

As the title of this article indicates, this article is geared towards being instructive for younger players who are looking to improve. I hope to give some valuable insights into how certain parts of the game work and share some of my own over the board experience with these ideas. Each time I hope to have some particular aspect of the game to focus on and discuss, whether that be a phase of the game in general, a particular type of game, such as very tactical struggles or more positional games, or possibly even psychological elements of the game. While I will try to communicate these in my annotations to the given games regardless of the theme, I will try to focus most of my thoughts on the given topic so as to avoid going too far off on a tangent. In addition to covering themes, I am considering doing features on some of the better junior players in state if they will allow me to do so. I hope to be able to write this column on a relatively regular basis, and right now I am hoping that I can manage to get out a new article every two months or so.

As this is the opening article of this column, I thought that the opening phase of the game would be a most appropriate theme. Since for now there are no features or other coverage of events, this month's article will be all instructive games. In keeping with gearing this article towards junior players, I will try to have a good portion of the instructive games featured in this article come from junior or scholastics tournament, or at least have one junior player involved in the game. While this column is geared towards the younger players among us, I hope that everyone who reads this will find some the material presented in the following games useful and entertaining.

This month my games make up most of the article, which allows me to comment much more on thought processes and psychological elements than I might otherwise be able to. However, in the future I hope to be able to incorporate much more variety with regards to the players than there is in this month's article.

The Opening

The opening phase is when we develop our pieces and prepare our armies for the battle to come. However, development is not just about getting the pieces out. The pieces need to be placed where they contribute to an overall plan and affect the relevant features of a position. Sometimes one of the armies involved fails to develop successfully and succumbs to a quick attack--not even surviving until the middlegame.

While there is an incredible amount of opening theory these days, most players do not have the time to study but a fraction of the theory available. Furthermore, studying theory requires more than just memorization of lines, as opponents who do not know the theory rarely follow the main lines very far. Studying the opening should be more about typical ideas of the openings that one plays rather than rote memorization of lines. However, most lines will help to illustrate the themes of a given opening even if they are slightly offbeat.

Surviving the opening phase is crucial to winning the game, but if the opponent is actively looking for chances it can be difficult to survive after just a few inaccuracies. Let's look at some examples of the game being decided in the opening phase.

J Cope (1784)-D Chapman (1255)

Winter Scholastic Chess Challenge 2005 (1.1) 2.12.05

1. Nf3 d5 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 Nc6 4. 0-0 e5 (D)

This is the Pirc Reversed. The extra tempo gives White a much better position than Black has in the same line of the Pirc proper, as White's extra tempo means that Black cannot launch a quick attack without White making a serious mistake of some sort.

Note that White is playing a hypermodern strategy, while Black is playing more classically. White is attempting to control the center from afar with his developed pieces, in particular the bishop on g2, while Black is occupying the center with pawns. Both strategies can be effective; the winner of a battle between the two strategies will be the one who carries out his strategy more effectively.

5. d3 Be7 6. Nbd2 Bf5 7. c4! (D)

One of the virtues of this opening line for White is flexibility. Typically in this opening White will play for an e4 push to challenge Black's center pawns, but here Black has devoted two pieces to controlling e4 in addition to his e5-pawn. The problem for Black is that his pawns can be attacked from a different direction. The text move effectively challenges the center and gives White pawn pressure on Black's center.

When a player obtains a pawn center as Black has in the game, then he must put all of his energies behind supporting it. If the player with the pawn center can make it indestructible, it will control important squares and cramp the opponent's pieces. However, if the pawn center is not adequately supported it can become a target. This is what happens in this game.

7 ... e4?

Up until now Black had played relatively well, but this move is much too optimistic. One of the virtues of a pawn center is its ability to control the squares in front of it. Hence, one must be careful when pushing these pawns because in doing so the pawns can lose control over important squares. In this game, perhaps the real problem behind this move is that it loses time. Black's center is being challenged and, instead of defending it, he plays a pawn move that contributes to its demise.

