

Chess Openings.

Chess Games are like good stories! They generally have a beginning, a middle and an end. Chess Openings are an important feature of the game and there are a variety of them. It is, therefore, a good idea to study the various openings in order to improve the way you play chess. It is also important, however, **to try to understand the general ideas behind how you should play in the opening period of the game.**

Remember that chess is said to be a game of **“understanding rather than memory”**. While it is important to learn and remember how to play the game, for example the first few moves of a particular opening, how to checkmate with a king and 2 rooks against a king, how to promote a passed pawn etc, **learning how to decide on what the best move is at a particular point in the game is also very important.** Accordingly, the following are the main ideas that you should generally follow regardless of which particular opening you decide to play:

- Move pawns so that they create space for your pieces – the most popular pawn moves in the opening usually involve moving the “e” and “d” pawns. Such moves allow space for the bishops and queens to move;
- Aim to “develop” your pieces quickly – this means getting them off the back rank as quickly as possible;
- Castle quickly to :
 - get your king away from the centre of the board; and
 - to move one of your rooks to a better square closer to the centre of the board where it can have a bigger influence on the game;
- try to control the centre of the board by either :
 - moving pieces and pawns towards the centre; or
 - “aiming” your pieces at the central squares (for example if the knights are moved to the f3,c3, f6 and c6 squares they are aiming at the boards central squares of e4, e5, d4 and d5.
- It is generally a good idea to move your knights out as early as possible as they are the only pieces on the board that can jump over other pieces and can therefore get off the back rank without you having to move pawns first; (Remember that as a general rule, you should avoid moving the knights to the edge of the Board as they can aim at less squares from there – remember the phrase **“knight on the rim is dim!”**);

- Avoid moving the same piece or pawn more than once in the opening moves – otherwise your opponent may get his/her pieces into the game much faster than you do and get a better position on the board.

The most popular first moves in chess games involve moving the “e” or “d” pawns as they occupy the central squares and exert immediate influence on the centre of the board. Other popular opening moves involve moving pawns to g3, b3, g6 and b6, so that bishops can be put on the squares g2, b2, g7 and b7. From these squares the bishops can control the board’s long diagonals from the corners right through the centre of the board. (The long diagonals stretch from the a1 – h8 and h1 – a8 squares. There are also other opening moves involving the “f” and “c” pawns moving early in the game. **It is important to note however, that the pawns at the edge of the board on the “a” and “h” files are rarely moved in the first few moves of the game.** This is because they don’t exert any pressure on the centre of the board or free up space for knights and bishops to move.

How do you go about remembering the ideas outlined above when you are starting a game of chess?

We can create a word, sentence or phrase to help with this. For example, the six ideas set out above can be summarised as follows:-

- Move pawns early to **create space** for your pieces;
- **Develop** your pieces, that is get them off the back rank quickly;
- Occupy **central squares** on the board or **aim** pieces or pawns at the central squares;
- Avoid moving the same piece or pawn **more than once** in the early stages of the game;
- **Castle** quickly;
- Don’t move pawns on the **edge** of the board;

If you take a look at the text in bold above, you will see that we have three “Cs”, that is for the creation of space, occupying central squares and castling.

You can also form the word MODEL to remind you not to move pieces and pawns “more than once” (MO), “D” for develop and “E” to remind you not to move pawns on the EDGE of the Board. I have added the “L” at the end simply because the word “MODEL” is probably easier to remember than the shorter word “MODE”. **This should help you to remember what to do in the opening !**