

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian
By Richard Palliser

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Introduction

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 (Diagram 1)

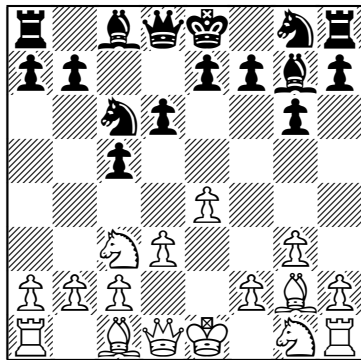


Diagram 1 (W)
The Closed Sicilian

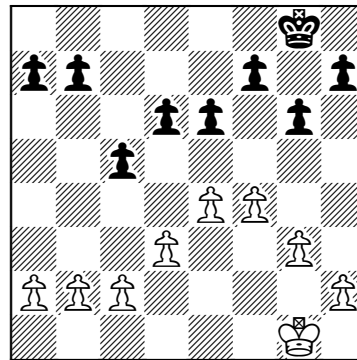


Diagram 2
The usual Closed structure

The Closed Sicilian is a reliable and promising weapon for those keen to avoid all the theory of the numerous Open Sicilian variations. It can be handled positionally, but nobody should be fooled by White's apparently slow build-up; his main plan is a gradual kingside advance leading to a mating attack against the black monarch. As we will discover on our journey through the Closed Sicilian, it remains an opening where a good understanding of the important attacking and positional motifs is more important than knowledge of specific moves and variations.

The key plans which both sides can employ are highlighted throughout this work, while the illustrative games have often been chosen more from an inspirational perspective than to display the latest theory. Both sides can play

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fairly sharply or relatively theoretically at times, but, while exploring such lines can be great fun and lead to practical success, there is usually a quieter and no less effective alternative for White which puts the emphasis back on to general understanding of the Closed Sicilian and its typical structure (**Diagram 2**).

Diagram 2 depicts the most common of all pawn structures in the Closed Sicilian, and Black will usually be fairly harmoniously developed with a bishop on g7 and a knight on e7 as he aims to prevent a strong f5-break. White should always be on the look-out to force that through, but he must be aware that any preparatory advance of the g-pawn needs to be well timed. A premature g4 can often be strongly met by ...f5; not only holding White up on the kingside but also often leaving him a little overextended.

White often aims to transfer as many pieces as possible to the kingside before advancing with f5, but an early advance of the pawn to f4 is actually no longer especially popular. White still aims for f4-f5, but he will often preface that nowadays with Be3 and Qd2. In one fell swoop he is then able to exchange off the dark-squared bishops with Bh6: eliminating any pressure down the long a1-h8 diagonal and crucially weakening the black monarch's defences.

A look at the structure quickly reveals that Black is vulnerable to f4-f5, but which advances should he be concentrating on? He can sometimes even play ...f5 without waiting for g4, but ...d5 is often not especially effective. White tends to have e4 well defended and, not minding a further closing of the position, isn't too unhappy to see the black d-pawn advance on to d4. A ...d5 break can also be met by e5; an advance which if well timed will blunt the g7-bishop and leave the black structure a little static, although if mistimed it can be well met by an immediate and liberating ...f6. Thus Black often prefers to remain quite flexible in the centre deep into the middlegame, instead focussing his efforts upon a rapid advance of his queenside pawns.

Piece Placement

One drawback to focussing too intently upon the pawn structure is that we can fail to fully take into account how the position of the pieces may affect the role of the pawns. A knight on f6, for instance, may well encourage White to throw his f- and g-pawns up the board. White for his part will usually keep his queen's knight on c3 into the early middlegame and there it can, just like the black e6- and g6-pawns are to the f5-break, act as a target for the black queenside pawns to latch on to.

Black's main way of obtaining counterplay is to advance on the queenside, supported by the g7-bishop, as well as to make use of the d4-square; a square which it can be hard for White to contest so long as his knight remains on c3. Thus the wise Closed Sicilian player will often quickly reroute his knight from c3 to e2 or even to d1, after which c3 will evict the black knight from d4 when White can press ahead on the kingside and sometimes also take over the cen-

tral initiative. For a model demonstration of that effective plan, let's see one of the world's strongest Closed Sicilian exponents in action.

Game 1

□ M.Adams ■ G.Sax

Bundesliga 1997

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3

Before launching his f-pawn, Adams intends to quickly complete his development and already White is angling for an exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

6...Rb8 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2 Nd4 9 0-0 b4 10 Nd1 Qc7?!

Black has countered aggressively if logically early on, but cannot afford to lose time like this. Sax may have enjoyed a long and successful career as a grandmaster, but even he isn't familiar with all of the Closed Sicilian's subtleties. The queen only stands well on c7 should White half-open the c-file with an exchange on d4, but that is a capture he most certainly does not want to make.

11 Nc1! (Diagram 3)

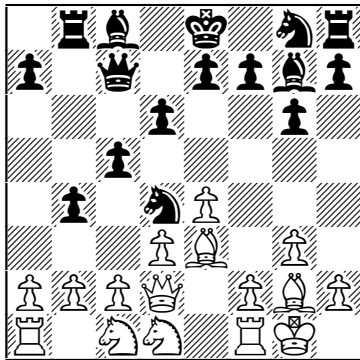


Diagram 3 (B)

Preparing to drive Black backwards

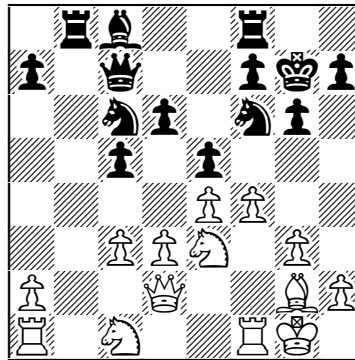


Diagram 4 (B)

'f for forward!'



NOTE: The white knights are far from unhappy on c1 and d1 and, as Black can no longer exchange on e2, the d4-knight will shortly have to retreat. Once it has done so the white pieces are quick to control the centre and to look for a kingside attack.

11...Nf6 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Nc6 14 Bh6! 0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Ne3

Adams has completed the initial stages of his overall plan by evicting the black knight from d4 and by weakening the dark squares around the black king. Sax, on the other hand, is a little low on counterplay, although his next most certainly doesn't help matters as White wants to advance on the kingside

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in any case.

16...e5?!

Another good example of how White can get the better of Sicilian theoryophiles with the Closed Sicilian was A.Ledger-K.Sakaev, Cappelle la Grande 1997. Konstantin Sakaev is a respected theoretician who has worked for Kasparov, but that didn't prevent him from reaching this unpleasant position. However, at least he didn't weaken himself down the f-file, preferring 16...Ba6. Even so, after 17 f4 Qb6 18 Rf2 e6 19 Nb3! Nd7 20 f5 Nce5 21 c4 Black was held up on the queenside, while White could simply double rooks. Indeed one suspects that it was chiefly Sakaev's much higher rating which saved him when he offered a draw just five moves later.

17 f4! (Diagram 4) 17...Ne7 18 Ne2 Bb7 19 g4!



TIP: When Black has a knight on f6, White should always look to strengthen his attack with a g-pawn advance. Here the threat of g5 prevents Black from freeing his position with 19...d5, while the e2-knight will find a useful attacking role on g3.

19...h6 20 h4!

Adams may be a super-grandmaster, but it is noticeable as to how the white attack almost plays itself. The threat is 21 f5 followed by g5 which Sax prevents, but at the high price of granting White strong pressure down the f-file.

20...exf4 21 Rxf4 Neg8 22 Raf1 Qe7 23 Ng3 Bc8 24 Qf2

Improving another piece and ensuring that almost all the white pieces are invited to the kingside party. Only the g2-bishop doesn't get to play an attacking role, although that piece was pivotal in earlier restraining ...d5 and thereby ensuring that Sax lacked counterplay.

24...Be6 25 g5 hxg5 26 hxg5 Nh7 27 Nef5+! (Diagram 5)

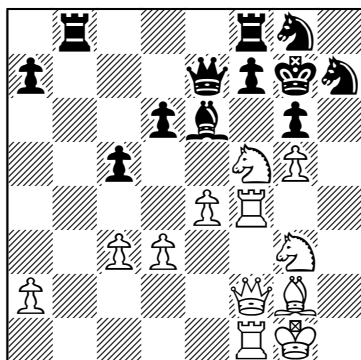


Diagram 5 (B)
A decisive sacrifice

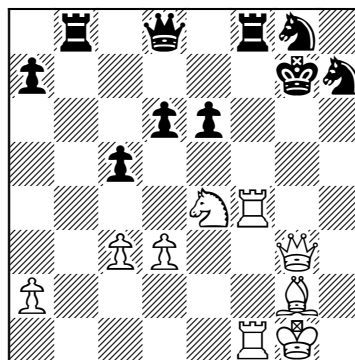


Diagram 6 (B)
Winning as 31...Kh8 32 Rf7 decides

With such a strong gathering of kingside force, it should come as no surprise that there is a sacrificial breakthrough to rip open the black monarch's defences.

27...gxf5

Black is already defenceless as after 27...Bxf5 28 exf5 Qxg5 29 Ne4 Qd8 White has 30 f6+ (Adams) when the f6-pawn will stick in Black's throat like a fishbone, albeit not for long as 30...Kh8 31 Rh4 leaves mate imminent.

28 exf5 Qxg5 29 Ne4 Qd8 30 fxe6 fxe6 31 Qg3+ 1-0 (Diagram 6)

Does Black have to fianchetto?

The Closed Sicilian is brought about by 1 e4 c5 2 Nc3, followed by a white kingside fianchetto. In practice Black also usually opts to fianchetto, but doing so is far from obligatory. He can prefer 2...e6 3 g3 d5 as we'll consider in Chapter Six, where we also examine Black's fairly rare alternative set-ups, including rapid queenside expansion after 2...a6. The system with 2...e6 and 3...d5 isn't inferior to a kingside fianchetto, but does require Black to be ready for an ...e6 Open Sicilian variation as White could always meet 2 Nc3 e6 with 3 Nf3 and 4 d4.

To reach our key branching point at move six (Diagram 1), Black can play ...Nc6, ...g6 and ...d6 in any order, and this set-up remains by far his most popular. Even at club level Black often knows that this is how he is advised by theory to meet the Closed Sicilian, although quite how much he'll know beyond move six is pretty variable. Even if Black knows some theory, he may well have rarely experienced the Closed, and thus his understanding of the position will often be far inferior to White's. In the Closed Sicilian that can easily prove costly.

We have already seen experienced grandmasters Sax and Sakaev betray a lack of both theoretical knowledge and general understanding in the Closed. If they can be under a fair amount of pressure by move 20, just think how well the average club player may fare. However, it would be rather naive to assume that one's opponent won't understand many of the Closed's little nuances. They may actually be rather experienced or regularly employ the English Opening, and of course 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 is a reversed Closed Sicilian. Thus throughout this work Black's best plans and ideas will be highlighted as well as White's, while a key factor in our main line (with a double kingside fianchetto) for both sides to realize is that g4 must usually be met by ...f5 where possible.

Game 2

□ **B.Spasky** ■ **L.Portisch**

Toluca Interzonal 1982

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 g6 5 d3 Bg7 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Rb1 Rb8

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One of Black's better replies to 10 Rb1 which enables Portisch to harmoniously complete his development.

11 Ne2 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 b6 13 g4?!



WARNING: Beware this g4-advance when Black hasn't impeded his f-pawn. White now doesn't gain an attack, but does come under some pressure down the h1-a8 diagonal.

13...f5! (Diagram 7)

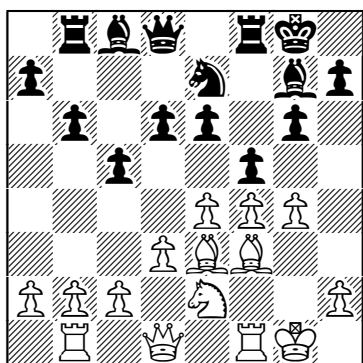


Diagram 7 (W)

An essential counter

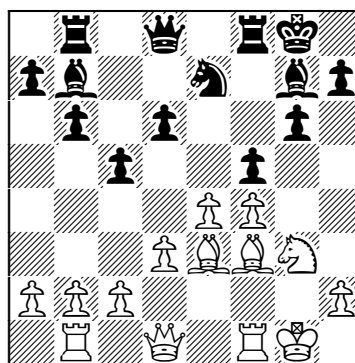


Diagram 8 (W)

Correctly recapturing asymmetrically

14 Ng3 Bb7 15 gxf5 exf5! (Diagram 8)

The correct recapture as the white monarch will be the weaker in the long run and Portisch will more immediately gain pressure against the white centre. I must admit that this game is a little puzzling, and I also feel a touch guilty for including it, as Spassky has done so much for the white cause in the Closed Sicilian. He must have known that g4 would be answered by ...f5, but presumably and wrongly thought that here there was a favourable way for White to benefit from the tension.

16 c4 Qd7 17 Qd2 Rbe8! 18 Rbe1 Nc6

Homing in on d4; not only can't White attack, but he's already looking rather overextended.

19 Bg2 Nd4 20 Kh1 fxe4 21 dxe4 h5! (Diagram 9)

The boot is firmly on the other foot here as Black gets to dangerously advance his h-pawn. Normally that's something that White wants to do, and indeed below we'll see Short successfully guiding a pawn to h6 with decisive effect.

22 Qd3 h4 23 Bxd4

Positionally grim, but White must keep e4 covered which 23 Ne2 h3 fails to do.

23...cxd4! 24 Ne2 h3 25 Bf3 Qe7

Preparing to lever Spassky open on the dark squares, while White can't capture on d4 as then f4 followed by his whole position would fall.

26 Qd2 g5! 27 Kg1 gxf4

Not a huge mistake, but Portisch later spotted something even better: 27...d3! 28 Qxd3 Bxe4 29 Bxe4 Qxe4 30 Qxh3 Rxf4! which neatly exploits the horrendously exposed white king.

28 Nxd4 Qf6 29 Nb5 Rd8 30 Nxa7?! Ra8 31 Nb5 Rxa2 32 Qxd6 Rxb2 33 Qxf6 Rxf6 34 e5 Rg6+ 35 Kh1 Bxf3+ 36 Rxf3 Bxe5! (Diagram 10)

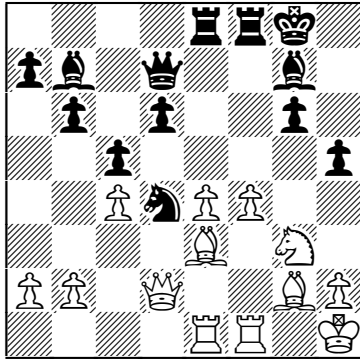


Diagram 9 (W)

Softening up the white position

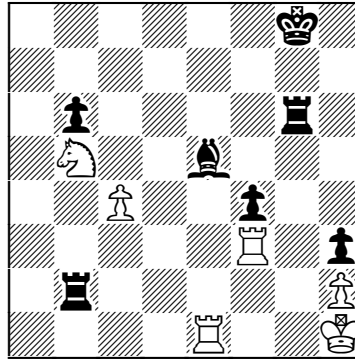


Diagram 10 (W)

The beginning of the end

Exploiting the active positions of both black rooks to pick off an important pawn and to bring the bishop into the attack.

37 Rxh3 f3 38 Rf1 Rbg2 39 Rd1 Bf4!

This must have been agony for Spassky who is too tied down to prevent both 40...Be3 and the advance of the f-pawn.

40 Nd4 f2 41 Nf3 Be3 42 Rd8+ Kg7 43 Rd7+ Kf6 0-1

Leading Exponents

The Closed Sicilian first came to international attention when Louis Paulsen used it with some success (+2 =1 -0) in his 1862 London match against Adolf Anderssen. Since then the opening has been employed by ten of the fourteen world champions. Many may have only made occasional use of it, but Vassily Smyslov, Boris Spassky and the young Anatoly Karpov have all made important contributions to its development and theory. The Closed may have rarely seized the attention of the world's elite, who generally prefer to investigate much sharper and more theoretical openings, but it has always had its supporters within grandmaster ranks.

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Over the past decade a new wave of players have been attracted to the Closed and especially to the 6 Be3 variation due to the success which both Michael Adams and Nigel Short have enjoyed with it. Indeed there is a certain English factor of late to the opening with Danny King having used the opening to good effect on many occasions in the nineties. More recently Luke McShane has jumped on the bandwagon, although he tends to seek a more flexible form of the Closed by employing a 2 d3 move-order, not rushing to develop his knight to c3. Other leading contemporary Closed exponents whom one would do well to keep an eye on are the 2004 FIDE Women's World Championship runner-up, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya; the English IM, Andrew Ledger; the Uruguayan GM, Andres Rodriguez; and the American GM, Alex Stripunsky.

White's Options

After 1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 (**Diagram 11**),

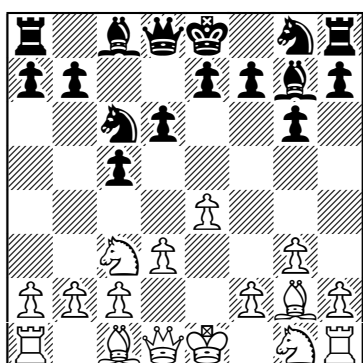


Diagram 11 (W)

Several tempting options

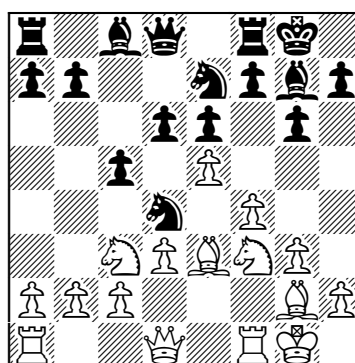


Diagram 12 (B)

Cutting open the black position

White is at a crossroads and there is something here for all types of player. That great champion of the Closed Sicilian, Boris Spassky, has employed 6 Nge2, 6 Be3 and 6 Nh3, but his name is synonymous with 6 f4; a move which has brought him several important victories. After 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3, Black usually prevents d4 with 9...Nd4. As we will see in Chapter One, White can then continue to build up fairly calmly as Karpov used to like to, but I would be tempted to advance with Christoffel's 10 e5!? (**Diagram 12**).

This strike may well surprise those new to the Sicilian as Black at all levels, while many opponents may have neglected to have studied it of late with 6 Be3 being all the rage. 10 e5 enjoyed a burst of popularity in the late eighties and early nineties, and could once again become a dangerous weapon in the hands of those still keen to explore it.

Game 3

□ B.Spasky ■ E.Gufeld

Wellington 1988

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Bf2!? (Diagram 13)

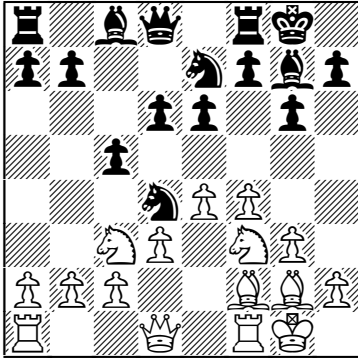


Diagram 13 (B)

Spasky's preferred move-order

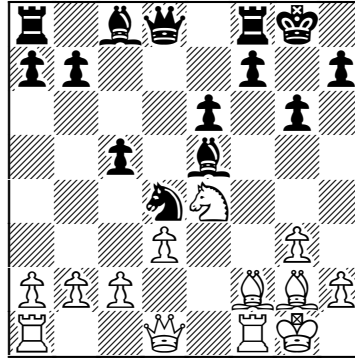


Diagram 14 (B)

Regaining the pawn

An interesting move-order which Spasky has favoured, although we soon land up back in the main line of the 10 e5 pawn sacrifice.

10...Nxf3+ 11 Bxf3 Nc6 12 Bg2 Nd4 13 e5! dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5

This arises more often via 10 e5 Nef5 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5 and in return for his pawn, White enjoys the superior light-squared bishop. However, the dark squares are even more important to his compensation and so Spasky immediately strikes on them.

15 Ne4 (Diagram 14) 15...f5!

The best move as Black must return the pawn and this is the best way of doing so. Otherwise White will maintain his strong knight on e4 and capture on c5 with his bishop after 16 c3. The move 15...Nf5 has also been tried with the idea of 16 Bxc5 Bd4+, but after 16 c3! Black lacks a good move. The position which arises after 16...c4 can also come about via 15...c4 16 c3 Nf5, but White has the advantage after simply 17 dxc4 due to his better coordinated pieces.

16 Nxc5

This position is something of a theoretical tabiya and we will explore it in much more detail in our first chapter. Even if Black has reached this position he must still play pretty accurately; something which was difficult for Gufeld to do when this variation initially packed a lot of surprise at grandmaster level.

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16...Qd6 17 b4! (Diagram 15)

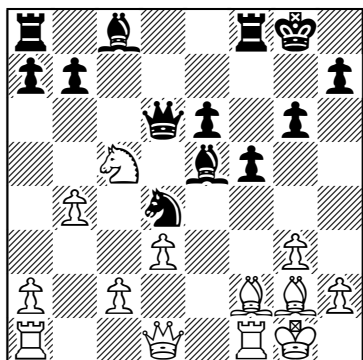


Diagram 15 (B)
Maintaining White's clamp

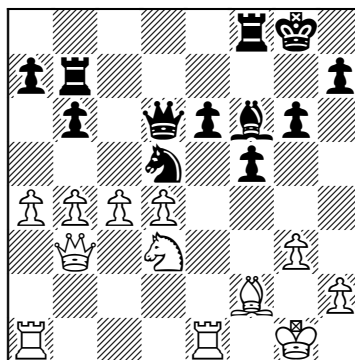


Diagram 16 (B)
White's advantage grows

Supporting the knight and preparing 18 c3. Gufeld's response is a little slow and Hjartarson was to later to improve with 17...Nc6 18 Rb1 Bd4!.

17...Rb8?!

Black can also easily get into trouble with the very greedy 17...Nb5?! when White is more than happy to part with the exchange for full dark-square control and the initiative. After 18 a4! Bxa1 19 Qxa1 Nc7 20 Nxb7 the white bishops are superbly placed and 20...Bxb7 21 Bxb7 Qxb4 22 Bxa8 Rxa8 23 Qe5! Qe7 24 Bd4 was shortly decisive in I.Starostits-K.Kappeler, Winterthur 2003.

18 c3 Nb5 19 d4! Bf6 20 Qb3 b6 21 Nd3

The knight may have temporarily been driven backwards, but White still enjoys a pleasant central bind and is soon able to begin to target e6.

21...Bb7?! 22 Bxb7 Rxb7 23 a4! Nc7 24 Rfe1 Nd5?!

The knight wasn't well placed on c7, but Spassky is very happy to be provoked into advancing in the centre.

25 c4! (Diagram 16) 25...Ne7 26 Nf4 Nc6

There is no doubting White's advantage after this, but 26...Bxd4 27 Rad1 Bxf2+ 28 Kxf2 followed by 29 Nxe6 would have been an even worse evil for Gufeld.

27 Rxe6 Qxb4 28 Qd3!



TIP: It is often a good idea to keep the queens on when one enjoys the initiative, and here the black queen will shortly find herself badly offside.

28...Ne7 29 Be1 Qb2 30 Bc3 Qb3 31 Rxf6! (Diagram 17)

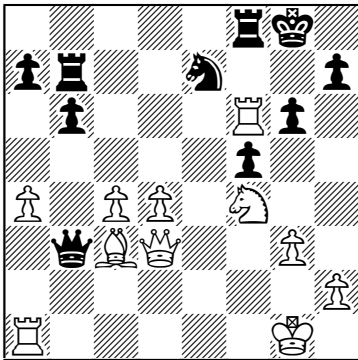


Diagram 17 (B)

Seizing the dark squares

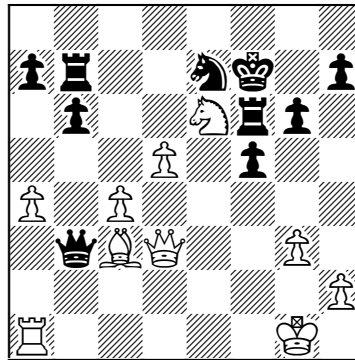


Diagram 18 (B)

The white knight is a killer

An aesthetic and strong way to cash in White's advantage as Gufeld is completely undone down the long diagonal.

31...Rxf6 32 d5 Kf7

Avoiding 32...Rd6 33 Qd4, but White can win back the exchange while keeping his dominant bishop as his next also threatens to trap the black queen.

33 Ne6! (Diagram 18) 33...Rxe6 34 dxe6+ Kxe6 35 Re1+ Kf7 36 Qd4

With much the better coordination and safer king position in Spassky's favour, the end is unsurprisingly nigh.

36...Qxa4 37 Qg7+ Ke8 38 Bf6 Kd8 39 Qf8+ Qe8 40 Rd1+ Rd7 41 Bxe7+ Kc7 42 Qxe8 1-0

Prior to Spassky's successes in the late sixties, seventies and eighties with the Closed, Vassily Smyslov employed the opening fairly extensively in the post-war years. However, he was more restrained in rushing his f-pawn up the board, usually preferring to first develop his pieces after 6 Be3. Fashion has now turned full circle and 6 Be3 is the move employed today by most leading Closed Sicilian exponents. Just as with 6 f4, White aims for eventual kingside glory and Black neglects the steady kingside build-up at his peril.

Game 4

□ N.Short ■ H.Stefansson

5th matchgame, Reykjavik 2002

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Bd7!?

A rare move, with 6...Rb8 being a much more common way to support ...b5. Short realizes that the bishop isn't so well placed on d7, from where it prevents Stefansson from later rerouting his f6-knight, and decides to transpose to an f4 set-up.

7 f4 b5 8 a3! (Diagram 19)

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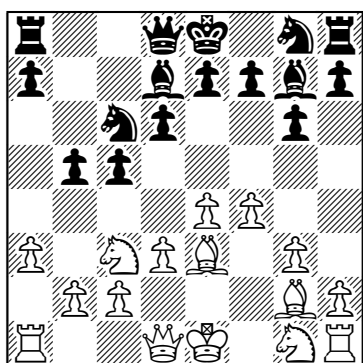


Diagram 19 (B)

Slowing down Black's counterplay

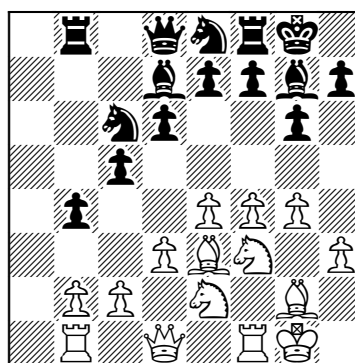


Diagram 20 (B)

White is all set to attack

White doesn't want to accelerate Black's queenside counterplay by allowing the b-file to be opened with an inopportune capture on b5. Instead Short wisely wants to hold Black up on the queenside as 8...a5 can now be met by 9 Nxb5! Rb8 10 a4, keeping lines closed.

8...Nf6 9 Nf3 0-0 10 h3 Rb8 11 0-0 a5 12 g4

Deciding to press ahead on the kingside, although White could also have first continued to hold Black up on the queenside with 12 a4!?. After 12...b4 13 Nb5 Ne8 14 Rb1 Nc7 15 c4 (Short) White has fairly successfully achieved his aim and stands slightly better.



NOTE: Black must always be careful should he try and play for any tactics down the long diagonal. Instead of 13...Ne8, the greedy 13...Nh5? fails to simply 14 g4 when 14...Ng3 15 Re1 traps the errant knight.

12...Ne8?!

Bringing the knight to d4 is both time consuming and still leaves Black vulnerable on the kingside. Thus an immediate 12...b4 was a better try, although Stefansson may well have been worried in any case by one dangerous attacking plan in Qe1-h4, f5, Bh6 and Ng5; an idea more commonly seen these days in the Grand-Prix Attack.

13 Rb1 b4 14 axb4 axb4 15 Ne2 (Diagram 20) 15...Nc7 16 f5!



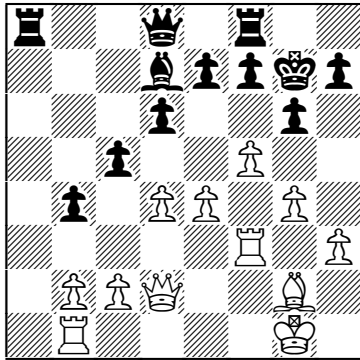
WARNING: This is a key attacking advance, but White should beware employing it when Black can sink a knight into e5 in return. From there a black knight both defends and counterattacks effectively, but here Black's king's knight has landed up on c7, not d7.

16...Nb5 17 Qd2 Nbd4

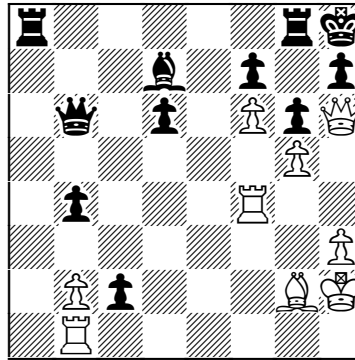
The knight has finally reached d4, but Short can simply exchange it off and then continue on the kingside.

18 Nexd4 Nxd4 19 Bh6 Nxf3+ 20 Rxf3 Ra8?!

Continuing to underestimate the kingside danger, although even after the superior 20...Qb6 (Donev) White can simply increase the pressure with 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rbf1 when Black must grovel with 22...f6.

21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 d4! (Diagram 21)**Diagram 21 (B)**

Black is vulnerable on the dark squares

**Diagram 22 (B)**

Mating in style

White's main focus might be the kingside, but he is still happy to seize central space when the opportunity arises as an exchange on d4 would drop the b4-pawn.

22...Qb6?! 23 e5!

TIP: When the dark squares around the black king are rather vulnerable, White should look for a way to exploit them, such as by ramming a pawn up to f6.

23...dxe5

Black has to try to prevent White's direct but rather strong plan as after 23...cxd4 24 f6+ exf6 25 exf6+ Kh8, there is the aesthetic 26 Qh6 Rg8 27 g5! when 27...d3+ 28 Kh2 dxc2 can still be met by 29 Rf4!! (**Diagram 22**) (Donev) and even 29...Qf2!? 30 Rf1! fails to save the day.

24 dxe5 Bc6? 25 f6+ exf6 26 Rxf6!

Quite possibly Stefansson had forgotten all about this option after which f7 becomes rather vulnerable, whereas 26 exf6+ Kh8 27 Qh6 Rg8 28 Rf4?! c4+ (Lane) would have given Black excellent counterplay.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

26...c4+ 27 Kh2 Rac8 28 Rbf1 Qc5 29 Qf4 Be8

Ugly, but there wasn't anything better with 29...Bxg2 failing to Short's intended 30 Rxf7+! Rxf7 31 Qxf7+ Kh8 32 Qf6+ Kg8 33 Qe6+ Kh8 34 Rf7 when Black cannot cover f6.

30 h4!

There was nothing wrong with 30 e6, but this is even stronger as Black isn't going anywhere in a hurry. Short now decisively brings his h-pawn into the attack before returning to the e6-advance.

30...Rd8 31 h5 Rd4 32 h6+! Kg8 33 Qe3 Rd5

Even the exchange of queens isn't going to save Black as Short finishes in style.

34 Qxc5 Rxc5 35 e6 Re5 (Diagram 23)

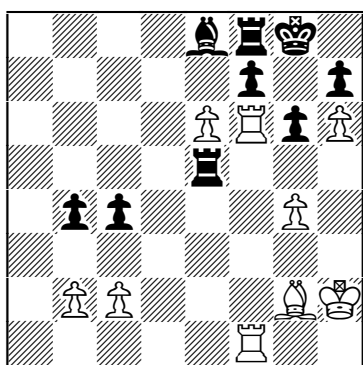


Diagram 23 (W)
Spot the cute deflection

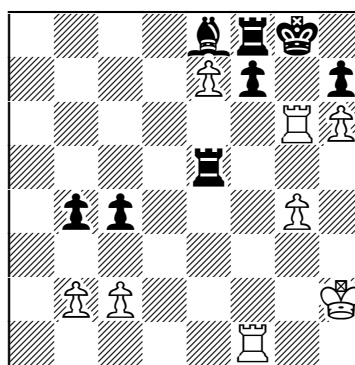


Diagram 24 (B)
A picturesque finish

36 Bd5! Rxd5 37 e7

White hasn't forced this through just to win the exchange, but 37...Rg5 would also have failed to save Black after 38 Kg3! and 39 Kh4.

37...Re5 38 Rxd5 1-0 (Diagram 24)

A beautiful coup de grace as 38...hxg6+ 39 h7+ forces one of the pawns home.

Once one has some experience of the Closed Sicilian, it is perfectly possible to employ both 6 f4 and 6 Be3. After all, good general understanding is the key to being successful with the opening and both 6 f4 and 6 Be3 lead to pretty similar positions and positional motifs. We will explore the main ideas for both sides in each variation and, being a *Starting Out* guide, these will be highlighted by a liberal use of tips, notes and warnings. There are also sections entitled 'Theoretical?' and 'Statistics' in which we respectively find out how

Introduction

much one needs to know about each variation – although few lines in the Closed can be described as being especially theoretical – and how well it has been performing. This work is primarily designed to help the club player take up the Closed Sicilian as White, but Black's best lines are far from ignored and so Sicilian players may also find much of interest.

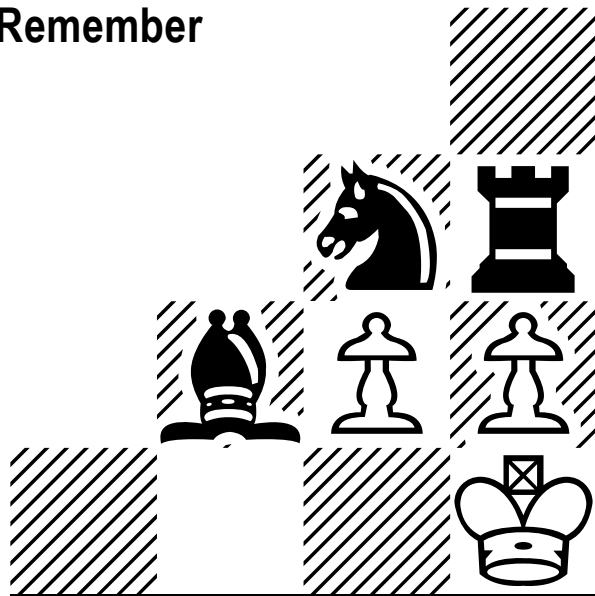
Against a well-prepared opponent, White can also be more subtle, preferring either 6 Nge2 or 6 Nh3; two fairly positional moves which theory has neglected a little. White is even often seen in early queenside action after 6 Nge2; there really is something for everyone within the broad umbrella of the Closed Sicilian! Indeed those seeking even more offbeat paths may well prefer a 2 d3 or 2 g3 move-order as we'll discuss in Chapter Seven where White aims to fight for central control by placing a pawn rather than a knight on c3. With so much to explore, it's time to begin our journey into the secrets of one of the Closed's main lines.

Richard Palliser,
Harrogate, England,
January 2006.

Chapter One

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

- Introduction
- The Critical 10 e5
- The 10 Bf2 Move-order
- Black Prefers 9...b6
- Points to Remember



Introduction

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
(Diagram 1)

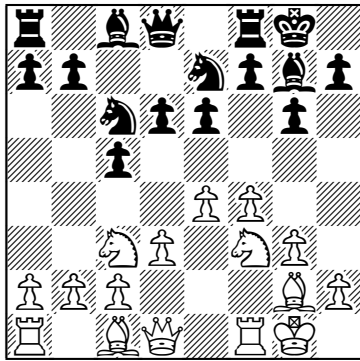


Diagram 1 (W)

The main line of the Closed

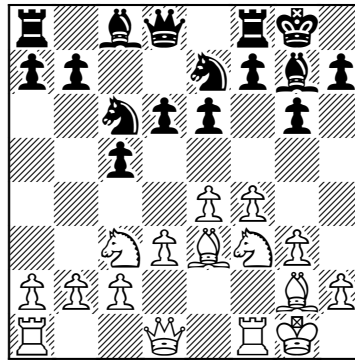


Diagram 2 (B)

d4 is a key square

Both sides have developed their forces in a sensible manner and this is the main line of the Closed Sicilian. As we have already discovered, White should be expecting a queenside advance from Black, while White needs to complete the mobilization of his forces and will generally then look to advance on the kingside.



TIP: Should Black neglect to sink his knight into d4, White may break with d4 after which the d6-pawn can become a target.

9 Be3 (Diagram 2)

By far the most popular move and practice has shown the alternatives to be inferior. For a while White dabbled with the concept of holding his own on the queenside and thus he preferred 9 a3 (9 Bd2 b5! 10 a3 Rb8 11 Bd2 transposes) 9...Rb8 10 Rb1 b5! 11 Bd2, but Najdorf's idea of 11...c4! nips White's plans in the bud.

White unsurprisingly shouldn't expect too many favours from the direct 9 g4 due to 9...f5! 10 gxf5 exf5, but 9 h4!?, softening up the black kingside, isn't as stupid as it looks. The Dutch IM and theoretician, Karel Van der Weide, has employed it on a few occasions, although 9...h5 10 Be3 b6 11 Ng5 d5! 12 Bf2 dxe4 13 dxe4 Ba6 14 Re1 Qc7 was fine for Black and hardly gave White any real attacking chances in K.Van der Weide-D.Rogozenko, Dieren 2001. 9 h4 still packs some surprise value in a speed game, but White also needs an idea against 9...e5!?. Such an advance is usually risky due to the pawn sacrifice 10

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f5, but here the h-pawn badly gets in the way of White's pieces. Thus White might try King's logical suggestion of 10 h5!? as 10 Ng5 can be well met by Sammalvuo's 10...f6! 11 Nh3 Be6 12 Be3 Qd7 with a pretty comfortable position for Black.

9...Nd4 (Diagram 3)

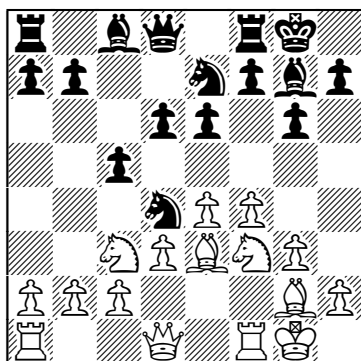


Diagram 3 (W)
Black prevents d3-d4

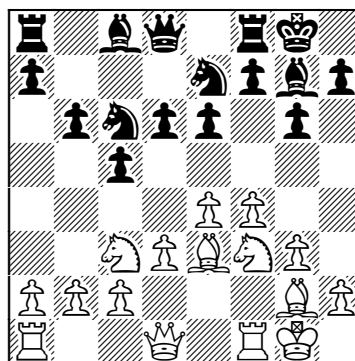


Diagram 4 (W)
Allowing d3-d4

White is at a major junction and we will first examine 10 Rb1 and 10 Qd2 in the classic Karpov-Quinteros. Against an experienced opponent, such slow build-ups aren't, however, considered especially dangerous; hence the interest in 10 e5 when it burst on to the scene in the late eighties. Theory considers 10 e5 to have been played out, but we will see if that is so below, while White can also consider 10 Bf2!?!; a move-order which has received an injection of new ideas of late.

9...Nd4 remains Black's main response, but over the past decade or so 9...b6 (**Diagram 4**) has soared in the popularity stakes. It permits 10 d4, but it turns out that Black is fairly well placed to meet that break due to his flexible set-up as we will consider below.

Illustrative Games

Game 5

□ A.Karpov ■ M.Quinteros

Buenos Aires 1980

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 Nc6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 Nd4 10 Rb1 (**Diagram 5**)

Covering b2, thereby allowing the c3-knight to challenge for d4 from e2. Karpov's choice also removes a target from the black queenside pawns and ap-

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

appears superior to the developing 10 Qd2 (**Diagram 6**). The problem with this approach is that Black isn't under any immediate pressure and White will have to invest further time dealing with the beast on d4. Black has time to gain pretty reasonable counterplay and a choice of ways to achieve it:

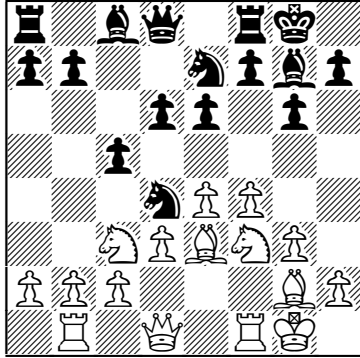


Diagram 5 (B)
Enabling Ne2

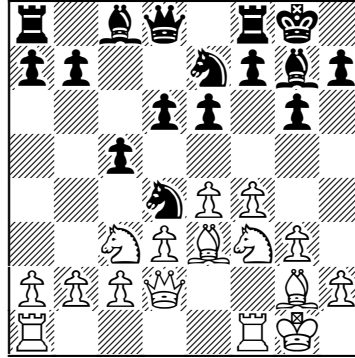


Diagram 6 (B)
White simply develops

a) 10...Rb8 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 Nc6 13 Rae1 Nd4 14 Bg2 b5 was a logical sequence of moves from Black in J.Hall-B.Svensson, Swedish Team Ch. 2004. After 15 Nd1 b4 16 c3 bxc3 17 bxc3 Qa5 White was still to evict the d4-knight and Black was already looking for a safe way to pick off the a2- and c3-pawns.

b) 10...Nec6 11 h3 f5!? is the dynamic approach, challenging White to find a good plan. That White can easily struggle to do so was one reason for all the interest in 10 e5 when it first appeared, whereas 12 Kh2 Bd7 13 Rab1 Rb8 14 a3 b5! 15 b4 (often an effective way to challenge on the queenside, but here it fails to dent Black's already promising position) 15...Nxf3+ 16 Bxf3 cxb4 17 axb4 a5! (**Diagram 7**) gave Black good, dynamic counterplay in L.Yudasin-R.Har Zvi, Israeli Team Ch. 1997.

10...Nec6

Logically keeping d4 well covered, whereas in the Introduction we saw Spassky badly struggle after 10...Rb8! 11 Ne2 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 b6 13 g4?!. Instead he might open the centre with 13 d4, but 13...cxd4 14 Bxd4 e5! 15 Be3 Qc7 isn't an especially promising version of an Open Sicilian for White and 13...Bb7!? may be even better. Thus White is best advised to meet Black's flexible approach with 13 Qd2, although this is unlikely to worry Black from a theoretical perspective. However, Black has to find a plan, whereas White can advance in the centre or with b4, and 13...Bb7 14 Bg2 f5 15 c3 Qd7 16 b4 (**Diagram 8**) led to an unbalanced struggle in J.Sugden-A.Hunt, Portsmouth 2004, but after 16...c4 17 dxc4! Bxe4 18 Bxe4 fxe4 19 c5 bxc5 20 Bxc5 White was able

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was able to successfully create strong pressure against the black central pawns.

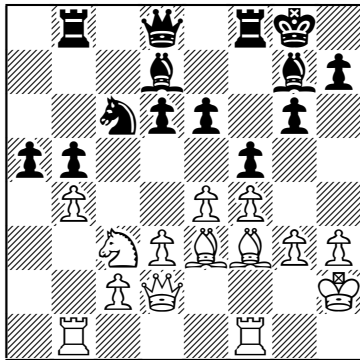


Diagram 7 (W)
Black is at least equal

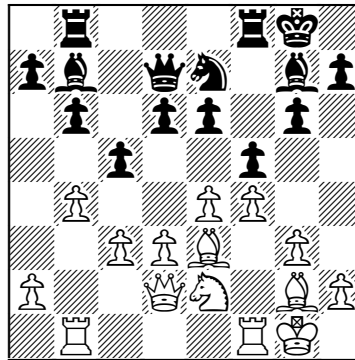


Diagram 8 (B)
Challenging on the queenside

11 Ne2 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 b6



TIP: 12...Nd4 appears logical, but after 13 Bg2 White will follow up with 14 c3 or with 14 Nc1!? and 15 c3. White then gains control of d4, and the d4 and b4 breaks promise a small advantage.

13 c3! (Diagram 9)

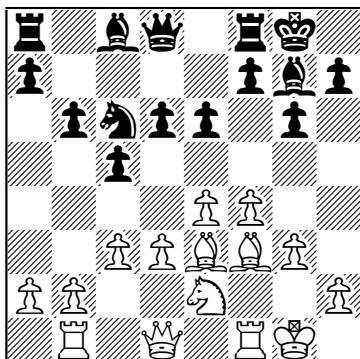


Diagram 9 (B)
Claiming the key d4-square

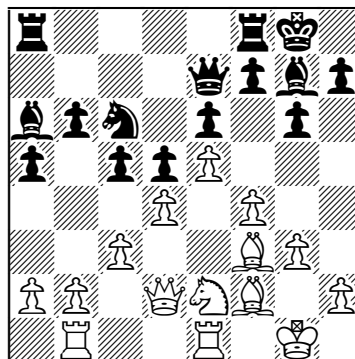


Diagram 10 (B)
An effective space advantage

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

Keeping Black out of d4 and preparing to complete his development. After this Karpov will look for a plan with b4 a good candidate, placing Black under some queenside pressure.

13...Bb7 14 Qd2 d5?!



NOTE: Advancing the d-pawn is normally premature when White can close the centre without ...Nf5 or ...f6 causing problems. Karpov now supplies a model display of how to exploit White's spatial advantage.

15 e5! a5

Black would like to counter 15...d4?, but cannot due to the diagonal pin.

16 d4 Qe7 17 Bf2 Ba6 18 Rfe1 (Diagram 10) 18...h5?!

Concerned about a gradual kingside build-up, Quinteros tries to prevent g4, but this merely serves to accelerate the intended kingside attack. Instead Black should have accepted a solid, albeit slightly worse, position after 18...cxd4 19 Nxd4 (but not 19 cxd4?! Nb4! with good counterplay) 19...Rfc8.

19 h3! Rac8 20 Kg2 f5

Continuing to try and hold Karpov up. With 21 g4 and then f5 on the cards, this was necessary but White still retains good chances to open the kingside.

21 Qe3 Rf7 22 a3!

Abandoning the b3- and c4-squares, but preventing ...Nb4 and leaving Black low on counterplay as White readies his g-pawn.

22...a4 23 g4 cxd4 24 cxd4 hxg4 25 hxg4 Na5 26 gxf5 Rxf5

Karpov quickly makes good use of the open h-file, although he also would have done so after 26...gxf5 27 Bh5 Rff8 28 Bg6.

27 Bg4 Rff8 28 Rh1 (Diagram 11)

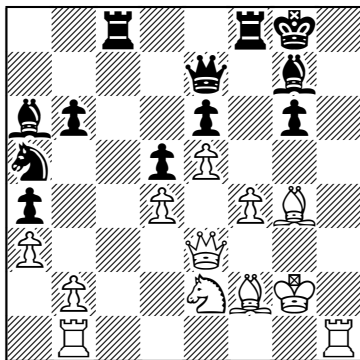


Diagram 11 (B)
The attack mounts

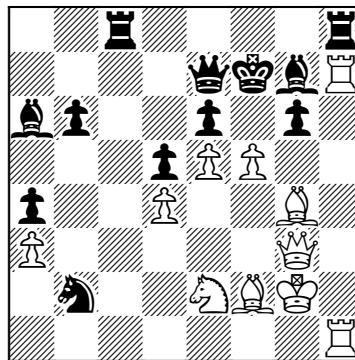


Diagram 12 (B)
Crashing through

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28...Kf7 29 Rh7 Rh8 30 Rbh1 Nc4

This is too little, too late to trouble the world champion, but neither would 30...Rxb7 31 Rxb7 Rh8 have saved Black due to Cebalo's suggestion of 32 Qh3 Rxb7 33 Qxb7 Qf8 34 f5! exf5 35 Nf4! with a decisive attack and passed e-pawn.

31 Qg3 Nxb2 32 f5! (Diagram 12)

Very powerful and also aesthetic as this is the advance Quinteros has been trying to prevent for so long. Now g6 must fall and the black position is in tatters.

32...Rxb7 33 fxb7 Kg8 34 gxh7+ Kh8 35 Nf4 1-0

The Critical 10 e5

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 e5!? (Diagram 13)

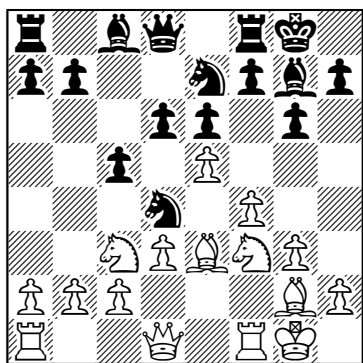


Diagram 13 (B)
A sharp advance

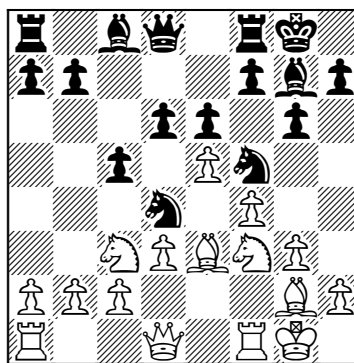


Diagram 14 (W)
Black's main response

10 Rb1 remains quite playable, but not all Closed Sicilian players want to slowly outmanoeuvre their opponents. 10 e5!? is a much sharper move, although it didn't catch on when it was initially essayed by Christoffel in 1961. However, that was largely due to a poor follow-up in the shape of 10...Nef5 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3?. By the late eighties White had realized that 12 Qxf3 was far better and 10 e5 became quite trendy for a few years.

Is White ready to play 10 e5?

We've already seen that 10 Qd2 does surprisingly little to help the white cause, but one advantage of the Closed Sicilian is that White does develop

quickly. After 9 Be3 he has stationed his minor pieces on good squares and would like to find a way to increase the scope of both bishops. 10 e5 fits the bill perfectly as White opens the h1-a8 diagonal and undermines the defence of c5 which may fall prey to the e3-bishop. Furthermore, the e4-square is vacated for the c3-knight from where it increases the pressure against c5 and d6. No wonder that Black players initially struggled against 10 e5 and should still at lower levels.

Is 10 e5 a sacrifice?

By advancing his e-pawn, White must be prepared to sacrifice it, but this is an excellent way for White to exploit his lead in development and the sacrifice is only temporary; should Black capture twice on e5 then he will lose c5 in return.

10...Nef5 (Diagram 14)

Unravelling with gain of tempo and bringing Black's second knight into touch with the d4-square. This is the critical continuation, but Black has several other options:

- a) 10...dxe5 immediately releases the tension and hopes to reach a solid position. However, White has good chances of gaining an edge against it by exploiting the e4-square as Game 6 reveals.
- b) 10...Bd7!? is a creative idea when 11 Ne4 Nef5 12 Bf2 transposes to Game 7.



WARNING: 10...Bd7 doesn't lose a pawn as 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Bxd4 dxe5 regains it because of the fiendish idea 13 Bxe5?? Qb6+ and 14...f6, trapping White's bishop.

c) 10...Nec6?! is rare and not especially promising as White can capture on c5 with his bishop; a capture he hopes to make after 10 e5. After 11 Ne4! dxe5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 c3 Nf5 15 Bxc5 Re8 16 d4 White's superbly-placed minor pieces and better development supply a very pleasant edge. Black tried to improve with 11...Nf5 in W.Posch-K.Sabitzer, Vienna 1999, but again after 12 Bf2 dxe5 13 fxe5! Nxe5 14 Bxc5 (**Diagram 15**) White had good play on the dark squares. Sabitzer thus tried 14...Nxf3+ 15 Qxf3 Bd4+?!, but White was well placed to exploit the exchange of bishops and 16 Kh1 Bxc5 17 Nxc5 Qd4 18 Ne4 Ne3? 19 c3 Qb6 20 Nf6+ Kh8 21 Qf4! Nf5 22 g4 Qxb2 23 gxf5 Qxc3 24 Qh6 and 1-0 was a model exploitation of the weakened dark squares around the black monarch.



NOTE: White's 13th was very accurate as 13 Bxc5 exf4! would have been a promising and typical exchange sacrifice in this line. Control of the dark squares is all important and neither side should easily give them up.

d) 10...Qb6?! initially appeared to be a promising response before Balashov

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had some very impressive results with 11 Rb1 Nef5 12 Bf2 Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3!. The black queen is then no longer especially well placed with both white bishops pointing westward and Black is yet to find a good improvement over 13...dxe5 (13...Nd4 14 Qd1 dxe5 15 fxe5 Bxe5 16 Ne4 transposes to 'd1' below) 14 fxe5 Bxe5 15 Ne4! (**Diagram 16**) when he has tried two defences:

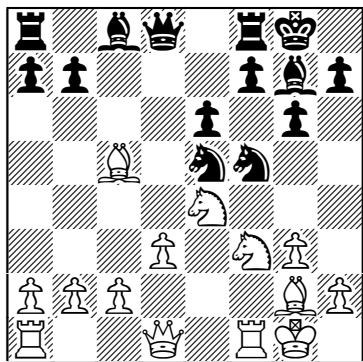


Diagram 15 (B)
White is better

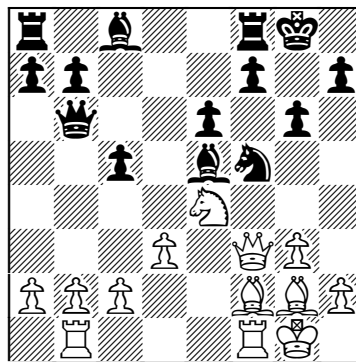


Diagram 16 (B)
A strong pawn sacrifice

d1) 15...Nd4 16 Qd1 f5 at first sight doesn't appear too bad for Black. However, his pieces aren't well coordinated and 17 Nd2 Qc7 18 c3 Nb5 19 Qe2!, threatening 20 d4, has been shown to leave White with more than enough compensation.

d2) Balashov has also faced 15...Bd7? when the trapper lands up being trapped after 16 Bxc5 Bd4+ 17 Kh1 Bxc5 18 Nf6+ which is a useful trick to remember.

11 Bf2 Nxf3+

Freeing up d4 for the other knight, although the 11...Bd7 of Game 7 is an important alternative. Black can also try to fianchetto his queen's bishop after 11...Rb8?, but this is a little slow and should be met by the energetic 12 Ne4! Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 b6 14 g4! (**Diagram 17**).

White has very promising chances on the kingside and 14...Bb7 15 Qh3! Bxe4 16 dxe4 Nd4 17 Bh4 Qd7 18 exd6 Nxc2 19 Rad1 was excellent for him in C.Gelman-J.Fedorowicz, Parsipanny 2002. The grandmaster may have had a 200+ point rating advantage, but was crushed after 19...Nd4 20 e5, although he had to avoid 19...Bd4? due to the deadly 20 Rxd4! Nxd4 21 Bf6.

Black can easily get into trouble if he doesn't know his theory after 10 e5, but he might try to close the position with 11...d5. White should respond with 12 Nxd4 because 12...cxd4 13 Ne2 doesn't leave Black with any nasty tricks and 13...Ne3 14 Bxe3 dxe3 15 d4 and 16 Qd3 will round up the e3-pawn. However, neither does 12...Nxd4 solve Black's problems due to 13 Na4! b6 14 b4, effec-

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

tively undermining the d4-knight, and 14...Bd7 15 c4! leaves Black under a fair amount of pressure.

12 Qxf3 (Diagram 18)

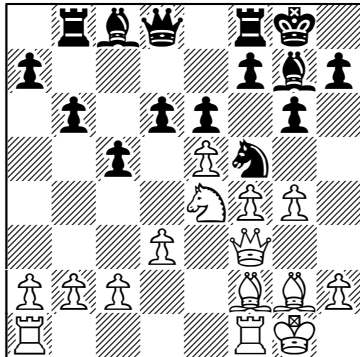


Diagram 17 (B)
Seizing the initiative

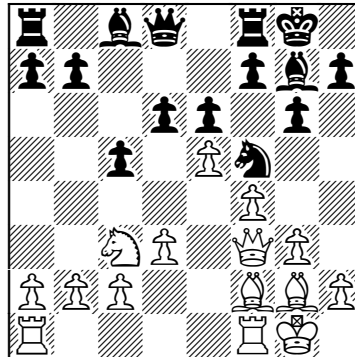


Diagram 18 (B)
The correct recapture on f3

White shouldn't worry about the possible reply 12...Nd4 as the time lost with his queen is less important than the activity his minor pieces have gained. Instead 12 Bxf3?! dxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Bxc5 Bd4+ 15 Bxd4 Qxd4+ is very comfortable for Black, but M.Christoffel-M.Matulovic, Zurich 1961 was much worse for White: 13 Bxc5? exf4! 14 Bxf8 Qxf8 15 Qe1? fxg3 16 hxg3 Bd4+ 17 Kh2? Qh6+ 0-1.



WARNING: Always be very careful when accepting an exchange on f8. White should only take it if he can continue to keep his king well protected, whereas Christoffel was unable to do so.

12...Nd4

Forcing the queen to retreat as White has no intention of exchanging his important dark-squared bishop. 12...Bd7!?, intending 13 Ne4 Bc6 (which actually transposes to the note to Black's 12th in Game 7), also leads to a very interesting position after 13 Qxb7! Rb8 14 Qxa7 Rxb2 15 Rac1 dxe5 16 Qa3!. White should emerge a pawn ahead, but must take care consolidating with his queen a little offside and the black pieces fairly active:

a) 16...Qb8?! holds the pawn for the time being, but Black lacks sufficient play after 17 Rb1! Rxb1 18 Rxb1 Qc8 19 fxe5 Bxe5 20 Ne4 (Zezulkin) when c5 is still dropping off.

b) 16...Rb8! 17 Bxc5 exf4 is much better and quite unclear:

b1) Once again White must avoid grabbing the exchange as 18 Bxf8? Bxf8 19

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Qa7 fxc3 20 hxc3 Nxc3 obliterates his entire kingside.

b2) Instead he should offer the exchange himself with 18 Rxf4! (**Diagram 19**) as 18...Bh6 19 Ne4 is promising due to the weakness of f6, and very promising should Black take on f4 and fully abandon the dark squares around his king. In Novicky-J.Zezulkin, USSR 1991, Black sensibly preferred 18...Qc7 when 19 Rc4 Rfc8 20 Bf2! Qd8 21 Rb1 still wasn't so clear as White continued to face problems consolidating.

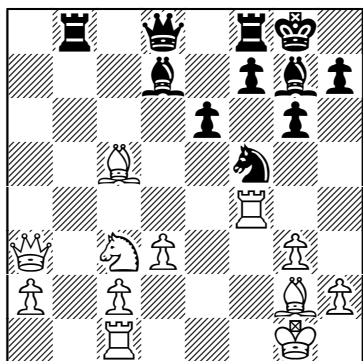


Diagram 19 (W)

It's good to be an exchange down!

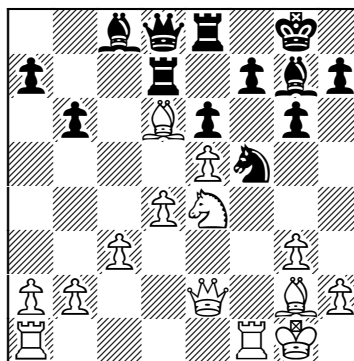


Diagram 20 (B)

It's taken just one slip from Black

13 Qd1 dxe5!

Correctly accepting the challenge, whereas the alternative 13...d5 transposes to 11...d5 12 Nxd4 Nxd4. That Black should not dally here was demonstrated by White's powerful performance in A.Martin-R.Britton, Barnsdale 1989: 13...Rb8? 14 Ne4 dxe5 15 c3 Nf5 16 Bxc5 Re8 (16...b6 17 Nf6+ Kh8 18 g4! Ne7 19 Qf3 Nd5 20 Bh4 was also rather strong in S.Meera-Wang Pin, Calicut 2003) 17 fxe5 when White had made his ideal recapture on c5, a7 was hanging and Black was crushed after 17...b6 18 Bd6 Rb7 19 Qe2 Rd7 20 d4 (**Diagram 20**).

14 fxe5 (Diagram 21)

White is finally ready to exploit his gain of the e4-square and, as that cannot be prevented, Black should accept the pawn. Game 8 reveals that declining it promises him nothing but suffering. After 14...Bxe5 15 Ne4 there is no way to maintain the extra pawn due to the threat of 16 c3 as we discussed in Game 3 in the Introduction. Black should thus play actively and force White to capture on c5 with his knight and 15...f5! 16 Nxc5 (**Diagram 22**) leads to something of a theoretical tabiya: Game 9 deals with the theoretically advocated 16...Qd6 and Game 10 with Black's most popular choice, 16...Qc7, as well as the radical 16...f4!?

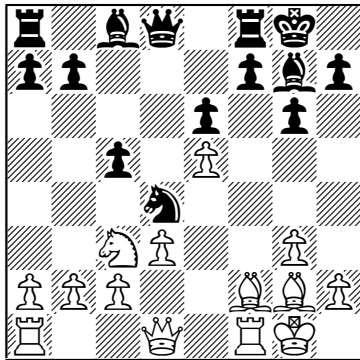


Diagram 21 (B)
Black should take on e5

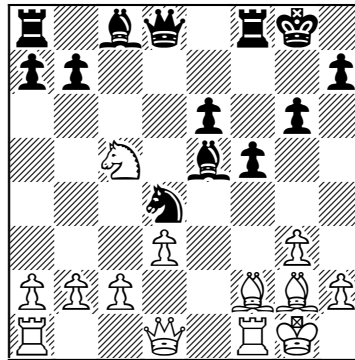


Diagram 22 (B)
A critical position

Theoretical?

This fascinating pawn sacrifice can easily lead to a rather complex position. White doesn't need to know all that much theory to play it, although some is useful especially to ensure that any inaccurate moves from Black are justly punished. However, by Closed Sicilian standards this variation is pretty theoretical and indeed it is the most theoretical in this book.

