



## COLUMNISTS

*Over the Horizons*

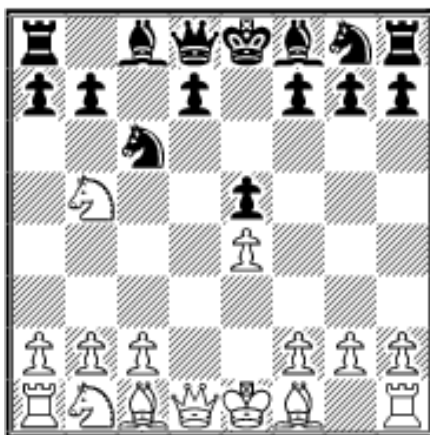
Stefan Bücker



## The Comeback of the ...e5 Sicilians

The old Löwenthal Variation presently seems to have made a comeback, and even the Haberditz Variation was covered in a short article by Reinderman [7]. These Sicilian lines could be useful alternatives to the fashionable Sveshnikov Variation, which can arise via the same move order; so let's have a look at some of the critical positions:

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5



The Löwenthal (5...a6) and Haberditz line (5...Nf6 6 N1c3 h6!?) both invite Nd6+, which leads to an exchange of Black's Bf8 against the knight. Even the queens are often exchanged, either on f6 or e7. The Sveshnikov Variation 5...Nf6 6 N1c3 d6 with its deeply analyzed theory is more popular, but this doesn't necessarily mean that the alternatives are worse. When you play the Sveshnikov, you are trying to win with Black, and the complexity of the position is an essential part of your attempt. This isn't the place to study main lines of the Sveshnikov, but the first part

of the column presents a good weapon for White – if only to get a comparison for what comes later.

## 1. The Sveshnikov Variation

In most books the Sveshnikov Variation begins as followings:

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6

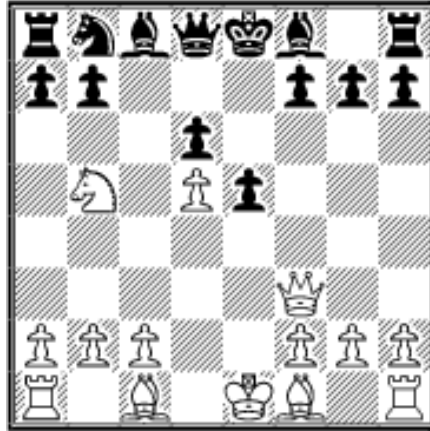
However, Sveshnikov players often prefer different move orders; e.g., 5...e6 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5, which excludes the following possibility of 7 Nd5. "I never feared variations of the type 7 Nd5 or 7 a4," writes Evgeny Sveshnikov in his book [4]. But many repertoire considerations influence your plans in a game.

Sveshnikov varied his move order himself; for example, by playing 2...e6, because he "simply did not always fancy countering 3 Bb5" [4]. In the older work *Sicilian: Lasker-Pelikan* [2] (1978) you can find a brief discussion of the move order 5...e6, but this is an exception.

7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8

According to theory, 8...Ne7 9 c3 is less precise and gives White a slight plus.

## 9 Qf3!?



The highly original manoeuvre Qf3-a3, combined with Bd2-b4, was introduced in 1986 by Lazar Markovic. It gained some popularity after an article by Jeroen Bosch in *New in Chess* 5/2003. An edited version of his article later appeared in the first volume of the *SOS* series [6]. The following sequence may be critical, it stems from my longer article in [12].

### 9...a6 10 Qa3 Be7 11 Bg5

It is important to force the opponent to play f7-f6. The immediate 11 Bd2? 0-0 12 Bb4 axb5! 13 Qxa8 Na6 14 Bd2 from the stem game Markovic – Joksic, Bela Crkva 1986 (Open), could have backfired after 14...Bg5! -/+.

