

Italian Game

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1 Introduction

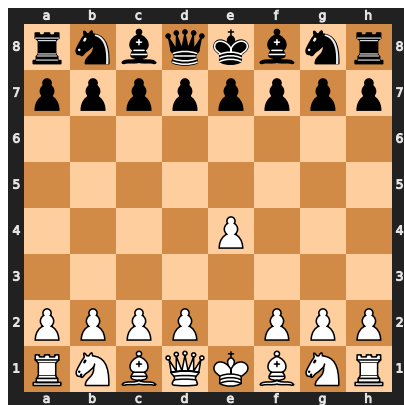
The Italian Game has been known for centuries: Giulio Cesare Polerio talks about it in his codes and it is mentioned in a treatise by Pedro Damiano of 1512 and, subsequently, by Gioachino Greco. Other moves in this line are reported in even older works. This opening has remained popular over the centuries and was played by the greatest chess players. This opening has three main variations:

- 1) Giuoco Piano;
- 2) Two Knights Defense;
- 3) Hungarian Defense;

Today, Grandmaster (GM) players such as Anish Giri, Wesley So, and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave often play the first variation which we will discuss later.

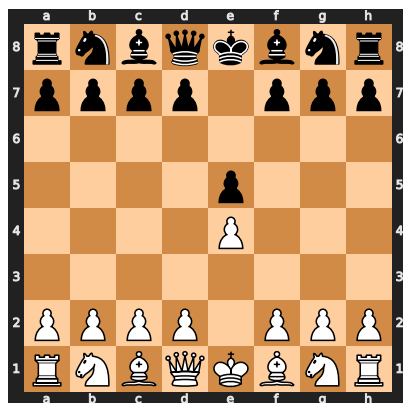
2 Italian Game

Italian Game starts with the King's Opening e4. Play e4, you will open the diagonals for White Queen and Bishop.



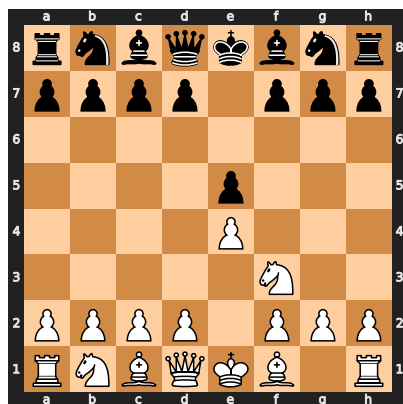
White 1. e4

Black replies with e5 with the same motivation.



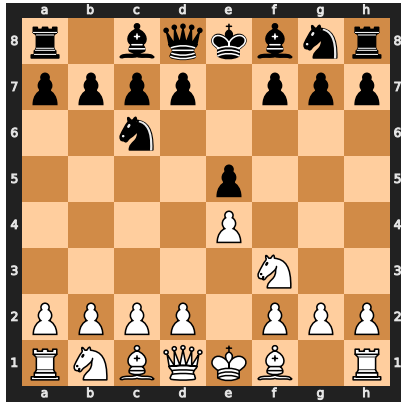
Black 1... e5

This configuration on the Chessboard is called King's Opening. Move Nf3 in order to attack the Pawn in e5.



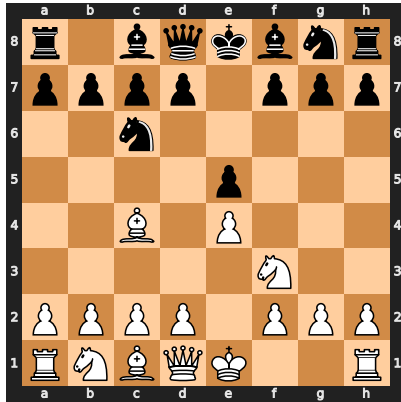
White 2. Nf3

Black replies with Nc6 in order to defend the Pawn in e5.



Black 2... Nc6

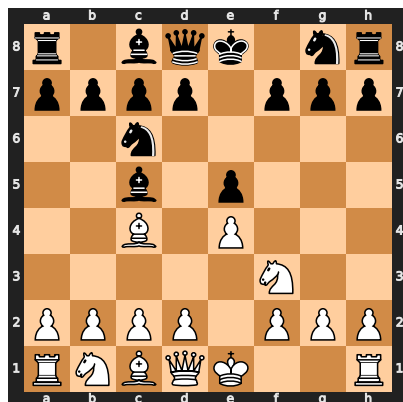
This line on the Chessboard is called King's Opening: Knights Variation. In order to play the Italian Game, you need to move Bc4.



