

# Challenging the Nimzo-Indian

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# CONTENTS

List of Symbols	5
Bibliography	6
How this book came to be	7
Chapter overview and recommendations	9
1 Endgame Variation	13
2 Avoiding the Endgame	25
3 The Old Variation	37
4 Bareev Variation	49
5 Sokolov Variation	61
6 Rozentalis Variation and 7...c5	73
7 Dutch and Vitolinsh Variations	89
8 Central Variation: Main Line	111
9 Central Variation: Deviations	129
10 Zurich Variation and Black's rare 4 <sup>th</sup> moves	149
11 Romanishin: 6.e3	161
12 Romanishin: 6.♘f3	171
13 Accelerated PCA Variation	189
14 Exchange Variation	199
15 PCA Variation	205
16 Romanishin Gambit and Short Variation	219
17 Adams Variation	227
18 Modern Variation	243
19 Knight Hop	261
20 Macieja Variation	281
21 Deviations after 4...c5	297
Index of Main Lines	310

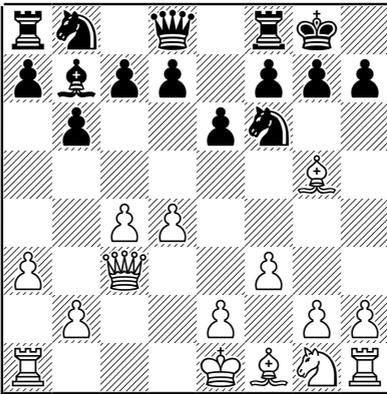
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## Chapter 2

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# Avoiding the Endgame

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2 0–0  
5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♗xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.f3

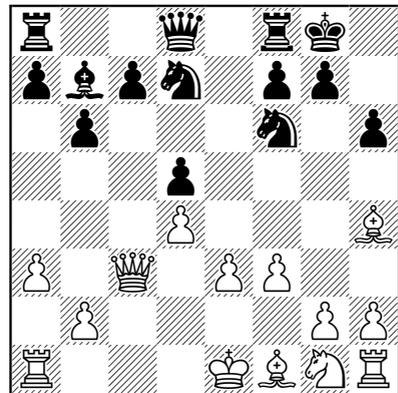


In this chapter we will look at lines where one side chooses to avoid the endgame studied in the previous chapter. While these lines are considered somewhat inferior, sometimes White becomes bored of the endgame and will choose to deviate with either 11.♘h3 (Game 6) or 10.cxd5 (Game 8). In general these lines are not so dangerous for Black theoretically, but the play can still become interesting and can help one understand the nature of the position. Black can also choose to avoid the endgame by playing 11...exd5 (Game 5), 10...♖e8 (Game 7), or the completely different 8...d6 (Game 9). These lines are all playable, but they give

White a very good chance to achieve a tangible advantage.

Game 5  
Kasparov – Timman  
Linares 1993

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2 0–0 5.a3  
♙xc3† 6.♗xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.f3 h6 9.♙h4  
d5 10.e3 ♘bd7 11.cxd5 exd5



Recapturing with the pawn is a bit passive. It allows White to complete his development in a harmonious way and look forward to having two bishops and play on both sides of the board. With the pawn structure now determined White can arrange his pieces in a very natural way.

12. ♖d3 ♜e8 13. ♗e2 c5

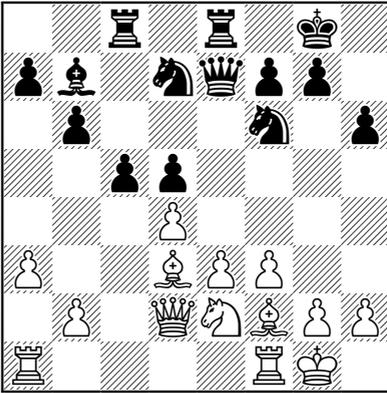
Striking in the centre is the most natural and is Black's best attempt to get a middlegame with chances for counterplay. Alternatives:

a) 13... ♗e4? 14. ♖xd8 ♗xc3 15. ♖xc7±

b) 13... ♗xe3? 14. ♖xf6 (not 14. ♖h7? ♗xh7 15. ♗xe3 ♗xh4†) 14... ♗xf6 15. ♖h7±

c) 13... a5 14. ♖f5 Δ♖xd7 (14.0-0 ♖a6) 14... ♗f8 15.0-0 c6 16. ♖f2± Li Wenliang – Liang Chong, Calcutta 2001.

