

Blind Faith

By Chris Ross

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Chris Ross

Foreword by Grandmaster Neil McDonald

In his introduction to *One Hundred Selected Games*, the former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik advises players keen on improving at chess to publish analysis of their games. The reason is simple. Sitting at home going through your games it is easy to convince yourself that you were unlucky if you lost, or flatter yourself with the quality of your play if you won. In contrast, knowing that your comments are going to be scrutinised by other players forces you to be objective.

Many years ago Chris Ross made the excellent decision to follow Botvinnik's advice by writing deep analysis to his games, and then sending it to his colleagues and friends in the chess world. Many players including myself regularly receive emails with his deep and interesting comments to his games.

In view of this hard work it is no surprise that Chris's playing strength has risen to international level. He is also one of the very best visually impaired players in the world. The publication of this book is a continuation of that process of self-improvement.

I've had the pleasure of knowing Chris since the late 1990s. On the same theme of Chris's objectivity, I'd like to tell you a rather embarrassing story. At one of my early events with Chris the coaches had been given permission by the arbiter to escort their visually impaired players to the bathroom if required during the game. The moment came when I had to perform this service with Chris. Not being very circumspect I didn't notice some metal light fittings protruding dangerously from the wall next to the door of the toilet. I contrived to slam Chris's face into them rather than guide him through the door.

I was horrified. But Chris said nothing, though he was still holding his face when he returned to his seat. I was even more mortified when I heard someone say "Ross has a bad position, that's why his coach hit him". It is to Chris's credit that he didn't let this incident disturb him and he went on to save the game. Nor did he upbraid me about it afterwards, though I did notice that from then on he always found his own way to the toilet.

There have been many times when I've poked Chris in the eye so to speak by suggesting poor ideas in our preparation. But he has always accepted responsibility for the choices he has made and not sought to blame his stupid coach or anyone else for any reversals. This self-reliance is an excellent quality for a chess player. It means that the path to improvement

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isn't blocked by a series of self-pitying excuses, such as the room was too hot, I didn't know the opening line, or my coach is a maniac.

You can see the outcome of decades of exhaustive and objective analysis in this book. Although Chris has never been a full-time chess player, having pursued a successful career in academia, his approach has always been professional. He has developed an impressive opening repertoire, as well as worked on his endgames and middlegame planning. I hope the reader enjoys this fine collection, learns a lot of new ideas, and is inspired to follow Chris's example in studying their own games.

14. Taking out a FIDE Master (May 2010)

I've just come back from the 2010 Ilford Congress, where I played some very strong players. I actually played well on the first two days of the tournament, scoring an amazing $3\frac{1}{2}/4$, drawing with top seed David Sands (graded 212), and beating FIDE Master Robert Eames (ECF 201) en route. I also defeated a 172 and Andrew Mayhew (ECF 188), an up and coming young man, who finished strongly in the tournament.

The final day saw me up against Andrew Lewis (207), who I lost to as Black, having made a poor opening choice. I then drew with David Ledger (2238), offering him a draw in a completely won position! This left me with 4/6, joint third in a very strong tournament.

I would like to show you my game against Robert Eames, who is a renowned attacking player. He loves to get involved in tactical warfare and crushes many of his opponents by playing aggressively. As White last year, he played a very dodgy line of the Rossolimo against me and was lucky to escape with a draw. How to take him on this year though? I soon came up with a very interesting and deeply thought-out 11th move, but was it justified?

Game 14

Chris Ross - Robert Eames

Ilford Congress 2010

Sicilian Moscow

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 d6 4. O-O Bd7 5. Re1 Nf6 6. c3 a6 7. Bf1 Bg4 8. d3 e6 9. Nbd2 Nd7

So far, so good and all according to theory.

Here is how round 2 of this congress went against Andrew Mayhew: 9...Be7 10. h3 Bh5 11. Qc2 O-O 12. g4 Bg6 13. Nh4 d5 14. Nxc6 hxg6 15. Nf3 Qc7 16. Bg2 Rfd8 17. e5 Nd7 18. Bf4 Rac8 19. Qd2 b5 20. h4 d4 21. c4 bxc4 22. dxc4 Nf8 23. h5 a5 24. h6 gxh6 25. Bxh6 a4 26. Bg5 Nh7 27. Bxe7 Qxe7 28. Bf1 Kg7 29. Bd3 Rh8 30. Kg2 Nf8 31. Rh1 Nd7 32. Qf4 Rxh1 33. Rxh1 Rh8 34. Rxh8 Kxh8 35. Bc2 and White went on to convert the ending.

10. Qc2

Treating the position similarly to a reversed Philidor, but as the game proves, the queen may not be well placed here. Getting on with the advance

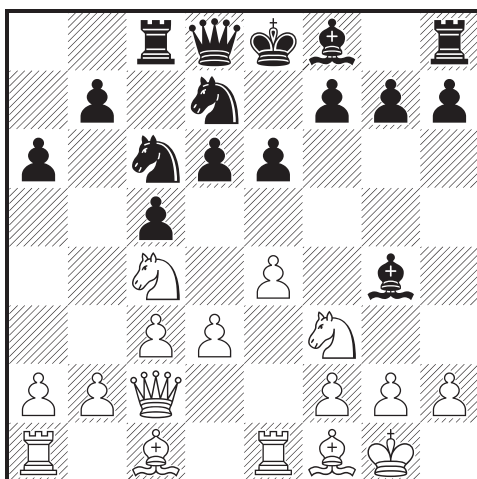
on the kingside or playing through the centre has to be preferred, as the opening references at the end illustrate.

10...Rc8

This probably proves why 10. Qc2 may not be the best positional move at hand. One of White's objectives in this type of position is to play a delayed d3-d4 and claim a stake in the centre. With the rook vis-à-vis the white queen, this break is not so easily accomplished.

