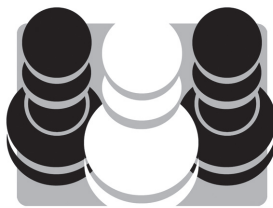


Grandmaster Repertoire

The Nimzo-Indian Defence

By

Michael Roiz



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

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Preface

My madness for chess started in 1989, when as a six-year-old kid I saw my father playing with my uncle. Back then, I could see chess in almost everything, and I started to collect and explore every chess book I could find. Those were tough times in the Soviet Union and it was not easy to get good chess books, but my parents did their best to support my hobby. So in 1990 I was lucky enough to have plenty of books at my disposal, including David Bronstein's tournament book about the Zurich 1953 Candidates. There were many spectacular games in this book, but I was especially impressed by the Geller – Euwe encounter, where the former World Champion played the Nimzo-Indian and scored a memorable victory in counterattacking style, using the exciting motif of a rook sacrifice. The influence of this game was so significant that for the next ten years I avoided getting doubled c-pawns in my games!

When I look back on my childhood career, I can understand why I did not play 3.♘c3 with White and allow the Nimzo-Indian – it is one of most complex openings from a strategic point of view, and the arising positions are sometimes tough to handle, even for grandmasters, so it would be impossible for a young child. Even after many years of playing the Nimzo-Indian with both colours, and analysing various systems with top players (including preparing for the Anand – Gelfand World Championship match in 2012, where the Nimzo played an important role) I still fail to evaluate some positions properly, and so does the engine!

So when Quality Chess asked me to write a book on this opening, focusing on Black's side, I found this project very challenging and this appealed to me. Indeed, White has a large choice of possibilities even on the 4th move – therefore, a thorough evaluation of all the possible responses for Black is difficult to say the least.

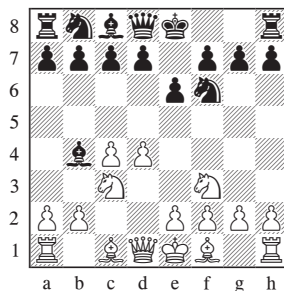
The concept of this book is to enable players to feel knowledgeable enough in any system they may encounter when playing the Nimzo-Indian. So I offer a complete repertoire for Black after 3...♗b4.

I feel I have succeeded in improving my own understanding of the Nimzo-Indian, and I hope to share this knowledge with the reader. Best of luck in your journey with the Nimzo-Indian.

Michael Roiz
Beer Sheva, December 2016

Chapter 8

Various 4th Moves



4. ♘f3

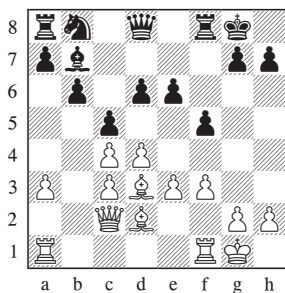
Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♖b4 4.♗f3

4...c5

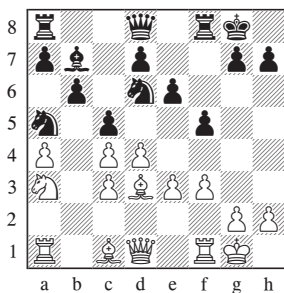
A) 5. ♖c2	110
B) 5. dxc5	111
C) 5. d5	112
D) 5. a3	112
E) 5. g3 ♘c6	115
E1) 6. a3?!	115
E2) 6. d5	116
E3) 6. dxc5	117

D) note to 10. ♗e1



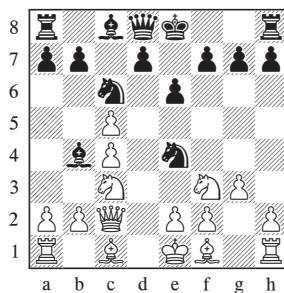
13... ♗c6!N

D) after 14. ♗a3



14... ♖e7!N

E3) after 7. ♖c2



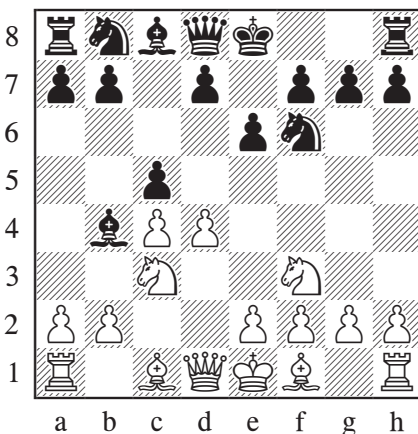
7... ♗xc3!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.♗f3

This move was first seen back in 1887(!), but it was mainly explored by the great players of the 1920s and 1930s: Alekhine, Euwe, Rubinstein and others. Developing the knight in this way keeps White's position quite flexible, and the dark-squared bishop can still be placed on g5 in the future. Nowadays this can be considered as an invitation to debate the Romanishin System – most White players prefer to enter it via this move order rather than with 4.g3.