14.0-0 ♜c8 15. ♗d2 ♗e7 16. ♖f2



White's pieces are harmoniously placed. It is difficult for Black to come up with a plan here. The move ...c4 would release the pressure on White's centre and allow the first player to aim for e3-e4. If Black plays ...cxd4, White will have a pleasant choice. He could recapture on d4 with a piece, leaving Black with an isolated d-pawn. This is tempting, but Black would at least have access to the c5- and e5-squares. White can also recapture on d4 with a pawn. This would maintain control of c5 and e5 and create a symmetrical pawn structure. Normally this will favour White because of his strong bishop pair and Black's very passive b7-bishop. White may play on either side of the board and can annoy Black with pins by playing ♖d3-f5 or ♖f2-h4 at some point.

16... ♖c6

Because it is difficult for Black to initiate action, he makes a flexible move. Also tried is:

a) 16... ♗b8?! is passive. 17. ♗fe1 cxd4 18. exd4! ♖a6 19. ♖f5 ♜cd8 20. ♗c3 ♗f8 21. ♖h4± Vigorito – D. Bennett, Phoenix 2005.

b) 16... cxd4 17. exd4 ♗e4? This is tempting but it does not work: 18. fxe4 dxe4 19. ♖b5 e3 20. ♗xe3 ♗xe3 21. ♖xe3 ♜xe3 22. ♖xd7 ♜xe2 (22... ♗d8 23. ♖g4±) 23. ♖xc8 ♜xg2† 24. ♗h1 ♖a8 (losing immediately are both 24... ♖e4 25. ♗fe1+- and 24... ♖d5 25. ♗f5+-) when White must be precise.

b1) 25. ♗fd1? is inaccurate because of 25... ♖f3! (not 25... ♖d5 26. h4!+- Vigorito – Marrero, Las Vegas 1997) 26. ♗d3 ♖d5 27. ♖b7 ♖xb7 28. d5 ♗g6 when White is only a little better.

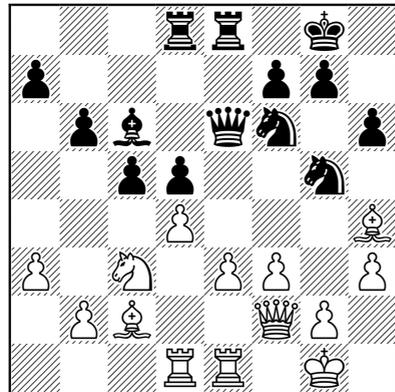
b2) 25. d5! ♖xd5 26. ♗fd1 ♖f3 27. ♗d3 ♖c6 28. ♜c3 ♖a8 29. h4+- was indicated by Kasparov. 17. ♗c3 ♗f8 18. ♗fe1 ♗e6 19. ♖h4 ♗g5

The pin on the f6-knight is annoying and Black has trouble coming up with a plan.

20. ♖f5 ♖d7 21. ♖c2 ♖c6 22. ♗ad1 ♗e6 23. ♗f2

White has a very pleasant advantage and Black has no counterplay. Kasparov soon breaks through in the centre.

23... ♜cd8 24. h3



White threatens to win a pawn with 25... ♖xg5 hxg5 26. ♗g3 by preventing ...g4. 24... ♗gh7

All of White's pieces are ideally placed. Now that Black has retreated his g5-knight, White initiates action.

25.dxc5 bxc5 26.e4! dxe4  
 26...d4 27.e5! dxc3 28.♞xd8 ♞xd8 29.exf6+-  
 27.♞xd8 ♞xd8 28.♞xc5

The pin on the e-file will net White a pawn.  
 28...♟g5 29.♟xg5 hxg5 30.♞xg5 ♞c4 31.fxe4  
 ♞d4† 32.♞e3 ♞xe3† 33.♞xe3 ♞d2 34.♞e2  
 ♞xe2 35.♟xe2 ♟xe4 36.♟xe4

White can also play the less committal  
 36.♟d4, which should be enough to win.  
 36...♟xe4 37.♟f2 ♟f8 38.g3 ♟e7 39.♟e3  
 ♟c6 40.h4 ♟d7 41.♟f4 ♟d6 42.g4 f6 43.h5  
 ♟e7 44.♟d4 ♟f7 45.b4 ♟a4 46.♟f5 g6  
 47.♟d6† ♟g7 48.♟c8 a6 49.♟d6 ♟d1?