The question now is: how to proceed as White? His decision is a big one and has long-term positional considerations. But are they justified tactically? We must not forget that White is playing a tactical player!

11. Nc4!?



(2rqkb1r/1p1n1ppp/p1npp3/2p5/2N1P1b1/2PP1N2/PPQ2PPP/R1B1RBK1 b k - 0 11)

A very interesting positional decision. In practice match situations, White had played h2-h3 with Nh2 manoeuvres to follow and the idea of launching the f-pawn. Although he has scored well with it, it is still not clear if that is the best approach.

Why the text move? Well, White wishes to block the c-file against the rook on c8. He wants too to free up his bishop on c1 to be developed. Also White wants to reroute the knight to e3 and have g2-g4 at his disposal, leaving the pawn on h2 for defensive purposes. After all, where else is the knight headed than e3?

As such, the common idea of h2-h3 and g2-g4 is still being achieved, but with the knight landing on the central square e3 to facilitate g2-g4 instead of the h-pawn doing so. This means that a later h2-h4 will not lose a tempo. All of that is fine, but the immediate question is what happens if Black shatters the pawn structure on the kingside.

11...Bxf3 12. gxf3 Nde5

Black reacts classically to the flank decision and potential flank-attack that White has, by attacking in the centre.

Let us consider the ramifications of White's 11th move. White now has a shattered kingside pawn structure. Although shattered, the pawns, especially the doubled f-pawns, control the centre and give White a pawn mass in the middle of the board. More importantly, and crucial to White's decision is that he now has the bishop-pair. White must therefore open up the position and allow his bishops to rake an open board. In that sense, he must not be scared of an open position or, indeed, an open king.

The decision is actually taken to allow the white king to become horribly exposed, but also allow both bishops to defend the monarch and attack across the board as well. Notice how White ultimately accomplishes this. Also, Kh1 and Rg1 ideas are in the offing for attacks down the half-open g-file. With Black having played ...Rc8 already, a queenside escape for the black king isn't so easily achieved.

All things considered, positionally speaking, the decision seems to be founded on firm ground. However, tactically, there could be blemishes. Black does have two knights, that can quickly come into the kingside and his queen has an easy, fast route into the attack. Does White have enough to fend off the coming onslaught?

Note too that 12...Qh4 13. Ne3 gets the knight back for defensive duties.

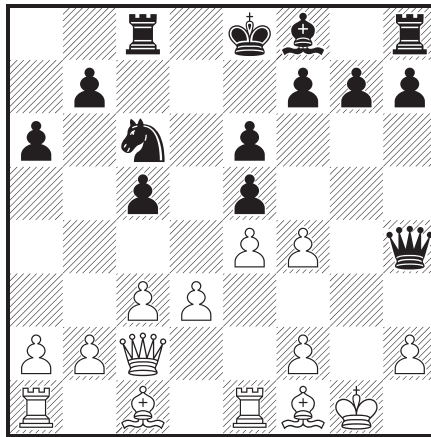
13. Nxe5 dxe5

Black wishes to blockade the position and hinder the white bishop-pair. Good positional sense and something that White cannot allow. Instead, he must seek to open up the position for those bishops. Dangerous and unclear play now occurs.

14. f4

Calmer would be 14. Kh1 Qh4.

14...Qh4



(2r1kb1r/1p3ppp/p1n1p3/2p1p3/4PP1q/2PP4/PPQ2P1P/R1B1RBK1 w k - 0 15)

White has to step carefully here. Black is summoning all his forces very quickly and White has to defend carefully. Once the flash attack has been repelled, then, and only then, can the bishops emerge to begin to wreak their positional damage. Currently the f-pawn is en prise and this cannot be allowed to be captured as Black's pawn would then march to f3 with mating nets. Instead, the position must be opened up.

15. fxe5 Nxe5

Another black piece heads towards the kingside and yet again, forks on f3 are threatened. Note the looseness of the rook on e1 too, preventing the white f-pawn from advancing. If that could advance easily, White's troubles would be just about solved.

16. Qe2

Placing the queen on a better square, with a future central break in mind (see the note to move 10, above). Also, the rook on e1 gains protection, as do the light squares around the white king.

Instead, 16. Re3 Bd6 17. Bg2 Nc6 seemed dangerous, as the f4-square would be available for the black queen to sneak into, with the bishop on c1 cut out of play. Calm calculated defensive play was instead required here.

16...Bd6

White had banked on Black playing this, the most aggressive line. It all looks very scary for White, who seems to be getting mated on h2. Indeed, ...Nf3+ tactics are looming, but White can hold things. Notice once again

that White cannot launch his f-pawn, due to ...Nf3+ tactics, with the rook on e1 being left loose if the knight is taken.

Apart from this direct approach, White was considering 16...c4 17. dxc4 Bc5 18. Be3, which is simply unclear.

17. h3!

Defence complete! Another important point of 16. Qe2 is that the g4-square is not only controlled by the pawn on h3, but also the queen. This allows future Qg4 ideas by White, forcing the exchange of queens, uniting the white pawn-chain again and ridding Black of all attacking possibilities. All of Black's immediate attacking possibilities have been squashed. How does he maintain any aggressive intentions?

17...g5

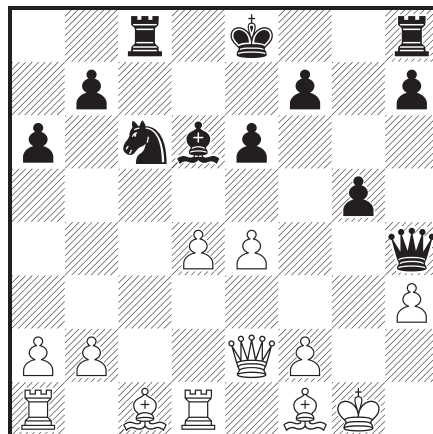
Played in the true spirit of Black's style. He attempts to continue the hack! However, all the entry squares have been covered and it's now time for White to start breaking out.