4...c5

4...b6 is also highly topical, with a Nimzo/Queen's Indian hybrid, and moves such as 4...0-0 and 4...d5 are of course possible, the latter being a Ragozin. But I will recommend the text move, directly challenging the d4-pawn and keeping the game in pure Nimzo-Indian territory.



The options we will cover in this chapter are A) 5.♞c2, B) 5.dxc5, C) 5.d5, D) 5.a3 and E) 5.g3. The last move is by far the most important, and the analysis of it will continue into the next chapter as well.

There are three other significant moves, but each of them transposes to a separate variation. 5.♞b3 has been covered in variation C of

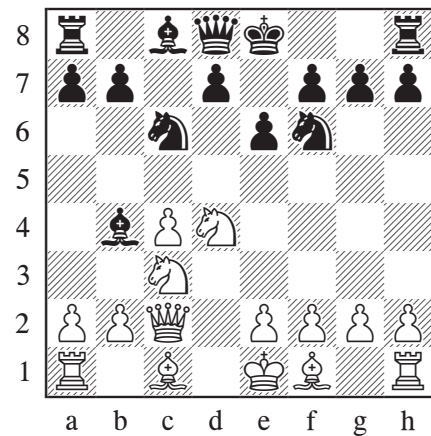
Chapter 2. 5.♞g5 is a harmless sideline of the Leningrad System – see the note on 5.♗f3 at the start of Chapter 4. And finally, 5.e3 0-0 is variation B of Chapter 10.

A) 5.♞c2

This leads to a harmless line of the Classical System with 4.♞c2 c5, where White responds with 5.♗f3 instead of the more critical 5.dxc5.

5...cxd4 6.♗xd4 ♗c6

White has to take care of the d4-knight, so it's obvious that the queen is misplaced on c2.



7.♗xc6

The modest 7.e3 0-0 8.♞e2 d5 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.0-0 ♞e7 11.b3 e5 didn't pose Black any problems in Yakimenko – Popilski, Golden Sands 2014.

7...dxc6 8.a3 ♞e7 9.♞f4 ♞a5!

The ...e6-e5 advance will solve the problem of the c8-bishop. Black is already completely fine, and in the following game he was able to take over the initiative.

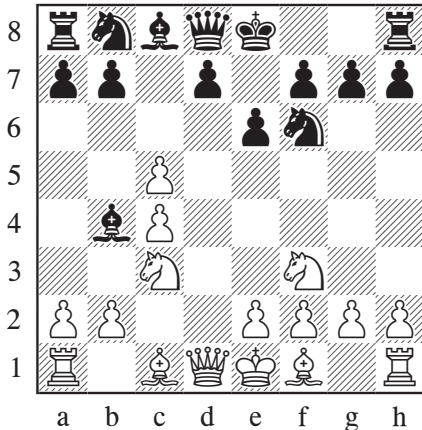
10.e3?! ♗h5!

Gaining the advantage of the bishop pair.

11.♞d3 e5 12.♞g3 g6 13.♞e2 ♗xg3 14.hxg3 ♞e6

Black was better in Fedoseev – Narayanan, Pune 2014.

B) 5.dxc5



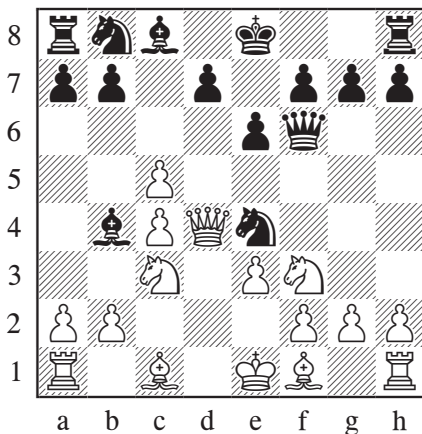
This offers comfortable play after:

5...♖e4! 6.♖d4

Also harmless is 6.♗d2, as played in Marwitz – Kolessov, Germany 2003: 6...♗xc3N 7.♗xc3 ♖xc3 8.bxc3 ♖a6 9.g3 0–0 10.♗g2 ♖xc5 11.♖d4 ♖b8 White has to take care to equalize.

6...♖f6 7.e3

7.♖xf6 gxf6 8.♗d2 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♖a6 gave Black comfortable play in Medvedev – Pantykin, Novokuznetsk 2009.



