



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

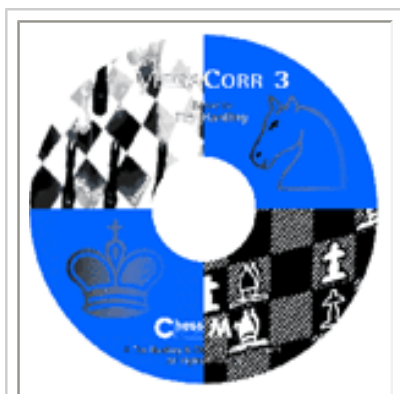
How Sokolsky Played the Sokolsky

Taking up a reader's suggestion, I intend now to begin my coverage of the opening 1 b4, usually called Sokolsky's Opening.

There will probably be three articles with a break, i.e., I will write about a different topic in August and then return to sum up on the Sokolsky in September. This arrangement will help to maintain variety and also give readers a chance to send in their own games and analyses, which can be considered (along with my own games in this opening) in the second or third article. In the later articles, I will try to identify what are the most critical lines and perhaps make some new suggestions.

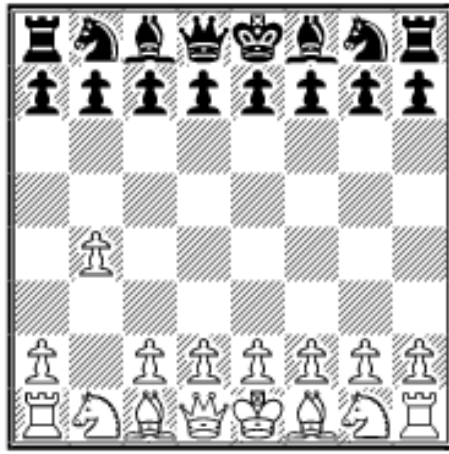
However, I intend to start with a summary of what this opening is about, chiefly from the praxis of its most loyal and celebrated practitioner, the Belarus master Aleksey P. Sokolsky.

With the move 1 b4, White immediately stakes a claim to space on the queenside and announces his intention both to expand there and to be first to occupy the long diagonal a1-h8 with a bishop. The latter plan can also be instituted with the more modest 1 b3, the Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack; 1 b4 however has additional strengths and weaknesses.



Order

*Mega Corr 3**Edited by Tim Harding*



Because the move 1 b4 attacks the square c5, which normally belongs to Black in almost all chess openings, it immediately challenges preconceptions that the defender may have. By taking a measure of control over c5, White is also making preparations for control of d4 (which the move ...c5

challenges) and with his bishop soon posted on b2, his influence rapidly extends to e5 and beyond. Another advantage of 1 b4 compared with the Reti and English is that it is unlikely that Black will play symmetrically, copying White's moves. 1...b5 is almost never tried in reply to 1 b4, and so the Sokolsky generally guarantees that asymmetrical pawn structures will arise.

If the b-pawn is attacked, White may defend it by a2-a3 or advance it by b4-b5, according to circumstances. If White is unchallenged on the queenside, he will later gain more space there with moves like a2-a4 and c2-c4.

Players who like to meet closed openings such as 1 d4, 1 c4 or 1 Nf3 with a fianchetto of the king's bishop face a problem already. The dark-squared strategy which King's Indian players like to adopt is already doubtful because White has staked a prior claim to the dark squares. While ...g7-g6 followed by ...Bf8-g7 is not necessarily ruled out in the Sokolsky, the development scheme is unlikely to lead to more than an exchange of bishops, leaving black with a weakness at g7 in his king's position.

Of course, the move 1 b4 also has drawbacks. The most obvious is that on b4 the pawn is unprotected and Black can rapidly attack it with his king's bishop or his queen. Also the lever move ...a7-a5, as well as ...c5, has to be reckoned with.

It should also be recognized that there is an element of surprise and psychological provocation in 1 b4. Black is challenged to refute this unconventional beginning — but to attempt to do so can be a dangerous option to take if White is one of the minority of experts who have studied the opening deeply.

In reply to 1 b4, Black has three main approaches:

- a) Fight for the dark squares by 1...e5, maintaining his pawn on e5 at all costs.
- b) Exchange his e-pawn for the b-pawn, hoping for rapid piece development and use of the e-file in the variation 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6.).
- c) “Work around” White’s plan with flexible schemes such as 1...Nf6 2 Bb2 e6 or an early ...c6.

When Black plays 1...e5 and adopts one of the first two approaches, Black can become extremely tactical early in the game and a fair amount of complicated theory has developed. On the other hand, if Black avoids 1...e5 then the play is much more positional, with flexible move order, few forcing lines and both players pursuing long-term objectives.

About A.P.Sokolsky

Aleksey Pavlovich Sokolsky was born on November 3, 1908 and died on December 27, 1969. In 1938 he was awarded the title USSR Master of Sport. Already at this time, he was starting to experiment with 1 b4, which he played against such masters as Belavenets (Moscow 1936), Rovner (Leningrad 1937) and then Chekhover and Kotov (Leningrad 1938). In 1937 he played a tied match (+6 –6 =5) with the chief founder of the Soviet chess school, Aleksandr Ilyin-Genevsky, who had beaten Capablanca in 1925, but I don’t know if Sokolsky dared to play 1 b4 against this eminent figure.

