

2025 Menlo Park CC Championship

Round 1 Bulletin • Nov. 6, 2025



White: Verma

Black: Vikram

Caro-Kann Two Knights

1. e4 c6 2. Nf3 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4

3... Bg4 4. h3 Bxf3 5. Qxf3 e6 { is most solid, which means “dreadful dull for both sides”.

4. Nxe4 Nf6 5. Qe2!

Chess is easier after you accept that your club-level opponents are quite capable of 5... Nbd7 6. Nd6#.

5... Nxe4 6. Qxe4 Nd7 7. Bc4 Nf6 8. Qe2

White should've tried again with 8. Ne5!, because 8...Nxe4 9. Bxf7# also happens.

8...Bg4?

See?

9. Bxf7+

Especially because Black played 8...Bg4?, White should feign inattention and play 9. Ne5. Then (assuming Black doesn't grab 9...Bxe2 10. Bxf7#) 9...Be6 10. Bxe6 fxe6 11. O-O is as good as winning the pawn, maybe better.

9...Kxf7 10. Ne5+ Ke8

After 10...Kg8 11. Nxe4 Nxe4 12. Qxe4, Black is fortunate there's a pawn on c6, for White threatens only mate in one with Qg4-e6, but not mate in two by Qg4-c4-e6.

11. Nxe4 Nxe4 12. Qxe4 Qd5 13. O-O Rd8 14. d3 h5 15. Qg6+ Kd7

Black's idea with 14...h5 should've been 15... Qf7, then White chooses between 1) Withdrawing the queen, which gives Black time to develop the kingside, but keeps the queens on while the black king is stuck in the center; or 2) Swapping the queens, which reduces Black's potential counterplay, but wipes out White's chances to exploit the exposed king. White should prefer the first option, because checkmate is the goal, while the trade of queens stays in the picture. So 16. Qe4 Rd5, and White is well ahead, but anything can happen while Black's development is better.



16. Be3

16. Re1 is most preferable, because you know you want a rook on e1, but you're less sure about the bishop. 16. Bf4 cuts off the black king, whereas 16. Bg5 shuts down Black's kingside development. I'd favor those ahead of 16. Be3, which blocks the file for the white rooks. On the other hand, 16. Be3 develops with a threat, which rules. But the most important thing to remember about a threatening move is that the opponent will first look to ignore it (if a threat can be ignored, it's a wasted move). Stockfish thinks Black's best reply to 16. Be3 is 16...e6, ignoring the threat, then 17. Bxa7 h4 (or 17...Qf5). Given all that, if a student said 16. Be3 plus 17. Bxa7 limits the black king, eyes Ba7-b6, and gives weight to a2-a4-a5 to help the rook, I'd encourage that kind of thinking.

16...Kc8

16...e6, because Black has no chance if the kingside pieces remain dormant.

17. Bxa7 Rh6

In the same vein, 17...Rd6, after which 18. Qg3 is the only safe retreat, inviting 18...h4.

18. Qe4

18. Qg3 coordinates on b8. Now 18...c5 could trap the bishop.



18...Qg5?

18...c5 19. b4 Qxe4 20. dxe4 cxb4 and with two active rooks, Black is more than just hanging on.

19. Be3

After all the positional chatter, it always comes down to tactics.

19... Qf6 20. Bxh6 Rd4 21. Bg5 Qd6 22. Qf5+ e6 23. Qf3 Rg4 24. Be3 Rh4 25. g3 Rh3 26. Kg2 1-0

White: Zelin Fang

Black: Leong

English

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 Bc5

Black had the right idea, but this bishop can be hit. Keres put his great name on 3...c6, and if Black is set on moving the bishop, then 4...Bb4.

4. Bg2

White played the tactical phase of this game well enough for us to wonder why he chose such a chicken opening. These English/Catalan things are the height of fashion, the most powerful setup for masters who don't want to take on any risk.

4...c6 5. e3 d5 6. d4

White does well with 6. cxd5 cxd5 7. d4 exd4 8. exd4, where Black's weak pawn is under greater pressure.

