

2020-21 Candidates Tournament

ROUND 10



ENGLISH OPENING (A13)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2789)

GM Kirill Alekseenko (2696)

2020-2021 Candidates Tournament

Yekaterinburg, RUS(10.4), 04.21.2021

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard for
Chess Life Online

Today's round was the least interesting of the tournament so far. Our game of the day is very one-sided, but because it put Nepomniachtchi a full point ahead of the field, so we should look at it.

1. c4 Nf6 2. g3 e6 3. Bg2 d5 4. Nf3 dxc4

According to the "old way" (early 20th century!) way of thinking, this is a concession, giving White an additional center pawn. As we shall see, this move is not stupid at all: Black gets some activity in return, and many of today's players are happy to make this trade.

5. Qa4+ Nbd7 6. Qxc4 a6 7. Qc2!

When this came into fashion, Black's life got a bit more difficult. In the old days, you played ... b7-b5 with tempo and ... Bc8-b7 without a problem. Without the queen on c4, this is not as easy.

7. ... c5 8. Nc3



8. ... Be7?!

This looks like the most natural move in the world, but is just a mistake. Black can always and easily solve his problems on the kingside later. It is much harder to develop the queenside, as Alekseenko is soon to learn.

The theoretical solution is 8. ... Qc7!, when Black is preparing ... b7-b5. Play continues 9. 0-0 b6! (9. ... b5 10. a4 b4 11. Nd1, when the knight will soon appear on c4, is a bit unpleasant

for Black.) 10. d4 Bb7 11. Bf4 Bd6 12. Bxd6 Qxd6 13. Rfd1 0-0 14. e4 and White had the tiniest of pressures in Giri – Karjakin, Riga 2019.

9. 0-0 0-0 10. d4 cxd4?

Another concession. It is both the most popular move, and a very bad one!

Black had to play 10. ... b5 and see what happens. Here White has three options:



(a) 11. Ne5!? Nxe5 12. dxe5 Nd5 13. Nxd5N (13. Rd1 Bb7 with equality in Oparin – Vetoshko, Internet 2020) 13. ... exd5 14. Be3 Be6 15. Bxc5! Qc7 16. b4 a5 17. Qd3 axb4 18. Bxe7 Qxe7 19. Bxd5 Rfd8 20. e4 and White is pressing a little bit, but Black should be fine with a few accurate moves.

(b) 11. dxc5 Bb7 12. b4 a5 13. Nxb5 Be4 14. Qb2 axb4 15. Nd6 Nxc5 was equal in Barros Rivadeneira – Vazquez, Guatape 2016.

(c) Strongest is therefore 11. Ng5!N Ra7 12. dxc5 Bxc5 13. Bf4, when the knight is ready to drop back to e4, with some pressure for White.

11. Nxd4 Qc7

The difficulties Black faces can be seen in the following example: 11. ... Bc5 12. Rd1 Qe7 13. h3 Rd8 14. Nb3 Bd6 15. Be3 Rb8



and at this point White chose to make a draw: 16. Ba7 16. ... Ra8 17. Be3 Rb8 18. Ba7? and here Antoniewski – Papp, Slovakia 2015, was drawn.

If he had instead played something along the lines of 16. Rac1 h6 17. Qd2 Ne5 18. Bb6 Rd7 19. Na4, Black's position would near collapse.

12. Rd1 Rd8

An untested move, but not preparation.

13. Be3 Nb6

13. ... Ne5 would be more natural, but White is ready for action. Probably Black was afraid of 14. Na4! Qxc2 15. Nxc2 Rxd1+ 16. Rxd1, when he has to play 16. ... Ned7 and he will never get the queenside developed.

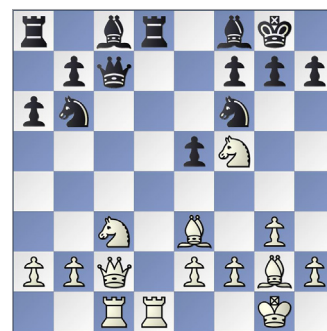
14. Rac1 e5

This is a bad move. Unfortunately, it is also the best possible move in the situation.

15. Nf5 Bxf5

Another concession. From here there is no return.

But after 15. ... Bf8



16. Nxf7!! Kxf7 (16. ... Bxf7 17. Ne4 Rxd1+ 18. Qxd1 and White wins.) 17. Qb3 Nbd7?! (17. ... Nc4 is objectively best. But after 18. Rxd8 Nxe3 19. Rxf8 White ends a clear pawn up, with all his positional trumps intact.) 18. Ne4 White has a winning attack and can play it multiple ways, a nice variation being 18. ... Qb8 19. Nxf6 Kxf6 20. Bg5+ Kxf5 21. Qxf7 (with mate in the near future) Qa7 22. Rd6 Bxd6 23. Qg7+ Kf5 24. e4+ Ke6 25. Bh3 mate.

16. Qxf5 Nc4 17. Bg5 Rxd1+ 18. Nxd1 Rd8

The winning line here was not difficult. Perhaps 18. ... Qd8 was a bit better, but still lost

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after 19. Bxf6 Bxf6 20. Bxb7 with a simple pawn up.



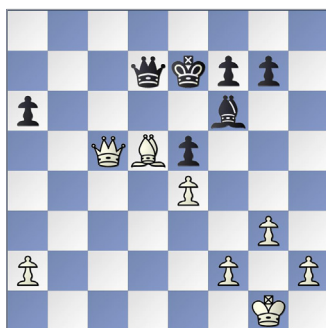
19. Bxf6! Bxf6 20. Be4

Black cannot defend the h7-square. White can now win many ways, and Nepomniachtchi chooses one of them.

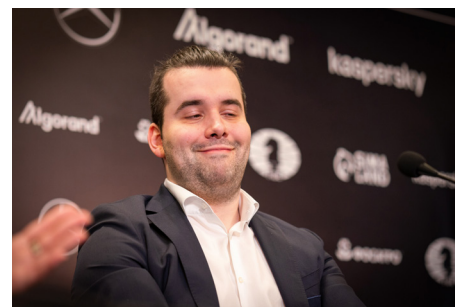
20. ... Qa5 21. Nc3 Kf8 22. Nd5 b5 23. Qxh7 Rxd5 24. Bxd5 Qd2 25. Rxc4 bxc4 26. e4

26. Qh8+ Ke7 27. Qa8! was a bit cleaner, but there is no real difference.

26. ... Qxb2 27. Qh8+ Ke7 28. Qc8 Qb6 29. Qxc4 Qb5 30. Qc7+ Qd7 31. Qc5+, Black resigned.



White will pick up another pawn and the conversion will not be difficult.



A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: NEPOMNIACHTCHI (TOP) AND ALEKSEENKO (BOTTOM).

