



A SELECTION OF OPENING CHOICES FROM THE 2023 WORLD CUP IN BAKU

How To Prepare Openings?

Instead of following the engine's top choices, why don't you make your own preferred choices? If approved, you'll have an original opening repertoire which you can fully understand, rather than blindly memorizing and following those top choices of the engines. In the examples that follow, you will learn how to approach opening preparation, and also note how some "secondary" lines might bring success.

By GM Emilio Cordova

Nowadays the input of computers in the chess world has placed openings on a "what to play list". However the next step is how to utilize the engines in the proper way, especially in the openings, so we can benefit from this valuable and amazing assistant in a way that will fulfil our needs. It must never be forgotten that, at the end of the day, the engine is just a tool, a very efficient one but nevertheless still a tool.

Moreover engines have made openings the most important focus of preparation before entering a tournament. Therefore, I will take the opportunity to introduce you to the topic of "how to prepare openings" with help of examples taken from the prestigious FIDE World Cup 2023. This strong tournament provided many interesting and playable ideas in various well-known setups – fresh ideas that will guide us when working with our silicone friend.

In this article I aim to present a variety of games with different setups, such as the English, Caro-Kann, Rossolimo, Open Sicilian, Neo Grunfeld, and Catalan.

So, let's begin in order – by ECO codes.

A

THE ENGLISH OPENING

The English Opening has always been considered a very sound and rock-solid

opening. Strategically speaking, this opening adopts more of a long-term approach – in other words it aims for superior endgames. In this case, let's investigate an interesting and easy-going line for Black, which will enable you to deal with the English Opening quite effectively.

A34

Hikaru Nakamura	2787
R. Praggnanandhaa	2707

Round 4, Game 1, World Cup, Baku 2023

1.c4 Some say the English Opening is a "Sicilian with an extra tempo"... However, the approach of this flexible opening is a little different from the ever dynamic Sicilian. In fact, generally speaking, the English Opening is far more positional and quiet than the Sicilian.

1...d5 **2.c3** **c5** **3.g3** **d5** **4.cxd5** **xd5** This is considered to be the most direct way to adopt a specific setup against the English. It is not about a right or wrong system, it is up to you whether or not you like what you see on the board. In fact, Black's main ideas rather resemble the Maroczy Bind with colors reversed – quiet positions with broad scope and solid control of the center.

5.g2 **xc7** **6.f3** **xc6** **7.d3** **e5** Now we can see some resemblance to the ever solid and logical Maroczy Bind. **8.d2** **xe7** **9.c4** **0-0** **10.0-0**

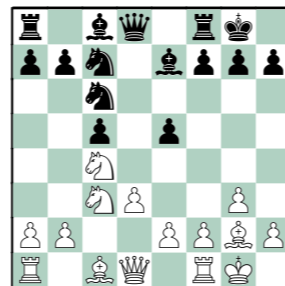
A **R** 1. d4, 1. e4
1. d4 R 1... d5, 1... f6
1. d4 f6 R 2. c4
1. d4 f6 2. c4 R 2... e6, 2...g6

B 1. e4 R 1... c5, 1...e6, 1...e5
1. e4 c5

C 1. e4 e6
1. e4 e5

D 1. d4 d5
1. d4 f6 2. c4 g6 3... d5

E 1. d4 f6 2. c4 e6
1. d4 f6 2. c4 g6 3... d5

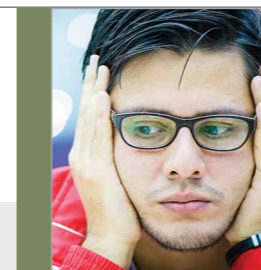


10...f6 As in any Maroczy Bind, it's important not to rush but keep improving and reinforcing the center, while gaining space on the queenside. The key is to restrain any attempts by your opponent to weaken your pawn structure.

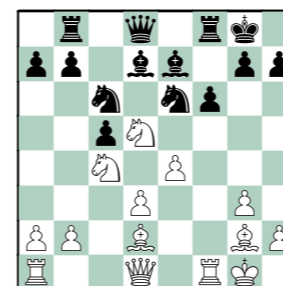
10...d7!? is an interesting try if you are looking for a sharper game. **11.xc6** Most of the time, trading the light-squared bishop for the knight is not so attractive for White, since the g2-bishop is the key piece in this position... White needs to have full control of the position in order to proceed with this exchange of pieces. **11...xc6** **12.xe5** **xe8** Black is down a pawn, but the bishop pair in a semi-open position, plus the activity of his pieces, together with the weaknesses on White's kingside, should give Black enough compensation.

