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## Game 24

# Xie Jun – Bent Larsen

*Ladies against Veterans, Monaco 1994*

Pirc, Classical

1 e4 g6  
 2 d4 ♗g7  
 3 ♖c3 c6

Black has several options if he develops his pieces via this move-order. It is possible to choose between ...d6 and ...d5. In the latter case, the game will transpose to the Caro-Kann Defence.

4 ♗f3 d6

I faced the move 4...d5 in my game against Nona Gaprindashvili at the Novi Sad Olympiad 1990, which continued 5 h3 ♗h6 6 ♗f4 ♖b6!? 7 ♖c1 dxe4 8 ♗xe4 ♗f5 9 c3 ♗e6 10 ♗d3 ♗d5 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♗d7 13 ♗ed2 ♖fe8 14 ♗xf5 gxf5 15 ♗e5 with the easier game for White.

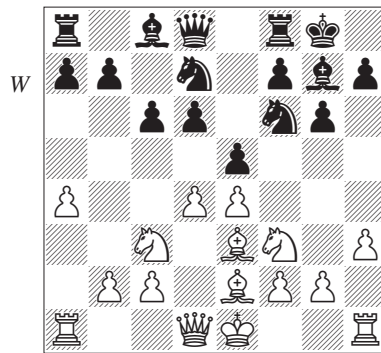
5 h3 ♗f6  
 6 a4 0-0  
 7 ♗e3 ♗bd7  
 8 ♗e2 e5 (D)

8...a5 is a reasonable alternative.

9 dxe5!?

The reason for fixing the pawn structure is that I did not want to allow Black to play ...d5 on the next move. This would have happened if I had castled, e.g. 9 0-0 d5 10 exd5 e4 11 ♗d2 cxd5 12 ♗b5 ♗e8 13 c3 f5 with a complicated position.

9 ... dxe5



10 0-0

When I checked my database afterwards, I found the same position in one of Spassky's games. He decided to play the knight to c4: 10 ♗d2 ♖e7 11 ♗c4 ♖d8 12 ♖d6 ♗f8! 13 0-0-0 ♖xd6 14 ♗xd6 ♗b6 15 ♗c4 ♖xd1+ 16 ♖xd1 ♗xc4 17 ♗xc4, with a slight edge for White in Spassky-Chabanon, French Ch 1991. The game later ended in a draw.

10 ... ♖e7  
 11 ♖d3 a5!?

This move prevents White from gaining more space on the queenside, but it does weaken the dark squares. 11...♗h5 was Black's choice in Franzoni-Gavrikov, Zurich 1992. The players agreed to a draw after 12 ♖fd1 ♗f4 13 ♖d6 ♗xe2+ 14 ♗xe2 ♖xd6 15

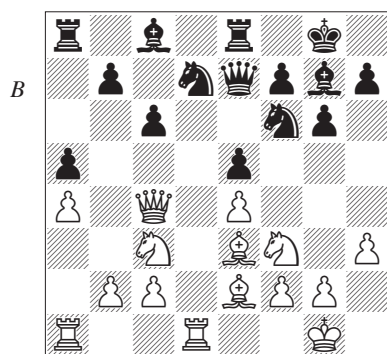
$\text{♞xd6}$   $\text{♜f6}$  16  $\text{♜c3}$ , so this game does not tell us very much. I believe that White should have played 12  $\text{♞d2}$ , instead of 12  $\text{♞fd1}$ , to prevent the black knight from landing on f4. After 13  $\text{♞fd1}$  he would have been better.

12  $\text{♞c4}$

12  $\text{♞fd1}$   $\text{♞e8}$  13  $\text{♞d6}$   $\text{♙f8}$  gives Black a solid position.

12 ...  $\text{♞e8}$

13  $\text{♞fd1}$  (D)



13 ...  $\text{h6?!$

Larsen's idea is to transfer the knight via h7 to g5, where it will be more active. In the future, the knight might even eye the squares d4 and f4 – from e6 – but it is quite obvious that this plan is time-consuming. More sensible would be 13... $\text{♞b4}$  14  $\text{♜g5}$   $\text{♞f8}$  15  $\text{b3}$   $\text{♞xc4}$  16  $\text{♙xc4}$   $\text{h6}$  17  $\text{♜f3}$   $\text{♞e8}$  18  $\text{♜h4}$  (18  $\text{♞d2}$   $\text{♙f8}$  is unclear) 18... $\text{♜f8}$  19  $\text{♞d6}$   $\text{♙e6}$  20  $\text{♜f3}$   $\text{♙xc4}$  21  $\text{bxc4}$   $\text{♜e6}$  22  $\text{♞b1}$  with some initiative for White. However, the doubled c-pawns are not pleasant and guarantee Black counterplay.

14  $\text{♜d2}$   $\text{♜h7?!$

Once Larsen has made up his mind and decided upon a certain plan, he finds it very hard not to carry on with it. It was not too late for 14... $\text{♞b4}$  15  $\text{♜b3}$  (15  $\text{♞b3}$  permits Black to develop his pieces rapidly with 15... $\text{♙f8}$  16  $\text{♜c4}$   $\text{♞xb3}$  17  $\text{cxb3}$   $\text{♜c5}$ ) 15... $\text{♙f8}$  16  $\text{f3}$  (better than 16  $\text{♞d2}$   $\text{♜b6}$ ) 16... $\text{♞xc4}$  17  $\text{♙xc4}$   $\text{b6}$  18  $\text{♞d2}$ , with only a small plus for White.

15  $\text{♞b3}$

The threat  $\text{♜c4}$  becomes a nuisance.

