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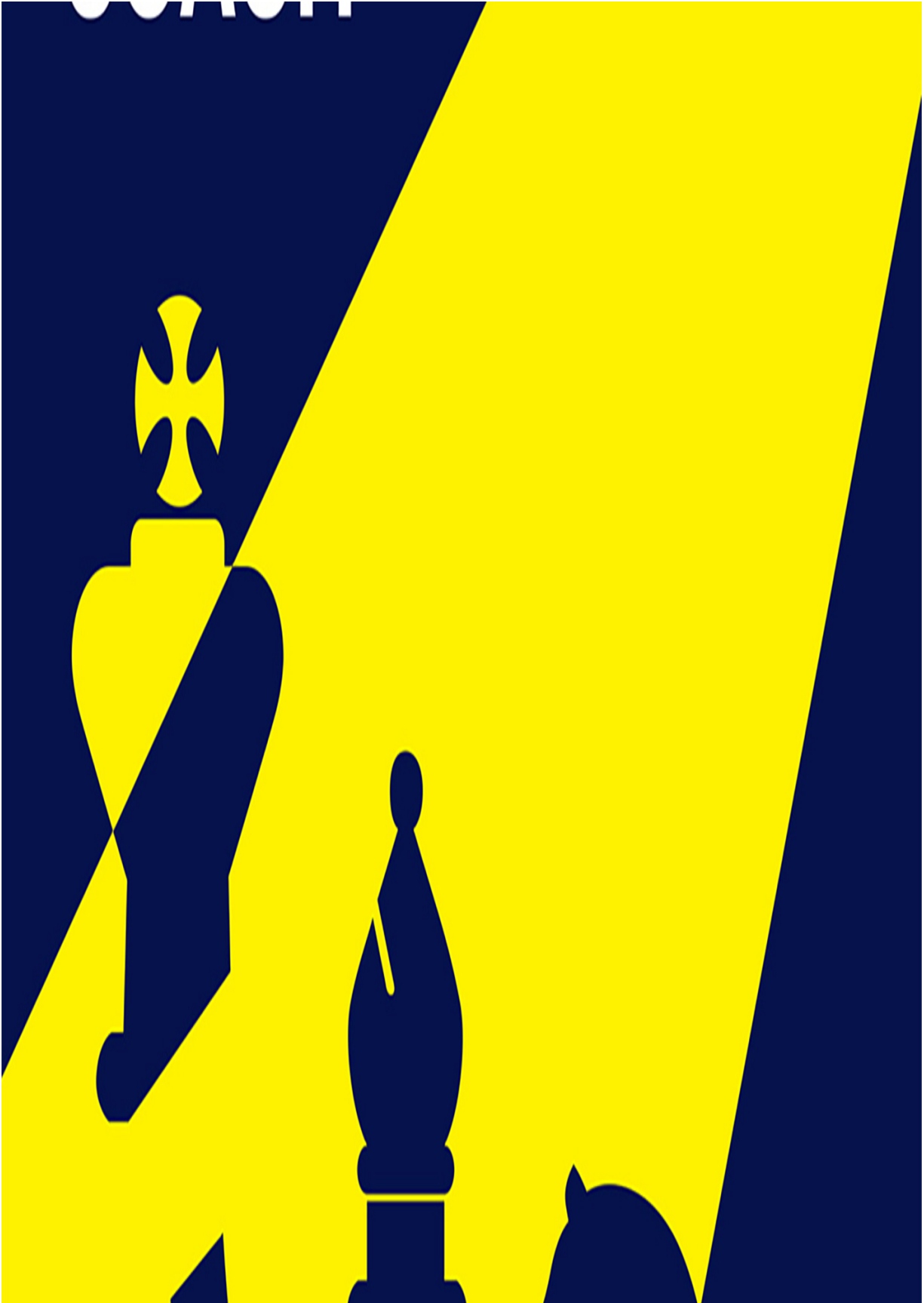
CHESS LESSONS FROM A CHAMPION COACH



Thomas
Engqvist

BATSFORD CHESS

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Chess Lessons from a Champion Coach

Thomas Engqvist

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Introduction

“History is the record of human behaviour, the most fascinating subject of all, but illogical and so crammed with an unlimited number of variables that it is not susceptible of the scientific method nor of systematising.” – Barbara Tuchman (American historian and author, 1912-1989)

“Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others.” – Otto von Bismarck (German statesman and diplomat, 1815-1898)

“Chess books should be used as we use glasses: to assist the sight, although some players make use of them as if they thought they conferred sight.” – José Raúl Capablanca (World Champion 1921-1927)

“In striving to absorb the entire ‘aroma of the times’, I did not seek individual moves, even though they might be beautiful or unexpected, but ideas and conceptions; I wanted to get to the heart of the matter, to grasp the logic of the development of events on the board, both in games by players from the past and in the games of contemporary masters. Under the influence of these events, arguments, diametrically opposed opinions and theoretical discoveries, my playing style was formed, a style which many consider universal. The combination of opposing influences made it such, or, at any rate, saved it from being too one-sided.” – Vasily Smyslov (World Champion 1957-58)

“If one does not play dynamically, one fails to obtain the best of the deep dialectics of chess art which inseparably unites the elements of logic and fantasy. The modern game has inherited the best of such opposed schools as the romantic and the positional. This did not happen in any artificial way, but came as a consequence of the development of chess processes through the centuries.” – Aleksei Suetin (World Senior Chess Champion 1996-97.)

It may be useful to explain to the reader my first steps in the chess world so as to gain a clearer picture of the motivation for writing this book. My overall experiences as a practising chess player have led me to clarify fundamental mistakes I made in my youth – and the main reason for these was the absence of a coach. If it was indeed possible to teach myself 45 years ago, everything would be fine because now I know exactly how to proceed. But such is the irony of time that unfortunately we cannot go back and correct our past mistakes. We can only learn from these, which is the reason I have written this book so that students (hopefully) will not repeat the same mistakes I made in my vain approach to learning about chess more efficiently.

When you are young, it is easy to think that motivation and time spent are enough, but they are not. A **well-thought-out study plan** is also necessary to make the training more effective. An aspiring player will benefit from competing with other aspiring players but will make even more progress by being part of structured teaching from an organised club or a competent coach. The competition can be extremely tough, so it is necessary to adapt to this reality by following a study plan which contains the most valuable wisdom and knowledge about the game.

Ever since I was nearly 13 years old, in the autumn of 1976, I have been involved in the chess world. It was then I became a member of the small chess club SK-33. It was a friendly club, and I have many happy memories and several lasting friendships. However it was

located in a small town called Enköping (40,000-50,000 inhabitants), which was situated about one hour by car from Stockholm. Obviously, this was not to a young chess player's advantage in the long run, especially from the perspective of effective chess development. I practiced chess by reading books in my own language, mainly by the Swedish GM Gideon Ståhlberg (1908-1967), which I borrowed from the local library. I am happy many of his books were readily available because he wrote about openings and endgames and other great players, such as Bobby Fischer.

I combined reading these chess books and others with playing in the local championships of which there were two every year. In 1978-1980 I managed to win the local championship in Enköping three times in a row, despite the fact that I was neither the highest-rated nor the most experienced player – although probably the most aspiring. The best and most experienced player in our club was Anders Lundqvist. On one occasion he travelled to the Netherlands, where he played in the Wijk aan Zee tournament and performed splendidly. He gained a rating of 2150 after this tournament and we, the members of SK-33, were very impressed by his achievement. My rating was around 2000, but since I was a developing player, I had good prospects of catching up with him due to my serious study and curiosity about chess. Lundqvist was very generous and let me borrow some of his *Informants*. This was one of the milestones in my chess training, and I even remember that the issues were 7, 12, and 13. These books contained the most important games, combinations, and endgames that had been played during six months of their designated period and were very dear to me, to the extent that I even held on to them for a couple of years. I could look up theoretical novelties in the variations I was playing, for example, the sharp Polugaevsky variation of the Sicilian defence, which was a hot opening when I was a junior. The first *Informant* I bought was number 25, and I have never missed obtaining an issue since then. In

fact this approach to chess study was why aspiring players of that time were called the *Informant* children or the *Informant* generation, and it was Lundqvist who introduced me to this new world. I remember playing through all the games from one of the *Informants*. This could not be regarded as serious training due to the fact that I didn't have any coach to tell me how to practice more efficiently. Lundqvist was not my coach, rather he was more like a mentor and someone to look up to and be inspired by, especially for us, the young and aspiring players in the club.

