

Yuri Yakovich

# Sicilian Attacks

Powerful Charges & Typical Tactics

New In Chess 2010

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# Preface by Sergey Rublevsky

Amongst the enormous library of opening books, volumes on the Sicilian Defence occupy a special place, due to the fantastic popularity of the opening.

Some writers devote whole volumes to particular systems, others try to explain how to obtain the advantage as White against every Sicilian variation. For some, all their recommendations as to how to get the advantage are summarised in a single volume, whilst others have produced multi-volume works.

But opening books devoted to such a dynamic and constantly developing opening (every month, numerous theoretically important games are played in the opening) quickly date, and their pages of variations lose their significance. The knowledge of specific systems, if not supported by an understanding of the general principles of play in a wide spectrum of positions, brings little benefit.

But how can one formulate principles of play, in what appear to be widely differing positions? It is to the solution of this difficult task that the book of my friend, Grandmaster Yuri Yakovich, is devoted. The erudition and talent of the author, who in my view turned primarily to training work rather too early in his career, has enabled him to write a brilliant middlegame textbook. Mind you, everybody knows how difficult it is nowadays to define precise boundaries between different stages of the game, and in this book you will also find numerous interesting and hitherto unpublished analyses and ideas, in the opening itself.

Ever since my childhood, I have played the Sicilian Defence for both colours, but unfortunately, in my day, nobody attempted to classify the different, highly complicated positions which can arise out of the opening, nor to give recommendations as to how they should be played, backed up with concrete variations. Nobody even thought of attempting such an 'impossible' task, and I was forced to do the job bit by bit, by studying many different books, magazines and tournament books, to collect together the necessary information.

I am delighted for the reader, whatever his playing strength, in whose hands this book finds itself, because I myself have read it through from cover to cover with enormous interest, discovering along the way many interesting ideas to which I had never previously paid attention. One only has to think of the analysis of the key moments in the famous game Tal-Larsen, which forces one to re-evaluate the battle which occurred in this great game. For 30 years, the most brilliant analysts, backed up in recent years by powerful computers, have claimed that Tal was bluffing, and should have lost against correct defence. However, Yuri shows that the genius' intuition frequently counts for more than the forest of variations, unfathomably deep for the human player, and that belief in his strengths and abilities, founded on an understanding of general strategic and tactical ideas, can work miracles.

I hope that this book will give you great pleasure!

Sergey Rublevsky

May 2010

## Introduction – A Fight to the Death

You have before you the most popular opening of the second half of the 20th, and start of the 21st century – the Sicilian Defence. The 11th and 13th world champions, Robert Fischer and Garry Kasparov, made an enormous contribution to the growth in popularity of this opening, winning brilliant games on both sides of the Sicilian. Nowadays, too, it is difficult to name a strong player, including both the current world champion Vishy Anand and his challenger Veselin Topalov, who does not include the Sicilian Defence in his opening repertoire.

I will try to summarise Black's main ideas: to avoid symmetry, fight actively in the centre, and to attempt subsequently to seize the initiative and space on the queenside and in the centre.

In my opinion, the strongest – or at least, the most interesting – response to 1.e4 c5 is 2.♘f3 followed by d2-d4, which is also the most popular system for White. Of course there are other lines, which lead to less tense positions and require less knowledge, but, in the words of Alexander Khalifman, that is the extent of their merits.

After White plays d2-d4, a situation arises with a wide choice of subsequent plans. Both sides have a very great number of playable set-ups, which is why the Sicilian is so popular – every player can find here variations which suit his style and tastes.

Even so, the great mass of white approaches can be divided into two main categories, depending on which side White castles – short or long.

Whilst in the early days of the Sicilian, White castled kingside in a clear majority of games, in more recent decades he has tended to prefer queenside castling. This is thanks to the efforts of Rauzer, Keres, and Velimirovic, and especially to the development of the white set-up involving ♕e3, ♖d2, 0-0-0, f2-f3 and g2-g4.

