

# Reno 2008 Fun and Games From The Western States Open

by  
Keith  
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## Preliminary Events

The 26th Western States Open was held in mid-October, the weekend of the 17th through the 19th. For the sports fan, that's right smack in the middle of an annual convergence - basketball in its pre-season, baseball in its post-season, football in its prime. Even hockey got in the act, with season openers. For 2008, we add a fifth sport: the World Chess Championship was in full swing.

Preliminary events started early this year, with a clock simul given by Sergey Kudrin on Wednesday. Alex Yermolinsky gave a larger, non-clocked simul on Thursday night. And a speed tournament was held Thursday also. I have only a vague, fuzzy memory of the results: Kudrin undefeated, Yermolinsky dropping only one game, and Jaan Ehvest winning the speed tournament. (Look for corrections next month.)

So ends my report on the events I did not witness. Before Thursday's side events, players were feted to another chess cake and champagne. Last year, players celebrated the silver anniversary of the Western States Open. But what was this year's party for? Just a new tradition? Jerry Weikel, the organizer of every one of these 26 tournaments, did not explain. He left that to John Donaldson. Donaldson congratulated Weikel on winning the USCF's Organizer of the Year award, pointing out the rarity of a Westerner capturing the attention of the larger east coast contingent.

Shortly after, with cake and punch still out, Larry Evans took the podium. His subject was the World Chess Championship being contested in Germany between Viswanathan Anand and Vladimir Kramnik. With new games on hand from rounds one and two, Evans was informal and chatty, taking questions, comments, suggestions, and opinions from the audience.

Evans posed an unanswerable question. Who (in our minds) was the Champion and who was the Challenger? Officially, Anand was the champion with Kramnik the return-match challenger. But (argued Evans) Anand did not win a match over Kramnik. Rather, Anand had won a tournament in which Kramnik also participated. In the

history of chess (all the way back to Steinitz in 1886), every champion earned his title by beating the preceding champion, with only two exceptions (Alekhine's death, and Fischer's withdrawal from chess). Evans suggested that Anand was really the challenger, and Kramnik the champion. I seem to remember someone (perhaps Evans himself) asking what if the match drew - which Evans answered with a slow shrug of his shoulders.

I don't remember the analysis of the two games Evans discussed. We spent much more time on the second match game (being an interesting draw) rather than the first match game (being an un-interesting draw).

## The Tournament Begins

Reno usually draws well from the Northwest. I suspect this is because of its easy access - a short 90 minute direct flight from Seattle, even shorter from Portland. Add the low entry fee for a major tournament, an amenable hotel/casino as host, and an experienced, reliable tournament staff.

This year's tournament suffered from the uncertainty of the economy and high gas prices (which, if you remember, topped four dollars a gallon way back then). The net result was about a hundred fewer players than last year. Is this a reflection of the economy? A trend away from over-the-board tournaments? I asked some parents whose children just played at Bryant's Chess Classic in December (Seattle). They assured me the game still draws heavily at the grade school level. Declining attendance? "Absolutely NOT!" quoth one of the coaches.

