

Kosteniuk Annotates

Alexandra Kosteniuk

Alexandra Kosteniuk recently won the Women's World Championship, the World Champion title in Chess960, and the Women's Blitz at the 1st World Mind Sports Games in Beijing. Here she annotates the first game from the final match of the Women's World Championship in Nalchik, as well as two games from the European Team Championships, where the Russian team won the gold medal and she earned the bronze medal on first board.

White: Hou, Yifan (2557)

Black: Kosteniuk, Alexandra (2510)
 Women's World Championship,
 Nalchik (6.1), 14.09.2008 [C90]

The first game of any match is very important. If the match is short it's even more important, since a good start means a lot. I was very happy to begin the match (for the first time in the championship) with the black pieces.

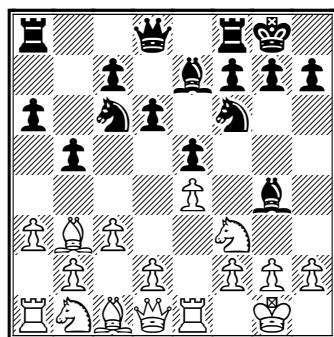
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.a3

An unexpected move. I was not ready for this variation. I thought she would opt for an Anti-Marshall starting with 8.a4.

8...d6

Since I knew very little about this variation, I tried to solve my opening problems with simple logic. Magnus Carlsen used this variation twice with white this year and scored 1½-½, though I doubt it was purely a question of the opening.

9.c3 Bg4



During the game I was interested in what would happen upon ...d5, and whether the move a3 be helpful for White. Since I couldn't discern the difference between a normal Marshall and one with a3, I finally decided to play differently.



**Women's World Champion
 Alexandra Kosteniuk**

Later I found a game between Suetin and Lilienthal where Andor played 9...d5 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxe5 Nxe5 12.Rxe5 c6 13.d4 Bd6 14.Re1 Qh4 15.g3 Qh3 16.Be3 Bg4 17.Qd3 Rae8 18.Nd2 Re6 19.c4 (19.a4 would lead to a well-known theoretical position of the mainline Marshall) 19...bxc4 (Black could have played 19...Bf4!) 20.Nxc4 Rb8 21.Bc2 Nxe3 22.Nxe3 Bf3 23.Qf5 Qxf5 24.Bxf5 Rf6 25.b4 Bf8 26.Bd3 Rd8 27.Nc2 Ra8 28.Re5 Bd5 29.Rae1 Rd6 30.Be4 Be6 31.Rd1 Be7 32.Rc5 1-0, Suetin-Lilienthal, URS 1967.

10.d3 Na5 11.Bc2

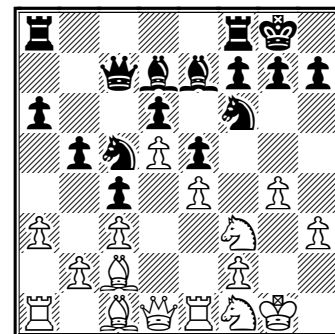
I was a little bit surprised to see this move. I thought that the bishop would go to a2.

11...c5 12.h3 Bd7 13.d4 Qc7 14.d5

After this we reach a position from the Classical Chigorin variation with the strange move a3 and an extra tempo for

Black. Since I play this kind of structure for White, I knew the basic ideas and plans for both sides and that gave me some advantage.

14...c4 15.Nbd2 Nb7 16.Nf1 Nc5 17.g4?!



A very risky move. Keres was first to use this move in the position with the pawn on a2 and the knight on b7. I knew this idea, since I unsuccessfully tried to use this plan for White in a recent blitz-game. I would suggest normal moves such as Ng3 or N3h2 for White.

17...h5!

Of course, Black didn't want to allow White to put the knight on g3.

18.N3h2?

White shouldn't allow Black to close the g-file. Hou should have played 18.gxh5 Bxh3 and only then 19.N3h2, hoping to use an open g-file for the attack.

