

England's Brightest Players Gather Again as EJCOA National Finals Reach New Heights

By Jake Hung

More than 250 of England's strongest junior players gathered in Nottingham for the 2026 EJCOA National Finals. Over three days players fiercely contested classical chess, expert analysis and lectures, the championship once again demonstrated the remarkable progress being made in junior chess across England.

Sponsors

The success of this year's event would not have been possible without the generous support of our valued sponsors:

- **Chess and Bridge**
- **Nottinghamshire Chess Foundation**
- **She Plays to Win**

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to Nottingham High School for once again providing an outstanding venue for the highly anticipated National EJCOA Finals. Our gratitude extends to Lauda Feedum, whose excellent food truck kept players, families, and volunteers well fed throughout the competition.

We are also grateful to the Nottinghamshire Primary Schools Chess Association (NSPCA) for supplying the boards, sets, and many of the chess clocks used during the event.

Finally, we would like to recognise our fantastic team of local volunteers. Their support was invaluable throughout the day, from setting up and packing away the venue to assisting with tournament organisation and serving as arbiters. Their dedication and hard work played a vital role in ensuring the event ran smoothly.

Round One

As the doors opened, players flooded into the tournament hall looking for their seats. Returning finalists exchanging greetings with familiar rivals, while newcomers paused to take in the scale of the National Final. Parents ushered away quietly making their way to the waiting area, leaving the competitors to focus on the challenge ahead.

As the arbiters completed their final announcements, conversation gradually faded. Pieces adjusted, scoresheets being filled in and clocks checked one last time. Months of preparation had led to this moment. With national titles and England selection opportunities at stake, every first move carried significance.

From the first round we faced interesting match ups including a sibling rivalry on the newly introduced liveboards.



Figure 1. Round 1 match up of the Ding twins.

Photo by J Hung ©

After move 28, Yiwen playing black was under pressure with his clock under 5 mins, with his twin sister on 45 mins, giving the advantage to white. However on move 32, Yihua blunders the position with Kd1

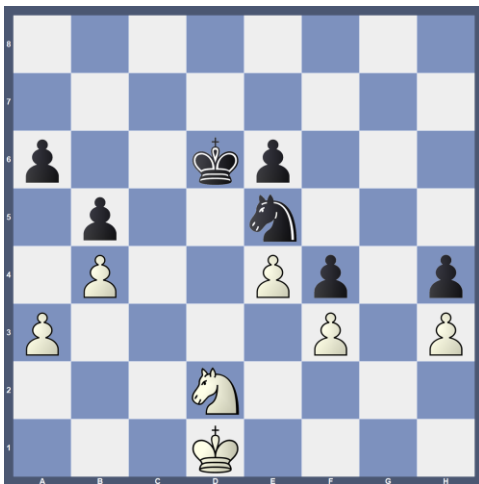


Figure 2. White blunders allowing Black to win a pawn, what does Black play here?

After finding the correct continuation he unfortunately blunders down the line giving all his advantage away and they ended in a draw.

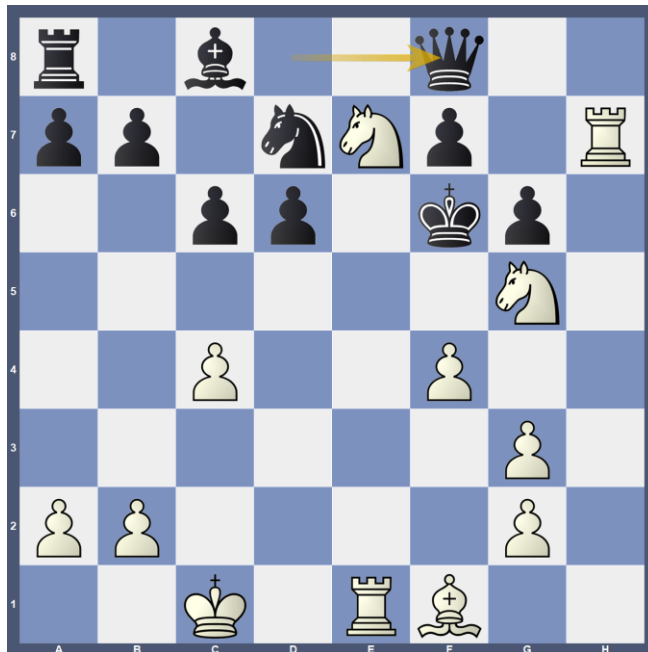


Figure 3 Can you find the mate in 2 which Gabi missed over the board?

