

# Nimzo- Larsen attack



**EVERYMAN CHESS** Byron Jacobs & Jonathan Tait

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The Nimzo-Larsen Attack (1 b3) enables White to take his opponent out of his stride from the very first move. By avoiding the theoretical landmines of openings such as the Sicilian and King's Indian Defences, White is able to steer the game towards a pure battle of chess skill, rather than a test of memory. Furthermore, as the games of exponents such as Grandmaster Julian Hodgson have shown, the Nimzo-Larsen Attack often provokes an overreaction by Black, causing him to overextend his position and thereby leave himself open to an early knockout blow.

- Dynamic surprise weapon for players of all standards
- Explains the basic elements, strategies and tactics for both sides
- Provides everything you need to start playing the Nimzo-Larsen Attack straightaway
- Ideal battle manual for competitive players

International Master Byron Jacobs is an experienced chess author and journalist, who has written extensively on all aspects of the game. His recent works include *The Caro-Kann Advance* and *Starting Out in Chess*.

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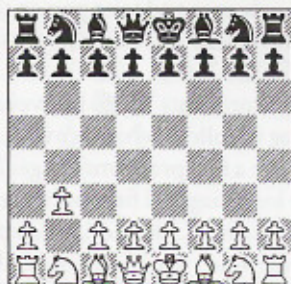
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# INTRODUCTION



## Why play the Nimzo-Larsen Attack?

Many opening monographs have enthusiastic titles of the form *Winning with the...*, and invite the reader to ingest some marvellous system or other and rack up the points – either by encyclopaedic knowledge of main lines or the methodical application of simple strategies.

So let us make it clear, first of all, that White has *no* advantage in the Nimzo-Larsen. The lines in *ECO*, for example, conclude mostly in '=' (equal) or '∞' (unclear), with just a few '±' (White stands slightly better) and even these '±' seem optimistic. Nor is the Nimzo-Larsen a 'system' opening in which the first moves are played parrot-fashion regardless of the replies. There *are* system-like elements in some variations – the plan ♖b5, ♗e5, f2-f4 in the reversed Nimzo-Indian (Chapter 4) for instance – but more often White (and Black) can do just about anything. Anyone who likes to win their games in the opening should therefore look elsewhere.

That's not to say White can't win, of course. In strategically rich positions, such as arise in the Nimzo-Larsen, the player who brings more to the game – in imagination, technique, spirit, or understanding – will generally have the better chances. 1 b3 also has the usual advantage associated with 'side-

line' openings: that opponents are thrown onto their own resources at an early stage. Thus theoretical equality is turned into a practical advantage, whereas a theoretical plus against someone's pet defence (or counterattack) can easily be outweighed by their superior understanding of the types of position that arise in that opening.

And in aesthetic terms there is an appealing leftfield quality about b2-b3. Kingside fianchetti are so commonplace that some players boast of fianchettoing their king's bishop in every game, White or Black. The queenside fianchetto is more exotic, and the bishop looks quaint gazing down the long diagonal into the heart of Black's kingside. Subjective factors do count for something in chess, if only to induce a positive attitude at the board.

## Should I play 1 b3 or 1 ♗f3, 2 b3?

The Nimzo-Larsen arises after either 1 b3 or 1 ♗f3, 2 b3. Nimzowitsch almost always began 1 ♗f3, Larsen usually with 1 b3. Of the modern practitioners, Minasian plays 1 b3, Blatny starts only with 1 ♗f3. There are pros and cons to both move orders.

With 1 b3 Black can reply 1...e5! and does so in nearly 50% of games. This is sufficient for a lot of players to be put off starting 1 b3.

On the plus side, White has more options in all the other variations; e.g. against 1...g6 or 1...d5 2 ♖b2 ♗g4. Also, the f-pawn remains free to advance and take part in the fight for e5; with 1 ♖f3 this is only possible after a later ♖f3-e5.

1 ♖f3 prevents 1...e5. However, if White is going to follow whatever with 2 b3, Black can cause a few problems: 1...g6, 2...♗g7 gets to the long diagonal first and disrupts White's development. 1...d6 and 1...♖c6 plan 2 b3 e5! reaching 1...e5 variations after all – and with the knight prematurely at f3. Black can be even more tricky with 1...♖f6 2 b3 d6!? intending 3...e5 again, or 1...c5 2 b3 d6 and 3...e5 when the knight on f3 might prefer to be on e2. For maximum effectiveness 1 ♖f3 should perhaps only be used by those who are comfortable with *not* playing 2 b3 in some positions; e.g. 1 ♖f3 d6 2 d4!.

#### What is included in this book?

Angus Dunnington has already provided an introduction to 1 b3 in chapter 2 of *Winning Unorthodox Openings* (Everyman 2000). So, rather than aim at the same audience, we have produced a more complete reference work on the Nimzo-Larsen.

Nevertheless, the amorphous nature of b2-b3 makes it impossible for a single book to be fully comprehensive. Transpositions to and from other openings occur constantly as

the Nimzo-Larsen can slide effortlessly into and out of an English, Réti, Dutch, King's Indian, Queen's Gambit, Bird, ... just as long as White inserts b2-b3 early in the opening. We have indicated numerous transpositional possibilities in the text, often with an example or two (see the ubiquitous 'e.g.');

but each example may be only a taste of another opening complex with its own accompanying body of theory.

Some b2-b3 variations have *not* been included, in particular those with e2-e4 arising from completely unrelated openings; e.g. 1 e4 c5 2 b3 or 1 e4 e6 2 b3. The only instances of an early e2-e4 are specific Nimzo-Larsen variations in which White attempts to exploit a certain black formation; e.g. 1 b3 e5 2 ♖b2 f6 3 e4!? (Game 27) or 1 b3 g6 2 ♖b2 ♖f6 3 e4!? (Game 58).

Nor have we attempted to present a repertoire for White or recommend defences for Black. There seems little point since *every* variation is theoretically equal, so that the struggle is mostly transferred to the middle-game. However, if White wants to keep the opening simple s/he might stick to lines with e2-e3 and look first at Games 6, 7, 20, 28, 35 and 59 for a basic grounding. In turn, Black can defend in keeping with her or his usual openings; e.g. ...♖f6, ...g7-g6 etc. for King's Indian players, or 1 b3 e5 and 1...d5 respectively for 1 e4 and 1 d4 exponents.

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