

CARO-KANN DEFENSE [B15]

GM Hermann Pilnik

GM Miguel Najdorf

Mar del Plata (13), 23.03.1942

Annotations by Reuben Fine in Chess Review, June-July 1942.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3

The Panov-Botvinnik attack, 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4! is rightly considered more energetic, but the line chosen has the merit of being somewhat simpler.

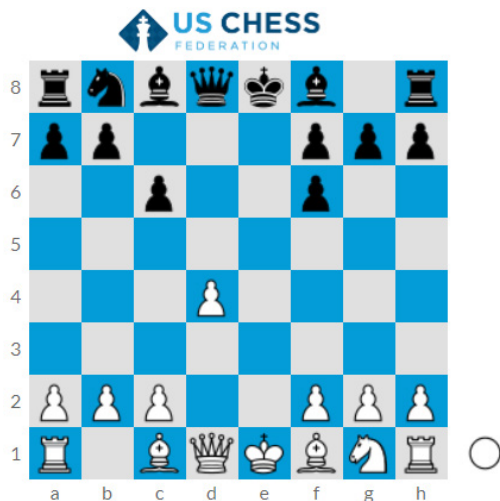
3. ... dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6

Undoubtedly superior to the alternative 4. ... Bf5.

5.Nxf6+

Alekhine has experimented with the speculative sacrifice 5.Bd3; it would be interesting to see it tried some more.

5. ... exf6



A common move, but none the less a violation of principle because it gives White a majority of Pawns on the Qside. Flohr, who has doubtless had more success with the Caro-Kann than anybody else, has produced some excellent games with 5. ... gxf6.

6.c3

A move that speaks volumes. White clearly intends to develop his Bishop at d3 (which is why he defended the Pawn first) and later his Knight at e2. All of which indicates that there is a storm brewing against the Black monarch.

While this line is vigorous, there are two theoretical comments in order. In the first place White's attack will be aimed at a King armed with a formidable phalanx of Pawns - a tough obstacle to hurdle. And in the second place, White should be able to secure the better of it by exploiting his Q-side majority, which indicates that his most reasonable continuation is undoubtedly 6.g3 followed by Bg2, Ne2, 0-0, c4 and advance on the Queen's wing or in the center.

6...Bd6 7.Bd3 0-0 8.Qh5!

Such a move requires self-confidence, imagination and recklessness, all qualities which a chess master ought to have. Besides, it has the psychological advantage of catching Najdorf, who is himself violently aggressive, off guard.

8. ... g6

Probably best, though 8. ... h6 was also playable, since the sacrifice 9.Bxh6 gxh6 10.Qxh6 f5! is not quite sound.

9.Qh4 c5

Black reacts correctly: counter-attack against the White center.

10.Ne2 Nc6 11.Bh6 f5

Black's defense is aggressive, but he pays too little attention to the weaknesses of the Black [dark] squares on his K-side (it is this which leads to the combinations later).

The more natural 11. ... Re8 was also better: if then 12.0-0 (and if 12.dxc5 Bxc5 13.0-0-0 f5! 14.Bg5! Qb6 15.Rhf1 Ne5 with excellent counter-chances.) 12. ... cxd4 13.Nxd4? Ne5² 14.Be2 g5!.

12.Bg5 Qb6 13.0-0!

The b-pawn, of course, does not count in the proceedings, but the exclamation mark is there to indicate that the more adventurous 13.0-0-0? cxd4 14.cxd4 Be6 leads to an overwhelming position for Black.

1 jh: Better is 14.Qxd8 Rxd8=.

2 jh: 13. ... Re5! with the idea of ... Rh5: 14.Be2 g5 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Qc4 Be6.

13. ... cxd4 14.cxd4 Re8?

An unfortunate transposition which has serious consequences. Instead 14. ... Be6 would have prevented a further weakening of the King position.

15.Bc4!

With the Black King wholly undefended and exposed, the position is ripe for a combination. It is because of this fact that White can make a perfectly simple move and threaten to decide at once by Bxf7+, ... Kxf7, Qxh7+, etc. The normal defense 15. ... Be6? does not work because of the fork 16.d5.

15...h5

Hardly to be avoided. On 15. ... Bf8 16.Bxf7+ Kxf7 17.Qxh7+ Bg7 18.Bh6 Rg8 19.Nf4! Nxd4 20.Rae1 the numberless threats are killing.

16.Rae1³ Re4

He has little choice, in view of his previous neglect. On the development attempt 16. ... Bd7 ⁴17.Bf6! , followed by 18.Qg5, is overwhelming.

17.Nf4!

The game is approaching a crisis. Black's King is still exposed and undefended, his Q-side is still back where it does not belong - no wonder that an explosion soon occurs! The most immediate threat is 18.Rxe4 fxe4 19.Nxg6!.

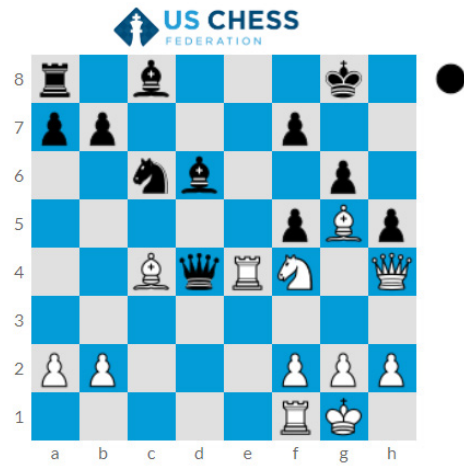
17...Qxd4

His best hope.

