



COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall

[\[Find us on Facebook.\]](#)

[Translate this page](#)



Play through and download the games from [ChessCafe.com](#) in the [ChessBase Game Viewer](#).

The Openings Explained

The English Attack in the Najdorf Sicilian [B90]

I am devoting this column to the study of 6...Ng4 against the English Attack in the Najdorf. First, I will provide some background on the Najdorf and this variation in a general sense. In this day and age, when computers have revolutionized opening preparation at all levels, it's not unreasonable to assume that many intermediate players prepare their openings in the length and the depth that I go into in this month's column. The first nine moves are standard and easy to remember, so the theory really starts from there. I want to thank one of my readers, Mr. Horst, who provided the suggestion for this column and gave me valuable games to use in preparation. I looked at his notes, as well as those at ChessPublishing.com and in *New In Chess Yearbook* in preparing this column.

1.e4 c5

At some point all e4-players lock themselves away with fifty books on the Sicilian with hopes of cracking this vast and complex opening. The move ...c5 shows Black's intention to pursue an asymmetric position, while still aiming to control the center. It promises an exciting battle.

2.Nf3 d6

This move can give rise to a number of different systems. 2...e6 and 2...Nc6 are popular alternatives. With the text, Black is still following basic opening principles: controlling the center and opening lines to get pieces out - while not stepping into any kind of symmetry.

3.d4

The Open Sicilian. Do not be afraid to play the main lines, even if there is much to learn. They are often the best.

3...cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

This is the start of the Najdorf Variation in the Sicilian Defense. Named after the great Polish-Argentinian player Miguel Najdorf, this opening attempts to maintain flexibility and generate play against the e4-pawn by means of ...b5, ...Bb7, ...Nbd7-c5. Fischer and Kasparov are among the many famous adherents who played the Najdorf.

6.Be3



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/1p2pppp/p2p1n2/8/3NP3/2N1B3/PPP2PPP/R2QKB1R b KQkq - 0 6"]

Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



[How to Play the Najdorf, Vol. 1](#)
by Garry Kasparov



[How to Play the Najdorf, Vol. 2](#)
by Garry Kasparov



[How to Play the Najdorf, Vol. 3](#)
by Garry Kasparov

Free Shipping!

On all Orders

More than \$75!



UPS GROUND Only.

The English Attack and currently in vogue. White has other options as well:

6.Bg5 was the main line, but the English Attack replaced it. 6...e6 7.f4 Qb6 The Poisoned Pawn variation is extremely tricky. (7...Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4) 8.Qd2 Qxb2 9.Rb1 Qa3 10.e5 We could analyze this for days, so I won't try to here. 10...dxe5 11.fxe5 Nfd7 12.Ne4.

6.Bc4 is the Fischer-Sozin Attack. 6...e6 7.Bb3 Nbd7 Lately it has fallen out of fashion.

6.Be2 is among the more tame choices and leads to an interesting fight. Black will play ...e5 and try for active play.

6...Ng4

According to ChessPublishing, this move is worse than 6...e6 and 6...e5.

6...e6 transposes to the Scheveningen Sicilian, another very well respected system.

6...e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Qd2 Be7 9.f3 0-0 10.0-0-0 Qc7 and a tough fight is ahead.

7.Bg5

This is basically forced.

7.Bf4? e5 8.Nf5 exf4 9.Qxg4 g6.

7.Bc1 Nf6 Obviously, it is to White's detriment to have a draw.

7...h6

The next few moves are standard.

8.Bh4 g5 9.Bg3 Bg7

Black has fallen slightly behind in development and loosened the kingside, but does have decent dark-square control.

10.h3



[FEN "mbqk2r/1p2ppb1/p2p3p/6p1/3NP1n1/2N3BP/PPP2PP1/R2QKB1R b KQkq - 0 10"]

This is the move that has been giving Black problems.

10.Be2 is a popular choice. 10...h5 11.Bxg4 (11.Nf5 Bxf5 12.exf5 Qa5 You should always try to make threats, no matter how simple.; 11.h4 gxh4 12.Bxh4 Nc6 13.Nb3 Be6 14.Qd2 Rc8 15.0-0-0 Qb6 unclear These are commonsense Sicilian moves. Black is okay.) 11...hxg4 12.0-0 (12.Nd5 Nc6 13.Nf5 Bxf5 14.exf5 Bxb2 15.Rb1 Qa5+ 16.Qd2 Bd4 17.Qxa5 Nxa5 18.Nc7+ Kd7 19.Nxa8 Rxa8 20.Kd2 Anand-Topalov Dortmund 1999. Although Black only has a knight and a pawn for the exchange, the white bishop is terrible. Black managed to get a slight edge.) 12...Nc6 13.Nf5 Bxc3 14.bxc3 Qa5 What I like about Black's play is that there are plenty of threats and chances for creative play, which makes it a great choice for an improving player. 15.

