



## COLUMNISTS

*The Kibitzer*

Tim Harding



Order

[Mega Corr 3](#)*Edited by Tim Harding*

## Significant Games in the Sokolsky Opening

In this article, I continue my treatment of the opening 1 b4 which is sometimes called the Sokolsky, the Orang-Utan or the Polish Opening. I shall conclude my coverage in September's column.

First, I wish to thank the many readers who sent in games or analysis; some of you will see your names mentioned, but other submissions will be more relevant to the last article. If you were thinking of sending in a game, but have not yet contributed, please do so by the middle of August or you will be too late.

This month I want to review some of the main 1 b4 lines which did not come up in the first article.

To recapitulate what was covered in the June article, I looked at the gambit line **1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6 3 e4 Bxb4**, and then moved on to a preliminary look at the pawn exchange line **1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6** and then we saw an example of how Sokolsky himself met the flexible defence **1 b4 Nf6 2 Bb2 e6**.

This time I will reverse that order and begin with the more positional lines, concluding with some of the critical points that can arise from 1 b4 e5. If your interest is in defending against 1 b4 and not playing it with White, then the positional lines with 1...Nf6 and 1...d5 (and maybe 1...c6) are what you should concentrate on. The much sharper positions arising from 1...e5 are really only suited to player who have a primarily tactical style, and Black can easily get into trouble early on if he

mishandles those variations.

I mentioned last time that the famous Chess Informator series has not published a 1 b4 game since issue 37. We shall look at that game now.

### ***Miles-Ribli, London 1984.***

#### **1 b4 e6 2 Bb2 Nf6 3 b5**

3 a3 is probably a waste of time. After 3...b6 (3...c5 see BF-Schlechter in Kibitzer 85) 4 Nf3 c5 White cannot maintain his pawn on b4, e.g. 5 b5 a6 6 e3 axb5 7 Bxb5 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 c4 Bb7 10 d3 Nc6 11 Nc3 Ne8 12 d4 Nd6 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 Qe2 Nxb5 15 Nxb5 (15 cxb5 Na5 Black's mobile centre will be more important than White's blockaded passed pawns.) 15...d5 16 Rfd1 Na5 with clear advantage to Black in Damjanovic-Gligoric, Yugoslav ch 1960.

#### **3...b6**

Black has a wide choice here. We saw the game Sokolsky-Veinblatt with 3...a6 last time.

#### **4 e3**

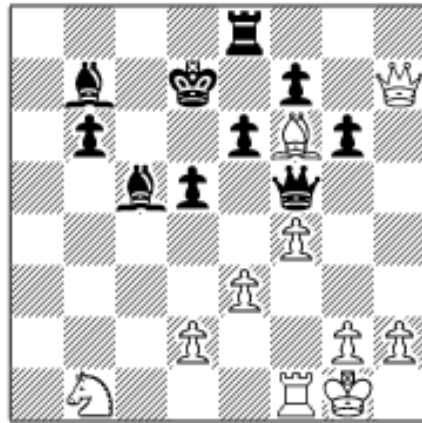
Soltis suggested 4 g3 Bb7 5 Nf3 Be7 6 Bg2; his idea is to play d3, controlling e4, and continue with c2-c4 or e2-e4.

#### **4...Bb7 5 Nf3**

5 f4 is sometimes played. Here is a recent example.

5...Bc5 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Be2 a6 8 a4 d5 9 0-0 c6 10 Nd4 Bd6 11 Nf3 (White offers a repetition, but Black switches to Plan B.) 11...axb5 12 axb5 Rxa1 13 Bxa1 c5 14 Ne5 Nbd7 15 Bd3 c4 16 Nxd7 Qxd7 17 Bxf6 cxd3 18 Qg4 g6 19 Qh4 Ra8 20 cxd3 Qxb5 (Black's b-pawn is a winning trump; now he just has to stabilize the kingside.) 21 Bd4 Bc5 22 Be5 Qxd3 23 Qf6 (Since White cannot get his Rook to h3, this is the only attacking plan.)

23...Kf8 24 Qh8+ Ke7 25 Bf6+ Kd7 26 Qxh7 Rf8 27 Bg7 Re8  
28 Bf6 Qf5

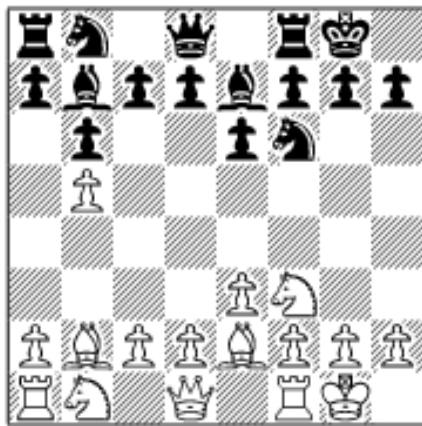


29 Qh4 (If White takes on f7, his Bishop is in a pin.) 29...b5 30 g4 Qe4 31 Nc3 Qc2 32 Qe1 b4 33 Qd1 Qxd1 34 Nxd1 Ba6 35 Re1 Be7 36 Bd4 Rc8 37 Nb2 Bb5 38 Ra1 Bc5 39 Bf6 Bb6 40 h4 Rc2 and Black soon won the endgame (K. Josefsson-A.R. Barnsley, ICCF Email World Ch Semifinal 1999).

### 5...Be7

Ribli suggested 5...c5!? 6 Be2 d5 7 0-0 Nbd7 8 d3 Bd6 9 Nbd2 Qc7=.

### 6 Be2 0-0 7 0-0



Sokolsky used to play c4 here or last move. Then 7...d6 or 7...d5 8 a4 c5! are alternative plans for Black.

### 7...d5!

If 7...d6 8 c4 Nbd7 9 a4 a6 10 Nc3 Re8 (Sokolsky-Chukaev, USSR 1959) Soltis suggested White might get an edge by 11 Nd4.

### 8 d3

If 8 a4 then 8...c5 was Sokolsky's recommendation for Black.