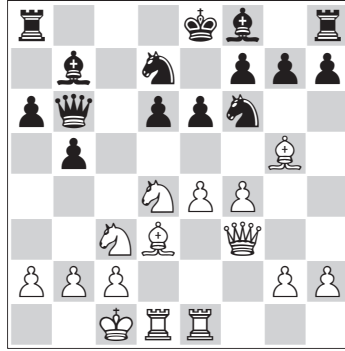
Of course, in such variations as the Sveshnikov (1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5), the Sicilian Counter-Attack (1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♕b4 etc.) it is wrong for White to castle queenside, for concrete reasons. But in the fight against the Dragon and Najdorf Variations, the Scheveningen set-up, the Taimanov System (1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e6 5.♗c3 ♖c7) and the Richter-Rauzer Attack, long castling is objectively the strongest choice for White.

When White castles queenside, Black almost always has two principal means of creating counterplay:

**1. Leave the king in the centre (until later, or even for good) and create a counterattack on the queenside as quickly as possible, hoping to get at the opponent's king first.**

The game Alexei Shirov-Viswanathan Anand, Morelia/Linares 2008, provided a striking example of the success of such a strategy:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♕g5 e6 7.f4 ♗bd7 8.♖f3 ♖c7 9.0-0-0 b5 10.♕d3 ♕b7 11.♞he1 ♖b6

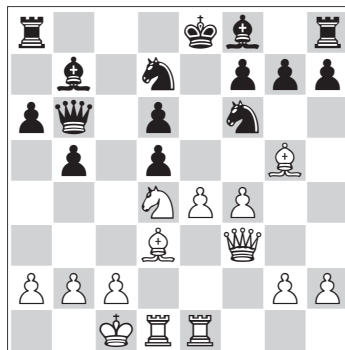


12. ♖b3 ♜c8!? 13. ♚h3 ♜xc3!

Black's play reminds one of the game Movsesian-Kasparov, Sarajevo 2000 – there too, we see a rapid development of Black's initiative on the queenside, an exchange sacrifice on c3, and a beautiful mating attack on the king.

14. bxc3 ♜c7 15. ♖b1 ♙e7 16. e5 dxe5 17. f5?! ♜d5 18. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 19. fxe6 fxe6?! 20. ♚g3 g6 21. ♜d2 ♜c8 22. ♚g5+? ♜e8 23. ♚g4? ♜xc3+ 24. ♖a1 ♙d5 25. ♜e3 ♜f6 26. ♚h4 ♚e7 27. ♙f1 ♙xb3 28. cxb3 ♜ce4! 29. ♜b2 ♜c1+ 30. ♜b1 ♚c5 0-1

On the other hand, as is well-known even from textbooks for beginners, the king in the centre faces many dangers. For example, in the game Maia Chiburdanidze-Semen Dvoirys, Tallin 1980, the black king did not enjoy a rosy future. In the position of the diagram, instead of 12. ♖b3, White played 12. ♜d5!?, which was a novelty at the time. Black immediately went wrong with 12...exd5? (12...♚xd4 13. ♙xf6 gxf6 14. ♙xb5 ♚c5, with sharp play, was essential), and the 6th women's world champion conducted a brilliant attack:



13. ♜c6!! ♙xc6 14. exd5+ ♙e7 15. dxc6 ♜c5 16. ♙xf6 gxf6 17. ♙f5 ♚c7 18. b4! ♜e6 19. ♚h5 ♜g7 20. ♙d7+ ♜f8 21. ♚h6 d5 22. ♜xe7! ♜xe7 23. ♜e1+ ♜f8 24. ♚xf6 ♜g8 25. ♜e7 ♜f8 26. ♙e6 ♚xe7 27. ♚xe7 fxe6 28. c7 h5 29. ♚xf8+ 1-0

## 2. Castle kingside and obtain sufficient chances by combining counterplay in the centre with an attack on the queenside.

This book discusses means of play in the Sicilian with castling on opposite sides.

How can one learn to play such positions well? One could take up an opening book, and try to pick out and remember the relevant variations. But little reward comes from such a method of study. Viktor Kortchnoi once said that ‘a chessplayer should develop his tactical and strategical intuition, and combine that with variations, in an attempt to replace the method of calculating everything. Experience is needed to achieve this balance in a tournament game’.

More than 30 years of study and practice of the Sicilian Defence, together with training work with both grandmasters and junior champions of Russia, Europe and the world, have helped me work out the following scheme for studying openings, which, in my view, is significantly more effective.

First of all, using clear illustrative games, we analyse the typical methods of attack in all of the different pawn structures which can arise from the opening. Often, detailed descriptions of the two sides’ plans and typical attacking and defensive ideas teaches one more than concrete variations. In my opinion, such a method enables a player to take correct decisions at the board, even in cases where one has forgotten (or never known) the concrete variations.

