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# starting out: the nimzo-indian

CHRIS WARD



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# starting out: the nimzo-indian

Ideal for those wanting to understand the basics of the Nimzo-Indian.

The Nimzo-Indian is one of the soundest and most popular defences against 1 d4, offering Black the chance to unbalance the game early on and play for a win without undue risk. Advocates include virtually all of the world's top players, including Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kramnik, Vishy Anand and Anatoly Karpov. In this revolutionary book, Grandmaster Chris Ward revisits the basic principles behind the Nimzo-Indian and its many variations. Throughout this easy-to-read guide the reader is helped along by a wealth of notes, tips and warnings from the author, while key strategies, ideas and tactics for both sides are clearly illustrated.

- Written by a battle-hardened Nimzo-Indian player
- All the important variations are covered
- A back-to-basics look at one of the most important openings

**Chris Ward** is a Grandmaster and a former British Champion. He is also a highly successful coach and a well-respected writer. His earlier works for Everyman include *Improve Your Opening Play* and the best-selling *It's Your Move*.



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*To my Mum, of course!*

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## Introduction

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 (Diagram 1)



Diagram 1  
A solid move

Don't be fooled by 4 e3. Commonly acknowledged as the Rubinstein Variation, White may appear to settle for advancing this centre pawn just one square, but advancing it to e4 (and possibly even e5 a little later) certainly hasn't been ruled out. The c1-bishop is temporarily blocked in but its partner on f1 is raring to go.

This chapter focuses on the response 4...b6, which I myself tend to favour. Generally the idea is to fianchetto the bishop on b7 from where it pressurises White's kingside as well as maintaining further control over the e4-square. Another option that Black has is to overshoot the bishop to a6 from where it can attack White's c4-pawn. This may be particularly effective if White has doubled c-pawns and has difficulty defending the further forward of the two.



**WARNING:** The move ...b7-b6 certainly doesn't rule out the participation of the black c- or d-pawns. However, regarding the latter Black should always watch out for Qa4+ which, if overlooked, could spell the end for a bishop on b4.

After 4...b6 I'd like to consider two different main paths: 5 Bd3 and 5 Nge2.

## White Plays 5 Bd3

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Bd3 (Diagram 2)

This is considered more accurate than 5 Nf3 as White immediately gets to grips with the e4-square and thus, for example, prevents the immediate reply 5...Ne4.



**Diagram 2**  
Scrutinising e4



**Diagram 3**  
White must budge the black knight

### 5...Bb7

The most natural reaction and consistent with the last move. Regarding my last warning, obviously not 5...d5?? 6 Qa4+ when Black drops a whole piece.

### 6 Nf3

Still the most popular continuation. However, protecting the g2-pawn via 6 f3 has been tried as has 6 Nge2, essentially offering the pawn as a sacrifice. Regarding the latter, 6...Bxg2 7 Rg1 Bf3 leads to a very interesting position. Instead of regaining the pawn with 8 Rxc7 Nh5 9 Rg1 Qh4!?, perhaps White should leave it as a gambit with 8 Qc2.

### 6...Ne4

The best way to ensure that White doesn't advance his pawn here is to insert a piece on this key square first. Further pressure is added to c3 and the black f-pawn is now able to have its say in the middle-game.

### 7 Qc2

White defends his knight whilst simultaneously attacking Black's. This looks obvious although in recent times White has favoured trying to delete this move altogether by tendering the pawn sacrifice 7 0-0. As it happens, that move order is the subject of our first illustrative game.

### 7...f5

Black stubbornly refuses to budge. Advancing the f-pawn also introduces other options for Black. For example, after castling the rook 'swinger' ...Rf6-h6(or g6) could be a good attacking weapon.

**TIP:** If Black has it in mind to play ...Bxc3, resulting in White obtaining two c-pawns, then he may prefer ...f7-f5 over ...d7-d5 to control the e4-square. The latter would enable White to easily undouble his



pawns. Yes, a timely **cxd5** and **c3-c4** would also see White emerging with more centre pawns.

#### 8 0-0 Bxc3

White's last move unpinned his knight and thus pressurised e4 again. Hence the time had come to part with the bishop. The alternative **8...Nxc3 9 bxc3 Be7** would have allowed White to gain the initiative with **10 e4**.

#### 9 bxc3 0-0 (Diagram 3)

### Plans

Natural developing ideas for Black include **...d7-d6** and **...Nbd7** with the knight on a good track that doesn't obstruct the bishop. One possibility is to try to aim for **...e6-e5** while a kingside attack, possibly involving the previously mentioned **...Rf6** swinger, is certainly not outrageous. This is particularly the case if White moves his f3-knight allowing the aggressive **...Qh4**. An amusing continuation that White should avoid is **10 Nd2 Qh4 11 g3?! Ng5 12 gxh4?? Nh3** mate, but he can't be criticised for retreating his knight. A priority should be to budge the e4-knight with **f2-f3** and if he can ever arrange **e3-e4** then all the better. Another idea that he may look out for is the opportunity to play **c4-c5** in order to undouble his pawns.

**NOTE:** Unless it nets a pawn, it is rarely a good idea for White to trade his bishop for the knight on e4 as both **...Bxe4**, dominating the light squares, and **...fxe4**, opening up the f-file, are attractive replies.



## White Plays 5 Nge2

#### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Nge2 (Diagram 4)



Diagram 4

A replacement is at hand!

With his last move White offers some extra support to the c3-knight

so that he is no longer troubled by the threat of doubled pawns. An ideal scenario for White is to have Black play ...Bxc3 so that he can just recapture with his knight. Following simple development, the 'two bishops' advantage can be claimed with no pawn structure blemishes.



**NOTE:** When the advantage of the 'two bishops' is referred to, the implication is that one side has a pair of bishops whilst the opponent may instead have one and a knight or perhaps two knights. If you have a bishop pair then it is rare that they are both bad and they can be positively awesome in an open position.

**QUESTION 2:** What is an 'open' position?

5...Ne4

A very principled move as Black maintains the pressure on the c3-knight. After this the threat of pawn doubling is still there. The same is not true after 5...Bb7 and thus 6 a3 is best met with 6...Be7. Nevertheless, as no pieces have been traded off, the space advantage after 7 d5 0-0 8 e4 leaves White with the upper hand despite his slightly deficient development.

Another idea which is sometimes employed here (as well as in similar positions) is 5...Ba6. Then a valid concept is that after 6 a3 Bxc3+ 7 Nxc3 d5, Black could hope to exchange light-squared bishops thus ultimately leaving himself with a knight against a bad bishop.



**NOTE:** The colour of the squares of a side's fixed pawns determine whether a bishop is 'good' or 'bad'. To work in harmony it is preferable that the pawns control one set of coloured squares whilst the bishop controls the other. A bishop is defined as 'bad' if its pawns are blocked on the same colour.

As it would be undesirable for White to be left with only a dark-squared bishop when he has pawns on dark squares, he shouldn't play b4 and 8 b3 would successfully retain some tension in the position.

6 Qc2

Perfectly playable instead is 6 Bd2; after 6...Nxd2 7 Qxd2 0-0 8 a3 Be7 White would have a space advantage but rather unusually it would be Black who has the bishop pair.



**TIP:** With a white knight on e2 rather than f3, both sides should consider ...Qh4 as a move.

With reference to the above tip, after 6 a3? Qh4! 7 g3 Qf6 the forced 8 f4 leaves White positionally all over the place.

6...Bb7 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3 Nxc3 9 Qxc3 0-0 (Diagram 5)

White has achieved his aim of obtaining the bishop pair without damaging his pawn structure, although now he is lagging behind in development.





**Diagram 5**  
No doubled pawns

## Plans

White must tread very carefully in trying to get his bishops out. For example, it would be very easy to suggest 10 f3?! (blunting the b7-g2 diagonal) with 11 Bd3 and 12 0-0 to follow, but there is a flaw. Black has 10...Qh4+! 11 g3 Qh5 hitting White's f-pawn twice. Upon 12 e4, very awkward is 12...f5.

With that in mind, White might prefer developing his other bishop on b2 first via 10 b3 or 10 b4. If he castles queenside then, aside from the obvious f2-f3 and e3-e4 plan, he could certainly consider offering the g2-pawn as a sacrifice.

On Black's part, developing the knight on d7 after ...d7-d6, from where it could transfer to f6 after the typical ...f7-f5 push, looks reasonable. The side of the board on which the white king opts to rest should influence Black's thoughts on which side of the board to concentrate his efforts.

