
VLAD'S OVERVIEW OF THE MATCH

GM Vladimir Kramnik provides in-depth commentary on the match, with insights and analysis that only a former World Champion (and still one of the world's top-ranked players) can have.

At the time of this book's writing, Kramnik is #2 in the world, with only World Champion Magnus Carlsen ahead of him by ten points on the rating list.



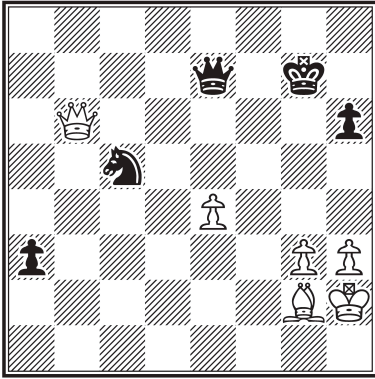
How would you describe Carlsen's and Karjakin's styles? How do their styles compare against each other, and against your own world championship match experience?

There are normally two types of world championship matches: Matches between opponents with similar styles of play and matches between opponents with differing styles. My successful classical world championship match in 2000 with Garry Kasparov is an example of the second situation. I was playing very positional chess, whereas Garry is well-known as a dynamic and aggressive player. In that situation, it is extremely important to bring the match, the games, into your territory.

In the other situation, such as the Carlsen—Karjakin match, the contestants were not so different. They're both positional players with great technique, trying to win games in a slow, positional manner. So the contest was more about nuances and better preparation. Certain new ideas appeared, but exactly what occurred in the openings became less important.

What are the strongest attributes of each player? Are their styles similar to any past champions?

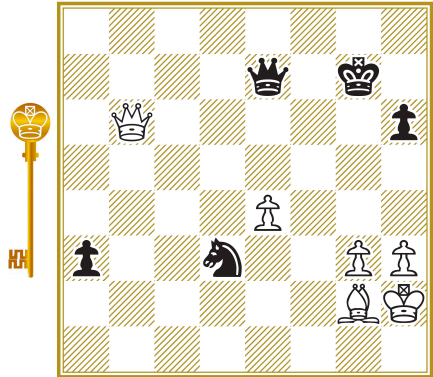
Carlsen and Karjakin are fantastic players. Magnus has great positional understanding and incredible technique. His style is extremely close to Anatoly Karpov. I have actually never seen two other world champions whose play is so similar—Karpov and Carlsen. They share similar strong points and weak points, if one can talk about weak points considering how great these two players are. Karjakin is somewhat different—an incredibly strong, “well-educated” player, truly a classical player, with an innate feeling where to put his pieces. He has a lot of knowledge in the openings and also a lot of knowledge of structures—what to do in different types of structures. He is a very healthy player. He is also a very tough defender, which we saw in this match. But that was already well known before the match.



Position after 48. Qxb6

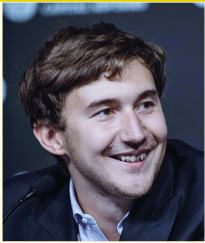
48. ...

Nd3! (0:37)



Position after 48. ... Nd3!

Probably White now expects a draw after the obvious 48. ... Nxe4.



SERGEY'S SELECTION

*Special contributor
World Vice Champion
Sergey Karjakin
recalls his top moment
from the match.*

The most memorable move for me in the entire match was 48. ... Nd3 in the eighth game. I felt that Magnus overlooked that move, expecting a natural 48. ... Nxe4 with a draw—while I aimed higher ... Black transfers his knight to the ideal-for-blockade e5 square, restricting White's bishop with his own pawn!

At that moment my opponent had to pull himself together and discover the only saving idea—to give up a pawn to activate the bishop with 49. e5. However, Magnus wasn't ready for such a sharp change in the position, and missed this opportunity, making further defense practically hopeless.

Yes, 48. ... Nd3 isn't necessarily a beautiful move, but occasionally such quiet moves are more effective than spectacular combinations.

