

How to Play the Winawer Counter gambit by Eric Schiller

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Winawer Countergambit (1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 e5!?) was dismissed by theory until quite recently, when it enjoyed a considerable renaissance in the 1990s. In this book you will find an up-to-date survey of the opening, with the largest collection of complete games and opinions on the variations from leading players past and present.

Three recent books were the primary sources for the material used in this work. Silman & Donaldson (1993), Matsukevich (1994), Markov & Schipkov (1994). I have supplemented these references with the Deja Vu Chess Library, finding complete scores of most of the games, and I present them in full in this book. Ancient wisdom was also consulted in the form of opening manuals dating back to the 19th century, and the history of the opening, or more accurately, of its reputation, is presented in the historical summary chapter.

Since the major sources cited are designed for use by advanced players, I have tried to extend the analysis and explain evaluations wherever necessary so that lower rated (1400+) tournament players can follow the discussion and use the opening in tournament play with a full understanding of the strategies and tactics which commonly arise.

In addition, I have tried to find new ideas, especially in the sidelines of the gambit.

How to play the Winawer Countergambit

Part One: White Accepts the Gambit with 4.dxe5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 e5 4.dxe5



Accepting the gambit is a common strategy for White. Even though Black will be able to develop quickly, and usually regain the pawn, the Black queen becomes exposed. By pressuring the Black queen, White can regain a lot of the time lost in the first few moves, and will often emerge with the initiative. At present, theory considers acceptance of the gambit to be one of White's best options.

4...d4 5.Ne4 Qa5+

This is the normal continuation. Black will tie down White's pieces and use the time for rapid development. The drawback is that at some point Black needs to regain the pawn, and this means returning the advantage in time. There are some options which involve a permanent gambit, usually with ...f6, but only time will tell if they are really sound.

Chapter 2: 4.dxe5 (Introduction)

Alapin – Marco

Monte Carlo, 1901

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 e5 4.dxe5 d4 5.Ne4 Qa5+

This is almost always seen. Bagirov tried to adapt Marco's idea of developing the light-squared bishop at f5, this time as a true gambit, without any attempt to regain the pawn. After 5...Bf5 (5...Bb4+ 6.Bd2 Bxd2+ 7.Qxd2 Bf5 8.Nd6+ Kf8 9.Nxf5 1-0, Mantia-Bair, Ohio 1987.) 6.Ng3 we have:

- a) 6...Be6, which remains untested, but looks unimpressive to me:
7.Nf3
- a1) 7...Qa5+ 8.Bd2 Bb4 9.Bxb4 Qxb4+ 10.Qd2 Qxd2+ 11.Nxd2±.
- a2) 7...Bb4+ 8.Bd2 Bxd2+ 9.Qxd2 Bxc4 10.Qxd4 Qxd4 11.Nxd4 Nd7 12.Ngf5!±.
- a3) 7...Bxc4 8.Qxd4 Bb4+ 9.Bd2 Qxd4 10.Nxd4 Bxd2+ 11.Kxd2 Nd7 12.Ngf5± –Analysis.
- b) 6...Bg6 is not good. 7.e4! effectively refutes this plan. 7...dxe3 (7...f6 8.e6 is given in Silman & Donaldson. 8...Bb4+ 9.Bd2 Qd6 10.f4 and the Bg6 is in serious trouble.) 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.Bxe3 Bb4+ 10.Bd2 Bxd2+ 11.Kxd2 and Black has nothing to show for the pawn. 11...Nd7 12.f4 Nh6 13.Nf3 Ke7 14.Kc3 Nc5 15.Nh4 Ke6 16.Be2 Rad8 17.Nxg6 hxg6 18.b4 Na4+ 19.Kb3 Nb6 20.Rad1 Nc8 21.Kc3 Ne7 22.Bf3 b6 23.Ne4 f6 24.exf6 gxf6 25.Rhe1 Rxd1 26.Rxd1 Nhf5 27.h3 Nc8 28.Bg4 Re8 29.Ng3 Nce7 30.Re1+ Kd7 31.Ne4 Rf8 32.Nd2 Kd8 33.Nb3 Ke8 34.Nd4 Nxd4 35.Kxd4 f5 36.Bf3 Kf7 37.Kc3 Rh8 38.Rd1 Ke6 39.c5 bxc5 40.bxc5 Rh4 41.Rd6+ Kf7 42.Rd4 a5 43.Kd3 Rh8 44.Ra4 Ra8 45.Kc4 Ra7 46.Ra3 Ke8 47.Kd4 Kf7 48.Kc4 Ke8 49.Rb3 Kd7 50.a3 Ke6 51.Rb6 Kd7 52.Kd4 a4 53.Ke5 Rc7 54.Kf6 Ra7 55.g3 Kd8 56.Rb8+ Kd7 57.Rh8 Rc7 58.Rh7 Ke8 59.Ke6 Kf8 60.Rf7+ Ke8 61.h4 Rb7 62.h5 1-0, Engqvist-Bagirov, Stockholm 1990.

How to play the Winawer Countergambit

6.Nd2

6.Bd2 is equally popular now.

6...Bf5



This was the original plan, but it was quickly abandoned.

