

Chess Training with Matthias Blübaum

*His way to the title
European Champion*

**Matthias Blübaum
Karsten Müller
Matthias Krallmann**



JBV Chess Books

Matthias Blübaum / Karsten Müller / Matthias Krallmann

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Explanation of Symbols

!	good move
!!	excellent move
?	weak move
??	blunder
!?	remarkable move
?!?	dubious move
+-	White has a decisive advantage
±	White is better
±	White is slightly better
=	the position is equal
-+	Black has a decisive advantage
±	Black is better
±	Black is slightly better
Δ	with the idea
□	better is
∞	unclear
≡	with compensation for the material deficit
×	takes
+	check
#	mate
N	theoretical novelty

Preface

Matthias Blübaum – Primus inter Pares

In many respects, Matthias Blübaum is the "first among equals", or to put it another way: the "king among princes". (For the "Group of Princes" of the German Chess Federation, see page 14.)

He was the first of this elite group to win a gold medal, because in 2015 he was a member of the youth team that took first place at the European Championships in Karpacz, Poland. Incidentally, with the then ten-year-old Vincent Keymer at his side.

He was the first to win the Grenke Open in 2016. Matthias triumphed in Karlsruhe and qualified for the "Classics" 2017.

There he was the first to sit opposite world champion Magnus Carlsen and wrestle a draw from him!

He was the first to climb to the top of the German rankings. In October 2020 he reached the place in the sun and thus heralded the changing of the guard among the German men.

And now he is the first to publish a top-class book in which he, together with his trainer Matthias Krallmann, throws all kinds of spotlights on his young career. The book is structured according to the most important theoretical training aspects and overall well done.

In the first part, Matthias Blübaum and Matthias Krallmann present joint analyses. This is the main work of a classic trainer-student duo. Why this move? Why not the other? What is the plan? How much time has been used? – On the side, the reader can also get to know the Blübaum chess family. Small anecdotes and big battles on the board follow each other in peaceful coexistence.

In the second part, a special highlight has been achieved: Renowned endgame guru, Dr. Karsten Müller, dissects selected endgames by Matthias Blübaum and adds a dozen exercises to solve yourself. A double delight for the reader!

In the next part, a look into the treasury of every grandmaster is granted, namely into his opening repertoire. Matthias Krallmann notes that even former world champion Alexander Khalifman once praised Matthias' complete and self-contained repertoire. I ask the question: "What could have become of Matthias if, after 1.e4, he had also had 1...e5 in his repertoire?"

The following chapter with Matthias Blübaum's games against the top stars of the scene, annotated by himself, is mouth-watering!

At the end, the reader is once again challenged himself. The big tactics test invites you to puzzle and calculate. I found the reasoning for awarding points according to Dvoretsky/Lutz interesting. As a coach I am more of a supporter of the Russian elite coach who died in 2016, as a player I understand the chess practitioner Christopher Lutz very well.

Matthias Krallmann and Matthias Blübaum don't offer easy reading! Typically East Westphalian, labour-intensive, exhausting, honest and straight – the portrait of the chess worker, the chess grandmaster, the chess practitioner Matthias Blübaum. You don't become number one in Germany in a sprint, but in a marathon! Mark Twain once famously described a "classic" as "a book that people praise but never read." – In this sense, I wish the authors that the book will not become a classic, but that it will be read, worked through and studied eagerly!

Bernd Vöbler

Apolda, January 2022

I) Matthias Blübaum's Games

In the following 66 games and game fragments, all important topics from game practice are dealt with – e.g. attack on the king (i.a. in games 4–8), material sacrifices (games 15–19), minor piece combat (games 24–30), piece activity (games 37–39), handling the pawns (games 45–47), combinations (fragments 52–59) and endgames (fragments 60–66). However, since these thematic areas never appear in isolation, but always more or less intertwine, a strict separation and corresponding classification of the games was dispensed with.



Matthias Blübaum – Vladimir Fedoseev

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Matthias Blübaum (2438)</p> <p>Vladimir Fedoseev (2509)</p> <p>World Youth Championship</p> <p>Maribor 2012 (A90)</p> <p>comment – Matthias Krallmann</p>	<p>9. $\mathbb{B}b1$ b6 10. b4 $\mathbb{B}b7$ 11. c5 $\mathbb{B}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$; 13... fxe4 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6\pm$ 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. f3 g5 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. e4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 21. e5 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ f4 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 24. a4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d3$</p>
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In a balanced position, Matthias repeats the moves, but Fedoseev, who is already a grandmaster and whose Elo rating is 70 points higher, plays for a win.

