

**Understanding
before Moving 1**

**Ruy Lopez – Italian
Structures**

Extended revised second edition

Herman Grooten

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Explanation of symbols:

!	good move	±	White has a clear advantage
?	weak move	∓	Black has a clear advantage
!!	excellent move	+−	White is winning
??	blunder	−+	Black is winning
!?	interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	dubious move	↑	initiative
□	only move	↑↑	lead in development
=	balanced position	↔	counter-play
∞	unclear position	Δ	with the idea
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	△	better is
±	White is slightly better	N	novelty
∓	Black is slightly better	#	checkmate
		+	check

Next to most diagrams you'll see a small square on the right. If it's White, it means it's white's move; if it's Black, it means it's black's move.

Bibliography

<i>Fundamental Chess Openings</i>	– Paul van der Sterren
<i>Queen's Indian Defence – Kasparov System</i>	– Mikhail Gurevich
<i>How to Open a Chess Game</i>	– Larry Evans
<i>Ausgewählte Partien</i>	– Paul Keres
<i>My Sixty Memorable Games</i>	– Robert James Fischer
<i>Mega Database</i>	– Chessbase

Visual aids



In this book we'll regularly use different kinds of visual aids. As a chess trainer I have noticed that visualizing specific strategic or tactical ideas can be illuminating.

Since I often make use of a projector I can highlight essential points by marking squares and indicating with arrows where a piece wants to go.



Our software developer Hub van de Laar has put together many nice arrows and markings that enable the reader to focus on the position's essence at a single glance. In the adjacent diagram we can immediately see what White is threatening and "what other arrow he possibly has left in his quiver". This position is taken from the splendid attacking game Van der Wiel-Ernst, Groningen 2004, in which White sacrifices his Queen in exchange for two minor pieces, greater activity and a large number of threats.

To indicate moves in this book we won't use letters to denote the pieces concerned, but the so-called figurines. A small overview:

Piece	Letter	Figurine
King	K	
Queen	Q	
Rook	R	
Bishop	B	
Knight	N	
pawn	–	–

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Preface

A wild and original idea does not often turn out to be a successful concept. This is true not only for chess itself, but also for a chess writer's practice. Nevertheless, we believe that the fundamental concept behind this book is one that will prove very valuable to average club player.

As a trainer of both youth and adult players I look at many games of my students. I noticed many of them had enough knowledge of the opening at their disposal. Yet as soon as the opponent deviated from theory, they were groping in the dark. Because how should the game continue?

This book series is about that central question: what matters in the opening? What plans are on hand? Which (hidden) concepts are concealed in the current position that has arisen just after the opening?

In *Schaakmagazine*, the journal of the Royal Dutch Chess Federation, I started writing a series of articles in which I go into the above-mentioned issues. I tried to clarify in this series what specific openings are really all about, without falling into complicated side-lines.

This line of thought may have begun with my own irritation when I tried learning openings from a book myself. My dislike of a “variation tree”, in which deviations are written down like, for example, B1.2a) or C4.3b1), not only made my wires cross, but also took away the pleasure of learning new things about chess. The attentive reader will catch me later using a similar way of enumerating in this book. Yet I hope the explanations accompanying the variations won't make you quit reading!

When I became better and got more understanding of the strategic ideas within certain openings, I became much more capable of studying an opening. I mainly owe this understanding to the grandmasters who were willing to write their thoughts down, of course accompanied by variations.

In my view the average club player will be more pleased with an opening book in which a profusion of ideas is offered. If this is also structured, you can hope that the readers will acquire the necessary understanding of standard positions. On the basis of this guideline, developing an opening repertoire could easily turn into a pleasant pastime. Together with my Belgian chess pal Daniel Vanheirzeele, the owner of *Thinkers Publishing*, I have been enabled to discuss the backgrounds of openings in a much more detailed manner, something I couldn't do in my article series because of the lack of space.

We hope to take the reader from the opening into the unfathomable depths of grandmaster chess. Here we try in a way of our very own to give a full explanation of the many plans, ideas and concepts that remain often hidden under the surface. In this way we hope to give the club player something to hold on to, as he really wants the question answered: how to continue if the opponent deviates from theory?