In the majority of cases, it is impossible to calculate all the way to mate in a Sicilian position with opposite-side castling. In a battle with mutual chances, the advantage goes to the player who is better acquainted with the strategic and tactical ideas of the system. Analysing the games in this book can help you improve your mastery in conducting a complicated struggle, and teach you to assess accurately obscure complications, and to choose the most effective methods of attack and defence in different Sicilian set-ups, even if you are insufficiently well-acquainted with concrete variations.

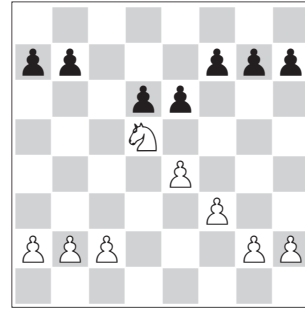
The author has reserved the right in certain cases to ignore move transpositions.

Yuri Yakovich  
October 2010

### Typical devices

- Piece sacrifices on d5, f5, or g7
- Whether the move a2-a3 is useful
- The prophylactic ♖b1
- The prophylactic ...♙e8
- The central break e4-e5
- Black counterplay in the centre by ...e6-e5
- Black counterplay in the centre by ...d6-d5
- Sacrificing the g-pawn; on g5, with g5-g6 or by g2-g4 with a black pawn on h5
- The sacrifice of the h-pawn in the Dragon Variation
- Exploiting pawn weaknesses
- Going into a better endgame

## Chapter 1.1 – The Knight Sacrifice on d5



The sacrifice of the knight on d5 is a typical attacking device in the Sicilian Defence. It is seen especially often when the black king is in the centre (see the game in the introduction), but can also be effective when the king has castled.

The following game has been analysed over the course of almost 40 years, in the pages of chess publications the world over, even by such great analysts as Garry Kasparov, Alexander Khalifman and Mark Dvoretsky. Even so, I think it is essential to include it in the present book, for the following reasons.

Firstly, it is a brilliant game, which illustrates the importance of being able to change the character of the battle by means of a positional sacrifice, without necessarily disturbing the objective equality. Its analysis will help to teach us how to play very sharp positions, in which any inaccuracy can have the most tragic consequences. Developing such qualities is essential to anybody who wants to be able to play the Sicilian successfully.

Secondly, in my view, the majority of commentators, despite the help of computer programs, have not assessed completely correctly the critical position arising after the piece sacrifice, and as a result the play of the two players in this magnificent game.

Game 1

**Mikhail Tal**

**Bent Larsen**

Bled m 1965 (10)

Before going over to the analysis, I would like to remind the reader of the circumstances in which the game was played. The match score was 4,5-4,5. In the event of a draw in this final game of ‘normal time’, the players would have had to continue the battle until the first victory. The interest in the game was

enormous, and the playing hall was packed.

Mikhail Nekhemievich considered that he had the advantage before this final game: ‘I had the white pieces and was in a good mood. In addition, I had faith in my ability to play crucial decisive games.’

1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. ♖g1-f3 ♜b8-c6
3. d2-d4 c5xd4
4. ♜f3xd4 e7-e6
5. ♜b1-c3 d7-d6

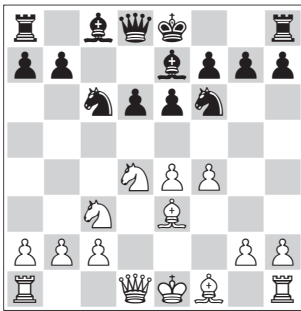


With this move-order, Larsen avoids the Keres Attack, which is discussed in Chapter 1.4, hoping to reach a Scheveningen position, where both sides castle kingside. But Tal has other ideas.

**6. ♖c1-e3!?**

I would point out that, notwithstanding the absence of the black knight from f6, the move 6.g4! (see Chapter 1.4) deserves the most serious attention even in this position.

