

Carlsen, Magnus **A29**
2835
 Caruana, Fabiano **2832**

World Chess Championship 2018 (9)
[RC]

While the Women's World Championship Cycle is going to imitate the overall World Championship, it might also hold the other way around. After eight rounds, there remained four games and an eventual tie-break to be played to determine the winner. The finale of the Women's World Championship looks quite similar in this respect, doesn't it? The match has been quite tense, both players have been fighting hard and it is therefore surprising that all the games finished in draws. This shows high class of both players as well as their superb defensive abilities. Moreover, the permanent progress of the opening theory makes it increasingly difficult to achieve an advantage with White against a well-prepared opponent. We all have probably hoped to see more decisive games, but it is really very hard to beat a 2800-rated player. **1.c4**

e5 2.Sc3 Sf6 3.Sf3 Sc6 4.g3 d5 5.cxd5 Sxd5 6.Lg2 Lc5

This is currently the most fashionable continuation. It had been played by club players many times before GM Grischuk introduced it to a top level.

7.0-0

[White could win a pawn by means of 7.Sxe5 Sxc3 8.Lxc6+ (8.bxc3 Sxe5 9.d4 Ld6=) 8...bxc6 9.bxc3, but Black would get an ample compensation after (9.dxc3 Dxd1+ 10.Kxd1 Lxf2 11.Tf1 Lc5 12.Txf7 Ld6 13.Tf3 Lxe5 14.Te3 0-0! 15.Txe5 Tf1+ should be fine for Black as well according to GM Marin

and IM Stoica (NIC Yearbook 125).) 9...Dd5 10.Sf3 Lh3 owing to his better development.]

7...0-0 8.d3

[A funny-looking continuation 8.Sxd5 Dxd5 9.Sg5 Dd8 10.Sxh7 Te8 11.Sg5 Dxc5 12.d4 Dh5 13.dxc5 Td8 14.Ld2 Sd4 gives Black a decent counterplay according to GM Marin and IM Stoica.]

[8.Sxe5 Sxc3 9.Sxc6? is not to be recommended in view of Sxd1 10.Sxd8 Lxf2+! 11.Kh1 Lg4! .]

8...Te8 This variation has already been played in the 4th round.

[A bishop retreat 8...Lb6 is equally playable, but it enables White to play b2-b4 in certain lines.]

9.Lg5!? This motif has been known from the Sicilian Dragon (with reversed colours). **Sxc3**

[If it also possible to play 9...Sde7, but retreating the centralized knight contradicts the spirit of this variation (if there is any).]

[Black would like to play 9...f6?, but it allows 10.Db3 Le6 11.Dxb7, when White seems to be better, e.g. Sdb4?! 12.Db5! and the queen escapes.]

10.bxc3 f6 11.Lc1 If any piece belongs to d2, it is the knight. Black players have been doing very well in this match. Magnus therefore sort of "switched colours" by losing time with his bishop. Well, he has slightly improved his pawn structure in return. Black can no longer claim the d4-square. **Le6** Pushing e5-e4 with an undeveloped queenside would be clearly inferior to this healthy developing move. **12.Lb2 Lb6**

[Here my computer likes 12...e4!? for some reason. 13.Sd4 (13.dxe4

Dxd1 14.Tfxd1 Lc4 15.e3 Tad8
gives Black a good compensation
owing to White's queenside
weaknesses.) 13...Sxd4 14.cxd4
Lxd4 15.Lxd4 Dxd4 16.Lxe4 c6
(or even 16...Ld5 17.e3 De5
should not be too dangerous for
Black.)

[I expected 12...De7, when 13.d4
allows Black to play Tad8.]

13.d4 Ld5 Black neutralizes White's
kingside bishop. **14.Dc2 exd4**

15.cxd4 Le4 16.Db3+ Ld5

[The endgame arising after 16...Dd5
17.Dxd5+ Lxd5 18.e3 is somewhat
more pleasant for White. Not much,
but it is hard to achieve more,
nowadays.]

17.Dd1 Magnus played quickly up to
this moment. I like his opening choice.
This seemingly unambitious variation
with few long forced lines gives him
decent chances to outplay his
opponent in the subsequent course of
the game. The b6-bishop might remain
out of play after e2-e3, Nf3-d2. True,
Fabiano Caruana is quite hard to be
outplayed.

