



SKITTLES ROOM



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The New England region of the United States has long been a very active and competitive chessplaying area. Names such as Harry Pillsbury, Weaver Adams, James Rizzitano and Patrick Wolff may come immediately to mind. But there is one name, perhaps less known outside New England, that is legendary in and around the northeastern United States: John Curdo.

Although he never earned an international title, those who have seen his play acknowledge that in his prime, he was easily of International Master strength. He has dominated the New England chess scene for well over a half-century.

ChessCafe is both pleased and proud to release not one, not two, but **three** electronic books in **ChessCafe Reader** format featuring the brilliant and exciting slash-and-burn style of John Curdo. The popular New England master self-published three books, and we have taken the title of one, *Chess Caviar*, and are calling the **ChessCafe** three-volume series *Caviar 1*, *Caviar 2* and *Caviar 3*. Each e-book has 100 miniature games, all under 25 moves.



Curdo won the Massachusetts State Championship 17 times, the first in 1948 the last in 1985. *Caviar 1* covers 1948-1981 and features wins over Massachusetts State Champions Harlow Daly, John Stopa, James Thibault, John "Jack" Peters, James Barry, William Kelleher, and Allan Bennett. *Caviar 2* covers 1982-1991 and features wins over various state champs including grandmasters Alexander Ivanov and Ilya Gurevich, as well as up-and-coming titled players: Joe Fang, David Vigorito, and Bobby Seltzer. *Caviar 3* covers 1992-1999 and features wins over grandmasters Robert Byrne, Sergey Kudrin, and IM Danny Kopec. The books are available for \$9.95 each, or all three for \$24.95.

A longer version of the following article is included in each e-book. To celebrate the release of the electronic books, and to honor this great regional master, **ChessCafe** is pleased to present...

Forty Years at the Top

by

Larry Eldridge

October 1947, an excited 15-year-old boy took a bus to Boston to play in his first

chess tournament. Little did the young John Curdo realize that he was really embarking on much longer trip, a lifetime journey through the vast realm of Caissa, which is still going strong nearly half a century later.

The occasion back then was the Massachusetts Schoolboy Championship, and despite his inexperience Curdo promptly served notice of things to come by beating out 61 rivals to take clear first place.

Now fast-forward to July 1994, and the same John Curdo is getting ready for another trip to a tournament. He gets up at 5 a.m., is on the road at 6, drives for 1.5 hours to Gilford, New Hampshire, grabs a bite to eat, gives a simultaneous exhibition, then zips through a 4-0 sweep of the Lakes Region Chess Club Open.

Is this just another day at the office for the veteran Master who has long since become a legend throughout his native New England and beyond? Well, not exactly, because this one happened to be the 500th tournament victory of a truly remarkable career.

That's right: 500 first places (mostly outright, some shared) in competitions ranging from small one-day tournaments like this one through scores of city, state, and regional championships, all the way up to his four U.S. Senior triumphs.



All-Time Record

Nobody keeps statistics on such things, but it's a pretty safe assumption that this is an all-time record. For one thing, until the last 20 years or so the opportunities just weren't there for the regular play necessary to reach such a number, so you can pretty much rule out anyone who played most of his chess before the modern era. As for his contemporaries, as Curdo himself puts it, "Who else would be crazy enough to do it?"

Good enough too, one might add, for most of us could play from now to infinity without winning that many tournaments.

Curdo is indeed good enough. Over the years he has locked horns with, and frequently bested, all the top players in the New England area as well as other masters, IMs, and even GMs from around the United States and elsewhere.

Throughout most of his career he has stuck fairly close to home, but in the last decade or so he has been branching out more, and with notable success.

Senior Open Success

One of his inaugural trips, and one of his most vivid memories, was his initial venture into the U.S. Senior in 1982. The tournament had just been launched the year before, and when Curdo saw that an expert won the championship, he got visions of a national title.

“So I go all the way out to Scottsdale, Arizona,” he recalls, “I walk in, and who’s there but Larry Evans? I don’t know if I was shook up because I saw him or what, but I sat down in the first round, got a winning position, then made three blunders in a row and lost.”

The story had a happy ending, though, as Curdo won his next five games, Evans was held to a pair of draws, and they tied for first place.

Since then Curdo has made three more trips to the Senior Open, and has been successful every time, winning it outright in 1986 and ‘88, and tying for first place in ‘87. He also has been playing more frequently these days in events like the U.S. Open, the World Open and some international tournaments. Judging from the results, one can’t help wondering what might have happened if he had gone this route earlier. For even at the relatively advanced chess age of 62, he is clearly still a player to be reckoned with at any level.

