

# The Beat of The Chess Drum

The ongoing history of  
a unique platform



A meeting of friends and fellow-journalists at the 2018 Chess Olympiad in Batumi: Haydn Gill (Barbados), Daaim Shabazz (USA), Jacinta Odongo (Kenya) and Ian Wilkinson (Jamaica).

For almost twenty years now, The Chess Drum has been focusing on Black chess players and highlighting chess activities within the worldwide African Diaspora. An apt moment for the website's editor and driving force **DAAIM SHABAZZ** to look back as well as ahead.

**I**n the late 1980s, I was having a friendly chat with a master-level player after a Chicago tournament. The conversation moved onto Black chess players.

'Where are the Black GMs and IMs?' he curiously and respectfully asked me. It was a question I had pondered many times. During this time, Black chess players were mostly absent from the chess narrative worldwide.

From that point on, the question kept burning in my mind and caused me to start searching for answers.

At the 1989 U.S. Open in Chicago, I met then-FM Maurice Ashley. He told me he was originally from

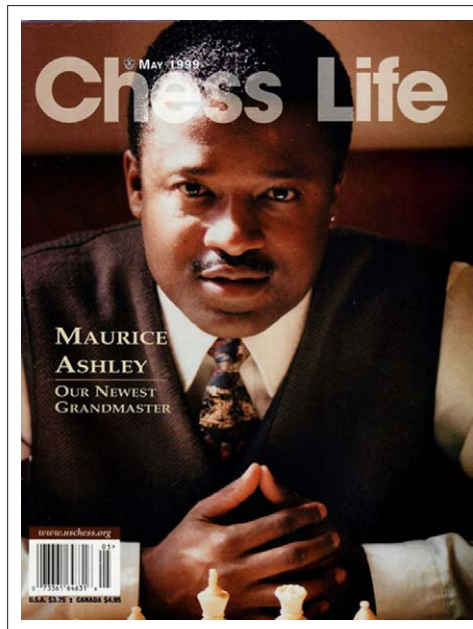
Jamaica. We quickly developed a rapport and bonded over reggae music as we analysed games. I shared with him my desire to create a global network for Black chess players. Weeks later, I left my hometown of Chicago for graduate school in Atlanta. One of my professors assigned us the task of creating a marketing plan. My plan laid out a platform for a Black chess network that would include a quarterly publication. I don't know if my Guyanese professor understood my chess passion or the magnitude of the idea, but he gave me full marks.

Between my first and second years of graduate school, I headed to New York to intern at Sports Illustrated. While interning at the Time-Warner company, my goal was to understand the process of putting together a magazine. After getting settled at New York University housing, I immediately contacted Ashley and told him I had something to share with him. We met at the iconic Washington Square Park, and I gave him a copy of my marketing plan to look over.

After finishing graduate school, I left Atlanta to take a teaching post at Florida A&M University. A year later, I received the May 1999 *Chess Life* magazine. On the cover was Maurice Ashley, with the headline reading, 'Maurice Ashley: Our Newest Grandmaster'. I stood transfixed at the mailbox, looking at the cover with Maurice looking back. I cracked a smile. Feeling the importance of the moment, I retrieved the marketing plan from my file cabinet, where it had been sitting for nearly 10 years.

### The drum beat

In the year 2000, I considered a few ideas for a quarterly magazine, but by that time, we were entering an Internet revolution, and the idea had lost its feasibility. I had done my doctoral thesis on Internet Commerce, so what better way to express this idea than through a website? After careful thought, I called the site 'The Chess Drum'. The name of the website



## I stood transfixed at the mailbox, looking at the cover with Maurice looking back. I cracked a smile

is symbolic of the 'talking drum' historically used for communicating messages in African societies.

