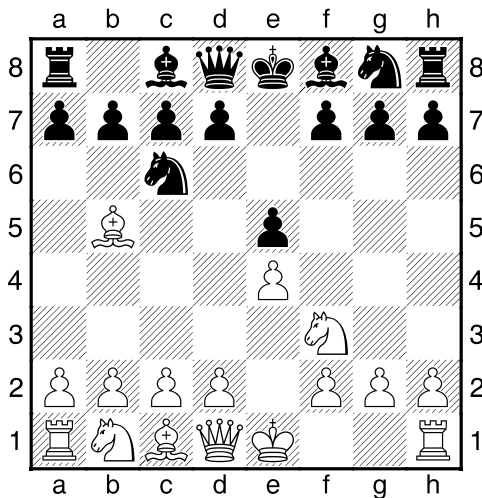


Ruy Lopez - Classical, 3. Bb5 Bc5!? - Mainline 4. 0-0 Nge7 [C64]

Kernan vs Wallace, Cavan Crystal, 1977
[IM Mark Quinn]

[I was fishing around the Irish Times Archive for news reports of the Cavan Chess Congresses that took place from 1973–1980 when I came across a reference in a J.J. Walsh article to a famous victory Paul Wallace had over the tournament favourite Bernard Kernan who was one of Ireland's strongest players in the 1970s and quite possibly of all time. I got in touch with Paul Wallace who plays with me on the Kilkenny Armstrong Cup Team and asked him if he had any recollection of the game that made headlines back in the 1970s. Incredibly, he was able to recall the game after more than four decades. Paul wrote: 'I have been able to reconstruct the game, it was a big deal for me at the time - Bernard was Irish Champion and sported the highest ever Irish Elo rating whilst I was a fresher in UCD and was just another punk in town. Looking back on the game today I realise that he must still have been half asleep (it was an early start on Saturday morning) whilst I was bright-eyed and spoiling for a fight.']

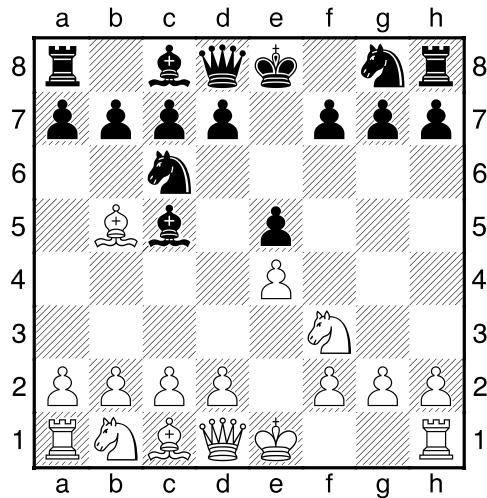
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5



The Ruy Lopez. A big beast of a line that was first mentioned in a Gottingen manuscript way back in 1496 and is still contested as the very highest level today. The Spanish priest Ruy Lopez de Segura published a chess book in 1561 where he analysed 3.Bb5 in depth and the line has carried his name ever since. Black has many options

here and there was considerable theory even back in the 1970s.

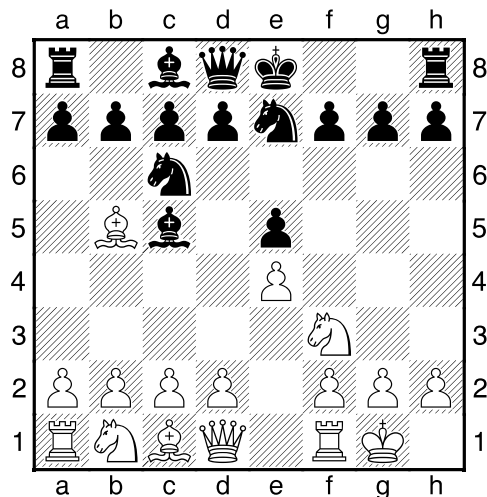
3...Bc5



Paul sidesteps the heavy mainlines and opts for Classical System which is also possible against the King's Gambit (2. f4 Bc5).

4.0-0 Nge7

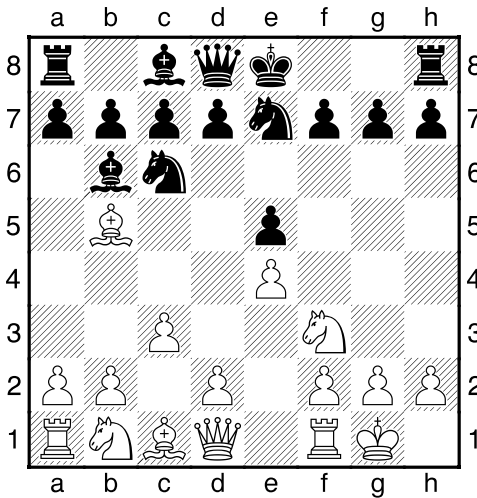
Black declines to play his knight to f6 and prefers instead to avoid the doubling of his c-pawns should white exchange on c6.



