

# New Mexico Chess Champions

## Josh Bloomer

Josh Bloomer won the 2017 New Mexico Open Chess Championship and was thus declared the New Mexico Chess Champion. He took clear first place with 5.5 out of 6 and raised his rating to an impressive 2326. His one draw was against Jesse Vicario of Las Cruces in the first round. In clear second place with 5 was Brian Wall. Brian lost the fourth round encounter with Josh, but won all his other games.

The outcome was a little unusual since both Josh and Brian live in Colorado. States that decide their state championship in an open tournament usually specify that while the high scorer is the winner of the tournament, the state champion is the highest scoring player who resides in the state. That was not done in this case, so Josh was rightfully declared the New Mexico State Chess Champion for 2017.

I had hoped to get a game played by Josh from the 2107 New Mexico Open, but apparently the score sheets were lost along with the NMCO computer that disappeared. I thought I could get a game by contacting Josh, but an attempt through Facebook got no response. So, I checked online and found the game below played between Josh Bloomer (White) and Brian Wall (Black) at the 2017 Fall Classic in Denver a month before they finished first and second in the New Mexico Open. It is curious that the results of the Fall Classic mirrored the results of the New Mexico Open. Here too Josh finished first giving up only a first round draw and Brian finished second losing only to Josh in round 4.

The game is fascinating! The opening quickly goes out of book, typical for Brian, but the position looks normal, when Brian hands to Josh a common sacrifice that seems to force a win. Brian manages to survive the initial onslaught, but when the dust settles Josh is a pawn up with a dominating center and Brian's king is still exposed - seemingly a clear win if Josh simply presses the attack in the center.

But then the game takes another unusual turn. With all the major pieces on the board and bishops of opposite color and given the nature of the position, conventional wisdom would be that Josh should avoid exchanging major pieces and press home his attack. The last thing he should do is trade off into a bishops of opposite color endgame where his extra pawn likely would not be enough to win. And yet Josh deliberately heads for the bishop endgame!

I cannot say that the resulting endgame was a theoretical draw, but it is certainly difficult to find any winning plan other than waiting for Black to make a mistake. On the other hand, if that was Josh's plan, it worked. After a lot of maneuvering around, Brian finally makes the mistake that allows Josh's king to get into his position.

**Bloomer, Josh (2316) - Wall, Brian (2295), 1-0**  
**2017 Fall Classic, Round 4**  
**Denver, Colorado, 10/8/2017**

## Pirc Defense

1. d4 g6 2. Nf3 Bg7 3. e4 d6 4. Bc4 c6 5. Nbd2 d5 6. Bb3 dxe4 7. Nxe4



7... Nd7?? This move amazes me. Any experienced player would know that you cannot play Nd7 in a position like this. It invites Josh's sacrifice on the next move because it blocks Black's queen bishop, thus making the e6 square weak. I have no doubt that an experienced master like Brian is aware of this, but he does it anyway. Brian has a reputation for playing unusual, provocative moves in the opening, but this is a bit much.

[White has a small edge due to his better center after 7... Nf6 8. Nxf6 Bxf6 9. O-O Bg4 10. Re1 O-O]

### 8. Bxf7!

[Also winning is the delayed sacrifice. 8. Neg5 Nh6 9. Bxf7! Nxf7 10. Ne6 Qb6 11. Nxc7 Kf8 12. Ne6 Kg8 13. O-O Black is down a pawn and his position is completely disrupted]

### 8... Kxf7 9. Nfg5!?

[9. Neg5 is better since it retains the option of playing the king knight to e5. 9... Ke8 10. Ne6 Qb6 11. Nxc7 Kf7 12. Ne6 h6 13. Qe2 Qb4 14. Bd2 Qd6 15. Nf4 Nf8 16. Ne5 With an extra pawn, better development and Black's king on the run, White is winning]

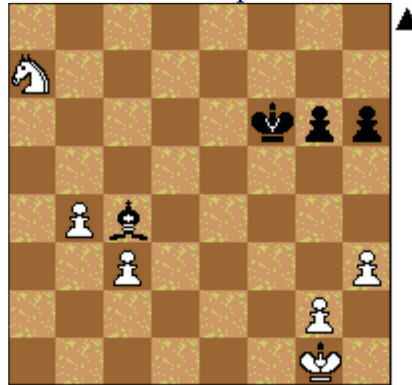
9... Ke8 10. Ne6 The reason 7... Nd7 was so bad is it blocked Black's queen bishop, thus making this move possible. 10... Qb6 11. Nxc7 Kf7 Oops! The knight is trapped! Perhaps Brian was correct in playing this line after all. 12. Ne6! h6