There have been individuals who are puzzled why there is a need for The Chess Drum. A player named Javier Gil even argued that the concept was 'very offensive and racist.' If you look at the lack of coverage of players of the African Diaspora over the years, it is evident that there was an entire segment the chess media had overlooked. Where else could you find this information? While I covered top international events, it was the stories in the far-flung places that indeed showed the spirit of *Gens Una Sumus*.

As the site gained its footing, there were contributions of articles and valuable news tips. In the first year, I received a curious note from a British player, who told me that my site was 'racist in a good way'. He also stated that I would not be able to find much

information on Black chess players. He even engaged in a bit of ribbing, because I had featured an article on Indian players. It was his proof that I had already begun to struggle.

On the contrary, there was no shortage of inspiring stories. Many of the tips were coming from players who were not of African ancestry, but saw the initiative's value. Apart from covering Black players in the U.S. and Africa, many tips came from the English-speaking Caribbean, notably Jamaica. There was a steady stream of enthusiastic contributions, and excellent photography from International Arbiter Jerry Bibuld.

Bibuld was a 1960s civil rights activist and a legendary advocate for Black chess players worldwide. He assisted several African federations, especially Uganda, Mozambique, and South Africa. In the latter case, he helped lobby for FIDE sanctions against apartheid South Africa. He also organized the Wilbert Paige Memorial Tournament held in Harlem, New York, in 2001. It featured 10 of the top players of African descent.



**Jerome Bibuld (1928-2013), 1960s civil rights activist and a legendary advocate for Black chess players worldwide.**

NEW IN CHESS



## Triple Exclam!!!

One of the players who was an early subject of The Chess Drum's coverage was the Chicago-born, Indiana-bred player who would become one of the game's most colourful personalities. Emory Tate was a swashbuckling tactician known for his creative ideas and theatrical post-mortems. Over the years, Emory would demonstrate these games to crowds and even commentate in his fluent Russian, one of the eight languages he spoke.

A five-time U.S. Armed Forces champion and Air Force Sergeant, his charisma and spirited play attracted a wide array of admirers. While his adventurism was erratic and never earned him the Grandmaster title, he was able to compile an impressive list of wins against strong players. Following is his game against Leonid Yudasin, who had previously reached 8th place in the world rankings. The game has been annotated (at different times) by many players, including GM Daniel Naroditsky, GM Larry Christiansen, IM Jack Peters, and FM Jon Jacobs. This is perhaps Tate's most famous win, and it showed his artistic flair and a natural intuition for the attack.

**Emory Tate**  
**Leonid Yudasin**

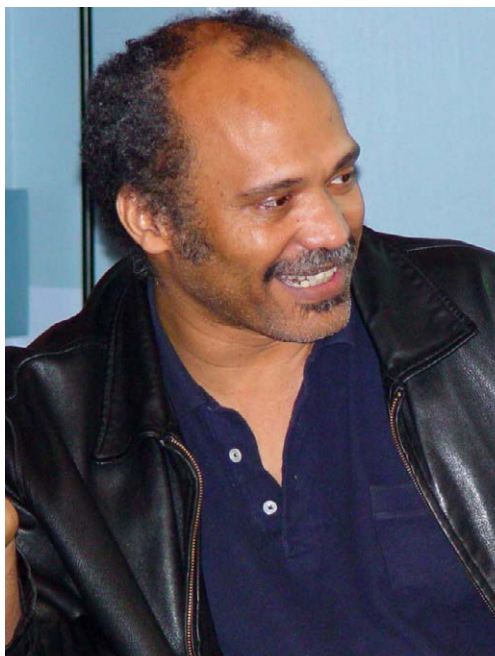
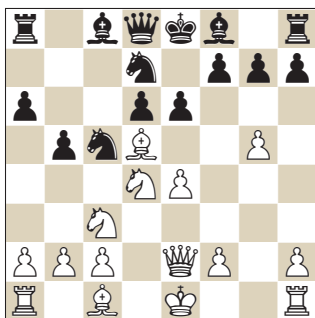
Chicago 1997

Sicilian Defence, Sozin Attack

**1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 a6 6.♞c4**

The Sozin Attack fits Tate's aggressive style perfectly.