Statistics

White has scored a perfectly respectable 54% from just under 1000 games with 10 e5 on ChessBase's *Big Database 2005*; a collection of almost three million games which we will use for all our statistics. He should be aware that 10...Bd7 scores an impressive 59% from 124 games in reply and so ensure that he is prepared for that, as many players weren't when it first burst on the scene. 10...Nf5 remains Black's main defence, although after 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5 15 Ne4 White's score is up to 60% from 330 games. In response 15...f5 16 Ne4 Qc7 and 16...Qd6 have netted Black just 36% and 43% respectively and so he should seriously consider 16...f4!? which has made a huge 62%, albeit from just 16 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 6

□ J.Roos ■ P.Wells

Budapest 1997

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

9 Be3 Nd4 10 e5 dxe5 (Diagram 23)

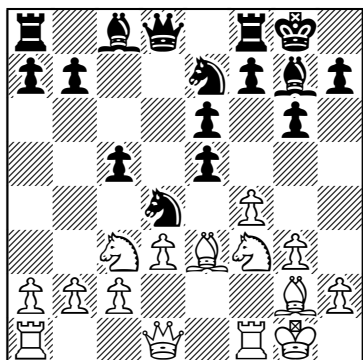


Diagram 23 (W)
Which recapture?

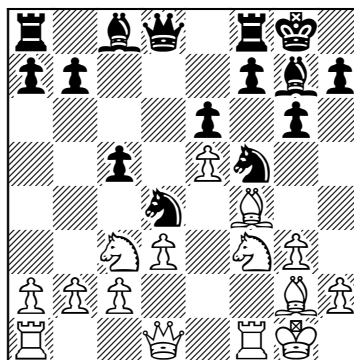


Diagram 24 (B)
Holding e5 for the time being

11 Nxe5

Fairly popular, but it turns out that Black can neutralize the e5-knight and pressure down the long diagonal without too much trouble. Thus 11 fxe5! should be preferred when White has the f6-square to aim for, just as he likes to have after 10 e5, while Black must decide where he wants his knights:

c1) 11...Nec6 12 Ne4 Nxf3+ 13 Bxf3! (13 Qxf3 Nxe5 14 Qe2 Nd7 15 c3 Qc7 16 Qf2 b6 17 Nxc5 Rb8 18 Ne4 Bb7 19 d4 gave White a small edge in P.Charbonneau-R.Leitao, Bled Olympiad 2002, but King's 14...f5! 15 Nxc5 Ng4 is a major improvement) 13...Nxe5 14 Bxc5 Re8 15 Bg2 Nd7 was analyzed by King, but rather than his 16 Ba3? Bxb2!, 16 Be3! Bxb2 17 Rb1 supplies a strong initiative and promising dark-square play after 17...Bg7 18 Nd6 or 17...Be5 18 d4 Bb8 19 Qd2 when Black can hardly move.

c2) 11...Nef5 is critical when 12 Bf2 hasn't caused Black any sleepless nights and, for example, 12...Rb8 13 Ne4 Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 b6 was fine for Black in M.Piper-St.Brown, British Ch., Norwich 1994, especially after 15 Rae1? Bxe5!. Thus White should concentrate his energies on 12 Bf4!? (**Diagram 24**); a move which King drew attention to in his fine chapter on 10 e5 in his 1997 work. Surprisingly the move hasn't caught on, but it appears promising with Black essentially being forced, with Ne4 on the way, into 12...Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 g5 14 Bc1 Bxe5. After 15 Ne4 f6 (or 15...Qd4+ 16 Kh1 h6 17 c3 Qd5 18 Qe2 and Black must retreat) 16 c3 the large gash in the black kingside should supply good compensation and Black certainly didn't enjoy the experience in J.Franke-S.Kishnev, 2nd Bundesliga 1993 as he soon had to bail with a draw offer despite a 300 point rating advantage.

11...Rb8 12 Ne4 b6

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

A logical approach pioneered by Stohl; Black retains control over c5 and f6, and shouldn't experience any real problems.

13 c3

After this White must always worry about the weakness of d3. The move 13 a4!?, hoping to soften up the black queenside, is less popular, but looks like a better try, although 13...Qc7 14 Nc4 Ba6 15 c3 Ndf5 16 Bf2 Nd5 17 Qe2 Rfd8 18 a5 Bb5 19 Ne5 Be8 20 axb6 axb6 left Black very solid and without any real problems in M.Bilalic-H.Hunt, London 2003.

13...Ndf5 14 Bf2 Qc7! (Diagram 25)

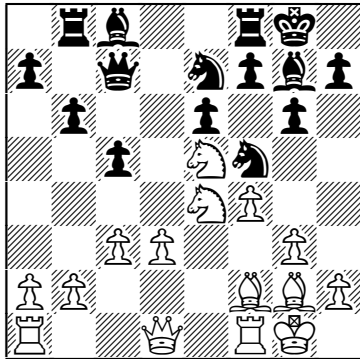


Diagram 25 (W)

Black develops accurately

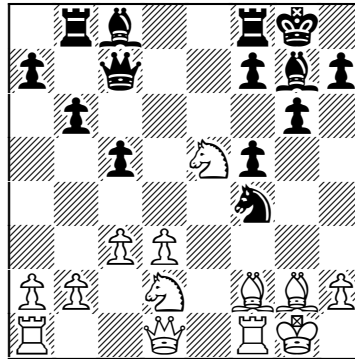


Diagram 26 (W)

A crushing sacrifice

A fine prophylactic move which maintains a solid black position, whereas 14...Bb7 15 Qa4! has proven surprisingly hard to meet as 15...Qc7 16 g4! is awkward with 16...Nd6?! 17 Qd7 picking up the exchange.

15 g4?!

One can sense Roos' frustration as the black position is very tough to crack open and White wants to make some use of his bishops. 15 Qa4 is a better try, although Black shouldn't be greatly troubled after 15...Nd5. Thus White should really prefer 11 fxe5 as Roos now runs into a strong piece sacrifice devised by Gallagher in his classic *Beating the Anti-Sicilians*.



TIP: Always be careful when advancing pawns in front of your king to make sure that your opponent doesn't have an effective way to exploit the newly-created weaknesses.

15...Nd5! 16 gxf5 exf5 17 Nd2 Nxf4 (Diagram 26)

White is in huge trouble down the long diagonal with his important light-squared bishop about to leave the board.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

18 Nc6 Nxb8 19 Nxb8 Nf4 20 Bg3 Nh3+ 21 Kg2 f4

Piling on the pressure and heralding the end.

22 Be1 Bb7+ 23 Kxh3 Qc8+ 0-1

Game 7

□ N.Short ■ G.Rechlis

European Championship, Ohrid 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 Nd4 10 e5 Nef5

Black's most popular move, but here we'll quickly transpose to a position more usually reached via 10...Bd7 11 Ne4 Nef5. The move 10...Bd7!? (**Diagram 27**)

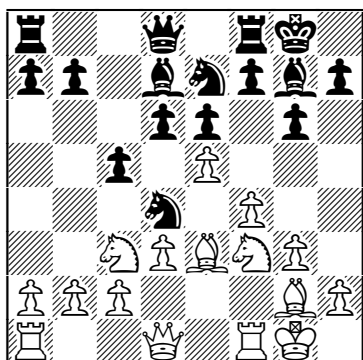


Diagram 27 (W)

Activating the c8-bishop

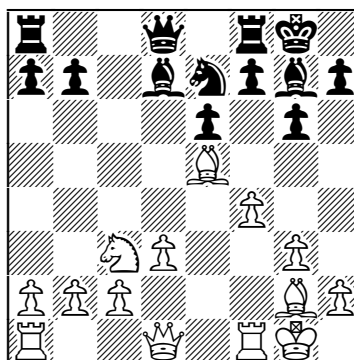


Diagram 28 (B)

How can Black win material?

was popularized by Sadler who used it to defeat Closed Sicilian author Lane, and the always well-prepared Sadler's opening ideas are always worth serious examination. After 10 e5, Black often struggles to get his light-squared bishop into the game, but here it will quickly become active on c6. In response White should maintain the central tension as he has no good way to exploit it, with 11 exd6 Nef5 12 Bf2 Bc6 13 Ne4 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 b6 being fine for Black who will regain his pawn with full equality after 15 c3 Rc8 and 16...Nxd6.



WARNING: White must avoid Black's trap with 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Bxd4 dxe5 13 Bxe5?? (Diagram 28) which drops a piece to 13...Qb6+! and 14...f6.

11 Bf2 Bd7 12 Ne4 Bc6?!



TIP: It is important for neither side to rush to ease the tension in this line.

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

Rechlis continues to improve his bishop, whereas after 12...dxe5? 13 Nxe5 b6 14 g4! Black is in serious trouble on the kingside and down the long diagonal: 14...Nh6 15 c3 Nc6 16 g5! Nf5 17 Ng4 is excellent for White, but 14...Ne7 15 Bh4! f6 (**Diagram 29**)

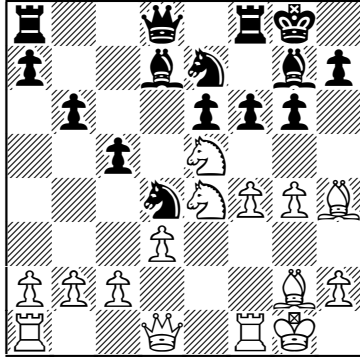


Diagram 29 (W)

White can exploit the long diagonal

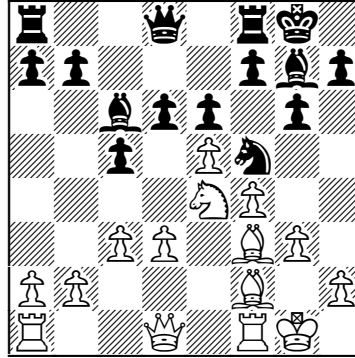


Diagram 30 (B)

The superior recapture

16 Bxf6! Bxf6 17 Nxf6+ Rxf6 18 Nxd7 Qxd7 19 Bxa8 sees White emerge a clear exchange ahead.

Black's best move-order is 12...Nxf3+! when White should recapture as Short does with the bishop. Then 13...Bc6 14 c3 is the game, whereas 13...dxe5?! 14 fxe5! favours White. Instead practice has shown that 13 Qxf3 Bc6 14 c3 Rc8! 15 Rad1 b6 correctly continues to maintain the tension and 16 d4?! d5! 17 Nd2 cxd4 18 cxd4 f6! gave Black a superb version of the French in D.Flores-R.Felgaer, Buenos Aires 2003.

13 c3?!

Short was presumably happy and prepared to play the position after 14 Bxf3. Otherwise he might have looked deeper into the position and found the strong retreat 13 Nfd2!. Suddenly the black knight isn't so happy on d4 and 13...dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5 is fairly essential to save it, but after 15 Nc4 Bg7 16 c3 Nb5 17 Bxc5 White has a very pleasant advantage.

13...Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3! (Diagram 30) 14...dxe5?!

This ...Bd7 variation really does appear to be a case of he who endeth the tension, he who suffereth. When Sadler faced the bishop recapture, he preferred 14...h5!, and 15 exd6 b6 16 Nf6+ Bxf6 17 Bxc6 Rc8 is fine for Black, despite the white bishop-pair, as d3 is backward and the f2-bishop rather passive. 15 d4 cxd4 16 cxd4 looks like a better try, maintaining the strong centre and keeping the g7-bishop blunted, albeit at the cost of leaving the c6-bishop and f5-knight fairly well placed. It has been the choice of the Canadian Glinert and 16...Rc8

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

17 h3 dxe5?! 18 dxe5 Qa5 19 Qe1! favoured White in S.Glinert-D.Cummings, Richmond Zonal 2002 with White already able to collect a clear pawn after 19...Qxe1 20 Rfxe1 Bd5?! 21 g4! hxg4 22 hxg4 Nh6 23 Bxa7. However, 16...Qa5 improves when 17 Qe1 Qb5 18 Qc3 a5! left the position rather unbalanced in S.Glinert-R.Bar, World Junior Ch., Goa 2002.

15 fxe5 Bxe4?

In view of White's strong recapture, this cannot be commended, although even 15...Bxe5 16 Bxc5 Re8 17 Qe2 would have left White with a pleasant edge, having managed to make his ideal capture on c5.

16 dxe4! Ne7 17 Bxc5 Nc6!?

We are just 17 moves into the game and already a 2500+ player is in serious trouble. Giving up the exchange already smacks a little of desperation, but this was Black's best practical try as after 17...Re8 18 Qxd8 Raxd8 19 Bxa7 Nc6 20 Be3 Nxe5 21 Be2 (Donev) the white bishops are well placed to guide home the extra pawn.

18 Bxf8 Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Bxf8 20 Qb3 Qc7 21 Bg4 Re8 22 Be2 Nxe5

Finally picking up the e5-pawn, but Black is a clear exchange down and Short displays fine technique.

23 Qa4 Ra8 24 Rad1 h5 25 Qd4 Be7 26 b4! Kg7 27 a3 b6 28 c4 (Diagram 31)

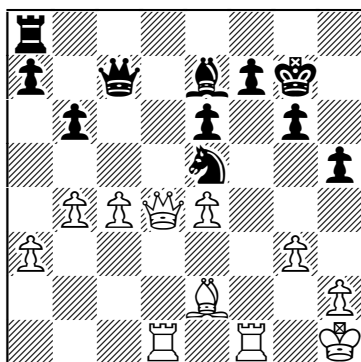


Diagram 31 (B)

A decisive queenside majority

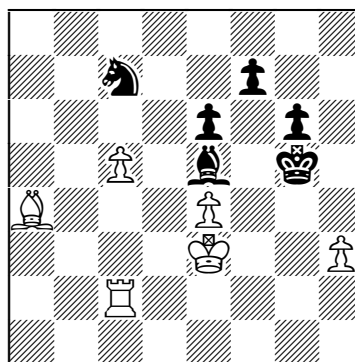


Diagram 32 (B)

The white king decides

28...a5 29 Rb1 axb4 30 axb4 Ra2 31 Rb2



NOTE: Short keeps offering exchanges and is also extremely vigilant against Black's dark-square counterplay. White can't simply just push his queenside majority; he must balance doing that with neutralizing any danger.

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

31...Ra3 32 Rbb1 Ra2 33 Rf2! h4 34 Bf1 Ra3 35 gxh4 Bxh4 36 Rc2 Bf6 37 c5! bxc5 38 bxc5 Nc6 39 Qd6

Rechlis has played well to develop any counterplay, but the queens must now come off when the activation of the white king enables Short to break any blockade.

39...Ra7 40 Qxc7 Rxc7 41 Ba6 Nd4 42 Rc4 Be5 43 Rb7! Rxb7 44 Bxb7 Nb5 45 Bc6 Nc7 46 Kg2 Kh6 47 Rc1 Bd4 48 Ba4 Kg7 49 Kf3 Kf6 50 Rc2 Be5 51 h3 Kg5 52 Ke3! (Diagram 32) 52...Kh4 53 Rf2 f6 54 Rf3 g5 55 Bd1 Bf4+ 56 Kd3 Be5 57 Be2 Bf4 58 c6 Ne8 59 Kc4 Nd6+ 60 Kd4 Ne8 61 Kc5 Bg3 62 Bf1 g4 63 hxg4 Kxg4 64 Be2 Bd6+ 65 Kb6 Kg5 66 Bc4 f5 67 exf5 exf5 68 Bf7

Short has patiently kept his pieces coordinated while advancing his king, and is now finally able to break the black defences.

68...Nc7 69 Rd3 Be5 70 Rd7 Kf6 71 Rxc7! 1-0

Game 8

□ V.Krapivin ■ G.Kuzmin

Olomouc 2004

1 e4 g6 2 Nc3 Bg7 3 f4 c5 4 g3 Nc6 5 Bg2 d6 6 d3 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 e5 Nef5 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5 Bd7?

Black can also decline the e5-pawn with 14...Rb8?, but doing so again plays into White's hands: 15 Ne4 b6 16 Nf6+! (Diagram 33)

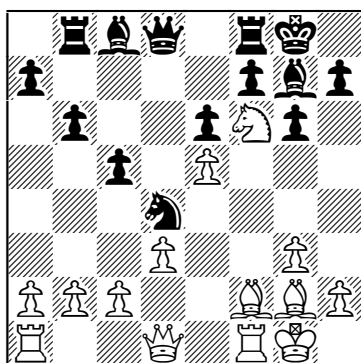


Diagram 33 (B)

A vulnerable black kingside

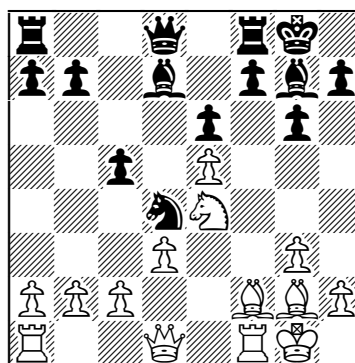


Diagram 34 (B)

A powerful white knight

launches a strong attack as 16...Bxf6 17 exf6 Qxf6 18 c3 Nf5 19 g4! Nd6 20 Bxc5 (King) not only wins back the pawn, but also leaves White very strong on the dark squares. However, ignoring the knight with 16...Kh8?! is even worse

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

and Black didn't last long on the kingside after 17 c3 Nf5 18 g4 Ne7 19 Qf3! Bb7 20 Qh3 in D.Driamin-V.Manaenkov, Tula 2003.

15 Ne4! (Diagram 34) 15...Ba4

The experienced grandmaster playing Black enjoyed a 200+ point rating advantage in this game and no doubt hoped that bishop sortie this would ensure him of some queenside counterplay. However, White isn't really troubled by advancing his b-pawn and Kuzmin is soon left wishing that he'd taken on e5 on move 14. Black still can a move later, but by then it's a little late as 15...Bxe5 16 c3 Nf5 17 Bxc5 Re8 18 d4 enables White to make his preferred capture on c5 and leaves him with a very pleasant advantage after 18...Bg7 19 Qf3.

16 b3 Bc6 17 c3!

Black will now get to capture on c3, but Krapivin has realized that capturing on c5 with his bishop is of much greater importance.

17...Nb5 18 Bxc5 (Diagram 35)

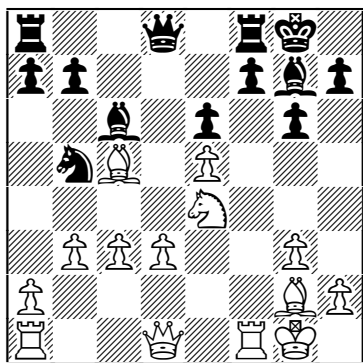


Diagram 35 (B)

White is already well on top

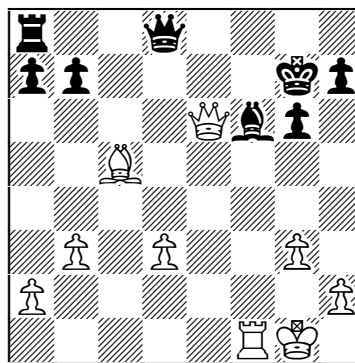


Diagram 36 (B)

A decisive attack

18...Bxe4

The rook could hardly move to e8 in view of 19 c4 Nd4 20 Nd6, but Black must also have considered 18...Bxe5!?. However, this is also rather grim for him as White emerges an exchange ahead after 19 Bxf8 Qxf8 20 d4 Bxe4 21 dxe5 Rd8 22 Qe1 Qc5+ 23 Kh1! (but not the plausible 23 Qf2? due to 23...Rd2!!) 23...Bxg2+ 24 Kxg2 Nxc3 25 Qf2 and Black will be hard pressed not to exchange the queens and thus ease the pressure down the f-file.

19 Bxe4 Nxc3 20 Qf3 Nxe4 21 Qxe4

White hasn't yet won any material, but just compare the difference in activity between the two sides' forces. 21...Re8 22 Qxb7 would leave Black without a

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

good way of defending f7, but Kuzmin's attempted break-out is far from convincing.

21...f5 22 exf6 Rxf6 23 Rxf6 Bxf6?!

The three white pieces now combine well to finish Black off and 23...Qxf6 was the last real try. After 24 Rf1 Qe5 25 Qxe5 Bxe5 26 Re1 Bg7 27 Rxe6 the ending is very good for White, although he must still display some technique.

24 Qxe6+ Kg7 25 Rf1 (Diagram 36) 25...Bd4+

This fails to help matters, but the black position had already gone and 25...Rc8 26 Rxf6 Rxc5 27 Rf7+ Kh6 28 Qe3+ Qg5 29 Qxg5+ Kxg5 30 Rxb7 would have been winning easily enough for White.

26 Kg2 Bf6 27 Bd6! 1-0

Crushing as Black has no good defence to the terminal 28 Rxf6.

Game 9

□ A.Rodriguez ■ G.Juarez Flores

American Continental Championship, Cali 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 e6 6 Nf3 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 d3 d6
9 Be3 Nd4 10 Bf2 Nec6 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 e5 dxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Ne4 f5
15 Nxc5 Qd6



NOTE: Rodriguez has adopted Spassky's preferred move-order; 10 e5 Nef5 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5 15 Ne4 f5 16 Nxc5 Qd6 is the alternative way to reach this position.

16 b4 (Diagram 37)

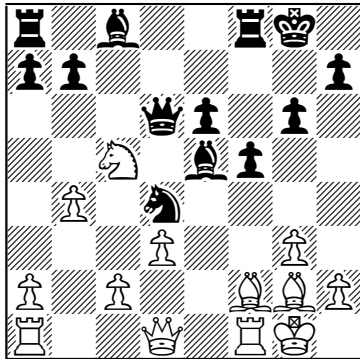


Diagram 37 (B)

Maintaining the knight on c5

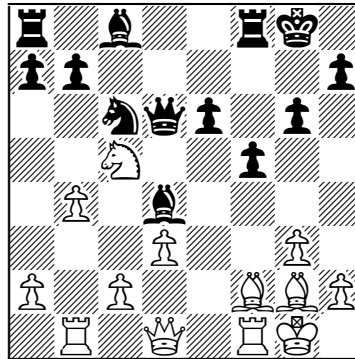


Diagram 38 (W)

Correctly exchanging bishops

16...Nc6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Black's best response, whereas in the Introduction we saw Gufeld come unstuck with the slower 16...Rb8?! against Spassky. In Game 3 the greedy 16...Nb5?! was also examined, while another option is 16...Bg7. That should be met by 17 a4!, further advancing on the queenside and removing a retreat square from the d4-knight, but not by 17 Rb1 due to 17...a5! 18 Nxb7 Bxb7 19 Bxb7 axb4 20 Bxa8 Rxa8 21 Be3 Rxa2 which left Black with all his pieces well placed and promising compensation for the exchange in G.Lane-A.Shneider, Cappelle la Grande 1992. After 17 a4, White intends to pose problems on the queenside with 17...e5 18 c3 Nc6 19 a5!, but 17...Nc6 18 b5 Na5 19 d4! Rb8 20 c3 b6 21 Nb3 Nxb3 22 Qxb3 Kh8 23 Rfe1 also left him with the advantage due to Black's problems down the e-file in B.Rogulj-N.Stanec, Graz 2001.

17 Rb1 Bd4! (Diagram 38)

Exchanging off the strong f2-bishop, and thus undermining the c5-knight and reducing White's queenside pressure. Otherwise Black's dark-squared bishop finds itself not especially well placed, such as 17...b6 18 Nb3 Bb7 19 d4 sees White achieve his ideal central advance and Black is suffering after 19...Bf6 20 c4! as 20...Qxb4? drops a piece to 21 Nc5 (Lane).

18 Qe1!?

Preventing 18...Nxb4 and attempting to improve over the 18 Qd2 of B.Spassky-J.Hjartarson, Munich 1991. After 18...Bxf2+ 19 Qxf2 Rb8 20 a3 b6 21 Nb3 Hjartarson was able to equalize with 21...Bb7 22 d4 Nd8!, although he later suggested that 21...e5 would have been even more accurate after which 22 Rbe1 Bb7 23 c4 Nd8 24 d4 Bxg2 25 Qxg2 Nf7 is fine for Black as 26 d5?! is well met by 26...e4! and 27...Ne5.

18...a5!

Beginning counterplay and correctly not copying Hjartarson with 18...Bxf2+ 19 Rxf2 Rb8. With the queen on e1, White has ideas of both Re2 and Qc3, while 20 Bxc6! is a strong exchange because 20...Qxc6 is well met by 21 Qe5. Better is 20...bxc6, although White retains a small advantage due to his superior structure after 21 Re2! a5 22 a3 axb4 23 axb4 Qd4+ 24 Re3 as 24...f4 isn't sufficiently troubling with 25 gxf4 Rxf4 26 c3 Rg4+ 27 Kh1 Qd5+ 28 Ne4 parrying the threats; White has the better-coordinated pieces and Black the bigger weaknesses.

19 c3!? Bxf2+ 20 Qxf2

With White's queenside under a little pressure, this recapture becomes the better choice and the queen will be able to later swing across to an active square on b2 or a2.

20...axb4 21 cxb4

Rodriguez's dynamic choice of defending b4 has left him with an isolated queen's pawn. That is offset, however, by his queenside majority and that his queen will still be able to use the a2-square, unlike if the a-file was open.

21...b6 22 Nb3 Rb8 23 a3 e5

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

Juarez Flores achieves this just before e6 is clamped by d4, although achieving ...e5 is not in itself sufficient to equalize. It is generally a favourable advance, but Black must be prepared for a rapid attack against e5.

24 b5! Ne7 25 Rfe1 (Diagram 39)

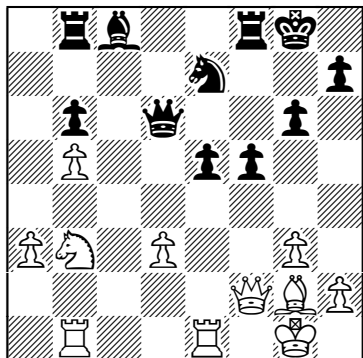


Diagram 39 (B)
Beginning to target e5

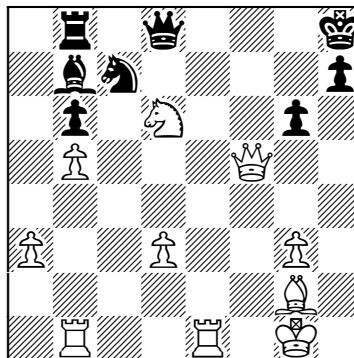


Diagram 40 (B)
Black has been completely crushed

25...Nd5?!

This rather forgets that the b3-knight would like to improve itself now that it cannot go to c5 or d4. Instead Black should have continued playing actively and accurately with 25...Qxd3! when 26 Qa2 is tempting, but it turns out that after 26...e4 27 Nd4 Rf7, White lacks a good follow-up. Thus Rodriguez was probably intending 26 Bf1! Qd6 27 Qb2, intending to regain the pawn when White's more active pieces should give him the advantage, especially due to his pressure down the a2-g8 and a1-h8 diagonals. However, the critical 27...e4 28 Bc4+ Be6 may well not be so bad for Black as 29 Rbd1 Bd5 30 Rxd5 Nxd5 31 Rd1 Qf6 32 Bxd5+ Kh8 33 Nd4 Rbd8 is far from clear. White has two pieces for the rook and, although they are actively placed, they are also falling over each other a little down the d-file. Black's pawn majority must also not be underestimated and this unclear position shouldn't be any worse for the second player.

26 Nd2! f4?

A rash advance as one mistake follows another. Instead Black should have backtracked with 26...Nf6 when 27 Nc4 Qxd3 28 Nxe5 Qxa3 is slightly better for White due to his more active pieces after 29 Rbc1, but Black is very solid and it is not so easy for White to make progress as the accurate 29 Nc6 Ne4! 30 Qd4 Rb7 reveals.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian



TIP: Never be afraid to admit your mistakes. Sometimes retracting a move which you know was wrong, even at the cost of two tempi, is better than continuing to plough ahead down the mistaken path.

27 Nc4 fxc3 28 hxc3 Qd8 29 Qb2

Winning the e5-pawn after which the floodgates quickly open for White's far better coordinated pieces.

29...Bb7 30 Qxe5 Rf5?!

Not the most stubborn defence, but Black would also have remained clearly worse and under significant pressure after both 30...Nc7 31 Bxb7 Rxb7 32 Nd6 Rb8 33 Rbc1 and 30...Nf6 31 Nd6 Bxc2 32 Kxc2 Ra8 33 Rbc1.

31 Qe6+ Kh8 32 Nd6 Nc7 33 Qxf5! (Diagram 40)

Simplest as White prevents any possible tricks and completes a comprehensive and instructive victory.

33...Qxd6 34 Qe5+ Qxe5 35 Rxe5 1-0

Game 10

□ J.Koch ■ J.Lautier

French Championship, Besancon 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 Nd4 10 e5 Nef5 11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5
Bxe5 15 Ne4 f5 16 Nxc5 f4!? (Diagram 41)

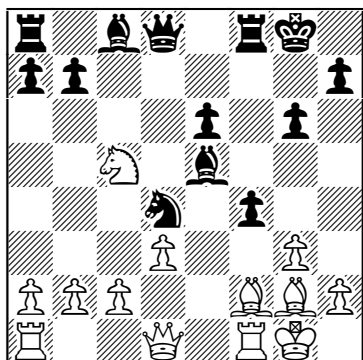


Diagram 41 (W)

A relatively fashionable advance

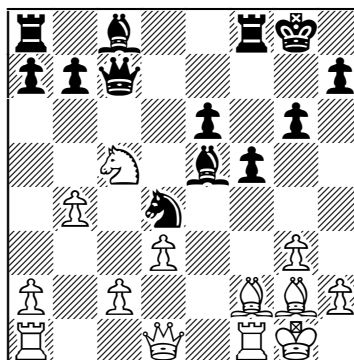


Diagram 42 (B)

White refuses to retreat

Since its use by Lautier, this active move has gained some attention and it may well turn out to be Black's best response to White's e5-sacrifice. An important alternative is 16...Qc7 when 17 b4 (Diagram 42), correctly supporting

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

the knight once again, leaves Black with quite a wide choice:

- a) 17...Bg7 gives White the option between gaining an edge with 18 c3 Nb5 19 Qb3 Nxc3 20 Rae1 Qf7 21 Nxe6 Bxe6 22 Rxe6, although exploiting it isn't so easy after 22...a5!, and preparing c3 with 18 a4!?, intending 18...e5 19 c3 Nc6 20 a5! with the advantage, but 18...Nc6 is much more challenging, intending 19 Rb1 a5! and 19 Rc1!? Bc3 20 b5 Nd4 21 Nb3 e5 22 Nxd4 exd4 23 Qf3 Rd8.
- b) 17...Nb5?! can be met by 18 a4!?, swapping the exchange for complete control of the long diagonal and promising compensation, or by 18 d4!. That leads to a forced tactical sequence, but after 18...Rd8 19 c3 Nxc3 20 Qf3 Rxd4 21 Rac1! (**Diagram 43**)

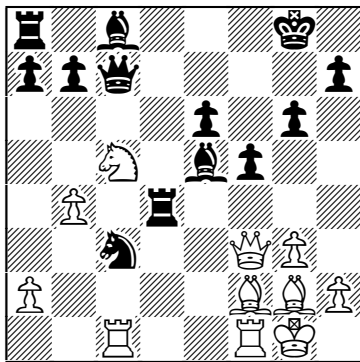


Diagram 43 (B)

Black's pieces are loose

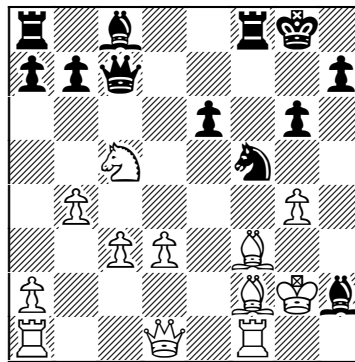


Diagram 44 (B)

Is 21...Ne3+ rather strong?

Black doesn't have a good move. He must either allow White to make a rather favourable exchange of rook for two important pieces on c3 or sacrifice the exchange, but 21...Ne4 22 Nxe4 fxe4 23 Qe2 Qd6 24 Bxd4 Bxd4+ 25 Kh1 Bd7 26 Bxe4 didn't offer much compensation in N.Zhukova-M.Lomineishvili, Dresden 2004.

- c) 17...Qg7?! 18 Rc1 f4?! is an inferior version of our main game as after 19 c3 f3 White can exploit the black queen's position with 20 cxd4! fxe3 21 Kxe3 Bxd4 22 Bxd4 Rxf1 23 Bxg7 Rxd1 24 Rxd1 Kxg7. Here 25 Rc1, followed by establishing the white rook on c7, was excellent for White in A.Rodriguez-E.Matsuura, Sao Paulo 2004.
- d) 17...Nc6?! isn't too good, unlike after 16...Qd6, as Black lacks control over d4, and 18 d4 followed by 19 c3 gives White the advantage.
- e) 17...f4! is the best and most active try when the position quickly becomes quite sharp after 18 c3! Nf5 19 g4 f3! (but not 19...Ne3? 20 Bxe3 fxe3 21 Rxf8+ Kxf8 22 Qf3+ and White is much better as Donev has shown after 22...Kg8 23 Rf1, whereas 22...Bf4 drops a pawn to 23 Rf1 g5 24 Qxe3) 20 Bxf3 Bxh2+ 21

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Kg2 (Diagram 44) and Black must avoid a tempting trap.



TIP: White is hoping for 21...Ne3+?? 22 Bxe3 Qg3 23 Kh1 Qh3 when Black might well expect to mate, but 24 Bg2 Qh4 25 Bg5! fully turns the tables and the trapper becomes the trapped.

That has actually claimed a strong IM as a victim and is most certainly a useful tactical motif to remember. Black should thus prefer to retreat with 21...Ng7, intending 22 Ne4 Bd6 23 Ng3 Bc6! to save his dark-squared bishop. White should be better after 21...Ng7, although, with a weakened kingside, he must tread carefully. In O.Stjajzhkina-I.Polovodin, St Petersburg 1999 she did exactly that with 22 Rh1! Bf4 23 d4 Bd7 24 Nxd7 Qxd7 25 Qd3 when White was better due to her intention to double on the h-file, although it was also possible to grab with 24 Bxb7.

17 c3

17 gxf4!? is risky as White is left with just one pawn shielding his king, but this is the critical test of 16...f4. After 17...Bxf4 (Diagram 45)

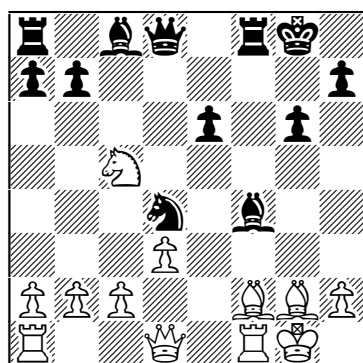


Diagram 45 (W)

An unbalanced position

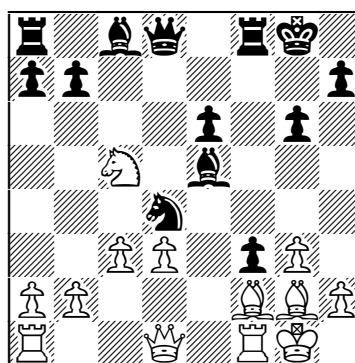


Diagram 46 (W)

White should force exchanges

White shouldn't further weaken his kingside with 18 h3?! as 18...Nf5 19 Qe2 Bb8! left him in trouble down the h2-b8 diagonal in V.Bhat-D.Reizniece, San Francisco 2000. Instead 18 c3 Nf5 19 Ne4 Qc7 20 h3 Bd7 21 Qb3 Rae8 was about equal in B.Rogulj-D.Stojanovic, Neum 2002 as both sides' weaknesses balanced themselves out. White should also consider 18 Ne4!?, immediately covering a number of important squares with the knight when the position is unbalanced, if roughly level, after 18...e5. Instead 18...Nf5 19 Bc5 e5 20 Qe1! covered the kingside in R.Djurhuus-M.Zelkind, Gausdal 1990 and 20...Rf7 21 Nc3 Rc7 22 Rxf4! hoped to gain a very strong attack for the exchange, although in the game White had to settle for an edge after 22...Rxc5 23 Rf2

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

which 23...Qd4 24 Qe2 would have maintained, whereas 23...Be6? dropped the key e5-pawn after 24 b4.

17...f3 (Diagram 46) 18 cxd4!

Correctly giving up the important g2-bishop as this can be followed up with exchanges, whereas 18 Bh3? underestimates the strength of the f3-pawn. Black can target the weakened white kingside with 18...Ne2+ 19 Kh1 Qg5! when White has been unable to find anything better than the grim 20 Qa4 Qh6 21 Qh4 after which Black is better following 21...Qxh4 22 gxh4 Nf4.

18...fxg2 19 Kxg2 Bxd4

Play quickly reaches an equal ending after this, but Black can also keep more tension in the position with 19...Qd5+!? 20 Ne4 Bg7. Lacking a light-squared bishop, White must end Black's attacking chances with 21 Qb3 and 21...Qxb3 22 axb3 Bd7 23 Be3! facilitated further exchanges and led to an equal ending in D.Novitzkij-G.Grigore, Creon 2004. White's structure was a bit of a mess, but he was a pawn ahead and the e4-knight held his position together.

20 Bxd4 Rxf1 21 Qxf1 Qxd4 22 Qf2

Swapping White's lead in development for centralizing the king in the ending which helps to neutralize Black's slightly superior minor piece.

22...Qxf2+

Lautier could have immediately opened the position for his bishop with 22...e5!? 23 Qxd4 exd4 24 Nb3 Bf5, but he prefers to keep some tension in the position probably because he had seen that here 25 Nxd4 Bxd3 26 Kf2 Re8 27 Rd1 Be4 28 Nb5! supplies White with sufficient counterplay and activity to maintain the balance.



NOTE: A bishop is usually superior to a knight on an open board in the ending. However, its strength is only felt if there is a pawn imbalance or if it has targets to attack, whereas here White is able to avoid disaster on the light squares without too much trouble.

23 Kxf2 b6 24 Ne4 Ba6 25 Ke3 (Diagram 47) 25...Rc8 26 Nc3!

Blocking the c-file and continuing to keep the black pieces at bay.

26...Rd8 27 d4 Kg7 28 Rc1 Rc8 29 Rc2 Kf7 30 Rf2+ Ke7 31 h4 Bb7 32 a3 Rd8 33 Ne2

Koch must have correctly realized that the forthcoming exchange was not actually a problem, although he also could have tried the more active 33 Ne4, intending 33...h6 34 Rc2 Rc8 35 Rxc8 Bxc8 36 Kf4.

33...e5!?

Lautier is quick to seize his small chance as the exchange of central pawns permits him to open more lines for his pieces.

34 dxe5 Rd5 35 Nc3 Rxe5+ 36 Kd4 Re6 37 Re2!

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

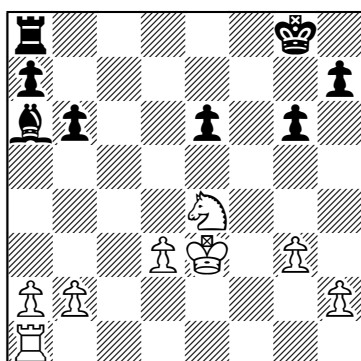


Diagram 47 (B)
An equal ending

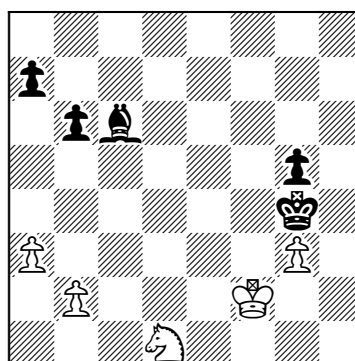


Diagram 48 (B)
Black can't make any progress

Good enough to draw, although so too was 37 Nd5+!? Kd6 38 Nc3 when Black is hard pressed not to repeat as 38...Bc6 39 Rf7 Re7 40 Rxe7 Kxe7 41 Ke5 grants White an even easier draw than the game.

37...Rxe2 38 Nxe2 Ke6 39 Nf4+ Kf5 40 Ke3 h6 41 Ne2

Lautier may enjoy the supposedly superior minor piece, but it cannot attack any pawns. White's king will now go to the same side as its counterpart and a draw becomes pretty much inevitable.

41...g5 42 hxg5 hxg5 43 Nc3 Bc6 44 Nd1 Kg4 45 Kf2 (Diagram 48)

45...Kf5 46 Ke3 Kg4 ½-½

The 10 Bf2 Move-order

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Bf2 (Diagram 49)

As readers will be aware from Game 3, this is Spassky's preferred method of implementing White's e5 pawn sacrifice. White moves his bishop out of the way of any ...d5 advance and is happy to meet Black's main move, 10...Nec6, with 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 e5 dxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 when we've reached a key position, albeit having saved a move, which was examined in some detail above. Presumably Spassky used to prefer to face Black's 10th move alternatives after 10 Bf2, rather than those after 10 e5. Spassky's chess appearances are rather rare these days which is a huge shame considering the many creative masterpieces he has given us. However, it would be interesting to know if the 10th world champion would still employ a 10 Bf2 move-order, as it currently appears that Black then has more promising sidelines than he has after 10 e5, when only really 10...Bd7 is at all tricky for White.

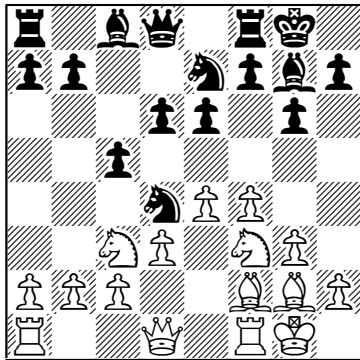


Diagram 49 (B)
White delays e5

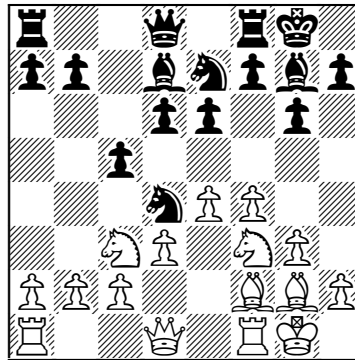


Diagram 50 (W)
Still a reasonable option

Should Black transpose to the e5-sacrifice?

This is really a matter of taste, although 10...Nc6 remains Black's most popular response to 10 Bf2. However, not all Black players are either prepared for or want to accept the pawn after 10 e5 and so they may well want to avoid 10 Bf2 Nc6. White's problem is that there are a number of reasonable ways for Black to do that:

- 10...Rb8 is Black's second most popular choice, freeing up the b7-pawn and the c8-bishop, but White has recently been making inroads against it as Game 11 reveals.
- 10...Nxf3+ can transpose to the e5-sacrifice after 11 Bxf3 Nc6 12 Bg2 Nd4 13 e5, but 12...Rb8 is a solid and good alternative. After 13 Rb1 b6 14 Qd2 Bb7 15 a3 Rc8 Black had developed harmoniously and White lacked a promising plan with B.Spassky-A.Karpov, Linares 1983 being shortly agreed drawn.
- 10 e5 Bd7!? has become quite popular, although White should far from fear the move as Short has shown. However, for a while that was widely hailed as the solution to Black's problems, but White cannot fully avoid the move as 10 Bf2 Bd7!? (**Diagram 50**) is also fully playable. As usual White should avoid the premature 11 g4?! due to 11...f5! and 12 h3 fxe4 13 hxe4 Rxf4 prepared a very promising exchange sacrifice for two great knights and kingside chances with 14 Bg3 e5! 15 Bxf4 exf4 16 Nh2 g5 17 Qd2 Ng6 18 Nd1 Ne5 in N.Padevsky-D.Lalev, Bulgaria 1989.



WARNING: It cannot be emphasized enough that White must always be very careful when advancing his g-pawn and have something promising in mind against ...f5 in response.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

White should prefer 11 Nxd4, although this doesn't appear too challenging for Black after either Benjamin's 11...cxd4 12 Ne2 Nc6 13 c3 dxc3 14 bxc3 f5! or 11...Bxd4!? when 12 Bxd4 cxd4 13 Ne2 Qb6 14 Qd2 d5! was an instructive advance to ensure Black of an equal share of the chances in B.Spassky-P.Cramling, Prague 1995.



NOTE: An early advance of the d-pawn can often rebound on Black as e5 in reply blunts the g7-bishop, but here Cramling had already exchanged off that prelate.

d) King drew attention to 10...e5!? in his 1997 work; a move which strangely hasn't caught on, but it again challenges White to find a constructive plan with his bishop on f2. 11 Nh4 is well met by 11...exf4 12 gxf4 f5!, but 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Ne2 Be6 is also fine for Black, such as 13 c3 dxc3 14 bxc3 Qd7 15 d4 Bg4! (**Diagram 51**)

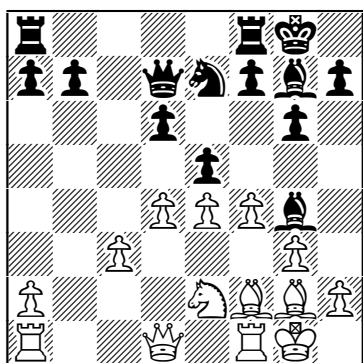


Diagram 51 (W)

Black is pretty comfortable

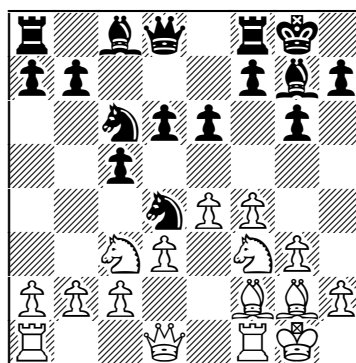


Diagram 52 (W)

Allowing White to play e5

left the white centre under a little pressure in E.Lenart-P.Wells, Hungarian Team Ch. 1994.

Thus Black appears to have a number of good alternatives to 10...Nec6 (**Diagram 52**) after which White can transpose to an e5-sacrifice with either 11 e5!? dxe5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Ne4 or the more usual 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 (11...cxd4!? 12 Ne2 f5! is a reasonable alternative, securing Black a share of the central play) 12 e5 dxe5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Ne4. However, in the latter variation he doesn't have to advance in the centre, with the 12 Rb1!? of Game 12 being a good alternative and so it is a little unfair to only refer to 10 Bf2 as a move-order device.

Theoretical?

As White often plays 10 Bf2 with the idea of transposing to the main line of 10 e5, he must again know some theory, while Black has a number of quite reasonable, and non-theoretical, alternatives to allowing e5 and then taking twice there.

Statistics

White has made 51% from just over 350 outings with 10 Bf2. 10...Nc6 only scores 46% from 160 games in response, whereas 10...Bd7 and 10...e5 have scored 54% and 50% respectively, albeit from under 30 games each.

Illustrative Games

Game 11

□ Y.Dembo ■ J.Gottesman

Budapest 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 f4 Nc6 4 Nf3 e6 5 d3 Nge7 6 g3 g6 7 Bg2 Bg7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 Nd4 10 Bf2 Rb8 11 Nxd4! cxd4 12 Ne2 (Diagram 53)

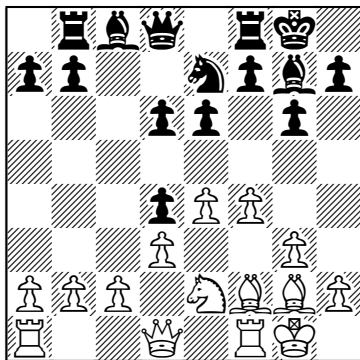


Diagram 53 (B)
c3 will remove the d4-pawn

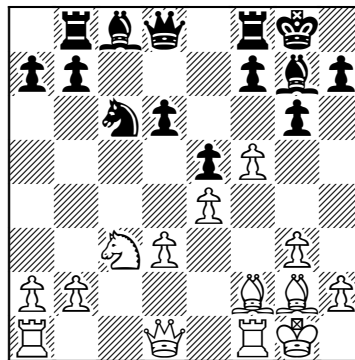


Diagram 54 (B)
An ideal advance

The exchange on d4 is White's most promising path against 10...Rb8. The d4-pawn may restrict the white pieces, but the plan is to remove it, thereby increasing White's central presence.

12...e5?

Expanding in the centre while opening a path for the c8-bishop, but this isn't too consistent with 10...Rb8. Black should prefer to improve his knight with 12...Nc6 when 13 c3 dxc3 14 Nxc3 is far less effective than in the game as

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Black controls d5. Instead 14 bxc3 b6 prepares to complete development and gave Black an acceptable position in M.Todorcevic-J.Scoatarin, Nice Olympiad 1974. The black position is pretty solid, but White should not mind such a scenario. Black currently isn't too active and White can aim to exploit his bishops pointing westward to seize the queenside initiative as Todorcevic managed with 15 Rb1 Bb7 16 c4! Rc8 17 Qa4 Qe8?! 18 Qa3 Qd7 19 Rfc1 Rfd8 20 Nc3, intending Nb5 and then d4.



NOTE: Black doesn't always have to prefix ...b6 or ...b5 with ...Rb8, but doing so ensures that the advance of the b-pawn won't be met by a nasty e5 and accident down the long diagonal.

13 c3 dxc3 14 Nxc3! Nc6

White's alert recapture on c3 has created the threat of 15 d4, which would give White some useful central pressure, and Gottesman moves to prevent that. Black played more actively with 14...exf4!? 15 gxf4 Qa5 in B.Gonzalez-J.Leandro, San Jose Julio 2005, but 16 a3! restricted any counterplay by keeping the black queen off the b-file when White was slightly for choice after 16...Be6 17 d4, and very much for choice following 17...d5? 18 Bh4! Rfe8?! 19 Bxe7 Rxe7 20 f5!.

15 f5! (Diagram 54)

Powerful play from Dembo as White seizes a strong initiative. Black had to now really exchange on f5 as he lacked a good alternative, especially with Nd5 on the way to increase the pressure.

15...gxf5 16 exf5 Bxf5 17 Bxa7! Bg6?

Gottesman is fully aware of the possible kingside danger, but he never really gains any compensation for the exchange. He was probably rather worried by the likes of 17...Ra8 18 Rxf5 Rxa7 when Black's kingside light squares are pretty vulnerable. In M.Todorcevic-N.Lakic, Yugoslav Ch., Skender Vakuf 1980 White gained a bind and excellent lasting compensation following 19 Nd5 Nd4 20 Qh5 Nxf5 21 Qxf5 h6 22 Be4 Re8 23 Rf1, but Dembo has suggested that 19 Be4!? Nd4? 20 Qh5! (**Diagram 55**) is even stronger when Black must lose his h-pawn as 20...h6? 21 Raf1, intending 22 Rf6, is crushing.



TIP: White often aims to follow up an f5 pawn sacrifice with an exchange sacrifice on that square to gain full control of the light squares. Black will usually face a grim defensive task and this is most certainly an idea to remember.

A similar scenario occurs after 17...Nxa7 18 Rxf5 Nc6 19 Be4, but Black had to try this and aim to tough it out. 19...Nd4? 20 Qh5 Nxf5 21 Qxf5 Re8 22 Rf1 Qc7 23 Nd5 (Dembo) is all over, but 19...Ne7!? 20 Qf3 Qd7 puts up some resistance, intending to aid the defence by bringing the queen to e6 and preparing to meet 21 Rh5 with 21...f5. White still has pressure and attacking chances

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

after 21 Qh5, but we are far from talking about a clear win.

18 Bxb8 Qxb8 19 h4!

The black bishops defend Gottesman's kingside and were no doubt hoping to become an effective force in the game. With d3 a little weak, Dembo correctly realizes that the g6-bishop can't be allowed to settle and so takes forceful steps to remove it.

19...Qa7+ 20 Kh2 Qd4 21 Be4! (Diagram 56) 21...Nb4

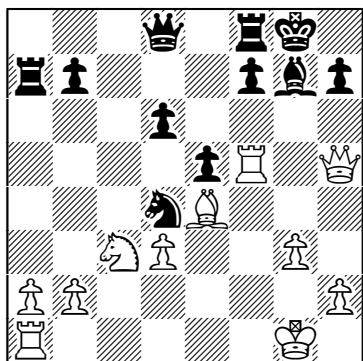


Diagram 55 (B)
Excellent light-square play

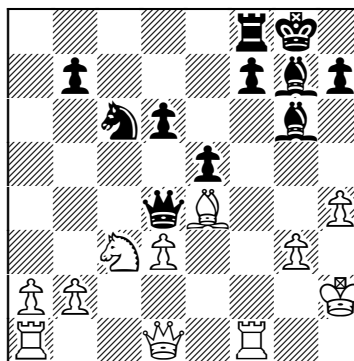


Diagram 56 (B)
White continues energetically

The black queen may have saved the g6-bishop, but Gottesman remains in trouble because of 21...f5 22 h5! when the white h-pawn again shows its worth. After 22...fxe4 23 hxg6 Rf2+ 24 Kh3 Black's counterattack is at an end and the boot is swiftly on the other foot after 24...hxg6 25 Qb3+ Kh7 26 Rxf2 Qxf2 27 Nxe4 Qe2 28 Rh1!.

22 h5 Bxe4 23 dxe4 Qxd1 24 Raxd1 Rd8 25 Nb5

Finishing efficiently by building up against d6 and, lacking any counterplay or compensation, Black isn't going to play on for long.

25...Bf8 26 a3 Nc6 27 Rd3 1-0

Game 12

□ M.Adams ■ J.Lautier

Tilburg 1996

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 g3 Nc6 6 Bg2 e6 7 0-0 Nge7 8 d3 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Bf2 Nec6 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Rb1!? (Diagram 57)

A positional course of action as White aims to challenge the d4-knight, not so much with b4 but with simply Ne2.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

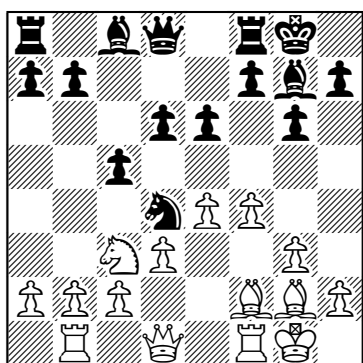


Diagram 57 (B)
Preparing Ne2

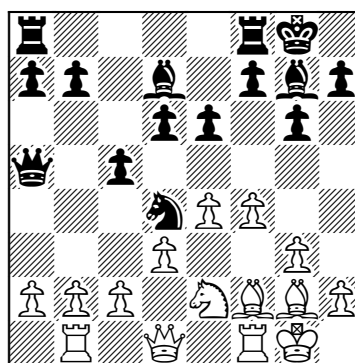


Diagram 58 (W)
Causing problems down the a-file

12...Bd7

Lautier completes his development and actually has an active role in mind for his light-squared bishop, but Black can also opt for 12...Rb8 when 13 a3! is a good response. Spassky has made good use of this idea in similar positions as White takes much of the sting out of 13...b5. That could either be met by 14 b4, fighting for the queenside initiative, or by 14 Ne2 when White will be able to break up Black's queenside advance after ...b4 with an exchange on that square. N.Davies-E.Fossan, Gausdal 1992 saw a slower approach from Black, but 13...b6 14 Qd2 Bb7 15 Nd1! d5 16 e5 Nc6 17 b4! Qe7 18 Ne3 Qc7 19 Ng4! left White with good prospects on both sides of the board.

13 Ne2 Ba4!?

Forcing White to weaken his queenside and thereby aiming to prevent the d4-knight from being dislodged by c3. However, the older 13...Qa5! (**Diagram 58**) may well be a better choice, placing the white queenside under some pressure and intending 14 a3?! Qa4!. That was already awkward for White in J.Vila Gazquez-P.Eljanov, Andorra 2003 as the necessary exchange on d4 granted Black easy and good play down the c-file. Spassky did better against 13...Qa5 when he faced it twice at Gjovik in 1983, although 14 Nc1 Ba4! 15 b3 Bc6 16 Be1 Qa3 17 c3 Nb5 18 Ne2 f5! was fine for Black and shortly drawn in B.Spassky-A.Adorjan.

White should thus probably prefer 14 c3 Nxe2+ 15 Qxe2 when Closed Sicilian expert, Andrew Ledger, has employed 15...Rac8 as Black to take the sting out of 16 e5 which can be met by 16...Bc6 17 exd6 Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Rfd8. Much sharper is 15...Qxa2!? which quickly led to a very unclear position after 16 e5 Qb3 17 exd6 Rfc8 18 f5! gxf5 19 g4 Bc6 20 Bh4 fxg4 21 Qxg4 f5! in B.Spassky-A.Miles, Gjovik 1983.

14 b3 Bc6 15 c4!

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

With 15 c3? dropping a pawn, Adams prefers to increase his central control.



NOTE: This advance prepares an exchange on d4; a capture which White can make as he will no longer be left with a backward c-pawn after it.

15...Nxe2+ 16 Qxe2 Qd7?

The queen will have to move again as she is not so well placed on d7 for when the d-file opens after d4. This may not look like a major slip, but it is all Adams impressively needs to take over the position. Instead Lautier should have preferred 16...Qc7 or 16...Qe7 when 17 Rbd1 Rad8 18 Be3 f5! was fine for Black and very equal after 19 exf5 exf5 20 Bxc6 bxc6 21 Qf3 Qxe3+ 22 Qxe3 Bd4 in F.El Debs-D.Lima, Sao Paulo 2005. However, neither would 18 d4 have promised White an advantage as 18...cxd4 19 Bxd4 Bxd4 20 Rxd4 e5! ensures Black of sufficient counterplay and leaves d6 no weaker than e4.

17 Rbd1! (Diagram 59)

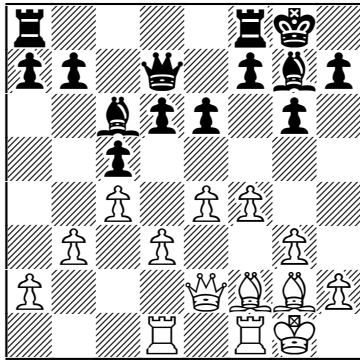


Diagram 59 (B)

d4 will be a strong advance

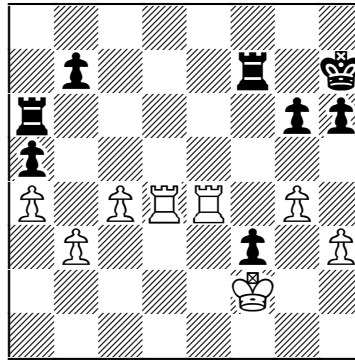


Diagram 60 (B)

Black is under severe pressure

17...Qe7

Hoping to meet 18 d4 with another double exchange and then 20...e5, but Adams has other ideas. However, Black couldn't clamp down on d4 with 17...e5 due to 18 f5 when White has the kingside initiative as 18...gxf5? 19 Bh3 (Adams) regains the pawn with some advantage.

18 Qd2! f5

With White able to recapture on d4 with his queen, Lautier scurries to distract him from that advance, but his active play over the next few moves simply creates new weaknesses and ones which Adams is quick to pinpoint.

19 Rfe1 e5 20 exf5 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 Rxf5 22 d4!

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

A strong advance which fully opens the position for White's well-centralized and coordinated forces.

22...cxd4 23 Qxd4 Qf7 24 Qxd6 Bf8 25 Qd7 exf4 26 g4!

Keeping the f-file closed and thus reducing any counterplay as White prepares to use his complete central control to slowly strangle the life out of the black position.

26...f3+ 27 Kf1 Rf6 28 h3 h6 29 Re4 a5 30 Qxf7+ Rxf7 31 a4!

Keeping control and now it's far from easy for Lautier to defend himself against threats along the fifth, sixth and eighth ranks, especially with move 40 approaching.

31...Ra6 32 Rd8 Kh7 33 Bd4 Bg7 34 Kf2 Bxd4+ 35 Rdx4 (Diagram 60)

35...Rb6?! 36 Re3 Rbf6 37 Rdd3 Kg7 38 Rxf3 Rxf3+ 39 Rxf3 Rd7 40 Ke2 Rd6 41 Ke3 b6 42 Ke4 h5 43 gxh5 gxh5 44 Rf5 Kg6

This has been a most impressive positional display thus far from Adams, but tragically he now relaxes. 45 Rd5 would have maintained White's winning lead, whereas White's careless next permits Black to enter a drawn pawn ending.

45 h4?? Re6+! (Diagram 61)

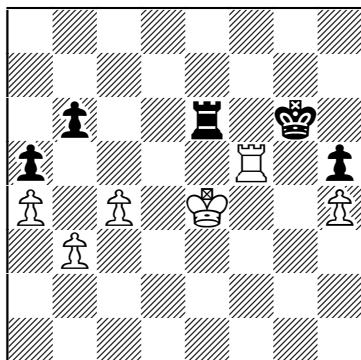


Diagram 61 (W)

A very rare slip from Adams

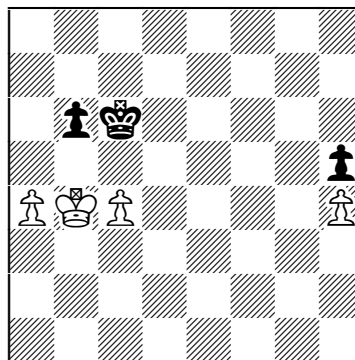


Diagram 62 (W)

A drawn ending

46 Re5

White's problem is that 46 Kf4 is met by 46...Rf6 and again the rooks must come off under unfavourable circumstances with Black holding the opposition. Adams does his best to force a mistake out of Lautier, but his extra pawn counts for little with the queenside fixed.

46...Kf6 47 Rxe6+ Kxe6 48 Kd3 Kd7! 49 Kc3 Kc7 50 b4 axb4+ 51 Kxb4 Kc6 52 Kb3 Kd6 53 Kc2 Kc6 54 Kd3 Kd6 55 Kc3 Kc5 56 Kb3 Kd6 57 Kb4 Kc6 (Diagram 62) 58 c5

The last try, but Black isn't troubled by this and draws because only the h-pawns will remain and his king can make it across in sufficient time.

