



COLUMNISTS

Inside Chess

Yasser Seirawan

*Winning Chess
Combinations*

by Yasser Seirawan

Yasser Annotates:

Fedorowicz - Seirawan, US Championship 1998

John Fedorowicz (2520) - Yasser Seirawan (2610)

US Championship 1988

French Winawer [C16]

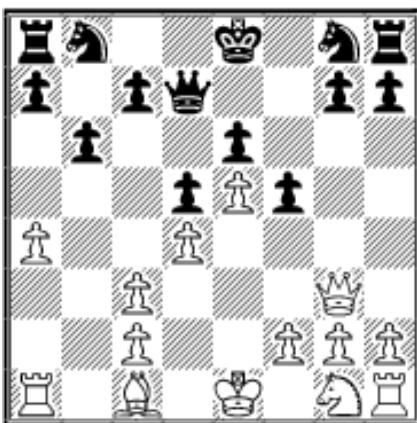
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Qd7 5.a3 Bxc3+

A major alternative for Black in this position (and one I used to favor) was the retreat 5...Bf8.

6.bxc3 b6 7.a4

A standard move in the French Winawer. White intends to exchange his isolated a-pawn as well as open up the a3-f8 diagonal for his bishop. Theory considers 7.Qg4 to be the most testing.

7...Ba6 8.Bxa6 Nxa6 9.Qd3 Nb8 10.Qg3 f5



The try 10...f6 was to be considered. In fact, our post-mortem confirmed this as Black's best. The move has several points: to pressure e5, to leave the outpost f5 free for a knight, and, last but not least, to lay a subtle trap.

To wit: Black wishes to lull White into believing that a battle will flare up around the e5-square. White might then be tempted to slot his knight to the wrong circuit with 11.Nf3?. But, after 11...f5, White would have to spend several tempi to bring his knight to its proper square, f4. However, John was having none of this. After the game he told me he intended 11.

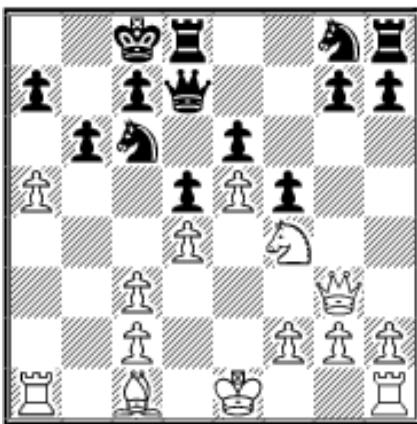
Ne2 Nc6 12.O-O with an interesting middlegame in view. But...

11.Ne2 Nc6 12.Nf4 0-0-0

So, we've transposed back into theory. But instead of sacrificing a knight against e6 on move 12 – theory's wild favorite – White has played a3-a4 on move seven.

I now faced the choice of allowing White his upcoming exchange sacrifice, or of playing 12...g6 13.h4 Nge7 14.h5 gxh5 15.Nxh5, when White has a kingside initiative for his shattered queenside. I decided to allow the sacrifice.

13.a5!?



Is this sacrifice good or bad? Well, it depends on your temperament and style. Personally, I can't believe it's good: Why should Black be punished? What has he done wrong?

Yet, White does get excellent positional value for the sacrifice. The c5-square is a great outpost for a knight or bishop, and Black's king is made vulnerable. As Nick deFirmian remarked after the game: "Couldn't White just wait to do this? Let Black play ...Nc6-a5-c4 and *then* sacrifice the stuff." Nick's approach seems much more rational.

13...Nxa5 14.Rxa5 bxa5 15.Nd3!

White now intends to play Nc5, Qg3-d3-a6 with a quick checkmate. I'll have to neutralize this threat with my queen, which currently defends g7. So, I must fasten down the kingside.

15...g6! 16.O-O

A mistake would be 16.Nc5 Qb5!, reminding White that he has a king too.

