



Players

Magnus Carlsen



Norway, 17 yo

Elo: 2775

World ranking: 6

Date and place of birth: 30.11. 1990 in Lommedalen

Lives in: Lommedalen

National ranking: 1

World junior ranking: 1

Best world ranking: 5 (April 2008)

In Biel GMT: 2005 (6th), 2006 (2nd), 2007 (Winner)

Number 2 in the World... actually

In the last few years, it has not been difficult to predict a glorious future for Magnus Carlsen. Nevertheless, few had foreseen such a precocious and mind-blowing breakthrough, especially in the last year. It was in Biel, at the 2007 Grandmaster Tournament, that he began his unstoppable rise. He clinched the gold medal of the 40th jubilee edition of the Festival, ranking first with 5,5 points in 9 matches, and beating U.S. player Alexander Onischuk in the tie-break.

In the summer of 2008, one should take the FIDE rankings with caution: Carlsen is ranked 6th in the world, with 2775 points. In fact, for administrative and timing reasons, the ranking does not yet take into account the results of the Foros tournament (Ukraine), which Carlsen brilliantly won in mid-June. In this case, he would have reached 2792 points Elo and would stand at the second place of the world's top players list, just behind Viswanathan Anand.

Thus, Magnus Carlsen is actually number 2 in the world, and he is only 17. It has been an incredible year: at the end of 2007, he reached the semi-finals of the World Cup (in Russia, with 128 participants). It was only the beginning. A month later, he shared the first place of the prestigious tournament of Wijk aan Zee (Netherlands) with 8 points in 13 matches, with players of the caliber of Anand, Kramnik, Ivanchuk or Leko trailing him. There was no doubt: he was now part of the world elite. He confirmed it a month later in Morelia/Linares (Mexico/Spain) with an extraordinary second place. In April, he won in Baku (Azerbaijan), in the first Grand Prix that counts for the world championship.

In spite of his young age, Magnus Carlsen is already considered an exceptional grandmaster, and he takes advantage of every position on the chessboard. Most of all, he is very creative. He recently added risky and dangerous openings to his repertoire. Carlsen is an authentic, multi-talented artist, whose rise to the top should only be a matter of time.



It was in Biel in 2005 that Magnus Carlsen took part in his first high-level closed competition. He was 14 then. In his 4th consecutive participation, the champion from Lommedalen (a suburb of Oslo) is the favorite of the 2008 edition. Chess connoisseurs are looking forward to enjoying his attractive matches.

Simon Kümin (olb/bs)

Visit Magnus Carlsen's blog: : <http://blog.magnuschess.com>

Leinier Dominguez



Cuba, 24 yo

Elo: 2708

World ranking: 25

Date and place of birth: 23.09.1983 in Havana

Lives in: Havana

National ranking: 1

Best world ranking: 25 (July 2008)

In Biel GMT: -

The Fearless Ambassador of Cuba

It is common knowledge that chess is very popular in Cuba. As a reminder, the third world champion in history, José Raul Capablanca (1888-1942) came from that country. His quasi invincibility earned him the nickname of "chess machine."

Soviet money does not flow into Cuba anymore, and this situation has had consequences for chess. Nevertheless, first-rate players climb the world's rankings. Leinier Dominguez is precisely the one who went the furthest. He is now 25th in the recent FIDE ratings, his best personal result as he arrives at the Biel festival, terra incognita for him.

The name of Leinier Dominguez was first heard in 1999, when, at 16, he finished third in the Cuban national championship. A year later, he had already become grandmaster and won the zonal tournament of Latin America (qualifying stage for the world championship); then, he successfully represented his country at the Olympics. He accomplished his greatest achievement at the Tripoli world championship (knock-out system), in which he reached the quarterfinals; he lost by a narrow margin to the Azeri player Teimour Radjabov.

Leinier Dominguez was twice Cuban national champion (in 2004 and 2006); one of his main rivals is his fellow citizen Lazaro Bruzon, who played in Biel in 2006. Dominguez has won twice the famous Capablanca Memorial, one of the most renowned tournaments in Latin America. His second victory is



only a few weeks old. The best Cuban player of this time is able to outdo himself and achieve great things, such as his victory in Barcelona (2006), when he beat the top-10 player Vassily Ivanchuk (Ukraine) with 8 points in 9 matches and a performance of 2932 Elo points.

