

**FOR TACTICS (CALCULATION) EXERCISES:**

**IDENTIFY THE TACTICAL MOTIFS**

Look for patterns such as pins, forks, double attacks, discovered attacks, and skewers in the position.

**CALCULATE VARIATIONS**

Based on the tactical motifs you have identified, calculate various lines and variations to determine the best move.

**CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES**

Once you have calculated a few lines, evaluate the consequences of each move, and determine which line leads to the best outcome.

**FOR STRATEGY (POSITIONAL) EXERCISES:**

**EVALUATE THE POSITION**

Determine the strengths and weaknesses of both your and your opponent's position, including pawn structure, piece placement, king safety, and control of key squares.

**IDENTIFY A PLAN**

Based on your evaluation, come up with a plan that takes advantage of your strengths and exploits your opponent's weaknesses. This can involve improving the position of your pieces, controlling key squares, or creating threats.

**CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES**

Once you have a plan, consider alternative moves or variations that might also achieve your goals. Choose the move that best fits your overall plan.

# Aagaard's MasterClass

by GM JACOB AAGAARD



Photo by David Liada.

GM Jacob Aagaard won the 2007 British Championship; but is mostly known as a trainer and writer. He co-founded Quality Chess and killerchesstraining.com. His books include the Grandmaster Preparation series, the Decision Making series with Boris Gelfand and latest A Matter of Endgame Technique. Jacob works day and night to help players of all levels improve their game and achieve their goals.

**AAGAARD**



**SHANKLAND**

California-based GM Sam Shankland is a leading American chess player. In 2018, Sam achieved several milestones, including winning the U.S. Championship, surpassing 2700 Elo, and claiming first place at the Capablanca Memorial and the American Continental Championship. He is author of two chess books from the series of "Small Steps to Giant Improvement".

## PLAY IT ALONG WITH SAM

Get ready to take your chess skills to the next level with Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass! Each issue is packed with 12 challenging exercises – 6 tactics/calculation exercises and 6 positional/strategic exercises – carefully curated by GM Jacob Aagaard and tested by none other than GM Sam Shankland.

In early 2023, Sam and Jacob held a training camp to put these exercises to the test, using real game scenarios from the end of 2022 tournaments in Charlotte, New York, and Hollywood. You'll be facing off against some of the brightest young talents in U.S. chess, as well as established grandmasters and players.

But here's the best part: even Sam, a seasoned Grandmaster, did not solve all the exercises correctly. That means there's a real chance for you to compete with him and test your chess knowledge. Whether you're a seasoned player or a beginner looking to up your game, Jacob Aagaard's Masterclass is the perfect way to challenge yourself and become a stronger chess player.

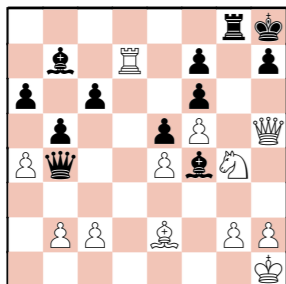
TACTICS			STRATEGY		
T1	T2	T3	S1	S2	S3
T4	T5	T6	S4	S5	S6

TACTICS

T1

Awonder Liang	2630
Alonso Zapata	2336

Charlotte 2022

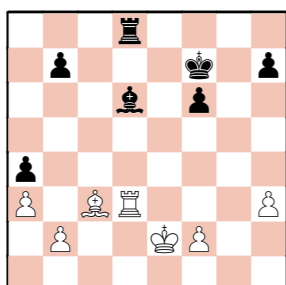


31.c3! "Not too hard" (Sam).  
31...xc4 32.xf7 b1+ 33.d1 1-0

T2

Nico Chasin	2429
Lazaro Bruzon	2615

Hollywood 2022

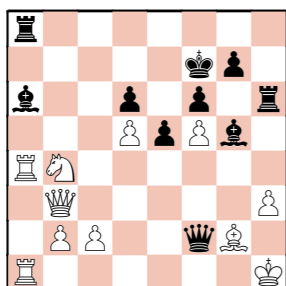


The players agreed a draw. You can easily understand why Bruzon offered this, as White wins a pawn with 33.d4! b5 34.d5!, exploiting the pin. Then White should win.

