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Anti-London Opening Analysis

By Coach M

Dear Students,

This resource contains an insider's analysis of the London System opening (London) from black's perspective.

Using this primer, with consistency, we can torpedo white's hopes for any edge with the London, often emerging out of the opening no worse or even better with black so buckle up & let's book-up on the anti-London!

Disclaimer: Not all move orders can be covered in this resource so only the most essential attempts by white will be addressed whereas any lesser attempts/inferior move orders are omitted as they can be refuted by keen players "over-the-board". This analysis is for YOUR eyes only!! As students of Coach M, you have been granted special security clearance to view this TOP SECRET information contained within. May it serve your game well and may our pawns be passed!

The London System opening (London): The London (Figure's 1-4) is characterized by white's placement of the d-pawn to d4, king's knight to f3, and queen's bishop to f4, in some order. Depending on white's move order; whether it is 2. Bf4, 3. Bf4, or if this B to f4 move is delayed further still, such as in the "Harwitz Attack" (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bf4), different set-ups for black are possible to torpedo the London.

As the Harwitz Attack has both good statistics and a favorable engine evaluation for white, we should consider sidestepping it with black by a deviation on move 3. or move 4. For instance, black can opt for a Queen's Indian defense (3... b6), a Ragozin defense (4... Bb4), or a Semi-Slav defense (4... c6). With these alternatives, black achieves adequate statistics in master play and the engine evaluations, at least in the optimal lines for black, are not that impressive for white. Specialists, who desire to do so, can also learn the fine lines of play to emerge, as black, from a Harwitz Attack, being only slightly worse (see for instance the recent games of Hikaru Nakamura, who with some regularity, opts to defend the black side of the Harwitz Attack.). Our focus for this primer analysis will rather be on when white plays either 2. Bf4 or 3. Bf4 and how we can effectively torpedo these London tries.

