



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bücker



The Cheeky Mokele Mbembe

For much of the last 25 years, one of my favorite lines has been **1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4!?**. Black's last move goes back to Allgaier (1763-1823), but the first serious analysis was published in 1922, when the "real" Alekhine Defense had just entered the stage. Swiss master Hans Fahrni (1874-1939) wrote a booklet [\[1\]](#) on the new fashion 1 e4 Nf6, spending 10 of the 28 pages on 2...Ne4. His introduction said that he regarded both knight moves as "interesting, especially 2...Ne4!, although 2....Nd5 seems better." In the early 1980s, I adopted 2...Ne4, refined some of its variations and began to play it in tournaments.



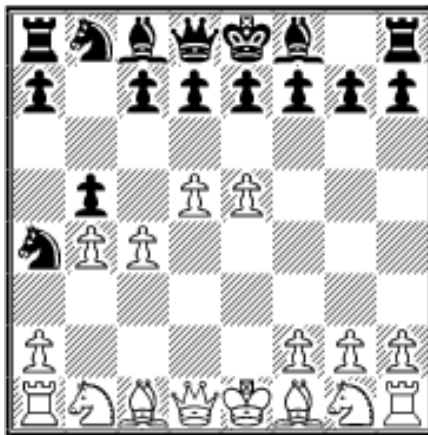
Hans Fahrni

Source: Barmen 1905 (tournament book)

My own results have been good enough, but in the next two decades the defense was rarely used by others. The exception was Kari Heinola, from Finland, who now lives in the USA. Some sporadic mentions in books did not convince many that the idea deserved to be played. Tim Harding wrote in *Dynamic Black Defenses* (1989): "Perhaps Bücker's most outrageous idea of all is the variation of the Alekhine's Defense which he calls the **Mokele Mbembe**, the name of a legendary African beast, of which the only trace is its tracks: 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4?! 3 d3 Nc5 4 d4 Ne6 5 d5 Nc5 6 b4 Na4 (6...Na6!?) 7 c4 b5."



An earlier book [\[4\]](#) was less



diplomatic and informed its readers that 2...Ne4 “is on the zany side even for Bückner. It is such rubbish that it is relegated to our waste-bin section.” The authors probably considered their warning still too reluctant, so they later rounded it up: “We pity the fool with Black’s position” and “Black’s position is a disgusting mess.”

Here and in the next column I’ll give an overview of the most important lines. White can chase the knight until it almost falls off the board (3 d3), or he can aim “to trap the knight on mid-board” [11] by means of 3 d4. The first variation is illustrated by the game below. In March, I’ll discuss the second variation 3 d4, which lately has been recommended as White’s strongest reply to the “cheeky move” (Emms) 2...Ne4.

Claus Dieter Meyer – Stefan Bückner

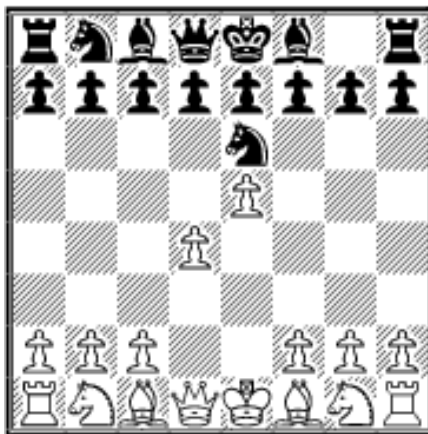
Hamburg 1983 (Open) [7]

Alekhine’s Defense [B02]

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d3

Against 3 b4, Fahrni [1] recommended 3...e6 4 c3 f6!. From the two modern authors that really analyze 2...Ne4, Khalifman [12] prefers the text move, while Emms [11] likes 3 d4.

3...Nc5 4 d4 Ne6



Hans Fahrni preferred 4...Na6, which certainly comes into consideration. This situation is almost identical with the “normal” line 2...Nd5 3 d4 Nb6!? (Tal – Lutikov, Moscow 1969). The only difference is that Black now has his knight on a6, instead of b6. Whether this is an advantage or a handicap, isn’t too obvious. After 4...Na6, Fahrni continued his analysis: 5 f4 d6 6 Bd3 dxe5 7 fxe5, when White

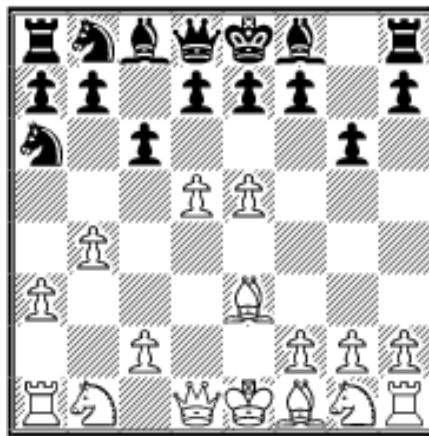
stands better [1].

