

A Pleasant Diversion

Chess has been a constant companion for a professor and pianist.

BY JOSHUA ANDERSON

“FUN!”

That’s how Neil McKelvie sums up his 80-plus years of playing chess.

Born in England in 1930, McKelvie learned the game from his father when he was four years old. In 1940, shortly after the outbreak

of World War II, he escaped “The Blitz” by moving with his mother from London to New Jersey. He learned more about the game from a teacher at his private school there. After the war, McKelvie returned to England to continue his studies at Cambridge, earning his B.A. and M.A. It was during those years that McKelvie had the rare honor of

taking first board for Cambridge in its annual match against Oxford.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, DRAGON VARIATION (B73)

D.A. Yanofsky (Oxford)
Neil McKelvie (Cambridge)
Oxford-Cambridge Match (board 1),
London, 03.28.1953

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Be2 g6 7. 0-0 Bg7 8. Be3 0-0 9. h3 a6 10. Qd2 Bd7 11. f4 b5 12. Bf3 Rc8 13. Nb3 Rb8 14. Nd5 a5 15. c3 Ne8 16. Bf2 e6 17. Ne3 a4 18. Nd4 Qa5 19. Nec2 Nxd4 20. Bxd4 Bxd4+ 21. Qxd4 Rc8 22. Rad1 Bc6 23. f5 Rd8 24. Nb4 Bb7 25. e5 Bxf3 26. Rxf3 Qc7 27. f6 Qb7 28. Rfd3 d5 29. Qe3 Kh8 30. Rd4 Qb6 31. Kh1 Rg8 32. Qg5, Black resigned.

McKelvie returned to the United States in 1954 to earn his doctorate in chemistry from Columbia University. He did post-doctoral work in analytical chemistry at Yale, got married, settled in New York City, and became a member of the Manhattan Chess Club.

In those early years in New York, McKelvie had occasion to play John Collins, a regular at the rival Marshall Club, who was making a rare appearance in an event at the Manhattan club. Collins, as always, was there with his sister Ethel, and the two were known to all, since Collins had worked with the likes of the Byrne brothers, William Lombardy, and, of course, Bobby Fischer.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B88)

Neil McKelvie
Jack Collins
Manhattan Club Ch, late 50s / early 60s
Annotations by Neil McKelvie

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 d6 5. Bc4 a6 6. Bb3 Nf6 7. Nc3 Qc7 8. f4 Nc6 9. Be3 Be7 10. Qf3 0-0



Neil McKelvie,
1967

PHOTO: US CHESS ARCHIVES

Right: The competitors at the British Universities Individual Championships, 1951. McKelvie is sixth from the left, second row.

An invitation to attack!

11. Rg1

Jack looked stunned; after some thought, he finally played...

11. ... Bd7 12. g4 Nxd4 13. Bxd4

Thanks for putting my bishop in such a nice place!

13. ... Bc6 14. g5 Nd7 15. Qh3 Nc5 16. f5 Nxb3 17. axb3 exf5



18. Qh6!

Suddenly Jack underwent a fit of violent shaking. I was scared — had I literally played a killing move? — but I saw that Ethel was calm; she'd seen this before.

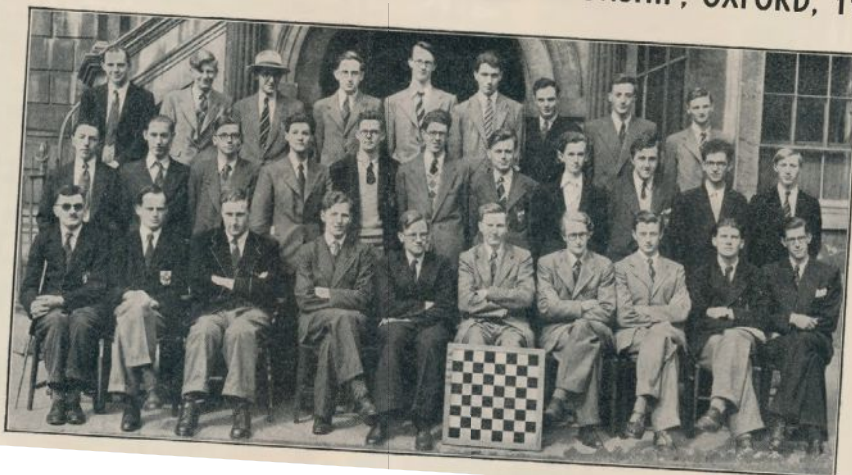
18. ... f6 19. gxf6 Bxf6 20. Bxf6 Rf7 21. 0-0-0 b5 22. Rg3 Ra7 23. Bd4 Rb7 24. Rdg1 b4 25. Rh3 bxc3 26. Qxh7+ Kf8 27. Rxc7, Black resigned.