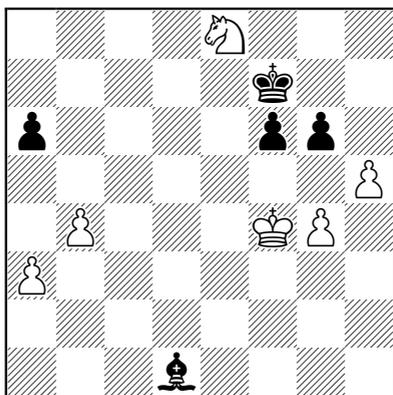
This loses quickly to a cute combination, but  
 Black could not save the game anyway:

a) 49...♟h6 50.♟e4 gxh5 51.gxh5 ♟xh5  
 52.♟xf6† ♟g6 53.♟e5 ♟f7 54.♟d5+-

b) 49...♟d7 50.♟e4 f5 51.♟c5 ♟c8 52.h6†  
 ♟xh6 53.g5† ♟g7 54.a4+-

c) 49...♟c6 was the best chance although  
 White can still win. Kasparov gives 50.♟e4 g5†  
 51.♟f3 ♟h6 52.♟e3 f5 53.gxf5 ♟xh5 54.♟d6  
 ♟h6 55.♟f7† ♟h5 56.♟e5+-.

50.♟e8† ♟f7



51.♟xf6!

This sacrifice makes it easy.

51...♟xf6 52.g5† ♟f7 53.h6

White will support his queenside advance  
 with the king, winning Black's bishop, and then  
 walk back to the kingside with a simple win.

1-0

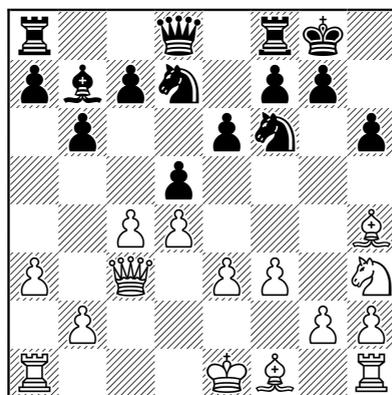
Conclusions: 8.f3 h6 9.♟h4 d5 10.e3 ♟bd7  
 11.cxd5 exd5 is passive and is rarely seen  
 nowadays. It is difficult for Black to find  
 counterplay and White can look forward to the  
 middlegame with the bishop pair and play all  
 over the board.

### Game 6

Bareev – Kramnik

Novgorod 1997

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♟b4 4.♞c2 0-0 5.a3  
 ♟xc3† 6.♞xc3 b6 7.♟g5 ♟b7 8.f3 h6 9.♟h4  
 d5 10.e3 ♟bd7 11.♟h3



This move is not very popular, as Black  
 has more than one route to equality. The  
 development of White's knight to h3 is  
 fairly common in the Nimzo-Indian, but in a  
 position like this, where the centre is fluid, this  
 kind of development must be very carefully  
 considered.

White's other method of development  
 with 11.♟d3 is poorly timed because Black is  
 well placed to open the position. A couple of  
 examples:

a) 11...dxc4 12.♟xc4 ♞c8 13.♟e2 c5  
 14.0-0 cxd4 15.♞xd4 e5 16.♞d3 ♞e7†  
 J. Graf – I. Farago, Garmisch Partenkirchen  
 1991.

b) 11...c5 12.♟e2 (12.cxd5 cxd4 13.♞xd4  
 e5 14.♞c3 ♞c8 15.♞d2 ♟xd5†) 12...cxd4

13. exd4 dxc4 14. ♖xc4 ♗e4! 15. ♖xd8 ♗xc3  
16. ♖e7 ♜fc8♣ Privman – Hebert, Philadelphia  
2001.

