

2020-21 Candidates Tournament

ROUND 11



RUY LOPEZ (C85)

GM Anish Giri (2776)

GM Ding Liren (2791)

2020-2021 Candidates Tournament,
Yekaterinburg, RUS (11.4), 04.23.2021

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard
for Chess Life Online

The Game of the Day is a strong practical performance from my favorite player in the field; the often underestimated Anish Giri. Although the game between Grischuk and MVL was also very interesting, I felt that this was right fit. After today's round, the two outsiders Nepomniachtchi and Giri are the only players that can compete for first. I don't think either of them will offer Carlsen a strong challenge for the title, but this is sports, and the winners are the winners. The pundits have to accept the ultimate verdict of the score table and forget all about their preconceived ideas.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. O-O Be7 6. Bxc6!



Obviously Giri does not believe that this will lead to an advantage. But against an opponent that is clearly wounded, it is much better to do whatever it takes to get a game. Caruana got nowhere in the deep theory of this line.

6. ... dxc6 7. d3 Bd6 8. Nbd2 Be6 9. Nb3!?

We are already entirely out of known theory, with only a few random games from unknown players. 9. b3 is the main line, preparing to play Nd2-c4. Everything is presumed equal, till otherwise is proved.

9. ... Qe7 10. Na5!

(diagram at top of next column)



The first move that could be out of preparation. Giri thought for seven minutes. The move is a bit annoying for Black. In order to defend the b-pawn, he will either have to castle queenside, saying he does not care about the knight being on a5, or he will have to play something he really does not want to play, like 10. ... Rb8.

10. ... O-O-O!? 11. Qe2

11. a3 Bg4 12. b4 was the most stereotypical way to play the position. I am not sure why Giri did not play like this. 12. ... Rhg8 and ... g7-g5 is the common riposte.

11. ... Bg4 12. c3!?

Definitely seeking a new way to play the position. The idea is to play b2-b4, a3-a4 and b4-b5.



12. ... c5?

Throughout this game Ding Liren commits the same mistake a number of times: advancing the pawns on the side of the board where he is weaker; aka. the queenside. The thinking behind this piece of classical abstractism is that when the pawns come closer to the opponent, he will need less time to attack them. Especially if his method of attack is with his pawns. You will both find this type of thinking in chess literature from 100 years ago, but also in the writing of more modern authorities like Mark Dvoretsky. As always, when we are giving sharing strategic concepts, they are meant to be a starting point for thinking and not close our minds to "exceptions". If there are strong reasons for playing a move that goes against these concepts,



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we should do it. But they do provide us with serious shortcuts to good ideas.

12. ... Nh5?! 13. h3! Bd7 14. Re1 is poor for Black. White's core play is Nc4 and Nfxe5, winning a pawn. If Black avoids it by playing ... b7-b5, White will strike hard in the center with d3-d4.

One way to avoid all of this was 12. ... Rhg8!. After 13. b4, Black can now play 13. ... Nh5! with the intention that

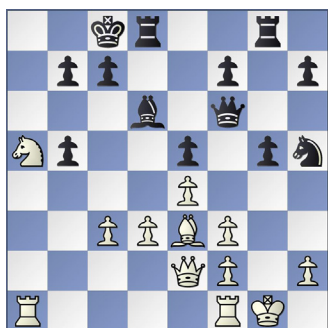
(a) 14. h3?! 14. ... Bd7 15. Nc4? g5! would be good for Black. ... g5-g4 is annoying; and the c3-pawn is hanging, so after Nxe5, the tactics are not favourable for White.

(b) 14. Qe3 Kb8 15. a4 g5 16. b5 with an unclear game may be best play. For example: 16. ... axb5 17. axb5 cxb5 18. Nxb7!? Kxb7 19. Qa7+ Kc8 20. Qa6+ Kd7 21. Qxb5+ Ke6



22. Nxe5! Bxe5 23. f3 Bh3 24. Ra6+ Rd6 25. Ra5 with a big mess.

(c) And after 14. a4 Qf6! 15. b5 axb5 16. axb5 Bxf3 17. gxf3 cxb5 18. Be3 g5



the game is entirely unclear. The computer gives long lines leading to equality. But in a practical game between humans, "unclear" is a much better assessment. Play could go: 19.

d4!? (19. Rfb1! looks better, after analysis. But this is not something we would be so certain about over the board.) 19. ... exd4 20. Nxb7 Bxb2+ 21. Kxh2 c6!! 22. e5! Qh6 23. Nd6+ Rxd6 24. Kg1 Nf4 25. Ra8+ Kb7 26. Bxf4 Rxa8 27. exd6 gxf4 28. Qe7+ Kb6 29. Qc7+ Kc5 30. cxd4+ Kd5 31. Rd1 Rg8+ 32. Kf1 Qh3+ 33. Ke2 Qe6+ 34. Kf1 Re8 and White is in big trouble.

13. a3?!

This is what we call the Shankland Rule: You should always try to see if you can make the ideas you really want to play work. And here it does: 13. b4! cxb4 14. Rb1 would have given White an initiative.