8. Nh4!

Simple and strong. This move unleashes the g2-bishop and gains time by attacking the f5-bishop. This brings up a point about moves that attack something: in all phases of the game, including the opening, a move should not be played just because it indiscriminately attacks something. Instead, it should only be played if it improves one's position in addition to attacking something. Here, White's move is justified, as his knight was under attack and he now has serious tactical threats that Black must deal with.

8 ... Qd7?

This move defends the bishop but walks into a tactical combination. 8 ... Bg4 was indicated when White has a small advantage because of the crumbling Black center, but Black is still very much in the game.

9 cxd5! +- (D)

Decisive. Black either loses two pawns or a piece, and in an interesting reversal, White gets a powerful center either way!

9 ... Nxd5

Better was 9 ... Ne5 when Black only loses two pawns, but White's advantage is overwhelming in any case.

10. Nxf5 Qxf5 11. dxe4 Qe5 12. exd5 Nd4 13. e4 0-0? 14. Nc4 Qf6 15. e5 Qg6 16. Qxd4 f6 17. d6 cxd6 18. exd6 Rad8? 19. Bd5+! Kh8 20. dxe7 (D)

1-0

Now let's look at an example in a more classical opening.

J Cope (1865)-J Blanche (1523)

Denker 2006 (5.22) 8.11.06

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 d6 4. Bb5

This is actually not the best move in the position. 3 ... d6 is bad because after 4 dxe5, dxe5; 5 Qxd8+ Black must give up the right to castle to avoid losing his e-pawn. However, I preferred to transpose into the Steinz Variation of the Ruy Lopez, a little played variation by Black players because it gives White a lasting edge.

4 ... a6? (D)

Here my opponent rewards me for my opening choice. While Black often plays 3 ... a6 in response to Bb5 by White, here it is bad because White has already played d2-d4, giving him extra pressure on the center. 4 ... Bd7 would lead to the main line of the Steinz Variation, where White tends to have an edge because of his space advantage, which gives him an easier development.

5. Bxc6+

Removing the defender of the e5-pawn. White has a clear, almost winning advantage on move 5!

5 ... bxc6 6. dxe5 Bg4 7. exd6 cxd6 8. h3 Bxf3 9. Qxf3 (D)

White's extra pawn, two bishops, and slight lead in development give him a clear advantage.

9 ... Be7 10. 0-0 Bf6?

This is much too slow. Black falls further behind in development, and now White can add an attack on Black's king in the center to his list of advantages.

11 Nc3

A solid move, but White has much better in 11 e5! which blows open the position while Black's king is still two moves away from castling.

11 ... Ne7 12. Bf4 Ng6 13. e5! (D)

White blows open the center and exposes Black's king to a direct and brutal assault.

13 ... Bxe5

Better was 13 ... Nxe5; 14 Bxe5, Bxe5; 15 Qxc6+ forcing White to trade bishop for knight before getting his check on c6.

14. Qxc6+ Qd7?

My opponent calculates that he gains counterplay by sacrificing his a8-rook, but this ultimately comes to nothing. Better was 14 ... Kf8 desperately trying to get the king to some kind of shelter.

15. Qxa8+ Ke7 16. Qe4 Nxf4 17. Nd5+ Nxd5 18. Qxd5 (D)

White has an extra exchange in addition to an extra pawn, and furthermore Black's king is still in peril in the middle of the board. This adds up to a winning position for White.

18 ... Rb8 19. Rfe1 Kf8? 20. Rxe5! Qc7 21. Re2 Rxb2 22. Rae1 Rb8 23. Qe4 Qd7 24. Qxh7 Qxh3 25. gxh3 Re8 26. Rxe8# (D)

This was the first game done in Round 5 of the Denker, and my quick win gave me chance to play a nice round of golf at Oak Brook Golf Club, in which I played much better than I did overall at the chess tournament. This was certainly the day of the trip that was the most fun for me!

1-0

Now let's take a break from my games and show that lower rated players are perfectly capable of understanding these concepts as well--including understanding general opening principles and tactical stuff.

M Camp (755)-J Punches (1020)

Pearl Harbor Scholastic 2004 (2.2) 12.4.04

1. e4 Nc6 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 d5?

While White has played three solid moves to open the game, Black has made two pawn moves whose result could have been accomplished in one. Black has essentially 'passed' on one move, giving White more time in addition to his first move.