58...bxc5+ 59 Kc4 Kb6 60 Kd5 Ka5 61 Kxc5 Kxa4 62 Kc4 ½-½

Black Prefers 9...b6

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 b6 (Diagram 63)

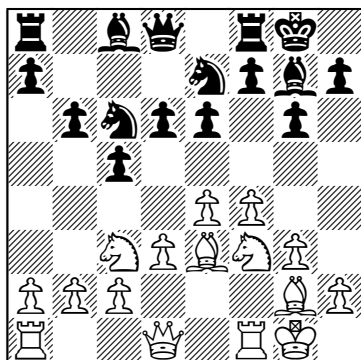


Diagram 63 (W)
Allowing d4

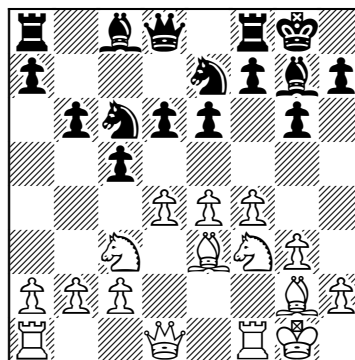


Diagram 64 (B)
Taking up the challenge

Why allow 10 d4?

By the early nineties, grandmasters were exploring this alternative to 9...Nd4, although that still remains in practice by far Black's most popular choice. They were either determined to avoid the complexities of 10 e5 or had realized that 10 d4 wasn't going to blow them away after 9...b6. Traditionally it had been thought that this advance would be strong as Black has, compared to a Dragon Sicilian, weakened the defence of d6 with ...e6. However, it turns out that Black can defend d6 and gain reasonable chances to obtain dynamic central counterplay. Today this line is just as important for the future of 6 f4 as the 10 e5 sacrifice, being a fairly popular choice after being recommended by both Joe Gallagher and Dorian Rogozenko in repertoire works for Black against the Anti-Sicilians.



TIP: Try to find out what a repertoire book for the other colour recommends against your favourite opening. Players of all levels who may have struggled against that line before are likely to have looked there and will often adopt the advocated response.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Is 9...b6 a problem?

Much still remains to be explored after 9...b6, but it isn't anywhere near a refutation of 6 f4 and 9 Be3. It has established itself as a fully viable alternative to 9...Nd4, but Black must still play accurately to reach an equal, but still unbalanced, position. That was certainly a task beyond Kramnik, albeit in a rapidplay game, as we will shortly see.

10 d4 (Diagram 64)

This remains the critical test of 9...b6 and White's best try for an advantage. He has, however, explored other paths and tried delaying this advance as we will see in Game 13.

10...Ba6

Rogozenko's 2003 recommendation, whereas back in 1994 Gallagher preferred 10...d5. That has been largely overtaken by 10...Ba6, but may well still be playable as Game 14 reveals. Black shouldn't, however, rush to ease the tension with 10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 Bb7, even if demonstrating an advantage for White is not so easy. 12 Qd2 is well countered by 12...Na5, but the direct 12 Ndb5 doesn't fully convince because after 12...d5! 13 exd5 exd5 14 Re1 Qd7, taking on d5 will drop b2 and 15 Nd4 Rfe8 is a reasonable IQP position for Black, although positional players may well be happy to play this as White. Instead in W.Posch-M.Gerhold, Austrian Team Championship 1997, White seized the initiative with 12 Nce2!? a6 13 f5! (Diagram 65)

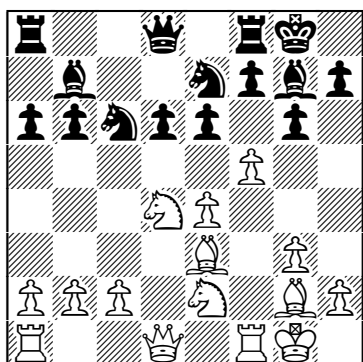


Diagram 65 (B)

A powerful advance

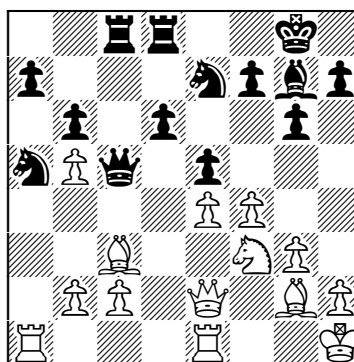


Diagram 66 (B)

The a5-knight is misplaced

and was better after 13...Nxd4 14 Nxd4 exf5 15 exf5 as 15...Bxg2 16 Kxg2 Bxd4 17 Qxd4 Nxf5 18 Rxf5 gxf5 19 Bh6 regained the exchange, leaving Black with too many loose pawns to defend.

11 Re1!

Due to an important tactical point the rook is better here, but after 11 Rf2 Qc7 Black isn't too inconvenienced by Rd2 ideas in any case. Instead 12 a4 Rad8 13 Nb5 Bxb5 14 axb5 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 cxd4 16 Bxd4 e5! sees Black crucially challenge in the centre and is very similar to the note to Black's thirteenth move below. White's problem is that after 17 Bc3 exf4, he cannot exchange on g7 without losing a pawn as 18...fxg3 hits the rook on f2, but 18 gxf4 isn't especially convincing either due to Mortensen's enterprising 18...Bxc3 19 bxc3 d5!; a strong sacrifice to gain the initiative and the f5-square for the black knight.

11...Qc7

Preparing to centralize the queen's rook, but 11...Rc8 is an important alternative which also continues to maintain the central tension:

a) 12 a4 aims to counter as in our main line but is left looking a little misplaced and slow after 12...d5!. This appears to be an excellent version of the 10...d5 variation as 13 exd5 exd5 14 Bf2 Nf5 creates unpleasant pressure against d4 and R.Tischbierek-B.Avrukh, Biel 2004 continued 15 dxc5 d4 16 Ne4 Nb4 17 Qd2 bxc5 18 Nxc5 Rxc5 19 Qxb4 Rxc2 when White was simply worse. Black's pieces all worked well to support his passed, if isolated, d-pawn; a pawn which proves its worth in a number of tactical variations and which is far from easy to attack or even to halt.

b) White should thus give serious thought to preserving the tension with 12 Bf2!? which aims to find out what Black's is up to. This appears more promising as after Black's thematic 12...cxd4 13 Nxd4 Na5, the prophylactic retreat to f2 proved its worth in O.Gesing-V.Nevednichy, Nice 2002. 14 f5 put Black under some pressure with White emerging clearly better after 14...e5 15 Ndb5 d5?! 16 exd5 Nxf5 17 Nxa7 Rc7 18 Nc6 Nxc6 19 dxc6. Black has also tried an immediate 12...Na5, but with the knight committed to the edge White is happy to revert back to the 13 a4 Qc7 14 Nb5 plan. That was successful after 14...Bxb5 15 axb5 cxd4 16 Bxd4 e5 17 Bc3 Qc5+ 18 Kh1 in M.Meinhardt-M.Sher, Paris 2005 as 18...exf4 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 gxf4 Qxb5 21 Qxd6 Nac6 22 Qa3 would have been better for White due to his central control, but 18...Rfd8 19 Qe2 (**Diagram 66**) 19...exf4 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 c3!, with the threat of 22 b4 before recapturing on f4, was also in White's favour.

12 a4

Preparing to blunt the a6-bishop and to gain queenside pressure with 13 Nb5, but White can also opt for 12 Bf2!?, intending 12...Rad8 13 a4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 cxd4 15 Bxd4 e5 16 Bf2 when White has lost a tempo, but kept his knight on c3, covering d5. Now 16...exf4 17 gxf4 Bxc3 18 bxc3 is rather risky for Black due to the unopposed white dark-squared bishop, but 16...d5! 17 exd5 exf4 18 a5! b5 19 Qe2 Nf5 was unclear in M.Meinhardt-E.Kengis, Paris 2005.

12...Rad8 13 Nb5 Qb8

Kramnik's choice, although he may have been trying to avoid simplification against an opponent rated more than 500 points below him. However, this grants White a pleasant space advantage and Black should prefer 13...Bxb5 14

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

axb5 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 cxd4 16 Bxd4 e5. This by now familiar central strike is his best chance, although after 17 Bc3! Black still has to proceed accurately to equalize. With the rook on e1, 17...exf4 allows 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qd4+! f6 20 gxf4 and White is clearly better and so Black should prefer to blow open the centre with 17...d5!. Then 18 Bxe5 Qc5+ 19 Kh1 dxe4 20 Qe2 (**Diagram 67**),

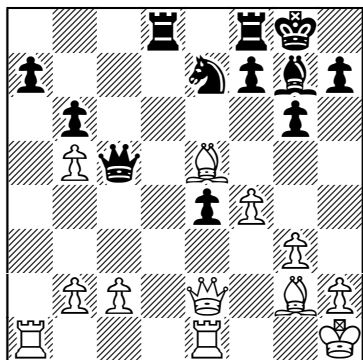


Diagram 67 (B)
Can Black equalize?

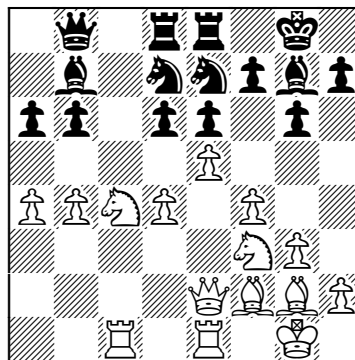


Diagram 68 (B)
Black is clearly worse

20...f6! 21 Bc3 f5 saw Black happy to play a pawn down in B.Gonzalez-R.Vera, Ubeda 2001 after 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Rxa7 Ra8, but with the g2-bishop hemmed in Vera enjoyed good compensation for the pawn and this position is roughly balanced as it is not especially easy for White to advance his queenside pawns. Instead Rogozenko has analyzed 20...Bxe5 21 fxe5 Qxe5 22 Qxe4 Qxe4 23 Bxe4 Rd7 which he assesses as being equal. However, although he shouldn't be more than slightly worse, after 24 c4 the onus is still on Black to draw this position, as the strength of the white bishop shouldn't be underestimated and White has the clear plan of trying to force through b4 and c5.

14 c3 Bb7 15 Bf2 a6 16 Na3

Black remains very solid, but White's central control promises him a small advantage and Black can't challenge in the centre due to the pressure created by the f2-bishop. It's worth seeing just a few more moves of J.Buenafe Moya-V.Kramnik, Villarrobledo (rapid) 1998 as White steadily and impressively increased his advantage following 16...Qc7 17 Rc1 Nb8 18 Qe2 Nd7 19 b4! Rfe8 20 e5! cxb4 21 cxb4 Qb8 22 Nc4 (**Diagram 68**) when Kramnik had to grovel with 22...Nc8.

Theoretical?

9...b6 isn't as theoretical as 9...Nd4 10 e5, but after both 10 d4 Ba6 and 10...d5 some forcing lines have established themselves. White should be aware of the

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

theory here as 9...b6 is a popular choice in practice, although a well-prepared White player has a good chance of gaining an opening advantage.

Statistics

Black has scored a very impressive 58% from 525 games with 9...b6, but White players should not, however, overly worry about the move. White's low score is partly due to his initially frequently being surprised by 9...b6, and even nowadays White still often isn't prepared to play the most critical lines against it. Still just 42% for White is rather disappointing and so do ensure that you are fully ready for 9...b6 and then White's score should begin to improve.

Illustrative Games

Game 13

□ E.Bareev ■ P.Leko

Melody Amber (blindfold), Monaco 2004

1 g3 c5 2 Bg2 g6 3 e4 Bg7 4 f4 Nc6 5 d3 d6 6 Nf3 e6 7 Nc3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 b6 10 Qd2

Simply developing, but White's problem is that he lacks a plan. Likewise, with there being no real need for Ne2, 10 Rb1?! is also rather pointless here and Black quickly seized the edge with 10...d5 11 Bd2 d4! 12 Ne2 Bb7 in C.Grubert-J.Gallagher, Gausdal 2001. Black has seized some useful space and White now decided that he had to do something, but 13 g4 f5 14 Ng5 Qd7 (Diagram 69)

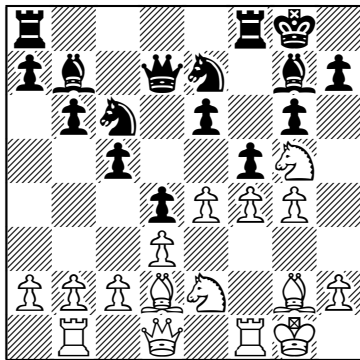


Diagram 69 (W)

Not a success for White

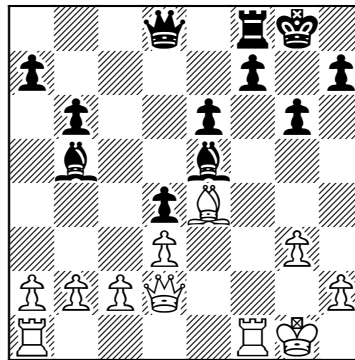


Diagram 70 (W)

An unclear situation

wasn't particularly effective with Gallagher more than able to maintain control after 15 Ng3 h6.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian



TIP: Never just routinely complete your development, but always try to do so with a clear objective in mind.

10 Bf2 at least keeps open the idea of d4, although White's main plan in practice has been to follow up with g4 and Bh4. This approach has gained a surprising amount of attention from some fairly strong players, but it is not especially convincing and it is really 10 d4 which White must try to make work. After 10 Bf2 Ba6! Black will advance at some point soon with ...d5 and White must look to the kingside for counterplay. Following, for example, 11 Qd2 Qd7 12 Rae1 Rae8 13 g4 f5 (B.Spassky-S.Atalik, Tallinn 1998) White must probably resort to 14 h3, but such an approach is rather slow, while the black kingside isn't all that vulnerable and Black most certainly is not worse after 14...fxe4!

10...Nd4!?

Faced with a slow set-up, Leko opts to return to more traditional methods and reveals a third way for Black to play the position after 9...Nd4 10 Qd2 (10...Rb8 and 10...Nec6 were considered in the notes to Game 5). However, in this exact position Black is also pretty comfortable after 10...Bb7 11 Rad1 d5!, which gave him good play in the centre in G.Keeling-R.Palliser, British Rapid-play Ch., Leeds 1999.

11 Rae1

Leko's last was actually quite provocative because White can play to win a pawn with 11 Bxd4!? cxd4 12 Nb5!. Now 12...e5 13 Qb4 Nc6!? 14 Qxd6 Qxd6 15 Nxd6 Ba6 offers Black some play for the pawn due to his bishop-pair, but that shouldn't be sufficient. Thus some quite strong players have been happy to add more wood to the fire with 12...Nc6!, intending 13 e5 dxe5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Bxa8 (15 fxe5 Bd7 16 Nxd4 Bxe5 17 Qe3 Bxd4 18 Qxd4 Rc8 was fine for Black in S.Bücker-I.Stohl, Dortmund 1992) 15...Bd7. Andersson has suggested that White is objectively slightly better after 16 Be4 Bxb5 17 fxe5 Bxe5 (**Diagram 70**), but his position is not especially easy to play in practice. The white rooks lack good roles, whereas Black has a useful central majority which, allied to the bishop-pair, promises good compensation. A.Medina Garcia-U.Andersson, Las Palmas 1974 continued 18 a4 Bd7 19 c4 dxc3! 20 bxc3 Qc7 21 d4 Bd6 22 Rfc1 Kg7 and was roughly balanced due to the slightly weakened white kingside and because c4 would be a rather risky advance, weakening d4.

11...Bb7 12 Bf2 Qd7

Having sunk his knight into d4, Black must remain flexible and refrain from 12...d5? which leaves d4 rather weak after 13 Nxd4! cxd4 14 Ne2 dxe4 15 dxe4.

13 Nh4?! f5! (**Diagram 71**)

Preventing any kingside expansion and Leko is already able to make use of his more harmonized position to take over the initiative.

14 Nd1?! fxe4



WARNING: When Black fianchettoes his queen's bishop, White must always watch out for tricks down the a6-f1 diagonal and here 15 dxe4? would drop the exchange to 15...Ba6.

15 Bxe4 Nef5 16 Nxf5

White is being outplayed and so Bareev realizes that he must make exchanges, hoping to steer the game towards a draw.

16...exf5 17 Bxb7 Qxb7 18 Bxd4 Bxd4+ 19 Ne3 Qf7 (Diagram 72) 20 a3

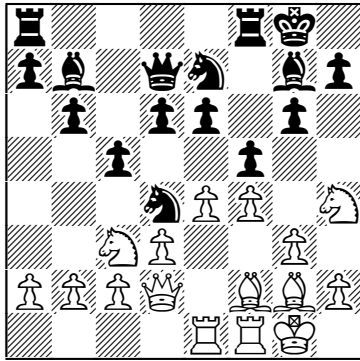


Diagram 71 (W)
Black has good play

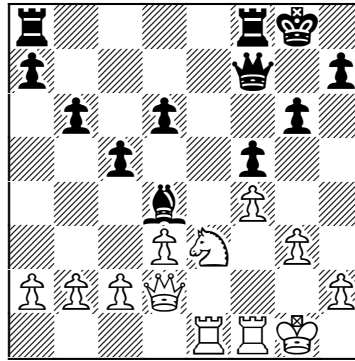


Diagram 72 (W)
White is in trouble

20 c4!? Qg7 21 Rf2 Rae8 22 Rfe2 would have left White rather tied up, but might well have been a better try as now Bareev should just have lost a pawn.

20...d5?

Bareev is normally a 1 d4 player and his lack of familiarity with the Closed really shows here. White simply cannot just potter around after 9 Be3 and must instead play vigorously. Here 20...Bxb2 would have left Black a clear pawn ahead, due to 21 c3 Qb3, and White regretting his choice of opening.

21 c3 Bg7 22 Nc2

Now the queen and knight defend everything and exchanges down the e-file are imminent as Leko's slip, no doubt caused by this being a blindfold game, has let White off with a draw.

22...Rfe8 23 Rxe8+ Rxe8 ½-½

Game 14

□ I.Starostits ■ V.Seifert

Leutersdorf 2002

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0
9 Be3 b6 10 d4 d5 (Diagram 73)

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

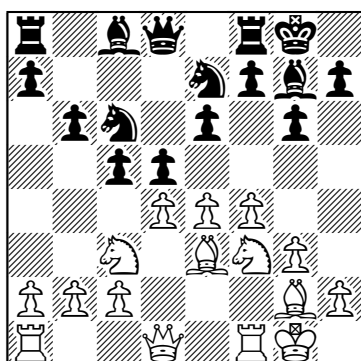


Diagram 73 (W)

Black challenges in the centre

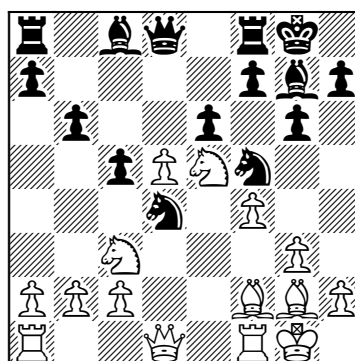


Diagram 74 (B)

Putting Black under some pressure

11 exd5



WARNING: Black's last was based on the tactical point that 11 dxc5?? d4 wins a piece. Always watch out for a forking ...d4 when Black advances his d-pawn to d5.

Starostits' choice is standard and best as this is a good example of a position where White doesn't want to go in for a French structure with 11 e5. After 11...Ba6 12 Re1 Nf5 Black's supposedly bad light-squared bishop is fairly active and d4 is under some pressure. B.Gonzalez-M.Röder, Santa Clara 2000 continued 13 Bf2 cxd4 14 Nxd4 (or 14 Ne2!? Bxe2 15 Rxe2 Rc8 16 Nxd4 Ncxd4 17 Bxd4 g5!?) which gave Black sufficient counterplay in J.Radulski-V.Iotov, Sofia 2004) 14...Ncxd4 15 Bxd4 Nxd4 16 Qxd4 Qc7 17 Qa4 Qc5+ 18 Kh1 Qa5!, forcing the queens off and thus leaving Black with good queenside pressure, while his dark-square bishop can reroute via f8.

11...Nf5!

Increasing the central pressure. Black has no interest in 11...exd5 because 12 dxc5! d4 is now impossible as 13 Nxd4! wins material down the long diagonal, but even 12...Bg4! 13 Bf2 d4 14 Ne4 should leave White with the better chances.

12 Bf2 Ncxd4 13 Ne5! (Diagram 74)

Taking the opportunity to leap forwards and this is by far White's most challenging course, whereas 13 Nxd4? cxd4 14 dxe6 Bxe6 gives Black active and promising play, especially after 15 Bxa8?? Qxa8 when White will be completely undone on the light squares.

13...exd5!

The modern preference, whereas the Gallagher-advocated 13...Ba6 has only

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been tested three times since his book was published in 1994. Presumably black players have been rather suspicious of their position after 14 Re1 Rc8 15 dxe6 Nxe6 16 Nd5 due to White's very strong centralized knights. After 16...Bb7 White correctly supported his d5-knight with 17 c4! (**Diagram 75**)

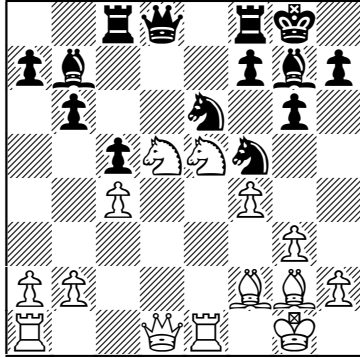


Diagram 75 (B)

The white knights dominate

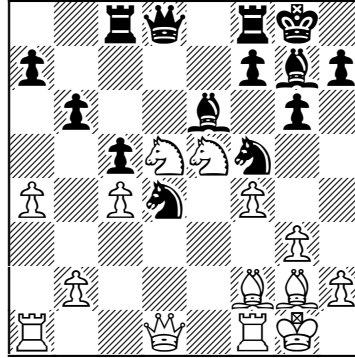


Diagram 76 (B)

Black is fine

in H.Bastian-G.Loew, German Ch., Binz 1995 and 17...Nfd4 18 Qa4 a5 (18...Ra8 19 Qd7! is also rather awkward for Black) 19 Qd7! left Black under some pressure. It is very easy here for him to simply lose an exchange, whereas 19...Bxd5 20 cxd5 leaves White with a strong passed d-pawn. Loew thus opted for the relatively best 19...Bxe5, although 20 Rxe5 Bxd5 21 Qxd5 Qc7 22 Rae1 left White with the bishop-pair and in full control of the position.



NOTE: Bastian correctly avoided 14 dxe6 Nxe6 15 Bxa8? due to 15...Qxa8! 16 Re1 Rd8 17 Qc1 Ned4 (Gallagher) with excellent compensation for Black. It is rarely worth giving up the key defensive light-squared bishop to win the exchange as doing so leaves the white kingside rather vulnerable.

14 Nxd5 Be6 15 c4!

Keeping the knights in position once again and now 15...f6 15 Nf3 Rc8 17 Re1 Re8 18 Rc1 Nxf3+ 19 Bxf3 Kh8 20 Rc2! might have driven one backwards in B.Rogulj-G.Forintos, Austrian Team Ch. 1999, but ...f6 was actually a little weakening and obstructive, leaving White with a pleasant edge.

15...Rc8 16 Re1!?

Black shouldn't be worse after this, but at least more play remains in the position. White has often preferred to prevent ...b5 with 16 a4 (**Diagram 76**), but that leaves Black with two good options:

a) 16...Re8 17 Re1 Qd6 18 Ng4 Bd7 19 Nge3 Rcd8 20 Ra3 Bc6 was very solid

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for Black and left it pretty hard for either side to make any progress in B.Rogulj-W.Wittmann, Austrian Team Ch. 1996.

b) 16...Nc6 increases Black's control over some key dark squares and 17 Re1 Nfd4 18 g4? Nxe5 19 fxe5 Nc6 20 Bg3 would have left e5 simply dropping off for insufficient compensation had Black opted for 20...Re8! in B.Rogulj-Ta.Horvath, Leiner 1996.

16...Re8?!

Too slow and Seifert should have taken advantage of the opportunity to break with 16...b5! when 17 b3 Re8 is fairly complex, but roughly equal. Instead Black preferred the ambitious 17...Nd6 in S.Brenjo-G.Arsovic, Obrenovac 2004, but after 18 Bxd4 cxd4 19 Qxd4 bxc4 White could have grabbed a pawn with Lane's suggestion of 20 Qxa7!? as 20...Nb5 21 Qb7 leaves Black without a good move and 21...Nd6 22 Qb4 extradites the queen.

17 b4! (Diagram 77)

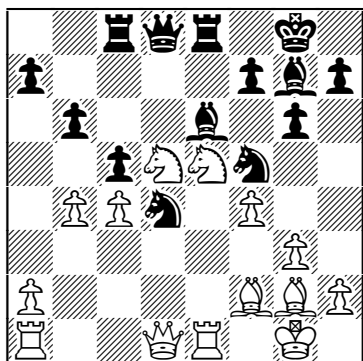


Diagram 77 (B)
White has an edge

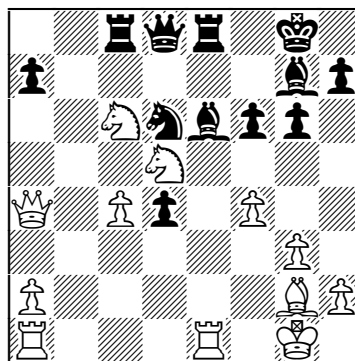


Diagram 78 (B)
Making good use of the knights

Starostits seizes his chance to gain the initiative by undermining the d4-knight.

17...Nd6

Black could still have tried 17...b5!?, although after 18 bxc5 bxc4 19 Nc3! – not 19 Nb4 a5 20 Nc2 Nb5 which is less clear – White emerges with the edge, such as with 19...f6 20 Nf3 Nc6 21 Qa4!.

18 bxc5 bxc5 19 Qa4 f6?

White's strong centralized knights are a bit of a handful and certainly create a number of awkward tactics for Black. Seifert must now lose the exchange, but he would only have been slightly worse had he prefaced advancing his f-pawn with 19...Kh8.

20 Bxd4! cxd4 21 Nc6 (Diagram 78) 21...Qd7 22 Nce7+! 1-0

Black saw no reason to continue as he is losing a clear exchange and the queens are coming off, because 22...Rxe7 is even worse for Black after 23 Nxe7+ Qxe7 24 Bd5.

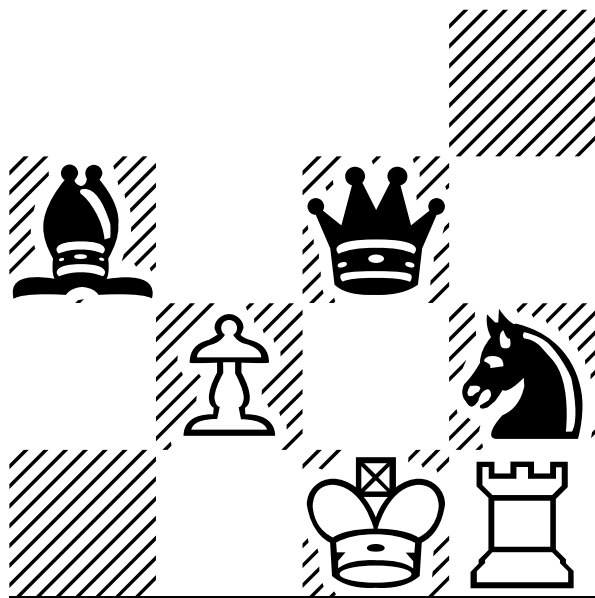
Points to Remember

- 1) 10 e5!? is crucial to the viability of 6 f4 and remains a slightly unpleasant surprise for many opponents. White should, however, prefer an immediate 10 e5, rather than copy Spassky with 10 Bf2.
- 2) White must follow up 10 e5 as energetically as possible, with his ideal capture on c5 (which Black shouldn't allow) being with his dark-squared bishop.
- 3) When White doesn't play e5, he would like to attack with f5, but preparing that with g4 requires a lot of care. Much more often than not g4 is powerfully countered by ...f5!.
- 4) A common Closed Sicilian motif is to follow up f5 with an exchange sacrifice on that square. With Black then lacking a g-pawn, White often enjoys excellent compensation on the light squares and against the black kingside.
- 5) The lines in this chapter are generally quite theoretical and White should ensure that he is prepared for the enterprising 9...b6!?, as well as for 9...Nd4.

Chapter Two

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

- Introduction
- Black Plays 6...Nf6
- Black Plays 6...e5
- Points to Remember



Introduction

In the Main Line of the Closed Sicilian with 6 f4, Black's most popular response by far at all levels is 6...e6. That is, however, by no means the only move which White should be ready for, as both 6...Nf6 and 6...e5 are independent systems in their own right. The former completes Black's kingside development as quickly as possible, but has long had a bad reputation, dating back to its destruction by Boris Spassky in his 1968 Candidates Match with Efim Geller. White can certainly launch a dangerous attack and advance with f5 after 6...Nf6, but with accurate defence Black's prospects may not be so bad as Garry Kasparov has recently demonstrated with a fresh analysis of the Spassky-Geller games as part of his monumental *My Great Predecessors* series.

One useful way of acquiring new ideas in the Closed Sicilian, is to study the English Opening. That may sound a little odd, but 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 (**Diagram 1**)

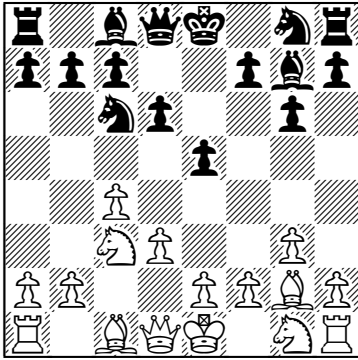


Diagram 1 (W)
Black adopts the Closed Sicilian!

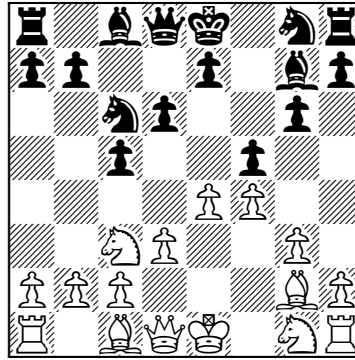


Diagram 2 (W)
A radical central challenge

is a reversed Closed Sicilian. That system enjoys a good theoretical reputation and has been employed as Black by a number of strong grandmasters, including no lesser players than Anatoly Karpov, Garry Kasparov and Nigel Short. As well as 6 Nf3 and 6 e3, another important option for White is 6 e4, reaching a set-up that Botvinnik popularized and which has been named after him.



TIP: Facing the English Opening shouldn't be a problem for Closed Sicilian players, who can adopt their favourite set-up against it. The tempo lost isn't especially important at all and Black will certainly have good understanding of the key positional motifs.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Returning to the Closed Sicilian with 6 f4, we can see why 6...e5 appeals to some black players, especially to those inspired to play the Botvinnik set-up as White by Tony Kosten's *The Dynamic English*. However, Botvinnik himself didn't meet 6 f4 like this as the extra tempo conceded in the Closed Sicilian version is actually rather dangerous for Black who must be careful that he isn't rapidly blown away, as we will see below.

After 1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4, Black also has two minor options:

a) 6...f5!? (**Diagram 2**) was used by Botvinnik and actually isn't a bad idea at all for the patient Black player happy to maintain the tension in the centre. After 7 Nf3 Nf6 8 0-0 0-0, White should consider 9 h3!? with the idea of exchanging on f5 as ...Bxf5 will be met by g4. Black should probably recapture with his g-pawn, but then White will aim to generate pressure down the central files after breaking with d4. It is also possible for White to develop and 9 Kh1 Kh8! 10 Be3 Be6 11 Qd2 Qd7 12 Bg1 Rae8 13 Rae1 b6 was about equal, and this tense position offered chances to both sides, in A.Medina Garcia-M.Botvinnik, Wijk aan Zee 1969.

b) 6...Rb8 is a good response when White has played 6 Be3, but here the white set-up contains more bite as Black must be alert to e5- and f5-advances after 7 Nf3:

b1) 7...b5 8 0-0 b4 9 Ne2! Nd4 sees Black thematically advance on the queenside and then prevent 10 d4. However, with his bishop on c1 this approach isn't at all problematic for White and the instructive 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 a3! leaves Black rueing his early queenside optimism. After 11...Qc7 12 axb4 Rxb4 13 b3 Bg4 14 Qd2 Rb5 15 Ra4 (**Diagram 3**),

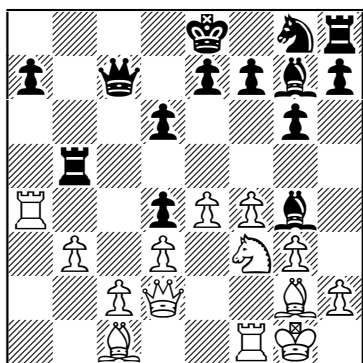


Diagram 3 (B)
White is much better

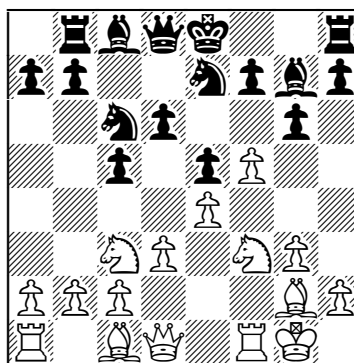


Diagram 4 (B)
Powerfully seizing the initiative

Black's queenside prospects had been well and truly ended, and he was set to come under pressure in A.Rodriguez-E.Scarella, Vicente Lopez 2000.



NOTE: With b2 still defended by White's dark-squared bishop, a3 can be a good idea to break up the black queenside pawns and thus dent Black's aims and counterplay on that flank.

b2) 7...e5?! shows concern about the extra space gained by the white e4- and f4- pawn duo. However, to play it here renders 6...Rb8 rather redundant and Black was swiftly and mercilessly punished in N.Short-I.Nataf, Istanbul Olympiad 2000 after 8 0-0 Nge7 9 f5! (**Diagram 4**) 9...gxf5 10 Nh4. Black's problem is that 10...fxe4? can even be met by 11 Nxe4! when f7 is rather weak, but 11...0-0 12 Nf6+ hardly solves Black's difficulties. Nataf later felt that he should have tried 10...f4!? 11 gxf4 Ng6; a standard ploy to return the pawn and reduce the pressure. However, here White retains some advantage with 12 Nf5 Bxf5 13 exf5 Nxf4 14 Bxf4 exf4 15 Rxf4 due to his safer king, the open lines on the kingside and the weakness of d5. The game actually saw 10...Nd4? and after 11 exf5 f6 12 Nd5! Nxd5 13 Bxd5 Qe7 14 a4! Black was stuck in a huge bind and had a horrible position.



NOTE: 14 a4 was a strong prophylactic response, preventing Black from challenging d5 with ...Nb5-c7 and ruling out 14...b6?? due to 15 c3, trapping the d4-knight. Always consider your opponent's intentions and ways to disrupt them!

Black Plays 6...Nf6

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 Nf6 (**Diagram 5**)

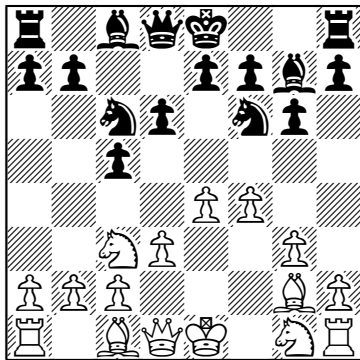


Diagram 5 (W)
Swiftly preparing to castle

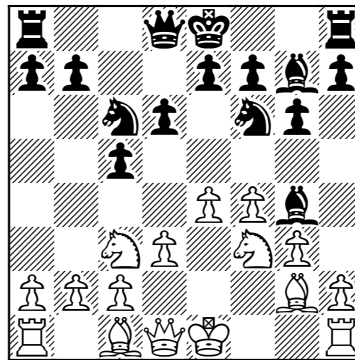


Diagram 6 (W)
Exchanging off the bishop

A Provocative Choice

6...Nf6 has been endorsed by no lesser a player than Kasparov himself, but it

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

is just the sort of move which can easily lead to a crushing white win at club level. White will force through f5 and gain a strong attack, and Black must defend accurately against such an onslaught. Such a task was even beyond Efim Geller, and he is by no means the only player who doesn't like to be attacked and who doesn't respond well when he is. At club level many players fall into such a category and Black is often quite simply blown away on the kingside. Nevertheless, if Black plays accurately his position is hard to break down: his dark-squared bishop is an excellent defender, and thus White will often try and exchange it with Bh6, while f5 is ideally met by ...Ne5; bringing the knight to an excellent square and covering some key kingside squares.

Should White play a3?

The main advantage for Black of employing 6...Nf6 is that he gets to accelerate his queenside counterplay and White must decide what to do about that. Traditionally White has been advised to challenge Black's pawn when it reaches b4 with a3. Doing so may appear to open further lines for Black, but the crafty idea is that only the a-file will open. White will also often play b3, thereby preventing any ...b3 advance, after which he hopes that Rc1 will defend his only weakness on c2, leaving Black unable to break through on the queenside and White set to win the game on the kingside. However, Black appears to be able, with accurate play, to gain counterplay whether or not White chooses to open the a-file and so some Closed Sicilian players prefer to omit a3, placing the onus on Black to find a way to break through on the queenside. The jury is currently out as to which method is better, but I would certainly recommend considering the latter against a well-prepared opponent who is probably expecting a3.

7 Nf3 0-0

Completing Black's kingside development, but a slightly underrated alternative is 7...Bg4!? (**Diagram 6**). This is a logical idea as Black's light-squared bishop often struggles to find a good role, although White will enjoy a strong central clamp after the exchange on f3, as ...d5 is much harder for Black to play. White should give serious consideration to 8 Ne2!?, intending to castle and take control of the key d4-square with c3 after which White might even switch to central expansion himself, supported by his extra light-squared bishop.

In practice 7...Bg4 has usually been met by 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 0-0 10 0-0 Rc8?!, but the rook doesn't achieve a huge amount here and it is ...b5-b4, and not ...c4, which Black should be playing for. Thus 10...Rb8 makes much more sense when 11 Be3 Nd7 12 g4 b5 13 e5? was far too ambitious in D.Novitzkij-I.Lutsko, Minsk 2001. After 13...Nd4 14 Qf2 dxe5 15 f5 e6 16 fxe6 Nxe6 17 Bd5, Black sensibly returned the pawn to maintain the advantage with 17...Nf4! 18 Bxf4 exf4 19 Qxf4 Be5. White should thus play more circumspectly, such as with 13 a3!? a5 14 Rab1 b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 Ne2.



TIP: Black sensibly moved his knight from f6 before playing ...b5 as 11...b5?? 12 e5! would have been rather embarrassing for him. Always watch out for tactical possibilities down both long diagonals.

Instead Black preferred 10...Rc8?! in N.Short-M.Narciso Dublan, Spanish Team Ch. 2003, but after 11 g4 Nd4 12 Qf2 b5 13 Nd1! b4 14 Ne3, the white knight was well placed, covering a number of important squares and supporting the imminent attack. 14...Nd7 15 h4! Nb6 16 Bd2 Nb5 saw Black gain some queenside pressure, but Short impressively dealt with that and 17 b3! Bxa1 18 Rxa1 (**Diagram 7**) 18...Nd7 19 Rf1 Rc6 20 h5 Ra6 21 Qh4 left White's strong kingside pawn roller and attacking chances as the most important features of the position.

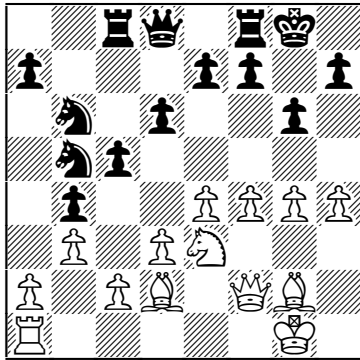


Diagram 7 (B)

A strong exchange sacrifice

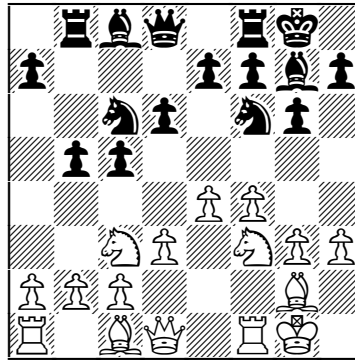


Diagram 8 (W)

The a3 dilemma

8 0-0 Rb8 9 h3!

Supporting g4, while enabling the dark-squared bishop to be developed to e3 and this has established itself as White's best set-up.

9...b5 (Diagram 8) 10 a3!?

Disrupting the black pawn advance like this has been the choice of several strong players, although when Nigel Short last reached this position he switched to an immediate 10 g4; the subject of Game 15.

10...a5 11 Be3 b4

Black can also first opt for 11...Nd7!?, a multipurpose move which ensures that f5 will be met by a knight going to e5 and which opens up the long diagonal. Should Black wish to prevent White from adopting a defensive queenside formation with b3 and Rc1 this is a reasonable idea, although 12 Rb1 b4 13 axb4 axb4 14 Ne2 Bb7 15 g4 Ra8 16 c4! saw White adapt well to the circumstances

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in N.Short-G.Kasparov, Zurich (rapid) 2001. Black doesn't want to allow White the superior central control after an exchange on c3, but otherwise the queen-side has remained relatively closed. Short continued to prevent Kasparov from opening lines with 16...e6 17 g5 Re8 18 h4 d5 19 e5! (**Diagram 9**)

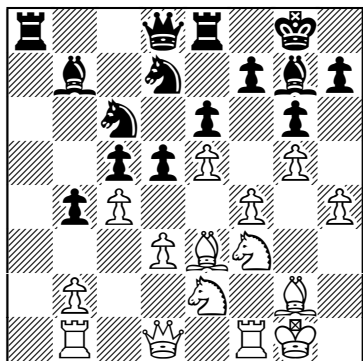


Diagram 9 (B)
Maintaining control

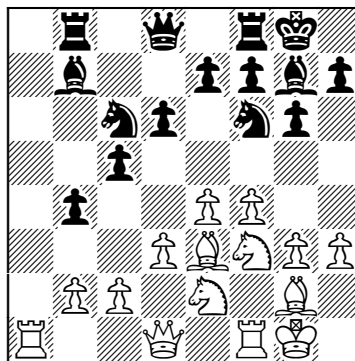


Diagram 10 (W)
White will advance on the kingside

when Black was very solid, but White enjoyed still enjoyed some kingside prospects.

12 axb4 axb4 13 Ne2 Bb7 (**Diagram 10**)

Black could also have transposed to our last note with 13...Nd7 14 Rb1 Bb7, but an immediate 13...Bb7 was Geller's choice against Spassky and is examined in Game 16.

Theoretical?

As with much of the Closed Sicilian, White can get by solely against 6...Nf6 with a good understanding of the key ideas for both sides. However, if he wishes to follow Spassky-Geller with 10 a3, then White may wish to undertake a little more specific preparation as that has been extensively analyzed of late by Kasparov.

Statistics

Black has scored 47% from 980 games with 6...Nf6; a move which is either played because Black is confident in his defensive technique or due to ignorance, at lower levels, of the more harmonious option of development with 6...e6 and 7...Nge7. White shouldn't though overestimate his attacking chances and must not get carried away rapidly advancing on the kingside as his score drops to 50%, from 48 games, following 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 Rb8 9 h3 b5 10 a3.

Illustrative Games

Game 15

□ N.Davies ■ I.Ivanov

Lloyds Bank Open, London 1992

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 Nf6 6 f4 d6 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 Rb8
9 h3 b5 10 g4 (Diagram 11)

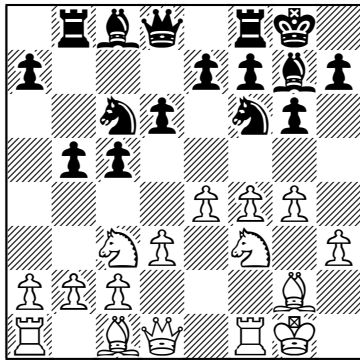


Diagram 11 (B)
White omits a3

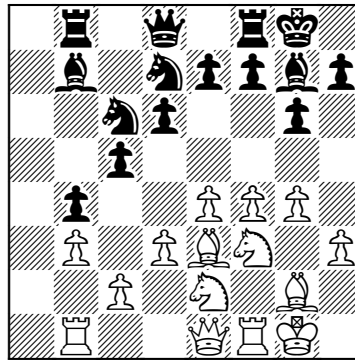


Diagram 12 (B)
The queen heads for h4

10...b4

Continuing on the queenside, although Black has also experimented with other plans:

a) 10...c4 aims to immediately open lines, but the opening of the c-file isn't at all problematic for White and indeed he may even be able to make good use of it. N.Short-Zhang Pengxiang, Beijing (rapid) 2003 continued 11 Be3 Bb7 12 a3! cxd3 13 cxd3 when White had a small edge. He wasn't even phased by 13...d5 as 14 Bf2 kept control and 14...d4?! 15 Ne2 Ne8 16 Rc1 e5?! 17 Rxc6! Bxc6 18 Nxe5 Ba8 19 Nxd4 was a strong exchange sacrifice to obliterate the black centre and maintain White's control over the position.

b) 10...Nd7 hopes for a premature f5 when again a black knight will happily sink itself into e5. Instead White should build up more slowly and 11 Ne2! Nd4 12 c3 Nxf3+ 13 Bxf3 b4 14 c4! e6 15 Ng3 favoured White, who was well massed on the kingside, while Black lacked counterplay in G.Giorgadze-R.Vaganian, Tilburg 1994.

11 Ne2 Ne8?!

Ivanov wants to concentrate both his knights on d4. Such a plan is positionally well motivated, but is rather time consuming and also risks leaving the black

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kingside under-defended. Black preferred to press ahead on the kingside in M.Al Modiahki-R.Ponomariov, FIDE World Ch., Las Vegas 1999 with 11...a5 12 Be3 Nd7 13 Rb1 a4 when White first held up Black on the queenside and then struck ahead on the queenside with 14 b3! axb3 15 axb3 Bb7 16 Qe1 (**Diagram 12**), intending Qh4 and f5. Ponomariov decided that he had to prevent that with 16...e6! when the position was rather complex as Al Modiahki logically responded with 17 f5!.



NOTE: Bh6 doesn't have to be prefaced by Qd2 and f5, and White often does better to implement his plan with Qe1-h4.

12 f5!

With Black only covering e5 with the one knight, this advance gains in strength, while it also prevents the e8-knight from emerging on e6.

12...Nc7 13 Qe1

Davies soon has both his knights exchanged off and should White wish to avoid such a scenario, Ravikumar's suggestion of 13 Ng3!? deserves attention. That reminds us that Qe1-h4, Bh6 and Ng5 isn't White's only attacking plan as g5 and h4-h5 is also possible.

13...Nb5 14 Qh4 Nbd4 15 Nexd4 Nxd4 16 Nxd4

White later preferred the more direct 16 Bh6!? when 16...Nxc2? 17 Ng5! is crushing. Black might hope that 17...f6 18 Bxg7 fxe5 saves him, but 19 Qh6 Rf7 20 fxe6 Rg7 21 Rf7+! actually leaves Black defenceless and losing his queen after 21...Rxf7 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Rf1+ Ke8 24 Rf8+. Instead 16...f6 17 Nxd4 cxd4 18 g5! (**Diagram 13**) saw White maintain a powerful attack in A.Rodriguez-J.Seminara, Buenos Aires 1998 and 18...Qe8 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Qf2! gxf5 21 exf5 fxe5 22 Qxd4+ Rf6 23 Rae1 kept up the strong pressure. Also, 16...Nxf3+ 17 Rxf3 Bxb2 is another risky pawn grab which rather backfires after 18 Raf1 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Bg7?! 20 fxe6 hxe6 21 g5!, intending to bring the queen to f6 and to follow up with Rf4-h4 or with Rf6 and h4-h5.

16...Bxd4+ 17 Kh1 Bb7 18 Rb1

By exchanging off all the knights, Ivanov has beaten off the first wave of the attack. However, the beauty of White's attacking set-up is that his extra kingside space remains and it isn't long before the reinforcements arrive with some effect on the kingside.

18...a5 19 Bh6 Qc7! (Diagram 14)

The best practical try as Ivanov ditches the exchange, but retains his strong dark-squared bishop and is no longer about to be mated on the kingside. Had the f8-rook moved, White would have had the strong and simple plan of exchanging on g6 and then doubling on the f-file. The white attack really can appear just to play itself at times!

20 Bxf8 Rxf8 21 Qe1 Rd8 22 Qd2!

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

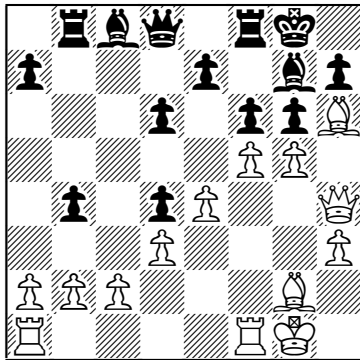


Diagram 13 (B)
A strong attack

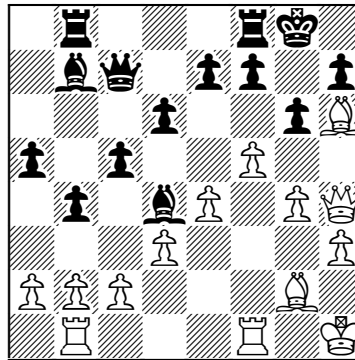


Diagram 14 (W)
Black's has to give up the exchange



TIP: Davies' queen was earlier well placed on h4, but with the attack over for the time being, she was doing little on the kingside. Thus he brings her back into the heart of the position and creates the possibility of c3. Always try to improve your worst-placed piece!

22...Bg7 23 g5 Be5 24 Qf2 Bd4 25 Qf3 Rf8 26 h4!

Despite his exchange sacrifice, Ivanov still hasn't gained any counterplay and so White presses ahead on the kingside.

26...f6!

Just in time before he is crushed, Ivanov wakes up and begins to pose practical difficulties by mixing up the position.

27 Qg4 Qd7 28 Bh3! d5! (Diagram 15) 29 Bg2?!

White panics in the face of a strong black bishop-pair and about the counterplay down the diagonal. However, he could have exchanged the queens as 29 fxe6! Qxe6 30 Bxe6 dxe6 31 gxh7+ Kg7 32 Kh2! runs the king up to h3 and maintains White's large advantage.

29...dxe4 30 Bxe4?!

The exchange of bishops was tempting but does serve to highlight the lack of pawn cover around the white monarch and so 30 dxe4 should have been preferred.

30...fxg5 31 Qxg5 Kh8 32 Qg2 Bxe4 33 dxe4 Rg8 34 fxg6 Rxe6 35 Rf8+ Kg7 36 Qf3 Bf6

Ivanov has managed to get right back into the game as move 40 looms, while his strong dark-squared bishop remains. The white rook is dangerously placed

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on the eighth rank, but Black has just enough time to seize the initiative and to generate some threats of his own.

37 Ra8 Qd2! 38 e5 Qd4!

Cool and impressive defence as it turns out that the advance of the e-pawn wasn't decisive but actually just leads to a sharp perpetual.

39 exf6+ Kh6 40 Kh2 Rxf6 (Diagram 16) 41 Qg3 Qd2+ 42 Kh3

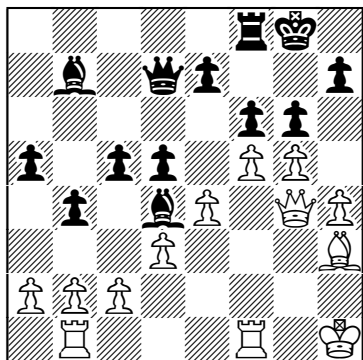


Diagram 15 (W)

Black gains some counterplay

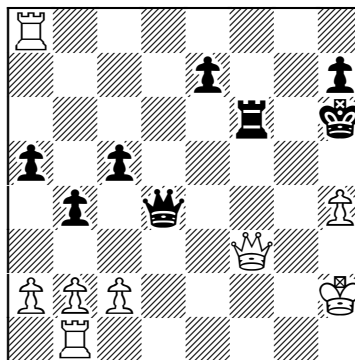


Diagram 16 (W)

Now Black has an attack

With his rooks stranded somewhat offside, White has no option whatsoever but to acquiesce to the draw.

42...Qd7+ 43 Kh2 Qd2+ 44 Kh3 ½-½

Game 16

□ **B.Spassky** ■ **E.Geller**

6th matchgame, Suhumi 1968

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 g6 5 d3 Bg7 6 f4 Nf6 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 Rb8 9 h3 b5 10 a3 a5 11 Be3 b4 12 axb4 axb4 13 Ne2 Bb7 14 b3! (Diagram 17)

Improving over the fourth matchgame as the a1-rook can come straight to c1 to cover c2. There Spassky had employed 14 Qd2 Ra8 15 Rab1 when Black could have employed a suggestion of the Dutch IM and theoretician, Karel van der Weide, with 15...Ra2, intending ...Qc7 and ...Rfa8. From c7 the queen helps to prevent any e5-advance, while Black still hopes that he will be able to pressurise c2, after b3, with a timely ...Nd4. Instead Geller misplaced his queen with 15...Qa5, although after 16 b3 Rfc8 17 f5 (**Diagram 18**) his position would still have been perfectly acceptable had he returned the queen to the defence with Kasparov's suggestion of 17...Qd8, intending 18 e5?! Nd5!. Geller actually continued to drift a little with 17...Qb6 18 g4 Ra2 19 Nc1 Ra5 20 Qf2! Qc7?! 21 Ne2 Ra2 22 Rbc1 Qd8 23 Nf4 Qe8 when 24 Qh4 would have placed

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

Black under a fair amount of pressure, whereas 24 Ng5? Nd4! gave Black strong counterplay.

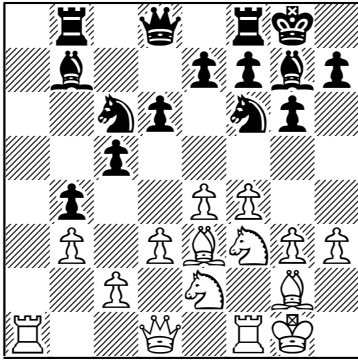


Diagram 17 (B)
Holding Black up

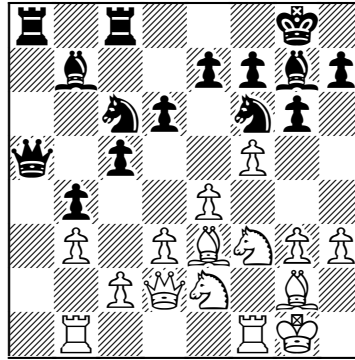


Diagram 18 (B)
Black should retreat his queen

14...Ra8 15 Rc1 Ra2 16 g4 Qa8?!

In the fourth game, Spassky's kingside pressure eventually told as Geller was unable to withstand it, even when he reached an objectively winning position. In this sixth game, Spassky didn't need any such fortune, although once again we find Geller leaving his queen a long way from with his kingside. Thus it is here where Black has sought improvements and 16...Qc7! (**Diagram 19**) keeps the queen in touch with the kingside and offers Black two ways to gain counterplay after 17 Qe1:

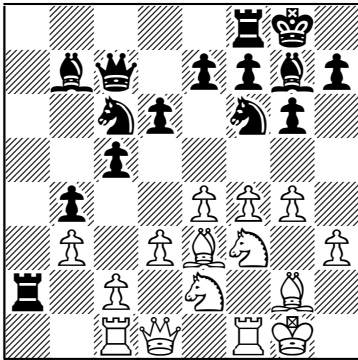


Diagram 19 (W)
A complex struggle beckons

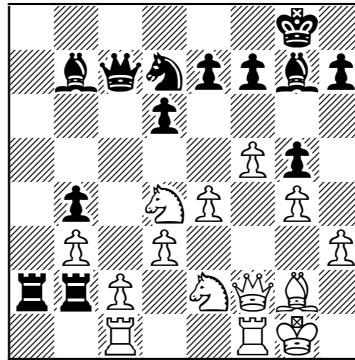


Diagram 20 (W)
Black has good compensation

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

a) 17...Nd7?! is a fairly common idea in such positions, but the knight is actually performing a useful defensive function on f6. White can't shift it with e5 and is also loath to play g5 as that obstructs attacking lines. Instead he will usually angle for an exchange sacrifice on f6, but that is still several moves away. The other downside to 17...Nd7 is that 18 Qh4 Nd4 is none too convincing due to simply 19 Nxd4 cxd4 20 Nxd4! e5 21 Nf3 exf4 (Black's problem is that 21...Rxc2? 22 Qe7! is rather hard to meet) 22 Bxf4 Ne5 23 Ne1 and White had won a pawn and maintained control in S.Marjanovic-R.Hernandez, Vrsac 1977.



NOTE: Black could have tried to regain his pawn with 20...Bxd4? 21 Bxd4 Rxc2, but giving up his dark-squared bishop usually leaves his kingside fatally exposed.

Here Black is in trouble not just down the a1-h8 diagonal, but also because his pawns are dropping off after 22 Rxc2 Qxc2 23 Qxe7.

b) 17...Rfa8 18 f5 Rb2 is much better when 19 Nf4 Raa2 20 Qf2 Nd4! 21 Bxd4 cxd4 22 Nxd4 g5! 23 Nfe2 Nd7 (**Diagram 20**) was an excellent pawn sacrifice in D.Reinderman-K.Van der Weide, Dutch Ch., Rotterdam 1998. At a stroke Black was able to safeguard his kingside, leaving himself with strong pressure and good play on the dark squares. The more direct 19 fxg6 (19 Qf2!?, covering d4 and not rushing on the kingside, may well be best) 19...hxg6 20 Qh4 was preferred in P.Helbig-R.Palliser, British League 2005, but after 20...Raa2 White had to defend c2 as 21 Ng5?! Rxc2 22 Rxc2 Rxc2 23 Nf4 should have been rather unconvincing after 23...Nd8!, covering all the key squares. Instead I buckled under the pressure, producing the inexplicable 23...Ne5?? which was deservedly punished by 24 Nfe6! fxe6 25 Rxf6! (**Diagram 21**) when 25...Bh6! 26 Rxc6+ Nxc6 27 Qxh6 Nf8 28 Nxe6? Nxe6 29 Qxe6+ Kf8 saw the black king run away, and Black even went on to win a sharp race situation, but 28 Qh5 Qd8 29 Qf7+ Kh8 30 Nf3! would have been all over.

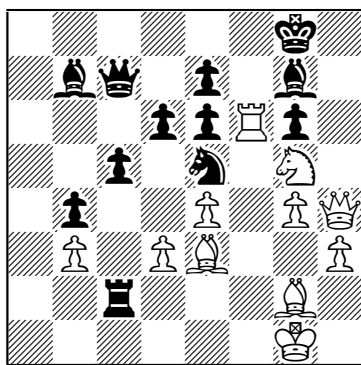


Diagram 21 (B)

A thematic breakthrough

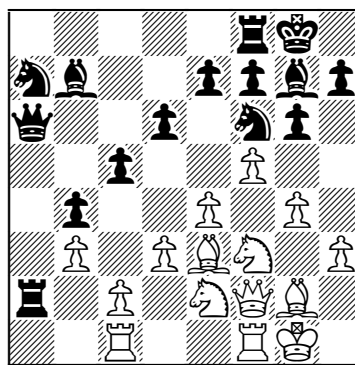


Diagram 22 (B)

White begins his direct assault

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

17 Qe1 Qa6 18 Qf2!

Superior to going to h4 as White first offers some support to the c2 and d4 squares. Spassky wants to quickly open the f-file and only then will his queen go to h4 with some effect.

18...Na7?! 19 f5! (Diagram 22) 19...Nb5 20 fxg6 hxg6?

Geller has already wasted too much time, but now a rather nasty exchange sacrifice on f6 looms. Instead he had to be prepared to weaken e6 to activate his rook with 20...fxg6!, leaving himself with some defensive chances. Spassky would then have had the choice, according to Kasparov, between the dangerous and sacrificial 21 Qh4 Nc7 22 Ng5 h6 23 Nf4! hxg5 24 Qxg5 Nh7 25 Qxg6 Rf6 26 Qh5 and the more positional 21 Nf4!? Bc8 22 e5 dxe5 23 Nxe5.

21 Ng5! Na3

The black knight finally reaches its destination, but any counterplay against c2 is rather a case of too little, too late.

22 Qh4



TIP: The white set-up with the queen on h4, knight on g5 and rook on a half-open f-file is a pretty effective one.

Geller now has no good defence to the imminent destruction of his kingside and neither would 22...Re8 have saved Black due to 23 e5! dxe5 24 Rxf6 exf6 25 Qh7+ Kf8 26 Bxc5+.

22...Rc8 23 Rxf6! (Diagram 23)

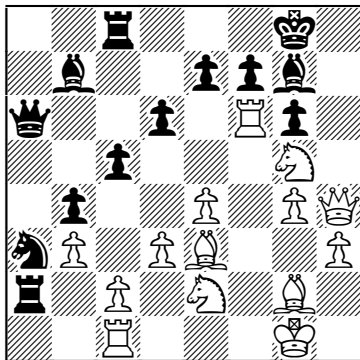


Diagram 23 (B)

Removing a key defender

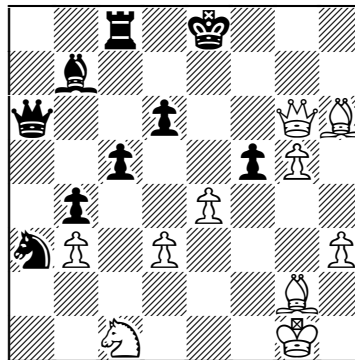


Diagram 24 (B)

Black is routed

23...exf6 24 Qh7+ Kf8 25 Nxf7!

Crashing through in style and ending any hopes Geller may have had of saving the game.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

25...Rxc2?!