There's a faster win with 27. Qxg7+ Rxc7 28. Rh8+ Rg8 29. Rxc7+ Kf7 30. Rg7+ Ke6 31. Rh6 mate, but my move did the trick as well.

McKelvie found that he greatly enjoyed playing at the Manhattan. The club was full of businessmen who took the game seriously, but who also had professional lives. For them, chess was nothing more than a pleasant distraction. McKelvie played there throughout the 1960s, drawing the attention of *Chess Review* readers with his win over GM Pal Benko.

By the 1970s, McKelvie was in his 40s and still doing quite well at his "fun distraction." In 1971, two prominent blitz tournaments took place: one was at the Manhattan to celebrate Fischer's run to the world championship, and the other was at the Marshall. In the Manhattan event, Fischer

BRITISH UNIVERSITIES INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONSHIP, OXFORD, 1951



annihilated the best players in New York, scoring 21½/22 (only Walter Shipman drew him), and Andy Soltis edged out Robert Byrne for second place.

The Marshall event lacked Fischer but included Samuel Reshevsky. The tournament began with two groups: McKelvie won one and Robert Byrne won the other. In the final round-robin, both men, along with Reshevsky, Arthur Bisguier, and Donald Byrne, were among the remaining participants. After losing to Bisguier and both Byrne brothers in the first three rounds, McKelvie thought his luck had run out. In the fourth, he met Reshevsky.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, KAN VARIATION (B42)

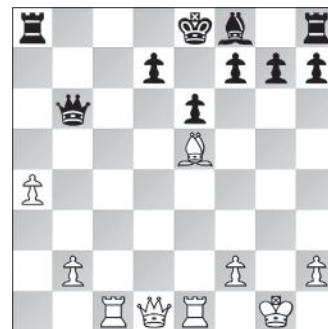
Neil McKelvie
GM Samuel Reshevsky
Marshall CC (blitz), 05.24.1971
Annotations by Neil McKelvie

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Bd3 Qc7 6. 0-0 b5 7. Re1 Nc6 8. Nxc6 Qxc6 9. Nc3 Bb7 10. a4 b4 11. Nd5 Nf6 12. Bd2 Nxd5 13. exd5 Qc7

Up to this point we were following a game recently published in *Chess Life* where Tal (after 13. ... Qc5) played 14. Be4 and won. The annotator suggested 14. c4, sacrificing a pawn, so I tried it! Reshevsky had no idea that I was unlikely to have a prepared variation; from here, I had to work everything out.

[Editor's note: I'm having trouble finding the citation in *Chess Life*, but the game appears to be 13. ... Qc5 14. Be4 f5 15. Bf3 Bxd5 16. Bxb4 Bxf3 17. Qxf3 Qc8 18. Bc3 Kf7 19. Rad1 Be7 20. g4 Rf8 21. gxf5 Kg8 22. Qg2 Bf6 23. Bxf6 Rxf6 24. Rxd7 Qxd7 25. Qxa8+ Rf8 26. Qxa6 and Black resigned in Tal - Gipslis, Riga 1958.]

14. c4 bxc3 e.p. 15. Bxc3 Bxd5 16. Bxa6 Bxg2 17. Bb5 Bc6 18. Be5 Qb7 19. Bxc6 Qxc6 20. Rc1 Qb6



Now I thought for a whole minute — an eternity in rapid play! — and tossed out:

21. Bc7

Sacrificing a second pawn. This hit Reshevsky like an electric shock! Through this move he had played almost instantly, obviously following analysis, whereas I had to think. He was sure that my move was some deep home preparation!

