

Championship Chronicle



2009 US Women's Chess Championship

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Zatonskih Extends Lead with Grinding Victory

IM Anna Zatonskih extended her lead to a full point after grinding out a win in round 5 against WFM Tatev Abrahamyan.

The opening was very tame and the game was a slow, maneuvering affair that was brought to life when Abrahamyan decided to open it up approaching the time control.

Zatonskih ended up winning a pawn but even that may not have been enough to win but Abrahamyan could not find the toughest defense and her position collapsed very quickly.

WGM Camilla Baginskaite moved into a share of second place as she beat Yun Fan. Fan again was up to the challenge of her higher rated opponent but a bad blunder

when accurate defense was required gifted Baginskaite the point.



Leader, IM Anna Zatonskih (Photo Betsy Dynako)

WIM Alisa Melekhina is the other player in second place after she drew with her second IM in the

tournament, Rusudan Goletiani.

The game was an entertaining affair with Goletiani missing a couple of opportunities to pressure the young WIM. However, the ending was probably drawn, despite Goletiani's material advantage, and Melekhina held on to secure yet another impressive result.

In the other two games, IM Irina Krush and WIM Iryna Zenyuk played an interesting draw which the IM should have converted towards the end of the first time control, while WIM Battsetseg Tsagaan managed to beat WGM Sabina Foisor who blundered a piece in an interesting ending that involved each side having unopposed, connected passed pawns on opposite sides of the boards.

Current Standings:

- 1 Anna Zatonskih, 4½
- 2-3 Camilla Baginskaite, 2½
- 2-3 Alisa Melekhina, 3½
- 4-7 Irina Krush, 2½
- 4-7 Rusudan Goletiani, 2½
- 4-7 Sabina Foisor, 2½
- 4-7 Battsetseg Tsagaan, 2½
- 8 Iryna Zenyuk, 2
- 9 Tatev Abrahamyan, 1
- 10 Yun Fan, ½

Round 6 Match-Ups

Anna Zatonskih and Alisa Melekhina meet in what is undoubtedly the most important game of round 6.

Zatonskih has a full point lead over Melekhina with just 4 games to play although it will be interesting to see if Melekhina is happy with a

draw for her norm chances or whether she goes all out for the win to have a shot at the title.

Camilla Baginskaite has the black pieces against Iryna Zenyuk and will no doubt employ the fighting chess she has shown throughout her previous games.

In the other games, Sabina Foisor will have to pull herself together after today's loss as she plays Rusudan Goletiani, Battsetseg Tsagaan will have white against Irina Krush and Yun Fan has the white pieces against Tatev Abrahamyan in a battle of the bottom two.



Ben's Best: Krush vs Zenyuk

GM-Elect Ben Finegold Picks His Game of the Day

Krush, Irina (2490) –
Zenyuk, Iryna (2271) [D02]

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c3

An unusual system against the King's Indian. Krush did not want to walk into Zenyuk's prep, so she decides to leave the main paths early, and try to fight for an edge in the middlegame.

3...Bg7 4.Bf4 0-0 5.Nbd2 d5

Black can also play 5...d6, and if white chooses 6.e4, the game has more of a Pirc feel.

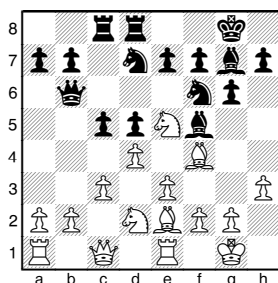
6.e3 Bf5!?

Usually black refrains from moving the c8 bishop, until the c pawn and knight have moved. Now Krush thinks she should have played 7.Qb3, so her queen is active, and Zenyuk's queen would be passive on c8.

7.h3 Nbd7 8.Be2 c5 9.0-0 Qb6
10.Qc1 Rac8

In the commentary room, Krush was not happy with her play up to this point, and felt, as did Jen and I, that black had easily equalized.

11.Ne5 Rfd8 12.Re1



12...Ne8!?

I like this repositioning of the knight to d6. Black also has chances to play e5 later.