In fact, at the annual St. Martin International tournament, he knocked off GM Utut Adianto of Indonesia, who was fresh from tying for first place in the New York Open. He also obtained good winning chances against GM John Fedorowicz before settling for the draw that clinched a major prize. And he defeated GM Robert Byrne in 22 moves en route to an 8-4 result at the U.S. Open.

Despite these increasingly frequent and successful forays, Curdo remains best known in New England for his “Forty Years at the Top”, to borrow the title of one of his books. And so in recognition we look back at the highlights of his long and illustrious career.

Growing up during the Depression and World War II, Curdo stumbled into chess when he won a set as a premium for selling seeds door-to-door. Quickly outstripping his playmates, he located the local chess club, but formal instruction was basically non-existent in those days, so he found what books he could in the library and worked things out pretty much on his own.

“I had a great teacher,” he likes to say now. “Me!”

Barnstorming

The year after winning the state schoolboy title, Curdo made his mark in a much bigger way by defeating one of New England’s top players, Harlow Daly, and going on to win the 1948 Massachusetts State Championship. That triumph got him national notice, and a chance to join the Log Cabin Chess Club of West Orange, NJ, a famous organization of the time that played matches with the Marshall, Manhattan, and other strong clubs in the New York area, and also barnstormed across the country.

In the summer of 1948, still only 16, he toured with the club by automobile to cities all across the United States, through Chicago to San Francisco and Los Angeles, then back home through Phoenix, Houston, New Orleans, and elsewhere. It was quite a thrill as well and a chance to play a lot of high-level chess, though not too successfully.

“That first year we pretty much got banged around,” he recalls. “But the next year we took another trip, and that time we did very well. We had a much stronger team then; players like Herman Hess, Weaver Adams, and Edgar McCormick. Even Larry Evans, who was in Texas for the U.S. Open, joined us for a couple of matches there.”

So as a teenager Curdo was already playing in the “big leagues” of that day, though not doing much in terms of the record he was destined to achieve. Tournaments were few and far between back then, with more emphasis on club activity, league matches, and postal chess. Although before military service beckoned he managed to win one more title: the 1949 Massachusetts State Championship.

Curdo spent most of his 2½-year Army stint in England, where he played very little serious chess, partly because he was “otherwise engaged,” so to speak, courting the young Scottish woman who was to become his wife. After his discharge he and Julia settled Northwest of Boston and raised three children before their marriage eventually became “a casualty of chess.”

Thus while Curdo has now been a full-time professional chessplayer for several years, his earlier career was woven in around a full life in the “real world” complete with a house in the suburbs, a family, and a regular job.

All these things slowed down his development and he spent most of the 1950s regaining his pre-Army form, battling the likes of Daly and Weaver Adams for state and regional supremacy, and not even gaining his own master rating until 1957. Even though by then he had already won the first of his seven New England championships and the first three of what would become an incredible 17 Massachusetts state titles.

W: Weaver Adams

B: John Curdo

New England Championship, Portsmouth, NH, September 6, 1948, B12 Caro-Kann Defense, Advance Variation

Weaver Adams was the perennial kingpin of New England chess in this era and a national force as well. Indeed, at the time of this game he was the reigning U.S. Open Champion, but the 16-year-old Curdo gave the veteran master all he could handle in what turned out to be the only time they ever crossed swords. The game came in the last round and a draw would clinch the championship for Adams, while a victory would give Curdo not only a tie for first place and the title on tiebreaks.

Despite playing Black, the youngster got the upper hand, but Adams hung in there and eventually his experience began to tell. By the end it was Adams who had the winning chances, but perhaps empathizing with the young foe who had fought so well, and to whom he must have realized the torch would soon be passed, he settled for the half point. He was, as Curdo puts it, “a gentle man.”

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 Bf5 4. Bd3 Bxd3 5. Qxd3 Qa5+ 6. Nd2 Qa6 7. Qe3 e6 8. Ne2 Ne7 9. g4 Nd7 10. f4 c5 11. dxc5 Nc6 12. Nb3 Qc4! 13. Bd2 Nxc5 14.