## Illustrative Games

### Game 1

□ B.Martin ■ Ward

Oakham Masters 1994

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Bd3 Bb7 6 Nf3 Ne4 7 0-0 f5  
Black chooses to keep the e4-square bolstered rather than accepting White's offered pawn.  
8 d5

**TIP:** This pawn push is a reasonable plan for White in the Nimzo when a black bishop is fianchettoed on the queenside. As well as blocking out this piece from the action, White pressurises the e6-



and f5-pawns. Furthermore, a white knight now has the attractive d4-square available.

### 8...Bxc3

With White again threatening to win a pawn on e4, it was decision time for Black.

### 9 bxc3 Na6

After, say, 9...exd5 10 cxd5 Nxc3 11 Qc2 Nxd5 12 Bxf5 White has good play for his sacrificed pawn with his dark-squared bishop ready to take up an active post along the b2-g7 diagonal. The drawback of White's 8th move is that it conceded the c5-square. This is an excellent home for a black knight and in fact the immediate 9...Nc5 may be more accurate.

### 10 Nd4 Nec5 11 Bc2??

This retreat is too time-wasting, a more dynamic plan being to try to get in the break e3-e4 a little quicker.

11...0-0 12 f3 Qf6 13 Bd2 g6 14 e4 e5 15 Ne2 f4! (Diagram 6)



Diagram 6

A delight for knights!



Diagram 7

The g-file is where it's at!



**WARNING:** White must be very sure about his chances before allowing Black to block up the position in this manner as this type of pawn structure is more favourable for knights.

### 16 Rf2 g5



**TIP:** Often it is best to concentrate your efforts on the side of the board to which your fixed pawns lean.

### 17 Kh1 Rf7

With the attacking break ...g6-g5-g4 imminent (the fixed pawns on e5 and f4 lean towards the kingside), Black starts to rally his troops. The g-file is going to be all-important.

### 18 Qf1 d6 19 g3 Bc8 20 gxf4

If White tried to block things up with 20 g4 then Black would turn to the pawn break ...h7-h5, with his major pieces likely to invade along the h-file instead.

20...gxf4 21 Rg2+ Kh8 22 Qf2 Bh3 23 Rgg1 Nb7

The g-file is very appetising but Black hasn't forgotten that when doubled, the c4-pawn is a natural target too. Black has plenty of time and sets about maximising the use of his knights.

24 c5

Frustrated, White offloads a pawn in order to try and increase the scope of his bishop pair.

24...Naxc5 25 c4 Nd7 26 Rae1 (Diagram 7)

White would have preferred to have doubled rooks on the open g-file but, due to the advanced black f-pawn, g1 is the only safe square available for use.

26...Nf8!

The start of an excellent plan.

27 Nc1 Ng6 28 Nd3 Rg8 29 Bd1 Rfg7

Had Black switched a rook to the g-file on move 26 then White could have solved some problems by trading off both sets of rooks.

**TIP: When you have a space advantage, you should try to avoid fair swaps.**

30 Be2 Nh4

This knight has covered a lot of distance but has found a perfect square.

31 Rxc7 Rxc7 (Diagram 8)



**Diagram 8**  
An inevitable invasion

32 Bf1

Black's superior control of the g2-square rendered 32 Rg1 unplayable.

**32...Bg2+ 33 Bxg2 Rxb2**

Rather than let his bishop go, White now opts to part company with his queen. The battle is lost.

**34 Qxb2 Qxb2 35 Kxb2 Qg5+ 36 Kh1 Qh5 37 Kg2 Nd8 38 Nf2 Nf7 39 Nh3 Ng5 40 Ng1 Qe8 White resigns**

Game 2

□ Inkiov ■ Psakhis

Minsk 1982

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 b6 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 e3 Ne4 6 Qc2 Bb7 7 Bd3 f5 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 0-0 10 Ne1**

Preferred here to 10 Nd2 with White instead choosing to chase away the annoying knight without allowing the trading option.

**10...c5 (Diagram 9)**



Diagram 9

White plans the f2-f3 pawn push



Diagram 10

Pressure on e6 and f5



**NOTE:** Although early on ...c7-c5 and ...b7-b6 are often seen independently, in the long run they can easily be played (as here) in tandem. One drawback is the slight weakening of the b6-pawn that may thus encourage an a4-a5 queenside-pressurising plan.

**11 f3 Ng5**

As there is no necessity to advance the d7-pawn (the b8-knight can develop on c6), an alternative and playable retreat here would have been 11...Nd6.

**12 d5 (Diagram 10)**

A critical feature in this game is that Black is never able to seal things up completely. Here 12...e5 is unplayable because of the hanging f5-pawn. For the same reason, 12...exd5 doesn't win a pawn.



**TIP:** When in possession of the 'bishop pair', White should always be on the lookout for ways to open up the position.

12...Qf6 13 e4 f4 14 e5!

Correctly played before Black can get his own e-pawn to this square.

14...Qh6

Instead 14...Qxe5 15 h4 Nf7 16 Bxh7+ Kh8 17 Be4, leaving the f4-pawn as an easy target, would be very favourable for White.

15 Be4 d6 16 exd6 e5

Black has come up with an interesting plan to close the position to suit his knights but White proves equally cunning at opening things up.



**NOTE:** Supported passed pawns are typically powerful in the end-game but in the middlegame they can often get in the way.

17 Nd3 Nxe4

If Black didn't take this now, then soon White would manoeuvre a knight to this square.

18 fxe4 Qxd6 19 Bxf4!?

Very dynamic. White acts quickly before Black has the opportunity to complete his development.

19...exf4 20 e5 Qh6 21 e6 (Diagram 11)



Diagram 11  
Nice pawns!



Diagram 12  
Beware Rf8+

The connected passed pawns are menacing and they do a good job of keeping Black's queenside pieces out of the action.

21...Na6 22 Rae1 Nc7 23 Qe2 Rae8 24 Qg4 Bxd5?!

Despite what may have sounded like biased comments from me, Black is of course consoled by having an extra piece. Though eager to break up White's pawns, he returns the material too soon. Correct was 24...Qg6.

25 e7! Be6?!

And now 25...Rf7 would have been more prudent.

26 exf8Q+ Rxf4 27 Qd1 Rd8?! 28 Rxf4 Qg6 29 Qf3! (Diagram 12)  
 Utilising the trick 29...Qxd3 30 Rf8+! to escape the pin.  
 29...h6 30 Ne5 Qc2 31 h4 Re8 32 Rf1 Kh7 33 Qc6 Rc8 34 Nd7  
 Qxc3 35 Qe4+ Kh8 36 Ne5 Qd4+ 37 Qxd4 cxd4 38 Rxd4 Kh7 39  
 h5! b5 40 c5 Bxa2 41 c6 Be6 42 Ng6 a5 43 Rf8 Rxf8 44 Nxf8+ Kg8  
 45 Nxe6 Nxe6 46 Rd7 Black resigns

Game 3

□ Merriman ■ Ward

Monarch Assurance Open, Port Erin 1994

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Nge2 Ne4 6 f3 Nxc3 7  
 Nxc3?! (Diagram 13)



Diagram 13

Keep in mind ...Qh4+



Diagram 14

Hunting an outpost on c4

As White is destined to obtain doubled c-pawns anyhow, he may as well gain a tempo on the bishop, and after 7 bxc3 Be7 8 Ng3 he can at least start amassing a big pawn centre.



**NOTE:** An opponent is more likely to more cramped by advancing centre pawns, the more pieces there are in existence. This is because he will have less space in which to house them all and manoeuvre them around.

7...Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nc6

Although ...d7-d6 and ...Nd7 is a generally acceptable development option, here Black has already decided on a target for this knight.

9 Bd3 Qh4+!



**TIP:** Always look out for checks. This queen check in particular is notorious for throwing a spanner into White's works as it provokes a weakening of the white kingside.

10 g3 Qh3

A real thorn, the black queen prevents White from castling kingside

and threatens to invade on g2.

### 11 Qe2 Ba6

Yes, it is the pawn on c4 that has been singled out for attention.

### 12 Ba3 0-0-0 13 f4 d5! (Diagram 14)

Introducing a new dimension. Although Black would like to win the c4-pawn, the square alone makes worthy prey.

### 14 0-0-0

After 14 cxd5 Bxd3 15 Qxd3 exd5 there is no more than a check on a6 but the backward e3-pawn would be in for a torrid time.

### 14...Na5

Black is angling for an outpost on c4 and the knight is just the piece that wants to occupying it.

### 15 c5 Bxd3 16 Rxd3 Nc4 17 Bb2 (Diagram 15)



Diagram 15  
Pretty grim!



Diagram 16  
Black dominates



**NOTE:** Diagram 15 is a very good example of a very 'bad' bishop!

### 17...Qf5

Frustrating White by not even allowing the pawn break 18 e4.

### 18 Rf1 h5

Black has a long-term plan in mind but in the meantime is sure to retain light-squared domination.

