



## COLUMNISTS

### Middlegame Motifs

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## Countering the Minority Attack: Capablanca's Maneuver

In [October's column](#) I looked at the minority attack, now I'm going to show you one of the means of trying to counter it that was used by the great Jose Raul Capablanca during his match with Alexander Alekhine. This plan still occurs in games played today and represents a major weapon in Black's arsenal of ideas.

Capablanca's remarkable intuition led him to understand that in the Queen's Gambit Declined Exchange Variation the very best place for a black knight is on the d6-square. From here it not only helps defend against the minority attack (b4-b5) but it is ready to hop into either c4 or e4 at the right moment.

Additionally the knight can be used to support an exchange of the light-squared bishops with ...Bc8-f5 (White's bishop presumably standing on d3). This is one of Black's major themes in this opening because it makes b4-b5 even harder for White to achieve and may also help to expose the c4-square.

**Alekhine, Alexander - Capablanca, Jose Raul**

World Championship 13th Buenos Aires (14), 14.10.1927

Queen's Gambit Declined [D64]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nd7 4.Nc3 Ngf6 5.Bg5 Be7 6.e3 0-0 7.Rc1 c6 8.Qc2 a6 9.a3



9...h6

9...Re8 may be more accurate, so as to meet 10.cxd5 with 10...Nxd5!. White would then be unable to avoid the exchange of his dark-squared bishop.

10.Bh4 Re8 11.cxd5 exd5

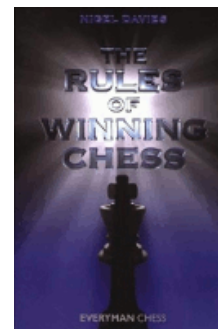
With the moves 9...h6 and 10.Bh4 interposed, White can now meet 11...Nxd5 with 12.Bg3!, avoiding exchanges. So Black finds it more difficult to free his position.

12.Bd3 Nh5 13.Bxe7 Rxe7 14.0-0 Nhf6 15.h3?!

Not the best. 15.b4 was more challenging with the idea of Nc3-a4-c5 and later a3-a4. Now Black gains equality with his celebrated knight manoeuvre.

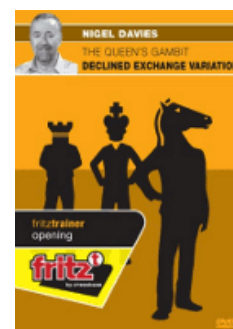
15...Ne8! 16.Ne2 Nd6!

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This is a really superb post for the knight, as it's now very difficult for White to achieve any of his desired pawn levers (b4-b5 or e3-e4). The game now sees steady simplification after which nobody has much to play for.

**17.Ng3 Nf8 18.Ne5 f6 19.Ng6 Nxe6 20.Bxe6**

The squares around Black's king look a bit weak but White can not exploit them.

**20...Be6 21.Ne2 Qd7 22.Nf4 Bf5!**



Another point behind having the knight on d6 is that it is often able to support this exchange.

**23.Bxf5 Qxf5 24.Qxf5 Nxf5 25.Nd3 Nd6 1/2-1/2**

The next game is an even more vivid demonstration of Black's strategic themes. He exchanges light-squared bishops in the opening and with the knight on d6 effectively stymies any hope that Portisch might have had of playing b4-b5. And the knight later plays a decisive role in both Black's kingside pawn advance and an eventual harvest of White's queenside pawns.

**Portisch, L (2600) - Kasparov, G (2775)**

Skelleftea, 1989

Queen's Gambit Declined [D35]

**1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5**

No doubt played to avoid tricky lines such as 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.e4 Bb4 6.Bg5 c5 . But Black has an easier time of it now than in some other forms of the Exchange Variation.

**4...exd5 5.Nc3 c6 6.Qc2 Na6**



**7.a3**

Again trying to stop the slightest possibility of tricks, this time with ...Na6-b4. However, a more testing way to play this is with 7.Bg5 Be7 8.e3 after which 8...Nb4 9.Qb1 g6 10.Qd1! Bf5 11.Rc1 gives White a good game.

**7...Nc7 8.Bg5 g6!? 9.e3**

White might have tried the sharp 9.e4!?, but this wasn't in Portisch's game plan.

**9...Bf5 10.Bd3 Bxd3 11.Qxd3 Be7 12.0-0 0-0 13.b4**

It might have been a good idea to deprive Black of one of his knights via 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.b4. By move seventeen Portisch was probably regretting this decision.

**13...Ne4! 14.Bf4!**

One of the tactical points behind Black's last moves is that after 14.Bh6?! Re8 15.Nxe4? dxe4 16.Qxe4 Black wins a piece with 16...Bf8 17.Qf4 Ne6.

