



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

A Portion of Sugar Tart

B.H. Wood once ran a feature in his *Chess* magazine where readers were invited to suggest titles for chess books — humorous or constructive. One category of proposed titles was monographs about individual masters, often little-known ones with strange-sounding names.

"That was a corker, *Przepiórka!*" would be a collection of brilliancies by the Polish master (1880-1942), while "Jolts for Stoltz" (Gustav Soltz, 1904-63) and "Kashdan in the Ashcan" were proposed as books about the decline of masters who failed to live up fully to early promise. Another title that stuck in my mind was "A Helping Of Sugar Tart", referring to 19th century world championship candidate Johannes Hermann Zukertort (1842-1888). A "helping" is old-fashioned English slang for a portion of food and Wood explained that the English translation of Zukertort's name would be something like "sugar tart".

This was in the early 1960s when I was at school and starting competitive chess. These were just names to me.

Several years later, I was working on a book about the Evans Gambit with Bernard Cafferty and I came to realise what a fine player Zukertort really was, and a significant figure in the development of chess who has however been rather overshadowed by his contemporaries Anderssen, Morphy and Steinitz. Most of his contemporaries such as Louis Paulsen and Simon Winawer have major opening variations named after them but Zukertort has only a half-share of the Colle-Zukertort Attack, a little-seen queen's pawn opening of which many players are unaware.

It is time to pay this great player some tribute and offer **Chess Café** readers a portion of sugar tart at last. A word of warning, though I am not attempting a biography of Zukertort and this article may include some (unintentional) misinformation or speculations. Since starting to write the article I discovered that Jimmy Adams has written a book in English about Zukertort, which I haven't seen; I have also learned that it repeats some of the myths about the man. Probably Tomasz Lissowski of Warsaw is the person best placed to give us a full and accurate account, some day, of this great player's ancestry, family and life.

Who was Zukertort and why should we be interested in him?

Zukertort was born in Lublin, Poland, on September 7, 1842. There was no Prussian or British connection as is sometimes claimed. Tomasz Lissowski informs me that Zukertort's parents and grandparents (all born in Lublin) were citizens of the "Kingdom of Poland", i.e., the Russian part of Poland. Harry Golombek's encyclopaedia surmised that he was probably Jewish or partly Jewish in descent, but I don't



know how good is the evidence for that. He lived and studied for a time in the German university city of Breslau (now the Polish city, Wroclaw) which was the home town of Adolf Anderssen, and the two played a great number of games. At this period, Zukertort probably achieved an academic doctorate but I have no details about this; claims that he got an academic doctorate in England are almost certainly false. However, in England he was often referred to as "Dr." Zukertort.

Zukertort died in England on June 20, 1888. One of the strongest chess players of the 19th century, Zukertort won London 1883, one of the greatest tournaments ever played. However, he is now best remembered as the loser (to Steinitz) of the first official World Chess Championship match, played in various American cities in 1886. His health was already in decline by the end of the London tournament and the Steinitz match jeopardised it completely. His results after that were poor and he was soon dead. Zukertort's earlier career and games were, however, most impressive. Among players of the era between Staunton and Lasker, only Anderssen, Morphy and Steinitz himself could match or surpass his achievements. It is probably fair to say that whereas Steinitz was indisputably the world's best player from 1866 (when he beat Anderssen) and through the 1870s, by the 1880s he was only "first among equals".

Zukertort on the Web

This article is intended as an introduction to Zukertort and complements a little web project I have in hand. Earlier this year, I wanted to have a series about building your own chess website in my Chess Mail magazine and build some pages to illustrate the points. I needed a subject and hit on a homage to Zukertort as a suitable topic.

It is still very much "work in progress". I rarely get time to add to it, but I have tidied it up and added to it for this occasion. After you have read this article, you can visit my pages at <http://www.chessmail.com/zukertort/index.html>. There you will find a short article about his life and a digest listing his main matches and tournaments. You will also find several games that you can play through online. (At the end of this article, I have given a couple of different games which will only be added to my site at a later date.)

