

Pillsbury – Lasker

Cambridge Springs, 1904

1.d2-d4 d7-d5 2.c2-c4 e7-e6 3.♘b1-c3 ♘g8-f6 4.♘g1-f3 c7-c5

Queens Gambit Declined, Semi-Tarrasch defence.

5.♙c1-g5 c5xd4

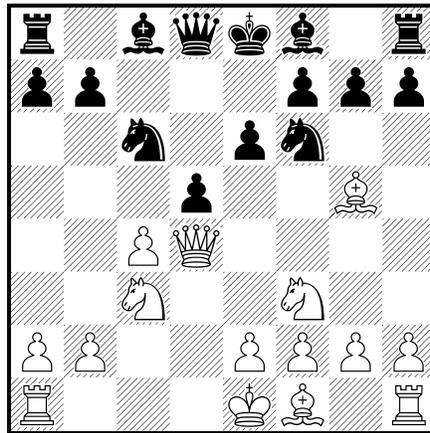
Black exchanges to avoid an isolated pawn.

6.♚d1xd4

This looks best, but allows ♘c6. It prevents Black from playing the central advance of ...e6-to-e5.

6...♘b8-c6

This is probably the best move here. (Despite what Reinfeld says, who claims that ...Be7 was better). 6...♙f8-e7 7.♖a1-d1.



7.♙g5xf6

The big improvement ... which Pillsbury had patiently saved for Lasker for almost eight years. Not only is this a surprise for Lasker, it even refutes what the World Champion had thought – and written – about this position. This had to be VERY carefully worked out by Pillsbury, as the loss of his dark-squared Bishop is potentially EXTREMELY dangerous for White.]

7.♚d4-h4 ♙f8-e7 8.0-0-0 ♚d8-a5 Pillsbury–Lasker, St. Petersburg 1895.

7...g7xf6

This could be forced. The funny part of this story – and a facet that is not very well known – is that Lasker said, in his chess magazine, that this position probably "clearly favored Black."

If: 7...♘c6xd4 8.♙f6xd8 ♘d4-c2+ (if 8...♘d4xf3+ 9.e2xf3 ♙e8xd8 10.c4xd5 e6xd5 11.♘c3xd5 wins a pawn) 9.♙e1-d2 ♘c2xa1 10.♙d8-h4 and the knight is trapped in the corner.; or 7...♚d8xf6 8.♚d4xf6 g7xf6 9.c4xd5 ♘c6-b4 10.♖a1-c1 ♘b4xd5 11.♘c3xd5 e6xd5 and White as the better pawn structure.

8. ♔d4-h4

The best square for the Queen.

8... d5xc4

It looks ugly to open the game in this fashion, but Black may not have any choice at this point.

8... d5-d4 9. ♖a1-d1 or castling long is also strong; or 8... ♕f8-b4 9. c4xd5 e6xd5 10. ♖a1-d1 ♕b4xc3+ 11. b2xc3; if 8... ♔d8-b6 9. 0-0-0.

9. ♖a1-d1 ♕c8-d7

Lasker was famous for being able to avoid the worst ... ('damage control') ... but here it does not help him. Pillsbury has analyzed this position very deeply. The next few moves are all the very best and or forced ... for both parties.

10. e2-e3 ♞c6-e5

Best ... according to the principle that the player who is being attacked, (or is under pressure); should seek to relieve problems by exchanges.

10... f6-f5 Kasparov. 11. ♔h4xc4; or 10... b7-b5?! 11. ♞c3xb5 ♖a8-b8 12. ♔h4xc4 ♔d8-a5+ 13. ♖d1-d2! (or 13. ♞b5-c3 ♖b8xb2).

11. ♞f3xe5

11. ♕f1-e2 komodo 8.

11... f6xe5



12. ♔h4xc4

There is no escape for Lasker ... who would like to exchange Queens, if only he could. 12. ♔h4xd8+ ♖a8xd8 13. ♕f1xc4 and the position looks very balanced.

12... ♔d8-b6

Lasker probes White's Queen-side, and also puts out some 'feelers' in this position. 'Do you want a draw?' 'Do you really want to sacrifice a pawn?' and 'How do you feel today?'

12... ♖a8-c8 13. ♔c4-e4 (or 13. ♔c4-b3).

13. ♕f1-e2!

Just how much courage it took to play this can readily be seen ... in some lines White has to sacrifice BOTH of his Queen-side Pawns (Kasparov).

13. ♖d1-d2 ♕d7-c6 14. ♕f1-e2!