5.c3

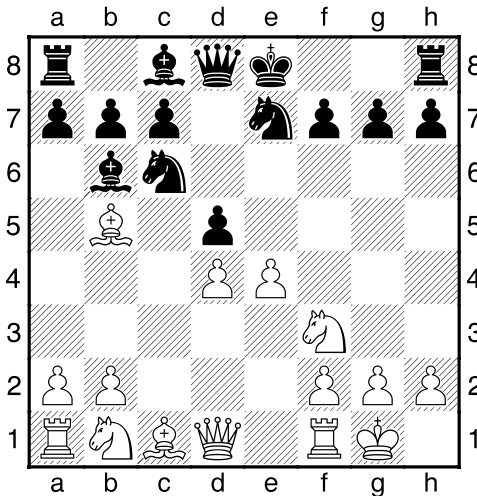
Intending to build a big centre by eliminating the black e5 pawn.

5...Bb6!



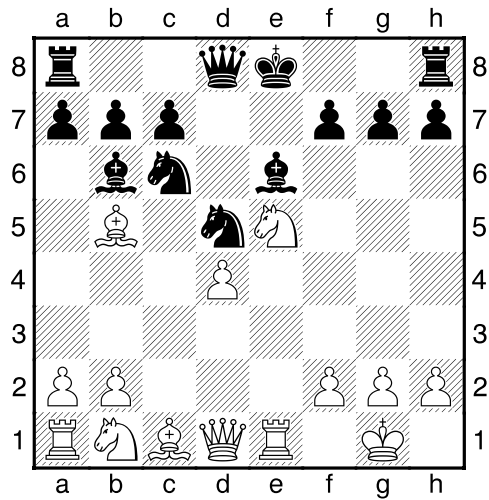
A useful prophylactic move. It's obvious that d4 is coming so it makes sense to remove the bishop from harm's way and then decide what set-up to adopt as black.

6.d4 exd4 7. cxd4 d5!



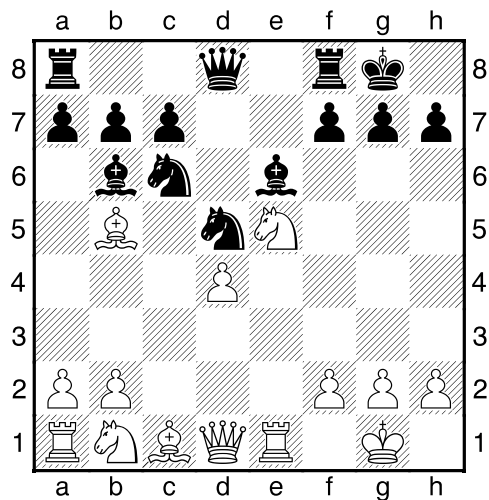
The thematic counter-thrust in the centre. Those white pawns cannot be allowed to get rolling!

8.exd5 Nxd5 9.Re1+ Be6 10.Ne5



The most obvious and natural move, but these days 10. Bg5 is considered more testing.]

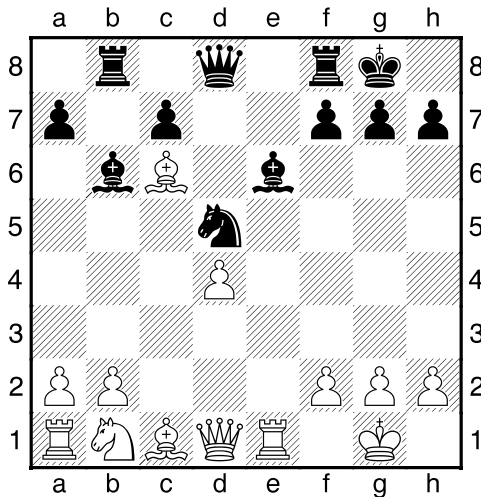
10...0-0!?



'Inspiration at the board,' recounts Paul who ignores Kernan's threat to win a pawn and calmly castles. It's an interesting pawn sacrifice that leads to decent practical compensation, although according to Paul, when confronted with this position, the great Bobby Fischer erred on the side of caution with Nde7 so as not to lose a pawn.

