



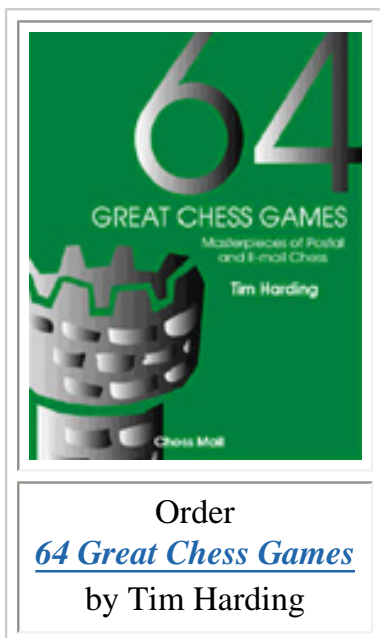
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COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



Once more unto the Urusov, dear friends, once more...

The Urusov Gambit, 1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nf3, has attracted interest on the Internet out of all proportion to its importance to mainstream chess theory.

This article updates my coverage of the gambit with some new analysis and games. I previously looked in detail at the Urusov in two main Kibitzer articles and referred to it briefly in some later ones.

Kibitzers 28 and 29 give all the background and historical information you need, plus a lot of analysis and primary games. Number 28 (“The Eternal Appeal of the Urusov Gambit”) and 29 (“Is the Urusov Gambit Sound?”) appeared in September/October 1998. Here I went on to look in detail at several main lines and principal ideas in the Urusov. The first of these articles is also in the **ChessCafe** anthology, *Heroic Tales*. You can find text versions of all the articles mentioned here in the [ChessCafe Archives](#).

There was additional coverage in Kibitzer 33, while another game sent in by a reader was published in Kibitzer 46 (March 2000), which dealt with various topics in the open games, on foot of a book by GM John Emms.

So it is three years since I wrote here on this opening and there have been several developments. Since then I have played a theoretically important game in the opening, which you will see later in this article.

I also notice that Michael Goeller has updated his online analysis of the gambit and related openings at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~goeller/urusov.html>. He has added a lot more content and greatly improved his presentation, so part of my purpose in this article is to review what he offers. He has certainly done a formidable amount of research but you have to approach his presentation with an open mind. He admits he has not been an active player for many years, so the site is a hobby for him.

My viewpoint for this article is primarily that of Black. If you play 1...e5 at all then you will occasionally come across it. If you play 1...e5 on the Internet, it's only a matter of time before somebody will venture this opening against you.

1 e4 e5 2 Bc4

My very first chess book dealt with this opening, but 2 Bc4 can be "interpreted" in various ways by White, some highly positional and others ultra-tactical. The Urusov Gambit is only one of its aspects.

2...Nf6

Black does not have a better move and indeed the alternatives are almost certainly too wild (2...b5?, 2...f5), rather passive (2...d6), allow White more scope (2...Bc5) or actually lose a pawn (2...Be7?! 3 Qh5).

3 d4!?

White's principal moves are 3 d3 (the true Bishop's Opening, as played by GM Bent Larsen on numerous occasions) and 3 Nc3, which is also a Vienna Game variation and offers Black the chance of entering the Frankenstein-Dracula variation by 3...Nxe4.

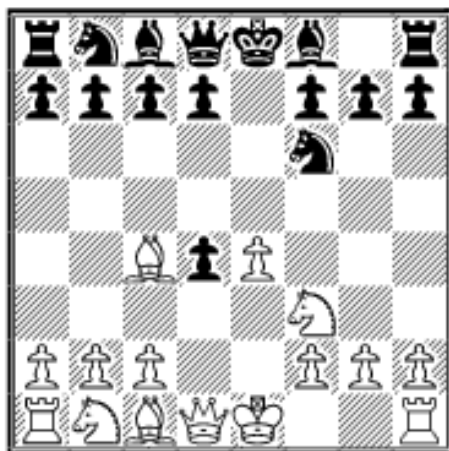
Another option is 3 Nf3!? (which can lead to the Boden-Kieseritsky Gambit), while 3 Qe2 is playable and other moves are not unknown.

3 d4 was featured in a fat book on openings by Horowitz, which came out in the early 1970s and which was probably more influential on American than European players.

3...exd4

The best move. See Kibitzer 28 for a brief discussion of Black's inferior alternatives.

4 Nf3!



Instead of 4 e5?! (Ponziani) or 4 Qxd4?!, which are probably good for Black.

It's important to note that the Urusov can also arise via a Petroff Defence move order, 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 d4 exd4 4 Bc4 and now 4...Nxe4 is the main line of the gambit accepted.

Many Urusov games actually began that way but this is a much less forcing route to the gambit. Black probably won't play a Petroff, and even if he does, he will probably prefer 3...Nxe4 to 3...exd4, and if Black does answer 3...exd4 White usually plays 4 e5 instead of 4 Bc4. Indeed GM Lasha Janjgva's book *The Petroff* (Gambit 2001) does not even mention 4 Bc4.

Anyway, I take 2 Bc4 as the primary route to the Urusov.

According to the older book on the Petroff Defence by Forintos and Haag, this gambit was worked out in 1857 by

Prince Sergei Urusoff, when he was about 30 years old.