13.Nxd7 Rxd7 14.Nb3

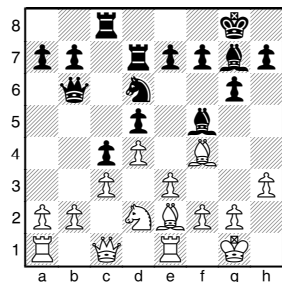
Here I expected 14...cxd4, but both players felt 14...c4 was the way to go. As usual, Rybka does not agree with me.

14...c4 15.Nd2

I expected this move, because I thought white wanted to play e4 ASAP. Of course, both players looked at the more "aggressive" 15.Nc5. Krush thought black *might* sacrifice the exchange with 15...Rxc5!?, but, Zenyuk said she would have played

15...Rdd8, which seems quite stable.

15...Nd6



16.Bg3?!

I did not understand this move when doing live commentary, and when Krush came into the commentary room, she said it was terrible. She had some variation in mind, where white plays b3 and e4, and the there were sacrifices on d4 and Bf4 was loose. But, clearly, 16.Bg3 is too slow.

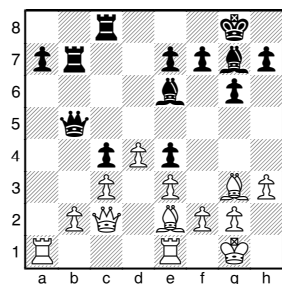
16...Qc6! 17.Bf3 Ne4 18.Nxe4 dxe4 19.Be2 b5 20.Qc2 Be6?!

Krush thought this was unnecessary, and, during the live commentary, I was also puzzled by this move. Black should get to business on the queenside, with something like 20...a5 or 20...Rb7.

21.a4 Rb7?!

Zenyuk simply overlooked Krush's powerful 23rd move. Best is 21...a6 with equality.

22.axb5 Qxb5



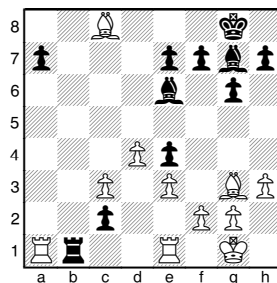
23.b4!

Krush must have had an easy time finding this move, after a similar unusual b pawn move played against her by Zaton-skih!

23...cxb3!

The only chance. Black has too many weak pawns otherwise. Now a tactical melee ensues, and the time trouble simply added to the tension.

24.Bxb5 bxc2 25.Ba6 Rb1
26.Bxc8



26...Ba2!!

This is what Zenyuk was counting on when playing 23...cxb3

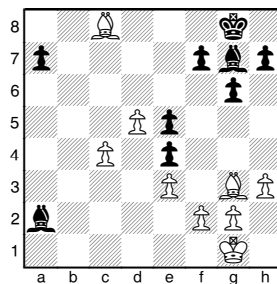
27.Raxb1! cxb1Q 28.Rxb1 Bxb1 29.c4

White is clearly better, but both players have less than one minute to get to move 40!

29...e5!?

Zenyuk needs counterplay, otherwise the two connected pawns are too strong. Also interesting was 29...a5.

30.d5! Ba2



31.Ba6?!

Krush misses a nice idea with... 31.d6! Bxc4 (31...Bf8 32.c5+-) 32.Bh4!!

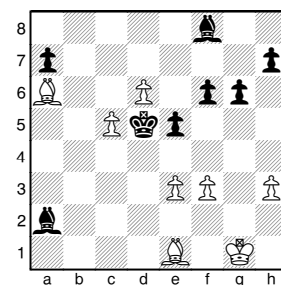
31...f6 32.d6 Kf7 33.c5 Bf8
34.f4! exf3 35.gxf3 Ke6

Black should have played 35...Bd5. With the clock ticking down, so to speak, moving the king towards the passed pawns seems more natural.

36.Be1

36.e4!

36...Kd5



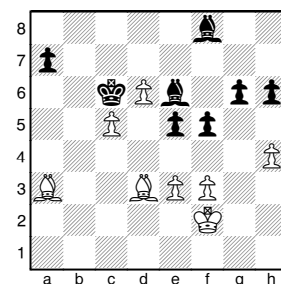
37.Bb4??

