



COLUMNISTS

*Over the
Horizons*

Stefan Bucker



The Impoliteness of Ice Age Openings

Perhaps the least respected openings are those involving an early ...g5, while 1 d4 g5? or 1 e4 g5?! might deserve their bad reputation, the case isn't so clear for other White first moves. Yet Myers' Defense 1 c4 g5 is hardly more popular. For most players it is just "one of these ice age openings." So if you dare to play 1 c4 g5, there is a danger to be misunderstood. Your opponent might believe that you are only a Neanderthal man at the chessboard, without sense for the subtleties of the game. Or, if he knows that your rating is higher than his own, your choice will seem impolite at least. Still, who cares, as long as the real merits of the opening are good enough to score with it.

In September 1996, Joel Benjamin's column "Unorthodox Chess Openings" in *Chess Life* had the title "Lunatic Fringe" [8]. It covered Myers' Defense 1 c4 g5, discussing a game Benjamin - Heinola. Benjamin presents an antidote against unorthodox opening play: "It takes some cold, rational thinking to prevent a dubious opening from working." Sounds like an excellent idea – against any opening.



Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Lüdenschied

Supplementary to Benjamin's cold and rational thoughts, I have used a report that his opponent Kari Heinola has sent me. Born in Finland, this original player now lives in the United States. In round one of the 1996 Hawaii Open he had played 1 c4 g5 and beat Leslie Au (Elo 2290). In the evening some of the players including Heinola, Benjamin and Eric Schiller went to dinner. Games were discussed, and Joel Benjamin asked: Didn't he and Schiller refute 1 c4 g5 in *Unorthodox Openings*? [5] Kari Heinola replied that he wasn't afraid of these lines. Then in

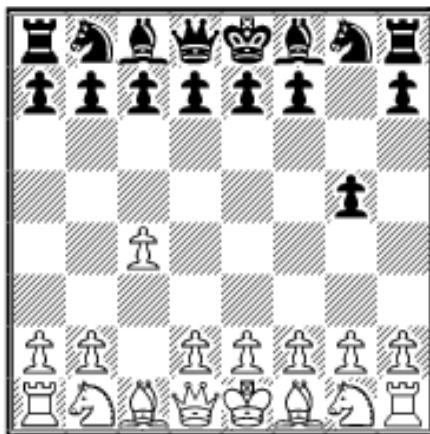
round three Benjamin had White against Heinola, an ideal opportunity for a theoretical dispute.

Joel Benjamin (2570) – Kari Heinola (2200)

Hawaii 1996 (Open)

Myers' Defense [A10]

1 c4 g5



“?! – The main quality in this move is its sheer audacity. It seems so horrible that White wants to refute it completely,” Benjamin [\[8\]](#).

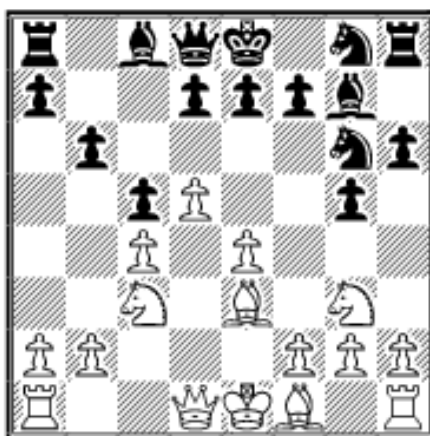
2 d4

In *MOB* 27 I analyzed 2 Qb3?! Nc6 3 Qg3, but Myers replied 3...Nf6! (or 3...Nd4 4 Kd1 [\[4\]](#) d6 5 Qxg5 Nf5!) 4 Qxg5 d5 5 Qh4 Rg8 6 h3 [\[4\]](#), when Black's has more than

enough for the pawn.