### 8...c5 9 Nbd2 Nbd7 10 c4 Bd6 11 Re1 Qc7!

White now needed to play 12 h3 to maintain equality according to Ribli; this becomes clear at move 14. In the game Black never stood worse and eventually won: not a very good

advertisement for this opening.

### **12 Bf1?! dxc4 13 Nxc4**

Miles decided to give up a pawn. 3 dxc4 might be sounder but Black has some initiative after 13...Rad8 followed by 14...Ne5 or 14...Ne4.

### **13...Bxf3 14 gxf3**

If 14 Qxf3 Bxh2+ 15 Kh1 Ne5! (not 15...Bd6 16 Qc6!) – Ribli.

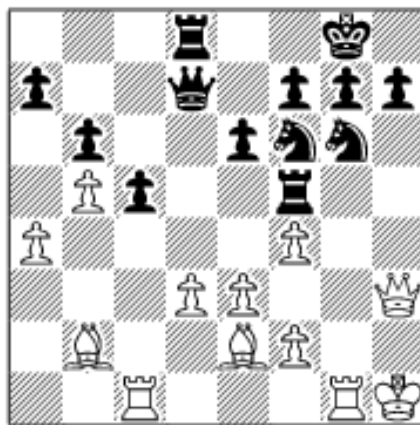
### **14...Bxh2+ 15 Kh1 Be5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 f4**

White has the bishop pair as some compensation, so he tries to drive back the knights and get good diagonals for the bishops.

### **17...Ng6 18 Qf3**

If 18 Bg2 then 18...Rad8 followed by ...Nh4 to harass the bishop.

### **18...Rad8 19 Be2 Rd5 20 Qh3 Rfd8 21 Rac1 Rf5 22 Rg1 Qd7 23 a4**



### **23...e5?!**

Afterwards Ribli thought this was the wrong way to complicate. 23...Qd5+ looks unplayable at first but after 24 e4 (else Black plays ...Qb3) 24...Nxe4 25 dxe4 Qxe4+ 26 Bf3 Qxf4 Black will have four or five pawns for the piece.

### **24 Kh2 Qe6 25 Rg5 Qa2 26 Rxf5 Qxb2 27 fxe5**

White returns the exchange in view of 27 Re1 exf4.

### **27...Qxc1 28 exf6 Qb2 29 Bf1 gxf6 30 Qf3 Kg7 31 Qe4 Qb3**

**32 Kg1 Qe6 33 Qg4**

33 Qxe6 straightens Black's pawns and after 33...fxe6 34 Rh5 Ne5 the endgame is hopeless for White.

**33...Rd5 34 e4 Rd4 35 Qg3 Rxa4 36 Rh5 Ra1 37 Kg2 c4**

Now all White's pawns are weak and his King becomes exposed.

**38 dxc4 Qxe4+ 39 f3 Qc2+ 40 Kg1 Qxc4 41 Qh3 h6 42 Qg2 Qd3 43 f4 Qd4+ 44 Kh2 Qxf4+ 45 Kg1 Qd4+ 46 Kh2 Rd1 47 Rf5 Rd2 48 Be2 Qh4+ 0-1**

White resigns as his Bishop is lost.

Here is another significant game in the flexible defence variation. It is not often these days that a 2600+ grandmaster plays the Sokolsky.

***Vladimir Akopian – Surye Shekhar Ganguly (India, 2440)*  
11<sup>th</sup> Goodricke open, Calcutta.2000****1 b4 e6 2 Bb2 Nf6 3 b5 d5**

V.Akopian-N.Mamedov, Dubai 2000, went instead 3...Be7 4 Nf3 0-0 5 e3 b6 6 c4 Bb7 7 Be2 d5 8 0-0 Nbd7 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nc3 c5 11 bxc6 Bxc6. This seems about equal. White now started an over-ambitious plan: 12 Nd4 Bb7 13 Bb5 Nxc3 14 Bxc3 Rc8 15 f4 Nf6 16 f5?! Qd5 17 Qe2 Ne4 18 fxe6 Nxc3 19 dxc3 Rxc3 20 exf7+ Kh8 21 Nf5 Bc5 22 Rad1 Qe5 23 Kh1 g6 24 Nh4 Rxe3 and White had to struggle to draw (1½-½, 38).

**4 e3 Bd6 5 Nf3**

I once tried 5 f4 here. However, this is probably inconsistent with the early queenside play. 5 c4 Qe7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Nc3 dxc4 8 Bxc4 e5 9 d4 exd4 10 Nxd4 is a line from Sokolsky's book; 7...Nbd7 is possibly an improvement.

**5...a6 6 a4 Qe7 7 c4 dxc4 8 Bxc4 e5**

8...axb5 9 axb5 Rxa1 10 Bxa1 could assist White.

**9 Ng5!?**

Instead of a plan based on d4, White goes boldly for a direct attack.

**9...0-0 10 Qc2**

The target is h7.

**10...h6 11 h4 e4**

11...hxg5?? 12 hxg5 gives White the classic winning attack on the h-file. Also 11...axb5 12 Nc3! bxc4? is unplayable because of 13 Nd5.

**12 Nc3 Bf5**

It is a little surprising that Black still rejects 12...axb5 13 axb5 Rxa1+ 14 Bxa1.

White now opens new attacking lines.

**13 g4! Nxg4**



**14 Nd5!?**

14 Bd5 seems clearer but Akopian plays a more ambitious move., changing the target to g7.

**14...Qe8?**

This move, trying to hold the e-pawn is probably the decisive mistake. 14...Qd8 may have been the best defence as 15 f4 (or 15 Nxe4 c6) 15...axb5 16 Qc3 Nf6 is unclear. 14...Qd7 is also

possible as the f5-Bishop is defended, so that 15 f4? would be answered by ...exf3 en passant.

### 15 f4 axb5?

The computer thinks Black should have tried 15...Kh8 16 b6 (16 Qc3 f6) 16...cxb6 17 Nxb6 Ra7 18 Bd5 Nd7 19 Nxd7 Qxd7 20 Bxe4 Bxe4 21 Qxe4 f5 22 Qd5 Qc6 getting the queens off at the price of a small disadvantage. 15...Nd7 16 Qc3 is also good for White, but not as much so as the game.