13... ♖b6xb2

As a mathematician, Lasker might have thought: "Having stated 'A,' I must logically follow with 'B' in this position." This has been heavily condemned by some writers ... but is it so bad? Is it wrong to possibly take a risk ... if all of the other variations very clearly favor White.

Lasker probably should not have taken this pawn. (But you should also understand that this was often the Lasker method, he would choose to mix it up and make things difficult and more complex most of the time. Going quietly was not Lasker's way to handle a defense. Anyone who has carefully studied the games of this great player should be able to verify this). Instead: 13...♙f8-e7 14.0-0 (Interesting was 14.♞d1-d2) 14...♞a8-d8 (14...♞d7-c6 komodo 8) 15.♞c4-e4 White is very clearly better here in this position.; or 13...♞b6-b4? 14.♞c4-c7! ♞d7-c6 15.♞e2-b5 ♞c6xb5 16.♞c7xb7 ♞a8-d8 17.♞b7xb5+ ♞b4xb5 18.♞c3xb5 Black probably cannot hold this ending.; if 13...♞d7-c6 14.♞e2-f3 ♞c6xf3 15.g2xf3 ♞f8-e7 (or 15...a7-a6; and not 15...♞b6xb2 16.♞d1-b1 ♞b2-a3 17.♞c4-b5+ ♞e8-e7 18.♞c3-e4 ♞a8-d8 19.♞b5xb7+ ♞e7-e8 20.♞e4-f6#)

14.0-0

This is clearly the best move for White. Pillsbury was still moving fairly quickly, so we can safely assume that this was all part of the great American player's preparation.

14...♞a8-c8

This is probably the best move for Black – the other alternatives are clearly and demonstrably worse.

14...♞f8-b4? 15.♞c3-b5 (or 15.♞c3-e4 komodo 8) 15...♞a8-c8 16.♞b5-c7+ ♞e8-e7 17.♞d1-b1 ♞b2-c3 18.♞c4-h4+ f7-f6 19.♞f1-c1 ♞c3-d2 20.♞h4xb4+ Black has only managed to achieve a lost position;

or 14...♞d7-c6? A natural move, Black seeks to move the Bishop off the (always dangerous) d-file and possibly exploit his own half-open g-file. 15.♞e2-h5! ♞f8-e7 16.♞c4xe6 0-0 17.♞e6xe5 White is clearly much better here, (possibly "+/-"); Black is a Pawn down ... and has a rotten position;

if 14...♞h8-g8? 15.♞d1xd7!! ♞e8xd7 16.♞f1-b1 ♞b2-c2 and mate in 3 (or 16...♞b2-a3?? 17.♞b1xb7+); maybe 14...♞b2-b6 15.♞d1xd7 ♞e8xd7 16.♞f1-d1+ ♞d7-e7 17.♞c4-e4 ♞a8-c8 18.♞c3-d5+ e6xd5 19.♞e4xe5+ ♞b6-e6 20.♞e5xh8 ♞c8-c2 21.♞e2-f3.

15.♞c4-d3 ♞c8-c7

If you have studied Lasker's games, you will know that he rarely was satisfied with a purely passive defense, with no chance of a victory. Of course not: 15...♞c8xc3 16.♞d3xd7#; if 15...♞d7-c6 16.♞e2-f3 ♞c6xf3?? (16...♞f8-e7! Marco) 17.♞d3-d7#

16.♞c3-e4!

The correct move. 16.♞c3-b5 ♞b2xb5 17.♞d3xb5 ♞d7xb5 18.♞e2xb5+ ♞e8-e7= Black is a Pawn up in a position where there are opposite-colored Bishops.

16...♞f8-e7

This looks forced: 16...f7-f5? 17.♞e4-f6+ and white wins; Kasparov: 16...♞b2-c2 17.♞e4-d6+ ♞f8xd6 18.♞d3xd6 ♞c2-c5 may be an adequate defense; if 16...♞b2xa2?? 17.♞e4-f6+ ♞e8-e7 18.♞f6xd7 wins.

17.♞e4-d6+

This is probably the best way for White to proceed from this point. Kasparov says that the position reached after the continuation of: 17.♞d1-d2 ♞b2-b6 18.♞f1-b1 ♞b6-c6 19.♞e2-f3 ♞c6-a6 20.♞d3xa6 b7xa6 might be "a tenable endgame" for Black, but I would have an uneasy position about this position if I were the second player here.

17...♞e8-f8

This looks to be Lasker's best bet.