2...Bg7

The immediate Bg7 followed by c5 is characteristic for Myers' interpretation of the opening. Michael Basman preferred the slower 2...h6, for example 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 c5 5 Nge2 Nc6 6 Be3 b6 7 d5 Ne5 8 Ng3 Ng6



9 Nh5 Be5 10 g3 Nf6 11 f4 gxf4 12 gxf4 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Nxe4 14 Bd3 Nd6 15 Qg4 Qc7? (15...e6 16 Bxd3 Rg8+=) 16 f5 Ne5 17 Qg7 Nxd3+ 18 Ke2 Rf8 19 Bxh6 Kd8 20 Qxf8+ Ne8 21 Ng7 Qe5+ 22 Kxd3 1-0, James – Basman, British Championship 1982.

3 Nc3

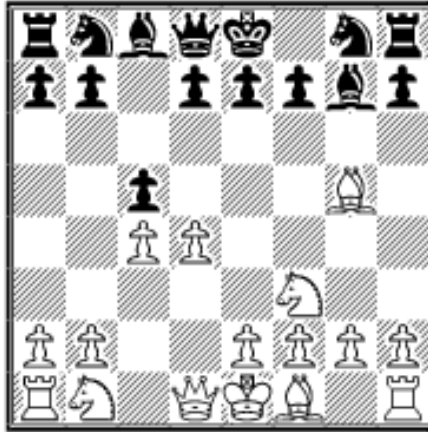
Probably best, says Hugh Myers in *Exploring the Chess Openings* [\[1\]](#).

Joel Benjamin: “In *Unorthodox Openings* (1987) [\[5\]](#), Eric Schiller and I recommended 3 Bxg5 c5 4 Nf3. While this may be good for White, it certainly entails some risk, e.g. 4...cxd4 5 Nxd4 Qb6 6 Nb5 sacrificing an Exchange for the initiative. Black might attempt to improve with 4...Qb6?. On principle, it's impractical to plunge into complications on

your opponent's personal turf. Since Black's opening is strategically suspect, this rule of thumb seems especially sensible." [\[8\]](#)

Kari Heinola has a third explanation: "After the game I asked Benjamin why he did not play the bust 3 Bxg5 from the book, and he replied that he didn't remember what the bust was."

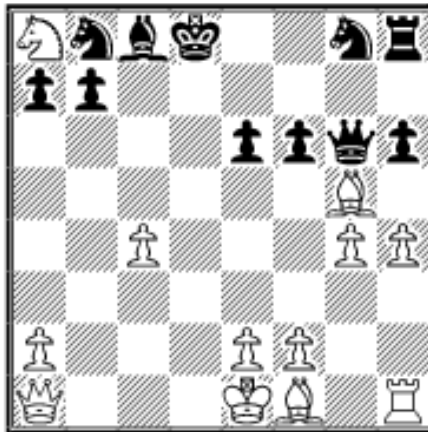
In fact 3 Bxg5 c5 4 Nf3 (4 e3 Qa5+) is a critical continuation:



(a) 4...Qb6 5 Nc3 (Jim Henri) 5...Na6 (suggested by Myers [\[4\]](#), 5...Qxb2 6 Nb5 is too risky) 6 Qd2 cxd4 7 Nd5 Qg6 8 Nxd4 e6 9 Nc3!, e.g. 9...Bxd4 10 Qxd4 f6 11 Be3 Nb4 12 Rc1 Nc2+ 13 Rxc2 Qxc2 14 Nb5 Kf7 15 f3 (15 Nc7 Rb8 16 f3 Ne7) +/-, now 15...Ne7 is refuted by 16 Nd6+ Kg7 17 Bh6+! and mate in a few moves.

(b) 4...cxd4 5 Nxd4 Qb6 6 Nb5! (M. van Raay [\[3\]](#)) 6...Bxb2 [\[4\]](#) 7 N1c3!

