



## COLUMNISTS

## Inside Chess

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## Inside Chess, 1988/5

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

OK. Draw with black, win with white. The formula of champions. What move order to play? Jonathan likes to play the Queen's Gambit Accepted, much as I do. So let's first play c4 and then d4.

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

Candidates Match, Saint John (2), 1988

Symmetrical English [A36]

1.c4 c5

A surprise. It's rare that GMs essay the symmetrical English against me.

2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.Nc3 Nc6 5.a3 d6

More common is 5...a6.

6.e3!

Now that Black has committed himself to ...d7-d6, I can place my knight on e2. The subtle point is that if Black now follows suit with 6...e6, White has the shot 7.b4!, gaining space on the queenside.

6...Nf6 7.Nge2 O-O 8.O-O (:20)



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp2ppbp/2np1np1/2p5/2P5/P1N1P1P1/1P1PNBP/R1BQ1RK1 b - - 0 8"]

Definitely not the best decision. I had been debating the merits of 8.d4 when I suddenly decided not to play for the center. With that in mind, my best move was 8.Rb1, provoking either 8...a5 or 8...Bf5.

The response 8...a5 would justify 8.Rb1, as White gains the square b5. In addition, since ...a5 would deny the a5-square for Black's knight, possibilities of d2-d4-d5 become more attractive.

So 8.Rb1 Bf5. Unfortunately, I wanted to play "correctly" and keep my fianchettoed bishop on the board. Thus I evaluated the following position incorrectly: 9.d3 Ne5 10.e4 Bg4 11.h3! Bf3 12.O-O. In this position I shouldn't be at all unhappy about the exchange of bishops. Too, Black's knight on e5 is slightly misplaced. It should be eyeing the d4-square. So 8.O-O is imprecise.

8...Bf5! 9.e4

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Otherwise Black will equalize with ...Qd7 and ...Bh3. I need the bishops for my queenside offensive to have any meaning.

**9...Bg4 10.f3 Bd7 11.d3 (:43) Ne8! (:43)**

The correct maneuver in such positions. The key point is d4. Black aims to control this square by playing ...Nc7-e6-d4.

**12.Be3 Nc7 13.Rb1 a5 14.a4!**



[FEN "r2q1rk1/1pnbppbp/2np2p1/p1p5/P1P1P3/2NPBPP1/1P2N1BP/1R1Q1RK1 b - - 0 14"]

Deep finessing. The queenside maneuvers have really been nothing more than distractions – but with my last move I secure the prize d4-square. How so? Well, by controlling b5, I put myself in position to put a knight there, after which ...Nd4 is met by NxN.

Now that I have a slight space edge in the center, I can also expand on the kingside. White for choice.

**14...Ne6 15.f4 (1:07) Ned4 (1:08) 16.h3**

Now that both players have achieved their respective goals, the position is building toward a major explosion. Note that I say "building." In truth, my position is not yet ready for active operations. I must first put a knight on b5. And I must improve my king's position with, say, Kh2. Then I can expand lustfully with g3-g4, etc.

In the meantime, how will Black mark time?

**16...e6**

This move has two purposes: to discourage g4, after which the black queen moves to h4; and to prepare ...f7-f5, stopping White's potential f4-f5.

**17.Nb5 Qe7 18.Kh2**

Clearing the g-file. You think I jest? Absolutely not. Experience has shown that White's g4 must be met by ...f5, after which the g-file is quickly ripped open.



[FEN "r4rk1/1p1bqbp/2npp1p1/pNp5/P1PnPP2/3PB1PP/1P2N1BK/1R1Q1R2 b - - 0 18"]

### **18...Rac8? (1:23)**

With this, Jonathan offers a draw. Nothing doing. The rook move is doubly bad – it does nothing and it loses a tempo. The pawn on a5 will soon be in need of protection. To keep White's advantage to a minimum, Black should have played 18...Kh8, preparing ...f7-f5.

