



## COLUMNISTS

### *Let's Take A Look...*

Nigel Davies

We invite you to submit games to be considered by Nigel in this column. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know. Please submit the games (in PGN or CBV format if possible) to: [nigeldavies@chesscafe.com](mailto:nigeldavies@chesscafe.com). Who knows, perhaps you will see the game in an upcoming column, as Nigel says to you, "Let's take a look..."

### Amateur Chess Is Different!

At top GM level chess has become a kind of arms race in which the tentacles of theory now reach well into the middle-game. Most top professionals would not dream of going to a tournament without having their laptop computer and the latest games. They might even garner the most recent games from the internet during an event and then analyze them with Fritz or Crafty in search of flaws and improvements. If one of their opponents is caught unawares it could mean a relatively easy point...

What does this mean for the average chess enthusiast? On the face of it not much; when I first started analyzing lots of club players' games in the mid-1990s I discovered for myself that amateur chess

is very different. Relatively few players follow main line openings so after 1 e4 c5 it's actually rather unlikely that you'll reach a main line Sicilian. Usually there will be something different on the second move such as 2 c3, 2 f4, 2 Nc3 (followed by either 3 f4 or 3 g3) or 2 d4. And if you get 2 Nf3, there's still a strong possibility that it will be followed by 3 c3, 3 Bb5 or 3 b3.

This is hardly surprising when you think about it. Most amateurs have little time for chess because of their job plus family or other commitments so they're not going to want to spend dozens of hours studying Najdorf theory. The conclusion they usually reach is that it's better to have a relatively low maintenance approach to the openings in which they can learn what they should be doing in a relatively short time. Of course there can be pitfalls with this approach...

Let's suppose that someone has picked up Daniel King's "Winning With The Najdorf". After a quick look at this book they'll learn a few basic ideas for Black such as putting pressure on White's e4 pawn with ...b7-b5 and ...Bc8-b7. It may seem useful to know this plan, but there again it might pop into your head in inappropriate situations.

I began to realize this after I once taught one of my young students to play 2 c3 against the Sicilian. After he'd had a few games with it we noticed something interesting; players who had learned the moves of the Najdorf (1...c5, 2 ...d6, 3...cxd4, 4...Nf6 and 5...a6) would often repeat them against his 2 c3. So his games would go 1 e4 c5 2 c3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 at which point White already has a nice position from the opening

because of his central pawns on e4 and d4. Very often Black would then compound his problems by continuing in 'Najdorf style' with ...b7-b5, ...Nb8-d7 and ...Bc8-b7 etc.

The implications of this are even more interesting. By second-guessing the plans and ideas most club players are familiar with, could we try to construct an 'amateur hostile repertoire'. For example a well-known idea is to play Be3, Qd2, Bh6 and h2-h4-h5 against a Black king-side fianchetto. This can be a useful plan but it should not be applied indiscriminately; what if we find a position in which it is inappropriate for our opponents to play it?

There are a few ways one might do this; one idea is to adopt the Pirc Defence. After seeing 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 many White players will be itching to play the plan they 'know' and start out with 4 Be3. Yet Black is by no means committed to castling king-side into White's intended attack and can instead gain space on the queen-side with 4...c6 5 Qd2 b5, threatening the e4 pawn with 6...b4. After the subsequent 6 f3 Nbd7 7 0-0-0 Qa5 it is Black who has the makings of a strong attack whilst White's own efforts are ineffective in this particular situation.

Let's also consider the Sicilian Dragon. In the 'normal Dragon' with 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6, everyone knows that it's good to play 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 followed by 0-0-0 and h2-h4-h5 etc. But if Black plays an Accelerated

Dragon with 2...Nc6, a similar sequence of moves will give him a good game. My proposed line is 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 after which Black can play 8...d5 without first moving his pawn to d6.

This is one of the reasons that I think that the Accelerated Dragon is a much better choice at club level than the 'real' 2...d6 Dragon. The other is that White's best line in the Accelerated, the Maroczy Bind (2...Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 c4), is not handled well by amateurs. You often see them lurching forward on the king-side with a premature f2-f4 when White's main idea should be to sit on his space.