Another important person who had a positive effect on my chess development was my peer friend Peter Fransson who joined the chess club at least one year earlier than me. Nevertheless I managed to catch up with him and eventually we were of about equal strength. We often played friendly games at his place and analysed together. He had a big chess library for one so young, and I remember borrowing the Yugoslav *Encyclopaedias of Chess Openings* and other chess literature from him. One day he told me he had a new and revolutionary book called *My System* by Aron Nimzowitsch. He told me it was regarded as the best training book in the world. I tried to understand it, but it was written in Danish, and I didn't appreciate its finer points, so I abandoned the project to assimilate the important knowledge regarding, for example, prophylactic play, that was contained in this milestone of chess literature. This is naturally something I regret, but the book was too difficult for me to take it all in. I wasn't lucky enough to be associated with a coach who could tell me the finer points of Nimzowitsch's ideas and why this book would be worth the effort to assimilate thoroughly. This is something I realised only later as an adult. I don't think my friend realised its true value either, but he nevertheless went on to win the Swedish junior championship in 1980 while I was fifth.

Now we come to one of the main ideas behind the title of this book. My mission is to help aspiring chessplayers, young players as

well as adults, who want to improve their understanding of chess by not making the same mistakes as I did, i.e. reading the wrong books and ineffectively at that. In the best of worlds a chess coach, who has studied the important classics by the greatest chess writers, knows what knowledge is the most relevant and can break it down into meaningful lessons. I am referring to timeless knowledge (and wisdom) that no computer can refute and is the core of genuine human understanding of the game.

The conclusion I came to from my experiences as a young, ambitious chess player was that I was at a clear disadvantage not having any coach, or at least a coach on a relatively regular basis. My development as a chess player also suffered from the drawback of living in a small town compared to a capital city like Stockholm where there would have been more opportunities for aspiring chess players like my peer friend and me. Nevertheless, on the positive side, I was able to compete and share important knowledge with some of the players in my club and be motivated to learn and play more. I also had the opportunity to meet a real coach, Robert Danielsson, on a few occasions in Stockholm, and he helped me structure my training so that I remained focused and practiced five important positions, from the middlegame and the endgame, every week. This scheme of training focuses on positions I have already described in depth in my *300-trilogy*.

To be a reasonably high standard chess player or chess coach is not necessarily the same thing. A chess player needs knowledge but also motivation and skill to be successful, but for a coach, apart from relevant knowledge, it is more about good pedagogy and an ability to inspire their students and lead them in the right direction. Of course, one should have a good education in chess and be very familiar with different ways of playing and understanding chess. Above all it is important to understand chess psychology, especially when dealing with older children and adults, I think many coaches underestimate

this topic, and this might be because one must be careful with psychology when dealing with young children, as they need first and foremost to focus on the technical aspects of chess.

My first experience as a chess coach started early when I was around 15 years old. I remember that I was responsible for a course at my club where I was teaching young people during a vacation period. A couple of years later, I was indirectly a coach when I, relatively regularly, worked as a chess journalist and wrote in chess magazines and local newspapers. My focus was mainly on annotating games from a pedagogical perspective because I have always been fond of the teaching aspects in chess. I guess this has to do with the fact that I read many books between 14-16 years of age, especially by Max Euwe, one of the most outstanding chess teachers in history. Many of his books, about all phases of the game, were fortunately translated into Swedish. My thirst for knowledge probably surpassed my skill, especially the ability to fight and be creative during a game. If I had had a coach during this time, the coach would probably have taught me not to rely solely on knowledge but also how to use this knowledge in terms of practical performance and development of imagination.

As I matured, my experiences as a chess coach developed and became greater, especially at the end of the 80s and the early 90s. At this time, the Internet made its breakthrough, and I gave many lessons online. ICC (Internet Chess Club) was the first online chess club in the world during these pioneering days. I played official matches and blitz games and gave many lessons to hungry and generous American players who wanted to improve their game on this unique and profitable site. This coincided with the period when I was a professional for two years, from 1989 to 1990, and reached the goal of becoming the highest-rated blitz player on ICC. However, eventually, ICC started to attract some outstanding players, and I slowly fell off the pinnacle. I remember playing many blitz games

against exceptionally strong players like Shirov and Dlugy, which was an excellent experience. Those golden days at ICC are gone now and many other homepages have taken over as the main chess sites. I played more than 10,000 blitz games on ICC, enough for me to eventually lose interest in this kind of chess which took place online. I think that its didactic value is limited and that it is more a matter of entertainment than any serious chess training. For me, real competitive play will ideally be classical chess, where you can feel, smell and watch your opponent on the opposite side of the board. I also like to prepare thoroughly against my opponents. The good thing with the development of the Internet and ICC was the possibility of teaching players abroad, especially in the U.S.A, where they understood the value of a good coach and were willing to pay for it.

