

2024 Menlo Park CC Championship



Round 2 Bulletin • Nov. 14, 2024

White: Rasyid

Black: Su

Open Catalan

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. Bg2 dxc4
5. Nf3 a6 6. O-O Nc6 7. Qc2**

The open Catalan isn't truly a gambit because White can usually recover the c4-pawn leisurely, when Black's tries to maintain that pawn entail too much risk. 7. Qc2, on the other hand, is a genuine pawn sacrifice, considering the pawn isn't coming back so readily, and especially since it offers the most important pawn on the board.

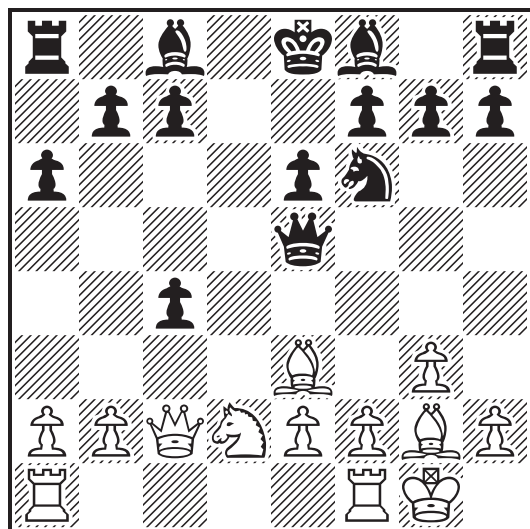
7...Nxd4 8. Nxd4 Qxd4 9. Be3

In master practice, 9. Nd2 is most common, threatening c4, or to gain the tempo by Nd2-f3 (after which the knight has more of a future than on c3), while postponing the bishop development is a good idea (as the game evolves, White should get a better idea for an active bishop move).

9...Qe5

Black is probably out of his book, so full marks for finding the best move. My inclination was a mistaken 9...Qd8. Then ...Bf8-d6 plus ...Qd8-e7 affords White time to take c4, and mobilize sufficiently to make up for the other pawn.

10. Nd2



10... c3

Maybe that was Black's idea behind ...Qe5, but he should be reluctant to spend a move on merely compelling White to capture b2xc3, opening the file for a b1-rook to coordinate with the Catalan bishop. 10...Nd5 11. Nxc4 Nxe3 12. Nxe3 is level.

11. Nc4 Qh5

The threatening move 11... Qf5 gives White pause for thought, then 12. Qxc3 (12. Qxf5 exf5 =+) 12... Nd5 13. Qb3 Nxe3 14. Nxe3 Qb5 is equal (White would much rather there were a forward outpost square for the knight).

12. Bf3 Ng4? 13. Bxg4 Qxg4 14. Qa4+

If I were Black, I'd call it a day. If there were counterplay brewing, Black might play some moves, but there's no play to be found since Black neglected to develop the pieces in order to capture pawns on c4 and d4 (and move one to c3).

14...Ke7 15. Bc5+?

15. Qb4+ Kf6 16. Qxc3+ e5 (16... Ke7 17. Ne5 crushes) 17. Nxe5 Qe6, and the best you can say for Black's defense is that White can't quickly force mate.

15... Kf6

Black's fighting spirit paid off, because it's a game again.

16. Qe8?

White keeps some advantage with 16. Qb4 Bxc5 17. Qxc5.

**16... Bxc5 17. Qxh8 Qxc4 18. Rac1 Qxe2
19. Rxc3 b6 20. Qd8+ Kg6 21. Qxc7
Qe4!**

Good move. The threat to load up on the long diagonal compels the trade of queens.

22. Qf4 Qxf4 23. gxf4 Bb7 24. Rd1 Bd5

Rooks don't show their full value until they're loose on an open board, and attacking things.

These white rooks are about as valuable as they were in the opening.

25. h3 Kf5 26. Rg3 g6 27. h4 Rc8 28. h5 Kxf4 29. hxg6 hxg6 30. Kh2 Rh8+ 0-1

White: Fang
Black: Keshavarzi
Slav Defense

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 Nf6

One reason 3. Nf3 is more typical is that Winawer's gambit 3... e5 improves on the Albin (1. d4 d5 2. c4 e5) because 4. dxe5 d4 is a hit.

4. Nf3 Bf5

Known to be bad for 104 years, since Johner-Nilsson, Goteburg 1920. 5. cxd5 cxd5 6. Qb3 wins 72% of the time in both databases consulted.

5. g3 e6 6. Bg2 a6

I found exactly one earlier occurrence of 6... a6, because Black has seven more useful moves (a 1300 player tried 6...h5 unsuccessfully). The Chabanenkov Slav 1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 a6 was all the rage in chess fashion recently, where Black commits to nothing, while readying ...b7-b5. If ...b7-b5 follows ...d5xc4, it wins a pawn. Without ...d5xc4, it forces White to commit the c4-pawn, perhaps at an inopportune time. In this position, Black has no reason to pussy-foot, and ought to play straightforward moves, pleased he got away with 4...Bf5?. 6...Nbd7 7. O-O h6 is solid for Black.

7. c5

Strange move, releasing the central tension before being provoked by ...b7-b5. White had no reason to fear 7. O-O dxc4, because 8. Ne5 inhibits ...b7-b5, and ensures the recovery of the pawn.

