

# Day – Hebert, 1978 Canadian Championship Revisited

by Bruce Harper

One of the key games of the 1978 Canadian Championship was Jean Hebert's fifth round win over Lawrence Day. This game appeared in "Canada's Chess Legacy" in the February 2004 issue of Chess Canada Echecs, complete with the original annotations from CFC Bulletin 30 (September-October 1978).

Most of these annotations were by David Lavin (described as "an excellent attacking player from Toronto", or Day. Hebert makes a single comment at the end of the game.

Many of these annotations are questionable. But as is often the case, errors become sanctified through repetition, and may end up being accepted as being holy writ.

As it happens, Grandmaster Duncan Suttles, who unfortunately did not play in the 1978 Canadian Championship, commented on through the Day-Hebert game in a fund-raising lecture for the 1981 Vancouver Chess Congress. That lecture was transcribed and his comments are reproduced below (with minor changes for clarity), along with the previously published annotations of others and my additional comments. Suttles' assessment of the critical position after 23...h4 is radically different from that of the players and Lavin.

As an added bonus, we have some comments from Grandmaster Yasser Seirawan, who was kind enough to have proofed this article.

And finally, we have Fritz...

## IM Lawrence Day – IM Jean Hebert Canadian Championship (5) Toronto, 1978

**1.g3 g6 2.Bg2 Bg7 3.e4 e5**

**Suttles:** Now, this is a little bit uncharacteristic from some of the other

games that Hebert played in the tournament, in that he appears to be attempting to make a draw by playing symmetrically. He manages to keep the position rather level by doing this, so it didn't really fail in that objective, and finally he won the game when Day made some mistakes late on, but I think it's rather uncharacteristic of his play in the rest of the tournament, this particular game, except for the finishing part, which is a sort of stock kind of Hebert attack.

**Harper:** Suttles had begun his lecture with Jean's beautiful first round win over Vranesic, which he termed "one of the nicest games of the tournament". It also ended violently.

It is interesting that both Day and Hebert seem to agree that initially Black was playing for a draw (see their final comments). But the symmetry in the position quickly disappears.

**4.d3 d6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.f4**

**Suttles:** I would give that move [6.f4] a question mark. I think that it's very premature and perhaps dubious to advance the f-pawn in this position. He should perhaps just play 6.Nge2 and castles before playing f4, so that at least if Black captures [on f4], [White] can have the option of recapturing with the pawn [gxf4] without giving too much initiative to Black.

Now, in this particular position, of course, if he takes with the pawn [6...exf4 7.gxf4], [Black's] queen goes to h4 check and White has to move his king and he probably will be quite a bit behind in development after a few more moves. So Hebert quite correctly just chops this thing off.

**6...exf4 7.Bxf4 Nge7 8.Qd2 Nd4 9.Nf3 Nxf3+ 10.Bxf3 Nc6**



### 11.0-0

**Day:** ?! A poor move order. 11.Bg5 Nd4 12.Bxd8 Nxf3+ 13.Ke2 Nxd2 14.Bxc7 Nc4 15.dxc4 Bxc3+ 16.Bxc3 Bg4+ give Black good play for the pawn. 11.0-0-0!? or 11.h4!? or 11.Bg2.

**Harper/Fritz:** 11.Bg5 Nd4 12.Bxd8 Nxf3+ 13.Ke2 Nxd2 14.Bxc7 Nc4?! is a fantasy variation in order to generate tripled pawns. Why should Black settle for “good play for the pawn” when he could play 14...Bxc3 15.bxc3 Nxe4! 16.dxe4 Kd7! 17.Ba5 Re8, which leaves him a pawn up with what is very likely a winning position?

### 11...h6

**Lavin:** !?

**Suttles:** I should say something about this move. Again, perhaps this is a little bit ambitious for Black to play 11...h6, because now the [h6] pawn is a target and [Black] can no longer castle. In this particular position I don't think Black has anything to fear at all, even if he just castles [11...0-0]. In other words, let's say he might play, first, 11...Be6 so that the knight can be taken off in case it goes to d5 [12.Nd5]. I don't see why Hebert is afraid of an exchange of bishops with Bh6 or some such move.

