

CHESSLIFE

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Danya
1995-2025





*FM Daniel
Naroditsky*

1995-2025

BY **FM MIKE KLEIN**



ANIEL “DANYA” NARODITSKY was a talented grandmaster, a young author, a gifted commentator, a keen historian, and a loyal friend. He loved vocabulary and humility, so let’s try that again in the way he might have said it:

Danya was a respectable grandmaster, a precocious author, a sesquipedalian commentator, an erudite historian, and a convivial friend.

Naroditsky died in late October at his home in Charlotte, N.C. He was 29. He is by far the youngest grandmaster in American history to pass away, but he leaves behind one of the largest legacies. In the days following the announcement of his death just weeks before his 30th birthday, members of the chess community ranging from world champions to past students told heartfelt stories of what Naroditsky meant to them. They also tried to come to terms with a prodigious life and life force cut far too short.

He was the Renaissance chessplayer/communicator of his generation. Naroditsky was nonpareil.

‘I was ensnared’

Long before becoming a phenom, Naroditsky grew up in the Bay Area and learned chess at 6 from his father, Vladimir, and older brother, Alan. His mother, Lena Schuman, an esteemed piano teacher at a music conservatory, helped pass on to her youngest son a love of the humanities and, likely, a blueprint for becoming an empathetic teacher and coach. But long before that, the young Naroditsky was simply hooked on the game. In his own writing, naturally, he used a better word: ensnared.

“At first chess was nothing but a pleasant diversion, but as I improved and our games became more competitive, Lego and Monopoly began to seem rather boring in comparison,” Naroditsky wrote on *Chess.com* about those early years. “On the weekends, my dad would read a Russian translation of Capablanca’s *Chess Fundamentals* aloud to us, and I was spellbound by every word. Chess is an unexplored world, a bloodless war, an infinitely complex mental and psychological challenge. Put simply, I was ensnared.”

Fairly soon after learning the game, he became a regular at the Mechanics’ Institute, in San Francisco. IM John Donaldson recalls that Naroditsky was about 7 when they met, and he would become a fixture there for the next dozen years. Naroditsky was originally small

for his age, eating an early diet consisting largely of buckwheat and needing to sit on something to see over the board. He would go on to tower well over 6 feet as an adult, and enjoy spicy foods — just several of the many curiosities in his life.

“Daniel enjoyed everything about chess, whether it was playing, studying or learning about the history of the game,” Donaldson said. “He was a voracious reader of chess literature. The Mechanics’ Institute has several thousand chess books in its library, and Daniel was constantly checking out game collections and tournament books. His father Vlad often brought back Russian-language chess books from his business trips to the former Soviet Union which would be added to Daniel’s ever-growing library.”

Along with books, sometimes the verbal lore of the Soviet days would come to him. One of his earliest teachers was GM Gregory Kaidanov, who visited Naroditsky at his house several times.

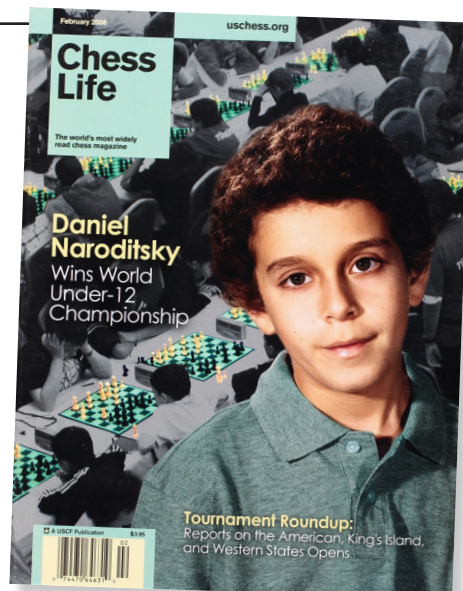
“He not only loved chess; he loved everything about chess,” Kaidanov said. “He would ask me endless questions about different chessplayers — their styles, where they lived, and so on. This was all before Google, of course.”

Naroditsky loved books so much that he contributed to chess literature at the tender age of 14, becoming the youngest published chess author. And this was no simple puzzle collection — that would not be Naroditsky’s style. *Mastering Positional Chess* was the weighty topic, and it would be followed by *Mastering Complex Endgames* three years later.

“Who writes a book about positional chess at the age of 14?” IM Danny Rensch wrote in his remembrance. “And a great book at that? The answer is nobody but Danya Naroditsky.”

“Some questioned how it was possible for someone so young to write so well, but if you knew Daniel it was no surprise,” Donaldson said. Naroditsky would go on to write chess columns for this magazine, for *Chess.com*, and for *The New York Times*. He often drew on his own experiences. Instead of the “highs and lows” of chess, he wrote of the “zeniths and nadirs.” When reading him you had to have your chessboard set up and your dictionary handy.

Kaidanov remembered clearly seeing Naroditsky’s competitiveness at an early age, both on and off the board. After their chess sessions, they would play basketball — one of Naroditsky’s lifelong loves and one area



in which he could already beat his teacher.

Naroditsky’s tournament victories included the World Youth U-12 Championship in 2007 and the U.S. Junior Championship in 2013. That same year, he became a grandmaster at age 17.

GM Lev Psakhis worked with Naroditsky on and off from 2009 to 2014. “Dani was a phenomenal student, and at times it was almost impossible to tear him away from the board!” Psakhis said. “I would give him quite challenging assignments. He didn’t always manage to find the right answer — but he tried so hard. One vivid example: In 2014, I set up a cunning and very complex rook



endgame position. Dani figured it out, but it took him one hour and 35 minutes, and it was simply impossible to pull him away from the board until he found the correct solution!”

Naroditsky continued to succeed, from the Samford to Stanford. He was awarded the Samford Chess Fellowship in 2014 and quickly zoomed from 2500 to 2600 FIDE. The next year, he represented the U.S. for the first time at the 2015 World Team Championship in Armenia. It would be his only tournament with the U.S. National Team as an adult player, but Donaldson, the captain of that team, called the event his “proudest moment” in his years of watching Naroditsky, as the teenager’s plus score helped an outgunned American squad tie for fourth place despite being ranked next-to-last at the outset. “It clearly indicated he was a world top-50 player,” Donaldson said.

Soon after, Naroditsky enrolled in university close to home. At Stanford University he devoured books, focusing on modern European history. College friend Philip Weiss, who would later also become his roommate in Kimball Hall, recalled his many late-night study sessions, which were followed by even later online blitz sessions. All through his life the nyctophile Naroditsky would thrive after sunset, going from the Hundred Years’ War to playing a hundred bullet games.

“I remember being astounded by his ability to juggle a demanding course load at

Stanford with his chess life, and also making time for his family and friends,” Weiss said. “Daniel thrived in the chaos.”

To Charlotte and coaching

Naroditsky faced a pivotal choice upon graduating in 2019. He seemed destined for academia, with his love of knowledge and of language (he spoke English, Russian, and Spanish fluently). He loved learning so much that he did indeed make that his career, but in the chess club, not the classroom. This also put his own chess ambitions largely on hold. That was a tradeoff he was comfortable with, and the decision came at a fortuitous time.

Naroditsky met FM Peter Giannatos, founder of the Charlotte Chess Center, at the Castle Chess Camp, in Atlanta. Giannatos was so taken with the grandmaster’s teaching ability and friendly personality that he offered to carve out a position for him — the first-ever grandmaster-in-residence at the fledgling chess club. Naroditsky accepted, and moved to Charlotte in 2019.

Whereas a lot of top players might seek out a city that could help their own careers, Naroditsky wanted to help a community. He

was the first top player to take a chance on Charlotte, and only after he helped build the club’s prestige did many other GMs and IMs follow. Giannatos in his eulogy called Naroditsky the “light of the Charlotte chess community.”



Kaidanov, himself one of the most esteemed coaches of our generation, last saw Naroditsky in May at SuperNationals VIII, in Orlando, where he complimented his former student on “how good a chess teacher he had become. In fact,” Kaidanov said, “he became exceptional at everything he pursued.”

Just how effective and dedicated of a teacher was Naroditsky? World top-5 GM Alireza Firouzja hired him to be his coach at the 2025 FIDE Grand Swiss. Naroditsky, who had said in 2024 that he no longer wanted to travel far from home, jumped on a plane with only a few hours’ notice, heading all the way from Charlotte to Uzbekistan to help the Frenchman tie for second.

“That’s who he was, always there, never hesitating to help,” Firouzja wrote. The student returned his teacher’s devotion, flying from Paris to California on short notice for the funeral. “We spent an amazing half month together. I’ll always be grateful for those days and everything I learned from him. Danya was the most genuine person I have ever known.”

Numerous students of all levels have come forward to explain how gentle and non-judgmental he was in his coaching. He would boost a student’s confidence with just the right words to explain how they could improve. Naroditsky never placed himself on any pedestal; in mixed company or in one-on-one lessons he didn’t think his title

or his skills conveyed any superiority or virtue. He loved learning, and he wanted you to love it, too.

At a blitz tournament at the Charlotte Chess Center in July, he sat down opposite GM Pia Cramling and immediately told the legendary player what an honor it was to have her in his city. She returned by praising his commentary, and he reflexively moved back in his chair, accepting the compliment reluctantly. Needing to cement the idea that he admired her more, Naroditsky gave another compliment to Cramling. His reverence bordered on obsequiousness as he asked her whether his water cup was OK at the corner of the table, and would she like him to throw it away? After winning the game convincingly, Naroditsky immediately praised one of her defensive moves. Cramling thought initially that he was pointing out a blunder, as the stronger player often does. Naroditsky had to repeat, “No, ... f5 was really nice.”

After his passing, several podcast hosts and chess historians proudly showed off private messages where Naroditsky offered them his fandom and praise, too. Usually these messages came out of the blue, and to those in the chess universe who thought themselves beneath the grandmaster. But Naroditsky just didn’t think in those terms. If you had a platform that served chess, he wanted you to know that he valued you and your work.

Going online

The decision to go to the Charlotte Chess Center turned out to be auspicious. A few months after moving, the world locked down for the COVID-19 pandemic, and he fell in quickly with a very tight friend group.

They cooked together, played blitz together, and that community cheered him on as he began his online streaming career. “We were so close we even had our own language,” Giannatos said in his eulogy. When it was time to depart, his friends never said “Good night” to Naroditsky. Instead they said, “See you on stream!”

This would prove to be the medium that mixed all Naroditsky’s skills in the perfect balance. Naroditsky could show off his blitz prowess; he could allude to Beethoven and Bogoljubov, and he could break down a position for a 200 or a 2000 — sometimes all in the same stream. He gained hundreds of thousands of subscribers and students by doing what his brother Alan said he did so well — showing the world that you can marry intellect and warmth.

When Naroditsky commentated on a top-level match, you had to tune in, no matter the players. Seeing him call the action in a time scramble was poetic. Watching him execute expert tactical vision and heightening the moment with just the right voice inflection and cultural references — no one



could match his frenetic eloquence. His demeanor was like putting the announcer Gus Johnson, the player Hikaru Nakamura, and the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin all in front of one microphone.

His favorite sidekick as a commentator was GM Robert Hess. “We shared a deep bond and passion for the game,” Hess wrote in a remembrance, also noting Naroditsky’s love of language. “He was a human thesaurus who casually dropped words like ‘mellifluous’ and ‘gallimaufry,’ all while playing elite tactical chess with seconds on his clock.” Hess added they were also “kindred spirits” in their love of history. “He was a student of life, always hungry to learn.”

In the past year, Naroditsky largely stepped back from commentary, but not from coaching or helping kids. And he never lost his sharp wit. Shortly before an event on *Chess.com* in early 2025 where he faced four IM-strength kids in a frenzied clock simul, he realized it was also the same day that his beloved Golden State Warriors were in town to play the Charlotte Hornets. His hometown team only came once per year, and he never missed that game.

“But I’m super pumped about the simul and that obviously takes precedence,” he texted to me. I then pointed out that it was theoretically possible to play very quickly and perhaps still make it to the game. “Hehe inshallah four out of the five players will experience time pressure... They’re about to experience the Naroditsky school of simul giving!” He won the match faster than anyone in the history of the series and made tip-off comfortably. Coincidentally, his favorite player was Stephen Curry, who went in the opposite direction to Danya, growing up in Charlotte before playing his entire career in the Bay Area. Naroditsky got to see him one last time; Curry dropped in 21 points to lift the Warriors over the Hornets.

Naroditsky’s speedruns garnered him the fandom of even the very best. “He was always, first of all, a great opponent,” GM Magnus Carlsen told the *Take Take Take* podcast, “but also very respectful, very nice. I spent many, many hours not only watching his games but also watching his streams, which were ... exciting for his incredible game play but also great explanations.”

Carlsen then smiled, remembering that Naroditsky was a part of two of the most special days in his life. The two played a few games online on Carlsen’s wedding night after wife Ella Carlsen had gone to sleep. They played again on the day Ella gave birth, while Magnus was waiting with

her in the hospital.

GM Judit Polgar taught alongside Naroditsky at several chess camps in Charlotte in recent years. “Daniel was a true artist of chess,” Polgar said, “a bright, imaginative player who loved every aspect of the game, from blistering bullet to deep strategic play. ... His attacking tactics, dazzling combinations and fierce creativity made chess his language and his home.”

He loved playing so much that he amassed more than 140,000 games alone on *Chess.com*, the eighth-most ever amongst titled players. Polgar said he showed “creative brilliance” and indeed he produced more than 22,000 “brilliant” moves on the server in those games, denoted by a double exclamation. “His values and warm personality will be long remembered,” she said.

GM Hikaru Nakamura was responsible for exactly 3,001 of those games, the most of any opponent. Their history goes back even further, to many more games played in the days of the original Internet Chess Club.

They would become not just competitors but fellow streamers. Naroditsky gained nearly one million followers on Twitch and YouTube, without any gimmicks or grand ambitions to be the largest channel. He just wanted to teach and play.

“You can talk about algorithms, you can talk about getting the most views,” Nakamura said in a stream right after Danya’s passing was announced, “... but at the end of the day, I always did believe that if you were an intermediate player who was trying to improve at the game, then Daniel’s videos were objectively the best, I felt, of anybody — better than mine.”

Naroditsky peaked at 2647 FIDE, but Nakamura felt that he could have reached 2700. In the last year of his life, Naroditsky expressed to some friends a desire to return to competitive chess. He played in the 2025 U.S. Open, largely to try to earn the automatic qualifier back to the U.S. Championship, which he played in several times, including a famous win [see page 38 ~ed.] over GM Fabiano Caruana in 2021. While he didn’t earn that spot, he did sweep the U.S. Open Blitz with a perfect 14/14.

After his passing, Naroditsky fans shared one specific moment more than any other that encapsulated the man they admired so much. And despite all of their hero’s loquaciousness, that moment required no words and no moves.

Late in the 2024 World Blitz Championship, Naroditsky was paired with someone else who has given his life to chess, GM Vasily Ivanchuk. After a tense time scramble,

Ivanchuk flagged and immediately began sobbing at the board with his head in his hands. Naroditsky instinctually felt the pain of a legendary player that he had doubtless studied and emulated. He then also covered his face while slumping in his chair to reduce his tall frame. Naroditsky looked down and away from the camera, making sure not to make eye contact or trivialize what Ivanchuk was feeling. Only after more than one minute of near motionlessness does Naroditsky place the kings in the center, quiet as a church mouse and graceful in his solemnity.

Honor at stake

The empathy and support Naroditsky showed others was not universally returned. As many online content creators have experienced, the internet is a space that can lend itself to the worst qualities amongst us. He struggled to deal with certain attacks on his character. While it remained unblemished, he was not.

“This stuff that was going on, it deeply affected him,” Nakamura said on stream, explaining that he also can get affected by the negativity of the online space. “There is a lot of toxicity ... It took a massive toll on Danya.”

GM Vladimir Kramnik, a former childhood idol of Naroditsky, led a very public campaign to question Naroditsky’s fair play. Other prominent GMs were known to join a cabal in more private channels. In this case, Naroditsky’s love of Russian history and language worked against him — he was tormented by the impugnation in two languages.

While there is no evidence at of press time to directly connect the harassment with his passing, friends spoke about how much the quest to clear his name bothered Naroditsky and affected his emotional state. Neither defensiveness nor aggressiveness would allow him comfort in an effort to clear his name. He was online constantly, and he read every word.

Former World Champion Garry Kasparov scoffed at the allegations, telling the *Guardian* that Naroditsky was “one of the most transparent players online — he streamed, he explained every move, he played blitz at 3000+ for years. To accuse him on the basis of some statistical model that even its creator says is preliminary? That’s not serious chess analysis, that’s character assassination.”

"The Fair Play team keeps close tabs and runs automated checks frequently on all the top players," a *Chess.com* Fair Play spokesperson said in a statement. "We never had any reason to question Danya's integrity during his 140,000 games on the site."

The torment lasted for the final two years of his life, with doubters wondering how he could show such online acumen without playing much over the board. After failing to reason with his accusers, who micro-analyzed every brilliant move and even his eye movements, the normally demure and restrained Naroditsky did several interviews vigorously asserting that it had to stop.

"I don't think I'm ... thick-skinned enough to say honestly that that isn't affecting me at all," he said at the 2024 World Rapid and Blitz to interviewer IM Levy Rozman. He acknowledged that some would look to his performance as possible ammunition for more allegations. Naroditsky finished in a 10-way tie for first in the Swiss portion of the blitz but did not qualify for the knockout due to tiebreaks. "I've been nice and civil and courteous to this army of troglodyte lowlifes for way too long," Naroditsky said. "I'm really sick of it. I'm not going to tolerate any of the hate any longer. ... To do what Kramnik has done and what everybody who supports him have done, in my mind, morally it makes you worse than dirt."

