

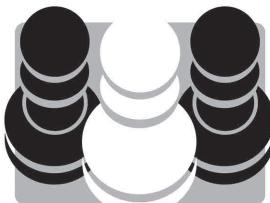
A Practical Repertoire

Playing the Najdorf

By

David Vigorito

For Zoe & Gavin and Clara & Jack



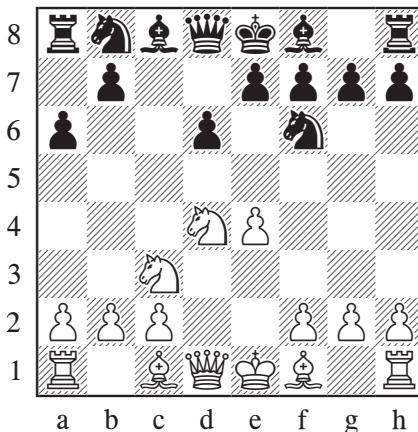
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Introduction

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6



The purpose of this book is to *teach you how to play the Najdorf*. Of course a lot of theory will be discussed, but there will always come a point where we are ‘out of book’ – be it move 25 or move 10 – and then we have to understand what we are doing.

I have been playing the Najdorf for about twenty-five years and teaching it for about a decade. Despite the fact that it has a reputation for being fantastically complicated and theoretical, I believe that at its heart it is a strategic opening, and that players of different styles can enjoy playing it and improve their chess while doing so. I have found that positional players adopting the Najdorf improve their tactical ability and feel for the initiative. Conversely, tactical players can develop their strategic play because there are so many recurring themes that arise from the typical pawn structures that one must master in order to successfully play the Najdorf.

When I was younger, I played the Sicilian Dragon for a long time, and it is still an opening that I have a strong attachment to. One advantage of the Dragon is that it is relatively simple to understand strategically. However, the drawback is that the strategy is also easy for your opponents! Everyone knows Fischer’s saying, “Open the h-file, sac, sac, mate.” So, if you are trying to outplay a lower-rated opponent, you may well have to achieve your objective tactically, because the strategic plans are so easily understood. Another disadvantage is that there are certain main lines (notably the Yugoslav Attack with 9.0–0–0) where Black is basically just trying to prove a draw.

Then along came the Najdorf. More specifically, along came Danny King’s *Winning with the Najdorf*. This book explained the Najdorf conceptually and helped me to realize that it was not all about the Poisoned Pawn Variation. Sometimes I will tell students, only half-jokingly, that I used

to play the Dragon until it was time to ‘grow up’, at which point I switched to the Najdorf and never looked back. I will admit that my years of playing the Dragon gave me a useful head start, as I was already pretty well versed in the various Anti-Sicilians, especially as I was playing 2...d6. Although King’s *Winning with the Najdorf* is from 1993, it is still a great read if you can find an old copy. So thanks Danny – and I hope that you find this book a worthy tribute to your 26-year-old book!

I am not going to present a bunch of ‘typical examples’ here in the introduction, as there will be plenty of instructive games throughout the book. I do, however, want to start with one famous game, as it does not fit so well with modern theory, yet it remains a classic example of a thematic pawn structure which every Najdorf player should know. Today many of the world’s best players employ the Najdorf: Carlsen, Nakamura, Anand, Vachier-Lagrave, Ding Liren, Grischuk, Nepomniachtchi, Karjakin, Topalov, Navara, Shankland and Wojszek have all incorporated it into their repertoires to varying degrees. Kasparov also played the Najdorf throughout his career – and before him, there was Robert James Fischer.

Wolfgang Unzicker – Robert Fischer

Varna 1962

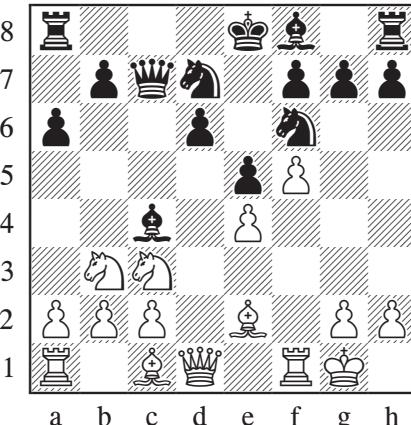
**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5 7.♗b3**

Our first three chapters will cover this classical line.

7...♗e6?!

Fischer makes a move which was popular in the 1960s. However, in Chapter 1 we will see that 7...♗e7! is more accurate.

8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.f4 ♗c7? 10.f5 ♗c4



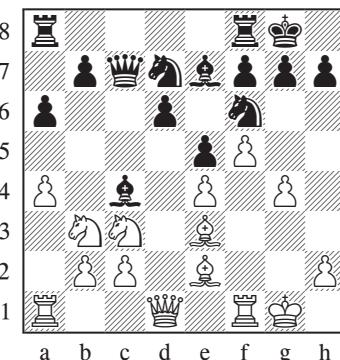
This is an important pawn structure. When I first saw this game, I was horrified that Black could allow his ‘good’ bishop to be traded off like this. I was sure that the ‘bad’ dark-squared bishop and weak d5-square would be the end of Black. However, there are counter-chances to be found on the queenside, especially the c-file, and White’s e4-pawn is also a target – a consequence of White’s early f4-f5.

11.a4

This restrains Black’s ...b5 advance.

