All,

An instructive game from the recent weekend of the 4NCL.

Nevil Chan is a top guy, who plays slightly off-beat lines in the openings.

Having prepped him for the match, I had the intriguing question on how to

exploit his rather unorthodox opening repertoire.

Studying his games, I learned that he particularly liked developing his

knights before the pawn structure was determined. Somewhat like in an

Alekhine’s or Two-Knight Tango method. A dance of the knights, as it were.

Now, one of the main points of playing a rather unorthodox opening is to

take the position into muddy waters, create complications and open up the

opportunities for obscure tactics. How then, am I to set out to refute such

aspirations?

Some data-base research, extensive theory-checking, a deal of careful

consideration and my decision was made.

In the reality, so surprised was my opponent on move 5, that it took nearly

5 minutes over his practically forced reply. After my 6th move, he

considered for 53 minutes!!

Being nearly an hour down on the clock, this did make his defence later on

in the game rather difficult and when he eventually resigned, he had about

30 seconds to make the time control, which he would never have achieved,

naturally.

Enjoy.

[Event "4NCL"]

[Site "Sunningdale, ENG"]

[Date "2012.02.11"]

[Round "5.3"]

[White "Ross, Chris"]

[Black "Chan, Nevil"]

[Result "1-0"]

[ECO "C91"]

[WhiteElo "2237"]

[BlackElo "2117"]

[PlyCount "61"]

[EventDate "2012.02.11"]

[WhiteTeam "Pandora's Box"]

[BlackTeam "Cambridge University 2"]

{B00: Nimzowitsch Defence}

1. e4 Nc6

2. Nf3 Nf6

(A provocative move-order. As in the spirit of the Alekhine Defence, black

wishes to lure white forward and hopes that he will over-extend.}

3. e5 Ng4

{Black begins his tactical ploys.

More thematic would be to develop in the style of the Alekhine Defence and

venture with 3... Nd5, but black is intent on extending white’s pawn

centre.)

4. d4 d6

(A very intriguing position. Black has a very similar setup to one of the

main lines in the Alekhine Defence, but this time, the black king’s knight

sits on g4 and not on d5.

Instinct determines that 5. h3 Nh6 is the correct approach. In previous

rounds of the 4NCL, black has faced this line and even had people capture

the knight on h6, yielding the bishop pair,, the open G-file and attacking

potential. The knight on h6 is not such a silly piece though. It can land

into f5 and hit the white centre.

How to deal with this precarious knight on g4, which pressurises the

spearhead to the white pawn chain?

White has to be very precise in his handling of a tricky position.

White can not allow exchanges on e5 and queen exchanges, leaving the f2

square weak. Tactics are ripe in such openings and nerves need to be kept.

Fortunately, this is one big advantage of such tournaments and leagues.

Opening preparation will allow you to prosper.

Study this position for some time and marshal your thoughts.}

5. e6!

{Sacrificing the focus of black’s play to neutralise all of those elements

discussed above in the initial spiel about black’s aspirations for the

opening.

First to the immediate tactics.

5... Bxe6 which is the natural capture loses a piece to 6. d5.

If black does not capture the pawn, exf7+ is going to displace the black

king and create holes in the black formation.

Now to the more subtle positional features.

The pressure on the e5 spearhead is gone. The centre is closed and there are

no long-term tactics to be concerned about.

The black knight on g4 no longer has much of a purpose on that loose square.

But more importantly, the two black bishops are now hindered in their

development. For the cost of a single pawn, black’s development procedure is

considerably lengthened and finding natural, good squares for his pieces

will not be easy to accomplish.}

5... fxe6

{Just about forced, but now look at the bishop on c8 and even more apparent,

is the blocked in bishop on f8.

Now, the second phase of the pawn sacrifice has to be put into place. Black

has, after all, a strong centre if nothing else, as well as a material

advantage.}

6. Bc4!

{The plan now is simple, rapid and fluid development and the intension to

exert pressure on the pawn on e6, as well as the light-squares along the

a2-g8 diagonal (as f7 is a target).

In the database, there are examples of 5. h3 Nh6 6. Bxh6 gxh6 8. e6 fxe6 but

this is not what I was wanting to achieve, as the Dragon Bishop can still be

a pain on the fianchettoed long diagonal.

No, slow, positional chess was my objective now. I have taken away all the

tactical difficulties black desired with a pawn sacrifice.

