

A Battle Royale

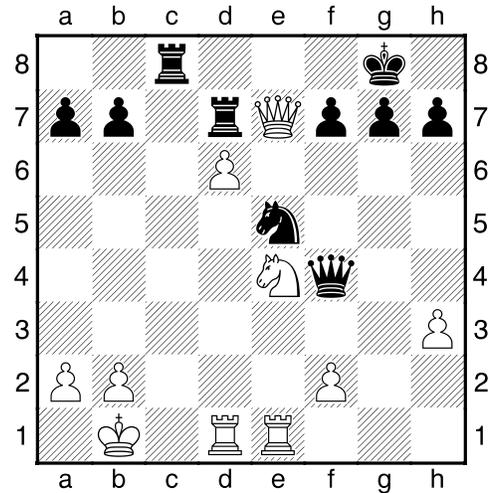
In a previous article I looked at a game between two legendary Hoosier players and the theme centered upon a far advanced pawn. Should one attack, or try to queen the pawn?

Here we will revisit this theme as it often comes into play. The question revolves about how much can you sacrifice in order to get that pawn to the promised land.

Before we get to the game, let me give you an exercise: [See the diagram at right.]

Your queen has just been attacked. Give yourself 15 minutes and decide upon what best play might be, and how would you play?

23...♖d7



[What pair of Hoosiers have played the most games against each other? I would venture to say that two legendary players from Kokomo; John Roush and Phil Meyers would be my guess. I'd say they have probably crossed swords over the board more than a thousand times! (Especially when you include their marathon blitz sessions!) I witnessed their most recent battle royale at the recent Super Tornado organized by Nate Bush in Indianapolis at the Delta Hotel.

But I'm also sure that by the time you are reading this that they will already have played many more games at the Kokomo IHOP in their ongoing journey across the chessboard.

This encounter was played at a very fast time control [g45+5], but that might have seemed slow to these battle tested veterans. The game has instructive points and I hope you enjoy it.]

Roush, John (1800) - Meyers, Phil (1713) [B21]

December Super Tornado (2.1), 12.12.2020

[FM Lester VanMeter]

1.e4 c5 2.f4 d6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.♙b5 ♙d7 5.c4

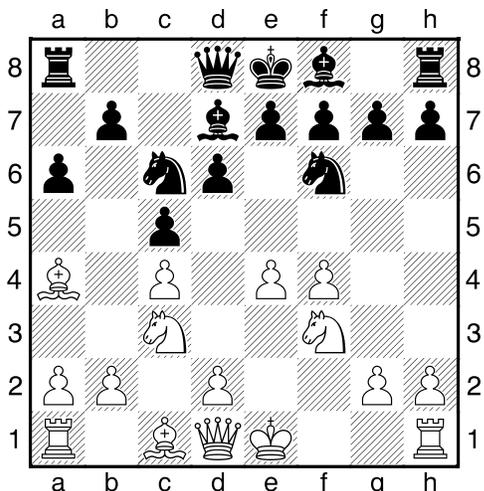
[This type of opening set-up is a favorite of John's and surely no surprise to Phil. ChessBase gives the following as an interesting alternative.]

[Relevant: 5.0-0 g6 6.♙xc6 ♙xc6 7.d3 ♙g7 8.♘c3 ♘f6 9.♙e1 b5 10.e5 ♘d5 11.♘e4 0-0 12.a3 ♙d7 13.♙h4 f5 14.exf6 ♘xf6 15.♘fg5 h6 16.♘xf6+ exf6 17.♘f3 f5

18.c3 ♖ae8 19.♙d2 ♖e2 20.♙g3 ♔h7 21.♖f2 ♖fe8 22.♘h4 ♙f7 23.♖af1 b4 24.axb4 cxb4 25.♖xe2 ♖xe2 26.♖f2 ♖e6 27.h3 a5 28.♘f3 a4 29.♙h4 ♔g8 30.♙d8+ ♔h7 31.♙h4 ♔g8 32.♙d8+ ♙e8 33.♙a5 b3 34.♘d4 ♙xd4 Liu,G (2462)-Gao,R (2546) Shenzhen 2017 1-0]