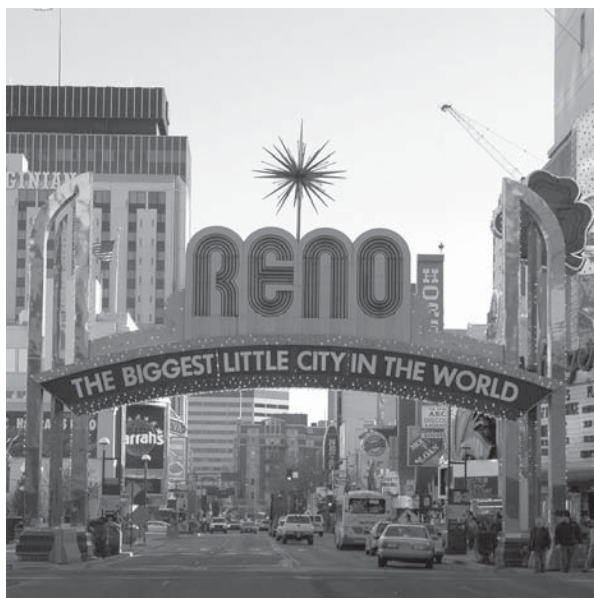
## Round Five - Madcap Imbalance

This year, I'm playing in the "A" section, rated right in the middle at 1900. I won my first two rounds, already bettering my score from last year (1 win, 1 draw, and 4 losses). The games were long, grueling, decided by blunders in deteriorating positions. Not the kind of game you want to see nor I want to annotate. Second day, a draw and a loss. Third day led to this fun game.

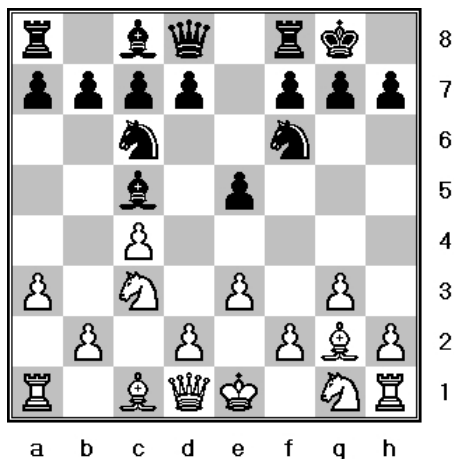
**K. Yamanaka - Michael Henebry**  
**Western States Open, Round 5**  
**Reno, October 19, 2008**

**1. c4 Nf6 2. g3 e5 3. Bg2 Bc5 4. Nc3 0-0 5. e3 Nc6 6. a3**

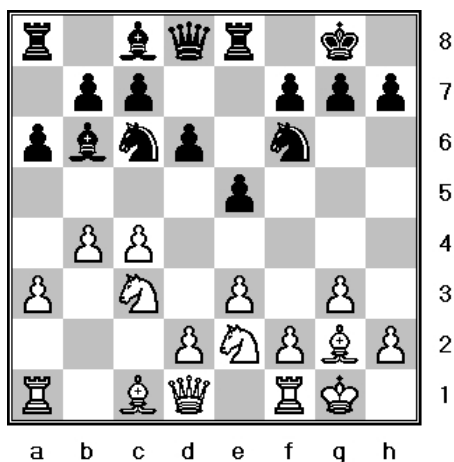
Once upon a time, White could play Nge2, 0-0, d4. But somewhere in the 90's, someone figured out ...d5!, followed by



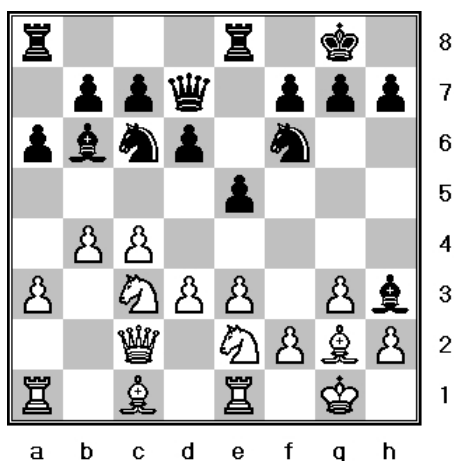
...Nb4, ...Nxd5. If White tries to hold the d-pawn, something very bad happens on d3.



6. ...a6 7. Nge2 d6 8. 0-0 Re8 9. b4 Bb6

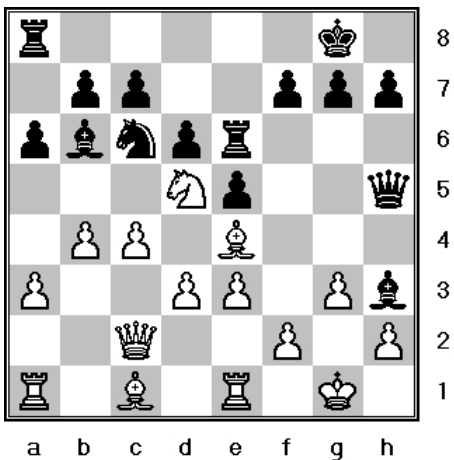


10. d3 Bg4 11. Qc2 Qd7 12. Re1 Bh3



13. Nd5 Nxd5 14. Bxd5 Qf5 15. Be4 Qh5 16. Nc3 Re6 17. Nd5

17. Qe2 seemed the safe move; 17. Nd5 had winning chances. Plan is to defend along the second rank with Ra2 and f4. Black's reply caught me completely by surprise.

