

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

I received, quite unexpectedly, many comments and opinions following the publication of my first book on the French Defence. These were quite varied, both in form and content. There were renowned experts, who pointed out that some of the variations were not analyzed to perfection. Some meticulous readers looked for, and found (!), possibilities for both sides, which I had omitted in several important, and even not so important, lines. There were people who criticized my rather ambitious concept, according to which I tried to present the opening the way I saw it, instead of just following the branches of the database. However, there were also some appreciative comments.

It took me some time to think about everything I had written, done, read and heard... In the meantime I realised the objective defects of my work. Chess develops so rapidly that writing a book devoted to opening theory which will be valid for a long period of time is “mission impossible” nowadays. What was fashionable a year ago quickly becomes outdated, while some dead and forgotten variations rise from the ashes. Nevertheless, I believe that the foundations which I laid eighteen months ago can be enriched with new variations and ideas, while the essence remains the same.

You are now holding in your hands a new book, in which the author ventured to reevaluate certain lines and enrich them with a new supply of fresh, contemporary information.

I should like to express my sincere acknowledgement to GM Vasily Yemelin for his invaluable collaboration in the process of writing of this book.

Nikita Vitiugov
Saint-Petersburg, January 2012

PREFACE

Black can enter the French defence, as a separate opening, on move one. I believe that players will find the French to be a comfortable and reliable defence against 1.e4, even if it happens to be the only one they choose. Admittedly, it is a fact that chess is becoming more popular and universal, and so you need to have a variety of weapons in your opening armoury. Nevertheless, if you judiciously switch your variations within the French defence, it should serve you faithfully as Black, even if it is your only reply to 1.e4.

According to the generally accepted classification, the French defence is semi-open. I think it can suit the styles both of aggressive tactical players and those who prefer patient positional manoeuvring.

The philosophical justification of the French defence is quite well founded. Black acquiesces to the fact that he will not be able to compete with White for control of every square on the chessboard, right from the beginning of the game. In contrast, he fights fiercely for the centre, attacks it with undermining pawn-moves, such as c7-c5 and f7-f6, and exerts piece-pressure on it with ♖f8-b4, ♗g8-f6, ♜b8-c6, ♝g8-e7-f5, ♚d8-b6.

The arguments for and against the correctness of the French defence began long ago and continue even now. The main themes are Black's lack of space and the consequence of that – the fate of his light-squared bishop, which is severely restricted right from move one. However, all “French” players are well aware of the rule that sometimes, at the decisive moment of the game, it is the same “bad” French bishop that strikes the decisive blow and settles the issue.

In this book you will not find an unequivocal answer to fundamental questions such as “is it possible to equalize by playing the French defence?”, or “can White obtain a convincing advantage after 1...e6?”.

Chess is a microcosm of life and the same principles are applicable – there are many questions and no definitive answers. In the French defence we have already seen devastating novelties in variations which previously had an unblemished reputation, as well as rehabilitation of lines long thought to be dead and buried. So I have decided to present to my readers the French defence – just as I see it and understand it.

I believe that chess players of all levels can find something new in this book. It will enable some of you to include the French defence in your opening repertoire and others of you to enrich your knowledge of this opening and sharpen your understanding of its ideas.

The time has long passed when you could play the opening simply according to common sense. Therefore there are many extensive analyses of concrete positions in the book, as well as new ideas discovered in the process of preparation for games and tournaments.

This book has been written from Black's point of view, but this should not preclude a study of it by players who prefer the white side of the French. It is always useful to know something thoroughly. It might happen that a player who loves the white side of the French might become an ardent fan of it as Black!

Nikita Vitiugov
Saint-Petersburg, April 2010

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