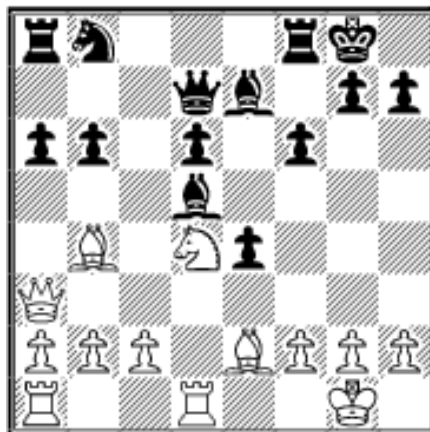
### 11...f6 12 Bd2 0-0 13 Bb4 Qd7 14 Bd3

My proposal, instead of 14 c4 b6 15 Nc3 f5 16 Be2 Bb7 17 Qb3 Qc7 18 0-0 Nd7, Solleveld – Alekseev, Santo Domingo 2003, “and Black’s chances are by no means worse,” Rogozenko in his excellent book [8].

### 14...b6 15 0-0 e4

Perhaps this is too risky. After 15...f5 16 c4 g6 17 Bd2 Bb7 18 Nc3 Qc7 19 f3 Nd7 20 Be3, White’s position seems slightly preferable.

### 16 Be2 Bb7 17 Nd4 Bxd5 18 Rfd1



### 18...a5

18...Bf7!? 19 h3 g6 20 f3 is unclear.

### 19 Bd2 Bf7 20 Bb5 d5 21 Qg3 +/-

White’s pawn sacrifice offers him good chances.

## 2. The Löwenthal Variation

### 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5

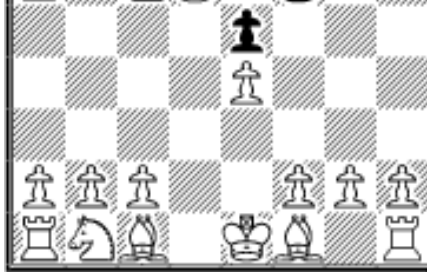
### Nb5 a6 6 Nd6+ Bxd6 7 Qxd6 Qf6

### 8 Qxf6

Recommended by Alexander Khalifman in his new book [11].

### (a) 8 Qa3 Nge7 9 Nc3 Rb8 10. Nd5 Nxd5





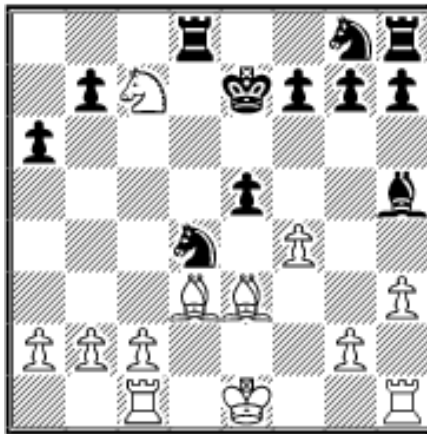
11 exd5 Ne7 12 Be3 b5 = doesn't offer White much, more analyses in [1].

(b) More complicated is 8 Qc7 Qe7!? (instead of the usual, but dubious 8... Nge7) 9 Nc3 Nb4 10 Kd1 Nf6 11 Bg5 Nc6 12 f4 d6 13 Qxe7+ Nxe7 14 Ke1 b5

15 Rd1 b4 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 Na4 f5 19 Bd3 fxe4 20 Bxe4 Ra7 and Black has almost equalized.

(c) 8 Qd2 Nge7 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Bd3 Nb4 11 0-0 d6 12 a3 (12 Be2!? Nbc6 13 Qg5) 12...Nxd3 13 Qxd3 Qg6 14 f4 f5 15 fxe5, drawn in M. Schäfer – Bucker, Oberliga North Rhine and Westphalia 2007.

