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## Inside Chess

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## Yasser Annotates:

Shabalov-Seirawan  
U.S. Championship 1998

The day before the free day and the players were beginning to get a bit desperate. Those with strong ambitions pushed themselves in this round content with the thought that they'd be given a day to recover their exertions. With apologies to the other players of the championship, I found the following game to be one of the most interesting of the tournament. Typical of my games with Shabba we both had the same impression - that is we both thought that we were winning.

***White: Alexander Shabalov***

***Black: Yasser Seirawan***

**Round 4, November 3, 1998**

**1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.Bg2 Bb7 5.0-0 Be7 6.d4**

Prior to and after reaching this standard QID position, I was taking a lot of time trying to recall some ancient analysis after 6...O-O 7.d5, an intriguing pawn sacrifice which I was just now certain(!) that Shabba was aiming to reach. After a lot of futile efforts, I just couldn't recall the line and hoped that things would click for me later.

**6...0-0! 7.Nc3**

Okay, probably this or 7.Re1 are better than 7.d5, but, I was happy to see it.

**7...Ne4 8.Bd2 d6?!**

GM Roman Dzindzichashvili gave me a grilling for this one. The moves O-O and Nb1-c3, in that order should be me by 8...f5! 9.d5!? Bf6 when according to Roman Black just has a good



game. This is based on the line 10.Qc2? Bxc3! 11.Bxc3 exd5 as costing White an important central pawn. Thanking Roman for the lesson I was forced to admit he was right. The text allows White a spatial advantage.

**9.d5 Nxc3 10.Bxc3 Bf6 11.Nd4 e5 12.Nc6?**

Looks good but in my opinion is wrong. White is comfortably better after 12.Nc2 planning a central, Kingside and Queenside buildup! I'm not sure which way Black is supposed to go. After the text I wasn't sure if the c6-pawn would be an asset or liability.

**12.Nxc6**

Neither was I sure whether the inclusion of the Queen moves: 12.Qe8 13.Qa4 Nxc6 favored Black or White.

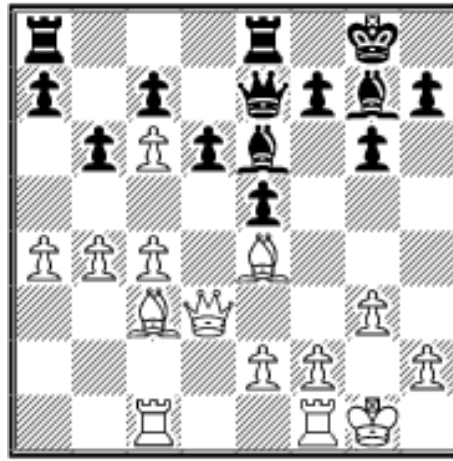
**13.dxc6 Bc8 14.b4!**

Approaching the position in a straightforward way. To utilize his c6-pawn, White will have to open up the Queenside. Most importantly the a-file. Well this will take some time, and, in the meantime the move ...a7-a5 could be annoying. Thus the text. For my part, I was happy to see this. I reasoned that White would spend a lot of tempi going for the open a-file only to get shut down. I mean, so what if White would double his Rooks on a7 and b7? The c7-pawn will be nicely insulated. So my future worries are a distant slow burn. To my mind, my ideal was simple take some central space by ...e5-e4 and ...f7-f5 and most importantly trade off all four Bishops. In a major piece ending I'd be better.

**14...Bf5! 15.Rc1!**

Avoiding two strategic traps: 15.e4? Be6 When my light-squared Bishop just became better than its counterpart and 15.Bd5? e4! 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 when I've successfully traded a Bishop and trading off the other one will be a cinch. Now 15...e4? 16.Qd5! Bxc3 17.Rxc3 Qf6 18.Re3 costs a pawn. Over the next few moves both players are trying to favorably resolve the move ...e5-e4 in their favor.

**15...Re8 16.Qd5! g6 17.Be4 Be6 18.Qd3 Qe7 19.a4 Bg7**



At this point I was quite happy with my position as I thought that ...f7-f5 and ...e5-e4 were both coming with tempo.

