



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bucker

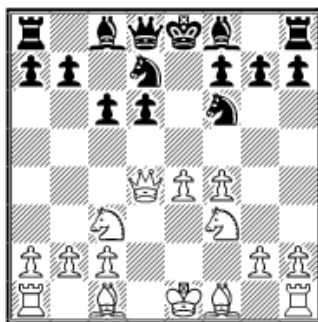


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The French Attack: Pirc or Philidor? Part One

There are several move orders to reach the Philidor Defence. One of the most aggressive begins like a Pirc Defence: **1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nbd7**. In about fifty percent of the games White now allows a transposition into a normal Philidor Defence (4 Nf3 e5), but the sharp **4 f4 e5 5 Nf3** is considered more critical. Though the line already appeared in Marshall – Alapin, Ostend 1905, it only became popular in the 1980s, thanks to the new idea **5...exd4 6 Qxd4** (6 Nxd4 g6=) **6...c6!?**.

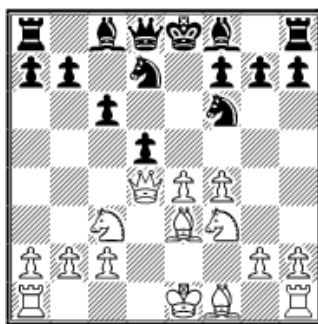


Black intends to play 7...d5, followed by 8...Be5 and 0-0, sacrificing a pawn for quick development. The ambitious setup has been called “a hybrid system” [4], “Hodgson System” [3], “Bücker System” [3] or “Neo-Philidor” [5], but I’d propose **“The French Attack”** as a more appropriate name, since it seems that the d6-d5 motif originated in France. These are the oldest games in the database:

- Kirsch – Thierry Manouck (France), French Championships Epinal 1986
- Marciano – Loheac Amoun (Lebanon), Belfort 1988
- Santo Roman – Emmanuel Bricard (France), Chanac 1989
- Schuh – Gilbert Grimberg, Dortmund 1989, etc.

This article concentrates on the most popular 7 Be3 (! in [2] and [3]). Beliavsky [4] wrote: “Black was fairly quickly crushed after 7 Be3,” but as we’ll see, Black has an improvement (which was already given in the same article [4], by René Olthof). Earlier alternatives for moves 4-6 (including 4 g4!?, lately recommended by Khalifman), plus alternatives for White at move 7 will follow in part two in November. Both articles will ignore 4 Nf3 e5, so you’ll need another source to study the standard Philidor.

7 Be3 d5!



(a) Against the passive 7...Be7, White has a choice: 8 0-0-0 Qb6 9 e5! dxe5 10 fxe5 Ng4 11 e6 fxe6 12 Qxg7 Qxe3+ 13 Kb1 Rf8 14 Qxg4 +/-, or 8 g4!? d5 9 g5 Bc5 10 Qd3 dxe4 11 Nxe4 Nxe4 12 Qxe4+ Qe7 13 Qxe7+ Kxe7 14 Bd4 Bxd4 15 Nxd4 Nc5 16 0-0-0 Rd8 17 f5 h6 18 h4 +/- (1-0, 41) Shirov – Ftacnik, Senec 1998.

(b) 7...Qc7 8 0-0-0 b6 9 e5 dxe5 10 fxe5 Bc5 11 Qd2 Bxe3 12 Qxe3 Ng4 (Knutsson – Harren, Rodeby 1998) 13 Qg5 +/-.

(c) 7...Ng4 8 Bg1 Qf6 9 Qd2 Be7 10 h3 +/- Mostertman – Van Egdom, corr. 1998.

(d) 7...Qb6 8 0-0-0 Qxd4 (8...Be7? 9 e5! transposes to line “a”) 9 Bxd4 Be7 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 Nh5 (11...Nd5 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Be3) 12 Ne4 (12 Be3) 12...0-0 13 Nd6 += Meszaros – Belkhodja, Agneaux 1999.



