

Interview with Parimarjan Negi and J.B. Singh Negi

“Parimarjan Negi (b. 9 February 1993) is a 13-year-old chess prodigy from India. In July 2005, he became the youngest International Master ever when he earned his third and final IM-norm at the Sort International open chess tournament in Sort, Spain. On 1 July 2006, at the age of 13 years, 4 months, and 22 days, he became the second youngest International Grandmaster ever, second only to Sergey Karjakin, when he earned his third and final GM-norm at the Chelyabinsk Region Superfinal Championship at Satka in Russia.” – Source Wikipedia.

After the final round of Copenhagen Open it was finally possible for yours truly to forget about his own chess and think about that of others. At this event one of the new acquaintances has been that of Negi from New Delhi, India, who has completed all requirements to become the youngest grandmaster in the world today, and the second youngest ever. As I do not believe in geniuses as a concept, I thought it would be a good place to start the routine of working again to ask the (soon to be) teenage star how one goes from potential to genius. At my request his father, J.B. Singh, joined him.

I quickly made up my mind. At only twelve this young man has a lot of promise. He has obvious talent and (maybe more importantly) a father with a sense of purpose, backed by a healthy approach to life and a friendly way about him.

Negi's overall performance in this tournament was good, though he lost two games. The first was against Danish surprise FM Allan Stig Rasmussen, who made his first GM-norm at the event (his first norm, period!) and then against Nigel Short in the final round. With 6½ from 9 he still managed to pick up a few extra rating points.

J.B. thought that Negi was a bit tired, as they had been travelling from tournament to tournament lately, in the search for the final GM-norm. After the tournament they would stay in Copenhagen for four days before travelling to the next tournament, living up to agreements made before the last norm.

I started out by offering my opinion that there are no geniuses, only people that has worked hard and can now do things that appears impossible to others, who has not prepared themselves for years to be geniuses.

J.B. agreed immediately. Negi has not arrived with the abilities of a grandmaster from his mother's womb, but has worked dedicatedly for years to acquire the skills and understanding of a grandmaster.

Negi learned to play chess at the age of four and a half by a friend of his father. (His parents did not play at all and still does not, though J.B. confessed that he would be able to spot the most obvious things by now.) To get Negi some opposition it was organised for him to play against a woman who more or less knew how the pieces moved.

At 5½ Negi had his first real trainer, G.B. Joshi, a 2350 professional. The collaboration went on for more or less five years, ending in the summer of 2005. At this time Negi had already worked with a few other trainers for some time and was already a strong player. Joshi is still a close friend and will at times drop by to have a few games with Negi and to check up on his progress.

The decision to focus on chess came in 2003. At the start of the year Negi had a rating of 2150. At the end of the year he had made his first IM-norm. “When I was ten I was rated 2150 and not so strong. At the end of this year I made my first IM-norm.”

To this J.B. adds: "It was then we decided it was time to get more trainers and to play more good tournaments abroad. Right from the beginning people said that Negi had a big future, but it was in 2003 we decided to start putting a lot of time and money into his chess."

From then on chess has been the main occupation of Negi. He has been training about 5-6 hours a day on most days, except in exam periods, when he focussed on schoolwork. "I do not follow the normal school schedule, but I take a few extra classes and take all my exams. I also go over there if I am not doing anything else."

After I had done the interview a friend of mine aired the normal middleclass view that it is risky to focus so narrowly on one talent. I have always found this view as simply stupid. What things will this boy learn about acquiring knowledge from this experience, should he one day decide chess is not for him? Quite a lot. And what kind of confidence will it give him in his own abilities to have achieved something people like myself is using decades to achieve at the age of twelve? And how will it develop his self-esteem to work with highly talented people who believe infinitely in his talent?

A child's upbringing is not decided by his schoolwork or if he is taught by his parents and children to work dedicated, but by the way his parents treat him. Clearly Gata Kamsky, the chess horror story of a child forced to perform, is happy when he plays chess. His troubles growing up came from the beatings his father would give him if he lost.

