

## Game of the Month

By GM Michael Adams



When you delve deeper into online games, even those involving very strong players, with the common 15 minutes + 5 seconds increment time limit, it is often the case that as the clocks run low serious mistakes occur. This one is an exception as the players successfully negotiate the strategic complexities for a long time, Luke keeps on probing artfully throughout, whilst Gata defends stoically. However the mounting pressure, and the psychological difficulties of being on the back foot mean that he finally misjudges the moment to break out and generate counterplay. This slip deep into the endgame allows Luke to liquidate to an instructive winning king and pawn endgame.

### Luke McShane- Gata Kamsky

European Club Cup Online 2021

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 4.d3** Luke is an expert on the Black side of the Berlin himself, and chooses to sidestep the forcing lines here, aiming for a slow build up.

**4...d6** 4...Bc5 is a more popular choice, but Kamsky prefers a less theoretical variation.

**5.0-0 Bd7 6.c3 g6** Due to White's quiet opening Black can deploy the dark squared bishop more actively than on e7.

**7.Re1 Bg7 8.Nbd2 0–0 9.Nf1 Nh5**



Gata decides to begin preparing f5, but this desirable advance often falls foul of tactical issues in such positions, sensible improving options such as 9...h6, or 9...Re8 were alternatives.

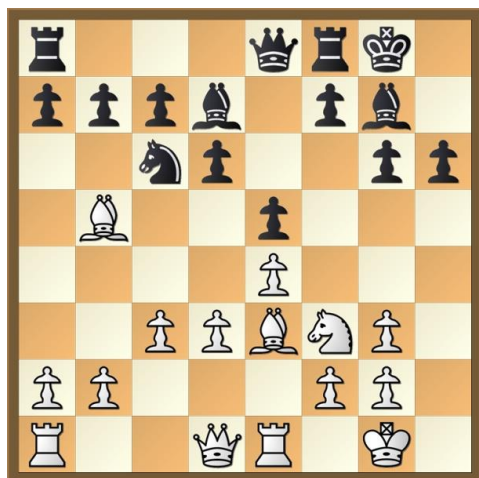
**10.Bg5 Qe8** If 10...f6 11.Be3 is best (11.Bh4 Kh8 12.Ne3 a6 13.Ba4 Qe8 14.Nd5 Rc8 looks alright for Black) 11...f5 12.exf5 gxf5 13.d4 leaves Black's position rather loose. If 13...e4? 14.Bc4+ Kh8 15.Ng5 is an immediate problem 15...Qe8 16.Bf7! Rxf7 17.Qxh5 wins.

**11.Ng3 Nxg3** 11...Nf4!? 12.Bxf4 exf4 13.Ne2 Bh6 leads to a rather strange position which is not very clear.

**12.hxg3** White's kingside structure has lost some flexibility, but the doubled g-pawns are a handy barrier making the White king very secure.

**12...h6** The typical tactical idea 12...Nd4!? swaps some pieces 13.Bc4 (13.cxd4 Bxb5) 13...Nxf3+ 14.gxf3 gives White a pleasant position; two captures towards the centre have resulted in good control there, and the half open h-file could well come in handy.

### 13.Be3



**13...a6** Kamsky switches plans, 13...Kh7 intending to follow with f5 was more consistent, perhaps he didn't like exposing his own king, but after this decision Luke is pressing a bit with little counterplay.

**14.Ba4 b5 15.Bb3** There was also a good case for retreating the bishop a bit further: 15.Bc2! intending d4 next.

**15...Na5 16.Bc2 c5** White's bishop on e3 is more useful than the one on g7, and the Black knight is lacking active options on the queenside. White also has more pawn breaks available.

