

the Jobava London System

Simon Williams



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About the Author

Simon Williams is a Grandmaster, a well-known presenter and a widely-followed streamer, as well as a popular writer whose previous books have received great praise. He is much admired for his dynamic and spontaneous attacking style.

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Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of the Jobava London System! A simple yet effective opening. An opening that is young in its life, but has a great future.

I came across this opening when watching the games of GM Baadur Jobava. My first thought was, 'What is this opening, why haven't I seen it before?'. The more I researched it, the more I thought it would be a perfect opening for numerous players. What are the benefits of the Jobava London?

1) It is a perfect opening for people who have little time on their hands. That is because the ideas and moves are simple to learn. There is very little 'theory' as such and so long as you master the main ideas and concepts, the Jobava London System will offer you lots of fun and exciting games. Compared to other openings where mountains of variations need to be learnt, this makes it an attractive opening. In essence, it is very simple, yet very powerful.

2) The opening hasn't been around for long. It is definitely fresh and fun! The Jobava London has only really started to gain momentum at top level in the last ten years, so in the terms of openings, it is a youngster. This means there are areas of it that are still to be explored.

3) It is perfect for beginners, juniors, people with bad memories and experts alike. As I have mentioned, the Jobava London's starting moves are very easy to learn. There are not many long lines which also makes it attractive to those of us who do not want to just rely on our memories, but instead want to be creative.

4) Black cannot play on 'auto-pilot'. Many players on the black side might have learnt what to do against standard White d4 openings, but the Jobava London is different. This means that it will surprise Black at an early stage, which cannot be a bad thing. Convinced yet? Possibly not! Well, let me show you some moves:

1 d4 d5

There are three main ways that Black can play against the Jobava London System:

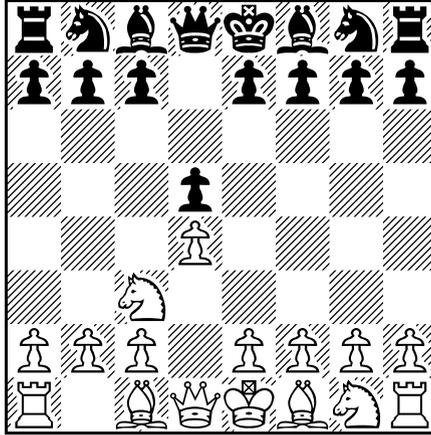
1) Systems with ...d5. These are very common and we start this book by looking at all the possibilities here.

2) Systems with ...g6. Of course, many people play an early ...g6 and we must know what to do against those lines.

The Jobava London System

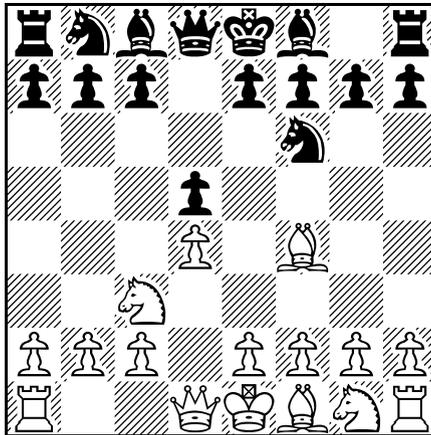
3) An early ...c5, ...♗b4 and other ideas. These speak for themselves and are in the third section.

After 1...♘f6 2 ♖c3 Black already cannot play on autopilot, which is another reason I love this opening. Following 2...g6 3 ♗f4 ♗g7 (Chapter Eight's 3...d5 4 e3 ♗g7 5 h4! is also very dangerous) 4 e4! White has good chances to attack, as we will study in Chapter Nine. 2 ♖c3!?



Already taking Black out of mainline theory. This does seem similar to a very popular opening, the Italian Game, with 1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 and 3 ♗c4. We are doing a mirror image of that, and with 1 d4!

2...♘f6 3 ♗f4



The starting position for our adventures. This bishop is often a great piece, as we will see later. One thing I love about the opening is that White often gets a good version of a standard London System. This is due to the knight on c3, which is much more of an active

piece in the Jobava London System.

The way I have structured the material is to run through Black's main defences, as outlined above. With each chapter, I've first taken a couple of 'informational' games that show you the main points of the opening. After these games, I move on to the theory that you need to know.

This book is an updated and so slightly expanded version of the course I wrote on the Jobava London System for Chessable back in 2019. My good friend and leading Jobava London aficionado Blair Connell kindly shared plenty of his own analysis and games to help with that. Now for this Everyman Chess version, I must also thank Richard Palliser and Byron Jacobs for their efforts.

