



COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

[Find us on Facebook.]

Translate this page



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

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

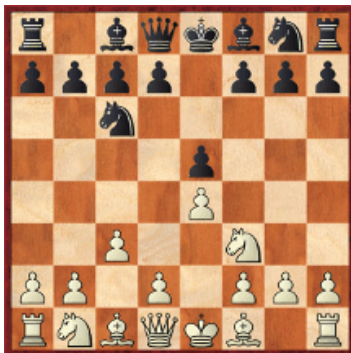
UPS GROUND
 Only.



Ponziani Opening: Other Critical Lines

In this second part of my two-part article about the Ponziani Opening, I look at the main lines with 3...Nf6 and 3...f5. There are other possible third moves for Black (such as 3...d6 and 3...Be7), but they don't give rise to critical situations.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pppp1ppp/2n5/4p3/4P3/2P2N2/PP1P1PPP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 3"]

At the same time, I am reviewing the recent book by Dave Taylor and Keith Hayward, *Play the Ponziani*, which is published by Everyman Chess (ISBN 978-1-85744-620-3; US\$27-95, UK £16-99, 300 pages softcover). Again I am including some comments from Robert Taylor of Preston, Lancashire, but his criticisms of the book's coverage of the 3...Nf6 lines is milder than of the variations discussed last month.

Last month's column examined the ramifications of the old tactical main line 3...d5. It concluded that the reply 4 Bb5 is not viable and that White must reply 4 Qa4, after which there are still some unclear lines. It seems from his comments that Keith Hayward is quite satisfied with my treatment, though I was surprised to learn that he had not found a copy of my little 1984 Chess Digest book on the opening.

If Black does not play 3...d5, what are the other options? There are two other ways of counter-attacking against the white e-pawn. The move that the Italian chess writer Domenico Lorenzo Ponziani advocated was 3...f5; his name somehow became transferred later to the opening as a whole. The most solid response to 3 c3 is 3...Nf6, attacking the White e-pawn, and much of this article will be devoted to that possibility.

The reply 3...Nf6 is probably the greatest deterrent to players adopting the Ponziani and it occurred in most of my games with the opening, some of which are included in this article. This is because, after the more or less obligatory 4 d4 (the only move consistent with 3 c3), Black only has to learn one line but White needs to learn, and be comfortable with, several different types of position ranging from the crazily wild to the almost unutterably boring and drawish.

There are also some quiet moves that Black may adopt if he wants to avoid a theory battle. Taylor and Hayward take 3...d6 seriously enough to give it a chapter to itself. They warn about 3...a6!?, which cuts out some of White's better lines by ruling out Bb5, e.g. 4 d4 exd4 5 cxd4 d5!, so White should prefer 4 Bc4. They also briefly consider 3...Be7 (the other reasonable try), 3...Nge7, and 3...Bc5?! which only encourages White to carry out his d4 plan. A final short chapter in the book surveys Black's second move alternatives, but

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



ChessBase Magazine #124

by Rainer Knaak



Kaissiber 17

by Stefan Buecker



Kaissiber 21

by Stefan Buecker

for the most important one (2...Ng6, the Petroff Defence) you will need other reference works too, of course.

The main line 3...Nf6 4 d4 Nxe4

After **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3 Nf6 4 d4 Nxe4** (Alternatives will be considered later in the article.) **5 d5** Black has two retreats for the knight, to b8 or to e7, after which White will regain his pawn. He can also sacrifice a piece to prevent White from castling, but that is unsound.



[FEN "r1bqkb1r/pppp1ppp/2n5/3Pp3/4n3/2P2N2/PP3PPP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 5"]

5...Ne7

In the book on page 40, this move is somewhat obscured because two lines of type have somehow been superimposed. Who was proof-reading this book?