Talking to J.B. you get the feeling that nothing could be more alien. In character he is more in line with Henrik Carlsen, the father of Norwegian wonderboy Magnus. Those airing these kind of ignorant accusations should see the fathers with their boys; and maybe learn a bit of parenting in the process. At the end of the interview J.B. told me that he has a job as flight controller in New Delhi. "I have 80 days holiday in the year. I use them all to travel around with Negi. My wife has two months holiday. This gives him about five months to play tournaments." Note that this is not holidays in the British understanding of holidays. The rest of the 285 days in the year J.B. is at work. Those who believe that he is sacrificing his son's childhood have gotten it backwards. He is sacrificing years of his own life to allow his son to develop his abilities in the field where he is gifted and passionate. "I hope that when he becomes fifteen it will possible for him to travel with a trainer."

But how does someone become a child prodigy? Well, it takes a lot of time and money.

As said, Negi has been working with various trainers for 5-6 hours a day the last few years. "Not 10 hours as many of the other Indians," J.B. points out, "we think it is more important to work systematically with high quality coaches and to play strong tournaments."

The additional training started slowly in 2002 when Negi started to work with foreign grandmasters in addition to his own trainer. One of these is GM Sherbakov, whom Negi worked with at times in 2003-2005. More work was done with GM Vladimirov; Negi had a lot of training sessions with him in 2004-2005. They worked a bit more than half of the time on the opening, as "my openings were really weak at this point, the rest of the time we worked on other parts of the game." They worked by analysing and solving exercises.

In 2005 Negi started to work with local IM Vishal Sareen, who is an opening expert. The Negis clearly have a lot of respect for Sareen, but admit that an important factor

in choosing him as a coach is simply that he lives in New Delhi as well. Negi still finds it hard to work on his own.

This year Negi has met all the requirements for obtaining the GM-title. His final norm was achieved in the Satka tournament in Russia, where he made a draw in the last game against one of his trainers, GM Sherbakov. Though this might seem as a bit of a present, you can see from the game given below, that it was the young Indian's great fighting skills and not friendly handouts that earned him a place in chess history.

After Satka Negi participated in the Greek Team Championship. On the way home from that event he stopped over in Athens for some training sessions with GM Nigel Short.

J.B. is open about the fact that the GM-title is just another step up the ladder. "He is still improving with this system," he says, referring to the combination of frequent training and tough tournaments. "But it will take some time before he can reach 2600. You saw this with Harikrishna, Sasikiran, Karjakin and Carlsen. Carlsen was 2580 and then dropped to 2520. It will probably take at least 1½ years."

This might all read out as a success story, but it is well known that no greatness is achieved without adversity. For instance, in 2005 Negi was rated 2397 before the Belfort World Cadets, an obvious favourite, and only three rating points away from being the youngest IM ever. He was about a hundred rating points higher than anyone else. Like many others Negi suffered under the terrible conditions in this event and played badly. He lost 25 rating points and ended 9th. Though there have been many successes, the young man is no stranger to disappointment.

I went into the interview with the notion that no one is born a genius and came out of it with this idea confirmed. Negi reminds me of a famous violinist who said: "I have practiced for ten hours a day for twenty years - and now they call me a genius!"

Watch this young man, Parimarjan Negi will go far.

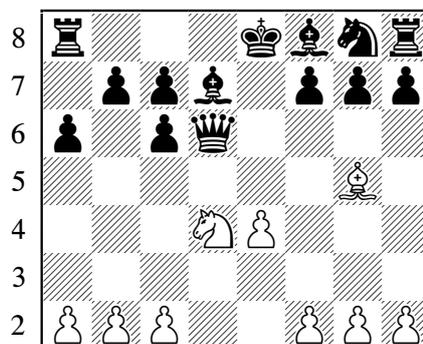
Annotations by Parimarjan Negi

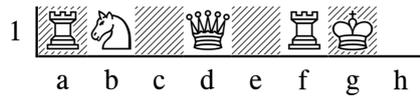
Nikolai Looshnikov (2437) – Parimarjan Negi (2445)

C68

Satka June 2006

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙xc6 dxc6 5.0-0 ♖f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♗d6 8.♘xd4 ♙d7!?





