

Source:

<https://www.forsvaret.no/aktuelt-og-presse/aktuelt/topp-ti-plassering-i-nato-lynsjakkturnering>

Translation

Top ten final ranking in the NATO blitz chess tournament

In the 33rd edition of the NATO Blitz Chess Championship 2023, Norway's only participant finished ninth place.

Published 20 Sep 2023 09:42

Text: Frederik Ringnes | **Photo:** NATO Chess Championship

Updated: 22 Sep 2023 11:13

From September 3 to 9, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Flaata was in the Slovenian city of Portoroz. Together with 116 players from 17 other nations, the performance in the main tournament was weaker than last year. Flaata ended up in the middle of the field in terms of results, compared to a strong tenth place in last year's tournament.

During the special blitz tournament on Friday 8 September, luckily things went much better, and Flaata led the tournament alone after 7 out of 11 rounds. Although he fell off a bit towards the end, he achieved a great ninth place overall out of 90 players.

- It is great that so many nations are participating, and for military chess this is important. This is something the organizers appreciate, and they are happy that Norway is taking part. The reason is that it is a NATO championship, where you want as many NATO nations represented as possible. Furthermore, we have a proud NATO chess history in Norway, where we have organized this championship a few times. We have also fielded teams a number of times, and won the tournament both as a team and individually.

<photo Alexander Flaata team photo>

Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Flaata is the day-to-day head of the Department of Military Psychiatry and Stress Management (IMPS) in the Norwegian Armed Forces' health service. He is also an experienced chess player and has been playing chess since 1991. Together with his team, SOSS (Selskapet for Oslo-emigraterte Sørlandsjakkspillere), he participated in the European Cup last year, and is participating again this year in Tirana in Albania.

- I am satisfied with the result. I have several title players, and other skilled players behind me on the results list, says Flaata after the annual NATO tournament, which he himself has participated in twice.

In chess, there are four different titles that can be achieved, depending on your ranking on the World Chess Federation's (FIDE) list.

During the tournament he met several players with championship titles. He believes it is important that there is a tournament for the NATO countries.

- The tournament is important to mark unity and make contacts through meeting players from other allied countries. Chess crosses cultural barriers. This year, for example, Turkey was back with a young and strong team, which is a country with a completely different culture to Norway. I see chess as a sport, a form of science, and in some cases art. Chess can also be seen as a universal language – people can play together regardless of gender, culture, ethnicity and religion.

<photo team captains>

Use of psychology

As a psychologist, Flaata has a background that most chess players can benefit from.

- *What is the significance of psychology in chess?*

- Most chess players do not think much about psychology. They focus on the moves and try to do their best, but some are more psychologically oriented, says Flaata.

Often it is about a combination of playing strong, but at the same time radiating self-confidence. Magnus Carlsen can be an example of this.

- Magnus Carlsen does not use psychology, but his reputation gives a psychological advantage, one might say.

In principle, to play chess, it is about being the best at calculating, thinking in time and space, being able to recognize structures, and looking for weaknesses and understanding what you see. You have to combine different types of information, and produce a solution.

- This requires cognitive flexibility and precision. A psychological approach to chess has been controversial in chess history, but no one is unaffected by psychology. It can be about aspects of the person, i.e. the personality, or aspects of the match itself. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and the personality is often reflected in the way we play, says Flaata and continues:

- How important is this game, and how quickly can you get up after a defeat? In some situations, the difference between victory and loss can mean that you do not become world champion, or that you do not get a chess title such as International Master or Grand Master. We have all seen how even Magnus Carlsen can be affected in the decisive moments. One of his strengths is that he is able to bounce back quickly with a win after a bitter loss. Another aspect of chess psychology is body language and how we behave. If you seem very combative, it can create uncertainty or hesitation on the side of the opponent, possibly causing the opponent to get into a fighting mood. The opposite can also be the case, by appearing disinterested or indifferent, one can make the opponent lower their guard. You can also play on psychology by trying to exploit your opponent's weaknesses and your own strengths.

- *Do you benefit from the fact that you are a psychologist when you play chess?*

- I like to believe so. When I play chess, I sometimes use psychology, consciously or unconsciously. I don't know how much it helps me. Primarily, there are techniques to help myself overcome stress, by being present, staying focused, and trying to reverse a negative trend. I can repeat a positive mantra: I feel strong, present and ready. Or that I free myself from the result: I dare to win, dare to lose and dare to draw. Then my decision taking during the game becomes more important than the result. It helps with focus.

- A form of chess psychology is also about looking at the opponent's playing style. It is about evaluating the opponent, analyzing his games, and trying to exploit his own strengths and the opponent's weaknesses.

<photo Alexander round 1>

- I can try to steer into a certain chess opening according to this very principle. I like an active and tactical game with sacrifices, and I am not as fond of long end games. Then I choose to steer towards open and tactical positions. But if you end up on the defensive from the start, you have to try to turn it to your advantage, Flaata says.

- Then you have to create as many problems as possible for the opponent, places where he can make mistakes, and make misjudgments. It is often said that a strong player must be beaten in all phases of the game, both opening, middle game and end game. This is because playing like this can cause problems in all phases, even if the position is "objectively" lost.

Chess for everyone

Many people know the chess player Simen Agdestein, but few know that he has won the NATO chess championship for Norway. In 1986 and 1987, Agdestein won the NATO Chess Championships for Norway. He is later known as Norwegian champion countless times, most recently this year, and he is the trainer of Magnus Carlsen.

Norway had last won a team medal in the 2009 competition. This is the goal for Flaata, who need three Norwegian players in addition to himself to be able to participate in the team competition.

- Everyone in the Armed Forces, both employees and conscripts, can participate. I'm trying to get more people involved, says Flaata. He hopes that next year he can field a Norwegian team if someone signs up.

- I am trying to recruit, and with the conscription model we have in Norway, there will probably be chess players who will serve their first service. Then they can maintain their interest in chess by participating and maybe win a medal in next year's tournament, Flaata says.