

# ChessBase Magazine

FOR PROFESSIONAL CHESS



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# #231

## THE NEXT WORLD CHAMPION?

Javokhir Sindarov dominates the competition at the Candidates Tournament



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### “JAVOKHIR’S LEVEL OF PLAY IS UNPARALLELED”

Wesley So comments on two games by the newly crowned World Championship challenger

### A MIX OF TWO SYSTEMS

Balázs Csonka examines the setup with 5.Be2 and 6.h3!? against the King’s Indian

### “I LOVE CAPTURING PAWNS!”

David Navara analyzes his brilliant game against Parham Maghsoodloo from the Prague Chess Festival

### “PRACTICAL TIPS”: THE 7TH RANK

Jan Markos explains when it’s particularly worthwhile to invade with the rook and when you should resist the temptation

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### 2026 Candidates Tournament:

World Champion Gukesh's challenger has been decided: Javokhir Sindarov played for victory from the outset in the 2026 Candidates Tournament, led at the halfway stage with 6 points from 7 games, and won the double-round-robin tournament undefeated with 10 points out of 14. The young Uzbek had already secured victory before the final round. Anish Giri took second place (8.5). Matthias Bluebaum finished sixth with 6 points. In this issue you can find analyses by Anish Giri, Vaishali, Wei Yi Wesley So and Yannick Pelletier. Dorian Rogozencos provides a video review with the highlights from Cyprus.

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Jan Werle follows in the footsteps of Viktor Korchnoi and examines one of his favourite variations against the French Tarrasch Defence, drawing on recent grandmaster games. Mihail Marin examines the game Yakkubov v Anton Guijarro (Prague 2026), in which the Uzbek player initiated a successful exchange sacrifice in the Italian Game with the novelty 12.Qe2. Daniel King's analysis of the Catalan Opening featuring the unusual 6...a5 once again drew its inspiration from Magnus Carlsen's games.

### Jan Werle: French Tarrasch Variation

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ng3 a6

### Mihail Marin: Italian Game

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.e5 d5 7.Bb5 Ne4 8.cxd4 Bb6 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Be3 Bg4 11.Qc2 Bf5 12.Qe2

### Daniel King: Catalan

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.g3 Be7 5.Bg2 0-0 6.0-0 a5

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Play through a game by chess legend Jan Timman, as well as the 'best game' from the 2026 Prague Chess Festival, move by move, in an interactive training format with our authors!

In the download and ChessBase Book versions, you will also find in-depth articles on strategy (Mihail Marin), tactics (Oliver Reeh) and endgames (Dr Karsten Mueller).

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*Is familiar with many subtleties of 5...Na6 in the Caro-Kann Two Knights Variation: Bogdan-Daniel Deac*

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### 5Petra Papp:

French Winawer Variation with 4.Nge2

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King's Indian with 5.Be2 and 6.h3

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### Lars Schandorff:

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*Alexei Sarana: An expert in the new 'hybrid system' (5.Be2 and 6.h3) against the King's Indian Defence*



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# 2026



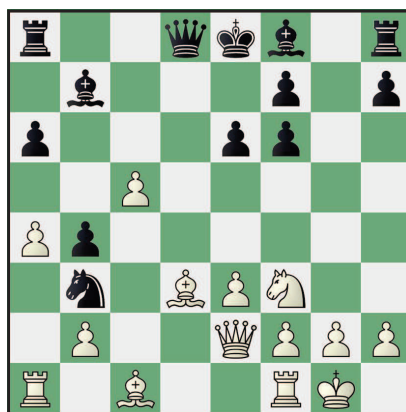
## A MESSAGE TO GUKESH

Javokhir Sindarov wins in Cyprus, finishing 1.5 points ahead of Anish Giri

At the FIDE Candidates Tournament, held from 29 March to 15 April 2026 in Pegeia (Cyprus), eight grandmasters from seven countries competed for the right to challenge reigning world champion Dommaraju Gukesh this year, with the Indian's ongoing slump in form likely providing additional motivation for some of the participants.

The tournament was played in a double round-robin format, i.e. 14 games in total. The experienced Fabiano Caruana and the young Javokhir Sindarov got off to the best start with 2.5/3. The two

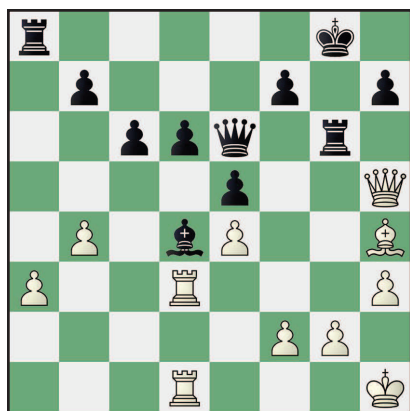
faced each other in round 4. (You can find Wesley So's analysis of the Praggnanandhaa-Sindarov game from round three on the following pages).



