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Inside Chess

Yasser Seirawan

A Stirring Game

Kasparov

vs.

Hracek

1996 Yerevan Chess Olympiad

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At the halfway point of the 1996 Yerevan Chess Olympiad the favorite seed, Russia, was beginning to flex their muscles. Russia's first board, PCA Champion Garry Kasparov finally got a victory over the Czech player Hracek. Undoubtedly inspired, the rest of the Russian team responded with a superb 3½-½ victory over the Czech Republic. This gave the Russian team 21 points and put them one and a half points clear of an inspired Spanish team. While Russia wasn't blistering the field they were doing what they had to do. Against good opposition they scored well and were in excellent position to repeat as Gold medalists.

The Spanish team had also been impressive. With the sudden appearance of a new big gun - Alexey Shirov from Latvia - on board one, Spain emerged as a contender. One wondered about their possibilities had émigré Valery Salov also competed for Spain. As it was, Spain upset England 3-1, a huge victory for the underdog! If Spain could hold its form together through the tough last rounds, they should finish in the top ten with a possibility of qualifying for the World Team Championships in Lucerne.

In a massive tie for the third position China, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Bulgaria, Estonia and Hungary all had 18 points. Many teams, including the USA and Armenia 1, were nipping at the leaders heels with 17½ points. I was particularly impressed with China. For several years the Chinese Women had vaulted to become some of the world's best players. Xie Jun even became the Women's World Champion. Now the Chinese men had made some breakthroughs and were emerging as a threat to the perennial European powerhouses. Of this group, Bulgaria, lead

by Veselin Topalov, was the strongest threat to take a medal. Armenia 1, enjoying the support of the home crowd, was also considered a dangerous threat. The World Team Champions, the USA, were less than impressive. However, a shocking 3½-½ pasting of a powerful Iceland team had boosted the USA out of ignominy. The USA has always been tough down the stretch and a good thing too! The Americans started poorly in these as well as the Moscow 1994 Olympics.

Some of the big name teams that are missing from the above include: England (17½), Germany (16½), France (16½), Latvia (16½) and Bosnia Herzegovina (16½). All of these teams would have to improve their play to make this a memorable Olympiad.

Below one annotated game at the halfway point.

Games Round 7 Men *Russia - Czech Republic* 3½-½

White: Kasparov

Black: Hracek

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0 Nxd4

A bit unusual. More traditional is 8...Be7 or 8...h6, the text seeks an early resolution of the central tension in order to launch a quick Queenside attack.

9.Qxd4 Be7 10.f4 b5



This is Black's motivation. He hopes that the move ...b5-b4 will come at an injurious moment for White. Kasparov now takes the bull by the horns and uncorks an ingenious idea of playing directly in the center.

11.Bxf6!?

Note that White gets nothing in the ending after 11.e5 dxe5 12.Qxd8+ Bxd8 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Bxd8 Kxd8 as the e5-pawn becomes a liability.

11...gxf6 12.e5

An extraordinary move as White attacks Black's center by a method that is unfamiliar to me. The move is both diabolical and quite logical. In this typical Rauzer position, White often has trouble finding a suitable square for his c3-Knight. This is quite logical as Black's center is flexible. Sometimes ...e6-e5 is played making the d5-square an inviting home. But how difficult it seems for the c3-Knight to jump to that square! The text is quite logical as it forces Black to commit his central pawns. That operation completed, the c3-Knight will then find its directions. The move is diabolical because of what it does to Black's two Bishops. In principal, Black would like to open the position; instead he finds himself playing ...d6-d5 keeping the position closed. But think of the consequences to the c8-Bishop. How will it become active?

12...d5

I know what its like sitting on the opposite side of a Kasparov novelty and it is not a pleasant experience. You immediately have the impression that your Garry has worked out all the possibilities down to the most minute detail. Even a ghost of an attack is enough to convince you that such a line of play leads to forced mate. Stung by the sudden fears of the positions it is very hard to recover your equilibrium.

