

The Carlsbad Pawn Structure Revisited

**Your Comprehensive
Guide**

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ISBN: 9789493435001

D/2025/31732/11

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com

Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2025 by Thinkers Publishing.

This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

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Christian Bauer

Thinkers Publishing 2025



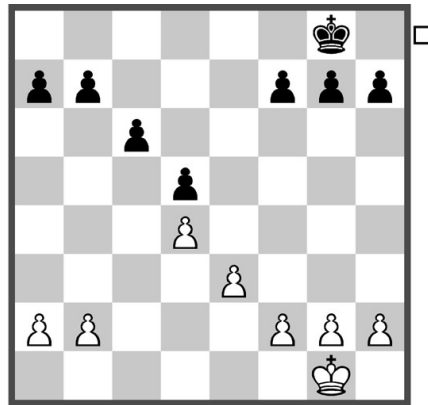
Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☉	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
△	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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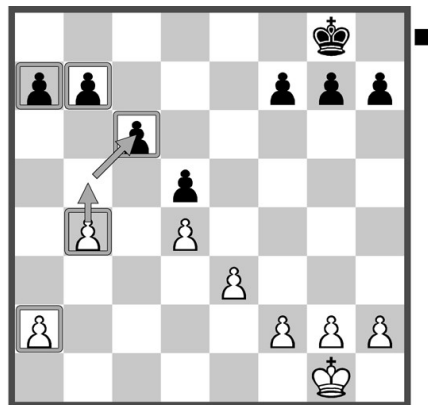
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Introduction



In this introduction, I will just focus on the pawn structure, to make things simpler, so I have removed all other pieces. Let's have a look at the possible modifications that are typical of this Carlsbad pawn structure!

1. b4

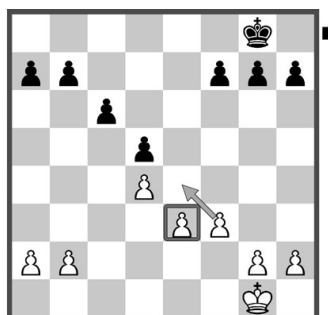


Position after: 1. b4

The Minority Attack, so called because White plays on the wing where he has only 2 pawns (a- and b-pawns) vs the 3 of his opponent. The basic idea consists in creating a weakness on c6, after b4-b5 and b5xc6. If Black doesn't do anything against this, the weakness on the half-opened c-file will bring White a marked edge (in conjunction with the nice outpost on c5). As a rule of thumb, the plans for both sides are often strongly related to the pawn structure. One must ponder if a certain change of this structure will favor one camp or rather the other. In the present case, White's prospects are improved following b5xc6 b7xc6.

We will mainly deal with this plan in the first part of the book.

1. f3



Position after: 1. f3

This is the alternative plan, which is equally valid. Its goal is to build up a central pawn-duo following the push e3-e4 (...dxe4, fxe4). This plan is less frequent, notably because it requires the king's knight (the g1-knight) to be developed on e2, which is not always possible given the move-order that led to the Carlsbad Structure.

We will deal with this in the second part of the book.

1... a6

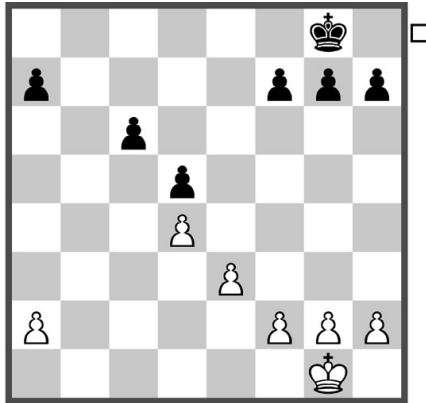
Most of the time this move will increase Black's options.

The option 1... b5 is often an appropriate reaction when a knight can quickly land on c4. Under unfavorable circumstances, however, Black will just have saddled himself with an ugly, backward c6-pawn.

1... f5

This will seldom occur, the reason being in my opinion that White's play on the queenside is faster. The f-pawn advance is also a kind of minority attack and by playing this way Black must pay attention to the weakened e5-square (the same is true for White on the other flank regarding the c4-square): f2-f4 followed by ♞f3-e5 could prove awkward to meet.