- 6. ... ♘g8-f6**  
**7. f2-f4 ♙f8-e7**



**8. ♖d1-f3!**

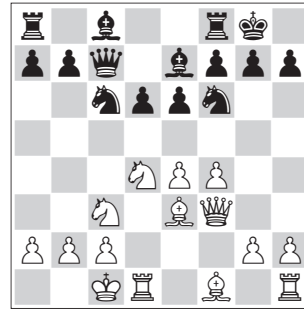
At that time this was a practically unknown set-up. Nowadays, however, it is hard to imagine a more natural plan, i.e. to castle long as rapidly as possible, and begin a pawn storm against the black kingside. The popularity of the line increased sharply after the present game.

**8. ... 0-0**

Larsen has no doubt that Black's chances will be no worse, after opposite-side castling.

**9. 0-0-0 ♖d8-c7**

(There was a threat of 10.e5)  
 Which attacking plan should White select now? The advance of the pawn to g5 is tempting, driving away the black king's principal defender, the knight on f6, followed by including the f-pawn in the attack, by means of f4-f5 and g5-g6 or f5-f6.



But Tal did not like the fact that the immediate 10.g4 would be met by the typical central counterplay introduced by the exchange 10...♗xd4 followed by ...e6-e5.

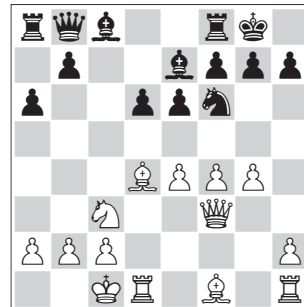
Even so, Kasparov, annotating the game in the second volume of his series *My Great Predecessors*, gives the move 10.g4 an exclamation mark. In my opinion, in the position in the diagram White does better to prepare the pawn storm by means of 10.♖g1!, but we will speak more about this when analysing Games 3 and 5.

Tal played instead

**10. ♗d4-b5?!**

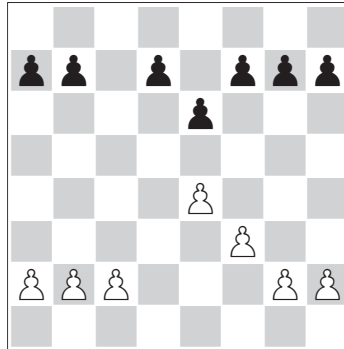
with the idea of 'starting the attack, after first worsening the position of the black queen' (Tal).

- 10. ... ♖c7-b8**  
**11. g2-g4 a7-a6**  
**12. ♗b5-d4 ♗c6xd4**  
**13. ♙e3xd4**



## Part 2 – Taimanov Structure

### Black Pawns on d7 and e6, White Pawns on e4 and f3



The set-up with black pawns on d7 and e6 is characteristic of the Taimanov System **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♖c7**.

In recent times, White has achieved excellent results with the variation **6.♙e3 a6 7.♖d2 ♗f6 8.0-0-0!** followed by f2-f3.

The pawn on d7 often later advances to d6, giving rise to positions examined in the previous Chapter 1.3.

In this section, we will analyse cases where Black quickly castles, leaving the d-pawn in its initial position. He may develop his dark-squared bishop either to e7 (Game 14) or b4 (Game 15).

In the first case, Black can save a tempo on Games 2 and 10 by dispensing with the move ...d7-d6 and start immediate play on the queenside with ...b7-b5. In the second case, he can try to exploit the pin on the knight on c3.

Utilising the fact that the e6 pawn is solidly defended in the present structure, Black is ready at a convenient moment to play ...f7-f5, weakening White's pressure on the kingside, and including the rook on f8 in the game.

The existence of these additional possibilities resulted in the set-up ♙e3, ♖d2, **0-0-0, f3** achieving popularity in the Taimanov System rather later than in the Scheveningen and Najdorf Systems. But practice in recent years has shown that White has considerable chances of developing a dangerous initiative in this variation as well.

White's main weapon is a kingside pawn storm with the g- and h-pawns. In addition, at an appropriate moment he can try to exploit the drawbacks of the pawn's position on d7, by going into a superior endgame where it will not be easy for Black to defend his weaknesses.

Game 14

**Sergey Karjakin**

**Alexander Morozevich**

Wijk aan Zee 2009 (1)

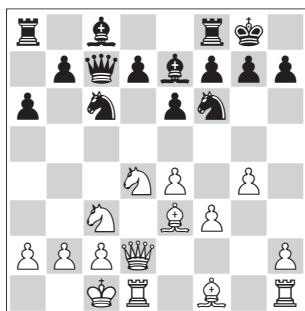
1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. ♘g1-f3 e7-e6
3. d2-d4 c5xd4
4. ♘f3xd4 ♘b8-c6
5. ♘b1-c3 ♖d8-c7
6. ♙c1-e3 a7-a6
7. ♖d1-d2 ♘g8-f6
8. 0-0-0!