11...c5

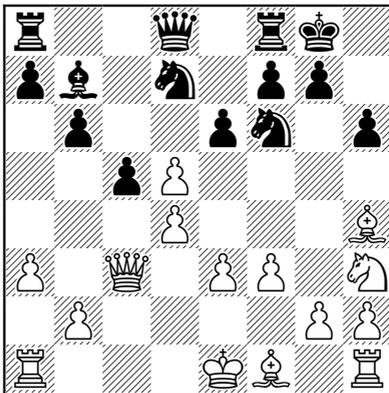
Instead 11...♞e8 would transpose into Game 7  
Kramnik–Tiviakov, but the alternative 11...♞c8  
is also good. Black would like to recapture on c5  
with a rook. White can try:

a) 12. c5 is critical but Black gets good  
counterplay after 12...bxc5 13. dxc5 c6 14. ♖g3  
♞a8 15. ♖d6 ♞e8 16. ♗f2 a5 17. ♖d3 a4 18. 0–0  
♖a6 19. ♖xa6 ♞xa6, as in Etchegaray – Veingold,  
Zaragoza 1993.

b) 12. cxd5 ♗xd5 13. ♖xd8 ♗xc3 14. ♖h4 ♗d5  
15. ♖f2 This looks like a normal 4. ♞c2 Nimzo  
ending, but White's knight is marooned on h3  
here. 15...c5 (Atalik suggests 15...f5) and Black  
has no problems. A couple of examples:

b1) 16. ♖b5 ♖c6 17. ♖a6 ♞cd8= Ebilina –  
Gershon, Bermuda 1999.

b2) 16. e4 ♗5f6 17. ♞d1 cxd4 18. ♖xd4 ♞fd8  
19. ♖e2 ♗c5 20. ♗f2 ♗fd7= is given by Atalik.  
12. cxd5



12...cxd4

This move of Timoshenko has been held for  
years to be a simple route to equality. Black  
gains time attacking White's queen and finds a  
very efficient arrangement of his pieces. There  
are a couple of alternatives:

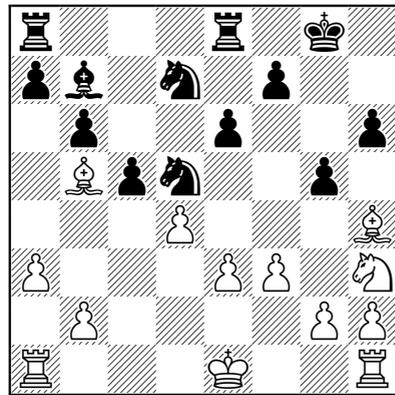
a) 12...exd5 gives White unnecessary chances.  
White is often better in this structure if he can

develop without problems. 13. ♖e2 and 13. ♖b5  
meet with 13...♗e4!, so White plays 13. ♖d3.  
Black has:

a1) 13...cxd4 14. ♞xd4 ♗c5 15. ♖c2 ♞c8  
16. ♖xf6♣ Gulko – Benjamin, USA 1989.

a2) 13...♞e7 14. ♖f5 (14. ♖b5!?) is suggested by  
I. Sokolov, who gives 14...cxd4 15. ♞xd4 ♗e5  
16. 0–0 a6 17. ♖g3♣ 14...cxd4 15. ♞xd4 ♗e5  
16. 0–0♣ was Gelfand – Lerner, Russia 1989.

b) 12...♗xd5!?) is a valid alternative to the  
main game. 13. ♖xd8 ♗xc3 14. ♖e7 White  
plays this to bring the black rook into a pin  
after ♖b5. 14...♞fe8 15. ♖h4 ♗d5 16. ♖b5 g5!



Black has held the balance here.

b1) 17. ♖f2 ♞ed8 18. e4 ♗5f6 gives Black  
counterplay, as shown in several games. The h3-  
knight is far from the action.

b2) 17. ♖xd7 ♞ed8 18. ♖f2 ♞xd7 19. dxc5 bxc5  
20. ♞c1 ♖a6 gave Black counterplay in Khenkin  
– Ulybin, Minsk 1990.

b3) 17. dxc5 ♗xc5!?(17...bxc5 18. ♖f2♣ is given  
by Atalik) is an interesting exchange sacrifice  
played in a game between two computers.  
18. ♖xe8 ♞xe8 19. ♖f2 ♗d3♣ 20. ♗e2 ♖a6 gave  
Black a very strong initiative in PHARAON64  
– DRAGON, France 2004.