26...♝ac8 27.♝e1 ♕h8 28.♝d2 ♕c4
 29.♝b2 g4 30.♝xc4 gxf3 31.♝xf3 fxg3
 32.♝g4 dxc4 33.♝xc4 ♜cd8

After 33...gxh2+?! 34.♔h1, the king is well protected by the opponent's pawn.

34. $\mathbb{H}e4$ $\mathbb{H}f2$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3?$

35. ♕c3 ♔h4 36. hxg3 ♔xg3 37. ♕e1 ♕f4=

37...♞f4?

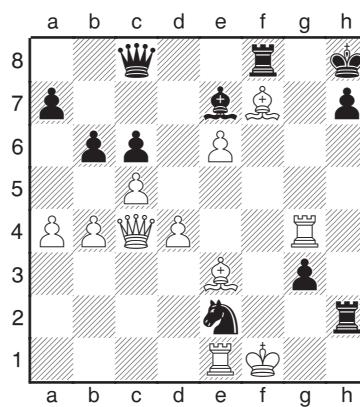
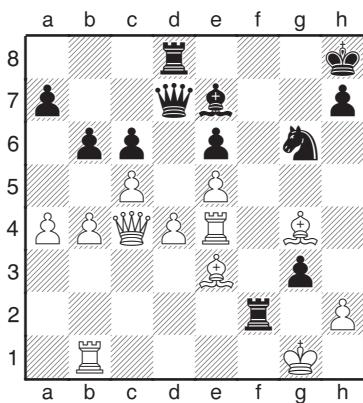
Once again, errors occur on both sides in a highly complex situation.

37... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 38. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 39. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}hd2$
 40. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 42. $e6$ $\mathbb{W}f6$
 43. $cx b6$ $axb6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$

38. ♕f7 ♔e2+ 39. ♔f1 ♕d7 40. e6 ♕c8

40... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 41. $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{K}xe2$ 42. $\mathbb{K}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
 43. $\mathbb{K}q1$ $h5$ 44. $\mathbb{K}4xq3+-$

41.♖e1 (41.♖b2+-) 41...♖f8



35...xh2

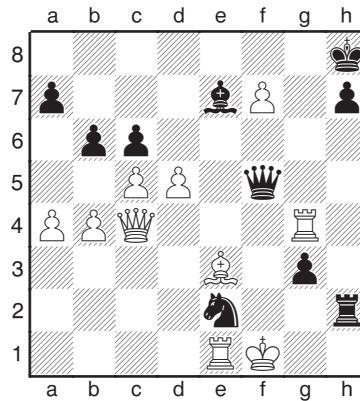
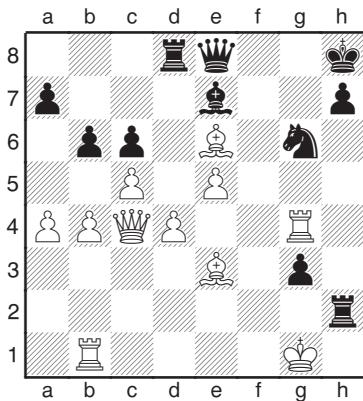
In time trouble, both players overlook a tactical finesse: 35... $\mathbb{W}d5!$ 36. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $cx d5$ 37. $hxg3$ $\mathbb{E}ff8$ 38. $\mathbb{E}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{E}xf4$ 40. $gxf4$ $\mathbb{E}g8+$.

36.♕xe6 ♜e8 37.♖g4? (37.♖f1=)

42.d5!

After this decisive breakthrough, the threat ♜d4+ is deadly.

42... \mathbb{H} f7+ 43.exf7 \mathbb{W} f5+



44. $\mathbb{W}f4!$ $\mathbb{W}xf4+$ (44... $\mathbb{Q}xf4??$ 45. $\mathbb{B}g8\#$)

45. $\mathbb{B}xf4$ $g2+$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $g1\mathbb{W}+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

1-0

A strong performance against a very good opponent who soon advanced to the extended world class. Five years later, the same opponents met again at the grandmaster tournament in Dortmund – and again the outsider managed to win.

