



COLUMNISTS

Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov



Interview with Alexander Moiseenko

Grandmaster Alexander Moiseenko. Born in 1980. Current FIDE rating 2663. Gold medal winner with Ukraine at the Chess Olympiad. Two-time winner of the Canadian Open. Alexander considers a few of his main achievements to be +4 and +5 in the two last European individual championships, and 8 out of 9 in the 2004-2005 Spanish League, with a 2900 performance.

Misha Savinov: Where you were born and how did you start playing chess?

Alexander Moiseenko: I was born in 1980 in Severomorsk, which is in the far northwestern Russian Federation. (Hence my ICC handle: severomorskij). My father is a military man and my mother is a doctor. She is a first category player, and I learned chess from her at the age of 6. I started playing seriously at 9, when my family moved to Kharkov. I liked chess very much, and I especially enjoyed winning.



MS: Why did you take chess more seriously in Kharkov? Were there more chess-playing friends?

AM: No, it was quite the opposite – most of my friends were in Severomorsk. In Kharkov, unlike in Severomorsk, there was only one extracurricular activity – chess, and I utilized it to the utmost. Also I played chess with my mother, although it was an uneven contest because she won all the time.

MS: Have you visited Severomorsk since?

AM: I visited a few times. I am a Nordic person by nature; I consider that country my motherland. I enjoy fishing, collecting mushrooms, etc. Unfortunately, I haven't visited for at least 10 years since it is a closed area because of the navy and military base.

MS: Who was your first trainer in Kharkov?

AM: Vladimir Savvich Viskin assisted my rapid improvement from 3rd category (1400) to a good candidate master level. I soon started dominating local events, and represented the city in the Ukrainian championships in my age group. I read a lot of chess and non-chess literature in those days.

MS: What did you read?

AM: My favorites were Jules Verne, Jack London and other authors of a similar genre. Nowadays young people play with computers more, but in my childhood there were no computers, so I read a lot.

I also eagerly consumed chess literature and progressed rapidly. However, I didn't manage to become Ukrainian champion, although I did gather a good collection of various medals. My best results were winning some junior tournaments (St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Alma Ata). It was during that period that I took some lessons from IMs Karpman and Shmuter. By the way, Shmuter was the first expert to forecast a bright chess future for me. Yet, in general I was not a child prodigy – I had high grades at school and wasn't sure that I was going to become a grandmaster and chess professional.

I passed the exams to the National Law Academy at the age of 17. Its rector, V.Tatsiy, supported a chess club there, with Vladimir Andreevich Savon being the trainer. He is a famous grandmaster and the 1972 USSR champion. Vladimir Andreevich was a wonderful person and excellent pedagogue. One can't overestimate the influence of his lessons on my play. In less than two years I went from being a candidate master in my first academic year to being a grandmaster with nearly a 2600 rating.

MS: Were you successful in European and World junior championships?

AM: My international debut in 1994 was rather mediocre. My best result was joint second place in 1996. International championships are conducted under the Swiss system, and our Ukrainian championships were round robin events – so the transition was not always smooth.



MS: Can you compare these two systems from the point of view of improvement? How useful are they for a developing player?

AM: A round robin tournament requires thorough preparation. It also introduces some strategic considerations such as playing for a win against one opponent in order to avoid complications against another one, etc.

MS: Does this make it more interesting?

AM: It is a matter of taste. I now prefer Swiss tournaments. Still, round robins might be more useful for development because the struggle becomes more tense and serious, and the results depend less on chance. Finishing first never happens by chance, but finishing second in a short Swiss is often a matter of luck.

MS: Can you describe your style?

AM: My style isn't easy to define. When I was a candidate master, I was very prone to time trouble, in virtually every game. Then I started to play lightly, in a more combinational manner. My approach is changing constantly. However, it is clear that I am not a classical chess player. I don't believe in the strongest move in any situation. Chess is too complex, there are many paths, and each chess player follows his own.

