

One Memorable Game

Allan Beardsworth recalls an inspirational game he was shown in his youth by the late, great Vic Knox



Victor Wilfred Knox (23 Jan 1945 - 24 Dec 2001), seen here on the right giving a simul, held the FIDE Master title, and was a teacher and journalist as well as a very strong player. From Cheshire, he won the 1960 British Under-15 Championship and scored 6½/11 in his first appearance in the British Championship in 1966, with a best placing of third in 1969. He was chess columnist of the Manchester Evening News in the 1970s and 1980s.

THIS ARTICLE IS about a chess game, but is also about friendship and helping others. I took up chess at the age of about ten, as a result of Fischer versus Spassky. I quickly took to the game (it can't have harmed that my first sparring partner was Nigel Short, three years younger than me, and at our first club we played each other week after week, and then going to senior school together) becoming a member of the England junior squad, progressing to become a decently strong player, before university, work and then family commitments took over.

Nowadays I play only on the internet, except for one rapidplay tournament a year, due to those commitments. Today, nearing 50, overall I am a weaker player, because the confidence and speed of calculation has gone, but at the same time my knowledge of the game has increased, due to now being an avid collector and reader of chess books. I understand far more but play less well; such is life.

I was recently at dinner with Malcolm Pein, whom I have also known since the early 1970s, and over the course of a wide-ranging discussion, I lamented how little formal training I had had -

mentioning, for instance, that it was in my forties when I learned from Dvoretzky's books about the principle of two weaknesses, to give just one example.

This might be a false memory, but I told Malcolm that I only ever recall having one game shown to me, and that it was a revelation to see how a strong player thought, the

game being Wirthensohn versus Victor Knox, which Victor showed a group of talented juniors: I thought Malcolm might have been one of those, and he was, and, remarkably, he also remembered the game and the training session (which was at Blue Coats School, Liverpool sometime in the mid-1970s: if anyone else who was there also remembers the session, let me know please).

I therefore decided to renew a quest I had started about ten years ago, to find the game. As far as I know (and, please, readers, don't prove me wrong and say it is in xxxbase, over the years I have searched, but doubtless databases improve and there will be some I haven't checked, so it might be somewhere). Vic died at too early an age in 2001 but through Mick Norris of Manchester Chess Federation, I got in touch with Vic's son David, and from David with Ray English. I had seen David and Ray at my annual congress a few years ago, but at that time finding the game wasn't much on my mind, so I didn't ask them. Ray has many of Vic's scorebooks, and, magically, he was able to call me back after only a very few minutes, and then dictated the game to me. (CHESS readers can also find the unannotated score of the game in one of our back numbers - March 1972, page 178 - ed.)

It was just as I remembered it, and worthy of not being lost to the chess world. When I asked Ray if he knew White's first name or initial, he didn't, telling me that Vic was notorious for not putting the names of his opponents on his scoresheets, nor dating them. It was played in round six of the Hastings Challengers in 1971/72. Though crosstables in CHESS and BCM both give Wirthensohn's initial as "M", we are presuming White was actually Heinz Wirthensohn, who later became an IM and was twice Swiss champion. I would welcome correction should that assumption not be the case.

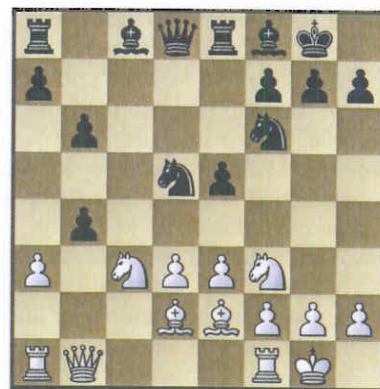
Hastings Challengers 1971/72

H.Wirthensohn - V.Knox

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♜f6 3 ♜f3 ♜c6 4 e3 ♗b4
5 ♔c2 0-0 6 d3 ♞e8 7 ♗d2 ♜f8 8 ♗e2 d5
9 cxd5 ♜b4 10 ♔b1 ♜bx d5 11 0-0 c5 |

don't recall much of what Vic told us during the training session. I was just enthralled at hearing a master speak, and describe some of the details of the game. I wonder if Vic told us that the position is now a reverse Sicilian Maroczy Bind? **12 a3 b6 13 b4** White gets in one of Black's typical breaks in the Maroczy formation; the position is probably around equal; it is the subsequent play which left such an impression on me. **13...cxb4**



