ka1 b5 36. Rxc4 when White wins.

35. Ka1 Rxf2 36. Nd4?!

It is hard to be precise in such a complex endgame, so I understood that I had good chances to win.

36. ... a6 37. Rc2 Rf1+ 38. Ka2 Rd1 39. Nc6 Ne3



40. Rc5?

White was banking on the d-pawn being a strong asset, but fortunately my rook controls it very well.

40. ... Nxc2

Not 40. ... Nxd5?? 41. Rxd5 Rxd5 42. Ne7+.

41. Ne7+ Kh7 42. Nc8 Ne3 43. d6 Nc4 44.

Rc6 Rd2 45. Kb1 f5 46. b3 Rd1+ 47. Ka2 Rd2+ 48. Kb1 Rd1+ 49. Ka2

Repeating the position twice to gain extra time to calculate. This is an important tip I received from my coaches.

49. ... Ne5 50. Rc5 Nf7 51. Rxf5 Nxd6 52. Rc5 Rd2+ 53. Kb1 Nxc8 54. Rxc8 Rxd2 55. Ra8 g5 56. Ra7+ Kg6 57. Rxa6+ Kf5 58. Ra5 g4 59. Rxb5+ Ke4, White resigned.

My pawns are way faster than his, so White gave up.

This win left me in clear first with 7/8, not to mention a perfect 4/4 with the black pieces. I was paired with the only player at 6½ in the final round, and with the white pieces I was able to get the draw I needed to secure first place!

This was the biggest tournament win of my career to date. I was very pleased with the quality of my play (a 2696 performance rating) after having felt stuck at a plateau for a few months. ♡