

For Immediate Release

## **Stage set for epic MVL v Ding Final**

**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ding Liren go into Grand Chess Tour Final as strong winners after defeating Magnus Carlsen and Lev Aronian, respectively**

**MVL's dramatic Semi-Final win over the World Champion widely seen as epic battle, with The Frenchman showing coolness under fire in decisive Sicilian Najdorf slugfest**

**Magnus Carlsen disappointed but gracious in defeat, now faces Lev Aronian in third-place playoff match**

The stage is set for a thrilling Grand Chess Tour Final between Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ding Liren starting Friday after the Frenchman sensationally knocked out World Champion Magnus Carlsen in an epic climax to their Semi-Final full of exciting rapid, blitz and playoff games.

The Frenchman defeated Carlsen by the narrow margin of a single rapid playoff game, after their regular match was tied 14-14 (two classical draws, two rapid draws, two blitz draws and a blitz win apiece).

The match revealed a slightly under par Magnus under pressure from MVL all the way, yet the World Champion still showing his trademark fighting spirit by tackling the Frenchman head-on in Najdorf Sicilians (where MVL is considered one of the greatest experts).

Ultimately, it was MVL who seemed to cope better with the stress of a crowded tournament calendar, despite his significant admission that his focus remains qualifying for the World Championship Candidates from the FIDE Grand Prix that starts on 10th December in Jerusalem.

In the second Semi-Final match, Ding Liren easily dealt with an out-of-sorts Lev Aronian, running out the comfortable winner with 19-9.

The Grand Chess Tour Final will see two days of Classical chess, and a third day of rapid and blitz (and if necessary playoff) games on Sunday. At stake is the \$150,000 first prize, and \$100,000 for second place.

In his match against Lev Aronian, Magnus Carlsen will be (for him) in the unusual situation of playing for third prize (\$60,000), versus the fourth prize of \$40,000.

While the Final is thus not one that most pundits would necessarily have predicted, it promises to be equally thrilling, as a new player is guaranteed to emerge as the Grand Chess Tour champion. Both players are extremely cool under pressure, and it remains to be seen whether the stress of a packed tournament calendar series will inspire a feast of great chess, or come down to who is the last player standing after a demanding three days of classical, rapid and blitz.

In the British Knockout Championship, also being held at the London Chess Classic, Mickey Adams and David Howell qualified for the Final after defeating Luke McShane and Gawain Jones, respectively.

Adams and Howell will now play two days of Rapid & Blitz to decide the £10,000 winner, while losing Semi-Finalists McShane and Jones will play a two-game exhibition match today featuring a brand new chess variant, "No-Castling Chess," which is being promoted by former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik and has been tried out by Google DeepMind's AI program, AlphaZero.

While the "No-Castling" games are purely for the entertainment of spectators, and no prize money is at stake, chess fans will be eager to see what this new form of the game looks like, how it compares with such variants as Fischer Random – and whether it can produce more exciting top-class GM games.

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Tim Wall, [@London Chess](#), press officer, London Chess Classic

### **Day 3 Recap**

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ding Liren will meet in the finals after defeating Magnus Carlsen and Levon Aronian respectively. While Ding was dominant in his match, Vachier-Lagrave had to go all the way to tiebreaks to secure his spot. Ding and Vachier-Lagrave will be competing for the \$150,000 first place prize and the title of Grand Chess Tour Champion, while Carlsen and Aronian will battle it out for the third place qualifying spot to the 2020 GCT in addition to a \$60,000 prize. Tomorrow the players will take a break from the action to partake in the corporate day, where they will be paired with entrepreneurs in friendly games to raise money for the UK charity Chess in Schools. Action will resume on December 6.

[Read more >](#)

## *The 2019 Grand Chess Tour final matches*

### **Ding Liren vs Levon Aronian**

The Chinese player was completely dominant in his match, advancing to the finals with three blitz games to spare. Aronian was unable to deal with the complications arising from his opponent's piece sacrifices in both rapid games, collapsing at the crucial moments. The two wins in the rapid gave Ding a 6 point lead, and he only needed 1 draw in the remaining 4 blitz games. He secured his spot in the finals by locking up the position in the first blitz game, forcing a draw and reaching 15 points. Aronian suffered two more losses, but did manage to end the day with a win. The Armenian star felt "ashamed" about his play today, whereas Ding felt lucky to win the first game.

### *Ding Liren*

### **Maxime Vachier-Lagrave vs Magnus Carlsen**

Unlike the smooth sailing by Ding, the match between Carlsen and Vachier-Lagrave was a complete roller coaster ride and was decided in the playoffs. Carlsen later explained to Maurice that he felt sluggish and "not good enough in the critical moments." After two tame rapid games, the World Champion escaped unscathed in the first blitz game only to go on to lose the next one. In his typical fashion, he bounced back immediately in the very next game with a win in a rook endgame. After a draw in the final blitz game, the match moved on to tiebreaks. The first tiebreak game was a wild affair with the evaluation of the position changing drastically several times. Carlsen had a crushing attack, but let the advantage slip with inaccurate play. After another blunder he found himself in a difficult position, then ultimately in a lost knight endgame, which Vachier-Lagrave converted masterfully with seconds on his clock. The Frenchman sealed the deal with a draw in the second game. This marks the

World Champion's second tiebreak loss this year, a blemish on his otherwise flawless tiebreak record.

*The handshake at the end of the first playoff game*

Watch all the action live on [GrandChessTour.org](https://www.GrandChessTour.org)

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