

How Sweet It Was

Jon Edwards

ICCF GM and the 32nd World Correspondence Chess Champion

I suspect that I will not long be remembered for my humor, but there sure have been some funny moments in my correspondence chess career. This game probably ranks near the top.

Some context is required. This game was played in the 11th US Correspondence Chess Championship from 1995-1998. I would wind up being the defending US Champion, eventually winning the 10th USCCC which started in 1993 and ended finally in 1997. My opponent here was Michael Colucci, who lived then and still in Ewing, NJ, the next town over from me, which of course meant that this game proceeded through the mail at a very rapid pace.

Michael had obtained his entry in the 11th USCCC by placing first in the prestigious Golden Knights. Just before our US11 game commenced, Michael and I met at a local club where, sadly, I gingerly explained to him that the Golden Knights was not the US Championship as he then believed (US Chess had so advertised the event). It was, rather, the club championship of the USCF, but it provided him with the real cool prize, an entry into the real US Championship run by the ICCF-US.

I fully acknowledge that there was real competition between and among the four postal chess outfits, USCF, CCLA, Nost, and my APCT, for whom I wrote the column "Win, Lose, or Draw." When I won this game, I wrote it up for my Nov-Dec, 1996 column, but I first assembled a funny version, which I emailed to my chess friends.

Unknown to me, one of these friends (I still do not know who) copied the head of the APCT, Helen Warren, who published the funny version in the APCT News Bulletin without my knowledge. Now that the damage is done, I submit the funny version of the column (which was originally titled "How Sweet it is") here with a short addendum, because what happened after publication is very much part of the story.

Before I proceed, a further brief note of explanation. Correspondence players scrupulously do not share news of their games while they are in motion, but we are a friendly lot. We send each other emails all the time about strange things that happen. In one of my games, an opponent made a horrible, game-ending error (although he played on and on), but he started signing each postal card with "What a whooha!"

None of my friends knew what a whooha was, but from that moment on, the word took on the meaning of a move or position that was so bad that it bordered on being funny.

I have placed in bold the comments that I added privately for my friends, so that those of you who do not much care about playing through the game can skip to the "funny parts."

One final note before we begin. Younger readers may not understand the somewhat subtle reference to Fischer's *60 Memorable Games*, in which he commented that Robert Byrne's resignation in the 1963-64 US Championship was a bitter disappointment, because he had hoped that the game score would include the amazing line that Fischer had correctly calculated.

Now on to the original column:

Jon Edwards – Michael Colucci
US11 CCC, 1995

While I am sitting here waiting for the 10th US Championship finally to end, I thought that I might just as well bring you the first result from the US11! The fact that I have a result to report is news enough, since the competition started just last December, but the real news is that I defeated the current USCF Golden Knights champion in just 24 moves.

I know Michael Colucci pretty well. He actually lives just one town over, and he occasionally drops by the local chess club. He's a nice guy, so I won't gloat...much. Still, our club president and fellow APCTer, Ned Walthall, reminds me that the USCF left me off their list of the top 50 correspondence players a few years back, and that their coverage of the APCT and the other clubs has, up until very recently been pretty pathetic, and that until three years ago when the correspondence chess community protested, they disingenuously referred to their own Golden Knights competition as the US Open Championship. Add in the way that they tried to cover up their atrocious, third-place, sub-0.500 performance in the National Team Championship by adding in their forfeit wins against the TCC and you get a sense of why many correspondence players have found it hard to take seriously the USCF's commitment towards correspondence chess.

So, I have taken a bit of revenge upon them. By submitting my wins from the US 10th, (that's right Virginia, not my one loss and three draws!) I now have a US Chess correspondence rating of 2691 (not yet including this last win!), the highest rating on their last correspondence chess rating list! It really looks nice on my Chess Life label! Of course, because the rating is

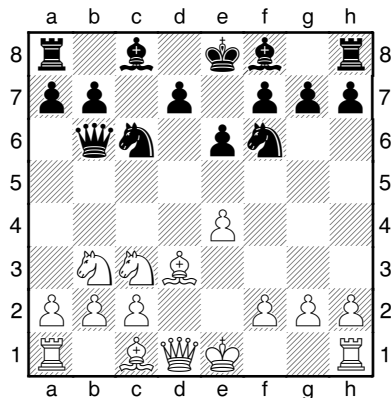
provisional, I still haven't made their list of masters or get invited to their Absolute. Not that I would accept the invitation anyway. Enough! Please forgive such obnoxious partisan zeal, such jingoistic pride, such curmudgeonly cantankerousness, such APCT ardor. Here's the game.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♙b6!?