**Harper:** “Or some such move?” This is an odd comment - is there some other way to exchange the dark-squared bishops besides Bh6?

**Suttles:** It would seem to me that the White position is probably weaker on the kingside than the Black one. So, anyway, he played this move [11...h6], I suppose [with the idea] in mind to drive the bishop [on f4] back eventually and get the square [e5] for his knight. There were some problems, and Day managed to get a kind of play going in the game in a few more moves. So, this is perhaps the beginning of an over-ambitious maneuver on the part of Hebert, that he played a move such as 11...h6 in this position.

### 12.Bg2

**Lavin:** White's only chance for an advantage lies in play for d4, so 12.Nd1 now looks most accurate. If 12...Bh3 13.Re1 and if 12...f5 13.exf5 Bxf5 14.Re1+.

### 12...Be6 13.Be3 Ne5



**Suttles:** Now, by tactical means, he [Black] attempts to prevent White from advancing in the centre. In this case, if the pawn moves forward [14.d4], the knight goes to c4 and attacks the bishop and the queen and gets the

two bishops, at least, if nothing else. It may have still been better for White to try that. White came up with another idea.

### 14.h3

**Suttles:** This is to prevent the knight from coming in and winning the bishop anyway.

### 14...Qd7 15.Kh2

**Day:** The position is equal.

### 15...c5

**Suttles:** Now the knight is firmly entrenched [on e5] and it looks like Black's play has been successful.

**Harper/Fritz:** For what it's worth, after 15...c5, Fritz gives White an edge.

### 16.Rab1

**Seirawan:** I think 16.Ne2 was White's best.

### 16...Rc8



### 17.Nd5

**Day:** ?! 17.b3! is better. If 18...Nc6 18.Ne2.

**Suttles:** This is a good move on the part of White. There's no way that White can

advance the b-pawn as long as the knight sits on c3, because the possibility of the sacrifice of the rook at c3, followed by winning the queen with a discovered check by the knight [17.b4? cxb4 18.Rxb4 Rxc3! 19.Qxc3 Ng4+]. So he has to get rid of the knight.

Now, of course, this gives Black a pawn majority on the kingside, but Black would have to waste at least one more move before he can castle, and this one extra move or so, plus the fact that White already has his rook on a potentially open file, will give White good counterplay on the queenside in this position, especially after Black's next move.

### 17...Bxd5

**Suttles:** He chops the knight, since if he doesn't take it, it goes to f6 and then [Black] would have lost the [dark-squared] bishop for a knight, in which case [Black's] kingside really would be weak, with White having a dark-squared bishop to exploit the dark squares, and Black having no counterpart with which to oppose it.

**Question from the audience:** "Is this White attack on the queenside play or counterplay?"

**Suttles:** At this point? Well, I would it's become play, really, because I think Black's strategy has failed.

### 18.exd5

**Lavin:** Black's kingside pawns are very mobile.

### 18...h5

**Suttles:** He must move this pawn before castling.

### 19.b4

**Day:** ? A weak plan. 19.d4!, straightening out the pawns, is logical. If 19...Nc4 20.Qe2,

and on 19...cxd4 20.Bxd4, White has a slight edge.

**Harper/Fritz:** Fritz gives 19.d4 cxd4 20.Bxd4 f5 as equal. Black has counterplay on both the kingside (...h4) and the queenside (...Qa4).

### 19...b6 20.bxc5 bxc5

**Suttles:** So now finally [White] has an open file with his rook posted on it. All White's pieces are now posted fairly well – the bishop on g2 is not too effective, but there's not much he can do about it.