Facing his third defeat in a row against the Closed Sicilian, Geller collapses. He had to try 25...Kxf7, although 26 Bh6 Rg8 27 Nf4 Rxc2 28 Rf1! (Lane) would still have left White, after inviting some more pieces to the party, with a winning attack.

26 Bh6! Rxc1+ 27 Nxc1 Kxf7

Now it's all over, but so too would have been 27...Bxh6 28 Nxh6 Ke8 29 Ng8 when White demonstrates the attacking power of the legendary queen and knight tandem.

28 Qxg7+ Ke8 29 g5 f5 30 Qxg6+ (Diagram 24) 30...Kd7 31 Qf7+ Kc6 32 exf5+ 1-0

A crushing victory and one which further confirmed that the Closed Sicilian was an excellent choice for Spassky in this match. Geller, like many Sicilian players, was happy to calculate in sharp Open Sicilian positions, but proved much less adept at handling the less forcing nature of play in the Closed.

Black Plays 6...e5

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e5 (Diagram 25)

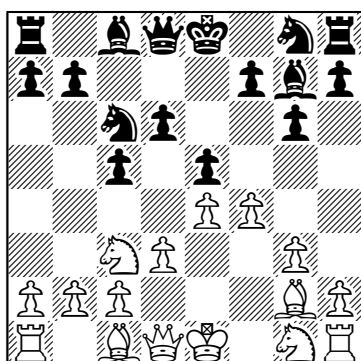


Diagram 25 (W)

Black chooses a Botvinnik set-up

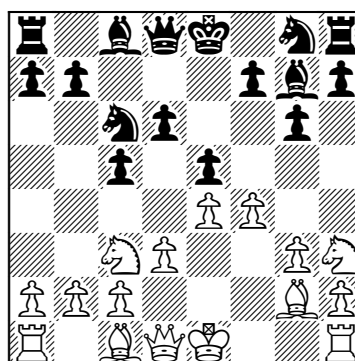


Diagram 26 (B)

White doesn't obstruct the f-file

A Risky Concept

With 6...e5, Black wants to challenge in the centre which is understandable enough, but he risks paying insufficient attention to the further advance of the white f-pawn. That is often played as a strong sacrifice and, although Black does have some defensive resources, even some rather strong grandmasters

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

have been blown away by it. At club level, White should be looking forward to seeing 6...e5 when he has good chances of quickly seizing a large advantage or a strong initiative on the kingside.

7 Nh3! (Diagram 26)

The key move as after castling, the white rook will support the f5-advance. Furthermore, the knight is far from badly placed on h3 and will often participate with some effect in any attack from g5 or with Nf2-g4. 7 Nf3 isn't, however, a bad alternative, although 7...Nge7 often leads to a fairly heavy manoeuvring struggle after 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Qd2. We will deal with this position in Chapter Three (via 6 Be3 e5 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 f4 Nd4 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0) as it more commonly arises these days via that move-order. That is because the majority of 6 f4 aficionados prefer not to block the f-file, although White can also sacrifice his f-pawn with 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 f5!?, when the king's knight will go to h4 as we'll see in Game 17.



NOTE: Sacrificing the f-pawn is White's main aim in this variation. That opens the f-file, splits the black kingside and enables White to target the black king.

7...Nge7

If Black wishes to make any sense from his choice of sixth move and not suffer on the kingside, the solid 7...exf4 should be preferred. That may appear a little unusual as the h3-knight can recapture, but after 8 Nxf4 Nge7 9 0-0 0-0 White's outpost on d5 is balanced out by Black's control over e5 and the opened up g7-bishop. Black is quite solid here and will gain queenside counterplay, with Y.Balashov-A.Kharlov, Russian Team Ch. 2001 being fairly level after 10 Be3 Rb8 11 Qd2 b5 (Diagram 27)

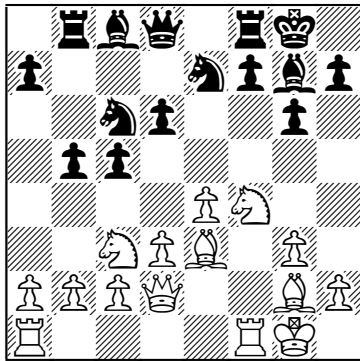


Diagram 27 (W)
d5 and e5 balance out

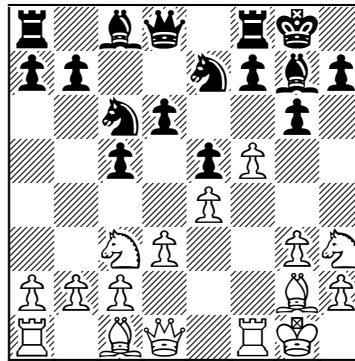


Diagram 28 (B)
A strong sacrifice

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

12 a3 a5 13 h3 b4 14 axb4 axb4 15 Nd1 Nd4. More testing is 8 Bxf4! when Black will have to weaken his kingside with the 8...Nge7 9 0-0 h6! of Game 18 to avoid having his powerful bishop exchanged by Qd2 and Bh6.

8 0-0 0-0?!

This is rather a case of castling into it and so Black should prefer to transpose into our last note with 8...exf4 9 Bxf4 (but not 9 gxf4?! f5!) 9...h6 or try the critical 8...Nd4!?. Game 19 examines the consistent 9 f5!? in response, although White can also prefer the prophylactic 9 Rf2, preparing to double on the f-file while usefully covering c2. That plan worked well after 9...h6?! 10 Be3 exf4 11 Nxf4! 0-0 12 Qd2 f5 13 Raf1 Kh7 14 Ncd5 when White enjoyed a pleasant edge in B.Spasky-J.Timman, Buenos Aires Olympiad 1978. Black should thus prefer 9...exf4 or just 9...0-0 when White doesn't really have a good alternative to the f5-advance as was shown by A.Kneutgen-M.Grunberg, Oberwart 2004 in which 10 Be3 b5 11 fxe5 dxe5 12 Qd2 Bg4! 13 Raf1 b4 14 Nd1 Qd7 was very comfortable for Black. However, after 10 f5!? gxf5 11 Qh5 f6 12 exf5 (S.Lorenz-M.Glienke, 2nd Bundesliga 1989) Black has to try 12...Bxf5!, intending 13...Bg6. White doesn't really want to allow Black to bolster his defences like that, but 13 Rxf5 Ndx5 14 g4 (14 Be4 Qe8! forces the white queen to retreat) 14...Nd4 15 Nd5, while still offering some practical chances, doesn't appear fully convincing, partly because White has lost a tempo with his rook.

9 f5! (Diagram 28) 9...f6

A common response as Black doesn't want to open his own kingside by capturing on f5, but 9...gxf5 is his best practical try as Game 20 reveals. 9...f6 simply grants White a free hand on the kingside, leaving Black lacking counterplay and unable to mix things up at all.

10 g4 g5?!

Further compounding the error as White will arrange to break with h4 at his leisure. However, Black has tended to suffer on the kingside in any case, although his alternatives at least force White to play a little more accurately and creatively:

a) 10...Nd4!? 11 Be3 Bd7 12 Nf2 Bc6 13 Ne2! saw White correctly not worry about ...d5 in V.Saravanan-P.Thipsay, Guntur 2000 as even that will not bring Black sufficient counterplay. After 13...d5 14 Ng3 b6 15 h4! dxe4 16 Nfxe4 gxf5!? 17 gxf5 Nd5 18 Bd2, White had instructively managed to play around the d4-knight and his kingside chances remained more important than Black's central piece gathering.

b) 10...Rb8 11 a4 maintains control over the position when Black again desperately tried to block the kingside with 11...Bd7 12 Kh1 g5 in N.Short-Zhu Chen, Dubai (rapid) 2002. Rather than arrange h4, Short preferred to immediately blast open the black kingside with 13 Nxg5!? f5 14 Bxg5 which was a strong piece sacrifice. After 14...h6 15 Bh4 Bf6 16 Bxf6 Rxf6 17 h4, White's advancing kingside duo supply excellent compensation, and they also did in the game after 14...Bf6 15 Bh6 Bg7 16 Be3 (**Diagram 29**)

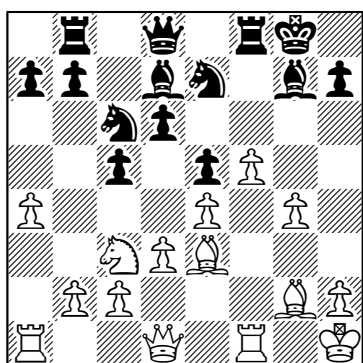


Diagram 29 (B)
A promising sacrifice

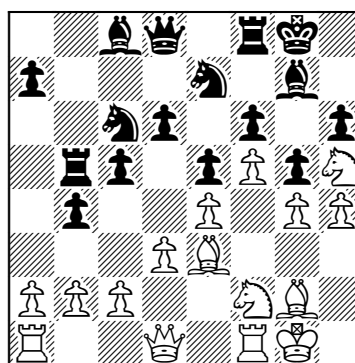


Diagram 30 (B)
Levering open the kingside

16...Nd4 17 g5. Still lacking any counterplay, Black desperately tried 17...Nxf5!?, but White remained much better after 18 exf5 Nxf5 19 Bd2 Bc6 20 Nd5.



TIP: With Black lacking counterplay, a piece sacrifice on g5 is often an effective weapon. White destroys the black kingside and is left with two very useful and mobile kingside pawns of his own.

11 Nf2

It is also possible to sacrifice on g5, but White sees no need to do so, having plenty of time to arrange his forces on the kingside before deciding how to break through.

11...Rb8 12 Be3 b5 13 Ne2!

Black should really have tried ...Nd4 to be able to exchange this knight which now imperiously leaps all the way to the commanding h5-outpost.

13...b4 14 Ng3 Rb5 15 Nh5 h6 16 h4! (Diagram 30)

Having brought the queen's knight over and into the attack, White began to increase the pressure in A.Collinson-E.Sakhatova, Oakham 1993. Collinson was hoping that Black would split her queenside by capturing on h4 when Nh3 and Qe1 regains the pawn, leaving White with excellent attacking prospects. However, White enjoys those in any case as a piece sacrifice on g5 looms, after an exchange of pawns there, when the black king won't even have an h-pawn to hide behind. Not only is White then left with two monster f- and g-pawns, but his extra kingside space enables his pieces to quickly and efficiently support their advance, whereas Black is left rather cramped and suffering.

Theoretical?

White's play following an f5-advance is pretty thematic and his attack often flows very effectively. Thus there isn't any real need to learn any theory here, and at club level Black rarely allows f5 intentionally. Instead he believes he is simply completing his development with 6...e5, 7...Nge7 and 8...0-0 when 9 f5 can come as a nasty surprise. However, at higher levels brave black players may prepare for 6...e5 7 Nh3 Nge7 8 f4 Nd4 9 f5 when Black does have his defensive resources, and White may wish to ensure in advance that he is happy with this version of the sacrifice. It is a fun position to analyze and White certainly has at least promising practical compensation.

Statistics

Black's most popular response to 7 Nh3 has been 7...Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 when White has unsurprisingly made a promising 60% from just over 100 games with 9 f5. However, 8...Nd4 9 f5 has also done very well in practice, scoring 69% if only from 31 games. Black might thus prefer the solid 7...exf4, although White can still be happy with his 56% from 44 games with 8 Bxf4 Nge7 9 0-0.

Illustrative Games

Game 17

□ C.Marzolo ■ I.Cosma

Chambery 2002

1 e4 c5 2 d3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 Nc6 5 f4 d6 6 Nf3 e5 7 0-0 Nge7 8 Nc3 0-0
9 f5 gxf5

Critical and best as the struggles revolves around the battle for the key f5-square.

10 Nh4 (Diagram 31) 10...Nd4

Bringing the knight to its favourite square, while adding support to f5. Black may, however, also be able to get away with the greedy 10...fxe4 11 dxe4 so long as he then defends accurately:

a) 11...Nd4?! 12 Nd5! Nxd5 13 exd5 leaves the d4-knight looking a little misplaced as White gains control over f5 due to 13...f5? 14 c3 Nb5 15 Qh5! (King). Black tried 13...Bf6 in B.Tiller-L.Ftacnik, British League 2000 when there wasn't anything wrong with 14 c3, but Tiller preferred the very aggressive 14 Bh6!? Re8 15 Be4! Bxh4 16 Qh5 f5 17 gxh4 Kh8 18 Bg5, gaining dangerous kingside pressure.

b) 11...f6! is the prudent choice when White hopes to gain a bind on the light squares as he did in T.Markowski-I.Smirin, European Ch., Saint Vincent 2000 after 12 Nf5 Bxf5 13 exf5 Kh8 14 Nd5 (**Diagram 32**) 14...Nxd5?! 15 Bxd5 Qb6 16 c4! Ne7 17 Be6. Black improved with 14...Qd7!? 15 c3 Rad8 in B.Bujisho-

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

E.Bacrot, French Team Ch. 2004, cleverly delaying the exchange on d5 and forcing White to commit his pieces. Here 16 g4!? deserves attention as 16 Qh5 Qe8 17 Qh3 Nxd5 18 Bxd5 Ne7 19 Be6 d5 20 g4 Rd6! saw the French number one prepare a strong exchange sacrifice; reducing White's attacking chances and leaving Black with a strong centre.

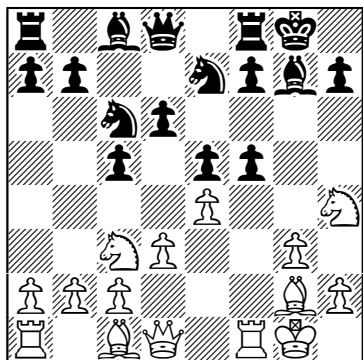


Diagram 31 (B)
The knight heads for f5

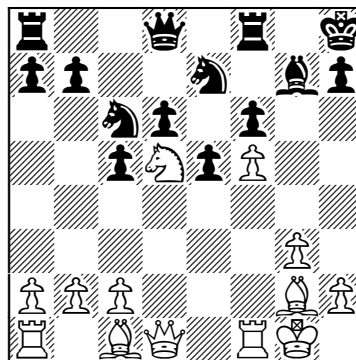


Diagram 32 (B)
Light-squared pressure

Some Black players have instead adopted the principle that a good way to reduce any pressure is to return the extra pawn. That is all very well in general, but specifics are also important and here 10...f4 11 gxf4 Ng6 12 Nf5! Bxf5 13 exf5 Nxf4 14 Bxf4 exf4 15 Qh5 still gave White good prospects on the kingside in A.Kogan-J.Reeve, Montreal 2000.

11 Nd5

As we have already seen, the Norwegian international master, Bjorn Tiller, is a leading practitioner of this particular form of the f5 pawn sacrifice. Instead of 11 Nd5, he has preferred 11 Bg5!? (**Diagram 33**) when White must be happy to continue a pawn or two in arrears, but with some compensation on the kingside:

a) 11...f4!? 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Qh5 Nxc2 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Rac1 Ne3 16 Nxe3 fxe3 17 Rce1 Be6 18 Rxe3 may not look too impressive, but was a good example of White's slow-burning compensation in B.Tiller-V.Ikonnikov, Ghent 2002. Many black players have underestimated White's kingside play at their cost, and Ikonnikov's attempt to tuck his king away and rely on his dark-squared bishop for defence didn't impress after 18...Kh8? 19 g4! h6 20 Rh3 (**Diagram 34**). Black failed to save himself by ditching the exchange with 20...f6 as he still continued to suffer on the light squares, but 20...Kg8 21 Nf5 Bxf5 22 exf5 would have been even worse for him as 22...Qf6 is met by the crushing 23 g5! Qxg5 24 Qxg5 hxg5 25 f6 Bh8 26 Rf5.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

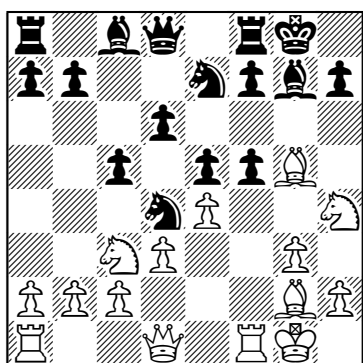


Diagram 33 (B)
Tiller's preference

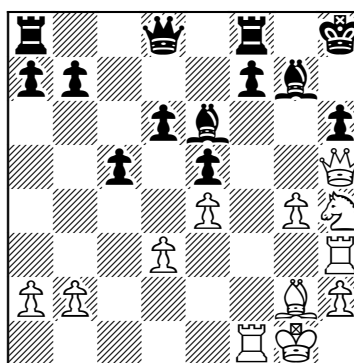


Diagram 34 (B)
A very strong attack

b) 11...f6 12 Be3 fxe4 13 dxe4 Be6 14 Nd5 Ndc6, but not 14...f5? 15 Bg5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Bf6 17 Bxf6 Rxf6 18 c3 Nb5 19 Be4! when f5 falls, saw Black treat White's concept with some respect in B.Tiller-D.Wise, British League 2001. This position clearly has many similarities to 10...fxe4 11 dxe4 f6 and again it was hard to break down the black defences as 15 Nf5 Nxf5 16 exf5 Bf7! revealed. 17 Qg4! Kh8 18 Rad1 is though a good try, rather than the overly ambitious 17 g4 Ne7 18 h4 Qd7 19 g5?! Nxd5! 20 Bxd5 Bxd5 21 Qxd5+ Kh8 when f5 was a little tender in the game.

11...Nxd5 12 exd5 f4! (Diagram 35)

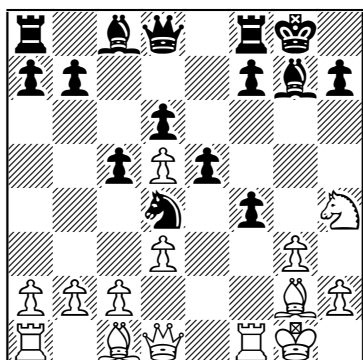


Diagram 35 (W)
Wisely returning the pawn

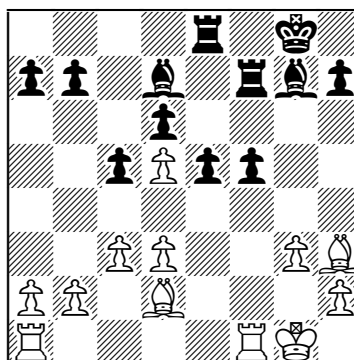


Diagram 36 (W)
Dynamic equality

Just in time before the white queen reaches h5 as Cosma exploits White's in-

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

ability to capture on f4.

13 c3

The only effective response, but now Black can instigate exchanges and so those wanting a full-blooded struggle should prefer to follow Tiller's lead with 11 Bg5!?.

13...f3 14 Nxf3 Nxf3+ 15 Qxf3 Bd7 16 Qh5 f5 17 Bh3 Qe8!

Ensuring that f5 is defended and, as 18 Qe2 Qg6 would be rather comfortable for Black, Marzolo decides that he must really exchange the queens. After that a draw becomes likely as Black can't really advance his e- or f-pawns, but neither can White effectively increase the pressure against f5.

18 Qxe8 Raxe8 19 Bd2 Rf7 (Diagram 36) 20 Rf2 Ref8 ½-½

Game 18

□ **B.Spassky** ■ **L.Portisch**

13th matchgame, Geneva 1977

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e5 7 Nh3 exf4 8 Bxf4 Nge7 9 0-0 h6!

Cutting across White's plans, whereas 9...0-0 10 Qd2 (Diagram 37)

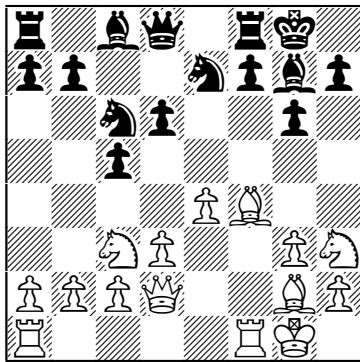


Diagram 37 (B)
Preparing Bh6

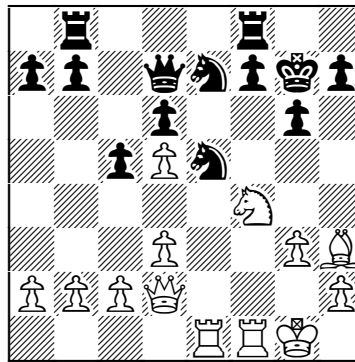


Diagram 38 (B)
Exploiting the extra bishop

should grant White a good game:

a) 10...b6 11 Bh6 Nd4 12 Rf2 Bb7 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Nf4 Ne6 15 Raf1 saw White construct an ideal kingside build-up in A.Shchekachev-V.Mezentsev, Russian Ch., Orel 1992 before Shchekachev made good use of his light-squared bishop with 15...Nxf4 16 Rxf4 Qd7?! 17 Bh3!, intending 17...Qxh3 18 Rh4, and 17...Qe8 18 Be6! began to decisively prise open the black defences.

b) 10...Nd4 brings the c6-knight to its favourite square, but the e7-knight must

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

remain on e7 to cover d5. White exploited Black's lack of control over e5 with 11 Rae1! in L.Day-G.Antunac, Wijk aan Zee 1970 and was rewarded with a promising position and good attacking chances after 11...Rb8 12 e5 dxe5 13 Bxe5 Bxe5 14 Rxe5 Qd6 15 Ree1.

c) 10...Bg4 11 Bh6 Qd7 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 Nf4 Be6 prevents White from installing a knight on d5, just as Black aims to after 8 Nxf4. However, here the dark-squared bishops have been exchanged and thus the black kingside has been weakened. White instructively exploited his edge in Z.Hracek-J.Beran, Czech Team Ch. 1989 with 14 Rae1 Rab8 15 Ncd5! Bxd5 16 exd5 when he was happy to be left with a pawn on d5 as 16...Ne5 17 Bh3 (**Diagram 38**) activated his bishop with some effect and 17...Qc7 18 Qc3!, preparing d4 and then Nd3, left Black under pressure down the long diagonal, especially after 18...b5? 19 b4!.



TIP: Black's defences are not so easy to break down even after the exchange of dark-squared bishops, and activating the g2-bishop is often the key to increasing White's small advantage.

10 Rb1!?

Black's last was directed against the plan of Qd2 and Bh6, and so Spassky sees no need for 10 Qd2. That would prevent Black from immediately castling, but 10...g5 (or 10...Be6 11 Be3 g5 12 Nd5 Qd7 13 Nf2 Ne5 14 Qe2 0-0 and Black was fine due to his strong e5-knight in D.Larino Nieto-A.Veingold, Don Benito 2004) 11 Be3 Ne5 12 Nf2 0-0 saw Black get his king to safety and was dynamically equal in J.Hodgson-S.Kudrin, Hastings 1986/87.

10...0-0 11 a3! (**Diagram 39**)

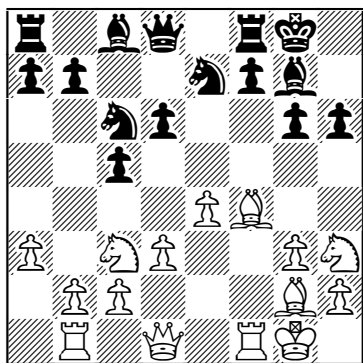


Diagram 39 (B)

White prepares for ...b5

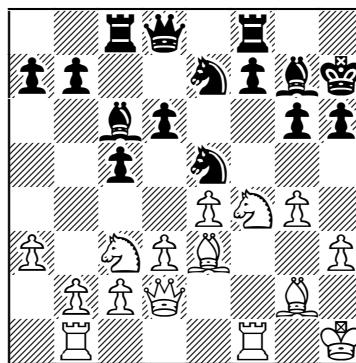


Diagram 40 (B)

Pushing forwards on the kingside

Continuing to feign a queenside advance and thus giving Portisch something to think about. White's chances in this sort of position lie on the kingside, but

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

Spassky's last two moves have been far from wasted: he can now improve his c3-knight and has already taken much of the sting out of any ...b5 advance.

11...Be6 12 Be3

That the bishop has had to move again may suggest that this position is not especially promising for White. Black may be close to equality, but there is no doubt that the white position is the easier to play. Compared to 8 Nxf4, Black has had to slightly weaken his kingside with ...h6 and Spassky now supplies a master class in how to gradually exploit that.

12...Ne5 13 Nf4 Bd7

The solid choice, although 13...Ng4!? was not so bad as 14 Bxc5 h5! gives Black some counterplay, such as with 15 Bf2 Nxf2 16 Kxf2 Qb6+. However, Portisch was probably right to steer clear of this because of 14 Nxe6! Nxe3 15 Nxd8 Nxd1 16 Nxb7 Bd4+ 17 Kh1 Nf2+ 18 Rxf2 Bxf2 19 Nxd6 when the knight will settle on c4 and White enjoys promising compensation for the exchange.

14 Kh1! Rc8 15 Qd2 Kh7 16 h3 Bc6 17 g4! (Diagram 40)

Seizing space as Spassky begins to build up his forces on the kingside. Portisch though cannot break with ...d5 and is left struggling a little for counterplay.

17...Qd7 18 Rf2 b6

Correctly not rushing with 18...b5?! when the prophylactic Rb1 and a3 would have been felt after 19 b4!, not only holding Black up on the queenside but also leaving him under some pressure on that flank.



NOTE: a3 and Rb1 is a plan Spassky likes to employ and it remains a good one. Many Black players rush ahead with ...b5, failing to take into account the counter-advance b4!.

19 Rbf1 Bb7 20 Qe2 Rce8?!

Too slow and Black should have seized the chance to at least gain some counterplay, now that the c3-knight isn't defended by the queen, with 20...b5!.

21 Bc1!

Instructive manoeuvring as White enables his queen to take up a more attacking post on g3.

21...Kg8 22 Qe3 b5 23 Qg3 b4?!

Black fails to gain sufficient play after this slightly panicky and premature advance. Instead 23...a5 was called for, although after 24 Ncd5! Nxd5 25 Nxd5 Bxd5 26 exd5 (King) White retains the edge and will aim to force further kingside weaknesses with Qh4.

24 axb4 cxb4 25 Nd1 d5 26 d4! N5c6 27 exd5 Nxd4 28 c4! (Diagram 41)

Quite possibly this was underestimated by Portisch as White defends d5 and takes over the initiative.

28...bxc3 29 bxc3 Nb3

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

This has been criticized, but 29...Rc8 is certainly no improvement due to 30 Bb2 Nb5 31 c4!, finally forcing the favourable exchange of dark-squared bishops.

30 Ba3 Rc8?

This fails to halt White's central expansion and 30...Ba6 was a much better try when the game continues as 31 c4? Bxc4 defends the b3-knight.

31 c4! Na5 32 Re2 Rfe8 33 Rfe1

33 Qe1! was even more efficient, but having secured a strong central advantage, Spassky is quick to exploit that to press ahead with his attack in any case.

33...Bf8?! 34 Nh5! (Diagram 42) 34...Nxd5

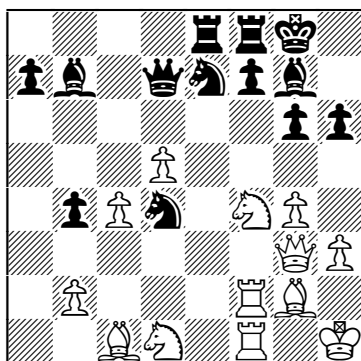


Diagram 41 (B)

Maintaining the important d5-pawn

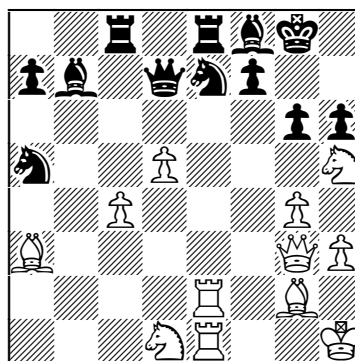


Diagram 42 (B)

Heralding the end

Desperation, but there was nothing better.

35 cxd5 gxh5 36 gxh5+ Bg7 37 Bb2 f6 38 Bxf6 Rxe2 39 Rxe2 Qf7 40 Re6!
1-0

Game 19

□ A.Rodriguez ■ A.Zuriel

Villa Martelli 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 d6 6 d3 e5 7 Nh3 Nge7 8 0-0
Nd4 9 f5 gxf5 (Diagram 43) 10 Bg5!?

A fairly rare idea, although creating a strong pin and the threat of 11 Nd5 is actually quite logical. White's main try has been 10 Qh5 when Black should avoid the greedy 10...Nxc2? due to 11 Ng5 and 11...Rf8 (or 11...Ng6 12 exf5) 12 Nxe7! Rh8 13 Bg5 Qc7 14 Rac1 Nd4 15 Bxe7 Qxe7 16 exf5 is very good for White as Black cannot exploit the pin down the h-file. Thus Black should prefer to cover g5 with 10...h6! when 11 Rf2 Be6 12 Be3 sees White prepare to

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

double rooks:

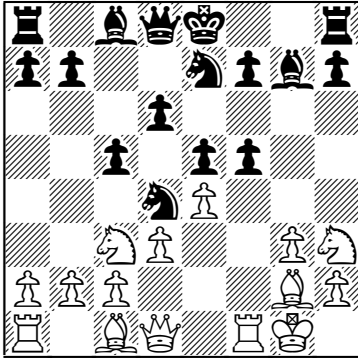


Diagram 43 (W)
A critical acceptance

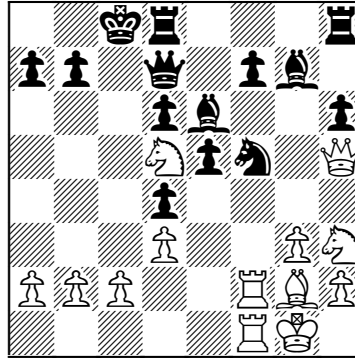


Diagram 44 (B)
White is much better

a) 12...Qd7 has been the traditional move, but 13 Raf1 0-0-0 14 Bxd4! cxd4 15 exf5 leaves Black in a fair amount of trouble and White brutally converted his pressure in I.Starostits-K.Kulaots, Riga 2002 with 15...Nxf5 16 Nd5 (**Diagram 44**) 16...Ne7?! (but neither did 16...Ne3 17 Rxf7 Nxd5 18 Rxd7 Rxd7 19 Qg6 Nc7 20 Nf2 give Black enough for the queen in S.Sale-L.Psakhis, Portoroz 1995) 17 Rxf7! Bf8 18 Ng5 Bxf7 19 Nxf7 Qb5 20 a4 and 1-0.

b) 12...Ng8! is an important novelty of Nataf's and the knight is en route to f6, driving the white queen backwards. 13 Bxd4 Nf6 (**Diagram 45**)

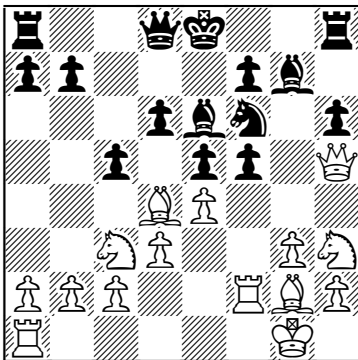


Diagram 45 (W)
A new and promising defence

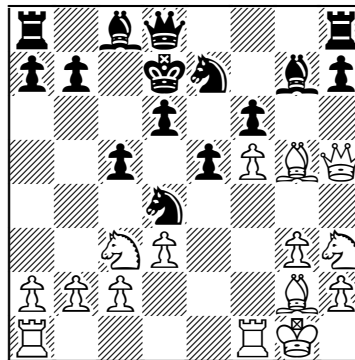


Diagram 46 (B)
Is the black king safe enough?

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

14 Qe2 cxd4 15 exf5 Bd7 16 Ne4 Bc6! saw Black contest the key diagonal, leaving him with a pretty reasonable position in I.Starostits-I.Nataf, Pardubice 2002. White should prefer the more challenging 16 Nd5!? and then not 16...Nxd5 17 Bxd5 Bf6! 18 Bxb7?! Rb8 19 Bd5 Rxb2 20 Bb3 h5! (Nataf) when Black has seized the initiative, but 18 Nf4!?, covering some key light squares and intending 18...Bc6 19 Qe4, followed by Nh5 with an unclear struggle in prospect.

White can also opt for the very aggressive 10 Ng5, although 10...h5! (10...h6 11 exf5 hxg5 12 f6 Bf8 13 fxe7 Bxe7 14 Nd5 f5 15 c3 Nc6 16 Qa4 gave White some compensation for his pawn in G.Welling-P.Jirovsky, Schaan 1999) 11 exf5 f6 12 Nge4 (12 Ne6 Nxe6 13 fxe6 d5 is also none too convincing for White) 12...Bxf5 13 Rf2 Rc8 left White struggling a little for compensation in L.Day-Y.Teplitsky, Toronto 1996 as 14 Qf1 is well met by 14...d5! 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Rxf5 Nxc2 (Day).

10...f6!

Black must break the pin and hope that his king will be sufficiently safe behind his central pawn mass.

11 Qh5+ Kd7 12 exf5 (Diagram 46) 12...Qe8

Driving the white queen backwards and keeping her out of f7, although Black can also try 12...Nxc2!? when 13 Rac1 Nd4 14 Ne4 Qf8 15 Be3 Nec6 was the logical continuation of J.Trapl-J.Pribyl, Czech Ch., Trinec 1972. Trapl maintained some compensation with 16 Nhf2, but Hort has suggested 16 Nhg5!? which should certainly be considered as 16...fxg5 17 f6 Bh6 18 h4 regains the piece and leaves White with a dangerous passed pawn on f6.

13 Qg4!?

Covering c2 due to the check on a4, whereas 13 Qd1 Kc7 14 Ne4 Rf8 15 Bd2 Bxf5 16 b4! b6 17 bxc5 dxc5 18 a4 gave White some, but objectively probably not quite enough, compensation in M.Dvoretzky-T.Giorgadze, Tbilisi 1973.

13...Qf7

Fighting for control of d5, but 13...h5!? 14 Qe4 Kc7 may well be more critical and the battleground for future tests of 10 Bg5!?. Here 15 Bd2 Rb8 prepares to develop Black's light-squared bishop and so White probably has to go in for 16 b4 Bxf5 17 Rxf5! Ndx5 18 bxc5, retaining reasonable compensation. After 18...Qc6 19 cxd6+ Nxd6 20 Qe1, the white bishops are a bit of a handful for Black who, despite his extra exchange, is also struggling to deal with the ideas of Nf4 and Rb1 which would increase the pressure and leave Black tied down and defending.

14 Be3 h5 15 Qe4 Bh6

White has retained control of d5 for the time being, but Black could aim for a fianchetto with 15...Rb8!? when Rodriguez may well have intended 16 Bxd4 cxd4 17 Nb5!? d5 18 Qe1, creating queenside threats like in the game, as 17 Nd5 Nxd5 18 Qxd5 Qxd5 19 Bxd5 Ke7 is fine for Black with White unable to

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

bring his knight to e4 and 20 Rae1 well met by 20...Bh6.

16 Bxd4!

White is prepared to allow Black control of the c1-h6 diagonal in return for creating some queenside threats before Black can consolidate and develop his queenside pieces.



TIP: Time is often of the essence in chess and so it may well be worth making a slightly ugly exchange, or a small sacrifice, to maintain the initiative.

16...cxd4 17 Nb5 d5! 18 Qe1 Nc6 19 c3! a6 20 Na3 (Diagram 47)

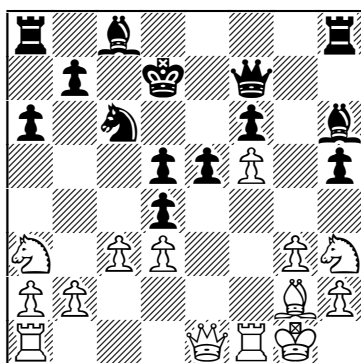


Diagram 47 (B)

White opens the queenside

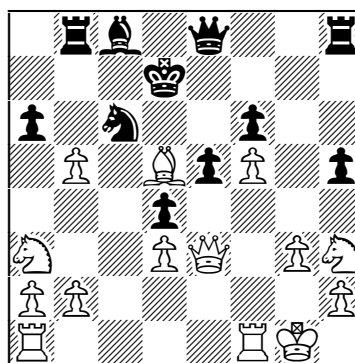


Diagram 48 (B)

Winning material

20...b5?

Having striven hard to close the long diagonal, Zuriel permits White a chance to reopen it, whereas 20...dxc3 21 Qxc3 would still have been quite unclear. The black king isn't especially happy, but Black controls the centre and has the bishop-pair, whereas the white pieces will take some time to regroup.

21 c4! Rb8?!

Losing a pawn and allowing the white bishop to take up a dominant post. Black had to try 21...dxc4 22 dxc4 bxc4 23 Qe2, although White is left with strong play on the light squares and against the black king.

22 Bxd5 Qe8 23 cxb5 Be3+??

A blunder as Black fails to notice that White doesn't have to block the check or move his king. Instead 23...axb5 24 Qe4 Kc7 was correct when the simple 25 Nc2 retains White's clear advantage, although 25 Rac1!? Bxc1 26 Rxc1 Bd7 27 Rc5 is also tempting.

24 Qxe3! (Diagram 48) 24...dxe3 25 Bxc6+ Ke7 26 Bxe8 Rxe8 27 Rae1 1-0

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Game 20

□ F.Kroeze ■ A.Kharlov

Leeuwarden 1994

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 e5 6 Nh3 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 f4 d6
9 f5 gxf5 10 exf5 Bxf5! (Diagram 49)

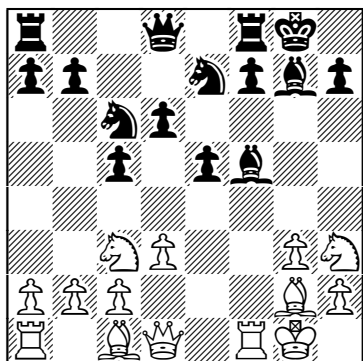


Diagram 49 (W)

Black's relatively best try

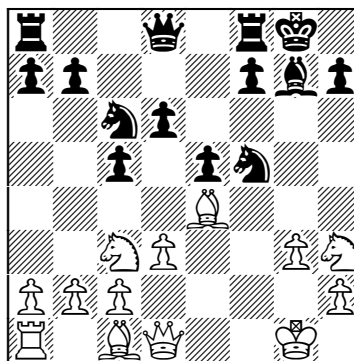


Diagram 50 (B)

Black must be very careful

Few players will want to go in for this position and I wonder if Kharlov, who has seconded Kasparov, had prepared this or just stumbled into it. At any rate, Black's best bet is to grab the pawn, whereas 10...f6?! is again too passive and 11 g4 d5 12 Ne2! Bd7 13 Ng3 Be8 14 g5 already left White beginning to increase the kingside pressure in I.Starostits-An.Horvath, Budapest 2004. However, only one capture on f5 is any good as 10...Nxf5? 11 Qh5! , intending 11...Nce7 12 g4 Nd4 13 Ng5 when f7 falls, is rather awkward for Black, but even the relatively better 11...Ncd4, hoping for 12 g4? Qh4!, still leaves Black badly suffering after 12 Be4.

11 Rxf5!



WARNING: The black bishop must not be allowed to retreat to g6, thereby covering the weak f7- and h7-pawns. Thus Kroeze correctly gives up the exchange for a strong light-squared attack, just as we saw Dembo achieve in Game 11.

11...Nxf5 12 Qh5

12 Be4! (Diagram 50) 12...Ncd4! 13 Qh5 transposes, but White should prefer this move-order if only because it gives Black greater chances to go wrong! In D.Mason-J.Rudd, British Ch., Torquay 2002 Black collapsed with 12...Nfe7??, allowing 13 Bxh7+! (Diagram 51)

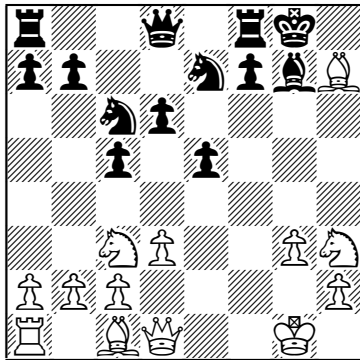


Diagram 51 (B)
A crushing Greek Gift

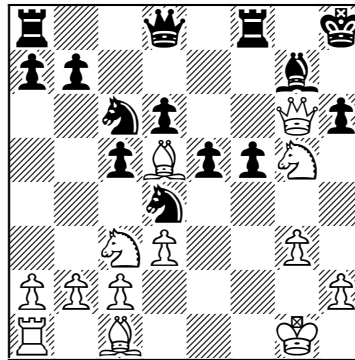


Diagram 52 (B)
A decisive mate threat

13...Kxh7 14 Qh5+! Kg8 15 Ng5 Re8 16 Qxf7+ Kh8 17 Qh5+ Kg8 18 Qh7+ Kf8 19 Ne6+, but neither does 12...Nfd4? 13 Qh5! help Black: 13...f5? 14 Bd5+ Kh8 15 Ng5 h6 16 Qg6! (**Diagram 52**) is a useful mating idea to remember, and 13...Re8 14 Qxh7+ Kf8 15 Bg5! was also crushing in I.Bilek-F.Gheorghiu, Bucharest 1968.

12...Ncd4 13 Be4 Qf6 14 Nd5 Qg6!

Correctly sacrificing the queen for a rook, knight, pawn and reasonable position which supplies sufficient compensation, but certainly no more. Black most certainly must though avoid 14...Qe6 as 15 Ng5! Qh6 16 Ne7+ Kh8 17 Nxf7+ Rxf7 18 Bxh6 Nxh6 19 c3 leaves White with an improved version of the game.

15 Ne7+?!

As Daniel King first pointed out, White should prefer 15 Qd1! (**Diagram 53**), reaching an improved version of the game, due to the weakened black kingside, after 15...h5!? (a consistent idea of Lane's whereas 15...Qe6 16 Ng5 Qd7 17 c3 Nh6 18 Nxh7! regains the exchange with interest) 16 Ne7+ Nxe7 17 Bxg6 fxc6 18 Ng5!.

15...Nxe7 16 Bxg6 fxc6 17 Qd1 h6! (Diagram 54)

Restricting the white bishop and knight, and highlighting why 15 Qd1! is an important improvement over immediately winning the black queen.

18 c3 Nf3+ 19 Kg2 Rf7 20 Be3 b6!

Good prophylaxis, whereas 20...Raf8?! would have permitted the white queen into the heart of the black position after 21 Qb3! b6 22 Qe6 (Kharlov).

21 a4! Raf8 22 a5

Correctly seeking counterplay with Black the side now well massed on the kingside.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

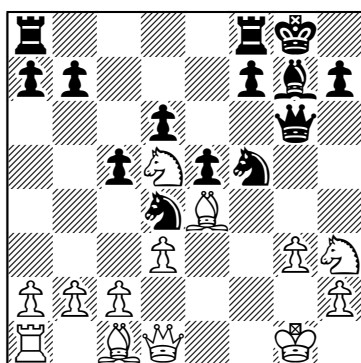


Diagram 53 (B)
Superior to winning the queen

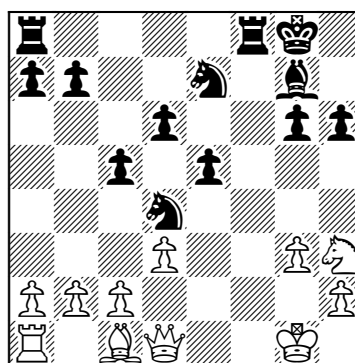


Diagram 54 (W)
Black has sufficient compensation



NOTE: The queen is often treated with slightly too much respect at lower levels. She is an important piece, but stronger players are often happy to sacrifice her and here we see Kharlov enjoying full compensation and good coordination.

22...bxa5 23 Rxa5 Nd5 24 Bf2 Ng5! 25 Qb3!

Permitting a forcing sequence at the end of which the exposed white king leaves Black with a perpetual.

25...Nxh3 26 Kxh3 Rxf2 27 Qxd5+ Kh7 28 Rxa7 R8f5! 29 Qb7 Rh5+ $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

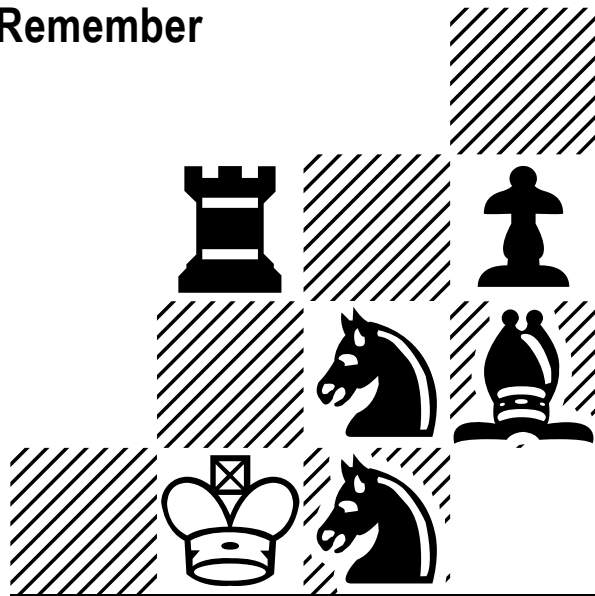
Points to Remember

- 1) 6...Nf6 has been underestimated by theory ever since Spassky's demolition of Geller, although the move should not be touched by those who don't like to be attacked.
- 2) White should meet 6...Nf6 with an advance of his kingside pawns, but he shouldn't hurry with f5 if Black has both his knights converging on e5.
- 3) Bh6 is an important plan to exchange off a key defender and is often better prefaced by Qe1-h4, rather than with Qd2.
- 4) Against 6...Nf6: a3, axb4, b3 and Rc1 is a reasonable queenside defensive set-up, although White may also prefer not to move any queenside pawns.
- 5) 6...e5 should be met by an f5 pawn sacrifice when White should also be prepared, if necessary, to give up an exchange to seize control of the light squares and to further his attacking chances.
- 6) Black risks far more than White after 6...e5, although both the solid 7 Nh3 exf4 and the ambitious 7...Nge7 8 0-0 Nd4 9 f5 gxf5 are playable for him.

Chapter Three

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

- Introduction and 6...e6 7 Qd2
- Black Plays 7...Nge7
- Black Plays 7...Qa5
- Black Prefers a Botvinnik Set-up
- Points to Remember



Introduction and 6...e6 7 Qd2

A Flexible Choice

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 (Diagram 1)

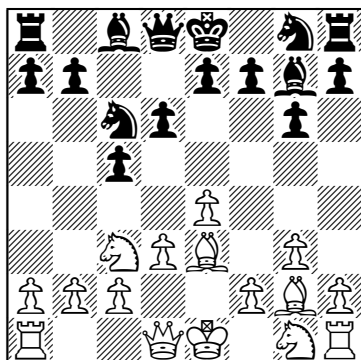


Diagram 1 (B)
Angling for Bh6

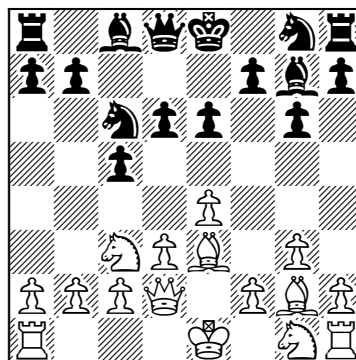


Diagram 2 (B)
Black has a few options

After 6 f4, we have frequently found White wishing to exchange off the dark-squared bishops with f5 and Bh6 to weaken the black kingside. 6 f4 remains an aggressive and very valid system in its own right, but White can also be a little clever by aiming to exchange the bishops before playing f4. Thus with 6 Be3 he aims for a rapid Qd2 and Bh6 which may still be the precursor to a kingside pawn advance with f4-f5, although White's flexible set-up allows him to also consider ideas of h4-h5 or even a switch to queenside play. This wide choice of options, depending on how Black responds, has led many players to 6 Be3 after which White tends to quickly and harmoniously complete his development. White players are also attracted by the variation 6...e6 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6 0-0 9 h4! which has led to some quick and crushing victories, and so we will begin our study of 6 Be3 by looking at 6...e6.

Natural Development from Black

Black's main way of countering 6 f4 is 6...e6 followed by harmonious development with ...Nge7 and ...0-0, and many Black players also employ 6...e6 against 6 Be3. However, Black must be careful as following up with 7 Qd2 Nge7 is a rather risky choice as we will see below. Thus Black may well prefer to keep his knight on g8, preventing Bh6, for the time being and 7...Qa5 prepares ...d5 and some queenside counterplay. Before we examine that impor-

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

tant choice, it is worth looking at Black's less common responses after 7 Qd2 (**Diagram 2**):

a) 7...Rb8 can be met with 8 Nge2 which should transpose to lines we will consider in the next chapter after 6...Rb8. White also has 8 Nf3!? (**Diagram 3**)

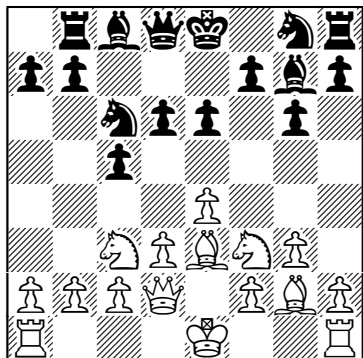


Diagram 3 (B)
Intending 9 d4

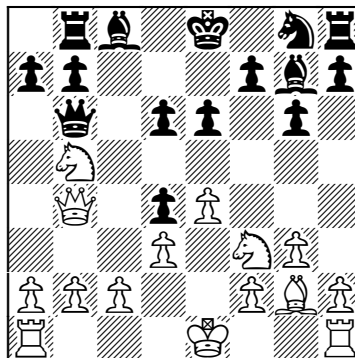


Diagram 4 (B)
There's no good way to defend d6

which looks a little strange as White blocks his f-pawn, but this is not so easy to meet. Black doesn't want to allow White to advance with 9 d4 when d6 may become vulnerable, but 8...Nd4? allows an undogmatic but strong exchange:



TIP: 8 Nf3 is a good practical try as many black players will respond with the seemingly natural 8...Nd4?, only to be hit by 9 Bxd4! cxd4 10 Nb5.

Suddenly Black discovers that he is already in big trouble as a7, d4 and d6 are all vulnerable and 10...e5 11 Qb4 Ke7 12 Nxa7 Bd7 13 Nb5 Qb6 14 a4 simply cost him a clear pawn in V.Kupreichik-J.Wallner, Oberwart 2000. Black might thus prefer to cover his loose pawns with 10...Qb6, but 11 Qb4 (**Diagram 4**) keeps up the pressure and intends 11...Ke7 12 e5. However, 11...Kd7 12 e5! is also pretty grim for Black and White has scored very well from here with E.Kovalevskaya-K.Arakhamia, Elista Olympiad 1998 continuing 12...dxe5 13 Nd2 when White's pieces were superbly coordinated. After 13...a5 14 Qa4 Kd8 15 Nc4 Qa6 16 Qa3 Bd7 17 Nbd6 Bf8, the cool 18 Qc5! would have left Black without a good defence. Black preferred 12...Qc5!? in C.Renner-V.Mikhalevski, Bad Wiessee 2000, but then White should simply opt for 13 Qxc5 dxc5 14 Nxa7.

Black is thus best advised to avoid 8...Nd4 after 8 Nf3, although he doesn't appear to be able to fully equalize in any case:

a1) 8...e5 9 Nd5 Nge7 10 Bh6 0-0 11 Nxe7+ Qxe7 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 h4?! f6 14

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

0-0 Be6 15 a3 a5 16 a4 b6 17 c3 d5! saw Black develop solidly and emerge with a comfortable position in G.Lagvilava-O.Alexandrova, Dresden 2004. White shouldn't, however, be so keen to ease the pressure and freeing the f-pawn is a better try with 9 0-0 Nge7 10 Nh4! 0-0 11 f4 exf4 12 Bxf4 Nd4 13 Rf2 Be6 14 Raf1 Qd7 15 Nd5!? leaving White a touch better in G.Cabrilo-D.Nestorovic, Bijeljina Dvorovi 2000.

a2) 8...b5!? intends to gain counterplay with 9 d4 b4 10 Ne2 Na5! 11 b3 Nf6 which is a little awkward for White. Thus 9 0-0 should be preferred when 9...b4 10 Nd1 Nf6 11 Bh6! forces a favourable exchange and 11...0-0 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 Ne3! e5 14 Ne1 Ng4 15 Nc4 left White with a pleasant edge in M.Krasenkow-E.Sanchez, Buenos Aires 1998.

b) 7...Nd4 rushes to occupy an important central square, but 8 Nd1! (**Diagram 5**) reveals it to be a little premature.

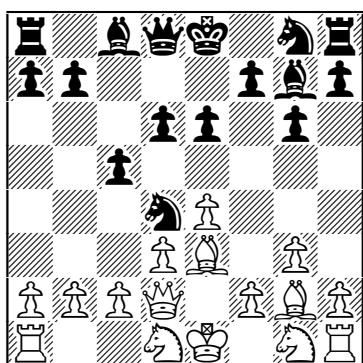


Diagram 5 (B)
Preparing eviction with c3

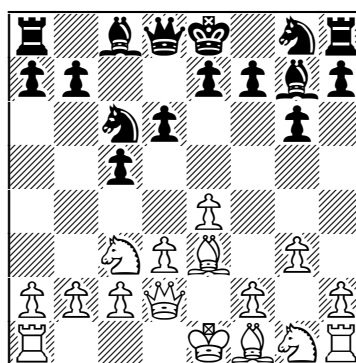


Diagram 6 (B)
White prepares for ...Nd4



TIP: White should rarely allow a black knight to settle on d4. He will usually meet it with Nd1 or Ne2 after which c3 will either drive the black knight backwards or force it to exchange itself.

Black is best advised to at least increase his central presence with 8...e5, although after 9 c3 White has good chances to gain an edge and 9...Nc6 10 Ne2 b6 11 0-0 Nge7 12 Bh6! 0-0 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Ne3 f6 15 f4 Rb8 16 Rf2 b5 17 h4! left White slightly better due to his kingside space advantage in A.Stripunsky-L.Van Wely, Minneapolis 2005. Black has also tried the other retreat, but 9...Ne6 10 Ne2 Nf6 11 Bh6 0-0 12 Bxg7 Nxe7 13 f4 exf4 14 Nxf4! didn't solve his problems in A.Ledger-A.Kosten, British Ch., Hove 1997. White enjoyed a strong grip on d5, but Kosten's attempt to weaken e4 merely left him with a sickly d-pawn after 14...Re8 15 0-0 c4?! 16 Ne3! cxd3 17 Qxd3 Ngh5 18 Nc4.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

17 0-0-0 Be6 18 Qe3 Qd7?! 19 Ng5 Bg8 20 Rh8 was crushing.

10 Qxh6 f6 (Diagram 9)

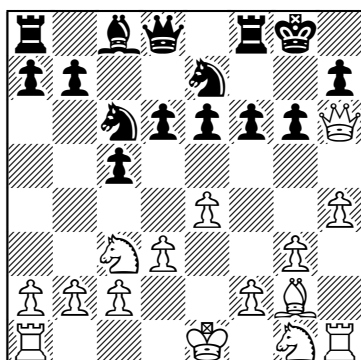


Diagram 9 (W)

Hoping to trap the white queen

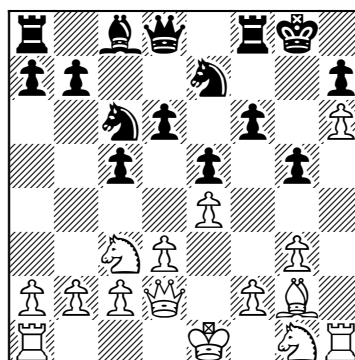


Diagram 10 (B)

Gaining a long-term advantage

Now the queen has to retreat and so this is more accurate than 10...Kh8 11 h5 Ng8 12 Qd2 g5 when White can continue as in our main line with 13 h6!, after which 13...Nd4 14 0-0-0 Bd7 15 f4 left Black under some pressure in M.Buckley-N.Batsiashvili, Baku 2002.

11 Qd2!



WARNING: The queen must retreat as she is trapped after 11 f4?? Nd4! 12 0-0-0 Ndf5 and 11 h5? is also one to avoid due to 11...g5!, again stranding the queen on h6 when there is no good defence to 12...Kh8 and 13...Ng8.

11...e5

Seizing some space and this is a better try than 11...Nd4 12 f4 d5 13 h5! when the exposed black king remains a source of concern. After 13...b5 14 hxg6 hxg6 15 exd5 exd5 16 0-0-0 White was better due to his safer king in A.Ledger-T.Nedev, Breda 1998 and even 16...b4 17 Nce2 Nb5 18 d4! c4!? 19 Qxb4 Rb8 20 Re1 Be6 21 Qd2 Qd6 22 Nf3 left Black with insufficient compensation for his pawn.

12 h5!?

The positional course, but 12 f4 is also slightly better for White. Black can then block the white h-pawn, but even 12...h5 13 Nf3 Kg7 14 0-0 Nd4 15 Rf2 Be6 16 Raf1 Qd7 17 Nh2 Rad8 18 Nd1! left White with a small edge due to his kingside pressure in H.Hamdouchi-M.Bezold, French League 1999.

12...g5 13 h6 (Diagram 10)



NOTE: Black may have kept the kingside closed for the time being, but the h6-pawn is a real nuisance for him. White will be able to exploit its presence throughout the middlegame and Black will have to be very careful if he allows the kingside to open up.

13...Be6

Black can also prevent 14 f4 with 13...Ng6 when 14 Nge2 is well met by 14...Nd4 15 f4 Bg4, but 14 Nce2!? can be considered. Instead 14 Nd5 Nce7 15 Ne3 Be6 16 Ne2 d5 17 exd5 Nxd5 18 Nc3 saw White challenge the d5-square and retain a small advantage in B.Golubovic-S.Boyd, Cannes 1996. This may not look like very much, but the black kingside weaknesses aren't about to run away and 18...Nge7 19 0-0-0 Nxe3 20 Qxe3 Qd4 21 Ne4! Qxe3+?! 22 fxe3 Bd5 23 Rd2 left White preparing to increase the pressure down the f-file.

14 f4 gxf4 15 gxf4 Kh8 16 Nd5

This has worked out well, but White can also keep his options open with 16 0-0-0.

16...Bxd5?!

Not a good way of resolving the tension, although Black is already under some pressure. Instead 16...Qd7 limits White to just a small edge, whereas 16...f5 17 0-0-0 fxe4 18 dxe4 Bg4 19 Rf1! Nxd5 20 exd5 Nd4 21 c3 Nf5 22 fxe5 dxe5 23 Nh3 reveals just how the opening of the kingside causes additional problems for Black as the h6-pawn becomes a key factor in the position.

17 exd5 Nb4 18 a3!

White enjoys the advantage with Black having failed to gain any real counter-play and his kingside weaknesses still there to be exploited. In M.Adams-C.Ward, Southend 2001 Black actually lost a piece with 18...Nbx5? 19 Bxd5 Nxd5 due to 20 Qg2!, but 18...Na6 19 0-0-0 Nf5 20 Ne2 Nc7 21 Be4! Nd4 22 Nxd4! cxd4 23 Bf5 would also have been very much in White's favour.

Theoretical?

Not really as Black rarely chooses to enter this line if he has seen before White's plan of Bh6 and h4 in action. White's play is pretty straightforward, even if Black correctly realizes that he must exchange the bishops on h6.

Statistics

White has scored 62% from just over 700 games with 8 Bh6, although I must admit that I'm surprised it isn't even higher! Unsurprisingly Black has only made 33% with 8...0-0, and from over 450 games which shows that 6 Be3 can still pack some surprise, but White often hasn't readjusted well enough after 8...Bxh6 which has made 50% from 200 outings.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Illustrative Games

Game 21

□ G.Waddingham ■ J.Gallagher

British Championship, Edinburgh 1985

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e6 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6 Bxh6 9 Qxh6 Nd4 (Diagram 11)

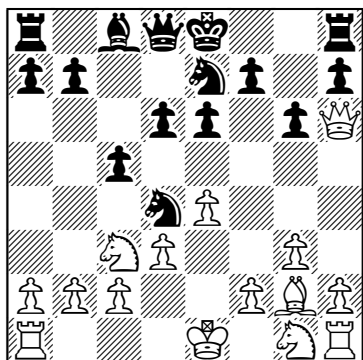


Diagram 11 (W)

Relatively best for Black

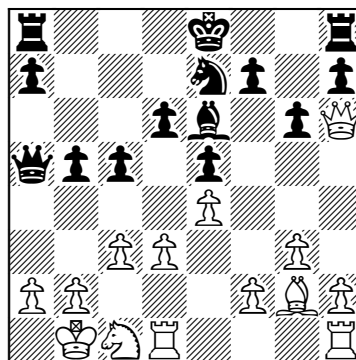


Diagram 12 (B)

Ending Black's attack

10 0-0-0

Keeping the queen aggressively placed on h6 and this is more challenging than 10 Qd2.

10...b5?!

Tempting, but too ambitious. Black hopes that he is gaining an attack, but White can keep his monarch defended whereas the black king is in danger of being left without a safe home. Thus Black has also tried 10...Nec6 11 Nge2 Bd7, but White supplied a model example of how to open the position in V.Hort-J.Hodgson, Wijk aan Zee 1986 with 12 Nxd4! cxd4 13 Ne2 Qa5 14 Kb1 Qa4 15 c3!, thematically undermining d4 and allowing White to take over the centre with some advantage after 15...dxc3 16 Nxc3 Qb4 17 d4.

