

Daniel Gormally

Smooth chess Improvement

**Danny's "impossible"
quiz inside!**



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INTRODUCTION

This chess book centers around an attempt to introduce analytics to modern chess, which eventually culminates in a chess personality quiz, although this takes part in the third part of the book.

The final few chapters are really intended as an aparetif, and accomplishment to what has gone before. So in essence, you could view this book as being made up of four parts.

In the first part of this book I'll be talking about some of my recent tournaments and what I have learned in regards to my own chess. The characters I've met along the way and what we can learn from them; their mistakes and my mistakes.

In the second part I will attempt to prepare you for the third and most important part, the personality quiz, which will hopefully guide the reader towards the necessary steps to make chess improvement.

GM Daniel Gormally

whispering about how hot it was and how nowhere in Europe seemed to have air conditioning.

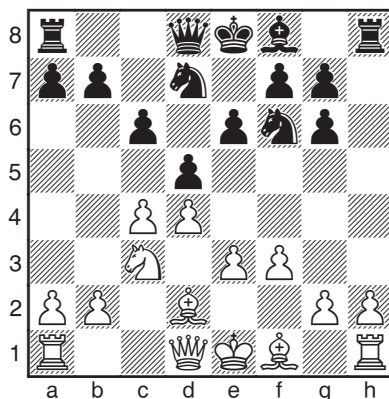
Hard Work Pays Off

If I am honest with myself I need to celebrate my successes as well as my failures, and I believe a more successful last 18 months is down to a slightly harder work ethic. I went through a long period where I had lost interest in chess and was just going through the motions. If anything, my only interest in chess centered around an obsession with engine lines and analysis. So when preparing for the game, engine. When looking at the game, engine. Anytime you get stuck on a position and are not sure of the lines or the evaluation, engine. That takes away the human interest and discovery part of chess that is fundamental to improvement. I would say that I still spend too much time analysing with engines but the situation has somewhat improved and now at least I try to do some of my own analysis, away from the board. Where I have often struggled over the course of my career is in the opening phase. I think I'm an underrated late middlegame and endgame player, but the issue is that I often don't get to that point with a playable position. I get blown away in opening theory as my preparation is often so lousy. It is true that I know a lot of theory compared to most players, even a lot of GMs, but as I tend to enter sharp variations, it is obvious that I often don't know enough. It didn't help that in Bruges I didn't have

a laptop, and that is something I will need to remedy going forward. But it also didn't escape my notice that both of the games I won in Bruges were in openings that I had recently studied. I had done a video course on the Slav for Chess 365; granted it seemed to be a poor seller, but I was now Master of the Slav.

1.c4 c6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 d5 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4 this does feel like a good variation for white if you really know what you are doing. White grabs the bishop pair at an early stage of the game.

6...♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♙d2 ♘bd7 9.♘xg6 hxg6



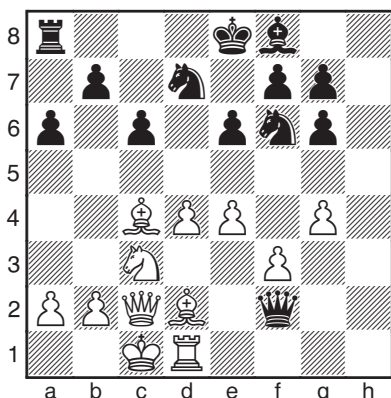
10.♙c2

10.♙b3 is interesting and by this method, white strives for an endgame. **10...♙b6 11.♙xb6 axb6 12.♙f2** white will eventually try to occupy the center with e4.

10...a6 11.g4 ♙c7 12.0-0-0 dxc4 Something I had learned from studying this line- black takes on c4,

intending to then follow up with ...b5 and then ...c5. Yes you give the light-squared bishop some scope but you are also following a clear plan. As I explain in a chapter later in the book, I still think the saying about a bad plan being better than having no plan at all, holds some water.

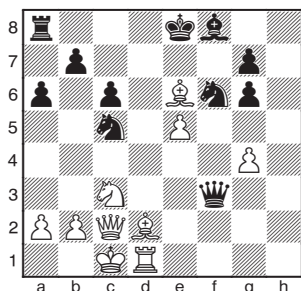
13. ♖xc4 ♖xh2 14. ♖xh2 ♔xh2 15. e4 ♔f2!



This move was the cause of irritation to my opponent. The queen creates a double-attack.