The French Attack
(c) by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski,
Lüdenscheid

White has three main continuations:

8 0-0-0 (A), 8 e5 (B) and 8 exd5 (C)

Variation A: 8 0-0-0

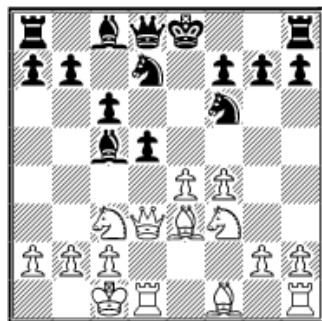
8 0-0-0

Offering simplifications. In the ensuing ending White hopes to keep a slight edge.

8...Bc5

8...c5? 9 Qa4 d4 (Olthof [\[4\]](#)) is too risky, because of 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 Bxd4 Be7 12 e5 Nh5 13 Be3 +/-.

9 Qd3!



More precise than 9 Qd2 Bb4!, when Black has nothing to fear: 10 exd5 Nxd5! 11 Bc4 (11 Bd4 0-0 [\[1\]](#)) seems playable) 11...Nxc3 (after 11...0-0? 12 Bxd5 cxd5 [\[4\]](#) Sveshnikov – Boric, Pula 2000, White should play 13 Qxd5 +/-) with complications.

9...Bxe3+

Not forced, but also after 9...Qb6 10 Bd2 (10 Nd4) 10...dxe4 11 Nxe4 0-0 12 Nxc5 += or 9...Qe7 10 e5 Ng4 11 Bxc5 (11

Bd4 Nf2 12 Bxf2 Bxf2 = Kr. Georgiev – Bricard, Sofia 1990) 11...Nxc5 12 Qd4 += White has some advantage.

10 Qxe3 dxe4

Or 10...Qe7 11 Re1 dxe4 12 Nxe4 0-0 13 Bd3 Nxe4 14 Bxe4 Qe5 (Zelcic – Jurkovic, Bosnjaci 2003) 15 Bd3 a5 16 Qe7 +=.

11 Nxe4 0-0 12 Nxf6+

12 Bc4 Qb6 13 Qxb6 (13 Rhe1 Nxe4 14 Qxe4 Nf6 15 Qd4 Bg4 =) 13...axb6 14 Nxf6+ Nxf6 15 Rhe1 b5 16 Bb3 c5 with sufficient counterplay, Pieri – Manouck, Forli 1993.

12...Qxf6 13 g4!?



Less dangerous is 13 Bd3 Nb6 14 Qe4 g6 or 13 Ng5 Nb6 14 Bd3 Bf5, about =.



13...Nb6

Not 13...Qe6?! 14 Qxe6 fxe6 15 Ne5!
Nb6 16 Bg2 Rxf4 17 g5! g6 18 Rd8+ +/-.

14 f5 Bd7 15 Qe5 Qh6+ 16 Kb1 Rae8,
and Black should be able to hold the
ending; for example, 17 Qg3 (17 Qc7 c5!)
17...Re3 18 Bd3 Rfe8 19 Rhe1 c5 20

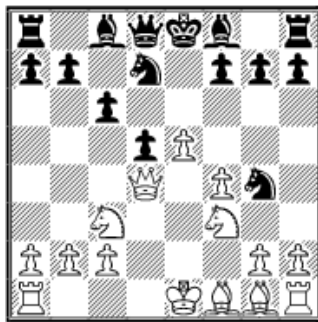
Rxe3 Rxe3 21 Re1 Rxe1+ 22 Nxe1 Qc6 23 Be2 c4.

Variation B: 8 e5

8 e5

Recommended in most sources, but the pawn advance is overestimated by theory.

8...Ng4! 9 Bg1



Neither 9 f5? Qb6! 10 Qxb6 Nxb6 =+ nor
9 Qd2?! Nxe3 10 Qxe3 Qb6! = give White
any advantage.

9...Qb6!