18...hxg4 19.hxg4 Qc8

Forcing White to weaken the black squares.

20.f3 Nh7 21.Ng3 Bg5 22.Nf5!?

An interesting idea.

22...Qd8 23.Kg2 g6 24.Ng3

After this move, Black's advantage is unquestionable. White should have tried to complicate the game with 24.Nxd6! Bxc1 25.Qxc1 Qf6 26.Nf5 gxf5 27.gxf5 Qg5+ 28.Ng4, and despite the fact that Black has an extra piece, she has to be very careful. For example, after 28...Qxc1 29.Raxc1 f6 30.Rh1 Kg7 31.Rcg1, White has very strong compensation for the knight.

24...Kg7 25.Rh1 Rh8 26.Nhf1 Qf6 27.Be3 Bxe3 28.Nxe3 Ng5 29.Qe2 Rag8?!

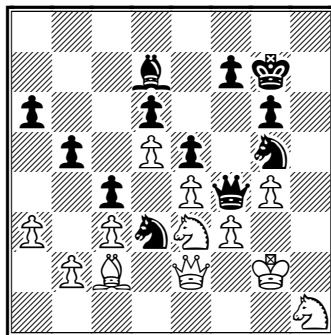
I didn't see how to continue and decided simply to wait. I think I should have played 29...Nd3!? 30.Bxd3 cxd3

31.Qf2 Qf4 32.Rad1, and it seems that the d3-pawn will be lost in a few more moves, but it's not that easy: 32...a5 33.Rxd3 (33.Rxh8 Rxh8 34.Rxd3 (34.Nef1 Qf6! preparing the f4-square for the knight 35.Rxd3 Nh3 36.Qe3 Nf4+ 37.Kg1 Nxd3 38.Qxd3 Qf4 and Black should be winning) 34...Nxe4! 35.fxe4 Rh2+) 33...Rxh1 34.Nxh1 (34.Kxh1? Nh3!) 34...Nxe4 35.Qe2 Rh8 with an attack.

30.Raf1 Qf4 31.Rxh8?

Hou couldn't handle the pressure and decided to exchange rooks, forgetting about a very strong resource that Black will have after this exchange. She should have continued the game by 31.Qf2. I'm not sure what would I choose to do here. During the game I was thinking about playing on the queenside, but although Black's position is better, it is unclear how to get something concrete from this small advantage.

31...Rxh8 32.Rh1 Rxh1 33.Nxh1 Nd3!



After this move, White's position collapses like a house of cards.

34.Bxd3

After 34.Ng3, Black would continue 34...Nxf3 35.Bxd3 Nh4+ 36.Kh3 cxd3 37.Qxd3 Nf3 dominating the game.

34...cxd3 35.Qf2 d2 36.Ng3 Nxf3!

Of course not 36...Qxe3 37.Qxe3 d1Q 38.Qxg5 giving White some initiative.

37.Qxf3 Bxg4!

After this move, the game is practically over and in this game I was precise until the very end.

38.Qf2 d1Q 39.Nxd1 Bxd1 40.Qe1 Bf3+ 41.Kg1 f5 42.exf5 gxf5 43.Qf2 Kg6 44.b3 e4 45.c4 bxc4 46.bxc4 Qg5 47.c5 f4 48.cxd6 fxd3 0-1

The last finesse; it was still possible to lose the game by 48...Qxg3+?? 49.Qxg3+ fxg3 50.d7.

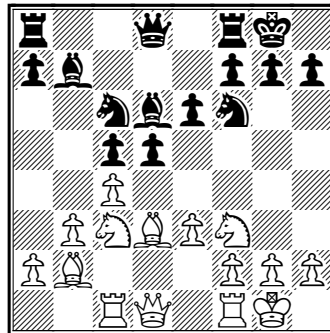
White: Danielian, Elina

Black: Kosteniuk, Alexandra

European Team Championship, Heraklion (2), 29.10.2007

This game was played in the second round of the 2007 European Team Championship in Crete.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.e3 b6 4.Bd3 Bb7 5.0-0 d5 6.c4 Bd6 7.Nc3 0-0 8.b3 c5 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.Bb2 Nc6 11.Rc1