White 3. Bc4

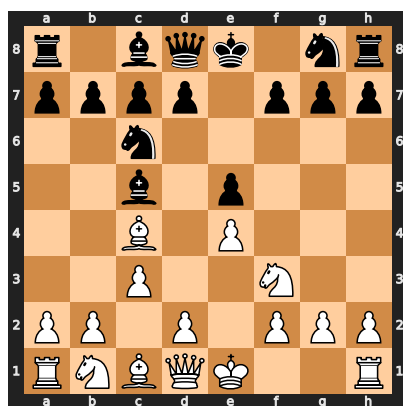
This configuration on the Chessboard is the Italian Game. The pro of this opening is that the Bishop defends the b5 and d5 cells and, in addition, it attacks the weak Pawn f7 that is only protected by the King. Moreover, it controls the center and it allows White to castle in the next moves. The cons of this line are the hanging Bishop and that central control is not so extended. Starting from this position there could be different variations depending on the Black and White replies. For example, the Giuoco Piano, Giuoco Pianissimo, Central Attack, Knight Attack, etc.

3 Giuoco Piano



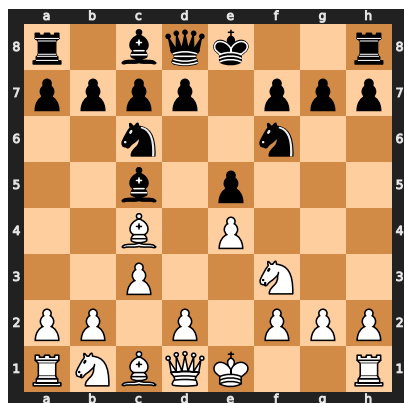
Black 3... Bc5

The best-known variation of the Italian Game is the Giuoco Piano (Quiet Game) where Black responds to the third move with Bc5. This variation is so-called because it leads to a more positional and slower game. The Black's reasons for making this move are the same as White's one. Put pressure on the weak pawn f2, fast development of the Bishop, control the cells b4 - d4, and the possibility of castling. However, Black is one piece behind White (the Knight). The cons of this move are the same as for White. In this variation White plays c3.



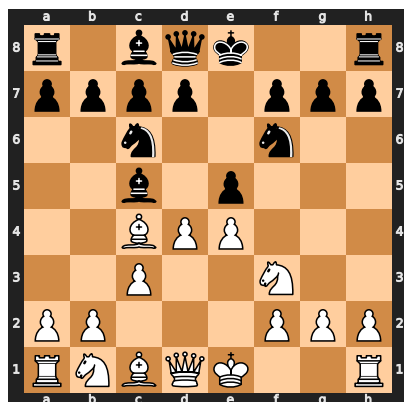
White 4. c3

The goal of this move is to defend cell d4 where we will move the pawn in d2 at the next move. Black usually replies with Nf6 in order to defend the d5 cell and attack the pawn in e4.



Black 4... Nf6

You can move now d4 attacking the Bishop in c5 and Pawn in e5.

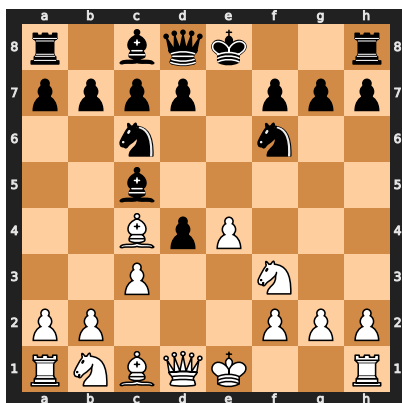


White 5. d4

This variation of the Giuoco Piano is called Central Attack. The White Pawn attack the Bishop in c5 and the Pawn in e5.

4 Giuoco Piano - Central Attack

When White plays the Central Attack, the best move for Black is exd4.