Another option is to wait as Black, allowing White to continue with 2.b5 and 3.bxc6 bxc6, reaching the following pawn structure;

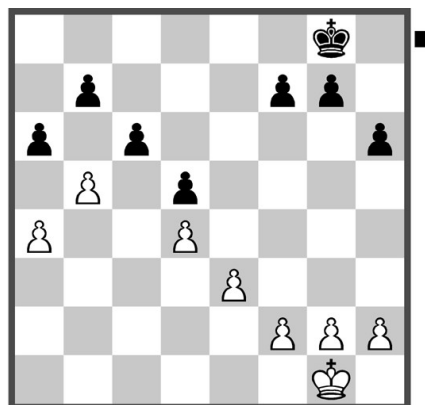


As in the final position we will discuss, White has managed to create a weakness on c6.

2. a4 h6

A "pass-move" for the sake of illustration.

3. b5

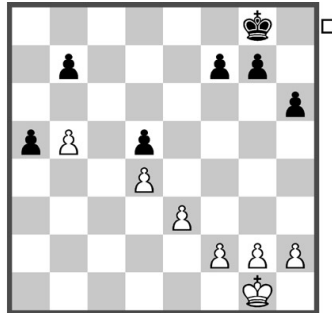


Position after: 3. b5

White continues his Minority Attack. Now, Black has different concrete options:

3... axb5

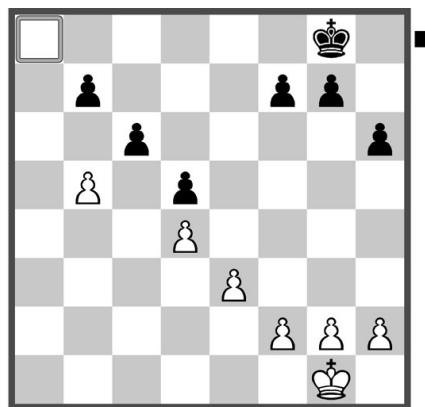
3... cxb5 4. axb5 a5



Position after: 4... a5

Is the passed a-pawn strong and can Black make use of the c-file? Or is the isolated d-pawn the major factor of the position?

4. axb5



Position after: 4. axb5

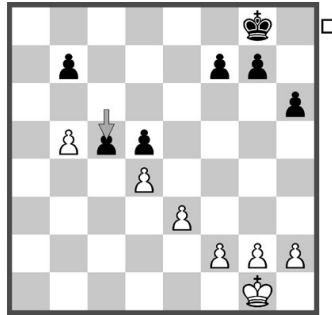
The insertion of ...a6-a4 has activated the a8-rook. Remember that, in the vast majority of cases, White has played ♖ab1 before pushing his b-pawn!

4... g6

Another passing move.

The option 4... cxb5?! will leave Black with many weaknesses and almost always be erroneous.

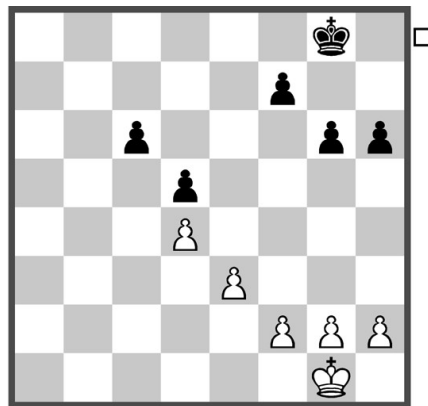
While after 4... c5



Position after: 4... c5

White will usually take with 5. dxc5. Black will take back with his bishop on e7 or perhaps with a knight, and the debate will then turn around the isolated d5 pawn.

5. bxc6 bxc6

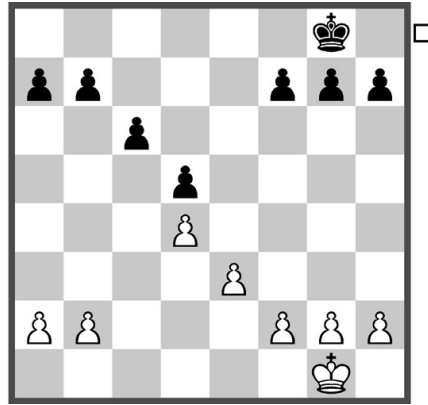


Position after: 5... bxc6

A common picture (with the black pawns on h7-g7 or h7-g6!). Black is rather solid, but in my opinion his chances to play for a win are pretty slim.

