



COLUMNISTS

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Playing the Board and the Man

Chess for Scoundrels, by Nigel Davies – Running Time: Four hours

My first introduction to chess psychology came in the form of an eight-year old kicking me under the table and making funny faces whenever it was my turn to move. Fortunately for me, he was so busy with his guerrilla tactics that he soon blundered and lost the game. Ever since I've seen my run of intimidators and warriors disguised as pacifist. How colorless would a tournament be without the kid who confidently slams the pieces and looks bored while we think; the cold-staring blitzer, or the player who throws his arms up in the air in losing positions making you believe he already gave up? Davies invites us to join this devilish bunch of scoundrels, and while he doesn't exactly advocate under-the-table Tae Kwon Do, he will expose you to an arsenal of psychological ploys any tournament player worth its salt should be aware of.



His first stop is Torture, which he describes as slowly improving one's position and playing on our opponent's nerves. The poster boy for this technique is non-surprisingly Tigran Petrosian, who was known for his python-like technique, slowly suffocating his opponents. To illustrate the torture technique, Davies shows us a ninety-six move marathon in which Petrosian tired his opponent through a long and tedious maneuvering game, finally inducing him to blunder at the critical moment. I personally enjoyed the game, though my step-dad fell asleep half-way through it. Davies was trying to make a point in showing a long game, but this is one rare instance in which I wished Davies could have gone through the moves a bit faster. The game was, after all, long and tedious.

Another dimension to Petrosian's psychological repertoire is presented by Davies through a story he once heard from Fedorowicz. The American grandmaster had found it unusual that Petrosian, whom he had never met before, was unusually friendly and warm towards him. Throughout the tournament he realized that he was paired to play Petrosian in the last round, and concluded that Petrosian was probably being friendly in case he needed to secure an easy draw.

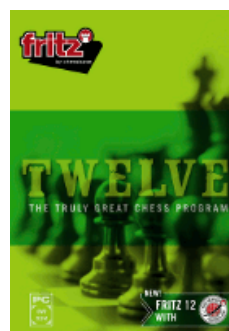
The second stop is Intimidation. This comes in several forms, such as exhibiting a confident demeanor, playing a sharp opening line or gambit, or making a visually impressive move. One of the two sample games was Karpov-Korchnoi from the 1978 World Chess Championship match in which Karpov uncorked the shocking knight sacrifice **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.Nbd2 Nc5 10.c3 d4 11.Ng5!?**

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Ever since, players have gone home to analyze this position and found grabbing the knight quite playable. I found over a hundred games in this line in my database, all the way up to last year. Korchnoi balked at accepting the intimidating sacrifice and managed to draw the game.

Another psychological ploy is Rope, where Davies advocates not playing forcing moves against weaker players. He reasons that weaker players are more likely to make mistakes if put in a position to make decisions. He tell us about an old interview by Spassky where the former champion half-jokingly stated that one shouldn't punish the first mistake of one's opponent, because one will often get an even worse mistake later on. Davies uses some compelling examples, including a game between Lieb-Andersson in which the GM went along with the opponent's piece simplification strategy, and won thanks to his opponent's inaccuracies. This was a terrific lecture and I only wished Davies would have included some psychological ploys to use against stronger players as well. Probably it is difficult to find such ploys without chess knowledge backing it up.

There are occasions where we feel compelled to win a game. Perhaps it is to secure a prize in the tournament, achieve a norm, or as is often my case, when we are tired of losing too many games in a row. In these instances, Davies suggests keeping maximum tension and complexity in the position and not coming all guns blazing into the tournament hall. He uses a couple of examples, one taken from Krogus's classic book *Chess Psychology*, where the author lost to a lower rated player, and the final game of the 1997 Kasparov-Karpov match, in which Kasparov needed to win in order to keep the title.

Another interesting and common technique is titled Pavlovian Responses. Just as the salivating dogs in Pavlov's classic conditioning experiments, chess players make inferior automated responses if bent on playing their pet lines (no pun intended). He uses various examples here, starting with a twenty-one move miniature between GM Smirin and Neff. After **1.e4 c5 2.c3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6**, Davies puts out his best scoundrel face, and with an entertaining grin on his face proceeds to tell us:

"Well, I am playing a Scheveningen so I will play 5..e6 because I play the Scheveningen. Except that this is not a Scheveningen at all because the moves have been completely different.... 5.a6 getting my "Najdorf"... not really a Najdorf at all.... I am going to play my "Dragon" with 5...g6, but it is not a Dragon at all...."

