

Strategic Plans 75 Modern Battles

Maxim Chetverik

Strategic Plans: 75 Modern Battles

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About the author

Maxim Chetverik, born in Voronezh in 1963, is one of Russia's biggest chess writers. He has written books published in Russian, English, French and German on the Queen's Indian Defense, Catalan Opening, English Opening, Benoni System, Queen's Gambit Accepted, Sicilian Defense, Petroff Defense, Dutch Defense, Alekhine Defense and Albin Counter Gambit, as well as more general opening books and books on the games of Alekhine, Tal and Spassky.

He became an International Master in 2003 and is a regular tournament player to this day, as well as being a coach in his native Voronezh. His best tournament results include Budapest Open, 1st place, 1996, Open championship of Slovan Club, Bratislava, 1st place, 1998, Prague Open, 2nd equal, 2002, Kecskemet (Hungary) round robin tournament, 1st place, 2003, Stuttgart Open, 2nd place, 2009, Yaroslavl Open, 3rd place, 2015, and Olomouc (Czech Republic), 2nd place, 2017.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
PART I. A one-sided game	8
Chapter 1. Chronicle of a black day.....	9
Chapter 2. When luck runs out.....	24
Chapter 3. The pawn is the target.....	39
Chapter 4. Positional sacrifice	55
Chapter 5. Multi-faceted advantage.....	62
Openly aiming for a draw	62
Pretending to attack the king	64
When indecision proves fatal.....	66
Opening up the game too early.....	69
Pointless sacrifices	71
When prophylaxis triumphs.....	73
Sabotage – in reality and behind the scenes.....	75
Stubborn avoidance of exchanges	79
I play against pieces.....	82
Switching play from one flank to the other	85
A MAGICAL INTERLUDE. Watch out, it's Fabiano!	89
PART II. A two-sided game	98
Chapter 6. Defending like a hero.....	99
Chapter 7. When equal forces collide.....	106
Chapter 8. Reaching a draw through spilt blood.....	116
Chapter 9. One step from saving the day	125
Chapter 10. The battle of macroplans	138
Chapter 11. The priority of piece coordination	156
Chapter 12. Macroplans and microplans.....	170
Triumph of the macroplan over local threats	170
Triumph on the “opponent’s” flank.....	175
Disaster on the “opponent’s” flank	184
Pawns don’t move backwards	186
Failed sabotage of the enemy king.....	190
Activating the pawn chain	193
The center takes priority.....	197
Triumph of a central bind.....	204
Endgame dynamics.....	208

Thoughtless reshaping of the structure.....	210
Risk strategy.....	213
Strategy gives way to tactics.....	216
Varying defensive plans.....	224
Ignoring the main threat.....	227
The art of consolidation.....	230
A HISTORICAL REFLECTION.....	234
<i>Players Index.....</i>	<i>235</i>
<i>Openings Index.....</i>	<i>237</i>

INTRODUCTION

In chess, we know that creating a strategic plan is when you devise a path to take advantage of your own position's strengths and your opponent's position's weaknesses. In 75 full games drawn from recent play, mostly by elite grandmasters, this book focuses **not on the plan of one player** (which is what you will find in the vast majority of text books on positional play), but on **the battle between the strategies pursued by each player**.

As a rule, grandmasters take a pragmatic approach over the board. It's not their aim to win with a brilliant combination or to carry out a perfect strategic plan from start to finish. Their aim is to win the point in the tournament and increase their cash reward as a result. When a grandmaster plays a clearly weaker opponent he will often resort to *trickery*. The stronger the player, the larger his arsenal of tricks and traps. If his opponent successfully negotiates the mine field laid out for him then it's time to agree a draw. In a nervous battle with reciprocal errors the winner is the player who blunders second-to-last.

If, however, you are not a grandmaster, you should learn how to set your priorities, in which trickery should be quite far down on the list. Playing without a plan, and preferring to set traps, you will eventually get stuck. A smart chess player has a good idea about how he can trick a weaker one. However, success in a tactical battle requires an ability to calculate variations deeply and precisely, to find surprise moves and remain calm and cool under pressure. In a positional battle, a player requires knowledge of typical positions, standard plans, and how to execute them in a smart way. Moreover, it is highly likely that the opponent will not remain a passive observer and will push his own plan.

