



## COLUMNISTS

*Inside Chess*

Yasser Seirawan



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## Inside Chess, 1988/5

## Speelman - Seirawan, St. John 1988, Game One

A Russian joke: Nikita Khrushchev and John Kennedy challenged each other to a race. According to *Tass*, "The two world leaders met in an international event; Khrushchev took second and Kennedy finished next to last!"

I can start this article only with a joke, for at times like this it takes a sense of humor to get through. Folks, there's not a lot of good to be said about my match with Jonathan Speelman. I lost 4-1, losing three games and drawing two. Not my best outing. Defeat is never easy, but it gets worse with age.

What went wrong? Well, let's begin with the obvious: In all five games I surprised myself by getting into what I usually avoid – time pressure. Strangely enough, I also played far too slowly in the 1987 U.S. Championship.

Too, in each of my Saint John games I made a "howler" – a term coined by my second, IM John Donaldson, to decry a move that's so bad it screams. How do you explain howlers? And so many, to boot? Time trouble? Nope. Some of my howlers were made with lots of time on my clock.

With the benefit of hindsight, I was in bad form while Jonathan seemed to be in fighting trim. Perhaps my long layoff between the American Open and the start of the match (January 24) hurt me. Perhaps Jonathan's short layoff – he had recently finished second in Hastings, a Category 13 event – helped him.

It seems I need constant competition to stay hot; after just a brief layoff I cool down. But the Candidates' is a bad time to realize this truth once again!

There had been the possibility of playing a challenge match against Beliavsky in early January, but when the Soviets refused the dates we offered, the match was called off. Without the possibility of competition, I chose the next best thing. John Donaldson and I tried to improve my opening knowledge ... ahem ... and I spent a full week with Walter Browne looking into deep middlegame positions.

Arriving in Saint John, I felt great. Physically, mentally, and emotionally I was at peak form. The only indication that I was "off" was revealed the day of Game 1 when John Donaldson and I played some casual games in which he did very well.

Let's have a look at the games and what I did wrong:

**Speelman, Jonathan (2625) – Seirawan, Yasser (2595)**

Candidates Match, Saint John (1), 1988

English Opening [A17]

**1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3**

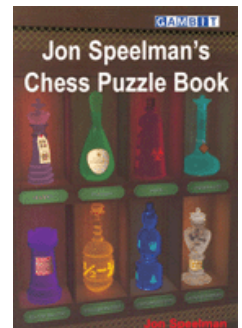
A bit unexpected. We had focused our preparation on 3.g3.

**3...Bb4 4.Qb3!?**

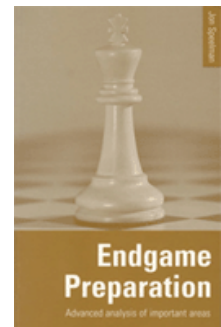
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Also unexpected, but welcome. The queen seems a bit misplaced in front of her b-pawn. In Game 3, Jonathan would play the "proper" 4.Qc2.

**4...c5! 5.a3 Ba5! 6.g3 Nc6 7.Bg2 O-O 8.O-O d5**

According to theory, the best way to establish equality is 8...a6! followed by ...Rb8 and ...b5. I agree.

**9.d3 d4?!**

A poor move played after eight minutes of thought. The move itself isn't so bad, it's the thought behind it – my first howler. My first thought was to play 9...Nd4!? and after 10.Nxd4 cxd4 11.Na4 dxc4 12.Qxc4 e5, Black stands better.

The problem with 9...Nd4 is the paradoxical retreat 10.Qd1. What should I do then? The straightforward 10...dxc4 11.dxc4 Bxc3 12.bxc3 Nxf3+ 13.Bxf3 leads to an unusual position in which White's two bishops more than compensate for his doubled pawns. A sample variation is 13...Qc7? 14.Bf4 e5 15.Bg5 Rd8 16.Bd5, when White has a big plus. Perhaps Black should consider 13...Qa5 or 13...Qe7. In either case, I prefer White's position.

But, given the game continuation, this is what I should have played.

**10.Na4**



**10...b6??**

This follow-up to my last move is howler number two. It is based on simple miscalculation. I still had time to consider 10...Nd7, though White gets a superior Benoni-type game after 11.e3 e5 12.exd4 exd4 13.Bg5 since all of Black's pieces trip over one another.

Still, that would have avoided the lost position I soon achieved.

**11.Ne5**

Ironically, I have forced White to play this extremely powerful move. That is, he falls into my trap! With hindsight I can smile happily and be glad that Jonathan didn't play 11.e3!? Considering my state of mind, I would have shot back with 11...e5?, which would have made 12.Nxe5 that much more devastating!

