

NIKOLA SEDLAK

WINNING

with the
Modern London System

A complete opening repertoire
for White against 1.d4 d5



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KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

PREFACE

Every chess player is searching for a suitable opening repertoire throughout his career. In this search the player is trying to find a playing style and a position type that will suit his sensibility and character.

I was likewise looking for openings based on my playing style in which I would feel free and comfortable while playing, without fear that I would be caught in unfamiliar territory facing my opponent's theoretical superiority. I began my search in the earliest days, actually from my junior years when I played 1.e4 as White, striving strictly for mainlines in which I was achieving solid results.

However, over time, the computer world has conquered chess and I realized that 1.e4 was too concrete for me. It was not allowing my playing style to express itself and I was not reaching positions in which I could show my true face. Also, I realized that 1.e4 couldn't be played without thorough computer analysis, and I must admit that I still prefer the approach of an older generation; one which favours a chess book and a board in front of them and which likes to hold pieces in their hands while working on the development of their chess skills.

So, my opinion about 1.e4 slowly began to change. At the age of 22 I decided to seriously focus on a study of 1.d4. However, I encountered one, should I say, obstacle — and that was 1... d5! Just to mention that 1... ♘f6 wasn't a problem, because the positions arising weren't symmetrical, while 1...d5 followed by the Slav Defence and the Queen's Gambit was becoming an 'impenetrable fortress' which could be credited largely to Grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik.

I wish to emphasize that the problem for me at that time wasn't being unable to find an advantage for White, because I think that if Black plays the opening phase precisely White can't reach an advantage in almost any system (except when Black is using openings proven to be incorrect), but the bigger issue was with the types of positions that were reached, which didn't allow me to be free and creative. Also, the arising positions were

deeply analysed by professional chess players with the help of very strong computer programs.

Continuing to explore 1.d4 I got an idea to check what one of my favourite players — Anthony Miles — had in his repertoire against 1...d5. Two games that left a strong impression on me were Miles — Minasian, Ohrid 2001 and Miles — Dominguez, Capablanca Memorial 2001. In those games Miles played 2. ♘f4, which is known as the “London System”.

Back then I didn’t know much about that system, and actually didn’t care to know, because I saw mostly weaker players playing the “London System” and it seemed to me that they were using it with the purpose of achieving a draw. It was precisely that attitude I had beforehand that helped me understand that maybe a great number of other players also had the same attitude, that they were underestimating the system and that maybe it should be analysed in greater detail and given a new meaning. I began to see that it could also serve as a very strong psychological weapon if studied well. The “London System” wasn’t played very often at the top level, it was relatively unexplored and it was precisely those conclusions that showed me that the effort should be made to thoroughly analyse this opening.

The move 2. ♘f4 is pretty underestimated and is not considered serious enough, but I think it’s completely natural and logical. White’s structure is natural, with positions similar to those from Slav Defence and Stonewall with reverse colours, but with the problem of the inactive bishop, the so called “bad bishop” solved at the very beginning! By the way, I successfully played both of those openings as Black. Having that experience with the black pieces in mind, the study of the “London System” wasn’t a problem for me because I was already well-acquainted with the ideas and types of positions arising.

At the beginning of my exploration of this opening’s secrets I didn’t know if adequate literature about this system existed, so I relied mainly on the database, while I learned the most through my praxis and of course through analysis of my own games. The games of Croatian Grandmaster Vlatko Kovacevic were also a great influence on me. Help from my friends in analysis of the system was also very useful, so I often exchanged experiences and ideas with top Hungarian Grandmaster Ferenc Berkes, and I will take the

liberty to say that it was a fruitful collaboration because I'm personally satisfied with the results achieved using the studied material.

10 years after my first game in the "London System" — with more than 50 games played against many Grandmasters among others and with an overall performance over 2700 — I felt free and confident enough to distil my experience into a book, its purpose being to serve as a guide for other players searching for an opening which they will play with pleasure. The ideas and ways of treating these positions have changed over time, and I put an emphasis on that which I currently consider to be best for White.

This is the reason why the book is called *Winning with the Modern London System*. I have to mention that 1.d4 ♖f6 2.♘f4 or 2.♖f3 with ♘f4 are also known as the London System. Personally, I'm not a fan of the London System against 1...♗f6, especially when Black arranges his pieces as he would in the King's Indian Defence. The position of the bishop on f4 seems adequate to me only when black plays 1...d5, in which case it has a very important role to play, as opposed to when Black has the option of playing ...d6 when the London set-up seems less logical and I don't believe in it.

So I chose to deal with the London System only against 1...d5 in this book!

INTRODUCTION

In this book the London System opening is presented using all of the most important games with thorough comments, through which the readers will have the opportunity to understand the essence of this opening, which in my opinion has a future ahead of it and a lot of space for growth and development.

I would like to mention that the book comprises the most important parts of this opening, and also the ideas reached through the experience of playing games in tournaments, as well as the positions analysed in collaboration with Grandmaster Ferenc Berkes. But there should always be room, if a player chooses this opening, for some new interesting idea during the game itself, because either side (both White and Black) can encounter something new and unexplored in a relatively early phase of the game. Therein lies the beauty of chess: creativity, freedom to mix things up, and an abundance of possibilities and ideas for a game of high quality.

I'm certain that this book will be very helpful to most chess players in building a strong foundation in order to be able to use this opening in praxis. At this point it's important to say a few words about the move order. Many players enter this system with 2.♘f3 and 3.♙f4. Positions reached after 2.♘f3 are usually identical to those with 2.♙f4, but that move order is actually less elastic and it narrows down White's options. It is for this reason that I am promoting the development of the bishop on the 2nd move as the main move order. Those differences in options will be the most obvious in chapters 2 and 4.

In the process of writing this book the biggest problems for me arose from the different move orders used in the analysed games. In order to avoid confusing the readers, for each chapter there's an introduction where the correct move order can be seen clearly. I'm using this opportunity to point out to readers that they definitely shouldn't skip the introductions to the chapters!

At the present moment the London System is becoming increasingly popular at the top level — even in ‘classical’ tournament games, although it’s much more often seen in rapid. Currently the top players who use it most frequently are American Grandmaster Gata Kamsky and Russian Grandmaster Boris Grachev, while other top players occasionally have it in their repertoire, usually using it as a surprise weapon. Among them are Magnus Carlsen, Vladimir Kramnik and others. Also a great contribution to this system came from the French Grandmaster Eric Prié, who plays it in a very original and active manner.

One way or the other, what’s important are the facts which I obtained through my study of the London System and which I will prove in this book with a thorough analysis of games. I will show that this system is fully deserving of your attention for analysing and playing, that it’s unjustly neglected in comparison with other openings and also that it gives players myriad interesting positions on the board, free and creative play, with lots of space for further growth and improvement.

