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Dear readers,

You are holding in your hands volume seven of our series “Opening for White according to Anand – 1.e4”, in which we have analyzed one of the most popular variations of the French Defence – the Winawer system (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗c3 ♗b4).

The French Defence has long acquired a quite peculiar reputation. Most of the top-class players do not even recognize it as an 100% correct opening. Well, it has certain strategical liabilities indeed: Black’s position is cramped, his light squared bishop is usually very weak and he has plenty of problems with the safety of his king. It is rather dangerous for Black to castle sometimes, while keeping the king in the centre impedes the development of his own pieces. Still, people played the French Defence; they are playing it and will play it! It is a quite difficult task to mention all the strong players who have been using it regularly and who have contributed greatly to its theoretical development. At first, that list would be quite long and secondly we might omit someone anyway...In fact it may be easier to make a list of the great players of the past and the present who have never played the French Defence...This should tell you a lot...

Whenever there are drawbacks to something, there are advantages to it as well. White’s space edge can be neutralized by timely undermining of his centre. Black’s light squared bishop can be exchanged at some moment, meanwhile there arises a question – whether it is really so bad after all...? In fact, that same piece might become sometimes extremely unpleasant for White in case the position gets opened. Black is often perfectly capable to solve the problem of the safety of his king by a profound theoretical knowledge.

If I have to summarize, I will have to mention that the French Defence is a quite interesting and unique opening in which both opponents must solve difficult problems right after the very beginning of the game and most of these problems are characteristic only for that particular opening. Of course, it is absolutely necessary to know thoroughly the opening theory, but the all-round understanding of the arising pawn-structures and the complex strategy of that opening should combine with an extensive practical experience.

I will completely agree that the systems 3.e5 and 3.♘d2 have their advantages as well, but I am taking the responsibility to recommend to you to study and to play the most principled move for White and that is – 3.♘c3. Well, I understand that the devotees to that active knight-move must know a lot of theoretical variations, but I can assure you – this move creates most of all problems for Black and it provides White with greatest chances to obtain an opening advantage.

I believe these short explanations are going to convince you that Black's move 3...♙b4 disrupts immediately the natural balance on the board. He is ready to exchange a bishop for a knight; meanwhile White will have the kingside as his field for actions. Black will act on the queenside trying to exploit White's weakened pawn-structure there.

In general, we can say – that system, particularly after: 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3 6.bxc3, leads to quite complex fighting positions in which White's chances are somewhat preferable. Still, he cannot play that variation relying just on common sense. White must know plenty of forced lines and the perfect place to find them is this book!

I hope the book will enrich your understanding of the French Defence too, because that opening has a special place in contemporary chess and quite deservedly so.

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