

## NATO Chess 2014 Round 1 Highlights

Jan Cheung, 04 February 2014

The 25nd NATO Chess Championship, which was held in Quebec City, was an eye opener for many chess players. For me, I have never been in North America and I have learned many things during my stay in Canada. Now back in Europe, I can pass my story to my country fellows that there are significant differences between Canada and USA!

I got positive reactions about my articles of the 2013 NATO Chess Championship, so I decided to continue these series.

Round 1 delivers the battle between low rated opponents against high rated opponents. For players with a high elo ranking, round 1 was a must win round to have a good start position in the first rounds of the tournament. There were many interesting games, showing that the lower rated opponent should not be underestimated.

### Position 1.



Position after 19...Bd7-b5 White to move

### Position 2.



Position after 25...Kg8-h8. White to move.

### Position 3.



Position after 9.a2-a4. Black to move.

### Position 4.



Position after 10...Nb8-c6. White to move.

### Position 5.



Position after 30...Ra8-g8. White to move.

Position 6.



Position after 23...Bf8-e7. White to move. Is 24.Qa1 playable?

Position 7.



Position after 16...Ra8-e8. Find a plan for white.

Position 8.



Position after 12.f4xe5. What should black play?

Position 9.



Position after 17.Ke1-f1. What should black play?

**Position 10.**



Position after 23...f7-f6. Choose between a) 23.Nxd7, b) 23.Nc4, c) 24.Nd3

**Position 11.**



Position after 42.f5-f6. Choose between a) 42...gxf6, b) 42...Qc7+, c).42...Qc1+

**Position 12.**



Position after 21.Qd2-f4. Choose between 21...Qb8, 21...Qb7, 21...Qc4

**Position 13.**



Position after 33.Bf5-e4. White to move.

**Position 14.**



Position after 16...Kg8-f7. White to move.

### Position 15.



Position after 10...Nd7. Choose between a) 11.Nd5,  
 b) 11.Nd4, c) 11.Qc2, d) 11.Bd2

### Solutions

**Position 1 is Wells – Drabke (1.1)**



This position arises from a Sicilian Defence where black has traded one of his knights for white's bishop at d3. Generally, such exchange is good for white because it allows him to strengthen the centre with c2xd3. Due to the big number of pieces at the board, white can set up a dangerous attack towards the king side. With 20.e5! it opens the f file. After 20...Nd7 (20...Ne8 will put the knight at a bad square. White will continue the attack with 21.f5!, while 20...dxe5 is a bad move. After 21.Bxe5 white wins the exchange) 21.Nxb5 axb5 22.Ra7. An important tempo move. The black queen has to protect pawn d6 ) Qc6 23.Na5! Another tempo move. Qc8 white has the opportunity to invade the queen side with



24.Be3! (with threat Rf1-c1 invading square c7) dxe5 25.Rc1 Qe8 26.Rcc7 Bd8 27.Rxd7 Bxa5 28.fxe5



White has the upper hand due to his active pieces.

**Position 2 is the same game Wells – Drabke (1.1).**

The pawn structure at the centre resembles a typical pawn formation in the Sicilian Rauzer. The next position arises after the following moves. 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0-0 Bd7 9.f4 b5 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Kb1 Qb6 12.Nf3 Be7 13.f5 h5



Now white can put the black pawn structure under pressure by putting a knight at f4, for example 14.Ne2!? Qf2 15.Qc1 (white has to keep the queens at the board to attack the black king) Rc8 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Nf4.

Let's return to the game Wells – Drabke. At the moment the white pieces are centralized. Looking at the position, white has two options to improve his position.

1. Attacking the black king by putting the pieces at the king side. There is a danger of this plan. If the white pieces are not centralized, black can take over the initiative by centralizing his pieces. Because the centre is not fixed, this chance is big.
2. Putting the knight at f4, and see what happens. White can afford this because he has structural advantage in the form of a better pawn structure.

Let's first look at option 1, the game continuation. 26.Ng4 Qd4 27.Nh6 Bd8 Notice that the bishop can go to b6, exposing square g1. White now has difficulties improving his position because the black queen is centralized and the knight is out of play.

Let's try option 2. The knight can put at f4 with 26.g3!? The black queen should defend pawn e6. 26...Qc5 27.Ng2 Qe5 28.Nf4



In option 1, black has no problems at all. In option 2, black has some difficulties with the pressure at e6.