Black also sometimes plays

a) 5...Nb8 when

a1) The main line goes 6 Nxe5 Bc5!? (for other moves see below) when White has

a11) 7 Nd3 is the safer option, avoiding great complications but running the risk that Black may just be able to equalize.

a12) 7 Qg4 0-0 8 Qxe4 d6 9 Bd3 f5 10 Qc4 b5 11 Qxb5 Qe7 12 0-0 and now

a121) 12...dxe5 13 Bg5 Qd6 (13...Qxg5 14 Qxc5 Na6 15 Qa5! is what White wants, while if 13...Bxf2+ 14 Rxf2 Qxg5 15 d6 Qc1+ 16 Bf1 favoured White in Zagorovsky-Bezzola, corr 1981 after the queens came off by 16...c6 17 Qxe5 Nd7 18 Qf4.) 14 Qb3 Kh8 (14...e4 and 14...f4 both lose to 15 Be7!) 15 Nd2 Nd7 16 Rad1 Qg6 17 Be3 Rb8 and now and the queen sacrifice for assorted material by 18 Qxb8!? Nxb8 19 Bxc5 gives White some winning chances; this is discussed on page 66 of the book.

a122) 12...Qxe5 13 Qa4 f4 (13...Kh8 14 Nd2) 14 Qe4 (14 Nd2!? "may be stronger" Hayward says.) 14...Qh5 15 Be2 Bg4 16 Bxg4 Qxg4 17 Nd2 Nd7 18 h3 has worked out well for Swedish postal master Per Söderberg. If then 18...Qf5 19 Qxf5 Rxf5 20 Nf3 Re8, Hayward and Taylor recommend 21 c4 Ne5 22 Nxe5 Rxe5 23 Bd2 Bd4 24 Ba5 keeping the extra pawn.

a2) If you don't like the look of that, the authors consider that 6 Qe2!? "offers White the chance of a safe edge in a queenless middlegame" following 6... Nf6 7 Qxe5+ Qe7 8 Qxe7+ Bxe7 9 Bc4.

b) After 5...Nb8 6 Nxe5 Black has less active possibilities too, notably 6... Be7 7 Qg4 Nd6, analysed on pages 93-4 as Line A5 in Chapter 2. (For the others, see the book; we cannot look at everything in this article.) Here my English correspondent interjects that "we have 8 Bd3 and 8 Qxg7?—and yet the move which other texts recommend, 8 Be3, does not get a mention (must be an oversight I think). Perhaps 8 Bd3 is the strongest, I concede."

c) 5...Bc5?! (invented by Dundee wild man G. B. Fraser in the nineteenth

century) is considered in the first chapter under Illustrative Games Eight and Nine and then in Chapter Four. Black's sacrifice should be refuted by 6 dxc6 Bxf2+ (6...Nxf2 should be refuted by 7 Qd5 Nxh1 8 Qxc5.) 7 Ke2 bxc6 8 Qa4! f5 9 Nbd2 when

c1) 9...0-0 10 Nxe4 fxe4 11 Qxe4 Bb6 12 Kd1! (Maróczy-Brody, Hungarian corr ch. 1893) which is the authors' Game 8.

c2) 9...Nxd2 10 Bxd2 Bc5 11 Qc4 is their Game 9, S. Kalygin-A. Logino, Tula 2002.

c3) 9...0-0 10 Nxe4 is critical. After 10...fxe4 11 Qxe4 and now

c31) 11...d5?! 12 Qxe5 when the tricky 12...Bb6!? is not mentioned in the book, only giving 12...Re8? 13 Qxe8+ Qxe8+ 14 Kxf2 which is nineteenth century theory. I had to meet 12...Bb6 many years ago in a Dublin tournament and the game continued 13 Bg5 Qd7 14 Kd2 Bb7 (14...Re8 15 Qg3 d4 16 Kc2 Qf5+ 17 Bd3 Qd5 18 Qh4+- Hulak) 15 Bd3 c5 16 Rhe1!? (Theory goes 16 Be7 Rae8 17 Rae1 Rf7 18 Bxh7+! Kxh7 19 Ng5+ Kg8 20 Nxf7 d4 21 Nh6+ gxh6 22 Kc1 Bd5 23 Rhf1 Kh7 24 c4 Bxc4 25 Qe4+ Kg7 26 Bf6+ Kf8 27 Qg6 1-0, Makarichev-Berkovich, USSR 1973.) 16...c4 17 Be7 cxd3 18 Bxf8 Rxf8 19 Qe6+ Qxe6 20 Rxe6 Bc8 21 Re5 Bf5 22 Rxd5 c6 23 Rxf5 Rxf5 24 Kxd3 and although I had a winning position here, I managed to let my opponent wriggle out with a draw (Harding-Doyle, Leinster championship 1979).