(d) You'll find a thorough discussion of the traditional alternative 8 Qd1 in *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian* [9]. Palliser's analysis runs 8...Qg6 9 Nc3 d5 (the famous "Graz Variation"; in *Kaissiber No. 1* Rudolf Palme reported that he found the move in 1960) 10 Nxd5 Qxe4+ 11 Be3 Nd4 12 Nc7+ Ke7 13 Rc1 Bg4 14 Qd3 Qxd3 15 Bxd3 Rd8 (so far already in [3]) 16 h3 Bh5 17 f4



17...Kd6! (according to Palliser [9], even 17...exf4 may be better than the old move 17...f6, but the king's move seems best) 18 Nxa6 bxa6 19 g4 Bg6 20 f5 Bxf5 21 gxf5 Ne7 22 Rd1. So far analysis by Palliser [9], but instead of his 22...Nd5, Black has a stronger continuation in 22...Kc7 23 0-0 Rd6 24 Bxd4 exd4 25 Rf4 Nc6 =, intending 26 Bxa6 Rb8!.

**8...Nxf6 9 Nc3 Nb4 10 Kd2 d6 11 a3 Nc6 12 Ke1 Be6**

Palliser [9] prefers "12...h6!? since 12...Be6 13 Bg5! was a little awkward in S. Smetankin – G. Kochetkov, Minsk 2000, and White retained an edge after 13... Rc8 14 Rd1 Nd4 15 Bd3 0-0 16 f3 Rfe8 17 Kd2! Nd7 18 Be3."

**13 f3**



Against 13 Bg5 (! [9]) Black can simply play 13...h6; for example, 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Bd3 Rg8 16 g3 0-0-0 with possibilities like Nd4 and f5, about =.

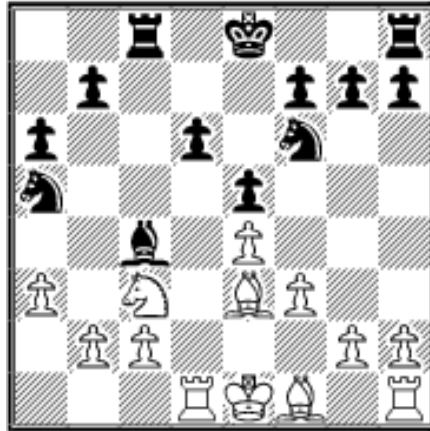
Khalifman [11] believes that this move (13 f3) "is more flexible than 13 Be3. The point is that Black can free his position with the move d6-d5 either immediately, or after the preliminary Nc6-e7. In the latter case, White might not need at all to occupy the e3-square with his bishop."

From the diagram Khalifman's analysis continues: 13...d5 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5

Bxd5 16 Be3 0-0-0 17 Kf2 Be6 18 Bd3 Nd4 19 Rhe1 Rhe8 (Korneev – Tomczak, Tegel 2006) 20 Rad1 h6 21 Be4 += [\[11\]](#).

Black could have prepared the advance: 13...0-0-0 14 Kf2 d5 15 exd5 Nxd5 16 Nxd5 Rxd5 17 Be3 Rhd8 18 Bd3 g6. Even more convincing seems:

**13...Rc8! 14 Be3 Na5 15 Rd1 Be4**



Black enjoys clear plans like Bxf1, followed by Nc4, or perhaps 16 Bd3 Ke7, followed by doubling his rooks on the c-file. It is difficult to develop a promising plan for White.



*Hans Haberditz*  
Source: Neues Wiener Tagblatt,  
January 19, 1941.

### 3. The Haberditz Variation

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 Nf6 6 N1c3 h6!?**



An original idea by the Austrian theoretician **Hans Haberditz**. Why should Black spend the move a7-a6 to chase the knight to a square where it wants to go anyway? Of course the value of the move h7-h6 can be disputed, but in several lines it is in fact useful. The rarely mentioned line had its recent reappearance in two new books. In both cases the final verdict is negative, but when I have to take sides, I always bet on Hans Haberditz.

**7 Nd6+ Bxd6 8 Qxd6 Qe7 9 Qxe7+**



The critical line according to both Reinderman [7] and Khalifman [11].

White can also try 9 Nb5:

(a) 9...Qxd6 (or 9...Nb4) 10 Nxd6+ Ke7 11 Nf5+ Kd8! (instead of Kf8) deserves attention: 12 Be3 Kc7 13 0-0-0 d5 +=.