This was quite an entertaining and valuable lecture, and something I feel happens quite too often when we memorize opening moves without understanding the ideas behind them.

Given the infinite possibilities of the game, it is surprising how many beginning moves are looked down upon by chess players. For instance, many who face the Grob with 1.g4 or 1...g5 feel their honor is on the line and try to go about setting their opponent straight no matter what. This sometimes leads to the insulted party losing all objectivity and playing for a win in inferior positions, falling head on into the scoundrel's trap. The most famous example of this is illustrated by Davies's compatriot Miles, who beat Karpov with 1...a6 at the European Team Championships in 1980. Miles commented that by the time he played 2...b5 the spectator's laughter was becoming embarrassing.

Deception is a fundamental weapon in competitive chess. Players often try to send mixed signals to their opponents, such as shaking their heads after making a move in the hopes that their opponents think they have blundered, or playing a move with a confident look while in fact they are unsure about it. Davies also includes specific chess strategies over the board, such as making moves on the queenside while really intending to attack on the kingside, draw offers, and others. Davies uses a great example from a game between De Firmian and Chernin.



"Oh my, what have I done??"

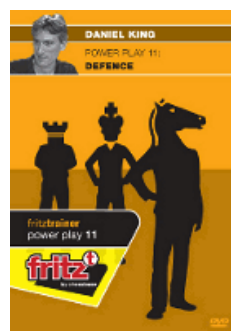
In time pressure De Firmian played **39.Bg2** while looking stunned and shocked right after making the move. Chernin fell for the ploy and immediately played **39...Qe1+ 40.Kh2 Qxf2** only to be faced with **41.Rxa6+ bxa6 42.Qxd5+ Kb8 43.Qd6+ Ka7 44.Qb6#**.

I would highly recommend this DVD for tournament players. Chess for Scoundrels is not a superficial treatment of a fascinating subject. Instead, Davies takes over four hours to discuss these psychological ruses. You will get suggestions for how to exploit time trouble, how to use and refuse draw offers, playing dead, engaging in active defense, defending difficult positions and never giving up. If you ever thought chess was confined to the sixty-four white and black squares, Davies will disabuse you of such naïve notions.

[Order](#) *Chess for Scoundrels*
by Nigel Davies

Power Play 11: Defence by Daniel King – Running Time: 5 hours 25 minutes

Most chess players are eager to devour a book on tactics, familiarize themselves with typical mating patterns, practice positions featuring the Greek sacrifice, or learn how to pry open files against the opponent's king. Attack is exciting! There is no shortage of materials out there to emulate Morphy or Tal, and they come with exciting titles such as *Rocking the Ramparts*, *Fire on Board*, *Storming the Barricades*, *The Art of Attack*, etc. Defense, on the other hand, gets close to zero attention, which is rather unfortunate because players often have to defend their positions over the board. Defense is a vital skill for the improving player.



One of the first books in the area of defense was Soltis's *The Art of Defense in Chess*. This inspiring book increased our knowledge and awareness of the subject, but not necessarily our ability. From a training and development perspective, the current best work on the subject is [Practical Chess Defence](#) by Jacob Aagaard, aimed exclusively at building one's defensive muscle. Through three levels and two hundred positions, Aagaard takes the reader on an emotional ride that will delight, frustrate, and torture readers as they balance on the brink of disaster trying to escape overwhelming attacking

positions. Aagaard clearly believes that one should develop defensive skills in the same way we approach tactical training.

This brings me to *PowerPlay 11: Defence* by GM Daniel King. Unlike Aagaard who puts us in the eye of the storm, King takes us back before the clouds begin to gather, and focuses on ways to avoid falling into defensive positions. He gets us started with ten puzzles, leaving the solutions at the end of the DVD. The idea is to first go over the main content before looking at the solutions, so that we can reassess our answers with the newly-gained knowledge. This is an excellent way to get viewers involved, treating the subject as a skill-development need.

The following is a sample from the test positions. White has just played g4 and Black must figure out how to deal with this aggressive advance.