### 19 Re1 Qe4 20 Qc2 Kb7

One option that Black has is to open the b-file with ...bxc5 when his rooks are ready to inflict some damage.

### 21 a4 f5 22 h4 (Diagram 16)

An absolutely horrible move for White to have to make. Nevertheless, it is necessary in order to prevent Black's rooks from entering his position down the h-file.

22...Rh6 23 Qe2 Rg6 24 Rg1 Kc6

Black's chosen plan is far from his only one. White's major pieces are pretty paralysed and amusing would be 24...Rg4 25 Kc2 Rh8 26 Bc1 Rh6 27 Bd2 Rhg6 28 Be1. The bishop has just about made it in time to defend the g3-pawn but due to pins Black can capture on either h4 or f4.

25 cxb6

**NOTE:** This game is a good example of why White doesn't always solve his queenside pawn structure problems by achieving c4-c5. Although he may exchange off a doubled pawn, the a-pawn remains isolated and, after ...axb6, Black's rooks would have an obvious target.

25...axb6 26 Kc2

Ironically it is the one pawn not on a dark square that is about to receive Black's attention. As all of White's other pieces are otherwise engaged in defensive duties, it's a case of all hands to the pump!

26...Ra8 27 Kb3

Unfortunately from White's point of view, his pieces are perfectly placed for a neat tactic.

27...Rxa4! 28 Kxa4 Qxd3 White resigns

Game 4

□ Townsend ■ Ward

British League 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Nge2 Ne4 6 Qc2 Bb7 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3 Nxc3 9 Qxc3 Qf6!? (Diagram 17)



Diagram 17  
White has the 'bishop pair'



Diagram 18  
Black is okay!

I was playing Black in this game and 9...Qf6!? was wheeled out after much thought. This over-the-board inspiration is not quite a novelty



but the move is certainly very rare.

**10 b3**

The point behind 9...Qf6 is that I intended snatching the g2-pawn after 10 Bd3, while upon 10 f3 the standard treatment of ...Qh4+ still looks promising. After the game my opponent was baffled as to where he had gone wrong or at least how he might have played more actively. One idea is the more adventurous 10 b4 although then White will be naturally wary of castling long.

**10...d6 11 Bb2 0-0 12 Qc2 Qh6**

Freeing up the black f-pawn and homing in on White's e3-pawn so as to prevent 13 f3.

**13 0-0-0 Nd7 14 Kb1 f5**

A standard continuation. Having unpinned his e-pawn, White was no doubt eager to play 15 e4. The text, of course, puts a stop to that and makes the f6-square a comfortable option for the knight.

**15 f3 Rae8**

Obviously not now 15...Qxe3?? as 16 Bc1 somewhat embarrasses the black queen.

**16 Bc1 Qf6 17 Be2 a5 (Diagram 18) 18 e4?!**

Played because White couldn't find an alternative plan. The problem is that this is detrimental and I'd be surprised if White is really worse after say 18 h4 or maybe 18 h3, angling for 19 g4. That said, I was more than happy with my position anyway.

**18...fxe4 19 fxe4 Qg6**

The white e-pawn becomes a natural target.

**20 Bf3 Nf6 21 Rhe1 e5 22 d5**



**NOTE:** The black bishop is clearly not well placed when fianchettoed against a pawn like this. However it can often re-enter the game via c8.

**22...Bc8 23 Be3**

My thoughts were that it was necessary here for White to play 23 h3 in order to prevent Black's next move. I know that this creates other holes and the f3-bishop is a bad one, but without it White has serious problems holding his position together.

**23...Bg4**

Now White has the unpleasant choice of taking or allowing a new target (a pawn) to be created on f3.

**24 Bxg4 Qxg4 25 Bg1 Rf7**

Were the queens off then White might be able to give Black something to think about by advancing his queenside pawns. As it stands, though, he can't afford to open up his king position.

**26 Re3 Ref8 27 Rde1 Nh5 28 Qe2 Qg6**

As previously remarked, there is no reason for Black to be interested in a queen trade. Black dominates the f-file and keeps an eye on the e-pawn. Meanwhile, of course, 29...Nf4 is a threat.

**29 g3 Nf6 (Diagram 19)**



**Diagram 19**

The e4-pawn is a target

**30 Rc3?**

An error in time trouble. I was expecting 30 h3 when with 30...h5 I figured I had an excellent available plan in ...Nh7-g5. Observe that there is no opportunity for White to place a rook on the f-file because of a ...Nxe4 tactic similar to as in the game.

**30...Nxe4! 31 Qxe4 Qxe4+ 32 Rxe4 Rf1+ 33 Rc1 Rxc1+ 34 Kxc1 Rf1+**

The awkwardly placed bishop was always the target.

**35 Kc2 Rxf1 36 Re2 Rf1 37 b4 axb4 38 axb4 Rf3**

Simple chess. Black cuts off the white king.

**39 c5 bxc5 40 bxc5 Ra3 41 Re1 Ra5 42 cxd6 cxd6 43 Rd1 Rc5+ White resigns**

Played in preference to 43...Ra2+. As the white king is now being consigned to a restricted queenside area, there is no hope in playing on.

Game 5

□ Gual Pascual ■ Argüelles García

Spanish Championship, Barcelona 2000

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Nge2 Ba6 6 Ng3 (Diagram 20)**

As previously stated, modern theory suggests that White can obtain a slight edge via the simpler 6 a3. With the text White encourages complications.

**6...Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 d5 8 Ba3**

Despite having several pawns on dark squares, White finds a useful post for this bishop. He ignores the current situation on e4 but prevents Black from castling.



**Diagram 20**  
Double my pawns!



**Diagram 21**  
Black can't castle

### 8...dxc4

This move looks a little too greedy to me. Of course after 8...Bxc4 9 Bxc4 dxc4 White can regain his pawn with 10 Qa4+, but after 10...Qd7 11 Qxc4 Qc6! Black has probably achieved equality. Being unable to castle short will not be much of a hindrance with the queens off.

### 9 Be2

Counting on long term compensation and hence choosing not to opt for the obvious 9 e4!?

### 9...Bb7 10 0-0 b5 11 Rb1 a6

Because of the pinned b5-pawn, White now has 12 Bxc4 Bxg2 13 Kxg2 bxc4 14 Qa4+ but opts to take an alternative route.

### 12 Bf3 Nd5 13 Qd2 (Diagram 21) 13...c6?

Okay, Black had to suffer a little but this is really too much to bear. Now his lack of dark-squared control is disastrous!

**TIP:** Be very careful about putting too many pawns on the same colour as your remaining bishop.

### 14 Ne4 Qd7 15 Nd6+ Kd8 16 e4 Nb6 17 Bh5 g6

Preventing 18 Nxf7+ but now another dark square bites the dust.

### 18 Qg5+ Kc7 19 Qe5 Black resigns

An accurate finish by White leaves Black with an attacked rook and an unpalatable discovered check to face. He does, however, still have his extra pawn!

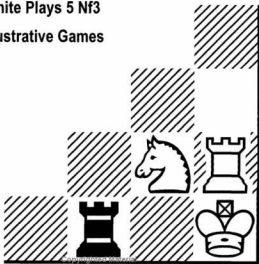


## Chapter Two

## The Rubinstein Variation

### 4 e3 0-0

- Introduction
- White Plays 5 Nge2
- White Plays 5 Bd3
- White Plays 5 Nf3
- Illustrative Games



## Introduction

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1**  
A sensible move

After 4 e3, the reply 4...0-0 is fairly non-committal. Black's logic is simple; he 'knows' that he is going to play this move anyway, so why not get it out the way now? How he follows up will depend upon the piece formation that White adopts. I am going to divide this chapter into 5 Nge2, 5 Bd3 and 5 Nf3. Certainly each option has distinguishing features but regarding the next chapter too, there is always a chance of a transposition.

## White Plays 5 Nge2

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Nge2



**Diagram 2**  
The c1-bishop is locked in



**Diagram 3**  
The d5-pawn is bolstered

Just as in the last chapter, the white knight supports its colleague to ensure that he doesn't end up with doubled pawns.

#### 5...d5 (Diagram 2)

Black stakes his claim in the centre. He now has every intention of preserving his dark-squared bishop.



**NOTE:** Black should never reject this move purely on the grounds that it might transpose into a 'Queen's Gambit Declined' (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6) as invariably there are fundamental differences. In Diagram 2, for example, White finds his dark-squared bishop locked inside the pawn chain. In a QGD he would have most likely deployed it on g5 or f4 before playing e2-e3.

#### 6 a3 Be7 7 Nf4

Despite my initial description of Nge2, one shouldn't write this move off as merely defending c3 as it has other options too. Although f3 is arguably its most natural start, in fact both the f4- and g3-squares have their moments. On f4 the knight pressurises the d5-pawn and if Black takes on c4 then White will most certainly aim to play e3-e4.

