



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****Starting Out: The King's Indian***

by Joe Gallagher

Starting Out: The Sicilian

by John Emms

Bird-Opening (CD-ROM)

by Dmitri Oleinikov

The Big Bird PowerBase

(CD-ROM) by Sid Pickard

The Bird's Day in the Sun

This month's Checkpoint bids welcome to two new types of products. Firstly, opening CDs from ChessBase, which have been in circulation for a long time, but not previously been reviewed here in Checkpoint. I will review one CD this month, but have already received more for next month's column, and without saying too much, I think there is a lot to be excited about on that front. Secondly, Everyman Chess has started a new series aimed at those who want to understand the basics of an opening, i.e., the not-yet-so-strong players. The idea is to help the learning process. So often a player will end up learning reams of theory but little or none of it will be put in the right context and will therefore not be properly understood; with these books, this supposedly should become less of a problem. For the first two books in this new series, Everyman has wheeled out two



big guns, GMs Emms and Gallagher, both of whom are established and very popular authors. I will take a look at how they fare in this new concept.

In today's column we round out reviews with a database product from Chess Central's Sid Pickard. He, like the CD from ChessBase, takes a look at the Bird Opening, 1 f4. It's interesting to see that an opening, which so rarely is covered in regular monographs, all of a sudden gets coverage in two different CD products at almost the same time. I will look at them individually as well as compare them. Enjoy!

Starting Out: The King's Indian by Joe Gallagher, 2002
Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 176 pp., \$16.95.

As mentioned above, this book along with the book by Emms on the Sicilian (reviewed below) is the first in the what I imagine will be a long series based on the premise of bringing the basic ideas of an opening to the reader through plenty of introductory text, game annotations, hints, plans and much more. Theoretical material, which is normally the dominating area of an opening book, has been cut down to less than the bare essentials.



To cover the King's Indian in this fashion, Everyman has found current Swiss resident English GM Joe Gallagher, who won the 2001 British Championship and who also is a life-long adherent of the King's Indian for Black. These credits aside, Gallagher has written several excellent opening books, including one of my personal favourites *Beating The Anti-Sicilian* and co-authored the excellent one-volume reference work *Nunn's Chess Openings*.

Gallagher opens the introduction by asking the highly relevant question: "Is the King's Indian the opening for me?"

Most books assume that just because you want to play the opening, the opening is right for you. Well, time to wake up, it isn't necessarily so. I played the King's Indian for a while, but I probably couldn't have found a worse opening.

Therefore this introduction would have been a godsend if I had seen it some 12 years ago, when I wasted too many black games playing according to a plan that I didn't really agree with. Let's see What Gallagher writes to steer us in the right direction: "If your attitude to playing Black in chess is to try to neutralize White's slight advantage b careful defensive play, then the answer is no. In that case you should be looking for a book on something like the Queen's Gambit Declined or the Queen's Indian.

If, on the other hand, you are a bit of a risk taker, you want to battle for the initiative right from the start, launch counter-attacks rather than meekly reacting to the opponents threats and lure White into over-extending himself, then the answer is a resounding yes!"

Then he moves on to tell us a little bit about the history and popularity of the King's Indian. The last part of the introduction has the headline "Objective and layout". Here Gallagher tells us a little bit more about the aim of the present book: "As can gauged from the title, this is not an opening book aimed at the expert player who has already played the King's Indian for many years (although it may still serve as a useful refresher course in the basic King's Indian strategy). Instead it should be of most use to inexperienced players or slightly more experienced players who wish to take up the King's Indian for the first time. Heavy theoretical variations have been kept to a minimum and the emphasis has been placed on explaining the ideas behind the moves in the early stages of the game".

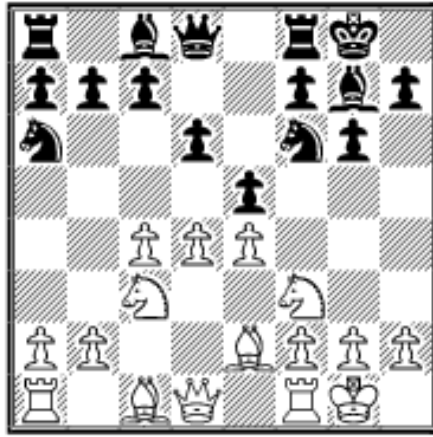
He continues: "The opening has been covered in a systematic manner and the material split into ten chapters. By far the most important variation in the King's Indian is the Classical

and this is reflected by the fact that it takes up the first four chapters. Each of the other major variations has its own chapter devoted to it while the final chapter covers a number of the lesser played systems. Each chapter is then further split up into several sub-sections and the variations are examined through a short theoretical section followed by illustrative games. Throughout the book, I have drawn attention to the most important King's Indian concepts by the way of notes, tips and warnings. There is also a sprinkling of exercises to test you on some of the recurring tactical themes in the King's Indian."