In this connection let me reveal a little secret – "If you are down a pawn but in return you have the bishop pair in a semi-open position, then you are not really down a full pawn – maybe only half a pawn!". So, don't be afraid.

11.f4 **xf4** **12.f4** **xe6** Controlling the center is the key, never forget that! **13.d2** **d7** A "no rush" strategy. **14.d5** **b8** **15.e4**



Emilio Cordova a Peruvian Grandmaster, peaked at a 2660 FIDE rating in December 2016. A talented junior, he won multiple Pan-American championships and has represented Peru in seven Chess Olympiads from 2004-2022, leading the team in 2016, 2018, and 2022. Cordova was the American Continental Champion in 2016 and tied for first in 2017. As part of the Webster Chess Team, he earned several Pan-Am titles and an individual gold in 2019. Emilio also has over 14 years of coaching experience.



15...b5 Gaining space and playing on the queenside forms part of Black's main strategy here. Don't try to play on the kingside – it's better to concentrate your mind on the center and queenside.

16.xe7+ **xe7** **17.d3** **ed4** Black has gained powerful control of the center and a very easy-going position. After a fierce fight, this game ended in a draw.

17...a5!? **18.f5** **d8** **19.c1** In any case, Black should be happy with the position he has reached with his choice of opening.

This line can be considered as a very nice and concrete line to play against the ever-solid English. The ideas are not so difficult, and the move order is very natural. But always keep in mind not to rush!

B

CARO-KANN

The Caro-Kann Defense is known for its solidity and quiet positional play. However, such an assessment does not really convey the essence of this defense. In fact, its flexibility makes it a very interesting choice and fun to learn.

B12

Ivan Cheparinov	2663
Jan-Krzysztof Duda	2732

Round 3, Game 1, World Cup, Baku 2023

1.e4 **c6** **2.d4** **d5** The Caro-Kann is a more flexible setup than I previously thought! **3.e5** With this advance, White is telling his opponent that his intentions are to gain space and attack on either flank, depending on Black's reaction. Indeed, it is the side having a space advantage who has the better chance to operate on both sides of the board.

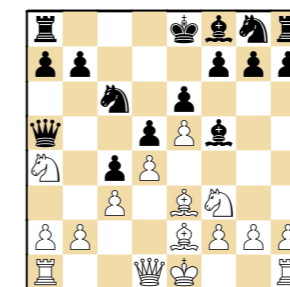
3...f5 Compared to the French Defense, in the Caro-Kann Black has the opportunity to develop his light-squared bishop. However, this will not be for free, as it will cost him some extra tempi.

4.f3 **4.h4** is another interesting try for White. The idea is to gain more space and provoke some weaknesses on the kingside. On the other hand, **4.d2** is considered to be the move leading to a gain of space on the queenside.

4...e6 **5.e2** **c5** It is very important to solidify the center with ...e6, before proceeding to undermine White's center with ...c7-c5. Never forget that remaining solid is your responsibility!

6.e3 **b6** Once the center is secured, you can always seek adventure by being a little more intrepid.

7.c3 **xc6** **8.a4** **a5+** **9.c3** **c4**



You won't normally see this move very often, since Black's main idea relies on effective pressure against d4. However, here Black will gain a powerful pawn phalanx on the queenside, as he would by the customary ...f7-f6, which will result in making White's center less stable. In fact, the ...f7-f6 thrust is considered to be the key idea in this type of structure.

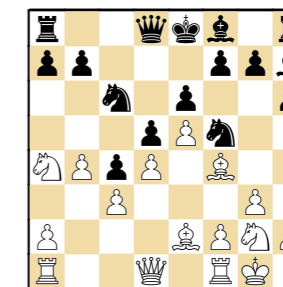
In general, if you see an enemy pawn that has crossed the middle of the board and it is depriving your pieces of free movement, try to formulate plans which can help you to undermine that pawn.

10.b4 **d8** **11.0-0** **h6** It is very important

to open a window for your light-squared bishop. If you have the chance to retain this piece, than do so. The text move is not only directed towards preserving a good square for the f5 bishop, but also enables Black to play ..g7-g5 in some positions.

