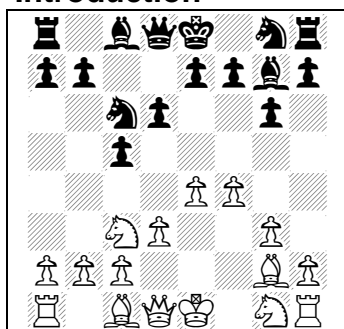


The Closed Sicilian

Chris Bellers, 1995

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Introduction



White aims to control d5 (Black's traditional source of counterplay in the Sicilian) while letting Black control d4. As it is difficult for either side to open the centre, the position is 'closed'. White concentrates his forces on the King's-side, Black may either try to match White here (see Smyslov-Botvinnik), or aim for counterplay on the Queen's side.

So, the closed Sicilian is interesting, not just in its own right, but also

- (1) as a model of how to approach attacking positions with a closed centre; compare many lines of the King's Indian Attack and Ruy Lopez;
- (2) as a common system (e4 with Bg2) in many openings - for example, we see the same approach at work in many lines of the English Opening.

Basically, White aims to concentrate enough firepower in the K-side to force a quick checkmate. In doing so, Black has a natural counterattack in ...Rb8, ...b7-b5-b4 and possibly also ...c5-c4.

There are many ways for White to play the position - for example, the dark-squared Bc1 could go to g5, e3 or even d2. The Ng1 could go to e2, f3 or h3. It is also possible to put the light-squared bishop somewhere on the other diagonal - c4 or b5 - as well as on g2. I will concentrate on one important line where the central blockade is most obvious (Black plays ...e5), but I also include an example of games with the bishop on each of

these two alternative squares c4 (Hodgson-Ady) and b5 (Hebden-Large), in variations of the Grand Prix Attack.

Black also has a wide variety of choices. Fianchettoing the Bf8 is not necessarily the best way to play - even if it is played, Black could play e6 or e5, with the Ng8 going to e7 or f6.

The Closed Sicilian with 6...e5 7. Nh3

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. f4

[6. Be3 is the most commonly-seen alternative, although Nge2 has often been played too]

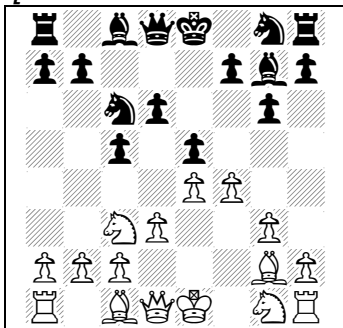


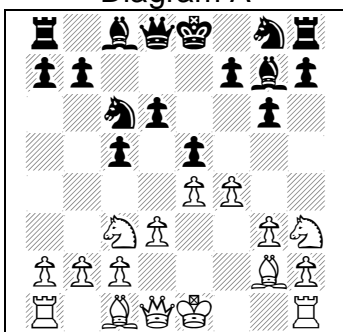
Diagram A

6... e5

[6... e6 is the main line 7. Nf3 Nge7 8. O-O O-O 9. Be3 Nd4 else d4 may follow; this complex position has been the Grandmasters' starting point for many years]

7. Nh3 (Diagram A)

This is relatively recent and has the advantage of bolstering f4, and leaving the f-file open for the rook(s). It also avoids the pin ...Bg4, and allows a retreat of the Nc3 to e2 if White wants to attack d4 or play c2-c3.



A rather drastic example of how White wants to play is as follows:

Holland-Whiteley, 1995

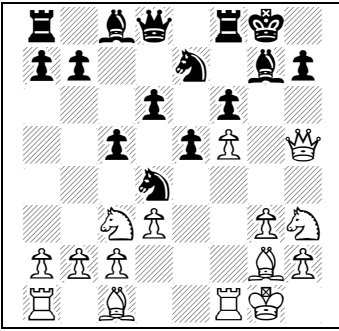
1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. f4 e5 7. Nh3 (diagram A) 7... Nge7 8. O-O O-O (?)

[latest theory suggest that this is premature: 8... Nd4 9. f5!? [9. Rf2 is safer for both sides!] 9... gxf5 10. Qh5 h6 [10... Nxc2 11. Rb1 with compensation (Lane) NOT (Plaskett)] 11. Rf2 += Spassky-Hort 1978 ... 1-0 in the ending(!)]

