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Yasser Annotates:

Kasparov-Kramnik
Linares 1997

In a finale that couldn't have been better scripted, the 1997 Linares audience and chess fans around the world saw the two co-leaders fight it out in Round 11 for first. PCA Champion Garry Kasparov got what he wanted, a fine professional victory and clear first place! The game wasn't vintage Kasparov, there were no tactical fireworks. It was a masterly strategic triumph.

White: GM Garry Kasparov (2795)

Black: GM Vladimir Kramnik (2740)

1.d4

It isn't necessary to explain what a wonderful player Garry is, but, his versatility to play Queen Pawn and King Pawn openings equally well makes him a formidable competitor. I witnessed him defeating Kramnik in the 1996 VSB Tournament with 1.e4, in a main line Richter Rauzer. At breakfast the next day, Kramnik was dissatisfied with his loss explaining that he had a good position from the opening. This time Garry chooses 1.d4 with, no doubt, some well prepared ideas to back his choice.

1...Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4

Vladimir is quite the specialist in the Slav, his choice of a Nimzo is surprising.

4.e3 O-O 5.Bd3 c5 6.Nf3 d5 7.O-O Nc6 8.a3 Bxc3 9.bxc3 dxc4 10.Bxc4 Qc7 11.Ba2 b6



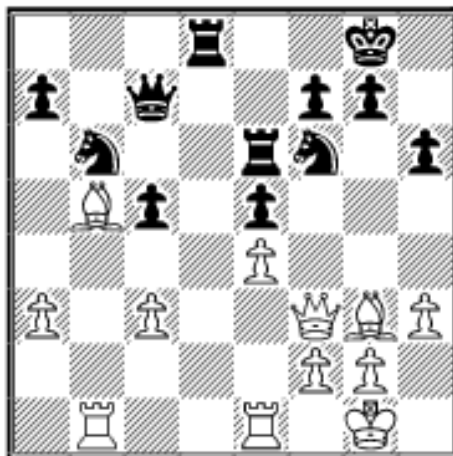
Opening chess theory constantly runs in a circle with each generation of players researching the openings played in the past. In 1980 as part of my preparation for the Interzonals, my team focused upon the Nimzo but concentrated upon 11...Rd8 as the main move. The idea behind 11...Rd8 is to follow

with ...e6-e5 and develop the c8-Bishop thereafter. The text is more subtle. Black can play to control either the a6-f1 or the b7-h1 diagonal. However, by not putting immediate pressure on White's center, White is better able to utilize his center and two Bishops.

12.Re1 e5!? 13.e4 Bg4 14.dxc5!

The temptation to establish a protected passed pawn by 14.d5 is great. It is also wrong. The salient feature of the position is White's two Bishops. To be effective, it is worth recalling that they require open positions. After 14.d5, the a2-Bishop would be ineffective.

14...bxc5 15.h3 Rad8 16.Qe2 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 Rd6



It is difficult to understand what is attractive about this position for Black. White's Bishops have a great deal of latent power while controlling the business squares along the d-file. Neither do Black's Knights have central outposts on which to hop.

18.Bg5

The text is better than the superficial 18.Be3?! Qa5! returning the favor of hitting the c-pawn.

18...h6 19.Bh4 Rfd8 20.Rab1!

White also grabs an open file. There is no obvious way to take advantage of Black's weakened kingside after 20.Bd5? g5 21.Bg3 Nxd5 22.exd5 Rxd5 simply winning a pawn.

20...Ne7

Black has reached an awkward moment. What should he do? His pieces are well placed but how to trump? As 20...Rd3 21.Re3 Rxe3 22.Qxe3 doesn't help since the f6-Knight is still under pressure. Black reasons that his c6-Knight needs to reposition itself. White's c3-pawn does a good job of controlling the hops.

21.Bc4 Nc8

Playing to block the b-file and to try and control White's light-squared Bishop. It would be more enterprising to go kingside but 21...Ng6 22.Bg3 stops Black from occupying the f4-square. While 21...g5 22.Bg3 Ng6 23.Qf5 hits the g6-Knight and e5-pawn. Black therefore tries the text to restrain White's activity. My own preference is for 21...Ng6 22.Bg3 Rb6 but Black's position is a reactive passive one.

22.Bg3 Nb6 23.Bb5 Re6



24.a4!

White has accomplished much since our previous diagram. He has improved both Bishops and grabbed the b-file, while Black's d-file control has let the second player down. The text is a powerful reminder that Black's b-file blocker is shaky at best. Finally, White has

utilized his a-pawn turning it from a likely weakness into an asset. Remember, a long journey always begins with small steps.

24...c4

This provocative move appears obligatory as Black faces a dilemma. He can't allow 25.a5 and 26.Bc4, both of which comes with tempo. Neither is 24...a5 satisfactory. Black cedes the b5-square with nothing to show in return.