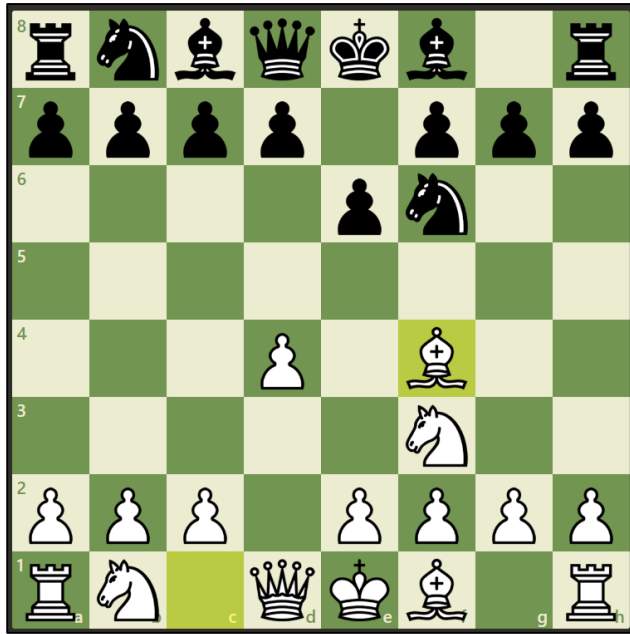


Figure 1

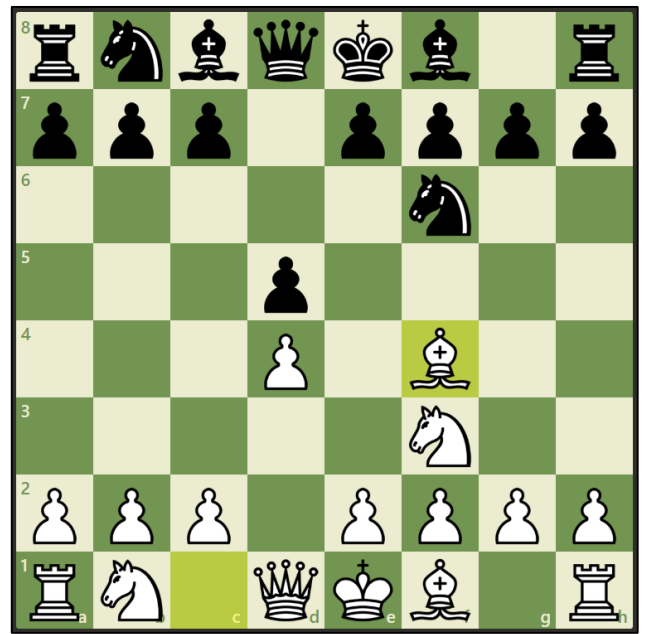


Figure 2

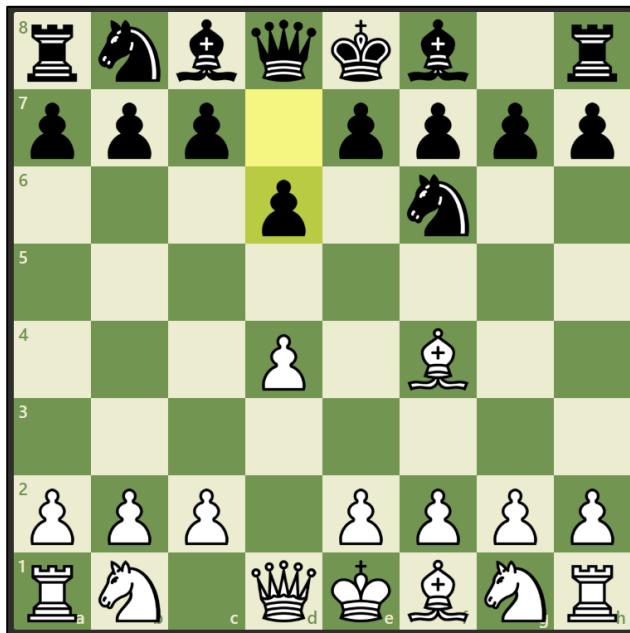


Figure 3

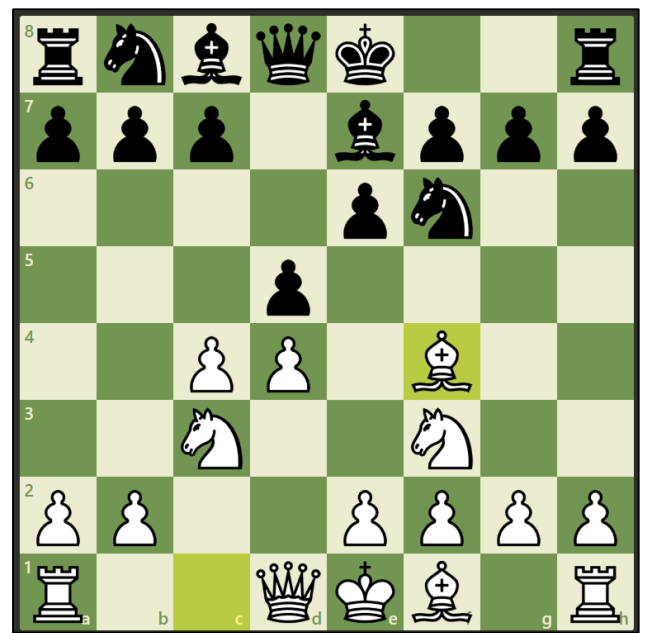


Figure 4

Figures 1-3: Miscellaneous London opening set-ups,

Figure 4: The formidable Harwitz Attack

Our sources within chess.com have smuggled out statistical summaries of the frequency of occurrence of the London opening, at the Master level, which is now given here on the next page (Figure 5-8).

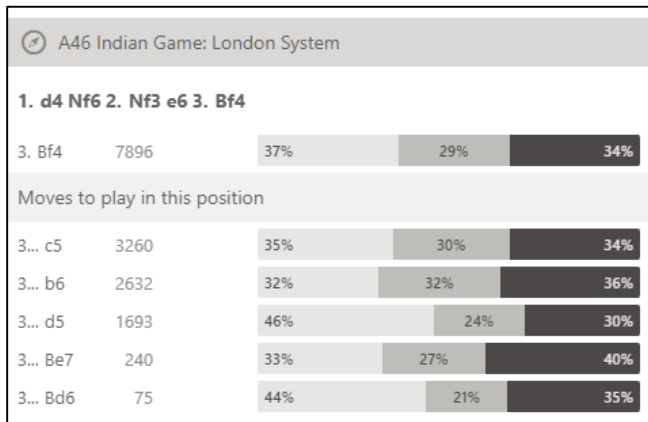


Figure 5

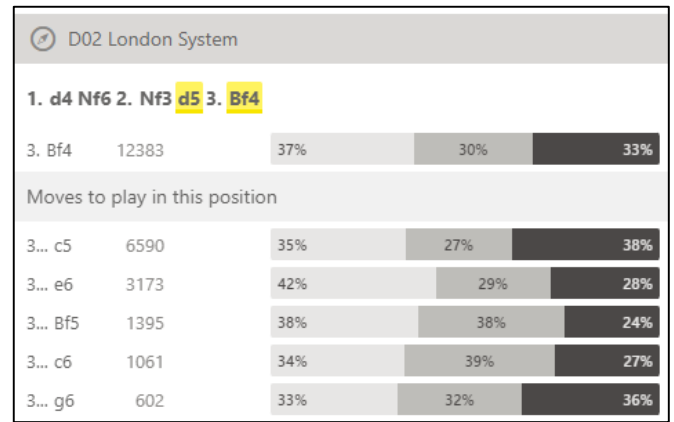


Figure 6

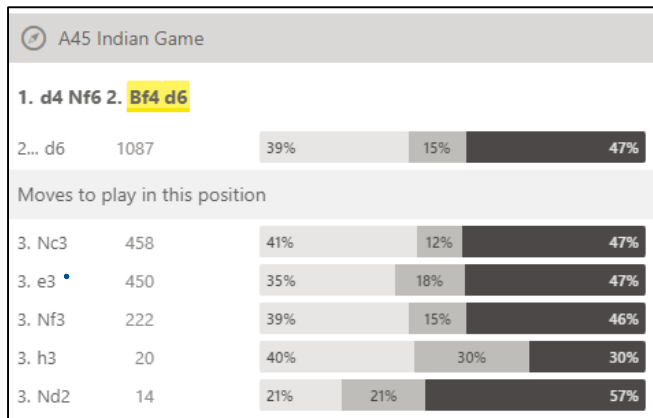


Figure 7

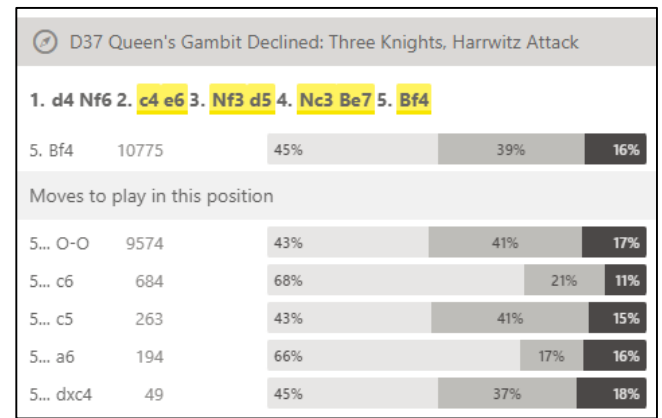


Figure 8

Figures 5-6: Symmetrical (or quasi-symmetrical) defensive set-ups for black, where black plays d5 at some point.