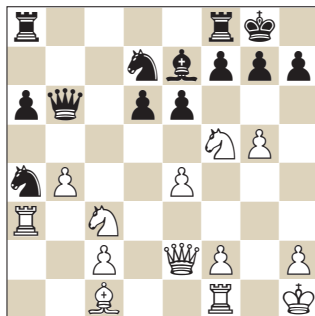
**6...e6 7.♞b3 ♞bd7 8.♞e2 ♞c5 9.g4!? b5 10.g5 ♞fd7 11.♞d5!?**



**Emory Tate, a swashbuckling tactician famous for his theatrical post-mortems.**

This was a novelty at the time and there are five games listed, including Fierro-Bruzon (0-1, 41), occurring a month later at the 1997 Capablanca Memorial in Cienfuegos, Cuba! According to FM Jon Jacobs, Tate thought on this move for 40 minutes.

**11...♞b7 12.♞xb7 ♞xb7 13.a4 bxa4 14.♞xa4 ♞bc5 15.♞a3 ♞b6 16.0-0 ♞e7 17.♞h1 0-0 18.b4!?**  
**♞a4 19.♞f5!**



Another standard sacrifice in the Sicilian, and one of Tate's favourites. This bold stroke takes advantage of the confusion in Black's camp.

**19...exf5 20.♞d5 ♞d8 21.exf5**

## Emory Tate would even commentate in his fluent Russian, one of the eight languages he spoke

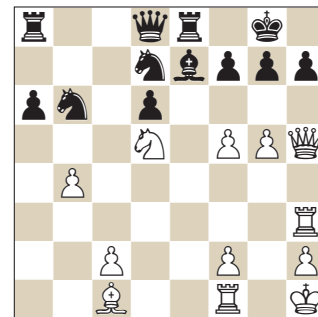
**21.♞xa4** throws away the initiative after **21...♞b6 22.♞xb6 ♞xb6**, since **23.exf5??** loses a rook after **23...♞c6+**.

**21...♞e8 21...♞xg5 22.♞xg5 ♞xg5 23.♞g1 ♞h4 24.♞xa4** is unclear.

**22.♞h5** A critical moment. White's pieces are menacing.

**22...♞ab6?** Christiansen gives the following alternatives: **22...g6 23.fxg6** is only a slight edge after **23...fxg6 24.♞h4 ♞f8 25.♞f6+ ♞xf6 26.gxf6 ♞e5** there is **27.♞h3! ♞h5 28.♞xh5!!** **24.♞h3 ♞xg5** (or **24...♞ab6 25.♞xb6 ♞xb6 26.♞xd7 25.f4 ♞h4 26.♞b3**).

**23.♞h3**



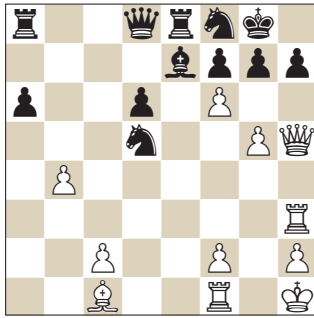
The rook has waited patiently, but now it swings into the attack with devastating effect.

**23...♞f8 24.f6!!**

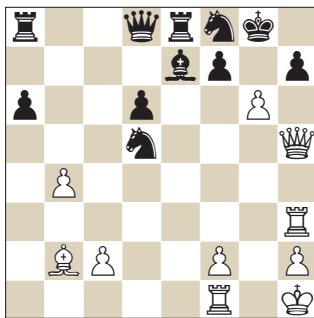
Tate offers another piece.

**24...♞xd5**

Peters demonstrates that eliminating the pawn will do no good. After **24...gxf6?? 25.gxf6 ♞xf6** White clinches victory by **26.♞g1+ ♞g7 (26...♞h8 27.♞xf7, and White mates on g8 or h7) 27.♞b2 ♞e5 28.♞xg7+! ♞xg7 29.♞h6+ ♞g8 30.♞xe5**, winning.