Various **strategic battle models** followed by each party are analyzed in this book, entirely on the basis of 21st century games. Many wonderful games of the 20th century have already been included in other strategy books. Modern trends in the positional struggle should, however, be observed in modern duels. Further, given the growing importance of the opening in chess, games should be considered in the context of the latest opening theory.

In any positional play text book, strategy is viewed as one of the key concepts and you are provided with a standard set of strategic elements with examples. This book is written for students of the game who are already familiar with the key strategic elements and so I have avoided repeating those lessons here. Such lessons can be found, for example, in Peter Romanovsky's excellent book on middlegame strategy. Naturally, as plans are executed, such elements appear throughout the games in my book, but they are only the key component in chapter three of Part I of this book (pawn weaknesses).

In this book, aside from the overall plan, which in any game is to win or draw against a stronger opponent and or achieve a result which is consistent with your tournament or match requirements, I refer to the following concepts, which are specific to the scale of the plan under discussion. The **macroplan** is the specific way to achieve the overall plan, for example, the successful exploitation of a queenside pawn majority. The **microplan** is a way of solving a local problem that involves several moves, such as transferring a knight from a bad square to a good one. Ideally, a macroplan is a chain of sequential and carefully calculated microplans.

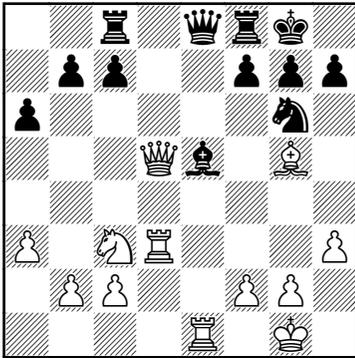
A diagram with a problem is posed before each game. This is not so much a test with a precise solution as much as a prompt to devise a working version. Then, it will be useful to compare your answer with the suggested answer based on the game, and to evaluate how important it was to gradually analyze the chain of events from the very first move. During the game, nobody will poke you in the back to tell you that you have reached a critical position! In a maneuvering battle, the well prepared player will not think long and hard over every move, and (often intuitively) will figure out in time when the automatic smooth execution of a plan will be replaced by deep thought.

This book is largely aimed at strong club players wishing to improve, or their coaches. The recommended Elo range is approximately 1,800 – 2,200, although it may of course be of interest to players a bit lower and a bit higher than this range.

Chapter 1

CHRONICLE OF A BLACK DAY

The games of the world's top players come in different shapes and sizes. Some are true brilliancies; more often than that, they are demonstrations of high-class play by both players. However, more often than we would like, they are dry draws, or, frequently, they contain a nervous battle strewn with errors by both players. Even a strong player is not a robot, and he occasionally finds himself in the role of punch-bag. In the games below, the “boxer” provided a strategic master-class and, as a result, we get to analyze a set of instructive examples.

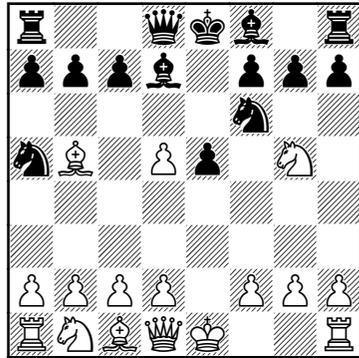


After 25. ♖d5

Black cannot put up with the centralized queen. From which square should he offer to swap queens – c6 or e6?

