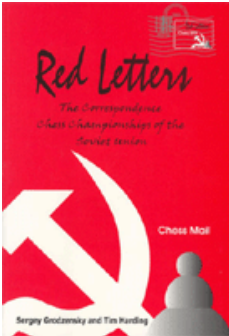




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



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The Databases are Reloaded

Having recently acquired a new laptop with sufficient power and memory to run [ChessBase 10](#) and sufficient hard disk space to work comfortably again, I spent some time during the late summer working on game databases again. Last Christmas, ChessBase kindly sent me a review copy of their [Mega Database 2009](#), a kindness which I was unable to appreciate at the time, due to my ageing and data-choked hardware. Now I am catching up.

The introduction to the database says it was compiled by Lubomir Ftacnik and Rainer Knaak. With 4,126,340 games, this really is a monster. Starting with some examples of play (actual or fictitious) from the earliest chess books of the Renaissance, it goes up to games played on 10 November 2008. Issues of [ChessBase Magazine](#) update that from time to time, or you can of course obtain the latest games from numerous free websites, or wait until the 2010 edition of *Mega Database* comes out at the end of the year. If you need a “reference database” for openings research, to check any new games against what was known before, this is clearly an indispensable tool – so long as you are talking about the openings that are current in master and expert amateur play today.

The database contents are broken down, temporally, as follows:

- Early games (before 1800): 204, mostly Greco’s compositions and Philidor’s later games that were preserved.
- Nineteenth century (1801-1900): 13,007
- Early 20th century (1901-1918): 12,136
- Inter-war and WW2 (1919-44): 38,778
- Early post-war (1945-1954): 37,245
- Fischer era (1955-1972): 148,938
- Karpov era (1973-1985): 219,268

Late twentieth century (1986-1999): 1,574,876 broken down as follows:

- 1986-1989: 162,958
- 1990-1993: 245,469
- **1994-1996: 457,145**
- 1997-1999: 587,486

The 21st century (2000-2008): 2,081,470 broken down as follows:

- Games played in 2000: 226,939
- Games played in 2001: 218,228
- Games played in 2002: 222,391
- Games played in 2003: 249,278
- **Games played in 2004: 279,980**
- Games played in 2005: 234,607
- Games played in 2006: 226,051
- Games played in 2007: 231,520
- Games played in 2008: 192,476 (to mid-November)

What do these statistics reflect? First, there is a clear upward trend in the number of games to around the mid-1950s. You can see that in the first ten years after World War Two there are about as many games as in the previous quarter century. This possibly reflects the volume of master and expert chess being played fairly accurately. Then, in the years Bobby Fischer was active (1955-72), the graph rises steeply and continues to do so through the 1970s and early 1980s. You have to remember, though, until about 1984 there were no database programs and until the late 1990s relatively few people were using them. By the mid-1990s there was the *New In Chess* game service, for which you had to pay, and then *The Week in Chess* started providing access to the most recent games free online. Major tournaments had electronic chessboards where moves played went straight into the computer without anyone having to input them tediously.

Thus the number of games becoming available electronically rose astronomically in the mid-1990s, particularly in the years I highlighted: 1994-96.

Before that time, it is hard to be sure whether the increase in games in the database reflects an actual increase in tournament and match play or just an increase in the availability of digitised chess. After that date, games were probably being input pretty much instantly. If that view is accepted,

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[Mega Database 2009](#)
Four million games!



[CORR Database 2006](#)
with 588,000 games

it can be seen that 2004 was the peak year for chess being played in competitions that ChessBase consider worthy of inclusion in their database. After that, there is a slight falling-off, and maybe a levelling around the 230,000 games per annum mark, or probably even a gradual fall back that reflects declining popularity of chess as a competitive sport. What the computer gives, the computer takes away.

As for games played in the early days of competitive chess, it is no surprise that hardly any games are known before the nineteenth century because the practice of recording games and publishing them was uncommon before the 1840s. Many of the early published games were also played at material odds. Of the games in *Mega Database 2009* from the nineteenth century, more than two thirds (8,892) of these were played from 1870 onwards. Of course I do have a few more in my personal database, as a search for the first lady champion Mary Rudge shows. *Mega Database 2009* has one of her games from the Ladies International; I have six of her games from that. In all, I have twenty-eight of her OTB games, plus some fragments and correspondence games.