Subsequently Sokolsky developed his ideas with this opening over several decades, playing it many times in both correspondence games and regular tournaments.

Sokolsky was a finalist in the 13th USSR Championship (1944) and 17th Championship (1949), finishing in the middle of the tournament table, but in two later championships he finished “bottom of the class”. His attentions turned more to writing, teaching and postal play. Also, in the early 1950s, he moved from Lvov in the Ukraine to Minsk, the capital of the Belorussian republic (now independent Belarus).

Sokolsky played in six USSR Correspondence Chess Championships, always with a good result except in the 8th Championship, which was played shortly before he died. His best finish was a tie for 2nd place with Simagin and Kopaev behind Konstantinopolsky in the 1st Championship, played from 1948-51. While this postal event was in progress, Sokolsky continued to play “over-the-board”, achieving some of his best results. He tied first in the all-Ukrainian Championship in the late 1940s and won a Soviet Championship semifinal in 1950. In many of these games he employed the opening move 1 b4.

Because he was primarily active in internal Soviet events, Sokolsky did not earn an international title, but he was recognized as a player with broad theoretical knowledge and an interesting style. In 1965 he was awarded the USSR chess trainer title. He won a lot of games against 1 b4, some against strong masters, and his draws with the opening included grandmaster opponents such as Geller and Keres.

The first edition of his book on chess openings appeared in Lvov in 1949. I have a copy of the 1955 edition, a handsome hardback of 470 pages, edited by Suetin and published in Minsk.

In an article in the journal *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (Chess in the

USSR) in 1953, Sokolsky elucidated the principal ideas of his opening. Later the same year, a book appeared by the German master L. Schiffler, principally consisting of games that Schiffler himself had played, but the earliest were from 1946-48, a decade later than Sokolsky's first master games with 1 b4. Sokolsky's own book *The Opening 1 b4* first appeared in 1963, in Minsk, and was rapidly translated into German by A.Hildebrand of Uppsala, Sweden, and published by Kurt Rattmann's company in Hamburg in 1964. This is really the classic work on the opening, although theory has of course developed since, and Sokolsky himself played several more important 1 b4 games between the publication of his book and his death.

I should also like to mention the very interesting later work by Sokolsky, 'Shakhmatnaya Partiya v eyo Razvitye' (Minsk, 1966) which also contains a few 1 b4 games. This, the last book of Sokolsky's to be published in his lifetime, was later translated into English by Harry Golombek under the title *The Chess Game Through His Development* if I recall rightly (I have the Russian edition). After his death, a little booklet *Vnimanie, Lovushka!* (Beware, Trap!) was published in 1970 and in 1977 a beginners' opening book *Vash Pervy Khod* (Your First Move) appeared.

In the first chapter of his book on 1 b4, Sokolsky gives a little history, recognizing his precursors. An eminent Moscow University mathematics professor, Nikolay Vasilyevich Bugayev, is named as one of the first players to take an interest in 1 b4. Bugayev played a match in 1888 against Solovtsov, a strong contemporary of Chigorin, and one of the games began 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6 3 a3 d5; Black eventually won. In 1896, Bugayev played the opening against Steinitz (who was giving a simultaneous). Instead of 3 a3, the professor played 3 b5 and went on to win the game.

According to Bill Wall, Professor Bugayev was the first person to publish analysis of the opening, which appeared in *Shakhmatnoye Obozrenie* in 1903.

Sokolsky also mentions that the Austrian master Bertold

Englisch (1851-1897) tried the opening and that in the Nuremberg international of 1896, Schlechter played it against Dr Tarrasch. That game began 1 b4 d5 2 Bb2 Bf5 3 e3 e6 4 b5 Nf6 5 Nf3 c5 6 bxc6 (en passant), whereupon Sokolsky remarks “The exchange of the b-pawn does not correspond to the idea of this opening”.

Tartakower began 1 b4 in his round four game against Maroczy in the great New York tournament of 1924. He called it the “Orang-Utan Opening” because, he said, he was inspired by a visit to the ape-house at New York Zoo, and in some quarters the Orang-Utan has remained the name of this opening. Actually, Soltis pointed out that Tartakower had already played 1 b4 against Reti in 1919. The name ‘Polish Opening’ is also sometimes seen, by analogy with the Polish Defence (1 d4 b5). However, I prefer the name Sokolsky Opening after the pioneer who did so much to develop it and make it a serious opening.

After that game, Tartakower also opened 1 b4 against Colle (Bartfeld 1926), in which the gambit variation 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6 3 e4!? was introduced. There were also some other hypermodern games in which the move b2-b4 was played at move 2 or 3. In the historical survey in his book, Sokolsky cites Alekhine-Drewitt, Portsmouth 1923 (1 Nf3 d5 2 b4) and Nimzowitsch-Reti, Karlsbad 1923 and Reti-Capablanca, New York 1924 (both starting 1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 b4) but I shall only concern myself with the “pure” Sokolsky, starting 1 b4.

The Sokolsky in opening literature

Schlechter’s 8th (1922) edition of the *Handbuch des Schachspiels* gives as its only example of 1 b4 a game that the grandmaster editor himself won with Black. The loser is identified only by his initials.