Black sat for over 50 minutes studying this position. He explained

afterwards that he considered this the refutation to the system. I’m not

sure about that, but it is clearly a very good demonstration to play against

it!}

6... Nf6

{In my preparation, I had to consider what to do against 6... e5, which was

my main concern. If black could get himself out of trouble by opening up the

centre, then he could easily equalise.

Some research, some thought and computer analysis showed me that 6... e5 7.

d5 was the best continuation. Black had no choice to go into 7... Nb8 8. Ng5

g6 when 9. Bb5+ Bd7 10. Qxg4! Tactics are on or white could play it slow and

develop the queen’s knight. In any case, the knight jumps into g5 and then

the e6 outpost, similar to ideas in the King’s Indian Defence.

So, after some considerable thought, my opponent simply retreated, losing

time, but not wanting to leave the knight loose on it’s wayward folly.

If black played 6... g6, I was prepared to respond in a similar way to the

actual game continuation.}

7. Ng5

{There was some rather ironic schadenfreude in playing this move, moving the

knight to knight-5 to create tactics, especially when this venture will

prove productive for white, when black’s hadn’t!

I simply could not resist this method of approach, which meant, being rather

aggressive in the follow-up, turning the tables somewhat on black, but the

passive 7. O-O g6 didn’t appeal to me as sufficient justification for the

pawn sacrifice.}

7... d5

{The e6 pawn was attacked twice and there was no satisfactory way to defend

it. Advancing the pawn to e5 allows nasty tactics on f7 and any knight

hopping into d5 allows Qf3 ideas, exploiting the light squares even that bit

more. The fun you can have with 7... nd5 8. Qf3 Nxd4 is amazing and I’ll

leave you playing through those variations on your own, but many of them end

up sacrificing the queen’s rook and mating the black king on b6 or a6!

However, the pawn structure has now been seriously compromised, the sole

justification for the king’s knight’s jump into g5.

The black E-pawns are now backward and the blocked in nature of the black

minor pieces is more evident.

A lot of tempo is being wasted by both sides in their piece manoeuvring in

this opening, but the pawn formation as a result is being established, in

white’s favour naturally, despite the pawn deficit. After all, the pawn

sacrificed is now that lonely pawn on e6, which is giving black more

headaches than it is actually worth.}

8. Bb5

{The correct plan for white. The light squares in the centre and on the

queen-side no longer matter, as I intend to enter into a good-knight, bad

bishop structure now, with the e5 outpost having been created. I must never

allow black to get e6-e5 in, as that will give him some kind of release.

It is essential then to attack the defender of the e5 outpost and maybe,

give black some more pawn weaknesses.}

8...g6

{The only way in which black can develop his king’s bishop. Otherwise, it

will be simply stuck in all game.}

9. h4!

{relentless pressure. White must not sit on his heels. White intends to

target the light-squares that bit more and especially the g6 square/pawn. F7

is a target and entry into that square can be achieved in some lines by this

very aggressive move. Again, opening preparation and computer analysis

showed me that this approach was the most consistent.}

9... Bg7

{Which I was slightly surprised about, but I guess it was automatic. My

preparation had shown me that black should not really give white the

opportunity to push onwards to h5 and then into h6, thereby cramping black

up even more.

I had expected 9... Qd6 10. h5 Rg8 11. hxg6 Rxg6 12. Na3 when things begin

to collapse for black on the king-side.}

10. h5

{Again, being consistent. A quick verification of the tactics and I ploughed

on, having now used 13 minutes for my opening to date and my opponent

ticking across to 75 minutes.

At which point, I got up, wandered away, fetched a coffee and freshened

myself up for the potential tactics that black could now plunge us into.

So, to date, excellent opening preparation, good clock management and I had

set myself for every best opportunity to wrap up an important victory for

the team.}

10... h6?

{I may even go so far and claim this as the losing move. Black’s been put

under tremendous pressure throughout this opening and this helping of white

to send his knight to the square where it actually wants to go is not in

black’s interest. Also, the g6 square is fatally weakened, which was a

target for white in any case. Now the light-squares around the black

king-side collapse.

Black’s time management has not helped him, but he should have preserved

time to consider crucial positions as this.

I will not enter into the deep variations here, but here is a flavour to

what I had expected.

A. 10... Nxh5 11. Rxh5 [the only practical and logical continuation] 11...

gxh5 12. Qxh5+ Kd7 13. Nd2 [heading for b3 and c5] 13... Qe8 14. Qe2 Qg6 15.

Nb3 Kd8 16. Bd3 Qf6 17. Qh5 Rf8 18. Be3 and white has all the play.

