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Yasser Annotates:

Anand-Ivanchuk

Dortmund 1997

Viswanathan Anand-Vassily Ivanchuk French Winawer C19
Dortmund (1) 1997

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Ne7
7.Nf3 h6!?

Vassily has a deserved reputation for creative approaches to a wide range of openings. The text is a highly refined idea in a decades-old position. In this variation, after the center and queenside have been blocked, White often seeks to play on the kingside with Nf3-g5, releasing the f2-pawn. Still, a tempo is a tempo and the text should allow White to activate his c1-Bishop.

8.Bd3?!

Why this move? In the Winawer French it is often questionable where to put the f1-Bishop -- sometimes the e2- or b5-squares are best. I'd choose 8.a4 with the standard plan of Bc1-a3, activating the c1-Bishop. If 8.a4 Qa5 9.Qd2 Nbc6!?, 10.Ba3! gives White a promising position.

8...b6

Attempting to take advantage of White's last move. If 9.Bb5+ Bd7 10.Bd3 Ba4, Black has made ...h7-h6 a useful tempo.

9.0-0 Ba6 10.Nh4!?

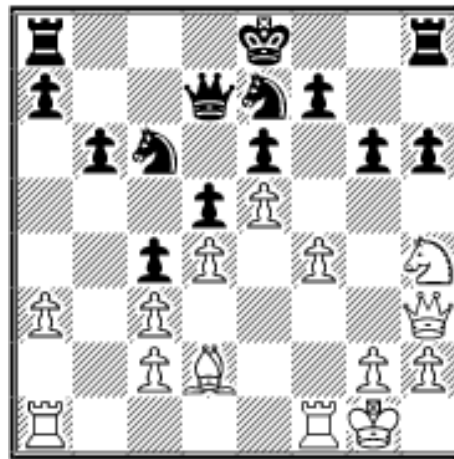
As already mentioned, White seeks to advance his f2-pawn, but



the Knight on h4 doesn't make a pleasing impression.

10...Bxd3 11.Qxd3 Nbc6 12.f4 Qd7 13.Bd2?! c4 14.Qh3 g6?!

If this position is bad for Black, then the French Winawer is simply unplayable! Black has secured all the trumps that he possibly can get. He has traded the proper minor pieces, prevented f4-f5 and will soon concentrate on King safety. The one move that Black would like to take back is ...b7-b6. In many games, Black is able to utilize the b6-square by playing ...Ne7-c8-b6-a4 or ...Ra8-c8-c6-a6. In both cases, Black is able to create queenside play. Therefore, his b6-pawn is a bit of a sore thumb.



15.a4 0-0-0 16.Nf3 h5?

A badly mistimed move that saves White some precious tempi. Of course, we all understand that Black is trying to secure the f5-square, but that is not the key problem. In the first place, the move ...h6-h5 can be played when needed and now is definitely not the time. By

giving up the g5-square without a fight, Black must always remain vigilant against Nf3-g5.

It is important for the reader to take a fresh, objective view of the position here and ask: "What is going on? What should White be doing? What should Black be doing?" In general, White's task is much easier. He just has to improve the position of his pieces. His Queen and Bishop especially have to reach much better squares.

Black has bigger worries. White has a big central wedge and superior play on the kingside. Black may lodge a Knight on the f5-square, but it is only temporary and what does the Knight do there anyway? With infinite patience, White will be able to play g2-g4 and begin a kingside push. The very real danger exists that if Black doesn't drum up queenside play, he gets squished.



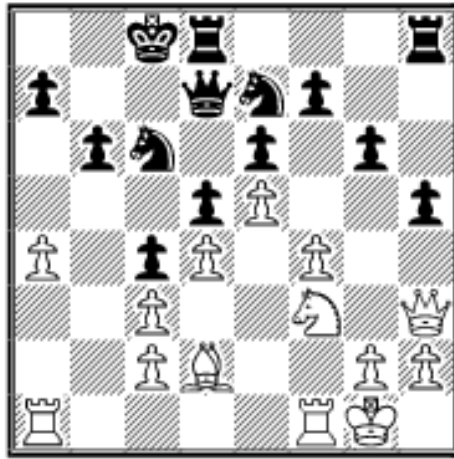
Herein lies the key: Black absolutely must play on the queenside! The beauty of this is that Black can even win the game by doing so! The correct plan is: ...Kc8-b7, ...a7-a5(!), ...Kb7-a6(!), ...Rd8-b8 and ...b6-b5. In this way, Black creates a passed a-pawn, ensuring that White must keep his pieces on the queenside. Let's take a look at