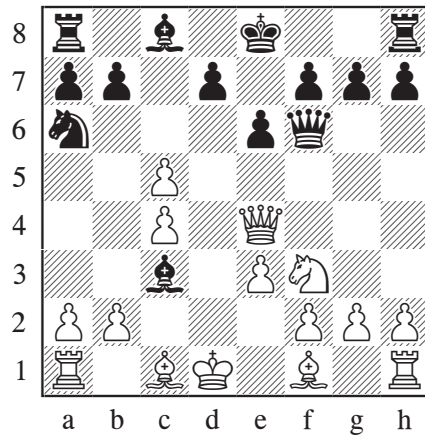
7...♖a6!

It is too early for 7...♖xc3?!, as 8.♗d2! gives Black some problems to solve.

8.♖xe4N

Inferior is 8.♗d2 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3 ♖xc3 10.bxc3 ♖xc5, and Black was obviously better in Ulanov – Molchanov, Togliatti 2014.

8...♗xc3† 9.♖d1



9...♗xb2!

Less convincing is 9...♖xc5 10.♖c2 ♗e5 11.♖xe5 ♖xe5 12.♗d2, when White's bishops may cause Black significant problems in the long run.

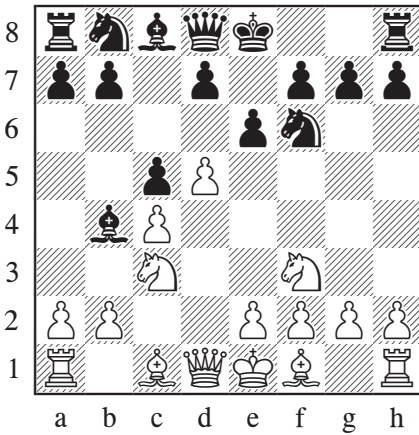
10.♗xb2 ♖xb2 11.♖d4 ♖xd4† 12.exd4 b6!

Creating some breathing room for the bishop, while forcing the following exchange to the benefit of the rook on a8.

13.cxb6 axb6 14.♖d2 ♗b7 15.♗e2 ♗e4=

Preventing ♖hb1. Both sides have a weak pawn in this endgame, and overall the chances are equal.

C) 5.d5



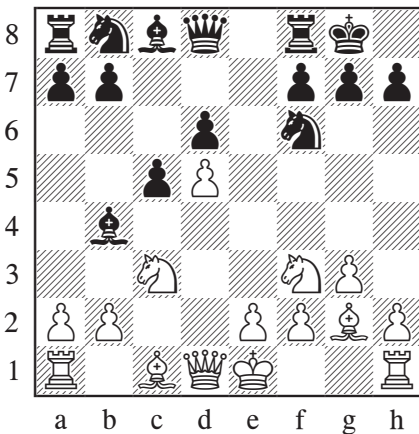
Gaining space does not seem to be effective in this situation – the d5-pawn becomes vulnerable when White cannot support it by e2-e4.

5...exd5 6.cxd5 d6 7.g3

7.♗g5 transposes to a line of the Leningrad System which was covered in variation B1 of Chapter 4.

7.e3 0–0 8.♕d3 will be covered via the 4.e3 move order – see variation B1 of Chapter 10.

7...0–0 8.♗g2



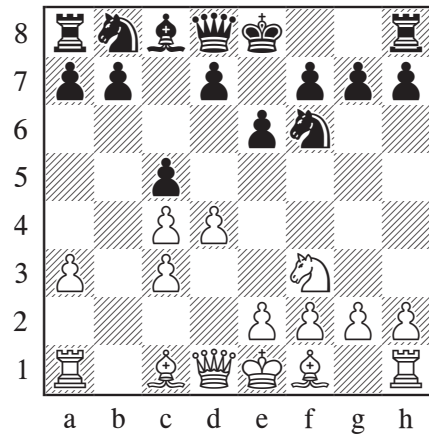
8...♖e4! 9.♕d2

9.♖c2 ♗f5 10.♘h4 ♖xc3 11.♘xf5 ♖xa2†
12.♕d2 ♗xd2† 13.♗xd2 ♖b4 14.♗c3 f6♯
doesn't offer White adequate compensation for the pawn.

9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♘d7

Black had excellent play in Fritz – Soelter, Lieme 2004, due to his control of the e4-outpost.

D) 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3



In comparison to the usual Sämisch System, White's active possibilities are limited – it's difficult for him to gain control over e4.

6...0–0

Since pinning the f6-knight isn't effective in this situation, there is no reason to reject this natural move.

