The Queen's Gambit

by chashmish

Summary

Bitter rivals Makoto Nijima and Goro Akechi compete for the title of world chessboxing champion. Haru Okumura, a fan-favorite commentator, is there to observe the match. Who will win in this battle of strategy and strength? The answer is anyone's guess.

Notes

do you know what chessboxing is? neither did i until yul commissioned me to write makoto and goro doing it. i can only hope i did this incredible sport justice

happy graduation yul!! you did it!!

It was an exciting day for Haru Okumura.

And also a very tense day. One might have even called it a stressful day. But she was a professional. What mattered was that she had a job to do. And she was going to do her job well.

Haru smoothed down her skirt before sitting down at the commentator’s table. She looked thoughtfully at the empty boxing ring in front of her. The room was packed with fans, their excited voices filling the air.

Haru leaned forward and spoke into her microphone. “Hello, chessboxing fans!”
The crowd roared.

"We love you, Haru!" someone yelled.

Haru giggled. "I love all of you, too! But let us focus on the matter at hand. As you all know, chessboxing is a sport that combines chess and boxing– a perfect combination of strategy and raw strength, of brain and brawn. And this is a very important match."

The crowd murmured in agreement.

“Today,” Haru continued, “two spirited fighters will be competing for the title of world chessboxing champion!” She paused. “I suppose I should disclose that I’m currently involved with one of them. But rest assured, I won’t let bias impede my commentary!” She gave a tinkling laugh. “Probably.”

The lights suddenly dimmed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Haru said, "it's time to introduce our competitors."

From one side of the ring, a woman with short, choppy hair appeared. Her mouth was set in a grim line, and her cold eyes were narrowed. The intensity of those eyes reflected a long history of thrilling knockouts, both on the chessboard and on the ring. As all the fans in the room knew, she was Makoto Niijima, who had been a formidable name in the chessboxing world since she was in high school.

From the other side came a shockingly handsome man with a winning smile. He waved brightly at the audience, giving them a wink, before turning his gaze to Makoto. His expression transformed immediately into something haughty and smug. He lifted his chin and stood straight, his aura nearly matching hers in raw power. It was Goro Akechi, another famous chessboxer, and universally agreed-upon to be a prodigy.

The audience felt the crackling tension in the air and shifted excitedly in their seats. These two fighters had transformed chessboxing, giving it its first long-term rivalry and drawing countless more spectators to the ring. In this meeting of bitter adversaries, it was anyone's guess who the victor would be.

"There's Makoto Niijima!" Haru shouted. "Talented and beautiful to boot! With a razor-sharp mind and a body like a goddess of war, she's unstoppable, and all her medals prove it! Ah, and there's Akechi, I suppose."

Some audience members would later swear that they saw Akechi shoot the commentator a glare at that point.

"I mean… there's Goro Akechi, a formidable fighter in his own right, and an old hand at the classic game of chess," Haru amended sweetly.

Both competitors were eager to start. This wouldn't be a long match– with six rounds of chess and five rounds of boxing, each lasting three minutes, the victor would be decided fairly quickly. The game would end if one of them forfeited, or if there was a checkmate on the board or a knockout in the ring.

First up was chess. In the middle of the ring, assistants brought over a board on a table and two chairs. Makoto and Akechi took their seats. A spotlight shone on the two of them. The timer was set.

"Our competitors are wearing noise-canceling headphones to prevent their being distracted by my chess commentary," Haru spoke into the mic. "With that being said, Akechi's opening move seems
almost as ill-planned as his haircut. Ah, look! Makoto is deftly countering with a Dutch defense. Fascinating! I wonder how her gambit will pay off. If Akechi is able to quit checking how he looks in the projector screen for even a moment, he may be able to develop a sound strategy for victory. Maybe."

The timer went off, and the lighting immediately changed. Assistants carefully pulled the table away. In seconds, the ring was clear. It was time for the first round of boxing.

Akechi started strong, hitting Makoto's side with a right hook. Makoto responded in turn, managing to push Akechi backwards with a series of powerful strikes. Her confident assault lasted until the round ended, but Akechi managed a formidable defense.

"Things got a little intense there, ladies and gentlemen!" Haru was fanning herself, eyes fixed on Makoto. "Well, back to chess!"

Akechi and Makoto breathed heavily after sitting down at the chess table, looking sweaty and a little worn-out as they stared at the pieces before them.

Makoto set her jaw and moved her knight forward. Akechi captured one of her pawns. They continued to play until the timer went off once more.