[17.Dc2 Le4 would not be very
inspiring.]

17...Lxf3?! Watching the game, I also
considered this move. It is a logical
and straightforward one. While it is
certainly not bad, it leads to a position
where White can play for the win
without any risk.

[I like 17...Dd7. Black can complete
his development and play Na5, c5
later on.]

[17...Sa5!? was another option.]

18.Db3+ This limits Black's options.

[18.Lxf3 Sxd4 19.Lxd4 Dxd4
20.Db3+ Kh8 is a mere
transposition (, while 20...Kf8!?
was not possible in the game.)]

18...Kh8 19.Lxf3 Sxd4 20.Lxd4

Dxd4 21.e3! De5 Black would like to
exchange the queens, but it is not that
simple.

[21...Dd6 22.Lxb7 Tab8

is also slightly better for White after
23.Tad1 Df6 24.Lo6, as Lxe3?
loses an exchange after almost any
queen retreat.]

22.Lxb7 Tad8 23.Tad1± White has
achieved a small but stable advantage.

His king is safer and his bishop is
more active than its counterpart. He
should keep the queens on the board
to maintain attacking chances. Magnus
Carlsen has already won many equal-
looking positions with rooks and
opposite-coloured bishops on the
board. On the other hand, Black's
position is quite solid and the drawing
margin is quite broad unless White
launches a mating attack. Black can
sometimes sacrifice a pawn to
exchange the major pieces and
achieve a drawish bishop endgame.

De7 24.h4! White needs to weaken his
opponent's king. **g6 25.h5?!**

[25.Lo6 looks better in hindsight, but
Black's defensive resources should
be sufficient anyway. Still, some
accuracy is needed, as Txd1?!
26.Txd1 Td8 27.Txd8+ Dxd8
28.Df7 would be fairly unpleasant for
Black.]

25...gxh5! A brave decision. Instead of
defending an inferior position after 25...
Kg7, Black launches counterplay. GM
Mihail Marin has recently written an
article on such an unexpected
recapture for a German magazine
"Schach".

[White would keep his trumps after
25...Kg7 26.Lf3±.]

26.Dc4 f5! Another good move. Black
prepares h5-h4, after which both kings

would be equally weak. Black has equalized, but the fight continues.

27.Lf3 h4 28.Txd8 Txd8 29.gxh4

Tg8+ 30.Kh1 Df6 31.Df4 Lc5!

The bishop joins the play. **32.Tg1**

Txg1+

[It was safer to play 32...Ld6 33.Txg8+ Kxg8, as the h4-pawn would then be hanging with check in many lines. Still, Black's continuation does not spoil anything.]

33.Kxg1 Ld6 34.Da4

Fabiano Caruana was a bit short of time, but he kept everything under control. **f4! 35.Dxa7 fxe3 36.Dxe3**

Dxh4 All Black needs to do is to exchange the queens without losing the pawns. **37.a4 Df6 38.Ld1 De5**

The bishop endgame is drawn.

39.Dxe5+ Lxe5 40.a5 Kg7 41.a6

Ld4 42.Kg2 Kf6 43.f4 Lb6 44.Kf3

h6 Black does not advance his pawns to far to be able to protect them.

Watching this endgame, I recalled an important game Aronian – Bacrot from the World Cup 2005 semifinal, where Black gave up in a similar position without his c-pawn and with White's bishop on h3 and pawn on f5. It looks like a dream scenario for White, but the final position of that game was still drawn! Needless to say, White cannot achieve it now. **45.Ke4 La7 46.Lg4**

From here White's bishop blocks the h-pawn and protects the f4-pawn. White can win a bishop for the a-pawn, but then Black's c-pawn could run forward to save a draw (at least). **Lg1 47.Kd5**

Lb6 48.Kc6 Le3 The c7-pawn can also be protected indirectly. There is nothing to be done. **49.Kb7 Lb6**

50.Lh3 Le3 51.Kc6 Lb6 52.Kd5 La7

53.Ke4 Lb6 54.Lf1 Ke6 55.Lc4+ Kf6

56.Ld3 Ke6

$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$