THE NARROW PATH OF ADVERSITY:

A BRIEF HISTORY

Searching through the database, the first name I found in connection to this opening, and who played it with the white pieces, was James Mason (19.11.1849–12.01.1905). A great number of his games can be found between 1876 and 1894. A little is known about this “forgotten” chess player from the XIX century. He was born in Kilkenny, Ireland. It’s interesting that he was adopted as a child and that his real name is in fact unknown. James Mason was the name given to him by the family which adopted him and with which he later moved to America in 1861. He was a writer and a journalist by profession, while chess was his hobby. James Mason left his first mark on the chess scene by winning the American Chess Congress in Philadelphia and also a tournament in New York. During the time he was actively playing he was one of the strongest players in the world, behind the strongest — Wilhelm Steinitz. He made a great contribution to the development of theory and even the “London System” was previously known as the “Mason

Variation”. He also wrote several books on chess, and the most popular were *The Principles of Chess Theory and Practice* (1894), *The Art of Chess* (1895), *Chess Openings* (1897) and *Social Chess* (1900).

J. Mason — J. M. Hanham [D02]

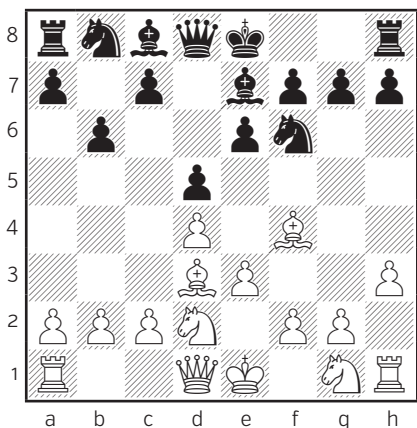
USA–06.Congress New York (13), 1889

This game shows that chess classics are still very important nowadays, especially in the development of young players who wrongly skips this part of chess, relying just on the assistance of computers. Over 130 years ago Mason James was playing the London System using ideas which are nowadays playable too, even though we live in the time of strong engines!

**1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d3
♘e7**

In the 19th century the Queens Gambit was one of the main openings against 1.d4 and Black is also aims for that set-up here. Nowadays it is considered a passive set-up for Black.

5. ♖d2 b6 6. h3



A limp move, but Mason wanted to preserve his Bishop. The modern reaction would be 6. ♖gf3 without fear of 6... ♖h5

(6... ♖b7 7. ♖e5 ♖bd7 8. ♖f3! and the square e4 is covered!)

7. ♖e5! and after 7... f6?

(7... ♖d7 8. g4 ♖hf6 9. g5 ♖h5 10. ♖f1!→ with ♖g3 next)

8. ♖g5!+- comes with an indefensible attack! 8... g6 9. ♖xh7! ♖f7 10. g4 ♖g7

(10... ♖xh7 11. gxh5 ♖xh5 12. ♖g1 f5 13. ♖f3±)

11. ♖xf6! ♖xf6 12. ♖f3 g5 13. h4 ♖d7 14. o-o-o ♖e7 15. ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 16. hxg5 ♖d7 17. ♖g3+- with many threats such as ♖f3- ♖h4 or f4-f5

6... ♖b7 7. ♖gf3 ♖bd7 8. o-o o-o

For Black 8... ♖e4 is almost always good, to close down the diagonal b1-h7! In the 19th century, players learned and built theory on their own mistakes, without books and databases.

9. ♖e5 ♖xe5

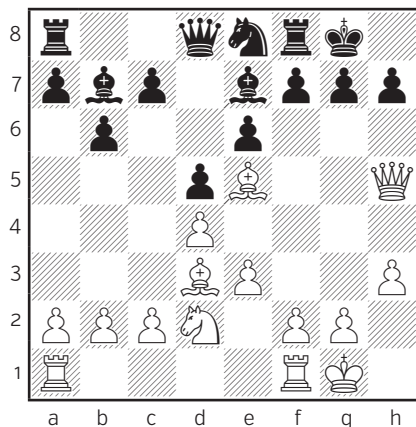
It also works here! 9... ♖e4!

10. ♖xe5 ♖e8?!

Black had no reason to play so passively. Consistent was 10... c5 11. c3 ♖d6 12. f4 ♖e4!= or the now well-known 10... ♖e4!

11. ♖h5!±

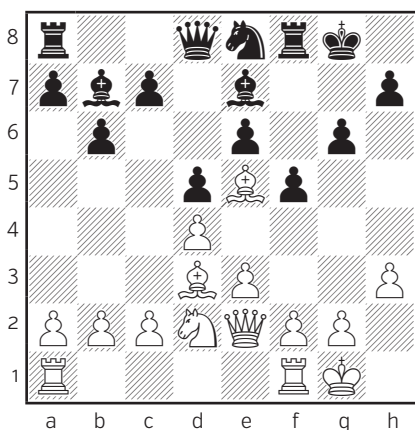
A typical plan in the London System also used nowadays by many strong players. White is trying to provoke weaknesses in Black's position, especially around his king.



11... g6 12. ♖e2 f6 13. ♖h2 f5

Prevents e4, but makes a weak point on e5!

14. ♖e5!



A nice positional move. Firstly White puts his bishop on its most active square and then continues with a typical kingside plan!

14... ♗f6?!

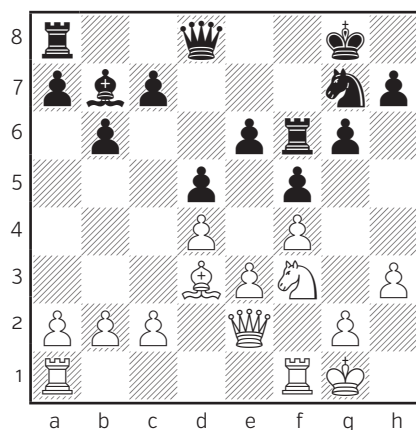
It was a bad idea to head for the exchange of bishops after which the dark squares will be permanently weak! Much better was 14... ♞d6 with ... ♞f7 next.

15. f4 ♞g7?

A very bad place for the knight. Much better and more natural was again 15... ♞d6

16. ♗xf6 ♜xf6 17. ♞f3±

After a series of inaccurate moves from Black, White is now positionally winning and all of Black's pieces stand awkwardly.



17... a5 18. ♞e5 ♜f8 19. g3

The position has a closed character so time is not a key factor, but anyway I don't support wasting time! It was better to play 19. g4± immediately.

19... ♞e8

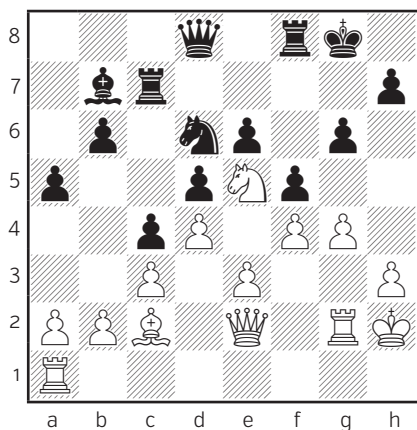
Finally Black improves his knight's position!

20. ♜f2 ♞d6 21. ♜g2 c5 22. c3 c4?

