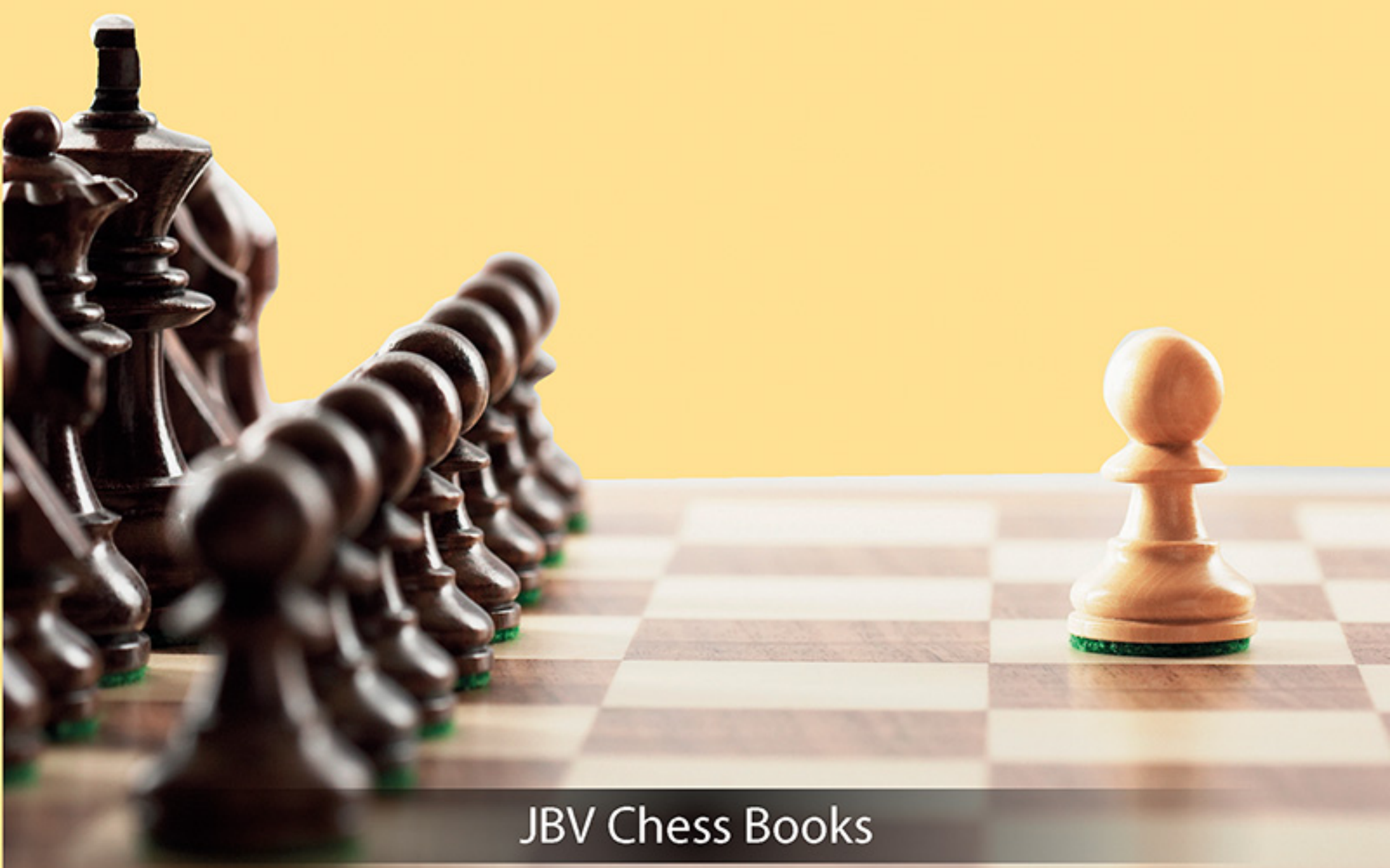


Justus Bargsten

The Italian Opening for White

Planning and strategic understanding



JBV Chess Books

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strategic understanding

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Preface

A few years ago, when I wrote a book about ‘the slow Italian’ (together with IM Georgios Souleidis), its boom, which continues to this day, had only just begun. Although White’s approach is quite slow, it’s nevertheless very sustainable. In contrast to the book mentioned, which offers a complete repertoire for White, Justus Bargsten’s work focuses on the two meanwhile established main lines, which differ mainly in the detail of whether Black chooses a setup with a7-a6 or a7-a5.

1st main line

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙c5 5.c3 h6 6.0–0 d6 7.♞e1 a6 8.a4 ♙a7 9.♘bd2 0–0 10.h3

or

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 a6 6.0–0 0–0 7.♞e1 ♙a7 8.h3 d6 9.a4 h6 10.♘bd2

2nd main line

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙c5 5.c3 d6 6.0–0 0–0 7.h3 h6 8.♞e1 a5

The author has succeeded in presenting the modern developments very well and in explaining the plans of the super grandmasters in an understandable way. It turns out that it’s anything but easy for Black to completely neutralize White’s initiative. The reason for this is that not only does White have many plans to choose from on either wing, but also a number of other small pluses – such as the first move advantage and the fact that the c6-knight is restricted by the c3-pawn.

From a didactic point of view, I find it very good that Bargsten’s book also offers well thought-out exercises. Furthermore, the reader is provided with valuable information about the subtleties of different move orders, about tricks and pitfalls to avoid, and particularly about the question of when and under what circumstances White should play h2-h3.