René Olthof [4] is right to prefer this
move over the alternatives. Palatnik/Ishee
[5] only analyze 9...Bc5 10 Qd2 Bxg1 11
Rxc1 Qb6 12 0-0-0 Nxb2! (soon -/+), but
their own alternative 12 Na4 Qe3+ 13
Qxe3 Nxe3 14 Bd3 is in fact much
stronger and rather +/- than += [5].



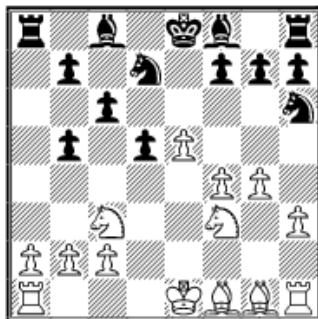
For example 14...b5 15 Nc3 Nc5 (15...
Nb6 16 a3 0-0 17 b3 Rd8 18 Nd4 Bb7 19
Kf2 Nec4 20 Nce2 g6 21 a4 Nb2 22 a5
Nxd3+ 23 cxd3 Nd7 24 a6 Bc8 25 Nxc6
Re8 26 Nc3 1-0, Dreev – Kveinys,
Vienna 1996) 16 Kd2 Nf5 17 b4 Nxd3 18
cxd3 a5 19 a3 Bd7 20 Ne2 h5 21 Ned4
Nxd4 22 Nxd4 and White has a clear
advantage.

10 Qxb6

Not 10 h3?! Bc5 11 Qd2 Bxg1 12 Rxc1

Nh2 =.

10...axb6 11 h3 Nh6 12 g4 b5!



12...Bb4 [4] (Wells – Oratovsky,
Budapest 1999) looks less reliable,
because of 13 Kd2! (to take back on c3
with the king, thereby keeping his pawn
structure intact) 13...Nc5 14 Bd3 0-0 15
a3 +-, when Black's minor pieces occupy
awkward squares. The rest of line "B" is
merely analysis, but my impression is that
Black has few problems:

13 Be3 b4 14 Ne2

14 Nb1 Nc5 15 Nbd2 f6.

14...Nc5! 15 Ned4 f6 with full equality, e.g. 16 Bg2 Nf7 17 0-0 Ne4 18 Rfe1 h5!,
and it is White who has to be careful.

Variation C: 8 exd5

8 exd5



The sharpest continuation and probably
best. Black has to find some precise



moves to demonstrate compensation for his pawn. On the other hand, any gambit player will like the following complications.

8...Bc5

A critical situation for the whole variation. We'll look at the following three lines:

- C2 9 Qd3 Qe7 10 Kd2
- C3 9 Qd3 Qe7 10 Nd4

- C1 9 Qd2

Variation C1: 9 Qd2

9 Qd2 Qe7



Both 9...cxd5?! 10 Bxc5 Nxc5 11 Bb5+ Bd7 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 13 0-0-0 +/- and 9...0-0 10 0-0-0 cxd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 Bc4 Bf5 14 Qxd5 Qa5 15 Kb1 Be6 16 Qd2 are good for White.

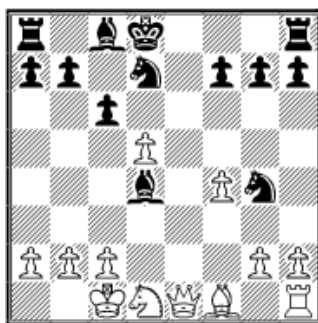
10 Nd4 Ng4 11 0-0-0

11 Nd1? is a serious error: 11...Ndf6 12 Bc4 Ne4 13 Qd3 (13 Qe2 Qh4+) 13...Nef2 14 Nxf2 Qxe3+ 15 Qxe3+ Nxe3 16 Nb3 Bb6 17 Bd3 Nxe3+ -/+.

11...Qxe3!?

11...Nxe3 12 Re1 0-0 13 Rxe3 Qf6 14 Re4 Nb6 15 Nb3 +/- Chernyshov – Jovanovic, Szombathely 2003, Black lacks compensation for the pawn. The text move complicates matters.