On the links page of my Zukertort sub-site you will find links to other interesting Zukertort material I have found elsewhere on the Web. This

includes game-by-game coverage from *The Field* of his matches with Rosenthal and Blackburne, as well as the world title match with Steinitz.

The article by Tomasz Lissowski, "A trap for historians" (at the Chess Archaeology site), is particularly worth reading. The main thrust of this is that a lot of the misinformation and rumours about Zukertort's life and parentage were due to members of his own family who misinformed a contemporary writer, whom later writers have used as a source!

At **The Chess Café**, Richard Forster wrote the third article in his *Late Knight* series about Zukertort's rivalry with Adolf Anderssen. They both lived in the same city for several years before Zukertort moved to England, and they played numerous official and unofficial games. I recommend that you re-read this article as I won't cover that part of Zukertort's career in this Kibitzer. You can find it in **The Chess Café Archives**. Zukertort also has a walk-on part in another Forster article, "More about Potter" which you can also read in the Archives.

From Zukertort's later career, his match with William Potter has been dealt with by me earlier this year in Kibitzer 49. His matches with Blackburne and Rosenthal (as reported in *The Field*) and the world championship matches with Steinitz are well covered by other webmasters. You can also find "Zukertort trivia" at <http://chess.liveonthenet.com/chess/trivia/z.html>, but I cannot vouch for the accuracy of any of that.

Zukertort's breakthrough

The event that established Zukertort as a master of world class was Paris 1878. This was a double round tournament of 12 players. Equal first were Winawer and Zukertort with 16½ points ahead of Blackburne 14½; Bird & Mackenzie 13, Anderssen 12½ etc. Zukertort won the play-off 3-1. Here is the, somewhat puzzling, decisive game, which is probably fairly typical of the master play of this period.

Simon Winawer - Johannes Zukertort Paris 1878 tournament play-off, 4th game Spanish, Berlin Defence [C67]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Be7

Kramnik played 5...Nd6 here in his recent match with Kasparov, while 5 Re1 Nd6 was the line seen several times in the Steinitz-Zukertort world title contest.

6 Qe2 Nd6 7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 dxe5 Nb7 9 Nd4 0-0 10 Nc3

Here the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings* (volume C, 3rd edition) gives 10 Nf5 d5 11 Nxe7+ as White's main line, offering prospects of a slight advantage. It also mentions 10 Rd1 as a reasonable alternative. *Nunn's Chess Openings* (NCO) gives 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Re1 as a line offering some chance of an edge to White.

10...Nc5 11 Rd1 Qe8 12 Nf5

White usually cannot resist this knight move but 12 Be3 gives White a slight advantage according to NCO.

12...f6 13 Qg4

In two games from Dubrovnik 1950, GMs Unzicker and O'Kelly both played here the more positional continuation 13 Qc4+ Ne6 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 exf6 Qxf6 16 Be3 and went on to win against the "unknown" E.Myhre. It is hard to read much into this when there is such a discrepancy of strengths between winner and loser.

13...Ne6

40 years after this game was played, Schlechter was still citing this as an equal main line position in the final edition of the *Handbuch des Schachspiels*.

14 Bh6 Rf7 15 Be3

The game Garcia-Sloan, World Open, Philadelphia 1989, went instead 15 Rd3!? fxe5 16 Rg3 d6 (16...Qf8!?) 17 Qh5 Nf4?? 18 Rxc7+ Kh8 19 Qxf7 Bxf5 20 Rxc7+ 1-0, but of course Zukertort would have defended much better.

15...Kh8 16 Nxe7

In the 2nd playoff game, Winawer had played 16 f4 d5 17 Nxe7 Qxe7 with the sharp continuation 18 f5 d4 19 exf6 (19 fxe6? dxe3) 19...Qxf6 20 Bxd4 Nxd4 21 Qxd4 Bxf5 22 Qxf6 Rxf6 it ended in a draw in 73 moves.