**20.f3!!**

A remarkable move which completely befuddled me. I had been expecting 20.Bd5 e4 21.Bxe4!? Bxc4 22.Qxc4

Qxe4 and a comfortable life.

**20...f5 21.Bd5 Bxd5 22.Qxd5+**

The other recapture 22.cxd5? e4 23.fxe4 Qxe4 obviously favors Black.

**22...Qf7 23.Rfd1 Bh6**

An inspired or misguided attempt to play for the win? I considered 23...e4 24.f4 Bxc3 25.Rxc3 Qxd5 26.cxd5 as a dead draw, whereas Shabba intended 26.Rxd5 claiming a plus. I disagreed with this assessment. After 26.Rxd5 (!) Kf7 I prefer Black's position. Thus my choice of the text.

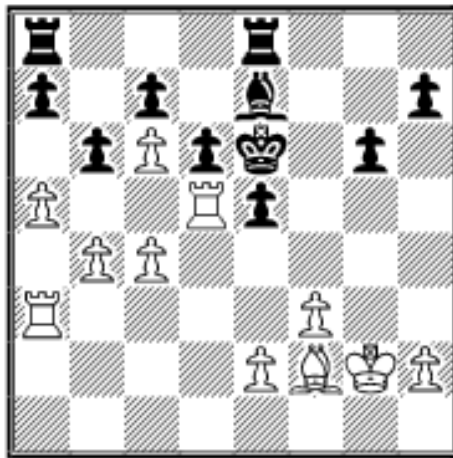
**24.Ra1 Be3+ 25.Kg2 Qxd5 26.Rxd5?**

The same mistaken recapture. White might argue that 26.cxd5 is a slight plus for him. After the text, I liked my position as my King has a direct path to the lofty e6-square. Also, White's ace-in-the-hole, might actually resolve itself now to my favor. Once my King gets to e6, the move ...b6-b5 becomes a consideration.

**26...Kf7 27.a5 Ke6 28.Ra3 f4 29.gxf4 Bxf4!**

While the recapture 29...exf4 might seem automatic (backward e2-pawn) White is doing fine after 30.Bd4 as the e2-pawn is easily defended and the pressure on the a-file might amount to something one day. Unfortunately at this point both players started to flounder a little. Me more so than Shabba as time trouble began to work its horrible magic.

**30.Be1 Bc1!? 31.Rad3 Bg5! 32.Bf2 Be7 33.Ra3**



This is where I begin to throw away tempi and thus lose the lion's share of my advantage. While Shabba thought he was clearly better, so did I. My reasons were structural. Shabba's were tactical. He will take the a-line, penetrate the seventh, chew off my base and so on. To my mind the c6-pawn was at risk as well as the Kingside. The right plan

was to play ...g6-g5, ...h7-h5, ...Rc8-g8, ...Ra8-f8, ...Be7-d8 and ...g5-g4 with a winning breakthrough. All I see for White is the plan outlined above and it doesn't work.

### **33...Rf8? 34.Be3?**

Just to stop ...Rf8-f4 touching the c4-pawn. I was happy to see this move as I thought the Bishop hardly belongs here. What is the e2-pawn doing? Better was 34.Rd1!? Rf4 35.e4 intending the defensive Bf2-g3 keeping the Kingside.

### **34...g5! 35.b5!**

A significant little move as it cuts out possibilities of ...b6-b5 by Black.

### **35...h5! 36.Rd1 Rg8! 37.Rda1 Rac8?**

Terrible! I'd like to offer a second question mark but the move doesn't lose material. After the rather painfully obvious 37...Raf8! 38.axb6 axb6 39.Ra7 Bd8 (In case 39.g4 isn't better) White is in trouble. The moves ...g5-g4 and ...d6-d5 will give Black the significantly more active pieces.

### **38.axb6 axb6 39.Ra7 g4**

Now this move doesn't have nearly the impact as it should.

### **40.f4 exf4?**

Another slip. Better was 40...Rgf8 41.Rf1 Rf5 with a small edge to Black because of his better King and more significant pawns.