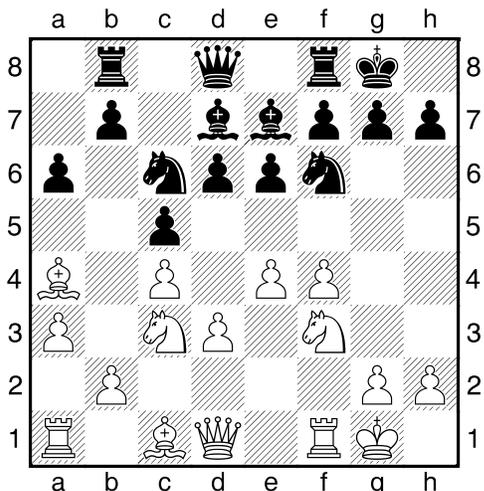
5...a6 6.♙a4 ♘f6 7.♘c3

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7...e6N [ChessBase proclaims this to be a novelty, but it certainly is a typical move, and it, too, fits Phil's style of play.]

[Predecessor: 7...♘d4 8.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 9.d3 ♘c6 10.0-0 e6 11.a3 ♙e7 12.♖b1 0-0 13.d4 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♖ac8 15.♙e3 ♘xd4 16.♚xd4 ♚c6 17.b3 ♘g4 18.♘a4 ♙f6 19.♚d3 b5 20.♘b2 ♙xb2 21.♖xb2 bxc4 22.bxc4 ♚xc4 23.♖d1 ♚xd3 24.♖xd3 ♖b8 25.♖db3 ♖xb3 26.♖xb3 ♖c8 27.h3 ♘xe3 28.♖xe3 ♖c6 29.♖b3 g6 30.♔f2 ♔g7 31.♔f3 f5 32.exf5 gxf5 33.g4 fxg4+ 34.hxg4 ♔g6 35.♖e3 d5 36.♖d3 ♖c5 37.♖e3 [Saveliev, D \(2050\)-Prihodko, A \(1967\) Uljanovsk 2006 ½-½ \(67\)](#) 8.d3 ♙e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.a3 ♖b8

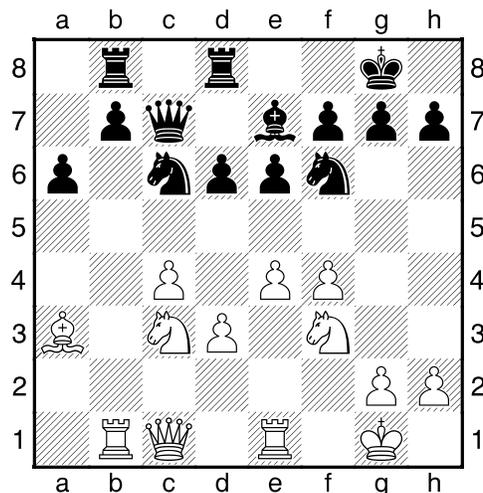


The position is balanced, and here John decides to lash out with a pawn sacrifice to

obtain open lines for his pieces.]

11.b4?! cxb4 12.axb4 ♘xb4 13.♙xd7 ♚xd7 14.♙a3 ♘c6 15.♖b1 ♖fd8 16.♖e1 ♚c7 [Being a pawn up Phil decided that he wished to wait and stay solid. He rejected opening up the position with the central break d6-d5 as he thought it would be weakening.]