### **19.Nexd4 (1:27)**

A pregnant moment, psychologically. Jonathan's last move tells me he's lost the thread and is beginning to drift. Since he's playing without a plan – a cardinal sin – should I play a move that helps him to find one? 19.Nexd4 is such a move, and it gives me a clear edge.

But do I have a better move? Yes. How about 19.b3? As strange as it may seem, 19.b3 would have been a key move. For in many variations, wholesale exchanges occur on d4. With the pawn on b3, my a4 pawn would be protected and my queen could journey to her heart's content. Also, the rook on b1 could "lift" over to the kingside by stepping up to b2. Another bonus: In variations in which the dark-squared bishops are not exchanged, having the option for Be3-c1-a3 is very nice.

However, all of these reasons are objective ones. The move 19.b3 works on a subjective level too, for the simple reason that Jonathan didn't appear to understand the position.

### **19...Nxd4 (1:28) 20.Nxd4 cxd4 21.Bd2 Ra8!**

An excellent move. One of the most difficult things during a game is to admit that you've committed an error, then correct yourself. Jonathan moves his rook back to a8 not only to protect the a5-pawn but also to discourage my b2-b4 break. Another critical reason for avoiding the "natural" ...b7-b6 is that Black must neutralize White's pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal by playing an eventual ...Bd7-c6. With the pawn on b7, the bishop on c6 will be protected.

### **22.b3 Bc6 23.Qe2 Qc7 24.Qf2**

A difficult decision. Also very strong is the immediate 24.f5 exf5 25.exf5 Rfe8 26.Qf2. In this line, Black's structure would be a little tattered, while I would have a number of kingside threats.

Still, the position I gained from 24.Qf2 is more advantageous than ones arising from 24.f5.

### **24...f5**

Obligatory.

### **25.exf5 gxf5 26.g4! Kh8! 27.gxf5 Rxf5 28.Be4 Rf7 29.Rg1**

Black has been pushed to the brink of defeat. His position is now critical. As I threaten a crushing tripling on the g-file, Black must stir up complications – or else.

### **29...Raf8 30.Rg4 (1:51) e5!? (1:56)**



[FEN "5r1k/1pq2rbp/2bp4/p3p3/P1PpBPR1/  
1P1P3P/3B1Q1K/1R6 w - - 0 31"]

Having said that Black's position is desperate, I shouldn't have been surprised by this move. But I was. I had spent a lot of time looking at variations involving ...Be5 and ...d5, or vice-versa.

The move ...e5 has to be rejected out of hand because of what it does to Black's bishop on g7. In fact, after 31.f5 the game is all but over. Unfortunately, at precisely this moment I came up with my third howler of the match. I wanted to sacrifice the exchange to force a winning pawn ending. The variation is clear, direct, and straightforward; unfortunately, it's a win for the wrong player. In calculating the game continuation, I forgot that I was sacrificing not only the exchange, but a pawn too!

Before returning to the game, let's stay with the position for a moment. Let's assume I had played 30.f5. Clearly Black would be positionally inferior – but what about the tactics? I was shocked to discover later in my room that I too must be careful!

The main lines run thusly: 31.f5 Bd7 32.Rxg7 Kxg7 33.Bh6+ Kh8 34.Bxf8 Rxf8 35.Rg1 Bc6 and now, say, 36.Qh4. Nobody could dispute the fact that White is for choice, but is the position a win? I'm not sure. The fact that the dark-squared bishops have been exchanged is a major plus for Black.

So was it necessary for me to exchange bishops? If not 32.Rxg7 what about 32.Rf1? Let's look at what would happen:



[FEN "5r1k/1pqb1rbp/3p4/p3pP2/P1PpB1R1/  
1P1P3P/3B1Q1K/5R2 b - - 0 32"]

Yes, at first glance this position appears won for White. Black cannot play 32...Bxf5 32.Bxf5 Rxf5 33.Qxf5 Rxf5 34.Rxf5, as the two white rooks would dominate the position. Nor can Black just "wait," as White will build a won position with Rg4-h4-h5 and Qf2-h4. So, as before, Black must stir things up.

