

Contents

Introduction 5

Part One – The Czech Benoni

- 1 The Classical Variation 11
- 2 The Modern System 69
- 3 The Fianchetto Variation 118
- 4 Less Common Approaches 145

Part Two – The Closed Benoni

- 5 Classical Development from White 168
- 6 Early Aggression with f2-f4 192
- 7 Alternatives to 2 d5 214

Index of Variations 249

Index of Complete Games 256

Introduction

I've long been of the opinion that the Czech Benoni, **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 (Diagram 1)**, is a rather-neglected defence to the queen's pawn and one which should suit many club players well, as the emphasis is very much on understanding rather than rote learning.

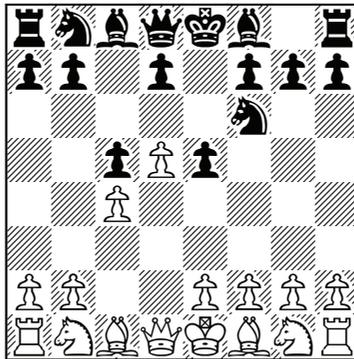


Diagram 1 (W)

The Czech Benoni

Thus when I was offered the opportunity to write a repertoire book for such players against 1 d4, I jumped at the chance to cover the Czech Benoni.

Who Should Employ the Czech Benoni?

Do you enjoy studying the latest theoretical fashions, hate not being able to follow

How to Play Against 1 d4

theory a fair way into the game and love early complications? If so, then this book is likely not for you. However, if the idea of burning the midnight oil memorizing opening variations is alien, but you would like to survive the opening stage before reaching a rich, full-blooded middlegame then do read on.

Many lines of the Czech Benoni require Black to be unafraid of a slightly cramped position as he slowly manoeuvres his pieces to their best squares for the resulting middlegame struggle. However, if the reader is happy with such patient early play, he will find that the Czech Benoni generally gives rise to quite complex middle-games in which both sides will try to outmanoeuvre each other. Moreover, the play may become quite dynamic and even tactical, especially when Black breaks with one or both of ...f7-f5 and ...b7-b5, and it's by no means unknown for the white king to land up under a direct assault.

Who Plays the Czech Benoni?

Firstly, I can't help noting that surprisingly few club players do in the UK, perhaps because the opening has never been especially popular. It received some early attention from the Soviet theoretician, Vassily Panov, in the late 1930s, but the chess world only really began to take note when it was employed with some success in the 1960s by the Czech Grandmasters, Vlastimil Hort and Vlastimil Jansa. Hence the name, the Czech Benoni.

In 1969 Bill Hartston's work *The Benoni* included a decent-sized chapter on the Czech Benoni, and he was soon employing the opening on occasion, as were other young English players. However, that was really the opening's high-point for quite some time. Black's slightly-cramped position early on and the lack of forcing lines ensured that it never attracted the theoreticians, and even a fair amount of use by Tony Miles in the late 1980s couldn't drag the Czech Benoni into the limelight.

The Czech Benoni in the 21st Century

When I spent a couple of days studying the Czech Benoni in the summer of 2002 whilst writing *Play 1 d4!*, I never dreamt that the opening was about to enjoy a surge of interest at grandmaster level, but it has, largely thanks to the patronage of the leading Romanian Grandmaster, Liviu Dieter Nisipeanu. From around 2005 I

began following Nisipeanu's games in the opening, and so far he has amassed the impressive score of +5 =7 -0, with a clear majority of his opponents fellow grandmasters. I should also mention that I wouldn't be surprised if Nisipeanu had studied the opening with his fellow Romanian, Mihail Marin, who also began playing the Czech Benoni at about the same time.