13. ♞xd4 e5 14. ♞d1

Other moves are equally harmless:

a) 14. ♖xf6 ♗xf6 15. ♞xe5 ♞e8 16. ♞d4 ♞xd5  
17. ♞xd5 ♞xe3♣ 18. ♗f2 ♗xd5 is good for  
Black.

b) 14. ♖d2 ♙xd5 15. ♗f2 (15. ♙b5 ♙e6 16. 0-0 ♗c5=) 15... ♙e6 16. ♙b5 ♗c5= is like the game. 14... ♙xd5 15. ♙b5 ♙e6 16. ♗f2 ♗c5

Black is fine here. He has plenty of space now and his pawns control the dark squares while his pieces have a grip on the light squares.

17. 0-0 ♗b3 18. ♖xd8 ♙axd8 19. ♙ad1 ♙xd1 20. ♙xd1 ♗d5 21. ♗g4 f6 22. ♙c6 ♗c7 23. ♙e1  
1/2-1/2

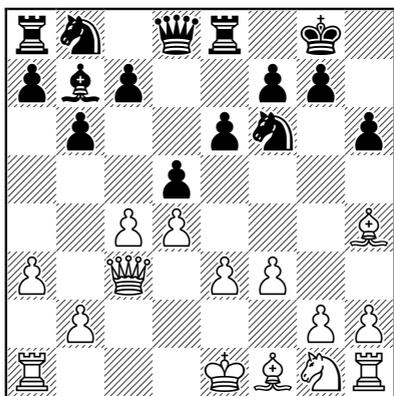
**Conclusions:** After 7. ♙g5 ♙b7 8. f3 h6 9. ♙h4 d5 10. e3 ♗bd7 White's attempts to maintain the tension with 11. ♙d3 or 11. ♗h3 allow Black to develop rapid counterplay. 11. ♙d3 will lose time to ...dxc4, and 11. ♗h3 is well met by either 11... ♙c8 or 11...c5.

**Game 7**

**Kramnik – Tiviakov**

Las Vegas (2) 1999

1. d4 ♗f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♗c3 ♙b4 4. ♖c2 0-0 5. a3 ♙xc3† 6. ♖xc3 b6 7. ♙g5 ♙b7 8. f3 h6 9. ♙h4 d5 10. e3 ♙e8



This waiting move is designed to discourage White from playing cxd5 because of the pressure down the e-file. This does avoid the endgame of Games 1-4, but it also gives White better chances of achieving an advantage.

**11. ♗h3!**

Kramnik refers to this move as “the most natural”. Compared to the previous game, the move ... ♙e8 is less useful to Black than ... ♗bd7 because ... ♙e8 does not help support the central break ...c5. Other 11<sup>th</sup> moves by White make some kind of concession and are more likely to justify Black's play.

11.cxd5 looks rather cooperative, but it is playable. After 11...exd5 12. ♙f2 c5 we have transposed into Game 8 (Beliavsky – Lautier). 11. 0-0-0 looks interesting but after 11... ♗bd7 Black is well ahead in development in a sharp position. 11. ♙c1 ♗bd7 12.cxd5 exd5 13. ♖xc7 ♖e7 is dangerous for White.

White's main alternative is 11. ♙d3. This looks natural, but Black may gain a tempo by playing ...dxc4. In practice he has preferred 11... ♗bd7 when White has:

a) 12.cxd5 ♗xd5! (12...exd5?! 13. ♗e2! transposes to Game 5, Kasparov – Timman) 13. ♙xd8 ♗xc3 14. ♙h4 ♗d5 15. ♙f2 e5! is another point of Black's early rook move. If 16.e4 exd4 17. 0-0-0 Black has the annoying 17... ♗f4.

b) 12. ♗e2 c5 (12...e5!? is a suggestion of Golod) 13.cxd5 cxd4 (13...exd5?! again transposes to Game 5) 14. ♗xd4 ♗xd5 15. ♙xd8 ♗xc3 16. ♙h4 (16. ♙xb6 ♗e5! was good for Black in Kniest – Hracek, Czech Republic 2002) 16... ♗e5! 17. ♙f1 (It's hard to imagine White being able to play for an advantage this way, but 17. ♙c2 gives up control of c4 and 17... ♗d5 attacking e3 and planning ... ♗c4, is good for Black.) 17... ♗d5 18. ♙g3 and here:

b1) 18... ♗xe3 19. ♙xe5 f6 20. ♙g3 ♙ad8 21. ♙b5! led to complications that were favourable for White in M. Gurevich – Kosten, France 2003.

b2) 18... ♗g6 19. ♗f2 ♙ed8 Black was active enough to hold the balance in both Ljubojevic – Kramnik, Monte Carlo 2003, and Van Wely – Kramnik, Monte Carlo 2003.