MS: When did you decide to become a professional?

AM: I became a chess professional at 23, after graduating from NLA. It gave my rating a boost, as I advanced to 2650 rather quickly. I had always invested a lot of time and effort into my studies, and after graduation I was able pay more attention to chess.

MS: How is it possible that chess is so incredibly popular in the Ukraine when there is a general lack of funding and there have been scandals within the chess federation involving ghost tournaments?

AM: Our chess federation plays a certain role in the country's chess life, but it is not completely bankrupt. It is much less powerful than, for example, the Russian chess federation. The UCF is more of a procedural body. We can't even dream about the kind of funding enjoyed by Russia.

The economy is a key factor in the Ukrainian chess boom. Playing chess is a prestigious occupation and you can earn money with it. Additionally, you travel around the world. So, a professional chess player has respect, unlike in Europe or the USA. By our standards, chess is a good career.

The girls and boys playing chess are generally smart and there always comes a point in which they or their parents decide whether or not a promising player should pursue a professional sports career. In Russia this choice often favors continuing one's education, but in the Ukraine young players are choosing chess more frequently.

Also, I think that Russia was a victim of their own success. Those players who have won everything are still in business – so why should they seek replacements? And in the Ukraine everyone is hungry for real chess achievements.

Of course, our trainers are doing a great job in bringing beginners to a good candidate master level, while earning a very small salary, about \$200 per month, just because they love chess and love their job. This factor is extremely important.

MS: What are the reasons for the success of the Kramatorsk school? They're very effective at turning out "stars."

AM: They gathered the most talented juniors of the country and provided them with everything needed for chess training, absolutely everything – except for paying the pupils, but that wasn't necessary. There was an outstanding chess atmosphere, which always catalyzes a young talents' development. Our Law Academy club is somewhat similar, but it is designed for students, and we must attend regular classes. The Kramatorsk school was very powerful, and it is a pity it ceased to exist after its main organizer Mikhail Ponomariov passed away.

MS: What is the average income in the Ukraine?

AM: I guess it is about \$200 per month, and \$250 in Kiev.



MS: I wonder how much more a professional 2500+ chess player could expect. How does it compare to the country's average income?

AM: Well... It depends on the frequency of playing. A 2550-player such as Burmakin can play hundreds of games in dozens of tournaments. In general – chess players earn much more than average workers. It is good money. A 2500 grandmaster can easily support a family – unfortunately, it will be a seldom seen family, because one has to travel for quite a serious amount of time.

MS: I remember I read an interview with GM Alex Goldin, where he said that a successful American player can make about \$70,000 in a moderately successful year.

AM: One also has to consider taxes and the high cost of living in the US. Of course, Americans are paying good money for a high quality of life – nice house, good car, etc. However, the remaining profit is similar to that of the European players, I guess. The problem with chess is that our earnings are very unstable.

Of course, those in the West live better financially. Almost any regular job brings more money with fewer headaches. Yet, few chess professionals are ready to sit in front of a computer in an office from 9AM to 5PM. It is kind of fashionable to lament about our poor life, but such a life is a conscious choice. It is a free life; you travel a lot, see the world and do your favorite job. It is very stressful, true, but we love chess. Millions of people are less fortunate: they work only because they have to.

MS: One of the drawbacks, in my opinion, is that chess players have to make a constant effort to stay afloat. One's level declines without training. Am I right? Or can one maintain their level just by playing in tournaments?

AM: True, it is a drawback. Another drawback is that time works against you. Having a regular job, you can expect that your income will increase over the years, as you acquire skill. In chess you must train regularly, and after 40 you will still inevitably decline. Experience is valuable when you're a trainer, but experience is far from being the most important factor at the board. One requires fighting spirit first of all.

MS: So, approaching 40, one has to consider what to do upon retirement?

AM: Indeed. The federation pays a small stipend for past national team members, but it is a very basic amount, similar to the country's average per capita income.