Over the past five years I've employed the Czech Benoni as a surprise weapon and in a number of rapid games. During that time two things have especially struck me, which researching and writing this book has only served to confirm:

1. There is still very little established theory on the Czech Benoni even in the theory-laden days of 2010. Stronger and/or more experienced club players are likely to have a set-up in mind for when they face the opening, but it's rare that they have studied the opening nuances or typical middlegame motifs in much detail. Moreover, the chance of Black being hit by a powerful computer-generated novelty remains pretty much zero!
2. A reluctance by Black in many lines to carry out the classical kingside regrouping plan after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7, which consists of ...0-0, ...Nbd7, ...Ne8, ...g7-g6 and ...Ng7, preparing ...f7-f5 as well as the exchange of dark-squared bishops with ...Bg5 (**Diagram 2**).

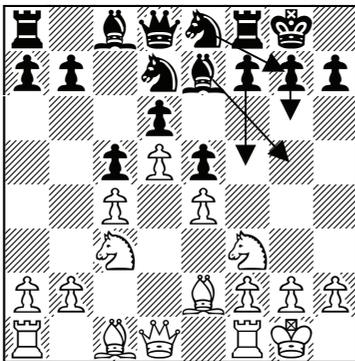


Diagram 2

The standard regrouping plan

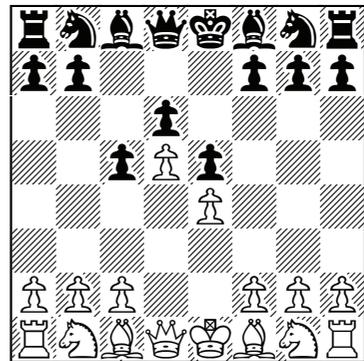


Diagram 3 (W)

The Closed Benoni

This is still a very important concept, but against certain white set-ups we will see that nowadays Black may prefer to free his bishop and f-pawn by ...Nh5, rather than the retreat to e8, with an early ...Nbd7-f8-g6 another important part of the modern Czech Benoni player's armoury.

Completing a Repertoire for Black

Perhaps it would have been simplest to recommend 1 d4 e6, in keeping with Neil McDonald's companion volume *How to Play Against 1 e4* which advocated the French Defence, but then I wouldn't have been able to cover the Czech Benoni. Unfortunately the Czech Benoni only arises after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5. In Chapter Four I have sketched out a mini-repertoire for Black against White's 3rd-move alternatives, but what about the likes of 2 Bg5, 2 Nc3 and especially 2 Nf3, keeping the c2-c4 possibility open?

I did give a fair amount of thought to presenting a complete repertoire with 1 d4 Nf6, but decided that many readers are likely to already have that move in their armoury. Indeed, one can certainly imagine that some King's Indian players will want to avoid, say, the Sämisch or Four Pawns Attack with the Czech Benoni, but will be perfectly happy to meet 2 Nf3 with 2...g6, fully content with the likes of the Barry and Torre, not to mention the Classical King's Indian after 3 c4 Bg7 4 Nc3 0-0 5 e4 d6. Likewise, a Modern Benoni player might be worried about some of the sharper lines and drawn to the Czech version, while still being happy to answer 2 Nf3 with their existing 2...e6 or even 2...c5.

Thus the second part of this book is devoted to another line badly neglected in chess literature (although it did share a chapter with the Czech Benoni in Raetsky and Chetverik's 2005 *Starting Out: Benoni Systems*), namely the so-called Closed or Semi-Benoni, **1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4** (3 c4 may actually lead back to the Czech version after 3...d6 4 e4 Nf6) **3...d6 (Diagram 3)**.

Why Play 1 d4 c5?

The player happy with the Czech Benoni should find the move order 1 d4 c5 pretty easy to pick up, since Black's ideas are quite similar even when White doesn't place his c-pawn on c4. Moreover, as early as move one Black is stamping his authority on the game. At club level there are many systems-based players as White, and just how will a Colle or London player react when surprised by 1...c5? White doesn't have to push his d-pawn on, but otherwise Black has generally gained by going ...c7-c5 before ...Nf6, as we'll see in Chapter Seven.