There is no point in White's playing 8.f3, presenting Black with the additional possibility 8...♘e5!? 9.0-0-0 b5!?

8. ... ♙f8-e7

The development of the bishop to b4 will be considered in the next game. Now 8...♘e5?! would be met by 9.f4! with a big lead in development for White.

9. f2-f3 0-0
10. g2-g4



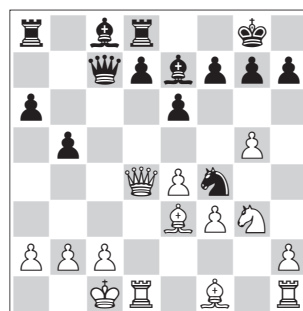
Compared with the position in Game 10 after White's 10th move, here Black has played ...♖c7 instead of ...d7-d6. Black hopes to save time on the advance of his d-pawn and because the c6 knight is defended he can immediately start play on the queenside.

10. ... b7-b5
11. g4-g5

White's plan is the same – a pawn storm on the kingside. But there is one additional nuance. The black pawn remains on d7, which may give White a plus in the endgame.

11. ... ♘f6-e8

The most common move, although after the present game the number of its supporters diminished noticeably. Lately, thanks to the efforts of Rafael Leitao, Black has had good results with 11...♘h5!?. The knight moves to the edge of the board, slowing up the white attack. 12.♘ce2!? ♖d8 13.♘g3 ♘xd4! Of course, Black should not open up the h-file by 13...♘xg3?. 14.♖xd4 ♘f4



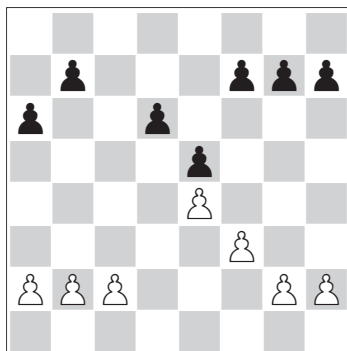
analysis diagram

Leitao's idea is based on a tactical point – 15.h4 ♙b7 16.♖b6 ♖b8! 17.♗b1 d5!! and it turns out that after 18.♙xf4 ♖xf4 19.♖xb7 (19.♘e2?! ♖d6) 19...♙c5! the white queen cannot hide from the attentions of the enemy rook: 20.♙d3 (20.♘e2 ♖d6=; 20.♖h3 ♖db8 21.♖d7 ♖d8 22.♖c6 ♖dc8=) 20...♖xg3 21.exd5 ♖db8 22.♖c6 ♖c8 23.♖b7 ♖cb8= Oliveira-Leitao, Brasil 2009.

It seems to me that in the position of the analysis diagram the move 15.♗b1!? deserves attention:

- A) The pawn cannot be taken: 15...♙xg5 16.e5 winning a piece;

## Chapter 4.1 – White Pawns on e4 and f3



White's central formation is solid, and after short castling by Black, the advance of the g- and h-pawns is tempting. What can Black do against this plan? Does he have to advance on the queenside (4.1.2 and 4.1.3), or should he first create the typical Sicilian pressure along the c-file, as seen in the game below (4.1.1)?

### 4.1.1 Black creates piece pressure on the queenside, without advancing his a- and b-pawns

Game 17

Alexander Grischuk

Lubomir Ftacnik

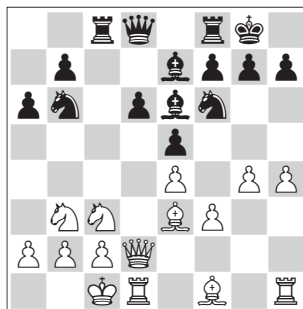
Calvia ol 2004 (5)

1. e2-e4 c7-c5
2. ♘g1-f3 d7-d6
3. d2-d4 c5xd4
4. ♘f3xd4 ♘g8-f6
5. ♘b1-c3 a7-a6
6. ♙c1-e3 e7-e5
7. ♘d4-b3 ♙c8-e6
8. ♚d1-d2 ♙f8-e7
9. f2-f3 ♘b8-d7

In the event of immediate castling, White has to start with 10.0-0-0!, since after 10.g4? there follows 10...d5! 11.g5 d4 with excellent play for Black.

