

Gerard Welling & Steve Giddins

Side-Stepping Mainline Theory

Cut Down on Chess Opening Study and Get a Middlegame

You are Familiar With

New In Chess 2019

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Introduction

Opening theory tends to play a disproportionately large role in the life of the average chess player. Most players spend the great majority of their chess study time on openings, yet still believe that this stage is their Achilles Heel and that they would be much stronger 'if only I knew my openings properly'. In reality, however, this is simply not the case. Except at the world championship or very top GM level, the openings are really not that huge a factor in success. The vast majority of games are decided by mistakes, usually tactical, in the middlegame or endgame, and for the typical amateur player, these mistakes are themselves often the result of spending so much time studying openings, at the expense of other aspects of the game. In his famous formulation of how many hours a player should need to advance from beginner to master, Emanuel Lasker argued that openings study should occupy just 10 of the 200 hours he thought necessary – a mere 5%! By contrast, most club and congress players nowadays probably spend 80% or more of their chess study time on openings.

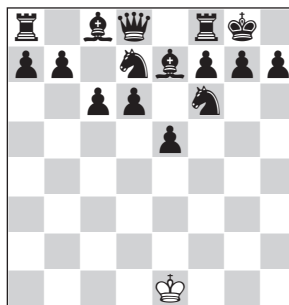
The problem with emulating the top GMs and playing the same openings that they play is that these openings are not really suitable for the average player. Mainly, they are extremely complex strategical lines, requiring a depth of understanding that is bound to be beyond the average amateur. Such depth is essential to top players, because it is the only way they can hope to outplay other top GMs – more simplistic approaches will not pose sufficient problems to their technically-trained opponents. However, for the average player, these deep main lines will be too subtle and difficult to handle effectively and, in addition, the detailed variations are extremely complex and change on an almost daily basis, requiring a large amount of memorisation and non-stop study, something quite beyond the resources of an amateur, who has limited time to devote to the game.

To use an analogy from another game, it is rather like an amateur snooker player, whose biggest-ever break is 20, watching the top players and deciding that he needs to spend all his practice time developing a really good safety game. It would be an absurd waste of time. Ronnie O'Sullivan needs really great safety play, because all of his opponents are quite capable of clearing the table every time they are allowed in with an easy starter pot. But if your snooker is limited to a few frames each week

at the local club, where two reds and two blacks counts as a ‘big break’, you are far better off concentrating on improving your potting than worrying about the intricacies of safety play.

Consequently, we firmly believe that, despite the growth in opening theory since **Lasker’s** time, and the explosion of databases, etc., **Lasker’s** basic point remains valid. For the average amateur, for whom chess is just a hobby to be fitted into a busy life of work and family, the aim should be to have an opening repertoire which involves the minimum amount of study and ongoing maintenance. Such players do not need to squeeze every drop of advantage from the opening, in the way that world championship contenders seek to do; rather, the only necessity is to emerge from the opening stage of the game with a reasonable position, from which one can then simply play chess and pit one’s own tactical and positional understanding against that of the opponent. That, after all, is what chess is about – it is not, or at least should not be, a memory contest. Such players also need openings which are not too deep and complex, with ideas and typical plans which can be mastered without the player having a world-class positional understanding.

The present book aims to equip such amateur players with a sound, rock-solid basic repertoire, which can be learned in the least possible time and which once learned, will require the bare minimum of ongoing maintenance and updating. Interestingly, when we began to compare thoughts on a possible repertoire, it transpired that both of us had in the past recommended the Old Indian-Hanham Philidor set-up to club players, so it took us little time to agree on this as the basis of our proposed repertoire here. Our basic formation is as follows:



As you can see, Black has developed in a self-contained way along his own first three ranks. This is a key point in seeking to avoid too much opening theory – if one tries to occupy a greater amount of space early on, then a clash with the enemy forces becomes inevitable (e.g. after 1.e4 e5, the e5-pawn can immediately come under pressure after White plays

♘f3, d2-d4, or even f2-f4, etc.) and this in turn means concrete variations, which one has to know and memorise. In our suggested formation, however, the only early point of contact between the forces is likely to be the e5-pawn, which is securely defended and can, if necessary, be further strengthened by moves such as ...♔c7 and/or ...♞e8 and ...♙f8. Black is therefore likely to be able to carry out his plans without undue interference from the opponent, and can hope in the great majority of cases to stay within his 'comfort zone'.

As the Roman poet **Virgil** so sagely observed, there is no such thing as a free lunch, and there are a couple of potential objections to our proposed set-up, which we should deal with here. One is that Black's position may appear cramped. It is true that Black has less space, at least at present, but this in itself is not the same as being cramped, and is not necessarily a disadvantage. A position is only really 'cramped' if it contains too little space for the pieces to operate effectively. In our case, the black pieces are quite well coordinated, and are not seriously tripping over one another. Only the QB and QR are currently suffering from a shortage of scope and this can be remedied by the typical expansion plan ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5, when the bishop can come to b7. Thus, Black's position cannot really be said to suffer from any acute space shortage and, meanwhile, he is extremely solid, with no weaknesses.

This last is an important point – it is much easier to handle a restrained but solid position than one with long-term weaknesses, where everything depends on highly accurate, dynamic counterplay, and in which the slightest inaccuracy can have serious consequences. In our set-up, Black is not operating on a knife-edge and even if he does not play the most precise move at every turn, it is unlikely his position will suddenly collapse. It is also noteworthy that modern computer engines, rather like old Dr **Tarrasch**, tend to underestimate such solid positions with a space disadvantage, so do not panic if you put the positions into an engine and see that it assesses them as better for White – unless it can point to a concrete tactical reason why White is better, you will find that in most cases, the assessment is just based on a point in its algorithm, where it has been told that more space is, *ipso facto*, an advantage. The hypermoderns disposed of that shibboleth a century ago.

The other possible objection is that the set-up we recommend is 'passive'. It is true that this repertoire is one for the patient positional player, one who likes to set up a solid position, defend where necessary and await the chance of a counterattack. If instead you are a very dynamic attacking player, who cannot wait to get to grips with the opponent's king and tear

his head off inside 25 moves, then this is not really the repertoire for you. Instead, you need to play much sharper lines, such as gambits, but of course, this also comes with a price tag – such lines require much greater study and memorisation, as well as frequently being of questionable soundness. Our repertoire seeks, in that time-worn phrase so beloved of annotators of old, ‘to shift the weight of the struggle to the middlegame’ (and even the endgame) and, thanks to the limited time investment needed to master the repertoire and maintain it, the player will have much more free time in which to study these other phases of the game.

As the reader will see, our repertoire can also be used as White, and Chapter 5 presents this side of it. The ‘passivity’ objection perhaps holds slightly greater force from White’s point of view, as most players tend to feel they should be more ambitious with the white pieces. But even here, there is much to be said for a more restrained approach, especially nowadays. The key points of wishing to limit opening study and memorisation, and to establish a solid position where one can rely on understanding, rather than memory, apply equally well with the white pieces. Furthermore, the modern computer-enhanced approach to chess has resulted in most sharp main lines being analysed almost to death. Indeed, formerly sharp gambits, such as the Marshall, are now used as a way of reaching a drawn endgame! It is noteworthy that **Carlsen** and many other top players nowadays increasingly resort to what have traditionally been considered passive, rather ‘boring’ white openings, such as the London System, in a bid to avoid an early clash of forces and instead reach a solid middlegame, where one can try to outplay the opponent. Our repertoire is another such approach and has even been used by **Carlsen** himself, to beat **Caruana** (see page 186)! Perhaps he should have repeated it in the 2018 World Championship match...