I can't deny that the Closed Benoni doesn't have the best of theoretical reputa-

tions, despite the large amount of memory work it saves Black. In the Czech Benoni it is far from easy for White to prove an objective edge, as we will see, but by keeping the c4-square free in the Closed Benoni White does have good chances of emerging from the opening with a small advantage. That said, we are only talking about an edge here, not a clear advantage or extra pawn. Moreover, while the odd club player might be ready for 1...c5 or find a sequence of good moves when surprised by it, I'd wager that the majority won't. In any case, though, a middlegame dominated by heavy manoeuvring will again often occur and there the reader should be able to make good use of their likely-superior understanding of various key themes.

Unlike the Czech Benoni, the Closed Benoni lacks regular grandmaster adherents – well, since the notable exception of Alekhine in the mid-1930s – but conceding a small advantage is more likely to be punished at that level. Still, the likes of Tiger Hillarp Persson and Alexander Morozevich have used the opening on occasion, and of late the creative Russian Grandmaster Vadim Zvjaginsev has begun to experiment with the black position. None of those players is known as a lover of theory and the reader who also just likes to play chess should enjoy meeting 1 d4 with 1...c5.

I'm especially grateful to my fellow Yorkshiremen, Chris Duggan, Andrew Ledger and Norman Stephenson for their help with this project. Now there's only time to wish you all the best with your new opening, whether that's just the Czech Benoni or 1 d4 c5.

Richard Palliser,
York,
August 2010

Introduction

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 (Diagram 1)

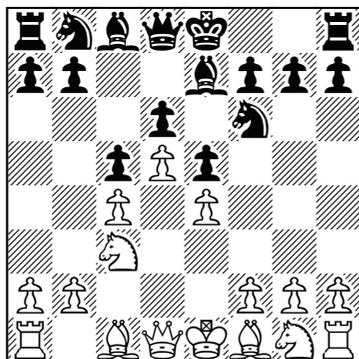


Diagram 1 (W)

Nf3, Bd3 and h2-h3 may follow

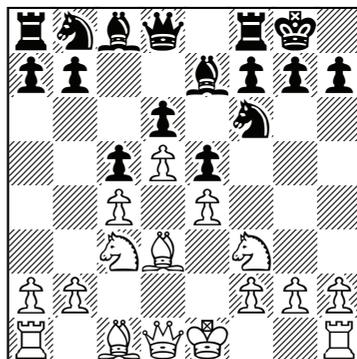


Diagram 2 (B)

h2-h3 and g2-g4 will clamp down

6 Nf3

The white system which we will consider in this chapter sees him deploying his pieces with Bd3, Nf3, h2-h3 and g2-g4. That kingside pawn advance is primarily a prophylactic measure: White wants to prevent ...f7-f5 and so squash Black. However, it can also be the prelude to a dangerous kingside attack should Black mis-time any ...f7-f5 break or allow White too much time to build up at his leisure on the kingside.

One problem for both your author and those studying these lines as Black is that White's move order is very flexible: he may play Nf3, Bd3 and h2-h3 in any order, and may even implement g2-g4 before developing one of his bishop or knight. Thus it is possible for White to begin with 6 h3 or 6 Bd3. Do please note too that while the Modern System is really all about White developing his knight to f3 soon after either of those moves if not on move 6, I have decided to end this chapter with the important sub-variation 6...Nbd7 (or 6...O-O) 7 Nge2 followed by Ng3. Technically-speaking it is not a Modern System, but it makes sense to group all Bd3 lines together, especially because whether the knight goes to f3 or g3 White is hoping to squeeze Black, and the second player must respond in more creative

ways than the classical ...0-0, ...Ne8, ...g7-g6, ...Ng7 and ...f7-f5 approach.

6...0-0

Slightly committal. Indeed, the modern preference amongst the leading Czech Benoni players is for 6...Nbd7 7 Bd3 Nf8, racing the knight to g6 which usually prevents g2-g4 since White doesn't want to create holes on f4 and h4. This important set-up will receive a fair amount of attention later in this chapter.

7 Bd3 (Diagram 2)

'It is very difficult to decide what plan Black should adopt here, since White's formation is extremely flexible. In particular, White will delay castling until it is clear what the situation demands: whether he should castle long and pursue an attack on the Black king; or leave his own king in the centre and try to increase his spatial advantage on both wings.'

