

chess

by richard shorman



The Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation

1 P-K4	P-K4
2 N-KB3	N-QB3
3 B-N5	P-QR3
4 BxN	QPxB

The exchange variation of the Ruy Lopez is currently enjoying a tremendous revival in popularity. Bobby Fischer, eight times U.S. champion and one of the best players in chess history, aroused new interest in this supposedly out-moded line by winning three excellent games against first-class opposition with the aid of an opening surprise:

5 0-0! . . .

To appreciate the impact of this move on modern chess theory we must view Fischer's innovation in historical perspective. Here are two examples of how masters used to handle the exchange variation (after 1 P-K4 P-K4 2 N-KB3 N-QB3 3 B-N5 P-QR3 4 BxN QPxB):

(a) Lasker-Capablanca, St. Petersburg, 1914: 5 P-Q4 PxP 6 QxP QxQ 7 NxQ B-Q3 8 N-QB3 N-K2 9 0-0 0-0 10 P-B4 R-K1 11 N-N3 P-B3 12 P-B5 P-QN3 13 B-B4, and now 13...BxB instead of 13...B-N2 as in the game maintains equality.

(b) Ilin-Zhenevsky-Botvinnik, Leningrad, 1926: 5 N-B3 (compelling Black's reply) P-B3 6 P-Q4 PxP 7 QxP QxQ 8 NxQ B-Q3 9 N/3-K2 (or 9 B-K3, but White seeks to deprive his opponent of the Bishop pair) N-K2 10 B-B4 BxB 11 NxB K-B2 12 0-0-0 P-QN3! 13 KR-K1 P-KN4 14 N-Q3 P-QB4 15 N-B3 N-B3, and Black, who threatens to win a piece with 16...P-B5, has the advantage.

Understandably, the initial reaction to Fischer's "new" move was to search the past for an authoritative precedent, in this case 5...P-B3.

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5 . . .	P-B3
6 P-Q4	B-KN5!

Portisch, the first of Fischer's victims at the 1966 Chess Olympics, tried 6...PxP here and was outplayed after 7 NxP P-QB4 8 N-N3 QxQ 9 RxQ B-Q3 10 N-R5! (tying down Black's QB and threatening 11 N-B4) P-QN4 11 P-QB4 N-K2 12 B-K3 P-B4 13 N-B3 P-B5 14 P-K5! (Fischer-Portisch, Havana, 1966.)

Some annotators have suggested 9...B-Q2 as an improvement on Black's play, but the move has not withstood the test of tournament competition: 10 N-B3 0-0-0 11 B-B4 B-B3 (White won in fine style after 11...R-K1 12 N-Q5! B-B3? 3 NxP/7 RxP 14 P-KB3 R-K7 15 N-R8! as in Barendregt-Sliwa, Marienbad, 1961) 12 RxRch KxR 13 R-Q1ch K-B1 14 N-Q5 BxN 15 PxB K-Q2 16 P-Q6! (Vitolinsh-Mileika, Latvian Championship, 1967.)

7 P-B3! . . .

Whereas 5 0-0 has been played before, albeit very rarely, this solid rejoinder can definitely be labeled as the personal product of Fischer's fertile imagination.

The alternative is 7 P x P Q x Q 8 R x Q B x N 9 P x B P x P 10 P—KB4 (or 10 P—N3 B—Q3 11 N—Q2 P—QN4 12 B—N2 N—K2!) N—B3 11 P—KB3 (better than Lee—Gligorich, Hastings, 1965-66: 11 P x P N x P 12 B—K3 B—B4 13 N—Q2 N x N 14 B x B 0-0-0 15 K—N2 R—Q4 16 B—N4 N—B5) B—Q3, and now not 12 N—B3? P x P 13 P—K5 B—B4ch 14 K—N2 N—R4, when Black's superiority is manifest (Minich—Gligorich, Budva, 1967), but 12 P x P B x P 13 P—KB4 B—Q3, with only a minimal edge.

Black secured an early draw in this line with 8...P x P 9 R—Q3 B x N 10 R x B N—B3 11 N—B3 B—N5 12 B—N5 B x N 13 R x B (Fischer—Smyslov, Monaco, 1967, continued 13 P x B R—KB1 14 B x N R x B 15 R x R P x R 16 R—Q1 K—K2, and Black has full equality). N x P 14 R—K3 N x B 15 R x Pch K—B2 16 R x N QR—Q1 17 Drawn (Gipslis—Geller, Budva, 1967).

7 . . .

B—Q3

Fischer's second victim at the 1966 Chess Olympics in Havana was none other than grandmaster Svetozar Gligorich, probably Bobby's most troublesome chess opponent: 7...P x P 8 P x P Q—Q2 (Gligorich considers 8...P—QB4 9 P—Q5 B—Q3 10 QN—Q2 to be unclear). 9 P—KR3 B—K3 10 N—B3 0-0-0 11 B—B4 N—K2 12 R—B1 N—N3 13 B—N3 B—Q3 14 N—QR4!, and White converted his positional plus into a splendid victory after 14...B x B? (Better, though probably still insufficient, is 14...K—N1.) 15 P x B K—N1 16 N—B5 Q—Q3 17 Q—R4 K—R2 18 N x RP!

Cuban chessmaster Jimenez was the third victim to fall under the initial onslaught of Fischer's new treatment of the exchange variation: 9...B—R4 10 N—K5! B x Q 11 N x Q K x N 12 R x B R—K1 13 P—B3 N—K2 14 N—B3 K—B1 15 B—K3 P—KB4 16 QR—B1 P x P 17 P x P, and White won the ending.

8 P—KR3

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Black appears to have counterchances after 8 QN—Q2:

(a) Bronstein—Geller, Tbilisi, 1966-67: 8...Q—K2 9 P—QR4 (Better is 9 Q—N3.) N—R3 10 P—R5 N—B2 11 Q—B2 0-0 12 P—R3 B—Q2 13 P—QN3 QR—K1.

(b) Vesterinen—Tsinn, Halle, 1967: 8...N—R3 9 P—KR3 B—K3 10 Q—K2 Q—K2 11 N—B4 N—B2 12 B—K3 P—KN4 13 P x P P x P 14 N—R2 P—KR4 15 P—B3 0-0-0.

8 . . .

B—R4

9 QN—Q2

. . .

The "best" move here, 9 B—K3, still awaits validation in serious tournament practice.

9 . . .

N—K2

10 N—B4

B—B2

11 Q—K2

N—N3

12 P x P

P x P

Robatsch (Black) simplified with 12...N x P against O'Kelly (Mallorca, 1966): 13 N/3xN P x N 14 R—Q1 Q—B3 15 B—K3 0-0 16 N—R5 QR—N1 17 P—QN4 B—K3 18 Q—R5 B—B2 19 Q—K2 Drawn.

13 B—N5

Q—B1

14 KR—Q1

P—R3

15 B—K3

Q—K3

The column is Johansson—Portisch, Halle, 1967. Black has trod a narrow path and suffered many reversals to arrive at this viable defensive position. Portisch appears to have exonerated himself in this fortified line from the stigma of his earlier defeat at the hands of Fischer's "secret weapon."

(Concluded next week with an analysis of Black's most aggressive counter to Fischer's improvement in the exchange variation.)