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Chess Training for Post-Beginners

A Basic Course in Positional Understanding

New In Chess 2014

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Preface

How can I improve at chess? How should I train? These questions preoccupy thousands, perhaps even millions, of people every day. A whole host of good books have been written and methods of training have been developed for chess beginners. You can learn the basics of chess with numerous books. And in addition to that there are very good books which have been designed for those at master level. In my opinion, the first and foremost writers of these books are Mark Dvoretsky and Iosif Dorfman.

There have also been attempts to write books for the 'middle class' (club players). However, such books usually fall down when faced with a central problem: the authors may be very good chess players, but they find it difficult to put themselves in the mind of other players and to understand the problems of club players.

In the course of his or her development, a chess player goes through many different phases. At first there are the difficulties of remaining focussed on the whole of the board and pieces or pawns are often simply left en prise. The next stage in development requires some intensive work on improving the skill of combination. Whenever the player has reached an Elo rating of 1400-1500, he should start to take an interest in simple strategic problems. My book is aimed specifically at this Elo 1400-2200 group.

In the book I should like to introduce you to a part of the system which I have tried out in practice with my own students. I am certain that it works.

I know how important it is nowadays to build future development on a solid foundation. Modern man suffers from information overload. This is especially true insofar as the game of chess is concerned. For that reason it is very important to structure your chess knowledge in a reasoned way. I do not wish to simplify things, because that could give the student the totally false impression that chess itself is simple. Chess is enormously complex, it has innumerable different facets on which one could cast some light in a manual. But in this book I would like to concentrate on what I consider to be the central problem: the evaluation of a position.

Whatever decision we take in chess is based on an evaluation of the position. Consciously or unconsciously, we are continually evaluating positions. We can only take a correct decision if we evaluate them correctly. As Magnus Carlsen said in an interview, it does not matter how many moves one can calculate in advance; what matters is whether our evaluation of the final position is correct.

So, how does one achieve a correct evaluation of a position? Our brain must compare the specific position with a pattern. Every chess player must develop a stock of such patterns. In order to develop such patterns, I recommend that every time you evaluate a position, you first of all for training purposes take into account quite schematically the following points: the safety of the king, control of the centre, long-term (static) advantages and short-term (dynamic) advantages. To be able

to make use of this framework, you must do some intensive work on each of the individual elements.

In this book we shall deal with the long-term advantages. We shall take a close look at each static element. I have discussed every position in the book with my students and many of those have gone on to become strong players, many even grandmasters. I am convinced that any player who studies this book intensively will improve his or her Elo rating by at least 100 Elo points.

In conclusion, I would like to recommend that you extend the framework provided for you in this book with your own examples, especially with examples taken from your own games. Things to which we keep on returning develop their own dynamic within our consciousness. This has been known for a long time and approximately 100 years ago it was confirmed in experiments by William James, one of the fathers of the science of psychology. I have made successful use of this knowledge in my chess training and, my dear readers, I hope that you will also benefit from it.

Baden-Baden 2013
Yaroslav Srokovski

Chapter I

Pieces cut off from the play

The activity of each piece can be measured by the number of squares which it controls. However, when doing so, one must take into account the fact that not all squares are of the same value. The most important ones are the central squares (e4, d4, e5, d5) and as a general rule the further a square is from the centre the less it is worth.

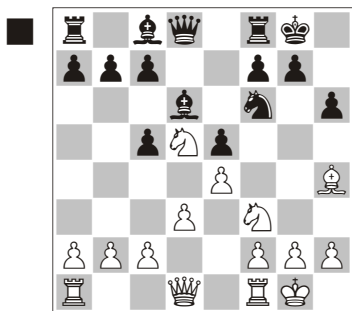
The characteristics of active pieces include the control of important squares, mobility and stability.

By stability we mean the ability of a piece to remain active over a long period of time and to be able to exert long term pressure on the opponent's position without the latter being able to attack it.

A piece can be cut off from the play and therefore not in a position to control important (e.g. central) squares. It is also immobile.

It is usually minor pieces which are cut off from the play, whereupon their relative value is strongly reduced from 3 pawns to 2 or even 1.5. If a rook is isolated like this, then its value rapidly recedes from 5 to 3 or even 2 pawns. A piece which is cut off from the action can be compared to a serious disease when a complete cure is rarely possible. The correct plan to adopt when playing against a piece cut off from the play frequently consists in play on the opposite wing because then the isolated piece cannot exert any influence on what is happening.

