

2020-21 Candidates Tournament

ROUND 12



SICILIAN DEFENSE (B45)

GM Fabiano Caruana (2820)

GM Anish Giri (2776)

2020-2021 Candidates Tournament,
Yekaterinburg, RUS (12.1), 04.24.2021

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard for
Chess Life Online

Today's game of the day is not a great game, but then, none of the games today were all that great.

Alekseenko was lost in less than 10 moves and kept on playing. Grischuk self-destructed after holding a slightly passive position together throughout the time control. Wang Hao kept playing strange moves against Nepomniachtchi, who played quickly and superficially -- qualities that will not help him in a match against Magnus Carlsen, who will most likely turn up as a very different type of beast than he has been in these online rapid tournaments he has organised throughout the last year.

However, the worst game today was this one, where you could see the light in Caruana's eyes go out. While this was not his last chance to challenge for the title, it is certainly another chance lost.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6

Giri chooses a different move order, presumably not wishing to see 2. ... Nc6 3. Bb5 on the board.

3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6



6. a3!?

Aiming to have a game. After 6. Ndb5 d6 7. Bf4 e5 8. Bg5 we have a main line Sveshnikov, but without the 7. Nd5 option played by MVL against Giri earlier in the tournament. Generally,

this move order is disregarded, as 6. Nxc6 bxc6 7. e5 is a serious option for White, with a long theoretical history of its own.

6. ... Be7 7. Be3 0-0 8. Be2 d6 9. Qd3 Bd7 10. f4



10. ... e5!

A strong move from Giri. White has to play the unfortunate exchange on c6.

11. Nxc6 bxc6

Black's idea was not 11. ... Bxc6?, when 12. 0-0-0 is much better for White.

12. 0-0 exf4 13. Bxf4 Be6

13. ... Bg4!? was also interesting. Black is not getting a lot out of his bishop.

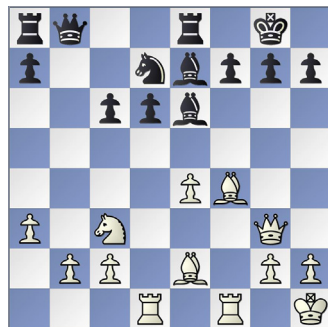
14. Qg3 Nd7

The computer suggests the very innovative 14. ... h5!? 15. Kh1 h4 with a complex position.

15. Rad1 Re8 16. Kh1

16. Bxd6 Bxd6 17. Rxd6 Qb6+ and Black is not worse.

16. ... Qb8



17. b4?!

I think this was a bit over the edge. After 17. b3!? Ne5 18. Bh5! g6 19. Ne2 Kh8 20. Bf3 with Ne2-d4 coming, White's position actually looks quite pleasant. White will play Ne2-d4, Bf3-e2 and Nd4-f3, removing this strong knight from e5. The moves from move 17 are not forced, but this is at least a much better game plan than what Caruana chose. After the pawns are scattered on the queenside, it is hard to believe that Black cannot hold his position together.

17. ... Ne5 18. b5! Rc8!

Accurate play from the Dutchman.

If 18. ... cxb5 19. Bxb5 with advantage to White.

19. bxc6 Rxc6 20. Nd5 Qf8!



After this move Caruana said he lost his tread and played very badly. Giri said that he felt that his opponent realized that he was no longer playing for an advantage and lost all enthusiasm. We can see this in the moves played in the game.

Giri showed the following line in the press conference as an example of things could go horribly wrong for Black. It's hard to believe that this could be what Caruana was hoping for: 20. ... Bxd5 21. exd5 Rxc2 22. Bxe5 dxe5 23. Bd3 Rc7 24. d6 Bxd6 25. Be4 and White wins material.

21. c3

A bit soft. The natural move is 21. c4, when after 21. ... Nxc4 22. Bxc4 Rxc4 23. Nxe7+ we are heading towards a draw.

21. ... Rac8 22. Rc1?!

Played quickly. You can feel the absolute disappointment in every move made by Caruana. There is no thinking of reasoning here.

After 22. Bxe5 dxe5 23. Qxe5 Bxa3 24. c4 I cannot see that White is really worse, although I would prefer having two bishops.

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22. ... Ng6



23. Bd2?

What a horrible move to play, and after only a few seconds of thought. It is the move of a man that is fighting his own emotions.

White can still sort of keep the balance with 23. Bg4! Nxf4 24. Nxf4 Bxg4 25. Qxg4 Rxc3 26. Rb1 and with the knight returning to d5 and the rook entering the game on b7, White has sufficient compensation.

23. ... Bh4 24. Qe3?!

Not the best square.

24. ... Rc5! 25. c4 h6!

A strong positional decision. After this Black has a serious advantage. White is going to end up with a poor bishop against a strong,

well-supported, knight.

26. Qb3 Bg5! 27. Bxg5 hxg5 28. Qg3 Qd8!?

28. ... Bxd5! looks more natural.

29. Rcd1

29. Ne3 Re5 is also very good for Black. The knight does not escape. But maybe it was a better practical chance.

29. ... Bxd5!

The knight is finally dead.

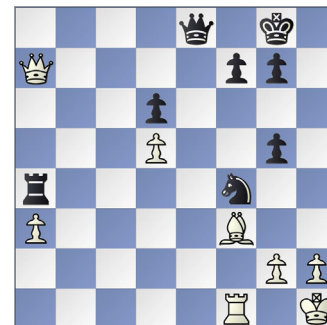
30. exd5 Nf4



31. Qf2

Around here Black can play in many different ways and keep a solid edge. It is very rare you see a World number two drift into a position where he has weaknesses and bad pieces. Strong players prefer to go down in flames.

31. ... R8c7 32. Rd4 Qe8 33. Bf3 Rxc4 34. Rxc4 Rxc4 35. Qxa7 Ra4



36. Qf2?

Caruana probably rejected 36. Qc7 Rxa3 because of 37. Qxd6? Rxf3! 38. gxf3 Qe2 with mate. But instead he could try 37. h4! when White is still fighting, i.e. 37. ... Ng6 38. hxg5 Ra4! (38. ... Ne5? 39. Qxd6!) 39. g3 Ne5 40. Bg2 Qf8 with a serious advantage for Black, but not yet a resignable position.

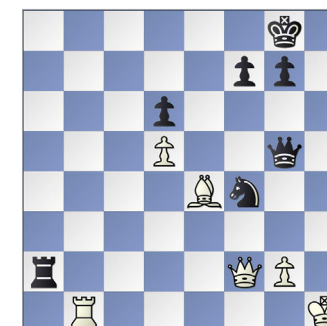
36. ... Rxa3

Now it is all over.

37. h4 Qe5 38. hxg5 Qxg5 39. Re1 Ra8 40. Be4 Ra2

Giri believed he was winning on the spot, but when it turned out to be a mirage, he could retreat and win slowly.

41. Rb1



41. ... Ra8

41. ... Qh5+ 42. Kg1 Ne2+ 43. Qxe2! Rxe2 44. Rb8 mate would be a surprising reversal.

42. Re1 f5 43. Bb1 Kf7 44. Re3 Rh8+ 45. Kg1 Nxg2, White resigned.