"Hmm," Haru mused. "Four rounds left in the chess game, and it doesn't seem like either fighter has an explicit advantage. We'll have to wait and see, chessboxing fans."

In the boxing ring, things were still tense. Makoto eventually came close to a knockout, grabbing Akechi in a chokehold for a long moment, but he managed to slip away and get in another hit just before the round ended.

After the round, someone in the audience unveiled a large banner, which read "AKECHI KEEP FIGHTING!" Akechi stared at it for a moment, looking incredulous, before finally beaming and waving.

*Looks like Akechi's weak to spelling mistakes,* Haru thought. And then she had a realization. *Oh!*

Haru leaned into the mic. "An exacting performance as always from Akechi! He's known to be persistent. As long as things remain at an impasse, he'll keep fighting his hardest!"

Makoto looked at her, seemingly confused. Then, her eyes suddenly widened.

No one else noticed that look– the chess table was being brought out. Makoto and Akechi sat down, looking a little worse for wear. It wasn't exactly easy to make chess strategy decisions after getting thoroughly knocked around in the ring. Akechi had a bloody nose. Makoto kept wincing and rolling her right shoulder.

"But there can be no hesitation," Haru said quietly into the mic. "This sport is about quick thinking. About using your brain, even when it feels like someone's punched your brain in the face. It's about standing proud and unyielding in tumultuous times, like a tall tree refusing to fall in the winds of a hurricane." She giggled. "I just love it! Don't you?"

Akechi captured one of Makoto’s knights, and she tensed up and hesitated. The timer continued to count down, and the people in the audience held their breaths. Finally, Makoto pushed her rook forward.

There were scattered groans from the crowd.
"Makoto…" Haru bit her lip. "It looks like Makoto's left her queen open to be captured."

The round ended before Akechi could make his move. But there was a smug smile on his face. He knew exactly what mistake Makoto had made— and what he had to do next.

Once more, the table was pushed aside, and the competitors donned their gloves and mouth guards. They stood glaring at one another. And then, the fight was on again.

This time Makoto was even fiercer. She launched a quick attack before Akechi even had time to think. For just one second, he was clearly caught off-guard, looking befuddled as he dodged to avoid a blow… leaving him wide open.

Makoto didn't waste any time. She moved in with an unforgiving uppercut. And then she did it again. And then, she followed it up with a harsh jab to Akechi’s stomach.

Akechi staggered before he crumpled onto the ground. Makoto, Haru, the audience, and the referee waited with bated breath.

But he didn't get up again.

Looking up, the referee called it. The crowd exploded into cheers.

"There you have it, ladies and gentlemen!" Haru roared. "A technical knockout!"

Makoto had used Akechi's arrogance against him! Just like he wasn't able to resist scrutinizing a spelling mistake, there was no way he could stay focused in the ring when Makoto had made such a risky move on the chessboard. And she'd timed it exactly so he wouldn't be able to counter until the next round of chess. Thinking he had the game in the bag, Akechi let his guard down— just in time for Makoto to get her second wind and overcome him with raw strength and a devastating series of attacks.

"Congratulations to Makoto Niijima, the new world chessboxing!" Haru cheered. "And my girlfriend!"

Makoto grinned as she took the referee's hand and raised it high. Then she and Akechi, who had staggered to his feet, faced each other.

"Well," Akechi said evenly, "congratulations." He wiped some blood off his jaw.

"For what it's worth, you were a worthy opponent." Makoto seemed amused.

"That commentator was clearly biased," Akechi muttered. "I have half a mind to file a complaint with the World Chessboxing Organization."

Makoto raised an eyebrow. "Relax, Akechi. You're still the darling of the WCBO. They know you've got star power. With your natural celebrity aura, they're counting on you to bring chessboxing to the world stage."

"You're only humoring me," Akechi grumbled. "But I'll allow it." He caught sight of a flashing camera and immediately pulled Makoto closer by the shoulder. "Ah, a photo op! Look alive!"

With the quick press of a shutter button, the photographer captured Akechi's winning smile and Makoto's battle-hardened glare.

And so it was that the title of world chessboxing champion was conferred— though the rivalry
between Makoto Niijima and Goro Akechi was sure to last, if Haru Okumura had any say in the matter. And oh, she was going to make sure she did. After all, it was spectacular publicity—just great for business. And it was always a welcome sight to see her girlfriend cut that prick down to size, and look very attractive while doing it.

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