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Chapter Two: The Advance Variation

“Tried by Zukertort in 1864, it was played eight times by Tal, without much success, in his World Championship match against Botvinnik, 1961.” – David Hooper/Kenneth Whyld, The Oxford Companion to Chess, 1996

“The move 3 e5 simply obligates White too much, and Black will always find the necessary time to adapt himself to the rigid position in the centre.” – Alexander Alekhine

“This [3 e5] leads to easy equality” – Aron Nimzowitsch

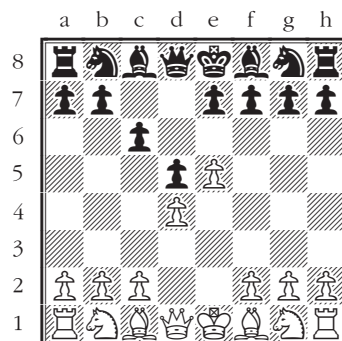
“Although it has been adopted by a number of very strong players (including former World Champion Tal), the Advance Variation is nowadays considered a fairly harmless continuation against the Caro-Kann Defence.” – Raymond Keene

“This extremely popular move has led to remarkably exciting, creative play. There have been more discoveries here than in any other variation of the Caro-Kann, and indeed more than most openings.” – John Watson

“3 e5 line against Caro-Kann is lately the most popular one. White has many different plans, so strong players very often decide to play this way because they see in this line more ways of finding new ideas.” – Chess Evolution July 2011

“Naturally, I do not intend to assert that the move 3 e5 is better than the classical schemes for White. Still, my long-term experience in playing the Caro-Kann Defence with Black has shown to me that his problems in this variation are not easy to solve at all.” – Alexey Dreev

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

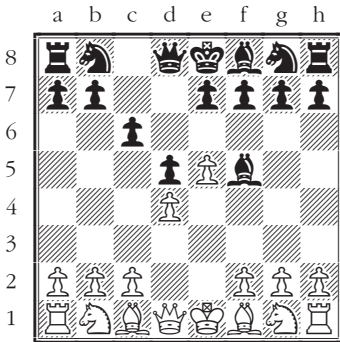


3...♞f5

The so called closed system is the principled move. Black develops

his bishop and plays for the break ...c5 later in the game, hence the closed system.

Black's other reply 3...c5 I have played many times and it is equally good as 3...♙f5. However, although the amount of theoretical knowledge is less it leads to more complicated and unusual positions and I don't think that these variations match the title of the book. It makes sense to prepare a timely ...c5 only after ...e6 has been played.



In this position many moves have been tried. We will concentrate on the following ten moves in relative order of importance:

- (A) 4 ♙d3
- (B) Réti's 4 g4
- (C) Gurgendz'e's 4 c3
- (D) Kostic's 4 c4
- (E) Kasparov's 4 ♙e3
- (F) 4 ♘e2
- (G) 4 ♘d2
- (H) Cohn's 4 h4
- (I) 4 ♘c3
- (J) Short's 4 ♘f3

Variation (A) 4 ♙d3

Model Game 9

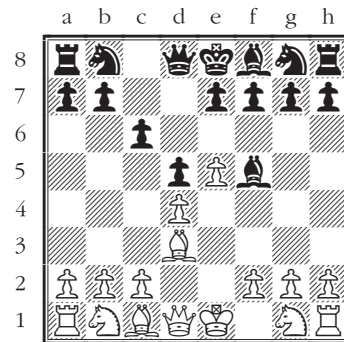
"For students, the game has considerable didactic value." – Alekhine

Nimzowitsch – Capablanca
New York, 1927

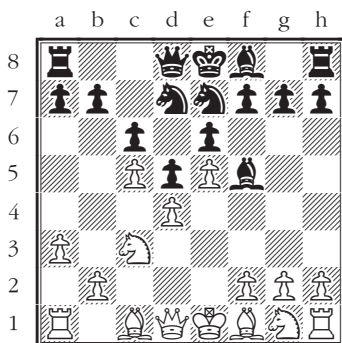
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

Nimzowitsch preferred this pawn push both against the French and the Caro-Kann. The reason is that he liked blocked positions where he could outplay opponents who were not familiar with his theories. Capablanca's play in this game though is on such a high level that it even goes beyond Nimzowitsch's celebrated theories of how to play in blocked positions!