In 2022 the Jobava London is very much alive and kicking. It's started to reap White a number of full points at club level, where it still contains plenty of surprise value. Overall, the opening, while an easy set-up to play, continues to pack a definite punch and often leads to some very enjoyable attacking positions.

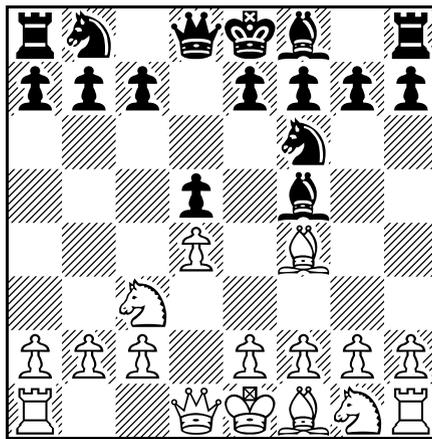
Good luck with your adventures with the Jobava London System!

Simon Williams,
Godalming, May 2022

Chapter Four

3...♖f5

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗c3 d5 3 ♕f4 ♕f5



An active development, but by placing the bishop outside the pawn structure so, Black encourages us to make one of our favourite advances: f3 then g4.

Game 5

B.Jobava-S.Mamedyarov

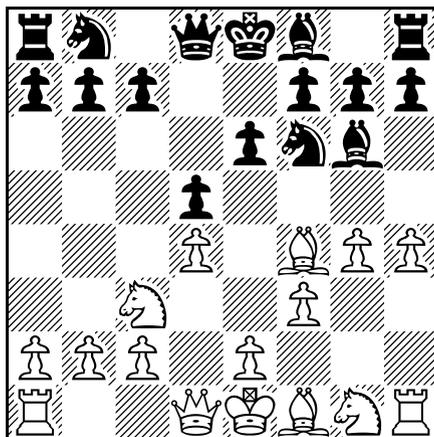
World Rapid Championship, Dubai 2014

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗c3 d5 3 ♕f4 ♕f5 4 f3

This is one of the key moves in the Jobava London whenever Black plays ...♕f5. By having

not developed the knight to f3, White can play the pawn to there and look towards a quick kingside pawn advance which both gains space and pushes Black's pieces back.

4...e6 5 g4 ♗g6 6 h4



This natural follow-up threatens to trap Black's light-squared bishop. As you will be aware, when I can push 'Harry' (the h-pawn), I will, especially when it is objectively the best move.

6...h6 7 e3 c5

This is the most active response, but is not without risk. As we will see in our next game, as well as the theory section, 7...a6 is safer.

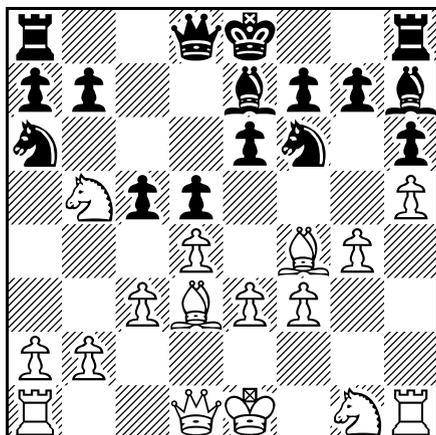
8 h5

8 ♖b5 is the move that I will be recommending in this position, but we can certainly learn from Jobava's approach.

8...♗h7 9 ♖b5

Jobava plays ♖b5 only after getting h5 in. I think a better approach is to keep in reserve the opportunity of playing h5, as the option will still be there after playing 8 ♖b5 first.

9...♖a6 10 c3 ♗e7 11 ♗d3



This is a logical move as while Black's bishop on h7 has been pushed back with tempo, it is still fairly active on the h7-b1 diagonal.

11...fxd3 12 Qxd3 Nd7 13 Ne2

The alternative development, 13 Nh3, may be preferable as it retains the idea of playing g5 if this opportunity presents itself.

13...0-0 14 a4

White has an edge. Jobava's play has made sense as it restricts active play, which is Mamedyarov's preferred type of game.

14...Qf6 15 Qd6 Re8 16 f4!?

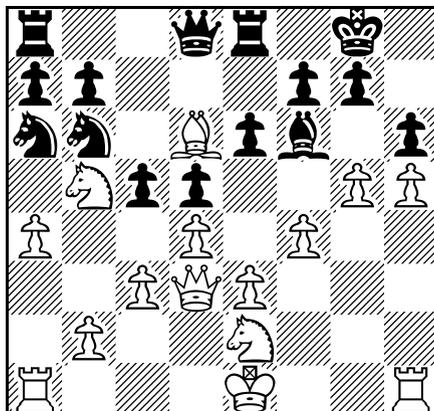
This is an ambitious move, but certainly in Jobava's style. It shows that this opening can contain many active possibilities despite what people may think.

