

NEW ENGLANDER

Chess Club Update – Christmas 2016

Chessmas Chatter

At this time of year, I usually remark on the many opportunities there are during the festive season for over-indulgence and poke fun at our willingness to take advantage. Why should 2016 be any different?

Whether your sinfulness is confined to bacon-wrapped chipolatas or extends to hard core mince pies with brandy butter, I hope you enjoy Yuletide and return to chess properly fortified and ambitious in 2017.

I am sure that, with family commitments, it will be a busy time for you all. With that in mind, I have prepared below a way for you to combine keeping fit for chess while keeping up our traditional obsession with an excessive calorie intake. Not Masterclass but Masterchef!

Paul Hanks

Meal of the Month

An article in a recent chess magazine pricked my conscience. It dealt with the question of why we fail to win and blamed it largely on making mistakes. So far, so obvious, you may say but the author did not refer to blunders that lose outright. Rather, he was interested in the sort of move that spoils a good position but still leaves you with a thoroughly playable game.

Instead of concentrating on the board in front of you and continuing objectively, you feel considerable psychological pressure from incompetently making your task so much harder than you anticipated only moments before. This state of mind is often the prelude to degrading your chances further and you are on the slippery slope to defeat.

I have decided to turn a vice into a virtue. If such a disappointment ever happens to me, I shall hope it is sufficiently instructive to qualify as a Match of the Month! Thrills and spills in critical positions are the spice of a chess meal. So, prepare yourself for a hot curry...

P Hanks v S Herring

New England A v Peterborough A, 14.01.2016

1	d4	Nf6
2	c4	Nc6

This possibility did not exist when I used to hang up a Christmas stocking. Back then, I was still young enough to learn openings and, although I now try to follow the games in grandmaster tournaments, it hardly ever appears at that level. I therefore assume it must be considered dubious under the clinical gaze of the chess gods who take current fashions with a pinch of salt.

Called the Two Knights Tango, the opening does feature in serious books and based on my limited experience against it, certainly deserves the epithet “pesky”. Black aims for quick piece activity – after all, he has developed two knights before White has touched his back rank. White’s difficulty is that the system opposing him is very fluid. Without a pawn formation to combat, it is too early for White to make strategic plans and in the absence of specific theoretical knowledge, I had to fall back on general principles – central control and development.

At first sight, this amuse-bouche promises some full-fat later courses.

3	Nf3	e6
4	Nc3	Bb4
5	Qc2	d6

The structure is emerging and now is a good time to think about strategy. I was content to develop the dark-squared bishop, play e2-e3 to release the other bishop, castle (probably on the kingside) and advance the pawns in front of centralised rooks. This standard fare is a decent plan provided you are unhindered by your opponent.

6	Bg5	h6
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Firstly, I have not taken into account of how lightly I have defended my centre pawns. It is almost as though my d4/c4 picket line is the poppadom starter – thin and easily broken.

Here, the retreat 7 Bh4 g5 8 Bg3 g4 costs the d pawn and after 7 Bf4, Black can choose between the same plan and 7 ... Nxd4 8 Nxd4 Bxc3+ (8 ... e5? 9 Qa4+) 9 Qxc3 e5 which solves with tempo the problem of deploying his light-squared bishop.

7	Bd2	0-0
8	e3	

I am trying to consolidate whereas Black wants to enliven his palate with relish. Very soon, I shall join him in a pickle.

8	...	e5
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My young opponent starts to make me change my ideas. He rightly judges my ponderous development is several moves from becoming dangerous but opening the e file will catch my king in the centre if I allow e5xd4. After 9 dxe5 dxe5, Black will end up with the strongest pawn in the centre and I am rewarded with a cramped game. My planning had it the other way round!

9	d5	Ne7
10	e4	

I was not confident of controlling e4 with pieces after 10 Bd3 and did not want to spend time having to calculate the consequences of Black's e5-e4 for several moves in succession.

I could see Black was hungering for the push f7-f5 which would give the flavour of a King's Indian Defence to the main course of the game albeit with his bishop on b4 not g7. The latter factor would enable me to gain the bishop pair after a2-a3 and exert pressure on e5 with Bd2-c3, Nf3-d2, 0-0 and eventually f2-f4. Again, I am beaten to the punch.

10 ... Nd7
11 a3 Bxc3
12 Bxc3 f5

My intended f2-f4 is still four(!) moves away and will never be realised if Black is permitted to serve up f5-f4. I decided to give my light-squared bishop some scope.