Bargsten’s work was created as part of a trainer’s course and it wasn’t just me who liked it very much right from the start, but also all the other members of the examination committee (among them FM Bernd Laubsch and Volker Janssen). And since the whole thing also stood up to my analytical scrutiny, it made sense to suggest that the author make a book out of it.

As a reader, let yourself be inspired by his profound thoughts on this opening and get as much as possible out of this solid and long-underestimated opening with White.

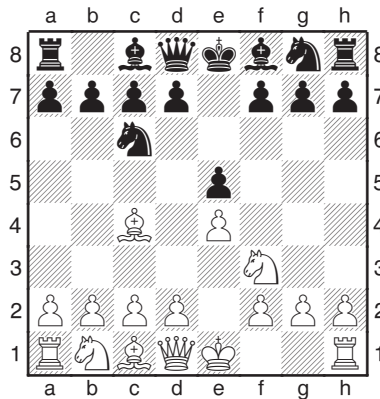
GM Dr. Karsten Müller

Hamburg, November 2022

1. Introduction

The problem with the Italian d3 structures is that they look easy even though they are not. They are often played by club players, and in this regard the bible quote „for they know not what they do“ is often appropriate.

(FM Bernd Laubsch)



The Italian opening is one of the oldest in chess history, being mentioned as early as the 15th century¹⁾, but is still a frequent guest today, even at the highest level, most recently at the 2021 world championship match between Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi. Here the Russian challenger chose it in the 11th and final game of the match, as he had previously bitten his teeth on Carlsen's solid repertoire after **3...Bb5** and therefore wanted to steer the game down different and less well-trodden paths. Although the challenger lost this game, the use of the Italian opening alone shows that it's a serious weapon even at the absolute top level.

With this work, the author aims to show players with a rating of around 1800-2000 the modern ideas of the Italian opening. The positions examined are based on White's 'slow' plan, i.e. if after **3...Bc5** he doesn't choose one of the many gambits such as the Evans Gambit **4.b4** or after **3...Nf6** the aggressive sortie **4.Ng5**, but instead a calmer approach characterized by positional ideas.

The author does not attempt to offer the reader a complete repertoire, but rather to explain the ideas of the resulting middlegame positions. The material primarily includes the systems **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d3 Bc5 5.c3 h6 6.O-O d6 7.Ba1 a6 8.a4 Bb7 9.Bbd2 0-0 10.h3** and **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d3 Bc5 5.c3 d6 6.O-O 0-0 7.h3 h6 8.Ba1 a5**, where especially the latter has gained enormous popularity in current practice. In these lines, the ideas for White are examined in separate chapters.

1) https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italienische_Partie

On the other hand, the positions after **1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 0-0 6.0-0 d5** or **1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3** are ignored unless Black continues with **4...♙c5** now. The reason is that they differ too much from those in the main lines and the concepts presented 'here' hardly apply 'there'. However, if a reader wishes to use this work as a basis for an opening repertoire, I strongly encourage him to study these systems as well.

1.1 Why the Italian?

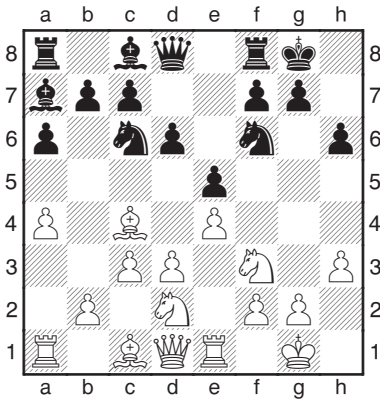
Many white players choose the Italian opening because they want to obtain a substantial game. The positions are often less concrete and tactical than, for example, the Scotch Game (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4) and less analyzed than the main lines of the Spanish Opening (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5). Thus, the modern Italian offers a good mix of uncharted territory and positional understanding.

Furthermore, in the Italian Opening (compared to the many possible setups against the Ruy Lopez - Berlin Wall, Marshall, Breyer and Chigorin to name a few) Black's choices are far more limited. Since the arising positions are often similar, it's easier for White to develop a plan based on the concepts presented in this work.

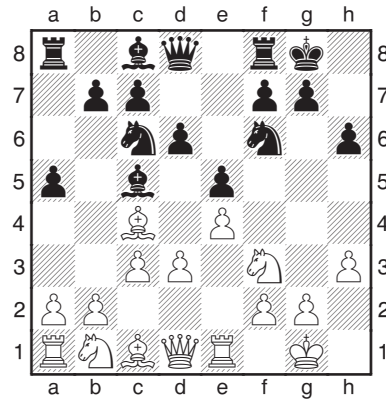
Although White's plan mostly depends on Black's setup, this should not be confused with a purely reactive approach, as White can very well put his individual stamp on the game. The typical plans with a7-a6 or a7-a5 are fundamentally different. Against a7-a6 White will mostly try to launch a long-term queenside deployment (as outlined in Chapter 2), while the plan against setups with a7-a5 often consists in a quick kingside attack (as analyzed in Chapter 3).

1.2 Different move orders

By heeding the rules given in this chapter, White can avoid falling into traps set by the opponent. The fact that the first moves of the modern Italian are rather imprecise in nature gives a lot of scope for different move orders. White always makes the same moves, but it's important to understand the order in which they are made²⁾.



(1)



(2)

These two positions are the starting positions of the a6-system (1) and the a5-system (2), and here are the rules of how they can be reached.