### 16 Qc3! Be5 17 fxe5 bxc4 18 e6!



White revives the mate threat on g7.

18...f6 19 e7 hxg5 20 Ba3

This seems even stronger than the immediate capture on f8.

20...Nd7 21 exf8Q+ Nxf8 22 Ne7+ Kf7 23 Nxf5

Black should resign.

23...Ne5 24 hxg5 Qd7 25 Rf1 Nfg6 26 gxf6 gxf6 27 Qd4 Qe6 28 Kd1 Nf3 29 Qc5 Rd8 30 Nd4 Nxd4 31 exd4 e3 32 dxe3 Ne5 33 Kc2 1-0

This example shows that the 1...Nf6, 2...e6 lines can lead to some very exciting play. However, trench warfare is often the outcome.

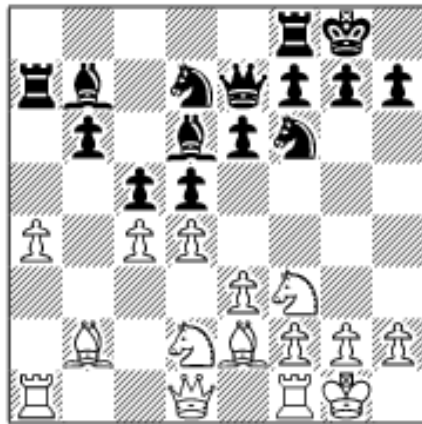
*A.P. Sokolsky – Paul Keres 18<sup>th</sup> USSR Ch, Moscow, 1950*

1 b4 e6 2 Bb2 Nf6 3 b5 c5

Another famous grandmaster tried 3...a6 against Sokolsky and that game resulted in an early draw after numerous exchanges in the centre: 4 a4 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Nf3 axb5 7 axb5 Rxa1 8 Bxa1

d5 9 d4 c5 10 dxc5 Ne4 11 Nbd2 Qa5 12 Be2 Bd7 13 0-0 Bxb5  
 14 Bxb5 Qxb5 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Qd4 Bf6 17 Qxe4 Bxa1 18  
 Rxa1 Qxc5 19 Qxb7 Qxc2 20 h3 Qc6 21 Ra7 Qxb7 22 Rxb7  
 Nc6 ½-½ Sokolsky-Geller, USSR ch semifinal, Kiev 1957.

**4 e3 d5 5 Nf3 Nbd7 6 c4 Bd6 7 d3 0-0 8 Nbd2 b6 9 Be2 Bb7  
 10 0-0 Qe7 11 a4 a5 12 bxa6 Rxa6 13 d4 Ra7**



**14 Ne5 Rfa8 15 f4 cxd4 16 exd4  
 Bb4 17 Ndf3 Ne4 18 Qb3 Nxe5 19  
 fxe5 Rc8 20 Rac1 Nd2 21 Nxd2  
 Bxd2 22 Rc2 dxc4 23 Rxc4 Rxc4  
 24 Bxc4 Qg5 25 d5 Qe3+ 26 Kh1  
 Qxb3 27 Bxb3 Bxd5 28 Bxd5 exd5  
 29 Rd1 Be3 30 Rxd5 h6 31 Rd8+  
 Kh7 32 Rd3 Bc5 33 h3 Rxa4.**

Black has a minimal endgame advantage because of his outside passed pawn, but White held the draw in 66 moves.

However, amateur and correspondence players tend to prefer the sharpest variations and therefore 1...e5 remains the most popular answer to the Sokolsky, although it is maybe not best. The following games illustrate some of the critical possibilities. If any more readers have comments or suggestions, please send them in by mid-August so that they can be considered for inclusion in my final Sokolsky article.

### ***Jens Kucharkowski – Johannes Zylla Thematic correspondence tournament, 1990***

**1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4**

2...f6 was discussed in my previous article, in connection with the game Sokolsky-Strugach. I may return to this in the final article, in September.

**3 f4!?**





“Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war” - William Shakespeare. This is the Kucharkowski-Meybohm Gambit (KMG), an alternative to the normally played 3 Bxe5. The KMG which has occurred in more than 200 correspondence games, mostly played in thematic tournaments to test the Sokolsky. The present game was played in one such event

devoted to this particular gambit. It cannot be said that any clear conclusion has been reached yet.

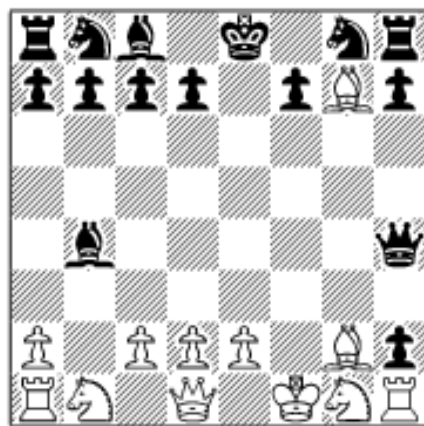
### 3...exf4

Also possible is 3...d6!?, according to the inventors of the gambit.

### 4 Bxg7 Qh4+ 5 g3 fxg3

Threatening mate by 6...g2. This gambit is reminiscent of the line in the Owen Defence, 1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 f5 4 exf5 Bxg2 5 Qh5+ etc.

### 6 Bg2 gxh2+ 7 Kf1



### 7...hxg1Q+

7...Nf6!? doesn't quite work after 8 Nf3 Qg3 9 Bxh8 Ng4 10 Bd4 c5 11 Be3 or even 11 Qe1.

### 8 Kxg1 Qg5

The queen can go to various squares, depending on the intended follow-up but it is hard to believe that Black has full compensation for the exchange he is sacrificing.

For example, 8...Qf4 9 Bxh8 f6? 10 e3 Qf5 11 Qh5+ Qxh5 12 Rxh5 1-0 (The black kingside pawns are doomed.) Maria Grosch-J. Grabenhorst, Halberstadt 1987.

### 9 Bxh8 h5

9...b6?! has also been tried but seems weak after 10 Rxh7 Bb7 11 Qf1.

### 10 e4

Black has done better in the line 10 e3 h4 11 Qf3 c6.

