

ChessBase *Magazine*

FOR PROFESSIONAL CHESS



SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2026 | 21,90 €

#233



HAPPY LEVON!

The veteran player wins the Biel Chess Festival 2026 thanks to a brilliant performance in both blitz and rapid chess



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**1.d4 g6 2.c4 Bg7 3.Nc3 d6 4.e4 c5
5.d5 Bxc3+ 5.bxc3 e5!?**

Robert Ris promotes the Barendregt Variation

BIEL TRIATHLON, NORWAY CHESS & CHENNAI MASTERS

Game analyses by Anish Giri, Le Quang Liem, Àlonso Rosell, and Aydin Suleymanli

**SPANISH ANTI-BERLIN:
„GIVE ME THE f-FILE!“**

Christian Braun likes 4.d3 Bc5 5.Be3!?

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2026 Biel Chess Festival:

A veteran player and two rising stars provided the highlights at this year's edition of the traditional Swiss tournament: Levon Aronian triumphed in the 'Masters', not least thanks to his outstanding performance in blitz and rapid chess; Vaclav Finek (16) won the 'Generations Challenge'; and Christian Gloeckler (14) shone once again – as the undisputed tournament winner in the MTO, with a GM norm to boot!

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Le Quang Liem comments on his boldly fought victory with Black in Biel against Jose Eduardo Martinez Alcantara. In his analysis of the encounter Firouzja–Carlsen (Norway Chess 2026), **Anish Giri** examines the world number one's dip in form. All other master analyses (by Anish Giri, Aydin Suleymanli and others) in this issue can be found in digital format or in the ChessBase Books version.

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Daniel King highlights 'new twists' in the English Defence (1.c4 b6 2.d4 e6 3.e4 Bb4+). Ivan Sokolov, drawing on the game Guklesh–Praggnanandhaa (Norway Chess 2026), explores an improvement for White in a popular variation of the Nimzo-Indian. And Mihail Marin unpicks Grischuk's 'exotic move 9...e5' in the Gruenfeld Defence.

Daniel King: English Defence

1.c4 b6 2.d4 e6 3.e4 Bb4+

Ivan Sokolov: Nimzo-Indian

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.a3 Bxc3+ 5.bxc3 Nc6 6.f3 b6 7.e4 Ba6 8.Bd3 Na5 9.Qe2 c5

Mihail Marin: Gruenfeld

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3

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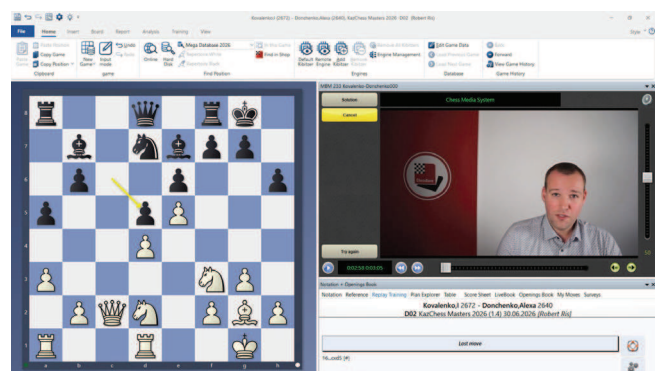
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'The queenless middlegame' is not an endgame! In his article, Jan Markos clears up a common misconception at amateur level and uses two games from grandmaster practice to illustrate why the role of the kings is particularly important in the queenless middlegame.

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Play through the winning game by the new German individual champion, Leonardo Costa, 'Move by Move', complete with numerous training questions and video feedback from Martin Breutigam. Robert Ris has chosen Igor Kovalenko's victory over Alexander Donchenko (KazChess 2026) for his 'Move by Move' column – 'a positional masterpiece!', from which there is much to be learnt about playing with space advantage and prophylaxis!

In the download and ChessBase Books versions, you will also find Dorian Rogozenco's column 'Modern Classics', as well as articles on strategy (Mihail Marin), tactics (Oliver Reeh) and endgames (Dr Karsten Mueller).