Leinier Dominguez's repertoire of openings is varied. He is at ease in solid and tactical positions. He is fearless when he faces big names of the chess world. Needless to say, he could do well in Biel if he maintains the quality of play he has demonstrated this year. (sk/olb)

Evgeny Alekseev



Russia, 22 yo

Elo: 2708

World ranking: 26

Date and place of birth: 28.11.1985 in Puschkin

Lives in: St. Petersburg

National ranking: 6

Best world ranking: 14 (October 2006)

In Biel GMT: -

The Success of the Russian School

Although the political and economic contexts are different, Russia still has plenty of talented players, among the best in the chess world. The situation has completely changed in the last few years. The disappearance of the Soviet bloc meant the end of state financial support; the best players had to look for a sports and financial home in Western Europe or the U.S. However, like with other elite sports, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the former Soviet republics now organize first-rate national championships, with significant means, thanks to the support of powerful oil and gas moguls.

Evgeny Alekseev is an emerging force in this new context. He is part of this new Russian generation that produces an abundance of young champions (e.g. Grischuk, Jakovenko, Inarkiev), which show very promising talent. At only 22, the champion of St Petersburg has already reached the world's top 20. In Biel, he will compete in the Grandmaster tournament for the first time, with the number 26.

His honor roll is already convincing. He won the Geneva Open in 2004, became champion of Russia in 2006, and confirmed the following year by winning the famous Aeroflot Open in Moscow (one of the most competitive in the world). He placed second in the Dortmund invitation tournament, behind Vladimir Kramnik.



Evgeny Alekseev's coach is Sergey Dolmatov, who is highly regarded in Russia, and whose skills in training young talents have been confirmed a while ago. Alekseev's recent successes show that he has become an assertive and consistent player against the best in the world. At the Biel Congress Center, he will enter the competition with the exact same number of Elo points as Leinier Dominguez, the grandmaster from Cuba. (sk/olb)

Etienne Bacrot



France, 25 yo

Elo: 2691

World ranking: 33

Date and place of birth: 22.01.1983 in Lille

Lives in: Toulon

National ranking: 1

Best world ranking: 9 (April 2005)

In Biel GMT: 2003 (2nd), 2004 (5th)

The Return of the Little Prince

Old-timers of the Biel Festival still remember the little 12-year-old prodigy who finished first of his tournament (a team competition among young swiss talents and an international team). This happened in 1995, when Etienne Bacrot first came to Biel.

It was only the beginning for the little prince of chess. What a career he's had: world champion in U10 and U12, international master at age 12, grandmaster at age 14 and 2 months (at the time, the youngest in history), France champion for five consecutive years (1999-2003) and places regularly in the top-15 world ratings. In 2004, Etienne Bacrot passed the threshold of 2700 Elo points for the first time, while participating in more top tournaments and beating the best grandmasters, such as then world champion, Vladimir Kramnik (2005).

Born in Lille in January 1983, Etienne grew up in the Picardie region and lived in the village of Méricourt-sur-Somme. He is now married, has two children, and lives on the French Riviera. For a few years, he has been writing a column in the weekly "Paris Match." In the last few months, he has developed an excellent personal website (in English and French). On www.chess22.fr he writes about his career and tournaments, as well as about international current events and tactical innovations. Etienne Bacrot talks about the most important variations in his eyes. His candidness is appreciate, especially in regards to other grandmasters who prefer to keep their analyses private, by fear of benefiting their rivals.

With his usual candidness, the French player admits that he has not been in great shape recently. He had his ups and downs during some tournaments, especially at the Baku Grand Prix, which explains



the loss of some Elo points (he stood at 2691 in July 2008), and his current 33rd place. But there is no law of series. Etienne Bacrot remembers that it was at the Biel Congress Hall, in 2003, when he achieved one of the best results of his young career when he won the 2nd place of the grandmasters tournament, behind Alexander Morozevich. It was also in Switzerland, in 1999, that he won the Lausanne Young Masters (unofficial junior world championship); he was then 16.

