

NM Chess Champions – Daniel Harger

Dan Harger won the New Mexico Championship in 1980. As with some other winners, so far as I can tell, his New Mexico Championship tournament was the only New Mexico tournament in his life. Most of his life he has lived and played chess in Iowa.

The fact is that Dan and I were both going to high school and playing chess in Iowa in the late 60's. Dan was already an expert at the time, whereas I was a class C player. We both went to all the Iowa tournaments and played each other three times. All three were embarrassing losses for me. He won the Iowa Championship in both 1969 and 1970. You could say Dan was the Stephen Sandager of Iowa chess, winning the state championship nine times before giving up chess in 1992. Dan's rating peaked at over 2300.

The following game is from the 1989 Midwest Masters Tournament in Chicago. I cannot say this game is brilliant in a conventional sense. But what the game does show is the perseverance I see in all of Dan's games. His opponent, 2100 player George Trammel, appears to be headed for an easy victory after an early blunder by Dan. But Dan keeps working to improve his position and put George on the defensive. Finally George cracks under the relentless pressure; losing his advantage and quickly thereafter the game.

Trammell, George I. - Harger, Daniel V., 0:1
Midwest Masters, Round 2
Chicago, Illinois, 1989

French Defense, Tarrasch Variation

1. e4 e6 The French Defense is a favorite of Dan.

2. d4 d5 3. Nd2 The Tarrasch Variation

3... Nf6 Black entices the pawn forward planning to undermine it later.

4. e5 Nfd7 5. Bd3 c5 6. c3 Nc6 7. Ngf3

[More typical is 7. Ne2 with the plan of moving the d2 knight to f3. 7... cxd4 8. cxd4 f6 9. exf6 Nxf6 10. Nf3 White is better due to Black's weaknesses on e5 and e6]

7... cxd4 8. cxd4 f5

[Again, more typical is 8... Qb6 9. O-O! White gambits a pawn to gain time for development. 9... Nxd4 10. Nxd4 Qxd4 11. Nf3 Qb6 12. Qa4 With better development and more space, White has compensation for the pawn;

Or 8... f6 9. exf6 transposes to the game]

9. exf6 Nxf6 10. O-O Bd6 11. Re1 O-O 12. Nb3 Qc7 13. Qe2 Bd7?! Dan starts to go astray. In the long run, with Black's problems on e5 and e6, White is better.

[Black needs to play aggressively to undermine White's center. 13... a5! 14. Bd2 a4 15. Nc1 (15. Nc5 Bxh2 16. Nxb2 Nxd4 17. Qe3 Qxc5 18. Rac1 Qb6 19. Bc3 e5 20. Qxe5

Nc6 21. Qg3 d4 White's center is destroyed and he is on the defensive) 15... Bd7 16. a3 Kh8 17. Bc3 Qb6 18. Qc2 Ng4 19. h3 Nh6! 20. Bxh7 Rxf3! 21. gxf3 Nxd4 22. Qd1 e5 23. Nd3 Kxh7 24. Nxe5 Bxe5 25. Rxe5 Qg6 26. Kh2 Nb3 27. Qg1 d4 28. Rg5 Qf6 29. Rd1 Qf4 30. Qg3 Qxg3 31. fxc3 dxc3 32. Rxd7 cxb2 33. Rdxg7 Kh8 34. R7g6 Ra6 0-1, Findlay, Ian T (CAN) 2350 – Carton, Patrick (IRL) 2189, Great Britain 1988]

14. Ne5 Rae8 15. Bg5 Bc8 16. Rac1 Qb6? Black already had problems due to White's bind on e5, but this move would have lost if it were not for Dan's resourceful play later.

[16... Kh8 is better, though Black still lost in the following game. 17. h3 Bb4 18. Bd2 Bd6 19. Bb1 Qb6 20. Bc3 Bxe5 21. dxe5 Ne4 22. Bxe4 dxe4 23. Qe3 Qa6 24. Qxe4 Qxa2 25. Qc4 Qa6 26. Qxa6 bxa6 27. Nc5 Rd8 28. Rcd1 Ne7 29. Rd6 Nf5 30. Nxe6 Rxd6 31. exd6 Re8 32. Nc5 Rxe1 33. Bxe1 Nxd6 34. f3 Kg8 35. Bg3 Nb5 36. Be5 Kf7 37. Kf2 g6 38. Ke3 Ke7 39. g4 h5 40. gxh5 gxh5 41. h4 Nd6 42. Bxd6 Kxd6 43. Kd4 Kc6 44. Ne4 Be6 45. Ke5 Bg8 46. Ng3 Kc5 47. Nxh5 Kc4 48. Nf6 Bf7 49. h5 Kb3 50. h6 Bg6 51. f4 Bc2 52. f5 Kxb2 53. h7 a5 54. h8=Q a4 55. Qb8 Bb3 56. Ne4 a5 57. Kd4 1-0, Vydeslaver, Alik (ISR) 2340 – Gruzmann, Boris (RUS) 2259, Budapest (Hungary) 1992]

17. Bxf6! Rxf6

[Or 17... gxf6 18. Bxh7 Kh8 (18... Kxh7? 19. Qh5 Kg7 20. Qg6 Kh8 21. Re3 Qxb3 22. Rxb3 Re7 23. Rh3 Rh7 24. Rxh7#) 19. Bd3 Threatening mate in two 19... Re7 (19... f5? 20. Qh5 Kg7 21. Qg6 Kh8 22. Re3 Re7 23. Rh3 Rh7 24. Rxh7#) 20. Ng6 Kg7 21. Nxe7 Nxe7 White is an exchange and a pawn up]



18. Bxh7! Nicely done!

18... Kxh7! Giving up the rook immediately is the best because it gives Black counter play.