No. 1. Two Knights Defense C58
S. Mamedyarov – A. Naiditsch
 Dortmund 2007

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙c4 ♘f6
 4. ♘g5 d5 5. exd5 ♘a5 6. ♙b5+ ♙d7

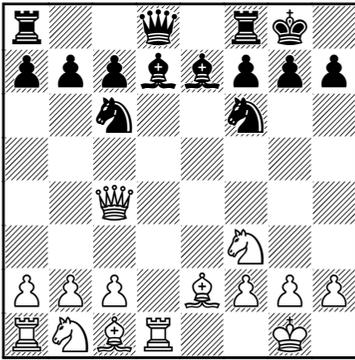


Earlier, Naiditsch (against Radjabov) tried the main move 6... c6, but this time he had prepared a surprise. Mamedyarov didn't attempt to hang on to his extra pawn, placing his bishop on e2, rather than his queen.

7. ♙e2 ♘xd5 8. d4 ♙e7 9. ♘f3
 exd4 10. ♖xd4 ♘f6

The position with symmetrical pawn chains is safe for black, as can also be seen after 10... ♘b4!? 11. ♖c3 0-0. Arkady probably considered the knights to be placed clumsily on the queenside and hence went for a more standard retreat.

11.0-0 ♖c6 12.♚c4 0-0 13.♖d1



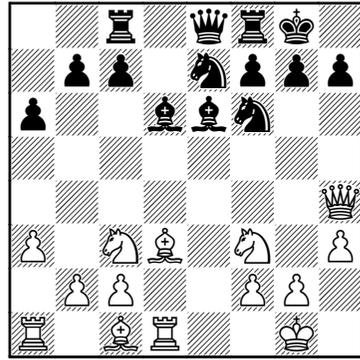
13...♚e8

Both players continue to mobilize their forces, with black more than happy to chase the white queen as he does so. However, by shaking off the pin black places his own queen on a poor square. It was better to continue 13...♗d6 14.♘c3 ♖e8, and 15.♘b5? would be met by a boomerang effect – 15...♖e4! 16.♚d3 ♘b4 17.♚d2 ♖xe2! 18.♚xe2 ♗xb5 19.♚xb5 ♘xc2.

14.♘c3 ♗e6 15.♚f4 ♖c8

There's no point in continuing to persecute the white queen: 15...♗d6 16.♚h4 ♗e7 17.♗g5 h6 18.♗d3! hxg5 19.♘xg5, and 19...♚c8 (protecting against 20.♘ce4!) is met by the pretty ploy 20.♗h7+ ♚h8 21.♘d5! with a powerful initiative. The four half-moves starting from 15...♖c8 are “short-range” in nature – protection of weaknesses and prophylaxis.

16.a3 a6 17.h3 ♗d6 18.♚h4 ♘e7
19.♗d3



19...♗f5

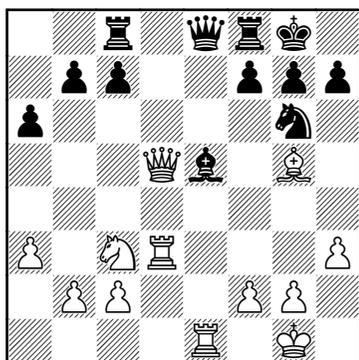
Naiditsch restarted the chase of the enemy queen but then halted it straight away. To properly evaluate the move 19...♗f5!? you have to get to 20.♗xf5 ♗xf5 21.♖e1 ♚d8 22.♗g5 h6 23.♗xf6 ♚xf6 24.♚xf6 gxf6 25.♘e4. The positive value of the black bishop pair is less than the negative value of black's broken pawn structure; still, black should draw this game comfortably.

Naiditsch exchanges the busy enemy bishop without breaking up his pawn chain. This decision is easy to understand, because the better formation of white's pieces is less stable than the structural advantage that white would have gained with the above variation.

20.♗g5 ♗xd3 21.♖xd3 ♘g6
22.♚d4 ♘d7

Heading for 22...♗e5 23.♘xe5 ♚xe5 24.♗xf6 ♚xf6 25.♚xf6 gxf6 26.♘e4 ♚g7 27.♘c5, would, firstly, be illogical (see the note to 19...♗f5), and secondly, would be clearly an inferior choice, as black would have no strengths in that position.

23. ♖e1 ♘de5 24. ♘xe5 ♙xe5
25. ♗d5



25... ♗c6?!