This is better for Black than with the pawns at a7 and a2 still remaining. Indeed, as White has the edge on the queenside (while Black is favourite on the kingside), and often a rook on b1 (to prepare b2–b4), with pawns still on a7 and a2 White would play ♖b1–b7. In the actual case, thanks to ...a7–a6 followed by ...a6xb5, Black has rid themselves of the a7-pawn and activated the rook on a8

Generalities



Usually in a standard Carlsbad, where White's queen-bishop has been developed on f4 or g5:

- none of the four bishops can be considered "bad";
- Black will be the side who benefits (slightly) from a trade of bishops, of either color, the best for him being to exchange all four bishops;
- a black knight stands very well on d6.


Black shall be flexible regarding his counterplay :

- if White launches a minority attack, Black shall first deal with that one rather than go all in on the kingside;
- if White opts for the f3–e4 plan, then a black action on the queenside is welcome. Should White start with the "new" a2–a4, then things may become completely different. Indeed, a4–a5 is time consuming, so that Black may be in time to contest White's customary initiative in the center and on the kingside.

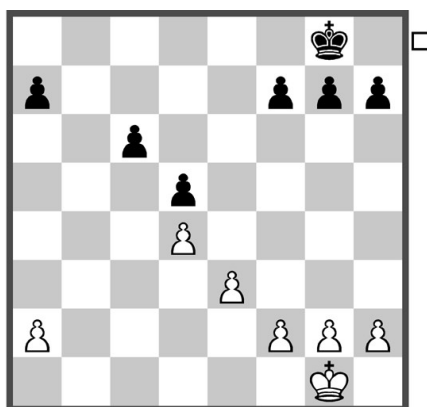


The Minority Attack

Part 1 – The Minority Attack

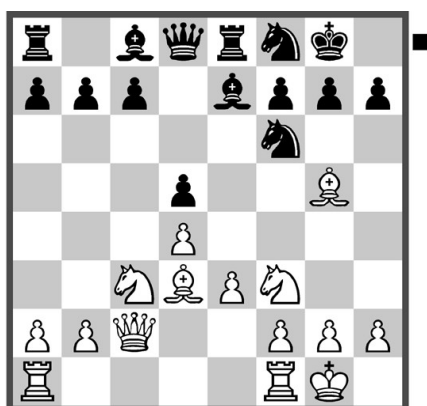
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Plan A) Black doesn't trade the a-pawns



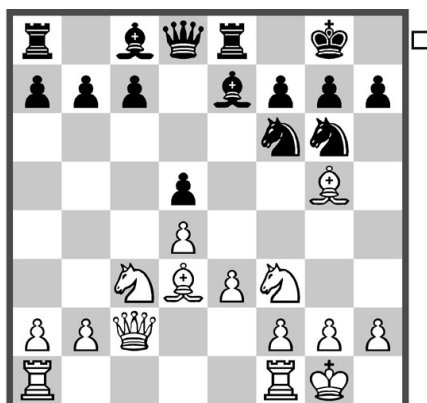
Game I: Dydyshko, V – Kveinys, A Moscow 1994

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 ♙e7 5. cxd5 exd5 6. ♙g5 0-0 7. e3 ♖e8 8. ♙d3 ♘bd7 9. 0-0 ♘f8 10. ♙c2



Position after: 10. ♙c2

10... ♘g6?!

Position after: 10... $\text{Nf6?!$

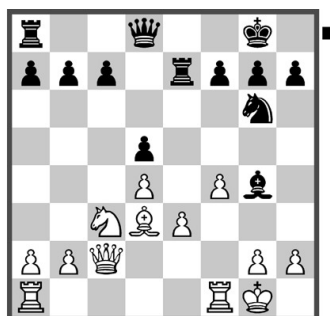
As we will see in another chapter, bolstering d5 with 10... c6 is more frequent. Black's move-order allows his opponent to do without h2-h3 and, more importantly, a concrete drawback exists.

11. Rab1

A) In our main game Black will find time to play ...c6, ... Qd6 and after an eventual ...h6 Qxf6 take back with his queen. For that reason, 11. Qxf6 Qxf6 12. b4 was interesting, even if the black c-pawn is still on his starting-block, meaning White won't be able to continue directly b4-b5xc6.

