All,  
A recent game from the Sheffield Congress June 2014. My opponent, Harry Russell, is a good friend of mine, and a real gent. A former team-mate of mine from the 1990’s, it is surprising that we have never faced each other over the board in a graded game. This encounter is particularly interesting, for when I knew Harry in the late 1990’s, the style of chess, with which I adopt here, I renounced and emphatically criticised. How maturity changes one!

Move 30 in this game is worthy of some very deep consideration. The whole angle of the game hinges on this very important moment in the game, and displays a very instructive turning point. Dynamic play has to be then implemented in the most direct of fashions.   
  
A very intriguing encounter and one that deserves deeper analysis than what I outline here. Computer analysis can provide deeper variations when the balance of the game is delicately poised, but I do not wish to spoil an enjoyable battle by highlighting the various points where both sides could have improved “theoretically” by computer-generated tactics.  
  
Enjoy!  
  
[Event "Sheffield Congress 2014"]

[Site "Sheffield, ENG"]

[Date "2013.06.29"]

[Round "4"]

[White "Russell, Harry"]

[Black "Ross, Chris"]

[Result "0-1"]

[ECO "E05"]

[Annotator “Chris Ross"]

[PlyCount "82"]

[EventDate "2013.06.29"]

{A01: Larsen Opening}

1. b3

{On the opening move, white begins the psychological combative moves. White is more than aware of black’s opening theoretical knowledge and does not wish to embark into main, open lines of either e4 or d4. Some gentle jibbing prior to the game illustrated that obscure openings, such as the Grob and Polish, had also been prepared for, one of which has been white’s choice of weapon in the past.}  
  
1... e5   
2. Bb2 d6

{Thus heading for a King’s Indian Defence setup. The purpose of which, is to blunt the fianchettoed dark-squared bishop of white.}

3. e3 g6   
4. g3

{White could attempt to exploit the long diagonal here with 4. F4, as with some lines in the Bird’s opening. However, those lines are also well known and tend not to give white much. Indeed, often the dark-squared bishop on b2 can be exchanged, a trade that white does not necessarily wish for. There are traps with black simply developing with Nf6, and if f4xe5, black can flick in the annoying Ng4 or Nfd7 move, effectively reversing the pin along the long diagonal, since the e5 pawn is pinned against the bishop on b2. Again, this tactic has to be calculated carefully, but it usually works to black’s advantage.}

4... Bg7   
5. Bg2 f5

{An aggressive setup by black. Black seizes space in the centre and heads for a complicated middle-game. Essentially, black is playing a Closed-Sicilian in reverse, but without Nc3 having been played. It can be argued too that black is playing a hybrid form of the King’s Indian, but he has already achieved f7-f5 already.

There are, of course, many setups against this slow Larsen opening. Examples can be seen below in the opening references. The Botvinnik system, as played against the English and other such Reti systems is also perfectly acceptable. With black’s choice, he intends an aggressive king-side attack in the far-distant future.}

6. Ne2 Nf6   
7. O-O O-O   
8. c4   
  
{transposing the structure in more familiar lines seen in the English opening. As outlined above, black has a reverse Closed Sicilian without the development of the queen’s knight. In the Closed Sicilian, the opposing side can push the B-pawn and dislodge the queen’s knight at queen-bishop’s three. Here, the knight is still at home, so this has saved time. Black chooses to close down the long h1-a8 diagonal and opts to have some flexibility within his pawn chain.}  
  
8... c6   
9. d4 e4   
  
{Clamping down on the light-squares. D3 and f3 have become target holes for the black pieces. Due to black’s lack of development, it would not be wise to open up the position by pawn exchanges.}

10. Nbc3 a5

{Holding up any queen-side expansion by the white queen-side. Black is also wishing to potentially force some weaknesses in the white queen-side pawn structure, as he has visions of his bishops working in tandem to rake down the long diagonals adjacent to one another. Also, the black queen’s knight is given a route to develop, since c6 has been taken away from it. F3 is a natural hole for the black knight, so a route is prepared, via a6, c7/c5, e6 and g5. A long-winded route, and there are lots of plans in the mean-time, but the pathway is cleared.}

11. Qd2 Na6  
12. a3   
  
{The first chink in the white pawn structure appears. White wishes to prevent Nb4/Nd3. The quiet pawn move does leave behind a weakness though and black can gain some time on this backward pawn now. The pawn move itself is not poor, as white could push with b3-b4 at a later stage, and it does prevent intrusion by the black steed.}  
  
12... Qb6?!   
  
