

# THE 15 ★ GREATEST POSITIONAL PLAYERS OF ALL TIME



## QUIET *But* DEADLY

Making a “best of” list is rarely something that leaves everyone satisfied, and we’re fully aware it will – and should – spark debate. From a publisher’s perspective, that’s actually a welcome outcome. After all, editors and readers alike are passionate chess enthusiasts first, and none of us can completely escape our personal biases. Even within our small editorial team, we had some heated debates. At one point, we nearly expanded the list to 16 names – just for internal peace – but ultimately, fifteen felt more natural for the cover.

No, we won’t reveal who the sixteenth candidate was; if you enjoy this concept, consider it just our first attempt, with future improvements likely.

Three questions naturally arise: how the list was created, whether the rankings were intentional, and why we chose positional players now. Creating this list was challenging, and while it wasn’t decided by a formal vote, we based our selection on feedback gathered through questionnaires, surveys, and many informal discussions with our readers, contributors, and friends

from the chess community. As with other popular magazine rankings, it’s open to debate and critique. Each placement – from number 15 to number 1 – is deliberate and carefully considered; none of the rankings are random. Finally, positional chess might seem less flashy compared to tactical fireworks, but it carries its own subtle magic, and these giants deserve recognition either for their exceptional strategic skills or for their contributions to the development of chess technique. Enjoy!

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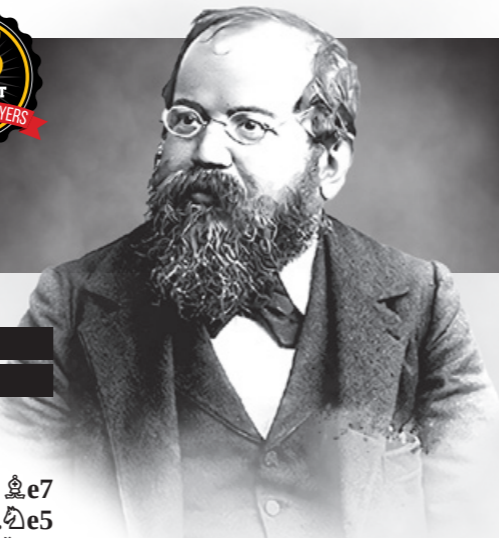
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## WILHELM STEINITZ

1836 - 1900



The career of Wilhelm Steinitz, the first official World Champion, transcended the mere act of winning the title. Steinitz, who emigrated to the United States in the early 1880s, introduced a systematic and scientific approach that shifted chess from the Romantic Era's sacrificial style toward modern positional play. He is often called the "father of modern chess" for initiating a fundamental change in how players thought about strategy.

Steinitz was a dominant force in the 1860s and 1870s, claiming multiple major tournaments and defeating the top rivals of his time. His victory over Johannes Zukertort in the 1886 World Championship match crowned him champion, yet his larger legacy lay in promoting the legitimacy of defense and careful maneuvering – at a time when all-out attacks reigned supreme. Though many of his ideas were later refined by Lasker, Tarrasch, and Nimzovich, Steinitz set the precedent for analyzing positions scientifically. One example was his advocacy for retaining a pawn on the second rank, illustrating his belief in slow, positional buildup.

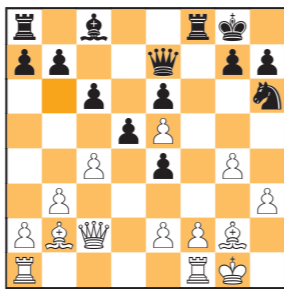
His theoretical impact on openings likewise left a mark. The Steinitz Variation of the Ruy Lopez (1. e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖a4 ♗e7 5. 0-0 d6) is one of the few lines bearing his name. Tigran Petrosian once noted how Steinitz "changed the course of chess history forever by raising awareness of defense" when it was still widely undervalued.

Wilhelm Steinitz

Johannes Zukertort

London 1872

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 ♖e8 7.♘c3 d5 8.♗e5 c6 9.b3 ♘e4 10.♖b2 ♘d7 11.♘d3 ♘df6 12.♖c2 ♗d6 13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.♗e5 ♗xe5? 14...♘d7 15.♖ad1±. 15.dxe5 ♘g4 16.h3 ♘h6 17.g4 ♖e7



