

Michael Goeller vs. Geoff McAuliffe

French Defense, Rubinstein Variation [C10]

Round 8, March 26, 2005

Kenilworth Chess Club Championship, Kenilworth, NJ USA

Annotated by Goeller,Michael

1.e4 e6!

Geoff made a little joke by pushing the pawn two squares, with his hand still on it, and then withdrawing it one move back. We both knew that I had fully expected him to play 1...e5 and head into the Urusov or Two Knights, where he could easily prepare something against me. I had also been very well prepared to play against the Scandinavian. The French, as he rightly expected, was a complete surprise.

2.Nc3 d5 3.Nf3 dxe4

The chief drawback of the Two Knights system against the French is that it allows this exchange, which seems pretty much equalizing. Black has two main alternatives:

a) 3...d4 4.Ne2 c5 5.Ng3!? (or first 5.c3 Nf6! 6.Ng3) is rather like a Nimzovich or Two Knights Tango in reverse.

b) 3...Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.d4 c5 is the most common line here, transposing into a well-known line of the Steinitz variation.

4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.d4 Ngf6 6.Qd3!?N

I was shocked to learn that this move has never been played in master competition! The idea is well known in the CaroKann (where the Queen discourages the development of Black's Bishop), but no one seems to have tried it in the French. I actually invented it at the board, after searching desperately for something that could make me enjoy playing this game, since the Rubinstein French has always seemed to me so equal and boring. It suddenly struck me that I might get my favorite Urusov formation after all if he exchanges -- which he did. More standard (and better) is 6.Bd3 Nxe4 7.Bxe4 Nf6 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Qe2 with a slight edge.



Position after 6.Qd3

6...Nxe4

There are several alternatives:

- a) The only game I could find in the databases with my Queen move continued 6...Be7!? 7.Be2 (White has a number of better options: 7.c3!? ; 7.Bd2!? Nxe4 8.Qxe4 Nf6 9.Qh4; 7.Nxf6+ Nxf6 8.Bf4!?) 7...Nxe4 8.Qxe4 Nf6 9.Qh4 and White went on to win after some very bad play by his opponent.
- b) 6...c5 7.dxc5! Nxe4! (7...Nxc5? 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.Neg5! Ke8 10.Ne5!+-) 8.Qxe4 Bxc5 9.Bd3 Nf6 10.Qh4 += is similar to a line that could have arisen from our game.
- c) 6...b6!? 7.Nxf6+ Nxf6 8.Ne5!? is rather Capablanca-esque.

7.Qxe4 Nf6 8.Qh4

Kernighan pointed out after the game that I always seem to get my Queen out onto my 4th rank, as I did in my game with him.

8...c5 9.Bg5

The alternative 9.dxc5!? Bxc5 10.Bd3 also gives White a nice development.



Position after 9.Bg5

9...Qa5+

Or 9...cxd4 10.Bb5+!? (10.0-0-0 Bd7 11.Rxd4!? +=) 10...Bd7 11.Bxd7+ Qxd7 12.Bxf6 gxf6 13.0-0-0 +=

10.c3

The alternative is 10.Bd2!? Qb6 (10...Qa4 11.b3 Qa3 12.Bd3 cxd4 13.Nxd4 Be7 14.0-0 +=) 11.0-0-0 cxd4 12.Bg5 Be7 13.Qxd4!? unclear

10...Be7

I worried about 10...Nd5!? 11.Bd3 (11.dxc5 Bxc5! 12.b4?! Nxb4! 13.cxb4 Bxb4+ 14.Kd1 Qa4+ 15.Ke2 Bd7!) 11...cxd4 (not 11...c4? 12.Bxc4 Ba3 13.Bc1!+- or 11...Nxc3? 12.Bd2+-) 12.Nxd4 h6 13.0-0 but this looks good for White now.

11.dxc5!?