9. f5 gxf5 10. Qh5 f6

looks ugly, but it seems to be fairly standard in this line - how else to prevent Ng5?

11. exf5 Nd4



Thematic, and seemingly powerful, threatening ...Nxc2 and ...Nxf5

12. Nd5 Nxc2 13. Ng5 Bxf5

[13... fxg5 e.g. 14. f6 Nxd5 15. Bxd5+ Kh8 16. fxg7+ Kxg7 17. Rxf8 Qxf8 18. Bxg5 Kh8 19. Rf1]

14. Rxf5 fxg5 15. Rxf8+ Qxf8 16. Bxg5 Ng6 17. Rf1

somehow the rook, which looked doomed on a1, escapes

17... Qc8 18. Be4 Qd7 19. Ne7+ 1-0

Black never had a chance to take the rook on a1, let alone create Q-side counterplay by advancing the a- and b-pawns. What went wrong? The whole position after f5 and Qh5 looks very good for White, and whether or not it is a forced win, we would all prefer to be White.

Crickmore-Bellers 1983

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. f4 e5 7. Nh3 (diagram A) 7... Nge7 8. O-O O-O 9. f5 (all as before) 9... f6

Black allows f5 but not Qh5

10. g4 Nd4 11. Be3

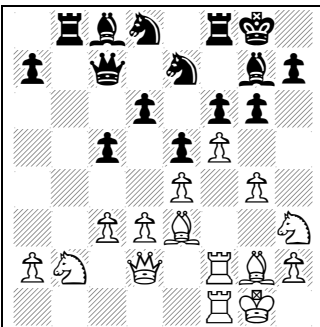
White's idea - common in the Closed Sicilian - is to follow with Qd2 and doubling rooks on the f-file

11... Rb8 (the standard counter-attack)

12. Qd2 b5 13. Nd1

An interesting choice: 13. Ne2 keeps the rooks connected but allows exchanges; the text covers b2 and allows c3 with tempo. Note that a4 or a3 do not stem the tide of Black's counterplay

13... b4 14. c3 bxc3 15. bxc3 Ndc6 16. Rf2 Qc7 17. Nb2 Nd8 18. Raf1



Mission accomplished - now Black's position looks critical

18... Nf7 19. g5 gxf5 20. exf5 d5

The classic central response to a wing attack - possible because of the position of the Knight on b2 not c3

21. gxf6 Bxf6 22. Qe2 d4 23. cxd4 cxd4 24. Qg4+ Kh8 25. Bg5 Nxc5 26. Nxc5 Nxf5 27. Rxf5 Bxf5

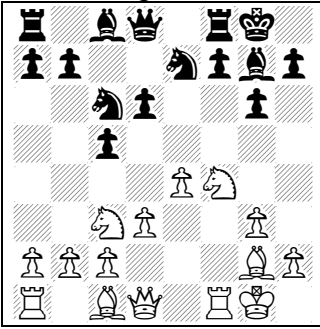
[27... Rxb2 appears to win the exchange without allowing a perpetual check 28. Qh5 Bxf5]

28. Qxf5 Bxg5 29. Qxg5 Rxf1+ 30. Kxf1 Rxb2 drawn

Variation with 6...e5 7. Nh3 exf4

Actually, Black can also prevent f5, and apparently equalise immediately, with

Diagram B



7...exf4!

Now

[8. gxf4 Bxh3 9. Bxh3 Qh4+]

So

8. Nxf4

[8. Bxf4 Nge7 9. Qd2 h6 !? Lane]

8... Nge7 9. O-O O-O DIAGRAM B

Two examples:

10. Be3 b5 11. a3 Ne5 12. h3 Rb8 13. Qd2 a5 14. Rf2 b4 15. axb4 axb4 16. Ncd5 Bb7 17. g4 Nxd5 18. Nxd5 Bxd5 19. exd5 c4 20. Ra6 b3 21. d4 Qc8 22. Ra1 c3 23. Qxc3 Qxc3 24. bxc3 b2 25. Rb1 Nc4 26. Bf4 Na3 27. Rff1 Nxb1 28. Rxb1 Rb6 29. Bxd6 Ra8 30. Rxb2 Rxb2

