

Ntirlis, N., 2016. *Playing 1. e4,e5: A Classical Repertoire*. Glasgow: Quality Chess.

Ntirlis, N., 2017. *Playing 1. d4,d5: A Classical Repertoire*. Glasgow: Quality Chess.

Nikolaos Ntirlis is not, perhaps, a name familiar to much of the chess world. Indeed, I was myself obliged to consult with Mr. Google to learn that Ntirlis is not a grandmaster but an analyst who has been employed by grandmasters to pep up their openings. In addition to that, Ntirlis is a reasonably strong correspondence player, albeit in tournaments where use of the silicon monster is permitted.

Thus one might suppose that the two books discussed here are well lubricated with “engine oil” and that is, indeed, the case. I think that is a weakness in these books for reasons I shall come to. But what, I hear you ask, is on offer?

Taken together, these two books offer a complete repertoire as black against white’s two most common opening moves. Plus, a reasonable steer on what to do against 1. Nf3 and 1 c4 as well. Against the two giants of the Ruy Lopez and the Queen’s Gambit, Ntirlis offers, in painful detail, the Breyer Defence against the Lopez, and the Orthodox Defence against the Queen’s Gambit with many variations extending well into the middle game. Indeed, the chapter “Breyer Main Lines” only starts with white’s fourteenth move.

I want to say some good things about these books. First, there is great merit to one’s chess development in defending against the Lopez and the QGD and the lines proposed are solid choices. In particular, I learned a great deal about the QGD Exchange Variation from this book. These three chapters are, in my view, the finest in either book.

Second, I like that good choices are offered against most of white’s alternatives to the Lopez/QGD. Ntirlis is bold in proposing the Two Knight’s Defence against 3. Bc4 but shows that it works. And there is some great stuff against the Colle and London options in the d5 book. Ntirlis also offers the open Catalan for black rather than the more staid closed variation which is nice.

But there are problems. Take the King’s Gambit. In the summary of lines, Ntirlis notes that 3. ... g5 is “...the ultimate test of white’s opening” but offers 3. ... Nf6, the Schallop Defence as his repertoire choice. He justifies this by the simplicity of the choice against an opening one may not encounter too frequently. Yet, against the Ponziani, an even rarer choice for white, he proposes a line requiring black to sacrifice a piece for two pawns with great complication. Rather mixed reasoning, I fear.

And then there is the “engine problem.” Once in a while the lines get to a point and black seems to be struggling a bit but Ntirlis pulls out a move suggested by his computer which saves the day. Well, OK, but I would prefer to see moves tested in games between carbon lifeforms since these are the folks I tend to play. My perception looking at the two books was that the e5 book was more inclined to this than the d5 one.

In summary, these two books offer a solid repertoire against white’s main options of the QGD and Ruy Lopez with a mixed bag of solid and enterprising choices against white’s minor choices. You are not going to memorise these lines in time to wow your team captain in your club’s next OTB match but, in correspondence play, and for stronger (say 2000+) players, there is a mass of detail here to satisfy. And, for all of us, the e5 book includes some

great games while the d5 book prefers more analysis and some better explanation of general ideas.

So, if you like defending in a classical manner in your correspondence games, these books are well worth having. However, I, and I suspect the majority of sub 2000 players, will benefit from pairing these books with another aimed more at the club player.

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