Mindsports International Festival 2025: London's Open Flourishes as Norm Hunters Shine

The V Mindsports International Festival, held last month in London's Hammersmith, confirmed its place as one of England's ambitious open tournaments. With **109 players from 28 countries**, including six grandmasters, two women grandmasters and a formidable cadre of titled challengers. The FIDE-rated event brought together both established professionals and ambitious juniors, all vying for norms and international recognition.

Organised by **London Chess Education** under the stewardship of **Lance Leslie Smith** and **Jake Hung**, and backed by **XTX Markets, The Chess Trust, the English Chess Federation, Aarti Lohia (Donor) and Chess England**, the festival has grown from a niche invitational into a fixture of the English circuit. This year's edition carried record prize funds and drew repeat participants from across the European continent, a sign of its rising reputation.

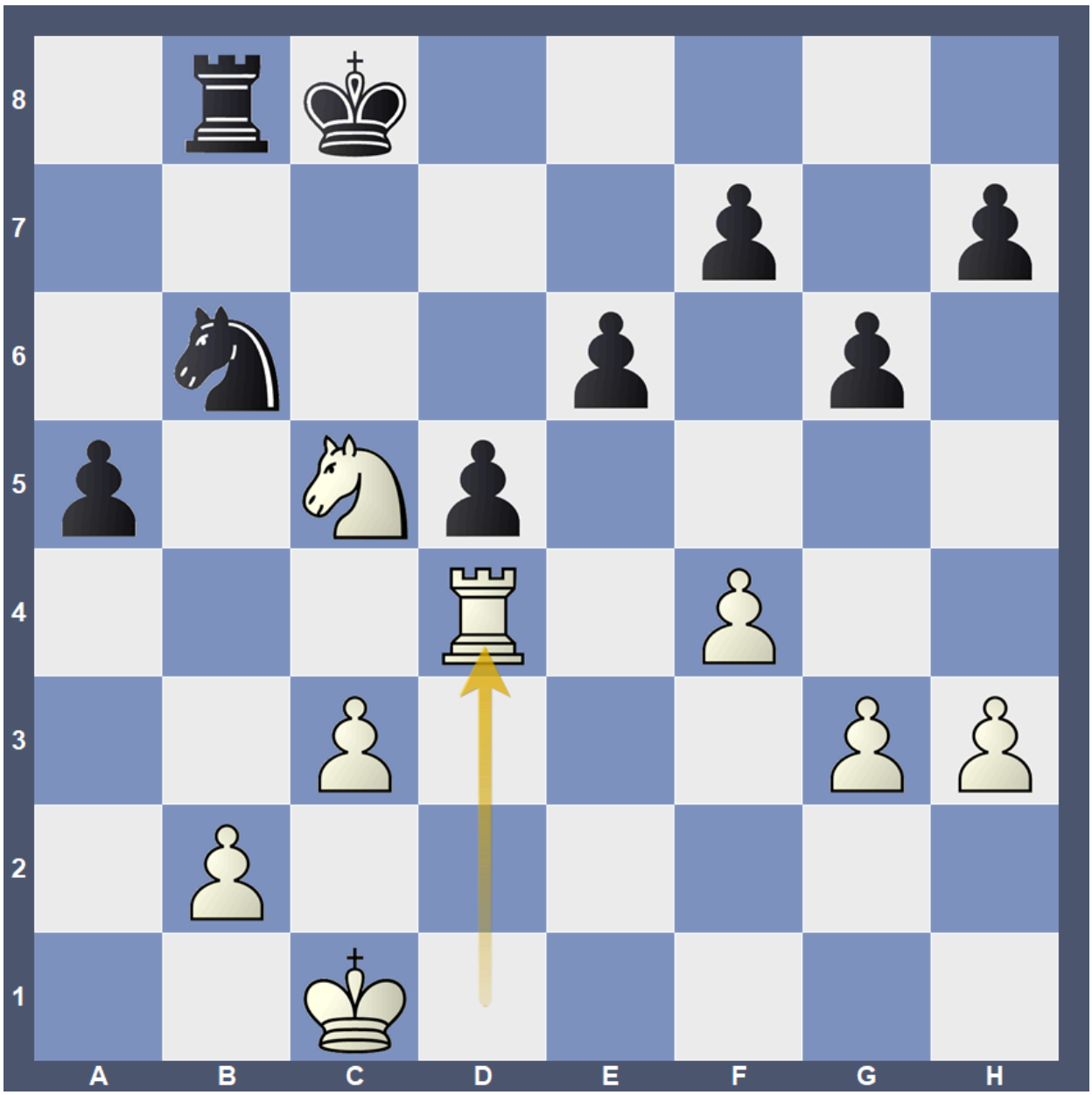




Clarke's Breakthrough, Janik's Consistency

The headline result was a shared first place between **GM Igor Janik** and **IM Brandon Gl Clarke**, both finishing on **7/9**. Clarke's run was particularly dramatic: in the final round he

defeated **GM Alexander Kovchan with Black**, securing not only tournament glory but also his **first GM norm.**