4. Nc3 dxe4 5. Nxe4 Bg4 6. Bb5 e6 7. c4 (D)

Despite Black's mistake, he has salvaged a reasonable game by focusing on development and the center again after his mistake on move 3.

7 ... e5?

However, after this move, Black is in serious trouble. Two wasted moves in the opening is just too much to bear in an open game like this, especially when the other player already has the advantage of the first move.

8. d5 a6 9. Ba4 Bb4+ 10. Bd2 Bxd2+ 11. Qxd2, b5? (D)

After 11 ... Bxf3 12. gxf3 b5 13. cxb5 Nd4 (D), Black is still alive because his knight just manages to escape from the pin and creates the threat of a fork on f3 in the process. However, White still has a pull even in this position. Now, however, Black just loses material for no compensation.

12. cxb5 axb5? 13. Bxb5 Ne7 14. Nxe5!

There is no reason to rush the capture of the knight on c6—it isn't going anywhere.

14 ... Rb8 15. Nxc6! Qxd5 16. Nxb8+?

More precise is 16. Qxd5 Nxd5 17. Nxb8+ when White wins more material.

16 ... Bd7?? 17. Bxd7+ Kf8 18. Qxd5 Nxd5 (D)

...and White went onto win with his massive material advantage.

1-0

So far we have looked only at White victories in these miniatures. However, while Black does face more danger in the opening because White has the first move, this does not mean that White cannot suffer a quick defeat. In the following game, White makes a couple of careless moves and soon finds himself with a lost position.

G Templeton (1004)-J Cope (1786)

2004 State Scholastic Championship (2.2) 3.27.04

1. e4 c5 2. d4

The move 2. Nf3 is the most common in the Sicilian, when White plans to recapture after a trade on d4 with the knight. White needs to gain something out of this pawn trade, because he is trading a center pawn, his d-pawn, for Black's c-pawn, which is a wing pawn. The resulting pawn structure is fundamentally favorable for Black, and GM Bent Larsen has gone as far as saying that d4 is a blunder in the Sicilian. Most disagree with him, however, because White gains real attacking chances after this trade. Without the preliminary Ng1-f3, White does not get his knight to d4 after the pawn trade, which means that his compensation for having only one center pawn to Black's two is somewhat lessened. While this move is certainly playable, it is probably better to go into the Smith-Morra Gambit after 2 ... cxd4 3. c3 dxc3 4. Nxc3 than follow the line played in the game, which gives Black extra time to develop.

2 ... cxd4 3. Qxd4 Nc6

This move is the problem with White's recapture on d4 with the queen. Black gains a tempo for development, which greatly reduces the chance that an early attack by White will succeed. This gives Black a better chance to exploit his advantageous pawn structure without excessive interference from White. This position is much different than the one encountered after 1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 because then after 4 ... Nc6 White has the option of 5. Bb5, retaining his queen on its central post at the cost of the two bishops. White has no such option in the game variation, and his central control suffers for it.

4. Qa4 Nf6 (D) 5. Nf3 e6 6. a3

This tentative move gives Black time to gain a real lead in development. Here White must be consistent with his earlier play if he hopes to have any chance at an advantage, and in fact he must take care that he does not fall too far behind in development.

6 ... Bc5 7. Bb5?

Although this is a developing move, it does little to solve White's opening problems. White is vulnerable, particularly on the f2-square, and this does nothing to ease its defense. 7 e5 was indicated, when after 7 ... Nd5 Black's king knight cannot go to g4 to aid an attack on f2.

7 ... Qb6! (D)

This applies intolerable pressure to f2 and gives Black a clear advantage. White will lose at least a pawn, and will also have an unsafe king.

8. 0-0 Ng4 9. Be3?

Giving up. However, White had no way to defend f2 and 9. Nbd2 Nxf2 was also unpalatable.

9 ... Bxe3! (D)

More accurate than 9 ... Nxe3. Black preserves the possibility of a discovered check after the exchange of bishops, which gives him a chance to win the exchange in addition to his extra pawn.

10. fxe3 Nxe3 11. Rf2? Ng4 12. h3 Qxf2+ 13. Kh1 Ne3 (D)

The final position does not show a pretty picture for the White pieces.