While the Urusov has primarily been played in Internet and correspondence games, it sometimes does have master outings. GM Paul Motwani commented at Chesspublishing.com about the game Avrukh-Skripchenko, 2001: “It's very interesting to find someone as strong as super-GM Boris Avrukh (rated 2630 at the time of this game) playing the Urusoff Gambit with White...”

Black now has a multi-way choice:

- a) Go directly to the Two Knights Defence by 4...Nc6. (This position, which I shall not discuss further, can also be reached via 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 and 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Bc4 Nf6.) This may be characterized as the safe, pragmatic choice, minimizing the amount of study and book learning — if you are already a Two Knights player.
- b) Keep off the beaten track by 4...d5,
- c) or by 4...Bc5,
- d) or by 4...c7-c5,
- e) Accept the Urusov by 4...Nxe4.

In the Emms book referred to above, the English grandmaster recommends option a). It's beyond the scope of this article.

In GM Yusupov's fat book on the Petroff (Edition Olms, 1999; page 275), he doesn't analyse the Urusov, saying “We offer two recommendations which may allow the successful handling of this system without profound theoretical knowledge”. Let's take a brief look at these suggestions.

b) **4...d5!?** 5 exd5 Bb4+ 6 c3 Qe7 (not 6...dxc3?? 7 Qa4+) is where Yusupov stops. This usually continues 7 Be2 dxc3 8 bxc3 (8 Nxc3 may actually be better.) 8...Bc5 (8...Bd6 is also known.) 9 0-0 0-0 10 c4, following Pillsbury-Marshall, Paris 1900. However 10 Bg5, as mentioned in Kibitzer 28, is more effective. There are several games in this line but master examples to really test the line are lacking.

ii) Yusupov's other suggestion, **4...Bc5**, looks like a dud to me. The problem is that he doesn't carry the variation far enough to know what he is really recommending in the critical line.

He says 5 0-0 (or 5 e5 d5 6 exf6 dxc4 7 fxg7 Rg8) 5...d6 6 c3 d3!? 7 Qxd3 Nc6= Spielmann-Alekhine, Stockholm 1912.

White does not have to allow transposition to the Max Lange Attack. There have been several correspondence games where White won after **5 e5! d5 6 exf6 dxc4 7 Qe2+ Be6 8 fxg7 Rg8**, but the following game seems to identify the critical line.



Max Zavanelli (USA)- Jørgen Axel Nielsen (Denmark)

Reg Gillman Memorial 'E', corr 1999

9 Bg5 Bb4+

Goeller hails this as a surprising innovation that has never been tried or mentioned before. First impressions are that White is

thrown on the defensive, but the resulting simplified position is not so easy to handle for Black.

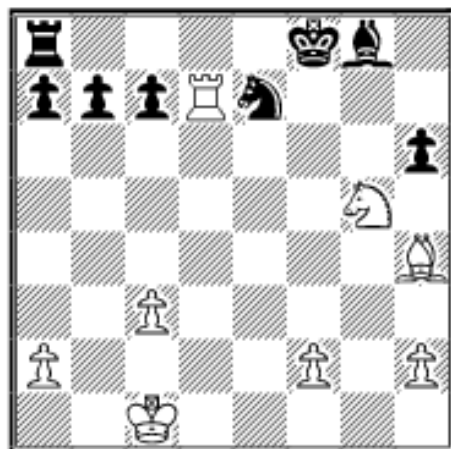
I guess that Black's play can be improved somewhere in this

game, and 9...Qd5 has been chosen more often. However, White has been successful in two games with 10 Nc3!!, when 10...Qf5? loses rapidly to 11 g4!. So maybe 9...Be7 is best but the position after 9 Bg5! seems favourable to White.

10 c3 dxc3 11 Nxc3 Qd3 12 Qxd3 cxd3 13 0–0–0 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Rxc3 15 Rxd3 Nc6 16 Rd2

White defends his a-pawn while he builds up for a middle-game without queens where Black is weak on the dark squares. Nielsen's next move does not turn out well.

16...f6?! 17 Bxf6 Rxc2 18 Bh4 Rg6 19 Ng5 Bg8 20 Rhd1 Kf8 21 Rd7 Rg7 22 R1d3 Re7 23 Rxe7 Nxe7 24 Rd7 h6



25 Nh7+! Bxh7 26 Rxe7 Bg8 27 Rxc7 Bxa2 28 Rxb7 a5 29 Kb2 Bd5 30 Rb6 Kg7 31 Bf6+ Kh7 32 Bd4 Bc4 33 Ka3 Be2 34 f4 1–0.

d) Apart from 4...Bc5 and 4...d5 other “untheoretical” moves are also possible. 4...Bb4+ is one possibility (then 5 c3 may be strong), but the most important remaining possibility is **4...c5**, which looks ugly but protects the extra pawn at d4. It looks like a computer suggestion but may be quite good.

In a later game than the one above, Max Zavanelli had to contend with this move, in the Dick Smit Memorial correspondence tournament. After 5 0-0 Nc6 he played the dubious 6 c3 (and drew in the end) but maybe 6 Ng5 Ne5 7 Bb3 (as suggested afterwards by his opponent, Cor van Wieringen) is the best try. You can find analysis of this line on Goeller's site but it would be worth trying to find improvements of your own in this relatively unexplored variation. Goeller also mentions that 5 Qe2 could give White a slight advantage but Van Wieringen reckons it leads to equality.

