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- Extensive use was made of notes taken by Wojtkiewicz's students and amateur video footage of Wojtkiewicz.

# Introduction

During the eight years that the late Aleksander Wojtkiewicz (1963-2006) lived in the United States, he won or tied for first place in more than 240 tournaments. He averaged over thirty tournament victories a year – or nearly three per month. “Wojo,” as he was affectionately called by his fans, was arguably the most successful tournament player in the United States, winning the Grand Prix six years in a row from 1999 to 2004. During that time, however, he was not considered one of the best players in the world. Although his name was sporadically on the FIDE “Top 100” rating list, his official ELO rating – which peaked at 2595 – never made it past the magic 2600 mark. How, then, did he achieve such success?

The answer is this: Wojtkiewicz was ruthlessly pragmatic in his approach to tournament chess. His opening repertoire was designed in such a way that he could essentially play his games on “auto-pilot.” He considered his games against non-masters trivial, and he rarely expended precious brainpower on them. Between moves, he could often be seen outside the tournament hall – usually at the nearest bar. Wojo would then return to the board after having been away, look at the position for five or ten seconds, and throw out a move. After scrawling on his score sheet, he would turn around and leave again. Other grandmasters devoted their full attention to beating weaker players, but Wojo played as if he already had everything worked out to mate.

This style of devil-may-care chess was possible for Wojo because he had – like a professional playing multiple poker games at once – a “system” for winning chess tournaments. Wojo realized that all he needed to do as a chess professional was to win his games against amateurs *a certain percentage of the time*. To this end he designed a repertoire that would deliver the necessary winning percentage while requiring the least effort. In order for an opening line to be incorporated into Wojo’s “system,” it had to meet certain criteria:

- **It must have “surprise value.”**  
Wojo didn’t mind if his opponents had seen a particular line before, or even if they knew some of the theory. Instead, it was more important to him that they not have a great deal of experience in handling the resulting middlegame or endgame positions. This gave Wojo a “home-field” advantage, forcing his opponents to fight on his turf.

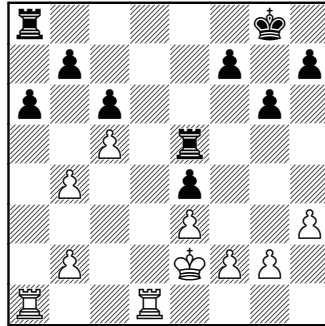
## Wojo's Weapons

- **It must be relatively sound.**  
Particularly when playing Black, Wojo had no objections to playing “risky” or “experimental” lines. But if the refutation could simply be looked up in a book, it was off limits.
- **It must be disconcerting to play against.**  
Wojo understood the psychology of the average “weekend warrior” tournament player, and he knew the fastest way to beat him: *force him to play a type of position that makes him uncomfortable*. With this in mind, Wojo would steer for quiet endgame advantages against “sharp” openings, but would play to “mix things up” against more docile ones. If the nature of the resulting middlegame or endgame position turned out not to be to the opponent’s taste, Wojo’s system had done its job.
- **It must fit in with the rest of the repertoire.**  
Wojo’s openings were designed to reach certain types of positions. For example, lines leading to queenless middlegames were commonly incorporated into his system. By using lines that complemented one another, Wojo was able to increase his advantage in experience over his opponents, maintaining his “home-field” advantage.

At the time of Wojo’s death in 2006, he had nearly perfected his system. Between 1998 and 2006, he defeated over 1,000 master-level players in U.S. tournaments. But – more importantly – he was able to consistently beat players rated between 2200 and 2400 an incredible 80% of the time. Draws made up 16%, and the remaining 4% were losses. Thus, his overall score against masters was 88%. Against those rated between 2000 and 2200, Wojo won 88%, drew 8%, and lost 4% for an overall score of 92%.

This book focuses on the opening lines Wojo decided to use in his system with White, specifically those occurring after 1.♠f3 d5. Throughout the work, the reader will certainly notice opportunities Black has to play for “drawn” endgames. This is because Wojo did *not* require that his system be able to defeat other grandmasters a large percentage of the time. For that, Wojo sometimes used a different set of openings – for instance, against the Slav with 1.♠f3 d5 2.d4 c6 3.c4 ♠f6, Wojo claimed only that 4.♞c2 was a great weapon for beating “weaker players.” By this, he meant players rated under 2400. Against other top players, Wojo was far more likely to play 4.♠c3 if he truly needed to win.

The fact that the repertoire we present allows Black to suffer to a draw in some spots does not bother us. Here is one example. In our recommended Wojo repertoire against the Slav Defense, the following position is reached after 1.♠f3 d5 2.d4 ♠f6 3.c4 c6 4.♞c2 g6 5.♙f4 ♙f5 6.♞b3 ♞b6 7.c5 ♞xb3 8.axb3 ♙xb1 9.♞xb1 ♠bd7 10.b4 ♙g7 11.h3 0–0 12.e3 a6 13.♙d3 ♠e4 14.♠e2 ♞fe8 15.♞a1 e5 16.dxe5 ♠xe5 17.♙xe4 dxe4 18.♠xe5 ♙xe5 19.♙xe5 ♞xe5 20.♞hd1:



As we explain in Chapter 13, this position is only marginally better for White, and should be drawn with accurate play. Yet the fact that this endgame is reached does not invalidate our choice of 4. ♖c2, as in practice White manages to win this type of endgame at least 1 in every 3 games – or, if White is the stronger player, perhaps even 1 in every 2 games. That means White is scoring between 66% and 75%. Considering that even most master-level players will have made a mistake with Black prior to this point (for instance, the defensive 8... ♗xb1! is a difficult move to play), White can still manage to win the required percentage of games with 4. ♖c2 to meet Wojo’s standards.

Now, on to the work itself. The book is divided into four parts, with each part covering one significant aspect of Wojo’s repertoire. Part I focuses on the Closed Catalan, which is really the heart and soul of the “Wojo system.” Because understanding the themes found in the Closed Catalan is so essential to the rest of the book, we have devoted the first two chapters of Part I entirely to the ideas behind the Closed Catalan opening. Only once the reader has grasped the key concepts do we attempt to outline a theoretical framework for that portion of the repertoire. This meant devoting more space to the Closed Catalan than even most “Catalan” books do, but it was well worth it: if you, the reader, are attracted to the example games presented in Part I, you will undoubtedly be interested in the rest of Wojo’s repertoire with White. And since so many games at club level feature the Closed Catalan, it is not hard for you to start applying the knowledge learned in Chapters 1 and 2 immediately.

Part II of the book focuses on the Open Catalan. This is by far the largest part of the book. It deals with both Black’s more traditional methods of development (such as ... ♗f8-e7 and ... 0-0) and his other ways of bringing his pieces into the game. We have organized the chapters in this part of the book more or less in order of their importance. The material in chapters 4 through 7 deals with Black’s most popular responses; the remaining chapters cover tries seen somewhat less frequently. Although we have struggled to highlight ideas and themes, some sections of Part II get quite theoretical. In our efforts to make this work an important contribution to the body of theory surrounding Wojo’s lines, we have included much of both existing theory and our own analysis, which we hope will not be too burdensome to the average reader.

## Wojo's Weapons

Part III deals with the Slav Defense, and in particular, Wojo's special treatment with 4.♖c2. For those who enjoyed Part I of the book, this part should also prove to be a good read. Themes, ideas, plans, and strategies once again reassert their predominance over theory, so there is really nothing at all in this part to scare away anyone with a fear of theoretical variations. Even someone playing well above master level should be able to get by without committing any variations to memory. That said, theory has largely ignored Wojo's interpretation of the 4.♖c2 Slav – it certainly isn't mentioned in many works – so we have tried to fill that gap in the existing chess literature. If the reader is looking for extensive coverage of the move 4.♖c2, he will certainly find it.

Finally, Part IV deals with Black's miscellaneous defenses – the Queen's Gambit Accepted, the Tarrasch Defense, the Chigorin, and a few other openings. Wojo's treatments of these openings should appeal to players who play the Catalan and want to force Black to play on their "home turf." With the exception of Chapter 16, which covers the Tarrasch Defense, these sections do not contain quite as much theory. We could easily have chosen to include less theoretical material in the Tarrasch chapter, but we felt that Wojo's systems with b2-b3 have gotten less than their fair share of attention in the past and we wanted to make up for it.

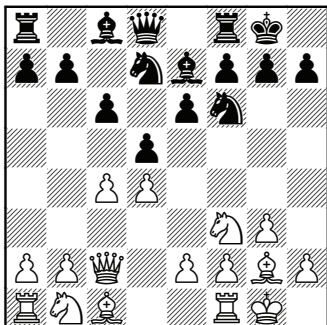
We sincerely hope that this book proves useful to those looking to explore Wojo's white opening repertoire. We also hope that, through this project, we are able to preserve some of the vast legacy left to the chess world by the genius that was Aleksander Wojtkiewicz.

Part 1

**The Closed Catalan**

## Chapter 1

# An Introduction to the Closed Catalan



1.  $\text{d}3$   $\text{d}5$  2.  $\text{d}4$   $\text{f}6$  3.  $\text{c}4$   $\text{e}6$  4.  $\text{g}3$   $\text{e}7$   
5.  $\text{g}2$  0-0 6. 0-0  $\text{c}6$  7.  $\text{c}2$   $\text{b}d7$   
(give or take)

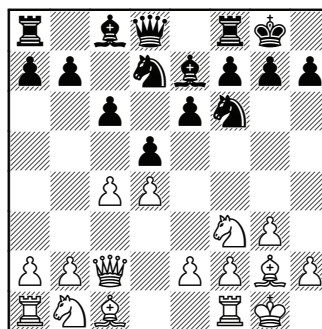
### Getting Started

Playing the Catalan appears simple at first. For Wojo, beating experts and class players in the Catalan Declined – known officially as the “Closed Catalan” – was a routine part of everyday life as he played in small “Grand Prix” tournaments around the United States. The storyline of these Closed Catalan games was nearly always the same: Wojo’s Catalan squeeze was the positional equivalent of Fischer’s famous “sac, sac, mate” in the Dragon Sicilian. We’ll delve into a deeper theoretical discussion of the Closed Catalan later in this chapter. But first, in order to better understand the current theory, we will examine the ideas behind it. Let’s start with one example of a typical Wojo victory over a club player. At the time of this match-up, Peter Langdon’s USCF rating was 1964, making him a “Class A” player.

### Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2595) Langdon, Peter

[E08] U.S. Open 1998

1.  $\text{d}3$   $\text{f}6$  2.  $\text{c}4$   $\text{e}6$  3.  $\text{g}3$   $\text{d}5$  4.  $\text{d}4$   
 $\text{c}6$  5.  $\text{g}2$   $\text{e}7$  6. 0-0 0-0 7.  $\text{c}2$   
 $\text{b}d7$



This is one typical starting position for the Closed Catalan. White spends



his next few moves preparing the thematic e2-e4 thrust.

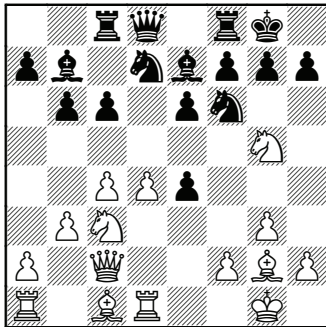
**8.♖d1 b6 9.b3**

White plays b2-b3 not only to fianchetto his queen's bishop, but also to defend his c4-pawn. He wants to put his queen's knight on c3 to add to the pressure on d5.

**9...♗b7 10.♘c3 ♝c8 11.e4 dxe4**

As we'll discuss later, "conceding" the center with ...d5xe4 isn't considered Black's most testing idea. Over the next several games, however, we'll be focusing on the structures that occur when Black plays ...d5xe4. The central capture is obvious and therefore natural, so it is little wonder that Black plays it more frequently than, say, 11...c5!?

**12.♘g5**



This is a promising alternative to 12.♘xe4, the main move here.

**12...♞e8?!**

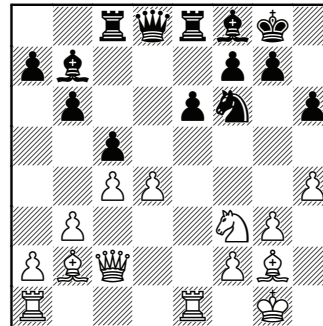
This kind of move often wastes time for Black, who should be focusing on making the ...c6-c5 break. As

we'll learn later, 12...h6 and 12...c5 are two stronger moves.

**13.h4**

This kingside thrust was often part of the "formula." White is simply gaining space on the kingside by securing the g5 square. The simple 13.♘gxe4 is perhaps an improvement.

**13...♗f8!? 14.♘cxe4 h6 15.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 16.♘f3 ♚e7 17.♞e1 ♜d8 18.♗b2 c5**



White has locked down the e5 square, so striving for ...e6-e5 is out of the question. This typical ...c6-c5 break gives White open lines for his pieces, but surprisingly, Black is still doing fine.

**19.♞ad1 cxd4 20.♘xd4 ♚e7??**

A costly oversight. Black could have instead played 20...♗xg2 21.♜xg2 ♚c7, when he is not in any real trouble.

**21.♘f5**

Now, White is just winning a piece.

**21...♚c7 22.♗e5 ♚c5 23.♗xb7 exf5 24.♗xc8 ♞xe5 25.♞xe5 ♚xe5**

## Chapter 1

26. ♖xf5 g6 27. ♗d3 ♘c5 28. ♕g2  
♜g7 29. ♗e2 ♗c7 30. ♗e4 h5 31. ♗f3  
1–0

This kind of game was all in a day's work for Wojo. The "clean" feel surrounding such Closed Catalan positions – and the efficiency with which he won them – constitute a large part of why so many players over the past decade have desired to emulate Wojo's style. Ironically, many strong players have now come to regard the Closed Catalan (particularly those lines in which Black exchanges with ...d5xe4) as a "weak player's" opening, and so they desire to stay away from it. In reality, however, Black often has plenty of equalizing chances in the Closed Catalan. Note that in the above game, Black actually had to make several mistakes before he was clearly worse.

