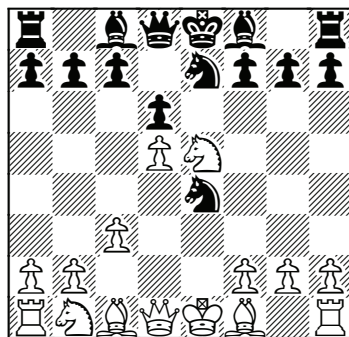


# Illustrative Games

The Ponziani Opening bluntly attempts to take control of the centre with 3 c3 followed by d2-d4. This classical motivation is shared in the Giuoco Piano line: 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 c3 followed by d2-d4. The Ponziani delays the king bishop placement to execute the plan for central control one move quicker. The potential power of this approach can be seen with the following opening trap.



## Game 1 G.Fouchet-D.Volpi Milan 1992

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 d4 ♘xe4  
5 d5 ♘e7 6 ♘xe5 d6?

(see following diagram)

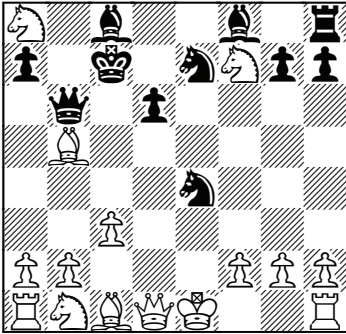
A common mistake that frequently occurs in blitz.

7 ♙b5+! c6 8 dxc6 ♚b6?

Threatens mate, but loses in pretty style. Black had to play 8...bxc6 9 ♘xc6 ♚b6 10 ♘d4+ ♚d8 11 0-0, though he has zero compensation for the pawn and his king is in trouble.

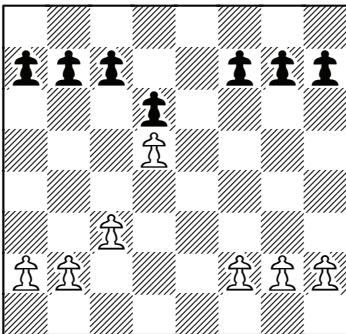
9 cxb7+ ♚d8 10 ♘xf7+ ♚c7 11 bxa8 ♘+  
1-0

*Ponziani Power!* This trap is well worth memorizing, and a beautiful example of under-promotion!



It is this opening trap that highlights the major difference between the Ponziani Opening and the Giuoco Piano. White can grab space boldly with d4-d5, and can later decide the most effective placement for the king bishop, e.g. ♖f1-b5+.

Despite this setback, 3...♘f6 is the most popular response for Black. The move develops a piece and puts immediate counter-pressure on the white e-pawn. A typical move sequence is **1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 d4 ♗xe4 5 d5 ♗e7 6 ♗xe5 ♗g6 7 ♚d4 ♚f6 8 ♚xe4 ♚xe5 9 ♚xe5+ ♗xe5 10 ♗d2 d6**, leading to the following pawn structure:



White has a nice space advantage due to his pawn on d5. His usual strategy is to play a4-a5, then c3-c4 with b2-b4 (or vice versa). The breaks will be with c4-c5 or b4-b5 depending on how the middlegame unfolds. Black has little to counter this queenside expansion plan, since playing ...c7-c6 often leaves the d6-pawn weak and on an open file after a likely d5xc6. Black's best strategy is to seek opportunities on the kingside, but initially White has no real weaknesses there. Ultimately, Black must be patient and wait for his counter-chances. He often initiates piece trades to relieve pressure on his position, but we hope to show this passive approach is not pleasant for Black.

We continue to look at games featuring 3...♘f6. The following game shows White can play simple solid positional moves and squeeze Black.

*Game 2*  
**A.Lukin-M.Novikov**  
 St Petersburg 1993

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 d4 ♗xe4 5 d5 ♗e7 6 ♗xe5 ♗g6 7 ♚d4 ♗xe5**

We suspect Black was theoretically unprepared to meet the Ponziani. 7...♚f6 is the common move here, covered in Chapter 1. Initially, 7...♗xe5 appears to be a well-principled reaction. By trading a set of pieces, including the queens, Black believes that

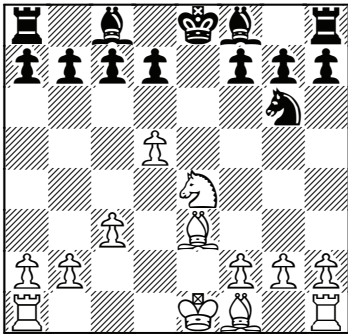
*Play the Ponziani*

White is left with no useful advantage. While that thought process might be correct in some other openings, in the Ponziani Black suffers for a long time due to his opponent's space advantage.