We wish you a lot of enjoyment and growth in working through this first book of a new series.

IM Herman Grooten, September 2018.

Acknowledgements

Although my first book in this new series was well received, it turned out that a new updated and revised edition would not be an unnecessary luxury.

This was partly due to the fact that it did not seem a bad idea to add more comments to a sub-variant in the Italian Game, the *Max Lange Attack*, which had received little attention in the first edition, but could be further explored. That has happened in this edition. Furthermore, it turned out from practice that the part in the Ruy Lopez where White can choose to close the center with **d4-d5** needed further explanation. This closed position with a pawn chain arisen in the center, as we know that from the King's Indian Defense, contains some hidden secrets that could be explored a little more. That is why I have compiled a number of extra pages in which the most important strategic (and also tactical) details of this type of positions are presented. Of course, two model games had to be added for both colors. These have now become the games Sutovsky – Stefanova, Hoogeveen 2015 (for White) and Bruzon Batista – Morozevich, Biel 2006 (for Black), which I have provided with a broad analysis and will be added right behind this strategic overview. Because this book has also become available on the internet platform chessable.com, it seemed a good idea to generate some extra exercises on top. These should of course not be missing in the printed edition. Since in the original version mainly the tactics were dominant, I have now chosen to split the chapter with the exercises into two parts:

- Section 1: Tactical exercises
- Section 2: Strategic exercises

I offer sixteen extra exercises, divided in both sections.

All in all, with this new edition, I hope to have fulfilled the expectations raised in some reviews. I wish the reader a lot of reading and playing fun while working through this book!

Herman Grooten, December 2020.

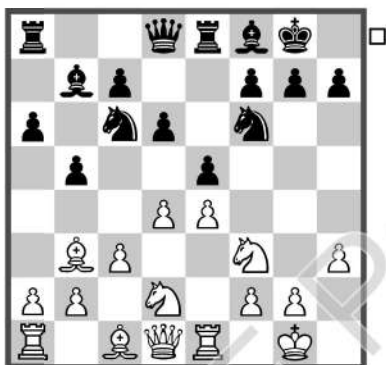
♁ Anand, Viswanathan (2798)
 ♚ Morozevich, Alexander (2788)
 🌐 Mainz Classic rap Prelim 2008

black knight is aiming for better squares.

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♕a4
 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♗e7 6. ♜e1 b5 7. ♕b3 d6
 8. c3 0-0 9. h3 ♗b7

The Zaitsev variation.

10. d4 ♜e8 11. ♘bd2 ♗f8



Position after: 11... ♗f8

12. d5

Anand closes the center on this moment, because Black has to lose time with regrouping his queen's knight.

Now 12. a4 is much more popular than the move played by Anand in this game.

12... ♘b8 13. ♘f1 ♘bd7

This knight-manoeuver we already know from the Breyer-variation. The

14. ♘3h2 ♘c5 15. ♗c2



Position after: 15. ♗c2

15... c6

White's white-squared bishop has been driven away from the central squares, Black thinks that this is the right time to attack the white center.

16. b4 ♘cd7



Position after: 16... ♘cd7

Again black's knight has been kicked away.

17. dxc6

White is forced to take on c6.

He can't keep the tension with a move like 17. ♖b3? because after 17... cxd5 18. exd5 [Much worse is 18. ♖xd5? because of 18... ♗xd5 19. exd5 f5 and Black has already a winning position due to the weak white pawn on d5.] 18... ♜c8 19. ♖b2 ♗b6 and Black has a big advantage. The pawn on d5 is a target, just like the pawn on c3 and the control of the important square c4 causes White headaches.

17... ♖xc6

A good moment to evaluate the position. Black has a backward pawn on d6 and has to deal with the potential weakness of the square d5. The next few moves will determine if Black can free his position with the pawn-advance ...d6-d5 or if White has a clever answer in store.

18. ♗g5

The first step of White's strategy: he wants to put pressure on the black pieces that are in control of the center squares.

