

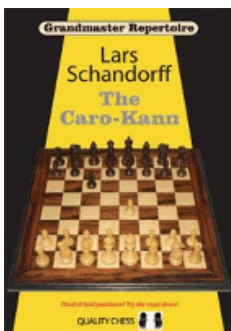


Boxing the Compass

David Vigorito

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ChessCafe.com is a proud sponsor of the [New England Nor'easters](#). Each Monday during the 2010 [U.S. Chess League](#) season we will bring you an annotated game or two of the week.

New England Nor'easters Week Twelve

After dispatching the defending champion New York Knights, Week Twelve saw the Nor'easters heading into the Semi-finals. Our opponent would be the Boston Blitz. The Blitz was the only team that we did not defeat during the regular season. It may seem strange that there are teams representing Boston (a city) and a New England (a region), but these are both just names, and in fact the teams play just a few miles from each other. Boston plays in Cambridge (not Boston!) and New England plays in Somerville.

Once again, in the event of a draw, we would move through to the next round. Our regular season record granted us this advantage, and it was clear this would be important in facing another elite team. At this point our record was 10½-½, and yet again we were considered an underdog. This may seem silly, but both New York and Boston have been the big boys of the east for several years. New York won it all last year, and in the previous two years Boston had made it to the finals. Our record may indicate that we were the favorites, but we really are just a bunch of scrappers, and many were predicting (as usual) that the Nor'easters would go down.

The line-ups were as follows:

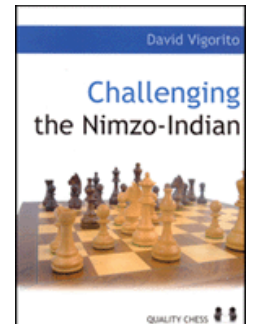
- **Board One**
GM Larry Christiansen (Boston) – IM Sam Shankland (New England)
- **Board Two**
IM Robert Hungaski (New England) – Jorge Sammour-Hasbun (Boston)
- **Board Three**
IM Marc Esserman (Boston) – FM Chris Chase (New England)
- **Board Four**
NM Alex Cherniack (New England) – Grant Xu (Boston)

We expected Boston to go with a "stacked" line-up – they loaded up on boards one through three, while conceding board four to a certain degree. This approach really goes for the knock-out, but there is some risk because by giving up one board, Boston would need to score 2½/3 on the other boards, which leaves very little margin for error. Boston had a clear rating advantage on board three, but we had some faith because we knew that Chris had an even score against Esserman in their previous encounters. I considered board two to be fairly level, with Sammour-Hasbun's 2600+ rating being compensated by both Robert's excellent form and the fact that we would have white. I thought the match may well come down to whether or not we could hold board one. I felt pretty good about our chances here, because Sam had been playing very confidently lately (four wins in a row against 2500-2600+ players), but not everything went according to plan.

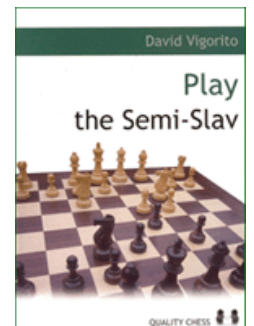
Like many of our matches, about halfway through things were looking very shaky. Both boards three and four were a bit lopsided, which was not a huge surprise. The first game to finish was Alex's:

Cherniack, Alex (2288) – Xu, Grant (2061)
USCL (12), 10.11.2010
French Defense [C02]
Notes by Cherniack

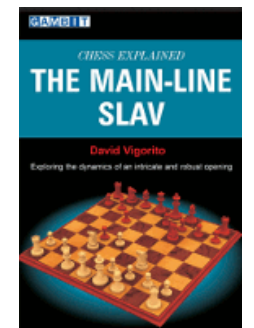
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My opponent demolished me in a G/60 event at the Boylston Chess Club last year, so I was not taking this game for "granted."

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Qb6 6.a3 a5



[FEN "r1b1kbnr/1p3ppp/1qn1p3/p1ppP3/3P4/P1P2N2/1P3PPP/RNBQKB1R w KQkq a6 0 7"]

7.b3

The nice thing about playing against an opening you know well is that you are aware of the positions that make you uncomfortable, and can steer the game there.

7...f6 8.Bd3 fxe5

8...g6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bg7 11.dxc5 Qxc5 12.a4 e5 13.Ba3 Qb6 14.Bb5 Bg4 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Qxf3 0-0-0 was Turkin-Merzliakov St. Petersburg 2006, and here 17.Ra2 gives White a small edge.

9.dxe5 Nge7 10.h4 Bd7 11.h5 0-0-0 12.Bg5 Be8 13.Nbd2 h6 14.Bh4 Rd7 15.g4



[FEN "2k1bb1r/1p1m1p1/1qn1p2p/p1ppP2P/6PB/PPPB1N2/3N1P2/R2QK2R b KQ g3 0 15"]

15...g5?

This move forfeits the use of g6-square for Black's pieces, which denies any further leverage on attacking the pawn on e5. Much better was 15...g6 16.hxg6 Bxg6 17.Qe2 Rg8 18.Bb5 Bf7 19.Rg1 h5. This is the sort of the position that I would be comfortable playing. If anyone is worse here, it's White.

