



## C O L U M N I S T S

*Let's Take A  
Look...*

Nigel Davies

**ChessCafe** is pleased to introduce its newest columnist, British grandmaster Nigel Davies. His career highlights have seen many outstanding results, among them firsts at Linares International 1987, Owens Corning Wrexham International 1993, Gausdal International 1997, as well as being named the Player of the Year in the 2001 4NCL Division II.

He has authored or co-authored *Master Chess* (Pergamon Press 1985) with Chandler, Kopec, Morrison & Mullen; *Bobby Fischer: The \$5,000,000 Comeback* (Cadogan 1992) with Pein & Levitt; *The Chess Player's Battle Manual* (Batsford, 1998); *The Power Chess Program: Book 1* (Batsford, 1998); *The Power Chess Program: Book 2* (Batsford, 1999); *Kasparov v Kramnik, London 2000* (Batsford, 2000) with Andrew Martin; *Alekhine's Defence* (Everyman, 2002); *The Grünfeld Defence* (Everyman, 2002); and *Taming the Sicilian* (Everyman, 2002). He lives with his wife Louise and son Sam in Southport, England.



In his **ChessCafe** column, Nigel will be annotating games of the average club player, looking at the good, the bad and yes, the ugly, with an eye to help

everyone benefit and improve.

We invite you to submit games to be considered by Nigel in this column. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know. Please submit the games (in PGN or CBV format if possible) to: [nigeldavies@chesscafe.com](mailto:nigeldavies@chesscafe.com). Who knows, perhaps you will see the game in an upcoming column, as Nigel says to you, "Let's take a look..."

## How to Study the Opening

How should someone study the opening? The impression one might gain from many opening books is that they should be learned by rote; the books concerned compile huge trees of variations without saying a single word. If these variations were not important, surely the author would not see fit to mention them? And as there is not a word of explanation as to what each side is trying to do, might one not assume that this is of minor or zero importance? Is that not a logical conclusion from the way these books are 'written'?

Well not necessarily. It could be that compiling moves is just an easier option than actually explaining them. The drawback for the reader is that it's very easy to find yourself following the wrong path; as a 13-year-old living in the heyday of such 'literature', I remember trying to 'learn' the Sicilian Dragon by memorizing variations from a particular book. Needless to say I did not come to understand it very well and in one of my old Dragon games I see that I blocked my 'Dragon bishop' with a wholly inappropriate ...e7-e5. With even a modicum of understanding I would never have done such a thing.

After several similar experiences it was back to the drawing board; I came to the conclusion that relying on memory was ineffective at best. Even when I managed to learn the variations, I'd tend to forget them in a very short time. But the greatest problem was in knowing what to do when I reached the end of my variation, or if my opponents played some supposedly dubious alternative. Because I did not understand much about the actual positions, I was not well equipped to improvise if things changed slightly from my rote learned lines.

Over the years, and after much trial and error, I gradually became convinced that the key to playing the opening well was to understand the middle game. I discovered that when you know where your pieces belong it becomes much easier to develop them on the right squares in the first place. You also know which pawn structures to aim for and which to avoid.

When one sees things in this light it follows that one of the best ways to study the openings is to examine complete games, for then you can see each side's strategy unfold from the very first moves. Playing over a lot of games very quickly can give you a good feel for the general game plan. I also think it's useful to study well annotated games in particular variations, for then one gets to grips with the actual problems and issues that arise when the aims of the two players come into conflict.

One of my own practices, which I heartily recommend, is to tinker around with typical positions, trying different moves and ideas until you are satisfied you understand how the thing works. When I do this I find that the position becomes 'part of me' and I play it much better. It's a process by which you get to 'own' the ideas rather than just know about them.

To show the value of this kind of knowledge, let's take a look at the following game played by two players with very different strengths and weaknesses. It was evident from the start that White knew what he should be doing and had almost certainly spent some time on the niceties of these positions. Black, on the other hand, had to work it all out for himself, and whilst he managed to find some of the thematic ideas over the board, such as playing ...f7-f5, he did not find the key idea of bringing his knight to e6. Without this his position soon started to creak.