16...Qxe7 17 exf6

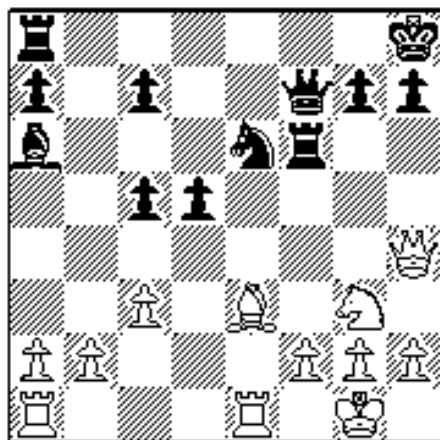
Zukertort must have reckoned this line was OK for White because he played it himself a few years later (v Englisch, Vienna 1882). An unclear position developed and on move 33 Zukertort blundered.

17...Rxf6

White seems to have an edge after this. Englisch preferred to take with the Queen.

18 Qh4 d5 19 Re1 Qf7 20 Ne2 c5 21 c3 Ba6 22 Ng3

White should almost certainly have played 22 Rad1. (*See Diagram*)



Emanuel Lasker often gets praised in chess histories for his risky handling of decisive situations. Let's see the extraordinary manner in which Zukertort handles this one. First he gets his counterplay rolling .

22...d4!? 23 Bg5

If 23 cxd4 cxd4 24 Bxd4?! Black presumably intended 24...Rf4 although White can fight on and possibly stand OK with 25 Qh6 Nxd4 26 Qxa6 Rxf2 27 Rf1.

23...Rxf2!?

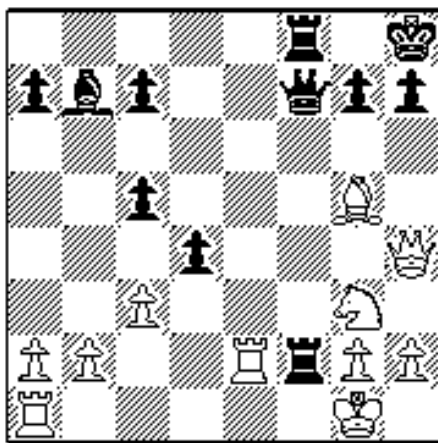
Zukertort gives up a piece, apparently unsoundly. He was never afraid of complicated calculations but it's hard to understand how he reckoned this offered more hope of advantage than the safe but simplifying line 23...Nxc5 24 Qxg5 Rxf2 25 Qxc5 (25 Re7 Qf8) when White must fight for a draw.

24 Rxe6 Bb7??!

Zukertort has given up a piece and this is an extremely dangerous continuation. Perhaps he originally intended 24...Rxb2 and then saw the riposte 25 Rf6! when White can force a draw after 25...gxf6 26 Bxf6+ Kg8 27 Qg5+ Kf8 28 Qxc5+ (although White could also play on for a win).

25 Ne4?

This loses; Winawer must have failed to see that he cannot keep the extra piece in this line. Instead, 25 Re2! must be winning for White, although he could face some awkward decisions for a while. After 25...Rf8 (*See Diagram*) the next move is a particularly tough call for White.



What is the correct defence here?

a) 26 cxd4 Ba6 (26...Qd5 seems insufficient after 27 Rxf2) and now

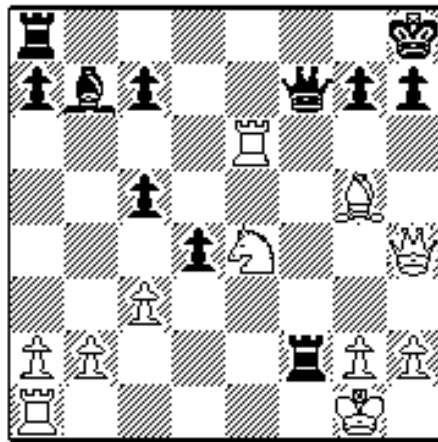
a1) Not 27 Reel Rxc2+ 28 Kxc2 Qf2+ 29 Kh1 (29 Kh3?? Bc8+) 29...Qf3+ with a draw;

a2) but after 27 Rxf2 Qxf2+ 28 Kh1 cxd4 Black's compensation for the piece, while it exists, looks nebulous. (If instead 28...Bb7 then 29 d5! devalues Black's pawns and after 29...Bxd5 30 Rg1 Qxb2

