

HARPER'S HORRORS



The following is the second of three games from a transcript of a lecture delivered by Bruce Harper at the Vancouver Chess Club, Dec 21, 1979. Editing has been kept to a minimum. Stephen Ball assisted in originally preparing this work for publication by the British Columbia Chess Federation.

The next game is one which some of you may have seen ... it's against a fellow named Peter Danenhower, and it had to be included ... it's a little bit long, but it flows nicely, and there aren't very many tactics in it. I was White. This was played in the 1972 B.C. Open.

1. d4 Nf6, 2. c4 c5, 3. d5 e5 This is the Czech Benoni, which was popular around here a few years ago.

4. Nc3 d6, 5. e4 Be7 This is all so normal that we'll just breeze through it. 6. Nf3 0-0, 7. Be2 Ne8 Basically a normal move. 8. 0-0 Bg4 Now that move has an idea, I have to admit, and that's to take on f3 and then play ... Bg5, and try to somehow rig it so that White ends up with a White-squared Bishop against a Knight. I played 9. Ne1 which must be the right answer. He took 9. ... Be2 and I took. 10. Qe2 White usually plays Ne1-d3 in these positions anyway because d3 is the right square for the Knight, so I didn't mind doing it with tempo. He played 10. ... Bg5 carrying out his half of the bargain. 11. Nd3 Bc1, 12. Rac1

Okay, so what's happened here is all the Bishops have gone. He's gotten rid of a few pieces, so he's a little less cramped, but it's cost him quite a few tempos. Now, in an open position, if you have a developmental advantage you break through and mate the guy and go home early. In this kind of position, the developmental advantage itself doesn't mean all that much -- you have to translate it into something else -- either a material advantage, which I guess is best of all, or a space advantage, which is what happens here.

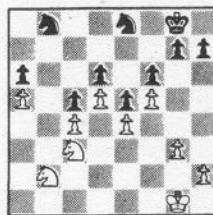
12. ... Nd7, 13. g3 The big pawn breaks are on the f-file and the b-file, and White gets them all in first, and because of that White starts to get a spacial advantage, which he then exploits, in a rather gross fashion. 13. ... a6, 14. a4 I'm not sure this is right -- there are a few imperfections in this game. At some point, he might just have played ... a5, and then only one wing of the board would be open. That was something which worried me, but it didn't occur to him. 14. ... Rb8 He's still trying for the [b5] break, but he can't get it in, so he really shouldn't.

15. f4 That's always a nice move to make in this sort of position. He's getting in trouble

here. 15. ... b6, 16. Qe3 Qe7, 17. b4 That's a good move. A lot of times you wouldn't be able to get away with that, but here if 16. ... cb4, then 17. Nb4, and I actually win material, because of the fork on c6 and the threat against the a-pawn. So, I got to play b4 without having to prepare with a3, which I couldn't play anyway. He played 17. ... f6, starting to dig the trenches. 18. Rb1 Nc7

Now I decided to clear things up a bit -- I took on c5 19. bc5 Here, he has three ways to take -- two of which are not bad and the other being what he played. He took back with the b-pawn 19. ... bc5 which I think is a mistake. It looks like the natural move, and people always tend to do that, but I'm always worried that they might take with the d-pawn and put a Knight on d6, or even take with the Knight, and then he at least has a nice Knight [on c5] no matter what else happens. I guess I would have to go Nb4-c6, but he would have a Knight on c5 -- I wasn't so sure about that. He took with the b-pawn ... I'm not saying White's winning yet, but

20. a5 Keep an eye on the Knights -- all the Knights. This is a very strong move, actually. I'm surprised I found it. 20. ... Rb1 I took back with the Rook 21. Rb1 Rb8 When your opponent starts doing this, you can figure out what he has in mind. It's always a nightmare when you're playing someone and they start trying to draw, but I guess that's one of the risks of the business I took on b8 22. Rb8 Nb8, 23. f5 This is a good move. It looks as though the position is starting to get blocked, which it is, but actually that's White's idea -- to block up the position as much as possible. As it turns out, it's objectively the right way to try to win the position, although I tend to do that anyway. 23. ... Ne8, 24. Qe2 Qb7, 25. Qb2 Qb2, 26. Nb2



Position after 26. Nb2
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Now we have the classic 'four Knight ending', which happens about once in a lifetime, I hope.