Black 5... exd4

Now we have a few options to continue
 cxd4

The best move for Black here is the intermediate check with the bishop with Bb4. Then we counter with Bd2. If the opposing bishop now accepts the exchange, we hit back with our knight with Nd2 and have reached a balanced position with the full center. However, if our opponent plays the better move knight beats e4, we swap the two bishops and then play the risky move bishop f7. In this way, we take the opponent's king out of castling, and we can then threaten the opposing knight with the move Qb3.

e5

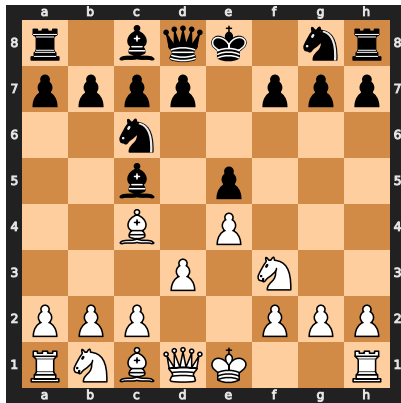
With this move, we endanger the opposing knight on f6. If he tries to escape, we can get a development lead. The better move here would be a pawn on d5. Here we flee with our runner and play a fairly balanced game.

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This variant is quite risky because we are betting on an opponent's mistake. If he castles after our castling, our pawn rush is starting with cxd4. But if our opponent plays the optimal move Nxe4, the game tends to be better for Black.

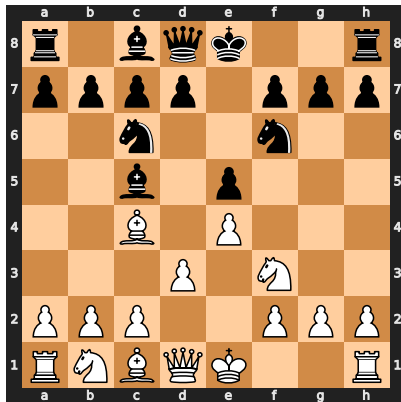
5 Giuoco Pianissimo

Another well-known variation of the Italian Game is the Giuoco Pianissimo. It is a continuation of the Giuoco Piano that leads to an even more positional and slow game. To play the Giuoco Pianissimo you need to move d3. Play d3.



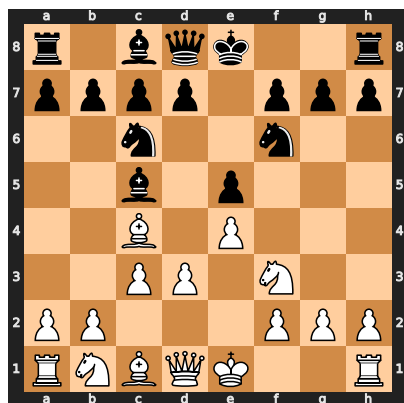
White 3. d3

The White Pawn in d3 defends the Bishop in c4 and Pawn in e4. Usually Black replies with Nf6.



Black 3... Nf6

White can continue the Giuoco Pianissimo playing c3 in order to control the cell d4 so that we can move d4 in the next move. Play c3.

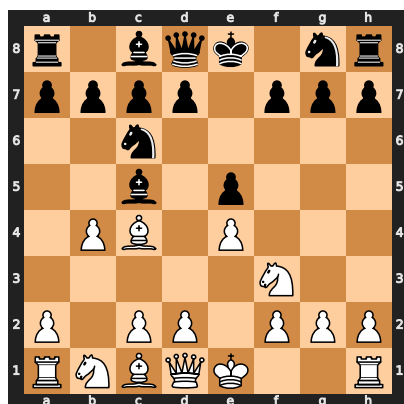


White 4. c3

White, in the next move, can continue with d4 to perform the Central Attack described in the Giuoco Piano chapter. Here we spent an additional move to arrive at the same configuration. However, in the meanwhile, we protected the Bishop in c4 and Pawn in e4.

6 Evan's Gambit

The Evan's Gambit is a continuation of the Giuoco Piano that adds a more aggressive approach to the White strategy. This variation involves move b4 after the Giuoco Piano.



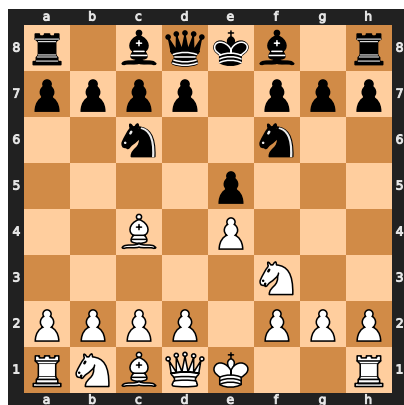
White 4. b4

This variation is not played at a very high level but it is quite frequent at

beginners and intermediate levels with an high success score.