Now let us move on to option e), the **Urusov Gambit**

Accepted.

We shall follow the game:

Max Zavanelli – Tim Harding

ICCF Delegates & Officials IM-A (email) 2001-2002

4...Nxe4 5 Qxd4 Nf6 6 Bg5

This move is usually stated to be imprecise. Zavanelli had employed the safer 6 Nc3 in previous games. As the main divergence point comes after White's 7th move, it rarely makes a difference which one is played first. The note to Black's 6th move below deals with the one variation that could highlight a difference between the two move orders.

The aforementioned game Avrukh-Shripchenko, Anibal Open, Linares 2001, went 6 Nc3 c6 7 Bg5 d5 8 0-0-0 Be7 reaching a position discussed below.

The golden rule not to move pieces twice without good reason in classical open games is infringed by 6 Ne5?, which is only superficially aggressive. The web server game hitmehard-Monster Mash at itsyourturn.com, 2001, went on 6...d5 7 Bb3 Be7 8 Nc3 c6 9 Bg5 Nbd7 10 0-0-0 0-0 11 h4 Qb6 12 Nxd7 Qxd4 13 Rxd4 Bxd7 14 Re1 Rfe8 15 Rdd1 Kf8 16 Ne2? Ng4 0-1. White got his wish: he was hit hard!

6...Be7

The main case where it does matter is if Black chooses to meet 6 Bg5 by 6...Nc6 7 Qh4 d5 (8 Bxf6 gxf6) as discussed in Kibitzer 46. This occurred in K.Gneiss–H.Gretarsson, Velden open 1996, and much earlier in Tartakower-Shories, match 1905.

Black takes advantage of the reduced White control over d5 to drive the bishop back at the cost of weakening his pawn

structure on the kingside. Goeller is of the opinion that 6 Bg5 is definitely inferior but I am not so sure. Zavanelli knows this opening very deeply and I reckon he is a stronger player than Goeller who is (I suspect) relying on computers a lot for his opinion of variations. The Urusov gambit is territory where it can be unwise to take computer variations and assessments as gospel.

Max's choice of 6 Bg5 in our game may have been an invitation to go in for this variation, suggesting he has something in reserve for White. Although I have never seen anything very convincing for White against this idea, there was something else that I wanted to try against Max, as we shall see. So I didn't want to be side-tracked.

7 Nc3



This position often arises via 6 Nc3 Be7 7 Bg5. At this point Black has the big decision to make between adopting a pawn structure with ...d5 and ...c6 or else developing his knight at c6. I chose the latter, but after my experience with it I suspect that 7...c6 gives Black more winning (and more losing) chances.

Therefore, a quick review of **7...c6** is in order. I cannot give all the possibilities in this article, however. Usually play goes **8 0-0-0 d5 9 Rhe1**, although Goeller considers that 9 Qh4 is the more precise move. Generally the same position should arise by move 11, whichever choice White makes but you can check out Goeller's arguments in favour of 9 Qh4 for yourself.

After 9 Qh4 the most plausible sequence 9...Be6 10 Bd3

Nbd7 11 Nd4 Nc5 12 Rhe1 gets back to the same critical position that we consider below. Instead, in the best-known recent master game, Skripchenko tried 9...Nbd7!? 10 Rhe1 dxc4 but Avrukh obtained a very strong attack by 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Ne4!, whereupon and Black got crushed after castling. According to a detailed analysis by Lukacs for ChessBase, not mentioned by Goeller, 12...0-0 might have led to a draw but I wouldn't trust this position for Black.

After (7...c6 8 0-0-0 d5) **9 Rhe1**, note that 9...dxc4?? is a blunder because of 10 Qxd8 checkmate, so Black has two options:

a) 9...0-0 (castling seems premature.) 10 Qh4 Be6 (not 10...h6? 11 Bxd5!; see Kibitzer 28 for Schlechter v Neustadtl & Tietz, 1901) 11 Bd3 h6 12 Bxh6! Ne4 13 Qh5!, as analysed in Kibitzer 29. Or for 10...Bf5 see Zarske-Schneider at the end of that article.

b) **9...Be6! 10 Bd3 Nbd7 11 Qh4 Nc5 12 Nd4** (see next diagram). Instead White sometimes plays 10 Qh4 Nbd7 when 11 Bd3 transposes but delaying the move could be suspect. Goeller cites a game that went 11 Nd4 Nc5 12 f4 0-0 13 Bd3 Re8 14 Bf5 (so far following Tseitlin-Lev, Tel Aviv 1990) and now 14...h6! (as in an ICCF game Serramidigni-Bulgarini, 2001) is an improvement which is very awkward for White to meet.



This is variation “N4b7” in Goeller’s somewhat confusing numbering scheme. It is generally considered the critical position of the ...c6 variation.

Now:

b1) **12...Ng8** is often considered

the critical defence and it gets a ! from Goeller.

There is a little to add to my Kibitzer 29 coverage.