(more convincing than Eric Schiller's 7 Nd2 Bxa1 8 Qxa1 f6 9 e4 [\[4\]](#), [\[5\]](#)). Now 7...Bxa1? 8 Qxa1 f6 9 Nd5 is hopeless, so Black has to try something like 7...Qg6 8 h4 Bxa1 9 Qxa1 Kd8 10 Nd5 f6 11 Nbc7 e6 12 Nf4 Qf5 13 Nxa8 h6 14 Nxe6+ dxe6 15 g4 Qg6



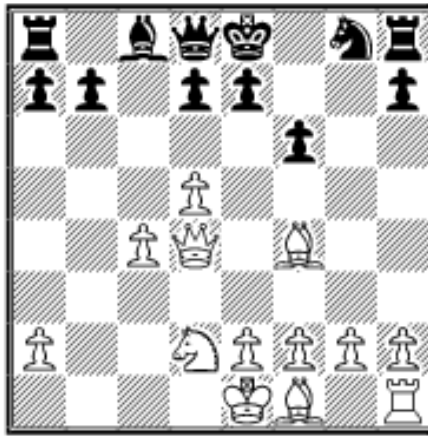
Black stands worse, but the position is weird enough to offer practical chances.

(c) After 4...Nc6 there are two options:

(c1) 5 e3 is the quieter treatment. 5...cxd4 (5...Qa5+! 6 Qd2 Qxd2+ 7 Nbx d2 cxd4 8 exd4 Nxd4 is simpler, e.g. 9 0-0-0 Ne6 10 Be3 Nh6 or 10 Bh4 d6 11 Ne4 Bd7=, or 9 Nxd4 Bxd4 10 0-0-0 Bxf2 11 Ne4 Bb6 12 c5 Bc7 13 Bc4 f6 14 Bh4 b6,

unclear) 6 exd4 Qb6 7 Qd2 Nxd4 8 Nxd4 Qxd4 9 Nc3+= (=, 32) Friedgood – Myers, Lugano 1968 [\[1\]](#), [\[10\]](#). Instead of the continuation 9...d6, the alternative 9...b6 10 Bd3 Bb7 comes into consideration (11 0-0? Bxg2! 12 Kxg2 Qg4+, giving perpetual check).

(c2) 5 d5! is critical. White sacrifices the exchange: 5...Bxb2 (what else?) 6 Nbd2 Bxa1 7 Qxa1 Nd4 8 Nxd4 cxd4 9 Qxd4 f6 10 g3? e5!-/+ , Kohler – Myers, Puerto Rico Open 1969. However, 10 Bf4! (Eric Schiller [\[5\]](#)) is a strong improvement. Black has serious difficulties in bringing out his Ng8 and Rh8.



10...Qa5 11 Qb2 (or 11 e3 d6 12 Bd3 Qxa2 13 0-0 Qa3 14 Ne4 b6 15 Ra1 Qb4 16 f3 Bd7. Obviously White can force a draw. I don't see how he can get more, but maybe I am overlooking something) 11...Kf7 12 e4 e5 13 dxe6+ dxe6 14 e5+-. For the exchange, White has a pawn and a lasting attack. For a correspondence game, variations (a) and (b) seem too risky, but accepting the exchange sacrifice

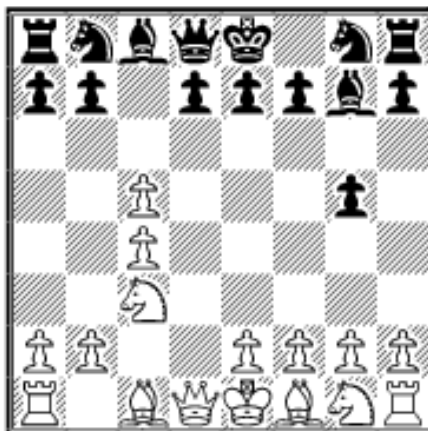
in main line (c2) doesn't guarantee full equality either. I haven't found a win for White and it rarely occurs in practice, but 3 Bxg5 certainly remains a dangerous line.