In Round 4, Gabi comes out with a win after underestimating the value of his e4 pawn, can you spot how Gabi could have won the game earlier in this position, here instead he plays Rxf7. You can follow the interesting game below.

Lavi, Gabi - Marasinghe, Minula

Under 14

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nf3 d6 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 0-0 6.Bg5 Nc6 7.Qd2 e5 8.dxe5 Nxe5 9.Nd5 Ned7 [9...Nxe4 10.Bxd8 Nxf3+ 11.gxf3 Nxd2]

10.Bh6 Nxe4 11.Qe3 Re8 12.0-0-0 Ng3 13.Qxe8+ Qxe8 14.hxg3 Qd8 15.Re1 c6 16.Ne7+ Kh8 17.Ng5 Bxh6 18.Rxh6 Kg7 19.Rxh7+ Kf6 20.f4 Qf8 21.Rxf7+ [21.Re6+ fxe6 22.Ne4#]

21...Qxf7 22.Nxf7 Kxf7 23.Bd3 Nf8 24.f5 Bxf5 25.Nxf5 gxf5 26.Bxf5 Re8 27.Rxe8 Kxe8 28.Kd2 Kf7 29.Ke3 Kf6 30.Kf4 c5 31.g4 a5 32.Ke4

One Year On

The continued growth of the EJCOA National Finals has been remarkable. Since last year's championship, the organisation increased the number of qualifiers and participants at the National Finals. A record 51 qualifying tournaments produced a field of 253 finalists, making this the largest and strongest EJCOA Final to date.

The increase reflects not only the growth in participation, but also the increased standard of junior chess across England. Every section featured returnees alongside ambitious newcomers, many competing not only to be called the best but for a spot to represent England internationally.



Figure 4. Both Yvon and Ethan returning to event this year hoping to prove themselves better a year on.

Photo by J Hung ©

Outside the Halls

One feature that continues to distinguish the EJCOA National Finals is the emphasis placed on learning alongside competition. Throughout the weekend, players were able to review their games with experienced coaches shortly after each round before attending a programme of lectures covering all aspects of the games topics such as, Pawn storms by IM Andrew Martin, Slaying the Dragon by FM Tim Wall, or Understanding why studies are valuable by IM Lorin D'Costa. Parents were also encouraged to attend,

creating an environment in which learning extended beyond the tournament hall.