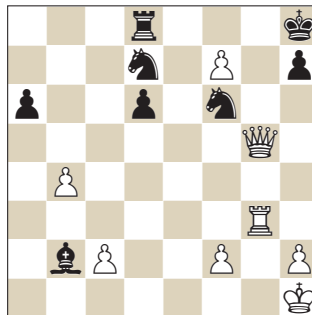
**25.fxe7!** 25.fxe7? ruins the party: 25...♟xe7 26.g6 ♘f6, and Black wins.  
**25...♟xg7** After 25...f5 Black is still busted: 26.gxf8♟+ ♟xf8 27.♟xh7 ♘xg5 28.♟xf5+ ♟f6 29.♟h8+.  
**26.♟b2+ ♟g8** In case of 26...f6 comes 27.♟g1! ♟h8 28.gxf6 ♘xf6 29.♟f7!, mating. **27.g6!**



Christiansen described this as a 'bone crusher', while Naroditsky gives this '!!'. Here Black can capture in three

ways, but all continuations will lead to mate.

**27...♟f6 28.gxf7+ ♟h8 29.♟g1?!** Threatening mate, but a slight inaccuracy. White could have delivered the *coup de grâce* with 29.♟g5! ♘e6 30.♟g6 ♘g5 31.fxe8♟+ ♟xe8 32.♟xf6+ ♘xf6 33.♟xf6+ ♟g8 34.♟xg5+.  
**29...♟e1** Trying to buy more time.  
**30.♟xe1 ♟xb2 31.♟e8** Threatening 32.♟xh7, mate. **31...♘f6 32.♟xd8 ♟xd8** Or 32...♘h5 33.♟xa8 ♘f4 34.♟g3 ♘4g6 35.♟xf8+ ♟g7 36.♟d8, winning. **33.♟h6 ♘e4 34.♟h4 ♘f6 35.♟g3** Setting up 36.♟xf6+ ♘xf6 37.♟g8, mate. **35...♘8d7 35...♘e6 36.c3**, and wins. **36.♟g5!**



Peters mistakenly put 36.♟h6 as the last move, but bystanders confirmed that he indeed played the killing blow. 1-0.

In 2015, Emory was stricken by a heart attack during a game at the Sam Shankland Open in Milipitas, California. He died later that night. In 2017, I released a biography on Emory entitled, *Triple Exclam!!! – The Life and Games of Emory Tate, Chess Warrior*. He left his mark with his creative ideas, including the Tate Variation of the Alekhine (1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.c4 ♘b6 4.a4 a5 5.♟a3!?).

### Universality of chess

For every story like Tate's, there are hundreds of others waiting to be told. Part of every journalist's aim is to be fair and objective, and to inspire. My mission has an added responsibility of introducing the world to a new segment of the chess community and expose the African Diaspora to international chess. The idea was not to create a separate federation for the African Diaspora, but to become a more integral part of the existing chess community.

Once the chess community understood the mission of The Chess Drum, I received generous tips about interesting personalities like Rogelio Ortega from Cuba, Raphaëlle Delahaye from France, Pontus Carlsson from Sweden, and Cuban immigrant Orelvis Mitjans, who lives

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in Spain. I recently received an e-mail from a Cuban player who lamented that the story of Afro-Cuban players is often overlooked. These suggestions became the basis of stories that would not normally see the light of day.

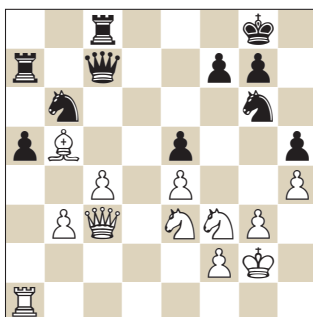
One of the sites that appeared in the early 2000s was hosted by Garry Kasparov and called *kasparovchess.com*. This short-lived site (it ceased to exist in September 2002) offered a variety of quality content, including news coverage. While browsing the site, I noticed articles by South Africa's Mark Rubery. He interviewed International Master Watu Kobese, who has a fascinating story growing up during the apartheid era.