Qxg4 f6 16.Qf3 (16.Rab1 Qxc3 17.Rfd1 Ne5 18.Bxe5 Qxe5 19.g3 b5 Black is doing well.; 16.f4 Bxf5 17.exf5 gxf4 18.Rxf4 Qxc3 19.Rb1 b5 The black king is safer in the center. 20.Qe2 Rc8 Black can hold his own.) 16...Ne5 17.Qe3 Bxf5 18.exf5 Rc8 19.Qa7 Kf7 20.Qxb7 Rxc3 21.Rfd1 Qb5 22.Qa7 Nc6 23. Qd7 Nd4 24.Qxb5 Nxb5= For the moment Black is down a pawn, but has plenty of activity.

10.h4 Nc6 Black has enough center control to stop play on the flanks for now.

10.Qd2 Nc6 11.Nb3 Nge5 12.f3 (12.a4 Be6 13.Nd5 Rc8 14.f3 Ng6 with sharp play.



[FEN "2rqk2r/1p2ppb1/p1npb1np/3N2p1/P3P3/1N3PB1/1PPQ2PP/R3KB1R w KQk - 0 15"]

Black has a good grip on the dark squares.) 12...b5 this, along with ...e5, is a typical black pawn thrust. 13.Bf2 Rb8 14.Nd4 b4 15.Nce2 Nc4 16.Nxc6 Qc7 17.Qd5 Be6 18.Qd3 Qxc6=.

10...Ne5

ChessPublishing prefers this over 10...Nf6, given as okay by none other than Kasparov in a recent DVD.

10...Nf6 11.Qe2 Nc6 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.e5 This direct approach was pretty strong according to Chess Publishing. 13...dxe5 14.Bxe5 0-0 15.h4 g4 16.g3 a5 17.Bg2 Ba6 18.Qe3+/- Rowson-De Firmian Selfoss 2003.

11.Nf5

11.f3 White wants to get the dark-squared bishop back in the game, but the dark-squares become even weaker. 11...Nbc6 12.Bf2 Ng6 (12...Be6 This is the older idea. 13.Qd2 Qa5 14.Nb3 Bxb3 15.cxb3 Nb4 16.a3 Ng6 17.Rd1 Nc6 18.Nd5 Qxd2+ 19.Rxd2 Maybe White has a slight edge.) 13.Qd2 (13.Nd5 Rg8 14.Qd2 e6 15.Nc3 Be5 16.0-0-0 Qf6 17.Nde2 Bd7 Black is holding his own.) 13...0-0 There is no strict rule regarding king safety, as we have seen positions where the king castles kingside, queenside, or stays in the center. Typically the Najdorf king stays in the center, since kingside castling runs into an attack and the queenside has expanded with ...b5. Remain flexible; don't rush it, but don't let it get in the way of rook development.

11.Be2 Nbc6 12.Nf5 Bxf5 13.exf5 Nd7 14.Qd2 Nd4 15.Bd3 Qa5 If White doesn't play forcefully, then Black quickly gets a fine position.

11...Bxf5

The knight has to be expelled right away.

12.exf5 Nbc6 13.Nd5 e6

Follow first World Champion Wilhelm Steinitz's advice and take away squares from the knights!

14.fxe6

14.Ne3 0-0 (14...Qa5+ 15.c3 Nf3+ This sort of transposes, without the moves

fxe6 and ...fxe6. The illustrative games will throw more light on the difference.) 15.c3 d5 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Be2 Qe7



[FEN "r4rk1/1p2q1b1/p1n1p2p/3pn1p1/8/2P1N1BP/PP2BPP1/R2QK2R w KQ - 0 18"]

18.0–0 Rad8 19.Qe1 Ng6 20.Rd1 Nf4 21.Bd3 Nxd3 22.Rxd3 Qf7 Black has a two pawn advantage in the center and is doing well.