[18... Kf8 19. Ng6 Kf7 20. Qh5 Bd7 21. Nh4 Ke7 22. Nf5 Rxf5 23. Qxf5 White wins]

19. Qh5 Kg8 20. Qxe8 Rf8 21. Qh5 Bxe5 22. dxe5?! Due to Black's clever decision on move 18, White has a difficult choice. He has to either allow the capture on f2 or return the exchange.

[Best is giving back the exchange with 22. Rxe5! because White keeps the initiative. 22... Nxe5 23. Qxe5 Threatening 24. Rxc8! 23... Bd7 24. Rc7 Rf5 25. Qg3 Rf7 26. h4 Played to remove back rank threats, thus freeing the knight. 26... Be8 27. Rc8 Re7 28. Qg5 Qd6 29. Ne5 Threatening 30. Nxb7. 29... b6 30. Nd3 Qd7 31. Qc1 Black will be in a terrible bind a pawn down after 32. Ne5]

22... Qxf2 23. Kh1 Bd7?! Developing is important, but ...

[sometimes being grubby is better. 23... Qxb2 With an exchange for a pawn, White is

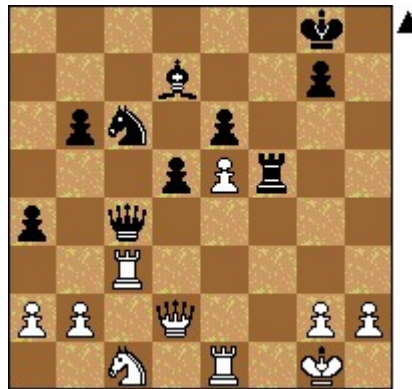
better, but Black has good chances]

24. Qe2?! An exchange up, White figures all he has to do to win is keep his extra material and exchange off. But there are better ways to do it.

[24. Nc5! Bc8 25. Nd3 Qd2 26. Qd1 Black has no compensation for the exchange and must either exchange or retreat.]

24... b6 25. Rc2 Qf4 26. Kg1 a5 27. Qd2 Qh4 28. Rc3 a4 29. Nc1 Rf5 Since his mistake at move 16, Dan has steadily improved his position and put White on the defensive. 30. Rh3 Qc4 31. Rc3 Qh4 32. Rh3 White must have been short of time, else why would he go for a repetition of position?

32... Qc4 33. Rc3



33... Qb4!! The "!!" is not for the theoretical evaluation of the move. Theoretically Black should jump at the opportunity to play 33... Qh4 and claim a draw. The "!!" is for the chutzpah it takes to refuse the draw and play for a win when an exchange down. 34. Nd3? Dan is immediately rewarded. It looks nice to get the knight more active, but it blocks both his rook and his queen and drops the pawn on e5.

[Much better is 34. a3 . Black has to either retreat 34... Qe7 (or go back to the drawing line 34... Qh4 35. Rh3 etc)]

34... Qd4 35. Kh1 Nxe5 36. h3? After this wasted move White is lost.

[Breaking the pin on the knight would have forced Black's hand. 36. Qd1 Nxd3 37. Qxd3 Qf2 38. Rcc1 Qxb2 39. a3 The chances are about equal]

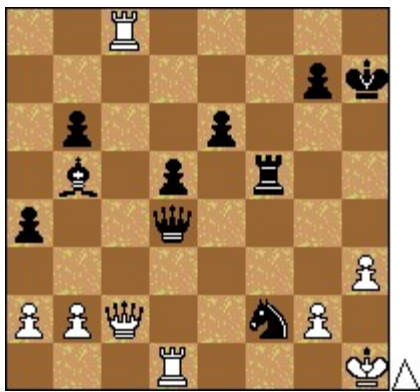
36... Bb5! The pressure is now unbearable.

37. Rd1 Nxd3 38. Rc8? How does the saying go? "Monkey sees check, monkey gives check."

[He has to trade off and hope for the best in the rook endgame. 38. Rxd3 Qxd3 39. Qxd3 Bxd3 40. Rxd3 Rf2 41. Ra3 Rxb2 42. Rxa4 e5 Black has the better king, the better rook and a pair of connected passed pawns. White has only a prayer]

38... Kh7 39. Qc2? One last blunder, not that it makes any difference.

39... Nf2 He wins the rook on d1 for nothing. Black either resigned or ran out of time. [0:1]



Matt Grinberg, 5/7/2016