

New Mexico Champions – Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson tied with Stephen Sandager for the New Mexico Championship in 1977. Unlike other players in this series, I have a lot of his games - 85 in all. However, none of them were played in New Mexico. He was most active in the 80's and 90's, playing most of his games in the Upper Midwest and in Bristol, England.

In playing through his games I noticed that his openings were most often quiet. However, once he was out of the opening, he played very aggressively. This game is a good example. The Queen Gambit has a reputation of being very dry and positional, but as soon as he gets out of the opening, it is clear what Mr. Johnson's real intentions are.

Johnson, Robert – Meisel, David, 1:0
U.S. Open Chess Championship, Round 9
St. Paul, Minnesota, 8/1982

Queen's Gambit Declined, Orthodox Defense

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Be7 4. Nf3 Nf6 5. Bg5 Nbd7 6. e3 O-O The Queen's Gambit Declined, Orthodox Defense saw its heyday about a century ago. It was played by World Champions Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine. Black's play in the Orthodox Defense conforms to the classical principles; he tries to gradually equalize, achieving a reliable but slightly constrained position. The outcome of Black's strategy to a great extent depends on whether he solves the problem of his light-squared bishop, which is restricted by its own pawns. **7. Qc2** Rubinstein's favorite. White does not hurry to develop his f1-bishop, as he hopes to win a tempo with Bxc4 if Black plays d5xc4. Now he is going to either castle queenside or to play Rd1, strengthening his pressure in the center. **7... Re8 8. O-O-O** Already White signals that he is not satisfied with a positional game, in spite of the opening. Clearly his intention is to go for a kingside attack, even if he risks a queenside attack by Black. **8... c6 9. Kb1 b6** The purpose of this is to solve the problem of the queen bishop, but at the same time it blocks in his queen.

[A more aggressive line is 9... a5 **10. h4 a4=**]

10. h4 Now there is no doubt as to White's intentions.

[Tamer continuations include 10. cxd5 **exd5 11. Bd3;**
and 10. Bd3 **dx4 11. Bxc4**]



10... Bb7 11. Bd3 This hands Black a tempo, but...

[the alternative gives Black the open c-file 11. cxd5 cxd5]

11... Qc7

[Black could have taken advantage of the opportunity to gain that tempo. 11... dxc4 12.

Bxc4 Nd5 13. Bd3 Nxc3 14. Qxc3 h6 15. Bf4 Rc8 16. Qb3 c5=]

12. Bf4! Of course! Black has to either trade off his good bishop or retreat his queen. 12... Bd6

13. Bxd6 Qxd6 14. e4 Here he comes! 14... dxe4 15. Bxe4! Nxe4?! As menacing as the bishop looked on e4, the knight will be worse. That is why Robert captured with the bishop - he would rather give up the bishop than the knight.

[15... Rad8 16. Rhe1=]

16. Nxe4 Qc7



17. c5! Black's bishop is locked in and White's knight has a beautiful outpost. 17... Re7 18. Rhe1 Ba6 19. Nd6 bxc5 20. dxc5 Qa5? In his sudden zeal to get active, Black loses by leaving the pawn on c6, the knight on d7 and the rook on e7 all inadequately defended.

[Defense is a better idea, though White's knight on d6 still gives him a strong advantage. 20... Nf6]

21. Nf5?! Probably good enough to win, but...

[21. Nd4! threatening Nxc6 is even stronger. 21... Qc7 22. N4f5 Winning an exchange AND maintaining the knight on d6]

21... Ree8 22. Nxf7 Kxf7??? Allowing White's rook to the seventh leads to disaster.

[22... Red8 23. Ne8 Nxc5 24. Nd6 With Black's kingside wrecked and poorly defended, it

is only a matter of time before White makes a decisive breakthrough]

23. Rxd7 Rad8?? This leads to mate, but the best he can do is drag it out a while anyway.

[23... Kg8 24. Rxf7! Qxe1 (24... Kxf7 25. Qxh7 Kf6 (25... Kf8 26. Qh8 Ke7 27. Qg7 Kd8 28. Rd1 Kc8 29. Qd7 Kb8 30. Qxe8 and wins) 26. Qh6 Ke7 (26... Kf7 27. Ne5 Ke7 28. Qg7 Kd8 29. Qd7#) 27. Qg7 Kd8 28. Rd1 Kc8 29. Qd7 Kb8 30. Qxe8 and wins) 25. Nxe1 Kxf7 26. Qxh7 Kf6 27. g4 Rad8 28. f4! Threatening mate. 28... e5 29. g5 Ke6 30. f5 The three connected passed pawns are decisive]



24. Rxf7! Kxf7 25. Qxh7 Kf8

[25... Kf6 26. Qh6 Kf7 27. Ng5 Kg8 28. Qh7 Kf8 29. Qf7#]

26. Qh8 Kf7 27. Ne5 Mate next. Black resigned. [1:0]

Matt Grinberg, 4/24/2016