



COLUMNISTS

*From the
Archives*

Hosted by
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From the Archives...

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The Kibitzer by Tim Harding

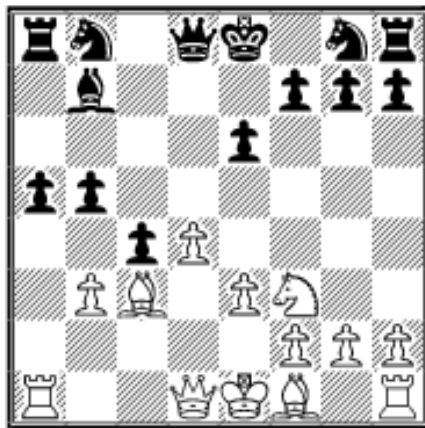
Noteboom or Abrahams: Whose Variation is it Anyway?

How to name variations – after their true originator or after the person who introduced them to master practice or the place where it was first played or on some other principle? This has become a live issue with the renewed popularity of a double-edged Queen’s Gambit variation. The following grandmaster game attracted a lot of attention in chess magazines earlier this summer. The sharp variation introduced by Black’s fourth move was for many years considered to be inferior and rarely appeared in master practice, but suddenly it has become all the rage. Yet what should the variation be called?

Boris Gelfand-Jeroen Piket

Verenigde Spaarbank tournament, Amsterdam 1996

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 e6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.a4 Bb4 6.e3 b5 7.Bd2 a5 (Black establishes a potentially dangerous queenside majority, obliging White to find some concrete means of justifying his pawn sacrifice.) **8.axb5 Bxc3 9.Bxc3 cxb5 10.b3 Bb7**



11.d5 (First analysed by Argentinean master in the 1950s, this move was, until recently, regularly given a question mark, but perhaps it is not so bad after all?) **11...Nf6 12.bxc4 b4 13.Bxf6 Qxf6 14.Qa4+ Nd7 15.Nd4 e5 16.Nb3 Ke7 17.Be2 Rhc8!? 18.Rd1** (Not in my 1981 book; 18.Bg4 Qd6 19.Nxa5 Rxa5 20.Qxa5 Ra8 21.Qxa8 Bxa8 22.Rxa8 Qg6 was unclear in Shulman-V.I.Ivanov, Moscow 1995.) **18...Nc5** (After 18...Qd6 Gelfand proposes 19.f4!? as critical and analyzes the drawish 19 0-0 in *New In Chess*.) **19.Nxc5 Rxc5 20.0-0 Ra6?!** (Huzman's 20...Kf8 is probably the critical move according to Gelfand.) **21.Qc2 a4 22.f4 b3 23.Qe4! Kd6 24.Qxh7 e4 25.Qxe4 a3 26.Qd3 b2 27.Qb3! Bc8 28.Qb8+ Kd7 29.Bg4+ Kd8 30.d6 a2 31.d7 1-0**

The Dutch-published *New In Chess* magazine referred to Black's opening as the Noteboom Variation when publishing notes by Gelfand (NIC 3/1996 pp29-31). I would have expected *British Chess Magazine* (6/1996) to uphold the name of the variation's English co-originator by referring to the Abrahams Variation, but they too called it the Noteboom. Gelfand referred to 4...dxc4 as "the variation of Daniel Noteboom, named after the talented Dutch player of the early part of this century, who, sadly, died very young." Noteboom's dates were 26/2/1910-12/1/1932. His outstanding performance came at the 1930 Hamburg Olympiad where he scored 11½/15, and at Hastings 1931-32 he took third prize.

The Dutch have been much more assiduous at remembering their lost genius than the British have been at giving credit to one of the game's more colourful characters. Gerald Abrahams, author of such books as *The Chess Mind* and *Technique in Chess*, lived from 15/4/1907 to 15/3/1980; he was a master-strength amateur player whom I remember seeing at several tournaments in the 1960s when I started playing actively. Since Abrahams was the first-born by several years and has a game with the variation on record from 1925 (when Noteboom was only 15) the Englishman's claim to priority is undoubtedly correct. On the other hand, the Dutch would probably claim that Noteboom discovered the line independently (this is not disputed), was the first to introduce it into master play and that had he lived he would probably have been a much stronger player than Abrahams, a rival to Euwe perhaps.