There is one other topic that we should address here and that is fear of the opponent’s preparation. Many club players chop and change their openings far too much and one excuse they often give is that they are reluctant to stick to a single opening, in case their opponents come prepared. There are three reasons why we believe this argument is flawed.

Firstly, it is very rare in practice for the average player to really prepare thoroughly for a game. Most club chess is played in evening leagues, with little or no advance warning about who one’s opponent is likely to be. Even if you are playing someone who knows you, it is very unlikely they will do much more than be aware of your favourite line – unlike a World Championship match, they are hardly going to spend days or weeks analysing your system and working out precise counter-lines.

Secondly, such detailed preparation is in any case only really effective in sharp, forcing variations, where the price of a mistake is high. In our system, events generally proceed much more slowly and not in a forcing way, so there is not really much scope for an opponent to mug up on some long, sharp variation, where you might get caught out. As we have already said, in our repertoire, Black is hardly ever walking a tightrope, where he needs to find the absolutely most accurate move at every turn, so, even if we are surprised by an opponent's choice of line, common sense and our general understanding of the position should enable us to find a perfectly reasonable reply. Probably only in the various ♙xf7+ lines of the Philidor (see page 113-114) does Black need to memorise a few precise variations.

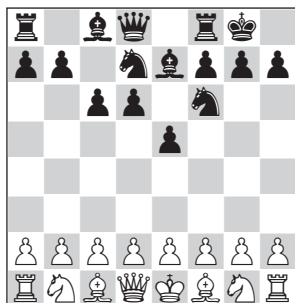
And finally, we have provided various options, in terms both of move-order and middlegame plans, which the reader can use to vary his play slightly, and thus avoid specific preparation, whilst remaining within the overall confines of the positions he knows and understands. If, for example, you usually play the Barendregt plan in the Philidor, but one day find yourself up against an opponent who you suspect has come prepared for that line, you can instead use the Pickett Shuffle plan, thereby avoiding his preparation, but still reaching a position you are familiar with and which is objectively perfectly sound. On other occasions, a slight change of move-order may serve to avoid the line he has prepared.

In what follows, then, we aim to equip the reader with all he needs to know in order first to reach the desired *tabiya* position and then to handle the resulting middlegame with confidence. We believe that the player who masters the material here will have a sound and fully viable, universal repertoire, which will serve him well for the remainder of his chess career, with the minimum of ongoing time investment.

CHAPTER 4

The Philidor against 1.e4

Introduction



The set-up shown for Black against 1.e4 is the Philidor Defence. It is a well-thought out and solid line, in which the lack of early exchanges and the fact that the game tends to come alive somewhat later means that it is also suitable for playing for a win...

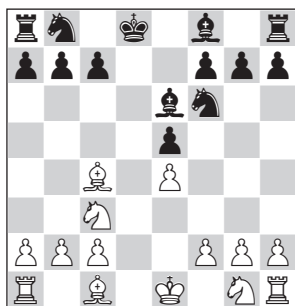
Here we will look at general strategic plans, but because the position is not closed, some tactical points can occur in the early stages and must also be considered. There will then be a general overview of each line and a consideration of move-orders. Finally, some illustrative games will follow which demonstrate the main ideas.

Strategy and ideas

Philidor endgame (I)

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♟f6 3.♟c3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5.♞xd8+ ♝xd8 6.♙c4 ♙e6

If Black is feeling especially cautious, he can play 6...♙e8, e.g. 7.♟f3 ♙d6 8.♙g5 ♟bd7 9.0-0-0 a6 10.♞he1 h6 11.♙h4 b5 12.♙b3 ♙b7= Rozentalis-Damljanovic, Evry 2008. With the text, Black accepts a doubled e-pawn, which is fully compensated for by his control of the central squares.



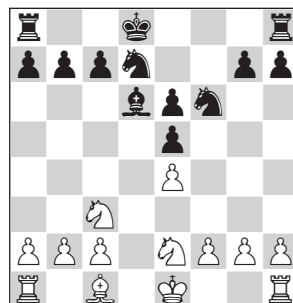
7.♙e6 fxe6 8.f3 ♙d6 9.♙e3 ♙e7 10.♟h3 a6 11.♟f2 ♟c6 12.♟d3 b5 Zifroni-Oratovsky, Israel 2003. The counterplay with ...a7-a6, ...b7-b5 and eventually ...♞hb8 and ...a6-a5, is typical of the variation.

Philidor endgame (II)

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♟f6 3.♟c3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5.♞xd8+ ♝xd8 6.♙c4 ♙e6 7.♙b3!?

An interesting try, which admits that the doubled black e-pawns after the exchange on e6 are probably not a real weakness and may even help Black.

7...♙d6 8.♟ge2 ♟bd7 9.♙xe6 fxe6

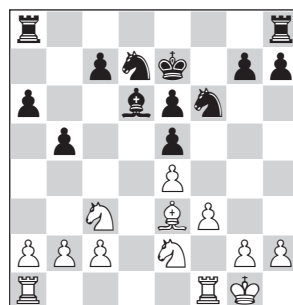


Now again we have the familiar structure, where the doubled pawn is not weak but controls many central squares.

10.f3 a6 11.♙e3 ♙e7 12.0-0

Or 12.0-0-0 b5 and it is a moot point whether the white king position is defensive or attacking.

12...b5



13.a3 ♞hb8 14.♞fb1 ♞b7 15.♟d1 a5 Gaining space, which should not be scorned. Black is already a tad better, A.Schneider-Welling, Bad Wiessee 2015.

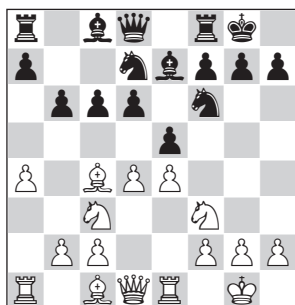
Barendregt's plan ...b7-b6-b5 (I)**1.e4 e5**

1...d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗c3 e5 4.♗f3 ♗bd7 would be our recommended move-order.

2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 ♗f6 4.♗c3

As noted, 4.dxe5! is more dangerous here.

4...♗bd7 5.♖c4 ♖e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♞e1! c6 8.a4 b6!



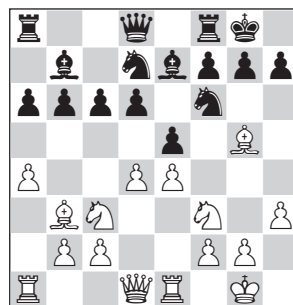
This plan of the Dutch master Barendregt intends to obtain counterplay by ...a7-a6, ...♖b7 and ...b7-b5.

