

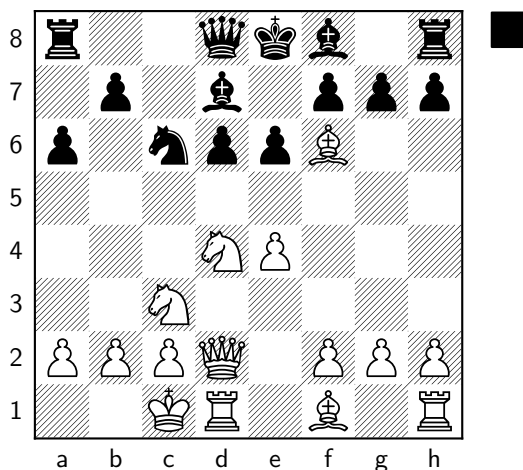
1 Ben Dean-Kawamura - Bryan Smith Rochester 2016

Going into this game, I couldn't help but think back to my final game of the 2015 Marchand. That tournament was probably my best chess performance and it ended with my first victory against a GM. The story of that game was:

- 1) I played questionable, but playable, opening.
- 2) Followed it with some nice active play.
- 3) I was able to capitalize on a mistake by my opponent and get a winning position.
- 4) Immediately after, I threw away most/all of my advantage trying to reach a "safe" position.
- 5) However, my opponent needed a win, and decided to play extremely risky rather than accept a draw.
- 6) I was able to make my way out of it and walked away with the win.

Would lightning strike twice this Marchand? As Barry Davis puts it, probably but the question was: who would be struck?

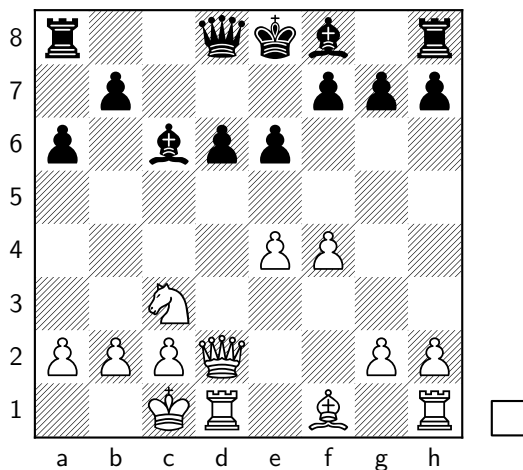
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♙g5 e6 7 ♚d2 a6 8 O-O-O ♙d7 9 ♙xf6?!



Step one complete! This is definitely a questionable choice. I wasn't very comfortable playing this line against GM Smith, who I've always thought of as a Sicilian aficionado. I simply forgot to play f4 first before capturing. Black can capture with the g-pawn and get a normal position, but my opponent goes for more. For an example of how to play this position correctly, check out the

fantastic Karyaken-Caruana game in the final round of the candidates tournament.

9... ♖xf6 10 ♗xc6 ♙xc6 11 f4 ♗d8

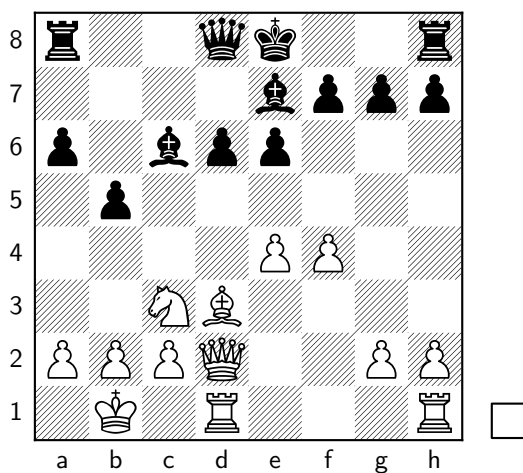


Black gets out of the way of any kingside pawn advances.

12 ♗b1

I thought a lot about playing this like a Sozin with some combination of Bc4, f5, Qe1, etc. However, I couldn't find a clear way to get that to work and I didn't like giving him b5 with tempo. So instead, I decide to play solidly.