Nbd4 Nxd4 15. Nxd4 Ne4 16. b3 Qc7 17. 0-0-0 Bc5 18. Kb2 Rc8 19. c3 0-0 20. g5 Qb6 21. Rc1 Rc7 22. Rc2 Rfc8 23. Rhc1 a5 24. Be1 a4?! 25. b4 Bf8 26. a3 Rc4 27. Nf5 Qc6 28. Ng3 Nxc3? 29. hxg3 Re4 30. Qd3 Kh8 31. Bf2 Qc4 32. Qxc4 Rxc4 33. Bd4 h6? 34. gxh6 gxh6 35. g4 Kh7 36. Rh2 Kg6 37. Rch1 R4c6 38. Rh5! b5 39. g5! Kh7 40. gxh6 R8c7 41. Rg1 Rc8 42. Rg4 R6c7 43. Rh3 Rc6 44. Bf2 Rc4! 45. Bd4 R4c6 46. Rg2 R6c7 47. Bf2 Rc4! 48. Bd4 R4c6 49. Rh5 R6c7 50. f5 exf5 51. Rxf5 1/2-1/2

W: John Curdo

B: Harlow Daly

Boston Metropolitan League, Boston, Nov. 13, 1948, C11 French Defense

Two decades later Harlow Daly would become New England's legendary "Grand Old Man of Chess," playing at expert or master strength into his 80s. Even Curdo in his heyday had trouble with Daly the octogenarian. But back at a time when Daly was still at or near his peak, the teenage Curdo seemed to have his number. He beat him earlier in the year to win his first state championship and he prevailed again in this game, a special treat since it came the day before his 17th birthday.

1.d4?!

Played only because I knew that Harlow would reply 1...e6, preparing his favorite Dutch Defense.

1...e6 2. e4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. e5 Nfd7 5. Nf3 c5 6. dxc5 Nc6 7. Bf4 Bxc5

7...Nxc5 is an excellent alternative.

8. Bd3 Nb4

Not 8...0-0, when the classic attack 9. Bxh7+ is strong.

9. O-O Nxd3 10. Qxd3 h6

Castling is still dubious, 10...0-0 11. Ng5 g6 12. Rad1.

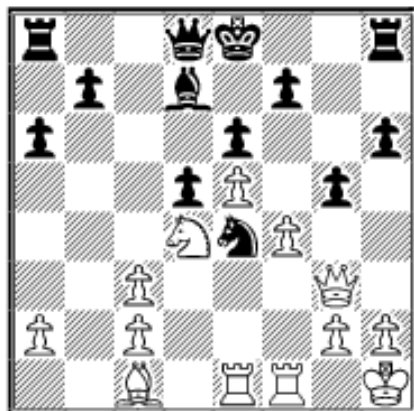
11. Kh1! a6

Black still hesitates to castle because the idea g2-g4-g5.

12. Rae1 Bb4 13. Nd4 Nc5 14. Qg3 g5?!

Less weakening is 14...g6.

15. Bc1 Bd7 16. f4 Bxc3 17. bxc3 Ne4



18. Rxe4! dxe4 19. fxe5 Rg8

This loses. Also bad was 19...Qe7 20. gxh6, when 20...0-0-0 is met by 21. Bg5.

Probably best was 19...Qb6, but White's position is better after 20. gxh6 or 20. g6.

20. Qf4 Qe7 21. Ba3! hxg5

If 21...Qxg5, then 22. Qxf7+ Kd8 23. Be7+! wins.

22. Qf2 Qxa3 23. Qxf7+ Kd8 24. Qxg8+ Be8 25. Nxe6+ Kd7

The only move.

26. Rd1+ Kc6 27. Rd6+ 1-0

The finish might be 27...Kb5 28. Nd4+ Ka5 29. Nb3+ Kb5 30. Qd5+ Ka4 31. Qa5 mate.

W: John Curdo

B: Saul Wachs

Interstate Team Match, Philadelphia, September 24, 1949, C17 French Defense

With tournaments few and far between in the 1940s, top players mostly competed in club and league play or in other matches. This game, against another young hotshot of the day, Saul Wachs; took place in a match between the Log Cabin CC and Philadelphia's Mercantile CC, two of the strongest clubs in the nation at the time.

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Ba5 6. b4 cxb4?!

Supposedly better in this variation is 6...cxd4.

7. Nb5 Nc6 8. axb4 Bxb4+ 9. c3 Be7 10. Qg4 Kf8 11. h4 h5

If 11...a6 12. Ba3! Bxa3 (if 12...axb5? 13. Bxe7+ and 14. Rxa8) 13. Rxa3 and the knight settles at d6.

12.Qf4 Bd7 13. Ba3 Nh6 14. Bd3 a6 15. Nd6 Qc7?!

The knight on d6 should be eliminated.

16. Ne2 Rb8?

Better is 16...Kg8.