31 Be7 White should probably win although there could be swindling chances.)

b) 26 Rd1 is also playable, I think, since if 26...Rxc2+ (26...Qd5 27 Rxf2 Rxf2 28 Kxf2 Qxc2+ 29 Ke1) 27 Rxc2 Bxc2 28 Qf4!. Maybe this is where Winawer miscalculated, if he saw only 28 Kxc2 Qf3+ 29 Kh3 Qxd1.

Now back to the actual finish after **25 Ne4?** (*See Diagram*)



25...Rxb2+! 26 Kxb2 Qxe6

The pin on the long diagonal is decisive.

27 Re1 Re8

Now there is a pin down the file too classical tactics.

28 Kf3 h6 29 Bd2 Kg8

Underlining White's helplessness and preparing his 32nd move.

30 h3

30 cxd4 cxd4 changes nothing.

30...Qf5+ 31 Qf4 Qxh3+ 32 Kf2 Rf8 33 Qxf8+ Kxf8 34 Bf4 Qf5 0-1.

So after his Lasker-like gamble at moves 23-24, Zukertort was justified from a practical point of view and emerged with first prize.

His next big tournament was Berlin 1881 where he took second prize — but three points behind Blackburne who scored a terrific 14/16. This setback was "rectified" later in the year when he beat Blackburne in a match. Steinitz reasserted his supremacy in 1882 by playing in, and winning, the great Vienna tournament (18 players, double round) but once again Winawer (clearly a player worth of "Kibitzing" some time in the future") shared first with 24/34. Mason was third, on 23, and half a point behind him came Mackenzie and Zukertort. Not a bad result, although probably somewhat disappointing. The next year however saw him dominate his rivals totally.

Greatest achievement

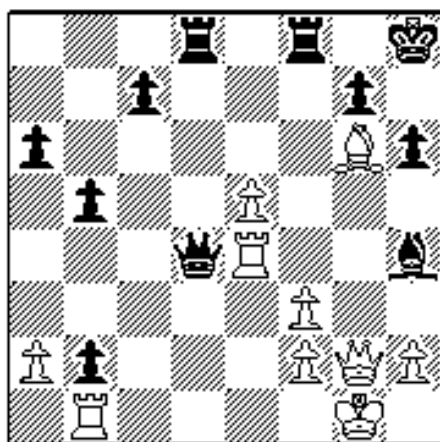
In the marathon London 1883 tournament, virtually all the top players of the decade competed, together with a few amateurs. At the half-way stage, Zukertort, had lost only one game, due to a blunder against Steinitz. He already had a lead of two and a half points from Mason. Steinitz and Chigorin trailed in joint third. The tournament book takes up the story "As the second round went on, it became clear that Zukertort would maintain his supremacy... which became almost a certainty when, after eight hours' play, he defeated his most formidable antagonist, Steinitz, on the 7th June, in one of the most scientific games, as played by both parties, throughout the Tournament." (The game is 89 moves long so I won't give it here!) "In the following week he defeated Winawer and Blackburne, when more than a week before the termination of the Tournament it became impossible for any other competitor to equal his score." "He added one more achievement to his scroll of victories by defeating Rosenthal, when the long-dreaded breakdown took place. It was well known to his friends for the last ten days, while he had been completing the roll of the successive victories with which his second round had opened, that he had been compelled to drench himself nightly with a most virulent poison to keep up his failing energies to the mark. But nature would not submit to any such dictation, and at last the long threatened breakdown occurred, fortunately when it was too late to deprive the champion

of the Tournament of his well-merited honours.

So what was his poison?