Instead, there was 17...c4 18. d4 Nd3, while simply 17...0-0 18. Bd2 or 18 Bg2 with the idea of f2-f4 is better for White.

18. d4 cxd4 19. cxd4 Nc6

More lines have been opened up, which is good news for the bishops. Central control has been established and things are starting to look very nice indeed for White.

20. Rd1



(2r1k2r/1p3p1p/p1nbp3/6p1/3PP2q/7P/PP2QP2/R1BR1BK1 b k - 0 20)

Defending the d-pawn and putting another heavy piece on a central file. Now d4-d5 threats could be on or e4-e5 and then d4-d5. Also, f2-f4 possibilities have been opened up without the rook loose on e1. Note too that ...Nb4 and ...Nc2 forks don't have to be dealt with and how the white pieces are starting at last, after their defensive duties have been completed, to begin to coordinate themselves very nicely indeed.

20...Ke7?

It's hard to find an explanation for this move. Black simply wanted to play aggressively and wished to connect the rooks. He should have realised by now that attacking possibilities were unlikely and that simple positional chess was now required. 20...Bf4 is the only move that makes any kind of sense.

21. e5!

Ironically, it's White who now begins to play aggressively. With the black king stepping up to e7, there are now tactical possibilities for White. Notably on f6, the a3-f8 diagonal and, most importantly, the b7-square! White's original intention was to play Qg4 at the earliest moment and get those queens off, improving the pawn structure at the same time. But now, it is White who wants to give Black some of what he's been trying to dish out for the past 10 moves.

21...Bb4

It is a good job that rook had moved away from e1. Black is obviously tempting White into a3 Ba5; b4 and driving the bishop to a better square on b6. White is not interested in that. Indeed, that bishop on b4 is a tactical liability.

Here 21...Bc7 22. Qf3 Rhg8 23. Qb3 was the original plan. Note how White targets that poor old b7-pawn.

22. Qf3

At this point, White began to feel very comfortable about taking home the whole point. The white queen steps on to a more aggressive square, targets f6, b3, the third rank and that all-important b7-square. Things are about to collapse for Black.

22...g4

Desperate. Black sacrifices a pawn in the hope of creating more tactical possibilities. The f6-square is now covered, but that is soon dealt with. Again, calm defensive measures are now needed for a move or two, but these are defensive moves that create attacking possibilities too. We most certainly must not forget the all-important, long-range bishops.

23. hxg4

Calmly taking the pawn. The white king is absolutely fine with the cover of the two bishops and the queen. Pawn cover is not required.

Instead, 23. Qxg4 Rhg8 would not be clever.

23...Rhg8 24. g5

Defending, and also renewing the threat of Qf6+ tactics. 24. Be2 Kf8
25. Qe4 h5 26. Bh6+ Ke7 was a messier approach.

24...Ke8

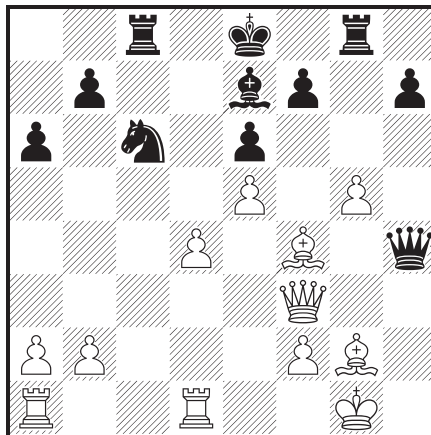
Simply admitting that 20...Ke7 was a poor decision. Also, the e7-square is made available for the bishop retreat.

25. Bf4

Finally developing the queen's bishop. The bishop is required for the kingside and that is where it is going. Note that e3 is not the best square for it, as White intends to blast open the centre. Therefore e5 requires protection and the bishop also has to cover the white king.

Quieter play would have been 25. Qh3 Qxh3 26. Bxh3 h6.

25...Be7 26. Bg2



(2r1k1r1/1p2bp1p/p1n1p3/4P1P1/3P1B1q/5Q2/PP3PB1/R2R2K1 b - - 0 26)

Covering the white king and improving its safety. Now the bishops begin to work their magic down the long diagonals. White's positional objectives are beginning to exert themselves.

26...Rd8

Attacking the d-pawn. White now simply continues with the positional strategy, refining the tactics to ensure all his aims are achieved simultaneously.

27. d5 exd5 28. Bg3 Qxg5 29. Rxd5 Rxd5 30. Qxd5 h5

Yet more aggressive intentions by Black. He wishes to throw the h-pawn

down the board and win a pinned bishop on the g-file. But here White illustrates the nimbleness of the bishops and, in fact, the light-squared bishop can stand anywhere on the long diagonal and still does its work, from whichever square it stands. However, first, simple development. If you can develop and defend at the same time, then all to the good.

31. Rd1 h4 32. Bh2 Nb4?

Black's losing move, but by now he was down to about two minutes for his last four moves. Having desperately attempted aggressive play all game, it must have been incredibly frustrating that the tactics weren't quite working for him.

32...h3 doesn't win the bishop on g2, as the rook's development to d1 allows a check on d7 with the white queen when Qxh3 is made possible. A simple demonstration of the effect of long diagonals and the range of bishops and the queen.

