

2022 CANDIDATES TOURNAMENT

JUNE 19, 2022 ■ ROUND 03

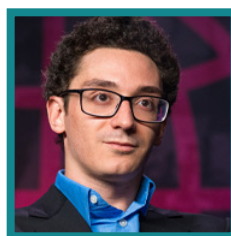


$\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$

Ding Liren



Richard Rapport

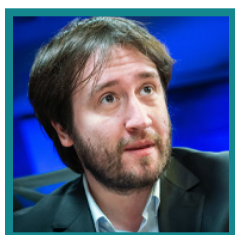


Fabiano Caruana

$\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$



Jan-Krzysztof Duda

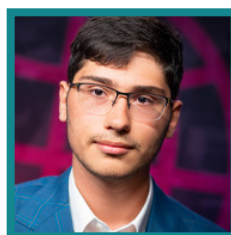


$\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$

Teimour Radjabov



Ian Nepomniachtchi



Alireza Firouzja

$\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$



Hikaru Nakamura

Current Standings

2022 FIDE CANDIDATES

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	Fabiano Caruana	2783	*	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$			1			2.0/3
2	Ian Nepomniachtchi	2766	$\frac{1}{2}$	*					$\frac{1}{2}$	1	2.0/3
3	Jan-Krzysztof Duda	2750	$\frac{1}{2}$		*		$\frac{1}{2}$			$\frac{1}{2}$	1.5/3
4	Alireza Firouzja	2793				*	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$		1.5/3
5	Richard Rapport	2764			$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	*			$\frac{1}{2}$	1.5/3
6	Hikaru Nakamura	2760	0			$\frac{1}{2}$		*	1		1.5/3
7	Teimour Radjabov	2753		$\frac{1}{2}$		$\frac{1}{2}$		0	*		1.0/3
8	Ding Liren	2806		0	$\frac{1}{2}$		$\frac{1}{2}$			*	1.0/3

GRÜNfeld DEFENSE, EXCHANGE VARIATION (D87)

GM Ding Liren (2806)

GM Richard Rapport (2764)

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.1),
06.19.2022

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard

Rapport was a bit worse in the Grünfeld, but a blunder put him on collision course with the full force of the world number two. He took the proper decision to mess things up, correctly assuming that the Chinese would struggle more with tactical play than technical conversion, even though he failed at both. This has to be a disappointment for Ding fans. It was a perfect chance for the Chinese number one to return to 50%. If we are honest, however, it showed the limitations in his play that have existed for quite some time.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. e4 Nxc3 6. bxc3 Bg7 7. Bc4 c5 8. Ne2 Nc6 9. Be3 0-0 10. 0-0 b6 11. Rc1 Bb7 12. Bb5 Rc8 13. Qd2 cxd4 14. cxd4 Qd6!?

The common move here is 14. ... e6, which is close to equalizing, as things usually go in the opening. One game went 15. Rfd1 Na5 16. Rxc8 Qxc8 17. Bg5 Qc7 18. d5 exd5 19. exd5 Qc5 20. Qd3± Qd6?! (Giri – Ding, Internet, 2020) and now 21. h4!± h5?! 22. Ng3!+-.

15. Rfd1

Ding is clearly out of preparation and thought for almost 15 minutes.

15. ... Qb4N

What is surprising is that Rapport also seems to be out of preparation, also spending 15 minutes. It seems that both players were surprised by the opponent's choices.

The only game in my database continued 15. ... Rfd8 in an internet game between Sjogirov – Mischuk, played in 2021. White can now either play the AZ move 16. h4!±, or 16. d5! Ne5 17. Nd4±, which looks rather pleasant.

15. ... Na5!? 16. Qd3 Rxc1 17. Rxc1 Rc8 is the engine recommendation. Black is close to equality. But it is a sad way to play and not without risk either.

16. Qd3! e6 17. h4!

The standard AlphaZero plan of putting the pawn on h6 and squeezing Black.

17. ... Rfd8?

A simple blunder. Rapport misses Ding's next move. Better was 17. ... h5!±.



18. Bg5!

Ding had seen it and played this quickly. Rapport now realized he had messed up and found a way to change the cause of the game.

18. ... Nxd4!?

An Exchange sacrifice out of desperation. After 18. ... Rd7? 19. d5+-, White wins on the spot.

And after 18. ... Rd6? 19. Rb1 Qa5 20. Bd2 Qxa2 21. Ra1 the queen is trapped.

