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Yasser Annotates:

Kasparov-Nikolic
Linares1997

(This month, American grandmaster Larry Christiansen adds his comments to Yasser's resulting in an interesting tandem; annotations by Yasser in *italics*; annotations by Larry in normal type.)

Garry unveiled a surprise weapon, the Scotch, in his 1990 FIDE Championship match with Anatoly Karpov. The match was so closely contested that it might even be said that the edge the Scotch gave him won the match for him. Garry has a knack for finding an opening that will surprise his opponent and I'm sure the Dragon Sicilian (Anand match) also has happy memories for him. Still, the Scotch is a serious and daunting weapon. If you like to play classical King pawn positions as Black, for example, the Open Ruy, you've got a problem: What are you going to do against the Scotch? It is entirely due to the efforts of Kasparov that this venerable opening has been rescued from oblivion.

Garry Kasparov-Predrag Nikolic
Linares (5) 1997
Scotch C45

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3

Believe it or not, an important opening nuance. At one time in my career, I enjoyed playing the Petroff Defense (2...Nf6) and watching White struggle to gain an edge. Then one day I sat down opposite Ljubomir Ljubojevic and he simply played 2.d4! exd4 and now 3.Nf3 challenged me to play a line of the Petroff that I didn't like, 3...Nf6 4.e5 Ne4 5.Qxd4 with an edge to White.

Wishing to avoid this line, I stared transfixed at the position for



some time while I considered what to do. My choices were 3...d5(?!), 3...Bb4+!? 4. c3 dxc3 5.bxc3 with an interesting Evans/Danish Gambit-type position or 3...c5?! 4.c3 with advantage for White. After a considerable thought, I decided my best move was 3...Nc6. After 4. Nxd4, Ljubo and I were in a Scotch! Thus, Ljubo found a fine method of avoiding my favored defense. My conclusion is that if White is determined to play a Scotch, the second move d2-d4 is more precise.

3...Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.e5 Qe7 7.Qe2 Nd5 8.c4 Ba6 9.b3

Kasparov played 9.g3 against Ivan Sokolov at the 1996 Yerevan Olympiad, the game continuing 9...g6 (9...f6?! 10. e6! dxe6 11.Bg2! Kf7 12.O-O Rd8 13.b3 g6 14.Re1! led to a White plus in Magomedov-Hachian, Yerevan 1996) 10.b3 Bg7 11.Bb2 O-O 12.Bg2 Rfe8?! (12...Rae8! 13.O-O Bxe5 14.Qxe5 Qxe5 15.Bxe5 Rxe5 16.cxd5 Bxf1 17.Kxf1 cxd5 18.Nc3 c6 looks okay for Black, Rublev-sky-Nikolic, Yerevan 1996) 13.O-O Nb6 (13...Bxe5 14.Bxe5 Qxe5 15.Qxe5 Rxe5 16.cxd5 Bxf1 17.Kxf1 cxd5 18.f4 Re3 19.Bxd5 is slightly better for White according to Kasparov in his notes to the game from *Informant* 67) 14.Re1 d5 15.Qc2! with a significant plus for White.

10...g5

Anand unveiled this move in his New York 1995 match with Kasparov and drew in a very sharp scrap. Credit for it goes to his second Ubilava. The idea, of course, is to make f4 accessible to the Knight on d5, while also preparing development with ...Bg7. The main drawback is the general weakening of Black's kingside.

Predrag employs the novelty which Anand introduced in the 1995 PCA Championship.

10.g3!?

In New York, Kasparov played 10. Ba3 d6 11.exd6 Qxe2+ 12.Bxe2 Bg7 13.cxd5 Bxe2 14.Kxe2 Bxa1 15.Rc1, but Anand uncorked his home prep with 15...O-O-O! and managed to equalize.

In the above-mentioned game, Garry tried 10.Ba3 d6, but didn't get anything for his efforts. The point of the text is rather straightforward. Black's problem is his hanging d5-Knight.

Forced to retreat, Black loses a valuable tempo and generally gives White an advantage. Black is denied an opportunity for ...Nd5-f4 solving his problem.

10...Bg7 11.Bb2 O-O?

Predrag gets caught in an opening that he isn't as familiar with as his opponent. After ...g7-g5, Black's King does not belong on the kingside. While lecturing at the 1995 PCA Championship I was engrossed in the ending after 11...O-O-O 12.Bg2 Rde8 13.O-O Bxe5 14.Bxe5 Qxe5 15.Qxe5 Rxe5 16.cxd5 Bxf1 17.Kxf1 cxd5 18.Nd2 g4. It reveals one of the points of Anand's novelty. Although I generally prefer the two pieces versus a Rook and two pawns, I like Black in this position. White's Bishop bites on central granite. Kasparov may have a different view of this ending, or he may have an earlier improvement in mind.

12.Nd2 f6?!

Nikolic has played in absolutely logical fashion to this point. He must start attacking White's cramping e5-spearhead before White consolidates. Black's badly placed cleric on a6 doesn't give him the luxury of "solid" woodshifting.