0-1

So far we have focused on how not playing with a plan and not developing one's pieces in the opening can lead to a quick defeat. However, even the best of us come out of the opening with a worse or even miserable position from time to time, and it is important to not give up even in the face of overwhelming odds.

This brings up a related topic of when a player should resign. Never resign if you have any play left in a position! GM Larsen has said that you should only resign if all the spectators understand why you are giving up, and I think that this is a reasonable assessment. If your friends don't understand why you should give up, then why throw in the towel? However, even further, I think that as long as you have any realistic outside hope of winning, then it is perfectly reasonable to play on. For instance, if you drop a piece in the opening, there is no reason to resign right away. I have seen many games, including some of my own where I made weird mistakes in the opening, turn around and end up in favor of the person who lost the piece earlier. In fact, we will look at an example of this in one of the following games.

In this next game, I make a definite mistake on move 10 which gives my opponent a clear advantage. However, I manage to make life difficult for my opponent, and eventually the strain of finding the correct move wears on him.

C Buynak (1250)-J Cope (1774)

2004 Monte Cassino Scholastic (4.1) 11.18.04

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6

This move introduces the Dragon Variation, one of the more controversial openings that is often played today. It is 'controversial' in that some are not totally convinced that it is sound. The Dragon is one of the sharpest opening variations, and hence both sides must play very accurately, as one slip can cost the game. The Dragon and Accelerated Dragon are very popular among younger players due to their aggressive and uncompromising nature.

This variation also shows the importance of developing with a plan. Black wants to develop his dark squared bishop, but he does not like its prospects on e7. Instead, Black decides to develop the bishop on the long diagonal, where it will be more active. The problem with this plan is that it takes time and also gives White a target for a pawn storm on the kingside in the g6-pawn.

6. Be3 Bg7 7. f3

This move is the start of the Yugoslav Attack, the most dangerous attacking scheme against the Dragon. White sees the weakness of Black's kingside pawn structure and wants to launch an attack in that sector. To do this, he must first secure the center and then find a home for his king. In the Yugoslav, White castles queenside and then advances his pawns on the kingside. This move bolsters the e4 pawn, covers the g4-square against annoying knight invasions, and prepares to play g2-g4 at some point.

7 ... 0-0 8. Qd2 Nc6 9. 0-0-0 (D)

This move is one of two main ideas in this position. The first is 9 Bc4, when White's idea is to prevent Black from achieving the move d6-d5, which frees his position. After this, both sides continue with their respective wing attacks. In this variation, White allows d6-d5 but counts on being able to generate play in the center.

9 ... d5 10. h4!?

This offbeat move threw me off stride. Normal is 10 exd5, but instead Chris plays the text move, which seems at first glance to be inconsistent with his last move, but Black must be careful anyway...

10 ... h5

Sometimes knowing a lot of theory can be a real problem. I have played the Dragon for years, but this was the first time that I had encountered 10 h4 in the 9 0-0-0 variation. Now, instead of continuing logically, I mixed ideas of this variation and the Soltis Variation beginning with 9 Bc4 in my head. This move does very little for Black. While it does prevent h5, this is not such a terrible threat if the center breaks open as well. The problem is that Black faces much more danger along the d-file if he is not careful than I had anticipated in the game. 10 ... dxe4, clearing up any possible pins on the d-file, is much more to the point.

11. Nxc6 bxc6 12. Bh6 Rb8 13. Bxg7 Kxg7 14. exd5 (D)

White has an advantage here, as there is no clear way for Black to recover his pawn. Sensing that normal play would not be enough, I threw caution to the wind and played all out for an attack.

14 ... Qa5!

This move gets an exclamation mark for psychological reasons. White now must wade through various tactics against his king to retain his advantage. The initiative is often of much more value in club level games than it is in professional games because defensive technique is much better at higher levels, so such a position often turns favorable for the side with the pressure.

15. dxc6 Be6! (D)

Instead of recovering one of his two lost pawns with 15 ... Qb6, Black develops as quickly as possible to generate threats against the White king.

