



The Most Flexible Sicilian

A Black Repertoire with 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6

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The Most Flexible Sicilian

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Foreword

This book offers a double repertoire for Black based on the moves 1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 e6!. It is divided in several parts: playing against ♗e2; against f4; g3; the third rank set-up ♗e3+♗d3; the English Attack; the hedgehog structures.

After 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4, I analyse in separate chapters the Taimanov move order with 4...♗c6, and the Kan with 4...a6. Every part begins with a chapter “Main Ideas” which discusses the pros and cons of the two approaches and offers advice which one works better against White’s particular set-up. The next chapters, called “Taimanov – Step by Step” and “Kan – Step by Step”, present detailed theory. Finally, a “Complete Games” chapter offers additional annotations.

This structure should allow you to better understand the typical ideas which are similar in many aspects:

Black’s pawn often remains on d7 allowing an early activation of the dark-squared bishop through b4, c5 or even d6 in some lines, the ...d5 break is without loss of tempo on ...d6;

The pressure on the e4-pawn with ...b5, ...♗b7, ...♗f6 is common for both systems;

The queen goes early to c7 to control the central dark squares and support the bishop when it goes to b4 or d6;

We often change the pawn structure by recapturing ...dxc6 followed by ...e6-e5.

The hedgehog structures share the same main plan – to achieve the break ...d5.

The concluding parts present a repertoire against the Anti-Sicilians like the Alapin with c3, the King’s Indian Reversed with d3, and the modern fianchetto with 3.g3.

It is difficult to make a repertoire which would satisfy every taste. I would recommend the Kan to readers who: understand positional play and prophylaxis; are not theoreticians; defend calmly and unabashedly.

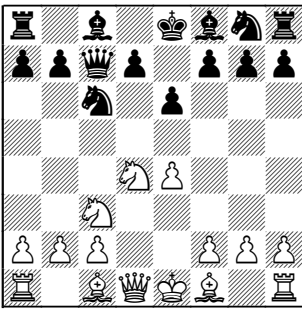
If you like early clashes and sharp theoretical disputes (and have good memory!), the Taimanov is the better choice.

The ultimate goal should be to master both systems. Then you’ll be really unpredictable to your opponents!

*Alexander Delchev
April 2014*

Introduction

The Taimanov System which arises after the moves 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6! 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♖c6 5.♗c3 ♚c7 was my main weapon against 1.e4 until 2008.



It suits well my style and it brought me good practical results. Another cause of my successes was that my opponents lacked clear models to follow since the variation was not popular at top level. I was able to play my own schemes and I only had to make minor improvements on my previous games. It was sufficient to keep in store a few alternatives which aimed to escape home preparation and assured me of the psychological edge. I had always the feeling that the battle was fought on my land. However, the second edition of *The safest*

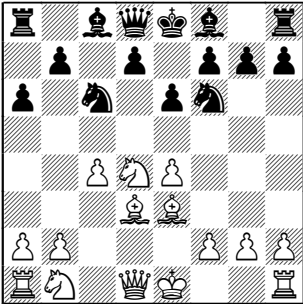
Sicilian brought about a burst of popularity of my pet system. The first players developed many new plans, the engines also improved dramatically. Some of my back-up alternatives were refuted. There was no more ground for retreat and I had to accept deep theoretical disputes in every game. It became practically unrewarding to keep my repertoire in full swing all the time.

So I decided to reserve the Taimanov for rapid games where there is no time for targeted home preparation and good understanding is often more important than the objective evaluation of the position. Thus I was able to experiment with new ideas without spending too much time on them.

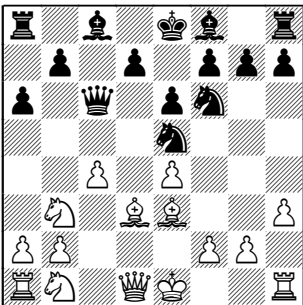
At the same time I began my migration toward the Kan. I was extremely impressed by its flexibility and the variety of plans it offers. The move order 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6! 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 is outwardly so modest and unobtrusive that White could choose virtually any developing scheme at his liking. The play is not forced and both sides have tons of options on every move. This greatly reduces the chance of being caught on a home preparation.

Introduction

The wide choice also means an ample ground for strategic mistakes. Even good grandmasters often mix up the move order and allow an easy equalisation. Look at the following variation: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4 ♗f6 6.♙d3 ♖c6 7.♙e3?!