16...Nb6?!

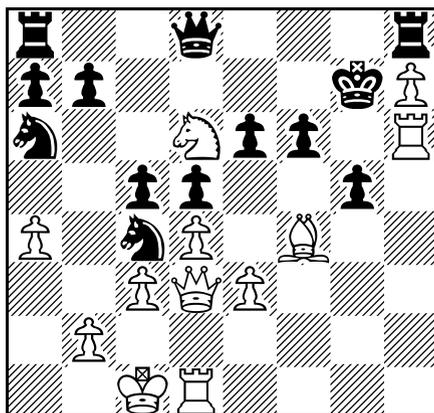
This is too slow and after this move Mamedyarov does not put up much resistance, but in any case the opening phase is comfortably over and White has prepared his pawn advances well.

17 g5

Jobava does not need a second invitation to crash through.



17...hxg5 18 h6! g6 19 fxg5 ♙xg5 20 h7+ ♚g7 21 ♙e5+ f6?! 22 ♘d6!? ♜h8? 23 ♘f4 ♙xf4
 The knight had to go, but now Black's kingside will be fatally levered open after all.
 24 ♙xf4 g5 25 0-0-0 ♘c4 26 ♜h6!?



Amazing creativity. While the rest of this rapid game wasn't perfect, White was able to completely overwhelm the defences and so triumph.
 26...♙xh6 27 ♘f7+ ♚g7 28 ♘xd8 ♜axd8 29 b3?! ♘b6 30 ♜g1 ♜xh7 31 e4 ♙h8?! 32 e5! gxf4?
 33 ♜g6 ♜f8 34 exf6 1-0

Game 6

D.Naroditsky-K.Kiewra
 US Online League 2015

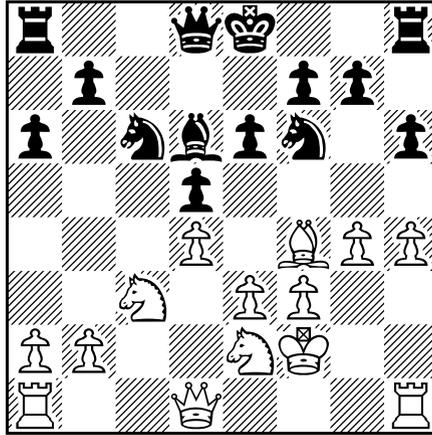
1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 ♙f4 ♙f5 4 f3 e6 5 g4 ♙g6 6 h4 h6 7 e3 a6

This is more prudent than allowing White to play ♞b5 , which as we have seen, ties Black up and is a key feature of the Jobava London whenever White is allowed to play it.

8 ♙d3 ♜xd3 9 cxd3 c5

This seems to play into White's hands and decision to recapture with cxd3 . We'll see ... ♙d6 on move 7 in our next two games and here too 9... ♙d6 might be prudent when White can carry on developing with 10 ♞ge2 .

10 dxc5 ♜xc5 11 d4 ♙d6 12 ♞ge2 ♞c6 13 ♚f2



This move shows the wealth of possibilities in this line. White's king should be entirely safe on f2 and he keeps his rook on h1, which strongly retains the prospect of further king-side advances. These advances are, at the risk of repeating myself again, a key theme of the whole opening.

13... ♝c8 14 ♝c1 b5?!

Another natural looking move, but as in so many lines of this opening, Black should be more careful about his dark-square weaknesses. It may not be immediately obvious that the c5-square is a key positional weakness, but that certainly isn't lost on a player of Naroditsky's skill.

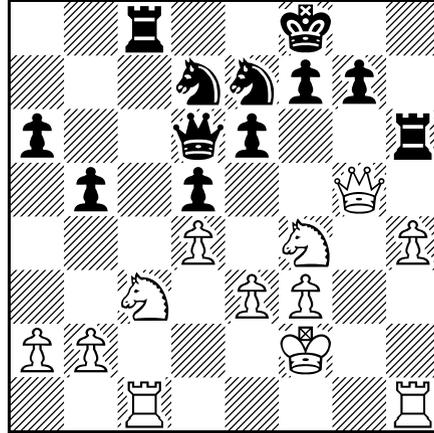
15 ♜xd6 ♚xd6 16 ♞f4 !

Not only does this cover the h5-square, which is consistent with a g4-g5 advance and the rook remaining on h1, but should White wish this knight can be rerouted to c5 via d3.