As Yannick Pelletier writes, the strong **14.c6! Bxc6 15.Nd4!** in Sindarov,J - Caruana,F 1-0 was part of a prepared line – which Sindarov, however, had already forgotten two moves later! Nevertheless, he managed to force his opponent to capitulate after 36 moves.

With this important victory, the 20-year-old Uzbek gained even more momentum and went on to beat both Hikaru Nakamura and Wei Yi in the next two rounds, playing Black in both games. As before, Sindarov also played in blitz mode against the Chinese player in the sixth round

– “apparently part of Javokhir’s tournament strategy to put his opponents under maximum time



pressure.”

25...c5! “Javokhir continues to blitz his moves, even though he still has 55 minutes left on the clock.” Wesley So also comments on this game in detail in this issue.

No one could keep up with Sindarov’s pace. At the halfway stage, he led with a sensational 6/7 and had a two-point lead after 10 rounds. His closest rival, Anish Giri, could have added some excitement once again in their head-to-head clash on the penultimate day. But the Uzbek ultimately drew confidently and was crowned winner of the Candidates Tournament ahead of



Matthias Bluebaum: A solid score 7-12 draws = 6th place

schedule – with 10/14, undefeated and with a substantial Elo gain. When he faces defending champion Gukesh as the new challenger this year, the latter will also be just 20 years old. Let’s look forward to the youngest World Championship match of all time!

The women’s Candidates Tournament, running in parallel, was – after all the games in the first two rounds ended in draws – much more closely contested. There were several joint leaders,

and going into the final round, six players still theoretically had a chance of overall victory. In the end, Rameshbabu Vaishali came out on top, finishing half a point clear (8.5/14) after a hard-fought victory over Kateryna Lagno, thereby earning the right to challenge the reigning world champion, Ju Wenjun.



**ALL GAMES.  
ALL  
ANALYSES.**

## 2026 Candidates Tournament

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
1 <b>Sindarov, Javokhir</b>	2745	* *	½½	1½	1½	1½	½½	1 1	1½	10.0 / 14
2 <b>Giri, Anish</b>	2753	½½	* *	½ 1	½½	½½	½ 1	0 1	1½	8.5 / 14
3 <b>Caruana, Fabiano</b>	2795	0½	½ 0	* *	1½	1 0	1½	½½	½ 1	7.5 / 14
4 <b>Wei, Yi</b>	2754	0½	½½	0½	* *	½½	½½	½½	1 1	7.0 / 14
5 <b>Nakamura, Hikaru</b>	2810	0½	½½	0 1	½½	* *	½½	½½	½½	6.5 / 14
6 <b>Bluebaum, Matthias</b>	2698	½½	½ 0	0½	½½	½½	* *	½½	½½	6.0 / 14
7 <b>Praggnanandhaa, Rameshbabu</b>	2741	0 0	1 0	½½	½½	½½	½½	* *	½½	6.0 / 14
8 <b>Esipenko, Andrey</b>	2698	0½	0½	½ 0	0 0	½½	½½	½½	* *	4.5 / 14

# OPENINGS OPENINGS OPENINGS



# MOBILE EDGE KNIGHT

Sergey Grigoriants tests 5...Na6!?



The Two Knights System against the Caro-Kann is one of the most solid variations for White. After 4...Nf6 the double-edged 5.Nxf6+ gxf6 is not everyone's cup of tea, and after the most popular move 5.Qe2, the tricky 5...Na6!?

the white queen is blocking the bishop on f1. In the following, Black very often wants to use this queen's knight actively with ...Nb4 or just manoeuvre it back to c7 and then to d5 or e6.

The above position is still relatively new, and strong players mostly go for it in rapid

and blitz time controls, the most notable experts being Rapport, Eljanov, Deac and Oparin. White has plenty of options, and Black needs to be prepared to respond effectively. I will examine A) 6.d3, B) 6.a3, C) 6.c3, D) 6.d4 and E) 6.Nxf6+.

A) 6.d3. A calm continuation - White wants to avoid any pawn structure battle. Still, Black has a very direct way to respond: 6...Nxe4 7.dxe4 e5!

