



Jennifer Shahade and Anna Zatonskih Photo provided by Anna Zatonskih

Chess is Better in the Caribbean—GM Chanda Sandipan Prevails in the Curaçao International

By Jennifer Shahade

I went to the Curaçao Chess Festival (August 5-15) on a whim, mostly because I wanted to play in a one-round-a-day-event, with the official FIDE time control (90 minutes for the game with a 30-second increment), which is rarely played in U.S. tournaments. I contacted the organizer Fabio Mensing, made some arrangements and a few weeks later I departed, not knowing quite what to expect.

One hour after landing in Curaçao (an island of the Netherlands Antilles, just 40 miles east of Aruba), I was on the beach sipping pina colodas. With me were the current U.S. Champion Alexander Shabalov, WGMs Anna Zatonskih, Rusudan Goletiani and USCF expert Michael Amori. A few hours later, we attended the opening ceremony in which short speeches were the prelude to a cocktail party. There I met many Curacanillos eager to tell me about their culture and native language, Papiamentu, which is a musical blend of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Afrikaans. At the party I met Lindomar, a young and fashionable real estate agent (who is one of the tournament sponsors).

One day after the game, he took me to the Kura Hulanda Museum in the city center. The Museum has one of the largest collections of African art in the world, and also commemorates the slave trade, of which Cura-

çao was once a major trading post. Lindomar tells me: "Curaçao used to be a transit point for slaves and now for other illicit things..." Drugs from Colombia stop in Curaçao on their way to Europe or North America. A few minutes from the airport is a prostitution village called "El Campo Alegre," where girls and women from the Caribbean and Latin America turn tricks, meanwhile living comfortably in pink-tinted cabins with televisions and private bathrooms.

Players stayed away from all that, in an all-inclusive resort hotel called Breezes where special conditions were offered to some titled players, and rates drastically discounted for amateurs. It was nice not to have to take out my wallet at Breezes, where even tipping is prohibited. Sumptuous lunch and dinner spreads, unlimited beverages were all included in the price. It's not smart, obviously, to drink a lot during a serious tournament, so for the most part I abstained. Sometimes I tried the special drinks, one of

which was pale green and tasted like key lime pie puréed and mixed with vodka.

Mostly I woke up early to sunbathe for a few hours before preparing and playing. In my case, the good times made for exciting chess. I figured if I was going to drag myself away from the beach, I might as well sacrifice something. I was particularly happy with my game against current Samford scholar WGM Rusudan Goletiani.

SICILIAN DEFENSE [B42]
KAN VARIATION
W: Jennifer Shahade
B: Rusa Goletiani
Curaçao International 2004

In the U.S. Championship held about six weeks before this game, Rusa and I played with the same colors. In that game, she surprised me by playing the Scheveningen, avoiding my preparation for her usual Kann. I was happy to play her with the same colors in Curaçao—I still had an idea against the line I expected a month before. **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 Bd3 Bc5 6 Be3!**? 6 Nb3 is normal. Here, I thought for three minutes, even though I had planned Be3 before the game. Be3 is a tricky but ultimately second-rate move. The point is to tempt Black to play Qb6, but if Black just plays d6 she will probably be able to maintain her bishop on c5 and White will have to

move the d4-knight at some point anyway—gaining a tempo off the ordinary lines.

6...Qb6?! 7 c3 I played this move more quickly—and Rusa probably realized that I had analyzed Qxb2 beforehand, and after just a minute, retreated her queen: The right decision.

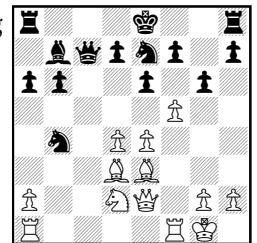
7...Qc7 7...Qxb2?! is very dangerous. There are all sorts of traps for Black to fall into. **8 0-0 Qxa1?** (8...Nc6; 8...Bxd4 9 cxd4; 8...Ne7? 9 Nb3! [and the black queen cannot escape from Bc1 or if Bxe3, fxe3, Rf2] 9...Bxe3 10 fxe3 and Rf2 is unstoppable.) 9 Qc2 Bxd4. Otherwise Nb3 wins the queen for a piece. 10 cxd4 Ne7 11 Nc3 Qxf1+ 12 Kxf1. If you count the material here, Black is up two points. Really, White is close to winning—it is too hard to coordinate the pieces, and White will combine threats against the king with ideas like Na4-Nb6.

8 Qg4! The right move. The line **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nd4 a6 5 Bd3 Bc5 6 Nb3 Ba7 7 Qg4** is best met by Nf6 when Qg7 Rg8 gives Black nice counterplay. Now the f6-square is undefended so Rusa has to weaken her kingside.