Kobese has some interesting highlights in his career, having defeated quality Grandmasters like Peter Leko, Judit Polgar, Kevin Spraggett, Alexander Yermolinsky, and John Fedorowicz. Watu trained in Germany for a year with the likes of Ludek Pachman, Miroslav Filip, and Lothar Vogt. In 2001, he faced Hungary's Peter Leko, who was among the world's top 10, at the FIDE Knock-out World Championship in Moscow.

**Watu Kobese**

**Peter Leko**

Moscow Wch KO 2001 (1.2)



position after 34...h5

Kobese mentioned that in preparing for Leko, he had to overcome his fascination for the Hungarian and think of him as an opponent. The South African sacrificed an exchange early and developed a light-square bind. In an interview with FM Calvin



Watu Kobese beat quality GMs like Peter Leko, Judit Polgar and John Fedorowicz.

## Several top players had assembled around Kobese's board, and he had to squeeze through the crowd

Klaasen, he mentioned that several top players had assembled around the board, and after a short walk, he had to squeeze through the crowd. Leko played 34...h5, and Kobese resettled into his chair and described his response as exerting 'psychological pressure' in the style of Akiba Rubinstein.

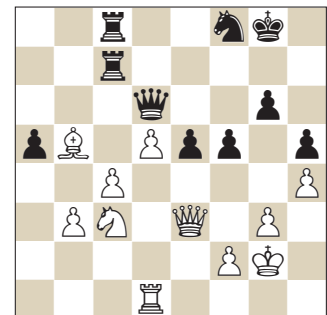
**35. ♖e1?**

Not amongst the engines' top choices, but Kobese's idea was to create 'fantasy'. If 35... ♖xa5?, then 35... ♖xa5 36. ♗xa5 ♘xc4! 37. ♘xc4 ♗xa5 38. ♘xa5 ♖c5!. With the retreat, White will reposition the queen to attack the weak h5-pawn via e2. Black will have to concede more weaknesses.

**35... ♖ca8 36. ♘d5 ♗c5 37. ♗e2 f6 38. ♖d1** Kobese stated that he wanted to reposition his knight, but decided to prevent ... ♗d4.

**38... ♘f8 39. ♘e1 ♘xd5 40. exd5 g6 41. ♘d3 ♗b6 42. ♘b2 ♗d6 43. ♘a4** White wants support for c5. **43... ♖c7 44. ♗e3 ♖ac8 45. ♘c3** Kobese intended 46. ♘e4, followed by d6 and c5 at some point. This forces another weakness.

**45... f5**



**46. ♘a4!** Black now has to stop c5, but tries create counterplay.

**46... ♘h7 47. ♗c3 f4 48. ♗xa5 fxg3 49. fxg3 ♖f7 50. ♗a6 ♗f8 51. ♗e6! ♘f6 52. ♖f1 ♔g7 53. d6 ♖d8 54. c5**

Finally, the pawns are rolling, and the result is no longer in doubt.

**54... e4 55. ♘c3 e3 56. ♗xe3 ♖b8 57. ♔c4 ♖a7 58. ♗d4 ♖e8 59. c6** 1-0.

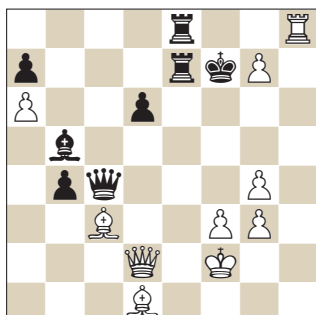
Rubery made another valuable contribution on Kasparov's website with a story about Amon Simutowe, a young phenom from Ndola, Zambia. A national champion at age 14, Simutowe won two African Junior Championships, scoring a whopping 12/13 in 1999, followed by an 11/11 score in 2000. He represented Zambia at the 2000 World Junior Championship in Yerevan, Armenia, and went unnoticed until he emerged as a contender.

