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# **Modern Chess Preparation**

**Getting Ready for Your Opponent in the Information Age**

**New In Chess 2012**

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# Foreword

## Preparation: the key to victory

Chess is sometimes described as a model of life. Garry Kasparov even devoted a weighty tome to that topic. In this book, however, the author will try to avoid such a temptation. The subject will be exclusively the preparation for a game of chess or, at most, the preparation for a life in chess.

A game of chess is a struggle between two individuals. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your opponent, and having a sober awareness of your own shortcomings, will pay dividends at any level, for beginners up to World Champions. Even if you and the person sitting opposite you have only recently grasped the rules of the game, knowing a simple mechanism – bringing the queen out to h5 and the bishop to c4 with mate on f7 to follow – can bring fantastic results when you're just starting out. Of course, sooner or later your opponent, puzzled by such a turn of events, will either by himself or with the help of a chess manual demonstrate the inadequacy of such cavalier attacks. And the weapon that had brought lightning victories will backfire against its owner. However, having tasted such success you'll have caught the preparation bug, and you won't be able to stop yourself looking for more sophisticated means of surprising your opponent. That constant battle between the sword and the shield, which never relents even for a day, is the essence of the art of modern chess preparation.



Over the last hundred years and more chess has travelled a long way from coffee-house games played for small stakes to become a complex, multi-faceted activity based on an unusual mixture of art, sport and science. As chess has developed the sporting component has squeezed out art to an ever-greater degree, while the recent appearance and rapid improvement of computer programs has given chess a new and unexpected boost.

With the emergence of the first official World Champion in 1886 the battle for that coveted title became the goal and meaning of life for many, adding spice and drama to the development of chess. World Championship matches were often turning points in the wonderful game's development.

## Modern Chess Preparation

The first part of this book reflects the complex journey chess players have undertaken from the game's amateur roots to its current professional status. There's a theory that claims the chess World Champions couldn't have been more representative of the epochs in which they lived, but it's just a beautiful hypothesis. Steinitz, Lasker and Capablanca don't provide the most convincing of evidence for it. Back then chess was only taking its first steps on the road to 'statehood'. The laws of this specific realm of human activity were just beginning to be established and had little in common with the processes taking place in parallel in real life. The more professional chess became the more it started to depend on the realities of the surrounding social environment.

The contribution individual chess players have made to establishing and developing the art of preparation is far from proportional to their sporting achievements; there are different heroes and prize-winners. In the conventional ranking of historical chess players Jose Raul Capablanca is above Max Euwe, while the position of Alexander Alekhine is incomparable to that of Akiba Rubinstein. In this book, however, the name of Euwe is mentioned much more often than that of the Cuban genius, and Rubinstein's opening discoveries are placed on a par with the creative achievements of the Fourth World Champion.

An amazing harmony was attained between chess champions and society in the Soviet Union. It's no accident that it was thanks to Soviet chess players, headed by Mikhail Botvinnik, that a breakthrough was achieved in treating chess as a serious profession, while preparation became systematic. Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, Karpov and Kasparov – all of them brought something new to the art of preparation.

Paradoxical as it sounds, the contribution of the universally-recognised chess geniuses is less significant in this regard. Robert Fischer was no exception, although his dominance over his contemporaries was overwhelming. The 1972 match against Boris Spassky put a stamp on the American's hegemony, while at the same time inaugurating an era of total confrontation in chess. Karpov's matches that followed against Kortchnoi and Kasparov were even fiercer, demanding previously unprecedented mental resilience from the players. Opening preparation also reached a new level. In Karpov's matches against Kasparov it became the norm for players to adopt one and the same system with both colours, while games would often end before the home analysis had run out. It was no accident that the clash between those two great players and arch-rivals coincided with the dawn of the computer era in chess.

A separate chapter has been devoted to modern chess preparation and the ever-growing role of the computer. This author still has a good recollection of methods of preparation that you'd be hard-pressed to describe as anything other than archaic nowadays. It would be naive to underestimate the influence of com-

puter programs on the game, but at times unconditional respect for the evaluations of our Metal Friend (or MF, as it will feature in this book) is combined with a note of irony. After all, for the moment it's still humans who decide the fate of a game of chess.