My other credentials as a chess coach, outside online chess, are that I have organised many private chess courses for adults, but apart from that, I have also taught young people in my former club SK Rockaden as well as the national ladies' team. The Stockholm Chess Federation and several clubs have invited me to organise courses or give lectures. In such environments, I have taught a wide variety of topics, such as chess history from a female perspective – from Rudenko to Judith Polgar, chess history from a male perspective – from Greco to Kasparov, pawn structures, chess training, chess defence, chess calculation, chess psychology, endgames, Nimzowitsch's *My System* and so on. I have held many private courses and delivered many lectures on great players such as Anand, Carlsen, Capablanca, and Fischer, which have been published on Youtube. However these are mainly in the Swedish language since my courses were originally designed for Swedish chess players.

I have been to China several times and helped talented players to improve their play. I was a coach at the Peng Cheng Chess Club in Shenzhen, southern China. I played several training and

simultaneous games, which were discussed afterwards and sometimes analysed with the help of Chessbase on a big screen by another coach in the Chinese language. The most talented opponent I played was presumably Zhu Yi. Soon after our meeting, he finished runner-up in the world under-12 championship in 2012. A fun event I remember from my time in China was a simultaneous clock exhibition I gave against a bunch of eight-year-old girls, who managed to beat me on time. They were very strong for such a young age with I guess an individual estimated strength of around 2000 Elo. China has schools that specialise in helping young people improve their abilities in a particular activity such as chess, piano, table tennis, etc. Highly competent coaches continuously drilled the youngsters. An equivalent strategy in Sweden would be if Ulf Andersson taught the most talented young people chess, but that doesn't work in a consistent manner in Sweden nor in the West – except in Norway. That country managed to produce the reigning World Champion Magnus Carlsen with GM Simen Agdestein as his coach.

In another form of chess, I supported Stefan Winge when he competed in the World Correspondence Chess Championship. In fact he was very close to winning this prestigious event in 2012. My main task was to be part of his team and prepare his next moves by consulting Junior and Shredder, which were regarded as the best programs at the time. This was before Rybka became the standard program, so it was imperative not to blindly trust the variations Junior and Shredder calculated, primarily due to the “horizon effect.” Because of my pedagogical perspective, I always communicated in words (by mail) to Winge why a suggested move should be played and supported it with concrete variations. We, the team, also met regularly to discuss his games. Unfortunately, he narrowly missed out on winning the title after failing to convert a clear advantage in his final and crucial game. This was a heavy blow

to him and all of us who were part of his team. His planned project to write a book about his achievement never happened since his own requirement was that he became World Champion, but unfortunately this was never to be. Nevertheless it was still a good experience to be part of this analytical work before computers became too strong.

In the course of many years as a coach and practising chess player, I have accumulated a huge amount of educational material and stored it in my computers as well as in two thick files of written papers. So I thought it would be worthwhile to share the important knowledge I have gained from my teaching experience and make the most valuable lessons available to an English-speaking audience. Originally my thought was to continue in the *300*-spirit, whereupon the title would have been *300 Most Important Chess Lessons*, but that would amount to an awful lot of pages and make it impossible to contain everything in one book. Moreover, it would not have been easy to structure the course in this format. So I thought the best way to present the material would be in chronological order, following in the footsteps of some of the greatest players of the last 500 years, starting with Ruy Lopez and finishing with Magnus Carlsen. Their most important discoveries, fundamental strategies, and ideas will be presented and discussed in a text which follows a red thread illustrated by key games. The main idea is to make use of the most significant knowledge that I have gathered during my life, both as a chess coach and as a chess player, but with a focus on important players, theories and key games rather than important positions which I have already elaborated upon in my *300*-trilogy 2018-2022. If that work may be called position-oriented, the present book is game-oriented with the emphasis on strategic ideas.

