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# 3 Capablanca Variation: 4 ♔c2 0-0

## Introduction

In this chapter we shall see a quieter way to meet the Capablanca Variation, in which Black plays in a logical manner but without trying to exploit White's lag in development immediately as in the previous chapter.

Here Black castles and plans a scheme of development with ...b6, ...♙b7 and ...d6, ...♘bd7 and ...c5, with the idea of exerting pressure on the c-file and controlling the e4-square. Obviously, White has many ways to play and we shall examine each of them.

## The Games

In **Game 7** (Radjabov-Alekseev) White tries to seize the centre right away with the aggressive 5 e4!?, but Black reacts immediately with 5...d5, followed by putting his knight on e4 and breaking with ...c5, which makes way for the queen to go to a5. A recurrent theme in this variation is that Black keeps his knight on e4, even when White plays f3, with the powerful ...f5!, so that if White captures the knight, Black takes on e4 with the f-pawn, attacking the bishop on d3 and opening lines against the white king, which generally has problems escaping from the centre. In this game White gave priority to development with ♙d3, ♘e2 and 0-0, but did not achieve anything special.

Games 8-11 all feature 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 ♚xc3 b6.

In Bocharov-Lysy, **Game 8**, White employed a very clever system based on prioritizing the development of his kingside (♘f3, ♙e2 and 0-0) after gaining the bishop-pair. But Black reacted correctly, creating an offensive on the kingside based on a Dutch-type set-up with ...♘e4, ...f5 and the deployment of the queen and the rook to that sector, generating a strong attack. Only mistakes in the conduct of the attack sent Black to his defeat.

In **Game 9** (Van Wely-Wells) White played the logical ♙g5 followed by e3, with the modern plan of bringing the g1-knight to c3 and the queen to c2, controlling the e4-square. In the game, Wells placed unfounded hopes on the attack on White's c4 point, but in so doing he left his d6-pawn very weak, which was exploited by Van Wely to gain a clear advantage. Black's attempts to attack the white king did not yield the results for which he hoped and with some precise moves White managed to castle, retaining both a material and positional advantage. In the notes to the game the best line for Black in this difficult variation is analysed.

The Gustafsson-Postny clash (**Game 10**), is an example of another knight manoeuvre (♘f3 and ♘d2) before completing the development of the kingside. In general in these variations, when Black attacks the centre with ...c5, White captures with dxc5, producing a particular pawn-structure where Black has central superiority and a useful b-file, while White possesses the bishop-pair and pressure on Black's d-pawn. This game is a good example of coordination on the part of Black, who manages with precise moves to bring each piece to a good square, in accordance with the general

plan of exerting pressure along the half-open b-file. The strongest plans for each side are explained in the notes. In the middlegame White had an opportunity to exploit an inaccuracy by his opponent but he missed it and Black was victorious in the endgame.

**Game 11** (M.Gurevich-Leko) is a confrontation between two of the greatest experts in this variation. White employed here the most ambitious system after 7 ♖g5, which consists of playing 8 f3, supporting the e4 advance. In the game Black played ...d5 and White chose to take play into an endgame which has been debated at the highest level for some years. We shall also analyse other possibilities, especially the typical structure following the exchange of pawns by cxd5 and ...exd5 with White remaining with a backward pawn on the e-file.

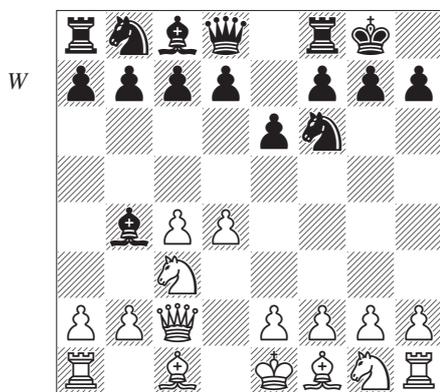
Leko's play in this game was very accurate, since he combined the occupation of the open c- and d-files with the creation of some weaknesses in the white centre, which was sufficient to equalize the chances. Overestimating his position led Gurevich to commit some mistakes which finally left him into a hopeless endgame.

### Game 7 [E32]

## Teimour Radjabov – Evgeny Alekseev

Sochi 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♙b4 4 ♖c2 0-0 (D)



One of the most important variations against 4 ♖c2. Black waits to see White's intentions and will react accordingly.

#### 5 e4!?

This ambitious move became popular in the mid-1980s and reached its climax when Karpov adopted it in some games from 2000 onwards. It is necessary to know that 5 ♗f3 should be answered with 5...c5! (not 5...b6? in view of 6 e4! d5 7 e5 ♗e4 8 ♙d3 with a white initiative) 6 dxc5 ♗a6! and Black will seize control of the e4-square, taking advantage of the white knight

being on f3, which guarantees him equality, even when he loses the bishop-pair. An effective plan is to follow ...♗xc5 with ...b6, ...♙b7 and ...♗ce4! or ...♖c8 with pressure on the c-file.