Finally, the concluding part of this book is devoted to games where the fate of a tournament, match or sometimes even a player's whole sporting career was decided. The secret of success in chess can be strange and sometimes elusive. The components of the mysterious formula are well-known: talent, memory, will-power (character), capacity for work and also good health. But the final outcome is by no means decided simply by a sum of the parts, and it seems impossible to construct a formula based on the rankings of past and present chess players.

There's also another component that's by no means unimportant – a love of chess. That works as a powerful battery to fuel memory, hard work and, to a certain extent, will-power. But if love is irrational and talent is granted from above, then all the rest can and needs to be trained and developed. This book was conceived as a guide to that extremely difficult and subtle process.

Although a modern chess player's preparation consists mainly of working on the opening, this book isn't solely about that. Firstly, chess fans aren't only made up of professionals who devote all their time to chess. Secondly, and this is perhaps the main point, chess isn't limited to the opening. So although the emphasis is placed on theoretical preparation, absolutely all the games in this book are given in full. The overwhelming majority of the examples are taken from the games of top-class players, so it's very interesting to follow how the advantage gained in the opening stages is ultimately converted into a win. It's no less instructive to analyse the games in which for whatever reason that failed to happen.

This book is intended for all those who've kept faith in their capacity for self-improvement and who want to increase their practical strength. Of course, the potential of those who've linked their professional future to chess inevitably differs from that of those who spend time on their favourite game only as a hobby. For the benefit of those 'club players' each chapter is followed by special recommendations and advice. If the reader can gain something new and useful for him/her then the author will consider his task accomplished.

Vladimir Tukmakov  
Odessa, June 2012

# Chapter 1 – The Evolution of Preparation

‘Do you think I’m morally obliged to play the same defence I played against Chigorin?’ ‘You’re not obliged, but the public expects you to defend your principles.’

Such, or approximately such, was the dialogue between Wilhelm Steinitz and Isidor Gunsberg in 1891.

Afterwards Steinitz played the move 6...♖f6, which had ended in a fiasco for him in his game against Chigorin, played over the very same days (!) by telegraph.

[C52]

Game 1

**Isidor Gunsberg**  
**Wilhelm Steinitz**

New York Wch-m 1891 (12)

- |           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. e2-e4  | e7-e5  |
| 2. ♘g1-f3 | ♘b8-c6 |
| 3. ♙f1-c4 | ♙f8-c5 |
| 4. b2-b4  | ♙c5xb4 |
| 5. c2-c3  | ♙b4-a5 |
| 6. 0-0    |        |



This is the point at which the famous dialogue we began our discussion of the art of preparation with took place.

6. ... ♖d8-f6?!

The traditional lines of defence are 6...d6 7.d4 ♙b6 or 6...♘f6.

7. d2-d4 ♘g8-h6?!

7...♘ge7 8.d5! (8.♖a4 ♙b6 9.♙g5 ♖d6 10.♘a3 exd4 11.♘b5 ♖g6) 8...♘d8 9.♖a4 ♙b6 10.♙g5 ♖d6 11.♘a3 c6 12.♞ad1 ♖b8 13.♙xe7 ♘xe7 14.d6+ ♘f8 15.♖b4.

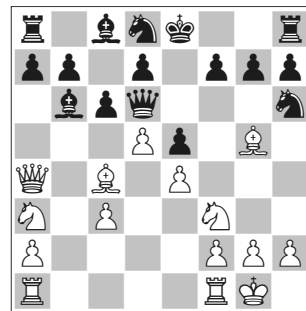
8. ♙c1-g5 ♖f6-d6

8...♖g6 9.d5 ♘b8 10.♘a3!? f6 11.♙xh6 ♖xh6 12.d6.

9. d4-d5 ♘c6-d8

10. ♖d1-a4 ♙a5-b6

11. ♘b1-a3 c7-c6



11...0-0 12.♙e2 f6 13.♘c4 ♖e7 14.♙xh6 gxh6 15.d6.

12. ♙c4-e2!

12.♞ad1 ♖g6 13.♙xd8 ♙xd8 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♘xe5 ♖f6 16.f4 ♙c7.