Perhaps instead 11.Bxf6! gxf6! (11...Bxf6?! 12.Qh5! +=) 12.Qh6!? cxd4 13.Qg7 Rf8 14.Nxd4 e5 15.Nb3 Qa4 16.Qxh7 winning a pawn -- though Black has compensation.

11...Qxc5 12.0-0-0 Bd7 (=) 13.Kb1 0-0-0 14.Be3 Qa5

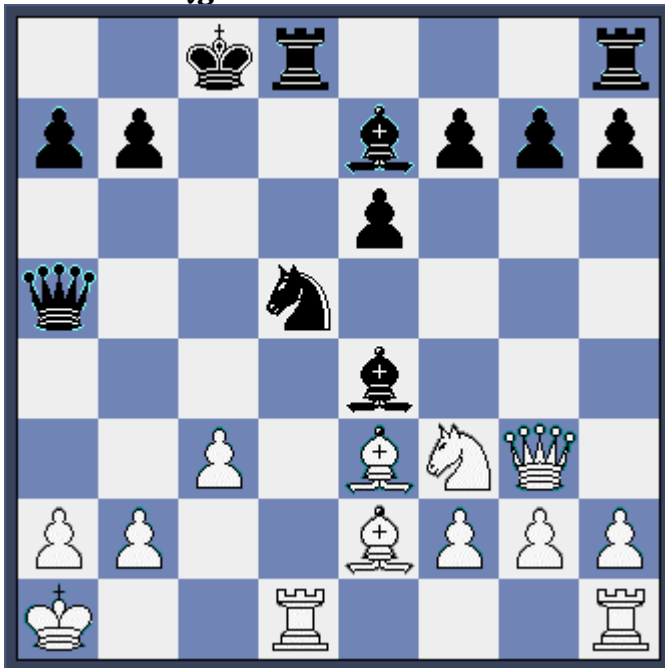


Position after 14....Qa5

15.Be2

White's best is 15.Qg5! Qxg5 16.Nxg5 going into a slightly superior ending. Now Black begins to grab the initiative.

15...Bc6! 16.Qg3 Be4+ 17.Ka1 Nd5?!



The Final Position - Agreed Draw

$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Geoff offered a draw and I accepted after some deliberation. The position is still quite complex, but I feared that the initiative was slipping into Black's hands. I was also behind on time. Just before Geoff moved, I started to get an inkling that Black had the better position, so I didn't mind the draw. But it is very sharp and both players must play precisely. I think

best for Black was instead 17...Bc2! (trying to get in Bb3!) 18.Rxd8+ Rxd8 19.Nd4 (19.Bc4!?) 19...Ne4! (19...Rxd4? 20.cxd4 Bb3 21.Rc1+ wins) 20.Qxg7?! Nxc3! and White is in trouble. After the specific move that Geoff chose, though, I should have played on -- but only if I could have found the best move: 18.Rd4! (with threats on the Bishop and on the King with Rc4+! -- not 18.Qxg7?! Bc2! or 18.Bd4? Bc2! 19.Rd2? Bb3! 20.a3 Bxa3! --+ ouch!) 18...Bg6! (18...Nxe3 19.Rxe4! Nf5 20.Rc4+ Kd7 21.Rd1+ Ke8 22.Rxd8+Qxd8 23.Qf4 +=; 18...Bd6 19.Qxg7! Bc2 20.Bd1! and White is able to stop Black's counterplay and keeps a safe pawn up; or 18...Bc2? 19.Rc4+ Kd7 20.Ne5+Ke8 21.Qxg7 Rf8 22.Bh5 Bg6 23.Bxg6 hxg6 24.Bh6 Nf6 25.Ng4+-) 19.Rc4+ Kd7 20.Ne5+ Ke8 21.Rd1 Bd6 22.f4 += and White should develop play against Black's king in the center, though it is still quite sharp. Not a bad outing for my novelty. But I doubt I'll try it again.