18. ... f6 is the computer's choice, but it also looks horrible. The downside compared to the game is the absence of complications after 19. Bf4 Ne5!? (a move it is not obvious Rapport seriously considered) 20. Rxc8 Bxc8 21. Qb1! Qxb1 22. Rxb1± and Black is about to make more concessions, with the c-file already lost.

19. Bxd8 Rxd8 20. h5?!

I honestly do not understand the purpose of this move, besides it looking “normal.” The issue is that the h5-h6 idea is not really happening with the absence of a white dark-

squared bishop. And exchanging pawns with h5xg6 later makes no sense whatsoever. Black is likely to have to rely on passive defense, where getting rid of the potentially weak h-pawn is a relief.

The right move was 20. Ba6!. Black has to take, or White plays 21. Qe3, now the bishop is no longer hanging. After 20. ... Bxa6 21. Qxa6 White has reduced the counterplay immensely. And after 21. ... Qb2 22. Kf1±, the knight on d4 is about to get exchanged off as well.

It is not totally winning, but the tipping point is close. Whether White is objectively winning, or Black would draw with immaculate defense, is hard to tell. My money is on the position being winning.

20. ... Be5



21. a4!?

21. Ba6 was strong again. It is important to have a look at this endgame: 21. ... Nxe2+ 22. Qxe2 Rxd1+ 23. Rxd1 Qxe4 24. Qxe4 Bxe4 25. Re1 f5 and here the point is that (a) 26. f3 Bg3 or 26. ... Bd4+ does not achieve anything.

The right path begins with (b) 26. Bc4!, not allowing the black bishop to go to d5.





After 26. ... Kf7 27. f3 Bg3 28. Re2 Bd5 29. Bxd5 exd5 30. Rc2 Ke6 31. Rc8 gxh5 32. Rg8 Bd6 33. Rg7 a5 34. Kf1± this endgame is very close to winning, if not just winning. With an extra h-pawn for White, things would have looked rosy.

21. ... Kg7?!

This should have lost by force, but the strategy of relying on complications to provide an escape saves Rapport...

21. ... Nxe2+ 22. Qxe2 Rxd1+ 23. Rxd1 Kg7± was the best try, objectively, but White looks good.

22. Kf1!

An important move, compared to the long variation at move 21. If Black takes on e2, d1 and e4, White would now have Rd1-e1 followed by f2-f3, when the king is out of the checks and White wins a piece.

22. ... Nxe2!? 23. Qxe2?

Ding is the world number two player and, on principle, I had to include him in the pre-tournament predictions. But thinking a bit further, I don't think he ever overcame his two main weaknesses: poor time allocation and tactical misses.

In the 2018 Berlin Candidates he was one of the leaders with lots of draws and a single win. But more wins were there for the taking. (See the game Ding – Grischuk for an outrageous example of ruining an advantage.) Spending too much time in situations where decisions had to be taken, he did not see the relatively simple tactical wins he was given.

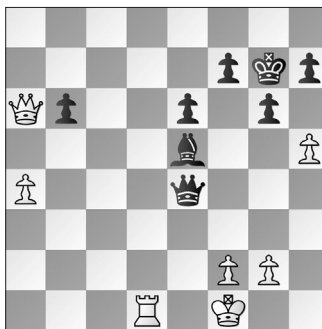
The same happens here. Ding spent 52

seconds on this move, believing Rapport and missing the win. 23. Qxd8 won. I think that Ding just saw 23. ... Nxc1 and rejected the option. (He was not scared of 23. ... Qxe4 24. Bxe2 Qxg2+ 25. Ke1 Qh1+ 26. Kd2 Bf4+ 27. Kc3, which does not give Black enough counterplay.) He missed a two-mover, as the win was clear after after 24. Qg5!!.

23. ... Rxd1+ 24. Rxd1 a6

As Black cannot take on e4 directly, he has to give up the a-pawn.

25. Bxa6 Bxa6 26. Qxa6 Qxe4



This endgame is close to balanced. It is all about the placement of the black bishop. If it manages to get to f6 without suffering problems with the b-pawn, Black will just have to avoid stupidity to hold. But if he does not get his pieces organized, he could lose. Ding thus had a terribly difficult win, one that is hard to understand and even more difficult to find with a ticking clock.

27. Re1?

Correct was 27. Qe2! forcing the black queen

to a worse square. After 27. ... Qf5 28. hxc6 hxc6 29. Kg1! White is threatening Qe2-e3. And after 29. ... Bc3 30. Qd3 he is seeking a rook vs. bishop endgame, which would win. After the queens are off, the white rook will seek to get to b7, when the bishop will be stuck on a5 and Black will face zugzwang. And after 30. ... Qe5 31. g3 Bb2 32. Qc4 Bc3 33. Rd7 Qf6 34. Qf4, there is no avoiding the endgame.