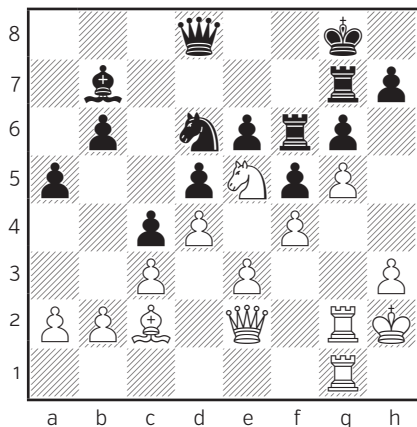
Another positional mistake! By closing the center, White has a free hand on the kingside! In many open tournaments, and also in my praxis, I encountered this bad move from low-rated players. Much better was 22... ♞c8 with the idea being to exchange the bad bishop with ... ♗a6!

23. ♗c2 ♜c8 24. ♜h2 ♜c7 25. g4!

Finally, after lengthy preparation, White obtains what he wanted.



25...Rg7 26. Bg1 Rf6 27.g5±

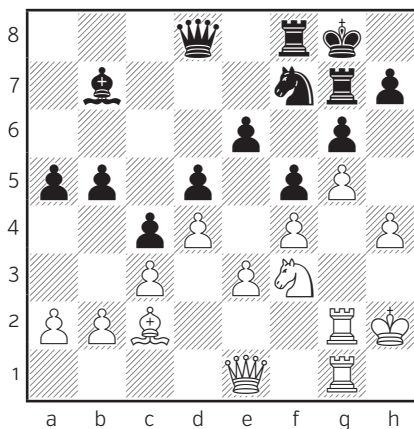


A very risky decision which could have cost him a half-point. Closing the position always brings the risk of a complete blockade. I prefer 27.h4 Rf8 28. Ke3± with the idea of h5

27...Rf8 28. Ke1!

White is careful! 28.h4? h5!= leads to a complete blockade!

28...b5 29.h4 Nf7 30. Nf3!



Of course! By exchanging knights White loses the chance to make a break-through!

30... Qc6 31. Qd1 Qe8 32.h5 Nd6 33. Rh1 gxh5?!

Black loses patience! He should search for an escape with 33... Ke7! 34.hxg6+ hxg6 35. Ne5+ Ke7 36. Qg3 Nf7 37. Rh7 Rfg8 and it's not clear how to break into Black's position.

34. Ke1 Ne4?

Pseudo-activity with the knight! It is needed to help in defense, so 34... Qg6 35. Ne5 Nf7 36. Qxh5 Nxe5 37.dxe5 Qb6± and a draw is not so far off!

35. Ne5 Ke8 36. Qxh5+-

Now nothing can save the black monarch!

36...♖fg8 37.♙xe8 ♜xe8 38.♖h6
 ♜e7 39.♜h4 b4 40.cxb4 axb4
 41.♖h2 c3 42.♘g6+!

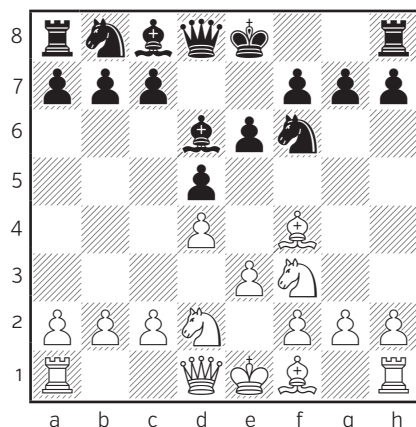
Conclusion: Nowadays, almost 130 years later, White uses the same plan on the kingside.

1-0

A. Rubinstein — S. Tartakower
 BCF Congress, London (13), 1922

In 1922, 17 years after James Mason's death, a very strong tournament called London BCF Congress was played, and it was won convincingly by 3rd World Champion Jose Raul Capablanca with score of 13 points from 15 games without defeat, in front of other elite players Alekhine, Vidmar, Rubinstein, Bogoljubow, Reti, Tartakower, Maroczy, Euwe etc. In that tournament the system with 1.d4 and ♙f4 was used very often and after that this opening was renamed from "Mason Variation" to the "London System". In this game the famous top player from the beginning of the 20 century, Akiba Rubinstein, used for that time a very original plan, where he destroys his own pawn structure in order to achieve other plusses in the position and nicely outplays his fellow famous opponent Savielly Tartakower!

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♙f4 e6 4.e3
 ♙d6 5.♘bd2!?

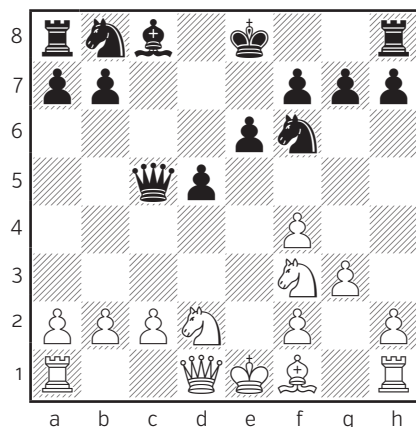


An interesting treatment of the position. Allowing a partial destruction of his pawn structure, White takes greater control of the e5 square.

5...♙xf4 6.exf4 c5

This is not a mistake, but I prefer 6...0-0 7.♙d3 b6 with the idea of ... ♙a6 and later ...c5. to have available, after dxc5, bxc5!

7.dxc5 ♜c7 8.g3 ♜xc5?!



8...♘bd7 was a better option with the idea being to exchange one pair of knights, e.g. 9.♘b3 (9.b4 b6 10.cxb6 axb6) 9...o-o 10.♙d3 ♘xc5 11.♘xc5 ♙xc5 and the position is about equal.

9.♙d3 ♘c6 10.c3

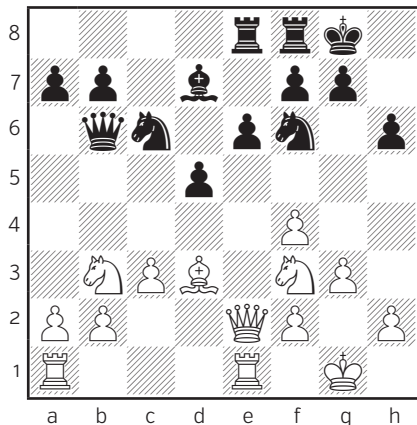
Preventing ...♘b4 and creating a post for the knight on d4.

10...o-o 11.o-o h6 12.♘b3 ♙b6 13.♙e1±

Black doesn't have an active plan, while White is controlling all the important squares in the center.

13...♙d7 14.♙e2 ♙ae8?

The wrong plan! Correct was 14...a5! with ...a4 next, aiming to exchange one pair of knights.



15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♘h7?

Tartakower resorts to passive play, which was not in his style! More active was to offer a pawn with 16...♘e4! 17.♙e3!

(After 17.♙e3 dxe4 18.♙xe4 ♙c6± Black getting some hopes with active Bishop!)

Entering into the endgame where Black lacks serious counterplay. 17...♙xe3 18.♙xe3 f5 19.exf6 gxf6!

(19...♘xf6 20.♙ae1±)

20.♙xe4 dxe4 21.♙xe4 e5 and a pawn down in the endgame Black can hope for salvation thanks to his active bishop.