That was Bill Hartston's apt summing-up of the situation and one which is just as relevant today as when he wrote it back in 1969. As we will see, matters are far from being all doom and gloom for Black, but he must take care not to land up in a lifeless position, grovelling on the back ranks.

7...Nbd7 8 h3 Ne8?! 9 g4! (Diagram 3)

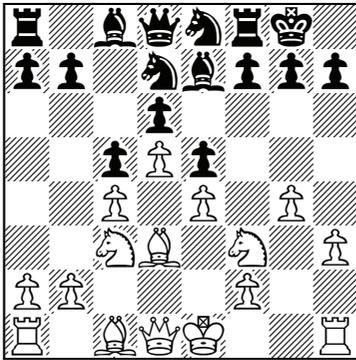


Diagram 3 (B)

Dangerous for Black

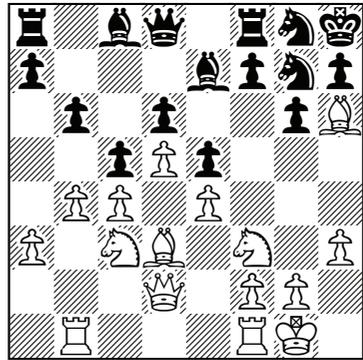


Diagram 4 (W)

It's like the Classical!

A key component in White's set-up. Instead 9 0-0 leads to similar play to the Classical, but with White's king's bishop slightly misplaced, as he will struggle to meet ...f7-f5 with exf5 gxf5; f2-f4 on account of the piece-forking ...e5-e4. Moreover, any hope of exchanging his potentially bad bishop with Be2-g4 has gone. The recent clash A.Kuzubov-T.Markowski, Polanica Zdroj 2007, continued 9...Kh8!? (trying to

How to Play Against 1 d4

tempt White into placing his bishop on e3) 10 a3 (Kuzubov is having none of it) 10...g6 11 Bh6 Ng7 12 Qd2 Nf6 13 b4 b6 14 Rab1 Ng8 (**Diagram 4**) 15 Bxg7+ Kxg7 16 bxc5 bxc5 17 Rb3 and now with White's grip on e4 secure, Black decided to delay ...f7-f5, preferring to hold his own on the kingside with 17...Nf6!? 18 Rfb1 Qa5 which was about equal. However, 9 g4! is much more of a problem.



WARNING: Black underestimates White's clever Modern set-up at his peril. Indeed, we will see some quite strong players being badly outmanoeuvred in Game 11, Kasparov-Miles, and its notes. Do not follow in their footsteps!

Before we examine those grim encounters, it is worth noting that White's set-up is much easier for a grandmaster to handle than a club player. The latter may panic about his king remaining in the centre and has been known to follow up g2-g4 by attacking far too rapidly on the kingside, thereby allowing Black to obtain good counterplay. Even allowing for such important practical considerations, though, I cannot recommend that Black contests the position after 9 g4 no matter how lowly-rated his opponent. Indeed, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to an examination of some superior set-ups for him.

Illustrative Games

Game 11

□ **G.Kasparov** ■ **A.Miles**
1st matchgame, Basle 1986

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 h3 Nbd7 8 g4 Ne8?! 9 Bd3

Observe how Kasparov delayed deploying his bishop until after he had established his kingside bind, but in any case we have reached a key position for White's Modern System and one from which Black hasn't scored especially well.

