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## Those Isolated Queen's Pawns...

Game 19

**Botvinnik – Vidmar**

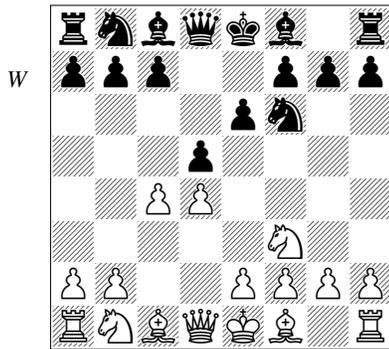
*Nottingham 1936*

Queen's Gambit Declined

**1 c4**

Although the game has started with the move 1 c4, which symbolizes the English Opening, it will swiftly transpose to Queen's Gambit waters.

**1...e6 2 ♖f3 d5 3 d4 ♜f6 (D)**



**4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 ♘c3**

A conventional move-order to reach this position is 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♜f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 ♘f3.

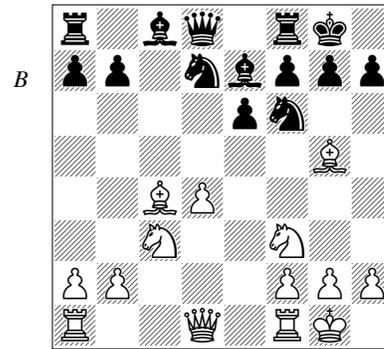
**5...0-0 6 e3 ♞bd7**

Black determines the course of the game by giving priority to developing his knight. Another major option here is the Tartakower Defence with 6...h6 7 ♗h4 b6, which mainly focuses on trying to solve the light-squared bishop's problem by developing it on the long diagonal.

**7 ♗d3 c5**

This advance suddenly increases the tension between the pawns, and therefore comes along with some risks. Apparently Botvinnik thinks it best to preserve the central status quo for the moment, and castles kingside, to be better ready for whatever developments may now occur.

**8 0-0 cxd4 9 exd4 dxc4 10 ♗xc4 (D)**



After all the exchanges, a typical 'isolated queen's pawn' position has been reached. Isolated pawns – ones that lack any friendly pawns on the adjacent files – can easily turn into weaknesses in the long run. This is because they can't be protected by other pawns, and so rely on piece support, and in general pieces should perform more major tasks than merely defend pawns. But an isolated queen's pawn in a structure like the one we have here provides a space advantage and attacking opportunities to its owner, as well as controlling some key squares such as e5. So, it is a double-edged element that directly creates imbalance on the board.

**10...♞b6**

This natural move, in addition to threatening the bishop, aims to establish firm control over the d5-square.

**11 ♗b3 ♗d7**

Now Black plans to strengthen his control over d5 with ...♗c6. Both sides have played rather logically so far.

**12 ♞d3**

On the other hand, White creates a classical attacking weapon by lining up his queen and bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal. Also, as we

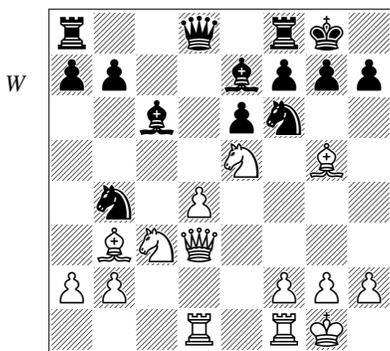
shall soon see in the game, the queen is ready for a possible switch to the kingside via the third rank. Still, there were other possible approaches here. For example, Black's control over e5 has been weakened by ... $\text{b6}$ , and White could try to benefit from this by centralizing a knight with  $12 \text{ N}e5$ .

**12... $\text{b}d5$  13  $\text{N}e5 \text{ Q}c6$**

We see that some of the aforementioned ideas are put to use, although in a different order.