#### 7...c6

Black adopts a solid formation and bolsters the d5-pawn.

#### 8 Bd3 (Diagram 3)

### Plans

If White could arrange the e3-e4 break then things would look rosy but, because of the lack of support for the d4-pawn, this seems unlikely. A 'containing' plan would be to put 6 a3 to good use and expand on the queenside, with b2-b4 being an obvious candidate. Meanwhile Black needs to figure out how to activate his light-squared bishop. At some stage he may need to concede ...dxc4 but be ready to break with ...e6-e5 or ...c6-c5.



**TIP:** A plan in itself which many Grandmasters adopt is to frustrate the opponent by limiting his activity. Frequently under the strain, victims will crack and lash out with deadly repercussions.

## White Plays 5 Bd3

#### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 (Diagram 4)

As this chapter's selection of practical games alone should demonstrate, White now has a few options here. 6 Nf3 will transpose to the next covered line but aside from the text below, also not uncommon are 6 a3 and 6 Nge2 dxc4 7 Bxc4, when either 7...c5 or 7...e5 should follow. Regarding the latter, observe that 8 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Ng4 wouldn't be advisable for White.

#### 6 cxd5 exd5

Maintaining control of the e4-square and freeing the c8-bishop. After

the inferior 6...Nxd5, once White easily solves the problem of his attacked knight (say with 7 Nge2) he can look forward to playing e3-e4.



Diagram 4

e2 or f3?, that is the question!



Diagram 5

Attacking the centre

### 7 Nge2 Re8

Black has at his disposal a half-open e-file and he should use it.

### 8 0-0 Bd6

This may seem like an odd retreat, especially when the queenside pieces are still at home. However, Black may want to play ...c7-c5 and he doesn't want this important piece caught offside. Furthermore, on d6 the bishop is very active and it makes White think about his h2-pawn.

### 9 f3

Were his dark-squared bishop outside of his pawn chain then White could consider a slower plan of queenside expansion. As things stand, though, the attraction is to get in e3-e4 and, if allowed, e4-e5!

### 9...c5 (Diagram 5)

## Plans

Now that White has weakened his e3-pawn, Black is not too worried about his d5-pawn becoming isolated. His last move pressurises the centre and, although attacking d4 is sensible, the possibility is always there to play ...c5-c4 and create a strong queenside with ...b7-b5 etc. As for White, arranging e4 and e5 will be difficult but in the interim a manoeuvre of Qe1-h4, with some chances for a kingside attack, should be a consideration.

## White Plays 5 Nf3

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Nf3 d5 6 Bd3

There is nothing amazing in White's last two moves and, along with Black's next move, they could all have come in a different order.

6...c5 7 0-0 (Diagram 6)



Diagram 6

Decisions, decisions!



Diagram 7

The famous 'IQP' middlegame

A pretty pattern has formed in the centre and Black's last move informed White that the second player is certainly going to have a say about the typically key area of the board. He must now decide whether to retain the tension in the middle of the board or saddle his opponent with an isolated pawn. Whilst the main continuation below is the most popular, there is in fact no obligation here for Black to clarify the situation. Indeed, 7...b6, 7...Nbd7 and 7...Nc6 have all been seen in practical play.

7...cxd4 8 exd4 dxc4



**NOTE:** In order to gain a tempo, Black has effectively waited until White's light-squared bishop has moved before taking on c4.

9 Bxc4 (Diagram 7)

Black could have switched the order of his 7th and 8th moves but the outcome would have been the same.

## Plans

The isolated queen's pawn position shown in Diagram 7 could be reached via a number of different openings that at first seem a million miles away from the Nimzo-Indian (e.g. via the Caro-Kann: 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Nf3 Bb4 7 Bd3 dxc4 8 Bxc4 0-0 9 0-0).

Whole books have been written on just this scenario but I will attempt to summarise the plans available. First up, the d4-pawn is isolated and hence potentially weak. In the long run Black may contemplate coordinating his forces to attack it, although at present this isn't





easy and White has plenty of defenders available. The more pieces that are traded off the weaker this pawn will become and, as is typical with a space advantage, White should try to avoid fair swaps.

**TIP:** When facing an isolated pawn, one can't go wrong by occupying the square directly in front of it with a piece.

Regarding the above tip, any black piece would ultimately look good on d5. Typically Black will fianchetto his bishop on b7 (via either ...b7-b6 or ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5) and a manoeuvre of a knight to d5 is very reasonable. Black can retreat his bishop to e7 where it may help to unpin the f6-knight (in the event of Bg5) or he can trade on c3. In the latter event the d-pawn would no longer be isolated but instead the new c-pawn could be a target.

White players tend to look upon the isolated d-pawn as strength rather than a weakness. Indeed, its inhibiting features include the control of the key e5-square and thus the prevention of the freeing pawn break ...e6-e5. A kingside attacking plan is to be encouraged, with a queen and bishop alignment against h7 a common occurrence and a rook 'swinger' along the 3rd rank also possible. Although White will often utilise the e5-square, he should also be on the look-out to achieve the d4-d5 break should Black let his guard down or if the ensuing tactics favour him.

## Illustrative Games

Game 6

□ Epishin ■ Pezerovic

Bad Wiessee 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d6?! (Diagram 8)



**Diagram 8**  
A little passive



**Diagram 9**  
Black is forced back

Not very inspirational. White is granted a hassle-free space advan-

tage in this game and he certainly makes the most of it.

6 Nge2 b6 7 0-0



**WARNING:** When Black plays moves such as ...d7-d6 and ...c7-c5 he must be sure to trade his bishop for the knight or at least take real care that it won't be trapped.

7...Bxc3

White was threatening to move this knight and then embarrass the bishop with a2-a3 and b2-b4.

8 Nxc3 Bb7 9 e4 e5 10 d5

Everything is going smoothly for White. He has the bishop pair without having had to compromise his pawn structure, and his attractive advanced pawns make Black's remaining bishop look silly.

10...Nbd7 11 Be3 Nc5 12 Bc2 a5 13 a3 Bc8 14 f3 Bd7 15 b4 (Diagram 9)

White continues to expand on the queenside, towards which his fixed pawns (on e4 and d5) lean.

15...Nb7 16 Qd2 Qe7 17 Rfc1 Ra7 18 Bb3 Rfa8 19 Rab1 h6 20 Ne2

**QUESTION 3:** Shouldn't White have played 20 b5 here?

20...axb4 21 axb4 Ne8 22 Nc3 Kh8 23 Rf1



**NOTE:** A feature of being cramped is the lack of communication that a player's pieces have between the kingside and queenside.

The black knights would take ages to switch sides and the rooks are pretty much tied to the a-file. Hence White switches attention to the kingside and prepares the pawn break f3-f4.

23...g5 24 Qb2

White deems Black's last move as a significant weakness and turns back to the queenside.

24...f6 25 Ra1 Qd8 26 Kf2!?

Feeling safe as houses, the white king starts to centralise. He might be anticipating the endgame although the idea of h2-h4 has something to be said for it too.

26...Kg7 27 Ke2 Qb8 28 Kd2 Rxa1 29 Rxa1 Ra7 30 Rh1

The grandmaster spends a lot of his time toying with his opponent – he is clearly enjoying himself. With reference to the space advantage situation again, in contrast to his opponent, observe how long it would take Black's major pieces to get over to the kingside.

30...Ra8 31 h4 Qa7 32 Bc2 Qa3 33 Qxa3 Rxa3 34 g3 Ra8 35 f4 Kg6 36 Bd1 Ng7 37 Kc1 Ra1+ 38 Kb2 Ra8 39 Be2 Re8 40 f5+ Kf7 41 Ra1!

After all that, it is White who has emerged in possession of the only open file!

41...Rb8 42 Ra7



**TIP:** As well as open files, rooks love the seventh rank.

42...Ke7 43 Bd1 Be8 44 g4 Bd7 45 h5

White effectively seals off the kingside, confident that he can make the necessary progress on the other side of the board.

45...Ne8 46 Ka3 Kd8 47 Ba4! Bxa4 48 Kxa4 Kc8 49 Kb5 Nd8 50 Ka6 (Diagram 10)



Diagram 10

Black is on the ropes!



**TIP:** The king is a very useful piece in the endgame.

50...c5

Black is struggling for air and one brilliant winning variation is 50...Nb7 51 Na4 Ng7 (or 51...Nd8 52 Bxb6! cxb6 53 Nxb6+ Rxb6+ 54 Kxb6 with the black knights in desperate trouble) 52 Bxg5! fxg5 53 f6 Nxb5 54 f7 Kd7 55 Rxb7!.