Black could have tried 12...dxe5 13.Qe4 (As before, 13.Qxd8+ Bxd8 promises White nothing.) Bd7 when the position is pregnant with possibilities. Black is dreaming of ...Ra8-c8 and ...Qd8-c7 with a promising position. But that ghost of an attack is frightening. Isn't Black's King sitting in the center begging for a right cross? What about 14.Nxb5 axb5 15.Bxb5 Ra7 16.Rxd7 Rxd7 17.Rd1 winning brilliantly? Well, yes indeed, that is a fine line, but why capture the Knight? If 14.Nxb5 O-O offers a complex game. White after all has opened the Queenside.

But that ghost is still hanging around. What about 12...dxe5 13.Qe4 Bd7 14.Rxd7 instead? The line appears pretty forced: 14...Kxd7 15.Bxb5+ axb5 16.Rd1+ Bd6 17.Nxb5 Ke7 18.Rxd6 Qb8 19.Qb4 when no one wants to play Black's position. Especially against one of the greatest attacking players of all times!

So that means that 12...dxe5 is tactically refuted. Black is compelled to close the center and fight against White's early initiative. Kasparov once again shows his profound

understanding of the opening.

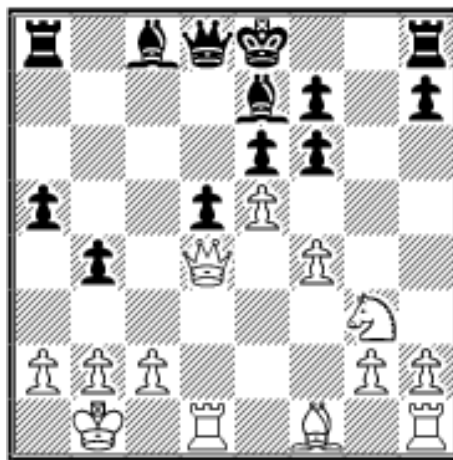
13.Kb1 b4?

White's c3-Knight is poorly placed as its jumping points are all controlled. Thus it makes little sense to force it onto its bicycle. Black has to bite his lip, take a deep breath and try 13...O-O encouraging Kingside aggression. I don't believe in Black's Queenside attack and therefore Black has to take a stand with his King on the Kingside. There are several plans for White to choose from, 14.f5!?, 14.Rd3, 14.Bd3 and 14.h4. Each one has to be analyzed in turn and properly weighed. Since this would cause me a lot of exhaustion, let me just state that Black's main aim is to play ...Kg8-h8 and ...Rf8-g8-g7 keeping things under control. Just two lines: 14.f5 fxe5 15.Qxe5 Bf6 16.Qg3+ Kh8 is a key line. While 14.Rd3 Kh8 15.Rh3 Rg8 16.Bd3 f5 allows Black the chance to cover up. This decision to castle into the attack might not be to everyone's taste, but the alternative 13...f5 14.g4!? fxg4 15.f5 looks promising for White.

14.Ne2!

Garry isn't interested in 14.exf6 Bxf6 15.Qxb4 slurping a pawn but opening up the way to a counterattack by 15...Qc7 and ...Ra8-b8 with the initiative. Instead the Knight seeks greener pastures on either the d4-square or the Kingside.

14...a5 15.Ng3!



Of the many tempting choices: 15.Qd2 preparing Ne2-d4; 15.g4 with the idea f4-f5; Garry finds the best. While Black's Queenside demonstration isn't too impressive, White shouldn't waste tempi. With the text, White is ready to make serious strides on the Kingside. Also he is prepared to handle Black's strategic

plan of trading light squared Bishops: 15...Ba6 16.f5 prying open the Kingside.

15...f5

Not a happy decision. In view of 15...fxe5 16.fxe5 when Bf1-d3 takes over a nice b1-h7 diagonal, Black feels compelled to waste a move keeping the game closed. Black's problem is that he is fast running out of bright ideas. White's relocated Knight makes castling short even more problematic. Nothings happening on the Queenside when the real danger is that only White will have active possibilities. It seems that Black will have to revisit his earlier play. His position is definitely uncomfortable.

16.Nh5!

