



COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall



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This past summer Abby Marshall achieved her greatest success in chess when she became the first girl to win the Denker Tournament of High School Champions. She has also represented the U.S. at the 2007 World Youth Championship in Turkey and at the 2008 World Mind Sport's Games in China. This November she will return to Turkey for the World Youth Championship, and she is working towards the grandmaster title. ChessCafe.com is pleased to introduce her new column, The Openings Explained, in which contemporary opening variations are explained move-by-move.

The Openings Explained

The Tarrasch Defense [D34]

Welcome to my first column of *The Openings Explained*! I'm glad to have this opportunity to share my favorite systems and I hope to ensure that you have success with them. The first opening I want to look at is the Tarrasch. It has been a staple in my repertoire since I was six years old and I've had many great games with it. I have only had one disaster, but it was because I forgot the correct move, not due to a problem with the opening itself. It's a great opening for improving players, because it's very important to learn how to play open positions with active piece play; while not any position can become closed, any position can become open. The Tarrasch can also be played against almost all queen-pawn openings. And, it's fun.

Theory

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5



These are the opening moves of the Tarrasch. One of the main goals Black has in many queen-pawn openings is to play c5, which often frees Black's position. One of the immediate benefits of the Tarrasch is that you get to play this move right away and quickly get an open position with active piece play. However, you also get an isolated pawn on d5, which I will talk about in a few moves. I love to play with isolated pawns, but it's important to know the correct way to handle the position, because the isolani can easily end up being a weakness.

4.cxd5

It's generally a good rule that if four pawns are engaged like this in the center, it is wise to trade at least one set of pawns. Otherwise, your opponent will do so, probably to his or her advantage. After 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.e3 Nf6 6.Be2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0, Black has nothing to fear and can decide

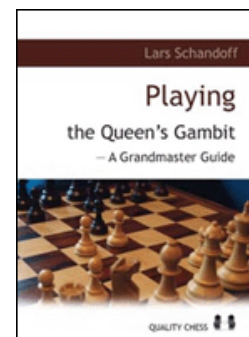
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how to resolve the situation in the center to his or her convenience. If White exchanges pawns in the center, it will transpose to Tarrasch lines.

4...exd5 5.Nf3

5.dxc5 is White's most direct challenge, but it's not very good. 5...d4 6.Na4 b5!? 7.cxb6 axb6



White is up a pawn, but his knight is misplaced and Black is extremely active. The lines get complicated, so some theoretical knowledge would be good here, but this is the subject of another column.

5...Nc6

Black brings a piece out and exerts some influence on d4. With isolated pawns, it is important to try to control the square in front of the pawn. If the pawn can ever be pushed, it severely limits the White pieces and gains space for Black.

6.g3

This is White's main and most challenging set-up. From g2, the bishop will hit the isolated d5-pawn. As well, the set-up provides extra protection for the white king if Black develops an attack. 6.e3 blocks the c1-bishop. The drawback of 6.g3 is Black often targets the c4-square and queenside because the bishop will be far away on the kingside.

6...Nf6

For Black, the main set-up is easy to play and remember. Bring out all your pieces.

7.Bg2



7...Be7

The bishop prefers square e7 to d6 because the latter would allow an unpleasant pin on the f6 knight when White plays Bg5.

8.0-0 0-0

This is the main line of the Tarrasch. The next several moves will usually result in Black having an isolated pawn on d5.

9.dxc5

This is one of the main lines and the one I want to examine. 9.Bg5 is the other main line. 9...cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6 Putting the question to the bishop and alleviating the pressure on the f6 knight, one of the defenders of the d5-pawn. 11.Be3



White eyes the d4-c5 dark square complex. 11...Re8 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13. Rc1 Bf8



One of Black's trumps is pressure on the e-file and the e2-pawn. The bishop leaves the way open for the rook to exert pressure. 14.Na4 Bd7 15. Bc5 Bxc5 16.Nxc5 Bg4 I've encountered this position many times and have always felt comfortable as Black. It's a dynamic fight. White will focus on the c6-d5 pawns and the c5-square, while Black will focus on the e-file, e2-pawn, and possibly the white king, because White will be distracted on the queenside.