8...g6 9 Qe2 It's hard for Black to get her king out of the center, since any knight move is met by Bh6.

9...b6 10 Nd2 Bb7 11 0-0 Nc6 12 f4 Nge7 13 b4!? I spent a lot of time deciding whether or not to go for this pawn sacrifice. Black is forced to accept the sacrifice and for the pawn I gain a few crucial tempi. On the other hand, White's position is great here, and a move like N2b3 gives White a strong attack, without sacrificing any material.

13...Bxd4 13...Nxd4 14 cxd4 Bxb4 and even visually, without examining variations, it is clear that the big center and well-placed pieces give White more than enough compensation for the pawn. Taking with the knight complicates matters more, since it hits White's bishop on d3.



after 15 f5

14 cxd4 Nxb4 15 f5 (diagram)

15...Nxd3 15...Qc3 is the critical test of the pawn sacrifice. **16 fx6** (16 fxg6 hxg6 17 Qf2 [17 Nc4 d5 18 Nd6+ Kd7 19 Nxb7 Qxd3; 17 Bc4 Nc2 18 Bd3 Nxa1 19 Nc4 Nc8] 17...Qxd3 18 Qxf7+ Kd8 19 Bg5 Qxd4+ 20 Kh1 Re8 21 Rac1 Bc6 22 Rc4 Qd6) 16...dxe6; 15...gxf5 16 Rac1 Qd8 17 Bb1 and all of White's pieces are nicely placed to attack Black's king, stuck in the center.

16 f6! 16 Qxd3 also gives White compensation, but I think the game is more unclear after **16...gxf5 17 Rac1 Qd8 18 exf5 Rg8.**

16...Nb4 16...d5 17 Qxd3 (17 fxe7)

17...dxe4 18

Nxe4 Nd5.

17 Bf4

(diagram)

Over the board, I was very excited about this move—it is the second-in-between move in

a row. I thought it was especially accurate, but the obvious fe7 is also winning. (17 fxe7 d5.) This is what I was afraid of, and the reason I avoided fxe7, but Bg5 is just crushing. It will take Black too much time to recapture the pawn on e7 and castle. 18 Bg5 dxe4 19 Nxe4 Nd5 20 Rac1 Qb8.

17...d6 17...e5!? A crazy defensive idea to save Black's extra piece. Fritz thinks it wins for Black, but after a few moves the computer begins to like White's position... 18 dxe5 (18 Bxe5?! d6! is Black's point.) 18...Nec6 19 e6 Nd4 20 exf7+ Kxf7 21 Qg4 d6 22 Rac1 Nbc2 23 Nf3 Qc8 24 Ng5+.

18 fxe7 Qxe7 19 Nc4 Rd8 20 Qd2! This double attack on the b4-knight and the g5-square is the finale.

20...d5 What else? **21 Bg5 Qc7 22 Ne5 Nc6 23 Rxf7** Ng4 is also winning. **23...Qd6 24 Rxb7 Nxe5 25 dxe5 Qc5+ 26 Kh1 Rc8 27 Re7+**, 1-0.

Top-seed Alexander Shabalov began with a 4-0 start, while the second seed, Chanda Sandipan from India, started with 3.5/4 (he missed a flight and got a first-round half-point bye). Paired in the fifth round, the two GMs made a twenty-one-move draw in the Berlin Defense. Thus maintaining his half-point lead, Shabalov looked intent on claiming first place. In the seventh round he beat the Venezuelan master Julio Ostos.

The penultimate surprise

The decisive game of the tournament was Shabalov's upset eighth-round loss to Juan Rohl.

THREE KNIGHTS' GAME [C46]

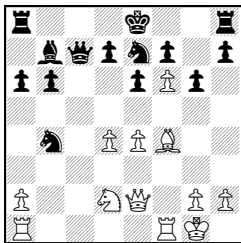
W: Juan Rohl

B: Alexander Shabalov

Curaçao International 2004

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 d4 ed4 Nd4 Bb4 is the main line. **3...g6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nge7 7 Qd2 0-0 8 0-0-0 d5** (8...d6 is safer.) **9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bh6 Bxh6 11 Qxh6 Qd6 12 h4** After the game, Shabalov told me he rejected the more theoretical lines, hoping to get his opponent off the books. He regretted it when he saw how easy White's attack was to play.

12...f6 13 Bc4 Be6 14 Rhe1 Bf7 15 h5 g5 16 Bd3! 16 e5 allows a queen swap after 16...Nf5 17 exd6 Nxb6.