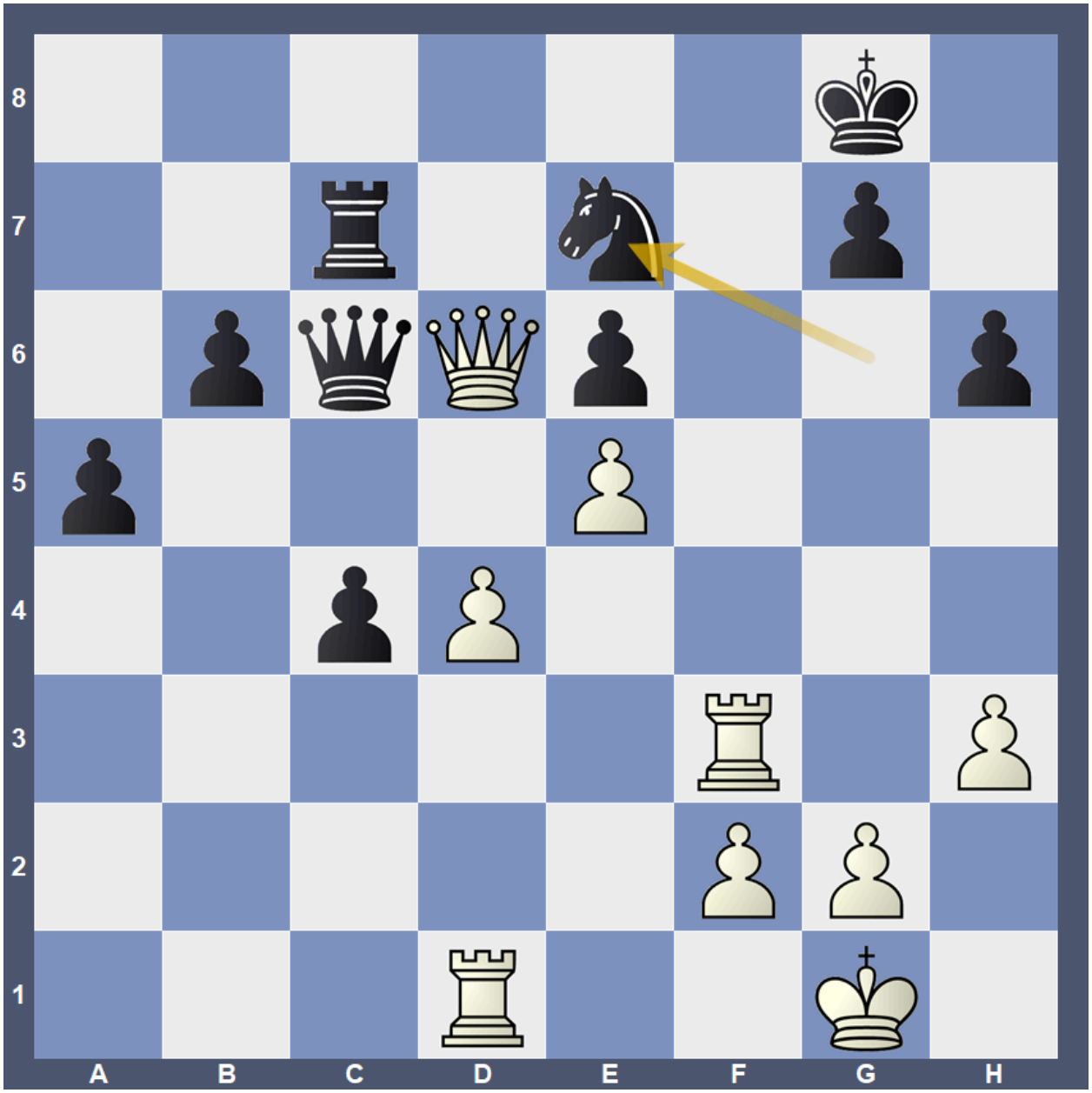


Here can you spot the move IM Brandon GI Clarke made on move 24 to secure the advantage in the position

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6 6. g3 Nc6 7. Nxc6 bxc6 8. e5 dxe5 9. Qxd8+ Kxd8 10. Bg2 Kc7 11. Bd2 Bg7 12. h3 Be6 13. O-O-O a5 14. Rhe1 Nd5 15. Na4 Rhb8 16. c3 Nb6 17. Nc5 Bxa2 18. Bf4 Bd5 19. Rxe5 Bxe5 20. Bxe5+ Kc8 21. Bxd5 cxd5 22. Bxb8

Rxb8 23. f4 e6 24. Rd4 Nc4 25. Nd3 Kc7 26. Ne5 Nxb2 27. Nxf7 a4 28. Ng5 a3 29. Kb1 Na4+ 0-1

Clarke's success was matched by the promise shown by a wave of young British players. **Rithvik Deepak Ambattu** (Scotland) scored **6/9**, highlighted by a win over **IM David Fitzsimons**, while **England's Rohan Pal** (5/9) and **Mikhail Kapechun** (6/9) both impressed with performances far above their rating expectations. In round one, **Zain Patel** claimed a notable upset over **IM Sven Tica**, underscoring the event's reputation as a battleground for ambitious underdogs.