3...♙f5 4 ♙d3



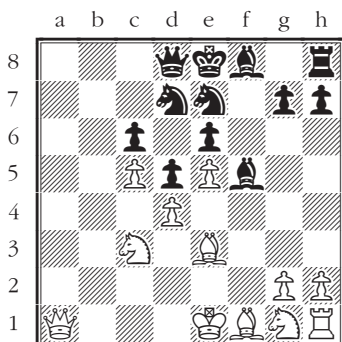
Nimzowitsch strives to trade Black's active bishop but it's not for free as a complex of weak white squares will be the result. Black can exploit the move by trading the bishops followed by a queen



Analysis diagram

Black's best reaction is to put immediate pressure on White's most aggressive pawns on c5 and e5.

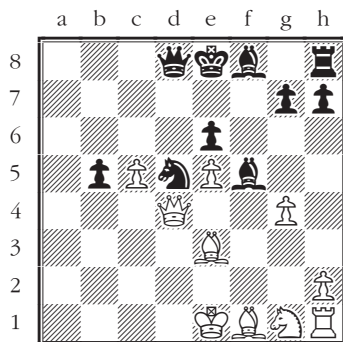
This can be achieved by playing 7...b6 8 b4 a5 9 ♖e3 axb4 10 axb4 bxc5 11 bxc5 ♜xa1 Black now decentralises White's queen. 12 ♜xa1 f6 13 f4 fxe5 14 fxe5



Analysis diagram

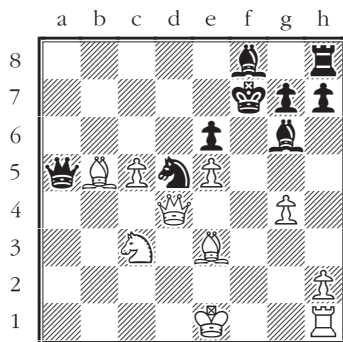
14...♞xe5! (14...♞xc5! 15 dxc5 d4 leads to the same position but it seems more principled to focus on the little centre.) 15 dxe5 d4 16 ♞b5! ♞d5!

17 ♞xd4 (17 ♜xd4 cxb5 18 g4! (Pastor Alonso de Prado – Ojeda Maroto, 2018) Black can equalise in several ways: The simplest is...



Analysis diagram

18...♜h4+ 19 ♞f2 ♜xg4 20 ♜xg4 ♞xg4 21 ♞xb5+ ♔f7=; More complicated is 18...♞g6 19 ♞xb5+ ♔f7 20 ♞e2 ♜a5+ 21 ♞c3

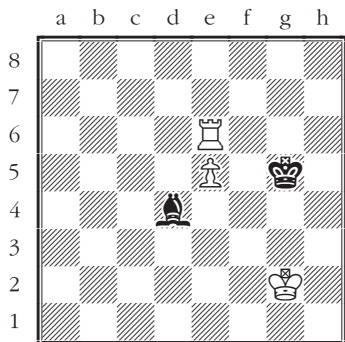


Analysis diagram

Black can draw by perpetual with 21...♜a1+ (21...♞xc3? loses to 22 ♜d7+ ♔g8 23 0-0 ♜a2 24 c6 and the pawn runs home; 21...♜xc3+ 22 ♜xc3 ♞xc3 holds

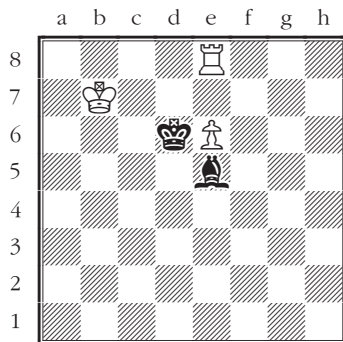
the draw as well after 23 0-0 ♔g8
 24 ♕c4! ♘d5 25 c6 ♕e4! 26 ♕xd5
 ♕xd5 27 c7 ♖b7 28 ♜b1 ♕c8
 29 ♜b8 ♕a6 30 c8=♞ ♕xc8
 31 ♜xc8 ♔f7 32 ♔g2 ♜g8
 and White cannot exploit his
 advantages in time and space.

However White can play on and
 use different pin motives: 33 ♜c7+
 (33 ♔f3 is answered by 33...♖b4
 or 33...♕a3 but not 33...♕e7?
 because then White would play
 34 ♜c7 ♔e8 35 ♔e4 with
 advantage.) 33...♔g6 34 h4 h5
 35 gxh5+ ♔xh5 36 ♜c8 ♔g4
 37 ♕c5 ♕xc5 38 ♜xg8 ♕d4
 39 ♜xg7+ ♔xh4 40 ♜g6 ♔h5
 41 ♜xe6 ♔g5



Analysis diagram

42 ♜e8 ♔f5 43 e6 ♕c5 44 ♔f3
 ♕d6 (Of course not 44...♔f6?
 45 ♔e4 ♕e7 46 ♔d5 and White
 wins.) 45 ♔e3 (White can try to
 penetrate on the kingside but Black
 will prevent this by the method of
 shouldering.) 45...♕c5+ 46 ♔d3
 ♔e5! 47 ♔c4 ♕d6 48 ♔b5 ♔d5!
 49 ♔b6 ♕e5 50 ♔b7 ♔d6!