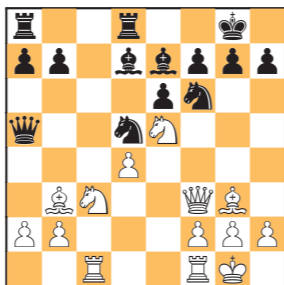
18.f3 exf3 19.exf3 ♗d7 20.f4 ♖c5+ 21.♔h1 b5 22.♖ad1 bxc4 23.♗d4 ♖e7 24.bxc4 a5 25.♖f2 ♖fc8 26.♗c5 ♖e8 27.♖fe1 ♖ab8 28.f5 exf5 29.e6 ♗xe6 30.cxd5 fxe4 31.♖xe6 ♖h5 32.dxc6 g3 33.♖d4 ♘f5 34.♖d5 ♔h8 35.♖e5 Black resigned

Johannes Zukertort

Wilhelm Steinitz

USA 1886

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.e3 c5 6.♗xc4 cxd4 7.exd4 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♖e2 ♘bd7 10.♖b3 ♘b6 11.♗f4 ♘bd5 12.♗g3 ♖a5 13.♖ac1 ♗d7 14.♗e5 ♖fd8 15.♖f3



15...♗e8! 16.♖fe1 ♖ac8 17.♗h4 ♘xc3 18.bxc3 ♖c7 19.♖d3?! 19.♗g3 ♗d6 20.c4∞. 19...♘d5 20.♗xe7 ♖xe7 21.♗xd5 ♖xd5 22.c4 ♖dd8 23.♖e3 ♖d6 24.♖d1 24.♖h3? h6! (24...♖xd4?! 25.♖xh7+ ♔f8 26.♖e3∞) 25.♖d1 f6±. 24...f6 25.♖h3!? h6! 26.♘g4 26.♘g6 ♖c7!-+ 26...♖f4 27.♘e3 ♗a4! 28.♖f3 ♖d6 29.♖d2 ♗c6 30.♖g3 f5!± 31.♖g6 ♗e4! 32.♖b3 ♔h7! 33.c5 ♖xc5 34.♖xe6 ♖c1+35.♘d1 35.♘f1 ♖f4!-+ 35...♖f4 36.♖b2 ♖b1 37.♖c3 ♖c8! 38.♖xe4 ♖xe4

White resigned

## Readers' Voices

**Capablanca, Petrosian, and Karpov.** Capablanca's best games seem effortless. Petrosian would stop attacks before they started and then punish positional errors. Karpov's pieces were always protected while he attacked his opponents. They all added up to Magnus.

Brian Glover

**Reshevsky, Portisch, and Karpov.** Samuel Reshevsky was a superb positional player as well as a brilliant tactician. Lajos Portisch was even known as the 'Hungarian Botvinnik' for his positional style! Anatoly Karpov, described as a 'boa constrictor' for his merciless positional play, would wait for the slightest error by his opponent and then crush him!

Lucien Liboiron

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## ARON NIMZOVICH

1886-1935



Although Aron Nimzovich was consistently among the top players from the 1920s to the early 1930s, he never became World Champion. Instead, he served as the foremost theorist of the hypermodern school, reshaping how positional chess was understood. Interestingly, Nimzovich began as a more combinational player but turned to positional ideas – reportedly after an unpleasant remark by Siegbert Tarrasch spurred him to prove a point.

Nimzovich's seminal book, *My System*, introduced the concepts of overprotection, blockading, and flexible planning. He emphasized placing multiple pieces around key squares or pawns, not only to defend them but also to create a sturdy foundation for dynamism. He also advocated doubling an opponent's pawns to blockade them and weaken the adversary's bishop pair – an approach that soon became a core strategic motif in modern chess.

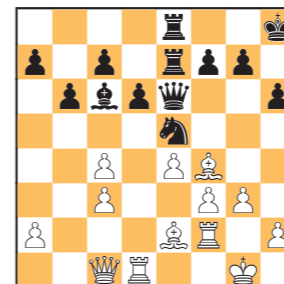
Several openings bear his name or owe their existence to his hypermodern philosophy. These include the Nimzo-Indian Defense (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♖b4), the Nimzovich Variation of the French Defense (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7), and the Modern Defense (1.e4 g6). In the words of Garry Kasparov, "Nimzovich's understanding of the dynamics between pieces and pawns set the stage for everything that followed."