BF – Carl Schlechter
Vienna, 1895

1 b4 e6 2 Bb2 Nf6

One of Black's most flexible systems against the Sokolsky,

which avoids direct confrontations.

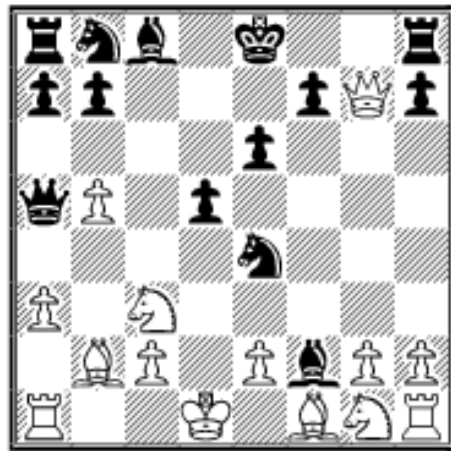
3 a3

Better was the immediate 3 b5 and this is indeed what Tartakower chose against Maroczy. Sokolsky played 3 b5 in many games, including the early one with Chekhover. In his book, he comments: "The logical continuation. The b5-pawn interrupts Black's development and creates space for White's future queenside operations".

3...c5 4 b5 d5 5 d4? Qa5+

Black already begins the decisive operation, remarks Schlechter.

6 Nc3 Ne4 7 Qd3 cxd4 8 Qxd4 Bc5! 9 Qxg7 Bxf2+ 10 Kd1



10...d4!! 11 Qxh8+ Ke7 12 Qxc8 dxc3 13 Bc1 Nd7!

In order to drive the white Queen away from contesting the c3-square, Black offers the second rook.

14 Qxa8

If 14 Qc4 Rd8 15 Qb4+ Ndc5+ 16 Bd2 Rxd2+ 17 Kc1 Qd8 18 Kb1 Rd1+ 19 Ka2 Qd5+ etc. (Schlechter). 14 Qxb7 would be met by 14...Rd8, threatening ...Nec5+ or ...Ne5+.

14...Qxb5 15 Bf4

15 Nf3 also does not save the game: 15...Qd5+ 16 Bd2 cxd2 17 c4 Nc3+ 18 Kc2 d1Q+ 19 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 20 Kxc3 Qc1+ 21 Kb3 Nc5+ and mates.

15...Qd5+ 16 Kc1 Be3+!! 17 Bxe3 Nf2! 0-1

White resigned, for if 18 Bxf2 Qd2+ 19 Kb1 Qd1+ 20 Ka2 Qxc2#.

That was an attractive miniature, but hardly an illustration of how to play 1 b4.

Since Sokolsky's death various monographs on 1 b4 have appeared but the value of many of them, except as source material, is doubtful.

In 1972, Andrew Soltis and Chess Digest produced a slim booklet entitled *1.P-QN4* (English descriptive notation) which introduces some of the main ideas and variations. Soltis at least makes some attempt to explain to the average player what is going on.

In 1977, Chess Player Ltd. of Nottingham, England, published a 72-page booklet *1 b4 Sokolsky Opening* by IM David Levy. This basically consists of the examples from Sokolsky's book, arranged by variation, with some new examples included and some of the less important ones omitted. In 1981, Tony Gillam of Chess Player himself, with a Mark Thomas (an international postal player for Wales), prepared a new booklet *Sokolsky Opening* but this just consists of game examples with even less explanatory text than Levy provided.

In 1989, *The Orangutan* by Bill Wall was published by Chess Enterprises. This was of a similar pattern to the Chess Digest booklets and contained no verbal explanations. For a player wishing to learn the opening, all the above (except the Soltis) are useless except as reference works. According to Wall's bibliography, there was also an article on the Sokolsky by Hugh Myers in *The Chess Correspondent* (June 1983) which I have not seen, and there was also a 1985 monograph *Sokolski-Eroffnung* by K. Grund published in Hamburg in 1985. This is not an exhaustive list and I would be

interested to get details of other titles on 1 b4.

I also wrote some monographs on irregular openings for Chess Digest which contained some material on the Sokolsky, but I don't think I understood the opening well. Also, some of what I wrote was altered by Ken Smith's editor, Hugh Myers, without my permission, so I disown the last of those works (*Dynamic White Openings* and *Dynamic Black Openings*, which I certainly did not dedicate to Myers) His idiosyncratic approach to chess publishing is typified by the fact that in his *Myers Opening Bulletins* the left-hand pages bear odd numbers and the right-hand pages have even numbers, the complete opposite of the normal convention worldwide. I once wrote to ask him why but his answer was basically that this was the way he did things and he was right and he wouldn't be changing!

If you have access to minority magazines on irregular openings published by enthusiasts, then you can find more recent games and analysis. Until a few years ago, there was a magazine on 1 b4 published by Dirk van Esbroeck in Belgium. His associates organized postal thematic tournaments called the Grund-Malyszko Memorials. I suspect that all this activity has now moved to the Internet.

There are also some Sokolsky resources on the Internet. After reading this article, you may like to look at these URLs:

<http://www.algonet.se/~marek/> which is the Sokolsky Opening site of Swedish enthusiast Marek Trokenheim.