T3

Nicholas Vettese	2310
Josiah Stearman	2377

New York 2022



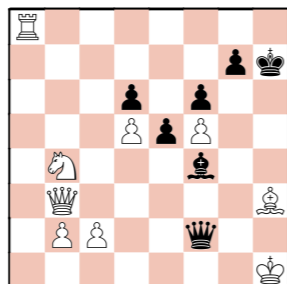
31...c4?? Josiah blundered like this, but so did Sam!  
32.xa8! Disappointing!  
32...xb3 33.a7+ xa7 34.xa7+ g8 35.cxb3 White won.

SOLUTION

"Now I feel foolish," Sam said after looking at the position anew for barely five seconds. One problem for Sam is turning on his concentration at will. This is common for most people, but it will seriously improve what you get out of your training if you learn to overcome this.

31...e3! is the key move. Sam hit upon it the moment he started to actually look... 32.xa6 32.xa6 g3 is at least mate. The same can be said of 32...ah8!?, although it is unnecessarily complicated. 33.b7+ g8 34.xa8+ h7 and it is all over.

32...xh3+! Mate is always preferable. 32...xa6 33.xa6 g3 also wins. 33.xh3 f4 34.a7+ xa7 35.xa7+ g8 36.a8+ h7

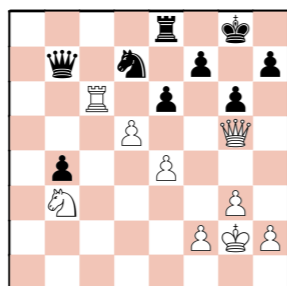


Mate can no longer be delayed with non-foolish moves.  
37.g2 e1+ 38.f1 xf1 mate.

T4

Andy Woodward	2454
Zurab Javakhadze	2479

Hollywood 2022



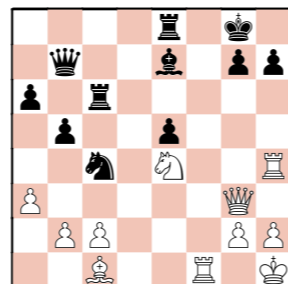
Andy Woodward is a member of Killer Chess Training and was by far the breakthrough U.S. player of 2022. Although he will not become the youngest GM of all time, he will make the title at an age when some greats of the past were still blundering pieces in most of their games... Here he excels again.

33.f4!! Sam also wanted to play this. 33...exd5?! The critical line, but not great resistance. 33...e5 "is horrible. If that has to be played, we are happy," Sam said. 34.c1, with a big permanent advantage, is the most natural response, but there are a lot of other strong options. 34.c7 b5 35.d4 a4 36.d6! The key move. 36...xe4 37.d6 e6 38.xd7 1-0

T5

Eyal Grinberg	2491
Bartlomiej Macieja	2514

Charlotte 2022



The game (and Sam) went: 27.g4?! d8 28.b3? Stronger was 28.d3!, when Stockfish says White has a winning position, although the decisive moment has undoubtedly been delayed quite a bit.

However now after 28...d6 Black's position is within the realms of being defensible.

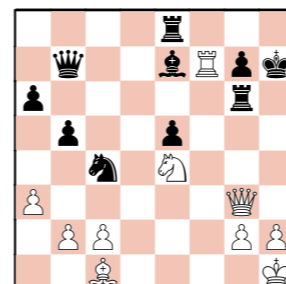
The key trick is 29.h6 f5! 30.xf5 xh6, when White has a slight structural advantage, but this is not enough to give him more than a minimal edge. Draw

SAM FINISHED THE TACTICS/CALCULATION EXERCISES WITH 3 1/2/6 AFTER TWO LAZY BLUNDERS



SOLUTION

27.xh7! "Good grief!" Sam said after looking again.  
27...xh7 28.f7 g6

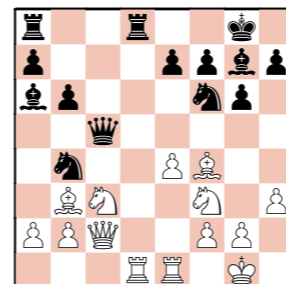


29.f6+!! xf6 30.h3+ h6 31.f5+! Sam had missed this last move the first time around, thinking that taking on h6 was mandatory (it loses). He went too fast, there is nothing else to say. White now wins the queen and the game.

