

# Benko Volga Gambit (ECO A57-A59)

## History

At IECC we're offered the chance to play thematic challenges. These games start from a certain point in the opening. Now as first example we're going to take a closer look at the Benko Volga Gambit. Now, I'm not a regular player of this opening, so these notes result from a little research in my books on chess.

Some special notes on the opening: historically it's the only opening that has a reference to a river in its name. The Hungarian player Paul Benko mentioned it in his book 'The Benko Gambit' (published in 1974). In the 1980's there were some Russian players that picked up this opening and played it frequently. There you have it: The Volga is a river that crosses Russia. There's a little controversy about this, since the first mentioning of this move sequence was by Argunov in 1946 (he lived in Kuibishev next to the Volga river). It's also known under the name Opocensky Gambit. One of the known players that used in practice was the Czech player Karel Opocensky. He analyzed it and played it rather often. It's classified as ECO A57 and is considered a semi open chess opening. It's somewhat related to the Indian and Benoni openings. So if you're familiar with those, you'll get a feeling about the game structure it's based on.

Now, one more thing to explain before we tackle the opening briefly. The term 'Gambit', what is it? Where does it come from? Here's what I found online:

### **gambit (n.)**

"chess opening in which a pawn is risked for advantage later," 1650s, *gambett*, from Italian *gambetto*, literally "a tripping up" (as a trick in wrestling), from *gamba* "leg," from Late Latin *gamba* (see **gambol**). Applied to chess openings in Spanish in 1561 by Ruy Lopez, who traced it to the Italian word, but the form in Spanish generally was *gambito*, which led to French *gambit*, which has influenced the English spelling of the word. Broader sense of "opening move meant to gain advantage" in English is recorded from 1855.

So in short, we're making someone trip by offering an extra pawn early in the game. Should make an interesting game, any gambit for that matter.

## Opening Theme

The idea behind this opening... it starts with 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 (listed as such in the thematic game list on the IECC website - Diagram 1).

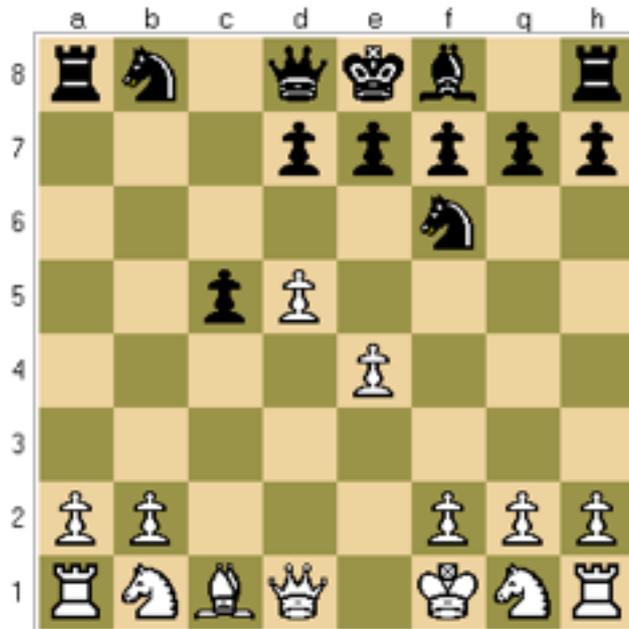


Diagram 1

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

If White accepts the pawn by 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 Bxa6 (Diagram 2) Black obtains a slight lead in development and (probably more important) lasting pressure on the queenside, where White's b-pawn is particularly vulnerable.

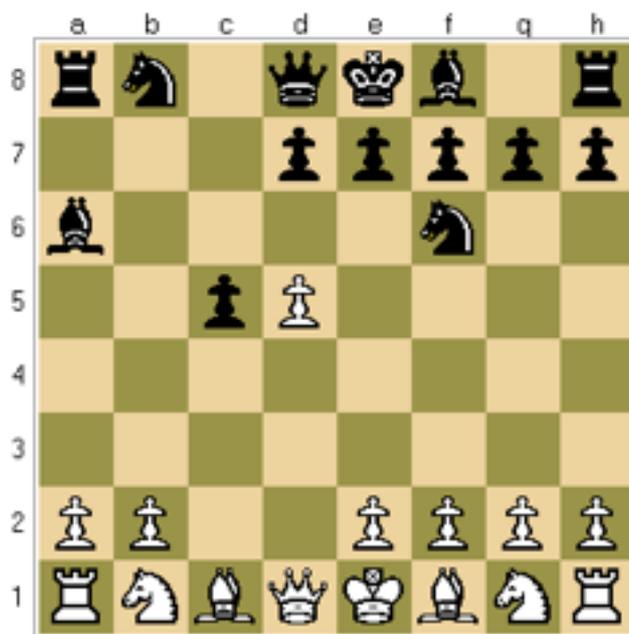


Diagram 2

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 Bxa6

Another problem is the White King Bishop. After playing the move e4, White will be confronted with Bxf1 by Black followed with Kxf1. The only option will be g3 for White in order to complete an artificial castling to get the King safe (example Diagram 3).

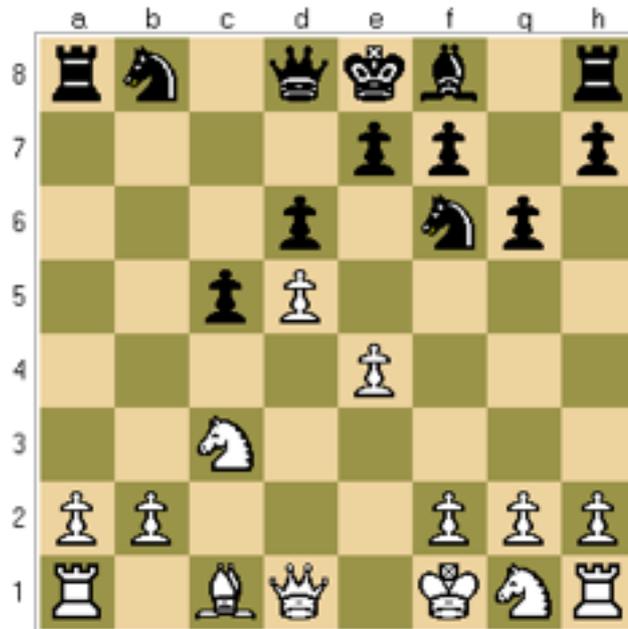


Diagram 3

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 Bxa6 6.Nc3 d6 7.e4 Bxf1 8.Kxg1 g6

End games where White manages reaching it with a pawn up are rarely (even theoretically) won by White, they often favor Black. White's most promising strategy may be to forget the fact that he's a pawn up and consolidate his position and try to play for a break in the center (move e5).

Although in theory White may be able to obtain some advantage by accepting the pawn, he has in practice achieved little success by doing so that attention has focused on the various ways of declining it. Several of these allow White to obtain at least an equal game without suffering indignities often attendant upon accepting the gambit. In particular 4.cxb5 a6 5.Nc3 is very effective against an unwary opponent, and 4.a4 is also not easy for Black to meet.

## Links

Here are a few interesting links.

[http://www.365chess.com/eco/A57-A59\\_Benko\\_gambit](http://www.365chess.com/eco/A57-A59_Benko_gambit)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benko\\_Gambit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benko_Gambit)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1673684> (Carlsen vs Bologan 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol3kTr3pQVk> (slower approach - probably more modern than my theory - more videos from here on)