**14...Nxc3 15.Qxc3?**

White should definitely take out Black's remaining knight via 15.Bxc7. Probably he missed Black's clever sixteenth move.

**15...Bd6 16.Bxd6**



**16...Nb5!**

Very clever. Now Black's knight gets to the ideal square and it becomes much easier for him to advance on the kingside than it is for Portisch to make progress on the other flank.

**17.Qb3 Nxd6 18.a4 a6 19.Ne5?!**

The knight will get driven away from here via ...f7-f6. 19.g3 might have been a better plan intending to reinforce White's king position with Nf3-h4-g2. It would have been very difficult for Black to make progress after that.

**19...Re8 20.Rfe1 Qg5 21.h3?!**

21.g3 was better here too, not least because Black's breakthrough may come via ...f7-f5-f4.

**21...Kg7 22.Qc2 Re6 23.Rac1 Rae8 24.Qb1?!**

And here 24.Qd1 was better, keeping the queen in contact with the kingside.

**24...Qh5! 25.Qb3 f6**



**26.Nd3?!**

Yet another sub-optimal move. 26.Nf3 would have been much more tenacious, the idea being that 26...g5 27.Nh2! would hold White's kingside together.

**26...g5 27.Qd1 Qg6 28.Qc2 R6e7! 29.Red1 h5 30.Qb1**

After 30.Ne1, Black would avoid the exchange of queens with 30...Qh6! in order to maintain his chances against White's king.

**30...h4 31.Qc2 g4 32.Nf4?**

This loses. White's best try was 32.hxg4 Qxg4 33.Nf4 after which 33...Kh6 34.Kh2 Rg8 gives Black very dangerous attacking chances but nothing that's crystal clear.

**32...Qxc2 33.Rxc2 g3! 34.Rd3**

34.fxg3 is powerfully met by 34...Nf5!.

**34...Kh6 35.Kf1 Kg5 36.Ne2?!**



In time trouble Portisch's resistance crumbles and we see the d6-knight make a decisive entrance. 36.Re2 was the best, though Black could then play 36...Ne4 37.f3 Nd6 intending 38...Nc4.

**36...Nc4! 37.Rcc3 Nb2 38.Rd2 Nxa4**

The first pawn falls with more to follow.

39.Rb3 Nb6 40.Ng1

Or 40.fxg3 Nc4 etc.

40...Nc4 41.Nf3+ Kh5 42.Rdd3 a5!



43.bxa5 Ra8 44.Rd1 Rxa5 45.Re1 b5 46.Re2 Ra1+ 47.Re1 Rea7 48.fxg3 Rxe1+

48...hxg3 would also have been good.

49.Kxe1 Ra1+ 50.Ke2 hxg3 51.Ne1 Ra2+ 52.Kd1 Rd2+ 53.Kc1 Re2 54.Kd1 Rxe3 55.Rxe3 Nxe3+ 56.Ke2 Nf5 57.Nc2 Nh4 58.Nb4

58.Kf1 Kg5 59.Nb4 Kf4 would see Black's king make a decisive entrance.

58...Nxg2 59.Kf3 Nh4+ 60.Kxg3 Nf5+ 61.Kf4 Nxd4 62.Ke3 Nf5+ 0-1

### Exercises (solutions next month)



Black to play, what should he do here?



Black to play, what's his best move?

### Solutions to last month's exercises

Vachier Lagrave, M (2718) - Yu Yangyi (2527)  
World Cup Khanty-Mansiysk RUS (3.1), 27.11.2009





White to play. He has successfully tied Black down to the weakness on d6 and also made progress on the kingside, but how does he put the ball in the net?

**49.Rxa5!**

This neat combination exploits all of White's advantages.

**49...Qe7**

Black has no choice. After 49...Rxa5 50.Rb7 Kf8 (50...Rd7 51.Rb8+) 51.Qxg7 + Ke8 52.Qh8+ leads to mate.

**50.Rxa7 Qxa7 51.Rxb4 Kh8 52.a4 Qd4 53.Rb7 Rg8 54.g3 Qd2 55.Kg2 Qc3 56.Qf7 Qd3 57.Qg6 Qc3 58.Rb5 Qd2 59.a5 Qa2 60.Qg4 Qc2 61.a6 1-0**

**Sefc, Jan - Petrosian, Tigran**  
EU-chT (Men) Vienna (4), 1957



Black to play. Black has tied White down to the g-pawn but still needs to break through. How does he do it?

**88...e4!**

This just wins material. White has no choice but to take this pawn as Black is threatening 89...e3.

**89.fxe4 Nxd3 90.Rxf5 Nc5 91.Rfd5 Rxb3 92.Rxd6+ Ke7 93.R6d4 Rc3 94.e5 b3 95.Rxh4 Rc1+ 96.Kf2 b2 0-1**

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