

Mini-Lessons From Short Games Of 21st Century

By IM Nikolay Minev

The Pirc Defense: Under Direct Attack.

In last decade “The Pirc Defense” (1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6) is under dangerous direct attack. This is demonstrated in the small collection of games below. One can argue that in these examples Black misses some opportunities, but the deeper truth is that White’s quick attacking variations are not easily repulsed.

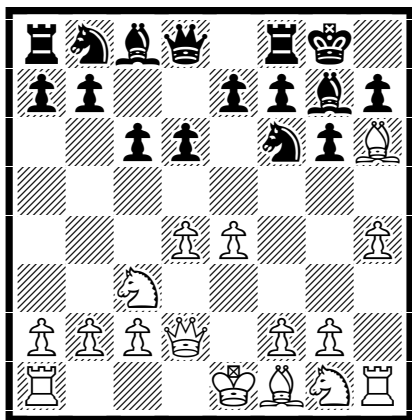
B07 J. Bourne – R. Johnson

England (ch team) 2005

1.d4 d6 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Be3 Bg7 5.Qd2 O-O

Instead 5...Ng4 6.Bg5 h6 7.Bh4 g5 8.Bg3 looks less attractive for Black. Maybe he should try 5...h6 6.f3 c6 or 5...c6 6.O-O-O b5 even if here, as we shall see, Black’s counter play is often not satisfactory.

6.Bh6 c6 7.h4



The most typical attacking pattern, with an early advance of the h-pawn.

7...Bxh6 8.Qxh6 Qa5 9.h5 Nxh5

9...Ng4!?

10.Nf3 f6

Or 10...Nd7 11.Ng5 Ndf6 12.Be2 etc.

11.Bc4+ e6 12.g4 1-0

B07 L. Nestorovic – N. Svetac
Belgrade 2009

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Bg5 c6 5.Qd2 Bg7

ECO suggests 5...b5.

6.O-O-O Qc7?!

Interesting, but probably too passive an idea. Maybe the immediate 6...b5 offers more counter chances.

7.Bd3 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.Bh6 O-O 10.h4

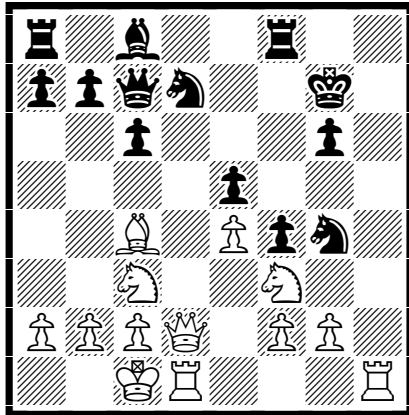
The typical pattern is in use again and, as in previous game, Black is not able to find a satisfactory defense.

10...Bxh6

10...b5!?, and if 11.h5 Na6 12.Bxg7 Kxg7 13.hxg6 fxg6.

11.Qxh6 Ng4 12.Qd2 f5 13.Bc4+ Kg7 14.h5 f4 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.Nf3 Nd7??

The decisive blunder. However, after 16...b5 17.Ng5 Nf6 18.Be6 White's attack continues, with great chances for success.



17.Rh7+!! Kf6

If 18...Kxh7 19.Ng5+ Kh6 (19...Kh8 20.Rh1+) 20.Ne6 with the double threat 21.Rh1# and 21.Nxc7.

18.Qd6+ 1-0

B07 J. Lillo Ferrer – T. Yastrebova
L'Estartit 2009

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Bg5 Bg7 5.Qd2 h6 6.Bh4 c6

For 6...g5!? 7.Bg3 Nh5 – see next game.