### 21.Bg5 0-0



**Day:** After the last two moves I thought ...h4 was no longer dangerous.

### 22.Qa5

**Lavin:** ? It doesn't do anything here. White hasn't realized how sensitive his kingside is.

**Suttles:** Now White begins to try to infiltrate on the queenside, perhaps to get the rook to the seventh rank or/and win [Black's] a-pawn.

**Harper/Fritz:** Fritz thinks this reduces White's advantage, because Black can reply with the simple 22...Rb8.

### 22...f5



**Suttles:** Now, again, this is perhaps over-active, but it's – let's put it this way – it succeeded, but perhaps it shouldn't have. This move makes sense in some sort of way, in that [Black] wants to try to make use of [his] extra pawn on the kingside and launch a kingside attack, but on the other hand, [22...f5] does weaken several squares in the position, mainly [Black's] second rank is now weakened and the pawn at g6 becomes weak, and it's not at all clear at this moment how [Black's kingside] pawns can be advanced against the White king position. So, it's a very ambitious move, and it worked in the game, but maybe it shouldn't have.

**Harper/Fritz:** Suttles' characterization of 22...f5 seems accurate. Black would be equal after 22...Rb8, but he would have few winning chances. So instead of defending the queenside, he counterattacks on the kingside.

### 23.Rfe1

**Lavin:** ?

**Suttles:** All right, this move is not a bad move, it's a delaying sort of tactic. The idea is to prevent the knight from retreating from the square in the center and driving the White bishop [on g5] away, because then the rook would come to the seventh rank.

**Question from the audience:** "Can I just ask a question here? Don't you think it was very unwise of White to take his rook off the file on which that f-pawn was obviously going to come?"

**Suttles:** If [White] had left the rook on the f-file, then Black could have gotten an effective defensive formation by retreating the knight to f7. It's true there's some danger of a breakthrough on the kingside, but it's also true that the White rook is now effectively placed to prevent any dislodging of the bishop which is on the optimum square [g5] at the moment and later he may be able to shift the rook to the b-file when he's finally coming in on the seventh rank.

**Harper/Fritz:** Fritz isn't often given to such subtlety, and recommends the more direct 23.Rb5, to double rooks on the b-file.

**Seirawan:** I think 23.Rfe1 was a wasted move.

**Suttles:** Okay, now, whose move is it?



## 23...h4

**Lavin:** !! An excellent move. White is now completely lost.

**Harper/Fritz:** Fritz unhesitatingly labels 23...h4 a mistake.

**Seirawan:** 23...h4 seems mistimed. Better is 23...Kh7, preparing ...Bh6. I like Black's position.



**Suttles:** All right. This is the move that, I guess, threw Day off. In other words, Black seeks a combinative solution to the problem of a breakthrough and the thing is whether or not this combination was really sound. I sort of doubt that it could do anything better than perhaps lead to a draw, at best.

The next move by White is probably not the best answer, and within a couple more moves, in fact, two more moves, White got a totally lost position, from a position which perhaps he can win.

White should simply, in this position, capture that pawn with the bishop and call Black's bluff. If 24.Bxh4, instead of the move played in the game, which was 24.gxh4, the of course if [Black's] f-pawn advances it can be removed: let's say 24...f4 25.gxf4 Rxf4. [White] may be able to play ... there are several different moves here. One

plausible move, perhaps, which is not too bad, is to play, I think, 26.Re4.

It's a little bit complicated, but I think it holds together and let's say, well, the only reasonable attacking chance here is 26...Nf3+ 27.Bxf3 Rxf3 and say 28.Rg4, guarding against any kind of business here [h3] and the other rook may even be able to come to the g-line, and it's not clear who's attacking whom here. Plus, it's going to be difficult for Black to coordinate an attack with the weakened first and second ranks. For instance, he plays a move like this: 28...Be5, just 29.Kg2 and it's hard to see exactly how he's going to continue the attack without allowing the g-pawn to go with check or the [White] queen to come back into the position, let's say here [Qd2]. In other words, probably Black is losing. He has some play here, but it's hard to break thought, because [f2] is guarded.

