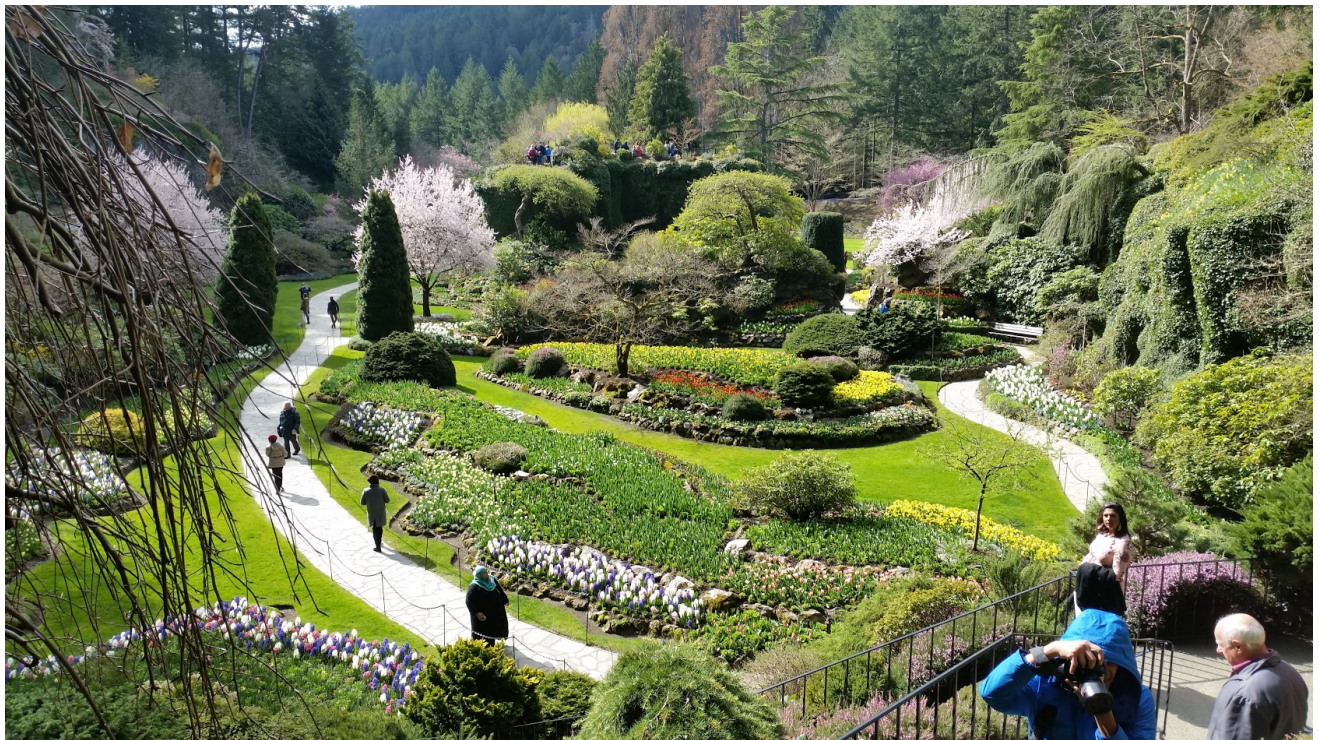


If you can't beat them, confuse them

From handling a live tarantula in the Bug Zoo to overloading my phone with pictures of the Butchart Gardens, I've always found things to do in Victoria when playing in the Grand Pacific Open. Chess just makes it more special. As I've played in the tournament four different times, my growing scores have a funny way of tracking my own growth as a chess player. This year, I ended with a *bang*, facing the highest rated player of the tournament himself: FM Jason Cao.



The Butchart Gardens; *photo credit: Guy Bashkansky*

Going into the game, a saying from when I used to do debate popped in mind—*if you can't beat them, confuse them*—and although I've never heard the exact saying used in a chess context, it applies particularly well when facing someone much higher rated. When you play stronger opponents, you can't expect to beat

them by doing nothing; slowly, they'll just outplay you. Instead, you have to complicate the position. Make them think twice and thrice in every position in fear of losing or drawing to someone much weaker.

It's a lottery where the odds are surely stacked against you. If you bet \$1,000 one dollar at a time, you'll almost definitely lose at least some money. If, however, you bet \$1,000 all at once, it might just be your lucky day.

With that mindset, I dived into the game.

WIM Naomi Bashkansky (2080)-FM Jason Cao (2423)

Grand Pacific Open 2018

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 O-O 5. Bd3 d5 6. cxd5 exd5 7. Ne2 Re8 8. O-O 8... b6

A slight diversion of the usual response in the opening, but still playable.

9. f3 Bb7

10. g4

When the bishop is on c8, I take time to prepare this move. Here, there's no reason to waste time.