Figure 7: An asymmetrical defensive set-up, where black places the d-pawn on d6 so as to “blunt” the London bishop.

Figure 8: The Harwitz Attack’s (impressive) statistics for white.

We observe here that the 3%-4% “gap”, measuring the white winning percentage minus the black winning percentage, for the London, is generally slightly favorable towards white, at least in the common starting positions shown in Figures 1-2 (see also Figures 5-6). Of note also is that in the 8% gap in the asymmetrical defensive set-up seen in Figure 3 (see also Figure 7) actually favors black! These observations motivate us towards an asymmetrical defensive set-up, like that shown in Figure 3 (see also Figure 7) wherever possible I.E. after 2. Bf4. The “opening defense rule of thumb 1” below gives some backing towards learning each of the defensive systems presented here in this London primer.

OPENING DEFENSE RULE OF THUMB 1:

Any defense against 1. d4, 1. e4, 1. c4, or 1. Nf3, that cuts the gap to 10% (or less) is a defense worth using/playing with regularity.

Thus, by this rule of thumb, the defensive set-ups given in Figures 1-3 (see also Figures 5-7) are worth using/playing with regularity. Other defenses that also achieve this threshold include but are not limited to the *Sicilian*

Taimanov Variation (1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6, (2% gap)),
Queen's Gambit Ragozin Variation (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3.
Nf3 d5 4. Nc3 Bb4, (8% gap)), and the *English Opening*,
Carls-Bremen, *Reversed Dragon* Variation (1. c4 e5 2.
Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 d5, (4% gap)). Here gap statistics are from
the chess.com Explorer. The above line of reasoning
leads us to the following Corollary 1:

CORROLARY 1 TO OPENING RULE OF THUMB:

Any defense against 1. d4, 1. e4, 1. c4, or 1. Nf3, that fails to cut the gap to 10% (or less) is a defense worth weening off/ditching/reducing regularity of reliance upon it.

Thus, by the above Corollary 1, the set-up used by black in Figure 4 (see also Figure 8), allowing a Harwitz Attack, (29% gap), should be either shelved completely by players of the black pieces or at least there should be some weening-off/ditching/reducing regularity of reliance upon it. Specialists who can navigate the fine line for black in the Harwitz Attack can disregard the above rule of thumb which like most chess principles, only offer guidelines and are NOT absolute. Following the above rules, white can opt for the Harwitz Attack when

permitted, knowing that the statistics (Figure 8), at least in master play, heavily favor white.

We'll now survey (3) set-ups within the London and gauge the suitability of them for inclusion in our own repertoire as black.



A. 2. Bf4, the “jump-the-gun London”

Players of the London sometimes are just so eager to show their London hand and consequently they bang out 2. Bf4?!, (see Figure 9), however, as we'll see, this move order is markedly inferior to delaying Bf4 to move 3 (at least according to Coach M's extensive experience and analysis in playing against the London.).

Question: *So what's the drawback of playing 2. Bf4?!*

Answer: *After 2. Bf4?!, black can immediately and effectively blunt the bishop with 2...d6!*

After this very *anti*-London response 2...d6!, white can basically give up any hope for any realizable edge.