12.e1 **ge7** **13.g3** **h7** Once the bishop gets to h7, the f5 square becomes attractive, since from there Black's knight will exert pressure on both d4 and the kingside, allowing it a multi-purpose function.

14.g2 **xf5** **15.f4**



15...xb4! By going for this amazing sacrifice, Black will obtain a very powerful pawn chain, together with control of the center. Now we can see how effective are the bishop on h7 and the knight on f5.

16.cxb4 **fxd4** **17.d3** **xe2+** **18.xe2** **xb4** Black has three pawns for a piece. After a tough and lengthy battle the game ended in a draw. However, it was Black who was striving for more.

In general, we can learn a lot from basic but relevant ideas – like the setup with the bishop going to h7 and knight going to f5. Combining these two pieces in a productive way might help Black seize the initiative. Never forget that once White plays 3.e5, Black's main idea will be to remain flexible at all times by considering the pawn breaks ...f7-f6, ...g7-g5, and ...c7-c5.

THE SICILIAN DEFENSE

The Rossolimo Variation has become one of the top choices for players who are tired of coping with the huge amount of theory that has developed in the Open Sicilian. Most of the critical ideas will be explained from both sides' perspectives, since I believe that this opening can be readily played on pure chess understanding. Moreover, lately there has been a very strong tendency to play the Rossolimo against the Sicilian, therefore it's important to know a bit more about the main ideas of this opening.



B30

Magnus Carlsen	2835
Nijat Abasov	2646

Semi-final match, Game 1, World Cup, Baku 2023

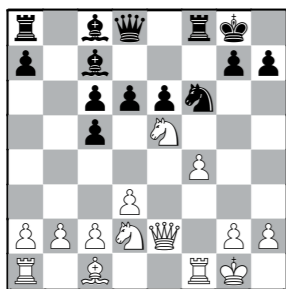
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 The Rossolimo has accumulated a lot of fans in recent years. Its simple strategy and easy-going play have made this line a very popular choice among players of all strengths. In a sense the main idea of the Rossolimo resembles a purely classical style – it relies on completing White’s piece development quite quickly and, if possible, damaging Black’s pawn structure in the process.

3...e6 The “...e6 line” can be considered as “forever green”. Some years ago, 3...g6 was literally everyone’s top choice!

4.♙xc6 bxc6 Here we have a very unbalanced game, where both sides have their pluses and minuses. White has the better pawn structure, fewer weaknesses and a long term perspective where quiet maneuvers will make all the difference. In contrast, Black has the bishop pair, and is looking for a more dynamic game in which tactics and initiative will play the leading role.

5.b3 Probably one of the most interesting move orders. Black aims to obtain a very powerful and flexible pawn center. In fact, what matters the most is how flexible your pawn structure can be in order to allow active piece play, particularly for the bishops. I’d like to illustrate Black’s main ideas in the following lines.

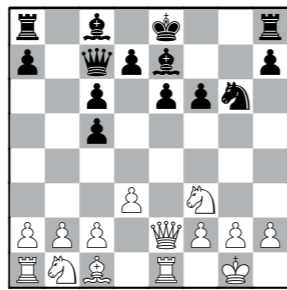
5.e5?! is not bad, but at least to me is a somewhat suspect idea. 5...f6! is the main response. Black uses his f-pawn to undermine the opponent’s e-pawn, and thereby reconstruct his pawn center by later playing ...d7-d6. Then play can continue 6.d3 fxe5 7.♗xe5 ♖f6 8.0-0 ♙d6 9.f4 0-0 10.♗e2 ♙c7 11.♗d2 d6...



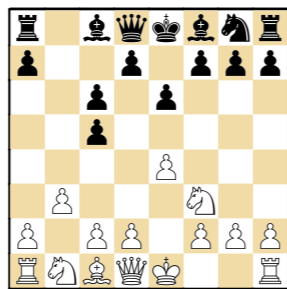
...achieving the ideal setup! Taking a close look at Black’s pawn structure illustrates what it means to have a flexible pawn structure. Mobility, flexibility, and protection.

Also after 5.d3 ♗c7 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.♗e2 ♗g6, Black’s previous moves are shown to

be directed at preparing to play ...e6-e5 at an appropriate moment, thereby obtaining a mobile and flexible pawn chain in the center. 8.e5 f6 Once again the f-pawn plays its part. 9.♗e1 ♙e7 Maintaining the tension and increasing the pressure. (9...fxe5 can be met by 10.♗g5! with strong kingside play! Also after 9...♗xe5 10.♗xe5 ♗xe5 11.♗xe5 fxe5 12.♗xe5 d6, Black is okay, although the dynamic factor has been largely reduced after trading pieces.) 10.exf6? gxf6!



