

New Englander

Chess Club Update – Christmas 2019

Chairman's Chatter

By the time you read this, I hope you have put behind you the blatant consumerism of modern Christmas and are concentrating instead on the things that really matter over the festive season – jovial company aided and abetted by a few more calories than usual.

Yes, there is nothing quite like feeling at home, whether it be the familiar surroundings of where you live or being equally relaxed and comfortable enjoying the hospitality of friends or relatives.

Of course, the yuletide sparkle cannot possibly extend to the dour logic of the chessboard - until you notice that in the game below, the black queen finds that the d8 square and Sandringham have a lot in common...

P Hanks v S Wozniak

New England Club Championship Rd 4; 13.11.2019

1	d4	d5
2	c4	Nf6

Whilst not exactly a mistake, this response to the Queen's Gambit concedes the centre and makes White's position easier to play. In fact, of the 473 games on the www.chessgames.com database, White wins 66.8%.

3	cxd5	Qxd5
---	------	------

Another option to contest the central squares is the surprising counter-gambit 3 ... c6 4 dxc6 Nxc6 5 Nf3 e5. Fritz is happy with a fairly level evaluation but the database shows 80% White wins and 20% draws.

4	Nc3
---	-----

This seems too obvious for comment but in an analogous position, Kasparov played 4 Nf3 based on the logic that the text move cannot be stopped and need not be played immediately. I cannot remember that game exactly but thinking along these lines, I reckoned 4 ... e6 5 Nc3 Bb4 merely invited pressure.

4	...	Qd8
5	e4	c6

5 ... e5 is a thematic try because 6 dxe5 Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1 Ng4 recoups the pawn but after 8 Nd5 Nxf2+ 9 Ke2 Nxh1 10 Nxc7+ Kd8 11 Nxa8, White is more likely to free the cornered knight e.g. 11 ... b6 12 Bg5+ Kd7 13 Rd1+ Kc6 14 Rc1+.

6	Bc4
---	-----

White has a range of tempting candidate moves with 6 Nf3 probably being best. My impetuous move aimed to offer Black options (6 ... e6, 6 ... Nbd7, 6 ... Bg4 7 f3) which stifle his development except for ...

6	...	b5
---	-----	----

The same trick 6 ... e5 runs into the sidestep 7 Qb3.

7	Bd3
---	-----

I could play a true gambit with 7 Bb3 b4 8 Nce2 Nxe4 9 Nf3. Fritz slightly prefers White despite the material deficit and the apparent lack of initiative. It can get nasty very quickly e.g. 9 ... Bg4 10 Ne5 Bh5 11 Nf4.

7	...	Qxd4
8	Nxb5	Qd8

The black queen returns home for a second time. I had hoped for a bit of variety with 8 ... Qb4+ but Black cannot defend the c7 square after 9 Bd2 and if 9... Qxb2 10 Bc3, the black queen only finds sanctuary off the side of the board.

9	Nc3	e5
---	-----	----

On database.chessbase.com, the single game in this line (Wurster v Schett, Wattens 1996) continued 9 ... g6 10 Nge2 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0. I was not unhappy with the way the opening has turned out. Black had an isolated pawn weakness on c6 and I had a natural strategy of occupying the open c and d files.

10	Nf3	Nbd7
11	0-0	Bc5
12	Qc2	Qc7

At this point, I felt the need for active play to press home my development advantage. I toyed with the idea 13 b4 Bxb4 14 Nb5 but could not clearly see any recompense. In fact, having the systematic computer as an assistant, I can discard

- 14 ... Qd8 (again!) or 14 ... Qa5, 15 Qxc6
- 14 ... Qb6 15 Be3 which will transpose having gained a valuable tempo
- 14 ... Qb8 when I can recapture with 15 Qxc6 or try for more with 15 Rb1
- 14 ... Qb7 15 Rb1 cxb5 (15 ... a5 16 Rxb4 axb4 17 Nd6+) 16 Rxb4 a6 17 a4 with a continuing assault.

Instinctively, I knew this would cause Black trouble but verifying the analysis was a lot of effort if he could simply decline with 13 ... Bd6.

13	Bg5	Bd6
14	Rac1	a6
15	Rfd1	Bb7

Perhaps it was time for 15 ... 0-0.

16	Qd2	Be7
----	-----	-----

Now 16 ... 0-0 17 Bxa6 might reduce the tension by exchanges albeit at the cost of a pawn.

17	Bxf6
----	------

He who hesitates is lost! 17 Nd5 immediately is the best way forward but the grey matter of my analysis engine was not working well this night. The problem is that there are several viable variations at almost every turn so that each line has to be cut short even at the risk of missing something over the horizon.

First, let us look at the exchange :-

17 ... Nxd5 18 exd5

- 18 ... Bxg5 19 Qxg5 when Black has weaknesses on c6, e5 and g7
- 18 ... Nf6 19 dxc6 Bxc6 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Be4
- 18 ... f6 19 Be3 c5 (19 ... 0-0 20 d6 Bxd6 21 Bc4+) 20 Bf5 Bd6 21 Qc2 with designs on Bxh7 and a check on g6 or 21 b4 c4 22 Qc2 Bxb4 23 Qa4 with a massive attack

and otherwise,

- 17 ... Qd8 (once more) 18 Nxf6. To avoid the horrible pawn structure following g7xf6, Black cannot capture with the knight due to Nf3xe5 and 18 ... Bxf6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 Bxa6
- 17 ... Qd6 18 Ne3 with possibilities for White all over the board.