Matthias Blübaum – a portrait

Matthias was born on April 18, 1997 in the small town of Lemgo in Westphalia. He learned chess from his father, a strong player who used to be East Westphalian champion several times. Matthias has three older sisters, two of whom also play chess. He certainly benefited a lot from this family constellation since there were always stronger opponents during his childhood. In 2005, at the age of eight, he began systematic training.

Matthias skipped a grade in elementary school and graduated from high school at the age of 17. His advanced courses were mathematics and physics. In his youth he played drums. He studies mathematics at the University of Bielefeld.

From April 2011 to March 2012, Matthias accomplished the feat of fulfilling the three norms required for the title of International Master in less than a year, and was the youngest German player to hold this title. It then took a year and a half to achieve the three required grandmaster norms, the last at the "Open Bavarian Championships" in November 2014. He was a member of the so-called "Group of Princes" of the German Chess Federation (see below) and spent a "chess year" in the 2014/2015 season.

Matthias' first chess club was 'SV Lemgo', but already in 2011 he switched to 'Hansa Dortmund', where he played his first games in the 'Bundesliga'. For five years he played very successfully for 'SV Werder Bremen' in the top German division and finally switched to 'Schachfreunde Deizisau' in 2017, where he still plays today. In addition, he plays in various countries for local clubs, in France for 'Mulhouse Philidor', in the Netherlands for the Groningen club 'SISSA', in Poland for 'KszSTILON Gorzów Wielkopolski' and in Austria for 'SK Sparkasse Jenbach'.

Matthias' greatest success in youth tournaments was winning the bronze medal at the U20 World Championships 2015 in Khanty-Mansiysk. In the same year he won the gold medal at the European Championships with the German youth national team.

As an adult, Matthias won four important tournaments: In 2016 the Grenke Open in Deizisau, the grandmaster tournament in Bad Ragaz, Switzerland, and the Open in Helsingør, Denmark. In 2020 he won the German Masters in Magdeburg.

Participating in the Aeroflot Open in Moscow in 2015, 2016 and 2018 made Matthias a tougher tournament player. He also played at the Qatar Masters in 2015, the Sharjah Masters in 2017 and in Group B of the Tata Steel Tournament in 2018.

Since 2014, he has been a regular player in the German national team. His greatest success was participation in the Chess Olympiad in Baku 2016, where he achieved the best result in the German team. Two years later he represented Germany at the Chess Olympiad in Batumi.

At the Fide World Cup 2017 in Tbilisi, he was only eliminated in the tie-break after a tough fight against top player Wesley So.

The strongest tournaments Matthias has participated in so far were the Grenke Chess Classics 2017 and 2018 and the grandmaster tournament in Dortmund 2017. At the Grenke Classics 2018 he drew against Carlsen, Caruana, Vachier–Lagrange and Aronian and won against Anand.

In November 2020, he reached Elo 2672, his highest rating in classical chess to date. In Blitz his Elo rating is 2685 as of last summer.

In April 2021, Matthias' team from his club 'Schachfreunde Deizisau' surprisingly won the European Cup, which was held online for the first time.



Maxim Vachier-Lagrange – Matthias Blübaum

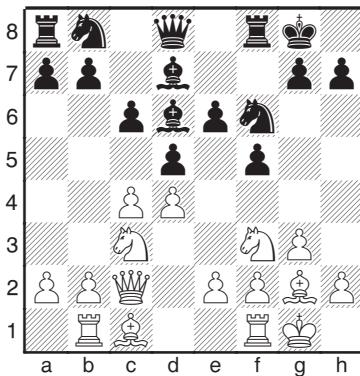
Matthias Blübaum (2433)

Predrag Nikolic (2638)

German Bundesliga 2013 (A90)

comment – Matthias Krallmann

1.d4 e6 2.c4 d5 3.♘f3 c6 4.g3 f5 5.♗g2
 ♘f6 6.0-0 ♘d6 7.♘c2 0-0 8.♘c3 ♘d7
 9.♗b1



By choosing a clever move order, Black has avoided Matthias' special weapons, which are based on a very early ♘g5 (see e.g. game 10). Against the Stonewall, however, he has the aggressive text move in his repertoire, a continuation he had already experience with at the World Youth Championship. By pushing his b-pawn to b5, White wants to attack the pawn on c6 to weaken the opponent's queenside.

