

TOURNAMENT BATTLEPLAN

OUTPREPARE YOUR
OPPONENT

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Editor & Proofreader: Frederick Rhine
Cover Design: Driedee Plus
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Production: BestInGraphics

ISBN 9789464201987 – paperback edition
D/2023/13732/34

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2023 by Thinkers Publishing.
This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

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OPPONENT

DANIEL GORMALLY

Thinkers Publishing 2023



Key to symbols

!	a good move	±	White has a serious advantage
?	a weak move	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!!	an excellent move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
??	a blunder	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	an interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	a dubious move	↑	with initiative
□	only move	⇌	with counterplay
=	equality	Δ	with the idea of
∞	unclear position	▷	better is
⊖	with compensation for the sacrificed material	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
∓	Black stands slightly better	#	mate

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Manual Introduction

Lyrics from pop songs are often revealing. One of my favourite songs is "Fast Car" by Tracy Chapman, from the brilliant album of the same title. It came out in 1988 and resonated with my teenage self. So many amazing songs! In the middle of Fast Car she sings, "You and I can both get jobs and finally see what it means to be living." I thought this ironic, as Tracy Chapman is exactly the sort of person who probably wouldn't hack a nine to five job if she could help it. She's a creative person who shines through her music.

Professional chess players are a bit like this. We are more or less unemployable in anything outside of chess, and aren't suited to the daily grind of a normal job. Over the years, however, even playing in chess tournaments has become a bit of a grind. For example, while I've been writing this introduction the Capelle la Grande tournament, which takes place near Dunkirk, finished a few days ago. Twenty years ago I would have been playing in this event, but now the effort of getting to Northern France seems all too much. Fairly sad I know. Partly it's the money. You play in a typical European open and the first prize might be £2000 if you are lucky, and it's very competitive. You may well get several 2600+ players. And your expenses may well offset any prize you happen to win. It is cheaper to stay at home, coach people online, and write courses, books, and articles.

Given all this, and the ease of playing online now, is it even worth playing over the board tournaments at all? I think it is because what you can achieve in over the board tournaments you can't replicate online. There are titles and reputation to be earned. There is also a sense of achievement you can gain with wins in games and tournaments over the board that you can't really get anywhere else. That's why it feels like a good moment in my career to put together a book which talks about tournament play and hopefully uses some of my own experience to put together a work that will be useful for the amateur player. There have been plenty of chess books published which have tried to give practical advice and tips for tournament players, so the genre is hardly new.

However, I feel that we badly need an update, since there have been so many changes in the chess world over the last few years. The pandemic giving rise to

vastly underrated junior and amateur players. Online chess taking a much more prominent role. Accusations of cheating making the headlines. Social media being used as a tool to educate the chess masses. All these have led to a different landscape, but some things stay the same. The player who is willing to analyse and work on chess harder than the rest will still separate him or herself from their peers. In my view, at least 90% of success in tournament play will come down to how good your calculation and analysis is, because that is the bread and butter of tournament play. This is what I will try to get across in this book, that a chess player will often stand or fall on the quality of analysis. I will discuss the positive and negative effects that working with computers have on a player's overall strength. I will also try to explain why my chess fell into a torpor because of an overreliance on computers, and how I have recently come to realize that technical deficiencies have held me back from reaching the higher echelons of the game.

In doing so, and looking at the chess world and trying to explain it from my point of view while following the progress of myself and others, I will try to put together a tournament battle plan. This will include:

1. An emphasis on technical play and how to win won positions. Not winning won positions can be infuriating, right? During this tournament battle manual I want to talk about a part of the game that amateur players often struggle with, which is the technical side. I give tips on how to improve on that while at the same time discussing some well known and some not so well known endings.
2. What you need to do to prepare for tournaments. Are you spending too long on preparation and tiring yourself out? Or are you not preparing for long enough?
3. I talk about modern opening theory and why certain openings are fashionable and why others have fallen out of fashion.
4. An underrated subject in my view - physical fitness. I've recently started going to fitness classes and it has made me realize why lower-rated players often struggle with their chess while professionals can make it look easier. Clearly I'm much more "chess fit" than I am physically fit.

5. I will also be talking about subjects that seem incidental to tournament play to some, but in my opinion are becoming increasingly important in these financially difficult times; like booking hotels, travel, etc.
6. At the end of the book is a Hastings diary, where I give a blow by blow account of what it is like to prepare for an international tournament. These and other subjects will be assembled into a battle manual that the reader will hopefully find useful, and that will help them improve their results.



