



## **Magnus wins his third World Chess Championship by checkmating Karjakin in the tie-breaker games**

November 30, 2016

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*Woody Harrelson makes the first move in the first game!*

After three weeks of 12 games, Magnus Carlsen (Norway) narrowly defeated his challenger Sergey Karjakin (Russia) 3-1 in the tie-breaker rapid/blitz games to retain his title by winning his third consecutive World Championship title. In the end, Carlsen finally broke through in fine attacking style and played a brilliant queen sacrifice to force a checkmate with seconds on the clock!

There had been nothing to separate champion and challenger after 12 classical games. The first seven ended in draws – with Karjakin coming back from the brink in the third and fourth – before the challenger drew first blood in the eighth. That left Carlsen more vulnerable than he had ever appeared during his three-year championship reign. But, Carlsen tied the match with a stirring victory in game 10 on Thanksgiving Day.

The World Championship was held November 11-30 in New York City and was contested over 12 games in lower Manhattan's renovated Fulton Market Building. It marked the first time the United States had played host to a world title match since 1995, when Garry Kasparov retained his title against Viswanathan Anand on the 107th-floor observatory deck in the south tower of the World Trade Center. Furthermore, this 2016 location was not far from the famed chess shops of Greenwich Village once frequented by Bobby Fischer, or the tables at Washington Square Park, where speed chess remains a year-round pastime. (Fischer's legendary 1972 victory over Boris Spassky in Russia is the last time an American won the world title.)

Carlsen previously defeated world champion Vishy Anand in 2013 to take the title, and defended his crown against Anand again in 2014. Karjakin, who changed his nationality

from Ukrainian to Russian in 2009, was often cited as a potential challenger for the world title as a child, becoming the world's young grandmaster at the age of 12 years, 7 months.

Carlsen's victory marked the monumental conclusion of a new generation of chess, as it was the first time that two players who grew up in the computer era played for the title. Furthermore, the two 26-year-olds (Carlsen's birthday was the day of his clinching victory) represented the youngest-ever World Championship face-off which is a dynamic organizers hope will lure more young fans and players to the game.

Whatever differences Carlsen and Karjakin may have as people and players, they are united in being members of the computer-chess generation. Historically, computers were criticized by chess pros. Even after IBM's Deep Blue defeated Garry Kasparov in 1997, resistance remained high. Today, the way computers calculate chess moves has trained and informed players at the highest levels of chess. Computers in chess have morphed from jester, to threat, to brilliant opponent.

Magnus is a rockstar in his native country Norway. He entered the tournament as the No. 1 player in the world and was heavily favored to win. "For me, it's a matter of when I get the chance, I'll try to punch him until he finally knocks over," Magnus said. He tried for nearly three weeks, but made little progress against the painstakingly resolute defensive play of his Russian rival, who time and again was able to salvage results from seemingly impossible positions. Ultimately, the 26-year-old Russian finally toppled to the canvas.

Karjakin, 26, came to New York with a No. 6 ranking and a colorful political backstory. An outspoken supporter of Russian president Vladimir Putin, he emerged as a formidable opponent to Carlsen, rattling him in a few key moments. Karjakin holds the record for being the world's youngest grandmaster at 12 years and 7 months old and won the 2016 Candidates Tournament over top-ranked American Fabiano Caruana. Reports have swirled that Putin had been avidly following his progress in the tournament.

Carlsen and Karjakin have faced each other 21 times in classical chess, which is chess that is 100 minutes for the first 40 moves, 50 minutes for the next 20 moves, and then 15 minutes for the rest of the game, plus an additional 30 seconds per move starting from move 1. Carlsen has won 4, Karjakin has won 1, while 16 games ended in a draw. But a closer look at the data shows "Karjakin's core strength: Staunch Defense." And that Carlsen, in spite of his brilliance, can still be prone to blunders.

Aside from anemic crowds, awkward post-match press conferences, and the World Chess Federation's leader, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, being barred from the United States for ties to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, the championship ran relatively smoothly. Dozens of members of the chess press, many in suits and ties having earned grandmaster titles of their own, packed into a media center where they avidly watched the moves on large projection screens. A labyrinth of black walls separated the sequestered players from VIPs and regular chess fans, myself included!

It all came down to a single, final day of a rapid-fire setup. To win the championship, a player needed to reach a score of 6.5 points, but because the two found themselves in a dead heat, Wednesday's tie-break play kicked in. Only a handful of championships prior, most recently in 2006 and 2012, have had tiebreakers deciding their title. The drama drew 10 million people to watch the match online and an estimated 10,000 spectators in and around the New York City Seaport.

The final day's play was to commence with four rapid games — 25 minutes per player per game and 10 seconds added after each move. Should that still not produce a winner, the format calls for two blitz games and if that results in a tie, the players keep playing two blitz games until a total of 10. From there, if still tied, players have an "Armageddon" game where white has five minutes, black four minutes, and black only has to draw to win the title, according to championship organizers. On paper, it would appear that the tie-break format would have favored Carlsen, as he also has World Rapid Championship and World Blitz Championship titles.

After the first rapid round resulted in a predictable draw, Carlsen and Karjakin began the second round with an assertive handshake. Curiously, Carlsen donned NBA socks to the competition. Karjakin's face was steely, calm, and the two leaned forward in black, leather office chairs, seldom making eye contact with each other. Carlsen asserted himself with a series of deliberate moves that placed Karjakin at an imbalance, both in terms of time on the clock and strength of pieces on the board. Yet in the last minute, Karjakin pulled off a stunning defense, clawing back to salvage a draw despite a wildly inferior position and a perilous time disadvantage. Carlsen had missed a move that surely would have led to victory, a blunder that enabled Karjakin to escape with the tie-breaker series still level.