Efim Bogoljubow

Aron Nimzovich

Karlsbad 1929

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♖b4 4.♘f3 ♗xc3+ 5.bxc3 b6 6.g3 ♖b7 7.♗g2 0-0 8.0-0 ♖e8! 9.♖e1 d6 10.♖c2 10.♘d2!? ♗xg2 11.♔xg2 e5 12.e4 ♘c6 13.♖b2. 10...♗e4 11.♖b3 ♘c6!± 12.♗f1 e5 12...♘a5 13.♖a4 e5±. 13.dxe5 13.d5 ♘a5 14.♖a4 ♘d7!±. 13...♘xe5! 14.♘xe5 ♖xe5± 15.♗f4 ♖e8 16.f3 ♖b7 17.♖ad1 ♘d7 18.e4 ♖f6 19.♗g2 ♘e5 20.♖d2 ♖e7 21.♖ed1 ♗c6 22.♖f2 ♖ae8 23.♗f1 h6 23...♘xf3+ 24.♖xf3 g5-+. 24.♗e2 ♔h8 25.♖a3 ♖e6 26.♖c1?! 26.♖b3 ♘g6 27.♗e3 f5!-+.



26...f5!-+ 27.exf5 ♖xf5 28.♖d2 ♖f7 29.♖d4 ♘g6 30.♗d3 ♘xf4 31.♖xf4 ♖xf4 32.gxf4 ♖f8 32...♖e3 33.♔g2 ♖xf3 34.♖xf3 ♖e3 35.♖df1 ♖xd3-+. 33.f5 ♗d7 34.♖dd2 ♗xf5 35.♖fe2 ♖xe2 36.♗xe2 ♖e8 37.♔f2 ♖e5 38.♖d5 g5 39.♖xe5 dxe5 40.c5 bxc5 41.♗a6 e4 42.a4 ♔g7 43.a5 exf3 44.♔xf3 ♔f6 45.♔e3 ♔e5 46.♗c4 ♗g4 47.♗a6 h5 48.♗c4 h4 49.♗a6 ♗d1 50.♗b7 g4 White resigned

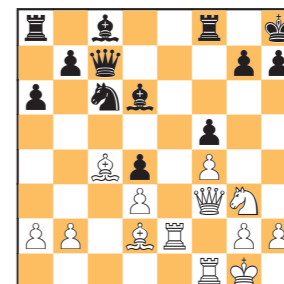
Aron Nimzovich

Akiba Rubinstein

Dresden 1926

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘b4 6.♗c4! e6 6...♘d3+ 7.♔e2! ♘f4+ 8.♔f1 ♘e6 9.b4!? cxb4 10.♘e2±.

7.0-0 ♘8c6 8.d3 ♘d4 9.♘xd4 cxd4 10.♘e2 a6 11.♘g3 ♗d6 12.f4 0-0 13.♖f3 ♔d3.e5 ♗e7 (13...♗c7 14.♗d2 ♘c6 15.♖h5+-) 14.f5 exf5 15.♘xf5 ♗e6 16.♖g4! g6 17.♗h6 ♖e8 18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♘g7!±. 13...♔h8 14.♗d2 f5 15.♖ae1 ♘c6 16.♖e2 ♖c7 17.exf5 exf5



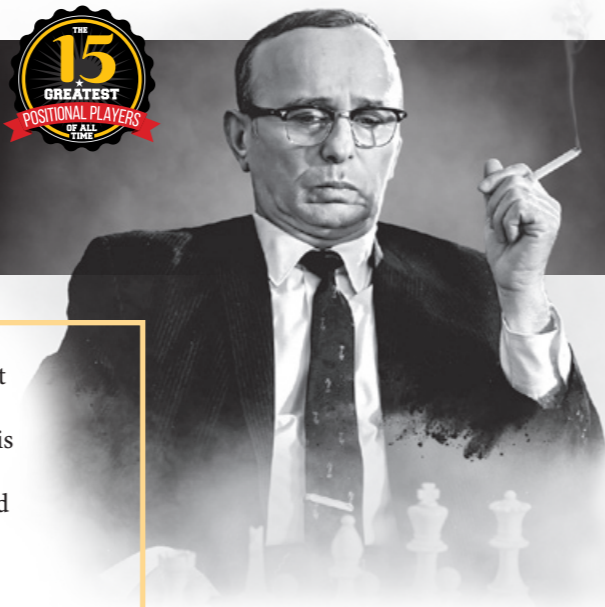
18.♘h1!? 18.♖fe1 ♘e7. 18...♗d7 18...♘e7 19.♘f2 ♘g6 20.♘h3±. 19.♘f2 ♖ae8 20.♖fe1 ♖xe2 21.♖xe2 ♘d8 21...♖e8 22.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 23.♖d5 ♘e7 24.♖xd4 ♗c5 25.♖e5 ♖xe5 26.fxe5±. 22.♘h3 ♗c6 22...♘f7 23.a3 ♗c6 24.♖h5±. 23.♖h5 g6 24.♖h4 ♔g7 25.♖f2! ♗c5 26.b4 ♖b6? 26...♗e7 27.♖xd4+ ♗f6 28.♖c5±. 27.♖h4 27.♖e1!!+- 27...♖e8 27...♖f6? 28.♘g5 h6 29.♘h7!+- 28.♖e5 ♘f7 28...♖xe5 29.fxe5 ♖xe5 30.♖h6+ ♔f6 (30...♔h8 31.♖f8 mate.) 31.♗g5 mate. 29.♗xf7! ♖xf7 29...♖xe5 30.♘g5!!+- 30.♘g5 ♖g8 31.♖xe8 ♗xe8 32.♖e1!! ♗c6 33.♖e7+ ♔h8 33...♔h6 34.♘e6+- 34.b5 ♖g7 34...axb5 35.♘e6! h6 36.♖f6+ ♔h7 37.♘f8+-; 34...h6 35.♘e6+-; 34...♖xb5 35.♖f6+ ♖g7 36.♖xb6+- 35.♖xg7+ ♔xg7 36.bxc6 bxc6 37.♘f3 c5 38.♘e5 ♗c7 39.♘c4 ♔f7 40.g3 ♗d8 41.♗a5 ♗e7 42.♗c7 ♔e6 43.♘b6 h6 44.h4 g5 45.h5 g4 46.♗e5

