

Background: The Current Status of Queen's Pawn Game Responses to ...g6-systems

Before jumping into a detailed look at how Zuka can be used against various ...g6 systems, a quick discussion of the current state of theory seems appropriate.

When discussing deviations from "Queen's Pawn Game" openings, loosely defined as anything where White opens 1.d4 and delays or omits c4, one can identify two categories that match two very different kinds of Black repertoires.

The first category comprises the various pet defenses, each designed to defuse an individual opening. The second category comprises recognized opening systems that naturally cut across White's plans; examples include the Benoni, Dutch, and King's Indian defenses. While challenging lines exist in both categories, the members of the second group are particularly problematic because they tend to result in structures the second player is well versed in playing. A tournament player might have to use each of his pet defenses once a year, but a Benoni specialist is going to bash out 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 c5 many times each month.

Furthermore, these "real" defenses are much more likely to provide Black substantial winning chances. Compare this to many pet defenses that make White work harder to achieve a significant advantage in the opening, but which can be quite hard for Black to win with even against mediocre play should White be happy with a draw. Examples include meeting the Colle with 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 d5 3.e3 Bf5 or the accelerated London with 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 d6.

But these two categories differ in another important regard. Pet lines are rarely tested at high levels, and their theory

changes slowly. Once White finds the proper refutation for such a line, it can be a long time before it gets resurrected. At one point many of these variations could have been considered silver bullets, but their tips have since degraded to bronze or clay. Not so with the Modern, Pirc, Benoni, Grünfeld, Dutch, and Indian systems. Many of these are played at high levels regularly, and the opportunity for developments, even in their sidelines—the variations Queen's Pawn Game players may adopt—is much greater. A recommendation for White that looked good in 2000 may have already had its coffin made by 2010.

Of these various defensive systems, those employing an early ...g6 are particularly difficult for Colle System players to meet. The knee-jerk explanation for this is that White's powerful Bishop on d3 bites on g6-granite. This reasoning contains some truth, especially for the C-K version which relies heavily on that Bishop. Yet it glosses over a more fundamental point. As I described in *Zuke 'Em*, the Colle-Zukertort aims to render Black's light-squared Bishop as worthless as possible. If Black fianchettoes his dark-squared Bishop, White has no real hope of containing Black's light-squared Bishop with a Colle structure because there is no compelling reason for the second player to issue ...e6.

This short circuits White's whole setup. Not only will Black get to make some use of his light-squared Bishop, but he does not need to take any drastic early action to do so. No wonder the Colle stands to do poorly against the ...g6 systems: Black has sabotaged from the start the whole basis of White's opening! (Incidentally, the Zuka system I will be recommending renews this idea of suppressing Black's play with this Bishop by eventually covering g4 and f5 with pawns on e4 and either f3 or h3.)

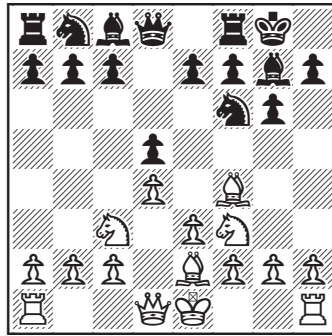
Because theory can change relatively rapidly even in the sidelines of these defensive systems, many different suggestions for White have been given over the years. Smith and Hall

actually suggested something close to the Zuka system against one particular ...g6 line, but they looked for massive Q-side expansion with a4 and b4, allowing Black to play ...e4. Soltis suggested White simply use a Torre against these openings in his 1992 repertoire pamphlet.

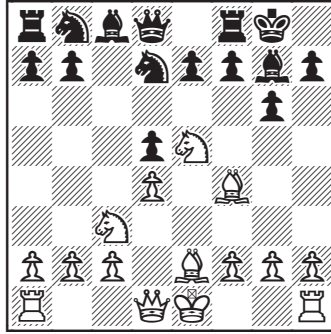
A new era began when GM Summerscale suggested the Barry and 150 Attack in the original edition of *A Killer Chess Opening Repertoire*.

The Barry Attack

The Barry Attack (1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Bf4 Bg7 5.e3 0-0 6.Be2) provoked much debate as it was used with some success by several strong players.



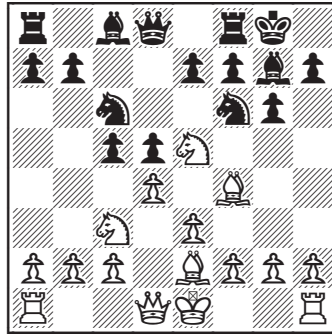
The Barry instantly became the preferred method for up-to-date Colle players to engage the ...g6 defensive complexes. Unfortunately, as is often the case in chess, success for White at high levels accelerated the evolution of the line. Black finally found a reliable response involving an annoying retreat: 6...c5 7.Ne5 cxd4 8.exd4 Nfd7!



White doesn't have anything better than 9.Nf3, so he had to find a way to make progress without Ne5.

