



Yury Shulman (l.) and Alexander Onischuk during the second game of the rapid chess playoff that decided the 2006 US Championship.

Onischuk described his victory in the tournament as the ‘happiest day of my life’ and took home the top prize of \$25,000 and a Champion’s chess set hand-made by a prominent local craftsman.

Onischuk’s road to the title was not quite as smooth as it looked. He had to fend off a determined Hakiru Nakamura in the last round to earn his ticket to the playoff.

The 64-player roster included 27 GMs, 15 IMs, 3 WGMs, 1 WIM and assorted FMs, WFMs, WCMs, masters, experts and a B player. Thirteen of the participants were seeded by rating or defending champion status, but the great majority had to qualify by

Alexander Onischuk cruised to a very convincing, albeit hard fought victory in the 2006 United States Championship, held March 1-12 at San Diego California’s Naval Training Center Promenade. The tournament, divided into 32-player Groups ‘A’ and ‘B’, saw the ‘A’ winner Onischuk defeat ‘B’ winner Yury Shulman 1½-½ in a rapid chess playoff before a large crowd of spectators both online and at the playing venue.

Larry Christiansen reports.

means of high places at various major open tournaments throughout the United States. A few, including GM Max Dlugy were special invitees selected by the organizers.

Here is a list of the countries of origin of the players that I found surprising: Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Cuba, England, Georgia, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova,

Mongolia, Peru, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, USA, Uzbekistan.

As in the 2006 Torino Winter Olympics, it was not certain whether the playing site would be ready on time. Feverish last-minute construction, painting and equipment set-up was completed in the early morning hours of the first round. Most players were satisfied with the large, airy playing hall, although its location near Lindbergh International Airport meant players had to get used to the roar of jet planes flying overhead. Earplugs were made available to the players, who also had the option of using 'non-receiving' headphone sets to drown out the noise. Most players simply got used to the noise.

There was also some controversy over the list of participants and the schedule. The tournament date was moved up a week to accommodate a planned Mexican

to decide upon which event to play in. She chose to play in the Women's World Championship.

Also, some fans and players grumbled about the participation of various women qualifiers. The main sponsor and organizer of the event, America's Foundation for Chess (AF4C) felt that the opportunity to participate in this pre-

A. This group was definitely a younger field than Group B. The top-rated player and defending champion Hakiru Nakamura headed the group but other GMs like Alexander Onischuk, Alexander Stripunsky, Ildar Ibragimov and Varuzhan Akobian, Joel Benjamin and Nick de Firmian stood in his way.



JOHN HENDERSON

Time for a drink. Alexander Onischuk has a glass of wine together with fellow champion Anna Zatonskih. Zatonskih beat defending champion Rusudan Goletiani in the rapid chess playoff that decided the women's title.

'The happiest day of my life'

super-event that unfortunately fell through. This created a conflict with the 2006 Women's World Championship tournament and meant that one of the top US women, Irina Krush, had

mier American event should be open to everyone.

Group A

Here is a brief summary of the tournament, starting with Group

As it turned out, Nakamura's bid for the title ended as early as Round 3 when he lost badly to Camila Baginskaite (Nakamura ventured the dubious 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.♖a4+ b5?!) which followed a loss in Round 1 to IM Josh Friedel and a draw to lowly ranked FM Jake Kleiman. Because it was decided that tie-breaks would be used, if necessary, to determine the winner of each section, Nakamura was virtually out of the running even if he won the rest of his games. His loss to Friedel was a thriller.

RE 7.12 – A11
Hikaru Nakamura
Joshua Friedel
 San Diego 2006 (1)

In his first game Nakamura was tripped up by the up-and-coming youngster Josh Friedel of New Hampshire. Friedel has risen steadily up the ranks and is a feared and tenacious tactician who works hard and has a very amiable, self-deprecating personality.

1. ♖f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 e6 4. ♖c2 ♘d6 5. ♗c3 f5 6.h3 ♗f6 7.g4

This spike attack does not look particularly challenging.

7...0-0 8.gxf5 exf5 9.b3 ♖e7! 10. ♘b2 ♗a6

Black's formation is aggressive and flexible. If White plays 11. 0-0-0 Black happily answers with 11...♘a3.