Normal has been 8...♙e7 and Black has been able to equalize according to the games, but the idea of the text is to keep the pair of bishops alive, and to continue normal development.

9.♘c3 ♘e7 10.♚d2

With the idea of ♙f4.

10.♘b3 ♚xd1 11.♞axd1 ♘g6 12.♞d2 f6 13.♙e3 b6 14.♞fd1 0-0-0 Black has a comfortable position.

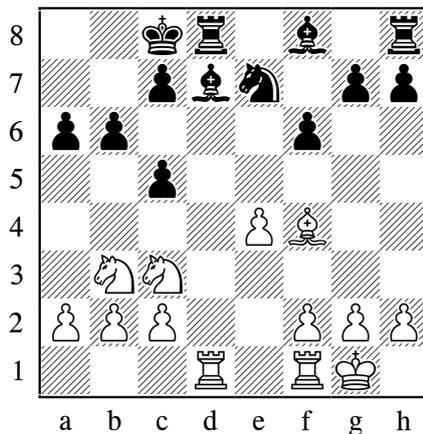
10...c5

10...0-0-0?! 11.♞ad1 h6 12.♙f4 ♚f6 13.♚e3 g5? 14.♙e5! ♚xe5 15.♘f3 with the idea of ♚a7.

11.♘b3 ♚xd2 12.♙xd2

12.♘d2 doesn't promise White much: 12...0-0-0 13.♞ad1 h6 (13...f6 is also fine.) 14.♙e3 b6 15.♘c4 ♞e8 16.a4 a5 17.♞d2 ♙e6 18.♘d5 ♙xd5 19.exd5 ♘f5 with even chances.

12...b6 13.♙f4 0-0-0 14.♞ad1 f6



With the idea of ...g5, ...♙g7, ...f5. White has conducted the opening unsuccessfully, and now Black has a comfortable position, with better chances.

15.♙g3

15.♞fe1 g5 16.♙g3 ♙g7 and ...f5 follows.

15...g6

15...♙e6 16.♞xd8+ ♔xd8 17.♞d1+ ♔c8 18.a4 and only Black can be in some trouble.

15...g5 was also satisfactory for Black. 16.f4 gxf4 17.♙xf4 ♙g7 but I decided just not to give White this option with f4.

16.♘c1

Other moves give Black good position also. 16.♖d2 ♘g7 17.♞fd1 ♙e6 and Black is slightly better. Or 16.♗d5 ♗xd5 17.♞xd5 ♘g7 with a big advantage.

16...♘g7 17.♗d3 ♙e6

17...f5 allows White to simplify matters with: 18.♙e5 ♙xe5 19.♗xe5 ♙e6 with equality.

18.♞fe1 ♞he8

White hasn't got any real plans here, while Black has a few of them, like f5 or Nc6-d4. 18...♙f7 19.e5 creates problems for Black in the centre.

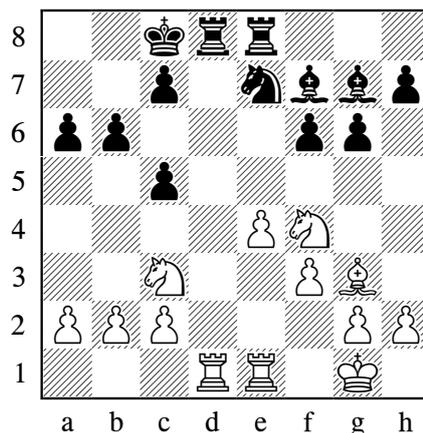
18...♗c6?! allows: 19.♗f4! bringing the knight to d5.

