38. ... Rd4!

Avoiding 38. ... Rxf2 39. Ra8+ Kf7 40. Ra7+ Kg6 41. Rg7+! with stalemate. “It is amazing that I even had this idea,” admitted Caruana.

39. Ra8+ Kf7 40. Ra3

“I would have had more chances with 40. Ra7+ Ke8 41. Ra8+ Kd7 42. Ra7+,” said Caruana, but Carlsen showed 42. ... Ke8! 43. Re7 Rd1!! 44. Kh2 Rf1 45. Rx6 Rxf2+ 46. Kh3 Rf1 47. Kh2 Re1 “and it should still be winning,” said the Norwegian.

40. ... Rxc4

“It is just over,” said Carlsen.

41. Rxf3+ Ke7 42. Re3 Rd4 43. f3 c4 44. Ra3 Rd3 45. Ra7+ Kg6 46. Kg2 c3 47. Ra4 c2 48. Rc4 Rd2+ 49. Kh3 Kd7 50. Rc5 Rf2 51. f4

There are not even any Rxc2 stalemate tricks because of this pawn.

51. ... Rf3+ 52. Kh2 Rfx4, White resigned.

CARUANA: THE UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

In some ways Caruana’s early career approximates that of his title opponent.

Caruana enjoyed an excellent early chess education in New York (where his family had moved from Caruana’s birthplace Miami when he was a pre-schooler) and began competing in tournaments around Europe, also becoming a grandmaster at 14.

Yet by then Caruana’s family had made even bigger life changes than Carlsen’s in order to help their son’s rise up the chess ladder.

Caruana and his parents moved to Europe in 2004 and the 12-year-old rising star became a chess professional. A year later Caruana had already been considering a change back to the U.S. However, he was now rated above 2800 and was world number two. A bidding war began between the Italian Chess Federation, who had begun supporting Caruana’s considerable training costs, and U.S. interests. Ultimately, the U.S. proved to have the resources to regain their man.

In 2015 Caruana officially moved to St. Louis and only a year later he was helping the U.S. team take their first Olympic team gold in 40 years.

Though he won many top-level tournaments between 2015 and 2017, Caruana could not recapture the incredible standard he had set at the 2014 Sinquefield Cup.

However, from March 2018 onward Caruana has played at an extraordinary level, with four elite tournament wins and a second at the U.S. Championship behind GM Sam Shankland.

Caruana seems to have added a seemingly indestructible opening repertoire to his hardworking, calculation-heavy, fearless style. His sense of danger can occasionally desert him, but when Caruana goes all-in few can hold him back, as the following game against Carlsen from the memorable 2014 Sinquefield Cup shows.

BISHOP’S OPENING (C24)

GM Magnus Carlsen (FIDE 2877, NOR)
GM Fabiano Caruana (FIDE 2801, ITA)
2014 Sinquefield Cup (3), St. Louis, Missouri, 08.29.2014

1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Nf6 3. d3

The move 3. Nd3 is not a viable option for White nowadays at the highest levels because 3. ... Nxe4 4. Qh5 Nd6 5. Bb3 Be7 is too close to dead equal.

3. ... c6 4. Nf3 d5 5. Bb3 Bb4+

This takes the c3-square away from the white knight. The continuation 5. ... Bd6 6. Nc3 dxe4 7. Ng5 0-0 is not bad for Black but offers few winning chances.

6. c3 Bd6 7.Bg5

“I thought this was too early,” said Caruana.

7. ... dxe4 8. dx e4 h6 9. Bh4 Qe7 10. Nbd2 Nbd7 11. Bg3

“This looks a little strange, but he didn’t want me to play ... Nf8-g6,” explained Caruana.

11. ... Bc7 12. 0-0 Nh5! 13. h3?

“Magnus probably thought that he could play 13. Nxe5? Nxe5 14. Qxh5 and missed 14. ... Bg4!,” said Caruana. “Now if he loses the g3-bishop it will just be a symmetrical structure with no prospects for White. So I expected something like 13. Nh4 Nxg3 14. fxg3?, but not the idea he played.”

13. ... Nxe3

“I’ll have to ask Magnus if I really made a mistake there,” said Caruana, “because he could have taken his knight back.”

13. ... Nxf3 14. Qxh7+ Kxh7 15. Ng5

“Now I have a bit of a winning edge,” Caruana commented.

15. ... Nxe5 16. fxe5 Ng4

“Before I played 16. ... Rxe5 Magnus would have played 17. Bf4,” explained Caruana.

17. ... Qg5!

The line 17. ... Qd8 18. Rf8+ Qxf8 19. Nxf8 Kxf8 gives Black plenty of material for the queen but after 20. Qh5 the black king remains exposed.

18. Bf8+ Kh7 19. Nxe8

“This was a big shock for me—he abandons his king to take my rook,” explained Caruana.