

My Loss to Bobby Seltzer

by

Bruce Downing

Before sitting down to my fifth round game in the 1988 Framingham Chess Club Challenge Cup, I knew very little about my opponent. I knew that he was young, possessed an expert rating and appeared in the chess news regularly as a successful scholastic competitor. I also knew that I had to win to have any chance of defending my title in this event, as I was already half a point off the pace.

Robert Seltzer (2064)
Bruce Downing (2101)
English Symmetrical

1 c4 c5 2 g3 Nc6 3 Bg2 g6 4 e3 Bg7 5 Ne2

I spent some time here and on the next move trying to figure out why he delayed Nbc3 and whether I could take advantage of the move order. Later he told me that he simply doesn't know book lines too much - a refreshing change from many booked-up but uncreative young players I've encountered.

5 ... e6 6 d4 Nge7

Better would be (6 ... cxd4 7 exd4 d5 =) and I have something for White's delay of Nbc3.

7 Nbc3

Bobby sensibly avoids the greedy (7 dxc4 Qa5+ 8 Nbc3 Ne5) and both c-pawns are loose. If (9 b3 Nxc4! 10 bxc4 Bxc3+) or (9 Qb3 Nd3+).

7 ... d6?! 8 dxc5 dxc5 9 Qxd8+ Nxd8

After the game, Bobby told me he felt White was better here as he had a tempo and I had a weak c-pawn. Probably so. At the time I felt Black was equal with development planned like (Bd7, Bc6) with the Knight on d8 holding the b-pawn, b6, Nb7, O-O and play on the d-file.

10 Ne4

The most aggressive. He will make me prove he can't win a pawn here.

10 ... O-O 11 Nxc5 Rb8

I think Bobby should play (12 Rb1) here so as to be able to play (b3) when the c-pawn is threatened. I would then have only a slight development edge as compensation for the pawn.

12 e4?! b6 13 Nd3 Ba6 14 Bf4

An interesting idea. There's no holding the c-

pawn so he gets the Bishop rolling. I had expected (14 O-O Bxc4 15 Rd1) with a good position for Black.

14 ... Rc8 15 Bd6 Re8 16 Ne5 Bxc4 17 Nxc4 Rxc4

Bobby has the 2 Bishops but I have a very active Rook and his King's Rook is still underdeveloped.

18 e5?!

I think this creates a target and makes it easier to deploy my Knights. However, it is consistent with what I had begun to see as an aggressive style.

18 ... Nf5

I thought this won material with something like (19 Rb1 Nxd6 20 exd6 Rc2).

19 b3!

Very resourceful! I can't play (Rc2) because of (20 Be4! Rxe2+ 21 Kxe2 Nxd6 22 exd6 Bxa1 23 Rxa1) and White has a big edge in piece activity and a probable won game. I was quite impressed that he had opened the long diagonal and gotten away with it.

19 ... Rc8 20 O-O?

Throws away the fruits of his find 19th move. Better is (20 Rd1) or (20 Rc1).

20 ... Rc2

Now I can play it, since the King no longer defends the Knight. Loss of material is now unavoidable for White.

21 Rae1 Nxd6 22 exd6 Rxa2 23 Nc1 Rc2 24 Be4 Rc3 25 Re2 Bd4?

My turn to blunder. Not being a master means I usually give my opponents several opportunities a game. Better is (25 ... a5) to be followed by (Bd4, e5) and the doom of Bobby's d-pawn.

26 Ra2

Bobby make the most of his chance. The position is now very complicated and my pawn-plus suddenly seems very unimportant. I have to defend against (Rxa7) and (Ne2). Over the board I thought (26 ... a5) was adequately answered by (27 Ne2 Rxb3 28 Nxd4 Rb5 29 d7! Re7 30 Nc6) and Bobby would hold the piece. I missed (29 ... Rf8!).

26 ... f5 27 Ne2

A Bishop retreat on the long diagonal would let me out by (27 ... a5 28 Ne2 Rd3). However, (27 Bb1) seems playable as he maintains his threats.

27 ... fxe4 28 Nxd4 Rd3 29 Nb5 Rxb3 30 Nc7 Rf8 31 Rxa7

The smoke has cleared a bit and I have a nice passed b-pawn and good pressure versus his d-pawn. Surely a win is in the bag. Overconfidence — a great weakness of mine. I should know by this time that I'm in trouble when I start trying to guess when my opponent will resign.

31 ... Rd3?

Attacking the d-pawn the wrong way! The rook is fine on (b3), guarding my b-pawn and keeping the Knight off (b5). A better plan would be (31 ... Nf7 32 Rd1 Rd8) netting the pawn with momentum.

32 Nb5 Nf7 33 Rc1!

Takes full advantage of my frontal assault of the d-pawn. A very strong move.

33 ... Nxd6??

Dealing with the possibility of doubled rooks on the seventh is more important than the d-pawn!

34 Nxd6 Rxd6 35 Rcc7! Rfd8

I offered a draw. I certainly can't stop him from perpetual check if he wants to... The sudden disaster had left me a little stunned. Bobby declined the draw by moving.

36 Rg7+ Kh8 37 Rxh7+ Kg8 38 Rag7+ Kf8 39 Rb7 Kg8 40 Rhg7+ Kf8 41 Rxg6

Bobby plays to win! He has a lot of pressure here as my Rooks seem very passively tied to weak pawns.

41 ... e3 42 Rf6+ Ke8?

With my experience, you would think I would know that the King belongs in the corner in this position. I hallucinated on seizing control of the seventh.

43 Rh6! exf2+ 44 Kxf2 R8d7 45 Rh8+ Ke7 46 Rh7+ Kd8 47 Rhxd7+ Rxd7 48 Rxd7+

I had expected (48 Rxb6) but Bobby is confidently simplifying to a won ending, rather than grabbing a pawn.

48 ... Kxd7 49 h4

Both over the board and later in analysis I could find nothing here. My pawns must both get to

the sixth to promote one of them. Without that position, White can pick them off at leisure while my King must stay with his connected passers. I played on another 14 moves before resigning as Bobby showed no signs of impatience as I dragged out the lost position.

1-0

Bobby showed me a lot in this game. He was aggressive without wildness, resourceful in the defense and steady in his concentration.