9...a5 10.c5 ♘c7 11.♗a4

11.♗g5 h6 12.♗f4 ♘xf4 13.gxf4 ♘e8
 14.♗e5±

11...♘e8 12.♘b3 ♘a7 13.♘f4 ♘xf4

14.gxf4 ♘h5

14...♗bd7

– 15.♗e3 ♘g4 16.♗d2 ♘h5=

– 15.♔h1 ♘h5 16.♗e3 ♘xf3 17.♘xf3=

15.♗e3 ♘xf3 16.♘xf3

The pawn robbery 16.♗xe6+ is too risky, because after e.g. 16...♔h8 17.exf3 ♘bd7 Black has very good counterplay.

By the way, after 17.♘xf3 ♘e4 18.♗xe4 ♘f6 White loses the queen – und after 18.♗b6 ♘d2 an exchange.

16...♘e4?!

Black got rid of his bad bishop and after 16...♗e7 or 16...♗e8 the position would be about equal. However, as his rating is 200 points higher he plays for complications.

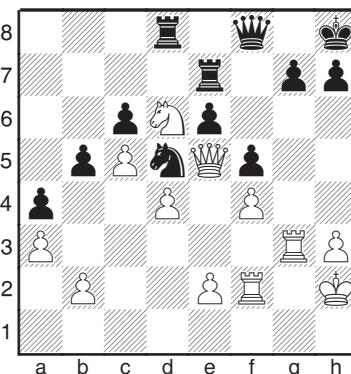
17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.f3 exf3 19.♗xf3

Here White could have won the backward pawn: 19.♗xe6+ ♔h8 20.e3 ♘f6 21.♗c4 ♘g6+ 22.♔h1 ♘d7 23.♗xf3 ♘e7 24.♗c2±.

**19...♗e8 20.♗b6 ♘d7 21.♘c4 ♘f6
 22.♗d6 ♘e7 23.♗g3 ♘a8 24.h3 b5**

24...♗e8 25.♗e5 (25.♗xe8 ♘xe8=)
 25...♗xd6 26.cxd6 ♘f7 27.♗xe6 ♘f8
 28.d5 ♘d8 (28...♗e8? 29.♗d1!±) 29.dxc6
 ♘xd6 30.♗e5 ♘xc6=

**25.♔h2 ♘d5 26.♗e5 ♘f8 27.♗f1 a4
 28.a3 ♘d8 29.♗f2 ♔h8**



The following decision against a much stronger opponent is courageous, especially since the resulting isolated pawn on f4 allows counterplay.

30.e4! fxe4 31.♗xe4 ♗f6 32.♗g5 ♗f8
33.♔g3 g6 34.h4 ♗g7 35.♗e5 ♗e7
36.♗h2

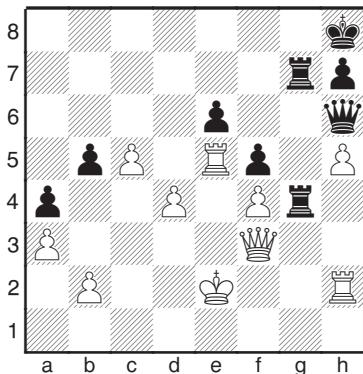
36.♗xe6 ♗f5+ 37.♔f2 ♗e7
37.♗d7 38.♗xe6 ♗xd4+ 39.♗xd4+
♗xd4 40.♗e5 ♗f5±

38.♗xf5 gxf5?

38...exf5 39.♗e3 ♗xe5 (39...♗fe8
40.h5±) 40.dxe5 ♗e6 41.♗d3 ♗f7=

39.♗xc6 ♗g8 40.h5 ♗h6 41.♗f3 ♗g4
42.♗e2 ♗eg7?

42...♗xf4 43.♗a8+ ♗g7 44.♗g2+ ♗f6
45.♗d8 ♗xh5+ 46.♗d2 ♗g4 47.♗ge2±



43.d5!

A classic breakthrough to clear the long dark diagonal and play for mate. Against Fedoseev's Stonewall, Matthias won with a similar motif.

43...♗xf4

43...exd5 44.♗c3! ♗c6 45.h6+-;
44...♗g8 45.♗e8+ ♗f7 46.♗e5+-

44.♗xe6 ♗xf3 45.♗xh6 ♗b3 46.♔d1 b4

47.♗e6

47.♗b6 bxa3 48.bxa3 was more precise.

