



COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall



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The Openings Explained

The Caro-Kann, Panov-Botvinnik Attack [B13]

In this column I take a look at the Panov-Botvinnik attack against the Caro-Kann Defense. My notes have a lot to thank from Jacob Aagaard's lovely book *Easy Guide to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack*. The line I examine actually gets interesting in the middlegame, which may appeal to the more positionally minded readers than the very sharp variations in my earlier columns.

Theory

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4

I initially played the Panov-Botvinnik attack because I thought it would get Caro-Kann players into positions that they do not like. I have since learned that the Caro is pretty flexible and black players are comfortable in closed and open positions, and the Panov definitely steers toward a more fluid game. I like the resulting positions, even if Caro players like them too.

4...Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3

This is the positional way to play. Since I have been covering a lot of tactical, variation-heavy lines lately, I wanted to change it up and focus on strategic positions that can be explained in words. I actually play the more tactical 6. Bg5; however, 6.Nf3 may cause more problems for Black.

6...Bg4



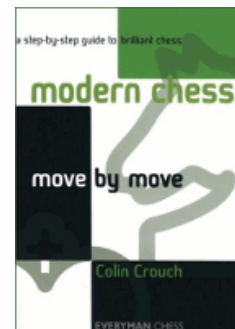
Nothing strange so far: White develops and Black attacks the center. The next seventeen moves that follow are the main line. 6...a6!? is a suggestion made by Neil McDonald on Chess Publishing to avoid the main line. After 7.Bg5 Be6 8.Be2 g6 9.Bxf6 exf6 10.0-0 Bg7 11.c5 f5 12.Qd2 Qf6 13.Rfd1 f4, McDonald calls the play unclear in Brynll-Speelman, Solingen 1998. It is worth investigating.

7.cxd5

White needs to resolve the position in the center, otherwise Black will take on f3, take on c4, and the d4-pawn will fall.

7...Nxd5 8.Qb3

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White has a double threat on d5 and b7, and gets out of the pin, so the knight on f3 is free to move.

8...Bxf3

Black takes the opportunity to double White's pawns and protects the knight on d5 for the time being.

9.gxf3 e6

Black protects the centralized knight and also threatens to take the d4-pawn. If Black wishes to avoid the following endgame, 9...Nb6 is a reasonable alternative. White has the two bishops, while Black has the better pawn structure. However, the endgame after 9...e6 is not something Black has to necessarily fear. The winning chances are small, but Black has excellent drawing chances.

10.Qxb7 Nxd4 11.Bb5+

White develops a piece with tempo and forces the next series of moves.

11...Nxb5 12.Qc6+!

This forces the king to an awkward square. 12...Qd7 is not possible because of 13.Qxa8.

12...Ke7 13.Qxb5 Qd7

The king on e7 makes development and king safety awkward issues for Black. Exchanging queens would help alleviate these problems. Black appears to gain from 13...Nxc3 14.bxc3 Qd5, as the black queen is on a better square than d7 and White has an additional pawn island on c3. However, 15.Rb1! Qxf3 16.Rg1 Qxc3+ 17.Bd2 Qf3 18.Bb4+ Kd8 19.Rd1+ and the open files show that 13...Nxc3 is not really playable, although Black did not have to go pawn munching.

14.Nxd5+

14.Qb3 Avoiding the queen trade loses too much time. 14...f6 15.Bd2 Nxc3 16.Bxc3 Kf7 17.Rd1 Qc6 18.0-0 Be7=.

14...Qxd5

14...exd5? 15.Qb4+ Ke8 16.Qd4



Black's lack of king security, the open files for White, and the weak d5-pawn give an advantage to White.

15.Bg5+!

Aagaard says that he believes this check is the best move in the position for three reasons:

- Black will have to weaken the second rank with 15...f6.
- another pawn is put on the bishop's color.
- the e6-square will be weakened.

15...f6 (15...Kd6 16.Rd1) 16.Qxd5 exd5 17.Be3



So what's going on? One advantage of this variation is that you get to play seventeen moves without taking much time off your clock if you know the theory thus far. This gives you more time to think now. When Aagaard talks about this position, he mentions several ideas that I will discuss as I go through the next moves. But initially, I want to elaborate on exchanges: Knowing what pieces should be exchanged or stay on the board is important not only in this variations, but in general.