The first subject in *PowerPlay 11* is premature castling, one of the main culprits for landing in defensive positions.



After White's **17.Bd3**, Black made the correct decision to avoid kingside castling and try to exchange one of White's powerful attacking pieces with **17...Bd6**. However, after **18.Re3** he castled with **18...0-0-0**, allowing White to attack on that side of the board with **19.a4** and soon went into a lost endgame. The game ended in another forty-three moves, but King stops after **19...Bxe5 20.dxe5 Qd5 21.Qf1 Qd4 22.axb5 a5 23.Rxa5 Rd5 24.Qe2 Rhd8 25.Ra3 Kb8 26.h3**.

King's style of presenting is suitable for club-players of all levels. He is well-known for his engaging style and clarity of communication, one of the main reasons the *Power Play* series is so effective. For instance, in the diagrammed position above he takes the time to slowly explain various positional factors, such as White's initiative due to the position of the bishops. The bishop on e5 has a beautiful diagonal looking at Black's camp from both directions, and after 17.Bd3 both bishops are looking towards the kingside. He also mentions the advantages of White's isolated d-pawn, which allows more space for moves such as 17.Bd3, the rook lift Re3, etc. For Black, he mentions the solid chain of pawns on the kingside, and the effective position of the light-square bishop along the h1-a8 diagonal. He often stops to dissect positions in this way, and no matter what the subject of King's DVDs, we leave enlightened with a greater understanding of positional chess.

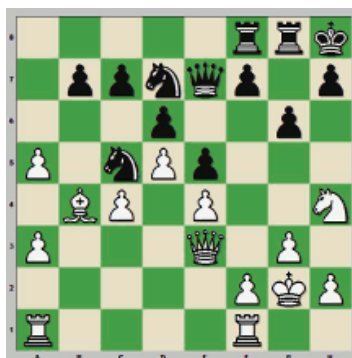
At the end of the first lecture King invites us to work out Black's best way of handling the position after 18.Re3, and he discusses the solution on the

second lecture where he recommends a strategy of simplification, exchanging bishops with 18...Bxd6. This is a good lecture and continues the theme of avoiding getting into difficult defensive positions. I do feel that perhaps King missed a nice opportunity to orient players on finding the best defensive moves in dire situations. For instance, he suggest that 18...0-0 might actually be playable, offering the sharp double-bishop sacrifice after 19.Bxh7+ Kxh7 20.Qh5+ Kg8 21.Bxg7 f6 22.Qh8+ Kg7 23.Bxf8 Rxf8 24.Qh7+ Ke8 25.Rxe6 Qxe6 26.Qxb7. This is a line where a false step can get Black mated, so it could have been good material to advise on how to remain calm and find only-moves in such critical defensive positions.

It is clear King does not want to get too much into the subject of defensive methods, but on how to avoid them altogether. This makes the title slightly misleading, and King admits this himself at the start of DVD. On the other hand, prevention in defense has tremendous practical value, and King gives ample treatment to this topic. In addition, some of the test positions in the test did require Black to find the best move to stay on the board.

The second topic is devoted to the subject delayed castling, which King covers in four lectures. He starts this lecture with his overall philosophy for this DVD: "In order to be a good defender, I think is important to be able to recognize the danger before it occurs." The lectures feature the game Topalov-Ponomarev from the M-Tel Masters in 2005: **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Ba6 5.b3 Bb4+ 6.Bd2 Be7 7.Nc3 0-0** where Topalov came up with a more aggressive placement of the light-squared bishop after **8.Rc1 c6 9.e4 d5 10.e5 Ne4 11.Bd3!?** The moral of these lectures is to help players be alert to counterattacking possibilities, and not to underestimate the opponent's attack.