In time trouble, Krush missed 37.d7 Be7 38.Ba5! winning. She simply did not think about a5 as a square for the bishop.

37...Kc6! 38.Kf2 Be6 39.h4 f5
40.Ba3 h6

The players make the time control, both with less than 20 seconds. Now Krush goes into a long think, but, the win has slipped away.

41.Bd3



41...Bg7!

White wanted to play 42.Bc2 and 43.Ba4+. If black counters with 43...Kb5, as in the game, then the Bf8 would be loose after 44.c6! Kxc6 45.d7! threatening the Bf8 and to simply promote with 46.d8. So, Zenyuk makes her bishop safe. With the possibilities of passed pawns on both sides and an active Kc6, Krush decides a draw is the right result, and the game ends in repetition. A very exciting game for the spectators, and the commentators as well.

42.Bc2 Kb5 43.Bd3+ Kc6
44.Bc2 Kb5 45.Bd3+ Kc6 1/2-1/2

Melekhina Remains Unbeaten but Goletiani Gives Her a Scare

**Melekhina, Alisa (2301) –
Goletiani, Rusudan (2437)**

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

Is Melekhina going to play an open Sicilian?

2...e6 3.c3

No! Melekhina continues with the c3 Sicilian that she played earlier in the event.

3...Nf6 4.e5 Nd5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.Nc3 Nxc3 8.bxc3 Bd7

A rare continuation, possibly in the hope that Melekhina hadn't seen it before since she is fairly new to this line. The usual moves are 8...Qc7 ; and 8...Nc6

9.Bd3 Bc6 10.Bf4 dxe5 11.Bxe5 Nd7 12.0-0 Rc8 13.Re1

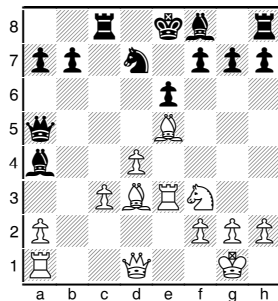
Black puts pressure on the c3 pawn.

13...Qa5 14.Re3

White can play either 14.Rb1 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Bd6

16.Nxc6 bxc6±; or 14.c4 which leads to a lot of complications after 14...Bb4 15.Re3 Bc3 16.Rb1 Nxe5 17.Rxe5 Qd8∞

14...Ba4



15.Bc2

Melekhina chooses the most solid continuation but the commentary room liked the pawn sacrifice 15.Qe2 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Rxc3 17.Rb1 with a lot of play for the pawn.

15...Bxc2 16.Qxc2 Nb6 17.Qb3 Qd5 18.Nd2 f6 19.Bg3 Kf7

Both sides have chances in

this position.

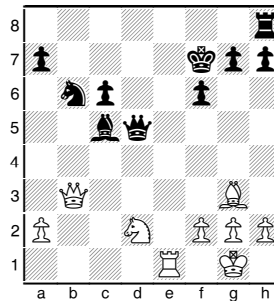
20.Rae1 Rc6

20...Qxb3!? 21.Nxb3 Nd5 22.Rxe6 Nxc3± White cannot defend the a-pawn but has some play in compensation.

21.c4 Qxd4 22.c5 Bxc5

The queen sacrifice with 22...Qxd2 23.Rd1 Qxd1+ 24.Qxd1 Bxc5 would have produced an interesting imbalance, at least from a spectator's perspective!

23.Rxe6 Qd5 24.Rxc6 bxc6



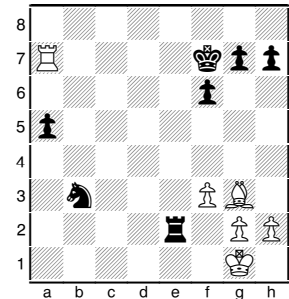
25.Rc1! Nd7 26.Ne4?

26.Qc2 Rd8 27.Nb3 Bb6 28.Rd1= and white will regain the pawn.

26...Qxb3 27.axb3 Re8 28.Nxc5 Nxc5 29.f3 Nxb3

Black is a clear pawn up although winning the position won't be easy.

30.Rxc6 a5 31.Ra6 Re2 32.Ra7+



32...Ke6

How else is black going to get her a-pawn further up the board?