Now, however, Naiditsch plays an illogical move. Normally, fragmented pawns on the queenside are even more ugly than those on the kingside, as they aren't protected by the king. After 25... ♗e6 26. ♗xe6 fxe6 27. ♘e4 b6 28. b3 h6 29. ♙e3 ♖cd8 the "island" on e6 is out of danger and black should not lose.

26. ♗xc6 bxc6 27. ♘a4 f6 28. ♙e3 ♖fd8 29. ♖ed1 ♗d6 30. b3 ♖cd8 31. ♘c5 ♖xd3 32. ♘xd3

Let's try forced play winning a pawn: 32. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 33. cxd3 ♙d6 34. ♘xa6 ♙xa3 35. ♘xc7. To make progress white would like to execute a pawn charge (d3-d4-d5 is better than b3-b4-b5, as it gains a more advanced passed pawn), however, it's hardly achievable. Therefore, white should avoid breaking his pawn chain.

32... ♙c3 33. ♗f1 ♗f8

Mamedyarov centralized his king to untangle his pieces, whereas black centralizes his king simply to strengthen his position. However,

black should instead have gone for counterplay: 33... ♖d5! 34. ♗e2 ♘h4 35. ♘c5 ♖xd1 36. ♗xd1 ♘xg2 37. ♘xa6 ♘xe3+ 38. fxe3 ♗f7 39. ♗e2 ♗e7 40. ♘xc7. White should not be able to convert his extra pawn into a win here.

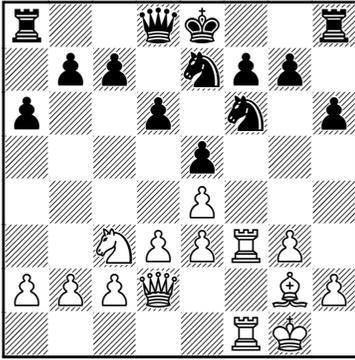
34. ♗e2 ♗e8?

This strong grandmaster displays a surprising lack of resistance in this challenging endgame. He should have prevented the enemy knight from invading on e6 by playing 34... ♗e7. After 35. ♘c5 ♖xd1 36. ♗xd1 a5 white would have had to make a huge effort to make progress.

35. ♘c5 ♖xd1 36. ♗xd1 a5 37. ♘e6 ♘e7 38. ♘xg7+ ♗f7 39. ♘h5 ♘d5 40. ♘f4 ♙b2 41. ♘xd5 cxd5 42. a4 c6 43. ♗e2 ♙e5 44. ♙b6

Black resigned.

The deceptive simplicity of positions with symmetrical pawns played a nasty trick on Naiditsch. Placed under relentless pressure he made one mistake after another. The decisive mistake was arguably his 34th move. As with his previous inaccuracies, it was caused by psychological pressure – his position was incessantly worsening and the ground was giving way under his feet. Still, the unfortunate outcome didn't dissuade Naiditsch from playing 6... ♙d7, and a couple of years later in this line he lost to Bartosz Socko, again in 44 moves.



After 12.♖af1

What shortcomings can you find in the following moves?: 12...h5 13.h4 ♜eg8 14.♙h3.

No. 2. *Four Knights Opening C26*

E. Najer – A. Volokitin

Baden-Baden 2008

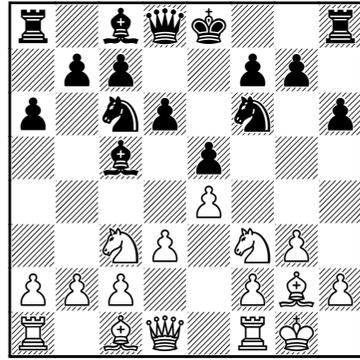
1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞f6 3.♞c3 ♞c6 4.g3 ♙c5

This is only a Four Knights Opening from a formal point of view. In reality, this is a modern interpretation of the fianchetto in the Vienna Opening, otherwise known as the Glek variation. Such structures without early pawn exchanges have become fashionable lately, and this book contains a number of examples.