Chapter One

The thread

I'll let you in on a secret. There is no technical phase. So when a writer says, and now the game enters the technical phase, they are speaking figuratively. There is no such thing. There is just good play, there is finding the correct move, and then there is something else. Yesterday I was watching the Norway Masters commentary on chess24. It reminded me that somehow Super Grandmasters aren't the same as us. It is as if they are their own species. When I saw Anish Giri commentate on the Anand-Carlsen Armaggeddon play-off, it amazed me how quickly he honed in on the right move. Anand and Carlsen followed suit with their choices in the game itself. It's almost as if Super GMs speak their own language, which only they understand. There seems to be an invisible THREAD running through the game, showing the essence of the position, and somehow these guys are able to always find it. So in this chapter we are going to talk about how to find that THREAD ourselves, and how understanding the essence of a position will enable us to win games that otherwise may have eluded us. The reason that Magnus and Vishy found themselves in an Armaggeddon game was that Anand had missed a golden chance to put Carlsen away in their classical game.

Anand Viswanathan (2751) - Carlsen Magnus (2864)

Two Knights Defense C55

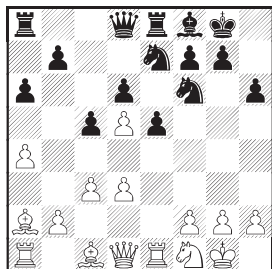
Norway Chess '22 Chess.com (9), 05.06.2022

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙e7
5.o-o o-o 6.♖e1 d6 7.a4 ♗a5 8.♙a2 c5
9.c3 ♘c6 10.♗a3 h6 11.♘c2 a6 12.♗e3
♙e6 13.♗d5 ♖e8 14.♗d2 b5

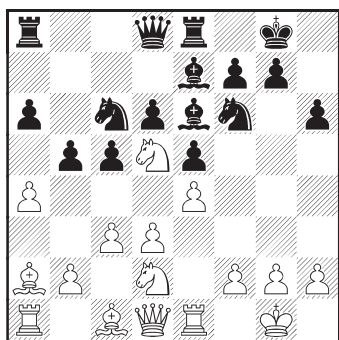
One of the main commentators, Jan Gustafsson, suggested that Black

could have played 14...♙f8 here. Anish Giri said something about how Magnus recently won the world championship match with such a plan. "The only thing he knows, right? He won a world championship with ...♖e8 and

...♙f8." 15.♘f1 ♕xd5 16.exd5 ♞e7



The Knight finds itself on a more productive square on e7, and Giri didn't like the way the Knight ended up on a5 in the game. He suggested that 14...♞b8 was possible, although he admitted that here it probably didn't work. The idea is that Black may now be threatening to carry out a favourable ...♞xd5 exchange, as when White takes back with the pawn there won't be a fork on the Bishop on e6 and Knight on c6. Familiarity with the opening ideas of a particular opening variation is crucially important. Giri has clearly studied this opening (and so many others) deeply and has good knowledge of all the various plans that each side has available. 15.♞xf6+ ♕xf6 16.♕xe6 ♖xe6 17.♞c4 ♞d7 is holding for Black, at least for now.



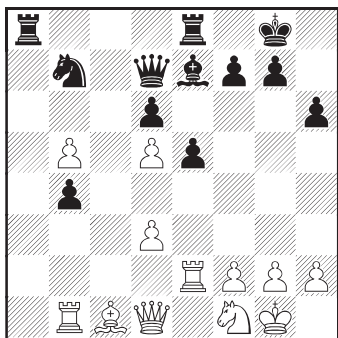
15.♞f1 ♕xd5?!

When Jan Gustafsson and Jovanka Houska spoke with Giri afterwards, he said this was a questionable decision. "Isn't that a very odd operation? I thought he's (Magnus) an expert." Anish is absolutely right because Black's position becomes slightly unpleasant after this. Although the computer evaluation doesn't change that much, it said White had a tiny edge before this and now it goes up to something more like a clear edge. Giri was able to understand at a glance that this was one of the key moments of the game. I was impressed. How was he able to do this? Mostly experience and knowledge, because he is something of an expert in the Italian Game. He would have sensed that Black's position becomes difficult to handle after this exchange. So the more opening and early middlegame knowledge we accrue, the better. This will help us to understand the essence of the game. Of course Magnus is also quite capable of understanding the essence of the game, so why would he make this "slight mistake"? Perhaps we can blame it on somewhat superficial play caused by the fast time control.