Analysis diagram

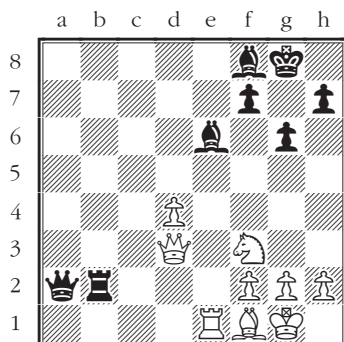
It is a theoretical draw because
 White cannot cooperate effectively
 with his rook and pawn. This
 position is useful to know as the
 ending might very well arise as
 a consequence of playing the
 Advance Variation with either
 colour.) 22 ♘d1 ♞a5+ 23 ♘c3
 ♞a1+ etc.

An even more complex
 possibility is 18...♞a5+ 19 ♕d2 b4
 20 gxf5 ♕xc5 21 ♞b2 (Or 21 ♞c4
 ♞a1+ with balanced play in a
 difficult position for both players.)
 21...0-0 22 ♕d3 ♜d8 23 ♘e2 ♘e3
 24 ♞b3 ♞a1+ with mutual chances
 in a very complicated position.)
 17...♞h4+ 18 g3 (18 ♔d1 cxb5
 [18...♞e4!?N is interesting.]
 19 ♕xb5+? (This natural move with
 a gain of tempo helps Black to
 develop his rook with decisive
 effect. Correct is 19 ♘f3 ♞g4
 20 ♕e2 with mutual chances.)
 19...♔f7 20 ♘f3 ♞g4 21 ♞b2
 ♕e7 and Black won in the
 game Grigorian – Pavlov, 2009)
 18...♞e4+ 19 ♔f2

18 ♖xd5 ♕xd5

18...♗xd5!?

19 0-0 ♖a8 20 ♖d3 ♖axa2
21 ♖xa2 ♕xa2 22 ♖e1 ♗f8
23 ♗f1!



23...♗b4

“The mousetrap, as Larsen calls it, would snap shut after 23...♖xf2 24 ♗e2!.” – Tournament book.

24 ♖c1!

After 24 ♖e2 ♖xe2 25 ♗xe2 ♕a1+ 26 ♗f1 ♗d5 White has the naive trap 27 ♖b5! ♗xf3 28 ♖xb4 ♗e2? 29 ♖b8+ ♔g7 30 ♖e5+ winning.

24...♖xf2 25 d5! ♖xf1+

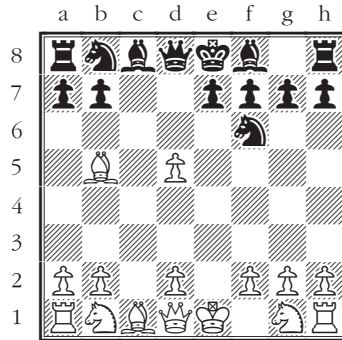
Black can equalise in many other ways too: 25...♗xd5 26 ♖d4 ♖xf1 27 ♖xf1 ♗f8=; 25...♗f5 26 ♖d4 ♖b2! =; 25...♖a7 26 ♖d4 ♖xd4 27 ♗xd4 ♖xf1+ 28 ♔xf1 ♗xd5=; 25...♗d7 26 d6 ♖a7 27 ♖c7 ♖b6 28 ♖d4 ♖xd4 29 ♗xd4 ♖d2=.

26 ♖xf1 ♖xd5 27 ♔h1 ♗e7
28 ♖d1 ♖b7 29 ♖b1 ♖a7 30 ♖a1
♖c5 31 ♗d2 ♔g7 32 ♖e1 ♖d4
33 ♖e2 ♗f6 34 ♗e4 ♗h4 35 ♖d1
♖e5 36 ♖f3 h5 37 ♖c3 ♖xc3
38 ♗xc3 ♗f6 39 ♗e4 ♗e5 40 ♔g1
♗f5 41 ♗c5 ♗c7 42 ♗a6 ♗f4
43 ♗b4 Draw.