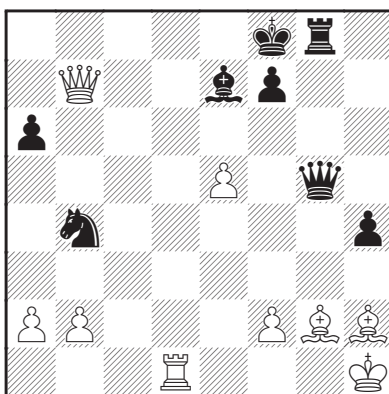
Why Black goes for a wander here with his knight, we don't know. He must have just wanted to deflect the white queen away from the bishop on g2 at all costs. Of course, if the white queen wanders from the protection of the g2-bishop or the indirect defence of the h3-square, Black could win tactically.

Instead, 32...Qg4 33. Kh1 Kf8 was White's original thought.

33. Qxb7

There goes the b7-pawn White had targeted. The queen stays on the long h1-a8 diagonal and sustains the Qc8+ and Qd7+ tactic to steal the pawn on h3 if it dares to advance.

33...Kf8 34. Kh1



(5kr1/1Q2bp2/p7/4P1q1/1n5p/8/PP3PBB/3R3K b - - 0 34)

Calmly defending against any attacks down the g-file. However, more importantly, once Black has been driven away from the g-file, guess who's going to take it over and counter-attack?

34...Kg7 35. a3

This is now logical, as the black knight has nowhere to retreat.

35...Nc2

What else? If 35...Qg4 36. f3 (36. Qxe7 is not possible due to 36...Qxd1+ 37. Bg1 h3 38. Qf6+ Kf8 39. Qh6+ Rg7 40. Qh8+ Rg8 41. Qxh3 Nc6) 36...Qe6 37. axb4.

36. Qe4

The final move of the time control. White missed the simpler and stronger 36. Rg1 when a cute finish would be: 36...Kh8 37. Be4 Qh6 38. Qxe7 Rxd1+ 39. Kxd1 Qc1+ 40. Kg2 Ne1+ 41. Kh3 Qc8+ 42. Kxh4 Qg8 43. Kh5 Nf3 44. Bf4 Qg7 45. Bf5 Nh4 46. Qd8+ Qg8 47. Qxh4 f6 48. Qxf6+ Qg7 49. Bh6 Qxf6 50. exf6 Kg8 51. Kg6 Kh8 52. Bg7+ Kg8 53. f7#.

36...Kh8

The time control reached. Time to walk away from the board, compose oneself, grab a coffee, stand outside for two or three minutes and let the adrenaline drain away. Then you can walk back to the board, cool, calculated, calm and do the professional thing to finish off the job.

37. Bf3 Rc8

There is no other way to defend the stranded knight on c2. Note how the white bishop has stepped up to f3 and still covered all the important squares on the kingside. Now the g-file has been opened and the black rook has wandered away, is there any wonder that Black is now caught on the kingside?

38. Rg1 Qh6 39. Bf4 1-0

Not the most accurate way to finish off the game, but by now it was clear that Black was fed up and wanted to throw in the towel. White was playing confidently and must have given the out the impression that he expected victory shortly. 39. e6 f6 40. Rg4 is cleaner, but it doesn't matter.

Black looked at White's 39th move for about 30 seconds, said "It's becoming too holey" and held out his hand. A nice job well accomplished!

Opening references:

- a) 10. h3 Bh5 11. g4 Bg6 12. d4 cxd4 13. cxd4 Be7 14. d5 Nce5 15. Nxe5 dxe5 16. Nf3 Rc8 17. b3 exd5 18. Qxd5 f6 19. Nh4 Nc5 20. Qxd8+

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Rxd8 21. Nf5 Bxf5 22. exf5 Nd3 23. Bxd3 Rxd3 24. Be3 Ba3 25. Rad1 Rxd1 26. Rxd1 Ke7 27. f4 exf4 28. Bxf4 Rc8 29. Rd2 Rc6 ½-½, Zhang Zhong-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2004.

b) 10. h3 Bh5 11. Nc4 b5 12. Ne3 Be7 13. g4 Bg6 14. Nf5 0-0 15. Nxe7+ Qxe7 16. Bf4 Nb6 17. Bg3 f6 18. d4 cxd4 19. Nxd4 Rac8 20. Nf5 exf5 21. exf5 1-0, Andreikin-Lintchevski, Dagomys 2009.

c) 10. h3 Bh5 11. g4 Bg6 12. d4 cxd4 13. cxd4 e5 14. d5 Ncb8 15. h4 h6 16. Bh3 Be7 17. h5 Bh7 18. Nf1 a5 19. Ng3 Na6 20. Bf1 Nac5 21. Bb5 0-0 22. a4 Kh8 23. Nd2 Bh4 24. Ndf1 Nf6 25. f3 Rc8 26. Be3 Ng8 27. Re2 Bg5 28. Ra3, Sedlak-Ivanisevic, Topola 2004.

d) 10. h3 Bh5 11. g4 Bg6 12. d4 cxd4 13. cxd4 Be7 14. d5 Nce5 15. Nxe5 dxe5 16. Nc4 0-0 17. d6 Bh4 18. Bg2 b5 19. Ne3 Qb6 20. Re2 Nc5 21. Nf5 exf5 22. exf5 Rad8 23. Be3 Rxd6 24. Rd2 Rxd2 25. Qxd2 b4 26. Qd5 Be7 27. Rc1 Rc8 28. fxg6 hxg6 29. Qxe5 Qd6 30. Qxd6 Bxd6 31. Bf1 Rc7, Kovalevskaya-Kosteniuk, Kazan 2004.

e) 10. h3 Bh5 11. g4 Bg6 12. d4 cxd4 13. cxd4 Be7 14. d5 Nce5 15. Nxe5 dxe5 16. Nc4 0-0 17. a4 exd5 18. Qxd5 Nf6 19. Qxd8 Rfxd8 20. f3 Bb4 21. Re2 Rd1 22. Ne3 Bc5 23. Kg2 Rdd8 24. Nc4 Nd7, Rublevsky-Sorokin, Tomsk 2004.

