

## The Clemenz

By Graham Brown

*As it is New Year holiday time we have another lighter issue today. As promised in CT-780, here is a look at my favourite opening **1.h3**. I would like to thank GM Mikhail Golubev and FM Stephen Berry for their help with this issue, lets start with ...*

## The 1...b6 argument

**1...b6** is the 'killer move' that is frequently championed (usually with scant supporting evidence) when **1.h3** is mentioned. And one is supposed to instantly and sheepishly admit that, at the very least, White's kingside is in tatters. But is **1...b6** really so good?

FM Stephen Berry has GM and IM scalps with **1. e4** but is also an expert **1. b3** player with White. I asked him if he thought that it's reverse, **1...b6**, exploited **h3** and his response was that he thought that, in fact, **h3** was a useful extra move here with **2. d4** a possible try.

To illustrate FM Berry's view that **1... b6** is not a refutation of **1.h3** I would like to present the following game, which I found on the excellent [Chess Lab](http://www.chesslab.net) site, in which a 2264 player holds the GM Bogdan Lalic to a draw in a 4<sup>th</sup> round tournament game.

□ **Xavier Delebarre (2264)**

■ **GM Bogdan Lalic (2520)**

Event: ch-Paris Paris FRA (4) - A00  
Clemenz

**1.h3 b6 2.e4 Qb7 3.d3 e6 4.d3 c5 5.g4 d5 6.Qg2 d4 7.Qce2 e5 8.f4 Qh4+ 9.Qf1 exf4 10.Qxf4 Qd8 11.h4 Qd6 12.Qd2 h5 13.gxh5 Qxf4 14.Qxf4 Qf6 15.Qf3 Qe7 16.Qe1 0-0 17.Qg1 Qbc6 18.Qh3 Qc8 19.Qxc8 Raxc8 20.a3 Qh8 21.Qg5 Qd8 22.Qg2 Qe6 23.Qxe6 fxe6 24.Qf1 Qh6 25.b3 Qf6 26.Qh2 Qxf1 27.Qxf1 Qf8 1/2-1/2**

Also on Chess Lab were success rates calculated from their 2 million game database with the following variations

**Clemenz 1..b6** 62%W 25% L 12%D

**Clemenz** 39%W 38%L 22%D

**Sicilian** 38% W33%L 29%D

I think that these statistics mean you can be very happy to see a move like **1...b6** given that the ordinary Clemenz only has a 39% win rate! Notice too that the Sicilian has a lower rate than either!

## The 1...d5 argument

Continuing our theme of weaker players beating stronger players we now look at a game of my own against an FM. I am an 1896 player and I can assure you that I am not in the habit of drawing with FMs ...

□ **G. Brown 1896**

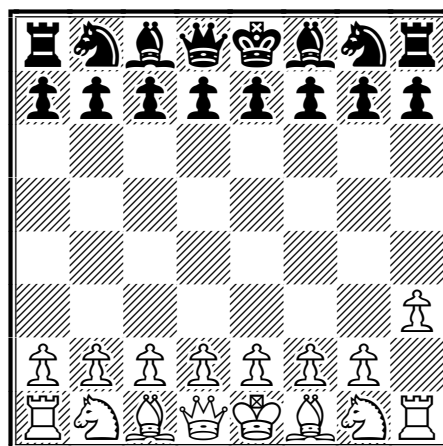
■ **FM Serge Vanderwaeren**

Event: 14th Open Tournament of Leuven, 2002 - A00 Clemenz

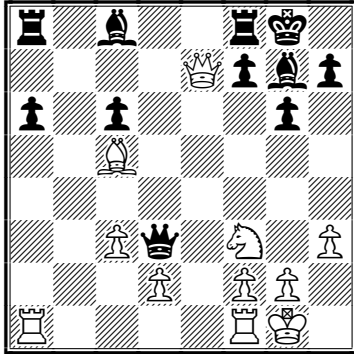
Annotations: **GM Mikhail Golubev**

Belgian FM Vanderwaeren likes to play unusual moves in the opening (such as **2...b6** after **1.e4 e6 2.d4**, just for example) and is known for that. Now, however he faces a really radical guy.