It is often said that the only way to refute a gambit is to accept it. White doesn't shrink from the task at hand and gamely calls black's bluff.

11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.Bxc6 Rb8



White may be a pawn up but black is extremely active. The black knight on d5 dominates the centre of the board. The black bishop on b6 is eyeing up white's weak IQP on d4 and the black queen is ready to jump to h4 where it will pile the pressure on d4. If white exchanges on d5, then black will have the two bishops and clear lines for his rooks. The position is remarkably tricky for white and the immediate retreat.

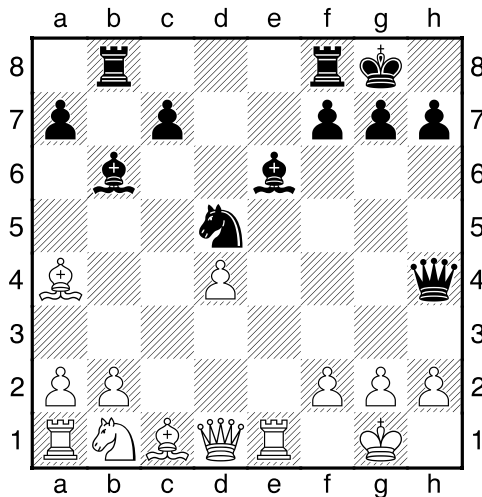
13.Ba4?!

Once again this most natural and obvious move may be a mistake. What is white to do with the exposed bishop on c6 though? Black threatens Nb4 attacking the bishop on c6 and then the immediate capture of the white pawn on d4 by either Bxd4 or Qxd4.

If white really wants to hold on to the pawn, the light-squared bishop could instead be jettisoned by exchanging on d5, but this only postpones the inevitable loss of the d4 pawn. For example, after 13. Bxd5 Qxd5 14. Be3 Rfd8 15.Nc3 Qc4! Sticking to the d4 pawn like glue. 16.Rc1 Bxd4 17. Bxd4 Rxd4 Black has regained the d-pawn and while the position is essentially equal, black has considerable pressure. Black has much the easier game and can double on the d-file and play c7-c5.

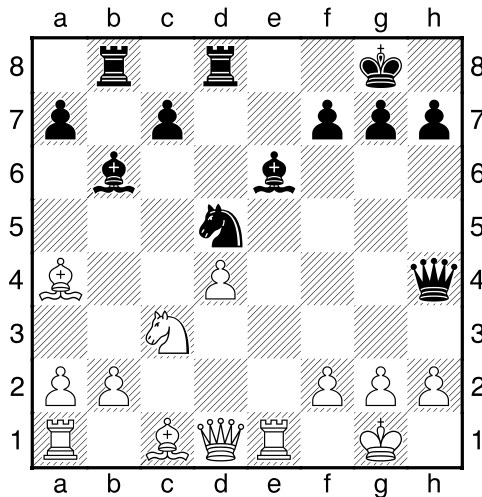
The first world champion Wilhelm Steinitz maintained that, 'If you have the initiative you must pursue it, or you risk losing it.' Following Steinitz's dictum, Paul doesn't hesitate to cast his queen into the fray.

13...Qh4!



When black can already claim an advantage as white will struggle to find good squares for his pieces and constantly have to worry about when not if black picks up the isolated pawn on d4.

14.Nc3 Rfd8!



Black declines to immediately recapture the pawn on d4. The mark of a strong player is often underscored by their ability to refrain from the

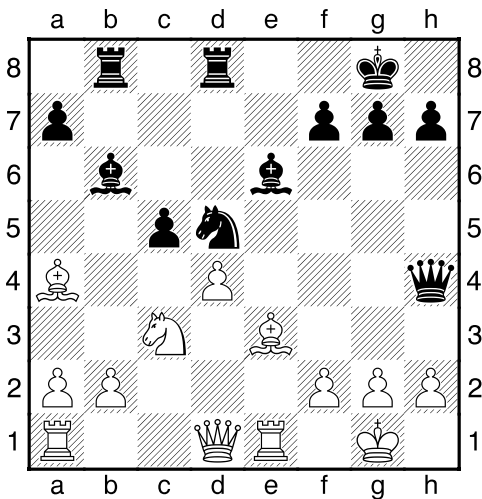
temptation to immediately recapturing sacrificed material, in this case by 14...Qxd4 15.Qxd4 Bxd4 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Rd1 c5

Paul decides to bide his time and completing his development and increase the pressure on the d-file. Interestingly, it is this move that ultimately sets the stage for the winning tactic that ultimately wins the game for black. White's Isolated Queen's Pawn on d4 is going nowhere. It is difficult to find good places for the white minor pieces. What's the rush?