This ...Nfd7 tactic had been known even before Summer-scale's book. Long-time Barry proponent Mark Hebden beat widely renowned opening theorist GM John Nunn in 1998 by castling long after playing Qd2, Ne5, and Be3. However, Hebden evidently didn't trust the specific continuation in that game and ran into trouble with this line in 2005-6 as he started looking for something better. He even tried Ng1 against fellow GM Jonathan Rowson. Nothing came of this experimentation and he agreed to a couple of draws from the position in 2006.

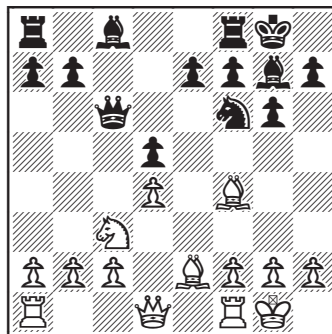
In my view 7...cxd4 8.exd4 Nfd7 is the biggest issue for Barry Attack players. IMs Richard Palliser and Yelena Dembo (writing from opposite sides of the chess board) have each put more weight on the 7...Nc6 variation.



Position after 7...Nc6

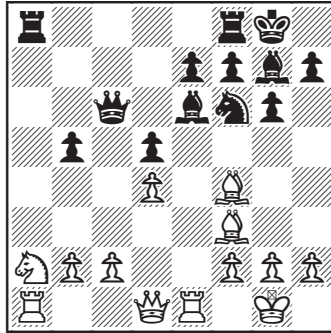
It's true that White has gotten the worse of it from this position in recent years if one looks at all games, but closer examination shows that this is largely due to White stubbornly trying to attack come hell or high water with h4 or playing Nxc6 too early. The traditional move, 8.0-0 continues to work fine for White, who must now play positionally on the Q-side.

The variation that Dembo gives as the refutation to White's setup is 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 Qb6 10.Nxc6 Qxc6.



Does this pose
a problem for White?

Palliser agrees with Dembo's assessment that White has nothing here, but I think they have under-estimated 11.Re1 a6 12.Bf3, which Dembo gives a "?!". The Greek IM criticizes this move because it does not stop Black's minority attack, but in the suggested continuation she gives, 12...Be6 13.a4 b5 14.axb5 axb5, I don't see what Black has accomplished after 15.Na2.



The b4-square belongs to White

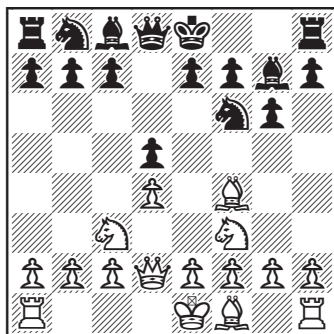
Following c3, Nb4, and probably Rc1, Black cannot make anything of the a-file. Note that he has problems finding a spot for his light-squared Bishop. He would like to move the Bishop to allow ...e6, shoring up the twice-hit d5-pawn. Rerouting it to e8 is complicated by the weakness on e7, and moving it to f5 invites a powerful K-side pawn storm. Retreating all the way to c8 leaves Black even less well-prepared to meet a K-side assault.

While I don't see 7...Nc6 as particularly problematic, it does prevent White from playing for an immediate K-side assault. It is a stylistic obstacle rather than a theoretic one.

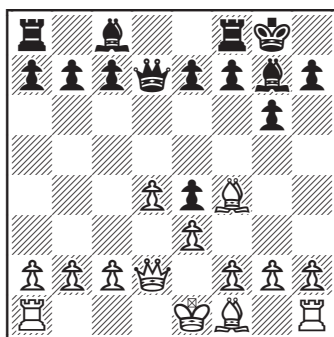
The Tarzan Attack

The Barry Attack lost its greatest advocate when Hebden switched openings after his dispiriting encounters of 2005-2006 against 8...Nfd7. He began tilling the fields of 1.d4 Nf6

2.Nf3 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Bf4 Bg7 5.Qd2, which Israeli GM Arthur Kogan had been cultivating for some time.



White's play, aiming at Bh6 with a K-side assault, may not appear particularly nuanced, but it has proven quite hard to contain. The variation has received a fair amount of attention recently, and its theory is still evolving. Several repertoire books have suggested Black play for a relatively early ...c5 after 5...Ne4 6.Nxe4 dxe4 7.Ne5 Nd7 8.Nxd7 Qxd7 9.e3 0-0.



White can really only stop ...c5 temporarily with 10.Qc3. After 10...c6 11.Be2 b6, Black will get ...c5 in eventually. The question is whether White can get anything out of it.

While White has had some rough games recently with this variation, I think it is still too early to render judgment. Kogan has looked for improvements on move 10, and there are plenty of possibilities left to explore. White might find

something in 11.a4, though Hebden only managed to draw with it against the significantly lower-rated Houriez in 2008. White could consider preventing ...c5 with 10.Qb4 instead of 10.Qc3. Castling long rather than developing his Bishop (11.0-0-0) is also a possibility.