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**These contribution are only included in the download and CB Books version!*



*Passed the Marshall Gambit test at the 2026 Candidates Tournament:
Javokhir Sindarov*



IIM Johan Barendregt introduced the variation 4.Nc3 c5!? 5.d5 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 e5!? in 1969.



A knight sacrifice: 9.Nd5!! – from the laboratory of the creative player Alexander Grischuk



ANALYSIS



LE QUANG LIEM COMMENTS:

6...g5!? – NOTHING VENTURED, ...

Jose Eduardo Martinez Alcantara -Le Quang Liem
(2026 Biel Masters 2026)



LE QUANG LIEM

1991, VNM

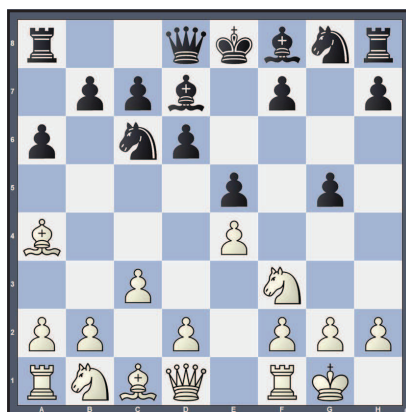
Vietnamese Grandmaster Le Quang Liem achieved the feat of winning the Biel Masters three times in a row (2022-2024)! This year, despite performing at his best in the long games, he could only manage 4th place.

The Biel Chess Festival has always been a special tournament for me. Not only because I enjoy the well-organized festival, but also because it presents a unique challenge: a combination of 960, classical, rapid and blitz formats. This is a true marathon where players with the most consistent performances across all time controls tend to rank high.

This was the first game of the classical portion, played after the rapid section but before the blitz. I did not play well in the rapid and was tied for 3rd-5th places, 5 points behind the leader Levon Aronian. Since only the top 4 players would qualify for the second stage of the event, and wins in classical were weighed more heavily (4 points for a win, 1.5 points for a draw, 0 point for a loss), I felt that I had to try to win some classical games.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6 Before this game, I had only played this move in three occasions, all in faster time controls. So, my hope was that my opponent did not expect it.

5.0-0 Bd7 6.c3 g5!?



This move is of course not new, but is a lot rarer than 6...g6. That was the point of my preparation: I wanted to surprise my opponent early on in the opening and steer the game into a more complicated battle where I might know the lines better.

This happens quite often in modern chess nowadays when a player intentionally enters a relatively dubious or provoking variation to take the opponent out of their comfort zone. With strong engines, one can analyse those ideas very deeply and eventually find playable positions in some forcing lines. The idea of 6...g5 is to advance pawns with ...g4 and ...h5, gaining space

on the kingside and driving away the white knight from f3, thereby slightly weakening White's grip on the center. The risk of this variation is that Black is behind in development and can run into a dangerous attack. Additionally, White has many options on almost every move, which makes it practically difficult to analyze and memorize all continuations.

7.d4 g4 8.Ne1 h5 9.f4 This is the critical move and also what I expected from my opponent, as he is not a player who avoids complications. White wants to challenge Black in the centre and to open the position to attack the black king. There are alternatives such as 9.d5; 9.Be3; or 9.Nc2.

I will not analyse those lines here, otherwise the annotation could be too lengthy and not directly relevant to the game.

9...exd4 10.cxd4 10.Nc2 is also an option, although no one has played it yet.

10...d5

see the following diagram



This move is important as Black has to stop the white pawns from rolling over in the center. Now, White is presented with many options that could easily overwhelm him if he is not familiar with the position.

11.e5 Apart from this, White could also have played 11.Nd3; 11.f5; or 11.Nc3.

All those moves are playable and lead to different, sometimes very concrete, positions. After analysing them in advance, I feel that Black has a reasonable chance to equalize everywhere. The upside for Black is that if White makes a mistake, his position could deteriorate very quickly.