[Sorry, you can't win back the piece. 12... Kxe6?? 13. Ng5 Kd6 (13... Kf6 14. Qf3 Kg7 15. Qf7 Kh6 16. Ne4 Kh5 (16... g5 17. Bxg5#) 17. Qf3 Kh4 18. Bg5#) 14. Bf4 e5 15. dxe5 1-0, Borngaesser Rene (GER) 2345 - Lodes Hermann (GER) 2147, Germany 1989 15... Ke7 (15... Kc7 16. Ne6 Kb8 17. Qd6 Qc7 18. Qxc7#) 16. Qd6 Kd8 (16... Ke8 17. Qe6 Ne7 (17... Kd8 18. Nf7 Kc7 19. Qd6#) 18. Qf7 Kd8 19. Ne6#) 17. O-O-O c5 18. Ne6 Ke8 19. Nc7 Qxc7 (19... Kd8 20. Bg5 Ne7 21. Bxe7#; 19... Kf7 20. e6 Kf6 21. Ne8 Kf5 22. Rd5 Ne5 23. Qxe5 Kg4 24. Qg5#) 20. Qxc7 White wins]

### 13. Nf4N

[The following is the only other game I know of in this line. The end of the game is kind of nutty. See the diagram. White is two pawns up and they are connected passed pawns on the queenside. Plus White has two more pawns which could be decisive if he can

divert Black into defending against the passed pawns. Yes, the bishop on the open board is better than the knight and Black's king is better than White's king. But I can't see how that compensates for the connected passed pawns. Even if White were to lose the passed pawns, he is in no danger of losing. So why did he agree to a draw??? 13. N4c5 Nxc5 14. Nxc5 Nf6 15. O-O Bf5 16. Qe2 Rae8 17. Qc4 Nd5 18. c3 e5 19. dxe5 Rxe5 20. Bf4 Ree8 21. b4 Qb5 22. Qxb5 cxb5 23. Be3 Nxe3 24. fxe3 Kg7 25. Rae1 Re7 26. e4 Rhe8 27. Nxb7 Rxe4 28. Rxe4 Bxe4 29. Nd6 Re6 30. Nxb5 Bd3 31. Nd4 Ra6 32. Rf2 Ra3 33. Nb3 Bb1 34. Rf1 Bf5 35. h3 Rxa2 36. Ra1 Rxa1 37. Nxa1 Kf6 38. Nb3 Be4 39. Nd4 Bd5 40. Nb5 Bc4 41. Nxa7 1/2-1/2, Chudinovskikh, Alexander M (RUS) 2263 - Jansen, Christof (LUX) 2250 , Brno 6/26/2012 It "Duras Open"



13... Ngf6 14. Nxf6 Nxf6 15. O-O g5 16. Ne2 Bf5 17. Ng3 Bd7?! Moving the bishop away from the exposed king does not look good. The king needs all the help he can get.

[Better is 17... Bg6 but even then White has an extra pawn, safer king and better pawn structure]

18. c3 Rae8 19. Re1 Bc8 20. b3 Qd8 21. Qe2 Qd7 22. Bb2 Qg4 23. f3 Qd7 24. Ne4 Nxe4 25. fxe4 Qg4 White has an extra pawn, a dominating center well supported by his pieces and Black's king is still exposed. The one problem White has is the bishops of opposite color, which makes a win difficult if the major pieces come off the board. Consequently conventional wisdom would say that White should avoid exchanging major pieces and try to win in the middle game.



26. c4!? As with Brian's 7th move, this amazes me. Unlike Brian's move, I can't say this is a mistake, but Josh clearly doesn't believe in conventional wisdom. The following sequence

makes it clear that Josh not only doesn't fear the bishops of opposite color endgame, he actually is playing for a win by trading off to a bishops of opposite color endgame!

There may have been a good reason for this. The time control was G90+30 and he may have already been short of time. Josh may have been thinking that trying to win with the major pieces on the board was just too risky. He may have judged that a substantial risk of a draw in the bishops of opposite endgame was better than a small risk of a loss in the middle game.

[Better is 26. Qe3 Kg6 27. d5! a6 28. c4! Here comes the attack!]

