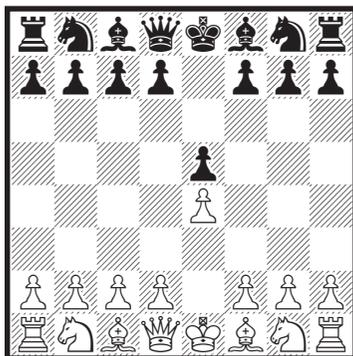


7. OPEN GAMES

INTRODUCTION

Ever since pawns earned the right to march forward two squares in one turn, the move $1.e4$ has been a favorite at all levels of play. It is the first opening choice of most players, and for good reason. The White pawn at $e4$ occupies an important square and controls both $d5$ and $f5$. If Black places a piece at $f6$, White can attack it by further advancing the pawn to $e5$.

When Black responds with $1...e5$, we have an **Open Game**. The point is not to maintain symmetry for its own sake, but rather to contest important squares in the center. By occupying $e5$, the pawn presents an obstacle to the further advance of the White pawn at $e4$. There are no real drawbacks to $1...e5$, save that it can serve as a target for White's pieces.



Indeed, the battle for control of $e5$ is the most significant aspect of the Open Games, and one which distinguishes them from all others. The most natural continuation, the **Spanish Game**, keeps the central battle raging for many moves. This has become the most established continuation, but White has also explored more direct methods of attack. Most of them have fallen from fashion, and only surface on rare

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occasions. There are a few, such as the **Italian Game**, that have attracted the serious attention of World Champions.

The pace of development in the Open Games is generally quite rapid, with all pieces comfortably developed and both kings castled safely well before the 15th move. If Black does not attend to the safety of the king early in the game, then the game can quickly end in disaster. White can afford the luxury of a few inaccurate moves, but Black must exercise more care. This is one of the aspects of Open Games that appeals to players as White, but can be annoying as Black.

Actually, the Open Games are fairly simple to play correctly if the pieces are developed actively by Black.

OVERVIEW

The Open Games have a long history and many branches have developed from the main lines. Nevertheless, the **Spanish Game** (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5), known in America as the **Ruy Lopez**, is the most respected of the Open Games. It contains a wealth of stylistic possibilities, and many players feel quite comfortable on either side of the board. It is rare to find a chessplayer who has never played it, and one can only pity those unfortunates, since the Spanish Game leads to some of the most profound positions in chess, which retain secrets even when analyzed well past move thirty.

The **Italian Game** (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4) is also ancient, with a great deal of theory accumulated well before the twentieth century. Nevertheless, new ideas are constantly being introduced, and both the present PCA World Champion, Garry Kasparov, and the FIDE World Champion, Anatoly Karpov, have played it in top-level competition. From the Italian Game, White can direct the play into the Scotch Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4, also reached via 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4) or Evans Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.b4!?).

The **King's Gambit** (1.e4 e5 2.f4) retains its vitality even though it was supposedly analyzed to death over 75 years ago. The **Vienna Game** (1.e4 e5 2.Nc3), a rather stodgy approach, can take on gambit characteristics after 3.f4. Other gambits are no longer seen in high-level play, except as surprise weapons.

Black has some gambits available too, such as the **Latvian Gambit** (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f5), though they are generally considered inferior and are not played by World Champions in serious circumstances. For the most part it is too risky to invest a pawn when behind in development.

After 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Black has more reasonable alternatives, for example 2...Nf6, the **Russian Game**, in which piece symmetry can be

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maintained only briefly, but pawn structure can remain symmetrical throughout the game. Another interesting option is the **Philidor Defense** (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6), which can lead to exciting positions with castling on opposite wings. The **Bishop's Opening** is a largely transpositional tool usually leading to the Italian Game.