A lot of the material there is very old, however and some links seem to be broken. The alternative Orang-Utan opening site is at:

<http://www.angelfire.com/home/bstjean/sokolsky/index.html> which is edited by Canadian player Benoit St.-Jean.

These sites offer experimental email tournaments where you can try out your own ideas against a mixture of experts and weak opponents.

General openings works usually do not have much space for the Sokolsky. However, it is important for would-be 1 b4 players to be aware of what such books recommend and those are the lines most likely to be learned by opponents who want a “quick fix” against 1 b4 without having to learn the opening in any detail.

Thus, Nick de Firmian’s 14th edition of *Modern Chess Openings* (pages 702-3) has two short columns of analysis: one featuring 1...e5 and the other 1...Nf6, while there is also a note on 1...c6. I shall come back to these lines when I discuss specific variations later. NCO (*Nunn’s Chess Openings*) has roughly the same amount of material (on page 9) but the main line recommended for Black is different. So you can see at once that there is no universal agreement on how to meet the Sokolsky. ‘ECO’, which classifies the opening as 1 b4, is a five-volume work so it has more information, but variations without text explaining ideas is of little help in this opening.

You can look for games with 1 b4 in Sahovski Informator but they do are not often featured, because the opening is a relatively rare visitor to international master play.

The most recent example I could find was Miles-Ribli, London 1984, in Informator 37. This means that the editors of Informator consider that no significant game with the Sokolsky has been played for over 18 years! This at least means you don’t have to work very hard to catch up with developments.

The Sokolsky Opening in practice

Now it is time to look at some of Sokolsky’s own games,

illustrating his ideas.

In this article, I shall give one example of his play against each of the four principal plans by Black: in order 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6, 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4, 1 b4 d5 and 1 b4 Nf6 2 Bb2 e6.

In several of these lines, there are many complicated alternatives which cannot be examined in a short article. My main purpose here is to help you get your bearings in the opening. Later articles will return to some of the critical positions in detail.

i) The Barricade Variation & Tartakower's Gambit

Black plays 1...e5 and tries to hold that square to counter the pressure from White's Bishop on b2.

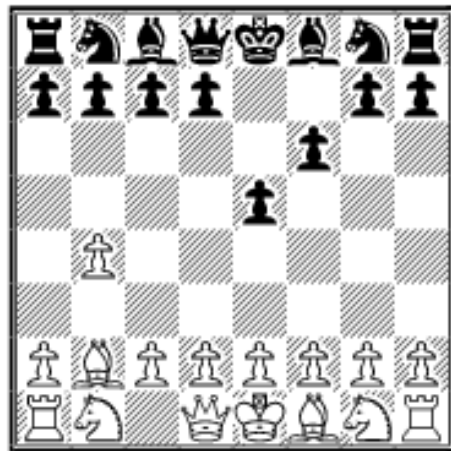
A.P.Sokolsky – Strugach

Belorussia ch, 1958

1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6

Black can also try to support the e-pawn by 2...d6 but of course this restricts the scope of his own king's bishop. In that case, Sokolsky usually continued in English Opening style with 3 c4, although he occasionally experimented with other moves. Black then needs to play 3...f5, otherwise he will be cramped for space. This plan is recommended in the recent book *An Explosive Repertoire for Black* by Finnish masters Yrjola and Tella, where they cite a 1981 Polish game where Black improved at move 12 on the game Sokolsky-Samarian which illustrates the variation in Sokolsky's book. White has a wide range of development options from moves 4-6 and can surely circumvent that line.

I will look again at this 2...d6 variation in a later article. At any rate, 2...d6 is a safer move for Black than 2...f6, which compromises his kingside.



In the diagram position, White has two entirely different plans, both of which were tried by Sokolsky many times; although in the pre-war games he always seemed to play 3 b5, in the post-war period he often chose Tartakower's gambit, 3 e4. It did not seem to matter whether it was a postal or "over-the-board"

game. It seems Sokolsky believed that the two moves were equally playable and perhaps made his choice on the basis of whom the opponent was, the tournament situation and maybe even his mood.

3 e4!?

This move, not mentioned in 'NCO', is of course the more exciting and critical choice. On the other hand, 'MCO' only mentions the gambit and does not discuss 3 b5.

White does not allow his opponent to set up the pawn centre seen in the 3 b5 d5 line; instead he sacrifices the b-pawn, hoping to exploit the weakness on the a2-g8 diagonal which has been created by Black's second move. Often White will follow up with an early f2-f4 to lever open the long black diagonal and expose the King, so 3 e4 is a move that would appeal to King's Gambit players who have temporarily renounced 1 e4. (The problem is that the position after 1 b4 Nf6 2 Bb2 e6 would suit them much less well.)

It is worth taking a moment to compare this position with the one arising after 1 b3 e5 2 Bb2 f6. In this situation, White can play 3 e4 without offer a gambit, and indeed Larsen-Martinez, San Juan 1969, continued 3...c6 4 f4 exf4 5 Nh3!?, when White went on to win. On the other hand, in that line the move 4 Bc4 for White is not good, as the bishop

does not have a retreat square on b3.

3...Bxb4

There is no reason for Black to refuse the pawn. He has the pain so he may as well have the gain too.

4 Bc4

The Bishop bears down on the weakened light squares without delay.