7.f4! b5 8.Bd3 Qb6 9.Nf3 Bg4 10.e5 dxe5 11.dxe5 Nfd7 12.a4 b4

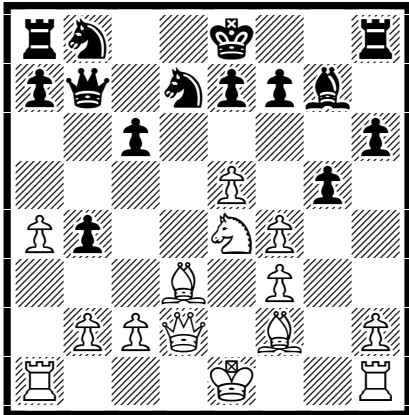
Maybe 12...bxa4!?

13.Ne4 Bxf3

Black overlooks White's 16th move. Better was the immediate 13...g5.

14.gxf3 g5 15.Bf2 Qb7

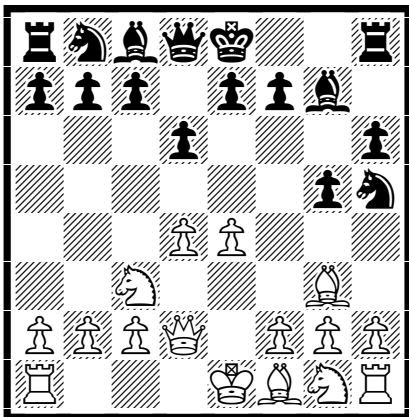
15...c5!?



16.e6! fxe6 17.O-O-O Nb6? 18.Nc5 Qc8 19.Bg6+ 1-0

B07 G. Hertneck – V. Beim
Austria (ch team) 2005

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Bg5 Bg7 5.Qd2 h6 6.Bh4 g5 7.Bg3 Nh5



In this way Black avoids the variations with the direct attack, but his King will remain in the center.

8.O-O-O a6

A very dubious idea. Probably 8...c6, intending 9...b5, offers more counter-chances.

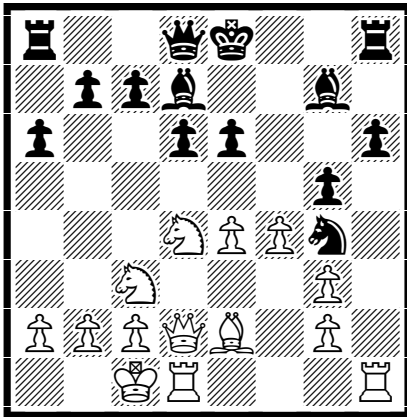
9.Nge2 Nc6

9...b5!?

10.f3 Nxc3 11.hxc3 e6 12.d5!

When the opponent's King is in the center – open the center files!

12...Ne5 13.Nd4 Bd7 14.f4 Ng4 15.dxe6 fxe6 16.Be2



16...Bxd4

Already Black is in big trouble. If 16...e5 17.Nf5!

17.Qxd4 e5 18.fxe5 Nxe5 19.Bh5+ Ke7 20.Nd5+ Ke6 21.Rhf1 1-0

B07 E. Vovsha – A. Schiffer
USA (Amateur ch team) 2009

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Be3 Bg7 5.f3 O-O

According to ECO, the correct strategy is to start immediately with counter play by 5...c6 6.Qd2 b5, without or late castling.

6.Qd2 c6 7.O-O-O Nbd7 8.g4 b5 9.Bh6 Qa5 10.h4 b4 11.Nb1

In this situation of mutual attack, White's chances are stronger because his attack is

quicker and has the participation of more forces.

11...Kh8?

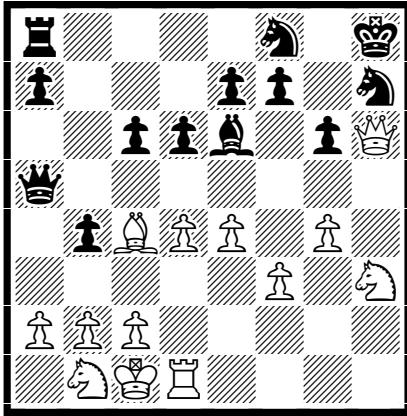
Already Black is in trouble, but this waste of time makes the position even worse.