**8 ♖xe4 ♜e7 9 ♙e3 ♘g6 10 ♘d2**

White has a good alternative in 10 ♖c4 c6 11 ♘d2 ♜h4 12 ♜e2 ♙d8 13 ♘f3 ♜h5 14 0-0-0 ♙c7 15 ♘g5 ♜xe2 16 ♙xe2 with a strong initiative in M.Schäfer-R.Stern, German League 1993.

**10...♜xe4 11 ♘xe4**



This position shows the power of the Ponziani. Despite the trading of queens, White has a useful space advantage and a lead in development.

**11...f6**

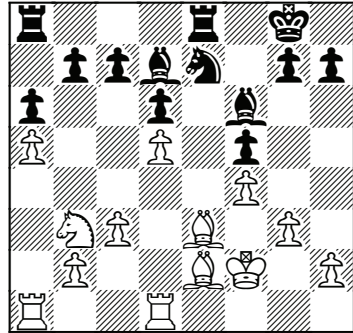
Black would like to have played 11...d6, but after 12 ♙d4 ♘f4 13 c4 he is struggling to develop.

**12 ♙e2 d6 13 0-0**

Castling queenside would slow down White's plans to advance pawns on that side of the board.

**13...♙e7 14 f4 f5 15 ♘d2 ♙f6 16 ♘b3 0-0 17 ♙f2 ♙d7 18 g3 ♘e7 19 ♜fd1**

**♜fe8 20 a4 a6 21 a5**

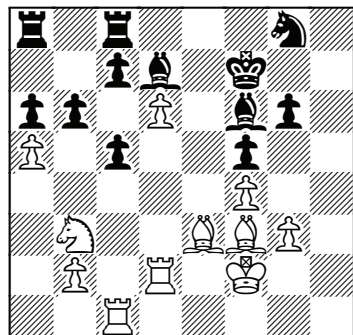


White's last two moves are a key part of the plan to keep Black bottled up. Chess engines will give White almost no edge, but notice how Black struggles to find anything useful to do.

**21...♙f7 22 ♙f3 g6 23 ♜d2 h5 24 c4 h4 25 c5!**

Transforming his space advantage into a direct plan of action. White is in complete control here.

**25...♘g8 26 ♜c1 hxg3+ 27 hxg3 ♜ec8 28 ♘d4 dxc5 29 ♘b3! b6 30 d6!**



The house of cards collapses! Black loses material and shortly the game.

**30...cxd6 31 ♙xa8 ♜xa8 32 ♜xd6 ♙e6**

33 ♖xb6 c4 34 ♘c5 ♙d5 35 ♜d1 ♞e7 36 ♞d7 ♙g7 37 ♞e5+ ♙xe5 38 fxe5 ♜h8 39 ♙c5 ♜h2+ 40 ♙e3 1-0

This is a typical example of *Ponziani Power*. Black played what looked like respectable moves in the opening, but that allowed White a solid space edge, which in turn resulted in strong positional pressure. The further course of the game supports the old notion that a player subject to long defence is prone to error and can fold to sustained pressure.

The previous game featured the traditional 7 ♖d4 line, but a newer move, 7 ♗f3!?, is proving to be equally good. IM Markus Schäfer has championed this with good results. For anyone curious, Taylor consistently plays 7 ♖d4, while Hayward prefers the slightly sharper 7 ♗f3.

*Game 3*  
**M.Schäfer-S.Van Gisbergen**  
 Münster 1993

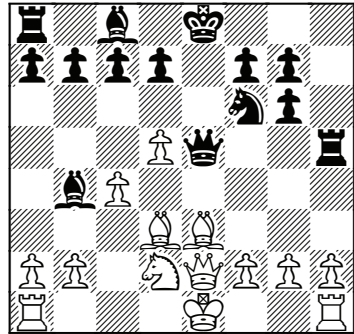
1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♘c6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 d4 ♗xe4 5 d5 ♞e7 6 ♗xe5 ♞g6 7 ♗f3 ♗e7 8 ♞xg6 hxg6 9 ♙e3 ♜h5!?

A creative move, adding pressure to the d5-pawn. In the theoretical section, we give 9...c6 as the main choice.

