



HOW TO PROPERLY EVALUATE THE POSITION?

Piece Activity

The dynamic potential of a position is mostly determined by piece activity. However, as these dynamics can change very quickly, a player should be aware that they continually need to be properly assessed so as not to drift into an inferior position.

By GM Illia Nyzhnyk

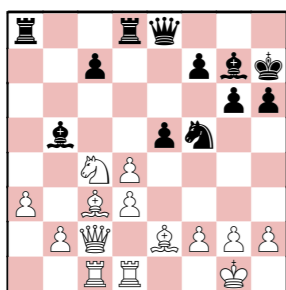
Welcome back to the series on how to evaluate positions properly, and what to look for during this process. In ACM #32, we discovered how king safety affects the evaluation, and this time we will be looking at another factor – piece activity.

It seems there are a few misconceptions with regard to the importance of piece activity in relation to material, as well as the importance of preventing your opponent's piece activity. To be honest, I have also found myself making similar misjudgements, and here I would like to show you, fellow readers, how very often keeping your pieces active and not going for immediate material gain can result in a far greater long-term benefit. Equally, making sure that your opponent's pieces are at bay can save you a headache or two. In the following critical position, Black has multiple recapture options. However it is extremely important to understand what it is that Black needs to be aiming for.

Bogdan-Daniel Deac 2710

V. Pranav 2530

Romanian Superliga 2022



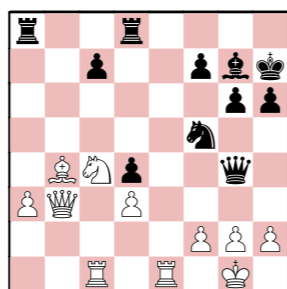
25...**exd4**? Although this move allows Black to immediately regain his lost material, it also solidifies the pawn

structure in White's favor.

25...**exd4**?! does not commit White to any particular response, but does leave Black with options of playing on the open d-file. 26.**xf3** **exd8** 27.**xe4**+.

25...**exd4**! would be the correct way to go. This forces White to trade his dark-squared bishop, which automatically gives Black additional compensation thanks to his newly acquired advantage of the bishop pair, together with some pressure on the d-file. 26.**exd4** **exd4** 27.**xd2** c6 28.**xf3** **exd5** 29.**xf1** f5∞.

26.**xb4** **xa4** 27.**b3** **xb3** 28.**xb3** **xe2** 29.**xe1** **g4**



Upon an extremely brief examination, it may appear that Black has not only regained his pawn, but also managed to create play against the white king. However...

30.**de5**! and Black is forced to submit to a trade that leaves his position in ruins.

30...**xe5** 31.**xe5** **xd7** 32.**h3** **xf4** 33.**ce1** **ad8** 34.**xc4** Unable to find a move, Black decided to give up material in order to free some of his pieces, but unfortunately it was too late. **Black lost** shortly afterwards.



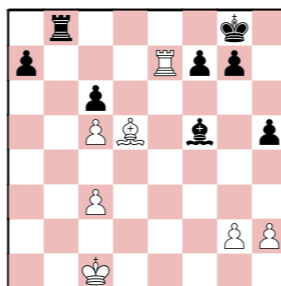
Born in Ukraine in 1996, Illia Nyzhnyk became a Grandmaster in 2011 before moving to the U.S. As a member of Webster University's SPICE program since 2014, he contributed to numerous championship victories. Illia also won several individual titles, including the 2020 Spice Cup Open and four World Opens. After obtaining his MBA in December 2021, he is now fully dedicated to advancing his chess skills.

In endgames most of the time we make an unconscious decision to go for extra material, knowing that it will likely result in a critical advantage. However, there still exist multiple cases where this strategy is not the best way to continue.