MS: Are there any examples of chess players succeeding in business after retiring from chess?

AM: GM Machulsky is now a very rich man who is the co-owner of a publishing company. And GM Novikov takes part in tournaments, but he is more concentrated on his main job. When you first start working in the Ukraine, it is difficult to expect a reasonable salary. I interned in the Prosecutor's office while at the Law Academy. It is considered a good place to work, as everyone is afraid of prosecutors nowadays, but the amount

offered is laughable. Maybe in 5 years you might get a promotion. And the work is very hard. I took part in investigations, interrogations – it is a very difficult in a moral sense as well. Chessplayers tend to take it lightly: “It is no problem for me to train for a new profession” – but it is surely not so. Especially if you are accustomed to earning more.

MS: So chess professionals from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have certain competitive advantages over their Western colleagues. But do you feel threatened by Chinese and Indian players? These are countries where the sportsmen often have serious state support.

AM: Yes, this could become a threat. However, China seems to be lagging in recent years. Only Wang Hao has been showing some progress. They have a different mentality compared to the Europeans. The Chinese can force a player to work on chess for 12 hours a day, but such a forced dedication is not free of inconveniences. In India there are a number of excellent players, but they also have a different mentality. Somehow, they are less inclined to fight. Even the best Indian players do not play their best at critical moments.

MS: This is comparable with the FIDE World championship – the main favorite Anand is failing to display his strength.

AM: It’s hard to say, Topalov is playing brilliantly. We all got used to Topalov playing excellent chess, but suffering from sudden hallucinations. In San Luis he is being very consistent. He prepared very well, and it is very difficult for Anand to turn things around. If Topalov were in Anand’s shoes, he would not even consider the perpetual check (16.Qf3 Kg7 17.Qg3+) – he would surely continue the attack even if it was risky.



MS: And would Moiseenko keep on playing? Or does it depend on the situation?

AM: I would surely play 16.Qd3. What’s the point of the perpetual check? One has to fight! In a team event I would draw without thinking, of course. And in an individual tournament one should play on.

MS: Did you favor Topalov before the championship?

AM: No, I rooted for Anand, but Topalov’s play deserves respect and admiration. Unlike some of my compatriots, I did not have much contact with him or his manager. However, twice I played in the same tournament

with the Bulgarian. So I didn't expect him to be so strong in this tournament! His success is well-deserved – he fights to the end. Morozevich also gives a maximum effort – well done! Generally, this championship is very enjoyable for me as a spectator. It suddenly has turned out that they can fight!

MS: Do you consider Topalov the legitimate champion, or should there be a unification match?

AM: Topalov is the legitimate champion. Kasparov's title only survived because of his supremacy. He was tearing everyone to pieces for years, so he could not be neglected. In Linares '99 he played like Topalov plays in San Luis, but the field in Linares was stronger. And Kasparov played like that for 15 or 20 years. And Kramnik... His results do not support his claim, and the legitimacy of his title has always been questionable.

MS: Do you think Topalov made a qualitative leap, or he is just having a good year?

AM: I think he has really improved. Look, it is already the third tournament in a row. Linares, Sofia, San Luis – he wins everything.

MS: You are saying Topalov is very well prepared, but experts have different opinions with regard to his opening preparation. Some people state that Topalov is under prepared in the openings, as he can't claim a single opening win. Others emphasize that he possesses a highly versatile opening repertoire, which allows finding specific lines against specific opponents. What do you think?

AM: I don't understand why we should focus on opening preparation. Chess is a lot more than just the opening. We are way too used to Kramnik-Leko stuff: oh, Black has equalized, it is a draw. Well, take for instance Svidler-Topalov. I felt that White was slightly better after the opening, but Topalov just kept playing for a win. And Svidler didn't withstand the pressure! He wanted to force some repetition, and after Topalov refused it, Svidler just collapsed. Topalov's exchange sacrifice against Anand is interesting, but the position is double-edged. It was not a terrific novelty after which White can play for a win without any risk – both sides were at risk. However, Topalov's pressure was so strong that even Anand broke – Anand, the best defender in the world! Topalov worked on his chess and has done a great job.