The third topic is the advanced of the f-pawn; a topic that King gives comprehensive treatment through eleven lectures, as well as other works in the series such as [Power Play 2: Attacking the King](#), and [Power Play 3: Pawn Storm](#). King often illustrates typical moves that should cause us to flick our alert buttons on immediately, such as the one in the game here after **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 Nc6 5.Nf3 d6 6.Bd2 Qe7 7.a3 Bxc3 8.Bxc3 e5 9.d5 Nb8 10.e4 0-0 11.Be2 Nh5**, with ideas of f5 and Nf4. As in most lectures, King leaves you with some homework to do. For instance, in the game above after 11...Nh5 King analyzes 12...Bh3 13.Nh4 Nf6 14.Qd3 15.b4 a5 16.bxa5 Na6 17.Qe3 Nac5 18.Bb4 Kh8 19.Bf1 Bxf1 20.Kxf1 g6 21.Kg2 Rg8 22.Rhf1 Raf8



King closes this lecture with the following comment:

"Both sides have bought their kings to relatively safe positions, both sides have developed more or less – this one is still in the corner [Ra1], and black is building up for some kind of kingside attack. So here is my question for you: What would you do as White in this position. It's white to play. My advice is: Think very carefully about what black is trying to achieve, and then on that basis, choose a move..."

On the next lecture you get the solution, often accompanied with more questions, making this DVD an excellent source of practice. King often recommends that we set up the positions on a board to help our ideas "flow from our fingertips and through our brains"

The fourth topic dealt with the f4-g4 duo advance in four lectures, and dealing mostly with Queen's Gambit positions, such as the game played between Spassky-Petrosian from the 1959 USSR Championship. King ends the first lecture asking how would we deal with white's aggression after **1.c4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3.Nc3 d5 4.d4 Be7 5.cxd5 exd5 6.Bg5 c6 7.Qc2 g6 8.e3 Bf5 9.Bd3 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 Nbd7 11.h4**.

King devoted one lecture to the final topics of passive play, the weakness of the back-rank, and stalemate; as well as a couple of lectures dealing with the process of elimination. The sample games were interesting, and the solutions to the questions posed by King exciting, as in Ennio-Nunn from the Geneva Open in 1987.



Black to play and win

Nunn ended matters with **28...Qe4!** and White couldn't avoid losing a piece.

King shows us a few more position featuring the back-rank mate. The example Rovner-Kamyshev (Moscow 1947) reminded me a little bit of one of the most famous back-rank examples of all time, where the unknown Edwin Ziegler Adams sacrificed the queen several times against Carlos Torre in New Orleans 1920. Although Edward Winter proved this game a sham, the position itself is still one of the most beautiful examples of this mating motif. King shows us several more examples to make the point that as defensive experts we need to be aware of this type mate, which occurs too often in chess.

The test positions covered all the content topics in more or less the same order. I thought it would be interesting to benchmark the difficulty of the questions, and invited my 1300-rated student to take the test along with me (I'm currently rated in the 1900s). I was able to find the correct solution to six out of ten puzzles, while my student got two correct. I would imagine a 2100-rated player would have gotten most of the questions right.

King is probably the best presenter in the Fritz Trainer circuit, and *Power Play 11* does not disappoint. I highly recommend this series to anyone, and hope they continue adding content to the Power Play series.

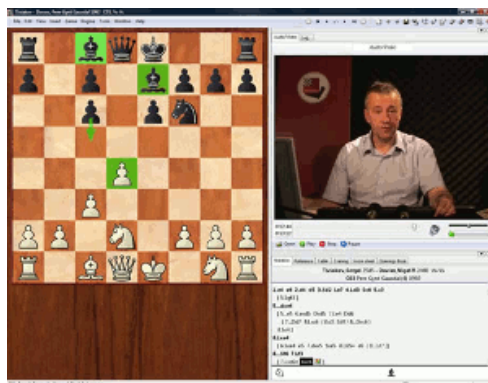
[Order](#) *Power Play 11: Defense*
by Daniel King

1...e6: A Solid Repertoire against 1.d4 and 1.e4 by Nigel Davies – Running Time: Five hours

In the [Arkhangelsk](#) DVD, Mikhailchishin asks the rhetorical question "why is the main line the main line?" His answer is that the line is not only the most played, but it is also the line where both players can best demonstrate the main plans and ideas behind a particular opening. This path is often heavily analyzed and one needs to be up-to-date in this analysis.



Enter here the average club player with full-time jobs and family responsibilities. We don't want to get slaughtered in the opening against a booked-up opponent, so we tend to look for shortcuts - easy-to-play openings that rely on general ideas rather than specific move orders. These moves might not be considered the very best ones, but they take prepared opponents off known-theoretical lines, and we avoid having to study reams of theory. For instance, most French players are familiar with the c5 plan, say after, 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. Nd2 Bd7 4.Bd3 and Black now gets the standard 4...c5 lever aimed mainly at leaving White with a weakness on d4. In *1...e6: A Solid Repertoire*, Davies suggests a different route with 4..Nc6 and shows viewers how to play these types of positions.