18... ♛c7

One might ask himself what the consequences are after 18... h6 19. ♖xf6 ♗xf6 White has an adequate reply on exchanging his nice bishop for a knight: 20. ♗g4! With this strong move he wants to trade the final black knight, just to force full control over the important central square d5. Black will get into trouble if he wants to get rid of his weakness with 20... ♗xg4 21. ♛xg4 The positional threat is ♗f1-e3 followed by ♖c2-b3, ♜ad1, controlling square d5. 21... d5?! 22. exd5 ♛xd5 23. ♖b3 ♛d7 24. ♛h5



Position after: 24. ♛h5

and White's pieces will quickly move to nice squares (♜ad1, ♗f1-e3-f5 or g4 etc.) to join a possible attack against the black king.

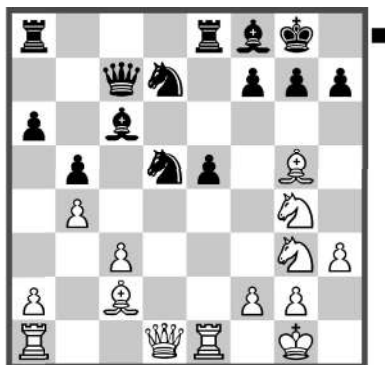
19. ♗g3

Again 19. ♖xf6 ♗xf6 20. ♗g4 came into consideration, but Anand has some different ideas in mind.

19... d5

Black sees no problems of getting rid of his weak pawn.

20. exd5 ♞xd5 21. ♞g4



Position after: 21. ♞g4

An important moment in the game. Black has liberated himself, but at the same time White has concentrated all his light pieces in the direction of the black king. That means that he needs to proceed very careful, because his poor king is lacking serious defenders.

21... ♞f4?

This is a severe blunder Anand spotted and took profit. Much better was the prophylactic defensive move 21... ♔h8 and now there's no immediate threat for White. The move 22. ♛d3 can be met by 22... g6 23. ♜ad1 f6 after which Black seems to have been solved most of his problems. After 21... ♙e7 22. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 [Possible is also 22... ♞xe7 although White after 23. ♛d2 will have a small but lasting advantage because his pieces are well coordinated.]

22. ♙xf4 exf4



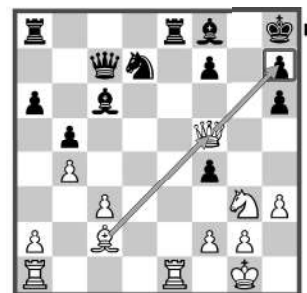
Position after: 22... exf4

23. ♞h6+!

That's the point! This knight sacrifice had escaped the attention of Black.

23... ♔h8

Pure poverty, this move. It's quite clear that the sacrifice cannot be accepted because of 23... gxh6 24. ♛g4+ ♔h8 [24... ♙g7 25. ♞h5+-] 25. ♛f5+-



Position after: 25. ♛f5+-

25... ♞f6 [Also 25... ♔g7 doesn't help after 26. ♞h5+ ♔g8 27. ♛xh7#] 26. ♛xf6+ and now, both 26... ♙g7 and

26... ♔g8 are leading to a total dismantling of black's king:

A) 26... ♙g7 27. ♚f5 ♔g8 28. ♜xh7+ ♔f8 29. ♘h5 ♙e5 30. ♜xh6+ ♔e7 [30... ♙g8 31. ♚xe5! ♜xe5 32. ♙h7+ ♔h8 33. ♙g6+ ♔g8 34. ♜h7+ ♔f8 35. ♜xf7#] 31. ♚ad1 ♚ad8 32. ♜g5+ ♔f8 33. ♚xd8 ♚xd8 34. ♚xe5 is winning for White.

B) 26... ♔g8 27. ♚f5 f6 28. ♘h5 is also devastating.

24. ♘xf7+ ♔g8



Position after: 24... ♔g8

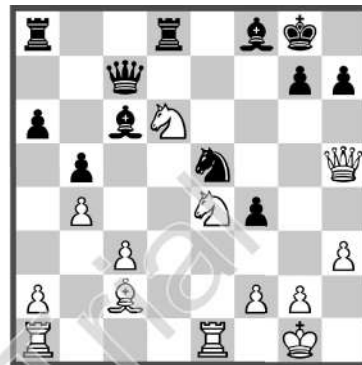
25. ♘e4?!

