



MUSINGS of an AMERICAN GRANDMASTER

by **GM Joel Benjamin**



Hope for the Future, Connection to the Past

If You Build it, They Will Come

Scott and Norma Mero wanted to teach their son Daniel about charitable giving and community service. Daniel, a student at Columbia Grammar in New York City, is an accomplished tournament player with a passion for chess. So the family brainstormed and decided to organize a chess event for charity. Their intention is to support a different charity each year. Band of Parents, a non-profit organization devoted to funding new therapies for neuroblastoma, the most common cancer in children under the age of two, was a worthy recipient. Nothing tugs at the heartstrings like pediatric cancer, which is severely underfunded.

They just needed a few celebrities to coax people to come out with

their wallets. In chess that means grandmasters. Though the Meros knew some VIPs through the Columbia Grammar program (Sophia and Danny Rohde helped direct the Charity Chess events, and grandmasters Michael Rohde, Marc Arnold, and myself have strong ties to the school), they were a bit unsure about what the response would be.

Grandmasters constantly decide whether or not an event is worth their while to participate in. They do a cost benefit analysis, think about lessons they might have to cancel if they play, and for family guys like me, what other obligations they have.

Through various social networks the Meros were able to make contact with lots of GMS, and happily, they got enthusiastic support. After all, charity produces a different equation. Many of my brethren are focused in the teaching business these days, and we try to do good works on a regular basis. But this was a rare and special opportunity to pay it forward. Everyone agreed to participate as long as they were in town and had no unavoidable scheduling conflicts. [Later Alex Stripunsky asked me about the event, very frustrated that he wasn't able to be there.]

Grandmasters were asked to participate in a blitz tournament. Though there would be no prizes—charity after all—we could expect to have a good time. Fifteen grandmasters were on hand for the blitz. Some are

more enthusiastic players than others. John Fedorowicz lived a few blocks away from the Marshall Chess Club for 25 years or so and rarely rolled out for their tournaments. But for a good cause, “HOF” could find his way to the Upper East Side. [And if you're reading, Canada, Fed loves to come north]. Max Dlugy, on the other hand, can sniff out a blitz tournament from ten miles away.

A week before, while coaching in Nashville (like many at the Charity Chess event), I noted my eight-year-old son's travel baseball rainout with mixed emotions. I was happy to get a shot at seeing another of his games, but I was afraid they would reschedule the game for the next Sunday. Fortunately he played on Saturday, and I got to see a joyful win for the Waldwick Warriors, with Aidan blasting a basehit to right center. I have done a somewhat better job of instructing my son in baseball (to the extent that I know what I'm talking about) than

chess, and I thought it would be nice for Aidan to hang out at a fun chess event. Plus my wife and daughter could come. Debbie was a frequent Olympic chess participant in a previous life, while Amy (6) might consent to learn the rules some time.

The Park Ave. Synagogue was most impressive, and I only saw the basement! Three rooms housed a variety of chess activities. The large back room held several quads, with the top section qualifying the winner (my student, Brandon Jacobson, yea!) into the grandmaster blitz that followed. The next room hosted the grandmaster simul with Robert Hess and Marc Arnold. The front room was for pizza and snacks on sale, general milling about, auctions for donated goods and services, and raffles for prizes like spots in the grandmaster blitz. [Aidan won a chess book; I'm working on him to put down the I-pad and finish reading it. He did enjoy playing with the giant chess set though.]

All these activities combined to raise more than \$20,000 for cancer research. It may be a drop in the bucket for such a large problem, but it shows the chess community can be a genuine force for accomplishing good works.

I was pleased that my rust did not prevent me from competing on the level I was accustomed to in my younger, more active days. I was able to jump out to the lead after six rounds, aided by this nice win in round four.

I recorded the game from memory. Maneuvering games can be hard to recall precisely; I may have some moves wrong, but the finish is exactly as it happened.

E94

Joel Benjamin	2544
Mark Paragua	2520

Charity Chess, New York 2017

1.c4 g6 2.e4 ♗g7 3.d4 d6 4.♖c3 ♖f6
Ok, I hadn't really planned what to do next.

5.♗f3 0-0 6.♗e2 e5 7.♗e3 It seemed like a good idea to sidestep the complications of the Mar Del Plata in blitz.

7...♗bd7 I was happy to see that move; now we're getting into Old School stuff I

don't have to think too much about.
8.0-0 c6 9.♖c2 h6 10.d5 c5



11.g3! I learned this cool strategy many years ago, using it to win a few games, most notably against Alexandre LeSiegé in Toronto 1990. More to follow on the origins of this idea.

11...♗h7 12.♗h4 h5 13.f3 ♗f6
14.♗g2 h4 15.♗d2 a6 16.a4 ♖b8
17.a5 hxg3 18.hxg3 ♗g5 19.♗e3
♗g7 20.♗g2 ♖h8 21.♖h1 ♗h7
22.♗cd1 ♗g8 23.♗c3 ♗df8 24.♗f2
♖e7 25.♗eg4 ♗g7 26.♗h6+ ♗xh6
27.♖xh6 ♗f6 28.♖d2 ♖xh6 29.♖xh6
♗h7 30.♖h1 ♖f8 31.♖e3 ♗d7 32.f4
exf4 33.gxf4 33.♖xf4 was a more direct win but in the final seconds I wasn't looking to calculate anything.