16. b3 Qa3+ 17. Kb1 Rfc8 18. Bb5 a6 19. Ba4!

White consolidates his position on the queenside, and it is now very difficult for Black to make progress. However, White has some problems undertaking positive action of his own, as his minor pieces are tied down to defense.

19 ... Qb4 (D) 20. Ne4??

The strain of defense finally takes its toll, and White makes the losing error of the game. While Chris understandably wanted to switch from defense to attack, this move leaves the a4-bishop hanging due to the pin on the b-file. After...

20 ... Qxa4 21. Nxf6 exf6 (D)

... Black went on to win with his material advantage.

0-1

The last game in this installment shows that there are often ways to continue undertaking positive action even when down material.

L Shaffer (1050)-M Camp (755)

2004 Pearl Harbor Scholastic (3.2) 12.4.04

Going into the last round of this tournament, Matt was a point behind Shaffer and needed to win to tie for first place. Since head-to-head was not the first tiebreak, Matt could not win the tournament even if he won this game. However, he could still tie for first in a section where he was the lowest rated player, so there was still plenty to play for.

1. f4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. b3 Bf5 4. d3 (D)

This move is not harmonious with White's previous three moves. White's plan seems to be to fianchetto the dark squared bishop to exert maximum pressure on the e5-square, but the move d2-d3 leaves an unnecessary dark squared weakness on e3 once the bishop is on b2.

4 ... e6 5. Bb2 Bd6 6. g3, 0-0

At some point in the last move or two ...Ng4 would have been very annoying for White, exploiting the weakness of the dark square complex in White's camp. However, Matt continues to develop solidly instead of undertaking ambitious but more risky ideas.

7. Nc3 c5 8. Nd2 Nc6 9. e4 dxe4 10. dxe4 Nxe4?? (D)

Occasionally Matt fails to pay attention at the board, and this is one of those times. This move simply loses a piece, as White had the e4-pawn adequately defended. After 10 ... Bg4 Black has a perfectly playable game.

11. Ndx4 Be7 12. Bd3?

While this move is not necessarily bad, White gives up the chance to exchange queens while up heavily on material. An extra piece should be more than enough to win an endgame, but White gives up the opportunity to get rid of Black's dangerous piece. This begins the second phase of this game, where Black slowly improves his position while White undertakes practically no positive action.

The reason that such an exchange favors the player who is ahead in material can be illustrated like this: if you have four computer games and your friend has five, then both of you should have enough to be entertained, although your friend will have some extra flexibility. However, if your friend has one computer game and you have none, then he will still be having fun while you have nothing to play! Hence, a material advantage takes on more significance as pieces go off of the board.

12 ... Qa5 13. Qd2 Rad8 14. Qe3 Nd4 (D)

Over the last few moves, Black has slowly been improving his pieces, while White has done nothing but a queen shuffle that has left that piece in a position that is still not altogether safe.

15. 0-0-0 Bf6?!

This allows unnecessary exchanges.

16. Nxf6+ gxf6 17. Bxf5 exf5 18. Na4?!

Absolutely unnecessary. This move gives up control of the e2-square and also sidelines the knight, which has so far been important in defending the queenside.

18 ... Rfe8! (D)

All of a sudden White is struggling to find decent moves despite still having an extra piece. There is not a truly satisfactory square for the queen.

19. Qc3??

Even so, this is NOT the answer. This move gives away the game and a possible outright first place finish.

Best is probably 19. Qf2, when after 19 ... Re2 White can play the surprising 20. Bxd4! (D), trading in the advantage of a piece for the less advantageous rook and two minor pieces against a queen. The problem for Black is that this eliminates his most dangerous attacking units and gives White time to exploit Black's positional problems, such as the ridiculous tripled f-pawns. However, Black has succeeded in limiting his disadvantage.

19 ... Ne2+

Matt notices the mistake.

20. Kb1 Nxc3+ (D)

...and Black went on to win with his material advantage.

0-1

That wraps up the Junior Chess Corner article for this month. If junior players would like to submit games to be featured in future JCC articles, then I can be contacted via OSCO at admin@oksches.org. Thank you for reading this article, and I wish everyone safe and happy holidays and the best of luck at the chessboard.