My personal “Early OTB” database has 293 games by Howard Staunton compared with their 131. Then it has 382 games by Zukertort compared with 199 in ChessBase’s database, and (thanks to Sid Pickard’s brilliant CD collection, *The Collected Works of Wilhelm Steinitz*) I have 696 games by the first world champion compared with their 388.

It is clear, therefore, that *Mega Database 2009* is predominantly a super-duper bang-up-to-date collection for practical players. Its gestures towards historical completeness are just that: gestures. Only forty of the eighty-five classic match games played in 1834 between Alexander McDonnell and La Bourdonnais (now easily available in a [book](#) published by McFarland) are included, to give another obvious example of how they could improve the earlier part of the database. There is no copyright on the moves, so why are these well-known historic games not included?

There are of course various websites, such as John Saunders’s [Britbase](#), where one can go to supplement the deficiencies of the collection. So perhaps ChessBase should forget about the early years and start, say, in 1952 where they first assign ratings to the players of some games, or perhaps with Groningen 1946, the first great post-war tournament, and leave the earlier stuff to those of us who really care.

If they really wanted to compile the most authoritative and complete database of games played before, say, the Second World War, they have the resources to do it, but they would have to pay a conscientious historically-trained person to work through all the available sources, and supply him or her with a team of students on piece-work to input the (probably) tens of thousands of published games that have never been put into databases. They won’t do this, of course, because the opening innovations in the lines played by masters and experts in twenty-first century repertoires rarely occur in games played before the 1990s.

As for the quality of the games included, *ChessBase 10* has a function (new to this version) to search for “good games”, though it is not clear to me how that is defined. The accompanying database claims it has 1,186,993 “good” games, starting with Adolf Anderssen and Paul Morphy. I suspect, therefore, that the program has a built-in list of players whose games are considered by definition to be good, as I don’t see any marker on the games themselves.

You may be interested to know how strong the players in the games were, although ratings are not always available for older games. A total of 483,413 games had, according to the search engine, at least one player rated over 2500. These start at 1952, but the figures in some cases may be historical peak ratings, or tournament ratings, for the player concerned. Thus Gligoric was possibly 2575 in 1952 if there had been a rating system then, and Smyslov was good for his 2620, but was America’s Robert Byrne really 2560 that early in his career? Apparently he beat several GMs in the Helsinki Olympiad that year and this earned him his IM title but he only became a grandmaster twelve years later.

Moreover, some players in these early games have no rating assigned, for example Reshevsky, Najdorf and even Bronstein who had tied a match for the world title the previous year. This means in fact that the 483,413 figure is a considerable underestimate for early grandmaster games.

As for annotations, I searched for games with any text comments, symbolic notes or variations; there are 66,191 of these. Of these, 42,341 had at least one player rated 2500 or higher, all from 1968 onwards, so that is a good core of high quality material for customers who want notes to games.

I do wonder about the accuracy of the data in minor events; e.g., did the following game (which I came across by chance when searching for a certain position) really happen?

W. Schmidt-W. Ziemer, Bad Laasphe 1994: **1 Nc3 g6 2 e4 e5 3 Bc4 d6 4 Nf3 Bg7** and now supposedly White played **5 Ng1 Nf6 6 d3 0-0 7 Nf3** and the continuation was **7...c6 8 a3 Re8 9 0-0 Be6 10 Bxe6 Rxe6 11 Ng5 Re8 12 f4 h6 13 fxe5 dxe5** $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$. Were these players close friends just messing about? Otherwise, I cannot imagine agreeing a quick draw with any opponent who played the manoeuvre Ng1-f3-g1-f3 in the first seven moves of a game against me! You may also ask what is such a game-let doing in the database at all, but I know from my own experience of collecting correspondence games, you cannot look at every game that comes in, and anyway you may want to include non-games for the sake of the completeness of a tournament or the career of a player. (Just as there are 4,281 games with no result included, some with no moves; this always happens with databases and is not a criticism. Of these, 418 are text or tables; some are fragments of games.)

Naturally, I could not resist looking to see what games of my own were included. I was pleased to see that my nine games from the 1984 Thessaloniki Olympiad, which a few years ago had been assigned to some other (probably non-existent) Harding have now been returned to me. The database has sixty-one of my games, from 1971-87 apparently all genuine although I do not recall a couple of them. I am surprised, however, that a game I won against Nigel Holloway in a county match during the 1970s, and which appeared in *Informator*, is not included. I would have thought that by now they would have got around to including every *Informator* game in the database; maybe that's a project for next year's version. The games of mine that were included all appear to be from tournaments.