51 Nb5 Rb7 52 Rxb7 Nxb7 53 Kxb6 cxb4 54 Na7+ Kb8 55 Nc6+ Kc8 56 Nxb4 Nd8 57 Na6 Nb7 58 Nb4 Nd8 59 Nc6 Nf7 60 Bd2 Nc7 61 Ba5 Kd7 62 Kb7 Ne8 63 Bb6 Ng7 64 Nb8+ Ke7 65 Kc8 Nxb5

Finally a black knight does something, but it is not enough.

66 gxf5 g4 67 c5 g3 68 c6 Black resigns

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Game 7

□ Gulko ■ Adams

Kasparov/Chess Grand Prix 2000

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 a3

An alternative to 6 Nf3, 6 Nge2 and 6 cxd5.

6...Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 dxc4 8 Bxc4 c5 (Diagram 11)

This pawn is undefended but, although gaining some dark-squared control, 9 dxc5? would leave some horribly weak queenside pawns.

Indeed, all three would then be isolated and one would most likely soon fall after ...Qa5.



Diagram 11

The black queen can go to a5



Diagram 12

Black has a queenside pawn majority



**TIP:** Black need not have the c5-square protected when playing ...c5 as dxc5 is frequently undesirable.

#### 9 Nf3 Qa5

Theory suggests that forcing White's bishop to d2 is worthwhile as then Black will never see it materialising on a3 (after a typical a4-a5 push).

#### 10 Bd2 Qc7?

Also playable is 10...Ne4 11 0-0 b6, but here Black opts to retreat his queen first.

#### 11 Bd3 b6

As an alternative to a plan of ...Nc6 and ...e6-e5, Black provides options for his light-squared bishop.

#### 12 e4

The big debate in this kind of game is whether White's extra centre pawn offers him a middlegame plus or whether Black's queenside majority will prove decisive in the endgame. In retrospect I suppose White could have opted for 12 Qe2 instead as it prevents ...Ba6, but I'm sure many would plump for 12 e4.

#### 12...Ba6

Thematic. Black seeks to exchange off one of the powerful white bishop duo.



**NOTE:** A bishop-for-knight advantage isn't usually as great as a two bishops vs. bishop and knight advantage.

#### 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Qe2 Qb7!

This seems fairly obvious as now the a6-knight is protected and the

## Starting Out: The Nimzo-Indian

c7-square vacated for its future residence. However, in addition the e4-pawn is attacked with no other white pieces available to come to its defence.

**15 e5**

Although this hits the f6-square, usually White only really wants to play this move if he can make use of either the e4-square or the b1-h7 diagonal. There is no white knight ready to take up this central post and of course his light-squared bishop has already been swapped off.

**15...Ne4 (Diagram 12)**

The d5-square looks like the natural post for a knight, but Black has earmarked his other knight for that.

**16 0-0 Rfd8 17 Rfd1 cxd4 18 cxd4 Nxd2 19 Rxd2 h6!**

Another multi-purpose move. Sure, Black usefully prevents any back-rank mates, but also Ng5 is stopped. This means that White has no real chances for a kingside attack and no obvious active future for his knight. Rather than being a strength, the extra d4-pawn is now more of a liability.

**20 Rc1**

As far as I can make out the rest of the game is a little depressing for White. For that reason, before Black gets in his central knight blockade, I may have been tempted by 20 d5!? Rxd5 21 Rxd5 exd5 22 Nd4 when it's probably fair to say that at least White has some play for his pawn. That aside, I'm afraid it's really difficult to say where White goes wrong in this game (his 12th move?). However, whilst Boris Gulko is a strong grandmaster, it must be added that his opponent Michael Adams is absolute class. I am always impressed with the current world number four's handling of the Nimzo-Indian and his games are a joy to watch.

**20...Nc7 21 Rdc2 Nd5 22 g3 Rac8**

The time when the extra queenside pawn will tell looms nearer.



**NOTE:** The term 'queenside pawn majority' means as it sounds, i.e. having an extra queenside pawn. This could involve a '3 vs. 2 pawns' or a '2 vs. 1 pawn' scenario and it's generally a good thing to have in an endgame where the kings are on the kingside. However, if both kings started on the queenside then it would be preferable to have a 'kingside pawn majority'. Sure, it is useful to have the ability to create a passed pawn to deflect the enemy monarch but one should still remember to take each position on its merits.



**WARNING:** Beware of generalisations, except this one of course!

**23 Qd3 Rxc2 24 Rxc2 b5 (Diagram 13)**

Another sensible alternative is of course 24...Rc8.

**25 Rc5 a6 26 Qe4 b4 27 axb4 Qxb4 28 Qe1**

Still White struggles for any action and it is Black that is turning the screw.



Diagram 13

The knight has a lovely outpost



Diagram 14

Shock treatment!

28...Qb3 29 Kg2 Rb8 30 Qc1 Kh7 31 h4 Ra8

Black has grand plans for his passed a-pawn.

32 Ra5 Qb7 33 h5 Kg8 34 Qc2 Rc8 35 Rc5 Rb8 36 Qc4 Qa8

Incredible manoeuvring that makes Adams such a good player to watch. Now Black's rook is on an open file whilst his queen supports the pawn push and is on a juicy diagonal.

37 Ra5 Ne3+!! (Diagram 14)

And out of the blue a decisive blow is struck.

38 fxe3 Rb2+ White resigns

In case you were wondering, with ...Qxf3 next on the agenda, mate is forced in five moves!

#### Game 8

□ Vera ■ Garcia Martinez

Cuban Championship, Las Tunas 2001

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nge2 (Diagram 15) 6...c5 7 cxd5 exd5

7...cxd4 8 exd4 Nxd5 is a different way to play that leads to an 'Isolated Queen's Pawn' middlegame with the knight on e2 rather than f3.

8 a3 Bxc3+

Current theory assesses 8...cxd4 9 axb4 (or 9 exd4 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 b6) 9...dxc3 10 Nxc3 Nc6 as equal.

9 bxc3 b6

This is a typical way for Black to play. He wants to eliminate White's bishop pair advantage by trading his 'bad' bishop for White's 'good' one.



Diagram 15  
Preferring e2



Diagram 16  
The white knight eyes up f5

### 10 0-0

A successful black strategy is illustrated well with 10 f3 Ba6 11 0-0 Re8 12 Ng3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Nc6 14 Bb2 h5!? 15 Rad1 e4 16 Qd2 Qd7 17 Rde1 h4 18 Nh1 Qf5 (Black at first fights to keep control of the e4-square) 19 Nf2 Qg6 20 Nh3 Re7 21 Qf2 Qh7 22 e4 dxe4 23 Ng5 Qg6 24 Nxe4 Rae8 25 Nd6 Rxe1 26 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 27 Qxe1 h3 28 Qe2 Qb1+ 29 Kf2 Qh1 30 Qf1 Qxh2 31 Nxc4 Ng4+ and White resigned, Bick-Del Rio Angelis, Ubeda 2000.

10...Ba6 11 Bxa6 Nxa6 12 Qd3 Nc7 13 f3 Ne6 14 Bb2 Rc8 15 Ng3

Without a black pawn on e6, the f5-square is ripe for invasion and White knows just the piece that he wants there.

15...Qd7 (Diagram 16) 16 e4 cxd4 17 cxd4 dxe4?

Arguably Black's previous move was an inaccuracy but this certainly is. We soon see the implications of opening up the f-file.

18 fxe4

These hanging pawns can either be very weak or very strong. In this encounter it appears to be the latter case. Although the centre pawns are targets, now the b2-bishop can see plenty of light at the end of the tunnel.

18...Nc5 19 Qe2 Na4 (Diagram 17) 20 Rxf6! Nxb2

Regarding the exchange sacrifice, 20...gxf6 21 Nh5 Kh8 22 Nxf6 Qd8 23 d5 compensates White exceedingly well.

21 Nf5!

The knight hops into its optimum position where it also happens to defend the d4-pawn. The f6-rook is immune to capture because of Qg4+ and Qg7 mate.

21...Qe8

To help explain this move, note how 21...Nc4 22 Qg4 g6 23 Nh6+

would drop the queen.



**Diagram 17**  
The f-file has been opened



**Diagram 18**  
Serious pressure!

## 22 Rf1

Now all of White's pieces are getting in on the act.

**22...Nc4 23 Qg4 g6 24 Nh6+ (Diagram 18) 24...Kh8**

**24...Kg7 25 Rxf7+ Rxf7 26 Rxf7+ Kxh6 27 Qh4** mate would be a different end to the game.

**25 Nxf7+ Kg7 26 Nd6** Black resigns

Black suffers heavy material damage.