As indicated in the note to Black's move 20, he could have simply played 20... ♗xg2 21. ♕xg2 ♗c7 with a roughly level game. White's position looks somewhat prettier, but with decent play, Black should not have too many problems reaching a draw by exchanging down the d-file. White's pawn majority on the queenside is not a particularly important factor here.

In fact, many lines in the Closed Catalan for Black are far better than their reputations. Thus no amount of purely theoretical knowledge is going to allow players of White to "win like Wojo." In order to start scoring points, what is needed is a thorough understanding of the entire Closed Catalan system. We'll begin to build this understanding by first examining the essence of the Closed Catalan setup.

### **Black's Defensive Formation: Semi-Slav, or Queen's Gambit Declined?**

Wojo's move order to reach any opening position almost always started with 1. ♗f3 and then either c2-c4 or d2-d4. When asked why he didn't play 1.d4 as his first move instead, he was occasionally known to say, "I'm too lazy!" It's true that by playing 1. ♗f3 first, Wojo avoided having to face several unpleasant openings, such as the Benko, Benoni, Albin Countergambit, and so on, but there are other reasons why 1. ♗f3 was a practical weapon for someone who made a living off handily winning local tournaments. At the club level, Black players who

have a system worked out against 1.d4 will generally try to use some adaptation of that system against 1. ♗f3 as well. Unfortunately for them, however, this is easier said than done. Two of the most popular defenses, the Semi-Slav Defense and the Queen's Gambit Declined, lead to unpleasant positions for Black if he insists on trying to play them against the Catalan. Once we have examined why White scores so well with the Catalan against these two systems, we will be able to appreciate why Black sets up the formation he does in the "real" Closed Catalan.

## The Semi-Slav: Why Black's Bishop Belongs on e7

In reaction to White's Catalan setup, diehard Semi-Slav players will tend to play ...d7-d5, ...e7-e6, ...♘g8-f6, ...c7-c6, and ...♙f8-d6. There are seemingly many good reasons for putting the bishop on the natural d6 square, chief among them Black's increased ability to play ...e6-e5 early on. Against a normal Queen's Gambit setup by White – which places White's light-squared bishop on e2 – this plan makes sense. If Black can break through in the center with ...e6-e5, he may well be able to free his own trapped bishop back on c8. The problem with attempting this plan against the Catalan, however, is that White's bishop is developed to the long h1-a8 diagonal. Rather than trying to prevent Black's break in the center, White welcomes it. After the central exchanges are made, Black will be slightly behind in development and under fire on the d5 square. Thus he will have to make some kind of concession, such as giving himself an isolated queen's pawn.

All of this doesn't, unfortunately, guarantee White a large advantage; in fact, Black has shown that he does have a few precise ways to steer the game towards equality. Regardless, the notes to the following game demonstrate why Black generally does not aim to play ...♙f8-d6 and ...e6-e5 early on in the Closed Catalan.

**Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2575)**  
**Bhat, Vinay (2235)**

[E01] San Francisco 1997

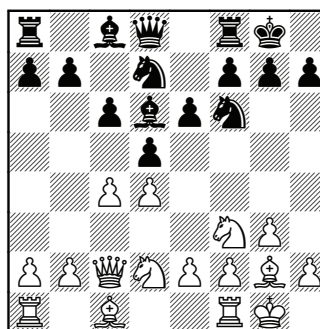
1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 c6 3.c4 e6 4.♘bd2

Wojtkiewicz often used this move order against an early ...c6 by Black so as to avoid any line where the second player might attempt ...d5xc4 and ...b7-b5, holding on to his pawn. The main disadvantage of this approach is that, should Black adopt the Closed Catalan setup, White can no longer develop his knight to c3, as in the previous game.

4...♘f6 5.g3 ♘bd7 6.♙g2 ♙d6!?

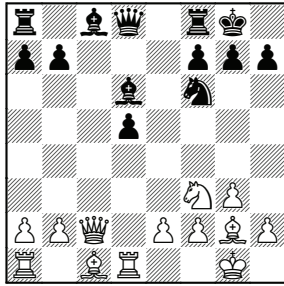
This move signals Black's intent to play the Semi-Slav.

7.0-0 0-0 8.♙c2



8...♙e8

Black is preparing to play his ...e6-e5 break. Surprisingly, 8...e5?! immediately is inferior, because after 9.cxd5 cxd5 (on 9...♘xd5, White gets the bishop pair with 10.♘c4 ♙e7 11.♘xd6 ♙xd6 12.♙d1 exd4 13.♙xd4, granting him active play) 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♙xe5 12.♘f3 ♙d6 13.♙d1, White has not yet spent a tempo on the move b2-b3:



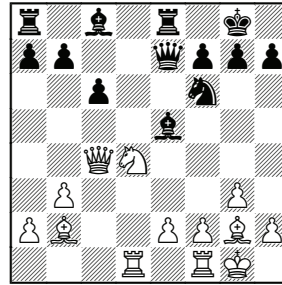
Thus White can effectively develop his bishop to g5 rather than b2. For instance, in Rogers-Handoko, Jakarta Zonal 1993, play continued 13...♙e8 (13...♙e6 14.♙b3, hitting b7, was strong in Damljanović-Tadić, Yugoslav Chp. 2001, after 14...♙b6 15.♙xb6 axb6 16.♗d4) 14.♙g5 ♙e6 15.♗d4 ♙e5 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.e4 (a typical idea, momentarily giving Black the center to gain the bishop pair and then immediately breaking it up again) 17...h6 18.♙xf6 ♙xf6 19.exd5 ♙ac8 20.♙d3 ♙xb2 21.♙ab1 exd5 22.♙xd5+ ♔h8 23.♙xb7 ♙cd8 24.♙f3, when White was safely up a pawn and managed to win.

### 9.b3 e5

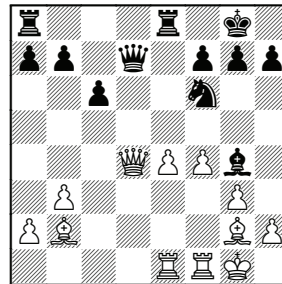
If even now Black feels uncomfortable playing ...e6-e5, he may elect to wait one more move with 9...♙e7. This continuation is probably Black's strongest, as with accurate play he gets fair chances. After 10.♙b2 e5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5, the "old" way to get a slight edge against this line is 12.cxd5 ♗xd5 13.♗d4, since White has his eye on the f5 square. The thinking is that after 13...♗b4 14.♙b1, White should be able to neutralize Black's activity.

More recently, however, strong players have favored playing the immediate 12.♗d4. One game in this line is Petrosian-Kozhuharov, European

Chp. 2008, which continued 12...dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♙xc4 ♙e5 15.♙ad1:



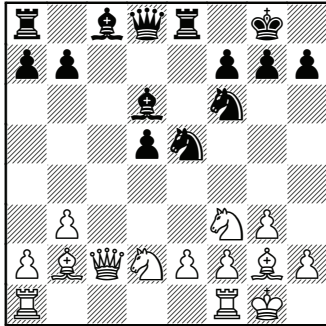
15...♙g4 16.f3 ♙d7 17.f4 ♙xd4+ (17...♙d6 18.e4 is good for White) 18.♙xd4 ♙g4 (18...♙xe2 leaves White with full compensation, for instance 19.♙f3 ♙b5 20.g4 h6 21.f5 ♙ad8 22.♙f2, and Black is under heavy pressure) 19.♙de1 ♙d7 20.e4:



White has a comfortable advantage thanks to his bishop pair and extra space.

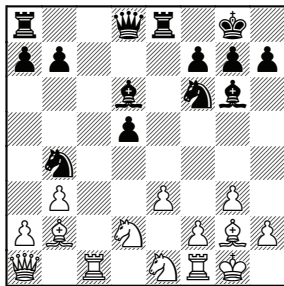
Backtracking to 12.♗d4, if instead of 12...dxc4, Black plays 12...♙b4, White should play 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.a3 as in Timman-Cifuentes, Dutch Chp. 1997. Play continued 14...♙a5 and here 15.♗2f3 ♗xf3+ 16.♙xf3 ♗e4 17.♙fd1 would have left White with a comfortable position. Instead, Timman played the overambitious 15.b4 ♙b6 16.e4? dxe4 17.♗xe4 ♗xe4 18.♙xe4 ♙h3, when Black's initiative was powerful.

10.cxd5 cxd5 11.dxe5 ♖xe5  
12.♗b2



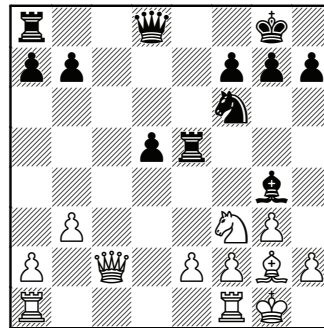
12...♗g4

Although this position has been reached a number of times in practice, it is not hard to see that Black now has a deflated version of a Tarrasch Defense. Anand once tried this position as Black and played 12...♖c6!?, but few other players picked up the torch and followed him. White gets a slight advantage by way of 13.e3 ♗g4 14.♞ac1 ♗h5 (or 14...♞e7 15.♖d4 ♖xd4 16.♗xd4 ♗a3 17.♗c5 ♗xc5 18.♞xc5 ♞xc5 19.♞xc5 ♞ac8 20.♞fc1 ♞xc5 21.♞xc5 ♞c8 22.♞xc8+ ♗xc8 23.♖b1 ♗d7 24.♖c3 was agreed drawn in Bareev-Anand, Biel 1993, though White could easily have played on if he had wanted to) 15.♞b1! ♗g6 16.♞a1 ♖b4 17.♖e1, when White defends everything and is threatening ♗xf6:



Now Black played 17...♗e7 18.a3 ♖c6 19.♖ef3 a5, when the simple 20.♞fd1 (rather than the more forcing 20.♖e5!?) would have given White the edge in Mochalov-Linauskas, Polanica Zdroj 1995.

13.♗xe5 ♗xe5 14.♖xe5 ♞xe5  
15.♖f3



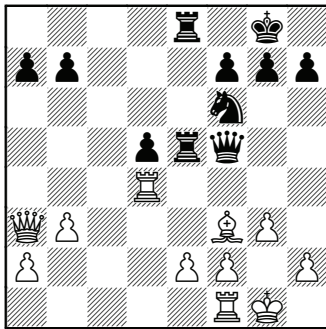
15...♗xf3

15...♞e7! is Black's best move. Although White retains a slight pull after something like 16.♖d4 (or 16.♞ac1 ♞c8 17.♞b2 ♞ec7 18.♖d4, transposing) 16...♞c8 17.♞b2 ♞ec7 18.♞ac1, in practice White has failed to convert his advantage and most games eventually wind up drawn. Alternatively, 15...♗f5!? 16.♞d2 ♞e7 17.♖d4 ♗e4 18.♗h3 ♞d6 19.♞f4 ♞b6 20.♞fd1 ♞ae8 21.♞ac1 h6 22.♞d2 ♞e5 23.♞c3 ♞h5 24.♗f1 left White better in Ehlvest-Fernández, Lake George 2005.

Finally, 15...♞h5!? is interesting but not very dangerous for White. Black lost miserably in M.Grabarczyk-Janiszewski, Polish U20 Chp. 2003: 16.♞ac1 ♞c8 17.♞d2 ♞c6 18.♖d4 ♞a6 19.♞c5 ♞d7 20.♞fc1 ♖e8 21.f3 ♗h3 22.g4 ♞g6 23.♞c8 ♗xg4 24.fxg4 ♞xg4 25.♞e3. Such rash attempts by Black to checkmate White's well-defended king are rarely effective. After

the peaceful text move, White has a slight but secure advantage. His first task will be to once again secure the d4 square, this time using his major, rather than minor, pieces.

**16. ♟xf3 ♞d7 17. ♞ad1 ♞c8 18. ♞b2 ♞ce8 19. ♞d4 ♞f5 20. ♞a3!**

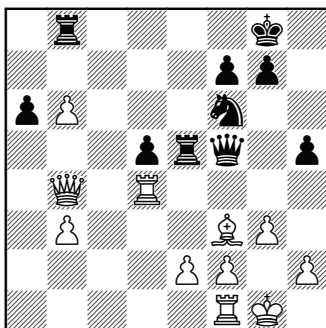


White “tickles” Black’s a-pawn. From this point onward, White’s advantage only increases.

**20...a6 21. ♞b4 b5 22. a4 h5!?**

22...bxa4 23. ♞xa4 would allow White to continue building pressure. It is difficult for Black to defend both the a6- and the d5-pawns at the same time, as White’s next move will likely be ♞f1-d1.

**23. axb5 ♞b8 24. b6**



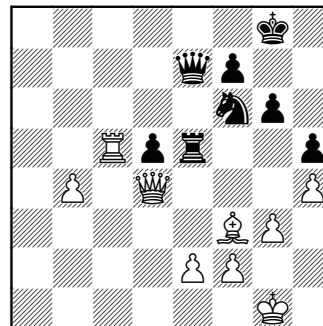
**24...♞e6?**

A costly inaccuracy. Black should play 24...♞e6 25. b7 ♞c6, when he can regain the pawn. White can then play 26. ♞a1 ♞xb7 27. ♞a3 ♞e6 28. b4, when Black is growing increasingly uncomfortable: both of his queenside pawns are isolated and blockaded.

**25. b7 ♞e5 26. ♞a1 ♞e6 27. ♞d3 ♞c6 28. ♞c3 ♞xb7 29. ♞d4 ♞e8 30. ♞xa6**

Black has managed to capture White’s b-pawn only to see his a-pawn fall. White now will try again to march a b-pawn down the board.