33.Rxg7 a4 34.Ra7 Ra2 35.Ra6+ Kd5 36.Bd6 Nc1 37.h4 Nd3 38.Bf8 Ne1 39.Rxf6 Nxf6 40.h5 Ne3 41.Rf7 a3 42.Rxh7

42.Bxa3 Rxa3 43.Rxh7 should be a draw.

42...Rg2+ 43.Kh1 a2 44.Ra7 Rf2 45.Bg7 Nf5 46.Kg1 ½-½



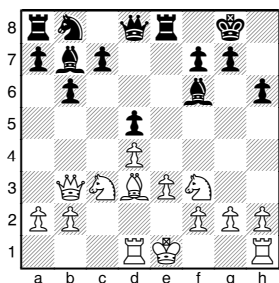
WIM Alisa Melekhina plays IM Rusudan Goletiani in round 5. (Photo Betsy Dynako)

"The queen sacrifice with 22...Qxd2 23.Rd1 Qxd1+ 24.Qxd1 Bxc5 would have produced an interesting imbalance, at least from a spectator's perspective!"

Baginskaite Wins Again, Fan Let's Another One Slip

Baginskaite, Camilla (2356) –
Fan, Yun (2201)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Be7
4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Bg5 0-0 6.e3
h6 7.Bh4 b6 8.Qb3 Bb7
9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.cxd5 exd5
11.Rd1 Re8 12.Bd3



12...c6

A little passive. Fan could well have prepared this line against Baginskaite but it would be interesting to find out if she did, why she didn't play the same move that scored Mkrtchian a relatively quick win a few years back 12...c5 13.Bb1 Nd7 14.0-0 cxd4 15.exd4 Nf8 16.Rfe1 Ne6 17.Qc2 g6 18.Qd2 Bg7 19.a3 Qf6 20.Ba2 Nxd4 21.Rxe8+ Rxe8 22.Nxd4 Qxd4 23.Qc1 Qe5 24.Nxd5 Qxb2 25.Qc4 Qd4 26.Qc1 Qe5 27.h3 Qe4 28.Qc7 Qe1+ 0-1 Baginskaite, C (2365)–Mkrtchian, L (2409)/Bled 2002

13.0-0 Nd7 14.Rfe1 Nf8
15.e4

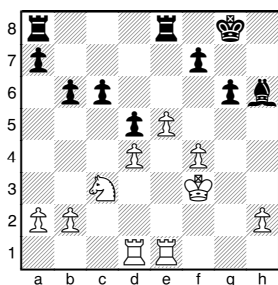
Because of this push the game takes on a different complexion from the one previously mentioned.

15...Ne6 16.e5 Be7 17.Bf5
Bf8 18.g3 Bc8 19.Qc2

Ng5 20.Nxg5 Bxf5
21.Qxf5 Qxg5 22.Qxg5
hxg5

Fan is slightly cramped but her position is solid.

23.f4 gxf4 24.gxf4 g6
25.Kf2 Bh6 26.Kf3



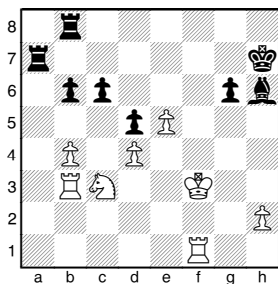
26...Re6

26...Kf8 with the idea of putting the king on e7 and using the h-file for the rooks should be equal.

27.b4 a6 28.Na4 Rb8
29.Rg1 Kh7 30.Rdf1 Bf8
31.a3 a5 32.Rb1 axb4
33.axb4 f6

Fan may not have liked the look of the rook ending after 33...b5 34.Nc5 Bxc5 35.bxc5 Ra8 36.Ra1 Ree8 37.f5!?

34.Rgc1 fxe5 35.fxe5 Bh6
36.Rf1 Re7 37.Rb3 Ra7
38.Nc3



38...Bd2

38...Rf8+ 39.Ke2 Rxf1
40.Kxf1 b5 is equal. The white pawns will become targets for the black bishop and rook.