21. ... Qb7

What I had seen was that if 21. ... Qxb2 then 22. Qf3 Rc8 followed by 23. Bf4. If he plays 23. ... Rxc1 24. Rxc1 I thought I was winning, and if instead 23. ... Rd8 24. Bc7 and either I win the Exchange for my two pawns, or I get a draw by repetition, which I'd be quite happy with against Reshevsky! But he was sure my move was prepared analysis, so after shaking his head, he declined the offered pawn.

[Editor's note: 23. Bf4 is a blunder, as the position is balanced after 23. ... Rxc1 24. Rxc1 Be7. Instead, White would have achieved his goals with the tricky 23. Rc4!

with the idea 24. Be5! winning nearly on the spot.]

22. a5

My reply was instant. I expected that he would try ... Bf8-e7 and then castle. I'd still be a pawn down, but the connected passers might balance things out. Instead, he played...

22. ... Bb4 23. Qb3

I expected 23. ... Ra7 24. Re2, but instead Sammy blitzed out...

23. ... Ke7? 24. Bb6!

This wins the bishop, and after Black grabbed the rook, I won more material.

24. ... Bxe1 25. Bc5+...

This takes the queen, and soon the game, as I delivered mate in a few more moves!

Ultimately Bisguier, a friend of McKelvie's and the 1954 U. S. Champion, won the event.

The 1970s proved to be a great decade for the Manhattan club and McKelvie, who won the club championship twice, in 1975 and 1979 (with Jorge Massana).

He also had the occasion to witness an unusual event. Here we quote McKelvie:

"He [Bobby Fischer] had been in California doing whatever for some time, and suddenly walked into the Manhattan Chess Club. It was nearly empty, and I

was about to go home, but we sat down together in a side room. I said that he could have been successful in many other occupations. He sprang to his feet with his back to me and gave a speech to an invisible audience about how he could have been great at so many things! I realized that he was quite deranged, but eventually he sat down and saw me.

I said that he certainly had superb intellect, but now in his early 30s it was a bit late to put in years of training, which for many started in childhood, like him in chess. I suggested computer programming, and I was sure Apple Computer for one would be interested in him.

I suggested a computer for rapid chess that would have a 10 second pause before a loss on time. I then left to go home. Years later, Fischer patented such a clock!"

As the Fischer boom died out, McKelvie continued to play at the Manhattan, though not with as much success as before. Still, the game provided much fun, and was a pleasant diversion for many years.

In the 1990s, McKelvie's first wife became sick, and he would eventually leave the club to spend more time with her before her passing. Today he lives comfortably in Mt. Vernon, New York. While he has largely retired from chess, he still looks at various puzzles and stories.

He also continues with his other great passion — the piano. McKelvie is an accomplished amateur pianist, having taken lessons with a number of leading teachers in his nearly 70 years of playing, and he has earned multiple special prizes in competitions.

McKelvie enjoys entertaining others with his wit and stories, and would welcome visits from any chess players who find themselves in his neck of the woods. Contact Joshua Anderson at joshuamiltonanderson@gmail.com if you would like to connect with McKelvie. For more, check out McKelvie's self-penned "My Best Move" in our March 2020 issue.

SELECTED GAMES

How to describe Neil McKelvie's playing style? Let's quote two experts:

- "Chemist McKelvie is naturally a master of analysis and accordingly prefers carefully concocted hot variations." (IM Hans Kmoch, *Chess Review*, August 1967)
- "McKelvie's chess style is best described as optimistically enterprising. His sharp, aggressive play leaves little room for compromise." (GM William Lombardy, *Chess Life & Review*, December 1975)

After reviewing nearly 80 of McKelvie's games, spanning almost 40 years of play, my only disagreement with these two masters is that they might have understated the case.

While capable of subtle positional struggle, McKelvie clearly relished the to-and-fro of tactical battle. Here are some of his most interesting games; for more, visit the *Chess Life Online* companion piece.