"I've sort of been less nice about the particular individuals driving this agenda forward over time," he said in another interview with WGM Ketī Tsatsalashvili. "I gave them the benefit of the doubt the first month. The second month I was a little more firm. ... The fact that this has been going on for as long as it has been, it's deeply frustrating to me."

He added, "When the history of chess is going to be written, this will be a very, very dark chapter. ... Not just because Vlad [Kramnik] has been allowed to go on with his nonsense for as long as he has, but because behind the scenes some top players are not outspoken enough to make it clear that the patients are not running the insane asylum." After being forced to defend himself once again, he was then asked for one of his famous impressions. In true Naroditsky style, he seamlessly produced a spot-on Wesley So that transitioned into a flawless Garry Kasparov, nailing the staccato of both despite a hint of sadness in his eyes.

The torment didn't stop in the 10 months that followed those interviews. Even in his next-to-last stream, Naroditsky noted that his results would always be questioned. He feared winning blitz games when not streaming. But even when he broadcasted,

no number of cameras could silence Kramnik and other detractors.

Naroditsky had said previously during an interview that nothing was more important to him than his honor. In that penultimate stream, he continued to express fear that it was being tarnished. Despite this, with his voice cracking, he still signed off thinking about others more than himself: "Thanks everybody. Be well, be healthy, be safe, and I'll see you guys, win or lose, after the match. Bye."

Despite some online chatter to the contrary, the community he helped build in Charlotte was very much there to help him as best they could, all the way until his final hours. While his cause of death has not been determined by authorities at of press time, the devotion that Giannatos, GM Olexandr Bortnyk, and others at the Charlotte Chess Center showed was revealed in private conversations and remembrances. Bortnyk, who said he moved to Charlotte specifically because of Naroditsky, celebrated his birthday on the weekend of his passing; that day, he said, his final words to his friend were "Danya, don't worry about anything. I love you so much." He added later that "I'm happy my last words were supportive." (Bortnyk won the first Titled Tuesday tournament on *Chess.com* to be held after the funeral, and dedicated his victory to Danya.)

Perhaps inspired by their friend the wordsmith, several close friends who rarely post publicly wrote glowing missives online. In the end, Naroditsky also inspired his friends to be writers.

Grant Oen, a longtime staff member of the Charlotte Chess Center, wrote a lengthy tribute where he explained, "If anything, his success made him value his friends, family, and relationships even more." Naroditsky, the famous person at the party, would also be the one to volunteer to do the coffee runs. "Danya, you were an amazing friend and the best person I've ever known," Oen said.

Top players also tried to buoy him in his final days, even ones who had never met him in person. Naroditsky's final games were against GM Nihal Sarin, who has never been to the U.S. but has played thousands of games against Naroditsky and has also been the subject of accusations. They exchanged more than games during that session: Naroditsky confided to Sarin the "immense stress he was under." Sarin said Naroditsky promised to share more, and even later after that Sarin followed up with a supportive message. "I can imagine the pain he was going through for a very long time," Sarin wrote.

As for me, one of my final support messages was a four-minute voice note that I sent him, noting that the call was coming from the obscure South Pacific island of Maupiti. I knew he loved geography as well as history, and IM Greg Shahade later shared that Naroditsky had "memorized all of the islands of the world" at age 11. But Naroditsky was not on an island himself. While he didn't always get back to you right away, he acknowledged your support when you saw him, and made sure you knew that it mattered.

The Comet

Several years after moving to Charlotte, Naroditsky told me that he loved the city and he never wanted to live anywhere else. I'm a Charlotte native and extremely prideful of my city, so I was honored. But even I admit that it doesn't have the identity or culture of the Bay Area. He was even living in a fairly nondescript neighborhood in Charlotte, more known for good schools than good times. I was never quite able to get him to explain his reasoning. Only at the funeral did it become clear — he wasn't talking about love for the city of Charlotte; he was talking about his friends at the Charlotte Chess Center. He had conflated his friends with the town itself. They were that close.

"We will honor his memory by carrying forward the passion, generosity, and the joy he shared so freely," Giannatos said.

Daniel Naroditsky taught us so much in less than three decades. He showed us that talent can be tied to humility. That you can build community locally and globally. That a voice can be sonorous and empathetic at the same time. That teaching is honorable and itself an art. That your rating doesn't define you and doesn't elevate you over your peers. That there is a perfect word for a situation, and even if you don't find it in English, maybe you'll learn another language where it exists. That even in a sport so defined by our skill level, there is dignity in all of us who play this game and who attempt to improve and grow.

He'll be remembered for his preternatural ability to inspire everyone, from the casual fan to the tournament player. We all adored him.

His final chess event, played only hours before his passing, was fittingly called the Comet Open. Some people burn bright but leave us too soon, with no one else like them to be seen in a lifetime. ♠



2005



2007



2011



2013



2015



2017



2021



2024



2025



The Play's the Thing

DANIEL NARODITSKY'S talent was so bright in so many areas — the written word, real-time commentary, spot-on impressions, teaching young players — that it can be easy to overlook just how good a chessplayer he really was.

His peers never forgot. They knew Danya was a creative, dynamic player who could hang with the very best of them. They saw him demolish the world's elite with speed, style, and that wry smile.

So much has been said about Danya's legacy, but it all starts with his play. Here are 29 of his games, spanning from his first moves right through his final days. The annotators of these games range from Charlotte locals to American legends to world champions, and that's testimony to the number of very different lives in chess that Daniel Naroditsky touched.

FOUR KNIGHTS GAME (C48)

Daniel Naroditsky (1042)

Gary R. Gray (1134)

Early Summer Swiss (4), Burlingame, 06.19.2003

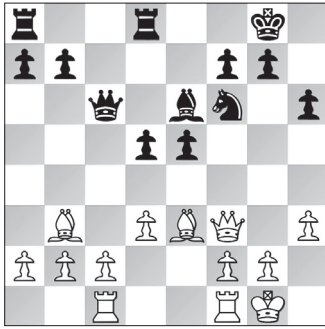
An early effort from his seventh tournament. Naroditsky earned his first official rating in this event. It was 1090.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. Nc3 Bc5
5. 0-0 Nd4 6. Nxd4 Bxd4 7. d3 h6 8. Bd2 c6
9. Ba4 0-0 10. h3 d5 11. exd5 cxd5 12. Qf3

Daniel Naroditsky: Selected Games

ANNOTATIONS BY **ARONIAN, CARUANA, DONALDSON, GELFAND, GIANNATOS, LEE, MORADIABADI, NEMCOVA, MAGESH, RAMESH, RENSCH, TANG, AND TOPALOV**

Be6 13. Nd1 Bc5 14. Ne3 Qc8 15. Bb3 Rd8
16. Rac1 Bxe3 17. Bxe3 Qc6



18. Bxh6 gxh6 19. Qxf6 Rd6 20. Qxe5
Bxh3 21. Qg3+ Kf8 22. Qxh3 Rg6 23. c4
d4 24. Bd1 Re8 25. Bf3 Qf6 26. Rce1 Rxe1
27. Rxe1 Kg7 28. Re4 Kh7 29. Re1 Rg5 30.
Be4+ Kg7 31. Qf3 Qd6 32. g3 Qe6 33. Qh1
Qe5 34. Kf1 Qf6 35. Qh4 Qd6 36. Qf4 Qd7
37. Qh4 Qd6 38. Bd5 Qg6 39. Be4 f5 40.
Bf3 f4 41. Qxf4 Rf5 42. Be4 Kf6 43. Qxf5+
Qxf5 44. Bxf5 Kxf5, and Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ALAPIN VARIATION (B22)

Daniel Naroditsky (1671)
Steven J. Svoboda (1912)
Tuesday Night Marathon (5),
San Francisco, 11.30.2004

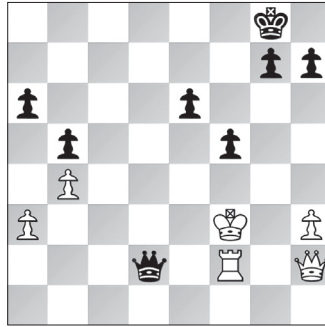
1. e4 c5 2. c3 Nf6 3. e5 Nd5 4. d4 cxd4 5.
Nf3 Nc6 6. cxd4 d6 7. Bc4 dxe5 8. dxe5
Ndb4 9. Qb3 e6 10. 0-0 Be7 11. Nc3 0-0
12. Rd1 Qc7 13. Nb5 Qb8 14. Nd6 Nxe5 15.
Bf4 Bxd6 16. Rxd6 Qxd6 17. Nxe5 Nd5 18.
Bg3 f5 19. Bxd5 Qxd5 20. Qe3 Rd8 21. h4
Bd7 22. Qg5 Bc6 23. Bf4 Rf8 24. h5 Qd8
25. Qg3 Be8 26. h6 g6 27. Bg5 Qd6 28. Qc3
Rc8 29. Qxc8 Bc6 30. Be7 Qxe7 31. Nxc6
bxc6 32. Qxc6 Rd8 33. Rc1 Qd6 34. Qxd6
Rxd6 35. Rc8+ Kf7 36. Rc7+ Kf6 37. Rxa7
Rd1+ 38. Kh2 Rd2 39. b4 Rxf2 40. Rxh7 e5
41. Ra7, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B86)

Steven Zierk (1490)
Daniel Naroditsky (1865)
CalNorth Youth Ch (4), San Jose,
04.17.2005

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6
5. Nc3 a6 6. Bc4 e6 7. 0-0 Be7 8. f4 0-0 9.
Be3 b5 10. Bd3 Bb7 11. a3 Nbd7 12. b4
Rc8 13. Qd2 Qc7 14. Nde2 Ng4 15. Nd1 Bf6
16. c3 Nb6 17. h3 Nxe3 18. Qxe3 Na4 19.
Rc1 Nb6 20. Nf2 Nc4 21. Bxc4 Qxc4 22. e5

Qc6 23. Qg3 dxe5 24. fxe5 Bxe5 25. Qg4 f5
26. Qg5 Bf6 27. Qg3 Bh4 28. Qh2 Rf6 29.
Nd4 Qd5 30. Nf3 Bxf2+ 31. Rxf2 Rg6 32.
Ne5 Rxc3 33. Rxc3 Qd1+ 34. Rf1 Qd4+ 35.
Kh1 Rxg2 36. Rc8+ Bxc8 37. Kxg2 Qd2+
38. Rf2 Bb7+ 39. Nf3 Bxf3+ 40. Kxf3



40. ... Qd5+ 41. Kg3 Qe5+ 42. Kg2 Qe4+ 43.
Kg1 Qe1+ 44. Rf1 Qe3+ 45. Kh1 Qxa3 46.
Qe2 Qxh3+ 47. Kg1 Qg3+ 48. Qg2 Qe3+ 49.
Kh1 Qh6+ 50. Qh2 Qe3 51. Qd6 Qe4+ 52.
Kg1 Qe3+ 53. Rf2 Qe1+ 54. Kg2 Qe4+ 55.
Rf3 Qe2+ 56. Kg3 Qe1+ 57. Kf4 Qh4+ 58.
Ke3 Qe1+ 59. Kf4 Qc1+ 60. Re3 g5+ 61. Kf3
Qf1+ 62. Kg3 f4+ 63. Kg4 fxe3 64. Qxe6+
Qf7 65. Qc8+ Kg7 66. Qc3+ Kg6 67. Qc6+
Kg7 68. Qc3+ Kf8 69. Qc8+ Ke7 70. Qc7+
Kf8 71. Qd8+ Qe8 72. Qd6+ Kf7 73. Qd4 e2
74. Qf2+ Kg8 75. Qe1 h6 76. Kf5 Qf7+ 77.
Kg4 Qf4+ 78. Kh5 Qh4+, White resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ALAPIN VARIATION (B22)

Daniel Naroditsky (1599 FIDE)
Jorge Cori (2080 FIDE)
World U10 Ch (4), Belfort, 07.23.2005

1. e4 c5 2. c3 d5 3. exd5 Qxd5 4. d4 Nc6 5.
Nf3 Bg4 6. Be2 e6 7. 0-0 0-0 8. Be3 cxd4
9. cxd4 Bb4 10. Nc3 Qd6 11. Rc1 a6 12.
Qa4 Bxf3 13. Bxf3 Nge7 14. Ne4 Qc7 15.
Ng5 Nd5 16. Bxd5 Rxd5 17. Rxc6 bxc6 18.
Qxb4 Rb5 19. Qc3 Rd8 20. Rc1 Kb7 21. g3
h6 22. Nxf7 Rc8 23. Ne5 Qa5 24. Qc4 Rxb2
25. Nxc6 Qc7 26. Na5+ Kb6, and Black
resigned in a few moves.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ACCELERATED DRAGON (B34)

Daniel Naroditsky (2002)
Frank Thornally (2200)
Tuesday Night Marathon (2),
San Francisco, 01.17.2006

This was Naroditsky's first win against a
master in US Chess rated play.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 g6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nc6
5. Nc3 Bg7 6. Be3 Nf6 7. Be2 0-0 8. 0-0 d5
9. Nxc6 bxc6 10. e5 Nd7 11. f4 Qa5 12. a3
Ba6 13. b4 Bxe2 14. Qxe2 Qc7 15. Rad1 a5



California State
Championship, 2007

Coaching the
Oakland A's, 2008

circa 2010

16. b5 e6 17. a4 c5 18. Bc1 Rfe8 19. Qf3 Nb6 20. Ne2 f6 21. exf6 Bxf6 22. g4 Kh8 23. g5 Bg7 24. h4 e5 25. h5 exf4 26. Nxf4 Rf8 27. hxc6 Qe5 28. Qh5, Black resigned.

The next two games appear in the February 2008 issue of *Chess Life* (available at uschess.org) with Naroditsky's annotations.

RUY LOPEZ, BREYER VARIATION (C95)

Jurica Srbis (2055)
Daniel Naroditsky (2124)
World U12 Ch (5), Antalya, 11.22.2007

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. c3 0-0 9. h3 Nb8 10. d4 Nbd7 11. Nbd2 Bb7 12. Bc2 Re8 13. Nf1 Bf8 14. Ng3 g6 15. Nh2 h5 16. Bg5 Be7 17. a4 c5 18. d5 Nh7 19. Bxe7 Rxe7 20. Qe2 c4 21. axb5 axb5 22. b3 cxb3 23. Bxb3 Nc5 24. Bc2 Ba6 25. Qe3 Rea7 26. f4 Qf6 27. fxe5 Qxe5 28. Ne2 Re7 29. Nf3 Qxd5 30. Nf4 Qb7 31. Nd5 Re6 32. Qf4 Rae8 33. Ng5 Nxc5 34. Qxc5 Kg7 35. Nf4 Re5 36. Nxc5+ Kf8 37. Qh6+ Ke7 38. Nf4 Kd8 39. Rad1 Qb6 40. Kh1 Bb7 41. Rd4 Bxe4 42. Bxe4 Nxe4 43. Kh2 Nxc3 44. Rxe5 Qxd4 45. Qh4+ Kd7 46. Rg5 Re4 47. Qg4+ Kc7 48. Qf3 Rxf4 49. Qa8 Rf5 50. Rg3 Ne2 51. Qa5+ Kb7 52. Qe1 Nxc3 53. Qe7+ Ka6, White resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B90)

Ivan Bukavshin (2248)
Daniel Naroditsky (2124)
World U12 Ch (11), Antalya, 11.28.2007

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be3 e5 7. Nf3 Be7 8. Bc4 0-0 9. 0-0 Qc7 10. Nd5 Nxd5 11. Bxd5 Nd7 12. Nd2 Nf6 13. Bb3 b5 14. Bg5 Bb7 15. Bxf6 Bxf6 16. Qe2 a5 17. Qxb5 Ba6 18. Qa4 Bxf1 19. Nxf1 Bg5 20. Rd1 Kh8 21. Qa3 a4 22. Bxa4 Qc4 23. b4 Qa6 24. Qg3 Bf4, White resigned.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E70)

IM John Grefe (2384)
FM Daniel Naroditsky (2366)
Benson Memorial IM Norm (9),
San Francisco, 08.19.2008
Annotations by FM Andy Lee

I first met Daniel Naroditsky when he was a diminutive prodigy, elevated by a cushion to see over the chess tables at the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club in San Francisco. He was fresh off the biggest success of his young career, first place in the U12 division of the World Youth Championships, when we played in the spring of 2008.

He beat me that evening after I had the poor judgment to turn down a draw, then gave me a few more lessons over the board before he grew too strong for local events. He was a tremendously gracious winner, quick to point out how hard I'd fought back from whatever self-inflicted damage I'd done to my position. And he was a fixture in the Bay Area chess community for years, returning to play in blitz events and anchoring the Mechanics' PRO Chess League team.

I chose to annotate another of Danya's games from his days at the Mechanics', an impressive attacking effort in his beloved King's Indian Defense. Danya finished a point shy of an IM norm, but this game, against Bay Area legend and former U.S. Champion John Grefe, felt at the time like a passing of the torch, from age and experience to the vigor of youth.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Bd3 Grefe plays something a little unusual to test the kid's preparation in his favorite opening.