MS: How much do you usually work on chess? What do you do?

AM: I try to do something every day – chess should become part of one's everyday routine. Examine games, study openings, look through the games from TWIC, read books... By the way, Dvoretsky's books have had a profound influence on me. The Russian edition was printed in Kharkov by

Pavel Eljanov's father, so Pavel and I helped with proof-reading, chess analysis, etc. I know these books from the inside, so to speak. Dvoretsky's books all have exceptionally rich and valuable chess content.



MS: What other chess books do you like?

AM: *Russians versus Fischer* is a good recent book. Voronkov and Plisetsky always write nice, entertaining books. I have mixed feelings about the so-called classic *My System*. I couldn't accept its strict rules. When people asked me: "What plan do you have in mind?" I couldn't help wondering: what plan are you talking about, if the opponent can make any kind of move. I have always been bothered by long-term planning. Alekhine and Botvinnik – they were great players, of course, but even being a first category, I felt that those long-term plans usually appeared *post factum*, while writing the annotations. And it was pleasure, and to some extent – a relief, to read a similar opinion in Dvoretsky's book. Khalifman's book is of a high quality. Although I do not play 1.e4, I enjoyed it! Sosoenko is an excellent writer, too, if we are passing from chess analysis to chess literature.

MS: Khalifman once said that a Swiss tournament teaches a player how to beat lower-rated opponents with minimal effort. As you are a very successful Swiss player, can you disclose the secret?

AM: No, I am the wrong person to ask because I always try playing with maximum effort regardless of my opponent. I know some grandmasters who play superficially against amateurs. They rely on their title and general understanding, walk around the tournament hall, chat, etc., but every opponent needs to be respected.

MS: Have you lost any games to amateurs since becoming a grandmaster?

AM: Of course! It happens quite often. When I just became a grandmaster, I played more solid chess, but now I win frequently, and lose relatively often as well.

MS: Why do you lose? Because of blunders?

AM: More precisely, I lose because I want to win too much, and overstep the margin of safety, because in a Swiss you always must win games. Draws do not pay off.

MS: Losses are painful for some players; they behave a bit eccentric afterwards...

AM: I belong to that group, too. Well, maybe eccentric is too strong a word – Semen Dvoirys immediately comes to a mind. But a loss is stressful for me. I would like to take them lightly, but I can't.

MS: I noticed that the social life of Swiss tournaments is often quite fruitful. Some players eagerly participate, while others tend to concentrate on their performance and limit their contacts. Which category are you?

AM: Generally it depends on the situation. I care about my result, but I don't refuse good company! I have many friends among chessplayers. There are many nice and interesting people in the chess world.

Alexander Moiseenko Annotates

Moiseenko (2631) - *Yakovich* (2596)
TCh-Russia, 2004 [B32]

1.e4!?

Usually I play 1.d4.

1...c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Qb6 5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Bd3 d5!?

An interesting move, used by the unforgettable Gufeld in Soviet tournaments.

7.Nc3

7.exd5.

7...Nxe4 8.Nxe4 dxe4 9.Be3

9.Bxe4 Qb4+ 10.Nd2 g6 11.0-0 Bg7 12.c3 Qb6 13.Nc4 Qc7=.

9...Qc7

The computer recommends 9...Qb4+ 10.c3 Qa4 11.Bc2 f5; however, after 12 f3 White has a strong initiative.