Black is feeling the heat to do something, because White's threats are looming large. An unhappy line is 12...Rae8 13.O-O-O Nb6 (the e5-pawn is poison) 14.f4, as Black's kingside is going to get pried open. The text, however, has that uncomfortable, slow feeling. Better was 12...d6, leaving the kingside alone.



13.Qh5!

Exploiting in direct and crude fashion the dark side of 9...g5. The immediate threat of 14.cxd5 gives White time to get to work on Black's kingside.

A powerful move which puts the boot to the d5-Knight, while invading squares on the

kingside.

13...Nb4

There is no other reasonable alternative.

Looks good, but consider that this move has a lone threat. Once that threat is defended, the problem b4-Knight is again hanging in the air, but at least Bf1-d3 is stopped for the moment.

14.h4!

I can visualize the scene in Linares as the hapless Nikolic is suddenly confronted with yet another theoretical bombshell from Dr. Kasparov's research department. The brilliant point behind this shot is 14...Nc2+ 15.Kd1 Nxa1 16.hxg5 fxe5 (forced) 17.Qxh7+ Kf7 18.Qh5+ Kg8 (18...Ke6 19.Bh3+) 19.f4!! and Black is totally helpless. For example, on 19...Rf7 20.f5! the pawns decimate the Black position with the coming f5-f6. Still, I am not quite sure that the line rubs out the ...g5 variation.

This is again right on the mark. Kasparov invites 14...Nc2+ 15.Kd1 Nxa1 16.hxg5, when Black's position will be destroyed. Black has no choice but to further weaken his kingside pawn shield.

14...g4

Too slow. Black had to play 14...Qe8! 15.hxg5 Qxh5 16.Rxh5 fxe5. It appears to me that Black is in decent shape. The thorn of ...Nc2+ and pressure against f2 prevents White from a free-flowing initiative. For instance 16.Kd1? Rxf2 17.a3 Nd5 is good for Black.

15.Kd1!!

Now two Black pieces on the queenside are hanging out to dry.

A devastating move in the finest traditions of Steinitz. Black's Knight is asked to take a hike. The temporary discomfort to White's King is not an issue, as Black's army is too uncoordinated to mount an attack.

15...c5

15...fxe5 16.a3 Rxf2 17.axb4 Qxb4 18.Be2 wins easily for White. So Nikolic has to expend precious time retrieving the Knight, allowing Kasparov to press forward an unstoppable series of threats.

This is an admission that Black's strategy has failed. The issue is tempi and this one costs! Black's kingside offers an open goal. Predrag would like to bail out with 15...fxe5, giving up a piece, but 16.a3 Rxf2 17.Qg5!? makes White the boss.

16.a3 Nc6 17.Bd3

When White's attack comes with tempo in the Scotch, things are bad indeed. It is one of those openings where an initiative for either side, once possessed, seems to grow of its own accord. This is due to the open nature of the position and the weaknesses over the whole board.

17...f5

Forced.

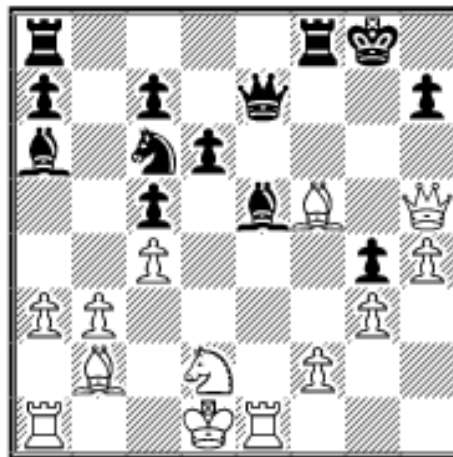
18.Bxf5

We now see why Kasparov tossed in h2-h4 earlier.

18...Bxe5

The Exchange sac 18...Rxf5 19.Qxf5 has no effect.

19.Re1 d6



20.Be4!

Precise play by White. Black hopes to be able to use the handsome d4- and e5-squares, but the only piece that could really enjoy these squares is the Knight and now it is frozen.

20...Bb7

Walking into a pin is not much improvement over chewing on concrete at a6.

21.Qxg4+ Qg7

Or 21...Kh8 22.Bxc6 Bxc6 23.f4 Qg7 (23...Bxb2 24.Rxe7)
24.Bxe5 (not 24.Rxe5?? Qxg4+) 24...dxe5 25.Qxg7+ Kxg7
26.Rxe5, etc.

*This is tantamount to resignation, but 21...Kh8 22.Bxc6 Bxc6
23.f4 would force ...Qe7-g7 anyway. Black has been lost for some
time and Garry drives that fact home over the next few moves.*

**22.Bd5+ Kh8 23.Bxe5 dxe5 24. Qxg7+ Kxg7 25.Ne4 Rad8
26.Nxc5 Bc8 27.Ra2 1-0**

*Two pawns down, with no cheapos on the horizon, Predrag hears
the dinner bell. A fine victory for Kasparov, which admirably
displays the strengths of the Scotch. After his eleventh move,
Black didn't stand a chance, but, to give Garry his due, any chess
teacher worth his salt lectures that the toughest thing to do in
chess is to win a won game. Garry made it look easy.*

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