18.♞d6-c4

The correct move ... Kasparov, (and many others); give this move without any comment or mark of any kind. This is strange as Rd2, Bh5, and f4 all looked promising.

18... ♖b2-b5

At this point, I would be very curious to know how Lasker assessed his position ... equal, or worse? 18... ♖b2xa2 19. ♗c4xe5 looks very dangerous for Black.

19.f2-f4

A truly brilliant move. In a way, this move is also the most logical ... White wishes to open the f-file against the Black King.

19...e5xf4?

I don't think it is a good idea for Black to open the file here: 19...e5-e4 20. ♖d3-d4 ♗f8-g8 21. ♖d1-d2 ♖b5-c5 22. ♖d4xe4 but it costs him a pawn to do so; or 19... ♖b5-c5 20. ♗c4xe5 (20.f4xe5) 20... ♗d7-e8 Probably the safest move.

20. ♖d3-d4

Pillsbury once again shows the correct path. It is entirely possible that the line, beginning with the move: 20. ♖f1xf4 leads to a position where White also has a fairly solid edge.

20...f7-f6 21. ♖d4xf4

The most natural move, and definitely the best.

21... ♖b5-c5

It is entirely possible that Lasker really thought he was OK in this position. Black only needs one or two moves to establish his counter play.

22. ♗c4-e5

The best move – either Lasker had overlooked this shot, or simply he had underestimated its impact.

22. ♖f4-h6+ komodo 8 22... ♗f8-e8 23. ♗c4-d6+ ♗e8-d8 (if 23... ♗e7xd6?? 24. ♗e2-h5+ ♗e8-d8 25. ♖h6xf6+ ♗d8-c8 26. ♖f6xh8+ ♗d6-f8 27. ♖f1xf8+) 24. ♗d6-f7+

22... ♗d7-e8

This was forced: 22... ♗d7-a4? 23. ♖d1-d4 (or 23. ♗e2-h5!)

23. ♗e5-g4

White had (at least!) 2 other possibilities which also yielded a sizeable advantage to the first player: 23. ♖f4-g5 komodo 8 23...f6-f5 24. ♖g5-h6+ ♗f8-g8 25. ♖f1xf5 e6xf5 26. ♗e2-c4+ ♖c5xc4 27. ♗e5xc4; or 23. ♖d1-d4 Kasparov 23... ♖h8-g8 24. ♖d4-c4 ♖c5-d5 25. ♗e2-f3 ♖d5xe5 26. ♖c4xc7.

23...f6-f5?

This looks absolutely forced, but according to engine Komodo 8 a blunder:

23... ♖h8-g8! 24. ♗g4xf6 ♗e7xf6 25. ♖f4xf6+ ♖c7-f7 26. ♖f6xe6 ♖g8-g6 27. ♖e6-e4 ♖c5-c6; if 23... ♗e8-g6?! 24. ♗g4xf6 ♗f8-g7

24. ♖f4-h6+ ♗f8-f7

Apparently this is forced: 24... ♗f8-g8 25. ♖h6xe6+ ♗g8-g7 26. ♖d1-d5 ♖c5-b6 27. ♖e6-e5+ ♗g7-g8 28. ♖e5xf5

25. ♗e2-c4!!

An ultra-brilliant move ... and even praised by Garry Kasparov as ... the "right way" to proceed.

25... ♖c7-c6

This too – is apparently forced: 25... ♖c5xc4 26. ♗g4-e5+

26. ♖f1xf5+

A very brilliant move, and not at all obvious, but practical and so best seems:

26. ♖d1-d4 komodo 8 26... b7-b5 27. ♕c4-b3 ♖f7-g8 28. ♗g4-f6+ ♕e7xf6 29. ♖h6xf6 ♖c5-f8 30. ♕b3xe6+ ♖c6xe6 31. ♖f6xe6+ ♖g8-g7 32. ♖f1xf5 wins.

26... ♖c5xf5

Of course this is also forced: 26... ♖f7-g8 27. ♖f5xc5 mate in 6 (27. ♕c4xe6+ mate in 7)

27. ♖d1-f1 ♖f5xf1+

28. ♖g1xf1 ♕e8-d7

Black struggles to free his trapped Rook. Black MUST hurry, his King is in very dire straits here: 28... ♖c6xc4 29. ♗g4-e5+

29. ♖h6-h5+ ♖f7-g8

30. ♗g4-e5

A beautiful game by Pillsbury, many consider it his best and/or greatest game. It was also played in the twilight of his career, Pillsbury died just two years later in 1906.

1-0