

Game 22

Shirov-Kasparov

Sicilian Defence

International tournament, Linares 1997

Like no other player, Kasparov has reaped the benefits of computer-aided preparation: by having a computer carefully check all the results of his own analysis move by move, he has reached a virtually unsurpassable level of preparation. Sometimes his preparation is based on a strategic finesse, as in the game we will deal with here. Shirov fails to find an adequate reply to the novelty on move 14 and comes to a rather inglorious end.

This was certainly neither the first nor the last in the long series of defeats that Kasparov has inflicted on Shirov. He must always have had this awful feeling of powerlessness: he can play as magnificently as his great opponent, but when they meet face to face, Kasparov always seems to come out on top - as he duly does again in this game. Black's play radiates an enormous dynamism. That he allows himself a slight inaccuracy on move 26 - which, incidentally, has no consequences - is of minor importance.

- | | |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. e2-e4 | c7-c5 |
| 2. ♘g1-f3 | d7-d6 |
| 3. d2-d4 | c5xd4 |
| 4. ♗f3xd4 | ♗g8-f6 |
| 5. ♗b1-c3 | a7-a6 |
| 6. ♕c1-e3 | ♗f6-g4 |

The Najdorf is Kasparov's main defensive

weapon. Besides the text, he has also regularly played the alternatives 6...e6 and 6...e5. Some six months ago Kasparov played 6...e5 against the same opponent in Tilburg.

7. ♕e3-g5 h7-h6

8. ♕g5-h4

An interesting alternative is 8.♕c1, as the text may turn out to be weakening in some lines of the Scheveningen.

8. g7-g5

9. ♕h4-g3 ♕f8-g7

10. ♕f1-e2 h6-h5



11. ♕e2xg4

White gives up the bishop pair, relying on his ability to maintain the strong central position of his king's knight. Practice has shown that the alternative 11.h4 yields Black sufficient counter-chances after 11...gxh4 12.♕xh4 ♗c6.

11. ♕c8xg4

This recapture has fallen into disuse; the alternative 11...hxg4 seems to solve every one of Black's opening problems. Initially, the recapture with the pawn was treated with suspicion, particularly in view of a game Shirov-Salov, Wijk aan Zee 1998, in which White was considerably better after 12.0-0 ♖xd4? 13.♗xd4 f6 14.♘d5 ♘c6 15.♗e3.

One year later Kasparov, again in Wijk aan Zee, improved on Black's play against Shirov by playing 12...e6 (instead of 12...♖xd4) and went on to win the game. During the usual press conference after the round he declared that Salov's 12th move had been a 'homosexual move'. A number of reporters were delicate enough to keep this strange observation out of their reports, but however this may be, the little move 12...e6 - which also arises later in this game - turned out to be equally unsuitable to guarantee sufficient counterplay for Black, as borne out by later examples.

A few months after the tournament, Shirov and Kasparov were facing each other again in Sarajevo. This time, Kasparov played 12...♘c6, the most natural move. After 13.♘f5 ♖xc3 14.bxc3 ♗a5! 15.♗xg4 f6 the game eventually ended in a draw. And so far no one has found a way to a white advantage in this energetic approach on Black's part.

12. f2-f3 ♖g4-d7

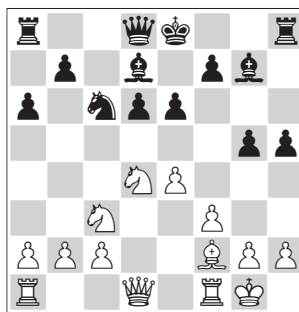
13. 0-0 ♘b8-c6

14. ♖g3-f2

This shows up the drawback of Black's 11th move: the white bishop is back in the game and controls the central squares. Now a kind of Dragon variation has arisen in which the advanced g-pawn and h-pawn seem to weaken Black's position.

This impression is eliminated in the game, but with more accurate play White would probably have been able to get an advantage, as we will soon see.

14. e7-e6!



A sharp little move whose main point is that it allows Black to meet 15.♘xc6 ♖xc6 16.♖d4 with 16...♖e5!. Kasparov indicates this bishop move in his comments in *Chess Informant* 69, and later practical examples have shown that White cannot hope for an advantage after an exchange on e5. It is true that he dominates on the queenside, but this is balanced by Black's general dominance, despite the doubled pawns, particularly because Black can avail of the breaking move f7-f5.

15. ♘c3-e2

Reinforcing his position in the centre and threatening to get a positional advantage with 16.c4.

15. ♘c6-e5

16. b2-b3

A superficial move that allows Black to take over the initiative with very sharp play.

Far stronger was 16.♗d2, as played in J.Polgar-Sutovsky, Hoogeveen 1997, a few months later. After 16...b5 17.b3 ♘g6 18.♞ad1 ♞c8 19.c3 ♖e5 20.♘c2 White

was better. Black had the problem that 17...g4 (instead of 17...♘g6) 18.f4 h4, as Kasparov continued after the text, does not really work in view of 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♖ad1 exd4 21.♙xd4 e5 22.♙c5, with a large advantage for White. In his comments for *Chess Informant* 70, Sutovsky indicates 16...♗c8 as an alternative. But then, too, White has the better chances: 17.b3 g4 18.f4 h4 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♖ad1 exd4 21.♙xd4 e5 22.♙e3.

I already mentioned that, in Tilburg, Kasparov had gone for 6...e5 (instead of 6...♘g4) against Shirov. This undoubtedly had something to do with the Hoogeveen game, which had been played some time before.

16. g5-g4
17. f3-f4 h5-h4!