17.♚c1



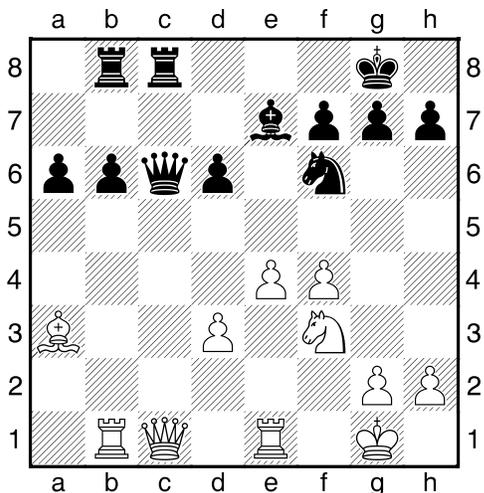
This move protects the ♙a3 & ♘c3 while getting out of the gaze of the ♖d8. It also eyes the undefended ♚c7 and this is a point that Phil overlooked...]

17...b6 18.♘d5! [This is a common tactic seen in the Hedgehog and English Opening lines. Phil was definitely a bit surprised and "put off" his normal game by it.

When hit by a surprise move, it is always a good idea (if you have time) to take a deep breath and allow yourself some time to calm down. The fast time control was not a factor in this game for either player.]

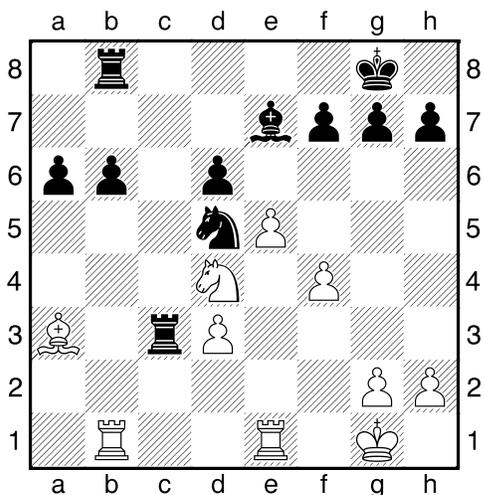
18...exd5 19.cxd5 ♖dc8 20.dxc6 ♚xc6

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21.e5! [John presses forward utilizing pins and undefended pieces.]

21...♞d5 22.♞xc6 ♖xc6 23.♞d4 ♖c3

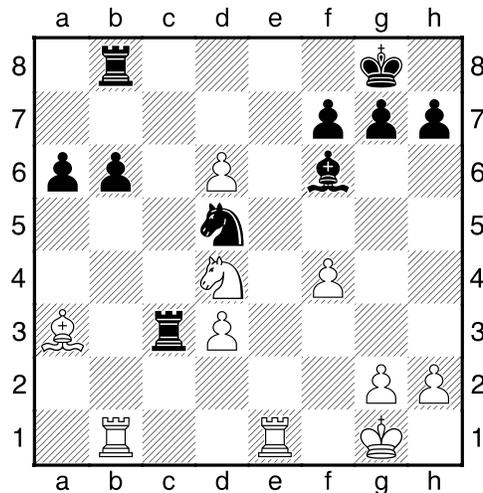


It was at this point that I first saw the game 'live'. I did join the postmortem afterwards with both players.

I was interested to see how he would play. 24. exd6 looked good, but the intermediate move of ♕f6 is just too strong.]

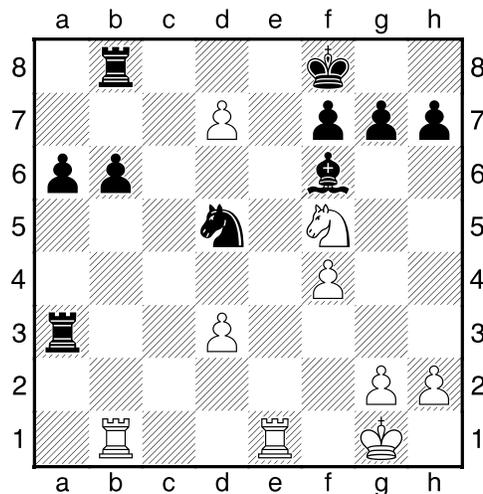
24.exd6? [The simple 24.♕xd6 was necessary.]