This is a dream come true for Black in view of his amazing pawn structure! Black is already for choice here.

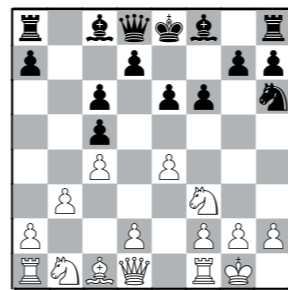


5...d6 Aiming to construct an almost perfect setup with his pawn on e5. Black would then gain a lot of space in the center when his flexible pawn structure would offer him all kinds of pawn thrusts.

5...e5 shows how this setup was originally conceived. 6.♗xe5 ♗e7 7.♙b2 d6 8.♗c4 d5 9.♗e3 d4 Aiming at the b2 bishop. 10.♗c4 ♗xe4+ 11.♗e2 ♗xe2+ 12.♗xe2 ♙e6 Black now has the bishop pair, but this is an endgame. Therefore, quiet moves and long-term play will matter more than the dynamic factor. I dare say that this position is easier to play for White. However, Black is solid enough. 13.d3 ♗f6 14.♗bd2 0-0-0 was seen in the stem game V.Anand 2791 – B.Gelfand 2727, Moscow 2012, which ended in a draw on move 25.

I believe that 5...f6 is better suited to the spirit of this position. Then 6.0-0 ♗h6 is another flexible way to complete Black’s piece development. (On 6...d6 7.c3! is an interesting idea to challenge ...e5 with d2-d4! Then after 7...♗e7 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5∞ Black’s pawn structure is sufficiently

flexible. Therefore, his position must be at least okay.) 7.c4

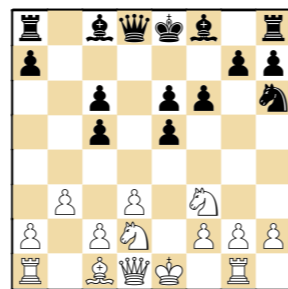


A) 7...e5? is bad, because of 8.d4! and White will inflict enough damage on Black’s center to claim an advantage. 8...exd4 (Or similarly 8...cxd4 9.♙xh6 gxh6 10.♗xe5!+-) 9.♙xh6 gxh6 10.♗e5!±;
B) 7...♗f7 8.d4 cxd4 9.♗xd4 ♙e7 White is marginally better, but Black maintains his flexibility, along with control of the center. **6.e5!?** This very interesting classical idea gives White the opportunity to significantly change Black’s pawn structure. In fact White sacrifices a pawn but in return Black’s position will be full of weaknesses, principally the c5 pawn.

6...dxe5 7.d3 f6 Black is up a pawn, but his c5 pawn will remain a target for the entire game. Moreover, Black’s pawn center will lose its flexibility, since any pawn advance will create new weaknesses.

7...c4! is an interesting attempt to keep the dynamic factor alive. After 8.bxc4 ♗e7 9.♗bd2 c5 10.0-0 f6, at least now the light-squared bishop will be able to join the battlefield. Remember that you should always try to give meaning and purpose to your pieces. 11.♗e4∞.

8.♗bd2 ♗h6 9.♗g1!? Trying to provoke more weaknesses on the kingside as well.



9...♙a6? From a6 the bishop is smacking against a big wall (the d3 pawn). In other words, this move is pointless.

9...♙e7 10.g4 ♗a5! is a very powerful idea. 11.♗f1 (11.♙b2?! now runs into 11...c4! revealing the idea behind ...♗a5, as the d2 knight can’t move.) 11...♙a6 In comparison to the text, here Black has forced the white king to walk into a dense forest.

9...♗f5 10.g4 ♗d4! gives purpose to the knight and Black should now be fine.

10.g4 White aims to provoke more weaknesses on the kingside by implying that it would be too dangerous for Black to castle there.

10...♗f7 11.♗e2 ♙e7 12.♙b2 ♗a5 13.c4 Depriving Black of any crazy dream related to the ...c5-c4 move, which would make Black’s position very dynamic and easy to play.

13...g5 14.h4 h6 15.♗h1 White has won the opening battle, and later Carlsen won this game as well after a tough fight.