ChessBase 10

My impression of *ChessBase 10* is that it is more stable than its predecessor. (I note that the upgrade DVD I bought from *Chess and Bridge* only upgrades from version 9, so maybe some incompatibility has been ironed out?) I found the search engine on that was buggy and frequently caused the program to crash although I re-installed the program. I haven't had any problem yet with searching for names or positions in CB10.

One feature that CB10 does retain from CB9 is the continuous player index for large databases. In CB8, it was broken down alphabetically so after looking for players whose names began, say "Ma-," you had to backtrack to the base level before you could search for, say, "Ka=". Now all the names just scroll on alphabetically, which has upsides and downsides. The upside is that you don't have to backtrack; the down is that if you scroll too fast, you go past the initial you wanted. On the whole, though, I prefer the new version. In most other respects, it seems to work much as CB8 did, which was the first version I really liked, and retains some the online support features added in CB9, which I rarely used but maybe important to you.

However, this article is not a review of CB10, partly because I purchased it, and partly because I have not yet had enough experience with all its extra features.

Correspondence Games

It must be pointed out that *Mega Database 2009* does not include games played by correspondence. ChessBase, about every two years, produces a separate database for that. I have had occasion in the past to criticise them for not taking enough care over it, especially because criticisms I have published remain ignored.

For example, one game that is well authenticated (though the precise date is unknown) is the very first Evans Gambit game played in London, by the inventor Captain William Davies Evans against Alexander McDonnell. It should be in *Mega Database 2009*, but it is not. It has been included in the last several issues of ChessBase's correspondence database instead, and moreover with an incorrect opening sequence. (In that game, after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5, Evans played 4 0-0 d6 and only then 5 b4.)

Looking back at the list of errors I found in their *Corr Database 2006*, I was not really surprised to find exactly the same errors in the 2008 edition, because all they do is add new games to the old version, and it's probably much the same with the over-the-board games for *Mega Database*. Those Chessbase "Corr Databases", last time I looked, also contain several other games that ought to be on *Mega Database* instead, for example Wyvill-Lowenthal, played at "St George's CC" and a game between Blackmar and Hodges. These are some of the obvious cases where "CC" for chess club has been misunderstood as CC for correspondence chess. Several other St George's Club and (London) West End club games come into this category. Will they get it right for 2010?

Don't get me wrong, though. In balance, *Mega Database 2009* is a great product, but ChessBase's correspondence database is not. Of course I must take this opportunity to promote my own *UltraCorr3* database,

available through www.chessmail.com, and so my criticism of ChessBase is inevitably tinged with some personal interest. I know my own database is not perfect, because perfectibility is impossible in this world, and even more so when it comes to correspondence games. ChessBase have a much easier job compiling a giant database of OTB games, most of which are verified by tournament organisers as each round of their competitions are played. *Corr Database 2008*, for example, still includes two “tournaments” that I do not believe are genuine.

Three games from the spurious “Munchhausen Memorial 1995” are still included. There used to be many more of them floating around, but the name of the event is the give-away of course. Still, 125 games of the possibly spurious “Pantos Mem 1999” and sixty-six of the equally dubious “Maturin Gambit-ch” (supposedly ICCF) 1999 are included. The players in these are unknown to ICCF and don’t appear in any other events. I believe ChessBase, or more likely another compiler, once invented these events – either as a joke or to catch out copiers – but I have been unable to identify who was responsible. If you have those games in your database, delete them now.

Correspondence database building is particularly difficult because postal and Internet correspondence games are not played at one specific place at one specific date and, until recently with the advent of correspondence chess web servers, are not always available in authentic versions with good metadata. In the early years of the Internet, several websites published inaccurate game collections (OTB and correspondence) and some commercial databases circulated inaccurate versions of many games. Sometimes it took me three or more cycles of producing first my “MegaCorr” and now “UltraCorr” databases to identify and eradicate the “bad pennies”. Even so, a few still turn up.

Unless the database collector and editor is a CC player himself, or herself, and knows the context of how events are structured, and how to use ICCF’s Eloquetry to verify data, and can look back through old magazines to establish just who played certain important tournaments, the job of improving the old data cannot be done.

Also each correspondence chess organisation tends to retain its own games, or publish them in various incomplete ways that need a lot of reconciliation, especially when the same person may play in two or three different clubs or servers at different times.

