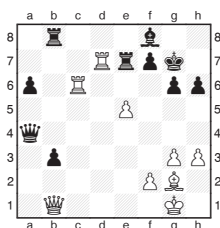


Michael Adams



Pipped at the post by a time lord

One unusual feature of the Grand Slam Masters at Bilbao was that we were given half an hour less to complete the first time control at move 40. This certainly increased the intensity – the complex time scramble below resulted in a pivotal win for Levon Aronian, who pipped me to the title by 4/6 to 3.5/6.



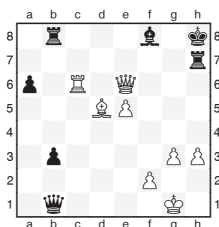
M. Vachier-Lagrave - L. Aronian,
6th Grand Slam Masters Bilbao

33.Rd7-d6 Qa4-a2
Aronian could have won without drama by advancing his pawn here: 33...b3-b2 34.Rd6xg6+ f7xg6 35.Qb1xg6+ Kg7-h8 36.Qg6-f6+ Bf8-g7 37.Qf6xe7 b2-b1Q+ 38.Kg1-h2 Qa4-d1 is easy enough.
34.Rd6xg6+ f7xg6
Forced, as 34...Kg7-h8 35.Rg6xh6+ Bf8xh6 36.Rc6xh6+ Kh8-g7 37.Qb1-h7+ Kg7-f8 38.Qh7-h8 is mate.
35.Qb1xg6+ Kg7-h8
36.Bg2-d5 Re7-g7
Due to the chronic weakness of the light squares, 36...Bf8-g7 fails to 37.Bd5-e4 Bg7-f8 38.Qg6-f6+ Bf8-g7 39.Qf6-f5 Bg7-f8

40.Rc6-f6.
37.Qg6xh6+ Rg7-h7
38.Qh6-e6

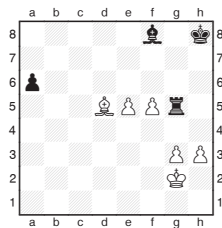
This looks natural to introduce the possibility of Rc6-c8, but White can win beautifully with 38.Qh6-g6 Bf8-g7 (38...Rh7-g7 also loses in the long line 39.Qg6-h5+ Rg7-h7 40.Qh5-g4 Qa2-b1+ (40...Bf8-e7 41.Rc6-c8+ Rb8xc8 42.Qg4xc8+ Kh8-g7 43.Qc8-g8+ Kg7-h6 44.Bd5-e4) 41.Kg1-g2 Bf8-e7 42.Rc6-g6 Qb1xg6 43.Qg4xg6) 39.Bd5-e4 when Black's rook runs out of squares. 39...Rh7xh3 (or 39...Rh7-h6 40.Qg6-f5) 40.Qg6-f5.

38... Qa2-b1+
Despite having only a few seconds remaining, Levon calmly inserts the key check to include his queen in the defence, 38...Rh7-g7 39.Qe6-h6+ Rg7-h7 40.Qh6-g6 wins as above.



39.Kg1-g2
The obvious spot for the king, but this is another slip. The game should end in a draw after 39.Kg1-h2 Rh7-g7 40.Rc6-c4 Qb1-h7 (40...Bf8-e7 41.Bd5-e4 is good for White) 41.Rc4-h4 Qh7xh4 42.g3xh4 b3-b2 43.Bd5-e4 b2-b1Q 44.Be4xb1 Rb8xb1 45.Qe6-h6+ Kh8-g8 46.Qh6-e6+.
39... Rh7-g7
40.Rc6-c8
Now 40.Rc6-c4 Qb1-h7 41.Rc4-h4 Qh7xh4 doesn't help as the 'g' pawn is pinned.
40... Rb8xc8
41.Qe6xc8 Rg7-g8
42.Qc8-b7
A better practical chance than 42.Bd5xg8 Qb1-e4+

43.Kg2-g1 Kh8xg8 44.Qc8-e6+ Kg8-h8 45.Qe6xb3 Qe4xe5 when the black pawn will eventually decide.
42... Qb1-h7
43.Qb7xb3 Rg8-g5
44.Qb3-e3
Although the three pawns aren't sufficient for a rook, the position remains tricky.
44... Qh7-e7
45.f2-f4 Rg5-g7
46.f4-f5
Taking the opportunity to move his pawns forward at the cost of the exchange of queens. 46.Qe3-f3 was the alternative.
46... Qe7-g5
47.Qe3xg5 Rg7xg5



48.g3-g4
This allows Levon to blockade on the dark squares, so 48.Bd5-e6 Bf8-g7 49.h3-h4 Rg5-h5 50.g3-g4 Rh5xh4 51.f5-f6 was a better try.
48... Bf8-g7
49.e5-e6 Bg7-f6
50.Kg2-g3 a6-a5
51.h3-h4 Rg5-g8
52.g4-g5 Kh8-g7
This excellent move makes the win easy. White's remaining pawns will be corralled by the rook and king.
53.Kg3-f4
Play is similar if the bishop is captured immediately: 53.g5xf6+ Kg7xf6+ 54.Kg3-f4 a5-a4 55.h4-h5 Rg8-h8 56.Kf4-g4 Rh8-d8.
53... Rg8-h8
54.Kf4-g4 Rh8-b8
55.g5xf6+ Kg7xf6
56.e6-e7 a5-a4
White resigned, as 57.h4-h5 Bb8-e8 58.h5-h6 Re8xe7 59.Bd5-g8 a4-a3 60.h6-h7 Re7xh7 61.Bg8xh7 a3-a2 enables Black to promote.