a likely line of play: 16...Kb7 17.Rfb1 (White can try to provoke ...h6-h5 by 17.Be1, aiming for Be1-h4-f6 to nab the h6-pawn: 17.Be1 Nf5! 18.Bf2 [not 18.g4 Ne3 19.Rf2 h5 with advantage for Black] 18...h5, when the difference is clear. White has invested the moves Bd2-e1 and Be1-f2 in order to provoke ...h6-h5. It can also be argued that White's Bishop on f2 is misplaced and should be on the a3-f8 diagonal.) 17...a5 18.Bc1! Ka6 19.Ba3 Rb8! Black's intentions are clear, he is going to play ...b6-b5 either with or without preparation via ...Ne7-c8-a7. White will have to scurry with g2-g3 and Qh3-f1-c1 to bring everything over to the queenside. In this case, the h-pawn is very useful if still on h6 and Black would have achieved what he needed to do, concentrate the theater of battle on the queenside, the only place on the board where he has a chance.

Ivanchuk's failure to enact this plan causes him to drift into a passive position. He also gives Anand the time he needs to improve his pieces. A careful study of the above will give French Defense players encouragement, because the rest of the game becomes a model for White.

17.Rfb1 Nf5?! 18.g3! Kb7 19.Qf1! Ka8

A very important admission. Instead of opting for active play based on 19...a5 20.Qc1!? Na7 21.Qb2 Qc6, Black slides into a passive shell, content to simply hold things together on the queenside. This approach ensures White's advantage! White is very pleased that the queenside remains closed, since he has always intended to win the game on the kingside.



20.Bc1 Rb8

Is Black waking up to the sound of his own bacon frying and intending to play ...b6-b5 after all?

Unfortunately not. Ivanchuk contemplates keeping a Rook on b7 to hold the queenside and the f7-pawn as well! A fine defensive scheme, but doomed to fail, as we shall

see.

21.Qe1

The first clear sign of trouble. White indicates that he is preparing g3-g4 in order to press matters on the kingside.

21...Rb7 22.Ba3 Qd8 23.Ng5?!

A small waste of time. Vishy gets the idea of holding up the break ...f7-f6 (something he should encourage!) and possibly sending his Knight on an exploratory mission. Much simpler and to the point was 23.Qd2 f6 (what else to do?) 24.exf6 Qxf6 25.Re1, when the theater of battle has moved to the center where White has a built-in advantage.

23...Re8 24.Qd2

White correctly realizes that 24. Nh7?! Rh8 25.Nf6 Nh6! only misplaces his Knight. Black would dearly love to trade Knights, as his structure wouldn't be picked at by White's powerful Knight.

24...f6 25.Nf3

Despite wasting several tempi, White is happy. All the action is in the center. Ivanchuk seems to be surprisingly unaware that he is strategically gone. He puts up valiant resistance, but the outcome is not in doubt.



25...Nh6 26.exf6

White must not allow 26...f5, locking up the center and kingside!

26...Qxf6 27.Re1 Nf7 28.Re2

Simple chess. White plays in the center where his strength lies. It's interesting to note how each of White's pieces

seem to bristle with more energy than their counterparts. The difference lies in the space advantage that White's pieces enjoy.

28...Ne7 29.Rae1 Nf5 30.Qc1 Ng7 31.Kg2 Qd8 32.h3?

There we have it. At last White shows that, to win the game, he has to move forward on the kingside. It should come as no surprise that the break g3-g4 is impossible to prevent when Black's Knights are getting corralled, but this move is mistimed. The move h2-h3 can always be played. The text gives Black clear queenside counterplay. White should play 32. Qb2 Qd7 33.Qb5 Qxb5 34.axb5 with a very nice endgame based on h2-h3 and g3-g4, opening up the kingside.

32...Qd7! 33.Nh4 Nh8 34.Nf3 Nf7 35.a5

The only way to play for the win. Of course, Black should be happy now, as he has been able to create counterplay on the queenside in response to White's central play. Ironically enough, White has provoked the opening of the queenside which puts the outcome of the game in doubt!

35...bxa5 36.Bc5 a6

I'm afraid that the point of the text is wholly lost on your poor scribe. Black is given a golden opportunity to activate his pieces and he insists on trying to create some kind of queenside fortress. I would have happily played 36...Nf5! with an eye toward hopping into the center, e.g., 37.Qa3 Rb5 38.g4!? N5d6, when Black has fine counterplay.

37.Qa3 Rb5 38.Ra1 Kb7 39.Ree1 Rb8

