



C O L U M N I S T S

The Instructor

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Dvoretsky on Berliner

1999 saw the publication of a book by the American chessplayer and programmer Hans Berliner, titled *The System*, in which the author lays out his approach to chess, and more particularly his opening strategy with the White pieces.

Among others, Russia has a grandmaster, Yevgeny Sveshnikov, who espouses a similar opening philosophy (although he comes to absolutely different conclusions). I believe the principal difference between the two may be brought down to the following: Berliner worked out his opening system, based on a system of general principles which he believes in; whereas Sveshnikov took the opposite approach: at an early age, he chose a small set of opening variations (which almost nobody else used at the time), has never wavered from them throughout his chess career, analyzed them in detail, and only then began to formulate the principles underlying the correctness of his choices, and his understanding of the openings.

I share neither Berliner's nor Sveshnikov's philosophies - indeed, I probably stand on diametrically opposed positions from theirs. I do not believe that any one opening move is stronger than all the rest, nor do I believe that there exists only one right way to treat the opening. Chess is too complex and multi-faceted for this - that's not a phrase, but a conclusion, drawn from many years as a player, a trainer, and an analyst.

But even if the opposite were true, I doubt this would have much effect on practical players. Even now, it is common for us to select an opening variant which we clearly know is not the strongest; we select it because it fits our style (or because it's uncomfortable for our opponent), and consequently offers us the best chance of success.

The advantage of this pragmatic approach is even more apparent when we have to make our decision, not at home during preparation, but right there at the board, with limited time for consideration. Or, as John Nunn so aptly put it (analyzing the reasons for falling into time-pressure) in his book *Secrets of Practical Chess*:

There is no point thinking for half an hour about a possible advantage or disadvantage of what the computer calls "0.1 of a pawn". This almost certainly is not going to cost you a half-point. The piece you hang later during time-trouble probably is.

Comparing Berliner's recommendations with the opening handbooks, it's not difficult to see that, in spite of some interesting analytical discoveries, he has not succeeded in refuting or even seriously altering the conclusions of contemporary opening theory, and thereby demonstrating the validity of his

views.

At the same time, Berliner's concrete analyses are meaty indeed (he is an outstanding analyst; it's no accident that he won the V World Correspondence Championship by an overwhelming score). And his strategic conceptions are indubitably based on rock-solid foundations - practical players would do well to study them. Just don't "absolutize" them: *look at them as possible, and only sometimes the strongest, ways of treating the position.*

Berliner successfully employed one of his strategic conceptions in the following game.

Berliner - Ratner 1969 Eastern Open

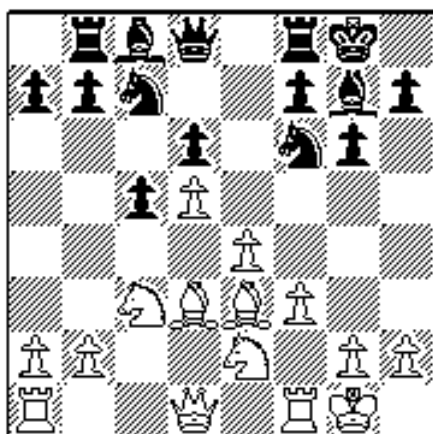
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. Nc3 ed 5. cd d6 6. e4 g6 7. Bd3 Bg7 8. Nge2

Typical for Berliner, he does not develop the knight on f3, in order to leave the way clear for the f-pawn's advance.

8...0-0 9. 0-0 Na6 (9...a6 10. a4 Nbd7) 10. f3!?

The usual theoretical continuation is 10. h3 Nc7 11. Ng3

10...Nc7?! (10...Bd7; 10...Rb8) 11. Be3 Rb8 (See Diagram)



12. Rab1!

This is the star move of this game. During the 1960s I had been analyzing many of the System formations arising in various defenses to 1. d4...The conclusion that I came to is that in many of these openings, when Black has created no direct object for attack, White should make a space-grab on the queenside with the move b4. This frequently has to be prepared, almost always by Rb1, and never by a3 unless Black prevents b4 with ...a5. So this is a rook move with a purpose. Openings such as the Dutch Defense, Old Indian and King's Indian fall into this category.

White plays b2-b4 in the hopes of eliminating the black pawn at c5, and thereby gaining access to the vital square d4.

12...b5 13. b4! cb 14. Rxb4 a5 15. Rb1 Bd7 16. Nd4

White's goal is achieved; he now holds a positional advantage.

16...Qe8 17. Qd2 b4?

An unfortunate plan: exchanging pieces on b5. After the d7-bishop disappears, the square c6 becomes hopelessly weak.

18. Nce2 Nb5 19. Nxb5 Bxb5 20. Bxb5 Qxb5 21. Nd4 Qa4 22. Nc6 Rb7 23. Bd4 Rd7?

This costs a pawn, but Black's game is difficult after 23...Ra8 24. Rfc1 also.