Before looking closer at the contents, let's have a look at how it is divided up:

- Introduction (3 pages)
- **The Classical Variation**
- 1 Alternatives to 7 0-0 (17 pages)
- 2 7 0-0: Alternatives to 7...Nc6 (14 pages)
- 3 7 0-0 Nc6: Main Line with 9 Ne1 (19 pages)
- 4 7 0-0 Nc6: Alternatives to 9 Ne1 (18 pages)
- **Other Variations**
- 5 The Sämisch Variation (24 pages)
- 6 The Fianchetto Variation (19 pages)
- 7 The Four Pawns Attack (18 pages)
- 8 The Averbakh Variation (11 pages)
- 9 White Plays an Early h2-h3 (13 pages)
- 10 Other Systems (12 pages)
- Solutions to Exercises (2 pages)

Each chapter as well as sub-section in the chapters start with an introduction of some sort to the variation that is covered, discussing relevant issues. One such topic is covered under the headline "Isn't the knight badly placed on the edge" in the coverage of the Modern 7...Na6 line that arises after **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 e5 7 0-0 Na6**.



This is by the way what Gallagher has to say about it: "On a superficial reading of the position the knight is indeed badly placed on the edge of the board. The move would appear to go against the basic chess principles of controlling the center. However, once we look a little more closely we can see that

this is not the case. White will not be able to hold the tension in the center forever and at some point he is going to take on e5 or play d5. In both cases the knight is poised to jump into c5, one of its best squares in the King's Indian. On other occasions Black, himself, may relieve the central tension by playing ...e5xd4 and here, too, the square c5 becomes available to the knight. If for some reason Black is unable to play ...Nc5 then there is an alternative method of bringing it back into play: ...c7-c6, followed by ...Nc7 and ...Ne6."

Very informative and instructive. The same goes for other discussions throughout the book, and these alone will help any newcomers to the King's Indian get a very good idea of what the underlying strategies, plans, set-ups, pawn structures, etc., are all about.

These introductions are followed by a very sketchy yet often relevant comments to the main theoretical points in the particular line. Next he asks the question: "Theoretical?", which is where you are being told whether it is important or not to spend your waking hours studying the theory of the variation being discussed. Then he looks at the statistics, how the line scores percentage-wise and how many games he found with the line in his database. This, however, can be quite deceptive as we don't know what kind of database he has, or at what level the games were played. For comparison I can mention an example I came across when writing my next book; a line had been played some 25 times with Black

scoring a respectable 50% against reasonably high-rated opponents, but a closer inspection revealed that it was one lowly-rated GM who had played all the games, and what seemed to be pre-arranged draws in one tournament after the other in Budapest, so it's popularity was false and so was its relative merit. However, to his credit, it should be said that Gallagher usually tells his readers what to look out for. An example from chapter 2: "After 7...Na6 (including 7 Be3 Na6 8 0-0) White has scored 57% from 1600 games. Not bad, but what is very interesting is that in the position after 13...Qe7, the main line from Game 7, White has only managed 46% from just over 100 games. With 8 Re1 White has scored 58%." Again compliments to Gallagher for his intelligent use of statistics, which can easily be abused to the point where they don't make any sense.

Then in the coverage of each line, Gallagher presents us with two or three intelligently chosen examples, games which are a mix of wins for both White and Black, as well as some draws. The games are annotated with mainly narrative text, although he gives us some relevant variations. The annotations are insightful and contain plenty of good advice; the most important ones have been written in bold as if to make it stick better. Some of these are:

Do not move your knights to b6 in the King's Indian

The idea of playing ...a5 to secure the c5-square for a black knight is seen throughout the book. This is one of Black's key strategical ideas in the King's Indian

In such positions the dark-squared bishop is usually worth at least a rook. With all the key pawns on light squares the dark squares in both camps are extremely vulnerable

...and many others. The only thing that bothered me about

the games was that there is no index of complete games. It could easily have been added without much extra work.