**1.h3**



1...d5 2.e4 ♘f6 3.exd5 ♘xd5 4.♗f3  
g6 5.♙c4 ♙g7 6.0-0 c5 7.♗c3  
♗xc3 8.bxc3 ♗c6 9.a4 0-0 10.♙a3  
♚a5 11.♙b5 a6 12.♙xc6 bxc6  
13.♚e2 ♚xa4 14.♙xc5 ♚xc2  
15.♚xe7 ♚d3



16.♚c7

Till now White's play was close to perfect, but here I have doubts if this miserable c6-pawn deserves spending two tempos to win. That operation leads to a deactivation of the White pieces. It is, basically, safer in chess to have a position with equal pawns and be more active than your opponent, than to stay a pawn up with your opponent being the active side. Here I would think about something like 16.♞fe1? ♙f5 (16...♙e6 17.♞xe6 fxe6 18.♚xe6+-) 17.♙d4!, switching off the black g7 bishop.

16...♞e8 17.♚xc6 ♙e6 18.♞fe1  
♞ec8 19.♚d6 ♚xd6 20.♙xd6 a5

G.B. A pawn down he offers a draw. It's the first round and he might want to avoid the 5 GMs! And he doesn't know that my endgame technique is terrible, I agree instantly! After all he is over 350 elo points higher than me.

M.G. Well done, Graham, but you forgot to finish the deal! ☺ As I see it, Black has compensation, but most important in chess is the psychological advantage, and that certainly stayed with White over the course of the game. 1/2-1/2

OK so I wimped out a bit in that game but it was the first round of the Open and I thought I might avoid the GMs with a draw. As it happened I still had to face a GM and my loss was

annotated by Mikhail in CT-780. But then again I was Black and couldn't play 1.h3!

Here is a game from later in the same tournament when I am finally playing a player of my own strength.

□ G. Brown

■ R. Valcke

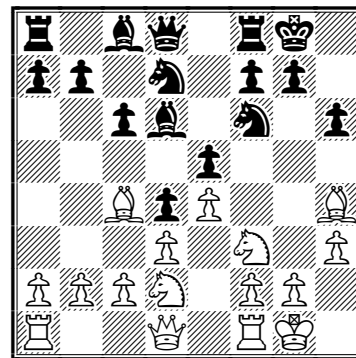
Event: 14th Open Tournament of Leuven, 2002 A00 Clemenz

Annotations: GM Mikhail Golubev

Once more Graham Brown's Reversed Englund Gambit game. I would be really afraid of facing Graham at the chessboard if he played this opening. (G.B. Considering Mikhail has just won in Bethune with 6½/7 I think I would be more afraid of Mikhail than him of me!)

1.h3 d5 2.e4 d4

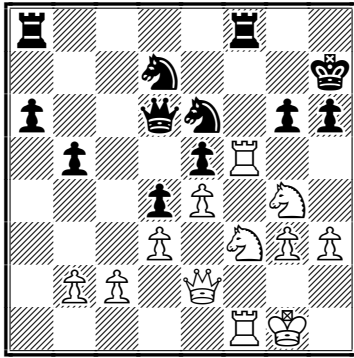
2...dxe4!? 3.♗c3 ♗f6 deserved some honest attention. White then, for example, can play 4.g4!?, winning back the pawn quite comfortably. 3.♙c4 e5 4.♗f3 ♙d6 5.d3 ♗f6 6.0-0 0-0 7.♙g5 h6 8.♙h4 ♗bd7 9.♗bd2 c6



10.♗h2!

White makes use of h2-h3. In the common (i.e. not reversed) Englund Gambit this manoeuvre would be impossible.

10...♙e7 11.♙g3 ♚c7 12.♙b3 b5  
13.a4 ♗c5 14.axb5 cxb5 15.f4 exf4  
16.♙xf4 ♙d6 17.♙xd6 ♚xd6  
18.♚f3 ♙e6 19.♙xe6 fxe6 20.♚e2  
e5 21.♞f5 ♗e6 22.g3 a6 23.♞af1  
♗d7 24.♗g4 ♚h7 25.♗f3 g6



### 26. ♖d2! g5?

Agony. It was necessary to take the rook, despite this White should be better after that as well. And now, as a logical continuation of the previous play, White gains a decisive advantage with a tactical blow:

27. ♖xh6! ♜xh6 28. ♖xg5+- ♜g7  
29. ♖f7! ♜xf7 30. ♜xf7+ ♜g6 31. h4  
♜h8 32. ♜e2 ♜xh4 33. gxf4 ♖f4  
34. ♜7xf4 exf4 35. ♜g4+ ♜h7  
36. ♜h1

Bravo, Graham!