18.Rxe4

3 jh: 16.Bf6! Na5 17.Bd3 with the idea of Qg5, etc.

4 jh: Fine gets this wrong. After 16. ... Bd7 17.Bf6 Black gets to equality with 17. ... Na5 18.Bd3 (18.Qg5 Nxc4 19.Qh6 Bxh2+) 18. ... Re6 and if 19.Qg5?? Rxf6 20.Qxf6 Bxh2+.



It could hardly have been foreseen that Black would be lost in this position, but truth is stranger than fiction - he is. There are only two possible moves, one of which he tried.

18. ... fxe4

The other is 18. ... Qxe4, when the simple 19.Nxg6! is decisive. If then 19. ... Qxh4 20.Nxh4 Be6 21.Be2 the ending is won (though this is Black's best chance) while on other tries such as 19. ... Kg7? 20.Bf6+! or 19. ... Ne5 20.Nxe5 Qxe5 21.Bf6 Black is either mated or has to give up a piece to stop mate.⁵

Now that White has a win, it must not be thought that his task is child's play. Pilnik, however, shows that accuracy and conciseness which are the hallmark of the expert. The conclusion is a miniature masterpiece.

19.Nxh5! gxh5

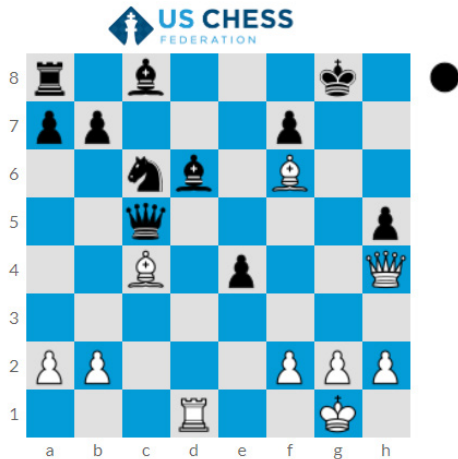
There is little choice: on 19. ... Qxc4 20.Nf6+ leads to mate in two.

20.Bf6!!! Qc5

The combinations occur "as if by magic" now that the Black position has been ripped apart. On 20. ... Qxc4 21.Qxh5! Black can give up.

5 jh: The note for 18. ... Qxe4 requires some attention. The move 19 options appear to be given for White's 21st move, and I had to reconstruct to the best of my abilities. After 19.Nxg6 Qxh4 (19. ... Kg7?? 20.Bf6+; 19. ... Ne5?? 20.Qxh5 is mate in six.) 20.Nxh4 Be6 21.Be2 modern engines think White is only slightly better.

21.Rd1!!!



This simple move is the key to the whole series of combinations, the point being that the threat 22.Rd5 is murderous.

21...Kf8

There is a plethora of entrancing possibilities.

On 21. ... Be6 22.Rd5! Bxd5 23.Qxh5!!! and mate at h8 can be postponed but not prevented. To other moves the answer is similarly almost invariably 22.Rd5, e.g., 21. ... Bg4 22.Rd5 Qxc4 23.Qg5+ Kf8 24.Rxd6 etc., but on 21. ... Ne7⁶ the most direct win is 22.Rxd6!.

22.b4!!

(We have run out of exclamation marks.) Note that 22.Rd5 would be bad because of 22. ... Qxc4! and White must lose a tempo to stop mate.

22. ... Nxb4

The Black Queen obviously must not move, since it defends both the h-pawn and the Bishop.

23.Qg3!!

6 jh: 21. ... Ne7 22.Rxd6? throws the advantage away after 22. ... Qxd6 23.Qg5+ Kf8 24.Qg7+ Ke8 25.Qxf7+ Kd8 26.Qg8+ Kc7 27.Qg7 (with the idea 28.Be5!) 27... Qc5 28.b3 and White has enough for the draw but not more. Instead White should play 22.b4! and Black has the unattractive choice between heavy material loss and mate, i.e. 22. ... Qxb4? 23.Qxh5 is mate on f7 or h8!

Bravo! as Tartakower would say. There is no rest for the weary.

23. ... Bg4

He could have shortened his labors with 23. ... Bxg3 24.Rd8#.

24.Rxd6 Nd3

On 24. ... Qxc4 25.Qf4! prevents the check and threatens a mate which can be warded off only by wholesale sacrifices.

25.Bxd3 Qc1+

On 25. ... exd3 26.Qf4 wins at once, as before.

26.Bf1 Rc8

With a piece behind Black's plight is pretty hopeless. There are still some pretty points, but the game is over.

27.h3 Qxf1+!

The last gasp: he hopes for 28.Kxf1 Rc1+ and mate next.

28.Kh2 Qc1

To get a few more spite checks in. 28. ... Rc1 29.Rd8# was shorter and sweeter.

29.hxg4 hxg4 30.Qxg4 Qh6+ 31.Kg3 Rc3+ 32.f3 1-0

A wise decision.

A fascinating game, beautifully handled by White from start to finish.