5.♙g2 d6 6.d3 a6 7.0-0 h6

The prophylactic move of the a-pawn allows the black-squared bishop to avoid being exchanged, and black immediately follows with pushing his other rook's pawn. Volokitin not only plays this to prevent white placing a piece on g5, but also to delay castling. Najer had already won a game after 7...0-0 against Pashikyan, so the

Ukrainian playing black deliberately chooses a different path.



8.♙e3 ♙xe3 9.fxe3 ♙g4

Steinitz noted way back that white's strong center here is fairly immobile, and in some games he captured on e3. White's initiative on the semi-open file is reduced if black swaps off his second bishop, although Steinitz didn't do that.

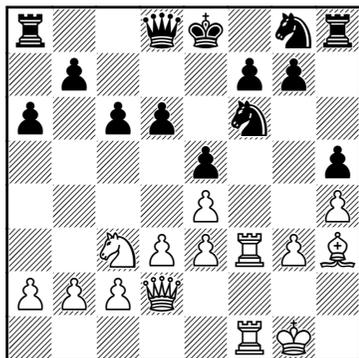
10.♙d2

Later, the game Yemelin – Volokitin (Budva 2009) continued 10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♙xf3 ♞e7 12.g4 c6 13.♞e2 ♞eg8 14.♞g3 g6 15.♖f2 ♖h7, which has a close resemblance to the current game. Black has protected his Achilles heel on f7, the queens were soon traded off, and a long struggle short on intrigue ended in a draw.

10...♙xf3

If the knight is allowed to stay on the board it will move to f5 via h4, after which black is virtually forced to trade it at the cost of undoubling the white pawns. White then gains a strong grip on the board.

11.♖xf3 ♞e7 12.♖af1 h5 13.h4 ♞eg8 14.♙h3 c6



Something has happened in the last 2 ½ moves. Black has thrown forward his rook's pawn and white has stopped it, at the cost of weakening the g4 square. Afraid of ending up with a bad bishop versus a good knight, Najer has twice rejected the centralizing move ♞c3-d5. Well, this was a mistake – the knight ends up without good squares in the game.

15.d4 ♞h6 16. ♖f5

There is no good plan for white now, and his continuation is rather feeble. Advancing the d-pawn prevented it from protecting its neighbor, and so white's alternative protection of e4 has closed the f-file.

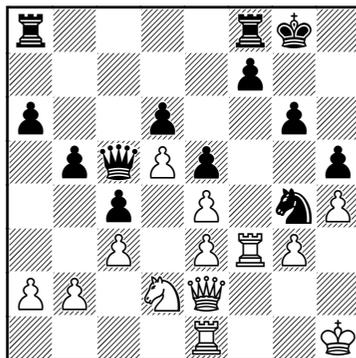
16... ♖e7 17. ♖d3 0-0 18.d5

Najer had to reckon with d6-d5, and even more so with b7-b5-b4, so he closes the center. Obviously, this reduces the effectiveness of his bishop.

18...c5 19. ♞b1!

White is a strong grandmaster from Moscow, but isn't playing like one! Now he retreats instead of stopping his opponent's expansion on the queenside with 19.a4.

19...b5 20. ♞d2 c4 21. ♖e2 ♖c7 22.c3 ♖c5 23. ♞h1 ♞hg4 24. ♖e1 g6 25. ♖xg4 ♞xg4



26. ♖ff1?

Black's strong play has eliminated the pressure along the f-file but now he's ready to get active on the kingside too, even though that should have been white's stronghold. The change in circumstances has caught Najer unawares, and he places a rook on a square that was crying out for his knight to occupy it.

26...f5 27.exf5 gxf5 28. ♖f3

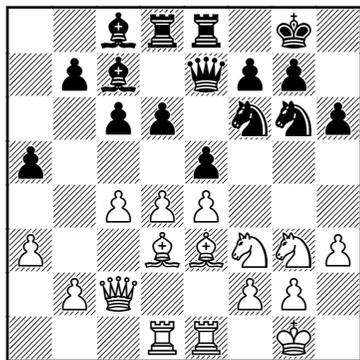
28.e4 fxe4 29. ♖xe4 would be met by 29...♞g7! with multiple threats, of which the most vicious is 30...♖f2. Now, 28...e4 would win the d5 pawn without compensation. However, the pawn will not run away.