10... c5

Also not a very common idea--usually, Black moves the bishop to d6 or f8 before playing c5. Still, it's not bad.

11. a3 Bxc3 12. bxc3 Ba6

I played 12. bxc3 without thinking twice about it, figuring if he plays 12... Ba6 I'll respond with 13. Bb1, but now I realized that 13... cxd4 would have led to an awkward pawn structure and a not-so-good position.

13. Bxa6 Nxa6 14. Ng3

With both of his bishops gone, I planned to push my pawns to g5 and f6.

14... h6 15. h4 Qc7

Again, he plans to take on d4. It might've been better to continue with my attack, but I didn't want to give any compensation.

16. Ne2 Qd6 17. Qd3 Nc7 18. g5 Nd7

18... Nh5 would've been better.

19. e4!?

Hurray for complications!

19... dxe4 20. fxe4 hxg5 21. hxg5 cxd4 22. cxd4 Qg6 23. Nc3 Rad8 24. Ra2 Ne5 25. Qe3 Nc6 26. Qg3

I probably should've played 26. Rh2 to keep on the attack, but I was scared to ruin what I saw would be a pretty decent endgame.

26... Qd6 27. Qxd6 Rxd6 28. Bf4 Rd7 29. d5 Ne5 30. Rd2 Na6 31. Bxe5 Rxe5 32. Rf5 Re8 33. g6!?

A spur of the moment decision that wouldn't have done much if he'd ignored it.

33... f6?

Now, I had a real advantage.

34. Rh2 Kf8??

Finally, after tiring him out throughout the game, I got the blunder I was hoping for.

35. d6!! Rxd6 36. Nd5 Rxd5 37. Rh8+ Ke7 38. Rxe8+ Kxe8 39. exd5 Nc7 40. Kf2 Ke7 41. Ke3 a5

42. a4?!

Not the best decision in a winning endgame to push pawns, but not the worst.

42... Kd6 43. Ke4 Ke7 44. Rf2 b5 45. d6+! Kxd6

46. Rxf6+? Ne6

I'd been looking into the d6 and Rf6+ combo for many moves. Thinking that I was so clever and that I'd be able to win the g7 pawn, I completely missed that Ne6

stops my plan. If I play 47. Kf5, he can take 47... gxf6 and his knight's close enough to stop my g-pawn from promoting. Instead, I should've first played 46. axb5.

47. Rf5 bxa4?? 48. Rxa5 Nc5+

With his mistake, I should've had a pretty easy win after 49. Kf5! and going after the g-pawn. However, low on time, I slowly lost my win.

49. Ke3 Kd5 50. Ra7 Ne6

51. Rxa4??

Allowing 51... Ke5 was my final mistake. Now, it was an easy draw.

51... Ke5 52. Ra5+ Kf6 53. Ra6 Kf5 54. Kf3 Nf8 55. Ra7 Nxc6?!

He said after the game that he took with the Knight because he was confident he could draw, but if he'd taken with the King, I probably would've just saved everyone the trouble and taken on g7 anyways.

56. Rxc7 Ne5+

Since there was no way for me to lose and we both were playing on the 30-second increment, I decided to test him on his endgame skills for a while longer.

57. Ke3 Ng4+ 58. Kd4 Nf6 59. Rf7 Ke6 60. Ra7 Kf5 61. Ra5+ Ke6 62. Rb5 Nd7 63. Ke4 Nf6+ 64. Kf4 Nd5+ 65. Kg5 Ke5 66. Ra5 Ke4 67. Ra1 Ke5 68. Re1+ Kd4 69. Re8 Ne3 70. Kf4 Nd5+ 71. Kf5 Ne3+ 72. Ke6 Nc4 73. Rd8+ Ke4 74. Rh8 Kd4 75. Rh7 Kc5 76. Rd7 Nb6 77. Rd6 Nc4 78. Rd5+ Kc6 79. Rh5 Nb6 80. Rh8 Kc5 81. Rh7 Nc4 82. Rb7 Kd4 83. Rc7 and I offered a draw.

Though my attempts to confuse him were successful, I couldn't outplay him in the end.

You'd think that would've been my favorite part of the tournament—my almost-win against a FIDE Master. However, truth be told, my favorite part was a mere hour later, during the prize ceremony. I'd gotten prizes from the Grand Pacific Open before, but I'd always left early and received the prize by check.

Imagine my surprise when I realized that Canadian money was *quite* a bit more colorful than American money.



Left to right, front: Kate Jiang, WIM Agnieszka Matras-Clement, NM Valeria Gansvind, WIM Naomi Bashkansky, missing Anna Van; back: Brian Raymer (organizer), Paul Leblanc (organizer), Elliot Raymer (TD); *photo credit: Guy Bashkansky*