**30...♞e7 31. ♞b6 ♞e6 32. ♞c8+ ♔h7 33. ♞xb7 ♞xb7 34. ♞c3 ♞e7 35. ♞c5 ♔g8 36. ♞d3 ♞e5 37. ♞d4 ♞e7 38. h4 g6 39. b4**



Now that his position on the kingside and in the center is fully secure, White decides that it is time to start pushing his passed pawn.

**39...♔h7 40. b5 ♞e6 41. e3 ♞d6 42. ♟xd5 ♞d7 43. e4 ♞b6 44. ♞c4 ♔e8 45. e5 1-0**

Black’s resistance is ending swiftly. After 45...♔g7 46. ♟c6 ♞d1+ 47. ♔g2 ♞b8 (or 47...♔c7 48. ♟f3) 48. b6, White is completely winning.

**Summary:** *Playing the “Semi-Slav” setup with ...c7-c6 and ...f8-d6 isn’t popular at the top levels for a good reason. By aiming for ...e6-e5, Black is giving White active piece play and saddling himself with an isolated d-pawn. Black’s position is, of course, playable, but White should score well.*

## The Queen’s Gambit Declined: Why Black Plays ...c7-c6

Those who play the traditional Queen’s Gambit Declined are often used to playing the maneuver ...b8-d7, ...b7-b6, ...c8-b7, and then eventually ...d5xc4 followed by a liberating ...c7-c5 break. Against the Catalan, however, an early ...b7-b6 can land Black in an unfavorable version of the Queen’s Indian. There are a few different ways for White to play for the advantage, but we will be focusing on Wojo’s most direct weapon, exchanging with c4xd5.

**Wojtkiewicz, Alex (2669)**  
**Morrison, William (2385)**

[E18] Philadelphia 1999

**1. f3 f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. d4**  
**e7 5. g2 0-0 6. c2**

Played slightly earlier than usual. Castling with 6.0-0 was more typical for Wojo, who would then meet 6...b6!? with 7.cxd5 exd5 8. c3 b7 9. f4 c6 10. e5 and so on. Wojo’s idea with 6. c2 was that after 6...dxc4, trying to enter the so-called “Open Catalan,” he could play 7. b2! and 8. xc4, with advantage. The downside of playing 6. c2 so early, however, is that Black can (and should) now respond with

6...c5! immediately. The queen on c2 feels slightly uncomfortable in the ensuing complications in the center.

### 6...b6!?

When Black plays this, he makes it clear that his light-squared bishop is headed for b7. This gives White a free pass to play the c4xd5 exchange, since the opening of the c8-h3 diagonal is no longer of use to Black’s light-squared bishop. If Black had played ...c7-c6 first, he could meet c4xd5 with ...c6xd5, more or less equalizing by creating a symmetrical pawn structure.

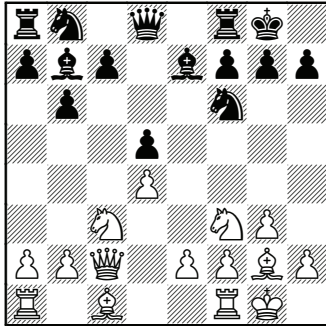
### 7.0-0 b7

7...c6 was still possible here.

### 8.cxd5 exd5

8...xd5 9.a3 followed by e2-e4 and b1-c3 allows White to establish a nice-looking center, so this kind of recapture with a piece on d5 is unusual, despite being a common theme in the Queen’s Gambit Declined and Semi-Tarrasch.

### 9. c3

**9...c5**

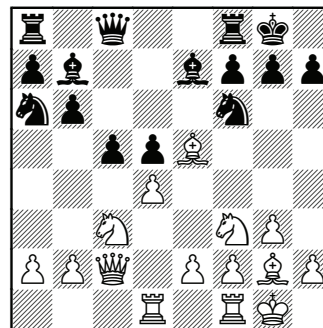
This move seeks activity for Black but ultimately does some damage to his pawn structure. The d5-pawn will prove somewhat problematic to defend. The more passive 9...c6 10.♟f4 ♞bd7 11.♞ad1 ♞e8 12.♞e5 ♞f8 (12... ♞xe5!? 13.dxc5 ♞d7 14.e4 d4! 15.♞xd4 ♟c5 16.♞d2 ♞e7 17.♞fd1 ♞xe5 18.a3 leaves White with the advantage) 13.e4 gave White a slight pull in Davies-Arkell, Halifax (rapid) 2003. White may get an isolated d-pawn, but his pieces will be more than active enough to compensate.

**10.♟f4 ♞a6**

Black often chooses to put the queen's knight on a6, where it interferes less with his defense of the d5-pawn than it would on d7. After 10...♞bd7, Khalifman once tried instead 11.♞ad1 ♞c8 12.♞b1!? against Ljubojević at Linares in 1995. He had the interesting idea of 12...♞e8 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♞g5!?, and on 14... h6 both 15.♞h3 and 15.♞xf7 15...♟xf7 16.♞xd5 are interesting possibilities. Instead, Black played the solid 14... ♞f8, and play continued 15.♞ge4 ♞b6 16.♞xf6+ ♟xf6 17.♞xd5 ♟xd5 18.♟xd5 ♞xe2 19.♞f5 ♞ce8 20.♟e3 ♞e6. White is perhaps slightly better here due to

his bishop pair, but the position is complicated.

However, instead of Khalifman's 11.♞ad1, it seems that White's simplest route to an advantage is 11.♞fd1. White is aiming to put his rooks on c1 and d1, and 11...♞c8 12.♞ac1 ♞e8 runs headfirst into 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♞e5, when Black's d5-pawn is coming under heavy fire. The awkwardness of Black's knight on d7 is demonstrated clearly here, as exchanging with 14... ♞xe5 15.♟xe5 would only increase White's pressure.

**11.♞ad1 ♞c8 12.♟e5**

A typical Wojto move to increase the pressure. Black is scrambling to reinforce his d5-pawn.

**12...♞e4 13.dxc5 ♟xc5**

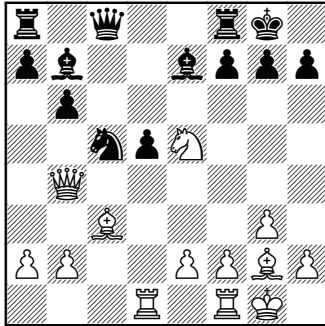
Of course, taking back with the b-pawn is out of the question here. Black is using tactical means to temporarily make the d5-pawn taboo.

**14.♞b3**

White gets his queen out of the line of fire from c8 and brings another piece into the pileup on d5.

**14...♞xc3 15.♟xc3 ♟e7 16.♞e5 ♞c5 17.♞b4!**





White transfers his queen to d4.

**17...♖e6 18.♗d4 f6 19.♘d3 ♘xd3**

19...♗xe2 20.♘f4 leaves White with a monstrous initiative.

**20.♗xd3 ♜fd8 21.♞d2 a5  
22.♞fd1 ♙c5 23.e3 ♞d6 24.a3**

White has converted his opening initiative into a comfortable positional bind. Black gains space on the queenside, but his position eventually falls apart.

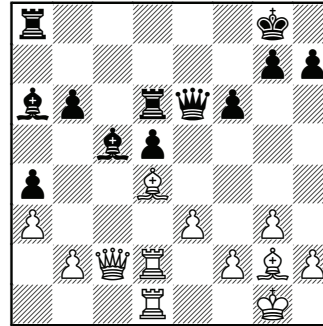
**24...a4**

Black plays this to stop White's b2-b4 push, but now the a-pawn is weak.

**Summary:** *Playing ...b7-b6 before ...c7-c6 gives White the opportunity to play a quick and effective c4xd5. Taking back with the e-pawn isn't favorable for Black here since he will be subjected to direct positional pressure. By utilizing the e5 square and placing his pieces on good squares, White can make Black uncomfortable.*

We have now looked at two common club-level responses to the Catalan, the Semi-Slav approach and the Queen's Gambit Declined approach. Both have their problems, but when Black gets confused and attempts to play both approaches in the same

**25.♙d4 ♙a6 26.♞c2**



**26...♙c4??**

26...♞c8 (as well as most other moves) drop the a-pawn, but this loses instantly.

**27.♙xc5 bxc5 28.♞xc4**

Now the game is over. Black's king is forced into a mating net in short order.

**28...dxc4 29.♞xd6 ♗e5 30.♙xa8  
♗xb2 31.♙d5+ ♔f8 32.♞d8+ ♔e7  
33.♙xc4 f5 34.♞1d7+ ♔f6 35.♞d6+  
♔g5 36.h4+ ♔g4 37.♔g2 ♞c2  
38.♙d5 ♗e2 39.♞8d7 g6 40.♞xh7  
1-0**

game, he can lose with unprecedented speed. The two systems are already subpar, so combining them doesn't help. The scholastic game Hilton-J. Beatty, Nashville 2009, went 1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.g3 b6 5.♙g2 ♙b7 6.cxd5 exd5 (6...♘d5 7.0-0 ♙e7

## Chapter 1

8. ♖a4+ ♗d7 9. ♗b3 is good for White) 7.0-0 ♗d6. Here after 8. ♖c3 0-0 (8... a6, stopping White's next, can be met by 9. ♖h4!? 0-0 10. ♖f5 ♗b4 11. ♗g5 with the initiative) 9. ♖b5! ♗e7 10. ♗f4 ♖a6 11. ♗c1 c6 12. ♖c3, Black was no better off than he would have been had he played the bishop to e7 in the

first place. The game concluded 12... ♖e4 13. ♖e5 f6? (on 13...c5 White continues 14.dxc5 ♖axc5 15. ♖d3, and if 14...bxc5, then 15. ♖xe4) 14. ♖xc6 ♗xc6 15. ♖xe4 dxe4 16. ♗xc6 ♗d5 17. ♗b3 ♗xb3 18. axb3 g5 19. ♗d2 ♗ad8 20. e3 ♖b8 21. ♗c7 ♗d6 22. ♗xa7 f5 23. f3 exf3 24. ♗xf3 g4 25. ♗d5+ 1-0.

### A Side Note: The Stonewall

One last idea that players often try is an early ...♖f6-e4 from Black. Because White is aiming for e2-e4, they reckon, Black should stop this by setting up a quick "Stonewall" structure in the center. This is often seen at the club level, and before we move on to the "real" Closed Catalan, it is useful to see why this approach for Black is not considered effective.

see, White has no difficulties preparing the time-gaining f2-f3 and e2-e4, rapidly gaining space in the center.

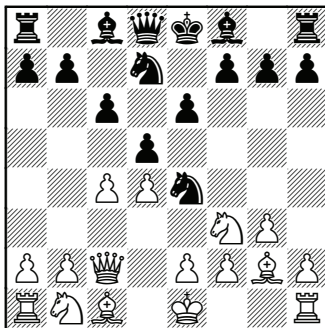
#### 7.0-0 ♗e7

Instead of this, 7...♗d6 8.b3 0-0 9. ♗b2 ♗e7 10. ♖e5 f5 11.e3 leads to a theoretical position in the actual Stonewall Defense:

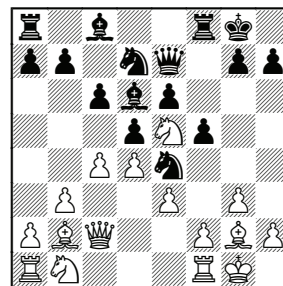
### Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2565) Pialan, Fernandito

[A93] Manila 1997

1. ♖f3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. d4 ♖f6 4. g3 c6 5. ♗g2 ♖bd7 6. ♗c2 ♖e4



Heading for a Stonewall Defense. In general, however, the knight should not be placed on e4 so early. As we'll



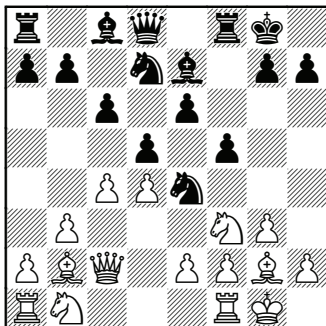
White has a slight edge here after 11...♖xe5 (11...g5?! 12.f3 ♖ef6 13. ♖d2 leaves White well-placed) 12.dxe5 ♗c5 13. ♖c3. The game Sasikiran-Radjabov, Biel 1999, continued 13...♖xc3 14. ♗xc3 b6 15. a3 ♗f7 16. b4 ♗e7 17. ♗d4 ♗b7 18. ♗fc1 ♗fc8 19. ♗b2 ♗f8 20. c5 b5 21. a4 a6 22. ♗a3 ♗e8 23. ♗ca1 and so on. If Black fails to trade knights on c3, as in Shipov-Dyachkov, Russian Club Cup 1998, White also gets a slight pull: 13... a5 14. ♖e2 b6 15. ♗fd1 ♗b7 16. ♖f4

a4 17. ♖d3 axb3 18. axb3 ♜xa1 19. ♜xa1 ♜a8 20. ♜xa8+ ♙xa8 21. cxd5 exd5 22. ♖c1!? ♖a7 23. ♙xe4 fxe4 24. ♗xc5 bxc5 25. ♙a3 ♖e7 26. ♖c3 ♙b7 27. ♙xc5 and White was better. Both games were eventually won by White.

**8.b3 0-0 9. ♙b2**

Note that White does not preoccupy himself with trading dark-squared bishops immediately. Many players of White will jump at the chance to play something like 9. ♙a3, having been taught that this exchange usually favors White in Stonewall structures since Black is weakening his central dark squares. Strategically, this is true. Unfortunately for White, however, a move like 9. ♙a3 leads to a significant loss of time. After 9... ♙xa3 10. ♗xa3 ♖e7, White would probably be better if he could only manage to play ♗a3-c2-e1-d3 quickly. That maneuver takes four additional moves, however, and at the moment, his queen occupies the c2 square. 11. ♖b2 b6 12. ♜ac1 ♙b7 13. ♜fd1 ♜ac8 14. ♗c2 a5 15. ♗ce1 b5 16. cxb5 cxb5 was completely fine for Black in Grunberg-Asrian, European Chp. 2004, so the players agreed to a draw.

