

# **The Modernized Modern Benoni**

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**Assistant Editor:** Daniël Vanheirzeele

**Typesetting:** Mark Haast

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# **The Modernized Modern Benoni**

**Alexey Kovalchuk**

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## Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊕	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞̄	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
⊆	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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# Preface




We all develop through childhood. Our expectations, dreams, fears, positive and negative character traits, love and attachment to things that have become important for us. From childhood, most of us also have a love for chess.




There was a spark in our eyes to fight again and again, to play as long and as often as possible, to get stronger and win. We came to the chess clubs, the coach taught us the basics and then gave us more complex materials when our level of play improved. We studied the games of the maestros of the past and wanted to carry out no less beautiful combinations, attacks, sacrifices, going all-out.

There came times when we understood in which positions we feel most comfortable, what suits us in a strategic game, and some of us became bewitched by tactical lines of struggle. Most of those who love dynamics try to seize the initiative as soon as possible and start an attack. As Black they do not want to be content with a draw. Such players usually started their way to the top of mastery with the King's Indian Defense -- a unique opening rich in history, like a phoenix, which was reborn countless times from ashes.






Over time, my attention focused on the Modern Benoni. In this opening, the bishop on g7 is the same icon that is the basis of the King's Indian, but here it can operate on the whole a1-h8 diagonal instead of being locked in by its own pawn on e5, as usually happens in the King's Indian. Black's plan is outrageously simple: with pawns on d6 and c5, and sometimes b4, he creates a breakwater that opens up space for his favorite on g7.

My expectations from the opening were reinforced by two games by the greatest chess romantic of all time, Mikhail Tal. It seems to me that these games will help you, dear reader, to be imbued with love for this extraordinary opening.

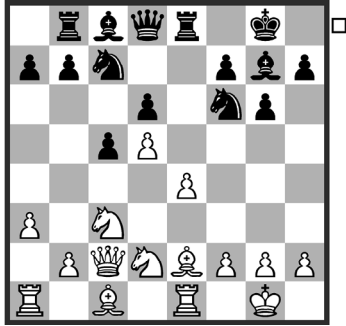
 Birbrager, Isaak  
 Tal, Mikhail  
 Kharkov 1953

0-0 9. 0-0 a6 10. d2 b4 11. e2  
e8 12. a3 a6 13. e1 c7

After some wandering, the knight takes up a fighting position.

1. d4 f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. f3 g7 8. d3

14. c2 b8



Position after: 14... ♖b8

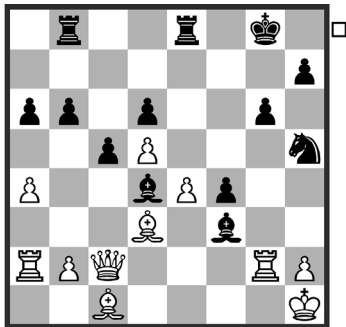
15. a4 b6 16. ♘b5 a6 17. ♘xc7 ♕xc7  
18. ♖a2 ♕e7

Black abruptly changes his plan and starts an attack on the kingside.

19. f3 ♘h5 20. ♘f1 f5 21. ♙d3 f4 22. g4 ♙d4+ 23. ♔h1 ♕h4

With gains of tempo, Black carries out a swift attack on the king.

24. ♖e2 ♕h3 25. ♖g2 ♕xf3 26. ♘d2 ♕e3 27. ♘f1 ♕f3 28. ♘d2 ♙xg4 29. ♘xf3 ♙xf3



Position after: 29... ♙xf3

Black has a bishop and two pawns as compensation for the queen! But how active the pieces are!

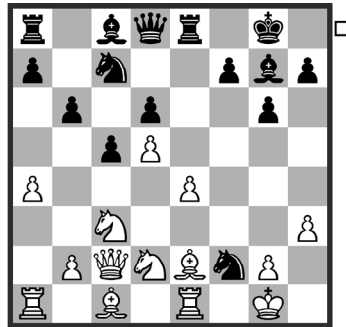
30. h4 ♖f8 31. ♙e2 ♘g3+ 32. ♔h2 ♙xg2 33. ♔xg2 ♘xe2 34. ♕xe2 f3+ 35. ♕xf3 ♖xf3 36. ♔xf3 ♖f8+ 37. ♔g3 ♙e5+ 38. ♔g2 ♙f4

The attack swept over the board like a whirlwind! Even if he did not mate the king, Black still remained with a significant material advantage and naturally won.