First, if all the pieces are exchanged except for kings and pawns, White has good winning chances because White can create an outside passed pawn on the queenside that distracts the black king. The White king will be free to attack Black's kingside pawns. Second, if all the rooks are exchanged, it is very drawish. White has the initiative because of the lead in development, and by exchanging rooks Black will alleviate the pressure. Even if Black can only exchange one pair of rooks, it brings him closer to a draw. Third, if the bishops are exchanged - creating a double rook endgame - evaluation depends on the activity of the rooks and the king. White has had good results in this ending, and the second game in this column is an example.

17...Ke6

The black king opens the diagonal for the bishop, protects the d5-pawn, and retains the possibility of coming over the queenside. Upon 17...Kf7?! 18.0-0 Rd8 19.Rd3 (19.Bxa7 Ra8) 19...Rd7 20.Rhd1 Ke6 21.a3, White restricts the black bishop and is better.

18.0-0-0

The king is best placed on the queenside. King safety is still an issue with two rooks and a bishop on the board, so the white king will be out of the action. It will also protect the queenside pawns.

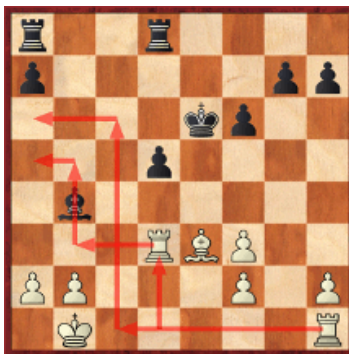
18...Bb4

This looks like it's putting the bishop in the middle of nowhere, but Black develops a piece and opens the rank for the h8-rook. The a8-rook wants to stay where it is to protect the a-pawn.

19.Kb1

The king creates room for the white rooks. 19.a3!? is also a choice, though Black should be okay. 19...Rhc8+ 20.Kb1 Bc5 21.Rhe1 Bxe3 22.Rxe3+ Kd6 23.Rde1 Rc4! 24.Re6+ Kc5 25.Ra6 Rf4 26.Rc1+ McDonald in his notes on ChessPublishing says that this is a critical position for the opening. It is move twenty-six! 26...Kb5! Black is doing okay. This is an improvement over 26...Kd4. 27.Rac6 Rc4! The white rooks were creating a net around the black king, so Black trades off a pair of rooks. 28.R1xc4 dxc4 29.Rc7 Re8! In rook endgames, activity is more important than material. Black cannot save his pawns, so he counterattacks. 30.Rxa7 Re2 31.Rb7+ Kc6 32.Rb4 Kc5 33.Rb7 Rxf2 34.a4 Rxb2 35.a5 Rh1+ 36.Ka2 Re1 37.Rxg7 Kb5 38.Rxb7 Kxa5 and a draw was agreed after ten more moves in Wahls-Brunner, Biel 1994. An excerpt from this game is also in Aagaard's book.

19...Rhd8 20.Rd3



Rook activity and initiative are very important if White is going to have an edge. The maxims of put your rook behind passed pawns, on the golden seventh rank, and on open files are very true. Also White has possibilities presented by the open queenside files and the weak d5- and a7-pawns.

20...Rd7 21.Rc1 a5!

Aagaard mentions the possibility of a5 in his book, but does not elaborate. Now Black will not be tied down to defending the a7-pawn, and it becomes more active. I am now following the game of Bologan-Velicka 1999. 21...Rad8 22.a3 Bf8 23.Rc6+ Kf5 24.Rd4! This is the blockading position that Black wants to avoid. It will be examined in the first game.

22.Rc6+ Kf5 23.Rb6 Be7 24.Rb5 Ke6 25.a4 Bb4

It is about equal here. White actually went on to lose, but that is because he pushed too hard for a win against his lower-rated opponent.

Lessons Learned

- This is a variation where ideas matter more than individual moves. Think about exchanges and piece placement.
- Remember 12.Qc6+ and 15.Bxg5+

Games

Lerner, Konstantin Z (2570) - Rogozenko, Dorian (2405)
Berliner Sommer 12th Berlin, 1994

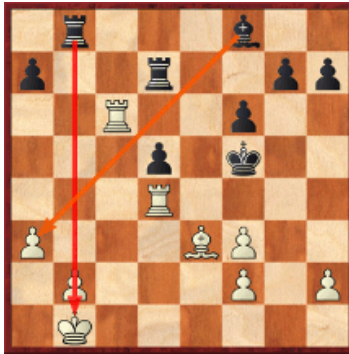
1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 Nf6 4.d4 cxd5 5.Nc3

The Panov-Botvinnik has been reached by transposition.

**5...Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cxd5 Nxd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.Qxb7 Nxd4 11.Bb5
+ Nxb5 12.Qc6+ Ke7 13.Qxb5 Qd7 14.Bg5+ f6 15.Nxd5+ Qxd5 16.Qxd5
exd5 17.Be3 Ke6 18.0–0–0 Bb4 19.Rd3 Rhd8 20.Kb1 Rd7 21.Rc1 Rad8**

Black does not employ the active 21...a5! plan.