Now, I don't know exactly, you'd have to ask Hebert what he had in mind when he made this pawn move [23...h4]. Perhaps he had in mind a completely unsound continuation in which he failed to realize the counter chance that White's position allowed. In other words, it may be that Hebert simply thought that on 24.Bxh4 he was going to play 24...Bh6, bagging a piece, unless [White's] g-pawn moves. It looks very plausible: [Black's g-pawn] threatens to attack the bishop [on h4] and if [White's g-pawn] moves then 25...fxg4 smashes the White king position. This may be what he was contemplating when he made the move...

**(See analysis diagram)**

However, he did not perhaps really look at the position and realize that after 25.Rxe5 dxe5 26.Qa6, I think, suddenly it's the Black position which is completely shattered and falling apart at the seams.

For one thing, [White's d-pawn] is threatening to advance and cause all kinds of problems. It's very hard to find a move here. For instance, if he ... I don't know if anyone

here can suggest a reasonable move to try to hold this position...



**(Analysis)**

**Suggestion from the audience:** "26...Qg7? 26... Kg7?"

**Suttles:** 26...Kg7? Any king move is sort of weak, isn't it? Because, on a king move, [White] can just play 27.d6, threatening 28.Rb7, winning the queen, so even [White's g2-bishop] can come into the game now. [Black] doesn't even have time to play [27...e4].

Perhaps he can do something with his queen, maybe [26...Qg7], but, again, what does he do after [27.Rb7]? He has to throw the [c8] rook in the way and lose the g-pawn, because if the other [f8] rook goes in [27...Rf7], then the [c8] rook is undefended [26...Qg7 27.Rb7 Rf7? 28.Rxf7 Qxf7 29.Qxc8+], so this is a very, very, very bad situation that Black is in. So, in that case [26...Qg7], it seems that [Black] just loses, because if [Black's] queen retreats he loses the g-pawn. The whole effect of the combination was the idea of being able to advance this pawn [Black's g-pawn] and trap the bishop [White's g4-bishop], and it simply does not work.

**Harper/Fritz:** Suttles' analysis is compelling, and it certainly convinced me at the time. Day was winning, and all the annotators were out to lunch! The concept of suddenly attacking along both the sixth and seventh ranks after 24.Rxe5 dxe5 25.Qa6 is deeply original and aesthetically pleasing, as it punishes Black's reckless kingside attack.

But to paraphrase Thomas Huxley, this appears to be an example of "The great tragedy of chess - the slaying of a beautiful theory by an ugly fact." Suttles' idea doesn't quite seem to work.

After 24.Bxh4 Bh6 25.Rxe5 dxe5 26.Qa6 Kg7 27.d6 Rb8! (the move that Suttles missed, although it seems like the most obvious way for Black to defend), Black survives, and it is White who must be careful. Forcing variations beginning with 28.Bc6 turn out to favour Black, but White can play 28.Rxb8 Rxb8 29.Be7, and now Black should bail out with 29...Rb6 30.Qc4 Rxd6 31.Bxd6 Qxd6, with an equal position.

White has a slightly better alternative with 27.Rb7! Rc7 28.Rxc7 Qxc7 29.d6 Qd7 30.Be7, but again Black seems to be able to escape with 30...Rf7, with the idea of 31...Rxe7. The ending after 31.Qxa7 Qxd6! 32.Bxd6 Rxa7 33.Bxe5+ Kf7 34.Bd5+ Ke7 35.Kg2 is only slightly better for White, at best, after the ridiculous computer move 35...Bg7! (36.Bxg7 Kd6).

So 24.Rxe5 doesn't lose, but it doesn't win either.