Black resigned



# 13 SAMUEL RESHEVSKY

1911-1992



Samuel Reshevsky arrived in the United States at the age of eight in 1921 and was immediately recognized as a chess prodigy. By his teens, he was outplaying top-level competitors, solidifying his status as one of the most formidable young talents in the world. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, Reshevsky consistently ranked among the elite, capturing the U.S. Chess Championship on seven occasions.

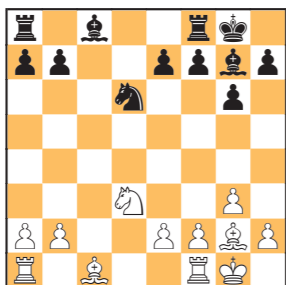
A key factor in his success was his strong positional feel – knowing exactly where his pieces belonged, given both his own and the opponent’s pawn structures. This gave him an edge in closed positions, where he could methodically maneuver for long-term advantages. Reshevsky was also known for his tenacity in pursuit of victory, sometimes landing in severe time trouble but emerging triumphant regardless.

His opening contributions include the Reshevsky Variation of the King’s Indian Defense (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗f3 0-0 6.♗e2) and his proficiency in the Classical Sicilian. Legendary grandmaster Miguel Najdorf once quipped, “Reshevsky’s ability to turn a quiet position into a strategically winning one was unmatched,” highlighting his competitive spirit and deep positional understanding.

Samuel Reshevsky  
Gideon Stahlberg

La Plata-New York radio match, 1947

1.♗f3 d5 2.g3 ♗f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.d4  
♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c5 7.dxc5 dxc4  
8.♖c2 ♖d5 9.♗a3 ♖xc5 10.♖xc4  
♖xc4 11.♗xc4 ♗c6 12.♗ce5 ♗xe5  
13.♗xe5 ♗e8 14.♗d3 ♗d6



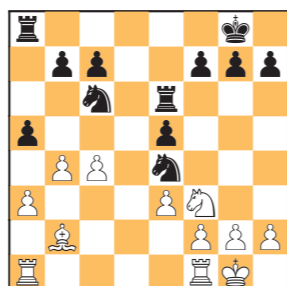
15.♗g5 ♗e8 16.♗ac1 h6 17.♗e3 ♗f5  
18.♗c7 ♗xd3 19.exd3 ♗ac8 20.♗fc1  
♗xc7 21.♗xc7 ♗xb2 22.♗xb7 ♗f6  
23.♗c6 ♗b8 24.♗xa7 ♗b1+ 25.♗g2  
♗a1 26.a4 ♗f5 27.♗b6 ♗d4 28.a5

♗c3 29.♗a7 ♗d4 30.♗e4 ♗b3 31.a6  
♗d4 32.♗xd4 ♗xd4 33.♗d7 f5  
34.♗d5+ Black resigned

Max Euwe  
Samuel Reshevsky

World Championship Tournament,  
The Hague/Moscow 1948

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2  
♗c6 5.♗f3 d6 6.♗d2 0-0 7.a3 ♗xc3  
8.♗xc3 a5 9.e3 ♖e7 10.♗d3 e5  
11.dxe5 dxe5 12.0-0 ♗e8 13.♗f5  
♗xf5 14.♗xf5 ♖e6! 15.♖xe6 ♗xe6  
16.b4 ♗e4 17.♗b2



