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# The Wonderful Winawer

Strategic Ideas & Surprise Weapons  
for Dynamic Chess Players

New In Chess 2010

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# Introduction



## Welcome to the Wonderful Winawer!

The French Defence is the only classical opening which has not yet been analysed out for twenty-odd moves in our days. The reason is probably that the positions in the French are so specific and the ‘theoretical’ possibilities so boundless, that in many cases a proper understanding of the French rules can be more practical than the study of concrete variations and the help of a computer’s engine.

A typical example is the dogma prevalent with many less educated players that the c8 bishop in the French is ‘bad’! In fact, the French bishop can be a much more helpful piece, in defence as well as attack, than its counterpart on f1, or even a white rook. The ultimate success in the use of these pieces chiefly depends on the strategy implemented by both sides. As a long-time French Defence fan (at least spreading across two centuries!) I can say that there is no bad French bishop – there are only players who don’t know how to use this wonderful piece!

In this book, my second one dedicated to the French Defence, we examine the highly complex Winawer Variation. It is characterized by the moves:

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4**



Since the days of Aaron Nimzowitsch (1886-1935) and Mikhail Botvinnik (1911-1995), who were the first pioneers of the French Defence, the Winawer System emerged as a result of the historical and theoretical development of the French, and therefore this variation includes all typical French resources – but it also has its own particular aspects, both strategic and tactical.

In the middle of the 20th century, the French Defence (and mainly the line 3...♟c3 ♟b4) was tested at the highest level in the World Championship matches Smyslov-Botvinnik (1954 and 1957) and Tal-Botvinnik (1960 and 1961). Soon enough, great experts in the French Defence appeared, such as Tigran Petrosian, Viktor Kortchnoi, Wolfgang Uhlmann, Rafael Vaganian and a whole army of ‘Francophiles’. Thanks to their ‘modern-classical’ games, the French Defence has become one of the most popular and complex openings today. It is amazing to see how many important and exciting games are played with the French Defence every month.

### Directions

*The main ideas of the 3...♟b4 pin are quite simple: attacking the centre and not wasting any tempi (as in the Classical Variation 3...♞f6 4.e5). The king’s knight stays on its most flexible square: g8. In the event of ...♟b4x♞c3 bxc3 Black will obtain a favourable pawn structure. The other bishop can be exchanged after ...b6 and ...♟a6, or activated by manoeuvres such as ...♟d7-a4 or ...♟d7-e8-g6.*

*Meanwhile, White must take profit from his space advantage, the weakness created on g7 (through ♖g4!), the mobility of his minor pieces, and also the attacking resources offered by the h-pawn with h2-h4.*

*(The Flexible French, page 212, by the same author)*

White has four main methods to develop his opening play:

- 1) **Anti-Winawer**: avoiding the advance e4-e5.
- 2) **Semi-Winawer**: playing 4.e5, but without including the key move 5.a3. These first two methods can be found in **Part I – The Open Game** (Chapters 1-2).
- 3) **Sub-Winawer**: after 5.a3 ♟xc3 White plays classically slow, developing and trying to make progress on all parts of the board. Otherwise, White can try a sharp flank attack with the h-pawn (h2-h4). See **Part II – Evolution** (Chapters 4-8) and **Part III – The Ultimate Winawer** (Chapter 11).
- 4) Massive **pressure on the kingside** – this always starts with the white move ♖g4. This method can be found throughout the book, and especially in Chapters 7-11.

Of course, White can combine the different methods.

Along the way, Black also has a number of deviations:

- 1) The **Barricading** method – playing without the direct ...c7-c5 (seen in Chapter 3).
- 2) The **Armenian Variation** – keeping the king’s bishop: after 5.a3, 5...♟a5 (Chapter 6).
- 3) The **Black Queen Blues Variation**: 6...♞a5 and 7...♞a4 (Chapter 11).

Many other main lines and sub-lines will be examined throughout this book.



## Statistics

Statistics are relative and should not be given all the credit since many games are between players with very different ratings – in most of them White had a higher Elo. Therefore, sometimes it is interesting to check the results among high-rated players who are known for their deep theoretical preparation.

In fact, when the author places the symbol (=) at the end of a line in this book, it does not mean that the game is a draw! There is still plenty of play in such positions. Moreover, we should not forget that computer programs do not understand French lines too well and here they are less helpful than in other sharp opening positions.

In all aspects and at all levels the Winawer System offers creative play for both sides. White can test almost all lines offered in this book and even try to make them critical, but on the other side, almost all Black's counter-ideas are playable and sound.