17. Bg6 Be8 18. Bxh5 b5 19. Bc5 a5 20. Rh3 b4 21. Rf3 Nf5 22. Nxf5! exf5

If 22...Rhx5 23. Nxe7 Nxe7 24. Bd6 wins, or if 22...Bxc5 23. Nxc7! Kxc7 24. Rg3+ Kf8 25. Qf6! Rxh5 26. Nf4, winning.

23. Qxf5 Bxc5 24. Nf4! Kg8 25. Nxd5 Qa7 26. dxc5 Rh6



Black defends against 27. Nf6+. If instead 26...g6? 27. Bxg6 fxg6 28. Qf8+ Kh7 29. Nf6 is mate.

27. cxb4! Nd4 28. Qg5 Nxf3+ 29. Bxf3 a4 30. c6! Kh8 31.c7

White's pawns are tremendous, as is his time pressure.

31...Ra8 32. Qe7

The threats are 33. c8Q! and 33. Qf8+ Kh7 34. Be4+ the remainder of the game was played move-on-move.

32...Qd4 33. Rd1 Qc4 34. Qc5 Qxc5 35. bxc5 Rc8 36. Bg4 Re6 37. Bxe6 fxe6 38. Nb6 Rxc7 39. Rd8 Re7 40. Nc8 1-0

For the next two decades or so Curdo was pretty much the top seed and the man to beat at virtually every tournament he entered throughout New England. Then as one promising young rival after another arrived on the scene, he became the standard against which this steady procession of future GMs and IMs was measured.

It's quite a list, too. Headed in the '70s and early '80s by Jack Peters, Norman Weinstein, and Jim Rizzitano, all on the way to IM titles, then in the '80s by Patrick Wolff and Ilya Gurevich en route to GM status.

Curdo gave all of them plenty of painful over-the-board "lessons" before they eventually began returning the favor, prompting his now-favorite philosophy about dealing mercilessly with these whiz kids. "Get 'em while they're young," he likes to say, "because you know they're going to get you sooner or later."

He also holds victories over GMs Alexander Ivanov and Edmar Mednis along with IMs Danny Kopec and Igor Ivanov, and draws with Robert Byrne, Walter Browne, Arthur Bisguier, and many other top names.

But few if any chessplayers can survive economically on tournament prizes alone, so like most of his peers, Curdo spends a good deal of time in the ancillary aspects of his profession, lectures, simultaneous exhibitions, writing, and teaching.

One of his students, in fact, was Wolff, who remembers appreciatively, the tutelage he got from Curdo as a young teenager.

“I think I benefited most by just being around him, being able to play him, and having his experience accessible to me,” says the 1992 U.S. champion. “He’d teach me, and we’d go to tournaments together. It was quite an experience for me. I’m really glad to see him getting the recognition he deserves,” Wolff adds. “John was for many years the man to beat in New England chess. He’s really a fixture of the chess culture of the region, both a product of and partly responsible for the great chess heritage we have in New England.”

But how does Curdo keep doing all this now? How does he keep all these wheels turning at a stage in life when most people in any field, and particularly one as demanding as full-time professional chess, are cutting back?

One big key is staying in shape. For years Curdo has maintained a regular fitness regimen including running two miles three times a week, and it pays off in a level of stamina that is extraordinary for a man of his years. Indeed, in the late rounds of a difficult event it is a common sight to see him still there grinding out a point while players half his age give into fatigue.

It’s obvious from his results that in his heyday Curdo had the playing strength to achieve at least the IM title, but he has no regrets, and no intention of pursuing such a goal at this point.

“At the right time in my career, I just didn’t go for it,” he says. “And I’m just not as strong now. Oh, no. The nerves aren’t the same. The memory’s not the same.”

W: John Curdo

B: Danny Kopec

Merrimack Grand Prix, Salem, NH 1969, B53 Sicilian Defense

Curdo was the No. 1 rated player in New England in 1969, completing a remarkable decade in which he held that position seven times. He was No. 2 the other three years and if you go back to include the late ‘50s, his record shows ten No. 1 rankings in 13 years.

In this game his victim was a young Danny Kopec, who has gone on to become a strong IM as well as a professor of computer science, and a leading national authority on artificial intelligence. The game notes here and below are by John Curdo as they appeared in *Forty Years at the Top*.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 Nc6 5. Bb5 Bd7 6. Bxc6 Bxc6 7. Nc3 e5

I have never liked this move in many situations. If played, then 8...h6 is probably necessary.

8. Qd3 Nf6 9. Bg5 Be7 10. Rd1 Qb6 11. 0-0 Rd8

The b-pawn is tainted, for example 11...Qxb2 12. Nh4!, with good play.

