

# Opening Studies

## *An Introduction to the Ruy Lopez*

(Adapted and amended from Rueben Fine's *Ideas Behind the Chess Openings*, by Richard Westbrook, 2003.)

The Ruy Lopez Opening, 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5, is old, highly regarded, and highly analyzed. It is White's most logical attempt to continue the attack started on Black's center at move two. White sends his light-squared bishop to b5 at move three, increasing pressure on Black's center by threatening the e-pawn's defender.

However, the immediate exchange on c6 and capture on e5 fails to gain an advantage. For example, if, after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 (*skip Black's move*), White tries 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.Nxe5 Qd4 regains the material and balances each side's chances.

Therefore, Black has time (one move) to decide how to reinforce his center. If he plays

|           |                             |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 3...      | d6?! (The Steinitz Defense) |
| then 4.d4 | Bd7                         |
| 5.Nc3     | Nf6                         |
| 6.0-0     | Be7                         |
| 7.Re1     | exd4 forced!                |

|         |                           |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 7...    | 0-0? (the "Dresden Trap") |
| 8.Bxc6  | Bxc6                      |
| 9.dxe5  | dxe5                      |
| 10.Qxd8 | Raxd8                     |
| 11.Nxe5 | Bxe4                      |
| 12.Nxe4 | Nxe4                      |
| 13.Nd3  | f5                        |
| 14.f3   | Bc5+                      |
| 15.Nxc5 | Nxc5                      |
| 16.Bg5  | Rd5                       |
| 17.Be7  | Rf7                       |
| 18.c4   | and White wins.           |

|        |       |
|--------|-------|
| 8.Nxd4 | 0-0!? |
|--------|-------|

White has a fine position.

However, Black can improve at move eight with (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.d4 Bd7 5.Nc3 Nf6 6.0-0 Be7 7.Re1 exd4 8.Nxd4)

|        |       |
|--------|-------|
| 8...   | Nxd4! |
| 9.Qxd4 | Bxb5  |

|         |     |
|---------|-----|
| 10.Nxb5 | a6  |
| 11.Nc3  | 0-0 |
| 12.Bg5  | Nd7 |

when the reduction in material reduces White's hopes of winning.

White can also improve: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.d4 Bd7 5.Nc3 Nf6 6.Bxc6!

Instead of castling; now White still has the right to castle on either side,

|        |               |
|--------|---------------|
| 6...   | Bxc6 (forced) |
| 7.Qd3! | ...           |

Now Black's e-pawn is attacked. Since there is no good defense, it must be exchanged

|           |      |
|-----------|------|
| 7...      | exd4 |
| 8.Nxd4    | Bd7  |
| 9.Bg5     | Be7  |
| 10.0-0-0! | 0-0  |
| 11.f4     | ...  |

White has a powerful attack. Usually, the best Black can hope for is a draw after a long, difficult fight. So, Black needs a better third move.

The Classical Defense, 3...Bc5, allows White to secure a strong pawn center, and so is more difficult to play than other defenses. For example,

|        |               |
|--------|---------------|
| 1.e4   | e5            |
| 2.Nf3  | Nc6           |
| 3.Bb5  | Bc5           |
| 4.0-0  | d6 [...Nf6]   |
| 5.c3   | Bd7           |
| 6.d4   | exd4 [...Bb6] |
| 7.cxd4 | Bb6           |
| 8.Nc3  | Nge7          |

Forced, because if 8...Nf6?

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| 9.e5!   | dxe5 |
| 10.dxe5 | Ng4  |

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11. *Bg5*            *Qc8* and White is winning. A strong and typical continuation is
12. *h3*            *Ngxe5*
13. *Re1*           *f6*
14. *Bxc6*          *Bxc6*
15. *Nxe5*          *fxe5*
16. *Rxe5+*        *Kf8*
17. *Be7+*         *Kf7*
18. *Qb3+*         *Ke8*
19. *Bf6+*         *Kf8*
20. *Qb4+*         *Kg8*
21. *Qc4+*         *Kf8*
22. *Be7+*         *Ke8*
23. *Bc5+*         *Kd8*
24. *Qh4+*         *g5*
25. *Qxg5+*       *Kd7*
26. *Qe7#*.

Therefore, against the Classical Defense, White has an excellent game.

Black can try to counter-attack immediately with 3...*Nf6*, the Berlin Defense. Black hopes to save a tempo by omitting ...*a6*:

1. *e4*            *e5*
2. *Nf3*          *Nc6*
3. *Bb5*          *Nf6*

Despite some tricky play, White can maintain a cramp by rapidly developing.

4. *0-0*          *Nxe4*
5. *d4*            *Be7*
6. *Qe2!* (so the rook can go to d1) *Nd6*
7. *Bxc6*          *bxc6*
8. *dxe5*          *Nb7*

Virtually forced although 8...*Nf5* can be played.

