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The Leningrad Variation

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PREFACE

We suggest you readers enlarged your opening repertoire on the basis of the Dutch Defence and one of its most complex lines the Leningrad variation. It was named like this because numerous players from the beautiful city on the river Neva took part in its theoretical development.

The fianchetto of Black's bishop on g7 is typical for the Leningrad variation. There arises on the board something like a hybrid between the King's Indian Defence and the Dutch Defence. This set-up has two main objects. On the one hand, Black exerts pressure with his bishop against his opponent's centre and on the other hand, contrary to the King's Indian Defence, White is not allowed to dominate in the centre. You should have in mind how difficult it is sometimes for Black to advance f7-f5 in the King's Indian Defence. Here, this move has already been made. Still, it is well known that you have to pay the price for everything...Black creates voluntarily long lasting weaknesses in this set-up and they have to be covered by his pieces. There are many players who use this system who might like at some moment to take back the pawn f5-f7, but unfortunately this is forbidden by the rules...

White is not forced to enter the lines of the classical Leningrad variation, so Black must be well prepared against the English Opening as well as for the Stonewall system of the Dutch Defence. You will learn all this in our book.

This system, just like any other, has its pluses and minuses. One of its special advantages is that White cannot enter dull and boring positions even if he insists on this. There cannot happen numerous exchanges in this variation. Therefore, it is often used when Black wishes to play for a win, particularly in decisive games. One of its drawbacks however, is that the system is strategically risky.

We have to mention that many players consider mistakenly that Black's main idea is to organise an attack against the enemy king. This is not quite true although this sometimes happens and Black ends up the game with a victorious kingside offensive. You have to know that the Leningrad variation is a system based on strategy and the games are usually decided in long battles and often in the endgame. In numerous variations Black plays in the centre, or on the queenside, or

on the kingside. Generally speaking, when you choose the Leningrad variation you must be patient and watch carefully what the situation on the board is.

This variation was played for the first time back in the year 1931 in Nice in the game Thomas Seitz. It was interesting that the players entered immediately one of the most fashionable contemporary variations. In fact, Black obtained a winning endgame, but failed to realise his advantage.

During the years after the Second World War the Leningrad master Evgenij Kuzminykh began to play this variation at a very high level – in the semifinal of the USSR Championship. Later, it was played sometimes by Boris Spassky and Mikhail Botvinnik (in his match for the World Championship in 1960 against Mikhail Tal). At the beginning of the 80ies of the past century the grandmasters from Ukraine Mikhail Gurevich, Alexander Chernin and Vladimir Malaniuk made it a part of their opening repertoire and the variation became very popular. For example, in the USSR Championship in 1983, it was tested by Malaniuk in three of his games. The author of this book made 2 ½ points out of 3 against Beliavsky, Lerner and Polugayevsky. There has never been a single tournament since then in which this system has not been played.

We present this book to our readers and we would like to warn you not to treat it in a formal fashion. You should not study the variations move by move, since you might get drowned in the sea of theory. There are numerous positions which may arise after different move-orders. You should better play close attention to the main lines. Which lines should you consider as main lines? The answer to this question is very simple. The lines used by the strongest players are the best. These players are top level because they understand the game of chess better than the others and they all work a lot on chess. This is what makes them elite players. In principle, if White chooses to avoid a theoretical dispute – this means that Black has scored a certain psychological victory. There are many seldom played side variations and you do not need to study all of them so thoroughly. In fact, Black has no problems against any of them.

So, leave aside all your doubts and play the move 1...f5!

Vladimir Malaniuk and Petr Marusenko