16.♕xd5 ♞xd5 17.exd5 ♞a5 18.b4 ♞b7
19.♖e2 cxb4 20.cxb4 a5! 21.axb5 axb4
22.♖b1 ♞d7?

This is too straightforward a defence, and Black soon finds himself in trouble. When forced to make "only moves," even world champions can falter. Here

Black had to find 22...♖c5! 23.♗xb4 ♗a1 creating sufficient counterplay for Black. 24.♕c2 ♕a8=



23.♗eb2! ♖c5

23...♕xb5 24.♗xb4 wins the Knight on b7 and the game.

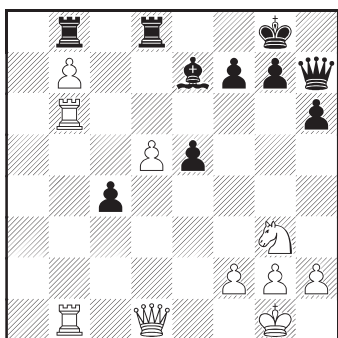
24.♗xb4 ♕f5 25.♙e3

It turns out that the crude plan of pushing the b-pawn spells trouble for Black.

25...♖xd3

25...♕xd3 26.♕xd3 ♖xd3 27.♗4b3 ♖c5 28.♙xc5 dxc5 29.b6+- also leaves Black in a jam.

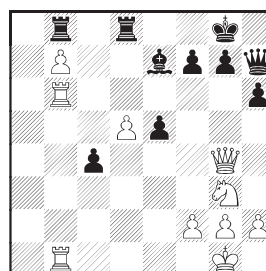
26.♖g3 ♕h7 27.♗4b3 ♖c5 28.♙xc5 dxc5 29.b6 ♗ed8 30.b7 ♗ab8 31.♗b6 c4



Anand must have sensed his position was winning here. His two passed pawns, particularly the one on b7, are not counterbalanced by Carlsen's on c4. But now Anand confronts one of the more difficult situations that arises when we have a technically winning game. White has several tempting alternatives, and it is no easy task to choose among them.

32.♗c6?

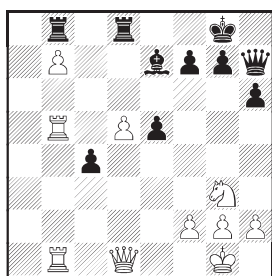
Afterwards, Anand looked rather depressed, not surprisingly. It's not often that you get a chance to defeat Carlsen in a classical game. "It was so winning," said Vishy, correctly pointing out that 32.♕g4!



would have closed the game out. When a player of Anand's calibre messes up, more than likely he will understand what the critical moment of the game was, and what he could have done differently. Someone like me might sense that White had a win, but not be able to identify the key moment. ♕g4! crushes Black, as the various threats like ♖f5 become too much to handle. 32...c3 33.♖f5 ♙a3 34.♗c6 Controlling the c-pawn and reducing Black to complete passivity. 34...♙b2

35. ♖xh6+ ♔f8 36. ♗f5 ♜xb7 37. ♝xc3+-;
32. ♖a4 was another alternative.
32...c3 (32...♜xd5 33. ♖c6 ♖d3 34. ♖c7
♙d6 35. ♝xd6+-) 33. ♖c4+-

Even the weird looking 32. ♝b5,



just defending the d-pawn, would have been good enough, although this is not a very human way to continue. When you are trying to put the game away, it makes more sense to go forward. 32...c3 33. ♝c1 controls everything.

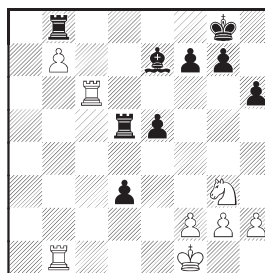
32... ♖d3!

Magnus finds the only chance, once again showing why he is one of the hardest players in history to beat.

33. ♖f1?

As usual when we start to deviate from the winning path, we continue to go wrong. On the webcam it was clear that Anand looked very uncomfortable before making this move. No doubt he had underestimated the strength of ... ♖d3! And probably felt that he had already blown the win.

