

New Mexico Chess Champions

John Cline

John Cline won the New Mexico Championship in 1997. In the late 1990's he played in many New Mexico tournaments compiling an impressive record. In 1995 he won the Albuquerque Open with a 5-0 record and defeated GM Jesse Kraai in the last round. In 1996 he tied for first in the New Mexico championship, but Steve Sandager was declared the champion on tie breaks (even though Cline defeated Sandager in the fourth round). In 1997 he again took first in the Albuquerque Open. In 1998 he took first in the Carlos Solis Memorial ahead of both Ron Kensek and Sandager. Once again took first in the Albuquerque Open in 1998, but finished second to Sandager in the New Mexico Championship. In 1999 he played in his last New Mexico Championship, finishing second to Kraai.

But in spite of Cline's success in New Mexico, I could only find a few of his games and the ones from New Mexico tournaments were all poorly played by his opponents. However, before moving to New Mexico, he lived in the Washington, DC area, as did I. In the game below he defeated me in the 1972 Washington Open.

The game is well played by both sides until I trade off into a pawn endgame. That is where the game is decided. I don't know if John still remembers this game, but I remember it well. I learned a good lesson - I didn't have a clue about how to play pawn endgames. Apparently he didn't either, but fortunately for him he made the next-to-last blunder. After the game, I bought the book, "Pawn Endings," by Yuri Averbakh and Ilya Maizelis. That book did more to improve my play than any other chess book! If it is still available, I highly recommend buying it.

Grinberg, Matthew - Cline, John, 0-1
Washington Open, Round 3
Washington, DC, 3/11/1972

Pirc-Robatsch Defense

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 Pirc-Robatsch Defense 4. f4 Nc6 5. Be3 Nh6!? "Knight on the rim spells a trim" and all that. Maybe it is not bad, but it is unusual. **6. d5!?** It looks nice to force the knight back, but this fails to take into account the point of Black's move.

[6. Nf3 Ng4 7. Bg1 O-O 8. h3 Nf6 9. d5 Nb8 Both sides have lost a lot of time, but White has more space.]

6... Nb8!? Which John apparently didn't understand anyway.

[6... Ng4! Because he omitted Nf3, White is forced to either give up a bishop for a knight or allow Black's knight to move to d4. 7. Bc1 Nd4=]

7. Bd4 Bxd4 8. Qxd4 O-O 9. Nf3 c6 10. Bd3 cxd5 11. exd5 Nd7 12. h4!? Playing for h5, but it is easily stopped.

[A better approach to the kingside attack is 12. h3 Nc5 13. g4 f5 14. g5 Nf7 15. O-O-O]

12... Qb6!? Trading queens takes the sting out of the attack, but...

[Black stops the attack dead in its tracks with 12... Nf6 13. O-O-O Nf5 14. Qf2 Ng4 15. Qd2 Ng3]

13. h5 Qxd4 14. Nxd4 Kg7 15. O-O-O We emerge from the opening with White having an advantage in development and more space. Is it enough? 15... Nc5 16. Bc4 Bg4 17. Rde1 Bxh5 18. Rxe7 Ng8 19. Rc7 Rac8 20. Rxc8 Rxc8 21. Be2? White misses the chance to win a pawn and loses his advantage in the process.

[21. Ndb5! Rd8 (Attempts at taking advantage of the undefended bishop still net White a pawn. 21... Ne4 22. Nxe4 Rxc4 23. Nbx d6 Ra4 24. Re1 f5 25. Nc3 Rxf4 26. Nxb7) 22. Nxa7 The extra pawn should win]

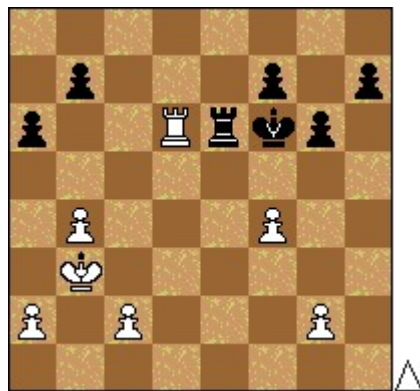
21... Bxe2 22. Ndx e2 a6 23. b4 Nd7 24. Rd1?! Because of White's scattered pawns, Black now gains the initiative.