16.Bg3 Bg7 17.Qe2 Rc7 18.Rb1 Na7

It's difficult for Black to coordinate his pieces. A better try might be overprotecting the queenside (18...Kb8, 19...Bd7, and 20...Rhc8) against the inevitable push of White's b- and c-pawns.

19.c4 Bc6 20.0-0 Rd7

The last chance to stop the queenside onslaught was 20...d4 21.Rfc1 Bf3 22.Nxf3 Nac6, although it would happen anyway once White's knight reached e4.

21.Rfc1 Kb8



[FEN"1k5r/np1rn1b1/1qb1p2p/p1ppP1pP/2P3P1/PP1B1NB1/3NQP2/1RR3K1 w - - 0 22"]

22.b4 axb4 23.axb4 dxc4

Very bad is 23...cxb4 24.c5 Qd8 25.Nd4 Qg8 26.Rxb4, and White's positional advantage is crushing.

24.Nxc4 Qd8 25.Nd6 Rf8

Or 25...cxb4 26.Nd4 Bd5 27.Bc4 and Black's position collapses.

26.Be4 Bxe4 27.Qxe4 cxb4 28.Nd4



[FEN"1k1q1r2/np1rn1b1/3Np2p/4P1pP/1p1NQ1P1/6B1/5P2/1RR3K1 b - - 0 28"]

Grant could have resigned here, but, according to Dave Vigorito, he always plays until the bitter end. The rest is not pretty.

28...Nec8 29.Nxe6 Nxd6 30.exd6 Qe8 31.Qd5 Qf7 32.Rc7 Rxc7 33.dxc7+ Ka8 34.Rxb4 Nc6 35.Ra4+ Na7 36.Qd8+ Rxd8 37.cxd8Q# 1-0

It was nice to get this win on the board, but as this win was "planned," we were hardly celebrating just yet. Sam was still looking O.K., but things in Robert's game took a sudden turn for the worse.

Hungaski, Robert (2427) – Sammour Hasbun, Jorge (2603)

USCL (12), 10.11.2010

English Opening [A33]

Notes by Hungaski

This time around, I had my cruise control set on sixty-five and my GPS led me to complete a journey of remarkable efficiency. I was somewhat concerned that such peace of mind might jinx my performance. At around this point my thoughts were interrupted by a loud bang, as my tire blew out right off Route Two. The round was about to start, but I was only a few blocks away. After getting picked up, I parked my car on the side of the road and hoped it would still be there after the round. Business first!

1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.g3 Qb6 7.Ndb5 Ne5 8.

Bf4 Nfg4



[FEN"r1b1kb1r/pp1p1ppp/1q2p3/1N2n3/2P2Bn1/2N3P1/PP2PP1P/R2QKB1R w KQkq - 0 9"]

9.e3!?

I had seen several games in the line, but I hadn't prepared it this time around, so I decided to keep it "simple." 9.Qa4!? g5 (9...a6) where things can get pretty messy.

9...a6 (9...Qc6 10.h3) 10.h3!

10.Nc7+ Qxc7 11.Qxg4 Qxc4!

10...axb5 11.hxg4 Nxc4 12.Qb3



[FEN"r1b1kb1r/1p1p1ppp/1q2p3/1p6/2n2BP1/1QN1P1P1/PP3P2/R3KB1R b KQkq - 0 12"]

I spent quite a bit of time on this move, since I had no idea that this was all book! The alternative 12.Qc2!? Qc6 13.Rxh7 (13.0-0 b4; 13.Rh5 d5) 13... Rxh7 14.Qxh7 Nxb2 did not inspire me.

12...d5 13.Bxc4

I had rejected 13.Nxb5!? Qa5+ 14.Nc3, because of 14...e5, but after 15.0-0-0! exf4 16.Rxd5 White had an overwhelming advantage.

13...dxc4 14.Qxb5+ Qxb5 (14...Qc6!?) 15.Nxb5 Bb4+ 16.Ke2 Ke7

16...Ra5 is also possible.

17.Rhd1

Apparently, this is a new move!

17...Ra5 18.Bd6+ Bxd6 19.Nxd6 b5



[FEN"2b4r/4kppp/3Np3/rp6/2p3P1/4P1P1/PP2KP2/R2R4 w - b6 0 20"]

20.a3

Of course, it would be very questionable to trade off into a drawish endgame given the match situation. (Sam and Chris weren't looking too sharp by now.)
20.Nxc8+?! Rxc8 21.a3=.

20...Ba6!



[FEN"7r/4kppp/b2Np3/rp6/2p3P1/P3P1P1/1P2KP2/R2R4 w - - 0 21"]

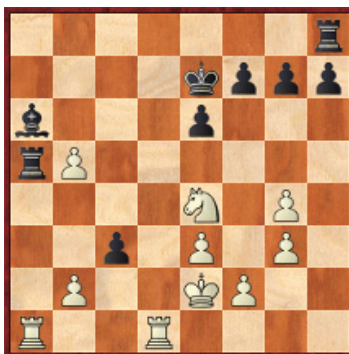
21.Ne4?

