

Game Seven
B.Gulko-G.Kasparov
USSR Championship, Frunze 1981
Modern Benoni

Joel: Can you put this game in context? From a historical perspective.

Boris: The first time I played him was 1978. I was the favorite. I was the USSR Champion and he was a 15-year-old debutant, but he outplayed me and I drew with a miracle. By the time we played this game, he was already the favorite. He was winning all of the tournaments including this one (he tied for first with Psakhis). I was out of practice because I was a refusnik.

Joel: What is that and why were you out of practice?

Boris: Refusniks were Russian Jews who applied for emigration but were refused, which is where the term comes from. We were refusniks for seven years. For two of those years they didn't let me play chess in any tournaments – until our first hunger strike, and only then they allowed us to play in 2 or 3 tournaments a year, so in 1981 I started to return to chess.

Joel: Who is us?

Boris: Me and my wife.

Joel: Was it highly publicized?

Boris: Yes, it was a dramatic struggle, which I document in my book, *The KGB Plays Chess*.

Joel: Was Kasparov considered in 1981 the way Magnus Carlsen is today?

Boris: Yes, exactly. It was clear he would be the next world champion.

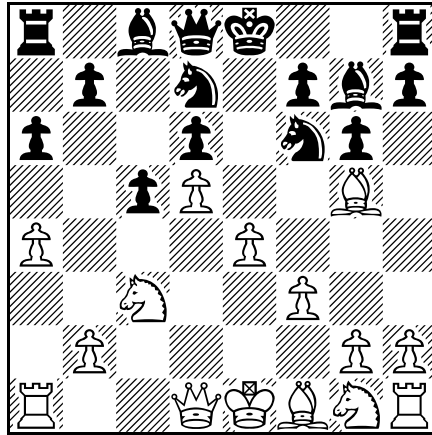
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3

Joel: Can you say something about this move?

Boris: I transpose the game into a variation known from the Sämisch King's Indian. I started to play this line in the 1960s and won some important games, one against Geller. The idea behind this move is that in the Benoni White tries to play in the center with f2-f4 and e4-e5 because he has an extra pawn there. Here, with

the move f2-f3, White completely changes the plan. White wants a stable position in the center and expects Black to play on the queenside where White hopes to take advantage of weaknesses Black creates there.

7...Bg7 8 Bg5 a6 9 a4 Nbd7?!



Exercise: How can White prove that Black's last move was dubious? (difficulty level 2)

Boris: This natural move is a very serious mistake. For White, there is one problem: what to do with the knight on g1? From e2 it can only go to c1 (obviously not ideal) or g3 where it can get attacked by ...h5-h4. By playing 9...Nbd7, Black allows me to transfer the knight to f2 via h3 because he blocks his light-squared bishop. The f2-square is a very appropriate square for the knight in this system. The theory of this system with f2-f3 and Bg5 was only starting to develop and this was an important game as it became a very popular approach afterward.

Joel: What could he have played that would have prevented your knight maneuver?

Boris: Black should castle and keep the knight on b8 until I develop my knight from g1. This variation was very successful for White until Tal found the correct idea: 9...O-O 10 Nge2 h6 11 Be3 Re8 12 Ng3 h5 and now Black is ready to attack the white knight with the plan of ...Nh7 and ...f7-f5. The correct plan for Black in this variation is to play on the kingside not on the queenside. This was Tal's discovery.

Joel: Do you remember the game?

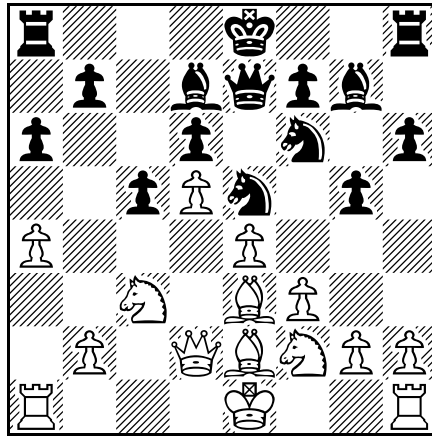
Boris: Well, it was not his game. He was helping Nakhimovskaya prepare for a game in a team competition and he showed her this plan. Therefore, although it was first played by Nakhimovskaya, it was Tal's plan.