16. d5 ♔xf3 17. dxe6 fxe6 18. g5

18. e5 ♖xe5 19. ♖e2 ♔g3+; during the game I became convinced I had blundered and that **18. ♖xe6 ♖c5 19. e5**



was good for white. **19... ♔d3!** was

the smothering move that I had missed, in my calculations, after which black is apparently fine. Would I have found it, if the position had appeared on the board? Who knows...

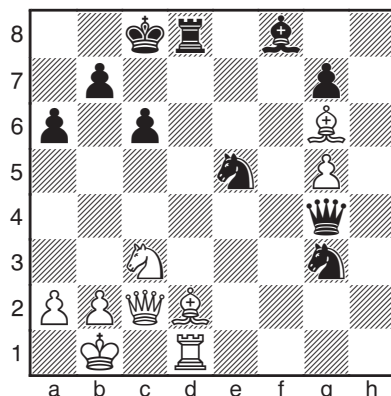
18... ♖h5 19. ♖xe6 ♖c5 20. ♖c4 0-0-0 Black is clearly better, a pawn to the good and controlling all the important squares.

21. ♖f1 ♔h3 22. e5?

I thought he would have at least tried **22. ♖f7** as that would have placed a rook on the seventh rank. **22... ♖d6 23. ♔b1 ♖d7** favours black.

22... ♖g3 23. ♖d1 ♔g4! The way I used my queen in this game I was very happy with. I think the whole opening and middlegame shows that solid openings like the Slav suit me. What I need is that platform, to get into the game. Once I get into the later stages, I can play a bit.

24. ♖f7 ♖d3+ 25. ♔b1 ♖xe5 26. ♖xg6?

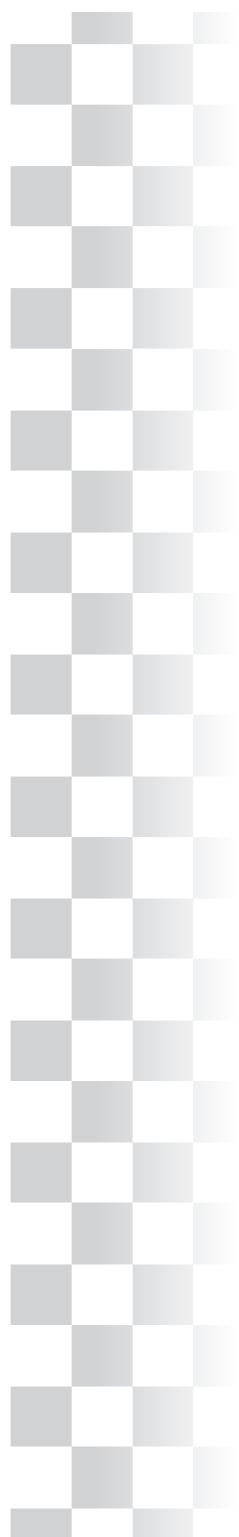


26... ♖b4

27. ♖h7 ♖xc3 28. bxc3 ♖c4+ 0 : 1

CHAPTER X

IS COACHING WORTHWHILE



ATHENA-PALLADA 2947 - FANTASTICINSPIRATION 2672

Blitz lichess.org 2024

The benefits are obvious, but reservations have to be made. The single driving force behind a player's improvement is always the individual themselves. They have to be committed- and as already discussed, it takes many hours of studying and playing to reach master level. The coach is only adding to that. Before I talk about what a player can hope to achieve through hiring a coach, I want to talk about my own experience of maturing as a player, as I feel that it is relevant to the topic being discussed. Although I joined a chess club shortly after I left primary school, I spent years at the lower levels. Looking back although that period may have looked like I was making no progress, in fact it was all soaking in, like osmosis. I didn't have a coach but I did have clubmates who gave me encouragement, said I should play this opening, read that book. 15 I was 150 BCF grade, 16 I was 170, 17 I was 190. The year after I went to 210. By the time I was 22 I was already an I.M. and rated over 2400. The reason why I had such fast improvement, from a junior going nowhere to someone who was one of the best young players in the country, was at least partly due to computers. You didn't really have software on desktops until later, or at least I couldn't locate as such back in