5. ... Nc6 6. Nge2 0-0 7. 0-0 Nd7 8. Be3 e5 9. d5 Ne7

True to character, Danya aims for the sharpest lines rather than simplifying with the more common 9. ... Nd4.

10. b4?!

Thematic (and new in this particular position), but it hasn't been played since. White's minor pieces are better placed to weaken

and restrict Black's center, as in the variation 10. Qd2 f5 11. exf5 gxf5 12. f4.

10. ... f5 11. f3 f4 12. Bf2 Nf6 13. c5 g5 14. cxd6 cxd6

With White's knight on e2 instead of the bishop (as in the main lines of the King's Indian), Black's attack comes very quickly. Under pressure, Grefe sends his other knight to be entombed on a7.

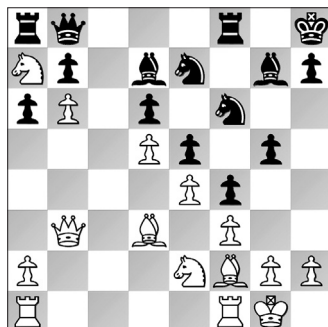
15. Nb5?! a6 16. Na7 Bd7 17. Qb3 Kh8

Stepping out of any Na7-c6 tricks on the diagonal, but Black's position would have also been quite good after 17. ... g4 18. Nc6 Qe8.

18. b5 Qb8?

Danya tries to force his venerable opponent to close the queenside before switching back to the plan of routing his queen to h5 via e8.

19. b6?



And fortunately for him, it works. The best way to justify the stranded knight is to sacrifice it, either by 19. Nc6 or the profoundly tricky 19. bxa6 Rxa7 20. Rfb1!.

19. ... g4!

Now Black is back in the driver's seat.

20. Rac1 gxf3 21. gxf3 Bh3 22. Kh1!?

Rather than play 22. Rfe1 only to have to follow up with Kg1-h1 and Re1-g1, Grefe cunningly offers the Exchange. Without the light-squared bishop Black's attack is much less serious, so Danya elects to keep it on the board.

22. ... Qe8 23. Rg1

Having offered the Exchange once, White might be better off offering it again with 23. Ng1.

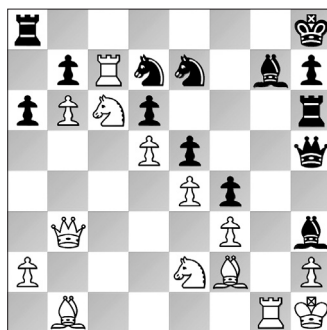
23. ... Qh5 24. Bb1 Nd7!

Very direct. Black is planning ... Rf8-f6-h6 in light of the terrible weakness of h2.

25. Rc7 Rf6 26. Nc6

This knight sacrifice has been on the table for a while now, but it's too little too late, as Black can safely ignore it.

26. ... Rh6!



27. Rxc7

Danya's attack cannot be stopped, only slowed. Accepting the knight offering on e7 leads to a pretty mate — 27. Nxe7 Bf1! 28. h4 Qxh4+! 29. Bxh4 Rxh4 mate — so Grefe clears g1 for his king.

27. ... Bg4?!

Flashy, but I suspect that with a year or two more experience Danya would have found the cleaner 27. ... Kxg7 28. Nxe7 Kf7!.

28. Kg1

Time to get out of Dodge.

28. ... Bxf3 29. Rxd7?!

29. Nxe7 would have put up more resistance, though Black should still win.

29. ... Bxe2

Renewing the threat of mate on h2.

30. Rg2 Rg8!, White resigned.

Danya eliminates the last defender of the king. After 31. Rxg8+ Nxg8 32. Bg3 Qh3! there is no good way to stop ... Qh3-f1 mate, so White gave up.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, CLASSICAL VARIATION (E94)

FM Daniel Naroditsky (2356 FIDE)

GM Yuri Vovk (2567 FIDE)

Leiden LCT Open (5), Leiden,

07.14.2009

This was Naroditsky's first win against a grandmaster.

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. d4 0-0 6. Be2 e5 7. 0-0 Nbd7 8. Be3 Re8 9. d5 Nh5 10. g3 Bf8 11. Ne1 Ng7 12. Ng2 f5 13. exf5 Nxf5 14. Ne4 Be7 15. f3 Nf6 16.

Bf2 Bf8 17. Bd3 Bh6 18. g4 Nxe4 19. Bxe4 Ne7 20. Qd3 Rf8 21. Bg3 Rf7 22. Qe2 Qf8 23. Rad1 Bd7 24. c5 a6 25. Qc2 Re8 26. Qb3 dxc5 27. Bxe5 Nc8 28. Bxc7 Nd6 29. Bxd6 Qxd6 30. Qc2 b5 31. Rfe1 Bg7 32. b3 Be5 33. Ne3 Ref8 34. Qg2 Kh8 35. Kh1 Rc8 36. Rc1 Qf6 37. d6 Qxd6 38. Rcd1 Qf8 39. Nd5 Bd4 40. b4 Rd8 41. bxc5 Qxc5 42. Qd2 Bg7 43. Qg5 Re8 44. Qh4 Kg8 45. g5 Be6 46. Rc1 Qa3 47. Nf6+ Bxf6 48. gxf6 Ref8 49. Rc6 Bxa2 50. Qg5 Re8 51. Re3 Qf8 52. Bxg6 hxg6 53. Qxg6+ Kh8 54. Rc5, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF POISONED PAWN (B97)

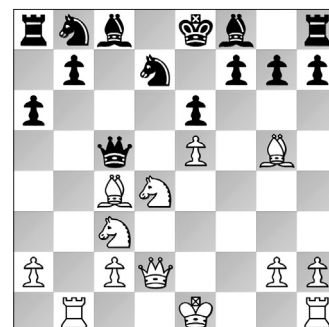
Daniel Naroditsky

"Dolgoruki"

Blitz, Internet Chess Club, 09.03.2009

Naroditsky published this game in multiple *Chess.com* columns, calling it "one of my fondest blitz memories" and "one of the watershed moments in my blitz addiction."

1. Nf3 c5 2. e4 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bg5 e6 7. f4 Qb6 8. Qd2 Qxb2 9. Rb1 Qa3 10. e5 dxe5 11. fxe5 Nfd7 12. Bc4 Qc5



13. Bxe6 Qxe5+ 14. Kd1 fxe6 15. Re1 Qa5 16. Nxe6 Kf7 17. Nd8+ Kg6 18. Rb5 axb5 19. Re6+ Nf6 20. Qd3+ Kh5 21. g4+ Nxg4 22. Qh3+ Kxg5 23. Ne4+ Kf5 24. Qf3 mate.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B92)

GM Alexander Shabalov (2678)

FM Daniel Naroditsky (2373)

North American Open (4), Las Vegas,

12.28.2009

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be2 e5 7. Nb3 Be7 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Re1 Be6 10. Bf3 Nbd7 11. a4 Qc7 12. a5 b5 13. axb6 e.p. Nxb6 14. Na5 Nc4 15. Nxc4 Bxc4 16. Bd2 Rfc8 17. b3 Be6 18. Ra2

Qb7 19. Qe2 Bd8 20. Rea1 Bb6 21. Na4 Bd4 22. Rd1 d5 23. exd5 Bxd5 24. Bxd5 Nxd5 25. Qf3 Rab8 26. Be1 Rd8 27. Nb2 Qa7 28. Nc4 e4 29. Qe2 Nf4 30. Qg4 Ne6 31. Kf1 Qb7 32. Na5 Qc7 33. g3 e3 34. fxe3 Bxe3 35. Rxd8+ Rxd8 36. Nc4 Ba7 37. Ba5 Qc5, White resigned.

RUY LOPEZ (C77)

FM Daniel Naroditsky (2423)

GM Magesh Panchanathan (2521)

National Open (3), Las Vegas, 06.12.2010

Annotations by GM Magesh Panchanathan

This was my first game against Danya. He was just 14 years old and I was already a grandmaster. I had no idea I was facing a young genius who would write books, study at Stanford, become an elite GM, and eventually rank among the top blitz and bullet players in the world.

We ended up drawing this game, but I felt like I had narrowly escaped suffering an embarrassing loss to a young kid. My impression of him was that he played very good moves but lacked the confidence at that stage to finish off a grandmaster —

which made sense, given how I managed to hold the draw.

As I got to know Danya better, I realized he wasn't lacking confidence at all. It was simply his nature to appear calm and unassuming. Even when he was completely crushing you, he would sit there quietly, looking as if he were still figuring things out, and afterward talk about the game as though it had been an equal fight. That's just who he was — humble, gracious, and always comforting his opponents, even after demolishing them over the board.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. d3

Back then, this move wasn't as popular as it is today, but it was still considered a solid setup for White.

5. ... d6

This has always been one of my favorite setups. One of my early coaches taught me to avoid the pin with Bc1-g5 by placing the bishop on e7, and I've essentially stuck with that idea ever since.

That said, for the setup I was planning it was better to go with the move order 5. ... b5, as it forces the white bishop to go to b3 and then to c2, rather than going in

one move. If 7. 0-0 d6 8. c3 0-0 9. Nbd2 Na5 10. Bc2 Black has reached the same position as in the game, but with an extra move because of the Ba4-b3-c2 maneuver. It's true that 5. ... b5 gives White an extra option in 6. Bb3 Be7 7. a4, but Black has 7. ... b4 with a regular game.

6. c3 Be7

The most popular, and best, option here is 6. ... g6 7. 0-0 Bg7 8. Re1 0-0.

7. 0-0 0-0 8. Nbd2 b5

Now the white bishop can move directly to c2. A wiser setup for Black in this move order is 8. ... Re8 9. Re1 Bf8 10. Nf1 h6.

9. Bc2 Na5?!

A better idea for Black here is 9. ... Re8 10. Re1 Bf8 11. Nf1 g6 12. h3 Bg7 13. Ng3 d5, as in Abdusattorov – Maghsoodloo, Tata Steel 2023, even though in this game White gained a considerable advantage and went on to win.

The direct 9. ... d5 is also preferable, looking to open the d-file and play the symmetrical pawn structure. One example is 10. Re1 dxe4 11. dxe4 Be6 12. Qe2 Qc8, which was drawn in Carlsen – Abdusattorov, Toronto 2023.

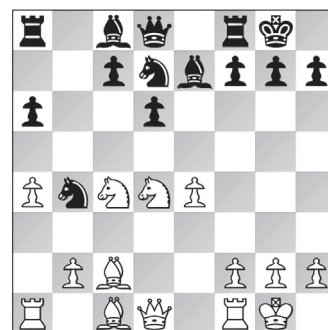
10. d4 Nd7 11. a4?!

A missed opportunity to capitalize on the lost tempo. After 11. b4! Nc6 12. a4 Black can't play ... c7-c5, which is clearly a problem.

11. ... b4

Correctly avoiding 11. ... c5, which runs into 12. axb5 axb5 13. b4. Now Black still has a fighting chance.

12. cxb4 Nc6 13. Nc4 exd4 14. Nxd4 Nxb4



Black has regained the pawn and has good control of the b4-square, but Black's weak light squares and White's piece activity gives him a healthy edge.

15. Bd2

Danya rightly decides to give up the bishop



Quebec Open, 2012

pair for swift development and an initiative.

White could save the bishop with 15. Bb1, but that gives Black an important tempo to regroup: 15. ... Re8 16. Bd2 d5! 17. Bxb4 Bxb4 18. Nc6 Qf6 19. Nxb4 (19. exd5 Bf8 leaves Black with good compensation for the pawn) 19. ... dxc4 and Black achieves dynamic equality.

15. ... Nxc2 16. Nc6

16. Qxc2 is also possible, when play could go 16. ... Bf6 17. Nc6 Qe8 18. Rfe1 Bb7 19. N4a5 and White keeps the pressure on.

16. ... Qe8 17. Nxe7+ Qxe7 18. Qxc2 Nc5 19. Rfe1 Be6 20. b4 Nd7 21. Ne3

Better was 21. Na5 c5 22. Nc6 Qe8 (or 22. ... Qf6 23. Bc3) 23. Qd3 and the pressure on the d6-pawn is a big problem for Black.

21. ... c5

At this point, I was still struggling to equalize but hoping to capitalize on any possible mistake from my young opponent to seize the initiative — though that mistake hadn't arrived yet!

22. f4 Rfc8 23. Qd3 a5?

Poor judgment on my part — White can obtain a significant advantage with almost any continuation.

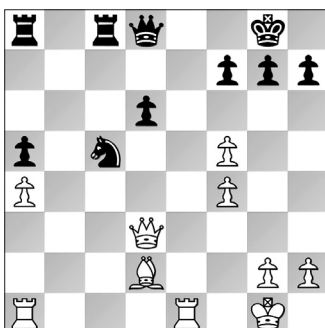
24. Nf5?

Another missed opportunity for White.

If 24. bxa5 c4 25. Qa3 f6 26. Rec1, and the problem for Black is that I cannot move the bishop easily to attack the e4-pawn because the white knight is ready to jump in to f5 or d5 anytime. For example, 26. ... Bf7 27. Nf5 Qxe4 28. Nxd6 wins.

White also had 24. b5 c4 25. Qa3 f6 (25. ... Nc5 26. f5 Bd7 27. Nd5 wins) 26. Rac1, and White does not need the rook to be on the a-file since it's closed. Meanwhile, Black's problems remain the same: The bishop on e6 is a bit stuck while White will slowly improve his position.

24. ... Bxf5 25. exf5 Qd8 26. bxc5 Nxc5



I breathed a sigh of relief here. I knew I had a better pawn structure and could try to push gradually.

27. Qd5 Qb6 28. Be3 Qb4 29. f6 Qe4 30. Qg5 Qg6?!

I could have kept the game double-edged with 30. ... Ne6 31. Qg3 g6, but I felt I was finally out of danger and preferred to simplify the position and play for a risk-free win. It's not what happened!

31. fxc7 Qxc7 32. fxc5 Ne6 33. Rd1 Ra6 34. Rd5 Kxc7 35. Rf1 Rc4 36. Rb5 Ra8 37. Rbf5 Rc7 38. Bb6 Rd7 39. Rd5 Kf8 40. Bxa5?!

Exchanging pawns on the queenside favors Black, as it leaves me with one less structural weakness to suffer. White is better after 40. h4 Ra6 41. Bf2 Nc7 42. Rd3 Ne6 43. Kh2.

40. ... Ke7

I embarked on the wrong plan here, leaving my king unnecessarily exposed in the center. It's still defendable after 40. ... Rda7 41. Bd2 Rxa4 42. Rxd6 Kg8, with all the pawns on the same side.

41. Bc3?!

Danya seems to simplify too quickly here.

After 41. h4 Kf8 (41. ... Rda7 is not as good anymore, because the black king will be stuck in the center: 42. Bb4 Rxa4 43. Bxd6+ Ke8 44. Rdf5 Nd8 45. g3) the best thing for me to do is undo my last few moves and take the king back to g7, although 42. Kh2 leaves White with good winning chances.

41. ... Rxa4 42. Bf6+ Kf8 43. Rb1 Ra8 44. Rbd1 Ra6 45. Rb1 Ra8 46. Rbd1 Ra6 47. Rb1, draw.

I was well aware of how close I came to being in serious trouble in this game, so I was quite happy to escape with a draw in the end.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, CLASSICAL VARIATION (E94)

GM Sam Shankland (2601 FIDE)
IM Daniel Naroditsky (2483 FIDE)
Imre Konig Memorial rapid (1), San Francisco, 09.22.2012

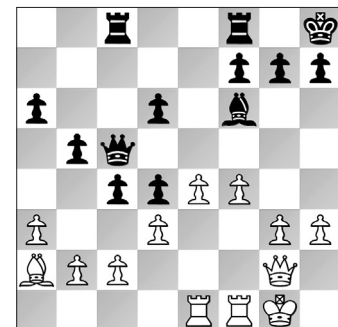
An early win over his most frequent opponent in slow time controls. (Across all time controls, Naroditsky played the most US Chess-rated games with GM Oleksandr Bortnyk.)

1. c4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. e4 d6 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Be2 e5 7. 0-0 Na6 8. Be3 Ng4

9. Bg5 Qe8 10. dxe5 dxe5 11. Qc1 c6 12. h3 Nf6 13. Bh6 Qe7 14. Rd1 Nc5 15. Bxg7 Kxg7 16. Qe3 a5 17. Rd2 b6 18. Rad1 Bb7 19. b3 Rab8 20. Bf1 Ba8 21. g3 Rbc8 22. h4 b5 23. cxb5 cxb5 24. Nd5 Bxd5 25. exd5 Nce4 26. d6 Qb7 27. d7 Nxd2 28. dxc8=Q Nxf3+ 29. Qxf3 Qxf3 30. Qc2 b4 31. Rd3 Qf5 32. Qd1 e4 33. Rd6 e3 34. f3 Rc8 35. Rd4 Qc2 36. Qxc2 Rxc2 37. Bc4 Rxa2 38. g4 Rd2 39. Rf4 Nd5 40. Re4 Nb6 41. Bf1 a4 42. bxa4 b3 43. Rxe3 b2 44. Rb3 Nxa4, White resigned.

BRILLIANT!

GM Isan Reynaldo Ortiz Suarez (2697)
GM Daniel Naroditsky (2696)
Millionaire Open (4), Las Vegas,
10.10.2014
Annotations by GM Levon Aronian



BLACK TO MOVE

24. ... g5!

A brilliant concept. The weakness of the white squares does not matter much, since the weakness of the g3-pawn makes the white king uncomfortable.

