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A black day in Kazan

There were two standout games in the first round of the FIDE Kazan Candidates, 2011; Kamsky's victory over Topalov and Gelfand's win against Mamedyarov, both with the Black pieces and both deciding their respective matches. The second result seemed a kind of natural justice as Mamedyarov received a wildcard due to his federation supporting the tournament financially, whereas Gelfand slogged his way through a 128-player qualifier.

The rook opens a path for Black's monarch to evacuate if required.

20.Kg1-h1

Better was 20.Be3-g5 h7-h6 21.Rh4xh6+ g7xh6 22.Qh3xh6+ Kh8-g8 23.f5xe6 Bd7xe6 24.Bg5xf6 Be7xf6 25.Rf1xf6 with a complex position.

20... Rc8xc3 21.b2xc3 Qe5xc3

The exchange sacrifice has reduced White's attacking potential, as now the dark-squared bishop can't move without the exchange of queens, which signals the end of White's attacking potential.

22.Rh4-d4

As mentioned 22.Be3-d4 Qc3xh3 23.Rh4xh3 a6-a5 is pleasant for Black, but the rook transfer is time consuming.

22... a6-a5 23.Rd4-d3 Qc3-c6 24.c2-c3 a5-a4 25.Bb3-c2 e6-e5

Black's pawns have edged forward and he dominates the centre.

26.Be3-g5 b5-b4 27.Qh3-h4

With his position creaking, Mamedyarov continues to try to target Gelfand's king.

27... b4xc3 28.Rd3-h3 Kh8-g8 29.Rf1-e1

After 29.Bg5xf6 Be7xf6 30.Qh4xh7+ Kg8-f8 the king will settle into a safe haven on e7.

29... e5-e4 30.g2-g4 Kg8-f8 31.Bg5-e3 Qc6-c4 32.g4-g5 Bd7xf5

Eliminating the menacing pawns is more important than retaining the knight.

33.g5xf6 Be7xf6

34.Qh4-h5 Bf5-g6

A very brave decision with both players low on time. It seemed more natural to play 34...Bf5xh3 35.Qh5xh3 (35.Qh5xh7 Bh3-c8 leaves Black well ahead on material) 35...Kf8-g8 when the pawns will overcome the piece.

35.Qh5-g4 Qc4xa2

A highly unusual balance of material. Black has six pawns for a rook. With four foot soldiers closing in on the back rank, and the others providing a safe spot for Black's king, the assessment is not in doubt.

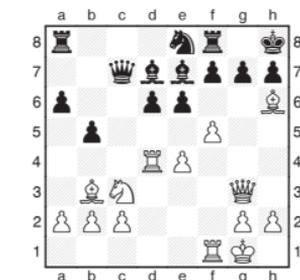


36.Bc2-b1

If 36.Qg4-d1 Qa2-c4 37.Be3-c1 a4-a3 38.Bc2-b3 Qc4-c5 39.Bb3xd5 Ra8-d8 Black wins.

36... Qa2-c4 37.Qg4-g2 a4-a3 38.Bb1-a2 Qc4-c6 39.Rh3-g3 Ra8-b8

Instead, the more direct 39...d5-d4 40.Be3-c1 Ra8-a6 was simpler. Here, White lost on time, although the position should be lost anyway. The best chance is 40.Be3-c1. I think Gelfand would have continued 40...Qc6-c5 (My computer suggests that 40...Rb8-b2 41.Bc1xb2 a3xb2 42.Ba2-b1 further confusing the material balance is very strong, but the bishop is doing a good job of holding up the pawns on the light squares.) 41.Qg2-h3 Rb8-d8 securing his assets before edging his pawns forward.



S. Mamedyarov - B. Gelfand
Kazan Candidates 2011

16.Bh6-e3

Mamedyarov doesn't normally like to retreat, so I am surprised he didn't try 16.f5-f6 Be7xf6 17.Rf1xf6 g7xh6 18.Rf6xh6 keeping attacking chances.

16... Ne8-f6 17.Qg3-h3 d6-d5 18.e4-e5

Trying to keep Black's pieces bottled up after 18.e4xd5 e6xf5 19.Kg1-h1 Nf6-g4 20.Be3-f4 Be7-d6 they become active.

18... Qc7xe5 19.Rd4-h4 Rf8-c8