Kasparov used to say that he stood on the shoulders of all the previous World Champions in chess history, without whom he would never have become the great player he eventually proved to be. So the main idea behind these lessons is to build on this fundamental

premise, because after every lesson you will have something new and important to add to your armoury, thereby increasing your overall understanding of chess. This additional knowledge will enable you to control your opponents' play more easily and also give you a clearer overview of what is going on in your games thanks to the teachings of past masters. Max Euwe has written that historic development parallels individual development, and I am a convinced supporter of this premise too. It is very logical because for every new shred of significant knowledge or key model game you assimilate, you will increase your chess strength. Suppose you have already acquired a particular fragment of knowledge, for example an understanding of the essence of Philidor's important maxim that "pawns are the soul of chess". In that case, you can continue with the following lessons and as these become more and more advanced, you will find yourself climbing the ladder from the 16th century to the present day and the greater your comprehension of chess will be.

Most of the time you will be aware of your progress from one lesson to the next, so my recommendation for a sensible approach and to get the most out of the book is that you slowly and thoughtfully read it from the first page to the last. Remember that knowledge is only a key tool, a compass, to assist your calculation of variations, natural ability, and creativity. When you have finally familiarised yourself with the development of chess ideas, perhaps up to Alekhine's time, it will be easier for you to go back and revise what had been new knowledge for you. One shortcut to revision is to check whether you can remember the answers to the key questions which are posed in the chapters containing important theories you really must understand, especially those associated with Steinitz, Lasker and Nimzowitsch. If you don't remember the answers, I recommend that you re-read the relevant chapter rather than look up the answers to the questions. This is because if you have forgotten the answers, it probably means that you hadn't assimilated the

essential knowledge in the first place. If everything in this book is new to you, you should just concentrate on one lesson at a time and absorb it slowly.

My wish is that you will go through all the lessons conscientiously, one by one, because if you do that I can guarantee it will improve your understanding of chess. This in turn will help you to develop both your practical skill and imagination. Armed with your newly acquired knowledge, you will increase your chances of gaining rating points regardless of your present level, especially when you meet opponents who, unlike you, are not familiar with the important lessons presented in this book and which are the sum total of 45 years experience.

If you have any comments or enquiries or discover some mistakes, feel free to contact me at thomasengqvist@protonmail.com and thereby help to improve on any possible future editions of this instructional book.

The Dawn of Modern Chess

Ruy Lopez

The Father of Chess Theory

“No move should be made without an aim.” – Pedro Damiano

“You should not play quickly.” – Pedro Damiano

“When you have a good move in mind, look to see if there isn’t a better one.” – Pedro Damiano

“Sit your opponent with the sun in his eyes.” – Ruy Lopez

The most famous and strongest player of the 16th century was the Spanish Catholic priest Ruy Lopez de Segura (1530-1580). He wrote *Libro de la invencion liberal y arte del juego del Axedrez* (Alcala 1561). It was one of the first fundamental chess books in Europe and made a strong impact for over 50 years.

His impulse to write the book came during a visit to Rome in 1560. Here he found a small chess treatise entitled *Questo libro e da imparare giocare a scachi et de le partite* (1512) by the Portuguese master Pedro Damiano (1480-1544). However, he didn’t like it and so decided to write his own book. In this way, coincidentally or not, he started a tradition that **a chess book should serve as a response and a living document on an actual chess topic.**

The first part of the book contains the rules and the origin of chess. The second part introduces the word “gambit” and has a

systematic survey of chess openings. One of these is the Ruy Lopez (Spanish) 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5, which he regarded as an improvement on Damiano's 3 ♙c4. According to Damiano, 2...♘c6 was the strongest reply, but according to Lopez it was not – due to 3 ♙b5.

Interestingly, it is still unclear today whether 3 ♙b5 is stronger than 3 ♙c4, particularly because of 3...♘f6 (the Berlin Wall), but Lopez does not mention this reply. He only suggests 3...d6 (Steinitz's Defence as it was later called) as an alternative to 3...♙c5, which is the main variation. Lopez's survey of many openings, especially the King's Gambit, led to chess history regarding him as the father of chess theory. In the final two parts of the book he analyses the games published by Damiano.

Ruy Lopez was ahead of his time because he understood the value of the centre. He advocated 3 ♙b5, with the idea of exerting pressure on the e5-pawn and playing it in a game in Madrid 1566. This made him 300 years ahead of his time, as his move only became popular around 1870 when Steinitz's classical period began. He also liked placing the c2-pawn on c3 and suggested 1 e4 e5 2 c3 ♘f6 3 ♔c2, preferring to move the d2-pawn to d3 rather than to d4, thereby producing a slower game than those seen in the old Italian school, which advocated a classical centre with pawns on e4 and d4 followed by a swift attack. It was Wilhelm Steinitz who, more than 300 years after this ingenious idea by Lopez, fully understood the latent attacking potential of a pawn centre consisting of pawns on e4, d3, and c3.