### 10...Nf6

10...h4 11 Nc3!? c6 12 Qe1 Be7 13 Rh2 d6 14 Kh1 Nd7 15 Bf3 Nh6 16 Qe2 Ne5 17 Rg1 Qf4 18 Rf2 h3 19 Bg7! Nxf3 20 Rxf3 Qh4 21 Bxh6 Qxh6 22 Rg8+ Bf8 23 Nd5!! 1-0 Kucharkowski-Sternik, same event.

### 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 c3 h4



### 13 Qh5!?

13 d4!? could also be considered according to Kucharkowski and it certainly seems safer, especially if after 13...Be7 White plays 14 Qg4 instead of his suggestion, 14 Nd2.

### 13...Be7 14 Na3!?

White wants to develop his a1-Rook. He said that 14...Bxa3 but that seems to be the critical line.

### 14...Na6 15 e5 Qg7

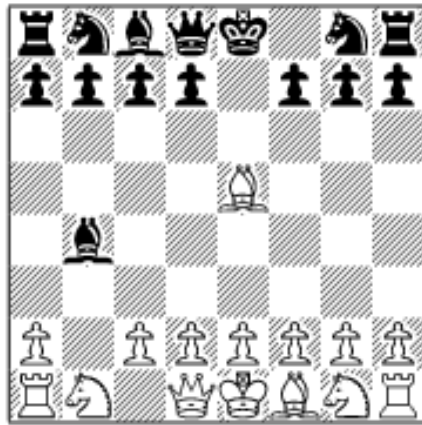
Black wants to trap the white queen by 16...d6 followed by 17...Qg4, but this is easily countered. However, if Black plays 15...Qb6+ 16 d4 Bxa3 White's attack is becoming dangerous

after 17 Rf1.

**16 Re1! Nc5 17 Nb5 Ne6 18 Re4 Ng5 19 Rexh4 Kf8 20 Qh8+ Qxh8 21 Rxh8+ Kg7 22 Nxc7 Rb8 23 Nd5 1–0**

Normally, however, masters playing the Sokolsky do not trust 3 f4 and instead capture the pawn on e5.

**1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5**



This gives White a central pawn majority, as against Black's queenside pawn majority. Which is better? There is no simple answer. A queenside pawn majority could be very useful for Black in an endgame, but "before the endgame the gods have placed the middle-game". In a middle-game, White hopes to complete his development and

castle, then expand, when his pawn majority can mean that he will grab significant amounts of space and have chances of launching a kingside attack where his active bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal can be very threatening.

White's basic plan was illustrated last month by the game **Sokolsky-Anishchenko**. When Black wants to avoid that sort of unfavourable positional battle, he will usually attempt to grab the initiative by early tactical operations, frequently involving a sacrifice on the e-file. We shall see several examples below.

Yes, before the middle game, the gods have placed — the opening! Frequently in this variation, White does not succeed in completing his development and his king is caught in the centre. Here is an example.

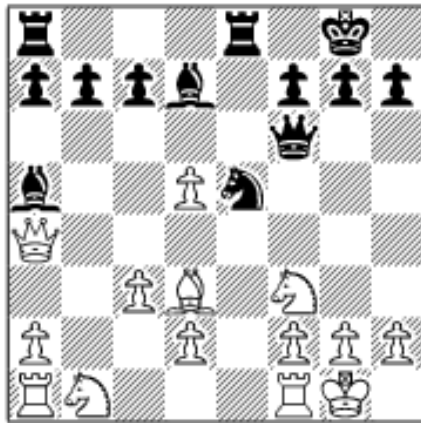
***Tim O'Mahony – Tim Harding* Armstrong Cup (Dublin league first division), 2001**

## 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 Nf3 Nc6

This move is not the most accurate; it provokes White to play Bb2 whereas Black has more tricks if the bishop remains on e5, as we shall see below. Black can simply castle.

Then an example of how **not** to play this opening for White was seen in the web server correspondence game Marekt-Maitreya, at [www.gameknot.com](http://www.gameknot.com) 2002:

4...0-0 5 c3 (not to be recommended in my opinion) 5...Ba5!? 6 Qa4 Nc6 7 Bxf6 Qxf6 8 e4 Re8 9 Bd3 d5! 10 0-0 Bd7 11 exd5 Ne5



12 Qxa5?? (Not 12 Nxe5?? Bxa4 so the only move is 12 Qe4 although 12...Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 Qxf3 14 gxf3 Bh3 gives Black excellent play for the pawn despite the queen exchange?) 12...Nxf3+ 13 gxf3 Qg5+ and mates by force: 14 Kh1 Bh3 15 Rg1 Re1 16 Bxh7+ Kh8 0-1. White played that game with a real death-wish!

Now we return to the O'Mahony-Harding game.

## 5 Bb2 d5 6 c4 0-0 7 e3 Bg4

7...Re8 may be more precise.

## 8 a3

It is often hard to know who benefits when the moves a3/...Ba5 are inserted.

## 8...Ba5

If Black retreats his bishop off the a5-e1 diagonal, the pressure on White's centre and therefore Black's tactical opportunities

are greatly reduced.

## 9 Qc2 Re8 10 Be2

If 10 Nc3 I intended 10...d4. The move order in this game is slightly unusual, but it is typical that White is reluctant to develop the king's bishop too soon because it can lead, as here, to a loss of tempo. Black, for his part, does not want to release the tension by exchanging on c4 until White moves the bishop. Of course it is also possible for White to exchange pawns on d5, as we shall see in the next game.

## 10...dxc4 11 Bxc4

This is not forced. I also had to analyse 11 Nc3!? and 11 Qxc4 Re4!?

## 11...Nd5 12 h3? Bxf3

White was hoping for 12...Bh5 13 Qf5 Bxf3 (only move) 14 Qxf3 when 14...Nxe3 can be met by 15 Bxf7+ (not 15 fxe3?? Qh4+ 16 Kd1 Qxc4).

## 13 gxf3



Now we have a typical position for this variation where White's centre can be demolished.