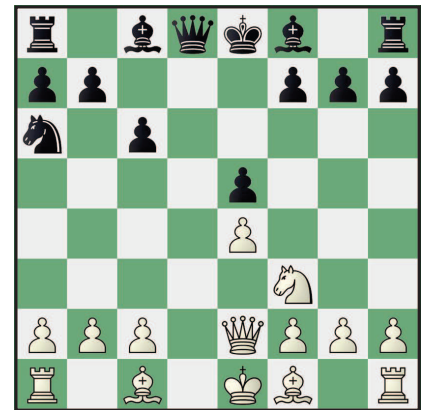
*see the following diagram*  
which uses the fact that 8.Nxe5



**SERGEY  
GRIGORIANTS**

1983, HUN

GM Sergey Grigoriants, who was born in Tashkent, has made a name for himself through his fighting spirit and strategic play.



fails to 8...Qa5+. Thus Black also has an advanced e-pawn in the centre, and the position is rather harmless for them.

B) 6.a3!?. One of the trickiest moves in this variation. White rules out any idea with ...Nb4. 6...Nxe4 7.Qxe4 Qd5.



This way to offer the trade of queens is a standard idea for Black in this line. 8.Qe3 Nc7 9.d4 and now Black can improve over the game Gangu-

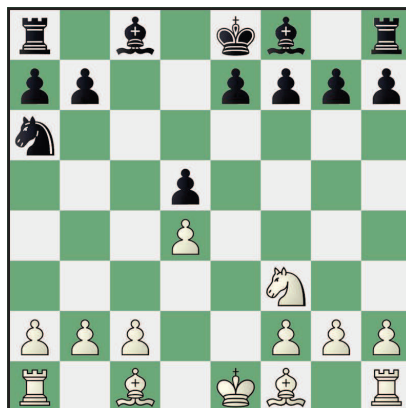
ly,S - Puranik,A 1/2 with 9... Bf5 or 9...g6, both giving them a very solid position.

C) 6.c3. Avoiding ...Nb4 is important. However, this pawn blocks the square c3, so that after ...Qd5 the tempo retreat Nc3 is not possible, allowing Black to apply pressure in the centre. Also, the common idea with g3 and Bg2 is not as strong as c2-c3 has weakened the d3 square. The game Deac,B - Nihal,S 0-1 now saw 6...Nxe4 followed by 7...Qd5, but I like immediately 6...Qd5!, inten-



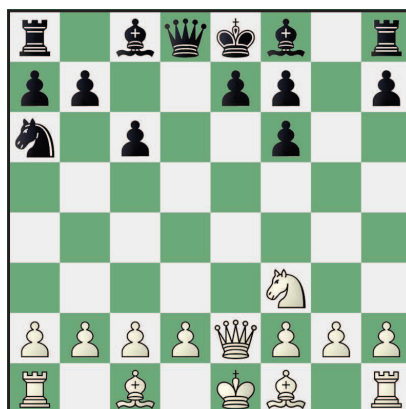
ding to continue with ...Bf5 and apply pressure again at the centre.

D) 6.d4. Possibly the most solid option. Rather than attempting to refute Black's strategy, White is focusing on development. 6...Nxe4 7.Qxe4 Qd5!. As mentioned above, this can be described as a key move in the whole system with 5...Na6!?. 8.Qxd5 cxd5 (see the following diagram). White can only hope for a minimal edge here; most strong players' games finished in a draw without any serious problems for Black. 9.Bxa6 bxa6 is not to be feared, and



otherwise the black main idea is to regroup the edge knight as quickly as possible with Nb8-c6 or d7, see Zhalmakhanov,R - Ganguly,S 1/2-1/2.

E) 6.Nxf6+. With this trade, White immediately creates an unbalanced position - which is very playable for both sides! 6...gxf6.



Black's standard arsenal includes ...h7-h5, ...Qd5, ...Bf5 and ...0-0-0, of course depending on the circumstances. The main point is that they need to play dynamically and prevent White's ideal setup with c2-c3, d2-d4, g2-g3 and Bg2.

In the diagram White has no less than four different pawn moves - let's examine them.

E1) 7.c3. A flexible conti-

uation, but Black's standard response again works well here. 7...Qd5! 8.g3 e5 9.Bg2 Bg4.



Opposite castling will lead to a position which is complex but totally fine for Black, see Alexandria 5.1.0 64-bit 8CPU - Caissa 1.16 64-bit 8CPU 1/2.

E2) 7.d4. Plausible, but as we will see, Black is doing quite well here. 7...h5!?.