## Game 9

□ V.Georgiev ■ Kalinin

Wijk aan Zee 2000

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 cxd5 exd5 7 Nge2 Re8 8 0-0 Bd6**

As White has at least temporarily incarcerated his dark-squared bishop, then Black can look upon 3...Bb4 as being a job well done. Certainly there is no longer any need for him to feel obliged to trade it for a knight and on d6 it points menacingly at the white king.

## 9 Bd2 (Diagram 19)

The jury is out on whether this is a subtle and useful developing move or a comparative waste of time. More common is the immediate 9 f3 c5 10 Qe1 Nc6 11 Qh4, but if Black's knight is better posted on c6 then perhaps Bd2 (dissuading ...c7-c5 as White is yet to weaken the e3-square) is justified.

## 9...Nbd7 10 f3 c5

Black isn't too worried about the prospect of an isolated d-pawn given the pressure that he should be able to mount against e3. Moreover, e3-e4 is now an even tougher break for White to achieve.





**Diagram 19**  
A waiting move



**Diagram 20**  
Space-devouring pawns

**11 Rc1 a6 12 Rf2 Nf8 13 Kh1 Ne6 14 Qg1**

One can't help feeling that White's last three (arguably preparatory) moves are just a little slow. Black in the meantime gets on with some handy queenside expansion.

**14...b5 15 g4 b4 16 Na4 c4 17 Bc2 Bd7 18 g5 Nh5 19 f4 Rb8 (Diagram 20)**

White's kingside pawns just don't look as menacing as Black's equivalent ones on the other side of the board. At a glance one can see that White's extra pawn is on e3, with Black's being much stronger on c4. Indeed, now Black is threatening to win a piece with 20...b3.

**20 Ra1 Bb5 21 Qg4 g6 22 b3 c3 23 Bc1 Neg7**

As it happens, incredibly powerful was 23...Qe7!, which amongst other things would have threatened ...Bxe2 with ...Nexf4 to follow. Nevertheless, Black clearly remains on top with White's queenside pieces in a complete mess.

**24 Qf3 Qd7 25 Nc5 Bxc5 26 dxc5 Ne6 27 a3**

White must attempt something to activate his queenside pieces, but he is clearly struggling.

**27...a5 28 Kg1 d4!**

Opening things up when White is bound to suffer for the absence of a back rank rook.

**29 Nxd4 Nxd4 30 exd4 Re1+ White resigns**

It's game over. Upon 31 Kg2, the crusher would be 31...Bc6.

Game 10

□ Rebel Tiger 12.0e ■ Shredder 4

Computer Tournament, Cadaques 2000

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 c5 7 0-0 Nc6**

(Diagram 21)



Diagram 21  
No captures yet!



Diagram 22  
Not really en prise

8 a3

White can opt to saddle Black with an isolated pawn via the immediate 8 cxd5 9 exd5 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 b3 Bg4, but then the bishop would be misplaced on d3 (it would belong on e2 where it wouldn't obstruct potential pressure against the d5-pawn).

8...Bxc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Be2

Central pawn exchanges would have left this bishop vulnerable, but as ...e6-e5 is a common Black plan it's fair to say that 11 Ba2 would also be a reasonable retreat.

11...e5

In retrospect Black may have preferred 11...Rd8!? to try and dissuade the ensuing pawn advance.

12 d5 Rd8 13 e4! (Diagram 22)

Neat. Black can't capture on e4 in view of 14 Qc2 when both knights would be attacked.

13...Ne7 14 Qc2 Ng6 15 Bg5 Qe7 16 g3 b6 17 a4!

**TIP:** When Black has a pawn on b6, it is always worth White at least considering this challenging a4-a5 plan.

17...h6 18 Be3

**TIP:** If possible to arrange, it is often sensible to block a supported passed pawn with a knight. The nature of the knight is such that it can comfortably rest there but fulfil other useful functions too.

18...Bh3 19 Rfb1 Ng4

Alas, a ...Ne8-d6 manoeuvre would still be too slow when compared to White's queenside ambitions.

20 Bd2 Qc7 21 a5 (Diagram 23)





**Diagram 23**  
Black's queenside is tested



**Diagram 24**  
Connected passed pawns rule!

**21...bxa5?**

To a human(!) this looks very suspect although it isn't easy to suggest a constructive plan.

**22 Rb5 Nf8 23 c4**

Now Black just has weak queenside pawns whilst White has a supported passed pawn and two handy bishops.

**23...Rdb8 24 Rbxa5 Rb7 25 Ne1 Nf6 26 f3 Bc8 27 Nd3 N8d7 28 Be3**

Black has had serious positional troubles for a while and now comes the inevitable decisive loss of the c5-pawn.

**28...Ne8 29 Nxc5 Nxc5 30 Bxc5 a6 31 Bf2 Qb8 32 R1a2 Nc7 33 Kg2 Rb1 34 Bd3 Rb3 35 c5 Ne8 36 c6 h5 37 Be5 h4 (Diagram 24) 38 gxh4**

It's always with moves like this that computers show their true colours. However, this decision will have little effect on the overall outcome of the game.

**38...Rxd3 39 Qxd3 Qc7 40 Qc3 Rb8 41 Bb4 f5 42 exf5 Bxf5 43 Rxa6 e4 44 d6 Nxd6 45 Ra7 exf3+ Black resigns**

A spite check only. Black must lose his queen to prevent mate on g7.

Game 11

□ Vladimirov ■ Kasparov

Europe vs. Asia (rapid), Batumi 2001

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 c5 7 0-0 cxd4 8 exd4 dxc4 9 Bxc4 b6 (Diagram 25) 10 Qe2**

Although Kasparov himself has no doubt been trying to, who could forget the shocking 10 Bg5 Bb7 11 Re1 Nbd7 12 Rc1 Rc8 13 Qb3 Be7 14 Bxf6 Nxf6 15 Bxe6 fxe6? (15...Rc7! has been proposed as a better

defence) 16 Qxe6+ Kh8 17 Qxe7 Bxf3 18 gxf3 Qxd4 19 Nb5 Qxb2? 20 Rxc8 Rxc8 21 Nd6 Rb8? 22 Nf7+ Kg8 23 Qe6! Rf8 24 Nd8+ Kh8 25 Qe7 Black resigns, of Kramnik-Kasparov at the 2000 BGN World Championship?

10 Re1 is the other popular alternative.



Diagram 25

The bishop will develop on b7



Diagram 26

The bishop is poor

10...Bb7 11 Rd1 Bxc3

11...Nbd7 is sensible too but Kasparov opts to mix things up here and now.

12 bxc3 Qc7

This sneaky move hits through to the c3-pawn and offers up the pawn-doubling ...Bxf3 as a serious possibility.

13 Bb2?!

I would have thought that 13 Bd2 is preferable to this but by far the most critical continuation must be 13 Bd3!? Qxc3 14 Bb2. White may be able to make a timely second pawn sacrifice with d4-d5, when his bishop pair would look particularly impressive.

13...Bxf3!

Continuing a destabilising policy.

14 Qxf3?

This game would tend to suggest that 14 gxf3 is better. White then has more pawn islands but there is still the potential for the two bishops to get in on the act. He may also be able to use the half-open g-file for attacking purposes.

14...Qxc4!

Confidently bashed out, Black was clearly in no need to check out the complexities of 14...Ng4. As the game goes, the white queen is trapped behind enemy lines.

**15 Qxa8 Nc6 16 Qb7 Nd5 (Diagram 26)**

Whilst the white bishop looks dreadful, Black's queen and knights dominate in the centre. However, although the white queen is lacking in squares, it is not yet doomed and White is of course the exchange up.

**17 Re1 Rb8! 18 Qd7 Rd8**

Showing who's boss. Black could take a draw by repetition but has something else in mind.

**19 Qb7 h5!?**

The immediate 19...Na5 20 Qxa7 Qc6 (threatening ...Ra8) does look promising, e.g. 21 Re5 (or 21 c4 Nxc4 22 Rac1 Nf4 23 f3 Nd3 24 Rxc4 Qxc4 25 Qxb6 Ra8) 21...Ra8 22 Rxd5 (utilising the back rank mate threat) 22...exd5 23 Qe7 Nc4. However, as White is arguably still just in the game after 23 Qb4 (and not 23 Bc1?? Re8), Kasparov instead tightens the screw. After the text there is no back rank problem and the h-pawn may even have an attacking role to play.

**20 Bc1!?**

Possibly concerned about the possibility of 20...Nf4, White misses Black's threat.

**20...Na5! 21 Qxa7 Qc6 22 Qa6**

As previously mentioned, amongst other reasons, 22 Re5 Ra8 23 Rxd5 Rxa7 24 Rd8+ doesn't work now because of 24...Kh7.