What other characteristics of amateur chess can we use? Well one is the tendency for people to be quite uncomfortable in positions if their opponent's pieces are active. The roots of this bias may be in the fact that it's usually brilliant attacking games that are published. If you see enough of these it can foster a belief that this is how chess should be played and that the defender always loses to some brilliant coup.

This in turn suggests that openings which give attacking chances are likely to do well in amateur chess even if they score badly against the likes of super-GM Mikhail Gurevich. So into consideration come a whole range of offbeat but aggressive lines such as the 2 Nc3 and 3 f4 against the Sicilian and gambits like the Budapest, Albin, Latvian, Evans etc. And these things can be great fun...

The following game, from the 1996 US Open, is a case in point, White winning brilliantly with the 'dubious' Smith-Morra Gambit. It's not easy to pull off wins like this in the main lines of the Sicilian:

***Whiteman, S (2015) - Schaetzle, W (1800)***  
**Sicilian Defence, Morra Gambit**  
**US Open, 1996**

**1 e4 c5 2 d4**

Introducing the Morra Gambit, a feared opening in many circles due to the accuracy with which Black must conduct the defense. In Grandmaster chess it has scored very badly because of the higher standard of defensive technique and greater likelihood that an extra pawn might decide the game.

**2...cxd4 3 c3 dxc3**

I have no doubt that this is the correct move, *but* Black needs to know what he's doing. If Black meets the 2 c3 Sicilian with 2...Nf6 he could play 3...Nf6, which results in a direct transposition after 4 e5 Nd5 etc. Another good way to decline is with 3...d3 and after 4 Bxd3 set up a 'hedgehog' formation with ...e6, ...d6, ...Ngf6, ...Be7, ...Nbd7, ...a6, ...b6, ...Bc8-b7, ...0-0. This may be psychologically very effective as the kind of player who uses the Morra may not be very suited to handling a more stable position in which great patience is required.

**4 Nxc3 Nc6 5 Nf3 g6**

Setting up an 'Accelerated Dragon' formation. But is it appropriate in this particular position? In his book "Beating the Anti-Sicilians" Joe Gallagher recommends 5...d6 6 Bc4 a6 (And not 6...Nf6?! because of 7 e5 dxe5 8 Qxd8+ Nxd8 9 Nb5 etc) 7 0-0 Nf6 after which 8 Qe2 is well met by 8...Bg4. 8 h3 would have been better to prevent this move. Black would then go for a 'Scheveningen' type formation with 8...e6 but having extracted a slight loss of time from White.

Another good line is 5...e6 6 Bc4 a6, yet here too White's active pieces will mean that Black must defend accurately, even if the position is good for him 'objectively'.

**6 Bc4 Bg7 7 e5!?**

An attempt to stop Black developing his pieces 'normally'. The other move is 7 0-0 after which 7...d6 (7...Nf6 leaves Black with long term problems over his king after 8 e5 Ng4 9 Bxf7+ Kxf7 10 Ng5+) 8 Qb3!? Na5 9 Qa4+ Bd7 10 Bb5 Nc6 11 Rd1 gives White some pressure for his pawn.

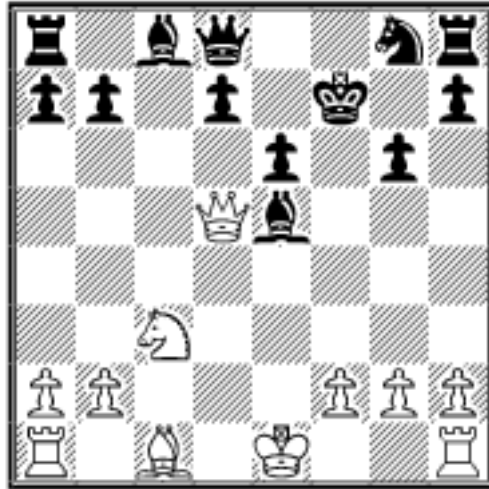
**7...Nxe5**

Probably Black's best. After 7...Nh6 8 Bf4 0-0 9 0-0 White has definite compensation for his pawn because of his beautifully developed pieces and the awkward position of Black's knight on h6.