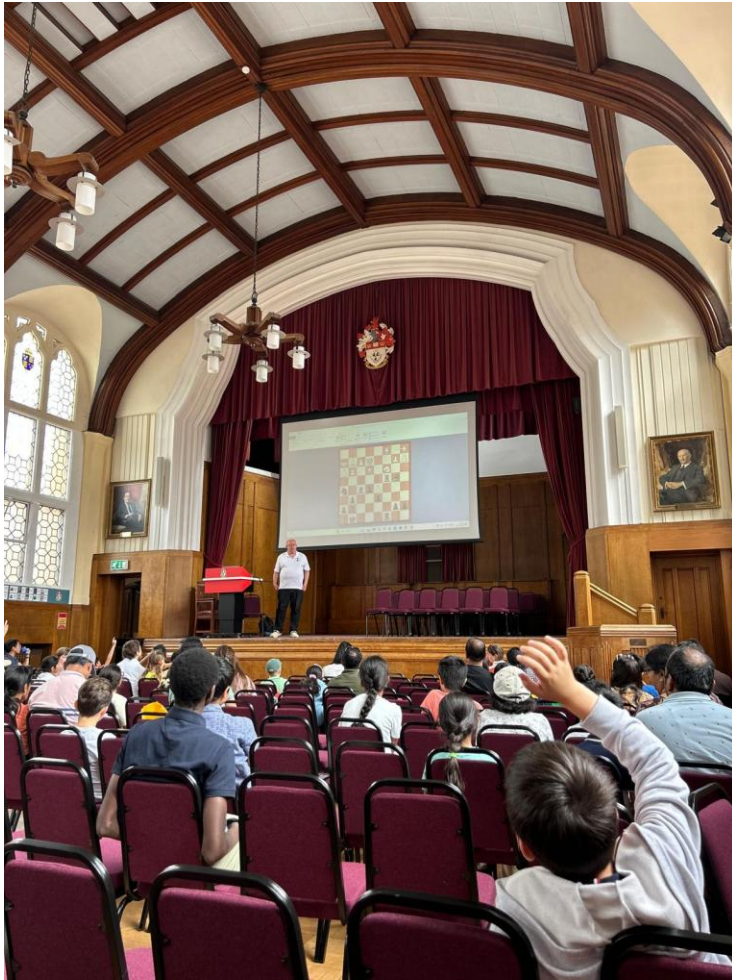


Figure 5. Students answering questions from FM Tim Wall

Photo by J Hung ©

The Anticipated Simultaneous vs the masters

Saturday evening's simultaneous exhibition attracted a record 108 participants. Facing so many enthusiastic juniors proved a demanding test even for the titled coaches (IM Lorin D'Costa, IM Andrew Martin, IM Ravi Kumar, FM Tim Wall and CM Robert Willmoth)

One of the most entertaining encounters of the simultaneous exhibition game between Theo Mears and CM Rob Willmoth. Theo built up a dangerous initiative and reached a position where one accurate continuation would have won decisive material. Under the pressure of the occasion, however, the opportunity slipped away. Can you find the move White missed?

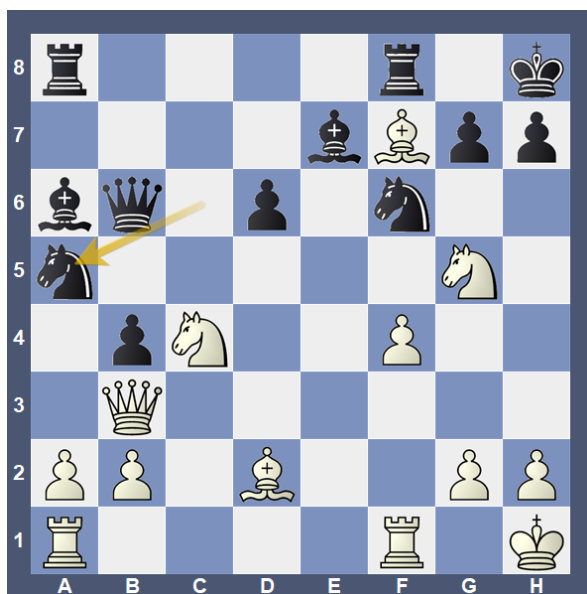


Figure 6. How can White win material here?



Figure 7. IM Andrew Martin making sure his simul opponent has no chance keeping his winning streak

Photo by J Hung ©



Figure 8. IM Lorin D'Costa discovering that he's playing one of his students

Photo by J Hung ©

Changes this Year

New for this year's event was expanded media coverage. Live commentary, player interviews and behind-the-scenes features enabled those who were unable to travel to Nottingham to follow the championship throughout the weekend. Commentary from Elizabeth Ivanov, the 2025 Japanese Women's Champion, provided an international perspective, having herself progressed through the English junior chess system and playing abroad.

Do find our interviews here: <https://ejcoa.co.uk/news/ejcoa-national-youth-championships-2026-report>



Figure 9. Our resident streamer Elizabeth overseeing one of the last few games of round 3

Photo by J Hung ©

The event was once again held at Nottingham High school, with the classical time control of 90 minutes plus 30 second increment once again produced many deeply contested games, with several encounters extending well beyond the four-hour mark. With the number of qualifiers increased, it allowed more quality players from around the country to enter, with U8- 49 players, U10- 70 players, U12- 57 players, U14- 42 players, and the combined U16-U20 section with 35 which was mostly filled with U16 players.