**14  $\text{R}ad1 \text{ N}b4?! (D)$**

In isolated queen's pawn structures, exchanging off the opponent's most effective pieces is an important defensive plan.  $14... \text{R}c8$  might be a good preparation for such an idea: then  $15 \text{ Q}c2$  is not very appropriate, as there is  $15... \text{N}b4$  in reply.  $15 \text{ W}h3$  (White's next move in the game continuation) needs careful handling because  $15... \text{N}xc3?! \text{ 16 bxc3}$  is tricky for Black since  $16... \text{Q}d5 \text{ 17 c4!}$  and  $16... \text{Q}e4 \text{ 17 Rfe1 Qf5 18 Wf3}$  are both awkward.  $15... \text{h6}$  looks risky, but  $16 \text{ Q}xh6$  is far from clear, while if the bishop retreats, then Black can consider offering to exchange some minor pieces.



Although Black has placed his knight on b4 with a concrete goal, this piece will soon have to return to d5, after several strong moves by White.

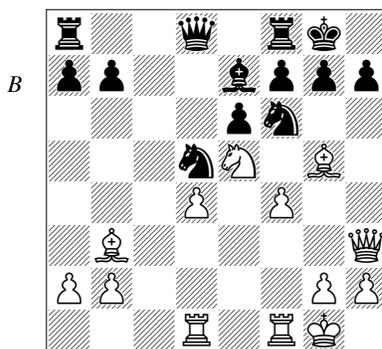
**15  $\text{W}h3!$**

Eyeing the e6- and h7-squares.

**15... $\text{Q}d5$**

Why is this blockading idea ineffective here? Because the c3-knight is available to eliminate the 'balancer' of the position, Black's light-squared bishop.

**16  $\text{N}xd5! \text{ N}bxd5 \text{ 17 f4! (D)$**

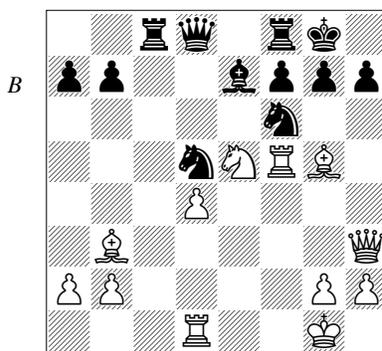


While keeping all his powerful attacking pieces on the board, White strengthens his assault with his reserves. The vulnerability of the e6-square has been emphasized with the  $\text{W}d3\text{-h3}$  manoeuvre. Now Botvinnik aims to put further pressure on this point with the  $\text{f5}$  advance.

**17... $\text{R}c8$**

Bringing the rook into action, while at the same time stopping  $\text{Q}c2$ . However, Black's seemingly solid position has already lost its dynamism; he is now merely parrying White's active plans. On the other hand, White's pieces constantly improve their positions and thereby increase the pressure on Black.

**18  $\text{f5 exf5 19 Rxf5 (D)$**



After this last exchange, the power of the unopposed b3-bishop is increasingly felt in Black's camp. Now  $\text{Q}h6!!$  is an incredible threat.

**19... $\text{Q}d6?! \text{ 20 Qh6!!}$**

It is easy to criticize nearly all of Black's moves in this tough position. But it would be fairer to look for the mistakes in his previous

moves. Alekhine, the 4th World Chess Champion, mentions that 19...♖c7 deserves attention. Yet in his notes, he also points out that the pressure would continue with 20 ♖df1. 20 ♙h6, with ♖g5 ideas, is also powerful.

Now Botvinnik strikes on the a2-g8 diagonal.

20 ♘xf7!

First Black's light-squared bishop, then the e6-pawn, and finally the f7-pawn have been eliminated. All these actions have taken place to benefit maximally from White's own light-squared bishop.

20...♖xf7 21 ♙xf6

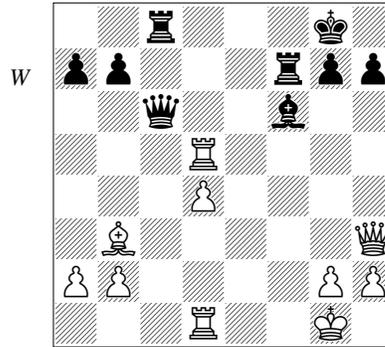
Now the guardian of the d5-knight is removed.

21...♙xf6 22 ♖xd5

White is a pawn up, but his advantage is of a far greater and more violent nature than that. With his consistent play, Botvinnik has made

the b3-bishop's influence the decisive factor in this game. Now it's time to seal the deal.

22...♗c6 (D)



23 ♖d6 ♗e8 24 ♖d7

Once again reminding us who is the 'boss' of this game.

