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Foreword

by Michael Adams



I think the first tournament that I played with Ivan Sokolov was the Oakham Young Masters (yes, we were young once) back in 1988. We then started to bump into each other at tournaments on a regular basis, became friendly and often socialised together following our games, sharing some glasses of wine. Our discussions were many and varied and some of them were even about chess.

I remember one particular conversation where I proposed a certain plan in a middlegame position; Ivan looked a little confused, his eyebrows started twitching, and he responded 'yes, but this is just a normal position'. In his chess education, he had broken down structures into various typical situations and analysed these. The English school of chess had a slightly more chaotic approach.

In this book, Ivan shares the fruits of his labours, which are invaluable tools for any player. This structured approach is quite instructive as often players choose their opening repertoire according to quite haphazard criteria, randomly picking up lines without giving serious consideration to how the resulting middlegames would suit them. To resolve this problem a bit of retro-analysis can prove helpful. By studying the resulting middlegames and determining your strengths and weaknesses, it is possible to go back to the earlier stages of the game and set out your stall accordingly.

The book also gives interesting pointers about the direction in which modern chess is heading. The role of the computer in opening preparation has become all-important and players' homework can progress right from the starting position until the end of the game. Reading the book, I was very happy that I was not caught in Ivan's preparation for his game against Krasenkow featured on page 265! I expect his opponent also thinks himself lucky that he diverged at an early stage.

Although the general advice will be especially helpful to club players, other topics covered will certainly be useful to players of a greater strength. Undoubtedly they will make note of the original opening suggestions, as I certainly have, but also enjoy the in-depth annotations to some excellent games. Club players shouldn't be dis-

heartened if the number of variations sometimes seems a bit daunting. As you can see from Ivan's own games featured here and elsewhere, aggressive, challenging play always makes it difficult under the rigours of a practical game to find the best defence. The level of defensive play that is possible at home in your study with some helpful suggestions from your silicon friend is rarely replicated in the heat of battle.

There are also a few of Ivan's losses in this book, I know from commiserating with him afterwards that some of them were quite painful, and he can't have enjoyed revisiting them for publication in this book. But an essential part of improvement, from which Ivan does not shirk here, is analysing what has gone wrong and being objective about not only the assessment of the position reached from an opening but your understanding of the resulting structures. After all, most main opening systems are completely viable but your mastery of them may not be.

Ivan's introduction struck a chord with me in this respect, as I suspect it does with most other players, as I personally sometimes persisted with unsuited opening systems too long. I would justify my choices to myself, on the grounds that objectively I had a good position, but the situations arising did not suit my style and I was then never able to get a good grasp of them.

Everyone must decide for themselves which systems best serve them but this book will certainly be a great asset in making these sometimes hard choices. Of course armed with the knowledge gained here you will be considerably better versed in all of them. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did.

Michael Adams, October 2008

Introduction

I started working on this book in March, 2007. As usually happens, due to different reasons, it took me longer than my publisher and me had planned and I finished my work in August 2008. In this book I wanted to explore the – in my opinion – four most important types of pawn structure in chess.

Quite a number of books on pawn structures have been published, and one may rightly wonder what makes this book different.

Well, I have tried, as much as possible, to

1. systematize the thematic plans used and give clear explanations of them, and
2. incorporate the ideas of the featured opening variation into the pawn structure that ensues.

The latter is actually quite important. In the pre-computer era players normally polished their opening repertoire over the years, and even though opening preparation did not go nearly as far as today, years of theoretical and practical experience brushing up one's repertoire would normally result in a reasonably good strategic understanding of the positions arising from the openings played.

In the past 15 years, the involvement of computer programs and databases has made it considerably easier to prepare a particular variation for a particular opponent. However, thorough study and good strategic understanding of the positions still remains a must in order to capitalize successfully on your opening preparation. I still remember watching one of Anatoly Karpov's post-mortems, when he had won from some initially inferior Ruy Lopez with black. His opponent, slightly annoyed, remarked: 'Here, after the opening, you were definitely worse', to which the 12th World Champion calmly replied: 'Yes, but soon I was better'.