The Results

The strength of the competition was reflected in the final standings. Only one top seed converted pre-tournament favourite status into victory, with Mary Cawdery claiming the Under-10 best girl title on $4\frac{1}{2}/5$. Perfect scores proved to be a challenging feat, only achieved only by two juniors, Sultan Sharkhanov (Under 8) and Anvikkashri Prabhakaran (Under 12).

2026 EJCOA National Junior Finals

Most sections remained undecided until the final game, with tie-breaks ultimately determining the winners. In the Under 8 Girls' section, three players finished level points, with Riva Zoe Oliveira securing first place on the Sonneborn-Berger tiebreak.



Figure 10. Sultan eagerly waiting for his opponent to comeback after playing his move

Photo by J Hung ©

Under 8

Top Girl: Riva Zoe Oliveira 3/5

Top Boy: Sultan Sharkhanov 5/5

Under 10

Top Girl: Mary Cawdery 4.5/5

Top Boy: Harrison Condron 4.5/5

Under 12

Top girl: Anvikkashri Prabhakaran 5/5

Top boy: Alfred Farnan 4.5/5

Under 14

Top Girl: Jia-arn Yeung 3.5/5

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Top boy: Akshath Shivakumar

Under 16

Top girl: Sameera Kodukula 3/5

Top Boy: Gabriel Sherwood 4/5

Under 18

Top girl: N/A

Top boy: Frederick Fairhurst 3.5/5

Under 20

Top girl: N/A

Top boy: Nikolai Harison 2.5/5



Figure 11. The U8 winner Sultan

Photo by A Atkinson ©

2026 EJCOA National Junior Finals



Figure 12. U10 Winners Mary and Harrison
Photo by A Atkinson ©

The Lesson of the Weekend



Figure 13. SPTW Founder IM Lorin D'Costa giving a lecture

2026 EJCOA National Junior Finals

Photo by J Hung ©

One of the weekend's most popular sessions came from IM Lorin D'Costa, who challenged players to rethink how they study chess. Rather than relying solely on screens, he encouraged juniors to spend even twenty minutes each day replaying the games of the world's greatest players over a physical board, a habit he believes develops calculation, concentration and positional understanding more effectively.

The Future

As the tournament hall gradually emptied with trophies being handed out in the courtyard catching the lovely weather, another successful National Final came to the close. Some players taking away silverware, others taking away valuable lessons from their games and the coaching sessions. Every competitor went home with new experiences to build upon, showcasing the continued development of Junior chess in England.

The EJCOA will continue to be committed in improving its events, for both current and future generation of players development. Our work extends beyond supporting juniors, with continued investment into projects for coaches and arbiters, ensuring the foundations for English Junior Chess remains strong so that the future is in capable hands.

With that, EJCOA 2026 comes to an end. We congratulate all that partook in the final and the leadup to the finale, and we look forward to welcoming everyone back for an even stronger EJCOA 2027

Join the Movement

To learn and support EJCOA, visit **ejcoa.co.uk** or follow us on social media

Liveboard Link:

<https://lichess.org/broadcast/ejcoa-national-youth-finals-u16-20/round-1/ImFVmU00>

Link to final standings:

2026 EJCOA National Junior Finals

Under 8: <https://s3.chess-results.com/tnr1420947.aspx?lan=1&art=4&fed=ENG&turdet=YES&flag=30&SNode=S0>

Under 10: <https://s3.chess-results.com/tnr1420945.aspx?lan=1&art=4&fed=ENG&turdet=YES&flag=30&SNode=S0>

Under 12: <https://s2.chess-results.com/tnr1420944.aspx?lan=1&art=0&fed=ENG&turdet=YES&flag=30&SNode=S0>

Under 14: <https://s2.chess-results.com/tnr1420943.aspx?lan=1&art=0&fed=ENG&turdet=YES&flag=30&SNode=S0>

Combined U16-U20: <https://s2.chess-results.com/tnr1420942.aspx?lan=1&art=0&fed=ENG&turdet=YES&flag=30&SNode=S0>