T6

Gergely Kantor	2561
Sandeep Sethuraman	2371

Hollywood 2022



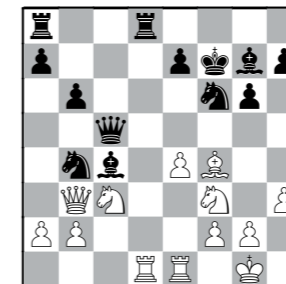
This exercise can easily be used as a playing position (hint to trainers), as it is impossible to calculate all the details to completion.

In the game 16.xd8+ xd8 17.b1 led to a win for White on move 46, but at this point Black had many decent options. I personally like the coordination from 17...c8! with full equality.

SOLUTION

The winning line goes: 16.xf7+!! "Taking on f7 is obvious, as everything else is ...". 16...xf7 has to be played. If 16...h8, then 17.a4 for example, and White is a pawn up. 17.b3+ f8 17...e8? is a much worse option, as the king is misplaced after

18.e5.  
17...c4 is far more serious than a first glance suggests.

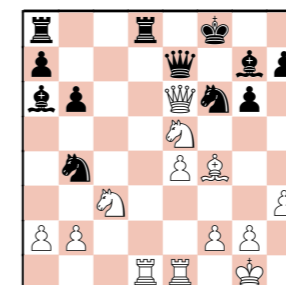


A) 18.xc4+?, as suggested by Sam without thinking, is a careless blunder. Play continues: 18...xc4 19.e5+ e8 20.xc4 d3, when Black either wins the exchange or White finds 21.c7! d7 22.e5 b2 (22...xe1!? 23.d7 d7 24.xe1 c8 25.f4 c5 26.g5! leads to equality.) 23.d7 d7 24.d5 xd1, where Black is only slightly better in the endgame.

B) 18.e5+!? xe5 19.xc4+ e6 20.xb4 is marginally inferior, as after 20...xd1 21.xd1 c8 Black has some short-term counterplay, although White remains better.

C) 18.xd8! is the most accurate. 18...xd8 19.e5+ xe5 20.xc4+ e6 21.xb4 and White is a pawn up with a winning position.

18.e5 e6 Sam missed this one on his first attempt, so I forced him to delve deeper. 19.xe6 19.d4 b5 20.c3 c5 is typical engine nonsense. 19...e7

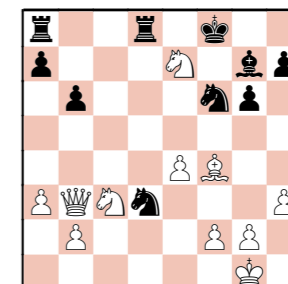


20.b3!! This is the difficult move White has to find. 20.xe7+? xe7 21.a3 d3 and Black ends a piece up.

20...d3 The best try. 20...ac8 is met by 21.d5 bxd5 22.exd5 c5 23.d6! c4 24.g3 with a winning attack.

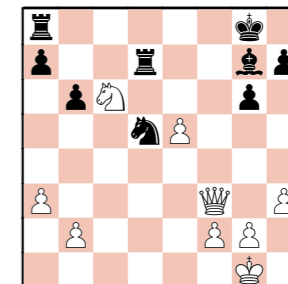
Sam was concerned about 20...h5, but White has plenty of ways to develop a strong attack. For example: 21.g5 f6

22.d5 xd5 23.h6+ g7 24.exd5, winning, on account of 24...xh6 25.xg6+!.  
21.a3 d2 22.xd3 xe1 23.d6 xd3 24.dxe7

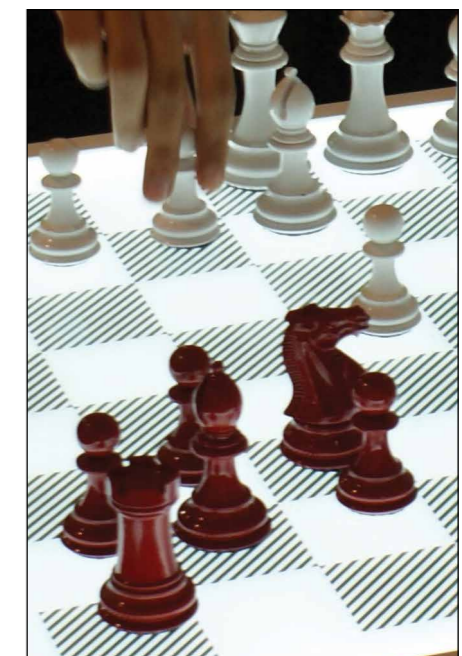


24...xf4 After 24...xe7 25.e5 xf4 26.b4+ e8 27.exf6 d3 28.gxh3 xf6 29.b5 White is winning, although a lot of play remains.