12.Bxg7+ Kxg7 13.h5 Rh8 14.hxg6 hxg6

Perhaps 14...fxg6 offers more resistance.

15.Rxh8 Kxh8 16.Qh6+ Nh7 17.Nh3 Ndf8 18.Bc4 Be6

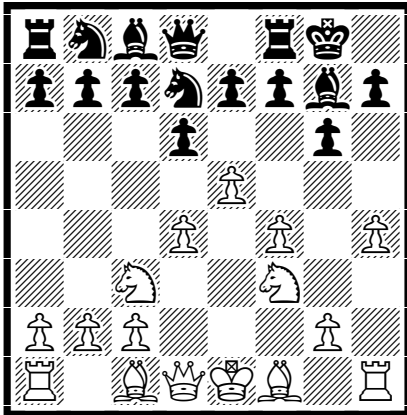
If 18...d5 19.Ng5 dxc4 20.Nxh7 Nxh7 21.Rh1 and White wins.



19.d5! cxd5 20.Ng5 1-0

B09 Z. Jovanovic – Z. Martić
Bizovac (Croatia) 2007

1.e4 d6 2.Nc3 g6 3.f4 Bg7 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.d4 O-O 6.e5 Nfd7 7.h4



7...c5 8.h5 cxd4 9.Qxd4

For 9.hxg6 – see the next game.

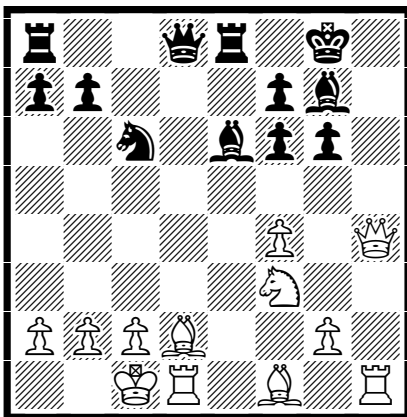
9...dxe5 10.Qf2 e4 11.Nxe4 Nf6 12.Nxf6+ exf6 13.hxg6 hxg6?

According to Parma, Black should play 13...fxg6 with equality. In my opinion the correct assessment is that the position is unclear.

14.Bd2 Nc6

14...Re8+!?

15.O-O-O Be6? 16.Qh4 Re8



17.f5! Bxf5 18.Qh7+ 1-0

Because of 18...Kf8 19.Bh6 and wins.

B09 J. Morris – B. Atzmon Simon
Australia (ch) Sydney 2010

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.f4 Bg7 5.Nf3 O-O 6.e5 Nfd7 7.h4 c5 8.h5 cxd4 9.hxg6 hxg6?

Instead 9...dxc3 10.gxf7+ Rxf7 11.Bc4 or 11.e6 is considered to be in Black's favor, but the arising positions are full of possibilities for tactics and surprising novelties.

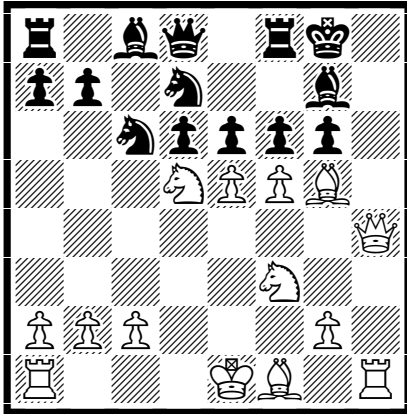
10.Qxd4 Qb6?

In case of 10...dxe5 11.Qf2 White has a strong attack – compare with the previous game!

11.Nd5! Nc6

If 11...Qxd4?? 12.Nxe7#!

12.Qa4 Qd8 13.f5! e6 14.Bg5 f6 15.Qh4



A unique position! Black is already lost.

15...gxf5 16.Qh7+ Kf7 17.exf6 Qa5+ 18.Bd2 Nxf6

Or 18...Qxd5 19.fxg7 Rg8 20.Ng5+ and White wins.

19.Ng5+ Ke8 20.Qg6+ 1-0