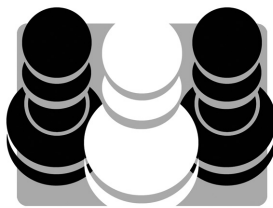


Grandmaster Repertoire 17

The Classical Slav

By

Boris Avrukh



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Preface

I was delighted when John Shaw and Jacob Aagaard offered me the chance to write a book advocating the Classical Slav. Usually my name is associated with the Grünfeld, but the Slav has always been part of my repertoire and I noticed to my surprise that I have not suffered a single defeat in serious games when employing this opening!

I have always felt that that the Slav is a solid choice, where Black fights for the centre from the very first moves, compared with the Grünfeld, where Black gives up the centre in order to challenge it later on. I am convinced it is a clever idea to have two distinct openings in your repertoire, especially if they are conceptually different (like the Slav and the Grünfeld). From my own experience I know that 1.d4 players can often be divided into two camps: members of the first group don't like to face such a forcing opening as the Grünfeld, while those in the second group struggle to show anything against solid set-ups like the Slav! Therefore it makes a lot of sense to have both types of weapon at one's disposal.

The Slav is a highly popular choice at all levels, and almost all the elite players have it in their repertoires. I tried to make my choice of lines attractive for active and ambitious players (yes, the Slav can be aggressive) with many original ideas and deep analysis. As the title says, the heart of this book is the Classical Slav, which means that Black's queen's bishop is often headed for f5. However, when choosing the right move involved transposing to another opening, I have done so. So you will find a few cases where I transpose to the Meran or even the Queen's Gambit Accepted, but only when White's most theoretically critical lines have been avoided.

Of course this is a repertoire book, but in a few cases I have offered two options for Black. For example, after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 I was delighted to prove the soundness of the relatively new idea 4...♗f5!?, which often leads to exciting sacrificial play. On the other hand, for those who like Chebanenko-type positions (and dislike gambits!) I have also covered 4...a6. Indeed, set-ups involving ...a6 are featured in a few other lines as well.

Also after 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 I have given two lines, though both start with 6...♗bd7. My main choice is the famous Morozevich Variation with a later ...g5, which I eventually realized is both aggressive and solid – a fine combination! The other line I recommend is much less well known, and I will leave the details as a surprise for later.

The book contains plenty of remarkable ideas, some of which arise at a surprisingly early stage. As usual, I tried to advance the state of theory rather than just repeat the current state of practice. I hope that every reader will enjoy my work and have great success with the Slav.

Boris Avrukh
Beer-Sheva, January 2014

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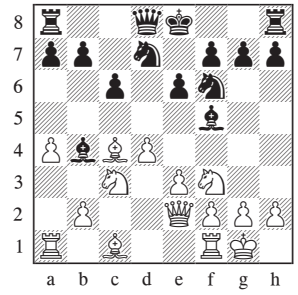
6.♘e5

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Chapter 27

6.e3



9.♙e2

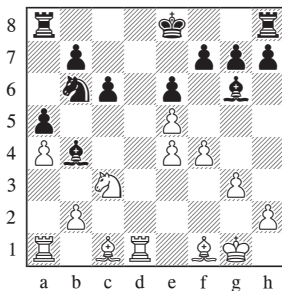
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1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♕f5 6.e3 e6
7.♕xc4 ♕b4 8.0-0 ♖bd7 9.♙e2

9...♗g6

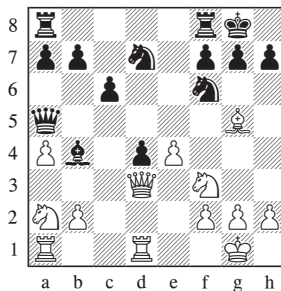
A) 10.♕d3	314
B) 10.♞d1 0-0	315
B1) 11.♕d2	316
B2) 11.♗e5	317

note to White's 10th move



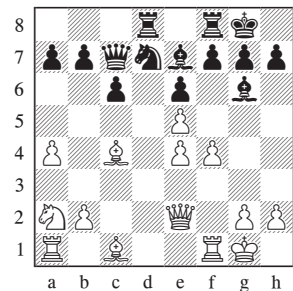
17...♗d7!N

A) after 15.♗a2



15...♕e7N

B2) note to 14.e4



16...♙b6†N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♙f5 6.e3 e6 7.♙xc4 ♙b4 8.0-0 ♘bd7 9.♖e2

This is White's most popular move, threatening e3-e4 and vacating the d1-square for the rook.