10. g2-g4 0-0

After 10...♖c8 11.0-0-0 ♘b6 12.h4! (once the black knight has obstructed its b-pawn, White does not need to hurry with the advance g4-g5) 12...0-0



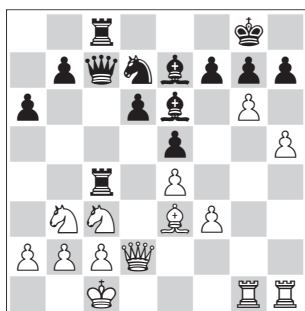
analysis diagram

we have transposed into Adorjan-Ribli, Budapest (m-4) 1979, where White played a new plan, starting with 13.h5!.

Now after g4-g5 the black knight cannot hold up the enemy attack by jumping to h5.

A) Only the central break **13...d5** can place a question mark over the correctness of White's plan, after which Adorjan's 14.♟xb6? ♞xb6 15.g5 leads to Black's advantage after 15...d4! 16.♞a4 ♞c6 17.gxf6 ♟xf6! (Adorjan only considered 17...gxf6? 18.♞ac5! ♟xc5 19.♞g1+ ♖h8 20.♞h6+-) 18.♞ac5 ♟xb3 19.♞xb3? ♟g5!. But the simple **14.g5!** (Kasparov) **14...d4 15.gxf6 ♟xf6 16.♞xd4** leaves White with an extra pawn;

B) **13...♞c4 14.♟xc4 ♞xc4 15.g5 ♞d7 16.♞dg1!± ♞c7?** Kasparov considers this move the decisive mistake. The only way to complicate White's task was 16...f5!?, although then too, after 17.g6 f4 (or 17...h6 18.♟xh6 gxh6 19.♞xh6) 18.gxh7+ ♖h8 19.♟f2 Black's position is unenviable. **17.g6 ♞c8** Ribli hopes to get counterplay by sacrificing the exchange on c3, but an unpleasant surprise awaits him. Now 17...f5 no longer works, because of 18.♞d5 ♞d8 19.h6, whilst after 17...♞f6 there follows the same blow as in the game: 18.♟h6! ♞e8 19.♟xg7 ♖xg7 (19...♞xg7 20.♞h6+-) 20.h6+ ♖g8 21.g7+-.

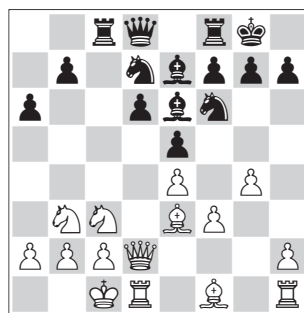


analysis diagram

**18.♟h6!** Black was hoping for 18.h6? fxg6 19.hxg7 ♞xc3! 20.bxc3 ♞xc3 with excellent play. **18...♟f6 19.gxh7+ ♖xh7 20.♟xg7! ♟xg7 21.h6!+- ♟f6 22.♞g2!** and Black resigned, since there is no defence to 23.♞g7+. An impressive crush.

**11. 0-0-0 ♞a8-c8**

Black's play is craftier than in the above game. He waits for 12.g5, so as after 12...♞h5 to hold up White's attack on the kingside, whilst not weakening his queenside with the advance ...b7-b5. After 12.h4 there could follow 12...b5 13.g5 b4!? with unclear play. But White finds a cunning waiting move.



**12. ♖c1-b1! ♞d7-b6?!**

Ftacnik hopes to exploit the fact that White has lost a tempo on the game Adorjan-Ribli with the king move. Black did not like 12...b5 13.g5! (only after the black queenside has been weakened does White change his plan of attack) 13...♞h5 (not 13...b4? because of 14.gxf6 bxc3 15.fxe7+-) 14.♞d5 ♟xd5 15.exd5 followed by ♞a5-c6 and c2-c4, with a strong initiative on the queenside. This plan will be analysed more deeply in the next game (see the note to White's 17th move there).

**13. h2-h4! ♞d8-c7**

Again, 13...d5 fails to 14.g5 d4 15.gxf6 ♟xf6 16.♞xd4 exd4 17.♟xd4 with an extra pawn for White.

**14. h4-h5!**