15.Be3?

Defending d4 is another logical move, but it fails to address the key threat facing white on the d-file. White's last chance to get some play and mix things up was 15.Ne4 Bg4 16.Qd2 Nb4 17.Qxb4 Rxd4 18.Qa3 Rxe4 19.Be3 Bf5 20.Bc6 when white would have survived the worst and managed to escape into an equal ending with some possibilities to still play for the win.

15...c5!



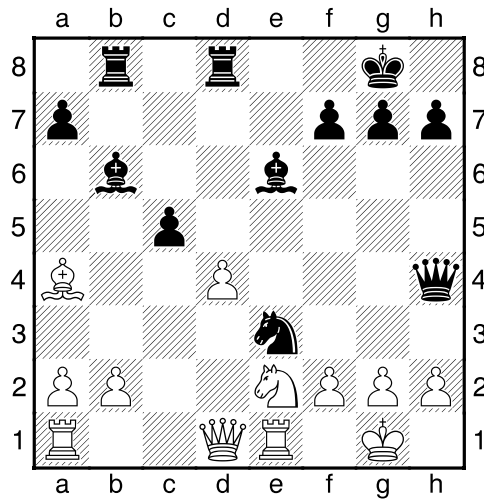
Now white is in real trouble thanks to the long-range pin from the black rook on d8. It's incredible to see how quickly compensation can grow and a position become critical if the side defending doesn't play incisively.

16.Ne2?

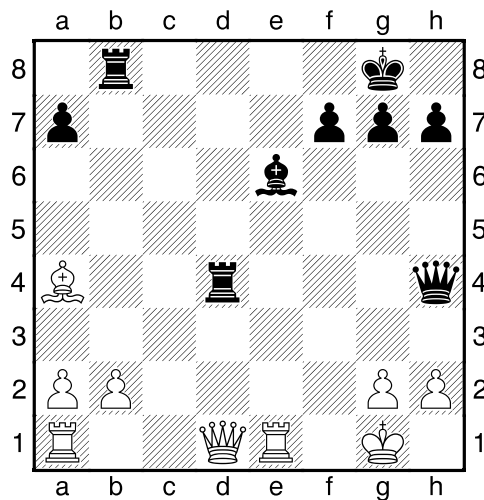
The last practical try was 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Qd2 cxd4 18.Bf4 which would have left black with the better ending but white can still fight!

Now black has a series of simple exchanges which leads to the win of the bishop on a4.

16...Nxe3!



17.fxe3 cxd4 18.exd4 Bxd4+ 19.Nxd4 Rxd4 -+



when the bishop on a4 will soon drop off the face of the board. White could have resigned here but chose to play on for a few more moves, perhaps, sensing that Paul suddenly realised he was winning and was quite possibilt getting nervous.

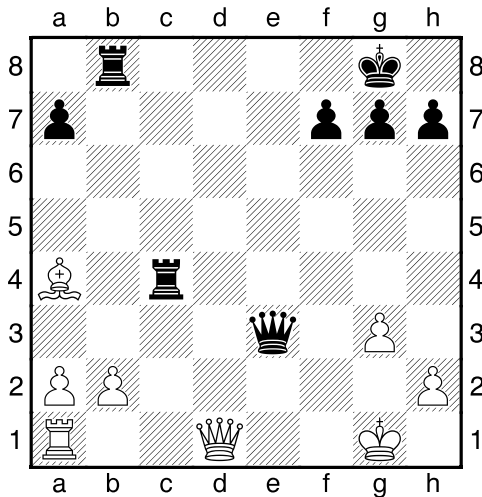
20.Qc2 Rc4?

Unnecessary, Paul is overly cautious. You can often see ghosts when you stand on the cusp of victory against a player several hundred rating points above you. 'Surely, I've missed something...there must be some catch.' This is when a cool head is required, several deep breaths usually do the trick and then you can re-focus on winning your won position.

21.g3 The last roll of the dice.

21...Qf6 22.Rxe6 Qxe6 23.Qd1 Qe3+

when white resigned owing to multiple threats leading to mate or further material loss. 0-1



A brilliant game against one of Ireland's greatest chess talents. The game has a freshness about it even after forty-five years. Kernan did not play poorly per se but drifted, as any strong player might have, into an extremely tricky position after accepting Paul's pawn sacrifice. A faint heart never won a fair game and sometimes to take down a much stronger player, you have to throw caution to the wind and trust to luck to guide you through the complications. Games played in this spirit often result in Brilliancy Prizes.