12 Re1 Bxd4 13 Nd1 Qxe1 14 Qxe1+ Kd8



The position is unclear. A sample line: 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 Qa5+ Bb6 17 Qg5+ Ngf6 18 Qxg7 Rg8 19 Qxf7 Bb7 20 Qb3 Kc7 21 g3 Rae8 22 Bg2 (22 Bh3) 22...Re7 23 Qc4 Rd8 24 b4 Ng4 25 b5 Ne3 26 Nxe3 Bxe3 + 27 Kb1 Ne5 28 Qb4 (28 Qc3!?) 28...Red7 29 a4 cxb5 30 Bxb7 Kxb7 31 Qa3 Bd4 32 axb5 Kb6, Black can be satisfied with his position.

Variation C2: 9 Qd3 Qe7 10 Kd2

9 Qd3 Qe7

9...0-0? 10 dxc6! bxc6 (10...Bxe3 11 cxd7) 11 0-0-0 Qa5 12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 Qd6 Be6 14 Nd4 Rfd8 15 Nxc6 etc., Dossis – Schalkwijk, IECG Email 2000.

10 Kd2



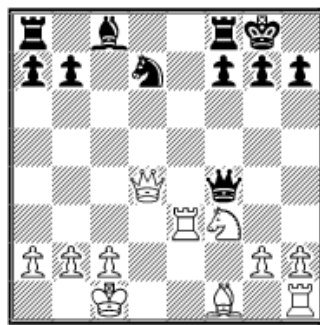
10...0-0!?

Other options:

(a) 10...cxd5?! 11 Re1 0-0 12 Bxc5 Qxc5 13 Qd4 b6, Ortega – Shirazi, Paris 1998, or perhaps 13...Qd6, followed by Nc5-e6, but in both cases White has an advantage (+=).

(b) 10...Nxd5 11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 Re1 0-0 13 Qxd5! (quiet continuations are harmless: 13 Bd4 Qd6 14 g3 Bxd4 15

Qxd4 Nc5 = Bendsorp – Biemans, Netherlands 2002, or 13 Kc1 Qd6 14 g3 Bxe3+ 15 Qxe3 Nc5, about =) 13...Bxe3+ 14 Rxe3 Qb4+ 15 Kc1 Qxf4 16 Qd4 +/=.



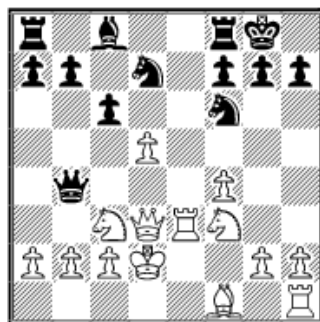
White stands better, but it isn't easy for him to convert his advantage into a full point: 16...Qh6 17 Kb1 Nb6 18 Bd3 Be6 19 Rhe1 Rad8 20 Qe5 g6 21 Qg3 (21 R3e2) 21...Bf5 22 Ne5 Bxd3 23 Nxd3 Nc4 24 Re7 Qd2 25 Rxb7 Rde8 26 Rc1 a5 27 a3 Re2 28 Qc7 Ne3 29 Nf4 Nd5 30 Nxd5 Qxd5 31 g4 Qg2 32 a4 Re4 33 Qxa5 Rxc4 34 Re7 Qxh2 35 Qa7 h5 =.

(c) 10...Bb4!? 11 dxc6 (11 Bd4 comes into consideration) 11...Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 bxc6 unclear, Timoshenko – Oratovsky, Cappelle la Grande 1999 [4].

11 Re1 Bxe3+!

Offers better chances than the passive 11...cxd5 +/=.