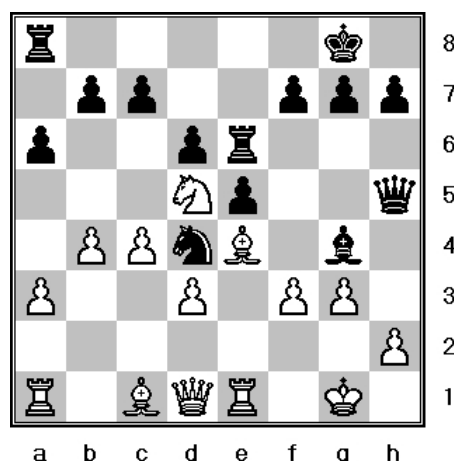


17. ...Bd4!? 18. exd4

I rejected a very messy alternative: 18. Ra2 f5 19. Nxc7 (if 19. exd4 fxe4 20. Nxc7 Nxd4 21. Qd1 Nf3+) fxe4 20. f3!? (Threat is ...Qh5-f3-g2#. Not 20. Qe2? Bg4 21. Qf1 Rh6 22. Qg2 Bf3) Rf8 21. Nxe6 Bxe6 22. exd4 Nxd4 and White's troubles continue. I didn't see all this over the board (I analyzed most of it for this article). Rather, I saw some of the lines. And what I saw was a swarm of pieces near my king and no way to shoo them away. Whereas accepting the sacrifice looked defensible.

18...Nxd4 19. Qd1 Bg4 20. f3

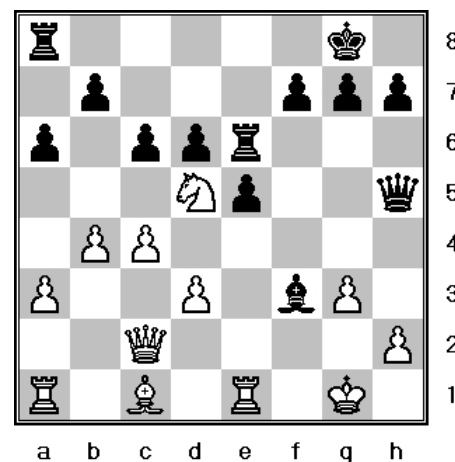
My opponent went into the think tank here, making me wonder if I missed something. I sat down and re-assessed. Problem: 20. ...Bxf3 21. Bxf3 Qxf3!? 22. Qxf3 Nxf3 23. Kf2 Nxe1 24. Nxc7 Nxd3+.



20. ...Nxf3+!

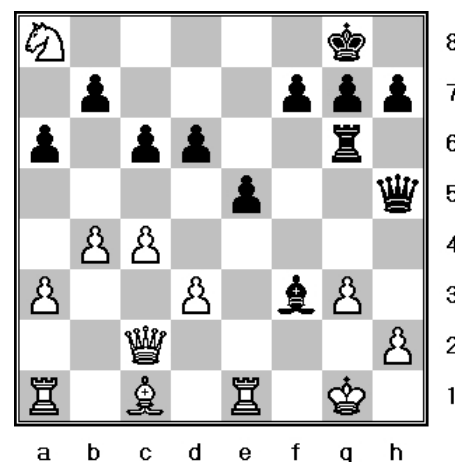
He didn't go for it. Why not? To state the obvious, you don't analyze past moves over the board! After the game, if you're curious (and you should be!) figure it out. In the previous line, 23. Kf1!? Nxe1 24. Nxc7 Nxd3 25. Nxa8 looks like an improvement. 22. Nxc7! is an even better one. 22...Rf6 23. Nxa8 Qf2+ 24. Kh1 Nf3 25. Re2 defends.