9.h3

Interesting and perhaps critical is 9.d5 ♖b7 (an idea of Kosten's is 9...c5!? 10.a5 a6 11.axb6 ♗xb6, intending ...♗e8-c7 and ...♗b5 and/or ...f7-f5) 10.dxc6 ♖xc6 (White will fight tooth and nail to dominate d5, whilst Black seeks counterplay) 11.♖g5 a6 12.♖xf6 ♗xf6 13.♗d5! ♗xd5 14.♖xd5 ♖c8 15.c3 ♖c7 16.♖xc6 ♖xc6 17.♖d3 ♖c4 18.♞ed1 ♖xd3 19.♞xd3 f5 with counterplay, Jansa-Mokry, Trnava 1987.

9...a6 10.♖g5

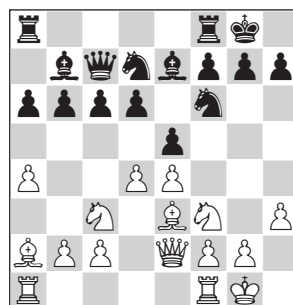
10.d5 c5; 10.♖f1 ♖b7 11.g3 b5 with counterplay.

10...♖b7 11.♖b3

11...b5 12.axb5 axb5 13.♞xa8 ♖xa8 with good counterplay, Antunes-Cifuentes Parada, Dubai Olympiad 1986.

Barendregt's plan ...b7-b6-b5 (II)**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♗f6 3.♗c3 e5 4.♗f3****♗bd7 5.♖c4 ♖e7 6.0-0 c6 7.a4 ♖c7****8.♖e2 0-0 9.h3**

On 9.a5 Black can seek counterplay in the centre against e4 or else stick to the usual plan with ...♞b8.

9...b6 10.♖e3 a6 11.♖a2 ♖b7**12.dxe5 dxe5**

Hans Ree usually prefers to capture with the knight, ...♗xe5, in such positions, so as to discourage White's ♗h4-f5.

13.♗h4 b5 14.♗f5 ♗c5

With counterplay, Enklaar-Barendregt, Amsterdam 1973.

Black plays ...exd4 (I)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.a4 c6
 8.♙a2 ♚c7 9.a5

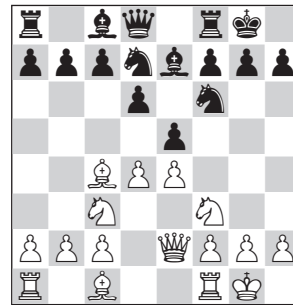


Now Black again has a chance to take on d4 and play against the e4-pawn.

9...exd4 10.♗xd4 ♗c5 11.♙f4 ♚b6
 12.♗b3 ♙e6 13.♙xe6 ♗xe6 14.♙e3
 ♚c7 15.♗d4 ♗xd4 16.♙xd4 ♖ad8=
 With a solid and comfortable position, Ivkov-Planinc, Amsterdam 1974.

Black plays ...exd4 (III)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♚e2



9...exd4

Now White has lost time with a4-a5. Black takes the opportunity to play ...exd4 and create pressure against e4.

10.♗xd4 ♖e8 11.♗f5 ♙f8 12.♗g3
 ♗c5 13.♖e1 ♙e6

Ree considers that Black stands comfortably, Ostojic-Ree, Budapest 1977.

Now Black begins counterplay, exploiting the fact that the white pieces are somewhat awkwardly placed in the centre.

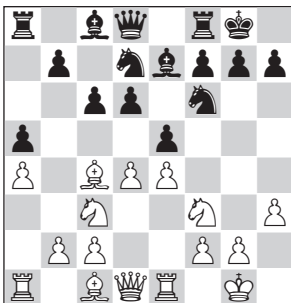
7...exd4! 8.♗xd4 ♗e5 9.♙b3 c5!
 10.♗f5
 10.♗db5 a6 11.♗a3 b5 12.♙d5 ♖a7
 13.♗ab1 b4 14.♗d1 ♗xd5 15.exd5
 favours Black, as does 10.♗f3 ♙g4
 11.♙f4 ♙xf3 12.gxf3 ♗g6 13.♙g3
 ♗h5 14.♗d5 ♙g5.

Black plays ...exd4 (II)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♖e1 c6
 8.a4 a5!?

Not allowing a4-a5.

9.h3

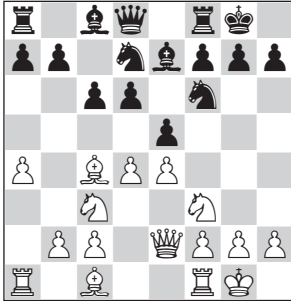


10...♙xf5 11.exf5 ♚d7!

With dynamic counterplay, Palciauskas-Staal, corr. 1975.

Black plays ...exd4 (IV)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♚e2 c6
 8.a4



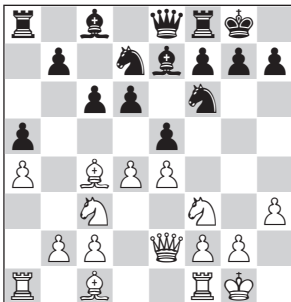
Another example where Black plays against the enemy pieces in the centre.

8...exd4 9.♗xd4 ♗e5 10.♙b3 c5!
 11.♗f5 ♙xf5 12.exf5 ♚d7 13.♗d5
 ♜fe8 14.c3 ♙d8 15.♗xf6+ ♙xf6
 16.♙d5 ♚xf5 17.♙xb7 ♜ad8 18.♙e4
 ♚e6

Black's position deserves preference, Åhman-Brglez, cr 1978.

Pickett Shuffle ... ♚e8 (I)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.a4 a5!?
 8.♚e2 c6 9.h3 ♚e8!?



Introduced by the English theoretician Len Pickett and played by Najdorf. Black takes advantage of the slow character of the play to transfer his ♙e7 to more fruitful squares, such as c7 or b6.

10.b3!

Trying to hamper Black's plan. Black can proceed with his plan undisturbed after 10.♙e3 ♙d8
 11.♜ad1 ♚e7 12.♜fe1 (12.dxe5 dxe5
 13.♜fe1 ♙b6) 12... ♙b6 (or 12... ♙c7).



analysis diagram

10...exd4 11.♗xd4 ♗e5 12.♙d3
 12.f4 ♗xc4 13.♚xc4 ♗xe4 14.♗xe4
 d5=.

12...d5?!

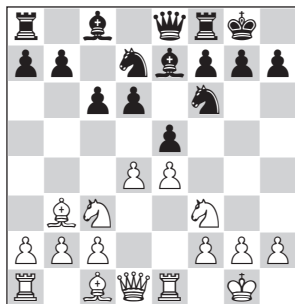
12...♙d7; 12...♗fd7.

13.exd5 ♙b4 14.♙b2 ♙xc3 15.♙xc3
 ♗xd5 16.♙d2 ♗xd3 17.♚xd3 b6

With equality. Analysis by Pickett.

Pickett Shuffle ... ♚e8 (II)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
 ♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.♙b3 0-0 7.0-0 c6
 8.♜e1 ♚e8!?



9. ♘h4

Aiming for ♘f5, to attack the dark squares directly.

9...exd4!

Black reacts in the centre.

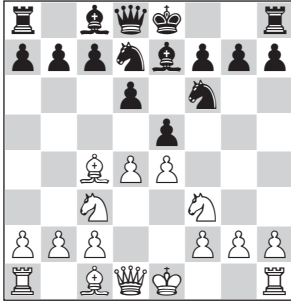
10. ♙xd4 ♘e5 11.f4 ♘fg4!