B) 11. Ne5! is the refutation of Black's last move, giving White an edge in all lines. For instance:

B1) In the event of 11... Ng4?! 12. Qxe7 the big difference with the pawn on c7 in place of c6 springs to light; Black must recapture with his rook. 12... Rxe7 13. Nxe7 Qxe7 14. f4±

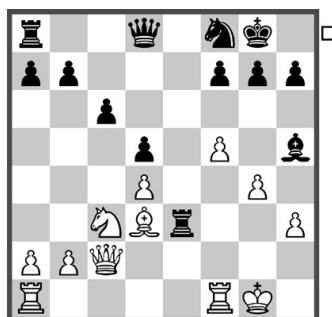


Position after: 14. f4±

The situation is already critical for Black since his opponent threatens to trap his bishop by means of f4-f5 followed by h2-h3, as well as to open a breach in his short-sided castle via f5-f6.

B1.1) White gets a greater edge after the greedy 14... ♖xe3?! 15. ♔d2 or 15. f5.

B1.2) 14... ♞f8 15. ♜ae1± Simpler than 15. f5 c6, especially if White then insists on trapping the enemy bishop. [15... f6?? 16. ♞xd5+– The knight being of course taboo due to the skewer by ♙c4.] 16. h3?! ♞h5 17. g4?? ♜xe3+–

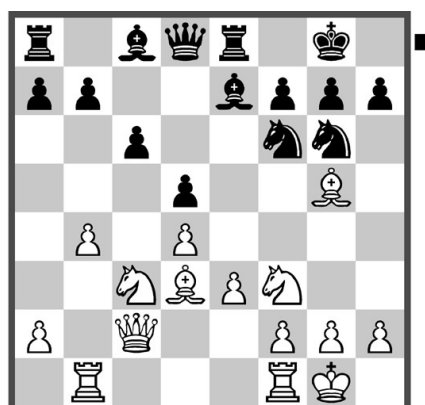


Position after: 17... ♜xe3+–

The black queen will soon land on g5 or h4 and White will only regret his king-side expansion.

B2) 11... ♞xe5 Relatively best. 12. dxe5 ♞g4 13. ♙f4± The h7-pawn will fall since h3 ♞h6, ♙xh6 gxh6 would be too ugly for Black.

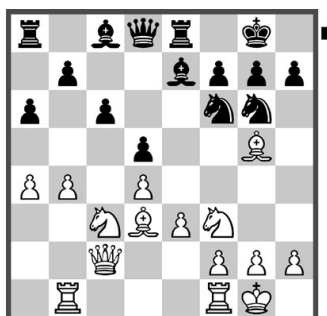
11... c6 12. b4



Position after: 12. b4

12... ♖d6

12... a6 is Black's most frequent choice here. In my view, including the pair ...a7-a6/a2-a4 will most often benefit Black as he can activate his rook after a later ...axb5 (axb5). As will be seen in another section, the reaction ...cxb5 axb5 a5 also becomes available after b4-b5. 13. a4

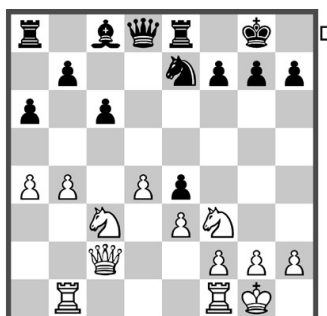


Position after: 13. a4

A) 13... ♘e4 is a decent alternative but I think White more easily gains a slight plus there.

A1) Above all, not 14. ♘xe4?? dxe4 15. ♖xe7 ♙xe7→+ but;

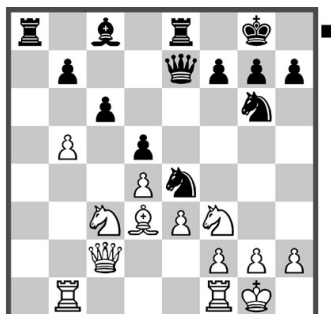
A2) 14. ♖xe4!? exists. 14... dxe4 [14... ♖xg5 15. ♖f5±] 15. ♖xe7 ♘xe7



Position after: 15... ♘xe7

White can't conveniently take on e4 now, so the game remains balanced. [There is also 15... ♙xe7 16. ♘d2 f5]

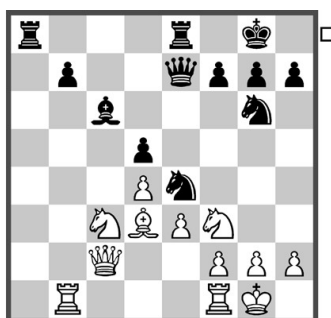
A3) 14. ♖xe7 ♙xe7 15. b5 axb5 16. axb5±



Position after: 16. axb5±

White has reached his strategic goal while his opponent hasn't yet generated counterplay on the kingside. The best continuation could be;

A3.1) 16... ♖d7 17. bxc6 ♗xc6



Position after: 17... ♗xc6

This occurred in the blitz duel Kuzubov, Y (2637) – Dzagnidze, N (2524) Riga 2021, where rather than...