c32) 11...Bb6 12 Kd1! (Maroczy) 12...d5 (12...d6!? 13 Qxc6 Bd7 14 Qc4+ Kh8 15 Bg5 followed by 16 Bd3 "should win with a measure of caution as Black does not have enough for the piece" say Hayward and Taylor.) 13 Qxe5 Bf5 (Sax) 14 Bg5! Qd7 15 Qe7 (to here was my analysis.) and now if 15...Qc8, the authors find 16 Ne5!h6 17 Bh4 Qb7 18 Qa3 (threatening Ba6) 18..a5 19 Be2 "and White is beginning to consolidate his extra piece."

6 Nxe5 Ng6 7 Qd4

In this position David Taylor has long been a great disbeliever in 7 Nxe5, which doubles the g-pawn but opens the h-file for Black, and this judgment carries over into the present work.

Robert Taylor disagrees, saying "I don't accept that variation F is inferior. 7 Nxe5 has turned up on Schemingmind and worked well—and the exponent of the move was very highly-rated." After 7...hxg6, "we see Hayward underrate the 8 Bd3 option for White. It isn't clear, either, why 7.Qd4 is awarded a ! Just another option."

Other possibilities are 7 Nc4 and 7 Nd3 but Black need not fear them. For the main 7 Qd4 variation, we follow a game of my own which is cited in the book.

Tim Harding – Antonio Padros Simon

Second North Atlantic Team Tournament, Board 4, 1985
Ponziani Opening [C44]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3 Nf6 4 d4 Nxe4

For the important alternative 4...exd4 see the next game.

Another possibility is 4...d5?! 5 Bb5! when the main line in the book, starting on page 136, goes 5...exd4 6 e5 Ne4 7 Nxd4 where White has an extra move (c2-c3) compared with the Two Knights Defence line 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 d5 6 Bb5 Ne4. If Black avoids that with 5...Nxe4 (note d on page 137), the book only considers 6 Nxe5.

Robert Taylor comments: "The alternative to 6 Nxe5 is 6 dxe5 and it is not mentioned, and since 6 dxe5 Be7 7 0-0 can develop into an Open Spanish, it certainly needed noting. (I think he's overselling 6 Nxe5 here)."

5 d5 Ne7

This retreat was at one time considered to be the safest defence, but as Hayward & Taylor demonstrate, Black will have to struggle to survive in a cheerless and quite possibly lost endgame.

7...Qf6 8 Qxe4 Qxe5 9 Qxe5+ Nxe5 10 Nd2 d6 11 Nc4 Nxc4 12 Bxc4



[FEN "r1b1kb1r/ppp2ppp/3p4/3P4/2B5/2P5/PP3PPP/R1B1K2R b KQkq - 0 12"]

White had to eliminate the well-placed black knight. The resulting simplified position, without queens or knights, and with symmetrical pawns, will not be to everyone's taste, however. White is playing in a rarefied atmosphere, seeking microscopic advantages. Most commentators call this position equal but Hayward and Taylor believe White's space advantage on the queenside to be significant.

12...Be7 13 0-0 0-0 14 Re1

14 Be3 can lead to the same position. Indeed the move order in the Hayward & Taylor book is 14 Be3 Bf6 15 a4 a6 16 a5 Bd7 17 Rfe1 Rae8

and now

a) I was following the Velimirovic-Smejkal, Rio de Janeiro 1979 game, which continued 18 f3 Re7, but Black missed a simple draw at move thirty-two (given on page 47 of the book).

b) The improvement is 18 Kf1!? avoiding f3, as first suggested in Taylor's earlier book *Ponziani Power*, 2000; see Hayward and Taylor p46.

14...Bf6 15 a4 Bf5

A more precise defence is 15...a6! 16 a5 and now instead of 16...Bf5 (the line given in the book), which transposes back to the present game, Black can prefer 16...Bd7! 17 Be3 instead transposing to the previous note.

16 Be3 a6 17 a5 Rfe8

17...Rae8 may be better, as Smejkal played in the analogous position.

