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Play 1 e4 e5!

by Nigel Davies

1...e5 is arguably the simplest and most logical reply to 1 e4, taking space in the centre and opening diagonals for the queen and bishop. It has been played by every world champion in the history of the game, and many of them played nothing else. Yet despite this great pedigree, many players, especially at club level, are simply afraid to play it! Why? Because of the ocean of possibilities. Besides various forms of the Ruy Lopez, there are a number of other major openings, not to mention a bunch of dangerous gambits.

This was my thinking for many years. I occasionally played 1...e5 but, with a view to 'avoiding' sharp theoretical lines, I usually played the Pirc or Modern Defence. The turning point came when the former Soviet Champion Lev Psakhis once explained to me that an extensive grounding in the Ruy Lopez was essential if you want to develop your game. He added that in Russia it was said that the one failing of Lev Polugaevsky was that he never received this education.

From that moment I resolved to start playing more games with 1 e4 e5 and to phase out the Modern Defence, with which my results against strong players were lacklustre. My results with Black against 1 e4 improved and within two years I gained the Grandmaster title. I attribute much of this achievement to Psakhis' advice and my belated education in the classics.

In writing this book my primary goal was to pass on this great lesson, and provide a simple enough 1...e5 repertoire to make playing this move a practical proposition for club players. Accordingly I have adopted a 'keep it simple' solution to most of White's options, while presenting a really challenging response to the dreaded Ruy Lopez. The Keres Variation (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Nd7) has been giving White some major headaches and has been adopted by the likes of Ponomarev, Beliavsky, and others. Should the reader subsequently want to try a different form of Closed Ruy Lopez, then acquiring a new line will not take much additional effort. This, in fact, is one of the great things about playing 1...e5 – Black isn't forced to stick to a few narrow channels or long sequences of only moves but can easily broaden his creative palette with new variations.

Fischer, R – Keres, P

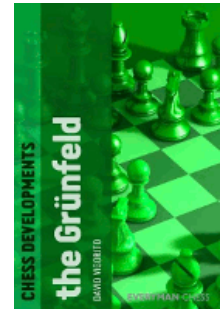
Candidates Tournament, Curacao, 1962
Ruy Lopez [C96]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.d4 Nd7 12.d5

Keres modestly stated that this advance was, in his opinion, premature. Although it is often a good idea in the Closed Spanish, in this particular position Black quickly gets in...f7-f5.

12...Nb6 13.g4

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[FEN "r1bq1rk1/4bPPP/pn1p4/nppPp3/4P1P1/2P2N1P/PPB2P2/RNBQR1K1 b - - 0 13"]

White attempts to prevent 13...f5, but is jumping from the frying pan to the fire. For the alternatives see Hunt-Davies.

13...h5! 14.Nh2

'By advancing his g-pawn White has significantly weakened the dark squares on the kingside. Naturally Black takes immediate advantage of this weakness.' – Keres.

14...hgx4 15.hxg4 Bg5! 16.Nd2 g6 17.Ndf3 Bxc1

Keres also considered 17...Bf4 here. After the text White gets to stop Black's attack on the kingside by exchanging queens; unfortunately the endgame is also poor.

18.Qxc1 Kg7 19.Qg5



[FEN "r1bq1r2/5pk1/pn1p2p1/nppPp1Q1/4P1P1/2P2N2/PPB2P1N/R3R1K1 b - - 0 19"]

19...Nb7

In his notes Keres was somewhat critical of this move, suggesting in fact that 19...Bd7 was best in order to prevent a2-a4. Interestingly, a game Blatny-Filip, Prague 1963, went 19...Qxg5 20.Nxg5 Bd7 21.Kg2 c4 22.Nh3 Nb7, also with a clear advantage to Black. It is unlikely that White had 'prepared' this line, for in the days before computers even games from the Candidates weren't easy to get hold of!

20.Qxd8 Rxd8 21.a4!



[FEN "r1br4/1n3pk1/pn1p2p1/1ppPp3/P3P1P1/2P2N2/1PB2P1N/R3R1K1 b - - 0 21"]

Fischer makes the most of his chances. The threat is to play 22 a5 followed by 23 b4, closing the queenside. Keres decides that he cannot allow this.

