



West Chester Chess Club - West Chester, PA

Established in 1974

Over 50 Years of Great Chess!

The West Chester Chess Club plays USCF-rated [OTB chess on Thursday evenings](#) for players 16 years of age or older. Details and contacts are [here](#). For newsletter-related questions, please reach out to wccnewsletter1974@gmail.com

Newsletter – April 2026

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West Chester Chess Club Member Profile: Joe Mucerino

By Ed Snyder

Joe Mucerino is one of the West Chester Chess Club's highest rated players and until recently was the reigning club Champion having won the title in January 2025. This is the sixth time he has held the title, having won in 2004, 2005, tying in 2019, and winning again in 2020, and 2023. Joe joined the club in 2003 the same year he became an expert.



Joe was born right before a 1978 blizzard in Bristol, Pennsylvania. In October of that year the Mucerino family moved from Croydon to Douglasville, Pennsylvania where Joe still lives. Coming from a family of chess players on his father's side it's no wonder he became interested in the game. In 1972 an uncle of his paid five dollars to challenge GM Bent Larsen in a simul when Larsen was the fourth ranked player in the world. At four years old Joe's father, Joe Sr., taught Joe how to play chess and they would play on the living room floor. After sometime Joe found chess boring and gave it up for other things. Not surprising for a youngster at that age.

When Joe was in eighth grade he resumed his interest in chess and joined the school's chess club where many of his friends were members. The team's coach had taught the other members the fundamentals like development and controlling the center and even though Joe had missed this instruction he was able to beat most of his friends on the team. An uncle of Joe's was delighted that Joe was playing and doing well and bought him his first chess book, Frank Brady's "*Profile of a Prodigy*," about Bobby Fischer.

In the summer of 1992 Joe played games with his friends and against himself. That was something I could never do and I wonder who won the majority of those games. This allowed him to acquire a better understanding and feel for the game. When he entered Daniel Boone High School in Birdsboro, Pennsylvania he was the strongest chess player in his freshman year. As a junior in 1994-95 Joe led his school to its first Berks County Chess Championship in five years and at the time was the only player in the history of the school to play all of his games on first board, a record he believes he still holds. That is quite an accomplishment. And he won individual honors taking the title from Peter Minear, of the rival Wyomissing High School, a player a lot of us know well.

Joe joined USCF in 1993 and also participated in his first West Chester First Saturday Quads which was sponsored by the club for many years. His first rating was 1213. This same year he took part in the Pennsylvania Team Tournament and in 1994 won the prestigious Huntingdon Valley Chess Society junior scholastic tournament, an achievement that got him the applause of over a hundred people in attendance and his first chess trophy. This achievement made him realize that chess would take an

important place in his life. Continuing to play during his senior year he entered the 1996 National High School Championship in Somerset, New Jersey with a rating of 1700.

Joe attended Lebanon Valley College, 1996-2000 and due his studies was unable to participate in as many tournaments as he would have liked, something that many of our younger players face. But as I like to say "Life gets in the way" and that is not a bad thing. During the summer of 1997 he played in the Kopec Chess Camp G/60 tournament during which he beat his first Master, Anthony Laster, and drew his first Grandmaster Aleksandr Wojtkiewicz resulting in a surge in his rating to Class A for the first time.

After graduating from college with a degree in economics and a minor in political science Joe landed a job as a paralegal at Beckett & Lee, LLC in Malvern, Pennsylvania. At this time he decided that he would play chess anywhere, anytime, with any time control and whether the games were rated or not. As a result he travelled throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania going to over a hundred and twenty towns in thirty-nine counties making him the state's most active player over the next quarter century. That's a lot of chess. This activity included playing in various venues such as supermarkets, a psychiatric hospital, a Masonic Lodge, shopping malls, and various parks. He and Peter Minear would also play blitz games at turnpike rest areas during their travels. He believes that playing so many different players contributed greatly to improving his own ability.