0-1

♙ Gurgenidze, Bukhuti  
♚ Tal, Mikhail  
🌐 Moscow 1957

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5 5. cxd5 d6 6. ♘f3 g6 7. e4 ♙g7 8. ♙e2 0-0 9. 0-0 ♖e8 10. ♘d2 ♘a6 11. ♖e1 ♘c7 12. a4 b6 13. ♕c2 ♘g4 14. h3 ♘xf2

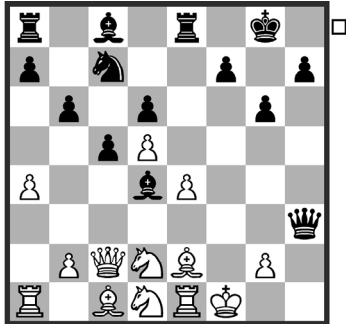


Position after: 14... ♘xf2



Tal rushes after the scalp of the opponent's king!

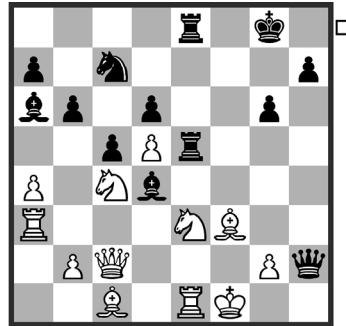
15. ♔xf2 ♚h4+ 16. ♔f1 ♘d4 17. ♞d1 ♚xh3



Position after: 17... ♚xh3

Again a most beautiful queen sacrifice.

18. ♘f3 ♚h2 19. ♞e3 f5 20. ♞dc4 fxe4 21. ♘xe4 ♘a6 22. ♘f3 ♖e5 23. ♖a3 ♖ae8



Position after: 23... ♖ae8

Every single black piece has joined the attack.

24. ♘d2 ♞xd5 25. ♘xd5+ ♖xd5 26. ♔e2 ♘xe3 27. ♖xe3 ♘xc4+

The final blow that knocks the opponent out.

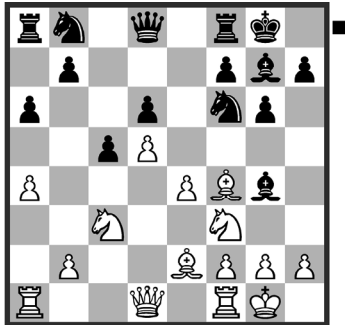
0-1

# Introduction

## Chapter 1

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. ♘f3 ♙g7 8. ♙e2  
0-0 9. 0-0 a6 10. a4 ♙g4! 11. ♙f4!

White tries to play as centrally as possible; each side tries to use the strengths of its position.



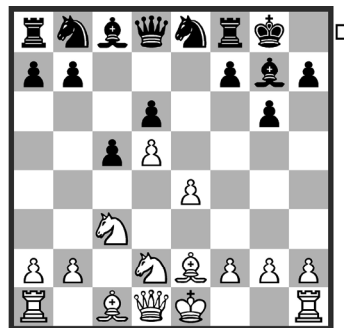
Position after: 11. ♙f4!

The positional play in this situation is quite diverse. The main epicenter of events can occur on the kingside, as well as in the center or on the queenside. Nevertheless, most often the game takes place on the queenside, where after ...b7-b5 Black presses on the isolated b2-pawn, while trying to neutralize White's plan. White, in turn, tries to carry out e4-e5, or after the exchange by axb6 he presses on the a6-pawn. The play in the center and on the kingside is connected with the attack on the e4-pawn by way of ...f7-f5 with the opening of lines.

## Chapter 2

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. ♘f3 g6 7. ♘d2!? ♙g7 8.  
e4 0-0 9. ♙e2 ♘e8!?

This chapter is devoted to Vladimir Kramnik's favorite idea -- to transfer the knight through d2 to the c4-square. In the 2000s this idea was insanely popular and became the most frequent weapon used against Black. However, everything flows, everything changes, and a number of other options attracted attention.