Variation (B) 5 ♗b5+

1 e4 c6 2 c4 d5 3 cxd5 cxd5
4 exd5 ♗f6 5 ♗b5+

The point of the bishop check is essentially the same as 5 ♖a4+ but it is less venomous and less demanding to master. It has been played in 2,468 games with a normal statistical score of 56.4%.

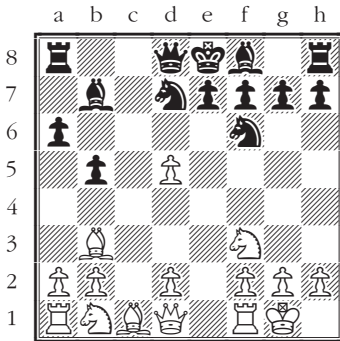


5...♗bd7

Though fully playable, 5...♗d7 6 ♗c4 b5 7 ♗b3 a5 8 a3! justifies White's set-up. More harmonious for Black is to wait a while with the development of his c8-bishop.

6 ♗c3

White naturally holds on to the pawn for as long as possible. However, the second most common move 6 ♖f3 has some psychological point as Black has to figure out *how* he wants to recapture the pawn. Upon 6...♗xd5 White has a slight initiative after 7 ♗c3 and if Black plays what is supposed to be the strongest continuation 6...a6 7 ♙a4 b5 8 ♙b3 ♙b7 9 0-0...

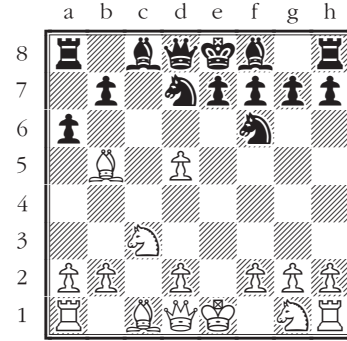


Analysis diagram

Black has three options whether to recapture the pawn with 9...♙xd5 or one of the knights, 9...♘xd5, respectively 9...♞b6. Which piece would you prefer and why? It is important to understand such nuances when facing the isolated pawn. I hope you have understood from all this that deep knowledge of isolani structures is a requirement to be successful in the Caro-Kann Defence. A good start would be to read Nimzowitsch's *My System* to get the basic and necessary knowledge of what according to him is one of the most

difficult problems to solve in middlegame theory.

6...a6



7 ♙a4

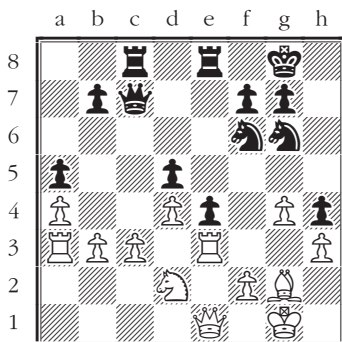
This is the main variation and without this move it would lose much of its point. It has been played 537 times with a statistic of 48.6% for Black. Four other moves have been played and we discuss them below in ascending order of popularity.

a) 7 ♙c4?! is the least important choice as it has been played in only 19 games so far and with a low statistical score of 42.1%. Hermann – Miles, West Germany 1984 continued 7...b5 8 ♙b3 ♙b7 (8...b4N and 9...♙b7 probably leads to the same position.) 9 ♗f3 (Agdestein – Gausel, 1996 saw 9 d4 which is more precise as it limits the scope of the queenside knight.) 9...b4 (9...♗c5 10 ♙c2 ♗xd5 with good piece play in Kueppers – Franke, 2019.) 10 ♗e2 (10 ♗a4 ♙xd5 was played in Hodgson –

19...h5! 20 ♖f1

On 20 h4 Black would have exploited the weakness on g4 by continuing 20...♗g4 21 ♖f1 f5.

20...h4 21 ♖e3 ♖e7 22 ♙a3 ♙xa3 23 ♖xa3 ♖ac8 24 g4 ♗g6 25 ♗d2



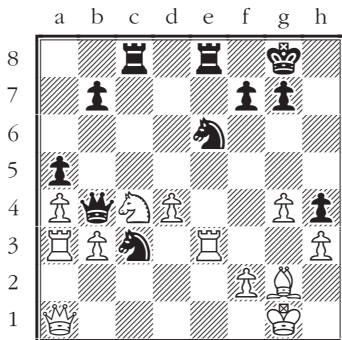
25...♗f4 26 c4

26 ♙f1 is answered by 26...♗h7.

26...♗b6 27 ♗a1 ♖e6 28 cxd5 ♗xd5 29 ♖c4

On 29 ♖xe4 Black plays 29...♗c3.