3...c5

Criticized by Benjamin. Again Black can choose Michael Basman's set-up 3...h6, and 3...g4 is also considered as playable. The text move follows the original plan as developed by Hugh Myers. Fans of Grob's Opening 1 g4 will know that protecting his center by c7-c6 is Black's most solid defense, instead of the complicated dxc4. The concept with colors reversed, created by Hugh Myers in 1968, follows the bold idea to play an *improved* version of "Grob's Attack" *with one tempo less*: after c2-c4, White has lost his option of c2-c3.

Apparently the earliest game with 1 c4 g5 was Barcza – van Geet, Amsterdam 1964. I wouldn't call it a stem game for our topic, since the applied strategy was strange and has not been repeated: 3...Nc6!? 4 d5 Ne5 5 Bxg5 Nxc4 (1-0, 20). According to Barcza, now 6 e4! is an improvement (in the game 6 Rc1 c6 occurred). Black could reply 6...h6 intending 7 Bh4 Ne5 or 7 Bf4 Nb6 8 e5 d6!? or 7 Bxc4 hxg5 8 Qd2 e6.

4 dxc5



"!" by Benjamin [8], who explains: "This is actually a novelty in this position. White normally pushes past, but it struck me that Black cannot routinely recapture this pawn with his g-pawn *en prise*. The pawn must be defended because 4...Qa5 5 Bxg5 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Qxc3+ 7 Bd2 Qxc4 8 e3 is clearly better for White." Unconsciously he repeats an analysis by John Watson (*MOB* 23 [3], p.10). In the same source

Hugh Myers had offered 6...Qxc3+ (or Nc6) 7 Bd2 Qe5!?, unclear, as

an improvement. Besides 7...Qa3 comes into question, which plans Na6xc5. Black's position seems playable, although in both cases White has the superior piece play (7...Qe5 8 Nf3 Qxc5 9 Bc3 f6 or 7...Qa3 8 Qb3 Qxc5 9 Bc3 f6) and Black merely fights for equality.

4...h6

Recommended by Maurits Wind (*MOB* 27 [4]), to postpone taking on c3 for a better moment (after 5 e4, see below). He believed 4...Bxc3+ 5 bxc3 h6 was refuted by 6 Be3!. But Hugh Myers suggested 6...Qa5, intending Na6, or 7 Qd4 Nf6 followed by Nc6, or finally 7 Bd4 f6 and 8...e5. Another interesting possibility: 5...Qa5 6 Qb3 Nf6 7 g3 Nc6!?, Holous – Welling, corr. 1980/81 (*MOB* 15, p.14), to save the move h7-h6. If 8 Bxg5, Black has 8...Ne4+=.

5 Be3

“!” Benjamin. 5 e4 Bxc3 or 5 Bd2 Na6 are variations by Maurits Wind [4].



5...Nc6?

An obvious move, already given in *MOB* 27 [4]. However, the knight on b8 had an advantage: he could go to a6, and this “threat” tied White’s bishop to the uncomfortable square e3. Now White can regroup, starting with 6 Bd2. Then Black is getting into serious trouble: 6...Nd4 (6...d6 7 cxd6 Qxd6 8 Nb5; 6...Nf6 7 h4 g4 8 e3) 7 Rb1 Ne6 8 b4 a5 9 Qa4 axb4

10 Qxa8 bxc3 11 Be3, with advantage for White.

5...Qa5? is no improvement: 6 Qd2 Na6 7 a3+/- (7...Nxc5? 8 b4 Ne4 9 bxa5 Bxc3 10 Qxc3 Nxc3 11 Bd4).

5...Bxc3+ is the thematic and probably best continuation (cf. 4...Bxc3+).