In *1...e6: A Solid Repertoire*, Davies has worked out an economical defense against 1.e4 and 1.d4. Of course, there is a plethora of other moves at this early stage of the game, so Davies concludes this DVD with a few suggestions against players of the Catalan, Colle, London, and Torre systems.

The contents are divided as follows:

- Introduction
- French 3.Nd2 Be7 lines (Six lectures)
- French 3.Nc3 Be7 (Four lectures)
- French 3.e5 c5 (Four lectures)
- French 3.exd5
- French – 2nd move Alternatives
- Franco-Indian 2.c4 (Five lectures)
- Catalan
- Anti-Torre
- Anti-London
- Anti-Colle

I left this video wondering how economical 1..e6 really is. First one has to contend with playing the French Defense, which might not be to everyone's taste. Davies tries to shortcut French theory with ...Bd7 in answer to 3.Nc3 and 3.Nd2, but then there is the advanced French, the exchange French, second-move alternatives, and various openings that Davies has no choice but to give minimal treatment to. Davies does state that 1...e6 is geared specifically to meet 1.e4 and 1.d4. We also get into Franco-Indian lines after 1. e4 e6 2.c4 Bb4+ which can often transpose to the Bogo-Indian Defense.

Nevertheless, my concern is really more a matter of personal taste. If you like playing the French, Davies does a good job here of balancing both the explanations and variations. 1...e6 generates some intriguing possibilities that had never occurred to me. For instance, in Franco-Indian lines Black has not bought his knight out to f6, as typically occurs in the Nimzo-Indian Defense. This gives Black a couple of extra options, such as playing ...f7-f5 before ... Nf6, and preventing the sharp Bg5 variation in the Nimzo-Indian after 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Bg5. Similarly, as Davies points out 1...e6 also avoids certain sharp choices by white in the Trompowsky, such as 1.d4 Nf6 2. Bg5 e6 3.e4 h6 4.Bxf6 Qxf6 and now white can play the dangerous Qd2/ f4 plan. My own experience facing 1.d4 e6 is that it is the move order used by those who like to play the Dutch after 1.e4 e6 2.c4 f5, but want to avoid the Staunton Gambit.

The "anti" lectures are useful bits to get us in the right direction to explore further. Against the Torre Attack, Davies uses the game Hort-Browne played in 1979 in the line 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bg5 h6 4.Bh4 g5 5.Ng3 Ne4 where Browne took the full point. Davies does not think much of the other common move arising after 4.Bxf6 Qxf6, and just mentions that Black gets a solid position from 5.c3 d6 6.e4 Nd7 7.Nbd2 g6. Coincidentally, I had the good fortune to be paired against IM Danny Kopec recently, in a game that featured the Torre. After the game, he mentioned that the 4...g5 line after 4.Bh5 seems to be effective.

The Colle and London lectures were extremely brief, the latter lasting a mere two and a half-minutes and featuring an amateur-level game. Still, the ideas were simple and easy to understand.

Order *1...e6: A Solid Repertoire against 1.d4 and 1.e4*
by Nigel Davies

The King's Indian by Viktor Bologan – Running Time: 5 hours 10 minutes

The King's Indian Defense is a rich and complex opening, boasting forty ECO codes, which is as many as the Ruy Lopez. It is an opening that has been played by great champions such as Kasparov and Fischer, as well as by Shirov, Gelfand, and Bologan, who relies primarily on his own games to explain his suggested repertoire for black. Amateur tournament players tend to play what is fashionable, so nowadays we seem to encounter the Slav more often than the King's Indian Defense, but the latter is still a common opening and Bologan appeals to the dynamism and flexibility this hypermodern opening offers. He explains that Black can play on queenside in Volga Gambit style, on the kingside with an f5 plan when White crosses over Black's territory with d4-d5, or possibly play in the center.



