



COLUMNISTS

Middlegame Motifs

Nigel Davies



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f5 in the f4 Sicilian

Throughout the 1980s Britain's Grand Prix weekend tournament circuit was dominated by players who used an attacking system against the Sicilian based on an early f2-f4 (either 1.e4 c5 2.f4 or 2.Nc3 followed by 3.f4). The two most notable exponents of this system were David Rumens and then Mark Hebden; both these players literally devastated the opposition.

In the UK this opening later came to bear the name "Grand Prix Attack." The reason it was so devastating is that Black's most natural system of development seems to be 2...Nc6, followed by a kingside fianchetto, but this can lead him into very dangerous waters, as we are about to see. The exponents of this variation would simply put their bishop on b5 and then take the knight on c6. And Black, to his horror, discovered that this left him with a very passive position.

White meanwhile could then marshal the rest of his forces on the kingside using the very simple strategy of Qd1-e1-h4 and f4-f5, unleashing his bishop on c1. After exchanging one of the last defenders of Black's king with Bc1-h6, they would then bring the rest of their pieces into play with Nf3-g5, plus assorted rook lifts.

It's sometimes difficult to believe that this crude plan could possibly work, let alone be utterly deadly. But work it does, and sometimes against quite strong opposition. The following two games are nice examples of this plan in action. In the first game Mark Hebden dispatches one of his great rivals at the time, Peter Large. And in the second it is a British GM from a different generation who picks up the f4-f5 baton.

Hebden, Mark – Large, Peter

BCF--ch Torquay (2), 1982

Sicilian Defense [B21]

1.e4 c5 2.f4 Nc6 3.Nf3 g6 4.Bb5 Bg7 5.Bxc6 dxc6 6.d3 Nf6 7.Nc3 0-0 8.0-0 b6

Black's position seems solid enough but his problem is finding an active plan. The pawn structure makes this very difficult.

9.Qe1! Ne8 10.Qh4

10.f5! was stronger immediately, because now Black could and should have stopped it.

10...Nd6

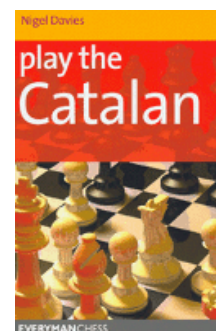
Black really had to play 10...f5!? here, blocking White's f-pawn and thus keeping the bishop on c1 out of play. Now the floodgates open.

11.f5!

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Maybe Black thought that he had this covered, but White's attack is devastating. If anything, the move 10...Nd6 made it even stronger.

11...gxf5 12.e5!

Hitting the knight and at the same time stopping Black from using the f6-square.

12...Ne8 13.Bh6!

And not 13.Ng5? because of 13...Qd4+ exchanging queens.

13...f6 14.Kh1 Bxh6 15.Qxh6 Ng7 16.Rae1 Be6 17.Ne2

All of White's pieces are headed towards the enemy gates.

17...c4 18.Nf4 cxd3 19.cxd3 Bxa2

After 19...Qd7, 20.Re3



intending to bring the rook to g3 or h3.

20.e6 Qc8 21.Re3! Nxe6

Desperately trying to beat off the attack.

22.Nxe6 Bxe6 23.Rxe6! Rf7

Or 23...Qxe6 24.Ng5 etc.

24.Rfe1 Qd7 25.Nh4 Re8 26.Nxf5 Qxd3 27.Nd6! 1-0

Jones,Gawain C (2567) - Abhishek,Das (2383)

Wch U20 Yerevan (1), 03.10.2007

Sicilian Defense [B23]]

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3

2.f4 went out of fashion because of the gambit line of 2...d5!



3.exd5 Nf6!. But in this game Gawain Jones reaches the same position via a tricky move order.

2...Nc6 3.Bb5 g6

One of the points of this line is that after 3...Nd4 4.Bc4 e6 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.0-0 d5, White has the spectacular 7.exd5 exd5 8.Nxd5! Nxd5 9.Nxd4 cxd4 10.Qh5 Be6 11.Re1, winning back the piece with interest because of the threats of 12.Rxe6+ and taking the knight on d5.