Indeed, Karpov has won from quite a number of inferior positions (his encounters with Garry Kasparov included), due to his superior strategic understanding of the openings he was playing. Kasparov has won many Najdorfs and King's Indians not only because he had the best novelties, but because he fundamentally understood those positions better than his opponents. On the other hand he was too stubborn to admit that the Berlin Variation of the Ruy Lopez was not 'his cup of tea', which ultimately cost him his World Championship title against Vladimir Kramnik in 2000.

Kramnik, on the other hand, being devastating in Catalan-type systems with white and Meran Slavs with black, at some stage started to opt for sharp Sicilians with white and King's Indians with black. That adventure did not last very long. Nowadays he is a merciless killing machine with his Catalans again, squeezing out the smallest of microscopic advantages, while the King's Indian with black is a long-forgotten voyage.

If such mistakes are committed by the world's very best, then what are we to expect from lesser gods? Throughout my own career, I have also scored reasonably well in the positions I understood and paid the price for being too stubborn to stay away from position types that did not suit me.

So the reasons why I have tried in this book to incorporate the strategic middlegame ideas and the games which I view as important into the four different types of pawn structure discussed in this book, were:

1. to provide a complete guide for the club player;
2. through a process of serious analysis of the material in this book, to also give the club player a reasonably accurate feeling as to which particular positions suit him and which do not; and
3. to give the club player who takes his time for a thorough study of this book, new strategic and also practical opening knowledge, after which he will definitely see a clear improvement in his results.

In the introductions to the four different chapters, I will further explain the distinguishing types of position, games and variations featured.

I hope that, apart from trying to improve his chess skills, the reader will also simply enjoy studying the games selected in this book.

Ivan Sokolov,
August 2008

Chapter 1

Doubled Pawns

Introduction

In this chapter, I will try to make structures with doubled pawns easier to understand and analyse, by systematizing them into 12 standard positions. The 12 ‘Structure’ diagrams I have connected with the commented games that follow, reflect those standard positions, which are reached the most frequently.

As we shall see, a vast majority of structures with doubled pawns arise from the various lines with 4.e3 or with 4.a3 (the Sämisch Variation) of the Nimzo-Indian Defence. Apart from the fact that it is good to understand these positions in general, for those who play 1.d2-d4 with white, or the Nimzo-Indian with black, the commented games below will have the additional practical value that they will clearly improve your opening knowledge, an improvement that can be immediately implemented in tournament play.

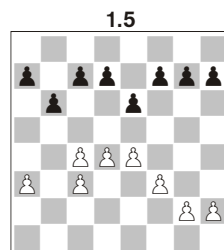
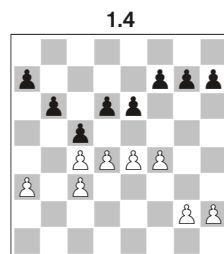
Structure 1.1 (Game 1 – Sokolov-Johansen) shows a relatively rarely reached type of position. I have included this game primarily in order to improve the reader’s general understanding. In practice it does not often happen in the Nimzo-Indian that White gets doubled pawns while Black keeps his bishop pair.



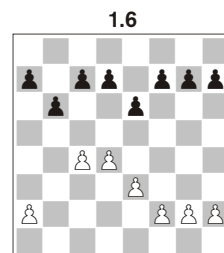
Structure 1.2 (Game 2 – Sokolov-Winants) and **Structure 1.3** (Game 3 – Gligoric-Nikolic) show what has been for many years the main line of the Nimzo-Indian. Anyone who attempts to fundamentally improve his chess skills needs to analyse these positions thoroughly. In the games related to Structures 1.2 and 1.3 I have tried to explain the pros and cons of these positions, which are difficult to play for both sides.