"There's one in Fine's 'Basic Chess Endings'."

Yes, there's Marco-Maroczy, p. 112. There White made quite a few mistakes in order to lose it, whereas here Black makes one or two more mistakes, but this position is close to being lost, believe it or not.

26. ... Kf7, 27. Kf2 Ke7, 28. Ke3 Always centralize your King, even if for no reason. 28. ... Kd8, 29. Nba4 Nd7 Okay, here's the first point -- his Knights can't get out on the Queenside, but my Knights can get in, via b6. That's one of the advantages to having more space. There are a lot of good things about having more space, and that's one of them. He has to keep this point [b6] under observation.

30. h4 A mistake. I should have played 30. g4. When you're advancing your pawns on a wing like this, it's cool to play h4 first -- I don't know why, but that's just the way it strikes me. But here, he could play 30. ... h5, and since I don't have a bishop or a Queen ... in a normal game this pawn [h5] would be quite vulnerable to attack by diagonal pieces, because you can't really support it with ... g6. You would also have the break g4, and your Rooks would put pressure on this [the pawn on g7]. Here, there are no Bishops and no Rooks, so I should have played 30. g4, and he should have played 29. ... h5, but he didn't realize that. The game goes on.

30. ... Kc7, 31. Nb2 Kd8, 32. Nbd1 Kc7, 33. Nf2 Kd8, 34. g4 I'm glad that's in -- it was bothering me too. 34. ... Kc7, 35. Kf3 Kd8

"May I ask a question here? If Black plays 35. ... g5, would that be any better?"

This is the thing -- he should do something on the Kingside. If he plays 35. ... g5, then I take 36. fg6 hg6, and I get an outside passed pawn, and then I really have something, especially since his pieces aren't too well set up. At a later point, he should play something over there as well. It's also possible that he should play ... h6, which is in accordance with the general idea of trying to trade pawns [when you want to draw]. I think either Black didn't understand what was going on, which isn't really fair to say, or he thought he couldn't lose this position because it was just too blocked. But there is still play in this position.

36. Ne2 Ke7, 37. Nc3 Kd8 I wanted to see which way his King would go -- I figured there was something going on between these two [N on c3 and K on d8] and I just wanted to find out about it. The Knight had to go back to c3, where it belongs, because it wants to go to a4. 38. Nh1 Kc7, 39. Ng3 Kd8 We're also approaching the time control, so have a little sympathy ... 40. Na4 Kc7 Obviously the Knight belongs on a4 -- there's no other place for it. 41. Nh5 Kd8, 42. Nc3 Ke7, 43. Na4 Kd8, 44. Ng3 Kc7, 45. g5

To be honest, nowadays I would have played this move ten moves earlier. He should play 45. ... g6 here, which is the only chance. Duncan [Suttles] and I were looking at this, and we finally figured out that White can break in. What you do is leave this [on the Kingside], run the King over to the Queenside, and then the crucial move is Nb6, sacrificing a Pawn, followed by h5, getting a passed pawn. It works out, because the passed pawn White gets is a g-pawn, so you can win the Knight on e8, and the White Knight takes care of the passed pawn on the Kingside and you can force Black's King back by tempoing it. But 45. ... g6 was a better chance -- fortunately, he didn't do it. He played 45. ... Kd8 and I played 46. g6

"Is it really that important for Black to stop that Knight from coming in at b6? Wouldn't his Knight be better off on f8?"