{Ambitiously played. The black queen gains tempo on the b3 pawn. 12... Qc7 is more precautionary. 12... Be6 has to also be an option, as then the rook on a8 is defended and the knight on a6 unpinned along the A-file.}

13. Qc2   
  
{13. B4! Was certainly worthy of consideration. 13... axb4 14. Axb4 and black would do best not to snatch the pawn, but to develop with 14... Be6 when 15. Na4 Qd8 seems to give white a space advantage.}    
  
13... Be6   
  
{Developing and connecting the black rooks. The queen-side pawns can now be snatched if they advance. With the base of the pawn chain [the A-pawn] having advanced to a3, b3 is now the base and weak. If that is undermined, c4 then becomes a target. The balance of the pawn-structure on the queen-side is swaying in black’s favour at the moment.}  
  
14. Rfd1 Qc7   
  
{Having done it’s work, the black queen retreats. Na4 will no longer gain time on her. However, another plan is formed, to weaken the pawn-structure that bit more. The queen though, is now headed for the king-side.}  
  
15. Na2   
  
{White aims for the b3-b4 push, but it is a long time before this knight re-emerges. The position is fairly blocked though, so a slow move can be justified. However, this move does allow black to play his plan for further pawn-chain strikes without hindrance.}

15... b5!

{Creating tension in the white pawn-chain.

Notice how d4-d5 is now no longer possible, as c6xd5 leaves the c4 pawn pinned, as the knight has retreated from c3. Exchanges on b5 would only leave the d5 square wonderfully accessible for the black pieces. If the queens are exchanged on c7, the knight on a6 has a route into c7 and then d5. The pawn on b3 is very vulnerable. Indeed, there are further tactics say, if exchanges occur on b5, then c7, black can chuck in Bxa2 and a5xb4 as the a3 pawn will be pinned against a loose rook on a2. If white does nothing to address the pawn chain on the queen-side, black may play a5-a4, thus undermining the base and causing more difficulties.}

16. Rac1 Rfc8   
  
{It is important to note that it is the f8 rook which gives additional support to the queen on c7. White was threatening to win a pawn on b5 as the “pin” down the C-file had been once again turned around. The knight on a2 is still vulnerable to tactics if exchanges occur and more so now, if black gets a5-a4 in at a future point. Why it is essential to move the f8 rook and not the a8 rook, becomes apparent with black’s next move.}  
  
17. Qd2   
  
{Removing the queen off the C-file and opening up the pin theme along that file again. There may be sneaky snatches of the a5 pawn too.}  
  
17... Qb7   
  
{Attacking along the light squares and again, over-protecting the d5 square. The black queen also looks down the B-file, ensuring that snatches on a5 do not occur. The rook on a8 defends the knight on a6, allowing b5xc4 ideas, as b3xc4 drops the bishop on b2.}

18. Nf4

{Although this gains tempo, it only drives the black pieces to safer squares and encourages future operations on the king-side. Best was  18. d5 cxd5 19. Nd4 Nc5 20. cxb5 Bd7 with complications, but white does have the d4 square to play with.}

18... Bf7

19. Bf1

{Once again, white exerts pressure on the pawn on b5, as it may be potentially weak. The knight on a6 may be loose at some stage too is heavy-piece exchanges happen down the C-file. Since b5-xc4 can now be answered with Bxc4 and Bxc4 is replied with Rxc4, snatches on a5 may be on, although this would be incredibly risky.}

19... b4

{It is now that black chooses to blockade things. Tension has now proven dividend for him, as the white pieces are somewhat contorted, in order to prevent intrusion on the queen-side. With this push, black threatens to take on a3 and leave the b3 pawn backward. Captures on b4 would only open up the A-file and although not fatal for white, black already has a rook posted on it, whereas white moved his away.}  
  
20. a4 Qe7   
  
{With white having blockaded completely on the queen-side, it is now time to switch operations to the king-side. Black has a space advantage through the centre already, so he is already slightly ahead in the chase there. The queen switch is to protect the e6 square and defend d6, were white considering giving up a pawn on e6 as in the style of many King’s Indian Defence variations. Also, if white is to blockade on the king-side by pushing the F-pawn, black wants to be pointing his pieces at the potentially backward E-pawn. To boot, if black is to push g6-g5, and eventually, f5-f4, the e4 pawn will need protection.}

21. Be2?!  
  
{Curiously, this is an inaccuracy, as the light-squared bishops can now be exchanged. White could have offered more resistance by keeping this bishop on the board.}

21... g5   
  
{Black begins to push white backwards. As there is no further play on the queen-side, things have to be blasted open on the king-side.  
Previously, I would have viewed this type of play as a “hack”, but in fact, it is only positional sense to gain space and seek a break!}