f) 9...Be7 10. h3 Bh5 11. Qc2 0-0 12. g4 Bg6 13. Nh4 d5 14. Nxg6 hxg6 15. Nf3 Qc7 16. Bg2 Rfd8 17. e5 Nd7 18. Bf4 Rac8 19. Qd2 b5 20. h4 d4 21. c4 bxc4 22. dxc4 Nf8 23. h5 a5 24. h6 gxh6 25. Bxh6 a4 26. Bg5 Nh7 27. Bxe7 Qxe7 28. Bf1 Kg7 29. Bd3 Rh8 30. Kg2 Nf8 31. Rh1 Nd7 32. Qf4 Rxh1 33. Rxh1 Rh8 34. Rxh8 Kxh8 35. Bc2 a3 36. bxa3 Kg7 37. Ba4 Na5 38. Bb5 Nb6 39. Nd2 Qb7+ 40. Qf3 Qxf3+ 41. Kxf3 f6 42. Kf4 g5+ 43. Ke4 Kg6 44. exf6 Kxf6 45. a4 Nc8 46. Nb3 Nd6+ 47. Kd3 Nxb3 48. axb3 e5 49. Bc6 Ke7 50. b4 cxb4 51. c5 Nc8 52. Kc4 Kd8 53. Kxb4 Kc7 54. Be4 Na7 55. Kc4 Nc6 56. Kd5 Nb4+ 57. Kxe5 d3 58. Kf5 d2 59. Bf3 Nd5 60. Kxg5 Nc3 61. Kf6 Ne4+ 62. Ke5 Nxf2 63. g5 Nh3 64. g6 Ng5 65. Bd1 Kc6 66. Kf5 1-0, Ross-Mayhew, Ilford 2010.

50. Moscow Rules (July 2015)

This encounter was my final round game in the recent Sheffield Congress. The victory took me to 4/5 points, half a point off the tournament leaders, which included grandmaster Mark Hebden on 4½/5. Sheffield was one of my better performances in the last few years, since I have moved to Northampton, and I'm delighted that my performance during the weekend demonstrated my old style of playing, achieving the results that I used to obtain.

I've written many times about the importance of the 'principles' of opening play. Not necessarily theory, but the concept of an opening's objectives, its strategic values and the fundamental basis of that opening. With that understanding, a player can establish a set-up with relative comfort and have a game-plan already formulated. The execution of such a game-plan can then often appear seamless in actuality.

In this encounter, Black is graded 185 ECF, which is very respectable indeed. The apparent ease with which White accomplishes all his opening targets is probably down to Black not appreciating the subtleties of the position and fully comprehending White's long-term aims.

If nothing else, I would strongly encourage all players to analyse their opening choices and grasp the principles of that variation or set-up. Don't just learn a batch of theory from a book or DVD, but contemplate its foundation. Those are the rules with which a player should start the game and then strive to obey. Adapt once things become disjointed or adversity over the board is evident. It is most instructive that the tactical finesses of a position will soon sort themselves out once the game-plan is suitably structured.

Game 50

Chris Ross - Peter Merics

Sheffield Congress 2015

Sicilian Moscow

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bb5+

The Canal-Sokolsky variation of the Sicilian Defence, often called the Moscow variation. Unlike its sister variation, the Rossolimo, the Moscow does not strive to shatter the Black formation in compensation for giving up the bishop-pair. Interestingly, though, the Moscow pertains similar objectives, one of which is the ultimate good knight versus bad bishop ending, that all the variations have in common. The Moscow variation sets

out to demonstrate that piece play, a lead in development and the occupation of the light squares will give White a positional plus.

3...Nd7

The response preferred by Gary Kasparov no less. 3...Bd7 allows the exchange of light-squared bishops and 5. c4, forming the Maroczy Bind, which gives White a comfortable edge, since the light-squared bishops are no longer on the board.

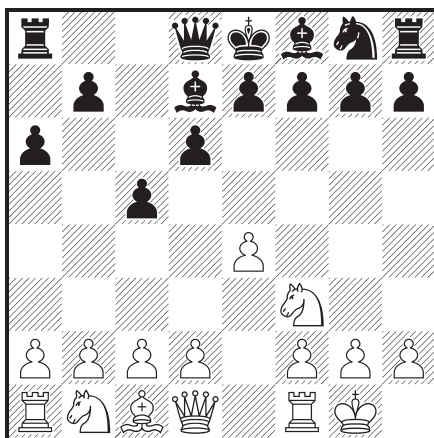
3...Nc6 is a more challenging variation, but after 4. O-O Bd7 5. Re1 White's light-squared bishop is given a flight-square back on f1, where it will later emerge to support White in his occupation of the light squares.

The text-move should force White to part with the bishop-pair, but this is ultimately within his game-plan in any case.

4. O-O a6

In round three of this tournament, Black played 4...Ngf6, permitting 5. Re1 and once again the light-squared bishop had a flight square back on f1. A subtlety in the move order, but important as White then achieved an easy advantage and converted the victory in under 35 moves.

5. Bxd7+ Bxd7



(r2qkbnr/1p1bpppp/p2p4/2p5/4P3/5N2/PPPP1PPP/RNBQ1RK1 w kq - 0 6)

Here a close analysis of the position should be undertaken. What is White attempting to achieve and where is he going to accomplish it?

White has voluntarily given up the light-squared bishop, which should only be done if a long-term objective is intended. Indeed, with this exchange,

White is stating that he believes Black's light-squared bishop is of little significance. Examining the black pawn-chain, it is clear that the pawns on c5, d6 and e7 limit the scope of the dark-squared bishop quite considerably. To develop the dark-squared bishop, Black will either have to advance the e-pawn, thereby leaving the d-pawn backward and vulnerable, or fianchetto it, which is not going to be easy considering White's follow-up.

