

Chapter Two

The Knight Sacrifice on e6

The sacrifice $\text{N}(x)\text{e6}$ is one of the less common sacrificial ideas in the Sicilian, as it tends to be a true sacrifice; White generally obtains only two pawns for his piece. However, from a strategic viewpoint, White gains complete domination of the vital central squares d5 and f5, whilst ripping away the pawn cover of the black king. The light-squared bishop which settles on e6 can play a leading role in the attack, especially if the g6-square has been weakened by an advance of Black's h-pawn. The weakness of g6 is in fact a green light for Nxe6 , as in the following classic contest.

Game 23
M.Stean-W.Browne
Nice Olympiad 1974

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6
5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 Nbd7 7 Bc4 e6

At that time 7... $\text{W}a5$ had been getting hammered, as in Spassky-Petrosian, 19th matchgame 1969, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

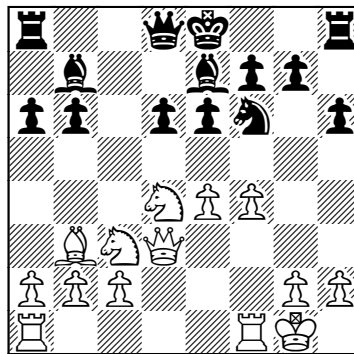
8 0-0

Threatening a timely Nxe6 !

8...h6 9 Nxf6 !

White plays à la Spassky.

9... Nxf6 10 Bb3 b6 11 f4 Bb7 12 Wd3
 Ne7



Now White must decide whether to

play fairly calmly with the standard thrust f4-f5, or to sacrifice something on e6. Since the American chess patron I.S.Turover had offered a prize of \$1000 for the most brilliant game at Nice, the young English IM went for the sacrifice with gusto.

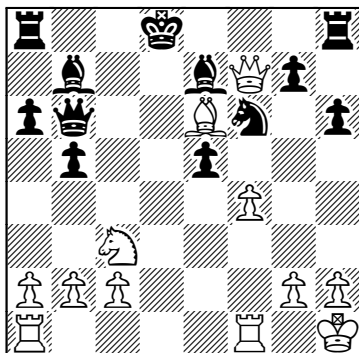
13 ♖xe6! fxe6 14 ♗xe6

Now Black's king is stuck in the centre, and there is the nasty if obvious threat of e4-e5 followed by ♖d3-g6+. Note that White had to sacrifice this way round: 13 ♗xe6? fxe6 14 ♖xe6 ♖d7 15 ♖xg7+ ♔f8! 16 ♖f5 ♗xe4! wins for Black.

14...b5

In the tournament book, Stean noted that he would have answered 14...♖d7 with 15 ♖ad1 ♖c5 16 ♖h3 ♖xe6 17 ♖xe6. If instead 14...♗c8, the bishop drops back to b3 and Black is no closer to escaping from the centre.

15 e5 ♖b6+ 16 ♔h1 dxe5 17 ♖g6+ ♔d8 18 ♖f7!



Now the plan is ♖ad1+ and/or fxe5.

18...♖c5 19 fxe5 ♗xg2+

Hoping for a miracle on the g-file. Gligoric gives 19...♖f8 20 ♖xg7 ♖d7 21

♖fd1 as winning, while 19...♖e8 20 ♖ad1+ ♔c7 21 Rd7+ is futile.

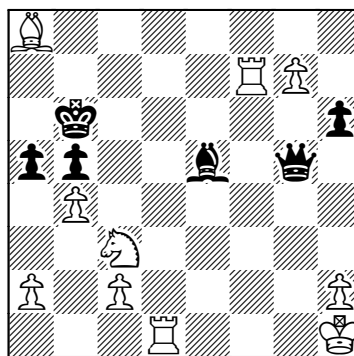
20 ♖xg2 ♖f8 21 ♖ad1+ ♔c7 22 ♖xg7 ♖g8 23 exf6!

Keeping the bishop around to support the resulting passed pawn proves to be the cleanest way to win.

23...♖xg7+ 24 fxg7 ♗d6

The point of White's 23rd is apparent after 24...♖g5+ 25 ♔h1 ♖xg7 26 ♖f7 ♖g5 27 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 28 ♖d5+.

25 ♖f7+ ♔c6 26 ♗d5+ ♔b6 27 ♗xa8 ♖g5+ 28 ♔h1 ♗e5 29 b4 a5



30 ♖b7+

White has mate in 8 with 30 ♖d5+ but the text is good enough.

30...♔c6

It's mate after 30...♔a6 31 ♖xb5 ♖xg7 32 ♖xa5+ ♔b6 33 ♖d5, as Gligoric pointed out.

31 g8/♖ ♖xg8 32 ♖b8+ 1-0

Browne was undoubtedly short of time and could not pause to resign sooner. By the way, Stean got his \$1000!

It's harder to make ♖xe6 work if you pick up less than two pawns or if

the black king has castled. Thus when Black has castled, the sacrifice tends to be of the sham variety. White may be able to use the d5-square to recoup his investment, as in the following extract.

Game 24
O.Nikolenko-Z.Nagy
Budapest 1990

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6
5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♙c4 e6 7 0-0 b5 8 ♙b3 ♙e7
9 ♗f3 ♗b6

This eccentric manoeuvre stems from Kavalek, I believe. These days 9...♗c7 is sometimes preferred.

10 ♙e3 ♗b7 11 ♗g3 ♘bd7 12 f3 0-0 13 ♘d5! ♙d8

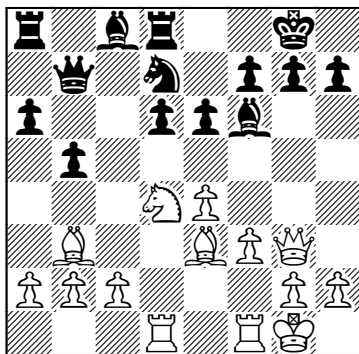
Of course, 13...exd5? 14 ♘f5 is decisive.

14 ♘xf6+ ♙xf6 15 ♗ad1

A computer would snatch the d6-pawn at once.

15...♗d8?

More obstinate was 15...♙e5.



16 ♘xe6!

This transaction will leave White

comfortably ahead in material.

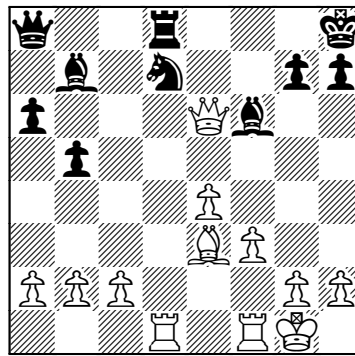
16...fxe6 17 ♙xe6+ ♗h8 18 ♙d5

There's that square again!

18...♗b8 19 ♙xa8 ♗xa8 20 ♗xd6

Only now! At this point 20...♘f8 21 ♗xd8! is strong, so Black played...

20...♙b7 21 ♗e6



and White duly converted his material plus and won in 38 moves.

Nonetheless, we have included a few examples of ♘xe6 sacrifices against a castled king. It's hard, though, to find many examples at high levels nowadays, as defensive technique has improved considerably thanks to the proliferation of silicon. (Also, consult Minic-Fischer in the introduction to Chapter Four for an example of ♘xe6 working against a king castled short.)

Over to Yury...

Game 25
B.Spasky-K.Darga
Varna Olympiad 1962

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6