12 Rxe3 Qb4



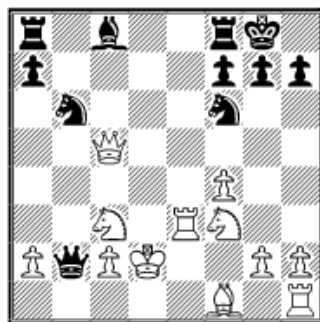
13 dxc6

The cautious 13 Kc1 seems wiser: 13... Qxf4 14 dxc6 bxc6 15 Qd4 Qh6 16 Kb1 c5 17 Qd2 Bb7 18 Bb5 Rad8 19 Rd1 Nb6 20 Qxd8 Qxe3 21 Qd2 Qxd2 22 Rxd2 g6 and White has a slight advantage.

13...bxc6 14 Qc4 Qxb2 15 Qxc6?

Too greedy. Correct is 15 Qb3 Rb8 16 Qxb2 Rxb2 17 Re7 Rd8 =.

15...Nb6 16 Qc5 (16 Qb5 Qa3)



16...Be6! →+

This refutation of White's play was difficult to see. In Ady – Kacheishvili, New York 1981, Black lost after 16...Rd8 +? 17 Bd3 Ba6 18 Ne5 Bxd3 19 Rxd3 Rdc8? (19...Qxa2 Olthof [4]; 19...Nbd5 =; 19...Rd5! 20 Qc7 Qb4 =+) 20 Qe7 Ne4 + 21 Nxe4 Qxc2+ 22 Ke3 Qxa2 23 Rhd1 Rf8 24 R1d2 Qb1 25 Kf2 g6 26 Nf6+ Kg7 27 Nh5+ gxf5 28 Rg3+ 1-0.

After the text move White is lost. An attractive line: **17 Bd3? Rfc8 18 Rb1** (or 18 Qd4 Nc4+ 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 Qd3 Rac8 21 Rb1 Qxc3+ 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 23 Rxc3 Ne4+ →) **18...Rxc5 19 Rxb2 Rxc3**, and White has to resign.

Variation C3: 9 Qd3 Qe7 10 Nd4!

9 Qd3 Qe7 10 Nd4!

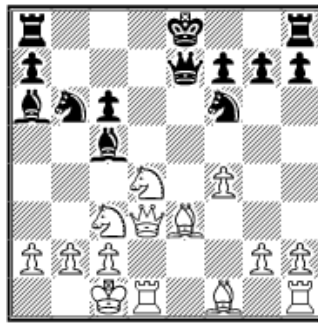


For 10 Kd2, see C2. The diagram shows a critical position of the "French Attack." Here it is rather White than Black who attacks.

10...Nxd5

The alternatives are less promising: (a) 10...Bxd4? 11 Qxd4 Ng4 12 0-0-0 0-0 13 Bg1 Nb6 14 d6 Qh4 (Holzke – Urban, Hamburg 1992) 15 g3 Qh5 16 Qc5 etc.

(b) 10...Nb6?! 11 dxc6 bxc6 (11...0-0 12 0-0 bxc6 13 Bg1 +/- J. Polgar – Rivas Pastor, Dos Hermanas 1993) 12 0-0-0! Ba6 (Olthof [4])



13 Qd2 Bxf1 14 Bf2!! Nc4 15 Qe1 Bxd4 16 Qxe7+ Kxe7 17 Rxd4 c5 18 Rd1 Bxg2 19 Bxc5+ Ke6 20 Rhe1+ Kf5 21 Rd4 +/- Nxb2 22 Rg1, etc.