Still, the hard-headed engine feels that White is more or less winning after the sequence 33. ♖xd3 cxd3 34. ♔f1! a nice tidy-up move that is often useful in technical situations and is often overlooked by those looking for more immediate solutions. 34... ♙f8 (34... ♜xd5



35. ♗f5! was possibly missed by Anand. 35... ♙f8 36. ♝c8 ♜d8 37. ♝xd8 ♜xd8 38. b8 ♖+-) 35. ♝c7 ♜xd5 36. ♔e1 Black remains in a passive situation.

33... ♙f8 34. ♝xc4

34.d6! it is hard to make such a decision when it seemed like you had an easy win earlier, because you feel with such a move you could be risking everything. 34... ♙xd6 (34... ♜d7 35. ♖xd3 cxd3 36. ♝c7 ♜xd6 37. ♔f1± is another complex line.) 35. ♜d1 ♖g6 36. ♝b6 c3 37. ♖c4 c2 38. ♝c1 ♙f8! Creating a threat against the back rank. 39. ♜xg6 ♜d1+ 40. ♗f1 ♝xc1 with decent counterplay.

34... ♖xf1+ 35. ♔xf1 ♜d7 36. ♝c8 ♝bxb7 37. ♝xb7 ♝xb7 38. ♗f5 ♜d7 39. g4 g6 40. ♖xh6+ ♔h7 ½

The three categories of missed wins

Ironically, on the same day I started writing this book Anand had this "classic" missed win game against Carlsen. It was ironic because one of the areas I need to improve on is converting a winning position. This game bought back all the thoughts and experiences I've had when failing to convert what seemed like a decisive advantage. It's always more painful to squander a win at longer time controls, as you have all the baggage that you build up over the course of several hours. The emotional ups and downs, and the time and hard work that you've invested to gain that winning position, can only lead to a feeling of emptiness and regret in the aftermath. That was painfully clear when Anand was interviewed later.

It occurred to me that Anand's game falls into one of the main categories of missed wins. I believe those categories are:

1. The missed tactical win. This was the situation in the Anand game, when there is a path leading to victory, but it is a narrow one and you have to calculate extremely well to find it.
2. Failing due to a lack of technical knowledge. An obvious example would be if the player doesn't know how to mate with Knight and Bishop.
3. Blundering away an advantage. A simple tactical blunder by us may let the win slip to a draw, or even worse a loss. Or we may simply get too hasty and make a rash move leading to the loss of the initiative.
4. Being gradually outplayed. We might build up a decisive advantage, but a series of suboptimal moves lead to us losing that advantage altogether. Anand would have been keenly aware during the classical game that trying to beat Carlsen is like trying to hold an anaconda in your hands. You may think you have it in your possession, but it is too powerful and slips out of your control. That in itself puts you under extreme pressure to be as accurate as possible. Fortunately for Vishy, he had a chance to redeem himself in the Armageddon playoff.

Anand Viswanathan (2751) - Carlsen Magnus (2864)

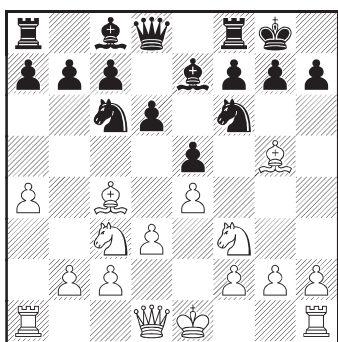
Italian Game C50

Norway Chess '22 Armageddon lichess.org, 06.06.2022

1.e4 e5

It was interesting to me that Carlsen took the time to adjust all his pieces before making his first move, despite the fact that he was already three minutes down on the clock. (In Armageddon, Black starts with a time disadvantage, but only needs to draw to win the game.) This suggests to me that he wanted to stay in emotional control. Being too hasty at the beginning, failing to do what he would do under normal circumstances, might set off a chain reaction that could cost him later in the game. When I faced Michael Adams recently in an OTB game, I got the same impression. He was throwing off a vibe of not being rushed, being totally relaxed, and having all the time in the world. Of course he won against the panicky and nervy Gorm.