24. Bb6! Ra8 25. Bxa5! Nxe4

25...Rxa5 26. Rxb4 Qxa2 27. Rb8+ Bf8 28. Qh6+-.

26. fe Bc3 27. Rxb4! Bxb4 28. Bxb4 Qxa2 29. Qd4 Ra4 30. Qf6 Rxb4 31. Nxb4

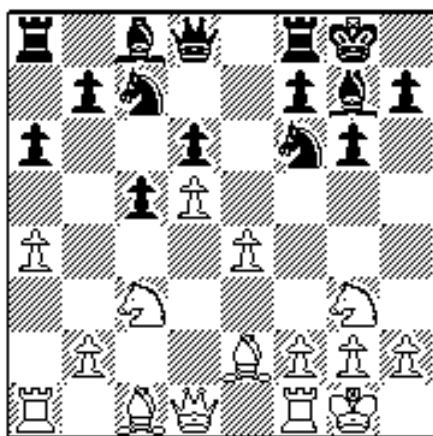
Black's a piece down, and could have resigned with a clear conscience.

31...Qc4 32. Ra1! Qc8 33. Nc6 Qb7 34. h4 h5 35. Kh2 Kh7 36. Ra7 Qc8 37. Ne7, and Black resigned. **1-0**

The plan discovered by Berliner later became standard play in such positions. Here are a couple of examples.

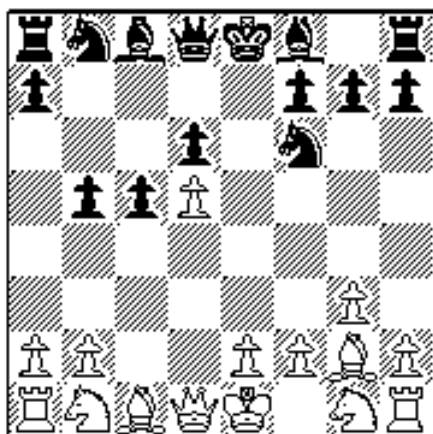
G. Giorgadze - L. Yurtaev Simferopol 1988

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nge2 0-0 6. Ng3 c5 7. d5 e6 8. Be2 ed 9. cd Na6 10. 0-0 Nc7 11. a4 a6 (*See Diagram*)



12. Rb1! Nd7 (Black stops b2-b4 temporarily) **13. Bf4 Ne5 14. Qd2 h5 15. Bg5 f6 16. Bh6 h4 17. Nh1 Bd7 18. Bxg7 Kxg7 19. f4 Nf7 20. Nf2 b5 21. ab ab 22. b4 c4 23. Qd4 Qe7 24. Bg4 Bxg4** (24...Ra3!?) **25. Nxc4 Ra3 26. Rf3 Nh6?! (26...Rh8) 27. Nxc6 Kxc6 28. Qf2 f5 29. e5 de 30. fe Qxe5 31. Qxc4+ (31 Re1!? intending 32 Ne4) 31...Kg7 32. Re1 Qf6 33. Qxf6+ Rxf6 34. d6 Rxd6 35. Re7+ Kg8 36. Rxc7 Rd2 37. h4**, and Black resigned **1-0**

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 c5 4. d5 ed 5. cd b5 6. Bg2 d6 (*See Diagram*)



In this position, White usually continued 7. Nf3 or 7. e4. But in the early 80's, White found the dangerous pawn sacrifice **7. b4!?**, with the same strategic point as in the Berliner game: the occupation of d4.

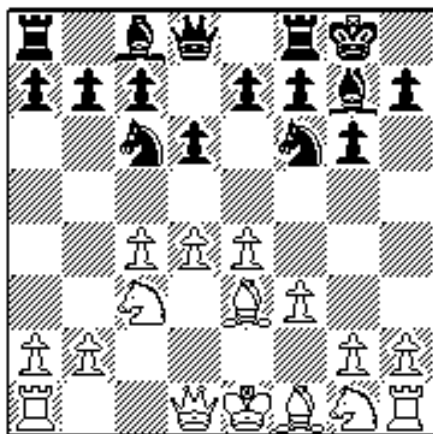
7...cb is met by **8. a3 ba** (8...b3 9. Qxb3 a6 10. a4 ba 11. Qxa4+ Nbd7 12. Nf3 Be7 13. Nd4 0-0 14. Nc6 Qe8 15. Be3+/- Albur - I. Ivanov, New York 1983) **9. Nxa3**, with good compensation. For instance: 9...Qd7 (9...Bd7!? Zaichik - Vladimirov, 1981) 10. Qb3 Na6 11. Qxb5 Rb8 12. Qxd7+ Bxd7

13. Nc2! Nc5 14. Rxa7 Be7 15. Nf3 Nxd5 16. Nfd4 Nc3 17. Nc6 Rc8 18. Nxe7 Kxe7 19. Nd4+/- (Sosonko - Adorjan, Wijk aan Zee 1984).