19.f3 ♙f7

White's position is very difficult, and there are no clear useful moves for him. Black's plan is simple - to play either Nc6-d4 or f5.

20.♗f4

20.a3 ♗c6! (20...f5 21.♙e5!) 21.♗f4 ♗d4 22.♞c1 f5 with problems for White.



20...g5?!

I played this move fairly quickly, underestimating White's reply, giving him counterplay. Black had to grab the opportunity with: 20...♞xd1 21.♞xd1 f5! and White's in deep trouble.

21.♗fd5! ♗xd5 22.♗xd5 ♞d7!

With the idea of ...f5.

22...♙xd5 23.♞xd5 ♞xd5 24.exd5 ♞xe1+ 25.♙xe1 f5 26.b3 doesn't look sufficient for real winning chances.

22...f5 does not give advantage for Black. 23.♗xc7 ♞xd1 24.♞xd1 ♞e7 25.♗d5 ♙xd5 26.♞xd5 fxe4 27.c3 exf3 28.gxf3 with even chances.

23.c4

Better was 23.♗e3 ♞xd1 24.♞xd1 f5! 25.♗xf5 ♙xb2 when Black is a little better. Black's bishop pair offers him better chances.

23. ♖c3 doesn't help in stopping the f6-f5 break. 23... ♖ed8 with the idea of ... ♗e6 and ... f5 leaves Black slightly better.

23...f5 24.b3

24.exf5 ♖xe1+ 25. ♖xe1 ♗xb2 and Black is clearly better.

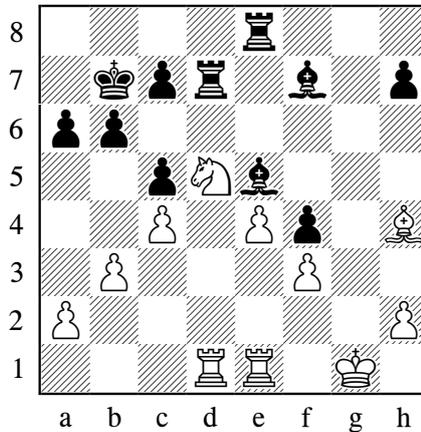
24...f4

24...fxe4 also gives Black the advantage. 25.fxe4 h5 with a clear edge.

25. ♗f2 ♖b7 26.g3

26.b4 doesn't help White's cause: 26...cxb4! (26...c6?? 27. ♖xb6! ♖xd1 28. ♖xd1 ♖xb6 29. ♖d7 ♗d4 30. ♗xd4 cxd4 31. ♖xf7 and suddenly White has a clear edge) 27. ♖xb6 ♖dd8! and Black is winning.

26...♗e5 27.gxf4 gxf4 28.♗h4



28...♖g8+?!

28... ♖e6! was the accurate way, as ♖g8-g6 gives the white knight the square of e7. Black is winning.

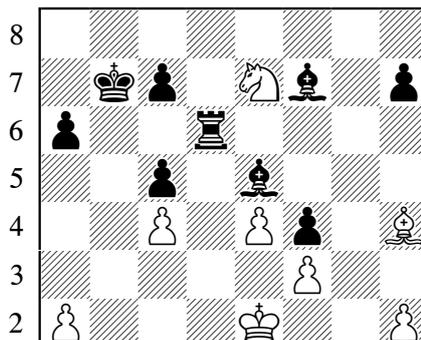
29. ♖f2

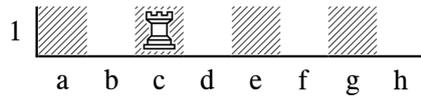
29. ♖h1 ♗h5 and Black wins.

29...♖g6

29... ♗d4+ doesn't work due to 30. ♖xd4! cxd4 31. ♖f6.