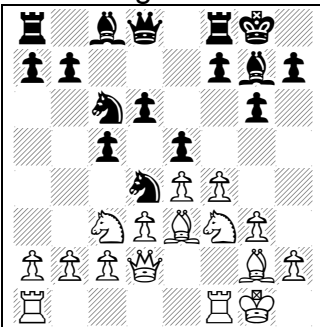
Savage-Gheorghiu 1979]

10. Nfd5 Nxd5 11. Nxd5 b5 12. c3 b4 13. Bf4 13... bxc3 14. bxc3 Be6 15. Qd2 Bxd5 16. exd5 Ne5 17. Rad1 Qa5 18. c4 Qa3 19. Bxe5 Bxe5 20. Rb1 Rab8 21. Kh1 a5 22. Bh3 f5 23. g4 f4 24. g5 Rb4 25. Be6+ Kg7 26. Rxb4 axb4 27. Rf3 Qc3 28. Qf2 Qa1+ 29. Kg2 Ra8 30. Qh4 Qxa2+ 31. Rf2 b3 again, the triumph of the b-pawn: Erlebacher - Gheorghiu 1979] [13. Be3 bxc3 14. bxc3 Ne5]

Note the power of ...Ne5, as opposed to ...Nd4

Variation with 6...e5 7. Nf3

Diagram C



So, maybe Nh3 is not so hot after all. It may be better to stick with 7. Nf3 when

7. Nf3 Nge7 8. O-O O-O 9. Be3 Nd4 10. Qd2 Nec6 (DIAGRAM C)

still seems to equalise for Black, e.g.

11. Nh4 exf4 12. Bxf4 Be6 13. Nd5 Bxd5 14. exd5 Ne5 (that move again) 15. c3 Nb5 16. Rae1 Qd7 17. Nf3 Rae8 18. h4 Nc7 = Ignatiev-Vasiukov 1962

or

11. Nd1 Bg4 12. Ne1 exf4 13. Bxf4 Ne2+ 14. Kh1 Nxf4 15. gxf4 f5 16. Ne3 Bh5 17. exf5 gxf5 18. c3 Qd7 19. Nf3 Kh8 20. Rae1 Rae8 21. Nd5 draw, Minev-Vasiukov 1962

Further examples for study:

White cannot castle Queen's-side into Black's counterplay

Jackson - Regis, Plymouth-Exeter, 1993

1. e4 g6 (this was the actual move order) 2. Nc3 Bg7 3. g3 c5 4. Bg2 Nc6 5. d3 d6 6. f4 e5 7. Nf3 Nge7 8. Be3

[8. O-O O-O 9. Rb1 Rb8 10. a3 b5 11. h3 += bco]

8... exf4

[8... Nd4 9. Ne2 Bg4 10. Bxd4 cxd4]

9. gxf4

[9. Bxf4]

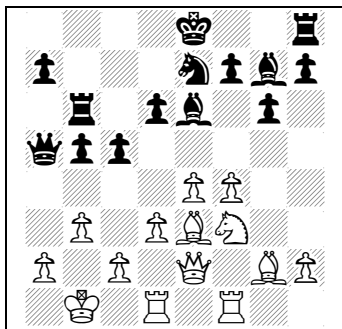
9... Nd4 10. Qd2

[10. O-O O-O 11. Qd2 Nec6 12. Rab1 Bg4 13. Nd5 Nxf3+ 14. Bxf3 Bxf3 15. Rxf3 f5 = Bastian-Ribli 1981]

10... Bg4 11. Rf1?

[11. O-O]

11... Rb8 12. O-O-O (?) b5 13. Ne2 Nxe2+ 14. Qxe2 Qa5 15. Kb1 Be6 16. b3 Rb6



17. Bd2 ?? (black to play and win)

[17. d4 Ra6 18. c4 (looks better than 18 c3!? Qxc3 19 Qb2 but fails to ...) 18... bxc4 19. bxc4 Rb6+ 20. Kc1 Qa3+ 21. Kd2 Rb2+ 22. Ke1 Rxe2+ 23. Kxe2 Bxc4+]

17... b4 ??