**Position 3 is Bacus – Dusak (1.2).**

In this Pirc defence, white has prevented e7-e5. Black has another possibility to contest the centre by 9...d5! After 10.e5 Ne4! blacks pieces are well placed. The move played in the game 9...Ne6 is less strong because it doesn't occupy the centre.

**Position 4 is the game Lebrun – Helbig (1.4).**

In this Reversed Kings Indian, the centre is closed which is the signal to continue at the flank. White strongest side is the king side, so it is important to prepare f2-f4 with 11.Rf1! A possible continuation: 11...b6 Black's strongest side is the queen side and he should mainly play at this side. 12.Nh4 Be6 13.b3 White only play at his weak side to improve his pawn structure. 13...Qd7 14.f4 exf4 15.gxf4 f5! The same story for black. He plays at his weak side to stop whites attack. 16.e5 Nd5 17.Bd2 with a complex middle game.

**Position 5 is the same game Lebrun –Helbig (1.5).**

White is an exchange down, but at the moment the position is closed so at the moment a black rook is not stronger than a white knight. Because white has a bishop at the white colours, in generally the white pawns have to be put on a black square. With 31.c5! followed by Nd2-c4-d6 his material disadvantage is not yet decisive.

In the game white played a weak move 31.c3 opening files for the opponent.

**Position 6 is the game Pedersen – Szczesniak (1.4).**

White has more space, but he has weaknesses at b3 and the diagonal a7-g1. Also notice that the rook e3 is undefended. His pieces at d2 and g2 are not active while blacks pieces are supporting the break d6-d5. We can say that black has a better position and that white should restrict his weaknesses.

24.Nf1 or 24.Kh2 are sensible moves. The move played in the game, 24.Qa1 doesn't solve the problem at the diagonal a7-g1 and can be tactically refuted by 24...Qa7! Black threatens Nxb3 , Nd3, Nxe4 and white can only prevent them all with 25.Bd4, but after 25...e5! 26.Bxc5 Nxc5! white will lose material.

**Position 7 is Musselman – Sypien (1.5).**

Black has structural advantage – more space. The pawns on the centre are not fixed. The bright sight for white is that the bishop at b3 is active and that the black queen is not defended. A plan to fix the white pawns on black squares with d3-d4 will backfire: it puts the bishop at b3 out of play. Notice that blacks plan to advance one of his centre pawns only gives white chances to trade one of his pieces, which is generally good for the player with less space. At the moment white best chance is to improve one of his worst pieces, the knight at c3. It has more functionality at e2 than at c3.

17.Ne2!



This move is possible because blacks plan to trap the knight at g5 does not work: 17...e4 18.Nf4! and now:

- 18...h6?? 19.Ng6#.
- 18...Qc7 Getting out of the pin on the d file. 19.Qd2!? Putting the queen at a colour opposite the colour of the bishop at b3, connecting the rooks. 19...c4!? Restricting the activity of the bishop at b3. 20.Ba2 c3 21.Qe2 g6 22.h4. In this position, black has won a lot of space, but it doesn't hinder the movement of whites pieces.

- 18...d4 An attempt to crush white at the centre. 19.Rc1!? Keeping the tension is the best practical chance. 19...Nb6!? 20.dxe4 c4 21.exf5! cxb3 22.cxb3 Qe5 23.Nf3 Qxf5 24.Nxd4 and white has some practical counter play for his piece.

In the game white played the active move 17.e4? trying to open lines for his pieces, but it costs him the pawn at e4 after 17...h6 18.Nf3 d4! 29.Bxg8 Kxg8.

**Position 8 is the game Papista – Leveillee (1.12).**

Black is a pawn up, but has no center. Furthermore, black has a weakness at f7. In this open position, every tempo counts. Looking at the diagonal a7-g1 and the open h file, have you noticed that the white king is a weakness? With 12...d5! Black has plans to put a knight at g3. Now white has several candidate moves.

13.exd5 Nf5! 14.Qd3 (14.Qf3? g4!) 14...g4! The threat is Qd8-h4. 15.g3



Now black has the opportunity to take over the initiative. 15...Nxg3+! 16.Qxg3 Rh3 Now 17.Qf4 fails because of 17...Bf5! 18.Nd2 Be3!, so there remains one move. 17.Qg2. Black will continue with 17...g3.