This game was played in the semi-finals and, although it didn’t bring him a favorable result, Abasov stuck to his guns in the next match for third place against Caruana.

B30

Fabiano Caruana	2782
Nijat Abasov	2646

Match for 3rd, Game 4 (Rapid), World Cup, Baku 2023

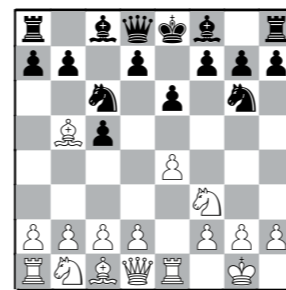
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 Here we go again it’s the Rossolimo – the classics will never go out of fashion!

3...e6 4.0-0 The most natural and simple way to play.

4...♗ge7 Here Black here has several playable options, 4...♗d4 being one of them. However, I think the text move better meets the demands of the position.

5.♗e1 a6 The most trendy line although Black has a number of moves since his pawn structure is so flexible. In fact, almost any move is playable here and any decision would still lead to very complex Sicilian-type positions.

5...♗g6 is another interesting try for all Sicilian fans.



6.c3 (6.d4 cxd4 7.♗xd4 ♙e7∞ leads to an Open Sicilian setup. Remember that the Sicilian is about flexible complex setups – if you are not flexible, don’t play the Sicilian!)

A) 6...a6 7.♗f1 ♙e7 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 transposes to a French-type structure. 10.e5 0-0 11.♗c3

A1) 11...f6?! 12.exf6 ♙xf6 (After



▲ Nijat Abasov

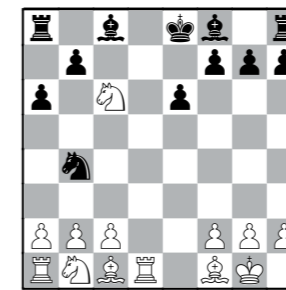
12...♗xf6?! 13.♙g5, Black will be forced to trade his dark-squared bishop, which should benefit White rather than Black.) 13.g3±.

A2) 11...h6, preparing the thematic strike at White’s center. 12.g3 f6! As in almost every French Defense game, Black has to react with ...f7-f6!.

B) 6...♙e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 is another version of the French-like structure.

6.♙f1 d5 7.exd5 ♗xd5 8.d4 ♗f6 Very playable for sure, and probably a more flexible approach.

8...cxd4 is the most direct way to remove some uncertainty from the board. 9.♗xd4 ♗db4 Now we have a very interesting endgame, where Black needs to know how best to place his pieces, based on his pawn structure. 10.♗xc6 ♗xd1 11.♗xd1

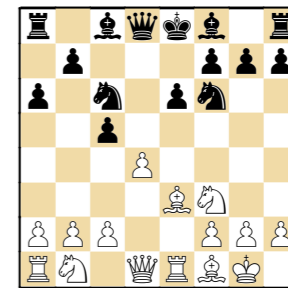


A) I think 11...♗xc6 is also playable here. However, White can take advantage of the vacant b6 square. 12.c3 e5 13.♙e3 ♙g4 14.f3 ♙e6 15.♗d2 f6 16.a4 First securing some space on the queenside. 16...♙e7 17.♗c4 ♗f7 18.♙b6± Now White can seize the initiative by exploiting the b6 square.

B) After 11...bxc6 Black’s pawn structure is worse due to his split queenside pawns. However, it’s not easy to show why this structure is that bad. 12.♗a3 a5 13.c3 (13.♙d2 ♙a6∞) 13...♗d5 Black has very active piece play, since all his pieces can be easily developed. 14.♗c4 f6! This is the key! It allows Black to consolidate his position, taking the e5

square under control and vacating the f7 square for his king.

9.♙e3

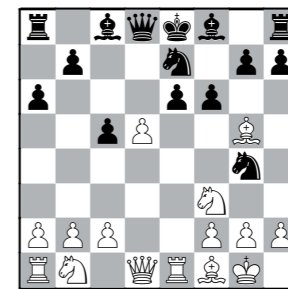


9...♗g4! Black is behind in development. Therefore he is unlikely to succeed in his attempts at attack, as his pieces are barely active and the center is open and unstable.

It is better to release the tension when you are far behind in development. 9...cxd4! 10.♗xd4 ♙d7 There’s no need to memorize long lines. There are certain positions where you just need to remember the ideas... 11.c4 ♗xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙c6 A very good diagonal for this bishop. 13.♗c3 ♙e7∞ Black has almost completed his development, and shouldn’t have any significant problems to solve.