Taking that analysis further, White is thus intending to make Black's dark-squared bishop 'bad' and wishes to have his own queen's knight (b1) prove to be 'good', thereby giving him an advantage in the endgame.

To that end then, White needs to ensure that Black does not keep the bishop-pair. Having exchanged his own light-squared bishop, White must endeavour to exchange his king's knight for Black's light-squared bishop. Due to the pressure exerted on the light squares in the middlegame, this is easily accomplished.

6. d4 cxd4

If permitted, White will play d4-d5 and clamp down on the light squares with his pawns, reducing Black's light-squared bishop to a mere observer. Black cannot allow this.

7. Qxd4

Best, as recapturing with the king's knight would only leave the knight awkwardly placed to reach its objective square. The queen recapture hinders Black's development and increases White's. Black's g-pawn is now pinned, preventing him from fianchettoing. Indeed, Black will now have to make some kind of concession to enable him to complete development.

7...e5

Black attempts to break out and remove the white queen from her dominating position. Black reckons that putting the pawn on e5 is better than on e6, as if 7...e6, the g-pawn would still be pinned, and the d-pawn is no less backward whether the e-pawn is on e6 or e5. Also, Black is controlling some useful central squares.

Like its sister variations, Black seeks a Sveshnikov or Kalashnikov type of set-up, understandably fighting for space within the centre. However, just like these sister variations, the outpost on d5 is now exposed. With White having refrained from landing his king's knight on d4, he will find it much easier to transfer this knight around to the outpost than if he had recaptured in the centre with the steed.

8. Qd3

White retreats the queen to a light square, as that is what coloured square she now belongs on, with the light-squared bishop having been exchanged.

The e-pawn is guarded and the black d-pawn becomes a focus point. However, as Nimzowitsch instructed us, the square in front of an isolated pawn or backward pawn is to be targeted and controlled, not the weakness itself.

8...Nf6

A slight inaccuracy in the move order, but this is not yet critical. 8...Be7 or 8...Bc6 is to be preferred.

9. Nc3

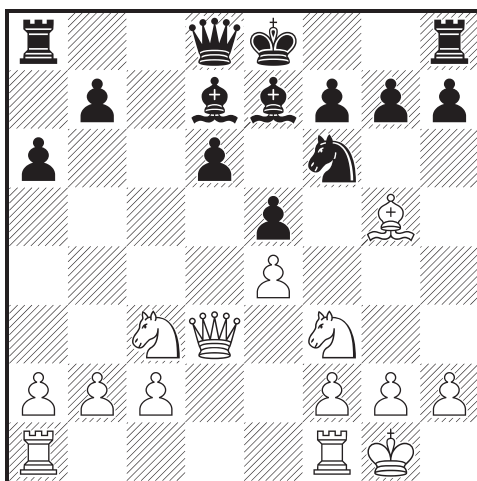
Slightly toying with Black. White does not wish to commit his queenside pawns, as Black's pawn break, ...b7-b5, may undermine it. In that sense then, White only wants to play a2-a4 or c2-c4 if he really must. This begs the question then as to whether Black should flick in ...Bb5 at some stage to force c2-c4, but the validity of this is not clear.

9...Be7?

After this, White has a strong, if not positionally winning set-up. Black has failed to appreciate the long-term plans for White and the seriousness of the d5 outpost.

9...h6 was Black's only good option. Although this leaves an anchor or hook for White to exploit and the f5-square beckons, Black's king's knight had to be maintained to keep any kind of control over the d5-square. After 9...h6, White can lever open the position at some stage with f2-f4 or simply transfer the king's knight around to the d5-square, as in the game.

10. Bg5



(r2qk2r/1p1bbppp/p2p1n2/4p1B1/4P3/2NQ1N2/PPP2PPP/R4RK1 b kq - 0 10)

White completes development and has a commanding position with overwhelming control of the d5 outpost. From here on, Black never achieves equality and White's play is natural, simple and extremely efficient.

10...Be6

Black attempts to regain some control of the d5 outpost. White's threat was to exchange on f6, luring Black's dark-squared bishop away from the defence of the backward pawn. If Black is required to recapture on f6 with the g-pawn, his pawn structure is so devastatingly fractured that an inevitable loss will soon occur.

11. Rfd1

The correct rook. It is removed from the a6-f1 diagonal, completely negating any possible tactics that Black may dream of. The d-pawn is yet again targeted and the white queen's rook is left on that side of the board in case a2-a4 and operations on the flank are necessary.

11...Qa5

Since Black is positionally struggling, he resorts to tactical means in an attempt to lessen the pressure. White, naturally, does not have to get involved with any complications and the continuation of his game-plan is the easiest and most effective way to refute the tactical tricks.

12. Bxf6

Removing a defender of the d5 outpost and beginning that long-term plan of obtaining good knight versus bad bishop. The departure of the second bishop is insignificant since White will soon regain Black's light-squared bishop or win material as an alternative.

12...Bxf6 13. Nd2

White ignores the tactical offer of a pawn and, instead, continues with his plan, mindful that his positional superiority is more than enough to convert the victory without having to get embroiled in a tactical melee. White's king's knight is transferred around to exert pressure on the d5 outpost. Black's attempt to complicate things tactically has only left his queen on a more vulnerable square, thereby aiding White in his endeavours.

13. Qxd6 Rd8 14. Qa3 Qxa3 15. Rxd8+ Ke7 16. bxa3 Rxd8 is not the route White wants to go down, despite being a clear pawn up.