Movsesian has preferred 10...Qa5!?, tying the white knight to c3 and preparing to castle. However, this sacrifice can be accepted and 11 Qg7!? (White can also proceed more simply with 11 Kb1 Bd7 12 Nge2 Nec6 13 h4! 0-0-0 14 h5 as in N.Short-S.Movsesian, Sarajevo 2000 when 14...Nb4 would have supplied some needed counterplay and have been fairly unclear) 11...Rf8 12 Qxh7 Nec6 13 Kb1 Bd7 was seen in D.Wanzek-S.Movsesian, Sala 1995. 14 Nf3? Nb4! 15 Ne1 Nb5! was rather dangerous for Wanzek, but White should prefer the prophylactic 14 Rc1!? (Lane), intending 14...Nb4? (14...0-0-0!?, intending to advance

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

the b-pawn is critical) 15 a3 Nbxc2 16 Rxc2 Nxc2 17 Kxc2 which isn't at all convincing for Black.

11 Nce2!

Moving out of the way of the black b-pawn and preparing to end Black's control of d4.

11...e5 12 c3 Nxe2+ 13 Nxe2 Be6 14 Kb1 Qa5 15 Nc1 (Diagram 12)

White's 12th may appear a little suspicious at first sight, but there doesn't appear to be any way for Black to show c3 up as a weakness. Gallagher does advance his b-pawn, but the closing of the centre merely confirms White's edge as his king is then fully safe and f4 imminent.

15...b4 16 c4 0-0-0 17 f4 Qc7 18 Rhf1 f5?

White had slightly the more pleasant position in any case, but this central advance rather rebounds. The position now opens up and as it does so, the difference in king safety becomes even more marked.



TIP: Always try to keep your king as close to its protective pawn shield as possible. Black would prefer his pawns back on b7 and c6, but here his king would actually be safest on b6.

19 fxe5! dxe5 20 Nb3 (Diagram 13)

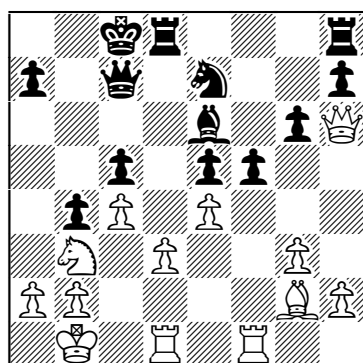


Diagram 13 (B)
Targeting c5

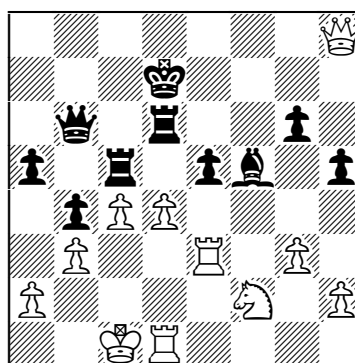


Diagram 14 (B)
Opening the position

20...fxe4 21 Bxe4 Nf5

21...Kb8 22 Qe3 Rc8 would have kept c5 defended, but then Black is in serious trouble down the long diagonal and on e5 after 23 Bg2.

22 Bxf5 Bxf5 23 Qe3

Simple chess; Waddingham rounds up the c-pawn and maintains central control.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

23...Rd6 24 Nxc5 Rc6 25 Ne4 Rd8 26 Rfe1 Rd4 27 Nf2 Rc5 28 b3 a5 29 Qf3!

Unsurprisingly the exposed position of the black king finally begins to tell.

29...h5 30 Qa8+ Kd7 31 Re3 Qd6 32 Kc1 Qb6 33 Qh8 Rd6?!

Black was struggling in any case, but now White takes his chance to launch a decisive attack.

34 d4! (Diagram 14) 34...exd4 35 Qe8+ Kc7 36 Re7+ Bd7 37 Ne4 Re5 38 Rxd7+! Rxd7 39 Qxe5+ 1-0

Black Plays 7...Qa5

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e6 7 Qd2 Qa5 (Diagram 15)

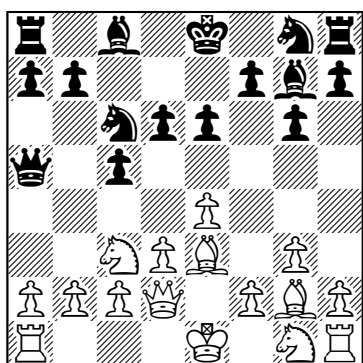


Diagram 15 (W)
Keeping the knight on g8

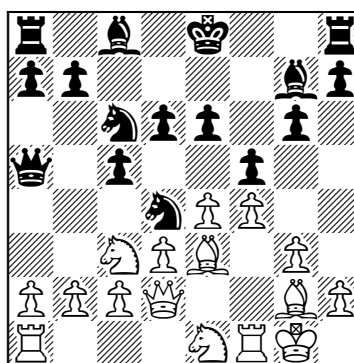


Diagram 16 (W)
Stymieing White's play

It is natural for Black to wish to prevent Bh6, but keeping his knight on g8 with 7...Nd4 and 7...Rb8 allows White some promising possibilities, as we have seen. 7...Qa5!? angles for a better version of such a plan as the queen is actively placed on a5 and supports Black's queenside counterplay. This has thus established itself as Black's most respectable follow-up to 6...e6 and was analyzed by Joe Gallagher in his *Beating the Anti-Sicilians*.

8 f4!?

Immediately giving up on the whole Bh6 concept to play for an e5 or f5 advance. Such a plan hopes to demonstrate that the black queen will be missed away from the centre and it appears quite promising. White can also continue his development with the 8 Nge2 of Game 22, but his other knight moves merely play into Black's hands:

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

a) 8 Nh3 h5! leaves Black with good prospects on both flanks. E.Lobron-V.Tukmakov, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984 continued 9 f4 Nd4 10 Nf2 h4 11 0-0 Ne7 12 Kb1 Nec6 and White was already struggling as, compared to similar positions considered in Game 21, there was no white queen actively placed on h6 nor any effective counterplay against the black attack.

b) 8 Nf3 isn't in general a particularly inspiring move unless there is a strong tactical idea behind it, as there is with 7...Rb8 8 Nf3. The f-pawn is blocked and by the time that had been freed and c2 covered in T.Shaw-J.Penrose, Nice Olympiad 1974 with 8...Nd4 9 0-0 Ne7 10 Ne1, Black was already comfortably placed and Penrose continued to thwart White's plans with 10...Nec6 11 f4 f5! (**Diagram 16**).

8...Nge7 9 Nf3 Nd4 10 0-0 (**Diagram 17**)

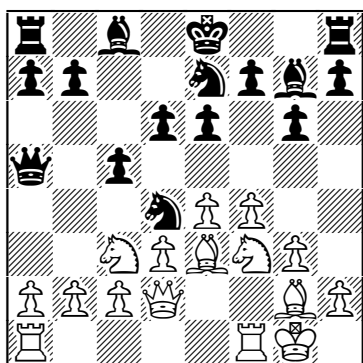


Diagram 17 (B)

White is ahead in development

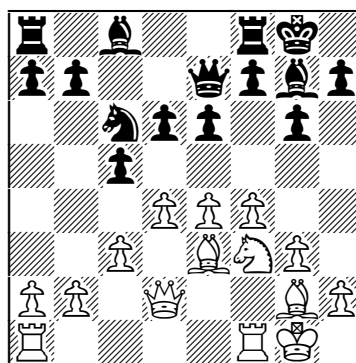


Diagram 18 (B)

A logical central advance

10...Nec6

Both sides have continued logically since 8 f4: White completing his development and Black improving his knights. Black's last added support to his control over d4 but is by no means essential and he can also aim to catch up in development.

a) 10...0-0 hopes for 11 e5?! Nef5 which is an ineffective version of the 10 e5 sacrifice from Chapter One as 12 Ne4 isn't at all promising. White should thus prefer to exploit a small tactic with 11 Nd5! when 11...Qd8 12 Nxe7+ Qxe7 13 c3 Nc6 saw Black being pushed backwards in J.Houska-N.Ioseliani, Bundesliga 1999. As Emms has suggested, White should here have pushed forwards in the centre with 14 d4! (**Diagram 18**), gaining some advantage. 14...cxd4 can even be met by 15 cxd4 d5 16 e5, intending to play on the queen-side with Rfc1, Nd3 and possibly a3 and b4. Targeting d6 is also good as even 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 e5 doesn't especially help Black with 17 Be3 preparing

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both Rad1 and f5.

b) Black's best course may be to await proceedings with 10...Bd7 when 11 Qf2!? is the most testing response:

b1) 11...Nec6?! 12 e5! reveals White's logical aim when Black is suffering, especially after 12...dxe5?! 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 fxe5 0-0 15 Ne4! (Emms).



NOTE: Remember that White can exploit his e4 and f4 pawn front, not just with f5, but also with e5; a thematic advance when ahead in development.

b) 11...Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qxc3 is very risky for Black who is then even more vulnerable on the dark squares. White might thus continue slowly with 14 Rab1, but the forcing 14 e5! is quite effective as 14...Nf5 15 exd6 leaves Black badly struggling to regain the pawn on d6 whilst defending c5 and b7.

c) 11...Qb6!?, supporting the d4-knight, may well be best when I quite like 12 Rab1 and after 12...0-0, either 13 a3!? or 13 Nh4, intending 14 Nd1 and c3.

Returning to 10...Nec6, and here the critical 11 e5! of Game 23 shouldn't come as a surprise. White can also play more slowly, but 11 a3 0-0 12 Nh4 f5! 13 Rae1 Bd7 wasn't too troubling for Black in T.Stepovaia Dianchenko-M.Litinskaya, Ukrainian Women's Ch. 1996 and 14 Qc1 Rac8 15 Nd1 Nd8! 16 c3?! was well met by 16... Qa4.

Theoretical?

7...Qa5 is much more of a sensible move than a theoretical one, although both sides should find a little theory useful for when White plays 8 f4, angling for a sharp e5-advance.

Statistics

A number of White players have been caught out by 7...Qa5 which has made a most impressive 56% from 465 games. The critical 8 f4 Nge7 9 Nf3 Nd4 10 0-0 still needs more tests when 10...0-0 11 Nd5 has scored 75% in 10 games, whereas 10...Nec6 11 e5 has only had 8 outings thus far.

Illustrative Games

Game 22

□ L.Stein ■ O.Sarapu

Sousse Interzonal 1967

1 g3 g6 2 Bg2 Bg7 3 e4 c5 4 d3 Nc6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Be3 d6 7 Qd2 Qa5 8 Nge2

The best square for the knight and White isn't just routinely developing, but also has plans to exploit the black queen's location.

8...Nd4 9 0-0 Ne7 10 a3!? (Diagram 19)

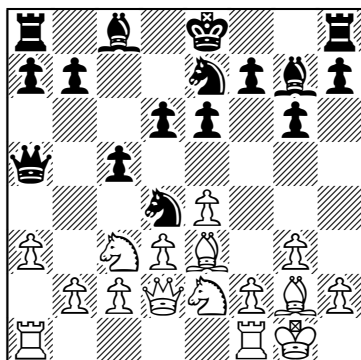


Diagram 19 (B)

White has ideas of b4

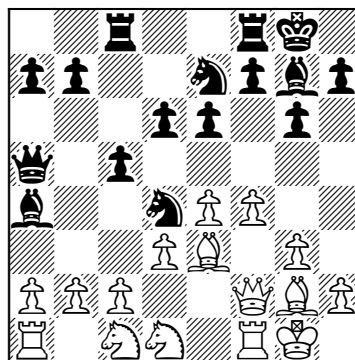


Diagram 20 (W)

Good counterplay against c2

An old move and one which has been rather neglected. White introduces the possibility of b4, but 10 Nc1 has received more attention. However, after 10...Bd7!? 11 Nb3 Qc7, it isn't clear that the knight achieves so much on b3 and Black can consider playing aggressively with ...0-0, ...f5 and ...e5. White has thus also tested 11 f4 0-0 12 Qf2, but after 12...Rac8 it is not so easy to cover c2 and 13 Nd1 Ba4! (**Diagram 20**) gave Black good counterplay, especially after 14 Bd2? Qb6 which collected a queenside pawn in J.Houska-J.Pigott, British League 1999.

A much quoted game is V.Smyslov-C.Kottnauer, Moscow 1946 in which the Closed Sicilian maestro chose to tuck his king away with 10 Kh1 and thus was considering advancing his kingside pawns. Smyslov did that with some effect and 10...Bd7 11 f4 Rb8 12 g4 h5 13 f5! gave him a strong initiative, but Black's tenth wasn't the most accurate and then he should still have met 12 g4 with 12...f5!.



NOTE: Just because White has begun with 6 Be3 and 7 Qd2 doesn't mean that the position is very different to those arising from 6 f4. There are many positional nuances which apply to both 6 f4 and 6 Be3, and once again f4 and g4 must almost always be countered by ...f5.

10...Nec6

Bolstering d4, but Black can also opt for the critical 10...Nxe2+ 11 Qxe2 Bxc3!? 12 bxc3 Qxc3. Such a policy is not without its risks, while White shouldn't hurry to exploit his extra dark-squared bishop; his compensation is fairly enduring. One idea is 13 Rab1!?, intending 13...Qxa3 14 Bg5 Qc3 15 e5! to open

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the position up for the white bishops. Black might thus prefer 11...0-0, but 12 Qd2 Nc6 13 Bh6! Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Nd4 15 Qd2 Bd7 16 f4 f5 17 Qf2 Rab8 18 Nd1! Qb6 19 Rb1 Qc7 20 Ne3 saw White instructively gain a small advantage in P.Lamford-F.Hoelzl, Dubai Olympiad 1986. White's play may not appear too special, but such is a beauty of the Closed Sicilian in that White's moves are often fairly straightforward and very logical. Lamford had logically prepared to evict the d4-knight with c3, while the black kingside defenders had been exchanged off.

11 Rab1

Also worth considering is 11 Kh1!?, with the idea of 11...0-0 12 b4! (**Diagram 21**), undermining the d4-knight which can no longer take on e2 with check. 12...Qc7 13 Rab1 leaves White with a small queenside initiative, whereas 12...cxb4?! 13 axb4 Qc7 was G.Lapin-K.Rattmann, correspondence 1957 when 14 Rab1 gave White a useful edge, but also promising was 14 Bxd4!? Nxd4 (and not 14...Bxd4? 15 b5! winning a piece) 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 16 Nb5 Qb6 17 Nxd4 Qxd4 18 c3 Qb6 19 d4, taking over the centre.

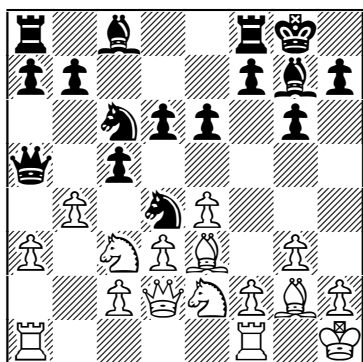


Diagram 21 (B)
Undermining the d4-knight

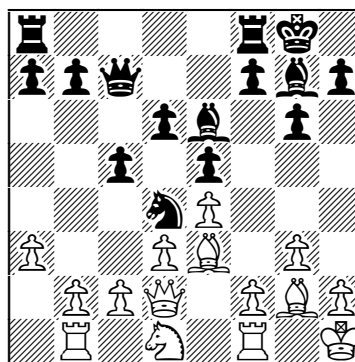


Diagram 22 (W)
Level but complex

11...0-0

Once again 11...Nxe2+ 12 Qxe2 0-0 is the alternative when White exchanged the d4-square for a queenside grip and ideas of f4-f5 after 13 Qd2 Qd8 14 b4! cxb4 15 axb4 Nd4 16 Nd1 Bd7 17 c3 Nb5 18 c4 Nd4 19 b5 Qc7 20 Bh6 Qc5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Ne3 in I.Zaitsev-Y.Estrin, Moscow 1964. Zaitsev was slightly better as he could play around the d4-knight.

12 Kh1 Nxe2 13 Qxe2 Nd4 14 Qd2 Bd7 15 Bf4

Hoping to force Black into playing ...e5 and thus weaken d5, but Sarapu correctly delays doing so until the white knight is further from d5.

15...Qc7 16 Nd1 e5 17 Be3 Be6 (Diagram 22) 18 f4 f5!

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

Refusing to let White gain any central initiative and the position is about equal, which is why White should probably prefer an early advance of his b-pawn. However, the position remains quite tense and Stein is able to outplay the New Zealander.

19 Nc3 Rae8 20 fxe5!

Unbalancing the position and trying to inflict hanging pawns on Sarapu.

20...dxe5?!

Stein now gets to install a knight on d5 and so 20...Bxe5 should have been preferred when Black can comfortably exchange off any knight on d5, leaving the white g2-bishop blunted. White should thus prefer 21 Bg5, but Black can maintain rough equality with 21...fxe4 22 Nxe4 Nf5.

21 exf5 gxf5 22 Nd5 Qd7 23 c4! (Diagram 23)

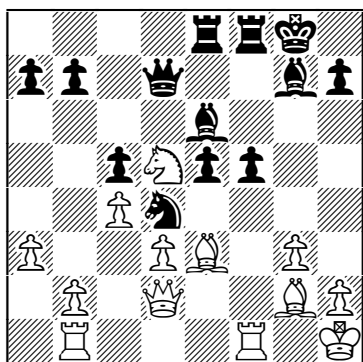


Diagram 23 (B)
Cementing control of d5

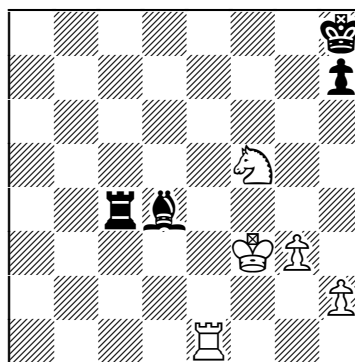


Diagram 24 (B)
A late but strong attack

23...b6 24 b4

The e5- and f5-pawns control a number of central squares, but they can't advance and White seizes the initiative.



NOTE: Hanging pawns can be hard to handle: they are sometimes a strong and mobile force, but often, as here, they are left rather static and weak. Always thus be careful when allowing the opponent to inflict them.

24...cxb4?! 25 axb4 Kh8 26 Rbe1 Qf7 27 Bxd4!

Exchanging off the only active black piece and taking control of the useful f4-square in the process.

27...exd4 28 Nf4 Bc8 29 Bc6 Bb7 30 Bxb7 Qxb7+ 31 Qg2 Qxg2+

It's a moot point as to whether or not Black should have made this exchange;

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either way he is condemned to suffer with the inferior minor piece.

32 Kxg2 a5 33 Nd5 axb4 34 Nxb4 Re3?!

Making matters easy as White can easily halt the e-pawn and then surround and win it. Stein may generally be remembered for his tactical brilliance, but he was also an excellent all-round player as he shows here, convincingly out-playing Sarapu.

35 Rxe3 dxe3 36 Kf3 b5 37 Nd5 bxc4 38 dxc4 Rc8 39 Nxe3 Bd4 40 Nxf5!

A neat way to finish; White gives up the c-pawn but his rook and knight combine with some effect against the black king.



TIP: Queen and knight are well known as a deadly attacking force, but a rook and knight also often combine well in the late middlegame and in the endgame.

40...Rxc4 41 Re1 (Diagram 24) 41...Kg8?

Losing the rook, but 41...h5 42 Re6 would have picked up the black h-pawn and reached a fairly easily winning ending.

42 Re8+ 1-0

Game 23

□ N.Short ■ G.Kasparov

Wijk aan Zee 2000

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 g6 5 d3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nd4 7 Qd2 Qa5 8 f4 e6 9 Nf3 Ne7 10 0-0 Nec6 11 e5! (Diagram 25)

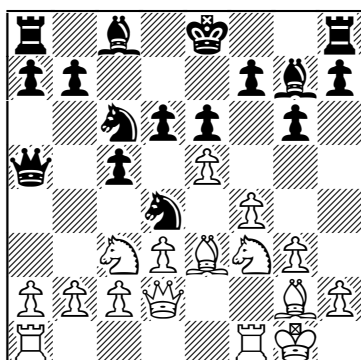


Diagram 25 (B)

Critical and promising

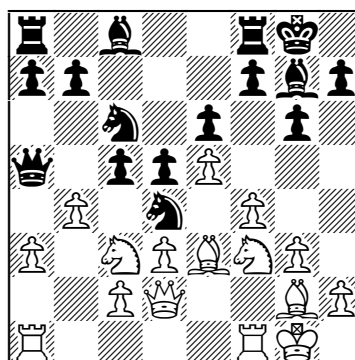


Diagram 26 (B)

White seizes the initiative

11...dxe5

Black's main move, whereas he should avoid 11...Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 dxe5? due to

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

13 Bxc6+! bxc6 14 fxe5 Bxe5 15 Qf2 (Short), regaining the pawn with a large advantage. Thus Black might try to close the centre and 11...d5 was essayed in M.Buckley-G.Pinter, Street 2003, but here I quite like 12 a3!?, intending 12...0-0 13 b4! (**Diagram 26**) when Black is struggling. Here 13...cxb4 14 axb4 Qxb4? 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Nxd5! Qxd2 17 Ne7+ Kh8 18 Bxd2 Bd7 19 Rfb1! sees White force a rook to the seventh as it turns out that there is no way for Black to trap the e7-knight, but even 14...Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 Qxb4 16 Rfb1 Qe7 17 Qf2 grants White good play on the dark squares and against the black queenside, with Nb5-d6 but one idea.

12 Nxe5 0-0

Prudent, whereas 12...Nxe5?! 13 fxe5 Bxe5 is asking for trouble after 14 Qf2, with an improved version of the 6 f4 and 10 e5 sacrifice for White. 14...f5 15 Ne4 Qc7 16 Nxc5 Qxc5 17 c3 regains the pawn with advantage, whereas 14...0-0 15 Ne4 Nf5 (15...f5?! 16 c3 Bg7 17 Nd6 Nc6 18 Bxc5 Rd8 19 d4 was excellent for White in J.Houska-S.Vajda, European Women's Team Ch., Plovdiv 2003) 16 Bxc5! b6 isn't problematic for White who gained excellent dark-square play and compensation for the queen with 17 Bxf8! Bd4 18 Qxd4 Nxd4 19 Bd6 (**Diagram 27**) in I.Rohacek-C.Kottnauer, Czech Ch. 1948.

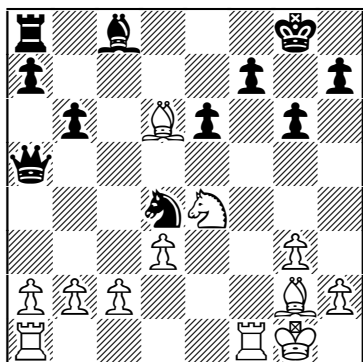


Diagram 27 (B)

A promising queen sacrifice

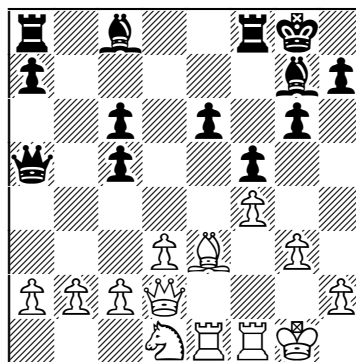


Diagram 28 (B)

White enjoys a clear advantage

13 Rae1

In view of the next note, White should give serious consideration to Emms' discovery of 13 Nxc6! as 13...bxc6 (or 13...Nxc6 14 Qf2 Nd4 15 Ne4 and the threat of c3 isn't easy for Black to meet) 14 Qf2 again favours White due to his superior structure. Black might prevent 15 Ne4 with 14...f5, but that allows White to choose between improving his knight with 15 Nb1!? and Na3, and 15 a3!?, once again intending to undermine the black d4-knight with b4.

13...f5?

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Now Black is condemned to suffer due to his inferior structure, but the world champion presumably didn't like the look of White's pressure after 13...Nxe5! 14 fxe5 Bxe5 15 Bh6 Bg7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qf2. However, Donev has demonstrated that Black can defend here with the calm 17...f6! (but not 17...f5?! 18 Ne4! Nxc2 19 Rc1 Nd4 20 Nxc5 with promising compensation – Short) 18 Ne4 e5 19 c3 Ne6 when White is struggling for sufficient compensation. Black must, however, avoid 13...Ne7? as 14 Nd5! Qd8 15 Nxe7+ Qxe7 16 b4! undermines d4 and sees White regain his pawn on c5 with a substantial advantage.



TIP: Having advanced vigorously with 11 e5, White should always be looking at ways to challenge or undermine the d4-knight, and to seize the initiative with a timely b4-advance.

14 Bxc6 Nxc6 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 Nd1! (Diagram 28)

Black might have the bishop-pair, but his light-squared prelate is very passive, while his structure is a wreck. Very, very rarely has Kasparov been in such a mess after just 16 moves.

16...Qxa2 17 Bxc5 Rd8 18 b3 Rb8 19 Rf2 Qa6 20 Nc3

Short aims to consolidate his bind after 21 Na4 and Kasparov must try and find some counterplay. True to his dynamic style he thus correctly gives up an exchange to stay in the game, albeit while remaining clearly worse.

20...Rxb3! 21 cxb3 Rxd3 22 Qa2 Rxc3 (Diagram 29)

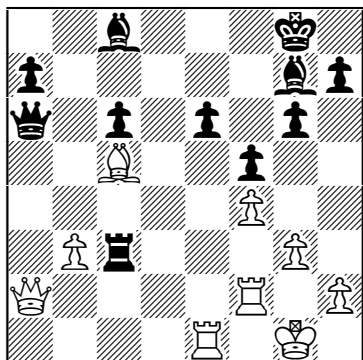


Diagram 29 (W)

Black has desperately mixed it up

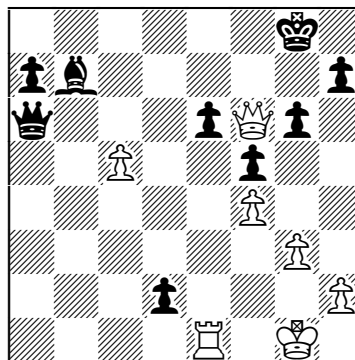


Diagram 30 (W)

White must take the perpetual

23 b4 Ra3 24 Qc2 Rd3

Black has two pawns for the exchange but is still somewhat restricted and the battle hinges on whether or not the light-squared bishop can be activated.

Against 24...Rc3 Short offers the instructive variation 25 Qd1 Rd3 26 Rd2 Rd5 27 Rxd5 cxd5 28 Bd4!, keeping the black d-pawn under control and thus pre-

venting the c8-bishop from reaching an open h1-a8 diagonal.

25 Rd2 Rd5 26 Rxd5 cxd5 27 Bf2 Bb7 28 Qc7?

Permitting Black to open the long diagonal and instead White should have forced the queens off, still retaining some advantage, with 28 Qe2.

28...d4! 29 Qd8+ Bf8 30 Qf6 d3!

Securing sufficient counterplay and now White must even be careful and force the draw, rather than allow Black to double on the long diagonal.

31 Bc5! Bxc5+ 32 bxc5 d2 (Diagram 30) 33 Qd8+ Kg7 34 Qe7+ ½-½

Black Prefers a Botvinnik Set-up

A Solid and Sensible Choice

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e5 (Diagram 31)

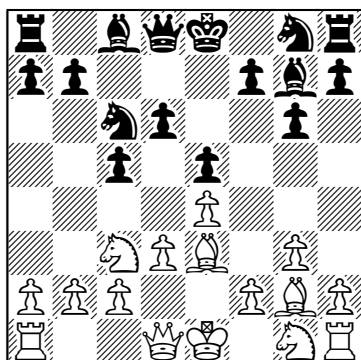


Diagram 31 (W)

Black claims some central space

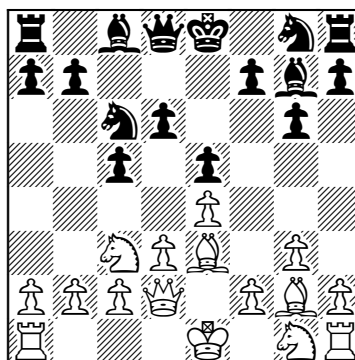


Diagram 32 (B)

Is Black worried by Bh6?

In the 6...e6 7 Qd2 Nge7 variation Black can easily run into trouble on the kingside, whilst he often finds himself having to advance with ...e5, contesting the centre and freeing his light-squared bishop. 6...e5 logically aims for an improved version of that system and indeed it makes Bh6 and h4-h5 far less convincing. White thus often prefers a quick f4, but he should be aware of the possibility of ...exf4, reopening the long diagonal for the g7-bishop.

This Botvinnikesque approach from Black is a tough nut to crack, but the Closed Sicilian player should be prepared to steadily improve his pieces, aiming to build up on the kingside and to find a favourable moment to get in Bh6. Leading Closed Sicilian expert, Daniel King, prefers this approach as Black, but White can make inroads against the solid black position in the main line.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

7 Qd2 (Diagram 32)

As White shouldn't meet 7...Nge7 with 8 Bh6, he may prefer the alternative move-order 7 f4 Nge7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0 Nd4 10 Qd2. That cuts down Black's alternatives to the main line, but with 7 Qd2 White can hope that Black will wrongly worry about 8 Bh6 and so play an inferior move to prevent it.

7...Nge7!

Best, whereas 7...Be6 commits the bishop a little early and with 8 f4 White gained the edge after both 8...Nd4 9 Nf3 Ne7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Rf2 Qd7 12 Ng5!, netting the bishop-pair, in N.Short-M.Rodriguez, Linares 2000 and 8...exf4 9 Bxf4 Nd4 10 Nf3 Nxf3+ 11 Bxf3 Ne7 12 Bh6!, offering an always useful trade, in V.Jakymov-M.Oleksienko, Ukrainian Team Ch. 2002. Black has also tried 7...Nd4 when 8 f4 Ne7 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 is our main line, but also possible is 8 Nce2!?, intending 8...Ne7 9 c3 Nxe2 10 Nxe2 0-0 11 Bh6.

8 f4! (Diagram 33)

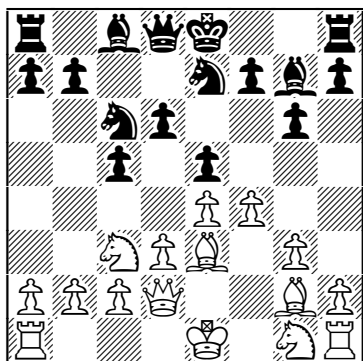


Diagram 33 (B)
Delaying Bh6

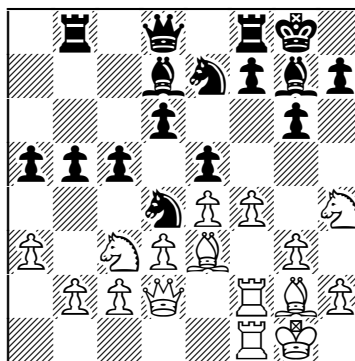


Diagram 34 (B)
f4-f5 is the ideal advance

Best and Game 24 demonstrates why 8 Bh6 isn't too much of a problem for Black in this position. That does exchange bishops, but Black has already arranged control of some key central squares with his pawns on c5 and e5.



TIP: White mustn't develop too slowly against 6...e5, such as with Nge2, as Black may be able to take over the initiative with ...f5, or with ...Be6 and ...d5.

8...Nd4 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0

Once again we see White quickly getting all his pieces into play and it's worth remembering that this position can also arise via 6 f4 e5 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Qd2.

10...exf4

Opening the long diagonal and preventing any f5-advance, although White can now gain some pressure by doubling on the f-file. 10...Bg4 is a major alternative and the subject of Game 25, but Black's rather rare options are also not so bad:

a) 10...Rb8 simply gets on with queenside counterplay. White responded well in S.Glinert-P.Cramling, Toronto 2003 with 11 a3 Bd7 12 Rf2 b5 13 Raf1 a5 and should now have prepared f5 with 14 Nh4 (**Diagram 34**). Black might prevent that with 14...b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 Nd1 f5, but that allows White to inflict hanging pawns which can quickly be pressurized after 17 fxe5! dxe5 18 exf5 gxf5 19 Bg5.

b) 10...Qb6 blocks the black b-pawn, but the queen is fairly well placed here, supporting d4 and preventing White from doubling his rooks on the f-file. 11 Rab1 Bg4 12 Nh4 exf4 13 Bxf4 Rad8 14 Rf2 Be6 was V.Arjun-A.Delchev, Bad Wiessee 2005 when 15 Bh6 would have logically reduced Black's power down the long diagonal and slightly weakened his kingside defences.

11 Bxf4



WARNING: White should recapture on f4 with a piece; 11 gxf4?! f5! leaves his dark-squared bishop badly blunted.

D.Ledger-D.King, British League 2000 continued 12 Rab1 Kh8 13 Qf2 Nec6 (**Diagram 35**)

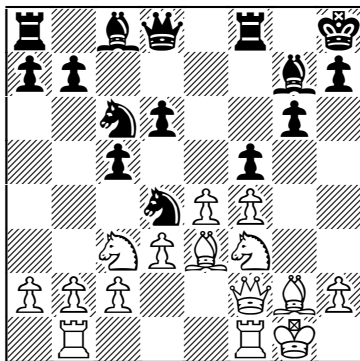


Diagram 35 (W)
White lacks a plan

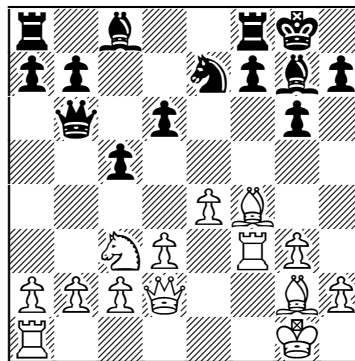


Diagram 36 (W)
Tying White to b2

14 Nd5 and White had control of d5, but that was all he had. King instructively improved his pieces and then challenged d5 with 14...Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 Be6 16 c3 Qd7 17 Kh1 Rae8 18 Rbd1 b6 19 Bc1 Rf7 20 Qg3 Ne7 after which White was still struggling to find anything to do.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

11...Nxf3+ 12 Rxf3 Qb6 (Diagram 36)

Portisch's move, interfering with White's kingside build-up. This has been heavily praised over the years, but White can still gain some kingside pressure and, while Black is solid, he can lack counterplay as we will see in Game 26.

Theoretical?

6...e5 has a good theoretical recommendation and was featured in Rogozenko's *Anti-Sicilians: A Guide for Black*, but is not especially theoretical. It does take the sting out of a rapid Bh6, but White shouldn't mind building up more slowly.

Statistics

White should avoid 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6, with which he has only made 43% from 258 games, and prefer 8 f4. He has admittedly only scored 46% from 172 games after 8...0-0 9 Nf3 Nd4 10 0-0, but White's rating performance has been higher than his average rating in those. That reveals that White has often been out-rated in games featuring 8 f4 and so 6...e5 is popular with a number of grandmasters who like to solidly develop their pieces and to equalize as Black.

Illustrative Games

Game 24

□ A.Parkanyi ■ D.Vigorito

Budapest 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e5 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6

Proceeding as with the black e-pawn back on e6, but Vigorito effectively demonstrates why the pawn is much more useful for Black on e5, while 8...Bxh6 9 Qxh6 Nd4 is also possible.

8...0-0 9 h4 (Diagram 37)

Probably White should prefer to play in slightly more restrained fashion with 9 Bxg7 Kxg7 10 f4. However, in S.Narayana-D.King, Calcutta 1993 Black made immediate and good use of having his pawn on e5 and 10...Nd4 11 Nf3 Bg4 12 0-0 Bxf3! 13 Bxf3 Qb6 (Diagram 38) left him well placed. The white bishop wasn't at all active and so it was imperative for White to play solidly, beginning with 14 Rab1. Instead 14 Nd1?! c4! saw Black take over the initiative and after 15 Kh1 cxd3 16 Qxd3?! Rac8 17 c3 Nxf3 18 Rxf3 f5! King's powerful play had already left White on the brink.

9...Bxh6 10 Qxh6 f6! 11 Qd2



WARNING: Just a little reminder that Black's last prepared to trap the white queen with 11 h5?? g5!, ...Kh8 and ...Ng8.

11...Nd4!

It may be a little surprising just how useful the extra tempo is for Black, but being able to freely develop his light-squared bishop is very useful as 12 Nge2 Bg4! demonstrates.

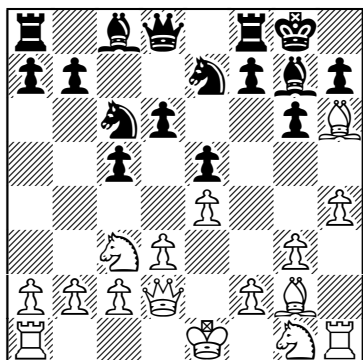


Diagram 37 (B)
Still playing for mate

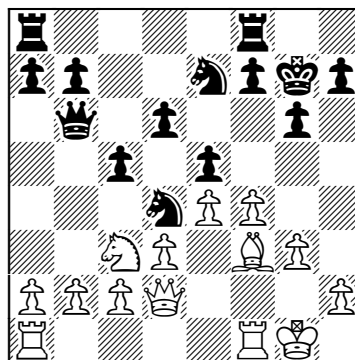


Diagram 38 (W)
Black is pretty comfortable

12 f4?!

Failing to notice the difference from 6...e6 and White should have tried 12 h5!? g5 13 h6, intending 13...Bg4 14 f3, although 13...Qa5 14 f4 exf4 15 gxf4 Ng6! brought Black control of some key squares and a pretty pleasant position in E.Moser-I.Radziewicz, European Women's Team Ch., Plovdiv 2003. Instead 12 Nd1 was tried in M.Strijbos-J.Van der Wiel, Vlissingen 1998, but is again too slow and 12...f5! 13 c3 Ne6 14 exf5 gxf5 15 Ne3 f4 left Black taking over the initiative.

12...Bg4 13 Bh3

This fails to shake Black's control of g4 and 13 Nd1!? was the alternative, although White continues to suffer after 13...d5! 14 Ne3 Be6 when his lack of development can quickly become a factor as shown by 15 h5 dxe4 16 hxg6 Nxc6 17 Bxe4 f5! 18 Bxb7 Rb8 19 Bg2 Rxb2.

13...Qd7 14 Bxc4!? Qxc4 15 Nce2 exf4?! (Diagram 39)

With hindsight Vigorito might well have preferred simply 15...d5 as matters aren't as clear as they first appear on the kingside.

16 0-0-0?

Feeble, especially when it appeared that White was playing for 16 gxf4! Qg2 17 Nxd4 Qxh1 18 Ndf3, trapping the black queen in the corner. Black can save her, but that comes at the cost of permitting serious counterplay, such as with 18...f5 19 0-0-0 fxe4 20 dxe4 d5 21 exd5 Nf5 22 d6!.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

16...fxg3 17 Nxd4 cxd4 18 Ne2 f5!

Maintaining the black g3-pawn and leaving White facing a crushing defeat.

19 h5 f4 20 hxg6 Nxg6 21 Nxd4 g2 22 Rhg1 f3 23 Qf2 Rae8 24 Rd2 h5 25 b3?!

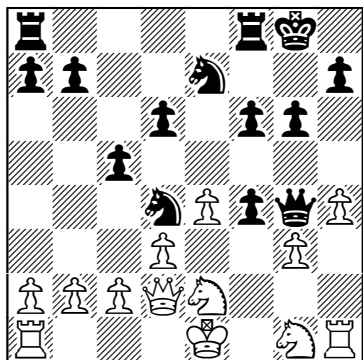


Diagram 39 (W)

White has a defensive resource

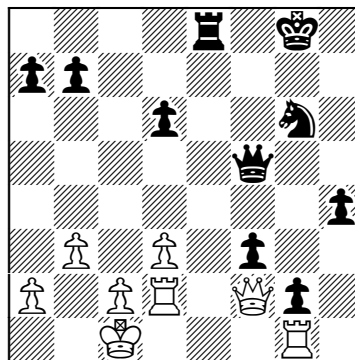


Diagram 40 (W)

Those are some passed pawns!

Black's last wasn't perhaps the most accurate as White could now have tried 25 Nxf3! Rxf3 26 Qxg2 Ref8 27 Qxg4 hxg4 28 Rxg4 Rf1+ 29 Rd1 Rxd1+ 30 Kxd1. That is winning after 30...Kf7, but with White having two pawns for the piece, Black would still have been required to demonstrate some technique.

25...h4 26 Nf5 Rxf5!

Facilitating the tidal wave of black pawns to sweep all before them.

27 exf5 Qxf5 (Diagram 40) 28 d4 h3 29 Qg3 Rf8 30 Kb2 Kg7 31 Re1 Rf7 0-1

Game 25

□ R.Hall ■ J.Nielsen

Correspondence 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e5 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 f4 Nd4 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4 (Diagram 41) 11 Nh4

Preventing any exchanges on f3 and hoping to be able to advance with f5.

White can also play more simply and 11 Rf2 exf4 12 Bxf4 Nxf3+ 13 Bxf3 Bxf3 14 Rxf3 d5 15 Re1 left him with an edge in V.Hort-P.Ostojic, Hastings 1967/8. Black thus preferred traditional queenside counterplay, rather than ...d5, in N.Short-I.Nataf, FIDE World Ch., New Delhi 2000, although 11...Qd7 12 Raf1 exf4 13 Bxf4 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 Bxf3 15 Rxf3 b5 16 Bh6 b4 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Nd1, followed by bringing the knight to e3, still left White slightly for preference.

11...exf4

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

Ruling out any f5 ideas, but 11...Qd7 is again the alternative when Emms has proposed the promising and thematic 12 Rae1 f6 13 f5! gxf5 14 Nd5 fxe4 (14...Nxd5 15 exd5 leaves Black unable to hold f5) 15 Nxe7+ Qxe7 16 dxe4 (**Diagram 42**) with good compensation for the pawn due to Black's light-square weaknesses.

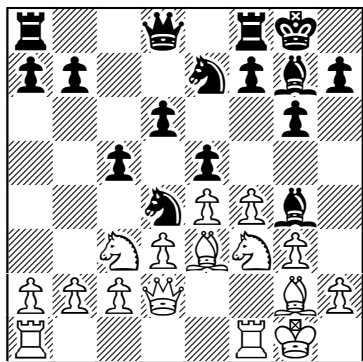


Diagram 41 (W)
Playing for exchanges

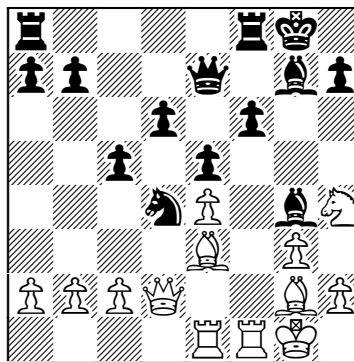


Diagram 42 (B)
A thematic pawn sacrifice

12 Bxf4 Qd7 13 Rf2 Rae8

A solid approach and Nielsen reveals that he has no interest in winning the game, preferring to set out his stall for a draw. Black played more actively with 13...b5 in O.Romanishin-J.Horvath, Balatonbereny 1993, but White retained a small advantage by once again doubling on the h-file and exchanging the dark-square bishops with 14 Bh6! Rae8 15 Raf1 b4 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Nd1 Bxd1 18 Qxd1 d5 19 c3 bxc3 20 bxc3 Ndc6 21 Qf3.

14 Bh6 f6! 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Raf1

White's position remains the slightly more pleasant to play, but in a correspondence game he is always going to struggle to break down the black defences.

16...b6 17 a3 a5 18 a4!



NOTE: This is a positionally instructive idea from Hall. White worries Black with the b4-advance after a3 and then seizes a queenside grip by meeting ...a5 with a4.

18...Qe6 (Diagram 43) 19 Nf3

Finally giving in and permitting exchanges, but Hall's main problem has been that h3 is impossible.

19...Nxf3+ 20 Bxf3 Bxf3 21 Rxf3 d5! 22 Rf4 f5 23 Nb5! Qd7 24 Qf2 dxe4 25

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

dxe4 Rd8 26 c4

Seizing control of d5 and preparing to meet 26...Qd2 with 27 Nc7. It appears that Nielsen is being outplayed, but he comes up with some impressive defence.

26...Rf7 27 exf5 Rxf5 28 g4 Rxf4 29 Qxf4 Nc6 30 Qf6+ Kg8 31 Nc3!?

This move is a last throw of the dice. Instead the line 31 h3 Qe8 32 Qf4 Rd3 would have permitted Black to safeguard his king and gain sufficient counterplay.

31...Qxg4+ 32 Kh1 Qd7 33 Nd5 (Diagram 44)

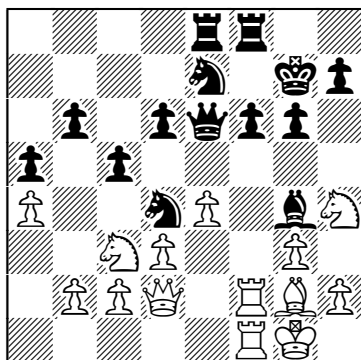


Diagram 43 (W)

Further solid play from Black

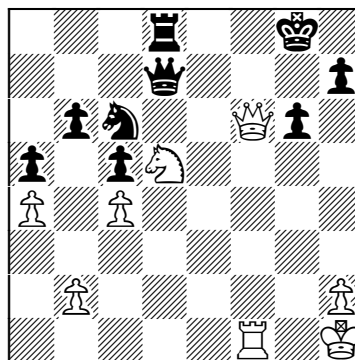


Diagram 44 (B)

Is Black in trouble?

This appears rather scary for Black, but, unfortunately for the English 2600, Nielsen has it all worked out.

33...Qe8! 34 Qh4

Forcing perpetual, but White couldn't avoid a draw as 34 Rf3 Rxd5! 35 cxd5 Nd4 36 Rf4 Qe1+ would also have been one.

34...Kh8 35 Qf6+ ½-½

Game 26

□ T.Stepovaia Dianchenko ■ J.Nill

European Women's Championship, Silivri 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 d3 Bg7 5 Be3 d6 6 Qd2 e5 7 Bg2 Nge7 8 f4 Nd4 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 exf4 11 Bxf4 Nxf3+ 12 Rxf3 Qb6 13 Rb1



WARNING: The b-pawn must be defended as 13 b3? Qb4! exploits Black's pressure down the long diagonal.

13...Be6 (Diagram 45)

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

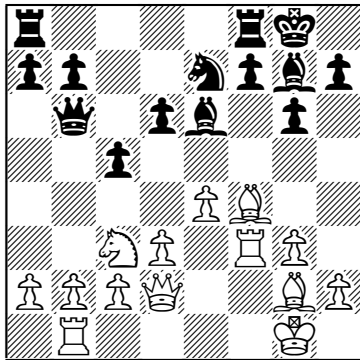


Diagram 45 (W)
Bh6 is logical

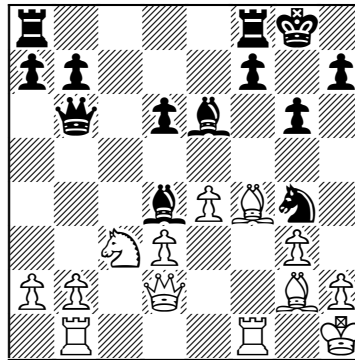


Diagram 46 (W)
Black has excellent dark-square play

14 Rf2!?

A new and subtle idea as White prevents ...Nc6-d4 from coming with tempo. This could do with further tests, but White certainly shouldn't play as he did when 12...Qb6 first appeared in B.Larsen-L.Portisch, 1st matchgame, Rotterdam 1977: 14 Bg5?! Nc6 15 Be3?! Ne5 16 Rff1 Ng4 17 Bf4 c4+! 18 Kh1 cxd3 19 cxd3 Bd4 (**Diagram 46**) and Black's preparation had worked a treat. Much better is 14 Bh6, immediately exchanging the bishops, and 14...Rae8 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 was M.Adams-V.Kramnik, FIDE World Ch. (rapid), Las Vegas 1999 when 16 Rf2 would have been superior to 16 Kh1. Very similar is 14...f6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Rf2! and 16...Rae8 17 a3 (**Diagram 47**)

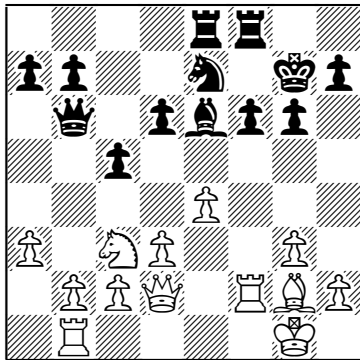


Diagram 47 (B)
Preparing b4

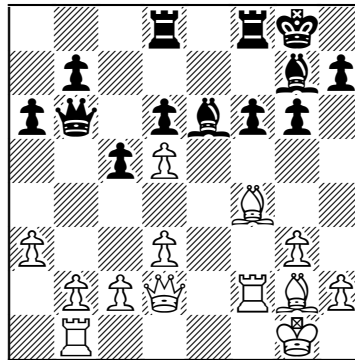


Diagram 48 (B)
White is better

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

17...Qd8 18 b4! b6 19 Rbf1 Nc6 20 Ne2 Ne5 21 Nf4 Bg8 22 c3 left Black under pressure and slightly worse in J.Houska-A.Delchev, Saint Vincent 2003.



NOTE: High-level games in the Closed Sicilian are always welcome, but it is possible to try and find improvements over them.

The idea of Rf2 and a3 appears to give White an edge, with Black being left solid but a little passive.

14...Rae8 15 Bh6 f6 16 Bf4!?

A change from the normal as Stepovaia Dianchenko eschews the exchange of bishops. This interesting approach asks Black where her counterplay is, although 16...f5 17 exf5 Bxf5, despite White's control of d5, wouldn't have been so bad for Nill.

16...a6 17 a3 Rd8?! 18 Nd5! Nxd5 19 exd5 (Diagram 48)

This exchange may appear to weaken the white structure, but much more important is the weakness created on e6. Furthermore, the d5-point rather cramps Black and leaves her lacking any active prospects.

19...Bf7 20 c3 Rfe8 21 Rbf1 Rd7 22 g4!

With Black solid but passive, White seizes the chance to expand on the kingside and Nill takes drastic steps to rule out h4-h5.

22...g5 23 Bg3 Qb3?

Underestimating White's threat, whereas 23...Bg6 24 h4 would have continued to soften up the black kingside, although Black does remain rather hard to break down after 24...h6.

24 Rxf6! Bxf6 25 Rxf6 Bg6 26 Bxd6 c4 27 d4 Qc2 28 Qxc2

28 Qxg5 was possible as 28...Rg7 29 Qf4 Re1+ 30 Bf1 defends without too much difficulty.

28...Bxc2 29 Be5! (Diagram 49)

Reminding Black of her exposed king and also creating the idea of Rb6 and d6.

29...Rf8 30 Rb6?!

Much more accurate was 30 Rh6!, trying to win the g5-pawn. 30...Bg6 appears to trap the rook offside, but White can force its release with some effect after 31 d6 and 32 Bd5+.

30...Bd1! 31 Be4?

Time trouble has taken hold of the game and 31 d6! would have been logical and strong. Black cannot allow 32 Bd5+, but 31...Bf3 32 Bxf3 Rxf3 33 Rb4 b5 34 a4 Rb7 (34...Rdf7 35 axb5 Rf1+ 36 Kg2 R7f2+ isn't a perpetual due to 37 Kh3 Rf3+ 38 Bg3) 35 axb5 axb5 36 d7 Rxd7 37 Rxb5 maintains White's promising compensation.

31...Bxg4 32 b3? Bf3?!

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

32...Bh3 would have been worrying to face with no time, although with 33 Bg2 Bxg2 34 Kxg2 cxb3 35 c4 Rc8 36 c5! the game continues and the rook ending after 36...Rxd5 37 Rxb3 Rxc5 38 dxc5 Rxe5 39 Rxb7 Rxc5 is only drawn due to the weakness of a6.

33 Bxf3 Rxf3 34 bxc4 Rxc3 35 c5 Rxd5 36 Rxb7 Rxe5!

Wisely removing the monster bishop as the game appears to head for a draw.

37 dxe5 Rxc5 38 e6 Ra5?? (Diagram 50)

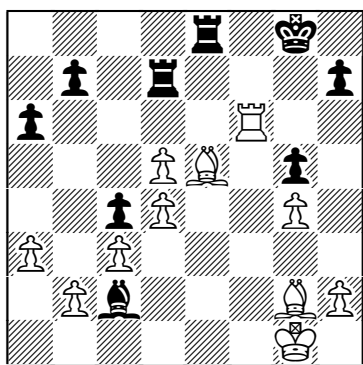


Diagram 49 (B)

A colossal white bishop on e5

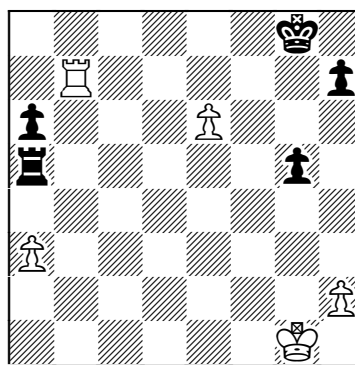


Diagram 50 (W)

A terrible blunder

Missing a trick and 38...Re5 would have drawn comfortably.



TIP: It can never be said enough that rooks belong passed pawns.

39 Rb8+ Kg7 40 e7 1-0

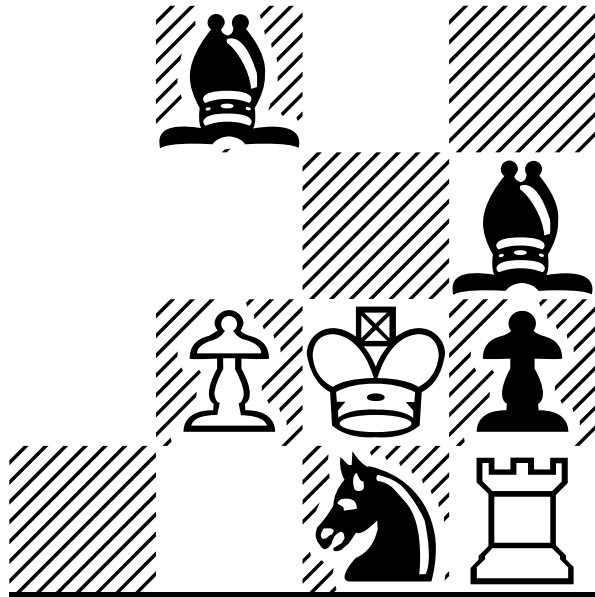
Points to Remember

- 1) 6...e6 remains by far Black's most popular defence to 6 Be3, but is a move which White should be happy to face.
- 2) 6 Be3 e6 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6 is dangerous for Black, especially after 8...0-0 9 h4!, exploiting the flexibility in the white set-up.
- 3) 7...Qa5 is Black's best try after 6...e6 7 Qd2 when White should change tack with 8 f4, angling to advance with e5.
- 4) The solid 6...e5 is a tough nut to crack and White shouldn't fall into the trap of proceeding as he does against 6...e6, instead preferring to slowly build up on the kingside.
- 5) 10...exf4 and 12...Qb6 has a good reputation, but 16 Rf2 and 17 a3, after an exchange of the dark-square bishops, is an important new idea.

Chapter Four

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

- Introduction and 6...Nf6
- Black Plays 6...Rb8
- Points to Remember



Introduction and 6...Nf6

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6

Black can play ...Nc6, ...d6 and ...g6 in any order, but sometimes he may try and delay ...d6 with 5...e6. 6 f4 is quite possible, but after 6 Be3 Black should actually transpose to 5...d6 6 Be3 e6 with 6...d6. Instead 6...b6 isn't especially impressive and 7 Qd2 Nge7 8 Bh6 0-0 9 h4! begins a logical attack, but 6...Nd4?! has been known to be misguided since the forties due to 7 Nce2! (**Diagram 1**).

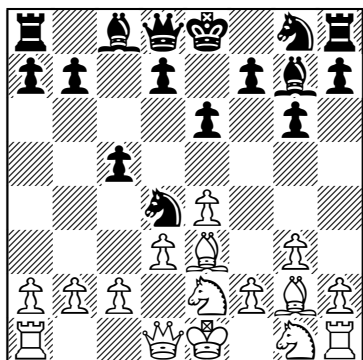


Diagram 1 (B)
Challenging Black's knight

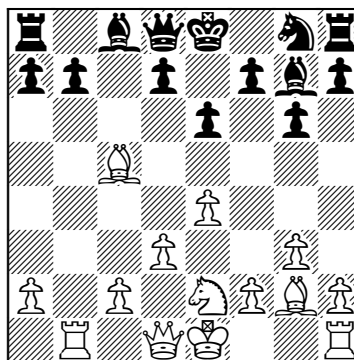


Diagram 2 (B)
White is better

This ensures White of a pleasant edge, no matter what Black tries:

a) 7...Nxe2 8 Nxe2 Bxb2 is clearly critical, but 9 Rb1 Qa5? 10 Bd2 Qa3 11 Rxb2 Qxb2 12 Bc3 wins material down the long diagonal. Black avoided that in H.Jurkovic-N.Levyar, Kostrena 2002, but after 9...Bg7 10 Bxc5 (**Diagram 2**), didn't like the look of leaving a powerful bishop on c5 to grab the a-pawn, although White was still somewhat better after 10...Ne7 11 0-0 d6 12 Ba3 0-0 13 Qd2 Qc7 14 c4 Rb8 15 d4.

b) 7...d5 tries to complicate the position, but with 8 c3 Nxe2 9 Nxe2 dxe4 10 Bxc5! exd3 11 Nf4 d2+ 12 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Nf6 14 Rad1 White gained a large advantage in L.Barczay-W.Uhlmann, Czech Ch., Trencianske Teplice 1979.

c) 7...Ne7 does nothing to challenge White's edge and after 8 c3 Nxe2 9 Nxe2 d6 10 d4 cxd4 11 Nxd4 White was able to build up against d6 in D.King-A.Domont, Swiss Team Ch. 1999.

6 Be3 Nf6 (Diagram 3)

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

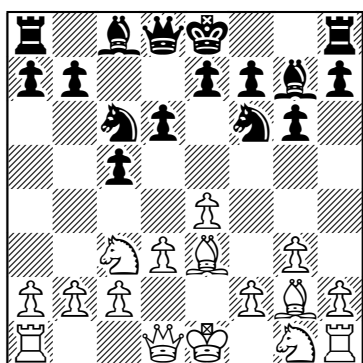


Diagram 3 (W)

Black quickly develops

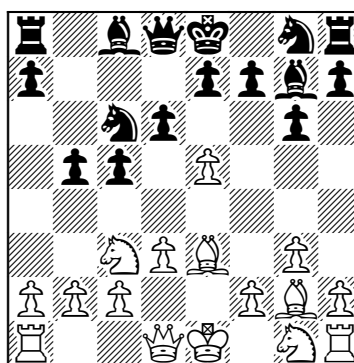


Diagram 4 (B)

Opening up the g2-bishop

This is a sister variation to 6 f4 Nf6 as once again Black completes his king-side development as quickly as possible and will then look for rapid queenside counterplay. Kasparov has also employed this version of 6...Nf6, although it is not Black's only alternative to moving his e-pawn:

- 6...Rb8!?, accelerating Black's queenside play, will be considered below.
- 6...Nd4 7 Qd2 transposes elsewhere after both 7...e5 and 7...Rb8.
- 6...Bd7 is a less flexible way of supporting ...b5 than 6...Rb8, and we saw Short accurately meet it with 7 f4 b5 8 a3! in Game 4 of the Introduction.
- 6...b5?! is the move Black would like to make work if he can, but testing in the early eighties revealed that it doesn't stand up to vigorous play from White, beginning with 7 e5! (**Diagram 4**). O.Romanishin-E.Torre, Indonesia 1983 continued 7...Qd7 8 exd6 exd6 9 Nge2! when 9...b4 10 Nd5 Bxb2 11 Rb1 Bg7 12 0-0 Bb7 13 c3! grants White promising compensation due to his pressure and superior coordination. Torre thus preferred 9...Nge7, although 10 d4 b4 11 Ne4 0-0 12 Bh6! still left Black worse and his position a little loose.

Returning to 6...Nf6, we find Black hoping for 7 Qd2?! Ng4!, eliminating an important white bishop.

7 h3 e5

Increasing Black's central control once again, but also quite possible is 7...0-0 8 f4 Rb8 (8...e5 9 Nge2! – but not 9 Nf3? Nh5! – transposes to our main line below) 9 Nf3 b5 when White must decide whether or not to hold Black up with a3, and after 10 a3 a5 11 0-0 play has transposed to the main line of 6 f4 Nf6 in Chapter Two. Against 7...0-0 White can also proceed logically with 8 Qd2, as was played in a game between two 6 Be3 experts, and 8...Rb8 9 Bh6 Bxh6 10 Qxh6 Nd4 11 Qd2 Qa5 12 Nge2 Bd7 13 g4! left White slightly better in A.Ledger-J.Emms, National Club Final, London 2004.

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

8 Nge2!



WARNING: This variation is deceptively tricky for White and it is probably best to prudently delay Qd2.

8 Qd2 is often preferred against which 8...Nd4! (**Diagram 5**) prepares some vicious tactics:

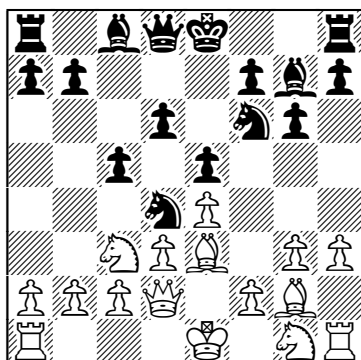


Diagram 5 (W)

White must be careful

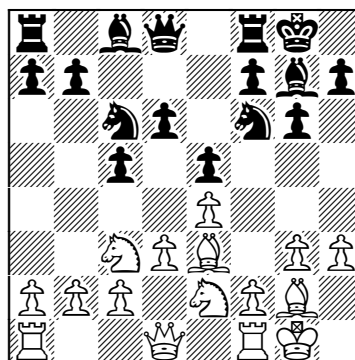


Diagram 6 (B)

White remains flexible

a) 9 f4? Nh5! is very awkward and 10 Nge2 Nxe2 11 Nxe2 exf4 12 gxf4 Bxb2 costs White a pawn.

b) 9 Nge2 0-0 hopes for 10 0-0? Bxh3!, exploiting the vulnerable f3-square and the white queen's position, although 10 f4 Rb8 just leads to an unbalanced race scenario and one typical of the 6 f4 Nf6 variation.

