

Karpov has a secret

MORE THAN a year ago, shortly after I had returned to New Zealand to play in the 1977-78 championships in Wellington, I was mildly chided by one of the local players about an opening article I had written in this column some months earlier. The complaint was that after analysing many variations

fairly deeply, and quoting a number of supporting games, I finished the article by saying something to the effect that the final evaluation was in a state of flux — and we would have to “wait and see” as to the ultimate assessment of the variation!

I recall the comment quite vividly, although a certain

Tim Spiller has probably forgotten saying it, because it brings home an important point about chess. One might assume that in home analysis, under ideal conditions and with the relevant books and time available, a master would be able to find out almost everything about a variation. When at the board it might be said that he is virtually improvising until he can rush home again!

However in fact it is almost the reverse. As in so many sports, it is the tension of

tournament competition that brings out the best. A master can prepare thoroughly, but cannot be sure until his analysis has been tested against a determined opponent straining to refute his plan.

Here in my second article on the Grunfeld defence we see Black attempting to gain counter-play by means of a swift attack on White's large centre. The problem is that in a recent game White ignored Black's threats — and in turn Black didn't continue his

plan! Ordinarily this could be dismissed as a wrong assessment by both players of the position, but White in this case was no less than world champion Anatoly Karpov.

Analysis may provide an indication of why this happened, but we can consider the last word said only when other top-level games have elaborated on the line.

GRUNFELD DEFENCE

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 g6
3. Nc3 d5
4. cxd5 Nx d5
5. e4 Nxc3
6. bxc3 Bg7
7. Nf3!?

To answer this newly fashionable move, Black can choose between 7... 0-0, which I examined last week, and 7... c5, which has the attraction of challenging White's big centre immediately. After 8.Be2 Nc6 9.Be3 Bg4 Black has uncomfortable pressure against White's d-pawn. Because of this White has tended to play 8.Bb5ch Nc6 9.0-0 when he already threatens 10.d5.

7. ... c5
8. Bb5 ch Nc6
9. 0-0 cxd4!

If 9... 0-0 10.d5! is strong. Black has a third alternative which is somewhat risky but playable, in 9... Qa5 10.Qb3 0-0 11.Bxc6 bc 12.Qa3 Qxa3 13.Bxa3 cxd4 14.cxd4 Rd8! 15.Ra1 Rd7! 16.Rfd1 (on 16.Rxc6 Bb7 regains the pawn) Ba6 17.Ne5 Bxe5 18.dxe5 Rad8 19.Rxd7 Rxd7 20.h4 Bb5 21.Bc5 a5 22.Kh2 Bd3 23.f3 a4 when accurate defence by Black has left him only a minimal disadvantage. Larsen-Hort, England 1978.

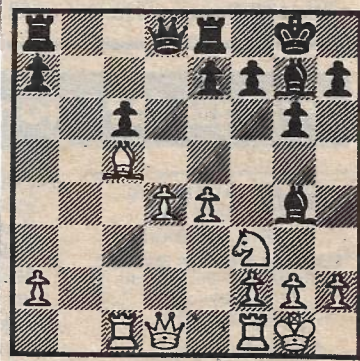
10. cxd4 0-0
11. Bxc6 bxc6

Now 12.Be3 is met by 12... Bg4 13.Rc1 Qd6, so to keep winning chances alive White must opt for the most aggressive diagonal.

12. Ba3 Bg4
13. Rc1 Re8!

Foiling White's plan of 13... Rc8 14.Bc5 with a plus. Now if 14.Rxc6 Bxf3 14.Qxf3 Bxd4 equalises, so White tries his idea anyway

14. Bc5



And a draw was agreed here in Hartston-Castro, Alicante 1979.

The clearest way to squash all White's hopes for an advantage is 14... Bxf3 15.Qxf3 Bxd4! 16.Rfd1 e5 17.Bxd4 exd4 18.Rxc6 and now 18... Rc8! 19.Rxc8 Qxc8 20.Rxd4 Rxe4! — being cheeky because of the back-

rank mate. The position is completely equal.

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This line is convincing, and in my view, if Black is satisfied with a draw, he should prefer the more direct 7... c5. Unfortunately now we come to the paradox. In the recent Montreal super-tournament, Soviet world champion Anatoly Karpov answered 7... c5 with 8.Be2, against top Yugoslav Lubomir Ljubojevic. Then, how-

ever, Ljubojevic meekly castled instead of continuing with 8... Nc6 and if 9.Be3 Bg4!

Among players of this calibre it is unlikely both had missed this possibility, so what was Ljubojevic scared of?

The solution may be found in the game Alburk-Plachetka, played in Tbilisi in the USSR, 1977. White played a most speculative exchange sacrifice, hard to believe at first sight, but Alburk is a known theorist.

After

8. Be2 Nc6

he proceeded:

9. d5!?
10. Bd2 Bxc3 ch
11. Qxa1 Bxa1
12. Nx d4 Nd4
13. Qxd4 cxd4

White has two raking bishops but no pawns in compensation for his sacrifice of the exchange.

13. ... f6
14. e5 Qb6!
15. Qa1! fx e5
16. Qxe5 Qf6

17. Qe3 0-0
18. 0-0 Bd7
19. Bc3 Qd6
20. Bc4 Rac8
21. Qd4? e5

Black has a large advantage. However White's 21st is of course a blunder, and the question is, how do we assess the position shortly beforehand?

Plachetka suggests that 21.Bb3 is “equals, unclear”, but I consider Black better as he has possibilities of returning the exchange for other advantages. However it is far from

clear, and Karpov may have discovered analysis in this line to justify his 8.Be2.

I dreamed up a variation 21.Be5 (instead of 21.Bb3) 21... Qc5 22.Qh6 Rf7 23.Bb3 a5 (! — to kick the bishop) 24.h4?! with the idea 24... a4 25.h5! axb3 26.hxg6 and White is winning now!

Food for thought anyway, and I'll continue searching so I can frequent the Wellington clubs again!

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