Lopez was very successful at the beginning of his career and remained the strongest player in the world for 20 years. He defeated the young law student Giovanni Leonardo di Bona (di Cutra) (1542-1587) in Rome in 1560. Leonardo was a talented, strong blindfold

player and a representative master of the more aggressive Italian school. Here is a fragment of their meeting:

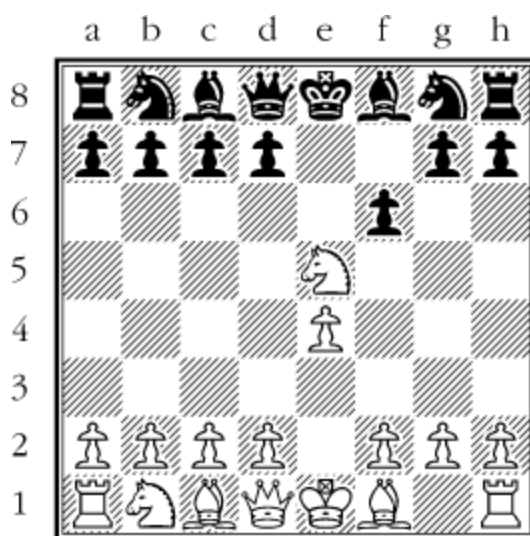
Ruy Lopez de Segura – Leonardo di Bona

Rome 1560

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 f6?

The Damiano defence is incorrect because of the many weaknesses it creates on the kingside, especially along the a2-g8 and h5-e8 diagonals. In fact White can exploit these weaknesses immediately.

3 ♘xe5!



3...fxe5?

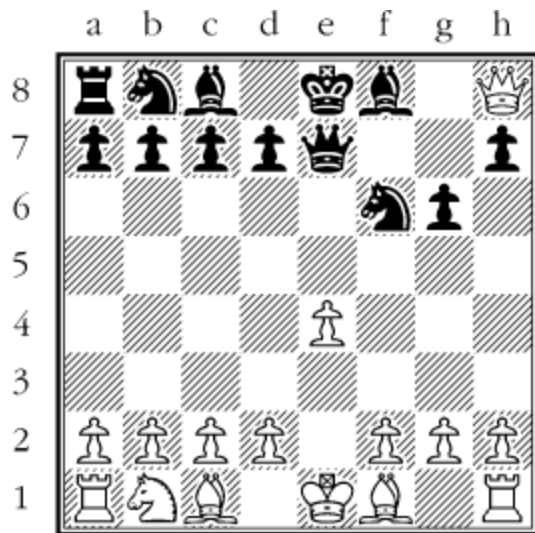
3...♙e7 4 ♘f3 d5 was necessary, although after the sequence 5 d3 dxe4 6 dxe4 ♙xe4+ 7 ♗e2 ♘c6 8 o-o ♗d7 9 ♘c3 ♙g6? (9...♙f5 was better but would lose the c7-pawn by force after 10 ♘b5! o-o-o 11 ♗d3 ♙h5 12 ♗f4.) 10 ♘e5! White won the queen for two minor pieces in Schiffers – Chigorin, St. Petersburg 1897, even if surprisingly the game ended in a draw after 34 moves.

4 ♙h5+ g6

4...♔e7 would lose to 5 ♚xe5+ ♔f7 6 ♜c4+ d5 7 ♜xd5+ ♔g6 8 h4 h6 9 ♜xb7! as 9...♜xb7? can be answered by 10 ♚f5 mate.

5 ♚xe5+ ♔e7 6 ♚xh8 ♜f6

This move was an improvement on Damiano's analysis. The idea is to keep the queen out of play, but Lopez proved it to be incorrect.



7 d4 ♔f7

Black prepares 8...♜c6 and 9...♜g7 to trap the queen in the corner, but this is easily prevented.

8 ♜c4+ d5 9 ♜xd5+ ♜xd5

The queen is now able to capture on h7 with an attack, which according to a note by Lopez actually occurred in a game he eventually won.