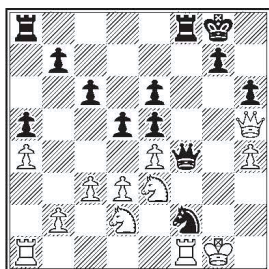
I was able to surprise Magnus with this move, and perhaps with a little more luck it could have become the key to my victory in the match. In any case, 48. ... Nd3 brought me victory in the eighth game.



VLAD'S VIEWPOINT

The move 21. Qh5 is a strange decision because 21. ... Nxf2+ is also a draw, but if Sergey didn't play it on the previous move, it's not very likely that he would play it now. That part is logical. But what if he does? Because sometimes you make a mistake and you realize it immediately. After 21. f3,

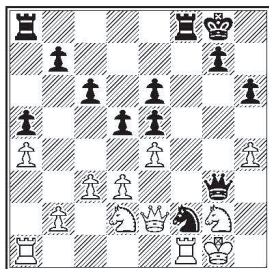
White would have had a very nice plus. Of course if Black doesn't play 21. ... Nxf2+ then White's advantage seriously increases, but White is taking the risk since Black might still play 21. ... Nxf2+. It also shows that Magnus was not in good psychological shape, because he was trying his luck for no good reason. I'm sure that Magnus was happy to see 20. ... d5 instead of 20. ... Nxf2+, but after that, normally a guy would thank his lucky stars and play 21. f3 very quickly so as not to give his opponent any further chance of ... Nxf2+. But fortunately for Magnus, it worked.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 25. ... Qxf4

26. Qe2 (forced) Qg3+ 27. Ng2

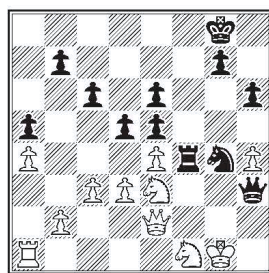


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 27. Ng2

This position is as far as Karjakin needed to see while considering 21. ... Nxf2+, because Black can claim an immediate

draw with 27. ... Nh3+ 28. Kh1 Nf2+ etc.; but having reached this position, he could have kept pressing forward: 27. ... Ng4! 28. Rxf8+ Rxf8 29. Nf1 Qh3 30. Nge3 Rf4.



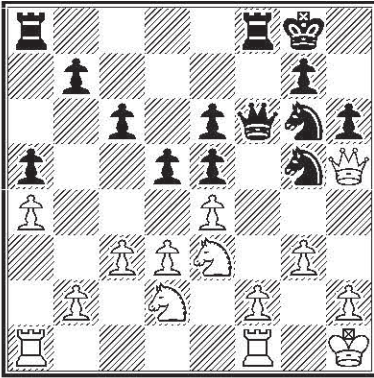
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 30. ... Rf4

White's problem is that he cannot unweave the net around his king, and Black will continue to infiltrate, grabbing more pawns as he does, with a technically winning position.

Returning to Analysis Diagram A, with 24. h4 ruled out, White must settle for an equal position, e.g., 24. Rae1 Qg5 25. Qxg5 Nh3+ and 26. ... Nxe5, or accept a draw by repetition.

21. ... Ng5 (0:19)



Position after 21. ... Ng5

22. h4 (0:34)

A strong alternative is 22. Rae1 to continue the slow buildup, but if Magnus was planning to trade queens to reach a less tactical position, then 22. h4 is the way to do it. 22. h4 leaves Sergey no choice but to exchange knights and queens (e.g., 22. ... Nh7 23. Ng4 Qf7 24. Nxe5 wins a pawn.) Carlsen spent less than a minute on 22. h4; so contrary to the principle of “if you see a good move, look for a better one,” and contrary to his normal practice, he saw a good move that reduces his overall risk and he played it.

Contributing factors to his quick decision may have been his prior shaky play, the overall match situation, and game-in-one-session time control, which limits the players’ depth of analysis.