1-0

## Safety First!

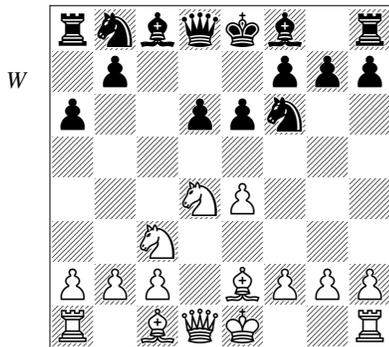
Game 20

### Smyslov – Kottnauer

Groningen 1946

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♗c3 a6 6 ♙e2 e6 (D)



The game has started with a *Najdorf* move-order (5...a6), but Black has chosen a *Scheveningen* pawn-structure with ...d6 and ...e6. In this sharp opening system, Black embraces a

kind of a 'zone defence' strategy, controlling all the squares from b5 to f5.

7 0-0 b5?!

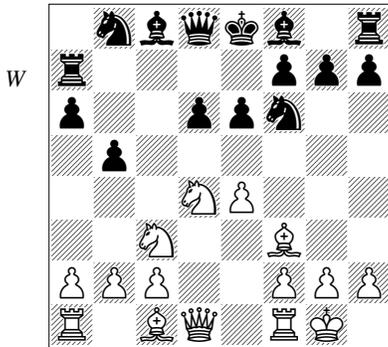
Of course ...b5 is an essential part of Black's game-plan, which mainly aims to exert pressure in the centre, while gaining some space on the queenside. But wouldn't it be a mistake to forget that such an advance, without first completing development or bringing the king into safety, comes along with major risks?

8 ♙f3!

Although winning some space in the centre with f4 is the most natural follow-up in the *Scheveningen*, Smyslov wants to threaten his opponent directly with 9 e5. Quite a concrete plan, isn't it? Suddenly, the focal point of the struggle will turn to the queenside, which has been somewhat weakened by Black's untimely 7...b5?!

**8...♖a7 (D)**

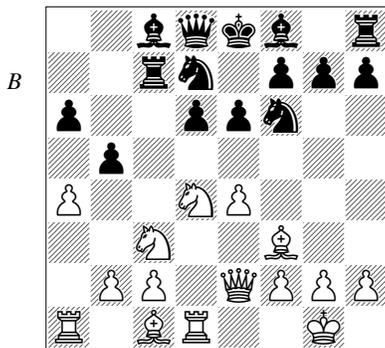
8...♖fd7 would be met by 9 e5 d5 10 ♖xd5! exd5 11 ♙xd5, when White is much better. The attempt to close the diagonal by 8...e5 weakens d5 and White would take an unquestionable command of this square with 9 ♖f5 g6 10 ♖e3 ♙e6 11 a4! b4 12 ♖cd5.

**9 ♗e2 ♖c7 10 ♗d1**

The e5 idea is prepared once again, with the emergence of the pin along the d-file.

**10...♗bd7 11 a4! (D)**

When choosing a plan, we should consider where our pieces' energy is most keenly felt. In this sense, beginning with 8 ♙f3!, Smyslov has directed his attention to the queenside, which his opponent exposed with an untimely advance. Now White aims to weaken the pawn-chain.

**11...bxa4**

11...b4 12 ♖a2 would leave the pawn vulnerable, because against 12...a5, there comes the reply 13 ♖b5.

**12 ♖xa4 ♙b7**

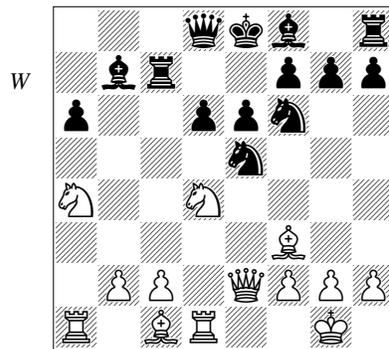
Normally 12...♙e7 followed by ...0-0 right away would be a good plan. But against this, 13 ♙d2 intending ♙a5 would be strong.

**13 e5!**

Opening lines against Black's uncastled king. There are now many possible sequences of captures, which require precise analysis.