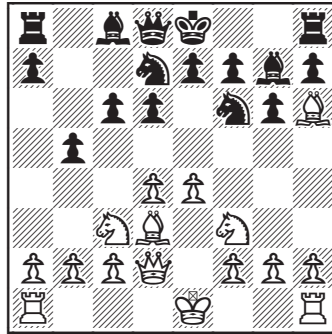
As of this writing, many of Kogan's personal suggestions for White involve Be5, either played immediately on move 12 or after 12.a4 or 12.0-0-0.

I don't think White has run out of ideas here, but it is hard to make a solid repertoire suggestion.

The 150 Attack

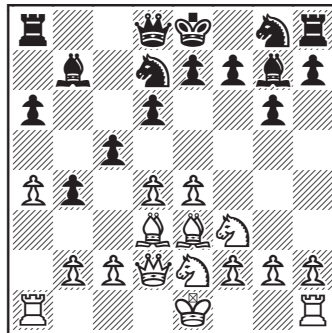
The 150 Attack refers to an opening system normally employed against the Pirc that emphasizes (to the point of caricature) the importance of classical development. White gets his pawns on e4/d4 and, meeting no resistance, proceeds to simply plop his pieces on their classically best squares. For Queen's Pawn Game players, this means d4, e4, Nf3, Nc3, Be3, and normally Bd3 and Qd2 as well. The downside is that his Knight on c3 blocks his c-pawn, limiting his ability to transform the center and bringing a certain degree of inflexibility to his game.

Back in 1999 GM Summerscale wrote that he thought the 150 Attack was putting Black off the Pirc at all levels, and he may well have been right. To this day Pirc players continue to struggle badly against the 150 regardless of whether they castle early (e.g., 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Be3 0-0 6.Qd2 c6 7.Bh6) or delay castling (e.g., 1.d4 d6 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Be3 c6 6.Qd2 b5 7.Bd3 Nbd7 8.Bh6). This latter idea, shown below, is considered Black's best, but White still tends to mop the floor with him in these lines as long as the first player knows the theory.



Position after 8.Bh6

While the 150 continues to dominate the Pirc, it has been on the business end of a rude awakening against the Modern Defense. In particular, after 1.d4 d6 2.Nf3 g6 3.e4 Bg7 4.Nc3 a6!, White has had a terrible time proving any advantage (practical or otherwise) at all. Opening manuals written for players using the 150 Attack tend to suggest 5.Be3 b5 6.Qd2 Bb7 7.Bd3 Nd7 8.a4! b4 9.Ne2, but no convincing response to 9...c5! has been found.



Eggshell in the omelet

Tiger Hillarp Persson suggested 10.c3 be met with 10... Ngf6 in his *Tiger's Modern*. That line has been good for Black. Worse, even if White finds a promising rebuttal to that particu-

lar variation, there appears to be no end to Black's worthwhile ideas and potential improvements elsewhere in this system.

This ...a6-version of the Modern has increased in popularity tremendously over the past 15 years, and I don't see any good way around it for those wanting to use the 150 Attack. White has other ways to meet 4...a6, but none of them are particularly compelling. Of course, White could elect to play the 150 only when Black plays an early ...Nf6, but this is no solution in terms of repertoire preparation because Black can remain flexible longer than White can. Eventually White will have to decide whether to play an early c4 (the only real deterrent to the Modern), and Black can keep all his options available until then.

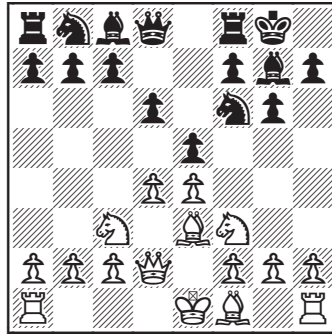
Thus, the only way White can reliably incorporate the 150 Attack selectively against the Pirc while still having good chances for an opening advantage against the Modern is to allow himself to be pulled into the King's Indian Defense after 1.d4 d6 2.e4 g6 3.Nf3 Bg7 4.c4 Nf6!

Speaking of the King's Indian, there is one other minor annoyance that sometimes goes unmentioned in manuals. Players using the Barry/Tarzan and 150 Attacks as a repertoire will often say they "use the Barry against the King's Indian and the 150 against the Pirc/Modern." But that is not true.

The Barry, after all, follows the move order 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Nc3 d5, but ...d5 is not a King's Indian move. What is really going on is that White assumes that after 3.Nc3, Black will opportunistically switch to an unusual version of the Grünfeld, taking advantage of the fact that White has omitted c4.

This is a reasonable enough idea. Black may not be particularly interested in playing a Pirc, and fixing a ram on d4/d5 is the most direct way of removing flexibility from White's setup. It also takes c4 away from White's pieces. However, while Black certainly has the option of switching to a Grünfeld and playing for ...c5 (as is thematic in that opening), there

is nothing requiring him to do so. As Richard Palliser has pointed out, there is no reason why a KID player cannot play the typical KID moves against a Barry/Tarzan/150 repertoire: 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Nc3 d6 4.e4 Bg7 5.Be3 0-0 6.Qd2 e5!?