12... ♙e7 13 ♙d3 b5



After O-O, I thought a pawn storm on the king side could be threatening,

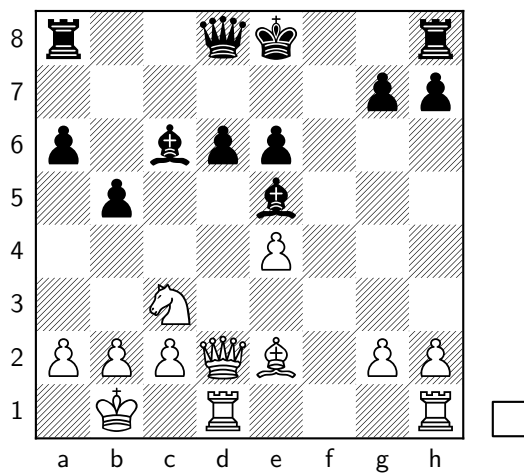
and apparently GM Smith did too. However, after some analysis, this seems like Black's best option. White's pawns reach black's side faster, but the missing dark squared bishop really hurts the attack. For example:

(13... O-O 14 g4 b5 15 h4 ♖b6 16 h5 b4 17 ♘e2 a5 18 g5 d5 19 e5 ♙c5 20 ♜h3 a4 =+)

14 f5 ♙f6

The start of a questionable plan. O-O was still possible and probably best.

15 fxe6 fxe6 16 ♙e2 ♙e5



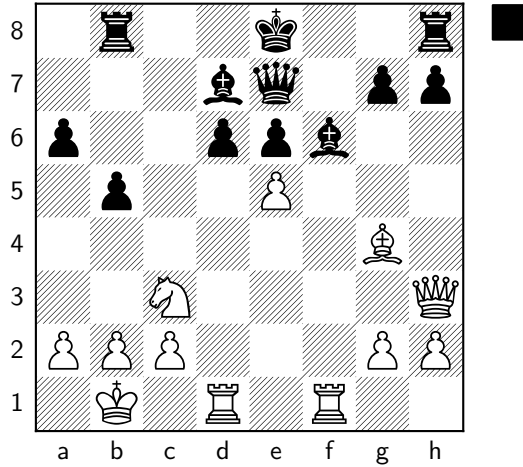
The logical follow-up to Bf6, but Black now has problems on the f-file. Stockfish recommends the tricky Rc8.

17 ♙g4 ♖e7 18 ♜hf1

Step 2: Active play. If black can consolidate he would have a great position, but in the meantime he has to deal with his king position and also some issues on the light squares.

18... ♜b8 the computer h5 to prevent my next sequence of moves. This would result in a pretty insane position. As in the game Black's king gets stuck in the center, but in this line he gets much more activity. (18... h5!? 19 ♙h3 g5!? 20 g3)

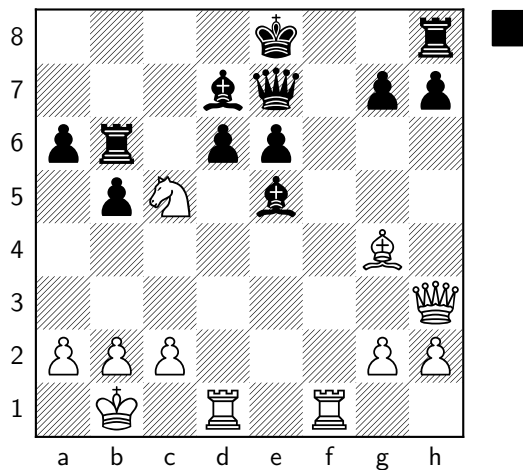
19 ♖e3 ♙f6 20 ♖h3 ♙d7 21 e5!?



After this sacrifice, White gets to keep black's king in the center and activate all his pieces. The computer prefers Ne2-f4, which seems to win the e6 pawn. Maybe that's objectively better, but I'm happy I was able to play actively and put pressure on my opponent. Step 3 complete.