Joe was laid off by Sears, a high school job which he kept to moonlight after college, permitting him to play chess in the evenings and to join local clubs. In 2005 Joe won thirty-five tournaments and was named the Player of the Year by the Pennsylvania State Chess Federation (PSCF). In 2008 his chess accomplishments continued with him being the only person to win a tournament in all four corners of Pennsylvania in the same calendar year that included Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie, and Scranton. In July of 2010 Joe hit his peak rating of 2176. In 2015 he was laid off by Beckett & Lee but within a few months was hired to a clerical position at Norristown State Hospital where he continues to work.

Joe's other achievements include writing articles for the PSCF's "*The Pennswoodpusher*." In 2004 he became the Secretary for PSCF and continues to hold that position. After serving for one term as the president of the North Penn Chess Club in 2016 he became the vice president and continues in that role, also.

All of this chess activity has Joe feeling like a PGA golfer going from one event to another. He has racked up an impressive amount of chess milestones; playing in nearly 2,000 events with over 8,500 games and sitting across the board from more than 2,500 different people.

Joe's other hobbies include collecting and flipping comic books visiting stores and flea markets in the towns where his tournaments are held. He also enjoys gambling on occasion and prefers roulette machines and bubble craps. He also like watching shows on the History Channel.

While he has no intention of slowing down his chess play he has begun to focus more on enjoying the game and worrying less about improving or his rating. He hopes to be able to keep going at his current pace for many years to come.

We hope so, too.

West Chester Chess Club Championship

By Ed Snyder

The West Chester Chess Club (WCCC) was founded in 1974 with the first championship played in 1975. The championship has continued annually since that beginning more than fifty years ago. It was not played in 2021 due to COVID. It is incredible to me that the club is not only still in existence but growing.

Dirk Troltenier managed to take the title as the lone 2026 champion with an amazing record of six wins, no losses, and one draw. Going undefeated in a field of strong players, as these tournaments always contain, is something to be remembered. Jim Larsen also went undefeated with a record of four wins, no losses, and three draws, which is also impressive. One of those draws was the only game Dirk did not win. Jim also drew Ariv Debmisra with whom he tied for second place. Ariv ended with a record of five wins, one loss, and one draw.



Dirk Troltenier

This year's championship, a seven round "round robin," saw two new players take part and proved to be as exciting as all those previous tournaments. Not until the two make-up games was it clear who would be the winner. There have been eight times when two players were co-champions. This year the possibility existed for as many as four co-champions.

Twenty different members have won the championship in the fifty-one years that a tournament was held. Michael Bury has won a record twenty times. First time contenders play in the championship almost every year and this was Dirk's first time. No one knows who will win next year. It could be you. It is always exciting to see new faces. Everyone who plays in the Upper Section throughout the year is eligible. That race began on March 5, 2026.

Thanks to Keith Johnson, an original member of the WCCC, who has faithfully kept the record of championship winners over all these years. Keith also won the very first championship in 1975 and again in 2015.

West Chester Chess Club Championship: Jim Larsen – Preston Ladson

By John Helmbrecht

Jim Larsen - Preston Ladson [B14]

West Chester Chess Club Championship, January 15, 2026

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 This is the Panov Attack which is one of White's more aggressive lines vs. the Caro-Kann. One of the early notable players championing this opening was former World

Champion Mikhail Botvinnik. In fact, sometimes this variation is named the "Panov-Botvinnik Attack" after Soviet players Vasily Panov and Mikhail Botvinnik. In this opening, White gains active piece play at the expense of an isolated queen's pawn. **4...Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 e6** Other choices for Black are 6...Bg5, 6...g6 or even 6...Be6. **7.c5**



7...Be7 8.Bb5 Bd7 9.0-0 We are still in book. **9...a6 10.Bxc6 Bxc6**



On the plus side, Black now owns the bishop pair; on the negative side, Black's light squared bishop is poor.

11.b4 0-0

Its better to address White's advance of their queenside pawns, by playing: **11...Ne4 12.Qb3 Nxc3 13.Qxc3 a5 14.a3** with only a slight advantage for White.

12.Ne5?= **12.a4!** **Ne4 13.Qb3** and with the white pawn on a4, a5 does not work anymore for Black.

12...Be8? **12....Ne4 13. Qc2 Nxc3** is recommended by the engine.