Black has tried several moves here, of which 4...Ne7 and 4...Qe7 are the most important alternatives to the move selected by Strugach in this game.

4...Nc6

Black offers to return the pawn (5 Bxg8 Rxg8 6 Qh5+ Ke7!) but White wisely prefers to keep his light-square pressure.

5 f4 exf4

5...Qe7 6 f5 g6 7 Nc3 Qg7 occurred in Sokolsky-Kryukov, 5th USSR CC Ch and Black eventually won the game, which has not been preserved. Sokolsky saw too late that 8 Nd5! Ba5 9 Nf3, would give White a strong attack, e.g. 9...gxf5 10 exf5 Qxg2 11 Rg1 Qh3 12 Rxg8+ Rxg8 13 Nxf6+ etc.

5...d6 was seen in later games; then Sokolsky liked to continue 6 f5 Nge7 7 Qh5+ g6 8 fxg6.

6 Nh3 Nge7

6...Qe7 is an interesting alternative. The game Sokolsky-A.Kuznetsov, 5th USSR Corr Ch, continued 7 Bd5 Ne5 8 Nxf4 c6 9 0-0! (Naturally, White can also retreat the B to

b3, wrote Sokolsky.) 9...cxd5 10 Nxd5 Qd6 11 d4 Ng6. In his book, Sokolsky indicated that he should now have played 12 c4! by which, Sokolsky wrote, White can create strong threats (13 c5, 13 Qa4) that are not so easy to counter.

7 Nxf4

Sokolsky commented: "A mistake in a difficult position, but it is unclear whether Black can defend himself against the Qh5+ threat".

7...Na5!?



This has often been criticised but in view of the improvements shown later in the notes, it may actually be the right move. Black wants to eliminate the dangerous c4-Bishop at all costs. 7...d5 was suggested in P.H.Clarke's "100 Soviet Chess Miniatures" (1963) as an attempt to gain some relief but it concedes that White has clearly won the opening after 8 Nxd5.

8 Bxf6!?

A dramatic shot, which brought White a quick win and a brilliancy prize in this game. However, modern computers are by no means convinced by this combination. I don't think the soundness of White's combination has ever been questioned before now.

Instead, 8 Qh5+ g6 9 Qe2 might give White a slight edge.

8...Rf8!

Black cannot capture either piece safely but at first sight this

is the saving move as so many white pieces are hanging.

8...gxf6 9 Qh5+ Ng6 (9...Kf8 10 Qf7#) 10 Nxg6 is obviously curtains for Black.

8...Nxc4 gives White a choice. 9 Bxg7!? is possible but I prefer his variation 9 Qh5+ g6 (9...Kf8 10 Ng6+!) 10 Nxg6! Nxg6 11 Bxd8 Kxd8 12 Qb5! Na3 (12...Ne3? 13 Qg5+) 13 Qa4! b5 14 Qb3 Nxb1 15 Qxb4 etc.

9 Nh5!

This threatens Nxg7 checkmate, but of course the Bishop on c4 can be captured.

9...Nxc4

9...Rxf6 10 Nxf6+ gxf6 11 Qh5+ Ng6 comes into consideration. Sokolsky intended 12 Bg8! (not 12 Qxh7 Ne5) 12...Qe7 13 a3 Bc5 14 Bxh7 Qxe4+ 15 Kd1 winning. If instead 12...Kf8 13 Qxh7 Ne5 my computers say the winning move is 14 c3 followed by d4. Sokolsky gave 14 0–0, threatening both d4 and Qh8, which may be just good enough.

However, in reply to 12 Bg8 my computer suggests 12...f5 — a move, not considered in Sokolsky's notes, which makes the situation unclear. As White, the computer prefers 12 Bf7+!? Kxf7 13 Qxh7+ Ke6 14 Qxg6.

10 Nxg7+ Kf7 11 0–0 Kg8

11...d5!? was not mentioned by Sokolsky or other commentators. It is also unclear because after 12 Qh5+ (12 c3 Bc5+ 13 d4 Kg8) 12...Kg8 13 Qg5 Black has the resource 13...Ng6! (13...Rxf6 14 Qxf6 and White's attack continues) 14 Bxd8 Bc5+ when 15 Rf2 is forced and after 15...Bxf2+ 16 Kh1 Kxg7 17 Qxd5 Black has a lot of material for the Queen and the position is utterly chaotic.

12 Qh5!

Simplest, wrote Sokolsky; threatening 13 Qg5. If 12 Qg4 Rxf6 13 Rxf6 Ne5 14 Qg3 N7g6 or 12 Nh5 Qe8!.

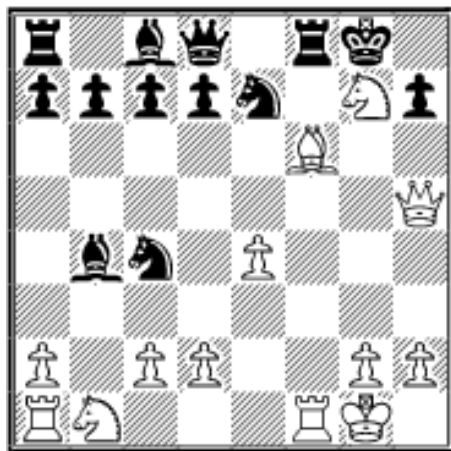
12...Rxf6 13 Rxf6 Ng6 14 Rxc6! hxc6 15 Qxc6 Kh8? 16 Ne8!