5 a3! is the main line, and will be seen in Games 8-11.

#### 5...d5!

Black strikes at the white centre.

#### 6 e5

Gaining space. Naturally White cannot capture twice on d5, since he would end up with an isolated pawn on d4 without any compensation.

#### 6...♗e4!

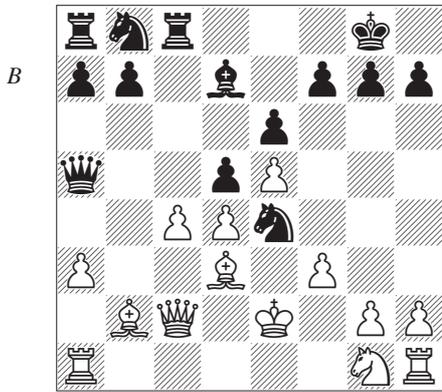
From now on, many of the variations are based on the theme of the insecurity of this knight, because it is usual for Black to try to maintain it in this position as long as possible, since the defence of his kingside depends on it. Note that if White gives up his light-squared bishop for this knight then Black will always obtain excellent play on the light squares.

#### 7 ♙d3

Giving priority to development. Remember that if White tries to dislodge the knight with 7 f3? he runs into 7...♖h4+ 8 g3 ♗xg3 9 ♖f2 ♗f5 and Black saves his piece, remaining a pawn up.

The main alternative is to strengthen the centre at the expense of development with 7 a3 ♙xc3+ 8 bxc3. After 8...c5!, the attack on the pawn-chain begins, and a path is opened for the queen to a5. White then has two lines:

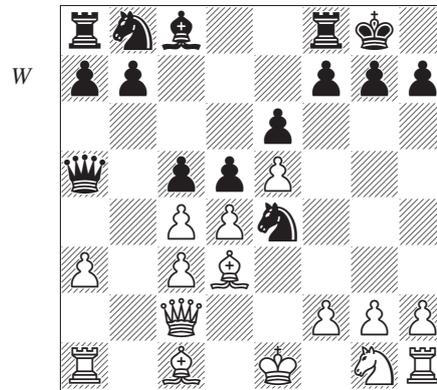
a) The strange 9 ♗b2!? cxd4 10 cxd4 protects the centre, but posts the bishop rather passively and delays the development of the kingside. Now 10...♖a5+?! fails to 11 ♖e2, when the threat of f3 forces Black to make positional concessions. One of the best responses is 10...♙d7! (keeping the queen on d8, which prevents 11 f3 for the moment in view of 11...♖h4+) 11 ♙d3 ♖a5+ 12 ♖e2 ♜c8! (exerting pressure along the file) 13 f3 (D).



Black should now play 13...f5!. Remember this idea, which comes up in many positions. Black maintains his knight on e4 or secures a good retreat for it to f6, since if White captures the knight he will be unable save his bishop on d3. 14 exf6 (Black was threatening 14...dxc4 15 ♙xc4? ♜xc4! and ...♙b5) 14...♞xf6 (admittedly Black remains with a weakness on e6, but for the moment White is not coordinated enough to attack it and is more worried about the security of his king and the pressure on the c-file) 15 c5 ♙b5! and Black exchanges his passive bishop and subsequently prepares to break with ...e5 or ...b6.

b) The main variation is 9 ♙d3 ♖a5! (D).

This queen move leaves White with the fewest options. Black puts pressure not only on c3 but along the whole a5-e1 diagonal. 10 ♞e2 cxd4 11 cxd5 (now 11 f3?! is not advisable:



11...dxc4! 12 ♙xe4 d3 with advantage to Black, T.Rej-Timoshenko, Sydney 2007) 11...exd5 12 f3 ♞xc3 13 ♞xd4. Here, Black has an extra pawn and several possible knight discoveries. For his part, White threatens ♙xh7+ and ♙d2, winning the knight. Usually Black continues 13...♞b5+ 14 ♙d2 ♞xd4 but after 15 ♙xh7+ ♖h8 16 ♙xa5 ♞xc2+ 17 ♙xc2 he stands worse because White has the bishop-pair, the more compact pawn-structure and the more centralized king. However, Leko's idea 13...♞e4+! 14 ♖e2 f5! changed the assessment of this position. We have already mentioned this idea. The knight is maintained on e4 by means of tactics. The disadvantageous position of the king on e2 gives Black sufficient resources. White is unable to capture the knight since, as Leko points out, Black wins after 15 fxe4?? fxe4 16 ♙b5 ♙g4+ 17 ♖e3 ♖b6! and the white king will not survive. Instead, 15 exf6 ♞xf6 leaves Black with an extra pawn, and is no good either. Vallejo-Leko, Morelia/Linares 2006 continued 15 ♙e3 ♞c6! 16 ♞xc6 bxc6 17 ♜hc1 ♜b8!, when the game was very complex but satisfactory for Black. Even after the best move, 15 e6!, Black has good play following 15...♞c6! according to Leko.