Finally each chapter ends with a summary, that draws a line through everything we have been shown on the previous pages. Let's have a look at one of the games with the author himself in action. The notes are those by Gallagher in the present book.

Zlotnikov-Gallagher Arosa 1996

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 h3 0–0 6 Bg5 Na6 7 Bd3 e5 8 d5 Qe8 9 g4 Nd7 10 Nge2 Ndc5

The immediate 10...f5 has also been played but the text is more accurate. Black wants to be in a position to recapture with the bishop, if White takes on f5.

11 Bc2 f5 12 a3

Warning: This may look like an unassuming little move but a3 spells danger for Black in this system. White is threatening to lock the knight on a6 out of the game. Black is forced to take action immediately and that means exchanging in the center.

12...fxe4 13 Nxe4?

White should have played 13 b4 Nd3+ 14 Bxd3 exd3 15 Qxd3 in order to try to keep the knight on a6 out of the game. I had envisaged a neat way to get the beast back into play: 15...e4 16 Qc2 c5! 17 b5 Nb4! although the position is just unclear.

13...Nxe4 14 Bxe4 Nc5 15 Nc3

It is essential for White to keep a piece on e4 to prevent Black from advancing his e-pawn. Black must take quick action as if White has the time to consolidate then his

blockade of e4 will give him a positional advantage.

15...b5!



Not deep, but a visually surprising move. Of course 16 Nxb5 is impossible, but Black's main point is that after 16 cxb5 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 Qxb5 the position has opened and White's king is very exposed. White prefers to give up a pawn to retain the blockade.

16 Be3 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 bxc4 18 Qc2 Qb5 19 0-0-0

The white king had a choice of evils.

19...Bd7 20 Rhe1

White plans to use his rooks on the second rank to defend b2.

20...Qa6 21 Nc3 Rae8?! 22 Rd2 Rb8!

Tip: Always admit your mistakes. Don't be embarrassed or too pigheaded to retrace your steps if that is what the position requires.

23 Qe4 Rb3 24 Rc2 Rfb8 25 Ree2

White has successfully defended his main weakness on b2. It is hard to see how Black can make further progress on the queenside. How can he increase the pressure? Well, ever since White played Qe4 the old adage that a queen is a bad blockader (the queen is too strong a piece to be reduced to the role of blockader) would not leave my head. If only the queen could be attacked then the white position is sure to fall apart.

25...g5!!

I particularly enjoyed the fact that the two key moves in this game were sacrifices of the knight's pawn (15...b5!). Black's plan is simple - to transfer his bishop to g6. The move ...g6-g5 had to be played at once otherwise White could prevent it with h4-h5.

26 Bxg5 Be8 27 f4

White allows the opening of the long diagonal in order to get some vague attacking chances of his own against the black king. The best chance was 27 Qf5 as after 27...Bg6 28 Qe6+ Kh8 29 Bf6 Bxc2 30 Bxg7+ Kxg7 31 Qe7+ White scrambles a draw by perpetual. Black shouldn't be so greedy. With 28...Bf7 29 Qf5 c6! his big center gives him the better prospects.

27...exf4 28 Qxf4 Bxc3!

This is not the sort of move one should play lightly and I didn't. I used up most of my remaining time making sure there would be no nasty surprises on the weakened dark squares around my king.

29 bxc3 Qxa3+ 30 Kd2 Rxc3!?

This is actually the safest move in the position as with best play it leads to a very favourable endgame.

31 Rxe8+?

The main line was 31 Rxc3 Rb2+ 32 Rc2 (32 Kd1 Ba4+ 33 Rcc2 Rb1+) 32 ..Rxc2+ 33 Kxc2 Qd3+ 34 Kc1 Qxe2 35 Bh6 Qe7 which should be winning for Black.

31...Rxe8 32 Rxc3 Qa2+! 33 Rc2

Or 33 Kd1 Qe2+ 34 Kc1 Qe1+ 35 Kc2 Re2+ and Black

wins.

33...Qa5+ 34 Rc3 Qxd5+ 35 Kc1 Re1+ 36 Kb2 Qb5+ 37 Ka2 Re2+ White resigns.