**17.a4!** Probing Black's queenside before the Black knight can regroup to c6.

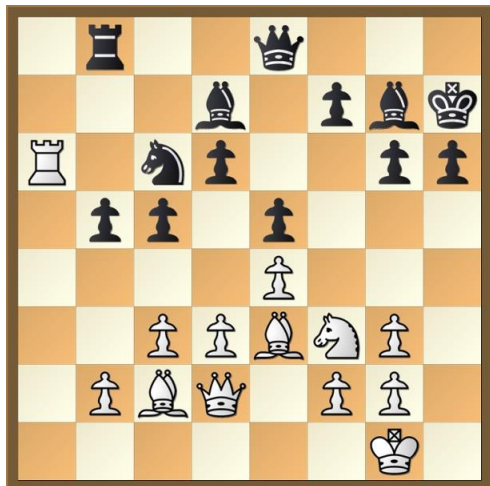
**17...Qe7** Black would like to play 17...b4 but 18.cxb4 cxb4 19.Qd2! leaves pawns hanging on both flanks. Gata chooses to improve the position of his queen, 17...Be6 doing the same for his bishop was a worthy alternative.

**18.Qd2 Kh7 19.Ra3** Luke prepares to double up before opening the a-line. There was another way to take the initiative on the queenside: 19.b4 cxb4 20.cxb4 Nc6 21.Bb3! - the point of the advance, White's bishop finds a more productive diagonal. 21...Be6 22.Bxe6 Qxe6 23.Rec1 keeps some pressure.

**19...Nc6 20.axb5 axb5 21.Rea1 Rxa3 22.Rxa3 Rb8** White's control of the open file isn't too serious yet due to the lack of entry squares, but it is something to work with. 22...Be6! was a decent option here as 23.Ra6 can be met by 23...Qb7.

### 23.Ra6 Qe8

Preparing to expel the rook 23...Nd8!? was also possible.



**24.Bb3!** Improving White's bishop.

**24...Qc8** 24...Ra8? 25.Bxf7 shows that it is never very comfortable to have the White bishop eyeing f7, and Gata hurries to swap it.

**25.Ra1 Be6 26.Bxe6 Qxe6 27.Qd1!** Bringing another piece towards the open file.

**27...Bf8** Kamsky continues to defend patiently, and secures the pawn on c5 with the idea to play d5 at some stage, the more 'active' 27...c4 28.dxc4 bxc4 29.Ra6 Qc8 30.Qa4 rebounds.

**28.Ra6 Qc8** Now 28...d5 doesn't work due to 29.Nxe5 Qxe5 30.Rxc6.

**29.Qa1 Qc7** It's not easy to relieve the pressure 29...b4 30.Qa4 Nd8 31.cxb4 Rxb4 32.Qe8! Qxa6 33.Qxf8 Ne6 34.Qxf7+ Ng7 35.Bxh6 Kxh6 36.Qf8 Kh7 37.Ng5+ Kh6 38.Qh8+ Kxg5 39.Qh4 mate is a pretty indicative line showing the dangers lurking in the position.

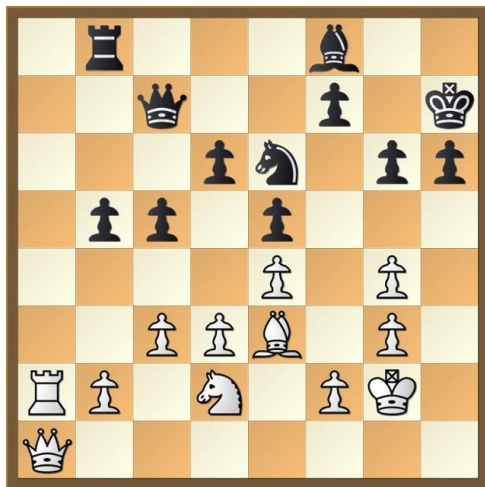
**30.g4** Luke gains space on the kingside, there were a couple of other good ideas; 30.Nh2 begins transferring the knight towards the enticing d5 square. This seems a bit slow, but the line 30...b4 31.Bd2 Rb6 32.Ng4 Bg7 33.Ne3 shows that it is a viable concept. 30.Qa2!? is another good move, this diagonal is more commonly occupied by White's bishop, but the queen is also well placed here preventing 30...Rb6? due to 31.Rxb6 Qxb6 32.Qxf7+.

**30...Nd8** Rerouting the knight is logical, but loses control of the a7 square. 30...Kg8 securing the pawn on f7 was another idea.