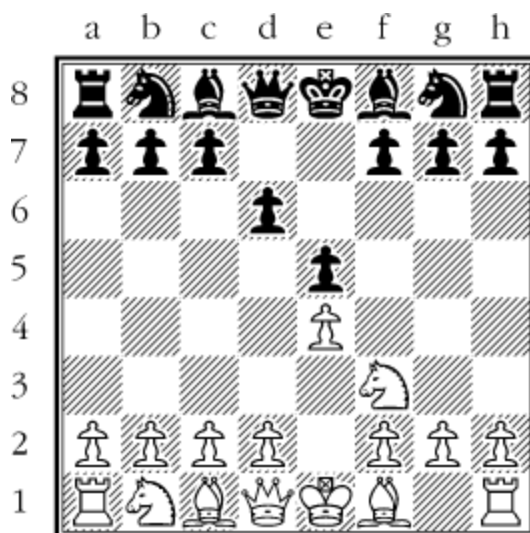
In Madrid during 1574-1575 his strength declined since he lost two matches against the above mentioned Leonardo di Bona and Paolo Boi (1528-1598). The last named also played strong blindfold chess, at which it is said that he could take on three players simultaneously while chatting to bystanders.

In a match against Leonardo di Bona two game fragments have been preserved and one can clearly see that Ruy Lopez was a precursor of Philidor's slower play. Here is one of these fragments:

Leonardo di Bona – Ruy Lopez de Segura

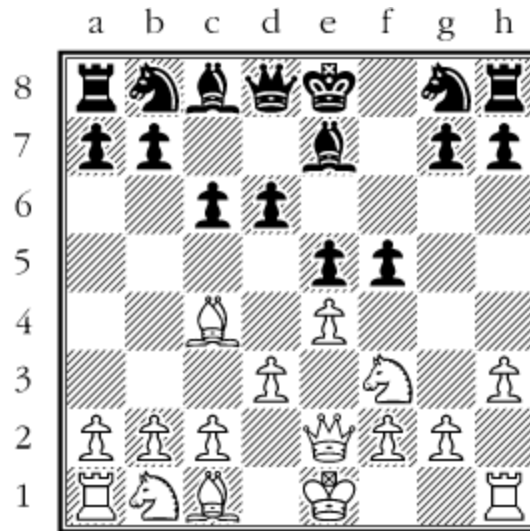
Madrid 1575

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 d6



Lopez avoids his own pet variation 2...♗c6 3 ♖b5. This alternative defence of the e5-pawn was later called the Philidor Defence. The drawback is that the f8-bishop remains passive behind its pawn chain. However the main idea is to strike at the e4-pawn with 3...f5.

3 ♗c4 f5 4 d3 ♗e7 5 ♔e2 c6 6 h3

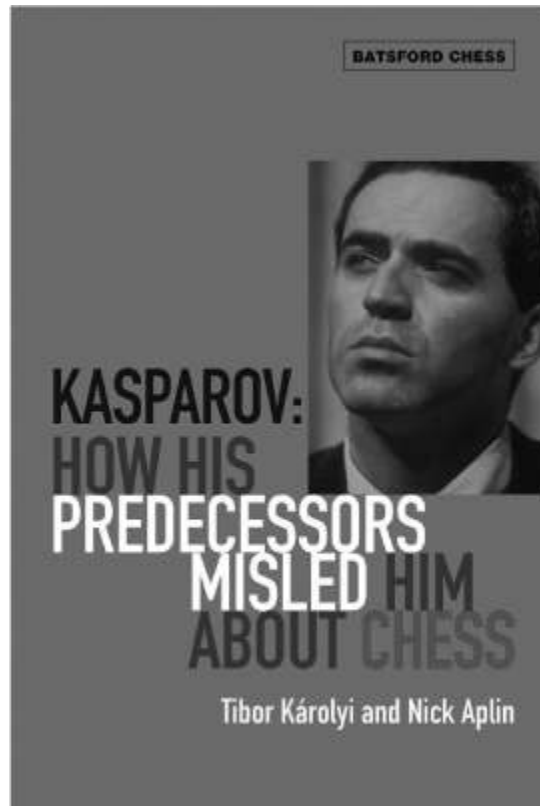


6...f4

Black creates a pawn chain with 6...f4, which Philidor might well have played as he liked such pawn formations. However, the main idea for Philidor was to exchange on e4 and gain a pawn majority in the centre as well as pressure on the f-file.