30. ♖e7 ♖gd6 31. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 32. ♖e2 b5 33. ♖c1 bxc4 34.bxc4





34...♖h6

More accurate was: 34...♖b6! and Black's rook invades. After ♖h6, I wanted to first provoke ♜f5 and then play this, but I didn't realise that ♖h6 creates no threat, since ♖h4 is met by ♖b1. After 35.♗c2 ♖b1 Black has the advantage.

35.♖b1+?

White blunders a pawn in mutual time pressure.

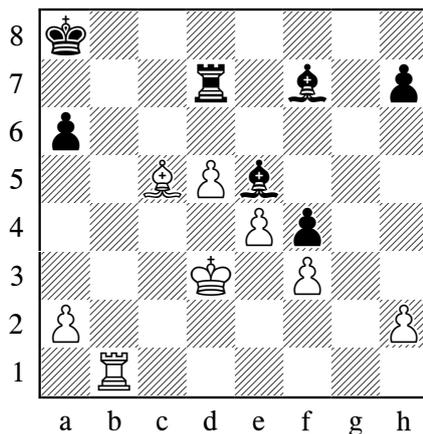
35.♔d3 ♖d6+! 36.♕e2 ♖b6 transposing to the note on Black's 34th move.

35.♜f5 ♖b6 and Black wins.

35...♕a8 36.♕d3 ♖d6+ 37.♜d5 c6 38.♙e7 ♖d7

38...cxd5 39.♙xd6 dxc4+ 40.♕c2 ♙xd6 also with big advantage.

39.♙xc5 cxd5 40.cxd5



40...♖c7?

On the last move of the time control, I quickly played this, simply missing my opponent's reply. 40...♖xd5+! wins at once. 41.exd5 ♙g6+ and so on.

41.♙d4↗

Now White has counterplay. The position, as I realised, suddenly had become very complicated, and White should have at least equal chances.

41...♙xd4 42.♕xd4 ♖c2

42...♖b7 43.♖xb7 ♕xb7 44.♕e5 with too many pawns for White.

43.♖b6

During the game I was more worried about: 43.♕e5! ♖xa2 44.♕f6! and Black has some problems.

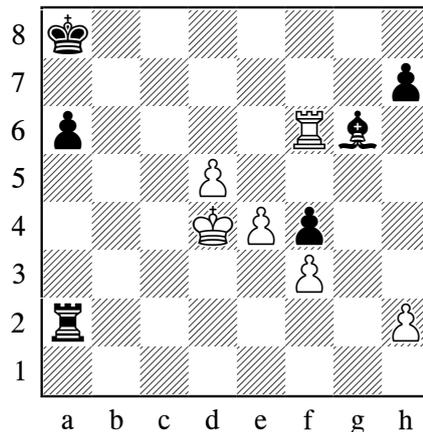
Note that 44.♕xf4 a5 45.♕e5 (45.d6 ♖d2 46.♕e5 a4 transposes to 45.♕e5) 45...a4 gives us the following options:

a) 46.♖b6? ♜a7! 47.♖b4 (47.♖c6 ♘e8 48.♖c7+ ♜b6 49.♖xh7 a3) 47...♘e8! 48.♜e6 a3 49.♖b3 ♘a4 and White's position is in some danger. 50.♖d3 ♘b5 51.♖b3 ♜b6!

b) 46.d6 ♖d2 (46...a3 47.♖b5! ♘e8 48.♖b3 and White saves a tempo compared to the lines with 46.Rb4. 46...♘b3 47.♜f6) 47.♜f6 ♘a2 48.♖b6 ♜a7 49.♖c6 a3 50.e5 ♘d5 (50...♘b1 51.♖c3 a2 52.♖a3+ ♜b6) 51.♖c3 a2 52.♖a3+ ♜b6 53.♜e7 ♘c4 54.d7 ♜c7 55.♖a7+ ♜b6 56.♖a3 with even chances.

c) 46.♖b4 ♘e8 47.♜e6 a3 48.♖b3 ♘a4 49.♖c3 ♜b7 with the idea of ♖a1, a2 ... with a completely unclear position.