2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙c5 5.♙g5
♙e7 6.♘c3 d6 7.a4 o-o



8.a5

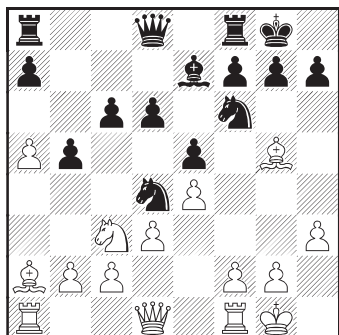
As Giri suggested, this was another indication of how working with computers has influenced people's style of play. "People would never grab space just for fun. Now they do it just like this." The knowledge of how to use space is an important part of a chess player's armoury. I feel it's something that amateur players often struggle with, as it seems like a difficult concept to grasp.

8...♙g4 9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♚xf3 ♘d4 11.♚d1
c6

Black's entire plan, which involves exchanging on f3 and then playing solidly with ...c6 and ...♘e6, was according to Jan Gustafsson a "typical Dubov operation."

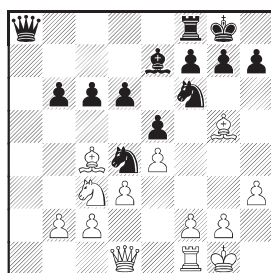
Daniil Dubov is a player who has helped Magnus on several occasions and apparently this approach to the demands of the position derives from his input. A player can and should use others to help them in their chess understanding. The way I see it, chess is a potpourri of different players and styles and approaches. A wise chess player should be like a magpie, grabbing ideas from everyone.

12.o-o b5 13.♙a2



According to Giri: "The Knight on d4 is super stable and if White trades with Nxe2 then Black will grab space by taking and playing ...d5. But I do rate the two Bishops tremendously. In my Italian course I give this position as advantage for White." Showing fantastic knowledge, and also not missing a chance to plug his Chessable course. Bravo.

13. axb6 axb6 14. Qxa8 Qxa8



might not have seemed convincing to Anand. Already Black has a strategic threat of ...b5, and if White retreats to a2 then ...b4 will win a piece, and if Bb3 then Black will take on b3 and White has lost the advantage of the Bishop pair. Vishy needed to win because the rules of this Armageddon game favour Black in the case of a draw, so exchanges are not in his

favour. However, Nxe2! allows White to retain some advantage. $15... \text{Nxe2+}$ ($15... \text{b5?}$ $16. \text{Nxd4 bxc4}$ $17. \text{Nf5+-}$) $16. \text{Qxe2}$ h6 $17. \text{Bc3}$ with perhaps the tiniest of edges, but it really isn't much.

13... Nxe6 14. Bc3

Giri was surprised by this, expecting White to take on f6. "Vishy is known for preferring Knights. But he also knows the Bishop pair is a good thing. He has heard of it."

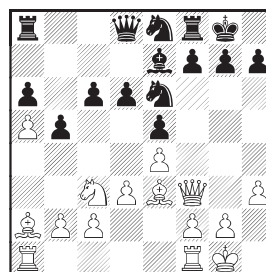
$14. \text{Bxf6 Bxf6}$ $15. \text{Nxe2 Bg5}$ discouraging the f4 break, and Black should be fine.

14... a6 15. Qf3

" Qf3 you play, or not?" said Anish, just milliseconds before Anand's hand reached out for the Queen. Amazing. The way these players follow the THREAD of the game never ceases to amaze.

15... Qd7

Magnus plays a solid move. The commentators were weighing various options like $15... \text{Ne8}$



intending ... Bg5 , with the strategically favourable exchange of dark-squared Bishops.

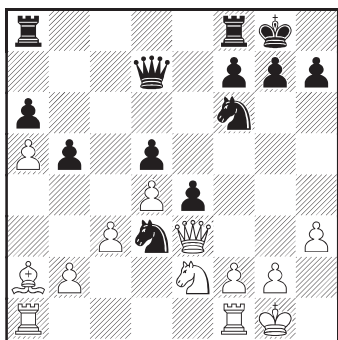
16. ♖e2 d5!

Carlsen's instincts are as correct as ever.

17. c3 ♕c5 18. exd5

This allows Black to eventually gain the initiative.

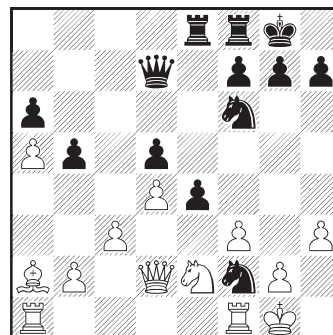
18. ♖g3! would have been a more logical continuation. 18...d4 19. ♕c1 dxc3 20. bxc3 ♖ad8 21. ♗d1± White has a pleasant game.