28...♖f6 29. ♖e2 ♖af8 30. ♖d1 e4 31. ♖f4 ♖g6 32.b3 ♖xd5 33.bxc4 bxc4 34. ♖ee1 ♞e5 35. ♖g1 ♞d3 36. ♖f1 ♖e6 37. ♖e2 f4!

White resigned, as he gets mated in two moves after 38.exf4.

The stars certainly didn't align for Najer in that game, and the number of errors he committed would normally have been enough for an entire tournament. I think there was a psychological factor, too – the quick loss of white's first move advantage. White failed to put up resistance to

black's pressure on the queenside and ended up with both flanks collapsing. Volokitin subtly took advantage of the weakness of white's doubled pawns, in exchange for which white failed to obtain counterplay.



After 21.a3

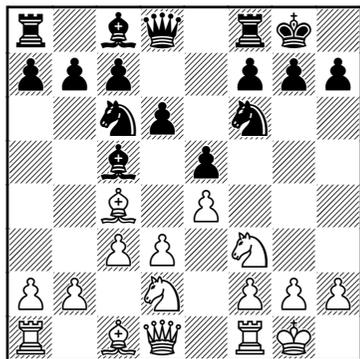
Think about black's surrender of the center with 21...exd4.

No. 3. Giuoco Piano C50

S. Karjakin – E. Tomashevsky

Wijk aan Zee 2016

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5
4.0-0 ♞f6 5.d3 0-0 6.♞bd2 d6 7.c3



7...a5

Black often frees up a square for the bishop's retreat in this position, but it is usually the more modest 7...a6. Black's choice here was no spontaneous decision, however, and even the unfortunate outcome of this game didn't dissuade him from repeating this move on other occasions.

8.h3

A month later, a rapid game Movsesian – Tomashevsky (China 2016) continued 8.♙b3 ♙e6 9.♙a4 h6 10.h3 ♖b8 11.♙c2 d5 12.exd5 ♙xd5 13.♖e1 ♖e8 14.♗e2 b5. It's as though white is playing with the black pieces. Well, that's no surprise, considering his light-squared bishop has wandered around far too much.

8...♙e6 9.♖e1 h6

The game Artemiev – Tomashevsky (Sochi 2016) witnessed great complications with: 9...♗d7 10.♙b5 ♙xh3! 11.gxh3 ♗xh3 12.♞f1 ♗g4+ 13.♗h1 ♗h3+ 14.♞3h2 ♙xf2 15. ♖e2 ♞g4 16.♖c2 f5, and three pawns got the better of the piece in the drawn-out ending that followed. After 14.♙g1 black may well have repeated moves, claiming moral satisfaction. The exchange 10.♙xe6 fxe6 would have prevented the sacrifice, though white could hardly claim any advantage.

10.♙b5

PLAYERS INDEX

(the game numbers are shown, and games played with the white pieces are shown in bold)