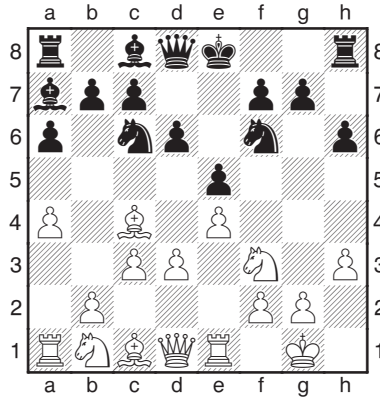
1) The difference between 3...♟c5 and 3...♞f6.

After **1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♟c4** Black has the choice between the two main moves **3...♟c5** and **3...♞f6**. The former can be answered with **4.0-0**, **4.d3** or **4.c3**, while after the latter White should best play **4.d3**, since both **4.0-0** and **4.c3** allow the reply **4...♞xe4**.

So I recommend the move order **1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♟c4 ♞f6 4.d3 ♟c5 5.c3** or **1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♟c4 ♟c5 4.c3 ♞f6 5.d3**, leading to the same starting position in both cases.

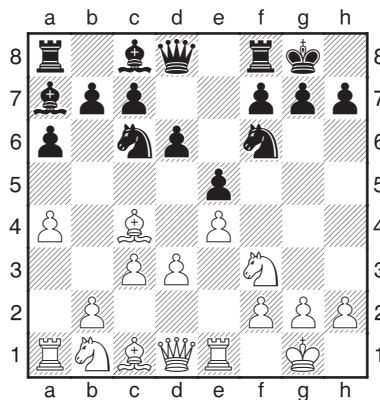
2) This second point helps you to understand when you can play h2-h3 and when not. As a rule of thumb: White may only play h2-h3 if Black has already castled, otherwise he can eventually launch an attack with h7-h6 followed by g7-g5-g4. And the following example shows why White should definitely not invite such an attack by creating a hook on h3.

2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkqxhUnA2hl>



In this position Black can play **9...g5!** and White gets in trouble because he offered the opponent's attack a target: the pawn on h3. In Chapter 4 (on less popular plans for Black) you will see why this attack is harmless for White if the h-pawn stays on h2.

3) The next rule of thumb shows under which circumstances White is even obliged to play h2-h3. Similar to a situation where the prophylactic move h2-h3 is played too early, a potential problem is that Black's counterplay is too fast. The opponent's intention, which must be prevented, is to answer Rfe1 with Ng4 , targeting the weakness on f2.



Carlsen, Magnus (2847)

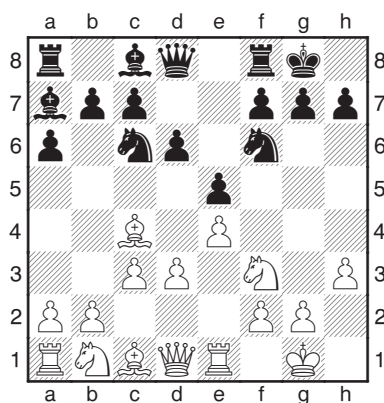
Giri, Anish (2780)

chess24.com INT 2021

Here White played **9. d2** and after the strong continuation **9...g4! 10. Re2 Kh8! 11. b4 f5** he was faced with an unpleasant attack. In the game, even the world champion had trouble creating counterplay.

The move h2-h3 must be played in a position where Black has already castled and removed his bishop from c5 (to prevent White from avoiding problems by gaining a tempo with the push d3-d4). Even with the pawn on h3, Black can try to carry out the plan with ♖h8 and f5. However, in Chapter 4 there's also a game that shows that this approach is not a problem for White with the pawn already on h3.

The last important rule concerns the question of when White should play a2-a4. As already seen in the two starting positions at the beginning of this chapter, White only plays a2-a4 in positions with the pawn on a6. This prophylaxis is only necessary if Black threatens to endanger White's bishop pair with ♘a5. And since the black pawn on a5 (instead of a6) prevents the move ♘a5, White doesn't need to play a4.



In this position 9. ♘bd2 would be a mistake, since after 9... ♘a5 the bishop could be eliminated. On the other hand, with the pawn on a5 instead of a6, ♘bd2 would be a normal move.

Here are a few exemplary move orders that lead to the known starting positions in compliance with the rules.

The first starting position is reached after one of the following move orders:

1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙c4 ♘f6 4. d3 ♙c5 5. c3 h6 6. 0-0 d6 7. ♖e1 a6 8. a4 ♙a7 9. ♘bd2 0-0 10. h3

1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙c4 ♙c5 4. c3 ♘f6 5. d3 a6 6. 0-0 0-0 7. ♖e1 ♙a7 8. h3 d6 9. a4 h6 10. ♘bd2

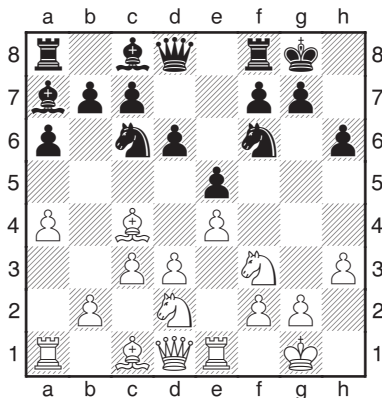
These are by far not the only possible move orders, but if White heeds the rules he should be able to avoid being caught off guard or even falling into a trap.