Nevertheless, I have at last managed to collect well over one million correspondence games, which has long been my target. I do not intend to continue this work much longer, and although I may eventually do a version “3a” including improved metadata, cleaned up annotations and the source data for early games (which I am keeping to myself until my book comes out next year), I would like somebody else to take over the labour of collecting and collating the new correspondence games from now on.

Now a Couple of Games

I conclude with a few games that are not on *Mega Database 2009*, but perhaps should be on the 2010 version. The first is my game with Holloway, mentioned above, and the others are from the nineteenth century.

Nigel Holloway – Tim Harding
Cambridgeshire v Kent, London, January 1974
Dutch Defence [A84]

This game was published with notes in *Chess* March 74 and in *Informator* 17.

1 c4 g6 2 Nf3 Bg7 3 g3 d6 4 d4 f5 5 Bg2 Nh6!?

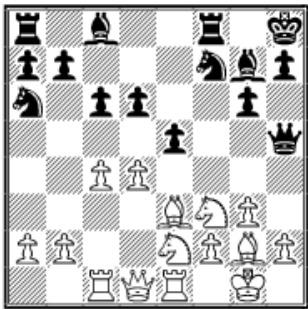
This had recently been played by Michael Basman.



6 Nc3 c6 7 0-0 0-0 8 e4 Na6 9 Re1 Nf7 10 Be3 Kh8 11 Rcl fxe4 12 Nxe4 Qa5!?

Basman idea was ...d5 in such positions, fixing d4. I didn’t really understand that and played for ...e5 instead.

13 Nc3 Qh5 14 Ne2? e5



15 dxe5 dxe5 16 Nd2 Ng5! 17 Bxg5 Qxg5 18 Ne4 Qe7 19 Qc2? Bf5 20 Rcd1 Nc5 21 N2c3 Ne6 22 Qa4 Nd4 23 h3 a5!

GM Ray Keene selected this game for *Informator* because he liked the play all over the board. The move ...a5 is related to Black’s ultimate plans for kingside supremacy.

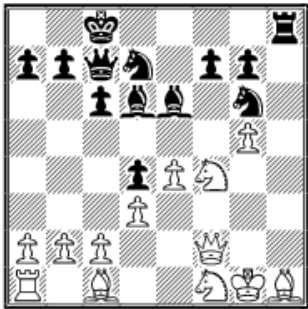


24 c5 Be6 25 Rd3 Qc7 26 Nd6 b6 27 Ne2 bxc5 28 Ne4 c4 29 Rc3 Bd5 30 Rxc4 Qf7 31 Nxd4 exd4 32 Rc2 Rae8 33 Qxa5 Qf5 34 g4 Qf4 35 f3 d3 36 Rd2 Bd4+ 37 Kh1 Bxe4 38 Rxe4 Rxe4 39 fxe4 Be5 0–1

I would include the following game because there are few high-level examples of “Grob’s Angriff”. This was originally published in one of Leonard Barden’s columns about thirty years ago. I am unsure, but all or some of the notes may be his. My database does not say; sorry, Len.

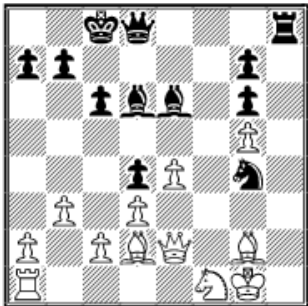
Eric Teichmann – Andrew Whiteley
Charlton (London), 1978
Grob’s Attack [A00]

1 g4 d5 2 Bg2 c6 3 g5 e5 4 h4 Bc5 5 d3 Bg4 6 Nf3 Nd7 7 Nc3 h6 8 e4 hxg5 9 hxg5 Rxh1+ 10 Bxh1 d4 11 Ne2 Ne7 12 Nh2 Be6 13 f4 exf4 14 Nxf4 Qc7 15 Qe2 Bb4+ 16 Kf1 0–0–0 17 Qf2 Rh8 18 Kg1 Bd6 19 Nf1 Ng6



White’s kingside is riddled with holes and Black has a fine square at e5, but White clings on.