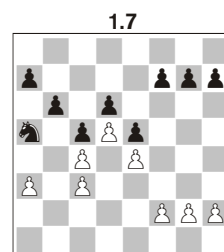
Structure 1.4 (Game 4 – Bronstein-Najdorf and Game 5 – Spassky-Hübner) and **Structure 1.5** (Game 6 – Kotov-Keres) deal with the positions arising from the Sämisch Variation. They are essential for an understanding of this variation, which was very popular 50 years ago, and played by the world’s greatest players of that time.



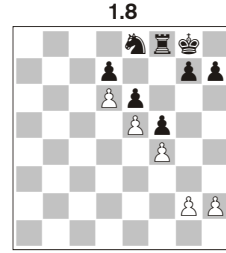
Structure 1.6 (Game 7 – Keres-Spassky) explains why for White it does not have to be bad to lose his c3 pawn in positions with a full centre and doubled pawns on c3 and c4. This idea is in use in a few Nimzo-Indian lines, and useful to remember and understand.



Structure 1.7 (Game 8 – Gligoric-Ivkov, Game 9 – Vyzhmanavin-Beliavsky, and, with a mobile centre: Game 10 – Z.Polgar-Sokolov, Game 11 – Sokolov-Bologan, Game 12 – Sokolov-Dizdarevic and Game 13 – Radjabov-Anand) shows a plan that is often seen in a different type of position with doubled pawns in a full-centre Nimzo-Indian: Black targets (and often wins) White’s weak c4 pawn, but by doing this, he gets his knight temporarily or permanently stranded on the edge of the board, i.e. on the a5-square. As you will see from the games analysed, most of the time White gets plenty of initiative on the kingside to compensate for the loss of his c4 pawn, but the game remains double-edged and White has to be energetic and accurate in developing and executing his kingside attack.



Structure 1.8 (Game 14 – Bronstein-Simagin) shows an original strategic idea by Bronstein, played almost 50 years ago and still very viable.



Structure 1.9 (Game 15 – Botvinnik-Chekhover and Game 16 – Kuzubov-Van der Wiel) shows an important strategic idea for White. He does not mind making the centre static, seemingly isolating his c4 pawn weakness even more, by exchanging his d4 pawn, in order to open the d-file and gain an important outpost on the central d5-square. An idea which was beautifully executed by former World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik 70 years ago (!) and still highly topical.



Structure 1.10 (Game 17 – Topalov-Aronian) deals with an idea similar to the one demonstrated in Structure 1.9, with the difference that Black's e-pawn and White's f-pawn have disappeared here and White has to rely more on his bishop pair.



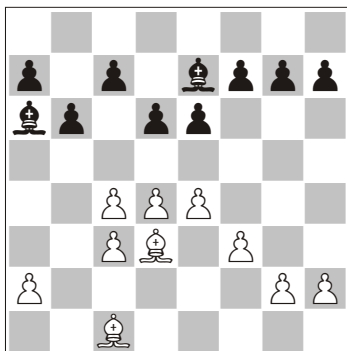
Structure 1.11 (Game 18 – Kaidanov-Onischuk) shows a beautiful positional exchange sacrifice idea in the Sämisch Variation of the Nimzo-Indian.



Structure 1.12 (Game 19 – Kasparov-Ivanchuk) deals with positions arising from the English Opening where White has doubled c-pawns. Mostly White also takes central control, but his d-pawn has not yet been pushed to d4 (which brings some clear advantages here). Furthermore, White's f-pawn has been exchanged for and Black's e-pawn, so that the f-file is open for White's rook.



Structure 1.1



Black has two bishops instead of ♖ + ♘

In the vast majority of positions with a full centre and doubled pawns, the side with the doubled pawns (usually White) has a bishop pair versus bishop + knight. However, if instead of bishop + knight Black also had two bishops, would it benefit him or would it (in a closed position) make it more difficult for him to manoeuvre his pieces? An interesting question. In the following game (which went rather wrong for me) I got the opportunity to find out some pros and cons.