Fritz suggests, instead of the forcing 25.Rxe5, the calmer 25.Qa6, deferring the capture on e5. White meets 25...g5 with 26.Rxe5! gxh4 27.Re6 hxg3+ 28.Kxg3 Qg7+ 29.Kf2 Bf4 30.Kf1 Qg3 31.Qa5! Rb8 32.Rb3 Be3 33.Qe1 Qf4+ 34.Ke2 Qg5 35.Qf1, and White puts his position in order. Black's queen can't get too frisky, because in many variations White counterattacks with Rg6+.

If Black refrains from 25...g5, say by exchanging rooks with 25...Rb8, Suttles' idea is realized: 26.Rxb8 Rxb8 27.Rxe5 dxe5 28.Qxg6+ Bg7 29.d6 Qf7 30.Qg5!, and White is winning.

But Black has a third choice – 25...Kg7! Now g6 is defended and Black still threatens ...g5. If 26.Rb7 Rc7 27.Reb1? Rf7, and Black has neutralized the pressure along the seventh rank and will soon neutralize White's h4-bishop as well, unless White gives way with 28.Rxc7 Qxc7 29.g4.

This means that after 25...Kg7!, White should play 26.Rb7 Rc7 27.Rxc7 Qxc7 28.d6, transposing into the line given earlier.

The conclusion? With best play, both 25.Rxe5 (Suttles) and 25.Qa6 (Fritz) come out the same - White is equal in a complex position.

**Seirawan:** Another variation worth noting is 24.Bxh4 Bh6 25.Rxe5 dxe5 26.Qa6 Kg7 27.Be7 Qxe7 28.Rb7 Rc7 29.d6 Rxb7 30.dxe7 Rxe7 31.Qd6, with two rooks for the queen. The valuation is a difficult one.

#### 24.gxh4

**Lavin:** If 24.Bxh4 then 24...Bh6! threatens to win the bishop.

**Suttles:** However, getting back to the game, against an unsound attack a bad defence is usually dealt with very quickly. In other words, usually attacks that are unsound require accurate defence to prove that they're unsound. In this case, [White] took with the pawn [24.gxh4] and [Black] advanced this pawn here...

#### 24...f4

**Suttles:** And bishop here...

#### 25.Be4

**Suttles:** Well, so far it's reasonable, but Black has got some play.

#### 25...f3

**Suttles:** And now, [White] played a completely horrible move which finished off





**Harper:** Where does all this leave us?

The Day-Hebert game from the 1978 Canadian Championship is a truly fascinating game, and was quite rightly featured as part of “Canada’s Chess Legacy”. The game is a credit to both players.

David Lavin falls victim to the most common fault of annotators - he works backwards from the ultimate result and assumes that Black was winning throughout the game. He implies that Black is better around move 18 (“Black’s kingside pawns are very mobile”) and after 23...h4 asserts that “White is now completely lost”. Unless one gives a great deal of weight to the shock effect of 23...h4, this is just wrong.

As for his analysis of the critical variation (“If 24.Bxh4 then 24...Bh6! threatens to win the bishop.”), the less said the better. We’ve all been there, with deadlines to meet and other games to write up.

Lawrence Day, having ultimately been dismantled in impressive style in this game, generously gives his opponent a great deal of credit, even second-guessing his first move (“Playing for a win with 1.g3 seems to be useless because of symmetrical variations.”) Had Lawrence found the defence to 23...h4, he would likely not have questioned his earlier play so harshly.

Jean Hebert’s assessment of the game was the most accurate of the three annotators. It is almost a metaphysical question whether White “...was simply outplayed.” Objectively Black was not winning as early as both players thought, but subjectively Black cast a spell with 23...h4 and White believed in it. So in this respect Jean is absolutely right. Chess is a game of mistakes, and after White pressed on the queenside, the position became complicated and he lost his way.

Duncan Suttles’ discovery of 24.Bxh4 Bh6 25.Rxe5!, which seems to be no better and no worse than Fritz’s 25.Qa6, shows just how strong Suttles is, especially at finding unusual and imagination moves. I guess we should all take our cue from Suttles, as well

as Bronstein, Tal and others, and look for such moves all the time! But it sounds like an awful lot of work...