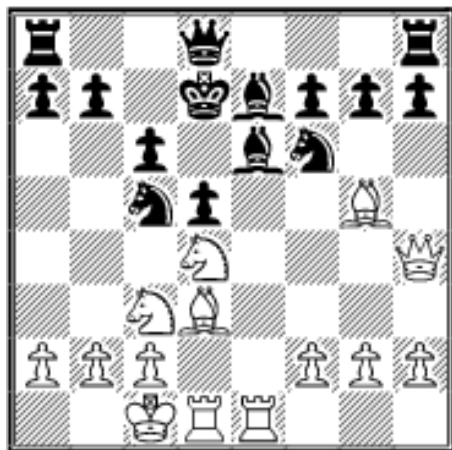
If White replies **13 Bxe7** Black is probably about equal, though he needs to take care in the well-known line 13...Qxe7 14 Qg3 g6 as White has various attacking options. The most recent significant game was N.Daubenfeld-M.Fabrizi from the Luxmebourg-BCCA correspondence match, 1997. I am wary of drawing conclusions from games like this, even when they are annotated by the players, because most games by amateurs involve serious mistakes at some stage or other. (This one was eventually decided by a clerical error.)

In Kibitzer 29, I recommended **13 f4** which gets a ! from Goeller. This still awaits a proper test by masters. He reckons the critical line then goes 13...Bxg5 14 fxg5 h6 (Also Pachman's 14...Ne7 remains unclear after a few tests) 15 Nxe6 (I analysed 15 Bg6!? in Kibitzer 29.) 15...Nxe6 and now 16 Re5 Qd6 17 Rde1 0-0-0 18 Qf2 hxg5 19 Qxf7 Nf4 20 Qxg7! “= with an interesting struggle” is his assessment.

Throughout his web article, Goeller is evidently relying a lot on computer analysis, mostly by some version of Fritz to judge from the results he is getting. I find that Shredder7, for example, often comes up with different assessments and different moves from Fritz. Computer programs will give different results depending on how powerful your hardware is, which program you use, how much time you allow them to analyse and what mode of analysis you use (“infinite” or “deep position analysis”.) Do not rely exclusively on computer analysis, especially if you only have one computer engine (e.g Fritz) at your disposal. However, sometimes the computer does come up with a definite improvement that refutes a particular line of attack — or defence. That is the case with the next sub-variation.

b2) **12...Kd7!?** was mentioned in Kibitzer 29. Probably White has nothing better than

13 Bf5 h6, with a position that can also arise via 12...h6 13 Bf5 Kd7. The black King tries to run away to the queenside.



Previous analysis here has concentrated on 14 Bd2 Nfe4 15 Nxe4 but 15 Qg4! is winning for White according to Michael Yeo, a strong English amateur. Instead 14...Bf5, 14...Bd6 and even 14...Qg8!? were suggested by him in unclear analysis at chesspublishing.com.

A game Jochen Wittmann-Yeo, 2000, from the 4NCL in Britain, showed how White can easily go wrong: 14 Nxe6?! fxe6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Qb4 Bxc3 17 Qxc3 Qg5+ 18 Kb1 Qxf5 19 Qxc5 Rhe8. Here, Yeo comments, “My opponent was disillusioned by the evaporation of his initiative, and ended the game with two blunders”: 19 Re3? Qxf2 20 Qb4?? Qxe3 0-1.

Goeller doesn’t have this game (yet), but he suggests a stronger move for White that probably renders it irrelevant. His proposal for White is 14 Bf4!, which seems very good. This move highlights the insecurity of the black King in the centre. He can try to eliminate the dark squared Bishop, in order to gain some freedom for the King, but after 14...g5 15 Qh3! gxf4 16 Qxe6+ simplification leads to a clearly better ending for White. After this, the line with ...Kd7 cannot be recommended for Black.

b3) **12...h6** can also be played with other intentions. My original suggestion 13 Nf5 seems incorrect (as shown in Kibitzer 33). Instead **13 Bf5** is best and as we have just seen

that 13...Kd7 is no good, what else is there? 13...0-0? is asking for the traditional Bishop sac on h6, while 13...Qd7 (successful in one game) should probably be good for White after 14 Nxe6 Nxe6 15 Qh3.

The only other reasonable move seems to be **13...Rg8** to unpin the h-pawn and force a liquidation, e.g. 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Qg4 Bxd4 16 Qxd4 Qd6 e.g. 17 Na4 Nxa4 18 Qxa4 Kd7 19 bxe6+ fxe6 must be about equal. Black has a strong pawn mass and his king is safe. So 12...h6 13 Bf5 Rg8!? is a reasonable option which nobody seems to have considered until now.

This concludes my review of the provocative 7...c6 variation, which remains highly unclear! In my game with Max Zavanelli, who is a dangerous and inventive attacking player, I preferred to put my trust in piece development. Therefore I chose the 7...Nc6 line.

7...Nc6



8 Qh4 d6

8...d5? is a dubious way for Black to handle the variation, which I didn't discuss in my earlier articles. After 9 0-0-0 Be6 Black seems to be OK in the line 10 Rhe1 0-0 but Victor Baja's continuation 10 Nxd5! Nxd5 11 Bxd5 Bxd5 12 c4 is at least a bit

better for White according to extensive analysis on the Goeller website.

9 0-0-0 Be6

At this point, Max wrote to me: "I've had Black play 9...Bf5 (losing quickly) and 2 games with 9...0-0 (losing even more

quickly). Too bad ...Be6 has become the standard move.”

10 Bd3?!

I have now come to the conclusion that 10 Bd3 is a serious inaccuracy after which Black should possibly be able to win. On the other hand, White could even have a slight edge with one or two of the other moves!

