



Boston Chess Congress 2015

Ivanov - Zierk

IM Steven Zierk

I came into this event not sure what to expect, as this was my first over-the-board tournament in over two years. Although this was a strong event, headlined by GMs Ivanov and Jimenez, I decided that my goal would be an ambitious one – to win the tournament. I knew I was capable of winning, and my results in the US Chess League were encouraging.

The first round was a warning that could have been much worse. Playing Black against NM Terrie, I reached a bad position out of the opening, and two overambitious attempts to turn the game around left me with serious difficulties. After a long defense, a hopeless middlegame turned into a pawn-down rook endgame. It was still lost, but there were defensive opportunities. At around one in the morning, long after every other game had finished, I salvaged an unlikely draw in a time scramble.

The lesson was learned, and although I continued to play ambitiously, I avoided overextending, and the next three rounds saw three wins, including a very satisfying victory in the Najdorf against IM Vigorito.

Going into the last round, Ivanov, Jimenez, FM Winer, and I were in a four-way tie for first with three and a half points out of four. In the fifth and final round, Winer-Jimenez reached an equal queen and bishop endgame, which I expected would peter out to a draw. Jimenez showed me how mistaken I was: he continued his characteristically energetic play in the endgame, and a little passivity by Winer was all it took for his position to be ripped apart by the Cuban GM.

This left only GM Ivanov and myself in contention for a share of first place with Jimenez. How that turned out can be seen below:

GM Alexander Ivanov (2603)
IM Steven Zierk (2543)
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French Defence [C11]

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nd2 Nf6 4. e5 Nfd7 5. c3 c5
6. f4 Nc6 7. Ndf3 Qb6 8. g3 Be7 9. Bh3 O-O
10. Ne2 f6?

Overly ambitious. Correct is first 10... cxd4
11. cxd4 (11. Nexd4 Nc5) 11... f6 12. Bxe6+
Kh8 13. exf6 Nxf6 14. Bxc8 Raxc8 15. O-O
Ne4 and Black has good compensation for the
pawn.

11. Bxe6+ Kh8 12. exf6 Bxf6

12... Nxf6 13. Bxc8 Raxc8 is similar to the line
above, except that White can respond to cxd4
with Nexd4.

13. O-O Nxd4 14. Bxd5 Qd6 15. Bb3?!

Better was 15. Be4 Re8 16. Nd2! - This retreat
keeps White safe, as he can defend the weak a8-
h1 diagonal with his bishop.

15... Nxf3+ 16. Rxf3 Qc7 17. Be3?



Superficially it seems like White is well developed, but this is far from the truth. After Black's next move it becomes clear that White's center pieces serve only as targets. 17.g4!? presents White with ideas of Ng3 as well as Rh3!?. As the game soon demonstrates, White does not have time to worry about pawn structure.

17... b5! 18. Bd5



It is crucial for White not to give Black control of the a8-h1 diagonal. But now his pieces will be easy targets for attack as Black develops.

18... Rb8 19. Rf1 Nb6 20. Bf3 Bh3 21. Re1 Nc4 22. Bc1 Rfe8?!

More precise is 22... Rbd8 23. Qc2 Rfe8 when White, despite the extra pawn, is completely lost, e.g. 24. b3 Ne3 25. Qb2 Rd3.

23. Qd5



White finds a clever attempt to untangle. Developing one's queen into attack is not ideal, but it is much better than nothing.

23... Rbd8

23... g6 preventing White's intended queen maneuver, was probably stronger.

24. Qh5 Be6 25. Be4 Bg8 26. Qf3?

26. Bg6 was necessary.

26...Nd2?

Very good for Black, but much stronger was 26...Rxe4! -. Though I saw this during the game, earlier difficulties following ...f6 and an inability to calculate variations to the end made me hesitate. But this is crushing - control of the h1-a8 diagonal is worth far more than the exchange: 27. Qxe4 Bd5 28. Qf5 Bb7 29. Qe6 (29. h4 Qc6 30. Qh3 Qe4) 29... Nd6 30. h4 Qc6 31. Qh3 Nf5 and despite White's material advantage he is completely lost as Black will invade with Rd3 and Qf3 long before he can develop.

27. Bxd2 Rxd2 28. g4 Bh4 29. Ng3 Rf8

30. Rf1 Rxb2

30... Bc4 31. Rf2 Rxf2 32. Qxf2 Rxf4 is a strong alternative.

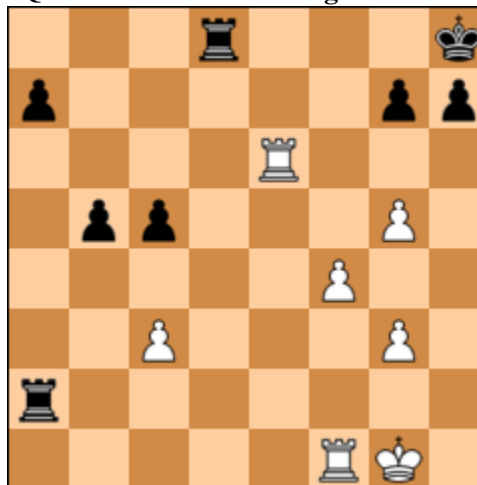
31. Bd5 Bxd5 32. Qxd5 Rd8 33. Rae1 Bxg3?!

I was worried about Nf5, g5 etc, but the bishop is still much stronger than the knight.

34. hxg3 Qc8 35. Qe6?!

This allows Black to simplify into a much better endgame. Better was Qf7 with counterplay.

35... Qxe6 36. Rxe6 Rxa2 37. g5?!



Trying to create counterplay by preventing ... h6, but it was much more important to attack the pawns immediately.

37... Kg8 38. Rfe1 Rd3 39. R6e3 Rxe3

40. Rxe3 b4 41. cxb4 cxb4 42. Kf1

42. Re8+ Kf7 43. Rb8 a5 hinders the pawns more, but Black is still winning comfortably.

42... Kf7 43. Ke1 Ra3

With the idea of cutting the king off at the d-file. ...a5 was also winning.

44. Re4 a5 45. g4 Rd3 46. Re5 a4 47. Ke2 Rh3

48. Ra5

White has many attempts here, but cannot stop a rapid promotion: 48. Re4 a3 49. Rxb4 a2

50. Ra4 Rh1 is a useful tactic in rook endgames.

48. Kd2 a3 49. Ra5 a2 50. Kc2 b3+ 51. Kb2 Rh1

48... a3 49. Kd1 b3 50. Rxa3 Rh1+

0-1

Steven Zierk is an International Master and current MIT student. He won the World Under 18 Championship in 2010.

This faceoff would be the climactic finish of the 2015 Boston Chess Congress, the fourth annual event at the Harborside Hyatt near Boston's Logan Airport.