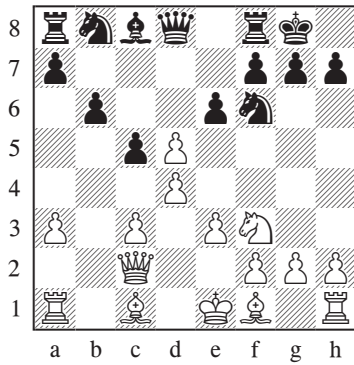
7.e3

It is amazing how one line can transpose to another in chess. Here is one more example:

7.♖c2 d5 8.e3

8.♗g5 is completely harmless after 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 dxc4 10.♗xc4 b6. This way of handling the position resembles the Classical System as covered later in the book. 11.e3 ♗a6 12.♗a4 ♗xf1 13.♖xf1 ♖bd7=

8...b6 9.cxd5



9...♙xd5

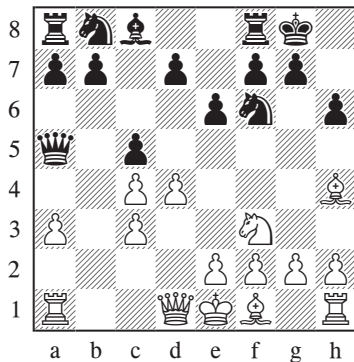
This suddenly takes the game into Classical paths – see variation B2 of Chapter 21, where this position arises after 4.♙c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♙xd5 6.e3 c5 7.a3 ♘xc3† 8.bxc3 0–0 9.♘f3.

Incidentally, 9...exd5! 10.c4 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♙b7 is also perfectly playable for Black.

Let's see why pinning the knight on f6 achieves nothing for White:

7.♙g5 h6 8.♙h4 ♙a5!

Exploiting the lack of harmony in White's camp.

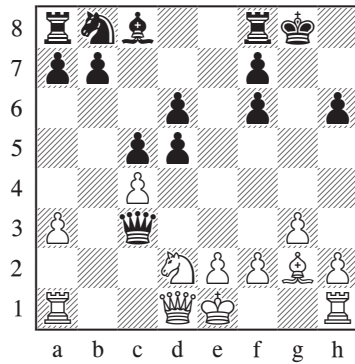


9.♙xf6?!

This pawn sacrifice is dubious, but it's the only way to fight for the initiative.

The passive 9.♙c2 is not in the spirit of the position: 9...♘e4 10.♙c1 d5 11.e3 cxd4N Black grabbed the a3-pawn in one game, but the text move is much easier: 12.♘d4 ♘c6 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♙d3 ♙e8 15.0–0 ♙d7=

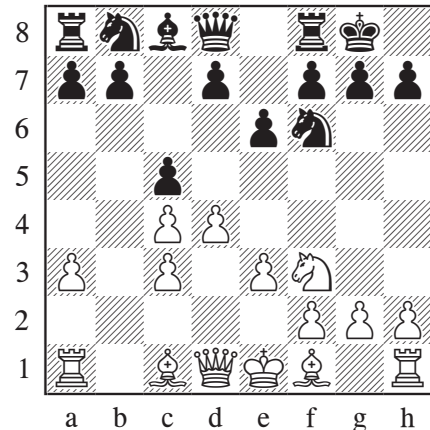
9...♙xc3† 10.♘d2 gxf6 11.d5 d6 12.g3 exd5 13.♙g2



This interesting position was reached in the game Ivanisevic – Kravtsov, Jerusalem 2015. White was trying to exploit the opponent's exposed kingside structure, but Black actually has no reason to deviate from the 'greedy' approach:

13...d4N 14.0–0 f5 15.♙b1 ♘c6 16.♙b3 ♙a5 17.e3 ♙e8†

The reduced material leaves White with insufficient attacking potential.



7...b6

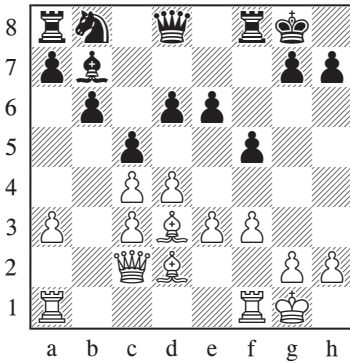
There is also nothing wrong with 7...d5, but I like the text move – it allows Black to keep control over the e4-square without letting White get rid of the weak c4-pawn.

8.♔d3 ♖b7 9.0-0 ♜e4

This theoretical position can be reached via various move orders. Practice proves that it is difficult for White to make the bishops work effectively.