6... exd4 7. exd4 Bb4 8. cxd5 cxd5

Transposing to the line above. 8...Nxd5 is a well-placed knight.

9. Ne2 Ne4?

Initiating the tactics while trailing in development.

10. O-O Nxc3 11. bxc3 Ba5?

Black is lost positionally. 11...Bd6 or 11...Be7 lose the d5-pawn, but it's harder for White to win because Black can castle.

12. Ba3! Bg4 13. Re1 Qd7 14. Bxd5 Nc6 15. Nf4+ Kd8 16. Qb3

If you hadn't seen the first 15 moves, you'd wager this was an Evans Gambit that's gone very poorly for Black.

16...Nxd4? 17. cxd4 Bxe1 18. Rxe1

White's pleased with this, swapping an undeveloped rook for two developed minors.

18...Rb8 19. Bxf7

White plays accurately, even with a decisive advantage, Black can't develop his king rook, while the e6-square opens for white pieces.

19...Qxd4 20. Be7+ Kd7 21. Qb5+ Kc8 22. Rc1+ Qc3 23. Rxc3# 1-0

White: Mani

Black: Davis

QGD Marshall

1. d4 d5 2. c4 Nf6

It has a terrible reputation, but namesake Marshall and another immortal attacker Keres won inspiring games this way.

3. cxd5 Nxd5



4. Nf3

The theory says that 4. Nf3 is necessary to restrain ...e7-e5, but I think White should welcome it: 4. e4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e5 { is a wide open game in which White has better central control and development.

4...Nc6

It's important to play 4...Bf5 to prevent e2-e4, and to get the bishop outside the e6-pawn ahead of ...e7-e6.

5. e4

With clear advantage.

5... Nf6 6. d5 Nb8 7. Nc3 e6 8. Bb5+ c6

White's made it more difficult for himself. Not capturing on c6 puts maximum pressure on d5, but capturing on c6 is inconvenient after 9... Qxd1+.

9. dxc6 Nxc6

9... Qxd1+ 10. Kxd1 bxc6 11. Bc4 Bc5 =.

10. Qa4

10. Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. Bxc6 bxc6 12. Ne5 restores White's advantage.

10... Bd7 =



11. O-O Be7

This is a case when P-R3, the most abused move in amateur chess, is good. Kicking the b5-bishop sets up a discovery: 11... a6 12. Be2 Ne5, and then 13. Qd4 Nxf3+ 14. Bxf3 Bc6 blocks the white bishop and improves the black. 11...Be7 enables White to move the queen to an effective square by 12. e5 Nd5 13. Qg4 +=.

12. Be3 O-O 13. Qc2 a6

I think it's too late, even if Stockfish doesn't. Now ...a6 pushes the bishop back to a diagonal on which it has more targets than the d7-bishop.

14. Bd3? e5

14... Nb4 15. Qd1 Nxd3 16. Qxd3 Bb5 17. Qxd8 Rfxd8 18. Nxb5 axb5 and Black is preferable for active rooks.

15. a3

No reason to fear the fork now: 15. Rfd1 Nb4 16. Qe2 Nxd3 captures the bad white bishop and improves white rooks.

15...Bd6

Aim to fork on a different square: 15... Bg4 16. Be2 Bxf3 17. Bxf3 Nd4 =.

16. Nd5

15...Bd6 didn't do anything but risk hanging the bishop. Either rook to d1.

16...Be6 17. Bg5

17. Bb6 forces the queen away from f6, then 18. Nxf6+ cracks the king shelter.

17...Bxd5?

Unleashing the white battery. 17... Be7 18. Rfd1 Rc8 =.

18. exd5 Nd4 19. Nxd4 exd4 20. Bxh7+ Kh8 21. Qf5 Be7 22. Bxf6 Bxf6 23. Qh5 1-0

Too soon to resign! White wins another pawn, but there are always chances with opposite-colored bishops: 23... Bg5 24. Bg6+ Bh6 25. Bxf7 Qd7 26. Bg6 Rad8 27. Bd3 Qxd5 28. Qg6 Qg8 and Black is alive.