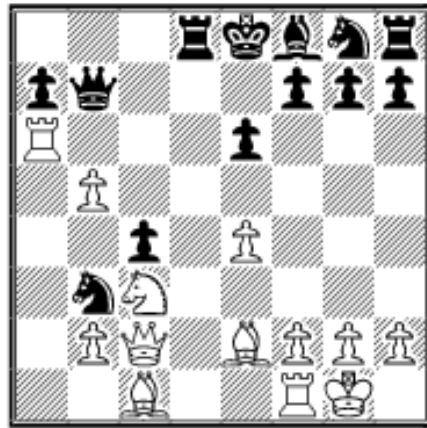
I turned to my 1981 Batsford book *Queen's Gambit Declined: Semi-Slav* to see what my research in those days had uncovered. I wrote then of 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c6 4 Nf3 dxc4!?:

Most books call this the Noteboom Variation, after a little-known pre-war Dutch player, but this is a misattribution. Credit for it belongs to the late Liverpool barrister Gerald Abrahams who employed it to defeat grandmaster Ragozin in the USSR-Britain radio match of 1946, 21 years after Abrahams had first devised and played it in his days as a student at

Viacheslav Ragozin-Gerald Abrahams

USSR-Britain Radio Match 1946

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.e4 b5 6.Be2 Nd7? (6...Bb4!? was a later Abrahams suggestion.; 6...Bb7 7.0-0 Nf6 Alatorstev-Kotov, 16 USSR Ch 1948) 7.0-0 Bb7 8.d5! Nc5 9.dxc6 Bxc6 10.Nd4 Qd7 11.Nxc6 Qxc6 12.a4 Rd8 13.axb5 Qb7 14.Qc2 Nb3 15.Ra6±

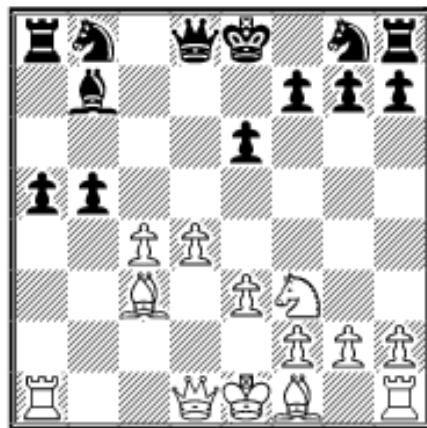


Rg5 52.Kd4 Rg4+ 0-1

But Black won: **15...Nf6 16.Be3 Bc5 17.Bxc5 Nxc5 18.Rc6 Nb3 19.Bxc4 Nd4 20.Qa4 0-0 21.Ra6 Qb8 22.f4 g5 23.e5 Nh5 24.g3 Kh8 25.Qd1 Ng7 26.Qg4 gxf4 27.Qxf4 Ndf5 28.Ne2 Nh5 29.Qe4 Rg8 30.Bd3 Rg5 31.Rc6 Rd5 32.Rfc1 Kg7 33.b6 axb6 34.Rc7 b5 35.R1c6 Qd8 36.Rc8 Qa5 37.Nf4 Nxf4 38.Qxf4 Qe1+ 39.Bf1 Qe3+ 40.Qxe3 Nxe3 41.Rd6 Rgxe5 42.Rxd5 Rxd5 43.Rc3 Nxf1 44.Kxf1 Rd1+ 45.Ke2 Rh1 46.Ke3 Rxh2 47.b3 Rh5 48.Rc7 Rg5 49.Kf4 Rd5 50.Ke4 h5 51.b4**

This was not a great game, but it was a fine achievement for a British amateur to turn the tables on a leading Russian grandmaster who a few years later became the second World Correspondence Champion. Abrahams later played “his” variation against Gligoric (Hastings 1951/2) but lost.

Ragozin’s treatment of the opening is fairly unusual, but perhaps quite good. Most games nowadays go: **1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 e6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.a4 Bb4 6.e3 b5 7.Bd2 a5** (This is really the characteristic move of the variation; there were some early anticipations in which it was not played, e.g. Schlechter-Maróczy, Vienna 1902, which went 5 e4 b5 6 a4 Bb4 7 Bd2 Nf6 8 Qc2 a6.) **8.axb5 Bxc3 9.Bxc3 cxb5 10.b3 Bb7** and now the main alternative to Gelfand’s 11 d5 is **11 bxc4**.



This position arose in the earliest known Abrahams/Noteboom Variation game, Allcock-Abrahams, London University-Oxford University 1925, which continued **11...b4 12 Bd2? Nf6 13 Bd3 Ne4!? (Simply 13...Nbd7 14 0-0 0-0 is good as in Plater-Trifunovic, Hilversum 1947, and a couple of recent games.) 14.Qc2 f5 15.Ne5 0-0 16.f3? Qh4+** and Black won quickly.