Aram Hakobyan 2613

Grigoriy Oparin 2683

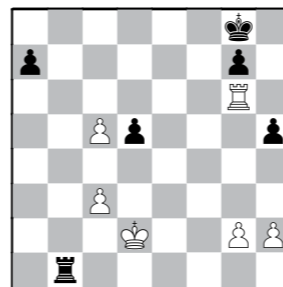
Fall Chess Classic-A, St Louis 2022



Such was the case in this example where a good friend of mine, Grandmaster Aram Hakobyan, attempted to win a pawn.

32.**xf7**+?! Unfortunately, White did not realize that due to the activity of Black's pieces it will be impossible to maintain his material advantage.

32.**xf7**! would have been the best attempt to win the game. This move requires an extremely precise calculation that goes deep into the rook endgame: 32...**xb1**+ 33.**xd2** **g6** 34.**xf6**+ **cxd5** 35.**exg6**



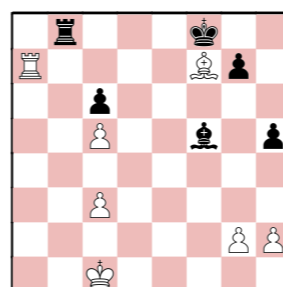
A) Now 35...**xb5** would have been the most likely continuation. Then after 36.**xc6**! a5 37.**xd3**

A1) 37...**a4**? is extremely logical, but runs into a beautiful winning pattern by White: 38.**xd4** **xa5** 39.**xe6**!! a3 40.c6 **xf7** (40...a2 41.**xe1**! a1 **xf7** 42.**xa1** **xa1** 43.c7 **xa8** 44.**xd5** **xf7** 45.**xc6** **xe6** 46.**xb7**+) 41.c7 **xa8** 42.**xa6** **xc8** 43.**xa7**+.

A2) Better is 37...**xf7**! 38.**xd4** **xb2** 39.**xd5** (39.**xe5** **exg2** 40.**xc7**+ **xe8** 41.c6 **eg6** should hold for Black.) 39...**exg2** 40.**xd6** **xd2**+ 41.**xc6** **exh2** 42.**xb6** **xb2**+ 43.**xa5** **xa2**+ 44.**xb6** **xb2**+ 45.**xa7** **xa2**+ 46.**xb7** **xb2**+ 47.**xb6** **xb6**+ 48.**xb6** h4 49.c6 h3 50.c7 h2 51.c8 **h1** 52.**xf5**+ and although the engine claims that White is winning, I have serious doubts about that.

B) Instead after 35...**xf7**! 36.**eg5** **xe6** 37.**exg7** **xb5** 38.**xd3** **xc5** 39.**exh7** a5 looks like Black might hold, but this line is extremely difficult to understand from the practical standpoint, and thus would have been an unlikely choice.

32...**xf8** 33.**xa7**



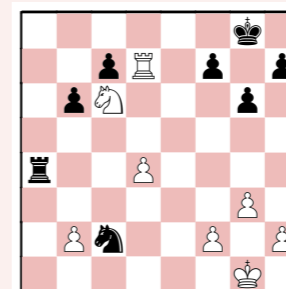
33...**xb5**?! Seemingly Black might have 'believed' White too much, and decided to defend an endgame a pawn down. However, there was absolutely no need for that, as after the simple 33...**g6**! = Black has two powerful threats, ...**xb5**, and ...**xb1**-b2, which allow him to immediately regain his lost pawn.

34.**exh5** **xc5** 35.**xd2** **e4** 36.**xa8**+

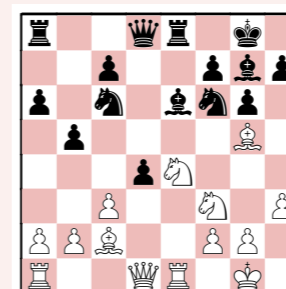
EXERCISES FOR SOLVING

And now it is time for a few exercises. I am challenging you to apply the concept we have just discussed to solve the following puzzles – but be careful as there are a lot of false leads here!