26... Qxe2 27. Rxe2 Rhf8 28. Rf1!? He continues the plan of trading the major pieces.

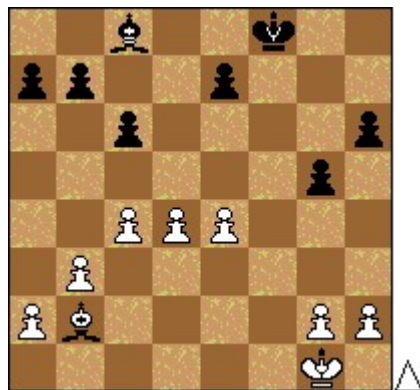
[28. d5 is a good alternative]

28... Kg8 29. Ref2 Rxf2 30. Rxf2 Rf8 31. Rxf8!? The last pair of rooks comes off the board.

[I would prefer 31. Re2 Bg4 32. Re3;

or 31. Rd2 Bd7 32. d5 But it is hard to see how either would lead to a win anyway]

31... Kxf8 So here we are in the bishops of opposite color endgame Josh aimed for. He still has an extra pawn and a strong center, but there is no clear winning plan. The problem is that Black's bishop dominates the light squares. Even if White manages to create a passed pawn, White's king and bishop will easily blockade it. The next phase of the game sees Josh jockeying for position, but with no detectable plan other than waiting for Brian to make a mistake.



32. Kf2 Bg4 33. Ke3 e6 34. Ba3 Ke8 35. Bd6 Bd1 36. Kd2 Bh5 37. Bb8 a6 38. Be5 Bg6 39. Ke3 h5?! Black is worried about the two pawns on the same color square as White's bishop, but advancing the pawns when his king and bishop have limited scope has its own risks.

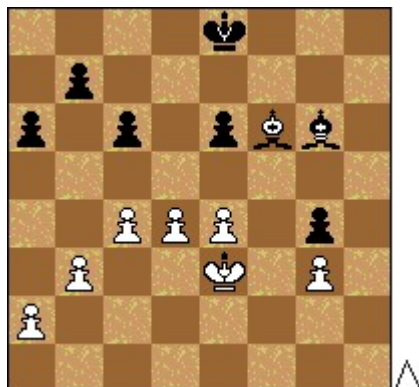
[39... Kf7 is better. White's bishop is only a threat to Black's kingside pawns while it is e5. But with Black's king on f7, that is not a threat anyway. Nor can White's king attack with the bishop on e5 because the king is tied down to defending the e-pawn]

40. g4!? White hopes he can win both of Black's kingside pawns by giving up the g-pawn. But it isn't there.

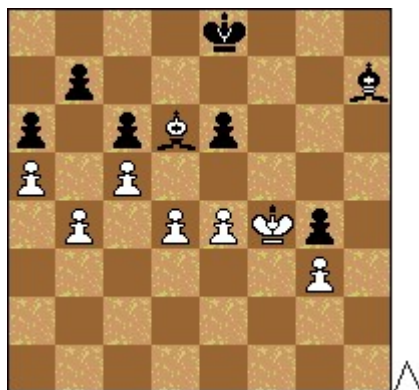
[If White wants to win he should avoid trading off pawns, which only makes the defense easier. After 40. Bf6 g4 Black's bishop is perpetually tied to the defense of the h-pawn and the squares f4, e5 and g5 have been opened to an invasion by White's king]

40... hxg4 41. Bf6 g3! A clever move! He sets up a position where White will not be able to win both pawns without giving up his e-pawn. 42. hxg3 g4 The g-pawn is secure! If Whites takes it with his king, he will lose his e-pawn. If he moves the e-pawn forward, then Black's bishop can defend both of his weak pawns from f5. But on the other hand, with the pawn no longer on g5

the path is now open for White's king to invade via f4. This is why the whole idea of playing h5 was dubious.



43. Kf4 Bh7 44. Ke5 Kd7 45. a3 With Black's king stuck on d7 and his bishop stuck on g6 and h7, White now embarks on a plan of simply advancing his queenside pawns. He hopes to either find a way to break through or set up a better position for going after Black's g-pawn. 45... Bg6 46. Bg5 Bh7 47. Bd2 Bg6 48. Bb4 Bh7 49. Bc5 Bg6 50. Kf4 Ke8 51. a4 Bh7 52. a5 Bg6 53. Bd6 Bh7 54. b4 Kd7 55. c5 Ke8



56. Kxg4! The only way to play for a win. 56... Bxe4 57. Kf4 Now Black has to defend against two serious threats - the advance of the passed g-pawn and an invasion of White's king to attack the b-pawn. This plus the need to defend the e-pawn will stretch Black's king and bishop to the limit. 57... Bd3 58. Ke5 Kf7 59. Bc7 Bb5? White's king will now be able to get at Black's queenside pawns.