The second starting position can be reached, for example, in the following way:

1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙c4 ♘f6 4. d3 ♙c5 5. c3 d6 6. 0-0 0-0 7. h3 h6 8. ♖e1 a5

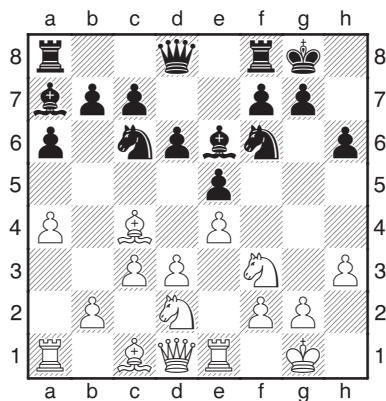
2. The pawn on a6

In this chapter, which deals with the typical plans for Black in positions with the pawn on a6, we will examine the exchange of the light-squared bishops and the regrouping of the black knights. In the positions after exchanging the bishops, White's plan mostly consists in gaining space on the queenside by means of the advances a2-a4 and b4-b6. His plans are often long-term in nature, and before beginning his own active operations, he usually first limits Black's resources of counterplay.



In this starting position, Black can pursue the plans mentioned above. In Chapter 2.1 and 2.2 we examine the main continuations 10...♙e6 and 10...♖e8 followed by ♙e6– and in Chapter 2.3 the plans based on the regrouping with 10...♘h5 or 10...♘e7.

2.1 The development with the early ♖e6



In this starting position, after the last move ♖e6, White can burden his opponent with doubled pawns on the e-file, although this opens the f-file for potential counterplay. In this system, there is often a battle between White's positional advantage (based on more space on the queenside and the double pawns) and Black's attack on the king-side. White's plan is based on stopping Black's attack in the early stages and exploiting the static advantages later in the game. To accomplish this, there are some typical maneuvers that are explained in this chapter.

The first game shows some typical plans for both sides if Black tries to oppose White's play on the queenside.

(1) Karjakin, Sergey (2773)

So, Wesley (2810) [C54]

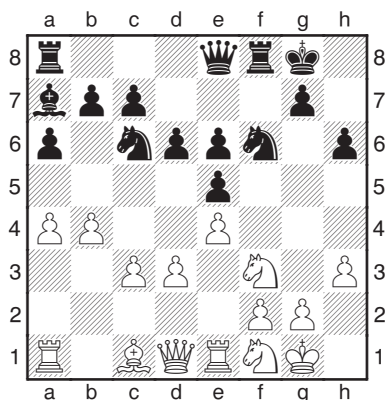
Sinquefield Cup Saint Louis 2017

In this game between two absolute top players, Karjakin instructively shows how counterplay on the kingside can be prevented and how White's long-term goals can be achieved.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.0-0 ♘f6
5.d3 0-0 6.h3 d6 7.c3 a6 8.a4 ♙a7 9.♞e1
h6 10.♘bd2 ♙e6 11.♙xe6 fxe6 12.b4

White wastes no time and prevents Black from disrupting the queenside deployment with a5, as would be the case after 12.♘f1?! a5!, for example.

12...♞e8 13.♘f1



A generally useful move: the knight can possibly move on to h2 to support its colleague on f3. In addition, the ♙c1 gets a clear view again and can either eliminate a knight appearing on f4 or move to e3 to exchange the strong ♙a7.

13...♘h5 14.♙e3 ♙xe3 15.♞xe3 ♘f4

The knight prevents the typical defensive maneuver g3 followed by ♙g2.

16.♞b1

White prepares play on the queenside.

16.♙h2?! would be an attempt to prepare g3, but in the given position it would be strongly met by 16...d5.

– Now 17.g3 would not be possible, because after 17...d4 18.cxd4 exd4 19.♞e1 ♘g6 Black gets counterplay too quickly.

– 17.d4 ♞g6 18.♘g3 exd4 19.♘xd4 would still be White's best option, but that's obviously not in line with his plan.

16...b5 17.♞a1

After White provoked the weakening push b7-b5 by threatening to play b4-b5 himself, the rook is now better on the a-file again.

17...♞g6 18.♘g3 ♞f6 19.♘e2!

After this good move, White threatens to exchange the strong ♘f4 and thus further limit Black's counterplay on the kingside. In the long term, Karjakin will initiate the typical maneuver g3 followed by ♙g2 and coordinate his pieces with ♘eg1 and ♞e1, for example.

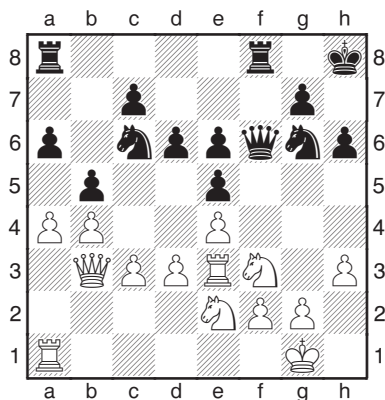
19...♘g6

The alternative 19...♙h7 20.♘xf4 exf4 would be bad.

(After 20...♞xf4 the queen is not in the best position, since it's in the way of the f8 rook and has to lose a tempo after 21.g3; e.g. ♞f7 22.♙g2 etc.)

21.♞e1 with a big advantage due to the mobile center.

20.♞b3 ♙h8



Karjakin exploits the fact that the black pieces are currently stepping on each other's toes for an interesting regrouping.

21. ♖f1

– 21. ♖h2 ♔e7 22. ♘eg1 followed by ♖e1 (or ♖e2) and g3 would have been a logical alternative.