He ultimately finished joint second with 8½-4½. Without a trainer and merely reading old chess magazines his brother sent him from England, his Elo rose to 2470.



The following position showed the vivid imagination of the 18-year-old and received praise from his opponent Colin Crouch, who graciously complimented the Zambian after losing.

**Amon Simutowe**  
**Colin Crouch**  
 London 2000



position after 42...♔f7

In this game, Simutowe had sacrificed the exchange and created a double-edged position. It appears that Black's battery on the e-file, assault on the e2-square, and mate threat on f1 are decisive, but Simutowe uncorked:

**43. ♖b3!! ♜e2+**

If 43...♙xb3, then 44. ♗f4+ ♔e6 (or 44...♙g6) 45. ♗f5, mate.

**44. ♗xe2 ♜xe2+ 45. ♔g1 1-0.**

Simutowe was a contemporary of Pontus Carlsson, and they faced each other in the 2001 World Juniors. Carlsson has recently been the subject of interviews concerning global racism. Born in Colombia of African ancestry, he was adopted by a Swedish family and began representing the country as a youth. In recent years, Carlsson has spent time in several African countries helping to develop the next generation of chess talent.

### Black star shining

In Africa, 48 out of 54 countries are members of FIDE, with Chad and Equatorial Guinea joining in March. The Caribbean has approximately 20 federations, with the Cayman Islands,



**Amon Simutowe sensationally finished joint second in the World Junior Championship.**

## Without a trainer and merely reading old chess magazines his brother sent him from England, Simutowe's Elo rose to 2470

St. Lucia, and St. Kitts as its most recent members. FIDE President Dr. Max Euwe visited Trinidad in 1950, and Garry Kasparov visited Jamaica during his 2014 campaign for FIDE President. The English-speaking Caribbean is still looking for its first grandmaster, but the enthusiasm has grown over the past decade.

Of course, the Dominican Republic has its only grandmaster in Ramon Mateo, while Cuba, with its rich chess legacy, is the region's strongest federation. While often overlooked, there is a sizable presence of players of African ancestry among the Latin American countries as well. Afro-

Cuban Rogelio Ortega was Cuba's national champion in 1966 and has an annual tournament named in his honour. In 2011, I happened to be in Cuba during the memorial tournament.

Vigorous debates have taken place on WhatsApp, Twitch, Facebook, and other platforms on building a more sustainable chess environment in these locations. The same question exists among African-Caribbean and African-American players. One of the travesties in chess is that many talented players in the African Diaspora have had to forgo chess ambitions due to lack of a support structure.

As far as diplomatic visits go, Dr. Max Euwe played in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1955, and visited again in 1974 on a fact-finding mission. Other luminaries paying personal visits to the continent have been Viswanathan Anand, Judit Polgar, and Nigel Short, who has visited 24 African countries to date. More recently, Levon Aronian, Hikaru Nakamura, and Wesley So have made personal visits to South Africa.

Last year, the Grand Chess Tour hosted the 'Rapid & Blitz' in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It was the first tournament in which a sitting World Champion competed in Africa. Not to mention that there was also a Didier Drogba sighting at the same hotel. Magnus Carlsen had competed as a 13-year-old at the 2004 FIDE World Chess Championships in Tripoli, Libya. He was eliminated by Aronian in the first round, but he came back to Africa as World Champion 15 years later.

These visits are a source of inspiration and give chess legitimacy, but it will take a coherent structure, better public relations, and significant financial support to go further. In my response to FIDE's recent statement on racism, I suggested a 'Grandmaster Institute' offering fellowships to promising talent from developing federations.