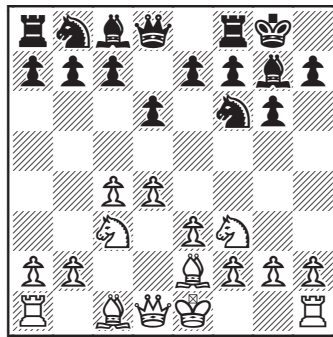
Position after 6...e5!?

In the few games between comparably rated, strong players, Black has done fine in this variation, which illustrates one problem with weaving together a repertoire based on two rather disparate, thematic systems. If your opponent mixes and matches moves from the two in an intelligent way, you can find yourself in uncharted waters where thematic components of neither system are necessarily critical or even pertinent.

Overview:

Using Zuka Against ...g6-defenses

Adopting a new opening requires committing both time and energy. Moreover, it involves overcoming a certain degree of psychological inertia, which is all the greater when the decision pertains to a defensive setup as important and common as the early-...g6 complex. Before discussing specific lines, I want to make sure you understand what you are getting into, and why.



Typical position of Zuka system against ...g6

An Integrated System

As described in the *CODENAME: Zuka* preface, the Zuka system is a natural choice for those who use the Colle System (either type) against ...d5 because the two integrate seamlessly. White doesn't have to learn two different systems based on

different Grünfeld move orders, and he uses the same basic pawn structure against most deviations from a Colle, including the Dutch, KID, and several anti-Colle lines (e.g., 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 d5 3.e3 Bf5).

Another level of this cohesion shows through when one considers just the ...g6-defenses. Most players using a Colle System nowadays have to use one setup against the KID and another against the Pirc. Given the resilience (and recent popularity) of the ...a6-Modern, they probably need a third system just against that opening, and a fourth against 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 d5 3.e3 g6.

In addition to requiring extra study time, this many-system approach is vulnerable to sabotage when Black employs a crafty move order. I gave a couple of examples in the previous chapter: there is nothing stopping Black from starting with a Pirc and switching to a KID, nor is there anything preventing him from feinting at a Modern and switching to a Pirc. When White relies on different systems with different pawn structures, he can find himself in unfamiliar territory after Black throws a curve ball.

Using an integrated system cuts such dangers down considerably. I feel strange saying this, but White really can use the d4/Nf3/c4/e3/Be2/Nc3 setup against practically any early-...g6 system without surrendering early equality to the Black player.

Why does saying this make you feel strange?

If you've read my Colle System books, you may recall that I give quite the opposite view when discussing that opening. The Colle System *can* be played safely against any Black setup, but that doesn't mean White is well advised to do so. Class-level Colle System players have traditionally been lazy about learning proper refutations to various anti-Colle lines. It's fine to start out using the Colle System against everything,

but you should gradually refine your repertoire by learning how to respond to Black's deviations.

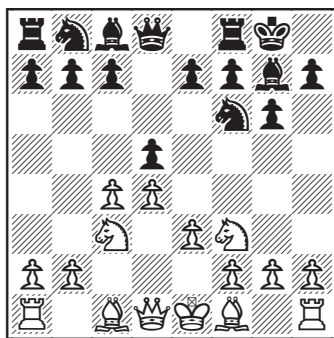
But this really does not apply to the earliest moves of the Zuka when played against ...g6. Situations where White need vary his 4th and 5th moves after 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 are few and easily recognized. Yet the opportunity to *optionally* deviate as a matter of taste is present, which brings me to my next point.

Extensibility

The Zuka system is "extensible" in the sense that players who happen to like other openings can work those into their repertoire. In some cases this simply lets White play a position he knows well. In other cases White's willingness to play one line gives him more flexibility when meeting other lines. Sometimes this additional flexibility allows White to play a stronger response than he might otherwise have access to.

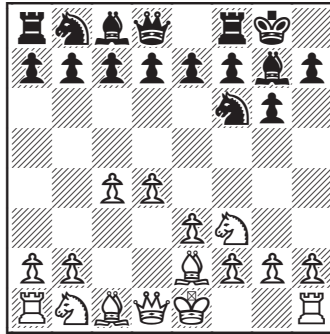
Can you give an example of how a willingness to play one line allows White more freedom when faced with a completely separate one?

Sure. A useful optional line for White is the closed Grünfeld: 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.Nc3 d5 5.e3 0-0.



The Closed Grünfeld is optional in the Zuka

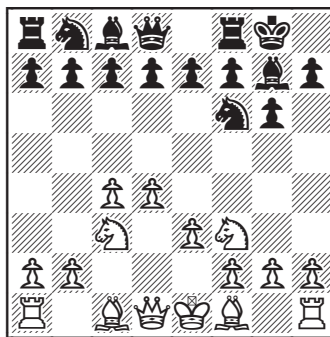
The repertoire proposed here does not require White to play this line, but if he is willing to do so, he can delay for an extra move the deployment of his light-squared Bishop. To avoid this version of the Grünfeld, White has to delay Nc3, meeting 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 with 4.e3 0-0 5.Be2.