1 WINTER - CAPBLANCA Hastings 1919



10...g5 11.♞xf6+

White had probably based his hopes above all on 11.♞xg5. After 11...hxg5?

12.♙xg5 the pin on the black knight would have been very unpleasant, e.g. 12...♙e7 13.♞xe7+ ♚xe7 14.♞f3 ♞g7 (forced) 15.♞g3 (White takes aim at the king and prepares f2-f4 so as to include the rook in the attack) 15...♞d6 16.♙d2+ ♞h8 17.♙c3 ♞d7 18.f4 ♞g6 (18...f6? would be wrong: 19.fxe5 fxe5 20.♞xf8+ ♞xf8 21.♞f1 ♞g7 22.♞h4+ ♞g8 23.♞f5 and White is winning) 19.♞h3+ ♞h7 20.♞e3 and White has more than sufficient compensation for the piece he has sacrificed.

But after 11...♞xd5! 12.♞f3 ♞e7 13.♙f6 ♞d7 14.♞d2 ♞h7 15.♙xe5 ♞g6 Black achieves a clear advantage.

White may have two pawns for the bishop, but that is not sufficient compensation for a piece.

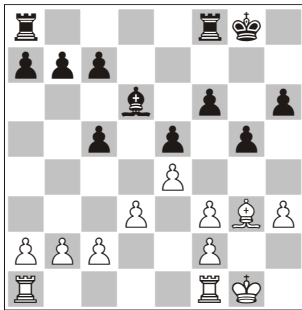
11...♖xf6 12.♙g3 ♙g4!

Black pins the knight and prepares the exchange on f3. After that the white pawn structure on the kingside is paralysed. The bishop on g3 is sentenced to 'lifelong imprisonment'.

13.h3 ♙xf3

Or 13...♙h5 14.♙h2 ♙xf3 15.♖xf3 ♖xf3 16.gxf3 with a position similar to that in the game.

14.♖xf3 ♖xf3 15.gxf3 f6



Black now has in effect an extra piece. But where should he be playing? On the queenside, of course, it is there that he has to open up the play.

This plan fits in with the golden rule of chess: 'Play where you have the advantage'.

16.♙g2 a5 17.a4 ♙f7

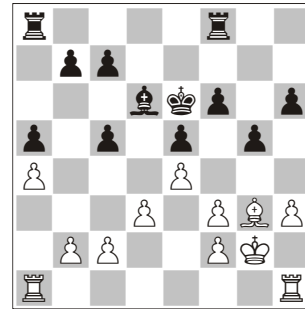
Typical Capablanca: in positions in which his opponent has no counterplay, all his pieces are first moved to their optimal positions before his actual plan is carried out. The optimal square for the black king is e6, where it is centralised and where it cannot be harassed by the two white rooks.

18.♖h1

White misses the opportunity to organise his defence. As Kasparov showed in

My Great Predecessors, White could also have set up a fortress with 18.c4! (see the next note), after which the black bishop is locked in as well.

18...♖e6



19.h4

Kasparov recommended 19.c4!, for example: 19...c6 20.♖hc1 ♖fb8 21.b3 b5 22.♖c3 ♖b6 23.♙f1 bxc4 (23...♖ab8 24.axb5 cxb5 25.♖xa5 also results in a tangible advantage for Black) 24.dxc4 ♖ab8 25.♖a3! and then ♙e2-d2-c2 would have guaranteed the draw. But not 25.♖b1? ♖b4 and the a4-pawn falls.

19...♖fb8

Black opens a second front, where he has an extra pawn at his disposal. This demonstrates the well-known principle of the two weaknesses. The first weakness is the bishop on g3 (a strategic disadvantage), the second is to be created on the queenside.

20.hxg5 hxg5 21.b3 c6 22.♖a2 b5! 23.♖ha1 c4!

The decisive breakthrough.

24.axb5 cxb3 25.cxb3 ♖xb5 26.♖a4 ♖xb3 27.d4

After 27.♖xa5 ♖xa5 28.♖xa5 ♖xd3 Black is also winning.

27...♖b5 28.♖c4 ♖b4 29.♖xc6 ♖xd4

White resigned.

Chapter V

Pawn majority on the (queen-)side

A pawn majority on the flank usually comes about in the opening after an exchange of central pawns. If one of the players has three pawns against two or two against one on the queenside we often speak of the advantage of a queenside pawn majority. If other factors are roughly in balance, this can absolutely be considered as a static advantage. The pawn majority plays a particularly important role in the endgame. In that case, the main task of the side with the pawn majority consists of the creation of a passed pawn.