A3.1b) 18. ♞d2 as in the game,

A3.1a) 18. ♖fc1! would have been stronger. As in Smyslov – Keres, the bishop clearly isn't happy on c6.

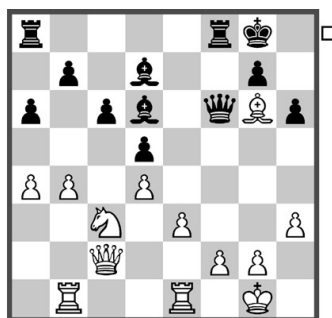
A3.2) 16... ♞xc3 17. ♚xc3 ♗g4 but then White just withdraws his knight and enjoys a stable little edge.

B) 13... ♗d6

B1) 14. ♖fe1 ♗g4 15. ♞h4!? An original way to parry the threatened ...♗xf3. Two plausible follow-ups are now:

B1.1) 15... ♖d7 This move threatens ...♖xh2+ ♔xh2 ♞g4+ followed by ...♞xg5. 16. h3?! [16. f3!? is a bit more comfortable from the white side.]

B1.1a) 16... h6! wasn't easy to spot. Following 17. ♖xf6 ♞xf6 18. ♞xg6 fxg6 19. ♖xg6 ♜f8

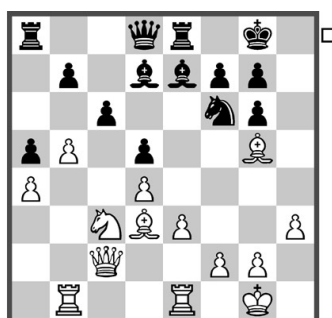


Position after: 19... ♜f8

and now after either 20. f4 or 20. a5 the computer sees shared chances.

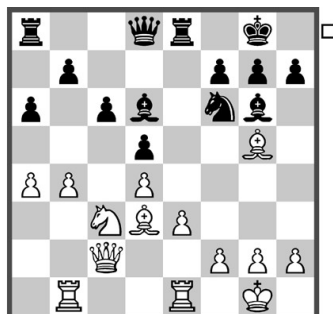
B1.1b) 16... ♖e7?! We are following Knaak, R (2500) – Inkirov, V (2485) Nordhausen 1987 where this second inaccuracy was followed by a third one, often a sign that the position isn't trivial to handle. The best option:

- o 17. b5!± was better, keeping in reserve the option ♞h4-f5, whereas after ...♞xh4 ♖xh4 Black would have to prevent ♖xf6.
- o 17. ♞xg6?! hxg6 18. b5 a5=



Position after: 18... a5=

B1.2) 15... ♖h5 As 16. ♞xg6 [Maybe 16. ♖xf6 ♞xf6 17. ♞f5 gives White slightly the upper hand.] 16... ♖xg6 is just equal.

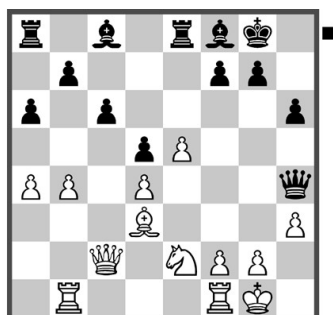


Position after: 16... ♖xg6=

Knaak, R (2525) – Balashov, Y (2540) Berlin 1988.

B2) 14. h3!? Not only taking away this square from the light-squared bishop but also avoiding the resource Black used in the game after 15.e4. Now 14... h6 15. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 16. e4

B2.1) 16... ♘h4?! 17. ♘xh4 ♕xh4 18. e5 ♗f8 19. ♘e2±



Position after: 19. ♘e2±

and the advance f4-f5 is looming.

