

Kramnik – Game 2

Comments	
Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game two, the first game with Karjakin playing white. Before the match you make extensive opening preparations; it's clear that Karjakin was mainly aiming for e4, and you don't know exactly what your opponent is going to play. So the first white game is quite important because you gain insight into the direction of your opponent's opening preparation. It's possible that your opponent will make a strategy of changing opening lines all the time, but that is becoming less popular over time, because it's simply too difficult to prepare a lot of good lines with black. In general, opening knowledge of top players is very high, so it's hard to surprise your opponent so much. Because black is currently doing well in most of the solid openings, what is becoming more normal and logical is for a player to prepare one or two openings, or 2-3 different lines in one opening, and to stick with your main weapon. That's why it became clear for Karjakin after this game that Carlsen was going to play the Ruy Lopez for most of the match, or even the entire match. Karjakin was not aggressive in this game. He wanted to probe a little bit, which at this stage of the match is understandable. It's his first match for the world championship, and at the beginning he would be trying to just settle into the match. The main fear is to get crushed at the beginning, especially against an opponent like Carlsen, and he would never be able to get into the match. I understand Karjakin's strategy to play very safe, solid chess, but perhaps it was a bit too safe because he could have tried to get a small advantage at some point.
13. Ra1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After 13 Ra1, I'm not completely sure about ...Nc4. It's not a bad move, but I think [pawn to] c6 was more to the point. Black can play his queen to c7, then pawn to c5. The knight is losing two tempi to get to b6, but with white's pawn on b3, it doesn't stand so well on b6 anyway. Magnus wanted to avoid having his knight on the edge of the board, but Nc4 loses a bit of time.
18. dxe5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After 17 ...Bf8 I believe that white has a small plus, but here I think Karjakin decided to play too safe. 18 dxe5 is probably a move in line with his strategy for the game, just to check what opening his opponent would choose, and to play very safe, to make a draw, and to get into the match. But I don't see that white should be in so much of a hurry to release the tension. For example, 18 Qd2, followed by Rad1.
19. a4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't think 19 a4 is the right idea because c6 is the right move for black anyway, and I don't see what white has achieved with a4. White could still be a bit better after Qxd8 Rxd8 Ne2, which is very logical, attacking the pawn on e5 and intending to reposition his knight to d3. White has a small plus. I don't think Sergey would manage to beat Magnus in this position, but at least he could make him suffer a bit, and without any risk. But after 19 a4, c6, it's completely equal.
26. ...Re6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One other interesting moment, which was worrying for Magnus, is after 26 b4. The position is pretty much equal, but the move 26 ...Re6 is very strange. It's clear that he simply missed a very simple tactics after 26. ...c5. Of course he saw the move ...c5, it's a very natural move, and already it's white who has to play safely to make a draw, as black is nominally better. Normally Magnus would have certainly played it, and I can see only one explanation that he didn't: after 27 Nxb5 cxb4 Nd6, he just didn't see the move Re6. Then Nxc8 Rxa6. I am pretty sure he missed the move 28 ...Re6, because otherwise he would have played 26 ...c5. It's not important for the result of the game, which would probably end up in a draw anyway, but it's a danger sign for Magnus, because he missed a simple tactic, yet he had lots of time.
27. Rb1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After 26 ...Re6, if Karjakin had played Rd1 instead of Rb1, he could have pressed on a bit. Of course it's still a draw, but after 27 Rb1 the position got liquidated after ...c5. So 27 Rd1 was more precise and also natural, because white keeps up a little bit of pressure, although the game should still end in a draw.
Recap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karjakin followed his strategy of playing passively, but he played too passively and should have tried 18 Qd2, or 19 Qxd8 and Ne2. In general it was a well-played game by Magnus, but his tactical mistake leading him to play 26 ...Re6 leaves an unsatisfied feeling after the game. The official commentaries of the game explained that it was a fine, normal game, but my opinion was different, namely some dangerous moments for Magnus, and that he was clearly not playing his best chess.