27. ... Qd4 28. Qe2 Bf6 29. hxc6?!

This makes life easier for Black. But it was holdable anyway. 29. Qe4!? would not allow Black to put the queen on d2: 29. ... Qc5±.

29. ... hxc6± 30. Qe4 Qd2 31. Re2 Qd1+ 32. Re1 Qd2 33. g3 Bd4 34. Qe2 Qc3 35. Rd1 Qc6 36. Qg4 e5 37. Rxd4 exd4 38. Qxd4+ Kg8 39. Qd8+ Kg7 40. Qd4+ Kg8, draw.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B90)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2783)

GM Jan-Krzysztof Duda (2750)

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.2), 06.19.2022

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard

Caruana played the way he always does and got nowhere. This is a success for Duda.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. f3 e5 7. Nb3 Be6 8. Be3 h5

This variation is Black's main choice after two decades of investigation here.

9. Qd2 Nbd7 10. 0-0-0 Be7 11. Kb1 b5 12. Nd5 Bxd5 13. exd5 Nb6 14. Bxb6 Qxb6 15. Na5 Rc8 16. Nc6

Caruana spent 20 minutes deciding which path to choose, before landing on the bloodless, toothless, flat continuation. Sorry guys. Not much to see here...

Black generally does well after 16. c4 bxc4 17. Nxc4 Qa7 18. Na5 Rc5 19. Nc6 Qd7 and now either 20. Bd3 or 20. Be2, but the engines still offer White a slight pull and, in practice, better than even chances.

Caruana, caught in the opening, chose to stay safe and hope for random chances. While Duda is one of the weaker players in the tournament, he was not weak enough to cause problems for himself. Only Radjabov would do so in this field.

16. ... Nxd5 17. Nxe7 Nxe7 18. Qxd6 Qxd6



19. Rxd6 Nc6 20. Rd2 Ke7 21. Bd3 Rhd8

Black is totally fine. The players did their duty, searching and searching, but were not able to find anything else than a flat ending.

22. Rhd1 g6 23. c3 Na5 24. Re2 Kf6 25. h4 Nb7 26. Red2 Nc5 27. Bf1 Rxd2 28. Rxd2 Ke6 29. c4 b4 30. Kc2 a5 31. b3 Nb7 32. g3 Rd8 33. Rxd8 Nxd8 34. Kd3 Nb7 35. Ke3 Nc5 36. f4 a4 37. bxa4 Nxa4 38. c5 exf4+ 39. gxf4 Nxc5 40. Kd4 Kd6 41. Kc4 Ne6 42. f5 gxf5 43. Be2 Nf4 44. Bf3 Ng6 45. Bxh5 Nxh4 46. Bxf7 f4 47. Bh5 f3 48. Bxf3 Nxf3 49. Kxb4 Nd4 50. a3 Nc2+ 51. Kb3 Nxa3, draw.

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E36)

GM Alireza Firouzja (2793)

GM Hikaru Nakamura (2760)

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.4),
06.19.2022

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard

Nakamura has played this variation many times and so far held all the games against his colleagues. It is the most solid corner of his repertoire. Firouzja comes with an interesting idea, but does not manage to rattle Nakamura, who finds all the right moves. But low on time in the endgame, Black gets into some problems, which he

had to solve with great accuracy to draw the game. Definitely the best effort of the day.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2 0-0 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. Qxc3 d5 7. Bg5 dxc4 8. Qxc4 b6 9. Rd1 Ba6 10. Qa4 h6 11. Bh4 Qe7 12. Nf3 Rd8 13. Qc2

A rare move, the start of Firouzja's preparation. Nakamura thought for a while and chose the most principled continuation.

13. ... c5 14. e4N

This logical move is the real novelty.

14. ... Bxf1 15. Rxf1 g5!



Black has to win the piece.

16. Nxg5

And White has to give it.

16. ... hxg5 17. Bxg5 Nc6 18. Qc1 Rxd4

You could imagine that Firouzja was hoping for lines such as 18. ... e5!? 19. d5!? (19. Bh4 Rd6 and White has to seek the perpetual check) 19. ... Nd4 20. Rd3 Rd6 21. Rg3 Kf8 22. Bh4 and Black would have to find 22. ... Qb7! 23. Qh6+ Ke8 24. Bxf6 Qa6! to make the draw.

One continuation is 25. Rg8+ Kd7 26. Qh5 Rxf6 27. Rxa8 Rf4 28. Qh3+ Nf5 29. f3 Qd3 and I believe Black has the necessary counterplay.