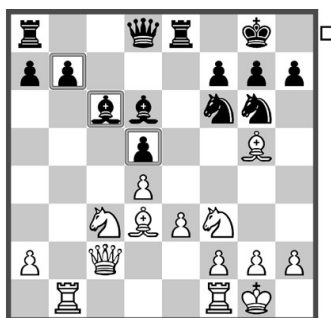
B2.2) 16... ♘f4?? 17. e5 Since Black doesn't have 17... ♕e6 18. exd6 ♕g4 at his disposal here (and 17... ♘xh3+ fails to 18. ♔h1+-), there is no other choice than to resign.

B2.3) 16... dxe4! 17. ♘xe4 ♕d8 White's forces are fully mobilized and his initiative is worth a bit more than the isolated d-pawn and the enemy pair of bishops.

B3) 14. b5 Everything is in place for this thematic push, but other options deserve consideration too: 14... axb5 15. axb5 with reciprocal chances.

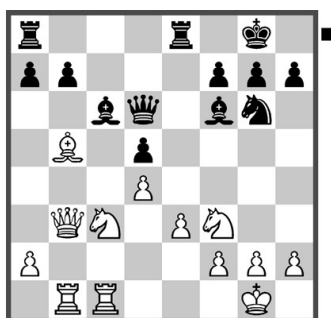
13. b5 h6

The move 13... ♖d7? occurred in Smyslov, V – Keres, P The Hague/ Moscow 1948, and proved an uncharacteristically weak decision from the Estonian. 14. bxc6 ♗xc6?



Position after: 14... ♗xc6?

The bishop stands quite poorly here but it does cover b7 and d5. Better was to opt for 14... bxc6 even though Black's passive previous move would then have been superfluous. 15. ♔b3 ♗e7 16. ♗xf6 [Alternatively, 16. ♗b5 was also good: 16... ♞d7 17. ♗xe7 ♞xe7±] 16... ♗xf6 17. ♗b5! ♔d6 18. ♖fc1±



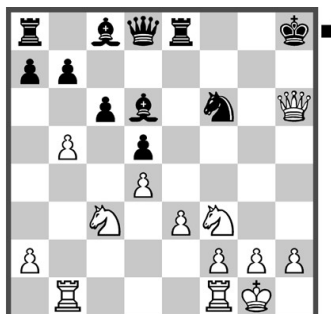
Position after: 18. ♖fc1±

White has a sizeable advantage.

14. ♗xf6

A) White may start with 14. bxc6 if he wants, forcing 14... bxc6;

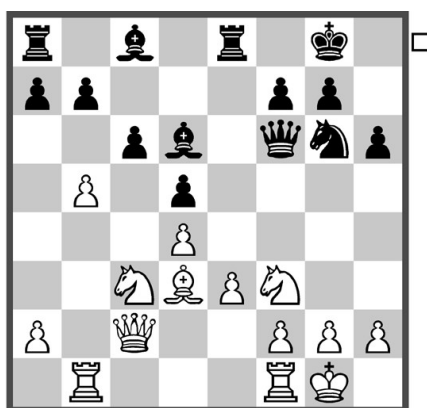
B) 14. ♗xh6?! is dubious: 14... gxh6 15. ♗xg6 fxg6 16. ♔xg6+ ♔h8 17. ♔xh6+



Position after: 17. ♕xh6+

The white troops are too far away from the enemy king and the piece surpasses the three pawns here. 17... ♖h7

14... ♕xf6



Position after: 14... ♕xf6

15. e4

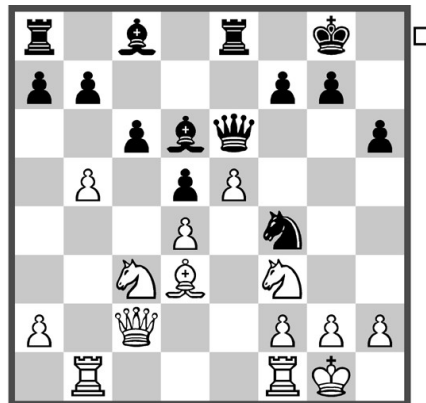
15. bxc6 bxc6 16. e4 Bunk, W (2431) – Nowak, I (2327) ICCF email 2006 is similar to the game continuation. Other possibilities are

- 16. ♖e2 ♗g4 17. ♖g3;

- 16. h3 ♗xh3 17. ♗xg6 fxg6 18. gxh3 ♕xf3 19. ♕xg6;

- 16. ♖a4 ♗g4 17. ♖d2 with approximate equality everywhere according to the machine.