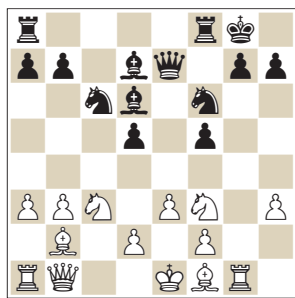
11. ♖g1 ♘d7?!

The no-nonsense 11...♗b4 12. ♖b1 f4! looks better, with the idea of 13.a3 fxe3!

12.cxd5 ♗b4 13. ♖b1 cxd5

13...f4? 14.dxc6 ♘xc6 (14...fxe3 15.cxd7 exd2+ 16.♗d1 wins for White) 15.♘c4+ ♗h8 16.e4 ♖ae8 17.d3 is good for White.

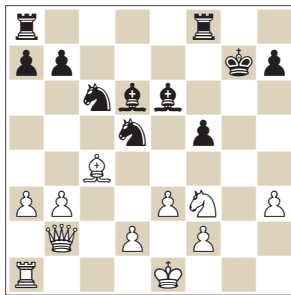
14.a3 ♗c6



15. ♗xd5?!

Nakamura plunges head-first into a maelstrom of complications. The quieter 15.♖d3 is for the over-30 crowd, but should give White a slight edge.

15...♗xd5 16. ♘c4 ♘e6 17. ♖xg7+ ♖xg7 18. ♘xg7 ♗xg7 19. ♖b2+

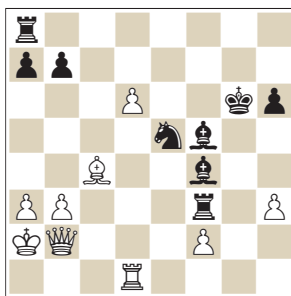


Black has a difficult decision to make. Should he play 19...♗h6 or walk into a pin with 19...♖f6? Both moves have their drawbacks. After 19...♗h6 20.0-0-0 ♖ac8 21. ♗b1 ♘e7 (to challenge the long diagonal) 22.h4! ♘f6 23.d4 seems to give White a lasting edge despite Black's symbolic material advantage. The g5 square should make an attractive invasion square for White in the future. The game continuation enables Black to control g5, but he will lose time untangling from the pin.

19...♖f6 20.0-0-0 h6 21.d3!

Nakamura tries to keep the threats flowing. Slow-playing the position with 21.♗b1 lets Black organize his position with 21...♖d8 22.♖g1+ ♗f7 23.♗d4 ♗xd4 24.♖xd4 ♘xa3 with a roughly balanced position.

21...♗f7 22.e4 fxe4 23.dxe4 ♖xf3 24.exd5 ♘f4+ 25.♗b1 ♘f5+ 26. ♗a2 ♗e5 27.d6+ ♗g6



Play has been forced since move 21. White's passed d-pawn and Black's unwieldy formation (exposed king, scattered pieces)

translate into a near-decisive plus for Nakamura.

28. ♘e2

Also possible was 28.♖g1+ ♗h7! (28...♗f6? 29.♖d4 ♖c8 30.♖e1 is paralyzing) 29.♖d4 ♗g6 (forced) 30.♖e1 with advantage for White.

28...♖xh3 29. ♖d4 ♖f8!

The only chance. Black now has potential counterplay along the f-file.

30. ♘b5 ♘e6

30...♘c2 31.♖g1+ ♗f5 (31...♗h7 32.d7 ♘xb3+ 33.♗b2 wins) 32. ♘c4 keeps the upper hand.

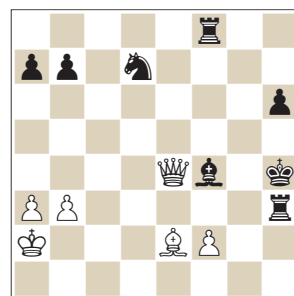
31. ♖e4+?

31.d7! should win after 31... ♘xb3+ (31...♖xb3 32.♖d6! ♖f6 33.d8 ♖ wins) 32.♗b2 ♘xd1 33. ♖d6+ ♗g7 34.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 35. d8 ♖+ ♗f7 36.♖xd1 ♖h2 37. ♖d4 ♘g3 38.♖xa7 ♖xf2+ 39. ♗b3.