13.Bf4 b6? Trying to break up the queen side pawns. Instead, Black should have tried to block White on the white squares with 13...Ne4! 14.Qb3 Nxc3 15.Qxc3 a5

14.a4 bxc5 15.bxc5



Quietly, Jim has built an advantage. What should Black try here? 15...Nd7? loses to 16. Nc6 and then winning the Bishop after the Queen moves. Instead, 15....Ne4! 16. Nxe4 dxe4 would help Black free up his position.

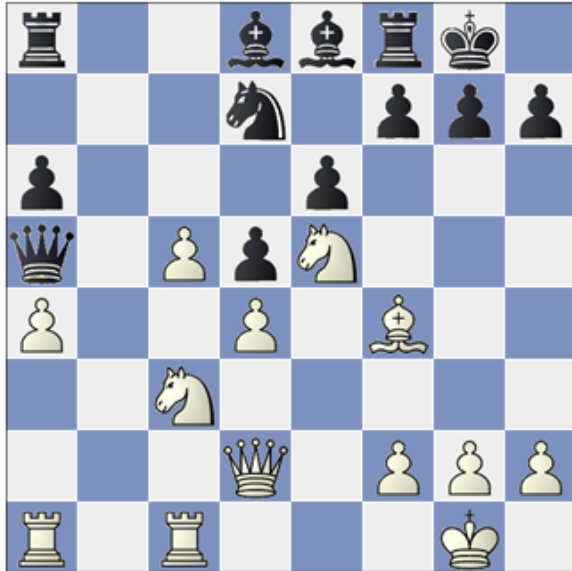
15...Qa5?+- 16.Bd2 Qc7 17.Bf4 Qa5 Repeating the position but Jim wanted to protect his Knight with the Queen.



18.Qd2 With the threat of Nxd5 winning material.

18...Bd8 Preston sees the threat and finds the best move!

19.Rfc1 Nd7?+-



Looks like a natural move trying to dislodge the strong Knight on e5. But, unfortunately, the Queen can now be trapped.

20.Nc6! e5 21.Nxa5 Bxa5 22.dxe5 Nxc5 23.Qxd5 Rc8 24.Ne4 Bb6 25.Nxc5 Bc6 26.Qb3 Ba5 27.e6 fxe6 28.Nxe6 Kh8 29.Nxf8 Rxf8 30.Rxc6

1-0

West Chester Chess Club Championship: Ed Kline – Dirk Troltenier

By Dirk Troltenier

Ed Kline – Dirk Troltenier [D02]

West Chester Chess Club Championship, February 27, 2026

The following game was played in the last round of the 2026 WCCC Championship and the ranking at the top was tight. I would win the Championship as long as I did not lose, but if I did, we would have had a 4-way tie for first place with Ariv, Jim, Ed and me.

1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 Nf6 3.e3 e6 4.Nd2 Bd6 5.Ngf3 0-0 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.Bg3



8...b6= By far Black's most frequent response according to the 2026 MegaDB, but other options are about as good, for example:

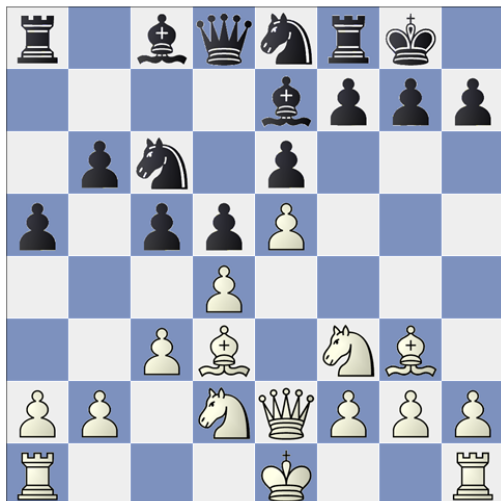
8...a5 9.a3 Qe7 10.dxc5 Bxc5= or 8...g6 9.0-0 b6 10.Ne5 Bb7= or 8...cxd4 9.exd4 Nh5 10.Bxd6 Qxd6 11.g3 g6=

9.e4 Be7 10.e5



10...Ne8? That's a mistake and White has now a clear advantage. Correct was: 10...Nh5!= 11.Ng5! (11.h4 Nxg3 12.fxg3 f5 13.Qe2-/+) 11...Bxg5 12.Qxh5 g6 13.Qe2 cxd4 14.h4 Be7 15.h5 with an equal and dynamic position with chances for both sides.