18...cxd5 19. ♕xc5 ♖xc5 20. d4 e4 21. ♖e3 ♗d3**22. ♖d2?!**

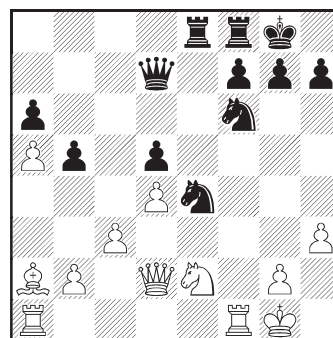
The cool 22. ♖ab1! would have extinguished some of Black's fire. The idea is ♕b3-c2, gathering a pawn. 22...♖ae8 23. f3 ♔h8 24. ♖g3±

22...♖ae8 23. f3 ♗f2!

So simple. This was the tactical possibility that Jan had already flagged and mentioned that the engine was recommending. You couldn't help but be impressed by how easily and quickly Magnus found the same idea. Wouldn't it be nice, to borrow his chess brain for a day...

**24. fxe4?**

24. ♖xf2 e3-+; 24. ♖e3 exf3 25. ♖xf3 ♗e4 26. ♖ad1±

24...♗2xe4**25. ♖d3**

"Magnus is very quick not just in terms of literal speed but quick at making good moves." What Anish Giri is saying here might seem obvious, because you think well, Magnus is world champion, of course he's good at that, but it still needs explaining. I think what Giri is saying is that some people can make good moves, but Magnus can find the best moves with very little thought. His great calculation and instincts lead him there a bit quicker. In faster time controls this is a crucial asset. It's also

an important quality if you get short of time. If you know you can execute one good move after another under time pressure, it frees you up earlier in the game and you don't feel rushed. In this case, when we discussed how at the start of the game Magnus was taking his time to adjust the pieces, it now makes sense. It's like saying to the opponent, "I'm the one in charge here. It doesn't matter if I get short of time, because I will continue to play excellently anyway." He is setting his stool out and it's a positive one. Carlsen is even economical in how he moves his pieces. If you don't believe me, watch some YouTube videos of Carlsen playing chess and gliding the pieces around the board with little effort. When he moves them they seem to go to their stations a bit quicker than when you or I move our pieces. Perhaps that's what Giri meant as well.

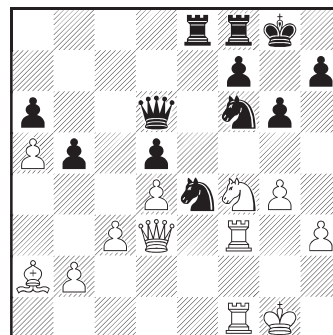
25...♔d6 26.♖f3

One of the other commentators, Jovanka Houska, suggested 26.♖f5? but Giri was critical of this, suggesting that Black wants to play ...g6 and ...♔g7 anyway, so you are giving away a tempo. Once again we can see that understanding the essence of the game (the thread) is all important.

26...g6

Sure enough, Magnus plays the Anish Giri plan!

27.♖af1 ♖h5 28.g4 ♖hf6 29.♖f4



29...♖g5?

Short of time, it becomes harder to control the position. We'll talk about the value of control in a later chapter. I'm sure in a classical game if confronted by this position Magnus would play 29...♖e7! 30.♗c2 ♖fe8 when White has a miserable position. It is difficult for him to undermine the Knight pair on f6 and e4. 31.h4 g5 32.hxg5 ♖xg5 33.♖g3 ♖e1-+

30.♖3f2 ♖ge4 31.♖g2 h6 32.h4 g5 33.hxg5 hxg5 34.♖h3!

The game is starting to turn chaotic which at blitz means more mistakes are inevitable. Anand was happy to find this idea where White intends ♖f5, attacking g5.

34...♔g7 35.♖f5?

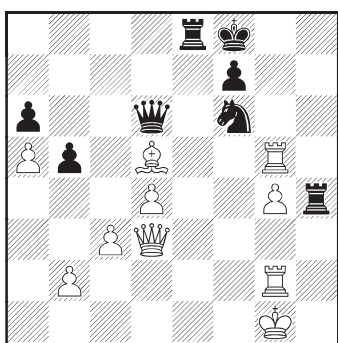
This turns out to be premature. The more careful 35.♗e3= was called for.

35...♖h8 36.♖xg5 ♖h4?