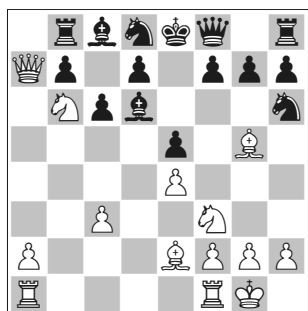
12. ... ♙b6-c7

12...♖c7 13.♘c4 f6 14.♙xh6 gxh6 15.♘fxe5! fxe5 16.♙h5+ ♘f7 17.♖a3.

13. ♘a3-c4 ♖d6-f8



14. **d5-d6**      ♖c7xd6  
 15. ♘c4-b6      ♜a8-b8  
 16. ♚a4xa7



16. ...      ♘h6-g4

16... ♘e6 17. ♖c1! ♘g8 18. ♖a3 c5  
 19. ♜ad1.

17. ♘f3-h4!      ♘d8-e6  
 18. ♖e2xg4      ♘e6xg5  
 19. ♘h4-f5      ♘g5-e6  
 20. ♜f1-d1      ♖d6-c7  
 21. ♘b6-a8!      ♜b8xa8  
 22. ♚a7xa8      ♚e8-d8  
 23. ♜d1xd7+      ♚d8xd7  
 24. ♜a1-d1+      1-0

Nowadays it's not so much the game itself, but the circumstances surrounding it, which are liable to provoke nothing but bewildered admiration. It shouldn't be forgotten that we're not talking about a coffeehouse game for meaningless stakes, but a match for the World

Championship. Of course, back in those idyllic times the struggle for the world chess crown was very far-removed from the total battle on all fronts it became in the second half of the twentieth century. But still... what's so remarkable about the conversation during the game is not simply the fact that it took place at all – today something similar is simply inconceivable – but the content, which is amazingly succinct for such a short conversation.



Wilhelm Steinitz

Just imagine that phantasmagorical situation: the World Champion with child-like directness asks his opponent if he's obliged to play a dubious move that had already cost him one defeat. And the challenger, who of course is dreaming of nothing other than seizing the title, replies: yes, you know, there are things that are more important than titles and prizes. And the Champion dutifully complies with his opinion! However, even if that remarkable conversation never *actually* took place, it would certainly have been worth inventing it, as it gives the best possible characterisation of the chess manners

The following example could easily be described as typical of modern chess.

[E20] Game 60  
**Ruslan Ponomariov**  
**Vugar Gashimov**  
 Astrakhan 2010 (11)

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. <b>d2-d4</b>  | <b>♘g8-f6</b>  |
| 2. <b>c2-c4</b>  | <b>e7-e6</b>   |
| 3. <b>♘g1-f3</b> | <b>c7-c5</b>   |
| 4. <b>g2-g3</b>  | <b>c5xd4</b>   |
| 5. <b>♘f3xd4</b> | <b>♙f8-b4+</b> |
| 6. <b>♘b1-c3</b> | <b>♘f6-e4</b>  |
| 7. <b>♙d1-d3</b> | <b>♘e4xc3</b>  |

At the dawn of the development of this variation in the 1970s Black almost exclusively played 7...♙a5 here, but lately as well as the move in the game popularity has been achieved by the line 7...♙xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♘c5.

- |                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| 8. <b>b2xc3</b>    | <b>♙b4-e7</b> |
| 9. <b>♙c1-f4!?</b> |               |

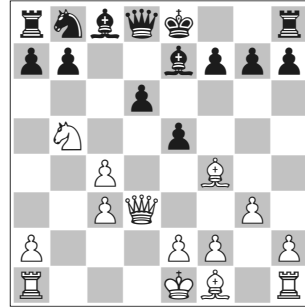
This move was most likely looked at during the process of preparing directly for this game. The probability that Gashimov would choose precisely this variation was quite high. It had already occurred twice in Vugar's games:

- A) 9.♙g2 0-0 10.0-0 draw, P.H. Nielsen-Gashimov, Havana 2007;  
 B) 9.♘b5 ♘c6 10.♘d6+ (10.♙g2 0-0 11.♙f4 e5 12.♙c1! b6 13.0-0 ♙b7 14.♙d1 occurred in Aronian-Karjakin, Tal Memorial Moscow 2010) 10...♙xd6 11.♙xd6 ♙a5 12.♙d2 ♙e5 13.♙d3 d5 14.♙g2 dxc4 15.♙xc4, l'Ami-Gashimov, Dresden Olympiad 2008. In the last game Black experienced some problems, but Ponomariov decided not to test out his opponent's analysis.

