Drawing together

THIS YEAR'S British championship in Brighton is on course for a remarkable sort of stalemate. As I write, after eight rounds, no fewer than eight players share the lead on 5½ points, among them Grandmaster John Nunn, myself and International Master Jon Speelman. A curious lack of decisive results has plagued the top boards, allowing a bunch to gather, and what will happen in the final three-round sprint is anybody's guess. The sponsors of the event, the London stockbroking firm of Grieveson, Grant, might perhaps regret having agreed to stage any play-off as well — a 12-player all-play-all is not out of the question!

Now for a rare specimen — a decisive game from Brighton.

SICILIAN DEFENCE

J. HODGSON **J. SPEELMAN**

1. e4	c5
2. f4	Nc6
3. Nf3	g6
4. Bb5	Bg7
5. 0-0	d6
6. B×c6 ch	

Julian Hodgson's counter to Speelman's Sicilian defence is unusual but probably playable. Nevertheless there was no need to exchange his bishop for Black's knight so soon, and Black's strategy is now quite simple — open the position up for his two bishops.

6. ...	b×c6
7. Nc3	Nf6
8. d3	0-0
9. Qe1	c4!
10. d4	

On 10.d×c4 Black continues 10...Ba6 with an unclear position.

10. ...	c5
11. d×c5	Bb7
12. f5 ?!	

Better is 12.e5 d×e5 13.N×e5 when Speelman had intended 13...Qc8, again with unclear complications.

After the text move Speelman sacrifices a pawn temporarily, regaining it three moves later thanks to his pressure on the e4 square.

12. ...	Qc7
13. c×d6	e×d6
14. Qh4	Rae8
15. Bg5	N×e4
16. f6	Bh8

Although this bishop appears out of play on h8 it does exert significant pressure on White's f6 pawn. Of course White cannot continue 17.Bh6 because of 17...B×f6.

17. Rae1	N×g5
18. N×g5	h5
19. Qd4	Qc6
20. Nf3 ?!	

Instead 20.Re4!, suggested by Speelman after the game, restricts Black to a small initiative.

20. ...	R×e1
21. R×e1	d5
22. Ne5	Q×f6
23. Q×a7	Ba8
24. Nb5!	

The best defensive chance, aiming to blockade with the knight on d4. But Hodgson's hopes are shattered by Speelman's following pawn sacrifice, leaving both bishops raking down the long diagonals.

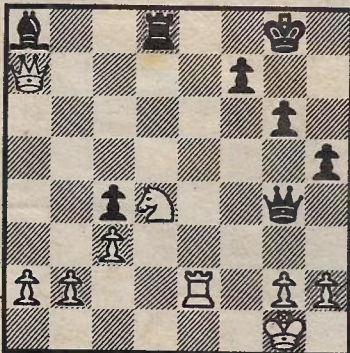|	
24. ...	d4!

25. N×d4	Qf4
26. Nef3 ?	

The losing error. After 26.Ndf3 White would still have chances of resistance, although Black could regain his pawn and maintain a slight edge by 26...B×f3 27.N×f3 B×b2 if he wished.

26. ...	Rd8
27. c3	B×d4 ch
28. N×d4	Qg4!
29. Re2	

With 28.g3 White could have prevented what now occurs, but he would then be too weak down the long white diagonal to survive for much longer.

SPEELMAN

HODGSON

29. ...	B×g2!
30. R×g2	Qd1 ch
31. Kf2	Re8

White's king is just too exposed to resist against Black's queen and rook; on 32.Nf3 Re2 ch 33.Kg3 Qd6 ch would mate.

32. Rg1	Qd2 ch
33. Kg3	h4 ch
34. Kg4	Q×h2

Here 34...Re4 ch 35.Kh3 Qe3 ch forcing 36.Rg3 also wins for Black, but the text is more efficient. Hodgson must return his extra piece to bring his queen back for defence.
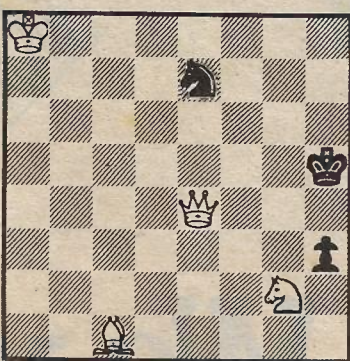
35. Ne6	R×e6
36. Qa8 ch	Kg7
37. Rg2	Qh1
38. Kf4	

More resilient was 38.Qd5, after which Black continues 38...Rf6 with the simple but crushing threat of advancing his h-pawn to queen.

38. ...	Qf1 ch
39. Kg4	Re4 ch

As 40.Q×e4 f5 ch would win the queen.

40. Kh3	Qh1 ch
41. Rh2	Qf3 checkmate.

White is to play and mate in three moves, against any defence (problem by N. A. Bakke).

The solution will be given next week.

MURRAY CHANDLER