

THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

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Stormy Weather

Any sharp, counter-attacking opening is ‘contrary to the ancient laws of chess chivalry (Black must defend!)’, says Tal, but is all the more honoured for that. Black forsakes safety for the sake of a complex and interesting struggle in which all three results are possible. But it is one thing to defy chess chivalry and quite another to deny chess logic: the risks in such a double-edged approach must fall disproportionately on Black. The sharper the opening, the more frequent must be the crises and the defeats.

The old main line of the Winawer Poisoned Pawn is very sharp indeed, and has seen many cycles of refutation and rehabilitation. Sometimes formerly dangerous lines that seemed becalmed erupt in new fury, and one such storm is currently raging in the Tait variation. It had been thought that Black had a single safe harbour, but recent results have been devastating. Once again, Black needs new ideas ...

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Poisoned Pawn: Tait variation with 16 ... f6

Tsygankov–Stengelin

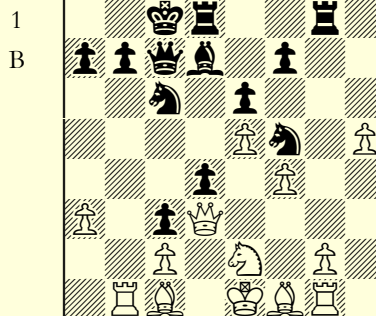
WC37/pr08 ICCF corr 2013

ICCF monthly archive, March 2014

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5
a3 ♘xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♗g4 ♗c7 8
♖xg7 ♞g8 9 ♗xh7 cxd4 10 ♘e2 ♘bc6
11 f4 ♙d7

12 ♗d3	♙dxc3
13 ♞b1	d4
14 h4	0-0-0
15 h5	♘f5
16 ♞g1! (1)	

Jonathan Tait’s discovery, circa 1986, and thus long pre-dating his article “A Bust to the 7 ... ♗c7 Winawer –?”, *Cor-*



espondence Chess 127, Summer 1995, pp. 10-15. White adopts a setup similar to

the 13 ♖xc3 main line, with h4-h5 instead of 13 ♖xc3-d3. This change has far-reaching consequences.

16 ... f6

Instead 16 ... ♗a5, Black's saving resource in the 13 ♖xc3 line (see issue 22), is ineffective here since the c-file is blocked, deadening the impact of a following ... ♗a4. As indeed already noted by Tait: the framework of the theory was all present in the original article.

Tait thought (16 ... ♗a5) 17 g4 ♗a4 18 gxf5? ♗xc2 19 ♖xc2 d3 20 ♖xc3 dxe2 21 ♖xc7+ ♖xc7 22 ♖xg8 exf1=♖+ 23 ♖xf1 ♖xg8 24 fxe6 fxe6 'should still give Black a draw', but here 25 f5! exf5 26 h6! seems to leave Black in dire straits (26 ... ♖b8 27 ♖b5; 26 ... ♗c6 27 e6). White also has the simpler 18 ♖b4: 18 ... ♗xc2 19 ♖xc2 d3 20 ♖xc3 dxe2 21 ♖xc7+ ♖xc7 22 ♗xe2±± or 20 ... ♗c6 21 ♖b1 dxe2 22 ♗xe2±±.

The enterprising text move was long the main line and is still the most common; ? Tait. But recent results have been disastrous and the whole line now seems refuted.

17 g4

Here 17 exf6? avoids the piece sacrifice below but gains no advantage after 17 ... e5 18 g4 ♗d6 ∞/=.

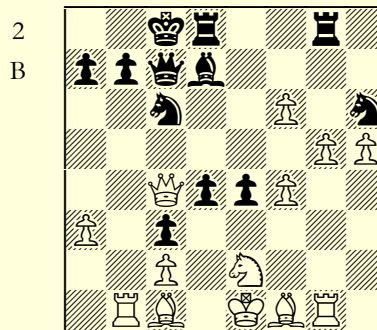
17 ... fxe5

The natural 17 ... ♗h4 loses the knight to 18 ♖h3±±: a major point of the Tait setup. (Cf. the 13 ♖xc3 lines.) The only alternative to the text move is a retreat to h6.

After 17 ... ♗h6 18 exf6, Berg *GMR-2 p. 151* gives 18 ... ♖xg4 19 ♖xg4 ♗xg4 20 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 21 ♖xd4±. Long ago Tait gave the continuation 21 ... ♗b5 (or 21 ... ♗e8,

'unclear' per Giddins *MbM p. 146, 22 ♖xa7 ♖c6 23 ♗e3±±*) 22 ♖g1! ♗xf1 23 ♖xg4 ♗c4 24 ♗e3 *Chess Mail 3/2, February 1999, p. 36* when White is winning, as borne out by several examples.