Rather strange, perhaps even strong, is 5...Nf6!? 6 h3 (6 Bd4 Nc6) 6...Qa5 7 Qd2 (7 Qc2 Ne4) 7...Qb4 (7...Na6 8 a3 Qc7 9 Nb5 Qc6 10 Nd4 is less logical) 8 Nb5 (8 Bd4 Nc6! 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 10 e3 Bg7) 8...Qxd2+ 9 Bxd2 Na6 with some play for the pawn, e.g. 10 Bc3 0-0 11 b4 b6 12 cxb6 axb6 13 e3 Bb7 14 a3 Rfc8 15 Nf3 d5 16 Nd2 Nc7 17 Nxc7 (17 Nd4 Nd7) 17...Rxc7 18 Be5 Nd7 with compensation.

6 Nf3

A logical choice was 6 Bd2, cf. the last note, which gives White an advantage without much trouble. But considering Black’s problems after 6...Bxc3+ (next note), the text move seems also strong. After 6

Qd2 Ne5 7 b3 Ng4 8 Bd4 e5 9 Be3 Ne7 Black could be satisfied with the position.

6...Qa5?

Once again. Under these circumstances (i.e. after 5...Nc6) exchanging on c3 appears less logical, but the maneuver still represents Black's best chance: 6...Bxc3+! 7 bxc3 Qa5 (7...Nf6 8 Bd4)

(a) 8 Qb3 Nf6 9 h4 Ng4 10 hxg5 Nxe3, and Black is okay.

(b) 8 Qd3 d6! 9 cxd6 Bf5 10 Qd2 0-0-0 11 c5 exd6 12 cxd6 Rxd6 13 Qb2 Nge7!, Black attacks.

(c) 8 Qc2 Nf6 9 h4 (9 h3 Ne4) 9...Ng4! (9...g4 10 Nd2 b6) 10 Qd2 (10 hxg5 Nxe3) 10...Nxe3 11 Qxe3 g4 12 Nd2 (12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Qxe5 f6 14 Qd4 Rb8 followed by b6) 12...b6!?, for example 13 Nb3 (13 cxb6 Qxb6 14 Qxb6 axb6=) 13...Qa4! 14 Qf4 bxc5 15 Qxg4 Rb8 16 Qg7 Rf8 17 Nxc5 Qc2 18 Nb3 Qb2 19 Rd1 Nb4! 20 Na1 Nxa2 21 Rh3 d6 22 Re3 e5 23 Qg3 Be6=

(d) 8 Bd4!



8...f6 9 Qc2! e5 (9...Nxd4 10 Nxd4 Qxc5? 11 Qg6+ Kf8 12 Nf5+/-) 10 Be3 f5 11 Rb1 Nge7 12 Rb5 Qc7. So far analysis by Kari Heinola. During the game, he says, he had forgotten the plan suggested in *MOB* 27 [4], 6...Bxc3+ combined with 8...f6 (as a reaction to Bd4). But even the final position after 12...Qc7 didn't look too promising to Heinola. He is certainly right.

In the diagram 8...Rh7!? deserves attention. This allows Black some direct attacks (plans are 9...g4 or 9...b6 10 cxb6 e5). For example 9 Qc2 f5!, unclear: 10 h4 (10 Qxf5? Nxd4) 10...g4 11 Nd2 e5 12 Qxf5 Rf7 13 Qe4 Nf6 14 Qe3 g3! 15 f3 Re7 16 Qxh6 exd4 17 Qxf6 Qxc3 18 Rb1 Nb4=. It seems 9 e3! is best: 9...d6 (9...b6? 10 Bd3+/-) 10 exd6 e5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 c5+/- (three strong pawns for the piece, plus serious attacking chances).

7 Qd2 Nf6

Black's in misery. 7...Bxc3+ 8 Qxc3 Qxc3+ 9 bxc3+/- is no alternative either. A clear extra pawn for White, since Bc8 cannot be activated without exchanging the pawn c5.

The simplest refutation of the nebulous idea 7...Kf8!? 8 Nd4 Ne5 9 b3 Ng4 seems to be 8 h4!+/-.