47...♗g1+ 48.♔e1 ♗g4 49.♗xb4 a3
50.♗e8+ ♗g7 51.bxa3 ♗xa3 52.d6 ♗xb4
53.♗d2 ♗a1+ 54.♔e2 ♗h4 55.♔f3 ♗h3+
56.♔g2 ♗ah1 57.♗f2 1-0

3

Matthias Blübaum (2510)

Michael Feygin (2512)

German Bundesliga 2014 (B38)

comment – Matthias Krallmann

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6
5.♗f3 0-0 6.♗e2 c5 7.0-0 cxd4 8.♗xd4
♗c6 9.♗e3 ♗d7 10.♗c2

Thanks to his Maroczy Bind, White has more space and doesn't want to exchange pieces, as this would make Black's task easier.

10...♗e6 11.f4 ♗c8 12.h3

In Saric – Hausrath (Biel 2013), White played 12.♗d2, after which Black (a club mate of Feygin's) could exchange a pair of minor pieces with 12...♗g4.

12...♗a5 13.b3 b5

Black strives for activity to avoid being slowly crushed, but this push gives White a slight advantage.

14.♗xb5 ♗xe4 15.♗d4 ♗g3 16.♗e1
♗xe2+ 17.♗xe2

After Black got the light-squared bishop for a knight, White logically exchanges the dark-squared bishops. After that, his centralized knight is stronger than the bishop, which even becomes an object of attack. In addition, Black suffers from the weakness of the e-pawn.

Karl-Ernst Blübaum in conversation with Matthias Krallmann

Since September 2020, Matthias Blübaum has been number 1 in the German Elo rankings. He was briefly overtaken by Alexander Donchenko in the February 2021 list, but reclaimed the place in the sun the next month.

As unusual as Matthias Blübaum's success story may be, it can still be explained. Of the many factors that came together, his talent and training enthusiasm are of course the most important. However, it is also undisputed that his father, Karl-Ernst Blübaum, played a major part in his son's steep career.

M. K.: Karl-Ernst, we met in 1984 at the East Westphalian Championship when you were 24 and I was 21. I remember you helping me analyze my adjourned game against one of your competitors. It helped insofar that the game ended in a draw and you became the co-winner. How did your chess career continue?

K.-E. B.: From 1985 on I didn't do much for chess anymore because of my job and my family. This changed when my daughter Bettina became interested in chess and I took on the role of youth officer at the club 'Königsspringer Lemgo'.

M. K.: In the 1990s we had more contact again, because your eldest daughter Bettina participated in the training sessions in Herford, where I was working as a trainer. Nowadays Bettina plays for the 'Hamburger SK' in the women's Bundesliga. Can you tell something about her passion for chess? As a 'big sister', did she have any influence on the chess beginner Matthias?

K.-E. B.: Definitely! Thanks to her, the topic of chess was revived in our family.

M. K.: Your daughter Johanna, who was born in 1993, is also a good player. She even played eventual world champion Hou Yifan once and only lost due to bad luck. From 2005 I trained both Johanna and Matthias, who was only eight at the time. I remember how they played two-minute games during the breaks – dramatic clashes full of tactical blows. Were the two childhood rivals, and did this rivalry encourage or rather disturb them?

K.-E. B.: Johanna continued what Bettina had started. Due to Bettina's influence she began to play chess earlier and I trained more intensively with her. By the way, the game you mentioned against Hou Yifan was her first game at an international tournament (World Youth Championship 2003). Matthias, who is 4 years her junior, also benefited from the training sessions with Johanna because he enthusiastically participated. Here the cornerstone was laid. Due to the age difference, the three were never actually rivals. That's why they could enjoy relaxed duels in friendly games.

M. K.: In the early years, I mainly did tactical training with Matthias. We almost completely worked through the book 'Improve Your Chess Tactics' by Jakov Neistadt. In addition, Matthias also solved many exercises from Volkhard Igney's 'Combine Successfully'. Can you still remember which tactics books you gave Matthias in his childhood?

K.-E. B.: We used various sources for tactical exercises, but I can't remember any specific books. From today's perspective, we didn't do enough tactical training back then. Our focus was more on openings and endgames.

M. K.: When Matthias came to the training at the age of eight, he already had an opening repertoire: with White he played 1.d4 like his father. You also taught him his weapon against 1.e4 with Black: the French. Which opening books did you use back then? – Why didn't you show Matthias the Open Games?