Black has excellent counterplay,
Riemersma-Welling, Leiden 1984.

Tactical motifs

White takes on f7 (I)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗c3
♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7



6.♙xf7+?!

Without the preliminary exchange
6.dxe5 dxe5 this is an unpromising
adventure.

6...♗xf7 7.♗g5+ ♔g8 8.♗e6 ♚e8
9.♗xc7 ♚g6 10.♗xa8 ♚xg2 11.♚f1

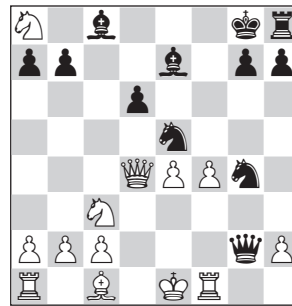


White has won material but Black
firmly takes over the initiative.

11...exd4! 12.♚xd4

12.♚e2 runs into the stylish
12...dxc3! 13.♚c4+ d5 14.♚xc8+
♔f7, and Black breaks through
decisively.

12...♗e5 13.f4 ♗fg4!



And Black's attack is ready to crash
through, Heidenfeld-Wolpert,
Johannesburg 1955.

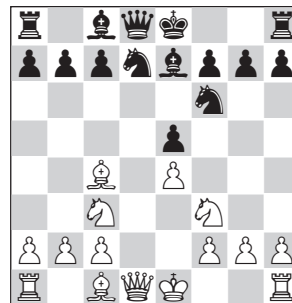
White takes on f7 (II)

1.e4 d6 2.d4 e5 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.♗c3
♗bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.dxe5

White can also attack f7 directly
with 6.♗g5 0-0 7.♙xf7+ ♚xf7
8.♗e6 ♚e8 9.♗xc7 ♚d8 10.♗xa8
whereupon there follows 10...
b5! 11.dxe5 (11.♗xb5 ♚a5+ 12.♗c3
♗xe4; 11.f3 ♙b7) 11...dxe5 see 7.♗g5.
Also good is 11...♗xe5!?

6...dxe5

Black can also avoid all
complications here with the quiet
and perfectly playable 6...♗xe5.



7. ♖g5 0-0 8. ♙xf7+ ♚xf7 9. ♗e6 ♜e8
10. ♗xc7 ♜d8 11. ♗xa8 b5!



12. ♗d5

12. ♗xb5 ♜a5+ 13. ♗c3 ♗xe4.

12... ♙d6! 13. 0-0

13. ♙g5 ♙b7.

13... ♙b7

with a perfectly playable position for Black, Arulaid-Heuer, Tartu ch-EST 1970.

White takes on f7 (III)

1. e4 e5 2. ♗f3 d6 3. d4 ♗f6 4. ♗c3

♗bd7 5. ♙c4 ♙e7 6. dxe5 dxe5

7. ♙xf7+?!



7... ♗xf7 8. ♗g5+ ♗g6!

If Black wishes to play for a win, he must take a risk. Playable, but about equal, is 8... ♗g8 9. ♗e6 ♜e8 10. ♗xc7 ♜g6 11. ♗xa8 ♜xg2 12. ♚f1 (without the preliminary exchange on e5, Black would now have excellent attacking chances with 11...exd4 and 12...♗e5 – see above) 12... ♗c5 13. ♜e2 ♙h3 14. ♙e3 ♜xf1+ 15. ♜xf1 ♙xf1 16. ♗xf1 ♗f7 (16... ♗e6 17. ♙xa7 ♗f7 18. ♗b6 ♙c5 19. ♗ca4!) 17. ♗c7 ♗fxe4 18. ♗xe4 ♗xe4 19. ♗d5 ♙c5=.

9. h4

9. ♗e6 ♜g8 10. ♗xc7 ♚b8—+.

9... h5 10. f4 exf4 11. ♗e2

11. ♗e6 ♜g8 12. ♗xc7 ♗e5! 13. ♗xa8

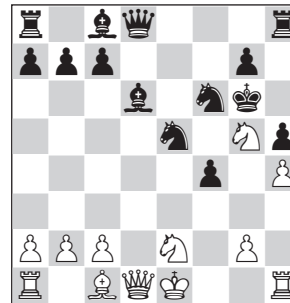
♙g4 14. ♜d4 ♗c6 15. ♜a4 ♜b8

16. ♜b5 f3! and White resigned in an old correspondence game Rosen-Schoisswohl, 1961.

11... ♙d6 12. e5

12. ♙xf4 ♗e5.

12... ♗xe5



13. ♗xf4+ ♗h6 14. ♗f7+ ♗xf7

15. ♗e6+ ♗h7 16. ♗xd8 ♚xd8—+

Analysis by Voronkov.

Move-orders

Philidor's Defence

1.e4 d6

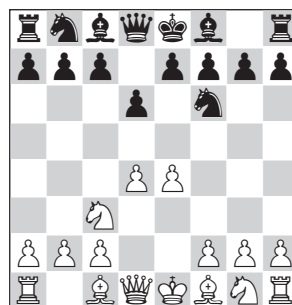
In bygone days, Black reached the Philidor by means of 1...e5 2.♘f3 d6, but then he has some theoretical problems in maintaining the pawn on e5:
3.d4



A) 3...♗f6 4.dxe5! ♗xe4 5.♖d5 ♗c5 6.♙g5 ♙e7 7.exd6 ♖xd6 8.♗c3 and White has a considerable development lead. Practice shows that Black is playing for a draw and has few practical winning chances;
B) 3...♗d7 (Hanham) 4.♙c4 c6 (necessary) 5.0-0 ♙e7 (the classical way to try to reach the tabiya position, but now White throws a spanner in the works) 6.dxe5 dxe5 (6...♗xe5? 7.♗xe5 dxe5 8.♖h5 loses material at once) 7.♗g5! ♙xg5 (7...♗h6 8.♗e6! fxe6 9.♙xh6 leaves Black problems) 8.♖h5 (E.Steiner-Brinckmann, Budapest 1929) 8...♖e7 (objectively best, since after 8...g6 9.♖xg5 ♖xg5 10.♙xg5 Black's position is weakened and he faces a powerful pair of bishops) 9.♙xg5

♗g6 10.♖e2 and White has a small but lasting advantage, which is not what Black wants from the main line of his repertoire.

2.d4 ♗f6 3.♗c3



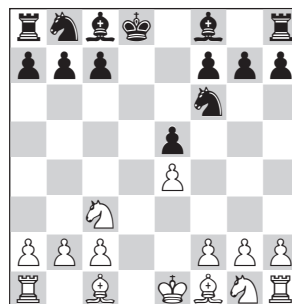
3...e5

Also possible is 3...♗bd7 but then Black must reckon with the sharp tries 4.f4 or even 4.g4!?. On the other hand, 4.♗f3 e5 leads to the basic Philidor position. See below.

4.dxe5

Here 4.♗f3 ♗bd7 again reaches the tabiya.

4...dxe5 5.♖xd8+ ♔xd8



6.♙c4

Principled; now what?

6...♙e6!?

Introduced by the Dutch master Johan Barendregt in the early 1960's and subsequently played by some top players. A solid alternative is 6...♖e8.