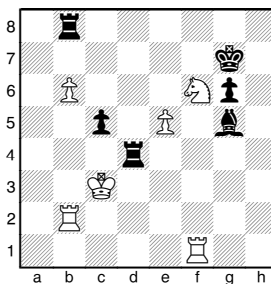
39.Ke2 Bg5 40.b5 c5
41.dxc5 bxc5 42.Nxd5
Ra2+?!

42...c4! 43.Rbb1 (43.Nf6+
Kg7 44.Rb4 Ra2+ 45.Kf3
Bxf6 46.exf6+ Kxf6=)
43...Re8 44.Nf6+ Bxf6
45.Rxf6 Rxe5+=

43.Kd3 Rxh2 44.b6 Rh4
45.Kc3 Rd4 46.Nf6+

46.Rf7+! wins but this is one of those silly computer lines. How many people would see to put their king on a1 and give up the d5 knight just so the b-pawn can advance? 46...Kg8 47.Rd7 Rf8 48.Rb5! Rf3+ 49.Kb2 Rd2+ 50.Ka1 Rf1+ 51.Rb1 Rff2 52.Ra7 Rxd5 53.b7+-

46...Kg7 47.Rb2



47...Rf4??

A blunder in a difficult position but Fan only had a few minutes left for the rest of the game. Taking on f6 doesn't save the position

47...Bxf6 48.exf6+ Kf7
49.Rh2!+-; Black's best may have been 47...Bf4 48.Nd7 Rxd7 49.Rxf4 Re7 50.Rf6 Rxe5 51.Rc6 g5 52.Rc7+ Kf6 53.b7 Ree8 54.Kc4 g4 55.Kxc5 Rg8 with no immediate win in clear sight for white.

48.Rxf4 Bxf4 49.Nd7

The white king will penetrate into c6.

49...Rb7 50.e6 Bd6
51.Kc4 g5 52.Kd5 Bf4
53.Kc6 Rb8 54.Nxb8
Bxb8 55.e7 1-0

"46.Rf7+! wins but this is one of those silly computer lines. How many people would see to put their king on a1 and give up the d5 knight just so the b-pawn can advance?"

Tsagaan Beats Foisor In Longest Game of Day

Battsetseg, Tsagaan (2265) – Foisor, Sabina (2390)

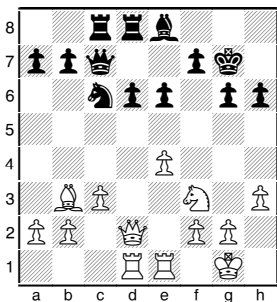
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Bg7 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Bc4 Qa5 8.0-0

Tsagaan plays the best move. 8.f3 is what Foisor faced in round in round 1 against Yun Fan although she missed the correct follow up with 8...Qb4. I'm sure Foisor was relishing Tsagaan possibly giving her a chance to correct that missed opportunity.

8...0-0 9.Bb3 d6 10.h3 Bd7 11.Re1 Rac8 12.Nd5 Rfe8 13.Bd2 Qd8 14.Nf3 e6

14...Nxd5 15.exd5 Na5 16.c3 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 has been played previously.

15.Nxf6+ Bxf6 16.c3 Qc7 17.Bg5 Bxg5 18.Nxg5 h6 19.Nf3 Red8 20.Qd2 Kg7 21.Rad1 Be8



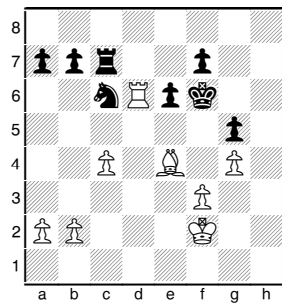
22.Re3

22.Nd4! with threats of sacrifices on e6 is good for white 22...Qa5 (22...Nxd4 23.Qxd4+ Kh7 24.Qxa7) 23.Bxe6 fxe6 24.Nxe6+ Kh7 25.Qd5± protecting a2 as the rook on d8 has nowhere to go.

22...Ne7 23.Rd3 Bc6 24.Rxd6 Rxd6 25.Qxd6 Qxd6 26.Rxd6 Bxe4

After all the swaps, material is equal but the position still has some dynamic possibilities thanks to the pawn majorities on each side.