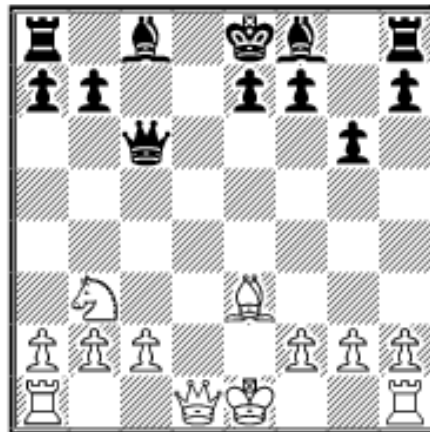
10.Bxe4 g6

10...e6?! 11.0-0 with an initiative.

A critical position. White is better developed, but Black has a clear plan: ...Bg7, ...0-0, ...b6, ...Bb7 etc, which would allow him to get a good position. So I decided to complicate things.

11.Bxc6+!?

11.h4 Bg7 12.c3 h5 with counterplay.

11...Qxc6!

11...bxc6 12.Qd4 e5 13.Qc3 Bg7
(13...a5? 14.Bb6!! Qxb6 15.Qxe5+-)
14.Bc5±.

12.Qd4 f6

It was possible to capture a pawn:
12...Qxg2 13.0-0-0 f6 14.Qd8+ Kf7.

13.0-0

After 13.0-0-0?! Black seizes the initiative by 13...Bf5! 14.Rd2 e5 15.Qh4 Rc8 with an initiative.

13...Bg7?

This natural move is a mistake. Black had two main alternatives: 13...e5 14.Qh4 Bg7 15.f4 with counterplay, or 13...b6 14.Rad1 Bb7 15.f3 e5 16.Qh4 with mutual chances.

14.Qb4!±

This is a multi-purpose move: The queen “hinders” the e7-pawn; Black has problems with castling; and it frees the d4-square for the knight. Not too bad for a single move!

14...b6

Not 14...Qxc2? 15.Rfc1 Qf5 16.Rc7 Qe6 17.Re1+-; 14...0-0 15.Qxe7 Re8 16.Qc5±.

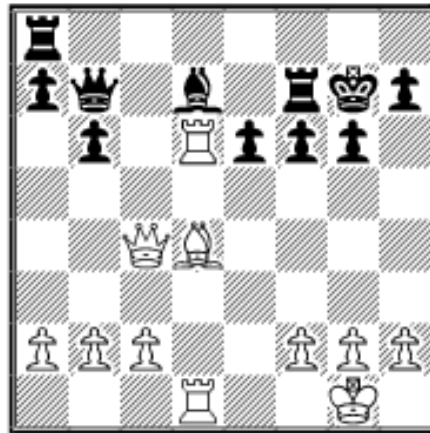
15.Nd4 Qd7 16.Qc4! e6

Wrong is 16...Bb7? 17.Ne6! Bd5 18.Qxd5 Qxd5 19.Nc7+ Kf7 20.Nxd5+-.

17.Rfd1 0-0 18.Nf5 Qb7 19.Nxg7 Kxg7 20.Rd6

The position has stabilized. White's pieces are more active and the presence of opposite-colored bishops, together with the weakened position of Black's king, makes it even more difficult for Black.

20...Rf7 21.Rad1 Bd7 22.Bd4!



The bishop targets the f6-square, which is Black's main weakness.

22...Bc8

22...Rc8 23.Bxf6+ Kxf6 24.Qf4+ Kg7 25.Qxf7+ Kxf7 26.Rxd7+ Qxd7 27.Rxd7+ Ke8 28.Rd2+-; 22...e5 23.Bxe5 fxe5 24.Qxf7+ Kxf7 25.Rxd7+ Qxd7 26.Rxd7+ Ke6 27.Rxh7+-; 22...Rd8 23.f4 with an attack.

23.f4 Qe7 24.Bc3 Qc7?

