



## COLUMNISTS

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

Nigel Davies



by Bruce Alberston

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..."

## Openings for the Club Player

It's interesting to compare black and white results in different rating categories. What becomes apparent is that the further you move down the rating scale the less significant the first move. There is also a dramatic fall-off in the number of draws.

In my largest database games between 2600+ players favour white by 56% to 44% with 28% of the games won by white, 16% by black and with 56% drawn. Between players 2000 to 2199 it is only 54% to 46% with 33% drawn. Go down as far as 1200 – 1399 and you have White scoring just 52% with only 27% of the games drawn.

I suggest this adds considerable weight to the argument that the obsession with openings amongst lower rated players is misguided. Both the "advantage of the first move" and the "draw danger" is considerably reduced, simply because the play is less accurate. Any advantage a player might get by being white or playing a particular opening just gets lost in the wash.

Of course, I'm not the first person to say this, although it is nice to be able to cite some numbers by way of evidence. What does this mean for players at lower levels? Basically, that you can play whatever takes your fancy without being particularly handicapped. Lines that are dismissed as too drawish at GM level should liven up in the early middlegame. You should also be able to get away with some really dodgy early moves; that won't be Shirov sitting opposite you in the next game!

To get the ball rolling away from the heavy theory that many super-GMs are involved with, here's a few opening ideas that don't need too much study. I should add that they're all quite sound, so there's no need to worry your opponent will come up with a refutation.

### **Sicilian Defence, O'Kelly Variation (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 a6)**

This is quite a smart idea. First of all there's a kind of positional trap in 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5!, which is known to give white nothing. The two main problems are supposed to be 3 c3 and 3 c4, but the former can be met by 3...e6 4 d4 d5 when 5 e5 Bd7 transposes into a French in which black will exchange his light-squared bishop with ...Bd7-b5. Against 3 c4 he can play 3...Nc6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 e5 when 6 Nf5 d6 is OK for black in my view.

### **French Defence, Romanishin Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Be7 or 3 Nd2 Be7)**

The Ukrainian GM Oleg Romanishin played this regularly when he first arrived on the scene. Against 3 Nd2 the move 3...Be7 has been enjoying some popularity of late, but it still doesn't need much study. At the top level it may not be active enough to get many winning chances for black, but at lower levels this doesn't matter.

### **Spanish Opening, Berlin Defence with 5...Be7 (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Be7)**

The fashionable 5...Nd6 is not the only way to play the Berlin. After 6 Qe2 Nd6 7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 dxe5 the old move 8...Nb7 is still quite playable whilst Boris Spassky has experimented with 8...Nf5. Spassky has experimented quite a bit with sound but uncommon lines, so his games can be inspiring material for the club player.

### **Queen's Gambit Declined (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Be7 or 3...Nf6)**

There aren't many amateurs who play this way, despite its soundness and the fact that you can play it against the English (1 c4 e6 2 Nc3 d5). A lot of people think it's dull, but they should take a look at the games of Saveilly Tartakover and Alexander Belyavsky before jumping to this conclusion. The QGD can be exciting even at top GM level, so you're sure to get chances against amateur opposition.

### **French Defence Exchange Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5)**

Another opening that a lot of club players consider boring but which Kasparov used to beat Victor Korchnoi and Evgeny Bareev. Not much theory needed for this one and certainly not a drawing line if one of the players wants to fight. After 3...exd5 it's worth considering 4 Qf3 or 4 Nc3 if you want something different.

### **Caro-Kann Exchange Variation (1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5)**

A nice simple line used by Bobby Fischer, Bent Larsen and Eduard Rozentalis; you don't need to know many variations, just play through a few nice games. The pawn structure is the same as in a Queen's Gambit Declined Exchange Variation so it's quite good to play this with White if you play the QGD with black; just one kind of position to understand.

### **Closed Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3)**

As played by Boris Spassky and Vassily Smyslov, but now completely out of fashion. This is definitely an opening whereby a good understanding of the

middle game is more important than “knowing theory,” so it’s surprising it isn’t more popular. I guess they’d have nothing to complain about!