**9...f5**



Thus Black achieves his Stonewall formation.

**10. ♗e1**

White wastes no time in preparing f2-f3. 10. ♗bd2 ♖e8 11. ♗e1 ♖h5 12. f3 ♗xd2 13. ♖xd2 ♗f6 14. ♗d3 was also better for White in Wojtkiewicz-Wenaas, Montréal 1996. That game ended quickly after 14...g5 15. a4 ♙d7 16. ♙a3 (here the exchange of bishops is good, as White's development is complete) 16... ♙xa3 17. ♜xa3 h6 18. ♖b4 ♜ab8 19. ♖a5 a6 20. ♖c7 ♖e8 21. a5 ♖d8 22. ♖e5 ♜c8 23. ♗c5 ♖c7 24. ♜a4 1-0, since Black's b-pawn will fall.

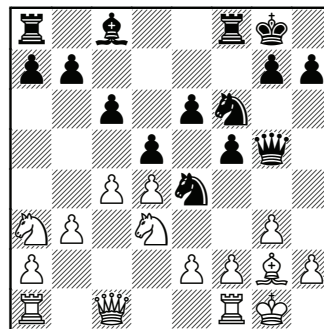
**10... ♙d6!?**

Black expends valuable time trying to launch some sort of kingside attack, but this type of plan has little chance of succeeding. White has too much play in the center. Better was 10... ♙f6, fighting for the d4 and e5 squares. Here 11. ♗d3 g5 12. f3 ♗d6 13. c5 ♗b5 14. e3 ♖e7 15. a4 ♗c7 16. ♖c3 ♜e8 17. f4 g4 18. ♗a3, aiming for b3-b4-b5, gave White a pleasant space advantage in Vukić-Kovačević, Yugoslav Chp. 1978.

**11. ♗d3 ♖g5 12. ♙a3**

Now that Black has wasted time with his bishop and queen, White decides to go in for this thematic exchange.

**12... ♙xa3 13. ♗xa3 ♗df6 14. ♖c1!**



Chapter 1

White's best move, fighting for control of the dark squares in the center.

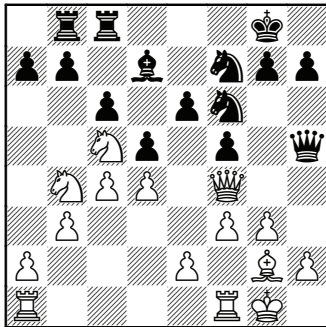
**14...♖h5**

14...♖xc1 15.♞axc1 a5, trying to fight for space in a queenless middle-game, was another idea, but after any reasonable move White would retain a sizable edge.

**15.f3 ♘d6 16.♗f4 ♘f7 17.♘c2**

Black is now getting pushed back. White has an advantage on the queenside and in the center.

**17...♙d7 18.♘c5 ♞ab8 19.♘b4 ♞fc8**



**20.e4 g5**

On 20...dxe4 21.fxe4 fxe4, the blow 22.g4! ♖g6 23.♞ae1 appears almost decisive.

**21.♖d2 a5 22.e5!?**

This move allows White to come crashing through. Black must now take on b4, as moving his own knight would hang the bishop on d7. The al-

ternative 22.♘bd3, maintaining the tension, was equally viable for White.

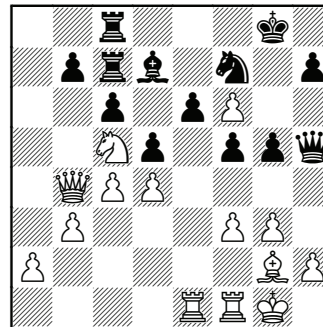
**22...axb4 23.exf6 ♞c7?**

23...♞d8 24.♖xb4 ♖g6, looking to regain the pawn, was a better option. White would still have a clear positional advantage due to his space on the queenside and better pieces.

**24.♖xb4 ♞bc8**

Now 24...♖g6 would lose the exchange to 25.♘a6.

**25.♞ae1**



White gives Black no time to put together a defense.

**25...♘d8 26.♘a4 ♖f7 27.♘b6 ♖xf6 28.♘xc8 ♖xd4+ 29.♔h1 ♞xc8 30.♖d6 ♖g7 31.f4 g4 32.cxd5 cxd5 33.♙xd5! exd5**

33...♞a8 34.♙g2 would have allowed Black to play on, but White is still just up a clear exchange.

**34.♞e7 ♘f7 35.♖xd7 ♞f8 36.♖xd5 1-0**

**Summary:** *If Black wants to play a Stonewall Defense, he should stick to the regular Dutch move order. Trying to play it against the Catalan involves committing the king's knight to e4 too early, allowing White to gain time with f2-f3 at some point. White should be careful to avoid playing the automatic ♗c1-a3 to trade dark-squared bishops if it means losing too much time. Instead, he can simply put the bishop on b2 and work toward getting a knight to the e5 square. Control of the dark squares is a key part of White's strategy.*

**Conclusion:** Black's miscellaneous early tries in the Closed Catalan are playable, but beyond that not much can be said in their favor. At club level, White should be happy to see one of these deviations, since they usually indicate Black is already "out of book." At higher levels, these moves can be used to fight for equality if Black has some specific idea prepared (Anand's ...♗e5-c6 maneuver in the Closed Catalan Semi-Slav comes to mind), but there are good reasons why they aren't seen that often.

## The "Real" Closed Catalan: White's Disappearing Advantage

When Black puts his dark-squared bishop on e7 and plays ...c7-c6 before attempting to fianchetto his light-squared bishop with ...b7-b6, we have a "real" Closed Catalan. This often results in positions similar to those in the first game of this chapter, say around move 14 or so. Seemingly, White has the position of his dreams: a nice center, a space advantage, and active pieces. It comes as little surprise to most Catalan players that White often scores 70-80% from such positions.

In practice, however, these results are difficult to obtain unless one understands the nature of White's "disappearing" advantage. As Black begins to execute maneuvers and make trades, White can find his center under increasing pressure. If Black can break with ...c7-c5 or ...e6-e5 at the proper moment, the game often heads

straight for a rather dull kind of equality. Black's equalizing ideas are often simple, and they don't necessarily require the skill of a strong master to be carried out effectively in practice, either – in the following game, one of the authors lost his opening advantage to a "Class A" player.

**Hilton, Jonathan (USCF 2249)**  
**Kluger, Alan (USCF 1874)**

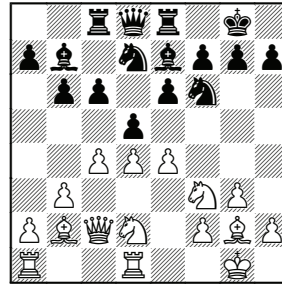
[E09] Parsippany 2009

1.♗f3 e6 2.c4 d5 3.d4 ♗f6 4.g3  
♗e7 5.♗g2 ♗bd7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♖c2  
c6 8.♗bd2

This is just one of many moves available to White here. By the end of Part I, we will have discussed 8.♗bd2, 8.b3, 8.♖d1, and our main recommendation, 8.♗f4.

**8...♖e8?**

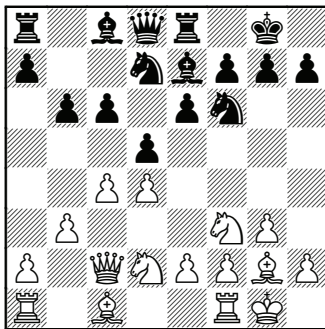
Since Black has no immediate plans to try to break with ...e6-e5, this move may appear to be a waste of time. However, the move does have merit in that it consolidates Black's position and prepares the followup ...♞d7-f8-g6 at a later point. In the grand scheme of things, Black's ...♖f8-e8 can often prove a useful waiting move. After the more popular alternative 8...b6, we'll look at how Wojto handled the position after 9.e4 dxe4 10.♞xe4 ♟b7 11.♞d1 ♚c8 12.♞xf6+ ♞xf6 13.c5 ♞d8 14.♟f4 in Wojtkiewicz-Hidding, Goch 1998, below.



Then one realizes that Black has committed the “inaccuracy” of playing his rook to e8 early. This leaves his knight on f6 uncomfortable, as after 12...c5?! 13.e5, something like 13...♞e4 14.♞xe4 dxe4 15.♞d2 would clearly favor White. Thus, Black would have to play 12...♞xe4 13.♞xe4 dxe4 14.♚xe4.

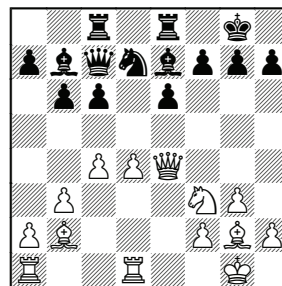
Everything now appears to be going fine for White, until he notices that his bishop has been prematurely committed to the b2 square. After Black simply develops with 14...♚c7, White suddenly wishes he had time for ♟b2-c1-f4!:

**9.b3 b6**



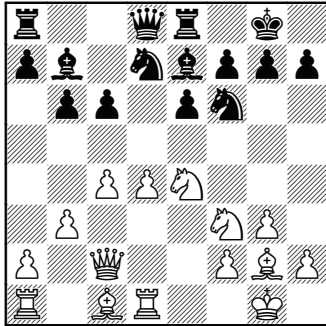
**10.e4**

Some subtleties behind different move orders in the Closed Catalan are revealed by a thorough discussion of this move. According to one line of thought, there may well have been cause to linger a few more moves before making the e2-e4 break here. For instance, after 10.♟b2 ♟b7 11.♞fd1 ♚c8 12.e4, it may appear at first that White has simply gotten the same position as in the note to his eighth move with his knight on d2 rather than c3:



Black is threatening to play ...c6-c5, so White will likely respond with 15.♚e2 or 15.♚c2. (The latter, 15.♚c2, has the idea of meeting 15...c5 with 16.d5!?) However, Black can respond to both moves with the simple waiting move 15...♞cd8. For instance, after 16.♞e5 in either position, White has little chance of gaining an advantage after 16...♞xe5 17.dxe5 c5. Thus, the text move, going for e2-e4 immediately, is probably White's best.

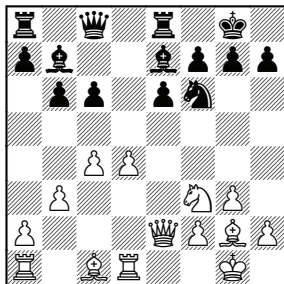
10...dxe4 11.♖xe4 ♗b7 12...♞d1



12...♞c8

First, it should be noted that the natural break 12...c5? fails here to 13.♖xf6+ ♗xf6 14.♖g5! ♗xg5 15.♗xb7 with a huge initiative. For instance, 15...♞b8 16.dxc5 ♗f6 17.♗c6 ♗xa1 18.♗xd7 ♞e7 19.c6 ♗f6 20.♗a3 was already winning for White in Taborov-Istratov, Kiev 2001.

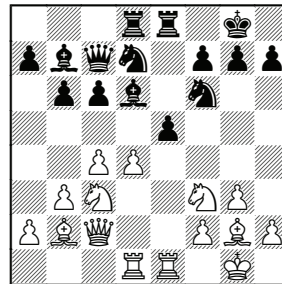
The text move is an excellent try by Black. If the queen were to go to c7 immediately, of course, White would just play ♗c1-f4. Even more accurate than the text, however, is 12...♖xe4 13.♞xe4 ♖f6 (not 13...♗f6?! 14.♗f4 ♞c8 15.♖e5 ♖xe5 16.♗xe5 ♞d8 17.b4 ♞e7 18.c5 ♗xe5 19.dxe5 bxc5 20.b5 ♞ac8 21.♞d6 ♞c7 22.bxc6 f5 23.♞c4 1-0 Wojtkiewicz-Mrochen, Essen 1997) 14.♞e2, and here 14...♞c8! with the same idea:



Black had few problems in Baumgartner-Jaeger, Seniors World Chp. 1993, after 15.♗b2 ♞c7 16.♞ac1 ♞ad8 17.♖e5 c5 18.♗xb7 ♞xb7 19.♞d3 ♖d7 20.dxc5 ♖xc5 21.♞xd8 ♞xd8 22.♞d1 ♞xd1+ 23.♞xd1 ♞e4!?. White's advantage is disappearing.

13.♗b2

This seems principled, as 13.♗f4?! ♖xe4 14.♞xe4 c5 looks suspect for White. If then 15.d5?, Black plays 15...exd5 16.cxd5 ♗f6. However, if White wants to maintain the advantage here, he must keep the minor pieces on the board. 13.♖c3, exploiting Black's omission of ...♖f6xe4, would have kept more life in the game. 13...♗d6 14.♗b2 ♞c7 15.♞e1 e5?! 16.♞ad1 ♞ad8:



17.a3 exd4 18.♖xd4 ♞xe1+ 19.♞xe1 g6? (19...a6 20.♖f5 was better, but still allowed White a nice initiative) 20.♖cb5 cxb5 21.♖xb5 ♞b8 22.♗xb7 ♞xb7 23.♖xd6 ♞c6 24.♞d1 ♖g4 25.♞e4 ♞xe4 26.♖xe4 1-0 was Sestjakov-Johansson, Kecskemet 1991. Note that instead of 15...e5?!, the more patient 15...♞ad8 16.♞ad1 a6 was more accurate. Black would then have good chances of equalizing by means of ...c6-c5.

13...♞c7

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Black no longer fears putting the queen on this square now that the White dark-squared bishop has committed itself to b2.

### 14. ♖xf6+

The positions that arise after 14. ♖e5 ♖xe5 15. dxe5 ♖xe4 16. ♗xe4 h6 offer White few real winning chances. For instance, 17. ♖e2 c5 18. ♗c2?, desperately avoiding unpleasant trades, would be bad after 18... ♖c6.