22. Ng2 Bh5

{Eliminating the light-squared bishops and making the f3 hole all that more vulnerable. The positional pluses are now gaining in intensity for black. White will shortly have to seek tactical ways to get out of a difficult position.}

23. Bxh5 Nxh5

24. Qe2 Nf6   
  
{It is too early to blockade with g5-g4. White would have the f4 square for a knight and potentially, h4. White even may have h2-h3 and he could be the quickest for the H-file. None of the black pieces are reaching the f3 square quickly. Also, the “break” is not g5-g4, but f5-f4.}

25. Rc2

{It makes sense to defend along the 2nd rank, but this may be a bit too slow. 25. Rf1 is a reasonable alternative, as he is intending operations down the F-file in any case.}

25... Rf8   
  
{The black rooks are brought back to the king-side. The rooks belong on f8 and e8. Also, black is envisaging that the black f5-pawn may need protection.}

26. f4   
  
{A brave move to play, but white was now having to play tactically, to prevent himself from being slowly squished. The reaction is predictable and possibly, forced, but a gentler way with 26. F3 or 26. Rf1 is still possible.}

26... exf3

{Lines must be opened. Again, g5-g4 is not what black wants, as it is white who could land on the H-file quicker than him. Taking on f4 is inconceivable when a white knight would be perfectly outposted. To protect the g5 pawn, h7-h6 would have to be played, which, again, is not in black’s plans. The opening up of lines is the only sensible way to go.}  
  
27. Qxf3 Ne4

28. Nc1 Nc7

{The black knight begins its long-awaited travel. Once on e6, the idea of g5-g4, gaining tempo on the white queen and then N6g5 followed by either Nh3+ or Nf3+ is a very strong manoeuvre, which white has to deal with. Which, he does, tactically!}

29. Nd3 Ne6

{The position is now poised. Black is all ready for g5-g4 and the landing on the holes, especially so, that one of f3. White needs a move!}  
  
30. g4!?  
  
{White solves the problem of g5-g4 by playing g4 himself. A subtle move, which is not easy to refute. The simple tactical point is that the knight on e4 has no longer the protection of the black queen, a very poignant feature. Black certainly does not wish to play d6-d5 and have the opening up of the C-file and giving white the e5 outpost. Black now needs an incredibly subtle move to hold his position together. Some very careful calculation is now required.}  
  
30... Bh8!

{A stunning move to find and to play!  
The move has so many attractive features about it, but it is justified in all manner of ways. Critically, the black king is no more exposed than the white counterpart. Importantly though, is that if the dark-squared bishops are exchanged, black would prefer to do this on h8 rather than on g7, thereby securing the king in the corner and away from potential checks.  
Critically though, is that the knight on e6 is given a flight square. Black cannot prevent gxf5 occurring. If that does happen, he wants to be able to retreat the knight to a good square and if possible, regain his pawn. Now the g7 square is vacated, the knight can retreat there, cover the h5 square [A possible point of penetration for the white queen] but allows a future Rxf5.   
A very dynamic move to play. The safe option was probably 30... Qf7 31. gxf5 Qxf5 32. Qxf5 Rxf5 33. Nf2 Rxf2 34. Rxf2 Nxf2 35. Kxf2 Rf8+ 36. Ke2, but black is not striving for any significant advantage in that line.}

31. Nf2?  
  
{Although understandable, this retreat is probably white’s downfall. Exchanges do not assist him and his pieces are not coordinated enough to permit an entry into an ending. The apparent weakening of black’s outpost, and pawns, is an appealing reason why to do this, but black is no longer interested in the ending. A direct attack is now on the cards.}

31... Nxf2

{Removing the only tactical loose piece in the position. The blasting open of lines now will only benefit black.}

32. Rxf2

{The only possible re-capture, but now white loses a lot of tempi. 32. Kxf2 loses the queen after fxg4 and re-capturing on f2 with the queen only drops the g4 pawn.}

32... fxg4

33. Qxc6

{White was possibly thinking that he was complicating matters here, but in fact, it’s only making life more difficult for himself with the loss of tempi.   
33. Qxg4 Rxf2 34. Kxf2 is the only way to continue. Black would have a wealth of ways then on how to continue.}

33... Rxf2

34. Qxa8+ Rf8

{A simple retreat, but now black has the open F-file. The direct attack at the white king is going to be very difficult for white to fend off.}

35. Qe4

{This retreat is forced. 35. Qxa5 Qf6 and white can resign as the penetration down the F-file will lead to mate.}

