



Playing for a Win with ...b6

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Chess Informant

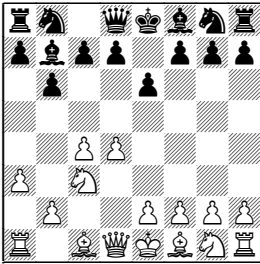
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The Week In Chess (www.theweekinchess.com)

Chess Publishing (www.chesspublishing.com)

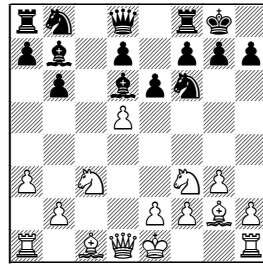
Introduction

For many years my only experience with the fianchetto 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 was from the White side. I did not study any theory as I was pretty confident that White is better after 3.a3 ♖b7 4.♗c3, followed by d5, g3, ♕g2.



Gradually I noticed that I was not getting any advantage as Black attacked the d5-pawn with too many pieces after ...c6, ...♗b8-a6-c7. I made some database research and found that indeed, 3.a3 was yielding some mildly positive score of 56.7%, while “normal” developing moves like 3.♗c3 and 3.♗f3 failed to even keep White above water! That stirred my interest and I analysed more thoroughly the diagram position.

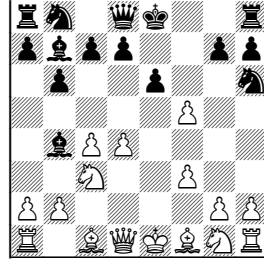
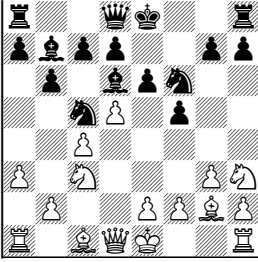
I discovered that Black does not have any theoretical problems in the following critical line:



The only drawback is that the move order 4...♗f6 5.♗f3 requires knowledge of the Petrosian System of the QID, so included Chapter 14 with a short survey of it.

Then I moved to the Dutch set-up 4...f5!. Basically I would play ...f5 only to undermine e4, but in this particular case the harmless move a3 gives us a vital tempo. We can even fight for the initiative in the rich positions that arise after 5.d5 or 5.♗f3. I cover them in Chapter 4. The typical set-up is with a bishop on d6, which we could shift to e5 or leave it on d6 after ♗b5:

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This line is my favourite way to play for a win against 3.a3.

The initial results of my study were so encouraging, that I turned ...b6 into my only riposte to 1.d4 and 1.c4. Many hundreds (if not thousands) of blitz games later, I can claim that the English Defence is a perfect way to break free from the boring balanced lines of the modern main openings. I can only admire the intuition and guts of the Englishmen Tony Miles, Jon Speelman and Raymond Keene. They took up the invention of Philip Wallis and popularized it at high level in the seventies, when official theory would discard it as an “irregular” opening. Well, nowadays everybody plays it, even World champion Carlsen.

The critical line is of course 3.e4 ♖b4+!, when the fact that we saved ...♗f6 allows us to destroy the enemy centre with ...f5. The whole English Defence “hangs” on the evaluation of the following position, where Black’s last move was 6...♗h6!!.

I believe that exactly this discovery of Miles, who beat Panno in 1979, spurred the development of the system. The point is to sacrifice a second pawn after 7.fxe6 ♗f5!!.

I met this idea for the first time when playing for the Bulgarian national team against France. The move order was different:

Semkov-Bricard, Sofia 1990: 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♖b7 4.f3 f5 5.exf5 ♗h6!!.

Here I chickened out and traded queens with 6.♗xh6 ♕h4+ 7.g3 ♕xh6 8.♖d2, to eventually win an equal endgame.

Modern engines confirm that Black has fair compensation for the pawn. More importantly, he owns the initiative. That is often decisive, especially in rapid chess.

Deviations from the main lines

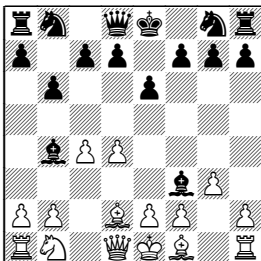
You can learn the most principled lines for just a few days. They took me only 3 chapters. However, when we start building a complete repertoire, we face a flood of transpositions to other open-

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ings. I made my best to cover all the tricks White may try to drag you in the main line of the Queen's Indian Defence with g3. However, there is no way to prepare a standalone repertoire, based only on the English Defence.