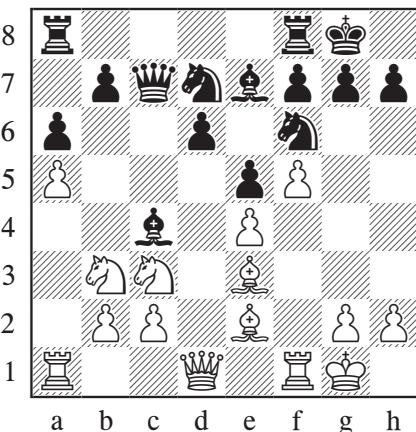
11...♗e7 12.♗e3 0–0 13.a5

After 13.g4!? White is not only looking to attack, but also to conquer the centre by driving away the f6-knight.



Black *must* play: 13...d5! (or at least the similar 13...h6 14.h4 d5!) 14.exd5

(14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ wins back the pawn) 14... $\mathbb{Q}b4\rightleftharpoons$ Fighting for the central squares, with excellent counterplay.

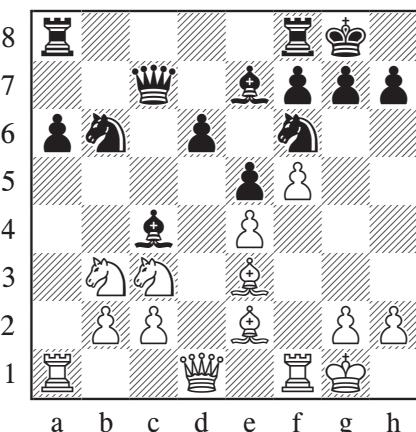


13...b5!

This also came as a surprise to me in my younger days. Black does not mind the en passant capture as he needs to open the queenside. A similar occurrence happens all of the time in the Modern Benoni.

14.axb6 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$

The knight sizes up the c4- and d5-squares.



15. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$

15. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ is more flexible, after which 15... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ reaches a position which was popular

in the early 1970s. Black has good counterplay, for instance: 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!?$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}fa1$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (22...a5 \rightleftharpoons has also scored well) 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 With chances for both sides. A couple of classic games are Scholl – Ivkov, Amsterdam 1971, and Karpov – Stoica, Graz 1972.

15... $\mathbb{W}xb6\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5?!$

Black is hoping to get in ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$.

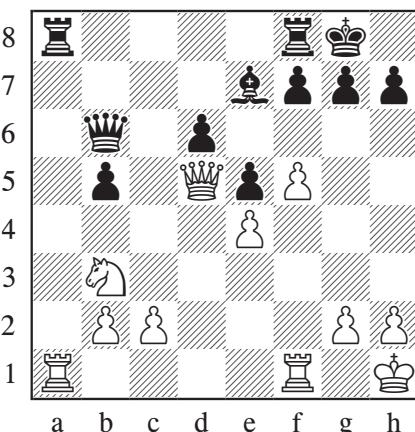
17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$

Black is doing well after 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ axb5 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ b4 \rightleftharpoons .

The safest choice for White was 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ with equality.

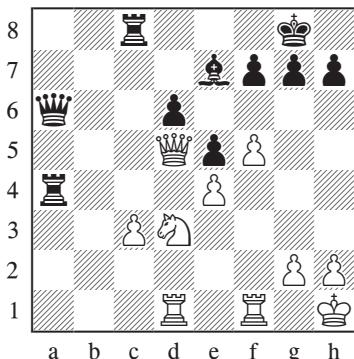
17...axb5 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd5$

Now we have a classic knight vs. bad bishop. Or do we? Again, the knight cannot get to the d5-square. With his next move Fischer grabs the initiative.



19... $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ 20.c3 $\mathbb{W}a6$ 21.h3

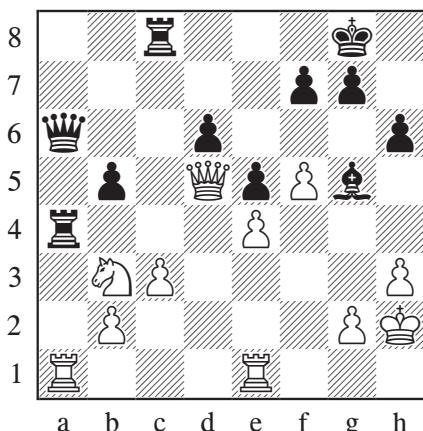
This move deviates from a game played earlier the same year, in which Fischer had the very same position against none other than Mikhail Tal. That game had continued: 21. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b4 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ bxc3 24.bxc3



In Tal – Fischer, Curacao 1962, Black could have fought for the advantage with 24... $\mathbb{E}xc3!$ because 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ $dxe5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ (26. $\mathbb{W}d8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8-$) does not work after 26... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ and if 27. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xf1\#$! Black wins.

21... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ h6 23. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Maybe Black's bishop is not so bad after all! White's ambitious f4-f5 has a downside, as his kingside is weakened. When you gain space like this, you have to be careful if the enemy pieces get behind the pawn shield to the soft underbelly of your position. This is what over-extension looks like.



24.g3?

White is trying to prepare h3-h4, in the hope of covering some dark squares and hiding his king on h3. He simply does not have time for it though. He needed to play 24. $\mathbb{W}d3$, when

both 24... $\mathbb{W}a7\#$ and 24... $h5\#$ (intending ... $h4$) maintain some pressure for Black.

24... $\mathbb{W}a7\#$

Threatening a nasty check on f2.

25. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}a2!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f1\#$

This loses immediately, but 26. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}xb2\#$ 27. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{E}xe2\#$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}c7\#$ would be ultimately hopeless as well.

26... $\mathbb{E}xc3!$

0–1

Despite the age of this game, it remains as instructive as ever – not just for understanding the Najdorf, but also as a lesson in strategic play.