Not the most accurate way to finish the game, but good enough for the win.

It's a pity that Anand was unable to find the next nice sacrifice: 25. ♙xh7+! ♔xh7 [25... ♙xf7 26. ♜h5+ ♔f6 27. ♜f5#] 26. ♘g5+ ♔g8 [26... ♙g6 27. ♜h5+ ♔f6 28. ♘h7#] 27. ♜b3+ ♔h8 28. ♜f7! Stopping the defense with ... ♘f6 due to the pin. 28... ♚xe1+ 29.

♚xe1 ♜d6 30. ♜h5+ ♜h6 31. ♘f7+ and Black loses the queen.

25... ♘e5 26. ♘fd6 ♚ed8 27. ♜h5



Position after: 27. ♜h5

27... ♙xe4

When such an exchange seems to be necessary it's a real sign on the wall things are going badly.

A) The retreat with the knight 27... ♘g6 can be met by 28. ♙b3+ after Black will get mated.

B) An important possibility 27... ♙xd6 28. ♘xd6 ♜xd6 leads after 29. ♙xh7+ ♔f8 30. ♚xe5 to another disaster for Black.

C) The best try with 27... ♙e8 fails to 28. ♘xe8 ♚xe8 29. ♜f5! when White has numerous threats that can't be stopped.

28. ♘xe4



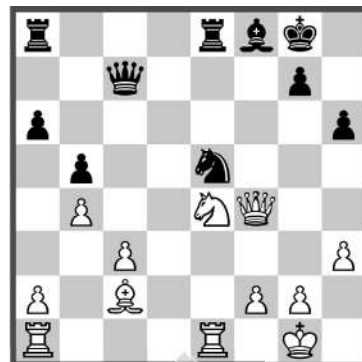
Viswanathan Anand (photo Jos Suttmüller)

Anand keeps his knight alive and he prepares the next attacking wave. More logical would be 28. ♘xe4 h6 29. ♖xe5 because Black would lose an exchange, without any compensation.

28... h6

More or less forces, because ♘g5 was a terrible threat.

29. ♖f5 ♖e8 30. ♖xf4



Position after: 30. ♖xf4

White just picked up a valuable second pawn and Black gets no counterplay at all.

30... ♖ac8 31. ♖f5

It's clear that the white squares are very much weakened in black's camp.

31... ♖d7

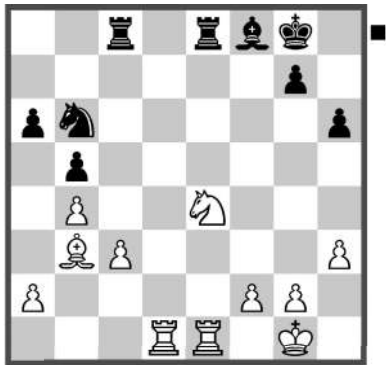
Because all the mating threats are still in the position, Morozevich wants to trade the queens. But the coming end-game will give him little chance of survival.

32. ♖xd7 ♘xd7 33. ♖ad1 ♘b6 34. ♘b3+

(see diagram next page)

34... ♖h8

After 34... ♘c4 35. ♘xc4+ bxc4 [35... ♖xc4? 36. ♘f6+--] 36. a4 leads to a technical won position.



Position after: 34. ♔b3+



Position after: 42. ♖e8

35. ♔f1 g5 36. f3 ♖c6 37. ♗d3 ♕g7
38. ♜ed1 ♕e5

When Anand went for his 39th move, he must have seen the consequences of returning one of his gained pawns.



Position after: 38... ♕e5

42... ♕xc3 43. ♖e7+ ♕g7

After 43... ♔h8 44. ♘xc3 ♜xc3 45. ♜e6 more black pawns are doomed.

44. ♘c5

Both players have made useful moves and now it's up to Anand to decide how he can make progress.