In conclusion, I must say that I am very impressed by this book. Gallagher has done an excellent job in relaying in the ins and outs of the King's Indian to us in terms so everybody can understand what this exciting opening is all about. The presentation is generally objective, but is basically from Black's perspective, with only a limited number of variations. I highly recommend this book to those players who are planning to take up the King's Indian or have just taken it up, and who may not be rated much higher than USCF 2000. So far one of the best opening books this year for players at this level..

My assessment of this CD: 

Order *Starting Out: The King's Indian*
by Joe Gallagher

Starting Out: The Sicilian by John Emms, 2002 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 174 pp., \$16.95.

From Gallagher we jump to another co-author of *Nunn's Chess Openings* and another British GM, John Emms, who long ago made a name for himself as an author several good opening manuals, the latest being his repertoire book *Attacking with 1 e4*, which was far better than its companion volume on 1 d4.



The present book is built around the same format as the one on the King's Indian, with the exception that this book does

not favor either side. Emms has tried to avoid it altogether, and that seems to have worked, because the chapters are very informative. For example, in the summary of the Najdorf Variation, we are told the following:

- 1) The Najdorf is an ideal weapon for ambitious players who are not afraid of learning opening theory.
- 2) Traditionally, 6 Bg5 has been the most aggressive and theoretical response to the Najdorf. One of Black's responses to this is the notorious Poisoned Pawn Variation, a favourite of both Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov.
- 3) The English Attack is a relatively fresh system which is less complex but just as aggressive as 6 Bg5.
- 4) White players looking for a quieter life will find that 6 Be2 should suit them.

This is in sharp contrast to the book that came out last year by Danny Kopec *Mastering The Sicilian*, where the author endorsed certain variations such as, for example, the Pseudo-Dragon (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Bd7 followed by 7...g6) and in general was extremely prejudiced against Black.

However while Kopec's book was one-sided when it came to coverage of the theory, it also contained some interesting discussions on the pawn structures in each of the lines of the Sicilian. We don't find anything similar in Emms' book, so if you want to supplement your knowledge on this extraordinarily important feature, then you may want to consult Kopec's.

Despite having only 174 pages to cover all lines in the Sicilian, Emms has done a remarkable job in presenting everything that is relevant in general considerations, although I still feel that he is somewhat more sketchy in his descriptions and explanations than Gallagher is in the King's Indian book. This of course stems from the fact that the

Sicilian may have much greater material to cover than the King's Indian. In the King's Indian, Black's ideas are generally the similar from one line to the next, whereas in the Sicilian, you often cannot recognize that we are talking about the same opening, e.g., alone in the Najdorf we have the Poisoned Pawn Variation: **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Qb6 8 Qd2 Qxb2**, the Polugaevsky Variation: **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 b5 8 e5 dxe5 9 fxe5 Qc7 10 exf6 Qe5+**, and the Classical Najdorf: **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be2 e5 7 Nb3**. These lines alone cover more kinds of positions than you will find anywhere in the King's Indian.

The material is divided up as follows:

- Introduction (3 pages)
- 1 The Dragon Variation (20 pages)
- 2 The Najdorf Variation (22 pages)
- 3 The Scheveningen Variation (22 pages)
- 4 The Sveshnikov Variation (15 pages)
- 5 The Classical Variation (17 pages)
- 6 Other Open Sicilians (28 pages)
- 7 Bb5 Systems (12 pages)
- 8 The c3 Sicilian (13 pages)
- 9 Other Systems (15 pages)
- Solution to Exercises (1 page)

For obvious reasons a lot of material is no more than superficially covered, while some is ignored altogether. This fact detracts from the total value of the book and makes you wish that Emms had been given some more pages to work with, but that was unfortunately not the case.

As in the Gallagher book, each line gets a small introduction, usually with a little history attached to it to make it a little more interesting. Then follows the short theoretical presentation, then a sketchy outlining of typical strategies for

both sides. Like Gallagher we are informed whether it's necessary to burn the midnight oil learning theory by heart or if we can work the right ideas out as we go along. We also get a look into the statistical side of the line under examination. Here Emms quotes *Megabase 2002* religiously by name as if he were paid for that too. Incidentally he calls it "a database of over two million top class games", which is, as many of us know, a bit of an exaggeration.