20 Nxg6 fxc6 21 Bd2 Rf8 22 Qh4 Ne5 23 Bg2 Qd8 24 b3 Rh8 25 Qf2 Ng4 26 Qe2



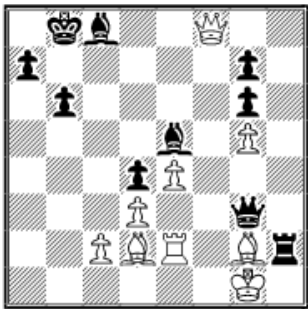
26...Be5

Around here Black starts to lose his grip. Simply 26...Rh7 intending 27 Bf3 Ne5 and....Qh8 would increase the pressure.

27 Bf3 Nh2 28 Nxh2 Rxh2 29 Bg2 Qh8 30 Qf3 Qh4 31 Re1 b6 32 Re2 Kb7 33 a4 Ka6

To play ...Bg4 without allowing a queen check.

34 b4! Bg4 35 Qf8 Qg3 36 b5+ cxb5 37 axb5+ Kxb5 38 Qb4+ Ka6 39 Qc4+ Kb7 40 Qf7+ Kb8 41 Qf8+ Bc8



42 Kf1!

Stopping ...Rh1+. Black still tries to win:

42...Qh4 43 Rf2 Qh8? 44 Bf4

and falls for a tactical trick.

44...Bxf4 45 Qxf4+ Kb7? 46 e5+ Ka6 47 Qxd4 Rh4 48 c4! Rxd4 49 Ra2# 1-0

The next two appear to be forgotten games by Carl Schlechter.

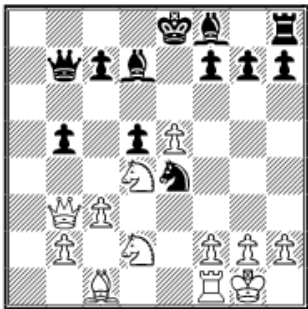
Carl Schlechter (?) – Professor (Vincenz?) Hruby
Vienna (match), 1893
Ruy Lopez, Open Variation [C80]

Notes by Hoffer, in *The Field*, 2 September 1893.

“The following is the second game of a match played during Prof Hruby's recent visit to Vienna with Herr Schleshter (sic), a rising Vienna player. Of three games sent to us by Prof. Hruby, two resulted in favour of the older master, and the one below was won by Herr Schleshter.”

This was almost certainly by Carl Schlechter; his initial “C” was given in the game header. Can anyone supply fuller details?

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 a4 Be6 9 axb5 axb5 10 Rxa8 Qxa8 11 dxe5 Na5 12 Nd4 Qb7 13 c3 Nxb3 14 Qxb3 Bd7 15 Nd2



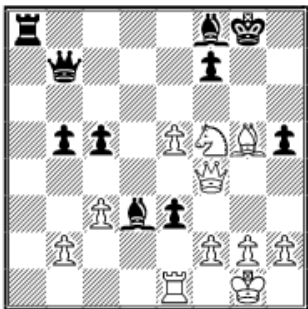
15...c5

Better would have been simply 15...Nxd2 leaving the pawns on the queen's side intact at present.

16 Nxe4 dxe4 17 Ne2 Be6 18 Qc2 Bc4 19 Re1 Bd3 20 Qd1 Be7 21 Ng3 0-0 22 Qg4 Rd8 23 Nf5 Bf8 24 Bg5 Ra8 25 Nxg7?!

25 Bf6 g6 26 Qg5 h5 27 g4 wins.

25...e3 26 Nf5 h5 27 Qf4



27...e2

27...Ra4 28 b4 exf2+ 29 Qxf2 (best) 29...cxb4 would probably have saved the game.

28 Bf6 Bxf5 29 Qxf5 Bh6 30 Qxh5 1–0

Carl Schlechter – Ladislav Prokes
Vienna 1907
Queen’s Gambit, Tarrasch Defense [D32]

From the *Illustrated London News*, 23 February 1907

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Bf4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 e3 a6 8 Be2 Bf5

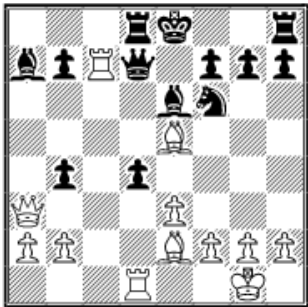
8...Ne4 might here be tried. It promises some diversion from the threatened isolation of his Queen's Pawn.

9 0–0 Be7 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Rc1



The steady piling up of the attack, which here begins, should be studied in detail. It proceeds with almost mathematical exactitude.