**31.g3 Ne6** 31...Qc8! 32.g5 h5 fixing the kingside structure limits White's options.

**32.Kg2 Rb6 33.Ra2** 33.Ra5!? was another good move. If the rook stays high up the board Black continues to offer an exchange: 33.Ra7 Rb7, or 33.Ra8 Rb8.

**33...Rb8**



**34.Qh1** Showing impressive vision Luke switches the attack to the other side of the board 34.b4!? cxb4 35.cxb4 giving the bishop on e3 more scope was another idea.

**34...Qb7 35.Qh4!** 35.Bxh6 Bxh6 36.g5 Nxg5 37.Nxg5+ Kg7 doesn't lead anywhere, this prepares the reinforcement Ra1–h1, which needs to be prevented.

**35...Ra8** Not 35...c4? 36.Ra7.

**36.Rxa8 Qxa8 37.Bxh6! Bxh6 38.g5 Qf8** Now 38...Nxg5? loses: 39.Nxg5+ Kg7 40.Nxf7. 38...c4 looks very dangerous after 39.gxh6 cxd3 40.Qe7, but now the unexpected 40...Kxh6! (40...Qxe4 41.Qxf7+ Kxh6 42.Qxe6 d2 43.Qxd6 wins) 41.Qxf7 Ng5! hangs on.

**39.gxh6** Although material is reduced the complexities of positions with queens and knights on the board mean that matters remain tense.

**39...Qd8** 39...Qxh6 40.Qe7 Qf8 41.Qd7 b4 42.Nd2! heading to c4 leaves Black in deep trouble.

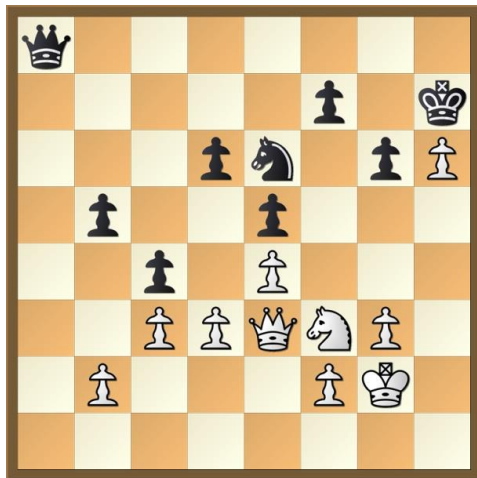
**40.Qh1** White must keep queens on to hang onto the extra pawn, 40.Qxd8 Nxd8 leads nowhere.

**40...Qa8** Kamsky takes control of the a-file and lines his queen up on the long diagonal towards the White monarch, thinking that the pawn on h6 provides cover for the Black knight, and seems likely to drop off sooner or later. However, later on he might have regretted not playing the more direct 40...Qf8, 41.Qa1 Kxh6 42.Qa6 (42.Qa7 Qe8) 42...Qb8 is passive but holding.

**41.Qc1 c4** The unexpected 41...f5! 42.Ng5+ (42.exf5 gxf5 leaves the White knight pinned, or 42.Qe3 f4 is annoying) 42...Nxd5 43.Qxd5 fxe4 equalises.

### **42.Qe3!**

A very strong move, keeping all White options open.



**42...cxd3** Black faces a tricky choice 42...Qb7 43.dxc4 bxc4 44.Nd2! f5! (44...Qxb2 45.Nxc4 Qb8 46.Qd2) 45.Nxc4 f4 was the best hope. 42...Qc6 is met by the thematic advance 43.d4! a move that has lost nothing in strength by the amount of time taken to play it. 42...Qa2? 43.Qb6 shows the vulnerability of the Black king 43...Qxb2 (43...cxd3 44.Qxd6 Qxb2 45.Qe7) 44.Qb7.