25.d6 d7 26.e5 d6d5 27.dxd5 xd5 28.f3+ g8



29.e7+! xe7 30.xa8+ f7 31.e4 and White has strong winning chances.

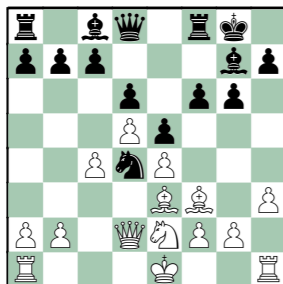


STRATEGY

S1

Yim Sung Ho	2209
Alexander Shabalov	2504

Hollywood 2022



Shabalov wanted to open the position too much. After 13...c5? 14.dxc6 ♖xf3+ 15.gxf3 bxc6 16.♖d1 White had counterplay against the d6 pawn, giving him equality – although he lost on move 43.

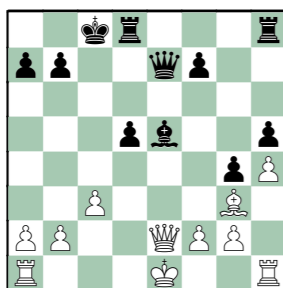
SOLUTION

13...♖xf3+! 14.gxf3 f5 is much stronger. The weakness on f3 persists, but there is nothing equivalent on the d-file. Black is close to winning.

S2

David Brodsky	2509
Dean Ippolito	2368

Charlotte 2022



Now, by releasing the tension, White failed to make the most of the pin. 23.♗xe5? ♜he8 24.0-0-0 24.0-0 with a small edge was better. 24...♗xe5 25.♗d2 ♖e4 and Black had good counterplay. The game was drawn by move 48.

SOLUTION

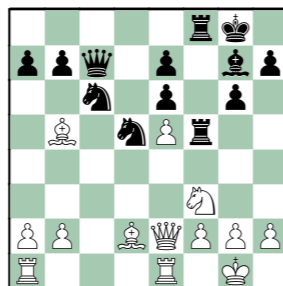
23.0-0 would have given White a winning position. The key point comes after

23...♗d6. 23...♜he8 24.♖fe1 f6 25.♗d3, with threats of an invasion on f5 or g6, is horrible for Black. 24.♗d3 ♗xg3 25.fxg3! White is strategically winning. The weak pawns on d5, f7 and h5 are all unmanageable liabilities.

S3

Kevin Wang	2389
Edward Song	2383

New York 2022



The game went 18.♖ac1? when Black should have played 18...♖xf3! Instead 18...♗b6? gave White another chance. After 19.♗xc6 bxc6 White later won the game. Strongest here is 20.♗c2 with a winning position. 19.gxf3 19.♗xc6 is met by a small tactic 19...♖xf2, with the better game, based on 20.♗xd5 ♗b6!. 19...♖d4 20.♖xc7 ♖xe2+ 21.♗xe2 ♖xc7 and Black is absolutely fine.

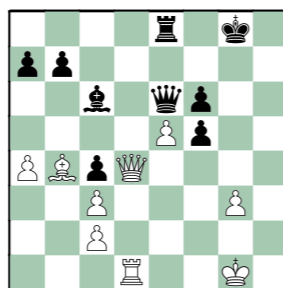
SOLUTION

White can remove all the tactics with 18.♗xc6!, when after 18...bxc6 19.♖ac1 White is strategically close to winning. (18...♗xc6?! 19.♖d4 only makes things worse.)

S4

Denis Kadric	2560
Benjamin Gledura	2637

Hollywood 2022



Black played the lazy 29...♗xe5?! 30.♗xe5 fxe5 31.a5, when he was better and won the endgame. But the risk of not converting it was real.