Overall Approach and Structure of the Book

I recommended the specific lines in this book because I have studied, played and taught them all for many years. In general, we will play 6...e5 when we can, to get a 'true' Najdorf structure. The main exceptions are 6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$, as these moves immediately influence the critical d5-square, rendering a quicke5 virtually unplayable. In these cases, we will play 6...e6 and gain some exposure to a different kind of structure.

I have used both the 'complete games' and 'variation tree' formats in my previous books, and I believe there are pros and cons to both. In this book I wanted to teach the Najdorf the way I learned it, and that was by going over a lot of games. In some lines, however, it is not so easy to find a nice model game. I also wanted to avoid analysing long endgames in what is an opening/middlegame book. Therefore I finally decided on a mixed structure involving a combination of illustrative games and variation trees, hopefully offering the best of both worlds.

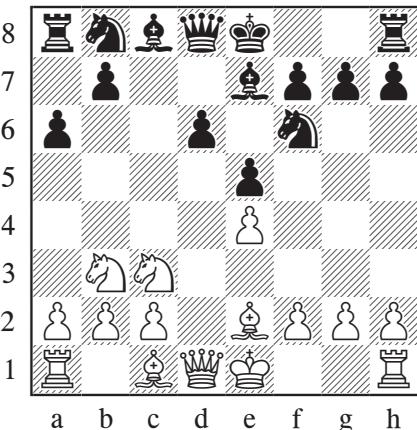
While I have included a lot of modern games, I also chose many older games which made a strong impression on me. In many cases, they are simply the best games. They are older by necessity, as they illustrated Black's best play against certain set-ups, thus forcing White players to move on to different schemes. In any case, these games taught me the Najdorf and I have, in turn, used them to teach others after me.

Repertoire Choices

The book is split into five subsections, each comprising a certain number of chapters. Here is a short summary of each of them, with an outline of my recommended solutions for Black.

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

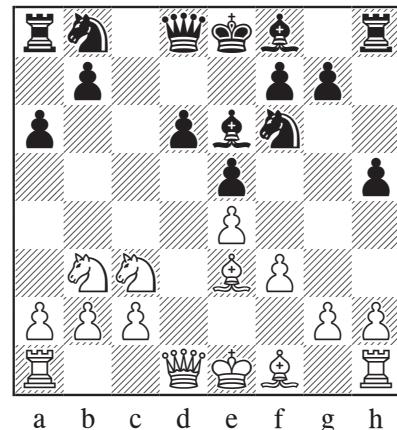
The choice against this move is easy enough, as 6...e5 is well known to be a good move and it fits with our theme of playing ...e5 whenever possible. After 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ we get a perfect example of the Classical Najdorf structure:



There will be a lot of discussion of this structure and its various permutations in the first three chapters.

6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

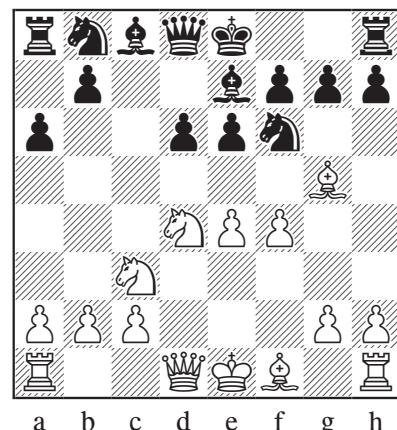
Here too, I recommend 6...e5, and after 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (the more positional 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ is Chapter 5) 7... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8.f3 we will go for the modern 8...h5:



I have tried a *lot* of different lines against the English Attack. This system is both modern and fashionable, but those are not the real reasons that I chose it.

6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

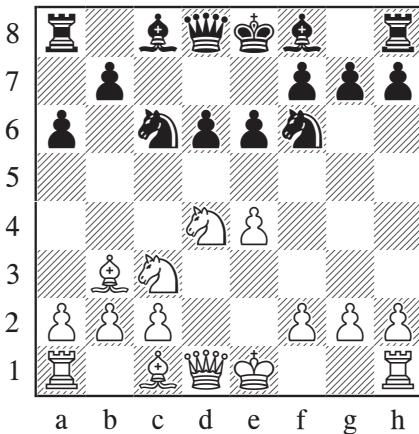
As mentioned earlier, we will meet this move with 6...e6. Then after the sharpest option of 7.f4, I will admit that the Poisoned Pawn with 7... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ may ultimately be 'best', but it is not the most practical choice for most players. Therefore I am sticking to my roots and going for the classical 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$.



This system has had its ups and downs, but it is looking quite sound right now.

6.♘c4

This is the Sozin Variation and my choice against it may seem controversial to some. After 6...e6 7.♗b3 I am proposing 7...♘c6!?:

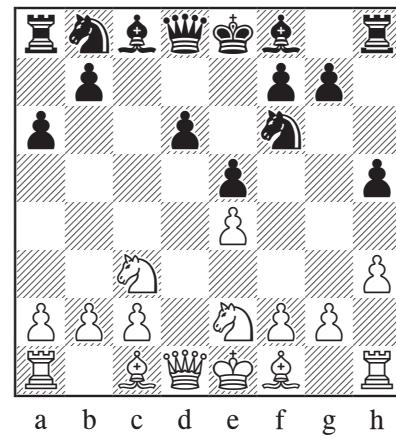


Many will contend that this transposes to the Classical Sicilian, but allow me to point out that even the ‘Najdorf’ moves 7...b5 and 7...♗bd7 are classified as a Sozin (B86-89) under the ECO classification. One might even claim that 7...♘c6 is ‘closer’ to the Najdorf’s B90-99 because its ECO code is B88-89, compared to B86-87 for the traditional moves which are covered in most books. More importantly though, I believe it is simply a good move, and I hope you will agree after checking out Chapters 11-13.