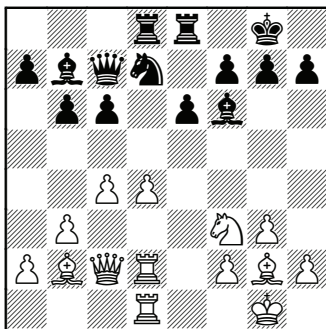
### 14... ♗xf6

This recapture is perfectly sound, since Black is now contesting the a1-h8 diagonal and controlling the e5 square.

### 15. ♖d2 ♖ad8

There is no need for Black to rush things. 15... e5 16. dxe5 ♖xe5 17. ♖xe5 ♗xe5 18. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 19. ♖ad1 would have still given White some initiative.

### 16. ♖ad1



### 16... ♖f8

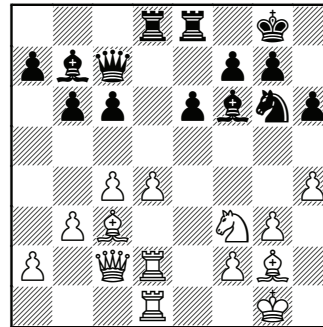
Again, Black is not in a hurry. 16... e5? 17. dxe5 ♖xe5 18. ♖xe5 ♖xd2

19. ♖xd2 ♗xe5 20. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 21. ♖d7 would be awful for Black. On the other hand, 16... c5!? 17. dxc5 bxc5 is perfectly playable, but it does make sense for Black not to saddle himself unnecessarily with any isolated pawns. Not as good is recapturing with a piece by 17... ♖xc5, as that would give White a pull after 18. ♗xf6 gxf6 19. ♖d4.

### 17. ♗c3

17. ♖e5 ♖g6 18. ♖e4 ♖xe5 19. dxe5 ♖xd2 20. ♖xd2 ♗e7 results in a structure that is, again, not that promising for White.

### 17... ♖g6 18. h4 h6

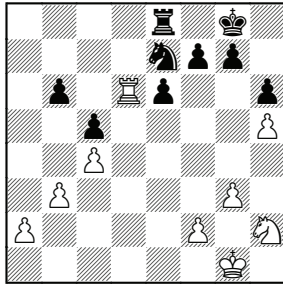


### 19. a4!?

Playing for a2-a4-a5 is a common idea, but here White misses an important opportunity to consolidate his slight edge. 19. b4! c5 is fine for Black, but 19. h5! ♖e7 20. ♖h2 was probably White's only attempt at an advantage. For instance, if 20... c5, White can play 21. ♗xb7 (not 21. ♖g4! ♗xd4 22. ♗xd4 cxd4 23. ♖xd4 ♗xg2 24. ♖xg2 ♖f5 and Black is fine) 21... ♖xb7 22. dxc5 ♖xd2 23. ♖xd2 ♗xc3 24. ♖xc3 bxc5 25. ♖a5 ♖b6 26. ♖xb6



axb6 27.♖d6 with some play in the endgame:



Black is under pressure here, and White is hoping to get his knight back into play shortly with ♖h2-g4-e5. This whole line isn't forced, but other moves should also leave White with some pressure. For instance, on 20... ♖f5 21.♗g4 ♕g5 22.♞e2, White is better.

**19...♞d7?!**

Better is the immediate 19...c5, since 20.d5 ♕xc3 21.♞xc3 exd5 22.cxd5 ♞d6 is fine for Black.

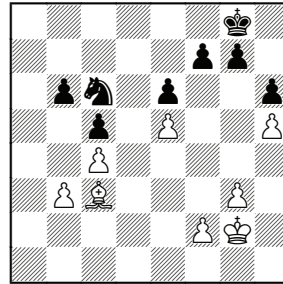
**20.a5**

20.h5 is still a better chance as, for the moment, Black's rook on d7 is misplaced. 20...♗e7 21.♗e5 ♕xe5 22.dxe5 ♞ed8 23.♞xd7 ♞xd7 24.♞xd7 ♞xd7 25.♞d2 ♞xd2 26.♕xd2 would leave White with a space advantage and the bishop pair.

**20...♞ed8 21.♗h2**

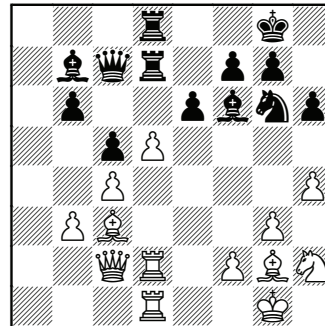
Now 21.h5 ♗e7 22.♗e5 ♕xe5 23.dxe5 c5 gives White less than before, as the light-square member of his bishop duo will be swapped off in short order. White can play on for an endgame squeeze, for instance,

24.♞xd7 ♞xd7 25.♞xd7 ♞xd7 26.♞d2 ♞xd2 27.♕xd2 ♕xg2 28.♖xg2 ♖c6 29.axb6 axb6 30.♕c3:



White's king is heading to e4 and he can expand on the kingside. Of course, the sad news is that 30...♗a5 31.♕xa5 bxa5 just leads to a draw. White's chances of making any progress in such a locked king and pawn ending are next to nil – his advantage has disappeared yet again.

**21...c5 22.axb6 axb6 23.d5**



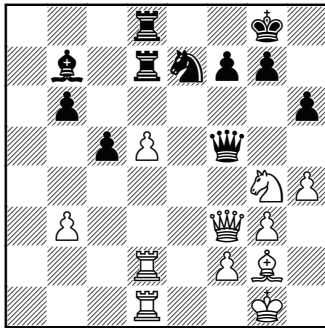
White, playing for the win, tries to mix things up. Despite White's passed d-pawn, however, Black stands well. White's failure to play h4-h5 at some point has allowed Black to escape punishment for his inaccurate 19th move.

**23...♕xc3 24.♞xc3 exd5 25.cxd5 ♞e5!?**

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Black's pursuit of a queen trade ultimately allows White a slight end-game pull, so it was probably better just to play 25...♖d6, ...♗g6-e7, and an eventual ...b6-b5, with more than sufficient counterplay.

26. ♖f3 ♗e7 27. ♗g4 ♖f5



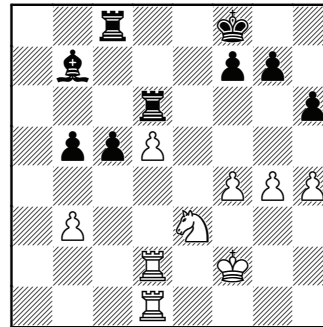
28. ♗e3

28. ♖xf5 ♗xf5 29. ♗e5 ♖d6 30. ♗c4 ♖f6 is perhaps a slight improvement on the game as Black's pieces are jumbled.

28... ♖xf3 29. ♗xf3 b5 30. ♖g2 ♖f8 31. ♗e4 ♖e8 32. g4 ♖f8 33. f4 ♗c8 34. ♗f5 ♖d6 35. ♗xc8 ♖xc8 36. ♖f2

White has transposed into an end-game in which his knight is slightly stronger than Black's hampered bishop. The advantage, however, proves to be insufficient for a win.

**Summary:** Although White's inaccuracies in this game were minimal, he still gradually lost his opening advantage over the course of a 50-move struggle. This is, unfortunately, a common occurrence in the Closed Catalan. The reader should bear this in mind when facing the Closed Catalan, and be psychologically prepared to either play for a win with c4-c5 (explained in the next section) or to admit the possibility of a draw against tireless, stubborn defense.



36...c4 37. bxc4 bxc4 38. ♖c2 c3 39. ♗d4 g6!

This move holds for Black. Otherwise, White might have ♗e3-f5 in all the key variations.

40. ♗d1

40. ♗d3 ♖cd8 41. ♖xc3 ♗xd5 42. ♖c7 ♗e6 43. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 44. ♖f3 should also be drawn.

40... ♖xd5 41. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 42. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 43. ♗xc3 ♗c6 44. ♖e3 ♖e7 45. ♗e4 ♗xe4 46. ♖xe4 ♖e6 47. f5+ gxf5+ 48. gxf5+ ♖d6 49. h5 f6 50. ♖d4 1/2-1/2

Oddly enough, White still enjoys a space advantage in the final position. Of course, the king and pawn endgame is a dead draw, so this fact is absolutely meaningless. The "advantage" is, at long last, entirely gone.

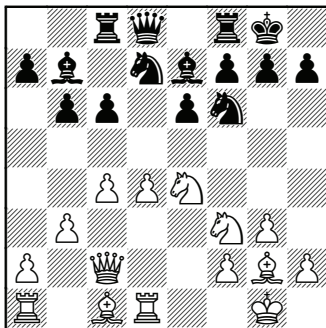
## White Gambles on c4-c5

Often – particularly when Black makes an inaccuracy – White gets the opportunity to play c4-c5, physically stopping Black's cherished freeing break ...c6-c5. Books on the Catalan are full of dramatic examples of White squeezing the life out of Black after a timely c4-c5 push. They usually tout how Black seemingly makes no large errors and yet still gets squashed like a bug on a windshield. Consider the following example game, which previously appeared in IM Angus Dunnington's classic 1997 text, *Winning with the Catalan*:

### Portisch, Lajos (2625) Radulov, Ivan (2500)

[E08] Moscow 1977

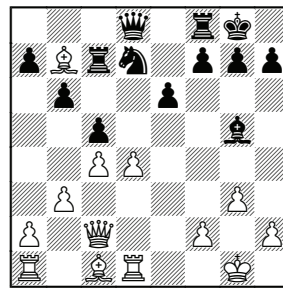
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 e6 3.♙g2 ♙e7  
4.0-0 0-0 5.c4 d5 6.d4 c6 7.♖c2  
b6 8.♗d1 ♗bd7 9.b3 ♙b7 10.♗c3  
♗c8 11.e4 dxe4 12.♗xe4



12...♗xe4?!

Taking on e4 is premature, as Black does not have the move ...♗d8-

c8 available to him. Black should instead play 12...c5, which keeps White's advantage to a minimum, for instance 13.♗xf6+ ♙xf6 14.♗g5 ♙xg5 15.♙xb7 ♗c7:



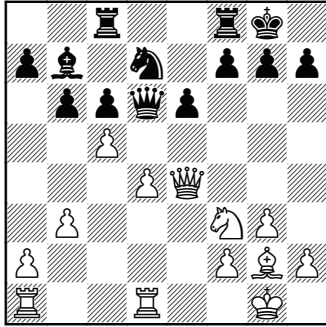
Here White can try:

a) 16.dxc5 ♙xc1 17.♗axc1 ♗xc5 (17... ♗xb7 18.c6 ♗c7 19.cxd7 ♗xd7 20.♗xd7 ♗xd7 21.♗d1 ♗c7 22.♗d3 gives White some chances to convert his slight pull) 18.♙e4 g6 19.b4 ♗c7 20.c5 bxc5 21.bxc5 ♗e7 22.c6 ♗f6 23.♙g2 ♗fc8 24.♗d4 ♗d5 25.♙xd5 exd5 26.♗d2 ♗xc6 27.♗xc6 ♗xc6 28.♗xd5 ♗c8 29.h4 ♗e4 30.♗d8+ 1/2-1/2, Paunović-Dzevlan, Yugoslav Team Chp.1991. White certainly had some pressure during this game, but a draw seems like a reasonable result.

b) 16.♙e4! f5 17.♙g2 cxd4 18.♙xg5 ♗xg5 19.♗xd4 e5 20.♗d5 ♗e7 21.♗e1 ♗c5 22.♗d2 with a nice edge. White controls the d-file, has the Catalan bishop against Black's knight, and has some chances with his queenside majority. This is the lesser of Black's two evils, however, as what happens to him in the game is atrocious.

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13. ♖xe4 ♜c7 14. ♙f4 ♘d6  
15. ♙xd6 ♜xd6 16. c5

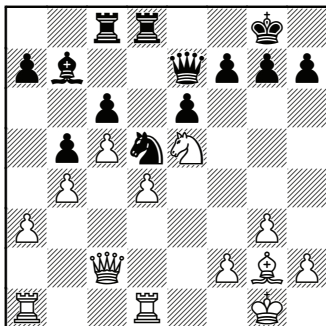


This position has, quite comically, occurred at least two dozen times in practice. By allowing the exchange of dark-squared bishops, Black has given White everything he could ever want from the opening, as we'll see shortly.

16... ♜e7

16... bxc5 17. dxc5 ♜c7 (17... ♗xc5 18. ♖b4 ♗f6 19. ♖e5 ♗d5 20. a3 ♜fd8 was another defensive try, but 21. ♖xc7 ♜xc7 22. ♗g5 with the idea of routing the knight to d6 leaves White with a clear advantage.

17. b4 ♜fd8 18. ♜c2 ♗f6 19. ♗e5 ♗d5 20. a3 b5



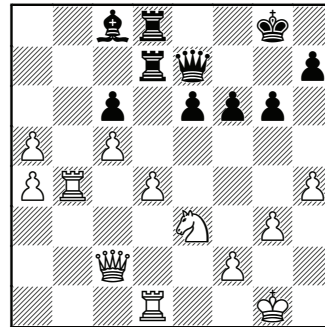
Played to prevent ♗e5-c4. The stage

has been set for Black's positional demise; his light-squared bishop is pitiful. White now begins action on the kingside.

21. ♙e4 g6 22. h4 a5 23. bxa5 ♜a8  
24. a4 b4 25. ♙xd5 ♜xd5 26. ♜ab1

Black's attempts at counterplay on the queenside have only opened lines for White to penetrate there. From here on out, the rest is a mopup operation.