Goeller sums up: “White now has four standard alternatives, all of which are playable, but none has proven to yield much more than an equal game against perfect defense... The most complex possibilities for White are to be found after 10 Rhe1, a line that is worth some ... The safest alternative may be 10 Bxe6...”

Here is my own assessment of the alternatives:

a) **10 Bxe6** is drawish and rarely played. It is probably risky for Black to try to hold on to his pawn but very heavy equalizing exchanges will not leave either side much to play for after 10...fxe6 11 Rhe1 Qd7 12 Qc4 0-0-0 13 Qxe6 Qxe6 or 13...Rde8.

b) **10 Bb5?!** looks like a tempo loss and I prefer Black, who has won most of the games, though none are convincing. Instead of the usual 10...0-0, I agree with Goeller that 10...h6 seems best, but at the end of his line 11 Nd4 0-0 12 Nxe6 fxe6 13 Bd2 a6 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 Rhe1 I like the continuation 15...e5! 16 Qc4+ d5 17 Qxc6 (Goeller calls this unclear) 17...Qd6 which is pretty obviously heading towards a good ending for Black. His central pawns will cramp White and both the b- and f-files are potential avenues for Black's rooks. Just about every black man on the board is superior to his White counterpart.

c) **10 Rhe1!** is the most critical move. White will rely on his

e-file pressure for compensation.

If 10...Qd7 11 Bb5 the question is whether Black can safely play 11...0-0. After 12 Ne5 (12 Nd4!?) 12...Qe8 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Bd3 h6 the thematic offer 15 Bxh6!? probably only draws because of 15...Ng4 but 15 f4! poses some awkward questions.

So Black generally replies **10...Bxc4 11 Qxc4** (11 Bxf6?! Be6!) **11...0-0** when an important position arises.



Now Goeller considers three moves for White, but there are certainly several other possibilities for a slower build-up too.

c1) In my preparations for Zavanelli, I was mostly concerned with the line **12 Re3** Nd7 13 h4 Re8 as in a well-

known Berlin-Budapest correspondence game, but White missed crucial opportunities, as Goeller shows. After 14 Bxe7 Rxe7 15 Rxe7 Nxe7 16 Ng5 Ne5 17 Qe4 N7g6 18 f4 h6 White should have played 19 fxe5! (or even instead 19 Nxf7!?) instead of 19 Nh3, so what should Black do instead against 12 Re3, I wonder?

Some computer programs like the more or less irrelevant 12...a5?, against which Goeller demonstrates the pretty refutation 13 Qe2 h6 14 Bh4 Re8 15 Re1 g5 16 Nxc5! hxc5 17 Bxc5 Nd4 18 Qd3 Ne6 19 Rxe6! fxe6 20 Rxe6 and White will win.

Therefore, Goeller thinks Black's best line is 12...Qd7 13 Bxf6! Bxf6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 c3 with a typical Urusov kind of position. (Shredder7 prefers 15 Qg4.) White has a bind but

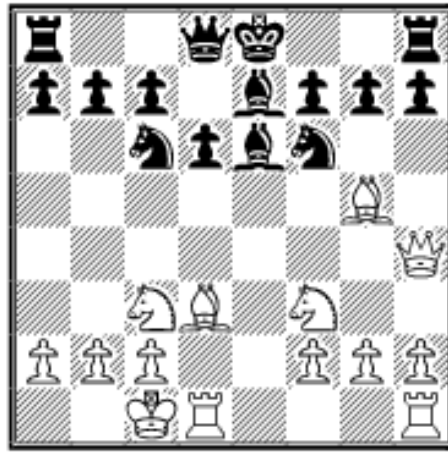
he is a pawn down and Black has avoided creating any pawn weaknesses near his king. Now he gives the sample line 15...a5 16 Qb5 Ra7 17 g4 but I think Black should be able to do better than this. White has definite pressure but Black has not yet made any major concession; tests are needed.

c2) **12 Qh4** when 12...Qd7?! can be met by 13 Rxe7 Nxe7 14 Bxf6 Ng6 15 Ne5!, but Shredder7 slightly prefers Black after **12...Qc8**, against which this trick does not work. Goeller considers best play is 12... Re8 13 Rxe7 leading to a forced draw after 13...Rxe7 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Nd5 Re6 16 g4 (Shredder7 thinks White does not need to hurry and indicates 16 Kb1 as giving a slight advantage.) 16...Kh8 (Is this really best?) 17 Nd4 Re8 18 Nh5 Re6 19 Nf4 etc., but evidently both sides have other possibilities.

c3) **12 Rxe7?! was** a daring sacrifice played in Torre-Santasiere from the 1924 Dimock tournament. Surprisingly, this game is not included in Gabriel Velasco's book of Torre's games, though some other encounters from the same event are there. That went on 12...Nxe7 After 12...Qxe7 13 Nd5 White has the better chances.) 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Ne4 and Santasiere went on to lose after 14...Ng6? 15 Qc3!. However, Goeller says Black should have played 14...Kh8! (instead of 14...Ng6?) 15 Nxf6 Ng8 16 Nh5 Qd7 and Shredder7 reckons Black should win in this line.

It seems (until further master games clarify the position) that best play for both sides is represented by the variation 10 Rhe1 Bxc4 11 Qxc4 0-0 12 Re3.

Now we return to the actual game after White's 10 Bd3.



What should Black do now?