Since Yuri Razuvaev is my trainer, I was familiar with the following game: 11.cxd5 exd5 12.Rc1 d4 13.Nb5 Be7 14.exd4 a6 15.d5 Nxd5 16.Nc3 Nf4 17.Bc4 Nd4 18.Nxd4 cxd4 19.Ne2 Nxe2 20.Qxd4 Qxd4 21.Nxd4 Bf6 22.Rfd1 Rfd8 23.Ba1 Nh4 24.Be2 Rd7 25.Bg4 Rd5 26.Rc7 Rg5 27.Rxb7 Rxe4 28.Kf1 Rd8 29.Re1 h5 30.h3 Rxe4 31.Bxd4 Rxd4 32.Re8+ Kh7 33.Rxf7 Ng6 34.Rc7 Rd2 35.Re2 Rd1+ 36.Re1 Rd2 37.Re2 Rd5 38.Rc4 Ne5 39.Ra4 a5 40.Re3 Kg6 41.Rc4 Kf5 42.b4 axb4 43.Rxb4 Bg5 44.Reb3 Nc6 0-1, Petrosian-Razuvaev, Moscow 1983.

11...d4 12.Nb5 e5 13.exd4 exd4

13...cxd4!? would lead to sharp and interesting play, but I decided to play more solidly.

14.Nxd6 Qxd6 15.a3 a5 16.Re1 Rfe8

A key strategic moment. During the game I was not sure about the correctness of my plan. It is clear that exchanging heavy pieces will not be in Black's favor. It's frightening to think what would happen if white's dark-squared bishop achieves freedom. And interesting plan would be to put pressure on the b3-pawn with 16...Rab8 17.Qd2 Bc8.

You can't play good chess just by applying rules and principles.
William Hartston, *Better Chess*

17.Qd2 h6 18.Rxe8+ Rxe8 19.Re1 Re6 20.Bc1

Elina could have exchanged rooks by 20.Rxe6 fxe6 21.Qe2, and Bc1, with a very complicated position.

20...Qc7 21.Qf4?!

This move allows Black to pose problems for White. Again, White should have considered 21.Rxe6 fxe6 with an unclear position.

21...Rxe1+ 22.Nxe1 Ne5 23.Bc2?!

Mistakes usually come in pairs. White loses the rhythm of the game and leaves the initiative to Black; although, especially in time trouble, White has problems finding the best moves. 23.Qg3, with the idea Bf4 or Bh6 was best: 23...Nh5 24.Qh4 Nxd3 25.Nxd3 Qc6 26.f3 Nf6 with an equal position.

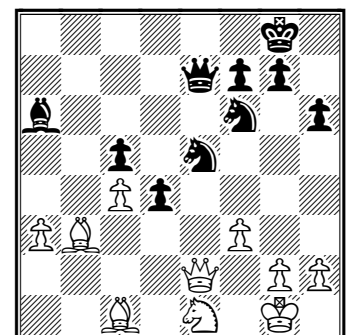
23...Qe7 24.Qd2?

A mistake; now White is too passive. White should have reduced the tension by 24.Nd3 Nxd3 (24...Be4 25.Qxe5 Qxe5 26.Nxe5 Bxc2 27.Nc6 Bxb3 28.Nxa5 Ba2 and Black can hardly play for a win). Now White has an intermediate move: 25.Qb8+! (25.Bxd3 Qe1+ 26.Bf1 Ne4 and White is losing) 25...Kh7 26.Bxd3+ Be4 27.Qg3 when the real fight has just begun.

24...a4 25.f3?

The decisive mistake, it was possible to hold after 25.f4 Neg4 26.bxa4 Qe6, although White's pieces are very passive 27.Bd3 Ne4.

25...axb3 26.Bxb3 Ba6 27.Qe2



27...Nxf3+!

