

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CORRESPONDENCE CHESS LEAGUE (BCCL)

By Neil Limbert

The BCCL is one of BCCA's major success stories. Since its inception in 1952, this eight-man team championship has flourished and continues to provide excellent competitive chess within a team environment. I therefore decided we were overdue a celebration of the BCCL with a look back through its history and to show some of its best games.

The formation of the BCCL was almost certainly prompted by the very successful Postal Chess League (PCL) launched by the Postal Chess Club (PCC) in 1944. For more details of the PCL and the PCC, I refer readers to Tim Harding's excellent new book "*Correspondence Chess in Britain & Ireland 1824-1987*". For most of its life the PCL was larger than the BCCL but, when the PCL folded in 2004, its remaining teams incorporated into the BCCL showing the BCCL to be more successful and more resilient in the long term.

The BCCL was devised by **George Sutton** and he became the first BCCL Tournament Controller. To quote from the 1952 BCCA Yearbook:-

"A service which the Association has hitherto lacked, the facility for inter-club play, is being provided by the formation of the British Correspondence Chess League. To allow for the entry of clubs with small membership, teams will be of 8 boards, each player meeting one opponent in two games."

This system remains unchanged to the present day and is one of the secrets of the success of the BCCL, in that it kills two birds with one stone. Firstly, it provides a facility for team play (as you can see from the above Yearbook quote, it was originally intended for chess clubs to enter but this soon expanded to other areas and I will come back to this point below) but it also allowed players new to correspondence chess to become involved. How often has your potential convert to correspondence chess shuffled away muttering "Yes, but all those games.....couldn't spare the time..."? The BCCL became the ideal introduction to CC.

Inaugurated by the BCCA in the autumn of 1952, play got underway in January 1953. Players were paired on the "jamboree" Hutton system, each player meeting an opponent of his own board number in two simultaneous games, one with each colour. Teams are arranged in divisions with promotion and relegation on the "two up, two down" basis. 32 teams entered the first season but this rapidly increased in subsequent seasons; the record number of teams entering was 68 in the 1986/87 season but numbers have come down again since then (see the chart on the next page for the number of teams entering per season).

Initially, the majority of entrants were club teams such as the first winners, Erdington Chess Club from Birmingham. Liverpool Chess Club then created an early record by winning the championship in four consecutive seasons. Gradually, non chess club teams were formed either by groups of friends or, very often, vocational teams. The Inland Revenue were the first vocational team to win the Championship in 1959-60 and were swiftly followed by the Nottingham Mechanics and the Braille Chess Association. Other vocational teams have included NALGO, Remploy, BBC, London Transport, Polish Combatants and various Ministry teams.

By 1961, there were already "composite" teams of BCCA players and their friends representing no particular club or vocation. Examples include the Woodlanders, Saltire, Chessnuts and the Argonauts. This has been the way ever since.

Soon after the inception of the event the BCF recognised the winners of the top division as the British CC Team Champions. A handsome Jubilee Cup was purchased as the

League trophy out of donations from members celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the BCCA in 1956 (see CC177, pg 10).

In recent times, the trophy has not being awarded to the winning team Captain, probably because it was mistreated by some. But I am happy that this tradition has been re-started and you will see here a photograph of **Phill Beckett** receiving the Trophy as the Team Captain of the victorious Sheffield team in 2009/10. From the very beginning the BCCL has always "paid its way". Each member of a team winning its division receives a prize and, for most of its history, there have also been Best Game prizes. Nevertheless, the revenue obtained by the BCCA from entry fees has always ensured that the

competition remains viable and on the right side of break even.