13 exf5 Nc5

I discounted this option on the basis of 14 b4 but 14 ... Bxf5 has a bitter taste for the white queen. 15 Qd1 Ne4 16 Bb2 Ng6 leaves many tactical possibilities.

14 g4

I am having to dance to my opponent's tune. I hoped to slow down capture on f5 sufficiently to make b2-b4 work e.g. 14 ... g6 15 b4 (15 fxe3 Rxf3).

14 ... Nxf5

Some hope! I had no appetite for the taboo piece. I should be unable to face my team mates following 15 gxf5 Bxf5 16 Qe2 Bg4 17 Bg2 e4 or 16 Qd1 Be4 17 Be2 Qf6 (Fritz says 17 ... Rxf3 is even stronger). I did not consider passive play e.g. 15 Be2 very deeply for the worst possible reason. In my imagination, I was so convinced Black would recapture on move 13 that I double-counted when he took the pawn on the subsequent move. I then assumed 15 Be2 would merely leave me a pawn down in a dreary position. Not seeing a reasonable continuation, I relied on more than a modicum of bluff.

15 b4

Fritz agrees with me. Not as a bluff of course but as the best move. Even so, the temperature of the game has suddenly shot up to vindaloo strength!

What I had foreseen and concerned me greatly was 15 ... Ne3. If I do not capture, I lose material by 16 Qe2 Nxf1 17 Rxf1 Bxg4. But if I do, my defensive technique will be tested to the limit by 16 fxe3 Rxf3 17 bxc5 Qh4+ when the position is very difficult even if I look only at the most obvious moves for Black :

- 18 Kd1 Bxg4 19 Be2 (19 Kc1 Rf2 20 Qd3 Bf5 21 Qd1 Qe4) Rxe3 20 Bxg4 Qxg4+ 21 Kc1 Qxc4
- 18 Kd2 Rf2+ 19 Be2 Bxg4 20 Rae1 Bxe2 21 Rxe2 Rxe2+ 22 Kxe2 Qg4+ 23 Kd3 (23 Kd2 Qg2+; 23 Kf2 Rf8+ 24 Ke1 Qf3 25 Rg1 Qxe3+; 23 Ke1 Qf3 24 Rf1 Qxe3+ 25 Kd1 Qxc5).

At the board, you cannot possibly see lines like these with all their subvariations but you can fear them.

15 ... Ne7

Phew. Having reduced me to a quivering jelly, Black turns down the heat with a backward step. Actually, Fritz prefers 15 ... Qf6 when Black continues to savour what is on offer. 16 gxf5 Bxf5 17 Qd2 Be4 looks familiar from the foregoing. Black reaches a superior position after 16 bxc5 Nd4 17 Bxd4 Qxf3 18 Rg1 exd4 or 17 Nxd4 exd4 18 Bxd4 Qxd4 19 Rd1 Re8+ 20 Be2 Qxg4. With an exposed king and loose pieces on f3 and h1, I might have bitten off more than I can chew.

16 Nxe5 dxe5
17 bxc5 Bxg4
18 Rg1 Bf5
19 Bd3

19 Bxe5 could be a substitute ingredient based on the see-saw created by 19 ... Bxc2 20 Rxg7+.

19 ... Bxd3
20 Qxd3 Rf5

Even after my half-baked fumbling, I have achieved a comfortable position but I cannot attack immediately because 20 Qg3 fails to 20 ... Rg5.

21 0-0-0 Qd7



Like a well-seasoned scallop, 22 f4 looked a very tempting morsel. If 22 ... Rxf4, 23 Rxg7+ Kxg7 24 Bxe5+ because 24 ... Rf6 allows mate starting 25 Rg1+ Kf7 26 Qh7+ etc.

22 Qg3

A complete turkey! This is the move that really, *really* rankles. Not only had I already seen the refutation of the text move but like a goldfish, I forgotten it in the space of a few seconds. I had also seen the winning move and failed to make it. How can I play like this?

22 ... Rg5

Nevertheless, Fritz still gives me an slight advantage equivalent to 0.7 pawns. To me, it felt like the roast dinner had suddenly turned cold.