25. fxc5

White is a strong grandmaster who was champion of Cuba and a member of their national team, but this move is inaccurate and the next few moves show the psychological effect of the surprising 24. ... g5. White desperately needs to get counterplay, and the best move was not easy to find: After 25. b4 Black has to either free up the a2-bishop or retreat the queen to c7, after which the attack on the g3-pawn is delayed.

25. ... Qxc5 26. Rf5 Qh6 27. Kh2

This is a mistake. The task of defending against the cloud of black pieces was very difficult and required deep calculation and courage! It was absolutely necessary to activate the e1-rook by playing 27. Rf1 Be5 28. g4!. It looks losing due to 28. ... cxd3 (28. ... f6 allows White to survive with rook exchanges

after 29. g5) 29. cxd3 Qe3+ 30. Kh1 Qxd3, but White survives through a miracle: 31. Bxf7 Rc2 32. Bc4!!.

27. ... Be5

Now things are very grim for White. After Black fortifies the bishop on e5, the rooks will double on the c-file and penetrate the seventh or eighth rank.

28. Qe2

White had to play 28. Rg1, although Black should slowly win after 28. ... Rc7 and doubling on the c-file.

28. ... Rg8 29. Rxe5

My guess is that Ortiz Suarez blundered that after 29. Rg1 Black wins with 29. ... Qe3, since after 30. Qxe3 dxe3 White can't stop the ... e3-e2 and ... c4xd3 ideas in an acceptable way.

29. ... dxe5 30. dxc4 Qe6

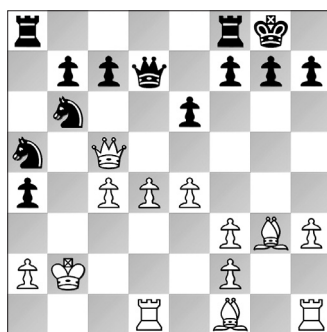
Naroditsky makes a few inaccuracies from here, but the outcome is never in doubt.

31. b3 bxc4 32. bxc4 Rg6 33. Rf1 Rcg8 34. Rf3 Rg5 35. Bb3 Qg6 36. Qe1 f5 37. exf5 Rxf5 38. Rxf5 Qxf5 39. c5 Rf8 40. c6 e4, White resigned.

TROMPOWSKY OPENING (A45)

GM Loek van Wely (2663 FIDE)
GM Daniel Naroditsky (2620 FIDE)
London Classic rapid (9), London,
12.07.2014

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bg5 Ne4 3. Bf4 Nc6 4. Nf3 d5 5. e3 Bg4 6. h3 Bxf3 7. gxf3 Nf6 8. c4 e6 9. Qb3 Bb4+ 10. Nc3 0-0 11. 0-0-0 dxc4 12. Qxc4 Bxc3 13. bxc3 Nd5 14. Bg3 Qe7 15. Kb2 a5 16. e4 Nb6 17. Qb3 a4 18. Qa3 Qd7 19. c4 Na5 20. Qc5



20. ... a3+ 21. Ka1 Qa4 22. Rc1 Qb3 23. Qb5 Qxf3 24. Rg1 Qxe4 25. Qe5 Qxe5 26. Bxe5 f6 27. Bxc7 Nd7 28. Bg2 Rfc8 29. Bxa5 Rxa5 30. Bxb7 Rc7 31. Bf3 e5 32. Rgd1 exd4 33. Rxd4 Kf8 34. Bd5 Nb6 35. Be4 Rac5 36.

Bxh7 Nxc4 37. Rd3 g6 38. Bxg6 Ne5 39. Rxc5 Rxc5 40. Rxa3 Nxg6 41. Kb2 Ne5 42. Rc3 Rd5 43. a4, and White resigned.

RETI OPENING (A09)

GM Baskaran Adhiban (2630)
GM Daniel Naroditsky (2622)
Gibraltar Masters (7), Caleta,
02.02.2015

Annotations by GM RB Ramesh

I had the honor of working online with Danya regularly for a few months during the COVID-19 lockdown. He was heavily into streaming and during our time together I was amazed by his drive and energy on camera. I remember warning him about the risks of becoming an online celebrity — such a role brings loss of privacy along with comments and insinuations from practically everyone it seems.

Danya had an infinite hunger for analysis, and we had a few sessions with Praggnanandhaa, Karthikeyan Murali, and Aravindh Chithambaram among others during that time. He was very strong over the board, and even then he had expressed his wish to return to tournament play.

I have chosen to annotate this game in part because I have worked with Adhiban as well and so I understand a bit about both players and their enterprising styles.

1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 d4 3. b4

What can one expect when two creative players face each other? Fireworks from the beginning!

3. ... Bg4

What happened to knights before bishops?

4. Ne5

Now White moves an already-developed piece again, and on Move 4?

4. ... Bf5 5. e3 Qd6!?

I thought we weren't supposed to bring the queen out too early! 5. ... dxe3 6. fxe3 e6 would have led to normal-looking positions.

6. Nf3

Both players are giving themselves space to show their creativity from the word go. Such battles are a treat to watch! Nevertheless, we should note that White might have considered 6. f4!? with an advantage.

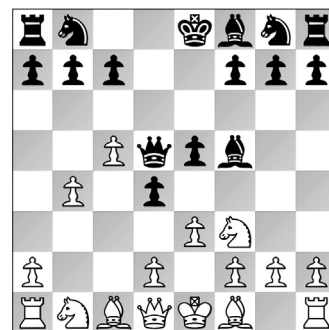
6. ... e5!?

After 6. ... dxe3 7. fxe3 Qxb4 8. Nc3 Nf6 White still has to show his compensation on the board.

7. c5

Now the e5-d4 pawn chain comes under scrutiny from the white pieces.

7. ... Qd5



8. Bb5+!?

8. Bb2 gives White a solid advantage, while after 8. Qb3!? Qxb3 9. axb3 f6 10. exd4 (10. Bb5+! is the engine suggestion, but we would need more analysis to understand this!) 10. ... Bxb1 11. Rxb1 e4 12. Ng1 Nc6 we have reached an interesting position.

8. ... c6 9. Ba4!

Very provocative moves from both players!

9. ... Bg4!?

All three minor pieces that are developed have moved more than once already!

If 9. ... Bd3 10. Bb3! Qe4 11. Bxf7+! Kd8! 12. Na3! with the idea of Bf7-c4, getting rid of the thorn on d3, followed by Qd1-b3.

10. Bb3! Bxf3 11. gxf3 Qd8

After 11 moves, both sides have managed to get ONE minor piece off the first rank!

12. Na3?!

12. f4! exf4 13. Bb2 dxe3 14. 0-0! is not for the faint of heart! I like to examine such ideas as possible training material for my students.

12. ... Na6!

Invoking distant opposition of the knights!

13. Nc4 Nxb4 14. Nxe5

Taking aim at f7.

14. ... Nh6!

Is there one opening principle that the players have not broken in this game?!

15. d3?

Too meek for a player called "The Beast"! 15. f4 f6 16. Ba3!? Bxc5 17. Qh5+ g6 18. Qxh6 fxe5 19. Qg7 is a total mess.

15. ... Bxc5?!

Black's play is easier after 15. ... f6 16. Nc4 Bxc5 17. e4 Nf7.

16. e4

It might appear that the h6-knight is feeling the heat, but Danya has understood the position very deeply.

16. ... Qe7 17. f4

Better is 17. Bxh6 Qxe5 18. f4! leading to complications that appear to favor White.

17. ... f6

Allowing Qd1-h5+. Possibly better was 17. ... 0-0-0 18. 0-0 f6.

18. Nf3

White passes up the chance to make use of the premature ... f7-f6 with 18. Qh5+ g6 19. Qxh6 fxe5 20. Ke2!, a clean way to defend the d3-weakness and connect the rooks! After 20. ... exf4 21. Bxf4 Rf8 22. Rag1 a5 Black is trying to create chances on the queenside, but now the computers note the cold-blooded only-move 23. Rxc6! hxc6 24. Qxc6+ Kd7 25. Qg4+! Ke8 when White can force a draw.

18. ... Nd5!?

I would not be surprised if the spectators were expecting 18. ... 0-0-0 instead.

19. Nh4!?

Both players feel it is best behavior to move their knights when the opponent does the same! 19. Kf1 Nc3 20. Qc2 0-0-0 appears to be the logical continuation for both sides.

19. ... 0-0-0

Finally someone castles ...

20. Kf1

... but the rule of symmetry only goes so far for Adhiban!

20. ... f5!?

Does anyone understand what is going on here?

21. exd5! Qxh4 22. h3



Preventing ... Qh4-h3+ and also keeping the h6-knight under control.

22. ... Bb4!?

Provocative to the core. Black is not worried about 23. dxc6 weakening his king position. Alternatively, the position after 22. ... Rhe8 is unclear.

23. Bb2??

The decisive mistake.

White should have accepted the challenge with 23. dxc6! bxc6 24. Bd2 and now Black has to find 24. ... Ng4! to justify his earlier play: 25. Qf3 Qxf2+! 26. Qxf2 Nxf2 27. Bxb4 Nxb4 28. Kg2 Rhe8! 29. Kxh1 Re3 with an unclear position.

23. ... c5

White has two bishops AND two doubled pawns! The main difference is in the king positions: Black feels extremely safe.

24. Rc1 Qxf4

Don't forget that Black also has two healthy extra pawns.

25. a3 Bc3! 26. Bxc3 dxc3 27. Rxc3 Qd4

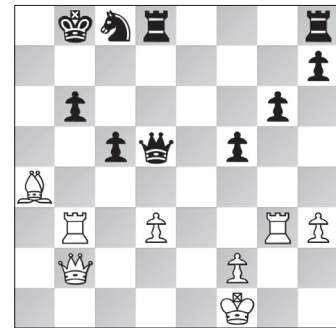
28. Qc2 b6

Black is quickly consolidating his position while White's pieces lack harmony and are scattered. The h1-rook is particularly sad.

29. Rg1 Kb8

The game is practically over for White at this point. Let's see how Danya brings home the win.

30. a4 Nf7 31. a5 Nd6 32. axb6 axb6 33. Ba4 Qxd5 34. Qb2 Nc8! 35. Rb3 g6 36. Rg3



Black has a decisive advantage after 36. Rxb6+ Nxb6 37. Qxb6+ Qb7.

36. ... f4?

A big mistake, letting White back into the game. Instead 36. ... Rhf8 keeps the pressure on.

37. Rg5! Qd6

Other possibilities here include 37. ... Qh1+ 38. Ke2 c4! 39. Qe5+! Kb7! 40. Rc3 Nd6! 41. Qd5+ Qxd5 42. Rxd5 cxd3+ 43. Rxd3 Kc7 44. Rc3+ Kb8 45. Rcd3 Nb7 46. Rxd8+ Rxd8 47. Rxd8+ Nxd8 48. Kf3 Ne6 49. Bd7 Nc5 50. Bb5 with counterplay, while 37. ... Qxg5



Adhiban –
Naroditsky,
Gibraltar, 2015

38. Rxb6+ Nxb6 39. Qxb6+ Kc8 leads to a perpetual.

38. Rb5?!

Strongest was 38. Rc3! Qd4 (38. ... Kc7? 39. Qb4! gives White lots of threats) 39. Rgxc5 Qxa4! 40. Rb3! Kb7 41. Rc4! when, despite being a full piece down, White has sufficient counterplay against the black king. If 41. ... Qd7 42. Rxc8! Kxc8 43. Rxb6.

38. ... Rhe8 39. Rgxc5 f3

Danya plays for mate with the idea of ... Qd6-h2 next, but the stronger 39. ... Qxd3+ 40. Kg1 Re6 really puts Black back in the driver's seat.

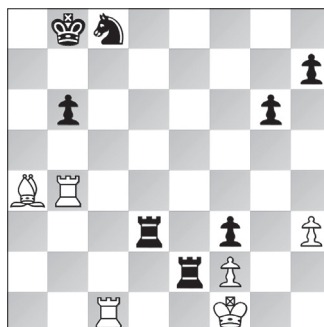
40. Rc1?

Another Move 40 blunder! White can give stiff resistance with 40. Qb4! Qxd3+ 41. Kg1 Re6 42. Qf4+.

40. ... Re2 41. Qb4 Qxb4?

41. ... Rxf2+! would have led to a pretty win for Black: 42. Kxf2 Qh2+ 43. Ke3 (43. Kxf3 Rxd3+ with mate soon) 43. ... Re8+! 44. Kxf3 (44. Kd4 Qf4+) 44. ... Qe2+ 45. Kf4 Rf8+! 46. Qxf8 Qf2+ and so forth.

42. Rxb4 Rxd3



It appears that Black should win easily with his two extra pawns, but the engine shows that it's not as simple as it looks.

43. Rf4!

Threatening both Rf4-f8 and Rf4xf3.

43. ... Re5 44. Rf8 Rc5 45. Rxc5?!

45. Rb1 Kc7 46. Rf7+ gives White counterplay.

45. ... bxc5 46. Ke1 Rd4 47. Bd1! Kc7 48. Bxf3?!

It's perfectly understandable to decide to win back one pawn after being two pawns

down for so long. Still, the right move was 48. Rf7+! Rd7 49. Rxf3 Nd6 50. h4 when White has enough counterplay to hold.

48. ... Nb6?

48. ... Nd6! 49. Rh8 Rh4 is a cleaner advantage.

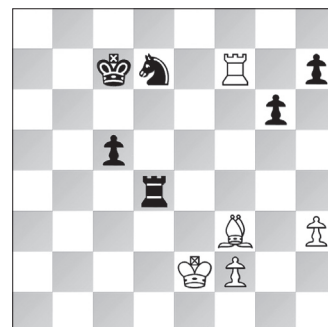
49. Ke2?!

49. Rf7+! Rd7 50. Rf8 is only a little better for Black.

49. ... Nd7?!

Stronger was 49. ... c4! 50. Rf6 Na4!.

50. Rf7!



Now the position is equal once again.

50. ... c4 51. Bg4??

The last mistake. 51. Ke3! Rd3+ 52. Ke2 would have kept the balance.

51. ... Kc6!

Now Danya finishes things cleanly and leaves Adhiban no chances.

52. Rxh7 Nc5! 53. Rg7 Rd6 54. Ra7 c3

White's bishop is unable to join the battle to stop the advancing c-pawn.

55. Ra3 Rd2+ 56. Ke3 Rd3+! 57. Ke2 c2 58. Ra1 Rc3 59. Kd2 Rc4 60. Be6 Nb3+ 61. Kd3 Nxa1, White resigned.

A very interesting fight, testing both players' nerves to the utmost. We will miss you Danya!

GIUOCO PIANO (C54)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2633 FIDE)

GM Dmitry Jakovenko (2744 FIDE)

World Team Ch (4), Tsaghkadzor,

04.22.2015

Annotations by IM John Donaldson

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4

Daniel invariably played the Ruy Lopez in games played at classical time controls. In blitz and rapid he often experimented with 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. g3 and 4. d4 exd4 5. Nd5. So what is he doing here? The explanation is that Daniel had played Jakovenko as White in Gibraltar earlier in the year, and the latter had drawn comfortably with his favorite Berlin Defense to the Ruy Lopez. Knowing he needed to put the Russian grandmaster, who was rated in the top 20 in the world at the time, under pressure, Daniel, for the first and only time in his career, plays the modern version of the Italian Game, hoping to surprise his opponent.

3. ... Bc5 4. d3 Nf6 5. 0-0 0-0 6. Re1

This move is not as popular as 6. c3, 6. Bg5, 6. h3, 6. Nc3 or 6. Nbd2, but the idea was to avoid the sequence 6. c3 d5 7. exd5 Nxd5, which was doing well for Black 10 years ago. Today, it's still a reasonable choice for Black, but not as fashionable.

6. ... d6

6. ... Ng4 7. Re2 Kh8 8. h3 f5 is one reason 6. Re1 is not seen so often. The piece offer cannot be accepted as 9. hxg4? fxg4 10. Ng5 g3 provides Black with more than ample compensation.

7. c3 a6 8. Bb3 Ba7

Jakovenko anticipates the advance d3-d4 by getting his bishop out of the way.

9. h3

This prophylactic move is needed, as after 9. Nbd2 Black gets good play with 9. ... Ng4 10. Re2 Kh8 11. h3 Nh6 12. Nf1 f5 13. Bxh6 gxh6, when Black's active pieces and attacking chances compensate for the ragged pawn structure.

9. ... h6 10. Nbd2 Re8 11. Nf1 Be6 12. Bc2

Keeping the light-squared bishops on the board is Daniel's most aggressive option, retaining a potentially important attacking piece. A year earlier Gata Kamsky had played 12. Ng3 against Jakovenko, a game that Daniel was well aware of.

12. ... d5 13. Qc2



In his notes to the game, published in the July 2015 issue of *Chess Life*, Daniel wrote: "I was aiming for this type of position in my preparation. Black has an impressive space advantage, but no clear plan of action. White has no objective advantage, but I could sense that Jakovenko was out of his comfort zone." White's position is in some ways like an improved Philidor Defense with colors reversed, as the bishop on c2 has more potential than one on e7.

13. ... b5

This aggressive move sets White a problem, as the natural 14. Ng3?! is met by 14. ... dxe4 15. dxe4 Bc4!, which forces White to offer the trade of queens. This would have ended any hopes Daniel had to put Black under pressure, as Jakovenko has always been an exceptional player in simplified positions.

14. Rd1

This move signals White is thinking of playing d3-d4, which explains Jakovenko's next move.