The point of 11.e5 is to close the a1–h8 diagonal so ...Bg7 no longer makes sense. White is also threatening f5 with a powerful attack on the kingside. Therefore, Black must place a knight on f5 to stop this plan as well as to put pressure on the d4–pawn.

11...Nh6 12.Nc3 Nf5 13.Nxd5 My opponent kept playing the most principled moves; however, this caused him to spend over half an hour up to this point while I was still blitzing out my

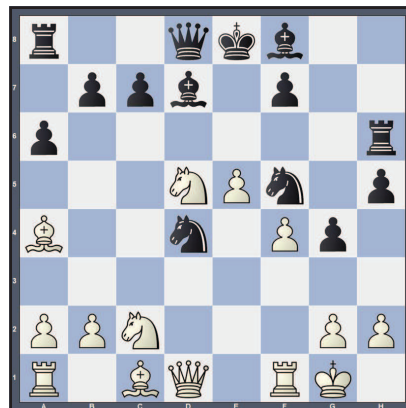
moves. I assume he might have seen the lines before but did not review them recently, so he had to recall and double check each move.

13.Nc2 This is an alternative, aiming to keep more pieces on the board. Play may continue with 13...Nce7 14.Bxd7+ Qxd7 with a strategically complex position. White enjoys a space advantage while Black has a nice blockage on f5 and a potentially more active dark-squared bishop.

13...Rh6! This move is forced as Black has to stop Nf6+. This rook will come in handy later in the game.

14.Nc2 14.Nf6+?! Rxf6 15.exf6 Qxf6 Even with the exchange down, Black is better thanks to his superior pieces and the weak white king.

14...Ncxd4!



Black gets back the pawn with tactical resources.

15.Nxd4 Bc5 16.Be3 The most human move.

16.Nf6+ White can take the

exchange, but Black has excellent compensation after 16...Rxf6 17.exf6 Bxd4+ 18.Kh1 b5! 19.Bc2 Qxf6 20.Re1+ Kf8 Black will follow up with ...Rd8 and ...c5 with a pleasant position.

16...Nxe3 17.Nxe3 Bxa4

18.Qxa4+ b5 After a series of exchanges, Black gets back the knight on d4, with a pin.

19.Qc2 Qxd4



My preparation ended around here. By this time, I was already up almost 50 minutes on the clock. The opening choice was quite a success for me from a practical point of view. We now enter the middlegame, which will shortly transition into an endgame.

19...Bxd4? This move would be a huge mistake because it would allow 20.Qe4 Bxe3+ 21.Qxe3+- White is clearly better because the black pieces are uncoordinated. White will soon open up the center with f5 and e6, when the black king will be in big trouble.

20.Rae1 White wants to play Kh1 in order to unpin the knight on e3. If that knight can reach f5, Black may be in trouble.

20...Qc4 This move makes sure that Black is not worse. In all versions of rook endgames (for example, after queen exchange and ...Bxe3/Rxe3), Black will always have sufficient counterplay on the queenside.

21.Rf2 This move was not a mistake, however, it slightly complicated White's tasks. My opponent wanted to gain a tempo by delaying exchanging the queens, but perhaps he missed my next move.

I was expecting 21.Qxc4 bxc4 22.Rf2 Rb8 23.Rc2 Rhb6 24.Rxc4 Bxe3+ 25.Rxe3 Rxb2= The rook endgame should be a draw.

21...Qb4!? Maintaining the tension and gaining a tempo by attacking the white rook.

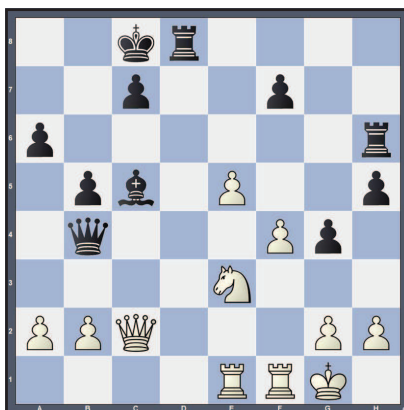
21...Qxc2 22.Rxc2 Bb6 23.Kf1 Rd8 24.Nf5 Rh8 This is still equal, but looks visually more pleasant for White as the knight can be potentially dangerous.