White now has only one move, 18.d6. After 18...Rxh2+ 19.Qxh2 gxh2 20.Bxf7+ black has two options.

- 20...Kd7? 21.e6+ Kc6 (After 21...Kd6 22.Rd1+ wins) 22.e7 and white wins
- 20...Kf8 21.Be6+ Ke8 22.Bf7+ with perpetual check.

Instead of 18...Rxh2 black can also play 18...Qh4. After 19.Bxf7+ Kd8 20.Bg5+ Qxg5 21.e6 Rxh2+ 22.Qxh2 gxh2 23.e6



Black gets the upper hand after 23...cxd6!.

The positions after 12...d5 are very exciting. After 13.Bxg5 c6!? 14.exd5 cxd5 the position has become sharp.

In the game black played the quiet move 12...0-0 and lost the initiative after 13.Qh5.

**Position 9 is the game Simard – Onley (1.13).**

There is no material difference at the moment. In this position, both kings are unsafe and it is important to keep the initiative. In the game black preferred material above initiative and soon lost: 17...Bg7? 18.Qxg6 Bd7 19.exf5 Rf8 20.Bxf8 Rxf8 21.Nf3 and white won.

After 17...g5! White has to take the bishop at c3, otherwise he has achieved nothing. 18.bxc3 Qxc3! and black has counter chances, for example 19.Re1 Nxe4 20.Bxe4 Rxd4 21.Rxe4 fxe4



Notice that the bishop at d6 is undefended. Black has the upper hand because the white pieces are not coordinated.

**Position 10 is the game O’Byrne – Macaspac (1.15).**

A typical position of the Slav Defence. The move played in the game, 24.Nd3, is not possible because of the weakness at b3: 24.Nd3? Bxd3 24.Rxd3 Nc5 and white loses the exchange. White has more space, so an exchange of pieces in generally favors the side with less space. However, if you have prevented an exchange, but it has cost you some tempi, then it is doubtful what is better. We have to calculate.

Let’s look at 24.Nc4. Black will reply with Nb6! Activating the pieces with tempo. 25.Na2!? Bf8 26.Nxa5 Nxa4 27.Nc3! Qxa5 28.Nxa4 with an equal position.

Finally let’s look at 24.Nxd7 Qxd7 25.Ne4 After 25...Qe7 26.Qc4 Kh8 27.Rac1 Bg8 28.Qc2 b6 white has difficulties to prevent e6-e5.

If we compare 24.Nc4 and 24.Nxd7 we have to say that the white pieces are better coordinated after 24.Nc4, so this move is whites best option.

**Position 11 is the game Stuhr – Hater (1.17).**

In an ending with only heavy pieces having the initiative is more important than material gain. The move played in the game, 42...gxf6 gives white the initiative and should be considered as a weak move. The game continued as follows: 43...Kh7 (43...Kg8 44.Rg3+ wins) and now instead of the played move 44.Qd4 (gives away the initiative) white can improve the position of his queen at e5 with the forced sequence 44.Qf7+ Kh8 45.Qe8+ Kh7 46.Qe7+ Kh8 47.Qe5+. Black will soon run out of checks: 47... Kh7 48.Kg3! Rg2+ 49.Kh4.

There are two methods of check, 42...Qc7+ and 42...Qc1+. Which is better? Objectively speaking, 42...Qc7+ has the advantage that it covers the 7<sup>th</sup> rank. Let's see what happens. After 42...Qc7+ black has to calculate: 43.Kf5 (43.Qe5? g5!+44.Kf5 Qh7 and black wins.) Qc8+ 44.Kg6 Rg2+ 45.Kf7 Qg8+ 46.Ke7 gxf6 47.Qxf6+ Rg7+! 48.Kd6 Qb8+ and the white king cannot find a shelter against the checks. For example: 49.Kc5 Qa7+ 50.Kd5 Qb7+ 51.Kd4 Qb4+ 52.Ke3 Qe1+ If white takes any risks now he can lose as well: 53.Kf4 Qc1+ 54.Kf5? Kg8!

Finally, let's look at 42...Qc1+. After 43.Ke5 or 43.Kf5 it leads to the same variations after 42...Qc7+.

