



COLUMNISTS

Over the
Horizons

Stefan Bucker

[\[Find us on Facebook.\]](#)[Translate this page](#)

Play through and download
the games from
[ChessCafe.com](#) in the
[ChessBase Game Viewer](#).

Free Shipping!
On all Orders
More than \$75!

UPS GROUND
Only.



Steiner's Variation vs. the Caro-Kann

In the history of our game, theoreticians have uttered bold claims: that 1 e4 e5 wins for White, that 1 e4 c5 2 Bc4 undermines the Sicilian Defense, or about the extreme risks of Alekhine's Defense. But have you ever heard serious concerns about the soundness of the **Caro-Kann Defense, 1 e4 c6?** The move only came into fashion around 1900, but then it was adopted by some of the greatest positional players: Capablanca, Nimzowitsch, Karpov, to name only three. Thus, it won't surprise anyone that the present article isn't meant to refute the Caro-Kann. We all know that White doesn't win by force, but some repertoire books want to make us believe that a "+=" can be achieved, if only White follows the prescribed recommendations.

In this series of unusual suggestions for 1 e4 players, I do not promise a significant white advantage, if the second player finds the best moves. The last column in [October](#) saw us sacrificing a knight on f7 in the French Defense, but the game ended in a draw. In spite of the result, the idea is exciting enough and worth exploration. Specializing in rare opening systems can be a successful venture. Your average opponent probably doesn't play like Capablanca (translation for younger readers: he doesn't play like a computer). A personal approach to the openings is often a success if Black can be lured onto unfamiliar territory, maybe just by a slightly strange move order, and if White has done his homework.

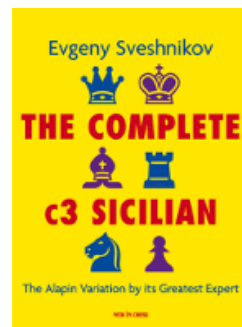


Horatio Caro (1862-1920)
Source: *Dt. Wochensach* 1894, p. 115

While that knight sacrifice in our last column denies Black the usual "French" type of position and rather resembles sharp lines of the Caro-Kann, the "advance" treatment **1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5** in the Caro-Kann creates a kind of "French." Unless that the position is entirely different, of course: Black is still able to develop his bishop to the active square f5, and will frequently do so. Only a few decades ago such a position would have been regarded as equalizing easily for Black. But Nigel Short has played 3 e5 Bf5 4 Nf3 followed by Be2 with success, apparently such treatments do contain some poison. Players of the highest category (say, in the "K" class) won't be caught on the wrong foot, but the lesser Caro-Kann players with limited experience in the French may feel uncomfortable. In the following game, we see a mixture of the Advance Variation 3 e5, and the Steiner Variation 2 c4, which can only increase Black's confusion. If this were not enough, the ChessBase software classifies it as Sicilian Defense, Alapin Variation 2 c3.

Attakinsky – Defendarov

Purchases from our
[chess shop](#) help keep
[ChessCafe.com](#) freely
accessible:



[The Complete c3 Sicilian](#)
by Evgeny Sveshnikov



[The Caro-Kann](#)
by Lars Schandorff



[Play the Scandinavian](#)
by Christian Bauer

1 e4 c6 2 c4

[FEN "rnbqkbnr/pp1ppppp/2p5/8/2P1P3/8/PP1P1PPP/RNBQKBNR b KQkq c3 0 2"]

In the 1930s, Lajos Steiner published analyses claiming that 2 c4 refuted the Caro-Kann. But in the case of d7-d5, he used to take twice on d5, instead of the advance e4-e5 in the present game.

2...d5

Older theoretical works were still looking at alternatives: 2...e5, which can result in Indian positions after 3 d4. Another reasonable option is 2...e6 3 d4 (or 3 Nf3) d5 4 Nc3, transposing to the Slav Gambit, or 4 exd5 cxd5, the Panov Attack, or 4 cxd5 cxd5 (4...exd5 5 e5 Na6 6 Nc3 Nc7 7 Nge2 Ne7 8 Nf4, Tal – Bisguier, Bled 1961, won by White only in a long ending) 5 e5, with a French Defense type of position. However, newer repertoire books prefer the text move, and it is by no means a bad move.

3 exd5 cxd5 4 e5!?

An unusual attempt, played in 1951 by Bogolyubov. The common continuation is 4 exd5, with roughly equal chances. Only a few books on the Caro-Kann Defense mention the text move.