22.Rff1? This was my opponent's first mistake in the game. It loses an important tempo.

It was not obvious, but necessary for White to play 22.Kf1 Compared to the game, having the white king close to the centre is actually better. White no longer has to worry about back rank problems. 22...Bxe3 23.Rxe3 0-0-0 24.Rc3 Rd7=.

This was my intention during the game. I felt that the position was still very complicated. The engine simply shows 0.00 everywhere.

22...0-0-0



23.Kh1? Unfortunately, mistakes often come in pairs. While it is logical to follow up with his plan of Kh1 and Nf5, it leads to a losing position.

White's only chance to hold on was 23.a3 Qc4 24.Rf2, but it does not look great after 24...Qd4! The white pieces are tied down due to the pin. 25.Kh1 Bb6!

23...Bxe3 Strictly speaking, this was not the best move. However, I wanted to keep things simple and limit White's options.

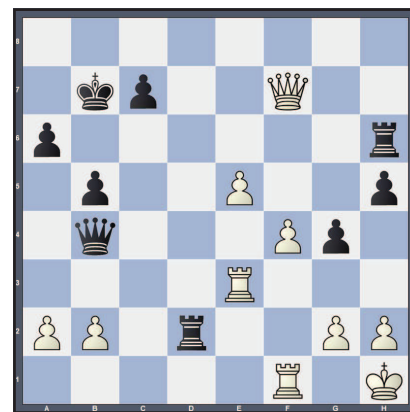
I spent a lot of time calculating 23...Rd2 24.Qf5+ Kb7 25.a3 (25.Qxf7 Bxe3 26.Rxe3 transposes to the game) I was not convinced that Black is winning here after 25...Qxb2 26.e6 (26.Nc4 This was also my concern, but Black can simply accept the sacrifice: 26...bxc4! 27.Rb1 Rb6 28.Rxb2 Rxb2+ White's king is too weak to survive this attack. In addition to ...Rxc2, Black also has the big threat of c4-c3-c2, followed by ...Rd1 or ...Rb1. 26.Qe4+ Rc6+) 26...Qd4! I did not see this move in my calculation. Apparently, there is

nothing White can do. 27.exf7 (27.Qxf7 Rf6+) 27...Bf8! A very hard move to find over the board, especially in calculation several moves before. Black will follow up with ...Rf6 and take the f7-pawn, after which White is helpless.

24.Rxe3 Rd2 25.Qf5+ 25.Qc1 This move is the best defence according to the engine, but it is understandable that White did not want to suffer an endgame without any counterplay. 25...Qxb2 26.Rc3 (26.Qxb2 Rxb2 27.f5 Rxa2 28.e6 fxe6 29.fxe6 Rh8+) 26...Qxc1 27.Rfxc1 Rd7+ Black is up a pawn. The win is not trivial, but it should be reachable eventually.

23.Kh1? Unfortunately, mistakes often come in pairs.

25...Kb7 26.Qxf7



26...Rc6! It is important to activate this rook before White can play e6. Now, all black pieces join the attack, and the white king is in big trouble.

27.Rc3 After he played this



"A unique challenge" – Le Quang Liem is a fan of the Biel "marathon".

Photo: Lennart Ootes

move, I managed to calculate the forced win. There was not much for White to do anyway.

27.Qxh5 Qxf4! 28.Ree1 Re2! This is the line that I was mainly calculating starting from 23...Bxe3. Without this move, I was not sure if I could win. Black's threats are twofold: exchange on e1 and follow with ...Rh6 or ...Rc1, or ...Qf2 to attack g2 and e1. Therefore, White's response is forced. 29.Qh4 Qxe5 30.Rxe2 Qxe2 31.Rg1 Rc2+. Black will start collecting the queenside pawns while White does not have any counterplay against the black king.