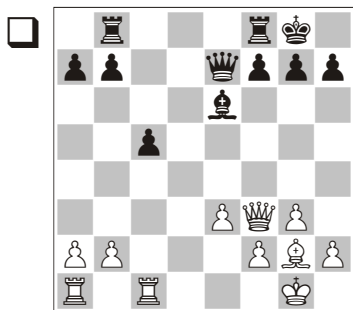
The student may perhaps wonder what the difference is between a majority on the queenside and one on the kingside. The queenside pawns are more mobile and quicker than their colleagues on the kingside. That is because the kingside pawns are also responsible for the safety of their own king. For that reason it is not so simple for them to storm forward, thereby leaving their monarch unprotected. On that account a queenside majority is often of more value than a kingside one.

Of course, this is only true whenever both sides have castled kingside. And it is also only true when there are a lot of pieces on the board. In the endgame when the kings have become active pieces and are centralised, both majorities are of equal value.

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MARSHALL - CAPABLANCA

New York 1909



The position is roughly level. White has an extra pawn on the kingside, Black three pawns against two on the queenside. One of the golden rules of chess is: play where you have an advantage. Seen

from that point of view, the correct plan for White would be to advance his pawn in the centre.

17. ♖e4

It was worth considering 17.e4 ♖c7 18. ♖e3 b6 19. ♖d1 ♖bd8 with a level game. This is not the sort of plan one thinks of after just moving the white rook from f1 to c1. Also 1.e4 limits the effective range of the bishop.

17... ♗c7!

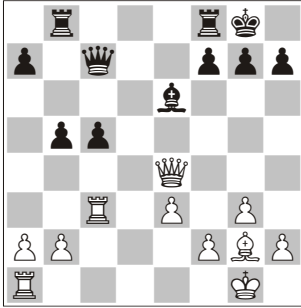
To forestall ♗g2-h3.

18. ♖c3

White completely ignores the open d-file. 18. ♖d1 was simpler. But, as was already mentioned above, White had moved the f-rook to c1 just two moves previously, meaning that the retreat would have been hard to consider

purely for psychological reasons. Also the plan he has initiated, attacking the queenside majority, is not a bad one. The decisive mistake has not yet been made (see next note).

18...b5



19.a3?

The correct move was 19.b3!, after which the pressure against the c5-pawn keeps the position level. Black's major pieces are tied down to the protection of the c5-pawn. Black's queenside pawn majority is restricted and completely ineffectual.

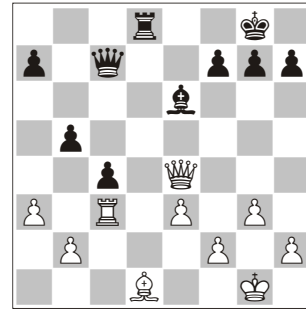
This game is often quoted as proof that a queenside pawn majority is superior to one on the kingside and Marshall is criticised for having given up the d-file instead of playing for a draw by swapping off the major pieces. This criticism is totally unjustified. The attack against the majority would have led to it being restricted, after which it would not have posed any danger.

Unfortunately, many commentators are inclined to cite as proof of specific theories games which do not offer the said proof, regularly proving that important defensive resources remain hidden.

19...c4 20.♙f3 ♖fd8

Black does not stand on ceremony and occupies the open file.

21.♞d1 ♜xd1+ 22.♙xd1 ♞d8



Black has obtained a big advantage. The black pawns are quite far advanced. The possession of the d-file makes it easier to make his advantage count.

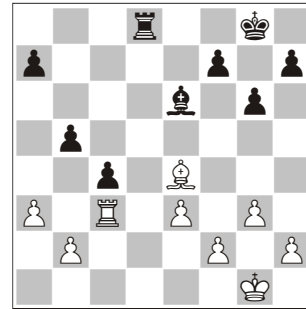
23.♙f3 g6 24.♞c6 ♞e5!

Black has basically nothing against the exchange of queens, but on his conditions. An immediate exchange would grant White some counterplay.

25.♞e4 ♞xe4

25...♞d1+ 26.♙g2 ♞xe4 27.♙xe4 leads to the game by transposition.

26.♙xe4



What would you play?

26...♞d1+

Preventing ♙g2-f1-e2. Black keeps the white king far away from the queenside, where he is planning his pawn advance.