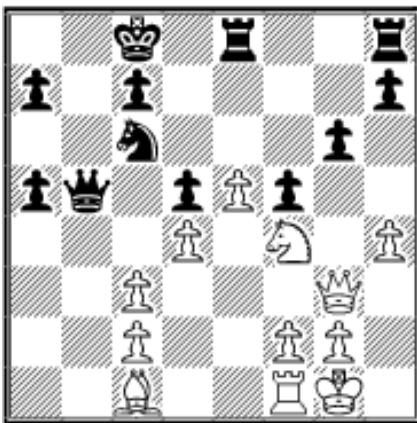
16...Qb5

It seemed too gluttonous to play 16...Qa4 17.Nc5 Qxc2. I was content with my booty and decided to play it safe.

17.Nc5 Re8 18.h4

Later John suggested 18.h3. But that's looking twenty moves ahead! My preference is 18.h4: in some positions it threatens to pry the kingside open with h5; it also clamps down on any ...g6-g5 ideas.

18...Ne7 19.Nxe6 Nc6 20.Nf4!



So, the knight ends up back where it started. A mistake would be 20.Nc5 Nxe5, capturing an important pawn and opening up files for my rooks.

20...Nd8

A hard move to criticize. I believed that White was lost. He is an exchange down and has a bad bishop to boot. Additionally, my passed a-pawns have a more promising future than White's passed e-pawn. The only jokers in the deck seemed to be the knights. By exchanging

them off, I thought the position a simple win.

But rarely are things so clear. It seems that here was the right moment to punish John for his reckless sacrifice. My knight is needed to support my a-pawns. Thus: 20...a4 21.

Qf3 Rd8 22.Ne6 Na5! 23.Nxd8 Rxd8 24.Ba3 Nc4 25.Bc5 Nd2 and wins.

So, White's bishop must stay at home – then, however, my a-pawns prove too strong. White's best chance is *not* to win an exchange back: 23.Ba3 Na5 24.Bc5 c6 25.Re1 Nc4 26.e6 Rhe8, and though the position abounds in tactics, the post-mortem favored Black.

21.Qf3! c6 22.Ba3 Ne6 23.Nxe6! Rxe6 24.Bc5 Kb7 25.Ra1

Only now did I recognize my error in judgment. White's bishop is a pillar of strength. My a-pawns aren't going anywhere. The kingside is closed and White is going to build his attack on the queenside.

He intends 26.Qd1 and Rb1 followed by Rb4 and Qb1, etc. If 25...Ka8, intending ...Rb8, then 26.Bd6 and the same problem occurs. Thus, I had to do some radical rethinking and decided to steer the game into safe channels.

25...Rxe5 26.c4!?

A surprising move that I initially thought cost White the game. I had been expecting 26.dxe5 Qxc5, with approximate equality. If White were to then try 27.c4, in that case 27...Qxc4 28.Rxa5 would favor Black.

After the text move, 26...Qb2 presents itself. At first sight things looked good: 27.Rxa5 Qc1+ 28.Kh2 Re4, threatening mate. However, before I could really get excited, I saw 27.Qd1!, which leaves my rook *en prise* as well as threatening Rb1.

Now I had to compromise my queenside structure yet again.

26...dxc4 27.Qc3?



Too cautious. I prefer White after 27.dxe5 Qxc5 28.Qc3. In this variation, White would have a passed e-pawn; but after the text move, the pawn ends up on c5, where it is entirely useless.

27...Rxc5 28.dxc5 Re8 29.Rxa5 Qb1+ 30.Kh2 Ka8!

Setting up a marvelous cheapo. If White greedily lops off the pawn with 31.Qxc4, then 31...Re4 32.Qg8+ and Black interposes with check after 32...Qb8+!, forcing a winning rook

ending. It was because of variations like this that John complained about his 18.h4 move.

31.Ra1! Qb8+

If 31...Qb5, then 32.Qd4 Qb8+ 33.g3 Qe5 34.Qd7 and Black's king is far more vulnerable.

32.Kg1 Re4 33.f3!

A surprising move. I had expected only g2-g3, which would have compromised White's

king. White's h-pawn is poisonous. Being in mild time pressure, I quickly played my next move, completely overlooking White's combination.

33...Qe5 34.Rxa7+! Kxa7 35.Qa5+ Kb7 36.Qb6+ Kc8 37.Qxc6+ Kd8 38.fxe4 fxe4 39.Qb6+ ½-½

The wrong moment to agree to the draw. The onus is still on White to prove equality after 39...Ke7. One of my most exciting games of the tournament.



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