I was amazed to discover he can do so with 32...d5! 33.cxd5 Bxf5 34.Bxf5 e4 + 35.Bf4 Rxf5 36.Bxc7 Rxf2+ 37.Rxf2 Rxf2+ 38.Kg3 e3. A wild variation to be sure. But it lacks a certain logical flow. When analyzing this position on my pocket set, I rejected the variation immediately and began to look for something better.

Still, it is precisely here that White is winning easily – with 39.Re4. This move brings the rook behind Black's passed e-pawn, prepares certain rook checks, and facilitates the d-pawn's touchdown run. Strange, huh? You bet,

but it's the best Black can do after 31.f5.

With hindsight, I find it impossible that I didn't play 31.f5. In a five-minute game with no time to think, I'd play it instantly. But with time to think, I uncorked ...

### 31.Rbg1??

Howler number four of the match.

### 31...Bxe4 32.dxe4 exf4 33.Rxg7 Rxg7 34.Qxd4 Kg8 (1:58)

Only now, while reaching out to confidently play 35.Bc3, did I realize what I had done to my beautiful position. After 35.Bc3 Rf7 36.Rxg7+ Rxg7 37.Qxg7 + Qxg7 38.Bxg7 Kxg7, I saw in my mind's eye that I would have a won pawn ending. After all, I had "won" Black's d4-pawn during all of the exchanges.



[FEN "8/1p4kp/3p4/p7/P1P1Pp2/1P5P/7K/8 w - - 0 39"]

But I now realized that the pawn sitting on f4 wasn't white but black! Perhaps I should explain. At some point during analysis, you don't look at the board. That is, you see the pieces, but you don't say that one is black and that one is white.

I had "seen" the pawn on f4 and understood it to be friendly. Now that I was literally looking, I saw that "my guy" was really his guy. And then I realized that the pawn ending was lost!

At least these were my thoughts. Now I had to come to terms with the fact that I had blundered an exchange and must seek to draw. Easier said than done, especially since I was wasting my remaining time silently lambasting myself.

### 35.Bxa5! (1:59)

The best chance.

### 35...Qe7! 36.Bc3 Rxg1 37.Qh8+ Kf7 38.Qxh7+ Ke8 39.Qh5+ Qf7



[FEN "4kr2/1p3q2/3p4/7Q/P1P1Pp2/1PB4P/7K/6r1 w - - 0 40"]

### 40.Qxf7??

An unbelievable lemon that loses instantly. Forced was 40.Qb5+, after which I would keep a few practical chances to draw.

#### **40...Kxf7 41.Kxg1 Re8?**

An annoying mistake. That was the problem with this whole match: Jonathan's mistakes were the little ones – a tempo here or there, a slightly inferior plan, or, as is the case here, an imprecise move.

Unfortunately, the move isn't bad enough to throw away the win. The immediate 41...Rg8+ 42.Kf2 Rg3 is curtains.

#### **42.Bb4 (2:15) Ke6**

I now searched long and hard for a saving resource, but there is none.

#### **43.c5 (2:53) dxc5 (2:05) 44.Bxc5 Ke5**

To be honest, I could resign here. I played on in the hopes that I could trade the queenside pawns and provoke Black into playing ...f4-f3, when the game is a draw.

#### **45.h4 Kxe4 46.Kf2 Rd8 47.Ke2**

Trying to bait Black into playing ...f4-f3 check.

#### **47...Rd3! 48.b4 Rh3! 49.Bf2 Rb3 50.Bc5 Rb2+ 51.Ke1 Kf3 52.a5 Rh2 53. b5 Re2+! 0-1**

Black wins the b5-pawn with 54...Re5.

A devastating defeat. Still, all in all, it was one that I accepted quite well. I had outplayed Jonathan completely and had simply failed to capitalize. It wouldn't happen again!

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