

Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

by IM Nikolay Minev

#8: The French Defense Rubinstein Variation is in Trouble

Recent statistics show that the French Defense-Rubinstein Variation (after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 (3.Nd2) dxe4) Black loses about 90% of the games at all levels of play. The reason is, I think, that the pawn structure that arises for Black is passive, and only a small number of players are able to successfully handle such positions. Or, are there other reasons for such results? Perhaps you will find something more in the following games, with troubles for the Black side.

C10 B. Macieja – V. Laznicka
Khanty-Mansiysk (Russia) 2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6+

This continuation is considered by the books as White's strongest.

6...Nxf6 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4!?

For 8.Bxf6 – see next game.

8...c5

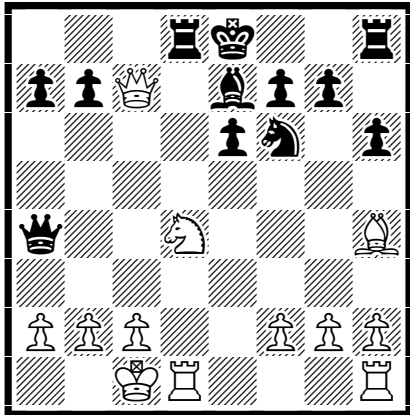
8...Be7!?

9.Bb5+!?

Usual is 9.Bc4.

9...Bd7 10.Bxd7+ Qxd7 11.Qe2! cxd4 12.O-O-O Bc5? 13.Qe5 Be7 14.Nxd4 Qa4 15.Qc7! Rd8

If 15...Qxa2 then 16.Nc6!! wins.



16.Nf5!! Rd7

Or 16...exf5 17.Rxd8+ Bxd8 18,Re1+ and White wins.

17.Qc8+ Rd8 18.Nxg7+ 1-0

C10 V. Topalov - E. Bareev
Monaco (Rapid) 2002

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 dxe4 5.Nxe4 Nbd7 6.Nf3 h6 7.Nxf6+ Nxf6 8.Bxf6 Qxf6

Tournament practice shows that after 8...gxf6 9.Bc4 White has better chances.

9.Bb5+!?

9.Bd3!? or 9.Bc4!? are the usual choices.

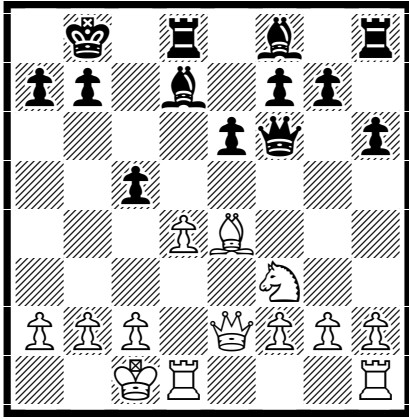
9...c6 10.Bd3 Bd7 11.Qe2 c5?!

Better is 11...Bd6 12.O-O-O O-O-O with an approximately equal game.

12.O-O-O! O-O-O

If 12...cxd4, then 13.Be4 or 13.Bb5!?

13.Be4 Kb8



14.Ne5!! cxd4 15.Bxb7!! Qf4+

If 15...Kxb7 16.Qe4+ Kc7 17.Qxd4 Be8 18.Qxa7+ Kc8 19.Rxd8+ Qxd8 20.Nc4! and wins.

16.Kb1 Kxb7 17.g3 Qf5 18.Rxd4 Bc5 19.Rf4! Qg5 20.h4 1-0

Because of 20...Qe7 21.Rxf7 Qe8 22.Qb5+ and wins.

**C10 S. Karjakin – A. Rychagov
Russia (ch team) 2007**

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6+ Nxf6 7.c3

Another rare and interesting plan for White's development.

7...c5 8.Be3 Qc7

Somebody should try 8...Ng4.

9.Ne5!

The point of White's plan.

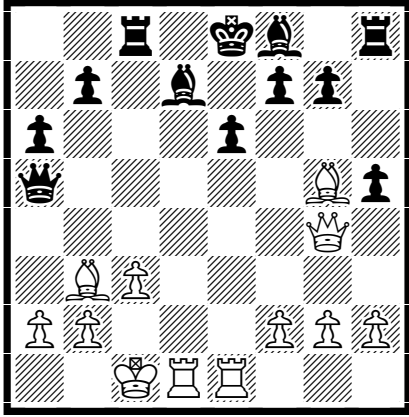
9...a6 10.Qa4+ Nd7 11.O-O-O cxd4 12.Nxd7 Bxd7 13.Qxd4

White stands clearly better.

13...Bc6

If 13...O-O-O? 14.Bf4 Qa5 15.Qa7 and wins.

14.Bc4 Rd8 15.Qg4 Bd7 16.Bb3 Qa5 17.Bg5! Rc8 18.Rhe1 h5



19.Bxe6!! Ba3

If 19...hxg4 20.Bxd7#, also 19...fxe6 20.Rxe6+ or 19...Rxc3+ 20.Kb1! and wins.