10.♙g5! Logical and best. **10...f6?** 10...♗f6! It is never too late to say “sorry”. After 11.♙xf6 ♗xf6 12.d5! ♗d4 13.♗fd2± White’s structure is way better, due to all Black’s weaknesses and slow development.

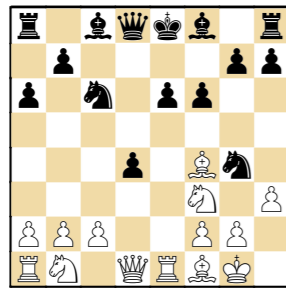
11.♙f4 Not bad, but also not best. 11.d5!! was the most concrete and direct way to punish such a brave king. 11...♗e7 (After 11...fxg5 12.dxc6 ♗xd1 13.♗xd1 bxc6 14.♗bd2+- the pawn structure speaks for itself!)



A) 12.h3
A1) 12...fxg5 13.hxg4 ♗xd5 14.♙c4 ♗b6 15.♗a3± A simple look at Black’s pawn structure speaks volumes about the position in which there are weaknesses all over the place.

A2) 12...♗xf2 13.♗xf2 fxg5 14.♗c3±;
B) 12.♙d2 ♗xd5 13.h3!

B1) 13...h5 14.♗h4 ♗e5 15.♗xe5 fxe5 16.♗g6 ♗h7 17.♙d3! ♙d6 18.♗c3+-
B2) 13...♗h6 14.♙xh6 gxh6 15.♗h4+-.
11...cxd4 12.h3



12...d6? 12...g5! is what the position demands! Natural and logical moves don't suit this unusual setup. 13.♗c1 h5!?∞

13.♗xh6 gxh6 White has finally achieved his main goal in the Rossolimo – to damage Black's pawn structure.

14.♖bd2 b5 15.a4+– White later won in a very convincing way. Black's pawn structure has been severely damaged, his king is still exposed in the center, and his center pawns can't really move without a further weakening of his king's position.

The Sicilian Defense has formed part of the repertoire of many top players, especially the Najdorf, which in fact we will also discuss later. Its versatility and dynamism have made the Najdorf the top choice line above the rest.

Besides that, I would like to show and explain another interesting line in the Sicilian known as The Four Knights Variation. This line has become very trendy and proven to be solid as a rock, as well as easy to remember. The ideas of this setup will be explained in more detail in the games that follow.

B45

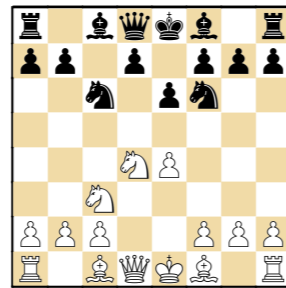
Fabiano Caruana	2782
Nijat Abasov	2646

Match for 3rd Game 2, World Cup, Baku 2023

1.e4 c5 It's always so refreshing to see the famous and powerful Sicilian being played at the highest level. Especially at this time when we are forever being so influenced by engine suggestions, and not the opposite. In fact, we should never forget that engines are tools – of course, useful tools but ones we should use with care.

2.♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗c6 5.♗c3 ♗f6 The Four Knights Variation in the Sicilian Defense has become a very hard nut to crack. This old line has so often proved its resilience and even been adopted by strong GMs as part of their principal repertoire. Also the logical and fluent play of this setup makes it an easy line to remember. In fact Black's main strategy here relies on its effectiveness in making

the most of his quick piece development and control of the center.



6.♗f4! My exclamation mark is not for the move itself, but rather for Fabi's bravery in playing this kind of suspect move, which leads to equality. Of course, because of the influence of the engine, it is very rare to see moves that aren't considered its top two or three choices. This approach makes us less creative and intrepid. That's why I believe the best way to use engines is by suggesting moves and ideas to it, in order to have more clarity and a better understanding of the resulting positions. The idea of ♗f4 is clear and clean – to control the d6 square, together with having a knight check on c7 as a potential threat.

The top two choices here are 6.♗db5 and 6.♗xc6, both with good play, but with tons of theory, which leaves less space for improvisation.