[17... Qxa2+ 18. Kxa2 Ra6+ 19. Ba5 Rxa5+ 20. Kb1 Ra1#]

18. a4 Bd7 19. e5 Bxa4 20. Bc1 O-O

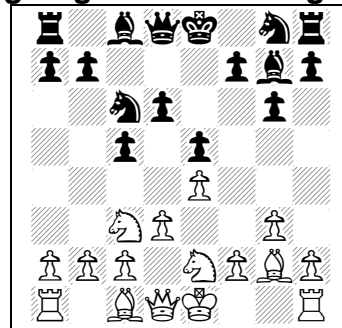
[20... Nd5 21. Bb2 Nc3+ 22. Bxc3 bxc3 23. exd6+ Kf8 24. Qe7+ Kg8 25. Ng5 Bxb3 (I hadn't noticed that this stopped the mate on f7 when playing move 20) 26. Qe8+ Bf8 27. Qxf8+ Kxf8 28. Nxh7+ Rxh7 29. cxb3 Rxb3+ 30. Kc1 Qa3+ 31. Kc2 Qb2#]

21. Nd2 Bb5 22. Bb2 Nf5 23. Nc4 Bxc4 24. dxc4 Draw agreed

White's f4 may block squares for the Knight and dark-squared bishop

Smyslov - Botvinnik, Moscow, 1954

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. Nge2 e5

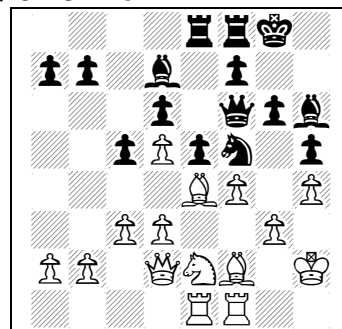


denying squares to the Ne2

7. Nd5 Nge7 8. c3 Nxd5 9. exd5 Ne7 10. O-O O-O 11. f4

does nothing for the Bc1 or Ne2

11... Bd7 12. h3 Qc7 13. Be3 Rae8 14. Qd2 Nf5 15. Bf2 h5 16. Rae1 Qd8 17. Kh2 Bh6 18. h4 Qf6 19. Be4



19... exf4 20. Nxf4 Nxh4 21. Be3 Nf5 22. Bxf5 Qxf5 23. Qg2 Qg4

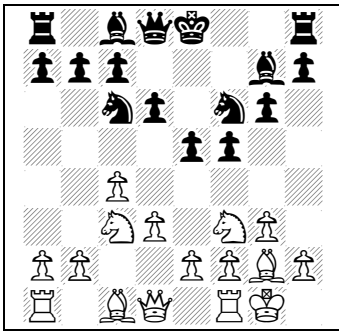
24. Qe2 Qxe2+ 25. Rxe2 Re5 26. Ree1 Rfe8 27. Bf2 h4 28. Rxe5 Rxe5 29. d4 hxg3+ 30. Kxg3 Rg5+ 31. Kh2 Rf5 32. Be3 cxd4 33. cxd4 Kh7 34. Rf2 g5 35. Ne2 Rxf2+ 36. Bxf2 f5 0-1

The Closed Sicilian as a system against the English Opening

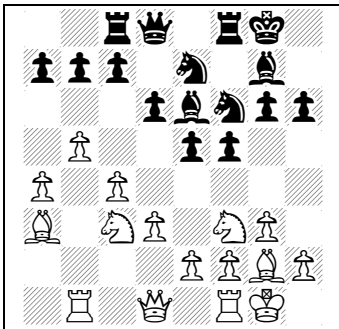
Psakhis - Kasparov, 1990

One of the best example games I have on file for the Closed Sicilian is this one

1. c4 g6 2. Nc3 Bg7 3. g3 Nc6 4. Bg2 d6 5. Nf3 e5 6. d3 f5 7. O-O Nf6

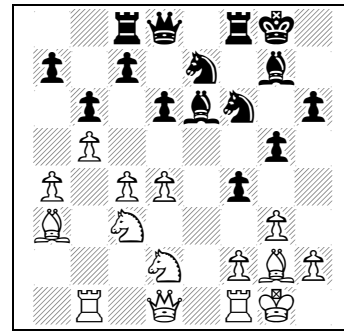


8. Rb1 h6 9. b4 O-O 10. b5 Ne7 11. a4 Be6 12. Ba3 Rc8

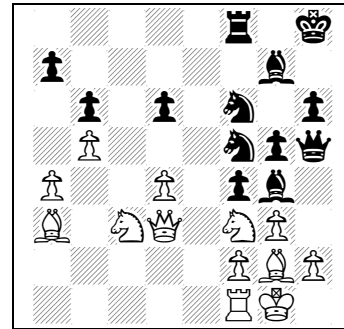


Black does not rush but secures the Q-side.