**11... ♗bd7**

Premature is 11...c5 12.dxc5 g5 (12...bxc5 13. ♙xf6 ♖xf6 14. ♖xf6 gxf6 15. 0-0-0±)

13.♔g3 bxc5 14.0-0-0 ♖c6 15.♗f2± Pham Minh Hoang – C. Balogh, Budapest 2002.  
12.cxd5

12.♙e2?! ♗e4! (Kramnik) leads to nothing for White because after 13.♙xd8 ♗xc3 White cannot keep both of his bishops. 14.♙xc7 ♗xe2 15.♙xe2 ♞ac8 wins back the pawn because c4 is loose.

12...exd5

12...♗xd5 is not as good. After 13.♙xd8 ♗xc3 White can play:

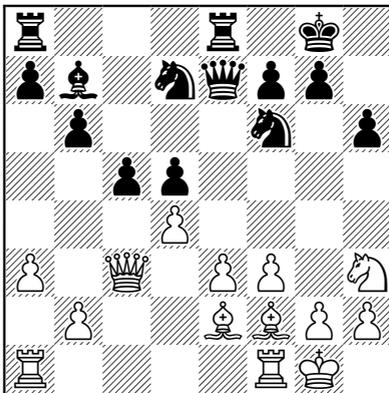
a) 14.♙xc7?! is too greedy. 14...♗d5 15.♙f4 e5 16.dxe5 ♗xe5 17.♙xe5 ♗xe3! was promising for Black in Efremov – S. Shipov, Alushta 1994.

b) 14.♙h4! ♗d5 15.♙f2 e5 (or 15...f5 16.0-0-0! Bareev – Ki. Georgiev, Moscow 1994) 16.e4 exd4 17.0-0-0! gives White an edge in the ending.

13.♙e2 ♞e7

13...♗e4 does not work now because of 14.♙xd8 ♗xc3 15.♙xc7!. Compared to the note to White's twelfth move, White has already exchanged his c-pawn so he emerges a pawn up after 15...♗xe2 16.♙xe2 ♞ac8 17.♞ac1±.

14.♙f2 c5 15.0-0



White has managed to complete his development and has favourably resolved the tension in the centre. The pawn structure is the same as Game 5 (Kasparov – Timman). Here White's h3-knight is oddly placed, but

it is still not easy for Black to come up with a constructive plan.

15...c4

With White's knight so far away Black starts his play on the queenside. Other moves have been tried as well, but White maintains a small and lasting advantage because of his bishop pair and flexible pawn structure. Some examples:

a) 15...cxd4 16.♞xd4 ♗c5 17.♞ad1± Brenninkmeijer – Douven, Netherlands 1990.

b) 15...♞ac8 16.♞fe1 and here:

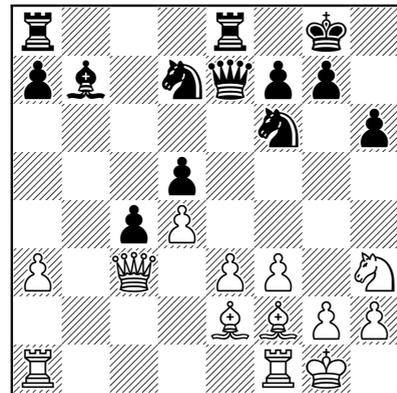
b1) 16...♗f8 17.♙f1 ♗e6 18.♞d2 ♗h7 19.♗f4± Beliavsky – Rodriguez, Lucerne 1989.

b2) 16...cxd4 17.♞xd4 ♗c5 18.♞ad1 ♙c6 (or 18...♗e6 19.♞d2± Beliavsky – Vaganian, Russia 1989) 19.b4 ♗e6 20.♞b2 ♙a4 21.♞c1± Dreev – Balashov, Lvov 1990.

16.b3!

White immediately attacks Black's pawn chain. With the bishop pair and an extra centre pawn White can play on both sides of the board.