To round the coverage of each line off, there is a selection of illustrative games, usually 2-3 per line. These are generally quite representative for the variation covered, but given the material he has to cover in each line, he often has to ignore many alternatives. One example is the very first line that is covered in the book, the Yugoslav Attack of the Sicilian Dragon; undeniably a line that you will never finish catching up with the latest theoretical developments.

Just to remind ourselves what the Yugoslav Attack is, it is the position that arises after **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3**, and now both White and Black can branch off into a million (well, almost!) different minor lines. Emms in his Illustrative Games section gives us three games, the first two continuing with 7...0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7, with the first branching out to 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 Nc4 while in the second, we see 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5. In the third game, Emms shows us a game with 9 0-0-0 d5!?. If you know a little about the Dragon, you will know that this doesn't even scratch the surface, but is more like a drop of water on the windshield in tropical storm; it's there, but not enough for you to notice it.

With more material to cover, the game annotations suffer a little too, given that he cannot go into as much depth as Gallagher. For example, take a look at the following game, which is a good representative example of what you will see throughout the book. The game is one by the young Anand. The notes are those by Emms in the book.

***Anand-Ye Jiangchuan* Kuala Lumpur 1989**

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6

In the introduction to the Scheveningen you will have noticed that Black played 2...d6 and 5...e6, but these moves are interchangeable.

3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 Rg1 Nc6 8 h4 h5 9 gxh5 Nxh5 10 Bg5 Nf6 11 Be2

White develops another piece and supports the possible advance h4-h5. White could also prepare queenside castling with 11 Qd2.

11...a6

Black more often than not plays this move in the Scheveningen. Two of its more obvious attributes are that it prevents a white piece coming to b5 and it prepares an eventual ...b7-b5.

Note: ...a7-a6 is a typical Sicilian move.

12 h5 Bd7 13 Qd2 Be7

Another idea here is to begin queenside counterplay with ...b5.

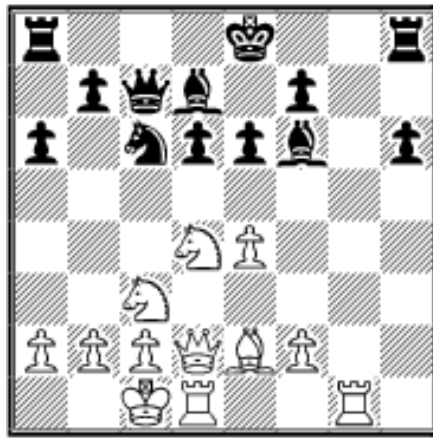
14 0-0-0 Qc7?

Black prepares to castle queenside. Outwardly, there seems nothing wrong with this move, but it allows a powerful white sequence. 14...b5, with a roughly level position, would have been stronger.

15 h6!

This move completely justifies White's previous play.

15...gxh6 16 Bxf6! Bxf6



17 Nf5!!

If Black captures with the e6-pawn, then this leaves the d5-square vulnerable to attack and Black especially has to watch out for the c3-knight hopping into this square.

Note: Knight sacrifices on the f5-square are not uncommon in the Sicilian.

17...Be7

17 ...exf5 is met by the brilliant 18 Nd5 Qd8 19 Qxh6!! and Black is lost (19...Rxxh6 allows 20 Rg8 mate).

18 Nxe7 Kxe7?

18. ..Nxe7 is more resilient, although White is clearly on the offensive.

19 Rg3!

In some cases the rook can swing over to d3 and attack the vulnerable d6-pawn.

19...b5 20 Qf4 Rad8 21 Qh4+ Ke8 22 Bxb5!

Another typical Sicilian sacrifice. Now 22...axb5 loses after 23 Nxb5 Qa5 24 Nxd6+ Kf8 25 Qf6 Rh7 26 Rdg1 Ne7 27 Rg7!.

Warning: Beware of Bxb5 sacrifices in the Sicilian.

22...Ne5 23 Be2 Qc5 24 Bh5 Rf8

Of course, 24 ...Qxf2 loses to 25 Rg8+.

25 f4 Nc6 26 e5!

Threatening Ne4.

26...d5 27 Bxf7+!

The final combination.

27...Rxf7


Or 27...Kxf7 28 Qh5+ Ke7 29 Rg7+ and White mates.

28 Rg8+ Qf8

Black is forced to give up his queen. 28...Rf8 29 Qh5+ Ke7 30 Rg7+ again mates for White.