24...♕f6



25.♞f5? [25.♞b3 keeps some fight alive, but when I came back to the board I saw that John had decided to go "all in", but this ♖ on the d-file does not compensate for a piece.]

25...♖xa3 26.d7 ♔f8



This was the position I saw when I came back. I was thinking, what is John up to? He told me later that he had just lost the ♕, but I answered that I thought he must have given it away deliberately trying to queen his d-pawn.]

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27. ♖bc1!? [An interesting attempt to confuse the issue.]

27... ♖c3 28. ♖xc3 [28. ♘d6 doesn't make a difference.]

28... ♘xc3? [This is a losing move (theoretically), but Phil's reason was understandable, "I wanted to keep two guards on the queening square."]

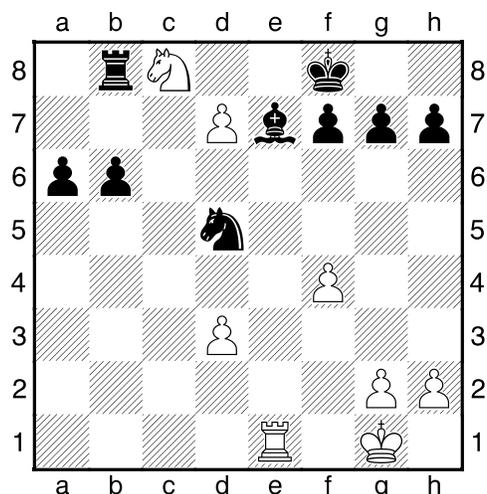
[28... ♗xc3 was the winning path. It gains time on the rook, and more importantly it keeps the knight close to the d-pawn. Phil's body language of being worse was clearly evident.

However, in such situations, I would like to remind a player to stay positive. Think of what you have; an extra piece, and even if you cannot figure out how to stop the d-pawn, then remember with an extra piece it is okay to give a piece back for that pawn!

In such a case, you would be a pawn up... However here with good play it would not even come to pass after black plays ♖b8-d8.]

29. ♘d6+- [Now this works, because he gets a tempo. The capture on c3 with the bishop, hitting the rook would preclude this move as white could not afford to give the ♖e1...]

29... ♗e7 30. ♘c8! ♘d5



... and now to just finish him off...]

31. ♖e5?

[oh, no...

The most common winning method, just take all the material away, right?

But this could have been a costly decision...]

[31. ♖xe7! threatening mate in one, AND eliminating the control over d8 by black.

It's simple once you see it, but if you haven't seen it, or you are not looking to 'give up' material, rather than winning material, then it is pretty much impossible to see.

Clearly it isn't on white's radar as he gets another chance and again passes on it.]

31... ♗c5+?

[Here was a chance again, but one has to have a sacrificial mindset! I've an extra piece, I just have to eliminate that d-pawn.]

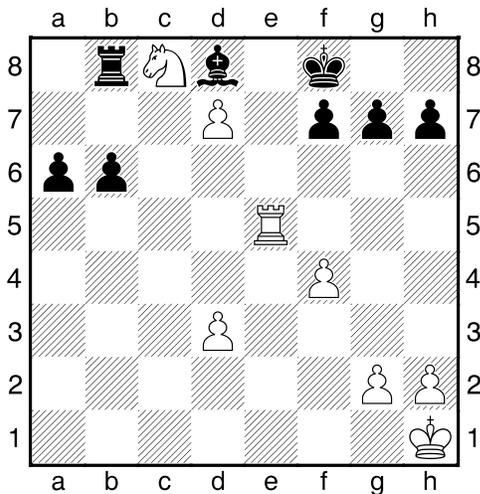
[31... ♘f6 and black will enjoy a pawn up endgame with every chance to win.