#### **41.Bxf4 h4 42.R7a3!**

A fine retreat whose strength I had completely underestimated. A moment ago my King was so safe on the e6-square and now it was being budged!

#### **42...Bf6 43.Re3+ Kf5?**

Played with a great deal of unhappiness. Some time ago I had dismissed this line as 43...Be5 44.Bxe5 dxe5 45.Rd1 Rcd8 with no problems. But, there is a problem. Instead of trading on e5, 44.Rd1! Gives White a clear advantage. Unfortunately the text has a clear drawback, Black won't be able to force the trade of a pair of Rooks. Best was 43...Kf7 44.Rf1 (44.Ra7 Kg6 and White's a7-Rook accomplishes nothing. Whereas there is a clear threat of 45...Kf5 harassing the f4-Bishop.) Rce8 45.Rxe8 Rxe8 46.Bg5! Rxe2+ 47.Kg1 Re6 48.Bxh4 and White will draw.

#### **44.Rf1! Kg6 45.Rd3!!**

Unexpected and very strong. I had thought that White was still in trouble as I expected to trade a Rook on the e-file, then grab the a file, then attack the c-pawn and... well you get the idea. Shabba's crafty point is that I have to watch out for a winning Bishop sacrifice against the d6-pawn.

#### **45...Rge8! 46.e3 Re6! 47.Rd5 Ra8 48.Rfd1 Ra2+?**

Around these parts I was using a lot of time trying to figure out what was happening on all of White's sacrifices based on 49.c5 bxc5 50.b6 as well as 49.Bxd6 with chaos. With my time ticking I decided to give a check, collect my 30 seconds and put my Rook behind White's pawn. Ridiculous! For now the Rook is well placed on the 8th rank. White's sacrifices are a cause for concern and 48...Be7! Stops them quite nicely thank you. Thereafter, Black can consider active measures by ...Ra8-a4 or ...Re6-e4 but only after this defensive move.

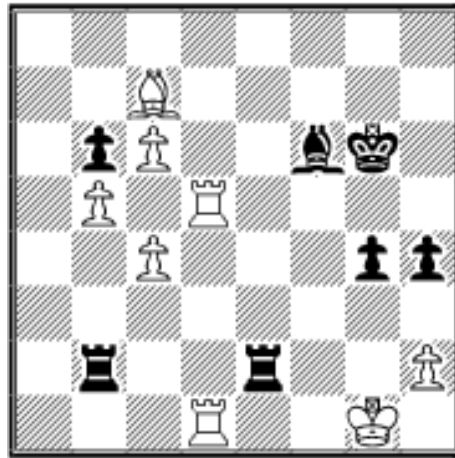
#### **49.Kg1 Rb2? 50.Bxd6!**

Shabba, bless his heart, didn't hesitate to fall into my trap and thereby secure a winning position!

#### **50...Rxe3**

Naturally, 50...cxd6? 51.c7 (51.Rxd6) Re8 52.Rxd6 Threatening Rd1-f1 and Rd6xb6 wins.

### 51.Bxc7 Ree2



Around these parts, despite my severe time trouble I was quite confident of at least a draw. My intuition told me with doubled Rooks on the 2nd, threats of pushing my Kingside and so I was expecting Shabba to fall into a cunning trap... For his part, Shabba was equally confident and within hours of the games conclusion found a win for

himself.

### 52.Bf4??

Strangely enough this "natural" move was the one that both Shabba and I devoted most of our attention. White wants to interfere with the control over the second by putting a piece on the d2-square while making room for the c6-pawn.

Readers are invited to compare this position and game five of the 1998 Kramnik-Shirov match. In that game, Black's Rook's, doubled on the second rank, were completely neutralized by a lone dark squared Bishop.

I had paid particular attention to the Kramnik-Shirov game but both during and after the game, I refused to believe that White's Bishop could perform miracles and save the King. Well its time to believe in miracles, as White has a win with the even more natural 52.Bxb6 capturing a pawn. At first this move appears to be suicidal as White gives greater rein to Black's Rooks. Once you notice that 52...Rxb2 53.c7 Rbg2+ 54.Kf1 h3 wins for Black, a shudder goes down the spine and that's the end of thoughts involving capturing the b-pawn.