I let his second move go by without a comment even though my feelings about ...♘c6 in the Sicilian are well known. Of course, there are perfectly reasonable systems after ...♘c6, and I was actually looking forward to playing the Velimirovic Attack against the Sozin. But Black's fourth move is quite a shock. I suppose that it's an acceptable weapon for OTB play, but it just seems to me to be a poor choice in so important an event and against a booked-up opponent. True enough, white must retreat the ♘d4, but black will almost certainly have to waste time later with ...♙b6-c7. In fact, I think that white's best strategy is not to try to gain a tempo early or late with ♗e3. After all, black's natural counter involves ...a6 and ...b5. So, if I just ignore the queen and pursue straight-forward development, he'll have to move the queen anyway. Now I suppose that he can make an argument about my misplaced ♘b3. We'll have to keep an eye on that too, eh?

5.♘b3 ♘f6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♗d3

Most of you are tired of hearing me write about move-pairs by now, so I will keep down the excessive noise. Suffice it to say you'll see them all through here if you give it a look.



For this game, the real issue has more to do with simple development. White's strategy is now already completely clear. White's attack will be on the kingside, so I'd like to be able to develop the rooks on e1 and f1. I'll almost certainly play f4 with the idea of e5 or f5. The queen can swing to the kingside with ♙e1-g3 (or h4) or with ♙f3-g3 (or h3). As is so often the case, the key is white's dark-squared bishop. If I place it on ♗e3 in order to kick the queen off the a7-g1 diagonal, perhaps as a preparatory move to castling kingside, I wind up blocking the natural ♖a1-e1-e3-g3 plan. Given the optimal placement of the rooks, I will castle

kingside. Of course, with the black queen on b6, I'll first need to tuck my king into the corner. But that's a prudent idea anyway.

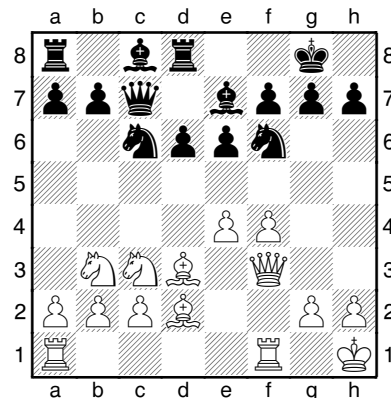
7...♘b4!? 8.♗d2 ♗e7?!

A very strange sequence. The bishop is misplaced on b4 in most of these lines. I personally prefer it on e7. It's clear, however, that black really wanted me to waste time playing ♗d2 before placing the bishop on e7 where it belongs. All this would be fine were it not for the fact that my queen bishop is ideally placed on d2. In other words, he wasted a tempo to force me to make the best move. As I so often do, I looked for all games with this pawn structure and found an amazing Velimirovic game in which he completed a very similar development with ♗d2, giving the move two exclamation points. I'm not sure that the move deserves such praise, but I felt pretty comfortable with the idea that I was being forced to insert a move about which Velimirovic thought so highly. In a sense, of course, black is laying down a gauntlet. Is my bishop really badly placed on d2? Won't I have to waste time moving it e3? After this sequence, the evaluation of the position depends very much upon how well three pieces perform: the white ♘b3 and ♗d2, and the black ♙b6.

9.0-0 d6 10.♙h1 0-0 11.f4 ♗d8?!

I understand all of these moves except for black's 11th. I'm preparing my kingside action as outlined above. There's simply no reason to change my plans here. But what does ...♗d8 do? Down so much time on the queenside, he can't seriously contemplate the ...d5 break. And after my next move, the weakness of the f7-square comes rather sharply into focus. Here's what I wrote in my notebook: "Let's add his ♗d8 to the list of critical pieces to watch. If my chess senses are correct, it won't get a chance to move again."