7 Two Knights Defense

The Two Knights Defense is an alternative to the Giuoco Piano. When White plays Bc4 to start the Italian Game the Black can reply with Kf6 instead of Bc5 of the Giuoco Piano.

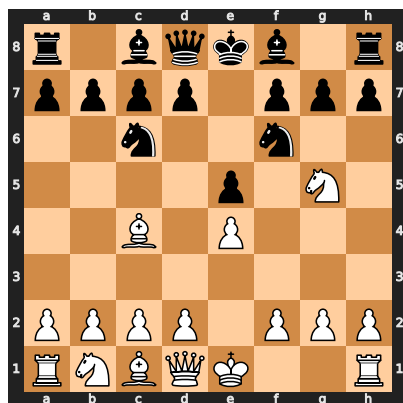


Black 1... Nf6

This defense allows the White some attacks such as the Fried Liver Attack or the Knight attack.

8 Knight Attack

Let's start with the Two Knights Defense. There is a trap we can play that is very effective with players with a rating ≤ 400 . Sometimes I even successfully played it with players in the 400-600 range, however, it is very risky because they usually know how to neutralize it. The trap consists in playing Ng5. Play Ng5.

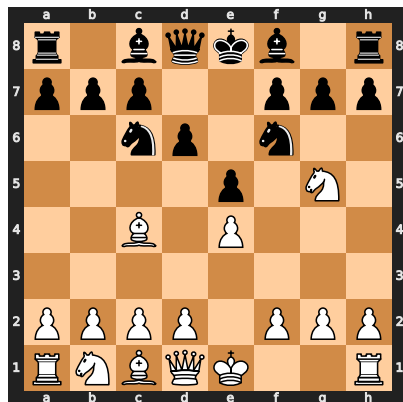


White 4. Ng5

The goal here is to attack with Bishop and Knight the weak Pawn in f7.

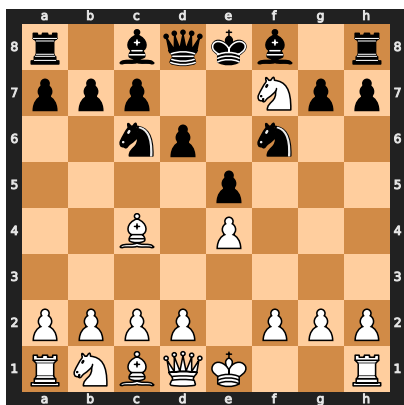
If Black neutralizes the attack with d5 we can move Nf7 to force the King to catch the Knight. You sacrifice it to avoid the opponent castles in the next moves. In the alternative, you can play d3 so that the Bishop in c1 will defend the Knight in g5.

However, when you play with very beginners players it could happen that they play something different from d5. Let's say Black plays d6.



Black 4... d6

Now you can move Nf7.

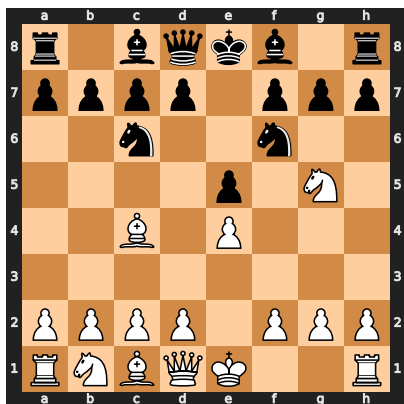


White 5. Nxf7

The Knight forked the Queen and the Rook. The King cannot catch it because it is defended by the Bishop. Usually, in this configuration, you earn a Rook that gives you a good advantage. However, in some games, some beginners even gave me the Queen losing the game.

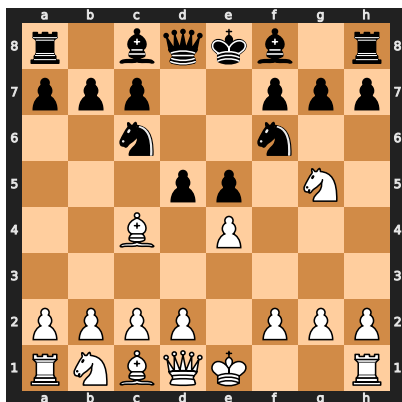
9 Fried Liver Attack

This is a well-known White attack against the Two Knights Defense. The goal for White is to sacrifice his Knight to avoid the Black's casting. The attack starts with Kg5.



