

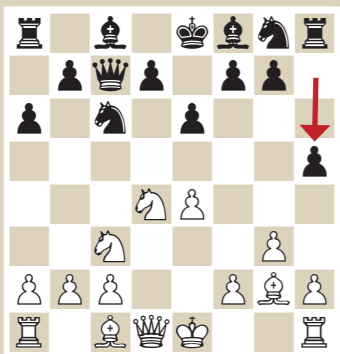


# An unusual Taimanov



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7...h5!?



SI 40.6 – B47  
Alexander Berelowitsch  
Francisco Vallejo  
Germany Bundesliga 2010/11

1.e4 c5 2.c3 c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 e6 5.c3 c7

The Taimanov Variation of the Sicilian, which these days is often met by 6.e3, followed by 7.d2 and queenside castling. One of White's main (and most solid) options has always been the kingside fianchetto, though.

## 6.g3

Many top players favour 6.g3, but Michael Adams deserves special mention as the main supporter of this line.

6...a6 7.g2 h5!?



Attaboy! It is unusual in such a theory-heavy opening as the Sicilian to see a top player like Vallejo leave the well-trodden paths at such an early stage in the game. The audacious 7...h5 was first played by Bent Larsen in a period when he experimented with many opening ideas. The launch of the h-pawn may remind you of cof-

fee-house chess (or ICC blitz), but it really isn't just about attacking bluntly on the kingside. Positionally speaking, the move 7...h5 is quite sound:

1. To stop the h-pawn in its tracks White would have to play 8.h4 here, which weakens the g4-square (as f4 is a normal part of White's plan).

2. Playing 8.h3, to meet 8...h4 with 9.g4, on the other hand, weakens the dark squares.

3. Allowing Black to play ...h4 gives him the opportunity to open the h-file whenever he wants to, and also weakens the g4-square somewhat (in these fianchetto lines White often wants to play h3 to protect g4, but this isn't possible when Black and White have exchanged their h-pawns on g3).

The main line is 7...f6 (your database will easily list some 3500 games!), but we do well to remember that 7...d6 8.0-0 d7 9.e1 e7 10.xc6 xc6 11.g4 h5!? 12.e2 h4 is another not unpopular line that scores very decently for Black: 13.a4 hxg3 14.hxg3 f6 is then the normal continuation.

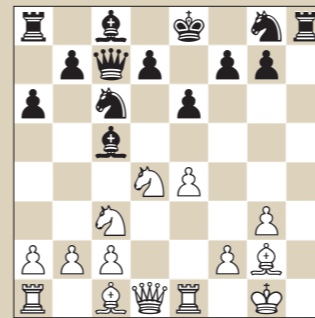
## 8.h3

A logical response to the threat of ...h5-h4.

Ignoring the advance of the h-pawn is possible: 8.0-0, castling into the storm, or obtaining a useful edge in development?

8...h4 9.e1 hxg3 10.hxg3 c5 (Black fights for the initiative; not 10...f6 11.d5! – 11.xc6 bxc6 12.e5 d5

is OK for Black – 11...exd5 12.xc6 bxc6 13.exd5+ d8 14.dxc6, and White has great compensation for the piece). Now:



– 11.e3 e5 12.f4?! (12.f5! xe3 – too dangerous is 12...exf5? 13.d5 d6 14.xc5 xc5 15.exf5 – 13.xe3 is slightly better for White, while 13.d6+ f8 14.xe3 f6 is less clear) 12...d6 13.b3 a7 14.e2 f6 15.d1 b5 is an ideal Sicilian for Black. His positional advantages are obvious, while his king is relatively safe in the centre: 16.d4 d7 17.f3 fg4! 18.f1 b4 19.xe5 xe5 20.b1 b5, and Black won an exchange and soon afterwards the game in S.Collins-A. Kogan, Port Erin 2002.