1-0

## Summary including 1...c5 and 1...e5

I started playing the Clemenz this season and the first 2 games are in the appendix. Both these I won against good players. Then I went to Leuven and got a draw against an FM, a loss (but due to a mistake in a winning position) and 2 wins with it. So I have developed rather a liking for this unusual opening.

There are various ways of playing the opening. The way I play it is to reverse into Black openings most of the time. For 1...e5 I play the reverse Scandinavian and for d5 the reverse Englund Gambit. Against 1...c5 I play the grob simply because IM Basman considers the grob is highly effective with Black against the English.

Of course there are many other ways to approach this opening. You may have other favourite Black openings. They may or may not suit the extra move h6. Why not check to see if they

do? I have found that checking this for my Black openings has increased my understanding of them. Of course, I am also improving them as I play them twice as much now.

And if in your checking you find that 1.h3 doesn't suit your choice of Black opening reversed then look for another opening idea like Anderssen's Opening (1.a3) hmm ... now there's an idea!

Happy New Year and I hope you enjoy your chess whatever you play in 2003! ☺

## Appendix: Assorted Games, info and Correspondence.

### Game 1.

□ G. Brown 1896

■ G. Taylor 1880

Notes by FM S. Berry & G. Brown

1.h3 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♖c3 ♖f6

4.♖ge2 ♖f5

SB I can scarcely believe that 4 ... Bf5 was a good move.

5.g4 ♖g6 6.♖f4 ♖c6 7.♖b5 e6

8.♖xg6 hxg6 9.♜e2 ♖e7

10.♖xc6+ bxc6 11.♖xe4 ♜d5

12.d3 ♜b8 13.b3 ♖d7 14.♖b2

SB After move 14 you are very much better. I think that 15 O-O-O with the idea of Kb1/f4/ Rdf1 and the gradual advance of the kingside pawns was a good idea.

♜f8 15.♜d2 ♖e5 16.0-0-0 ♖b4

17.♜f4 ♖d6 18.♖xd6 cxd6

19.♖xe5 dxe5 20.♜a4 ♜g8 21.h4

a5 22.♜c4 ♜d6 23.h5 ♜b4 24.♜a6

g5 25.♜a8+ ♜h7 26.♜a7 ♜f8

27.♜e3 f6 28.h6 g6 29.♜a7+ 1-0

I was lucky to win this game as I drifted into a rather poor position in the middle game against Geoff who is a very strong local player who recently beat GM Matthew Turner.

### Game 2.

□ G. Brown 1896

■ B Hewson 1888

1.h3 b6 2.e4 ♖b7 3.♖c3 e6 4.a3 c5

5.♖f3 ♖c6 6.♖b5 ♖d4 7.d3 a6

8.♖c4 d6 9.0-0 ♖e7 10.♖xd4 cxd4

11. ♖e2 b5 12. ♗b3 ♘c6 13. f4 ♖b6  
14. ♘g3 ♗c8 15. f5 e5 16. ♗g5 ♘d8  
17. ♖h5 ♖c7 18. a4 ♗e7 19. axb5  
axb5 20. ♗d2 ♗a8 21. ♗xa8 ♗xa8  
22. ♗a1 ♗b7 23. ♗f1 ♗f6 24. ♖g4 h6  
25. ♘h5 ♖f8 26. ♘xf6 gxf6 27. ♖h5  
♖e7 28. ♗a1 ♗c6 29. ♗a5 ♖d7  
30. ♗b6 **Black Resigns**

**Clemenz Variations:** The Clemenz Opening starts with 1. h3 and has various forms such as: **1. h3 e5 2.a3 Clemenz: Global 1. h3 e5 2.a3 d5 Clemenz: Global (Creepy Crawly) Mead's, Basman's or de Klerk's 1.h3 d5, 2. g3 e5, 3. f4 Bxh3, 4. Bxh3 exf4 Amar gambit 1.h3 h5 2.g4 Clemenz Opening, Spike Lee Gambit**

#### Email exchange with my Dad:-

----- Original Message -----

**From:** kenneth brown

**To:** Graham

**Sent:** Monday, October 14, 2002

**8:02 PM Subject:** 1. h3

1. h3 is rubbish!?! Wasn't it Fred Reinfeld, probably the best chess teacher in America at the time, who said : "If you cannot find THREE reasons for making a move in an opening then don't play it - think of a better move. h3 makes an escape-hole for the K to stop a back row mate and it stops a Knight or Bishop later to g4. TWO reasons and you castled on the Queenside anyway! p.s. anyway I hope you win with h3 in Belgium!! Good to play something different and out of the book.