4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.f4 Bg7 6.d3 Nf6 7.Nf3 0-0 8.0-0 b6

Actually transposing into Hebden - Large. Black does things a bit differently in this game, but it still doesn't save him.

9.Qe1 Bg4 10.Ne5

Preserving the knight.

10...Qc7 11.Qh4 Be6 12.Nf3 h6



13.f5!

Once again the key pawn advance, and this time h6 is hanging should Black capture on f5. There's only one thing he can try but it meets with a spectacular reply...

13...g5 14.Nxg5!

Great stuff! Of course there's no way Black's going to survive this attack unless he can feed pieces over to the kingside, and White's powerful c2-f5 pawn chain kind of rules that out.

14...hxg5 15.Bxg5 Bc8 16.Rf3 Rd8

Or 16...Qd6 17.Rg3 threatening 18.Bf4.

17.Bh6 Ne8 18.Bxg7 Nxg7 19.Rh3



19...f6

Black's last few moves have been forced.

20.Qh7+ Kf7 21.Qg6+ Kg8 22.Rf1!

Attack as a numbers game.

22...e6 23.Qh7+ Kf7 24.fxe6+ Bxe6 25.Rh6



25...Qe5 26.Qg6+ Kg8 27.Rxf6 Qd4+ 28.Rf2 1-0

Black has no good way of stopping 29.Qh7 mate.

Exercises (solutions next month)



White to play. How should he break through here?



White to play. Black has just prevented mate on h7 by 12...h6. How should White reply?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Steinitz, William – Lee, Francis Joseph

London (11), 13.06.1899



White to play. What is his best move?

25.Nc5!

The best, leading to the win of a pawn. Steinitz was not a young man when this game was played and here he lets his opponent off the hook after 25.b6. After 25...Qc8 26.Qa7 f4! Black suddenly got counterplay on the kingside with a minority attack of his own. The game concluded 27.Nc5 fxe3 28.Nxb7 exf2+ 29.Kf1 Bf5 30.Bxf5 Qxf5 31.Nxd8 Qd3+ Perpetual check. 32.Kxf2 Qd2 + 33.Kf3 Qd3+ 34.Kg4 Qf5+ 35.Kg3 Qd3+ 36.Kh4 Qxd4+ 37.g4 Qf6+ 38.Kg3 Qe5+ with a draw by perpetual check.

25...Qc8 26.Qxb7 Qxb7 27.Nxb7 Bc7 28.Nc5 Be8 29.bxc6 Bxc6 30.g3 and Black will have a tough time saving the game.

Kotov, Alexander – Ragozin, Viacheslav

URS-ch17 Moscow (11), 02.11.1949



White has just played 27.b4-b5. What did he have in mind after 27...c6-c5?

27...c5

The game actually went 27...Rac7, when 28.bxc6 Kg7 (28...Nxc6 29.Bb5 Nxd4 30.Rxc7 Rxc7 (30...Nxc2 31.Rxc8 Nxa3 32.Rxe8+ Kg7 33.Bd3 is winning) 31.Qxc7 Nxb5 32.Qxd6 Nxd6 brings about an endgame in which White should win.) 29.Qb1! Nxc6 30.Qxb6 Rb8 31.Qxb8! Nxb8 32.Rxc7 Qxa3 33.Bxg6 Nc6 34.R1xc6! Bxc6 35.Rxf7+ Kh6 (35...Kh8 36.Bh7 threatening Ng6# wins) 36.f4! Qxe3+ 37.Kh2 Qxe5 38.fxe5 and Black resigned.

28.dxc5!! Qxe5

Or 28...bxc5 29.Rxc5 Rxc5 30.Qxc5 Qxe5 31.Qxa7 etc.

29.cxb6 Rxc3 30.bxa7!! Rxc2 31.Rxc2! and White will queen his a7-pawn.

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