**22...Nc4 23 Rb1 Nc7 White resigns (Diagram 27)****Diagram 27**

The queen lacks escape squares

As the only 'saviour' is 24 Rxb6, White throws in the towel..

## Chapter Three

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# The Rubinstein Variation

## 4 e3 c5

- Introduction
- White Plays 5 Nf3
- White Plays 5 Bd3
- White Plays 5 Nge2
- Illustrative Games



## Introduction

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1**  
Challenging the centre

Here Black gets straight to the point. With 4...c5, castling is temporarily eschewed in favour of getting to grips with the centre.



**Note:** White is rarely tempted to capture this pawn in this sort of position as there is then a realistic chance of him being saddled with doubled or even tripled isolated pawns.

Dismissing 5 dxc5, White has a decision to make about the piece configuration that he wants to adopt and there is a familiar choice. His light-squared bishop could be tempted by d3 and the knight, as usual, must decide between e2 or f3. Let us take a look at some options.

## White Plays 5 Nf3

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Nf3 (Diagram 2)

Considered to be fairly innocuous, this position can also be reached via the alternative Nimzo-Indian move order 4 Nf3 c5 5 e3.

5...Nc6

Just one of a few playable continuations. White has d4 well guarded, but Black simply develops his knight to a sensible square.

6 Bd3



**NOTE:** Although generally quite tempting for White, the advance d4-d5 is far from always good. The pawn will become a target on d5 and, because of the pin on the c3-knight, the supporting e4 push is not always possible. Indeed, White is frequently advised to keep his pawn structure fluid and d4-d5 may be prove really powerful later.



**Diagram 2**  
Lacking ambition?



**Diagram 3**  
A cagey middlegame awaits



**TIP: Often the threat is greater than the execution!**

Yes, the last tip is a popular piece of advice. Black will always have to worry about White advancing his d-pawn but, for the time being, see what happens to 6 d5 in this chapter's first illustrative game.

**6...Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 d6**

Having traded off his dark-squared bishop, Black logically looks to place pawns on dark squares in order to complement the bishop that remains.

**8 e4 e5 9 d5**

With the d4-pawn under pressure, finally White relents. Of course, it makes more sense to advance this pawn to gain more space rather than to trade pawns and end up with doubled isolated pawns.



**NOTE: Doubled pawns aren't necessarily a bad thing. By definition their presence infers at least one half-open file and often they control key squares.**

**9...Ne7 (Diagram 3)**

## Plans

Although the c4-pawn is often a target – and in another situation Black may have preferred ...Na5 with possibly ...b7-b6 and ...Ba6 to follow – it also has a positive role to play. There is little chance of Black expanding on the queenside with ...b7-b5 and indeed White may choose to utilise his a-pawn and the b-file to pressurise his opponent. In addition, the pawn on c3 does a good job of keeping enemy knights out of what would otherwise be an excellent outpost on d4. Other typical plans for White to try and make progress include turning to the pawn break f2-f4 and trying to manoeuvre a knight to f5. In contrast, the f4-square is an attraction for the black knights and



Black's strategy often simply involves frustrating his opponent. He has no real weaknesses and knows that most endgames should be favourable for him.

## White Plays 5 Bd3

1 d4 Nf6 2 e4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 Nge2

By now we know that this is a familiar feature of 4 e3; the king's knight opts to support its colleague.

6...cxd4 7 exd4 d5 8 cxd5

As the c3-knight is protected, White opts to trade pawns rather than allow the ...dxc4 that would distract (if only temporarily) his bishop from its most active diagonal.

8...Nxd5 9 0-0 0-0 (Diagram 4)



Diagram 4  
Blocking the isolated pawn

## Plans

Many of the same ideas hold true as in my last discussion on the typical 'IQP' position. The clear difference, as can be seen in Diagram 4, is that there is a knight on e2 rather than f3. This means that it will travel a different path. Sure, it supports c3 but then again there is a lesser grip over the e5-square. The d4-pawn will become weaker the more pieces that are traded off and a white kingside attack (possibly initiated by Bc2 and Qd3) should certainly be considered.

## White Plays 5 Nge2

1 d4 Nf6 2 e4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Nge2

White ensures that he won't receive doubled pawns at the cost of obstructing his bishop.

**5...cxd4 6 exd4 d5**

My selected line here serves the purpose of introducing a new dimension. However, also slightly different to anything we've seen so far is 6...0-0 7 a3 Be7 8 d5 exd5 9 cxd5. White's pawn on d5 affords him a nice space advantage but he is lacking in development. To get castled he may have to fianchetto his king's bishop while Black makes the most of the e-file and ponders how to bring out his queenside pieces.

**7 a3 Be7**

It seems a shame to help White untangle, although saddling him with an isolated pawn via 7...Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3 dxc4 is an acceptable alternative.

**8 c5**

This whole concept had to appear eventually, although in fairness it is probably forced here as an IQP is definitely undesirable with the bishop languishing on f1.

**8...0-0 9 g3**

The f1-bishop must come out to enable White to castle and it isn't convenient to budge the e2-knight just now.

**9...b6**

A useful insertion. Black challenges White's restricting pawn whilst also offering up ...Ba6 as a possibility.

**10 b4 (Diagram 5)****Diagram 5**

Pawn structure imbalance

## Plans

---

It comes as no great surprise that White wants to support his advanced c-pawn in this manner. Indeed, 10 cxb6 would hand the initiative to Black as White's isolated d4-pawn would then be far more of a target than Black's equivalent a- or b-pawn.

Now an exciting middlegame looks on the cards, particularly in the likely occurrence of 10...bxc5 11 dxc5. Centre pawns are always considered vital in the opening and middlegame and Black would have two extra of those. On the other hand, White's large queenside pawn majority would clearly hold potential too.

## Illustrative Games

Game 12

□ Norri ■ Pulkkinen

Helsinki 1993

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 d5

As I previously stated, many club players would have difficulty resisting this early advance, although in fact it is very rare at the highest levels.

6...Ne7

The pawn on d5 gains space but has also become a target. Remember that 7 e4 is obviously unplayable because the c3-knight is pinned.

7 d6 Nf5 (Diagram 6)



Diagram 6  
Strong or weak?



Diagram 7  
Symmetrical queens!

The d-pawn has encroached further into enemy territory and could easily help in suffocating the opponent. However, Black has set his sights on rounding it up.

8 Qd3

White would have preferred not to have moved his queen so soon but 8...Ne4 was a threat.

8...Qb6

The d6-pawn is now hit twice, thus forcing White's hand.

**9 e4 Nd4**

Okay, this square is an outpost but Black doesn't seriously expect this knight to remain in long-term existence. It does, however, fulfil the purpose of cutting off the white queen's protection of his 'out-on-a-limb' pawn.

**10 Be3**

More adventurous would have been 10 e5!? but after 10...Ng4 no doubt White was worried that both of those pawns might drop off.

**10...Qxd6 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Bxd4 e5! (Diagram 7) 13 a3**

After 13 Be3 Qxd3 14 Bxd3 Bxc3+ 15 bxc3 White's doubled isolated c-pawns would soon suffer.

**13...exd4 14 axb4 0-0 15 Be2 Qxb4 16 Qxd4 Nxe4! 17 0-0**

Black would regain the material after 17 Qxe4 Qxb2.

**17...Qxb2 18 Qxe4 Qxc3 (Diagram 8)**

**Diagram 8**  
Extra pawns

Black has emerged two pawns up and the rest is fairly straightforward.

**19 Rfd1 d6 20 Bf3 a5 21 Rab1 a4 22 Rxd6 a3 23 Rdd1 a2 24 Ra1 Be6 25 Qxb7 Rab8 26 Qa7 Qxa1 27 Rxa1 Rb1+ 28 Bd1 Rxa1 29 Qa4 Rd8** White resigns

**Game 13**

□ Babula ■ Van der Sterren

Bundesliga 2000

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 d6 8 0-0**

Different to the 8 e4 e5 9 d5 Ne7 in the theoretical section.

**8...e5**

Black, however, reacts the same. His dark-squared pawns nicely com-

plement his light-squared bishop.

**9 Nd2 (Diagram 9)**



**Diagram 9**  
Preparing f2-f4



**Diagram 10**  
An awkward check



**NOTE:** It is a common theme in this so-called 'Hübner Variation' for White to allow Black to attack d4 more times than it is defended. The logic is that White is happy to clear off more pawns (even at the cost of losing one) as it leaves the board freer for his bishops to operate. In contrast, Black prefers a more blocked pawn structure where his knights can rule the day.

White paves the way to introduce his f-pawn into the equation. 9 Ng5, also with an idea of hopping into e4, is also possible.

**9...0-0 10 Rb1 Qc7!?**

Played as an alternative to 10...Qe7, which would instead offer its weight to ...e5-e4. Nevertheless, Black has a reason for his selection.