I completely underestimated Black's chances here. 21.Ke1? h5! 22.gxh5 Rxb5 23.Ne4 b4+ and White is once again getting crushed.; 21.f3!? h5 22.g5! h4 23.Kf2 and White can probably hold; 21.e4 Rb8 (21...b4? 22.axb4 c3+ 23.b5!) 22.Ke3 Rb6 23.e5 b4-/+.

21...b4!

21...Rb8? 22.Nc3 Bb7 23.f3 Bc6 24.Na2+/- was the endgame I was hoping for.

22.axb4 c3+ 23.b5!

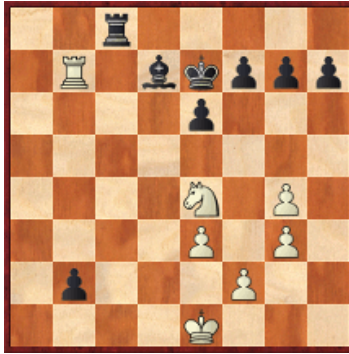


[FEN"7r/4kppp/b3p3/rP6/4N1P1/2p1P1P1/1P2KP2/R2R4 b - - 0 23"]

23...Bxb5+?

I missed the strength of this intermezzo: 23...Rxa1 24.Rxa1 cxb2! 25.Rb1 Bxb5+ 26.Kd2 (26.Kf3 Bc6 27.Kf4 e5+ (27...Rb8) 28.Kxe5 f6+ 29.Kd4 Rd8 +) 26...Rd8+ 27.Kc3 Bd3—+.

24.Ke1 Rxa1 25.Rxa1 cxb2 26.Ra7+ Bd7 27.Rb7 Rc8



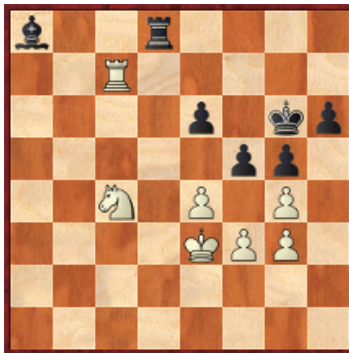
[FEN"2r5/1R1bkppp/4p3/8/4N1P1/4P1P1/1p3P2/4K3 w - - 0 28"]

Black offered a draw here.

28.Rxb2 Rc4 29.f3 Bc6 30.Nd2 Rc1+ 31.Kf2 g5?!

This weakens the dark-square complex, an easy target for a knight. 31...h6.

32.e4 Kf6 33.Nb3 Rc3 34.Nd4 Ke5 35.Ne2 Ra3 36.Rb6 Ba8 37.Rb8 Bc6 38.Rb6 Ba8 39.Rb5+ Kf6 40.Rc5! h6 41.Nc3 Bb7 42.Ke3 Ra1 43.Rc7 Ba8 (43...Ba6 44.Ra7) 44.Nb5 Rd1 45.Ke2 Rd8 46.Ke3 Kg6 (46...Rd1 47.Na3) 47.Na3! f5 48.Nc4



[FEN"b2r4/2R5/4p1kp/5pp1/2N1P1P1/4KPP1/8/8 b - - 0 48"]

48...fxe4??

48...Kf6 49.f4 gxf4+ 50.gxf4 Rb8 51.gxf5 exf5 52.e5+ Ke6 53.Kd4!+/- (53.Rh7 Kd5!).

49.Ne5+ Kf6 50.f4!+- Rd3+ (50...Rf8 51.Nd7+) 51.Ke2 1-0

This game finished right after Alex's victory so we were all pretty excited about advancing to the finals. However, I could not stick around to celebrate, because I rushed out to see if my car had been towed. Fortunately, it was still there. I have to thank Paul MacIntyre for using his bicycle pump to fill up my spare, and Dave Vigorito for lending me his cell phone charger (yeah, my cell died too). Otherwise, who knows how many more adventures I would have encountered throughout that fateful night. We're now looking confidently toward the final match-up. Yet I can't help but get a little nervous as my mishaps intensify approaching the grand finale, but if it means a USCL title I say bring it on!

This game shocked us! Even though Robert had a big time edge, for the most part the kibitzers thought Robert would accept the draw offer. Sam actually looked O.K., and we knew that Robert had a flat tire to deal with before the

long drive back to Connecticut. We seemed to forget that Robert is a total gamer, and the pressures of the board and the clock somehow proved to be too much.

Winning this game gave us a 2-0 lead and thus wrapped up the match (remember, draw odds). Suddenly all of the tension was gone despite the fact that there were still two games ongoing. Chris's position was beyond salvation, but Sam still looked O.K. Perhaps the match situation caused a lapse of some sort, as Sam made a rash decision to sacrifice his queen in a fairly level position. This backfired badly, and Boston tied the match 2-2.

Even though our record now stands at an undefeated 11-1, we have had several difficult matches. The fact that it was the Boston team that scored two draws against us (10-0 against everyone else, including the defending champion New York Knights!) shows a lot about chess in this part of the country!

Next up is the Finals on Saturday, November 20 against the red-hot Miami Sharks!

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