27.Ne5 Rc7 28.f3 Bd5 29.c4 Bc6 30.Kf2 h5 31.g4 hxg4 32.hxg4 g5 33.Bc2 Kf6 34.Nxc6 Nxc6 35.Be4



35...Ke5

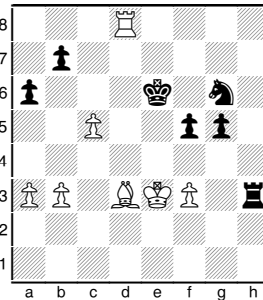
35...Ne5! Even in some of the most innocent of positions there lays a tactic. Black misses this win of a pawn although both players were getting short of time approaching the 40



WIM Battsetseg Tsagaan makes a move in her round 5 game against WGM Sabina Foisor. (Photo Betsy Dynako)

move time control 36.b3 Nxg4+ 37.fxg4 Ke5

36.Rd1 Ne7 37.b3 f5 38.gxf5 exf5 39.Bb1 Ke6 40.Ke3 a6 41.Rd8 Ng6 42.a3 Rh7 43.Bd3 Rh3 44.c5



44...Nh4?!

Black goes chasing the f3 pawn but it is the wrong idea. White's pawn majority will probably get there before black's given the bishop against knight and white's rook which is well position to defend against the black pawn push. 44...Nf4 45.Bc4+ Ke5 46.Re8+ Kf6 47.b4 g4 48.Rf8+ Kg5 49.Rg8+=

45.Bc4+ Ke7 46.Rb8 Nxf3

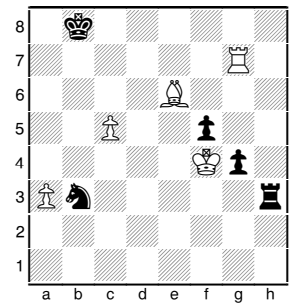
47.Rxb7+ Kd8 48.Bxa6 g4?!

Accurate play is needed by both sides but this should be drawn 48...f4+! 49.Kd3 Ne5+ 50.Ke4 Nc6 51.a4 Re3+ 52.Kf5 Nd4+ 53.Kxg5 Ne6+ 54.Kf5 Nxc5 55.Kxf4 Rxb3 56.Rxb3 Nxb3=

49.Kf4 Nd4 50.Bc4 Kc8 51.Rg7 Nxb3??

The capture of the b-pawn has to be prefaced with 51...Rc3 52.a4 Nxb3 53.Be6+ Kb8=

52.Be6+ Kb8



53.c6!

It is all over. Black will now have to lose the knight or get mated.

53...Rc3 54.Rb7+ Ka8 55.Rxb3 Rc5 56.Bxf5 Ka7 57.Bd7 Rc4+ 58.Kg3 Ka6 59.Rd3 Kb6 60.Rd5 Rc3+ 61.Kxg4 Rxa3 62.Rb5+ Kc7 63.Rb7+ Kd6 64.Kf5 Ra1 65.Rb4 Kc7 66.Rc4 Rf1+ 67.Ke5 Re1+ 68.Kd5 Rg1 69.Rc2 Rg5+ 70.Kc4 Rh5 71.Kb4 Rh4+ 72.Kb5 Rh5+ 73.Rc5 Rh1 74.Bf5 Rh8 75.Be4 Re8 1-0

Zatonskih Grinds Out Win Against Abrahamyan

Abrahamyan, Tatev (2334) –
Zatonskih, Anna (2496) [C24]

1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d3 c6
4.Nf3 d5 5.Bb3 Bd6 6.Nc3

French GM Bauer played it differently here against Zatonskih back in 2006 6.exd5 Nxd5 7.0-0 0-0 8.Re1 Nd7 9.Nbd2 Bc7 10.Ne4 h6 11.Bd2 Re8 12.a3 N5f6 13.Bb4 Nxe4 14.dxe4 Qf6 15.a4 a5 16.Ba3 Bb6 17.Qd6 Qxd6 18.Bxd6 Bc5 19.Bc7 Bb6 20.Bxb6 Nxb6 21.Re3 Bg4 22.h3 Bxf3 23.Rxf3 Re7 24.Rd1 Kf8 25.Rd6 Ke8 26.g3 f6 27.Rc3 Rd7 28.Rxd7 Nxd7 29.Be6 Ke7 30.Bf5 Rd8 31.Kg2 Kd6 32.Kf3 Nc5 ½-½ Bauer, C (2599)–Zatonskih, A (2432)/Paris 2006