9...a6

An attempt to obtain some counterplay on the queenside. Black has also begun with 9...g6 when White might swing his bishop right up to h6, but in V.Ivanchuk-Y.Seirawan, Reykjavik 1990, he preferred 10 Be3. Play continued 10...Ng7 11 Rg1 Nf6 12 Qe2 h5!? 13 Nd2 Qd7 14 f3 Nh7 15 0-0-0 Bg5 (**Diagram 5**) when it looked like Seirawan had both held White up on the kingside and exchanged off his bad

bishop. However, a deeper look should reveal that sooner or later White will open the kingside and, meanwhile, just where is Black's queenside counterplay? Indeed, after 16 Bxg5 Nxg5 17 Qg2 Qe7 (Cox notes the instructive line 17...h4 18 Qf2! Nxb3 19 Qxh4 Nxg1 20 Rxg1 f6 21 Rh1 Kf7 22 Qh7 Qe7 23 Rh6 with a huge attack for just an exchange) 18 h4 Nh7 19 Qg3 a6 20 g5! (the f3-f4 lever is coming after all and even Black's very defensively-placed knights won't be able to save him) 20...f6 21 gxf6 Rxf6 22 Rdf1 Bd7 23 f4! exf4 24 Rxf4 Rxf4 25 Qxf4 Rf8 26 Qh6 Be8 27 e5! White soon crashed through down the g-file.

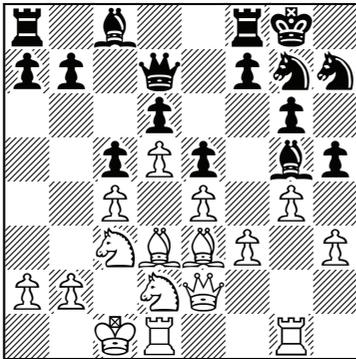


Diagram 5 (W)

Thematic but too slow

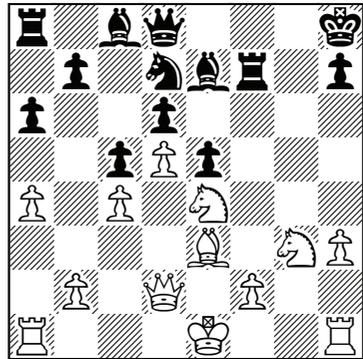


Diagram 6 (B)

White is in total control



NOTE: That's just the kind of position we want to avoid. Even a great strategist as Seirawan was quickly reduced to a defensive grove on the kingside, and one which he was unlikely to ever survive against Ivanchuk.

In contrast in our main game, Miles at least obtains a bit of counterplay and so gives White chances to go wrong, which in fact even Kasparov eventually does!

10 a4

A good case can also be made for 10 Qe2!?, but the then new World Champion doesn't mind losing the possibility of a2-a3 and b2-b4.

10...Rb8

Black is determined to break with ...b7-b5. Perhaps I shouldn't give another example of what can easily go wrong for Black in this line, but the game M.Gurevich-A.Guseinov, Baku 1986, is also rather instructive as an example of what to avoid: 10...g6 11 Bh6 Ng7 12 Qd2 Nf6 13 Ng1!? (13 Ke2 and 14 Rag1 was the direct approach, but Gurevich wants his king's knight on g3, further restricting ...f7-f5, and

How to Play Against 1 d4

to free his f-pawn) 13...Kh8 14 Be3 Nd7 (unfortunately for Black, 14...Ng8 would have been rather well met by 15 f4!) 15 Nge2 f5!? (Black decides that it's now or never for this break, but just White is more than ready for it) 16 exf5! gxf5 17 gxf5 Nxf5 18 Bxf5! Rxf5 19 Ng3 Rf7 20 Nce4 (**Diagram 6**) and White's complete grip on the e4-square allied to his kingside prospects left him firmly in the driving seat.



WARNING: In case it's still not obvious, Black cannot play as he does in the Classical Variation against the Modern System. The plan of ...g7-g6 and ...Ng7 is not only too slow, but helps White with his attack: either h4-h5 will eventually arrive with some effect or, after ...f7-f5, the g-file will open in White's favour.

11 Rg1 Nc7!?

Criticized by Kasparov in his notes in *Informant 41*, but few would have wanted to grovel with 11...g6 12 Bh6 Ng7 against the man whom Miles would christen after the match a 'monster with a thousand eyes who sees all'. Indeed, one can easily imagine that Kasparov would have fancied his long-term attacking prospects on the kingside here.

12 b3!

Continuing prophylactically; ...b7-b5 will now make less of an impact.