21. Bxf3 Bxf3 22. Qc2 c6!?

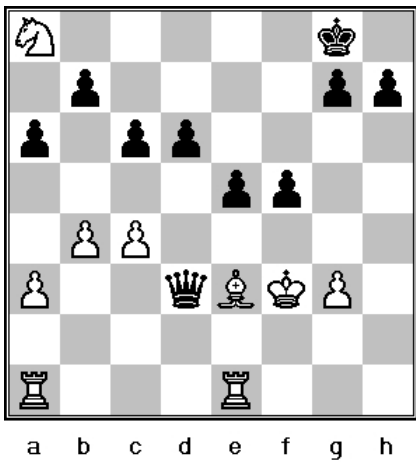


What is this, some incredible blunder? Over the years, I've learned that when my opponent plays a blunder, more often than not it's my blunder. So I settled down to figure out what I missed. I found Black's idea pretty quickly, but I couldn't find anything better than to fall into it.

23. Nc7 Rg6 24. Nxa8



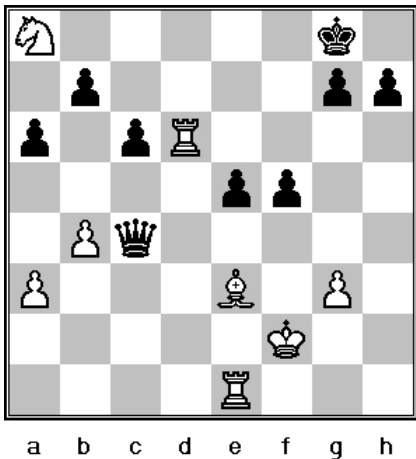
24. ...Rxc3+ 25. hxc3 Qh1+ 26. Kf2 Qg2+ 27. Ke3 Qxc2 28. Kxf3 Qxd3+ 29. Be3 f5?



I think Black is playing for material. When you have a madcap mismatch of pieces and pawns, it's better to play for the imbalances that favor you. Black's positive imbalances are a mobile queen (for perpetual checks or forks) and a full set of pawns (to erect a fortress). My imbalance is an army of pieces (can swarm his king). Black should have played 29...Qxc4 followed by ...e4, ...Q-somewhere, ...d5, and his wall would have been intact. If that happened, my hope was to sac a minor piece to break through, preferably that useless horse in the corner.

**30. Rad1 Qe4+ 31. Kf2 Qxc4 32. Rxd6**

Now his position falls apart fast. Sometime between now and move 36, ...f4 is probably necessary to provide some kind of escape route for the black king while trying to clear the rest of the white pawns, though the position is still big trouble.



**32. ...Qa2+ 33. Rd2 Qxa3 34. Rd8+ Kf7 35. Rd7+ Ke6 36. Red1**

**36. ...Qxb4 37. Nc7+**

The lost horse has the final say!

**1-0**

### Reno Today

A short detour, mostly for other Reno regulars. I've always liked the Reno area. The tourist/casino area is tightly bundled downtown, all walking distance, colored with train lines and the Truckee river. In today's Reno, the lights are even dimmer. The host casino, Sands, is only three blocks from the main downtown drag (and famous Reno arch). But those blocks are littered with huge hulking fossils that were once the Comstock, Sundowner, and Flamingo. Signs promise future condos, but the buildings themselves are dark and still, skeletal or dressed in plywood and soap.

The latest casualty is Fitzgerald's. It was open in October, but shutdown in November. It was a smaller hotel tower, colored green (or course), just behind the Reno arch.

I am pleased to report that the tournament host (Sands) shows signs of continued life. It was purchased recently by Terrible's (as far as I can tell, this parent company name really is a possessive).

During the tournament, the casino/hotel was undergoing a colorful paint job, from beige ("sand" colored, get it?) to a blue/orange/yellow pattern like a huge cabana. I asked an employee outside of the site what he thought of his new employer. His response was cautiously optimistic. So I am also cautiously optimistic that the Western States Open host is good for years to come.