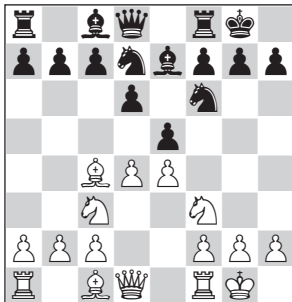
7. ♖xe6 fxe6

We have reached a middlegame without queens, in which Black has a doubled pawn and has lost castling rights. However, the e-pawns control many central squares and, especially, the ♘c3 has few prospects. Practice shows that the chances are roughly equal.

Main line

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♖c4 ♖e7 6.0-0 0-0

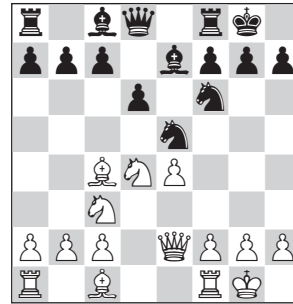
The basic position of the Philidor Defence.



7. ♖e1

After 7.♖e2, strong and dynamic is 7...exd4! (Black can now play according to his main plan with 7...c6 8.a4 exd4; 8...♖c7 9.a5 is also possible, when Black can either play in the centre with ...exd4 as in the games of Hans Ree, or stick to the standard plan with ...♖b8 and ...b7-b5; finally, Black also has an experimental set-up with 8...a5 9.h3

♖e8 in order to transfer the bishop to c7 or b6) 8.♘xd4 ♘e5

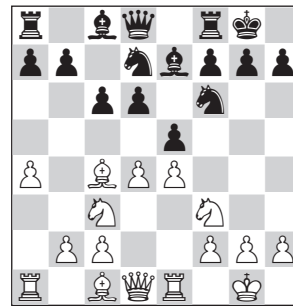


analysis diagram

9. ♖b3 c5.

Things usually transpose after 7.a4 c6 (also possible here is 7...a5) 8.a5 ♖c7 9.♖e1 see 7.♖e1.

7...c6 8.a4



8...b6!

Going straight for the Barendregt set-up with ...a7-a6, ...♖b7 and ...b6-b5. Also possible is 8...♖c7!? when after 9.a5 Black can play 9...exd4 and fight for counterplay in the centre.

A recent move-order wrinkle to opt for the Barendregt strategy is 8...♖b8!?

The experimental set-up 8...a5 9.h3 ♖e8!?, in order to re-position the bishop via d8, is also possible.

Illustrative games

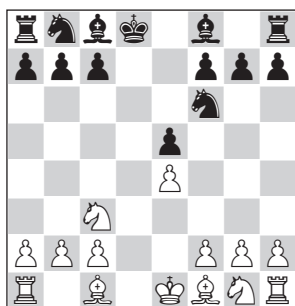
The Philidor endgame

Game 35

Michael Tscharotschkin 2247**Gerard Welling** 2371

Schwäbisch Gmünd 2009 (4)

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗c3 e5 4.dxe5
dxe5 5.♖xd8+ ♕xd8**



6.♗f3

A superficial developing move, after which Black has no problems.

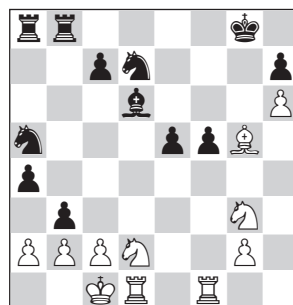
After 6.f4!? Black can side-step preparation with Bologan's

suggestion 6...♗c6!? 7.♗f3 ♘d6 8.♙b5 (8.fxe5 ♗xe5 9.♗xe5 ♙xe5) 8...♗d4 9.fxe5 ♗xf3+ 10.gxf3 ♙xe5 11.♙e3 c6 12.0-0-0+ ♖c7 13.♙c4 ♙e6 14.♙xe6 fxe6 15.♗a4 ♗d7 and Black holds the balance or choose the simple 6...♙d6 or 6...♙b4.

6...♙d6 7.♙g5

7.♙c4 ♙e6!? (7...♖e7 8.♙g5 ♙e6!) 8.♙xe6?! (8.♙b3, intending ♗g5) 8...fxe6 9.♙e3 ♗c6 and Black has reached a good version of the variation with 6.♙c4 ♙e6: 10.0-0-0 a6 11.♗d2 b5 (the usual

method of seeking counterplay) 12.f3 ♖e7 13.♗b3 ♗d7 14.h4 ♖hb8 15.h5 a5 16.h6 g6 (16...a4! 17.♗d2 g6) 17.♗e2 (17.a4 17...a4 18.♗d2 ♗a5! (intending ...b4-b3; 18...♗b4 19.a3; 18...b4 19.♗c4) 19.♙g5+ (19.♖b1 b4 20.c3 bxc3 21.♗xc3 ♖b4 22.♙c1 ♖ab8 23.♙c2 a3 24.b3 c5) 19...♖f7 20.♖hf1 (20.♖b1 b4) 20...♖g8 (20...b4 21.f4 ♖g8) 21.f4 (21.♖b1 b4 22.♙c1) 21...b4 22.f5 exf5 23.exf5 gxf5 24.♗g3 (24.♖xf5 b3) 24...b3! (24...f4 25.♗ge4 b3)



analysis diagram

25.cxb3 axb3 (25...f4 26.♗ge4 ♗c6!) 26.a3 f4 27.♗f5 (Walz-Welling, Schwäbisch Gmünd 2009; 27.♗ge4 ♗c6! 28.♗c4 ♗d4) 27...♙f8! 28.♗xd6 cxd6 29.♗e4 ♗c4 30.♗xd6 ♗e3 with a winning advantage for Black.

7...♙e6 8.0-0-0 ♗bd7 9.♙b5 ♖c8 10.♙xd7+?!

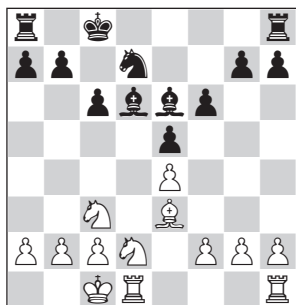
Now Black gets a very comfortable position. Perhaps better was 10.♙xf6 ♗xf6 11.♗g5 a6.

10...♗xd7

Black should now attack the light squares (target: c2). White in turn

needs to place the pawns on light squares.

11. ♖e3 f6 12. ♗d2 c6
12...a6 13. ♗d5.



13. ♗b3 ♖b4! 14. ♗e2 a5 15. c3 ♖e7
16. ♖b1 ♖c7

With hindsight, more accurate is 16...a4! 17. ♗bc1 (17. ♗d2 ♖c5) 17...♗c5 (17...b5; 17...f5 18.f3 fxe4 19.fxe4 ♗c5) 18.f3 ♖c7.

17.f3 h5!

An excellent decision to play on two fronts; now Black has a clear initiative. 17...a4 18. ♗bc1 ♗c5 (18...b5) 19.g4 g6 is less precise.

18.h3 h4 19.f4 a4 20. ♗d2

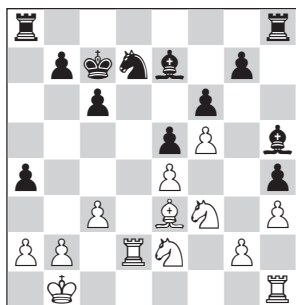
20. ♗bc1 ♗c5.