Well, I'll tell you -- you're right. The [White] Knight, at this point, wouldn't do that much on b6. Again, this is a psyche. I think there's more psychology in chess than people think, unless you're playing a Sicilian, or something, where it's just a matter of tempos ...

"Wouldn't it have been better for him to put the Knight on f8, so that he could play ... g6, and if you captured he could take with the Knight?"

It's also better because then I couldn't play g6. The thing was,

he thought after 46. ... h6 the game was a draw, because the whole position is blocked, except for one file (and there are no Rooks) and he figured all he had to do was stop a Knight from coming in to b6 and, by definition, the game would be a draw by blockade. A draw by blockade, if it's really a blockade, is the safest way to draw in existence ...

"Did you know this position was a win, during the game?"

I figured this was a win if I could get a pawn to g6.

"But you'll have to sacrifice a Knight sometime."

Yes, well ... in a way.

"It's the only way to break through."

No, it's not.

"Bruce, I'm wondering where you're going to sacrifice your Knight."

We'll get to that ... Maybe the fifteen moves where I went in circles helped, by lulling him into a false sense of security. I don't know if I was doing that on purpose or not.

"Why wouldn't he just leave his Knight on b8 and let your Knight come in to b6?"

Well, then his Knight can never move ...

"But I don't know what your Knight can do there [b6] really ..."

Not much ... unless he moves his King too far away, when it might go to c8 to a7 to c6, and start bouncing around ...

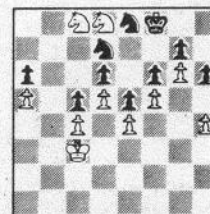
47. Nf1 Kc7, 48. Ne3 Kd8, 49. Kg4 Kc7 That's a mistake. 50. Kh5 Kd8, 51. Ng4 I think that answers the question about where White's going to sacrifice his Knight ... 51. ... Ke7

Now, at this point 52. Nh6 wins immediately, but I didn't play it because I was really starting to get into this position. If 52. Nh6 gh6, 53. Kh6 Kf8, 54. Kh7 Ng7 (to stop h5-h6) 55. Nb6, and because he can't take it, 55. ... Nb8 is forced, and 56. Nc8 wins the d-pawn, and he's totally tied up and I start winning everything in sight.

52. Nf2 I played this because that was too much to calculate, and I realized that he could have stopped 52. Nh6 by playing his King to f8 earlier, which is what I really wanted him to do. 52. ... Kf8, 53. Nb6 This can't be taken because the b-pawn Queens. 53. ... Nb8, 54. Nc8

Now he has a bit of a problem. He can't move his King over and he can't move his Knight to let his King out ...

54. ... Nd7 The only move. 55. Kg4 Nb8, 56. Kf3 Nd7, 57. Ke3 Nb8, 58. Kd3 Nd7, 59. Kc3 Nb8, 60. Nd1 Some positions are easier to play than others. 60. ... Nd7, 61. Nb2 Nb8, 62. Na4 Nd7, 63. Kb3 Nb8, 64. Nab6 Now he's down to King moves. 64. ... Kg8, 65. Na7 This had to be played at a moment when his King can't come out. 65. ... Kf8, 66. Nbc8 The changing of the guard. 66. ... Kg8, 67. Kc3 Kf8, 68. Nc6 If he takes on c6 [68. ... Nc6] then 69. dc6, and he has to move away with his King -- this was the point of the tempo manoeuvre [67. Kc3] -- then Ne7-d5. He went 68. ... Nd7 and now 69. Nc8 which is the culmination of the strategy.



Position after 69. Nd8

After 69. Nd8 he played 69. ... Nc7, 70. Ne6 Ne6, 71. fe6. (1-0) Black resigned because he loses several pawns. Unfortunately, that robbed us of this: 69. ... Kf8, 70. Ne5 Kg8, 71. Ne7 Kh8, 72. Nd8 followed by 73. Nf7. It's always faster to mate than get a Queen. That game shows some of the possibilities of Knights.