White can avoid the Closed Grünfeld by delaying Nc3

So long as White holds back Nc3, he can meet ...d5 with the Sneaky Grünfeld line, where he exchanges on d5 and then plays e4, after which Black cannot exchange his Knight because there is nothing on c3 for Black's Knight to capture.

If White is willing to play the Closed Grünfeld, then he can instead play 4.e3 0-0 5.Nc3, arriving at the same position but with Nc3 instead of Be2.



The value of this line is that White may wish to play his Bishop to d3 rather than e2 on the off chance that Black plays ...c5, leading to an irregular Benoni.

Best of all, if Black plays this way, he probably hasn't studied the Benoni much. Benoni players do not typically begin their games 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6. Actually, even if Black is a Benoni specialist, he will likely be flummoxed by this particular Benoni. As we shall see, his standard tool for generating play (an early ...b5) does not work in this line.

This last point applies in general to most lines White will play when using the Zuka setup, leading to my next point.

Black Is on His Own

The Closed Grünfeld's recent popularity notwithstanding, modern chess theory tends to sneer at an early e3, unless White has already developed his dark-squared Bishop. This goes double against the ...g6-systems, perhaps because it is assumed White should secure a good post for his c-Bishop because his f-Bishop is unlikely to find a good square early on.

The flip side of this disposition is that opening manuals tend to dismiss the possibility of an early e3. Many treatments of the King's Indian don't discuss the line at all. Ironically, one of the few places I've found worthwhile discussion of the idea is Volume 2 of John Watson's excellent *Mastering the Chess Openings*, which is generally devoted to the most important or illustrative lines. Not even Yelena Dembo's *Fighting the Anti-King's Indians* gives any analysis of the Zuka setup. One paragraph in her Colle System chapter applies to the Zuka system by transposition, but she gives no variations or strategic advice. We will discuss her suggestion later in this chapter.

Other than the practical advantage of taking Black out of book, what does White accomplish by playing e3 instead of e4?

I thought you'd never ask...

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Delaying e4

In most lines I will be suggesting White eventually play e3-e4. Since mainstream play in these lines calls for White to play e2-e4, one could see this as the forfeiture of a tempo. However, such a judgment is rash, for the lines I recommend only involve playing e4 after Black has already been forced to abandon his typical play.

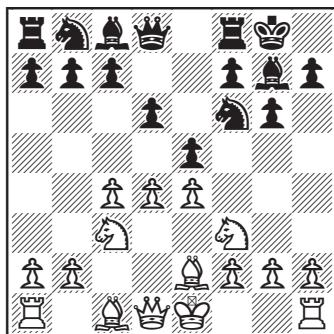
To accurately evaluate White's slow approach, we must look at it in context. The whole point of hypermodern opening strategy is to speed development by forgoing early central control, and then use that faster development to undermine and attack White's center. If Black is unable to attack White's center, the onus is on *him* to show adequate compensation for his lack of central presence.

Black's lead in development is only meaningful if he can use it to force a concession, but the Zuka setup presents no targets for the second player. Much of Black's general play in more popular (e2-e4) lines revolves about the relative weakness of White's d4-pawn, and the early moves can depend critically on the presence of a pawn on e4 that Black can attack.

To put a finer point on this, let's look at Black's most common response when White uses a Zuka setup.

King's Indian Defense

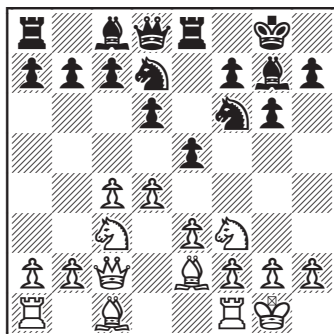
In the case of the KID, the relevance of the e4-pawn shows up on move 6 in the standard move order: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3 0-0 6.Be2 e5.



Black can play ...e5 safely

A rote beginner could be forgiven for asking why Black can even play 6...e5, yet KID practitioners do it without the barest hint of concern for their pawn. They know White cannot win material owing to 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.Nxe5 Nxe4. With White's pawn on e3 though, this central push is a dubious gambit at best.

For this reason the standard method of dealing with e3 is to support ...e5 by first playing ...Nbd7, but this already takes Black outside the modern treatment of the line; that Knight normally goes to e7 by way of c6. Long ago, ...Nbd7 was Black's standard play, and its advantages and disadvantages (compared to ...Nc6) are well known. Our proposed move order allows White to maintain an opening advantage in this thematic line, even playing a move down. The basic position is shown below.



White to move

I give plenty of analysis of this position later, but for now I point out that Black's ...Nbd7 gives White greater fluidity in the center, allowing him to catch up on his development. By the time the center becomes static, Black is unable to conveniently attack it as he does in more familiar variations.