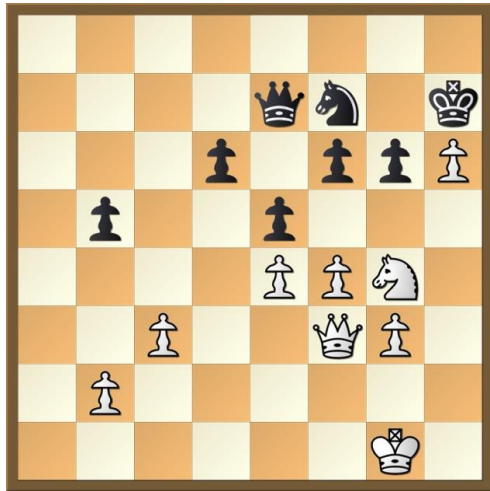
**43.Qxd3 Qc6 44.Qe3** The unexpected 44.Qd5! is strong 44...Qxd5 (44...Qb6 45.Qa8) 45.exd5 Nd8 the knight is forced onto a bad circuit due to 45...Nc7 46.Ng5+. Then 46.Nd2 Kxh6 47.Nb1 and White will pick off the pawn on b5.

**44...Qb7 45.Kg1 f6** Covering the g5 square to free the black knight.

**46.Nh2!** A better direction than 46.Nd2 b4 47.c4 Nc5.

**46...Ng5 47.Ng4 Qe7 48.f4 Nf7 49.Qf3**

49.f5! Ng5 leaves White with an edge although there is still plenty to play for.



**49...Nxf6?** Gata misses his chance, and makes a fatal slip falling in with White's plans, 49...f5! forces White's knight backwards and gets Black right back into the game. 50.exf5 gxf5 51.Qd3 e4 52.Qd4 Nxf6 is alright.

**50.Qh1** The pinned knight gives Luke the option to liquidate all the pieces at the moment of his choosing, heading towards a winning king and pawn endgame.

**50...Qg7 51.Qh4! g5** 51...f5!? was a bit trickier but 52.Nf6+ Kh8 53.g4 fxg4 (53...exf4 54.g5) 54.Nxg4 Kh7 55.fxe5 dxe5 56.Kg2 g5 57.Qxh6+ Qxh6 58.Nxh6 Kxh6 59.Kg3 leaves Black with a familiar problem - a remote passed pawn on the queenside will distract the Black king decisively: 59...Kh5 60.b3 g4 61.c4 bxc4 62.bxc4 Kg5 63.c5 Kf6 64.Kxg4.

**52.fxg5 fxg5 53.Qh5** 53.Qxh6+ comes to the same.

**53...Qg6 54.Qxh6+ Qxh6 55.Nxh6 Kxh6 56.Kf2 Kg6** 56...Kh5 57.Kf3 g4+ closes the kingside, but doesn't help 58.Ke3 Kg6 59.Kd3 Kf6 60.c4 bxc4+ 61.Kxc4 Ke6 62.b4 Kd7 63.Kd5 Kc7 64.b5

**57.Kf3 Kh5 58.b4!** White will eventually create a passed pawn with c4 to decide the game.

**58...Kg6** 58...g4+ 59.Ke3 Kg6 60.Kd3 prepares c4.

**59.c4** It's still possible to go wrong: 59.Kg4? Kf6 and White is already lost! 60.Kh5 (60.Kf3 Ke7! A neat triangulation 61.Kg4 (61.Ke3 Ke6) 61...d5! 62.exd5 (62.Kf5 d4) 62...e4 63.Kh3 Kd6) 60...d5 61.exd5 e4 62.Kg4 Ke5. The simple 59.Ke3 Kf6 (59...Kh5 60.c4) 60.Kd3 Ke6 61.c4 is also good enough.

**59...Kf6** After 59...bxc4 60.b5 c3 61.Ke2 d5 62.b6 dxe4 63.b7 the Black pawns are too slow.

**60.cxb5 Ke6 61.Kg4** 61.Ke2 Kd7 62.Kd3 Kc7 63.Kc4 Kb6 64.Kd5 also works.

**61...d5 62.exd5+ Kxd5 63.b6 Kc6 64.Kxg5**

Black resigned, 64...Kxb6 65.Kf5 removes his last pawn and all hope.