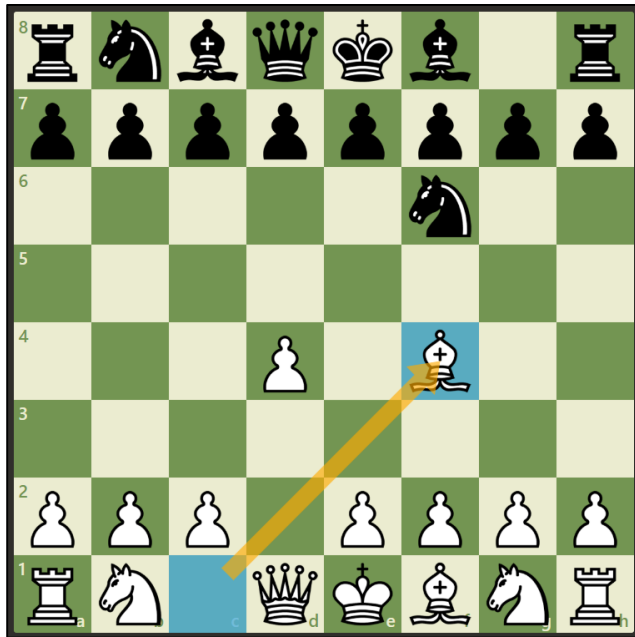


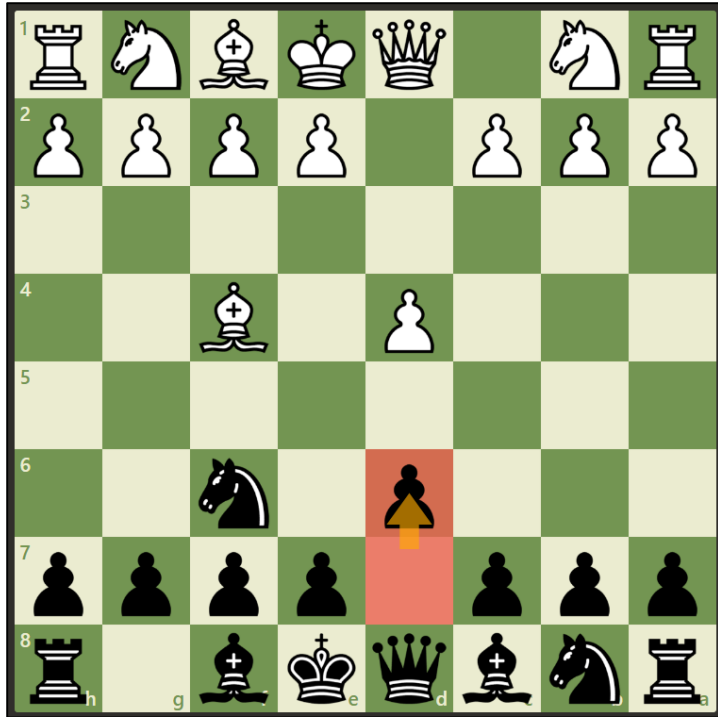
Figure 9

After the excellent 2...d6!, the two primary issues for white are as follows:

1. The B on f4 can be immediately blunted by the d6 pawn and therefore it is rather

ineffective on this h2-b8 diagonal. 2. The B on f4 is exposed to both a Nh5 hop/raid and the e5 pawn thrust which threaten to either bag the B for a N or gain tempo on this misplaced bishop while securing a strong foothold in the center, respectively.

Factors 1-2 make black's game rather easy, even with absolute best play by white as shown in Figures 11-12.



Black counters 2.
 Bf4?! with the
 excellent 2...d6!

Figure 10

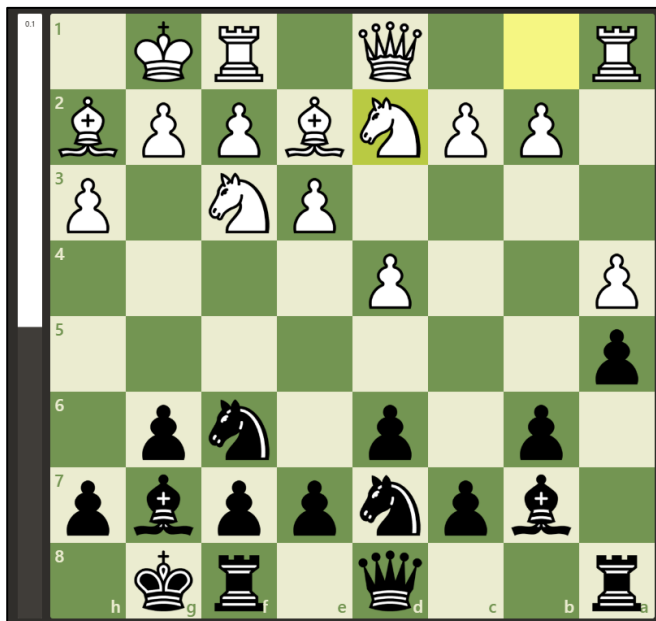


Figure 11

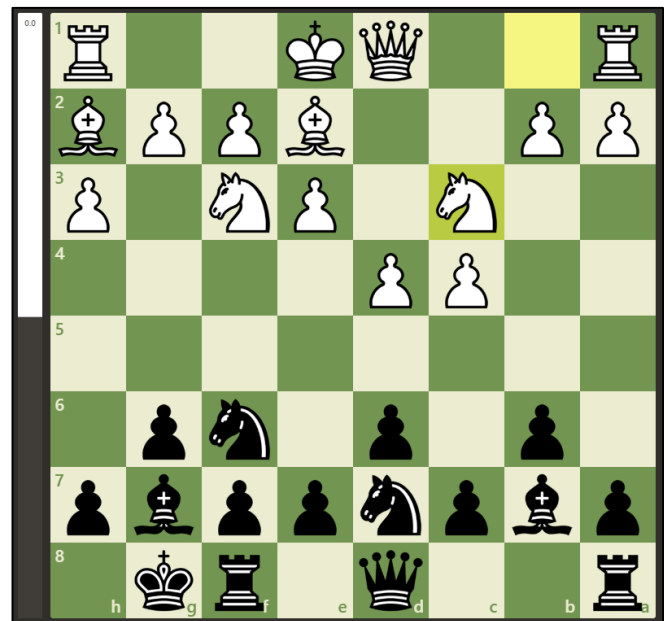


Figure 12

Figures 11-12 show white and black playing relatively “best” or equal best moves for the 2. Bf4 variation, as determined by the resident chess.com Stockfish 16 engine. White’s edge is nominal or nonexistent.

Furthermore, any deviation in the first (5) moves by white are consequential resulting in disadvantage for white as compared to the theoretical positions given in Figures 11-12. To this point, white’s first moves in the 2. Bf4 London, as played by Masters/Specialists, almost invariably are 1. d4, 2. Bf4, 3. Nf3, 4. h3, and then 5. e3, in that order! This move order for white is compulsory against our star anti-London set-up with 2...d6!