**13...♖xe5 (D)**

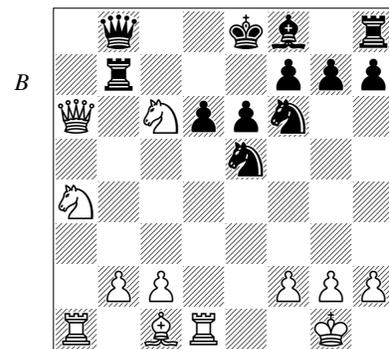
Black has other options, but none of them seem bright: 13...♙xf3 14 ♖xf3 dxe5 15 ♖xe5 ♗c8 16 ♙f4! and White is unquestionably better as 16...♖xc2? fails to 17 ♖ac1!; 13...dxe5 14 ♙xb7 ♖xb7 15 ♗xa6 ♗c8 16 ♖c6 and once again, White has the upper hand as 16...♖c7 is strongly met by 17 ♖b6!

**14 ♙xb7 ♖xb7 15 ♗xa6**

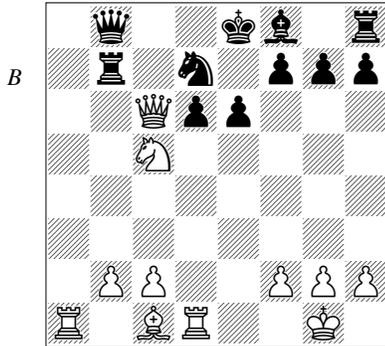
Maintaining the pressure on Black's queenside. Black has already lost his a- and b-pawns, and will now come under attack from White's queen and knights.

**15...♗b8 16 ♖c6! (D)**

Constant pressure! It is essential to continue with forcing moves, to deny the opponent any chance to organize his defences.



16...♖xc6 17 ♔xc6+ ♗d7  
 17...♗d7 loses to 18 ♗b6, when White wins material.  
 18 ♗c5!! (D)

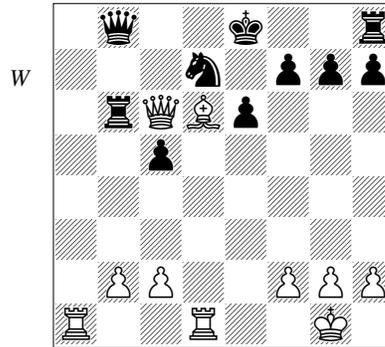


A great blow, which benefits from the pin and opens the d-file and h2-b8 diagonal. Of course it is obligatory for Black to accept the offer.

18...dxc5 19 ♕f4

Development with tempo leaves Black helpless.

19...♗d6  
 19...♔xf4 20 ♔xb7 and White wins.  
 20 ♗xd6 ♗b6 (D)



A last desperate try.

21 ♔xd7+! 1-0

Kottnauer resigned because 21...♗xd7 22 ♗xb8+ leaves Black a piece down.

## The Double Bishop Sacrifice

Game 21

Kirilov – Furman

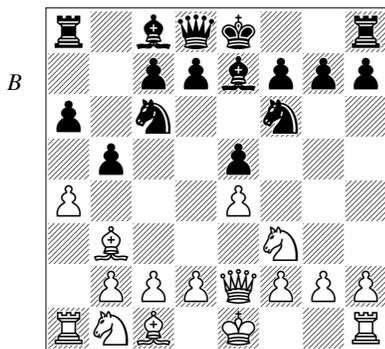
Vilnius 1949

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♕b5 a6 4 ♕a4 ♗f6 5 ♔e2

See Roesch-Schlage, Hamburg 1910 (Game 11).

5...b5 6 ♗b3 ♕e7 7 a4 (D)



In the Ruy Lopez, it is quite common to attack Black's queenside pawn-chain with this advance. White aims to force his opponent to make a concession – either a weakness in the pawn-structure, or a weak square.

7...b4 8 ♗d5?!

This move tries to benefit from the vulnerability of the e5-pawn, yet it is unnecessarily ambitious. So far, Black has not made any single mistake that can be punished. Therefore, it was better to continue with normal development.

A series of exchanges now simplifies the position.

8...♗xd5

It was hard to tolerate the pin.

9 exd5 ♗d4 10 ♗xd4 exd4 11 0-0