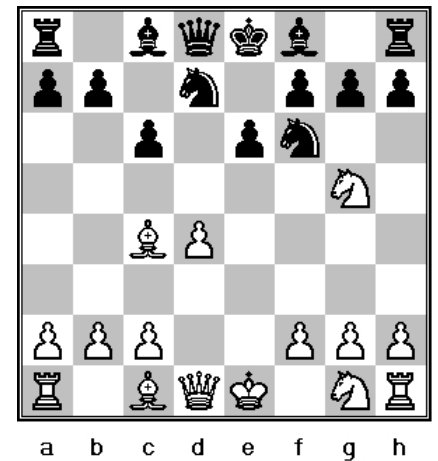
### Round Six – Last Stand

Back to the tournament. My results in

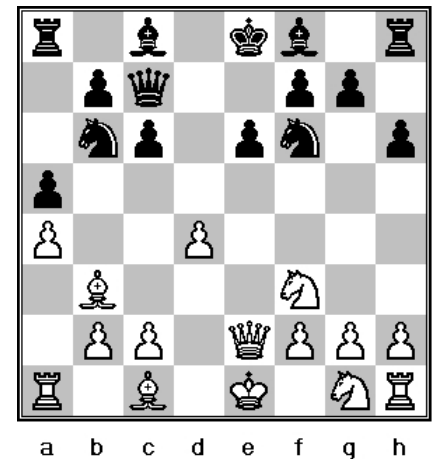
last round games have been decidedly inconsistent. Somewhere in the back of my mind are thoughts of cross-table finish (and sometimes prizes), last-day sights and sounds, travel home, back to work, etc. Furthermore, the last round play and result live longer in the mind and can uplift or taint an entire tournament memory. All of these distract from the business at hand. My opponent is rated 1846.

**Nicholas Karas – K. Yamanaka  
Western States Open, Round 6  
Reno, October 19, 2008**

**1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4 4. Nxe4 Nd7 5. Bc4 Ngf6 6. Ng5 e6**

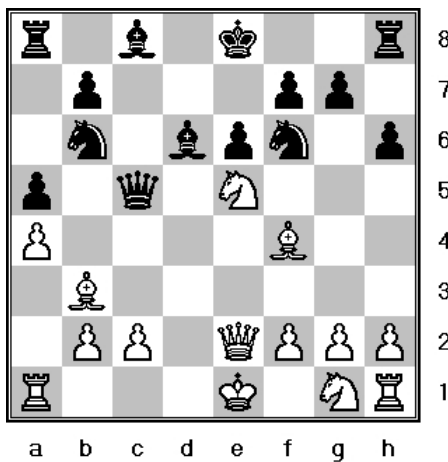


**7. Qe2 Nb6 8. Bb3 h6 9. N5f3 a5 10. a4 Qc7?!**



Right idea, wrong order. 10. ...c5 is book.

**11. Ne5 c5 12. Bf4 Bd6 13. dxc5 Qxc5**

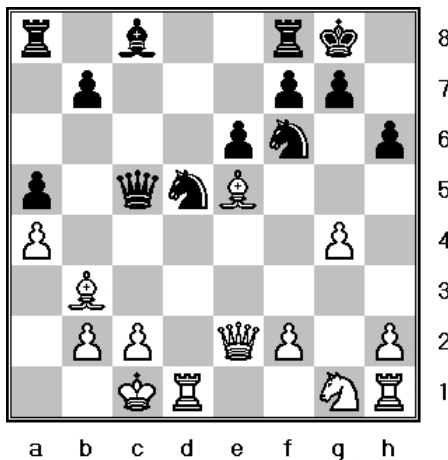


The right idea is to challenge white's occupation of e5. Now my queen is misplaced. Yes, it challenges e5, but it doesn't challenge through to f4 as it would from c7. How subtle is that? Given all that, I don't think the damage from my 10th move is all that bad.