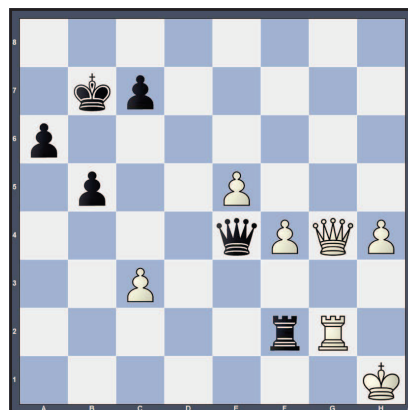
27...Rxc3 28.bxc3 Qe4 29.Rg1 h4!

Now opening up the white king position is inevitable.

30.Qh5 h3 31.Qxg4 hxg2+ 32.Rxg2 White is temporarily up two pawns, but the material is meaningless here as the white king is too weak.

32...Rxa2 Collecting the a-pawn to ensure that my a-pawn will face no opposition in the future. Also, Black is threatening ...Ra1+.

33.h4 Rf2!

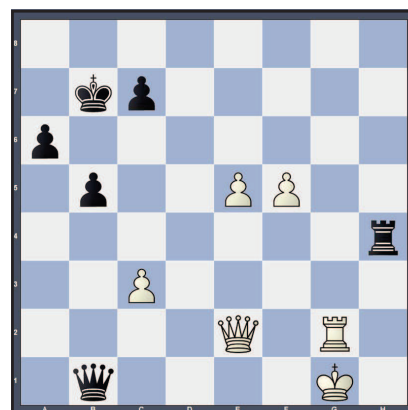


The most accurate, although not the only move, to win. All the white kingside pawns will fall one after another.

34.f5 Rf4 35.Qe2 Rxh4+ 36.Kg1 Qb1+

see the following diagram

My opponent resigned here, as after 37.Kf2 Rf4+ 38.Kg3 Qxf5,



White's position is helpless.

Overall, I was very pleased with this victory. I came up with an opening surprise and was able to navigate the middlegame and the endgame quite accurately, taking advantage of the two mistakes that he committed on moves 22–23 to win an important game.

0–1



**GO TO THE
MASTER
ANALYSIS!**

OPENINGS OPENINGS OPENINGS

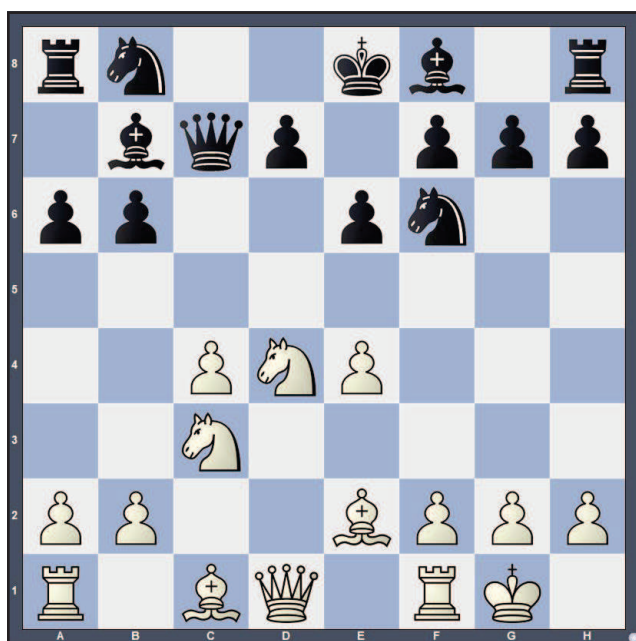




*Knight sacrifice 9.Nd5!! – from the laboratory of the creative player Alexander Grischuk
Photo: Lennart Ootes*

GRISCHUK'S STROKE OF GENIUS

Petra Papp presents a surprise in the Sicilian Kan Variation



Sicilian Kan Variation B41:

- 1.e4 c5
- 2.Nf3 e6
- 3.d4 cxd4
- 4.Nxd4 a6
- 5.c4 Nf6
- 6.Nc3 Qc7
- 7.Be2 b6
- 8.0-0 Bb7

The Sicilian Kan Variation has always been regarded as a fighting opening. After 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3, Black employs the typical Hedgehog moves ...Qc7, ...b6, and ...Bb7, keeping the dark-squared bishop flexible (which can still be developed to e7, d6, c5 or b4). However, in the above diagram position there is a brilliant idea: **9.Nd5!!**.

see the following diagram

Few games featuring this knight sacrifice can be found in the databases, making it a real insider's



tip! The most prominent player (though not the first) to employ it was Alexander Grischuk; one can therefore safely assume that he has analysed it in depth.