Other Lines

Many years ago, 6.h3 was just a sideline whose main pedigree was that Fischer occasionally used it as a surprise weapon. Nowadays, it is one of White’s most popular choices! This discouraged me at first: Black already has enough on his plate dealing with the theory of 6.♗e3, 6.♗g5 and so on, but now I have to worry about 6.h3 too? All right, such is life – and it is not the end of the world. Black has

various ways to respond, but we will stick with the thematic 6...e5 7.♗de2 (7.♗b3 ♘e6 is the other possible direction) before going with a modern interpretation of the Najdorf: 7...h5!?



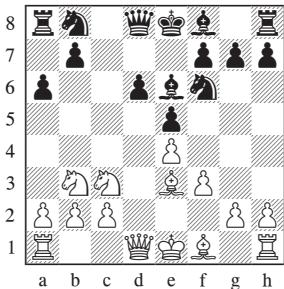
See Chapters 14-15 for more details about this.

Against the other ‘quiet’ moves such as 6.g3, 6.f4, and 6.a4, we will also go for 6...e5. Other moves, headlined by the recent ‘nothing’ moves 6.♗b3 and 6.a3, and the crazy-looking 6.h4! are covered in Chapter 18. Finally, although Anti-Sicilian lines are outside the main topic of the book, I will offer some ideas and advice about dealing with them in an Appendix.

I have a few people to thank: Jacob Aagaard and John Shaw, for welcoming back the prodigal son; Andrew Greet, for the probably torturous work of editing this beast; Nikolaos Ntirlis for his analysis and for keeping me in touch with various modern ideas; Mika, Nithin, and Arshaq – the Najdorf students who I also learned from myself; and finally Zoe and Gavin and especially Heather, simply for always being there.

David Vigorito
Andover, Massachusetts
November 2019

Chapter 5



The English Attack

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6
6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e5 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8.f3 h5!

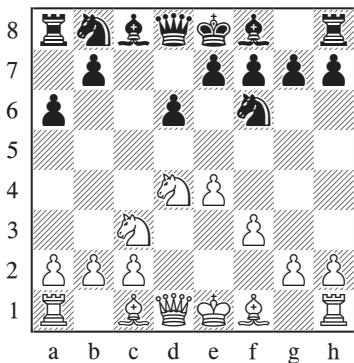
| | |
|--|-----|
| A) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ <i>Game 13</i> | 133 |
| B) 9. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ | 138 |
| B1) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ | 140 |
| B2) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ | 142 |
| B3) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ <i>Game 14</i> | 149 |

- 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3**

Before tackling our main subject of 6...e5 7.♗b3 (rather than the alternative knight retreats from the previous chapter), we should briefly consider another possible move order:

6.f3

Sometimes White opts for this move as a means of avoiding the 6.♗e3 ♗g4 line. We will simply meet it with our standard reply:



6...e5 7.♗b3 ♘e6

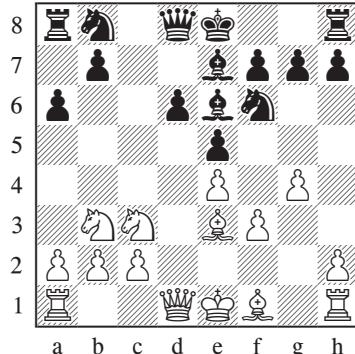
The overwhelming majority of games continue with 8.♗e3, transposing to the English Attack, as featured in this and the next chapter. Other moves are inferior, for instance:

8.g4?!

8.♗g5?! ♘bd7 9.♗d2 ♘e7 10.0–0–0 b5 leaves White's bishop misplaced. The advance g4-g5 is obstructed, and ♘d5 will hardly be possible because ...♗xd5 will leave White's bishop hanging.

8...♗e7! 9.♗e3

9.g5 ♘h5 leaves the g5-pawn attacked, and White does not have time to arrange a convenient defence with ♘e3 and ♘d2. Play may continue 10.♗d5 (10.♗g1 ♘b6?; 10.h4 ♘g3) 10...0–0 11.♗g1 ♘c6 when Black enjoys a lead in development and may follow up with ...f6 or ...a5.



9...d5!

This has been played many times, usually after an earlier ♘e3 when Black meets the premature 9.g4? with 9...d5!. The trick is revealed after:

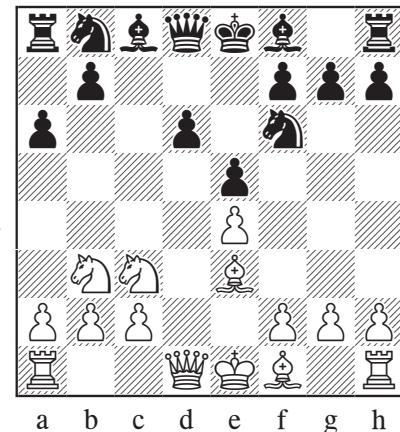
10.g5

10.♗c5?! d4 is obviously great for Black. Objectively White should probably prefer 10.exd5 ♘xd5 although in that case it's obvious that the early g2-g4 was a mistake.

10...d4! 11.gxf6 ♘xf6+

At the minimum, Black will regain the piece with a clear advantage. On the other hand, I have had more than one blitz game conclude with 12.♗d2?? ♘h4† 13.♗e2 ♘c4 mate!