7... Be7 8. Nh4

I sat at the next board, thinking I'd have preferred to have Black's game here than the mess I made for myself. I would've played 8...Nbd7 or 8...O-O, when 9. Nxf5 exf5 looks forward to a bind on the e-file, and capturing away from the center risks less because White's c4-c5 took all the pressure off the d5-square.

8...Bg6 9. Nxc6 hxg6 10. Qb3 Qc7

A plain loss of a move, but White's position lacks energy, and can't make use of the time gained.

11. Bf4 Qc8 12. Na4 Nbd7 13. h4

Another odd move. White isn't angling for h4-h5, and if he's worried about O-O-O plus Rhe1 dropping a pawn, he's got plenty of time for h2-h4 before then.

13...Nh5 14. Bd2 a5 15. O-O-O O-O 16. g4 Nhf6 17. Bf3

In a game of opposite-wing castling, sacrifice anything but time, said Purdy. White did just that, because Bg2-f3 is unnecessary: 17. h5, and if Nxc6, then 18. Qg3 with a winning initiative.

17... Bd8

Black shows life with 17... b5 18. cxb6 Rb8 19. h5 Nxb6 20. hxg6 Nc4.

18. h5 e5? 19. e3?

19. hxg6 fxc6 20. g5 +/-.

19... e4 = 20. Be2 Re8

Black should strive to keep the h-file closed by 20...g5.

21. Rdg1

Given the opportunity, White should open the file with 21. hxg6.

21...Nf8

21... g5.

22. g5

22. hxg6.

22... N6h7 23. Nb6

23. hxg6.

23... Bxb6 24. Qxb6

24. hxg6.

24... Ne6 25. hxg6

Each delay in making this move reduced its effectiveness.

25...fxg6 26. Bg4 Qc7?? 27. Bxe6+ 1-0

White: Ungar
Black: Pu
Modern Defense

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Be3 d6 4. Nc3 a6

Hugo and I haven't worked together in a spell. I figure he found a coach who'd abide this opening play.

5. f3 Nf6 6. Qd2 O-O 7. O-O-O b5 8. h4 h5

Five games in the 365chess database: Black lost three times with 8...h5, won twice following the developing move 8...Nbd7, then 9. Bh6 and the centrally-pertinent 9...e5. 8...h5 is "pulling the shield away from the king's body", while h4-h5xg6 usually persuades Black to capture away from the center with ...f7xg6, opening f7 for the rook to defend and attack.

9. Be2

Masters played 9. Nh3, postponing this bishop development until move 23 in one case. White knows the knight must get off the back rank (on the way to g5, say, while making room for Rh1-g1), but the bishop's future isn't as clear.

9...b4 10. Nd5 Nxd5 11. exd5 a5

Stockfish reminds students that center control is still a primary goal, and suggests 11...c5.

12. g4 hxg4

In games of opposite-wing castling, sacrifice anything but time, said Purdy. The computer gives 12... b3 13. cxb3 a4.

13. h5

Good move.

13...gxf3?

A mistake for three reasons: 1) Neglecting the queenside counterplay, 2) Aiding White's development by enabling the knight to come forward with the recapture, and 3) Opening the file on which the king sits.

14. Nxf3 Bb7 15. Bh6 Bxd5 16. Bxg7 Kxg7 17. Rdg1

Black can resign after 17. hxg6 fxg6 18. Qh6+ Kf7 19. Ne5+! dxe5 20. Rhf1+.

17... Rh8 18. Rh2?

18. hxg6.

18... Nd7 19. Qf4

Threatening 20. fxg6 fxg6 21. Rxg6+! Kxg6 22. Rg2+, so the computer recommends 19...e6 to prevent Qf4-h4+.

19...Nf6 20. hxg6 fxg6

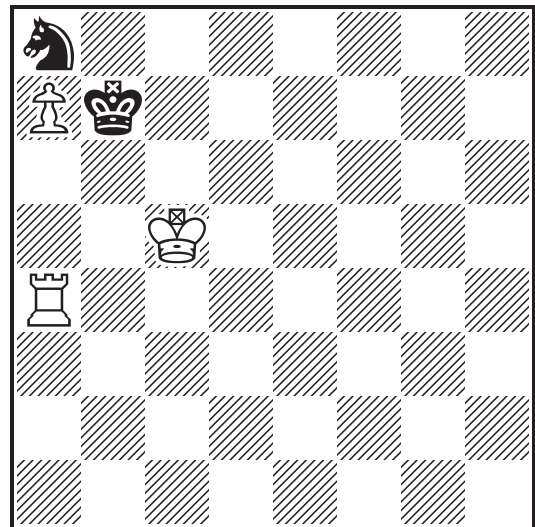
20...Rhx2 21. Nhx2 Qh8, and the heavy pieces arrive from the queenside like the cavalry in old movies.

21. Bd3 Bf7? 22. Rhg2

22. Nh4 threatens 23. Nxf5+ with mate brewing, so Black will have to throw his rook on the knight.

22... Qe8 23. Nh4

The scoresheet ends here while White has a winning attack. 40 or 100 moves later, theirs was the last game to finish (Black lost on time), in an ending like this.



White's material advantage is not as great as it looks. With all the play in one corner, the knight is as good as the rook, because the rook's long-distance ability is meaningless (for the same reason, in endings of knight vs. bishop, if the pawns are on one side of the board, the knight is the preferable piece).

According to Averbakh in *Rook vs. Minor Piece Endings*, White's winning plan is to sacrifice the pawn to bring about a mating position:

101. Rb4+! Kxa7 102. Kc6 1-0