16... ♞e7 17 g5 ♞d7

Black has defended well, but White still has the initiative and his position is the more pleasant and easier to play.

18 gxf6 ?! ♝xh6 19 ♚g1 ♞f8 20 ♚g5

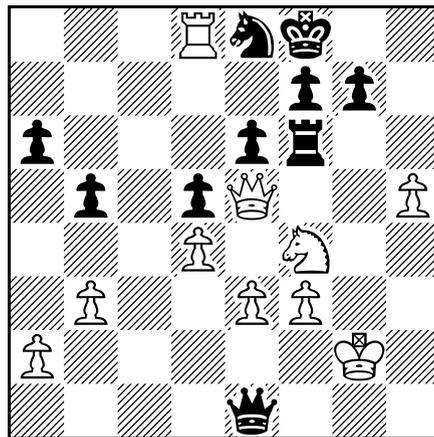


White's play may not be perfect, but the old adage that it's better to have a plan than no plan at all continues to stand the test. Naroditsky's play is consistent as he continues in attack mode.

20...♘f6 21 ♖hg1 ♞e8 22 h5 ♜c4 23 b3 ♜c6 24 ♞ce2! ♜f6 25 ♜xc6 ♞xc6 26 ♜c1 ♞e7 27 ♞g3 ♞f5 28 ♜c8

28 ♞xf5 was stronger.

28...♞d7 29 ♜a8 ♞xg3 ♞c6 31 ♜d8 ♞c1 32 ♞e5 ♞e1+ 33 ♞g2



33...♞d2?

The pressure tells just when 33...♜xf4! would have led to a draw.

34 ♞h3 ♞b4 35 ♞xd5! 1-0

Black cannot save everything.

Game 7
D.Naroditsky-M.Saltvedt
Xtracon Open, Helsingor 2016

1 d4 d5 2 ♘c3 ♗f6 3 ♕f4 ♕f5 4 f3 e6 5 g4 ♗g6 6 h4 h6 7 e3 ♕d6

I've realised that this move and ...♕b4 ideas are feared the most by white players, but they need not be. Naroditsky demonstrates why.

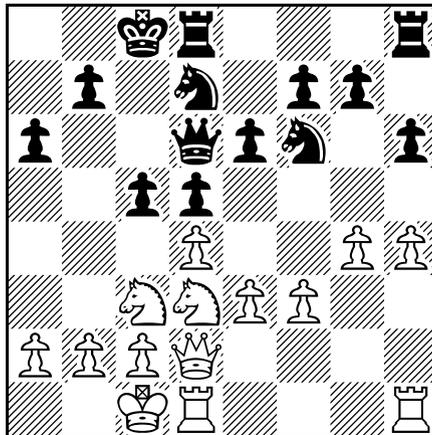
8 ♗ge2

8 h5!? ♕h7 9 ♕d3 is a tempting alternative, as we'll see Rapport demonstrate in our next game.

8...a6 9 ♕xd6 ♖xd6 10 ♗f4 ♗c6

This is probably the best move, but that alone shows how tricky Black's position is. I would certainly say it is not natural to allow White to take on g6.

10...♕h7 is the logical alternative, but once again the recurring theme of Black's dark-square weaknesses comes to the fore. This theme along with that of kingside expansion keeps cropping up in this opening and must be learnt from. Here after 11 ♕d3 ♕xd3 12 ♗xd3 ♗bd7 13 ♖d2 c5 14 0-0-0 0-0-0 we might say that Black has played the opening well.

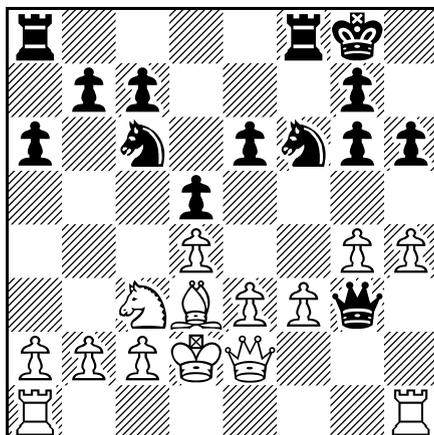


However, White retains an edge both in position and ease of manoeuvring after 15 h5.

11 ♗xg6 ♖g3+

To most players this would look scary, but it's not to be feared. Black has no other pieces to join in the assault.