After 17 Bf4

16...Qf4+ 17 Kb1 d4 18 e5 Nf5 19 Bxf5 Qxf5 20 g4 Qf4 20...Qxg4 21 exf6 21 Re4 and Black resigned because of Qf3. 21 exf6? Bxa2+ 22 Kxa2 Rxf6 **21...Qf3 22 exf6 Bxa2+ 23 Kxa2** and Rf6 is no longer viable since the g-pawn is loose. **1-0.**

Meanwhile I lost to Sandipan, which left Sandipan a full point ahead of the field at the start of Round 9. After a quick draw against IM Jose Sequera, he clinched first place. It was Chanda Sandipan's twenty-first birthday.

SICILIAN DEFENSE [B52]

ROSSOLIMO ATTACK

W: Chanda Sandipan

B: Jennifer Shahade

Curaçao International 2004

It was difficult preparing for this game. I wasn't sure if Sandipan would play mainline e4, mainline d4 or some sideline against the Sicilian. **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Bd7 4 Bxd7+ Nxd7 5 0-0 Ngf6 6 Qe2 e6 7 b3 Be7 8**

Bb2 0-0 9 c4 a6 10 d4 cxd4 11 Nxd4 Re8 12 Nc3 Qa5 13 f4 Qh5?! 14

Nf3 Rac8 15 Rad1 d5? This leads to a forced variation which is just good for White. **16 e5**

Bc5+ 17 Kh1 Ng4 18 cxd5! (diagram)

A powerful exchange sacrifice.

18...Ne3 19 dxe6 Nxf1 20 Qxf1 Nf8 21 exf7+ Qxf7 22 Ng5 Qg6?! Why not blockade the f-pawn immediately? **22...Qf5 23 Qc4+** (23 h3) **23...Ne6 24 Nxe6 Qxe6 25 Qxe6+ Rxe6 26 Rd7.**

23 Nce4 Qf5 I felt embarrassed to play this when I could have played it last move. But Qf5 is forced at this point, and there is even the bonus that now h6 may win a piece in some variations.

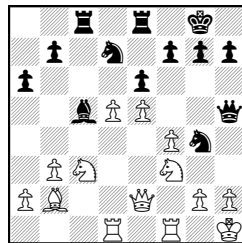
24 Qd3?

Inaccurate... **24 Qc4+ Ne6 25 Nxe6 Qxe6 26 Qxe6+ Rxe6 27 Nxc5 Rxc5 28 Rd8+ Kf7 29 Ba3 Rc2 24...Red8 25 Qc4+ Qe6!** (diagram)

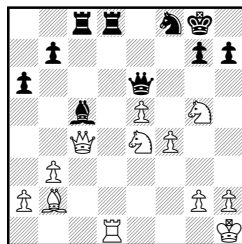
A pretty defensive resource that puts me back in the game. **25...Ne6 26 Rxd8+ Rxd8 27 g3.**

26 Qe2 26 Rxd8 Rxd8 27 g3 and now Black is okay, since instead of having a pinned knight on e6, I have a queen which can capture on c4 into an unclear ending.

26...Rxd1+ 27 Qxd1 Qd7? It's hard to explain this blunder since I



after 18 cxd5



after 25...Qe6

saw a few moves ago that Nd6 was winning. Jumping right into the rocks, hoping they'll be soft. The psychological root of such flawed decision making must be rooted in a desire to release the tension, along with the pleasure of seeing what was in my head translate to the board (even though what I saw was bad for me). **27...Qc6!** and I am fighting back! **28 Nxc5 Qxc5 29 f5 h6 30 Nf3 Qf2.**

28 Nd6! Bxd6 29 Qd5+ Ne6 30 Nxe6 Qb5 31 Qxb5, 1-0.

Most of the participants in Curaçao were from the Caribbean and Venezuela, which is less than 50 miles from Curaçao. It was odd how few American players were in Curaçao. It's only a three-hour trip from Miami. I urge anyone who loves chess, good food and the beach to plan to go for next year's event (July 21-30). Though, you should be careful. At the opening ceremony, I met Dolce, a soft-spoken intelligent Dutch woman. Three years ago, she came to Curaçao on vacation. Two weeks later, she called her boss in Amsterdam to quit. She was staying in Curaçao.

Interview with U.S Champion Alexander Shabalov

Jennifer Shahade: How does Curaçao compare to other islands in the Caribbean?

Alexander Shabalov: Well, most of the others I've been to have an American touristy feel, where in Curaçao there is a distinctive Dutch touch.

JS: This is your fourth time here, right? How did you enjoy Curaçao this time?