6...e5 7.♗b3



This is by far the main move. It is played about six times as often as 7.♘f3, and the

number of games is even greater when factoring in the move order of 6.f3 e5 7.♗b3 followed by ♗e3.

7...♝e6 8.f3

Other options do exist, and these will be discussed in Chapter 7.

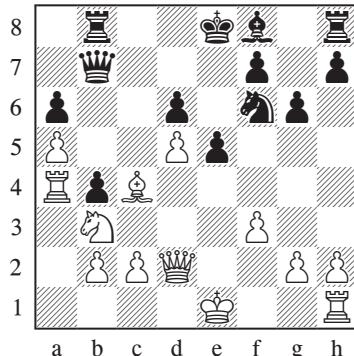
The text move introduces the English Attack, a popular choice at all levels. White's plans over the next few moves are straightforward and easy to understand: he intends some combination of ♖d2, 0–0–0 and g2-g4 followed by a kingside attack. I have tried many different counterattacking systems myself, and I have no hesitation in recommending that we curtail White's kingside plans at once with the following modern solution.

8...h5!

This advance is not uncommon in the Najdorf nowadays. I remember long ago reading something attributing this move to Ljubojevic. According to my database, 'Ljubo' played 8...h5 in 1997, while Sakaev played it a few times in 1995-6. Nowadays the move is often associated with Topalov, as he has played the present position many times – with both Black and White.

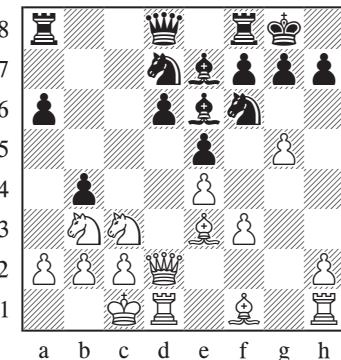
Before going any further, here is a quick breakdown of Black's other main options and why I am avoiding them.

a) 8...♗bd7 9.♖d2 (there is also 9.g4, as recommended by Shaw) 9...b5 is a popular continuation but I never liked it because of: 10.a4 b4 11.♗d5 ♜xd5 12.exd5 ♗b6 13.♗xb6 ♜xb6 14.a5 ♜b7 15.♗c4 g6 16.♗a4 ♜b8



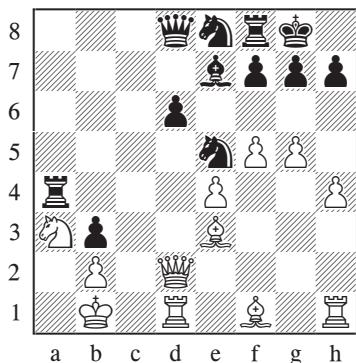
Now White can force a draw by repetition with 17.♗d3 ♜a8 18.♗d2, should he wish to. There are a number sharp lines in the Najdorf (especially after 6.♗g5) where White can force a draw, but most of them are quite detailed, whereas here White forces a repetition with minimal knowledge. There are other lines after 8...♗bd7 which I also consider problematic for Black, so it is not for me.

b) For a long time I played 8...♝e7 9.♖d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♗bd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 b4 but, once again, there is more than one problem.

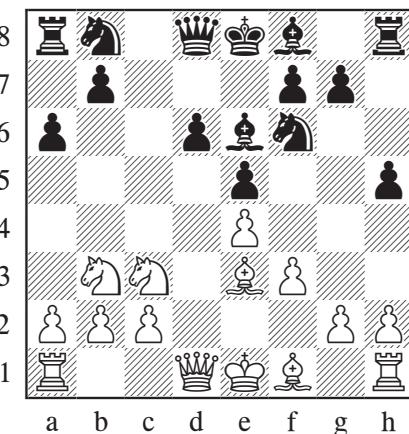


13.♗e2 (13.gxf6!? bxc3 14.♗xc3 ♗xf6 15.♗a5 was once considered harmless, but lately White has been scoring well and this is indeed Shaw's recommendation) 13...♝e8 14.f4 a5 15.f5 a4 (15...♝xb3 16.cxb3 a4 17.bxa4 ♜xa4 18.♗b1 ♜xa2! is a lovely idea but the cool 19.♗c1! kills all of Black's fun) 16.♗bd4 exd4 17.♗xd4 b3 18.♗b1 bxc2†

19.♘xc2 ♜b3 20.axb3 axb3 21.♘a3 ♜e5
22.h4 ♜a4



Once upon a time this position used to be a fresh battleground with room for creativity. But once it became clear that there was a major theoretical branching between 23.♗d4, 23.♗g2 and 23.♗h3, I felt sick and realized that even if Black is objectively okay, it was time to move on.



With the text move Black avoids needing to memorize too much, yet the play is complex, both tactically and strategically. Black often has to play with his king in the centre for a while, but that is nothing too unusual in the Najdorf. Besides, I have learned that this has a positive side, as I lost a couple of games to much lower rated players in the English Attack when I castled, as White benefits from the

clear strategic plan of g2-g4, h2-h4 and so on, whereas the present variation requires a more nuanced approach.

We can outline three different ways for White to play, with some variety thrown in to each set-up. With A) 9.♗e2 White changes gears and treats the position something like a 6.♗e2 line, but with f2-f3 and ...h5 thrown in. I (and most others) do not consider this to be dangerous at all. The more traditional English Attack treatment involves B) 9.♗d2 followed by 0-0-0.

The direct 9.♗d5! is the most important option of all, and we will consider it separately in the next chapter.