[White should play more actively. 24. Ne4 Rc7 25. Nxd6 Ngf6 26. Ng3 Nb6 27. Nge4 Nbx d5 28. Nxf6 Nxf6=]

24... Nb6 25. Kb2 Nf6 26. Kb3 Nc4 27. Rd3 Nb6 28. Rd4 Re8 29. Rd3 Nbx d5 30. Nxd5 Rxe2?! Black in turn gives up his advantage.

[Black wins after simply 30... Nxd5 31. Rxd5 Rxe2 32. Rxd6 Rxc2 33. Rb6 h5 34. Rxb7 h4 In the race of the passed pawns, White is two tempi behind, so he is forced to retreat his rook to stop Black's passed pawn. 35. Rd7 h3 36. Rd1 h2 37. Rh1 Kf6 38. c4 Ke6 39. a4 Kd6 40. b5 axb5 41. cxb5 Kc5 Black will win by simply advancing his kingside pawns]

31. Nxf6 Kxf6 32. Rxd6 Re6



33. Rxe6? Trading off into this endgame presents three problems for White. First Black has a potential outside passed pawn and second Black's king is closer to White's kingside minority than White's king is to Black's queenside minority. But the biggest problem for White is that if he is willing to trade off into this endgame, he doesn't know much about pawn endgames.

[White can tie up Black's rook by attacking the queenside pawns. 33. Rd7 b5 34. Ra7=]

33... Kxe6? It is better to take with the pawn here because it gives Black opportunities to convert either the e-pawn or the h-pawn to a passed pawn.

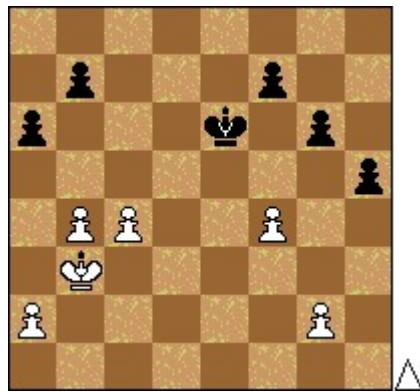
[33... fxe6 34. Kc4 (34. c4 Kf5 35. c5 (Attempting to defend is just a waste of time. 35. g3 h5 36. Kc3 e5 37. fxe5 Kxe5 38. Kd3 g5 39. Ke3 h4 40. gxh4 gxh4 41. Kf3 Kd4 Black wins) 35... Kxf4 36. a4 Ke5 The king has to come back to defend, but his 3 on 1 majority on the kingside will win anyway. 37. Kc4 Kf6 38. b5 axb5 39. axb5 Ke7 40.

Kd4 h5 41. Ke4 g5 42. Kf3 Kd7 43. g3 e5 44. Ke4 h4 45. gxh4 gxh4 46. Kf3 Ke6 47. Kg4 Kd5 48. c6 bxc6 49. bxc6 Kxc6 50. Kxh4 Kd5 51. Kg3 Ke4 Black wins) 34... Kf5 35. a4 (35. g3 This prevents Black's e-pawn from becoming passed, but it wastes a tempo in fighting Black's h-pawn. 35... Kg4 36. Kc5 Kxg3 37. Kb6 h5 38. Kxb7 h4 Black queens first and wins) 35... Kxf4 36. b5 axb5 37. axb5 e5 38. Kd3 Kf5! Black assures an easy win by dropping back to defend against White's pawns. 39. Ke3 (39. c4 Ke6 40. Ke4 Kd6 41. b6 h6 42. Kf3 Kc5 43. Ke4 Kxb6 44. Kd5 e4 45. Kxe4 Kc5 Black wins because White cannot simultaneously defend the c-pawn and defend against the advance of Black's kingside pawns) 39... h5 40. Kd3 (40. c4 Ke6 41. c5 Kd5 42. c6 bxc6 43. b6 Kd6 44. Ke4 c5 45. b7 Kc7 46. Kxe5 Kxb7 47. Kd5 Kb6 Black wins) 40... Ke6 41. Ke4 g5 42. c4 b6 43. Kd3 Kd6 44. Ke4 g4 45. Kf5 Kc5 46. Kxe5 Kxc4 47. Kf5 Kxb5 Black wins]

34. c4!? Unless there is a direct route to queening a pawn, it is usually better to get a strong position for your king before advancing your pawns in pawn endgames.

