










Game 1









 Grigoryan, K. (2621)
 Oratovsky, M. (2423)
 Elgoibar 2019






This game was played during the Elgoibar Closed GM tournament, in a little town 50km away from Bilbao, Spain. This is round 3 of the tournament, in which Grigoryan cruised to victory with a nice score of 7/9. The Armenian GM started off this battle with an aggressive approach, eventually leading to a very messy game between the 2 Grandmasters.

1. e4 d6

One thing to reckon with: don't try to reach the Philidor Defense via the following move order: 1... e5 2.  d6 3. d4



A) Black is now advised to go for the Antoshin Variation, but it doesn't have a good reputation 3... exd4! 4.   5.   and both 6. g3± /+/- and 6.  /+/- are theoretically better for White.

B) 3...  4.  c6 [4...  5. dxe5 dxe5 6.  would be pretty unfortunate.] 5. 0-0  6. dxe5! dxe5 7.   8.  with a double attack on f7 and g5. White will gain the bishop pair and enjoy a very










nice and stable edge. 8...  9.   10.   11. f3±/+-. Being a bishop-pair lover myself, I would claim this is close to lost considering the weaknesses of the dark-squares and the poor placement of Black's pieces.

2. d4 3. e5

A) 3... g6 leads to the Pirc Defense, a more double-edged opening.

B) 3...  would be another way to reach the Philidor Defense, but White has greater freedom of choice here. 4.  [4. f4!?!; or 4. g4!?! as in Gruenfeld – Rukavina.] 4... e5

4.

4. dxe5!?! dxe5 5.   This middlegame without queens is what motivates Black players to choose the 3...  move order instead. 6.  [6.  is now out of fashion 6... c6 7. 0-0-0+  8.  h6!∞ Black doesn't wish to part with his bishop pair but 9.  allows 9... ]



Position after: 6. 

A) 6... ♖b4!? is an interesting counterattack, but White can secure a safe edge with 7. ♙xf7 ♜f8 8. ♙b3 ♞xe4 9. ♞ge2 ♞c5 10. ♙g5+ ♔e8 11. ♙c4! Keeping the bishop pair 11... ♙e6 12. ♙xe6 ♞xe6 13. ♙e3±

B) 6... ♙e6? 7. ♙xe6 fxe6 8. f3! is known to be a very safe plus for White. The f6-knight is dominated by f3/e4 and White will slowly pressurize the e5-pawn. 8... ♙d6 9. ♙e3 ♔e7 10. ♞h3! Followed by ♞f2-♞d3 is a key maneuver to remember. 10... ♞c6 11. ♞f2 a6 12. ♞b1! The c3-knight was a dominated piece, but White has time to look for better prospects. 12... ♜ad8 13. ♞d2± Now e5 will be under severe long-term pressure.

C) 6... ♔e8!



Position after: 6... ♔e8!

C1) White usually plays straightforward with 7. ♞f3 ♙d6 8. ♙g5

C1.1) 8... c6!? This would be the ideal setup, but Black's isn't quite in time to get a fully acceptable position.



Position after: 8... c6!?

9. 0-0-0 ♙c7 10. h3! A very subtle move to get ready for ...h7-h6, ♙e3 while avoiding ...♞g4. [10. a4? h6! 11. ♙e3 ♞g4±] 10... ♞bd7 [10... h6 11. ♙e3! b5 12. ♙b3 ♞bd7 13. a4±] 11. a4!± Seizing some more space. Black keeps a solid position though, so it's not much of an edge

C1.2) 8... ♞bd7



Position after: 8... ♞bd7

9. 0-0-0 a6 10. a4 h6 11. ♙h4 ♞h5!±/= . Followed by ...g7-g5. Black should be able to absorb the pressure.

C2) 7. a3!? A fascinating idea promoted by my Stockfish. White creates the option of playing ♙a2 on

...b7-b5, which is a more harmonious way to get organised.



Position after: 7. a3!?

C2.1) 7... ♔d6 If chooses to go for the other setup with ...♔d6 and ...a6, then 8. h4!? is a funny idea. Just thinking about how confused your opponent will be after you play 8.h4!? in a half-a-second is reason enough for this move. White wants to grab a lot of space with h4-h5. [More conventional is 8. ♕e3 ♖bd7 9. ♘f3 a6 10. ♕e2!? followed by ♘d2-c4.] 8... ♖bd7 9. f3 c6 10. h5 ♘c5 11. ♕e3± ♔e7 12. h6 g6 13. 0-0-0± and White should enjoy a tiny plus in the endgame. The h6-pawn will be a problem, because Black will take some time to get rid of it...time that he may not have.