7...Qb4 fails to 8 Nd5 or 8 Rc1 (Qxc4? 9 Nd5). The text move at least threatens Qb4 or Ng4, a last attempt by Black.



8 Nd5?

Without his usual play against White's tripled pawns Black is in a fatal situation. White only has to eliminate the few remaining threats of his opponent, to achieve a clear advantage.

Therefore the correct decision would have been 8 h4!+/- g4 (8...gxh4 9 Rxh4 h5 10 Nd5 etc.;

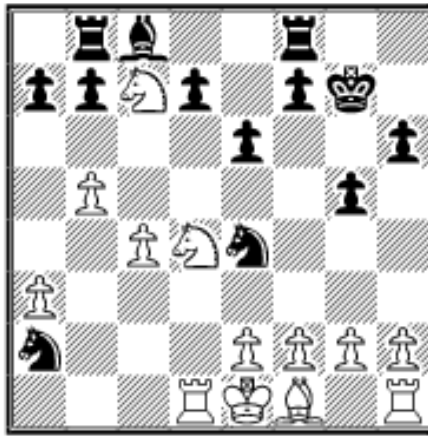
8...Ng4 9 hxg5 Nxe3 10 Qxe3+/-) 9 Nd4. This maneuver clearly improves White's piece activity, and Black's knight f6 loses the square g4.

Benjamin [8] likes the text move (8 Nd5?): "Black is actually generating some threats, namely 8...Ng4 and 8...Qb4. Thus I grabbed the opportunity to seize the initiative by returning the pawn."

8...Nxd5?

The other knight move 8...Ne4? 9 Qxa5 Nxa5 10 Nc7+ Kd8 11 Nxa8 Bxb2 12 Rd1 Bc3+ 13 Nd2 Nxc4 is refuted by 14 Bd4! (analysis by Kari Heinola).

But both players may have overlooked 8...Qxd2+! 9 Bxd2 (9 Kxd2 Nxd5 10 cxd5 Nb4) 9...0-0. Black gets some concrete counter play. It may not lead to full equality, but in any case Black's chances are better than in the game: 10 Bc3 (10 Rd1 Ne4 11 b4 e6 12 Nc7 Rb8 13 Nb5 g4 14 Nh4 Nxd2, at least =; 10 Nxf6+ Bxf6 11 Rb1 d6! unclear, or 11 0-0-0 b6!+=) 10...Ne4 11 Bxg7 Kxg7 12 Rd1 (worse is 12 b4? e6 13 Nc7 Nxb4 14 Nxa8 Nc2+ 15 Kd1 Nxa1, because the knight cannot escape from a8: 16 Kc1 Nxc5 17 Nc7 a6 18 Na8 b6! 19 Nxb6 Bb7) 12...Nxc5 (12...e6 13 Nc7 Rb8 14 Nb5) 13 b4 Ne4 14 b5 e6 15 Nc7 (after 15 bxc6 exd5 16 cxd7 Bxd7 17 cxd5 Rfe8 Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn: 18 e3 Rac8 19 Be2 f5 20 Nd4 Nc3 21 Rd2 f4=) 15...Nb4 16 Nd4 Rb8 17 a3 Na2, unclear.



Remarkably all four knights are placed on unfavorable squares. It is difficult to tell who may have an advantage.

9 Qxa5 Nxa5 10 cxd5 Bxb2

10...g4 11 Bd4 gxf3 12 Bxg7 fxg2 13 Bxg2 Rg8 14 Bc3+/- results in an uncomfortable ending.

11 Rb1 Nc4?+-

A “hallucination” (Heinola), which practically means the end of the game. Besides Black was already very short of time.

Upon 11...Bc3+ 12 Bd2 Bxd2+ 13 Nxd2, Benjamin [8] comments: “The position resembles a Grünfeld gone bad for Black. The a5 knight is so poorly placed that Black may have to cough up a pawn to extricate it.” His assessment seems somewhat exaggerated. After 11...Rb8 followed by b6+= White has an advantage, but it may still be a draw, if defended accurately.