[34. Kc4 b6 (Or he can go for a queen endgame. 34... Kf5 35. Kc5 Kxf4 36. Kb6 Kg3 37. c4 f5 38. c5 f4 39. Kxb7 Kxg2 40. c6 f3 41. c7 f2 42. c8=Q f1=Q 43. Qg4 Kh2 44. Qh4 Kg2 45. Qxh7=) 35. Kd4 Kd6 36. c4 f5= Neither side can make progress.]

34... h5



35. a4?? This move effectively decides the game. But you are supposed to advance your pawn majority in a pawn endgame, aren't you? Yes, but as indicated by the comment to my last move, only if doing so directly leads to queening a pawn or the pawns are well supported by your king. Neither is true here.

[White is still okay if he brings his king to the center. 35. Kc3 h4 36. Kd4 f6 37. Ke3 g5 38. Ke4 f5 39. Ke3 g4 40. Kf2 b6 41. a3 Kd7= Both kings are stuck having to defend against the opponent's pawn majority and neither pawn majority can safely advance]

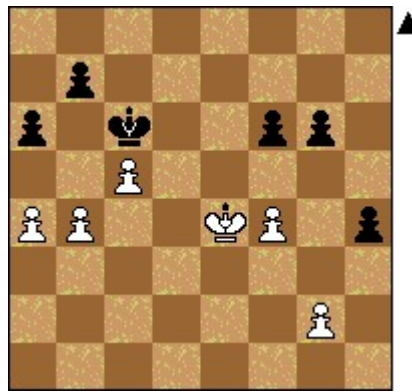
35... Kd6?? But Black does not see the problem with White's last move either.

[35... a5! No matter what White does, his queenside majority will be neutralized. Black then advances his king pawns, forcing Black to move his king over. Then Black will pick off all of White's queenside pawns and win. For instance: 36. bxa5 Kd6 37. Kb4 Kc6 38. Kc3 Kc5 39. Kd3 f6 40. Kc3 g5 41. fxc5 fxc5 42. Kd3 h4 43. Ke4 g4 44. Kf4 h3 45. gxh3 gxh3 46. Kg3 Kxc4 47. Kxh3 Kb4 48. Kg3 Kxa4 49. Kf3 Kxa5 50. Ke3 Kb4 51. Kd2 Kb3 52. Kc1 Ka2]

36. Kc3?? White MUST play a5 to stop Black from playing a5!

[36. a5! f6 37. Kc3 h4 38. Kd4 g5 39. Kd3 g4 40. Ke4 f5 41. Ke3 (41. Kxf5?? h3 wins)

- 41... Kc7 42. Kd4 Kd6 Once again we have reached a position where neither side can make progress]
- 36... f6?? This draws.
[Whereas 36... a5 wins]
37. Kd4 Bringing the king to a strong position in the center is good for a draw. 37... h4
[With White's king in a strong position, 37... a5 no longer works. 38. c5 Kd7 39. b5 Ke6 40. Ke4 White's strong king gives him the better game]
38. c5 Kc6 39. Ke4?? By taking his king away from the defense of the c-pawn, White once again allows a5!
[White holds after 39. Kc4 g5 40. b5 Kd7 41. fxg5 fxg5 42. Kd4 g4 43. Ke4 h3 44. gxh3 gxh3 45. Kf3 a5 46. Kg3 Ke6 47. Kxh3 Kd5 48. c6 bxc6 49. bxc6 Kxc6 50. Kg3 Kc5 51. Kf4 Kb4 52. Ke3 Kxa4 53. Kd2 Kb3 54. Kc1 Ka2 55. Kc2]



39... a5!!! Finally Black plays the winning move! Looking at this move still feels like a kick in the gut 44 years later. As soon as he played it I knew I was busted. 40. bxa5 Kxc5 White's pawn majority is shattered and Black's pawn majority wins. The rest needs no comment. 41. f5 g5 42. Kd3 Kb4 43. Kd4 Kxa4 44. Kd5 g4 45. Ke6 h3 46. gxh3 gxh3 47. Kxf6 h2 48. Kg7 h1=Q 49. f6 Qg2 50. Kh8 Qh3 51. Kg7 Qg4 52. Kh8 Qg6 53. f7 Qxf7 54. a6 Qe8 Sorry, no stalemate. White resigned. [0:1]

Matt Grinberg, 7/14/2016