12 ♖d2 fxg6 13 ♕d3 0-0 14 ♖e2

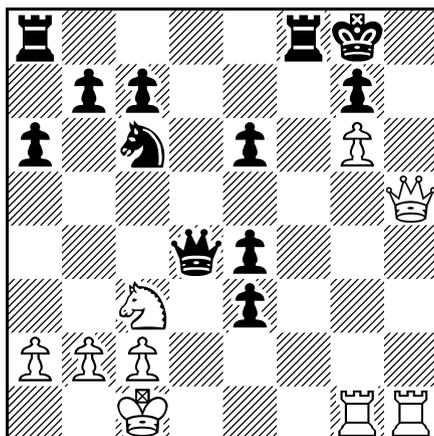


The check on g3 by Black has actually helped White, as now the queen's rook can readily join the action if required. White's position is both strong and very playable. The kingside play presents itself and should be readily appreciated.

14...g5?

Panic, but what else to do? A retreat with 14... ♖d6 would be an admission that things have already gone awry.

15 hxg5 hxg5 16 ♖ag1 ♖d6 17 f4 gxf4 18 g5 ♗e4+ 19 ♘xe4 dxe4 20 ♗h5 fxe3+ 21 ♔c1 ♗xd4 22 g6



White will force mate.

22... ♖d2+ 23 ♔b1 1-0

Game 8
R.Rapport-L.Rindlisbacher
 Zurich Open 2014

1 ♖c3

We do not, of course, recommend this move order as it allows Black to reply with 1...e5 when 2 d4 would be a poor choice.

1...d5 2 d4

Back to where we want things!

2...♘f6 3 ♙f4 ♙f5 4 f3 e6 5 g4 ♙g6 6 h4

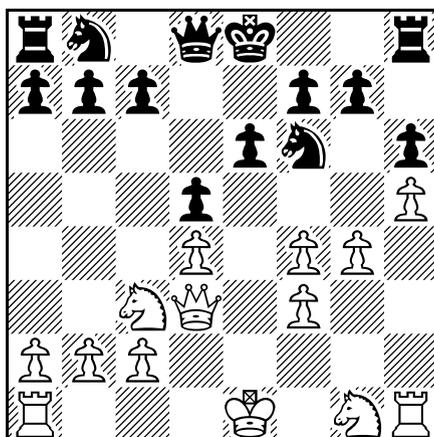
This key expansion once again. White threatens h5, trapping the light-squared bishop.

6...h6 7 e3 ♙d6 8 h5!?

Rapport is happy to see all the bishops come off, so presses straight ahead rather than develop with 8 ♘ge2, as we've just seen Naroditsky do in this position.

8...♙h7

After 8...♙xf4 9 exf4 ♙h7 10 ♙d3 ♙xd3 11 ♚xd3 I prefer White's position due to his kingside space and control of the centre.



His plan is to castle queenside, complete development and choose between centralisation with ♚he1 and perhaps f5 or continuing to push on the kingside. The game actually reaches the same position.

9 ♙d3 ♙xf4 10 exf4 ♙xd3 11 ♚xd3

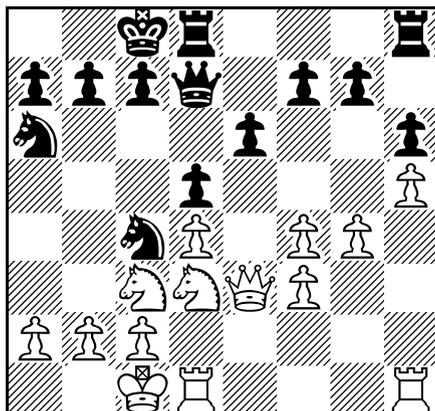
Here we are again!

11...♚d7 12 0-0-0 ♘a6 13 ♚e3 0-0-0 14 ♘h3

White develops this knight to the initially funny looking h3-square, but Rapport truly understands the position and is planning ♘h3-f2-d3. It's all about the dark squares on c5 and e5 again. This is such a key theme that every Jobava London player must try their best

to understand it. Indeed, this concept should be kept in mind at all times.

14... ♖e8 15 ♗f2 ♘d6 16 ♘d3 ♗c4



Most club players may feel that this favours Black, but the queen can simply retreat, keeping the pressure on the half open e-file (a classic tenet of the best place for a queen: on a half-open line where it exerts pressure without fear of attack from an opposing rook). The clever placement of the knight on d3 is further revealed as it protects b2 should Black find a way of bringing his queen to b6, for example.