## A change is coming

There was once a time when the first round of Olympiad tournaments read 4-0 or 0-4 many times, but increasingly players from unheralded nations are beginning to score against strong grandmasters. There are many examples, including Sudan holding Bulgaria to a 2-2 draw at the 2016 Baku Olympiad. It featured two 300-point upsets, notably Abubaker Tagelsir's crushing defeat of Momchil Nikolov on the first board.

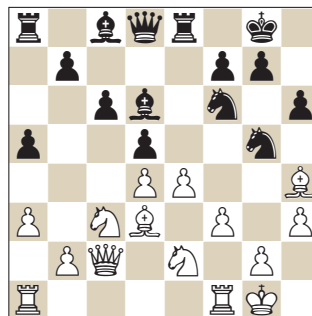
There have been individual medals by Dawit Wondimu (Ethiopia), Amon Simutowe (Zambia), and Odion Aikhoje (Nigeria). The remarkable 9/9 (2690 TPR) of Robert Gwaze (Zimbabwe) at the Bled Olympiad in 2002 and Zambia's 47th place in the 2010 Olympiad (without Simutowe), are signs of progress for the continent. These remain as sources of inspiration for the African Diaspora. Of course, it will take quite an effort to challenge Egypt. They have dominated African chess since the emergence of Bassem Amin and Ahmed Adly.



Born and raised in New York, Kassa Korley now plays for Denmark.

For the U.S., there is promising young talent like Nigerian immigrant Tani Adewumi and Brewington Hardaway, but it will take time to assess their true potential. On the other hand, Kassa Korley may be ready for a breakthrough. Born and raised in New York, his father is Danish-Ghanaian, and he currently represents Denmark after switching federations in 2014. Here is a brilliant game that created a sensation at the Xtracon Open in Denmark last year.

**Alexander Moiseenko**  
**Kassa Korley**  
 Helsingør 2019

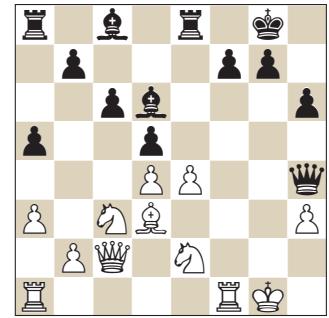


position after 15.e4

This game is following Karpeshov-Meister, Perm 1997, which Korley had not seen beforehand. It appears that Black's knights are stumbling over each other, and the threat of e5 is looming. However, Korley had a deadly response [In New In Chess 2019/6, Jan Timman showed that Korley had already executed a very similar combination in a tournament earlier that year – ed.].

**15... ♖fxe4! 16.fxe4 ♜xh3+ 17.gxh3 ♜xh4**

**After the game, Korley stated: 'I will never play a more beautiful game.'**

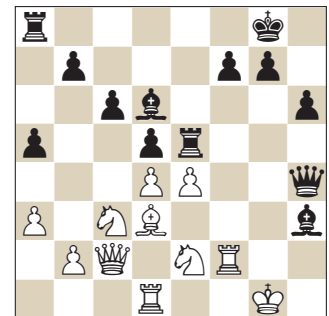


Black has tremendous compensation for the piece.

**18. ♜f2** After 18.e5 Black plays 18... ♜xe5!!, which turns out to be a similar pattern as in the game. 18.exd5 is followed by 18... ♜xh3 19. ♜f2 ♜e3.

**18... ♜xh3 19. ♜d1** A better try is 19. ♜xd5 cxd5 20.e5 ♜b8, and Black's rooks will soon join the attack. After 19.e5, 19... ♜xe5!! 20.dxe5 ♜c5 gave Black a decisive advantage in Karpeshov-Meister, Perm 1997, but that game was drawn in 64 moves.