But Carlsen, who is also the world's top-ranked rapid player, recovered admirably playing as black in the third game. He build up positional and time advantages to pressure Karjakin, who resigned after an inexplicable blunder. Carlsen reclaimed his confidence and pulled off the win handily, by sacrificing a pawn for more significant pieces.

That left Karjakin in need of no less than win with the black pieces to keep his flickering title hopes alive. The sprint of speed chess had turned into a brutal marathon. Karjakin opted for the Sicilian defense, but couldn't overcome Carlsen's tactical aptitude and unwavering positional advantage. A queen sacrifice by the Norwegian caught the challenger's king in a mating net, allowing the champion to finish off the championship defense in style.

Responding to journalists' questions, Carlsen too acknowledged that it was the toughest championship match he had played. *"In terms of world championship matches, it was the most difficult for sure, so it's more comparable, perhaps, to the Candidates and 2013 where I barely got through. It was very tough, I mean, after Game 8. Before that, even though it was frustrating not to win some better positions I still thought that I was going to win, but after Game 8 I had all sorts of negative thoughts in my head and it was very difficult to settle down and play normally,"* Carlsen added. "I'm very happy that at

the end of the match I managed to find joy in playing,” Carlsen said. “Today, it was fun to play.”

At the post-games press conference, Karjakin admitted there were flaws in his preparation for the rapid play games. *“It was a very difficult match. I’m satisfied with the classical part, although there were some mistakes. But I was not fully prepared to play rapid chess, I played badly. Magnus exploited my mistakes and deserved the victory. Congratulations to him,”* the Russian grandmaster said.

The prize fund for the tournament organized by AGON for FIDE was \$1 million Euros (about \$1.1 million USD), with Carlsen receiving 550,000 euros and Karjakin getting 450,000 euros. With the victory in hand, he leaped from the table with a wide smile, applause echoing through the building. And those in attendance sang “Happy Birthday” to Carlsen.







See video -----

Yours truly asked the following question: "On behalf of the Ohio Chess Association and the Buckeye Chess Club in Columbus, Ohio...In this setting of New York City in Bobby Fischer's hometown, please name your favorite Fischer game? Here's each of their response:



*Here's the picture after I asked my question! The players had some fun at the press conference answering my question!*

Carlsen's choice was a game against IM Anthony Saidy in the U.S. championship. The two played at least seven times, but Carlsen remembered Fischer's class in the knight vs. bishop ending:

"I understand that wasn't the greatest game but it did make an impression on me, at some point. But there are too many great games to mention."

### **Anthony Saidy vs. Robert James Fischer**

US Championship | New York, NY USA | Round 11 | 1 Jan 1964 | ECO: A33 | 0-1



1. c4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. Ndb5 Bb4 7. a3 Bxc3+8. Nxc3 d5 9. e3 O-O 10. cxd5 exd5 11. Be2 Bf5 12. Nb5 Qb6 13. O-O a6 14. Nd4 Nxd4 15. Qxd4 Qxd4 16. exd4 Rac8 17. Bd1 Bc2 18. Be3 Bxd1 19. Rfxd1 Rc2 20. Rd2 Rfc8 21. Rxc2 Rxc2 22. Rc1 Rxc1+ 23. Bxc1 Nd7 24. Kf1 Nf8 25. Ke2 Ne6 26. Kd3 h5 27. Be3 Kh7 28. f3 Kg6 29. a4 Kf5 30. Ke2 g5 31. Kf2 Nd8 32. Bd2 Kg6 33. Ke3 Ne6 34. Kd3 Kf5 35. Be3 f6 36. Ke2 Kg6 37. Kd3 f5 38. Ke2 f4 39. Bf2 Ng7 40. h3 Nf5 41. Kd3 g4 42. h4 g4 43. fxg4 Nh6 44. Be1 Nxd4 45. Bd2 Kf5 46. Be1 Nf6 47. Bh4 Ne4 48. Be1 Kg4 49. Ke2 Ng3+ 50. Kd3 Nf5 51. Bf2 Nh4 52. a5 Nxd4 53. Kc3 Kf3 54. Bg1 Ke2 55. Bh2 f3 56. Bg3 Ne3

Karjakin picked a game against GM Tigran Petrosian, but couldn't remember the setting. The chess.com posting is fairly sure he meant the following game:

**Fischer, Robert James (2760) vs. Petrosian, Tigran V (2640)**

Candidates final | Buenos Aires | Round 7 | 1971 | ECO: B42 | 1-0

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Bd3 Nc6 6. Nxc6 bxc6 7. O-O d5 8. c4 Nf6 9. cxd5 cxd5 10. exd5 exd5 11. Nc3 Be7 12. Qa4+ Qd7 13. Re1 Qxa4 14. Nxa4 Be6 15. Be3 O-O 16. Bc5 Rfe8 17. Bxe7 Rxe7 18. b4 Kf8 19. Nc5 Bc8 20. f3 Rea7 21. Re5 Bd7 22. Nxd7+ Rxd7 23. Rc1 Rd6 24. Rc7 Nd7 25. Re2 g6 26. Kf2 h5 27. f4 h4 28. Kf3 f5 29. Ke3 d4+ 30. Kd2 Nb6 31. Re7 Nd5 32. Rf7+ Ke8 33. Rb7 Nxb4 34. Bc4