21... ♖xe5 22 ♗e4 ♜b6? (22... g6 black needs to prevent the check on h5. After g6 the position seems completely unclear. Some sample variations: 23 ♜fe1 (23 ♜e3 ♜c8 24 ♗g5 ♜f8 25 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 26 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 27 ♗xe6 ♜f7 28 ♗d4 ♜c4) 23... ♜b6 24 ♗c5 dxc5 25 ♜xe5)

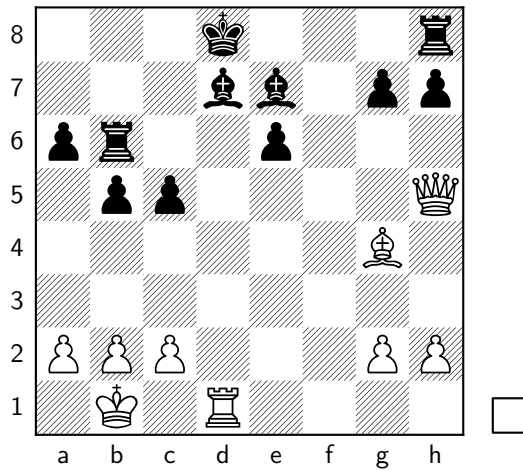
23 ♗c5!



This flashy move secures an advantage.

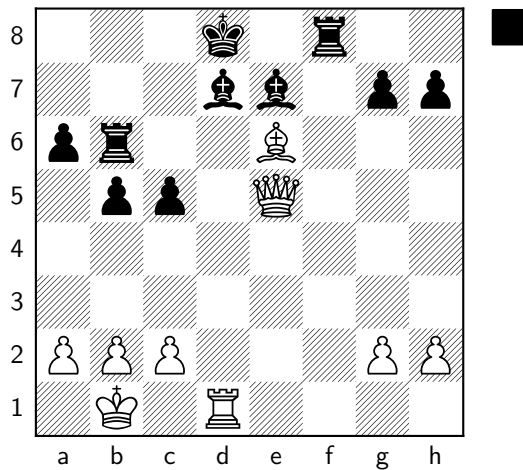
23... dxc5 24 ♜h5+ ♔d8 25 ♜f7 ♖d6 (25... g6 26 ♜xd7+ +-)

26 ♖xe7 ♗xe7



Some sharp play has netted me a winning advantage. Time to move to step 4: giving it back.

27 ♗e5 ♖f8 28 ♗xe6?



Completely missing my opponent's resource. There were many ways to win, a4 might be the cleanest.

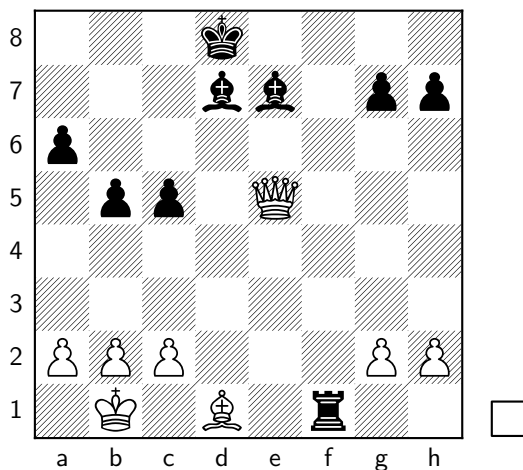
28... ♖d6 29 ♗g4?

Just like in my 2014 game, I try to play "safe." However, it was much better to keep the tension.

(29 ♖c1 ♖xd1+ 30 ♖xd1 ♗xe6 31 ♗xe6 white should win easily

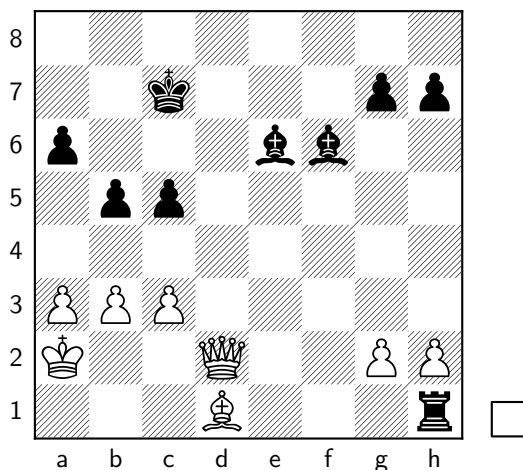
thanks to the queen on a wide open board. I didn't play this because of a fear of some back rank attack, maybe associated with Bg5+. But that was simply impossible.)