18 f3 h5 19 Kf2 Re7 20 Bd2 Rae8 21 Rxe7 Rxe7 22 Ra4 Kf8 23 Rb4 Bc8 24 Bd3 Ke8

If 24...Re5 25 c4 Re7, I intended 26 Be3.

25 Be3 Kd8 26 Bd4 Bxd4+ 27 Rxd4 g5 28 h4 g4!



[FEN "2bk4/1pp1rp2/p2p4/P2P3p/3R2pP/2PB1P2/1P3KP1/8 w - - 0 29"]

29 Be2?

A terrible oversight, overlooking the reply. White loses the fruits of his previous subtle play.

Hayward and Taylor think I missed a win here and they are probably right although it is hard to provide an exhaustive analysis of the possibilities. White should play 29 Re4 when Black has four main options:

a) 29...Re5 (This perhaps loses a tempo, since White intends to play c3-c4 soon anyway, and so the main line may be to capture at once on e4; see note d.) 30 c4 (30 Rxe5 dxe5 31 c4 also comes into consideration.) 30...Rxe4 31 Bxe4 and now

a1) Hayward's variation runs 31...Ke7 32 fxg4! Bxg4 33 Bf3 f5 34 Bxg4 fxg4



[FEN "8/1pp1k3/p2p4/P2P3p/2P3pP/8/1P3KP1/8 w - - 0 35"]

Is this king and pawn ending really won for White? Hayward and Taylor continue 35 b4! (setting up what Hans Kmoch called the "quart-grip" in his book *Pawn Power in Chess*, although the authors do not say that.) 35...Kf6 36 g3 Ke5 37 Ke3 Kf5 38 Kd4 Kf6 39 Ke4 Kg6 (Else Black must lose a pawn, but now White has the break...) 40 c5! dxc5 41 bxc5 Kf6 42 Kf4 Ke7 43 Ke5 Kd7 44 d6 "with an easy win".

a2) Deep Rybka 3 comes up with 31...b6! when White can choose between 32 b4, 32 Kg3 and 32 Ke3.

b) 29...Bd7 is another waiting move that does not improve Black's chances. Deep Rybka 3 continues 30 fxg4 Bxg4 31 Ke3 Re5 32 Rxe5. This concedes Black a protected passed pawn, so at first sight may not be best. However it does also create a clear queenside pawn majority and Black must defend new weaknesses. 32...dxe5 33 Ke4 f6 34 c4 Ke7 35 c5 Kd7 36 c6+ Kc8 37 cxb7+ Kxb7 38 b4 Ka7 39 b5 axb5 40 Bxb5 Kb7 41 Bf1 Ka7 42 Bd3 Kb7 43 Bb5 Ka7 and White is better, but it's not over yet.

c) 29...gxf3? only prevents the white bishop attacking h5 for a few moves, and invites the white king to come forward. 30 Kxf3 f5 (30...Bg4+ 31 Kf4 f6 32 Rxe7 Kxe7 33 Bf5 Be2 34 g4 creating an outside passed pawn.) 31 Rxe7 Kxe7 32 Kf4 Kf6 33 Be2 Kg6 34 b4 b6 (Passive defence should result in zugzwang after a few moves.) 35 b5 axb5 36 axb6 cxb6 37 Bxb5 (The h5-

pawn is now indefensible.) 37...Kf6 38 Be8 Bb7 39 Bxh5 Bxd5 40 g3 and although White's bishop cannot control the queening square of the h-pawn, it will be hard for Black to defend this position.

d) 29...Rxe4! 30 Bxe4 Ke7 31 fxg4 Bxg4 32 Kg3. Play continues much as in Hayward's analysis. White will try to win a kingside pawn, and if Black prevents this, he can force a probably winning king and pawn endgame:

d1) 32...f5 (Black is a tempo ahead of Hayward's line but probably still loses.) 33 Bd3 (33 Bf3 is premature as White's pawn is still on c3 and Black may be able to hold after 33...Kf6 34 Kf4 b6.) continuing

d11) 33...Kf7 is brilliantly refuted. Black is trying to prevent a zugzwang costing him the f-pawn, by maintaining his bishop on g4 and triangulating with the king, but White has a queenside breakthrough: 34 Kf4 Kg6 35 b4 Kf6 36 Bxa6!! bxa6 37 b5 Be2 (or 37...axb5 38 a6) 38 b6 queening a pawn.