22. ... Nf3 (0:19)

23. Nxf3 (0:29) Qxf3+ (0:19)

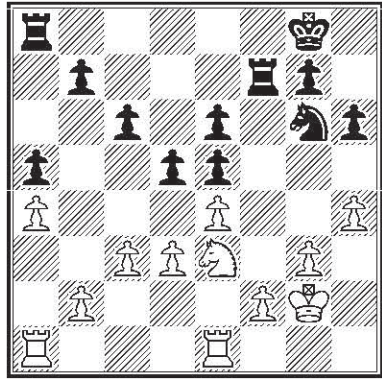
24. Qxf3 (0:29)

Magnus was probably happy, and a bit relieved, to trade queens in order to reach the late-middlegame with a clearly superior position.

24. ... Rxf3 (0:19)

25. Kg2 (0:29) Rf7 (0:18)

26. Rfe1 (0:29)



Position after 26. Rfe1

VLAD'S VIEWPOINT

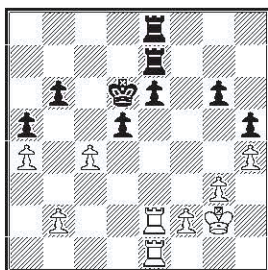
It might just be a matter of taste, but this is a strange decision because it just looks so logical for White to play 26. h5 followed by 27. Ng4. This is what you would play in a blitz game automatically, and it seems to me that it's better than what he did. After 26. h5 Nf8 27. Ng4 Nd7, Black is completely tied up, and then you start to push on the queenside with a plan like Rb1 and b2-b4. It looks very difficult for Black. I believe that Magnus would have played this in nine games out of ten, but for some reason in this particular match he was choosing strange moves.

26. ... h5 (0:15)

Sometimes the cure can be worse than the illness. Black prevents the plan of h4-h5 followed by Ng4, but now the g5-square becomes a strong landing spot for the White knight.

36. ... e5 is therefore a valid option for Black, but once again, Karjakin's match strategy—"safety first"—guides him to keep the position as static as possible.

The move 36. Nb3 has been suggested instead of 36. Re3, but 36. ... b6 can prove to be useful for Black, e.g. 37. Nd4 Nf7 38. exd5 cxd5 39. Nb5+ Kd7 40. c4 Nd6 41. Nxd6 Kxd6.

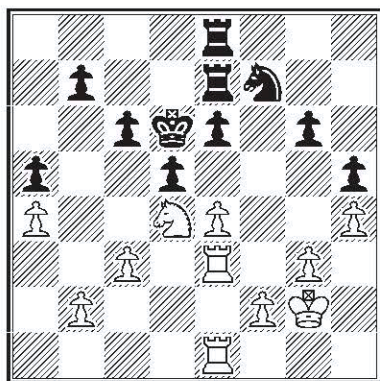


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 41. ... Kxd6

Black is able to liquidate some material and bring the game closer to a drawn result.

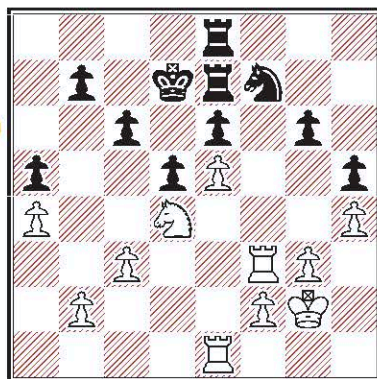
36. ... Nf7 (0:10)



Position after 36. ... Nf7

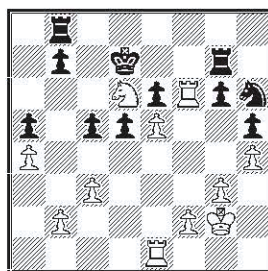
37. e5+ (0:06) Kd7 (0:10)

38. Rf3 (0:06)



Position after 38. Rf3

Finally the conditions are right! 38. ... c5 attacks the knight, so White no longer has the option of playing the (previously) effective b2-b4 break. After 39. Nb5 (39. Nb3 b6 40. Nd2 Rb8 or 40. ... Rg8 and Black holds firm) 39. ... Nh6 40. Rf6 Rg7 41. Nd6 Rb8



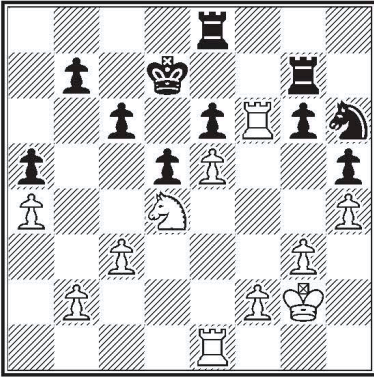
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 41. ... Rb8

White's pieces are optically impressive but they have no real prospects for improvement, e.g., 42. f3 Ng8 43. Rf4 Nh6 or 42. c4 Ng4 43. Rf3 d4 with an equal position.