– On the other hand, the immediate 21.g3?? doesn't work, since the badly placed rook on e3 offers Black the tactical option 21...d5! 22.exd5 ♘ce7 23.dxe6 bxa4–+.

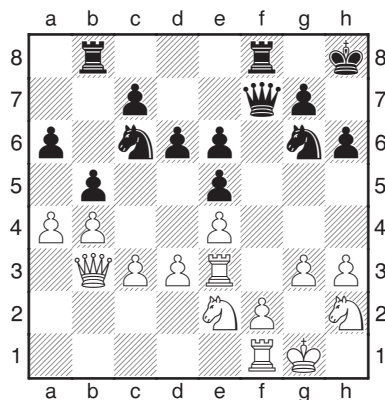
21... ♖ab8 22.g3?!

The move order 22. ♘h2 ♔f7 23.g3 would be more precise.

22... ♔f7

Here both players overlooked the possibility 22... ♘f4!!, which would have posed problems for White. After the computer line 23.axb5 axb5 24. ♘xf4 exf4 25. ♖ee1 fxg3 26.fxg3 ♘e5 27. ♘xe5 ♔xe5, Black has a slight advantage in view of the weakened opponent's king.

23. ♘h2

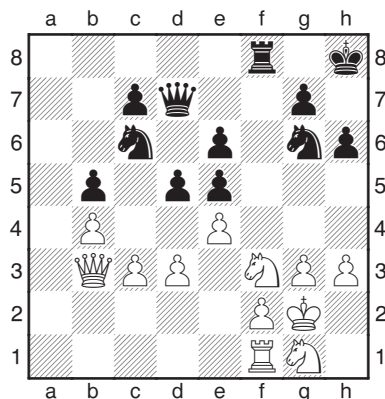


Now the idea of the rook move to f1 becomes clear: White wants to exchange his somewhat misplaced rook with ♖e3–f3.

23...d5

This push is always a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it gains space in the center, but on the other hand, it also weakens the square on c5 and the e5-pawn – a disadvantage that will play an important role later in the game.

24. ♖f3 ♔d7 25.axb5 axb5 26. ♖g2 ♖xf3 27. ♘xf3 ♖f8 28. ♘eg1



After White has completely stabilized his position, he can now start targeting the weaknesses in Black's camp.

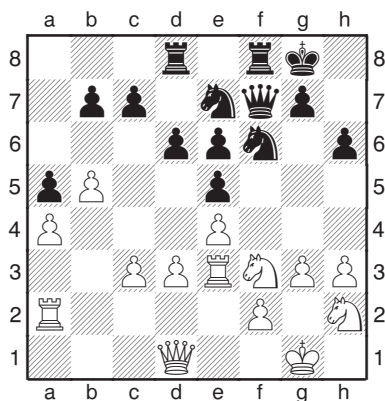
2.1.1 Summary of the plans

In the system with the early development ♖e6, Black hopes for play on the kingside, which is however difficult to achieve if White knows the right antidotes. The two example games illustrated how this counterplay can be prevented by swapping queens and stabilizing the kingside. The static advantages of White's position remain, even if he can only make progress after patiently continuing his positional massage.

Here is a brief summary of the most typical motifs that White can use in these positions.

Control of the squares on f4 and h4

In order to gain sufficient control of the kingside, White can primarily deny his opponent access to the critical f4 square by playing g2-g3. Since after this loosening the ♘f3 loses its safe protection, the other knight can be used for stabilization, typically from h2 or g1 (see the game Karjakin – So).



Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2779)

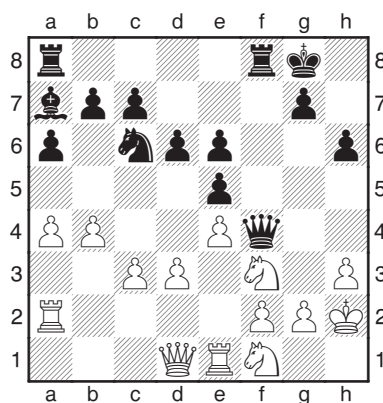
Nakamura, Hikaru (2777)

Blitz Chess.com INT 2018

The diagram shows a typical position in which White has achieved the optimal setup and can even reinforce it with ♖g2 if necessary.

The elimination of the knight on f4

White can also weaken the counterplay by eliminating a knight appearing on f4. This is best if Black can only recapture with the queen, as this will disrupt the coordination of the black pieces. Furthermore, the fact that, under the right circumstances, the queen can be chased away with g3 can speed up the maneuver g3, ♘1h2, ♖g2.



Relyea, Alexander (2289)

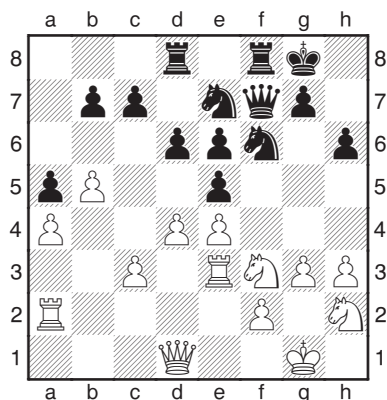
Roy, Rabirashmi (2188)

ICCF email 2021

In this typical position after the exchange on f4, White can continue with ♖h1, ♘1h2, g3 etc., since the queen on f4 is blocking the ♖f8.