A nice blow that ends the game in favor of Black

28.Qxf3 Qxe1+ 29.Qf1 Qc3

The point: Black now wins material by force.

30.Ba2 Qc2 0-1

The bishop on a2 is caught, so White resigned.

White: Kosteniuk, Alexandra

Black: Peng, Zhaoqin

European Team Championship, Heraklion (8), 05.11.2007

This game was played in the penultimate round. The tension was high, as the Russian women's team needed to win. Prior to this game my opponent had a fantastic 6½ of 7 score, with a performance rating over 2800.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 dxe4 5.Nxe4 Nbd7 6.Nxf6+ Nxf6 7.Bd3 h6 8.Bh4 Bd7

Peng plays the opening in a very interesting way.

9.Nf3 c5 10.dxc5

10.0–0 was also worth consideration.

10...Qa5+ 11.c3 Qxc5 12.Qe2 Bd6

Black is in no hurry to castle, and invites White to decide first.

13.Bg3 Bxg3

After this move, I started to like my position very much: the h-file is opened and I planned to bring my rook to the center and to advance my kingside pawns. I also considered 13...Nd5. If White castles on the kingside, then Black can take on g3. 14.0–0–0 (14.Ne5 Nxc3 15.Qh5 0–0 16.Rc1 Bxe5 17.Bxe5 f6 18.Rxc3 Qxe5+ 19.Qxe5 fxe5 and White has to fight for equality) 14...0–0 (14...Nf4 ?! 15.Qd2 and Black has to go back) 15.Bxd6 Qxd6 16.Rhe1 with complicated play.

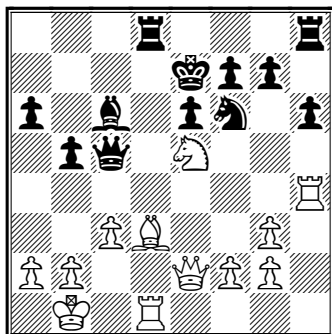
14.hxg3 Bc6 15.Rh4 a6

I had the impression that Peng did not want to castle and give me chances to attack her king directly.

16.0–0–0 b5 17.Kb1?!

This prophylactic move was unnecessary. Better would have been 17.Rd4, controlling the d-file and asking Black to castle. 17...0–0 18.Ne5 Bd5 19.Kb1 with the further advance of the f- and g-pawns.

17...Rd8 18.Ne5 Ke7?!



In such systems, the black king often feels quite comfortable in the center; nevertheless, I think it would have been better to castle: 18...0–0 19.g4 (19.f3 Rd5; 19.Nxc6 Qxc6 20.f4 Rfe8 21.g4 e5) 19...Be4.

19.f4

I spent twenty minutes calculating 19.Qe3!? Qxe3 20.Nxc6+ Kd7 (20...Kd6 is a mistake in view of 21.Nxd8 Qxf2 22.Nxf7+ Kc7 23.Nxh8) 21.Nxd8 Qb6 (21...Qxf2 22.Bxb5+ Kc7 23.Rc4+ Kb8 (23...Kb6? 24.Rd6+ Kxb5 25.Rb4+ Ka5 26.Nb7# I saw this variation during the game, too bad it is not forced.) 24.Bxa6 Qf5+ (24...Rxd8 25.Rxd8+ Ka7 26.Ra4) 25.Ka1 Rxd8 26.Rxd8+ Ka7 27.Rc7+ Kb6 (27...Kxa6 28.Rd6+ Kb5 (28...Ka5 29.b4+) 29.c4+ Ka4 30.Ra6+ Kb4 31.Rb6+ winning) 28.Bd3 Qh5 29.Rcc8 Qh1+ 30.Bb1 Nd5 31.Rd7 and if White does not get mated, White will have greater chances to deliver mate) 22.Bxb5+ (22.Nxf7 Rf8 23.Rd4+) 22...Kc7 (22...Ke7 23.Nc6+ Kf8 24.Rd8+ Ne8 25.Ba4 g5 26.Rhd4 Kg7 27.Ne5 Nf6 28.Rxh8 Kxh8 29.Nxf7+ Kg7 30.Ne5 with compensation for the queen) 23.Rc4+ Kb8. During the game it was impossible to evaluate this position, as well as the one that arises after 21...Qf2. Although my desire to end the game with a beautiful queen sacrifice was very strong, I remembered that it was a team competition, so I played 19.f4. Home analysis shows that White risks little in this position, but, on the other hand, I could not find anything better than perpetual check. 24.Ba4 Qxf2 25.Rb4+ Kc7 26.Rc4+ (26.Rb7+ Kc8 27.Bd7+ Nxd7 28.Rdxd7 Qf1+ 29.Kc2 Qxg2+ 30.Kb3 Qxb7+ 31.Rxb7 Rxd8 32.Rxf7 Rd7) 26...Kb8.