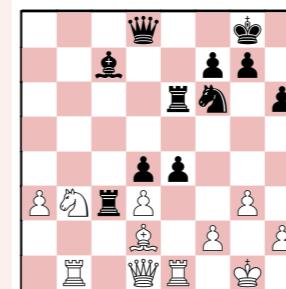
1. Black to move



2. White to move



3. Black to move

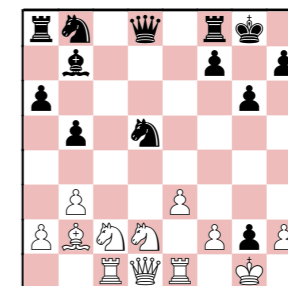


Solutions on page 65

Magnus Carlsen 2856

Nils Grandelius 2651

Meltwater Champions Tour, Internet 2022

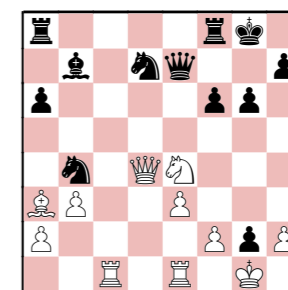


In this position, Black clearly underestimated the importance of White's idea and played 17...**xd7**! I could argue that most of us would make this kind of move with our eyes closed – it develops a piece, takes care of a couple of key squares in the center, and allows a further repositioning in case this knight should want to go to f6. However, it does not solve Black's main problem, and I guess that Grandelius failed to recognize he has a problem at all.

17...**xe8**! was a must to ensure that the white knight does not get to e4, which is objectively and practically the best possible square for the knight. Then after 18.**xf3** **xd7** 19.**xd4** f6 20.**ed1** **xe7**+ we would reach a position similar to that which occurred in the game, but with no clear follow-up for White.

18.**de4**! All of a sudden, Black is faced with having to defend against multiple threats. Fortunately, he can do so and the game proceeded with 18...**xe7** 19.**xd4** f6 20.**xa3** Now it is apparent why it would have been better for Black to move his rook away from the f8 square on move 17.

20...**b4** 21.**xb4** **xb4**



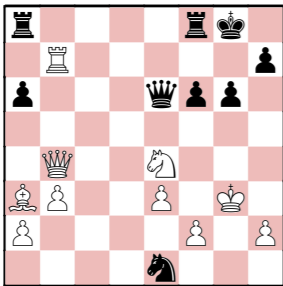
22.**xc7**!? Magnus endeavors to improve the positions of each one of his pieces as much as possible, on the understanding



that he can always regain his lost piece – which is true!

22.♘d2 was another attractive option, but does not look as appealing as the game move. 22...♟f7 23.♙xb4 ♖e6 24.f4∞.

22...♟e6 23.♟xb7 ♘e5 24.♟xb4 ♘f3+ 25.♙xg2 ♘xe1+ 26.♙g3



26...♟f5?? Black cracks under the pressure. Despite the fact that White is the exchange down, this is offset by his piece activity in conjunction with the vulnerability of the black king. Therefore White has more than enough to claim full compensation.

26...♟ae8! would have been the correct

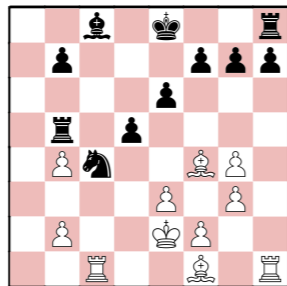
approach, on which might have followed 27.♘d6 ♟e5+ 28.♟f4 ♟xf4+ 29.♙xf4 ♘d3+ 30.♙g3 ♟e6 31.♟c7 h5∞.

27.f4! ♟ae8 28.♟c4+ ♙h8 29.♙xf8 ♟xf8 30.♟c7 **Black resigned.**

In some cases, we have to make a choice – either to activate our own pieces or else ensure that our opponent's pieces cannot perform to their best ability.

Harika Dronavalli 2507
Anna Muzychuk 2522

FIDE Women's Grand Prix, Munich 2023



In this position, Black played 18...e5?, which loosened her pawn structure and allowed the white bishops to perform to their maximum.