Let's start with the first move. I definitely discarded 1.d4 b6 since White will get an excellent version of the Sicilian after 2.e4! and ...c5. And I do not want to hear about the Hippopotamus as an option. We should aim to win by playing best possible moves, not cafe chess. So we start with 1.d4 e6! (but 1.c4 b6! to avoid 2.g3). At this point White can still answer 2.e4, but the French 2...d5! is as viable as ever. If you do not play it, it would be a good occasion to start!. After all, if your opponents open the game with 1.d4, they are hardly the best connoisseurs of 1.e4 e6.

I frequently face 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘f3 ♙b7 4.g3. White expects to transpose to the QID after 4...♘f6, but 4...♙b4+!? 5.♙d2 ♘xf3! always acts as a cold shower.



White does not perform well with split pawns after ...♘f6 and ...d5, and by all means this structure is not what he hoped for when playing 4.g3.

Even worse, he often drops a pawn after 5.♘bd2 ♘xf3! 6.exf3 ♘c6 7.a3 ♘xd2+ 8.♙xd2 ♗f6! with a double hit on f3 and d4 – 9.d5 ♘d4.

The biggest challenge is 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3. 2...b6 is still bad owing to 3.e4!, remember?

The only way to exploit White's passive approach to the centre is 2...c5!? (this also works against 2.g3). The point is that 3.d5 would pass the initiative to Black after 3...exd5 and ...♘f6. There is a catch though – 3.e4 converts to the Sicilian! If you are interested in it, you may look at my recent book *The Taimanov-Scheveningen Hybrid*. Here I cover in separate chapters:

Chapter 9. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3

Chapter 10. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4

Chapter 11. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3

Chapter 12. London and Jobava Systems.

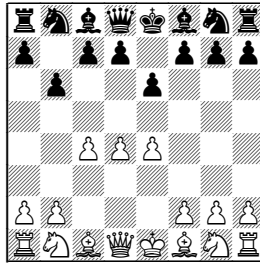
Chapter 13 is devoted to the English Opening 1.c4 b6, when White refrains from d2-d4.

Thus I propose a full repertoire against 1.d4 and 1.c4, which is theoretically sound and leads to sharp, strategically unbalanced positions.

Semko Semkov, March 2023

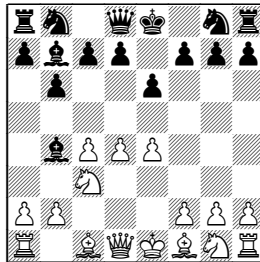
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3...♖b4+ 4.♗d2 (4.♘c3 25; 4.♘d2 10) 4...♗xd2+ 5.♙xd2 (5.♘xd2 10)
5...d5! 11

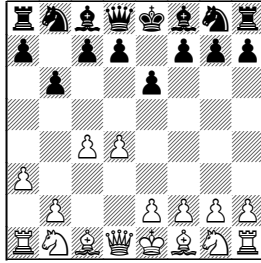
Chapter 2. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♖b4+ 4.♘c3 ♗b7



5.f3 f5 25 (5...♗xc3+!? 25)
5.♗d3 30
5.♙c2 34
5.d5 35

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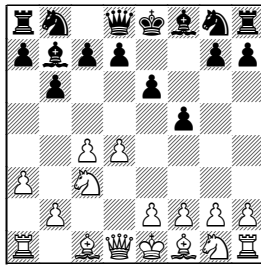
Chapter 3. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.a3!?