Almost certainly, Zukertort was regularly taking laudanum, a tincture of opium. Opiates nowadays are strictly controlled in most countries, but it seems this drug was readily available in England in the 19th century (to those who could afford it). Literary figures such as the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and de Quincey also indulged in it. Contemporary writings such as the 1883 tournament book, however, refrain from being absolutely explicit on the point of Zukertort's health and habits. Does anyone have firm evidence about this matter? Anyway, at this time when FIDE are threatening to bring drug-testing into professional chess, there is little evidence that any drug is conducive to improved play. On the contrary, in the case of whatever Zukertort was on. "As the tournament book says, "In his game with Captain Mackenzie, "having, in a defence to the Ruy-Lopez obtained an absolute winning position, Zukertort, under the extraordinary hallucination that he had already doubled his Rooks on the Queen's file, went in for what he believed to be an immediately winning combination, which actually resulted in the loss of a Rook and Bishop, and necessitated the instant abandonment of the game."

This is what actually happened. (*See Diagram*)



Now Black stands much better after 25...Qd1+! 26 Re1 Qd2 but Zukertort "forgot" to give the check first and played immediately **25...Qd2?** leaving his Bishop en pris. Even after **26 Rxb4 Qc1+ 27 Qf1** he could have played on by 27...Qg5+ but the second blunder **27...Rd1?? 28 Qxd1** brought the game to an abrupt halt. The tournament book continues: "On the following two days the champion was successively defeated by the two weakest players in the Tournament, and while heartily congratulating them on the

satisfaction they must have felt at so unexpected an occurrence, it is impossible to deny that on each occasion Zukertort performed most artistically the Japanese happy despatch, and defeated himself with somewhat of the like pertinacity with which he had previously defeated others."

His style and repertoire

The London 1883 tournament book says (with reference to his win against Blackburne) that "Zukertort enrolls himself in the modern school of strategy versus combination, but genius will claim its own..."

The development of Zukertort's style and the maturing of his opening repertoire would probably be the fit subject for a major article, preferably by a grandmaster. Compared with Steinitz, Zukertort is generally regarded as a tactician yet compared with his first great sparring partner, Anderssen, he was a strategist. Like all great players who have had relatively long careers (like Steinitz and Tal, indeed!) Zukertort's style changed over the years as he kept

up with theoretical developments and indeed was at the forefront of them.

In his early career, Zukertort almost exclusively opened 1 e4 and was a great expert in open games, especially the Evans Gambit. He never entirely gave up 1 e4 but in later years he showed himself willing to experiment and go for a slower build-up, especially against top opponents who were probably becoming hard to defeat in classical openings. This is especially notable in his 1872 match with Steinitz where his failure to make much impression with White doubtless caused a rethink about his opening repertoire.

He had dabbled with Bird's Opening, 1 f4, in the late 1860s, but now he switched to a mixture of 1 d4, 1 e3 and 1 c4, e.g. in his match with Potter (1875). However, at a major event like Paris 1878 he mostly employed 1 e4; this was still effective at destroying lesser masters and even the likes of Bird and Mason, but he lost with 1 e4 against Blackburne, another wake-up call.

From 1881 onwards, the English Opening became a major weapon for Zukertort and in 1883 he began using 1 d4 also. Sometimes he would get Queen's Gambit type position and other times he would play Bd3 and an early queenside fianchetto, usually followed by c4 later: what is now known as the Zukertort system in the Colle opening. (Colle played Bd3 in conjunction with c2-c3 and no fianchetto.)

1 e4 always was his most effective opening for scalping rabbits but to the end of his career Zukertort now saw that 1 d4 and 1 c4 were the ways to play for an opening advantage against his great and sophisticated rivals Steinitz, Blackburne and the rising star, Chigorin.

With Black, Zukertort almost invariably met 1 e4 which was the choice in the mid-19th century of virtually all players, professional and amateur. Almost invariably, he answered it by 1...e5 reaching the classical openings of which he was an unparalleled master. Unlike Steinitz, who experimented with various eccentricities, Zukertort tended to play the main lines as he saw them. He played various systems against the Ruy Lopez, but 3...Nf6 (just like Kramnik!) tended to get his approval on major occasions.