9. *Nc3*          *0-0* and now
10. *Nd4*          ...
- prevents the freeing ...*d5* for awhile, so White has a fine game. 10.*Re1* is good, too.

Other third moves, including Bird's Defense, 3...*Nd4*, and the gambit line of the Schliemann Defense, 3...*f5*, are even less promising. However, Black has a very useful move in 3...*a6*, the Morphy Defense.

Unlike the defenses first mentioned, the Morphy Defense attempts to activate the knight on c6 by forcing White's bishop off of the a4-e8 diagonal. Then, the knight will be able to rejoin the fight for control of d4 and e5. Compare the following variations:

### Variation 1

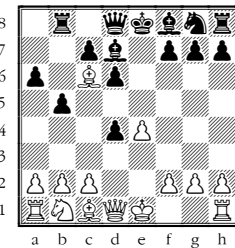
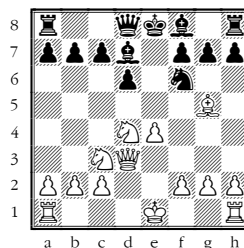
1. *e4*            *e5*
2. *Nf3*          *Nc6*
3. *Bb5*          *d6*
4. *d4*            *Bd7*
5. *Nc3*          *Nf6*
6. *Bxc6*          *Bxc6*
7. *Qd3*          *exd4*
8. *Nxd4*         *Bd7*
9. *Bg5*          ...

### Variation 1a

1. *e4*            *e5*
2. *Nf3*          *Nc6*
3. *Bb5*          *a6!*
4. *Ba4*          *d6?!*
5. *d4?*          *b5*
6. *Bb3*          *Nxd4*
7. *Nxd4*         *exd4*
8. *Bd5!* ...

If 8. *Qxd4?* *c5!* 9. *Qd1* *c4* wins the bishop.

- 8...            *Rb8*
9. *Bc6+*        *Bd7*



Black's fourth and White's fifth moves are played for the sake of comparison and are not the best available in the respective positions. The point is to see the difference made by playing 3...*a6*. It is clear that in Variation 1, White has a fine game based on a better center and development, whereas in Variation

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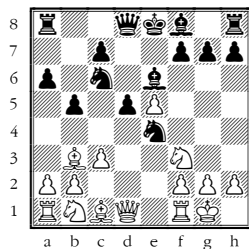
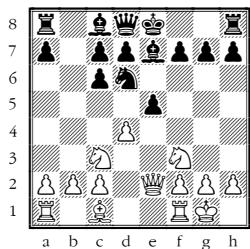
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1a, White's advantage is small due to the exchange of pieces and reduction of tension in the center. (Black has fewer problems to solve).

And, compare the two lines that follow (Variation 2 and Variation 2a). Again, you will see that Black has greatly improved his game by freeing his queen's knight and king's bishop.

| <u>Variation 2</u> |             | <u>Variation 2a</u> |             |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
| <b>1.e4</b>        | <b>e5</b>   | <b>1.e4</b>         | <b>e5</b>   |
| <b>2.Nf3</b>       | <b>Nc6</b>  | <b>2.Nf3</b>        | <b>Nc6</b>  |
| <b>3.Bb5</b>       | <b>Nf6</b>  | <b>3.Bb5</b>        | <b>a6!</b>  |
| <b>4.0-0</b>       | <b>Nxe4</b> | <b>4.Ba4</b>        | <b>Nf6!</b> |
| <b>5.d4</b>        | <b>Be7</b>  | <b>5.0-0</b>        | <b>Nxe4</b> |
| <b>6.Qe2</b>       | <b>Nd6</b>  | <b>6.d4</b>         | <b>b5</b>   |
| <b>7.Bxc6</b>      | <b>bxc6</b> | <b>7.Bb3</b>        | <b>d5</b>   |
| <b>8.Nc3</b>       | <b>...</b>  | <b>8.dxe5</b>       | <b>Be6</b>  |
|                    |             | <b>9.c3</b>         | <b>...</b>  |



In Variation 2, White has clear advantages in a better center, better development, and a better pawn structure; however, in Variation 2a, Black has roughly equal chances due to the knight at e4 and the ability to develop quickly as a result of playing ...d5.

After 3 ... **a6**  
**4.Ba4** **Nf6!**

Black should apply pressure to White's center.

**5.0-0** **...**

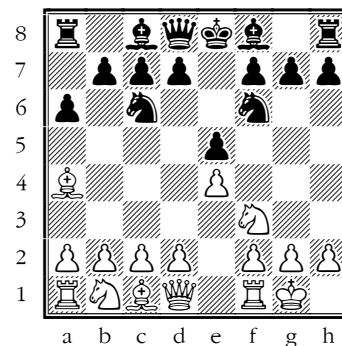
Now, Black must choose either to maintain e5 (keeping a strong point in the center) or counter-attack.