The BCCL has been very fortunate in that it has had a series of excellent Tournament Controllers allowing the competition to remain strong right up to the present day. These are the unsung heroes allowing players to get on with the important matter of just playing chess. However, many of the names will be familiar:-

1952-60 George Sutton	-	Founder of BCCL
1960-62 Jack Bloodworth	-	Magazine Editor for many years.
1962-64 Bill Clews	-	Still a member today, and playing well!
1964-67 William Mason	-	His legacy to the BCCA sees the BCCA Championship named after him.
1967-74 Frank Avison	-	Founder of Avison Shield- Yorkshire CC Team Chp.
1974-82 Bob Hanbridge		
1982-87 David Blair		
1987-89 Peter Clapham		
1989-91 Steve Mann	-	Still active today in Sheffield chess circles
1991-2001 Bob Mitchell		
2001-2006 Bob Ryan	-	Still a member
2006 to date Stan Grayland	-	Needs no introduction!

These Controllers are often supported by divisional Tournament Directors who deal with all the day to day running of the competition. The current TD's are Phill Beckett, Peter Coast and Ray Pomeroy; every year in his BCCL Yearbook report you will see Stan thanking these men for their hard work.

It is this combination of a sound structure, tradition, team play, excellent Controllers and a non-requirement for too much playing commitment from the players which makes the BCCL the success it remains today. On the following page is the full list of winners with the number of teams entering per year.

BCCL WINNERS

The number at the side of each winner represents the number of teams entering the competition in that season.

1952-3	Edrington	32	1981-2	Civil Service C	61
1953-4	Liverpool	32	1982-3	Inland Revenue A	65
1954-5	Liverpool	32	1983-4	Inland Revenue A	65
1955-6	Liverpool	32	1984-5	Streatham & Brixton	65
1956-7	Liverpool	35	1985-6	Civil Service A	64
1957-8	Cambridge City	36	1986-7	Atticus	68
1958-9	Liverpool	39	1987-8	Civil Service B	67
1959-60	Inland Revenue	31	1988-9	Knights of the Square Table	66
1960-1	Watford & Bushey	33	1989-90	Mensa	58
1961-2	York	40	1990-1	Civil Service A	51
1962-3	Nottingham Mechanics	42	1991-2	Inland Revenue A	46
1963-4	Braille Chess Assn	39	1992-3	Sheffield A	49
1964-5	Liverpool	45	1993-4	Civil Service A	54
1965-6	Nottingham Mechanics	51	1994-5	Midland Bank A	53
1966-7	Nottingham Mechanics	53	1995-6	Peckham Postal Chess Club	50
1967-8	Inland Revenue	50	1996-7	Peckham Postal Chess Club	47
1968-9	Insurance I	51	1997-8	Peckham Postal Chess Club	40
1969-70	Hoylake	45	1998-9	Peckham Postal Chess Club	42
1970-1	York	44	1999-00	HSBC A	40
1971-2	Nat Assn of Schoolmasters	44	2000-1	Square Bashers	39
1972-3	East Ham CC	46	2001-2	Peckham Postal Chess Club	40
1973-4	Inland Revenue	48	2002-3	Square Bashers	36
1974-5	Bradford	53	2003-4	Square Bash / Peckham PCC	37
1975-6	Windemere	52	2004-5	Square Bashers	43
1976-7	Cambridge	52	2005-6	Warrington A	38
1977-8	Streatham & Brixton	55	2006-7	SCCA	33
1978-9	Bradford	58	2007-8	SCCA	30
1979-80	Inland Revenue	57	2008-9	SCCA	30
1980-1	Atticus	60	2009-10	Sheffield B	31
			2010-11	White Rose B	29

Most number of Wins – 7 Inland Revenue

2003-4: the first tie. 2004 – Postal Chess League collapsed and all teams transferred to the BCCL.

Now it is time to look at some games. But please remember to look at the important announcement at the end of the article!

ARB Thomas – JA Fuller

BCCL 1953/4

Ruy Lopez ECO C80

Notes by JA Fuller

write "*Chess for the Love of It*" in 1973 (a very nice book if you happen to find it second-hand), was a member of Liverpool Chess Club who won the BCCL five times in the 1950's!

John Fuller was British CC Champion in 1954 whilst his opponent, who went on to

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.c4

An attempt to get off the beaten track which I do not recommend.