A) 9.♗e2

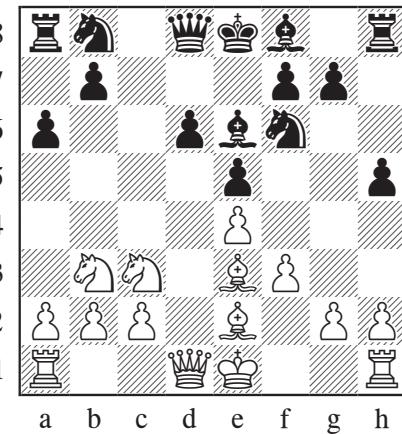
GAME 13

Anne Haast – Sam Shankland

Wijk aan Zee 2015

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♗b3 ♛e6 8.f3 h5 9.♗e2

White can also play 9.a4 first, or 9.♗d2 ♗bd7 10.♗e2. It is all pretty similar.



White plays a classical (6.♘e2) set-up, hoping that ...h5 will prove to be a loss of time and/or a weakening move. However, I do not believe it actually harms Black, and sometimes the advance of the h-pawn can prove to be quite useful. Moreover, White's 'extra' move f2-f3 is just as likely to be useless or harmful.

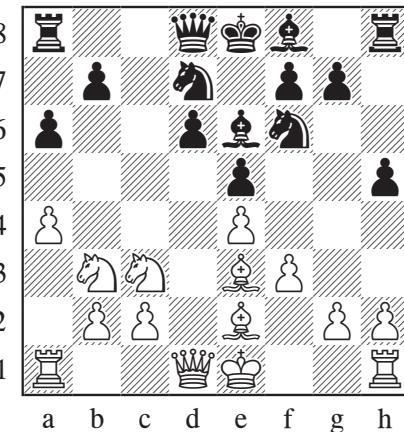
9...♗bd7

There is no reason not to develop the knight immediately. Compared to the 6.♘e2 line, Black does not have to worry about a quick f4-f5 (White would lose a tempo), while g2-g4 is obviously ruled out by our h5-pawn.

10.a4

White stops ...b5. In the 6.♘e2 lines this is not such a concern, but here 10.0–0 can be met by 10...b5! (10...♗c8 is also perfectly playable) when 11.a4 b4 12.♗d5 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♗b6 looks quite comfortable for Black.

White's objectively best approach is to change gears with 10.♗d5, when 10...♗xd5 11.exd5 g6 12.♗d2 reaches variation C of Chapter 6.



Black has a pleasant choice between two set-ups here. He can castle, when the 'extra' moves f2-f3 and ...h5 somewhat offset each other, or he can try to make use of the advance of the h-pawn and play ...g6 and ...♗f8-g7, often with ...h4 in mind.

10...♗c8

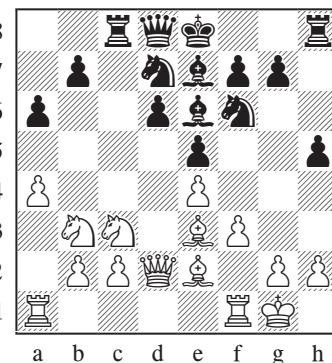
This is a flexible move. Black can also play 10...♗e7 11.0–0 ♗c7 12.♗d2 0–0 13.a5 ♗ac8 14.♗fd1 ♗fd8 reaching a position that can occur from various move orders; Black looks fine here too.

11.a5

Another approach is:

11.0–0 ♗e7 12.♗d2

White tries to save time by omitting a4-a5, but Black can utilize the absence of that move by means of:



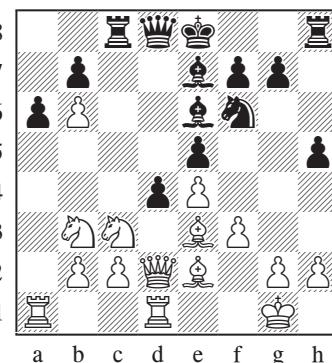
12...♗b6!?

12...g6, 12...h4 and 12...0–0 are all playable as well.

13.♗fd1

After 13.a5 ♗c4 14.♗xc4 ♗xc4 15.♗d3 ♗c8 16.♗a4?! ♗xc2 17.♗b6 ♗c7 18.♗fc1 ♗xc1† 19.♗xc1 ♗b8† White did not have quite enough for the pawn in Polgar – Topalov, Vitoria Gasteiz 2007.

13...d5!? 14.a5 d4 15.axb6

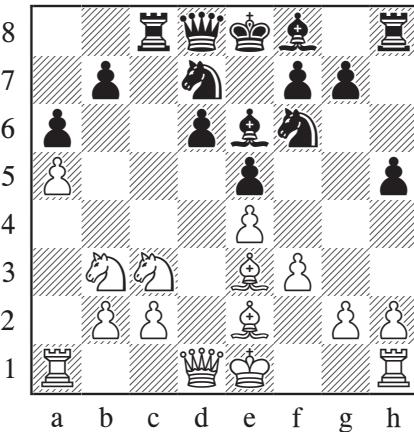


15... $\mathbb{Q}xb3!$ 16.cxb3 dxe3 17. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$

The point of exchanging on b3 is seen after 17. $\mathbb{W}xe3??$ $\mathbb{W}xd1\#$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xd8=$

Black was fine in Piccoli – Rizzardi, corr. 2011.



11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12.0–0 $\mathbb{g}6$

Instead 12...0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ transposes to 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ above, while 12... $h4!?$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $g6$ is 13... $h4!?$ below.