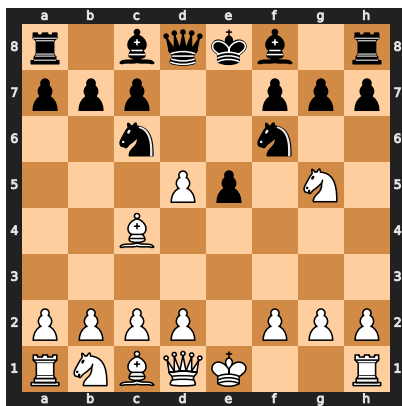
White 5. Ng5

The best move for Black is d5.



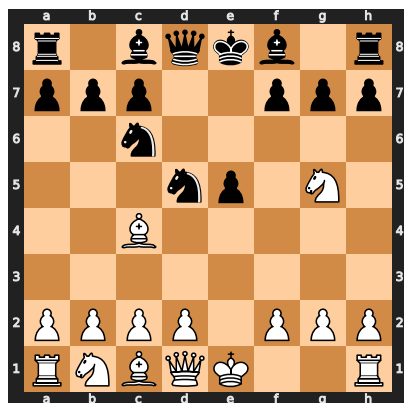
Black 5... d5

White catch the Black Pawn with exd5.



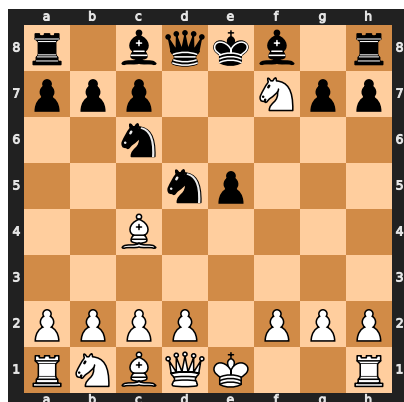
White 6. exd5

Black replies with Kxd5.



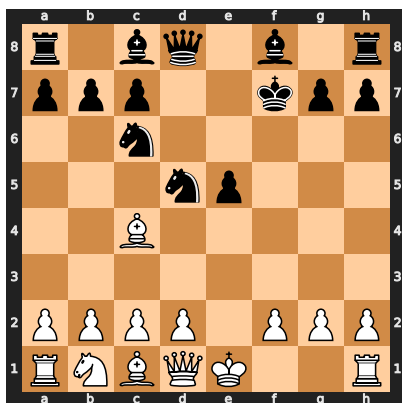
Black 6... Nxd5

Now White is ready to attack with Kf7.



White 7. Nxf7

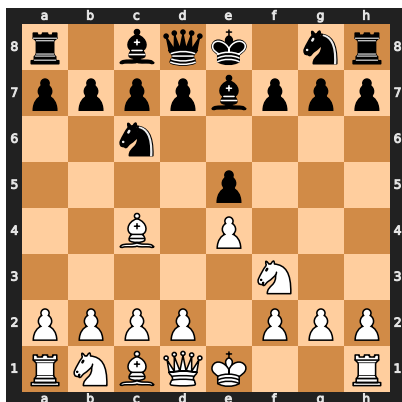
As in the Knight attack the White Knight fork the Queen and the Rook but this time there is no Bishop protection. Therefore, the King can catch the White Knight removing the threat but with no possibility to castle in the next moves. Black move Kxf7.



Black 7... Kxf7

10 Hungarian Defense

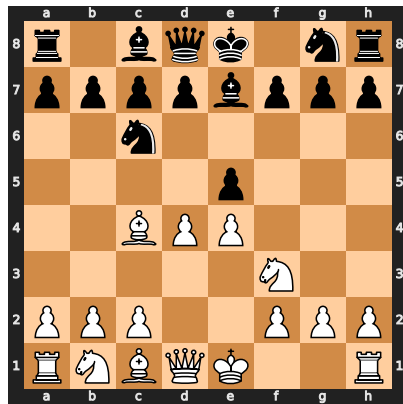
The Hungarian Defense is an alternative to the Giuoco Piano and the Two Knight Defense. This is a line typically chosen as a quiet response to the aggressive Bc4. The opening is seldom seen in modern play. To play this defense Black play Be7 avoiding the complexities of the Giuoco Piano, Evans Gambit, and Two Knights Defense. White has an advantage in space and freer development, so Black must be prepared to defend a cramped position. Black play Be7.



Black 7... Be7

The Bishop protects the g5 square preventing the White Knight from attacking.

The best reply for White is d4.



White 8. d4

With d4 White has an advantage in controlling the center.