31...♗h5?

Friedel spent 5 minutes of his remaining 15 minutes on this move. It seems counter-intuitive, but the king should head for the corner with 31...♗g7 as White must deal with Black's emerging counter-attack. For instance then 32.♖g1+ ♗h8 33.♖xb7 loses to the killer-retreat 33...♘g5!. White should instead play 32.♘c4, but Black is doing fine after 32...♘d7! 33.♖xb7 ♖h2 34.♖xa7 ♘g5 – in fact White is the one fighting for a draw there.

32. ♘e2+ ♗h4 33.d7! ♘xd7 34. ♖xd7! ♗xd7



35. ♖e7+?

White should win with 35.♖e6!



JOHN HENDERSON

In his first game defending champion Hikaru Nakamura was tripped up by the up-and-coming youngster Josh Friedel of New Hampshire.

♖f6 36.♗e7 (overload theme) ♜g5 37.♗xf8 ♜d5 (37...♗h2 38.♗c5 forces mate) 38.♜f3 ♜f4 39.♜xb7 ♗h2 40.♗c5.

35...♜g5 36.♗xd7 ♗f4

White's king is suddenly in mortal peril – it cannot escape from the second rank.

37.f3 ♗h2 38.♗d3 ♜g3 39.b4 ♗f2 40.♜b1 ♜g2 41.♜d1 ♜h4

Friedel prefers to completely wrap his king in blankets and deny checks before advancing his h-pawn.

42.♗g6+ ♜g3 43.♜c2

Or 43.♗xh6 ♗d4 44.♜b3 ♗h4 and wins.

43...h5! 44.♗xh5 ♗c4 45.♜e4 ♗d4 46.f4+ ♗xe4 47.♗d5 ♗e2

48.♗xb7 ♜g1

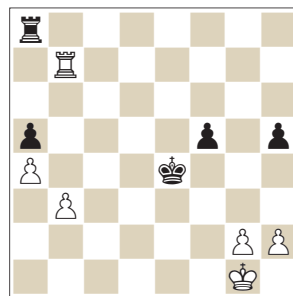
Black wins.

49.♗xa7+ ♗f2

White resigned.

The early leaders of Group A were Onischuk and veteran GM Dmitry Gurevich. Gurevich seemed to be in excellent form. He held Onischuk to a draw and outplayed Alexander Goldin in a fine game to keep the pace up to Round 5. Then disaster struck for Dmitry. In Round 6 he lost a rook and pawn ending against Akobian (who was on a comeback after a

disastrous loss to IM Emory Tate in Round 1) that shocked everyone. Dmitry's reward for that loss? Black against a resurgent Nakamura in Round 7. Here is Dmitry's meltdown against Akobian.



Gurevich-Akobian
position after 41...h5

White is a good pawn up. Black has an excellent king position but his rook is passively tied down to the a-pawn. Let's see what happened.

42.♗e7+?!

42.b4! looks easily winning, when 42...♗c8 (42...axb4 43.♗xb4+ ♜e5 44.g3 is easy) 43.bxa5 ♗c4 44.a6 ♗xa4 45.a7 followed by h3 and then a king stroll to b1 should bring home the point.

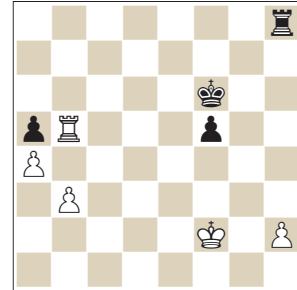
42...♜f4 43.g3+ ♜g5 44.♗e5 h4

Black now should have just ended counterplay to draw.

45.♜g2 ♜f6 46.♗b5 hxg3 47.♜xg3

47.hxg3 ♜g5 48.♜f3 ♗c8 draws.

47...♗g8+ 48.♜f2 ♗h8



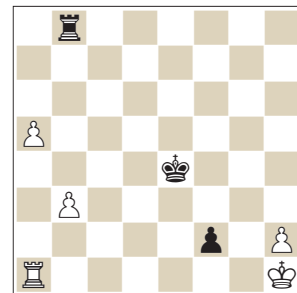
It was around here that Akobian offered Gurevich a draw twice in succession. Perhaps that clouded Dmitry's judgement as he chases a win that is no longer there.