5 Be3

Apparently C. D. Meyer’s prepared improvement for our battle in the last round. In an earlier game of the same tournament White tried the

natural 5 f4 (“White’s space advantage is overwhelming,” Khalifman [12]) 5...g6 6 d5 (6 Nf3 d6 7 Nc3 dxe5 8 fxe5 Nd7 9 Be3 c6, Beckemeyer – Bucker, 1982. White had a slight advantage, but lost in 53 moves, [7]) 6...Ng7 7 Nf3 d6 8 Be2 e6 9 Nc3 Be7 10 0-0 c6 (0-1, 38) Rostalski – Bucker, Hamburg 1983. Instead of 7 Nf3, Khalifman suggests 7 Nc3 d6 8 Nf3 Bg4 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 [12], but here 8...e6 9 Bc4 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 with a later c7-c6 must be better, +=.

A critical line is 5 d5 Nc5 6 b4 (if 6 f4 e6 7 Nf3, as in Pinkas – Bucker, Katowice 1985 [=, 41], 7...d6! is the correct answer, [7]) 6...Na6 (for the wild 6...Na4?! 7 c4 b5 see my detailed analyses in [13], [14]) 7 a3, and White has good play, according to Fahrni [1]. But my analysis in [14] shows that Black can confidently reply 7...g6! 8 Be3 c6, for example:



- (a) if 9 dxc6, Black gambits a pawn by 9...Bg7! 10 cxb7 Bxb7 11 f4 0-0 12 Nf3 d6 13 Nc3 Nd7 with compensation.
 (b) 9 c4 Bg7 10 f4 d6 11 Nf3 Bg4 12 dxc6 Nxc6! 13 b5 dxe5 14 Nbd2 exf4 15 Bxf4 0-0 =.
 (c) 9 Nf3 cxd5 10 Nc3 Nc7 11 Nxd5 Bg7 12 Bg5 Nc6 13 b5 h6.
 (d) 9 d6!? exd6 10 exd6 Qf6 11 Bd4 (11 Qd4 Bg7 12 Ne2 c5!) 11...Qe6 + 12 Be2 f6 13 Nf3 Bxd6 14 0-0 0-0

15 Re1 Qf7 unclear.

5...d6 6 exd6

White is satisfied with keeping a small initiative. More ambitious was either:

(a) 6 d5 Nc5 7 Nc3 (7 Bxc5!?) 7...e6 8 Nf3 Be7. I don’t think that Black has much to fear, but maybe I am overlooking something?



(b) 6 Nf3 g6 7 d5 Ng7 8 exd6 Qxd6 9 Nc3 Nf5 10 Bd4 (10 Nb5) 10...Bg7 11 Nb5 Qd8 12 Bxg7 Nxg7 13 Qd4 0-0 14 0-0-0 Nd7 15 Qf4 c6 16 Nc3 Qa5 17 g4? (critical is 17 Bc4 Nb6 18 dxc6 Nxc4 19 Qxc4 bxc6 20 Qxc6 Be6 21 Qb5 Qc7, when the open b- and c-file give Black some compensation for the sacrificed pawn) 17...Nf6 18 d6 Nd5?! (18...Ne6 19 Qe5 Qxe5 20 Nxe5 exd6 =) 19 Nxd5 (19 Rxd5!? +=) 19...cxd5

20 dxe7 Re8 21 Qh6 f6 = with chances for both sides in Domont – Bucker, Biel II, 1984 (but 0-1, 56). In this round robin tournament, I didn't have a successful start, while before our game Domont was leading the field. Considering the situation, it was evident that I had to choose my most reliable system.

6...cxd6 7 c4

White's plan is easy to anticipate. While the pawn structure is the same as in the exchange variation of the Alekhine's Defense, Black's knight is on a very strange place: on e6 instead of b6. White simply hopes that the knight sooner or later will become a handicap for the black forces.

