

The Anatomy Of A 20–Minute Think (aka "The One That Got Away")

by Erin Dame

Dame, Erin (1943) – Sciacca, Patrick (2086) [B03]

NH Amateur G/60 (2), 01.11.2008

[Dame, Erin]

Ever stare at a position and just know, just feel it in your bones, that you have a killer shot, if you could only find it? Maybe you even know the exact move that ought to do it, nay, that HAS to do it, but the variations get murky the longer you look. Meanwhile, the clock ticks and your confidence erodes with each passing minute. It's here you either give up on the move and chicken out or you ask yourself, WWTD (What Would Tal Do?) and play it anyway. Or, I suppose, there's a third option, namely, pressing on, trying to work it all out to a nat's bum and losing on time. Thankfully, I'm not prone to that last one, but I've been known to choose, if you can call it that, either of the other two. And, doesn't it always seem you end up lamenting either decision? Such was the case on Saturday, November 1st, as I locked horns with the eventual winner at this year's NH Amateur Championship. As always when the two of us sit down across the 64 squares, it was a highly tactical battle.

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 7.Be3 Bf5 8.Nc3 Qd7 9.Nf3 e6 10.Be2 0–0–0 11.0–0 Bg4 12.c5

This was not a fun move to play, but there's nothing wrong with it. Pat suggested 12.Ng5 as more testing, after which either 12...Bxe2 13.Qxe2 f6 or 12...Nxc4 13.Rxf7 Be7 are possible continuations.

12...Nd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.h3 Qe4N 15.Qb3

Pat thought this might be a new move, but the idea's been played before, just after 14.b4 instead of 14.h3. Ironically, in the four games I found where my fourteenth move was played, only 14...Bh5 was tried. So, it was Pat's move that gets the official novelty designation.

15...Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Bxe2 17.c6!

I had originally intended 17.Rf4 Qxe5 18.Nxe2 but this is better. 17.Nxe2? meets with 17...Rd3 and 17.Rxf7 immediately is too soon as the c-pawn would fall.

17...b6 18.Rxf7!?

18.Rf4 Qxe5 19.Nxe2 was still very good. Pat's fallback plan was to seek the exchange of queens with 18...Qd3

18...Bc5



So, here it is, that fateful fork in the road. Up til now, I'd played well and felt good about my position. However, I must admit I had been surprised by ...Bc5, which I'd completely overlooked. Apparently, without a pawn capture as bait, I didn't see it as a square Black wanted to occupy. A little bit of chess blindness that did no harm on the board, but wasn't good for me psychologically. If you've ever wondered what a Class-A player thinks about while deep in the tank (besides some stupid song repeating annoyingly ad nauseam), here are my thoughts, as near as I can reconstruct them. I invested a full third of my entire allotted time on the following blunder.

19.Nb5??

I first considered 19.Qxe6+! Kb8 and even saw 20.Rxc7! as the most natural continuation. Black can't capture due to 21.Qf7+ mating. But, what if he doesn't take? After all, it's no longer check now that the queen has forced him over. Worse yet, he gets a free check of his own. That about ended the investigation of that move for me, minus a couple all-too-brief returns as I got desperate. We'll come back to it in a little here because it's the winning shot.

Next, I looked at 19.Nxe6 Bxe3+ (or 19...Qxe3+) and again didn't like that zwischenzug (aka, intermezzo or in-between move). If I'd pursued it just a little further, I would've found an easy draw to keep in my back pocket in case of emergency. This is always a nice feeling when investing gobs of time into finding the winning lines. The perpetual check is unavoidable after 20.Kh1 Rd3 21.Rxc7+ Kb8 22.Rb7+ Kc8 (not 22...Ka8?? 23.Nc7 mate) 23.Rc7+ etc.. I wish I'd seen this line more clearly. For some reason, I only saw the Nc7 mate with my knight coming from b5.

With the attack no longer appearing as simple as I felt it should have been, I spent an inordinate amount of time trying to force things with checks. For that reason, 19.Rxc7+? predominated my thinking. After it failed over and over, I then tried to at least make it draw by perpetual (neglecting the much simpler way just demonstrated). I got as far as 19...Kxc7 20.Nxe6+ Kxc6 21.Nxd8+ Rxd8 22.Bxc5 bxc5 23.Qe6+ Kb5 24.a4+ Ka5, when Black escapes then consolidates to victory.

Ultimately, I played the overly cute game move. The ideas are similar to 19.Nxe6, hitting c7, with the added benefit of adding another mate to the mix after, for example, 19...Qxe3+ 20.Kh1 Qxb3?? 21.Rxc7+ Kb8 22.Kc8 23.Na7 mate. It also looked to me as though 20...Bxb5 would fatally introduce my queen into Black's territory. Needless to say, 21...Qd3 came as a rude awakening!

As promised, the winning lines, for the record, after 19.Qxe6+! Kb8 20.Rxc7! are

- 1) 20...Kxc7?? 21.Qf7+
- 2) 20...Qxe3+ 21.Kh1 Bxd4? 22.Rb7+ Ka8 23.Qf7 mates
- 3) 20...Qxe3+ 21.Kh1 Qxd4 22.Qf7 Rhf8?? 23.Rc8+! and mate next move.
- 4) 20...Bxd4 21.Qf7 Bxe3+ 22.Kh1 Qxc6 23.Rxc6 Rhf8 24.Qc7+ Ka8 25.e6

Lastly, Black's best chance, an absurdly long endgame variation from Junior

- 5) 20...Qxe3+ 21.Kh1 Qxd4 22.Qf7 Qd1+ 23.Rxd1 Rxd1+ 24.Kh2 Bg1+ 25.Kg3 Bf2+ 26.Kxf2 Rf1+ 27.Kxe2 Rxf7 28.Rxf7 Re8 29.Rxg7 Rxe5+ 30.Kd3 Rd5+ 31.Ke3 etc.

19...Qxe3+ 20.Kh1 Bxb5 21.Qxb5 Qd3 22.Qa4 a5 23.Rc1 Rd4 24.Rc3 Qb1+ 0-1