**14. 0-0-0 Nbd5 15. Bg3 Bxe5**

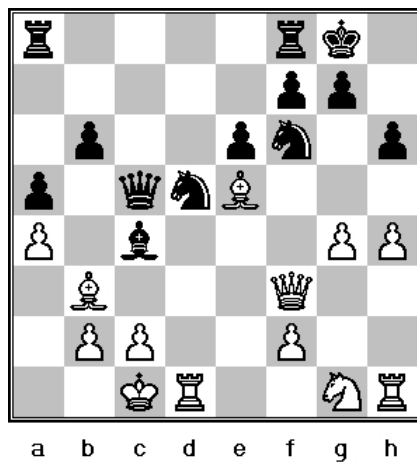
*{This exchange looks like a fairly radical decision, parting with the bishop pair and surrendering e5 for awhile. 15. ...0-0 seems solid enough. ~editor}*

**16. Bxe5 0-0 17. g4**

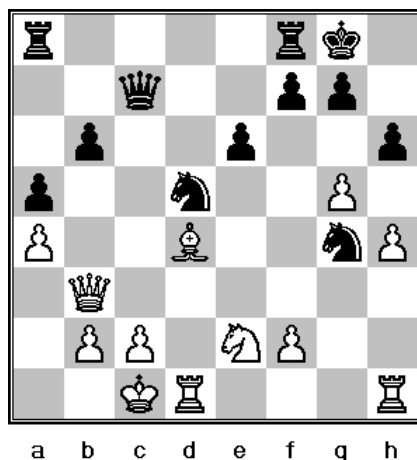


I suppose White can pick his attack, pawn storm or pieces. I can't prove it, but I think the latter is more dangerous starting with 17. Rd3.

**17. ...b6 18. h4 Ba6 19. Qf3 Bc4**



**20. g5 Bxb3 21. Qxb3 Ng4 22. Bd4 Qc7**  
*{22. ...Qb4!, meeting 23. Qxb4 axb4 24. f3? with 24. ...Nge3 (25. Rd3 Nf5) ~editor}*  
**23. Ne2**



**23. ...e5! {? ~editor}**  
 Desperate measures. I intended 23. ...h5, but after 24. f3 where does my knight go? Surely not h2.

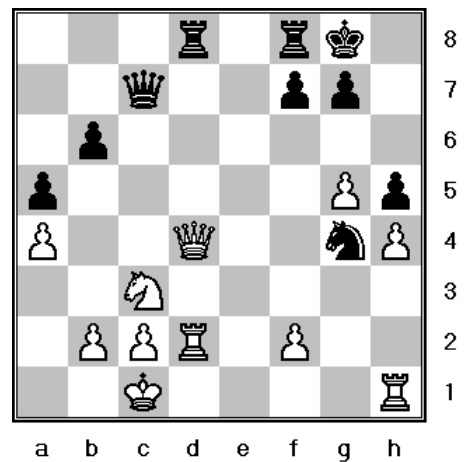
*{What's wrong with 23. ...h5 24. f3 Ne5? ~editor}*

**24. Qxd5 exd4 25. Qxd4**

*{25. gxh6! is stronger. ~editor}*

**25. ...Rac8 26. Nc3 h5 27. Rd2 Rcd8**

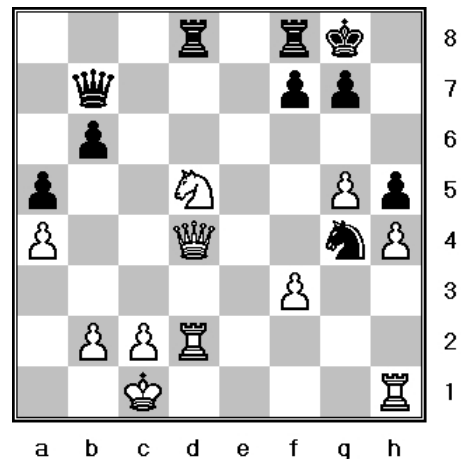
Look at that - his queen is trapped in the middle of the board! At this point, I was rather pleased with myself.