22.a3 Bf8 23.Rc6+ Kf5 24.Rd4



This is not a happy situation for Black. The d-pawn is blockaded and isolated, and Black's pieces are passive.

24...Rb8 25.Ra4 Rbb7 26.h3

It is not necessary to rush in the endgame. Making seemingly innocent moves lures your opponent into a false sense of security. 26.h3 could also be useful in the future in restricting the advancement of Black's kingside pawns.

26...Bd6 27.f4

This restricts Black's bishop and king, even though it makes the pawn weaker.

27...Bb8 28.Rc5 Ke6 29.Kc2 Rd6 30.b4 Bc7 31.Kd3

White logically improves his position. Black is tied down.

31...Bb6 32.Rc1 d4

This is a mistake, but so often the defending side gets frustrated and lashes out. Now the pawn is very weak and the black bishop is effectively dead. 32...Kf5 This maintains the balance.

33.Bd2 Rd5 34.Ra6 Rh5 35.Rh1 Kd5 36.a4

Aagaard says this is the winning plan. Notice the bishops: Black's bishop is killed by the d4-pawn, while White's bishop is doing a fantastic double duty of protecting the kingside and queenside pawns.

36...Rh4 37.f3 f5 38.a5 Bc7 39.Rc1 Bd6 40.Rc4

The pawn is lost.

40...Rd7 41.Rxd4+ Ke6 42.b5 Ke7 43.Raxd6 1–0



After all the pieces are exchanged, the king and pawn ending is winning for White. This is a textbook example of how to play an ending with a blockade. Improve the position slowly. It is not an advantage that is necessarily decisive, but often the defender will crack under the pressure.

Nun,Jiri (2470) - Timmer,Robert

Dortmund op, 1988

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cxd5 Nxd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.Qxb7 Nxd4 11.Bb5+ Nxb5 12.Qc6+ Ke7 13.Qxb5 Qd7 14.Nxd5+ Qxd5 15.Bg5+ f6 16.Qxd5 exd5 17.Be3 Ke6 18.0-0-0 Bb4 19.a3



White chooses to play the text instead of 19.Kb1.

19...Rhc8+ 20.Kb1 Bc5 21.Rhe1 Bxe3 22.Rxe3+ Kd6 23.Rde1 Rc4 24.b3

I looked at 24.Re6 immediately in the theory section. Aagaard says he dislikes 24.b3 because it weakens the queenside. It is not necessarily bad however.

24...Rb8?

Black's rook came to c4 not to stay there, but to get active. The black rooks are not doing much on b8 and c4. As I said in the theory section, evaluation of the position depends on the activity of the rooks. 24...Rh4= The rook is active.

25.Re6+ Kc5 26.Kb2



26...a5

After 26...Rh4 27.Rc1+ Kd4 28.Rd1+ Kc5 29.b4+ Kc4 30.Rc6+ Kb5 31.Rc7, the black king is in a perilous spot and the black pawns are beginning to look ripe for picking.

27.Ra6 Rb5 28.Re7

Black's pieces are all crunched together. White is very active.

28...Rf4 29.Rc7+ Kd4 30.a4

The a-pawn is now won.

30...Rb8 31.Rxa5 Rxf3 32.Rb5 Rxf2+ 33.Ka3 Re8 34.h4



34...Ke4

Black wants to make room for the d-pawn to advance, but maybe it gives up too much material. 34...Rg2 may be better. When White advances the a-pawn, Black can play ...Rg1 and try to get behind the pawn.

35.Rxg7 d4 36.Rxh7

This is not an easy win for White. It is instructive how White converts his advantage into a full point.

36...Rd8 37.Re7+ Kf3 38.Rf5+ Kg2 39.Rxf2+ Kxf2 40.Kb2!

The king arrives just in time to stop the pawn.

40...d3 41.Kc1 Rb8 42.h5 Rxb3 43.h6 Rb8 44.Kd2 Rh8 45.h7 f5 46.a5 f4 47.a6 f3 48.a7 Kf1 49.Rb7 f2 50.Rb8 1-0

Further Reading

- *Easy Guide to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack* by Jacob Aagaard. This book, like all of Aagaard's works, is excellent.

Practitioners

- Onishchuk has played this endgame a lot at least in the past.
- Karpov had an epic fight with Kramnik in this variation at Linares 1993.
- Kamsky has also played it a few times.

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