**19... ♜e5!!** A stunning move!



**20.dxe5 ♜c5 21. ♜d4**

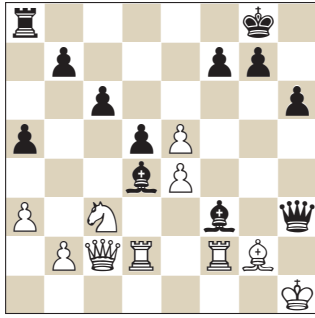
Throwing pieces to clear the rank for a last-ditch defence.

21. ♜df1 ♜xf1 22. ♜d1 ♜xf2+ 23. ♜xf2 ♜xe2 24. ♜xe2 ♜g5+ 25. ♜f1 ♜xe5 should be winning for Black.

**21... ♜xd4 22. ♜dd2**

It seems as if White will be able to hold this with all the piece support, but this move allows some incredible mating patterns on the back rank.

**22... ♜g3+ 23. ♜h1 ♜g4! 24. ♜f1 24. ♜g2 ♜h4+ 25. ♜h2 ♜e1+ 26. ♜g2 ♜g1 mate. 24... ♜f3+ 25. ♜g2 25. ♜xf3 ♜g1 or 25. ♜g2 ♜h3, mate. 25... ♜h3+**



With mate on the next move.

After the game, Korley stated, 'I will never play a more beautiful game.' It was a powerful performance, and hopefully he will secure his last norm to earn the GM title when over-the-board play fully resumes.

### Queen of Katwe

One of the things I love as part of my mission is to provide a platform for chess-oriented stories in which chess plays as an underlying theme. One such case was Phiona Mutesi, whose 'Queen of Katwe' story Disney made into a screenplay. The movie starred David Oyelowo and Lupita Nyong'o and got less than enthusiastic views by the chess community. Why?

There seemed to be more attention on her chess rating than the horrid conditions under which she was able



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Thanks to chess and Disney fame, Phiona Mutesi got a scholarship to study in the US.

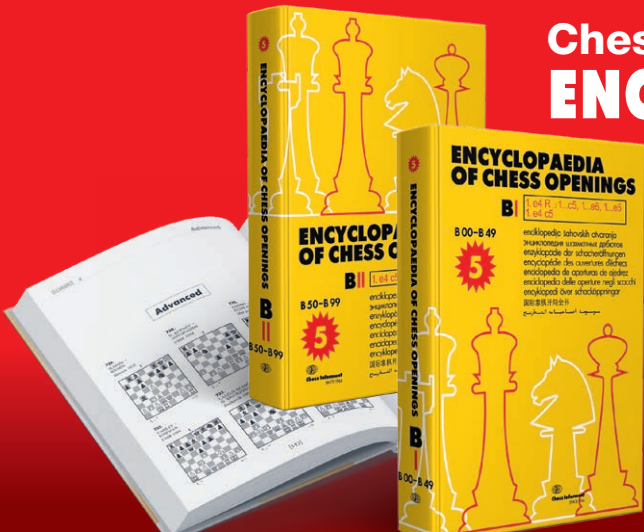
to survive and thrive. Phiona's story is not about her chess skill. It is about her triumph over hopelessness and despair in one of the poverty-stricken parts of the world, the slums of Uganda's capital Kampala. Chess was simply the avenue out of a poverty of thinking. She now has a chance at a better life and earned an opportunity to attend Northwest University in the

**Phiona Mutesi's story is about her triumph over hopelessness and despair in one of the poverty-stricken parts of the world.**

U.S. Would she have had this chance if not for chess?

Twenty years after launching The Chess Drum, I still get the question, 'Where are the Black GMs and IMs?' Now, after compiling thousands of pages of information, I have a more comprehensive answer. For every Phiona Mutesi in an African village, an Amon Simutowe is waiting to blossom.

It is my view that ensuring participation from overlooked demographics will ensure a bright future for chess. There are glimmers of hope for chess in the African Diaspora, and the development of this segment will undoubtedly help the growth of chess worldwide. ■




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