– 11.xc6 is a very decent alternative: 11...bxc6 (11...dxc6? 12.e5±) 12.e5! e7 (12...f5!?) 13.g5 (13.e4!) 13...f8 14.a4 a7 15.e3 (15.c4!?) 15...xe3 16.xe3 f5 17.b3 b8 18.c5?! b5! 19.xb5? cxb5 20.b4 xe5, and although the win is still not that easy, Black clearly had the upper hand in Ocantos-R.Swinckels, Maastricht 2010.

– Black should meet 11.b3 with 11...e7 (11...a7 12.f4), when he should be happy to have achieved the withdrawal of the knight from the centre, for example 12.a4 d6 13.a5 f6, with about equal chances.

– 11.f4! is a very concrete attempt. Black must reply with 11...e5, when it all depends on 12.d5 b8 and now 13.xc6 (13.b3 exf4 14.xc5 fxg3 with sharp play. Black has achieved a lot on the kingside, but White has an advantage in de-

velopment) 13...dxc6 (if 13...dxc6 is too mundane for you, then you may well wish to investigate the sharp 13...xf2+ 14.fxf2 bxc6) 14.e3 xe3 15.xe3 e6 is equal.

White can prevent ...h4 by withdrawing his knight to f3, but this is harmless: 8.f3 e7 9.f4 d6 10.d2 e5 11.e2 d7 12.c3!? d6!? 13.e5



13...d5! (13...dxe5 14.xe5 b6 15.xg7 b4 16.xh8 is unclear) 14.a3 c8 15.h4 h6 16.0-0 g4, and Black was better in the stem game Terkelsen-Larsen, Aarhus 1959.

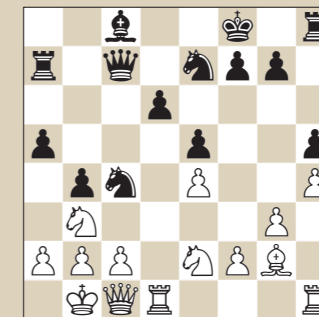
Moving the knight to b3 has also occurred in practice. This immediately gives Black an easy game. 8.b3 h4 9.0-0 (9.f4 e5) 9...hxg3 10.hxg3 f6 11.e2 e5 12.g5



and now Black has many good options to obtain the better game: 12...b4 (12.fg4; 12...d6; 12...b5) 13.d1 c4 14.xc4 xc4, and Black had a very comfortable queenless middlegame in Misailovic-Kotic, Cetinje 1992.

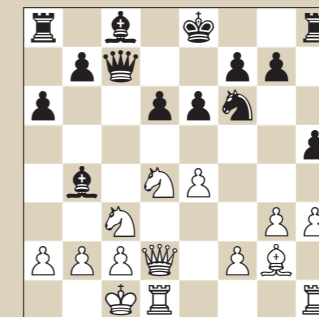
8.h4 – stopping the cheeky rascal in its tracks. Let's follow the example of Spanish GM Arthur Kogan: 8...c5 9.b3 a7 10.f4. It's normal to de-

velop the bishop to f4 (moving a pawn to f4 would accentuate the weakness of square g4). 10...e5 11.e2 d6 12.0-0-0 e7 (12...f6!?) 13.e3 b5 14.xa7 xa7 15.d2?! (15.f4) 15...c4 16.g5 (a shot in the dark; the black king doesn't mind moving to f8 anyway) 16...b4 17.e2 f8 18.b1 e5! 19.c1 a5!



and Black's chances are to be preferred, Remiro Juste-Kogan, Spain 2004.

8.e3 f6 (8...h4 is a bit rash when White hasn't castled kingside and has spent no time on preventing ...h4. White could, for instance, play 9.xc6 bxc6 10.d4, intending to castle queenside) 9.h3. White reacts belatedly to the threat of ...h4. With his next move Black exploits the early development of the bishop to e3: 9...e5! 10.e2 b4 11.d2 c4 12.0-0-0 xd2 13.xd2 d6. White has no compensation for having lost the important dark-squared bishop. Black has a slight edge.



14.de2 d7 15.g5 (just like in our previous example, this yields nothing) 15...f8! 16.d2 c8 17.