This is Kasparov in his element. He exploits the fact that White has blocked the returning squares of his centralized knight.

18. ♙f2-e3

Necessary, as after 18.c4 Black had planned the frontal assault 18...g3! 19.hxg3 ♘g4, after which he would soon have an irresistible attack.

18. h4-h3

This advance opens the long diagonal even more, so that the white king will be permanently exposed.

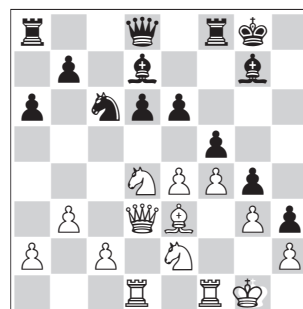
19. g2-g3 ♘e5-c6

After fixing the kingside pawn structure very favourably for himself Black withdraws his knight. For the moment, his bishop pair is not yet very active, but he will soon manage to create tension in the centre that will open up the board.

20. ♖d1-d3 0-0

21. ♖a1-d1 f7-f5

A power move that is totally justified strategically.



22. c2-c4

Shirov expands his centre, after which the battle gets sharper still. By swapping on c6 he could have aimed for simplifications, but this would not have solved all his problems, as witness 22.♘xc6 ♙xc6, and now:

A) 23.♗xd6 ♖xd6 24.♖xd6 ♙xe4 25.c4 e5, and Kasparov indicates that Black is slightly better. I regard this as a very modest assessment indeed. The black bishop pair is very strong, and even if White managed to swap one set of minor pieces, the remaining black bishop would be superior;

B) 23.exf5 exf5 24.♙d4 (and not 24.♗xd6 in view of 24...♗e8, and the pin along the e-file puts White into serious trouble) 24...♙e4 25.♗d2, and now Kasparov indicates 25...d5, concluding that Black is slightly better.

To me the position seems unclear, especially because Black has cut off his bishop's retreat with the advance d6-d5, and square d5 is no longer accessible to his pieces. After 26.♙xg7 ♖xg7 27.♘d4 White can be quietly confident. I think, therefore, that the correct approach is 25...♗c8. only to be followed by 26...d5 after 26.c4. Black can then meet 27.♙xg7 ♖xg7 28.♘d4 with 28...♗b6.

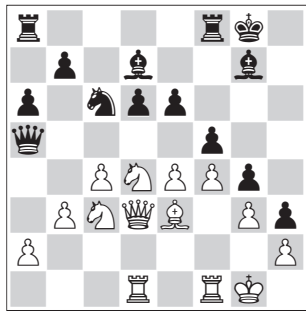
White's best continuation is probably

26. ♖xg7 (instead of 26.c4) 26... ♔xg7
 27. ♕d4, when it is true that after
 27... ♜e8 Black is slightly better. We can
 conclude from this that the text is White's
 best bet, as it will enable him to maintain
 the balance with accurate play.

22. ♜d8-a5

This queen sortie leads to forced develop-
 ments. In his comments, Kasparov indi-
 cates 22... ♜e8 by way of an alternative.
 With this modest queen move Black is
 supposed to sidestep a queen swap, but
 the net result is that he would have little
 hope left of hanging on to the initiative. It
 seems that 23. ♜fe1 would be enough for
 White to keep a sufficient measure of
 control over the position.

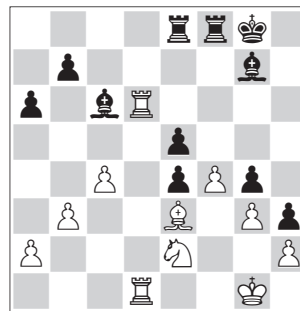
23. ♗e2-c3



After this move the white position be-
 comes 'a colossus on feet of clay', a
 phrase Euwe used to use to characterize
 the Four Pawn Attack in the King's Indian.
 Correct was 23. ♜d2!, after which Black
 finds it hard to avoid the queen swap.
 Kasparov's suggestion 23... ♜a3, intend-
 ing to meet 24. ♗c3 with 24... ♜ad8, al-
 lows White to build a strong position
 with 25. exf5 exf5 26. ♗d5. After
 23... ♜xd2 24. ♜xd2 taking on e4 is not
 good, as White swaps on c6 and then
 takes on d6, after which the long diago-

nal is utterly lost for the black king's
 bishop. Nor will knight moves like swap-
 ping on d4 and 24... ♗e7 suffice, as
 Kasparov shows with the aid of pointed
 variations. This means that he has to
 chose between two rook moves:

A) 24... ♜ae8 25. ♜fd1 fxe4 26. ♗xc6
 ♗xc6 27. ♜xd6 e5. The point of the 24th
 move. In the changed circumstances
 Black now succeeds in breaking open the
 position, with the result that his bishop
 pair comes into its own. Yet the situation
 remains unclear, as may be seen from:



analysis diagram

A1) 28. ♔f2 ♔h7, with unclear play,
 according to Kasparov. It seems to me that
 Black is slightly better, as White has no
 active plan;

A2) 28. ♜g6. The critical move. White
 pins the king's bishop and attacks the en-
 emy g-pawn. The drawback of this rook
 move is that it allows Black to occupy the
 d-file with 28... ♜d8. Kasparov's variation
 now continues 29. ♜e1 ♜d3 30. ♗c1
 ♜xe3 31. ♜xe3 exf4 32. gxf4 ♜xf4, and
 Black has sufficient compensation for the
 exchange. This is absolutely correct; the
 bishop pair is potentially very strong.
 But the critical line, I think, is 29. ♜xd8
 ♜xd8 30. f5, after which the bishop pair
 is only of nominal value. After 30... ♔f7