17...f6! 18.b5 ♗e7 19.♗fd1 ♗d6!  
20.♗f1 ♗c8! 21.♗dc1 c5 22.♗c3  
♗xc3 23.♗xc3 e4 24.♗g1 ♗b6  
25.♗e2 f5 26.♗e1 ♗ad8 27.♗c2 ♗f7  
28.♗g3 ♗e6 29.♗f1 ♗d3 30.♗g3 g5!  
31.♗e2 ♗a4 32.♗g3 ♗e5 33.♗f1 h5  
34.f3 ♗b3 35.fxe4 fxe4 36.♗f2 ♗b2  
37.♗c2 ♗d3+ 38.♗e2 ♗f8 39.♗d2  
♗f2+ 40.♗d1 ♗b2 41.♗xb2 ♗xb2+  
42.♗c1 ♗xg2 White resigned

## Readers' Voices

Rubinstein, Capablanca, and Karpov.  
Making something out of nothing.  
Carlsen is still young, so we must  
wait until he retires then maybe he  
will be on the list.

Tal Haimovich

Karpov, Botvinnik, and Fischer.  
Karpov – his steady buildup of  
small advantages leading to a vice-  
like command of the position with  
limited options for the opponent.  
Karpov – Portisch, Tilburg 1988.  
Botvinnik – the first truly scientific  
player whose great understanding  
of positional advantages led  
to a spectacular run as world  
champion. Botvinnik-Capablanca,  
AVRO 1938. Fischer – tactical  
brilliance based on positional  
advantage. Fischer-Petrosian,  
Game 7 from their match in 1971.

Douglas White

# 12 MIKHAIL BOTVINNIK

1911-1995



Mikhail Botvinnik is widely regarded as the founding figure of the Soviet Chess School. His methodical, scientific focus on preparation and exhaustive analysis guided future Soviet stars, including Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov. Botvinnik believed that chess was both an art and a science – emphasizing how studying typical structures in the opening and middlegame could flow seamlessly into endgames. He famously regarded lost games as precious tools for self-improvement, painstakingly dissecting his errors to refine his approach.

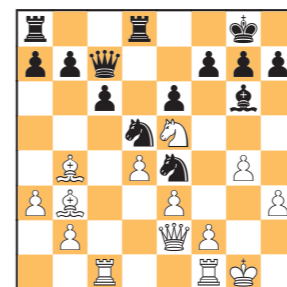
From 1948 to 1963, Botvinnik held the World Championship for all but a few short interruptions – briefly ceding the title to Vasily Smyslov (1957-1958) and Mikhail Tal (1960-1961) but managing to reclaim it each time before ultimately losing to Tigran Petrosian in 1963.

His theoretical achievements also remain influential. He devised or enriched several key systems in the King’s Indian (the Botvinnik System), Caro-Kann (Botvinnik Variation), and Semi-Slav (Botvinnik Variation). For Botvinnik, central pawn structures were paramount, and he often used them as a springboard for long-range planning. Indeed, his scientific approach to the game and profound will to validate his ideas set a model that subsequent Soviet generations emulated.

Mikhail Botvinnik  
Viacheslav Ragozin

Game 4, Training Match, Moscow 1936

1.♗f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 ♗f6 4.♗c3 ♗f5  
5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♗c4 e6 7.0-0 ♗d7 8.d4  
♗d6 9.♖e2 ♗b6 10.♗b3 ♗g4 11.h3  
♗h5 12.♗d2 0-0 13.♗e4 ♗f6 14.♗xd6  
♖xd6 15.a3 ♗fd8 16.♗ac1 ♗e4 17.♗b4  
♖c7 18.g4 ♗g6 19.♗e5 ♗d5

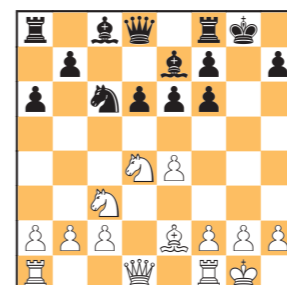


20.♗e1! ♗d6 21.f3 ♖b6 22.♗a2 f6  
23.♗xg6 hxg6 24.♗c5 a5 25.♗g3 ♗f7  
26.e4 ♗c7 27.♗f2 ♖a6 28.♖c2 ♗g5  
29.♗e3 ♗hx3+ 30.♗g2 ♗g5 31.♗c4  
♖a7 32.f4 ♗f7 33.f5! gxf5 34.gxf5  
exf5 35.♗xf5 ♗d6 36.♖f2 b5  
37.♗xf7+ ♗xf7 38.e5 ♗dd8 39.♗xf6+  
♗g8 40.♗f7 Black resigned