39. ♜d8 ♜xd8 40. ♜xd8+ ♔g7 41. ♜g8+



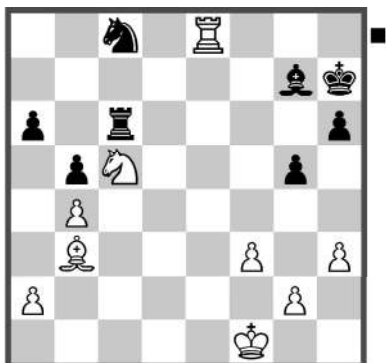
Position after: 44. ♘c5

A nice in-between check, just to force the black king to the edge of the board.

41... ♔h7 42. ♜e8

This knight jump was part of White's intentions. It blocks the c-file and threatens both ♘e6 and ♘a6.

44... ♖c8 45. ♜e8



Position after: 45. ♜e8

Threatening ♜c2+.

45... ♜c3 46. ♜d5!

With this move the rook will be forced to a square where he falls victim to a nasty knight fork!

46... ♜c7 47. ♜e4+

After 47. ♜e4+ ♔g7 48. ♜e6+ ♔f7 White not only wins the rook but at the same time he protects it's own rook with 49. ♜xc7.

1-0

♁ Ribshtein, Nati (2384)
♁ Mikhalevski, Victor (2566)
♁ Dov Porath Memorial 2004

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♜c4 ♜c5 4. c3 ♘f6 5. d3



Position after: 5. d3

This position is a modern tabiya of the Italian Giuoco Piano that remains enormous popular with the world top. There are several ways of playing this position. Black has to decide if he wants to go for the active ...d7-d5 or for the more solid ...d7-d6.

5... d6

Now we can see the similarities typically characteristic for the Italian Game. Probably too early is 5... d5 6. exd5 ♘xd5 because of 7. ♙b3 and Black is already in trouble as was seen in the game Nisipeanu – Melkumyan, 2017 in which followed: 7... ♘f6 8. ♜xf7+ ♔f8 9. 0-0 ♙xd3 [9... ♘a5 10. ♙b5] 10. ♜c4



Position after: 10. Qc4

and White had a big advantage because of the exposed black king and his weakened pawn structure.

If Black still wants to play with ...d5, he can castle first: 5... 0-0 6. 0-0 and now 6... d5 7. exd5 Nxd5 8. Re1 Qg4 9. Nbd2 Nb6 10. h3 Qh5 11. Qb3 Qxd3 12. Nxe5 Qf5 [In Giri – Harikrishna, 2019 came 12... Qxd1 13. Nxd3 Qxb3 14. axb3 Qe7 15. b4 when White got the more pleasant endgame.] 13. Ndf3 Qad8 14. Qe2 And in Aronian – Dominguez Perez, White came on top but much later.

6. Nbd2 a6



Position after: 6... a6

This is the normal reply: Black makes room for his bishop, with a safe hideaway on a7.

Lately 6... a5 is becoming fashionable. Some players want to avoid b2-b4 and one of the thoughts behind this pawn advance is that White can't take advantage of the weakened square b5.

7. Qb3

Also White's bishop retreat is part of the common strategy that has been adopted by the top players. Black might try to exchange with ...Qc8-e6 and being in early stage of the game that's not White's goal. There is a certain inconsistency in this whole setup. White may decide to exchange the white-squared bishop at a later stage in the game. The reason is most likely to have the nice f5 square for one of his knights available. We have seen before that the white-squared bishop on c2 had latent attacking possibilities.

7... Qa7 8. h3

Carlsen used to play 8. Nf1.



Position after: 8. Nf1

And we consider that the main alternative. Before castling he already brings over his queen's knight to the desired square g3.

8... ♘h5

Mikhalevsky likes to exploit the fact that with h2-h3, White slightly weakened his square on f4.

Many games continue with 8... 0-0.

9. ♘f1



Position after: 9. ♘f1

This seems to stop ... ♘f4 but the Israeli plays it anyway.

Of course the 'trick' with 9. ♘xe5? doesn't work because of 9... ♘xe5 10. ♙xh5 ♘xd3+ and Black is already in the winning modus.