This position is particularly important for those utilizing the Zuka system. It is also rather unexplored. Finding serious games between strong, comparable opponents is like searching for a straight pool cue in a low-class honky tonk. That is to say, they are uncommon. Yet, I claim White has good chances and, perhaps more importantly, a comprehensible plan. The lines I suggest give White control of the center and a space advantage while suppressing Black's counterplay.

If Black's repertoire is centered on the KID, he should reach the diagramed setup through natural play, but even if his repertoire is built on some other ...g6 opening, he is likely to end up there anyway. With the d4-pawn solidly defended, ...Bg4 loses much of its sting, so Pirc players will probably find themselves there as well. The c6-Modern just leaves Black a move down on the Grünfeld; its brother, the a6-Modern, is particularly ill-suited to meet White's setup because d4 cannot be undermined, e4 cannot be targeted, and (most of all), Black cannot play for ...a6/...b5 after White has played c4.

Neither can Black move-order White by playing a delayed Leningrad (1.d4 d6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.Nc3 f5) because White can just transpose into the Dangerfield Attack with Bf4. Nor is 1.d4 g6 2.Nf3 f5 to be relied upon, for that move order is particularly prone to 3.h4!

To wit, whatever Black may originally intend to play after ...g6, he will likely end up transposing to the position shown above unless he plays into a Grünfeld line. In a tiny minority of games, Black will steer into Benoni waters by playing ...c5 instead.

The Delayed Benoni

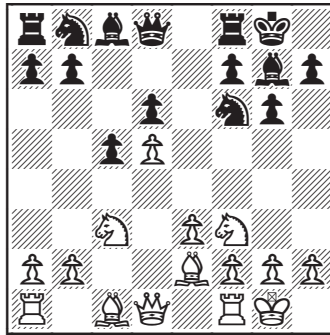
In her *Fighting the Anti-King's Indians*, IM Dembo suggests Black change course, presumably because she wants to avoid the standard ...Nbd7/...e5 line described in the previous section. Dembo does not give any lines, but suggests that 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.e3 be met by 4...c5 or 4...0-0 and 5...c5, which she says yields "a very weak and harmless Benoni" if White responds with d5.

It's worth mentioning that Dembo's general suggestion for fighting the Colle System centers on inflicting hanging pawns that can then be attacked. The Zuka setup is the only one that allows White to avoid that by advancing his d-pawn before Black can exchange it, so our setup represents a unique challenge to her entire suggested strategy. From a repertoire-building standpoint, one can understand the temptation to dismiss it as a rare line one hopes not to see too often.

I do not mean to single Dembo out for criticism. In fact, her ideas are important to consider, and they lead to lines where White's objective advantage is smaller than in the more common KID continuations. Still, I believe she has uncritically dismissed White's potential, and a slew of strong GMs would appear to agree. I present these lines at this early stage because they provide further examples of how White's delaying e4 has subtle benefits.

The First Benoni Continuation

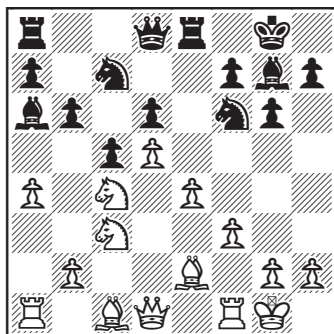
Let's first look at the idea of 4...0-0 followed by 5...c5, assuming White plays 5.Be2. (5.Nc3 will transpose to Dembo's 4...c5 line, which we treat later in this subsection. Strong players should consider 5.h3!?, a tricky optional play discussed in the *Shrewd 5.h3* chapter.) After 4...0-0 5.Be2 c5 6.d5 d6 7.Nc3 e6 8.0-0 exd5 9.cxd5, we arrive at a near-copy of the "old" Classical Variation of the Modern Benoni, the only difference being that White has a pawn on e3 rather than e4.



The fact that White's e-pawn is on e3 rather than e4 does not impact his long-term trump, his central majority. While a case could be made that the pawn on e3 prevents White from even contemplating Bf4, a thematic threat in this line, the truth of the matter is that Black typically avoids this anyway with 9...Re8, provoking 10.Nd2, blocking the Bishop.

In fact, taking a closer look at ...Re8 highlights the value of delaying e4. In the Classical Variation, which can be visualized by mentally moving White's e-pawn to e4 in the above diagram, the targeting of White's e-pawn is a critical component to Black's game plan. After White uses a move on Nd2 he finds his pieces all a jumble, so he uses another move on f3 to allow Nc4. Of course, c4 is often a great square for a Knight, but that is irrelevant here because Black is just going to play ...b6, ...Ba6 and ...Bxc4.

A typical version of this line illustrating all the time spent by White shoring up the vulnerable e4 is 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 d6 5.Nc3 exd5 6.cxd5 g6 7.Nd2 Bg7 8.e4 0-0 9.Be2 Re8 10.0-0 Na6 11.f3 Nc7 12.a4 b6 13.Nc4 Ba6.