10.♞e1

Also possible is 10.♞d2, but the immediate exchange of knights also doesn't bother Black: 10...♞xd2 11.♙xd2 f5 12.f3 d6 13.♖c2 (13.e4 fxe4 [13...f4!?] 14.fxe4 ♜xf1† 15.♖xf1 ♞c6 16.♖f2 ♖f6 offers Black a very comfortable endgame)

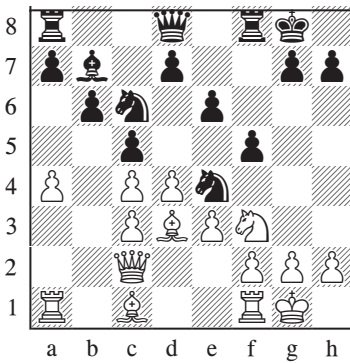


This was played in Orr – Joyce, Armagh 1994, and could be well met by: 13...♞c6!N 14.e4 f4 15.e5 h6 16.exd6 ♖xd6 With excellent play for Black.

10.♖c2 f5 11.a4

After 11.♞d2 ♞xd2 12.♙xd2 ♞c6 Black's chances were already preferable in Gevorgyan – Papin, Samara 2015.

11...♞c6

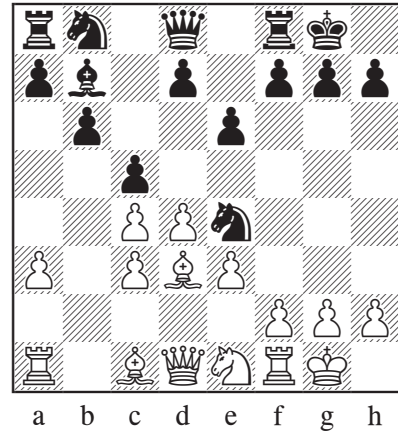


12.♞d2?!

12.♙xe4N is better, but after 12...fxe4 13.♞d2 d5 Black has at least equal chances.

12...♞xd2 13.♙xd2 ♞a5 14.♖fe1 ♖f6

Black had a better structure and the more harmonious position in Matinian – Bocharov, Voronezh 2015.



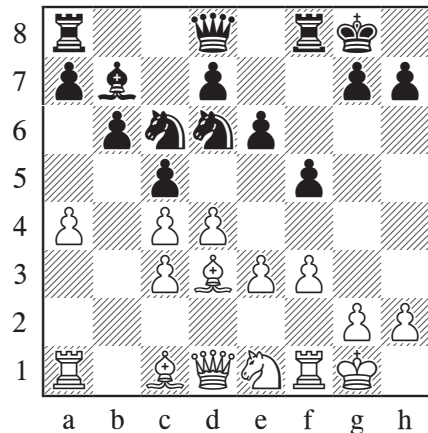
10...f5!

The same concept as in the lines above – White should not be allowed to push e3-e4!

11.f3 ♞d6 12.a4

After 12.♙e2 ♖e7 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♖b1 ♙c6 Black had a clear advantage due to his better pawn structure in Yurtaev – Timman, Yerevan (ol) 1996.

12...♞c6



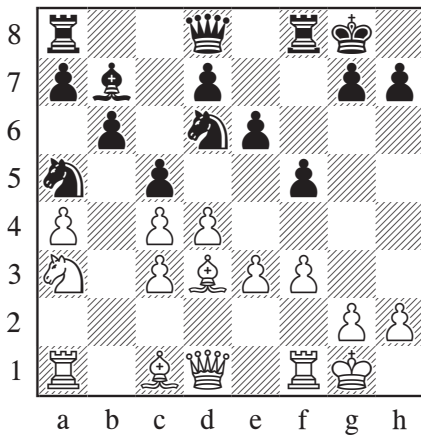
13.♘c2?!

White chooses the wrong way to handle the position – the c4-pawn isn't worth such measures.

Better was 13.dxc5 N bxc5 14.♙a3 ♘e5 15.♙xc5 ♖c7 16.♙xd6 ♗xd6 17.♙e2 ♗c7= when Black gets full compensation for the pawn, but not more.

13...♘a5 14.♘a3

This position arose in Lautier – Gelfand, Biel 1997, when Black's strongest continuation would have been:



14...♗e7!N 15.♗e2 e5!♞

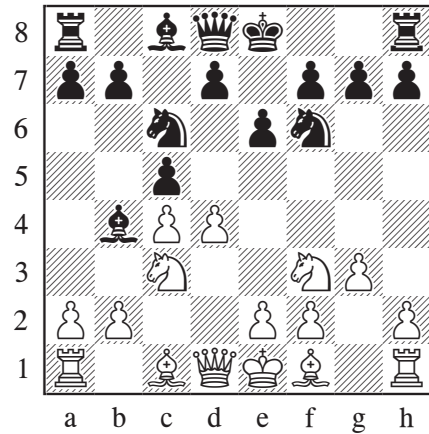
Securing a definite advantage.