6.♗db5 ♗b4 is in the spirit of the Four Knights Variation. (6...d6 7.♗f4 e5 8.♗g5 leads to a Sveshnikov setup.) 7.a3 ♗xc3+ 8.♗xc3 d5 9.exd5 exd5 10.♗d3 0-0 11.0-0 d4 12.♗e2 ♗g4 White has the bishop pair, but Black has very fluent and easier piece play.

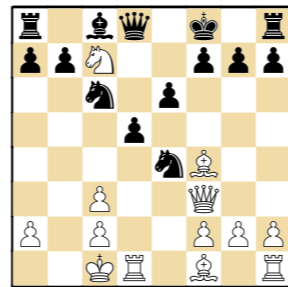
6.♗xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♗d5 8.♗e4 Probably the main *tabiya* (critical opening position) of this setup. 8...♗c7 9.f4 ♗b6 10.c4 ♗b4+ (10...♗e3!?) 11.♗e2 f5∞ This line has a lot of theory ahead and leads to very complex positions where both sides have their pluses and minuses.

Interestingly enough, both these continuations could be seen in the World Cup games of one of Caruana's main seconds – Leinier Dominguez! As a curiosity, Dominguez was eliminated from the World Cup by his own mentor, so it's likely that he then switched to helping Fabi in this match. So, 6.♗f4 was certainly a worthy recommendation to test Abasov's preparation and memory!

6...♗b4 7.♗db5 With this move order, White forces his opponent on the ropes by testing his knowledge of this very sharp line. 7...♗xe4 7...0-0 is a less accurate move order, which will allow White to keep the position under control. For example, 8.♗c7

♗e7 9.♗d6!, and now Black is deprived of having his own mobile pawn center, which is indeed what makes this line very attractive. After 9...♗xd6 10.♗xd6, Black lacks any pawn play in the center.

8.♗f3 d5 9.♗c7+ ♗f8 10.0-0 ♗xc3 11.bxc3



Fabi has forced his opponent to enter a very concrete position, where the moves won't come easily or naturally. In fact, in such situations, either you know the line or you don't! Playing secondary lines like 6.♗f4 (which is absolutely not without venom) might offer you some advantages such as the surprise factor, getting your opponent out of his comfort zone (theory), etc. Some secondary lines can be more dangerous than main lines, because those are not so well studied and tend to be more dynamic. 11...♗e7?! Not the most precise. Here Black is forced to continue playing natural moves like 11...e5. However, as I said, such moves in a dynamic position, you either know or you don't know. This guessing game might be considered a gambling zone – a sort of lottery.

11...e5 12.♗xd5 f5 Since this line is known as the Four Knights, it makes sense to reinforce these pieces at any cost. 13.♗e3 ♗a5 14.♗c4 ♗e6 leads to a very complex position.

12.c4 ♗f6? Mistakes very often come in pairs!

13.c3! After Black lost tempi by playing ...♗e7 and ...♗f6, he achieved nothing more than a consolidation of White's position.

13...g5 14.♗d6+ ♗g7 15.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 16.♗xa8 After the trade of queens, White exploited his advantage without particular problems in a very technical endgame.

The ♗f4 sideline has proved how dangerous it can be. That's why it's important to keep searching and suggesting interesting lines to the engine – in that way we may be able to win without even thinking so much with our own brains. In this case, the surprise paid off!



TO BE CONTINUED IN ACM #36



HOW TO CREATE AN INVESTMENT PLAN? HOW AI HELPED CHESS PLAYERS WITH ADJUSTING THEIR GAME PLANS?

Choose wisely

By Luca Barillaro



Luca Barillaro is doctor of economics, an independent financial consultant and trader residing in Modena, Italy. Luca is also an avid chess player, and thanks to his proficiency in using AI for chess preparation, his help was of benefit to several elite grandmasters and their teams.

In chess there is a saying that “a bad plan is better than no plan at all.” In order to adopt the correct plan, chess theorists have found the connection between openings, middlegames and endgames, and modern chess is based on these connections, but with the use of AI! However, don't get misled by the statistics – choose your own plan tailored to your own style and preference.

Any investment strategy is built up around the investor's risk tolerance and his/her needs. The combination of these two makes up an investment plan. As Tartakower used to say: “tactics is knowing what to do when there is something to do, while strategy is knowing what to do when there is nothing to do.”

In finance the importance of having a plan cannot be stressed enough. The investment plan is very much created like in chess – according to the needs of the investor (player), his/her risk tolerance (age, experience, willingness to risk), strategy choice (fundamental, technical, macro) and time horizon (short term, long term). Nonetheless, one plan may not be suitable for different investors, just like not every opening strategy is suitable for every player.

