

Mini-Lessons from Short Games of the 21st Century

by IM Nikolay Minev

#5: The Most Common Mistake In The Opening

Losing two or more tempi to win a pawn is the most typical, notorious mistake in the opening. Such adventures very often end in catastrophic consequences for the greedy party. All of the examples presented below are the typical case: Black's Queen loses tempi, grabbing the b2 pawn early in the opening. And it is instructive to see how this crime against the development is severely punished in each case.

B07 A. Subaru – A. Ivanov
Kharkov 2005

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 c6 4.Nf3 Qa5

Twenty years ago this variation was an interesting novelty, today its reputation is not very high.

5.Bd2! Bg4

The idea behind 4...Qa5 is 5...e5. But this is not so convenient here because of 6.Nd5 Qd8 7.Nxf6+ and Black is forced to reply with 7...gxf6 because 7...Qxf6 9.Qg5 Qg6 10.dxe5 loses a pawn.

6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 Qb6

Here again 7...e5 leads to a worse position after 8.Nd5.

8.e5 Nfd7 9.exd6 e6?

After this move, Black not only loses the opportunity to ever regain the d6 pawn, but also will be practically forced to lose several tempi capturing White's pawns on the Queenside.

10.Ne4! Qxb2

If 10...Qxd4 11.O-O-O, followed by 12.Bc3.

11.Bc3 Qa3

Probably 11...Qxc3 offers more resistance.

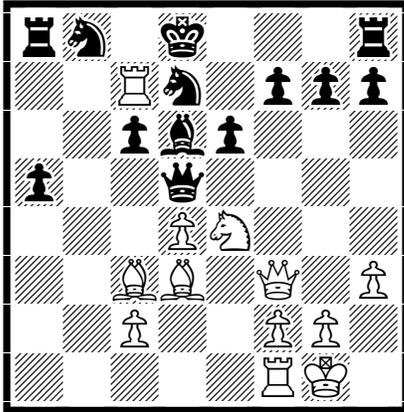
12.Rb1 Qxa2 13.Rxb7 Qd5 14.Bd3 a5

White is at least three tempi ahead. According to the rule of Rudolf Spielmann, this means that White already has winning position and he should try to find the right continuation. And he found it!

15.Rc7!

The threat is 16.Rc8#

15...Kd8 16.O-O Bxd6



17.Bc4!! Qxc4

In case of 17...Qf5 White wins as in the game 18.Rc8+!!

18.Rc8+!! Ke7 19.Rxh8 Bb4 20.Bxb4+ axb4 21.Re8+! 1-0

An important game for the theory of this opening variation.

A45 D. Konenkin – S. Airumian
St Petersburg 2008

1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 c5 3.Nc3 Qb6?!

Interesting and unclear is 3...cxd4 4.Qxd4 Nc6 5.Qh4, followed by O-O-O.

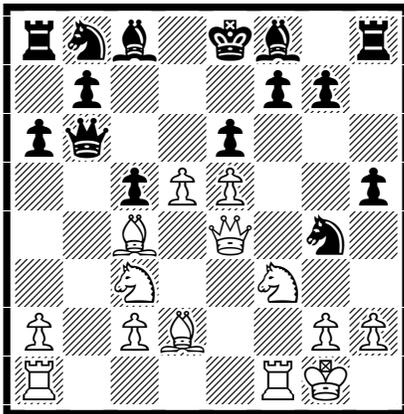
4.d5

This position arises usually from following order of moves: 1.d4 Nf5 2.Bg5 c5 3.d5 Qb6 4.Nc3.

4...Qxb2 5.Bd2 Qb6 6.e4 d6

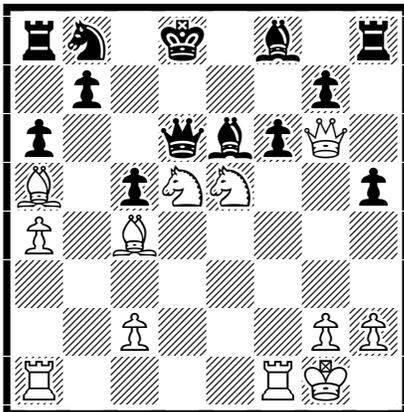
The theory recommends 6...e5 7.f4 d6 8.fxe5 dxe5 9.Nf3 Bd6 10.Bc4 and according to Hort, White has compensation for the pawn.