36...♖xg5 37.♖xg5+ ♔f8 and Black is getting there first. The White King looks wide open. 38.♖f5 ♖e1+ 39.♖f1 ♖xf1+ 40.♗xf1 ♖e4-+

37. ♖xd5!

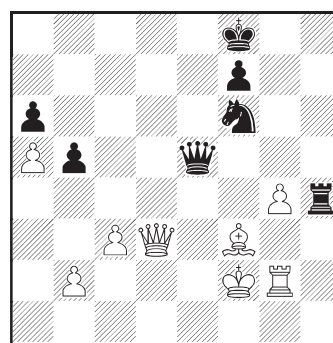
The commentary team predicted that Vishy would find this move. "Typical Vishy tactics" and "like that game against Kasparov" were some of the comments.

37... ♜xg5 38. ♖xg5+ ♔f8**39. ♖f3?**

39. ♖g3! would have won the game, as the commentary team saw. But Vishy didn't see this move, as he admitted afterwards. This is surprising, as it's a useful tactical tidying up move that is typical of Anand's excellent technique. 39... ♖xg3 40. ♖xg3 ♜xd5 41. ♖xd5+- the endgame is fairly hopeless for Black. The alternative 39. ♖xf7? was suggested as a possible attacking try, but this fails on several counts. 39... ♖e1+ 40. ♔f2 ♖f4+ 41. ♔xe1 ♖h1+ turns the tables completely. But I don't mind the idea of ♖xf7. We should at least look at such moves, even if they don't always work!

39... ♖f4

39... ♖e1+ 40. ♔f2 ♖hh1 looked quite scary for White. 41. ♖f5! only move. 41... ♜e4+ 42. ♖xe4 ♖h6 43. g5 ♖h4+ 44. ♖g3 ♖hf1+ 45. ♖xf1 ♖xf1+ 46. ♔xf1 ♖xg3 47. ♔e2=

40. ♖e5 ♖xe5 41. dxe5 ♖xe5 42. ♔f2**42... ♖h3?**

I was surprised when watching that Magnus didn't go for 42... ♖h1, especially since this threatened mate in one. 43. ♖d2 leads to a state of dynamic equilibrium. (Vishy said afterwards that he was intending 43. ♖e3?!, but this loses on the spot to 43... ♖f1+! 44. ♔xf1 ♖xe3.)

43. g5 ♜h5 44. g6 fxg6?

44... ♖c5+ 45. ♖d4 ♖xd4+ 46. cxd4 ♜f4 was the only way to keep resisting.

45. ♖d8+ ♖e8 46. ♖xe8+ ♔xe8 47. ♖xg6 ♜f4 48. ♖xa6 ♜d3+ 49. ♔e3 ♜e5 50. ♖e6+ 1-0

Chess as a duel

The essence of chess is the cut and thrust. You come up with an idea or plan, and your opponent scrambles to refute it. Such was the case when

observing Anish Giri's dissection of his game against Aryan Tari. Anish maintained the "thread" of the game by understanding the ups and downs well.

Giri Anish (2761) - Tari Aryan (2663)

Queen's Pawn Game D02

Norway Chess '22 lichess.org (8), 09.06.2022

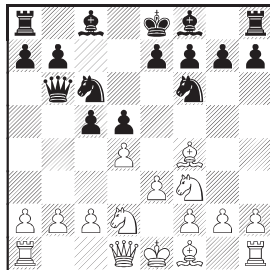
1. Nf3 d5 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bf4

The London System has become extremely popular lately. As chess is increasingly dominated by reams of main-line theory, the ability to create new battlegrounds has become ever more important.

3... c5 4. e3 Nc6 5. Nbd2 Bg4

A logical response anchoring the Bishop outside of the pawn chain before playing ...e6.

5... Qb6



attacking the pawn on b2, is also a critical option and has been played many times. It is important to play

this before White has had the chance to play c3, so that he is not in time to meet this comfortably with Qb3 . In a practical tournament game faced with the move ... Qb6 , I would take the time to think about the position. White has an important decision to take. Do you want to limply defend the b-pawn or not bother doing so? The problem is that if you play a move like Qb1 , then d4 will hang. So White is probably going to lose a pawn for the time being. The point is to not panic, actually think about the position, realize you have done nothing wrong, and try to work the moves out systematically. 6. dxc5 Qxb2 7. Qb1 Qc3 8. Bb5 e6 9. O-O Bc7