4...Nc6

4...d4 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 h3!? Bxf3 7 Qxf3 should not be underestimated; e.g., after 7...Nc6 the sacrifice 8 e6!? fxe6 9 Bc4 Nf6 10 0-0 offers promising play for the pawn.

5 d4

[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pp2pppp/2n5/3pP3/3P4/8/PP3PPP/RNBQKBNR b KQkq d3 0 5"]

The same position can arise via the Alapin Variation in the Sicilian Defense: 1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 e5?! Nc6 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4. Or even via the Scandinavian Defense: 1 e4 d5 2 e5?! c5 3 c3 Nc6 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4. Neither of these treatments is critical for those openings. For example, 3 e5?! in the first line is ignored in Sveshnikov's [The Complete c3 Sicilian](#). He doesn't need to feel guilty about it, you cannot cover everything. Objectively, Black should have

equal chances in the diagrammed position. However, even in an equal position a well prepared player has an advantage.

5...Qb6

Looks good, but actually it may be an inaccuracy. The main alternative is 5... Bf5 (5...g6 6 Nc3 Nh6 7 h3 is good for White) 6 Nc3 (better than 6 Bd3 from Bogolyubov – Pfeiffer, Dortmund 1951, a game lost by White) 6...e6 7 Be3, when White scored 7½ points in twelve games in my database. I believe that White hasn't much, if Black defends carefully. In any case it appears to be an interesting situation, the better player should win. Or rather, perhaps, the player who has a better understanding of French pawn formations.

6 Nc3! Qxd4?!

Black has quieter continuations, but in each case White seems to have an edge:

(a) 6...Bf5? 7 Nxd5 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 0-0-0 9 Be3 Nxe5 is too risky: 10 a3 Ng4 11 Bd2 +/-.

(b) 6...e6 7 Nf3 Nge7 8 Na4 Qc7 9 Be2 Nf5 10 0-0 Be7 11 g4! Nh4 12 Nxh4 Bxh4 13 a3 +=, White won in Skibbe – Günther, German Bundesliga (women) 1995/96. Perhaps 13 Be3 is even stronger, as a later Rc1 and b2-b4 might save the tempo a2-a3.

7 Qxd4 Nxd4 8 Nxd5 Nc2+



[FEN"r1b1kbnr/pp2pppp/8/3NP3/8/PPn2PPP/R1B1KBNR w KQkq - 0 9"]

Here my database gives White a plus score: 7½ out of thirteen games.

9 Kd2!

And now the score becomes a clean 3-0. In some lines the king marches to the square c3, trapping the knight a1. Interestingly, the strong text move was already played in the oldest game, Wiedmann – Baumgartl, Pfarrkirchen Open 1988, while the weaker 9 Kd1 happened in several later games.

9...Nxa1

9...Bf5 10 Nc7+ Kd7 11 Nxa8 Nxa1 12 Bb5+ Kc8 13 Bd3 is no improvement:

(a) 13...Nh6 14 Bxf5+ Nxf5 15 Nf3 e6 16 Kd3 Bc5 17 Bd2 Kb8 18 Rxa1 Rd8 + 19 Ke4 Kxa8 20 Rc1 b6 21 b4! +/-.

(b) 13...Be6!? 14 Ke2 Bxa2 15 Be3 Nb3 16 Nh3 Kb8 (16...e6 17 Bxa7) 17 Rd1 e6 18 Bb1 Nd4+ (White was threatening checkmate on d8) 19 Rxd4 Bd5 20 Ng5 Nh6 21 Ra4 Kxa8 22 Bxa7 b5



[FEN"k4b1r/B4ppp/4p2n/1p1bP1N1/
R7/8/1P2KPPP/1B6 w - b6 0 23"]

White has a clear advantage; e.g., 23 Ra1 Kb7 24 Be3 Kb8 25 Ra7 +/-.

10 Nc7+ Kd8 11 Nxa8 Be6

Improving upon the earlier examples:

(a) 11...Bf5? 12 Bd3 e6 (12...g6 13 Bxf5 Bh6+ 14 Kc3 and soon 1-0, Wiedmann – Baumgartl, Pfarrkirchen Open 1988; or 12...Be6 13 Kc3 Kc8 14 Be3 and White won in Zilch – Kokschi, Bad Zwosten 2000; or 12...Nh6 13 Nf3, etc.) 13 Bxf5 exf5 14 Nf3 Kc8 15 Kd3 +/-.