Sometimes Zukertort would attempt a different first move, and he is known to have tried Owen's Defence (1...b6) and the Sicilian occasionally. His picking up the c-pawn against the American amateur Sellman in a late round of London 1883 was fate: he lost quickly in what can be seen as the first true example of what later became known as the Sozin Attack!

In the World Championship match, Steinitz employed the Ruy Lopez, although once in their 1872 match he had opened 1 d4 and won against the Dutch Defence. Thereafter on the rare occasions when Zukertort had to meet 1 d4 in competition, he generally replied 1...d5 and defended a Queen's Gambit. Like his contemporaries, he did not fare well but he did not get many opportunities to play this opening with Black until the very end of his life. It was really the next generation (that of Lasker, Pillsbury and Tarrasch) that first understood how to handle that opening effectively.

One Last Game

Many games by Zukertort are available online, on my own Zukertort pages, at

the pages mentioned earlier in this article, and many of the usual game download locations. It would be too easy an option to select one of the many swashbuckling Evans Gambit games from early in Zukertort's career or the famous queen sacrifice against Blackburne from London 1883. Anyway you can see that at <http://www.chessmail.com/zukertort/games.html>.

It is more interesting to look at a little-studied game in which he employed a closed opening. To what extent did he understand what he was doing? There is a tendency not to bother looking at the games Zukertort played after he lost the title match, but maybe there is something to be learned even though the games were flawed. He was trying to work out a new way of handling the white pieces but his health wasn't really up to the struggle of long tournaments any more.

To round off this article, I shall end with one of Zukertort's lesser-known wins from late in his career. Frankfurt 1887, in which he scored less than 50%, was his nadir, and his last tournament outside England. This game was played in round 16 of the 20-round event.

Johannes Zukertort - Jean Taubenhaus Frankfurt 1887 Queen's Gambit Declined [D53]

1 c4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bf4 Bd6?!

Theory prefers 4...c5 against White's unusual fourth move. Now White could play 5 Bxd6 Qxd6 6 c5! Qe7 7 f4 with a firm grip according to ECO (Vassiliev-Burlaev, USSR 1974). Schlechter's last edition of the Handbuch however says that the best answer to 4...Bd6 is 5 Bg3.

5 Bg5 Be7

We now have a normal position with each player having wasted a tempo.

6 e3 b6

This should be preceded by 6...0-0 7 Rc1 h6 8 Bh4 (Tartakower Variation).

7 Nf3 Bb7 8 Rc1 c5

Now Zukertort is able to give his opponent hanging pawns.

9 dxc5 bxc5 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Bb5+ Nbd7 12 0-0 0-0

It looks like a Tarrasch Defence now! White's King's Bishop would normally be fianchettoed in modern chess. It cannot achieve much outside the pawn chain so Zukertort exchanges it, which reduces the potential defenders of Black's pawns.

13 Bxd7! Qxd7 14 Ne5

The continuation of an extraordinary concept that weakens White's own kingside but also extracts some concessions from Black.

14...Qf5 15 f4

Ugly and forced - but with a definite intention. (See move 19.)

15...Rfd8 16 g4 Qe6!?

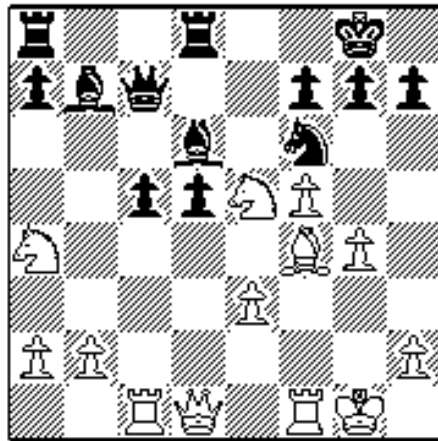
Provoking a further pawn advance. This costs a tempo.

17 f5 Qc8 18 Na4

The hanging pawns look like a weakness now. Note the pin on Black's f6-Knight because the e7-Bishop is undefended.