Gaining space with b4-b5 followed by d3-d4

White can convert the advantage (based on the opponent's doubled pawns) as follows: By advancing the d-pawn to d4 (usually prepared with b4-b5) he gains space in the center and on the queenside and can then specify his further actions. Since Black is forced to take on d4 to avoid isolated doubled pawns on e5 and e6, White can later use the half-open c-file to exert pressure on the weakness on c7 (see example 2).



Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2779)

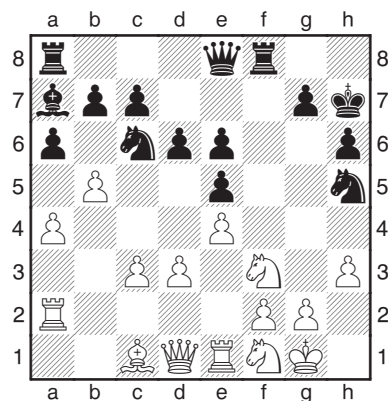
Nakamura, Hikaru (2777)

Blitz Chess.com INT 2018

After the continuation **1...exd4 2. exd4 e5** followed by **3. Rxc2 Ng6 4. d5 Rxc8 5. Qc1** White was better.

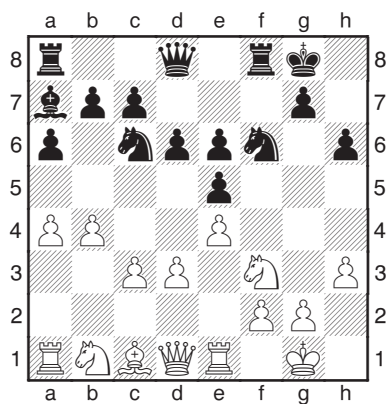
The multifunctional effect of a rook on a2

On a1, the rook supports the long-term plan on the queenside, but from a2 it can also defend the kingside. The position of the rook on a2 also makes the advance b4-b5 possible, since certain tactics are eliminated (see example 2).



The exchange of the ♗c1

Since there is no active use for the ♗c1 on the c1-h6 diagonal, it can at most be exchanged for a knight appearing on f4 or placed on e3 to neutralize its very strong counterpart on a7. This bishop not only targets White's greatest weakness on f2, but can also protect the weakness on c7 from the square on b6 after the possible sequence d3-d4 exd4 – cxd4. And since the weak square on f4 is often controlled by a pawn on g3, White's dark-squared bishop usually has no better task than to neutralize the dangerous opponent on the diagonal g1-a7 (see example 1; for the exception see example 2).



In this typical position White can strive for the exchange of the dark-squared bishops with ♗e3 eventually followed by ♗xe3 ♖xe3.

4. Different plans for Black

The last two chapters have covered the modern main systems of the Italian Opening and shown how White proceeds against Black's most typical plans. Although these have become established as the main plans (especially at the GM level) it makes sense to also familiarize yourself with other plans that Black could resort to – either because he wants to steer the game away from familiar territory or because of an inspiration over the board.

White usually gets an objectively good position against these plans, but they can prove dangerous as many of our strategic guidelines from the last chapters lose their effectiveness. We will now examine the plans that deviate most significantly from normal paths.

The first of these plans consists in the attempt to prepare the push f7-f5, an example of which has already been given in the chapter on different move orders. However, Black can also choose this approach if White follows all the afore-mentioned rules, although, as will be seen below, it loses much of its effectiveness.

The second attempt to quickly steer the game into unclear areas is already known from the discussion of typical mistakes when it comes to different move orders, namely the plan to postpone castling and instead initiate a pawn storm with h7-h6 followed by g7-g5. However, the relevant example shows how White has to defend himself if Black starts this pawn storm, even though White's position doesn't offer a hook on h3 that could be exploited.

Another approach is to quickly play b7-b5 to hamper White's plan to make progress on the queenside. However, this plan is also not a problem if White knows the appropriate countermeasures.

The first sample game shows how White doesn't even allow the f5-plan and then gets a good position simply by following our set of standard rules.

(12) Caruana, Fabiano (2822)

So, Wesley (2760) [C54]

Supernet rapid Bukarest 2019

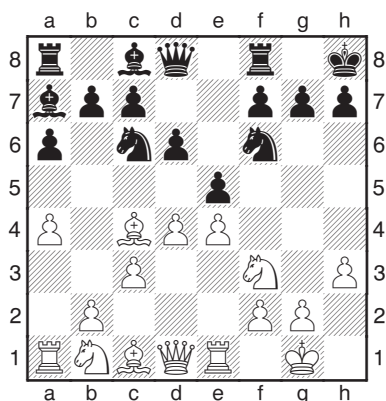
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6
5.d3 d6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 0-0 8.♖e1 ♙a7
9.h3

In this well-known position, the continuation 9...h6 10.♘bd2 would lead to a line that has already been sufficiently examined.

9...♔h8?!

By moving the ♘f6, Black wants to clear the way for the f-pawn and quickly strive for a wild position far away from strategic considerations.

10.d4



With this logical move Black tries to keep the ♙c8 on the board (similar to Chapter 2.2) in order to launch a quick attack. On the other hand, White has to play in the center.

A game Karjakin – Vitiugov (2019) took the course 10.b4 ♘g8 11.♘bd2 f5 and

Black got exactly the active play he had in mind when he chose the maneuver ♔h8 followed by ♘g8.

10...♘g8 11.b4

Another parallel to Chapter 2.2: After gaining space in the center, White will continue to play on the queenside. Here White sacrifices a pawn, but as Caruana will show, he can develop enough activity since Black has lost too much time.