## 13...Nxe3! 14 fxe3 Rxe3+ 15 Kd1

If 15 Kf2 Qh4+! 16 Kxe3 Re8+ 17 Qe4 Rxe4+ 18 fxe4 Qg3+ 19 Ke2 Qg2+. Other possibilities were 15 Be2 Nd4 and 15 Kf1 Rxf3+.

## 15...Nd4 16 dxe3

This is hopeless but Black should have good winning chances (especially against the clock) after 16 Bxd4 Qxd4 17 Ra2 (17

Nc3? Bxc3) or 16 Qa4 Qf6!? (Actually here my opponent feared 16...c5).

**16...Nxc2+ 17 Kxc2 Qh4**

Demoralised, White now collapsed with further blunders.

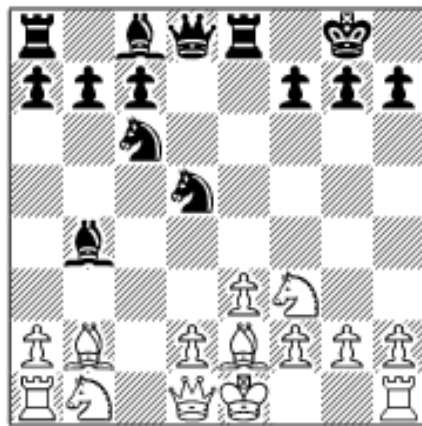
**18 Rh2?? Qxc4+ 19 Nc3 Rd8 20 Rd2? Rxd2+ 21 Kxd2 Qb3 0-1**

Black's sacrifice in that game was not really original, although the setting was slightly different from normal. Let's now see a case where White exchanges pawns on d5.

***R. Franke- A.G. Loeffler ICCF WT/M/166 corr, 1984***

This is a famous attacking win for Black against the Sokolsky, graphically illustrating how things can go drastically wrong for White in the main line if he allows the thematic piece sacrifice on e3. In this case, the piece sacrificed there is different.

**1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 c4 Nc6 5 Bb2 0-0 6 e3 d5 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Nf3 Re8 9 Be2**



**9...Rxe3! 10 fxe3 Nxe3 11 Qb3 Nxe3+ 12 Kf2 Bh3! 13 d4**

Loeffler analysed these alternatives:

a) 13 Rg1? Bc5+ favours Black;

b) 13 Kg3? Qd7!? 14 Ng1 (14 Ng5 Bd6+ 15 Kf2 Qf5+ 16 Nf3 Bc5+ 17 Kf1 Nf4+ 18 Ke1 Re8 or 16 Bf3

Bc5+ 17 Ke2 Qxg5) 14...Bd6+ 15 Kf2 Bc5+ 16 Kg3 Bxg1 17 Rxg1 Qd6+ 18 Kxh3 Nf4+ 19 Kg4 Nxe2.

**13...Qe7 14 Nbd2 Re8 15 Rhe1?!**

This loses. 15 Bb5!? a6 16 Rhe1 Nxe1 17 Rxe1 Be6 18 Bxc6 bxc6 might be unclear.

**15...Nxe1 16 Rxe1 Nxd4!! 17 Nxd4**

If 17 Bxd4 Bxd2 18 Nxd2 Qh4+ 19 Qg3 Qxd4+ 20 Kf3 Re3+ is good for Black (Loeffler).

**17...Bxd2 18 Rd1?**

This accelerates the defeat but 18 Qxh3 Bxe1+ 19 Kxe1 c5 20 Qg4 cxd4 21 Bxd4 f5!? 22 Qf3 Qb4+ 23 Qc3 (23 Bc3 Qb1+ favours Black) 23...Qb1+ was good for Black according to Loeffler.

**18...Be3+ 19 Kg3 Qg5+ 20 Kxh3 Re4 21 Nf5 Qxf5+ 22 Kg2 Rg4+! 23 Bxg4 Qxg4+ 24 Kf1 Qf3+ 25 Ke1 Qf2# 0-1**

It is also possible for Black's sacrifice to occur on e5, if White's dark-squared bishop has not retreated. In the following brilliancy, and its twin, Black first gives up the exchange on e5 and then a piece on e3! The motivation is similar: to destroy the white kingside and remove the first player's castling rights as prelude to a king hunt.

After last month's article, Alexander Munninghof from the Netherlands sent me the following comments to a game he won many years ago against Yury Smolensky (who was at that time from Odessa in the Ukraine but now lives in the USA).

***Yu. Smolensky – A. Munninghof 3<sup>rd</sup> ICCF World Cup preliminary round, 1974***

[Notes by Munninghof]

**1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 c4 0-0 5 e3 d5 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 Nf3 Re8 8 Be2 Rxe5! 9 Nxe5 Qf6 10 f4 Nxe3**



## 11 Qa4

In Chess Informator 19 I found a game by Swedish player Sörenfors, who obviously had had the same idea as I had. The two games overlapped — when Informator was published, this game was already almost finished — and on this 11th move White played 11 Qb3;

annotator Berglund gives 11...b5 on the text move in my game. I still prefer my solution.

## 11...Bd7 12 Nxd7 Qxa1 13 Kf2 Nd5

13...Qd4 14 Nf6+ (14 dxe3?? Be1+) 14...Qxf6 15 Qe8+ Bf8 16 dxe3 gives White more counterplay.

## 14 Nc3 Qxh1

Not 14...Nxc3?? 15 Qxb4+-.

## 15 Nxd5 Nxd7 16 Qxb4 Nb6 17 Nxc7 Rb8

17...Rf8 looks better, but certainly not 17...Rc8 18 Bg4 Rxc7 19 Qd6.

## 18 Qd6 Qxh2 19 Ne6 Qh4+ 20 Kf3 Re8 21 Nd4 Qe7 22 Qxe7 Rxe7 23 Nb5 a6 24 Nc3 Rd7 25 Ke3 Nd5+ 0-1

Returning to the diagram, here is that game from Informator which has been republished many times.