Vasily Smyslov  
Mikhail Botvinnik

World Championship Tournament,  
The Hague/Moscow 1948

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4  
♗f6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♗e2 ♗e7 8.0-0  
0-0 9.♗db5 a6 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♗d4



11...♗h8! 12.♗h1 ♗g8 13.f4 ♗d7  
14.♗f3 ♗c8 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♗e2  
d5 17.f5 ♖c7 18.c4 dxc4 19.♖d4 c5  
20.♖xc4 ♗d6! 21.g3 ♗b5 22.♖c2  
exf5 23.exf5 ♗ce8! 24.♗f2 ♗e3  
25.♗g2 ♖e7 26.♗g1 ♗d3 27.♖d2  
c4 28.♗f3 ♗e8 29.♗d1 ♗c5 30.b3  
♗e1 31.bxc4 ♗xc4 32.♗f1 ♗xd1  
33.♖xd1 ♗d8 34.♖c2 ♗d5 35.♖c3  
♗d4 36.♖d3 ♖e3 37.♖xe3 ♗xe3  
38.♗g2 ♗xf3 39.♗xf3 ♗d2 40.♗e2  
♗xa2 41.♗g2 White resigned

## Readers' Voices

Carlsen, Capablanca, and Reti.  
Carlsen for his relentless ability  
to squeeze small advantages out  
of seemingly equal positions.  
Case: Carlsen vs. Aronian,  
2012 – A beautiful example  
of slow, strategic domination.  
Capablanca was the epitome  
of positional elegance. Case:  
Capablanca vs. Tartakower, 1924  
– A textbook positional squeeze,  
where every move strengthens  
his position until his opponent is  
suffocated. Reti changed chess by  
challenging classical principles,  
advocating for controlling the  
center indirectly rather than  
occupying it outright. Case:  
Reti vs. Capablanca, 1924 – the  
famous game where Reti defeated  
Capablanca in a positional  
masterpiece, breaking his 8-year  
undefeated streak.

Mehran Divanbaigyzand



## How To Properly Evaluate A Position POSITIONAL LOCKDOWN

ENJOY FINE MANEUVERS, PROFOUND STRATEGIC IDEAS, AND THE ART OF DEVELOPING AND INCREASING POSITIONAL PRESSURE IN THE GAMES OF THE GREATEST POSITIONAL PLAYERS.

By GM Illia Nyzhnyk

Whenever I think about chess, I often find myself somewhat in two minds. On the one hand, as a player I always strive for excellence and practicality so as to achieve the best possible results. On the other hand, however, I still see chess as nothing more than a game, which can sometimes be aesthetically pleasing to the eye. I am sure that out of tens of millions of chess players around the globe I am not the only one who is looking to experience both the excellence and aesthetics of chess, and it so happens that often chess can provide both experiences at the same time!

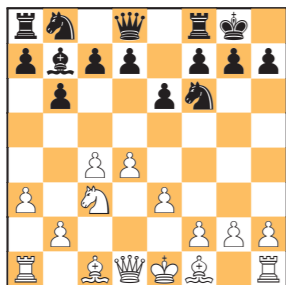
Therefore, I would like to introduce you, fellow readers, to the topic that I like to call “positional lockdown,” which exhibits both practical and aesthetic properties that most players yearn for. We begin the article with a game of a player that I consider one of the best positional players of the past, the ninth World Champion Tigran Petrosian.

### “IRON” TIGRAN INCREASES PRESSURE MOVE-BY-MOVE

Tigran Petrosian

Loris Kalashian

Armenian Championship, Yerevan 1946



**8.d5!** Given this game was played approximately 80 years ago, I like to think of it as a baseline example of what happens when one side doesn’t react to attempts at a “positional lockdown”. **8...♞e7** Back then, Black probably didn’t know just how bad things can get if this problem is not addressed as soon as possible. In these Queen’s Indian structures, if White attempts to lock in Black’s light-square bishop, something better must be done quickly, and **8...c6!** does just that, exploiting the fact that

White is lagging behind in development, thereby making it very difficult for him to keep his pawn chain intact.

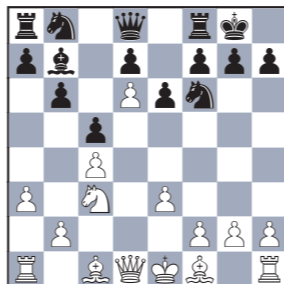
**A) 9.e4 cxd5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.exd5 ♖a6 12.♙c4 ♜c8 13.♞d4 ♜e8+ 14.♙e3 ♖c5 15.0-0 ♞ce4=** and Black generates sufficient counterplay against the pawn on d5, as well as on the open c- and e- files.