11.Qe2 a5+/-



12.a4?= That's not optimal and loses the advantage. Instead, Ed should have pursued a kingside attack right away and without losing a tempo: 12.h4 h6 13.Bf4 f6 14.Bb5 +/- gives him a clear advantage.

12...Nc7 13.h4 h6? +/- That is another mistake of mine: I did not want to play Ba6, because I only saw the bishop sacrifice on h7 and failed to see Black's 16th move in this variation: 13...Ba6!= 14.Bxh7+?? Kxh7 15.Ng5+ Kg8 16.Qh5 Bd3! – + which prevents the check mate and would have given me a winning position.



14.Bf4?= 14.Bc2 is better because it does not allow Black to exchange White's important attacking piece, the Bd3, via Ba6.

14...Ba6= 15.Bxa6 Rxa6? It is better to take with the knight and transfer it to b4 to get counterplay: 15...Nxa6= 16.Rh3 cxd4 17.Nxd4 Nxd4 18.cxd4 Nb4=

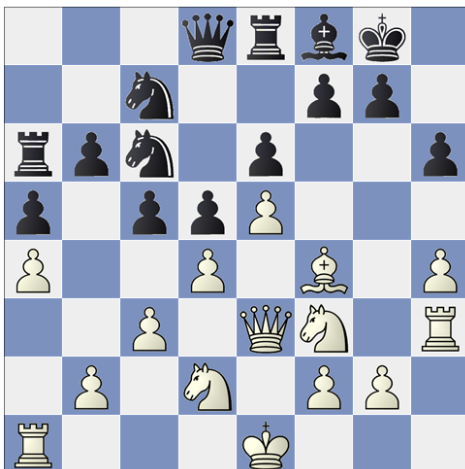
16.Qe3



16... Re8?+— That's a really bad mistake because it allows the bishop sacrifice on h6 and gives White a winning position. Better was: 16...cxd4! 17.cxd4 Kh7 18.Rc1 18...Nb4 19.Ng5+ Kg8! With a clear advantage for White

17.Rh3? Not a bad move, but losing the winning advantage for White. Better is: 17.Bxh6+— gxh6 18.Qxh6 Bf8 19.Qf4! That is the move I was afraid of during the game, and rightly so: Black is lost: 19...Re7 (19...Ne7+— 20.Qg4+ Bg7 21.h5+—) 20.Rh3 Bg7 21.h5+—

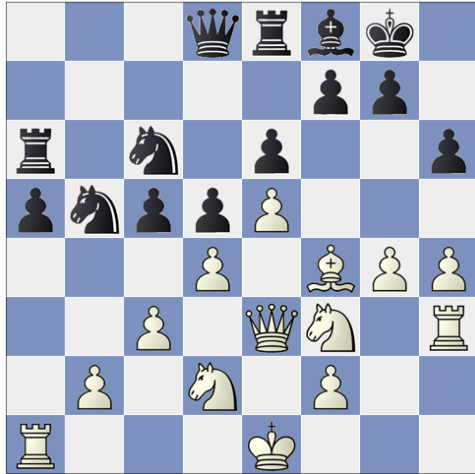
17...Bf8



18.g4? White is still superior, but there was a better move: 18.Rg3 Ne7 19.Bxh6 Nf5 20.Qf4 cxd4 21.Bg5 Qd7 22.Rg4 with a clear advantage

18...b5? Being afraid of White's kingside attack, I was desperately trying to get something going on the queen side. But b5 is not correct, playing cd4: and Nb4 was better with an inferior position, but not losing.