## *Lindqvist – Per Sorenfors Sweden 1-08 corr SSKK, 1975*

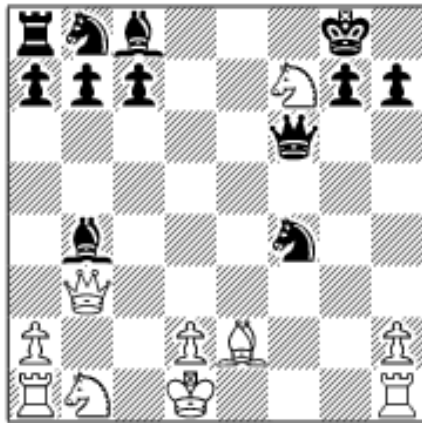
(1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 c4 0-0 5 e3 d5 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 Nf3 Re8! 8 Be2? Rxe5! 9 Nxe5 Qf6 10 f4 Nxe3)

## 11 Qb3?



After this Black definitely has a winning attack.

**11...Nxg2+ 12 Kd1 Nxf4 13 Nxf7**



**13...Qxf7**

13...Be6 14 Qxb4 Qxa1 is probably even better according to Kosten.

**14 Bc4**

Franke-Porzig, corr 1985, ended instead 14 Qxb4 Nc6 15 Qe4 Nxe2 16 Kxe2 Qh5+ 17 Ke3 Qh3+ 18 Kf2

Be6 19 Nc3 Rf8+ 20 Ke1 Bg4 0–1

**14...Be6 15 Bxe6 Nxe6 16 Re1 Nc6 17 Qxe6 Qxe6 18 Rxe6 Bd6**

It looks as if Black may have to play a long endgame but he is helped by the next move.

**19 h4?! Ne5 20 Nc3 Rf8! 0–1.**

Black regains the exchange, because of the twin threats of ...Rf1+, and ...Kf7, trapping the e6-R.

These are the sort of games Black is hoping for when he plays 2...Bxb4, but should such attacks only work against an unwary opponent, or can they be more or less forced? I am not sure, but sometimes I think the sacrifices are more sound than in other cases. Small differences in the position of one or two pieces may make a difference. Sokolsky himself did not mention these types of sacrifice by Black; apparently they did not occur in his games and these tactical ideas emerged after his death.

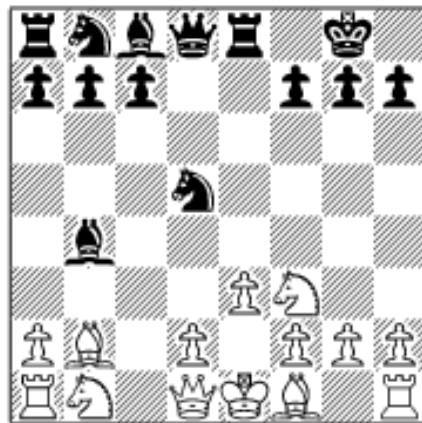
Nobody would play 1 b4 if White did not have improvements. In fact, I think that a lot of the motivation for many players opening 1 b4 (especially in correspondence games) is that they do not believe Black's sacrifices should be sound. If White

plays an accurate move order, circumventing the positions where sacrifices on e5/e3 are definitely correct, maybe White can win by refuting Black's over-optimistic play?

Late in 2001, shortly after the McMahon game, I began an email tournament in which I had Black against the Sokolsky. My opponent, Stanislav Skerlik from Slovakia, actually scored five draws and two wins with White in this event — although one win was because of his opponent's early withdrawal. My game was quite short because at the critical moment, I lost confidence in the sacrifice I had intended and avoided it; I got an inferior position but fortunately Skerlik accepted a draw offer. See the precise opening sequence that he employed,

**1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 3 Bxe5 Nf6 4 c4 0–0 5 e3 d5 6 Nf3 Re8 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Bb2**

First point: White does not allow the exchange sacrifice. He retreats the bishop voluntarily and so maintains control of e5.



**8...Nc6**

I thought it mysterious that *Nunn's Chess Openings* (NCO) has Black play the passive retreat ...Be7 in this kind of position (not quite identical).

ECO used to recommend 8...Nf4!? here (with the idea 9 Qc2 Nc6 or 9 Qa4 Na6! threatening ...Nc5) which

is possible because of the bishop's retreat, half-opening the e-file. It is an interesting possibility but it is not that clear. White usually answers 9 Ne5 with a position that computers usually somewhat favour for Black (because of the queenside pawn majority) but which lacks true master level tests. I probably should have looked into this line more deeply when I was playing Skerlik.

Black can also consider 8...Bf5 and 8...Bg4 here.

## 9 Be2

9 a3 Ba5 10 Be2 is also possible, with similar consequences if Black goes in for the sacrifice, 10...Rxe3!?!; I lost with White in a game many years ago where I did not defend well.

If Black does not take the risk, he may almost equalize but is liable to get pushed back positionally. Arkell-Gallagher, London GLC II 1986, went on 10...Qd6 11 0-0 Bf5 12 Qb3 Rad8 13 Ne3 Bxc3 14 Bxc3 Nxc3 15 Qxc3 Be4 16 Rfc1 Qg6. This may be about equal but Keith Arkell is an excellent “grinder” and he won in 41 moves.

## 9...Rxe3!?

This is the sacrifice that I “chickened out of” against Skerlik — and which he was almost certainly hoping I would play. Skerlik-Harding instead went 9...Bg4 10 0-0. This all occurred in the classic game Sokolsky-Anishchenko (given in Kibitzer 85); Sokolsky considered White stands better as he will play d2-d4 next move, but he did not consider the reply 10...Qe7. I reckoned this move was a promising possibility:

a) If White is careless, the sacrifice on e3 can come even after castling: 11 Nd4 Bxe2 12 Nxe2 Rad8 13 d4 Nxe3! 14 fxe3 Qxe3+ 15 Rf2 Nxd4 (15...Bc5!?! may be even stronger.) 16 Bxd4 Bc5! 17 Qb3! Rxd4 18 Qxf7+ Kh8 19 Nbc3 Rf8 and Black went on to win in 0-1 A. Zschalich-U.Auerswald, corr, East Germany 1988.

b) Or if 11 d4 Rad8 (clearer than Nxe3) and Black has pressure against the point e3.

c) 11 a3 Bd6 and if 12 Nc3 Nxc3 13 Bxc3 Bxa3 grabbing a pawn.