29... ♖xd1+ 30 ♙xd1 ♖f1



Passive play has allowed black to develop some real attacking chances. White is still winning and if you check with an engine it seems quite simple. But it felt much different for me in the game and I wasn't able to find a clean path to victory.

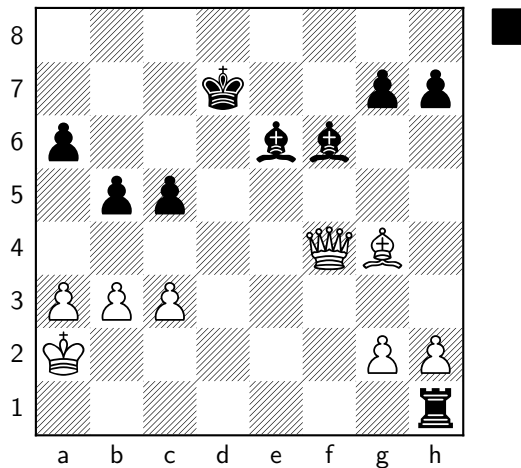
31 ♔e2 ♖h1 32 a3 ♙e8 33 ♔d2+ ♗c7 34 ♗a2 ♙f7+ 35 b3 ♙f6 36 c3 ♙e6



So far so good. White's king is a bit shaky, but I should have been able to develop play of my own.

37 ♖f4+? (37 ♜f3! followed by a couple accurate moves would have put the game away 37... ♜d7 (37... a5 38 ♖f2 ♝d6 39 g3) 38 ♖d5 ♞e1 39 ♖b7+ ♝d8 40 ♖b6+ ♝e8 41 ♖xc5)

37... ♝d7 38 ♜g4?



I felt the thread of the game slipping, so I more-or-less made a draw offer with this move. I wasn't happy that I gave up a win, but at least I would walk away with a good tournament result and some rating points. However, I could and should have forced an advantage with the cold-blooded:

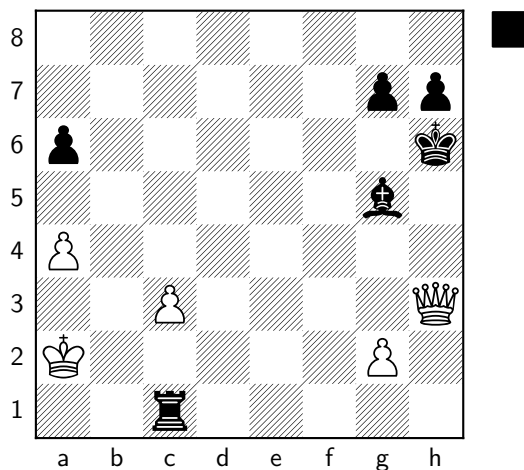
(38 ♖f3 ♝d6 39 ♜e2 ♜d5 40 ♖e3 ♜e5 41 ♜f3)

38... ♜xg4

And we move on to step 5. This is objectively losing, but my opponent decided he had to go for it because a draw netted no prize money.

(38... ♜xc3 and white needs to force a perpetual to avoid mate 39 ♖f7+ ♝d8 40 ♖f8+ ♝d7 41 ♖f7+ =)

39 ♖xg4+ ♝e7 40 ♖g3 ♝f7 41 ♖c7+ ♝g6 42 ♖xc5 ♞xh2 43 ♖c6 ♞h1 44 a4 bxa4 45 bxa4 ♞c1 46 ♖e4+ ♝h6 47 ♖e3+ ♜g5 48 ♖h3+



At this point, I think I had about 3 minutes to my opponent's 2 and stopped keeping score. Fortunately, my position was not only objectively winning, it was also much easier to play. Black has many more issues to worry about than white here. I played with decent technique, slowly getting ready to win a pawn race, then was able to sneak in a fork against his king and rook to secure the game.

All-in-all, I'm pretty happy with my play. It's always nice to be able to put pressure on a strong opponent and I feel good about my middlegame play in that regard. However, it seems I still haven't learned the lesson I should have taken away from the last Marchand: if you're lucky enough to have a winning position against a strong opponent, don't let up! I think I wanted to achieve an easy/obvious win without calculating, but that was absolutely the wrong mindset.

Still, it was a very nice end to a great tournament. Thanks to everyone who helped make it great: Ron, Ken, Dave, and everyone else involved.

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