C2.2) 7... c6 8. ♘f3 b5 [8... ♔d6 White directly goes for 9. ♕e3 ♖g4 10. ♕d2 ♖d7 11. h3 ♘gf6 12. ♕e3 ♕c7 13. 0-0-0 b5 14. ♕a2± This retreat is now possible and White has a better version of the structure with ...c7-c6.] 9.

♕a2 ♕d6 [9... ♘bd7?? 10. ♖g5+-] 10. ♕g5 ♖bd7 11. 0-0-0 ♕c7 12. h3!± With the identical intention of ♕e3 while prohibiting ...♖g4.

4... ♖bd7

We now reach a Philidor Defense by transposition

5. g4!?



Position after: 5. g4!?

The most aggressive approach available for White here.

5. ♕c4! is objectively a better move. Current theory suggests that White can retain an edge with logical development. 5... ♕e7 6. 0-0 0-0 7. a4 c6 8. h3 Black's plan is often to slowly prepare the ...b5-push via ...b7-b6, ...a7-a6, ...♖b8 and only then ...b6-b5. I think White's best plan against it is the ♕e3, ♖e2 and ♖d1 setup, which I believe to be the most flexible. Later on, White usually gets the opportunity to transfer the f3-knight to f5 via h4.

5... ♞xg4!

This is critical. The further g4-g5 is too huge of a threat and Black doesn't really compromise his solidity. Still, White wins a lot of development tempi and plans on breaking through in the center, with Black's king as the main target.



Position after: 9. ♔e2!

A) 5... g6!? Securing the h5-square. 6. g5 ♞h5 7. ♔e3 ♔g7 8. ♚d2 0-0



Position after: 8... 0-0

A1) 9. 0-0-0?! may be imprecise because of 9... ♞b6! and White isn't in time to prevent both ...f7-f5 and ...♔g4.

A1.1) 10. ♚g1 f5! is the only way to justify 9... ♞b6. 11. exf5 [11. gxf6?! ♚xf6 The tempo on the ♞f6 makes all the difference 12. ♔e2 ♞f4↑] 11... ♔xf5 12. dxe5 dxe5∞

A1.2) 10. ♔e2 ♔g4! 11. dxe5 dxe5 12. ♚hg1 ♔e6∞ Black has the more active pieces and, more importantly, he hasn't had to play ...c7-c6, weakening the d6-square.

A2) 9. ♔e2!

A2.1) Now 9... ♞b6 10. ♚g1! White prevents the two ideas and 10... f5 11. gxf6 ♚xf6 12. a4! is troublesome for Black. 12... a5 [12... ♞f4 13. ♔xf4 ♚xf4 14. ♚xf4 ♚xf4 15. a5 ♞d7 16. ♞g5!→] 13. dxe5 [13. 0-0-0!? ♞f4 14. ♚g3 ♞h5 15. dxe5 dxe5 16. ♞g5! ♞xg3 17. hxg3∞] 13... dxe5 14. ♔c5! ♚d8 15. ♚g5 After the queens come off, White can play with the king in the center more smoothly. 15... ♞f4 16. ♔xb6 cxb6 17. ♔c4+ ♚h8 18. ♚xf6 ♔xf6 19. ♞d5 ♞xd5 20. ♔xd5± The bishop pair is dominated.

A2.2) 9... c6 10. 0-0-0↑ Black remains cramped. 10... ♚a5!? 11. a3! Anticipating ...b7-b5-b4 so that after 11... b5? 12. dxe5! dxe5 13. ♚d6!± and Black's forces are separated from each other.

B) 5... h6?! 6. ♚g1 c6 7. ♔e3 b5 8. a3↑ Black is solid but doesn't have time to generate the usual counterplay with ...♚a5 and ...♔a6 like we'll see in this game.

C) 5... exd4? 6. ♖xd4! Everything is nice about White's position now. 6... ♗c5 7. g5!+- ♗fxe4 8. ♕e2 ♕e7 9. ♗d5 ♕e5 10. ♗xc7+ ♔d8 11. ♗f3! ♗d3+ 12. cxd3 ♕a5+ 13. ♗d2 ♗xd2 14. ♗xa8+- There are no dangerous discoveries.

D) 5... d5!? 6. exd5! e4 7. ♗d2!? ♕b4 8. ♕g2 ♗b6



Position after: 8... ♗b6

[8... 0-0 9. 0-0 ♕xc3 10. bxc3 ♗b6 11. g5 ♕g4 12. f3 exf3 13. ♗xf3±] 9. ♗dx4 ♗xe4 10. ♕xe4 0-0 11. ♕f3! Reinforcing pressure on f5; Black shouldn't have adequate compensation. 11... ♕h4 12. ♖g1! h5 13. ♕f5! [13. gxh5?? ♕xc3+ 14. bxc3 ♖e8 15. ♕f4 ♕f5 16. ♕e5 ♖xe5 17. dx5 ♕xe4+±] 13... ♕xf5 14. gxf5 ♕xd4 15. ♕h6→

6. ♖g1 ♗gf6

6... exd4? 7. ♗xd4 ♗de5 8. h3 ♗f6 9. f4 ♗g6 10. ♕e2!→ Planning ♕d2 and 0-0-0. White has great attacking potential.