(b) 9...Rb8! and now:

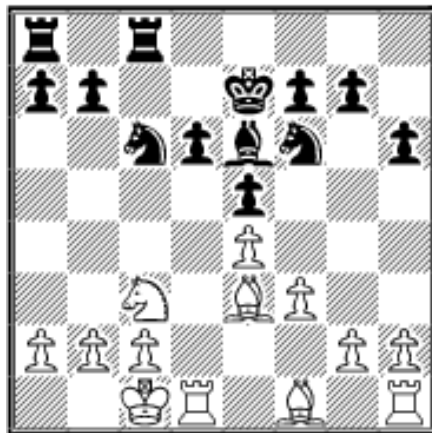
(b1) 10 b3 Nxe4 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 Ba3+ d6 13 f3 a6 14 fxe4 axb5 15 Bxb5 Ra8 = (=, 49) Saastamoinen – Salonen, Tampere 1998 [7].

(b2) 10 Be3 Nxe4 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 f3 a6 13 fxe4 axb5 14 Bxb5 d6 15 0-0 Be6, and Black seems to hold: 16 Rf2 Rhc8 17 a4 Ra8 18 Rd1 Nb4! 19 c3 Na6 =.

### 9...Kxe7 10 Be3 d6 11 f3 Be6 12 0-0-0

Khalifman: “White’s plan remains practically the same irrelevant of Black’s response – he starts a pawn-offensive on the kingside.”

### 12...Rhc8



Both sources give 12...Rhd8, then they recommend different moves for White:

(a) “White obtains an advantage with 13 Kb1 followed by 14 Nd5+. Alas, I don’t see a good way to avoid this as Black,” Reinderman [7]. I’d suggest the reply 13...Kf8 (the immediate 13...d5? 14 Bc5+ Ke8 15 Nb5 is wrong); for example, 14 Nd5 Bxd5 15 exd5 Ne7 16 c4 Nf5, or 14 b3 Ne7 15 Bd3 d5 =.

(b) 13 h4 d5 14 Bc5+ Ke8 15 Nb5 b6 16 Nc7+ Kd7 17 Nxd5 “and White remains with an extra pawn,” Khalifman [11]. Obviously 13...d5? was premature. After the correct 13...Kf8! 14 b3 b6 (d5) 15 Kb2 Ne7, White keeps a small advantage: 16 Bf2 (16 Nb5 d5 17 Nc7 dxe4 18 Bc4 Bxc4 19 Nxa8 Rxa8 20 bxc4 exf3 21 gxf3 Nf5 22 Bd2 Rc8 23 Bb4+ Ke8 24 Rhe1 Nd7 25 Re4 g6, about =) 16...d5 17 Bb5 dxe4 18 Nxe4 Nxe4 19 fxe4 Bg4 20 Rxd8 + Rxd8 21 Rf1 +=.

### 13 g4

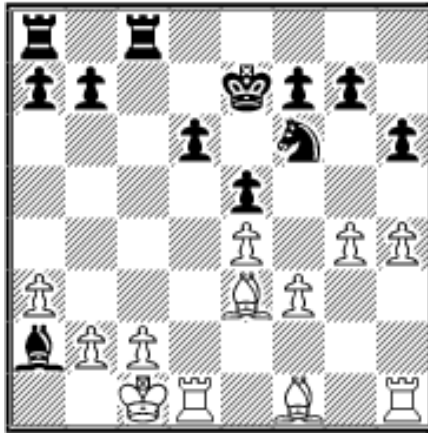
(a) 13 Kb1 Na5 14 Bf2 (14 Nb5 b6! 15 b3 d5) 14...a6 15 Na4 Nd7 16 b3 b5 17 Nb6 Nxb6 18 Bxb6 Nb7, and Black has a solid position.

(b) 13 Bf2! might be an improvement: 13...a6 (13...Nb4 14 Kb1!, now Black cannot play d5) 14 b3 Nb8 15 Kb2 Nbd7 +=.