12. b3 h6 13. Bxf6 Bxf6 14. Nd2 0-0 15. Nc4 Qc5 16. Ne3 b5 17. Ncd5 Bxd5

18.

Nxd5 Bg5 19. g3 Rfe8 20. h4 Be7 21. Rc1 Rc8 22. c4 b4 23. a3! a5

Better was the active, though still losing 23...bxa3 24. b4 Qc6 25. Qxa3.

24. axb4 axb4 25. Ra1 Bd8 26. Ra4 Ba5 27. Rfa1 Ra8 28. Qe3! Rf8 29. Ne7+ 1-0

W: John Curdo

B: Jack Peters

New England Open, Boston 1973, B89 Sicilian Defense, Scheveningen Variation

Los Angeles Times chess columnist IM Jack Peters grew up just south of Boston and cut his chess teeth in New England. Naturally he got some “lessons” along the way from Curdo, as in this pleasing effort.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. g3 Be7 7. Bg2 0-0 8. 0-0 Nc6 9. b3 Qa5 10. Bb2 Rd8 11. Re1 Bd7 12. Qd2 Ng4

A point behind in the last round, Peters tries to stir things up!

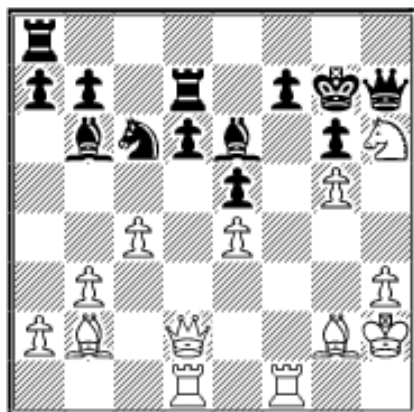
13. Rad1 Qh5 14. h3 Nge5 15. Nce2 Nxd4 16. Nxd4 Nc6 17. Nf3 e5 18. g4 Qg6 19. Nh2 Be6 20. c4 Rd7 21. Nf1 h5 22. f3 Bd8 23. Ne3 Bb6 24. Kh2 hxg4

Positionally unwise, White now has the f-file along with his center control.

25. fxg4 Qh7 26. Nf5 g6 27. Rf1!

Not 27. Nxd6? Bc5. If now 27...gxf5 28. exf5 regains the piece and opens lines to White’s advantage.

27...Bc5 28. Nh6+ Kg7 29. g5 Bb6



30. Qf4!

Threatening 31. Qf6+ Kf8 32. Qxe6, and White's next.

30...Bd8 31. Rxd6 Bxg5

Black also loses after 31...Rxd6 32. Bxe5+ Nxe5 33. Qxe5+, etc.

32. Qxg5 Rxd6 33. Bxe5+ Nxe5 34. Qxe5+ Kxh6 35. Rf4! 1-0

Since 35...g5 36. Rf6+ Kh5 37. Bf3+ leads to mate.

W: John Curdo

B: GM Arthur Bisguier

Greater Boston Open 1979, C49 Four Knights Defense

Three months after Curdo's near miss against Browne, he again came close to beating one of the nation's best-known grandmasters of the day. This time Arthur Bisguier was the near-victim, but despite a ferocious attack, Curdo had to settle for the half-point.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bb5 Bb4 5. 0-0 0-0 6. d3 Bxc3 7. bxc3 d6 8. Bg5 Qe7 9. d4

Customary is 9. Re1.

9...Nd8

The win of White's e-pawn after 9...exd4 10. cxd4 Qxe4 11. Bxf6 gxf6 12. Re1 Curdo-Terrie, Somersworth, NH 1979, could be hazardous to Black's health!

10. d5 h6 11. Bh4 Bg4

The sacrifice 11...g5?! 12.Nxg5 has to be good for White.

12. h3 Bxf3 13. Qxf3 g5 14. Bg3 Nd7 15. h4 Nc5 16. Qf5

I may have misused my initiative somewhere through here.

16...f6 17. Rae1 Kg7 18. Re3 a6 19. Bd3 Qd7 20. Qf3 Nf7 21. Qh5 Nh8 22. f4!

An offer that Black CAN refuse, unfortunately.

22...Qe8!

Apparently, Arthur agrees that 22...exf4 23. Rxf4 gxf4 24. Bxf4 is strong for White.

