



COLUMNISTS

Inside Chess

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*Winning Chess
Combinations*

by Yasser Seirawan

Yasser Annotates:

Timman - Nikolic, Dutch Championship 1997

Jan Timman (2625) - Predrag Nikolic (2630)

Dutch Championship Playoff (m-3) 1997

Dutch Leningrad [A81]

1.Nf3 f5 2.d4 Nf6 3.g3 g6 4.c3!? Bg7 5.Qb3

This is an old idea of Viktor Kortchnoi's to cross Black's Leningrad by roping him back into a Stonewall.

5...e6?!

Going along with White's program, but it's often necessary to meet imaginative play with equal creativity. Better is 5...Nc6 6.Bg2 Na5 7.Qc2 (7.Qa4!? b6 8.Ng5!? c6 9.b4 Nb7 is unclear) 7...b6, playing for a double fianchetto.

6.Bg2 O-O 7.O-O Nc6 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Nbd2 d6 11.e4 f4?

This is one of those moves that looks much better than it actually is. In these middlegame positions, it's important that the g7-bishop keep a role in the game. 11...Qf7! 12.Rae1 g5! is necessary: it keeps the center tense and the kingside dynamic. White now gets a strategic stranglehold on the position.

12.Rae1 Qf7 13.e5 d5

Not surprisingly, White has a huge advantage in this position. Why? Just look at this position from the viewpoint of a French Defense and add up White's advantages: with Black's c7-pawn where it is, White's center is untouchable; White has gotten rid of his bad bishop, while both of Black's bishops are bad; and White can open up the kingside – just what he wants to do in a French – any time he wants!

14.Qc2?

Wasting a tempo for absolutely no reason. White is close to winning(!) with two different, but straightforward, plans. After 14.Kh1! b6 (14...Bd7 15.Rg1!) 15.Rg1, planning Bg2-f1-d3, a flood of white pieces go kingside. The other line, 14.gxf4! Qxf4 15.Re3 Ne7 16.Ne1 (16.Bh3) 16...Nf5 17.Nd3 Qg5 18.f4 Qe7 (18...Qxg2+!? 19.Kxg2 Nxe3+ 20.Kg3 Nxf1 21.Nxf1 is good for White) 19.Re3 gives White space and initiative; he will chomp his way through the kingside with Bg2-h3xf5 and play on the g-file. A question of taste, surely, but I just can't understand why Timman didn't choose one of them.

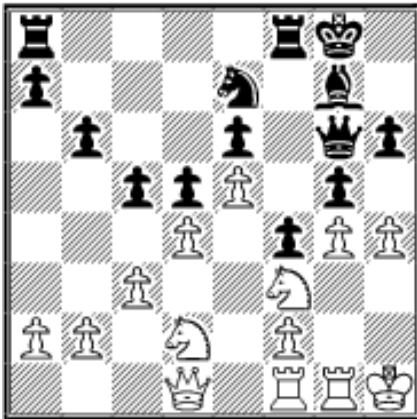
14...Bd7 15.Kh1 Ne7 16.Rg1 g5 17.g4

Not a bad move at all, but 17.Bf1!, then Bf1-d3, is begging to be played.

17...Qg6 18.Qd1

White's position is so overwhelmingly good, I don't want to be too critical of his moves, but the text allows Black to trade off one of his poorly placed pieces. After 18.Qxg6 Nxg6 19.Bf1, followed by Bf1-d3 and an eventual h2-h4, Black is lost. The only way Black can save his position is through incremental improvements. His d7-bishop is terrible and now he gets to trade it off.

18...Bb5 19.Bf1 Bxf1 20.Rexf1 b6 21.h4 c5



22.Re1

This move seems like another little slip. Black is up the creek after 22.Kg2! Kf7 23.Rh1 Rh8 24.hxg5!? hxg5 25.Rxh8 Rxh8 26.Rh1, intending 27.Rxh8 Bxh8 28.Qa4, when the g5-weakie will prove to be the decisive factor.

22...Rac8 23.Kg2

With 23.hxg5 hxg5 24.Kg2 cxd4 25.cxd4!? Rc2 26.Rh1 Rxb2 27.Rh5 White has a promising attack.

23...cxd4 24.Nxd4 f3+

Of course, Black is utterly desperate. If White is allowed N2f3, he will have achieved strategic domination.

25.Kh3!

An excellent move, as White's king is now extremely comfortable. The f3-

pawn isn't going anywhere.

25...Rf4 26.h5 Qf7 27.N2xf3 Rf8 28.Rg3 Re4 29.Qb1!



All my quibbling aside, White still has his strategic victory well in hand. His king is super-secure and he has the dominant minor pieces. Predrag's pawn desperado hasn't worked; so he throws out another jab, this time with a knight.

29...Nf5 30.gxf5

White is short of victory after 30.Rxe4 dxe4 31.Qxe4 Nxg3 32.Kxg3 Qf4+ 33.Qxf4 Rxf4 34.Nxe6, as 34...Re4! holds.

30...exf5 31.Kg2 f4



32.e6?

Jan has one shortcoming that has plagued him throughout his career: he loves to win beautifully instead of prosaically and is mesmerized by complications. Why this sharp move, when 32.Nxg5 hxg5 33.Rxg5 f3+ 34.Kg1 leaves White two pawns up with an easy win? White even has threats of Re1xe4, winning a third pawn, or h5-h6, winning a piece, in this line.

32...Qxh5 33.e7!? Re8 34.Rh1??

Time trouble rears its ugly head and Jan utterly spoils his position. With 34.Rxe4 dxe4 35.Qxe4 fxg3 36.fxg3, White still has the advantage.

34...Qg6

White's debacle is complete. Suddenly his pieces are embarrassingly misplaced.

35.Rg4 R8xe7 36.Qd1 Bxd4 37.cxd4 Qf5 38.Rhh4 Rg7! 39.Nxg5 hxg5 0-1 (2:00/1:53)

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