10 Nh3! h6 11 Be3 Ne5 12 Nf2 Bd7 13 Be2 g5! 14 Qd2

Boris: An alternative plan for White is 14 f4!? gx4 15 Bxf4 Qe7 (15...0-0!?) 16 Qd2 h5 (16...Neg4!?) 17 Bg5!.

14...Qe7?!

Boris: It was better to play 14...Rb8 and if 15 a5 then 15...b5 16 axb6 Rxb6, sacrificing a pawn for questionable compensation.



Exercise: How does White have to play? (difficulty level 2)

15 a5!

Boris: Black's last move allowed me to fix his queenside and start to attack it.

15...Rb8 16 Na4

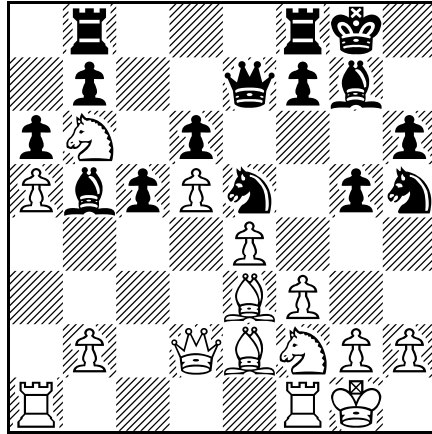
Joel: After 16 Na4 he can't move his b-pawn.

16...Nh5!?

Boris: With this move we see that Black is a great player. He sees that his game is

hopeless on the queenside so he starts to make something happen on the kingside at all costs. In the case of the natural 16...Bb5!? 17 0-0! I am ready to play Nh1-g3-f5 and his position is hopeless. (17 Nb6 Nfd7 was inferior for White.)

17 Nb6 Bb5 18 0-0 0-0



Exercise: How does White proceed with his plan? (difficulty level 2)

19 b4!

Boris: This move is the culmination of White's queenside strategy.

19...c4!?

Boris: With this move he tries to decoy my pieces and, in the time it takes me to win the c-pawn, he hopes to create an attack on the kingside. In the case of 19...Bxe2 20 Qxe2 cxb4 21 Rab1 White would have a big advantage in a quiet situation.

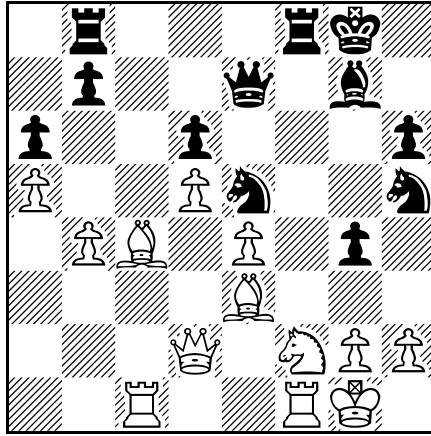
20 Rac1 f5!? 21 Nxc4 Bxc4 22 Bxc4 g4! 23 fxg4!

Boris: 23 f4?! Nxc4 24 Rxc4 g3! 25 hxg3 Nxc3 26 Rfc1 fxe4 would be wrong for White.

Joel: Why is this wrong?

Boris: Because in the final position there are equal pawns and Black has active opportunities.

23...fxg4



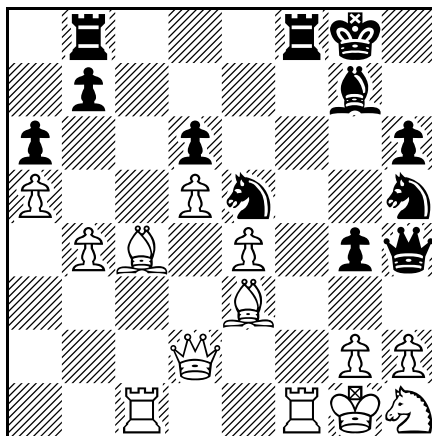
Exercise: How can White extinguish Black's activity on the kingside? (difficulty level 3)

Joel: White has the advantage. He is up a pawn (although it is backward) and has the bishop pair (although the light-squared bishop is currently obstructed by the e4- and d5-pawns). Black is trying to generate a kingside attack as the endgame would be bad for him. The pawn push ...g4-g3 must be part of this plan because exchanging would give Black a strong knight on g3, which could lead to a mating attack with ...Qh4 and ...Rxf2. Therefore, White should prevent this move. Also, White should aim to kill Black's counterplay and exchange pieces, heading towards the endgame when his extra pawn and bishop pair will give him a decisive advantage. The move 24 Nh1! accomplishes both of these goals.