He also makes a good case for taking up the King's Indian if we want to play for a win. Bologan's perspective is that if one is familiar with middlegame strategic ideas in the King's Indian Defense, we can often find ourselves easily outplaying our opponents, even if they are higher rated. He also points out that sometimes it is psychologically difficult for White to handle Black's play-to-win approach in the King's Indian, and that there are no lines that give White an immediate advantage, making this a strong and solid weapon.

Bologan promises a full repertoire for Black and he delivers. The DVD contains the following lectures:

- Introduction
- White plays Bg5 or Bf4
- White plays h3
- White plays 5.Ne2 or 5.Bd3
- The Samisch Variation with 6.Be3
- The Samisch Variation with 6.Bg5
- The Four Pawns Attack
- The Averbakh Variation
- The Exchange Variation
- The Exchange Variation
- The Gligoric System
- The Classical Variation with 9.Bg5, 9.Bd2, 9.a4 and 9.b4
- The Classical Variation with 9.Ne1
- The Classical Variation with 9.Nd2
- The Classical Variation with 8.Be3
- The Fianchetto Variation with d3
- The Fianchetto Variation with b3
- The Fianchetto Variation, other 7th moves and 8.e4

- The Fianchetto Variation with 8.h3
- The Fianchetto Variation with 8.d5
- The Fianchetto Variation with 8.b3
- The Fianchetto Variation without c4

Bologan has a very organized style of presenting, which I find highly effective for dealing with complex openings. He starts each video by presenting the general ideas, concepts, and piece placements in each line, and then transitioning into the actual moves. A typical example would be the first lecture in the Sämisch Variation after 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.f3. Bologan explains:

"Now White is playing a very solid move. It is clear that White wants to prepare this set up of Be3 and Qd2 or, or Bg5 and Qd2. So this is very solid set up because White has a very strong pawn center, and for Black it is not so easy to attack it. I will recommend the system which starts with a6 and Nbd7. First we make sure we castle of course (5...0-0). Now we are waiting for the sixth move for White ... Here we have two possibilities, mainly 6.Be3 and 6.Bg5, and on 6.Be3 we play here 6...a6 ... The idea behind this move is to prepare Nbd7 and c5, this is the main plan for Black ... 6...a6 is just a useful move, especially in the lines where Black is playing c5, White is playing d5 and Black is sacrificing a pawn with b5..."

This is a typical introduction from Bologan. He is a bit more economical with words at the start, just offering us some general concepts, and then describing what will be his recommended repertoire and why. Once he is going through the moves, he explains things further. He also closes each lecture with a formal conclusion, summarizing key learning points. One typical conclusion is offered at the end of the lecture on the Averbakh variation:

"So let's make conclusions on this line, on Averbakh...we play Na6. The ideas behind this move are the same as in the Four Pawns attack ... c5. Sometimes If they put the bishop on g6 and pawn on f4, in that case we then play c6 and Nc7, and h6 with the idea of attacking the bishop ... and we are not afraid of this h4-h5 attack, because meanwhile we play e6 and open the center, and we normally put our queen on c7, and at the same time we have our play on the queenside with a6, b5 with good counterplay..."

One method I found highly effective in Bologan's lectures was his tendency to often stop and emphasize a move that was typical in the given variation. For example, in the lecture on the h3 variation after 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.h3 Nbd7 6.Nf3 e5 7.d5 Nc5 8.Qc2 he tells us not to rush to castle and first play a5. He reminds you that a5 is a very typical move in the King's Indian when the knight is on c5, and that we always have to be careful not to allow White to play b4 and disturb the placement of the knight. These terrific verbal stops are interspersed throughout the lectures, making the content easier to retain. Viewers will undoubtedly appreciate this aspect of Bologan's lectures, given the large number of white systems and variations Black needs to prepare against in order to successfully play the King's Indian.

Bologan opted for non main-lines if the moves were solid and easier to play. For instance, in the Four Pawns attack he suggests a plan with 0-0 and 6...Na6, instead of immediate play in the center with 0-0, c5, and e6. This seems to be a safer and more positional treatment of the variation, which Bologan deems as one of the sharpest responses from White and where players are looking to refute the King's Indian altogether these days.



As a viewer I felt in very good hands with Bologan. He is tremendously organized and consistent in his approach. He also makes terrific use of the color commentary functions, leaving these visual cues in the accompanying games to make them easier to analyze.

[Order](#) *The King's Indian*
by Viktor Bologan

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