The time White has lavished on e4, directly or indirectly, has allowed Black to prepare his Q-side expansion, which is now more or less impossible to stop. Black's ...b6 cannot even be considered a waste of time because it prevents White from holding Black back with the simple a5. Moreover, since Black is certain to achieve ...b5, White must use another move retreating his Bishop from c4 after it recaptures.

From the diagram, White generally plays Bg5, and after ...h6 Black has actually scored pretty well in top-level play, scoring exactly 50% in my database (though there are not many games to be found since White now prefers Bd3 instead of Be2 and this gives him such a good game that interest in the Benoni at top levels has dwindled).

The vigor of Black's Q-side initiative must be respected. For those who have never been on the receiving end of a Benoni Q-side assault, I'll give the bloodbath seen in Kožul-Cvitan, Stari Mikanovci 2010, which involved the strongest players I can find locking horns in recent times over this line. That game continued 14.Bg5 h6 15.Bh4 Qd7 16.Re1 Rab8 17.Bf2 Bxc4 18.Bxc4 a6 19.Bf1 Qd8 20.Rc1 Nd7 21.f4 b5 22.axb5 axb5 23.b4 cxb4 24.Na2 Na6 25.Rc6 Ndc5 26.e5 b3 27.Nc3

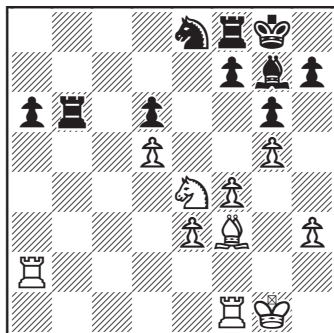
dxe5 28.f5 gxf5 29.Ne2 Rc8 30.Ng3 Qg5 31.h4 Qf4 32.Nh5
Qb4 33.Rxc8 Rxc8 34.Nxg7 Kxg7 35.Rxe5 b2 36.Qb1 Ne4
37.Be3 Rc1 38.Bxc1 bxc1Q 0-1.

***I bet you're going to tell me that White can avoid such mas-
sacres by delaying e4.***

Quite so. Since White does not have to spend time tend-
ing to his e-pawn and then untangling the aftermath, he can
play a4 and Rb1 (threatening b4) much sooner. Black's entire
strategy is neutralized, and White still has his long-term posi-
tional advantage (space and a central pawn majority). Black's
thin hope at play lies in advancing his c-pawn to c4 and then
making use of c5. But then White can target the c-pawn, which
will enjoy no pawn cover—unlike in similar variations of the
Classical Benoni where Black gets pawns on a6, b5, and c4.

You might be surprised to see who has opted to play
this “very weak and harmless” Benoni. IMs Managadze and
Renner, GMs Strikovic, Hort, Ftáčnik, Miles, and Lobron have
all chosen White's side of this position, as well as super-GM
Morozevich, who played it in the 2007 World Championship
tournament against reigning champion Kramnik, and won!

Following 9.cxd5 (see first diagram of this section), that
game continued 9... Bg4 10.h3 Bxf3 11.Bxf3 Nbd7 12.a4 a6
13.g4 c4 14.Be2 Rc8 15.g5 Ne8 16.f4 Qe7 17.Ra3 Rc5 18.Bf3
Ra5 19.Bd2 Nc5 20.Qe2 Nb3 21.Ne4 Nxd2 22.Qxd2 Qd8
23.Qb4 b5 24.axb5 Rxb5 25.Qxc4 Qb6 26.Qc6 Bxb2 27.Qxb6
Rxb6 28.Ra2 Bg7



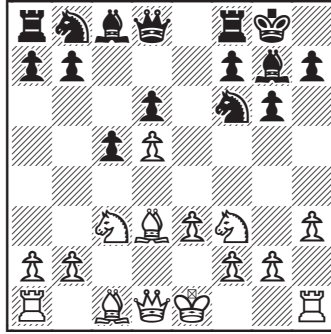
29.Rc1 h6 30.h4 hxg5 31.hxg5 f6 32.Rc6 Rxc6 33.dxc6 fxg5
 34.Nxg5 Nc7 35.Rd2 Rd8 36.Bg4 Bc3 37.Rd3 Ba5 38.Kg2 d5
 39.e4 d4 40.e5 Bb6 41.Rb3 Rb8 42.Rh3 Ba5 43.Rh6 Rb2+
 44.Kg3 Be1+ 45.Kf3 d3 46.Rxg6+ Kf8 47.Rd6 d2 48.Ke4 1-0

Notably, White's g4-g5 would be impossible in the normal Benoni, with White's pawn on e4, because Black could play ...Nc5, forcing the e-pawn forward and dissolving the center.

Some of these games where an IM or GM plays an e3-version of the Benoni come from an English move order, but in most cases White willingly plays e3 after Black has already signaled his interest in a Benoni. A couple (IM Renner – IM Kolbus 2008/9 Bundesliga and GM Lobron – GM Wojtkiewicz, 2000 Frankfurt) are notable for matching exactly the move order expected when the Zuka system is used against an early ...g6.

