

Restriction of black knight's mobility in closed systems of the Ruy Lopez.

The great German player Siegbert Tarrasch once said:

"Der Springer am Rande

Ist immer die Schande"

, or in English: "a knight on the edge is always disgrace". Although this aphorism is over a hundred years, with no principle in chess being absolute, Tarrasch's words are confirmed even in the games of today's top players.

Here is the latest example.

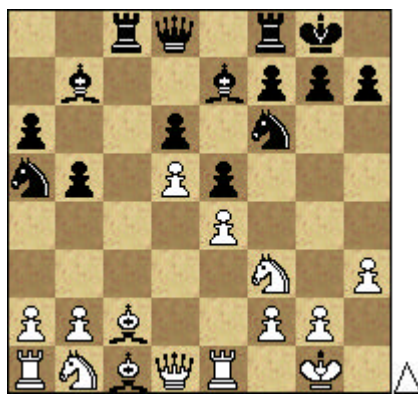
Morozevich - Ponomarev

FIDE World championship, Moscow 2001

Morozevich, Alexander - Ponomarev, Ruslan Moscow FIDE WCh KO

5.12.2001

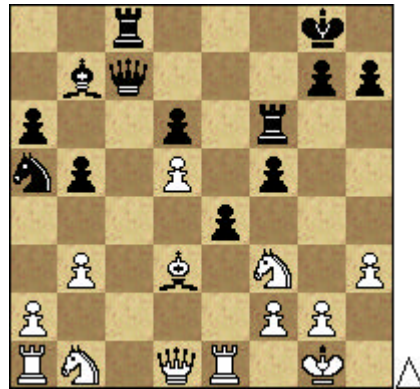
1. e4 e5 2. ♖ f3 ♘ c6 3. ♜ b5 a6 4. ♜ a4 ♗ f6 5. O-O ♜ e7 6. ♙ e1 b5 7. ♜ b3 d6 8. c3 O-O 9. h3 ♘ a5 10. ♜ c2 c5 11. d4 cd 12. cd ♜ b7 13. d5 *In this variation of the Ruy Lopez Black's counterplay involves operations along the open c-file and preparations for the f7-f5 advance; at the same time Black should prevent his a5-knight from being left out of play.* 13... ♙ c8?! *Along with 13... ♜ ñ8, this is one of the most popular continuations. This move, however, does not help to solve a problem of the a5-knight. [Instead, 13... ♘ c4!? deserves attention, bringing the knight into play. A weighty argument in its favor is that it was chosen by the ex-world champion Vasily Smyslov in one of his games.]*



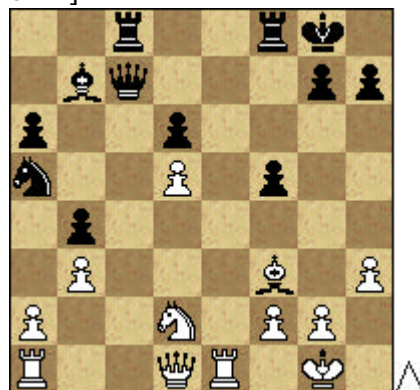
14. b3! *A typical move, restricting the knight, which was played many times in similar positions. Here, for some strange reason, it had never been tried.*

14... ♜ c7 15. ♜ d3 *But this position is not new - with another move order it occurred in the game Ciocaltea-Smejkal, Halle 1974.* 15... ♘ e4?N *A dubious novelty. [Smejkal preferred 15... ♘ h5 16. ♜ f1 (16. ♘ a3!? deserved attention, for example 16... ♘ f4 17. ♜ e3 ♘ d3 18. ♜ d3 ♜ a8 19. ♙ ac1 ♜ d7 20. b4 ♘ b7 21. ♘ b1 ♙ c1 22. ♙ c1 ♙ c8 23. ♙ c8 ♜ c8 24. a4±) 16... f5 17. ef ♘ f4 18. ♜ f4 ef 19. ♘ a3 ♜ f6 20. ♙ b1 ♜ c3 21. ♘ b5 , and the players agreed a draw. Play could have continued 21... ab 22. b4 ♘ c4 23. ♙ b3 ♜ a1 24. ♜ a1 ♜ a1 25. ♙ a1 ♜ d5 26. ♙ d1 ♜ e4 27. ♘ d4 ♜ f5 28. ♜ d3 ♜ d7 (28... ♜ d3 29. ♙ dd3 ♙ b8 30. ♙ bc3 ♘ e5 31. ♙ d1²) 29. ♜ e4²] 16. ♜ e4 f5 17. ♜ d3 e4 18.*