16...b5 17.bxc4 bxc4



18.♙d1!

A fine regrouping. White places the bishop on c2 where it can monitor the queenside and assist in preparing e4.

18...♗b6 19.♙c2 ♙c6 20.a4

It is interesting that Kramnik later reached this position again, but this time as Black. He drew the game, but his position was worse

after 20. ♖a5!? ♜d7 21. a4 ♘c8 22. ♗f4 ♘d6  
23. ♗e2 ♞eb8 24. ♞fb1± Khalifman – Kramnik,  
St Petersburg – Paris 2003.

20... ♜d7?!

20... a5 was suggested by Golod to stop  
White's a-pawn.

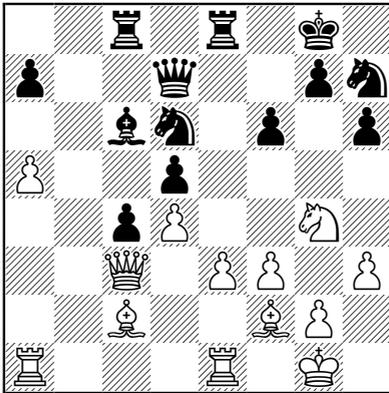
21. a5 ♘c8 22. ♙h4 ♘h7 23. ♗f2

White finally gets the knight back to the  
centre. His now has a very pleasant position  
with the bishop pair and the possibility of a  
central breakthrough.

23... ♘d6 24. ♗g4 ♗f5 25. ♙f2 f6

Black threatens to trap White's knight with  
...h5.

26. h3 ♘d6 27. ♞fe1 ♞ac8?



The decisive mistake according to Kramnik.  
Black had to try either 27... h5 or 27... ♘g5 to  
stop White's next.

28. e4!

A thematic breakthrough in the centre to  
open up for action on the dark squares.

28... ♘b5

The alternatives do not give much hope:

a) 28... h5 29. exd5 ♙xd5 30. ♗e3 gives White  
a big advantage.

b) 28... dxe4 29. d5! ♙b5 (29... ♙xd5 30. ♞ad1  
leaves Black with no good defence to ♜d4)  
30. fxe4 h5 31. ♗h2 ♗g5 32. e5! fxe5 33. ♙g6  
♗df7 34. ♗f3± is given by Kramnik. With  
the position blown open, the bishops are very  
strong.

29. ♜d2 h5

White has a huge centre after 29... dxe4

30. fxe4 h5 31. ♗h2±.

30. ♗e3! dxe4 31. d5 f5 32. ♗xf5!

Breaking Black's defences.

32... ♜xd5

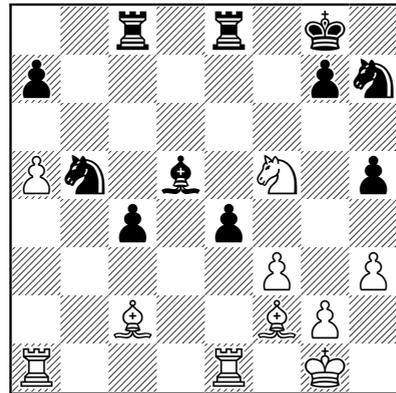
Other moves do not help:

a) 32... ♜xf5 33. dxc6+-

b) 32... exf3 33. ♜b4!

c) 32... ♙xd5 33. ♙xe4±

33. ♜xd5† ♙xd5



34. ♙a4!+-

Black will not be able to avoid a knight fork  
on d6.

34... a6

34... ♞b8 35. ♙xb5 ♞xb5 36. ♘d6 wins.

35. ♙xb5 axb5 36. fxe4 ♙c6

Black's connected pawns are not dangerous  
and Kramnik efficiently mops up with his extra  
exchange.

37. ♘d6 ♗f6 38. a6 c3 39. a7 c2 40. e5 ♗e4

41. ♗xe8 ♞xe8 42. ♞ec1

1-0

**Conclusions:** After 8. f3 h6 9. ♙h4 d5 10. e3,  
10... ♞e8 is a tricky move. Most of White's  
11<sup>th</sup> moves give Black good counterplay in  
the centre, so the flexible 11. ♗h3 is best. By  
keeping the tension for one extra move White is  
able to avoid little tactical problems and develop  
efficiently.