33...♖e8 34.e5 ♗f5 35.♖f3 dxe5
36.fxe5 ♗d7 37.♖g3 ♖e7 38.♗g4
♗xg4 39.♗xg4 ♖g5



40.e6 40.♖xh7 ♗xh7 41.♗f6+ was not bad either.

40...fxe6 41.♗h6+ ♗f8 42.♖f1+ ♗e7
And now I noticed I had something stronger than 43.♖f7+.

43.d6+

Black resigned

I felt a certain exhilaration as I left the board. I came upon my fellow fossilized friends, Fedorowicz and Rohde, who I knew would appreciate my experience.

"I just won a game on automatic pilot. I hardly had to think at all."
"What was it?" Fed asked.
"King's Indian with ♗bd7" I replied.

Fed thought for a moment. "You play the ♖c2, don't you?"

"Yeah, and when the center got closed, I went g3 and ♗h4."

We all nodded our heads, as if recalling a pleasant memory. "I think we got that from Dlugy," Fed said. "I think he was the first to come up with that idea."

I couldn't remember if that was true. I have a pretty good memory, but John's is razor sharp. Still more on this history later...

I could have wrapped up the tournament by drawing with the White pieces in the last round against Dlugy. I have not had a great history in that situation, and I always believe that trying to force a draw does not get you one. Still, I played a truly dreadful game without a trace of discipline or common sense, and lost horribly. At least a last round disaster did not cost me a lot of money! Instead the pre-tournament favorite had the honor of lugging home the first place trophy, a beautiful but heavy giant ceramic chess piece.

Norwalk to Remember

Benjamin-Dlugy encounters used to be frequent in the old days, late 80s and early 90s for those whose memories don't extend that far back. But Max left chess for several years, and while he has returned, I am now pretty inactive in my stay-at-home dad phase. Still, I got another crack at him a few months later.

The Chess Club of Fairfield County is one of the best kept secrets in American chess. The club occupies a building which formerly housed a bank in the small city of Norwalk, CT. It's about an hour's drive from Northern New Jersey, and accessible by train from NYC. Though it doesn't have the high-profile events we see in St. Louis, it is an equally spacious and comfortable place to play chess.

Most of their events are quite small,

but once a year they organize a mid-size one-day tournament (blitz or rapid) of interest to grandmasters. Ian Harris emails the usual suspects to ensure a quality turnout for the \$1,000 prize fund.

I was trounced by Alex Fishbein in the second round, and this time faced Max a half point behind, with 2/3. We contested a pretty fascinating game.

B01

Joel Benjamin	2544
Maxim Dlugy	2518

Fairfield County Masters 2017

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♗c3 ♗d6 4.d4 c6 5.♗f3 ♕g4



6.h3 I had no illusions about Dlugy accepting this sacrifice. I recalled his USCL game with Izoria (I did an ICC *Game of the Week* video on it), but Max is a pawn-grabber from way back anyway. He is certainly a better defender than I am a burn-your-bridges attacker, and 6.♕e3 is certainly more my style. For reasons I can't explain, I became confused and thought this was the last round. Feeling I had nothing to lose, I went all out. I thought of Awonder Liang's recent defeat of Alex Lenderman with a similar pawn sacrifice [See Page 40 - Ed.], and decided to step outside of my comfort zone.

6...♕xf3 7.♖xf3 ♗xd4 8.♕e3 ♗d8 9.♕d3 The bishop is not well-placed here, but I thought it would help to castle queenside. I do have options of pawn-storming, but the possibility of bring the second rook to the e-file quickly did not prove too relevant. 9.♞d1 ♗d7 10.♕c4 e6 11.0-0 ♗g6 12.♞d2 ♖a5 13.♖g3 ♗h5 14.♖g4 ♗hf6= was seen

in M.Muzychuk 2491 - A.Karpov 2619, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2013.

I was in quite a good mood after winning this game, so I bought a copy of Dlugy's book, *Grandmaster Insides*, which he was selling at the tournament. It's quite an interesting read, with a lot of work poured into it. But if I had read it before the tournament, things would have been different! I found out that Dlugy was rather more of an expert in this line than I realized. When I flipped to page 261 I learned that Dlugy showed this line to Karpov (including the ♗f6-h5 idea) for the afore-mentioned game. And he had a fair bit of experience in other games as well.

9...♗d7 10.0-0-0 ♗g6 11.♗e4 ♖a5 12.♗b1 e6 13.♕d2 This is the first new move. 13.♕d4 ♕e7 14.g4 ♗e5 15.♖g3 ♗xd3 16.♕xf6 gxf6 17.♞xd3 ♞d8 18.♞xd8+ ♗xd8 19.♖f4 gave White standard compensation in I.Saric 2627 - M.Dlugy 2524, Blagoevgrad 2013. Dlugy was actually well on top for most of the game, but blundered into a draw very late.