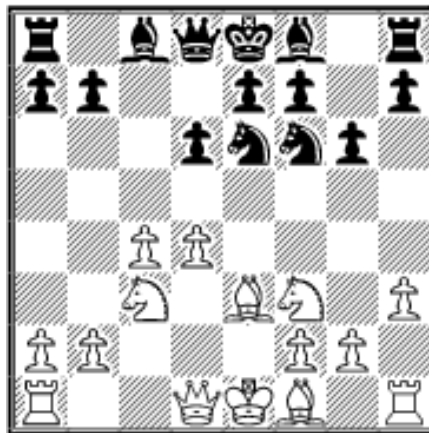
7...Nd7

The knight belongs on f6, to avoid any harassment of the fianchettoed bishop. After the immediate 7...g6, the reply 8 d5 followed by Bd4 would be too strong.

8 Nc3

If 8 Qa4 g6 9 d5 Nc5, Black wins an important tempo by attacking the queen.

8...Nf6 9 h3 g6 10 Nf3



White undoubtedly has a sound position, but it soon becomes clear that Black doesn't have serious problems either.

10...Bg7 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 d5 13 Rc1

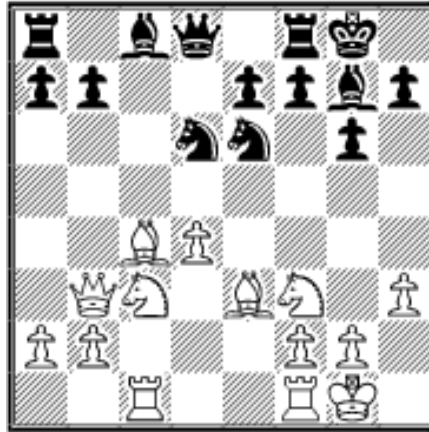
Here White had some alternatives: 13 b3 dxc4 14 bxc4 b6, about =. Maybe 13 c5! was best, to profit from Black's unusual formation, but

after 13...Ne4 14 Qb3 Nxc3 15 bxc3 b6, Black seems to keep sufficient counterplay.

13...dxc4 14 Bxc4 Ne8

To blockade the isolated pawn, Black brings his knight to d6. Obviously, White's pieces are more active, and an assessment of += probably would be justified. But Black has no significant weaknesses, which makes it difficult for White to develop a promising plan.

15 Qb3 Nd6



“Praeceptor Germaniae” Siegbert Tarrasch once warned about putting a knight on d6. What would he have thought about this situation? However, the d6- and e6-knights control many important squares.

16 d5 Nc7 17 Rfd1 Nxc4 =

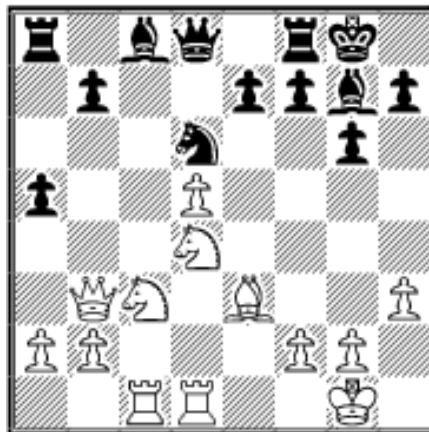
It is a pity that Black has to part with his blockading knight. But I feared the consequences of 17...Nf5

18 Bf4 Ne8 19 d6! Nfxd6 20 Ng5 Qb6 21 Nd5, when the white bishops are becoming dangerous.

18 Qxc4 Ne8 19 Qb4 Nd6 20 Nd4

Increasing the pressure on the queenside.

20...a5 21 Qb3



21...Ra6?

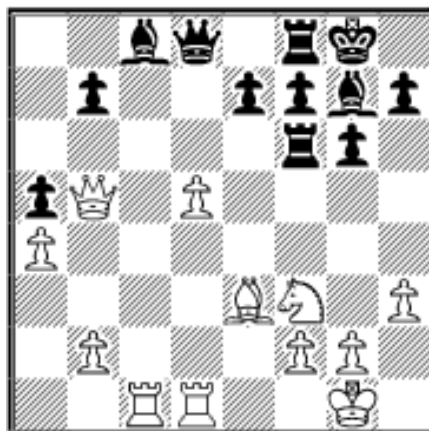
Too artificial. The correct defense is 21...Bd7, to fight for the light squares; for example, 22 a4 Rc8 or 22 Na4 Bxa4 23 Qxa4 Qe8 =.

22 a4 Be5

Prophylaxis: Black foresees problems with his c7-square, so he decides to “protect” it. At the same

time he provokes the “weakness” 23 f4. Nevertheless, White could have accepted the invitation. After 23 f4 Bxd4 24 Bxd4 Nf5 25 Bf2, he certainly has an advantage (+=), although I called it unclear in [7].