However, 52.Bxb6! Rxb2 53.R5d2! Rhxd2 54.Rxd2 Rxd2 55.c7 Rd1+ 56.Kf2 g3+ 57.Ke2 and White wins.

It seems that Black doesn't have the time to capture the h2-pawn.

Thus: 52.Bxb6 g3! And now that both 53.R5d2?? gxh2+ and 53.hxg3?? Rg2+ lose for White the game again seems to favor Black. This is where computers show their great strength. While we humans can play chess well only by looking at a selective search of moves, the computers consider every move. Neither Shabba or I considered the amazing move: 53.h3!! Which voluntarily allows Black a protected passed g-pawn that does nothing for his attack. The b6-Bishop happily patrols the g1-a7 diagonal thereby neutralizing both of Black's Rooks. Black is busted! While it confuses me, it seems the move ...g4-g3 actually helps White.

The next try was: 52.Bxb6! (By this time this capture is beginning to earn an exclamation mark.) 52...h3 Seems to be logical. Now, 53.c7 Rxh2 54.R5d2 Rhxd2 55.Rxd2 Rb1+ 56.Kf2 (56.Kh2?? Be5 Checkmate!) 56...Bh4+ or possibly 56...h2 enters that world of unclear. This is where things really go from bad to worse. After 52.Bxb6! h3 53.Bc7!! White pauses to hold up the h2-pawn and the game is immediately won.

On the free day Shabba, Alex Yermolinsky, Danny Olim and I spent a lot of time looking at other tries for Black including: 52...Bc3, 52...Be5 and 52...Rbc2. In end, I couldn't make any thing work and was forced to admit that 52.Bxb6 was winning for White.

Upon reflection it struck me as extremely funny that on consecutive moves White could have played Bxd6, Bxc7 and Bxb6 wiping out my whole "solid" structure.

Back to the game! After the text, I confidently played my next winning move.

**52...g3 53.Bd2!**

Obvious yet somehow I had completely missed this move when laying my "trap." Expected was 53.R1d2 Rb1+ 54.Rd1 Rbb2 drawing or 53.R5d2?? Bd4+! 54.Kf1 Rbxd2 winning or 53.hxg3?? Rg2+ 54.Kh1 Rh2+ 55.Kg1 Rbg2+ 56.Kf1 h3 winning. Now, with no time on my clock, I had to rely upon my increment bonus to save my bacon. It is quite a shock to go from a draw or a win to a likely loss. Much worse when you have no time. Without the Fischer clock, I would have lost. Thank you Bobby.

**53...Rc2! 54.hxg3 hxg3 55.Rd6**

Not allowing: 55.c5? Rxc5! 56.Rxc5 Bd4+ With a winning tactic.

**55...Rxc4 56.Rf1 Rf2!**

Shabba had missed this one.

**57.Rxf2?**

Another miscalculation as White lets me off the hook. The best move 57.Be3! looks pretty strong to me. I'm not sure if White wins, but, I'm glad I didn't have to find out.

**57...gxf2+ 58.Kxf2 Kf5 59.Be3 Be5 60.Rh6 Rb4! 61.Kf3**

I was grateful that Shabba didn't try 61.Rh7 Rxb5 62.c7 Rb2+ 63.Kf3 Rc2 64.Bxb6 and after a likely ...Be5xc7 the notorious R&B versus B ending is reached. Actually I do know this ending very well and it is an easy draw for the defender. But at faster time controls a slip is possible.

**61...Rb3**

Avoiding the trick: 61...Rxb5? 62.c7 Bxc7 63.Rh5+ Surprise! And White wins.

**62.Rh5+ Ke6 63.Ke4 Rb4+ 64.Kd3 Rb3+ 65.Ke4 1/2-1/2**

The end of an eventful game and a much needed rest day greeted the players after this round.

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