9...exd5 10.exd5!.

Let's take consider this position.



White has sacrificed a knight for long-term positional compensation. The e-file has been opened, and a major piece could soon appear there to pressure the black king on e8. The c4/d5 pawn pair completely paralyzes both the bishop on b7 and the knight on b8. The move ...d7-d6 (to enable ...Nbd7) would weaken the c6 square and render the bishop on f8 passive. The white knight on d4 eyes an excellent outpost on f5. White's ideal setup consists of Bd3, Bg5, and Re1. Black relies primarily on manoeuvring the

knight to e4 and forming a battery with Bd6 and Qc7 to generate counterplay. Finally, there remains the option of returning the piece with ...Nc6.

All in all, White's chances are great, and I am confident that **9.Nd5!!** will gain big popularity!

In the above diagram, I will examine the following continuations for Black: **A) 10...h6?!**, **B) 10...Bc5!?** and **C) 10...Bd6!.**

A) 10...h6?!



Prevents Bg5. Nevertheless, this move looks like a pure loss of time. It occurred in a game played about 30 years ago. Gueth,D - Haufe,W 0-1 contained quite a few errors; but I made an important discovery, which is why I included it in the article anyway: **11.Bf3!.**

A significant improvement over the game. The bishop stands well on the h1-a8 diagonal, where there are many tactical points. Furthermore, White gets ready to immediately to utilize the open e-file with the heavy pieces. The game annotations also show what happens if Black plays **10...d6?!**.



PETRA PAPP

1997, HUN

WGM Petra Papp has already represented her country at various international chess competitions and has been a CBM contributor for six years.

B) 10...Bc5!?



A logical move, the bishop is developed onto a natural square. **11.Nf5!.** Certainly! The knight is really active on f5, threatening to take on g7. **11...Kf8!.**



After the natural looking 11...0-0 White has several very promising continuations, the most energetic being 11.b4!?.

Black protects the pawn g7 with the king, reserving the option ...Rg8 to solidify their position. Now, White has several plans, and it's hard to decide which is objectively best. In the annotations on Ballotti,L - Margaryan,A 1-0, I analyse three moves pretty deeply: **12.b4!?** **12.Bg5!?** and **12.Qd2!?**.

In all lines, White ends up with a very promising position!

All in all, White's chances are great, and I am confident that 9.Nd5!! will gain big popularity!

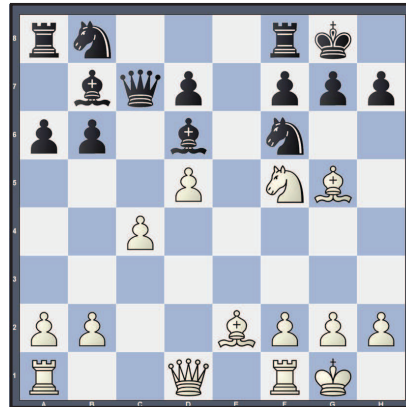
C) 10...Bd6!



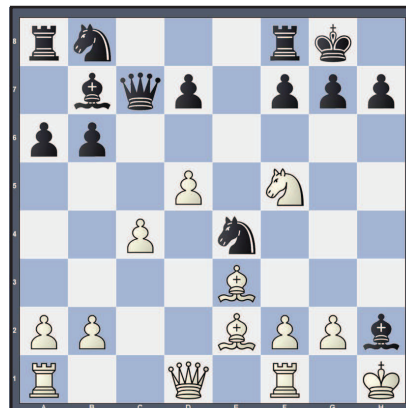
Most of the games saw this active move. The queen-and-bishop battery immediately gives Black counterplay along the diagonal towards h2.