d12) 33...Kf6 34 Kf4 Bd1 35 Bxf5 b6 36 axb6 cxb6 37 g4 a5 38 g5+ Kg7 39 Bd3 Bb3 40 Ke4 Bd1 41 Kf5 Bg4+ 42 Kf4 and the extra pawn and superior piece positions should decide.

d2) 32...b6 33 b4 Be2 34 Kf4 Kf6 35 Bf3 Bc4 36 Bxh5 Bxd5 This trade can occur in several lines. Black avoids losing a pawn but White's one queenside pawn holds Black's two and his passed h-pawn gives god winning chances after 37 Be2 Bb7 38 g4 Kg7 39 h5 f6 40 g5 fxg5+ 41 Kxg5 Kg8 42 h6, etc.

d3) 32...Be2 33 Bf3 Bf1 34 Bxh5 winning a pawn.

d4) 32...Kf6 33 Bf3 Bxf3 34 Kxf3 Kf5 (34...Ke5? 35 g4!) 35 c4 and Black must give way, allowing g2-g4.

To conclude, but I am not yet convinced that 29 Re4 wins by force, but admittedly, I should have played it and it would be worth trying to get into this line if you enjoy playing endgames. Black, on the other hand, would hardly want to steer for this position from the opening!

29...g3+! 30 Kf1 Bf5 31 f4 Re3!

Now White must force a draw.

32 Rb4 Kc8 33 Rd4 ½-½

3...Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 (Goring Gambit Declined)

Many people would consider this to be the most important line of all in the Ponziani, and one that must be studied by anyone who meets 1 e5 by 1...e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 since White can force a line which also arises in the Goring Gambit—a gambit which is probably best not accepted. The following recent game of mine came about through this move order, and unusually I was Black, but I have had also some games with White.

Igor M. Dolgov – Tim Harding
ICCF Seventh European Team Championship
Preliminary-3 Board 1, 2005
Ponziani Opening [C44]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3 Nf6

The Ponziani route to this position is 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4.

5 e5 Nd5

As recommended by grandmaster Nigel Davies in a book that came out shortly before this game began. I have long been of the opinion that 5...Ne4 is good for White.

As for 5...Qe7?! (stemming from Steinitz's *Modern Chess Instructor*) I met

this once in a local league game and although I did not continue accurately, it left me in no doubt that White stands better after 6 cxd4 d6 7 Bb5 Bd7 (or 7... dxe5 8 0-0! e4 9 Ne5 Bd7 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Nc3) 8 0-0 dxe5 9 dxe5!.

6 Bb5!?

This is perhaps the most critical line from a tactical point of view.

a) However, the authors recommend 6 Qb3, with which I have no experience. They continue 6...Nb6 7 cxd4 d6 8 Bb5 leading to a position where they claim an edge for White. Robert Taylor disagrees. He thinks it "odd that 7...d6 is quoted as main line; I always believed that 7...d5 is fine (and I don't see how Hayward disproves this). However, I do select 6 Qb3 when I get to this variant, I admit, so I agree in general with his choice."

b) 6 Bc4 Nb6 leads to the same kind of play as the game, the only difference being that Black has not advanced ...a7-a6.

c) The main alternative is 6 cxd4 which I have also played with White, winning rather luckily against WIM Sheila Jackson many years ago. Then

c1) The authors observe that 6...d6 gives an Alekhine's Defence position!

c2) Since people who play 1...e5 usually don't play the Alekhine's also, you are more likely to encounter 6...Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ when 8 Nbx d2! (keeping options with the queen) is the Hayward and Taylor recommendation. Instead I played 8 Qxd2 which should not give much.

6...a6 7 Ba4

As I remarked in my booklet, it looks as if White is playing the Ruy Lopez and Black is playing Alekhine's Defence!

Black need not fear 7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 Qxd4 (8 Bg5 Be7 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 Nigel Davies) 8...Bf5 (This move, due to typesetting and proof-reading failings, is missing from the book on page 122, left hand column.) 9 0-0 c5 10 Qd1 Qd7 11 Qb3 Qc6! (Sermek-Rogic, Dresden 1998) and now 12 Re1 is the least evil (Davies).