E) 5.g3

Finally we arrive at the main line, which can also be reached via 4.g3 c5 5.♘f3.

5...♘c6

This move is somewhat provocative – it looks like White is being invited to seize a lot of space with gain of tempo by pushing d4-d5. However, the pin on the c3-knight offers Black various tactical resources, so this idea is justified. Two more common moves are 5...cxd4 and 5...0-0, but after much analysis, I like what is happening after the knight move.



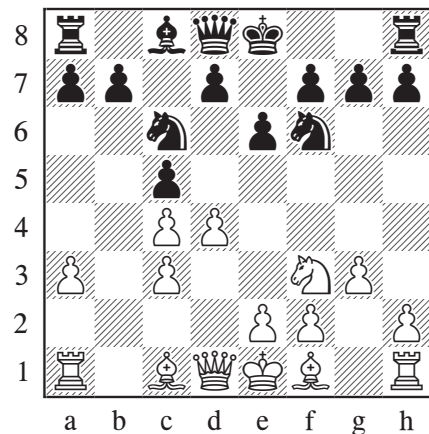
The lines we will consider in depth in this chapter are **E1) 6.a3?!**, **E2) 6.d5** and **E3) 6.dxc5**. The main line is 6.♙g2 and we will cover it in the next chapter.

6.♗d3?! runs into 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘e5, and after 8.♗c2 ♘xc4 9.♙g2 (9.♗b3 ♙xc3† 10.♗xc3 d5 11.♙g2 0-0♞) 9...0-0 10.0-0 d5 White did not have much for the missing pawn in Plastowez – Wiechert, Mannheim 1994.

E1) 6.a3?!

This is too slow.

6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3



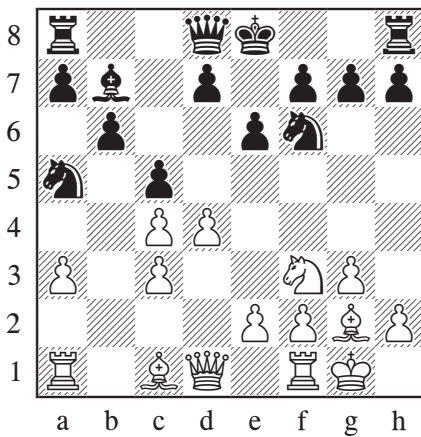
7...b6

It makes sense to neutralize the pressure along the long diagonal as soon as possible.

8.♙g2 ♚b7 9.0-0

9.♘e5 can even be met by: 9...♘e5!?:N (the simple 9...♘a5 is also fine) 10.♙xb7 ♘xc4 11.♙xa8 ♗xa8 12.0-0 ♖c6 Black's position seems preferable from the human point of view, since White's rooks are useless in the closed position that arises.

9...♘a5



10.♙g5!?:N

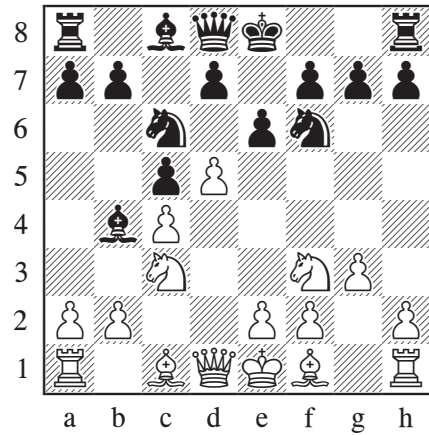
This may be White's best attempt to justify his opening play, although it still doesn't inspire confidence in his set-up.

After 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♙f4 ♘xc4 Black was obviously better in Starc – Morovic Fernandez, Pula 2000.

10...♘xc4 11.♘e5 ♙xg2 12.♖xg2 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 h6 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♗d6

White has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but Black is the only one who can realistically fight for the advantage.

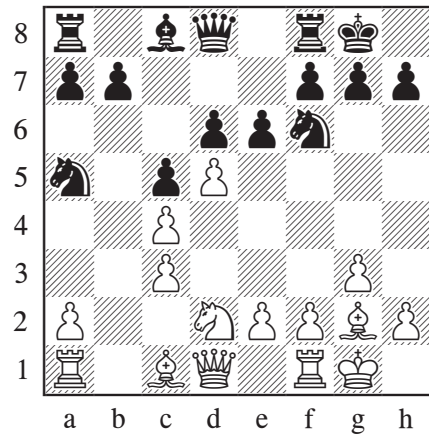
E2) 6.d5



Seizing space with gain of tempo is amongst White's most natural replies. However, closing the long diagonal helps Black to develop the queenside pieces and attack the c4-pawn.

