



COLUMNISTS

*From the
Archives*

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



From the Archives...

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The Kibitzer by Tim Harding

Time to Gamble on a Gambit

Long ago, grandmaster Rudolf Spielmann wrote an article *From the Sickbed of the Gambits*, but as we approach the end of the 20th century, gambit openings have rarely looked healthier! Of course, Spielmann was thinking primarily of the “romantic” and primarily tactical time-for-material gambits, such as the King’s Gambit and Evans Gambit, but even these are not doing so badly these days, and there are other kinds of gambits that I shall mention in a moment. A gambit means a chess opening in which one player or the other gives up material (usually a pawn or two). The term “Counter-Gambit” is also seen. Sometimes, as in the Falkbeer Counter-Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5), this involves a gambit offered in reply to a gambit by White, but a counter-gambit can be any gambit where Black offers the material. Curiously, one of the most ancient and famous of these is not called a gambit at all: the Two Knights Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 etc.)

There are many books on gambits, but none quite meet with my approval. The best is Graham Burgess’s 1995 book, *Gambits*, which does a good job of discussing motivations for gambits and types of compensation, but in my opinion the author uses the term “gambit” too loosely and many of his examples are positional sacrifices and not what I would call gambits at all. M. Yudovich’s little book *The Gambit* just dips into a few topics that interest the author; Yakov

Estrin's *Bauernopfer in der Eroeffnung* was likewise skimpy and unsystematic; and Raymond Keene's 1990 *The Complete Book of Gambits* is certainly far from complete!

One can speak of a gambit (as opposed to a middlegame pawn sacrifice) when it is part of a recognised opening sequence, such as the Marshall Counter-Gambit against the Ruy Lopez/Spanish: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5!?. Such a gambit can arise even later: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 Bf5 6 e3 e6 7 Bxc4 Bb4 8 0-0 Nbd7 9 Qe2 Bg6 and now 10 e4, as played by Kasparov, but usually the offer comes very early in the game, often between moves two and five, as in the well-known gambits that I discuss here. However, I would not necessarily speak of a gambit just because an opening involves the possibility of a dodgy pawn-grab that is normally ignored.

A few openings that are called "gambits" are really non-gambits, the most obvious example being 1 d4 d5 2 c4, since even the Queen's Gambit Accepted (2...dxc4) is very rarely played with the intention of holding the pawn and White just regains his investment in the course of normal development. If it were not for the venerable antiquity of the name, the Queen's Gambit would long ago have been dropped from the canon of gambits. True gambits are easy enough to find, but here are a few of the most popular ones these days (among chess players as a whole, not masters):

- The Benko Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5);
- The Goring (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3) and allied Scotch (4 Bc4) and Danish (2 d4 exd4 3 c3) Gambits;
- The Icelandic Gambit (1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6);
- The Slav Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c6 4 e4 dxe4 5 Nxe4 Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Qxd4 etc.);
- The Milner-Barry Gambit (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 cxd4 Bd7 8 0-0 or 8 Nc3);
- and, of course, the aforementioned Marshall, King's and Evans Gambits.

There is also a class of somewhat fashionable gambits more typical of correspondence play (especially thematic tournaments) than over-the-board play. Some gambits (especially the BDG and Latvian) have schools of passionate adherents who know them in enormous detail. In this category I would place:

- The BDG or Blackmar-Diemer Gambit: 1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3;
- The Latvian (or Greco) Counter-Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5);
- The Elephant Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d5 3 exd5 Bd6; note that it is *not* an Elephant Gambit if Black plays 3...e4);
- The Morra Gambit: 1 e4 c5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 (or sometimes 2 Nf3 and then 3 d4 cxd4 4 c3);
- The Winckelmann-Riemer Gambit (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 a3 Bxc3+ 5 bxc3 dxe4 6 f3!);

- The Hennig-Schara Counter-Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 cxd5 cxd4!?);
- The Albin Counter-Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e5);
- The From Gambit (1 f4 e5);
- The French Wing Gambit (1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 e5 c5 4 b4).

Finally there are some truly eccentric and almost certainly unsound gambits, which may have their place in pub games, five-minute tournaments and other forms of casual play:

- The Tennison, or Abonyi, Gambit (1 Nf3 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Ng5);
- The Englund Gambit (1 d4 e5) in its various forms;
- The Gibbins-Weidenhagen Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 g4);
- The Diemer-Duhm Gambit (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 c4);
- The Halasz Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 f4).

In each category, one could think of more examples.

The above might be considered a categorisation by (approximate) soundness, but there are other ways of looking at gambits. For example, there are families of gambits of which the BDG family is the most obvious. With White and Black both having d-pawns advanced, the attraction of Black's d-pawn to e4, usually followed by the move f2-f3, features not only in the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, but also in the Winckelmann-Riemer, the Alapin-Diemer Gambit (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Be3 dxe4) and the allied Rasa-Studier Gambit (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Be3) and analogous gambits against the Caro-Kann. Another family of gambits involves the move e2-e4 (or ...e7-e5 for Black) inviting the opposing d-pawn to capture while one's own d-pawn is yet unmoved; here the Tennison and Englund Gambits relate to the Budapest Fajarowicz (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 Ne4) which is rather sounder; gambits in which the e-pawn is advanced to challenge the opposing f-pawn (From Gambit, Staunton gambit) are second cousins to these.