3...♘f6 (3...♙b7 4.♘c3 f5 65) 4.♘c3 ♙b7 5.♙g5 48 (5.♘f3 227; 5.f3 48; 5.♙f4 48)

5.d5 50

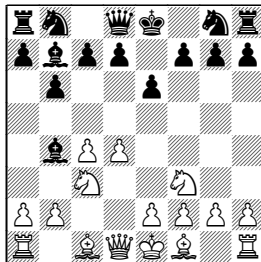
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5.♘f3 66

5.d5 68

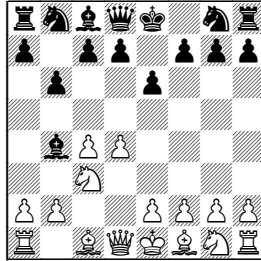
Chapter 5. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 ♙b7



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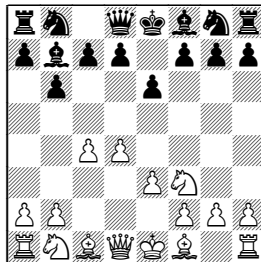
5.♔d2 92 (5.♖c2 ♘f6 115; 5.e3 ♙xc3+ 120; 5.♗b3 a5 125)
5.♙g5 95
5.g3 96

Chapter 6. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘c3 ♙b4



4.♖c2 113 (4.f3 113) 4...♙b7 5.a3 ♙xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♘f6 7.♙g5 113
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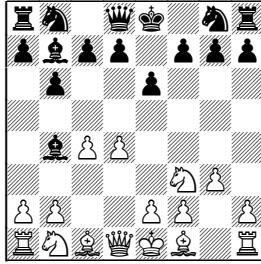
Chapter 7. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘f3 ♙b7 4.e3



4...♘f6 (4...f5 137) 5.♔d3 (5.♘c3 137) 5...d5 6.0-0 138
6.cxd5 140
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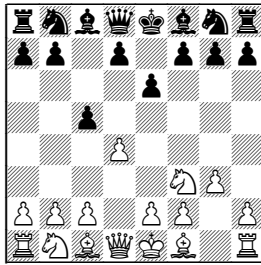
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Chapter 8. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘f3 ♗b7 4.g3 ♗b4+



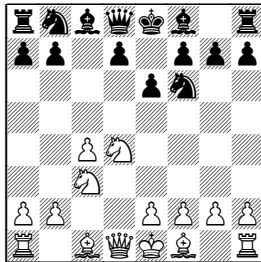
5.♗d2 (5.♘c3 96; 5.♘bd2 151) 5...♗xf3 151

Chapter 9. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3



3...cxd4 4.♗xd4 d5 5.♗g2 ♘f6 6.c4 162
6.0-0 164

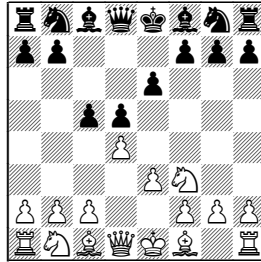
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5...♘c6 (5...♗b4 173) 6.g3 (6.e4 ♗b4 173; 6.a3 173; 6.♘db5 174) 6...
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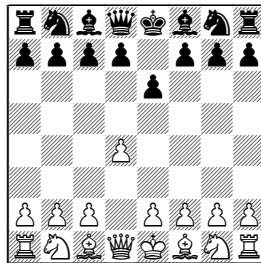
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4.b3 186 4...♗f6 5.♙d3 ♗c6 6.♙b2 b6 7.♗bd2 ♙e7 8.0-0 187
8.a3 188

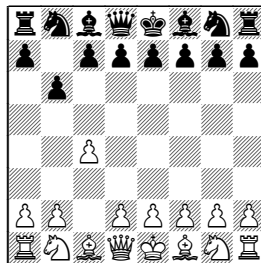
Chapter 12. 1.d4 e6



2.♙f4 c5 3.e3 (3.c3 ♖b6 197) 3...♖b6 198

2.♗f3 c5 3.c3 d5 4.♙f4 ♖b6 200

Chapter 13. 1.c4 b6

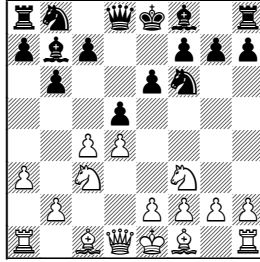


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2.♖c3 ♗b7 3.e4 (3.♗f3 e6 4.g3 213) 3...e6 214 (3...e5 214)

2.♗f3 ♗b7 3.g3 c5 (3...♗xf3 217) 4.♗g2 g6 217

Chapter 14. 1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 b6 4.♖c3 ♗b7 5.a3 d5



6.cxd5 227 (6.♗g5 227; 6.♖c2 227) 6...♗xd5 7.♖c2 228 (7.e3 228)