**11...Nxe5 12.Bxa8**



Hmmm. I now went into the think tank and had a deep freeze. What to do?

My "trap" had been 12...Bd7 13.Bg2 Qe8, winning the knight on a4. The only problem was I hadn't reckoned on 14.Qa2!, when White suddenly wins one of the bishops after 14...Bxa4 15.b4. If I don't capture White's knight in this line, then after a pawn sacrifice with b2-b4 White will have tremendous Benko Gambit-type play.

One of the truest tests of a grandmaster's strength – in fact the strength all players – is this: When you're material down and you *know* your opponent is going to grind away, what do you do? There is no predetermined answer. My advice is to distance yourself from the position. That is, stop looking at concrete variations. Instead, answer some basic questions: "Where are my pieces? Where are my opponent's pieces? Should I search for chances on the kingside? queenside? Center?"

From this sobering point of view, you'll be surprised at how often you experience moments of inspiration. Look back to the game position. White has no pieces around his king. How to attack? Yes, I see it now. First my queen goes to e8. Then the f6 knight to g4, I play ... f7-f5 and ...Qe8-h5 and – crunchola – I win. Wrong. Not even close. The timely moves h2-h3 and f2-f4 are killers.

But the germ of the idea is there: Student body kingside.

**12...Qe8 (1:25) 13.Bg2 Nh5!**

There we have it. Counterplay? Maybe not. Inspiration or desperation? Whatever the case, my only chance is ...f7-f5-f4. Here goes nothing.

**14.Qd1**

He's worried. I can double the pawns on a4 and don't have to face a possible b2-b4 sacrifice. Well, great, progress. At least I've earned a concession.

**14...Bd7 15.e3 (1:17) Nf6! (1:47)**

Having placed such energy into ...Nh5 and ...f7-f5, I wasn't about to give the idea up easily. The move 15...f5 would create far too many targets on the e-file. The text also brings my knight back into the game.

**16.b3?**



This gives me a chance to climb back into the game. White has a big edge after 16.exd4 Bxa4 17.b3 Bc3 18.dxe5 Bxa1 19.exf6 Bc6 20.fxg7 Bxg7 21. Qg4. White is then a pawn up with attacking chances.

**16...dxe3! 17.Bxe3 Bxa4 18.bxa4 (1:31) Qd7 (1:50)**

With each move I had grown increasingly confident. I feel the game is now equal. But with so little time, I was by no means home free.

**19.d4 Nxc4 20.dxc5 Nxe3 21.fxe3 bxc5 22.Qxd7 Nxd7 23.Rab1**

A crossroads: How to prevent White's penetration to b7? Or do I simply live with it? Living with a rook on b7 means living with those vicious things on a4 and a3. If 23...Rb8, then 24.Rxb8+ Nxb8 25.Rb1 must be winning for White. And 23...Bb6 24.a5 Bxa5 25.Rb7 hardly improves matters.

No, I must place my faith in my c-pawn. Should I place my bishop in front of or behind the c-pawn? For instance, 23...Bd2 24.Kf2 c4 25.Rb7 Ne5 26.Ke2 c3 27.Rxa7 Nc4 The position is a real mess. Perhaps I'm OK, but who knows. So, in front or behind? My experience told me in front! My intuition said behind. The bishop on d2 does nothing to stop the white a-pawns. So...

**23...c4! (1:53) 24.Rb7 Nc5 25.Rxa7 Bb6 26.Ra8 Nb3!**



White has won my a7-pawn, but that doesn't mean his a-pawns are going anywhere. The game is now slightly better for Black!

**27.Rxf8+ Kxf8 (1:59) 28.Re1**

Forced. The c-pawn has become a monster. Thus, 28.Kf2? c3 29.Be4 Nd2 wins!

**28...c3 29.Be4 (1:41) Nd2 30.Bb7 ½-½**

I reluctantly agreed to a draw here only because of my time shortage. Obviously, 30...Nc4 31.Kf2 c2 32.Ke2 Bxe3 33.Kd3 c1=Q 34.Rxc1 Bxc1 35. Kxc4 is in Black's favor, with a likely draw. Since I can force White into this line, perhaps I should have blitzed off my moves. Still, I felt happy to be alive.

If I was happy, my second, IM Donaldson, was on the brink of despair. Apparently, the electronic clock had shown that I had overstepped on time

and had actually lost. It's no easy job being a second.

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