**Vienna with 3 g3 (1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3)**

A similar set up to the Closed Sicilian with white developing his kingside and perhaps later pushing his f-pawn; once again, understanding is more important than knowledge of variations with the game developing at a slower pace.

The following game was sent to me by Richard Kennedy who also avoids theory but in a rather more exotic way. I don’t think that 2 a3 is such a strong move, but why not give it a try?

***Kennedy, R (1496) - Erikj (1539)***

Bezgodov Sicilian B20

FICS Rated Blitz Game, 2005

**1 e4 c5 2 a3!?**

I’m not sure I’d recommend this move to my friends but it can’t be too bad. 1 c4 e5 is quite playable, and having a pawn on a6 is almost always useful for Black. Apparently White had reviewed a recent book on this opening by Alexei Bezgodov and decided to give it a whirl.

**2...Nc6**

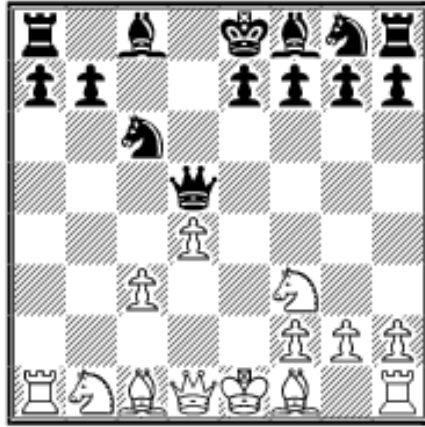
As I don’t own the book, I don’t know what the answer to 2...g6 is supposed to be. Maybe 3 b4!? Bg7 4 Ra2!? intending to exchange dark-square bishops with 5 Bb2? Chess from planet Mars!

Now White gets an interesting form of Wing Gambit (1 e4 c5 2 b4!?), a line I’ve always had a bit of a soft spot for. I’ve never been able to understand why this has been so much less popular than the Morra (1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3) which gives up a center pawn.

**3 b4 cxb4 4 axb4 Nxb4 5 c3 Nc6 6 d4**

This has become very nice for White who is several tempi up on a Wing Gambit.

**6...d5 7 exd5 Qxd5 8 Nf3**



Apparently Lawrence Day has recommended 8 Na3 here. But there's nothing wrong with the text.

### 8...Bg4

Black should play 8...e6 to get his kingside developed and restrain the advance of White's c- and d-pawns. And I should point out that I don't "know" this because I've studied the theory of this line, it's just experience at work.

### 9 Be2 Nf6

By now 9...e6 is looking mandatory. When White's center pawns start rolling Black will be in all sorts of trouble.

### 10 c4 Qh5 11 d5 Rd8 12 Nbd2

Not bad, but 12 Qa4! wins a piece! Black would have to try 12...Nxd5 13 cxd5 Rxd5 but with his development so bad the pawns aren't going to compensate him.

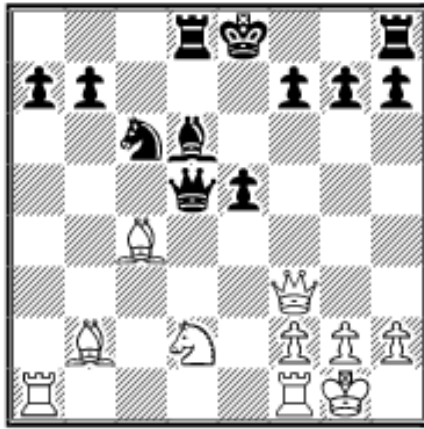
### 12...Nxd5

It's better to play 12...Bxf3 13 Nxf3 e6 when I suggest the line 14 Nd4 Qe5 15 dxc6 Bb4+ 16 Kf1 bxc6 (16...Rxd4 17 Qa4 Bc5 18 cxb7+ looks like it might be good for White) 17 Be3 Bc5 18 Nxc6 Rxd1+ 19 Rxd1 Qc7 20 Rd8+ Qxd8 21 Nxd8 Bxe3 (21...Kxd8 22 Bxc5) 22 Nxf7 Kxf7 23 fxe3, reaching a drawish endgame. I hasten to add that I worked this out with the help of Hiarcs 9.