Or 7...Na6 8. bc Nxc5 9. Nf3 g6 10. 0-0 (10 Nd4!?) 10...Bg7 11. Nd4 0-0?! (11...Bb7) 12. Nc3! a6 (12...b4 13. Nc6 Qd7 [13..Qb6 14. Rb1] 14. Nb5!, with advantage to White) 13. Nc6 Qc7 14. Be3 Bb7 15. Bd4 Rfe8 16. a4!+/- (Kasparov - Korchnoi, 11th match game, London 1983).

The following attempt to employ the same approach is somewhat less trivial: Berliner proposes a whole new way of playing a popular opening system.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. f3 0-0 6. Be3 Nc6 (See Diagram)



Theory examines only 7. Nge2 or 7. Qd2. Berliner thinks the strongest move is one that isn't even mentioned in the opening books!

7. Rb1 (!! - Berliner)

The move b2-b4 is imminent and will sweep aside all of Black's hopes on the queenside once it is played. White need only be careful about his timing, as there may be tactical counterchances starting with ...e5 and if d5, then ...Nd4. So we have.

a) On 7...Bd7 (7...a6 leads to similar play) White plays 8. b4. Now, in order to avoid being swept away, Black is practically forced to play 8...e5 9. d5 Nd4 10. Nge2 Nh5! 11. Qd2! (11. Nxd4 ed 12. Bxd4 Qh4+ is too strong; however, now Bf2 becomes possible as the c3-knight is defended.) Now Black can no longer maintain the d4-knight without sacrificing a pawn in a rather unproductive way. If 11...Qf6, then 12. Bg5. Or if 11...Qh4+ 12. Bf2 Qf6 13. Nxd4 ed 14. Ne2. And 11...c5 12. dc is hardly to be considered. So Black must play 11...Nxe2 12. Bxe2, when White has an excellent position, several tempi ahead of similar positions that occur in this variation. 12...f5 can be met by 13. 0-0, when 13...Nf4 14 Bd1 Qg5?! 15. Kh1 Qh5 16. Bc2 gives White a formidable queenside initiative, while Black's attack still has a long way to go before it becomes dangerous. Nor does 13...f4 14. Bf2 Bf6 15. Qe1 g5 16. c5 offer Black much as White is again well ahead compared to usual positions in this variation.

b) Nor does 7...a5 8. a3! change anything. White will still advance b4, and not worry about the a-file, which will belong to White in the not-too-distant future.

c) On the immediate 7...e5 8. d5 Nd4 (8...Ne7 9 b4 and the queenside

attack is underway) 9. Nge2 c5 (if 9...Nxe2 10. Bxe2, and White is several tempi ahead of the standard variations in which White attacks on the queenside and Black on the kingside) 10. dc Nxc6 and White has a large positional advantage.

Let's take a critical look at Berliner's analysis. What is the drawback of his proposed move, 7. Rb1? First of all, the fact that instead of developing his kingside pieces, White begins a rather abstract assault on the other side; he thus risks falling behind in development.

For example, we could try 7...a5 8. a3 Bd7. Berliner thinks that, after playing b2-b4, White will soon wrest the a-file away from his opponent (obviously, as a result of his preponderance on the queenside). And so it would be, if White had the time. But this will not happen if Black succeeds in opening the center quickly.

9. b4 ab 10. ab e5 11. d5 Nd4 12. Nge2 Nh5 13. Qd2 (all so far as analyzed by Berliner, except with the inclusion of the a-pawn moves) 13...f5! 14. Nxd4 ed 15. Bxd4 Bxd4 16. Qxd4 Qh4+ 17. Qf2 Qf6. Black obviously has more than enough for a pawn, and the opening of the a-file was clearly good for him.

White should probably not follow his intended plan in this instance. 7...a5 is better met by the usual plan of 8. Nge2 or 8. Qd2. It's not so easy to determine, in that case, who is favored by the inclusion of the moves 7. Rab1 a5; most probably White. Yes, he has lost the right to castle queenside, which he sometimes does in this system; on the other hand, Black no longer has his standard plan of ...Rb8, ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5.

But Black is within his rights to try this pawn sacrifice even without the preliminary opening of the a-file.

7...Bd7 8. b4 e5 9. d5 Nd4 10. Nge2 Nh5 11. Qd2 f5!?

11...a5!/? deserves close scrutiny as well. We already know the consequences of 12. a3 ab 13. ab f5! On 12. b5, the queenside assault is stopped in its tracks, while winning a pawn by 12. ba or 12. Nxd4 ed 13. Bxd4 looks too risky.

12. Nxd4 ed 13. Bxd4 Bxd4 14. Qxd4 Qh4+ 15. Qf2

15. Kd1 is met by 15...Ng3 (15...fe 16. Nxe4 Bf5 isn't bad, either) 16. Qf2 Qf6 17. hg Qxc3, threatening not only 18...fe, but also 18...Ba4+.

15...Qf6, and Black has compensation.

With White's king stranded in the center, and his dark squares weak, Black obviously has fully sufficient counterplay.

Translated by Jim Marfia

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