7...Nb6

In one of my old postal games Black played 7...b5 8 Bb3 Nb6 9 cxd4 d5 with an inferior kind of Open Spanish. I won as White in the end but not convincingly.

8 Bb3 dxc3!?

This now looks unnecessarily risky to me.

Davies said 8...d5! and didn't give any other lines. Taylor's old book didn't mention that move, but it is in his new book with Hayward and seems the clearest route to equality; e.g., 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bg5 Be7= (Velimirovic-Spassky, Reggio Emilia 1986), so if White wants to make something happen he must choose 9 cxd4 when Black's possible replies are 9... Be7 or 9...Bg4 (see page 123 in the book). There is scope for original exploration here.

9 Nxc3



[FEN "r1bqkb1r/1ppp1ppp/pnn5/4P3/8/1BN2N2/PP3PPP/R1BQK2R b KQkq - 0 9"]

If 9 Bxf7+ (not in the book) 9...Kxf7 10 Ng5+, Black has 10...Qxg5 11 Bxg5 cxb2 giving up the queen to bust the attack with big material advantage; e.g., 12 Nd2 (12 Qf3+ Ke8 13 e6 Bb4+) 12...bxa1Q 13 Qxa1 when Black has rook, bishop, knight, and pawn for queen.

9...d5!?

9...d6 is probably more accurate, say Hayward and Taylor, to induce the capture on d6, and I tend to agree. Then if 10 Bg5 Be7 while 10 0-0 dxe5 is also unclear. Not 10 Ng5? Nxe5 while 10 exd6 transposes to Taylor's line below.

10 Be3!?

A computer move, not considered by Taylor previously, but they have found my game in the database and it is cited up to move eighteen now.

Alternatives that I was considering before the game were

a) 10 exd6? is the main line, remaining from Taylor's earlier book, but it is weak. Why sac a pawn? I was going to follow his analysis 10...Bxd6 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bg5 Be7 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Re1 Be6 15 Bxe6 fxe6 16 Qb3 (Taylor reckoned 16 Qe2 Rae8 17 Rad1 Qc5 18 Rd3 Nd5 19 Ne4 Qa5 is a bit better for Black.) 16...Rxf3! 17 gxf3 Nd4 (I had detected that 17...Nd5 in Taylor's 2000 book was a misprint, and it's corrected in the new book.) 18 Qd1 Qf6 which is clearly better for Black.

b) 10 Nxd5 is mentioned as a possibility in new book but with no analysis. Naturally I wondered about this early in the Dolgov game but decided that 10...Nxd5 11 Bxd5 (if 11 Qxd5 Be6.) 11...Bb4+ 12 Ke2 (12 Kf1 Be6) looked about equal, but it's not clear really.

c) Hayward and Taylor also suggest 10 0-0 with no continuation. After 10...Be6 White has to try to justify his gambit.

10...Bg4!?



[FEN "r2qkb1r/1pp2ppp/pnn5/3pP3/6b1/1BN1BN2/PP3PPP/R2QK2R w KQkq - 0 11"]

10...Be6 is another possibility.

11 h3

Evidently 11 Nxd5 also came into consideration. My idea was 11...Nxd5 12 Bxd5 Bb4+ 13 Kf1 0-0 and if White captures on c6 then Black's bishop pair should balance the damaged pawns.

11...Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Bb4 13 Qg3

13 Bxb6 leads to drawish simplification after 13...cxb6 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 bxc3 0-0 16 Qxd5 Qxd5 17 Bxd5 Nxe5.

13...Qe7 14 Qxg7

If 14 0-0-0 Bxc3 15 bxc3 0-0, and then if 16 Bh6 f6.

14...0-0-0 15 Bg5 Bxc3+

This must be played immediately to avoid the line 15...Qc5 16 Bxd8 Bxc3+ 17 Kf1! which is a bit awkward.

16 bxc3

Now if 16 Kf1? Bxe5 17 Bxe7 Bxg7 18 Bxd8 Rxd8, Black obtains two pieces for a rook.

16...Qc5 17 0-0

17 Bxd8?? doesn't work here 17...Qxc3+ and takes rook with check, because if 18 Ke2 Nd4+.

17...Rhg8

17...Rdg8 18 Be3 Rxd7 is possible but White has two bishops against two knights in an open position, with the option to play Bxb6 if he prefers.