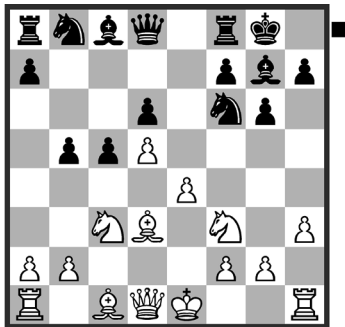
Position after: 9... ♘e8!?

To get decent play, Black needs to make a decisive and unconventional move -- sacrifice the d6-pawn in the variation with an early knight transfer. In the case of classical development on the part of White, the solution is to undermine the center by ...f5 and unexpectedly transfer the game to the queenside by the decisive and thematic ...b7-b5.

### Chapter 3

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. ♙d3 ♙g7 8. h3 0-0  
9. ♘f3 b5

White tries to fortify the e4-pawn with pieces at once, but runs into a dynamic counter-punch which nullifies all his efforts.



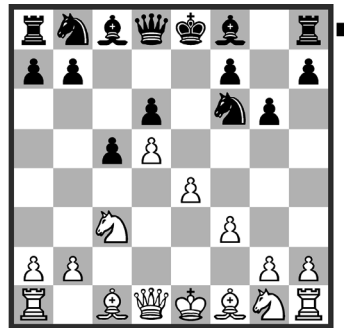
Position after: 9... b5

After Black undermines the pawn on e4 it is very difficult for White to survive, so he has to sacrifice the pawn, creating pressure with his pieces in the center. Black must be extremely careful. If playing correctly, he gets a combat-ready position with active pieces and strong play in the center and on the queenside.

### Chapter 4

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. f3!?

White strengthens his pawn center in advance and creates a strong barrier. Thanks to this wall, he tries to complete the development and arrange his pieces as compactly as possible (as far as the position allows).



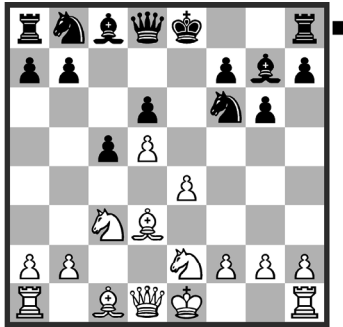
Position after: 7. f3!?

Despite all the dangers of this variation, depending on the direction White has chosen, Black also varies his game plan, using his entire arsenal of accumulated knowledge. Counterplay on the queenside is associated with the undermining by ...b7-b5, and on the kingside with a pawn march ...h7-h5-h4-h3 and a counter-strike in the centre by means of ...f7-f5.

## Chapter 5

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. ♙d3 ♙g7 8.  
♘ge2

This chapter is devoted to finding the g1-knight a different path without first cementing the pawn center.



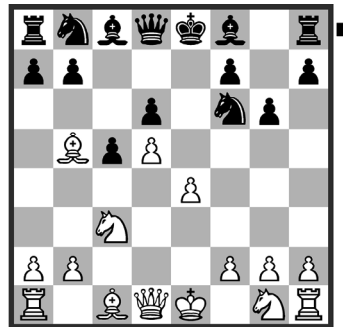
Position after: 8. ♘ge2

However, the main problem lies in the poor interaction of White's pieces, and in the variation with ♙d3 White's pieces can easily be attacked. Black's main counterplay is connected with activity on the queenside, where the ...c5-c4 and ...b7-b5 breaks, provide him decent play. Also, his knight tends to head towards the e5-square, where it gains a tempo by hitting the opponent's unfortunate bishop.

## Chapter 6

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. ♙b5+

An early attack by the bishops on the g5 and b5 squares will induce disharmony in Black's ranks, which gives White a chance to use the confusion for his own selfish purposes.



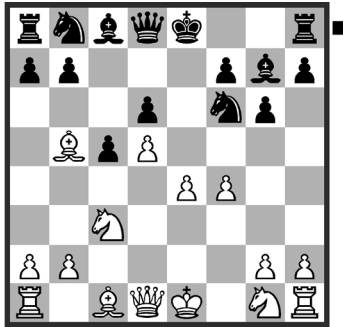
Position after: 7. ♙b5+

Black's task is to try to finish his development as soon as possible and unravel the tangle of his own army, which is somewhat suffocating from the lack of space. It will not hurt to exchange one or two pairs of minor pieces. The game proceeds directly along the central axis and on the queenside by moving pawns. White tries to strengthen his outpost on e5.