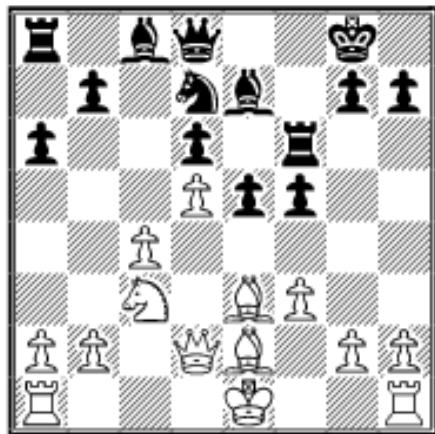
Allowing a neat finish; however, Black's position is already lost.

25.Bxf6+! Kxf6 26.Qd4+ Ke7 27.Rc6! Black resigns.

Perez Candelario (2474) - *Moiseenko* (2653)
Tch-Spain, 2004 [B33]

Before this game Perez Candelario had played very well. He defeated Damliyanovich and Nijboer and needed just half a point to get his final GM norm.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.Nge2 Nf6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 Nb8 9.c4 Be7 10.Be3 0-0 11.Qd2 a6 12.Nc3 f5 13.f3 Nd7 14.Be2 Rf6!



A new and quite interesting move! The main idea is to start attacking after 0-0.

15.Rc1 Nf8 16.b4

White begins active operations on the queenside.

16...a5!

A good move! I open the a-file for my rook.

17.a3 axb4 18.axb4 Rg6

Black starts his kingside attack.

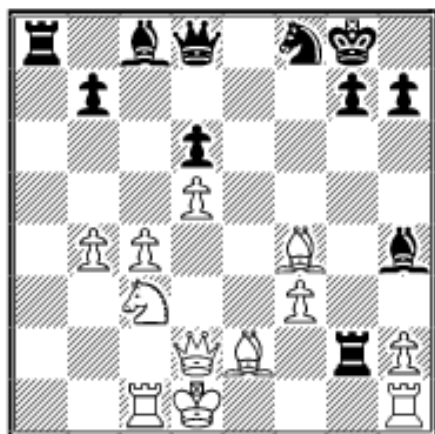
19.g3 f4!

Sacrificing a pawn! 19...Bg5 20.Bxg5 Rxg5 21.c5 and White is slightly better.

20.gxf4

Also possible was 20.Bf2 fxg3 21.hxg3 Bg5 22.f4 exf4 23.gxf4 Bh6 with chances for both sides.

20...Bh4+ 21.Kd1 exf4 22.Bxf4 Rg2!



In this position Black has a full compensation for the pawn.

23.Ne4?

The computer likes this move, but I think that 23.c5 was better, i.e.: 23...dxc5 24.bxc5 Ng6 25.Be3 Bf5 26.d6 Kh8 with compensation.

23...Ng6! 24.Bxd6 Bf5

Now Black has a very strong attack.

25.Ng3!

The only move! 25.Bf4? Bxe4 26.fxe4 Qe8 27.Bg3 Qxe4 28.Re1 Bg5!! 29.Qxg5 Ra2 30.Qd8+ Nf8 31.d6 Qd3+ 32.Bxd3 Rad2#; or 25.Bc5? Bxe4

26.fxe4 Qe8 27.Rg1 Bg5 28.Qxg5 Rxg5 29.Rxg5 Qxe4-+ are both unsatisfactory.

25...Bd7 26.b5

After 26.Bc5 Ba4+ 27.Ke1 Rxh2! 28.Rxh2 Bxg3+ 29.Rf2 Qh4 30.Qd4 Nf4 Black is winning.

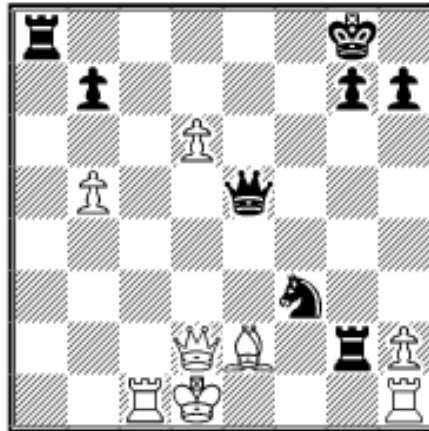
26...Bxb5 27.cxb5 Qxd6 28.Nf5!