K.-E. B.: Since I had no trainer, my openings were shaped by a few books and my preference for certain types of positions. And the Open Games were simply not included. During the training, it was natural for me to convey what I knew myself. The basis for our opening repertoire was not formed by specific books, but by our own analyses in Chessbase databases. When preparing these analyses, I naturally used a wide variety of sources (books, games and magazines) and then summarized them and commented on them.

M. K.: I found it amazing that Matthias played the 'Benko Gambit' as a child, even though you are a die-hard Dutch player. How did that happen?

K.-E. B.: On 1.d4 I played the King's Indian, the King's Fianchetto and also the Volga Gambit for a long time before switching to the Dutch. For the training with my children, I decided to use a solid positional opening. That's why Bettina, Johanna and Matthias played the Volga Gambit first.

M. K.: In 2009, Matthias was admitted to the 'Group of Princes', a group of talented youngsters that was founded by the youth trainer of the German Chess Federation Bernd Vöbler. How do you rate this project from today's perspective?

K.-E. B.: I believe that the 'Group of Princes' had a very positive effect on Matthias' chess development. The joint participation in courses or in major tournaments would not have happened without the 'Group of Princes'. It was important that the 'chemistry' within the group, including the parents, was right and that good framework conditions could be created.

M. K.: You also accompanied Matthias to tournaments, e.g. to the World Youth Championships in 2010 in Porto Carras in Brazil and in 2015 in Durban in South Africa. What are your memories of these trips and Matthias' tournaments? Did you also help him with the preparation?

K.–E. B.: The World Youth Championship in Porto Carras was the last tournament for which I prepared him. After that he either prepared himself alone or he had a trainer from the German Chess Federation. The role of a companion or keeper came to an end for me with the World Youth Championship in Durban.

M. K.: Another project was the 'Chess Year', which Dennis Wagner and Matthias have spent in the 2014/2015 season. The parents were also involved in the planning. How was your experience with this project?

K.–E. B.: The chess year was basically a continuation of the 'Group of Princes'. Matthias and Dennis had the opportunity to train and play tournaments under professional conditions for a whole year. Like the 'Group of Princes', this project was an initiative of the national youth coach Bernd Vökler, who thus played a large part in Matthias' development.

M. K.: Matthias made his breakthrough by winning the 'Grenke Open 2016' when he beat Shirov, among others. You were there too. How did you experience this tournament?

K.–E. B.: By renaming the 'Neckar Open' to the 'Grenke Chess Open' and moving it to Karlsruhe, the organizer Sven Noppes has created one of the most beautiful and largest chess events in Europe, which became even more attractive when it was merged with the 'Grenke Chess Classic'.

When I talked to Matthias about the tournament beforehand, his goals and expectations (ELO–Plus, placement better than seeding) ranged within a rather manageable framework. A top placement or even the victory in this strong tournament was not an issue. That only changed after the win against Shirov in the 8th round, because now the tournament victory was within reach. After his draw in the last round, the Buchholz rating had to decide, as 6 players tied for first place. Thanks to the highest Buchholz, he then had the necessary bit of luck to win the tournament.

VII) Matthias Blübaum at the European Championship 2022

The German national player triumphs at the European Championship in Terme Catez (Slovenia)

In the first round, Matthias Blübaum managed to achieve a fortunate draw (he later admitted that he should have lost) against the Slovenian IM Jernej Spalir (Elo 2373), but then started a winning streak. The German national player defeated the Croatian Boris Golubovic (Elo 2393) in a 'wobbly' (M. Blübaum) game – and then, in a commanding manner, another representative of the host country, Matej Sebenik (2510).

In the fourth round, Matthias was much worse in a cramped position against the Spaniard Alvar Alonso Rosell (2565), but then managed to outplay his opponent. Accordingly, despite the circumstances, he had a very successful start with 3.5 points from four games. And from then on, the Bundesliga player not only played successfully, but also at a really high level.

In the fifth round, he played against the young grandmaster Velimir Ivic (2610) who seemed to be becoming the German's feared opponent after beating him twice last year. But this time Matthias was able to defeat the talented Serb in the endgame of an originally played 'Grünfeld Indian'. However, Matthias was not finished with four wins in a row.

In the next round against Emre Can (2578) from Turkey, Matthias managed to win an equal ending in a 'French Defense'. Can also had his chances, but Matthias has a lot of experience in these typical endgames with distributed pawn majorities.