The killing move, eliminating Black's resources seen in the variations 16 Nh5 Qg8! and 16 Nf5 Qf8.

16...Qe7 17 Nf6 1-0.

That was a beautiful cascade of sacrifices, but unfortunately the combination begun at move 8 was probably unsound! Let's go back and look at the final stages with a more critical eye. Maybe readers can even discover some new twists in what follows.

Here is the position after 12 Qh5.



12...Rxf6

Clarke wrote that this was forced but Black has several other moves here that are not clear either. The point is that when White executes his main threat, Black gives up the Queen and gets too much in return.

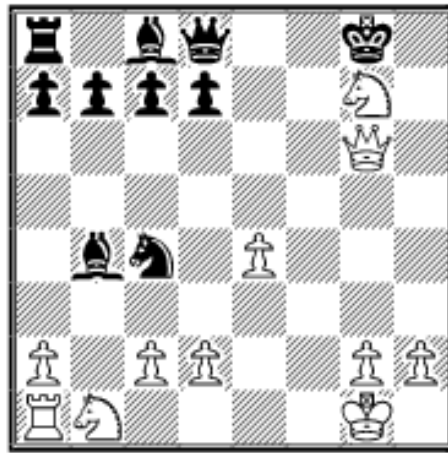
12...d5!? 13 Qg5 Ng6 14 Bxd8 Bc5+ 15 Rf2 Bxf2+ 16 Kh1 is similar to the 11...d5 line.

12...Nxd2?! seems not quite good enough for Black, e.g. 13 Nxd2 Bxd2 14 Ne6 dxe6 15 Qg4+ Ng6 16 Bxd8 Rxd8÷ Black has Rook and two Bishops for the Queen but White retains chances.

12...Rf7! 13 Qg5 (13 Ne6? dxe6 14 Qg5+ Kf8) 13...h6! seems to bring White's attack to a halt and may bust his position completely. Can anybody find something for White here? For example, if 14 Qxh6 Qf8 or 14 Qg3 Bc5+ 15 d4 Rxf6 or 14 Qb5 Nd6 15 Qxb4 Rxf6 16 Rxf6 Nd5 17 exd5 Qxf6. White is probably losing after 13...h6.

The move actually played by Strugach is not bad, either, if followed up correctly.

13 Rxf6 Ng6 14 Rxg6! hxg6 15 Qxg6



Now Black played the losing move 15...Kh8.

Sokolsky's notes give 15...Ne5! 16 Qg3 and now 16...Qf6? 17 Nh5+ Qg6 18 Qxe5 d6 19 Qg3! when White has two pawns more.

However, instead of 16...Qf6, the cool 16...Kh7! might refute White's attack (even 16...Bc5+ 17 Kh1 Kh7 could be good).

After 16...Kh7, the try 17 c3 is refuted by 17...Qg8 and 17 Qxe5 (putting White temporarily material up) is no good either because White cannot rescue the Knight: 17...d6 18 Qb2 Bc5+ 19 d4 Bb6 20 Nf5 Bxf5 21 exf5 Qh4. Finally, 17 Nf5 Qf6 18 d4 Nf7 19 c3 looks plausible but White has only two pawns for the Knight and Black seizes the initiative again by 19...d5.

I suspect the move 3 e4!? is a good practical move and the better tactician will usually win, but the calmer 3 b5 is probably advisable if you are not a combinative genius. I shall look at that line in one of the later articles.

ii) The Pawn Exchange Line

Black trades his e-pawn for the white b-pawn, seeking a lead in development and a piece attack in the centre.

Sokolsky - Anishchenko
Minsk, 1959

1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 c4 Nc6 5 Bb2 0–0 6 e3 d5 7 cxd5 Nxd5

7...Qxd5 as played by Litvinov in the same tournament, is double-edged. 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Ne2 Bd6 10 Nbc3 Qa5 11 Ng3 leads to the better game for White said Sokolsky.

8 Nf3 Bg4 9 Be2 Re8 10 0–0 Be7

Sokolsky remarked that Black's plan to regroup the Bishop on f6 is incorrect, but 10...Bd6 is also not good because of 11 Nc3. He said that 10...Qd7 11 d4 Rad8 is probably best, but that White's game is preferable because of the central pawns and coming pressure on the c-file.

11 d4 Bf6 12 Nbd2 Bf5 13 Nc4 Nb6 14 Rc1 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Na5

Black wants to mobilise his queenside pawn majority and attack the centre by ...c5 but this plan fails. 15...Qd6 was better according to Sokolsky, because after 16 Qb3 Bg6 17 Qxb7 fails to 17...Rab8 (The German edition of his book actually has a misprint, giving Rad8 which is senseless.).

16 Be2 b6

Black has to prevent Rc5 and this move also prepares ...c5 but White's reply cuts across his plan.

17 Ba3!



17...Be7?!