Conclusion: 42...gxf6 is a weak move, 42...Qc7+ and 42...Qc1+ are both good moves.

### **Position 12 is the game Michalski – Middaugh (1.18).**

Notice that Bc3 and Qf4 are dangerously pointing at black's king. Black has to remove white's queen as soon as possible, starting with the active 21...Qc4! After 22.Qxc4 Bxc4 his position is somewhat worse, but he has more chance to defend than with queens at the board.

The other moves are much weaker because it does not prevent the attack at the king side.

21...Qb8 The move played in the game has the disadvantage that black's queenside remains undeveloped. 21.Qg4 Ne5 22.Qh5!

21...Qb7 Putting the queen in the dangerous diagonal a8-h1. 22.Qg4 f5 23.Qf4. Black has a lot of weaknesses with the queens at the board.

### **Position 13 is the game Chwieseni – Sycz (1.19).**

White has to prevent the rook invasion at c2. It can be accomplished by 34.Bd4! After 34...Bxf3 35.Bxf2 Rc2 36.gxf3 Rxf2+ 37.Kg3 Rxa2 38.Rxb4 white has chances to survive the rook ending because of his active king. For example: 38...Kf7 39.Kf4 Re2 (Centralizing the rook) 40.h4 Re6 41.Rc7+ Ke8 42.Rc7 Rb6 43.Ke5!

### **Position 14 is the game Bigras – Marquardt (1.23).**

First notice that black's king is unsafe, but that is a temporary situation because black's pieces control the centre. So white should look for a move that keeps up the initiative. Furthermore, notice that black's king is at the same file as the rook at f1 and that black can play Qc5+ complicating the game.



With 17.Ne6! white prevents the queen sortie at c5. Now, 17...Qxe6 is not possible because of 18.f5!  
So black has to play 17...Kxe6. After 18.f5+ blacks only option is 18..Kd7.



After 19.cxd6! the black king is exposed: 19...Qc5+ 20.Kh1 Nf8 21.dxe7. After 21...Kxe7 22.Re1+ Kd8 23.Be3! white continue to have the initiative, for example: 23...Qc7 24.Bf2 Nd7 25.Rc1! with the plan c2-c4.

19.fxg6 is also a good move, but it gives black a opportunity to complicate the game with 19...Qxc5+

In the game white played the weaker move 17.f5. It wins back material, but it gives black an opportunity to activate his pieces: 17...Qxc5+? (17...Kxg7! 18.fxg6 Qxc5+ 19.Kh1 Raf8!) 18.Kh1? (18.Nd4! and white keeps the upper hand) Kxg7 19.fxg6 Raf8!

**Position 15 is the game Toscani – Tucker (1.27).**

Notice that white has a weakness at square b3. Black is threatening Nd7-c5 and a5-a4 to fix the weakness. Also notice that white has trouble to develop the bishop at c1. So, a candidate move is 11.Bd2. Let first look at that move. After 11.Bd2 Nc5 12.b3 (With 12.Qc2 white wants to play around the weakness, but after 12...a4 13.Rad1 Qb6! White has big difficulties to improve his position: 14.Bc1 Qb3!) 12...Qb6 13.Rb1 Bf5 14.Rb2 e6



In this position, the white pieces on the queen side are developed, at the price of vulnerability at diagonal a1-h8 and the weak spot at d3. Furthermore, white is going to lose the battle at d4. We are now looking for a better candidate move. The gap at b3 can be contested by the knight at f3. Let's now look at 11.Nd4. Now if 11...Qb6, 12.Ndb5 protects b3. So black will play 11...Nc5, threatening a5-a4.



White can fight against this plan with 12.Nb3!

- 12...Bxc3 13.Nxc5 dxc5 14.bxc3. The double pawns are as weak as the black pawn at c5.
- 12...Qb6 13.Nxc5 Qxc5 14.Na4 Qa7 15.Bd2 restoring the balance
- 12...Ne6 13.a4 b6 14.f4 with counter play at the king side. For example: 14...Nb4 15.e4 Bb7 16.Be3

Finally there is 11.Nd5 the game continuation. That move doesn't solve white problem at b3 after 11...Nc5 followed by a5-a4.

Conclusion: 11.Nd4 (option b) is the strongest move, contesting black's plan to fix the weakness at b3.