14...fxe6 15.Ne3 Qa5+

15...0–0 White could transpose to this position in the previous line, so it should be good here too. This is a possibility if you want to avoid the complications that follow.

16.c3

16.Qd2 Qxd2+ 17.Kxd2 0–0 Black's central pawn majority, or more accurately domination, ensure good chances.

16...Nf3+!



[FEN "r3k2r/1p4b1/p1npp2p/q5p1/8/2P1NnBP/PP3PP1/R2QKB1R w KQkq - 0 17"]

This was Topalov's idea.

17.Qxf3 Bxc3+ 18.Kd1 (18.bxc3 Qxc3+) 18...Qa4+

18...Bxb2 is also playable, but let's stick with the main line.

19.Nc2

19.Kc1 Bxb2+ 20.Kxb2 Qb4+ 21.Kc1 Nd4 A picturesque Najdorf scene: the black king sits safely in the center of the board, while the white king is a victim. 22.Qh5+ Ke7 23.Bc4 Qc3+ 24.Kb1 (24.Kd1 Qxa1+) 24...Qb4+ 25.Kc1 (25.Bb3 Nxb3 26.Nc2 (26.axb3 Qxb3+ 27.Kc1 Rac8+) 26...Nd2+ 27.Kc1 Rac8) 25...Qc3+= Black shouldn't be upset with a draw.

19...Bxb2 20.Rc1!

20.Qb3 Qxb3 21.axb3 Bxa1 22.Nxa1 Ke7 It is two bishops versus a rook and two pawns. Roughly equal, but practice this position against friends, or better yet, rivals. (22...Ne5 is another idea.).

20.Rb1? Qxa2 21.Rxb2 Qxb2 the black queen is still lodged in the white position.

20...Rc8 21.Bd3 Rf8=



[FEN "2r1kr2/1p6/p1npp2p/6p1/q7/3B1QBP/PbN2PP1/2RK3R w - - 0 22"]

There is no need to rush. Black is fine. Yet the position is crazy! Let's look at some games and see how top players approach this system.

The following game is where 15...Nf3+! was first played, with excellent results.

Svidler, P (2738) – Topalov, V (2788)
WCh-FIDE San Luis ARG (5), 03.10.2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 Ng4 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 9.Bg3 Bg7 10.h3 Ne5 11.Nf5 Bxf5 12.exf5 Nbc6 13.Nd5 e6 14.Ne3

Notice that White omits 14.fxe6 for now.

14...Qa5+ 15.c3 Nf3+ 16.Qxf3 Bxc3+ 17.Kd1 Qa4+ 18.Nc2 Bxb2 19.fxe6

This move should help Black, since it opens lines.

19...fxe6 20.Qb3

Later games improved on this try. But Svidler is 2700+, so it is instructive to see how a world-class player handled the situation. I imagine Black's play had caught him off guard. Whenever an opponent comes out with a stinger, especially in the opening, always take a deep breath and collect yourself. Otherwise, the game will feel out of control.

20.Qh5+? Ke7 Now Black's rooks are connected and the white king is stuck.

20...Qxb3 21.axb3 Bxa1 22.Nxa1 Ke7 23.Bd3 Rac8 24.Re1 Nd4 25.f3



[FEN "2r4r/1p2k3/p2pp2p/6p1/3n4/1P1B1PBP/6P1/N2KR3 b - - 0 25"]

Both players are trying to activate their pieces, the fundamental axiom of chess.

25...Rc3 26.Kd2 Rbc8 27.Rb1 R3c5 28.b4

28.Bf2 The pin doesn't work out. 28...Rd5 29.Be4 Nxf3+.

28...Rd5 29.Bf2 Kd7 30.Be3 Nf5 31.Bf2 Nh4 32.Bxh4 gxh4 33.Nc2

The problem for White is that this knight was tucked in a corner for quite a few moves. Now, White has already ceded one of his bishops and Black has all the activity.

33...h5

33...Rg8 seems more natural to me. 34.Ne3 Rd4 35.b5 a5.

34.Re1

34.b5!? a5 35.Ra1 Ra8 36.Ra4 Rg5 37.Ne3 Rc5 38.Rxh4 a4 White has at least some counterplay.

34...Rg8 35.Kc3 a5

35...Rxc2 36.Ne3 Rxd3+ 37.Kxd3 Rh2 also looks very convincing.

36.Bc4

36.bxa5 Rxa5 37.Kb4 Rc5.

