

Introduction

During the eight years that the late Aleksander Wojtkiewicz (1963-2006) lived in the United States, he won or tied for first place in more than 240 tournaments. He averaged over thirty tournament victories a year – or nearly three per month. “Wojo,” as he was affectionately called by his fans, was arguably the most successful tournament player in the United States, winning the Grand Prix six years in a row from 1999 to 2004. During that time, however, he was not considered one of the best players in the world. Although his name was sporadically on the FIDE “Top 100” rating list, his official ELO rating – which peaked at 2595 – never made it past the magic 2600 mark. How, then, did he achieve such success?

The answer is this: Wojtkiewicz was ruthlessly pragmatic in his approach to tournament chess. His opening repertoire was designed in such a way that he could essentially play his games on “auto-pilot.” He considered his games against non-masters to be trivial, and he rarely expended precious brainpower on them. Between moves, he could often be seen outside the tournament hall – usually at the nearest bar. Wojo would then return to the board after having been away, look at the position for five or ten seconds, and throw out a move. After scrawling on his score sheet, he would turn around and leave again. Other grandmasters devoted their full attention to beating weaker players, but Wojo played as if he already had everything worked out to mate.

This style of devil-may-care chess was possible for Wojo because he had – like a professional playing multiple poker games at once – a “system” for winning chess tournaments. Wojo realized that all he needed to do as a chess professional was to win his games against amateurs *a certain percentage of the time*. To this end he designed a repertoire that would deliver the necessary winning percentage while requiring the least effort. In order for an opening line to be incorporated into Wojo’s “system,” it had to meet certain criteria:

- **It must have “surprise value.”**
Wojo didn’t mind if his opponents had seen a particular line before, or even if they knew some of the theory. Instead, it was more important to him that they not have a great deal of experience in handling the resulting middlegame or endgame positions. This gave Wojo a “home-field” advantage, forcing his opponents to fight on his turf.

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- **It must be relatively sound.**

Particularly when playing Black, Wojo had no objections to playing “risky” or “experimental” lines. But if the refutation could simply be looked up in a book, it was off limits.

- **It must be disconcerting to play against.**

Wojo understood the psychology of the average “weekend warrior” tournament player, and he knew the fastest way to beat him: *force him to play a type of position that makes him uncomfortable*. With this in mind, Wojo would steer for quiet endgame advantages against “sharp” openings, but would play to “mix things up” against more docile ones. If the nature of the resulting middlegame or endgame position turned out not to be to the opponent’s taste, Wojo’s system had done its job.

- **It must fit in with the rest of the repertoire.**

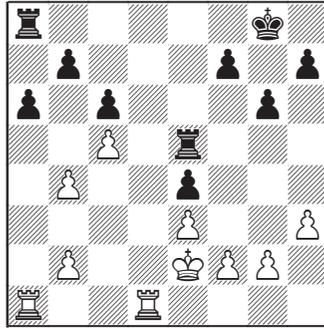
Wojo’s openings were designed to reach certain types of positions. For example, lines leading to queenless middlegames were commonly incorporated into his system. By using lines that complemented one another, Wojo was able to increase his advantage in experience over his opponents, maintaining his “home-field” advantage.

At the time of Wojo’s death in 2006, he had nearly perfected his system. Between 1998 and 2006, he defeated over 1,000 master-level players in U.S. tournaments. But – more importantly – he was able to consistently beat players rated between 2200 and 2400 an incredible 80% of the time. Draws made up 16%, and the remaining 4% were losses. Thus, his overall score against masters was 88%. Against those rated between 2000 and 2200, Wojo won 88%, drew 8%, and lost 4% for an overall score of 92%.

This book focuses on the opening lines Wojo decided to use in his system with White, specifically those occurring after 1.♭f3 d5. Throughout the work, the reader will certainly notice opportunities Black has to play for “drawn” endgames. This is because Wojo did *not* require that his system be able to defeat other grandmasters a large percentage of the time. For that, Wojo sometimes used a different set of openings – for instance, against the Slav with 1.♭f3 d5 2.d4 c6 3.c4 ♭f6, Wojo claimed only that 4.♖c2 was a great weapon for beating “weaker players.” By this, he meant players rated under 2400. Against other top players, Wojo was far more likely to play 4.♭c3 if he truly needed to win.