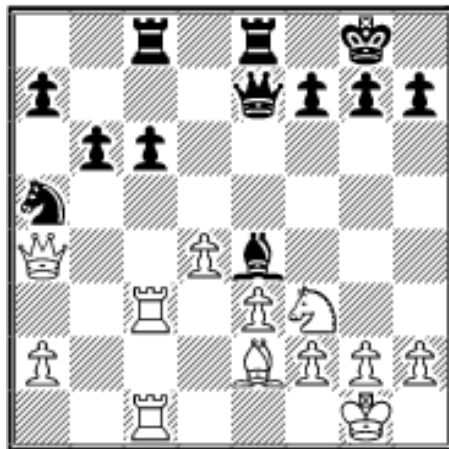
Sokolsky doesn't have a note here. I think that the position had some similarity to a Grünfeld Defence. This exchange only helps White; Black should have posted his light-squared Bishop on b7 and tried for ...c5 at all costs, retaining his dark-squared

Bishop.

18 Bxe7 Qxe7 19 Qa4 Rac8 20 Ba6!

Now White controls c8 and will follow up by doubling on the c-file.

20...Rcd8 21 Rc3 Be4 22 Be2 Rc8 23 Rfc1 c6



24 Nd2

White finds a way to intensify the pressure against the black c-pawn.

24...Bd5 25 Bf3 Bxf3 26 Nxf3 f6 27 h3 Red8 28 Nd2 Kf8 29 Nb3 Rd5 30 Nxa5 Rxa5 31 Qc2

This is the culmination of the plan begun at move 24.

31...g6 32 Rxc6 Rd8

32...Rxc6 33 Qxc6 Rxa2 34 Qc8+ Qe8 35 Qb7 threatening Rc8.

33 Qb3 Rad5 34 R1c4!

34 Rc7 R5d7.

34...R5d6 35 Qc3 Rxc6 36 Rxc6 Kg7 37 Qc4 Rd6 38 d5 Kf8

38...Rxc6 39 dxc6 Qc7 40 Qe6 is hopeless for Black.

39 g3 Kf7?

A blunder in a lost position.

40 Rc7 1-0

iii) The Flexible Defence

Black does not play ...e5 but develops his pieces.

A.Sokolsky - Veinblatt

A00.

Ukraine championship, Odessa, 1949

1 b4 Nf6

Sometimes 1...d5 is played, which can be the prelude to various plans. Sometimes Black will answer 2 Bb2 by 2...Bf5 and does not contest the a1-h8 diagonal but sets up his own sphere of influence around a strong-point on d5. Another possibility is 2...Qd6 but these lines are rarely played.

Other first moves are also occasionally seen.

1...a5 was played against Sokolsky on a few occasions. In a game played too late for inclusion for the 1 b4 book, but annotated in 'Shakhmatnaya Partiya v Eyo Razviti', he continued 2 b5 Nf6 3 Bb2 d6 4 c4 e5 5 e3. We have a position similar to the line 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 d6 but Black has wasted a tempo on ..a5 and lost the chance for a lever with ...a6 later. His queenside development is cramped.

1...a5 does not achieve much. After 2 b5 Nf6 3 Bb2 d6 4 c4 e5 5 e3 we have a position similar to the line 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 d6 but Black has wasted a tempo on ...a5 and lost the chance for a lever with ...a6 later. His queenside development is cramped.

1...c6 is an improvement on 1...a5 because it sets a trap and I once wrote an article for B.H. Wood's magazine about this in the 1970s. The main point is that White's "automatic" next move 2 Bb2 is met by 2...Qb6 after which 3 a3 a5 is a serious embarrassment. White cannot allow ...axb4 and he cannot play bxa5 either. In Sokolsky-Doroshkevich, USSR 1964, White ingeniously avoided loss of material by 4 c4 axb4 5 c5! Qc7 (5...Qxc5 6 axb4 costs Black the exchange.) but after 6 axb4 Rxa1 7 Bxa1 Nf6 8 Nf3 Na6 Black has the initiative and went on to win. He threatens the blocked b-pawn and will soon break with ...d6.

However, in an earlier game White had played 2 c4 and possibly even better is 2 e3.

2 Bb2 e6 3 b5

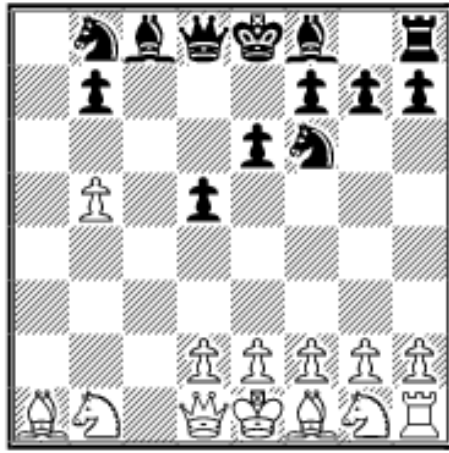


This is an important position, which frequently arises in the Sokolsky. Black can continue in various ways, including 3...d5, which would lead to the previous variation. However 3...b6 and a queenside fianchetto is a natural way for Black to proceed with light-square action without committing himself or restricting the scope of his bishop.

3...a6!?

Future articles will look at some of Black's other choices but 3...a6 is of course a natural move to try as it leads to the advanced pawn becoming isolated.

