



Interview

Magnus Carlsen:

“This victory is a milestone for my career. Biel is a perfect fit for me.”

Interview: Olivier Breisacher



Magnus Carlsen played his first high-level grandmaster tournament in Biel in 2005 (category 16). He was 14 years old, he finished 6th. As he was leaving Biel, he said, “I will never finish last again here.” In 2006, he climbed to 2nd place, adding, “If I come back in 2007, it has to be for a victory.” Carlsen has just accomplished what he had predicted: on August 2, he won his first high-level tournament, in the 18 category.

A few hours after his tiebreaker victory over Alexander Onischuk and before flying home to Norway, the youngest victor in the history of the Biel Grandmaster tournament talked about his swiss itinerary and other current events.

Magnus Carlsen, what does this victory mean to you?

I won this tournament in category 18, which is the most important success in my career. I will remember it as a special moment. I finished second at the Morelia/Linares tournament last March, but a 1st place is something else.

Biel seems to be a good fit for you.

Yes, I feel good here. The playing conditions are good, and so is the atmosphere. I also like the fact that the tournament takes place in the same hall as the Opens.

You won after five tie-break games against Alexander Onischuk, with a final “Armageddon” blitz that was favorable to you. What do you think of the “tie-break” to decide between winners who have equal points, rather than relying on “Sonnenborn-Berger”?

It is a very interesting idea that could be replicated in other places. Of course, weariness can be a decisive factor. However, it gives a clear winner in a tournament and that is very important. Chance plays a lesser role than with the Sonnenborn-Berger point system.

In this tournament, you were in the lead for a long time.

I was lucky against Motylev, and I played well against Onischuk. With 4.5 points in 6 games, I was almost certain of winning the tournament.

You unexpectedly lost twice, against Yannick Pelletier and Loek van Wely.

Two disastrous games! I do not want to remember all the miscalculations I made. Later, I even wondered how I could have played so badly. Against Pelletier, it was not a bad idea to sacrifice 16. Bh7. But with my move on 21. Ne4 I made a deadly mistake.

What about your best games?

It is difficult to choose between my victories against Onischuk or Radjabov. It was the first time I beat Radjabov in classical games, after four draws, including two in Biel last year. Every time, it felt as if my position was at least as good as his. This time it worked.



Since your last visit to Biel in 2006, you have been invited to the most prestigious tournaments in the international circuit.

I have been through ups and downs, but I also noticed that I could resist quite well against top players, if not as well as them. I still need to gain stability and improve my opening repertoire, which is not as good as what my direct opponents can produce. It will come with time. However, I am very satisfied with my results.

Last June, at the Elista tournament in Russia, you were the youngest competitor in history for a world title. You failed of becoming the youngest finalist of a world championship tournament.

I am not too disappointed. I had nothing to lose against Levon Aronian. In any case, I will have other opportunities in my career. Needless to say, I am thinking of the world title, but I will be better prepared in a few years to reach this goal.

What is your plan?

I will enjoy my vacation for a while, and then I will go back to school. Later, I will participate in the European Club Cup (with Baden-Baden), a blindfold chess tournament in Bilbao, the Tal Memorial in Moscow, and the World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk.

You took part in the Biel Festival without the presence of the your father. Two friends who were part of the Open accompanied you. It seemed to have worked well.

Last year at the Olympiads, my father was not present either. Everything went well in Biel. I had his moral support anyway.

How do you handle being a celebrity at 16?

It is not very important to me. Actually, I do not understand why some people absolutely want to know me, just because I am well known. I had a few problems with that when I became a grandmaster at 13. It is a little easier now. In any case, chess is not very popular in Norway. I take the bus to school every day, and someone recognizes me only every couple of weeks.

How is school going, in spite of your long absences for chess competitions?

It is going well. I am in a special curriculum for young athletes of my region. Given the fact that so many disciplines are represented, we almost never attend classes together.

Do you plan to attend university later?

My parents would like me to, but I am not sure. I would like to dedicate myself to chess.

You never took classes in a chess school. According to many experts, this is a disadvantage.

I do not think so. In a chess school, you have to study chess, even if you do not want to. For me, chess was always spontaneous; I have always felt the need to work on my own, which is much more valuable to me. I have learned a lot by myself, nobody has ever forced me. I studied with books, then with a computer. I was also trained by Simen Adgstein.

Your fees and prizes are going up in tournaments. What is your relationship to money?

To be honest, I do not know what to do with it. A company has been created for practical reasons. I am not a spender; I do not have big needs. I do not go shopping to buy clothes and my cell phone bills are ridiculously low, as opposed to my friends.

What kind of teenager are you?

I am quiet. I can be ironic and self-derisive.

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Do you dream of chess in your sleep?

Rarely. When I do, however, nightmares wake me up with a jolt. I see myself make a stupid mistake, or I see my opponents cheat so that they can beat me!

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