the mid 1990s, but I did have machines like Mephisto and the Nigel Short Saitek computer in which you could play the moves on a wooden or plastic board, and the board would light up with the response that the computer wanted to make. Playing against these machines relentlessly, greatly improved my tactical ability. Combine that with studying magazines like *New in chess* on a plastic board, and I was spending many hours thinking about and playing chess, and at a young age, that becomes a powerful thing. Leaving chess aside for one moment I regret doing this and not focusing more on my school studies. I left school at 15 because I developed a school phobia and as a consequence took no qualifications. I did the G.C.S.E. mocks, but not the exams themselves. I bummed around for a few years after that and would barely leave my room of the house. I became a hermit, in essence. I had no real plan to become a chess-player, but once I realized that I had some ability in that area, I started to become excited by the idea of playing more and more tournaments and it snowballed from there. My mum used to say to me, why don't you re-train? I eschewed her wisdom because I was focused on one thing only. And yet if I had committed to the chess much more, done, 6-7 hours a day, every day, I'd have achieved much more and it might have become a worthwhile career. I have achieved

many things in chess that I am proud of, but today's lower-rated grand-master is really forced to take their attention away from the playing side if they want to make any money at all. I have written many books- of which this is number 11 or 12, I don't know as I've lost count. I enjoy the process in many ways but it also feels like something of a grind as well, and you feel like you're a hamster on wheel. I'd have a greater passion for writing a novel than a chess book but by going down this path I have some assurance that I will be published and have some financial success. If I wrote a novel or a screenplay, the likelihood is that it would sink without trace. So that's it, doomed to stay on the hamster wheel forever until I die. The other issue with chess books is that while if you go back 50 years there might have been relatively few titles, there are far more professional chess players than there were back then so the market is much more saturated. Looking on the plus side we also live in a more connected world, so it is easier to access other markets where you can make sales worldwide. One of my best selling chess books was "mating the castled king", which was lucky enough to be translated into Chinese. Not just the volume of chess titles that are published now, but other competing sources of information like online videos, have impacted on the sales of chess books. The war in Ukraine and the overall global

economy tanking has also not helped, so you can start to see why one of my recent books only sold 552 copies. Nevertheless this struck me at the time as being very poor sales. Don't get me wrong here; chess has always been a niche market; not that many people relatively speaking play the game. The sales of a top chess author are hardly likely to compete in the best sellers market. But to write a chess book is a huge commitment, so if you are going to get £2,000 or £3,000 maximum for at least four months of your life, it doesn't feel like a great reward. What about other sources of chess content, like video creation, Youtube and so on? They seem to have a greater upside when you look at the career of someone like Levy Rozman, who has also used his social media content to promote his chess books. Few could achieve his level of success but I do have a Youtube channel, and harbour some hope that I could scale up to 10,000 subscribers. At that level I could expect to be making several hundreds of pounds a year, assuming that I keep producing videos and that enough of these subscribers are watching the ones that have adverts on them. I'm a long way off at the moment and only have 590 subscribers, despite making over 200 videos. Unfortunately my technical skills are almost non-existent, so my thumbnails (a key driver of views) either don't exist or are very poor. And again the Youtube environ-

**NODIRBEK
ABDUSATTOROV 2783 - PARHAM
MAGHSOODLOO 2719**

lichess.org 2004

To be a strong chess player you need both optimism and pessimism. Optimism, because we need to see more candidate moves and believe in our position. Pessimism, because we need to retain a sense of danger and see what might be wrong with the candidate move that we selected. It is interesting to hear master psychologist Magnus Carlsen talk about optimism: "I've always thought that the right balance in chess is somewhere between optimistic and delusional. You have people in chess who are like absolutely delusional optimists. Like former world chess champion Kramnik, whenever we played a game he would say, it's a miracle you survived." I find this statement quite revealing because I always thought that chess was about finding a middle ground between optimism and pessimism, but Magnus seems to be suggesting that in fact you have to err on the side of optimism, almost to the extent where you become delusional but without quite doing so (so don't become full Kram.) In other interviews Magnus has expanded further on this topic: "And I think it's always better to be overly confident than pessimistic. I realize sometimes after games that, you know, I was actually way too confident here. I was way