12...Re8 13 h4! (**Diagram 7**)

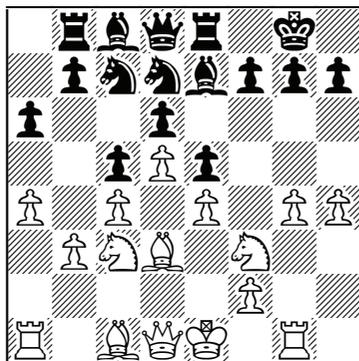


Diagram 7 (B)

Sounding the charge

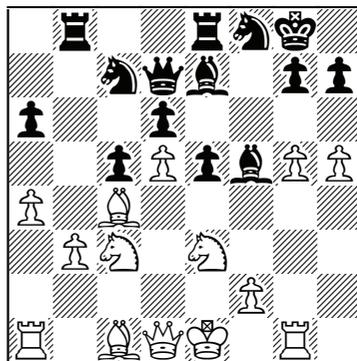


Diagram 8 (B)

Black must get some counterplay

But now it's time to get on with it!

13...b5!

At least this will open a queenside file and in any case it was too late to hope to block the kingside; Kasparov giving the instructive line 13...h6?! 14 h5! Nf6 15 g5 hxg5 16 Nxg5 and the attack just rumbles on.

14 g5 Nf8

This was the point of Miles' 12th, but the knight arrives on f8 too late to have any chance of leaping forward to disrupt White's build-up with ...Ng6-f4. Still, that manoeuvre is an important weapon in Black's armoury against the Modern System and one which we will see plenty of in this chapter.

15 h5 Bd7 16 Nh2! bxc4 17 Bxc4

Kasparov has cleverly prevented Black from obtaining any real counterplay on the queenside. Now Miles is in huge danger of being over-run in the long term on the kingside, but his attempt to break out only serves to open lines for White's forces.

17...f5!? 18 exf5! Bxf5 19 Nf1 Qd7 20 Ne3 (Diagram 8)

Miles is being outmanoeuvred, but at least unlike Seirawan and Guseinov, he hasn't been reduced to total passivity and against a lesser opponent might well have managed to turn this struggle around.

20...e4! 21 Bb2 Bd8 22 Ne2?! Qf7! 23 Nf4!

Kasparov had clearly underestimated Black's defensive queen manoeuvre and must now continue precisely to maintain the upper hand. Many ordinary mortals would have been tempted to plough ahead on the kingside with 23 Ng3 Bc8 24 g6?!, but then, as the great man points out, 24...hxg6 25 hxg6 Nxg6! 26 Nh5 Bh4 would have been no more than unclear. Indeed, all of a sudden Black's coiled position is unwinding at some speed and one could easily picture him seizing the initiative, such as after an exchange sacrifice on e5.

23...Bc8 24 Rg4!! (Diagram 9)

The struggle has really flared into life and one must give credit to Miles for obtaining counterplay with ...b7-b5 and then ...f7-f5, before regrouping his pieces with some effect in the limited space available. Again a sacrifice looked on for White, but after 24 g6?! Qxf4 25 gxh7+ Kh8! (and not 25...Kxh7? 26 Rxg7+ Kh6 27 Qd2!) 26 h6?! (better is 26 Rxg7, although Black is in time to block the long diagonal with bishop or rook, leading to a rather unclear struggle in either case) 26...Qxh6 27 Bxg7+ Qxg7 28 Rxg7 Kxg7 29 Qh5 Nxh7 Black's extra pieces would have enabled him to fend off White's additional queen.

24...Qe7!?

Forcing the rook back. Instead after 24...Bxg4 25 Qxg4 Qe7 White might have calmly retreated his knight to h3 before going forwards on the kingside, but Kas-

How to Play Against 1 d4

parov was actually intending more violent measures with 26 Ne6!? Nfxe6 27 dxe6.

25 Rg3 Qf7 26 Nfg2

The only way to continue, but a good one at that.

26...Na8!

Black hints at activating his dark-squared bishop and so causing a little bit of discomfort to the white king. However, White should just allow the bishop to a5 and/or the knight to b6, but already running low on time Kasparov errs.