6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘a5 8.♘d2 0-0 9.♙g2 d6 10.0-0

After a series of obvious moves, Black now has to decide how to finish his development.



10...b6!?

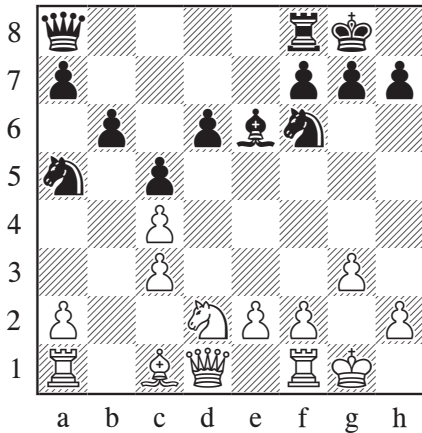
I like this concrete approach – White will not be given time to protect the c4-pawn.

10...♗e8 11.e4 b6 12.♗e1 ♙a6 13.♙f1 led to a long, strategic battle in Miladinovic – Short, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

11.dxe6

11.e4?! ♙a6 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.e5 dxe5
14.♙xa8 ♖xa8♞ leads White to an inferior
position.

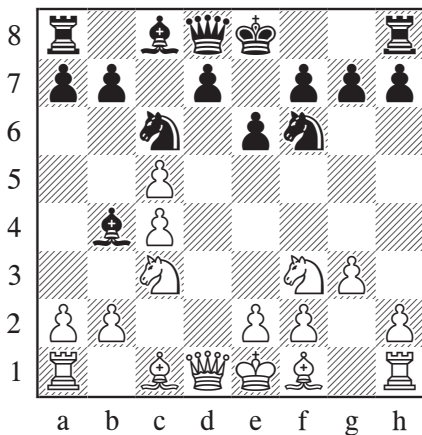
11...♙xc6 12.♙xa8 ♖xa8



13.f3 ♘xc4 14.♘xc4 ♙xc4♞

Black had an extra pawn plus long-term positional compensation for the exchange in Gulko – Kuzmin, Tashkent 1984. Black's minor pieces coordinate nicely, while it is not so clear what White should do with his rooks and bishop. The loss of the g2-bishop also means that White's king could be vulnerable in the long term.

E3) 6.dxc5



Releasing the pressure in the centre should be met with:

6...♘e4

I like this aggressive move. Since 7.♙g2 would simply drop material, White is obliged to waste a tempo to protect the knight.

7.♖c2

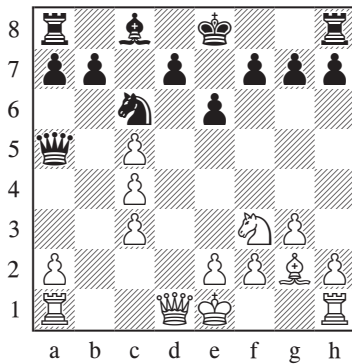
Clearly dubious is 7.♖d3?! as in Name – Jatoba de Oliveira Reis, Dois Irmaos 2008, in view of 7...♙xc3†N 8.bxc3 ♘xc5 9.♖e3 b6 10.♙a3 d6 11.♙g2 ♙b7♞.

White's only other plausible continuation is:

7.♙d2 ♘xc3 8.♙xc3

8.bxc3 ♙xc5 9.♙g2 0–0 10.0–0 d6♞ simply leaves White with an ugly pawn structure.

8...♙xc3† 9.bxc3 ♖a5 10.♙g2



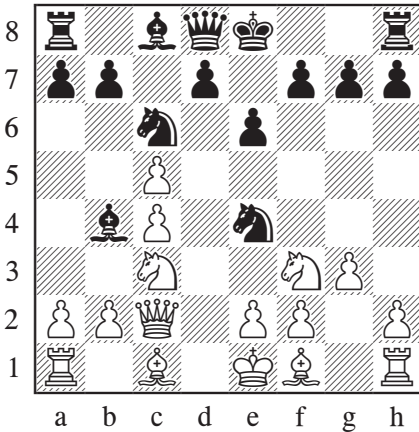
10...♖xc5!

The other capture would be a mistake: 10...♖xc3†?! 11.♘d2 0–0 12.0–0 b6 13.e3 bxc5 14.♘e4 ♖xc4 15.♖d6 White has a powerful initiative, which more than compensates for the pawn.

11.♘d2 0–0 12.0–0 b6 13.♖a4 ♙b7=

Black had successfully neutralized the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal in Giorgadze – Novikov, Lvov 1986. Although the position is objectively equal, in a practical game it is White who will face the greater challenge not to end up in a bad endgame with a rotten queenside structure.