**From:** graham brown

**To:** kenneth brown

**Sent:** Monday, October 14, 2002

**9:34 PM Subject:** 1. h3

OK Dad I will give 3 reasons for this move.

**Reason 1:** I have a better record with Black than White in the league here. I have some good Black openings against 1.e4 and 1.d4 which I have good experience and knowledge of.

They are also full of tricks and traps. After 1.e4 I am always happy as I have a lot of experience in the Center Counter and have played countless games with it. When I play 1. e4 my opponents will also have their favourite reply. They may be experts in the Sicilian, Caro Cann, Pirc, etc etc. I am in their book, I am playing in their home laboratory, their chess study, lined with books on this specialist opening, playing against years of playing the same opening and learning hard lessons. They may only be amateurs like me but they are experts in their own openings, maybe knowing more than GMs in specific lines. With 1.h3 they are in my book and it is altered in that if they play 1.e5 or 1.d5 then I am playing reversed openings that I am expert in and also have a very useful extra move. With 1.h3 their entire opening library vanishes.

Here's a quote from FM Steve Berry

*"Can1 h3 be a bad move in either the Englund or the Centre-Counter? I doubt it so Black (apart from the fianchetto) might try 1... c5. 1 ...f5 you can answer by an early g4, Hah!"*

So I would argue that 1.h3 is ok as an extra move in both these lines. In fact I have worked out for myself that it is very useful in both Black openings. In fact I took some time finding a move that could reverse into a centre counter and 1.h3 is the only one that preserves all the lines I play.

**Reason 2:** h3 makes an escape-hole for the K to stop a back row mate (Kenneth Brown)

**Reason 3:** It stops a Knight or Bishop going to g4 (Kenneth Brown)

That is 3 reasons but I have more than 3 reasons for playing the move 1.h3.

**Reason 4:** If Black doesn't occupy the centre. I will do that and have avoided the Sicilian etc. The 1.. b6 line which

seems a popular way of not occupying the centre has a very poor statistical record and the game Delebarre V GM Bogdan Lalic shows that a 2264 player can draw with a Grandmaster with the Clemenz if he doesn't stake a claim for the center.

**Reason 5:** Surprise value ... it looks rather passive but isn't if played in counter attacking style. It can make the opponent a bit compacent.

**Reason 6:** By giving me more chance to play Black openings that I am good at it gives me more experience in them. If I lose, then having played an opening that I use a lot then I have learned a valuable lesson for the next game. If I win or draw great!

**Reason 7:** Deferred development in general and in warfare can be a good idea. Once you see what your opponent is doing you can plan the ideal counter measures.

**Reason 8:** I like plans with Nh2 and an f pawn advance.

**Reason 9:** Opponents sometimes don't realise that White has started if they come in late and thus the clock ticks on even more.

**Reason 10:** Time on the clock is vital, going into home-prepared lines like h3 is a tremendous advantage.

**Reason 11:** People are scared of losing to 1.h3 and it thus makes them play a different game to their normal game.

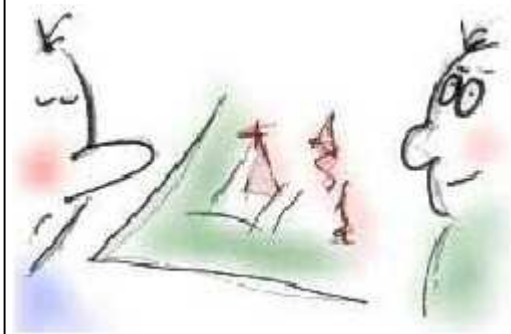
**Reason 12:** If you lose then you can always try 1.e4! next game.

Cheers!,

Graham

----- **End of Message** -----

He's a **Bad Loser** By GKB



"Well if you must win with such rubbish as 1.h3 - it's not played at the top levels you know!"

"OK then - when you reach them I won't play it against you!"

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**Website:** <http://www.chesstoday.net/>

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