20.Bxd7+ Kf8 21.Qg3! h4

If 21...Rxc3+ 22.Kb1! Rxg3 23.Re8# or 21...Ra8 21.bxa3.

22.Qe5 1-0

C10 P. Svidler – E. Bareev

Wijk aan Zee 2004

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Bd3

This continuation is also quite popular and successful too!

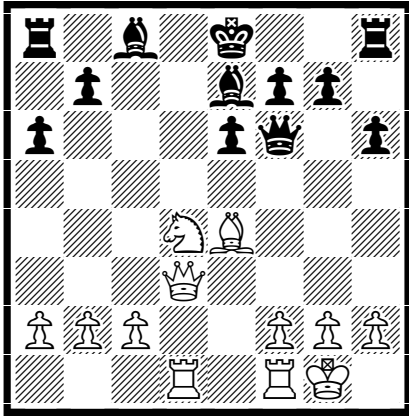
6...c5 7.O-O Nxe4 8.Bxe4 Nf6 9.Bg5 cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6?!

10...Be7!?

11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Qd3!

Threatening 13.Bxb7 Bxb6 14.Qb5+

12...a6 13.Rad1 Be7



14.Nc6! e5

Black should play 14...O-O, with a worse, but still playable, position.

15.Nxe7 Qxe7 16.f4 exf4?

A blunder. However, also after the best 16...O-O 17.f5! f6 18.Qb3+ Kh8 19.Rd3 White has a big advantage.

17.Bxb7! 1-0

Because of 17...Qxb7 18.Qd8# or 17...Bxb7 18.Rfe1.

C10 A. Khalifman - E. Bareev

Wijk aan Zee 2002

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Bd3 Ngf6 6.Qe2!?

An interesting order of moves which, in my opinion, deserves serious consideration. Usual is 6.Nf3 or 6.Nxf6+.

6...c5

If 6...Nxe4 7.Bxe4 Nf6? 8.Bxb7! Bxb7 9.Qb5+.

7.Nxf6+ Nxf6 8.dxc5 Bxc5 9.Bd2

White stands better.

9...O-O 10.O-O-O!?

A formidable sacrifice of two pawns that at first glance looks like a terrible mistake!

10...Qd5 11.Kb1 Qxg2 12.Nf3 Qxf2 13.Qe5

Two open files against Black's castled position provide good compensation for the sacrificed pawns, but the game is far from over.

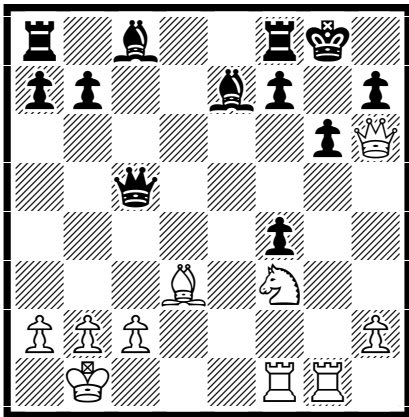
13...Be7

Instead 13...Qxf3 14.Qxc5 looks much more dangerous to Black. For 13...Nd7 – see next game.

14.Rdf1 Qc5 15.Qg3 Nh5 16.Qh3 g6 17.Rhg1 Nf4?

This tactical defense is the decisive mistake. Instead Black should try 17...Ng7.

18.Bxf4 e5 19.Qh6 exf4

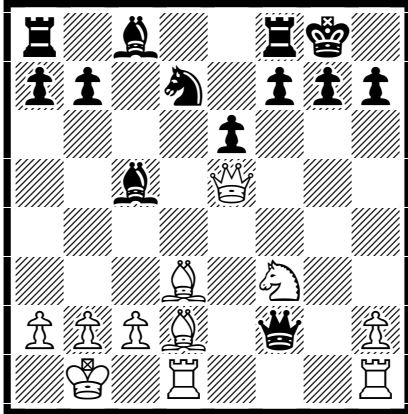


20.Rg5!! 1-0

Because of 20...Qd6 21.Rh5! with inevitable mate.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Bd3 Ngf6 6.Qe2 c5 7.Nxf6+ Nxf6 8.dxc5 Bxc5 9.Bd2 O-O 10.O-O-O Qd5 11.Kb1 Qxg2 12.Nf3 Qxf2 13.Qe5 Nd7

Even worse than 13...Be7 as in the previous game Khalifman – Bareev.



14.Bxh7+! Kxh7 15.Qh5+ Kg8 16.Rhg1! Be3

If 16...Nf6 17.Rxg7+! Kxg7 18.Qg5+ Kh7 19.Qxf6 and Black is hopeless. For example 19...Qg2 20.Ng5+ Kg8 21.Qh6 or 19...Qe2 20.Re1 Qf2 (if 20...Qc4 or 20...Qg2 then 21.Ng5+ Kg8 22.Qh6) 21.Bc3 Rg8 22.Qxf7+ Kh6 23.Qxg8 Qxf3+ 24.Bd2+ and White wins.

17.Bxe3 Qxe3 18.Rg3 Qc5

Or 18...Qe4 19.Rh3 f6 20.Rg1 and wins.

19.Qh6 1-0