10...Qd7 is usual, when after 11 Bb5 (11 Rhe1!? Keres) Black must not play 11...0-0-0 but 11...0-0 is the main line (see Kibitzer 29) while 11...a6 is interesting. English writer D.V. Hooper even suggested playing ...a6 immediately at move 10.

Instead of either of these lines, Andrew Biedermann suggested 11...h6 meeting any of 12 Rhe1, 12 Nd4 or 12 Bd2 by 12...a6; this analytical note was published in issue 5/2001 of my magazine *Chess Mail*.

10...h6?! was the old move, hoping White will play 11 Bxh6 (which only draws) but 11 Rhe1 is dangerous (see Kibitzer 29). Then Black can try 11...a6 (Keres), which is essentially the same as the above note.

I think this idea involving ...a6 is interesting but I was disinclined to test it against Max who sees my magazine and might be expecting this. I wanted to play something where he couldn't use my own published material against me.

10...Nd7!?

This move, not considered in my earlier Kibitzer articles nor mentioned on the Michael Goeller website for the Urusov gambit as it then stood, is however far from new. The idea of ...Nd7 is to keep a solid position and enforce some exchanges, which defuse White's pressure and (Black hopes) leave his compensation for the pawn in doubt. Since writing my earlier articles, I was going through a box of old "Sahs" magazines (the Latvian publication that used to be edited by Gipslis) and I found the move in this little-known postal game.

Anna Sukhinina-E.Cherniaeva
USSR Women's Corr Ch, 1978-79

11 Qg3 Nde5 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Bb5+ c6 15 f4 Ng6 16 Bd3 f5 17 Bxf5! (Without this combination, White would have nothing.) 17...Bxf5 18 Rhe1 Ne5 19 fxe5 (For 19 Ne4 see below.) 19...d5 20 Rd2 (I think this is an error, after which the assessment moves from equal to 'better for Black'.) 20...0-0 (Goeller just says =+ citing Ivanov & Kalinichenko; evidently he didn't know this game, but they must have done.) 21 Rf2 Bg6 22 Rxf8+ Rxf8 23 a3 Qc5 24 e6 Qf2 25 Qxf2 Rxf2 26 e7 Be8 27 Na4 b6 28 c4 dxc4 29 Nc3 Rf6 30 Re5 Kf7 31 Ne4 Rg6 32 Nd2 Re6 33 Nxc4 Rxe5 34 Nxe5+ Kxe7 35 Kd2 Ke6 36 Nf3 Kd5 37 Ke3 c5 38 h3 a5 39 g4 b5 40 h4 b4 41 axb4 cxb4 42 b3 a4 43 bxa4 Bxa4 44 Kd2 Bd7 45 g5 Ke4 0-1.

I then got the opportunity to try the move in a web server game.

Nick Kravitz - Monster Mash
www.itsyourturn.com, 2001

11 Rhe1? Nde5 12 Bxe7 Nxd3+ 13 Rxd3 Qxe7 (White's compensation for the pawn is already only history.) 14 Qh5 0-0-0 15 Ng5 Rde8 16 f4 Qf6 17 g3 Qf5 18 Qf3 Ne5 19 Qe3 Nxd3+ 20 cxd3 Qc5 21 d4 Qc6 22 Qd3 Bxa2 23 Rxe8+ Rxe8 24 d5 Qc5 25 Qf5+ Kb8 26 Qxf7 Re1+ 0-1.

Goeller may be right to suggest that Black's idea should be implemented in a slightly different way, with 10...Ng4! (instead of ...Nd7), as then 11 Qg3 is impossible. So White continues 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Qg3 and now 12...0-0-0 gives Black the edge says Goeller, although 12...Qf6 and even 12...0-0 could also be considered. In this line Black keeps the pawn and looks very solid, but he also has less activity than I get in the actual game. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that Max Zavanelli has found something for White.

11 Qg3! Nde5!?

The consistent continuation; unfortunately, it seems it is

only good for a draw at best! After an hour and a half's calculation, Fritz7 still preferred 11...0-0 but I consider that it's usually risky to castle early against the Urusov. Nevertheless, it is obviously worth analyzing and maybe trying in a future game.

One of the attractive things about the 10...Nd7 line from Black's point of view is that he keeps open the options of castling on either wing, so that it is hard for White to be sure of his opponent's intentions and has to calculate a lot.

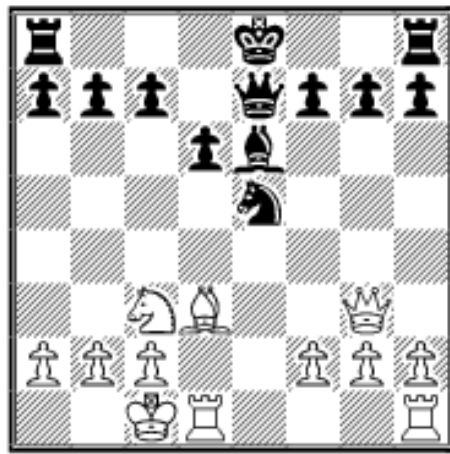
12 Bxe7 Qxe7

Black also has to consider throwing in 12...Nxd3+!. It doesn't make a difference except in case where White meets ...Qxe7 by Nxe5, which is what Max did. So presumably this is what Black should try next time if he wants to play for a win.