The book's structure allows the reader to study both the theoretical and the historical development of the main lines in the Winawer System, while enjoying the games of the great stars of the French Defence. There are 35 heavily commented model games. Each game in this book is an article with many stories, so each chapter is full of interesting issues.

There is much to learn in The Wonderful Winawer!

*My best wishes to all Francophiles,  
Viktor Moskalenko  
Barcelona, August 2010*



Szymon Winawer

Why is this old main idea in the Winawer so much less popular today? In this chapter we will try to find the right answers to the arising problems.

### Keep in Mind

- In the Knight System Black defends g7 tactically with the key moves ...♜f5 and ...h5, diverting the white queen.
- However, a sharp advance such as ...h7-h5 is double-edged and can weaken your own kingside.
- In this battle of barricades Black balances static and dynamic chess!

**GAME 18 – 7...♜f5 8.♖d3 h5 9.♗h3 (72 games=61.8%). A barricading weapon:  
7.♗g4 ♜g6 (87 games=29% only!)**

### The Old Weapon

After Petrosian lost against Tal with 7...♜f5 (Moscow ch-URS 1957), later I decided to play this line against him. I noticed that Tal always repeated the same variation since it was working well in practice, without any further checking or deep analysis. So I prepared an improvement for our new game in 1958 – Viktor Kortchnoi.



Mikhail Tal vs. Viktor Kortchnoi. Viktor had something of an ‘Indian sign’ over Tal. His great logic and psychological skills match those of the legendary Sherlock Holmes.

□ **Mikhail Tal**

■ **Viktor Kortchnoi**

Riga ch-URS 1958 (9)

Here is this game between the two giants: the dynamic Mikhail Tal (22 years old) vs. the quite ‘static’ Viktor Kortchnoi (here 27 years old).

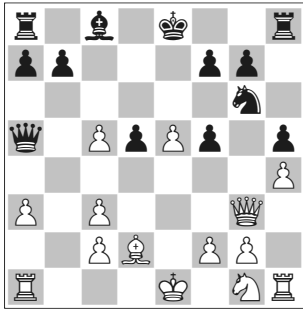
**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♜c3 ♖b4 4.e5 c5  
5.a3 ♖xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♜e7 7.♗g4 ♜f5!?**

An old weapon of many famous ‘Francophiles’. The black knight defends the kingside from the barricades.




**WEAPON:** Another defence by the knight, 7...♜g6, was one of several ‘barricade’ methods à la Petrosian. I don’t know if it is playable, but a clear refuta-

tion is yet to be found: 8.h4!? h5! 9.♖g3 ♗a5!? (unfortunately the idea 9...b6? is not playable because of 10.♙d3!) 10.♙d2 ♘c6 11.♙d3 ♘ce7 12.dxc5! (12.♘f3 c4! =) 12...♘f5!N (≤ 12...♗xc5 13.♘f3± was seen in Liberzon-Petrosian, Moscow 1964) 13.♙xf5! exf5.



This could be the new key position of this line. Black is still very solid here.

**8.♙d3**

Attacking the defending knight is a must.  WEAPON: 8.♘f3!? would be an interesting option for attacking players, since it avoids the trading of the queens. 8...♗a5 I think that the best continuation is 8...h5! 9.♗f4, which leads to some of the main lines in the next game. However, here Black does not have the option ...♗h4. 9.♙d2 c4 10.♗h5!↑



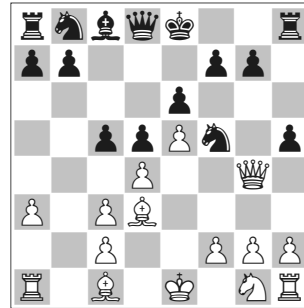
analysis diagram

10...♙d7 10...0-0? would not be good either: 11.g4 ♘e7 12.♘g5 h6 13.♘h3!?

♗a4 14.♖c1 ♘d7 15.f4→. 11.g4 ♘e7 12.♘g5 ♘g6 13.f4!→ and White should be happy with this position, Karjakin-Arizmendi Martinez, Biel 2003.

**8...h5!**

The key to the black defence. White would have a strong attack after 8...0-0? 9.♙g5 ♗a5 10.♘e2 ♖h8 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.♗h3! c4 13.♙xf5 exf5 14.♘f4 ♙e6 15.♖fe1 ♗c7 16.♗h4 ♖fe8 17.♖e3!+– Klovans-Grants, Riga ch-LAT 1965.



**9.♗h3**

Looking for an immediate refutation. The main idea of this manoeuvre hides some tricks: 9...♗h4?? 10.♙xf5, winning the knight. White also threatens to advance g2-g4. However, Black has enough time at his disposal to guarantee satisfactory counterplay.