6...dxe4 7.Ng5 0-0
8.Ncxe4 Nxe4 9.Nxe4 Bf5
10.Ng3

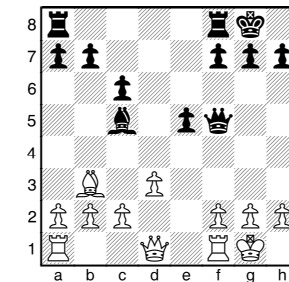
This move is rare. The main moves are 10.Qf3 and 10.O-O as played by

Super GM level players. [10.0-0 Na6 11.Nxd6 Qxd6 12.Qf3 Be6 13.Qg3 Bxb3 14.axb3 Nb4 15.c3 Nxd3 16.Rd1 Rad8 17.Bg5 f6 18.Be3 a6 19.Rd2 Rfe8 20.Rad1 e4 21.Qxd6 Rxd6 ½-½ (59) Anand, V (2770)–Kramnik, V (2790)/Frankfurt 1998; 10.Qf3 Bxe4 11.dxe4 Nd7 12.c3 a5 13.a4 Nc5 14.Bc2 b5 15.0-0 Qc7 16.Rd1 Rab8 17.axb5 cxb5 18.g3 b4 19.cxb4 Rxb4 20.Bd2 Rxb2 ½-½ Adams, M (2715)–Kramnik, V (2780)/Tilburg 1998

10...Qd7

All instances I have of this position being reached have seen black retreat the bishop with 10...Bg6

11.Nxf5 Qxf5 12.0-0 Nd7
13.Be3 Nc5 14.Bxc5 Bxc5

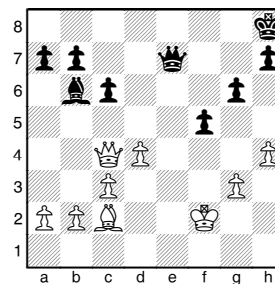


With just the major pieces and opposite colored bishops, the game now sees a lot of maneuvering pieces and pawns onto better squares for when some action does take place.

15.Qe2 Rad8 16.Rae1 Rfe8 17.Qe4 Qf6 18.c3 Re7 19.Kh1 g6 20.Rd1 Kg7 21.g3 Bd6 22.Kg2 Bc7 23.Rfe1 Rde8 24.Re3 Bb6 25.Rf3 Qg5 26.h4 Qh5 27.Re1 f5 28.Qc4 Kh8 29.d4 e4 30.Rfe3 Qh6 31.Bc2 Qg7 32.f3

There is no need for Abrahamyan to open up the position and she could play something like 32.b4 and just sit and wait for Zatonskih to try and break through.

32...exf3+ 33.Kxf3 Rxe3+
34.Rxe3 Rxe3+ 35.Kxe3
Qe7+ 36.Kf2



36...f4!

Zatonskih forces the win of a pawn.

37.gxf4 Qxh4+ 38.Kf3
Qh3+ 39.Ke2 Qg2+
40.Kd1 Qg1+ 41.Ke2
Qg4+ 42.Ke1

The pawn was falling anyway, 42.Ke3 Qg3+ 43.Ke2 Qxf4

42...Qxf4

Despite the loss of the pawn, white possibly still has good drawing opportunities with the opposite colored bishops and the open kings.

43.Qe6 Kg7 44.Qe7+?!

44.Ke2

44...Qf7 45.Qe5+ Qf6
46.Qe4 Bc7 47.Bd3 Qf4
48.Qe7+ Qf7 49.Qe2 Qxa2

Another pawn falls and black is now clearly winning.