15... ♖f4! 16. e5 ♕e6



Position after: 16... ♕e6

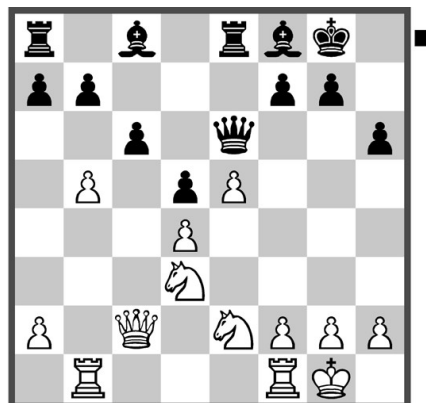
17. ♞e1

17. exd6? wasn't advisable in view of 17... ♕g4 18. ♞e1 ♜xe1± but another knight-move also maintained the balance: 17. ♞e2!?

17... ♞f8 18. ♞e2?!

18. ♕d2!=

18... ♞xd3 19. ♞xd3



Position after: 19. ♞xd3

19... cxb5!

Opening diagonals for the bishop(s) is the right decision and definitely better than allowing bxc6.

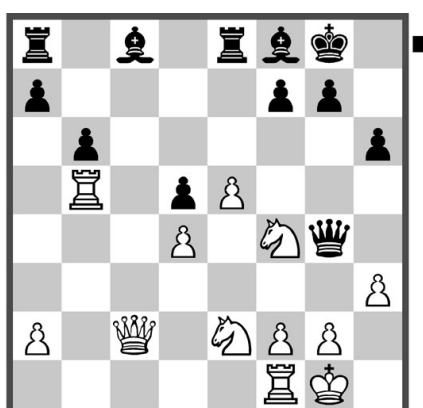
20. ♞df4

Or 20. ♖xb5 ♕a6 followed by ... ♗f5.

20... ♕g4?

Turning the tables, when 20... ♕c6! 21. ♕b3 b4 would have been slightly in Black's favour.

21. ♖xb5 ± b6 22. h3



Position after: 22. h3

22... ♕g5?

22... ♕f5 was preferable, leaving Black with decent compensation after 23. ♕xf5 ♗xf5 24. ♖xd5 ♖ec8. Compared to the game, Black doesn't endure a wild assault on the kingside.

23. ♖b3

23. ♖xd5!?

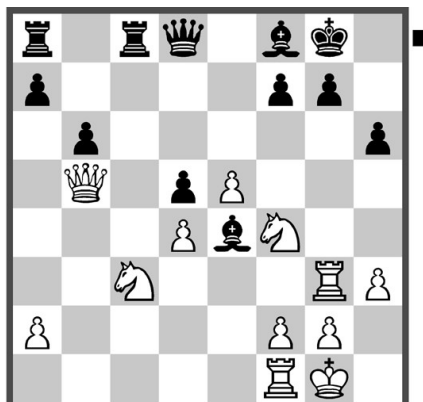
23... ♗f5 24. ♕c6 ♗e4 25. ♖g3

White had time to throw in 25. ♖c1! with the idea of trading his queen vs the two enemy rooks in case of ... ♖ac8 or ... ♖ec8.

25... ♖ec8?

25... ♖ac8 was a bit more tenacious. 26. ♕b5 ♕f5 27. ♗xd5 ±

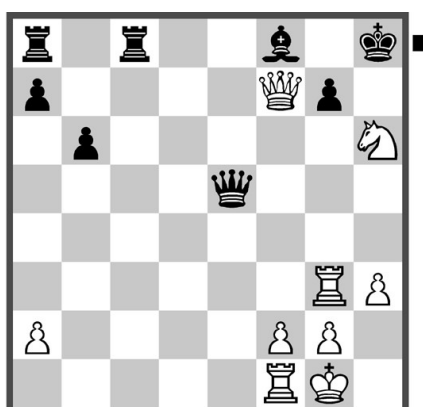
26. ♔b5 ♕d8 27. ♞c3+–



Position after: 27. ♞c3+–

The d5-pawn drops and Black doesn't even have the shadow of counterplay.