19. Rxd4 Nxd4 20. Qf4



20. ... Nc2+

Black had the kind of tactical solutions that players would worry about trying when other options are available. When you are playing against Stockfish — Firouzja was still making moves instantly — you will not feel certain that lines like the following work.

Although here, as things turn out, it does: 20. ... Qd7! 21. Bxf6 Nc2+ 22. Ke2 Qb5+ 23. Kd2 Qxf1 24. Qg5+ Kf8 25. Qg7+ Ke8 26. Qg8+ Kd7 27. Qxf7+ Kc6 28. Qxe6+ Kb5 and White should look for a draw soon.

21. Kd1 Qd7+ 22. Kxc2 Qa4+ 23. Kb1 Qxe4+ 24. Qxe4 Nxe4 25. Bf4



25. ... Nf6

The endgame is objectively drawn, although having the bishop and the distant passed pawn gives White a right to push. As we shall see, Black has to defend, and a few

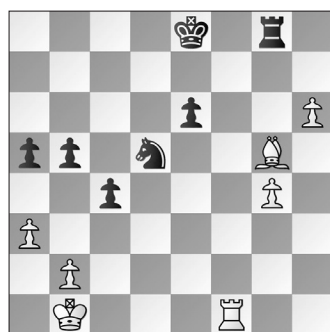
inaccuracies brought him into “the zone of one mistake,” where he had to show accurate defense to avoid losing.

25. ... c4! was more accurate. Black will have to have a more difficult defense now.

26. h4 Nd5 27. Bd2 f5 28. g3 Kf7 29. f3 Rh8 30. Bg5 c4

More accurate was 30. ... e5! 31. g4 f4!.

31. g4!± b5 32. Rd1 fxg4 33. fxg4 a5 34. h5 Rg8 35. Rf1+ Ke8 36. h6



The engine goes off the charts here. White is 0.93 better at depth 45, for example. This does not mean he is winning, but that Black is almost losing. Here the “almost” becomes the final conclusion. Nakamura finds the only moves and makes the draw. A great achievement by the streaming star.

36. ... Rf8!! 37. Rxf8+

Other options also looks tempting, but Black holds after something like 37. Rh1 Rg8 38. Bc1 Kf7 39. Rf1+ Kg6 40. Re1 Re8 41. Re5 Re7± and it is unpleasant, but not enough.

37. ... Kxf8 38. Bd8 a4! 39. g5 Kf7 40. h7 Kg7 41. g6



41. ... c3!

Just in time. The pawn can be recaptured with check, otherwise Black would be lost.

42. bxc3

42. Bh4 e5! also draws. 43. Bg3 Nf4 and the draw is near.

42. ... Nxc3+ 43. Kc2 Nd5 44. Bg5 e5! 45. Kd2 Kh8!

45. ... Nf4? would lose to 46. Bf6+!.

46. Ke1

46. Ke2 Nf4+= with a draw. 47. Bxf4?? exf4

48. Kf3 b4 would of course lose.

46. ... b4!

Creating a passed pawn for counterplay. 46. ... e4? 47. Bc1 and White wins.

47. axb4 a3 48. Bc1 Nxb4 49. Kd2 Nd5 50. Bxa3 Nf4 51. Bb2 Nxg6 52. Bxe5+ Nxe5 53. Kc3 Kxh7, draw.

CATALAN OPENING (E04)

GM Teimour Radjabov (2753)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2766)

FIDE Candidates Tournament (3.3),
06.19.2022

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard

Radjabov is losing 18.9 rating points on this list so far. He has drawn all his white games and lost 4/6 of his black games. No wins since 2019. And a prediction of no wins in this tournament either. In this game he also forced a drawish position, and drew. Skip it.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5. Bg2 c5 6. 0-0 Nc6 7. dxc5 Qxd1 8. Rxd1 Bxc5 9. Nbd2 c3 10. bxc3 0-0 11. Nb3 Be7 12. Nfd4 Bd7 13. Nxc6 Bxc6 14. Bxc6 bxc6 15. Be3 Nd5 16. Bd4 c5 17. Nxc5 Bxc5 18. Bxc5 Rfc8 19. Bd4 Nxc3 20. Bxc3 Rxc3 21. Rac1 Ra3 22. Rc2 h5 23. Rd7 a6 24. Kg2 g6 25. e3 Kg7 26. Rcc7 Rf8 27. Rd6 Re8 28. Rdd7 Rf8 29. Rd6 Re8 30. Rdd7, draw.



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