50.c4 Qa5+ 51.Kd1 Qg5
52.Kc2 Qf6 53.Qe8 Bd8
54.Qd7+ Qe7 55.Qg4 Qf7
56.Kb1 Bf6 57.Qf4 Qd7
0-1



IM Anna Zatonskih and WFM Tatev Abrahamyan model their hats before their round 5 encounter. (Photo Betsy Dynako)

Photo Gallery: All Photos by Betsy Dynako



Chess Club & Scholastic Center of St. Louis
4657 Maryland Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63108
Phone: (314) 361-2437
Fax: (314) 361-5465

www.SaintLouisChessClub.org
www.USChessChamps.com



Schedule: Remaining Rounds

- Round 6, Saturday, October 10, 12:00 pm
- Round 7, Sunday, October 11, 12:00 pm
- Round 8, Monday, October 12, 12:00 pm
- Round 9, Tuesday, October 13, 10:00 am
- Tie-Break (if necessary), Tuesday, October 13, 5:00 pm

Other Events

- Breakfast with Players at Siteman Cancer Ctr, Friday, October 9, 8:30 am
- Players Simul at Sci-Fest, Friday, October 9, 10:30 am
- Players Lunch at Chess Club, Friday, October 9, 12:00 pm
- Closing Ceremony, Tuesday, October 13, 7:00 pm
- A Game of Chance, 2009 US Women's Champion vs Special Guest Kemper Art Museum, Wednesday, October 14, 6:00 pm

FM Mike Klein's Daily Wrap-Up

At the dawn of the tournament's only rest day, the fifth round of the 2009 U.S. Women's Championship on Friday at the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, gave every player both added incentive to fight hard and a reason to be nervous. After many careful calculations, all 10 participants found themselves low on time and close to forfeiture, with several women within 10 seconds of losing by not making the required 40 moves in the first two hours. In the end, all boards cleared the time hurdle, and a hectic scramble gave way to a clearer picture of who has the best chance to win.

Defending champion and pre-round leader Anna Zatonskih, of Long Island, N.Y., won her fourth match in five rounds (the other was a draw) to increase her tournament lead to one point. She said her position against Tatev Abrahamyan, of Glendale, Calif., was approximately equal, but tournament rules prohibit players from

agreeing to a peaceful tie before 30 moves have been made. The two played on and Zatonskih eventually found a pawn advance that irreparably weakened Abrahamyan's king.

One of Zatonskih's two closest rivals, who she will play in round six on Saturday, remains the tournament's youngest player, 18-year-old Alisa Melekhina, of Philadelphia, Pa. She drew the No. 3 seed Rusudan Goletiani, of Hartsdale, N.Y. In her five games, Melekhina has 3.5 points from two wins and three draws. Melekhina has adopted a new opening system for the championship against the popular Sicilian Defense, and it was good enough to split the point against her favored opponent.

Melekhina was also the youngest competitor during her first U.S. Championship in 2007. She said she prefers being in the underdog role, as there is less pressure. The college sophomore said she had not yet thought about preparing

for the pivotal battle with Zatonskih; Melekhina has an online test to take at noon Friday.

Melekhina is joined in second place by the tournament's oldest player, 42-year-old Camilla Baginskaite, of Sioux Falls, S.D. She defeated tournament tail-ender Yun Fan. Like Melekhina, she has two wins and three draws for 3.5 points. After a period of semi-retirement following motherhood and a return to college, Baginskaite has been hinting that she wants to rededicate herself to chess.

In a battle of good friends and shared names, the favored Irina Krush, of Brooklyn, N.Y., fought to a wild draw with Iryna Zenyuk, of Pittsburgh, Pa. After a peaceful opening that offered a stalled initiative, Krush found a unique breakthrough, but missed a win with only seconds remaining on her clock. Only in the post-game analysis was the winning shot found, but with only seconds remaining on her clock, Krush over-

looked it during the game. So far Krush has scored a dismal 50 percent, calling Friday's result a "never-ending disappointment." Following the game, the two friends analyzed with good humor, but only one was satisfied with the result. "Why is Irina playing chess?" Krush said.

Battsetseg Tsagaan, of Ellicott City, Md., again played the longest game of the round for the third day in a row. She upset Sabina Foisor, of Baltimore, Md., who has dropped two games in a row since briefly approaching the top of the standings.