29 Rxf8+ Rxf8 30 Qh5+ Ke7 31 Qxh6 Black resigns.

Some closing comments: This book covers a lot of ground in relatively few pages and therefore a lot of the coverage is a bit too lightweight. Nevertheless, this is a very informative book, and players up to about USCF 1800-1900 should be able to benefit from and learn the principles of the Sicilian Defence for both Black and White.

My assessment of this CD: 

[Order](#) *Starting Out: The Sicilian*
by John Emms

Bird-Opening (CD-ROM) by Dmitri Oleinikov, 2002 ChessBase GmbH, Figurine Algebraic Notation, CD-ROM, \$29.95



I will be perfectly honest with you, that I don't know a great deal about Bird's Opening, but I know that it is not called "Bird-Opening" as Oleinikov and ChessBase have named it. It was named after the Englishman Henry Bird, who was a man with many truly original ideas in the opening.

The present CD contains five main elements:

- 1) Bird-Base - database with more than 15000 games
- 2) Bird-Tree - variation tree covering all of the Bird
- 3) Bird Training Tactics - 23 examples
- 4) Bird Training Strategy - 24 examples
- 5) Bird Instructor - with 13 texts and 200 selected games

There is nothing really to say about the first two elements; they have to be on a CD such as this. Regarding the database, in my own database in a search under ECO codes A02 and A03 found no less than just over 14600 games, so I have to assume that most of the games are already accessible from other sources.

The training databases are quite interesting, but in my opinion it wouldn't have been too difficult to come up with many more examples. To me the most interesting part of the CD is the fifth element (no, not the movie...!), the Bird Instructor. That element of the CD is divided into following segments:

- 01 Contents
- 02 How to use this CD
- 03 Introduction
- 04 Black classical set up

- 05 Black king-side fianchetto [sic!]
- 06 Black king-side fianchetto without d5
- 07 From gambit accepted
- 08 From gambit declined
- 09 Neo-From 2...Nc6
- 10 Schlechter defence ...Bg4
- 11 Symmetrical line 1 f4 f5
- 12 Rare continuations
- 13 Useful additional information
- 14 McDonnell [sic!] on Bird
- + 200 selected games

To start with the last first, the games, many of them annotated by Oleinikov, are of very inconsistent quality, varying from games like Larsen-Spassky, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964 to the following beauty:

***Rasmussen,M - Rosenberg,J* [A02] Politiken Cup
Copenhagen (10), 13.07.1999**

**1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 exd6 Bxd6 5 e4 Bg4 6 Bb5
Bd7 7 d3 a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 Bb3 Bg4 10 Bxf7+ Kd7 11 Bxg8
Rxxg8 12 Be3 Ne5 13 Nxe5+ Bxe5 14 Qxxg4+ Kc6 15 Qe6+**
and, needless to say, White went on to win.

I find it hard to determine how the games were chosen, but clearly some, like the above example, should not have been included in that selection.

In segment 14, we are dealing with a chess magazine clipping, where G.A. MacDonnell has a few words to say about Henry Bird. Why MacDonnell's name got butchered on the contents page I don't know, but this type of mistake, obvious typos, spelling errors and the like are littered throughout this part of the CD, leaving us with the impression that neither the author nor editor are particularly concerned about these little mistakes that are so completely unnecessary and equally easy to correct.

In segment 3, the Introduction, we see the following

statement: "This CD presents a complete opening system as White, based on the Bird Opening - 1 f4 - perhaps the soundest non-gambit opening available, which is also rare and unusual."


Excuse me, but is there any part of this statement that is actually true? Perhaps the part about the CD presenting a complete opening system for White. But "...perhaps the soundest non-gambit opening available, which is also rare and unusual" is one of the oddest statements I have seen in an opening book . An opening that has been played 15,000 times is not rare, it's a reasonably popular opening, although perhaps not among IMs and GMs, even if some, like Danish GM Henrik Danielsen, play it enthusiastically. If we follow his definition of a rare opening, the Richter-Rauzer in the Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5) is even rarer with only about 13,000 games in my database. I don't think anybody is willing to make the claim that the Richter-Rauzer is a rare opening.

However, the rest of the segments are very well-written and informative. They are full of diagrams that illustrate what is being described, plenty of links to relevant games, discussions of typical plans for both sides and much, much more.