13...♖b6 14.♕c3 ♗d5 15.♕c4 The engine indicates 15.♕e2, to avoid the bishop hanging on c4 after ♖b6-b4. But it's not a human move, particularly in a rapid game.

15...♗xc3+ 16.♖xc3 h6! 17.♞d3 I was looking at crazy stuff like 17.♞xd7 ♗xd7 18.♞d1+ ♗e8 19.♕xe6 fxe6 20.♖e5 c5, but it's unsound. I had to play something slow, with perhaps just enough long-term compensation.

17...0-0-0 18.♞hd1 ♖b4! I saw this on move 16, but forgot about the idea.

19.♖d4 c5



20.♖e3! The exclamation is not because this sacrifice works - it doesn't - but because the alternatives (20.a3, 20.c3, and 20.♖c3) all lead to depressing

pawn down endings. I think Max would have had little trouble converting those endgames, and my winning chances would have been zero. I'm much worse without the piece, but Black can easily make a mistake, and winning is not a complete dream for me.

20...♖xc4 21.♖f4 ♖b5 22.♖xf7 c4?

In our long history, there have been many games where I attacked, came up short, and gratefully accepted Max's blunders in my time pressure. The slope begins here as he doesn't detect how much precision is required here. I was concerned about 22...♖c6, which indeed preserves a large edge.

23.♞d4? Fortunately, I missed 23.♗c3! ♖c6 24.♞xd7! ♞xd7 25.♖e8+ ♗c7 26.♞xd7+ ♖xd7 27.♗b5+ ♗c6 28.♗xa7+ ♗c7 29.♗b5+ with a peculiar perpetual.

23...♕a3 24.b3 cxb3? I was not surprised that Max blitzed this out - it seems obvious to avoid giving the c4-pawn for nothing. But I was very happy to see this move because now there will be no back rank mates.

I thought my goose would be cooked after 24...♖f5, e.g. 25.♞xc4+ ♗b8 26.♞xd7 ♖xf7 27.♞xf7 ♞d1#. But the engines show White can turn the tables with 25.b4!!



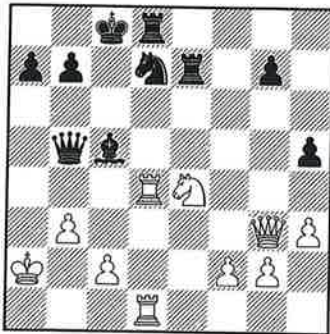
Truly amazing. Now 25...♕xb4 26.♞xc4+ ♗b8 27.♞xd7 and 25...♖xf7 26.♗d6+ ♗b8 27.♗xf7 are both bad. Black has to find 25...♗b6 26.♖e7! ♞xd4 27.♞xd4 ♕xb4 (the box is the *Chess Informant* symbol for forced) 28.♖xb4 ♖e5 with equality.

The right move is once again 24...♖c6! with the idea that 25.♞xc4? ♗c5 wins on the spot.

25.axb3 ♞hf8 26.♖xe6 ♞fe8 Here's a weird computer line: 26...♖e5 27.♖c4+ ♗c5 28.f4 b5 29.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 30.♞xd8+ ♗xd8 31.♖g8+ ♖e8 32.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 33.♗d6+ ♗e7 34.♗xb5 ♕b4 35.c3 ♕xc3



36. ♖xc3 ♖xb3 with a small edge for Black.
 27. ♖g4 ♜e7? 28. ♜a2 Now I realized, much faster than Max, that the tide was turning.
 28...h5 28...♗b4 29. ♜xb4 ♖xb4
 30. ♖d6+ wins.
 29. ♖g3 ♗c5??



Max still didn't grasp the danger. 29...♗b4 30. ♜xb4 ♖xb4 31. ♖d6+ ♜c7 32. ♖e8+ ♜b6 33. ♜d6+ (In my time shortage I might have played 33. ♖c7+ ♜a6 34. ♖xd8, when Dlugy would happily force an endgame with 34...♖a5+, leaving me with a lot of work to do to convert to a win.) 33...♜a5 34. ♖g5+ and White takes a rook with a winning position.; So 29...♜xe4 was necessary, though it is White who is already clearly better.

30. ♖xc5 Max just forgot about this simple move, which left him muttering to himself for a minute or so. But he didn't give up yet.

30...♖c6 31. ♖d3 The engine favorite, appropriately introducing the prospect of liquidating into the pawn ending!

31...♖xc5 32. ♜c4 Dlugy fought on gamely, as I had just a minute left. I

played almost every move in less than five seconds to take advantage of the five-second time delay. So while it took me another 30 moves to win, I was never in danger of running out of time.

This put me in a first place tie with Rohde, who I met in the last round. It seemed best to leave well enough alone, so we drew and watched the two games break against us (fair enough). Dlugy and Giorgi Kacheishvili joined us at 3½ out of 5.

The final word on the g2-g3 and ♖f3-h4 idea from the Paragua game: On page 377, Dlugy explains that he worked the whole thing out with his coach Vitaly Zaltsman in 1986 and played it against Fedorowicz. All these years I thought it was John's idea. But good ideas are always welcome, no matter how you come upon them.

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