14. ... d4 15. Ng3 a5 16. Bb3

This move might seem like a waste of time after White's 12th move, which specifically

avoided the trade of bishops, but the position has changed — Black was threatening to shut it out with ... a5-a4, so now it's the right decision.

16. ... a4 17. Bxe6 Rxe6 18. Nf5



Daniel writes: "A critical position. The cold-blooded 18. ... Ne7 would have kept the position balanced, but my opponent — after quite a bit of vacillation — decides to strike immediately."

18. ... a3

Jakovenko is looking for active counterplay on the opposite side.

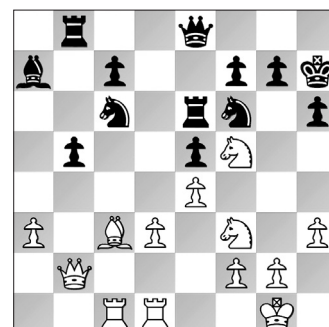
Daniel writes that Jakovenko evidently rejected 18. ... Ne7 because of 19. Bxh6!? (19. N3h4 "would probably have been my choice") 19. ... gxh6 20. Nxh6+ Kg7 21. Ng5 Qe8 22. Nhx7 Ng6 23. Nxe6+ Qxe6 24. Ng5 Qd7 and "Black is definitely not worse."

19. Qc2

"Now, Black is compelled to release the central tension."

19. ... axb2 20. Bxb2 dxc3 21. Bxc3 Qe8

22. Qb2 Rb8 23. Rac1 Kh7 24. a3



"Timely prophylaxis against ... b5-b4. White's pieces are ideally placed, and the pressure has reached a zenith. With mutual time trouble approaching, my opponent desperately tries to alter the game." Black is doomed to a passive defense, though the position remains very solid.

24. ... g6?!

Dmitry manages to push the knight away, but his king is not completely safe anyway.

Black could also try 24. ... Rb7 hoping to follow up with ... Nf6-g8-e7, or even the immediate 24. ... Ng8. Both these moves leave Black very solid, but White with the easier, more active position to play. The move played by Jakovenko is easy to understand — it's awkward when your opponent has a knight on f5 — but this move and the next weaken Black's position.

25. Ne3 Bxe3?!

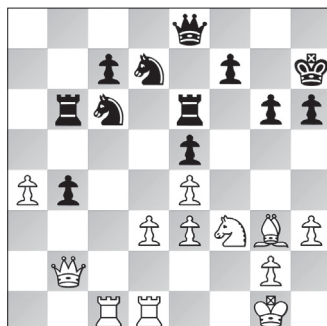
This move reduces Daniel's attacking pieces but at the cost of once again allowing White the long-term plan d3-d4. 25. ... Rb7 26. Nd5 Nd7 was better, if passive.

26. fxe3 Nd7 27. Be1!

This multipurpose move opens the c-file while preparing the bishop to get to a superior square on g3.

27. ... Rb6 28. Bg3 b4

Jakovenko is trying to activate his pieces, but Daniel doesn't let him.

29. a4!

Best! The immediate 29. d4 initially looks crushing but allows Black to escape with 29. ... exd4 30. exd4 Rxe4 31. Bxc7 Re2 32. Qb3 Na5 33. Qd3 Re3 34. Qf1 Rf6 35. axb4 Nb3 36. Rc2 Nxd4 37. Rxd4 Rxf3 38. Rf2 Rxf2 39. Qxf2 Re2 40. Qf3 Re3 and Black is holding.

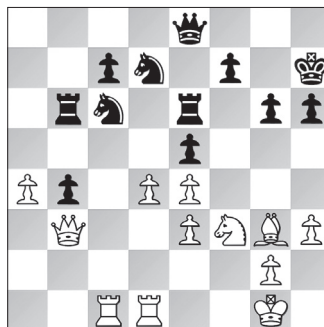
29. ... Ra6 30. Qb3

The immediate 30. d4!? exd4 31. exd4 Rxe4 32. Qb3! Re3 33. Qc4 is even stronger, but Daniel's move is also good as Black cannot stop d3-d4 in any case.

30. ... Rb6

Black has hopes of obtaining counterplay by advancing his b-pawn, but this is too optimistic an approach. Instead he should have tried to stand his ground with 30. ... Qe7 31. d4 Na5 32. Qb2 Rec6, although after 33. Qe2

White retains a big advantage.

31. d4!**31. ... exd4?**

Opening up the position is a decisive mistake. Sidestepping d4-d5 with 31. ... Re7 was forced, although after 32. Rf1 f6 33. Qd5 Black is getting squeezed.

32. exd4 Na5

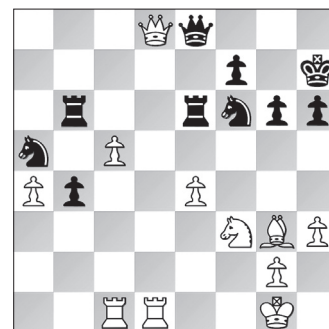
White wins after 32. ... Rxe4 33. Bxc7 Ra6 34. Qd3 because 34. ... Ndb8 is met by 35. Be5 trapping the rook.

33. Qd5

It's now a question of how White wants to win. Here 33. Qd3! was possibly a bit cleaner: 33. ... c5 34. dxc5 Rb7 35. Nd4 Ne5 36. Bxe5 Rxe5 37. Qa6 Rxe4 38. c6 wins material immediately.

33. ... c5 34. dxc5 Nf6

Dmitry has managed to activate his knights, but the position is still terrible.

35. Qd8

In time pressure, Daniel strives to keep the position under control by simplifying. 35. Qd3 Rb7 36. Nd4 Rxe4 37. c6 was also winning.



U.S. Championship, 2015

35. ... Ra6 36. Qxe8 Rxe8

Or 36. ... Nxe8 37. Nd4 Rxe4 38. c6 and the passed c-pawn decides the game.

37. Rd6! Rc6

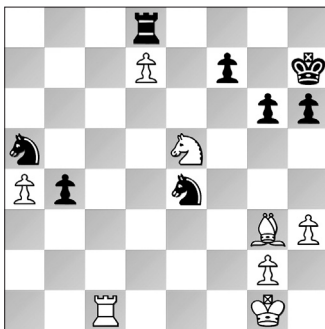
37. ... Rea8 was more stubborn, although after 38. Nd2 Ne8 39. Rb6 Nc6 40. Nc4 White still has a dominating position.

38. Ne5

This breaks the blockade. Now the d-pawn is a monster.

38. ... Rxd6 39. cxd6 Nxe4

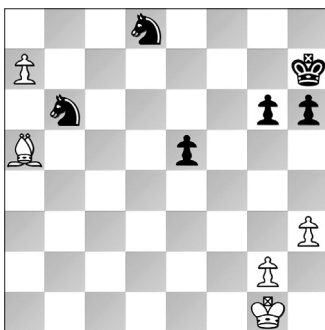
On 39. ... b3 40. d7 Rd8 41. Be1! wins.

40. d7 Rd8

“Deep breath. With 30 minutes added after Move 40, I had all the time in the world to calculate, double-check, and quintuple-check. Many roads lead to Rome, but one stood out among the others.”

41. Be1! f6 42. Rc8 Nb7 43. Rxd8 Nxd8 44. Bxb4

“The ‘academic’ 44. Nd3 b3 45. Ba5 wins as well, of course, but I could not resist.”

44. ... fxe5 45. a5 Nf6 46. a6 Nxd7 47. a7 Nb6 48. Ba5!

The fulcrum on which everything stands. To stop the pawn, Black must not only give up a knight, but relegate the other one to passivity.

48. ... Na8 49. Bxd8

The resulting endgame is hopeless since White is effectively a piece up.

49. ... Kg7 50. Kf2 Kf7 51. Ke3, Black resigned.

“Needless to say, I was elated after this win, which enabled Team USA to tie the match. It was also my first victory over a super-grandmaster; hopefully, it is not my last (fingers crossed).”

SICILIAN DEFENCE, MARÓCZY BIND (B38)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2708)

GM Andrey Gorovets (2585)

Chicago Open (8), Chicago, 05.25.2015

Annotations by GM Levon Aronian

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 g6**5. c4 Bg7 6. Be3 Nf6 7. Nc3 d6**

This more passive way of handling the Maróczy has lately been relegated to blitz. Nowadays people don't like to give away space and the center without any concrete ideas, so the normal way to play is either 5. ... Nf6 6. Nc3 Nxd4 7. Qxd4 d6 (at least not letting White take on d4 with the bishop, which they would rather do), or trying tricks with 6. ... Qb6 or 7. ... Ng4.

8. Be2 0-0 9. 0-0 Bd7

Black players generally use this line against inexperienced Maróczy players, but this game is a great example of Danya's positional understanding. From looking at Naroditsky's games I feel that, because of his big experience in King's Indian structures, he understood very well the role of space, and showed much better results in the games where he had a space advantage.

It's simpler and sounder to play 9. ... Nxd4 10. Bxd4 Bd7, and you will soon see why.

10. Nc2

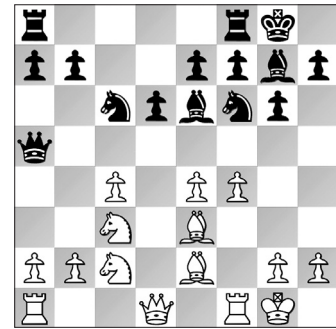
The best move. One rule that applies to most positions where one side has a solid positional grip is, the side with the advantage must try and keep more pieces on the board. Control of space or the center means that you have more squares to maneuver and improve the placement of your pieces.

10. ... Be6

Black is vacating d7 for a typical maneuver of the f6-knight to c5, as well as planning ... a7-a6/... b7-b5 or ... a7-a5-a4.

11. f4

Stopping ... Nf6-d7 and underlining Black's space problem.

11. ... Qa5

Naturally, Black is trying to quickly get the f8-rook to c8 and start counterplay with ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5. The engine suggests a very sad way to play for Black: 11. ... Na5 with the idea of meeting 12. b3 with 12. ... Ng4 exchanging some pieces. But I don't think people play King's Indian or offbeat Sicilian structures to suffer for a draw in some passive and slightly worse position.

12. g4

Bold, brave and original! White is trying to use the time factor in his favor.

12. ... Rfc8

This move looks OK, but in hindsight Black could play the other rook to c8 and be better prepared for Danya's idea.

13. f5

Played without any hesitation or doubt!

13. ... Bd7 14. g5 Ne8

Black might have been better off with the passive option 14. ... Nxe4 although, as I mentioned before, it would work better with a rook still on f8. One line could go 15. Nxe4 Bxf5 16. Ng3 Bh3 17. Rf2 Bxb2 18. Rb1 Bg7 19. Rxb7 Rab8 20. Rxb8 Rxb8 21. Qd5 Qxd5 22. cxd5 Rb1+ and Black is fighting for a draw in the endgame.

15. Nd5

This whole sequence is the reason I chose this game. If I didn't know that White was a GM, I would think they have no clue about handling Maróczy structures. How many times do we see people go beast mode in this opening?

15. ... e6

Logical. Very few people would dare to take on b2 and allow the rook to b7, but surprisingly it does not kill Black. The best way to react against 15. ... Bxb2 is 16. Rb1 Bg7 17. Nd4 Qd8 18. h4, continuing the siege on the kingside.

16. fxc6 hxc6

16. ... fxc6 is not a consideration: After 17. Nf6+ Bxf6 18. gxf6 the threat of f6-f7 forces Black to waste two moves putting the c6-knight on f7 which leads to a passive and lost position. Having two knights in a passive position can't lead anywhere good.

17. Nf6+ Bxf6

Correct again. After 17. ... Nxf6 18. gxf6 Bf8 19. Rf2 Black's position is close to hopeless: White's plan is to transfer the queen to h3 and threaten to put the bishop on h6 and/or swing the rook to f4 and h4.

18. gxf6 Qe5

This move is fine objectively but leads Gorovets to trouble. After 18. ... Ne5 19. b3 Bc6 20. Rf4 Nd7 White has many interesting options for aggressive play, but Black's position looks harmonious.

19. Bd3

Another excellent move.

19. ... Nxf6

This tempting move loses the game in spectacular fashion. Black had two decent options:

(a) 19. ... Qh5 is hard to assess. It looks losing after 20. Qxh5 gxh5 21. Bf4 Ne5 22. Bxe5 dxe5 23. Rae1, headed to e3 and either g3 or h3, but Black gets counterplay with 23. ... b5.

(b) The more human option is 19. ... a6, although after 20. Qf3 b5 21. c5 dxc5 22. Rad1 Black has to resort to winter fattening with 22. ... Qxb2 because they'll eventually have to sacrifice a piece on f6 and a tough defense is coming.

20. Qf3 Kg7 21. Rf2

White has the nasty threat of pushing the b-pawn to b5 and then playing Be3-d4. It's impossible to stop without material losses.

21. ... Rf8 22. b4 d5

There are many ways to win after 22. ... Nxb4 but the easiest is 23. Bd4 Qg5+ 24. Rg2 Nxc2

25. Bxc2 Qh4 26. Rg4 Qxg4+ 27. Qxg4 e5 28. Qg3 exd4 29. Qxd6.

It seems like Black could survive until we realize that after (a) 29. ... Bc6 White can play 30. e5 followed by 31. e6, weakening the king's fortress, and after (b) 29. ... Rad8 Black loses slowly with 30. Rf1 Nh5 31. Qxd4+ Kg8 32. Qxa7 Bc6 33. Qe3 and White can eventually play c4-c5, e4-e5, Bc2-b3 and e5-e6.

23. b5 dxe4 24. Bxe4 Nxe4 25. bxc6 Bxc6

Gorovets is trying his best to fight against the inevitable, but Danya's play is very precise.

26. Bd4 f6 27. Bxe5 fxe5 28. Qxf8+ Rxf8**29. Rxf8 Kxf8 30. Nb4**

If not for this move, Black could hope to save the game, but since the black pawns will fall like ripe plums without the bishop, there is no choice but to allow White to get the knight to the dominant position on e5.

30. ... Ba4 31. Nd3

The rest of the game is a good example of immaculate technique and does not require further comment. Naroditsky's play is a great example of an energetic and undogmatic approach in well-known structures.

31. ... Ke7 32. Re1 Ng5 33. Nxe5 Bc2 34. h4 Nf7 35. Nf3 Bd3 36. c5 Bc4 37. a3 Bd5 38. Kf2 Kf6 39. Kg3 Nh6 40. Ng5 Nf5+ 41. Kg4 e5 42. Ne4+ Ke6 43. Kg5 Bc6 44. Nd6 Nd4 45. Kxg6 Nf3 46. Rh1 b6 47. h5 bxc5 48. Nc4 Be4+ 49. Kg7 Kd5 50. Rc1 Ng5 51. h6 Bd3 52. Rg1 Ne6+ 53. Kf6 Nf8 54. Ne3+ Ke4 55. Re1 Nh7+ 56. Kg7 Kd4 57. Ng4 Ng5 58. Nxe5 c4 59. Nxd3 cxd3 60. Kg6 Nf3 61. Rd1 Ne5+ 62. Kg7 Kd5, and Black resigned.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E90)

GM Georgi Margvelashvili (2530)
GM Daniel Naroditsky (2616)
PRO League Stage (4), Chess.com,
01.30.2019

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nf3 0-0 6. h3 e5 7. d5 Nh5 8. Nh2 Qe8 9. Be2 Nf4 10. Bf3 f5 11. g3 Nxb3 12. Bg2 fxe4 13. Be3 Nf4 14. gxf4 exf4 15. Bd4 f3 16. Bf1 Be5 17. Qd2 Bf5 18. 0-0-0 Nd7 19. Qe3 Nf6 20. Bxe5 Qxe5 21. c5 a6 22. Bc4 b5 23. cxb6 e.p. cxb6 24. Qxb6 Qf4+ 25. Qe3 Qxe3+ 26. fxe3 g5 27. Rdg1 g4 28. Nf1 h5 29. Ng3 Bg6 30. Kd2 Kg7 31. Bb3 Kh6 32. Bc2 Rae8 33. Ke1 Kg5 34. Kf2 h4 35. Nf1 g3+ 36. Nxc3 Ng4+ 37. Kf1 Nxe3+ 38. Kf2 Ng4+ 39. Kf1 hxc3 40. Rxc3 Kf4 41. Rhg1 Ne3+ 42. Kf2 Nxc2 43. Rg4+ Ke5 44. Rxc3 e3+ 45. Kg3 f2 46. Rf1 Nd4 47. Rg5+

Rf5 48. Rxf5+ Kxf5 49. Nd1 e2 50. Rxf2+ Kg6 51. Rxe2 Rxe2, White resigned.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E70)

GM Le Quang Liem (2714)
GM Daniel Naroditsky (2616)
PRO League Stage (7), Chess.com,
02.20.2019

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nge2 0-0 6. Ng3 a6 7. h4 h5 8. Bg5 Nc6 9. d5 Ne5 10. Qd2 c6 11. 0-0-0 cxd5 12. cxd5 b5 13. Kb1 b4 14. Nce2 Nc4 15. Qxb4 Nxb2 16. Rd2 Nxe4 17. Qxe4 Rb8 18. Nd4 Nc4+ 19. Nb3 Nxd2+ 20. Bxd2 a5 21. Qa4 Bd7 22. Qxa5 Qc8 23. Bd3 Ra8 24. Qb6 Ba4 25. Rc1 Qg4 26. Rc4 Qd1+ 27. Rc1 Qg4 28. Rc4 Qd1+ 29. Rc1 Qg4 30. Rc4 Qd7 31. Rc7 Qd8 32. Rb7 Qc8 33. Na5 Qg4 34. Be2 Qxh4 35. Qb4 Qf6 36. Qxa4 Rfc8 37. Bc4 Rab8 38. Kc2 Rxb7 39. Nxb7 Qb2+ 40. Kd3 Qd4+ 41. Ke2 Rxc4 42. Qa8+ Kh7 43. Na5 Rc2 44. Nb3 Qc4+ 45. Kd1 Rb2 46. Qc6 Qd3 47. Ne2 Rxa2 48. Nec1 Qf1+ 49. Be1 Rxf2 50. g3 Rg2 51. Nd2 Qf5 52. Qc4 Bh6 53. Qe4 Rxd2+ 54. Bxd2 Qxe4, White resigned.