25.Qe2 Rd3 26.a5 Nc8 27.Rb4! Rxc3

Not 27...Qxa5 28.Bxc4 Rxc3 29.Rb5 wins an exchange.

28.Rxc4 Rxc4

Now 28...Qxa5 29.Qd2 wins an exchange in a different manner. Again, White accomplishes a small but instructive task. He has traded off another pair of pawns, thereby opening up the position to his two Bishops while simultaneously limiting the activity of his opponent's pieces. Like interest in a bank, White's position is making gains.

29.Qxc4 Qb8

An unpleasant choice as 29...Qxc4 30.Bxc4 Rc6 31.Bf1 (31.Rc1; 31.Bd5!?) Rc5 32.a6 Nd6 33.f3 achieves White's ideal ending. Two powerful Bishops in an open position with pawns on both flanks. Kramnik decides that he is better off keeping the Queens on the board.

30.Qc5! Nd6 31.Bd3 Nd7 32.Qa3!

Impressive play by Kasparov. This Queen retreat covers a lot of key squares while setting up the introduction of his Rook. Black's position continues to slip perceptibly without having made a clear error. Black's Knight's bereft of central outposts, lead a purposeless existence. White will further activate his pieces while leaving it up to Black to find a plan with his own.

32...Nf8 33.Rb1 Qc7 34.Rc1 Qd8 35.a6

Nailing down the a7-pawn. White's idea of rerouting his Bishop to the g1-a7 diagonal is clear. But Black has no way of countering the obvious.

35...Ng6 36.Qc5 Re7 37.f3

And this is it. White's position is solid as a rock while Black's position is increasingly vulnerable.

37...Ne8 38.Bf1 Rc7 39.Qe3 Rd7

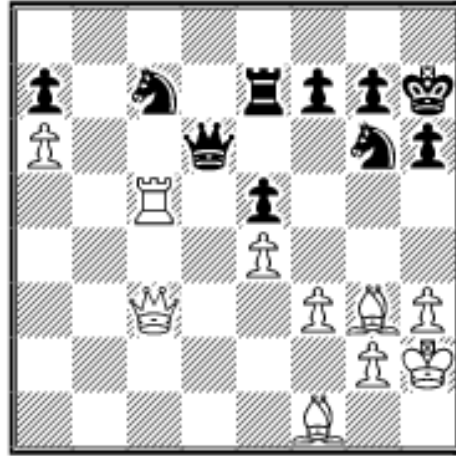
An exchange of Rooks doesn't help. After 39...Rxc1 40.Qxc1

White reloads with Bg3-f2 and Qc1-e3 winning.

40.Kh2

With each move, White's options increase. Now the c1-Rook is left free to wander - Rc1-c5 and Qe3-c3 - without having to worry about back rank counterplay.

40...Re7 41.Rc6 Kh7 42.Qc1 Nc7 43.Qc3 Qd7 44.Rc5 Qd6



45.Bf2

Each move is a link which strengthens White's position while limiting the opponent. Black is getting squeezed. Review the previous diagrams and you'll see how White has achieved the strategic ideal without allowing any tactical resources. Clearly Kasparov isn't just a formidable

tactician. Five matches versus Anatoly Karpov have given Kasparov a fine strategic understanding too. His play in this game has been remarkably smooth and error free.

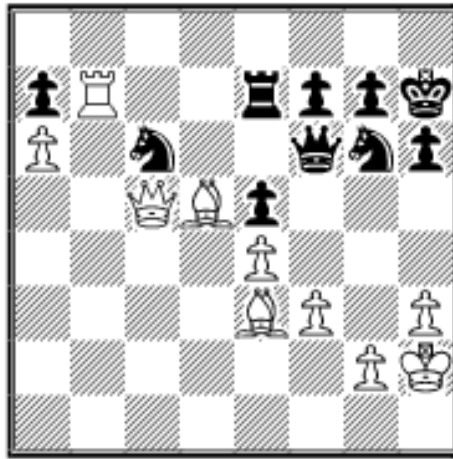
45...Ne6 46.Rd5 Qb8 47.Rb5 Qd6 48.Rb7

The bonuses continue to mount. Now White is able to utilize the b7-square too.

48...Nd4 49.Qb4 Qf6 50.Qc5! Nc6

Black is completely tied up. White takes his time before cashing in by snuffing out any counter chances.

51.Be3! Re6 52.Bc4 Re7 53.Bd5



A complete strategic triumph. Every White piece is superior to its counterpart. Black is forced to part with his a-pawn.

**53...Nd4 54.Rxa7 Rxa7
55.Qxa7 Ne7**

The desperado, 55...Nxf3+
56.gxf3 Qxf3 57.Qxf7! Nf4
58.Qf5+ Kh8 59.Qf8+ Kh7

60.Bg8+ and checkmate in short order.

56.Bc4 h5 57.Qc5 1-0

A fantastic victory by Kasparov and one of the most complete and beautiful crushes that I've seen. Kramnik was simply outclassed this day.

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