6...Bg4 is a recent try which turned out well in its debut.

a) 7.Ngf3 and now:

a1) 7...Bxf3 8.exf3 Qxe5+ (8...Nd7 9.f4 0-0-0 10.Bd3 Nc5 11.Bf5+ and White will castle with a good game.) 9.Qe2 Qxe2+ (9...Bd6 10.Qxe5+ Bxe5 11.Bd3 Nf6 12.0-0 0-0 13.Re1 and White has the bishop pair and the initiative.) 10.Bxe2 Nf6 11.0-0 Be7 12.Re1 0-0 13.Ne4 and the bishop pair may be worth more than the doubled pawns.

a2) 7...c5 8.b4!? Qxb4 (8...cxb4 9.Nb3 Qd8 10.Qxd4±) 9.Rb1 Qa5 10.Rxb7 Qxa2 11.Ng5 Be6 (11...Bh5 12.e6) 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.e3 dxe3 14.fxe3 and White will have a lot of fun on the light squares.

b) 7.h3. I don't like this kingside expansion plan much. Why not just develop? 7...Bh5 8.g4 Bg6 9.Ngf3 h5 10.Bg2 hxg4 11.Nxd4 Nd7 12.e6! Ne5! 13.exf7+ Bxf7 14.N4b3 Qc7 15.Ne4 Nxc4 16.Bg5 Bd5 17.Qd4 Bb4+ 18.Kf1 Ne7 19.hxg4 Rxh1+ 20.Bxh1 0-0-0. Matsukevich considers this position unclear. 21.Bf3 Qh2 22.Rd1 Ne5 23.Bg2 Nf7 24.Qxb4 Nxc5 25.Qxe7 Nh3 26.Ke1 Qxg2 27.Nd6+ Rxd6 28.Qxd6 Qxf2+ 29.Kd2 Ng5 30.Kc1 Ne4 31.Qe7 Qe3+ 32.Nd2 g5 33.Qf8+ Kc7 34.Qe7+ Kb6 35.Qb4+ Kc7 36.Qe7+ Kb6 37.Qa3 Qxe2 38.Qb4+ Kc7 39.Nxe4 Qxe4 40.Qxe4 Bxe4 41.Rf1 Kd6

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42.Rf7 b5 43.Rxa7 Ke5 44.Rf7 Kd4 1-0, Epishin-Shabalov, Tilburg 1993.

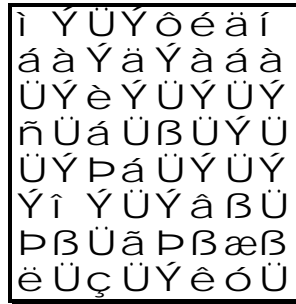
7.Ngf3 c5

Black must do something about the weak pawn at d4, especially since if it falls to the knight, the bishop on f5 will be attacked. As we have seen in Engvist-Bagirov (above), the problem with the bishop at f5 is that it is just too exposed to attack by White knights.

8.Qb3

8.g3± is preferred by Matsukevich, and if one compares this position with that of the Albin Countergambit, it is clear that Black's pieces are poorly placed. But there is nothing wrong with delaying the fianchetto and developing the queen.

8...Nd7 9.g3 Be4 10.Bg2 Bc6 11.0-0



White has a clear advantage. The extra pawn is strong and the light squares can be contested. Yet it is the nature of gambit play that if the side with the extra material is not careful, some counterplay can arise.

11...Ne7 12.e3 dxe3 13.Qxe3 Nf5 14.Qf4 g6

Black is still much worse, but starts to get a glimmer of hope on the dark squares and with opposite wing castling.

15.Ne4 0-0-0 16.Neg5?!

This allows White's pieces to get tied down.

16.Nd6+!?

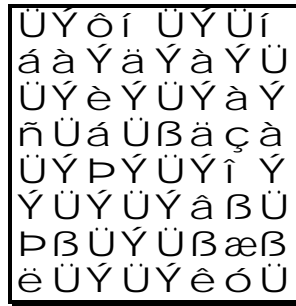
a) 16...Bxd6 17.exd6 Bxf3 18.Bxf3 Nd4 19.Be3! (19.Qxf7?? Rdf8. or 19.Bd5?? Ne2+) 19...Nc2 (19...Nxf3+) 20.Rac1 Nxe3 21.fxe3

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Qxa2 22.Ra1 Qxb2 23.Rfb1 Qf6 24.Bxb7+ Kb8 25.Bc6+ Nb6
26.Rxb6+ axb6 27.Ra8#.

b) 16...Nxd6 17.exd6 f5 18.Bd2 embarrasses the Black queen.
18...Qa6 19.Bc3 Rg8 20.b4 cxb4 21.Bxb4±

16...Bh6 17.Qg4 Bxg5 18.Bxg5 h5



19.Qf4 Rde8 20.a3?

White is wasting time. With an extra pawn and the bishop pair, more aggressive play was required. 20.Bh3 Bxf3 21.Qxf3 Rxe5 (21...Nd4 22.Bxd7+ Kxd7 23.Qxf7+. 21...Nxe5 22.Bxf5+ gxf5 23.Qxf5+ Re6 24.Bf6) 22.Rad1 looks good for White, with the bishop pair and a strong initiative, for example: 22...Qxa2 (22...Nd4? 23.Bxd7+ Kxd7 24.Qxf7+ Kc8 25.Bf6) 23.Rxd7 Kxd7 24.Qxb7+ Ke6 (24...Ke8 25.Qb8+) 25.Qe7#.

20...Re6 21.b4 Qc7 22.b5 Bxf3 23.Bxf3 Nd4!

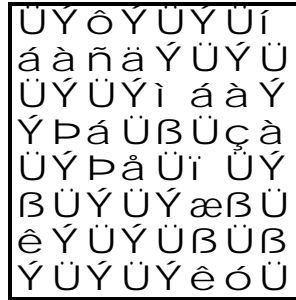
White's pieces are not doing anything, and with the locked queenside, Black's king is safe, so there is opportunity for such counterplay.

24.Ra2?

An incomprehensible move.

24...f6!

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Suddenly Black is winning!

25.Bd5

Or 25.exf6 Qxf4 26.Bxf4 Nxf3+.

25...fxg5 26.Qxg5 Qxe5 0-1.

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