7. ♕c4

Threatening the basic attack on the f7-pawn with ♗g5

7. ♕e3!? is Gaehwiler – Plat, see Game 2.

7... h6! 8. ♕e3

White has a big lead in development, and pressure both in the center and on the kingside thanks to the ♖g1. White's king will be very safe on the queenside. Knowing that, Black's king can't realistically castle kingside, so he should logically head for the queenside, which is not something you'll often see in the Philidor defense. Let's see how GM Oratovsky orchestrates the escape of his monarch.

8... c6!



Position after: 8... c6!

8... g6? 9. dx5! dx5 10. ♕xf7+! ♔xf7 11. ♗xe5+ ♔e8 12. ♗xg6→

9. dx5

♔xa2–+ and the attack is all Black's from now on.

14. ♖d5?

White still retains an edge, but this is linked to the sacrifice on f7 on the next move, which is now unlikely to happen.

14. ♖xf7+!! It's quite hard to understand that this can be crushing, but...
14... ♔xf7 15. ♖xd7+! ♘xd7 16. ♔h3!!



Position after: 16. ♔h3!!

Black is too uncoordinated and objectively there is no saving the game. 16... ♔d8 [16... ♖c8 17. ♔f5+ ♔e8 18. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 19. ♔xe5+ ♔f7 20. ♔d5+ ♖e6 21. ♔xa8+–] 17. ♔f5+ ♔g8 18. ♔e6+ ♔h7 19. ♖xh6!+–

14... b4 15. ♔e1?

15. ♖xf7+! This is obviously a worse version. 15... ♔xf7 16. ♖xd7+ ♘xd7 17. ♔h3 ♖b5! 18. ♘xb5 [18. ♔f5+ ♔e8 19. ♘xe5 bxc3–+ doesn't work anymore; 18. ♘d5!? g6! Preventing ♔f5+. 19. ♖xg6 ♔xg6 20. ♔e6+ ♔g7 21. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 22. ♔f6+ ♔g8 23. ♔e6+= ♘f7?? 24. ♔g6+ ♖g7 25. ♘f6+ ♔f8 26. ♖xc5+ ♘d6 27. ♖xd6#] 18... ♔xb5

19. ♔f5+ ♔e8 20. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 21. ♔xe5+ ♖e7 22. b3!∞

15... 0-0-0!

Black's king finally vacates the center and White is left a pawn down with aimless pieces.

16. ♘b1 ♘xd5 17. ♖xd5 ♖b7–+ 18. ♖xd7!

A good practical decision.

18. ♖d1 ♔xa2–+ is totally hopeless

18... ♖xd7 19. ♘xe5 ♖c7 20. ♘c4 ♔xa2 21. ♔e2 ♔a6!?



Position after: 21... ♔a6!?

Oratovsky redirects his queen towards the action, with e6 being a nice central square for her majesty.

22. b3 ♔e6 23. ♘bd2 g6!

23... ♖xe4!? is possible, to give back the exchange for a pawn and a dominant bishop pair. 24. ♖f4? [24. ♘xe4!

♙xe4 25. ♔b1→ Black is objectively winning but his king is getting a lot weaker. There's some room for a swindle here.] 24... ♘d5! 25. ♚xe6+ ♘xe6 26. ♘xc7 ♔xc7→

24. ♘f4 ♖d7 25. ♚e3



Position after: 25. ♚e3

25... ♘e7 26. ♘xh6 ♖hd8 27. ♘f4 ♖d4 28. ♚g3 ♘a6 29. ♘e5

Thus far, I like how Black has managed to get his pieces out, but there are no clear targets, so Black should be careful.

29... ♖4d7?

A very impractical decision.

29... ♖xc4! 30. ♘xc4 ♘xc4 31. bxc4 ♚xc4→ would have killed off White's growing initiative and ensure an easier conversion of the full point. 32. ♘b8 ♖d7!

30. f4

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 30. f4

This is evaluated as -2 for Black, but don't be fooled by the evaluation of 'compy'. Black doesn't have a clear plan and may have been running low on time as well. This is somewhat unclear from a practical point of view.

30... ♘xc4?!

White's cavalry is fighting for the same c4-square, so exchanging isn't ideal here.