KING'S INDIAN ATTACK (C00)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2615)
GM Hikaru Nakamura (2763)
PRO League Stage (10), Chess.com,
03.13.2019
Annotations by GM Boris Gelfand

Even though I didn't know Danya personally so well, in 2017 I helped prepare him online for the U.S. Championship and I highly enjoyed our training and our conversations. This summer, we were coaching together at a camp in Charlotte, where we had some wonderful dinners together with other members of the camp.

Every time we met, I was touched by his kindness, modesty, and love for chess. He was a big fan of blitz, and I regret that we didn't have a chance to play during my last visit to Charlotte. He will be dearly missed.

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. g3 d5 3. Bg2 e6 4. 0-0 Be7 5. d3 b6 6. Nbd2 Bb7 7. e4 c5 8. Re1

Danya is a big expert on the King's Indian, so I guess he felt comfortable playing it with reversed colors.

8. ... Nc6 9. Qe2

If White starts with 9. e5 Nd7 10. h4 Qc7 11. Qe2, Black will not hurry to castle short into White's attack: 11. ... b5 12. Nf1 (12. c4!?) 12. ... a5 13. N1h2 b4.

9. ... Qc7 10. Nf1 d4

Hikaru is also looking for a fight. Black could simplify a bit with 10. ... dxe4 11. dxe4 Nd4 12. Nxd4 cxd4 13. e5 Nd5, leading to a balanced game.

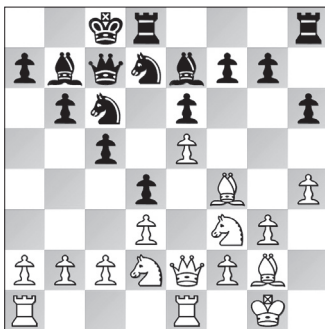
11. e5 Nd7

I would rather prefer 11. ... Nd5 12. h4 h6 13. N1d2, but it's a matter of taste.

12. Bf4 h6 13. h4 0-0-0!

Correct decision! 13. ... 0-0? 14. N1h2 will allow White to start a direct attack with 14. ... Rfe8 15. Ng4 (15. g4!?; 15. a3!?) 15. ... Bf8 16. Qd2 Kh7 17. c3.

14. N1d2



14. ... Nb4?

This is the only mistake in the game, but a serious one. Black had to look for counterplay with 14. ... g5! 15. hxg5 hxg5 16. Nxg5 Bxg5 17. Bxg5 Rdg8 18. Bf4 Ne7 (18. ... Kb8!?) with full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

15. Nc4 Nd5 16. Bd2

Now begins a direct attack against the king, and Danya conducts it almost flawlessly.

16. ... Nb8

Or 16. ... b5 17. Nd6+ Bxd6 18. exd6 Qxd6 19. c3 dxc3 20. bxc3 and Black's king is also weak.

17. a4 Ba6

Black is also in trouble after 17. ... Nc6 18. a5 b5 19. Nd6+ Bxd6 20. exd6 Rxd6 21. a6 Ba8 22. c3.

18. c3 dxc3 19. bxc3 Nc6 20. a5

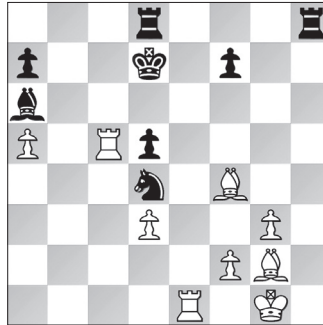
The engine claims this is an inaccuracy and prefers 20. Reb1 and 20. Na3! but I will not criticize Danya for playing in the most direct way.

20. ... b5 21. Nd6+ Bxd6 22. exd6 Qxd6 23. c4 Nc7

It doesn't help to play 23. ... Ndb4 because of 24. Bxb4 cxb4 25. cxb5 Bxb5 26. Rec1 Kb8 27. Qe3. The more stubborn defense was

23. ... bxc4 24. dxc4 Rhe8 25. Rad1 Qc7, but it's hard to find, especially in a rapid game.

24. cxb5 Nxb5 25. Rac1 g5 26. hxg5 hxg5 27. Bxg5 Nbd4 28. Nxd4 Nxd4 29. Qe4 Kd7 30. Bf4 Qd5 31. Qxd5+ exd5 32. Rxc5



Black could already resign here.

32. ... Ne6 33. Rxd5+ Ke7 34. Bg5+ f6 35. Rxd8 Rxd8 36. Be3 Bxd3 37. Bxa7 Kf7 38. Bb6 Rd6 39. Rd1 Ke7 40. Bf1 Be4 41. Rxd6 Kxd6 42. a6 Ng5 43. f4 Nf3+ 44. Kf2 Nh2 45. Be2 f5 46. a7 Ng4+ 47. Ke1 Ba8 48. Bd3 Ke6 49. Kd2 Nf6 50. Bf2 Ne4+ 51. Ke3 Kd6 52. Bxe4 Bxe4 53. g4 Bc6 54. gxf5 Ke7 55. Bh4+ Kd6 56. Kd4 Bf3 57. f6 Ke6 58. Kc5 Bd5 59. f7 Kd7 60. Kxd5, Black resigned.

An impressive victory against one of the strongest players in the world.

LONDON SYSTEM, JOBAVA VARIATION (D00)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2683)

GM Isan Reynaldo Ortiz Suarez (2662)

U.S. Masters (7), Greensboro, 08.24.2019

Annotations by GM Veselin Topalov

Daniel's tragic death will have a strong impact in the chess world for sure. I shared time with him during the three occasions I visited Charlotte for their summer camps. He was very polite and educated, and the kids adored him. But he had bad luck.

Some people are just born "honest" and with "integrity," and from that moment on it does not matter what they do, they will *always* be honest and 100 percent right. Vladimir Kramnik is such a person. Daniel had a dispute with Kramnik, but as I understand it, from the very beginning it was an impossible dispute to win.

In 1928, Ilf and Petrov published the novel *The 12 Chairs*, featuring the character Ostap Bender. During one of his many adventures through the vast Soviet Union, Bender visits

the small town of Vasjuki, claiming he is a famous grandmaster. During a press conference, if I remember correctly, Bender proclaimed, "The blond guy will always play better than the brunette and no amount of training can change that" (my translation). With Kramnik we have the same situation: No matter what he says, he is right. Except that Kramnik is not blond.

1. d4 d5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Bf4 e6 4. Nb5 Na6 5. e3 Be7 6. Nf3 0-0 7. a3

7. h3 gives the bishop on f4 a place to hide after a future ... Nf6-h5, while 7. Be2 makes sense as well. But Daniel has a different plan.

7. ... Nh5 8. Be5!



Bay Area International, 2019

I remember as a kid reading the books of Botvinnik, who said in a line in the Exchange Slav that Black's move ... Nf6-h5 should be met by Bf4-e5.

8. ... f6 9. Bg3 c5?



10. c4!

Suddenly White already has a serious advantage. At first glance it looks like Black did nothing wrong; he developed his pieces and went for the dark-squared bishop. But the knight on a6 is misplaced and the pawn structure, especially the pawn on e6, will be weak.

10. ... g6 11. Bd3 cxd4 12. exd4 Nb8

Too slow. It would have been better to wait for White to castle, exchange on g3, and put the knight on c7.

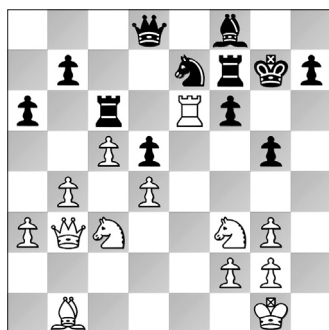
13. 0-0 Nc6 14. Re1 Nxd3 15. hxd3 Rf7 16. Nc3 Bf8 17. b4 Ne7 18. Qb3 Kg7 19. Re2

White has a big advantage and many good moves. Daniel prepares a typical Exchange sacrifice on e6, a strike that will completely destroy the black pawn structure.

19. ... Bd7 20. Rae1 Rc8

What I like about this game is that it shows how playing “normal” moves does not save one from trouble. Black didn’t make any incredible mistake, and still he is objectively lost.

21. c5 g5 22. Rxe6! Bxe6 23. Rxe6 a6 24. Bb1 Rc6



25. Rxe7!

White did not need to do that, but it is a very elegant way to finish. Personally, the Exchange sacrifice is my trademark, and that's why I chose this game.

25. ... Qxe7 26. Nxd5 Qe6 27. Qd3 Kh8 28. Ne3 Rc8 29. d5 Qd7 30. d6

Full domination.

30. ... Bxd6 31. cxd6 Rc1+ 32. Kh2 Rxb1
33. Qxb1 Qxd6 34. Nf5 Qe6 35. Qd3 h5
36. N3d4 Qe5 37. Nh6 Rf8 38. Ndf5 Qe6
39. Qf3 Qe8 40. Qxb7 Qg6 41. Qe7, Black
resigned.

Rest in peace, Daniel.

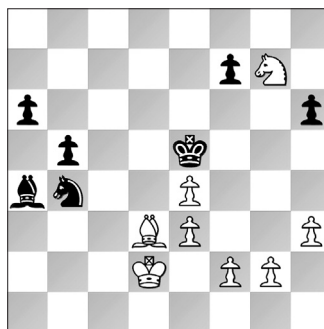
BULLET MONA LISA

DrNykterstein (3273)

Rebecca Harris (3126)

Rated bullet game, *Lichess.org*,
05.04.2020

Annotations by IM Danny Rensch



WHITE TO MOVE

Danya's brilliance and "practical wit" was perhaps best on display when he played bullet chess. He was second to almost nobody when the seconds were running down! Obviously there are so many games that show Danya's strength both over the board and online, but like so many of his online fans, I remember his late-night streams where he'd go on long winning streaks, swindling his way to one victory after another in the fastest time controls.

I'll never forget one game in particular, played on his anonymous (and infamous!) RebeccaHarris account on *Lichess.org*. After being outplayed by DrNykterstein (Magnus Carlsen) all game, Danya sensed an opportunity to pressure his opponent and shift the game down a path where White would have to find an impossible only-move to save himself.

39. f4+ Kd6!

I give this an exclamation point precisely BECAUSE it's bullet chess and in spite of the engine recommendation. Trying to hold with a move like 39. ... Kf6 would have been a sure way to get checked, tortured, and flagged. This shift at the right moment, ensuring there would be a pawn race where the bishop might be stronger ... it was perfect.

40. Nf5+ Kc5 41. Nxh6

You could almost argue that White should have kept the d3-bishop in a bullet game and not entered the passed pawn madness that would ensue. In situations like these, it's not how many pawns you have, but which ones will promote first. Astute analysts will note that White is still winning for the next few moves, but he's entering very dangerous territory from a practical perspective. Humans can assess context, and (with the eval bar off!) you might already sense the tides turning.

41. ... Nxd3 42. Kxd3 b4!

If I could manually control *Chess.com's* Game Review, I'd give this a "!!" (brilliant!!) symbol. Trying to hold onto the pawn with 42. ... Bb3 just invites White to start bringing the king over. You have to be ready to push the pawns and create the chance for a tempo move (... Ba4-b5+) to get going.

43. Nxf7 Bb5+ 44. Kc2 a5 45. h4 a4 46. Ne5 a3 47. h5 Ba4+ 48. Kb1 b3

The last few moves play themselves — almost literally given the speed of their input! — and once you see that White has to find one of two difficult paths to victory it's clear that Danya was already winning under the laws of bullet chess!

49. h6

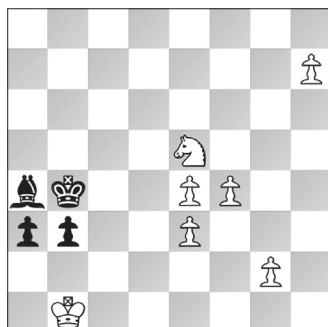
So far, so good.

The second path was 49. Nd3+ Kc4 and now only 50. Nb2+!!, which is so counter-intuitive during a time scramble that even bullet elite would struggle to find it. After 50. ... axb2 51. h6 White promotes in time to stop any checkmate threats.

For example: (a) 51. ... Kc3 52. h7 Bb5 53. h8=Q+ and White promotes with check just in time to stop ... Bb5-d3 mate and claim victory for himself.

Alternatively, if (b) 51. ... Bc6 52. Kxb2 (52. h7?? Bxe4+ 53. Kxb2 Bxh7 is a Black win, although anything might happen in a bullet scramble!) 52. ... Bxe4 53. g4 Bh7 54. f5 Kd3 (54. ... Kd5 55. e4+ Ke5 56. g5 Kxe4 (56. ... Bg8 57. g6) 57. Bf6 Bg8 58. f7 Bxf7 59. h7 and White wins) 55. Bg6 and the pawns are too much for Danya's bishop to handle.

49. ... Kb4 50. h7



50. ... Kc3!

Why is it so important to play this move first? One of the most underrated skills



Winter Classic, Saint Louis Chess Club, 2019

of the world's best time-scramblers is that they avoid forcing, obvious lines that elicit direct responses. You need to give your opponents the chance to go wrong! This brilliant bullet move won Danya the game.

Playing 50. ... a2+ would have led White down the path to finding the knight retreat (it's more obvious with check) needed to stop the pawns. Danya's move order instead puts White in the impossible position of finding a non-forcing knight retreat and also avoiding the game continuation with — spoiler alert — an underpromotion mate. Who could handle this kind of pressure?

Starting with 50. ... a2+?? fails to two moves: (a) 51. Ka1 really highlights the flaw in Black's plan after 51. ... Ka3 52. Nc4+ and White wins easily. If (b) 51. Kb2 a1=Q+ 52. Kxa1 Kc3 53. Nc4 and it's much easier to see the retreating knight sacrifice with the smoke cleared.

51. h8=Q??

This finally turns the tables and sends Black on his way to the win. By looking at the movement of momentum, it's clear that Danya's amazing ability to put his opponents under impossible pressure in time scrambles struck again!

It would have taken an astounding retreating-knight-move sacrifice to hold on for White. The path to victory begins with 51. Nc4!! (or 51. Nd3 with the same idea) with the key point being that the b2-square is guarded after 51. ... a2+ (if 51. ... Kxc4 52. h8=Q wins easily) 52. Ka1. There's no ... b3-b2+ or any underpromotion tricks.

51. ... a2+

Only now does the pawn push put in motion this most memorable finish.

52. Ka1 b2+ 53. Kxa2 Bb3+ 54. Ka3 b1=N mate.

A brilliant display of speed and talent. You can be sure that Danya had already seen to the end when he played 50. ... Kc3. But this was just another day at the office for Daniel Naroditsky, whose absence we will feel for the rest of our lives. Miss you always, Danya.

COLLE-ZUCKERTORT SYSTEM (D05)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2702)

GM Jeffery Xiong (2777)

U.S. Championship (2), St. Louis, 10.07.2021

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

This game is an excellent example of Naroditsky's style: a non-forcing opening line that keeps many pieces on the board, a good sense of piece placement, a deep understanding of dynamics, and a reasonable degree of accuracy in the technical part of the game.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. e3 c5 4. Nbd2 e6 5.

b3 b6 6. Bb2 Bd6 7. Bd3 cxd4 8. exd4

8. Nxd4 is a serious consideration, but Danya chose the classical path.

8. ... Ba6

Black tries to take the venom out.

9. c4 0-0 10. 0-0 Nbd7 11. Ne5 Rc8 12. f4

The most aggressive move among the variety of choices.

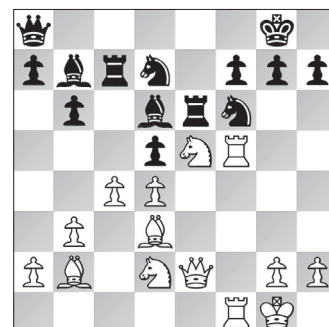
12. ... Bb7 13. Qe2 Rc7 14. Rae1 Qa8?

Too artificial. This is the very same way Chekhover went down in flames against Botvinnik in Moscow in 1935.

15. f5

The most natural response, although the engine prefers 15. a3! with the plan of g2-g4-g5.

15. ... exf5 16. Rxf5 Re8 17. Ref1 Re6?!



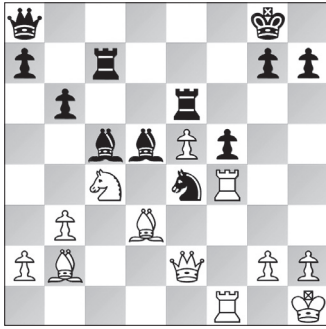
The queen needed to get back into the game. Black's fine after 17. ... Qd8.

18. cxd5!