13...Rd8 14. Nc4 Bxc4

Black exchanges his light-squared bishop as this knight can cause so much damage otherwise. Tactically, the d-pawn may be vulnerable as the black queen does not have many squares to escape to. If needed, the white knight can step backwards on to e3 and then jump satisfactorily into d5. Either way, the white knights will lead a merry dance around the black

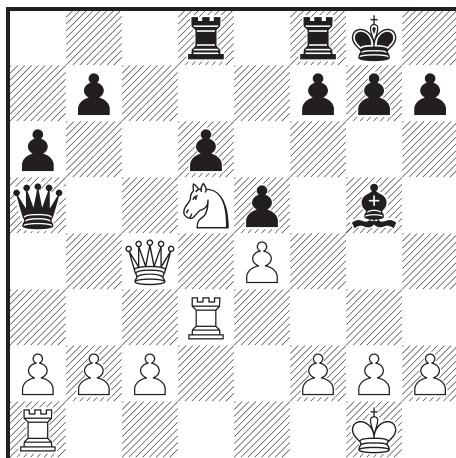
forces and effectively split them in half. So, with the text-move, Black hopes to regain some tempi to permit himself to castle and organise an untangling process.

15. Qxc4 0-0 16. Nd5 Bg5

Black wishes to keep his dark-squared bishop, as his only true hope of salvaging the game is by tactical means and, potentially, with a kingside attack. Instructively, all the black forces are not only uncoordinated, but are indeed undefended.

White has now achieved pretty much everything he has set out to do from the opening. He has obtained a huge positional advantage and any endgame will simply be winning. How then to complete development and where is the focus to be concentrated?

17. Rd3



(3r1rk1/1p3ppp/p2p4/q2Np1b1/2Q1P3/3R4/PPP2PPP/R5K1 b - - 0 17)

The white rook is lifted on to the open third rank, placed on a light square and so facilitates the doubling up of rooks on the backward d-pawn. The undefended white queen is an issue in the position, though, as it is not entirely clear at the moment where she belongs. Black's natural break is ...f7-f5 and whilst the white queen remains on the a2-g8 diagonal, he must waste time to ensure that no discoveries are going to cause him fatal consequences.

17. a4 is certainly an option, gaining space on the queenside and introducing the tactical threat of 18. b4, winning the black queen. Black

can easily avoid this with 17...Rc8 and may follow up with the ...b7-b5 thrust. Although this opens up the a-file for White, it is unclear whether any joy will be gained down it. Despite being a promising prospect, the uncertainty of the plan does not warrant the compromised nature of the white pawn-chain. Indeed, the white c-pawn is backward on a half-open file. To ensure that it does not become weak, White will be obliged to play c2-c3. That is one pawn weakness in the white queenside; playing a2-a4 would incur a second, possibly one too many.

Thus, the rook lift. However, this does not entirely solve White's 'true' weakness, again a guiding principle for the black-sided player of the Sicilian Defence, that being the e4-pawn. That e4-pawn is a focus-point and Black can now turn his attention to its undefended nature.

17...Rc8 18. Qb3 b5

Black gains space on the queenside, and, more importantly, gives himself the c4 outpost. This is, though, in all reality, not a true outpost, for although Black can temporarily occupy the square, he cannot maintain in. This is an important feature and the quintessential difference in the actual effectiveness of an outpost.

19. c3 Qd8

Black retreats to defend his loose bishop on g5 and has the potential of swinging the queen across to the kingside for an attack. After 19...Rc4 20. Qc2 the e-pawn is defended covertly though, due to 20...Rxe4 21. Rg3, revealing an attack on the two loose black pieces.

20. Rad1 Rc4 21. f3

This puts a pawn on a light square, which is somewhat inconvenient for White, who no longer has the third rank for his rook. Awkwardly too, the a7-g1 diagonal becomes a tactical liability. This is a necessary evil, though, since White needs tempi to consolidate his position. Although a temporary measure, White has something else in mind, namely to counter-attack against the oncoming black onslaught. Similar themes can be seen in the King's Indian Defence and other such openings.

21...g6

Unfortunately, Black does not have the luxury of such preparatory moves. He is naturally striking out with his break of ...f7-f5, but there is not time to waste here. Again, Black mistakenly perceives that he will be obliged to recapture on f5 with a pawn, in order to open up the g-file and to have a central pawn mass. Things are not so clear, though, as will soon become apparent. That said, 21...f5 22. exf5 Rxf5 23. a4 is a sneaky way with which to attack the black queenside pawns, because if 23...Rxa4? then

24 Nb6+ wins the exchange.

22. Qc2

Transferring the white queen across to the kingside, both for defensive purposes and to facilitate some other heavy-piece manoeuvring. More important is the fact that the black rook posted on c4 can now be evicted.

22...f5

Black strikes out, as surely he must, for otherwise White will slowly improve his piece superiority, not least the queen, and then begin to exert pressure on the black queenside pawns, as well as the backward d-pawn. The show of impatience by Black is understandable, but it leads to a swifter demise for him.

23. b3 Rc8 24. exf5

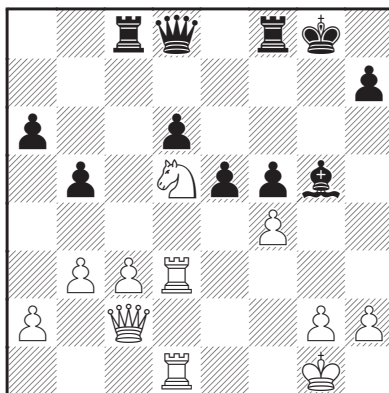
It was essential to evict the black rook from c4 before this exchange occurred, as the fourth rank becomes open. It would have been criminal to permit the rook on c4 to swing across to h4 and join in a possible kingside attack. With the move order adopted, White's forces now begin to control more light squares and, indeed, the e4-square is freed up.

24...gxf5

It is difficult to criticise such a natural response, but Black is on the verge of sheer collapse in any case.

