

Your goals in the chess opening are center control and piece development. You're off to a good start when you can put two pawns in the center:

Moving both center pawns will suffice for complete development of the pieces, while e2-e4 plus d2-d4 are most advantageous for White's control of the center. But Black knows the same, and in case of 1. e4 e5 or 1. d4 d5, White might feel positionally motivated to try to deflect the black pawns from the center by 1. e4 e5 2. f4 or 1. d4 d5 2. c4.

Then 2...dxc4 3. e4 in the Queen's Gambit is fine:



But 2...exf4 3. d4 in the King's Gambit is premature, because 3...Qh4+ is dangerous (White has three ways to anticipate ...Qd8-h4+: 3. Nf3 prevents it, 3. Bc4 provides f1 as a flight square, 3. Qf3 guards the h1-rook to make 3...Qh4+ 4. g3 fxg3 5. hxg3 possible).



White can play 1. e4 e5 2. d4 directly:



Then after 2...exd4, 3. c3 threatens 4. cxd4:



And if 3...dxc3, then 4. Bc4 (4. Nxc3 is also good) cxb2 5. Bxb2 gives White powerful bishops:



However, if White really likes the idea of a pawn pair on e4 and d4, then White has to play c2-c3 before d2-d4, preparing the recapture c3xd4:

White: Morphy

Black: Bottin

Event: Paris

Date: 1858

(C20 King's Pawn, Lopez O)

1. e4 e5 2. c3



2. c3 has two names: Lopez Opening (suggesting that the Spanish priest Ruy Lopez played this, as well as his famous 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5), and MacLeod Attack (after the Scottish master who played it often).

The trouble with the well-meaning 2. c3 is that it doesn't threaten, and it doesn't aid White's development (except for the queen along the d1-a4 diagonal). If Black is on the ball, he will play 2...d5!, and Black is first to get two pawns in the center. Then if 3. exd5 Qxd5, the pawn on c3 blocks White from attacking the queen with Nb1-c3.

2...Nf6

2...d6 3. d4 Bd7 4. Bc4 Nf6 5. Qb3 Qe7 6. Qxb7 Bc6 7. Qc8+ Qd8 8. Bxf7+ Ke7 9. Qe6# 1-0 was Steinitz-NN, New York 1890.

If Black doesn't want White to have his e4/d4 center, he might play 2...c5. Then White should recognize the transposition to the Sicilian move order 1. e4 c5 2. c3! e5.

3. d4 Nxe4 4. dxe5 Bc5 5. Qg4 Nxf2

Much better to play a more powerful threat: 5...Bxf2+ 6. Ke2 d5.

6. Qxg7 Rf8 7. Bg5 f6 8. exf6 Rxf6?

Again, 8...d5 is the right move.

9. Bxf6 Be7 10. Qg8+ 1-0

If White wants to pursue the plan 1. e4 plus c2-c3 and d2-d4, it's better to develop some pieces first. Even one developed piece makes a big difference:

White: Tchigorin

Black: Gossip

Event: New York, New York

Date: 1889

(C44 Ponziani, Steinitz V)

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. c3



For the interpolation of 2. Nf3 Nc6 before 3. c3, we call it Ponziani's opening.

3...d5

Naturally.

4. Qa4

Ponziani's 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. c3 is a significant improvement over MacLeod's 2. c3, because White can answer 3...d5 with another developing move that threatens (3. Bb5 is also possible).

4...f6

4...dxe4 5. Nxe5 Qd5 6. Nxc6 Qxc6? 7. Bb5 1-0 happened in Sturell-NN, Boras 1956.

4...Qd6 5. exd5 Qxd5 6. Bc4 Qe4+ 7. Kd1 Bd7? 8. Bxf7+ 1-0 was Ludwig-Andreas, Oberwart 1992.

5. Bb5 Ne7 6. exd5 Qxd5 7. O-O Bd7 8. d4 e4 9. Nfd2 Ng6

9...O-O-O is better.

10. Bc4 Qa5 11. Qb3 f5

White builds an initiative now. Black should forget about the e4-pawn: 11...O-O-O 12. Nxe4 is not so bad.

12. Bf7+ Ke7?

A losing move. 12...Kd8 had to be played.

13. Nc4! Qa6 14. Bg5+ Kxf7 15. Nd6# 1-0

Ponziani's 3. c3 could be improved upon again with more development. 3. Bc4 prepares White for castling and inhibits ...d7-d5. Then 3...Bc5 4. c3 is perfectly good, but — like MacLeod's 2. c3 — it does not threaten (in fact, its name means "quiet game" in Italian). If White wants to do this right, the sequence should be:

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4!



A threatening move.

4...Bxb4

So c2-c3 is also a threatening move.

5. c3 Bc5 6. d4 exd4 7. cxd4



Mission accomplished. 4. b4! was the invention of seafarer Captain William Davies Evans. Like Morphy against Bottin, Captain Evans also dabbled in 1. e4 e5 2. c3 — well after he introduced his gambit 4. b4! — because variety is the spice of life and chess.