Tigran Petrosian



Born in 1996 in Ukraine, Illia Nyzhnyk earned his Grandmaster title in 2011 and subsequently moved to the United States. Since joining Webster University’s SPICE program in 2014, he has been instrumental in securing multiple championship wins. In addition to team successes, Illia has claimed various individual titles, such as the 2020 Spice Cup Open and four World Opens. After completing his MBA in December 2021, he has fully committed himself to further developing his chess abilities.

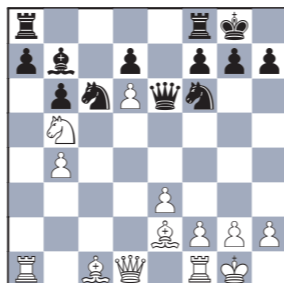
**B) 9.dxe6** leaves all options open for Black. **9...dxe6 (9...fxc6 10.♞d6 ♖e8 11.♞g3 d5 12.♙e2 ♖d7∞) 10.c5!? ♖bd7 11.cxb6 axb6 12.♙e2 c5 13.0-0 ♖e5=.**  
**C) 9.d6 c5**



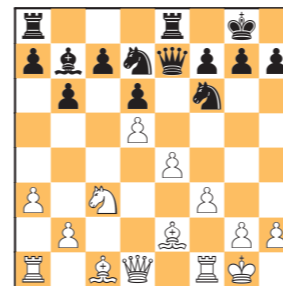
**10.h4!? ♖c6 11.h5 h6 12.b3 ♖e8 13.♙b2 f5 14.♖e2 e5∞.**

**9.♙e2 exd5 10.cxd5 d6?** This essentially is an acceptance of the fact that the bishop on b7 will be a sad spectator for the rest of the game.

It was not too late for **10...c6 11.d6 ♞e6 12.0-0 c5**, and I would say that Black’s position will be fine in general, although a strong engine somewhat disagrees, giving White a slight edge after **13.b4 cxb4 (13...♖c6?! 14.bxc5 bxc5 15.♞b1 ♞ab8 16.♞b5 ♙a6 17.♜xc5 ♙xe2 18.♖xe2±) 14.axb4 ♖c6 15.♖b5**



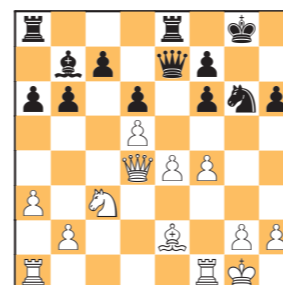
**A) 15...♖e8 16.♙b2 ♖xb4 17.♞a3!?**  
**A1) 17...♞d5 18.e4 ♞xd1 19.♞xd1 a6 (19...♙xe4?? 20.♞d4 ♖c2 21.♞xe4 ♖xa3 22.♙xa3+–) 20.♖c3 ♙c6 21.h4! a5 22.h5±;**  
**A2) 17...a5 18.e4!±;**  
**B) 15...♖xb4 16.♖c7 ♞e5 17.♞a4 a5 18.♖xa8 ♞xa8 19.♙d2 ♙c6 20.♙xb4 ♞d5 21.♞xd5 ♖xd5 22.♞a3 ♖xb4±.**  
**11.f3!?** **11.0-0** was probably better, as it does not make any commitments with the pawn structure. **11...c6 12.dxc6 ♖xc6 13.b3 d5 14.♖b5±.**  
**11...♞e8** Once again, **11...c6!?** was the way to go, but this looks ugly with Black being forced to play with an isolated pawn: **12.dxc6 ♖xc6 13.0-0 d5! 14.♖b5 ♞fe8∞**, but at least Black has a target.  
**12.0-0 ♖bd7 13.e4**



To be frank, if I ever find myself in this sort of position from Black’s side, I will think that it is close to hopeless. The game itself did not last for too long either, thereby proving my point.

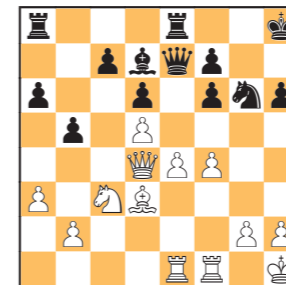
**13...♖e5 14.♙g5 a6 15.♞d4 h6 16.♙h4 ♖g6 17.♙xf6 gxf6** With Black being saddled with a new set of weaknesses, defending becomes unbearable. Playing an endgame after **17...♞xf6 18.♞xf6 gxf6 19.♞ac1+–**, does not look any better, as Black is left with horribly placed pieces and multiple weaknesses.