8...0-0 9 0-0 (**Diagram 6**)

Keeping open the option of f4 as well as that of Qd2 and Bh6. Critical is now Kasparov's ambitious 9...b5!?, as we'll see in Game 27, but Black may also play the natural 9...Nd4 when 10 f4 Nxe2+ 11 Nxe2 exf4 12 Nxf4 Bd7 13 Qd2 Bc6 14 Kh2 Nd7 15 c3, preparing to double on the f-file, gave White an edge in M.Kuijf-J.Sunye Neto, Amsterdam 1983.

Theoretical?

6...Nf6 isn't heavily theoretical, but White will find it useful to know a little theory if he intends to transpose to 6 f4 lines and also for handling Kasparov's 9...b5!? concept.

Statistics

6 Be3 Nf6 has scored 48% for Black from just over 1100 games, but many have

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transposed to variations we considered under 6 f4 Nf6. Indeed 7 h3 e5 8 Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 b5!? has only received seven outings so far, whereas 9...Nd4 has made 47% from 17 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 27

□ R.Palliser ■ J.Rowson

British Championship, Scarborough 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Nf6 7 h3 e5 8 Nge2 0-0 9 0-0 b5!? (Diagram 7)

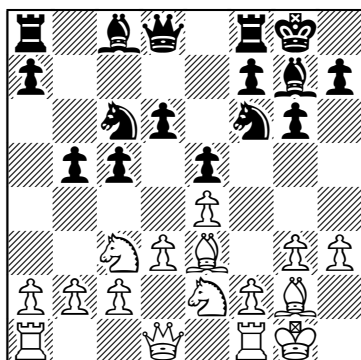


Diagram 7 (W)

Not even waiting for ...Rb8

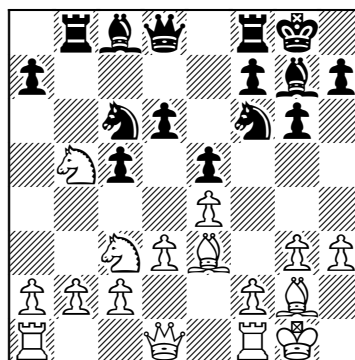


Diagram 8 (B)

A reasonable white try

10 Nxb5

Taking up the challenge is critical, whereas 10 f4 b4 11 Nd5 Nxd5 12 exd5 Nd4 13 fxe5 Nxe2+ 14 Qxe2 Bxe5 (Adams) is already a little better for Black. White could try to play by analogy with 6 f4 and prefer 10 Qd2 b4 11 Nd1 Rb8 12 f4, but this isn't such a good version because 12...Nd4 is already a little awkward. 13 g4!? could though do with a test, whereas 13 Kh2?! Nh5! undermined f4 in T.Hinks Edwards-J.Shaw, Hastings Challengers 2003/04.

10...Rb8 11 a4

To gain an edge White needs to make good use of his knights, and Bg5xf6 is an important idea to weaken Black's control of d5. Black may not then allow a knight to reach d5 and so an exchange may occur on d5 after which a tough manoeuvring struggle ensues. Having the pawn on a4 isn't especially useful for that and so White should probably follow Adams' lead from the second time he faced 9...b5 with 11 Nec3!? (Diagram 8) 11...a6 12 Na3 Rxb2 13 Nc4 Rb8 14 Bg5!. This approach is very logical and 14...h6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nd5 Bg7 17

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Rb1 Rxb1 18 Qxb1 (**Diagram 9**) saw White install a knight on d5 and enjoy the easier position to play, although Black was still very solid in M.Adams-V.Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1999. Adams has thus suggested that Black should prefer 14...Be6!? 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Ne7 which is fairly complex and the position may hinge on who can make the better use of their fianchettoed bishop: White can consider Na5-c6, while he must keep an eye out for ...e4. Here White could improve his queen with 17 Qc1!? Qd7 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Qa3 which does permit 19...e4, but that can be met by simply 20 Rab1 or even by 20 dxe4!? Bxa1 21 Rxa1, giving up the exchange for control of the centre and intending a strong Benoni-style e5 advance.

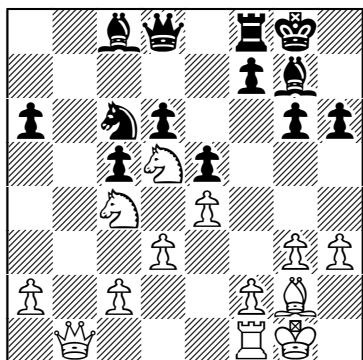


Diagram 9 (B)
White has a small edge

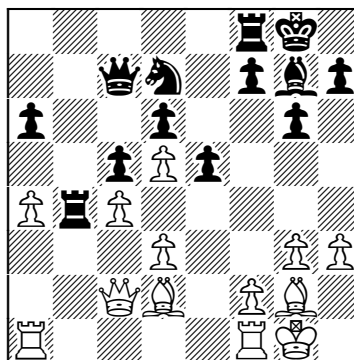


Diagram 10 (W)
The sacrifice should be declined

11...a6 12 Na3!

Keeping c3 free for the other knight, and heading for c4.

12...Rxb2 13 Nc4 Rb8 14 Nc3?!

This fails to really trouble Black, whereas a tough positional struggle occurred after 14 f4 exf4 15 Nxf4 Na5 16 Nd2! Bd7 17 Ra2 in M.Adams-G.Kasparov, Linares 1999.

14...Be6 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Na5!

Exchanging off White's remaining knight and intending to demonstrate that Black is left with the superior minor piece for this blocked position.

17 Nxa5 Qxa5 18 Bd2 Qc7 19 c4!

Preventing Black from taking the queenside initiative with ...c4 and now it's hard for either side to break through.

19...Nd7 20 Qc2 Rb4! (Diagram 10)

A strong and thematic sacrifice which was first employed in a similar position by Botvinnik. 21 Bxb4 cxb4, followed by ...a5 and ...Nc5, gives Black excellent

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compensation, especially with the white rooks lacking active roles. Thus White must decline the sacrifice and aim to keep Black at bay down the b-file.

21 a5! Rfb8 22 Bc3 R8b7 23 Ra3 Qb8 24 h4! Rb3 25 Rxb3 Rxb3 26 Bh3 f5 27 Rd1 e4!?

White has refused to allow Black to fully dictate the pace and Rowson decides that this is as good a moment as any to transform the position.

28 Bxg7 exd3 29 Rxd3 Rb1+ (Diagram 11)

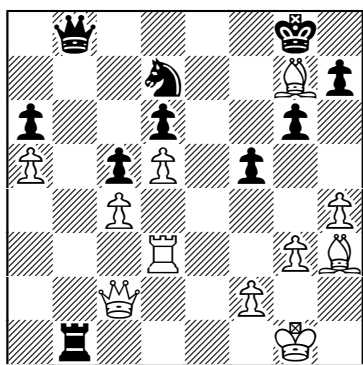


Diagram 11 (W)
Black is pressing

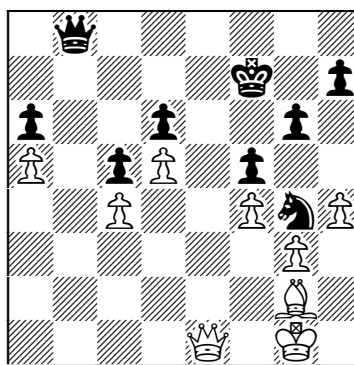


Diagram 12 (B)
White makes a draw

30 Rd1!

A queen and bad bishop against queen and knight position is now reached, but the black king is sufficiently exposed, whereas 30 Bf1 Kxg7 31 Re3 Ne5 would have given Black good pressure and left White passive and suffering.



TIP: Sometimes one has to sit and defend passively, but always make sure that there isn't an active and better alternative.

Here White has been looking out for one for some time, as 24 h4 showed, and it is the active white queen which eventually forces a draw.

30...Rxd1+ 31 Qxd1 Kxg7 32 Qa1+ Kf7 33 Qa4 Ke7 34 Qa1

Continuing to harry, whereas 34 Qc6 Ne5 35 Qxa6 Qb1+ 36 Kh2 Qb2 which sees f2 fall, and the black queen and knight circle around the white king, was just the kind of scenario I was determined to avoid.

34...Ne5 35 Bg2 Kf7 36 f4!

A final accurate move based on the point that 36...Nxc4 37 Qc3 Qb4 38 Qh8 Qb2 doesn't give Black a favourable ending because 39 Qxb2! Nxb2 40 Bf1 c4 41 Kf2 brings the king across to halt the c-pawn after which Black must be

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rather careful with a6 also quite weak. He might thus try 37...Nb2!?, but 38 Bf1 keeps the knight under control and once again pinpoints the a6-weakness.

36...Ng4 37 Qe1 (Diagram 12) 37...Qb3

Acquiescing to the draw, rather than allow White a passed a-pawn after 37...Qe8 38 Qe6+! Qxe6 39 dxe6+ Kxe6 40 Bb7.

38 Qe6+ Kg7 39 Qe7+ Kg8 40 Qe8+ Kg7 ½-½

Black Plays 6...Rb8

Logically Preparing ...b5

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Rb8 (Diagram 13)

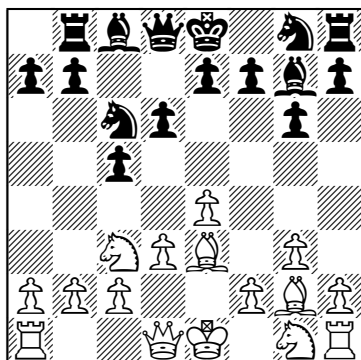


Diagram 13 (W)
Black sidesteps e4-e5

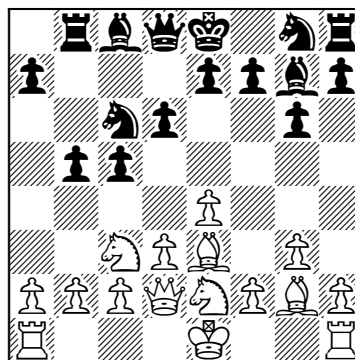


Diagram 14 (B)
White prepares 9 d4

If there is a downside to 6 Be3, it is that it leaves b2 a little vulnerable. Thus it is logical for Black to want to target b2, but to do so without allowing White the initiative which he gains after 6...b5?! 7 e5!. The move 6...Rb8 prepares a rapid advance of the b-pawn, while Black also continues to prevent Bh6. He must avoid falling too far behind in development but does retain the option of developing his king's knight to e7, to f6 and sometimes even to h6. This flexibility, allied to Black's early queenside advance, has helped to make 6...Rb8 a fairly popular choice. White does, however, retain good chances of gaining an edge in the main line, and a well-prepared white player may also be able to make good use of a number of subtle positional nuances.

7 Qd2

White can also try 7 f4, but Black is unlikely to fall for 7...b5?! 8 e5!, whereas 7...Nf6 should transpose to 6...Nf6 variations.

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7...b5 8 Nge2 (Diagram 14)

Flexible development from White which immediately focuses on the important d4-square, and which is more promising than the 8 f4 of Game 28.

8...b4

Black can also employ the move-order 8...Nd4 9 0-0 (and not 9 Nd1?! Bg4! when White must part with his important bishop on d4 to cover the f3-square) 9...b4, transposing to the main line, although 9...b4 is far from mandatory:

a) 9...Qa5 brings the queen to an active square, but she may be missed away from the centre and so White should consider 10 f4. 10 Nc1 is a more common choice, but after 10...b4 11 Nd1 Qa4! White had some problems with the c2-square in J.Houska-R.Pert, British League 2001, although she responded well with 12 Bxd4 Bxd4 13 Nb3 Bg7 14 a3! bxa3 15 Rxa3 Qd7 16 Nc3 Nh6 17 e5!?, gaining some activity to offset the bishop-pair.

b) 9...e6 should be met by the prophylactic 10 Nd1 when 10...Ne7 11 Nc1 b4 transposes to the main line, whereas 10...Nxe2+ 11 Qxe2 Ne7 12 Qd2 0-0 13 Bh6! Qc7 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Ne3 e5 16 f4 f6 17 Rf2! Bd7 18 Raf1 Rf7 19 h4! was a model kingside build-up from White in S.B.Hansen-A.Lindner, Bundesliga 2002.

c) 9...h5!? (**Diagram 15**) is an ambitious choice, even in this modern era where an early g4 is almost commonplace. White should avoid 10 h3? Bxh3! as 11 Bxd4 cxd4 12 Bxh3 dxc3 leaves Black well placed and with good dark-square pressure. The solid and sensible choice is instead 10 h4 when 10...b4 11 Nd1 e5 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxe2+ 14 Qxe2 Ne7 15 f4 Bg4 16 Qd2 Qa5 led to an unbalanced and tough struggle in M.Adams-M.Illescas Cordoba, Madrid 1998.

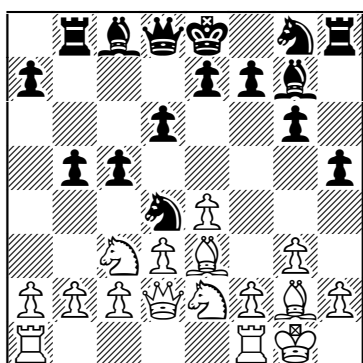


Diagram 15 (W)

Ambitious play from Black

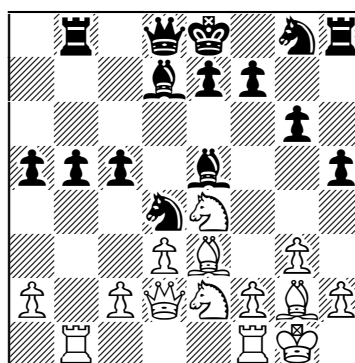


Diagram 16 (B)

White has promising compensation

It is noticeable that when Adams next faced this daring kingside thrust, he was ready to take Black on in some hand-to-hand combat with 10 b4!. This

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

critical response does offer an exchange, but Black hasn't yet been foolhardy enough to accept it as 10...Nxe2+ 11 Nxe2 Bxa1 12 Rxa1 leaves him under pressure on the dark squares and without a safe home for his king, while 12...cxb4 13 Bxa7 Rxa7 14 Qxb4! (Emms) nets a pawn due to the potential fork on d4. M.Adams-V.Ivanchuk, Linares 1999 still quickly flared into life, but White was able to gain the initiative after 10...a5!? 11 bxc5 dxc5 12 Rab1 Bd7 13 e5! Bxe5 14 Ne4 (**Diagram 16**). Ivanchuk avoided 14...Qc7 15 c3! Nxe2+ 16 Qxe2 Bg4 17 f3 Bf5 18 d4 when the white initiative continues to grow and instead the position was quite unclear after 14...Bg4 15 f3 Bf5 16 f4 Bg7 17 Nxc5, but a detailed analysis from the Ukrainian has shown that 17...Nh6?! should have been punished by 18 Nb7!.

9 Nd1 Nd4 10 0-0



WARNING: White wants his knights on c1 and d1, but 10 Nc1? Bg4! must be avoided.

That forces White to part company with an important bishop and 11 Bxd4 cxd4 12 0-0 Nf6 13 f3 Bd7 14 Nf2 h5! 15 h3 Bh6 16 f4 e5 saw Black already exploiting his dark-square advantage in J.Smith-R.Palliser, Liverpool 2005.

10...e6

Black's main move, preparing to develop his king's knight to e7, but 10...e5 may actually be a better idea as Game 29 demonstrates. Leaving the knight on g8 any longer is a little risky, although Black did so with 10...a5 11 c3 Nxe2+ 12 Qxe2 Ba6 in L.Yudasin-B.Gelfand, Munich 1991. White should punish that with 13 f4 as 13...a4 14 Rc1! a3 15 b3 (Yudasin) instructively keeps the queen-side closed and favours White. Likewise 10...Qc7?! 11 Nc1! gives White the advantage as Adams demonstrated in Game 1 of the Introduction.

11 Nc1! (**Diagram 17**)

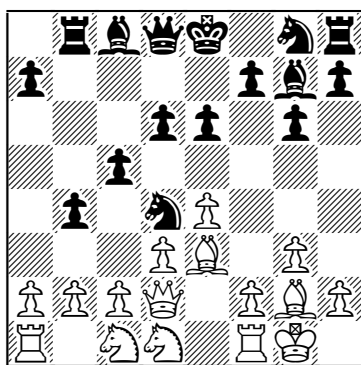


Diagram 17 (B)
Driving away the d4-knight

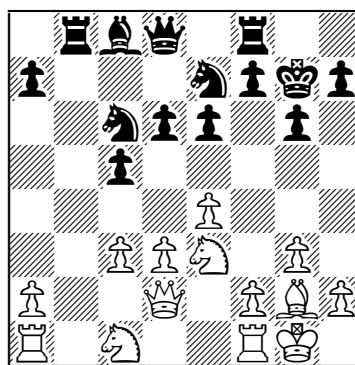


Diagram 18 (B)
White may attack on the kingside

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A deep and important concept. The white knights may look a little strange, but Black will no longer be able to meet c3 with an exchange on e2 which serves to slightly misplace the white queen. Instead the d4-knight will have to retreat after which the white position quickly expands.

11...Ne7

Simply developing, whereas 11...Qa5 has been recommended as an improvement in several places, although it's far from clear that it is one as Game 30 reveals.

12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Ndc6 14 Bh6

Having won control of d4, it is logical for White to exchange off Black's active bishop which is an important kingside defender.

14...0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Ne3 (Diagram 18)

White's central control and kingside chances grant him a small advantage in this position which has been reached several times. A few examples:

- a) 16...e5 weakens d5 and 17 Ne2 Ba6 18 f4 f6 19 Rac1! Qa5 20 Rc2 Rb7 21 Bh3! saw White activate his bishop effectively in N.Short-E.Hossain, Dhaka 1999.
- b) 16...d5 is also a little weakening and can be well met by 17 Nb3 Qd6 18 exd5 exd5 19 d4!, fixing the d5-pawn. T.Hinks Edwards-R.Palliser, Witley 2001 continued 19...cxd4 20 Nxd4 Ne5 21 f4! Ng4 22 f5 and White had successfully increased the pressure.
- c) 16...Ba6 17 f4! leaves Black struggling to prevent f5 as 17...f5 18 exf5 exf5 19 Nb3 gives White a pleasant edge and 19...Qc8?! 20 Rfe1 Re8 21 c4! Bb7? 22 Qc3+ placed the black king in some danger in J.Houska-M.Jelica, European Women's Team Ch., Plovdiv 2003.

Theoretical?

6...Rb8 is relatively quite a theoretical variation after 6 Be3. It certainly pays White to know his theory to be able to counter 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2 Nd4 9 0-0 h5!? with 10 b4! and to enable him to punish anybody still employing 11...Qa5 in the main line.

Statistics

9...h5 has taken a number of players by surprise, and is not at all easy to refute, as is reflected by its huge score of 72% from 27 outings. White is doing much better in the main line with his score up to 54% from almost 100 games after 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2 Nd4 9 0-0 b4 10 Nd1 e6 11 Nc1!, before rising further to 61% from 44 games following 11...Ne7 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Ndc6 14 Bh6 0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Ne3.

Illustrative Games

Game 28

□ J.Cappon ■ V.Dimitrov

Koszalin 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Rb8 7 Qd2 b5 8 f4 b4 9 Nd1 Qb6!? (Diagram 19)

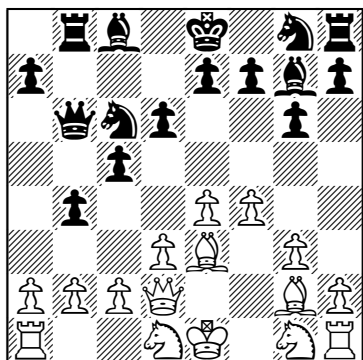


Diagram 19 (W)
Black prepares ...f5

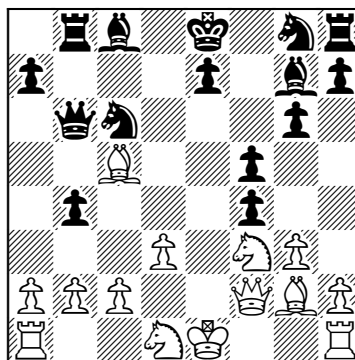


Diagram 20 (B)
Active play from White

An ambitious idea advocated by Gallagher in *Beating the Anti-Sicilians* which enables Black to play ...f5, pressurizing e4 and restricting the white pieces. Black is also fine if he prefers simply 9...e6 when 10 Nf3 Nd4 11 Nh4 Ne7 keeps f5 in check. White should though prefer that to 10 f5?! which is the ideal advance, but losing control over e5 so early is more important, and 10...Ne5! 11 fxe6 Bxe6 12 Ne2 Ne7 13 Bh6 0-0 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Nf4 Bg4! was pretty comfortable for Black in A.Rodriguez-R.Cifuentes Parada, Ayamonte 2004.

10 Ne2?!

Developing, but this doesn't fit in well with White's eighth move. He should thus prefer a more aggressive path:

a) 10 Nf3 f5 (Black can also delay this and 10...Nh6 11 a3 a5 12 axb4 axb4 13 h3 f5! 14 0-0 0-0 15 Bf2 e6 16 Ne3 Nf7 17 Nc4 Qc7 was roughly level in N.Short-V.Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005) 11 e5?! (probably too ambitious and 11 0-0 is safer when Kiselev's 11...Nh6!? can be met by 12 exf5 Nxf5 13 Bf2 0-0 14 Ng5!?, intending to bag the bishop-pair with 14...h6 15 Bd5+ Kh8 16 Ne6) 11...dxe5 12 Qf2 exf4 13 Bxc5 (**Diagram 20**) grants White some activity and this approach has defeated Volokitin, but 13...Qc7!? 14 0-0 fxg3 15 hxg3 Nf6 16 Re1 0-0 17 Ng5 Rb5! left White struggling in W.Spoelman-W.Hendriks, Dieren 2002.

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b) 10 h3 f5 11 Nf3 is another critical line which White hasn't done especially well with and 11...Nf6 12 Nh4 fxe4!? 13 dxe4 Bb7 14 Bf2?! Nd4! 15 Bxd4 cxd4 16 Nf2 0-0 17 f5 d5! opened the centre and was excellent for Black in A.Ledger-J.Rowson, British League 2003.

10...e6

With White not displaying any aggression, Dimitrov is able to harmoniously complete his development and has no need to hurry with ...f5.

11 0-0 Nge7 12 Rb1 0-0 13 h3 f5!



WARNING: This is just the sort of position White needs to avoid after 6 Be3. His pieces lack good roles and there is no clear plan, whereas Black can improve his position without too much difficulty.

14 g4?! Nd4 (Diagram 21)

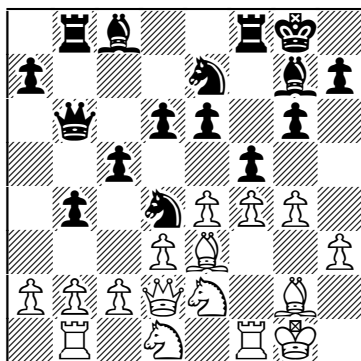


Diagram 21 (W)
White is struggling

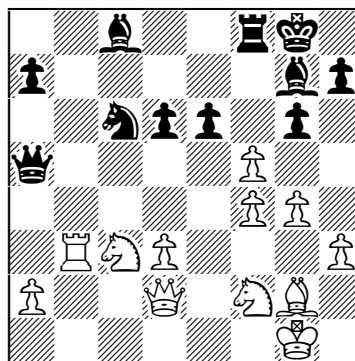


Diagram 22 (B)
Spot the winning tactic!

15 Nf2 Qa6!

Already poor Cappon is rather suffering and lacks a good way to defend his queenside.

16 Bxd4 cxd4 17 c3?

White had to grovel with 17 Ra1 as the position now opens up with some effect for the monster g7-prelate.

17...bxc3 18 bxc3 Rxb1 19 Rxb1 dxc3 20 Nxc3 Qa5 21 Rb3 Nc6 22 exf5? (Diagram 22) 22...Nd4! 0-1

Both 23 Rb1 Qxc3! and 23 Rb2 Nf3+! win material and highlight the dangers of allowing Black's dark-squared bishop to operate unopposed when the long diagonal opens.

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

Game 29

□ A.Ledger ■ R.Palliser

York 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 Nc6 6 Be3 Rb8 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2
b4 9 Nd1 Nd4 10 0-0 e5 (Diagram 23)

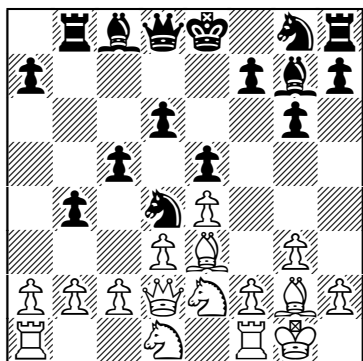


Diagram 23 (W)

More active than 10...e6

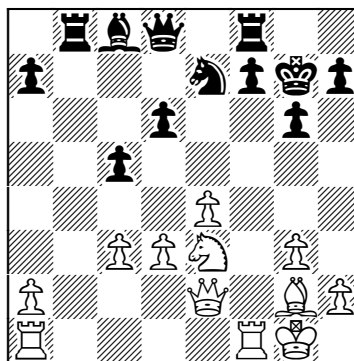


Diagram 24 (B)

White is a slightly better

11 Nc1

The standard ploy against 10...e6, but White should consider 11 c3 bxc3 12 bxc3 Nxe2+ 13 Qxe2 when he has tried two approaches after 13...Ne7:

a) 14 Qd2 0-0 15 f4 exf4 wins Black the e5-square, although 16 Bxf4 Nc6 17 Bh6 Be6 (17...Ba6 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Ne3 Ne5 improves and is about equal) 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Ne3 was slightly better for White, who had possibilities of Nf5+, in A.Ledger-A.Cherniaev, Hastings Weekend Open 2000.

b) 14 f4 should also be met by 14...exf4 15 Bxf4 0-0, whereas 14...0-0 15 fxe5! Bxe5 16 Bh6 Bg7 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Ne3 (**Diagram 24**) 18...Be6 19 Rf2 prepared to double rooks and gave White the edge in A.Ledger-D.Lopushnoy, Ubeda 1998.

With Black lagging in development, the ambitious 11 f4!? also deserves attention. L.Rouillon-S.Fuks, Lvov 1999 continued 11...Bg4 12 Nc1 exf4 13 gxf4! Ne7 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Nb5 16 a4 (**Diagram 25**) 16...Nc7 when simply 17 Nf2 looks sensible, retaining ideas of both d4 and f5.

11...Ne7 12 f4

Rare, but this doesn't really lead anywhere and so it will be interesting to see how Ledger responds next time he faces 10...e5. He had previously also tried 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 when 13...Ne6! makes good use of Black's tenth move to take the sting out of 14 f4 (which is well met by 14...exf4 15 gxf4 f5!). Thus

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

A.Ledger-J.Donaldson, Isle of Man 1997 continued 14 Bh6 0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Ne3, but Black drew comfortably with 16...f5! 17 exf5 Nxf5 18 Ne2 Nxe3 19 Qxe3 Qg5.

12...exf4!

Again reducing White's kingside options and intending to castle, followed by ...f5 or ...d5, while White's problem is that his knights on c1 and d1 take much longer to untangle than they do after 10...e6.

13 Bxf4 0-0 14 Rf2 f5! 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Ne6 17 Bh6

Thematic, but Black enjoys a fair share of the centre here and also isn't struggling in terms of development. However, he does lag a little in development after 11 f4!? and so it will be interesting to see if that aggressive move catches on.

17...Bxh6 18 Qxh6 fxe4 19 dxex4 Nc6 (Diagram 26) 20 Nd3

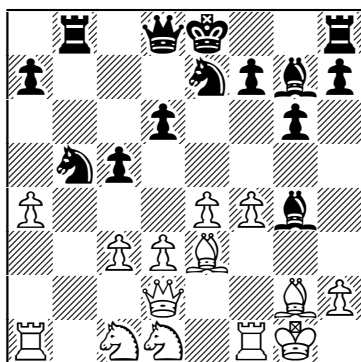


Diagram 25 (B)

White pursues the initiative

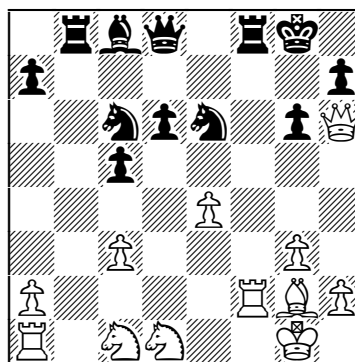


Diagram 26 (W)

Black is fine

White is still very solid and his control of d5 offsets Black's over e5, but this is still quite a comfortable position for Black. Unlike in the 10...e6 lines, he isn't at all cramped and is fully equal after the forthcoming exchange of queens.

20...Rxf2 21 N1xf2 Qg5 22 Qxg5 ½-½

Game 30

□ A.Ledger ■ J.Shaw

Isle of Man Open 1998

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 d3 Bg7 5 Be3 d6 6 Qd2 Rb8 7 Bg2 b5 8 Nge2 b4 9 Nd1 Nd4 10 0-0 e6 11 Nc1 Qa5?! 12 a3! (Diagram 27)

Exploiting the pin down the e1-a5 diagonal and this is much more promising than the standard 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Nc6 14 Ne2.

12...Qa4

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

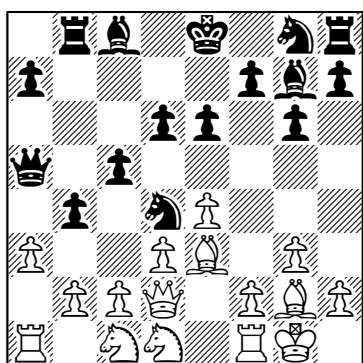


Diagram 27 (B)
Effective queenside play

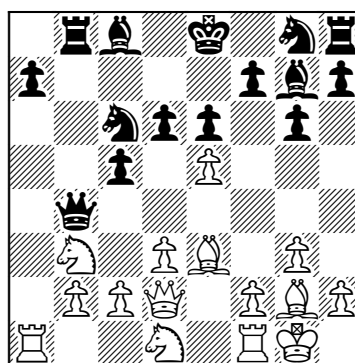


Diagram 28 (B)
White seizes the initiative

This doesn't fully convince but it is not clear if there is anything better:

- a) 12...Ne7?! appears natural, but enables White to reveal his main idea with 13 Bxd4! cxd4 14 Nb3 Qb6 15 axb4 Nc6 16 c3, netting a pawn.
- b) 12...Qa6 avoids dropping a pawn, but White is still better after 13 Bxd4 cxd4 14 Nb3 bxa3 15 Rxa3 Qb6 16 Qa5 due to his queenside pressure.
- c) 12...Nc6?! 13 Nb3 Qb6 also avoids losing the b-pawn, but does permit the strong 14 axb4 Qxb4 15 e5! (**Diagram 28**) 15...Nxe5 16 Qxb4 Rxb4 17 Rxa7 with some initiative for White. Black should probably now try 17...Nf6, although he is still worse after 18 d4 cxd4 19 Bxd4 0-0 20 Ne3, whereas 17...Nxd3 (S.Lalic-S.Dishman, British League 2001) can be powerfully met by Emms' idea of 18 Bc6+ Kf8 19 Ra8 Ne7 20 Bd7.

13 Bxd4!



NOTE: This exchange is actually promising as it leaves Black in trouble on the queenside.

13...cxd4 14 b3! Qa6 15 Nb2 Ne7 16 Nc4 0-0 17 Ne2 (Diagram 29) 17...d5!?
17...bxa3 18 Rxa3 leaves Black unable to cover both a7 and d6.

18 axb4 Qb7 19 exd5 exd5

The most combative try as 19...Nxd5 20 Nf4 Rd8 21 Ra5! Qxb4 22 Nxd5 Qxd2 23 Ne7+ Kf8 24 Nxg6+ hxg6 25 Nxd2 would have left White a clear pawn ahead and still with a large positional advantage.

20 Nf4 Bh6 21 Rfe1 Be6 22 Re2 Nf5 23 Ne5!

White is a pawn ahead, although it is not so easy to make progress due to the pin against the f4-knight. Ledger does though keep his pieces well coordinated and also Shaw's counterplay under control.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

23...Nd6 24 Nf3 Nb5 25 Re5 Rfc8 26 Rae1 Rc6 27 h4 Rbc8 28 Ng5 Rxc2 29 Qd1

More clinical was 29 Nxd5! as 29...Rxd2 (or 29...Bg7 30 Qf4) 30 Nf6+ Kg7 31 Bxb7 Kxf6 32 Bxc8 Bxc8 33 Rxb5 sees White emerge the exchange ahead.

29...Bg7?!

Not taking his chance and allowing a strong exchange sacrifice, although White would still have been much better, with two active rooks against the black queen, after 29...Rc1 30 Qxc1 Rxc1 31 Rxc1 Nc7 32 Rc5.

30 Rxd5! Bxd5

Now the black kingside collapses, but after 30...Nc3 31 Qxc2 Nxd5 32 Qd1 White's pressure against e6 would have been decisive.

31 Bxd5 (Diagram 30) 31...Qc7 32 Bxf7+ Kh8 33 Bc4

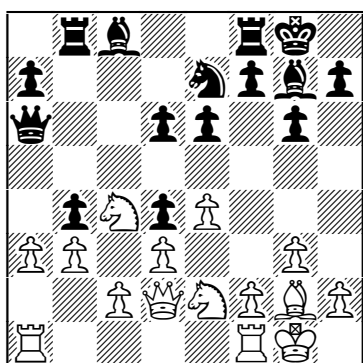


Diagram 29 (B)

Preparing to open the a-file

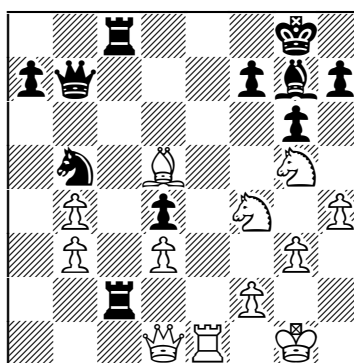


Diagram 30 (B)

A crushing exchange sacrifice

Plenty good enough, but 33 Nxc6+! hxc6 34 Bxc6 would have been a crisper finish to a crushing display from Ledger.

33...Rxc4 34 bxc4 Nc3 35 Qg4 1-0

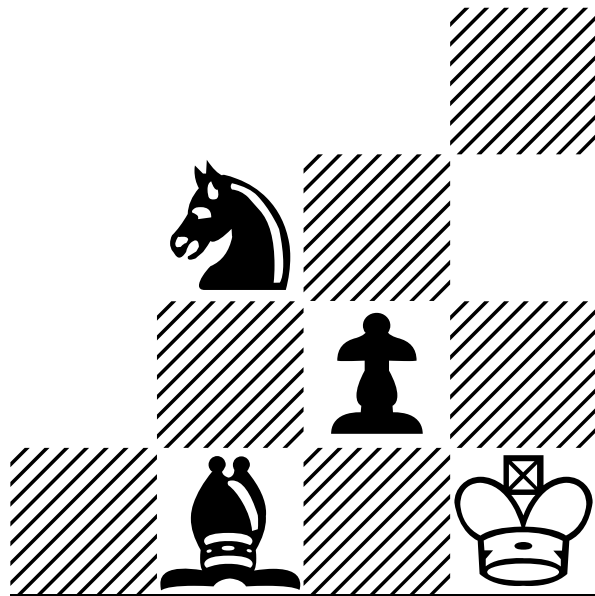
Points to Remember

- 1) 5...e6 6 Qd2 Nd4?! 7 Nce2! is a useful idea to remember.
- 2) 6...Nf6 forces White to develop accurately and delaying Qd2, but playing Nge2, is generally quite prudent.
- 3) 6...Rb8 is one of Black's better options against 6 Be3 and is best challenged by 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2, rather than by 8 f4.
- 4) White should always aim to evict the black knight from d4 and thus Nc1 and Nd1 is an important motif, to be followed up by c3, Bh6 and f4.

Chapter Five

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

-  White Plays Nge2
-  White Plays 6 Nh3
-  Points to Remember



White Plays Nge2

A Creative Approach

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nge2 (Diagram 1)

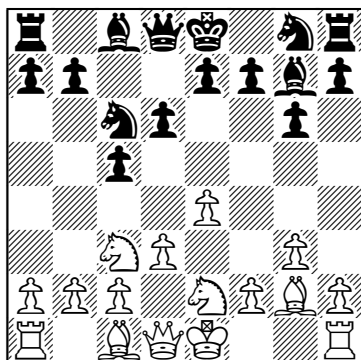


Diagram 1 (B)
A flexible move

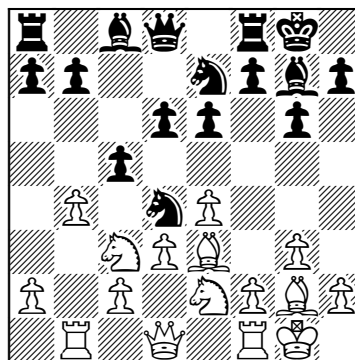


Diagram 2 (B)
A thematic advance

6 f4 and 6 Be3 are the main lines of the Closed Sicilian and two quite potent weapons. Those with some experience of both those variations and the Closed Sicilian's many subtleties may on occasion prefer something a little different and more creative. The variations considered in this chapter contain much fertile ground for those who like to experiment as White, while they, even more than the main lines, see a much greater emphasis being placed on understanding ideas rather than knowing specific move-orders. 6 Nge2 keeps White's options open, allowing him to follow up with f4, Be3, or even with Rb1 and b4 depending on which set-up Black opts for.

If a system with Nge2 appeals to White, he should give serious consideration to delaying d3 with 5 Nge2!? which is a favourite of the ever-creative Israeli, Jacob Murey, and also the American Parisian, Martin Appleberry. White plans a quick advance of his b-pawn and we will consider this interesting approach in Game 31.

Returning to the more standard 6 Nge2:

6...Nf6

A sensible move as the white knight isn't perfectly placed on e2 for a kingside pawn storm, whereas 6...Rb8 usually just transposes after 7 Be3 to 6 Be3 Rb8, and another acceptable course for Black is the 6...e5 of Game 32. Some players may not though be aware that 6...e6 isn't here considered quite so good. After

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

7 0-0 Nge7 White shouldn't wish to get involved in 8 f4 0-0 9 g4?! f5!, but 8 Bg5!? is a better choice as we will see in Game 33. However, it is also possible to follow Spassky's lead with 8 Be3 0-0 9 Rb1, intending 9...Nd4 10 b4! (**Diagram 2**). 10...Nec6 11 a3 Rb8 12 f4 Bd7 13 Qd2 b6 14 Nc1 Rc8 15 Nd1! borrowed an idea from 6 Be3 to give White the edge in Q.Bao-S.Temirbaev, Calvia Olympiad 2004 and so Black should prefer to head into the unclear 10...b6!? 11 e5 Nd5, as he did in B.Spassky-M.Chandler Bundesliga 1987, although this is just the sort of original position sought by 6 Nge2 exponents.

7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 Rb8

Commencing queenside counterplay, but those unfamiliar with the 6 f4 Nf6 variation may wrongly worry about White advancing with d4. 8...Nd4 has thus been seen, but 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Ne2 (**Diagram 3**) is a favourable exchange for White as Black lacks a satisfactory way to defend d4. 10...Qb6 11 c3! dxc3 12 bxc3 Bd7 13 a4 Rac8 14 c4 gave White good queenside play in D.King-G.Miralles, Bundesliga 1999 and so Black should probably prefer 10...Nd7 11 f4 f5. However, even here he isn't fully out of the woods and 12 Kh2 Kh8 13 exf5! gxf5 14 c3 dxc3 15 bxc3 Qa5 16 Be3 prepared Bd4 and left the black structure a little vulnerable in B.Spassky-A.Gipslis, USSR Ch., Baku 1961.

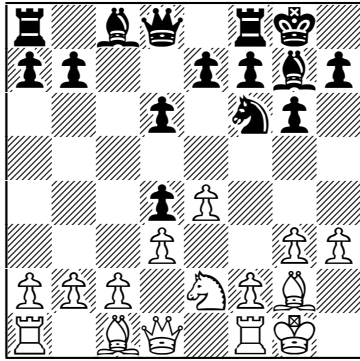


Diagram 3 (B)
White has the edge

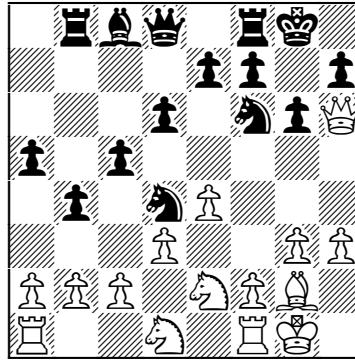


Diagram 4 (W)
Hoping for 14 Qd2?! Bxh3!

9 f4

Best as the e2-knight just really gets in the way after 9 Be3 b5 10 Qd2?!. Black can highlight that with 10...b4 11 Nd1 a5 when he is already well-advanced on the queenside and ready to meet 12 Bh6 with 12...Bxh6! 13 Qxh6 Nd4 (**Diagram 4**) after which White has rather struggled; 14 Nxd4 cxd4 15 c4 bxc3 16 bxc3 Qb6 17 Rc1 Be6 18 Qd2 d5 favoured Black in J.Houska-J.Dworakowska, Bundesliga 2003.

9...Bd7

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Wisely avoiding dropping a piece with 9...b5?? to 10 e5!, but 9...Nd7 is a sensible alternative as, just like in the 6 f4 Nf6 variation, there isn't any need to immediately develop the black light-squared bishop. White has struggled a little here and 10 g4 b5 11 f5?! b4 12 Nd5 e6 13 Ne3 Nd4 14 Nf4 Ne5! saw both black knights reach good squares in A.Skripchenko-A.Naiditsch, 6th match-game, Dortmund 2001, but 11 Ng3 would have been a better try.

10 Be3

White should probably proceed full speed ahead with 10 g4 b5 11 Ng3 so that his queen's knight can move over to e2. White might prefer to have his knights on f3 and g3, but such a set-up isn't possible after 6 Nge2. Nevertheless, here 11...Nd4 12 Nce2 Nxe2+ 13 Qxe2 Ne8 14 c3 b4 15 c4! Nc7 16 f5 (**Diagram 5**)

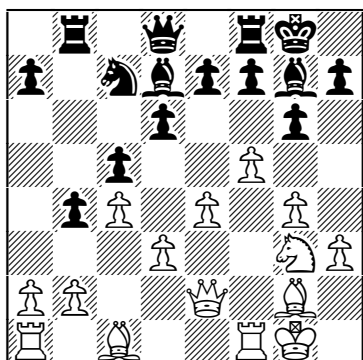


Diagram 5 (B)
White is better

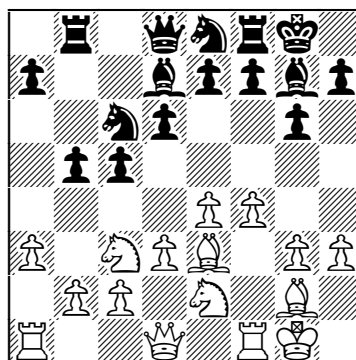


Diagram 6 (W)
Allowing d3-d4

kept the queenside closed and gave White the sort of attacking potential he was after in N.Sedlak,N-Miranovic, Sombor 2004. Black should instead race on with 11...b4 12 Nce2, although 12...a5 13 a4!? bxa3 14 Rxa3 Ne8 15 c3 held him up on the queenside in A.Morozevich-Z.Efimenko, European Club Cup, Rethymnon 2003. 12...Ne8 is also thematic and 13 f5 Nd4 14 Nf4 Bb5 15 Be3 Nc7 led to a typically unbalanced and unclear position in E.Gasanov-A.Averjanov, Tula 2004.

10...b5 11 a3!?

White refuses to plough ahead with 11 Qd2 and instead aims to disrupt Black's queenside advance, such as with 11...a5 12 a4! b4 13 Nb5.

11...Ne8! (Diagram 6)

The knight heads for c7 from where it supports Black's queenside play and may also come to d4 via e6. The position is roughly level whether White opts for 12 Rb1 Nc7 13 Qd2 or prefers to change the nature of the struggle with 12 d4!? after which 12...cxd4 13 Nxd4 b4! saw B.Spasky-R.Fischer, 22nd match-

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

game, Belgrade 1992 fizzle out towards a draw after 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 axb4 Rxb4 16 Rxa7 Rxb2 17 e5! Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Nc7.

Theoretical?

No. White plays Nge2 when he wants a battle of ideas; not a theoretical duel.

Statistics

After 6 Nge2 e5, Black should beware 7 h4!? which has made a promising 67% from its first 12 outings as opposed to just 41% from 147 games for 7 0-0. 6...Nf6 7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 Rb8 9 f4 has scored a quite reasonable 55% from just over 100 games for White, while the whole 5 Nge2!? move-order is still in need of further testing, but 5...e6 6 0-0 d6 7 a3 has made a most impressive 72%, albeit from only 29 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 31

□ J.Lautier ■ L.Ljubojevic

Melody Amber (rapid), Monaco 1996

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 Nc6 5 Nge2 Rb8!?

A rather ambitious choice and Black usually prefers to first set out his central stall after 5...d6 6 0-0:

a) 6...e5 7 a3 Nge7 8 b4!? (**Diagram 7**) has certain similarities to a Symmetrical English and 8...cxb4 9 axb4 Nxb4 10 Ba3 leaves White with reasonable compensation, whereas 8...0-0 9 Rb1 b6 10 d3 Nd4 11 f4 gave him some pressure on both flanks and the edge in J.Murey-D.Komljenovic, Sautron 2002.

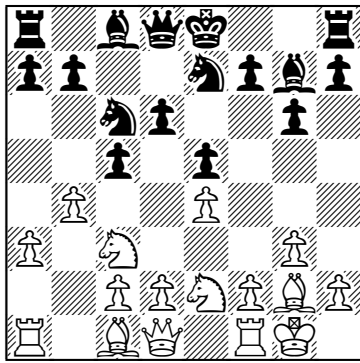


Diagram 7 (B)
Sacrificing for the initiative

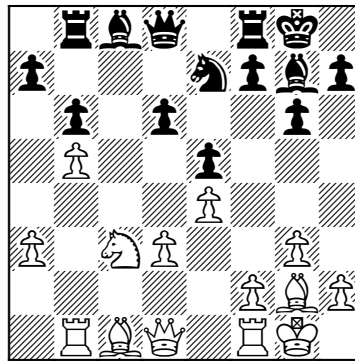


Diagram 8 (B)
White has the edge

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

b) 6...e6 7 a3 Nge7 sees Black develop naturally and, with the long diagonal open, White must this time prepare b4 with 8 Rb1. Murey has also had quite promising results with this and his games suggest that 8...0-0 9 b4 b6 10 d3 Rb8 11 b5! Nd4 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Ne2 e5 14 c3 dxc3 15 Nxc3 (**Diagram 8**) is slightly in White's favour due to extra queenside space and flexible central possibilities. Instead 8...b6!? 9 b4 Bb7 10 d3 0-0 11 b5 Nd4 12 Nxd4 Bxd4! 13 Ne2 Bg7 was unclear, despite White's extra space, in J.Murey-A.Kharlov, Cappelle la Grande 2000.

The Murey System is rarely seen after 5...Nf6, but there doesn't appear to be anything wrong with it and 6 0-0 0-0 7 a3 d6 8 Rb1 Nd7 9 d3 Rb8 10 b4 b6 was J.Van der Wiel-A.Naiditsch, Essen 2002 when 11 b5 would have been consistent.

6 0-0 b5 7 a3!

The Murey System is certainly well suited to dealing with an early ...b5 as White can quickly counter on the queenside.

7...e6 8 b4 a5 (**Diagram 9**)

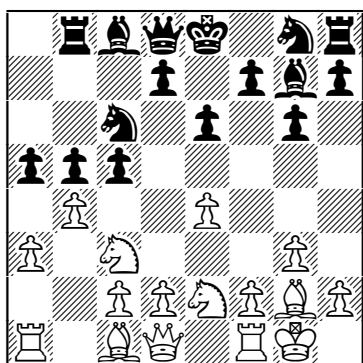


Diagram 9 (W)

Already the queenside is opening

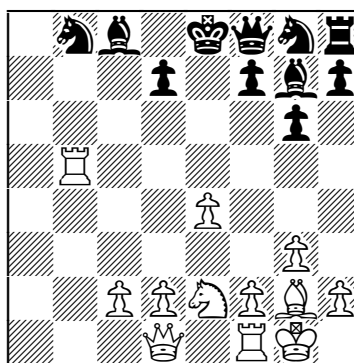


Diagram 10 (B)

Very unimpressive development

Black can also flick in 8...cxb4!? 9 axb4 before challenging b4, but after 9...a5, 10 Rb1 isn't the only choice and 10 e5!? was M.Appleberry-A.Demkovich, Budapest 1997. Following 10...axb4 White should though explore Van der Weide's suggestion of 11 Ne4!, offering a further pawn to gain play on the dark squares and good compensation.

9 Rb1 axb4 10 axb4 cxb4

10...Nxb4?! 11 d4! also grants White promising compensation and 11...d6 12 dxc5 dxc5 13 Qxd8+ Kxd8 14 Be3 Bf8 15 Rfd1+ Ke8 16 e5! leaves him with a strong initiative.

11 Na2 Qa5

Defending b4 and attacking a2, and Lautier had to realize when he played 8 b4 that he could save his knight due to tactics down the open a1-h8 diagonal.

12 Bb2 e5?

12...Kf8 13 Nacl, intending 14 Nb3 and 15 d4, wouldn't have been especially comfortable for Black and so his early play may just have been too ambitious. However, Ljubojevic's choice should have lost back the extra pawn to 13 Nxb4! as 13...Nxb4 14 Bc3 regains the piece with interest because 14...Bf8 15 Bxe5 forks the black rooks. 13...Qxb4 14 Bxe5 Qf8 is the only other try, but that is also far from convincing as 15 Bxb8 Nxb8 16 Rxb5 (**Diagram 10**) leaves the black pieces all at home in a manner reminiscent of the classic Karpov-Kasparov, Linares 1993.

13 Nacl Qb6 14 Nb3 Nge7 15 d4

Despite missing a tactic in this rapidplay game, White still enjoys very good compensation as his central play is more important than the extra doubled b-pawn.

15...d6 16 Qd2 0-0 17 d5!

Claiming some useful space and ensuring that White regains the pawn on b4.

17...Na5 18 Nxa5 Qxa5 19 Ra1 Qc7 20 Qxb4 (Diagram 11)

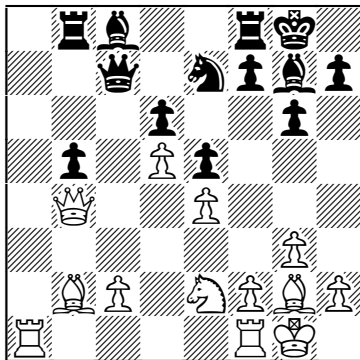


Diagram 11 (B)
White will target b5 and d6

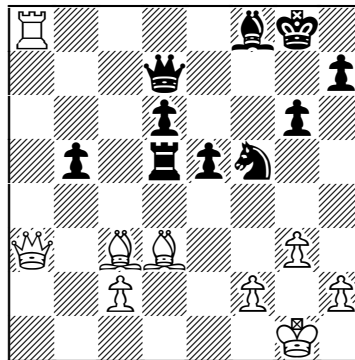


Diagram 12 (W)
A simple tactic decides

20...f5

Wisely avoiding having his queen trapped deep in enemy territory after 20...Qxc2? 21 Nc3, but even the thematic advance of the f-pawn doesn't solve Black's problems. We effectively have a King's Indian position before us and it is clear that White's queenside play is already far advanced.

21 Nc3 fxe4 22 Nxe4 Rb6 23 Qb3 Bf5 24 Bc3!

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Increasing the pressure on the queenside and also preparing ideas of Ng5-e6.

24...Bxe4 25 Bxe4 Qd7 26 Ra5 Nf5 27 Rfa1 Rb7 28 Ra8! Rc7 29 Rxf8+ Bxf8 30 Ra8 Rc4 31 Bd3 Rc5 32 Qa3 Rxd5?? (Diagram 12)

Making matters easy as the rook will hang to a check on a8.



TIP: Always try to keep your pieces on defended squares where possible. A useful mnemonic to remember is Nunn's LPDO ('loose pieces drop off').

33 Rxf8+! 1-0

Game 32

□ V.Smyslov ■ M.Botvinnik

World Championship (Game 15), Moscow 1954

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nge2 e5 (Diagram 13)

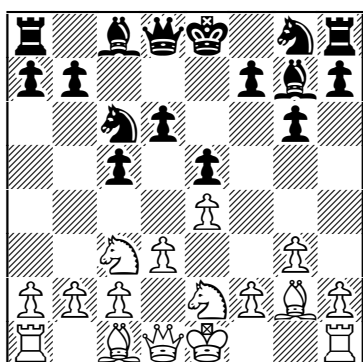


Diagram 13 (W)

Patented play from Botvinnik

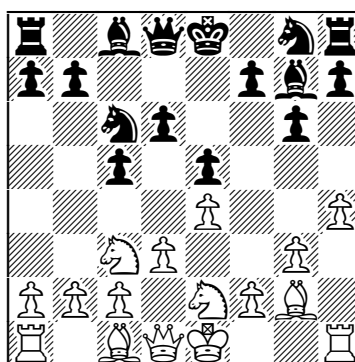


Diagram 14 (B)

Posing early problems

7 Nd5

White's problem against 6...e5 is that 7 0-0 Nge7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Qd2 allows Black to calmly develop with 9...Nd4! (preventing 10 Bh6) 10 f4 Be6. With the knight on f3, this would allow Nh4 or possibly even f5!?, meeting ...gxf5 with Nh4 and the usual compensation. The knight is simply not especially well placed on e2 and 11 Rae1 Qd7 12 Rf2 Rae8 13 Ref1 f5 offered White nothing at all in A.Parkanyi-Y.Dembo, Budapest 2000.

7 h4!? (Diagram 14) has been championed by the Austrian IM, Walter Wittman, and more recently by Daniel King and is at the least White's most enterprising choice:

a) 7...Nf6?! 8 Bg5 Be6 9 Nd5! h6 10 Bxf6 Bxf6 11 h5 Bg7 12 hxg6 fxg6 13 Bh3! was a positional disaster for Black in W.Wittmann-G.Miniboeck, Vienna 1986.



NOTE: White was happy to exchange on f6 to gain control of d5 and to leave Black with a bad dark-squared bishop.

b) 7...h6!? keeps the kingside closed and 8 Nd5 Nge7 9 Nec3 Be6 10 f4! exf4! 11 Bxf4 Nd4 12 Qd2 Nec6 13 0-0 Ne5 was unclear and led to a complex struggle in N.Short-I.Stohl, European Team Ch., Batumi 1999.

c) 7...h5 has been Black's main response, but it is easier for White to exploit the weakening of g5 than it is for Black, of g4. After 8 Nd5 Nge7 (8...Nce7 9 Nec3 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Be6 11 c4 Bxd5 12 cxd5 Bh6 13 b4! Bxc1 14 Rxc1 b6 15 Bh3 (**Diagram 15**) was a little better for White in D.King-A.Sokolov, Swiss Team Ch. 2000) 9 Bg5 Qa5+!? 10 Bd2 Qd8, as well as King's 11 c4, White should give serious thought to continuing in uncompromising strategy with the 11 Nec3 0-0 12 Ne3 f5 13 exf5!? Nxf5 14 Be4, aiming to open the kingside, of M.Rufenacht-J.Goncalves, correspondence 2001. That led to an unclear position, while Black had again done well not to rush into an exchange on d5 as 11...Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Ne7? would have been rather embarrassing for him after 13 Bg5, but even 12...0-0 13 Ne3 Ne7 14 g4! (Rufenacht) begins a favourable attack for White.

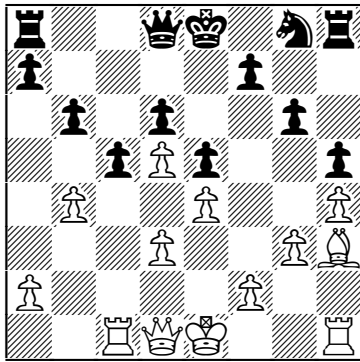


Diagram 15 (B)
A useful white bishop

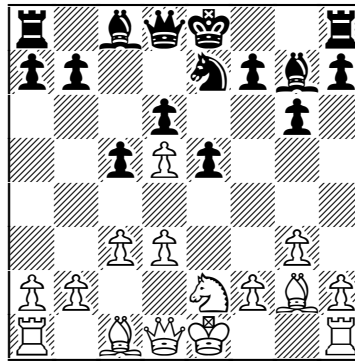


Diagram 16 (W)
An effective kingside majority

7...Nge7 8 c3?!

This isn't a position where having a pawn on d5 helps White and instead it becomes a bit of a dead point.



TIP: There are positions where bringing the white e-pawn to d5 does work well, but that is generally when the centre is more open than it is here.

8 Bg5 is a better try, although 8...h6 9 Bf6 0-0! was fine for Black after both 10 Nxe7+ Nxe7 11 Bxg7 Kxg7 12 Qd2 Be6 13 f4 Qd7 14 0-0 f6 (A.Karpov-

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

A.Adorjan, European Junior Ch., Groningen 1968) and 10 Nec3 Bxf6 11 Nxf6+ Kg7 12 Nfd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Ne7 14 Ne3 f5 (B.Spassky-L.Christiansen, Linares 1985).

8...Nxd5 9 exd5 Ne7 (Diagram 16) 10 0-0

It is natural to try and undouble the d-pawns, but all that 10 d4 exd4 11 cxd4 cxd4 12 Nxd4 0-0 (Botvinnik) achieves is to highlight the relative strength of the fianchettoed bishops: Black's operating on an open diagonal and White's biting on granite.

10...0-0 11 f4 Bd7 12 h3

Preventing ...Qc8 and ...Bh3, weakening the white kingside and especially d5. 12 fxe5!? dxe5 13 d6 Nf5 14 Bxb7 Rb8 15 Bg2 Qb6 would also have favoured Black, but would at least have unbalanced the position. The trend already appears to be going against Smyslov and he could really do with finding some activity and play of his own.

12...Qc7 13 Be3?!

Now matters become really grim. It was much better to prevent ...Nf5 with 13 g4 (Kasparov), which also prepares kingside expansion with Ng3.

13...Rae8 14 Qd2 Nf5 15 Bf2 h5! 16 Rae1 Qd8 17 Kh2

Continuing to crank up the pressure as Smyslov is completely outplayed. At club level there is often a big misconception that 'solid' and 'passive' mean the same thing. Here White is passive, but not solid; Botvinnik breaks down his defences without doing anything too special.

17...Bh6! (Diagram 17)

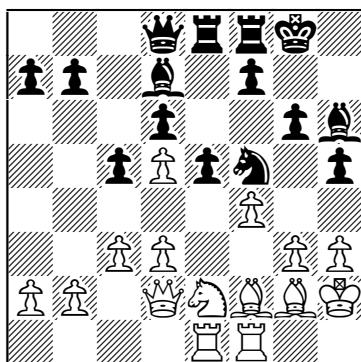


Diagram 17 (W)

Black has strong pressure

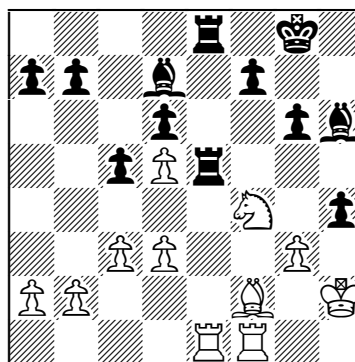


Diagram 18 (W)

Smyslov has been crushed

18 h4

Botvinnik gives 18 g4 hxg4 19 hxg4 Nh4 20 g5 Nxg2 21 Kxg2 exf4! 22 gxh6

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

Qg5+ 23 Kh2 Qxh6+ 24 Kg1 Qg5+ 25 Kh2? Kg7! and wins, which is a long but thematic variation to reveal the main point behind Black's 18th.

18...Qf6! 19 Be4

Shedding a pawn, but there was nothing better.

19...exf4 20 Nxf4 Nxh4 21 Be3 Nf5 22 Bxf5

The Patriarch has unsurprisingly calculated everything well and indeed 22 Nxf5? fails due to 22...gxh5 23 Bxf5 Bxe3 24 Rxe3 Qg5, winning material.

22...Qxf5 23 Qg2 Qg4 24 Qe2 Qxe2+ 25 Rxe2 Re5 26 Ree1 Rfe8 27 Bf2 h4! (Diagram 18)

The torment draws to an end for poor Smyslov who has had so many better days with the Closed Sicilian. Black now gains two extra and connected passed pawns, and White isn't able to muster much more resistance.