A) 30... ♔b7!? to hide the king on a8 was probably a better idea, before taking any action in the center. Slowly preparing ...a5-a4 seems like a good long-term plan. 31. ♚f3 ♘b5 32. ♚g3 ♔a8 33. ♚f3 a5→

B) 30... f6? 31. ♚xg6∞ The f6-pawn is pinned to the queen.

31. ♘xc4 ♚c6 32. ♖e1∞/ →

White is very stable and, in a time trouble situation, this is anyone's game.

32... ♘f6

32... a5!! is the amazing computer idea to open lines for his rooks. 33. ♖xa5 ♕a6 34. ♘c4 and only now 34... ♙f6!⚡.

33. ♕h3 ♕a6 34. ♔b2

Now White's king is very safe due to the presence of the a7-pawn.

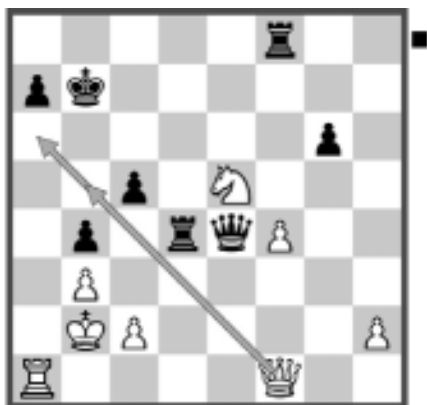
34... ♔b7 35. ♕f3 ♙xe5+ 36. ♘xe5 ♖d4?

36... ♕f6!⚡ keeps everything under control.

37. ♘xf7∞ ♖f8 38. ♖a1!

White finds a nice sequence of moves that materializes his attacking potential. Looking at the rest of the game, I feel like Grigoryan, probably ecstatic at the swindle, started to play for a win.

38... ♕c6 39. ♘e5! ♕xe4 40. ♕f1!



Position after: 40. ♕f1!

40... c4!

Blocking the f1-a6 diagonal to prevent ♕a6.

41. ♘xc4 ♖xf4 42. ♘a5+ ♔b6 43. ♕g1 ♔b5 44. ♖e1!?

44. ♘c4! leads to a simple draw for Black after 44... ♖xc4 45. bxc4+ ♕xc4 and ... ♕d4+ is unstoppable, leading to a drawn rook endgame. 46. ♖xa7 ♕d4+ 47. ♕xd4 ♖xd4 48. ♖h7=

44... ♕f5 45. ♕g2!?



Position after: 45. ♕g2!?

Introducing a nice trap.

45... ♖de4

45... ♔xa5?? 46. ♕b7! With the game-ending threat of ♖a1#. 46... ♖f1 47. ♕xa7+ ♔b5 48. ♕b7+ ♔a5 49. ♕c7+ ♔a6 [49... ♔b5 50. ♖e5+-] 50. ♕c6+ ♔a5 51. ♖e8+- ♖d8 52. ♕a4+ ♔b6 53. ♕xb4+ ♔c7 54. ♕c4+ ♔d7 55. ♕a4+ ♔c7 56. ♕a7+ ♔c6 57. ♖xd8 ♕f6+ 58. ♕d4+-

46. ♖c4! ♔f6+

46... ♖xe1 47. ♔b7+ ♕c5 48. ♔c7+ ♕b5 [48... ♕d4?! 49. ♔d6+ ♔d5 50. ♔xf4+- ♕c5 51. ♔c7+ ♕b5 52. ♔xa7=] 49. ♔b7+=

47. ♕a2



Position after: 47. ♕a2

47... ♔a6+?

The winning sequence is hard to spot.

47... ♖xe1! 48. ♔d5+ ♕a6 49. ♔a5+ ♕b7 50. ♔xb4+ ♕c8! This is the key move. Black needs to hide from future checks. 51. ♔xe1 ♖f1! 52. ♔e8+ ♕c7! 53. ♖b2 ♖f2--+ Usually, this kind of position is dynamically balanced, but here White's pieces are terribly placed. Black should convert with precise play, the threat of exchanging queens being Black's main weapon.

48. ♕b2 ♔f6+ 49. ♕a2 ♔a6+ 50. ♕b2 ♔f6+ 51. ♕a2

½-½

Finally Oratovsky settles for a draw in this rollercoaster-game. Overall, mistakes were plentiful, but this is the kind of position where computers excel compared to humans: where nothing really makes sense. The early 5.g4!? is the only dangerous attempt at the life of the Philidor Defense, which remains a very good choice to get a solid position. White got a huge lead in development and could have sealed the game with an amazing idea (14. ♕xf7 / 15. ♖xd7 / 16. ♔h3). Grigoryan couldn't spot any dynamic opportunities and had to go for an exchange-down position without much compensation. Still, nothing was easy for Black and the game got messier until the better player found good resources to secure the draw.