The **strong-point system** (Closed Variations) requires patience and a good knowledge of positional ideas. The immediate continuation for both sides is dictated by four considerations:

- (a) development;
- (b) holding the pawns at e4/e5;
- (c) White should avoid exchanging his KB;
- (d) Black should advance the c-pawn to c5 in order to free the QN.

With this in mind, the moves of the strong-point line are easy enough to understand.

**1.e4** **e5**  
**2.Nf3** **Nc6**  
**3.Bb5** **a6**  
**4.Ba5** **Nf6**  
**5.0-0** **...**



**5...** **Be7**  
**6.Re1** **b5**  
**7.Bb3** **d6**  
**8.c3** **...**

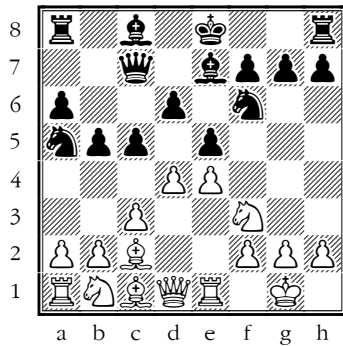
This move prevents the bishop being swapped after ... Na5, and strengthens d4.

**8...** **Na5** (The Chigorin Defense)  
**9.Bc2** **c5**  
**10.d4** **Qc7**

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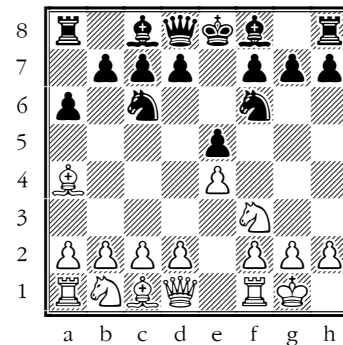


So far, so good. Both sides achieved their main objectives: White has a favorable pawn structure in the center (pawns at d4 and e4 vs. pawns at d6 and e5), while Black has held his strong point and is pressuring White's d-pawn. The ideas which now come into play are the following:

1. White will bring as much pressure as possible to bear on Black's center, especially the center pawns. He will try to manoeuvre his knight to d5 or f5 where it will aid in an attack.
2. In view of the fact that Black's position is still somewhat cramped, White will avoid exchanges and attempt to build up an attack against the Black king.
3. Black first must concentrate on closing the center (i.e., forcing either dxe5 or d5). The effect will be the solidification of his strong point e5 which in turn frees his pieces for action elsewhere. Under no circumstances must he undertake any action before the center situation is clarified. This point is far more important for Black than for White because the defender is still trying to equalize his chances.
4. Black's eventual counterchances lie on the queenside. He must never allow the pawn position there to be blocked in such a way that he cannot secure an open file.

The main continuations are well-tested at the highest levels: **11 h3** to avoid the pin; **11.Nbd2** intending to play Nf1-e3; and even **11.a4** to smash Black's queenside.

Black's **counter-attack** (the Open Variation) after 5.0-0 involves a forcing sequence: **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba5 Nf6 5.0-0 ...**



**5... Nxe4**

Black captures the e-pawn, hoping the active knight will give him good chances.

**6.d4! ...**

If 6.Re1?! Nc5!.

**6... b5**

Now, Black must break the pin or else risk disaster in the center.

**7.Bb3 d5**

Black must keep White's bishop off of d5.

**8.dxe5 Be6** (forced)

**9.c3! ...**

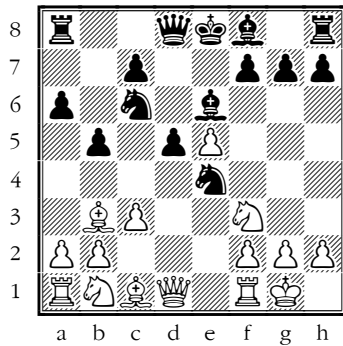
To preserve the bishop and strengthen d4.

**9... Be7**

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Here, the leading ideas are:

For White, preservation of the light-squared bishop; and, for Black, securing a strong pawn at e5, maintenance of the knight at e4, securing a strong pawn at d5, and adequate development of the dark-squared bishop without cramping the other pieces. The strategies here are easier than in the Closed Variations, but the tactics are more complicated.

The above position has a number of important features: Black has not yet completed his development, and some of his pieces, particularly the Nc6 and Be6, are (or may turn out to be) in vulnerable squares. Also, White has a majority of pawns on the kingside, Black on the queenside.

The long-range plans for both sides focus on two vital points:

1. White will try to utilize the rather loose position of the Black pieces to secure a kingside attack or a permanent bind on the queenside. (Such a bind is usually brought about by playing Nd4, when Black exchanges ... Nxd4 cxd4 opening the c-file and leaving Black with a backward c-pawn on an open file.)
2. Black will try to get his Nc6 out of the way and start his pawns rolling.