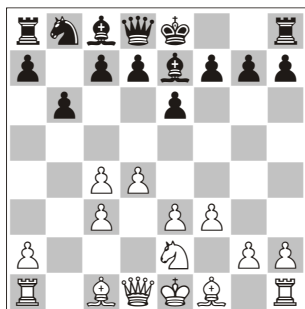
NI 13.6 (E44)

Ivan Sokolov

Darryl Johansen

Manila ol 1992 (2)

1. d2-d4 ♘g8-f6
2. c2-c4 e7-e6
3. ♘b1-c3 ♙f8-b4
4. e2-e3 b7-b6
5. ♘g1-e2 ♘f6-e4!?
6. f2-f3!? ♘e4xc3
7. b2xc3 ♙b4-e7



GAME 1

8. e3-e4

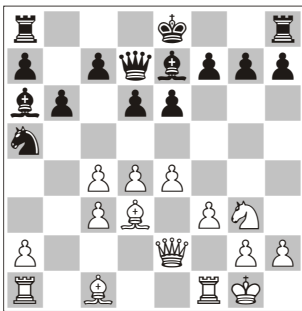
Deciding to advance the central pawn and then develop the knight further. In Shirov-Adams, Las Palmas 1994, White opted for a different set-up: 8. ♘g3 ♘c6 9. ♙d3 ♙a6 10. 0-0 ♘a5 11. ♙e2 c6 (in the event of 11...d6 I guess Shirov's idea was to push 12.f4) 12.f4 d5 13.cxd5 ♙xd3 14. ♙xd3 exd5 15.f5 h5! with a complex game. Note that with his last move (typical for these positions) Black disturbed White's attacking plans.

8. ... ♘b8-c6
9. ♘e2-g3 ♙c8-a6
10. ♙f1-d3 ♘c6-a5
11. ♙d1-e2 d7-d6
12. 0-0 ♙d8-d7

Black follows the regular Sämisch Nimzo plan, as if there was a knight on f6 and the e7 bishop did not exist. With a black bishop on e7 instead of a knight

on f6, White misses the important tempo move e4-e5 with which he often develops an initiative.

Black could also have decided to harass the g3 knight immediately by playing 12...h5? – however, with his king in the middle, this would give White the opportunity to take immediate action and sacrifice a piece with 13.f4! h4 14.♘h5! g6 15.♘g7+ ♕f8 16.♘xe6+ fxe6 17.f5 (White has opened up the black king's position and charges with a direct mating attack, while Black's bishop and knight are stranded on the a-file) 17...♖g7 (or 17...exf5 18.exf5 ♙f6 19.♙g5! ♖g7 (on 19...♙xg5, 20.fxg6+ ♙f6 21.♖e6 wins) 20.♙xf6+ ♖xf6 21.fxg6 and White wins) 18.fxg6 ♗f8 (18...♙f6 19.e5) 19.♙d2 and White wins in the attack (19...♙f6 20.e5).



13. ♖a1-b1?!

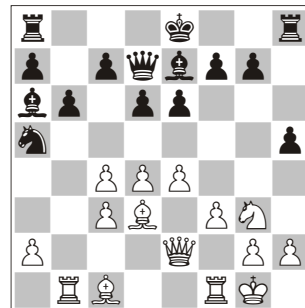
Typically in such positions, White has to use his extra space and his advantage in development to work out an initiative, before his structural deficiencies will start to be felt.

13.f4! was a good and energetic way to start: 13...♖a4 14.f5 ♙xc4 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.♘h5 ♗g8 17.♘f4 0-0-0 18.♘xe6! and White is better. In such positions, most of the time the critical moment arrives rather early in the

game. White has to sense this and seize the initiative, and should not be afraid to sacrifice material and take risks. If White misses such opportunities and continues playing 'regular moves', like I did in this game, then he will often get outplayed positionally, lose the game without firing a shot and wonder throughout a sleepless night how he ended up with such a lousy position after making all those 'normal' moves.