This position has been seen five times in practice. In all those games, the knights were exchanged on c3, seemingly automatically. I would like to suggest something better:



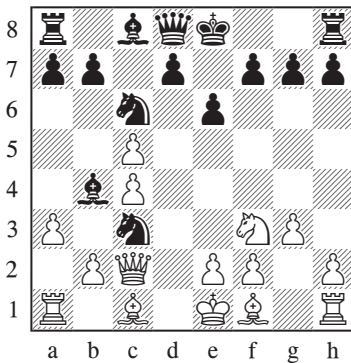
7...♙xc3!N

To understand the necessity for this improvement, we must consider the alternative.

7...♘xc3

In Farago – Dely, Budapest 1978, the obvious 8.bxc3 ♙xc5 led to a fine position for Black. However, I discovered a great new idea for White:

8.a3!!N



8...♙xe2†

8...♙a5?! runs into 9.axb4! ♙xa1 10.bxc3 and White is clearly better, with ♙g2 and

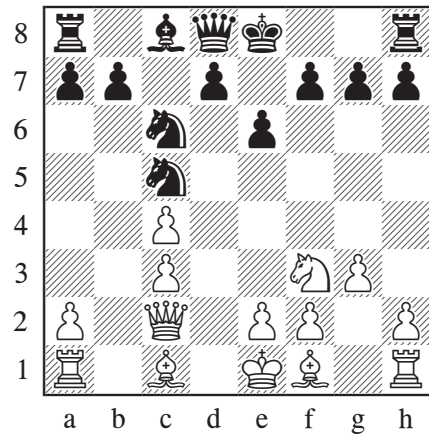
0–0 to follow shortly. Note how strong White’s tripled pawns are!

8...♙xc5 is safer, but 9.♙xc3 0–0 10.b4 ♙e7 11.♙b2 ♙f6 12.♙d2± is pleasant for White. 9.axb4 ♘xc1 10.♙xc1 ♘xb4 11.♙c3 ♙f6 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.♙d2 ♘a6 14.♘d4 ♘xc5 15.♙g2

White has at least enough compensation for two pawns; the poor bishop on c8 is going to have no moves for a long time.

8.bxc3 ♘xc5

Even though the knight is somewhat less effective in fighting for the dark squares, Black’s position still looks quite attractive due to having stable squares for both knights and potential play along the c-file.

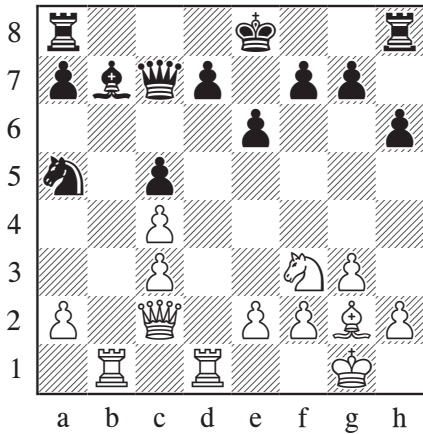


9.♙g2

9.♙e3 b6 10.♙xc5 bxc5 11.♙g2 ♙b7 12.♙b1 ♘a5 13.0–0 would transpose to the same position.

Black has better chances after: 9.♘d4 ♘e5 10.♙a3 d6 11.♙d1 ♙d7 12.♘b5 ♙xb5 13.cxb5 ♙c8

9...b6 10.0–0 ♙b7 11.♙a3 ♘a5 12.♙xc5 bxc5 13.♙ab1 ♙c7 14.♙fd1 h6



By limiting White's active possibilities Black gets a comfortable position. I should mention that Black is not obliged to castle, as the king may feel safe in the centre, as in the following line:

15.♘d2 ♗xg2 16.♙xg2 ♕e7!?

Followed by ...♖ab8, intending to swap the rooks and put pressure on White's doubled pawns.

Conclusion

4.♘f3 is one of the most ambitious ways of meeting the Nimzo. White keeps a flexible position and avoids blocking the dark-squared bishop, thus retaining the option of the annoying ♗g5 pin. I recommend the direct 4...c5, when the ambitious 5.d5 exd5 6.cxd5 illustrates the main drawback of having the knight on f3: it will be difficult for White to play e2-e4, which means that the d5-pawn will be vulnerable.

5.g3 is the most significant option, when I suggest the provocative 5...♗c6, putting pressure on the centre. Once again White has a choice, but in this chapter I looked at the relative sidelines, saving the main line for the next chapter. Black has a mostly comfortable ride in the variations examined here, although it's worth familiarizing yourself with the novelty on move 7 of variation E3, as the alternative could lead to problems if your opponent happens to be armed with the big improvement I found for White.