But no better is (17 ... ♗h6 18 exf6) 18 ... e5 19 g5 e4 20 ♖c4!(2).



The classic game **Tait–Oomen, BCCA-NBC corr match 1992-94** (*Tait (1995); McDonald FW pp. 30-1*) continued 20 ... d3 21 ♗xc3 dxc2 22 ♖b2 e3 23 ♖xc2±± (1-0, 37), and McDonald gave 20 ... ♗f5 21 f7 ♖h8 22 g6±±.

There are two examples from recent years: **Dvirnyy–Genna, Conegliano Open 2008**, where Black did better after 20 ... ♗f5 21 ♗g3 d3 22 ♖xc3? e3 23 ♗xf5 d2+ 24 ♖d1 ♗xf5 25 ♗e2 dxc1=♖+? (25 ... ♗fd4! with a winning attack) 26 ♖xc1 ♖xf4= and ½-½, 37, but here simply 22 ♗xf5 followed by ♖e6+ wins; and **Bulmaga–Bukal Jr., European Individual Ch, Plovdiv 2012**, when Black did much worse after 20 ... ♖ge8? 21 gxf6±± ♗e6 22 ♗h3 (or 22 ♖b5±±) 22 ... ♗xh3 23 ♖g7 ♖d7 24 f7 ♖ed8 25 h7 (1-0, 34).

So 17 ... ♗h6 deserves its long-standing poor reputation.

18 gxf5 exf5!

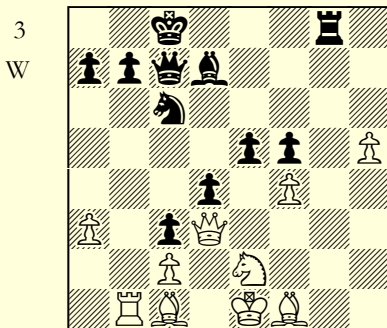
The natural 18 ... ♖xg1? 19 ♗xg1 exf5 leaves Black with little or no compensation after 20 fxe5!, as already given in Tait's original article: cf. **Zapf-van Willigen, BdF/Bronze ICCF corr 2007** (1-0, 28) for a more recent example.

By capturing on f5 before exchanging, Black prevents 19 fxe5? since 19 ... ♗xe5±± 20 ♖xd4? allows 20 ... ♗f3+ (no knight on g1) and the queen may not move to the g-file either. The stem game **Harding-Arounopoulos, World Ch 2 ½-final-05 corr 1997** was extensively analysed by Harding in the article "Is Black OK in the French Winawer, Tait Variation?" (Elburg, with additions by Harding and Tait) *Chess Mail* 3/2, February 1999, pp. 34-37 and formed the foundation of the theory until recently, e.g. Watson *ChessPublishing.com, August 2010*, Moskalenko *tWW pp. 226-7*.

19 ♖xg8

On 19 ♖g5!? Watson analyses 19 ... e4! and 19 ... ♖ge8!? (each ∞/=).

The immediate 19 ♖b5 leads to no advantage after 19 ... e4 20 ♖c4 ♖xg1 21 ♗xg1 ♖h8=. With the knight on g1 White is not threatening to take on d4.

19 ... ♖xg8(3)**20 ♖b5!!**

Harding played the natural 20 ♖c4 and lost a spectacular game after 20 ... ♖d8!? 21 fxe5? ♖h4+ 22 ♗d1 ♖g4! 23 e6 ♗e8! 24 ♖b5 ♖f2 and the black king is able to escape in all lines (0-1, 35). Better 21 ♗d1, and after 21 ... ♖g4 22 ♖d5 ♖h4, taking the perpetual check with 23 ♖xb7! as in **Bergmann-Neven, WC.2005.F.00006 IECG corr 2006** (½-½, 26) (*Watson, Moskalenko*). After 22 fxe5? Watson analyses 22 ... ♖h4 23 ♖b5 ♖f2 24 ♗h3 ♖f3?! 25 ♗d2 to equality, but 24 ... b6! wins, as does 24 ♖xb7+ ♗d8 25 ♗h3 ♖f3 26 ♗d2 ♖g1+ 27 ♗e1 d3±±.

There are few examples with 20 h6. After 20 ... ♖d8 21 ♗d1 ♖g4 22 h7 ♖h4 23 fxe5 ♖xh7, as in **Sakai-Demian, CCOL15/S3/B2 ICCF email 2003**, White lacks any obvious way to exploit his material advantage (½-½, 63).