13 Nxe5

13 Qxg7 is a major alternative. Black should probably throw in the capture on d3 as 13...0-0-0 14 Be4 (the only move that could trouble Black) is not entirely clear. Queens will probably come off soon, when the question is whether the g-file (for Black) is more significant than his slightly weakened pawn structure.

13...Nxe5



14 Be4!?

Continuing as a gambit is in Max's style, so I expected this. Goeller cites "14 Qxg7 0-0-0=" again citing Ivanov & Kalinichenko. Of course I looked at this in some detail. Yes, it regains the pawn but if White wanted to do this it is probably better at move 13.

The main alternative is 14 Bb5+ c6 and now:

- a) 15 Qxg7 0-0-0! e.g. 16 Bf1 Rhg8 17 Qh6 Kb8 18 h3 d5. Black gives the pawn back to get ahead on development and grab more space in the centre.
- b) 15 f4 (as in the women's game above) 15...Ng6 16 Bd3 f5 17 Bxf5 Bxf5 18 Rhe1 Ne5 and now 19 Ne4 as in Schulz-Reiners, corr 1995, which Goeller takes as his main illustration for the 10...Nd7 line.

I cannot account for why he would think a game between two unknown German amateurs would be of more theoretical importance than a game between two IMs rated over 2400, but I guess he just didn't understand my game or only found it at the last moment. After 19 Ne4 0-0-0 20 Nd2 Rhe8 21 fxe5 White will regain his pawn but the only winning chances (given proper play) are with Black. I was considering 21...dxe5!? (Reiners played 21...d5) which Goeller dismisses saying 22 Nc4 +=, but I think this is just typical of Goeller's general over-estimation of White's chances in the Urusov.

I reckon Black has one or two =+ options here, thanks to his Bishop versus Knight, although a draw is the most likely

result because of the symmetrical pawn structure. For example, 22...Qc5 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Qxe5 Qf2! 25 Re2 Bg4! creates complications that cannot be worse for Black (26 Re1 b5!?). If White takes the queen at move 26, he is mated in one.

I expect that the idea of going in for a simplified line, at move 14 with White, where only his opponent had winning chances did not appeal to Max Zavanelli! The move he plays is better than 14 Bb5+ but now comes my innovation.

14...Qf6!

See what I mean about Black's flexible options in this line. He has the option to castle on either wing here — but in fact the best move is neither!

The precedent for White's 14th move is unimpressive: 14 Be4 0-0-0? 15 Qxg7?! c6 16 Bxh7? Qh4 17 Rxd6 Nd7 18 Rxd7 Bxd7 0-1 M.Krzyzaniak-V.Mamaev, corr 1990. Instead 16 Qg3 is unclear and 15 f4 is clearly good for White.

After 14...0-0 (which Shredder 6 wanted to try) White must either play for a kingside attack a pawn down or else risk opening the b-file to get his pawn back. Unfortunately the former seems a good plan as Black's Bishop gets into difficulties.

Max confessed later that he thought he was winning because he had not seen 14...Qf6.

In most of these lines, Black keeps the extra pawn in some variations only; White can win it back if he really wants to. My move also gives White opportunity to sac a second pawn for a dangerous-looking initiative that might well win “over the board” but in correspondence chess would probably lead

to an eventual 0-1 in the crosstable.

15 Bxb7

Max wrote: “I didn't see your last move which was very strong, so I had better grab my pawn back.” If he thought the second pawn sac too risky, it really must be bad!

Play could go 15 f4!? Nc6 16 f5 Bxf5 17 Bxf5 Qxf5 18 Rhe1+?! (White can bail out for a draw by 18 Qxg7 0-0-0 19 Rhf1 Qg6 20 Rxf7 Qxg7 21 Rxg7 Rdg8 etc.) 18...Kf8 19 Nd5 Qd7. This is a pretty tense and unclear position but in correspondence play, I prefer Black. The main issue for Black is how to get his 8-rook into the game but he is now TWO pawns up, so White needs something concrete as otherwise endings favour Black.

15...Rb8

Now material is level but Black can castle kingside and has chances against the white King castled queenside, thanks to the open b-file etc.

16 Bd5 0-0 17 Rhe1

Max wrote “Tiger of Chess Assistant recommends Rd4 here which has got to be a royally stupid computer move.”

17...Rfe8

My rook doesn't really belong on this file as if he exchanges on e6 it will have to return to f8. However, the other pieces already seem well placed, and I doubt if I can improve my solid position by direct action.

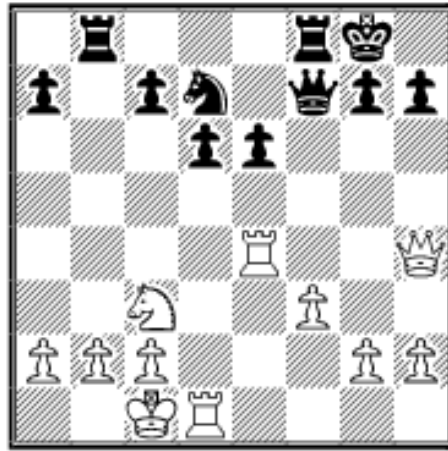
18 Bxe6 fxe6 19 Re4 Rf8 20 f3 Nd7

Goeller calls this position equal — which it is, more or less.

However, just before a major decision point for Black is a rather arbitrary point at which to throw in an assessment.