26... f6 27. ♗g4 ♜ad8 28. ♜xb4 ♙c8 29. ♗e3 ♜5d7



30. ♜b8 e5 31. d5 cxd5 32. c6 ♜d6 33. c7 ♜f8 34. ♜xd5 f5 35. ♜c5 ♜e6 36. ♖xe7 ♜xe7 37. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 38. ♜d8+ ♜e8 39. ♜xe8+ ♜xe8 40. ♗d5 1-0

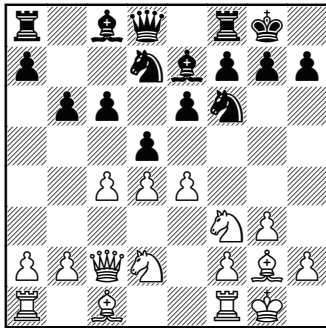
In reality, winning with the move c4-c5 is rarely so simple. Although many Catalan players dream of playing such a game as this one, not even Wojo managed to have more than a handful of such aesthetic victories. Often, playing c4-c5 is more of a gamble on White's part than most Catalan books would have their readers believe. After all, the move seriously weakens the d5 square and renders

White's queenside pawn formation vulnerable. In the following game, readers are advised to pay particular attention to the sharp positions that arise in the note to Black's move 16.

**Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2595)  
Hidding, Markus (1906)**

[E09] Goch 1998

1.  $\text{d}3$   $\text{d}5$  2.  $\text{c}4$   $\text{c}6$  3.  $\text{d}4$   $\text{d}f6$  4.  $\text{c}2$   
 $\text{e}6$  5.  $\text{g}3$   $\text{e}7$  6.  $\text{g}2$  0-0 7. 0-0  $\text{d}bd7$   
 8.  $\text{d}bd2$   $\text{b}6$  9.  $\text{e}4$



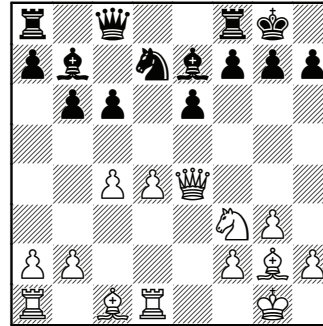
9...  $\text{d}xe4$

White's move order, which aims for a quick  $\text{e}2\text{-e}4$  by omitting waiting moves such as  $\text{b}2\text{-b}3$  or  $\text{f}1\text{-d}1$ , is played less frequently than other move orders because here  $9\text{...}\text{b}7$  leads to positions with adequate counterplay for Black. After  $10.\text{e}5$   $\text{d}e8$   $11.\text{b}3$   $\text{c}c8$   $12.\text{b}2$   $\text{c}5$ , Black is doing fine.  $11.\text{cxd}5$  instead is recommended by Israeli GM Boris Avrukh, but after  $11\text{...}\text{cxd}5$ , the closed nature of the position doesn't fit a "dynamic" Wojo-style repertoire.

10.  $\text{d}xe4$   $\text{d}xe4$

$10\text{...}\text{b}7$   $11.\text{d}d1$   $\text{d}xe4$   $12.\text{c}xe4$   $\text{c}c8$  would transpose.

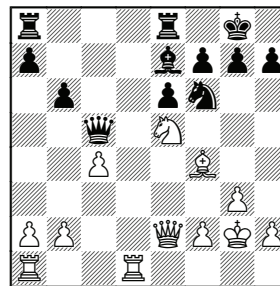
11.  $\text{c}xe4$   $\text{b}7$  12.  $\text{d}d1$   $\text{c}c8$



13.  $\text{c}2$

$13.\text{f}4$  is recommended by Avrukh and has been played by a number of strong players, such as GMs Alexander Goldin and Ian Rogers. Avrukh's idea is that after  $13\text{...c}5$   $14.\text{d}5$   $\text{e}e8$   $15.\text{c}2$   $\text{exd}5$   $16.\text{cxd}5$   $\text{f}6$ , White can play  $17.\text{d}g5$   $\text{f}xg5$   $18.\text{f}xg5$ , winning the bishop pair with a slight advantage.

This sounds reasonable, but Black can easily stall rather than playing  $\text{...c}6\text{-c}5$  so early:  $13\text{...}\text{d}f6$   $14.\text{c}e2$   $\text{e}e8$   $15.\text{d}e5$   $\text{c}5$   $16.\text{dxc}5$  occurred in Rogers-Allen, Australia 1995, when Black could have (at least approximately) equalized with  $16\text{...}\text{f}xg2$   $17.\text{f}xg2$   $\text{c}xc5$ :

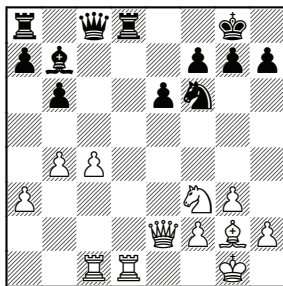


White has a little bit of pressure, but it's hardly anything serious. This

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actually occurred in Adla-Rodríguez López, Nigrán 1996, via a much different move order. White tried 18.g4!? and did manage to create some complications, but after 18...♞ad8 19.♚f3 h6 20.b3 b5, Black had excellent counterplay and was never worse. The computer move 18...♙d6!? also looks good for Black: White's g4-pawn is loose, and Black has a lot of annoying ideas like ...♚c5-c7 and ...♜f6-d7.

Going back, White should probably try 15.♞ac1 rather than Rogers' 15.♜e5. In the case of 15...c5, Black doesn't quite manage to equalize, for instance, 16.a3!? cxd4 17.♙e5! (17.♞xd4?! ♙c5 18.♞dd1 ♜g4 is annoying) 17...♜d7 18.♙xd4 ♙f6 19.♙xf6 (19.b4 e5 20.♙b2 ♚c7 is fine for Black) 19...♜xf6 20.b4 ♞d8:

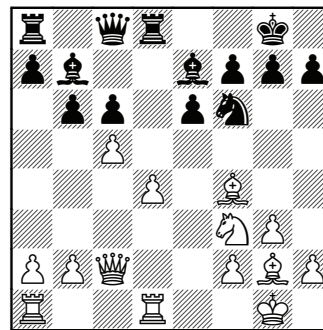


White's position is pleasant here. With something like 21.c5 bxc5 22.♞xc5, he can look forward to making something of his extra activity and queenside majority. Thus, we can also recommend 13.♙f4 as a solid way to play for the advantage. With the text move, however, Wojo is prepared to "gamble" with the move c4-c5, taking his chances in order to get the proverbial "big edge."

### 13...♞d8

A more normal move order to reach the same position is 13...♜f6 14.c5 ♞d8 15.♙f4. Meanwhile, 13...c5 is met by 14.d5, when White may have an advantage after 14...exd5 15.cxd5 ♙d6 (15...♞d8 is met by 16.♙f4) 16.b3 ♞e8 17.♙b2. The position is still a struggle, but White has fair tactical chances of landing a strike in the center or against Black's kingside.

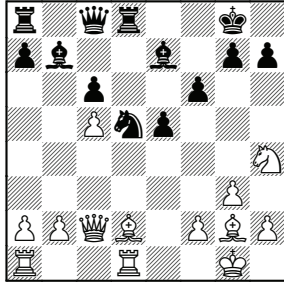
### 14.♙f4 ♜f6 15.c5!?



Going for it. Will White be able to create a positional bind, or will Black have sufficient counterplay from utilizing the newly weakened d5 square?

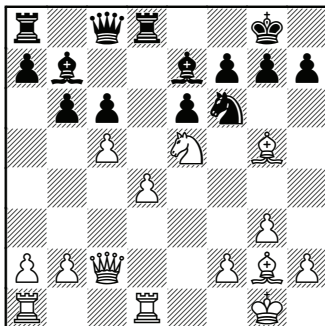
### 15...♜d5 16.♙g5 ♜f6?!

After this move, it becomes clear that White is simply controlling the game. The only challenging idea was to prevent the exchange of dark-squared bishops with 16...f6. Then 17.♙d2 bxc5 18.dxc5 e5 (not 18...a5?!, when 19.♙h3 f5 20.♞e1 ♙f6 21.♙g5 ♙a6 22.♙xf6 ♜xf6 23.♜e5 ♞d5 24.♙g2 ♜e4 25.♙xe4 ♞xe5 26.♙f3 ♞xe1+ 27.♞xe1 ♜f7 28.♚c3 left White clearly better in the simultaneous exhibition game Kasparov-Dubiel, Kato-wice 1993) 19.♜h4!:



19...Wf6 20.Bf1 represents what is likely to be “best play” for both sides. White had a nice initiative in Freisler-Kačirek, Mlada Boleslav 1995, after 20...Wf7 21.d5, as White’s knight on f5 is well placed. If Black tries to stop d4-f5 with 20...c8!? instead, then 21.e4 g6 22.xg6 leads to a draw after 22...hxg6 23.Wg6+ h8 24.Wh6+ hg8 25.Wg6+, but 21.f4 Bb8 would keep things interesting. Although White has the initiative, Black’s pieces are centralized, and the c5 pawn may prove a tactical liability in some lines: 22.e4 h8! 23.xh7 xc5+ 24.Wxc5 hx7 is one example. Thus, things are not so simple, and Black is able to put up stiff resistance if he finds the right moves.

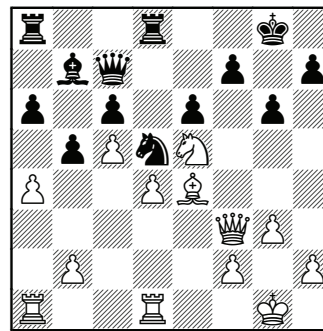
17.d5



17...b5?

Déjà vu. White now has an undisputed advantage, similar to Portisch-Radulov above. 17...h6 with the idea of returning the knight to d5 once again would have kept Black in the game. Play continues 18.xf6 (likely better than 18.e3 d5) 18...xf6 19.Bac1 Wc7 20.We2 Bbc8, and although Black is under pressure, his position is more or less intact. He can exchange on c5, allowing Bxc5 from White, and then play his queen to b6. Even if White wins the c6-pawn, his d4-pawn will still be vulnerable. After the text move, Black winds up succumbing to White’s probing for weaknesses on the kingside: given Wojo’s prowess in these kinds of positions, the game is nearly over.

18.a4 a6 19.We2 d5 20.xe7 dx7 21.e4 Wc7 22.Wh5 g6 23.Wf3 d5



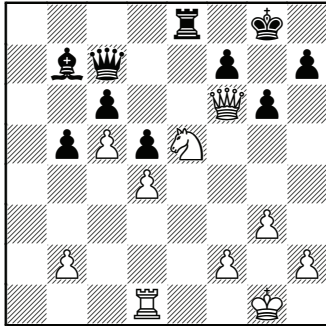
24.axb5 axb5

White also keeps a dominating position after 24...cxb5 25.c6 c8 26.xd5 exd5 (26...Bxd5 27.dg4) 27.Wf4.

25.Bxa8 Bxa8 26.xd5 exd5

26...cxd5 27.Wf6 h5 28.Bd3 doesn’t help Black much.

27. ♖f6 ♜e8



If Black plays 27...h5, he finds himself coming up short after 28. ♞d3 ♜e8 29. ♞f3 ♜e6 30. ♞xf7+.

28. ♘g4 h5

28...♞e6 29. ♘h6+ ♔f8 30. ♞h8+ ♔e7 31. ♘xf7! ends the game.

29. ♘h6+ ♔h7 30. ♘xf7 1-0

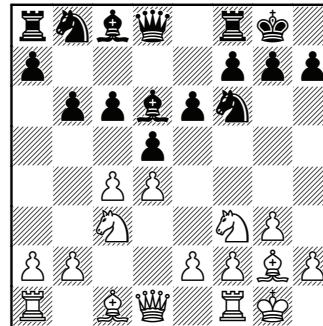
It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that just because White has the opportunity to push c4-c5 doesn't always mean that he should. White needs to put some thought into the move and heed the weaknesses it will create.

In the following rapid game, Wojo jumped at the chance to play c4-c5, even though some sort of preparatory move first would likely have been better. With best play, Black could even have had the advantage.

**Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2543)  
Privman, Boris (2222)**

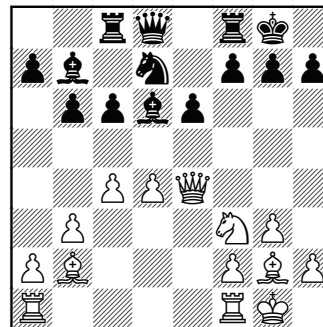
[E01] New York 2003

1. ♘f3 e6 2. g3 d5 3. ♙g2 c6 4. 0-0 ♘f6 5. c4 ♙d6 6. d4 0-0 7. ♘c3 b6!?



Rather than trying to play a Semi-Slav by aiming for ...e6-e5, here Black is actually aiming for an “improved” variation of the Closed Catalan. The point of putting the bishop on d6 here will become apparent shortly.

8. b3 ♙b7 9. ♙b2 ♘bd7 10. ♞c2 ♞c8 11. e4 dxe4 12. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 13. ♞xe4



This position has been reached a handful of times from a variety of different move orders. Essentially, Black has seized control of the h2-b8 diagonal, making it seem unlikely that White will ever be able to play c4-c5 and ♙b2-c1-f4. Oddly enough, White manages c4-c5 anyway.

13...♞c7

13...♘f6 14. ♞c2 has also occurred, when Black is discouraged from play-

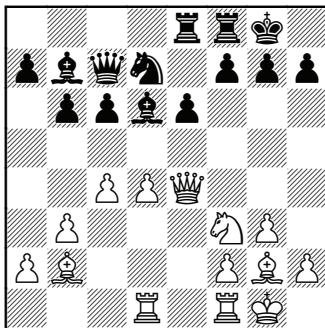


ing the immediate 14...c5 in light of 15.dxc5!. He is now forced to make an awkward recapture on c5 with the rook: 15...♙xc5?? 16.♘g5! with the threat of ♙xf6 and mate on h7 wins the bishop on b7. After 15...♞xc5 16.♞ad1 or 16.♘g5!? ♞xg5 17.♙xb7 ♚c7 18.♙g2 ♙e5 19.♞ad1, Black is awkward.