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32. ♖xe7 ♞xd7 33. ♖xd7 ♖xc8]

32. ♔h1 ♚e7 33. ♖xd5 [33. ♖xe7]

33... ♚d8 34. ♖e5



[This certainly looks over, but...]

34... f6?

[34... f5 Would force white to find a couple more accurate moves down the road. 35. ♖e8+ ♔f7 36. ♖xd8 ♔e6 37. d4 ♖b7 38. d5+ ♔xd5]

35. ♖e8+ ♔f7 36. ♖xd8 ♔e6 37. f5+ [The difference, this is too easy to spot.]

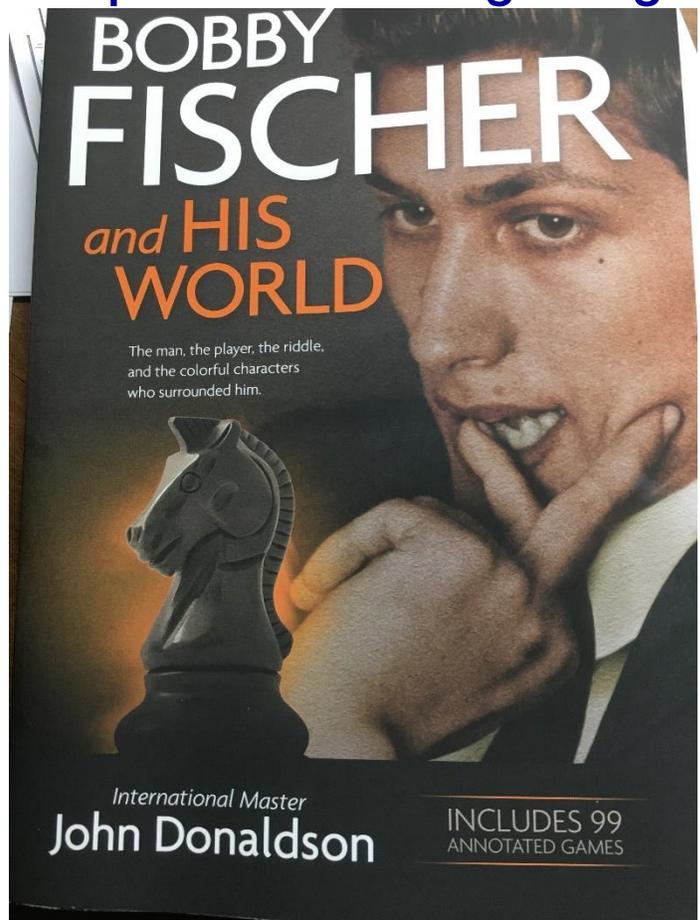
37... ♔d5 38. ♖e8 [A true battle. The key takeaway for me is to always resolve to make it as difficult for your opponent as possible. Naturally the reverse is true, too. When you are up, DO NOT relax and keep pushing.]

1-0

Let us now return to the exercise I posed at the beginning.

I am currently reading the new Bobby Fischer book just out. It is an excellent book, and for many players new and fascinating details about him and "HIS WORLD" will be revealed.

I have also been studying Bobby's games from his 11-0 sweep of the US Championship with my students. All of these games are interesting and full of chess ideas worth knowing. The position depicted is from his first round game in that event. White was GM Edmar Mednis, who annotated this game rather deeply in an obscure Regional US chess pub, and Donaldson presented it in his book.. Hans Kmoch annotated all of Bobby's games from this event in Chess Review, and commentary upon this game also appeared in the American Chess Quarterly magazine published by Larry Evans. Select notes can also be found in Fischer game collections by Mueller or Hays or appreciations of Bobby's play by Brieger or Augur.