- |        |              |
|--------|--------------|
| 9. ... | <b>d7-d6</b> |
|--------|--------------|

A natural but far from only move. Also possible were 9...♘c6; 9...a6 and even the provocative 9...g5!?

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 10. <b>♘d4-b5</b> | <b>e6-e5</b> |
|-------------------|--------------|



- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 11. <b>c4-c5!</b> |  |
|-------------------|--|

And here are the main fruits of the home preparation. In the only game before this where 9.♙f4 was played, there followed 11.♙e3 a6 (11...♘c6; 11...♙e6) 12.♘a7! ♙d7 13.♙g2 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 ♙xc6 and Black didn't have any particular problems: Mastrovasilis-Fedorchuk, Cappelle la Grande 2010. However, Ruslan's task wasn't particularly complex – Rybka immediately gives this spectacular move as its first line and continues to consider it the best, leaving Mastrovasilis' choice as the second line.

- |                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| 11. ...          | <b>e5xf4</b> |
| 12. <b>c5xd6</b> | <b>0-0</b>   |

12...♙f6? 13.♘c7+.

- |                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 13. <b>d6xe7</b>  | <b>♙d8xe7</b> |
| 14. <b>♙f1-g2</b> |               |

It's perfectly possible that 11.c5! came as no great surprise to Black. Gashimov had probably analysed similar positions, and the computer's first line shouldn't, in principle, have escaped his attention. Ponomariov would have had to take that into account during his preparation. As

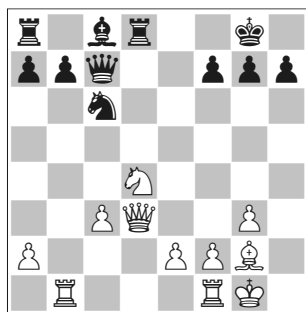


well as the natural move in the game the more energetic 14. ♖d6!? was also interesting, after which the best reply is probably 14... ♗c6! (after both 14... ♗xd6 15. ♘xd6 fxg3 16. hxg3 ♖d8 17. 0-0 and 14... ♗e4 15. ♖g1 White maintains an initiative) 15. ♗xe7 ♘xe7 16. gxf4 ♘d5, winning back the pawn.

14. ... ♖f8-d8  
15. ♘b5-d4 ♗e7-c7

15...fxg3 16.hxg3 h6 is also perfectly possible. The open h-file doesn't bring White any particular dividends.

16. 0-0 f4xg3  
17. h2xg3 ♘b8-c6  
18. ♖a1-b1



The home preparation hasn't brought White any great benefits – Black's position is perfectly defensible – but his opponent had used up no small amount of effort and emotions, and that factor could turn out to be decisive later on. For that, however, it's essential to maintain the tension, which is what Ponomarev skilfully does.

18. ... ♗c8-d7  
19. ♖f1-d1 ♘c6-a5

In order to fully equalise Black only needs to play ... ♖ac8, but it's White to move!

20. ♗g2-e4! g7-g6  
21. ♗d3-f3 ♗d7-c6

21... ♖ab8 22. ♗d5.

22. ♘d4xc6 ♖d8xd1+  
23. ♖b1xd1 ♘a5xc6  
24. ♗e4-d5 ♖a8-e8  
25. c3-c4 ♗c7-e7  
26. ♘g1-g2 h7-h5?!

Premature activity. More circumspect was 26... ♘e5 27. ♗c3 b6.

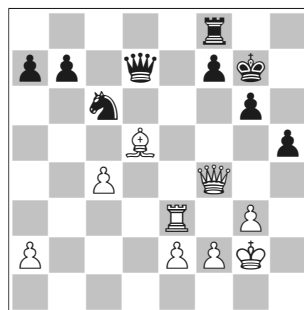
27. ♖d1-d3! ♘g8-g7

Forced! Worse is 27... ♘e5 28. ♗e4 ♘h7 29. ♖e3 ♗d7 30. ♗f4.

