

The Salamanca Chess Festival 2024 took place from May 22-25, 2024, in Salamanca, Spain, known as a cradle of modern chess. The main event, an 8-player round-robin featuring Alekseenko, Ponomariov, Adams, Iturrizaga, Mariya Muzychuk, Salimova, Paehtz, Calzetta (four men and four women) with the time control of 45+5 was aimed to commemorate the newborn rules of the modern chess published back in 1497. These new rules were written by Lucena, a student at Salamanca University, who published them in an incunabulum titled “Art of chess with 150 match games”. One of these copies is preserved in the University Historical Library.

The participants competed in a luxurious playing hall, the former Banco de España, a few meters from the Plaza Mayor, with beautiful graphic designs and extraordinary technical means, with the Alumni team of the University of Salamanca at the forefront. The tournament had strong exposure on different platforms and social networks, as well as a YouTube channel.



After the first day, the German Elisabeth Paehtz and Kirill Alekseenko, representing Austria, grabbed the lead, scoring 2/2. The German GM convincingly outplayed Muzychuk and then surprisingly beat Iturrizaga with the black pieces. The young Bulgarian Salimova had a crushing attack vs Alekseenko in Round 2 but eventually fell in a topsy-turvy game. Meanwhile, Ponomariov and Adams, against the odds, netted only a half-point each in two games.

On the second day, the situation turned around. The two leaders faltered a little and allowed Adams and Ponomariov to recover. Alekseenko went too far against Ponomariov, but to the Ukrainian's credit, he defended very well and finally won by direct attack on the black king. Adams had a slight advantage against Paehtz that he eventually converted after the German's gross mistake. Elsewhere, Salimova crushed Spain's Calzetta, and Iturrizaga soundly defeated former Women's World Champion Muzychuk.



The fourth round saw women-vs-men clash on all four boards. Muzychuk was the big winner against the odds, toppling Michael Adams. The Englishman desperately tried to squeeze water out of a stone in a slightly better position, but Mariya reacted well and created counterplay on the kingside until Adams blundered miserably. For her part, the Spaniard Calzetta got an edge against Iturrizaga (in fact, she was winning) but then collapsed in a position with chances to equalise. Salimova tested always interesting Trompowsky against Ponomariov but played perhaps too actively and created some weaknesses in her pawn formation, which was the decisive factor in the endgame. Finally, Elizabeth Paehtz had a hard time facing Alekseenko and threw in the towel on move 49.

Consequently, Alekseenko and Iturrizaga took the lead with 3 points, followed by Ponomarev with 2.5 points.

On Friday, only one round was played, with the last two decisive rounds to go. Alekseenko won against Muzychuk in a typical Nimzo-Indian position, which was slightly better for her but solid for Black. Mariya went wrong on the move 13 and gradually fell into an inferior position. Kirill wrapped it up with a nice tactic on move 28.



Ponomarev beat the Spanish Calzetta, showing his recovery after the bad results of the first day. Paehtz and Salimova drew with the 'New London'. Adams could not prevail over Iturrizaga despite having a bishop pair.

On this day, a special activity was organised, such as a visit to the Library of the University of Salamanca, so that the privileged attendees could see the Lucena incunabulum, on which **the rules of modern chess are based**. A marvel which, according to urban legends, was one of the first 'modern' witnesses to the world champion Boris Spassky on his visit to

Salamanca in 1991, and one of those who emphasised the importance of preserving it and giving it the space it deserves in the history of the city of Salamanca.

Before Saturday's final day, there were three definite candidates for the title: the sole leader, Kiriil Alekseenko, Ruslan Ponomariov and the Spanish-Venezuelan Eduardo Iturrizaga, both trailing Kirill by a half-point.

The key games of the day were, in the sixth round, Alekseenko-Iturrizaga and Ponomariov-Pahtz. And in the seventh and final round, Muzychuk-Ponomariov, Iturrizaga-Salimova and Adams-Alekseenko were scheduled.



Kirill Alekseenko, residing in Valencia (he already speaks a little Spanish), had the most difficult opponents ahead of him. But he settled his duel with his direct rival Iturrizaga with considerable aplomb in a Caro-Kann defence variant of the advance, where he had the advantage of space and better pieces. But Eduardo counter-attacked on the queenside, and

in a few moves, everything became very complicated. Kirill rose to the challenge and scored a very important victory. Meanwhile, Adams made quick work of Paehtz to stay within striking distance from the leader.

Facing Muzychuk with the black pieces in the final seventh round, Ponomariov played with great originality, trying to create attacking chances on the queenside. Eventually, it paid off, as Anna lost her thread in a better position and capitulated on move 45.

This result forced Alekseenko to press hard against Adams because, in the case of a draw, Ponomariov won the tie-break due to his victory in the direct encounter. Michael was a little worse off in the opening, as Kirill emerged with an extra pawn. However, it wasn't easy because the Englishman had some compensation and later on managed to complicate the game with a c5-break, almost forcing the d5-advance. Trying to win at any cost Alekseenko took it too far, making the crucial mistake on move 43 that cost him the game and the title.

Final standings:

1 GM	Ponomariov, Ruslan	UKR 2646 5½
2 GM	Alekseenko, Kirill	AUT 2677 5
3 GM	Iturrizaga Bonelli, Eduardo	ESP 2590 4½
4 GM	Adams, Michael	ENG 2676 3½
5 GM	Paehtz, Elisabeth	GER 2457 3½
6 IM	Salimova, Nurgyul	BUL 2436 3
7 GM	Muzychuk, Mariya	UKR 2510 2½
8 WGM	Calzetta Ruiz, Monica	ESP 2242 0½