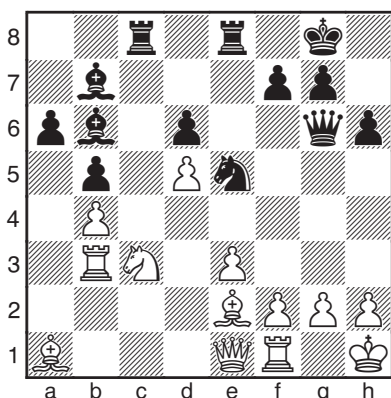
too optimistic. But if you're not optimistic, if you're not looking for your chances, you're going to miss. You're going to miss opportunities. And you know, I think there are — there are plenty of players in history who have been immensely talented, but they're — they're just too pessimistic. They see too many dangers that are not there and so on so they cannot perform at a very high level." He went on to say in the same interview: "Yes, you need to have that. You need to have that edge, you need to have that confidence, you need to have that absolute belief that you're — you're the best, and you'll win every time." Also revealing because I once read an autobiography by the golfer Nick Faldo who essentially said the same thing;



Nodirbek Abdusattorov

that to fully achieve your goals and to win the best tournaments in the world, you need to possess total self belief.

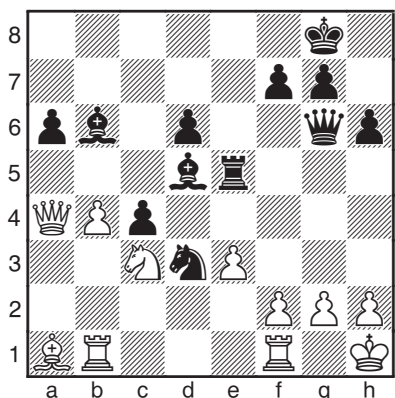
**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4
4.e3 0–0 5.♙d2 b6 6.♙d3 ♙b7
7.♘h3 c5 8.d5 exd5 9.cxd5
d6 10.♘f4 ♘bd7 11.0–0 ♘e5
12.♙e2 a6 13.a3 ♙a5 14.♖b1 b5
15.b4 cxb4 16.axb4 ♙b6 17.♙c1
♖c8 18.♙b2 ♖e8 19.♔h1 ♚d7
20.♙a1 ♚f5 21.♖b3 h6 22.♘h5
♘xh5 23.♙xh5 ♚d3 24.♚e1
♚c2 25.♙d1 ♚g6 26.♙e2**



26...♖c4! The move of an incorrigible optimist. It also gives you pleasure to make such moves, almost like you are lighting up a dull board. I was watching the commentary on the official European chess union Youtube stream. The lead Grandmaster commentator Jankovic, suggested that Parham always played in this devil may care fashion, whether he was playing in a serious event or whether he was playing blitz with friends in a coffee bar. That was

something to admire about him, that he was always a true optimist and stayed true to his principles no matter what. He also suggested that No-dirbrek already has the reputation of being the best defender at the top of world chess. This was not something I had heard before, so I was grateful for this insight, but better defender than Magnus Carlsen?! really? In general I didn't really enjoy this broadcast because there seemed to be no real chemistry between the two hosts. Jankovic seemed to dominate proceedings and seemed to have little interest in asking his female co-commentator whether she had any insights on the games themselves. She was left to stare forlornly at the chat, to see if any new comments had come in. Obviously I have to say I only watched it seriously for about ten minutes or so, and this might have been a false impression. The commentator also suggested at this moment that the computer would just take the exchange and win, but for a human player it wouldn't be so easy to navigate this position from the white side. I found this a strange comment, because it seems to suggest that the exchange sacrifice is just a practical decision by Parham, when in fact engines suggest the situation is very unclear here and ...♖c4 is just as good as anything else.

27.♙xc4 bxc4 28.♖b1 ♘d3 29.♚d1 ♖e5 30.♚a4 ♙xd5



it is clear that white's position is tough to defend, and now Nodirbrek goes badly wrong:

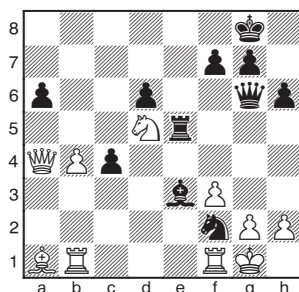
31.f3? overlooking an important point, but again this points to a players optimism, misplaced in this case. Nodirbrek no doubt saw that the main variation lead to perpetual check so in his desperation to try and win the game, he rejected this and played something else instead. I think that here we have stumbled across one the reasons that players like Nodirbek are so strong; they are maximilists, and have total self belief. And it is hard to achieve this state, because you look at the white position with so many pieces pointing at the king and your natural human inclination is that you're afraid and in that situation flight or fight kicks in and you choose flight. Even against a significantly lower-rated player than Parham, i'd be looking to bail out as white here. So what Nodirbek is saying in this game, and Magnus said in the interview before him, that to achieve a greater level of success we can't operate with fear and are in-

stead obliged to take some risks, and operate in an almost permanent state of optimism.