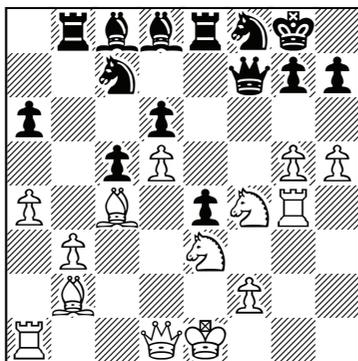


Diagram 9 (B)

A strong exchange sacrifice

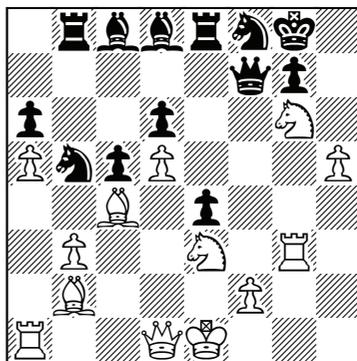


Diagram 10 (B)

Black is right back in the game!

27 a5? Nc7 28 Nh4 Nb5

That knight was certainly pretty fast in racing out of the corner!

29 g6?! hxg6 30 Nxg6 (Diagram 10) 30...Bf6?!

After such a tough manoeuvring struggle it is no surprise that both players were very low on time by this point and now it's Miles' turn to err. Instead 30...Nd4! 31 Kf1 Bf6 would have left Black beginning to take control of the game.

31 Bxb5 Rxb5 32 Qc2 Bxb2?! 33 Qxb2 Nxg6?

It's never easy to live with an enemy piece so close to one's king, but here Miles had to. Instead the counterblow 33...c4! would have left all three results very possible.

34 Rxg6 Re5 35 0-0-0! Rxh5 36 Rdg1

White has well and truly regained the initiative.

36...Rh7 37 Nc4 Qf4+ 38 Kb1 Rb7 39 Nxd6 Bf5 40 Rf6! (Diagram 11) 40...Qh2??

Miles slips up on the last move of the time control, although even with 40...e3+! 41 Nxf5 exf2 he wouldn't necessarily have saved himself on account of the brilliant 42 Rxg7+!! Rhxg7 43 Ne7+ Rbxe7 44 Rxf4 Re1+ 45 Ka2 f1Q 46 Rxf1 Rxf1 when White retains some winning chances thanks to his passed d-pawn and soon-to-be rampant queen.

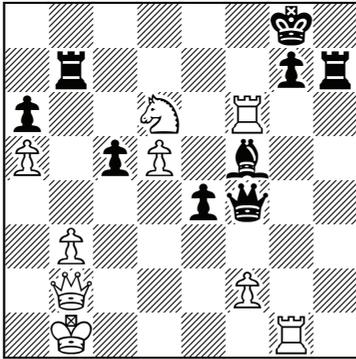


Diagram 11 (B)

The notorious move 40

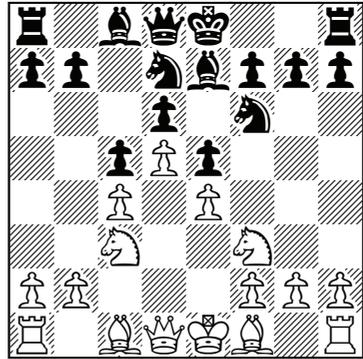


Diagram 12 (W)

An important move order

41 Rg3!

Cutting the black queen off from the defence and so deciding proceedings.

41...Qh1+ 42 Ka2 1-0

Exciting stuff and a game which in many ways Miles could be quite proud of. Even allowing for a sub-optimal opening set-up, the first English Grandmaster fought back well and managed to hold his own in the hand-to-hand fighting right up until the time scramble.



NOTE: I don't advocate retreating the king's knight to the back rank as early as Miles did, but he was certainly right that ...Nd7-f8-g6 is a much better early middlegame plan for Black than ...g7-g6 and ...Ne8-g7 against the Modern System.

Black Refuses to be Squashed

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7