6...Nc5! 7.Bc2 Ne6!

This knight manoeuvre makes a nonsense of White's system as he cannot even force d4. **8.Re1 Bc5**

I did not expect White's reply, or I would have probably have played 8...d6 and the result would have been far less fun than the game.

9.Nxe5! Nxe5

I had intended...9...Bxf2+ 10.Kxf2 Qh4+ 11.Kg1 Qd4+ 12.Kh1 Nxe5 but now 13.Re4 Qd6 14.d4 regains the piece with a good game.

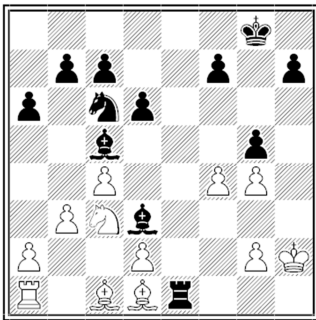
10.Rxe5 d6 11.Re1 Qh4 12.Qf3 0-0 13.Qg3 Qxg3

I decided to try to make something out of my better development and pawn position, rather than keep queens on and allow White easy development.

14.hxg3 Nd4 15.Bd1 Bf5 16.Nc3 Rae8 17.Rxe8 Rxe8 18.b3 Re1+ 19.Kh2 Nc6 20.g4

To gain time. Black threatened Nc6-e5-d3 as well as Bxf2.

20...Bd3 21.f4 g5!!



The winning move! White must take (if 22.g3 Rf1) when Black gains control of e5. **22.fxg5 Bd4 23.Bb2 Be5+ 24.g3 Rf1! 25.Na4**

Losing at once. If however...25.Kg2 Bd4! 26.Na4 Rg1+ 27.Kh2 (27.Kf3 Ne5+ leads to mate.) 27...Be4! 28.Bf3 Rxa1 winning the exchange and the endgame.

25...Bxb2 26.Nxb2 Be4 0-1

White resigns as the only move - Bf3 - loses the exchange and the endgame as before.

AE Webb – TJ Beach

Watford v Liverpool BCCL 1955/6

Ruy Lopez C 82

Notes by TJ Beach

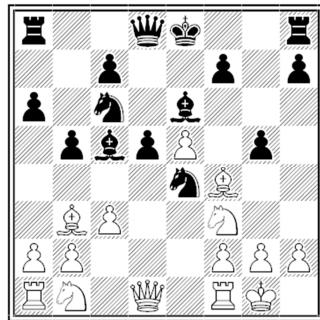
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Bc5

"Strategically, this move burns Black's boats; for Black only gets a completely satisfactory pawn formation by playing ...c5 which this move makes more difficult. In compensation, Black makes it more difficult for White to play the natural Be3, and obtains various tactical threats on the kingside. Black's chances of success with 9...Bc5 lie in these tactical threats paying off; Whites chances lie in beating back Black's attack and then taking the advantage of the weakness at c5 and the strength of white's king's bishop on the a2 - g8 diagonal." (Barden)

10.Bf4?

Trying to improve on the "book" by developing the bishop before playing Nbd2.

10...g5!



11.Nxg5

11.Be3 Bxe3 12.fxe3 g4 winning a pawn.;

11.Bg3 h5 12.Nd4 Bxd4 13.cxd4 h4 14.f3 hxg3 15.fxe4 gxh2+

11...Nxcg5 12.Bxcg5 Qxcg5 13.Bxd5 0-0-0

A simple but effective way of retaining the piece.

14.Bxe6+ fxe6 15.Qf3

The aggressiveness of despair. Sounder is 15.Qe1

15...Rdf8 16.Qxc6

As good a way as any of losing the game. If 16.Qe2 Rxf2 17.Rxf2 Qc1+ 18.Qf1 Bxf2+ 19.Kxf2 Rf8+

16...Rxf2 0-1

Resigns for if 16...Rxf2 17.Qxa6+ (17.g3 Qe3 18.Qxc5 Rxf1+ 19.Kxf1 Qxc5) 17...Kb8 18.Qxb5+ Bb6 19.Rxf2 Qc1+

KB Richardson – Dr PJN Howorth

BCCL 1963/64

Sicilian Defence ECO B28

Notes by PC Gibbs

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 a6

The O'Kelly system.