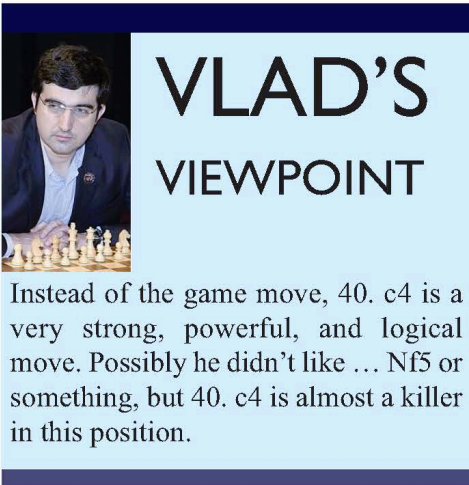
38. ... Nh6 (0:10)

39. Rf6 (0:06) Rg7 (0:10)



Position after 39. ... Rg7

40. b4 (0:06)

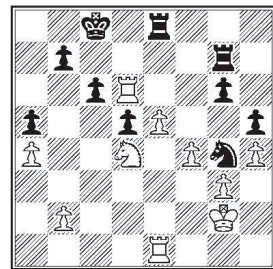


Instead of the game move, 40. c4 is a very strong, powerful, and logical move. Possibly he didn't like ... Nf5 or something, but 40. c4 is almost a killer in this position.

A player must always be wary of making a committing move just before the time control—chess history is replete with examples of model games that were spoiled by such a move—but this position is ripe for either 40. b4 or 40. c4. Whereas 40. b4 is fully consistent with a strategy of restraint, and is clearly a good move that can be made after minimal calculation, the move 40. c4 does indeed significantly change the dynamics of the position. Whether those changes would be to Carlsen's advantage would require quite a bit of calculation and assessment,

which in turn requires time—and time is not a resource that Magnus had at this moment.

After 40. c4, there are a half-dozen candidate moves requiring assessment. Some can be examined rather quickly, e.g., 40. ... c5?! 41. Nb3 Kc6 42. Nxa5+ Kb6 43. Nb3 d4 (the point of Black's attempt—to try to lock up the position) 44. a5+ Kc6 45. Nc1! and White has too many trumps in the position: his knight's ideal post on d3 and the strong pawn lever b2-b4, not to mention that Black is down a pawn. Similarly, 40. ... Ng4 41. cxd5 exd5 (41. ... Nxf6? 42. exf6 and Black loses on the spot due to the upcoming 43. dxe6+; or 41. ... cxd5 42. Rf3, and White has succeeded in creating weaknesses on Black's queenside) 42. Rd6+ Kc8 (42. ... Ke7? 43. f3 Nh6 44. Ne6! Rf7 45. Nc5, and both the b- and g-pawns are attacked) 43. f4 is clearly favorable for White, so this line would quickly pass Magnus' inspection as well.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 43. f4

Also after 40. c4, the move 40. ... dxc4 seems counterintuitive, yet still it would need to be carefully examined. A sample line is 41. Rd1 Kc8 42. Nxe6 Rge7 (another sharp move deserving attention here is 42. ... Rf7!? 43. Rxc6 Ng4 44. Nf4 Rxe5 45. Rd4 Rd7 46. Rxd7 Kxd7 47. Nxc5 Nxf2 48. Kxf2 Rxc5 but



The nerve-wracking game four commences, and will last for 96 moves—the longest game of the match.



Some frustration shows on Carlsen's face after he was unable to convert game four.