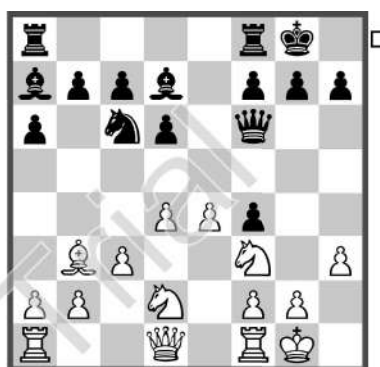
9... ♘f4

An other option was 9... ♙f6 just to support the knight on f4.

10. ♙xf4 exf4

In return of rendering his pawn center, Black had gained the bishop pair.

11. ♘1d2 ♙f6 12. d4 0-0 13. 0-0 ♙d7



Position after: 13... ♙d7

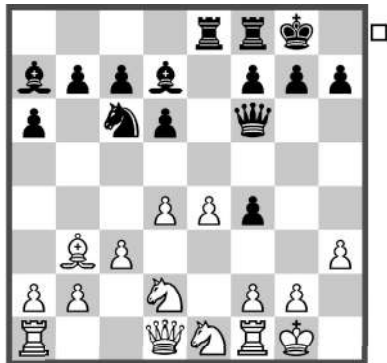
Black is rapidly developing: he wants to bring all his pieces into play as soon as possible. The next move will be ... ♖ae8.

14. ♘e1

White needs to regroup some of his pieces. He likes his knight on d3 while his queen can make use of the diagonal d1-h5 in certain cases.

One idea for White would be 14. ♖e1. The idea behind this move could be a continuation with e4-e5 and offer head room for his king. With treats like 14... ♙g6 or ... ♙xh3 this can now be met by 15. ♘f1.

14... ♖ae8



Position after: 14... Rae8

15. N d3?!

He enters the wrong move order. White doesn't understand Black's idea and therefore 15. Qh5!? might have been better because he is preventing Black from moving his queen to the desired outpost on h6.

15... Qh6!?

Mikhalevsky wants to take advantage of the weakening of h3 by preparing an advance of his kingside pawns.

16. Re1

Now 16. Qf3 is simply too slow because of 16... g5!

16... Kh8 17. Qf3

After a move like 17. f3?! Black strongly retaliates with 17... Ne5! 18. Qe2 and now even 18... c5! will make White's life difficult.



Position after: 17. Qf3

17... g5!?

Of course Black needs to advance his pawns to get to the enemy king on fire.

The other advance with 17... f5? can be refuted by 18. exf5! Qxf5 19. Rxe8 Rxe8 20. Nxf4 and White has won an important pawn.

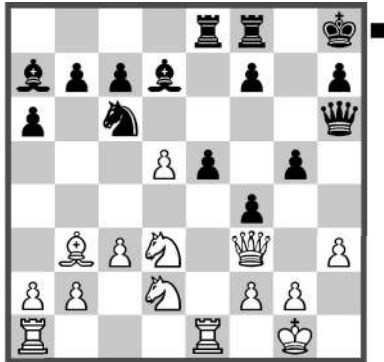
18. e5

That was the intention of Qf3. The queen has its eye on b7. Moreover White has based his strategy on the ancient adadum "A wing attack should be answered by a central break".

18... dxe5 19. d5?

White is unaware that the Sword of Damocles is hanging over his head. Black immediately takes over the initiative. White had a difficult chose. 19. Nxe5 was necessary and after 19... Nxe5 20. Rxe5 Rxe5 21. dxe5 Qh4,

leading to an unclear but playable position.

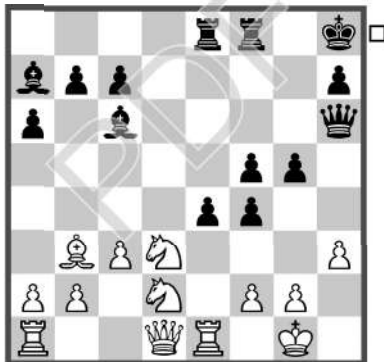


Position after: 19. d5?

19... f5!

A brilliant idea of Black. He can sacrifice his knight just to enable a serious pawn roller.

20. dxc6 ♗xc6 21. ♔d1 e4



Position after: 21... e4

Who would not love these beautiful pawns?