35... Qf6

{Annoyingly for white, the knight on g2 creates back-rank difficulties for white. The threat is Qf2+ followed by Qf1+ with a back-rank mate.}

36. Qc2 Qf3

{Completely penetrating into the white camp. This prevents Qe2 by white, and then Rf1 ideas, as the exchange of pieces would give white much hope. White now strives to achieve that desired exchange.}

37. Re1   
  
{Preparing Qe2. However, there is another very significant feature in the position, which white has failed to address. With the rook on e1, the fianchettoed knight has nowhere to go! Even if Qe2 is now played, Qxf3 is not possible for white, as the re-capture with g4xf3 attacks the knight and it has no flight square.

Keeping this in mind, black has all of his pieces in their ideal positions. The bishop is strong, defending the king, although this is slightly screened by the apparent exposed nature of the monarch. The knight is dominating and if allowed, Nf4/Nh3 could be a problem. The queen and rook stand dominatingly on the F-file.  
  
So, with both things in mind, there is only one thing to do!}

37... h5!  
  
{Oh, how the Chris Ross of the late 90’s would cringe at playing such a move!!  
The direct march of the H-pawn is the nail in white’s coffin though. Preventing this pawn’s march is impossible. Importantly though, is that tactical feature that Qf2+ is going to be made possible once g4-g3 has been permitted. For g3xf2+ will fork king and rook. A remarkable, indefensible threat!}

38. d5

{38. Qg6+ achieves nothing. Black could even consider blocking with the bishop and allowing the knight on e6 to go with check, for the black king can hide on h7 and then Qf2+ cannot be prevented.}

38... Ng7   
  
{Amazingly, black can simply retreat this knight. The king-side pieces matter nothing in view of the direct king-side attack. Other knight retreats permit Qg6+ with mate, so, that threat has to be dealt with. A wonderful setup of king-side pieces!}

39. e4 h4

40. Ne3

{There is no defence now. The threats are too great. 40. Bd4 g3 41. Qd1 holds out a few more moves.}

40... g3

{And the threat of Qf2+ is too overwhelming. A unexpected, and very uncharacteristic approach by black!}

41. hxg3

{White could have played on with 41. Nd1 Nh5 42. Qg2 Qxb3 but it is miserable to play such a poor position.}

41... Qxg3+

41... 0-1  
  
Opening references  
  
A.  
5... Nc6 6. Ne2 Nge7 7. d3 O-O 8. c4 Be6 9. Nbc3 Qd7 10. Nd5 Rfe8 11.

O-O Nd8 12. Qc2 c6 13. Nxe7+ Rxe7 14. Rad1 d5 15. Qc1 Bh3 16. Qa1 Bxg2 17. Kxg2 f5 18. Rfe1 Nf7 19. Ng1 Rae8 20. e4

Karlsson,L (2205)-Kaiszauri,K (2360)/Motala 1976/MCD/1-0 (40)}

B.  
5... Ne7 6. Ne2 O-O 7. O-O Nbc6 8. d3 a5 9. a3 Bg4 10. c4 Qd7 11. Re1 Bh3 12. Bh1 f5 13. Qd2 Rad8 14. Nbc3 Bh6 15. Nd5 b6 16. Rad1 Bg4 17. f4 Bg7 18. b4 axb4 19. axb4 h6 20. Nxe7+ Nxe7 21. Ra1 Nc6

Mihalincic,K-Drescher,W/Griesheim 1997/EXT 2002/1/2-1/2 (33)}

C.

5... Ne7 6. Ne2 O-O 7. c4 c5 8. O-O Nbc6 9. d3 Be6 10. e4 Qd7 11. Qd2 f5 12. Nbc3 Nd4 13. f4 Nec6 14. exf5 Bxf5 15. Nd5 Rae8 16. Nxd4 exd4 17. Rfe1 Nd8 18. b4 Nf7 19. bxc5 dxc5 20. Ba3 b6

Vieira,A-Bastos Neto,W/Brazil 1998/EXT 2002/0-1}

D.  
5... Ne7 6. c4 h5 7. d4 h4 8. g4 Nd7 9.

h3 f5 10. d5 Nf6 11. g5 Ne4 12. f4 c6 13. Bxe4 fxe4 14. fxe5 cxd5 15. Ne2 O-O 16. Nbc3 Bxe5 17. Qd2 dxc4 18. Nxe4 Bxb2 19. Qxb2 Nd5   
20. O-O-O

Bagirov,V (2470)-Loeffler,S (2320)/Berlin 1990/EXT 1997/1-0}  
  
  
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