18 Qf6



[FEN "2kr2r1/1pp2p1p/pnn2Q2/2qp1B1/8/1BP4P/P4PP1/R4RK1 b - - 0 18"]

Hayward stops here saying "with an unclear position".

18...Qxc3!?

18...Rde8 is safer, but this was a correspondence game.

19 Qf5+ Rd7 20 Bf6 Rg6 21 Qh5

If 21 e6 Qxf6 22 exd7+ Kd8 23 Qxf6+ (23 Qb1 Nd4 24 Bxd5 Nxd5 25 Qxb7 Rxd7+! forces a draw by perpetual check.) 23...Rxf6 24 Rad1 Rd6, and with two connected passed pawns for the exchange, Black has the better winning prospects.

21...Nd4 22 Qxh7 c5!?

Instead of playing ...Kb8, Black wants to cramp the white bishop as well as giving the king a flight square.

23 Qh5 c4 24 e6 Rxf6 25 exd7+ Nxd7



[FEN "2k5/1p1n1p2/p4r2/3p3Q/2pn4/1Bq4P/P4PP1/R4RK1 w - - 0 26"]

26 Rfd1

26 Ba4 b5 27 Qxd5 (27 Rfd1!?) 27...Ne2+ 28 Kh1 Qd4 29 Qa8+ Nb8 30 Bd1 Ng3+ 31 Kg1 Nxf1 32 Bg4+ Kc7 33 Rxf1 c3 is less clear, but a draw may still be the likeliest result.

26...Re6 27 Kf1 Ne5 28 Rac1 Qb2 29 Rb1 Qc3 30 Rbc1 ½-½

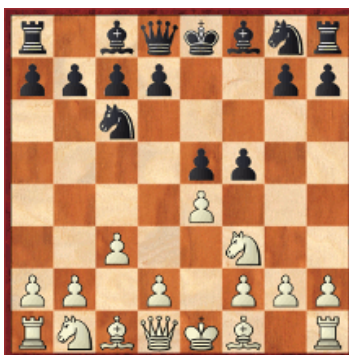
The 'Real' Ponziani, 3...f5

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3

In the nineteenth century, German literature often referred to this opening as the "Englische Springerspiel" (English Knight's Game) because English players, especially Staunton, employed it.

3...f5!?

This and not White's third move was actually the suggestion of the eighteenth century Italian writer, Ponziani. It's not an obviously bad move either; White cannot afford to neglect it in preparing to play the opening.



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pppp2pp/2n5/4pp2/4P3/2P2N2/PP1P1PPP/RNBQKB1R w KQkq f6 0 4"]

4 d4

In the Greco (or Latvian) Counter-Gambit, 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5, accepting the pawn by the move 3 exf5 is certainly playable, albeit not very popular. In the early days of computer chess, IM David Levy employed it to win a bet by beating a program. Yet one would expect the extra move Black has played here (the developing ...Nc6) should be more useful than White's c2-c3 which if anything hinders his own development.

Yet Hayward and Taylor give 4 exf5!? an exclamation mark and devote several pages to it. Strangely, they call it a reversed Vienna or Breyer King's

Gambit and don't seem to notice the comparison with the line I just mentioned.

It certainly has shock value, but is it good? They point out that after 4...e4 White has a choice between 5 Ng1 and 5 Nd4 (the pawn move proves useful after all) 5...Nf6 (5...Nxd4? 6 Qh5+) 6 g4!? the tactics seems to work.

All this proves is that the Latvian Gambit is so terrible that, even when Black has an extra tempo he still loses!

Of course it is far from clear that 4...e4 is best. Keres recommended 4...Qf6 which, as Hayward points out, books (including mine) have repeated, but it is hardly ever been played. The critical line seems to go 5 d4 (also they suggest 5 Bb5!?) 5...e4 6 Ng5! d5 and now White can consider 7 Qh5+ and 7 g4 as well as 7 f3 which occurred in the game they cite. Black met 7 f3 by 7...h6 but instead there is 7...exf3 8 Qxf3 Bf5 9 Qxd5 h6 10 Nf3 Bd6 11 Be2 0-0-0 12 Qc4. The authors think it is unclear whether Black has compensation for the pawn here, but Rybka finds 12...Nge7 13 0-0 Nd5! 14 Bd3 (14 Qxd5?? Bxh2 +) 14...Kb8 or 14...Rh8 when it rates the position about equal. Black has a well coordinated position and his development is far ahead of White's, whose position hangs by a thread.