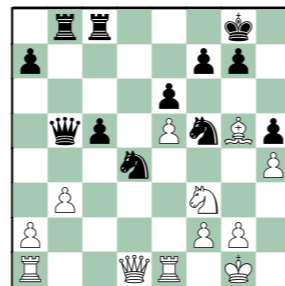
SOLUTION

Exchanging queens when the white king is this exposed makes little sense. Let's attack! 29...f4! 30.exf6 The only test. If Black is allowed to play ...♗h3 it will all be over. 30...♗h3 31.f7+! This is the move to foresee. But Black has 31...♖h7!! "Not too hard," Sam concluded.

S5

Aleksandr Ostrovsky	2404
Kevin Wang	2389

New York, 2022



Sam totally underestimated Black's counterplay, as probably did Ostrovsky. 23.♖xd4? cxd4! 23...♖xd4? 24.♗xh5 ♖c2 25.♖e4 "is mate, right?" Yes. Also, 25.♖ad1!? wins here. 24.♗xh5 ♖c5 Black has good counterplay. The rook lands on d5 and the d-pawn is strong. The game was drawn.

SOLUTION

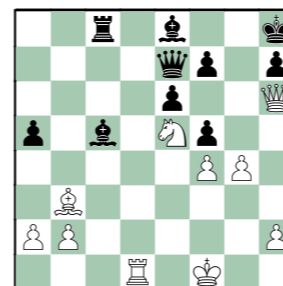
Once you understand that you should not give Black a passed pawn on the d-file, it is easier to find 23.♖d2! Another point is that the knight on d4 is strong, but the knight on f5 is simply an 'extra' as Black can only use it if the d4 knight vacates its square. 23...g6 The h-pawn is actually under attack, as White would meet ...♖c2 by ♖e4-f6+ with a deadly attack. 24.♖e4! I presumed White's strongest was 24.♖c4, when he is also better, but the knight is more flexible on e4, whereas preventing ...c5-c4 is not that important.

24...♗a5! 24...c4?! loses to 25.♖d6! ♖xd6 26.exd6 ♖f5 27.d7. White has a big advantage after either 25.♗d3!? or 25.♖f6+ ♖g7 26.♖e4 with an attack.

S6

Sila Caglar	2268
Alder Escobar Forero	2510

Charlotte 2022



Escobar did not find the way to claim an advantage. 39...a4? Sam wanted 39...♖d8?, but after 40.gxf5! ♗b5+ 41.♖g2 White is quite safe. 40.♗c4 led to an unclear position. Black now further degraded his position. 40...♗d6?! 40...♖d8! was best now, which is what Sam wanted on his second try.

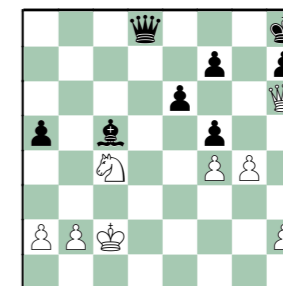
SAM SCORED 4/6 ON THE MIXED/STRATEGY EXERCISES AND...

After 41.♖xd8 ♗xd8 42.gxf5! exf5 43.b3 White's position is eerily holding together. 41.b3 axb3 42.axb3 fxg4?? Asking the knight to come to f6. 43.♖xg4 f5 44.♖xd6! ♖xc4 45.bxc4 Black resigned

SOLUTION

39...♗b5+! 40.♗c4 This is forced. 40.♖g2 ♖g8! Sam missed this move entirely, which is why he did not go for 39...♗b5+. Even looking at it, he did not easily see that White has no defense against ...f7-f6. 41.g5 f6 42.♖f3 a4 43.♗c2 ♗c6. 40...♗xc4+ Sam suggested 40...♗b7?, when White has an amusing draw: 41.♖xf7+! ♖g8 42.♗g5+! ♖f8 (Not 42...♖xf7?? 43.♗xf5+ and White wins.)

43.♗h6+ with perpetual check. 41.♖xc4 ♖d8! The second key idea. Black is seeking to exchange all the defenders around the white king. 42.♖e2 ♖xd1 43.♖xd1 ♗d8+ 44.♖c2



44...♗d4 45.b3 fxg4 Black is totally winning.

...7½/12 OVERALL. CLEARLY HIS WORST SHOWING.

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