It was time to hit the escape chute with 31.♘xd5 ♖xd5 (31...♘xf2+ 32.♙g1 ♘h3+ 33.♙h1 ♘f2+=) 32.♙xa6 ♘xf2+ 33.♙g1 ♘h3+= (33...♙xe3 also seems to offer no more than equality. 34.♙a8+ ♙h7 35.♙xd5 ♘e4+ 36.♙h1 ♘f2+=)

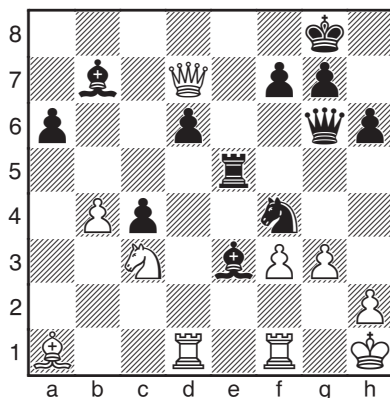
31...♙xe3! 32.♖bd1

32.♘xd5 ♘f2+ 33.♙g1



33...♙xg2+!! is what Nodirbek must have missed earlier. 34.♙xg2 ♖g5#; 32.♘d1 ♘f4 33.♘xe3 ♖xe3 also looks terrible from white's perspective. 34.♖b2 c3-+

32...♙b7 33.♙d7 ♘f4 34.g3

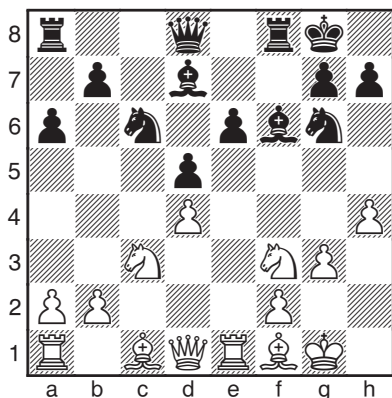


MIDDLEGAMES

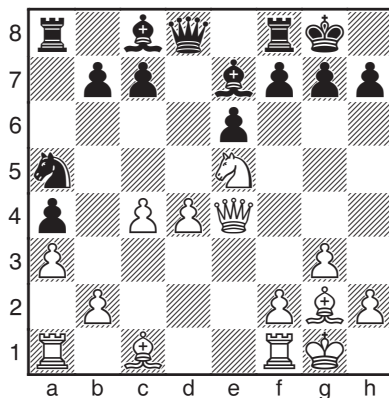
**KAI HANACHE 1987 -
SRIVATHSAN SASIKUMAR 1924**

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 e6 4.
0-0 ♗ge7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♙f1 ♗g6
7.c3 ♙e7 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5
10.e5 0-0 11.♘c3 f6 12.exf6
♙xf6 13.g3 ♙d7 14.h4



Black to play



White to play

**SLOBODAN J FILIPOVIC 2233 -
JAVOKHIR SINDAROV 2668**

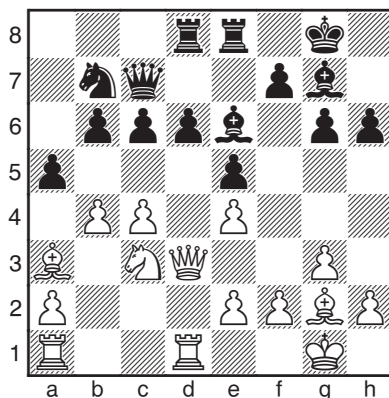
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1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.b3 d6 3.♙b2 e5 4.d3
g6 5.g3 ♙g7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.c4 ♖e8
8.0-0 h6 9.♘fd2 c6 10.♘e4 ♘a6
11.♙a3 ♗xe4 12.dxe4 ♗c5 13.
♘c3 ♙c7 14.♙d2 ♙e6 15.♖fd1
♖ad8 16.♙e3 b6 17.b4 ♗b7 18.
♙d3 a5