**28. Nd5!**

Walking right into a pin. But as my clock ticked, I was less and less pleased. I couldn't find a way to take advantage of the pin. And my knight is close to being trapped after f3.

**28. ...Qb7 29. f3**



**29. ...Ne3!**

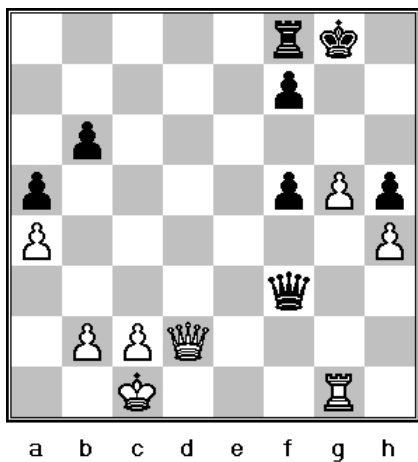
Somehow, this lets me survive to an endgame.

**30. Nf6+**

*{30. Qxb6! ~editor}*

**30. ...gxf6 31. Qxe3 Rxd2 32. Qxd2 Qxf3 33. Rg1 f5**

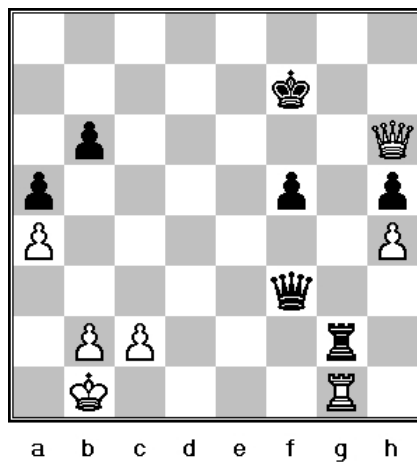
At this point, things were looking up. Got my pawn back, attack pieces traded off, kinside in a stable, defensive stance.



34. g6!

Rips open my kingside without even sac'ing a pawn. After 34...f6??, it's hard to find a line that doesn't get me checkmated. Hence the text.

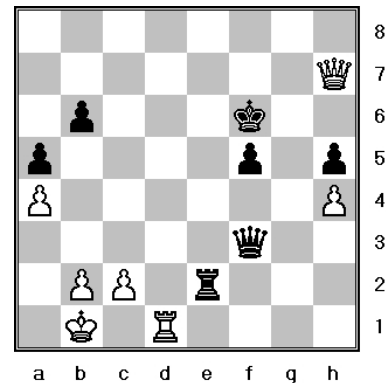
34. ...fxg6 35. Rxc6+ Kf7 36. Rg1 Re8 37. Kb1 Re2 38. Qh6 Rg2



39. Rxc6

I was happy to see this; it means I won't be checkmated.

White has great winning chances starting with 39. Qh7+ Kf6 40. Re1 Re2 (40. ...Rg7? 41. Qh6+ Kf7 42. Qe6+ Kf8 43. Qe8#; 41. ...Rg6 42. Qf8#) 41. Rd1.



Tough decision at time control.

39. ...Qxc2 40. Qxh5+ Kf6 41. Qh6+ Kf7 42. Qh7+ 1/2-1/2

White thought a long time before settling for the perpetual. If he trades off his h pawn, Black would still be a pawn down, but better. Black slowly advances in one of those Check/Interpose/Pawn-push dances.

This last draw was good for a 5th place tie in a field of 40 players.

### Party Over, Hale and Farewell

After the party was over, the return flight (like the flight out) was another reminder of the economy. The plane was a smaller propeller plane, decidedly snug. I'll admit, though, there's something retro-romantic about walking across the tarmac, climbing the walkway, and hearing the propellers spin up.

Did I say Reno's appeal is easy access? My travelling companions were David Wagner and Catlan Moser (C and E sections, respectively). Their return flight only started with the Reno-to-Seattle flight. After that, a three-hour layover, a flight to Walla Walla, another wait, then a late bus ride to Milton-Freewater.

And according to them, well worth the effort.



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