28. ♗f3-f4 ♖e8-f8

There's no pleasure in making such moves. For the moment White doesn't have any direct threats, but it's also hard to defend. It looked more natural to play 28... ♖c8 29. ♖f3 f6 30. ♖e3 ♗c7 although you also don't want to weaken the seventh rank.

29. ♖d3-e3 ♗e7-d7



30. a2-a3!

A wonderful prophylactic move, particularly unpleasant for your opponent to meet in time trouble. It's now impossible to approach the d5-bishop.

[E74]

Game 76

Vladimir Tukmakov

Garry Kasparov

Frunze ch-URS 1981 (17)

- |    |              |              |
|----|--------------|--------------|
| 1. | <b>d2-d4</b> | <b>g8-f6</b> |
| 2. | <b>c2-c4</b> | <b>g7-g6</b> |
| 3. | <b>b1-c3</b> | <b>f8-g7</b> |
| 4. | <b>e2-e4</b> | <b>d7-d6</b> |
| 5. | <b>f1-e2</b> | <b>0-0</b>   |
| 6. | <b>c1-g5</b> |              |

The opening variation that occurred in the game was easy to predict: at the time the King's Indian was Kasparov's main weapon, and I often played the Averbakh System.

- |    |              |                |
|----|--------------|----------------|
| 6. | ...          | <b>c7-c5</b>   |
| 7. | <b>d4-d5</b> | <b>b7-b5!?</b> |

An unambiguous display of aggression! For the 18-year-old junior this was the first chance to become USSR Champion, and he was literally shaking with excitement. In contrast, I was calm and sure of success. I remember that at some point I even started to pity my opponent – in such a nervous state I'd be completely helpless. As for the objective evaluation of the last move, it's not bad at all. You get a version of the Benko Gambit that's quite good for Black.

- |    |               |              |
|----|---------------|--------------|
| 8. | <b>c4xb5</b>  | <b>a7-a6</b> |
| 9. | <b>a2-a4!</b> | <b>h7-h6</b> |

An improvement on 9...♖a5 10.♙d2 ♘bd7 11.♞a3!±, Kasparov-Spassky, Tilburg 1981. After achieving a won position White eventually lost that game.

10. ♙g5-d2

The inclusion of 10.♙f4 g5! in the variation that occurred in the game is more in Black's favour.

- |     |              |              |
|-----|--------------|--------------|
| 10. | ...          | <b>e7-e6</b> |
| 11. | <b>d5xe6</b> | <b>c8xe6</b> |
| 12. | <b>g1-f3</b> | <b>a6xb5</b> |
| 13. | <b>e2xb5</b> |              |

13.axb5? is weaker due to 13...♙b3!  
14.♞c1 ♞xa1 15.♞xa1 ♞e8.

- |     |            |              |
|-----|------------|--------------|
| 13. | ...        | <b>b8-a6</b> |
| 14. | <b>0-0</b> | <b>a6-c7</b> |

On 14...♘b4, 15.♞e1 is also not bad.

15. ♞f1-e1

If White preserved the bishop he'd lose the advantage: 15.♙e2 d5! 16.exd5 ♘fxd5 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

- |     |              |              |
|-----|--------------|--------------|
| 15. | ...          | <b>c7xb5</b> |
| 16. | <b>c3xb5</b> |              |

16.axb5 ♞xa1 17.♞xa1 d5 18.exd5 ♘xd5 and Black has good chances of equalising.

- |     |                |              |
|-----|----------------|--------------|
| 16. | ...            | <b>d6-d5</b> |
| 17. | <b>e4xd5</b>   | <b>f6xd5</b> |
| 18. | <b>f3-e5!?</b> |              |

A good move! Less clear is 18.♞c2 ♘b4! 19.♙xb4 cxb4 when the strong bishop pair guarantees Black excellent counterplay.

- |     |     |              |
|-----|-----|--------------|
| 18. | ... | <b>f8-e8</b> |
|-----|-----|--------------|