**11 h3**

White would love to open up the position for his bishop pair and sees f4 as being the perfect break. However, first he feels the need to remove the possibility of ...Ng4. As it transpires, though, there is a downside in the form of the hole soon created on g3.

**11...b6**

Following textbook policy, Black continues to place pawns on the opposite colour to his remaining bishop. This further bolsters the c5-pawn, moves the pawn itself out of potential trouble from the b1-rook and offers up ...Ba6 for the future.

**12 f4**

Getting straight to the point, although in view of the game continuation, possibly 12 Ne4 would have been more prudent.

**12...exd4 13 cxd4 cxd4 14 exd4 Re8!**

Stronger than the immediate 14...Nxd4 when, bearing in mind a future Bb2, 15 Ne4 could be rather dangerous.

**15 Kh1?!**

The white king attempts to tuck itself out of harm's way but only succeeds in walking into more trouble!

**15...Nxd4 16 Bb2 Bf5!**

A key move that effectively seals White's fate.

**17 Bxf5 Nxf5 18 Bxf6 Ng3+ 19 Kg1 Qc5+ (Diagram 10)**

The queen appears right on cue.

**20 Kh2 Nxf1+ 21 Nxf1 gxf6**

Finally Black takes this bishop, leaving himself plenty of material up.

**22 Ng3 Kh8 23 Rb5 Qf2 24 Qa1 Re6 25 Rf5 Rg8 26 Qc3 Rg6**

**White resigns**

Game 14

□ Kacheishvili ■ Jenni

Anibal Open, Linares 2001

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0**

Actually 4...0-0 rather than 4...c5, but this game is more relevant to this chapter than the last.

**5 Bd3 c5 6 Nge2 Nc6**

Not as popular as 6...cxd4 7 exd4 d5 or indeed the immediate 6...d5, neither of which commit the queen's knight.

**7 0-0 d5**

7...cxd4 8 exd4 d5 is more like the main line with White generally choosing between 9 Bg5, 9 a3 and 9 cxd5.

**8 cxd5 exd5 9 a3 Bxc3 10 bxc3 Re8 11 f3 b6 (Diagram 11)**



**Diagram 11**  
Tension in the centre



**Diagram 12**  
Lying in wait!

White has the bishop pair and a capacity for a big pawn centre. Black has a free enough position but would do well to keep the enemy dark-squared bishop out of the action.

12 Ra2



**TIP:** White players should keep an eye out for this crafty move as it is often the best way to activate the queen's rook.

12...Bb7 13 g4!?

Unable to get in e3-e4, White opts to expand on the kingside.

13...c4?!

Facilitating Black's next move, but sealing in his bishop and taking the pressure off the centre. As yet he has no targets on the kingside and so a less panicky move like 13...Qd6 might be more prudent.



**WARNING:** Be very sure before taking the pressure off the centre.

14 Bb1 Na5 15 Ng3 Nb3 16 g5 Nd7 17 e4

Compared to White's centre, Black's extra pawn on the queenside is unlikely to have a big impact for some time.

17...Nxc1 18 Qxc1 b5 19 e5 (Diagram 12)

The pawns, nicely placed on dark squares, beautifully complement the light-squared bishop. Now the e-, f- and g-pawns look very menacing and there are other problems besides.



**NOTE:** Bishops are long-range pieces. It may rest on b1 but White's light-squared bishop has a big influence elsewhere.

19...a5 20 Nh5 Qb6 21 Nf6+!

This 'spanner-in-the-works' move was looking distinctly on the cards.

21...gxf6 22 gxf6

Now Qg5 and Qh6 will both be mating, thus forcing Black's response.

22...Kh8 23 Qh6 Rg8+ 24 Kh1 Nf8 25 Rg1 (Diagram 13)



**Diagram 13**  
Mate is inevitable

Calling in the cavalry. After a trade of rooks mate will come at g7.

**25...Ng6 26 Rg5 Black resigns**

Cute! As well as 27 Rh5, White threatens the queen sac 27 Qxh7+.

Game 15

□ Sherbakov ■ Jakovenko

Russian Team Championship, Omsk 2001

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6**

Specifically 4...b6, but with a transposition clearly possible I have chosen to include it here.

**5 Nge2 c5 6 a3 Ba5 7 Rb1 (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14**

Don't forget the bishop!



**Diagram 15**

A king in trouble

The bishop on a5 is precariously placed, with b2-b4 a perpetual threat to be guarded against.

**7...Qe7 8 Bd2 Ba6**

8...Na6 is more common as it further controls the b4-square. Nevertheless, Black's dynamic choice asks questions of the c4-pawn.

**9 Nf4 cxd4 10 exd4 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 d5 12 g3**

12 cxd5 exd5+ 13 Be2 Bxe2 14 Nxe2 Nc6 would leave White with a bad bishop.

**12...Qd7**

After 12...Bxc4 13 Bxc4 dxc4 White had in mind 14 O-O!, with Black unable to prevent the advance d4-d5 that would vastly improve the bishop.

**13 b3 Bb7 14 Bg2 dxc4?**

A careless move which nevertheless proves very instructive for us. Better was the solid 14...O-O.



## Starting Out: The Nimzo-Indian

**15 d5!**

The opening of the long diagonal is painful for Black. Now castling looks too dangerous.

**15...cxb3!? 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Nh5! Qd6 18 0-0**

In contrast to its enemy number, the white king is now safely tucked away.

**18...Na6**

No better was 18...Nd7 19 dxe6 Qxd1 20 Rfxd1 Nc5 21 Bxb7 Nxb7 22 Rd7, e.g. 22...Nc5 23 Nxf6+ Kf8 24 Rxf7 mate.

**19 Nxf6+ Ke7 20 Qd4! e5 21 Qh4 (Diagram 15)**

**QUESTION 4:** Black now didn't take the knight, but why not?

**21...Kd8 22 Rxb3 Kc7**

A desperate attempt to escape with the king.

**23 Ne4! Qxd5 24 Rd3!!**

Very nice. Now the queen is forced to leave the e5-pawn unprotected.

**24...Qxd3 25 Qe7+ Qd7 26 Qxe5+**

26 Rc1+ Nc5 27 Qxe5+ Kd8 28 Nxc5 bxc5 29 Qxh8+ was a simpler way to win, but White gets there in the end.

**26...Kd8 27 Qf6+ Kc7 28 Qe5+ Kd8 29 Qxh8+ Ke7 30 Qf6+ Kf8 31 Qh6+ Ke7 32 Qf6+ Kf8 33 Qh6+ Ke7 34 Re1 Qe6 35 Qh4+ Kf8 36 Qxh7 Nc5 37 Re3 Nxe4 38 Bxe4 Bxe4 39 Qh8+ Ke7 40 Qh4+ Kd7 41 Rxe4 Qf5 42 Qe7+ Kc6 43 Rf4 Qd5 44 Qf6+ Kc7 45 Rd4 Qe6 46 Qf4+ Kc8 47 Rc4+ Kd8 48 Re4** Black resigns

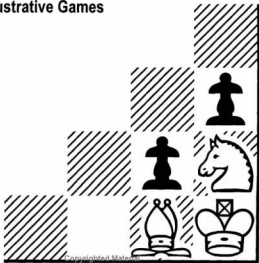
## Chapter Four

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# The Classical Variation

## 4 Qc2 d5

- Introduction
- White Plays 5 a3
- White Plays 5 cxd5
- Illustrative Games



## Introduction

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Qc2 (Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1**  
A comfort move



**Diagram 2**  
Resembling a QGD

The Classical Variation has become very popular in recent times as White aims to obtain a slight plus via the acquisition of the bishop pair advantage without doubled pawns.

**TIP: Don't bring your queen out too early.**

Above is a standard opening tip that is generally aimed at preventing such a valuable piece being kicked from pillar to post when the rest of the army should be getting developed instead. However, the c2-square is hardly a vulnerable square for the white queen and, having higher short-term ambitions for his dark-squared bishop, this is preferred to 4 Bd2.

Black's three main replies are covered over the next three chapters, starting with

### 4...d5 (Diagram 2)

Black observes that White might be being crafty and in controlling the key square e4, prevents his opponent from obtaining central domination through 5 e4. Bearing this in mind and taking a slight deviation, it should be observed that 4...b6?! is almost a case of shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. Unlike in the 4 e3 lines, Black's bishop won't arrive on b7 in time to prevent the attractive advance and indeed, with f2-f3 possibly following, it could well find itself fianchettoed against a wall of pawns.

Diagram 2 shows definite similarities with the Queen's Gambit Declined. The fundamental differences are that White would normally give preference to developing a knight or bishop rather than the queen and, not usually interested in a bishop-for-knight exchange (as