The correct move was 18...♟xb4!, maintaining Black's intact pawn structure, as well as the extra pawn. Then 19.♙e5 0-0 20.♙c3 ♟b3∞.

19.♙xe5! ♙xg4+ 20.♙e1 Even though Black has managed to develop her light-squared bishop, her position is suddenly in ruins.

20...f6 21.♙c3 ♟b6 22.b3 ♘e5 23.f4 ♘f7 and **White won** shortly after.

To summarize, when evaluating positions we need to take into consideration the activity of both our own and our opponent's pieces, and we should never forget that quite often piece activity may outweigh any immediate material gains! ■

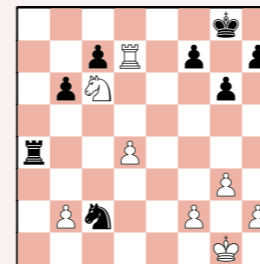


Solutions to EXERCISES on page 63

1. BLACK TO MOVE

Peter Michalik 2577
Marco Baldauf 2501

Bundesliga 2022



26...♟c4 Best was 26...♟a1+. It is essential to take the b2 pawn out of the equation, as that would allow Black to create a passed pawn of his own, as well as enable him to place his rook in an active position on the second rank. 27.♙g2 ♟b1 28.♟xc7 ♟xb2 29.♙f3 ♘e1+ 30.♙e3 ♘c2+ 31.♙e4 ♘a3 32.d5 ♘b5 33.♟c8+ ♙g7∞.

27.♟xc7 ♙g7 28.d5 ♘b4 Black probably calculated this far, thinking that his position would be fine. However...

29.♟xf7+! ♙xf7 30.♘e5+ ♙f6 31.♘c4 ♘xd5 32.♙f1 b5 33.♘a3 ♘c7 34.♙e2 ♙e5 35.♙d3 and **White won.**

2. WHITE TO MOVE

Nodirbek Abdusattorov 2713
Parham Maghsoodloo 2719

Tata Steel Masters, Wijk aan Zee 2023



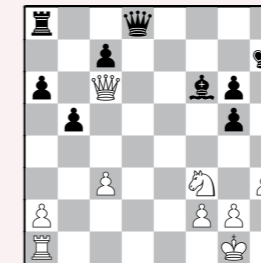
It is obvious that White's pieces are exerting a lot of pressure, specifically against the pinned f6 knight. In such cases, it is usually better to avoid unnecessary exchanges, as that would only help your opponent to relieve the pressure.

17.♙b3? This gives Black just enough time to rid himself of the annoying pin.

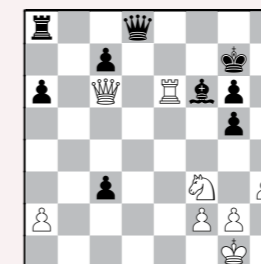
17.cxd4! was a must, and now, despite

the fact that Black gains control over the outpost on d5, the threats are just too overwhelming. 17...♘b4 (17...h6 loses by force to 18.♙xf6 ♙xf6 19.d5! ♙xb2 20.♟b1+- and Black loses a piece.) 18.♙b3 Surprisingly, Black does not even get to place a piece on d5, as that would lose instantly. 18...♙xb3 (18...♘bd5? 19.♙xd5! ♙xd5 20.♙xf6+ ♙xf6 21.♟xe8+ ♟xe8 22.♙xf6+-) 19.♟xb3 ♘bd5 20.♘e5! ♟e6 21.♟ac1 h6 22.♙xf6 ♙xf6 23.♘c6 ♟d7 24.♟xd5 ♟xd5 25.♘xf6+ ♟xf6 26.♘e7+-.