15 ...  $\text{♜g5}$

Larsen proceeds with his plan. As a result, he forfeits his last opportunity to exchange queens, with 15... $\text{♞b4}$  16  $\text{♜c4}$   $\text{♙f8}$  17  $\text{♞a3!?$   $\text{♜hf6}$  18  $\text{♜d6}$   $\text{♞d8}$  19  $\text{♜xc8}$   $\text{♞xa3}$  20  $\text{bxa3}$   $\text{♞axc8}$  21  $\text{♞ab1}$ . Thanks to the bishop-pair, White maintains an edge.

16  $\text{♜c4}$   $\text{♜c5?}$

A careless move. Black will be forced to exchange queens, only now under less favourable conditions. The white knight will invade on d6 or b6, with devastating effect. I suggest 16... $\text{♜e6}$  as the better move.

17  $\text{♞a3}$   $\text{♜ce6}$

18  $\text{♞xe7}$   $\text{♞xe7}$

19  $\text{♜b6}$   $\text{♞b8}$

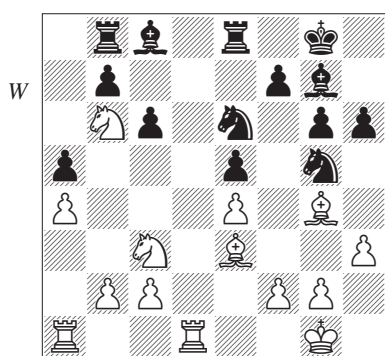
20  $\text{♙g4!}$

It is important to keep the c8-bishop incarcerated. The powerful knight on b6 restricts all Black's activities.

20 ...  $\text{♞e8}$  (D)

We have arrived at the critical moment in the game. Black has played

his rook back to e8 in order to free his cramped position. He is ready for 21...h5, which was impossible with the rook on e7 (20...h5? 21 ♙xg5). So what can White do to consolidate the firm grip?



21 ♙xg5!

The right answer! The text-move resolves the ...h5 issue, yet there remains one other problem to solve: how is White to deal with the freeing manoeuvre ...♙f8-c5?

21 ... hxg5

22 ♘b1!

The combination of my 21st and 22nd moves decides the result of the game. Black has no counterplay whatsoever.

22 ... ♙f8

23 ♘d2 ♙c5

24 ♘dc4

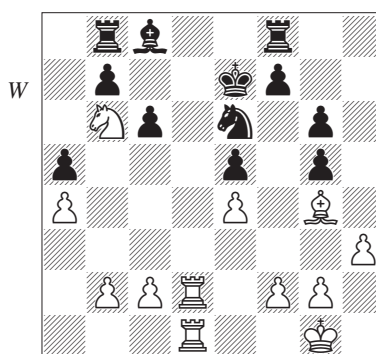
The second knight arrives just in time.

24 ... ♙xb6

25 ♘xb6 ♙f8

26 ♖d2 ♙e7

27 ♖ad1 ♙f8 (D)



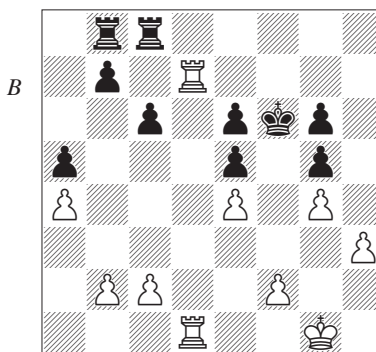
28 ♘xc8+ ♖fxc8

29 ♖d7+ ♙f6

29...♙f8 30 ♙xe6 fxe6 31 ♖h7 will also suffice for a win.

30 ♙xe6 fxe6

31 g4!! (D)



A lovely position. I was just wondering whether Larsen would go as far as to allow me to play 32 ♖d3 and 33 ♖f3, with mate 'between the posts'. He did not, and resigned instead.

1-0

The final position created considerable commotion amongst people in the analysis room. Some of my colleagues even joked that we had produced the position deliberately. Well, this is a question only my opponent can answer. I never asked Larsen why he went for this finale. Maybe he just thought that it would make a nice diagram. In any case, it was the first time I ever managed to win a game like this, and it is indeed one of my sweetest chess memories – especially since my opponent was one of the great players of all time.

Some months later, the Olympiad was held in Moscow but I did not perform well. I found it hard to focus on chess and, all the time, I instinctively felt that something was wrong at home. Perhaps this was a kind of telepathy, because when I returned to China I found out that my mother had been taken into hospital. She had undergone major surgery and was treated with chemotherapy. I was shocked and felt extremely sad. For the next two and a half months, my father and I took care of my mother. We did not have time to do anything else. The health care system in China is different compared to Europe and America, where patients usually only see their relatives during visiting hours. Family members in China, in contrast, take care of each other, even in hospital. My father and I spent a lot of time cooking for my mother and we stayed with her as much as possible. She could not eat much and we had to divide the meals over the day. These events affected me deeply and sent me into a period of reflection. I started to wonder about the meaning of life, and chess did not seem all that important any more. There were other priorities. It is needless to say that my chess schedule was severely disrupted by all this and, moreover, I had lost some of my interest. Initially I had planned to participate in the tournament in Groningen in December, but now my chess federation had to cancel my entry. Instead, I stayed at home with my family.

In March 1995, I travelled to Switzerland for the first leg of a twelve-game match against Lucas Brunner and then, in April, to San Francisco. I felt obliged to do so, because I had promised to compete, even though I did not feel much like playing. My mother was still in hospital. On both occasions I was not in great shape, but the results were not too bad. The performance in San Francisco was solid, but I suffered a disaster in the last round when I failed to convert a winning position against Robert Hübner.