17 ... Nxf6
18 Nd5 Qd8

I expected 18 ... Nxd5 19 exd5 c5. Black has a solid position but I have a passed pawn to exploit. I had not anticipated her majesty feeling homesick already.

19 Nxe7 Qxe7
20 Qa5

20 Qg5 was OK but my forces are less coordinated.

20 ... 0-0
21 Nxe5 Qd8

Not a fourth time!

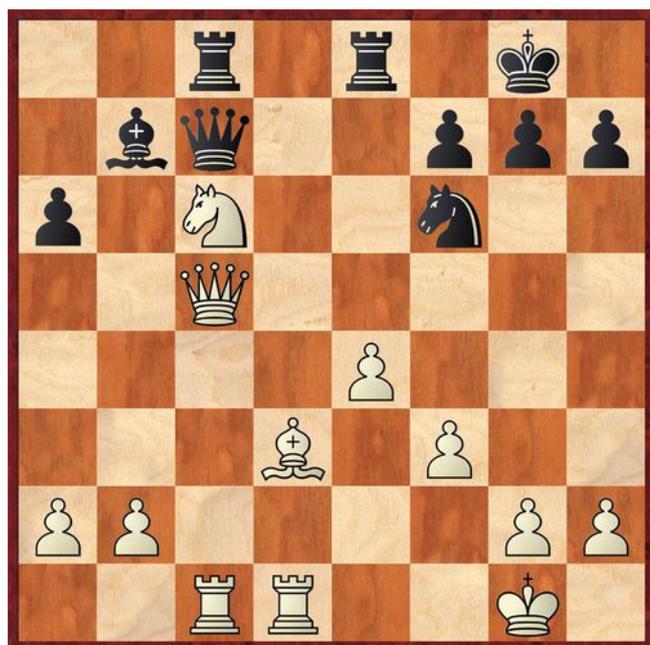
22 Qc5 Qc7
23 Nxc6

I was threatening 24 Ne7+ but falsely thought 23 ... Rfe8 did not stop it based on 24 Ne7+ Rxe7 25 Qxc7.

23 ... Rfe8

Only now did I see 24 ... Qxe7 so I quickly solidified my centre.

24 f3 Rac8



Whoops! Here is the sting in the tail. In my haste, I had not calculated this move and the recent passage of play had unnerved me. Have I blundered a piece or is there an escape? You have a maximum of 5 minutes to solve this puzzle – and then play the endgame in the remaining time!

25 Qa5

I failed! There are several red herrings :-

- 25 Na5 leads to B + 2P v R by 25 ... Qxc5+ 26 Rxc5 Rxc5 27 Nxb7
- 25 b4 Bxc6 26 Bxa6 gives Black scope for error (he has to find 26 ... Nd7) but less so after 25 ... Qxc6 26 Qxc6 Rxc6 (26 ... Bxc6?! 27 Bxa6)

My move tried to keep the queens on the board but is essentially giving in to my mistake.

Instead 25 e5 offers a chance of salvation. I briefly looked at this move and dismissed it thinking the knight moves leaving me the same problem on c6 and an extra weakness on e5.

If the black knight does not move, however, I do not lose a piece and meanwhile, the pawn is safe (25 ... Rxe5 26 Qxe5). So the knight has to move but does not have many safe squares (25 ... Nd7 26 Ne7+). But what about 25 ... Nh5?

Because the knight has relinquished cover of the e8 square, hidden deep in the position is a back rank mate – not something I remotely contemplated. White can exploit this with 26 Bxa6!

- 26 ... Bxa6 27 Ne7+ Rxe7 (27 ... Qxe7 28 Qxe7 Rxe7 29 Rxc8+ Bxc8 30 Rd8+) 28 Qxc7 Rexc7 29 Rxc7
- 26 ... Bxc6 27 Bxc8 Rxc8 28 Qxc6
- 26 ... Qxc6 27 Qxc6
 - 27 ... Bxc6 28 Bxc8 Rxc8 29 Rxc6
 - 27 ... Rxc6 28 Bxb7 Rb6 29 Bc6 Rc8 (29 ... Reb8 30 b3) 30 Bd5.

25 ... Bxc6
26 Qxa6

I might have tried for some last-minute fiddles with 26 Qxc7 Rxc7 27 b4 (27 Bxa6 Rd7 breaks the pin) 27 ... Rd8 28 e5 Nd7 29 Bxa6 Ba4. Great stuff for time trouble!

26 ... Qb7
27 Qxb7 1/2-1/2

As the black queen can no longer return home to d8, a draw was agreed. The computer marginally favours White but I have squandered all my advantage. With 5 minutes left on each clock, the outcome has become a lottery and neither side fancied the risk. A fair conclusion which befits the spirit of peace and tidings of goodwill to all mankind.

Merry Chessmas!

Paul Hanks