36...Rc8 37.Ne3 Rb5 38.Kd3 Rxb4+ 39.Bxe6+ Kxe6 40.Nc2+ Kd5 41. Nxb4+ axb4

Black liquidates into a winning rook endgame. Contrary to the popular saying, not all of them are drawn.

42.Re7 b5 43.Rh7 Rc3+ 44.Kd2 Rc4 0-1

The debut of Topalov's idea was certainly successful. Let's see if history will agree with his inventive play.

Here is a rather recent game with this opening. Black defeated his stronger opponent in our new favorite line.

Yemelin, V (2578) – Bogner, S (2467)

2nd Pfalz Open Neustadt an der Weinstrasse (6), 19.02.2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 Ng4 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 9.Bg3 Bg7 10.h3 Ne5 11.Nf5 Bxf5 12.exf5 Nbc6 13.Nd5 e6 14.fxe6

Unlike the Svidler game, White captures the e-pawn immediately.

14...fxe6 15.Ne3 Qa5+ 16.c3 Nf3+ 17.Qxf3

17.gxf3 only justifies the knight sacrifice! 17...Bxc3+ 18.bxc3 Qxc3+ 19.Qd2 (19.Ke2? Nd4+ 20.Qxd4 Qxd4+) 19...Qxa1+/-.

17...Bxc3+ 18.Kd1 Qa4+ 19.Nc2 Bxb2 20.Rc1!

This makes sense. White needs to protect the rook and also keep the black queen out.

20...Rc8

This is the recommendation of *New In Chess*.

20...Bxc1? 21.Qf6 (21.Kxc1?? Qxc2+ 22.Kxc2 Nd4+ 23.Kd2 Nxf3+ 24.gxf3 e5+) 21...Kd7 22.Kxc1 Qxa2 23.Bd3 is similar to the game we just looked at, except the queens are present, which tilts the advantage to White, since the two bishops offer attacking chances. 23...Rac8 24.Rd1 d5 25.Bf5 Rhe8 26.Qf7

+ Kd8 27.Re1 Qa3+ 28.Nxa3 Ne5+ 29.Kd2 Nxf7 30.Bxe6 Let's draw a curtain over the rest of the game. 1–0, Svidler,P (2735)-Grischuk,A (2726), Mexico City 2007.

20...0–0–0!? is Horst's idea.



[FEN "2kr3r/1p6/p1npp2p/6p1/q7/5QBP/PbN2PP1/2RK1B1R w - - 0 21"]

It seems promising: 21.Qg4 Qxg4+ 22.hxg4 Bxc1 23.Kxc1 e5 24.Ne3 Kd7 25. Bd3 Nd4 26.Kd2 Ke6; 20...Qxa2? 21.Qe4 Qd5+ 22.Qxd5 exd5 23.Rb1+-.

21.Bd3 Rf8 22.Qe4

22.Qg4 Horst gives 22...Nd4 (22...Qxg4+ 23.hxg4 Bxc1 24.Kxc1 Rf6 I like this too.) 23.Re1 Qxa2 24.Re4 Bxc1 25.Rxd4 Bf4=.

22.Qh5+ Kd7 23.Qxh6 Bxc1 24.Kxc1 Qxa2 25.Rd1 Ne7 26.Qxg5 Rc6 New In Chess analyzes this position deeply. But practicing this position is more useful that memorizing moves. 27.Qg7 (27.Bh4 Rxc2+! 28.Bxc2 Nf5 29.Qg4 Rc8 30.Qe4 Nxh4 31.Qh7+ Ke8 32.Qh8+ Kd7 33.Qh7+=) 27...Rfc8 28.Qb2 unclear.

22...Qxe4 23.Bxe4 Bxc1 24.Kxc1 Nd4

Bogner does not let the position die and keeps pushing.

25.Re1 Kd7 26.Kd2 Nf5 27.Bh2?!

Now White is coming under the mercy of Black.

27.Bxb7 Rc5 28.Bxa6 Rb8 29.Bd3 Rb2 Black gets a lot of activity for the pawn, but maybe this is best.

27...Nh4 28.Bg3 d5 29.Bd3

29.Bxh4 gxh4 30.Bf3 Kd6 31.Ne3 Rf4 As we have seen, Black does pretty well in this unbalanced ending.

29...Nxb2 30.Rb1 b5 31.Nb4

Finally, White gets some piece play, but Black keeps his cool.

31...h5!

Black switches from queenside to kingside play, a sign of a great player.