AS: Yeah, this trip was more healthy. I worked on my tan, played a lot of tennis...

JS: What is the best weather for good chess?

AS: Cold and rainy.

JS: Is it hard to play with the great weather and the unlimited free food and alcohol at Breezes?

AS: Yes, maybe the best thing would be to forgo the chess and just distribute the prize fund, before the tournament according to pre-tournament ratings.

JS: You're joking around—you love chess....

AS: Chess and playing chess are very different. It's kind of like the difference between making love and working in a law firm.

JS: I've heard you're working on a book about Zen and chess? Why that topic?

AS: Well, I wanted to write about something...there are already excellent books by American grandmasters on the middlegame, like Yermolinsky's *Road to Chess Improvement* or Christiansen's *Storming the Barricades*, so it would be unnecessary to try to write this kind of book. I've been



Sloima Zonenshchaine Photos provided by Jen Shahade

interested in Zen since 1993.

JS: It seems that Zen and chess are in many ways opposite: my understanding of Zen is that it's about emptying your mind, while with chess, you are cramming it with variations...

AS: Yes. But the feeling I get when I play chess is very similar to the feeling I get when I practice Zen—my brain releases some chemical that makes me happy.

JS: Is there a difference between getting in the zone for chess and getting into the zone for writing?

AS: They are very different for me. In writing, I need to be in a creative mood and it's good for me to be comfortable...in chess, it's better if I haven't eaten all day, preferable if my car just broke down... a little anger and hunger helps.

JS: Zen is about focus, right? Is your book about how to concentrate in chess?

AS: Maybe. Concentration is the most important thing. It's what separates the top ten in the world from the rest.

JS: Who are the best American players in concentration?

AS: Hikaru Nakamura, though I still think he needs a little work in this area. If he does solve it, none of us will have a chance.

JS: What percentage of the game do you concentrate?

AS: Well...I think about girls maybe 50 to 75 percent of the game... I devote another 15 percent to time management, and a few percent to calculation.

JS: Is that typical?

AS: Absolutely.

JS: Fifty to 75 percent is a wide margin to think about girls... which is it?

AS: Well, you can tell pretty easily by the quality of the games... 50 percent is great chess. Seventy-five percent is still ok, but where it gets really dangerous is when it creeps up to 90 percent.

JS: How'd the tennis go?

AS: Badly. I played with the Dutch journalist Ard Van Beek and lost most of the games... In one instance, I got so mad that I broke my new, expensive racket.

JS: You don't seem to get as upset when

you lose at chess. In this tournament, after your eighth-round upset loss to Rohl [which cost Shabalov first place], you seemed calm.

AS: Well, I left the room immediately. But I was not calm. I do not take losses lightly. The first 10 minutes are the worst. I lose approximately eight games a year though, so it's not a new experience for me... The problem with my game against Rohl was that I avoided the main line, thinking that my chances of winning were higher that way...but he just played some good moves, and my position was bad. It was a mistake I often make...I go to the game determined to play the main lines, but at the board, I just do something different.

JS: How do you feel when your opponent avoids the main lines?

AS: I am happy. I hate to face the main lines, like if my opponent plays c3 against the Sicilian [which I played against Alex in the fourth round, losing]...well this is not what I'm worried about.

JS: But your winning percentage is very high. You just have a lot of decisive results for a GM...

AS: Yes...

JS: New York Masters just got sponsorship from Generation Chess and adopted the no-draw rule—what do you think of this? What if a big tournament, like the U.S. Championship, were to instate it?

AS: I think it's cool. I'm all for it.

JS: You've won a lot of tournaments in 2003/2004...any explanation?

AS: Well, driving to the Summer Open in Vermont 2003, my Nissan broke down. I wanted a new car, and I wanted a BMW. I need to win a lot of tournaments to afford it. I won the U.S. Open, Denver in September and then Vegas in December 2003. In January 2004, I bought the BMW.

JS: How do you like the chess-playing lifestyle?

AS: Well, three days out of the month, I have this urge to get up at nine in the morning, put on a suit, get on a subway somewhere, and go to some office till 5 p.m. But the other 28 days...I'm happy not to go to work. Still it's not quite like when I was in my 20s, when I would have been happy to go on a plane, wherever it was going. Now travel sometimes wears on me.

JS: Why are there so few American players in Curaçao?

AS: They don't know about it. If they knew what they were getting, they would come.

Interview with Sloima Zonenshchaine, who has been playing chess weekly for sixty years.

JS: You've been living in Curaçao for 75 years. How did you end up here?