12.♙f3 ♙c7



What a whooha! One of those pieces we were keeping our eyes on has admitted defeat. He retreats his queen without my having to waste time going after it.

13.♖a6 14.a3 ♗d7?

Another sequence in which one move makes no sense. a3 and a6 are natural preparatory moves. Black would like to be able to play ...b5. White wants to prevent counterplay with ...♗b4 and ...b5-b4. But how to explain ...♗d7? He plays ...♖d8 and then blocks the rook's support of ...d5? Does he really expect to have time to develop effectively with ...♗d7-c6? My Uncle Joe explained how certain positions have a definite odor to them. After so many inaccuracies by black, white must be winning. I'm pretty well developed... so it must be clobbering time.

15.♜h3 e5 16.f5 ♗d4

I thought that his last, best defensive chance was 15...g6. The ...e5 f5 move pair seals in white's light squared bishop, but it also seals half of black's forces from defending the kingside. His 16th move is an act of desperation.

17.♗xh4 exd4

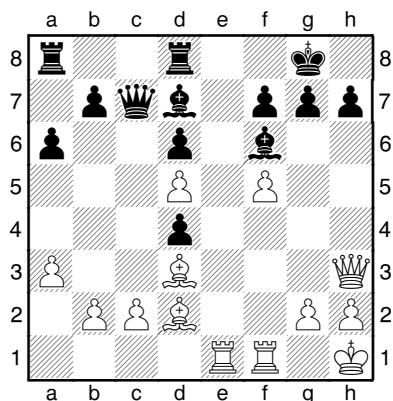
Well, we were keeping an eye on my ♗b3. It sure re-entered the game with a bang. As a result of this capture, black must defend an impossible middlegame knowing that, if he's lucky somehow to escape to survive the upcoming storm, he'll lose the endgame.

18.♗d5!

If Velimirovic can give ♗d2 a couple of exclamation points, this move deserves at least one. But don't feel bad if you favor ♗e2. Of course it wins, only a little bit more slowly.

JRE: Perhaps the true joke is on me. Modern neural nets prefer ♗e2!

18...♗xh4 19.exd5 ♗f6



I thought that he might try ...♗f8, but the only realistic hope is to freeze white's f-pawn. If you're playing along, stop right here. It's white to move and win. And it's kinda pretty.

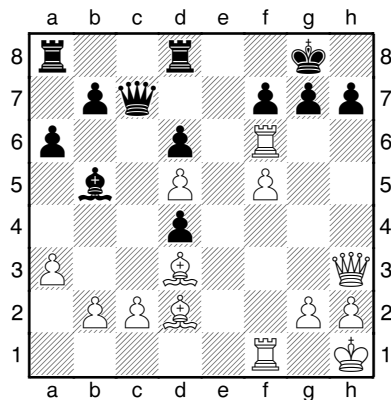
20.♖e6

Rook "sac" number 1. **I thought that Michael might show off his tactical ability by resigning here.** This maneuver is pretty but quite thematic. Obviously, the rook is immune because white's attack after ...fxe6 is simply crushing starting with the threat of ♖xf6.

20...♗b5

20...fxe6 21.fxe6 with the obvious ♜h7+ threat 21...h6 22.♗xh6 and that ♗d2 does its thing.

21.♖xf6



Rook "sac" number 2. Obviously, he would like to trade off my light-squared bishop in order to defend his h7-square. The second rook sac is much harder to ignore, because the rook just captured a piece. But he really can't take it.

21...♗xh4

21...gxf6 22.♗h6 The bishop again! 22...♜h8 Otherwise ♜g3-g7. 23.♜h4 ♜e7 24.♖e1+-

22.♜xh4

Rook "sac" number 3.