After six rounds, Matthias Blübaum was the sole leader with 5.5 points and played with White on the first board against the Ukrainian Yuriy Kuzubov (2639). This was the first highlight in 'his' tournament. A 'Nimzo-Indian' led to an exciting game. Matthias, who was better prepared, soon had a great time advantage and then also the better position. You could feel the experienced Kuzubov faltering.

And indeed, after the Ukrainian mistakenly gave up his dark-squared bishop, he got under so much pressure on the diagonal a1/h8 that he decided to sacrifice an exchange. But Matthias didn't let that bother him and ended the game in style with a mating attack. Six wins in a row! When was the last time a German player put in such a convincing performance in a top-class tournament?

After the tournament, Matthias said, at this point he dreamed of becoming European champion for the first time.

In the seventh round, the German was a nominal outsider with Black against the Armenian Gabriel Sargissian (2681), who was half a point behind. But when he was confronted with a small opening trick in the Catalan opening, he offered Matthias a

draw after only 11 moves. Of course, he had no reason to refuse, as he could still maintain his overall lead.

Then there was the inner-German duel with Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu (2652). Matthias had White, but Nisipeanu is known to be a very safe player who is difficult to defeat. The German-Romanian surprised with the Budapest Gambit and Matthias came out of the opening with an advantage. But when Liviu-Dieter offered a draw on the tenth move, Matthias heeded the philosophy that half a loaf is better than no bread.

He later said that in the last three rounds he was 'mentally in no shape to play really good chess'. However, by accepting a draw with the white pieces, he put himself under pressure for the following day. It was clear that in the penultimate round another strong opponent would be waiting for him and that he would have to play with Black.

Before the last two rounds, Matthias was leading with 7.5 points from nine games, followed by a trio with seven points: Gabriel Sargissian, Maxim Lagarde from France and the big surprise of the tournament, the Azerbaijani Abdullah Gadimbayli. Sargissian defeated Gadimbayli quickly and convincingly with the white pieces. Matthias was Black against Lagarde and won an exchange for a pawn just before the time control, but the reduced material allowed the Frenchman to save the draw.

So the standings before the final round were as follows: Blübaum and Sargissian with eight points each ahead of Ivan Saric (Croatia), Jaime Santos Latasa (Spain) and Lagarde with 7.5 points each. All other players could no longer intervene in the fight for the European Championship title. The pairings were: Saric – Blübaum, Santos Latasa – Sargissian and Cheparinov – Lagarde. Sargissian drew after just a few moves, securing second place. Lagarde lost to Cheparinov and was out of the race.

But who would be European champion? Blübaum or Saric? A draw was enough for the German, while Saric had to win for the title. The 2018 European Champion chose the King's Indian Defense striving for complex and double-edged play. Matthias reacted with the Exchange Variation and offered a draw early on. This line isn't his first choice against the King's Indian, and offering an early draw isn't his style either. As this offer obviously came too early for the Croatian's liking, he declined. After the game, Matthias confessed that he simply forgot how to react to the pawn push $h7-h5$. In his view, he played 'terribly'. However, he was satisfied with his idea of playing $e4-e5$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

Despite the exchange of queens and a certain simplification of the position, the Croatian got the slightly better position. Matthias had to defend himself carefully. In an interview, he said it 'felt a bit dangerous'. Saric tried everything and tormented his opponent in an endgame with a rook and a bishop. But after the time control, Matthias was able to fend off all of Black's winning ideas and the Croatian offered a draw himself. Matthias accepted and was European Champion!

Six wins and five draws against an average rating of almost 2600, an Elo performance of 2775 – truly a deserved title! Matthias received 17,500 € in prize money

for his success. He would also gain 20 Elo points and climb to second place in the German rankings.

In 2005, Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu won the European Championships in Warsaw – although he was still playing for Romania at the time. This makes Matthias Blübaum the first German ever to win the tournament for the title of European Champion, which has been held since 2000.

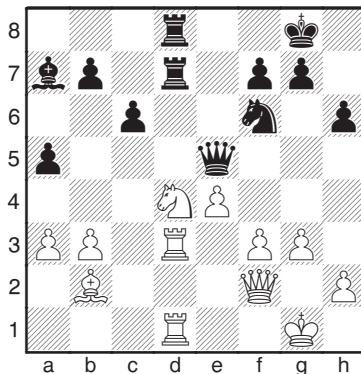
Games from the European Championship

comments: Matthias Blübaum (M.B.), Matthias Krallmann (M.K.)