19.axb5+— Nxb5+—



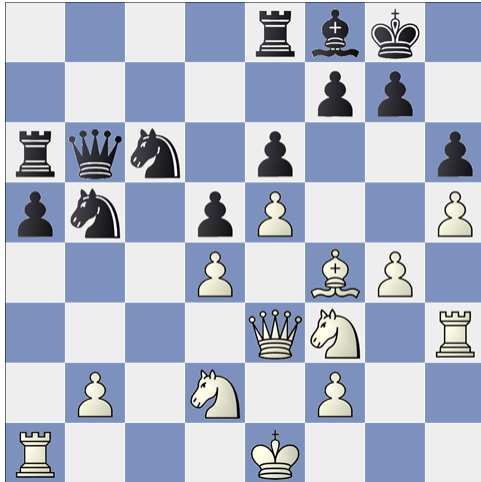
20.h5?? Now the position is equal: Better was 20.dxc5+- d4 21.Qe2! That's a move that is difficult to see! (21.cxd4? Nbx4d4?) 21...dxc3 22.bxc3 Nc7 23.Ne4 Ra8 24.g5 Nd5 25.Bh2 h5 and while his king side attack is stopped White's position is positionally clearly superior and he is a pawn ahead. After bringing the king to the safe g2 square, White should win relatively easily.

20...cxd4=



21.cxd4??-+ This is losing: Better was 21.Qd3!= which was a move that was difficult to see, and (like 21.Qe2 in the previous comment) gets its power from the unprotected rook on a6. 21...Rb6 22.Kf1 dxc3 23.bxc3=

21...Qb6 Now Black has counterplay on the queenside, there is not immediate threat to his king and he is winning.



22.Nb3? Black overlooked that White can take on d4, after his knight goes to c4. From now on its easy for Black to play.

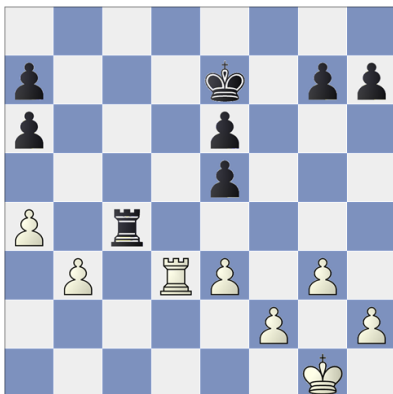
22...a4 23.Nbd2 Nbx d4 24.Rc1 Qxb2 25.Qc3 Qxc3 26.Rxc3 Bb4 27.Rc1 Nb3 28.Rc2 a3 29.Ra2 Nc1 and the fork on d3 wins a piece and the 2026 WCCC Championship 😊

0-1

Interesting pawn endgame at the Halloween Swiss WCCC tournament

By Dirk Troltenier

Last November WCCC members John Helmbrecht and Ariv Debmisra played a very interesting and hard-fought game in which the following position occurred, with Black to move:

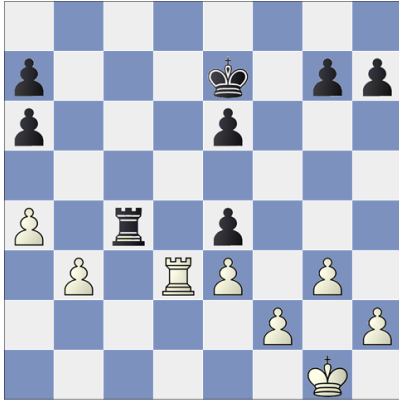


The position is equal, but Black decided to play 29...e4?, which, very surprisingly, is a mistake. In the actual game White played 30. Rd2? which resulted in an equal position. White

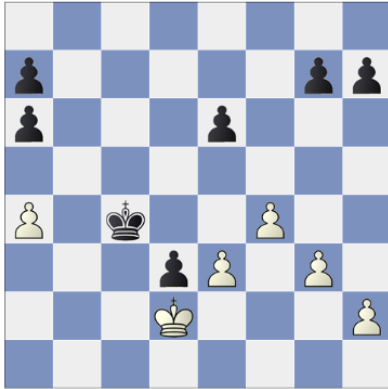
subsequently lost the rook endgame, which was also very interesting and which is subject of an analysis in the next newsletter.

Remark: In the following analysis the main line is printed in **bold** for readability.