22...♜e7

There's nothing better. 22...♖dc8 23.♜xd4!; 22...gxf6 23.♜g3+ ♜h8 24.♜h4 ♜e7 25.♖e1

23.♖h6

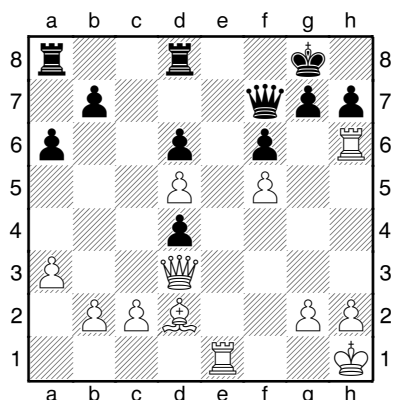
Rook "sac" number 4. And speaking of rooks, whatever did that ...Rd8 accomplish?

23...f6

Right around here, I started hoping that he would play on and on. 24 ♖h4 wins of course, as do all rook retreats, but ♖e1 is a brutally accurate move. Apart from the fact that it leaves the ♖h6 *en prise* for one more move, I gain control over the e-file (with the devastating threat of ♖e6!).

I expected him to permit a prettier finish with 23...g×h6 24.f6 ♖f8 (24...♖e5 25.♗f5+–) 25.♗f3 with the unstoppable idea of ♗g3–g7.

24.♗e1 ♖f7



Of course, he can go for 24...♖×e1+ 25.♗×e1 g×h6 26.♖×d4, but this winds up being a trade of ♖+♗ for two rooks in a position in which I am already up a bishop and with all the play. And he'll have a slew of weak pawns.

25.♗h4

with Rook to e6 next.

His resignation here was a bitter disappointment. I had hoped for my first endgame against a player from the USCF.

1–0

As you might imagine, the story does not end there.

I had no idea that Helen Warren had published the fun version when, about a week after the issue came out, I sat down across the board from Michael Colucci at a match between my Pennington team and his Ewing team.

As we reached out to shake hands at the beginning of the game, Michael asked: "What's a whooha?"

Needless to say, I was way too embarrassed to focus up-on the game and Michael won handily.

Permit me finally to apologize to Michael publicly and in print, something I should have done years ago. My issue at the time was not in any way with him, but rather with the administration of US Chess's correspondence chess. It is worth mentioning, that US Chess soon thereafter improved that administration, they ended their practice of calling the Golden Knights the US Open Championship, and they brought on Alex Dunne, whose columns were an utter delight and the first place to which I went in every issue of *Chess Life*. Miss you Alex!

With the **World Championship** set to be played in a few days here is a reminder of past World Champions: 1.Wilhelm Steinitz: 1886-1894 2.Emanuel Lasker 1894-1921 3.José Raúl Capablanca 1921-1927 4.Alexander Alekhine 1927-1935, 1937-1946 5.Max Euwe 1935-1937 6.Mikhail Botvinnik 1948-1957, 1958-1960, 1961-1963 7.Vasily Smyslov 1957-1958 8.Mikhail Tal 1960-1961 9.Tigran Petrosian 1963-1969 10.Boris Spassky 1969-1972 11.Robert Fischer 1972-1975 12.Anatoly Karpov 1975-1985 13.Garry Kasparov 1985-2000 14.Vladimir Kramnik 2000-2007 15.Viswanathan Anand 2007-2013 16.Magnus Carlsen 2013-2023 17.Ding Liren 2023-Present

Continued From Page 24

the fact that modern chess programs are far superior to Kaissa in terms of their capabilities and algorithms, its contribution to the progress in this field remains invaluable. Nowadays the practical results of research from those years are all around us.

As Vladimir Arlazarov notes, chess programs were one of the first areas where complex algorithms and methods of artificial intelligence were tested. Later they found application in non-game-related spheres. Today these technologies are all around us in everyday life and travel, work and entertainment, in countless different places and situations. These are modern OCR-systems for recognizing and authenticating personal and business documents, scanning QRs, deciphering bank forms and tax forms.

Vladimir Lvovich Arlazarov is currently the Chief research officer at [Smart Engines](#), a leading IT company. He continues to build intelligent systems using the legacy of Kaissa. Today chess has certainly ceased to interest scientists and can hardly tell something new about human thinking. But the story of the victory at the first ever World Chess Championship among computer programs, which shook the world, still reminds us about endless horizons of science and future discoveries that simplify our lives today.