14. ... Nh5 15. h3 Bd7 (15. ... Bxf3 16. Qxf3 g6 17. cxb4 gives White an overwhelming advantage. Black has to play something like 17. ... c6, when his position looks very fragile, as after 17. ... Bxb4 18. Nxb7! Black's position is collapsing.) 16. cxb4 Rhg8 (Black can try to sacrifice a pawn with: 16. ... g5!? 17. Bxg5 f6 18. Be3 Rhg8, but after 19. Nh4 Nf4 20. Bxf4 exf4 21. Qf3 c6 22. Rfc1, his main achievement is losing a pawn. White is ready for d3-d4-d5.) and now

(see diagram at top of next column)

17. b5!! axb5 (17. ... Bxb5? 18. a4 with collapse.) 18. d4! exd4 (18. ... f6 19. dxe5 Bxe5 20. a4! also gives White a winning attack. We do not need to know anything more. But give a monkey



a space bar and he will press it, as long as it gives interesting moves. 20. ... Bc3 21. Qe3!? Bxa5 22. Qa7 Bc6 23. Qa8+ Kd7 24. Qxa5 b6 25. Qc3 Qc5 26. Qb3 bxa4 27. Qf7+ Kc8 28. Be3 Qa5 29. Bxb6 cxb6 30. Rfc1 and White wins.) 19. e5 Bc5 20. Bg5 f6 21. Qe4 c6 22. Rxb5.

13. ... c6 14. b4 Bc7 15. Nb3?!

More natural was 15. Nc4 when White is a little better. Fighting for the c5-square does not really work.

15. ... Nd7!?

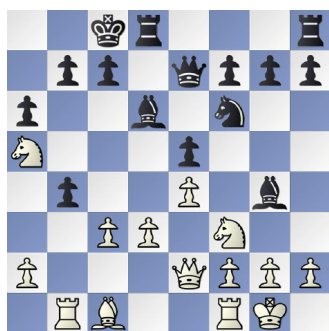
This move is not actually bad, but Ding Liren missed the chance to set a fantastic trap with 15.

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... Qd6!! Here 16. Rd1? would be the first idea of many, not fearing 16. ... c4. But instead Black has:



16. ... Nxe4!! 17. Qxe4 f5 18. Qe3 e4! and White can escape from immediate defeat with 19. Qxc5! exf3 20. Qxd6 Bxd6, where Black is only a little bit better, but it would be a sad affair for White, having to defend against those powerful bishops.

For this reason, best play may be: 16. Nxc5 Nd7 17. Nb3 Nb6!? (17. ... f5!? with a wild game is also feasible.) 18. Nc5 Nd7 with a repetition of moves.

16. h3 Bh5 17. Be3?

Giri continued fighting for the c5-square and is met with a strong reply. Only after playing his move did he realize that Black had ideas with ... c5-c4 and ... f7-f5.

17. Re1 or another quiet move was preferable, after which the position is quite level.

17. ... f5! 18. Bxc5!

White cannot play 18. exf5? or he will get destroyed on the light squares:



18. ... c4! 19. Nbd2 cxd3 20. Qxd3 Bxf3! 21.

gxf3 g6! and the kingside is opened in a way very unfavorable for White. He can still fight with 22. f6 but it is clear that his position is bad.

18. ... Qf7 19. Rab1 g5 20. exf5



20. ... g4??

Typical of Ding's play for this tournament, whose play has been unrecognizable in this tournament. Playing this awful move after just 3 minutes is unbelievable.

Natural was 20. ... Qxf5 21. Qe4 Qf6 with equality and a tiny bit more. It is hard to understand what Ding missed.

Note that 20. ... Qxf5 21. g4? Bxg4 would never be played. But just for clarity, we should say that after 22. hxxg4 Qxxg4+ 23. Kh1 e4! Black has a winning attack, i.e. 24. Qxe4 Qh3+ 25. Kg1 g4 26. Qf5 Rhg8 27. Ne5 with mate of some sorts could be a fitting finish.

21. Ng5 Qxf5 22. h4



According to Giri, Ding simply missed this.

22. ... b6?!

Ding spent half an hour playing this move, provoking Giri to sacrifice a piece. It just makes his position worse, and again it is a pawn move

on the side of the board where he is weaker.

While thinking on his move, Giri realized that he would be winning after 22. ... Nf6 23. Be7 g3 24. Qe1! and all of Black's pieces are hanging. White also dominates after 22. ... Rhe8 23. Ne4.

23. Ne4!?

A bold sacrifice, but probably a bit unnecessary.

Giri considered his opponent's move a trap, based on 23. d4? Nb8, when Black will accept the piece sacrifice under less clear circumstances. After 23. Be3, it is hard to see what Black was planning to do. For example, there is 23. ... Nf6 24. d4! b5 25. Nc5 with a better position, on top of that extra pawn.

23. ... bxc5?!

It is hard to decline a piece sacrifice when there is nothing to be happy about with your position. But still, this is what Black had to do.

After 23. ... g3 24. Qb2 gxf2+ 25. Rxf2 Qg4 26. Be7 (26. Na5?! Nb8! is not clear at all.) 26. ... Rde8 27. Bd6 White would have a real advantage, but Black would not be out of the race just yet.

24. bxc5 Nf6



25. Nd6+!

Eliminating an important defender.

25. ... Bxd6 26. cxd6 Rxd6 27. d4 c5?!

Defending the a6-pawn, but not exactly defending the king. This pawn move in front of the king is not doing anything good for the Black position.

28. Nxc5 Re8 29. Qc4, Black resigned.

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