

□	Garcia, Federico (1562)	<i>US Amateur Team East Ch., 2005</i>
■	Labate, Ernesto (1829)	<i>Queen's Gambit Declined</i>

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♖c3 ♗b4.

The Ragozin System, a hybrid between the Orthodox Queen's Gambit and the Nimzoindian. With the next move, White forces the Black Knight to c6, an unusual position in closed openings when Black has not played c5. The opening thus shares some themes with Chigorin's Defense (1. d4 d5 2. c4 ♖c6). Chigorin was a fan of Knights, and willing to trade at c3 early, in exchange for advantage in development.

4. ♖a4+ ♖c6 5. ♖f3 ♗d7.

Quickly taking the chance to molest the White Queen. But the Black pieces are not cooperating. Chigorin used to develop his Queen Bishop to g4 (and trade it at f3).

6. ♖b3 ♖f6 7. ♗g5 dxc4 8. ♖xc4.

The Queen wanders around. This resembles some sharp lines of the Grnfeld Defense, but of course there the Black Bishop is fianchettoed at g7.

8. ... h6 9. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 10. e4.

Now a trade at c3 would be wonderful for White, and the point of the early Bb4 is hard to see. White's only problem (not an easy one) is development, and Black tries to hinder it.

10. ... b5?!

A reasonable idea. But there is no clear short-term way to take advantage of the delay in White's development, and the text move in fact creates longer-lasting problems: Black has more or less given up Queen-side castling, so the ♗Bd7 is bound to hang after ...0-0; the ♖c6 is also hanging, as is the c7, and, of course, the b5 itself is unprotected.

11. ♖d3 [11. ♖xb5? ♖xd4 12. ♖xb4? ♖c2+]; 11. ... 0-0 12. ♗e2 a6.

Passive. Called for was 12. ... ♗ad8.

13. 0-0 ♖g6?

Again, 13. ... ♗ad8 was necessary. The White pieces are quite prepared to repel any attack that Black might be thinking of.

14. d5!

Classic: a premature attack on a flank must be met by a counter-attack in the center. With the Queen gone, the Black Knight cannot hold the center (14. ... ♖e5 is not possible), and Black has to give it up.

14. ... exd5 15. ♖xd5 ♗d6 16. ♖xc7!?

The ♔d7 is hanging, as was announced at move 10. (There is, however, a response available for Black that both Ernesto and I overlooked.)

16. ... ♖ad8? [16. ... ♗b4! 17. ♚d2 ♖ad8 18. e5 ♔xc7 19. ♚xb4=];
17. ♗d5 ♚h5? 18. ♗f6+!

The Bd6 is hanging too!

18. ... gxf6 19. ♚xd6 ♚g6 20. ♖ac1! ♚xe4 21. ♔d3.

It is sad that after 21. ♚xf6 ♚xe2 22. ♖fe1 the Black Queen has still one (and only one) place to go. But, in any case, White's attack is promising.

21. ... ♚e6 22. ♚f4 ♗e5 23. ♔b1.

Not the strongest. I thought long for this move: on the one hand, I wanted to keep my attacking Bishop. On the other, I did like the prospect of an opening g-column if Black traded Knights at f3. Could it prove too dangerous for my own King? I decided I would try it, so I retreated my Bishop, at the same time defending a2. Correct, however, was 23. ♔e4!, as will be clear in the next move.

23. ... ♔c6?

Ernesto also overlooked the easy way: 23. ... ♚g4 was enough to equalize, because the White Queen cannot leave the ♗f3 (this is why 23. ♔e4! was better: 23. ... ♚g4 would be met by 24. ♚xf6). The text move loses immediately.

24. ♚xh6+- ♗d3!

The best possible move. The Black Queen is defending one-too-many pieces, so 24. ... f5 loses to 25. ♚xe6. And after 24. ... ♗g6 25. ♔xg6 fxg6, that same Queen hangs, so 26. ♚xg6+ ♗h8 27. ♗g5 wins for White (27. ... ♚d7 28. ♖xc6 fxg5 29. ♚h5+ ♚h7 30. ♖h6).

25. ♖fe1!?

This move is correct, but, in the circumstances, it is a blunder. Easiest, and obvious, was 25. ♖xc6! (with the idea that 25. ... ♚xc6 loses to 26. g5). I must admit that Ernesto's last move had surprised me, so maybe it's like I had to prove (to myself, to my pride) that there were still impressive resources. After having played this move, I realized what I had missed ("the right move was so terribly near, so glaring in its urgent obviousness," as George Steiner wrote in *Fields of Force*)... I cannot really tell how much this weighed on me for the rest of the game.

25. ... ♔e4!

Black is still lost, but I was surprised again. My nerves are starting to crumble, since in addition I am facing a terrible time trouble: I have 20 minutes for the next 15 moves, in this not-quite-simple position.

Literally, I had no time to assess the potential of 32. ♔c7. My choice turns out to be best, but I had the discomfoting feeling of 'conceding' because of lack of time.

32. ... fxe4 [32. ... ♖xf4? 33. ♗f6+]; 33. ♔xe4 ♖fd3 34. ♔e2.

What to do now? How to trade Queens without letting Black into the seventh rank?

34. ... ♔f5 35. ♖c3?

The solution is 35. ♖cd1, but the prospect of a Queens-endgame did not appeal to me (with or without time). I could not even try 35. ♔e4 (with the idea that Ernesto would go for a repetition with 35. ... ♔h4), because a Queen trade at e4 leaves me in the endgame I have been so busy in avoiding. I have 10 minutes for 5 potentially complicated moves.

35. ... ♖c2 36. ♔e7??

"Mate in two?" announced/asked my opponent. "Yes, it is," I realized.

What can I say? It was a very interesting game, and one of the most intense experiences that I have lived through chess. For the first time, in addition, I was not angry at my blunders. Amazingly, I do feel proud of this game. But it's being able to feel proud that most makes me happy.

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