3.c3 d5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.d4 Nf6 6.Be2 e6 7.0-0 cxd4

Although this gives White an isolated pawn, it is preferable to preserve the centre by 7...Be7 8.Be3 Nc6

8.cxd4 Nc6 9.Nc3 Qd6

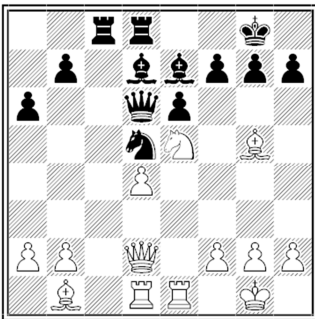
9...Qd8 looked more natural.

10.Bg5 Be7 11.Qd2 0-0 12.Rad1 Rd8

13.Bd3 Nb4 14.Bb1 Nbd5

Now Black has blockaded the isolated pawn in traditional fashion, but his position is restricted.

15.Ne5 Bd7 16.Rfe1 Rac8 17.Nxd5 Nxd5



Against any other method of recapture, White retains a strong initiative by 16.Qd3 but there is no immediate sacrificial combination.

18.Bxh7+

Not really a surprising move if the possibility of the knight fork is seen; but, in this case, a neat method of continuing the attack.

18...Kxh7 19.Nxf7 Qb6 20.Bxe7 Nxe7 21.Qg5 Nf5 22.Qh5+

It is interesting to note how White is setting up a standard mating position with the queen at h5 and knight at g5 arising out of the previous combination.

22...Kg8 23.Ng5 e5 24.Qh7+ Kf8 25.Rxe5 Nh6 26.h3

A rather diabolical waiting move. Black has no good move.

26...Rc6 27.Qh8+ Ng8 28.Re7 1-0 Resigns.

If the rook is taken there is mate in two by 28...Kxe7 29.Qxg7+ Kd6 (29...Ke8 30.Qf7#) 30.Qe5#

JT Pascoe – D Lavender

BCCL 1976/77

King's Gambit ECO C34

Notes by C Warburton

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 d6 4.Be4 h6

This was claimed to initiate the Fischer "bust" of the King's Gambit.

5.d4 g5 6.g3

Fischer based his analysis on 6.0-0 so 6.g3 is new to me.

6...Nf6 7.e5 dxe5 8.Nxe5 Nd5

This does not look right but we must be thankful to see such moves occasionally because of the interesting play which can follow, as it does in this game.

9.Qh5 Be6 10.Nc3 Nf6

Presumably without any thought of the sacrifice which now occurs.

11.Bxe6!

Very enterprising and perhaps inspired by a sight of the De la Bourdonnais - McDonnell games of 1835.

11...Nxc5 12.Bxf7+ Ke7 13.Nd5+ Kd6

Giving back the queen would not help.
14.c4 c5 15.Bxh5 Rh7 16.0-0 cxd4 17.gxf4
Nc6 18.Nf7+ Rxf7 19.Bxf7 Qd7 20.Bh5 d3

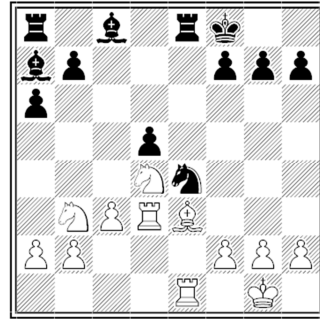
20...Qh3 might have proved better. The text helps White's rook into play.

21.fxg5 hxg5 22.Rf6+ Kc5 23.b3 b5
24.Be3+ Nd4 25.Rc1 Qh3

Overlooking the mate.

26.b4# 1-0

Old-fashioned fare, but a queen sacrifice is still unusual enough to warrant notice.