Instead 20 ♖b5!!, from **Mikhailchuk-Gawehns, harlekin's mini-tournament III, www.gameknot.com corr 2011** *Chess-Publishing.com, May 2011* (*Watson*) (1-0, 37), 'turns the theory of the Tait variation on its head' (*Watson*). The immediate threat is 21 fxe5, when 21 ... ♗xe5 fails to 22 ♖xe5 and 23 ♖c4+, and more generally the rook will undermine Black's centre. It turns out that the WQ is already ideally placed on d3 where it helps keep the K-side secure while still eyeing d4 (cf. 20 ♖b3?! e4=).

20 ... ♖d8

Instead 20 ... e4 21 ♖c4 ♖d8 22 ♗d1± (Watson) and 20 ... ♖e8 21 ♖g3± offer dismal prospects, as borne out by two examples each.

21 ♖h3 e4
22 ♖d5 ♖f6

23 h6

The hasty 23 ♟xd4? lets Black off the hook after 23 ... ♟xd4 24 ♖xc3+ ♘c6 25 ♗xd4 ♜h4+ 26 ♚d1 ♜xh5+= 1/2-1/2, **van Willigen–Jonckheere, EU/TC9/sf3 corr 2011**. It is important to divert the rook from the g-file first.

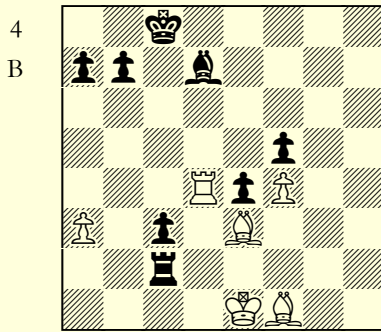
23 ... ♗h8
24 ♟xd4 ♗xh6

Now 24 ... ♟xd4? 25 ♖xc3+ ♘c6 26 ♗xd4 ♜h4+ 27 ♚d1 ♜h5+ loses quickly to 27 ♘e2 (which would previously have been met by ... ♗g1+ and ... ♜h4++).

25 ♖e3! ♟xd4

Instead 25 ... ♗h1 26 ♗c5±/±± allows White to consolidate: cf. Watson.

26 ♗xd4 ♜h4+
27 ♖f2 ♜xf2+
28 ♚xf2 ♗h2+
29 ♚e1 ♗xc2
30 ♘e3(4)

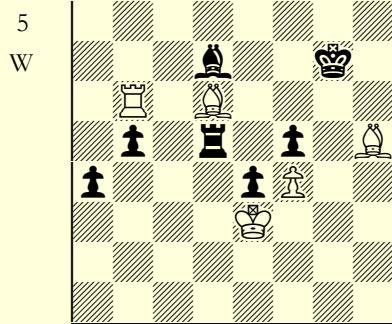


This position has been reached nine times, with nine White wins. After the a3

and c3 pawns are exchanged, Black is unable to advance the Q-side pawns very far, given White's domination of the dark squares, and White is free to manoeuvre to attack f5.

The themes are well illustrated by **Nightingale–Löschnauer, WS/GMN/034 corr 2012**. After ... b5 the pawn on a6 became an extra weakness, overloading the bishop. With setup White: ♗c5, ♘d4, ♘e2; Black: ♚b8, ♗h1, ♘b7, Black had to give up material (52 ... ♘e8? 53 ♘e5+ and 54 ♗c7+) (1-0, 65).

In the main game, twenty moves later (5) the BK has transferred to the K-side to help shore up the f-pawn, the Q-side pawns have advanced, and Black appears to have established a fortress of sorts.



But it is still not enough: after 51 ♚e2! Black resigned. It's zugzwang: 51 ... ♗d3 52 ♘e5+ ♚f8 53 ♘f6 ♘c8 54 ♗b8 and now the BR has no square available on the c-file.

Conclusion: 16 ... f6 has been refuted. Black needs other ideas. ►

GMR-2 BERG, Emanuel, *The French Defence 2* (Grandmaster Repertoire 15) (Quality Chess 2013) —see issue 13.
MbM GIDDINS, Steve, *The French Winaver Move by Move*. London: Gloucester (Everyman) 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1-85744-992-1.
FW MCDONALD, Neil, *French Winaver* (Everyman 2000)—see issue 18.
AWW MOSKALENKO, Viktor, *The Wonderful Winaver* (New in Chess 2010)—see issue 16.