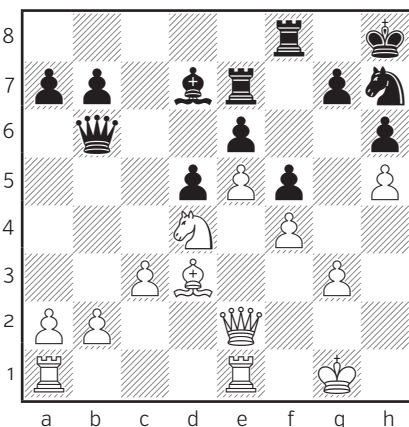
17.h4 f5

Black is more-or-less forced to play this move. For example 17...f6 18.♙c2 f5 19.♘d4±

18.♘d4 ♙e7 19.f4

In this game, like in the previous, Black has a problem with his "French bishop".

19...♙h8 20.h5!



Black is left without counterplay and White has enough time to prepare the g4 break.

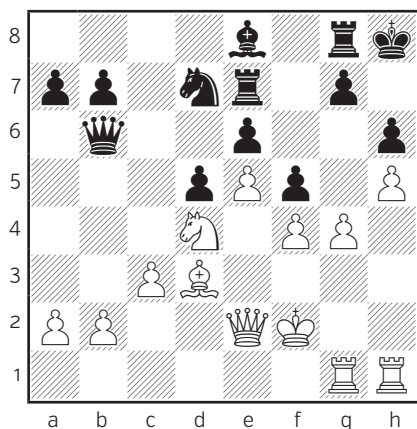
20...♖g8 21.♔f2?!

Rubinstein starts to lose the thread of the game! Now Black can consolidate his position. The safest move was 21.♔h1! ♜f8 22.♖g1 ♕e8 23.♖g2 ♜d7 24.♖ag1 ♜c5 25.♕b1± and g4 is coming next move!

21...♜f8!

Now Black finds the nice knight route via d7-c5-e4

22.♖h1 ♕e8 23.♖ag1 ♜d7 24.g4!?



White continues with his plan! Also interesting was the prophylactic 24.b4!? and although it looks like a weakening and a very 'responsible' move, White would prevent counterplay (with ...♜c5) and after 24...♜b8 25.♖e3 ♜c6 26.♖c1 White has a small but long-term advantage.

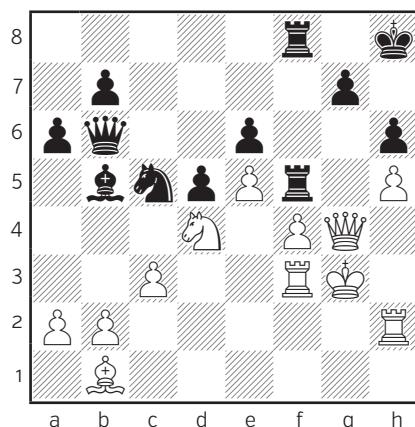
24...♜c5 25.♕b1 fxg4 26.♔g3?!

An adventurous move, maybe in time-trouble, but it doesn't have a big negative effect on White's happiness! 26.♖xg4 was good enough 26...♜e4+ 27.♔g2± with the idea of taking on e4 at some point.

26...♖f8 27.♖h2

A clever move! Freeing the queen from defending the b2 pawn.

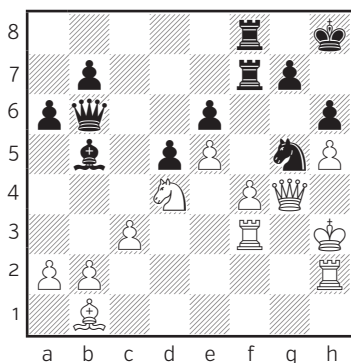
27...♖ef7 28.♖f1 a6 29.♖xg4 ♕b5 30.♖f3 ♖f5??+-



A 'panic' move; now we can be sure they were in time-trouble! Black could still save the game, although with less than easy moves! 30...♜e4+ 31.♔h3

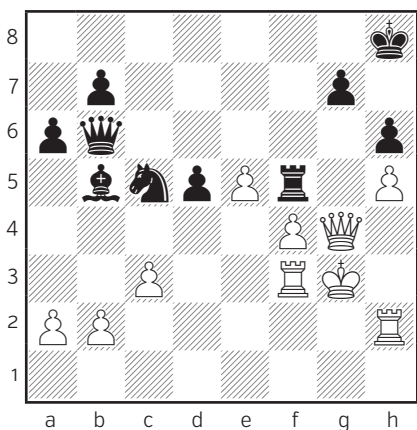
(31.♕xe4? dxe4 32.♖e3 ♖xf4 33.♖xf4 ♖xf4 34.♔xf4 ♕c4±)

31...♜g5+!



32.fxg5 ♖xf3+ 33.♘xf3 ♕e3
34.♙g3 hxg5 35.h6 g6 36.♖f2 ♖f4
37.♗xe6 ♖xf3+! 38.♖xf3 ♗g1+
39.♙h3 ♗h1±

31.♘xf5 exf5 32.♙xf5 ♖xf5?



Black misses his last practical chance. An interesting try was 32...

♘e4+!? after which White has to find difficult moves 33.♙h4!

(33.♙g2 ♙e2↖; 33.♙h3 ♖xf5!
34.♗xf5 ♗g1↖; 33.♙xe4 dxe4
34.♖ff2 ♗e3+ 35.♙g2 ♗d3
36.♗g6!±)

33...♗c5 34.♙xe4 dxe4 35.♖ff2 e3
36.♖fg2 ♖f7 37.♙g3 ♖d7 38.♖h1
♖d2 39.♖e1+-

33.♗xf5 ♘e4+ 34.♙g2 ♙e2
35.♗g6!

Being a double-exchange up, it is not a bad idea to give back one to simplify the position.

35...♙xf3+ 36.♙xf3 ♗b5 37.♗g2

Still White needs to be careful not to blunder into some perpetual checks.

37...♗d3+ 38.♙g4 g5 39.♗f3

Now it's over and the rest of game just shows the fighting spirit of the legendary Savielly!

39...♗b1 40.fxg5 hxg5 41.h6 ♗g1+
42.♖g2 ♗c5 43.♗f7 ♗c8+ 44.e6
♗g8 45.♗xg8+ ♙xg8 46.♙f5

1-0

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PART 2



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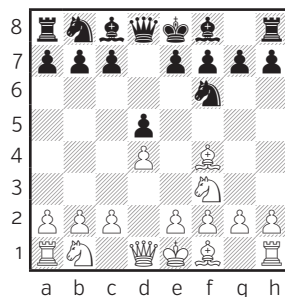
PREFACE

One year after my first book *Winning with the Modern London System* was published, I decided to round out our white repertoire to include Black's response 1...f6. I have tried my best to write this book in the same spirit as my first one, meaning that openings are explained through analysing complete games, putting the accent on typical plans and pawns structures arising in these kinds of positions. Only a small part of the book contains some forcing positions that need more in the way of 'memorising'. This repertoire which I am recommending is a good weapon against very sharp and well-prepared opponents.