23 Nf3 Bg7 24 Nb5 Nxb5 25 Qxb5 Rf6?!



At least creating a concrete threat: Bxh3. Note that the immediate 25...Rd6? 26 Bf4 Rb6? is refuted by 27 Bc7 +–.

26 Bd4?

The move that I had hoped for; during the game I feared the



alternative attack 26 Bg5 Rf5 27 d6!
Rxb5 28 dxe7 Qxd1+ 29 Rxd1 Re8

[7] 30 Rd8 Bd7 31 axb5 Bxb5 32

Nd4 Bxd4 33 Rxd4 Kg7 34 Rd6 f5 +=. But in reality 26 Nd2! +/- was White's best option, which prevents Bxh3 and prepares an eventual Nc4 or Ne4-c5. Black's play in the last five moves would have been completely refuted.

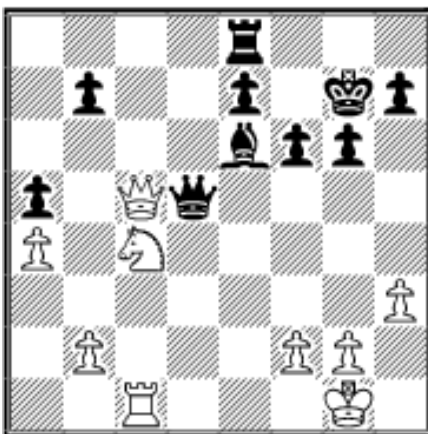
26...Rd6 27 Bxg7 Kxg7 28 Rd2 Re8

Black has solved his problems. During the coming play, White does not find the best moves and slowly drifts into difficulties.

29 Qc5 f6 30 Rd4 Bd7

Regrouping for an attack against the isolated pawn. Now if 31 Qc7, Black replies 31...Be6!.

31 Nd2 Be6 32 Nc4 Rxd5 33 Rxd5 Qxd5



34 Ne3?

White still had 15 minutes on his clock, which should have been enough to find 34 Nxa5 Qxc5 35 Rxc5 =. But in this last round there was also some prize money at stake, and the nervous tension decided the outcome of the game.

34...Qd2 35 Rc2 Qe1+ 36 Kh2 Kf7

Black has won a pawn.

37 Qb6 Qb4 38 Qxb4 axb4 39 Rc5?! Rd8 40 Rb5 b3 41 Rxb7 Rd2 42 a5 Rxb2 43 a6 Rxf2 44 a7 Ra2 45 Kg3 b2 46 Rxb2 Rxa7 47 Kf4 h5 48 h4 Ra4+ 49 Kg3 Re4 50 Re2 f5 0-1

Next month I'll discuss the dangerous 3 d4. White traps the knight, and Black strikes back.

Sources:

[1] H. Fahrni: *Die Aljechin-Verteidigung*, Bern 1922 (pp. 19-28)

[2] S. Bucker: article in *Europa-Rochade* 9/1984, p. 24

[3] E. Siebenhaar, A. Delnef, R. Ottstadt: *Aljechin-Verteidigung I*, Mannheim 1986 (pp. 147-152)

[4] J. Benjamin, E. Schiller: *Unorthodox Openings*, London 1987, p. 87f.

[5] S. Bucker: game in *Myers Openings Bulletin* 39 (1988), p. 11

- [6] S. Bucker: game in *New in Chess Yearbook 17* (1990), p. 52
[7] S. Bucker: "Das Mokele," in: *Groteske Schacheröffnungen*, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 83-93
[8] J. Watson, E. Schiller: *The Big Book of Busts*, San Francisco 1995, p. 120f.
[9] S. Bucker: (review of [8]), in: *Kaissiber 1* (1996), p. 62f.
[10] E. Schiller: *Unorthodox Chess Openings*, New York 1998, pp. 40-42.
[11] J. Emms: *Attacking with 1 e4*, London 2001, p. 151.
[12] A. Khalifman: *Opening for White according to Anand 1.e4*, vol. 5, Sofia 2005, p. 118.
[13] S. Bucker: "Auf der Fährte: Bewegungsfreudiger Dinosaurier," in: *Kaissiber 25* (2006), p. 50f.
[14] S. Bucker: "Auf der Fährte: Scherz oder tiefere Bedeutung?," in: *Kaissiber 26* (2007), p. 40f.

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