In the game I definitely saw the possibilities associated with 13.f4!, but playing White against some under-2500 Australian guy, I thought 'regular' moves should suffice, and the win should arrive without any risks involved. This is perhaps a reasonable way of thinking when you play some Catalan line with white, but not in this type of Nimzo. White is about to learn this lesson soon.

13. ... h7-h5!



14. ♖f1-e1?!

One more 'regular', timid move and Black is already slightly better. It was high time – and White's last chance – to realize the need for energetic action and opt for 14.f4! and the consequential piece sacrifice. Not an easy decision, but nevertheless this was the principled way to proceed: 14...h4 15.♘h5 g6

16. ♖g7+ ♕f8 17. ♖xe6+ ♖xe6 18.d5 (18.f5 gxf5 19. ♖xf5 is also possible) 18... ♖d7 (or 18... ♖f6 19.e5 ♖g7 20. ♕e3 with compensation) 19.f5 gxf5 20. ♖xf5 with a strong attack. Black's ♕a6 and ♖a5 are again stranded on the wrong side of the board.

14. ... h5-h4

15. ♖g3-f1 c7-c5

White has missed his opportunities to take the initiative and Black, due to his better pawn structure, now enjoys a slight but lasting advantage

16. ♕c1-e3 ♖a8-c8

17. ♖f1-d2 e6-e5

18. f3-f4

Trying to remain active and keep some central tension. In general this is a good strategy – however, the position does not offer the same opportunities as a few moves earlier. Black now has firm control of the central squares and White's action will soon result in more pawn weaknesses.

It was better to accept that things have not gone White's way and close the centre with 18.d5 ♖a4 19.f4 ♕f6 20.f5, and even though Black has achieved his strategic objectives, a draw is the most likely outcome.

18. ... ♕e7-f6!

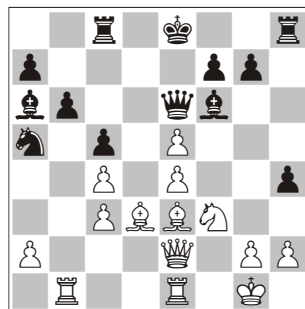
19. d4xe5

Maintaining central tension was perhaps better, but Black would keep the upper hand after 19. ♖f3 h3! – but not 19...cxd4? 20.cxd4 exd4 21. ♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 22. ♖xd4 and White gets what he wants. He will develop an initiative, since 22... ♕xc4? 23. ♕xc4 ♖xc4 loses to 24. ♖ec1 ♖a5 25. ♖f5 0-0 26. ♖g4.

19. ... d6xe5

20. ♖d2-f3 ♖d7-e6

21. f4xe5



21. ... ♕f6-e7!

Looking at my horrible pawn structure and slowly becoming aware of the long and difficult defence that lay ahead, I could not help but wonder about the speed of my positional collapse: in a mere 20 moves, playing White against an opponent I had never heard of and not having made any clear mistake – except that my whole concept was a positional blunder.

22. ♖e1-f1 ♕a6xc4

23. ♕e3-g5 ♕c4xd3

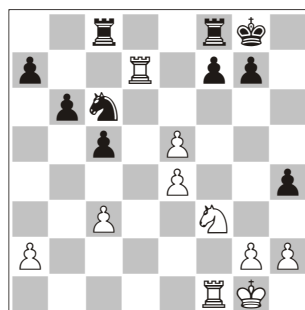
24. ♖e2xd3 ♖a5-c6

25. ♕g5xe7 ♖e6xe7

26. ♖b1-d1 0-0

27. ♖d3-d7 ♖e7xd7

28. ♖d1xd7



28. ... h4-h3!

Inflicting the final damage to White, rendering his pawn weaknesses definitely irreparable.