13. Nd2 b6 14. e3 g5 15. d4 exd4 16. exd4 f4

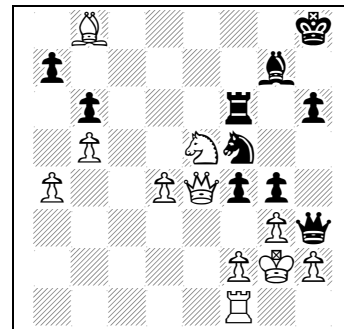


17. Re1 Bg4 18. Nf3 Qd7 19. c5 Rce8 20. Rc1 Nf5 21. Qd3 Kh8 22. cxd6 cxd6 23. Rxe8 Qxe8 24. Rf1 Qh5



The Black pieces hover like vultures

25. Ne4 Nxe4 26. Qxe4 Bh3 27. Ne5 Bxg2 28. Kxg2 g4 29. Bxd6 Rf6 30. Bb8 Qh3+

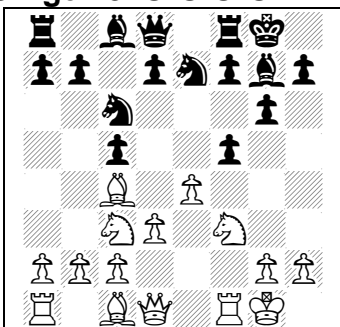


0-1

The Grand Prix attack with Bc4

Hodgson - Ady, Streatham Vs
Ymca, London, 1981[B23]

1. e4 c5 2. f4 g6 3. Nf3 Bg7 4.
Nc3 Nc6 5. Bc4 e6 6. f5 exf5 7.
d3 Nge7 8. O-O O-O?



This natural-looking move is probably a decisive mistake. Black has no effective counter to White's simple mating attack.

9. Qe1 Nd4 10. Qh4 Nxf3+ 11.
Rxf3 fxe4 12. Rh3 h6 13. Bg5
Re8 14. Rf1 d5 15. Nxd5 hxg5 16.
Nf6+ Black resigns

[16. Nf6+ Kf8

[or 16... Bxf6 17. Qh7+ Kf8 18.
Qxf7#]

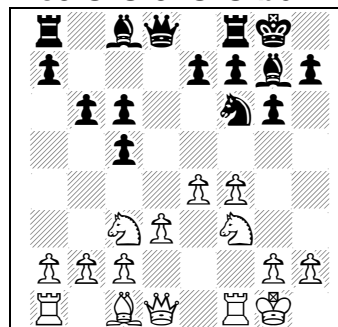
17. Nh7+ Kg8 18. Bxf7+ Kh8 19. Nxc5+
Bh6 20. Qxh6#]

1-0

The Grand Prix attack with Bb5

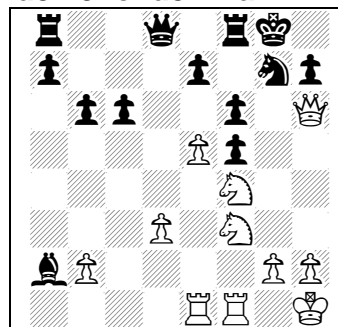
Hebden - Large, British Ch'p,
1982[B21]

1. e4 c5 2. f4 Nc6 3. Nf3 g6 4.
Bb5 Bg7 5. Bxc6 dxc6 6. d3 Nf6
7. Nc3 O-O 8. O-O b6



White has an obvious plan. And the player with a plan will always beat the player without one.

9. Qe1 Ne8 10. Qh4 Nd6 11. f5
gxf5 12. e5 Ne8 13. Bh6 f6 14.
Kh1 Bxh6 15. Qxh6 Ng7 16.
Rae1 Be6 17. Ne2 c4 18. Nf4
cxd3 19. cxd3 Bxa2



Black might as well snatch a pawn, he has achieved nothing to counter White's simple attack.

20. e6 Qc8 21. Re3 Nxe6 22.
Nxe6 Bxe6 23. Rxe6 Rf7

[23... Qxe6 24. Ng5 Qf7 25. Nxf7 Rxf7]

24. Rfe1 1-0