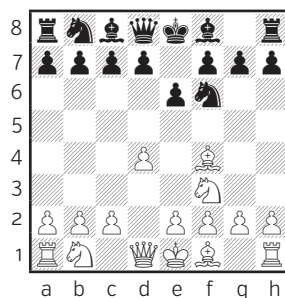
Nikola Sedlak

INTRODUCTION

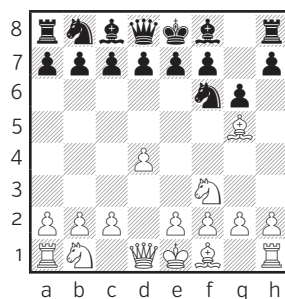
The book in front of you is organised into four main chapters. The first chapter deals with positions after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♙f4 which I refer to later in this book as the “Updated London System”. The main subject of this chapter are new positions which have become popular in the last year. The leaders of the black pieces came up with new, computer-assisted ideas and a big theoretical battle is still in progress.



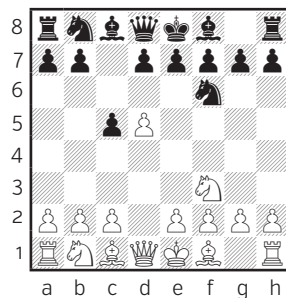
In the second chapter we will see positions starting with 1. d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙f4 which is also a branch of the London system. Most of the games that I analyse here are without Black’s response ...d7-d5, a move which I already covered in my first book. Most often plans chosen by Black in this line are connected with ...c7-c5 and ...b7-b6, aiming for “hedgehog” setups. The most prominent exponent in these positions for the white side is the American grandmaster Gata Kamsky and this chapter features several beautiful victories by him.



Next we turn to the Torre Attack, which starts after the moves 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♙g5. The Torre Attack has become very popular at the top level and constitutes an unpleasant weapon against King’s Indian and Grünfeld players, because the arising positions are not so forced and sharp. It was often employed by great English grandmasters, such as Adams and Miles. It is also popular among Indian grandmasters, notably Harikrishna and Sasikiran.



Last but not least is the chapter with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 covering Anti-Benoni positions. The main difference to normal Benoni/ Benko structures is that White does not play c2-c4, but rather Nc3 immediately - leaving the c4-square available for the knight. This setup is considered to be unpleasant for Black, because it throws them off their familiar ground. This repertoire that I suggest to you is simple to grasp, yet the positions are not without venom. The best proof for this is that these positions were (and still are) in the repertoires of World Champions such as Kasparov, Carlsen, Smyslov and Kramnik. The positions covered in this book are often interesting and original and I hope that it will help you to achieve good results in your own games!

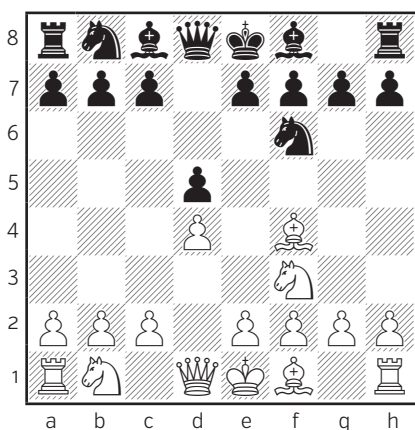


Nikola Sedlak

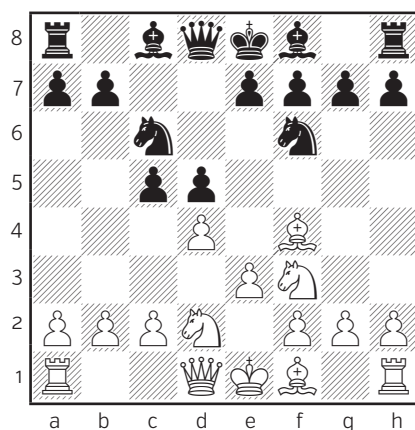
CHAPTER ONE

THE UPDATED LONDON SYSTEM

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♙f4



3...c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.♘bd2!?



My suggestion here is to go for a 'London System'. Compared with my 1st book, here we encounter a difference because in this position we have inserted the moves ♘f3 and ...♘f6. It doesn't change so much, only in one position, so in this chapter we will see only that critical position — and some new plans for Black played in the last year. If you need more you can find it in 'Winning with the Modern London System', Chess Evolution 2016.

Only this move-order promises a fight for the initiative. In the past year this position has become very popular, even at the top level of chess.

Other possibilities, such as 5.c3?! give Black a comfortable position after 5...♙b6 6.♙b3 c4 7.♙c2 ♙f5! and Black is fine.

5...♙b6

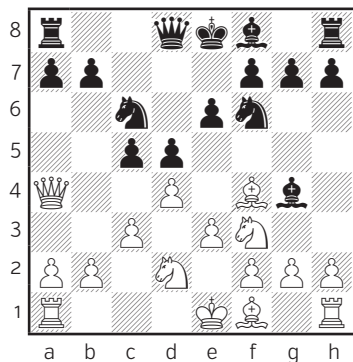
The most critical move, after which the position is going to be very sharp. Black also has other options;

5...cxd4 Here we have a transposition to the famous 'Carlsbad structure'. 6.exd4 ♙b6 Only this

move is interesting for us here. The bad side of this move is that it renders difficult the implementation of a minority attack. Other continuations you can again find in my first book 'Winning with the Modern London System', Chess Evolution 2016 in CHAPTER 1. (6... ♖g4; 6...g6; 6... ♖f5) 7. ♘b3 ♖g4 8.h3 — see Ni Hua–Igonin Temur, Asia Continental Open 2016;

5... ♖f5?! at this moment doesn't work well because White has 6.dxc5! e6 7. ♘d4 ♖xc5 8. ♘xf5 exf5 9.c3± with a long-term and stable advantage thanks to his better pawn structure;

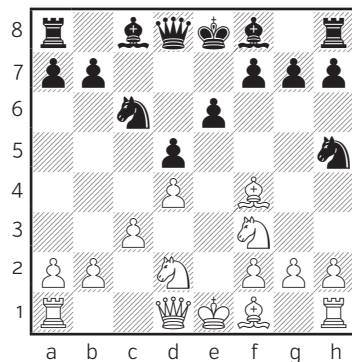
5... ♖g4 is one of the reasonable options: 6.c3 e6 7. ♖a4!?



See Shimanov A-Cox J, us Masters Open 2016;

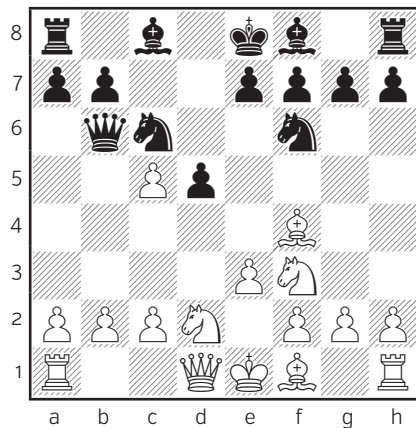
5...e6 is again displayed in 'Winning with the Modern London System', Chess Evolution 2016 in CHAPTER 4, but in this book I will explain a new Black concept, one which started to become very popular at

the end of 2016. 6.c3 cxd4!? 7.exd4 ♘h5



See Sedlak N-Shimanov A, Minsk 2017.