There are, of course, countless variations along the way. But once the main ideas are learned, the differing attempts for advantage will be easily understood. Below are some Sample Games which include ways in which White can punish Black's mistakes.

### Sample Games: (White victories)

#### **Ricardi, P (2480) - Facino, H**

Argentina, 1993

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| <b>1.e4</b>  | <b>e5</b>  |
| <b>2.Nf3</b> | <b>Nc6</b> |
| <b>3.Bb5</b> | <b>a6</b>  |
| <b>4.Ba4</b> | <b>Nf6</b> |
| <b>5.0-0</b> | <b>b5</b>  |
| <b>6.Bb3</b> | <b>Bb7</b> |
| <b>7.c3</b>  | <b>Bc5</b> |

Black should play 7...Be7.

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| <b>8.d4</b>   | <b>Bb6</b>  |
| <b>9.dxe5</b> | <b>Nxe4</b> |

Better is 9...Ng4 10.Bxf7+ Kxf7 11.Ng5+ Ke8 12.Qxg4 Nxe5 but White is still winning.

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| <b>10.Qd5</b> | <b>1-0.</b> |
|---------------|-------------|

#### **Shamkovich, L - Dely, P**

Moscow, 1962

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| <b>1.e4</b>   | <b>e5</b>   |
| <b>2.Nf3</b>  | <b>Nc6</b>  |
| <b>3.Bb5</b>  | <b>a6</b>   |
| <b>4.Ba4</b>  | <b>Nf6</b>  |
| <b>5.0-0</b>  | <b>Bc5</b>  |
| <b>6.Nxe5</b> | <b>Nxe4</b> |

It's better to play 6...Nxe5 and allow the Center Fork Trick.

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| <b>7.Qe2</b>  | <b>Nxe5</b> |
| <b>8.Qxe4</b> | <b>Qf6</b>  |

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Stronger is 8...*Qe7* because White must be careful of discovered attacks on his queen. If White tries 9.*d4 Nc6 10.Qxe7+ Bxe7*, he doesn't have much of an advantage.

**9.d4**            **Bxd4**  
**10.c3**           **Bc5**  
**11.Bf4**          **1-0.**

**Meier, K - Krebs, J**  
Germany, 1995

**1.e4**            **e5**  
**2.Nf3**          **Nc6**  
**3.Bb5**          **a6**  
**4.Ba4**          **Nf6**  
**5.0-0**          **Nxe4**  
**6.Re1**          **Nc5**  
**7.Nc3**          ...

It is safer to play 7.*Bxc6*.

**7...**            **Nxa4**  
**8.Nxe5**          **Nxc3**

Best is 8...*Be7* since it develops the bishop and blocks the e-file.

**9.Nxc6+**        **Be7**  
**10.Nxe7**        ...

Black probably thought White would capture the queen instead of the bishop 10.*Nxd8 Nxd1* and Black remains a piece ahead.

**10...**           **Nxd1**  
**11.Ng6+**        **1-0.**

Black resigned because after 11...*Qe7 12.Nxe7* his knight is trapped, but White's knight can escape.

**Byrne, R (2465) - Bergquist, J**  
US Open, Chicago (1), 1989

**1.e4**            **e5**  
**2.Nf3**          **Nc6**

**3.Bb5**           **a6**  
**4.Ba4**           **Nf6**  
**5.0-0**           **b5**  
**6.Bb3**           **Bb7**  
**7.d3**            **Be7**  
**8.c4**            **b4**  
**9.a3**            **a5**  
**10.Ba4**          **Bd6**  
**11.Nbd2**        **Nd4**

Black should castle after which he will have equal chances.

**12.Nxd4**        **1-0.**

Black resigned because 12...*exd4 13.e5 Bxe5 14.Re1 0-0 15.Rxe5* costs him a piece.

**Pongratz, P - Kirch, D**  
GER-ch U10, 1999

**1.e4**            **e5**  
**2.Nf3**          **Nc6**  
**3.Bb5**          **a6**  
**4.Ba4**          **Nf6**  
**5.0-0**          **Nxe4**  
**6.Re1**          **d5**

It is wrong to try to maintain the knight in the center. Better is ...*Nc5*, attacking the bishop.

**7.d3**            ...

White could also play 7.*Bxc6+ bxc6 8.d3 Nf6 9.Nxe5* with a very strong attack.

**7...**            **Nd6**  
**8.Nxe5**          **b5**

Even if Black plays 8...*Be6 9.Nxc6 Qd7 10.c4! bxc6 11.cxd5!* White wins decisive material.

**9.Nxc6+**        **1-0.**