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Qualifying with their feet up

A curious feature of the current World Championship cycle was that two players qualified for the 2014 Candidates while relaxing at home. Sergey Karjakin was the beneficiary of an additional rating place when Vladimir Kramnik won the World Cup, even though bizarrely Karjakin had been eliminated much earlier in the same competition.

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov also advanced without pushing a pawn himself as no one was able to overtake his Grand Prix total in the final event. The rules remain much in need of simplification as well as a reduction in the number of wild-card privileges throughout the cycle.

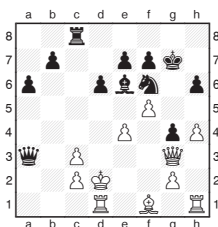
26.Kd2-c1 g4-g3 27.Qf2-e2 Be6-g4 28.Qe2-d3 Qc3-a1+. However, 22.f4-f5 ignoring the poisonous offering was better.

22... Ne5-d7
23.Bd4xg7 Kg8xg7
24.f4-f5 Rc6xc3

The knight could also return, as 24...Nd7-e5 25.f5xe6 Rc6xc3 is very strong.

25.b2xc3 Qa5xa3+
26.Kc1-d2 Nd7-f6

Protecting the 'g' pawn and hitting e4 ties up Black's position. His greater activity gives him a large edge.



27.Qg3-d3 Be6-c4
28.Qd3-d4 d6-d5
29.e4xd5 Bc4xd5
30.Rh1-g1 Bd5-e4
31.Bf1-d3

Hikaru has defended robustly so far and finally his bishop emerges but problems remain.

31... Qa3-a5
32.Qd4-b4

32.Bd3xe4 is well met by 32...Rc8-d8.

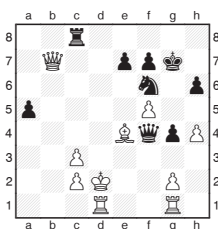
32... Qa5-c7
33.Bd3xe4

This loses to a precise tactical sequence, 33.Kd2-c1 securing the king was necessary.

33... a6-a5
34.Qb4xb7

34.Qb4-d4 Rc8-d8 is decisive.

34... Qc7-f4+



35.Kd2-e2 Rc8-c7
A key intermezzo found

with little time on the clock, as well as securing Black's rook and 'e' pawn, White's queen is forced to a much worse square.

36.Qb7-b6 Nf6xe4
37.Qb6-d4+ Kg7-h7
38.c3-c4

Nakamura had to play 38.Rg1-f1 Ne4xc3+ 39.Qd4xc3 Qf4xf1+ 40.Rd1xf1 Rc7xc3, although Black should win the rook and pawn endgame. Now another calm rook move again harassing the white queen closes the show.

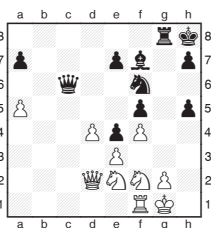
38... Rc7-d7
39.Qd4-e3

39.Qd4xd7 Qf4-f2+ 40.Ke2-d3 Ne4-c5+ is no better.

39... Ne4-g3+
40.Qe3xg3 Qf4xg3

41.Rd1xd7 Qg3-e5+

White resigned as he loses one of the rooks after 42.Ke2-d2 (or 42.Ke2-f2 Qe5xf5+) 42...Qe5xf5 43.Rd7xe7 Qf5-f2+.



V. Ivanchuk - A. Grischuk
FIDE Grand Prix Paris 2013

This game came to an abrupt conclusion. It is hard to imagine that Black's bishop skulking near his king will soon become a key participant in a decisive attack.

29.Rf1-c1 Qc6-a6
30.Rc1-c5

One better idea was 30.d4-d5 opening the long dark diagonal and freeing the d4 square for his pieces; surprisingly the rook is needed on the back rank.

30... Bf7-c4
31.Ne2-c3 Bc4-f1

Utilising the whole of the board! White resigned as there is no way to prevent a calamity on g2.

H. Nakamura - B. Gelfand
FIDE Grand Prix Paris 2013

21.f3-f4 Rf8-c8

A fine decision, mobilising his rooks and emphasising the advantage in development as the threat to his knight is illusory.

22.Qf2-g3
The capture 22.f4xe5 quickly rebounds 22...d6xe5 23.Bd4-e3 Rc6xc3 24.b2xc3 Qa5xa3+ 25.Kc1-d2 Qa3xc3+