6.dxc5



What else? Otherwise White loses a pawn.

6... ♖xb2

The most principled reaction.

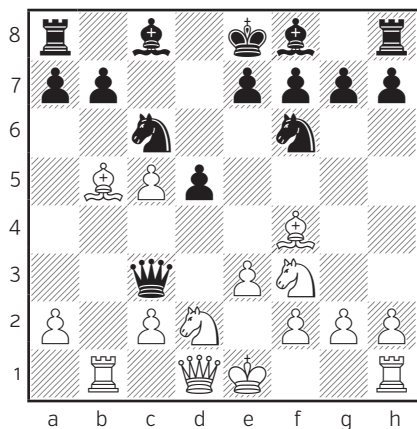
7. ♖b1 ♖c3□

The safest place for the queen and preventing c4!

7...♔a3?! — this move is senseless because it allows a quick c4 compared with 7...♔c3;

7...♔xa2? 8.♙b5 ♔a5 9.c4 e6 10.0–0↑

8.♙b5



White has a lead in development and the main debate revolves around White's ability to use it and gain something more than compensation for the b-pawn. Tournament praxis shows at the moment that this position is very dangerous for Black. See the games: Sedlak N–Blagojevic D, Cetinje Open 2016 and Pert N-D Costa L, BCF 2016.

Ni Hua—T. Igonin [Do2]

Asian Continental op 15th Tashkent
(4), 2016

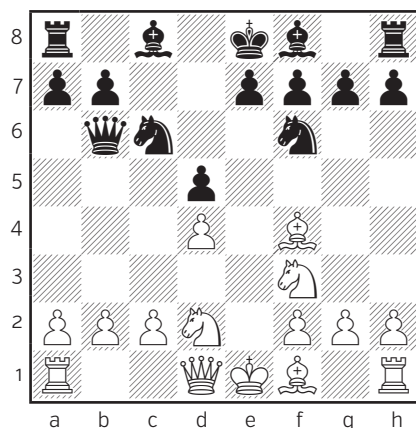
This game is very instructive, mainly because of the famous Carlsbad structure where Black went wrong

with the dubious plan of 6...♔b6. With that move, Black was unable to implement the minority attack, which is the main idea in similar positions. It gave White time to organize a typical kingside attack undisturbed.

1.d4 d5 2.♙f4 ♘f6 3.e3 c5 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.♘bd2 cxd4 6.exd4

The Carlsbad structure occurs frequently in the 'London System', and that's why it is important to know the chess classics.

6...♔b6?!



This move reduces Black's opportunities on the queenside, because the minority attack — as mentioned, one of the main ideas for Black in this structure — is far off.

Much better options for Black are 6...♙f5, 6...♙g4, 6...g6 and all of them are explained in my earlier book 'Winning with the Modern London System'.

7. ♖b3±

White is forced to put his knight in a 'strange' place in order not to lose a pawn, but in general the knight's position is not bad and can often be very useful, especially after pushing a4-a5.

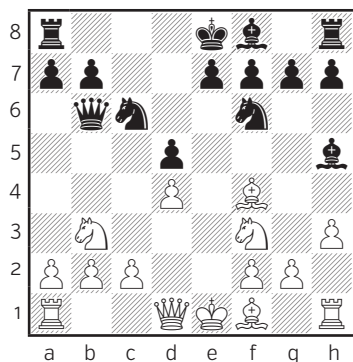
7... ♙g4

Black can also play the natural 7... ♙f5 8.c3 e6 (Preserving the light-squared bishop would be a big waste of time. 8...h6?! 9.a4! a6 10.a5 ♖d8 11. ♖c5±) 9. ♖h4! ♙e4 10.f3 ♙g6 11. ♖xg6 hxg6 12.g4 ♙e7 13. ♚c2±

8.h3 ♙xf3?!

But giving up the bishop pair in this way is not a great idea because it facilitates White's play on the kingside.

A better option was 8... ♙h5



but it's not without risk. Now White has two ways to continue; very aggressively or more positionally. Let's see both: The more positional option is 9.c3 which I suggest because

it's more in the spirit of these structures.

(Very sharp and complex positions arise after 9.a4!? a6. It seems as though Black needs to stop the a-pawn.

(9...e6 10.a5 ♖d8 11.a6± and now Black feels the absence of his light-squared bishop from the queenside after the following ♙b5.)

10.a5 ♖d8 11.g4!? This is not necessary, but it's an interesting try.

(It is always possible to play 11.c3 with standard plans.)

11... ♙g6 12. ♖e5 and now Black needs to play very accurately in view of his shaky bishop on g6. 12... e6 13.h4 ♖xe5 14.dxe5

(14. ♙xe5 ♖c8 15.c3 h5±)

14... ♖c7! The only way to avoid material losses. 15. ♖d4

(15.c3 h5! 16.g5 ♖d7±)

5... ♖xg4 16.f3 ♖h6 17.h5 ♙f5

(17... ♙xc2? 18. ♖c1 ♖f5 19. ♖d2 ♖c8 20. ♖a1!+-)

18. ♖a4+ ♖d7 19. ♖d4 ♙c5 20. ♙xh6 ♙xd4

(20... ♖xa4 21. ♜xa4 gxh6 22. ♘xf5 exf5=)

21. ♘xg7 ♜g8 22. ♖xd4 ♜xg7= and after this all-out melee, the position is approximately equal.)

9...e6 10. ♘d3 ♖d8! If you are improving your pieces, it can't be a waste of time.

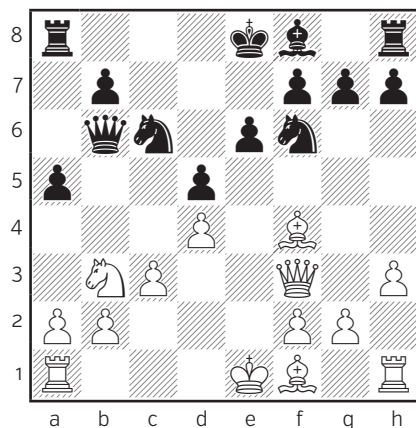
(At grandmaster level, in one game, Black chose a dubious plan with 10... ♘e7 11. ♖e2 a5 12. ♜b1 o-o 13. ♘bd2 a4 14. o-o ♜fc8 15. ♜fe1 ♖d8 16. a3 ♘g6 17. ♘xg6 hxg6 18. h4± and White had a free hand to build a typical attack with ♖g2-♜h1-h5 Berkes F – Mihok O, Zalakaros 2016)

11. o-o ♘d6 12. ♘xd6 ♖xd6 13. ♜e1 o-o 14. ♘bd2 ♜ab8 15. a4 a6 16. ♖b1! Removing himself from the pin with the idea of ♘e5. 16... ♘g6 17. ♘xg6 hxg6 18. ♘e5 ♖c7 19. ♘d3± It's easier to play with White. The typical plan with g3-h4-♖g2-♜h1 also works here, and Black's minority attack with ...b5 is not dangerous. For example: 19...b5 20. axb5 axb5 21. b4 and White gains a pleasant position for his knight on c5.