B. 10... Qd6 11. h6 or 11. c3 or even 11. f4 is possible.

C. 10... gxh5 11. Nc3 although 11. Rxh5! Was tempting. 11... Qd6 12. c3 or

11. Nd2 is playable or 12. Rh4 and the black pawn structure is pretty

horrible.}

11. Nf3

{I did consider 11. Qd3 but could not make my mind up. I will probably win

something on h6 after I capture on g6 with check [if black snatches the

knight on g5], and if Kf8, push with h5-h6, but I did not feel overly

confident in that line. Even if black wandered with his king to d7, I can

win the bishop on g7, but felt that I was straying away from the white game

plan.

So, I decided to keep it simple and follow on with my positional plan. The

knight is now headed for e5, the outpost and to attack those light-squares

that bit more.}

11... g5

{Here the queen jump into d3 would be worth it if black captured on h5.

11... Nxh5 12. Bxc6+ bxc6 13. Qd3 and black’s in trouble.}

12. Ne5 O-O

{Certainly brave of black, who is making every attempt in this game to

scramble out of harm’s way.

I applaud his bravery to give up the pawn back on c6 to seek activity for

his pieces.

I would say then, that this is the only point of the game where I became

slightly unsure to my precise continuation.

I knew that I did not really want to go about snatching my pawn back on c6

and lose lots of tempi with my pieces retreating.

I did not really want to develop my queen’s bishop yet, as the g5 pawn is a

natural target. I intend to get f2-f4 in, of course, to break down the pawn

chain. Naturally, if g5xf4, the bishop recapture controls the d6 square (the

best development square for the black queen) and targets the h6 pawn.

I was reluctant though to capture on c6 so fast, as I did not want black to

have the a6 square so quickly for his light-squared bishop. So, I found a

sort of waiting move.}

13. Ng6

{13. Nxc6 bxc6 14. Bxc6 Rb8 gives black activity and 13. Bxc6 bxc6 14. Ng6

Ne4 15. Nxf8 Qxf8 gives black chances to hold.}

13... Ne4

{Again, plucky play by black, who’s really striving to seize equality.

However, the white pieces are so well placed, that it is almost impossible

for him to do so.}

14. Be3

{Keeping calm and developing.

This defends my major weakness on d4 and stops tactics on f2.

14. Nxf8 Bxd4 15. Rf1 Qxf8 is not in white’s best interest.}

14... Rf7

15. Bxc6 bxc6

16. Nd2 Nxd2

{The advantage for white in the tactics by black in the last few moves is

that he is able to complete his queen-side development.

The remainder of the game is about simple technique now. Black will achieve

bishops of opposite colour, but with the major pieces on the board, an open

black king, the rest plays itself without too much thought. Avoidance of

silly tactics is my only concern now.}

17. Qxd2 e5

{Again, black’s tenacity to wriggle out is impressive. He offers the pawn

back now to develop his pieces. Although this will expose his king that bit

more, he has become desperate enough to attempt drastic measures. Otherwise,

he was going to be simply squished slowly and overran on the king-side.

17... c5 is what I was expecting as a possible break for freedom.}

18. Nxe5 Bxe5

19. dxe5 Bf5

20. O-O-O

{And development completed for white. How to force a break-through now, that

is my only stumbling block.}

20... e6

{Securing his bishop and opening up the 2nd rank. He was also worried about

sacrifices on g5 with open lines towards his king.

However, he may have been best to attempt some activity on the queen-side

with 20... Qc8 although he is a long, long way from creating anything solid

on that side of the board.}

21. f3

{The only way to force a break.

Black can not be permitted to play g5-g4 blockading the position.

So, when I break myself with f2-f4, I need to prevent him from pushing past.

In that regard, I need to play g2-g4 myself, before I break. Logical play

and something black can do nothing to prevent.}

21... Kh8

{Black had very little time now to complete the remaining 19 moves. He is,

naturally, wary of the G-file and see that it’s going to open up shortly.

21... Qf8 22. Qc3 [stopping c6-c5 and pressuring the a1-h8 diagonal vis à

vis the black king on h8] Rb8 and I can even go pawn-grabbing on the

queen-side if I so wish.}

22. g4 Bh7

23. f4 gxf4

24. Bxf4 Be4

25. Rhf1 Qg8

{Amazingly, black is contemplating snatching some pawns of his own, but how

exposed this is going to leave his king!}

26. Bxh6

{My pawns don’t’ matter. More important is the exposed black king. Snaffling

this final black pawn means that the end is near for black.}

26... Bf3

{Trying to blockade things and prevent the white pieces from penetrating.