### 13...Nb4

13...Na5 comes into consideration.

**14 a3 Na2+ 15 Nxa2 Bxa2 16 h4**



“+/- Gaprindashvili – Dzindzichashvili, Gori 1968,” writes Khalifman [11]. This game was short enough to be quoted in full: 16...Bc4 17 g5 hxg5 18 hxg5 Ne8, drawn. It is true that the final position is better for White (19 Bg2 Nc7 20 b3 Ba6 21 f4), but instead of his unfortunate sixteenth move, Dzindzichashvili could have played the prophylactic 16...Nd7! 17 Rh2 Rc6 18 g5 (or 18 h5 f6) 18...h5, and here Black has a sound position, rather = than +=.

The superiority of the Sveshnikov does not rest alone on the theoretical symbols +=, =, =+ (in which respect it may even be worse!), but on the complex situations that allow Black to play for a win. Nevertheless, I find the sharp contrast in popularity astonishing. Against the Sveshnikov (25,000 games in the database), White scores fifty-three percent, the same result as against the Haberditz (173 games). His sixty percent against the Löwenthal (2,400 games) can be misleading – if Black knows his theory, he should get his fair share of the points, at least as many as in the Haberditz.

#### Sources:

- [1] T. Harding, P. Markland: *Sicilian: ...e5*, London 1976
- [2] R. Wade, J. Speelman, N. Povah, L. Blackstock: *Sicilian: Lasker-Pelikan*, London 1978
- [3] G. Welling, R. Olthof: “A New Idea in an Old Variation,” in: *The Myers Openings Bulletin*, No. 11 (1980)
- [4] E. Sveshnikov: *The Sicilian Pelikan*, London 1989
- [5] M. Gurevich e. a.: *Sveshnikov and Sicilian with 4...e5*, Brussels 1995
- [6] J. Bosch: “A Tactical Weapon,” in: *Secrets of Opening Surprises*, vol. 1, Alkmaar 2004
- [7] D. Reinderman: “The Haberditz Variation,” in: *Secrets of Opening Surprises*, vol. 2, Alkmaar 2004
- [8] D. Rogozenko: *The Sveshnikov Reloaded*, Gothenburg 2005
- [9] J. Emms, R. Palliser: “Vallejo’s Viable Löwenthal,” in: *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian*, London 2006
- [10] R. Palliser: “Has Vallejo Rehabilitated the De La Bourdonnais?,” in: *NIC Yearbook 82* (2007)
- [11] A. Khalifman: *Opening for White According to Anand 1. e4*, vol. 9, Sofia 2007
- [12] S. Bückner: “Der stärkste Zug,” in: *Kaissiber 28* (2007)

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#### Corrections

**Building a Fortress (April 2007):** 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ne4 3 d4 f6 4 Bd3 d5 Against Spohn’s proposal 5 Nd2 the article had recommended 5...f5 6 Nh3 e6 7 Nf4 Kf7 8 0-0 c5 9 g4 Nxd2 10 Bxd2 c4 11 Be2 g5 12 Nh5 f4



wrote: "Closing the door of the fortress. Calling Black's position 'sound' comes close to a sacrilege. But what can his opponent do?" A convincing answer came from **Walter Braun** from **Austria**. He plays 13 c3 Nc6 14 h4 h6 15 Qc2, adding that White's plan of Kg2, Rh1, hxc5 and Bxf4! should lead to an almost forced win for White. He seems to be absolutely right. Before opening the h-file, White can even prepare the final blow, by means of Rh1-h3 and Ra1-h1. Black can hardly survive. With hindsight, I'd now prefer 5...Ng5 (instead of 5...f5) 6 Ngf3 Nxf3+ 7 Qxf3 (Nxf3) g6, although White must have an advantage.

**Don't Name the Gambit after Me** ([May 2007](#)): In the section "Food for Thought I," following the second diagram, a move was missing. Instead of "improves upon the usual 12 a4," the text should read "improves upon the usual 11...Qc7 12 a4." Thanks to **Pierre F.** from **Canada** for pointing this out.

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