

2025 Menlo Park CC Championship

Round 2 Bulletin • Nov. 13, 2025



White: Sun
Black: Verma
Kan Sicilian

1. e4 c5

When strong players play 1...c5, it's because they're creating an immediate spatial imbalance. When club players play 1...c5, it's because they think it's cool.

2. Nf3

The most logical move is 2. c3. Unrated players playing 2. Nf3 plus 3. d4 are mimicking great players. They don't know why White is willing, as Larsen put it, to sacrifice a good center pawn for a stupid wing pawn. The only developing move that threatens is 2. Qh5, which therefore merits more attention. Nakamura's played it multiple times, because players who are good at tactics know to generate tactical positions.

2... e6

Opening fashion is also set at the club level — at the Kolty Club, 2...g6 is what the cool kids play.

3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6

The least interesting Sicilian because there's very little independent significance. The Dragons are based on that wicked bishop. The Najdorf (especially the Gothenburg subvariation) is about establishing e5 as an outpost square (all Najdorf players know that). The ...e6 Sicilians are often double-edged because Black invites Nd4-b5 with or without Nb5-d6+, but the Kan is the worst of everything. No piece activity, chicken pawn moves.

5. Bd3

The Kan is so innocuous that the most-flexible 5. Bd3 is White's commonest move, meeting nothing moves with a nothing move that at least develops a piece. 5. Bd3 puts a guard on e4 that isn't 5. Nc3, which enables the pin ...Bb4. 5. Bd3 also keeps out of the way of c2-c4 if White wants to play that.

5... Nc6

When I was young and wanted to be a cool Sicilian player, I played 5...g6 here, because even

though I didn't know how dumb I was, I had a sense of humor about pawn structures. My first win against a master was with 5...g6, but the dopey opening had nothing to do with winning.

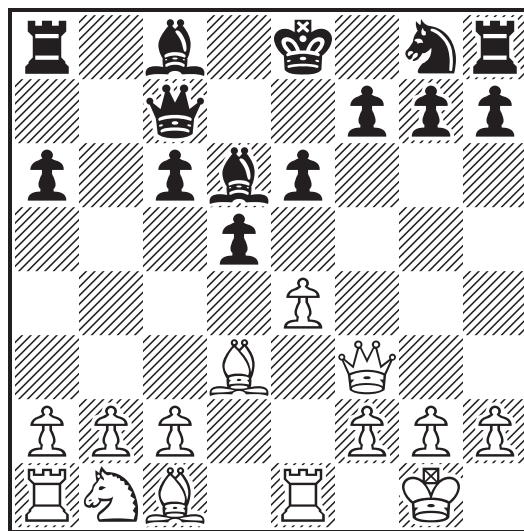
6. Nxc6 bxc6

Stuffs the c8-bishop, so 6...dxc6 should be preferred. "Should be", though it isn't clearly preferable — Tal and Gaprindashvili played both.

7. O-O d5 8. Qf3

8. c4! opens the position while Black has no pieces developed. 8. c4 Nf6 9. cxd5 cxd5 10. exd5 exd5 11. Nc3 and Black is uncomfortable (Fischer-Petrosian, final candidates m, 1971).

8... Bd6 9. Re1 Qc7



10. h3

No one listens when I say P-R3 is the most abused move in chess. White should invite ...Bd6xh2+ because Black has to spend another move to prevent the bishop from being trapped by g2-g3. 10. exd5 Bxh2+ 11. Kh1 Bd6 12. Nc3 and White clearly stands better.

10... Bb7

A knight development plus castling is equal, after which Black can think about putting his bonus center pawns to use (which is Black's long-long-term goal in every Open Sicilian, which every Sicilian player knows).

11. exd5 cxd5 12. Nc3 Ne7 13. Qg4

Understandably, White avoids double attack by ...d4. 13. Qh5 is the right queen move, hindering ...O-O for another turn. After 13. Qg4, Black may castle, but Black should let the g7-pawn go, envisioning a rook on g8 coordinating with the b7-bishop.

13... f5

13...e5 is prettier for the mobile pawn center, and because White will think 14. Qxg7 is his own idea rather than feel pushed into it.

14. Qxg7 Rg8 15. Qf6?

Grab the h7-pawn. The queen is no safer on f6 than she'd be on h7.

15... Rg6

Black has a winning advantage.

16. Qh8+ Kd7 17. Qd4 e5 18. Qh4 d4 19. Bg5 Rag8 20. Bxe7 Rxg2+ 21. Kf1 Bxe7

How often do you see that piece configuration. Black's bishops and royals are each one step southwest from the initial position.

0-1

White: Wright

Black: Mani

Catalan/English/Yawn

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 e6

At move one, I've played 1...g5 as Black. At move two, 2...b5. Anything to infuse some life into these positions.

3. g3 Be7 4. Bg2

The Catalan/English things are the height of fashion, a powerful setup for grandmasters who don't want to take any risk. Fashion trickles from 2700 to 1700 to 700.

4... O-O 5. O-O Na6 6. d4 d5

If Black wants to make sense of 5...Na6, then 6...c5. If White captures on c5, the knight recaptures. If White advances d4-d5, then ...Na6-c7 helps with an eventual ...b7-b5. ...Na6 doesn't fit with ...d7-d5 — Black's eventual equalizing plans include ...e6-e5 or ...c6-c5. In either case, the knight belongs on d7. (A few moves later, Black will wish he'd left the knight on b8, ahead of ...dxc4 plus ...Bc8-d7-c6.)

7. Nc3 c6 8. b3 Bd7

Both queenside minors moved aimlessly.

9. a3 Re8

Black is warming up for ...e6-e5, but the a6-knight and d7-bishop chewed two turns while providing no assistance.

10. Qc2 Bd6 11. e4!

The fundamental difference between king pawn games and queen pawn games is that after 1. e4 e5, White can play d4 at will, and the swap of center pawns creates open lines (the "open game"). After 1. d4 d5, White has work to do before achieving a pain-free e2-e4, and in the meantime, the lines stay closed (the "closed game").

11... dxe4 12. Nxe4 Nxe4 13. Qxe4 Qf6 14. Ne5

White managed the push to e4 without a hiccup, but Black's e-pawn is locked down. The c-pawn is pinned, so ...c5 is also out. Material is equal, and White even has two undeveloped pieces to one for Black. Even so, I'd wager Stockfish evaluates White's advantages in space and mobility around 1.5. (1.32 at 37 ply, said Dr. Stockfish.)

14... Bxe5

This makes things worse, conceding more space, plus the bishop pair. Black needed to put a rook on d8.

15. dxe5 Qe7 16. b4 Rad8 17. Be3 b6 18. Rfd1 c5

Worse still, because the c6-pawn was the finger in the dike.

19. b5 Nb8 20. Qb7 a6 21. bxa6

When these pawns reach the rook's seventh squares to hit a knight on knight 8, it's one of my favorite patterns to demonstrate the pawn's unique quality of capturing and moving differently. For example: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6 5.Ng3 h5 6.Bg5 h4 7.Bxf6 hxd3 8.Be5 Rxd3 9.Rxd3 Qa5+ 10.c3 Qxe5+ 11.dxe5 gxd3 0-1 Schuster-Carls, Bremen 1914.

21... Ba4 1-0