OK, so let's get back to the starting position of this analysis:



The next couple of moves are basically forced **30.bxc4! exd3 31.Kf1 Kd6 32.f4 Kc5** (instead, sacrificing a pawn does not help Black since White will get 2 passers: 32...e5 33.fxe5+ Kxe5+) **33.Ke1 Kxc4 34.Kd2:**



At first this position looks scary for White: Black has an active king and threatens to create a remote passed pawn by picking up the pawn on a4.

But after closer examination one realizes that even if Black gets the pawn on a4, White is able to

- a) trap the black king using opposition and significantly slow down Black's advancement of the a-pawn and
- b) create a passed pawn of their own on the king side which will be faster than Black's queen side pawns.

If, on the other hand, Black does not go after the a4 pawn White's winning plan is straightforward: Advance their f, g, and h pawns on the king side to prepare a breakthrough which will be initiated by advancing the e-pawn. The e-pawn advances last because its advance allows black's king to get

to d4. If White's pawns are already advanced that will not matter as one of White's pawns will queen after the breakthrough.

34...h5 That is losing, but other ideas are losing, too. What ideas are available to Black?

- a) Black could pick up the white pawn on a4 to get a distant passed pawn: 34...Kb4 35.Kxd3 Kxa4 36.Kc4 Now Black has two options:

- 1) Advance their a-pawn as quickly as possible. For this to work, the black king has to get out of its way but that is easier said than done because the white king will restrain the Black king on the edge of the board slowing down Black's pawn promotion while creating a passed pawn that cannot be stopped. For example: 36...a5 37.g4 Ka3 38.e4 a4 39.Kc3! Ka2 40.f5 exf5 41.gxf5 a3 42.Kc2! and White wins.

- 2) Try to get back to the 8th rank (if possible) to help stop White's future passed pawn, but White can easily prevent that so Black's king has to turn around. The ensuing queen endgame is won because White can force the exchange of queens to get a winning pawn endgame: 36...Ka5 37.Kc5! Ka4 38.e4 a5 39.e5 Kb3 40.f5 a4 41.fxe6 a3 42.e7 a2 43.e8Q a1Q 44.Qb5+ Kc3 45.Qc4+ Kd2 46.Qd4+ Qxd4+ 47.Kxd4

- b) Black could try to first push their queen side pawn and hold on the pawn on d3, but does not work either because White's pawn majority moves forward: 34...a5 35.g4 a6 36.f5 exf5 37.gxf5 h5 38.h4 and White is winning

- c) Black could try to move the g pawn in stead of the h pawn, but that does help either: 34...g6 35.g4 h6 36.h4 h5 37.g5 a5 38.e4 and White wins.

35.h3 a5 36.g4 hxg4 37.hxg4 g6 White's plan succeeds. And Zugzwang helps: If the black pawn could stay on g7 and Black would not have to

move, the breakthrough would not work and the game would be a draw. 38.g5 a6 39.e4 Kd4 40.f5 and one of the white pawns will queen.

Did you know? *Introduction to problem chess: What are its main categories?*

Adapted by Dirk Troitenier from [Problem World](#) (author: Peter Wong) and Wikipedia articles.

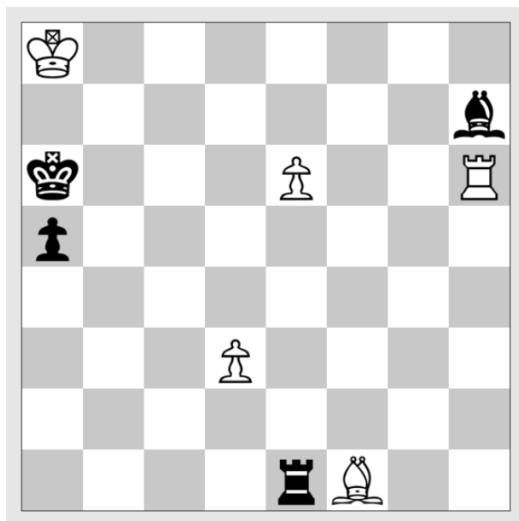
There are five main categories in problem chess:

“Directmate”: This category is similar to regular chess and likely exactly what you think it is: White is to move first, then Black, then White, etc. with White aiming to checkmate Black in as many moves as are stipulated under the diagram of the “Directmate” chess problem. Example: “Mate in two moves” or “Mate in 2” for short.