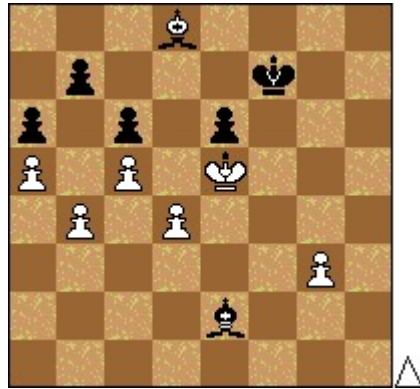
[He has to stop the invasion of White's king! 59... Ke7 60. Bd6 Kf7 61. g4 Advancing the g-pawn does White no good because Black's king and bishop will always control g6. 61... Bc4 62. Bc7 Ke7 63. g5 Bd3 64. Bd6 Kf7 65. Kf4 Bh7 66. Be5 Bc2 67. Bf6 Ke8 68. Kg4 Bd1 White cannot make progress]

60. Bd8? As soon as he has it, White lets the win slip away again.

[While he has the chance, he must play 60. Kd6 Kf6 61. Kd7 Bf1 62. Be5 Kf7 63. Kc7 Bb5 64. Kxb7 White will win as in the game]

60... Be2? The third successive bad move. This time Josh doesn't let Brian off the hook.

[Black just barely holds after 60... Ke8! 61. Bh4 Kd7 62. g4 Bc4 63. Kf6 Ke8 64. Kg7 Be2 65. g5 Bb5 66. g6 Bd3 67. Be1 Be4 68. Kf6 Bd5 69. g7 e5! Black gives up another pawn, but still holds because of bishops of opposite color. 70. Kxe5 (70. dxe5 Kd7= The position is drawn so long as Black keeps his king on d7 or e6 and his bishop on the a2 to g8 diagonal. If White tries to promote the g-pawn by playing Kg6, Black stops him by playing Bg8, and if he tries to advance the e-pawn, Black will always be able to take with the bishop if White's king is defending e6 and he will always be able to take with the king if White's king is elsewhere) 70... Kd7 71. Kf6 Bg8 72. Kg6 Ke6 73. Bg3 Kd7 74. Bf4 Ke6 75. Be5 Ke7 76. d5 Ke8! Whether he takes, pushes or just leaves the pawn where it is, White still cannot make progress]



61. Kd6 Bd1 62. Kc7 Be2 63. Kxb7 Black is two pawns down, all his pawns are weak and White still has that pesky passed g-pawn. In spite of the bishops of opposite colors, White wins. 63... Bb5 64. Bc7 Kf6 65. Be5 Ke7 66. Kc7 Ba4 67. g4 Bb5 68. g5 Kf7  
 [68... Ba4 69. Kb6 Bb5 70. g6! Kf8 The king is forced to give way. 71. Bf6 Now the king can no longer defend the e-pawn. 71... Kg8 72. Kb7 Kf8 (72... Bd3 73. Kxc6 Bxg6 74. Be5 Kf7 75. Kd7 The c-pawn will cost Black his bishop) 73. Kc7 Ba4 74. Kd6 White wins because Black can no longer defend all the pawns]  
 69. Kd6 Ba4 70. g6 Kxg6 71. Kxe6 Bb5 72. Kd6 Kf7 73. d5! Ke8  
 [Or 73... cxd5 74. c6 Ke8 75. c7 Bd7 76. b5 Bc8 77. b6 Bb7 78. Ba1 Kf7 79. Kd7 d4 80. Bxd4 Kf8 81. c8=Q Bxc8 82. Kxc8 White wins]  
 74. Bf6 cxd5 75. c6 d4 76. c7 Bd7 77. Bxd4 Bc8 78. Kc6 Ke7 79. Be5 Ke6 80. Bg3 Ke7 81. Kb6 Kd7 82. Be5 Ke6 83. Bc3 Kd6 84. Bd2 Kd7 85. Bf4 Ke6 86. b5! One of White's pawns will queen. Black resigns. [1:0]

Matt Grinberg, 4/6/2018