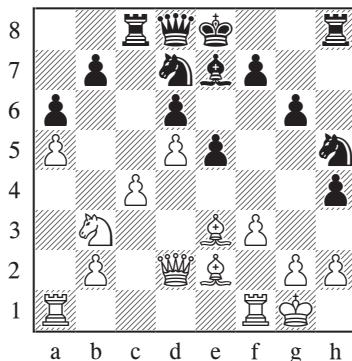
13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

A fully playable alternative is:

13... $h4!?$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ led to unclear play in Morozevich – Sadler, Reykjavik 1999, an early success for Black which generated attention for 8... $h5$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16.c4



16... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

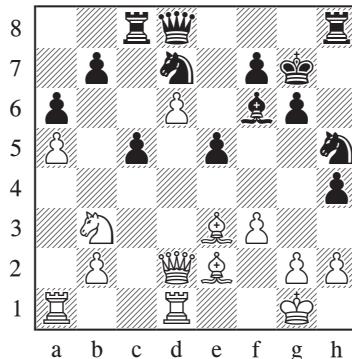
16... $f5!?$ looks premature. 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $f4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $h3$ occurred in Kosteniuk – Zhu Chen, Moscow 2001, when 19.g4!N $fxg3$ 20.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ would have given White the upper hand.

16... $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$ N 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $exf4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 0–0 is a computer suggestion. Black will always have counter-chances on the dark squares.

17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18.c5!?

18. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ transposes to the 16.c4 line in the notes to the main line below.

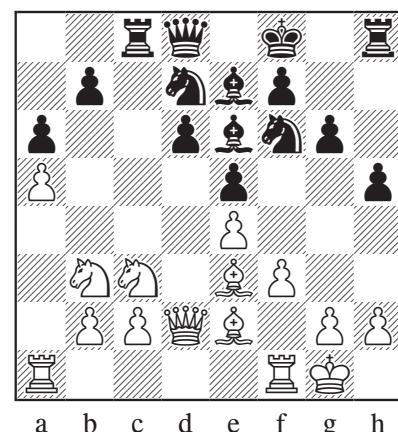
18... $dx5$ 19.d6 $\mathbb{Q}f6$



20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}c2!?$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{R}c6$

23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$

Black took control with this strong exchange sacrifice in Nijboer – Sadler, Arnhem 1999.



14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Instead 15...h4 16.c4 transposes to the next note below after 16...♗g7 (Black can also start with 16...♗h5).

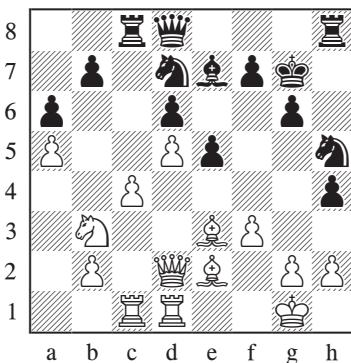
16.♖a4?!

This is a bit exotic, and the rook is immediately targeted.

A better plan is:

16.c4 h4 17.♖ac1 ♗h5 18.♖fd1

This position has been reached a few times in practice. As usual, Black has more than one decent continuation.



18...♗f4

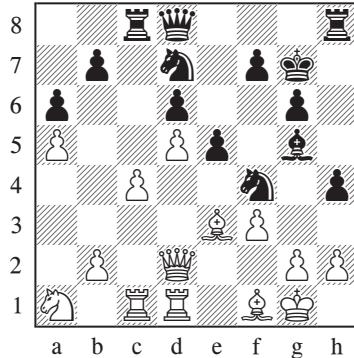
18...♗f6 has also done well for Black:
19.♕a1 ♗f4 20.♔f1 ♗g5 21.b4 ♗f6
(21...♗f6 22.♗b3 ♜ce8 23.♗d3? h3 24.g3
♗xd3 25.♗xg5 ♜xf3 26.♗c3 e4† was
Wang Pin – Zhang Zhong, Shanghai 2000)
22.♗b3 This was Gadjily – Magerramov,
Dubai 2000, and here Ftacnik points out the
improvement 22...♗d7!N intending ...♗a4,
and if 23.♗a1 ♗f5→.

19.♔f1

After 19.♗xf4!? exf4 20.♗xf4 Black should
avoid 20...♗g5?! 21.♗xd6 ♜xc1 22.♗xc1±,
and instead play 20...♗f6! with good play for
a pawn, e.g. 21.♗c2 ♗e5 22.♗d2 ♗f6∞.

19...♗g5 20.♗a1

20.♗c3 ♗h5!? gave Black interesting play
in Feygin – Sadler, Netherlands 2000,
and 20...♗f6N and 20...f5N were worth
considering too.

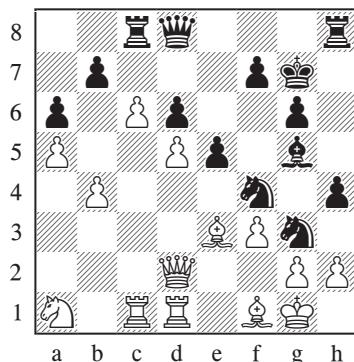


20...♗f6 21.b4 ♗h5 22.c5?

22.♗b3 ♗g3 23.♗d3 was necessary.