SZ: My family were immigrants from



Chanda Sandipane

Romania, and we wanted to come to the United States. Most of my family had preceded me in 1925, but I was so small then, my mother decided to wait a few years. By that time it was nearly impossible for Eastern Europeans to immigrate to the U.S. because of the fear of communism. We thought we'd have a better chance by going through the Caribbean. So we ended up in Curaçao, never made it to the U.S. I left Europe on September 1, 1929, exactly 10 years before I, as a Jew, would have gotten killed by the Nazis.

JS: When did chess enter your life?

SZ: I learned to play chess in school. In Curaçao there was a chess shop founded in '34—with a German owner. Since Holland was officially neutral at the start of the war, all was well until May 10, 1940, when Germans invaded Holland, and all the Germans in Curaçao were moved to Bonaire. So for a couple years there was no place to play chess. After Germany won over France in 1942, there was an official blackout in Curaçao till the end of the war. We were afraid that Martinique would bombard Curaçao. There were no lights at all, you had to get your way around the city by touch on moonless nights.

JS: You became well acquainted with Bobby Fischer during the 1962 Candidate's match here in Curaçao?

SZ: Yes, I was on the welcoming committee to meet Fischer at the Curaçao airport and I drove him in my car. If I had known then what kind of man he was I would not have let him in my car. I, like all the rest, thought he was a hero—the only one who could stand up against the Russians. But now I know that as a man, he was worthless.

JS: How did the famous '62 Candidates match end up in Curaçao?

SZ: Well, since Curaçao is a Dutch colony, and Max Euwe, then the president of FIDE was also Dutch, he helped to arrange it here. In Curaçao our main industry is oil, and Euwe's brother was a big shot at the Shell plant here. Those were days

before the oil from Arabia was available. Max Euwe was a fine man. There are few like him.

Interview with tournament winner GM Chanda Sandipan

JS: How'd you end up in Curaçao?

CS: I wanted to train with GM Jan Ehlvest, and he suggested we have it here, so I decided to play in the tournament prior to the session.

JS: How'd you get hooked up with Ehlvest?

CS: There was a training academy for Indian juniors in my city of Calcutta; Ehlvest was coaching there and he impressed me.

JS: Today you won the tournament and you turned 21. How does it feel?

CS: Great...I played three times on my birthday in previous years, and I lost two of the games, and drew a difficult game.

JS: Will you celebrate with a few drinks?

CS: I don't drink at all.

JS: Neither does my brother—he has never had a sip of alcohol in his life.

CS: That's unusual for a Westerner... but in India, there are many who don't drink.

JS: Is it related to your religion?

CS: I'm a Hindu, and there is nothing in my religion against drinking. I think orange juice is even better

[laughing].

JS: What is your city Calcutta like?

CS: Many westerners imagine Calcutta as a place of maximum poverty—there is a lot of pollution and poverty there, but it is no different than the rest of India—there are all sorts of people there.

JS: Does it make you sad to see such suffering?

CS: Yes, but to do something about it, I first need power. Despite the material problems in India, I love my country: It is very spiritually rich.

I think it is the place in the world where the most research on life has been done. I just wish there were a better balance here between the material and the spiritual.

JS: What is chess for you?

CS: For me, it's more than a sport... ordinarily, young people's needs are taken care of by their parents...but in chess you learn really early on that you have to think on your own and make your own decisions.

JS: Do you practice yoga?

CS: Yes. I try to do it five times a week. But like with chess, I sometimes get lazy.

JS: While preparing for our game, I saw that you play both e4 and d4.

That's quite an accomplishment for a 20-year-old grandmaster!

CS: Yes, it's really great to play both—it's difficult to prepare for, plus I learn

about all sorts of positions. I started with e4, so when I play d4 and win a nice game, it makes me very proud.

JS: That's interesting. My Olympic teammate, Irina Krush, who started out with d4 told me it feels great when she wins with e4. Will I see you at the Olympiad in Mallorca?

CS: Yes: I'll be playing for the Indian team for the first time. I'm a bit nervous because Anand is playing for the first time in 21 years.

JS: Why now?

CS: I think since we are fielding a very young, all grandmaster team, he is interested to see how well we can do.

JS: Are you friendly with him?

CS: I worked with Anand at a training session for a few days, in his hometown Madras, with some other talented Indian juniors. It was a great experience. In three days, you can't learn so much, but it was amazing to see how Anand thinks, and also inspiring.

JS: Did you enjoy yourself here in Curaçao?

CS: Yes...I went to the beach, but at night after the game when it was not so crowded. I don't like crowds. I also went bowling for the first time here; bowling is not so popular in India. I scored 109 in one game, which some people said was good for a beginner.

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