Should white shuffle this 5-card pack and say, play e3 too early on move 3. or 4., (a common error), black can pounce and will already be no worse (see the illustrative positions at the end of this primer for instance.). Figures 13-14 shows further theoretical positions where black has thematic ideas to play for the initiative from 2. Bf4?! London positions that evaluate in the 0.00 range (black has equalized).



Figure 13



Figure 14

Figures 13-14: Theoretical positions where black has equalized without any difficulty against 2. Bf4?! Engine evaluations are given by Stockfish 15.1 at relatively high depth.

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B. 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4, London System Opening:

As we saw in Figures 1-2, white can hope for a nominal edge by waiting an extra move or two to play the key London move B to f4. This section covers some of the most common move orders when white plays 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4. Our recommendation for black will be a transposition into the *Queen's Indian Miles Variation* (QIDMV) which has the benefit of a full computer engine backing evaluation of 0.00 though it should be said that white does have some success, at least in Master play, in racking up more wins. One explanation for the favorability in the gap may be the relatively small sample size of master games down this route (only ~100 or so games in the chessgames.com database).

Truly, the QIDMV is bit of a rarity in Master play. The opening takes its' name from the creative English GM, Tony Miles, the very same GM who famously defeated World Champion Anatoly Karpov in a classical game with 1...a6!?. Strategies for white in the QIDMV, are characterized by the London move B to f4, and mirror those in other London set-ups. Namely, white aims to “win on the queenside” but, as we shall see, black is well-positioned to torpedo this one as well with simple

thematic play. The starting position out to move 4. of the QIDMV is shown in Figure 15.

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Black takes a page from the QID to combat whites' 4. Bf4 London. Play is balanced and equal in the theoretical (best) lines of play yet white does enjoy a favorable gap of 14%. This size of such a gap normally might deter us from

Figure 15

taking on such a defensive set-up yet the cold hard engine analysis in this line conveys that black nullifies white's opening edge completely by move 6. Thus we may set aside the CORROLARY 1 TO OPENING RULE OF THUMB.

Play will typically follow the line 4. Bf4 Bb7 5. e3 Bb4+ 6. Nbd2 after which engine analysis indicates that white's edge is already nominal and thus, for all intents and purposes, black has indeed equalized by move 6.

Remark 1: It can be seen that statistics for the QIDMV are at least as impressive as 4. a3, the Kasparov-Petrosian System (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf6 b6 4. a3.).