d) Unfortunately with 11 Qc2! and his next two moves, Skerlik avoided the dangers and obtained an edge. I considered replying 11...Nf4 but after 12 exf4 Qxe2 13 Ng5 and Black has to play

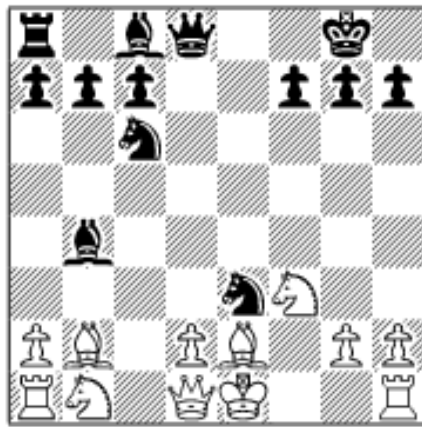
the weakening move 13...g6. Instead my game went on 11...Bd6 12 Nc3 Qe6 13 Nb5 and White obtained the bishop pair. I was rather relieved to escape from this game with a half point a few moves later and if I had been White then I would certainly have played on.

This experience confirmed me in a view about the 2...Bxb4 line for Black. It must be played “with a rage to destroy” because if White gets to about move 15 with a “normal” position and no obvious disadvantage then he’s probably better. Black must do something violent, such as 8...Nf4 or 9...Rxe3, to justify his choice of variation.

Whether they are sound against best play is another matter. A lot of the games in databases were played by non-master players in correspondence event before the advent of computers. Moreover many of those games were in thematic events played for fun and experiment where no ratings or prizes or titles were at stake. Even when these positions are given to modern computers, the resulting variations are inconclusive because of the unbalanced nature of the positions. There is still a lot to discover here!

The main line of the sacrifice on e3 would now go as follows:

**10 fxe3 Nxe3**



**11 Qb3**

11 Qa4!? comes into consideration; computers like it. 11 Qc1 used to be thought best but I doubt it. For example, E.Engelhardt-J.Rollwitz, Berliner Sommer 1995, went on 11...Nxc2+ 12 Kf2 Nf4 13 d4 Nxe2 14 Kxe2 Bg4 15 Qf4 Bxf3+ 16 Kxf3 Qd5+ 17 Qe4 Qh5+ 18 Kf2 f5 19

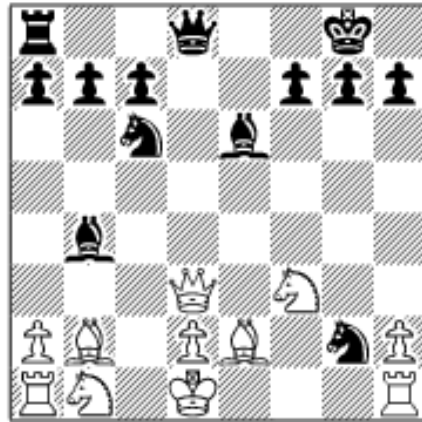
Qd5+ Kh8 20 Na3 Re8 21 Qf3 Qh4+ 22 Kg2 Nxd4 23 Bxd4 Qxd4 24 Rhf1 Qb2+ 25 Kh3 Bd6 26 Nc2 Qf6 27 Rf2 Qh6+ 28

Kg2 Qxh2+ (Now Black has five pawns for the rook!) 29 Kf1 Qh4 30 Re1 Rf8 31 Rfe2 h6 32 Re8 Qc4+ 33 Qe2 Qf4+ 34 Qf2 Qc4+ 35 R8e2 (White avoids the repetition.) 35...f4 36 Qd4 Qb5 37 Qf2 f3 38 Kg1 Qg5+ 39 Kh1 Qh5+ 40 Kg1 Qg4+ 41 Kf1 fxe2+ 0-1. Both players were rated below 2,000 so don't read too much into this.

### 11...Nxg2+ 12 Kd1!

This is probably the only move, which leaves Black chasing the game. 12 Kf1 Bh3 is losing for White, I suspect, and 12 Kf2 is probably not much better.

### 12...Be6 13 Qd3



This may well be the critical position of the 2...Bxb4 line.

Not 13 Bc4?? Bxc4 0-1 (since 14 Qxc4 Ne3+ wins the queen)  
C.Meiboom-D.Accone, Pretoria 1985.

However, 13 Qa4 emerged when I gave this variation to my computer to analyse overnight. Fritz 8's main line continued 13...Nf4 14 Re1 Nxe1 15 Rxe2 Qd5 16 Qb3 Qxb3+ 17 axb3 Bxb3+ 18 Kc1 f6 19 Ba3 and Fritz claims an edge to White. Four pawns are not, after all, a complete material equivalent for a rook in most cases.

### 13...Qxd3

After 13...Qe7 14 Rg1 (Fritz likes 14 Nd4!? which has won a few correspondence games) 14...Rd8 White probably gets too much for the queen by 15 Rxg2 Rxd3 16 Rxg7+ Kf8 17 Bxd3 although he must still develop his queenside before he can think of winning.

J.Durka-A.Drvota, Trnava-B 1979, concluded: 17...Bxd3 Bd5 18 Rg3 Bd6 19 Bg7+ Ke8 20 Nc3 Bxa2 21 Rxa2 Bxg3 22 hxg3 Qd6 23 Be4 Qxg3 24 Bf6 h5 25 Rb2 Nd8 26 Rb5 Qh3 27 Rg5 Ne6 28 Rg8+ Kd7 29 Ne5+ Kd6 30 Bg2 1-0.

In practice, the queen exchange does not seem to have been tried, but paradoxically it could be Black's best chance?

**14 Bxd3 Bg4 15 Be2 Nf4 16 Rg1 h5 (Fritz8).** This is pretty unclear; Black has only three pawns for the Rook as yet but the position remains tactical and anything could happen.

Let us conclude by looking at one more game, which I lost against an idea not mentioned in most Sokolsky books.

**T.M. Whiteside – Tim Harding,**

BPCF open corr, 1991

**1 b4 e5 2 b5!?**



Instead of the almost invariably chosen 2 Bb2, White removes the pawn from the firing line and uses it to cramp the black queenside. Whiteside actually beat me twice with this move!