20... ♖f7

20... ♖c5.

21. ♗f3 ♖g6 22.f5 ♖h5! 23. ♖d2

23.c4 g6.



23...g5!?

Also possible was 23...♗c5 24. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 25. ♖hd1 ♖hd8. Black utilises a tactical point to strengthen his control of the dark squares.

24. ♖hd1 ♖ad8

24...♖hd8.

25.c4 a3 26.b3? ♖b4 27. ♖d3 ♗c5

28. ♖xc5 ♖xd3

Also good is 28...♖xc5 29. ♗c3 ♖xd3 30. ♖xd3 ♖d8 31. ♖xd8 ♗xd8 32. ♗a4 ♖f2 33.c5 g4 and the bishops dominate.

29. ♖b6+ ♗xb6 30. ♖xd3 ♖c7

31. ♖c2 ♖c5

31...♖d8 32. ♖xd8 ♗xd8 33. ♗c1 b6 34. ♗d3 ♖d6 35.b4.

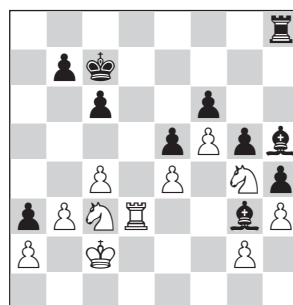
32. ♗c3

32. ♖c3 b5 33.cxb5 cxb5 34. ♖d2 b4.

32... ♖f2 33. ♗h2

33. ♗d1 ♖g3 34. ♗e3.

33... ♖g3 34. ♗g4



At first sight, it appears that White has a blockade.

34... ♖xg4!

The best decision, as the rook ending is probably winning.

35.hxg4 h3!! 36. ♗e2

36.gxh3 ♖xh3 and the rook escapes.

36...h2 37. ♗xg3 h1 ♖ 38. ♗xh1 ♖xh1

39. ♖d2 ♖h4

Winning back the sacrificed pawn, with a vastly more active rook.

40. ♖e2 ♜xg4 41. c5

41. b4 c5! 42. ♖b3 ♜g3+ 43. ♖a4 ♖c6;
41. ♖c3 c5 42. ♖c2 ♖b6 43. ♖d2 ♖a5
44. ♖c2 ♖b4 45. ♖d2 ♜g3 46. ♖c2
♜c3+ 47. ♖d2 g4.

41...b6! 42. ♖c3

42. cxb6+ ♖xb6 43. ♖d3 ♖b5.

42...bxc5 43. ♖c4 ♖b6 44. b4 cxb4

45. ♖xb4 ♜g3 46. ♖c4 ♖a5

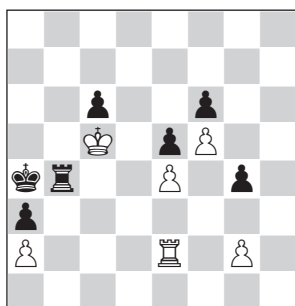
46...g4 47. ♜d2 (47. ♖b4 c5+ 48. ♖c4
♖c6) 47...♜e3.

47. ♖c5 ♜d3 48. ♜c2

48. ♖xc6 ♖b4 49. g4 ♜d4 50. ♖c7
♖c3.

48...g4 49. ♜e2 ♜d4 50. ♜e3 ♖a4

51. ♜e2 ♜b4



52. ♜c2 ♜xe4

52...♜b2.

53. ♖d6 ♜b4 54. ♜xc6 ♜b2 55. ♜c4+

♖b5 56. ♜xg4 ♜xa2 57. ♜g8 ♜d2+

58. ♖e6 a2 59. ♜a8 e4 0-1

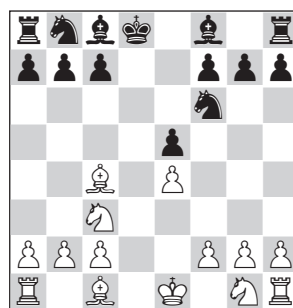
Game 36

Andreas Schneider 2025

Gerard Welling 2334

Bad Wiessee 2015 (3)

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♖c3 e5 4.dxe5
dxe5 5.♙xd8+ ♖xd8 6.♙c4**



6... ♙e6 7. ♙b3 ♙d6 8. ♘g2 ♘bd7

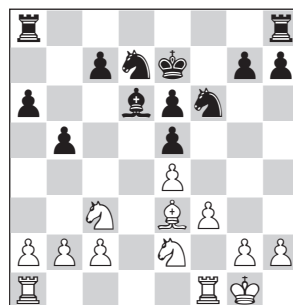
9. ♙xe6 fxe6

Now we reach the familiar structure, in which the doubled pawn is not weak but controls a lot of squares.

10.f3 a6 11. ♙e3 ♖e7 12.0-0

Or 12.0-0-0 b5 when it is a moot point whether the white king's position can be considered an attacking or a defensive one.

12...b5



13.a3 ♜hb8 14. ♜fb1 ♜b7 15. ♘d1 a5

This space gain should not be scorned.

16. ♘f2 ♙c5!?

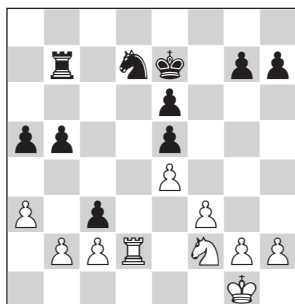
An interesting but double-edged decision. Black exchanges off his 'bad bishop', but the piece was doing a good job defensively. The move proves justified, thanks to sloppy counterplay by White.

17. ♖xc5+ ♜xc5 18. ♞d1 ♞a6 19. ♜c1 ♞d6 20. ♜cd3 ♜fd7 21. ♞d2 ♜xd3 22. ♜xd3 c5

Gaining even more space.

23. ♞ad1 c4 24. ♜f2 ♞xd2 25. ♞xd2 c3!

Breaking up the white structure, which must be beneficial.



26. bxc3 ♞c7 27. c4?!

27. ♞d3 ♜b6 28. ♜g4 ♜c4 with advantage; 27. ♜d1 ♜b6.

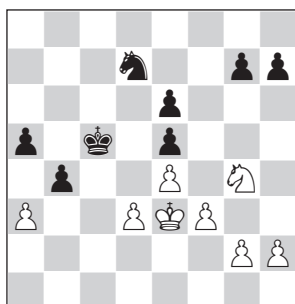
27... ♞xc4 28. ♜g4 ♞c3 29. ♞d3 ♞xd3!

29... ♞xc2 30. ♞b3 ♞c5 31. ♜f1 and 31... h5 32. ♜f2 is not so simple.

30. cxd3 ♜d6

30... b4 also looks strong.

31. ♜f2 ♜c5 32. ♜e3 b4



33. axb4+

33. ♜xe5 is too late: 33... bxa3! (or 33... ♜xe5 34. d4+ ♜c4 35. axb4 a4) wins for Black.

33... ♜xb4

The rook's pawn is the deadliest enemy of the knight.

34. ♜d2 ♜b3 35. f4

Panic, but also 35. ♜e3 a4 36. ♜c2 a3 loses.