32.Nxa6 h4 33.Bxb5+ Ke7 34.Be5 Rxf2+ 35.Kd3 Rcc2 36.Rd1 Rxa2 37. Bc3

37.Nb4 Here is a sample variation. 37...Ra3+ 38.Kd4 Nf4 39.Nd3 Re2 40. Nxf4 Re4+ 41.Kc5 gxf4.

37...Rf3+ 38.Kd4 e5+ 39.Kxd5 Rxc3

Now the win is very simple.

40.Kxe5 Re3+ 41.Kf5 Rf2+ 42.Kg4 Re4+ 43.Kh5 Nf4+ 44.Kh6 Re6+ 45. Kh7 Nxh3 46.Nc7 Rf7+ 47.Kg8 Rg6+ 48.Kh8 Rd6 49.Re1+ Kf6 50.Ne8+ Kg6 51.Kg8

White fights to the finish but Bogner is an expert in these kinds of positions.

51...Rff6 52.Re7 Rd8 53.Rg7+ Kf5 54.Bd7+ Kf4 55.Re7 g4 56.Kg7 Ra6 57. Nf6 Rxf6 58.Kxf6 Ng5 0-1

I was really impressed by this game.

This next game was played a few weeks ago by two world-class players.

Karjakin,Sergey (2760) - Grischuk,A (2771)
Tal Memorial Moscow RUS (6), 11.11.2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 Ng4 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 9.Bg3 Bg7 10.h3 Ne5 11.Nf5 Bxf5 12.exf5 Nbc6 13.Nd5 e6 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.Ne3 Qa5+ 16.c3 Nf3+ 17.Qxf3 Bxc3+ 18.Kd1 Qa4+ 19.Nc2 Bxb2 20. Rc1 Rc8 21.Bd3 Rf8 22.Qg4

We looked at this move briefly in the previous illustrative game.

22...Nd4 23.Re1 Qxa2 24.Re4 Bxc1 25.Rxd4 Bf4

This position looks about equal.

26.Bxf4 Rxf4 27.Rxf4 gxf4 28.Qg8+ Kd7 29.Qf7+ Kd8 30.Qf8+ Kd7 31. Qxf4 Qd5



[FEN "2r5/1p1k4/p2pp2p/3q4/5Q2/3B3P/2N2PP1/3K4 w - - 0 32"]

Even though the queens are still on the board, Black is much safer than in previous scenarios that we examined.

32.Qf7+ Kd8 33.Ke2 Rxc2+

Grishuk goes for the draw.

33...Qe5+ 34.Ne3 d5 If you are playing someone of roughly equal strength, play on with these fighting moves.

34.Bxc2 Qe5+ 35.Kd2 Qa5+ 36.Kd1 Qa1+ 37.Ke2 Qe5+ 38.Kd3 Qd5+ 39. Kc3 Qc5+ 40.Kb2 Qe5+ 41.Kc1 Qe1+ 42.Kb2 Qe5+ 43.Kb3 Qb5+ 44.Kc3 Qc5+ 45.Kd2 Qa5+ 46.Ke2 ½-½

Black is still holding his own in this line. The verdict is still out on 6...Ng4; though it has been supplanted by 6...e6 and 6...e5.

Lessons Learned

- The Najdorf is about active piece play and the pawn breaks ...b5 and ...e5. Remember to keep your pieces active and make threats.
- Don't be afraid of the endgame, since the rook and two pawns usually

proves better than the two bishops.

- Memorize as much as you can and write down what you learn from your practice games. If you are playing the Najdorf, this should not be anything new.

Practitioners

- Sebastian Bogner is a recently crowned grandmaster from Germany. Keep a watch on this young player.
- Alexander Grischuk. This Russian grandmaster has long been among the world's best. I know him best for his dreadlocks and leather jackets, but those days may be past. He is also a world-class blitz player with a sharp style.
- Veselin Topalov. The Bulgarian grandmaster still has world title aspirations.

Further Reading

This variation is constantly evolving, so I would keep current with new games via *The Week in Chess* (TWIC) and look for updates in the *New In Chess Yearbooks*. Opening books are not as essential, since the theory on this changes so quickly.

© 2010 ChessCafe.com. All Rights Reserved.

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

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[ChessCafe Archives\]](#)
[\[ChessCafe Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#)
[\[Contact ChessCafe.com\]](#)

© 2010 BrainGamz, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.