

ACTIVE VS. THE LONDON SYSTEM

Alexey Kuzmin examines Black's idea Nf6-h5

London System D02: 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 d5 3.e3 c5 4.Nf3/c3



The question as to how in the London System Black can bring about a complicated system which would give him realistic chances of confusing and outplaying his opponent is of great importance for many players. The original plan with the early sortie Nf6-h5 represents an attempt to answer that question.

Our first starting sequence goes

1) 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 d5 3.e3 c5 4.Nf3 Nc6

Here there are two continuations in the spirit of the London System: A) 5.c3 and B) 5.Nbd2.

A) 5.c3 Nh5

Here this idea works particularly well. None of the possible bishop moves (6.Be5, 6.Bg5, 6.Bg3) causes Black any problems - see the annotations to the following game. The principled reply is 6.dxc5 Nxf4 7.exf4 e6 8.b4 as in Laznicka, V - Sorm, D 1-0, Pardubice 2020. But then Black either wins the pawn back and is left with a good game or else he obtains sufficient compensation in return for it.

B) 5.Nbd2

This move order was employed this year, e.g. by Carlsen, Grischuk and Aronian. In a certain sense it is aimed against 5...Nh5. 5...Nh5!?

Here this move is somewhat risky. But if in the opening Black is aiming for a complex position with real counterplay, he must also be prepared to incur some risk – the only important thing is to correctly evaluate just how high it is. 6.dxc5 As is the case after 5.c3 Nh5 too, the moves of the white bishop also cause no problems, only 6.Be5 requires a precise reaction. For the specifics see Tang, A - Sarkar, J ½-½, Reykjavik 2019. 6...Nxf4 7.exf4



Now Black has two options for generating counterplay. The consequences of 7...Qa5 are considered in the game Carlsen, M - Caruana, F 1-0, Lichess.org INT 2020. As for 7...g6 see Firouzja, A - Dubov, D ½-½, Wijk aan Zee 2020.

2) 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 d5 3.e3 c5 4.c3

In practice, especially in less prominent tournaments, White often delays the development of his king's knight. This move order allows him to meet the Qd8-b6 continuation with Qd1-b3 and in addition excludes the possibility of Nf6-h5. But on the other hand this delaying the development of his kingside also has its disadvantages. 4...Nc6 5.Nd2 Bf5 Here White has two options available to him, but neither promised justified hopes of obtaining the initiative: 6.Ngf3 Qb6!? or 6.Qb3 Qc8.

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