11...exd4

Should Black continue his plan with 11...f5, White can exploit the fact that he has postponed ♘bd2 and gained space in the center. After the possible continuation 12.♙g5 ♘f6 13.exf5 ♙xf5 14.b5 ♘e7 15.dxe5 Black gets the desired open position, but in view of White's activity this is a better version than, for example, in the game Karjakin – Vitiugov.

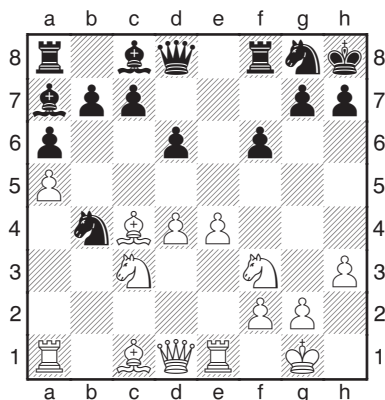
12.cxd4 ♘xb4 13.a5!

After this interesting move, Black has difficulty to save the stranded knight on b4.

13...f6

Here the prepared plan to push the f-pawn would already be a clear mistake, because after 13...f5? 14.e5 White gets a passed pawn, while Black's hoped-for activity is not yet visible. For example, since after 13...♘e7? 14.♖a4 c5 15.♘g5 ♙d7 16.♔h5 White is too active, Black has to make another passive move with f7-f6.

14.♘c3



A good position for a summary. White didn't let Black's attack get out of the starting blocks and can now return to his typical plans. He can play on the queen-side or (as against systems with a7-a5) take advantage of the strong center to start an attack on the king. The ♞b4 remains a problem for Black and White clearly has the easier game.

14...♞e7 15.♞e2 d5

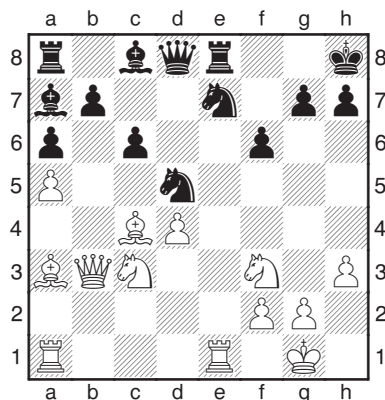
This liberation attempt comes too soon. Since White has all the pieces in play and is much better coordinated, Black's position should not withstand the attack.

After the logical continuation 15...♞g6 16.♟a3 ♞c6 17.♞d2, the white pieces are fully activated, while the black bishop pair has no active perspective whatsoever. And all this for just one pawn.

16.exd5 ♞bxd5 17.♟a3 ♞e8 18.♞g3

Although this is the typical square for the knight, in the given position this move is a step in the wrong direction. The control of the d5 square in front of the isolani would have been essential here.

18.♞b3 c6 19.♞c3! would have been a better continuation.



After 19...♞d7 20.♟f7 White wins material and since there is no other way to shake off the pressure, Black's position will collapse sooner or later.

18...♞d7 19.♞b3 ♟c6 20.♞e4 b5 21.axb6 ♞xb6 22.♟xe7 ♞xe7 23.♞xe7

Somehow Black has managed to get back into a reasonable position. White won the game, although he missed a good chance with 18.♞g3. The remaining moves have little value for our consideration.

23...♞xe7 24.♟xa6 ♟d5 25.♞c3 ♞d8 26.♞e1 ♞d7 27.♞c5 ♞c6 28.♞e7 ♞d7 29.♞h4 ♟f7?

After 29...♞xe7 30.♞xe7 ♞d7 Black would have no problems and the game would soon have ended peacefully.

30.♟b5 ♞xe7 31.♞xe7 ♟d5 32.♞h5 ♞c8 33.♞xg7 ♟xd4 34.♟d3 ♟g8 35.♞f5 ♞d6 36.♞xd4 1-0

Summary: In this game, Caruana showed very schematically how to deal with the plan ♟h8, ♞g8, f5. By observing our set of rules, the aim is to keep Black's attack on the kingside under control. Since Black removes his pieces from the center, White

plays right there. Black allows his opponent to gain space on the queenside, so that's exactly what happens. Although Caruana unfortunately didn't manage to convert his good position (possibly due to time trouble), the game still helps us to understand White's approach very well.

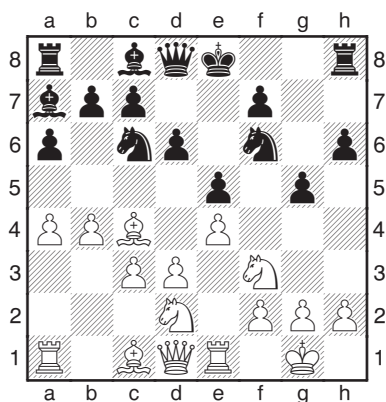
Here's an example of the same players (with colors reversed), this time with Caruana trying to surprise his opponent with a side line. Again, White demonstrates an instructive concept of how to stop the attack based on the moves h7-h6 and g7-g5.

(13) So, Wesley (2770)

Caruana, Fabiano (2835) [C54]

Lichess.org INT 2020

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6
5.d3 a6 6.0-0 d6 7.a4 h6 8.♖e1 ♙a7
9.♘bd2 g5?!



This is another attempt by Black to put a highly individual stamp on the position.

(9...0-0 10.h3 would be the transition to familiar territory.)