27.♙g2 a5 28.♞c2 b4 29.axb4 axb4 30.♙f3 ♞b1 31.♙e2 b3! 32.♞d2 ♞c1

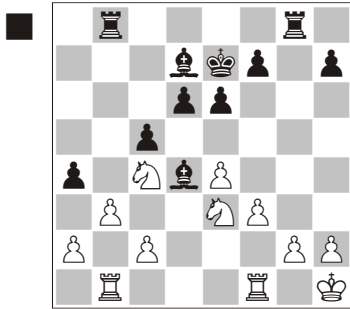
Threatening 33...♞c2.

33.♙d1

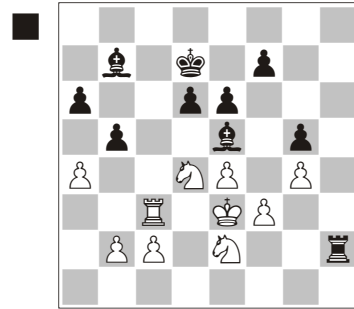
Find the correct move.

Training exercises

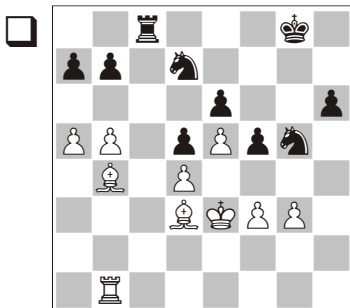
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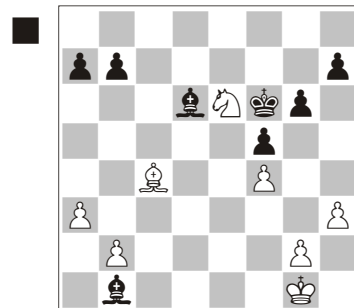
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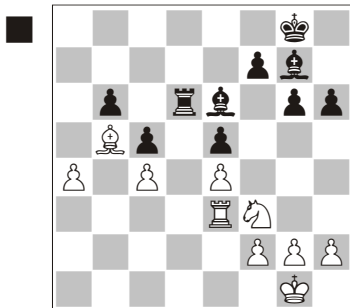
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Chapter XII

The advantage of the bishop pair in the middlegame

The games which follow demonstrate the advantage of the bishop pair in the middlegame and its superiority in open positions.

Why do we speak of the advantage of the bishop pair instead of the superiority of bishops over knights? Experience teaches us that in some 70-75% of games in which the bishop pair has to face two knights, or knight and bishop, the two bishops show themselves to be stronger. A widespread belief ascribes the advantage of the bishop pair to the superiority of the bishop over the knight. That is, not actually to the bishop pair itself! But this point of view overlooks the factor of cooperation: the two bishops need each other! Although one bishop in itself does have its advantages (mainly its mobility and the fact that it is a long-range piece), it also has a significant disadvantage: any bishop can only control squares of a single colour! If the opponent's pieces are placed on squares of the other colour then they can no longer be attacked by that bishop. This failing has to be compensated for by its colleague.

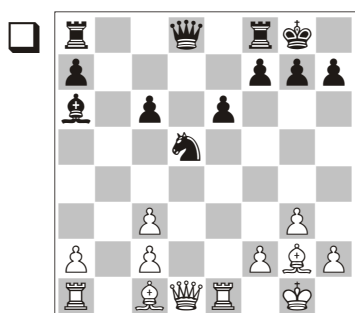
The advantage of the bishop pair is static in nature and long-term. In order for them to be efficiently deployed, open diagonals are often an advantage for the bishops. So the side which has the bishop pair frequently tries to open up the position – especially the diagonals. For this purpose sacrifices are often justified.

1. Clearing diagonals

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TSESHKOVSKY - TIMOSCHENKO

Ashkhabad 1978



13.c4!

White sacrifices a pawn so as to open the important a1-h8 diagonal for his bishop.

13...♙xc4 14.♙a3!

This forces the rook on to the e8-square and in the event of a mating attack with ♖g4 it eliminates the defensive option of ...♘f6, since then ♙xf6 followed by ♙xc6 would win the exchange.

14...♜e8 15.♙b2

15.♖g4! was even stronger. After 15...♙a6 16.♙b2 g6 17.c4 ♘b4 18.♜ed1 ♖b6 19.♙e5! White has a decisive attack thanks to his control over the dark squares.

15...e5

15...f6 was slightly stronger, although even after it the defence is still difficult.