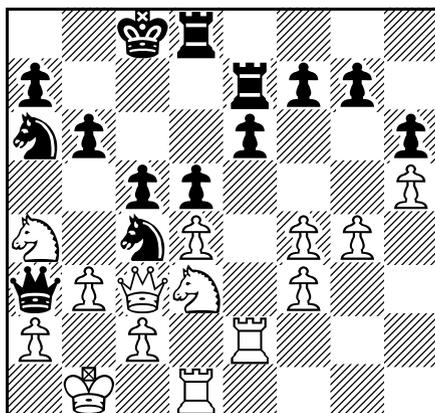
17 ♕e1 ♕d6

White's space advantage is the key here. Rapport does not play perfectly (who does?), but the opening phase has gone well and he still goes on to win in 32 moves!

18 ♘a4 b6 19 ♖h2

A clever rook lift, heading for the e2-square to form a battery, with the rook leading the queen from the front.

19... ♖he8 20 ♖e2 ♖e7 21 b3 ♕a3+ 22 ♗b1 c5 23 ♕c3



23...♖c7?

23...♘b4 was very hard to see, but also the only way to maintain the tension for Black.

24 dxc5 b5 25 bxc4 ♖xa4 26 ♘b2 ♗b4 27 ♗xb4 ♘b4 28 cxb5 d4 29 ♘a4 ♖b7 30 c4 dxc3 31 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 32 ♘xc3 ♘d5 1-0

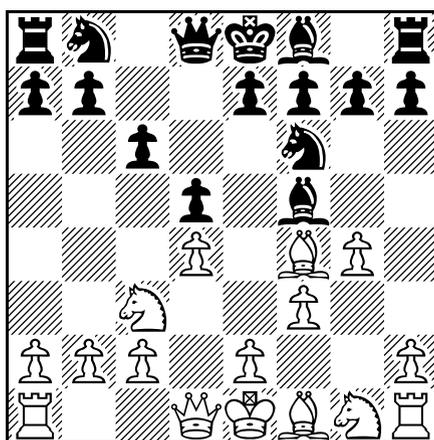
White is far too many pawns to the good.

Theory

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 ♗f4 ♗f5 4 f3 e6

This locks the bishop outside the pawn chain, inviting White to attack it.

Black's main alternative is 4...c6, which should not be critical. As ever, though, it is always best to be prepared. Again, 5 g4 gains space while chasing Black's bishop around.

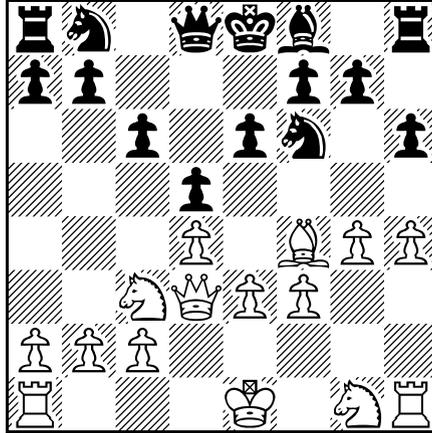


Here Black might try:

a) 5...♗g6 6 h4 when Black must decide how to create an escape square for the bishop:

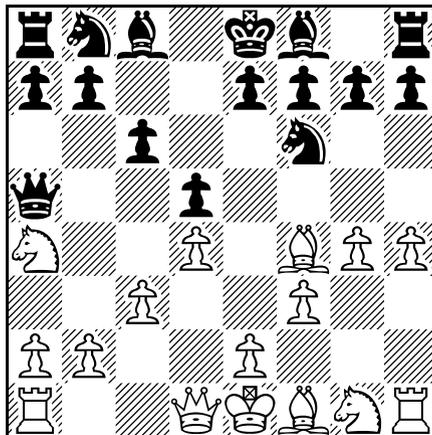
a1) 6...h5 7 g5 (White is already getting on top, as wherever the knight retreats to, White will play e4, commanding the centre) 7...♘g8 8 e4 and White has a large space advantage. He can simply develop his pieces and castle queenside with a pleasant position: for example, 8...e6 9 ♘ge2 ♗d6 10 ♗d2 ♘e7 11 a3 was seen in E.Prie-R.Duff, Montpellier 2013, where White won in 31 moves. Here 11 ♗xd6 may be even stronger with the idea of castling queenside. Black is likely to castle kingside, but with the opposite-side castling, White's extra space and clear lead in the race against the kings gives Black a worrisome defensive task: 11...♗xd6 12 ♘f4 ♘d7 13 0-0-0 0-0 14 ♗h2 and the threat of ♘xg6 (with the idea of the intermezzo ♘xe7+, winning material) means Black's best move is the meek retreat 14...♗b8, which merely highlights White's advantage.

a2) 6...h6 is an alternative, but again White already has a comfortable position. Moreover, play continues in line with the general themes of the opening: 7 e3 e6 8 ♗d3 (not committing to an advance of the h-pawn in order to retain the option of g5 with maximum effect) 8...♗xd3 9 ♗xd3.