4 a4 axb5 5 axb5 Rxa1 6 Bxa1 c6 7 c4 cxb5 8 cxb5 d5



In his book, Sokolsky wrote: “An interesting and original position; the question is whether the advanced b-pawn is strong or weak. The answer is: both! The strength of the pawn lies in its seizing of space and cramping effect on the opponent's pieces. The weakness of the b-pawn lies in the fact that the enemy pieces

can attack it. This open question was well illustrated by the present game which featured a sharp struggle.”

9 e3 Nbd7 10 Nf3 Bd6

Black wants to prepare ...e6-e5 - an advance which, however, is not dangerous to White. He could now play 11 Nc3 e5 12 Qb3 Nc5 (12...Nb6 13 Na4) 13 Qa2 Be6 14 d4! when Black will end up with a weak isolated d-pawn.

In this game White instead prevented ...e5 by the blockade of the black central pawn.

11 d4 Ne4!

Natural and good, says Sokolsky. Black highlights the weakness of the a5-e1 diagonal and contests the initiative.

12 Bd3 Qa5+ 13 Nbd2 Bb4

13...Nc3? doesn't work because of 14 Qc1 Bb4 15 0-0 Nb6 (15...0-0 gets the Bishop into difficulties: 16 Bxc3 Bxc3 17 Nb3 Qb4 18 Qc2 Nf6 19 Rc1) 16 Nb3 Qa4 17 Bxc3 Qxb3 18 Bxb4 Qxb4 (18...Qxd3? 19 Qc5) 19 Qc7 Qa5 20 Ng5! and White wins.

14 Ke2 Ndf6 15 Qc2 Bd7 16 Nb3

16 Nxe4? dxe4 17 Bxe4 Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Bxb5+.

16...Qb6

Black has developed his counterplay against the b-pawn. He attacks in twice and can have a third attacker by playing ...Nd6. Nevertheless, White finds a way to defend this important pawn.

17 Ne5! Nd6

17...Bxb5? is premature because of 18 Qc8+ Ke7 19 Qxh8 Bxd3+ 20 Nxd3 and Black loses a Rook without compensation.

18 Nc5! Ke7

Black finds that he still cannot capture the pawn because of 18...Bxb5? 19 Rb1 Qa5 (19...Bxd3+ 20 Ncxd3 winning a piece) 20 Bxb5+ Nxb5 (20...Qxb5+ 21 Ncd3) 21 Nxb7.

19 Rb1 Ra8!



20 g4!?

Sokolsky wrote that White's positional superiority is obvious. He says that instead of this sharp continuation, which gave Black real counterplay, he should have continued simply 20 Rxb4 Rxa1 21 Nb3 Ra8 (21...Rh1 22 Qc5!) 22 Qc5! Qxc5 (22...Qd8? 23

Nxf7) 23 dxc5 Ra2+ 24 Kf1 Nde4 25 f3 Nd2+ 26 Nxd2 Rxd2 27 c6! bxc6 28 b6 winning.

In this variation, 22...Qa7 is not so clear, however; perhaps Black can hold on.

20...h6 21 h4 Be8

21...Bxb5? 22 Rxb4 Rxa1 23 Bxb5 Nxb5 24 Qd3 Ra5 25 Nb3.

22 g5?

22 Rxb4 Rxa1 23 Nb3 was still correct according to Sokolsky but computers don't agree. 22 f3 is the move suggested by Shredder7.

22...hxxg5 23 hxxg5 Nfe4 24 Bxe4?

Because of White's mistake at move 22, he has lost his advantage and this further error means the situation is now critical. White will lose the precious b-pawn.

24 Rxb4 was necessary according to Sokolsky.

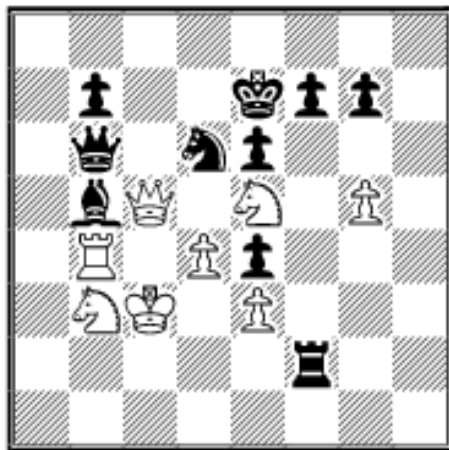
24...dxe4 25 Rxb4 Bxb5+ 26 Kd2 Rxa1 27 Nb3 Rf1?

Scouting mating chances, Black in turn goes wrong.

27...Ra4! was correct. Sokolsky gives this continuation: 28 Rxa4 Bxa4 29 Qc5 Qxb3 (29...Qd8 30 Qa7! gives Black no winning chances, because 30...Bxb3? is refuted by 31 Nc6+.) 30 Qc7+ Ke8 31 Qb8+ Ke7 32 Qc7+ and White escapes with perpetual check.

Here 29...Qxc5 is not mentioned by Sokolsky but would give Black chances of winning the endgame after 30 dxc5 Bxb3 31 cxd6+ Kxd6 32 Nxf7+ Kc5 although there is still a lot of work to do to cash in on the passed b-pawn because Black's other pawns are vulnerable. However, White does not seem to have any way to get his Knight to a square where it can attack the black g-pawn.

28 Qc5! Rxf2+ 29 Kc3





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