18...Qc7 19 Bf4 Bd6

19...Qa5 looks much better. (*See Diagram*)

**20 Nxc5!**

Probably a nasty surprise for Taubenhaus.

20...Bxc5 21 Nd3 Bxe3+ 22 Bxe3 Qd7 23 Nc5

Now the holes on White's kingside don't look as bad as Black's dark-square weaknesses.

23...Qe7 24 Bg5 Bc6!

Black must retain this Bishop in the hope of eventually being able to create threats

on the kingside.

25 Qd4

Blockade! Unfortunately 25 Nb3 doesn't work as Black forestalls Nd4 by the pin 25...Ba4!.

25...Re8 26 Nd3 Rac8 27 Rfe1 Qd6 28 Bxf6 Rxe1+ 29 Rxe1 gxf6!

Taubenhaus recognises that his position would be even weaker without the Queen to cover e7 whereas now he can maybe pull off a swindle.

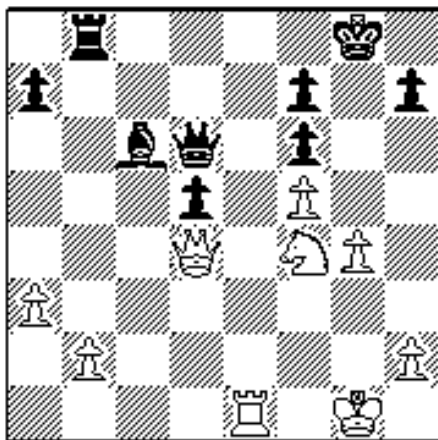
30 Nf4

There is probably nothing better for if 30 a3 Bb5 threatens ...Rc4 and some tricks.

30...Rb8

Black achieves the ghost of counterplay?

31 a3? (*See Diagram*)



Here at last Taubenhaus had a chance to punish Zukertort for his loosening kingside pawn advances much earlier in the game. However, the concept of the exchange sacrifice was not yet developed. The pawn move ruling out ...Rb4 probably looked much safer than the brutal 31 Nh5 when everything must be calculated. Nevertheless, 31 Nh5! seems correct although it is met by 31...Rb4 32 Nxf6+ Kh8! (32...Kf8 33 Nd7+! and mates) as 33 Qc3! seems to work. It maybe looked messy to Zukertort but

33...d4 34 Qd2 Rxb2 (34...Rc4? 35 Qh6!) 35 Qxb2 Qxf6 36 Qb8+ Kg7 37 Qe5 is a technical win for White, while 34...Qf8 offers little prospect in the long run.

31...Re8??

Black must play 31...Rxb2! 32 Qxb2 Qxf4 33 Qe2 d4. Now the Bishop comes to life and White will have great technical difficulties to win the game. The move actually played is equivalent to resignation.

32 Rxe8+ Bxe8 33 Nh5 Kf8 34 Nxf6 h6 35 Nxd5 f6 36 Qxf6+ Qxf6 37 Nxf6 Bf7 38 Kf2 Ke7 39 Ne4 Bd5 40 Ke3 a5 41 Kd4 Bb3 42 h4 Bd1 43 g5 Bg4 44 Ke5 1-0.

Missing Games

Finally, Lissowski has been tracing Zukertort's games and is still looking for a bit of help. He says "I found 95% of his official games though some are missing." Note that he says "official" games; Zukertort played countless offhand and exhibition games. If anyone thinks they can help, they can contact Mr Lissowski through the Chess Archaeology website or through me. Here is his list. London, July 1886 1. Zukertort v. Hanham, ½-½. 2. Zukertort v. Burn, 0-1. 3. Zukertort v. Mason, ½-½. Nottingham, August 1886 1. Zukertort v. Rynd, 1-0 (only last moves known). 2. Hanham v. Zukertort, 1-0. 3. Gunsberg v. Zukertort, ½-½. London, November ? December 1887 1. Zukertort v. Lee, ½-½ (only last moves known). 2. Zukertort v. Guest, ½-½ (only last moves known). 3. Zukertort v. Bird, ½-½. 4. Gunsberg v. Zukertort, 1-0.

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