9...Bxc5

Now Black has an isolated pawn. It all depends on the specific position as to whether the isolated pawn is a strength or a weakness. The benefits of having an isolated pawn are the open files on either side of the pawn, active piece play, and if the pawn ever gets to d4 it will restrict White's position and gain space for Black. However, in an endgame it is almost always weak because no pawns can defend it, and the square in front of the pawn is weak because no pawns can defend that square. Black must play actively, avoid trading into an endgame, and always look for opportunities to push to d4.

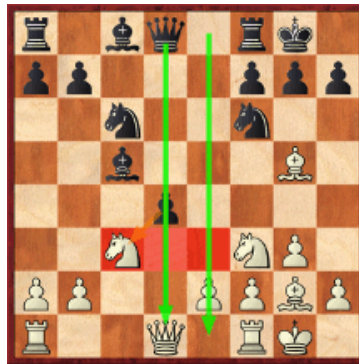
10.Bg5

10.Na4 Be7 11.Be3 This is similar to the line with 9.Bg5, where White is targeting Black's queenside. 11...Bg4 12.Bc5 Re8 13.Rc1 Ne4



This is ideal for Black. Having a knight on e4 is strong and the bishop on g4 indirectly pressures the e2-pawn. 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 15.Re1 (15.Qxd5? Rad8 16.Qb5 Bxf3 17.Bxf3 Nd2 18.Rfe1 Nd4 Black wins.) 15...Rad8 Black is very active and slightly better.

10...d4



Always, always, always play this move if given the chance. Look at how much space Black gains.

11.Bxf6

11.Ne4 Be7= By allowing Black to play d4, White needs to generate some play against the weakened light squares (e4, d5, c4) left behind. Trades are inevitable now and contradictory to White's goals.

11...Qxf6 12.Nd5

12.Ne4 Qe7 13.Nxc5 Qxc5 14.Rc1 Qb6 15.Qc2 h6 16.Rfd1 Be6 Again, White has nothing to show for allowing Black to push d4.

12...Qd8 13.Nd2!



This is the idea. Black gets to push to d4, but the light squares on the queenside become vulnerable and White's bishop has a lot of scope.

13...a6!



I love this variation and have never had problems with it. The idea is to bring the bishop back to a7 after Ne4. It protects the d4-pawn, defends the queenside, and if White ever pushes the e-pawn, after the exchange of d- and e-pawns in the center, Black's bishop will have great influence on a7.

14.Rc1

14.Ne4 Ba7 15.Qd2 This is all normal looking stuff. Now Black strikes out dynamically. 15...f5 16.Ng5 f4 17.gxf4 h6 18.Ne4 a5 Black is looking at the b4-square. 19.Ng3 Be6 20.e4 dxe3 21.fxe3 Nb4 22.Rad1 Nxd5 23. Bxd5 Bxd5 24.Qxd5+ Qxd5 25.Rxd5 Bxe3+ 26.Kh1 Rxf4 Black is much better.

14...Ba7 15.Nf4

15.Ne4 Re8 16.Nc5 Re5 17.Qb3 Rb8 White has some loose pieces, while Black is slowly building up pressure.

15...Bg4!

Taking on c6 is not a real threat. Black gets another piece out.

16.h3

16.Bxc6?! bxc6 17.Rxc6 d3 18.Nxd3 Qe8 19.Qc1 Qxe2 Black is down a pawn, but has the two-bishops and White's pieces are in messy places.

16...Bf5 17.Qb3

White needs some activity and develops the queen with a threat against b7.

17...Rb8

The position is about even here. The pawn on d4 cramps White's position and Black has the two bishops, even though Black's position is a little precarious on the queenside. If Black just plays chess here, it should be a good game.

18.g4

The rest of the variation is White's most forcing way to play, but Black is too active and has no problems.

18...Qg5 19.Qg3 Bd7 20.Ne4 Qe7 21.Nd5 Qe6 22.Qh4 f6 23.g5 fxg5 24. Nxc6 Qh6 25.Qxh6 gxh6 26.Ne4 Kh8



The open files and the two bishops counteract the weak h-pawns.

Lessons Learned

1. Playing with an isolated pawn: active piece play is essential. Avoid trades and an endgame, and always look for ways to push the pawn.
2. The usual set-up for Black is bishops on g4 and a7, rooks on the e- and d-files, and the knight on e4.
3. White is playing on the queenside, Black is playing in the center and on the kingside.

Games

The following game showcases some motifs in the main line with 9.dxc5 that I focused on when I explained the theory of the Tarrasch.

