

Viktor Korchnoi

A 'Close Encounter of the Korchnoi Kind' by Allan Beardsworth



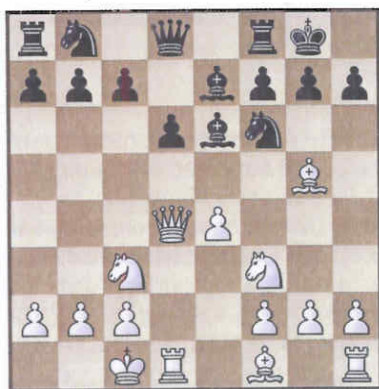
Photo: Ray Morris-Hill

London 30-Board Simul 2010

V.Korchnoi - A.Beardsworth

Philidor's Defence

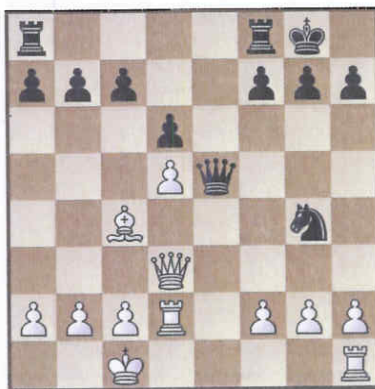
1 e4 e5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 exd4 I play this line a lot in blitz. It is quite a solid line: my initial aim was not to be the first person to lose; my second aim not to have a lost position early on. 4 ♖xd4 ♜f6 Watch this knight: it is the star of the game; moving g8, f6, g4, f6, d5, b4, c6, a5, c6, e5, c6, b4, d5 before finally landing on c7 achieving victory. 13 moves in all, almost a quarter of all my moves. If ever a Knight deserves to be a Sir, this is the one. 5 ♜g5 He played this with a forceful gesture. Korchnoi is quite aggressive in his manner at the board. In my blitz games, people play ♜c3, which of course transposes, but ♜g5 first shows more aggressive intent, or so I thought. 5...♜e7 6 ♜c3 0-0 7 0-0-0 ♜e6



I normally play 7...♜c6, protecting the e5 square, but I knew Viktor wouldn't

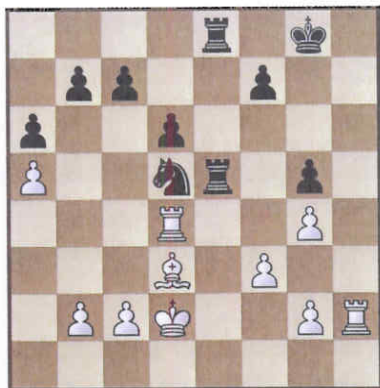
simplify with 8 e5. I was surprised though by his move, which I think loses a tempo.

8 ♜c4 ♜c6 9 ♖d3 ♜g4 Seeking to benefit from White's lost tempo. At this stage, I could see simplification and a possible quick draw, which to me would have been a very decent result. 10 ♜xe7 ♖xe7 11 ♜d5 I missed this, but once I saw it, I saw how logical it was: meeting a threat with a superior threat. 11...♜xd5 12 exd5 ♜ce5 13 ♜xe5 ♖xe5 I chose this capture for activity. I couldn't work out whether ♜e5 was stronger, nor if it would have a good role on e5. I didn't particularly want to swap it off for the bishop, which I assumed in this position was a lesser piece. Also, just on the off chance (very off chance) that Viktor, who was sprinting round at this stage, might blunder with the natural h3, losing to ♖f4+. 14 ♜d2

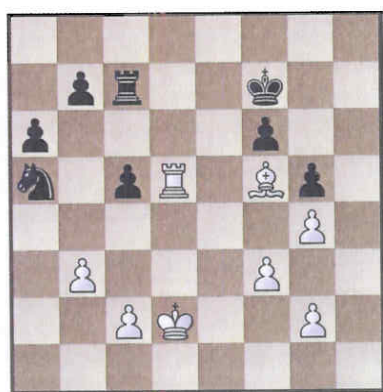


Naturally, he didn't blunder. I thought my knight was at least as good as his bishop,

which is blocked by the d5 pawn, and just chose simple development. 14...♜fe8 15 ♖g3 I was pleased to see Viktor offering to exchange queens. 15...♖xg3 16 hxg3 ♜e5 17 f3 ♜f6 18 g4 ♜ae8 19 ♜d4 Here I started to worry. Clearly, he wasn't going to settle for a quick draw, and I started to have visions of him untangling and swinging his rook over to (for example) b4 and infiltrating. In this line, I never know where to put my queen side pawns. Often I opt for c7-b6-a5, but this gives white square weaknesses; which I thought somehow Viktor would be able to exploit. I choose to be more fluid, but soon regretted it. 19...g6 I had a plan here, which I quickly changed (a poor decision on my part) to edge up with g6, ♜g7, h6, g5, and try to play ♜g8-e7-g6-f4. Though I knew that was not much of a plan, because firstly once the knight moves from f6, White can release his bishop and move it to d3, to exchange the knight when it reaches g6. Or he could maybe play g3 at some stage to undermine the knight on f4. 20 ♜d2 a6 21 a4 ♜g7 22 a5 I panicked now. Viktor bashed his pawn down on a5 (on lots of the boards, when he was winning, he banged the pieces down, often staring at his opponent at that stage) 22...g5 I panicked because I could see lines like ♜b4, where ...♜b8 would be answered by ♜xa6. I also didn't think Viktor would exchange the d-pawn for the h-pawn. I missed the power of the open h-file / b1-h7 diagonal / weak g5 pawn. 23 ♜d3 ♜xd5 24 ♜xh7+ ♜g8 25 ♜h2