22...♗g3! 23.c6

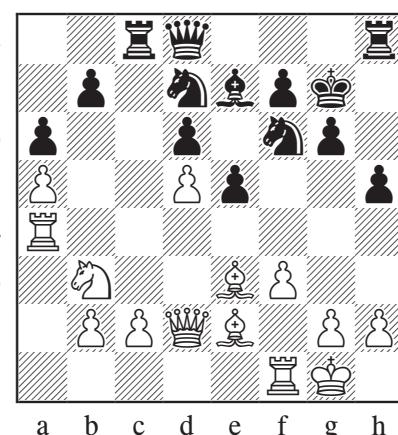
White eventually prevailed in Erenburg – Nakamura, Reykjavik 2004, but things would have been different if Black had found:



23...♗f5!N 24.♗b6 ♗h3† 25.gxh3 ♜xd2

26.♗xd8 ♜xc1+–

Black's extra exchange should decide.



16...b5! 17.♗aa1

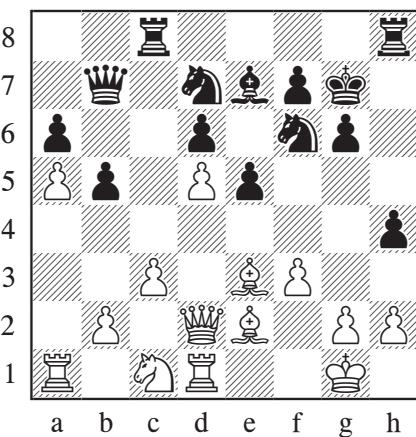
17.axb6 ♗xb6 18.♗xa6 ♗bx_d5 is no problem for Black.

17...♗c7

17...h4?!N was also worth considering.

18.c3 ♗b7 19.♗fd1 h4 20.♗c1

White hopes to play ♗a2-b4.



20...♗d8!

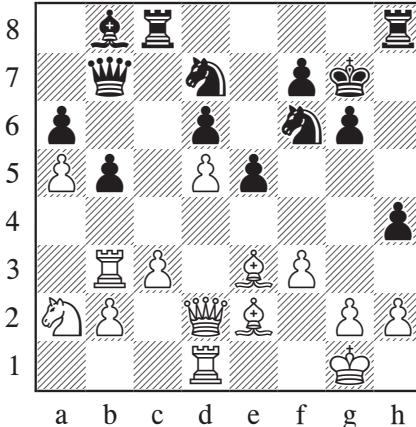
Shankland finds a way to bring the bishop into the action. The b6-square is not available, but there is another path to the desired diagonal. Moreover, the pressure on the a5-pawn conveniently slows down White's knight manoeuvre.

21.♗a3 ♗c7!

The bishop snakes its way to the a7-g1 diagonal.

22.♗a2 ♗b8 23.♗b3

23.♗b4 ♗a7 24.♗c6? allows 24...♗xe3† 25.♗xe3 ♗xd5 26.♗xd5 ♗xc6† with a solid extra pawn.



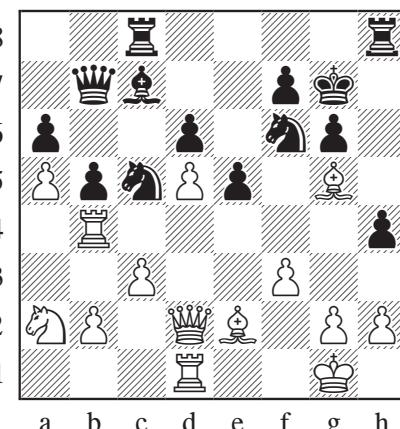
23...♗c5!?

A good alternative is 23...♗a7 24.c4 ♗xe3† 25.♗xe3 ♗c5 26.♗b4 ♗c7 27.cxb5 ♗xa5 28.♗a3 ♗xa3 29.bxa3 a5!? (or 29...axb5) 30.♗bb1 ♗fd7 with a good ending for Black, who can follow up with ...♗b6 and ...f5. The text move is more ambitious.

24.♗b4?!

24.♗a3 was better.

24...♗c7 25.♗g5



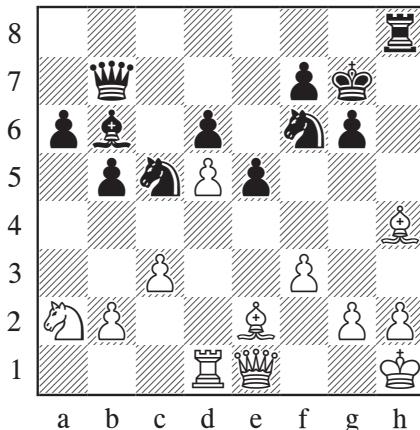
25...♗xa5

An interesting decision. Black could also flick in 25...h3?!†.

26.♗xh4 ♗xh4 27.♗xh4 ♗b6 28.♗h1 ♗h8

29. $\mathbb{W}e1$

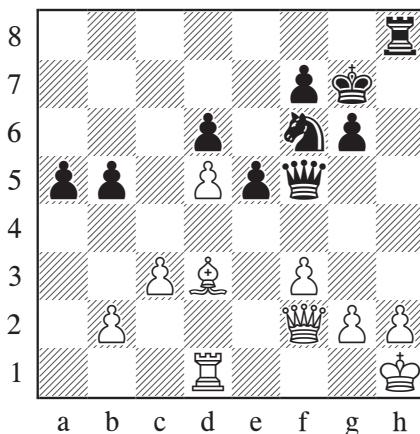
White does not gain anything from 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ as the king will just slide back to g7.



29... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5 32. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$

Walking into a little combination. Better was 32. $\mathbb{Q}c6$.

32... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xf2$



34... $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#!$

Not too complicated: Black wins the queen and the game.

35. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4\#$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{W}c8$
 38. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 39. b4 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 40. bxa5 $\mathbb{W}xa5$
 41. $\mathbb{B}b1$ b4 42. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ f5 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1$
 $\mathbb{W}b5\#$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0-1