¥ g5! ¥ f6 19. ¥ f6 | f6



20. ¥ e2 [White also has another promising way. 20. b4!? ef (20... ed 21. ba £ c2 22. ¤ d4 £ b2 23. ¤ b3 ¥ d5 24. £ d3; 20... ¤ c4 21. ¥ c4 £ c4 22. ¤ d4 £ b4 23. a4 | c4 24. ¤ c6 ¥ c6 25. dc | c6 26. ab £ b5 27. £ d2±) 21. ba fg 22. ¤ d2 £ a5 23. ¤ b3 £ b4 24. £ f3±] 20... ef 21. ¥ f3 b4 Black intends to bring the knight into play via ¤ b7-c5 and prevents White's b3-b4 advance, which could be unpleasant after the knight's retreat to b7. [21... £ c2 does not help Black to overcome his difficulties. White simply completes his development, while exchanges only worsen Black's situation due to the awkward position of the a5-knight. For example: 22. £ d4 ¥ a8 23. ¤ d2 £ c3 24. £ c3 | c3 25. | ac1 | c1 26. | c1 | f8 27. ¤ f1 g6 28. ¤ g3 ¥ b7 29. | c7 | f7 30. | c2 | e7 31. ¤ e2 | e5 32. ¤ f4 | e1 33. ¤ h2 | e7 34. ¤ e6 ¤ f7 35. ¤ d4 ¤ f6 36. g3 g5 37. g4±] 22. ¤ d2 | ff8 Possession of the c-file has brought Black nothing, and so he tries to fight for the e-file. [22... £ c5 23. | c1 £ c1 24. £ c1 | c1 25. | c1±; 22... £ c2 23. ¤ f1 £ b2 24. ¤ g3 | ff8 25. | e2 £ c3 26. | e6 £ c5 27. £ d2±]

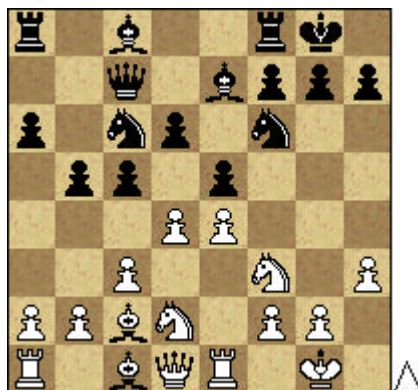


23. a3! Now Black is unable to avoid material losses. 23... £ b6 24. ab £ b4 25. | a4 £ c3 [25... £ b6 26. £ a1 | c2 27. | d1 ¤ b3 28. ¤ b3 £ b3 29. | b1•] 26. | e3 £ b2 27. ¤ f1 | c5 28. £ e1 | c1 29. £ a5 The knight's torture is over. 29... £ b1 30. ¥ e2 f4 31. | f3 g5 32. ¥ d3 £ b2 33. | c4 Black resigned.

In similar positions of the Ruy Lopez, Black often gets into trouble due to his a5-knight.

THE "SPANISH" KNIGHT.

Geller Efim P (RUS) - Mecking Henrique (BRA) Palma de Majorca (Spain) It (cat.14) 1970



13. d5 ♖ a5 14. b3! (*Restriction of the a5-knight mobility*) 14... ♜ d7 15. ♖ f1 ♖ b7 16. ♖ g3 c4 17. b4! (*White does not allow the black knight to move to an active position. Black is condemned to suffer due to his queen's knight until the end of the game*) 17... | fc8 18. ♖ f5 ♜ f8 19. ♖ h2 a5 20. | e3 ab 21. cb ♜ f5 22. ef c3 23. ♖ g4 ♜ e7 24. ♖ f6 ♜ f6 25. | e4 f d7 26. f f3 | c7 27. h4 f e7 28. g3 ♖ d8 29. a3 | cc8 30. | b1 | c7 31. f e2 | b8 32. | b3 f d7 33. f f3 ♜ e7 34. | e3 ♜ f6 35. | e4 ♜ e7 36. g4 f6 37. | e3 ♖ f7 38. | bc3 | bc8 39. ♜ e4 ♜ d8 40. ♜ d2 | c4 41. | c4 | c4 42. | c3 ♜ b6 43. | c4 bc 44. g5 fg 45. hg ♜ d8 46. f h5 c3 47. ♜ e3 h6 48. f6 **1:0, Geller - Mecking (Palma de Majorca, 1970)**

The following old game is a fine instructive example on the subject.

Boleslavsky Isaak - Bondarevsky Igor (RUS) Tbilisi 1951



15... ♖ e8?! *Here and on the next move Black misses an opportunity to transfer his knight to a better square via ♖ a5-b7-c5 or ♖ a5-c4-b6.* 16. b3! g6 17. ♖ e3 ♖ g7 18. ♜ d2! ♖ b7 19. | c1 ♜ d7 20. b4! | ac8 [**20... a5 21. a3!±**] 21. ♖ g4 *White develops his initiative on the K-side, while a bad position of the b7-knight does not allow Black to organize counterplay with f7-f5. A correct plan, introduced by Rubinstein, involves 21... f7-f6 followed by a knight's transfer from b7 to f7.*



21... ♠ d8? 22. ♠ e2 f5? 23. ef gf 24. ♠ h6 ♙ h8 25. g4! (*enlivening the c2-bishop*) 25... ♠ e8 26. gf ♠ f5 27. ♠ e5! ♠ d4 28. ♠ e4! ♠ c2 29. ♠ d7 ♠ e1 30. ♠ f8 ♣ f8 31. ♙ c8! ♠ c8 32. ♠ e1 ♣ g7 33. ♠ e6 **1:0, Boleslavsky - Bondarevsky, Tbilisi, 1951**

The miserable b7-knight was a passive spectator of the downfall of the black K-side.