All these 4 exf5 lines are quite mad but since 4 d4 may not give White any advantage, maybe there is method in it after all! Black can also play 4...d6, which maybe best. It resembles the old Philidor line 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 f5 but in an improved form since ...Nc6 is more useful than c2-c3.

4...fxe4

Here Black can also play 4...d6 when White should probably play 5 exf5. The alternative 5 Bb5 fxe4 6 Nxe5 dxe5 7 Qh5+ Ke7! "gives White no more than a draw" they say.

Here Robert Taylor comments that Tomcsanyi in his earlier Ponziani book quite properly notes that the dead-drawn 6 Nxe5 can be avoided by the interesting 6 Ng5!?. "In view of this it's odd that Keith Hayward leaves it out (White should try to avoid a draw after all?). I will go further: I think that a subsequent move which Tomcsanyi omits is worth trying, as follows: 6 Ng5!? exd4(!) now 7 0-0! which by my analysis gives black something to think about, I believe it is a sensible way to enter a line with equal-chances, making black do some hard thinking and denying him the early draw that results from 6 Nxe4."

I fed this suggestion into Deep Rybka 3 which considers that after 4...d6 5 Bb5 fxe4 6 Ng5 exd4 7 0-0 Black continues 7...d5 8 f3 h6 forcing the piece sacrifice 9 Nxe4 dxe4 10 fxe4 Be6 and after 11 cxd4 Qd6 (to meet 12 d5 by ... Qc5+) 12 Kh1 0-0-0 13 d5 Black has two ways to keep the material, 13...Ne5 or 13...Qc5, but returning the piece by 13...Nf6 14 Qa4 Bxd5 looks stronger. This is all certainly worth further investigation but I would not play it for White in a correspondence game. Black seems to have tactical resources whenever he needs them.

5 Nxe5



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pppp2pp/2n5/4N3/3Pp3/2P5/PP3PPP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 5"]

5...Nf6

This is the main move although 5...Qf6 is also possible.

6 Bg5

6 Bb5 a6? (6...Bd6 7 Nc4 Be7 is much better.) 7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 Bg5 Rb8 9 b4 Bb7 10 Qa4 d5 11 0-0 h6 12 Bh4 Qd6 13 Bg3 Rg8 14 Nd2 Rc8 15 Nb3 Nd7 16 Na5 Nb6 17 Qc2 Ba8 18 f3 exf3 19 Rxf3 Qe6 20 Re1 Be7 21 Nexc6 Qxe1 + 22 Bxe1 Bxc6 23 Qg6+ Kd8 24 Nxc6+ 1-0, Staunton-Harrwitz, 2nd match game 1846.

6...d6 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 Nd2!



[FEN "r1bqkb1r/p1p3pp/2pp1n2/6B1/3Pp3/2P5/PP1N1PPP/R2QKB1R b KQkq - 0 8"]

I once had a tournament game in London as black with 8 d5 Be7!? which is complicated, but seems all right.

The text move, however, yields White an edge because after 8...d5 9 f3 exf3 (9...Be7 10 Bxf6 Bxf6 11 fxe4) 10 Nxf3 Bd6 11 Qe2+! neither reply is entirely satisfactory (page 247 in the book).

Although a lot more analysis could be done on 3...f5, it may not be worth it because the initial impression that it is a weakening move is likely to be borne out in the long run.

As a sort of conclusion, it may be said that the Ponziani is not entirely played out. Because it is relatively little-known, it could score you points against people who are prepared for the better-known open games. If you are Black, choose 3...Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 Nd5, which also has the practical advantage that you can use this as your defence to the Goring Gambit as well. Keith Hayward admits (page 115) that this is his preferred line. So probably anybody examining this opening from scratch should start by looking at that line and White's reply 6 Qb3. If you are dissatisfied with the positions it gives, then analyse my game with Dolgov. If you don't like that for White either, then don't play the Ponziani.

© 2010 Tim Harding. All Rights Reserved.

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

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

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