35... exf4 36. d4 ♜c4 37. d5 exd5

38. e5 ♜c5 0-1

Game 37

Daniel Hristodorescu 2253

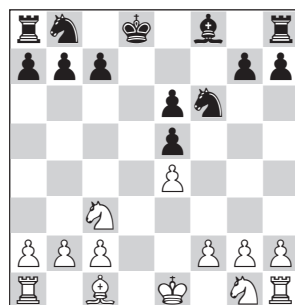
Sergey Kasparov 2458

Den Helder 2002 (3)

1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♜f6 3. ♜c3 e5 4. dxe5

dxe5 5. ♞xd8+ ♜xd8 6. ♖c4 ♖e6

7. ♖xe6 fxe6



8. f3

The position arising after 8. ♜f3 ♖d6 9. h3 ♜e7 10. ♖e3 a6 11. a3 ♜bd7 12. 0-0 b5 13. ♜d2 from Zarinfam-S. Kasparov, Ahvaz 2007, gives rise to an interesting question. Black exchanged the 'bad bishop' with 13... ♖c5. This was also the case in the game A. Schneider-Welling but grandmaster Hickl, who is a notable expert in this line, has made the remark that this bishop is often important to keep Black's central fortress together and it may be

better to refrain from the exchange.
Food for thought.

8...♙d6



9.b3

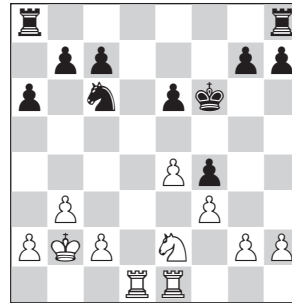
In Khrushchiov-S.Kasparov, Minsk zt 2000, White continued 9.♙e3 a6 10.♗ge2 ♜e7 11.♗c1 ♗bd7 12.♗d3, on which Black reacted with the space-gaining 12...c5!? 13.a4 c4 14.♗f2 and exchanged the bishops with 14...♙c5, which gave him a reasonable game. In his interesting and detailed book *A Cunning Chess Opening for Black* S.Kasparov suggests 14...♙ac8!? as an alternative. With the text move White intends to pressurise e5 but Black is well prepared to counter that idea. Dzindzichashvili gives as an alternative 9...♗bd7 10.0-0-0 ♜e7 11.♗ge2 a6 12.♙d2 b5.

9...♜e7 10.♗h3 a6 11.♗f2 ♗c6 12.♗d3 b5 Zifroni-Oratovsky, Israel tt 2003, and the counterplay with ...a7-a6, ...b7-b5 and eventually ...♙hb8 and ...a6-a5, is typical for this variation.

9...a6 10.♙b2 ♜e7 11.♗h3 ♗c6 12.♗f2 ♗h5!? 13.♗d3 ♗f4 14.♗xf4 exf4

Now e5 is available for a black minor piece and Black is perfectly fine.

15.0-0-0 ♙e5 16.♙he1 ♜f6 17.♗e2 ♙xb2+ 18.♜xb2



18...e5?!

18...g5 seems more in line with Black's previous play, for example 19.♙d7 ♙ac8 with ...♗e5 coming, and 20.h4 h6 does not help White.

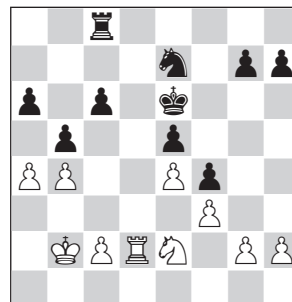
19.♙d7 ♙ac8 20.♗c3 ♙hd8 21.♙ed1 Black's point was that after 21.♗d5+ ♜g6 22.♙xc7? ♙xc7 23.♗xc7 ♙d2 he takes over.

21...♙xd7 22.♙xd7 ♗e7 23.b4 White is better after 23.♗d5+ ♗xd5 24.exd5, e.g. 24...h5 25.d6 cxd6 26.♙xd6+ ♜e7 27.♙b6 with pressure.

23...♜e6

Now the position is more or less equal.

24.♙d2 b5 25.a4 c6 26.♗e2



26...bxa4

An ugly move but clearly best, the paradox of some positions.

27. ♖a3

27. ♖c3 c5 is probably more accurate as Black now gains some initiative.

27...c5 28. ♖xa4 cxb4 29. ♖xb4 ♖c6+

30. ♖a3? ♖a5

This should have been stopped.

31. ♖b4 ♖c4 32. ♖d1 ♖e3 33. ♖c1

♖xc2 34. ♖xc2 ♖xc2+ 35. ♖a5 ♖e1

36. ♖xa6 ♖xg2

A pawn to the good in the knight and pawn endgame Black should be winning. And he did!

37. ♖b6 ♖e1 38. ♖g1 ♖c2 39. ♖c5

♖d4 40. ♖c4 g5 41. ♖d3 h5 42. h3

♖d6 43. ♖c4 ♖c2 44. ♖d3 ♖a3

45. ♖e2 ♖c5 46. ♖c3 ♖b5 47. ♖e2

♖b4 48. ♖d2 ♖c4 49. ♖e1 ♖d4

50. ♖g1 ♖d3 51. ♖f2 h4 52. ♖f1 ♖e3

53. ♖g2 ♖e2 0-1

Game 38

Andrei Sokolovs 2360

Viktor Bologan 2530

Jurmala 1991

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♖f6 3. ♖c3 e5 4.dxe5

dxe5 5. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 6. ♖c4 ♖e8

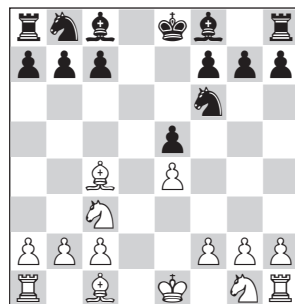
With 6... ♖e6 7. ♖xe6 fxe6 Black plays for square control in the centre, and we have seen that he stands perfectly well.

The text move is also a valid alternative, however, and avoids compromising the pawn structure.

In practice, it is perhaps slightly more difficult to handle than

6... ♖e6, as here Black must be aware of potential traps involving ♖b5 or ♖d5, but providing he plays

accurately for a few moves, his position is very sound. We therefore offer this as an alternative, which Black can perhaps use to surprise opponents who may be ready for 6... ♖e6.



7. ♖e2

After 7.f4 Black has more than

one option, but 7... ♖d6 8. ♖f3

♖bd7 is a solid reply and on 9.g3

he can consider 9...c6, which does

not seem a bad choice instead

of the theoretical but unclear

consequences after 9... ♖b4 10.0-0!

Logical and often played is 7. ♖f3,

for example 7... ♖d6 8. ♖g5 ♖bd7

9.0-0-0 a6 10. ♖he1 (10.a4 h6 11. ♖h4

b6 is OK for Black) 10...h6 11. ♖h4

b5 12. ♖b3 ♖b7 with an equal game,

Rozentalis-Damljanovic, Evry 2008.

7...c6

The actual move-order in the

game was 3...c6 4.f3 e5 5.dxe5 dxe5

6. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 7. ♖c4 ♖e8.