49.♜g2 ♗g8+ 50.♜f1 ♗h8 51.

♜g1 ♗g8+ 52.♜h1 ♜g5! 53.

♗xa5 ♜f4 54.♗c5 ♜e4 55.♗c1 f4

56.♗g1 ♗b8 57.♗a1 f3 58.a5 f2



59.a6??

59.b4, to set up checks along the first, second and third ranks draws.

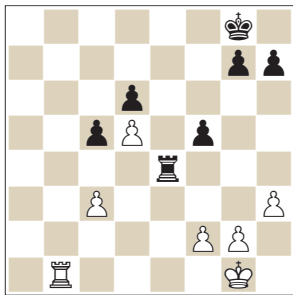
59...♜f3 60.b4

60.a7 loses to both 60...♗e8 61.♗f1 ♜e2 or 60...♗a8.

60...♗e8

White resigned.

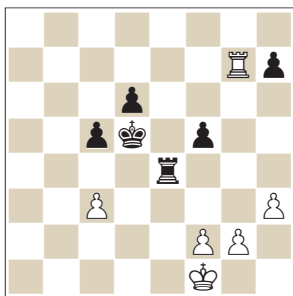
Onischuk seized a golden opportunity in his critical Round 6 game with GM Sergey Kudrin. Kudrin totally misjudged a rook ending with mutual passed pawns and went down to defeat.



Kudrin-Onischuk
position after 28...Kxe4

A draw seems to be the inevitable result here. 29.Kb6 Kc4 30.Kxd6 Kxc3 is the natural continuation. Kudrin carelessly allows Black's king to take a very dominant position in the center.

29.Kf1? Kf7! 30.Kb7+ Kf6 31. Kd7 Ke5 32.Kxg7 Kxd5



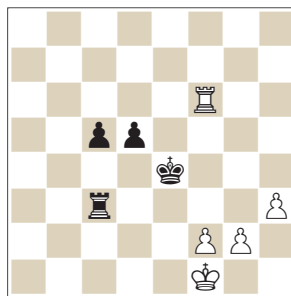
33.Kxh7?

It was time to get some pawns rolling with 33.g4! fxg4 (33...Kc4 34.f3 helps White) 34.hxg4 Kc4 35.f3 Ke8 36.Kxh7 Kxc3 37.Kf2 when the race should boil down to a draw.

33...Kc4 34.Kh5?!

34.g4! fxg4 35.Kg2 should still draw.

34...Kxc3 35.Kxf5+ Ke4 36.Kf6 d5



37.h4?

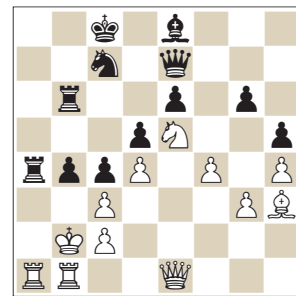
37.g4! might still draw. It helps give White's king some room while launching sorely needed counterplay. After 37.h4? Black wins easily.

37...d4 38.h5 d3 39.Ke1 Kc1+ 40.Kd2 Kc2+ 41.Kd1 c4 42.h6 c3 43.Ke6+ Ke5 44.Ke5+ Kc4 45.Ke4+ Kb3 46.Ke3 Kd2+ 47. Ke1 Kc2 48.f4 Kxg2

White resigned.

That win gave Onischuk 5/6, a clear lead, and the white pieces against IM Dmitry Schneider in Round 7. Onischuk crushed Schneider ('I played like a total idiot') and went into Round 8 with a 1½-point lead over the field.

Meanwhile, like the proverbial tortoise and hare, Alexander Stripunsky and Ildar Ibragimov were rising up the leader table. Ibragimov has been one of the hottest open players in the US for several years now, reflected in his USCF rating of 2715. His name is almost always near the top of the prize list. Stripunsky, the 2004 runner-up, has improved steadily and also usually delivers in crucial games. The hoof beats of Nakamura were also becoming louder:



De Firmian-Nakamura
position after 39...axb4

Nick de Firmian's bid for a high place in the Championship crumbled on the 40th move of time control against the resurgent Nakamura. Black has finally broken through with ...b5-b4, and White's king is feeling some heat. With 40.Kc1! the position appears to be dynamically equal after both 40...b3 41.cxb3 Kxa1 42. Kxa1 Kxb3 (42...cxb3? 43.Kb2 kills Black's counterplay) 43.Kd2 Kb8 or 40...bxc3 41.Kxa4 Kxb1+ 42.Kxb1 Ka4 43.Kxc3 Kb5! 44. Ka5 Kb7 and now White must take a perpetual with 45.Kxc4 dxc4 46.Kg2+ Kb8 47.Ka8+



Nick de Firmian's bid for a high place in the Championship crumbled on the 40th move of time control against the resurgent Nakamura.