**2...a6!?**

2...Bc5!? is a strange move, which should give White some slight advantage. Normally Black retains his bishop within the pawn chain. Harding-M.W.Plijter, corr 1989, continued 3 Bb2 Nf6 4 e3 (Of course not 4 Bxe5? Bxf2+ 5 Kxf2 Ng4+ when Black is probably better.) 4...Qe7 (To restrain d2-d4.) 5 Nf3 d6 6 Be2 0-0 7 0-0 Re8 (Black continues to prevent d4, so White switches to gaining space on the queenside, hoping to gain time by attacking the Bishop.) 8 d3 a6 9 a4 Bg4 10 Nbd2 (Maybe 10 Nfd2 is better.) 10...Nbd7 11 Nb3

axb5 12 axb5 Bb6 13 Qd2 Nf8 and now 14 Qb4 should give White the edge.

2...d5 3 Bb2 has occurred more often. Now:

a) 3...f6 transposes to the line 2 Bb2 f6 3 b5 where White doesn't play the gambit seen last month. Now Argentinian correspondence player J. Fernandez Fornes has tried 4 e4!? here more than once but South African master John Barlow showed that Black can capture the e-pawn and survive. Sokolsky used to play the calmer 4 e3, e.g. 4...Be6 5 Nf3 c5 6 c4 d4 7 Bd3 Nh6 8 Qe2 Qd7 9 a4 a5 10 0-0 g6 (1-0, 50) Whiteside-Springall, corr. We will look again at this variation in my last article.

b) 3...Bd6 is an attempt to do without the "weakening" move ...f6 but actually it is not clear that Black has enough resistance on the long diagonal in this case.

Now 4 e3 Nf6 5 d4 is an alternative scheme, tried by German email player Dirk Rosner. However, Whiteside used to play 4 Nf3 Qe7 5 e3. Here are some examples:

b1) 5...Bg4 6 Be2 Nd7 7 h3! Bh5 when:

b11) 8 0-0 Ngf6 9 d4 e4 10 Nfd2 Bxe2 11 Qxe2 0-0 12 c4 c6 13 Nc3 Whiteside-Paredes i Prats, corr 1983.

b12) 8 c4 dxc4 9 g4 Bg6 10 Bxc4 h5 11 Rg1 hxg4 12 hxg4 e4 13 Nd4 Rh2 14 g5 Rh5!? (14...Ne5) 15 Nf5 Rxc5 16 Nxe7 Rxc1+ 17 Bf1 Bxe7 18 Bd4 Ngf6 19 Nc3 Nc5 20 Bxc5 Bxc5 21 Qb3 0-0-0 22 0-0-0 Rg5 23 Kb1 unclear but 1/2-1/2 in Whiteside-H.Temmink, corr 1984.

b2) 5...Nf6 6 c4 0-0 occurred in an earlier postal game between Whiteside and me. That game went 7 cxd5 (A dubious experiment, he said afterwards.) 7...Nxd5 8 Bc4 Nb6 9 Be2 a6 10 a4 axb5 11 axb5 Rxa1 12 Bxa1 c5!? (Probably 12...c6 is better.) 13 0-0 N8d7 14 d3 Nf6 15 Nbd2 Bd7 16 d4 cxd4 17 exd4 e4 18 Ne5 Bf5 19 Ndc4 Nbd5 20 Nxd6 Qxd6 21 Qb3 Be6

22 Bc4 and I now analysed the wrong position and made a clerical error which lost immediately

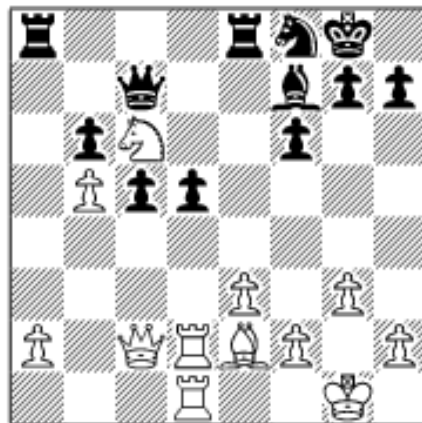
### 3 c4 axb5 4 cxb5 d5 5 Bb2 Bd6

I assumed that my opponent would have some improvement on 5...Nd7 6 e3 Ngf6 7 Nf3 Bd6 8 Qc2 0-0 9 Be2 Re8 10 0-0 (10 d3 is probably better.) 10...Nf8 11 d3 Bg4 12 h3 Bd7 13 a4 Qc8 14 Ba3 e4 15 Nh2 exd3 16 Bxd3 Be5 17 Bb2 Bxh3 18 Bxe5 Rxe5 19 gxh3 Qxh3 20 f3 Rg5+ 21 Kh1 Nh5 22 Rg1 Ng3+ 23 Rxg3 Qxg3 24 Nc3 Re8—+ T.White-side-G.S.Botterill, Aberystwyth 1985.

### 6 e3

6 Nf3 Nd7 7 g3 Ngf6 8 Bg2 Qe7 9 a4 was tried in Fernandez Fornes-Idema, Lewkowitz Memorial A corr 1994 (drawn in 50 moves).

**6...Nf6 7 Nf3 Qe7 8 Qc2 0-0 9 Be2 c5 10 d3 e4 11 dxe4 Nxe4 12 Nc3 Nxc3 13 Bxc3 Nd7 14 0-0 Rd8 15 Rfd1 Nf8 16 Rd2 b6 17 g3 Bc7 18 Rad1 Be6 19 Be5! f6 20 Bxc7 Qxc7 21 Nd4 Bf7 22 Nc6 Re8**



**23 Nb4! d4 24 exd4 Rxe2 25 Rxe2 Bh5 26 f3! Qf7 27 dxc5 bxc5 28 Qxc5 Bxf3 29 Re7 Rc8 30 Qe3 1-0**

Next month I shall write on another topic and then I'll wrap up my Sokolsky coverage in September.

*If you have played games with the Sokolsky Opening that you would like to share with the world, please send them in before the end of June. [info@chessmail.com](mailto:info@chessmail.com) Thank you!*



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