The most popular move here is 9.♗f4!?, which will be analysed in the next game. Black is doing fine after 9.♗d1. I would recommend the following set-up: 9...cxd4 (9...♘c6!?) 10.♙xf5 exf5 11.cxd4 b6⇄ and now, for instance, 12.♘e2 ♙a6 13.0-0 ♘c6 14.♖e1 ♙xe2! 15.♖xe2 0-0 with equal chances.

**9...cxd4**

Here is the famous Kortchnoi adage: take material (i.e. pawns) at any cost. Another possibility would be to increase the pressure on d4: 9...♘c6!? 10.♙xf5 10.g4?! ♘h4 or 10...♘fe7 is good for Black. 10...exf5 11.♗g3!



analysis diagram

11... ♖a5 Remember Uhlmann's universal dynamic plan: preparing queenside castling. However, the most solid continuation would be 11... ♖f8!? and then ...h5-h4, and if 12. ♖g5 ♖a5⇌. 12. ♘e2 ♖e6 13.0-0 0-0-0∞ Black is ready to launch a pawn jet with ...h4, ...g5. 14.dxc5 h4! 15. ♖e3 g5 16.f4 gxf4 17. ♖xf4 ♖dg8 18. ♖b1 ♖h7 19. ♘d4 ♖hg7 20. ♖f2 f4 21. ♖xf4 ♖xc3→ and Black is the one who attacks, as in Teschner-Uhlmann, Wagnenningen 1957.

### 10. ♘f3

And this is the dynamic Mikhail Tal in action.

A) 10.cxd4 ♘xd4! (Kortchnoi);

B) The best option for White might be to simplify the position by 10. ♖xf5!? exf5 11. ♖g3!? ♖f8□ 12.cxd4 ♘c6 13. ♘e2 h4! 14. ♖f3 h3 15.g3



analysis diagram

and this position is balanced, e.g. 15...b6!?⇌;

C) The advance 10.g4 is still a bad idea: 10... ♘e7 Including 10... ♖a5!? is interesting, e.g. 11. ♘e2 ♘e7∞ Sidorov-Furman, Gorky 1950. 11.cxd4 ♖c7 12. ♘e2 ♘bc6 13.0-0 ♖d7 14.gxh5 0-0-0!⇌ with typically barricaded play in Dubinin-Petrosian, Gorky 1950.

### 10... ♖c7!

Here is the surprise prepared by Kortchnoi! This move order is correct for Black.

A) However, 10...dxc3!? also looks good, for instance 11.g4?! ♘e7 12.gxh5 ♖c7 13. ♖g3 ♘d7! is fine for Black;

B) In the previous victorious game by Tal the line chosen was 10... ♘c6, but in that historic game nerves played an important role and there were lots of tactical lapses: 11.g4 11.cxd4!?. 11... ♘fe7



analysis diagram

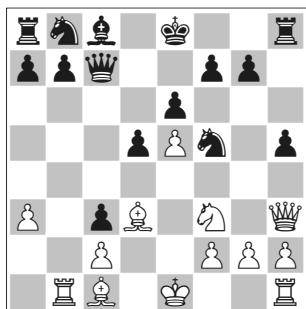
12.gxh5 After 12.cxd4 Black's queenside castling will strengthen the barricades and safeguard his king: 12... ♖c7 (or 12... ♖a5+!⇌, Mitkov-Rozentalis, Schellenberg 1991) 13. ♖d2 ♖d7 14. ♖b1 0-0-0 15.gxh5 f6!⇌, Dorawa-Uhlmann, Schkopau ch-DDR 1958. 12... ♖c7 12... ♖a5!?. 13. ♖f4 13.cxd4? ♘xd4!. 13... ♘g6 13...dxc3!?. 14. ♖g4 ♘xf4 14... ♘ge5!?. 15. ♖xf4



**dx3** 15...♖xh5?! 16.cxd4±. **16.♖g5** (16.♖g1 f6!) **16...♗e7** **17.♖xg7 ♖f8** 17...♖xh5!♣. **18.♖g5 ♖h6** **19.♖g1∞ ♖xg5?!** 19...♖xh5? 20.♖f6!. **20.♖xg5 ♗d7** **21.♗e2?** 21.h6!±. **21...♗e7** **22.♗e3 ♖af8** **23.♖ag1 ♗e8** **24.♗d4 f5??** 24...f6=. **25.♗xc6+!** ♗xc6? **26.♗d4±** reaching a winning endgame at last, Tal-Petrosian, Moscow ch-URS 1957.

Statistic note: objectively speaking, Petrosian was not very lucky in the 7...♗f5 variation. He lost 1½-½ against Tal and 1-0 to Leonid Stein (see next game), and only won one single game.