Thus, Black players often try 14...h6 to stop any of White's ideas on g5. White then turns his attention to playing an effective c4-c5, for instance, 15.♞ad1 ♚c7 16.♞fe1 ♞fe8 17.c5 ♙e7 18.♘e5 ♘d7 19.♘d3 ♙f6 20.♙c3 e5? 21.dxe5 ♘xe5 22.♘f4 ♘d7 23.♘h5 ♞xe1+ 24.♞xe1 ♚b8 25.♙h3 ♞c7 26.♙xd7, 1-0 Ryskin-Pedersen, Minsk 1994. That example is dramatic, but regardless, Privman's 13...♚c7 is a better choice than 13...♘f6.

#### 14.♞ad1 ♞ce8

14...c5 immediately is possible, but of course White can simply play something like 15.♚c2 cxd4 16.♘g5 g6 17.♙xb7 ♚xb7 18.♙xd4 with a possible slight edge. However, he can also take advantage of the fact that Black has deserted the h4-d8 diagonal with 15.♚h4!?, which still keeps ideas involving ♘f3-g5 in the air. 15...cxd4?? 16.♚xd4!, winning a piece, is just one of the points behind this move.

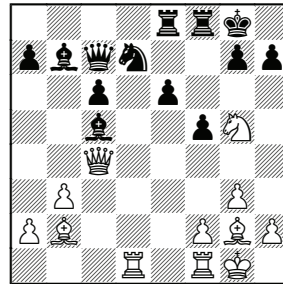


#### 15.c5!?

Once again, going for it. 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♙e7 defends adequately for Black, and, as always, isn't that interesting. However, the preparatory 15.♞fe1 was probably called for here, as we'll see in the note to Black's move 16.

#### 15...♙e7

Not good for Black is 15...bxc5 16.dxc5 ♙xc5? 17.♘g5! (stronger than the obvious 17.♞xd7 ♚xd7 18.♚e5 ♙xf2+ 19.♞xf2 f6 20.♚e3 with a clear advantage for White) 17...f5 (17...g6 18.♘h7! wins) 18.♚c4 and White is winning:



For instance, 18...♞e7 19.♞fe1 ♞fe8 20.♞xe6 ♞xe6 21.♘xe6 ♘b6 22.♘xc7+ ♘xc4 23.♘xe8 ♘xb2 24.♞d8. Note that after the superior 16...♙e7, 17.b4 is an advantage for White, although Black is hanging in there after 17...a5 18.a3 axb4 19.axb4 ♙f6.

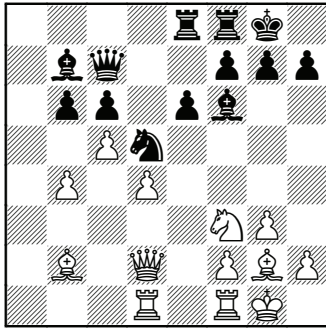
#### 16.b4 ♘f6

Black misses a prime opportunity. 16...♙a6 17.♞fe1 (sacrifices such as 17.♘d2?! are speculative) 17...♙c4 would have allowed Black to reroute his bishop outside the pawn chain. Black's worst piece suddenly becomes

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his most active one, so his chances are preferable. Even after the game move, however, Black is doing fine.

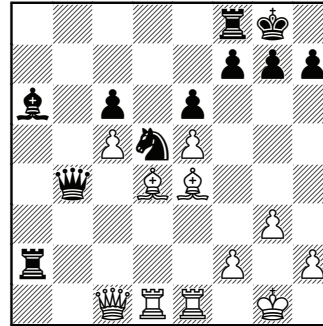
17. ♖c2 ♘d5 18. a3 a5 19. ♗d2  
axb4 20. axb4 ♙f6



20... ♙a6 21. ♖fe1 ♙b5 would have been at least equal, if not better, for Black. The game continuation is too complacent, and leaves White with a fairly nice game after all. Black's light-squared bishop must become active if Black is to have true counterplay.

21. ♖fe1 ♖a8 22. ♘e5 ♙xe5 23. dxe5

bxc5 24. bxc5 ♖a2 25. ♙e4 ♗a5  
26. ♗c1 ♗b4 27. ♙d4 ♙a6



Black's position appears to be fairly active, but White's two bishops actually are enough for a small edge. Black's queenside pieces have no clear targets.

28. ♙b1 ♖e2??

These types of blunders often occur in rapid games. 28... ♖a3 would have continued the struggle.

29. ♖xe2 ♙xe2 30. ♗c2 1-0

**Summary:** *Playing c4-c5 is a game changer. If White is able to trade dark-squared bishops and utilize his new outposts on e5 and d6, he is usually assured a big advantage. If Black can keep the dark-squared bishops on the board and generate counterplay, the game turns into a complex struggle with chances for both sides.*

**Conclusion:** When Black plays ...d5xe4, White has the better chances. In most cases, he is able to play for a win without risk. In other cases, he may actually elect to take on some positional risk with c4-c5 in order to go after an even larger advantage. Which approach White takes is sometimes dictated by the position on the board (for instance, a trade of dark-squared bishops usually means White really should try for c4-c5) and is sometimes just a matter of taste (in Wojtkiewicz-Hidding, there is a choice between 13. ♗c2 and c4-c5 or Avrukh's solid 13. ♙f4). The reader should aim to score well in the ...d5xe4 positions, but an occasional draw is just par for the course.

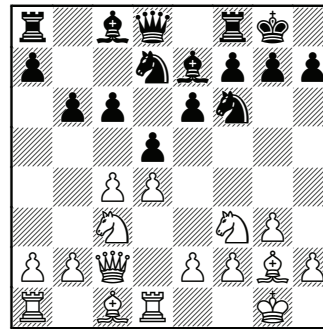
## Black Refuses to Play ...d5xe4: Delving Deeper into Closed Catalan Theory

In general, when White plays e2-e4, the move ...d5xe4 is considered a concession from Black. So long as he still has the e8 square for his king's knight – that is, he hasn't played ...f8-e8 as a waiting move – theory contends that Black should focus on a swift counterpunch with ...c6-c5. Although move orders and piece placements change from variation to variation, White has two main ideas after a ...c6-c5 strike from Black. He can either push ahead with e4-e5, trying to gain space, or capture with e4xd5, trying to create complications in the center. Approaches with e4-e5 tend to be inflexible and were not much to Wojo's taste. Over the next few games, we will get a feel for how Wojo handled these types of positions and what his ideas and opinions were. Then, in Chapter 3, we will attempt to assemble a workable repertoire against the Closed Catalan by using the themes we have examined.

**Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2566)**  
**Mulyar, Michael A (2425)**

[E08] Stratton Mountain 2003

1. d3 f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. d4  
e7 5. g2 0-0 6. 0-0 c6 7. c2  
bd7 8. d1 b6 9. c3



9.b3 first is considered the main line, but Wojo enjoyed this move order as well.

**9...b7**

This bishop placement is natural but passive. If Black wants to play the variation with ...c6-c5 rather than ...d5xe4, he needs to extend the fianchetto slightly with 9...a6 instead. Then 10. e5! e5 11. dx5 d7 12. cxd5 cxd5 13. e4 d4 14. fxd4 c7 15. f4 transposes into a line we'll examine in the next section. This is the chief advantage of Wojo's 8. c3 move order. The only visible disadvantage of 8. c3 is that Black can try 9... dxc4. However, this move has yet to occur in practice. Simplest for White is just to regain the pawn immediately with 10. d2, for instance, 10... a6!? 11. xc6 c8 12. g2 b5 13. a3 b6

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14.♖f3 ♘b7 15.e4 followed by ♖f3-e5, ♙c1-e3, and so on. White has the center.

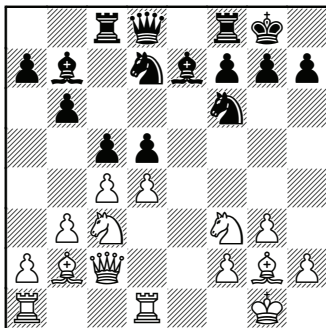
### 10.b3 ♜c8

The main line. The immediate 10...c5 can be met by 11.cxd5 exd5 (11...♖xd5 12.♗xd5 ♘xd5 13.e4 ♘b7 14.dxc5 ♙xc5 15.♗e5 was better for White in Castañeda-Pendurin, Tula 2006) 12.♙b2 ♜c8 13.dxc5 ♙xc5 14.e3, with good play against the isolated queen's pawn, as in Salov-Bauer, Eng-hien 1999. Other moves that Black has played here include 10...♜c7, 10...♜c8, and even 10...♙a6.

### 11.e4 c5?!

11...dxe4 with the idea of 12.♗xe4 c5, as mentioned in the game Portisch-Radulov above, seems like the only thing close to acceptable for Black here. Black's bishop on b7 will now become the subject of a long tactical discussion along the Catalan diagonal.

### 12.exd5 exd5 13.♙b2

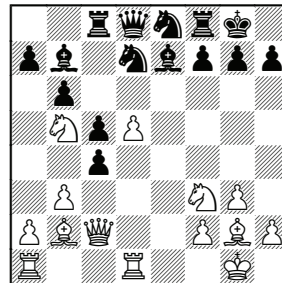


The older line 13.dxc5 dxc4 14.b4 was seen in Wojtkiewicz-Feldman, New York 1993, but it is now apparent that maintaining the tension in the center is even stronger for White.

### 13...♜c7

This is bad, but Black apparently has nothing better. He cannot just continue his development with something like 13...♜e8, as White has been successful with 14.♗g5!?. The idea is simply to pin Black's d5-pawn to his bishop on b7. It works: after 14...h6 15.♗h3 ♜c7 16.cxd5 cxd4 17.♜xd4 ♙c5 18.♜dd1, Black is, amazingly, just down a pawn. Even if he manages to attack d5 enough times to regain it, he will have wasted valuable time and effort doing so.

The usual course of events is 13...dxc4?!, when 14.d5 is a powerful pawn push. White is simply threatening d5-d6, winning a piece. Here 14...♗e8 (or 14...cxb3 15.axb3 ♗e8) has been tried, but 15.♗b5! – even stronger than 15.bxc4 – gives White a tremendous initiative:

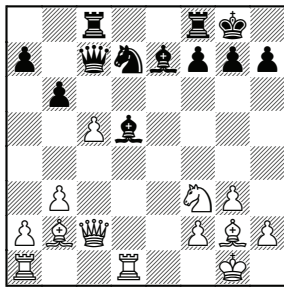


Black has no satisfactory solution to his problems here. 15...a6 16.♗a7 just wins the exchange in view of 16...♜a8? 17.♗c6, winning a full piece. 16...♜c7? was tried in the simultaneous exhibition game Kasparov-Kamsky, New York (exhibition) 1989, but 17.♗c6 ♙xc6 18.dxc6 ♜xc6 19.♜xd7! ♜xd7 20.♗e5 wins on the spot. Meanwhile, accepting the pawn “sacrifice” with 15...cxb3 16.axb3 a6 17.♗a7 fares little better, and White eventually won

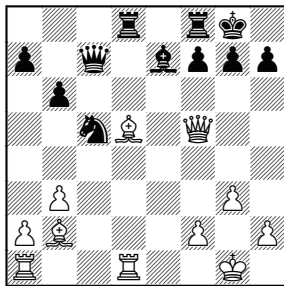
in Stohl-Horvath, Croatian Team Chp. 1995, after 17...♗d6 18.♗xc8 ♖xc8 19.♞e1. Finally, something like 15...♞a8 16.d6 ♟f6 17.♗g5! ♟xg5 18.♟xb7 just leaves White dominating the board. As it turns out, the text can hardly be considered an improvement.

**14.♞e1**

A strong novelty by Wojo. Instead, the more commonly played 14.♗xd5 ♗xd5 15.cxd5 ♟xd5 16.dxc5 has resulted in a number of quick wins for White:



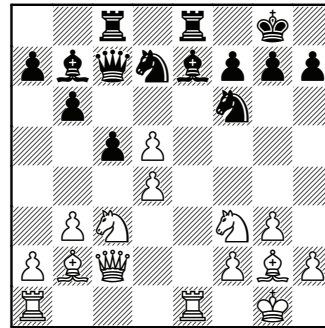
After 16...♟xf3 17.♟xf3, the recapture 17...♖xc5 18.♞e2 is surprisingly bad for Black. One example: 18...♗f6? 19.♞ac1 ♖b4 20.♞xc8 ♞xc8 21.♞d4 ♞c1+ (21...♖c5 22.♞c4 wins) 22.♟xc1, 1-0, Casagrande-Herzog, Austrian Team Chp. 1992. After the better 17...♗xc5, 18.♖f5 ♞cd8 19.♟d5 left Black under uncomfortable pressure in Chekhov-Goetz, Bundesliga 1996:



Things only went downhill for Black after 19...♖c8 20.♖h5 ♗d7 21.♟e4 g6 22.♖f3 f6?! (losing, but it's hard to come up with much for Black, as 22...♗c5 23.♟d5 threatens ♖f3-c3) 23.♞ac1 ♖b8 24.♖g4 ♗e5 (24...♗c5 25.♟xg6 hxg6 26.♖xg6+ ♗h8 27.♞e1 followed by ♞c1-c4-h4 wins) 25.♖e6+ ♞f7 26.♞xd8+ 1-0. White can meet either recapture with ♞c1-c8, winning on the spot.

Backtracking a bit, Black can avoid some of these woes by stubbornly refusing to give up the bishop pair with 16...♟b7, though White does retain a strong pull after 17.♖f5 ♗xc5 18.♖g4 or 18.♟e5. The latter was seen in Danailov-Zarnicki, Andorra 1991, in which Black actually did suffer through the middlegame to earn a draw. It is hard to say whether Wojo's new move is even stronger than 14.♗xd5, which has a proven track record of winning games for the first player. It is easy, however, to conclude that this whole line is simply pitiful for Black.

**14...♞fe8 15.cxd5**



**15...c4**

Black is losing material no matter what. The line 15...♗xd5 16.♗xd5 ♟xd5 17.♞xe7 ♞xe7 18.♗g5 ♗f6 19.♟xd5 h6

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(what else?) 20.♙xf7+ ♖xf7 21.♗xf7 ♜xf7, leaving White a pawn to the good, is just one example. 15...cxd4 16.♗xd4 ♗xd5 17.♙xd5 ♙xd5 18.♗xd5 ♜xc2 19.♗xc2 ♖xc2 20.♗xe7+ ♔f8 21.♙a3, losing Black a full piece, is another.