- | | |
|---|---|
| Adams – 12, 30 , 64 | Ikonnikov – 14 |
| Alekseev – 65 | Ivanchuk – 33 , 37, 71 |
| Anand – 16, 49, 61 | Jakovenko – 65 |
| Aronian – 37 , 38, 63 | Jenni – 56 |
| Arutinian – 13 | Jobava – 66 |
| Avrukh – 19 | Kamsky – 16 |
| Bauer – 9 | Karjakin – 3, 8 , 10, 28, 32 |
| Beliavsky – 8 | Kasimdzhanov – 5 |
| Bologan – 52 | Kobalia – 57 |
| Bu Xiangzhi – 66, 75 | Korchnoi – 53 |
| Carlsen – 10, 38 | Korneev – 9 |
| Caruana – 26 , 27, 30, 31, 32 , 34, 40 | Kosteniuk – 72 |
| Cheparinov – 63 | Kramnik – 4 , 36, 47 , 49, 70 |
| Chernyshov – 22 | Kuzubov – 21 |
| Chetverik – 44, 73, 74 | Lalic – 73 |
| Conquest – 12 | Leko – 33 |
| David – 11 | Ljubojevic – 7 |
| Degraeve – 68 | Luther – 18 |
| Delgado – 15 | Mamedyarov – 1, 41, 45 , 58 |
| Dominguez – 28 | Mchedlishvili – 67 |
| Donchenko – 6 | Meier – 59 |
| Farago – 29 | Milos – 58 |
| Fressinet – 6 | Mirzoev – 23 |
| Gagunashvili – 13 | Moiseenko – 57 |
| Gareev – 24 | Morozevich – 70 |
| Gashimov – 14, 67 | Muzychuk – 35 |
| Gelashvili – 24 | Naiditsch – 1 |
| Gelfand – 47 | Najer – 2 , 22 |
| Giri – 50 | Nakamura – 7 , 61 |
| Glek – 55 | Neiksans – 44 |
| Grachev – 46 | Nielsen – 34 |
| Grandelius – 60 | Nisipeanu – 17, 62 |
| Grishchenko – 25 | Onischuk – 42 |
| Guseinov – 75 | Pelletier – 23 , 56 |
| Haba – 68 | Polgar – 69 |
| Hajnal – 20 | Ponomariov – 69 |
| Hammer – 40 | Ragger – 26 |
| Hou Yifan – 35, 45, 72 | Rasulov – 59 |

- Rublevsky – 52, **54**
Sanikidze – **74**
Shirov – **17**
Shishkin – **29**
So – **50, 64**
Spassky – 53
Spraggett – **11**
Stojanovic – 20
Svidler – 19, **25, 39, 41, 42**
Tiviakov – 54
Tomashevsky – 3, **5**
Topalov – **31, 36, 48, 60, 62, 71**
- Tseshkovsky – **21**
Vachier-Lagrave – 4, 39, 51, 55
Vajda – 46
Van Wely – **48**
Vitiugov – **27**
Volokitin – 2
Wegerle – **18**
Wells – **43**
Williams – 43
Wojtaszek – **51**
Zhang Zhong – **15**

OPENINGS INDEX

Reti Opening

A05 – 10, A07 – 4, A13 – 40

English Opening

A18 – 38, A22 – 15, A23 – 22,
A24 – 19, A28 – 32, A29 – 34,
A33 – 65, A34 – 31, 39, A36 – 50

Queen's Pawn Opening

A46 – 35, D70 – 41

Modern Benoni

A56 – 70, A60 – 14, A61 – 59

Dutch Defense

A80 – 74, A92 – 73

Scandinavian Defense

B01 – 62

Alekhine Defense

B03 – 44, B04 – 18

Caro-Kann

B12 – 12, 67

Sicilian Defense

B22 – 56, B23 – 21, B34 – 7,
B46 – 52, B48 – 17, B51 – 54, 55

French Defense

C02 – 48, 68, C03 – 30, C11 – 20,
71, C12 – 11

Four Knights Opening

C26 – 2, C47 – 57

Petroff Defense

C43 – 27

Giuoco Piano

C50 – 3, 49

Two Knight's Defense

C58 – 1

Spanish Opening

C70 – 69, C77 – 33, C84 – 26, 60,
C85 – 28, C88 – 42, C90 – 72,
C92 – 8, C95 – 58

Queen's Gambit Accepted

D20 – 16

Slav and Semi-Slav defenses

D11 – 63, D12 – 9, D30 – 37,
D45 – 13, 47, D47 – 36

Queen's Gambit

D35 – 25, D37 – 23, 61

Ragozin Defense

D38 – 24, 45, 66

Grunfeld Defense

D83 – 51

Catalan Opening

E06 – 64

Bogo-Indian Defense

E11 – 6

Nimzo-Indian Defense

E12 – 53, E35 – 29

King's Indian Defense

E89 – 46, E90 – 5, E91 – 75,
E94 – 43