24...Rxf5 25. Qe2 Rf7 is the only possible way for Black to survive the position for any length of time. White can then choose his continuation which will include the occupation of the e4-square or the targeting of the black queenside pawns.

25. f4



(2rq1rk1/7p/p2p4/1p1Nppb1/5P2/1PPR4/P1Q3PP/3R2K1 b - - 0 25)

A devastatingly disruptive move. The third rank is yet again opened up for the white rook and the pressure on the e5-pawn reverberates backwards on to the d-pawn. If fxe5 and ...dxe5 is permitted, there are discoveries along the open d-file and penetration by a white rook must occur.

25...exf4

Black's pawn formation is a miserable sight to behold, but annoyingly for Black, 25...e4 26. Rg3 would lose the pinned bishop on g5. White is in no hurry to recapture the doubled f-pawn, for as it is, it limits the scope of the dark-squared bishop. Studying the black pawn structure now reveals four pawn islands, with doubled and isolated pawns to boot.

26. Kh1

Remaining calm to the finish. The white king is removed from all the tactical possibilities along the a7-g1 diagonal, so that the white knight can leave the d5-square without any tactics occurring against the exposed white king. Although this increases the weakness of the white back rank, Black simply does not have time to exploit this, as his own king will be slain well before he is offered that opportunity.

26...Qe8

Black seeks penetration possibilities down the open e-file. Possibly ...Qe4 is an option or maybe ...Qh5 with kingside ambitions, both of which are easily refuted. The black queen has no good squares though, while forks on b6 may tie Black down and Nb4 may pressurise the d-pawn to such an extent that it's simply lost.

27. Qf2

Removing the white queen from the gaze of the black rook on the c-file. Possibilities now offer themselves with h2-h4 if needed, but critically, White will now challenge the open file. Black can offer little resistance now.

27...Rc5

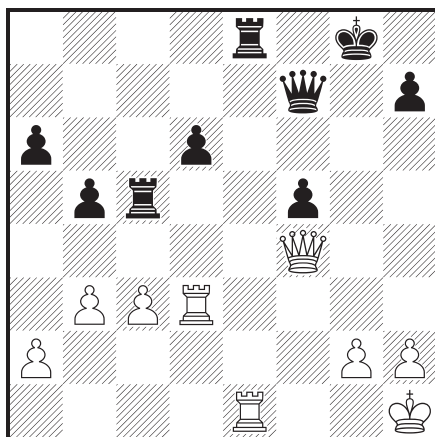
Presumably played with the intention of offering up the exchange on d5 followed by ...Qe4 or ...Qe3 penetration ideas. White must not, and does not permit such tricks.

28. Re1 Qf7 29. Nxf4

Simple and strong. White has cashed in his positional plusses. The damage caused to Black's pawn structure and openness of the king no longer mean that the endgame is necessary. There are too many weaknesses in the black camp for it to be tenable.

White now has too many threats. 30. Ne6, winning an exchange, is threatened, as well as 30. Rg3, picking up that loose bishop on g5 again.

29...Bxf4 30. Qxf4 Re8



(4r1k1/5q1p/p2p4/1pr2p2/5Q2/1PPR4/P5PP/4R2K w - - 0 31)

As good as resigning, but the black position was hopeless and the various weaknesses in the black camp meant that there is no acceptable defence. 30...Qf6 would have offered some resistance, as it controls the long a1-h8 diagonal and puts pressure on the only weakness in the white position, the c3-pawn, but the conversion is simple enough for White, with the open files and ranks.

After the text-move, the tactical finish is simple in its entirety, but perfectly apt for all of that.

31. Qg5+ Kh8 32. Rxe8+ Qxe8 33. Qf6+ 1-0

With 34. Rg3+ coming in, Black will lose his queen and the mop-up is easy enough thereafter.

Opening references:

a) 9. Bg5 h6 10. Bxf6 Qxf6 11. Nc3 Rc8 12. Nd5 Qd8 13. Rfd1 Be6 14. Qb3 Bxd5 15. Rxd5 Qc7 16. c3 Be7 17. a4 b6 18. Qd1 0-0 19. Nd2 Rfd8 20. Qe2 Qb7 21. Nc4 Rc5 22. Ne3 Bg5 23. Rxc5 bxc5 24. Nc4, Adla-Schneider, Gibraltar 2015.

b) 9. Bg5 Rc8 10. Nc3 Be6 11. Rfd1 h6 12. Bxf6 Qxf6 13. Nd5 Bxd5 14. Qxd5 Rc7 15. Rac1 Be7 16. Nd2 Qe6 17. Qa5 Qc8 18. c3 0-0 19. Nf1 Rc5 20. Qa4 b5 21. Qb3 Qc6 22. Ng3 Rc8 23. Rd3 Bf8, Peptan-Vajda, Sovata 1998.

c) 10...Bc6 11. Rad1 0-0 12. Bxf6 gxf6 13. Nh4 Qc7 14. Nf5 Rfd8
15. Qg3+ Kf8 16. Qg7+ Ke8 17. Qxh7 Bf8 18. Ng7+ Bxg7 19. Qxg7 Ke7
20. Qh6 Rg8 21. Qd2 Qd7 22. Qd3 b5 23. a3 Rg6 24. Nd5+ Bxd5 25. Qxd5,
Etrog-Le Bihan, Montigny le Bretonneux 1999.

d) 10...0-0 11. Bxf6 gxf6 12. Nd5 Re8 13. Nh4 Kh8 14. Rad1 Bf8
15. Qf3 Re6 16. Nf5 Rc8 17. Qh5 Re8 18. Rd3 Bxf5 19. Qxf5 Bg7 20. Rh3
h6 21. Ne3 Re6 22. Qh5 1-0, King-Ernst, Eeklo 1979.