## Chapter 7

1. d4  $\text{Nf6}$  2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4.  $\text{Nc3}$  exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. f4  $\text{Bg7}$  8.  $\text{Bb5+}$ !

Very interesting and incredibly dynamic is the idea of moving a pawn to f4. White wants to crash through the center right off the bat with e5.



Position after: 8.  $\text{Bb5+}$ !

The positions arising in this variation are of a sharp nature, where Black is required to have precise knowledge of the theory. It is very important to remember the move ... $\text{Nfd7}$ , thanks to which Black avoids losing an extra tempo when the white pawn pushes forward to e5. Counterplay, of course, is on the queenside.

## Chapter 8

1. d4  $\text{Nf6}$  2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4.  $\text{Nc3}$  exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6.  $\text{Nf3}$  g6 7. g3  $\text{Bg7}$  8.  $\text{Bg2}$

The light-squared bishop fianchetto is one of the most reliable and popular lines among high-class chess players. With this bishop, the king is sheltered by a stone wall.



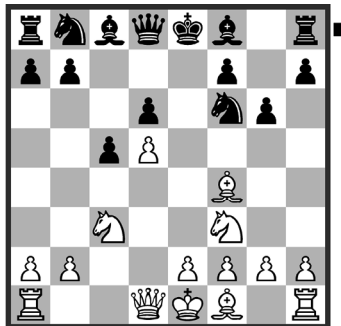
Position after: 8.  $\text{Bg2}$

But in this plan, there is a flaw. The bishop leaves the most important f1-a6 diagonal and aims at the stationary d5-pawn. The plans of the opponents also proceed from the understanding of these truths: White pushes the central pawns, making a breakthrough at e5; Black plays on the queenside, taking advantage of his superiority in strength and numbers in that sector.

## Chapter 9

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. ♘c3 exd5  
5. cxd5 d6 6. ♘f3 g6 7. ♚f4

White brings out his dark-squared bishop in advance, and immediately organizes pressure on the d6-pawn, creating significant discomfort for Black. This line is also popular among strong players and is an integral option in their pool of opening schemes.



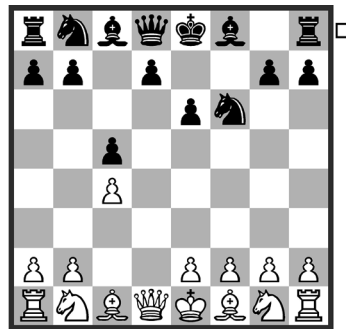
Position after: 7. ♚f4

Black's play is universal. He also tries to carry out typical counter-attacks with ...b7-b5 and ...f7-f5. It is very important to watch the movements of the opponent's pieces, since White's position most often has no weaknesses. Therefore, the pieces move freely around their camp.

## Chapter 10

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. dxex6 fxe6

White abandons his advanced center and tries to create piece pressure, taking advantage of his developmental advantage.



Position after: 4... fxe6

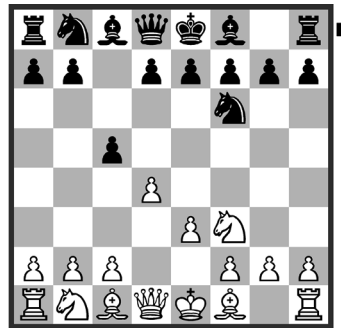
And yet, with careful play, using the interaction of pieces and pawns, Black can quickly play to seize the initiative, having an important trump card: an advantage in space.

## Chapter 11

1. d4  f6 2.  f3 c5 3. e3

The chapter is entirely devoted to anti-Benoni systems. White tries to avoid the classical lines of the variation and still impose his own play on his opponent. The options can be closely intertwined with one another.

The directions of the game are incredibly varied. Positions arise from the English Opening, the Caro-Kann Defense,



Position after: 3. e3

the Hedgehog system, the King's Indian Defense, and the Queen's Gambit Orthodox Defense.