(b) 11...b6 12 Nf3 Bb7 13 Nxb6 axb6 14 Bd3 e6 15 Ke2 Ne7 16 Be3 Nd5 17 Rxa1 Nxe3 18 fxe3 +/- . White has a sound extra pawn and the better position.

12 Kc3 Bxa2 13 Nh3 e6 14 Ng5 Nh6 15 Be3



[FEN"N2k1b1r/pp3ppp/4p2n/4P1N1/
8/2K1B3/bP3PPP/n4B1R b - - 0 15"]

15...Bb4+

The lesser of two evils: 15...Nb3 16 Bc4 Bc5 17 Bxb3 Bxe3 18 fxe3 Bxb3 19 Kxb3 Ke7!? 20 Nc7 Rc8 21 Nb5 Rc5 22 Nc3! (much stronger than 22 Nxa7?) 22...Rxe5 23 Nf3! +/-, when after 23...Rxe3? 24 Ra1 a6 25 Kc2 the black rook is in serious trouble; for example, 25...Nf5 26 Kd2 h5 27 Ra5 f6 28 Nh4! Re5 29 Ng6+ and wins.

16 Kxb4 Nc2+ 17 Ka4 Nxe3 18 fxe3



[FEN"N2k3r/pp3ppp/4p2n/4P1N1/
8/2K1B3/bP3PPP/n4B1R b - - 0 15"]

18...f6

18...Bd5 isn't better: 19 Kb4 Kc8 20 e4 Bc6 21 Bc4 Kb8 22 Rf1 Be8 23 Nb6 axb6 24 h3 +/-.

19 exf6 gxf6 20 Ka3!? fxg5

The only alternative was 20...Bd5 21 e4 fxg5 22 exd5 exd5 23 Be2 Kd7 24 Rd1 Rxa8 25 Rxd5+ Kc7 26 Rc5+ Kd6 27 Rxc5 +/-, Black's h-pawn will fall.

21 Kxa2 Kc8 22 Bc4 Kd7 23 Bb5+ Kc8 24 e4!



[FEN"N1k4r/pp5p/4p2n/1B4p1/4P3/8/KP4PP/7R b - - 0 24"]

Denying the knight the square f5. White's rook will soon infiltrate the opponent's position, while Black cannot do much.

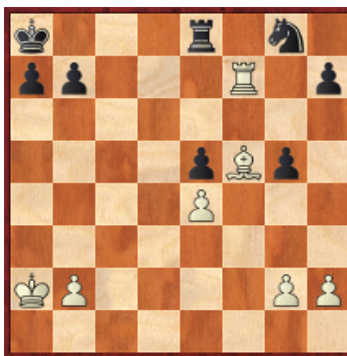
24...Kb8 25 Bc4 Re8 26 Rf1 e5

If 26...Kxa8, White wins the e-pawn: 27 Bxe6.

27 Bb5 Rc8 28 Bd7 Rd8 29 Rf6!

Again White profits from Black's weak eighth rank: 29...Rxd7?? 30 Rf8+ and mate next move.

29...Kxa8 30 Be6 Ng8 31 Rf7 Re8 32 Bf5



[FEN"k3r1n1/pp3R1p/8/4pBp1/4P3/8/KP4PP/8 b - - 0 32"]

White's pieces are dominating. The only question is whether the advantage is sufficient for a win – which seems to be the case.

32...h6

A passive defense, but 32...h5 33 Bg6 h4 34 Rf5 Rd8 35 Rxe5 Kb8 36 Rxc5 Ne7 37 Bf5 almost certainly wins for White, too.

33 Kb3 a6 34 Kc4 Ka7 35 Kd5 Ne7+ (desperation) 36 Kxe5 Nc6+ 37 Kf6 Re5 38 Rd7 Rb5

38...Kb6 39 Rd5 Re8 40 Kf7 is also hopeless.

39 Rd2 Na5 40 Re2 Nc4 41 e5



[FEN"8/kp6/p4K1p/1r2PBp1/
2n5/8/1P2R1PP/8 b - - 0 41"]

This advance of the e-pawn decides the game.

41...Nxe5

There is nothing better.

42 Rxe5 Rxb2 43 Be4 1-0

Send your games or comments to redaktion@kaissiber.de.

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[ChessCafe Archives\]](#)
[\[ChessCafe Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#)
[\[Contact ChessCafe.com\]](#)

© 2010 BrainGamz, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.