Matthias Blübaum (2642)

Jernej Spalir (2373)

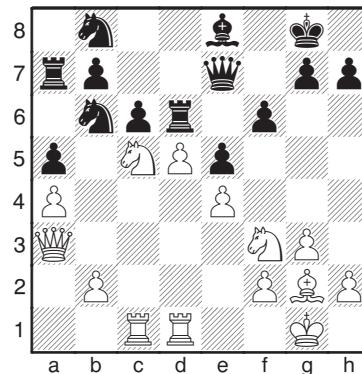
European Championship 2022 (A11)



Alvar Alonso Rosell (2565)

Matthias Blübaum (2642)

European Championship 2022 (E04)



M.K.: White has gotten into a nasty pin. If Black had found the maneuver $\mathbb{Q}f6-h7-f8-e6$, he should have won, since White can't do anything about it.

29... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Black wants to play c6–c5, but that's the wrong idea. Matthias was extremely lucky and managed to draw the game.

$\square 29... \mathbb{Q}h7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. h4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ (33. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+-$) 33... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+-$

M.B.: In the game I only expected the knight to be transferred to e6 via e8 and c7. My idea was 29... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, but here I missed 31... $\mathbb{Q}g5+-$, after which White simply loses material.

30.b4 axb4 31.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d2 = 1/2-1/2$

M.K.: In this position, White could obtain a clear advantage.

23.b4

M.B.: To be honest, I expected this move in the game. I thought that after 23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ I could just play $\mathbb{Q}a8$ again. Anyway, I haven't seen anything concrete that White could do, although of course the whole black position looks very suspicious.

23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$!

- 1) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f5+-$
- 2) 23... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}8d7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g6 27. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $bxcc6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d6!!$
 - a) 31... $\mathbb{Q}xd6?$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xg6#$

b) 31... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d2+-$

3) 23... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g6 25. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ cxd5 27.exd5 f5 28. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 29. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}cxe4$ fxe4 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe4+-$ 23...cxd5 24. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g6 25.exd5

M.B.: My opponent was already in serious time trouble and I thought for a while how to get the most chances.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$

Unfortunately, 25...axb4 26. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6?$ doesn't work here, because after 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ bxa6 28.a5+- the knight has no good squares.

26. $\mathbb{Q}d2?$

This runs into exactly the trick I was hoping for when I played $\mathbb{Q}xa4$.

26.bxa5! was the move I was most afraid of. After 26... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ many black pieces are hanging, but with 27... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ he can just about keep the balance.

26...axb4?

And Black converted his advantage.

27. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ and after 28. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ Black wins back the exchange by means of the knight fork; 0-1 on move 46.

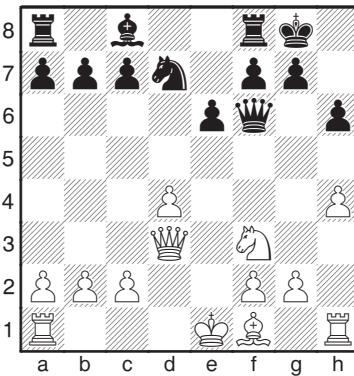
**Emre Can (2578)
Matthias Blübaum (2642)**
European Championship 2022 (C13)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

M.B.: Since my opponent usually plays 3. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ against the French and I hadn't even expected 1.e4 before the game, I wasn't sure which line to play. I chose a

probably not entirely correct system, that I had checked with the engine a few years ago and that seemed reasonably playable to me.

4... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 8.h4 h6 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0



11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

11. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 14.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ cxd6 19.g4 g6 20.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24.b3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5 26.g5+ hxg5 27.hxg5+ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}fh2$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 31.c4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32.a3 f6 33.b4 axb4 34.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 36.c5 dxc5 37.dxc5 bxc5 38.bxc5 e5 39.fxe5 fxe5 40. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 1-0 (44), Sevian, S. (2578) – Salomon, J. (2438), Stockholm 2016

11...b6 12.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5 14.g4 $\mathbb{Q}ac8$

M.B.: Up to this point my opponent has played the most logical moves and I knew that 14... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ is playable and that the direct 15.g5 is not the most dangerous reply. 15.c3!? probably causes Black more problems, although for a human