White will continue to develop, connect the rooks and eventually play the advance g4-g5. After 9... ♖bd7 10 ♗ge2 ♖a5 11 a3 (preventing ... ♗b4 and also making it harder for Black to break with ... c5, since after dxc5 ♗xc5 White could play b4 with a fork) 11... ♖c8 12 ♔f2 (castling queenside would be too risky in this situation; the king is perfectly safe on f2) 12... ♖d8 13 ♗g3 there are chances for both sides, but White has a lead in development, more space and threats of further kingside expansion. Black, for his part, is totally reliant on the ... c5 break and I definitely prefer White's position.

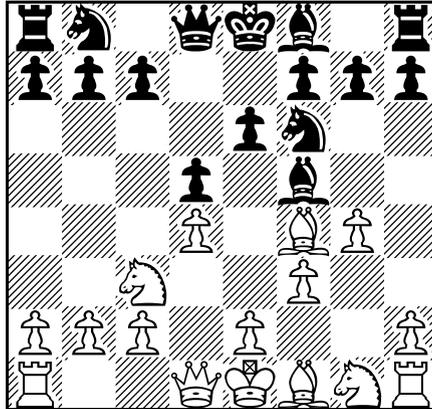
b) 5... ♗c8 could possibly be Black's best move, but if this is the case then it is clear that Black is admitting guilt for his previous moves. White now continues with the plan of kingside expansion and 6 h4 is in no way taking liberties as Black has lost several tempi with his bishop. Play might continue 6... ♖b6 7 ♗a4 (this is an important move to remember against ... ♖b6, and you must be careful that you can play ♗c5 if the knight is subsequently attacked by a ... b5 pawn thrust) 7... ♖a5+ 8 c3.



The point of White's play. The queen now guards the knight on a4 and White is poised to continue with b2-b4, increasing his control over the c5-square. Here 8...e6 (8...b5?! 9 ♘c5 is a very important option; White's extra space, lead in development and control of the dark squares gives him more than a pleasant position) 9 b4 ♗d8 10 e3 supplies an edge and ensures that White can answer 10...a5 with 11 b5. White has a space advantage on both sides of the board and can simply continue developing. His king will be quite safe on f2.

We can now return to the main line, 4...e6:

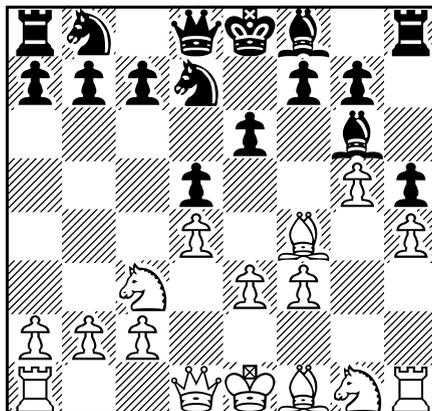
5 g4



Again, we see the real point behind 4 f3 as White expands with tempo, seizing some very useful space in the process.

5...♗g6 6 h4 h6

Once again, the main alternative is 6...h5 when 7 g5 ♘fd7 8 e3 reminds us that one idea after Black has played ...h6 or ...h5 to safeguard his g6-bishop is to challenge it with ♗d3, since an exchange of bishops will highlight the weakened light squares on the kingside.



Here Black has:

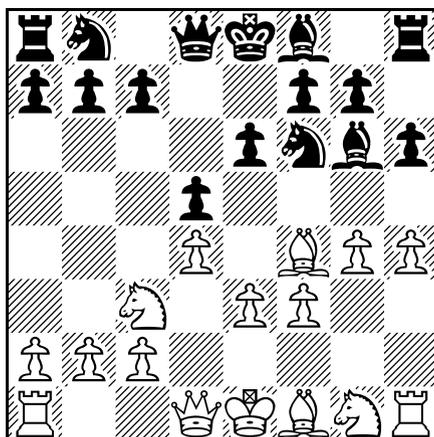
a) 8...♟d6 9 ♟xd6! has rarely been seen which is why I have given it an exclamation. I feel it's an important improvement on previous grandmaster games: for example, 9...cxd6 10 ♖h3 (this knight will be strongly positioned on f4) 10...♗c6 11 ♗f4 ♗e7 12 e4 when White has extra space and central dominance. It's more than a pleasant position; indeed, it's one which any player of the white pieces should consider to be an opening triumph.

b) 8...c5?! allows our typical Jobava London strike: 9 ♗b5 ♗a6 10 c3 ♟e7 11 ♟g3. A clever move, intending ♗h3-f4. Once again the combination of White's dark-squared bishop and knight on b5 ties Black up on the queenside. White has an edge both in position and in future plans.