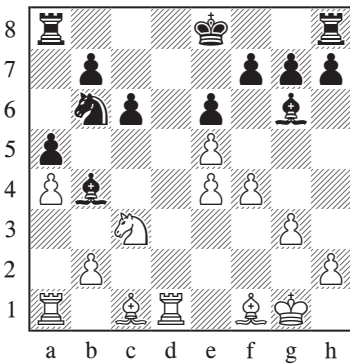
9...♙g6

This is Black's most popular continuation, although 9...0-0 is likely to transpose to the next chapter after 10.e4 ♙g6.

After the text move White has tried several moves. In the present chapter we will consider the relatively harmless **A) 10.♙d3** and **B) 10.♞d1**.

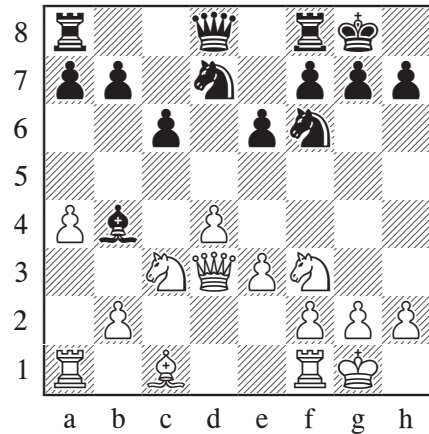
The main theoretical direction is unquestionably 10.e4, which is covered in the next two chapters.

10.♘e5?! is dubious, as after 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘d7 White does not have enough activity to compensate for his damaged pawn structure. A good example is: 12.f4 ♘b6 13.♞d1 ♖h4 14.g3 ♖h3 15.♖f1 ♖xf1† 16.♙xf1 a5 17.e4



17...♘d7!N (17...♙xc3?! 18.bxc3 ♙xe4 19.♞d4 followed by c3-c4 gave White good compensation in Wassin – Perun, Kiev 2003.) 18.♙e3 ♘c5 White must fight for equality.

A) 10.♙d3 ♙xd3 11.♖xd3 0-0



This can hardly be dangerous for Black.

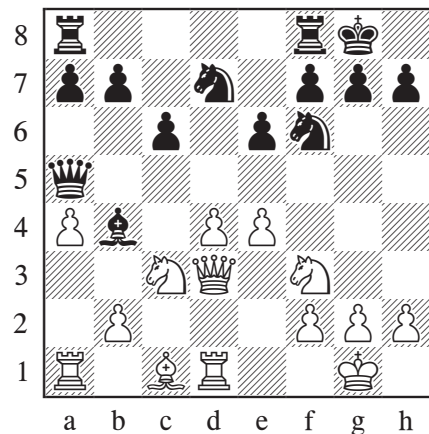
12.♞d1

12.e4? allows a typical tactical device: 12...♙xc3! 13.bxc3 ♘c5! 14.♖c2 ♘xe4 15.♞e1 ♘d6 White does not have sufficient compensation for the missing pawn. 16.c4 ♘f5 17.♙b2 ♖c7 Black slowly but surely converted his extra pawn in Laren – Finegold, Lansing 1989.

12...♖a5

White has tried a few different moves here, but the following central advance is the most principled.

13.e4

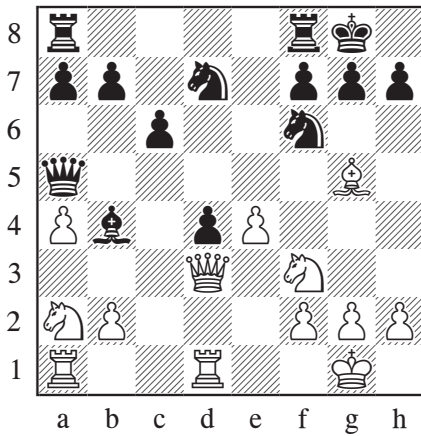


13...e5! 14. ♖g5

14. ♖a2 is the main alternative. Here I found two games in which Black captured on d4, but I would prefer to keep the tension with 14...♗e7N. A possible continuation is 15.b4 ♖c7 16. ♖b2 exd4 17. ♖xd4 ♖fd8 intending ...♗f8 with an unclear game.

14...exd4 15. ♖a2

This position occurred in Yusupov – Bareev, Germany 2001. Here I suggest:



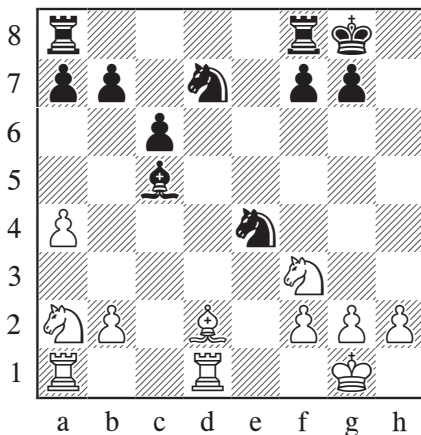
15...♗e7N 16. ♖xd4 h6!

Based on the following tactical point.