26... Rxf1 27. Rxf1 Qxg4 was the only other alternative.}

27. Rde1

{Simply avoiding obvious tactics for black in his desperate time trouble. I

did not wish to give him easy moves to make, such as making captures.

27. Bg5 Kh7 28. Rde1 Bxg4 was the best line, but I was worried that he would

try and give up the queen with the following line:

27. Bg5 Bxd1 28. Bf6+ Rxf6 29. Rxf6 Bxg4 30. Rh6+ Qh7 and I get a rook and

bishop for the queen, and will win, eventually, but I will have to go

pawn-grabbing on the queen-side and run my A-pawn home to convert. I saw no

reason why I should drag it out.}

27... Qxg4

28. Bg5

{The check on f6 is going to be the final blow for black. There is no

defence now.}

28... Rf5

{Black can struggle on a bit longer with 28... Rg8 29. Rg1 Qf5 30. Bf6+ Rxf6

31. exf6 Qxf6 32. Rxg8+ Kxg8 33. Rg1+ Kh7 but the outcome is going to be the

same.}

29. Rg1

{Again, making the simple, less obvious moves to predict. White defends the

bishop on g5 and forces black to make a capture, he really does not want to

make.}

29... Qxh5

{Exposing the black king that bit more. Naturally, 30... Rxg5 is not good,

as I can take the queen or simply go 31. Qxg5 as the queen is defended by

the rook on g1.}

30. Bf6+ Rxf6

31. exf6

{And with no time on the clock, black offered his hand. The conversion is

simple enough and the black king will not survive on such an exposed board.

31... Rf8 32. Rxe6 is good enough to start for example.}

31... 1-0

Opening references

A.

5. exd6 Qxd6 6. Bc4 Bf5 7. c3 e6 8. Nh4 O-O-O 9. Be2 h5 10. Na3 Be7 11. Nxf5

exf5 12. Nc4 Qd5 13. Ne3 Nxe3 14.

Bxe3 g5 15. Bf3 Qd6 16. Qa4 f4 17. Bd2 Kb8 18. O-O-O Qd7 19. h4 g4 20. Bxc6

Qxc6

Chauvet,J (1964)-Busson,B (2089)/Provence 2006/EXT 2007/1-0 (48)

B.

5. exd6 cxd6 6. Be2 g6 7. Nc3 a6 8. Ne4 Qd5 9. Ng3 Bg7 10. c3 O-O 11. h3 Nf6

12. Bf4 Qa5 13. O-O b5 14. b4 Qb6 15. a4 Nd5 16. Bd2 Rb8 17. axb5 axb5 18.

Qc2 f5 19. Qa2 e6 20. Bd1 Nd8

Baier,H (1966)-Burkhardt,H (2047)/Bayern 2005/EXT 2007/1-0 (55)

C.

5. exd6 cxd6 6. Be2 Nf6 7. Bd3 Nb4 8. Bb5+ c6 9. Ba4 Bf5 10. O-O Nd7 11. c4

Bd3 12. c5 Qg6 13. Qb3 Bxf1 14. Kxf1 Qd3+ 15. Qxd3 Nxd3 16. Bd2 e5 17. Bc2

Nf4 18. Nxe5 Nxe5 19. Bxf4 Ng6 20. Bg3 Rd8 21. Nc3 Rxd4

Hedden,H (2100)-Gottuk,S (2229)/Hamburg GER 2011/0-1 (57)

D.

5. exd6 Qxd6 6. h3 (6. Bc4 Nf6 7. Nc3 Bf5 8. Bc4 O-O-O 9. Be3 e5 10. d5 Nb4

11. O-O Nfxd5 12. Bxd5 Nxd5 13. Nb5 Qe7 14. Nxa7+ Kb8 15. Qe2 f6 16. Rfd1 c6

17. b4 Nc3 18. Rxd8+ Qxd8 19. Qc4 Nd5 20. Rd1

Susak,Z (2220)-Berebora,F (2375)/Split 1999/EXT 2001/0-1 (44)

E.

6. Bb5 a6 7. Be2 g6 8. O-O Bg7 9. a4 O-O 10. d5 Nce5 11. Nd4 Qb6 12. a5 Qc5

13. Nb3 Qa7 14. Ra4 f5 15. h3 Nf6 16. Be3 Qb8 17. Nc3 h6 18. Qd2 Bd7 19. Rb4

Kh7

Behnick,E-Schneider,T/Frankfurt 2001/EXT 2002/1-0 (44)

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