c) With 8...a6 9 ♟d3 White simply exchanges off Black's most active piece. After 9...♟xd3 I couldn't resist taking with the pawn in S.Williams-D.Pruess, Internet (blitz) 2020, but here I think that the straightforward recapture 10 ♗xd3 is stronger. White has ideas of g6 and e4 to open lines and bringing the knight from g1 to f4 may also cause Black problems on the kingside and light squares.

d) 8...♟b4!? 9 ♟d3 (as played by Jobava himself; White is now ready to complete development with ♗ge2 and also has ideas of ♟xg6 then ♗d3; note too that we should not fear an exchange on c3) 9...♟xc3+ 10 bxc3 0-0 11 ♗e2 when White has the sneaky idea of ♟g3 followed by ♗f4, putting Black under some pressure on the kingside.

7 e3



Again with the idea of playing ♟d3 and exchanging Black's light-squared bishop.

7...c5

This runs into a familiar motif, so Black might prefer the alternative 7...a6, which in many lines is a prudent choice, preventing any ideas White has of playing ♗b5. After 8 ♟d3 ♟xd3 recapturing with 9 cxd3!? may look odd, but Black is intending to play ...c5 when we can undouble our pawns and keep two pawns in the centre. Then 9...c5 10 dxc5 ♟xc5 11 d4 sees the position now resemble an exchange Slav where Black hasn't a boxed-

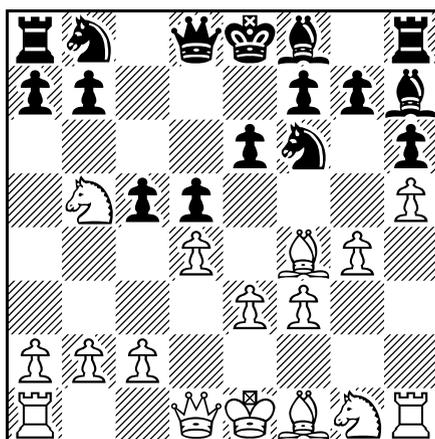
in light-squared bishop on c8, while White has some extra space on the kingside. Following 11...♙d6 12 ♘ge2 ♘c6 13 ♙xd6 (the immediate 13 ♙f2 was seen in Game 6, Naroditsky-Kiewra) 13...♚xd6 14 ♚c1 it's fair to say that this position is roughly equal, as Black again demonstrates that the best defensive lines often include ...a6. White should not in any way be unhappy though, as he has a clear space edge and will continue with ♙f2 and most likely g5.

Black also has 7...♙d6 when 8 ♘ge2 turned out well in Naroditsky-Saltveldt (Game 7), as did 8 h5!? ♙h7 9 ♙d3, refusing to fear an exchange of bishops in Rapport-Rindlisbacher (Game 8).

8 h5

First White gains some space at the expense of the g6-bishop.

8...♙h7 9 ♘b5



This really is a powerful option which Black should probably not allow. Whenever White gets the knight to b5 after Black plays ...c5, it dominates Black's queenside as ...♘a6 is the only sensible reply. Simply put, Black is tied up in knots by the knight on b5 and the bishop on f4.

9...♘a6 10 c3

This pawn move is a very useful one, preventing any future ...♚a5+ or ...♘b4 ideas.

10...♙e7 11 ♙d3

Exchanging off Black's best minor piece.

11...♙xd3 12 ♚xd3 ♘d7

Black was afraid of the g4-g5 push.

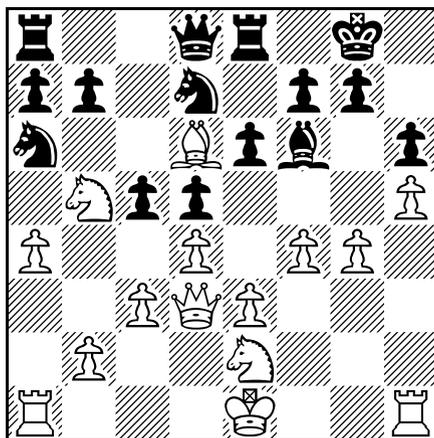
13 ♘e2 0-0 14 a4

A strong move, reinforcing the knight's position on b5. It's here to stay for at least a good while yet.

14...♙f6

This allows White to improve the f4-bishop's position.

15 ♗d6 ♖e8 16 f4



With a strong grip on the centre, as well as ideas of playing g5.

16... ♗b6?! 17 g5!

White is clearly better, as we saw back in Game 5, Jobava-Mamedyarov.