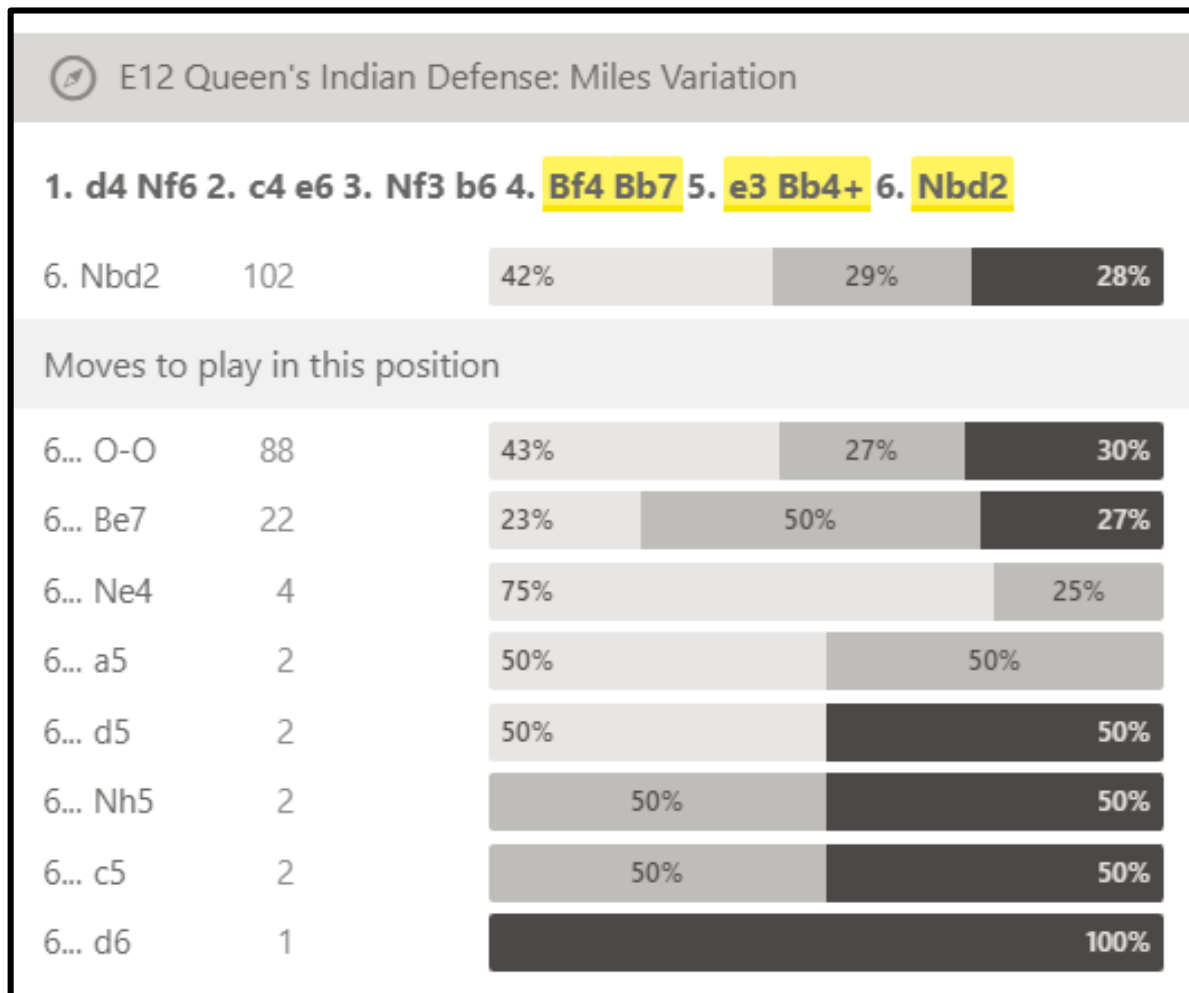


Figure 16

Figure 16: White has a favorable gap in the QIDMV.

Remark 2: It can be seen that only 102 Master games feature the Miles Variation of the QID. We also observe that there is a large 13% gap in the 6. 0-0 “main line” which is indeed impressive when compared to the lesser gaps obtained in lesser alternatives though, engine analysis does not rate white’s Miles Variation as sufficient for any edge (same as Kasparov-Petrosian Line actually).

Also, due to the small sample sizes, little stock can be put into these gap statistics and further analysis/practice with it is required to ascertain whether this Miles variation is capable of being a good long-term choice for white to or just another dead end in the London for white.



Figures 17



Figure 18

No edge.
Black is equal.

Figures 17-18: Black has equalized by move 6.

Further Figures 19-20 show that black has reduced white's edge to nominal levels and stats are generally bullish for black (except in the QIDMV).

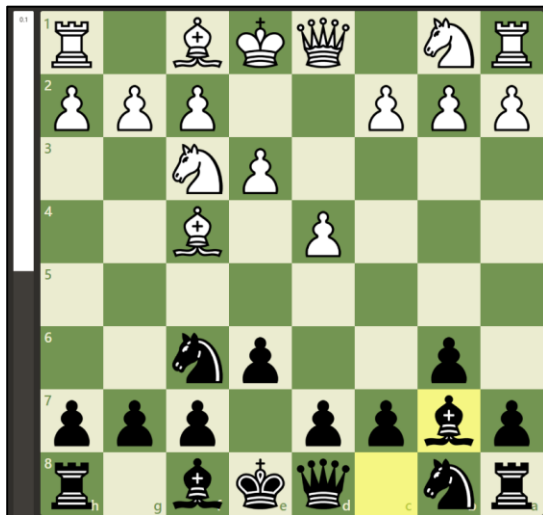
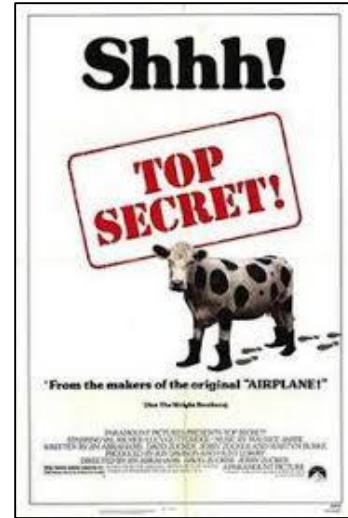


Figure 19

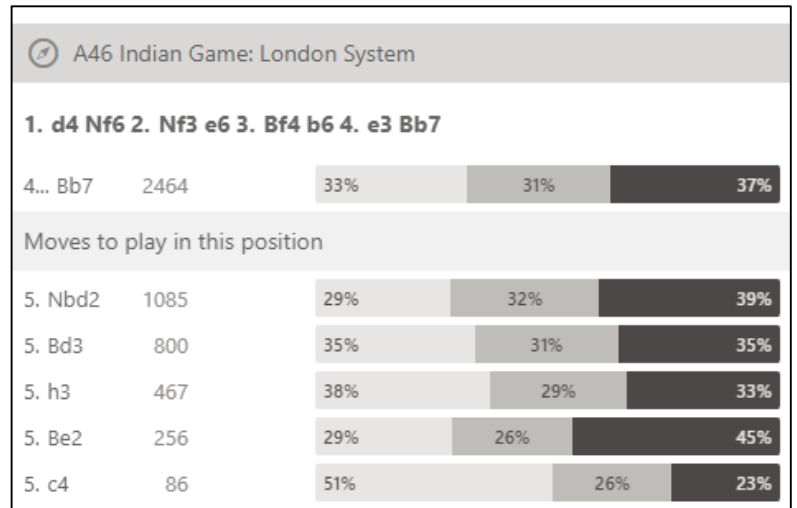


Figure 20

Figures 19-20: Black has reduced white's edge to nominal levels by employing a QID-style development scheme to combat white's 3. Bf4 London. White may choose several options here including 5. c4, (a QIDMV), though engine evaluations do not rate white's position advantageous at all, (see Figures 17-18).