23. Qxe8 Raxe8 24. fxg5 fxg5 25. hxg5 Rxf1+ 26. Kxf1 Rf8+ 27. Bf2 hxg5 28. Rg3 Nf7 29. Be3 Kg6 30. Kg1 Rh8 31.Rg4 Nd7 32. Rg3 Nc5 33. Rh3 Rxh3 34. gxh3 Nh6 35. Kg2 Ng8 36. Kf3 Nf6

The knights are better than the bishops, but not enough to win.

37. Bf2 Kh5 38. Be1 1/2-1/2

Black's hedgehog kingside defense doesn't allow White to get his men in.

W: John Curdo

B: Jim Rizzitano

Franklin K. Young Memorial, Boston 1982, C48 Four Knights Game

In the '80s it was Jim Rizzitano and a young Patrick Wolff who brought their tremendous budding talents into the mix to make Curdo's life more interesting. By 1982 Rizzitano had actually surpassed Curdo on the rating list, while Wolff, though still a young teenager, was already a force to be reckoned with. It was quite a feat, therefore, to defeat them both in the same tournament, as Curdo did in this event.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Nc3 Nc6 4. Bb5 Bc5 5. 0-0 0-0 6. Bxc6

I lost with the sharpest move 6. Nxe5, and drew with 6. d3 d6 7. Bxc6.

6...dxc6 7. d3 Bg4 8. Be3 Bd6 9. h3 Bh5

The bishop is misplaced on the kingside; it is safer to play 9...Bxf3 10. Qxf3 Nd7, with equality.

10. Kh1!

The beginning of an excellent plan. Not 10. g4? Nxg4! 11. hxg4 Bxg4, followed by ...f7-f5, with advantage for Black.

10...Nd7?

Missing his last chance for 10...Bxf3.

11. g4 Bg6 12.Ne2

Heading for a powerful outpost on f5.

12...Re8 13. Ng3 Nf8 14. Nf5 Ne6 15. Rg1

White methodically concentrates his forces on the Ringside, while Black eyes the hole on f4.

15...Nf4

The knight cannot be maintained on this square: better is 15...Kh8, but White has a strong initiative.

16. Kh2 Kh8 17. Qd2

Threatening 18. Nxd6 Qxd6 19. Bxf4 exf4 20. e5, winning the f4-pawn.

17...Bxf5 18. gxf5 Nh5 19. Rg4 g6 20. Rag1 Rg8 21. Nh4 Qd7 22. fxc6

Releasing the tension, but after 22. Kh1 c5, how does White get in?

22...fxg6 23. f4!?

Although this unexpected shot presents Black with difficult problems, it should not work against the best defense.

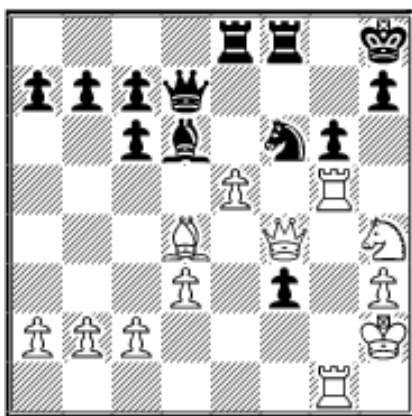
23...Nf6??

An incredible blunder. Also bad is 23...exf4? 24. Bd4+ Ng7? 25. Nxc6+! hxc6 26. Rh4 mate. The correct defense is 23...Nxf4 24. Rxf4 exf4 25. Bd4+ Rg7 26. Nf5! Bf8! 27. Bxc7+ Bxc7 28. Nxc7 Qxc7 and Black is no worse.

24. Rg5 exf4 25. Bd4! f3+ 26. e5 Rae8! 27. Qf4!

The most accurate.

27...Rgf8



28. Nxc6+! hxc6 29. Rxc6 Ng4+

There is no defense against the multitude of threats.

30. Qxc4 Qxc4 31. exd6+ Kh7

Or 31...Qxd4 32. Rh6 mate.

32. R6xc4 1-0

W: John Curdo

B: Charles Braun

Cambridge, MA 1984, B52 Sicilian Defense, Rossolimo Variation

Curdo hasn't won 500-plus tournaments without knowing how to handle last-round pressure. Whether tied for the lead or half a point ahead and battling another top gun to nail down first place; or half a point behind and seeking to overtake the leader. He's been in each of these scenarios so many hundreds of times that it's all second nature to him at this point.

This time it was Curdo who needed the win and as he has done so many times before and since, he got it. Finally, in addition to its importance in the tournament, Curdo notes that this game is an excellent example of the outpost theme, in this case d5.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bb5+ Bd7 4. Bxd7+ Qxd7 5. 0-0 Nc6 6. c4 Nf6 7. Nc3 e6 8. d4 cxd4 9. Nxd4 Be7 10. Be3 0-0 11. Qe2 Rfc8

A clever, but dubious idea.