11...Ba7 12 Qb3 Qd7 13 Ne5 Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Be6 15 Rfd1 Rd8 16 Nb5 d4 17 Qa3 axb5 18 Rc7 b4



Ingenious, but unavailing. If now 19 Qxb4, to retain command of the K 7th square, 19...Nd5 goes far to save the situation.

19 Qxa7 Qd5 20 Rxd4 1–0

Finally, the following should be included in a good historical database, although they are odds games, because they are very rare.

Walker wrote in *Bell’s Life* in London, 24 November 1844:

“The following game, now first published, will be received by amateurs as a great curiosity; having been played by Mr Sarratt, in 1816, giving the odds of pawn and two moves to Lewis. We call it curious, as emanating from the acknowledged first player of his time, Mr Sarratt. How he would rank now is impossible to say, but sure we are that he has been much over-rated by his contemporaries, with the simple view of swelling themselves into more ample proportions than their real deserts would warrant.”

William Lewis – Jacob Sarratt
Odds game, London, 1816

Sarratt (Black) gives odds of pawn and two moves, i.e., White begins 1 d4 and 1 e4 while Black starts without his f-pawn.

1 d4 and e4



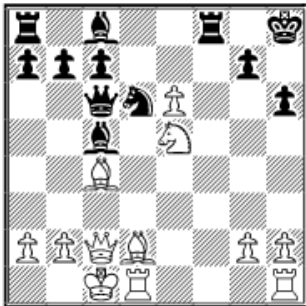
1...Nc6

TH: This knight move was often played at the pawn-and-move odds, as it prepares 1...e5, which would otherwise lose the pawn to 2 Qh5+. When White has the extra move d2-d4, it seems too risky and Sarratt’s pupil, Lewis, rapidly punishes it.

2 d5!

Very aggressive, claiming space. In a Tuckett-Staunton game from the 1840s, also published by George Walker, White played timidly 2 Nc3, which allowed Black to claim a share of the center. There continued 2...e5 3 d5 Nce7 4 Bg5 d6 5 h4 h6 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Be2 c6 8 dxc6 bxc6 9 f4 Qc7 10 fxe5 (Better 10 f5 – Walker) 10...dxe5 11 h5 Be6 12 Bc5 Rd8 13 Bd3 Nc8 14 Bxf8 Rxf8 15 Qe2 Bg4 16 Qe3 Nxe5. Black regained the odds pawn with a fine game and duly won.

2...Ne5 3 f4 Nf7 4 e5 e6 5 c4 Bc5 6 Nf3 d6 7 Bd3 Ne7 8 Nc3 0–0 9 Qc2 h6 10 Bd2 exd5 11 cxd5 dxe5 12 fxe5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Qxd5 14 Bc4 Qc6 15 0–0–0 Kh8 16 e6 Nd6 17 Ne5 “and wins” (1-0)



“This game is well played by Mr. Lewis; indeed it would be impossible to change any one of his moves for the better. The opening, however, is so weakly played by Mr. Sarratt that we again say, if this was the first player of his time, how was chess then played compared to what it is now? We have no doubt at all that Mr. McDonnell could have given Mr. Sarratt at least pawn and move.”

The last is a later game at the same odds, the comparison with Sarratt’s fiasco showing how understanding of how to open such games had progressed, and how Staunton made himself the master of the pawn and two game.

Henderson – H. Staunton, 1844

At the same odds; from *Bell’s Life* in London, 22 September 1844.

1 d4 and e4, 1...e6



2 Bd3 c5 3 d5 d6 4 c4 g6 5 h4 Bg7 6 Nc3 a6 7 Nge2 Nf6 8 Bg5 e5 9 f4 Bg4 10 Qb3 b6 11 0–0–0?

Better 11 fxe5 (Walker).

11...Nbd7 12 Rdf1 exf4 13 Nxf4 Ne5 14 Bc2?! (14 Be2) 14...h6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Bd1 Bd7 17 Nce2 b5! 18 cxb5 c4 19 Qg3



19...g5! 20 Nh5 Nd3+ 21 Kc2 Be5 22 Qf3 Qa5 23 Nc1 Rc8! 24 Ng7+ Kd8 25 Ne6+ Bxe6 26 dxe6 Qxb5 27 e7+ Kxe7 28 Nxd3 cxd3+ 29 Kd2 Qxb2+ 30 Ke1 Bc3# 0-1

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