

The rise and fall of . . . Nb6!?

KEEPING UP to date on opening theory is very much part of a professional player's preparation for tournaments. Some months ago in England I took up the Caro-Kann defence and aside from consistently playing it in English events I also looked up as much of the current theory as I could find on the defence.

In one of the books I found a very interesting alternative to an old variation which had become popular after Fischer, as White,

scored a decisive victory over Euwe with it. The game by Fischer-Euwe went as follows:

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.eXd5 cXd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cXd5 NXd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 e6 (9... NXd4 10.Bb5 ch, 9... Nxc3 10.Qxb7 and 9... Ndb4 10.Be3 NXd4 11.BXd4 QXd4 12.Bb5 ch Nc6 13.0-0 all win for White) 10.Qxb7 NXd4 11.Bb5 ch Nxb5 12.Qc6 ch Ke7 13.Qxb5 Nxc6? (13... Qd7! is not so bad).

14.bxc3 Qd7 15.Rb1! with a big advantage.

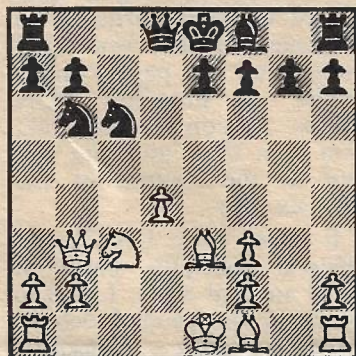
Hence the 8.Qb3 variation became popular for some time and the first appearance of 9... Nb6!? did nothing to lessen it. The game Zuravljec-Gutman followed Fischer-Euwe until move 9 when Gutman as Black essayed 9... Nb6 10.d5 Nd4 11.Qd1 e5!? 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.Be3 Bc5 14.b4 Qf6! 15.bxc5 Nxf3 ch 16.Ke2 0-0 17.cxb6 Qxc3? 18.Bg2 Qc4 ch 19.Qd3 with a big advantage.

However, not to be beaten 9... Nb6 bounced back again in the form of Hermlin-Piskin, corr. 76 when instead of 17... Qxc3 as in the previous game, Black found a way to continue the attack with 17... Rad8!! 18.Qc1 (Or 18.Qb3 Nd4 ch 19.BXd4 RXd4 20.Nd1 Re4 ch 21.Kd3 Qd4 22.Kc2 Qxa1 etc. or 18.Qc2 Nd4 ch 19.BXd4 QXd4 20.Ke1 Rxf2! 21.Rd1 Rxc2 22.RXd4 RXd4 23.bxa7 Rd8 with a slight plus. Best is 18.Bg2 RXd1

19.RhXd1 aXb6 20.RaC1 NXd2 with an unclear position) 18... Qf5 19.Qb1 Qh5! (19... Qg4 20.Qe4!=) 20.Qb2 Qg4 21.Qb3 Nd4 ch 22.Ke1 Nxb3 23.aXb3 Qb4 24.Rc1 Qxb3 25.bxa7 Rc8 26.Bd2 Qb6 27.Be3 Qa5 28.a8=Q Qxa8 29. Resigns.

After that display I was almost on the verge of taking up the Caro-Kann solely in the hope of my opponent playing that variation!

Then the Martin/Bellon game turned up (see my July



9, 1977 column) and I was inspired to take up that particular defence against the dangerous Pannov-Botvinnik attack. Things worked out well for a while, ie the following game I played as Black against a not too weak opponent at Ilford, 1977.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.eXd5 cXd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cXd5 NXd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 Nb6!? 10.d5 Nd4 11.Qd1 e5 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.Be3 Bc5 14.b4 Qf6! 15.bxc5 Nxf3 ch 16.Ke2 0-0 17.cxb6 Rad8! 18.Qc2 Nd4 ch 19.BXd4 QXd4. (Of course up to here we are still following the Hermlin-Piskin notes; now my opponent varies and it does not take long to find Black's killer), 20.f3 Rxf3! 21.Nd1 Qe5 ch! 22.Kxf3 Rf8 ch 23.Kg4 Qf4 ch 24.Kh3 Qf3 ch 25.Kg4 Rf4 ch and mate next move.

So, the preparation paid off and I decided to reserve this as my secret weapon in the Asian Junior. However the only game I played with it was against Australia's Dan Fardell when I was cruising to first place in the second to last round.

Fardell-Chandler 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.eXd5 cXd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cXd5 NXd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 Nb6 10.d5 Nd4 11.Qd1 e5 12.dxe6 fxe6.

Draw agreed! I did not totally trust the 18.Bg2 line and I needed a draw to virtually secure first place — in the final round I was paired against scoreless Philip Goodings.

So next I imported 17... Rad8! to Austria for the World Junior. But alas! During round 8, I saw the Hungarian representative, H. Groszpeter churning out the first few moves as Black against the Mexican player M. Sisniega. "After this the whole tournament will know the line," I groaned to Rayner, the Welsh player, and I went back to my own game. Shortly afterwards I looked up and the boy on the demonstration board was resetting the pieces and he placed Sisniega's king in the centre, signalling he had won! The tournament bulletin told the sad story: Sisniega (Mexico) — Groszpeter (Hungary) 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.eXd5 cXd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.cXd5 NXd5 8.Qb3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 Nb6? 10.Be3!

An excellent move which gives White a big advantage.

Obviously Black cannot play 10... NXd4 11.BXd4 QXd4 because of 12.Bb5 ch. The rest of the game is really just a sample variation of how bad the Black position is. 10... e6 11.0-0-0 Rc8 12.Kb1! Qc7 13.Nb5 Qb8 14.Nxa7 Nxa7 (If 14... Qxa7 15.d5), 15.Qxb6 Nc6 16.d5 exd5 17.Bh3 Rd8

18.Re1 Bd6 19.Bg5 Ne7 20.Rxe7 ch Bxe7 21.Re1 Qd6 (21... fh 22.Bxf6!) 22.QXd6 Resigns.

Yes, well... so much for that defence. I have a feeling that Sisniega's 10.Be3! was flown in from the USSR however; his second was Russian International Grandmaster Vasiukov.

So reading books is no substitute for actually being on the spot and I immediately gave up that variation pending anything new for Black. That game will not see daylight in magazines for some months yet.

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