7 g3 fxg3 8 fxg3 ♔c7 9 ♘c3 ♙f6 10 b4

And White eventually won.

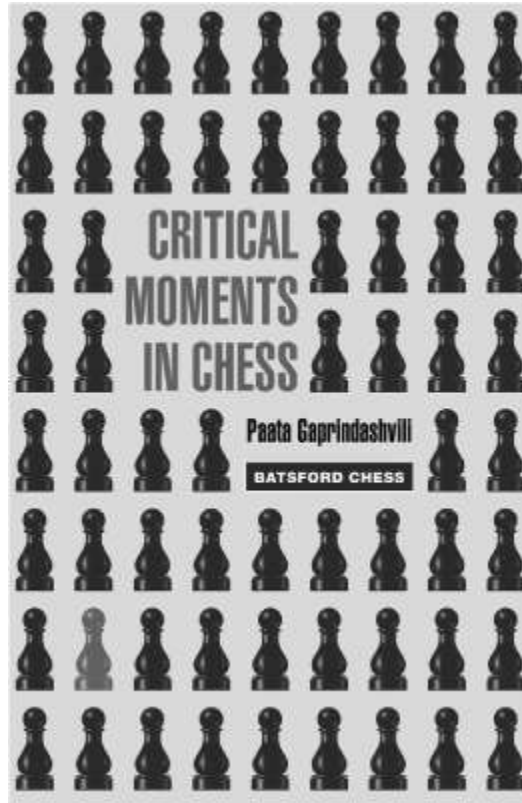


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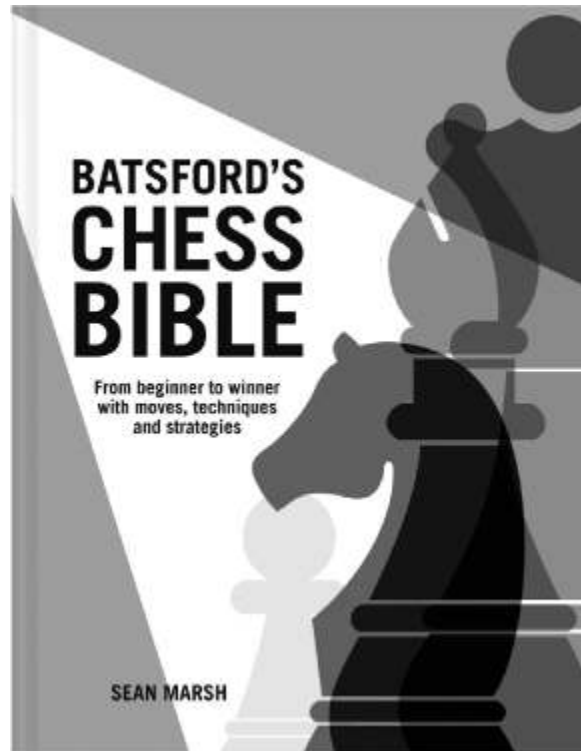


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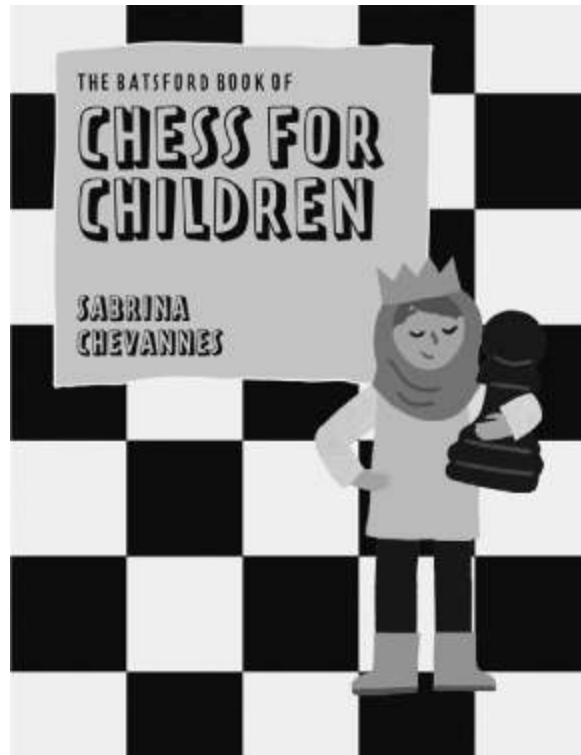


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