17...h6! 18.♙xe6 ♟xe6 19.♘xf6+ ♙xf6 20.♟xe6 fxe6 21.♟e2 hxg5 22.♟xe6+ ♙h7 23.♟xc6 dxc3 24.bxc3 In such an unclear position, Black's smartest choice would have been to activate his rook by means of the maneuver ...♟b8-b6.



24...♟b8! 24...b4?! happened in the game, and although Black is winning a pawn in this way, the fact that the black rook is still on a8 could potentially be his undoing. 25.♟e1! bxc3 26.♟e6 ♙g7



A) 27.♟e4! ♟d7 (27...♟b8?? 28.♘e5!+-) 28.♟xf6 ♙xf6 29.♟xa8 ♟d1+ 30.♙h2 c2 31.♟f8+ ♙e6 32.♟e8+ ♙d6 33.♟xg6+ ♙c5 34.♘e1! c1♟ 35.♘d3+ ♟xd3 36.♟xd3 ♟f4+ 37.♙g1 ♟c1+ 38.♟f1± and White is the one trying to win with his extra pawn.

B) In the game 27.♘e5?! was played, overlooking a nice resource. 27...♟d1+ 28.♙h2 ♙xe5+ 29.♟xe5 ♟d6 30.♟xc3 ♟e8 31.f4

B1) 31...♟xe5 32.fxe5 ♟e7 33.e6+ ♙g8

34.♟c6 (34.♟e5 a5) 34...♟d6+ 35.♟xd6 cxd6 36.♙g3 ♙g7 37.♙g4 ♙f6 38.e7 ♙xe7 39.♙xg5 ♙f7 (39...♙e6 40.h4 d5 41.♙f4) 40.g4 d5 41.h4 ♙g7 42.h5 gxh5 43.gxh5 ♙h7 44.♙f5 ♙h6 45.♙e5 ♙xh5 46.♙xd5.

B2) 31...♙f8 32.♟xg5 ♟xf4+ 33.♟g3 ♟e6 34.♙g1 ♙g8 and even though **Black** had managed to equalize, he **lost** the game as a consequence of time pressure.

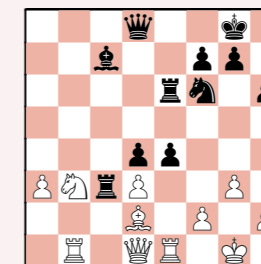
25.♟xa6 25.♟e1 ♟b6 26.♟c5 ♟d6 27.c4 ♟d1 28.cxb5 ♟xe1+ 29.♘xe1 axb5 30.♟xb5 ♟d1 31.♙f1 ♙c3 32.♟e2 ♟a1 33.♟e7+ ♙h6= with a relatively simple draw after Black regains his lost pawn by capturing on e1 and then on a2.

25...b4 26.♟b1 ♟a8 27.♟c4 bxc3∞ which would have been anyone's game.

3. BLACK TO MOVE

Parham Maghsoodloo 2719
Vincent Keymer 2696

Tata Steel Masters, Wijk aan Zee 2023



This puzzle is another one of 'those' – Black is faced with a multiple choice: whether to take on d3 with a pawn, with a rook, or run back to c6. Which one do you think is practically best?

25...exd3? was chosen by Black in the game, leading by force to an endgame which may be assessed as approximately equal.

Instead 25...♟xd3! would have been an important dynamic material sacrifice. Then 26.♘c5 ♟xd2! 27.♟xd2 ♟e5 28.♟ec1 d3∞ when Black's position is dominating, although it will still take some effort to transform his advantage into a win.

25...♟cc6 is second best, but it looks like White might be able to construct a fortress after 26.dxe4 ♘xe4 27.♟f3 ♟d5 28.♙b4 ♙b6 29.♘d2 f5 30.♟b3∞.

26.♟xe6! fxe6 27.♘d4! ♟xd4 28.♙xc3 ♟xc3 29.♟b3 ♟c6 30.♟xd3 ♘e4 31.♟e2 ♙d6 32.♟e3 ♘xf2 33.♙xf2 **Draw.**

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