The fact that the repertoire we present allows Black to suffer to a draw in some spots does not bother us. Here is one example. In our recommended Wojo repertoire against the Slav Defense, the following position is reached after 1.♭f3 d5 2.d4 ♭f6 3.c4 c6 4.♖c2 g6 5.♙f4 ♙f5 6.♖b3 ♖b6 7.c5 ♖xb3 8.axb3 ♙xb1 9.♙xb1 ♭bd7 10.b4 ♙g7 11.h3 0–0 12.e3 a6 13.♙d3 ♭e4 14.♙e2 ♖fe8 15.♙a1 e5 16.dxe5 ♭xe5 17.♙xe4 dxe4 18.♭xe5 ♙xe5 19.♙xe5 ♖xe5 20.♙hd1:

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As we explain in Chapter 13, this position is only marginally better for White, and should be drawn with accurate play. Yet the fact that this endgame is reached does not invalidate our choice of 4.♞c2, as in practice White manages to win this type of endgame at least 1 in every 3 games – or, if White is the stronger player, perhaps even 1 in every 2 games. That means White is scoring between 66% and 75%. Considering that even most master-level players will have made a mistake with Black prior to this point (for instance, the defensive 8...♙b1! is a difficult move to play), White can still manage to win the required percentage of games with 4.♞c2 to meet Wojo’s standards.

Now, on to the work itself. The book is divided into four parts, with each part covering one significant aspect of Wojo’s repertoire. Part I focuses on the Closed Catalan, which is really the heart and soul of the “Wojo system.” Because understanding the themes found in the Closed Catalan is so essential to the rest of the book, we have devoted the first two chapters of Part I entirely to the ideas behind the Closed Catalan opening. Only once the reader has grasped the key concepts do we attempt to outline a theoretical framework for that portion of the repertoire. This meant devoting more space to the Closed Catalan than even most “Catalan” books do, but it was well worth it: if you, the reader, are attracted to the example games presented in Part I, you will undoubtedly be interested in the rest of Wojo’s repertoire with White. And since so many games at club level feature the Closed Catalan, it is not hard for you to start applying the knowledge learned in Chapters 1 and 2 immediately.

Part II of the book focuses on the Open Catalan. This is by far the largest part of the book. It deals with both Black’s more traditional methods of development (such as ...♙f8-e7 and ...0-0) and his other ways of bringing his pieces into the game. We have organized the chapters in this part of the book more or less in order of their importance. The material in chapters 4 through 7 deals with Black’s most popular responses; the remaining chapters cover tries seen somewhat less frequently. Although we have struggled to highlight ideas and themes, some sections of Part II get quite theoretical. In our efforts to make this work an important contribution to the body of theory surrounding Wojo’s lines, we have included much of both existing theory and our own analysis, which we hope will not be too burdensome to the average reader.

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Part III deals with the Slav Defense, and in particular, Wojo's special treatment with 4.♖c2. For those who enjoyed Part I of the book, this part should also prove to be a good read. Themes, ideas, plans, and strategies once again reassert their predominance over theory, so there is really nothing at all in this part to scare away anyone with a fear of theoretical variations. Even someone playing well above master level should be able to get by without committing any variations to memory. That said, theory has largely ignored Wojo's interpretation of the 4.♖c2 Slav – it certainly isn't mentioned in many works – so we have tried to fill that gap in the existing chess literature. If the reader is looking for extensive coverage of the move 4.♖c2, he will certainly find it.

Finally, Part IV deals with Black's miscellaneous defenses – the Queen's Gambit Accepted, the Tarrasch Defense, the Chigorin, and a few other openings. Wojo's treatments of these openings should appeal to players who play the Catalan and want to force Black to play on their "home turf." With the exception of Chapter 16, which covers the Tarrasch Defense, these sections do not contain quite as much theory. We could easily have chosen to include less theoretical material in the Tarrasch chapter, but we felt that Wojo's systems with b2-b3 have gotten less than their fair share of attention in the past and we wanted to make up for it.

We sincerely hope that this book proves useful to those looking to explore Wojo's white opening repertoire. We also hope that, through this project, we are able to preserve some of the vast legacy left to the chess world by the genius that was Aleksander Wojtkiewicz.