This move kills the prospects of the b2-bishop, but gives White's knights and queen a lot of maneuvering power. This is what Naroditsky was best at: dynamic intuition, trading one advantage for another.

18. ... Bxd5 19. Ndc4 Nxe5 20. dxe5 Bc5+ 21. Kh1 Ne4

A curious fact: Naroditsky had run this critical position up to depth 50 on his computer back in 2021, with Stockfish 14.1, and was probably surprised to see that, despite Black's dubious maneuvers, they're still doing all right.

22. R5f4! f5!**23. b4!**

A brilliant move. If 23. Rxf5?? Ng3+ 24. hxg3 Bxg2+ 25. Qxg2 Rh6+ leads to checkmate, so White deflects the bishop and enables the c4-knight to land on e3 and target f5.

23. ... Bxb4??

The losing mistake. Black is still holding with 23. ... b5! 24. Bxe4 Bxe4 25. Nd2 Bxb4 26. Nxe4 fxe4 27. Qxb5 a5 28. Rxe4 h6. To my “old school” GM-eye, this looks like a healthy pawn up after 29. Re2, but then the engine comfortably plays 29. ... Qc6 and claims

equality. It does make sense: The e5-pawn is well-contained, and Black can create active play on the queenside.

24. Ne3?!

24. Rxf5 wins material: 24. ... Rh6 (24. ... Bc5 25. R5f4 and the knight is trapped; the tactic doesn't work because ... Re6-h6+ is answered by Rf4-h4) 25. Bxe4! Bxe4 26. R5f4 Bd5 27. Ne3 Be7 28. Qd3 Be6 29. Nf5 Bxf5 30. Qxf5 with e5-e6 coming up.

24. ... g6 25. a3 Be7 26. Nxd5 Qxd5 27. Qf3!

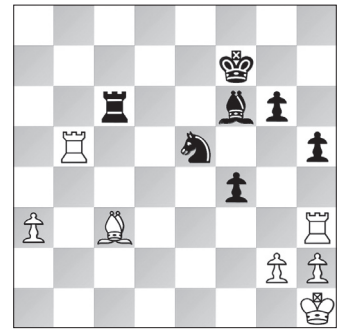
A key tactical nuance. Now White has the serious threat of taking on e4 followed by Rf4-f8+.

27. ... Nc3

If 27. ... Rc8 28. g4! and White's initiative will keep growing.

28. Bc4?!

Good enough: 28. Bc2!! Qxf3 29. R4xf3 Ne4 30. Bb3 is not that easy to find.

28. ... Rxc4 29. Qxd5 Nxd5 30. Rxc4 b5 31. Rc8+ Kf7 32. Rf3 Nb6 33. Rc7 Nc4 34. Bc3**Nxe5 35. Rh3 h5 36. Rxa7 f4 37. Rb7 Rc6 38. Rxb5 Bf6**

White is winning. Danya's conversion technique is nothing less than perfect from here onward.

39. Rb1 Ng4 40. Be1!

The only move.

40. ... Rc2 41. Rf3 g5 42. h3 Ne5 43. Rf2 Rc4 44. Ra2!

Rook behind the passed pawn.

44. ... f3 45. a4 Re4 46. Bg3 fxg2+ 47. Kxg2 Nd3 48. a5 h4 49. a6 hxg3 50. a7 Nf4+ 51. Kxg3 Re3+ 52. Kg4, Black resigned.

A classy finish.

RUY LOPEZ, STEINITZ DEFENSE DEFERRED(C72)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2871)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2702)

U.S. Championship (5), St. Louis, 10.11.2021

Annotations by GM Fabiano Caruana

This game from the 2021 U.S. Championship was the last time I faced Danya in classical chess. We both had a slow start in the tournament and were eager for a big fight.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 d6

Danya was known for his varied and often unusual opening repertoire. His preference in particular was for more strategic opening variations, with less emphasis on concrete preparation. He was one of the greatest experts in the King's Indian Defense, which also explains his choice of opening for this game — the Steinitz Deferred shares many similar themes with the KID.

5. 0-0 Bd7 6. c3 Nf6 7. Re1 g6 8. d4 Bg7

This is the major starting point for the modern theory of the Steinitz. After this game, I was inspired to pick the opening up myself,



After defeating Caruana, U.S. Championship, 2021

and played it in more than a dozen games, including in a match against MVL. We can see the similarities with Danya's beloved KID, as White often will push d4-d5 with a structure identical to that of the classical King's Indian variations.

9. Nbd2

Because of Danya's response to this move, it is now considered theoretically harmless. The modern approach to play for an opening advantage is 9. h3! 0-0 10. Bc2.

9. ... exd4!

Black can also castle first and capture next, in almost all cases transposing. Either way, this is an impressive hypermodern idea: Black completely cedes the center, and will instead attack the vulnerable white pawns from a distance, with the pride of Black's position — the bishop on g7 — bearing down on d4.

10. cxd4 0-0



Danya had four games from this position and won all of them!

11. h3

Some prophylaxis against future ... Bd7-g4 ideas.

11. ... Nb4!

Very timely! This knight is aiming for d3, and will temporarily distract White with this threat. The trade of one pair of pieces is also useful, as Black suffers a slight space disadvantage.

12. Bxd7

12. Bb3 allows 12. ... Nd3, when Black gains the advantage of the bishop pair.

12. ... Qxd7!

Now Black has ideas of both ... Nb4-d3 and ... c7-c5. It looks logical to uncover the bishop with 12. ... Nxd7, but it removes pressure on the e4-pawn, and after 13. Nb3! White is able to consolidate.

13. Qb3

Preventing ... Nb4-d3 and gaining a tempo on the knight.

Now 13. Nb3 can be met by 13. ... Qa4!. The queen cannot be removed from this square, and puts a lot of pressure on White's queenside. Next, Black can continue by attacking the e4-pawn with 14. ... Rfe8.

13. Nf1 is logical, to maneuver the knight to g3, and Black must act quickly: 13. ... c5! 14. a3 (14. d5? c4! and the knight invades on d3) 14. ... Nc6 15. d5 and now 15. ... Nd4! is a dynamic pawn sac. After 16. Nxd4 cxd4 17. Qxd4 Rfe8 the threat is 18. ... Nxe4. White is up a pawn, but Black's activity fully compensates for it. Play could go 18. Qd3 Qb5! 19. Qxb5 axb5 20. Ng3 Nxd5! and due to the pin on the e4-pawn, Black regains the pawn and is at least no worse.

13. ... a5!

It is very useful to get this move in before retreating, as Black will later gain space on the queenside with ... a5-a4. We will see in the game how important this is.

14. a3 Nc6 15. Nf1

Getting the knight around to g3 is logical, but perhaps it was more critical to maneuver the knight to c3 via b1.

15. ... a4! 16. Qd3 Na5!

The point of 13. ... a5 is making itself felt. The knight is ready to position itself on the beautiful b3-square, where it is outposted and also attacks d4.

17. Bg5

I was generally happy to exchange off bishop for knight, as this takes some pressure off my center.

17. ... Nb3

There is nothing wrong with this, but my engine prefers 17. ... b5 with ideas of ... Na5-c4. It is also possible to stay flexible with 17. ... h6!? and only later decide where to place Black's a5-knight.

18. Rad1 h6

Logically, Danya did not want to tolerate my bishop on g5 for too long.

19. Bxf6 Bxf6 20. N1d2

Attempting to simplify the position, although this trade does not harm Black. 20. Ne3!?, aiming for the d5-square, was perhaps a better choice.

20. ... Na5!?

Keeping it complicated! An interesting

choice, but it's fully in Danya's style to retain more tension in the position. 20. ... Nxd2 21. Qxd2 Bg7 was a perfectly fine choice. White has the center, but Black has a strong, unopposed bishop and a superior queenside structure. The position is roughly equal.

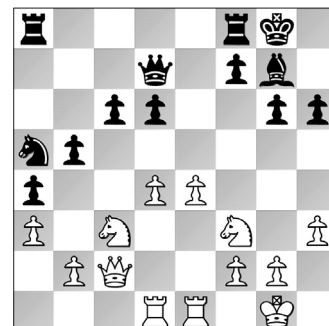
21. Nb1

Continuing to maneuver, but this gives Black time to expand and consolidate the bind on the queenside. It was a good time to act concretely with 21. e5!? dxe5 22. Ne4. After 22. ... Bg7 23. Nxe5 Qd5 I wouldn't be counting on any real advantage here, but I would probably have survived this game!

21. ... b5!

Black's knight looks to the c4-square.

22. Qc2 Bg7 23. Nc3 c6



Black has an excellent queenside structure. Although I was still not worse here, we will see how the weakness of b2 haunts me in the future.

24. e5!?

It is very logical to break free, as all my pieces were ideally placed and it's hard to imagine how to improve them. On the other hand, opening the position is generally beneficial to the side with the bishop.

24. ... Rfe8

This prevents any e5-e6 ideas I may have been aiming for.

25. Ne4 Nc4!

The knight is beautiful here.

26. exd6 Nxd6 27. Ne5

I remember being somewhat excited here, as my pieces are very active. Although that is true, Black is very solid and has excellent pieces as well. You can rarely break a healthy position with activity alone. Danya's understanding of the position was excellent — Black was never even slightly worse in this game.

27. ... Qf5!

Instructive! Black utilizes the pin on the e4-knight to provoke the weakening g2-g4.

28. g4

A must, as I have no way to tolerate this pin.

28. ... Qe6 29. Nc3?!

Not a big mistake, but certainly a step in the wrong direction. I was trying to keep the position complex, but my ambition led me astray.

29. Nxd6 Qxd6 30. Nxc6 wins a pawn. However, Black has enough compensation after a variety of quiet moves such as 30. ... Bf6!?, planning ... Kg8-g7 and eventually looking to take the c-file. The issue for White is that if the d-pawn ever advances, b2 becomes very weak. Black has full compensation, although objectively White should also not be risking much.

29. ... Rac8

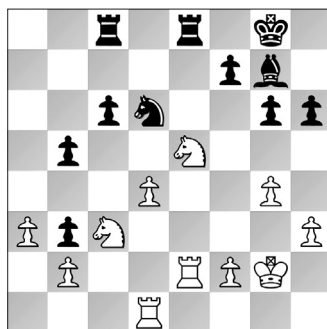
Defending c6 and preparing Black's next move.

30. Re2

I try to double on the e-file.

30. ... Qb3!

A trade of queens and the appearance of a pawn on b3 is strategically dangerous for White, but I didn't want to let the queen live on b3.

31. Qxb3 axb3 32. Kg2?!

This is the first really careless move in what was up to now a very well-played game. After this I will face a great deal of danger.

In hindsight, 32. f4! would have been safer, supporting the knight and preparing against ... Bg7xe5/... Nd6-c4 ideas.

32. ... c5!

An impressive, dynamic sacrifice! This must have been so tempting for a natural King's Indian player, opening the way for the monster on g7. Danya's eyes were set on the weakness of the b2-pawn.

33. dxc5 Nc4! 34. Nxc4 Rxe2

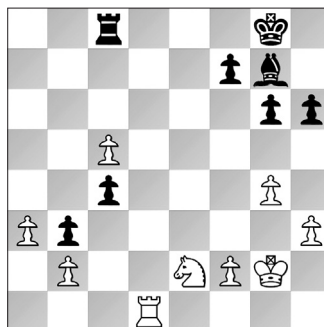
The pressure was very much on now. I could still save this game, but I'd have to calculate very well under time pressure.

35. Nxe2?

This is probably the decisive mistake.

35. Nd6! would hold: 35. ... Bxc3 36. Nxc8 Rxb2 (36. ... Bxb2 37. Rd3! eliminates the dangerous b3-pawn. After 37. ... Bxa3 38. Rxb3 Bxc5 39. Rxb5 Rxf2+ Black is up a pawn and White still has to be accurate to hold, but objectively White is fine) 37. c6! and Black has a tremendous passed pawn, but so does White!

Now 37. ... Be5 prevents c6-c7, but then White has 38. Ne7+ Kf8 39. Nd5! Rc2 40. Nb4!, the only move to hold! The wayward knight finally comes home: 40. ... Rc4 41. Rb1 b2 42. Nd3, and finally White will eliminate this dangerous pawn and save the game.

35. ... bxc4**36. Rc1?**

After this natural move all hope is lost.

White would have chances to hold, although perhaps not many, after 36. Nc3! Rxc5 (36. ... Bxc3 37. bxc3 is also a highly dangerous endgame, but objectively White can hold this. I'll spare the variations, but suffice to say White will have to play a series of very difficult only-moves to survive) 37. Rd8+! (37. Rc1 Kf8! is just slowly lost for White — without activity, the long-term weakness of b2 is decisive) 37. ... Kh7 38. Rb8! when the rook is ideally placed behind Black's b-pawn. After 38. ... Bxc3 39. bxc3 Re5! the rook comes to e1, and most likely Black will win. For reasons difficult to comprehend, the rook must be on e1 and not d1. A very complex endgame!

36. ... Bxb2 37. Rxc4 Bxa3

Now there is no way to eliminate Black's b-pawn.

38. c6 b2 39. Nc3 Bf8!

A nice maneuver. The bishop cleaned up

on the queenside and is now coming back home! On g7, the bishop will defend the passed b-pawn.

40. Nb1 Bg7

White has b2 blockaded, but the pawn can never be eliminated. Now Black's only task is to round up the c6-pawn.

41. Kf3 Kf8!

The king comes in to assist.

42. h4

White could activate the king with 42. Ke4 Ke7 43. Kd5, but it allows Black's rook to invade: 43. ... Rd8+! 44. Kc5 Rd1, winning a piece (or more).

42. ... Ke7 43. h5 Kd6

The c6-pawn is falling, and the rest is trivial. I tried to hang on as long as possible, but we both knew what would happen.

44. hxg6 fxg6 45. Rb4 Rxc6 46. Rb7 Be5**47. Nd2 Rc2 48. Ke3 Kc6 49. Rb3 Rc3+**

A final simplification. Without rooks, the knight is eternally tied to guarding the b2-pawn.

50. Rxc3+ Bxc3 51. Nb1 Bb4 52. f4 Kd5 53. Kd3 h5

The h-pawn will fatally distract White's king.

54. f5 hxg4 55. fxg6 Ke6 56. Ke4 g3 57. Kf3 Bd6, White resigned.

Seeing no way to continue, I resigned. A phenomenal game from Danya! Precise opening play, good strategic vision and accurate technique crowned this achievement.

FRENCH DEFENSE (C02)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2701)

IM Michael Bodek (2497)

U.S. Masters (9), Charlotte, 11.28.2021

Annotations by FM Peter Giannatos

1. Nf3 e6 2. e4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. d4

By transposition we get to a rare line of the Advance French. There was a time that I was playing this quite regularly online and in over-the-board blitz games, and it caught Danya's eye. We had some chats about the variation; soon he began playing it quite a bit online and, as we see here, OTB. He affectionately began calling this line the Giannatos Variation. While I was flattered, I knew that this was an idea of Aron Nimzovich and was more than 100 years old.

4. ... cxd4 5. Bd3

This is the main idea — a temporary sacrifice of the d4-pawn in order to accelerate development. The e5-pawn is a thorn in Black's position and hampers their development, so White seeks swift piece play on the kingside and in the center.

5. ... Nc6 6. 0-0 Qc7

In my view, the best lines for Black involve a quick ... f7-f6, challenging control of the e5-square. It can be played on this turn, or Black can play 6. ... a6 to prevent 7. Bb5 first.

7. Bf4 h6

Here Bodek goes for an ambitious, albeit risky, approach, seeking to expand on the kingside and to work around the e5-pawn.

8. Bg3 g5 9. Nbd2

A typical scheme in this line. White completes development and brings the knight to b3 to gang up on the d4-pawn.

9. ... Bg7 10. Nb3

Danya welcomes the capture of his e5-pawn, should Black like to open lines in front of his king!

10. ... Nge7

Technically 10. ... Nxe5!? is possible, but understandably Bodek doesn't want to open the floodgates: 11. Nbx d4 Nxf3+ (11. ... Ne7 is better but still risky) 12. Qxf3 e5 13. Nb5 Qd8 14. Rae1 is a disaster for Black.

11. Nfxd4

The correct capture, giving the white queen some action on the kingside.

11. ... Bxe5

Bodek wants to remain a pawn up. He understands that he is behind in development, but his position remains solid. He's looking for a fight.

12. Qh5!

A natural follow-up to White's 11th. This places a lot of pressure on the kingside and pins the f7-pawn, opening up doors against e6. It also helps connect the rooks, which can race to the center of the board.

12. ... Qb6

12. ... Bxg3 13. fxxg3 only accelerates the attack.

13. c3 Bd7 14. f4!

Danya was a natural attacker. These moves didn't have to be questioned, but the real idea will be seen next move.

14. ... gxf4



Or 14. ... Bxf4 15. Bf2 with similar ideas.

15. Bf2!!

The whole idea — now there are fatal discoveries in the air. Black must retreat, costing him time that he does not have.

15. ... Qc7

Not 15. ... Nxd4?? 16. Qxe5, while after 15. ... Bxd4?! 16. Nxd4 nothing has changed except Black has given away the dark squares.

16. Nb5 Qb8

Now Black cannot castle queenside, which he would have desperately wanted to do. White must now act with great force to justify his play.

17. Rae1

A natural good move.

17. ... Bg7?

The final mistake. Kicking the knight out with 17. ... a6 was by far the best option here, although Black is still under heavy pressure: 18. N5d4 Qd6 19. Nxc6 Nxc6 20. Bb6 prevents queenside castling and ensures White massive compensation.