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE, FISCHER VARIATION (E43)

Neil McKelvie
Bengt Alenius
World Student Team, Brussels,
03.18.1953

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 b6 7. Bd3 Bb7 8. f3 0-0 9. e4 d6 10. Bg5 Nc6 11. Ne2 e5 12. d5 Na5 13. Ng3 h6 14. Be3 Kh7 15. 0-0 Ba6 16. Qe2 Qd7 17. Nf5 Ng8 18. a4 g6 19. Nh4 Qe7 20. g3 Nf6 21. f4 Nxe4? 22. Bxe4 f5



Below: Celebrating the 45th anniversary of AVRO at the Manhattan Chess Club, L to R: Alburk, Bisguier, Reshevsky, Botvinnik, McKelvie, Grayson (seated), and Pandolfini.



23. Nxg6! Kxg6 24. Qg4+ Kh7 25. Bxf5+ Kh8 26. fxe5 Nxc4 27. Bxh6 Rxf5 28. Rxf5 Nxe5 29. Qh5 Bd3 30. Bg5+ Qh7 31. Bf6+ Kg8 32. Rg5+, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B96)

Neil McKelvie
Robert Steinmeyer
Manhattan CC Ch, 1964

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bg5 e6 7. f4 b5 8. e5 dxe5 9. fxe5 Qc7 10. Nf3 Nfd7 11. Ne4 Bb7 12. Bd3 Nxe5 13. Nxe5 Qxe5 14. 0-0 Nd7 15. Qh5 Nf6?



16. Rxf6! 0-0-0

Worse is 16. ... gxf6? 17. Nxf6+ Kd8 18. Ng4+.

17. Rxf7 Bc5+ 18. Kh1 Bxe4 19. Bxe4 Be3 20. Qf3! Bxg5 21. Bf5 Rd5 22. Be4 Rd6 23. Bb7+ Kd8 24. Rf1 Bf6 25. Bc6 Qf5 26. Rd1! Qe5 27. Rxd6+ Qxd6 28. Rd7+ Qxd7 29. Bxd7 Kxd7 30. Qb7+ Kd6 31. Qxa6+ Kc5 32. Qa7+ Kc6 33. b4 Rd8 34. Qc5+ Kb7 35. Qxb5+ Kc7 36. Qe2 Rd4 37. c4 e5 38. g3 e4 39. h4 Kd6 40. a4 Ke5 41. a5 Rd3 42. a6, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, SCHEVENINGEN VARIATION (B82)

Neil McKelvie
GM Pal Benko
Manhattan CC Ch, 1966

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. f4 a6 7. Be3 b5 8. e5 dxe5 9. fxe5 Nd5 10. Nxd5 Qxd5 11. Be2 Qxe5 12. Qd2 Bb7 13. Bf4 Qd5 14. 0-0-0 Qd7? 15. Qc3 Bd5

(see diagram top of next column)

16. Nf5!

Also winning was 16. Nxe6 fxe6 17. Bh5+ Kd8 (17. ... g6 18. Qxh8 gxh5 19. Bh6) 18. Rxd5 exd5 19. Qa5+ Kc8 20. Bg4!.



Above: GM Lev Alburt lectures at the Manhattan Chess Club, year unknown. McKelvie is standing, second from left.



16. ... Nc6 17. Rxd5 exd5 18. Bg4 Kd8 19. Nd4 Nb4 20. Kb1 Qb7 21. a3 h5 22. Bh3 a5 23. axb4 Ra6 24. Nxb5 axb4 25. Bc7+ Ke8 26. Re1+ Re6 27. Bxe6 fxe6 28. Qh3 Rh6 29. Rxe6+ Kf7 30. Rxh6 gxh6 31. Qf5+ Kg8 32. Qe6+ Kh7 33. Qf7+ Bg7 34. Nd4 Qa7 35. Nf5 Qg1+ 36. Ka2 b3+ 37. Kxb3, Black resigned.

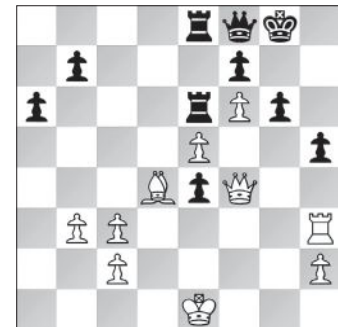
SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B88)

Neil McKelvie
Steven Grant
Metropolitan Masters, 1967

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Be3 Nc6 7. Bc4 Be7 8. f4 0-0 9. Bb3 Na5 10. Qf3 Nxb3 11. axb3 a6 12. g4 e5 13. Nf5 Bxf5 14. gxf5 d5 15. fxe5 Nxe4 16. Rg1 Bb4 17. f6 g6 18. Qf4 Re8 19. Ra4 Bxc3+ 20. bxc3 Re6 21. Rxe4 dxe4 22. Rg3 Qf8 23. Rh3 Rae8 24. Bd4 h5?