White played a natural developing move, but Black suddenly leaps forward: 7...♗e5! 8.h3 – another natural move which occurred in 5 games (8.♗c3 ♗fg4; 8.0-0 ♗fg4 9.♙f4 g5!) 8...♗b6! and Black already has an initiative – 9.♗b3 (9.a3 ♗xb2 10.♗b3 ♗xd3+ 11.♗xd3 ♗e5 12.♗1d2 ♗c7; 9.♗b5 ♙c5+) 9...♗c6! (9...♙b4+ 10.♗c3 ♗d6 11.♙d4 ♗xd3+ 12.♗xd3 e5 13.0-0-0!)



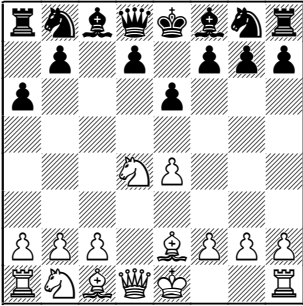
White must give up the c4-pawn with a dubious compensation.

The best way to exploit the weaknesses of your opponents' repertoires is to master the whole range of systems with 2...e6. That would allow you to choose the most unpleasant set-up against any particular opponent. For instance, if the White player is narrowly specialised in the English Attack, you may choose to delay ...♗c6. This approach effectively discourages White's set-up with ♙e3. It is also very good against the fans of an early f4, the fianchetto with g3 and the Classical system with ♙e2. On the contrary, if your opponent is a practical player who avoids main lines, then the Taimanov move order would be more unpleasant as it narrows White's safe paths in the opening.

I would choose the Kan against any player who treats it with 5.♗c3, and the Taimanov against fans of the Maróczy Bind. The Kan may also be the better option if your opponent tried to outwit you by the move order 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.♗c3. The knight is committed to c3 so 3...a6!? would be an excellent choice.

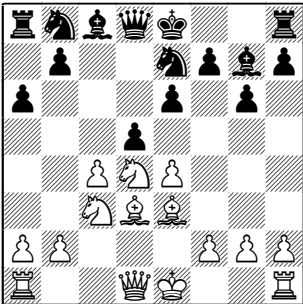
Keep in mind that the Taimanov is a self-sufficient system while in some Kan lines it is best to develop the knight on c6 switching over to the Taimanov. One such example is 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♙e2!?

Introduction



Perhaps the best option here is 5...c7 (or 5...d6 first) 6.0-0 d6 7.d3 c3 d6.

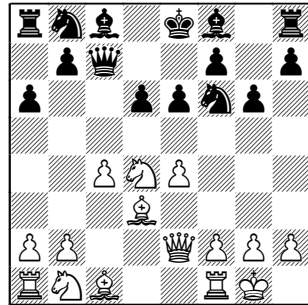
Undoubtedly, the move order with 5.d3 is the most challenging system against the Kan. White hopes to build up the Maróczy Bind with c4 and keep a firm grip on the centre. A partial consolation for Black is that he is spared of direct attacks against his king. I offer two anti-dotes. If you hate long manoeuvring in hedgehog pawn structures, you can play 5...g6!? followed by ...d7-d5.



Thus you will be able to eliminate the centre and gradually neutralise White's lead in development. This line is not popular among top

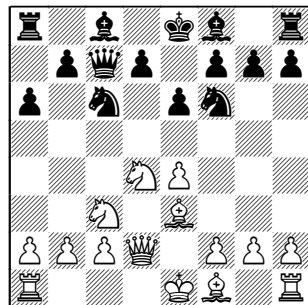
players. That means your opponents will lack a model game to follow and will have to play over the board with their own capacity.

A more complex approach is 5...d6 6.0-0 c7 7.d3 e2 d6 8.c4. Again, I propose 8...g6.



Ivanchuk often plays it with the fresh positional idea of ...d5, ...g7xc3 followed up by a blockade on the dark squares.

The most dangerous plan against the Taimanov has always been the English Attack – 1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.dxd4 d6 5.d3 c7 6.d3 a6 7.d2 d6



In 2013, Black has developed a new way of meeting it – 8.0-0-0

Introduction

♙e7! 9.f3 b5 10.g4 ♘xd4! 11.♙xd4
♙b7 which brings terrific results.
White even began to avoid it and
switched over to 8.f4, but we are
well prepared against it, too.

In conclusion, the Sicilian develop-
ment with 2...e6 has never been
in a better theoretical state. It has
become extremely popular among
the elite so we'll be seeing it very of-
ten in the years to come.

**I wrote this book in first
person, but it is a collabora-
tive work.**

Every line has been checked
and discussed by both authors. I
play these systems with both col-
ours while Semko Semkov de-
fends exclusively Black's side –
first as a practical player, then as
a theoretician.

We tried to answer for you all the
questions we thought important.

*Alexander Delchev
April 2014*

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