JT Hollingworth – MP Foss

BCCL Div 1 1982/83

French Tarrasch ECO C08

Notes by JT Hollingworth

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5
5.Ngf3 a6

An idea belonging to Botvinnik, preventing Bb5+. Other alternatives are 5...Nf6; 5...c4; 5...Nc6 the best reply.

6.dxc5

White can also choose from 6.Be2; 6.c4; 6.b3

6...Bxc5 7.Nb3 Ba7 8.Bd3

8.Bg5 Nf6 9.Nfd4 0-0 10.Be2 Qd6 11.0-0 Ne4 =. Keres-Botvinnik 1948.

8...Nf6

8...Qe7+! is a better move. 9.Qe2 Nc6 10.0-0 Bg4= Mantanovic - Korchnoi 1968.

9.Qe2+ Qe7 10.Qxe7+ Kxe7 11.0-0

11.Bg5 was another move but I did not want to waste time if Black plays ...h6. The queen's bishop has a role to play in support of the d4 square which is a good outpost for my pieces.

11...Ne4 12.Nfd4 Nc6 13.Be3 Re8 14.Rfe1 Kf8 15.c3

To prevent...Nb4 which would otherwise be quite uncomfortable for me.

15...Ne5 16.Rad1 Nxd3 17.Rxd3

I did not mind this piece swap because my bishop was a defender and Black has not yet completed his development. His isolated d-pawn is also under pressure.

17...f5 18.f3 Nf6 19.Red1 h6 20.h4 Rd8

21.Nc2 Be6

If 21...Bxe3+ 22.Nxe3 Be6 23.Nc5

22.Bxa7 Rxa7 23.Ncd4 Kf7 24.Nxe6

There are many roads to Rome but this is the quickest route.

24...Kxe6 25.Nd4+ Ke5 26.Re1+ Ne4

26...Kd6 loses a couple of pawns.

27.fxe4 fxe4 28.Rg3 Rg8 29.Rg6 Raa8

30.Rf1 1-0

R Smith – M Yeo

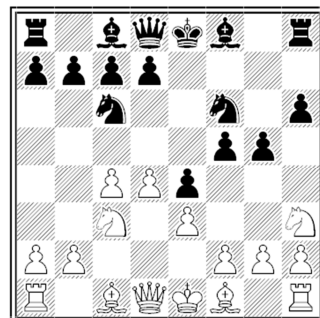
BCCL 1997/98

English Opening ECO A27

Notes by Roland Smith

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.Nf3 f5 4.d4 e4 5.Ng5

Nf6 6.e3 h6 7.Nh3 g5



I have never met this line although I have championed the English Opening for 47 years! The analysis which follows is my own.

8.f3 exf3 9.Qxf3

9.gxf3 gives rise to very unclear positions.

9...d6

9...g4? 10.Qxf5 gxf3 11.Qg6+ Ke7 12.Nd5+ Nxd5 13.cxd5

(a) 13...Nb4? loses immediately 14.d6+ cxd6 15.Qe4+ Kf7 16.Bc4+ d5 17.0-0 Kg8 18.Bxd5+ Nxd5 19.Qxd5+ and mates.

(b) 13...hxg2 14.Bxg2 Qe8 15.Qxe8+ Kxe8 16.dxc6 with advantage to White.

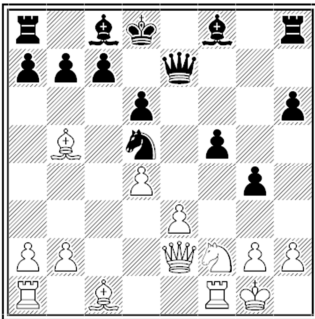
10.Nf2 Qe7 11.Nd5

11.Qe2 was tried by Korchnoi against Nikolic in 1997 but after 11...Bg7 12.h4 Qf7 13.hxg5 hxg5 14.Rxh8+ Bxh8 he had merely weakened his own kingside. Black later won with an invasion down the h-file.