(see diagram top of next column)

25. Rxh5! gxh5 26. Bc5! R6e7 27. Bxe7 Rxe7 28. Qg5+ Kh7 29. Qxh5+ Kg8 30. Qg5+ Kh7 31. fxe7 Qe8 32. Qf6 Kg8 33. Qd6, Black resigned.



SICILIAN DEFENSE, SOZIN VARIATION (B88)

Neil McKelvie
Walter Shipman
Metropolitan Masters, 1967

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. Be3 Be7 7. f4 Nc6 8. Bc4 0-0 9. Bb3 Bd7 10. Qf3 Nxd4 11. Bxd4 Bc6 12. g4 Qa5 13. 0-0-0 e5 14. fxe5 dxe5 15. Qf5!? Bd7 16. Qxe5 Qxe5 17. Bxe5 Bxg4 18. Rd3 Be6 19. Nd5 Bxd5 20. exd5 Ne4 21. Rg1 Bg5+ 22. Kb1 f6 23. Bc7 Nd2+



24. Rxd2 Bxd2 25. d6+ Kh8 26. Bd5 Bf4 27. Bxb7 Rad8 28. Rd1 Rd7 29. c4 Bxd6 30. Bxd6 Rfd8 31. c5 Rxb7 32. c6 Rf7 33. b4 f5 34. Rd2 a6? 35. a4 h6 36. b5 axb5 37. axb5 f4 38. b6 Rf5 39. c7 Re8 40. b7 Rb5+ 41. Rb2 Re1+ 42. Ka2, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, TAIMANOV VARIATION (B48)

Neil McKelvie
IM Arnold Denker
Manhattan CC Ch, 1968

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Nc3 Qc7 6. Bd3 Nc6 7. Be3 Nf6 8. Qe2 Bd6 9. g3!? Nxd4 10. Bxd4 e5 11. Be3 Bb4 12. 0-0 Bxc3 13. bxc3 0-0 14. Bg5 Qc6 15. f4 exf4 16. e5 f3!? 17. Rxf3 Ng4 18. Be7 Re8 19. Bd6 b5?



20. Qe4! Qxe4 21. Bxe4 Ra7 22. Bd5 Nh6 23. Raf1 Re6 24. Bxe6 dxe6 25. c4 bxc4 26. Rc3 Bd7 27. Rb1 f5 28. Bb8 Ra8 29. Rxc4 Nf7 30. Rb7 Nd8 31. Rxd7 Rxb8 32. Rcc7, Black resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ACCELERATED DRAGON (B39)

Mitch Saltzberg
Neil McKelvie
69th US Open (9), Aspen, 08.20.1968

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. Nf3 cxd4 4. Nxd4 g6 5. Nc3 Bg7 6. e4 Nc6 7. Be3 Ng4 8. Nxc6 Nxe3 9. Nxd8 Nxd1 10. Nxd1 Kxd8 11. Bd3 d6 12. Rb1 e6 13. 0-0 Ke7 14. Re1 Be5 15. Ne3 h5 16. h4 f6 17. g3 g5 18. Ng2 Bd7 19. Kf1 Bc6 20. b4 a6 21. Rec1 Rhg8 22. Re1 Rgc8 23. Rec1 b5 24. c5 dxc5 25. Rxc5 Bd4 26. Rcc1 Bb7 27. Ke2 f5 28. hxg5 fxe4 29. Bc2 Rg8 30. Bb3 Kd6 31. Nf4 Bd5 32. Rd1 Ke5

(see diagram top of next column)

The king is a fighting piece!