43...♖xa2 44.♖f6 ♘g6



45.h4?

The decisive mistake, White should have tried just to push his pawns. The text is just a waste of time. 45.♜e5! here the position gets very complicated, some variations: 45...a5! (45...♜b7 46.♖xf4 ♖d2 47.♜e6) 46.♖xf4 a4 47.♜d6 with an unclear position, for example: 47...a3 (47...♖d2 48.e5 ♘c2 49.♜c6! (49.e6 a3! 50.e7 ♖e2 51.♖f8+ ♜a7 52.♖f7 ♜b6 53.♖f8 ♖xe7 54.♜xe7 ♜b7 55.d6 a2 56.d7 a1♖ 57.d8♖ ♖e5+ 58.♜d7 ♘a4#) 49...a3 50.♜b6 ♘f5 51.♜c7 ♖c2+ (51...♘c2 with even chances) 52.♜d6 a2 53.♖a4+ ♜b7 with unclear play) 48.e5 ♘c2 49.e6 ♖b2 50.e7 ♖b6+ 51.♜c5 (51.♜d7 ♖b7+ 52.♜d6 ♖xe7 53.♜xe7 a2 and Black wins) 51...♖b8 52.♖f6! ♜a7 (52...♖e8 53.♖a6+ ♜b7 54.d6! and White wins) 53.♖f7

a) 53...♜a6 54.♖f8! and White wins.

b) 53...♖e8 54.d6 a2 55.d7 ♘a4 (or 55...a1♖ 56.dxe8♖ ♖c3+ 57.♜d6 ♖d4+ 58.♜e6 ♖e3+ 59.♜f6 ♖h6+ also with even chances) 56.d8♖! a1♖ 57.♖b6+ ♜a8 58.♖a6+ with even chances.

c) 53...♜a8 54.♖f6 with equality.

45...a5!

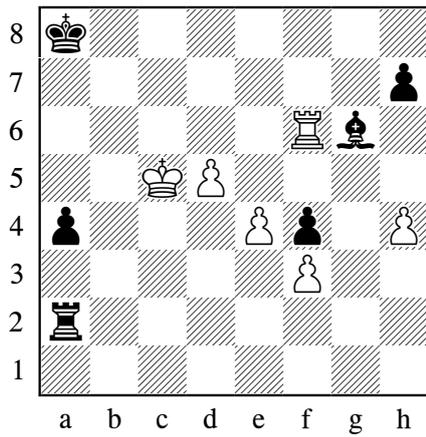
Black's pawn is faster.

46.♜c5

After 46.e5 then 46...♜b7 gives White play. 47.♜c5 a4 48.♖b6+ (48.♖xf4) 48...♜a7 (or 48...♜c7 49.♖c6+ ♜d7 50.♖d6+ ♜e7 51.♖e6+ ♜f7 52.♖f6+ ♜g7 (52...♜e7 53.♖e6+ with equality) 53.♖xf4 with complications.) 49.♖b4 with unclear play.

Better is therefore 46...a4 47.♖xf4 a3 48.♜c5 ♖c2+ 49.♜d6 (49.♜b6 ♘e8 and Black wins) 49...♘e8 50.♖e4 a2 51.♖e1 ♘h5! and Black wins.

46...a4



47.♔b4

47.e5 a3 48.♖xf4 ♜c2+ 49.♔d6 ♕e8 and Black wins.

47...♔b7 48.♖xf4 ♕e8 49.♖f8 ♜b2+ 50.♔a3 ♜b3+ 51.♔a2 ♕b5

Black is winning.

52.♖f7+ ♔b6 53.♖xh7 ♕c4 54.♖h6+ ♔b5 55.♖h8 ♖xf3+ 56.♔a1 a3 57.♖b8+ ♔a4

58.♖b1 a2 59.♖c1 ♔a3 60.d6 ♜b3! 61.d7 ♕d3 62.♖c3 ♖xc3

0-1