**8 Nxe5 Bxe5 9 Bxf7+**

After 9 Qd5 Black defends himself with 9...Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 e6 when White doesn't have enough for his pawns.

**9...Kxf7 10 Qd5+ e6?**



A positional blunder which horribly weakens the dark squares. When Grandmaster Miso Cebalo obtained this position with Black he played the superior 10...Kg7! after which 11 Qxe5+ Nf6 12 0-0 d6 left White with rather

nebulous compensation for his pawn. The game continued 13 Qg5 Rf8 14 h3 Bd7 15 Re1 Rf7 16 Be3 Bc6 17 Rad1 Qd7 and Black was consolidating nicely (Topalovic - Cebalo, Ptuj 1995).

**11 Qxe5 Qf6 12 Qc7 Ne7 13 Ne4 Nd5?!**

13...Qd4 looks better, keeping more options open for the knight.

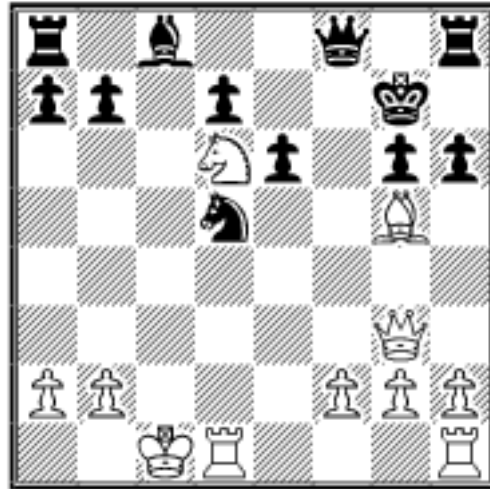
**14 Qg3 Qe7**

Perhaps 14...Qd4 was better try in this position too, though I have to stress that I don't like Black's position.

**15 Nd6+ Kg7 16 Bg5 Qf8**

Black's position is also horrible after 16...Nf6 17 0-0-0. Besides his weak dark squares he can't get his queenside pieces out.

**17 0-0-0 h6**



**18 Rxd5!**

Removing a key defender of the dark squares.

**18...exd5**

After 18...hxg5 White wins with 19 Rxd5 Qf6

20 Ne4 Qf7 21 Qe5+ etc.

**19 Be7!**

A neat follow up, though 19 Qe5+ Kh7 20 Be7 followed by 21 Bf6 would have been equally effective.

**19...Qg8**

After 19...Qxe7 there is 20 Nf5+ Kf7 21 Nxe7 Kxe7 22 Qe5+, picking up the rook on h8 as well.

**20 Re1**

Another way was to play 20 Qe5+ Kh7 21 Bf6 etc.

**20...g5**

Or if 20..Kh7 then 21 Bf6 followed by 22 Re7+.

**21 Bf6+!**

The snappiest way to finish things off.

**21...Kxf6**

After 21...Kg6 White delivers mate via 22 Qd3+ Kh5 23 Qh3+ Kg6 24 Qf5+ Kh5 25 Re3 and 26 Rh3.

**22 Qe5+ Kg6 23 Qf5+ Kh5 24 Re3 Qf8 25 Rh3 mate 1-0**

The objective merits of the Smith-Morra Gambit were not in question here; the point is that the defense is very difficult at club level whereas in GM chess it would be hard to prosecute the attack. It just goes to show; amateur chess is different.

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### **Further Reading**

*Winning With The Smith-Morra Gambit* by Graham Burgess (Batsford, 1994): A comprehensive guide to this opening.

*Beating the Anti-Sicilians* by Joe Gallagher (Batsford 1994): A master of the Sicilian explains how to beat the side-lines.

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