Another method of categorisation is by style or motivation. I have already mentioned tactical/time-for-material gambits, but there are also positional gambits (although it is hard to find another pure example to match the Benko) and perhaps the most interesting these days: what I call "randomising gambits." Completely the opposite of the Benko, the gambiteer is seeking not a rational position with objective compensation but rather an extreme tactical melee in which human and computer opponents alike may lose their way. Typically in a randomising gambit, the player who first offers a gambit may soon even end up ahead on material e.g. in the Frankenstein-Dracula Variation (the subject of my first Kibitzer [article](#) back in June) or in Latvian Gambit lines like 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Bc4 fxe4 4 Nxe5 Qg5 5 d4 Qxg2 6 Qh5+ g6 7 Bf7+ Kd8 8 Bxg6 Qxh1+, or else the material situation will become quite unbalanced, as after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Bc4 fxe4 4 Nxe5 d5!? 5 Qh5+ g6 6 Nxe6 hxg6 7 Qxg6+ (acceptance by 7 Qxh8 being at least as risky for White).

As yet I have not published any of my own games in *The Kibitzer*, so perhaps

this is a good time to give one.

T.Harding - S.I.Zlobinsky (Russia)

corr (EU/M/GT/360) 1992-5

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Bc4 Bc5 5 c3 dxc3 6 Nxc3 d6 7 Bg5 f6

Apparently a Keres suggestion, for which I can find no precedents.

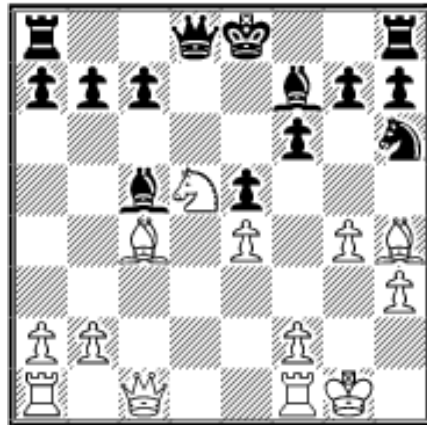
8 Bh4 Nh6

Obviously, 8...Nge7 also comes into consideration.

9 0-0

This seems a necessary preparation for active operations. The whole line of the Scotch Gambit needs much more analysis.

9...Bg4 10 h3 Bh5 11 g4 Bf7 12 Nd5 Ne5 13 Nxe5 dxe5 14 Qc1!



This move eyes both c5 and h6; White has emerged with some advantage.

14...Qd6! 15 Rd1

Instead, 15 Bxf6!? seems to give equal chances at best.

15...0-0-0

This looks like the only move, in view of 15...Bd4? 16 Rxd4! exd4 17 Bg3.

16 Qc2

My second “creeping move” continues the triangulation of the queen.

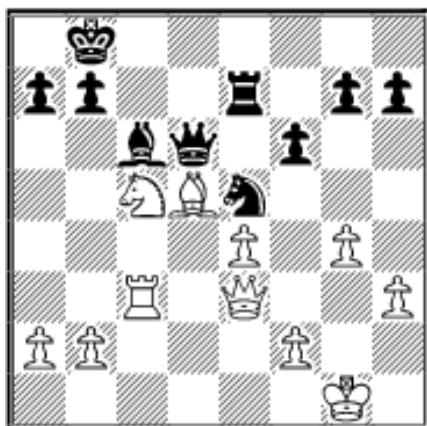
16...Bd4 17 Rac1

Logically brings the last piece into the attack. 17 Rxd4!? was my original intention, but I suspect it is unsound.

17...Kb8 18 Rxd4 exd4 19 Bg3 Qc6 20 Bxc7+ Ka8 21 Bxd8 Rxd8 22 Qd2 Qd6 23 Qxd4 Kb8 24 Rc3 Be8 25 Qe3 Nf7

Else I may simply exchange queens by Qf4 or Qg3.

26 Nf4!? Ne5 27 Bd5 Bc6!? 28 Ne6 Rd7 29 Nc5 Re7?!



Black has defended quite well until now, but this seems based on a miscalculation. Better is 29...Rc7. Black's next move is a blunder in a bad position.

30 f4! Bxd5? 31 fxe5 Qxe5 32 Qd3 b6 33 Na6+! 34 Nb4 1-0

White threatens mate by 35 Qa6+ and on 34...Be6 35 Qa6+ Ka8 (35...Kb8 36 Nc6+) 36 Rc8+ Bxc8 37 Qxc8+ Qb8 38 Qxb8+ Kxb8 39 Nc6+ Kc7 40 Nxe7+.

There will always be some players for whom gambits are anathema, for reasons of style and temperament. Most non-professional players, however, are willing to gamble on a gambit. The two main reasons I see for gambits making a comeback are: the faster time-limits in over-the-board play (both quick-play events and "allegro" finishes to games played for the first 90 minutes or so at a normal time rate) and the desire to confuse computer analysts in correspondence games. A third motive, common to both OTB and correspondence players, is simply to avoid the heavily-signposted freeways of grandmaster theory and stake out a little claim to originality of one's own. That is probably the best motive of all for playing gambits.

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