23	Qh4	Qf5
24	Rxg5	hxg5
25	Qg3	Ng6
26	Qd3	Qf4+
27	Bd2	Qf6

I thought I had blown my chance on move 22 and had failed subsequently to exploit Black's weak pawns (if 28 Rg1 Nf4). I was not enthusiastic about analysing my position but it was gratifying afterwards to see that during this series, I was following the computer's favoured moves. I should have tried 28 d6 but after a hearty repast, I started to doze.

28	Qe4	Rd8
29	Bc3	b6
30	c6	Kf7
31	Rd3	Qf4+

And now, we move on to the dessert. I should find the last phase quite slimming – there is very little in it for me.

32	Qxf4+	gxf4
33	f3	

The pudding, however, is turning out to be quite stodgy. As c4-c5 and d5-d6 are unlikely, Black has crippled my central pawn advance and I had settled for the prospect of a draw. I overestimated the danger of e5-e4 and tried to set up a fortress. Even this is becoming problematic due to the remoteness of my pawn on the open h file.

33	...	a5
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A chance! In my depressed state, I missed 34 c5 bxc5 35 Bxa5 Ne7 (35 ... Rc8 36 Bxc7!) 36 Bxc7 Rxd5 37 Rxd5 Nxd7 38 Bxe5. I had the same vague idea but time pressure (I hope!) caused me to be more tentative. As dessert wines go, that shot would have been very sweet...

34	Be1	Ke7
35	Bf2	Kd6
36	Rd2	

I felt I was losing but the computer is happy with equality. In fact, despite time trouble, I had spotted the outline of a tactical resource but it took a computer-aided post-mortem to show the details. 36 Rd1 was my alternative to the text move when my analysis ran 36 ... Rh8 37 Rg1 Rxh2 despite 38 Rxg6 with check! Fritz highlighted 37 ... Rh6 38 h4 Nxh4 39 Rxg7 with checkmate on d7. The icing on the cake, maybe.

36	...	Rh8
37	Kc2	

37 ... Rh3 would set off the indigestion.

37	...	Nh4
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Most of my time after the control disappeared here. Was I thinking of the traditional film on the TV after the meal? I was definitely seeing demons like 38 Bxh4 Rxh4 39 Kd3 Rh3 40 Rf2 Kc5 41 Kc3 e4 though 41

Ke4 may give me the initiative since 41 ... Kxc4 allows 42 d6.

38	Rd3	Nf5
39	Bg1	Rh6
40	Bf2	

Rubbish! That full-bodied wine is having an effect. I challenge you to find a weaker move!

40	...	Rxh2
41	Rd2	Rh3

This is the strongest move but it came as a great relief. I was expecting to leave the table if Black had played 41 ... Nd4+ 42 Bxd4 (otherwise 42 ... Nxf3) Rxd2+ 43 Kxd2 exd4 44 Kd3 Kc5 when I thought my advanced pawns would simply fall. The king and pawn endgame is not one-sided and Black could be in trouble after 45 Ke4 Kxc4 46 d6.

42	Kd3	Nh4
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I am getting back into the game though not through my own efforts. 42 ... Ne3 43 Bxe3 Rxf3 was the way for Black to clear his plate.

43	Bxh4	Rxh4
44	Rg2	Rh7
45	Rg6+	Ke7
46	Re6+	

We were leading the match 2½-1½ with only this game remaining so I offered a draw. It would have been a fair result at this point. My opponent showed great spirit in going for the required win.

46	...	Kd8
47	Rxe5	Rh1
48	Ke4	Ra1

It is no longer about calculation but surviving on time so I went for the most decisive line.

49	Kxf4	
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Correct technique could have saved my a pawn because 49 Rh5 Rxa3 50 Rh8+ Ke7 51 Rc8 Kd6 52 Kd4 when Black's c pawn will fall to Rc8-d8-d7.

49	...	Rxa3
50	Kg4	Rc3
51	Re4	

Here, I spill the coffee. The correct continuation was 51 Rg5 but under time pressure, could you see how to halt the advancing a pawn? The trick is 51 ... a4 52 Rxg7 a3 53 f4 a2 54 d6 cxd6 (54 ... a1=Q 55 Rg8#) 55 Ra7 and furthermore, you will need to judge that a draw is reached after 55 ... Rxc4 56 Rxa2 Rxc6.

I have, at last, spotted a little sweetener...

51	...	a4
52	Kg5	Rc1
53	Kg6	a3
54	Kf7	Re1
55	Rxe1	1-0

Anyone for After Eights?

Merry Combinations and a Happy New Year!

Paul Hanks