21 Qh4 Qf7!

This costs a lot of thinking time, as I had to really weigh up what is going on and what the players' long-term objectives are. Black needs to keep queens on the board, because my dynamic advantage consists of several well-placed pieces and controlling much of the centre with my pawns. It avoids technical positions where White has a chance of exploiting his static advantage (two pawn islands against my three) and makes my safer King position more relevant.



I am not going to give analysis of the rest of the game in any detail. The opening is over and ideas are more important now. Basically, White would like to get queens off and walk his queenside pawns down the board or get in a sneak attack on my King. He will let me win a kingside pawn so I can try to

advance my majority or get in a sneak attack on **his** King. If both sides are wary, and unwilling to take outrageous risks, the chances are balanced.

22 Rdd4!?

Unexpected. Max wrote: "Nimzowitsch would be proud, tripling on 4th rank".

22...d5 23 Rf4 Nf6 24 Ra4!

After 24 Rb4 and exchanging one pair of Rooks, I can push my e- and c-pawns with winning chances.

24...e5 25 Rfb4 Rxb4 26 Qxb4

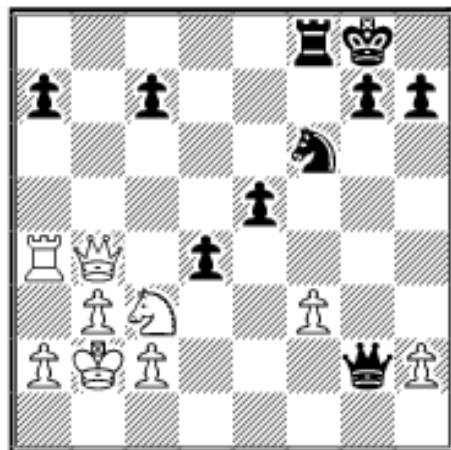
After the Rook recapture, Black can consider ...d4 followed by grabbing the a-pawn.

26...Qg6 27 b3!

White finds cover for his King and this move could also facilitate the advance of the a-pawn.

27...Qxg2 28 Kb2 d4

White is the one with options around here while he dictates play for a move or two. Black's moves are obvious so I have to see what White does and then decide if I can play for a win or not.

**29 Qc4+**

The main alternative was 29 Ne4 Qxf3 30 Nxf6+ (For 30 Qc4+ see the note to White's 30th below) 30...Qxf6 31 Rxa7 Qc6 which is a bit of a gamble for White. My e-pawn is potentially very strong, though he may be able to draw.

29...Kh8 30 Nb5

I had expected 30 Ne4 Qxf3 31 Ng5! Qh5! 32 Ne6 Rg8 33 Qxc7 d3 but I analysed it to a probable draw: 34 cxd3 Qxh2+!? 35 Ka3 Qd2 36 Rxa7 (36 Nd8 h6) 36...Nd5 37 Qxe5 Qb4+ 38 Kb2 Qd2+ with perpetual check.

30...Qxf3

This is not the only move but it was the obvious one to keep

my temporary pawn advantage and make the e-pawn passed. Now White has four different captures, and if he takes on a7 then next move he has three ways of taking the c-pawn, so it was hard to exhaust the analysis.

31 Qxc7 d3!

As in the note to move 30, it is important to break up his King position before he can consolidate and advance his a-pawn.

32 Qd6

32 Qxe5? loses to 32...d2 while 32 Rxa7 threatens mate on g2, but maybe should lose: 32...Qg2! is awkward for him, as it defends g7, threatens c2 and also ...d3-d2.

32 cxd3 is probably adequate for White to draw, but Black can choose between 32...Nd5 and 32...e4!?

32...Nd5!

Played so that my Queens defends my Rook and threatens ...d2. It is probably the only move as I must defend the Rook and ...Nd5 stops him playing Qxd3.

The tournament situation was becoming clear by now. We were the only possible winners of the event. I had points on the board and one other game going, which Max probably feared I was winning although in fact I could only draw it. He had two or three unclear ongoing games in which all results were possible, but I didn't know this yet. I just felt that the main thing was to run no risk of losing and this proved to be the right policy in the end.

33 cxd3

Probably his only move.

33...Rf6

There is nothing to lose as he must repeat via Qd8+ or Qb8+ and then I can choose another move if I want. If Black was the one who needed a win at all costs, then ...Ne3!? would have to be tried, either right away or after a repetition. Apparently Max thought my Rook would have to go to g8 at some stage.

34 Qb8+ Rf8 35 Qd6

I will win if he avoids the repetition.

35...Rf6 36 Qd8+ Rf8 1/2-1/2.

So twice in the game White overlooked my same key move, a piece to f6!

Eventually, Max and I both finished on 11/14, sharing the prize money and earning the ICCF Senior International Master title, but with me just ahead in the table on SB tiebreak. So it was “only” a draw — but a very satisfying one in every respect!

Conclusion

The conclusion is that (as yet) there is no conclusion. The Urusov remains a tricky and unclear gambit worth further exploration. My feeling before the game that Black was on the brink of refuting the gambit has receded, but equally I don't think Black should be worse in the better lines as he often has choices at key moments if he avoids unnecessary concessions. The rarer 4th moves probably deserve re-examination too.

Mr Goeller clearly has a lot of work to do now to update his site with the new ideas in this article!

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