Jonasson, Benedikt (2210) - Chandler, Murray (2515)
Reykjavik op (2), 19844

**1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.d4 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.g3 Nf6 7.Bg2 Be7
8.0-0 0-0 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.Nd2 a6
14.Ne4 Ba7**

14...Qxd5 Yeah, this line, sacrificing the queen when White plays 15.Nf6 and 16.Bxd5. Hmm, never mind it is probably not good.

15.Rc1 Re8 16.Qd2

In the theory part of the column I explained what happened after 16.Qb3. The text is a very normal move as well, but gives Black some interesting possibilities.

16...Re5

16...Bh3!? is a possibility worth watching for. It's a good move here, but would be even a better move if White had played h3 at some point, and Bxh3 would win a pawn. 17.Bxh3 Qxd5



White's pieces are awkwardly placed. 18.Ng5 h6 19.Nf3 Rad8 20.b3
Stops 20...Qxa2. 20...Bb6!? The bishop wants to play too. 21.Qd3 Nb4 22.

Qd2 a5 Black is better here. We have space and pressure on the center and on the queenside.

17.Nb4

17.Nf4 Black has immediate threats here. 17...Bf5 18.f3 Qa5 19.Qxa5 Rxa5 20.a3 d3+ 21.Kh1 Be3 is a disaster for White.

17...Nxb4 18.Qxb4 Rb5

18...Be6!? I like developing another piece. 19.Nc5 Bd5 was a threat. (19. Qxb7 Bd5) 19...Bxc5 20.Rxc5 Qf8 21.Rfc1 b6 22.Rxe5 Qxb4 23.Bxa8 g6-/+.

19.Qd6

White has to remain active to keep from being tied down into passivity. 19.Qd2 Qe7 20.Rfd1 Bf5 The knight is trapped on e4 and the white queen is tied to b2. It's a mess.

19...Bf5 20.b3 Qe8

Keep pieces on the board!

21.Qf4 Bb8 22.Qd2 Re5 23.Nc5 Rxe2 24.Qxd4 Ba7



The pawn structure is now symmetrical, but notice Black's activity. The rook is on the second rank and the two bishops oversee the entire board. Of course, White is also now active as well.

25.Qf4

It's basically drawn here. 25.Bxb7 Rd8 26.Qh4 Rxa2=/+.

25...Bxc5 26.Rxc5 Bd3 27.h4

27.Bxb7?? Re1 28.Rxe1 Qxe1+ 29.Kg2 Bf1+ 30.Kf3 Qe2#.

27...Re7 28.Rfc1 Be4 29.Bxe4 Rxe4 30.Qxe4 Qxe4 31.Rc8+ Qe8 32. Rxe8+ Rxe8 33.Rc7 Rb8 34.Kg2 Kf8 1/2-1/2

I chose the next game because it is one of the great Tarrasch games and illustrates the potential of the black pieces. It investigates the other main line of the Tarrasch with 9.Bg5. Kasparov has the black pieces, so you know there will be fireworks.

Zueger,Beat (2400) - Kasparov,Garry (2735)
SUI-Kasparov Switzerland, 19877

1.c4

The Tarrasch is easy to get after 1.c4 or 1.Nf3, so it pays to make sure that you understand how to transpose to a Tarrasch if your opponent plays

a different move order. 1.Nf3 d5 2.d4 c5 I like playing this against the Nf3 move order. 3.dxc5 (3.c4 e6 4.Nc3 Nc6 5.cxd5 exd5 is familiar.) 3... e6 Black will get the pawn back, even if White tries to hang on to it. 4.b4 a5 5.c3 axb4 6.cxb4 b6.

1...Nf6 2.Nc3 c5 3.g3 e6 4.Nf3 d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4 Nc6

And we are back in a Tarrasch.

7.Bg2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Bg5 cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6 11.Be3 Re8 12.Rc1 Bg4

Simple chess. Black develops all his pieces. 12...Bf8 This is the line that I play. 13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.Na4 Bd7 15.Bc5 Bxc5 16.Nxc5 Bg4 17.Re1 Qa5



Black is active and has clear targets: the queenside pawns and the e2-pawn.

13.h3 Be6

This reinforces the d5-pawn and keeps an eye on White's kingside. Black sometimes retreats to h5, but keep in mind that it leaves the f5-square for the white knight and is somewhat out of play.

14.Kh2 Qd7 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Na4



White begins the characteristic plan of zeroing in on the dark squares. He will blockade the hanging pawns and strengthen his queenside. But Kasparov had other plans.