11...Nxd5 12.cxd5 Nb4 13.Bb5+ Kd8

Although losing the right to castle, Black does win the pawn on d5. The alternative was 13...Bd7 14.Bxd7+ Qxd7 15.0-0 g4 16.Qe2 Nxd5 17.e4 Qe7 18.Qc4 Nb6 19.Qb5+ Qd7 20.Qxf5 with advantage.

14.0-0 g4 15.Qe2 Nxd5



I was following the game Lautier - Nikolic, 1994 which continued 16.Nh1 Bg7 17.Bc4 Nb6 18.Bd3 Rf8 19.Qf2 c5 20.dxc5 dxc5 21.Qc2 and Lautier eventually won. My opponent had a much higher OTB grade than me and, on analysing 16.Nh1 I realised why he was content to reach this position. Nikolic had missed 16...f4!! 17.e4 (or 17.exf4 Qxe2 18.Bxe2 Bg7 19.Rd1 Rf8 20.g3 Re8 (having prevented Ng3) 21.Kf1 Bf5 22.Nf2 h5 with a strong initiative for Black.) 17...Bg7 18.exd5 Qxe2 19.Bxe2 Bxd4+ 20.Nf2 g3 21.Bxf4

gxf2+ 22.Kh1 Bd7 and Black has a good plus.

16.Bc4

The idea was to temp 16...Nb6 when 17.Bd3 followed by Nh1-g3 hits the f-pawn.

16...Nf6 17.Bd2 Bg7 18.Rac1 Re8 19.Qd3 d5 20.Bb5 Bd7 21.Qb3 Kc8 22.Nd3 c6

22...Ne4 might have been better as the Bg7 then covers the hole on e5. In any event, White's pieces swing into action: 23.Bb4 Qf7 24.Ba5 c6 25.Nf4 and Black cannot save the d-pawn unless he retreats the knight to f6.

23.Ne5 Qd6 24.Bb4 Qc7 25.Qa4

Threatening Nxc6 etc.

25...Re6

If 25...Rxe5 26.Ba5! Qd6 27.dxe5 Qxe5 28.Bxc6 wins.

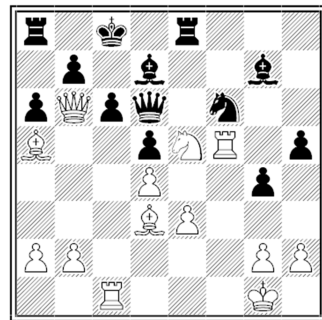
26.Ba5 Qd6

26...b6 loses to 27.Nxc6

27.Rxf5

27.Rxc6+ Afterwards my opponent pointed out that this move, followed by 28.Rc1, also wins. But I had my sights set on the big demolition as Black had no defence.

27...a6 28.Bd3 h5 29.Qb3 Re8 30.Qb6



30...h4

30...Bxf5 31.Rxc6+ bxc6 32.Bxf5+ mates however Black tries to block e.g. 32...Nd7 33.Nxd7 Re7 34.Nc5+ Rd7 35.Qd8#]

31.Nf7 Qb8 32.Rxf6 1-0

Black resigned because of 32...Bxf6 33.Rxc6+ bxc6 (33...Bxc6 34.Bf5+ Bd7 35.Qc5+) 34.Bxa6+ Rxa6 35.Qxa6+ Qb7 36.Nd6+.

N Blackburn – M Calvert
 BCCL Div 1 1999/2000
 Sicilian Rossolimo ECO B31
 Notes by Neil Blackburn

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

In my last 2 BCCL games with White I had played 3.d4 and both had ended in draws. So I decided on a change.

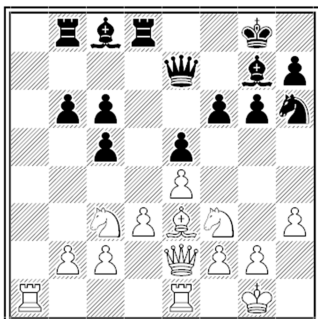
3...g6 4.0-0 Bg7 5.Re1 e5 6.Bxc6 dxc6 7.d3 Qe7 8.a4 Nh6

8...a5! is a little used alternative which I think deserves some attention.