9. ♖xf3 e6

Too risky would be 9... ♘xd4? 10. ♘xd4 ♖xd4 11. ♘b5+- with a decisive initiative for White!

10. c3 a5?!



This move doesn't really have a deep idea behind it. It looks like a try to justify 6... ♖b6 and nothing more.

It is easy to say this in hindsight, but the best plan was to admit the mistake and continue with 10... ♖d8 11. ♘d3 ♘d6± with an acceptable position.

In a relatively fresh game there was played 10... ♘e7 11. ♘d3 o-o 12. o-o ♖d8 13. ♜fe1 ♘d6 14. ♘g5± with a slight and stable advantage for White: Nisipeanu, L - Khismatullin, D Gjakova 2016.

11. ♜b1 ♘e7

Forcing events is not going to be in Black's favour after 11... a4 12. ♘d2 a3 13. bxa3! ♖a7 14. a4 ♘e7 15. ♘b5 o-o 16. o-o±

12. ♘d3 o-o 13. o-o a4 14. ♘d2 ♜ad8?!

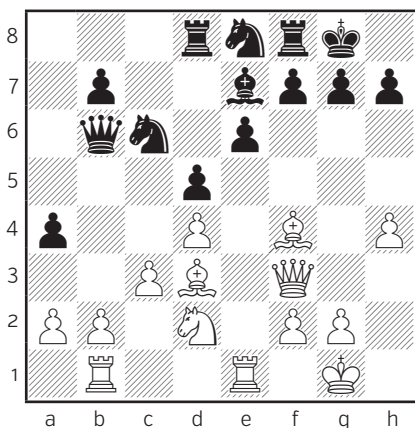
After this move, Black's queen will remain far from the action.

It was still not too late for 14... ♖d8 with the idea of ... ♗d6.

15. ♖fe1 ♘e8

With a lack of active play, these kinds of moves become a reality.

16. h4!±



By pushing the h-pawn, White is going to provoke weaknesses.

16... ♗d6

Immediately losing is 16... ♗xh4 after 17. ♖h5+-

17. ♗g5

White avoids a trade which would make Black's position easier.

17... ♗e7 18. ♗c2 ♖a5

Now White would be happy with swaps after 18... ♗xg5 19.hxg5 because White will use his open h-file for the attack by bringing his rook to h1 after g3-♗g2-♖h1

19. ♖d1?!

A somewhat unexpected move.

More natural was 19. ♖d3 g6 20. ♗h6 ♘g7 21. ♘f3→ and the attack plays itself.

19...b5?!

Black misses his chance.

After 19...a3 20.b4 ♖c7± Black could gain decent play (against the pawn on c3).

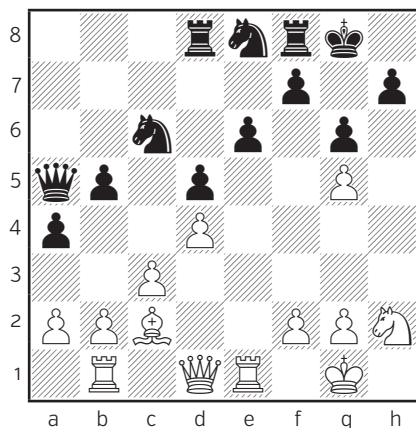
20. ♘f3 ♗xg5

Black finally cracks under the pressure.

21.hxg5 g6

Sooner or later, this weakening of the dark squares around the black king was inevitable! White's threat was ♖d3.

22. ♘h2!



Of course, White is going to use these weakened squares.

22...♔c7 23.♚e2 ♖b8 24.g3

This is a typical method of using the open h-file with the idea of ♖g2-♖h1.

24...♘d8

Black defends the e6-point, planning to defend with ...f6 if necessary.

25.♙d3?!

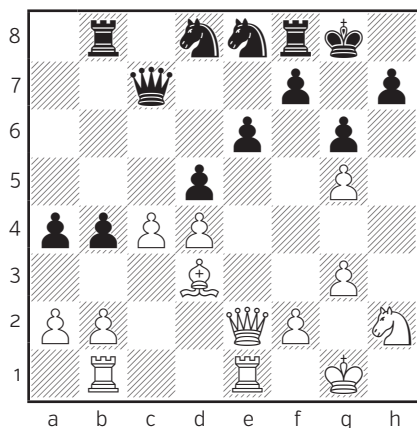
Probably in time trouble, White allows some counterplay.

After 25.a3± all Black's dreams on the queenside would disappear.

25...b4

Spoiling White's structure doesn't bring Black a satisfactory result, because all complications lead quickly to Black's demise. For example: 25...a3 26.bxa3 ♚xc3 27.♘g4! ♚xd4 28.♙xb5 ♘d6 29.♖b4! ♚g7 30.♘f6+ ♔h8 31.♖h4+-

26.c4?!



This is a typical reaction against the minority attack, but here — concretely — it was not the best idea. Black develops serious counterplay against the d4-pawn and things are no longer going to be so clear.

Less weakening was 26.♖bc1 bxc3 27.bxc3 with a continuing attack on the kingside.

26...♘c6 27.cxd5 exd5?

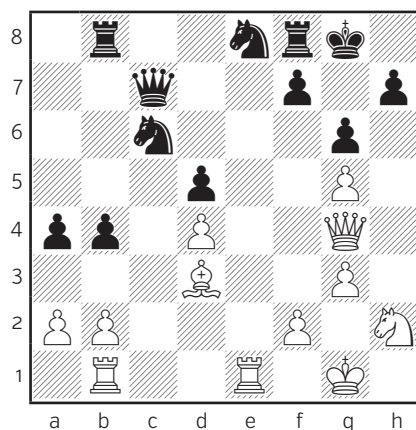
Black again misses his chance!

27...♘xd4! would have brought him close to equality: 28.♚e3 ♘f5 29.♙xf5 exf5±

28.♚g4?!

The g4-square looks more natural for the knight, but in a big fight, imprecisions are a natural occurrence!

The best move was 28.♖bc1! and after 28...♘xd4 29.♚e3 ♚b6 30.♘g4± Black remains with bad piece coordination.



28... ♖b6?

The queen heads far from her weak king.

Black could solve his problems with the active move 28...f5! 29.gxf6 ♖f7 30.♗f3 ♘xf6 31.♖e6 ♖xe6 32.♙xe6 ♘e4! ♗ and a draw is not far off.

29.♗f3 ♘g7 30.♙bc1 ♙bd8 31.♙g2 f5

Black must somehow oppose the ♖h1–♖h4 plan.

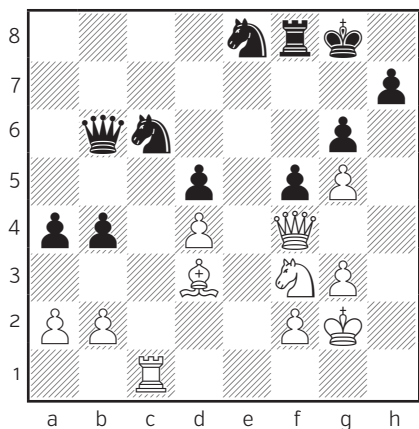
32.♖h4 ♙de8 33.♙xe8 ♘xe8

The only move!