JOHN HENDERSON

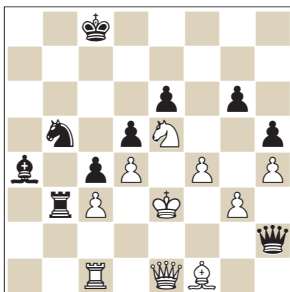
Ildar Ibragimov has been one of the hottest open players in the US for several years now, reflected in his USCF rating of 2715.

♙c7 48. ♖b7+ ♙d8 49. ♖a8+ etc. Instead Nick took on a4 and Nakamura soon launched a blistering attack.

40. ♖xa4? ♙xa4 41. ♙c1 b3 42. cxb3 ♖a3+ 43. ♙d2 ♖a2+ 44. ♙e3 ♖xb3 45. ♖c1

Forced. Now White's second rank becomes vulnerable.

45... ♖h2! 46. ♙f1 ♖b5



47. ♖xc4

Desperation. White can hardly move. If 47. ♙e2, then Black wins nicely with 47... ♖d6 48. ♖f2 ♖f5+ 49. ♙f3 ♖xc3+! 50. ♖xc3 ♖h1+ 51. ♖g2 ♖e1!

47... dxc4 48. ♙xc4 ♖b2 49. ♙xe6+ ♙d8 50. f5 gx f5 51. ♙xf5 ♖d6 52. ♙d3 ♖g2 53. d5 ♖xg3+ 54. ♙d4 ♖xh4+ 55. ♙c5 ♖f4 56. ♖e6 ♖b7+

White resigned.

SAN DIEGO

QI 15.6 – E15

Varuzhan Akobian

Ildar Ibragimov

San Diego 2006 (9)

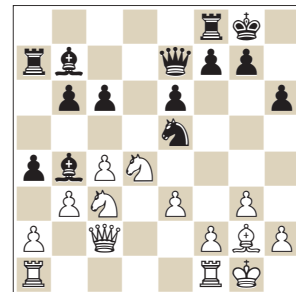
1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 b6 4. g3 ♙a6 5. b3 ♙b7 6. ♙g2 ♙b4+ 7. ♙d2 a5 8. 0-0 0-0 9. ♙g5

Karpov prefers 9. ♖c3 followed by 10. ♖c2 here.

9... a4 10. ♖bd2 h6 11. ♙xf6 ♖xf6 12. ♖c2 ♖a7 13. e3 ♖c6

Black has troubles coordinating his position.

14. d5 ♖e5 15. ♖d4 c6 16. ♖e4 ♖e7 17. dxc6 dxc6 18. ♖c3



18... c5!?

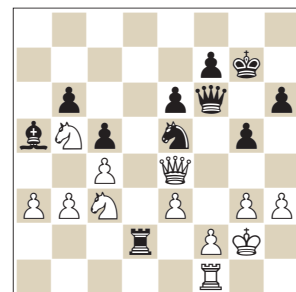
Safer is 18... axb3 19. axb3 ♖fa8. Ibragimov sacrifices the a-pawn to gain control of the d-file.

19. ♖db5 ♙xg2 20. ♙xg2 ♖d7 21. ♖e4! ♖f6 22. ♖xa4 g5!

A key move in Black's plan – he stops ♖f4 and plans ... ♖d2 followed by ... ♖d3. Now 23. ♖xb6 ♖d2 is unpleasant.

23. ♖ad1 ♖fd8 24. ♖ac3 ♖d2 25. a3 ♙a5 26. h3 ♙g7 27. ♖xd2 ♖xd2

One knight on the rim is bad, but two can be disastrous.



NEW IN CHESS 59