28 Rxe5 Rxe5 29 d4 hxg3+ 30 Kxg3 Rg5+ 31 Kh2 Rf5 32 Be3 cxd4 33 cxd4 Kh7! 34 Rf2 g5 35 Ne2 Rxf2+ 36 Bxf2 f5 0-1

Game 33

□ J.Maiwald ■ J.Pribyl

2nd Bundesliga 2000

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nge2 e6 7 0-0 Nge7 8 Bg5!?
(Diagram 19)

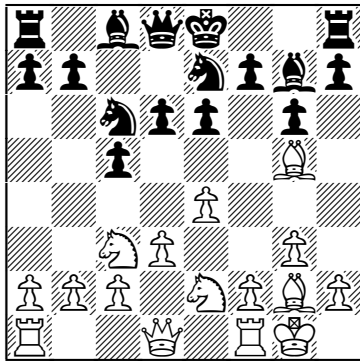


Diagram 19 (B)

Hoping for ...h6

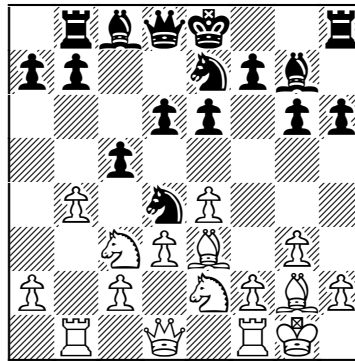


Diagram 20 (B)

b2-b4 once again

A mid-eighties favourite of Spassky's and a refinement over 8 Be3 designed to provoke a slight weakening of the black kingside with ...h6.

8...0-0

Black does best not to be provoked when it's back to business as normal for White with the plan being Qd2 and Bh6. After 8...h6 9 Be3 Spassky has even

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

seen no need to meet 9...Nd4 with 10 Qd2, preferring to later gain a tempo with that move rather than prevent Black from castling. 10 Rb1!? Rb8 11 b4 **(Diagram 20)** 11...b6 12 bxc5 dxc5 should though be followed up by 13 Qd2, whereas 13 a4 0-0 14 Nb5 would have been fine for Black in B.Spasky-S.Kindermann, Dubai Olympiad 1986 after 14...Nec6. Kindermann didn't though solve the original problems posed and 14...Nxb5?! 15 axb5 a6 16 bxa6 Bxa6 17 Qd2 Kh7 18 h4 left White slightly better. Black has also tried 9...0-0, but 10 Qd2 Kh7 11 h3 Nd4 12 Rab1 Rb8 13 b4 again saw the b4 thrust work well for White, especially after 13...Nxe2+ 14 Nxe2 cxb4 15 Qxb4 b6 16 Nd4! Qd7 17 Nb5, in M.Paragua-Goh Wei Ming, Ho Chi Minh City 2003.

9 Qd2 Nd4

As usual, it's tempting for Black to occupy this square, but delaying doing so may reduce White's options. Instead 9...Rb8!? 10 Bh6 b5 11 Bxg7 Kxg7 12 f4 Nd4 was a sensible approach from Black in B.Spasky-A.Karpov, Bugojno 1986. White's only real try for the advantage was 13 Nxd4 cxd4 14 Ne2, but Black remained very solid after 14...e5, although King's suggestion of 15 f5!? would have been a reasonable try to pose a few problems.

10 Rab1

A recurring theme in this chapter, although Spassky has preferred 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 Ne2, but 11...e5 12 c3 f6 13 Bh6 dxc3 14 bxc3 Bxh6 15 Qxh6 Be6 **(Diagram 21)** left Black without any problems at all in B.Spasky-U.Andersson, Reykjavik 1988.

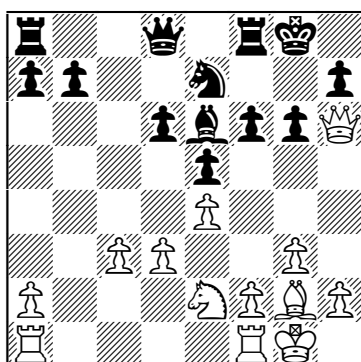


Diagram 21 (W)
Black is fine

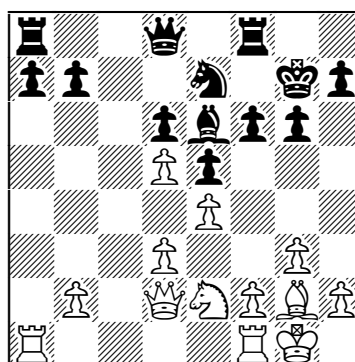


Diagram 22 (B)
A strong white centre

10...Bd7 11 Nxd4!?

A surprise, especially when we were expecting 11 b4, but presumably Maiwald felt that Black was actually not doing so badly after 11...f6 12 Be3 Nxe2+ 13 Nxe2 Qc7, although White could certainly play this and continue with 14 c4!?

11...cxd4 12 Ne2 e5 13 c3 f6

After 13...dxc3 14 bxc3 the rook would have it uses on b1, but 14...f6 15 Bh6 Qc7 16 d4 would still have been playable for Black who remains very solid.

14 Bh6 Be6?!

Underestimating the strength of the extra central pawn which White gains, and exchanging on h6 and c3 à la Andersson was to be preferred.

15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 cxd4 Bxa2 17 Ra1 Be6 18 d5! (Diagram 22) 18...Bd7 19 f4

The extra white pawn may be doubled, but it is clearly going to advance to d4 at some point. Maiwald first though improves his pieces by making good use of his extra space.



NOTE: Black might like to challenge in the centre with ...f5, but is here rather wary of doing so as an exchange on e5 would leave White with a strong passed d-pawn.

19...Qb6+ 20 Kh1 Rac8 21 h3 Ng8 22 Rf3 a6 23 d4 exd4?!

The white knight is such a powerful piece on d4 that Black should have tried hard to avoid allowing it there. Thus 23...Nh6 was probably a better defence, intending to blockade any passed d-pawn on d6, although Black would still have remained under some pressure with Ra1 and g4 on the cards.

24 Nxd4 Rc4 25 Rd1 Rfc8 26 b3 Rb4 27 g4!



TIP: One good way to exploit a strong central advantage is to use the extra space that permits your pieces to launch a flank attack.

27...a5 28 g5 a4 29 e5! (Diagram 23)

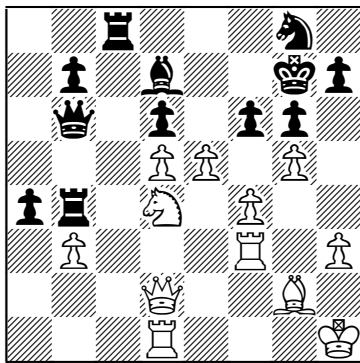


Diagram 23 (B)
A strong advance

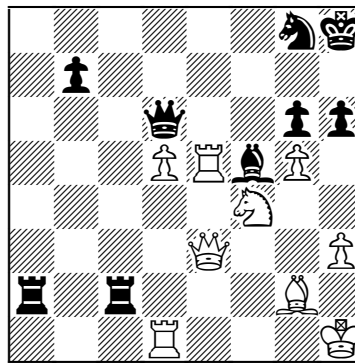


Diagram 24 (W)
White has a neat tactic

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Black has focussed his pieces on the queenside and counterplay, but this thematic breakthrough does rather leave his king low on defenders.

29...fxe5 30 fxe5 dxe5 31 Qe1! Qd6

Pribyl couldn't allow the white queen to come to e5, but this allows another powerful tactic.

32 Ne6+! Kh8 33 bxa4

Eschewing the pretty reasonable 33 Nc5, forcing Black to give up an exchange, to play the position more simply, aiming to maintain full control.

33...Rxa4 34 Re3 Rc2 35 Rxe5 Raa2 36 Nf4 Bf5 37 Qe3

Maiwald has parried the threats and retains some advantage due to his passed d-pawn and safer king position.

37...h6?? (Diagram 24)

Attempting to buy the black king a square, but this actually permits White a decisive attack.

38 Rxf5! gxf5 39 Qd4+ Nf6

39...Kh7 40 g6+ wins the queen, but Pribyl isn't going to be able to halt both passed pawns.

40 Qxf6+ Qxf6 41 gxf6 Rd2 42 Re1 Kg8 43 Re7 1-0

White Plays 6 Nh3

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nh3 (Diagram 25)

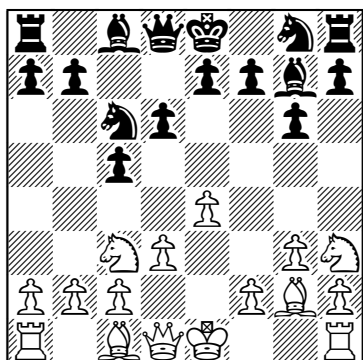


Diagram 25 (B)
Not blocking the f-file

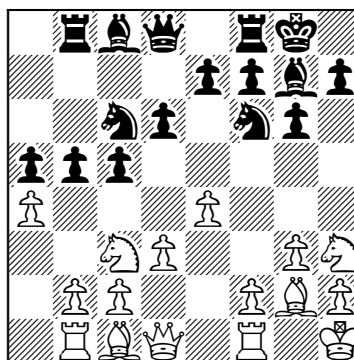


Diagram 26 (B)
Instructively holding Black up

This is another choice which should appeal to those who like to go their own way and to avoid theory. White may bring the knight to f4, but he is usually more interested in advancing his f-pawn to f5 as his knight doesn't block the f-

file. Both Nigel Short and Alex Stripunsky have experimented with 6 Nh3 of late, and those who normally play the main lines of the Closed may wish to consider this as a surprise weapon, especially against a generally well-prepared opponent.

Eagle-eyed readers may be wondering why there isn't any mention in this chapter of 6 Nf3; a move which is usually categorized as a Closed Sicilian. 6 Nf3 isn't a bad choice, but as White usually shortly moves his knight again to free the f-pawn, it appears more flexible for White not to block it in the first place. Thus 6 Nf3 won't be covered here, and also because many games in that variation see White actually playing Nf3 before g3; thus leaving himself without the option of keeping the f-pawn free to advance.

Returning to 6 Nh3:

6...h5!?

A slightly scary move to face and one that is logically aimed against the knight's position on h3. It is interesting to note, however, that Smyslov has assessed this oft-recommended move as being dubious and Black certainly has some reasonable alternatives:

- a) 6...e5 tends to be met by 7 f4, reaching a position we saw via 6 f4 e5 7 Nh3.
- b) 6...Rb8!? again intends a rapid advance of the b-pawn and asks White to justify the knight's position on h3 as we'll see in Game 34.
- c) 6...Nf6, just like after 6 Nge2, is a pretty respectable option. White has scored well with 7 0-0 0-0 8 f4!? Bg4 9 Qd2 Nd4 10 Kh1, but only really because Black often eschews 10...Qd7. That leaves a few white pieces slightly misplaced and 11 Ng1 Be6 12 Nd1 d5! 13 c3 Nc6 14 e5 Ne8 15 d4 cxd4 16 cxd4 f6 was quite an acceptable French position for Black in A.Medina Garcia-P.Benko, Malaga 1970. White players may wish to explore 8 f4, but there has also been some experimentation with 8 Kh1!? Rb8 9 a3, delaying f4 and aiming to disrupt Black's queenside play. V.Sergeev-J.Michenka, Trinec 2001 continued 9... b5 10 Rb1 a5, permitting 11 a4! (**Diagram 26**) and after 11...b4 12 Nb5 the queenside was closed, although the position wasn't so bad for Black following 12...d5.
- d) 6...e6 7 0-0 Nge7 is also quite playable due to the unforcing nature of 6 Nh3, but we must remember that White hopes to exploit his superior understanding of the position to outplay Black in the middlegame. 8 Be3 (**Diagram 27**) is very similar to the 6 Be3 variation as was shown by the 8...0-0 9 Qd2 Nd4 10 Bh6 of A.Stripunsky-B.Finegold, King's Island 2002, although the position was roughly equal following 10...Bxh6 11 Qxh6 f6! 12 Qd2 e5 13 f4 Bg4 14 Kh1 Qd7 15 Ng1 Kg7 16 Rf2 b5.



NOTE: Black will often arrange to meet f4 by doubling on the c8-h3 diagonal, thereby driving the h3-knight backwards. That can be a reasonable plan, but White will hope that the g4-bishop is vulnerable to ideas of h3 and f5.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Black can also meet 8 Be3 more subtly with 8...b6 9 Qd2 h6!?, ruling out Bh6 at the cost of a delay in castling. 10 Rae1 Bb7 11 f4 Qd7?! 12 f5! gxf5 13 exf5 Nxf5 14 Rxf5! exf5 15 Bxh6+ left Black regretting his strategy in D.Suttles-L.Kavalek, Sousse Interzonal 1967, but Black improved with 11...f5! (**Diagram 28**) in O.Romanishin-M.Petursson, Malmö 1993. Ftacnik's suggestion of 12 Nf2 then appears to lead to a tough struggle, whereas Romanishin was struggling after 12 e5?! dxe5 13 fxe5 g5! which contained White on the king-side and left e5 vulnerable.

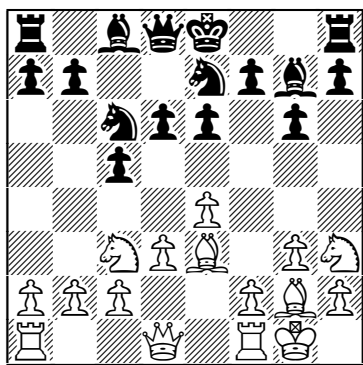


Diagram 27 (B)
Preparing Qd2 and Bh6

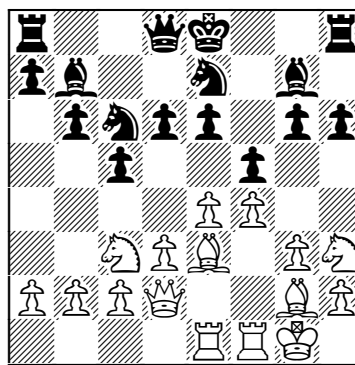


Diagram 28 (W)
Allowing Black to castle

7 f4

The advance which 6 Nh3 prepares, but those who find this a little too ambitious should investigate the 7 0-0 of Game 35.

7...Bg4 8 Qd2 Nd4

Targeting the f3-square and creating a nasty threat, but theory appears to have been a little quick to ignore 8...h4!?, delaying ...Nd4, and 9 Nf2 Bd7 10 Ne2 e5 11 c3 Nf6 was perfectly acceptable for Black in M.Krasenkow-B.Grabarczyk, Polish Ch., Sopot 1997.

9 Ng1! (Diagram 29)

The best way of preventing 9...Bxh3 and White will gain time to develop after h3.

9...Qd7?!

Removing a useful retreat square for the light-squared bishop which is not too well placed on e6 and Black might well prefer something else:

- a) Smyslov's 9...Qa5!? aims to make it hard for White to unravel and is sensible, but surprisingly remains untested.
- b) 9...e5 10 Nd5! immediately exploits the hole created while preparing 11 c3.

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

10...exf4! 11 gxf4 Nf6 was J.Shaw-A.Vaisser, Barcelona 1993 when White should consider keeping pieces on with Donev's suggestion of 12 Ne3 Be6 13 c3 Nc6 14 Nf3, intending Ng5.

c) 9...Nh6 prepares to cover the often vulnerable g5-square from f7, and 10 h3 Bd7 11 Nd5 e6 12 Ne3 f5 13 c3 Nc6 14 Nf3 Nf7 was about equal in D.Semenov-S.Pavlov, Kiev 2002.

10 h3 Be6 11 Nce2!

Undermining d4 and now 11...Nf6 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Nf3 would force Black to misplace his knight to defend d4. However, Romanishin's choice is also far from ideal for Black as the e6-bishop is vulnerable to an f5-advance.

11...h4 12 g4 f5?! 13 exf5! gxf5 14 g5 (Diagram 30)

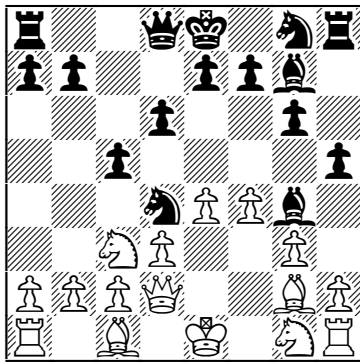


Diagram 29 (B)

An unusual position

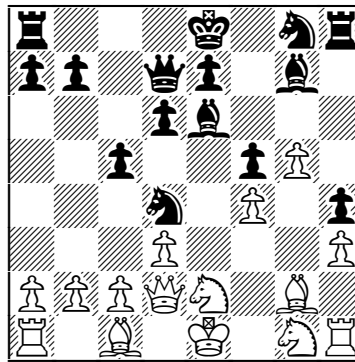


Diagram 30 (B)

White is better

Black has prevented f5 with the standard ...f5 but was left with a grim position in V.Smyslov-O.Romanishin, USSR Ch., Moscow 1976. It was far from easy to complete Black's kingside development and 14...0-0-0 15 Nxd4 cxd4 16 Ne2 Bf7 17 c3! dxc3 18 bxc3 Kb8 19 Rb1 d5 20 0-0 didn't really help, leaving White with good queenside attacking prospects.

Theoretical?

6 Nh3 is a move played by free thinkers, not by those who like their theory. Thus it was no surprise to see Romanishin switch to the white side after his loss to Smyslov.

Statistics

White has scored 51% from 441 games with 6 Nh3. The move 6...Rb8 has made a promising 59% from 34 games for Black, whereas the often recommended

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

6...h5 isn't perhaps so hot after 7 f4 which has obtained 67% for White, albeit from just 9 games. There's still a vast array of fertile ground to explore after 6 Nh3.

Illustrative Games

Game 34

□ Ye Jiangchuan ■ Bu Xiangzhi

Taiyuan 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 Nc6 5 d3 d6 6 Nh3 Rb8 (Diagram 31)

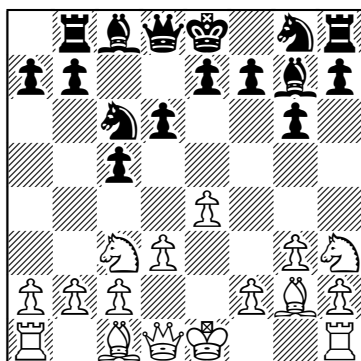


Diagram 31 (W)

The queenside counter begins

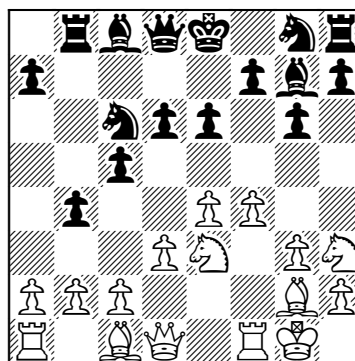


Diagram 32 (B)

White supports a rapid f5

7 0-0 b5 8 f4

Thematic, but after this the white pieces can struggle to coordinate efficiently. Thus Vladimir Sergeev's 8 a3!? deserves attention and 8...e6 9 Bg5 Qb6 10 Rb1 Nge7 11 Qd2 0-0 12 Kh1 a5 13 a4 saw White reveal his main idea, and one which Spassky would certainly have approved of, in V.Sergeev-V.Malakhatko, Kiev 2004. After 13...b4 14 Nb5 f6 15 Be3 Nd4 16 c4 e5! 17 f4 White had achieved his aim of closing the queenside but lacked a fast way to advance on the other flank and the position was about equal.

8...b4 9 Nd5!

The knight will better support the f5-advance from e3, whereas 9 Ne2 Qb6, preparing ...f5, is fairly comfortable for Black.

9...e6 10 Ne3 (Diagram 32) 10...Nf6!

Combining ...Nf6 and ...e6 is rare, but Bu has realized that he isn't about to be troubled by f5 and Bg5. This way 11 f5 is less annoying for him than 10...Nge7 11 f5! would be, whereas 10...Nd4 doesn't fully solve Black's problems as White can open the queenside with 11 a3.

11 f5

Continuing the plan, but this doesn't lead to any real advantage and so both 11 a3!?, breaking up the black queenside advance, and 11 e5!? deserve attention, although against the latter Black appears to be able to equalize with some accurate defence: 11...Nd5! 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Bxd5 Ne7 14 Bg2 dxe5 15 Re1 exf4 16 Bxf4 Rb6.

11...0-0 12 g4 h6! 13 Nc4 g5

Creative and strong play from Black. It may appear that White has forced a concession, but Bu is quite comfortable here, having kept the kingside closed and the white knight out of f4.



NOTE: White really needs to find an effective way to get his h3-knight into play which is usually done by bringing it to f4 or by using it in a kingside attack. Here, however, Ye is prevented from ever really finding a good role for his knight.

14 Nf2 Nh7

Opening up the raking g7-prelate and thereby confirming Black's control over e5. White now needs to develop his c1-bishop, whereas Ye indulges in a long knight's tour which fails to even help him attack with h4.

15 Kh1 Bb7 16 Nd2?! Ne5 17 Nf3 d5! (Diagram 33)

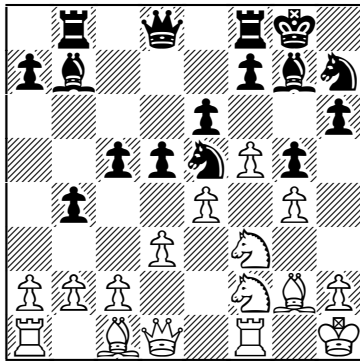


Diagram 33 (W)
Black seizes the initiative

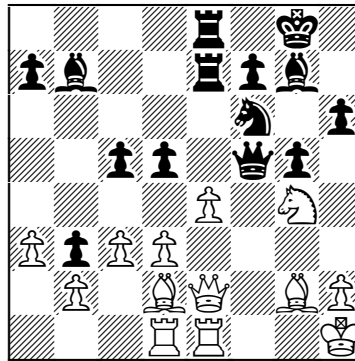


Diagram 34 (W)
White is badly struggling



TIP: The old adage that a flank attack is best met by a central break is still a good one to always bear in mind.

18 Qe2 Qd6 19 a3 b3! 20 c3 Nf6 21 Nxe5 Qxe5 22 Re1 Rfe8 23 Bd2 exf5 24 gxf5 Re7 25 Rad1?!

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Failing to disrupt the build-up of pressure against e4. White had to try and change the trend of the game with something radical, such as 25 d4!?, intending 25...cxd4 26 Nd3 Qc7 27 e5 even if this objectively still favours Black after an exchange on c3.

25...Rbe8 26 Ng4?

Simply dropping a pawn which completes a miserable day for the long-time Chinese number one.

26...Qxf5! (Diagram 34) 27 Ne3 Qg6 28 exd5 Nxd5 29 Qf2 Nf4 30 Bxb7 Rxb7 31 Qf3 Rd7 0-1

Game 35

□ N.Short ■ S.Williams

British League (4NCL) 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nh3 h5 7 0-0 (Diagram 35)

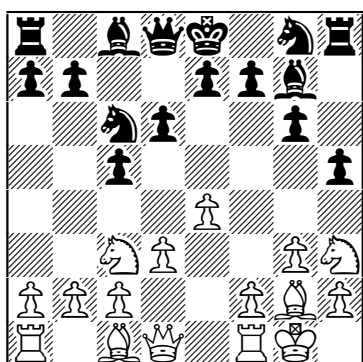


Diagram 35 (B)

Not fearing ...h4

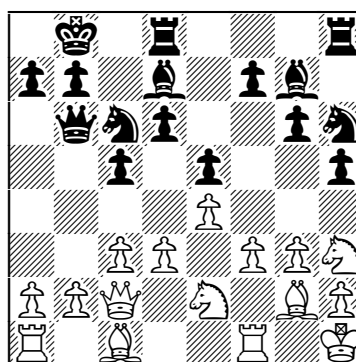


Diagram 36 (W)

Two attacks brew

7...Nf6

Practice has also seen an immediate 7...h4 when 8 g4 Nf6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Be3 was similar to our main game and White held a small advantage in M.Taimanov-V.Ciocaltea, Harrachov 1966. However, Benko's flexible 7...Nh6! is a good alternative and 8 f3 Bd7 9 Ne2 e5! 10 c3 Qb6 11 Kh1 0-0-0 12 Qc2 Kb8 (Diagram 36) 13 Be3 Qc7 14 Rfc1 led to a sharp race situation, and one in which Black wasn't any worse, in D.Suttles-P.Benko, US Ch., New York 1965.

8 Nd5!

Refusing to sit back and allow Black just to attack, while after 8...Nxd5 9 exd5 Ne5 10 Ng5 Short had realized that his long-term pressure down the e-file was quite useful and the g5-knight hard to evict.

8...Ne5 9 f3 h4 10 g4

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

Keeping the kingside closed and already any black attack is at an end. Thus White is already for choice as the black king lacks a secure home.

10...Be6 11 Ndf4 Bd7 12 c3 Nc6 13 Rb1 (Diagram 37)

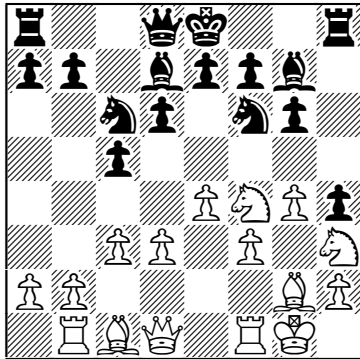


Diagram 37 (B)

Aiming to open the position

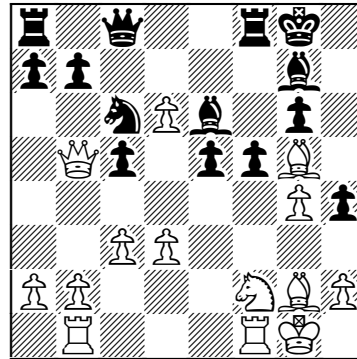


Diagram 38 (B)

Black regrets ...h5-h4

13...e5!?

Trying to prevent White from slowly and methodically improving his position and advancing, but this fails to challenge White's small advantage; it just alters the nature of it.

14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 Ne7 16 f4!

Opening the position and turning up the heat against the black king.

16...Qc8 17 Nf2 f5?! 18 fxe5 dxe5 19 d6! Nc6 20 Qb3 Be6 21 Qb5!?

21 Bd5 was also quite strong, but Short was clearly happy to see Black go long when White gains attacking chances after 21...Qd7 22 Be3! 0-0-0 23 Bxc5. Still that was a better try than the game continuation after which the vulnerable black pawns quickly fall.

21...0-0?! 22 Bg5 (Diagram 38)

Williams has got his king to safety, but this has cost him the weak h4-pawn.

22...e4 23 Qxc5 b6

The black position is already rather critical and 23...Bxa2 24 Ra1 Be6 25 dxe4 b6 26 Qe3 fxg4 27 Bxh4 would also have rather favourable for White.

24 Qe3 Ne5 25 Bxh4 Qd7 26 Bg3 Qxd6?! 27 gxf5 gxf5 28 dxe4 1-0

White has emerged two clear pawns ahead and so Williams, whose early ambition has well and truly backfired, saw no need to continue.

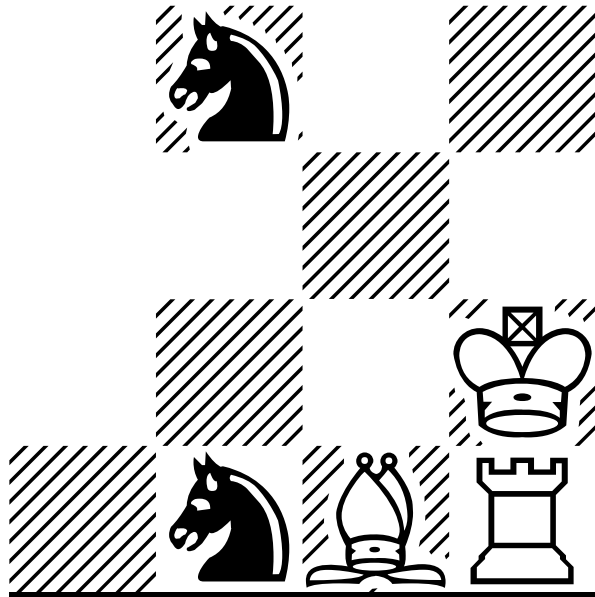
Points to Remember

- 1) 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3 are good choices against a well booked-up opponent or for the creative white player.
- 2) White needs to follow up 6 Nge2 by ensuring that his knight doesn't become misplaced on e2 and in the way of the c3-knight's possible need to retreat.
- 3) Murey's 5 Nge2 move-order, intending a rapid a3 and b4, is something a little different from standard Closed Sicilian positions and deserves further attention.
- 4) 6 Nh3 also remains rather under-explored and a good try for those who like to go their own way.
- 5) Black should meet 6 Nh3 with 6...Rb8 or 6...Nf6 as the oft praised 6...h5 hasn't done especially well in practice after both Smyslov's 7 f4 and Short's preferred 7 0-0.

Chapter Six

Early Black Deviations

- ▨ Black Plays 2...e6 3 g3 d5
- ▨ Black Employs a ...Be7 Set-up
- ▨ Points to Remember



Black Plays 2...e6 3 g3 d5

A Respectable Option

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6 3 g3 d5 (Diagram 1)

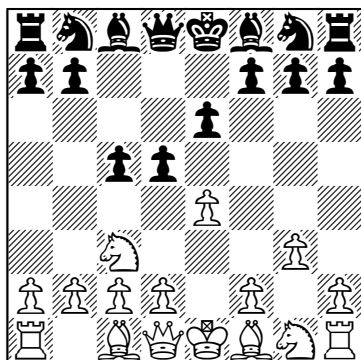


Diagram 1 (W)

Black counters in the centre

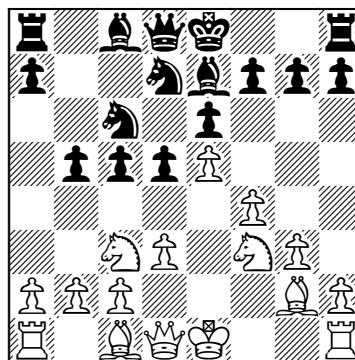


Diagram 2 (W)

An unbalanced position

Thus far we have only considered variations in which Black counters White's kingside fianchetto with one of his own. That is by far his most popular option at all levels, but those happy to play an Open Sicilian with an early ...e6 may prefer this immediate central advance. 2...e6 and 3...d5 is especially popular amongst classically-educated grandmasters of the Soviet school whose main aim is to equalize and to make a draw with the black pieces. White can, however, play to exploit Black's early ...d5, aiming to gain a small central advantage. That can be done with an exchange on d5 followed by d4, creating an isolated queen's pawn (IQP) on d5, or by piece pressure against d5 which may well force the black d-pawn to advance.

How should White try for an edge?

There is no clear consensus as to White's best line against 3...d5; it really comes down to a matter of taste. Some players even prefer to avoid 3 g3 d5 by delaying g3 for a move with 3 Nge2, as we will consider in Game 36.

4 exd5

Preventing Black from exchanging on e4 and from seizing space with ...d4, but a line currently quite popular amongst leading Closed Sicilian exponents is 4 d3!?, aiming to transpose to a King's Indian Attack (KIA) type position after ...d4 and Nce2. Black usually eschews the immediate 4...d4, largely because

then he will have to lose another move with his e-pawn, preferring to catch up in development:

a) 4...Nf6 5 Bg2 leads to another split:

a1) 5...dxe4 6 dxe4! Qxd1+ 7 Nxd1 Nc6 8 Ne3 and White is slightly better placed in the centre as ...e5 would concede the d5-square. Thus White should be able to obtain a small edge as he did after 8...Be7 9 b3 0-0 10 Bb2 Nd7 11 f4! b5 12 Ne2 in K.Van der Weide-M.Van der Werf, Dutch Ch., Leeuwarden 2001.

a2) 5...Be7 6 f4 Nc6 7 Bd2?! Rb8 8 Nf3 b5! 9 Ne5 Bb7 10 Nxb5 dxe4 11 0-0 0-0 was not much of a success for White in N.Short-A.Sokolov, European Ch., Ohrid 2001. He should, however, prefer to close the centre and 6 e5 Nfd7 7 f4 Nc6 8 Nf3 b5 (**Diagram 2**) leads to a tough struggle. The position is similar to a KIA, but e5 is there usually less secure with the f-pawn back on f2. Nevertheless, play retains certain Closed Sicilian characteristics as was shown by the 9 a3! Qb6 10 0-0 g6 11 Kh1 h5 12 Qe1 a5?! 13 a4! b4 14 Nb5 of M.Chandler-V.Bologan, Bundesliga 1992.

b) 4...Nc6 makes it harder for White to close the centre and so he usually opts for 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bg2, transposing to our main line after 6...d4 7 Ne4 Nf6 8 Ne2 Nxe4 9 dxe4.

4...exd5 5 Bg2

If White wishes to inflict an IQP on Black, 5 d4!? (**Diagram 3**) is the way to aim for one, while this is a more enterprising try than 5 Bg2. Play usually continues 5...cxd4 6 Qxd4 Nf6 7 Bg5 Be7 (7...Nc6 8 Bb5 Be7 transposes) 8 Bb5+ Nc6 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 10 Qc5 (**Diagram 4**) when the astute reader will have recognized that a Göring Gambit is on the board, albeit with colours reversed and g3 included.

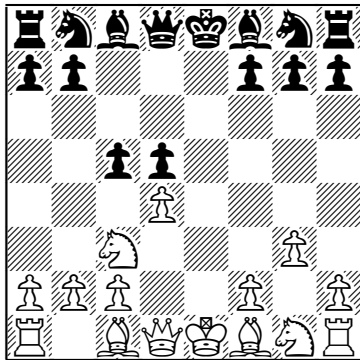


Diagram 3 (B)
Sharpening the struggle

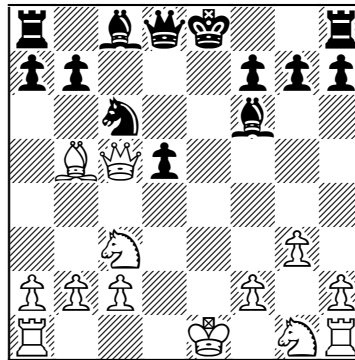


Diagram 4 (B)
A Reversed Goring Gambit!

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Many black players may well have never even considered using the ancient Göring as White and so this is a good practical try for the Closed Sicilian player against 2...e6. Raetsky has described 10...Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Qe7+! 12 Qxe7+ Kxe7 as being 'a probable draw', but White should play on this dynamically balanced position and both Nunn and Tregubov have lost on the black side.

Black can also choose to meet 5 d4 with some uncompromising play of his own:

a) 5...Nc6 has usually been met by 6 dxc5 d4 7 Ne4 Bxc5, but the IQP exerts a certain cramping influence from d4 and 8 Nxc5 Qa5+ 9 Bd2 Qxc5 10 Bg2 Bf5 leaves Black pretty active. Thus White shouldn't rush to exchange on c5, preferring first Emms' 8 Bg2!? Bf5 9 Ne2.

b) 5...Nf6!? intends 6 d4 cxd4 7 Qxd4 Nc6 8 Qa4 d4 9 Nce2 Bd7 when Black is fine.



NOTE: A black IQP on d5 can be hard to attack, but White is often still better due to his control of the d4-square in front of the pawn. Here, however, White wasn't able to bring a knight to d4 fast enough, which allowed ...d4 to gain space and left Black with good activity.

Thus White should prefer 6 Nge2!?, transposing to a position considered in Game 36 via 3 Nge2 Nf6 4 g3 d5 5 exd5 exd5 6 d4.

5...Nf6

Defending d5, although the slightly less accurate 5...d4 6 Qe2+ Be7 7 Nd5 is hardly the end of the world for Black. After 7...Nc6 8 d3 Be6 9 Nf4 Bd7 White can repeat with 10 Nd5, but he should prefer to continue posing problems with the aggressive 10 g4!.

6 d3!

Enabling White to recapture on e4 with the pawn as 6 Nge2 d4! 7 Ne4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Nd7! (**Diagram 5**) prevents White from keeping his bishop actively placed on e4. White has struggled to show any advantage at all here with 9 d3 Nf6 10 Bg2 Bd6 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bf4 Bg4! 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 fully equalizing in B.Spassky-V.Korchnoi, 5th matchgame, Kiev 1968, whereas 9 0-0 Nf6 10 Bg2 Bd6 11 c3!? can be met by Kasparov's dynamic and forcing 11...d3!? 12 Nf4 0-0 13 Nxd3 Bxg3 14 fxg3 Qxd3 15 Qf3! Qxf3 16 Bxf3 Bh3! or more simply by Ribli's 11...0-0 12 cxd4 cxd4 13 d3 Re8.



NOTE: Recapturing on e4 with the bishop leaves it on an open diagonal, but it is difficult for White to effectively coordinate his pieces after...Nd7-f6 and he can easily drift into a slightly passive position. Instead dxe4 may block the h1-a8 diagonal, but it does enable White to try and bring his knight to d5 and also to launch a kingside attack.

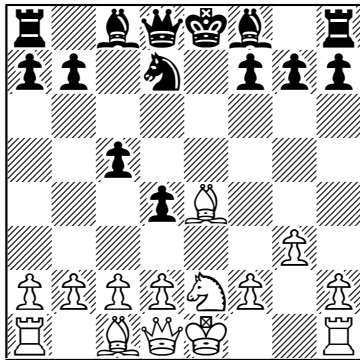


Diagram 5 (W)

The knight heads for f6

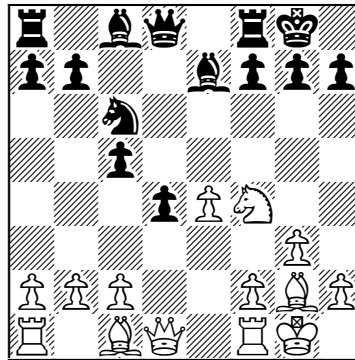


Diagram 6 (B)

The knight is en route for d5

6...d4

With Bg5 and Nf4 on the way, Black is advised to push ahead in the centre, although he can also do so with 6...Be7 7 Nge2 d4 and then he has several options after 8 Ne4:

a) 8...Nxe4 9 dxe4 transposes to our main line.

b) 8...0-0?! 9 Nxf6+! Bxf6 10 0-0 ensures White of an edge as Black hasn't been able to quickly cover his kingside with...Nd7-f6 and 10...Nc6 11 Nf4 Be5 12 Re1 Bd6 13 Qh5! left White with good light-square play and kingside chances in J.Murey-L.Ungure, Cappelle la Grande 1995.

c) 8...Nd5!? 9 Nf4 Nxf4 10 Bxf4 Nc6 delays going short and 11 h4!? Be6 12 0-0 h6! 13 Re1 Qd7 14 a3!, intending to meet 14...0-0-0?! with 15 b4!, led to a tough struggle in A.Stripunsky-D.Gurevich, US Ch., Seattle 2003.

7 Ne4 Nxe4 8 dxe4 Nc6 9 Ne2 Be7

With a pawn on e4, Black has avoided ...Nd7-f6 which would simply encourage e5 ideas. Thus he usually prefers to place his knight on c6 and then to quickly develop, although 9...Be6 is also seen. However, with 10 0-0 and 11 Nf4 White has good chances for a small edge, as was achieved with the powerful 10...f6 11 Nf4 Bf7 12 Bh3! Qd6 13 Nd5 Be7 14 Qg4! of T.Stepovaia Dianchenko-T.Molchanova, Russian Team Ch. 2004.

10 0-0 0-0 11 Nf4 (Diagram 6)

Logically following up 6 d3 and 8 dxe4, and the knight is en route to d5 from where White hopes it will dominate the black position. White has often obtained an edge with this, although objectively Black may well be fine as we will see in Game 37.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Theoretical?

2...e6 and 3...d5 doesn't possess a large body of theory, but White should ensure that he has carefully examined its nuances because it is not so easy to gain an edge.

Statistics

2...e6 3 g3 d5 has a good theoretical reputation and so White may wish to consider 4 d3 when 4...Nf6 5 Bg2 Be7 6 e5 Nd7 7 f4 Nc6 8 Nf3 has netted White 55%, albeit from only 21 games. Instead White has a slight minus score in the main line (with just 46% from 63 games with 6 d3 d4 7 Ne4 Nxe4 8 dxe4), but that was largely caused by his being out-rated in the majority of those games.

Illustrative Games

Game 36

□ R.Fischer ■ B.Spasky

17th matchgame, Belgrade 1992

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6 3 Nge2 (Diagram 7)

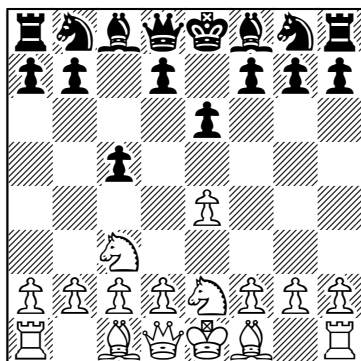


Diagram 7 (B)
Delaying g3

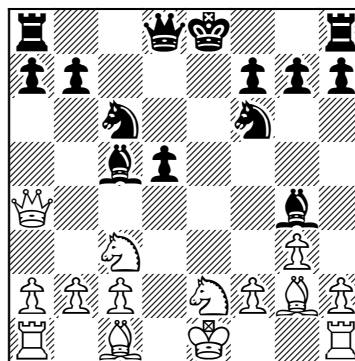


Diagram 8 (W)
Black's activity offsets the IQP

Should White be happy with the Nge2 system of Chapter Five, he may even wish to consider meeting 2...Nc6 and 2...d6 with 3 Nge2 and only then 4 g3. Here, however, White's move-order has more independent significance as he intends to omit g3 in the case of 3...d5 4 exd5 exd5 5 d4!. Then 5...Nf6 6 Bg5 Be7 7 dxc5! 0-0 8 Qd2 Be6 9 0-0-0 Nc6 10 Nf4 favoured White in V.Rogovskii-N.Zhornik, Simferopol 2003 and White should be prepared to play quite vigorously against the IQP as he also did with 5...Nc6 6 Be3 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Bb4 8 Nxc6 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 bxc6 10 Bd3 Nf6 11 Bc5!, usefully preventing Black from castling, in B.Spasky-L.Polugaevsky, Bugojno 1982.

3...Nc6

Wisely delaying ...d5, but Black can also do so with 3...Nf6!? as 4 e5 Ng4! 5 d4 cxd4 6 Qxd4 h5 (Sveshnikov) may leave White a little over-extended. Instead 4 g3 d5 5 exd5 exd5 6 d4 Nc6 transposes to the note to Black's sixth move in our main line, although Black can also play more ambitiously:

a) 6...cxd4 7 Nxd4 Bb4 8 Bg2 Qe7+?! 9 Be3! Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 was a little too ambitious in V.Moskalenko-E.Sveshnikov, Alushta 1994 as the bishop-pair is a useful tool for White. 10...Ng4? may regain a bishop, but 11 Qe2 Nxe3 12 Qxe3! Qxe3 13 fxe3 wins the d5-pawn because 13...Be6 runs into the strong riposte 14 c4.

b) 6...Bg4!? is a better try and 7 Bg2 cxd4 (but not 7...Nc6 8 h3 cxd4?! 9 hxg4! dxc3 10 Nxc3 d4 11 Qe2+ Be7 12 g5 Nd7 13 Nd5 and White's powerful play left him much better in D.Novitzkij-V.Litvinov, Minsk 2002) 8 Qxd4 Nc6 9 Qa4 Bc5!? (**Diagram 8**) gives Black good activity, even after the prudent 10 0-0 when it's about equal, whereas 10 Nxd5 Bxe2 11 Bg5! 0-0 12 Bxf6 Qe8 13 Kd2 (Emms) is playable, but quite risky for White.

4 g3 d5 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bg2!



WARNING: White must not immediately proceed with 6 d4? due to 6...Bg4! when there is no good defence to both threats (7...Nxd4 and 7...Bf3).

6...d4!

As in the 3 g3 d5 variation, this is Black's best idea, whereas 6...Nf6 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 (**Diagram 9**) gives White control of d4 and good chances for the advantage as he gained with, for example, 8...Bg4 9 Qd3 Be7 10 h3 Be6?! 11 Nxe6! fxe6 12 0-0 0-0 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bd2 Qd7 15 Rae1 in R.Fischer-M.Bertok, Zagreb 1970.

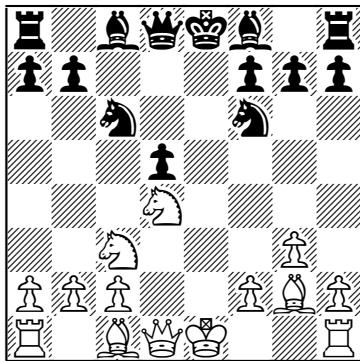


Diagram 9 (B)
White is slightly better

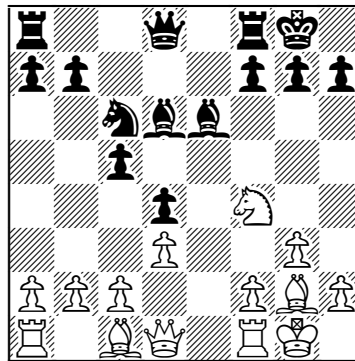


Diagram 10 (B)
Playing for the bishop-pair

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

7 Nd5

Highlighting a key reason why Fischer selected 3 Nge2 over 3 g3; he is able to leap into the d5-square. Whether this is enough for any advantage is not, however, so clear.

7...Nf6 8 Nef4 Nxd5

Black should consider maintaining the tension with 8...Bd6!?, meeting 9 Qe2+ with 9...Ne5, while 9 d3 0-0 10 0-0 Re8 11 Bd2 Ne5 was fairly acceptable for the second player in N.De Firmian-A.Zapata, Linares 1994.

9 Nxd5 Bd6 10 0-0 0-0 11 d3 Be6 12 Nf4! (Diagram 10)

Trying to gain the bishop-pair and this is a better try than the previously played 12 Qh5 as 12...Ne5 13 h3 Ng6 14 f4 f5! already ends any attacking hopes White may have harboured.

12...Bf5!?

A simpler approach was 12...Bxf4 13 Bxf4 Bd5! which subsequent practice has shown to be about equal as the remaining white bishop lacks a great role and isn't superior to the black knight.

13 h3 Rb8 14 Bd2 Re8 15 Re1 Rxe1+ 16 Qxe1

Fischer has ideas of advancing on the kingside and of doubling on the e-file, whereas Spassky must still play more cautiously, as the weakness of d5 remains a feature of the position. However, it was better for him to allow the knight back to d5 and then try to exchange it, rather than be forced to concede the bishop-pair.

16...Qd7?! 17 g4! Re8 18 Qd1 Bxf4 19 Bxf4 Be6 20 Qf3! (Diagram 11)

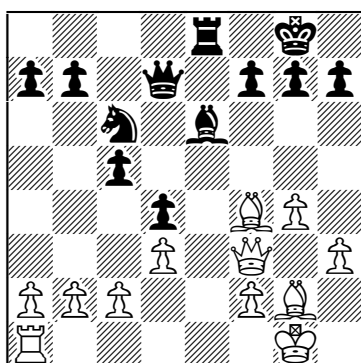


Diagram 11 (B)
Beginning to press

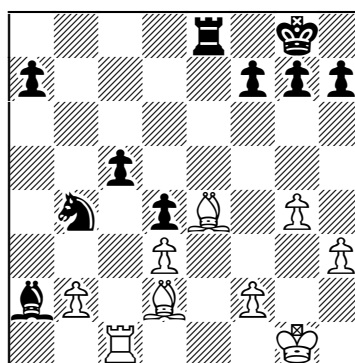


Diagram 12 (B)
White will favourably regain the pawn

White enjoys good pressure in a north-westerly direction and has also realized that it is not so easy for Spassky to equalize in the following exchanges.

20...Nb4! 21 Qxb7 Qxb7 22 Bxb7 Nxc2 23 Rc1 Nb4 24 Be4 Bxa2?

Possibly underestimating White's next, whereas continuing in active vein with 24...c4! 25 dxc4 Bxg4 would have led to a drawn ending after 26 Re1! Bf5! 27 Bd2 Rxe4 28 Rxe4 Bxe4 29 Bxb4 (Ftacnik).

25 Bd2! (Diagram 12)

A neat retreat, whereas 25 Rxc5 Bb1 would have led to further exchanges and a likely draw.

25...Bd5 26 Bxd5 Nxd5 27 Rxc5

Spassky has managed to avoid leaving White with a powerful bishop-pair but is still struggling. The bishop is superior to his knight on this open board and 27...Rd8?! is impossible due to 28 Ba5!, netting a key pawn after 28...Nb6 28 Rc6 Rb8 30 Bxb6 axb6 31 Rd6.

27...Nb6 28 Kf1 f6 29 Ra5 Re7 30 Bb4! Rd7 31 Bc5

Fischer has been quick to tie the black pieces down to passive roles and the stage is now set for his king to decisively join the action.



TIP: Always remember to activate your king in the endgame where it is a very important piece.

31...Kf7 32 Ke2 g5?! 33 Kf3 (Diagram 13)

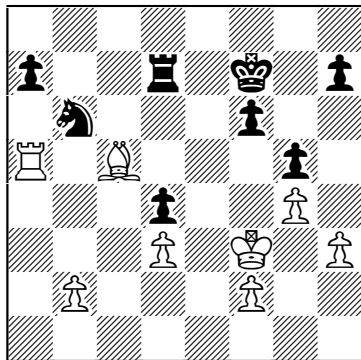


Diagram 13 (B)
Decisively activating the king

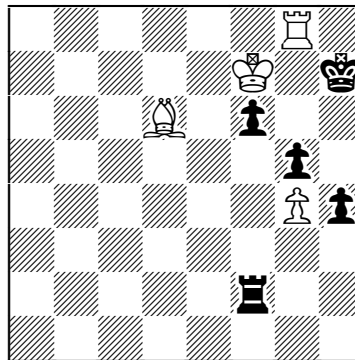


Diagram 14 (B)
Playing for mate!

33...Kg6 34 Ke4 h5 35 Bxd4

White has demonstrated good technique all game, and that continues as Fischer instructively converts his extra pawn while maintaining control of the position.

35...Re7+ 36 Kf3 h4 37 Bc5 Re1 38 Rxa7 Nd5 39 Bf8! Re8 40 Bd6 Re6 41 Rd7 Nb6 42 Rd8 Nd5 43 b4 Re1 44 b5 Rb1 45 Rb8 Rb3 46 Ke4 Nc3+ 47

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Kd4 Nxb5+!

Resourceful defence from Spassky, but even this isn't quite enough to save him.

48 Kc4 Rc3+ 49 Kxb5 Rxd3 50 Kc6! Rxh3 51 Kd5 Rf3 52 Ke6! Rxf2 53 Rg8+ Kh7 54 Kf7 (Diagram 14) 54...Ra2

This loses fairly straightforwardly, but Black's problem is that he is mated after 54...h3 55 Rg7+ Kh8 56 Rg6 Kh7 57 Bf8.

55 Rg7+ Kh6 56 Bf8 Ra7+ 57 Kxf6 Ra6+ 58 Kf7 1-0

58...Ra7+ 59 Kg8 Rxg7+ 60 Bxg7+ Kg6 61 Be5 comfortably halts the h-pawn and leaves White with an easy win as g5 must fall.

Game 37

□ N.Short ■ V.Topalov

Sarajevo 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6 3 g3 d5 4 d3 Nc6 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bg2 Nf6 7 Nge2 d4 8 Ne4 Nxe4 9 dxe4 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nf4 Bg5

Preparing to exchange the dark-square bishops in the event of Nd5 and this is a sensible idea which ensures that Black won't suffer from being slightly cramped. He has also tried:

a) 11...b6 12 Re1 Ne5 13 Nd5 Bg4 14 f3 Be6 15 f4! (**Diagram 15**) which saw White prepared to give up his often sacrosanct light-squared bishop to maintain the knight on d5, and because 15...Bg4 16 Qd2 Nf3+ 17 Bxf3 Bxf3 18 Qd3 Bg4 19 f5! left the black bishop trapped behind enemy lines in J.Maiwald-M.Thesing, Bundesliga 2005.

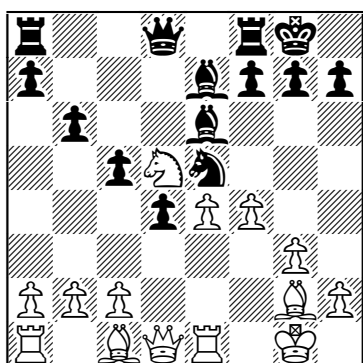


Diagram 15 (B)

Exploiting White's majority

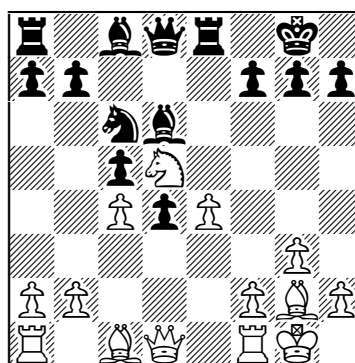


Diagram 16 (B)

Supporting the dominant knight

b) 11...Bd6 12 Re1 Re8 keeps any e5-advance under control and sees Black hope to exploit his queenside majority after ...c4. White might thus break up

Early Black Deviations

the black central pawns with 13 c3!?, but 13...Bxf4! 14 Bxf4 Be6 15 Qh5 b6 16 e5 Bd5 was fine for Black in B.Larsen-B.Spassky, Moscow 1959 with the game ending in a kingside perpetual after 17 Bg5 Qd7 18 Bf6 in much the same way as our main game.

c) 11...Re8 12 Nd5 Bd6 13 c4! (**Diagram 16**) entrenched the knight on d5 in I.Donev-A.Felsberger, Austrian Team Ch. 1995, and suggests that White should consider meeting 11...Bd6 with 12 Nd5. Here King has analyzed 13...Ne7 14 Bg5! after which White can set his pawn majority in motion, such as with 14...Qd7 15 Bxe7! Bxe7 16 f4 b6 17 Qd3 Bb7 18 Rae1 when White is better as Black lacks counterplay against the advance of the white central pawn duo.

12 c3

Chipping away at the black centre again and preventing ...Nb4. However, White should consider 12 Qh5!? as 12...Nb4 13 Nd3 Bxc1 14 Rfxc1 covers c2 and 14...Na6 15 e5 leaves White slightly better. Black preferred to drive back the white queen with 12...Re8 13 Nd5 Bxc1 14 Raxc1 Re5 in B.Rogulj-Z.Bogut, Bosnian Team Ch. 2002, although 15 Qd1 f5 16 f3! fxe4 17 fxe4 Be6 18 c3 dxc3 19 bxc3 retained a small edge due to the strong d5-knight and White's control of the equally important d4-square.

12...Bxf4! 13 Bxf4 Be6

Just as Spassky realized when facing his favourite opening, Topalov has deduced that the white bishop-pair isn't anything to fear. The c6-knight is an important piece, supporting Black's central pawns, whereas White's dark-squared bishop struggles to find targets and a good role.

14 Qh5 b6 15 e5 Bd5! (Diagram 17)

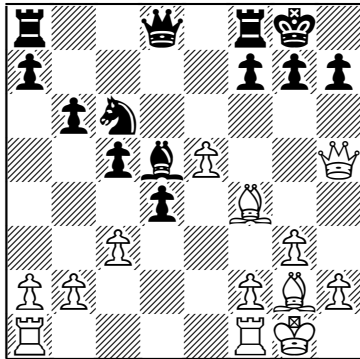


Diagram 17 (W)

What plan now for White?

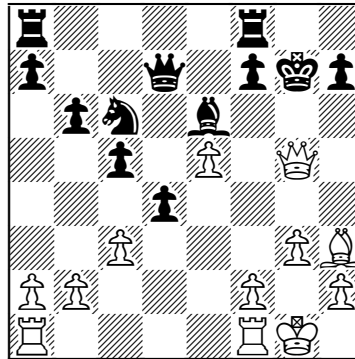


Diagram 18 (B)

White had nothing better

Fully neutralizing the pressure down the long diagonal and, lacking a good

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

alternative, Short decides to exploit the lack of black kingside pieces to force a draw.

16 Bg5 Qd7 17 Bf6! Kh8

Naturally avoiding 17...gxf6?? 18 exf6 when Black cannot defend d5 and cover g7, whereas Topalov's choice prepares to cover g7 should White not settle for the perpetual.

18 Bh3 Be6 19 Bxg7+ Kxg7 20 Qg5+ (Diagram 18) 20...Kh8 21 Qf6+ Kg8 22 Qg5+ ½-½

Black Employs a ...Be7 Set-up

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 (Diagram 19)

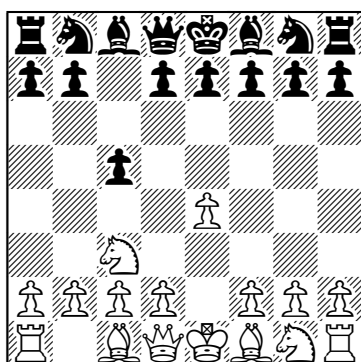


Diagram 19 (B)

Black has several options

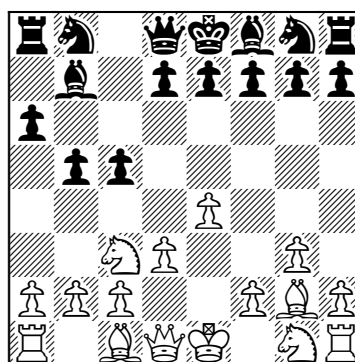


Diagram 20 (B)

White develops as usual

2 Nc3 and 3 g3 isn't White's most forcing option against the Sicilian and here we will consider those lines in which Black develops his pieces as he might in an Open Sicilian, especially by developing his king's bishop to e7, rather to g7. White's next few moves are still pretty much the same in any case and thus 2...a6 should be met with the standard development scheme of 3 g3 b5 4 Bg2 Bb7 5 d3 (**Diagram 20**). Here 5...g6 should be met by 6 Be3 and 7 Qd2, whereas 6 f4 Bg7 7 Nf3 d6 8 0-0 Nd7 prepared to keep the white pieces restrained and the black bishops unopposed after 9...e6 and 10...Ne7 in V.Konstantinov-V.Popov, Russian Team Ch. 2003. Black has also tried 5...e6 when 6 Be3 doesn't achieve a huge amount and so White should prefer 6 f4:

a) 6...d5 allows White a choice between closing the centre with 7 e5 and retaining the tension with 7 Qe2 when 7...b4 8 Nd1 dxe4 9 dxe4 Nf6 10 e5 Bxg2 11 Qxg2 Nd5 12 Ne3 gave White a little pressure down the long diagonal in E.Gasanov-A.Areshchenko, Kramatorsk 2002.

b) 6...Nf6 7 Nf3 would be standard development from White, but he might prefer to borrow another idea from elsewhere in the Closed Sicilian. 7 Nh3!? doesn't impede the f-file and 7...d6 8 0-0 Nc6 9 f5! b4 10 Ne2 e5 11 c4 Be7 12 Nf2 a5 13 g4! kept the queenside closed and favoured White due to his long-term kingside chances in S.Ivanov-T.Seeman, Laukaa 2000.

Returning to 2 Nc3:

2...Nc6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 e6

Black might also prefer 4...d6 when 5 d3 e6 6 f4 transposes, whereas 5...g6 will lead to lines considered in either Chapter Two or in Chapter Four depending on White's preference for 6 f4 or for 6 h3 and 7 Be3.

5 f4 d6

Opting for a central set-up reminiscent of the Classical and Scheveningen Sicilians, but 5...d5 remains an option. White should close the centre with 6 e5 Nd7 7 Nf3 Be7 8 d3 when e5 is much more secure than in a standard King's Indian Attack position. A race situation might well develop, but White appears to be slightly faster while he tends to have the opposition monarch to aim directly at. V.Golod-*Junior*, Givatayim 1998 instructively continued 8...0-0 (better is the 8...b5 of Chandler-Bologan as we considered under the move-order 2...e6 3 g3 d5 4 d3) 9 0-0 Qb6?! 10 Kh1 Rd8 11 Rb1!? a6 12 Bd2 Qc7 13 Ne2! d4 14 g4! (Diagram 21)

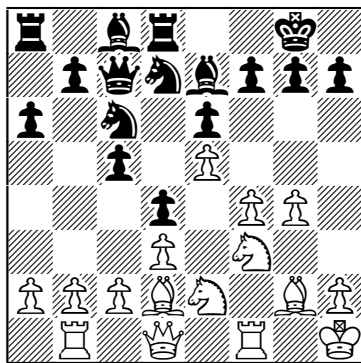


Diagram 21 (B)
Beginning the kingside assault

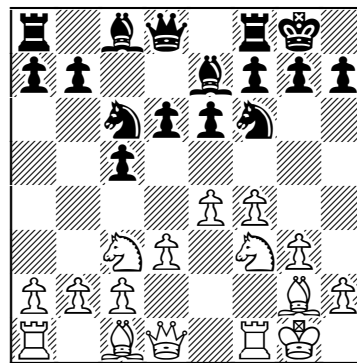


Diagram 22 (B)
How will Black gain counterplay?

14...b5 15 Ng3 Bb7 16 Qe2 and White was all set to press ahead with f5.

6 Nf3 Be7 7 0-0 0-0 8 d3 (Diagram 22) 8...Rb8

Black usually first prepares ...b5 with this or 8...a6 even if he intends to advance his d-pawn. 8...a6 is very similar to our main line and should again be met by 9 h3 d5 10 g4 as we'll see in Game 38.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

9 h3

Preparing g4 and many black players now worry that they lack counterplay against White's attack and so try to gain some by breaking in the centre.

9...d5

If Black prefers 9...b5, he should really have employed a kingside fianchetto when his kingside is much stronger, whereas here 10 g4 Nd7 11 Ne2 b4 12 Ng3 Nd4 13 Nxd4! cxd4 14 g5 e5 15 Nf5 Nc5 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 f5 gave White good attacking chances in E.Vorobiov-V.David, Cappelle la Grande 2003.