This cinches things. Black is definitely not castling Kingside as g2-g4 will blow things up on that side of the board.

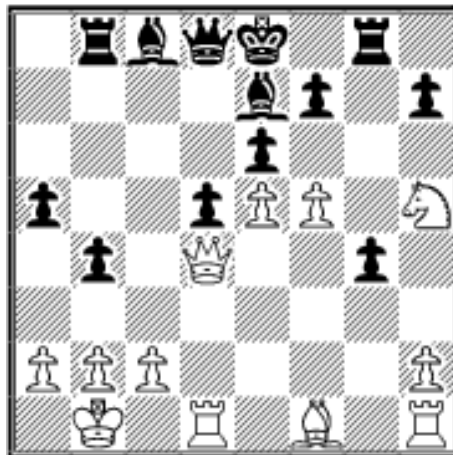
16...Rb8

16...a4 17.g4 fxg4 18.Bb5+!? Bd7 19.Bxd7+ Qxd7 20.f5 is terrible for Black.

17.g4!

Well played; Garry is in fine form today. Black is obliged to accept the opening of the position with his King still planted in the center. If he allows g4xf5 he can file for bankruptcy.

17...fxg4 18.f5 Rg8



Black goes down in a hailstorm of blows after 18...exf5 19.e6 Rg8 20.exf7+ Kxf7 21.Bg2 Bb7 22.Qe5 or 22.Rhf1 when Black's army is totally uncoordinated. Hracek now unhappily aware it was better to have stayed in bed decides he doesn't want to go down in a typical Kasparov victory and so fastens the hatches.

19.Nf6+!

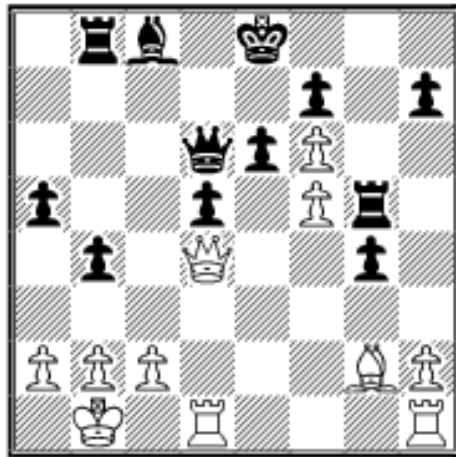
A shocking conclusion. The text had never appeared to be a threat but now it neatly uncovers Black's King. The e7-Bishop was Black's best defender and now it's gone. White intends to

exploit the e-file leaving Black with the same age-old question of what he's going to do with his King.

19...Bxf6 20.exf6 Qd6

Completing a strategic disaster. Clearly Black has spent time preparing ...Qd8-b6 but now that the e5-square is available, booting the White Queen there serves no purpose. Black now tries to cover some dark squares. An unhappy variation is: 20...exf5 21.Qe5+ Be6 22.Rxd5 Qxd5 (22...Qc8 23.Ba6; 22...Qb6 23.Bb5+ Kf8 24.Rd6 or Rhd1 both win) 23.Qxb8+ Qd8 24.Bb5+ with mate in view.

21.Bg2 Rg5?



In a bad position, Hracek errs further. He has to come to grips with the fact that Black's King is going to be stuck in the center. In that case the e6 and d5-pawns must remain intact. Forced was 21...Bb7 22.Rhe1!? Kd7 23.fxe6+ fxe6 and hope for the best.

22.Bxd5!

The winning blow. Now that Black has conveniently left his g5-Rook without protection, everything works for White. For example: 22...exd5 23.Qe3+ or 22...Qxd5 23.Qf4 hits both of Black's Rooks. Now, on top of everything else 23.Bc6+ is on the agenda.

22...Bd7 23.Rhe1! h6

As 23...Rxf5 24.Bxe6 Qxd4 25.Bxf5+ fails, Black covers his Rook and hopes.

24.fxe6 fxe6 25.Qa7

Realizing that 25...Rxd5 26.Rxd5 Qxd5 27.Qxb8+ is hopeless, Hracek gave up. A stirring game by Kasparov. **1-0**

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