Perhaps wanting to get to the second time period IM Sven Tica did not recognize the slight predicament in the position, giving his junior opponent a sniff. Are you as clinical as Zain Patel and find the combination to take a marginal advantage in this position on move 41?

1. Nf3 d5 2. d4 a6 3. c4 e6 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Nc3 h6 6. Bf4 Nf6 7. e3 Bd6 8. Bxd6 Qxd6 9. Rc1 O-O 10. Bd3 Be6 11. O-O Nbd7 12. h3 Rfd8 13. Qc2 Rac8 14. Na4 c6 15. Nc5 Rc7 16. Rfd1 a5 17. Nxd7 Nxd7 18. Bf5 Rcc8 19. Bxe6 fxe6 20. Rd3 Rf8 21. Rb3 b6 22. Rc3 c5 23. e4 c4 24. e5 Qe7 25. a4 Qb4 26. Nh2 Rf4 27. Ng4 Kh8 28. Rg3 Nf8 29. Rd1 Rf7 (29... Rc7 30. Qc1 Rcf7 31. Nf6 Rh4 32. Ne8 Qxa4 33. Nd6 Rhf4 34. Nxf7+ Rxf7 35. b3 Qc6 36. bxc4 dxc4 37. Qc3 Rc7 38. Rf3 Kg8 39. Qa3 Ng6 40. Qd6 Ne7 41. Qd8+ Kh7 42. Rf7 Nd5 43. Rf8 Re7 44. h4 Qd7 45. Qb8 Qb7 46. Qd8 Qc7 47. Qa8 h5 48. Rh8+ Kg6 49. Qg8 Kf5 50. Qh7+ Kf4 51. Rf8+ Rf7 52. Qxg7 Rxf8 53. Qxf8+) 30. Qc1 1-0





More Than Just an Open



Alongside the main tournament, the festival staged three blitz events and a Chess960 competition, the latter boasting the unusual distinction of awarding more prizes than there were non-prize-winners.

One of the most memorable evenings came when **GM Daniel Naroditsky**, renowned for his online commentary and Twitch streams, made a surprise appearance in two blitz events. His presence drew a surge of local 2000+ players, many eager for the rare chance to face the American grandmaster over the board.

Building a Norm Factory in London



While the atmosphere was generally relaxed, the stakes in individual games were high. The tournament has become a key arena for English players to chase international norms without the cost of travelling abroad. “It’s about giving our players the chance to play world-class opposition at home,” said one organiser, reflecting the dual mission of fostering elite competition while growing the domestic scene.

The festival’s evolution from small all-play-all invitationals to one of London’s largest international opens demonstrates the organisers’ balance of ambition and

accessibility. With **more than 100 participants**, **increased strength of field**, and a reputation for friendliness alongside fierce competitiveness, the fifth edition set a new benchmark.

Looking Ahead

Now firmly embedded in the English/European/FIDE chess calendars, the Mindsports International Festival is expected to grow further. Organisers have already signalled plans to expand capacity, raise playing standards, and continue offering norm opportunities to nurture the next generation of home-grown stars.

As Clarke and Janik leave London with their victories and Rithvik, Rohan, Mikhailo and others with reputations enhance the message from London, Hammersmith is clear: The United Kingdom's chess future looks that little bit brighter.

The Sponsors

The event would not have been possible without the continued support of its sponsors:

XTX Markets

The Chess Trust

English Chess Federation

Chess England

Aarti Lohia (Donor)

Looking Ahead

Now firmly established in the European chess calendar, the Mindsports International Festival continues to balance ambition with accessibility. With more players, stronger fields, and an atmosphere that combines intensity with community spirit, the fifth edition set a new benchmark for the event's future growth. In the years to come we plan to continue to increase the capacity and attract many strong players to continue encouraging the growth of our national players. Looking onwards to create the next generation of talented super stars.


35





Useful Links

Prize Winners:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17RYgcb017n66B_Pf1HgP_JmB1_8ZeZssXoGVHOMoL5U/edit?gid=1551136549#gid=1551136549

Lichess Stream:
https://lichess.org/broadcast/v-mindsports-international-2025/round-1/j70srWMw#boards

Chess.com Stream:
https://www.chess.com/events/v-mindgames-international-2025/games