This game is annotated by Boris Spassky in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (№ 11, 1959).

The translation from the original Russian is by Douglas Griffin.

**Spassky (Leningrad) – Tal (Latvian SSR)**

6th round, 1st board, 2nd USSR People's Spartakiad, Final Group, Moscow, 07.08.1959

This game was very similar in its course to the meeting between the same opponents in the 25th USSR-Championship (Riga, 1958). In both games the result proved to be unexpected for the one who was rightfully master of the situation: mistakes, provoked by the great heat of the struggle, distorted the natural outcome of the encounter. For me the doubts even arose - is it appropriate to annotate a game in which my opponent did significantly more than the winner? I appealed to Tal that we should prepare a joint commentary, but the Riga grandmaster was occupied with preparation for the Candidates' Tournament, and he was not able to participate in this work. But this would have been of interest for lovers of chess, since the analysis of the 'victim' often proves to me much more substantive than the opinion of the victor.


*(Translator's note: This variation, first elaborated by Bulgarian chessplayers, was highly topical in the late 1950s; Tal himself played this position with both colours in a series of well-known games.)*

11.Nbd2

Sometimes it becomes annoying that theory is too well known. Therefore before making this natural move, I resolved to check why 11.Bd5 is not played here. The result of the testing proved not to be in favour of this move: after 11...Bb7 White achieves nothing.


With White, Tal had earlier preferred the continuation 11.Be3, e.g. 11...exd4 12.cxd4 and now:


**b)** 12...Na5 13.Bc2 c5 14.e5! was the continuation in the famous game Tal-Panno (Interzonal Tournament, Portorož 1958).

11...exd4 12.cxd4 d5

I do not understand the point of this system for Black. Why should he spend two(!) tempi (...Nf6–d7 and ...Nd7–b6) in order after this to exchange at d4 and carry out the move ...d6–d5?
13.Bc2
Thus played Vasiukov against Furman (Match Moscow-Leningrad, 1959). Furman continued 13...Nb4 14.Bb1 dxe4 15.Bxe4 N4d5. However, after 16.Nb3 it transpired that Black’s queen’s flank is perceptibly weakened and all of the play for the possession of the square d5 is ‘not worth the candle’.

13...Be6
This move Tal played without thinking. Evidently, the whole variation was well known to him.

14.e5 Qd7
What are the results of the opening? Black has weakened his queen’s flank (the ‘hole’ at c5 and the backward c7–pawn), given White a pawn majority on the king’s flank, and the pawn at e5 restricts the operation of Black’s pieces. Evidently, Black’s plan should consist in the undermining of the e5–point with ...f7–f6. On the queen’s flank he should aim to carry out the advance ...c7–c5; otherwise White can proceed to exploit his pawn-supremacy on the king’s flank. All this determines the plan of play for both sides in the middlegame.

Now, seemingly, the most logical for Black appears 14...Nb4 15.Bb1 c5. However, after 16.dxc5 Bxc5 17.Nb3 Be7 18.Nfd4 White, in association with the threats of 19.a3, 19.f4 and 20.f5, or even 19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.Qh5 obtains a winning position. As was shown by the development of events, White did not manage, on account of mistakes at the 23rd and 24th moves, to carry out his plan (pressure along the c-file and the exploitation of the pawn-majority on the king’s flank), and Black not only equalised the chances, but as a result of subtle and bold play (moves 24–33) achieved a clear advantage.

15.Nb3 Bf5 16.Bg5
Nothing is given by 16.Nc5 on account of 16...Bxc5 17.Bxf5 Qxf5 18.dxc5 Nd7! 19.Qxd5 Nb4 20.Qe4 Qxe4 21.Rxe4 Nc2 22.Rb1 Nxc5 with good play for Black. Therefore White strives to exchange bishops, in order to exploit the weakness of the dark squares on the queen’s flank.
16...Bb4
If 16...f6, then 17.exf6 Bxf6 18.Nc5 Qc8 19.Rc1, and White stands significantly better.

(Translator’s note - All this was later repeated in the game Fischer-Reshevsky (2nd Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica 1966); there Black preferred but after 16...Rfe8 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 18.Rc1 Nb4 (18...Nc4 19.Nc5 Nxb2? 20.Qe2, and White wins a piece) 19.Nc5! Bxc2 20.Qd2 Qe8 21.Qxb4 Black’s position was strategically lost.)

17.Re2
In the case of 17.Bd2 Black can go back to e7 with the bishop.

17...Rfe8
Here Tal offered a draw, but I assessed my position as better and rejected this proposal.

18.Rc1
After the game Tal said that he had feared the move 18.Nh4, in order after the exchange of bishops to proceed to the organisation of an attack on the king's flank. However, after 18...Bxc2 19.Qxc2 Nc4 it is difficult to carry this out, since on 20.Nf5 there follows 20...f6. If instead White prepares the offensive on the king, say, with the move 20.Rd1 (in order to free the knight from the defence of the pawn at d4), then Black with 20...a5 obtains counter-play in association with the threat of ...a5–a4–a3.

Possibly, better on 18...Bxc2 is not 19.Qxc2, but 19.Rxc2, but in this case too after 19...Nc4 Black has counter-play. For example, 20.Nc1 Bf8 21.b3 Na3 22.Re2 b4 followed by ...Nb5. In all these variations the knight at h4 proves to be out of things.

18...Nc4
19.Na1!
To play such an unsightly-looking move is perhaps even somewhat shameful. But this
manoeuvre has a definite idea, since Black's only active piece on the queen's flank - the knight at c4 -
will be driven back after b2–b3. Before playing 19.Na1!, I spent not a little time in order to
convince myself that Black cannot exploit the poor position of the knight at a1, and win the pawn at
d4. First and foremost I examined the continuations 19...Be4 and 19...f6.