33...♙xe8 34.♙h1 ♘h5 35.♙xf5+-

34.♖f4!+-

White is not interested in the h-file anymore and instead starts to play against the bad knight on e8.



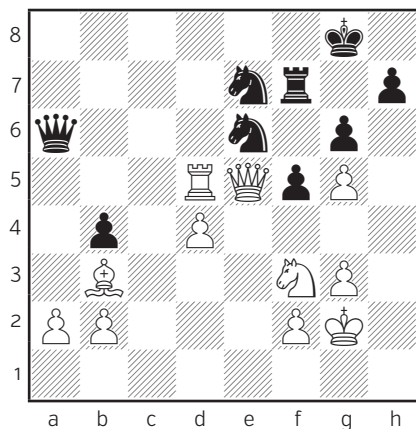
34... ♖b7 35.♙c5 ♘e7 36.♖e5

White's pieces are slowly entering into Black's camp.

36... ♙f7 37.♙b5

The positional advantage is now transformed to a material one as the bishop comes to the ideal b3-square.

37... ♘g7 38.♙xa4 ♖a6 39.♙b3 ♘e6 40.♙xd5!



White finds the fastest and most effective way to finish the game.

40... ♘xd5 41.♖xd5 ♙f8

Black is forced to give up more material.

41...♙e7 doesn't help because White can utilise the pin with 42.♖d8+ ♙f7 43.♘e5+-

42.♖xe6 ♖xe6 43.♙xe6 ♙c7

44.♙b3 ♙c1 45.♘e5 1-0

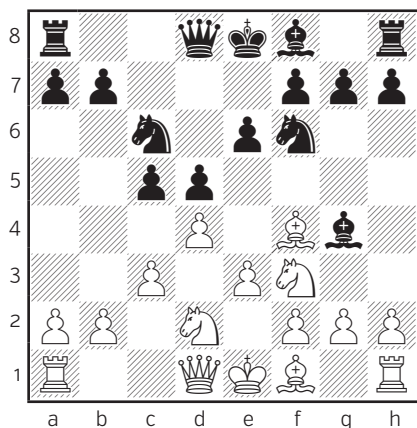
A. Shimanov — J. J. Cox [Do2]

US Masters Open Greensboro (1.1),
25.08.2016

In this game Black used one of the most solid continuations with 6... ♘g4. The game is very instructive, mainly because of the many original decisions made by Shimanov, where he often changed the structure in this game with the idea of avoiding boring positions. This game also shows that the London is not just a static and schematic opening, but offers a player the chance to show his creativity.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f4 ♘f6 3.e3 c5 4.♘d2
♘c6 5.c3 ♘g4 6.♘gf3 e6

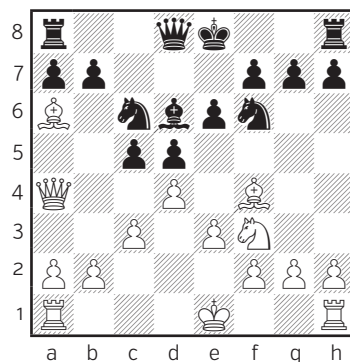
Black chooses a very natural method of development. If White want to fight for the advantage he must do something concrete.

**7. ♖b3**

A typical reply! White moves from the pin with tempo.

Also making sense was 7. ♖a4, in the spirit of the Cambridge Springs variation with reverse colours. The threat is unpleasant — ♘e5 — but Black has a pretty and simple solution 7... ♘xf3 8. ♘xf3 a6! A key move! Black prevents ♘b5 and avoids the trap.

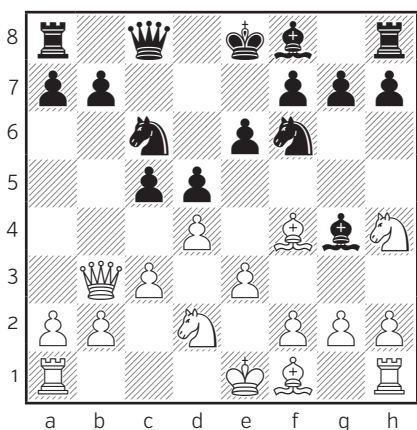
(The famous trap in the London System appears after 8... ♘d6? 9. ♘a6!±



Skoberne J-Sebenik M, Vidmar Memorial, 2016.)

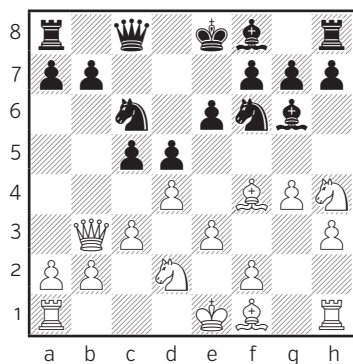
9. ♘e5 ♖c8 10. ♘xc6 ♖d7! 11. ♘e2 ♖xc6 12. ♖xc6+ ♖xc6 and the end-game is very close to equal. Black's idea is just to exchange dark-squared bishops and 'not play for a win' anymore.

7... ♖c8 8. ♘h4!



Only with this move-order can White take the bishop pair avoiding simplifications.

Imprecise is 8.h3 ♘h5 9.g4 ♘g6 10. ♘h4



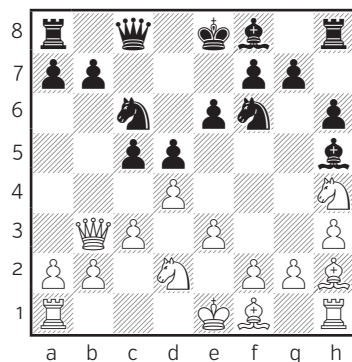
because Black has the relieving move 10... ♖e4! 11. ♖xg6 (11. ♖xe4 ♘xe4 12.f3 ♘e7! 13.g5 c4 14. ♖d1 ♘g6 15. ♖xg6 hxg6 16.h4 ♘d8! with ... ♘c7 next and Black is fine!) 11... ♖xd2 12. ♖d1 hxg6 13. ♖xd2 ♖d7 14. ♘g2 cxd4 15.exd4 ♘d6= 1/2 -1/2 Prohaszka P –Horvath J, Hungary 2016.

8... ♖d7

This is a critical moment and Black plays one of many logical moves in this position! He is improving his queen in order to play ...o-o-o or ... ♘d6 at an opportune moment.

Very logical is 8...h6!? threatening a fork with ...g5, which leads to very non-standard positions after 9.h3 g5

(9... ♘h5 10. ♘h2!



10...g5 What else against g4? 11. ♖hf3 — and it transposes to 9... g5) 10. ♘h2 ♘h5 (10... ♘xh3 11.gxh3 gxh4 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.o-o-o ♖d7 14. ♖a4±)

11. ♖hf3 and White has easier play as his pawn structure is healthier. For example: 11...c4 12. ♖d1 ♘e7 13. ♘e2± with the idea to trade bishops after ♖e5 and then e4 comes.

Lukewarm moves like 8... ♘e7 play into White's hands after 9.h3 ♘h5 10.g4 ♘g6 11. ♖xg6 hxg6 12. ♘g2± and White has achieved