7.f4 Nbd7?! 8.Nf3 a6 9.e5 dxe5 10.fxe5 Ng4 11.Qe2 e6 12.Qe4 h5 13.Bc4 Nb8 14.O-O



What a picture! White is fully developed, while Black is behind with at least four tempi. The picture on the next diagram is even more dramatic!

14...Qc7 15.a4 f6 16.dxe6 Nxe5 17.Nd5 Qd6 18.Nxe5 Bxe6 19.Qg6+ Kd8 20.Ba5+



1-0

For if 20...b6 21.Bxb6+ Kc8 22.Rab1 etc.

B42 M. Rechel – A. Moroz
Pardubice 2000

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Bd3 Qb6 6.c3

6.Nb3!?

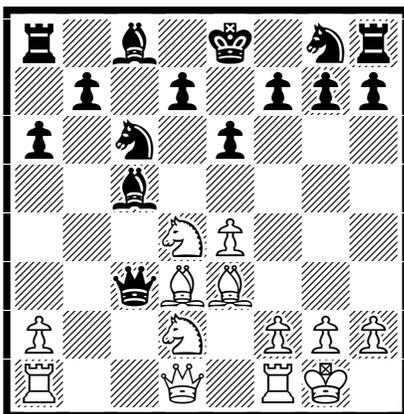
6...Nc6 7.Be3! Bc5

After 8...Qxb2? 8.Nb3 Black's Queen is trapped.

8.Nd2!?

A bold sacrifice of two pawns for quicker development and initiative. However, at this moment is not easy to precisely assess the value of this compensation. It comes down to a question of skill, instinct and experience.

8...Qxb2 9.O-O .Qxc3

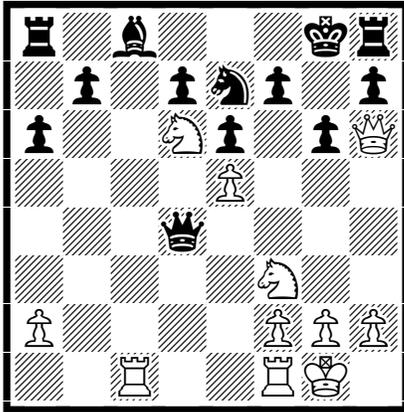


White's development is finished, while Black needs three more tempi. Generally speaking, Black should be in big danger. As we shall see, the truth is no different here.

10.Nxc6 Qxd3?

As often happens, the side under the pressure makes a decisive mistake. Critical is 10...Bxe3 11.fxe3 Qxd3 12.Ne5 Qxe3+ 13.Kh1 Nf6 14.Ndc4 Qc5 15.Nd6+. The position is very complicated and unclear, even for a computer!

11.Ne5 Qd6 12.Nec4! Qc7 13.Bxc5 Qxc5 14.e5 Kf8 15.Rc1 Qd4 16.Nd6 Ne7 17.Qh5! g6 18.Qh6+ Kg8 19.Nf3



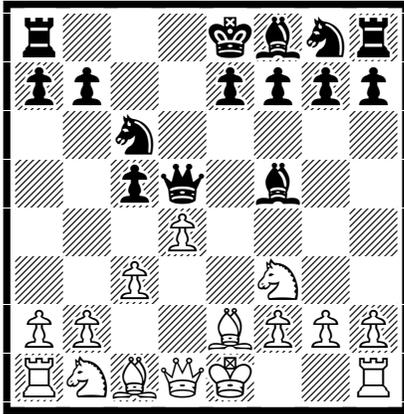
1-0

Not only is Black completely paralyzed, but also when his Queen retreats, then 20.Ne8 will lead to inevitable mate.

So the moral of the story is: If you are thinking about capturing a pawn in the opening for a price of tempi, think twice! And remember our last typical example!

B22 M. Tscharotschkin - D. Dimitrijevic
Gibraltar (Catalan Bay) 2007

1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 Qxd5 4.d4 Nc6 5.Nf3 Bf5 6.Be2



6...Bxb1??

An “idea” that loses at least three tempi in the opening (Bf5, Bxb1, Qxa2) for a single pawn, this is always a crime! Correct is 6...e6 or 6...cxd4 7.cxd4 e6. The punishment is very quick.

7.Rxb1 Qxa2 8.Be3 cxd4 9.Nxd4 e6 10.O-O Nxd4 11.Qxd4 Ne7 12.Bb5+ Nc6 13.Rfd1 Be7 14.Qd7+ Kf8 15.Qxb7 1-0