27... ♖f5 28. ♞cxd5 ♕h4 29. ♕b3 ♔h8 30. ♞e3 ♕xf4 31. ♕xf7 ♕xd4 32. ♞xf5 ♕xe5 33. ♞xh6



Position after: 33. ♞xh6

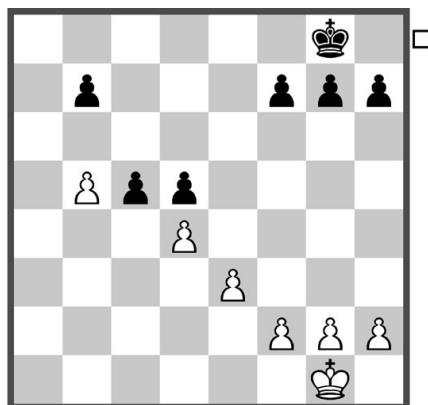
Things are getting worse and worse for Black whose king now runs a great danger. The rest requires no comment.

33... ♖c5 34. ♞f5 ♖c6 35. ♖xg7 ♖h6 36. ♞xh6 ♕xg7 37. ♕h5 ♖f8 38. ♞g4+ ♕h7 39. ♕e5+ ♕g7 40. ♕h5+

This convincing performance by Dydyszko shows that Black nevertheless obtains acceptable prospects when he does nothing to stop the minority attack.

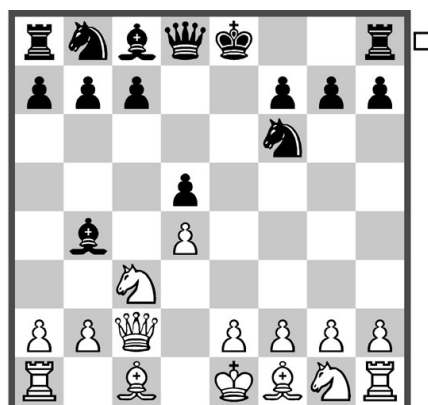
1-0

Plan B) Black replies ...c5 to b5



Game 2: Firman, N – Zhrebukh, Y Khmelnitsky 2008

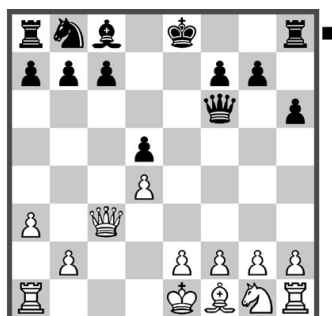
1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. ♕c2 d5 5. cxd5 exd5



Position after: 5... exd5

6. a3

6. ♗g5 is White's choice in almost 9 games out of 10. Play can become quite wild if Black embarks on the immediate 6...c5!?, or if – after 6...h6 7. ♗h4 – he opts for the same ...c5, or else 7...g5 8. ♗g3 ♘e4. 6... h6 7. ♗xf6 is quieter and more familiar to us after 7... ♕xf6 8. a3 ♗xc3+ 9. ♕xc3

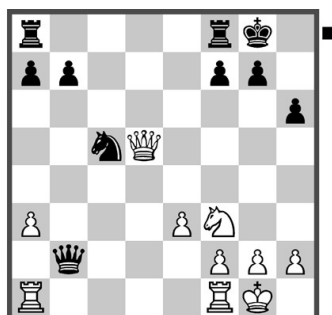


Position after: 9. ♔xc3

9... 0-0 10. e3 ♘f5 11. ♘f3 [11. ♔xc7? gives Black too much play after 11... ♖c8] 11... ♞d7 If White now plays passively with 12. ♘e2, Black's most ambitious plan is ...c5-c4 followed by ...b7-b5, ...a7-a5 and then the preparation of ...b5-b4. Therefore:

A) 12. ♘d3 ♘xd3 13. ♔xd3

A1) 13... c5 14. dxc5 ♔xb2 15. 0-0 ♞xc5 16. ♔xd5=



Position after: 16. ♔xd5=

Tatai, S – Sosonko, G Zurich 1984. Both knights will be safely anchored at c5 and d4 respectively. Black has the edge with the queenside pawn majority, but White hopes the jump ♞d4-f5 might prove nasty at some point.

A2) 13... a5!? Novak, J (2408) – Morgado, J (2605) ICCF email 2001, or:

B) 12. ♖c1 ♖fc8 Renewing the threat of ...c7-c5, since after 13. ♘e2 c5 14.dxc5 ♖xc5 15. ♔xf6?? (15. ♔d2=) ♖xc1+ 16. ♔d2 Black has the intermediate move... ♖c2+ → 13. b4 a5! 14. ♘d3 axb4 15. axb4 ♘xd3 16. ♔xd3

(see analysis diagram next page)