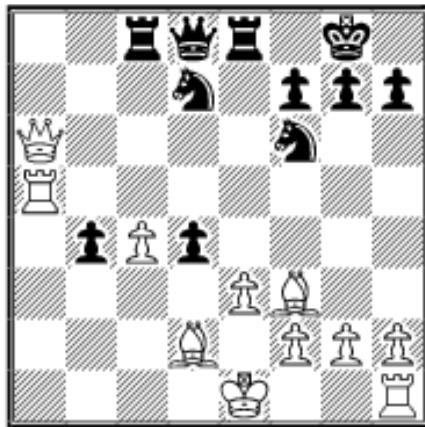
Of course it is quite possible that Noteboom never saw Abrahams’ game, unless he

studied English chess publications. He was probably seeking to improve on such games as Marshall-Rubinstein, Bad Kissingen 1928 (5 e3 b5 6 a4 Qb6?) and Rokhlin-Ilin Genevsky, USSR 1926 (5 e4 b5 6 a4 b4?!) or was quite possibly unaware of those games too.

Voisin (France)-Daniel Noteboom

Hamburg Olympiad 1930

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.e3 b5 6.a4 Bb4 7.Bd2 a5 8.axb5 Bxc3 9.Bxc3 cxb5 10.b3 Bb7 11.bxc4 b4 12.Bd2 Nf6 13.Ne5 Nbd7 14.Qa4 0-0 15.Nc6 Bxc6 16.Qxc6 e5! 17.Be2 Re8 18.Bf3 Rc8 19.Qa6 exd4 20.Rxa5 (20.Qxa5? dxe3!)



20...Nc5! 21.Qb5 Nb3! 22.Ra2 Rb8 23.Qf5 dxe3 24.Bxe3 Nd4 25.Qb1 b3 26.Rd2 Qa5 27.Bd5 (27.0-0 Nxf3+ 28.gxf3 Rxe3!) 27...Nc2+ 28.Ke2 Qc3+ 29.Rhd1 Nxd5 30.cxd5 Qc4+ 31.Rd3 Rbd8 32.Kd2 Rxd5 33.Rxd5 Qxd5+ 34.Kc1 Qc6 35.Kb2 Qf6+ 36.Kxb3 Nxe3 0-1

Instead of 12 Bd2, until recently the best line for White was reckoned to be 12 Bb2, but master games in the early 1990s appeared to show that Black had sufficient resources after all: 12...Nf6 13.Bd3 Nbd7 14.0-0 Qc7 15.Qc2 (15.Re1 e5!) 15...0-0 16.e4 e5 17.c5 (Or 17 Rfe1 Rfe8 Neverok-Kramnik, USSR Ch 1991) 17...exd4 (17...Rfe8 is also playable) 18.Bxd4 h6 19.Rfc1 Bc6 20.e5 Nd5 21.Bc4 Rfe8 22.Qe4 Qb7 23.Qg4 Re6 with counterplay (Jasnikowski-Shcherbakov, Katowice 1992).

The question of who should be given the credit remains unclear. Before you can say who introduced the variation into master practice, you have to decide what move (or group of linked moves) constitutes the variation, because clearly 4...dxc4 followed rapidly by one or more poor or inconsistent moves does not make a true anticipation of the variation. After all, Nimzovitch was not the first person to play 3...Bb4 after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 and there are several other such cases. It is also a little unfair to disqualify Abrahams on the grounds that his game with Allcock does not count as introducing the variation into master practice, his victory over Ragozin being 16 years too late, when he was after all analysing and playing the line in the intervening years.

In practical terms, however, I think that the Dutch have been allowed to win this argument by default!

As a postscript, I found the following game by Alekhine in one of the databases at the Pitt.edu ftp site. Does anybody know the source of it or who was Black?

Alekhine-Amateur

Paris 1928

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c6 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.a4 Nd7? 6.e4 Bb4 7.Bxc4 Qa5 8.Bd2
e5 9.0-0 exd4 10.Nxd4 Qc5 11.Bxf7+ Kxf7 12.Qb3+ Ke8 13.Ne6 Qe5 14.Bf4
Nc5 15.Qxb4 Qxe6 16.Qxc5 Ne7 17.Rfe1 Ng6 18.Nd5 b6 19.Qc3 Kf7 20.Nc7
Qg4 21.Bg3 Rb8 22.h3 Qd7 23.Rad1 Qe7 24.Bd6 Qf6 25.e5 Qf5 26.e6+ Bxe6
27.Nxe6 1-0**



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