8. ♖g5

8.a4 a5 9.f3 (9. ♖e3 ♖g4 10. ♖d2 ♖c5

11.0-0 ♖d7 with the idea ...♖e7,

... ♖d6 and ...♖c5) 9...h5!? 10.h4 ♖c5

11. ♖d2 ♖bd7 12. ♖c1 (Nguyen Ngoc

Truong Son-Bologan, Moscow 2007)

12... ♖d4 (in the game after 12... ♖d6

13.♖d3 the exchange 13...♗c5 came into consideration) 13.♗d3 ♗c5 14.0-0-0 ♗xd3+ 15.♗xd3 ♗d7, with counterplay for Black, was suggested by Barsky.

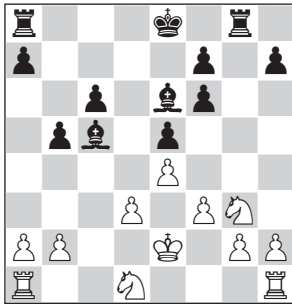
8...♗bd7 9.f3 b5 10.♗d3 ♗c5

White's set-up is not to be recommended as it gives Black ample opportunities for counterplay.

11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.♗g3 ♗xd3+

13.cxd3 ♖g8 14.♗d1 ♗e6 15.♖e2 ♗c5

With the bishop pair and pressure along the open g-file Black is better.



16.♗e3

Winning a pawn with 16.♖c1 ♗b6 17.♖xc6 is a temporary gain as after 17...♗d7 18.♖c1 h5 19.♖f1? h4 20.♗h5 (neither 20.♗f5 ♗xf5 21.exf5 ♗d4 nor 20.♗e2 ♖ac8 help White much) 20...♖e7 21.g4 ♖gc8 White's position is close to lost.

16...♗d4 17.♖hb1

17.♖ac1 ♗d7 18.b3, although Black is better. Things go rapidly downhill now.

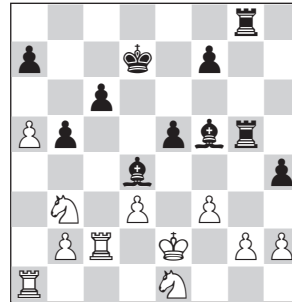
17...♖g5 18.♗c2 ♗b6 19.♖c1 ♗d7

20.a4 h5 21.a5 ♗c5 22.♗e1 ♗d4

23.♖c2 h4 24.♗f1 f5 25.exf5 ♗xf5

26.♗d2 ♖ag8 27.♗b3?

A mistake in a bad position.



27...♗xb2! 28.♖a2

28.♖xb2 ♖xg2+ wins

28...♗d4 29.♗xd4 exd4 30.♖ab2

♗d6 31.♖b4 ♗d5 32.♖b1 ♖xg2+ 0-1

Game 39

Peter Acs 2601

Dorian Rogozenco 2522

Germany Bundesliga 2010/11 (6)

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♗f6 3.♗c3 e5 4.dxe5

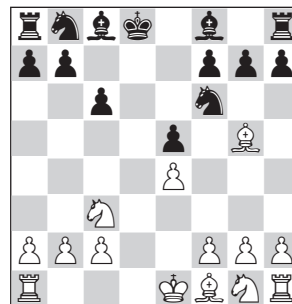
dx5 5.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 6.♗g5 ♗bd7

Why not? Besides the theoretical

6...♗e6, which after 7.0-0-0+

leads to complications that are perfectly playable, Black has several reasonable replies to side-step extensive memorisation:

A) 6...c6:



analysis diagram

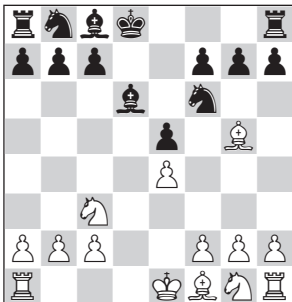
A1) 7.♘f3 ♖d6 (7...♘bd7!? 8.0-0-0 ♜e8 9.♖h4 ♖c5 looks solid, Vaissier-Moskalenko, Fuerteventura 1992) 8.0-0-0 ♜e7 9.♖c4 ♖c7 with sufficient square control to hold the balance, Moen-Pelletier, Eilat 2012;

A2) 7.0-0-0+ ♜e8 8.f4 ♘bd7 9.fxe5 ♘g4! (thematic once again) 10.e6 fxe6 11.♘h3 ♖e7 12.♖xe7 ♜xe7 13.♖e2 ♘ge5 14.♗hf1 (Riff-Pelletier, France 2010) and now maybe the cautious 14...♗f8 or the adventurous 14...b5;

A3) 7.f4 exf4 (7...h6 8.♖xf6+ (8.0-0-0+ ♜c7 9.♖xf6 gxf6 10.f5 ♖b4 11.♗d3 b6 12.a3 ♖f8 13.♗h3 a5 14.a4 ♖a6 15.♘f3 ♖xf1 16.♗xf1 ♘a6 should be about equal, Fletcher-Richmond, Cardiff 1995) 8...gxf6 9.♖c4 ♖e6 10.0-0-0+ ♘d7 11.♖xe6 fxe6 12.fxe5 fxe5 13.♘ge2 (13.♘f3 ♜c7) 13...♗g8 14.♗hf1 ♖e7 15.g3 ♜e8 16.a4 h5 and Black holds the balance, Petr-Sebenik, Szeged 2007) 8.e5 h6 9.♖xf4 (Jobava-Lazic, Milan 2011), and engines suggest 9...g5!?

10.♖d2 ♘g4 11.♘f3 ♘d7 with a reasonable game;

B) 6...♖d6 is another of several dependable replies.



analysis diagram

7.0-0-0 (7.♖c4 ♖e6; 7.♘d5 ♘bd7 8.♖c4 ♜e8 Sasu Ducsoara-Litinskaya, Dresden 1997) 7...♘bd7 8.♘f3 (8.f3 a6 Veresagin-Akhmetov, Orel 1996) 8...♜e8 9.♖b5!?

and S.Kasparov suggests 9...a6 10.♖xd7+ ♘xd7 11.♘d5 f6 12.♖e3 b5 13.♗d3 ♖b7 14.♗hd1 ♗d8. White may be a bit better but Black is solid.

7.0-0-0

7.♖c4 is simply met by 7...♜e8.

7...c6 8.f4 ♖e7 9.♘f3

9.fxe5 ♘g4 is thematic and quite OK.

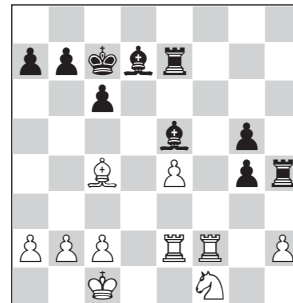
9...♘g4 10.♗d2 f6 11.fxe5 fxe5 12.e6 ♜c7 13.exd7 ♖xd7

The complications have turned out in Black's favour.

14.♖c4 ♖f6 15.♘d1 ♗ae8 16.♗e1 ♗e7 17.♘f2 ♘xf2 18.♗xf2 g4 19.♘d2 ♖e5 20.g3 h5 21.♘f1 h4

Targeting g3.

22.gxh4 ♗xh4 23.♗ee2 g5



24.♗f7?

A tactical mistake.

24...♗xf7 25.♖xf7 g3! 26.♘xg3 26.hxg3 ♗h1 27.♗f2 ♖d4 28.♗f3 ♖g4.

26...♖f4+ 27.♜d1

27.♜b1 ♖xg3.

27...♖g4 0-1