The only move again! 28.Ne4 Qa3! 29.Rc2 (29.d6 Qb3+ 30.Qc2 Qxc2+ 31.Rxc2 Ra1+-) 29...Qa1+ 30.Rc1 Qa4+ 31.Rc2 Nf4! – a nice tactic – 32.Qxf4 Qd4+ 33.Qd2 Rg1+ 34.Bf1 Qa1+! 35.Rc1 Rxh1 36.Rxa1 Rxa1+ 37.Kc2 Ra2+ 38.Kc3 Rxd2 39.Nxd2 Be1-+.

28...Qe5 29.Nxh4 Nxh4 30.d6

30.Qd3 Rxe2 31.Qxe2 Qxd5+ 32.Ke1 Nxf3+ 33.Kf2 Rf8-+.

30...Nxf3!



A beautiful idea!

31.Qd3!

Again Manuel finds the best defense! 31.Bc4+ Kh8 32.Qxg2 Qd4+ 33.Ke2 (33.Kc2 Qxc4+ 34.Kb1 Qb3+ 35.Qb2 Nd2#) 33...Re8+ (33...Qd2+) 34.Kxf3 Re3+ 35.Kf2 Rc3+ 36.Ke2 Qe3+ 37.Kf1 Rxc1#.

31...Rxe2 32.d7!

White's last chance is his strong pawn on d7. 32.Qxe2 Qxd6+ 33.Kc2 Nd4+-

32...Re1+

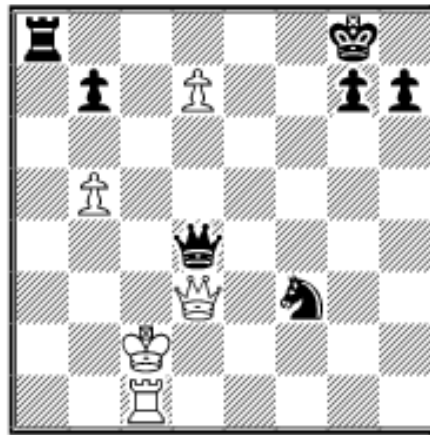
Not 32...Rd2+? 33.Qxd2 Nxd2 34.Rc8+ Kf7 35.Rxa8 Qh5+ 36.Kxd2 Qd5+ 37.Kc3 Qxd7 38.Rf1+ and Black has a slight advantage.

33.Rxe1 Qxe1+ 34.Kc2 Qf2+ 35.Kd1

Here we both had little time so I started checking the white king.

35...Qg1+ 36.Kc2 Qxh2+ 37.Kd1 Qh1+ 38.Kc2 Qg2+ 39.Kd1 Qh1+

40.Kc2 Qg2+ 41.Kd1 Qg1+ 42.Kc2 Qd4!



The winning move. Naturally, neither 42...Qg6?? 43.Qxg6 hxg6 44.Kb2 Kf7 45.Rc8+-; nor 42...Nd4+ 43.Kb1 Ra1+ 44.Kxa1 Qxc1+ 45.Ka2 Ne6 46.d8Q+ Nxd8 47.Qxd8+ Kf7 48.Qd5+ Kf6 49.Qxb7 with good chances for draw suited me.

43.Qxd4 Nxd4+ 44.Kd3 Rd8 45.Kxd4 Rxd7+ 46.Ke5 h5 47.Rc4 Kh7 48.b6 Rf7 49.Rc7 Kg6 50.Kd6 h4 White resigns.

I was happy because I won a beautiful game, but slightly unhappy because Perez Candelario did not get his final GM norm. Still, he is sure to achieve it. Hopefully as soon as possible!

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