10 ♙d3 ♘f6 11 c4 ♗e5

11...♗b4+ 12 ♞d2 ♗xb2 13 ♜b1 gives White good compensation for the pawn(s); for example, 13...♗xa2 14

♙d4! ♗a3 15 c5, or 13...♗e5 14 ♗e2 ♙d6 15 ♞f3 ♗e7 16 0-0 ♞g4 17 c5!.  
 12 ♗e2 ♙b4+ 13 ♞d2



This position highlights the differences between 7 ♖d4 and 7 ♗f3. White has the typical space advantage, but the features of the position are more dynamic. Black has active pieces, but his kingside pawn structure has been compromised. White will castle queenside and can play overtly in the centre.

**13...d6**

The b-pawn is poisoned: 13...♗xb2?? 14 ♙d4+ cost Black his queen.

14 0-0-0 ♙xd2+ 15 ♗xd2 ♙f8 16 ♜de1

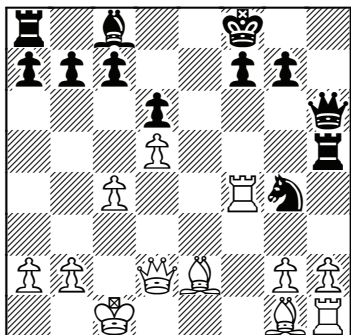
White's pressure on the e-file makes his advantage obvious. Note that the h-pawn is poisoned due to ♙f3.

**16...♞g4**

No better is 16...♙f5 17 f4 ♗e8 18 ♙d4 ♗a4 19 b3 ♗a3+ 20 ♙b1, when White's king is safe and Black's pieces look misplaced.

17 f4 ♗f6 18 ♙g1 g5 19 ♜f1 gxf4 20 ♜xf4 ♗h6 21 ♙e2

White removes the pressure from the h2-pawn.



21...♖e5 22 ♙xh5 ♗xf4

A cute reduction combination, but unfortunately for Black, he is still left with a difficult middlegame.

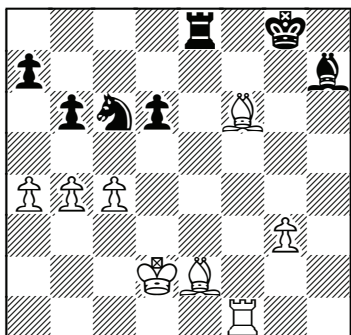
23 ♗xf4 ♘d3+ 24 ♔d2 ♘xf4 25 ♙f3 ♙f5 26 ♙d4 f6 27 ♗f1 ♙g6 28 h4 b6 29 g3 ♘d3 30 h5 ♙h7 31 h6

White handles the late middlegame with great skill.

31...♗e5 32 ♙e2 ♖e8 33 b4 ♔f7 34 hxg7 ♙xg7 35 a4 c5?

Opening the position up only helps White's bishops. 35...♙g6 offered more chances for a draw, waiting to see how White plays on the queenside.

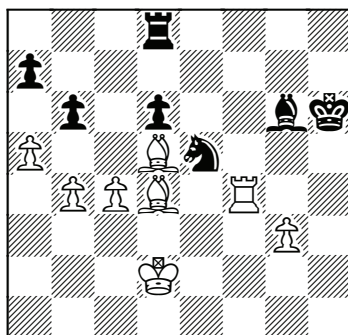
36 dxc6 ♘xc6 37 ♙xf6+ ♔g8



38 ♙c3

Missing a quicker winning tactical shot in 38 c5! d5 (38...dxc5 allows a hard-to-see mate: 39 ♙c4+ ♔f8 40 ♙e5+ ♔e7 41 ♗f7+ ♘d8 42 ♙c7+ ♘c8 43 ♙a6 mate) 39 b5 ♘a5 40 c6 and Black can resign.

38...♙e4 39 ♗f6 ♗d8 40 ♗f4 ♙g6 41 ♙f3 ♘e5 42 ♙d5+ ♔g7 43 ♙d4 ♔h6 44 a5



Creating more weaknesses in Black's position – the bishops dominate the ending.

44...bxa5 45 bxa5 ♗d7 46 ♔c3 ♗c7 47 ♔b3 ♘d7 48 ♗h4+ ♔g5 49 ♗h8 ♘c5+ 50 ♙xc5 dxc5 51 ♔a4 ♙f5 52 ♔b5 ♔f6 53 ♔a6 ♔e5 54 ♙b7 ♔d4 55 ♔xa7 ♔xc4 56 a6 1-0

One is left with the impression that Black was under constant pressure, being squeezed the whole game.

White adopts another boa constrictor-like strategy in the next game, controlling space and slowly squeezing Black to death.