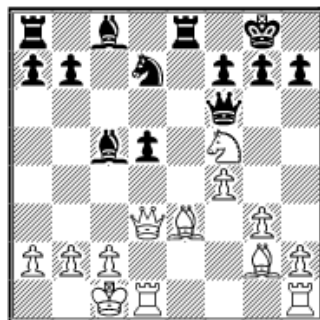
(c) 10...Ng4!? is not entirely clear: 11 Nf5 Nde5 12 Nxe7 Nxd3+ 13 Bxd3 Nxe3 14 Nxc8 Rxc8 15 dxc6 Rxc6 (15...Nxg2+ 16 Kf1 Nxf4 17 cxb7 Rb8 18 Be4) 16 g3 0-0 17 Ke2 Bd4. Whether Black has sufficient compensation for his pawn is difficult to decide; for example, 18 Rab1 g6 19 Nb5 Be5 20 Kf3 a6 21 Nc3 (21 Na3 b5) 21...Bd4 22 h3 Rd8 23 Rh2 Bxc3 24 Kxe3 Rb6 25 b3 Re6+ 26 Kf3 Kg7 27 Re2 Rxe2 28 Kxe2 Re8+ 29 Kf2 Bd4+ 30 Kg2 Bc3 31 Kf3 f5 32 Be2 Rd8 33 g4 Kf6 34 Bd3 Rd4, and Black can hope to survive.

11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 Nf5

A tempting attack, but 12 0-0-0 also deserves attention: 11...0-0 (12...Nf6) 13 g3 Nf6 14 Bg2 (Galissot – Verheyen, Artek 2000) 14...Re8 =.

12...Qf6 13 Bxc5

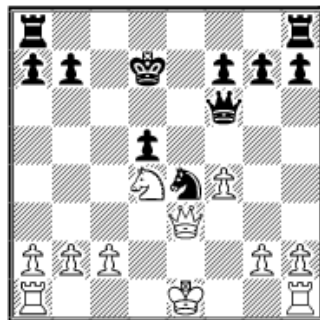
13 0-0-0 0-0 14 g3 (or 14 g4 Re8! 15 Bxc5 Nxc5 16 Qxd5 Bxf5 = Miras Garcia – Ross, Email 2001) 14...Re8 15 Bg2



15...Qg6! 16 Bd4 (16 Bxd5 Nf6 or 16 Rde1 Nf6 are safer) 16...Ne5 17 Ne7+ Bxe7 18 Bxe5 Bf5 19 Qb3 Bf6! 20 Bxf6 Re2 21 Rd2 Rxd2 22 Kxd2 Qxf6 23 Bxd5 Re8 24 Bc4 a6 25 a4 b5 26 axb5 axb5 27 Re1 Qd4+ 28 Bd3 Rxe1 29 Kxe1 Qg1+ 30 Kd2 Qxh2+ 31 Be2 g6 32 Qxb5 Qxg3 =.

13...Nxc5 14 Qb5+

Another entertaining line: 14 Qe3+ Ne4
15 Bb5+ Bd7 16 Bxd7+ Kxd7 17 Nd4



White plans to profit from Black's exposed king position. But if nothing else works, Black still has the attractive tactical escape: 17...Ng3!? 18 0-0-0 Nxh1 19 Nb5:

(a) 19...Kc6 20 Rxd5 Kxd5 21 Nc3+ Kc6
22 Qf3+ Kd7 23 Qxb7+ Ke8 24 Qxa8+
Qd8 25 Qxa7 Kf8 26 Qg1 Qd6 27 Qxh1
Qxf4+ 28 Kbl g6 29 g3 Qd4 30 a4 Kg7
31 Qd5 =.

(b) 19...Oc6 20 Oe5 Oe6 21 Oc7+ Ke8 22

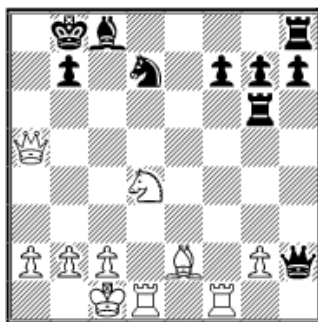
Qxb7 Qe3+ 23 Kb1 Rd8 24 Rxh1 Kf8 25
Oxa7 Oxa7 26 Nxa7 Re8 = with roughly equal chances.