On 19...Be4 possible is 20.Rxe4 dxe4 21.Bxe4 with good play for the exchange. After the game
with a strong attack.

In the case of 19...f6 White disposes of two possibilities:
a) 20.exf6 Be4!. For example, 21.Bxe4 dxe4 22.Ne5 N6xe5 23.dxe5 Qxd1+ 24.Rxd1 Rxe5

b) 20.Bxf5! Qxf5 21.exf6 Rxe2 (or 21...gx6) 22.Qxe2 Nxd4 23.Nxd4 Qxg5 24.Qe6+ Kh8
25.fxg7+ Kxg7 26.Rd1 with advantage for White.

19...Bxc2 20.Qxc2 Re6 21.Qf5
Also good was 21.b3 Na3 (or 21...Nb6) 22.Qf5 with advantage for White.

21...h6! 22.Bf4 Rf8

23.b3?
A mistake, which is brilliantly exploited by Tal. White should play 23.Qg4 with the threat of
advantage. If instead Black continues 23...Kh7, then after 24.Nc2 followed by b2–b3 and Nc2–e3
White will have an overwhelming position. The continuation 23.Qg4 was the logical conclusion of
White's plan and would have placed Black in a difficult situation.
23...f6!
An excellent reply, with the help of which Black equalises the chances.

24.Qg4?
A turning point. After this move White’s entire strategic plan is ruined and he is left back where he started. Black’s pieces are becoming active. His knight at c4, for which White had prepared an unenviable fate, bursts into White’s camp with terrible force at the square e4.

Still giving a level game is 24.Bxh6!. For example, 24...fxe5 25.Qg4 Nb6 26.Be3. In the case of 24...gxh6 25.bxc4 bxc4 26.Nc2 White has a good position.

24...f5! 25.Qh5 Nd6!
The picture of the battle has changed. It is already White who has to defend. Unpleasant now, for example, is 26...Ne4 with the threat of winning a piece after 27...g6. In search of counter-chances White has to examine a mass of variations. As a result I almost decided on 26.Rxc6 Qxc6 27.Rc2, considering the only possible reply for Black to be 27...Nc4. How surprised I was, when after the game Tal pointed out that 27...Qe8 gave Black an extra exchange.

White’s misfortune is now in the poor position of the queen at h5.

28...c5! 29.Rb2
Bad is 29.dxc5 on account of 29...d4. If White preliminarily plays 29.a3, then 29...Nd6 30.dxc5 g6! 31.Qf3 (Translator’s note: of course, if 31.Qxh6 then 31...g5 wins material.) 31...Nd4 wins the exchange. With the move in the game White wants to include the queen in the play and at the same time defends against ...c5–c4.

29...cxd4 30.Qd1 g5 31.Bh2 Re8! 32.Rxc8+ Qxc8 33.f3
If 33.Qxd4, then 33...Qc1 34.Re2 (34.Kf1 Nd3!) 34...Nc3 35.Re3 Nbxa2 with an extra pawn and the better position.
33...Qc3
Tal’s excellent play has achieved a winning position. During the game I feared the continuation 33...Nc3. If then 34.Qxd4, then 34...Nxa2, and there is no apparent defence against 35...Qc3, after which the win for Black is a matter of straightforward technique. If instead 34.Qd2, then also 34...Ncxa2! For example, 35.Rxa2 Nxa2 36.Qxa2 Qc1 37.Kf2 Qc3+ 38.Kf1 d3 39.Bg1 Qc1, and Black wins.

With the move in the game Black significantly complicates the win for himself. Evidently this, and also the following mistakes, are explained by the time trouble in which Tal found himself.

34.fxe4 Qxb2?
A mistake, after which Black must already fight for a draw. Much stronger was 34...dxe4 and, despite the loss of a piece, Black’s central pawns all the same left him with winning chances.

On 34...dxe4 probably best of all for White is 35.Rf2. In this position Shamkovich pointed out the interesting move 35...Nd5!. On this there could follow 36.Rc2 Qe3+ 37.Kh1 Nc3 (stronger than 37...d3 38.Rc8+ Kg7 39.Rd8, and if 39...Nc3, then 40.Qh5!) 38.Qa1 Ne2 (39.Bg1 was threatened) with sharp play in which, in my opinion, Black’s chances are better.

35.exf5 Rc6 36.Bg3
Circumstances on the board have again changed. White’s connected passed pawns, along with the poor position of the black king, give the possibility of fighting for victory without risk.

The tempting-looking move 36.Qh5 did not give winning chances on account of 36...Nd3 (pointed out by Tal). For example: 37.Nxd3 Rc1+ 38.Nxc1 Qxc1+ 39.Kf2 Qe3+, and White cannot avoid perpetual check; or 37.Qe8+ Kg7 38.Qe7+ Kg8! 39.Bg3 (impossible is 39.f6 on account of mate in 6 moves) 39...Nxe1 40.Bxe1 Qc1! 41.f6 Qxe1+ 42.Kh2 Rxf6 43.Qxf6 Qe4 with a draw.

White avoided the move 36.Qh5 on account of 36...Qc3, which is also sufficient for a draw.

36...d3?
A final and decisive mistake in this long-suffering game. Black can still all the same make a draw. This is most simply of all achieved with 36...Nc2 37.Qh5 Nxe1 38.Bxe1 Qc1!

37.Qh5 d2 38.Qe8+ Kg7 39.Qe7+ Kh8 40.f6 dxe1Q+ 41.Bxe1
Black resigned.