19...Rd6 20.f5

20.g4 Rhd8 21.g5 hxg5 22.fxg5 Nd7 23.Nxc6+ Qxc6 24.Rf1 Qc5 25.g6 was possible.

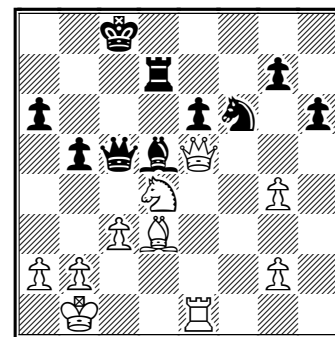
20...Rhd8 21.Rd4 Be8 22.Nf3 Bc6 23.Ne5 Be8 24.fxe6 fxe6 25.Rxd6 Rxd6 26.Re1 Bc6 27.Nf3 Bd5 28.Nd4

Black has continuously faced the problem of where to move her king, but her intuition did not tell her to bring it to the kingside.

28...Kd8

28...Kf8 was possible.

29.g4 Kc8 30.Qe5 Rd7?



A mistake likely due to time trouble. Black should have played 30...Kb7 31.Ka1, with the idea g5, which is not possible now due to Qxg5 Bxa2+. (31.Kc1 was frightening 31...b4 32.c4 Nd7 33.Nb3 Qc7 34.Qe2 with complicated play).

31.g5!

A good move; Black hoped for the immediate 31.Nxe6 Bxa2+ 32.Kxa2 Qxe5 33.Rxe5 Rxd3 with an equal endgame.

31...hxg5 32.Nxe6 Qd6

After 32...Bxa2+ 33.Kxa2 Qxe5 34.Rxe5 Rxd3 35.Rxg5, Black would lose the g7-pawn.

33.Nd4 Qxe5 34.Rxe5 Kc7 35.Rxg5 Kb6

Now it is just a matter of realizing the advantage.

36.Kc2 b4

36...Bxa2 37.b3 b4 38.Bf5, and Black would likely lose the bishop.

37.a4 bxa3 38.bxa3 Rc7 39.g3 Ne4?

Now the win is much easier. Black did not see my 42nd move coming.

40.Rg6+ Ka7 41.Rxa6+ Kb7 42.Nb5!

An excellent move! Defending and attacking at the same time.

42...Rc5 43.Nd6+ Nxd6 44.Rxd6 Bc6 45.Rg6 Ba4+ 46.Kd2 Rc7 47.c4 Re7 48.Kc3 Be8 49.Rg5 Kc6 50.a4 Kd6 51.a5 Bc6 52.Rg6+ Kc5 53.Rg5+ Kd6 54.Kd4 Rd7 55.Rg6+ Kc7+ 56.Kc5 Bf3 57.Bf5 Re7 58.Re6 1–0

Before this game, Yuri Razuvaev told me the following anecdote about Botvinnik: during a training session the leader of the Soviet School asked his frightened pupils, "How did Capablanca realize his one-pawn advantage?" Silence ensued and Botvinnik pronounced in a stern voice, "He waited until his opponent blundered another one!"

"That's the way for you to play in today's game," Razuvaev said to me, and he was right.