22. ♘c4

If White would save his knight on d3, Black has the strong 22. ♘b4 e3! 23. ♖e2 White has to return material, but Black can finish the job with another nice sacrifice: [23. fxe3 fxe3 24. ♔h2 ♕d6+ 25. ♔h1 exd2 is also hopeless.] 23... ♗xg2! 24. ♔xg2 g4 The pawns are doing their job! 25. ♖h1 f3+ and White can head for home.

22... ♖h4!

Mikhalevsky plays this game in great style. His motto: "pawns are stronger than pieces!"

23. ♘ce5



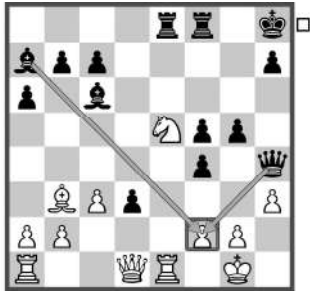
Position after: 23. ♘ce5

23... f3!?

Black has created a nasty treat, completely missed by White.

(see analysis diagram next page)

Objectively speaking 23... exd3! was better, but can we blame Black by deci-



Position after: 23... exd3!

ding this game in this nice way?

24. ♞xc6?

This loses at once. But there was no chance of survival after 24. ♔h2 fxg2 25. ♞xc6 bxc6 26. ♔xg2 g4 and if the knight moves, Black's queen will enter White's position. Beside that with ...gxh3 coming, the g-file will feel like an empty highway with disastrous consequences.

24... ♕g3!



Position after: 24... ♕g3!

White resigned.

0-1

♟ Ponomariov, Ruslan (2743)
♜ Beliavsky, Alexander G (2661)
♠ FIDE GP 2002

1. e4 e5 2. ♞f3 ♞c6 3. ♘b5 a6

The good old 'Ruy Lopez', this time no Berlin Wall, arriving after 3... ♞f6 4. 0-0 ♞xe4 5. d4 ♞d6 6. ♘xc6 dxc6 7. dxe5 ♞f5 8. ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 etc.

4. ♘a4 ♞f6 5. 0-0 ♘e7



Position after: 5... ♘e7

No 'Open Ruy Lopez' (5... ♞xe4) as well.

6. ♖e1 b5 7. ♘b3 d6

Also no Marshall Attack, which nowadays ensures Black equal changes.

8. c3 0-0 9. h3

White doesn't allow the pin on his f3-knight.

9... ♞a5



Position after: 9... Na5

And there we are: The famous Chigorin variation, played many times in the old days.

10. ♖c2 c5 11. d4 ♘d7

We have seen this idea, played by Paul Keres, we have discussed the main ideas behind this set-up in some other games as well.

12. ♗bd2



Position after: 12. Bbd2

12... exd4

With the exchange of his e-pawn on d4, we will see the modern approach of Black.

13. cxd4 ♞c6

The knight has to return to its previous square, otherwise White would park it on the edge of the board, after playing d4-d5.

14. d5



Position after: 14. d5

From now on we are transforming in a kind of Benoni-structure where Black's prospects are certainly not worse.

14... ♞ce5 15. ♞xe5 ♞xe5

This is called the Graf-line of the Keres-variation. Let's compare this with a normal Benoni-position.

- Normally Black's black-squared bishop is on g7 (after the fianchetto with ...g7-g6).



Ruslan Ponomarev (photo Jos Suttmüller)



Position after: 15... Nxe5

- In most Benoni-positions White tries to avoid the advance ...b7-b5 as long as possible with a2-a4. In the current position Black already achieved this.
- Because of his lack of space Black likes to exchange one light piece.

After the previous moves he has already achieved this goal.

16. f4

But there is a big difference: the knight on e5 can be kicked away very quickly. White is ready to move forward with his mobile king's pawns.

16... Nf6 17. Nf3



Position after: 17. Nf3

17... f5!?

This set-up seems quite risky, but Black has correctly estimated that he can lure the white pawns forward making them rather vulnerable. The activity of black's pieces are a big plus in comparison with his counterpart, mainly because White's queenside is underdeveloped.

An important part of Black's strategy is to force the apparently mighty white pawn center to discard squares that Black can use for his pieces.