17. ♖xh6?!

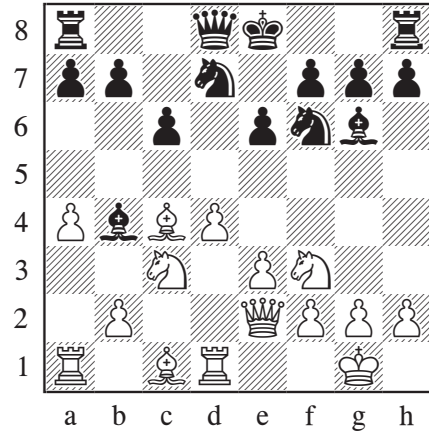
17. ♖d2 ♖h5! is also pleasant for Black.

17...♗c5! 18. ♖d2 ♖xd2 19. ♖xd2 ♗xe4



Black's active pieces give him a slight edge.

B) 10. ♖d1

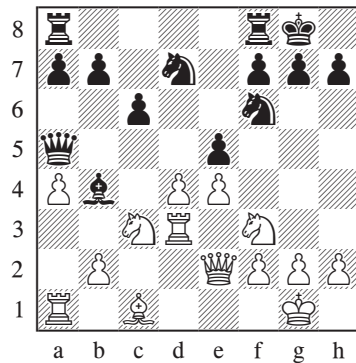


10...0-0

After this obvious reply it is worth considering two main options: B1) 11. ♖d2 and B2) 11. ♖e5.

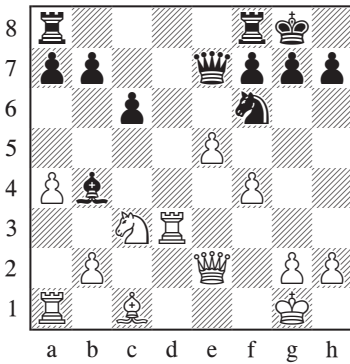
11.e4? reaches a position covered on page 320 – see 11. ♖d1? in the notes to move 11 in the next chapter.

11. ♖d3 ♖xd3 12. ♖xd3 (12. ♖xd3 was covered in variation A above, after 10. ♖d3 ♖xd3 11. ♖xd3 0-0 12. ♖d1) 12... ♖a5 13.e4 e5 is not dangerous for Black. A plausible continuation is:



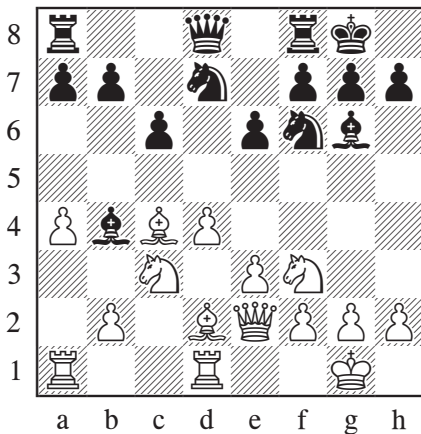
14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 16.f4 ♖e7

(16...♖e6 17.e5) 17.e5 Now Black can exploit the odd position of the rook on d3 with:



17...♖ad8! 18.♗xd8 ♗xd8 19.♕d2 This was Raffaele – Hermans, email 2002, and now 19...♘d5N would have been at least equal for Black.

B1) 11.♕d2



11...♖e7

With this flexible move, Black maintains the options of both ...e5 and ...c5.

12.♕e1

12.a5 looks quite logical, and has been played several times. Here I like the preparatory 12...♖ac8N, waiting for a suitable moment to strike at the centre.

12...♖ad8

White has a solid position but Black has a lot of resources, as showcased by the following game.

13.♖ac1?!

White should have preferred 13.h3N with equality.

13...♕h5!

Suddenly the pin along the d1-h5 diagonal causes problems for White.

14.h3

14.♖c2 is the lesser evil, although Black will have a slight edge after exchanging on f3.

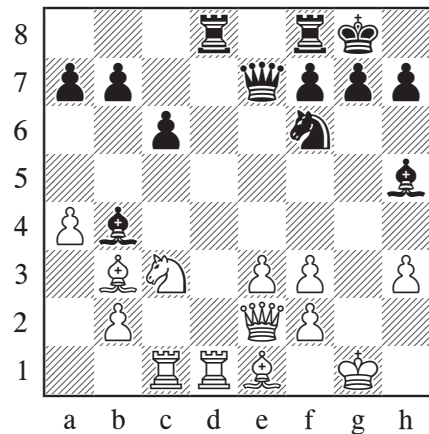
14...e5!

Black is already clearly better.

15.dxe5

After 15.g4 ♘xg4! 16.hxg4 ♕xg4 17.♗e4 ♕xe1 18.♖xe1 ♖h8! Black has a decisive initiative.