Therefore, we must not stop at the percentages that we see in the chessbase opening tree, but it is necessary to understand the plans behind the moves – just as it happens on financial markets where different investment decisions in a portfolio must be aimed at the realization of a single plan. It is not enough (and, indeed, it is dangerous) to test an investment strategy and use it only because it has had positive returns in the past.

The investment process is made up of a plan and within the plan of several micro-plans as GM Kotronias illustrates in his illuminating book *How to Play Equal Positions*.

The importance of having a plan is known to all chess players ever since they first learn the rudiments of strategy and tactics. Standard plans in the main openings are usually dictated by pawn structures that form the skeleton of the position, but the qualitative leap in elaboration of the plans started thanks to the research of Botvinnik and later of all the Soviet masters. The connection between the opening and the middlegame up to the deep exploration of typical endgames deriving from different strategic plans in different openings has been. This was a strong point of the Soviet masters for many generations after the Second World War.

The books by Zlotnik and Shereshevsky *Mastering the Endgame vol.1&2* are just one example of the depth of analysis that Soviet players applied in the pre-computer era. On the internet, as indicated by GM Ehlvest in his book *Grandmaster Opening Preparation*, it is probably still possible to recover one of the leaked files from Kasparov's preparation in the mid-1990s which demonstrates how different opening lines were explored all the way to the endgame.

In finance, different strategies are tested through AI, both on past time series and “live”, in order to find the most efficient way to deal with different market environments.

Today in chess it is no mystery that every professional GM uses artificial intelligence to verify and test the opening plans by assessing their validity in probabilistic terms depending

on the possible endings that may occur.

Even in the recent World Cup we had several examples. Daniele Vocaturo, against Volokitin, employed a Grunfeld line which seemed to perform highly negative for Black.

D87
Andrei Volokitin 2674
Daniele Vocaturo 2609
FIDE World Cup, Baku 2023

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♗xd5 5.e4 ♗xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗c4 c5 8.♗e2 ♗c6 9.♗e3 0-0 10.0-0 e6 11.♗c1 ♗e7



12.♗b5 ♗d8 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♗a4 cxd4 15.cxd4 a5 16.♗fd1 ♗a6 17.♗c3 ♗b4 18.a3 ♗xa4 19.♗xa4 ♗b5 20.♗c5 a4 21.♗b7 ♗d7 22.♗c5 ♗dd8 23.♗b7 ♗d7 24.♗c5 ♗dd8 Draw

The Italian GM has reached a high degree of specialization in the use of AI engines that can be seen clearly from his style and preparation, now at the level of 2700 players. In this specific case, the plan with 11...♗e7 allows Black to simplify the game and enter an endgame without risk.

The clearest example in using plans double-checked by AI seems to be that of Indian GM Vidit in his match against Ian Nepomniachtchi.

A13
Ian Nepomniachtchi 2779
Vidit Santosh Gujrathi 2719
FIDE World Cup, Baku 2023

1.c4 ♗f6 2.♗f3 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 d4 5.0-0 ♗c6 6.d3 ♗c5

7.♗bd2 0-0 8.♗b3 ♗e7 9.e3 dxe3 10.♗xe3 ♗g4 11.♗c5 ♗xc5 12.♗xc5 b6



13.♗d2 ♗ge5 14.♗cb3 ♗b7 15.d4 ♗g6 16.♗e1 a5 17.♗f3 a4 18.♗c1 a3 19.b3 ♗d6 Black won on move 60.

Vidit (Black) deliberately enters a line he had previously employed with White against Keymer. The line seems statistically favorable for White, but Black's idea is to gain space on the queenside with ...a5-a4-a3 to win the endgame. Vidit's maneuver, typical of the AlphaZero style, is clearly the result of studying possible endings, and his plan has eventually proved successful against Nepomniachtchi who failed to counter Black's plan.

The temptation to judge one line better than another just by looking at past results is as high as it is wrong. Backtesting is always a useful tool, but it can also be misleading, and, therefore, dangerous.

Past statistics are certainly useful, but they are not a guarantee of success – just as the strategies applied by other investors are not necessarily suitable for our risk tolerance and our investment objectives. In chess, the study of plans must remain closely connected to the middlegame and endgame objectives which must be suitable to our style and our needs in a single game or a tournament.