**11.♖b1 dxc3!**



Pawns are the soul of chess – keep them safe!

**12.g4?**

Back then this advance, reinforced by Tal's hypnotic eyes, used to scare many Francophiles. But not a great psychologist like Viktor Kortchnoi.

**12...♗e7** **13.gxh5 ♗bc6**



*WEAPON: The computer likes 13...b6!? 14.♖g4 ♗d7♣.*

**14.♗f4**

If 14.♖g3 ♖xh5 15.♖xg7? ♗xe5 16.♗g5 ♗xd3+ 17.cxd3 ♗g6♣ – Kortchnoi.

**14...♗g6!**

This puzzling position is similar to that of Tal-Petrosian, but here Black has

gained an important tempo with the inclusion of the moves 11.♖b1 dxc3.

**15.♗g3 ♗gxe5♣**



Black has won the opening battle. However, the sharp struggle continues.

**16.♗xe5**

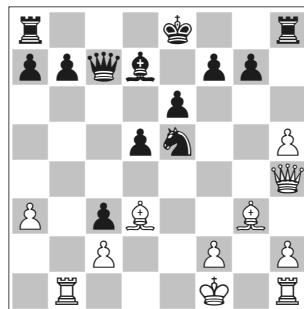
White incorrectly restricts his own possibilities. The critical continuation was to move the king without exchanging knights: 16.♗f1 – Kortchnoi. However, even after the best move 16.♗f1 Black's position is much better: 16...♗d7 (also 16...f6!? 17.♗b5 ♗d7 18.♗xc6 ♖xc6 19.♗xe5 d4!♣) 17.♗b5 (17.♖e1! f6♣ 18.♗g6+ ♗d8!♣) 17...♖a5! 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5 19.♗xe5 ♗xb5+ 20.♗e1 ♖a4! –+.

**16...♗xe5** **17.♗f1**

17.♗d1?? ♗xd3!

**17...♗d7!** **18.♖h4**

*This move, made with the aim of activating his queen, is a serious mistake, which should have led to a difficult position for White – Kortchnoi. 18.♖e1 f6 19.♗g6+ ♗f8!♣.*



Normally, for security reasons, Black avoids castling kingside in most Winawer lines. Therefore, on a few occasions in Part II I have called the move ...0-0 the 'New Winawer'. Many Winawer players refuse to play 7...0-0 for three main reasons:

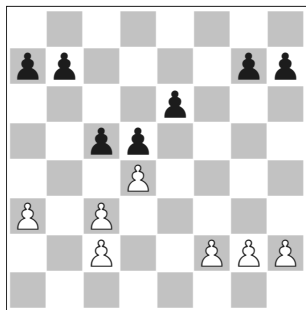
1. They do not like forced or over-analysed lines.
2. They do not like to move their king to a potentially dangerous corner. In the Winawer system, Black's king position must remain flexible.
3. They do not see how Black can get real strategic counterplay. In some lines the arising positions are fundamentally passive.

However, as a professional player and a 'systematic worker' I like to trust in my own findings. I believe that the value of some key positions analysed in existing monographs may change with time. So after a period of extensive study on the subject using many sources and my 'optimistic skills', I became an expert on 7.♔g4 0-0!

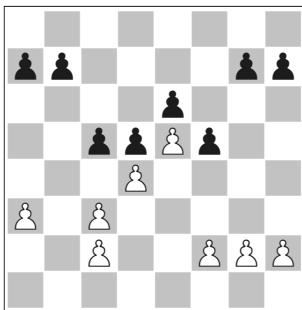
This chapter allows those who do not have enough time to work through massive volumes to prepare a repertoire with 7...0-0 fairly quickly by picking out one system versus 8.♘f3 and one versus 8.♗d3.

### Three Pawn Structures

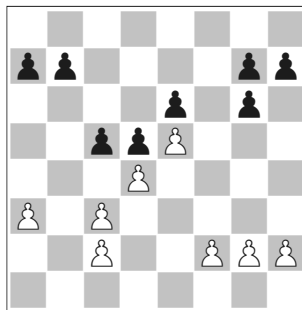
Regardless of the colour of their pieces, a Warsaw player has to learn how to play with three main pawn structures:



The modern dynamic structure, typical for many Winawer lines, named the 'Polonaise' in this chapter.



Stonewall blocked structure – similar to certain old Winawer lines.



Warsaw static structure – mostly appropriate for the Warsaw Variation.

Indeed, a good knowledge of these pawn structures is the first secret of the Winawer system – as it is in the entire French Defence and generally in chess.