This is just what I was looking for, something that gives me as a reader a look into how this opening is understood and played by those who know it well, very much unlike me.

That being said, I am tremendously disappointed with the annotations to the annotated games. Often the annotations consist of only one or two comments to the entire game, which of course is hardly sufficient.

Bottom line, this CD both has its highs and its lows, but for people with interest in this fascinating opening, this CD is something you should seriously consider investing in.

My assessment of this CD: 

Order *Bird-Opening* (CD)
by Dmitri Oleinikov

The Big Bird PowerBase (CD-ROM) by Sid Pickard, 2002
Pickard & Son, Publishers, Figurine Algebraic Notation,
\$29.95

This CD is also about the Bird, but its contents are significantly different:

- A huge database of 35,438 games (compared with just over 15,000 on the previous CD!)
- 509 main annotated games
- Nearly 1,000 further games with medals, critical marks, evaluations, etc.
- Detailed opening key with over 1650 classification positions
- 5 theme keys and clean indexes
- 4 text documents incl. H.E. Bird essays and photos
- A giant tree database, plus specialized Fritz books (From's, Stonewall, Leningrad)
- Complete PGN files
- Bonus database of selected odds games with Bird's Opening.

While I don't know much about Sid Pickard's abilities as an author, I have for a while known about his research capabilities, as this has been his function on several products from his own publishing company as well as on a book on the Latvian, that he co-authored with GM Anatoly Lein some years back.



The contents of the CD is staggering. Most noteworthy is the more than 20,000 extra games he has managed to dig up on Bird's Opening compared to the Oleinikov CD. The majority of these games come from the databases of the ICC from which an enormous amount has been included on this CD. Even if many of these games were played with short time, they can contain some quality and theoretical value if the players are strong enough. Many of these games are played by GMs or IMs, so by carefully going through the games, you may be able to detect some valuable information, while some games could have and should have been purged, but that's why there are 20,000 extra games. It should also be added that there are many games that arise through other move orders such as the reversed Stonewall, that often start with 1 d4 d5, with f4 often only coming in on move 4, 5 or 6.

There is a short biography on Henry Bird, a biography that also includes the same MacDonnell text that could be found on the Oleinikov CD.

While Pickard doesn't have the same run-through of game plan, tactics and strategy like Oleinikov has, he is quite confident that you have everything you need to start playing Bird's Opening.


In the 'Getting Started' section he writes: "This CD contains everything you need to become an expert at Bird's Opening: a giant database of games, lots of notes, refined search tools, opening trees for Fritz - even a list of books that serious 1.f4 players should collect. We will examine some of these features in a moment, but first let us discuss what preconditions must be met before anyone sets out to 'get good' at Bird's Opening. That's right, we need to talk about the mental equipment YOU will bring to the table.

"Before that first tournament 1.f4 game, there is a fundamental question that must be answered: 'Do you believe in Bird's Opening?' The question is not whether it's

good enough, or passable - but does it satisfy every condition required of a first rate, primary opening system for White? Frankly, if the answer is not 'Yes!' you're probably wasting your time. It does no good to play 1.f4 with a trembling, sweaty hand. You must screw that pawn onto f4 with full confidence, certain that nobody can trick you or find some hidden refutation. Only that kind of faith will see you through the crisis that comes in every game."

How do the two CDs compare? They are two different birds of a feather (pun intended), and it is really difficult to recommend one over the other, as each has its pros and cons.

I like Oleinikov's detailed examination of typical ideas against the various set-ups for Black, but his section with annotated games is absolutely appalling, and his database is unimpressive. Pickard doesn't have anything similar to Oleinikov's examination, but the size of the database is staggering, and the inclusion of the many annotated by the best players from the 19th and beginning of the 20th century is absolutely first class and worth every penny of the price of the CD. Therefore if you can afford it and you have a distinct interest in Bird's Opening, buy both. If you have to buy one, it depends on your strength, players up to around USCF 1500 will probably benefit more from Oleinikov's approach, while those rated higher than 1500 will have more use of Pickard's CD.

My assessment of this CD: 

[Order](#) *The Big Bird PowerBase* (CD)
by Sid Pickard

<i>The Ratings</i>
 — A poor book, not recommended.
 — Not a particularly good book, but perhaps useful for some readers.
 — A useful book.
 — Good book, recommended.
 — Excellent book, highly recommended.

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