The plan is clear: to launch an attack with g5-g4 followed by activating the ♘f6 and the queen. However, since White has not yet played h2-h3, Black's attack lacks a clear target. In addition, it can be fatal for Black in the long term that his king doesn't have a safe haven on the kingside, while on the queenside it could get into a pawn storm.

White need not be afraid of the aggressive push. He will try to advance his

d-pawn to d4 and gain space on the queenside to carry out his plans like in a normal position.

10.♘f1 g4 11.♘3d2 h5 12.♘e3 h4
13.♘df1 is another continuation that has been played in the past. However, since this approach doesn't come with an active plan, it was not in the spirit of Wesley So, who prefers to counterattack on the queenside and in the center.

10...♘h7

Now g5-g4 threatens to win the knight.

After immediately 10...g4 11.♘h4 the knight on the rim disrupts Black's plan, and the concrete continuation 11...♘xe4 12.♘xe4 ♖xh4 13.d4 is more dangerous for Black than for White.

11.♘b3

White prepares d3-d4 and the knight clears the d2-square for its colleague from f3.

11...g4 12.♘fd2 ♖f6 13.d4

As recommended in textbooks, a push on the wing is met with a counterattack in the center. As against the 'normal' attack (see Chapter 2.2), Black tries to ward off this approach with active counterplay.

13...♘g5 14.b5

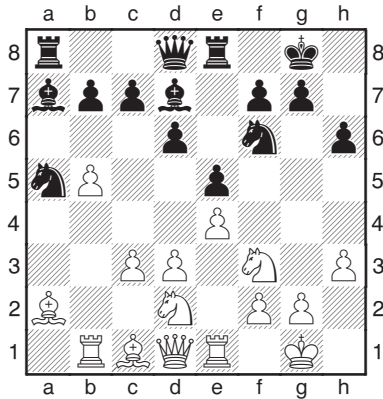
Game 60

Swiercz, Dariusz (2657)

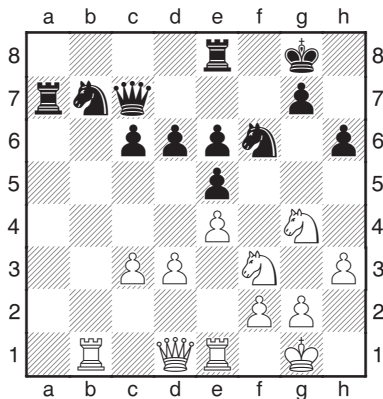
Petrosian, Tigran L. (2613) [C54]

Las Vegas 2018

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6
5.d3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 ♙b6 8.a4 h6
9.♖e1 a6 10.♘bd2 ♖e8 11.b4 ♙a7
12.♖b1 ♙d7 13.b5 axb5 14.axb5 ♘a5
15.♙a2±



15...c6 16.bxc6 bxc6 17.♘f1 ♙e6
17...d5!? 18.♘g3 ♙b8 19.d4∞
18.♙xe6 fxe6 19.♙e3 ♖c7 20.♙xa7 ♖xa7
21.♘e3 ♘b7 22.♘g4



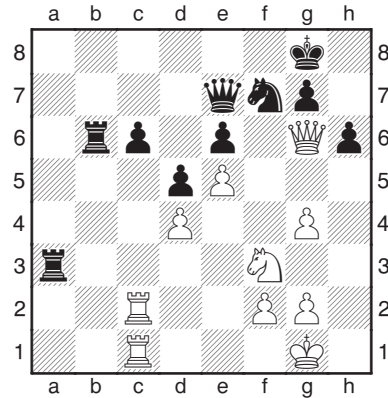
22...♘d8 23.d4

23.♘xf6+! gxf6 24.d4±

23...♘xg4 24.hxg4 ♘f7 25.♖b3 exd4
26.cxd4 ♖d7 27.♖bc1 ♖ea8 28.♖c3±
♖a6 29.e5 d5 30.♖c2 ♖e7 31.♖ec1 ♖b6
32.♖d3

32.♖b2 ♖xb2 33.♖xb2±

32...♖a3 33.♖g6!



33...♖d7 34.g5 hxg5 35.♘xg5 ♘xg5
36.♖xg5 ♖a4 37.♖g4 ♖e8 38.♖c3+
♖ba6 39.♖g3 ♖a7 40.♖h3 ♖a3 41.♖h6
♖e7 42.♖h5 ♖d3 43.♖h4 ♖g6 44.♖xc6
♖e4 45.♖h8+ ♖f7 46.♖h5+ 1-0

7. Index of sources

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkqXHUnA2hI>

8. About the author

After I learned the game from my father at the age of 7, it took a long time for me to be captivated. This only happened when I took part in competitions for the first time in the 3rd grade of elementary school as part of a study group. After that, I was quickly drawn to the local chess club, with which I took part in various team and individual tournaments in the following years of my youth.

By participating in many tournaments in Lower Saxony, I met many friends, and I have been playing with some of them in the club 'Post SV Uelzen' since 2019. This change of club allowed me to improve enormously and take part in the German U20 team championship twice.

Since 2019, however, I have not only been connected to chess as a player, because after I completed my courses as a C-trainer at the Lower Saxony Chess Association, I also coach groups and individual players. During my subsequent courses as a B-Trainer in early 2022, I wrote the material contained in this book as my final paper.

My special thanks go to the instructors of the courses, Volker Janssen, FM Bernd Laubsch and GM Karsten Müller, as they have had an enormous influence on my career as a coach and as a player. I also owe it to Karsten Müller that the final paper of my coaching courses was published in book form.