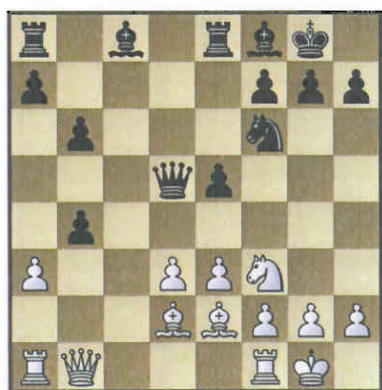
Watch over the next few moves how the position changes from rough balance, with pieces spread evenly, to one where White's pieces move to the left, and Black's shift in reply to the kingside. There can only be one winner from this flow. My abiding memory of the session, which I can still clearly picture almost



Photo: John Saunders

Author of this article Allan Beardsworth (right) playing in consultation with England number one Mickey Adams at the Staunton Society dinner in London last September. Allan is a former non-playing captain of the English Olympiad team.

forty years later, is of Vic using both his hands, and shifting his body, moving from the queenside to the kingside, showing that the game was decided not by brilliant moves, but by the natural consequence of different plans; White tried to play on the queenside, Black's pieces moved almost unnoticed in the other direction. 14 dxd5 wxd5



15 e4 This move surprises me: I assume it is space gaining, and with the intention of playing d4 at some later stage, but that seems a far off prospect. Simple recapture on b4 and play for equality seems more likely to be the best approach. Note that in conjunction with two further moves, c3 and h3 , White manages to weaken his black squares around his king, and particularly f4. 15... wb7 An elegant move, which I doubt I would have even considered, but, having seen that Vic played it, I can see its logic – in the main, to keep the c8–h3 diagonal open for the bishop. It also puts some pressure on e4, so stifling d4, and can also swing to the kingside via e7. There were alternative good squares for

the queen, but I admire Vic's surprising choice. 16 axb4 g4 17 c3 d6 18 wb3 I don't know what this move is aimed at; maybe wb2 instead, at least putting pressure on e5. I doubt the queen eyeing f7 is important, and on b2, it would also support f2. White might even have a slight edge after wb2 . 18... we7



19 h3 d7 20 wfc1 White is moving his pieces from the kingside, whilst at the same time Black is amassing his pieces there. The numerical imbalance soon becomes too big. 20... dh5 21 f1 df4 If you compare the position now to that after move 14, Black's position, by a series of sensible moves on his side, has become overpowering. I wonder if Vic told us, as I now appreciate, how threatening a knight on f4/f5 can be? 22 wb2 At least from here, where I think the queen should have gone earlier, at move 18, it eyes the king side. 22... wf6 23 d2 This seems to be far too slow a plan. It was, I suspect, better to play 23 d4 on the basis that the threatened fork on e5 will dissuade dxh3+ . 23... wg5 24 dh2 we6



25 e1 dxh3 26 df3 wf4+ 27 dh1 wh6 28 gxh3 dxh3 29 dh2 dxf1 30 dg1 wxh2 31 dxf1 wf3 0-1

I have chosen not to give any variations, nor have I checked my impression of the game with an engine, since this article is more about memories and friendship than moves.

In an obituary Malcolm Pein wrote about Vic, he said that he was an excellent tactician, who was deadly with the initiative. I think this game exemplifies that: by a combination of clever moves (such as 15... wb7) and simple manoeuvres (such as dh5-f4 , which is simple once you see it), Vic got an overwhelming advantage after which a breakthrough was inevitable. Vic also taught us one more thing in that session: the importance of playing through our games, and I think this lesson was pivotal to my development as a player.

He also taught us to prepare for our opponents, and in my last game against him, by which time I was a considerably stronger player, alas, I ruthlessly simplified the game, exchanging into an ending, and won after rebutting his attempted attack. I am glad to say, however, that my lifetime score against Vic was 1–2, with him beating me equally easily in our first two games.

My abiding memory of Vic, though, was that he was always nice to me, firstly helping, latterly exchanging views about the game we both loved.

What I've also learned from Vic, and from my understanding of what others did for me as a child, is the importance of passing knowledge on, helping others. I wish Vic could know how much pleasure and help he gave me, but at least David and Vic's widow Eunice now know.