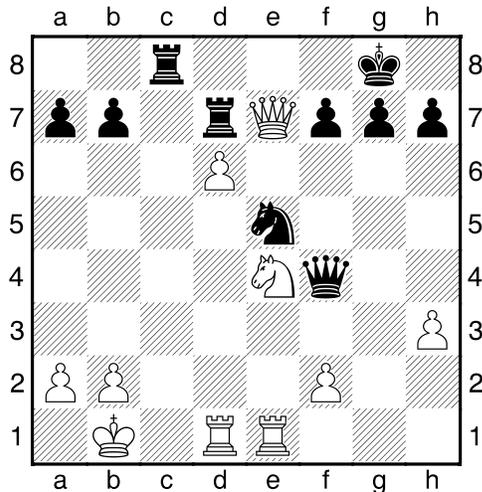


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This follows upon our theme regarding a passed pawn. I am only going to give light notes/commentary. For those of you interested in more details, please feel free to consult the references cited above, or just contact me. I am more than happy to help aspiring students of the game.

Mednis, Edmar John - Fischer, Robert James [C54] USA-ch New York (1), 15.12.1963

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6
5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 ♙b4+ 7.♙d2 ♙xd2+
8.♘bx2 ♘xe4!? 9.♚e2 d5 10.♘xe4 0-0
11.0-0-0 ♙g4 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.gxf3 dxc4
[13...dxe4] 14.♚xc4 ♚h4 15.♙b1 ♚f4
16.d5 ♘e5 [16...♘e7] 17.♚xc7 ♖ac8
18.♚d6 [18.♚xb7=] 18...♖cd8 19.♚c7
♖c8 20.♚d6 ♖fd8!? 21.♚e7 ♘xf3 22.d6!
♘e5 [22...♚e5=] 23.♖he1 [23.♚xb7]
23...♖d7 [This has been a complicated game
and Mednis is already short of time. Here is the
critical choice:



[Naturally this game was followed closely by the large crowd. Here a strong master, Sidney Bernstein, thought about ♘c5, and contemporary analysis of this game centered about this idea.]

24.♚g5?

24.♘c5!! Mednis 24...♖xe7 (Fritz 14:
24...♚f5+ 25.♙a1 ♖xe7 26.dxe7 ♖e8
27.♖d8 f6 28.♖xe8+ ♙f7 29.♖b8 ♙xe7
30.♖xb7+ ♙d6 31.♘e4+ ♙c6 32.♖xg7
♘d3 33.♖f7 ♚xh3 34.♖xf6+ ♙b5 35.♖d1
h5 36.f3 ♚g2 37.♘c3+ ♙c4 38.♖c6+ ♘c5
39.♘e4) 25.dxe7 ♖e8 26.♖d8 f6 27.♖xe8+
♙f7 28.♖g8!]

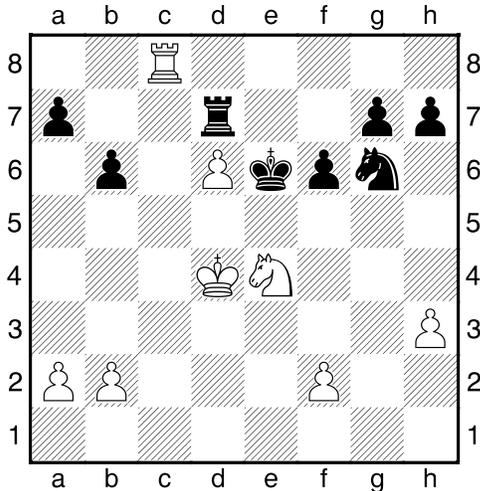
Our modern friend the SM gives the correct line. Did you find it?