### 13 cxd5 Qxd5 14 Bb2

The immediate 14 0-0 seems simpler and better.

### 14...e5 15 0-0 Bd6 16 Bc4 Bxf3 17 Qxf3



Transposing into an endgame that is far from easy to win; trusty Hiarcs 9 points out that 17 gxf3! is strong, for example: 17...Qc5 18.Ne4 Qb4 (18...Qxc4 19 Nxd6+ Rxd6 20 Qxd6 leaves Black a rook down with his king stranded in the middle) 19 Qd5 0-0 20 Bc3 Be7 21 Bxb4 Rxd5 22 Bxe7 Nxe7 23 Bxd5 leaves White with an extra rook. Not that this is easy with only a few minutes on the clock.

**17...Qxf3 18 Nxf3 0-0 19 Rfe1 Rfe8 20**

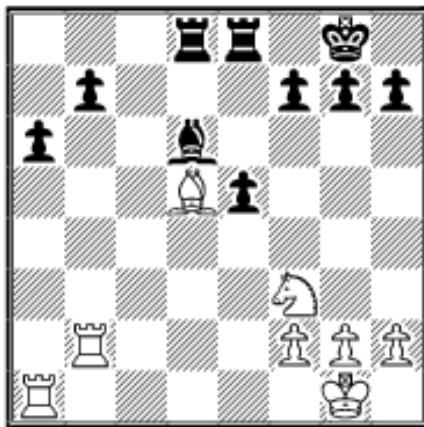
**Bd5 Nb4 21 Bb3**

After this Black gets very real drawing chances; White does better with 21 Be4, for example 21...a6 22 Bc3 b6 23 Rad1 a5 24 Nxe5! Bxe5 (24...f6 25 Nc4) 25 Rxd8 Bxh2+ 26 Kxh2 Rxd8 27 Rb1 is winning because the bishops dominate the board – though this isn't easy when the clock is ticking.

**21...Nd3 22 Re2 Nxb2**

Voluntarily giving up the monster knight makes it easier for White to unravel. 22...a6 is a better chance.

**23 Rxb2 a6 24 Bd5**



White had a stronger move in 24 Ng5, for example 24...Rf8 25 Rd1 Ba3 26 Rxd8 Rxd8 27 Bxf7+ Kh8 (Or 27...Kf8 28 Ne6+ Ke7 29 Rxb7+ Rd7 30 Rxd7+ Kxd7 31 Nxc7 etc) 28 Bb3 Bxb2 29 Nf7+ Kg8 30 Nxd8+ Kf8 31 Nxb7 reaches a minor piece endgame with an extra piece.

**24...Re7?**

Black should have played 24...Ba3! when 25 Rd2 Bb4 26 Rdd1 Rd7 makes it difficult for

White to win.

**25 Rxb7**

From here on White is always winning.

**25 e4 26 Rxe7 Bxe7 27 Bxe4 a5 28 Kf1 Bb4 29 Bc2 g6 30 Rd1 Rc8 31 Ba4 Rc4 32 Ne5 Re4 33 Nc6 Bc3 34 Bc2 Rc4 35 Ne7+ Kf8 36 Nd5 Be5 37 Bb3 Rc5 38 f4 Bb8 39 Ke2 Rb5 40 Rb1 Ba7 41 Ba2 Rc5 42 Kd2 Rc8 43 Rb5 Rd8 44 Rxa5 Bb8 45 g3 1-0**

## Recommended Reading

*Spassky* by Bernard Cafferty and Leonard Barden (Hardinge Simpole, 2002)

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