16...Bf5



Black eyes the e4-square and starts clearing the e-file for the black rook.

17.Bc5 Bd8!

Generally, when you have isolated pawns or hanging pawns, you do not want to trade pieces. In an endgame, you will be worse. Black's pieces are better than White's pieces.

18.Bd4 Ne4

Black covers the c5-square.

19.f3?!



This move weakens the e-file and the squares around the king. White wants to gain more control over c5 and dislodge the knight from its active post, but the price is too high. White may have to be satisfied with 19.Nc5 Nxc5 20.Bxc5 Bf6=/+.

19...Ng5 20.Nc5 Qe7 21.e4



If White does not play this, then his bishop remains buried and Black is free to attack the kingside. The best answer to an attack on the flank is to attack in the center.

21...dxe4 22.fxe4 Bg6 23.e5

The game is complicated now. Black will hope that his active pieces and the exposed white king will compensate for his busted queenside.

23...Bb6 24.h4 Rad8!!

This is an amazing move. It really emphasizes the dynamism of Black's pieces and the open files, and provides a lesson in attacking chess; awesome stuff by the former number one.

25.hxg5

25.Bxc6 is best. 25...Ne6 26.Nxe6 Qxe6 27.Rf4 It's even here.

25...Qxg5 26.Qa4

White gets out of the pin on the d-file.

26...Qh5+ 27.Kg1 Rxe5!



Another great move, which exposes the dark square weaknesses around White's king. Even though Black is giving up the exchange here, he gets rid of White's principal defender of the dark squares and unleashes his own dark-square bishop.

28.Bxe5 Qxe5 29.Qb4

29.b4 Qe3+ 30.Kh1 Qxg3 Black has a very strong attack.

29...Rd3

Kasparov brings all his pieces into the attack.

30.Rf2 Rxc3 31.Qf4

31.Qc4 Survives longer, but Black has huge amounts of pressure. 31...Qg5 32.b4 Rg4 33.Qc3 Rxb4.

31...Rxc3+! 32.Kxc3 Qd5+ 33.Kg3

33.Qf3 Qg5+ 34.Qg3 Qxc1.

33...Bxc5 34.Rd2 Qh5 35.Qg4

35.b4 The best. The computer is going to love White, but any sane person would prefer Black. The white king is exposed and Black has three pawns for being down a double exchange. 35...Be7 36.Rxc6 Bg5.

35...Qe5+ 36.Qf4 Qe7 37.Rc3 Bb6 38.Kg2 Qe1 39.Rc1 Qe6 40.Qg3 Be4 + 41.Kh2 Qf5 0-1

Further Reading

- [Meeting 1.d4](#) by Jacob Aagaard – "People who play this as Black will want to have this book..." Carsten Hansen, *Checkpoint*, [April 2002](#)
- *Winning Pawn Structures* by Alexander Baburin – This is a great book that explains the typical ideas in isolani positions.

Practitioners of the Tarrasch

- Miguel Illescas-Cordoba
- Garry Kasparov (in the 1980s)
- Me?!

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Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.

Readers' Responses

Henry from the **USA** - Love your new layout and the new column *The Openings Explained*.

Atomic Patzer from the **USA** - Good job Abby. Looking forward to many more articles like this.

Busson from **France** - Very nice lecture on the Tarrasch! Do you think that the Swedish variation, 6...c4 !? 7...Bb4 and 8...Nge7, is playable or only a surprise weapon? Hope to read you for a long time!

Allan from the **USA** - American GM Varuzhan Akobian has also played the Tarrasch frequently.

Paul from the **USA** - Excellent column Abby. Thank you. And Chesscafe - love the new look!

Mark from the **USA** - I couldn't have put it better myself, not much anyway! Other Tarrasch practioners of note: Siegbert Tarrasch (doh!), Eduard Dyckhoff (an amazing German correspondence player of bygone, pre-computer days), Paul Keres (he beat Tal with it) and Boris Spassky, who used it to defeat Tigran Petrosian in their memorable match for the world championship.

Abby Marshall - Thanks for all the nice comments! To Busson - I have never played that way so I am not an expert, but I believe that it is unsound. You might catch someone offguard, but in the long run you would want a reliable way to play.

Mark from the **USA** - You write an excellent column, Abby. Do you recommend any particular books on this defense?

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