This position makes knight a5 prospects quite hazy.

In case of Ka5-c4-b6 the knight has got no prospects after b2-b3, and in case of Ka5-b7 the knight is limited by a standard b2-b4 move.

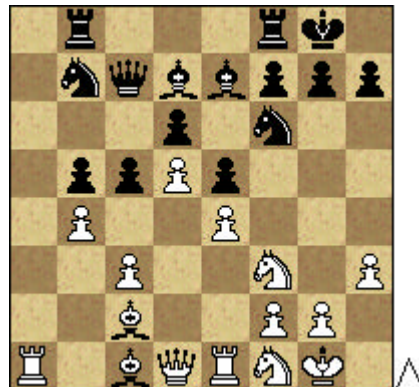
Bronstein David I (RUS) - Geller Efim P (RUS) Moscow (Russia) Ch URS 1951



20... ♠ b7 [**20... ♠ c4** **21. b3 ♠ b6±**] 21. b4! a5 22. a3 ab 23. ab± **Bronstein D. - Geller E., Moscow 1951 Ch URS**

In case line a is cleared, knight b7 position prevents one from struggling for the cleared line.

Karpov Anatoly (RUS) - Unzicker Wolfgang (GER) Nice (France)
Olympiad 1974



However, White can also utilize the a-file for a queenside attack. 18. ♗e3 | a8
19. ♜d2 | fc8 [19... | fb8!? 20. ♜d3 ♜c8] 20. ♗d3 g6 21. ♞g3 ♜f8 22. | a2
(The "Spanish" knight is stuck on b7 hampering Black to fight for the a-file)
22... c4 23. ♜b1 ♜d8 24. ♜a7!! (A typical move. White concentrates his major
pieces along the a-file under protection of the a7-bishop) 24... ♞e8 25. ♜c2
♞c7 26. | ea1 ♜e7 27. ♜b1 ♜e8 28. ♞e2 ♞d8 29. ♞h2 ♜g7 30. f4! (Making
use of his spatial advantage, White starts to play on both flanks) 30... f6 31. f5
g5 32. ♜c2± Karpov - Unzicker (Nice, 1974)

Bronstein David I (RUS) - Viniwarter Krems Olympiad 1967



White sacrifices a piece, intending to create the connected passed pawns on the queenside. 1. ♞dc4! bc 2. ♞c4 ♜b5 3. ♞b6 ♜e2 4. ♜e2 ♜e7 5. ♞c8 ♜c8 6. ♜a7 ♞d7 7. ♜a6 1:0, Bronstein - Viniwarter (Krems, 1967)
In this position the black knight is driven back to a7, where its fate is no better than at a5.

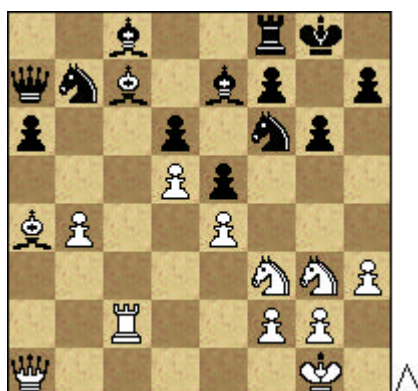
Smyslov Vasily - Keres Paul Moscow 1941



16. d5! ♖ a7 17. ♖ a5! ♜ d7 18. ♜ d3 | c8 [18... ♖ c8 19. | c1±] 19. b4!±
followed by a2-a4. Black's Q-side is falling apart at the seams. Smyslov - Keres, Moscow 1941.

An ugly position of the knight at b7 kills Black. How can White convert his great advantage into a win?

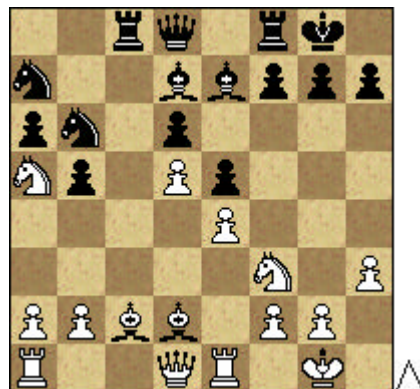
Prandstetter Eduard (CZE) - Pinter Jozsef (HUN) Barcelona (Spain) Cup European Club 1993



31. ♖ e5! de 32. ♜ e5 ♖ d6 33. ♜ e7 • *Prandstetter E. - Pinter J., Barcelona 1993*

Both Black's knights are helpless. How can White exploit this?

Almasi Zoltan (HUN) - Piket Jeroen (NED) Groningen (Netherlands) It
(cat.17) 1995



18. b3 f5 19. ♞ b4± *Almasi Z. - Piket J., Groningen 1995*