The Other Benoni Continuation

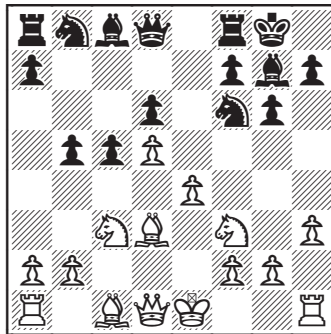
Dembo's other suggested move order provides a further example of the subtle value of delaying e4. After 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.e3 c5 5.d5, White can transpose to the line discussed above, but he can also push for a Bd3-continuation. After 5...d6 6.Nc3 0-0 7.h3 e6 8.Bd3 exd5 9.cxd5, we arrive once again at a near-replica of a major tabiya of the Benoni, but with White having his pawn on e3 rather than e4.



Modern Benoni with e3 instead of e4

If White's e-pawn were on e4 rather than e3, we would be at the critical position for the modern main line of the Benoni, reached thousands of times in tournament play between titled players. Black's essential problem in that system is a lack of natural pawn breaks. He cannot prepare ...b5 with ...a6 because White can just play a4. Even if he manages to get ...f5 in, it is quite risky owing to the weakness on e6.

For that reason, the critical line for Black (in the mainline version) is 9...b5!?



Normal Modern Main Line after 9...b5!?

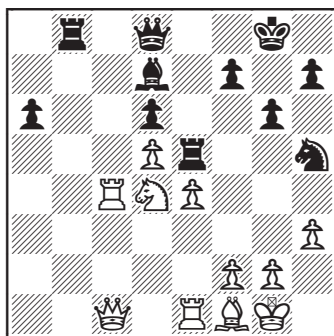
Overview: using Zuka Against ...g6-defenses

Black depends on the tactic 10.Bxb5 (10.Nxb5 Re8 avoids material loss owing to further tactics) Nxe4 11.Nxe4 Qa5+ to get compensation for his material after 12.Nfd2 Qxb5 13.Nxd6. Black can exert pressure down the e-file and create practical chances by making a mess of the Q-side with his pawn mass on that wing. (See *Mastering the Chess Openings: Volume 2* for illustrative examples and more discussion.)

But with White's pawn still on e3, this will obviously not work. Black's Knight no longer eats a pawn on its way to e4. Instead, Black has to come up with some other way to find play because White still has the long-term trump, his central majority.

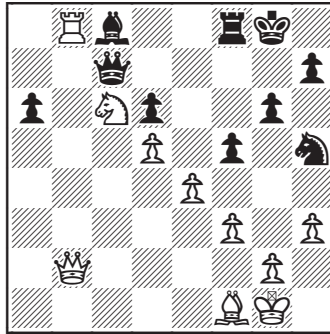
There are fewer typical move orders that arrive at this e3-version of the modern main line, but I did find one high-level game between Vladimir Burmakin and Andrey Zontakh (Portoroz, 1995), one year after the former had earned his GM title and two years before the latter would do the same.

That game continued 9...a6 10.a4 Nbd7 11.O-O Re8 12.Re1 Qc7 13.e4 Rb8 14.Bf4 Nh5 15.Bh2 c4 16.Bf1 Ne5 17.Nxe5 Bxe5 18.Bxe5 Rxe5 19.a5 b5 20.axb6 Rxb6 21.Ra4 Rxb2 22.Rxc4 Qd8 23.Qc1 Rb8 24.Ne2 Bd7 25.Nd4.



White has a great position because Black cannot stop an eventual Nc6. Black can lance the boil by exchanging on c6, but that gives White a dangerous, advanced, passed pawn. Instead, Black just decided to live with the Knight and White

built up a very strong position after 25...Qb6 26.Qd2 Rc8 27.Rxc8+ Bxc8 28.Nc6 Re8 29.Qc2 Nf6 30.Rb1 Qc7 31.f3 Nh5 32.Rb8 Rf8 33.Qb2 f5.



From here, opening the a3-f8 diagonal with e5 would have been decisive, but White instead continued with 34.Qb6?, allowing Black to exchange on e4 and then pressure that square. Black sacrificed one pawn to allow him to trade off enough others to escape with a draw.

Conclusion

The Zuka system works against Black's basic strategy in the various hypermodern ...g6 lines by refusing to give Black easy targets on d4 and e4 until after White has developed sufficiently (and forced Black to deviate from his preferred setups) to make attacking those squares unfeasible.

The system is rather unexplored, and even a small amount of study will generally guarantee that you have a better grasp on the relevant strategy than your opponent.

There are only a handful of important variations to know. In most games when White faces an early ...g6, he will find himself playing against either ...d6/...Nbd7/...e5 or the Sneaky Grünfeld. Rarely, White may find his opponent switching into a Benoni. In all three cases, White's delay of e4 has subtle and important benefits.