Remark 3: One “elephant in the room” is why Coach M does not recommend meeting the London with a symmetrical “snoozefest” playing 3... d5 or even 3...c5 as black which also equalizes quite easily? The reason Coach M would not recommend these systems is the oxygen in the game can quickly get sucked out leaving dry positions with little for either player to play for (from Coach M’s experience). Against a strong high-rated player, this may actually be a reasonable strategy to play for a draw and make your high-rated opponent push and possibly overextend or take excessive risk to make something out of nothing but this strategy is simply not Coach M’s cup of tea and thus we opt for a recommendation to meet 3. Bf4 or 4. Bf4 Londons with a QID set-up. Play will be more imbalanced generally and thus give black more opportunities to take the game from white (based on Coach M’s experience).

C. Odds and Ends, The Jobava London

This peculiar London variation is characterized by white committing a cardinal sin in the queen’s pawn game. Namely, white willfully blocks their own c-pawn with their queen’s knight without guarantee of the ability to

play pawn to e4. Yikes! The risk for white is amplified with this peculiar idea as without the ability to play either pawn to c4 or pawn to e4, black has excellent chances to take the lion share of the center. In other books, this opening is also referred to as a Veserov opening and can be described as a Chigorin's defense (a rather poor defense) but played by white up one tempo (I.E. a reversed Chigorin). We will give a simple line of play for black that smack's the Jobava London sufficiently hard to warrant this whole line basically being tossed in the rubbish bin for white.



ABC's of smacking the Jobava London:

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nc3?! (YECH!) d5 3. Bf4 a6! 4. e3 b5! 5. Bd3 Bb7 6. Nf3 e6 7. 0-0 c5! (Black already has a small edge).

Can white find some improvement here? Well, yes but as we'll see, a tweaked move order still doesn't completely

fix all of white's self-made problems by playing Nc3 in front of the c-pawn in the London. Here's one improved move order for white that does about as good as any other yet black is still perfectly OK.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4?! d6! 3. Nc3!?! Nbd7! (threatening to steal a tempo with e5) 4. Nf3 c5! (preventing e4). The gap is an astounding 20% in favor of black here though only 100 or so Master games have gone down this queer route for white. See Figure 21 for a view of this peculiar line of play along with an evaluation bar run at high depth, ~40, using Stockfish 16.1 lite. Stockfish 15.1 was similarly employed, running at equally high depth, and found interestingly that white's position is not without its merits. These engines both put white ahead by ~+.1 and so we may actually consider this to be one of white's "best bets" when insisting on playing a London and meeting our d7-d6 concept. Only the supercomputers (and perhaps Super GMs) who access such computers may know whether white really has any edge here... Coach M let the engines think out to depth 50 to reach their conclusions...

If you can find em', you can send me an Alpha Zero or Leela Zero or some super charged Stockfish game in this line but I did not find any such game and thus am

doubtful that this line of play is actually anything much to write home about for white... This said, at full disclosure, several strong GMs have played this position, and relatively recently! Some of the cream of the crop opted for both sides, including even some Super GMs! Perhaps this one is one to study further then for those wishing to adopt the recommendations given here in this primer to play 2...d6! against the London, at least when meeting 2. Bf4?!

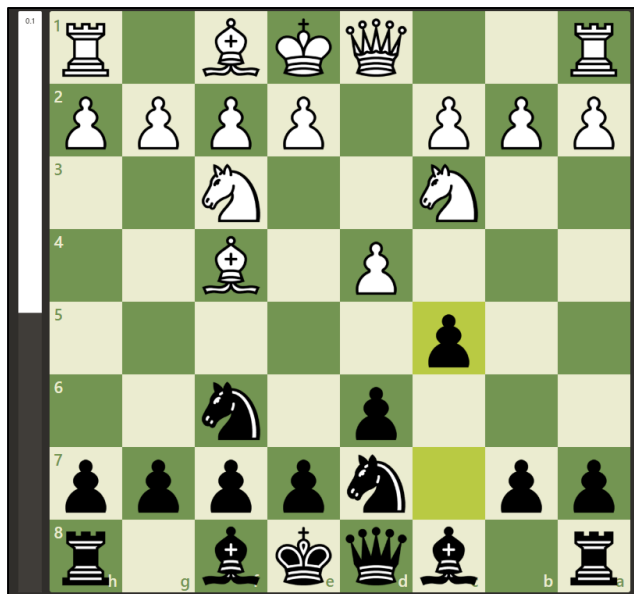


Figure 21

Figure 21: White retains some small edge in this rare London line of play. Is this discovery sufficient enough to move us back into the snooze fest lines where black plays 3... d5, 4... c5, and 5...Nc6, etc., etc...? Given that ultra-high depth engine dives lowered white's edge to $\sim+.1$, it seems that this is no real threat to our suggested line of play.