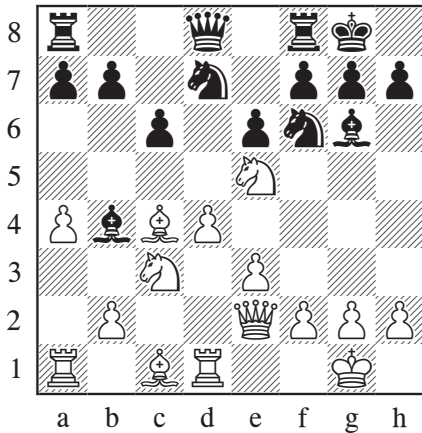
15...♗xe5 16.♕b3 ♗xf3† 17.gxf3



17...♗d7!

Black was already winning in Zilberman – Balogh, Cappelle la Grande 2009.

B2) 11.♘e5

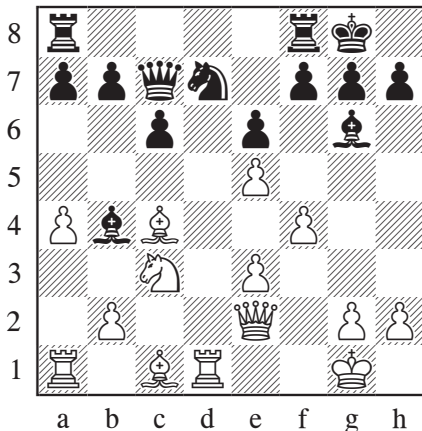


This is the most popular, and a consistent way to follow White's previous move.

11...♗xe5!

In such positions, it is always a big question whether or not to go for the exchange on e5. In this particular case it is highly recommended, and I believe Black can fight for an advantage.

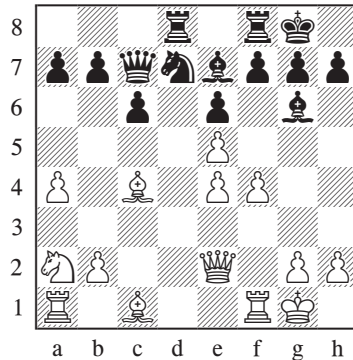
12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.f4 ♖c7



14.e4

14.♙d2 ♜fd8 15.♙e1 is rather slow, and after 15...♗c5♣ Black's superior pawn structure gave him the upper hand in Vincensini – Houard, Marseille 2009.

14.♘a2 has scored well for White, but I do not believe it alters the assessment of the position as being in Black's favour. 14...♙e7 15.e4 ♜ad8 16.♜f1 This was Ivkov – Vukovic, Zagreb 1949, and here Black could have obtained an excellent position with:



16...♜b6†N 17.♘h1 (17.♙e3 ♙c5) 17...♜d4 18.♗c3 ♙h5! 19.♜xh5 ♜xc4 Black has succeeded in swapping off his endangered bishop before f4-f5 became a serious problem. In the resulting position White still has some attacking chances, but Black's superior structure and counterplay along the d-file are more significant.

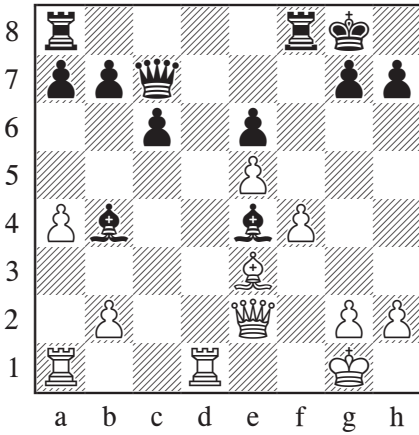
14...♗c5 15.♙e3

15.♘a2? is a clear mistake here due to 15...♗xe4 16.♗xb4 ♜b6† 17.♙e3 ♜xb4♣ and Black is just a healthy pawn up, Ju Wenjun – Cramling, Beijing (blitz) 2011.

15...♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♙xe4 17.♙xe6N

17.♜d4? occurred in Brasoy – Forsaa, Tromso 2003, and here Black missed the simple 17...♙g6!N 18.♙xe6 ♙c5♣ securing a material advantage.

17...fxe6



18. ♕c4 ♗d5

18... ♞xf4!? 19. ♔xf4 ♞b6† 20. ♖h1 ♗d5☞ gives Black nice compensation, but it is hardly necessary to play this way as the main line is more than sufficient.

19. ♞xb4 b6☞

Black has an obvious positional advantage as his bishop is stronger than its white counterpart.

Conclusion

The sidelines examined here demand a certain amount of accuracy from Black, but ultimately none of them pose much of a theoretical threat. After this short introduction to the 9. ♞e2 ♗g6 variation, the next two chapters will be devoted to the much more critical variation beginning with 10.e4.