

Richard Shorman

Chess

ADVICE ON THE OPENINGS FOR YOUNG PLAYERS

Joseph Henry Blackburne

(1841-1924)

The first piece of advice I would offer to the young student who wishes to improve his chess is that in the formation of his style he should try to follow his own aptitude and temperament. One player derives pleasure from working out a game accurately like a sum in mathematics, another cares for nothing but ingenious combination and brilliant attack. It is by far the best for each to develop his own qualities.

For this reason, instead of recommending any opening to all and sundry, I shall only note a few characteristics of each, so that the reader may judge of it for himself.

THE FRENCH DEFENSE

The French Defense is a very good example. When I began to play in 1861 it was very seldom offered. I had a considerable share in popularizing it, and as long as the old form beginning with 3 P×P continued it suited me well, as it led to much pretty play with the minor pieces. But 3 P-K5 produces a very different and much closer game, one that leads to delicate maneuvering for position rather than the direct attack in which my own strength lay. At the present moment, and after all the analysis bestowed on it, 3 P×P is still a safe reply to the French Defense, and it leads to a game that, although apparently simple, is in reality full of snares and difficulties.

THE RUY LOPEZ

This, the most fashionable opening of today, was in no great favor in the sixties. It is a game I never play in a tournament, except when I feel a little off color and am content with a draw, and then it usually means losing half a point. In a match this does not matter, as a draw leaves the two opponents precisely where they were before, but in a tournament every draw costs something, as the leaders usually win the majority of their games.

The Lopez is essentially an opening for the safe and cautious player, leading to no attack, and usually ending either in an equal position or with a very slight advantage to the first player. On very few occasions indeed have I played it in simultaneous or blindfold games, where a quick and brilliant attack is the object chiefly aimed at.

I would not recommend the young player to adopt it. One of his first objects, if he wishes to become a great player, is to obtain experience of the board, so that afterward he may be able to see almost instinctively when his opponent is drifting into a losing position. But out of this dull and safe opening there arise very few opportunities for fine and beautiful play, and the beginner who adopts it therefore is never more than half-educated in chess.

Moreover, it has been so fully analyzed in recent years that you can scarcely hit upon a variation not in the books, and so the laborious drudge has, in playing this opening, an advantage over the clever player who trusts more to ideas than memory.

THE SCOTCH GAME AND SCOTCH GAMBIT

It happened that the little book from which I learned the moves of chess contained the famous game between Edinburgh and London which brought the Scotch into public favor, and partly for that reason it is one of my favorite methods of operating.

It gives birth to the sort of position that the young player should study. He may go on playing 3 B-N5 for years and never find out what talent he has for chess, but let him venture on 3 P-Q4 and 4 NxP and he will quickly find himself called upon to show what he is made of.

In the old days it was deadly in match play, but modern analysis now enables Black to draw easily. For blindfold and simultaneous play, however, it is little, if at all, inferior to the King's Gambit itself, and in this way I have played it at least as much as any other opening.

At the end, my opinion is that anyone who wishes to improve his play should work hard at the Scotch. It abounds in chess, and never has been or can be a wood-shifter's opening.

THE KING'S GAMBIT

At the present time the King's Gambit is rarely played in important contests, because when there is a great deal at stake few players dare venture into the shoal of intricate and hazardous positions to which it gives rise. Accordingly, if anyone more daring than his fellows ventures to offer it, the usual plan is to resort to one or other of the numerous methods of declining.

It is just as well for the young player to accept the gambit and defend it in the ordinary manner, as no other opening affords greater scope for ingenuity or leads to more entertaining chess. When the novice can play 2 P-KB4 with an idea in his head of what is to follow, he has begun to understand chess.

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White: Gustave Neumann.

Black: Joseph Blackburne.

Dundee, 1867.

King's Gambit Accepted

1 P-K4	P-K4	18 NxR	N-B3!(f)
2 P-KB4	PxP	19 NxN	NxP!
3 N-KB3	P-KN4	20 NxB	NxNP
4 B-B4(a)	B-N2	21 N-K6ch(g)	PxN
5 P-Q4	P-Q3	22 Q-N6	R-R7!!(h)
6 0-0	P-KR3	23 RxP(i)	PxR
7 P-KN3	P-N5	24 KxR	Q-R5ch
8 N-K1(b)	P-B6	25 K-N1	Q-R8ch
9 P-B3	N-Q2	26 K-B2	Q-N7ch
10 N-R3	N-N3	27 K-K3	N-B8ch
11 B-N3	Q-K2	28 K-B4	QxQ
12 N-Q3	B-Q2	29 KxP	N-R7ch
13 N-KB4	P-KR4	30 K-B2	KxN
14 Q-Q3	P-R5(c)	31 B-KB4	Q-B4
15 N-N5	PxP	32 K-N3	Q-N5ch
16 PxP(d)	P-QB3!(e)	33 Resigns	
17 N-B7ch	K-Q1		

(Notes by J. H. Blackburne in "Mr. Blackburne's Games at Chess", edited by P. Anderson Graham, London, 1899, pp. 85-86)

(a) This form of the gambit is almost out of date. Chigorin, however, occasionally plays it, and with success. Now more frequently adopted is 4 P-KR4, bringing about the Allgaier or Kieseritzky gambit.

(b) This was the generally acknowledged best square for the knight to play to, but in actual practice my experience is that 8 N-R4 is equally effective.

(c) The beginning of a strong counterattack, which is often the best line of defense.

(d) It is obvious that White cannot take the pawn without immediate loss, e.g., 16 NxBPch? K-Q1 17 NxR RxP, and he has no defense.

(e) The editor of "Chess World" says, "A daring move, the main object of which is to prevent White establishing a knight at Q5, and for this Black sacrifices rook and knight."

(f) And, "Again bold play, not even losing time by capturing the knight."

(g) Something must be done, but perhaps 21 N-N2 would have been slightly better.

(h) This move, which wins the game by force, was evidently not expected by White. I candidly confess that it was not foreseen when I played 16 P-QB3. However, nothing venture, nothing win. I have a vivid recollection of Neumann's countenance when this move was made. He gave a slight start, turned round to the Rev. G. A. Macdonnell, who was looking on, shrugged his shoulders and smiled, but it was a sickly sort of smile.

(i) He has nothing better, for if 23 KxR, then mate follows in two moves by 23...Q-R5ch and 24...N-K7.