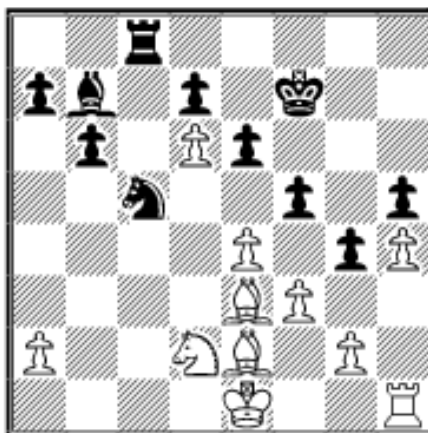
12 Rxb2! Nxb2 13 Bd4 Na4

Black tries to catch the bishop h8.

14 Bxh8 f6 15 d6 Nxc5 16 h4 g4 17 Nd2

Benjamin concentrates on freeing his bishop, the simplest route to the full point.

17...b6 18 Bg7 h5 19 f3 Bb7 20 e4 Kf7 21 Bh6 e6 22 Be2 f5 23 Be3 Rc8



24 0-0

“Late castling is cool,” Joel Benjamin. The game is over.

24...Na4 25 fxc4 Nc3 26 Bd3 hxc4 27 exf5 e5 28 Nc4 e4 29 Ne5+ Ke8 30 f6 Bd5 31 Ba6, Black resigned.

Benjamin probably experienced the whole game after 1...g5 “?!” and especially after the sharp 3...c5 as a clear cut case for White. He attributes two of his moves with an exclamation mark, on Black’s side he is similarly one-sided. With the

exception of 11...Nc4?, the mistakes committed by his opponent are ignored. 1 c4 g5 simply must be bad, no serious analysis was intended. The article's title "Lunatic Fringe" speaks for itself.

How did the loser take his defeat? In round seven he was paired against IM Eugene Martinovsky (Elo 2285), and when asked by his opponent whether he would like to repeat 1 c4 g5, Kari Heinola replied: "Sure!" So it happened that in his third 1 c4 g5 encounter in just one tournament, Heinola won for the second time (1 c4 g5 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 h6 5 e4 Bxc3+), using the typical strategy of this unusual defense.

In the first edition of *Batsford Chess Openings* (1982), with regards to 1 c4 g5, Gary Kasparov wrote: "Chess is not skittles." Checking the database, we find 167 games with this defense. White's score of 57 percent is a few points higher than what one can expect from standard openings. I hear you saying: "Quite what I expected." But in another ice age opening: 1 Nf3 h6 followed by g5, White can hardly be satisfied with his 39 percent out of 42 games! More about that topic in another column.

Sources:

- [1] H. Myers: *Exploring the Chess Openings*, Davenport 1978, pp. 34-37.
- [2] H. Myers / M. Wind: "1. c4 g5 English Opening, 1. ... g5 Defense", in: *The Myers Openings Bulletin* (= MOB) No. 16 (1981), pp. 7f.
- [3] P. J. Szeligowski: "1. c4 g5, The Myers Defense", in: *MOB* No. 23 (1982), pp. 2-15.
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- [5] J. Benjamin / E. Schiller: *Unorthodox Openings*, London 1987, pp. 106f..
- [6] H. Myers (review of [5]), in: *MOB* 39 (1988), pp. 22f..
- [7] T. Harding: *Dynamic Black Defenses*, Dallas 1989, pp. 29-42.
- [8] J. Benjamin: "Lunatic Fringe", in: *Chess Life*, September 1996, p. 24.
- [9] G. Burgess: *101 Chess Opening Surprises*, London 1998, pp. 81-83.
- [10] H. Myers: *A Chess Explorer*, Davenport 2002, pp. 101-103.

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