## ***J Turnock (2016) – Gary Murphy (1960)***

***Sicilian Defence***

**England 2003**

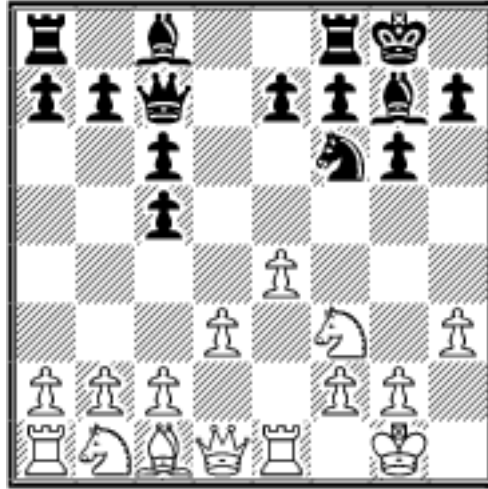
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5**

The so-called Rossolimo Variation, which lends the game a completely different character to the open lines with 3 d4. I know a number of Accelerated Dragon devotees who prefer to avoid it with 2...g6, not worrying about White's alternatives to transposing into a regular Accelerated Dragon such as 3 c3 or 3 d5 cxd4 4 Qxd4.

**3...g6 4 O-O**

The old move. Recently White has been playing 4 Bxc6 as after 4...dxc6 5 d3 he keeps the option of castling queenside. A nice example of this plan was Ivanchuk - Anand, London 1994, which went 5...Bg7 6 h3 e5 7 Be3 b6 8 Nc3 f6 9 Qd2 Be6 10 O-O-O Ne7 11 Bh6 O-O 12 g4 Nc8 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Nh4 Nd6 15 Ng2! (preparing to open up the king side with f2-f4) 15...Nb5 16 f4 Nd4 17 Rdf1 b5 18 Kb1 Qa5 19 b3 c4 20 Rf2 and White's attacking chances were more potent than anything Black could drum up on the other side of the board.

**4...Bg7 5 Re1 Nf6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 h3 O-O 8 d3 Qc7?!**



In this kind of position you really need to know what plan you should adopt as it's not easy to figure it out over the board. Although this looks like a natural move Black really needs to keep that c7 square free so he can route his

knight from f6 to e6 via e8 and c7. Over the next few moves things go badly wrong for Black as he struggles to make sense of his position.

To find examples of how to play this position, the obvious thing to do is to conduct a ChessBase search for games after 6...dxc6. But one can also look at games from the English Opening where you can get the same type of position with colors reversed.

A great expert in this kind of position is the German Grandmaster Wolfgang Uhlmann and his games are well worth studying. An example is the game Uhlmann – Jansa, Amsterdam 1975 which went as follows: 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 g3 Bb4 5 Bg2 O-O 6 O-O e4 7 Ne1 Bxc3 8 dxc3 h6 (Preventing Bc1-g5 because Black's knight on f6 is an important defender of the e4 pawn and d5 square. An example of Black omitting 8...h6 is the game Hardiscay – Lindgren, Budapest 2000, which went 8...d6 9 Bg5 Re8 10 Nc2 h6 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 Ne3 Bf5 13 f4 Qe6 and now 14 g4! Bh7 15 Qe1!? followed by 16 Qg3 looks nice for White - he has taken lots of space on the king side and Black's bishop on h7 is out of play) 9 Nc2 d6 10 Ne3 Re8 11 Qc2 Re5 12 Bd2 Bd7 13 f4 (White's knight is beautifully placed on e3) 13...exf3 14 exf3 Re8 15 Rae1 Ne7 16 b4 (Gaining space) 16...Qc8 17 Rf2 a5 18 Rfe2 Kf8 19 Bc1 b6 20 a3 Rb8 21 Qd3 Bc6 22 Nd5!? Nexd5 (After 22...Bxd5 23 cxd5 Nfxd5 24 c4 as White's bishops look very powerful) 23 Rxe8+ Bxe8 24 cxd5 Bd7 25 Qd4 Ng8 26 bxa5 bxa5 27 c4 Qb7 28 Bd2 a4 29 c5 Re8 (After 29...Qa7 White would play 30 Bb4 with strong pressure against d6) 30 c6 (Winning a pawn) 30...Rxe1+ 31 Bxe1 Qb1 32 cxd7 Qxe1+ 33 Bf1 Qe7 34 Qxa4 Qd8