14...Nd7 15 Ne3

A new attempt. In the game Soriano Ascaso – Ramo Frontinan, Aragon 2003, White played 15 Bd3 0-0 16 Qxd5 Re8+ 17 Kd2 and finally won after 17...Qxb2 18 Rb1 Qf6 19 Rhe1 Re4 g4 h6 21 h4 g5 22 hxg5 hxg5 23 Rh1 gx4f4 24 Rh6 Qe5 25 Rbh1 Qb2 26 Rxe6 Qb4+ 27 c3 Qb2+ 28 Be2 1-0. However, 17...g6 practically forces a draw: 18 Nh6+ Kg7 19 Qg5 Qxb2 (19...Qxg5 20 fxg5 Nc5) 20 Nf5+ Kg8 =.

15...Qxf4!

Better than 15...a6 16 Qb4 d4 17 Nc4 Qxf4 18 Be2 a5 19 Nd6+! (stronger than 19 Qa3 = or 19 Qd6 +=) 19...Kd8 20 Qa3 Kc7 21 Nb5+ Kb8 22 Rf1 Qxh2 23 0-0-0 Ra6 24 Nxd4 Rg6 25 Qxa5 with heavy complications:



(a) 25...Rxc2 26 Kb1 Qe5 27 Nb5 Qc5 28 Be4! Ne5 29 b3 Rg6 30 Rd5 Nxc4 31 bxc4 Qb6 32 Qe1 Ka8 33 Kb2 (33 Qd2 Re8 34 Rf3) 33...Rd8 34 Rxd8 Qxd8 35 Rxf7 Rf6 36 Qg1 Qa5 37 Qc5 Rc6 38 Ne7 + and wins.

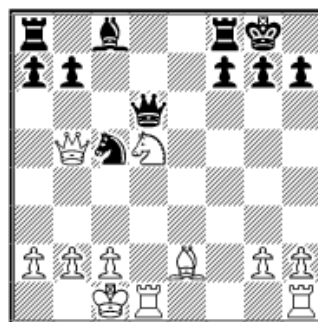
(b) 25...Qe5 26 Qd2 Rxc2 (26...Nf6!? 27 Qb4 Nd5 28 Qa5 Be6 29 Bf3 Rc8 30 Rfe1 Qc7 31 Qd2 +=) 27 Rf5 Qh2 28 Qb4 Rg6 29 Qe7! (29 Ra5 Nb6 with a solid position, for example 30 Bf3 Bd7 31 b3 Rc8 32 Kb2 Rf6 33 Rd2 Qf4 34 c4 Rxc4! 35 bxc4 Nxc4+ 36 Kc3 Qxd2+ 1/2-1/2) 29...

h5 30 Bf3 Rg1 31 Qe3! Rxd1+ 32 Bxd1 Nf6 33 Ra5 Re8 34 Nc6+! +/-.

16 Nxd5 Qd6!

16...Qe5+ 17 Be2 0-0 18 0-0-0 a6 19 Qc4 Nb6 20 Qc7! favors White.

17 0-0-0 0-0 18 Be2 (18 Bc4 a6) **18...Nc5** +=



Because of his superior development White stands better, but Black has good chances to consolidate his position; for example, 19 Bf3 (19 Qb4 Bd7 20 Rhf1 Qh6+ 21 Kb1 b6) 19...Kh8 20 Nc3 Qc7 21 Rd5 Ne6 22 Kb1 a6 23 Qa4 h6 24 h4 Rb8 25 Rhd1 b5.

Sources:

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- [2] T. Harding: "Invitation to a Philidor," in: *New in Chess Yearbook* 22 (1991), p. 37.
- [3] H. Warzecha: *Die Ufimzew-Verteidigung. Moderne Systeme*, Ludwigshafen 1995.
- [4] A. Beliavsky: "A Risky Strategy by Black," in: *New in Chess Yearbook* 56 (2000), p. 58.
- [5] S. Palatnik, M. Ishee: *The Tarrasch Formula*, USA 2004. [6] A. Khalifman: *Opening for White according to Anand 1. e4*, vol. 4, Sofia 2005.

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