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The Ruy Lopez is one of the oldest and most important openings. After 1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6, White plays 3 b5 (1a). This looks less scary than 3 c4 as White doesn’t target the f7-pawn, but White’s plan is to put pressure on the e5-pawn by attacking its defender. Sooner or later, Black will need to parry this threat, and White hopes to use the time gained to establish a strong grip on the centre. Note also that Black’s pawn-thrust ...d5, which we saw repeatedly in the Giuoco Piano and Two Knights, will not hit the bishop. Black has a wide choice of replies, as White isn’t yet threatening 4 xc6 dxc6 5 xe5, because 5...d4 regains the pawn with a good game. Thus 3...d6 is unnecessarily passive, and 4 d4 gives White the freer game. The main line is 3...a6, with points like 4 a4 d6 5 d4?! b5! 6 b3 xd4 7 xd4 exd4 8 xd4?? c5, when ...c4 will win the white bishop. The solid 3...f6 (3) and the wild 3...f5 (4) are also possible, while the natural 3...c5 leaves the bishop exposed to White’s c3 and d4 pawn-break.

Basic Positions of the Ruy Lopez

1a) Black moves
3...a6 forces the bishop to declare its intentions. For 4 xc6 dxc6 see diagram 2a. 4 a4 keeps the bishop, waiting for a better moment to exchange on c6.

1b) Black moves
Then 4 f6 5 0-0 leads to this position. It looks as if White has forgotten about his e-pawn, but see page 40 for 5 xe4. The main move is 5 c7 (pages 36-9).
2a) **White moves**  
After 5 d4 exd4 6 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}x}d4 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}xd4 7 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xd4, a pure pawn ending would be bad for Black, so he must avoid too many exchanges and put his strong bishops to work. 5 \text{\textit{\textbf{B}}}xe5 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}d4 gives White nothing.

2b) **White moves**  
The position after 5 0-0 \text{\textit{\textbf{B}}}xe4!? 6 h3 h5!. The bishop is taboo: 7 hxg4? hxg4 8 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}h2? \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}h4. After 7 d3 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}f6 Black intends ...\text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}e7-g6 and may exchange on f3 if this doubles White's pawns too.

3) **White moves**  
This defence has the idea 4 0-0 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xe4 5 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}e1 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}d6, attacking the b5-bishop. This pops up again in the line 5 d4 \text{\textit{\textbf{B}}}d6 6 \text{\textit{\textbf{B}}}xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}f5 8 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}xd8+ \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xd8, with a complex queenless middlegame.

4) **White moves**  
A point of this thrust is 4 d4 fxe4 5 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xe5 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xe5 6 dxe5 c6. If the bishop moves, 7...\text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}a5+ wins the e5-pawn. After 4 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}c3 fxe4 5 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xe4 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}f6 6 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}xf6+ \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}xf6 7 \text{\textit{\textbf{W}}}e2 \text{\textit{\textbf{Q}}}e7 Black offers a pawn to get piece-play.
A true test of chess understanding

1 e4 e5 2 Ìf3 Ìc6 3 Íb5 a6 4 Ía4 Ìf6 5 0-0 Ïe7 (1a) is known as the Closed Ruy Lopez, and often leads to play of great strategic subtlety. But don’t be fooled by the name: there are plenty of ways for the game to open up. First things first though: White now needs to protect his e4-pawn, so 6 Îe1 is the normal move. White then threatens to exchange on c6 and take on e5, so Black prevents this idea with 6...b5 7 Íb3. You might think that White has simply lost time with this bishop, but it has arrived on a very good diagonal, and Black’s moves ...a6 and ...b5 can provide useful targets for White. Having secured his e5-pawn, Black needs to decide how to deploy his pieces. 7...d6 is the standard move, bringing in ideas of ...Íg4 and also with the positional threat of ...Ìa5, exchanging off White’s potent bishop. That’s why White normally replies 8 c3 (1b), which also prepares the move d4. Then after 8...0-0 9 h3 (2a) we have reached a position where Black has a very wide choice of plans.

Basic Positions of the Closed Ruy Lopez

1a) White moves
Direct attacking methods achieve little for White here. His best plan is to secure his e-pawn and play c3 and d4, building a strong and flexible pawn-centre.

1b) Black moves
Now 8...Ìa5 gets nowhere after 9 Ïc2. Following 8...0-0 9 d4, Black’s 9...g4! idea puts pressure on White, as 10 h3? Ïxf3 11 Ïxf3 exd4 costs him a pawn.
2a) Black moves
White plans d4, with an ideal centre, and then to develop by Ìbd2, and if possible Ìf1-g3, freeing the c1-bishop. Black’s main defences all hinder this manoeuvre – see the next three diagrams.

2b) Black moves
This is the Chigorin Defence, 9...Ìa5 10 Ìc2 c5 11 d4. Now 11...Ìc7 12 Ìbd2 Ìc6 13 d5 closes the game, 11...exd4 12 cxd4 Ìb4 13 Ìb1 c5. But note 11 Ìg5 Ìf8 12 Ìf3, seeking a draw.

2c) White moves
9...Ìb7 10 d4 Ìe8 puts direct pressure on e4, and can lead to exciting play in lines like 11 Ìbd2 Ìf8 12 a4 h6 13 Ìc2 exd4 14 cxd4 Ìb4 15 Ìb1 c5. But note 11 Ìg5 Ìf8 12 Ìf3, seeking a draw.

2d) White moves
Breyer’s 9...Ìb8 10 d4 Ìbd7 11 Ìbd2 Ìb7 reorganizes Black’s pieces flexibly, with ...d5 and ...c5 both still possible. The two players must manoeuvre carefully, ready for many different structures.