35 Bb5 Nf6 36 Bc6 Ke7 37 Qd4 Nxd7 38 Qxg7 Ne5 39 Qxh6 Nxf3+ 40 Kg2 Ne5 41 Qh4+ f6 42 Qh7+ Nf7 43 Qf5 Kf8 44 Bb7 Ne5 45 a4 (45 Qc8 loses a pawn after 45...Qxc8 46 Bxc8 Nc4 47 a4 Nb6 etc) 45...Kg7 46 Qc8 Qe7 47 Qe6 Qd8 48 a5? (48 h4 looks better meeting 48...Qb8 with 49 Qc8 etc) 48...c5! 49 dxc6 Qxa5 50 h4 (50 Qxd6 still looks winning for White) 50...Qd2+ 51 Kh3 Qc1 52 Qe7+ Kg8 53 Qe6+ Kg7 54 Qe7+ Kg8 55 Qe6+ ½-½ (After 55 c7 there follows 55...Qf1+ 56 Bg2 Qf5+ 57 Kh2 Ng4+ with at least a draw)

After looking at a game like this you realize that the right way to play this was with 8...Ne8 (Intending...e7-e5 followed by...Ne8-c7-e6) after which 9 e5 Nc7 10 Nbd2 Ne6 11 a4 a5 12 Nc4 12 Qc7 (Only now!) 13 c3?! (Weakening d3) 13...Rd8 14 Qe2 b6 15 Nh2 b5 16 Na3 Qd7 17 Rd1 Ba6 gave Black excellent counter play in Mikadze - Meduna, Decin 1976.

### **9 e5 Nd5 10 b3 f5**

Black rightly feels that this is the kind of thing he should be doing, but now his knight gets driven to the awful b6 square. Objectively speaking his best move might well be 10 Qd8 freeing up c7 for the knight. Not that this is an easy thing to do after having played 8...Qc7.

### **11 c4 Nb6 12 Qe2 e6**

This looks like the point at which Black's position goes from grizzly to downright lost. After racking my brain I found a possible defense in 12...Re8, so as to meet 13 Ba3 with 13...Nd7 and send the knight towards e6 via f8. 12...Rd8 looks less good because of 13 Ba3 Nd7 14 d4 when the e7 pawn is hanging after 14...cxd4.

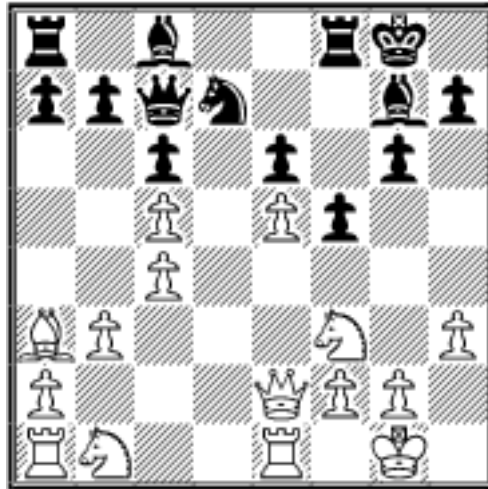
### **13 Ba3 Nd7**

After 13...Qe7 14 d4 Nd7 Black is horribly tied up. A sample variation is 15 Nc3 b6 16 dxc5 Nxc5 17 Na4 Rd8 18 Nxc5 bxc5 19 Qe3 Bf8 20 Red1 when White will bring his knight to d3 via e1 and win the c5 pawn.