12. Rfd1 Nxd4 13. Bxd4 Qc6 14. b3 e5

Consistent with his plan, but leaving a gaping hole at d5!

15. Be3 a6?

Changing his mind at the last minute.

He must have intended 15...Nxe4, when I planned 16. Nd5! Bd8 17. Bxa7 with a slight edge for White. The “?” is for not realizing the impact of 16. Bg5. Black needed to play 15...h6.

16. Bg5 Rab8 17. Bxf6 Bxf6 18. Nd5 Bd8 19.Rac1 Qe8

Needing only a draw, Black reacts passively. He does better to play 19...b5, when 20. Rc3 is fine for White.

20. Rc3 b6

If 20...b5 21. Rdc1.

21. Ne3

Initiating a shift to the kingside.

21...Qe6 22. Rcd3 Be7 23. Nf5 Rc6

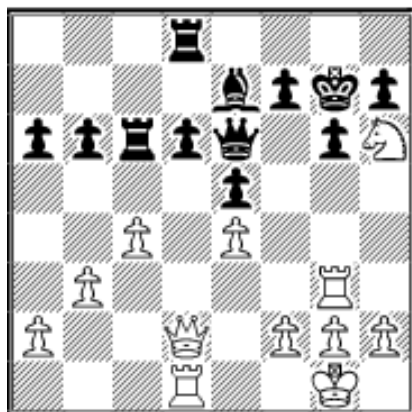
This awkward rook placement is forced; if 23...Rd8 then 24. Qd2 wins the d-pawn.

24. Qd2 Rd8 25. Rg3 g6

Again forced; 25...Bf6 (or ...Bf8) 26. Nxg7! Bxg7 27. Qg5 wins.

26. Nh6+ Kg7

The try 26...Kh8 loses to the neat 27. Qd5!, but 26...Kf8 is better than the text.



27. f4!

The best move in the game, with the strong threat of 28. f5.

27...exf4 28. Nf5+ Kh8 29. Nd4 fxe3

Maintaining material parity seems best, e.g. 29...Qd7 30. Nxc6 fxe3 (30...Qxc6 31. Qxf4) 31. Nxd8 Qxd8 32. e5.

30. Nxe6 gxh2+ 31. Kxh2 fxe6 32. Rf1 Rc7?

Time pressure makes Black's task of survival hopeless.

33. Qd4+ Kg8 34. Qxb6 Rdd7 35. Qf2! Kg7 36. Qf7+ Kh6 37. Rf3 Bh4 38. Qf4+ g5 39. Qf6+ Kh5 40. Qxe6 Rg7 41. g4 1-0

W: Edgar McCormick

B: John Curdo

Hot Springs, Arkansas 1986, C28 Vienna Game

This instructive victory over Edgar McCormick led to his first clear U.S. Senior Open title.

1. e4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Bc4 Nc6 4. d3

Edgar was a friend and disciple of the late Weaver Adams, so I expected the aggressive 4. f4.

4...Na5 5. Bb3 Nxb3 6. axb3 d5 7. Bg5 c6 8. exd5 cxd5 9. Nf3 d4

White's development lead is annoying, and 9...d4 seemed the only way to gain any edge.

10. Ne4 Be7 11. 0-0

Not 11. Nxe5? when 11...Nxe4 12. Bxe7 Qxe7 wins material.

11...Nxe4 12. Bxe7 Qxe7 13. dxe4 0-0

Black has space plus a bishop versus knight in a favorable pawn structure. These are small advantages to be sure, but if White remains passive Black will work on the c2-pawn via the c-file, with a possible ...f7-f5.

14. Qd3 Bg4 15. h3 Bd7 16. Ra5 f6 17. Nh4

Hoping to get in f2-f4, which never materializes, so the immediate 17. c3 makes more sense.

17...a6! 18. c3?

The threat of 18...Bb5 stops White's 18. f4. But this opening of the center gives Black the d-file.

18...dxc3 19. bxc3 Be6 20. c4

The alternative 20. b4 weakens a different set of squares. Either way, White's disorganized army can't contest the d-file.

20...Rad8 21. Qe3 Rd7 22. Raa1 Rfd8 23. Rab1 Rd3?!

With visions of a kingside attack. Better, however, is 23...Rd4 24. Nf3 Rd3 25. Qb6? Bxh3! 26. Ne1 R3d6.