9.a5 0-0 10.Nc3 Rd8 11.Qe2 Rb8 12.h3 b6

A novelty. On 12...f6 13.Be3 Be6 14.b3 Nf7 as in a game 1988-91 I intended to try 15.Nd2 as a possible improvement.

13.axb6 axb6 14.Be3 f6



Time for a strategic overview: Black has the two bishops "He who has the bishops has the future" - Tarrasch. Black also has useful pawn breaks. All in all, the old rule about keeping the position closed when your opponent has the two bishops is a load of rubbish. The knights need squares too, so it is time to fight for some.

15.Na4 Nf7 16.b4

This seems to be a rare but strong idea.

16...cxb4

16...f5 is possible but after 17.Nxb6 Rxb6 18.Bxc5 we have a messy situation where White "may" be better but nothing is really clear.

17.Bxb6 Rd7 18.Bc5 Qd8

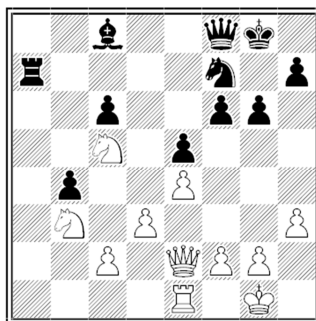
Nd7 29.Nc1! Ral 30.Qc4+ being the main starting point for analysis.

I had been more concerned about 18...Qe8 with the idea Nd6-b5, but perhaps I could have ganged up on the b4-pawn in that case.

19.Nd2 Bf8?!

Hmm. I was quite pleased to see this. The bishop pair bites the dust; the key defender of Black's king disappears and I am guaranteed full use of c5. On the other hand Black gets some freedom for his pieces on the queenside, and swaps a passive piece for an active one in time-honoured, but not necessarily correct, tradition.

20.Bxf8 Qxf8 21.Nb3 Ra7 22.Nac5 Rba8 23.Rxa7 Rxa7



24.d4!

It was only after I found this move that I realised I was a lot better now. The whole thing is pure Philidor: Black's pawn majority has been neutralised and now White gets to play.

24...Nd6 25.Qd2 Ra2?!

I thought this was a bit dodgy and I now managed to find time for six hours of analysis which failed to convince me otherwise!

26.dxe5 fxe5

Time for a second strategic overview: Black has a weak pawn on e5, two more on c6 and b4, his bishop is still stuck on home base, and his king is feeling the draught. Now it is a case of neutralising his active rook, avoiding any sacrifices on h3 and keeping f2 secure. If 26...Nc4 27.Qxb4 Nxe5 White gets a major advantage in all variations, e.g. 28.f4

27.Nc1 Ra5

27...Nc4 28.Qxb4 Rxc2 29.N1d3 is good enough. The key lines come on 27...Ra1 which can also be met by 28.Qxb4; and 27...Rb2 when putting a knight on d3 then taking the b4 pawn was the idea.

28.Qxb4 Rb5 29.Qc3 Nf7

Black has a number of options of course but all of them are hopeless. I am going to put a knight on d3 and, thanks to the earlier exchange of one pair of rooks, it is impossible to stop the other rook flying down one of the two remaining open files.

30.N1d3 Qd6 31.Ra1!

Decisive.

31...Kg7 32.Ra8

Hitting the bishop and whether he moves it or not, Black's position collapses.

32...Be6

If 32...Rb8 33.Rxb8 Qxb8 34.f4 wins.

33.f4 h6 34.Re8 Bd7 35.fxe5 1-0

Black resigned. If 35...Qc7 36.Re7 wins outright.; If 35...Rxc5 36.Qb4 Rb5 37.Qxd6 Nxd6 38.Re7+ Nf7 39.Rxd7.



The BCCL Rosebowl awarded to the Champion team