18. Bc5

Another tempo; White threatens 19. Bd6.

18. ... Nc8 19. N3d4

Threatening 20. Nxe6, thanks to the pin on the f7-pawn. Black's position is crumbling.

19. ... Ne5 20. Rxf4

Danya's pieces are at their maximum, and Black can no longer provide resistance.

20. ... b6



21. Rxf7!!



L to R: Ramesh, Topalov, Giannatos, Polgar, and Naroditsky; Charlotte, 2024

The final blow, or, as we'd call it in Charlotte, a CDF. For now, I will not share what the acronym stands for. Let's just say it's similar to *coup de grâce*.



World Rapid and Blitz Championship, 2024



U.S. Masters, 2023

21. ... Nxf7 22. Nxe6

The floodgates have opened.

22. ... bxc5 23. Ng5+ Ne7 24. Qxf7+ Kd8 25. Qxe7+ Kc8 26. Qxc5+, Black resigned.

A really fantastic attacking game by Danya, and one true to his style. Might others begin to take up the Gianna... I mean, the Nimzovich Variation, in the future? Time will tell!

CARO-KANN DEFENSE (B10)

IM Brian Escalante Ramirez (2557)

GM Daniel Naroditsky (2700)

U.S. Masters (4), Charlotte, 11.25.2022

Annotations by WGM Katerina Nemcova

Danya had a way with words. That's what struck me the most when I first met him, and what kept astonishing me over the years. Whether he was trash-talking during a casual game, commenting on a broadcast, or just having a conversation in any of the languages he knew, his poetic sentences, witty remarks, and the speed at which he created them felt unreal.

Along with his brilliance in chess and language, Danya was incredibly kind and genuine. Once after I suffered a tough draw at the U.S. Championship a few of us hung out and went over it together. With Danya's commentary, it turned into one of the funniest analysis sessions I've ever experienced. I remember how the frustration of the game faded, and I was simply grateful to be surrounded by such amazing people in the chess world.

I chose to annotate this game because it captures the wide range of Danya's chess abilities — his patience, deep positional understanding, and sense of when to strike and when to sacrifice. It's one of those games that is not only instructive but a work of art.

Danya dedicated so much of his life to the chess world. He gave us beauty and inspiration and became one of the most influential voices in modern chess. He deserved so much more in return. Thank you for everything, Danya. We were lucky to have you.

1. e4 c6 2. Nf3 d5 3. exd5 cxd5 4. Ne5!?

An interesting idea in this opening. White usually responds with 4. d4 to control the center. However, this early knight jump avoids future pins with ... Bc8-g4 and complicates the development of Black's c8-bishop.

4. ... Nc6

4. ... f6?? fails tactically to 5. Qh5+ g6 6. Nxc6! hxc6 7. Qxh8.

5. d4 a6!?

Stopping any pins with Bf1-b5.

The main continuation here is 5. ... Nf6. Daniel was well familiar with this position, as he had it at least seven times with the white pieces against players such as Firouzja, Abdusattorov, and Vachier-Lagrave. For example, 6. Bb5 Bd7 7. Nxd7 Qxd7 8. c3 e6 9. 0-0 Bd6 10. Nd2 (Naroditsky – Abdusattorov, World Rapid Ch, New York 2024) and I think White is a little better with the bishop pair.

6. c4 e6 7. Nxc6 bxc6 8. Bd3 Bd6 9. 0-0 Ne7

A great square for the knight, as Daniel's plan is to challenge the center with ... f7-f6.

9. ... Nf6?! is not good here — the knight will be pinned, both bishops are restricted, and there's no counterplay in the center after 10. c5! Bc7 11. Bg5 0-0 12. Re1.

But 9. ... Qh4!? is interesting. White can meet the double attack with 10. f4 Qf6 11. Be3 Ne7 and a double-edged position. White has more space and better development but some issues with an awkward e3-bishop. Black will finish development and target the b-file and the central pawns.

10. c5 Bc7 11. Nd2 0-0 12. Nf3

12. f4! is probably more accurate, preventing central breaks and blunting the c7-bishop. The game will show how powerful such an attack can become.

12. ... Ng6

The cagey 12. ... f6!? might improve, as it stops White from taking a knight on g6 for another move.

13. Re1

Perhaps continuing development with 13. Bd2!? is better, and there's a concrete trick: if 13. ... f6? 14. Bxg6! hxc6 15. Nh4 and Black is in trouble. A sample line is 15. ... Qe8?! 16. Qc2 Kh7?! 17. f4! Bd7 18. Rae1.

13. ... f6! 14. Qc2

The immediate 14. Bxg6?! is a mistake, as after 14. ... hxc6 15. Nh4 Qe8 16. Qc2 Kh7 Black is better with the ... e6-e5 push coming and great diagonals for the bishops.

14. ... Qe8!?

Patience is a quality of a master. Daniel does not rush to break in the center but prepares patiently while improving his army first.

14. ... e5 creates complications, but there's no clear advantage after 15. dxe5 fxe5 16. Bxg6 hxc6 17. Nxe5 Bf5 18. Qc3 Be4 19. f3 Qf6! 20. Ng4 Qh4.

15. h4!?

It's easy to look at this position and think White is for choice, with the coming h4-h5 push and a potential kingside attack. But Black is actually totally fine. Let's see how Daniel turned things around.

15. ... Kh8!

Prophylaxis, avoiding any checks on h7.

16. Bd2 Qf7

Another patient move, inviting White to push the h-pawn. Now Black can double on the f-file and consider the ... e6-e5 push in the center.

17. h5?

Invitation accepted, but it's a mistake!

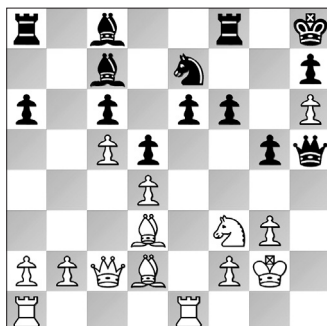
17. ... Ne7! 18. h6

18. Bxh7? isn't check, giving Black time for 18. ... Qxh5 19. Bd3 g5 20. Re2 Kg7! 21. Rae1 Rh8.

18. ... g5!

Now an avalanche of pawns rushes towards the white king. The rest of the game is a masterclass in growing an initiative and understanding pawn structures.

19. g3 Qh5! 20. Kg2?



Inviting the capture of the h6-pawn, but likely overlooking Daniel's different — and incredibly strong — tactical idea.

After 20. Nh2 Qxh6 21. b4 Bd7 White is still worse, but it requires some skill to convert the advantage. Here Black plans ... Qh6-g7 and the ... e6-e5 push.

20. ... e5!!

Brilliant! Black advances his e-pawn while creating threats, taking space, and freeing up his light-squared bishop. All the black pieces are suddenly invested in checkmating the white king. Of course 20. ... Qxh6?? loses to 21. Rh1.

21. Rh1 Qf7 22. Ne1

Played to avoid the powerful ... e5-e4 fork. 22. dxe5? only helps Black to open the f-file.

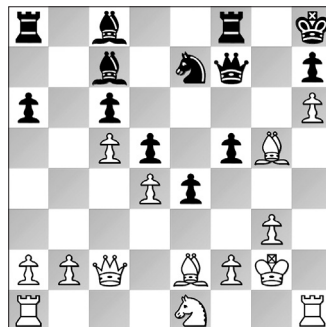
22. ... e4!

Played anyway!

23. Be2 f5!?

Time to roll! Giving up the g-pawn is a small price to pay for the central pawn wedge. The more conservative 23. ... Ng6 first also makes a lot of sense.

24. Bxg5?



White's boldness knows no bounds! Let's see how greed is punished.

24. ... f4! 25. Bh5

Taking another pawn is too much: 25. gxf4 Ng6! (no need to recapture immediately!) 26. Kg1 Bxf4 27. Bxf4 Nxf4 and with the open g-file the end is near.

25. ... Ng6 26. g4 f3+!

This pawn chain belongs in a museum with other works of art.

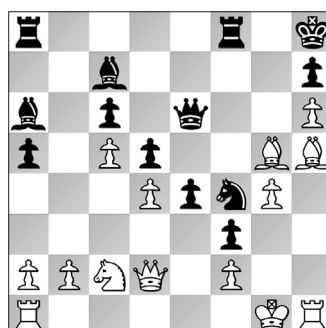
27. Kf1 a5!

Mixing a tactical mindset with positional play, shifting from the kingside to the queenside. It is time to improve the placement of pieces, especially the light-squared bishop. The a6-f1 diagonal looks perfect.

28. Qd2 Ba6+ 29. Kg1 Qe6!

Another quiet hammer blow, removing the queen from a pin to target the g4-pawn and freeing the g6-knight to attack.

30. Nc2 Nf4!



Everything is in place for the invasion.

31. Bxf4

If White doesn't take the knight, it becomes an attacking force: 31. Ne3 Ne2+! 32. Kf1 Rg8! (a powerful intermediate move to control the g-file) 33. Bh4 Ng3+! 34. Kg1 Nxf5! and Black wins.

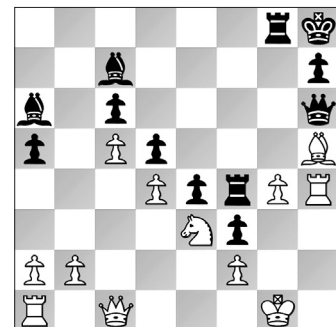
31. ... Rxf4! 32. Ne3 Rg8!

Such piece harmony! Daniel makes attacking chess look effortless.

33. Rh4 Qxh6

Now there are dangerous pins on the h5-bishop and the e3-knight.

34. Qc1



34. ... Rfxg4+!

Take a moment to savor this position — the coordination of Black's army is a wonder.

35. Nxg4

Mate is unstoppable after 35. Rxf4 Rxf4+ (35. ... Qxh5 works too) 36. Nxg4 Qxh5.

35. ... Rxf4+! 36. Rxf4

36. Bxg4 Qxh4 is mate in 3.

36. ... Qxh5!

Black is down two Exchanges, but the bishops rule the board. Mate on h2 is the current threat.

37. Rg3

If 37. Rf4 Qg5+ 38. Kh1 Qg2 mate.

37. ... Bxg3 38. fxg3 f2+!

The final touch of this masterpiece. Now the queen and bishop collaborate to lure the king into mate.

39. Kxf2 Qh2+ 40. Ke3

Or 40. Ke1 Qe2 mate.

40. ... Qxg3+, White resigned.

For the record: 41. Kd2 Qd3+ 42. Ke1 Qe2 mate.



U.S. Open, 2025

QUEEN'S PAWN OPENING (A41)

penguingm1 (2979)

DanielNaroditsky (3124)

Rated blitz, Chess.com, 01.24.2023

Annotations by GM Andrew Tang

Like so many in the chess community, I knew Danya as a great man, player, commentator, and educator. On a more personal level, I knew Danya as someone who was genuine, had a great sense of empathy, and treasured chess more than anyone else I know.

There really aren't many people who love speed chess more than I do, but Danya was always ready to go for a bullet marathon. When I was a typical college student with a degenerate sleep schedule, Danya would still outlast me until I had to beg him to stop playing so I could get enough sleep to make it through class the next day (our lifetime record is as even as it gets, with almost 5,000 games on *Chess.com* alone). He loved online chess and speed chess so much that I thought it was fitting to honor him with

one out of his many memorable attacking blitz wins against me.

1. d4 d6 2. c4 Nd7 3. Nc3 e5 4. e4 g6 5. Nge2 Bg7 6. f3

Danya loved attacking with the King's Indian Defense, and I would stubbornly defend with my Sämisch. We probably played over a thousand games in Sämisch structures over the years.

6. ... Ne7 7. Bg5

A typical developing plan, hoping to provoke ... h7-h6 and then gain a tempo attacking the pawn with Qd1-d2.

7. h4 is another common idea when Black chooses setups with the knight on e7. Since there's one less defender on h5, a quick h4-h5 makes a lot of sense. And if 7. ... h5 the g5-square is weakened. White has a nice position after 8. Bg5.

7. ... h6 8. Be3 0-0 9. Qd2 Kh7 10. d5 f5

11. h3 a5

It was probably preferable to keep the option of ... b7-b5 alive, aiming to thwart what I was cooking up with 11. h3. After 11. ... a6 12. g4?! b5! White's center is too loose as it is attacked from all angles.

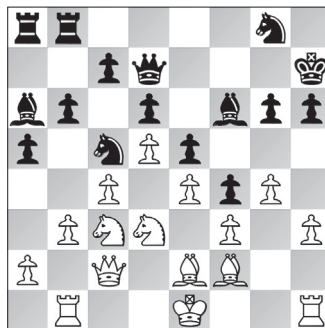
12. g4!

With ... b7-b5 nearly ruled out, I can get away with this, threatening to bust open the kingside and attack.

12. ... f4 13. Bf2 b6

The opening has been a success for me — I can shut down Black's kingside ideas by playing h3-h4, and with my space advantage in the center and on the queenside I should be the only one who can play for a win.

14. Nc1 Nc5 15. Nd3 Ba6 16. b3 Qd7 17. Rb1 Rfb8 18. Qc2 Ng8 19. Be2 Bf6



Both players have been reasonably rearranging their pieces, but now I play a careless move that lets Danya take the initiative and never let it go.

20. 0-0?

Too focused on beginning action on the queenside, I relax my control over the h4-square.

20. ... Qe7!

I had no idea I was already worse! Danya takes impressive control of the kingside.

21. Kg2 Bh4 22. Bg1

It was probably time to grovel and defend with 22. Rh1 Bxf2 23. Nxf2 Qh4 24. Rbg1 when I am very passive but reasonably solid.

22. ... Bg3

Inching his way into my position. With the queen coming to h4, dislodging this bishop is actually a very difficult task.

23. Nf2 h5 24. a3

Trying to begin some counterplay on the queenside, but Danya does not care.

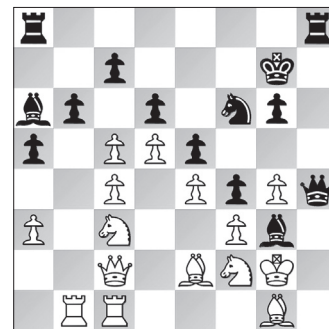
24. ... hxg4 25. hxg4 Qh4 26. b4 Kg7!!

An incredibly strong idea in a blitz game, played in 13 seconds. While the engine thinks 26. ... Nd7 is equally strong, 27. c5 allows me to regain some counterplay; for example: 27. ... Bxe2 28. Qxe2 Kg7 29. c6 Ndf6 30. Nb5 and at least I have prospects on the queenside.

27. bxc5 Nf6! 28. Rfc1

After 28. cxd6? Rh8! there is no good defense to ... Bg3xf2 followed by mate.

28. ... Rh8



29. Kf1?

This is a serious blunder, trying to get my king to safety. 29. Ncd1 was necessary, when my kingside is barely hanging together, but my pieces have almost no moves. Black is still better despite being down a piece.

29. ... Bxf2!

As usual, Danya does not miss tactical opportunities.

30. Bxf2 Qh1+ 31. Bg1 Rh2!

The idea is ... Qh2-g2+ followed by ... Qg2xg1+, when my position is falling apart.

32. Qd3 Rah8!

Clinical. Danya gains a tempo by threatening ... Qh1xg1+, followed by ... Rh2-h1+ and ... Rh8-h2 mate.

33. Ke1 Qxg1+ 34. Kd2 Qxc5 35. Na4 Qf2 36. Rf1 Qg3 37. Rg1 Rg2 38. Rxc2 Qxg2 39. Nxb6

Desperation — might as well try something in a blitz game.

39. ... cxb6 40. Rxb6 Bc8 41. Rxd6 Nxg4 42. c5

Or 42. fxg4 Bxg4 followed by ... f4-f3.

42. ... Rh1! 43. Rb6 Rd1+!, White lost on time.

With ... Ng4-f2+ coming, Danya finds the nicest way to cap off a typically impressive performance. Even in blitz, Danya was capable of producing inspired attacks that the rest of us would be proud to have played in a classical game.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, CLOSED VARIATION (B23)

DanielNaroditsky (3107)

Dr_Tyger (3068)

Rated blitz, Chess.com, 10.18.2025

Seen on his penultimate stream, this bril-

liant attacking effort is one of Naroditsky's final games.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. Nc3 Nd4 5. e5 Nxb5 6. Nxb5 Nd5 7. Qe2 a6 8. Nd6+ exd6 9. exd6+ Be7 10. d4 cxd4 11. Bg5 f6 12. Bd2 0-0 13. Qc4 Rf7 14. Qxd5 Bf8 15. 0-0-0 Qb6 16. Bf4 Qc6 17. Qxd4 b6 18. Rhe1 Bb7 19. Re3 Qb5 20. Rb3 Qf5 21. Rxb6 Bc6 22. Rxc6 dxc6 23. Qc4 c5 24. Be3 Rd8 25. Bxc5 g6 26. b4 Kg7 27. Rd5 Qd7 28. Nd4 Kg8 29. Kb2 f5 30. f4 Bg7 31. Re5 Kf8 32. Ne6+ Kg8 33. Nxd8, Black resigned. ♠

Daniel Naroditsky was a Chess Life columnist from 2014-2020. Check out his columns in our Digital Archive at uschess.org.



PHOTO: COURTESY CCC / KELLY CENTRELLI

U.S. Masters, 2024