Diagrams of thematic moves and exploitations:

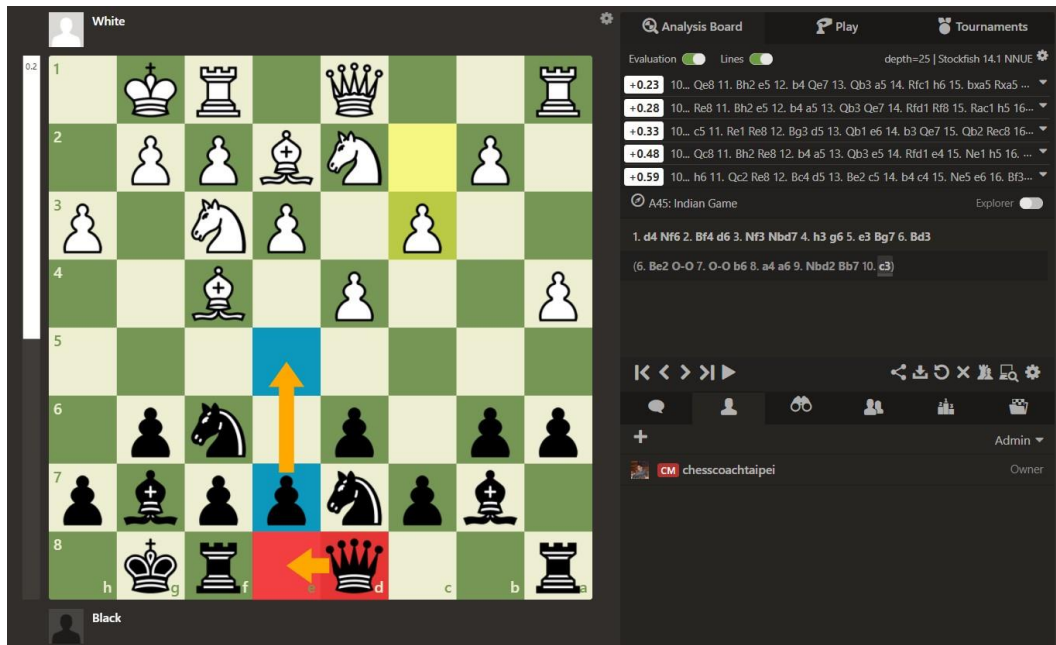
1. White fudged the move order (h3 before e3, whoops!).



2. White develops the K's B to the wrong square (ouch!).

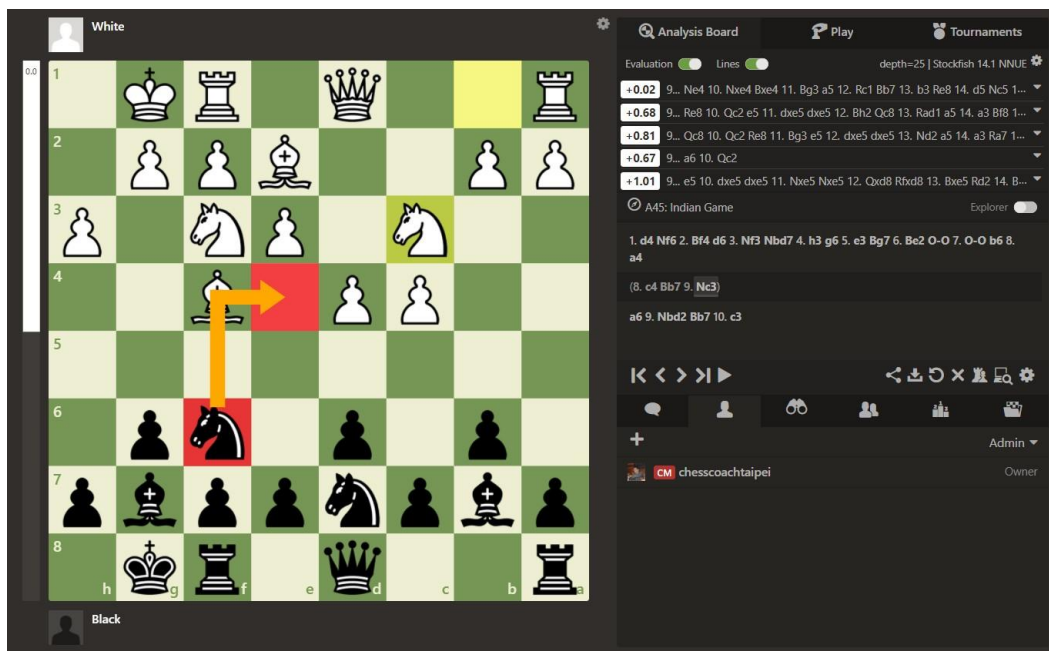


3. A fun Queen move to put in the tool box



...The Queen can support the e7-e5 thrust from the e8 square, with the potential benefit of leaving the K's R to stay behind the f-pawn and then play for f7-f5. Notice black opted to not block a4 with a5 but a6 instead. Also, notice the white's N is on d2 and not c3 when this idea arises...

4. A key N move in our anti-London set-up



Select Illustrative Games:

Anti-London:

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/54406211865>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/69147112533>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/74680347821>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/89124114063>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/33622767731>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/106337917367>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/102880932785>

<https://www.chess.com/live/game/101890518969>

Queen's Gambit Declined – Harwitz Attack:

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/87410526099>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/80368824183>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/90607132831>

<https://www.chess.com/live/game/113752846831>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/116024984497>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/118171778195>

Queen's Indian Defense - Miles Variation:

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/78848552389>

Anti-Jobava London:

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/86965850957>

<https://www.chess.com/game/live/98766880925>

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I’m so much looking forward to continuing to develop high-quality chess materials in 2024 and beyond. Seeing you all continue to climb the ranks, grow stronger, and achieve your chess goals is what drives me as a coach!

All the best! Sincerely, Coach M

P.S.

(* Do visit my website,

http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/,

for more Chess Worksheets or find me on FB at “Dr. M’s Chess and Math Page”, and please do LIKE and FOLLOW my page there, which will encourage me to make more original high quality chess content.

Thanks!

-Coach M