11.Nf5! (**11.Bd3!?**, effectively preventing any ideas involving ...Ne4, is a very interesting novelty, see Narva,M - Martic,I 1-0.) **11...0-0** **12.Bg5!**.

see the following diagram



Active development. Black can attack this bishop with ...Ne4, but the knight will be quite unsafe there. **12...Bxh2+** **13.Kh1** **Ne4** **14.Be3!**.



14...Be5 (after **14...Bf4!?** White has two good replies, **15.Bd3** and **15.Bd4**) **15.Bd3!**.



Attacking the unstable knight is the strongest move. Also, the d1-h5 diagonal is also now open for the white queen. In this very

complicated position, Black needs to know and find difficult defending and counterattacking moves to survive. And even if they do, White retains the better chances. The game Grischuk,A - Jumabayev,R 1-0 saw **15...Nf6?** **16.f4!** when Grischuk scored a very nice victory!



Summary: I think the entire concept of the positional knight sacrifice **9.Nd5!!** is brilliant. The idea is still relatively unknown (only 6 games in the database); so, if you have a precise understanding of the key concepts, you can quickly gain an overwhelming advantage.

If Black knows the correct defence, they can hold the game, but White still retains a comfortable position. I wish you the best of luck in following in Grischuk's footsteps!

**THE
COMPLETE
ARTICLE
CONTAINS:**



- ✓ Overview text
- ✓ 4 annotated sample games

VIDEOS VIDEOS VIDEOS



*The English Defence in its heyday:
Timman – Speelman (Amsterdam
Zonal Tournament 1978)
Photo: Dutch National Archives*

WHERE DID GUKESH GO WRONG?

In the encounter between Gukesh and Pragganandhaa at the 2026 Norway Chess tournament, the opening went anything but smoothly for the World Champion in the Saemisch Variation. In one of the currently very popular variations featuring **8.Bd3 Na5 9.Qe2 c5**, his compatriot surprised him after **10.Nh3 cxd4 11.cxd4 Rc8 12.e5 Ng8 13.Nf2** with the novelty **13...f5!**



Ivan Sokolov, who had been follo-

wing the game, analysed this position – his conclusion: all engines show an advantage for Black, and rightly so!

So what exactly went wrong for White, and where can his play be improved? Sokolov's analysis begins after **9...c5** – his recommendation is **10.Be3**. In doing so, he examines the continuations **10...Rc8** (unproblematic, as after **11.d5 d6 12.Nh3** White obtains a very comfortable position with a space advantage for his pieces), **10...0-0** (White could respond to this with the novelty **11.Bg5!?**), **10...cxd4** (**11.cxd4 Rc8 12.c5!?** leads to a slight advantage for White) and **10...d6** – the main line, in which Black has numerous options after **11.Nh3**.

After **11...Qd7**, a transposition of moves leads to the game Spassky–Huebner (1982), for which Sokolov has a strong improvement in store for White! Our author regards the sequence **11...cxd4 12.cxd4 Rc8 13.Rc1 e5 14.Rc3! 0-0 15.0-0 Nd7 16.f4 Qe7**

Nimzo-Indian E24:

- 1.d4 Nf6
- 2.c4 e6
- 3.Nc3 Bb4
- 4.a3 Bxc3+
- 5.bxc3 Nc6
- 6.f3 b6
- 7.e4 Ba6
- 8.Bd3 Na5
- 9.Qe2 c5



17.Nf2!? or the sharp **17.Ng5!?** **exd4 18.Bxd4 h6 19.Nf3 Nc5**, leading to the spectacular and extremely difficult-to-defend piece sacrifice **20.Bxg7!**.



IVAN SOKOLOV

1968, NED

Over 20 years ago, Ivan Sokolov was among the very best in the world. Today, he is one of the most sought-after coaches worldwide! His series 'Understanding Middlegame Strategy' is one of ChessBase's most successful training courses.



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