### 14 d4 Qb6

Losing a pawn, but after 14...b6 15 Nc3 Black is hard pressed to find a move. After 15...Bb7 White plays 16 Na4 with unbearable pressure against c5 whilst 15...Rd8 is answered by 16 d5.

### 15 dxc5 Qc7



15...Nxc5 16 Qe3 wins the exchange, so Black settles for the loss of a pawn and a truly miserable position. The only thing he can do is to try to hang on and see if White slips up in his attempts to win.

**16 Nc3 Re8 17 b4 b6  
18 cxb6 axb6 19 Bb2  
Bf8 20 a3 Bb7 21 Rad1**

**Ra7**

**22 Nd4 Ba8 23 f4 Bh6 24 g3**

Personally speaking I would defend the f-pawn with 24 Bc1 rather than create weaknesses around the king. White is winning anyway, but if you take precautions like this it helps reduce the odds of an accident.

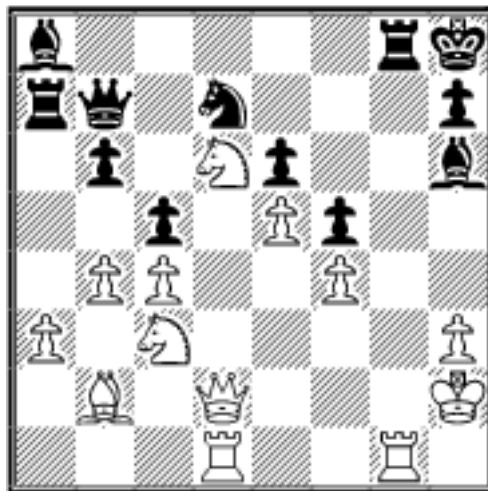
**24...Qb7 25 Kh2 Kh8 26 Qd2 g5 27 Rg1 gxf4 28 gxf4 c5!?**

With Black's position looking quite desperate he spots a really amazing swindle and decides to roll the dice. Objectively speaking it might have been better to play the stubborn 28...Nf8, which Black rejected during the game because of 29 Nxf5 exf5 30 e6. But this is unconvincing after 30...Bg7 (and not 30...Nxe6 because of 31 Nb5+ Bg7 32 Nxa7 Qxa7 33 Rxg7 Nxg7 34 Rg1 Rg8 35 Rxg7 Rxg7 36 Qd8 mate) 31 Nb5 cxb5 32 Rxg7 Qxg7 with plenty of bits and pieces for the queen.

**29 Ndb5 Rg8**

This looks like a defensive move, but in fact it contains a huge threat! It also tempts White to play for mate.

**30 Nd6??**



Falling for it, hook, line and sinker. White should first play 30 Rxg8+ after which 30...Kxg8 31 Rg1+ defends everything. After 31...Kf8 (in this position 31...Kh8 could be safely met by 32 Nd6) White can start

taking material with 32 Nxa7.



### **30...Bxf4+!!**

Kapow! A bolt from the blue!

### **31 Qxf4 Qh1+!!**

And now a queen sacrifice!

### **32 Rxf4 Rg2 mate**

A really great 'swindle' by Murphy, worthy I'd say of the great Frank Marshall. It would be interesting to see how strong Murphy could become if he also had good understanding of certain middle game positions to supplement his tactical flair and imagination.

Turnock played well in the opening and early middle game showing good positional understanding, but did not sense danger well enough and then overlooked Black's combination. He should probably spend some time trying to sharpen his tactics, and I'll discuss how to do that in a later column.

### **Further Reading**

*Winning With The French* by Wolfgang Uhlmann (Batsford, 2002): Uhlmann is an acknowledged expert on the openings he plays and his name has become synonymous with the French Defence. It's well worth taking a look at this book to understand how he thinks.

*Opening Preparation* by Mark Dvoretsky (Batsford,

1994): One of the most enlightening books around about opening issues.

*Ideas Behind The Chess Openings* by Reuben Fine (Bell, 1948): More than half a century old this is still the best book around for explanations of the openings.

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