### 16.♗e5

White has too many tactical motifs in the air for Black to keep up here:

♗e5-c6, b3xc4, d5-d6, ♜c2-f5, ♙g2-h3, and the list goes on.

### 16...cxb3

16...♙a6 was probably an “only” move, but White is still just a pawn up and can play what he pleases. 17.♗c6 looks good. Now Black is lost.

17.♜xb3 a6 18.d6 ♙xd6 19.♗xf7 1-0

**Summary:** If Black is looking to meet White’s e2-e4 break with ...c6-c5 rather than taking on e4, he should strongly consider placing his bishop on a6 rather than b7. This particular game was miserable for Black because he had so many tactical issues along the e-file and the long h1-a8 diagonal.

In the following game, we’ll look at one of Wojo’s treatments of the ...♙c8-a6 idea from Black. Rather than enter one of the theoretical main lines, Wojo elects a rare sideline which gambits a pawn for positional pressure. The idea of 10.♙b2 and 11.♗c3 appears to be perfectly reasonable, but the fact that Korchnoi was able to outplay Wojo in this particular encounter has most likely contributed to the line’s present-day obscurity.

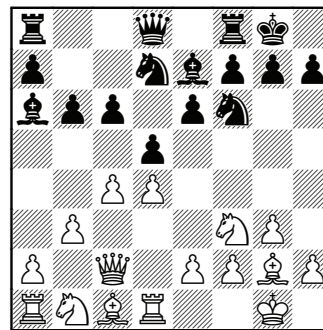
### Wojtkiewicz, Aleksander (2563) Korchnoi, Viktor (2659)

[E08] Reykjavik 2000

1.♗f3 d5 2.d4 ♗f6 3.c4 e6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♗bd7 7.♜c2 c6 8.♙d1 b6 9.b3

Wojo plays the usual move order in this game.

### 9...♙a6

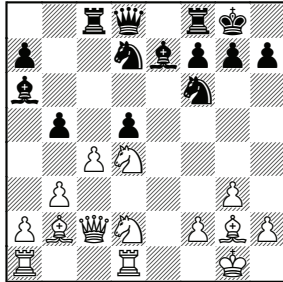


This is Black’s best move. 9...♙b7 10.♗c3 would transpose into the line in the previous game – something Black definitely wants to avoid.

### 10.♙b2

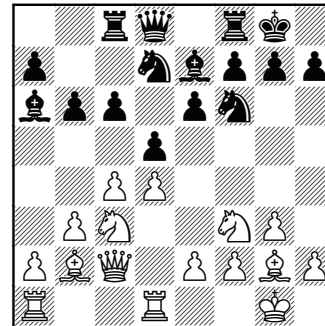
With this, Wojo is preparing to sacrifice a pawn in order to bring his knight to the c3 square anyway. Mod-

ern theory continues along a completely different path, with White playing into the line 10.♖bd2 ♜c8 11.e4 c5 12.exd5 exd5 13.♗b2 (13.♖f1!? is a more recent try), and here 13...cxd4 14.♖xd4 b5:



There is a mountain of theory from this position, and so far none of it has seemed overly promising for White. As we'll discuss in Chapter 3, trying to play this line is rather impractical for most Catalan players. Black is having more than his fair share of the fun: 15.♞f5 bxc4 16.bxc4 g6 and here 17.♞g5!? dxc4 18.♖c6 ♜xc6 19.♗xc6 ♞b6 20.♗xd7 ♞xb2 21.♞ab1 ♞a3 22.♗b5 c3 23.♖c4 ♞c5 24.♞xc5 ♗xc5 25.♞dc1 ♗xb5 26.♞xb5 ♖e4 27.♞xc5 ♖xc5 28.♞xc3 gives White nothing, while 17.♞h3 dxc4 18.♗c3 ♖c5 19.♖c6 ♜xc6 20.♗xc6 ♖d3 21.♖e4 ♞b6 22.♞g2 ♖g4 23.♞ab1 ♞xc6 24.♖f6+ ♞xf6 25.♗xf6 ♗xf6 is given by Raetsky and Chetverik as unclear. Although White could certainly play into this line and still score well, it would be virtually impossible for him to use it as a "system," as Wojo liked to do. It is all strictly analysis; there are no recurring positional themes, only tactical ones.

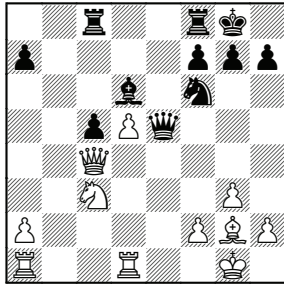
**10...♜c8 11.♖c3**



**11...dxc4**

Korchnoi decides to put Wojo's gambit to the test. 11...c5?! doesn't work well for Black here, as White's knight on c3 puts more pressure on the center than it would on d2. The central counterpunch 12.e4!? with complications is certainly possible, but White can get an advantage with far less effort by just playing 12.cxd5, when 12...cxd4 13.♖xd4 ♖xd5 14.♞d2 ♖xc3 15.♗xc3 with ideas of ♖d4-c6 gives White a pleasant initiative. Otherwise, 12...exd5 13.♞f5 puts pressure on Black's "hanging pawns" on c5 and d5. 13...g6 14.♞h3 doesn't help Black.

Returning to the diagram, the position that occurs after 11...♞c7 has been reached a number of times through Queen's Indian Defense transpositions. Then 12.e4 dxc4, followed by trying to hold on to the pawn, is critical here. 13.♖d2 cxb3 14.axb3 offers White compensation for his pawn in the form of queenside pressure, so 13...b5!? was tested in the blitz game Grischuk-Carlsen, Tal Memorial 2008, when 14.bxc4 bxc4 15.♖a4 c5 16.d5 exd5 17.exd5 ♖e5 18.♗xe5 ♞xe5 19.♖xc4 ♗xc4 20.♞xc4 ♗d6 21.♖c3 was just a little better for White thanks to his solid passed d-pawn:



There is still a lot to be decided in this line, but White should certainly have good prospects of getting an edge.

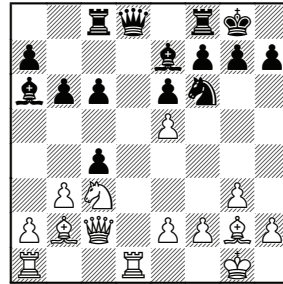
Finally, 11...b5!? has been tried a few times, but White has all the chances after 12.c5 b4 13.♖b1 (better than 13.♖a4, which sidelines the knight) 13...♗b5 14.a3 a5, as played in Bauer-Roeder, Valle d'Aosta 2003. In general, White should meet such ...b6-b5 strikes from Black with c4-c5, gaining space.

In that game, White slowly built up on the queenside: 15.♗e1 ♖c7 16.♘d3 ♗xd3 17.♗xd3 e5 18.e3 e4 19.♗e2 ♖a8 20.♘d2 ♖fe8 21.♖a2 ♗b7 22.♗da1. Black has expanded on the kingside, but, unlike White, he has no clear plan. 22...♗eb8 23.♗e1 ♗e8 24.axb4 axb4 25.♗h3 ♗f8 26.♖a4 ♗e6 27.♖1a2 ♗8c7 28.♗a1 and White eventually wore down Black's defenses on the queenside.

### 12.♗e5 cxb3

Black declares that he is willing to give up central space and play a long defense in order to hold his extra pawn. 12...♗xe5 is the obvious alternative.

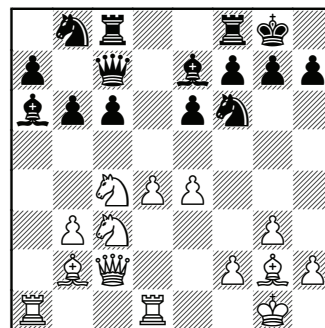
After 13.dxe5, Black has two possible knight blocks:



a) 13...♗d7 14.♗e4 ♖c7 15.f4 gives White promising pressure. Black cannot keep his extra pawn, as 15...cxb3?! 16.axb3 ♗b5 17.♘d6 ♗xd6 18.exd6 with a looming kingside attack provides tremendous compensation.

b) 13...♗d5 14.♗e4 b5 15.♗d6!? leads to 15...♗xd6 16.exd6 f6 17.bxc4 bxc4, and here 18.♗a3 looks like a slight improvement on 18.♗c3, seen in Stefansson-Johannessen, Malmö 2002. After 18.♗c3 f5?! 19.e4 fxe4 20.♗xe4 ♖h8 21.♗e5, Black wound up suffering from king safety problems and eventually lost. Instead, with 18.♗a3 ♖d7 19.♗c5, White controls the dark squares.

### 13.axb3 ♗b8 14.e4 ♖c7 15.♗c4



White prepares for e4-e5 and ♗c3-e4, completing the bind. Black must take action.



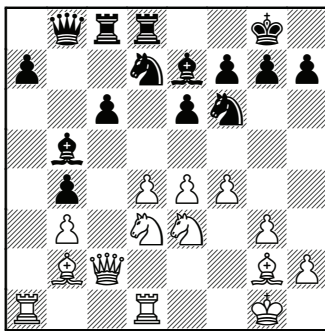
**15...b5**

15...c5?! 16.e5 d5 (or 16...fd7 17.d5) 17.dxd5 exd5 18.d3, crashing through on d5, is not a good idea for Black.

**16.d3 b4 17.a4 b5 18.c5**  
**bd7 19.d3 fd8 20.f4**

Black has gained some time off White's knight, so it cannot really be said that White has an advantage in development. He does have a tremendous advantage in space, however, and all of his pieces are well placed. Black is vulnerable along the a-file, his b4-pawn is exposed, and his c5 square is rather weak. Thus, despite Black's extra flank pawn, the balance is maintained.

**20...b8**



**21.h1**

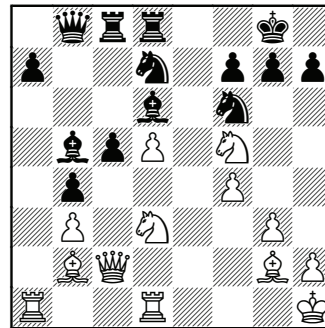
An important loss of time, and possibly the result of indecision on White's part. 21.d4 immediately was fine. If then still 21...c5!?, after 22.d5 exd5 23.exd5 d6 (or 23...xc4 24.bxc4 d6 25.h3 c7 26.d3, heading for c6) 24.d3 White's chances are preferable. Thus Black would probably

have opted for something else, for instance 21...b6 22.d3, when the struggle continues.

**21...c5**

Black, fully mobilized on the queenside, strikes back.

**22.d5 exd5 23.exd5 d6**  
**24.d3?!**



Tempting, but now White finds himself in serious trouble on the queenside. 24.d4 anyhow may have turned out better. Unfortunately, the tempo White lost by playing g1-h1 hurts him here; for instance, Black can try 24...xc4 25.bxc4 e8, when he essentially prevents d3-e5.

**24...c4!**

Black's break on the queenside comes before White can create real chances on the kingside.

**25.bxc4 xc4 26.f2**

For the moment, it appears that White has full compensation. His bishops are crisscrossing the board, his queen and rook are converging on a7, and Black is weak along the critical

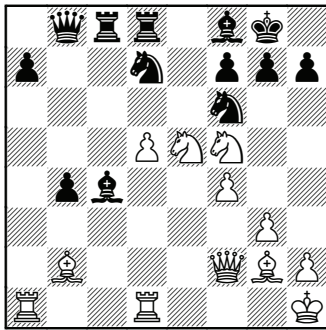
## Chapter 1

a1-h8 diagonal. Unfortunately, Black has an unexpected tactical resource.

**26...♙f8**

Best. Black is unconcerned with White's d-pawn and is simply trying to consolidate.

**27.♘e5**



**27...♙xe5 28.fxe5**

Clearly, Wojo had planned to play 28.♙xe5 here. For instance, after 28...♙b5, he has 29.♙xf6 gxf6 30.♙d4, when the kingside piece assault continues. The counterpunch 28...♘g4!, tactically resolving Black's issues, is most likely what he had overlooked. The text move is hopeless.

**28...♘xd5 29.♖d4 ♗b6**

Black pins the rook on d4 with his queen, not the bishop, just to be on the safe side. He figures it is better to leave the key defender on f8 for now.

**30.e6 ♗xe6 31.♖e1 ♗b6 32.♙c1  
♘e7 0-1**

White is down three pawns and is under heavy tactical fire. Wojo saw no reason to play on against a player of Korchnoi's caliber.

**Summary:** *Wojo played an ambitious gambit against the solid Korchnoi, who defended adequately but didn't emerge with an enviable position from the opening. White had compensation for his pawn, but a few inaccuracies led him down a quick path to defeat.*

**Conclusion:** White had full compensation for his pawn in this game. Ambitious players of White may want to look at Wojo's idea, add their own analysis, and attempt to use it as a dangerous weapon. Please note, however, that it is not necessary to play these kinds of gambits in order to succeed with the Catalan. Although we won't discuss the issue of move orders in depth until Chapter 3, being familiar with the ideas presented in this game will come in handy later on when we start assembling a specific repertoire.

Any would-be Catalan player who has made it this far can feel confident playing against the Closed Catalan system below master level. The reader has been amply acquainted with the lion's share of the themes and ideas he will ever encounter at a weekend Swiss. What he doesn't know already shouldn't be impossible to handle over the board. The next two chapters, however, are dedicated to those who wish to specialize in the Closed Catalan and go after even better returns. So if you're a club player hoping to have a Wojo-like repertoire before your next event, now would be a fine time to skip to Part II to get a feel for the Open Catalan systems. But, if you're ready to head deeper into the Closed Catalan, carry on.