[Fritz 14: 24.♖d5! ♖xe7 25.dxe7 ♘c6
26.♘d6 g6 27.♘xc8 ♘xe7 28.♘xe7+ ♙g7
29.♘c8 ♚c4 30.♖d8 ♚h4 31.♖d2 ♚xh3
32.♘d6 ♚h4 33.♙c2 h5 34.♖e4 ♚g5
35.b4 f5 36.f4 ♚h4 37.♖ed4 b6 38.♘b5
1.69/19;

Fritz 14: 24.♘g3 ♖xe7 25.dxe7 ♖e8
26.♖d8 f6 27.♖xe8+ ♙f7 28.♖b8 ♙xe7
29.♖xb7+ ♙e6 30.♘e4 f5 31.♘c5+ ♙d6
32.♖b5 ♚d2 33.♘b7+ ♙c6 34.♖bxe5
♙xb7 35.♖e7+ ♙b8 36.♖e8+ ♙b7
37.♖8e2 ♚d3+ 38.♙a1 ♚d4 39.♖e7+ ♙b6
0.58/20;

24...♚xg5 25.♘xg5 f6 26.♘e4 ♘g6
27.♖c1 ♖xc1+ 28.♖xc1 b6! 29.♖c7 ♘f8
30.♙c2 ♙f7 31.♙c3 ♙e6 32.♖c8 ♘g6
33.♙d4

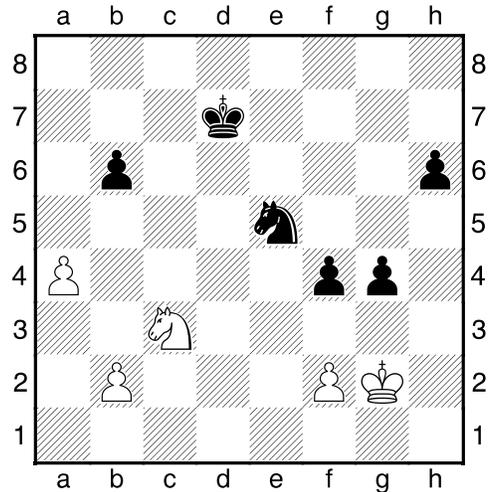
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33...h6 34.♖e8+ ♕f7 35.♖c8 ♘f4 36.h4 g6
 37.♖h8 f5 38.♖h7+ [The draw was there
 with 14: 38.♖e5 ♘d3+ 39.♖d5 ♘b4+
 40.♖e5 ♘c6+ 41.♖d5 ♘e7+ 42.♖e5
 ♘c6+ 43.♖d5 ♘e7+ 44.♖e5 ♘c6+
 45.♖d5 ♘e7+ 46.♖e5 ♘c6+ 47.♖d5
 ♘e7+ 48.♖e5 ♘c6+ 49.♖d5 ♘e7+
 50.♖e5 ♘c6+ 51.♖d5 ♘e7+ 52.♖e5
 ♘c6+ 53.♖d5 ♘e7+ but in horrific time
 trouble now Mednis was not in a "sacrificial"
 frame of mind.]

38...♖e6 39.♖xd7 ♖xd7 40.♘c3 ♖xd6
 41.♘b5+ ♖d7 **[Likely the players were still
 blitzing out their moves and this is the decisive
 error.]** 42.♘xa7? ♘g2! 43.♖e5 ♘hx4

44.♖f4 g5+ 45.♖g3 ♘g6 46.a4 f4+
 47.♖g2 g4 48.♘b5 [the sealed move, and
 the game was resumed a couple of days later]
 48...♘e5 49.♘c3



49...♖e6!! [The winning idea. Mednis
 missed this in his adjournment analysis,
 but Bobby didn't....

Edmar had considered only [49...♖c6;
 49...♘d3; 49...♘c4] and thought that he
 had good chances to draw.]

50.b4 ♘c6 51.f3 h5 52.b5 ♘e5 53.fxg4
 hxg4 54.♖f2 ♘d3+ 55.♖g2 ♘c5 56.♖f1
 ♖f5 57.♖g2 ♖e5 58.♖f2 ♘d3+ 59.♖e2 g3
 60.♖f3 ♘e1+ 61.♖e2 g2 62.♖f2 f3 0-1