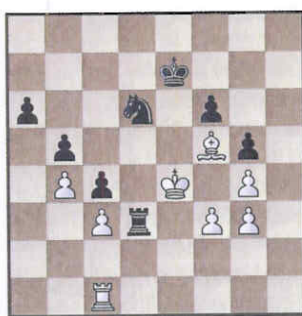


25...c5 I wasn't sure about c6, and decided c5 was safer. Not sure if this view was correct. I also looked at d6 and thought it more risky: 25...d6 26 b4 xa5 27 xb7. Maybe here 27...c5 and Black might be equal. 26 e4 d4 I underestimated the play on the h file and b1-h7 diagonal; I should have looked at d6 more carefully: 26...d6 27 xe5 xe5 28 h1 d5 – this looks better than the d4 I played. 27 h6 e5e6 28 h5 f6 28...e5?? is a move I considered until I saw 29 xg5+. 29 xe6 xe6 30 h7+ Viktor slammed this piece down. 30...f8 31 f5 and again 31...e7 32 h8+ and again; he hovered, rather than moving to the next board, so I gestured, and he indicated I could make my next move. 32...f7 33 d8 He bashed this move down, sending a couple of pieces at the side of the board flying, and stared at me, and grimaced/sniggered. But I felt sure that it was a mistake, or at least not as good as changing rooks and hitting the b-pawn. 33 h7+ e8 34 xe7+ xe7 35 c8 d8 36 xb7 c7 37 e4 d5 must be better for White. 33...d6 34 xd6 xa5 35 b3 c7 36 d5



He played his move confidently, and I took a "pass" at this stage. There were relatively few boards still going on, and Viktor was going round at a good pace. I struggled to see how best to untangle. I was thinking of ...b6, followed by d7, but I thought this was ungainly and preferred, if I was to go down, to do so by playing natural moves. I wanted to improve the position of my knight and even though it didn't have stability on e5 (g3-f4) I thought it could

move from there to f7 or d7, and at least would be more central. However, I could see he was making a lot of moves by rote, without calculation. 36...e7 37 e3 b5 38 e4 c4 39 b4 d6 40 c3 b7 I couldn't make d4 work. 41 d1 e5 42 d5 Viktor played the last few moves quickly and effortlessly. He simply improved his pieces, probably with not much care for tactics. I was fairly happy now, though, and could see that with my rook on the sixth rank, I could keep his king out, and also had one or two fantasies about checkmating him in the centre. 42...b6 43 h1 d6+ 44 e4 44 c5 c6+ 45 d5 d6+ is equal. 44...d3 I wasn't sure whether to play the rook to d3 or d2. I chose d3 for several reasons – whimsies of a mating net; the possibility of a pawn race (as actually happened); the feeling that winning/forcing him to move his g2 pawn wasn't a success for me. 45 h7+ I prayed for 45 c1?? but knew he wouldn't play it, and that he would play h7. On the board next to mine, Black had just played f5, in reaction to which Viktor grimaced, thought, and then played h4, trapping the king in a mating net. He pointed with his finger to f4, saying "one" – there was a pawn on g3 and d4-f4 was mate in one. Here, I cheekily thought, but of course wouldn't have dared to say, that, had he played 45 c1??, that I would have played 45...d7 and announced "one": 45...d7 46 g3 d6 mate.



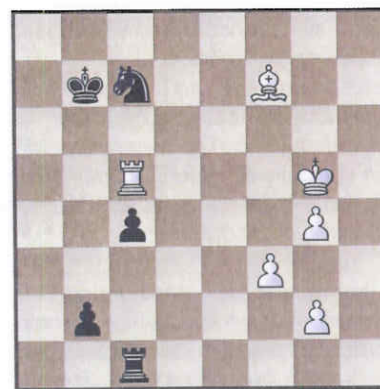
Analysis Diagram
(if Korchnoi had blundered)

45...d6 46 a7 46 h6 e7 47 h7+ was what I expected, and I planned if h6 happened to repeat first, and then think if I could do better than a draw. 46...xc3 Now I started to hope for a win for the first time. I always intended 46...c3, but when looking at move orders, wondered about 46...d6?? first, but quickly saw the unfortunate mate – it made me realise generally how tactical this positional game actually was, under the surface... 47 d7



Allan Beardsworth, back to the camera, awaits Viktor Korchnoi's move.

mate. 47 xa6+ d6 48 g6 c1 48...d3?? had been my initial intention until I saw 49 e8 winning. I chose c1 rather than c2 for two reasons – in the event of a pawn race, to be on the queening square; because the g2 pawn probably wasn't relevant; plus c1 is also a black square. 49 f5 c7 50 e8 xb4 51 xf6 I had expected 51 a5. 51...d5 52 h6 b4 53 xg5 b3 54 c6+ b7 I was confident now: I knew by moving to b7, attacking the rook, I was overloading his bishop; and that when the knight came to c7, his rook couldn't get to the b-file. 55 c5 I now saw that I had set up a fork on e6. 55...d7 56 f7 Viktor initially played g6, and then made a grimace – a painful facial expression which I shall never, ever, forget. He then stared at the board for a long time, before shakily moving the bishop to f7. 56...b2 0-1



Viktor resigned gracefully, though the controller told me that I shouldn't ask him to sign the score sheet, since he had been refusing signing the scoresheets for the games he had drawn and would doubtless refuse my request. This was the only game Viktor lost in the simul.