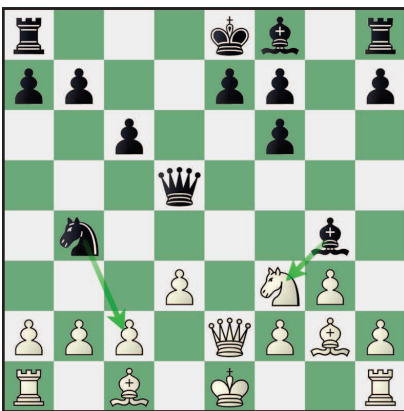
The h-pawn advance prevents White from stabilising on the kingside, and they are now unable to execute the two necessary moves g2-g3 (fianchetto) and c2-c3 (protection of d4) in time. 8.c3 (8.g3 h4! 9.Nxh4 Qxd4) Qd5!? and after our typical queen move once again Black is okay, see Stockfish 17.1 64-bit - Lizard 11.2 64-bit

8CPU 1/2.

E3) 7.g3?!. With this most natural move White is falling into Black's trap - one of the tricky points behind 5...Na6!?.



7...Nb4!. Threatening ...Nxc2+. It turns out that the knight a6 has tactical potential! 8.d3 Bg4! 9.Bg2 Qd5!.



Once again, we see the black queen coming into the game this way and doing really well. Black threatens to win a pawn with ...Nxc2+ followed by ...Bxf3 and is more than fine, see the detailed analysis in Malinowsky,L - Palczert,M 0-1

E4) 7.a3. As we have already seen, White should never forget the tactical ...Nb4 option. The pawn on a3 seems to rule this out completely, but here the



*Knows many subtleties of 5...Na6 – Bogdan-Daniel Deac*

situation is trickier: 7...Qa5!?.



Black is continuing to look for some tactics! 8...Nb4 is a threat, and the d2 pawn is pinned (= d2-d4 is not possible).

Another strategic approach, and also very respectable, is 7...h5!? to push our “counterplay pawn” to h4. There are rather unusual positions in this line, see Shuvalova,P - Potapova,M 1-0.

**Conclusion:** Against the Caro-

Kann Two Knights System, I would highly recommend 5...Na6!? (which, incidentally, is also one of the engine's first suggestions).

This article offers a wealth of interesting ideas for both sides. It introduces many tactical and positional concepts that you should thoroughly understand. By working through all the sample games step by step, you can become an expert – and successfully apply this challenging variation in your own practice!

**THE FULL ARTICLE CONTAINS:**



- ✓ Overview
- ✓ 8 annotated sample games

# VIDEOS VIDEOS VIDEOS



# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF VIKTOR KORCHNOI



**JAN WERLE**  
1984, NED

Since winning the European Championship in 2008 and completing his law degree, Jan Werle has been working as a lawyer. However, his passion remains chess. Werle provides online coaching, teaches in schools and competes in tournaments himself.



## French Tarrasch C08:

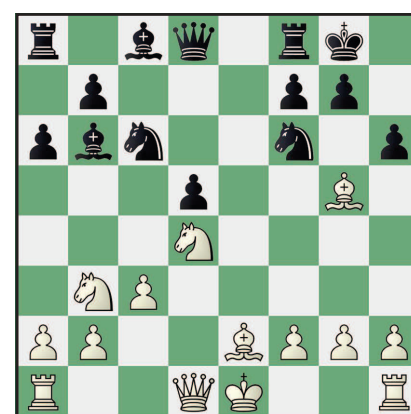
- 1.e4 e6
- 2.d4 d5
- 3.Nd2 c5
- 4.exd5 exd5
- 5.Ngf3 a6

Viktor Korchnoi was the greatest expert on the French Defence of his time. Against the Tarrasch Variation, he often chose a side line with 5...a6 – which, according to the Mega Database 2026, actually has a slightly positive score for

Black in practice! Jan Werle first presents the key game Stean – Korchnoi (1975), in which, after 6.Be2 cxd4 7.Nb3 Nf6 8.0-0 Nc6 9.Bg5, Black seized the initiative with 9...h6! 10.Bh4 g5 and won the game with an exemplary attack on

the king. Our author then examines the main and side lines, taking into account variations such as those from the Sicilian Defence. In doing so, he incorporates recent games by Jobava, Harikrishna, Carlsen and others into his analysis.

It is noteworthy, and a sign of the validity of Black's setup, that in one of the main lines – 6.dxc5 Bxc5 7.Nb3 Bb6 8.Nfd4 Nf6 9.Bg5 0-0 10.Be2 h6 – the engine already



indicates a slight advantage for Black!



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