21...bxa4 22.Bxa4 Nxa4 23.Rxa4 Bd7



[FEN "r2r4/1n1b1pk1/p2p2p1/2pPp3/R3P1P1/2P2N2/1P3P1N/4R1K1 w - - 0 24"]

24.Ra2

From what was a rather desperate situation White has now obtained some counterplay on the queenside. Keres finally manages to bring home the point anyway, but Fischer's superb defence almost saves the day.

24...c4 25.Nd2 Bb5 26.Nhf1 Rh8



[FEN "r6r/1n3pk1/p2p2p1/1b1Pp3/2p1P1P1/2P5/RP1N1P2/4RNK1 w - - 0 27"]

27.Ne3 Rh4 28.Kg2

After 28.Ndxc4 Black plays 28...Rah8 29.Kf1 (29.Kg2 Rh2+ 30.Kf3 R8h3+ 31.Ke2 Nc5) 29...Nc5, when his initiative will at least pocket White's e4-pawn.

28...Rah8 29.Nf3



[FEN "7r/1n3pk1/p2p2p1/1b1Pp3/2p1P1Pr/2P1NN2/RP3PK1/4R3 b - - 0 29"]

Here too 29.Ndxc4? Rh2+ 30.Kf1 Nc5 puts White in all sorts of trouble.

29...Rh3 30.Nf1 Nc5 31.Ng3 Bd7 32.g5 f6 33.gxf6+ Kxf6 34.Re3 Ke7 35.Nd2 Rh2+ 36.Kg1 Bb5 37.Ra1 R2h4 38.Kg2 Rf8 39.Rf3 Rb8 40.Kg1 Ra8 41.Ra5 Rc8 42.Ra3 Ra8

Perhaps 42...Nd3 would have been better.

43.Ra5 Ra7 44.Kg2 Nb7 45.Ra1 a5 46.Ngf1 Nc5 47.Ne3 a4



[FEN "8/r3k3/3p2p1/1bnPp3/p1p1P2r/
2P1NR2/1P1N1PK1/R7 w - - 0 48"]

47...Nxe4 runs into 48.Nxe4 Rxe4 49.Rh1, suddenly developing all sorts of activity.

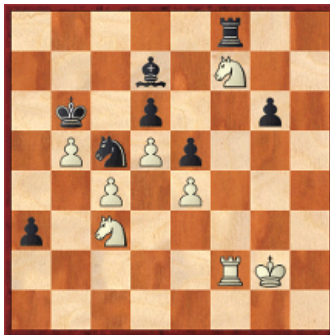
48.Rh3

Also worth considering is 48.Rg3, when 48...Kf7 could be answered by 49.Nexc4 Bxc4 50.Nxc4 Nxe4 51.f3!? Nxg3 52.Nxd6+ Kf8 53.Kxg3 followed by 54.Ne4. White would then have two connected passed pawns and a strong knight for the exchange. Could he actually be better?

48...Rxh3 49.Kxh3 Nd3 50.Ra2 Nxf2+ 51.Kg3 Nd3 52.Nexc4 Ra8 53.Nb6 Ra6 54.Nbc4 Nc5 55.Kf3 Ra8 56.b4 Nb3 57.Na3 Bd7 58.Kg2

I don't see how Black would make progress after 58.Ndc4 Rh8 59.Rg2 – his knights hold the queenside, allowing him to go active with the rook.

58...Bg4 59.Nac4 Rc8 60.Ne3 Bd7 61.c4 Rb8 62.b5 Nc5 63.Nd1 Kd8 64.Nc3 Ra8 65.Nf3 Kc7 66.Ng5 Kb6 67.Nf7 Rf8 68.Rf2 a3



[FEN "5r2/3b1N2/1k1p2p1/1PnPp3/
2P1P3/p1N5/5RK1/8 w - - 0 69"]

69.Rf3?

After 69.Nxd6 Black can play 69...Rxf2+ 70.Kxf2 Kc7 71.Nf7 Nxe4+ 72.Nxe4 a2, with a new queen about to be crowned.

69...Bg4 70.Rf2?

70.Rf1 would have been more tenacious.

70...a2! 71.Nxa2 Nxe4 72.Rf1 Bf5 73.c5+

73.Nh6 Bh3+ wins White's rook.

73...dxc5 0-1

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