24. Qb6! Qd7 25. Nf5

Probably his best chance, hoping for a double-rook endgame after the exchange of queens.

25...Bxf5 26. exf5 Rd6 27. Qb4 Qc6 28. Rbc1 Rd4 29. Qe7 Re8 30. Qb4 Red8 31. Qe7

To protect the f5-pawn by 31. g4 would be dangerously weakening.

31...R4d7 32. Qb4

After 32. Qe6+ Qxe6 33. fxe6 Re7, either a single or double rook ending is good for

Black.

32...Qe4 33. Rc3 Qxf5 34. c5 Rd1!

The queenside is falling apart. If the a- and b-pawns disappear, Black's four to three majority on the kingside isn't worth much in most endings, so I decided to go for the king.

35. Qc4+ Kh8 36. c6 bxc6 37. Qxa6

Worse is 37. Qxe6 Rxf1+ 38. Kxf1 Qb1+ 39. Ke2 (39. Rc1 Rd1+!) 39...Qd1+ 40. Ke3 Qd2+ 41. Kf3 (41. Ke4 Qf4 mate) 41...Qf4+ 42. Ke2 Rd2+, mating.

37...Qb1 38.Rxc6 h6!

Threatening 39...Rxf1+ 40. Qxf1 Rd1 winning, so White is forced to suffer through a long king march.



39. Rxd1 Rxd1+ 40. Kh2 Rh1+ 41. Kg3 Qg6+ 42. Kf3 Qf5+ 43. Ke2

If 43. Kg3 Qf4 mate, while 43. Ke3 Re1+ 44. Kd2 Qxf2+ is similar to the game.

43...Qe4+ 44. Kd2 Qd4+ 45. Kc2 Qxf2+ 46. Kc3 Qd4+ 47. Kc2 Qe4+ 48. Kb2 Qxg2+ 49. Rc2 Qe4!

Protecting the critical b1-h7 diagonal, e.g. 49...Qxh3?! 50. Qa8+ Kh7 51. Qe4+, when 51...f5 is forced.

50. Qc8+ Kh7 51. Qd7 Qf3 52. Rc7 Qe2+ 53. Rc2 Qf1! 54. b4 Rxh3 55. b5 Qf3 56. Qc6 Qa3+ 57. Kb1 Rb3+ 0-1

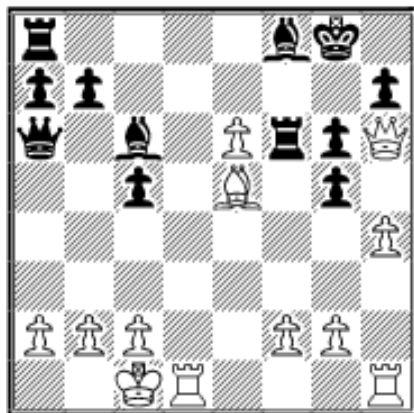
W: John Curdo

B: GM Robert Byrne

U.S. Open 1994, B51 Sicilian Defense, Rossolimo Variation

What better way to conclude this selection of outstanding games over nearly half a century than with yet another grandmaster scalp, this time that of Robert Byrne. Showing no fear of the former world championship candidate, Curdo attacked sharply from the beginning, sacrificed a piece at the key moment, then finished off his famous foe in just 22 moves with a pretty little mating combination featuring a queen sacrifice.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bb5+ Nd7 4. d4 Nf6 5. e5 Qa5+ 6. Nc3 Ne4 7. Bd2 Nxc3 8. Bxd7+ Bxd7 9. Bxc3 Qa6 10. d5 e6 11. Ng5 dxe5 12. Qf3 f6 13. dxe6 Bc6 14. Qf5 Be7 15. 0-0-0 g6 16. Qh3 fxg5 17. Bxe5 0-0 18. Qh6 Rf6 19. h4 Bf8?



20. Qxh7+ Kxh7 21. hxg5+ Kg8 22. gxf6 1-0

Since breaking the 500 barrier, John Curdo has continued his winning ways. Indeed, when asked how he could verify all his records and be absolutely sure that he had won 500 events, Curdo replied: "I don't have to. I'll just keep going to 550 to clear up any doubts!"

Postscript: Today at age 71 John Curdo recently celebrated his 685th tournament victory.

This article was originally published in *Chess Life* in two parts, in March and May 1995. It has been slightly edited and appears here with the permission of Chess Life, U.S. Chess Federation, and Larry Eldridge. ChessCafe.com extends

its thanks all of them for allowing it to be reprinted. We also note that it could now more accurately be called *Fifty Years at the Top...*



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