“Helpmate”: This category is different from regular chess as both sides cooperate (!) to checkmate Black: The move sequence is such that Black begins, White moves, Black moves etc. and finally White mates. As a consequence, the notation in the solution is reversed: Black’s move comes first. Here is an example for a Helpmate in 2, which means Black moves first, then White moves, then Black moves, and finally White mates:

25. David Shire

Phénix 1993, 3rd Commendation



Helpmate in 2, 2 solutions

Solution to Helpmate in 2:
1.Bd3:Be2 2.Bb5 e7#
1.Rg6:Rg6 2.Rb6 d4#

Solution to Selfmate in 2:
1.Bd6 cb4: (the only move)
2.Qd2+Nd2# (the only move)

FYI: 1.Qe7 does not work because of Kc3 (and not: cb4:)

Michail Botvinnik – José Raúl Capablanca, AVRO tournament, 1938

By Dirk Troltenier

From [Nov 6 – Nov 27, 1938, the AVRO tournament](#) took place in the Netherlands as a double round-robin with rounds played across ten different Dutch cities. It was one of the strongest tournaments ever played: Eight of the world's best players, including Max Euwe and José Raúl Capablanca, two former world champions, and the reigning world champion Alexander Alekhine, met to (unofficially) determine the challenger for the next world championship match. I use the word “unofficially” because at that time the reigning world champion could determine themselves who they would accept as challenger based on their personal preference and the price money the challenger could raise.

Two of the top aspirants for first place and, hence, for challenging Alekhine, were [Michail Botvinnik \(1911-1995\)](#), the rising star hailing from the Soviet union, and the Cuban [José Raúl Capablanca \(1888-1942\)](#). Botvinnik, who started to play chess relatively late at the age of fourteen, had in recent years won a number of strong tournaments. He was the poster child of Soviet chess and famous for his methodical and systematic, engineering-like, approach to chess.



tournament games!”

[Capablanca](#) on the other hand had been a chess prodigy who supposedly learned the game's rules at the age of four by just watching his father and uncle play. He had been the world champion 1921-1927, losing his title to Alekhine. Amazingly, he only lost thirty-four of the 570 games he played in his career, i.e., on average only about one out of seventeen games, which earned him the nickname “the chess machine”. It is no surprise then what Botvinnik said about Capablanca: *“José Raúl Capablanca was always my idol. How else could I regard a person, who, before becoming World Champion, lost a total of just eight*



One of the two games Botvinnik and Capablanca played in that tournament (BTW: AVRO is the abbreviation for a Dutch radio company at the time: *Algemeene Vereeniging Radio Omroep*) became one of the most famous chess games ever played. Why?



A) The strategy Botvinnik used to launch an attack on his opponent's king in the Rubinstein variation of the Nimzo-Indian opening was innovative and withstood the test of time: Even today, i.e., 88 years later, opening experts widely regard it as White's strongest option in that opening and are still not sure how to best respond as Black.

B) The game's concluding combination is original, beautiful, and tricky: Can you figure out what White's next move is in the position on the left?

(BTW: The fact that [Botvinnik admitted that he was not able to calculate the whole variation to the end](#) should not discourage you to go as far as you can in your analysis 😊.)

If you are interested in the solution, check out White's 30th move using this [lichess link where you can also play through the complete and commented game](#).

What happened to our two heroes in and after the tournament?

Capablanca did not do well in this tournament, as it was the only one in his life in which he scored less than 50%. He also did not get a chance to play for the world championship another time and passed away only about 3 years later at the age of fifty-three in New York City.

Botvinnik's plan to challenge Alekhine for the world championship did not work out either because WW II began less than a year after the AVRO tournament. However, Botvinnik did go on to become World Champion in 1948, in a tournament (world champion Alexander Alekhine had died undefeated) which to a large extent consisted of the players that took part in the AVRO tournament 10 years earlier.