**ANDREW J LEDGER 2337 -
ALEXANDR PREDKE 2677**

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1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♙b4+
4.♘bd2 d5 5.♙a4+ ♘c6 6.a3
♙e7 7.g3 0-0 8.♙g2 a5 9.0-0
♙d7 10.♙c2 a4 11.e4 dxe4 12.
♗xe4 ♗xe4 13.♙xe4 ♗a5 14.
♗e5 ♙c8



White to move

**IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI -
NODIRBEK ABDUSATTAROV**

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What does a day in the life of a chess grandmaster typically consist of? I thought I would relate how my day typically goes in this chapter (So you can hopefully do the opposite.) Who knows, it might inspire you. I normally wake up around about 7.30 A.M. I suspect that many grandmasters and professional chess players get up closer to 8 P.M. after pulling an all-night poker session, but there you go. That's the limits of getting older I guess. More often than not I wake up completely exhausted; why, I do not know but I suspect it has something to do with the asthma that I have suffered from for several years. I first started exhibiting symptoms back when we lived in London, close to the busy main road that goes all the way to Folkestone. (I suspect that's what caused it, as my younger sister developed the condition as well.) Stupidly after a few years of cadging cigarettes from hardened smokers at chess tournaments to relieve my stress, I started smoking more seriously in my early 30s as an easy way to get rid of some of the stress I was feeling. That was only for a couple of years, but my asthma got worse. I have been tested for sleep apnea, diabetes and it has come back clean so the tiredness that I feel at night isn't easy to diagnose. Like many chess

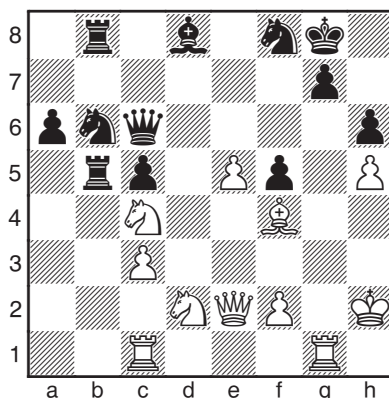
players, I am something of a hypochondriac. I might do some stretching in bed as I suffer from a bad back and then I'll play a free spelling game on my tablet to get my mind working and one that I find worryingly addictive. I wish I was more addicted to video games than random word games, as at least that would seem a tiny bit more constructive. It's a good way to keep your mind engaged and active, though. I used to play the spelling bee on the New York Times, where they also have wordle. Wordle is free on the New York times but the spelling bee isn't. Once you score a certain number of points it locks you out and you have to subscribe to go further. I did once try to pay, but it didn't go through. After about an hour of pointless scrolling through Youtube videos and the Daily Mail website (I am currently reading the article "America's kindest husband, who went viral for the romantic note he left for his wife is now suspected of killing her.") I will then get up and get ready and leave the house. Typically I have a shopping bag with me, so that if I get lost or confused, passers-by can identify me as a chess player. My first port of call is the local WHSmiths where I'll pick up the sun newspaper. I'll then call in at Greggs to get some processed junk food to keep me going for a while. I have become concerned about my diet and how often I visit these places. I'm saving up problems for future. I should probably eat at home, but I tend to



Kateryna Lagno

are there any obvious alternatives? This is often when our laziness kicks in and the temptation to turn on the engine, to highlight the good alternatives, can become overwhelming. 32.♖g1 is the obvious danger and now the plan for white is to stack the rooks with ♖g3 and ♖cg1. Perhaps that is why Bibisara put the bishop on d8– with the concept of blocking that plan with ...♘h7 and ...♘g5. It is difficult to offer advice for black here and I don't see an adequate way to create counterplay. Perhaps the decisive moments of the game have already occurred?

32.♖g1 ♘b6 33.gxf5 exf5



34.♘d6! crushing.

34...♘e6 35.♙xh6 ♔h7 36.♙d3
1 : 0

HUMPY KONERU 2530 -
STAVROULA TSOLAKIDOU 2445

FIDE Women's Grand Prix
Shymkent 2024

A welcome feature of FIDE events in more recent times, is that there is more of an emphasis on relating to the online audience. It seems they have gone all-in on capturing social media, as there is a dedicated commentary team as well as Charlize Van Zyl waiting to interview the players after the games. The tall Charlize often towers over the players, some of whom are much more diminutive. A typical question that she poses is – "Do you have any plans for the rest day?" Sometimes these questions get a bit repetitive, but they do allow a way for the viewers to relate to the players. I often wonder if I was put in the same boat if I'd come up with more humorous answers like, "I'm