33. g6 Rac8 34. Rd2 h4 35. Rbd1 Bxb3



36. axb3 hxg3 37. fxg3 Rcd8 38. g7 Rxc7 39. Rxd4 Rxd4 40. Rxd4 Rxc7 41. Nxe6 Rc3 42. Kd2 Rg3 43. Ke2 Rg1 44. Kd2 Rb1 45. Ke3 Re1+ 46. Kd2 Rb1 47. Kc3 Rc1+ 48. Kd2 Rh1 49. Ke3 Rh3+ 50. Kd2 Rg3 51. Ke2 Rg2+ 52. Ke3 Rg4 53. Rd8 Rg3+ 54. Ke2?? Here 54. Kd2 draws, i.e., 54. ... Kxe6 55. Re8+ Kd5 56. Rd8+ Kc6 57. Rd4 Rxb3 58. Rxe4.

54. ... Kxe6 55. Ra8
We see the flaw in White's 54th move with 55. Re8+ Kd5 56. Rd8+ Ke5 57. Re8+ Kd4 58. Rd8+ and now 58. ... Kc3!.

55. ... Rxb3 56. Rxa6+ Kd5 57. Ra8 Rxb4 58. Rd8+ Kc4 59. Ke3 Kc3 60. Rd1 Rc4 61. Rb1 b4, White resigned.

ENGLISH OPENING (A25)

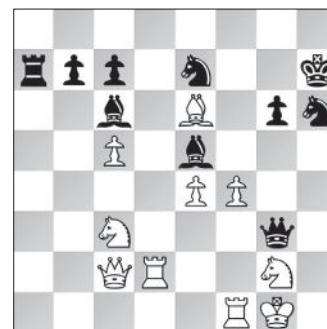
Eugene Shapiro
Neil McKelvie
Manhattan CC Ch, 1975

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. e3 Nge7 6. Nge2 Nf5 7. Rb1 a5 8. a3 h5 9. Qa4 Ra6 10. d3 d6 11. Bd2 Bd7 12. Qc2 h4 13. b4 axb4 14. axb4 Ra7 15. c5 Nce7 16. 0-0 dxc5 17. bxc5 Bc6 18. e4 hxg3 19. hxg3 Nh6 20. f3 Qd7 21. Be3 f5 22. Rbd1 Qe6 23. Rd2 0-0 24. Bh3 Qf6 25. d4



25. ... f4!?
Annotating this game for *Chess Life* (December 1975), Lombardy here noted that "McKelvie has obviously made a thorough study of Tal's style!" — and we can't disagree.

26. dxe5 Qg5 27. Be6+ Kh7 28. Bxf4 Rxf4 29. Nxf4 Qxg3+ 30. Ng2 Bxe5 31. f4



31. ... Nef5 32. fxe5 Ng4 33. Re1? Qh2+ 34. Kf1 Qh1+
Of course 34. ... Ng3 mate is also good.

35. Ke2 Qxg2+ 36. Kd1 Ra1+ 37. Nb1 Nge3+ 38. Kc1 Nxc2 39. Rxc2 Nxe1 40. Rh2+ Nh6 41. Kb2 Ra4 42. Nc3 Nd3+, White resigned.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, RICHTER-RAUZER VARIATION (B66)

Neil McKelvie
IM Maxim Dlugy
Manhattan CC Ch, 05.12.1984

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Bg5 e6 7. Qd2 a6 8. Be2 Bd7 9. a4 Be7 10. 0-0 0-0 11. Nb3 Qc7 12. Rad1 Ne5 13. f4 Ng6 14. e5 Qb6+ 15. Kh1 Ne8 16. a5 Qb4 17. Bxe7 Nxe7 18. f5 Qh4 19. fxe6 Bxe6 20. Rf4 Qh6 21. exd6 Nf5 22. d7 Nf6 23. Nc5 Rad8 24. Bd3 Qh5 25. Qe1 Ng4 26. h3 Nfe3



27. Nxe6 fxe6 28. Rxc4 Nxc4 29. Qxe6+ Kh8 30. Qxc4 Qxc4 31. hxg4 Rxd7 32. Ne4 Rd5 33. b4 Rf4 34. Re1 Rxc4 35. Nc5 Rd8 36. Re4, Black resigned. ♠

For more of McKelvie's games, please visit the accompanying CLO article at new.uschess.org/news/games-neil-mckelvie.