Boris: Good! I would add that with this move I also kill the activity of his knight on h5. This reminds me of a very deep thought of Nimzowitsch's: *when we are attacking the best moves are very often the most beautiful, but when we are defending the best moves very often look ugly.*

24 Nh1! Qh4

Boris: During the game I considered the knight sacrifice as Black's last chance, but playing accurately White refutes the idea: 24...Nf3+!? 25 gxf3 gxf3 26 Ng3 Nxc3 27 hxg3 Qxe4 28 Bd3 Qg4 29 Qh2! Bd4 30 Bf2!.



25 Be2!

Joel: Why is this such a good move?

Boris: With this move I continue playing against the h5-knight and simultaneously over-protect the f3-square.

25...g3 26 Nxc3

Boris: Of course White has to get rid of his knight on h1 and trade off Black's knight on h5. It would be a mistake to take with the h-pawn; for example, 26 hxg3? Rxf1+ 27 Rxf1 Qxe4 28 Bxh5 Nc4 29 Nf2 Qxe3 and Black has escaped his troubles.

26...Nxc3 27 hxg3 Qxe4 28 Rxf8+ Rxf8 29 Bf4!

Joel: Why do you give this an exclamation point? It seems to me that you are just shutting down the kingside and consolidating your advantage.

Boris: After this move Black's initiative has evaporated. White has an extra pawn and a much better position. Generally speaking, the game is won.

29...h5 30 Rc7 Qb1+ 31 Qc1 Qg6

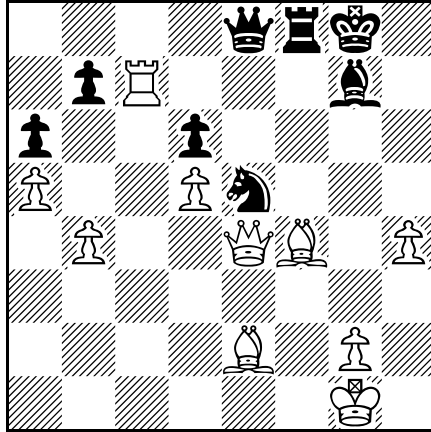
Boris: Black doesn't have 31...Qxb4 because of 32 Rxc7+ Kxc7 33 Bh6+ and White is winning.

32 Qc2 Qe8 33 Qe4

Boris: I planned a small combination here but during the game forgot about it and

made a move that is not worse but not so spectacular. I planned 33 Bh6! Nd7 (if 33...Nf7 34 Qg6 wins) 34 Bxg7 Kxg7 35 Bxh5 and wins.

33...h4 34 gxh4



34...Qd8

Boris: If 34...Ng6 then 35 Qxe8 Rxe8 36 Bh5 wins.

35 Rxb7 Qc8

Boris: If 35...Qxh4 then 36 Rxg7+ Kh8 37 g3 wins.

36 Re7 Qd8 37 Bg5 1-0

Boris: The game shows that a bad strategy in the opening can bring disaster even to the greatest of players. After White achieved the advantage on the queenside, Black tried everything to get active on the kingside but, using prophylaxis, White was able to extinguish Black's chances.

Joel: What I liked about the game, beside your prophylactic moves such as 24 Nh1, was actually how Kasparov tried his best to activate on the kingside. It demonstrates what you have often said that all great players will try to muddy the waters rather than suffer in a hopeless position. I know for myself that I have sat there lifeless and suffered defeat when I should have taken active chances.

Boris: That's correct. We will discuss this topic of muddying the waters in much greater detail when we analyze my game against Korchnoi (Game Sixteen).