#### 7...c5!

It is essential to react in the centre, before White consolidates with ♞e2 and 0-0.

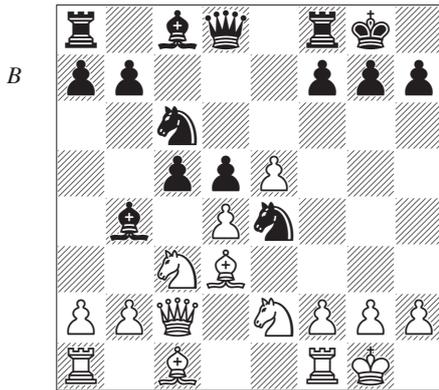
#### 8 ♞e2

If 8 dxc5?! ♞d7! Black regains the pawn with the better development.

Inserting 8 cxd5 exd5 before 9 ♞e2 just gives Black additional possibilities, although it

generally leads to the same position as in the game after 9...♖c6 10 0-0 cxd4. However, Black can deviate with 9...cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♖d7!? or after 9...♖c6 10 0-0 ♕f5!?, with good prospects in both cases.

8...♖c6 9 cxd5 exd5 10 0-0 (D)



Finally White manages to remove his king from danger, but now his pawn-centre vanishes.

10...cxd4!

Preferable to 10...♖xd4 11 ♖xd4 cxd4 12 ♖xe4 dxe4 13 ♕xe4, when White has slight pressure on both flanks.

11 ♖xd5!

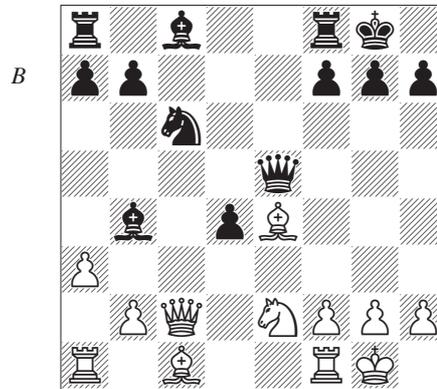
Worse is 11 ♖xe4?! dxe4 12 ♕xe4 ♖xe5 13 ♕xh7+ ♔h8 and White has problems with the h7-bishop and dealing with the passed pawn.

11...♗xd5 12 ♕xe4 ♗xe5 13 a3 (D)

White wants to determine the position of the black bishop as soon as possible and then post his own pieces accordingly. His hopes are based on combining an attack on the kingside (by deploying the queen and the rooks towards that sector) with a degree of pressure on Black's queenside and the siege of the queen's pawn. However, Black has enough resources to maintain dynamic equality. His centralized queen is a major obstacle to White's attack and his passed pawn on d4 does not allow White to take too many liberties.

A more common approach is the direct 13 ♕xh7+ ♔h8 but apart from a slight initiative for a few moves White has gained nothing concrete. For example, 14 ♕e4 (if 14 ♕f4, then 14...♗f6 or 14...♗c5!?, while 14 f4 is met by

14...♗c5!?, which is still OK) 14...♗e8 15 ♖g3 ♕e6 16 ♕d2 ♕d5 and Black stands well, A.Ramirez-Vescovi, Buenos Aires 2003.



13...♕a5

It is also possible to bring the bishop to the kingside with 13...♗e8!? 14 ♕xh7+ ♔h8 15 ♕d3 ♕f8, but from a5 it controls the e1-square and later from b6 it supports the queen's pawn.

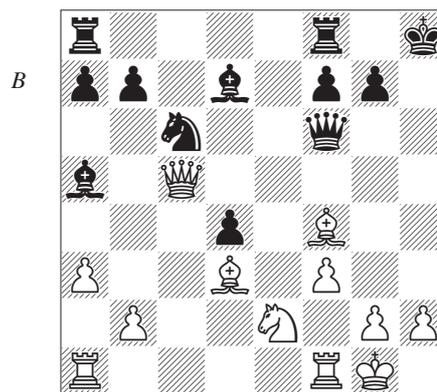
14 ♕xh7+ ♔h8 15 ♕d3 ♕g4

A typical idea; by putting pressure on e2 Black provokes a weakness on the a7-g1 diagonal.

16 f3 ♕d7

If 16...♕e6 then 17 f4! and 18 f5, winning tempi to initiate the attack on the kingside.

17 ♕f4 ♗f6 18 ♗c5! (D)



One of the ideas of 13 a3: the queen gains the c5-square to transfer to the kingside.

18...♔g8 19 ♗h5 g6