10 g4! (Diagram 23)

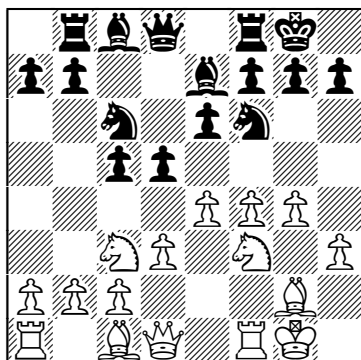


Diagram 23 (B)
The pawns start to roll

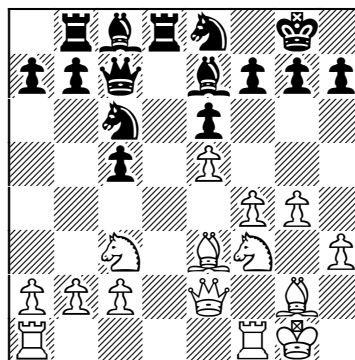


Diagram 24 (B)
Black is struggling

There's no need to close the centre as an exchange of queens favours White and 10...b5 11 g5 drives the knight back to e8 (11...Nd7? drops the d5-pawn) when 12 h4 continues the kingside advance.

10...dxe4 11 dxe4 Qc7

11...Qxd1 12 Rxd1 is a pleasant edge for White due to his extra space, control of the d-file and because he will increase the pressure with e5 and Ne4.

12 e5! Rd8 13 Qe2 Ne8

Not the ideal square, but the black pieces are rather falling over each other after 13...Nd7, whereas the white pawns roll on following 13...Nd5?! 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 f5.

14 Be3 (Diagram 24)

Black lacks a plan, whereas White has the superior development as well as good prospects in the centre and on the kingside with Ne4 and Qf2, and that gave him a useful advantage in B.Macieja-A.Lesiege, Bermuda 2001.

Theoretical?

Black rarely plays these lines when he is familiar with the main lines of the Closed. He may also use them to avoid theory, but can easily then land up with a grim position as we saw Lesiege did.

Statistics

White has reached the position after 8 d3 (see Diagram 22) 218 times and should be pretty happy with the 64% he has scored from there.

Illustrative Games

Game 38

□ P.Wells ■ D.Gormally

London 1998

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 d6 3 f4 a6 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 g3 e6 6 Bg2 Nf6 7 0-0 Be7 8 d3 0-0



NOTE: The game may have begun as a Grand-Prix Attack, but it could also have occurred via a Closed Sicilian move-order, such as with the line 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 e6 5 d3 Nf6 6 f4 Be7 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 a6.

9 h3 d5 10 g4 dxe4 11 dxe4

Once again White, with his spatial advantage, welcomes an exchange of queens and so Gormally tries to gain some queenside counterplay.

11...b5 12 e5 (Diagram 25)

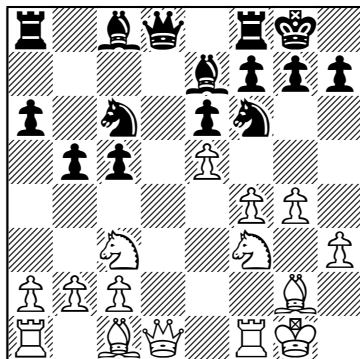


Diagram 25 (B)
Claiming further space

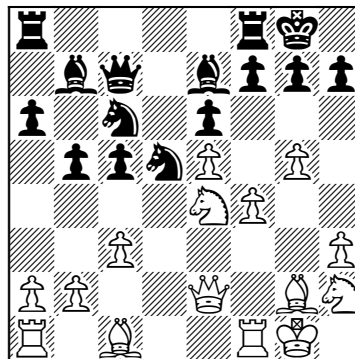


Diagram 26 (B)
The h2-knight heads for f6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

12...Nd7 13 Ne4

The knight is well placed here, but White can also proceed more slowly with 13 Qe1!? Bb7 14 Be3, intending to place Black under some pressure after Qf2 and Rad1.

13...Nb6 14 Qe2 Qc7 15 g5!

This may appear a little rigid, but Wells is already planning to prise open the black kingside by sacrificing a knight on f6. Furthermore, the e4-knight's position makes it hard for White to advance his f-pawn and 15 Ng3 Bb7 16 f5 is well met by 16...Nc4 17 Re1 f6!.

15...Nd5 16 c3

Keeping the black knights out of b4 and d4, and thereby limiting Black's counterplay.

16...Bb7 17 Nh2! (Diagram 26) 17...Rfd8 18 Ng4 Bf8 19 Ngf6+! Kh8!

White has achieved his goal of reaching f6 with a knight, but Gormally responds well and refuses to cave in, whereas 19...gxf6? 20 gxf6 (Diagram 27) would have left Black unable to effectively meet the threat of 21 Qh5 followed by 22 Rf3 and 23 Rg3.

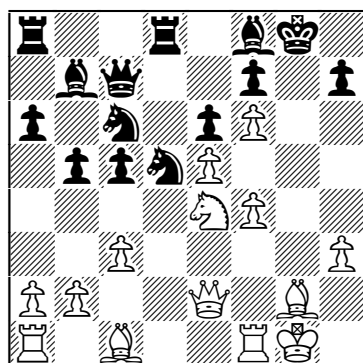


Diagram 27 (B)
Black is defenceless

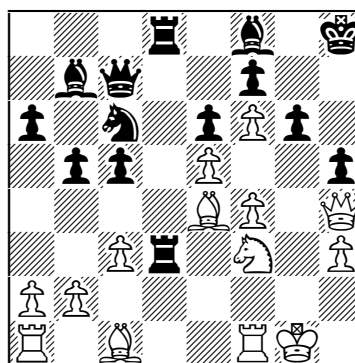


Diagram 28 (W)
White should take the exchange

20 Qh5 Nxf6 21 gxf6 g6 22 Qh4 Rd3 23 Ng5 h6 24 Be4 Rad8!?

Sensibly aiming for counterplay, even at the cost of an exchange. After 24...Rd7 White can build up after 25 Be3 or even immediately sacrifice with 25 Bxg6!? fxg6 26 Nxe6 Qc8 27 Nxf8 Qxf8 28 e6 when the e6 and d6 pawn duo are rather strong and White has good compensation even after the forced 28...Rh7.

25 Nf3?

After a very creative effort, time trouble may have already been influencing the game. It is understandable that White would reject winning the exchange,

as he wants to find a sacrificial breakthrough, but 25 Bxd3 Rxd3 was the correct course. That does leave White rather vulnerable down the long diagonals towards his king, but crucially he retains the f5-advance to target h6. One quite reasonable idea to keep Black at bay is to block one diagonal with 26 Re1!? and 27 Ne4 when the knight can always retreat to f2 if needed. Instead Lane has analyzed 26 Nf3 with the idea of 26...Nd4 27 cxd4 Bxf3 28 f5, and after 28...Kh7 29 fxe6 fxe6 30 Bf4 Qd7 31 Qf2 cxd4 32 Rac1 White is better and can place his king on h2 if needed, although clearly this isn't such an easy advantage to convert.

25...h5? (Diagram 28)

Avoiding any f5 ideas, but missing 25...Nd4! 26 Bxd3 Nxf3+ 27 Rxf3 Bxf3 when Black intends to double on the long diagonal with 28...Bb7 and 29...Qc6, and 28 f5 fails to 28...Rxd3 29 Bxh6 Kg8 30 fxe6 Qxe5!

26 Ng5?

26 Bxd3! Rxd3 27 Ne1 Rd7 (or 27...Rd1 28 Qf2 Qd7 29 Nf3) 28 Be3 would have left Black with some compensation on the light squares, but it is not so easy to get at the white king which can always move to h2 or f2.

26...Kg8 27 Nxe6! fxe6 28 Bxg6

This must have been a nightmare to play with little time as the position is very complex. 28 Qg5 is also tempting, but Black can defend with 28...Qh7! 29 Bxg6 Qh6 when anything could happen. One line is 30 f7+ Kh8 31 Qxh6+ Bxh6 32 Bxd3 Rxd3 33 f5, aiming to rely on the white pawns, but 33...Nxe5 34 fxe6 Rg3+ 35 Kf2 Rg2+ 36 Ke1 doesn't leave the white king particularly happy. I'll leave this to readers to analyze, but probably this fascinating position will end in perpetual.

28...Nxe5 29 fxe5?

It is now Black who gains the decisive attack and 29 Bxd3 was again the correct move. 29...Nxd3 30 Qg5+ Kh7 31 f5 may well give White at least a perpetual and Black must defend accurately with 31...Nxc1! (but not 31...Bd6? 32 Qh6+ Kg8 33 f7+! Qxf7 34 fxe6 and Black lacks a good defence and remains clearly worse after 34...Bh2+ 35 Kxh2 Qxf1 36 Qg6+ Kh8 37 Qxh5+ Kg8 38 Qg4+ Kh7 39 Be3) 32 Qxh5+ Kg8 33 Qg6+ Kh8 34 Raxc1 Rd2 35 Qh5+. Taking the perpetual would now be understandable, although the game could also lurch on with 35...Qh7!? 36 Qxh7+ Kxh7 37 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 38 Rxd1 Bd5! 39 b3 Kg8 40 fxe6 Bxe6 which leaves Black with a monster bishop-pair, but it will take some time to round up the extra two white pawns and that should enable White to find some activity for his rook.

29...Qxe5 30 Bxd3 Rxd3 31 Bf4 Qd5 0-1

A terrible turn-around against poor Wells who couldn't even save himself with 32 Qg5+ as 32...Qxg5+ 33 Bxg5 Rg3+ 24 Kf2 Rxg5 leaves the black bishops dominant and f6 being rounded up.

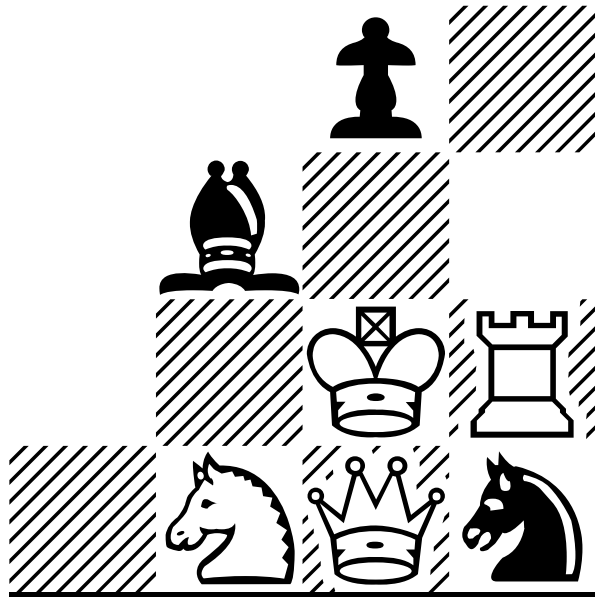
Points to Remember

- 1) 2...e6 3 g3 d5 is a tough nut to crack, although White has a number of quite different tries for a small advantage, with the sharpest being 4 exd5 exd5 5 d4.
- 2) Should White opt for 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bg2, recapturing on e4 with the bishop is well met by ...Nd7-f6 but dxe4 is the more uncompromising and dynamic choice.
- 3) A black isolated queen's pawn is not necessarily a weakness in itself. White may gain the advantage if he can satisfactorily blockade it, whereas Black will hope that he has active piece play to offset the IQP which can itself possibly advance to d4.
- 4) When Black opts for a ...Be7 set-up, White's most challenging response is usually f4.
- 5) White should aim to meet a delayed ...d5 by advancing on the kingside and also by seizing central space with e5 and Ne4.

Chapter Seven

Crafty Move-orders: 2 d3 and 2 g3

-  White Plays 2 d3
-  White Plays 2 g3
-  Points to Remember



White Plays 2 d3

Delaying Nc3

1 e4 c5 2 d3 (Diagram 1)

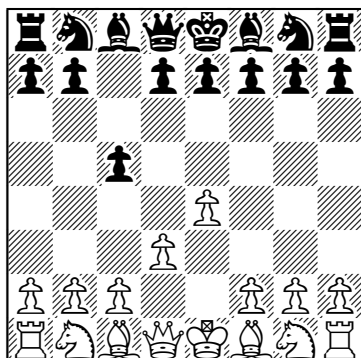


Diagram 1 (B)

Keeping White's options open

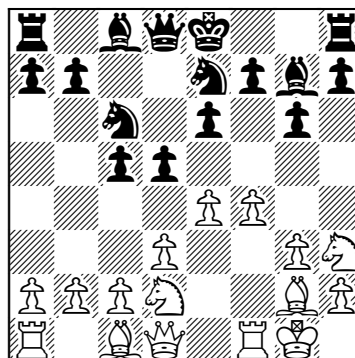


Diagram 2 (B)

An improved KIA?

This is a clever move-order, generally used by experienced Closed Sicilian players who are also happy to play a King's Indian Attack (KIA) position. White is hoping to be able to control d4 with an early c3 after 2...Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 d6 6 Nf3 e6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3! which has been christened 'the Clamp'. That is a most sensible name considering that White has good central control which he intends to use to keep the black pieces at bay for long enough to mount a strong kingside attack.

White has scored pretty well in practice with the Clamp and so experienced black players tend to try to avoid it. One option is 2...e6 when 3 Nf3 is a popular line of the KIA which was extensively covered in *Starting Out: The King's Indian Attack*. White can also be a little more clever, meeting 2...e6 with 3 Nd2 and thus keeping open the option of playing f4 before Nf3. Black may also opt for 2...Nc6 3 g3 d5 when again 4 Nd2 is interesting and has been employed by the ever-creative Alexander Morozevich:

a) 4...e6 5 Bg2 g6 6 Nh3!? Bg7 7 0-0 Nge7 8 f4 (**Diagram 2**) saw White keep his knights out of each other's way in A.Morozevich-V.Bologan, Kishinev 1998. This approach appears promising and certainly worthy of investigation, and after 8...0-0 9 e5 f6 10 exf6 Bxf6 11 Nf3 Re8 12 Qe2 b5 13 Nf2! Bg7 14 Ng4, Morozevich's knights converged on e5.

b) 4...Nf6 5 Bg2 Bg4 6 Ne2!? e5 7 h3 Be6 8 g4 was somewhat more provocative

in A.Morozevich-Z.Hracek, Bundesliga 2000. Perhaps Black should consider 8...c4!? here, although 8...g6 9 g5 Nh5 10 exd5! Bxd5 11 Ne4 Be7 12 h4 wasn't so bad for him but did give White just the kind of unbalanced position he was after.

Can Black develop with normal Sicilian moves?

2 d3 isn't strictly a Closed Sicilian, but rather seeks an improved version of one with the Clamp. The majority of black players don't like to meet it with an early ...d5 and prefer to develop as in the main lines of the Closed. White can of course transpose to those lines with Nc3 at any moment, but here we will consider his quest to reach the desired Clamp formation.

2...Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 d6

If Black has an inkling about that which may be imminent, he may prefer to delay or even omit this, preferring 5...e6 6 Nf3 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 when 8...b6 will be considered in the notes to Game 40, but 8...d5 also appears quite sensible. However, the clamp player is usually happy to keep the centre closed, intending to then attack on the kingside. 9 Na3! b6 10 e5 Ba6 11 Re1 b5 12 Nc2 sees White delay advancing his d-pawn, which would give Black more counterplay, such as with an exchange on d4, followed by...Na5-c4, and I.Ibragimov-R.Sherbakov, Sochi 1997 continued instructively with 12...b4 13 cxb4 cxb4 14 Be3 Bb7 15 Ncd4 Qd7 16 Qd2 a5 17 Nb3! Nf5 18 Bf2 (**Diagram 3**)

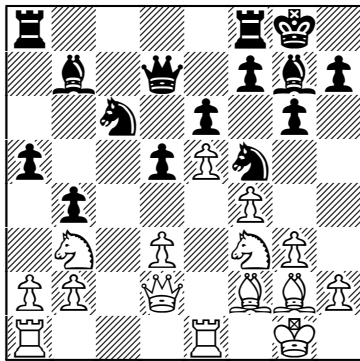


Diagram 3 (B)
Preparing g4

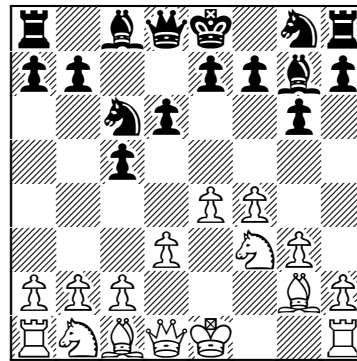


Diagram 4 (B)
6...e6 isn't the only option

18...h5 19 h3 Rfc8 20 g4 when White had achieved an ideal position: his control of c5 greatly reduced any counterplay, allowing Ibragimov to build up on the kingside.

6 Nf3 (Diagram 4) 6...e6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Continuing as per usual for a Closed Sicilian, but 6...Nf6 is, as ever, a reasonable alternative after which White may well wish to change tack with 7 Nc3, although we'll consider his independent alternatives in Game 39.

6...e5 is a move 2 d3 players should be ready for, having been advocated by both Gallagher and Rogozenko, when 7 0-0 (**Diagram 5**) prepares an f5-sacrifice.

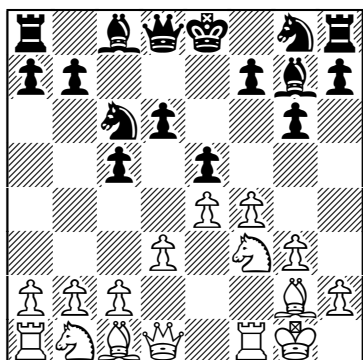


Diagram 5 (B)
Angling for f4-f5

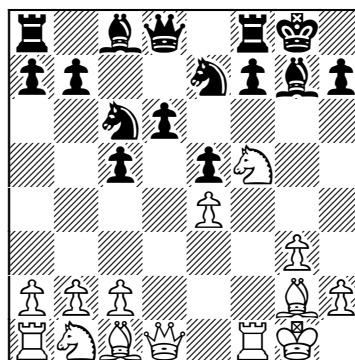


Diagram 6 (B)
A split black kingside



TIP: Never forget that all the variations of the Closed Sicilian are closely linked and that f5-sacrifices occur in many different lines.

Rogozenko has even suggested that Black should take immediate steps against 8 f5 with 7...exf4!? 8 gxf4 Nge7 which seriously weakens any f5-advance as the black pieces would then gain the use of the e5-square. White should thus develop more slowly, looking to find a way to exploit his extra central pawn as he managed with 9 c3 0-0 10 Be3 Kh8?! (10...b6 11 d4 is slightly better for White, although Black remains quite solid) 11 Na3 f5 12 Qe1! Be6 13 e5! in A.Nadanian-E.Mortensen, Yerevan Olympiad 1996.

More usually Black meets 7 0-0 with 7...Nge7 when delaying f5 isn't effective if Black is alert and 8 c3 0-0 9 Na3 exf4! 10 Bxf4 d5 11 exd5 Nxd5 was fine for Black in I.Ionescu Brandis-N.Bojkovic, Warsaw 2001. Instead 8 Nc3 deserves attention and this has often been considered fine for Black, as the knight is on f3 rather than h3, but Game 17 demonstrated that this line does contain some bite for White. He can also play more aggressively and creatively with 8 f5!? gxf5 9 Nh4:

a) 9...f4 10 Qh5 Qd7! 11 gxf4 Qg4 is a sensible approach, although the position remains fairly unbalanced and after 12 Qxg4 Bxg4 13 Nc3 Nd4 14 fxe5! Bxe5

Crafty Move Orders: 2 g3 and 2 d3

15 Rf2 Ng6 16 Nf5 White was able to exploit his pressure against f7 and the weakness of the d5-square in G.Welling-N.Miezis, Port Erin 2002.

b) 9...fxe4 10 dxe4 0-0 has been recommended in a few places for Black and 11 Na3 Be6 12 Nf5 Bxf5 13 exf5 f6! is quite solid for him. Thus White should prefer the immediate 11 Nf5!? (**Diagram 6**):

b1) 11...Nxf5 12 exf5 f6 13 Be3 Ne7 14 g4 Rb8 15 Nc3 gave White good compensation due to his control of d5 in S.Korolev-I.Privara, correspondence 1983. Korolev was able to double on the d-file and later decisively broke through with g5.



TIP: Korolev was 2610 at the time and high-level correspondence games are an excellent source for new ideas as the players generally prepare their creations in some depth.

b) 11...Nd4? tried to challenge the f5-knight in G.Welling-R.Stone, Hertogenbosch 1999 when I like 12 Nh6+! Bxh6 13 Bxh6 Re8 14 c3! Ndc6 15 Qf3 as there is no good way for Black to defend f7 and 15...f5 will cost him at least two pieces for a rook and pawn. Black must thus try 13...Ng6! 14 Bxf8 Qxf8, as Welling has observed, but his compensation isn't entirely convincing after 15 c3 Ne6 16 Nd2, keeping the black knights at bay and still leaving Black with a vulnerable structure.

7 0-0 Nge7 8 c3 (Diagram 7)

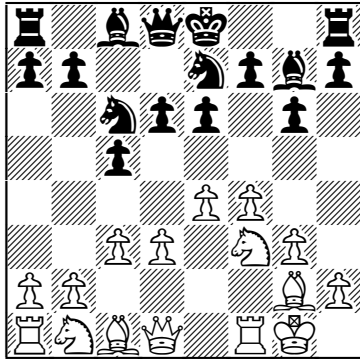


Diagram 7 (B)
The Clamp

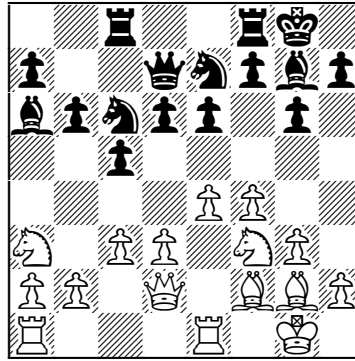


Diagram 8 (B)
White has slightly more space

8...0-0

Black has also challenged the clamp with 8...d5, but 9 e5 b6 10 Na3 a6 11 Be3 Bb7 12 Bf2, intending a later g4 and Bh4, was a fairly pleasant edge for White in M.Chandler-M.Cebalo, Vrsac 1981.

9 Be3 b6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

Developing the light-squared bishop, whereas Black's main alternative is to seek his traditional counterplay with 9...Rb8 and ...b5-b4 as occurred in Game 40.



WARNING: Do not rush with d4 in this variation as that assists Black's counterplay, and 9...b6 10 d4?! cxd4 11 cxd4 Ba6 12 Re1 Rc8 13 Nc3 Na5! gives Black easy development and queenside play.

10 Na3! Ba6

The most active square for the bishop, but Black has also tried:

a) 10...Bb7 11 Bf2 Qd7 12 Nc2 f5!? saw him unable to sit still in A.Fedorov-A.Morozevich, FIDE World Ch. (rapid), Las Vegas 1999, but 13 exf5 gxf5 14 d4! cxd4 15 Ncxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Rad8 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Re1 favourably opened the centre, exchanged off the g7-bishop and gave White reasonable pressure down the central files.

b) 10...Rb8 is typical of the indecision that Black often displays due to unfamiliarity with the Clamp. In A.Minasian-Ye Jiangchuan, Elista Olympiad 1998, White decided that he could exploit it with 11 d4! and 11...d5 12 e5 c4 13 b4! b5 14 Nc2 a5 15 a3 Ra8 kept the queenside fairly closed and allowed White to start his advance with 16 g4.

11 Re1 Qd7 12 Bf2 Rac8 13 Qd2 (Diagram 8)

White is slightly better and may even advance with d4 if Black continues to dally, while ...d5 will again be met by e5 after which White will look to the kingside to begin an attack.

Theoretical?

2 d3 aims to avoid theory and the Clamp is a system chiefly based on understanding some key motifs. However, if White does wish to undertake any analysis, he should focus on 6...e5 and the previously neglected idea of 11 Nf5.

Statistics

The Clamp has earned White (from diagram 7) an above average 56% from 752 outings. 6...e5 attempts to avoid it, but allows White plenty of play with 7 0-0 Nge7 8 f5 (54% from 53 games), whereas 6...Nf6 is a solid choice and has helped Black to a respectable 48% from 228 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 39

□ A.Fedorov ■ G.Kasparov

Wijk aan Zee 2001

1 e4 c5 2 d3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 d6 6 Nf3 Nf6 (Diagram 9)

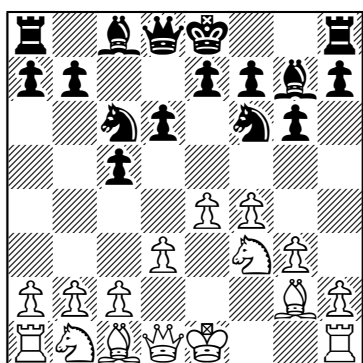


Diagram 9 (W)
Rapid kingside development

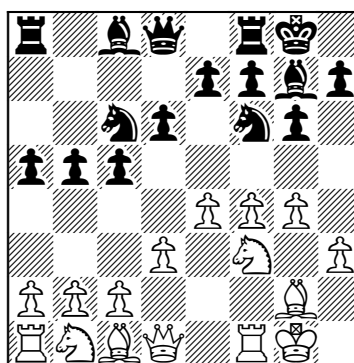


Diagram 10 (W)
Black doesn't waste any time

7 0-0 0-0 8 h3

As well as 8 Nc3, White has tried to set up a clamp with 8 c3, but 8...Bg4!? 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Rc8 is a good response, solving the issue of Black's problem bishop. White slightly lags in development and that enabled Black to develop sufficient counterplay with 11 Na3 Nd7! 12 Be3 b5 13 Nc2 Nb6 in C.Braga-H.Pilaj, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

8...b5! 9 g4

Black's last is a little risky, but had Fedorov preferred 9 e5, a typically Kasparovian sacrifice lay in store: 9...dxe5! 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Bxa8 Bxh3 12 Bg2 Bxg2 13 Kxg2 Nc6 and Black has good compensation due to his superior development and much safer king position.

9...a5 (Diagram 10) 10 f5?!

Too ambitious, whereas 10 a4 would have been thematic, although Black can gain reasonable counterplay against b2 with 10...bxa4!? 11 Nc3 Rb8 (Kasparov).

10...b4 11 Qe1?!

Ploughing ahead on the kingside, but it is rather risky not to develop one's queenside, especially against Kasparov!

11...Ba6 12 Qh4 c4!



TIP: It's worth stating again that the best way to meet a flank attack is often to counter in the centre.

13 Bh6? (Diagram 11)

Continuing to play very optimistically, although Black would also have had good pressure after 13 Rd1 cxd3 14 cxd3 Qb6+.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

13...cxd3 14 cxd3 Bxd3 15 Re1 Bxh6 16 Qxh6 Qb6+ 17 Kh1 Ne5!

A simple but effective approach from Kasparov who makes good use of his control of e5 to ensure that White hasn't any real chances on the kingside.

18 Nbd2 Rac8 19 Ng5

Continuing the plan begun on move ten, but Fedorov is going to struggle to remove the f6-knight.

19...Rc2 20 Rf1!? Bxf1 21 Rxf1 Rfc8 22 fxg6 hxg6 23 Nb3

White's position is a wreck, but he was unable to breakthrough on the kingside in any case with both 23 Nxf7 Kxf7 24 g5 Qe3! (Kasparov) and 23 Rxf6 exf6 24 Qh7+ Kf8 (Lane) falling well short.

23...Rxc2! (Diagram 12) 24 Kxg2 Rc2+ 25 Kg3 Qe3+ 0-1

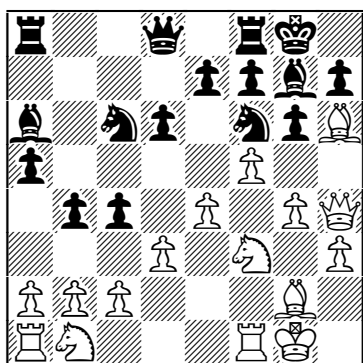


Diagram 11 (B)

Far, far too ambitious play

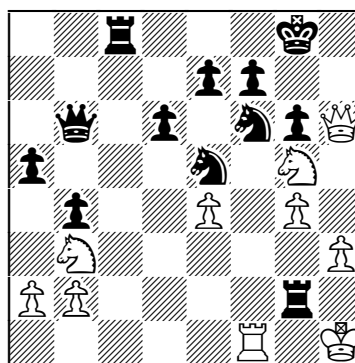


Diagram 12 (W)

White gets his comeuppance

Game 40

□ L.McShane ■ A.Khalifman

Smartfish Masters, Drammen 2005

1 e4 c5 2 d3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4 d6

Khalifman had previously struggled against the Clamp and 5...e6 6 Nf3 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 b6 9 Na3 Ba6 10 Re1 d6 11 Be3 Rc8 12 Bf2 Qd7 13 Nc2 Bb7 14 Qe2 Rfe8 15 Rad1 gave White the edge in A.Shchekachev-A.Khalifman, St Petersburg 1994. Commenting on that, Daniel King noted that the Clamp 'was a good choice of opening against Khalifman who is usually well-versed in the main lines of openings.' Perhaps McShane remembered that as his excellent choice of 2 d3 led to Khalifman's first defeat in a serious game for 18 months!

6 Nf3 e6 7 0-0 Nge7 8 c3 0-0 9 Be3 Rb8 10 d4! (Diagram 13) 10...b6 11 Bf2

Having prevented ...b5-b4 by advancing in the centre, McShane wants to

Crafty Move Orders: 2 g3 and 2 d3

maintain control, although 11 Re1 Bb7 12 Bf2 Rc8 13 Qd2 Rc7 14 Na3 Qa8 15 Rad1 Rd8 16 Nh4! was also a little better for White in I.Ibragimov-M.Mertens, Metz 1999.

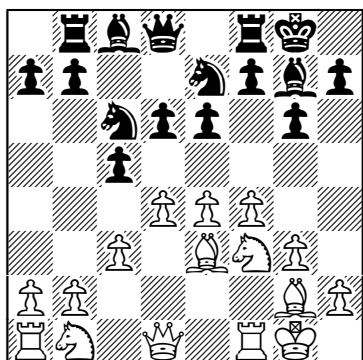


Diagram 13 (B)
White has a strong centre

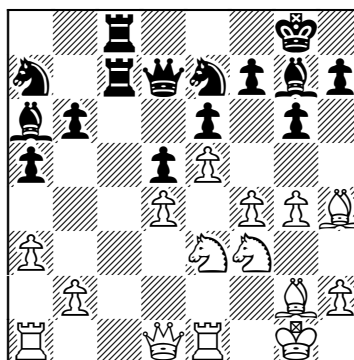


Diagram 14 (B)
An ideal kingside build-up

11...a5

The downside to d4 is that it can assist Black's counterplay, but McShane had realized that 11...Ba6 12 Re1 cxd4 13 cxd4 Nb4? is powerfully rebuffed by 14 Qa4! when White wins material after 14...Nec6 15 a3.

12 Re1 Ba6 13 a3

Keeping the black knight out of b4 as the b1-knight doesn't have to go to c2 via a3, but can also head for e3 via d2 and f1.

13...Qd7 14 Nbd2 Rfc8 15 Nf1

Both sides continue to improve their forces and now Khalifman has run out of useful moves and must counter in the centre.

15...cxd4 16 cxd4 d5 17 e5 Bxf1?!

Turning White's light-squared bishop into a strong piece, although White would also have been better after 17...Na7 18 Ne3 Rc7 19 g4! Rbc8 20 Bh4 (**Diagram 14**) (McShane) with the usual, promising chances on the kingside.

18 Bxf1

Black must be careful as 19 Bb5! is threatened, snaffling his counterplay, and once White has done that he will turn his attention to a kingside advance.

18...b5 19 b3 Na7 20 Re2 h5 21 Rea2! (**Diagram 15**)

Deep prophylaxis against ...b4 which Karpov would have been happy to have played himself.

21...Nf5 22 Qe1 Qc7 23 Bd3 a4?! 24 b4 Rb6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

24...Qc3 25 Qb1 followed by 26 Be1 would have evicted the black queen, and any queenside hopes of Khalifman's have been thwarted by McShane. Thus a slightly radical sacrifice is forced from Black.

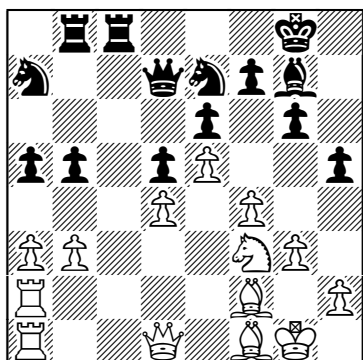


Diagram 15 (B)

Maintaining control of the position

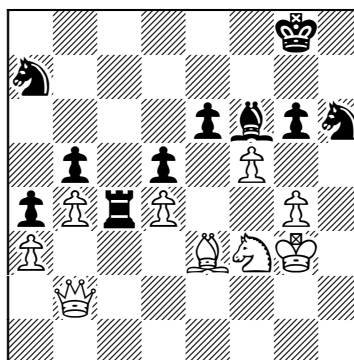


Diagram 16 (B)

A decisive breakthrough

25 Rc2 Qxc2!

The only try as after 25...Rc6, McShane offers the instructive 26 Rc5! Bf8 27 h3 Bxc5 28 dxc5! when Black's extra exchange is completely irrelevant and he will be blown away on the kingside.

26 Bxc2 Rxc2 27 Rc1 Rbc6 28 Rxc2 Rxc2 29 Qa1 Bf8 30 h3 Nc8 31 Qf1!

Khalifman is being completely outplayed and this accurate move keeps his pieces tied down and leaves him struggling.

31...Rc3 32 Ng5!

Allowing White to counter 32...Rxa3? with 33 Qc1 and reminding Black that f7 will be rather weak should the white queen ever penetrate into his position.

32...Na7 33 Qa1 Rc2 34 Qb1 Rc3 35 Qb2 Rc4 36 Nf3 Nc8 37 Kg2 Na7?! 38 g4!

McShane has played in a most impressive and restrained manner. Only now that has he fully neutralized Black's counterplay does he decisively open up the kingside.

38...hgx4 39 hxg4 Nh6 40 Kg3 Be7 41 Be3 f5

A last-ditch try, but White isn't phased by this final hurdle.

42 exf6 Bxf6 43 f5! (Diagram 16) 43...Nf7 44 fxg6 Nd6 45 Qh2! Rc7 46 Bf4 Nac8 47 Kh3 Rc6 48 Kg2 1-0

White Plays 2 g3

Aiming for the Clamp

1 e4 c5 2 g3 (Diagram 17)

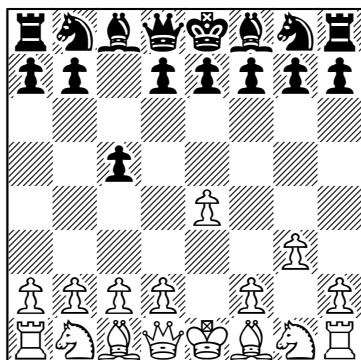


Diagram 17 (B)

Another way to omit Nc3

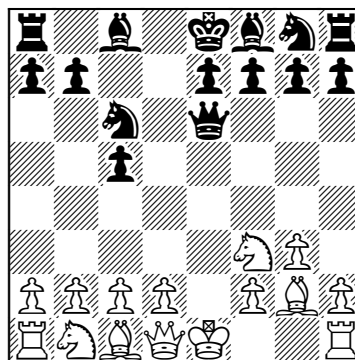


Diagram 18 (W)

A recent try for Black

2 g3 is often met by 2...Nc6 3 Bg2 g6 4 d3 when play has transposed to those lines we considered above under a 2 d3 move-order. 2 g3 players are usually seeking to reach the Clamp, but without allowing a KIA position and 2 g3 e6 3 Bg2 d5 4 exd5 Qxd5 permits White the option of 5 d4! (5 Nc3 transposes to Chapter Six). 2 g3 has never had the best of theoretical reputations due to the reply 2...d5, but the resulting positions are rather original and should suit the creative white player, whereas many black players will not be fully prepared for them.

2...d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nf3 Bg4

Continuing to play forcefully on the light squares and intending 5 Be2?! Bh3, but recently 4...Nc6 has become quite popular. Black avoids having his bishop potentially stranded a little offside on g6, as can occur in the main line, and may develop quite solidly. Yakovich has demonstrated that 5 Nc3 Qe6+ 6 Be2 Nd4! works well for Black and so White should prefer 5 Bg2 Qe6+ (**Diagram 18**) 6 Kf1:

- a) 6...Qd7 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 d3 e6 9 Bf4 Bd6 10 Bxd6 Qxd6 saw Black determined to keep any white creativity firmly under wraps in A.Grosar-A.Jankovic, Nova Gorica 1999, although 11 Nd2! a6 12 Nde4 Nxe4 13 Nxe4 Qe5?! 14 f4! Qxb2 15 Rb1 Qd4 16 c3 Qd7 17 Nxc5 saw White seize the initiative and the advantage.
- b) 6...Nf6 7 d3 b6!? prepares to fianchetto and White should take up the chal-

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

lenge, although 8 b4! cxb4 9 Nd4 Nxd4 10 Bxa8 Qg4! 11 f3! Qh3+ 12 Kf2 Qf5 13 c3! bxc3 14 Qa4+ Qd7! 15 Qxd7+ Nxd7 16 Nxc3 Nc5 still left Black with some compensation for the exchange in A.Nadanian-M.Golubev, Kiev 1997.

5 Bg2 Qe6+

The more accurate way to check as after 5...Qe4+ 6 Kf1, White will gain a tempo with Nc3.

6 Kf1! (Diagram 19)

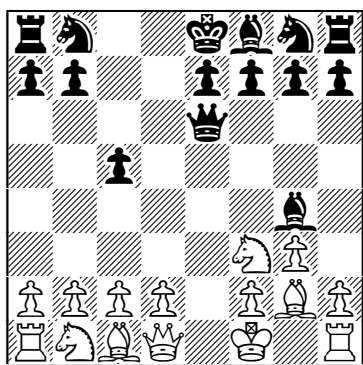


Diagram 19 (B)
An unclear situation

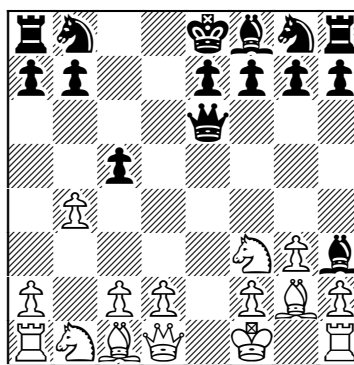


Diagram 20 (B)
A strong gambit



WARNING: White must play dynamically after 2 g3 and so 6 Qe2?! Qxe2+ 7 Kxe2 Nc6 is fully off the agenda as well as being very comfortable for Black.

6...Nc6

Unsuspecting black players still continue to try to exchange light-squared bishops with the seemingly natural 6...Bh3?! when 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Qd5! is fine for Black, but Sergey Korolev's brainchild 7 b4! (**Diagram 20**) isn't.



TIP: Always seek aggressive and dynamic ways to try and gain the initiative after 2 g3 d5.

7...Qc4+ 8 d3 Bxg2+ 9 Kxg2 Qxb4 10 Na3 Qg4 11 Rb1 clearly gives White a strong initiative, but Black also faces promising compensation after 7...cxb4 8 a3:

- 8...bxa3?! falls in with White's plan of quickly opening lines to favour his superior development and 9 Nxa3 Nc6 10 d4 Qd7 11 c4! 0-0-0?! 12 Nb5 a6 13 Bf4! gave White a strong attack in S.Korolev-Semin, correspondence 1980.
- 8...Nc6 9 axb4 Nxb4 10 Na3 Rc8 11 d4 Qd7 12 c4 Bxg2+ 13 Kxg2 also left

Crafty Move Orders: 2 g3 and 2 d3

Black facing a strong and mobile white centre in S.Korolev-Babadianov, correspondence 1975, although 13...e6? 14 Ne5 certainly didn't aid Black's cause.

c) 8...b3!? tries to keep lines closed, but White can continue forcefully with 9 Nc3 Nf6 10 Rb1!. Now 10...g6 11 Rxb3 b6 was K.Bischoff-G.Meins, German Ch., Altenkirchen 2005 when White should continue 12 Nb5! Na6 13 Re3 Qd7 14 Ne5! as 14...Qxb5+ 15 c4 Bxg2+ 16 Kxg2 regains the piece with interest after 16...Qc5 17 Qa4+ and 16...Qa5 17 Qf3 Rc8 18 Qb7 Qc5 19 Qxa6. Black might thus try 14...Qd5, although 15 Qf3 Bxg2+ 16 Kxg2 Bh6 17 c4! Qxf3+ 18 Rxf3 still leaves him under pressure and White better, especially after 18...0-0 19 Nc6.

7 h3 Bh5 8 d3

White can also prefer the move-order 8 Nc3 when 8...Nf6 9 d3 transposes to our main line, but 8...Qd7 is also often seen. Raetsky and Rogozenko have both suggested that this favours White, but, as was demonstrated in *NCO*, Black appears to be fine with a little accuracy after 9 Ne5!? Bxd1 10 Nxd7 Bxc2 11 Nxc5 0-0-0! 12 b4! (**Diagram 21**)

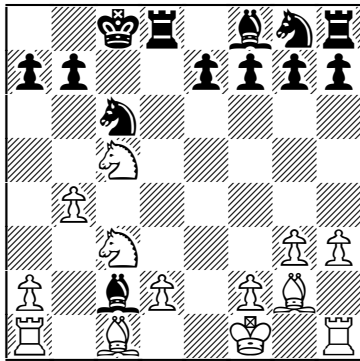


Diagram 21 (B)
Active play from White

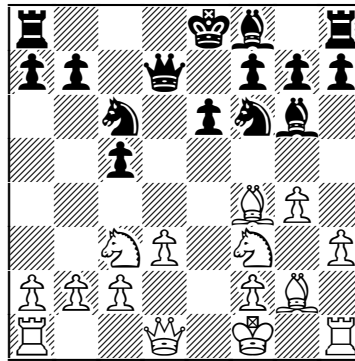


Diagram 22 (W)
How should White continue?

12...e6! (but not 12...Nxb4? 13 Ba3 Nd3 14 Bxb7+ Kc7 15 Be4 e6 16 Nb5+ with some attack in S.Vesselovsky-V.Yasinsky, Minsk 1994) 13 Nxb7 Kxb7 14 b5 Nge7 15 Ba3 Nd5 16 bxc6+ Kxc6 17 Bxf8 (the 17 Nxd5?! of S.Nadyrhanov-G.Serper, Tashkent 1993 should have been met by Gallagher's calm 17...Bd3+ 18 Kg1 Bxa3 when Black is better) 17...Bd3+ (Emms) and 18...Rhxf8 is fine for Black whose king will be safe enough and actually quite well placed on d6.

8...Qd7!

More accurate than 8...Nf6 as now Black can play ...f6 should White adopt a Na3-c4 manoeuvre.

9 Nc3

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

The older move and we consider 9 Na3, heading for c4 and then possibly e5, in Game 41.

9...e6 10 Bf4 Nf6 11 g4!

White has rarely been successful by exchanging the black bishop on g6 after Nh4, but 11 g4 also enables him to try and gain the initiative with Ne5 or an advance of his kingside pawns. In the short term the white king is perfectly safe on f1 and Black still has to complete his kingside development.

11...Bg6 (Diagram 22)

We're at a theoretical crossroads and 12 g5 Ng8 13 Qe1 Nge7 14 h4! Bh5 15 Ne5 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 Nc6 17 a4! saw White instructively open up his g2-bishop and gain the advantage in J.Speelman-J.Sunye Neto, Graz 1981, but 12...Nh5! 13 Ne5 Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Bd6! 15 Bxd6 Qxd6 was a big improvement, and at least equal for Black, in S.Nadyrhanov-H.Stefansson, World Team Ch., Lucerne 1993. Unless White can find something against 12...Nh5, he must prefer 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Bxe5 when the pawn sacrifice, 13...Bd6!?, has been recommended by both Raetsky and Rogozenko as we'll see in Game 42.

Theoretical?

The position can easily become quite sharp and complex after 2 g3 d5, and white players are advised to know their theory; not that there is very much. That way any slips from Black, such as with 6...Bh3?! 7 b4!, can be fully punished.

Statistics

Only about a quarter of black players feel prepared to meet 2 g3 with 2...d5 even though that is the theoretically recommended move. Black has scored quite reasonably in the main line and 8 d3 Qd7 9 Na3 is statistically the best reply, scoring 52% from 41 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 41

□ O.Sepp ■ J.Stocek

European Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003

1 e4 c5 2 g3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Bg2 Qe6+ 6 Kf1 Nc6 7 h3 Bh5 8 d3 Qd7 9 Na3 (Diagram 23) 9...Rd8!?

Rare, but this appears to be a playable alternative to Black's more common options:

a) 9...e5?! is a little too ambitious as was demonstrated by the 10 Be3 Nf6 11 Nc4 Qc7 12 Qe1! Be7 13 Nfxe5!, intending 13...Nxe5 14 Bf4, of R.Tischbierek-So.Polgar, Vienna 1991.

b) 9...e6 is Black's most respectable move-order and White has often struggled to get anywhere after 10 g4 Bg6 11 Nh4 Be7 12 Nxc6 hxc6 13 Nc4 Nf6 when Black is very solid and White can easily find himself overextended. Instead 10 Nc4 f6 11 Be3 Rd8 transposes to variation 'c3' below, although Black should also consider 10...Bd6!? as 11 Qe1 f6 12 Nxd6+ Qxd6 13 Be3 Nge7 14 g4 Bf7 15 Qc3 b6 was quite comfortable for him in V.Jansa-H.Emunds, Muenster 1992.

c) 9...f6?! is slightly inaccurate as Black has struggled after 10 Be3 (**Diagram 24**):

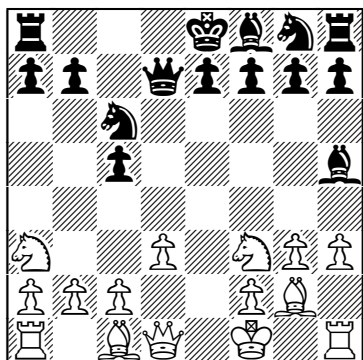


Diagram 23 (B)

Trying to activate the knight

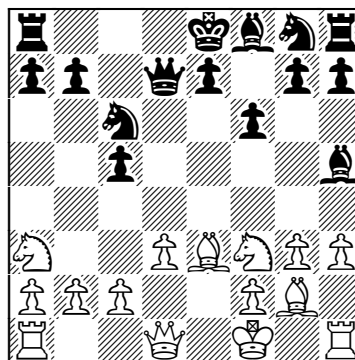


Diagram 24 (B)

Hoping for 10...e5

c1) 10...e5?! 11 Nxe5! Bxd1 12 Nxd7 Bxc2 13 Nxf6+ Nxf6 14 Nxc2 netted White a pawn in S.Vesselovsky-K.Toma, Frydek Mistek 2005.

c2) 10...Nd4 11 c3! Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Nxf3 13 Qxf3 (**Diagram 25**) gave White the initiative which grew after 13...e5 14 Kg2 0-0-0 15 d4! in I.Ibragimov-T.Tolnai, Budapest 1992.

c3) 10...e6 is the most solid choice, but this move permits White a small edge after 11 Ne5! Bxd1 12 Nxd7 Bxc2 13 Nxf6+, whereas the line 11 Nc4 Rd8 12 a4 Nd4 13 Bxd4 cxd4 (**Diagram 26**) was fine for Black, despite White's creative 14 Qe1!? Ne7 15 Qa5 Bxf3 16 Bxf3 b6 17 Qb5, in O.Sepp-Y.Yakovich, Leeuwarden 1993.

10 Be3

This doesn't really lead anywhere, but Stoczek had prepared to meet 10 Bf4 with 10...f6 as after 11 Nc4 e5 12 Nfxe5? Bxd1 13 Nxd7 Bxc2 the white knight's absence from a3 is sorely felt, while 11 Nb5!? e6! is also fine for Black.

10...e6 11 Nc4 Nf6 12 g4 Bg6 13 Nfe5

Thematically trying to open up the white bishops, but Stoczek remains rather solid.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

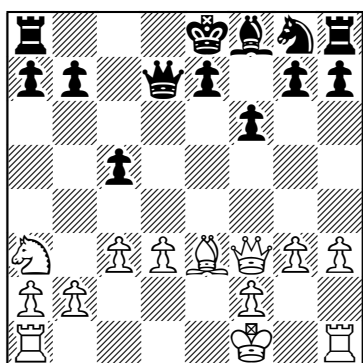


Diagram 25 (B)
Powerful play from White

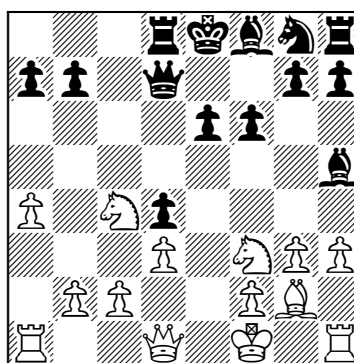


Diagram 26 (W)
It's roughly level

13...Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Qc7 15 Bf4 Bd6 16 Qe2 Nd7! (Diagram 27)

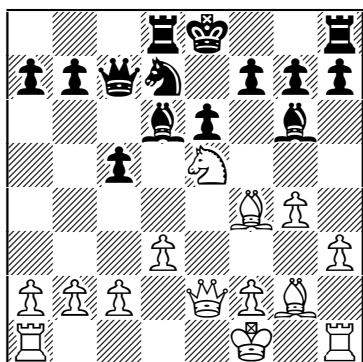


Diagram 27 (W)
Forcing further exchanges

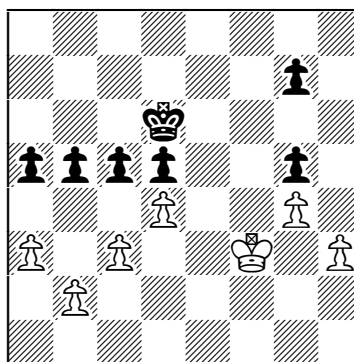


Diagram 28 (B)
Keeping the queenside closed

17 Nxg6 hxg6 18 Bg5

The black king is safe enough on e7 and so Sepp should have considered 18 Bd2!?, keeping pieces on and hoping to launch his h-pawn up the board should Black castle.

18...Be7 19 Bxe7 Kxe7 20 Qe3 Nf6 21 Re1 b6

Removing the final target from the long diagonal and Black has fully equalized. Sepp now realizes that he can keep his kingside covered and so heads for an exchange of queens and a draw.

22 Qe5! Qxe5 23 Rxe5 Rd4 24 Ke2 Kd6 25 Re3 g5!

Fixing g5 and Stocek now tries to grind his lower-rated opponent, but Sepp is having none of it.

26 c3 Rf4 27 a3 Nd5 28 Bxd5! exd5 29 Rf3 Re8+ 30 Re3 Rh8 31 Rf3 Rxf3

The only real try, but Black lacks sufficient weaknesses to target, or hooks to latch on to, to be able to mount a real attempt.

32 Kxf3 b5 33 Kg3 f6 34 f4! Re8 35 fxg5 fxg5 36 Rf1 Re3+ 37 Rf3 Rxf3+ 38 Kxf3 a5 39 d4 (Diagram 28) 39...Kc6 40 b4 cxd4 41 cxd4 axb4 42 axb4 Kd6 ½-½

Game 42

□ J.Horner ■ S.Quigley

British Championship, Chester 1979

1 e4 c5 2 g3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Bg2 Qe6+ 6 Kf1 Nc6 7 h3 Bh5 8 d3 Qd7 9 Nc3 Nf6 10 g4 Bg6 11 Bf4 e6 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Bxe5 Bd6! (Diagram 29)

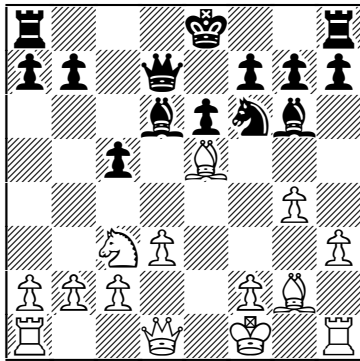


Diagram 29 (W)

Black tries to gain the initiative

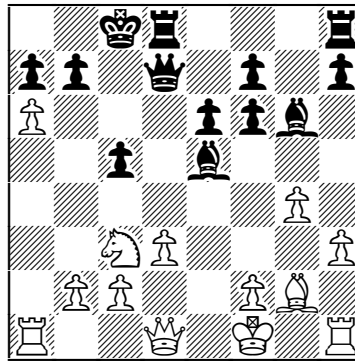


Diagram 30 (B)

A fishbone in Black's throat!

Ravikumar wasn't impressed by this back in 1993, but it appears fully playable as 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Bxb7 Rb8 16 Qf3 0-0 17 Rb1 c4! has been shown to give Black promising compensation. Instead 13...0-0-0?! 14 a4! is risky for Black and 14...Bd6 15 Bxf6 gxf6 16 a5 Be5? 17 a6! (**Diagram 30**) 17...b6 18 Qf3 Kc7 19 Qb7+ Kd6 (R.Bar-N.Ribshtein, Rishon Le Zion 1999) should be met by 20 Qxa7! Qxa7 21 Nb5+ when the white a-pawn remains very dangerous.

14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Qf3 Be5

Covering f6 and lessening the impact of Ne4, but the Rogozenko-advocated 15...f5!? 16 Qxb7 Qxb7 17 Bxb7 Rb8 18 Bc6+ Ke7 19 Rb1 Be5 is also quite a reasonable choice for Black.

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian

16 Re1!?

Not considered by Raetsky in *Meeting 1 e4*, but this contains some venom. Instead White has recently tried 16 a4, but, despite his aggressive play, 16...Rb8 17 Re1 Ke7 18 h4 h6 19 g5 hxg5 20 hxg5 Rxh1+ 21 Bxh1 Bxc3 22 bxc3 fxg5 23 Qg3 Qd6 24 Qxg5+ Kd7 still didn't promise him any advantage in A.Smirnov-V.Kupreichik, Tula 2002.

16...Rb8?

It is e5, not b7, which is in need of support and so Black preferred 16...Qc7 17 Ne4 Ke7 18 h4 h6, which was roughly balanced, in V.Varlamov-B.Avrukh, St Petersburg 1994.

17 h4!

Forcing Black to weaken his kingside before employing a strong exchange sacrifice to expose the centralized black king.

17...h5 18 Rxe5! (Diagram 31)

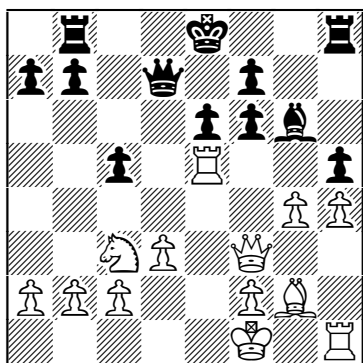


Diagram 31 (B)
A strong sacrifice

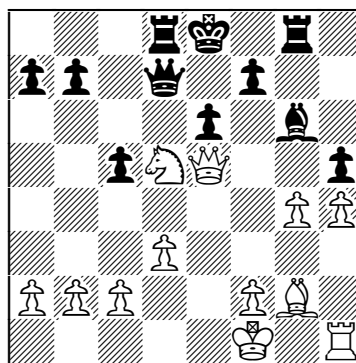


Diagram 32 (B)
Threatening a family fork

18...fxe5 19 Qf6 Rg8 20 Qxe5 Rd8?

Black's only trump is his extra exchange which is now lost. He had to try 20...Rc8 to be able to meet 21 Nd5 Kf8 22 Nf6 with 22...Qd4!, although White still has promising play for the exchange after 23 f4!

21 Nd5 (Diagram 32) 21...Kf8 22 Nf6 Qd4 23 Qxd4 Rxd4 24 gxh5 Bxh5!?

Quigley hopes that his rook will be able to cope with the two pieces in the ending, but this is rather unlikely as it is White, not Black, who has the extra pawn.

25 Nxh5 Rh8 26 Bf3 c4 27 Ke2 b5 28 Ke3 e5 29 Nf6!

Simplifying and leaving White with a straightforward technical task.

Crafty Move Orders: 2 g3 and 2 d3

29...Rdxh4 30 Rxh4 Rxh4 31 Nd7+ Ke7 32 Nxe5 Ke6 33 d4 Rh8 34 Nc6 a6
35 Nb4 a5 36 Nc6 a4 37 a3! Rg8 38 Kd2 Rg1 39 Na7 Rb1 40 Nxb5 Rxb2 41
Nc3 Ke7 42 Bd5 1-0

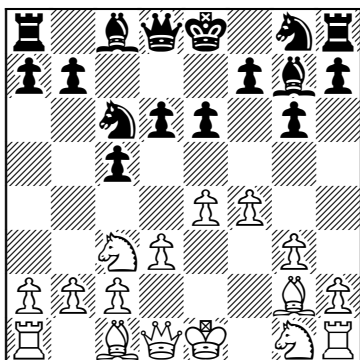
Points to Remember

- 1) 2 d3 and 2 g3 are both generally employed by those seeking to reach the so-called clamp formation.
- 2) 2 g3, and to a slightly lesser extent 2 d3, should appeal to the creative player. The former is more provocative, whereas the latter forces White to be happy to play a KIA position.
- 3) Should White reach the desired Clamp, he should meet ...d5 with e5 to keep the centre closed and then generally delay or even omit d4, thereby giving Black less counterplay.
- 4) After 2 g3, White should always be looking out for a dynamic and aggressive plan or advance.

Index of Variations

Spassky's 6 f4: The Main Line with 6...e6

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6



7 Nf3 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 Nd4

9...b6

10 Bf2 – 59; 10 d4 – 61

10 e5

10 Rb1

10...Nec6 – 23; 10...Rb8 – 9

10 Bf2

10...Rb8 – 49; 10...Nec6 – 51

10...Nef5

10...dxe5 – 32; 10...Bd7 – 34

11 Bf2 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Nd4 13 Qd1 dxe5 14 fxe5 Bxe5

14...Bd7 – 37

15 Ne4 f5 16 Nxc5 Qd6

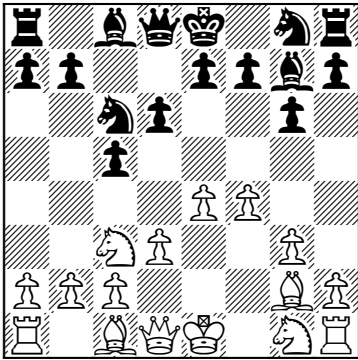
16...f4 – 42

17 b4 Nc6 – 39

17...Rb8 – 14

Spassky's 6 f4: Black's Other Defences

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4



6...e5

6...Nf6 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 Rb8 9 h3 b5

10 g4 – 73

10 a3 – 76

7 Nh3

7 Nf3 – 84

7...Nge7

7...exf4 – 87

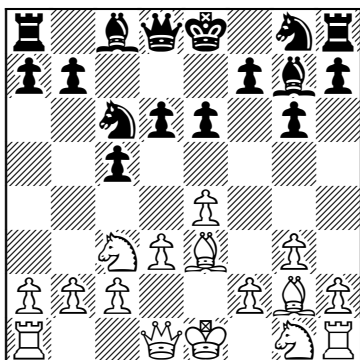
8 0-0 0-0 – 94

8...Nd4 – 90

The Fashionable 6 Be3: 6...e6 and 6...e5

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 e6

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian



6...e5 7 Qd2 Nge7

8 Bh6 – 118

8 f4 Nd4 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0

10...Bg4 – 120

10...exf4 – 122

7 Qd2 Qa5

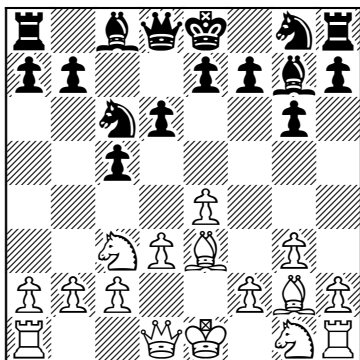
7...Nge7 – 104

8 f4 – 112

8 Nge2 – 108

The Fashionable 6 Be3: Black's Alternative Set-ups

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3



6...Rb8

6...Nf6 – 130

6...Bd7 – 15

7 Qd2 b5

8 f4 – 137

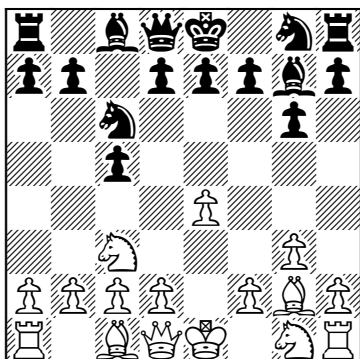
8 Nge2 b4 9 Nd1 Nd4 10 0-0 e6 – 140

10...e5 – 139

10...Qc7 – 7

The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7



5 d3

5 Nge2 – 147

5...d6 6 Nge2

6 Nh3

6...Rb8 – 160

6...h5 – 162

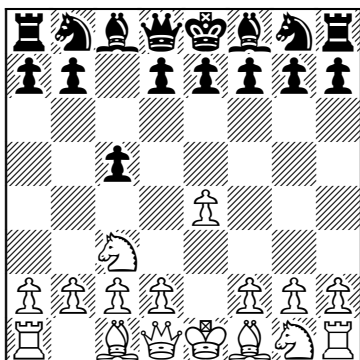
6...e6 – 153

6...e5 – 150

Early Black Deviations

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian



2...e6 3 g3

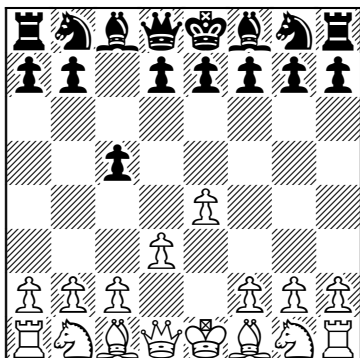
3 Nge2 – 170

3...d5 – 174

3...Nf6 – 179

Crafty Move-orders: 2 d3 and 2 g3

1 e4 c5 2 d3



2 g3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Bg2 Qe6+ 6 Kf1 Nc6 7 h3 Bh5 8 d3 Qd7

9 Na3 – 196

9 Nc3 – 199

2...Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 e6 – 190

6...Nf6 – 188

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