After 2003 and 2004, he will compete for the third time in the grandmasters tournament of Biel, with the determination of an ambitious outsider. (sk/olb)

Alexander Onischuk



United States, 32 yo

Elo: 2670

World ranking: 50

Date and place of birth: 3.9.1975 in Sevastopol (Ukraine)

Lives in: Manassas (Virginia)

National ranking: 3

Best world ranking: 28 (July 2001)

In Biel GMT: 1999 (3rd), 2007 (Co-Winner); won the GMT B in 1997

The Pursuit of a New Performance

Alexander Onischuk's strengths are well known: a universal player, who is at ease in strategic and tactical positions, and a tough defender. He displayed his skills in the summer of 2007, when he tied Magnus Carlsen at the end of the Biel grandmaster tournament, after some brilliant victories during the Festival. The American player yielded to the Norwegian by a narrow margin, in the fifth match of the tie-break (blitz).

Born in Sevastopol, Ukraine, Alexander Onischuk received an early initiation to chess. He followed the Soviet training school while studying sociology in Moscow. His hard work paid off: in 1995, he represented his country at the world championships for juniors and finished second. A pillar of the national team, with which he won the silver medal at the 1996 and 1998 Olympics, he took advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union, traveled freely, and participated in numerous tournaments abroad.

In 2001, he received a green card and settled in the U.S., first in Denver (Colorado), then in Baltimore (Maryland) and now in Manassas (Virginia), close to Washington, D.C. A member of the U.S. national team, he was crowned U.S. champion in 2006, and finished at the second place in 2007 and 2008.



Today, his official I.D. documents and his personal website (www.alexonischuk.com) show that he replaced his first name “Alexander” with “Alex.”

He comes to Biel for the fifth time. In 1997, he won the grandmasters B tournament. In 1999, he earned the bronze medal at the grandmasters tournament, and silver in 2007. He strives to climb the last step in 2008, and achieve a new feat. (sk/olb)

Yannick Pelletier



Switzerland, 31 yo

Elo: 2569

Date and place of birth: 22.9.1976 in Biel

Lives in: Montpellier

National ranking: 3

Best world ranking: 69th (January 2003)

In Biel GMT: 1997 (6th), 1998 (5th), 1999 (5th), 2001 (4th), 2002 (5th), 2003 (4th), 2004 (4th), 2005 (3rd), 2006 (5th), 2007 (3th)

Welcome to Biel

Yannick Pelletier settled in 2007 in Montpellier, along with his girlfriend Sophie Milliet, who is also a chess player. Nevertheless, the best grandmaster “made in Switzerland” will always feels at home at the Biel International Festival, which he has been attending for two decades, and in which he participated for the first time in the grandmaster tournament in 1997, when he was 20.

Every year, the pre-tournament script looks the same: he is ranked last at the start of the grandmaster tournament, but he takes the best of the situation, and resists his opponents—most of whom are better ranked than he is. In the last ten years, he never finished “his” competition at the last rank. Even better: in 2005 and 2007, he finished third, ahead from impressive players such as Judit Polgar, Teimur Radjabov or Alexander Grischuk.

This summer, Yannick Pelletier (2569) has 206 fewer Elo points than Magnus Carlsen (2765), who is the top-seeded in Biel, and 100 fewer than all other contenders. History has shown that the chessboard reality can change on one given day. Didn't the French-Swiss player beat Magnus Carlsen 12 months ago? Yannick Pelletier is not overwhelmed by his opponents. His pragmatism, his ambition and his fighting spirit contribute to his good performances.

Pelletier was crowned three times individual Swiss champion, and four times with the Biel Chess Society. This season, he competed in many national team championships with Zurich (in Switzerland),

2008 Players

Biel International Chess Festival



Werder Bremen (in Germany) and Clichy (in France), where he became national champion a few weeks ago. He is fluent in French, German, English, Spanish, and Russian. (sk/olb)