29...♗b4 30 ♖xe4 ♗c3 31 ♖e3



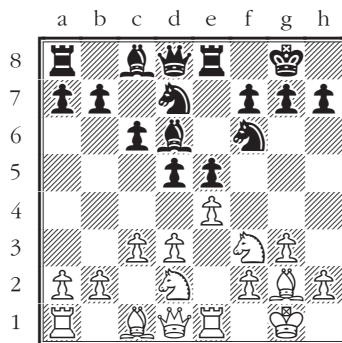
31...♗xd4 32 ♗e1 ♖xe3 White resigns.

Model Game 44

Ljubojević – Karpov
Buenos Aires 1980

1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 2 ♗d2 e5 4 ♗gf3 ♙d6 5 g3 ♗f6 6 ♙g2 0-0 7 0-0 ♖e8 8 8 ♖e1 ♗bd7 9 c3

White prepares expansion in the centre with a timely d3-d4 while securing c2 for the queen. This has been played in 213 games with a statistical score of 45.4%.



9...dxe4

It was better to keep the tension in the centre. A good moment to make this exchange is to wait until the d2-knight has declared its intentions – usually it lands on the available square f1. There are several interesting moves to improve the position for Black. One of them is 9...a5 which is the most commonly seen in practice. (9...h6!? and 9...♙f8!?) are other options.) 10 ♗c2 (10 d4 exd4 11 ♗xd4 ♖e5 12 exd5 ♗xd5 leads

to good piece play for Black.)
 10...a4 11 ♖b1 ♜c7 12 b4 axb3
 13 axb3 b5! Black removes the
 c4-square from White's knight
 according to Navarra's concept.
 14 ♙b2 g6 This is a prophylactic
 move to be able to meet 15 d4 dxe4
 16 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 17 ♚xe4 with
 17...f5 18 ♜e2 e4 and secure a
 space advantage. Black continues
 his development by ...♞f6 and
 ...♙e6.

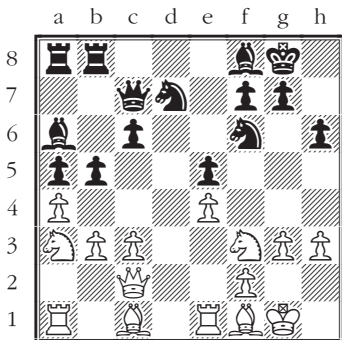
10 dxe4

It was better to liberate White's
 position by 10 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 11 dxe4
 with equal play. White's idea with
 the text move is to enable him to
 profit from the c4-square.

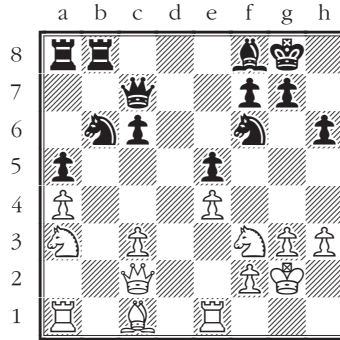
**10...♜c7 11 ♜c2 a5 12 ♞c4 ♙f8
 13 a4 b5**

White has not been allowed to
 settle his knight on c4 for a long
 time and it is now driven to the edge
 of the board.

**14 ♞a3 ♙a6 15 ♙f1 ♜eb8 16 b3
 h6 17 h3**



**17...bxa4 18 bxa4 ♙xf1 19 ♚xf1
 ♞b6 20 ♙g2**

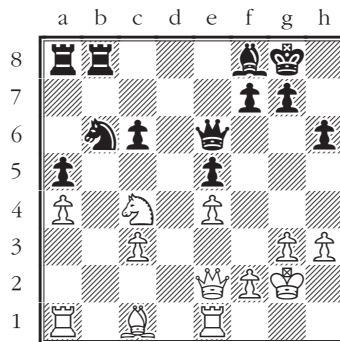


20...♞fd7

Black cannot win the battle
 for the c4-square because after
 20...♜d6 21 ♙e3 ♜e6 22 ♙xb6
 ♜xb6 23 ♞d2 ♙xa3 24 ♜xa3 ♜ab8
 White simply plays 25 ♜d3
 followed by 26 ♞c4.

**21 ♞d2 ♜d6 22 ♞ac4 ♞xc4
 23 ♞xc4 ♜e6 24 ♜e2 ♞b6**

The battle for the c4-square
 continues.



25 ♞b2

25 ♞xb6 ♜xb6 followed by
 26...♜b3 is not so dangerous as it