**18.f4!** Fully restricting the knight on g6.



**18...♙c8 19.♞ae1 ♙d7 20.♙d3** Petrosian slowly improves all his pieces. **20...b5 21.♖h1** Highly accurate prophylaxis, directed against a potential

queen trade along the g1–a7 diagonal. **21...♖h8**



**22.♖e2!** Rerouting the last piece to its most active location! With a couple of precise maneuvers, the game ends quickly. **22...♖f8 23.♖g3 ♖h7 24.♞e2** One should pay attention to the masterful way Petrosian has maximized the harmony of his pieces.

**24...♞ad8 25.♞c2 ♙c8 25...♞c8** was no better, as after **26.♞fc1** White’s bind will soon result in material gains.

**26.♞fc1 c5 27.dxc6 d5 28.c7 ♞d6 29.exd5 ♞e3 30.♞xe3 ♞xe3 31.♖f5**  
**Black resigned**

### CARUANA’S CONCRETE APPROACH

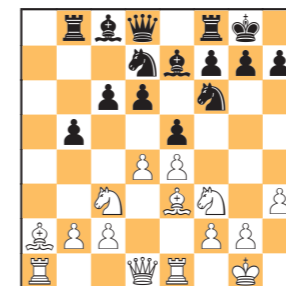
Fabiano Caruana

2662

Stephane Hautot

2420

European Team Championship,  
Novi Sad 2009



In the following game, Black is demonstrating his clear intention of advancing on the queenside. However, White has something to say about that!

**13.b4!** Fixing Black’s pawn structure and eliminating one of the very few ideas that Black has here.

**13...♞c7 14.♙b3 ♖b6 15.♞d3!** Preventing the black knight’s advance to c4 is another important step for delivering a positional lockdown.

**15...♙e6** Black needed to develop

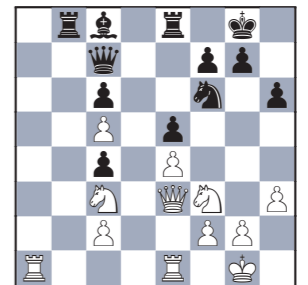


▲ Fabiano Caruana

Photo by Lennart Ootes

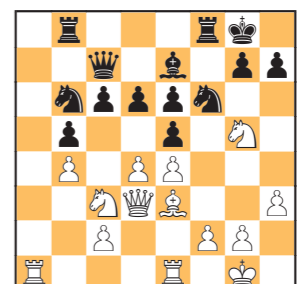
somehow, but this move offers White more options.

It was better to start with **15...h6!?**, taking away the important g5 square. Then after **16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♙c5 ♞e8 18.♞e3 ♙xc5 19.bxc5 ♖c4 (19...♖bd7?! 20.♞ed1 ♞e7 21.♖e2 ♖f8 22.♖g3±) 20.♙xc4 bxc4**



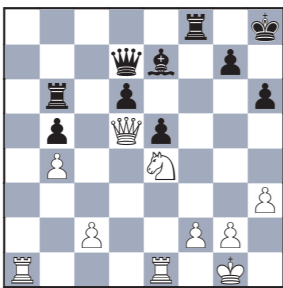
**21.♖a4 ♞b5 22.♖b6 ♙e6 23.♞a4**, while White may still be slightly better, Black’s position now has some life, which gives it a great chance of survival.

**16.♙xe6 fxe6 17.♖g5!?** Immediately putting the pawn on e6 in “check” and politely asking Black how he intends to deal with this newly created problem.





17...♖c8? It's no surprise that Black makes an immediate misstep. 17...♗d7!? would have been a better try, but probably it was unpleasant to make peace with the following 18.d5! (18.dxe5?! dxe5 19.♗xd7 ♖fxd7 20.♖xe6 ♖fc8 21.♖a7 ♖xb4 22.♖xb6 ♖xb6 23.♖e3 ♖f8∞) 18...exd5 19.♖xb6 ♖xb6 20.exd5 h6 21.♖ge4 ♖xd5 22.♖xd5 cxd5 23.♗xd5+ ♖h8

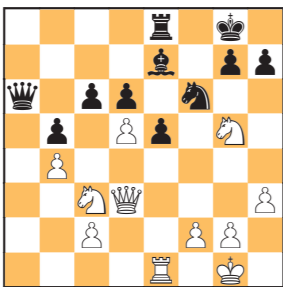


24.♖a3±, with a complete positional lockdown.

18.♖a7! White keeps throwing "wood on the fire," placing Black under more annoying stress.

18...♖e8 19.d5! Great timing for this positional breakthrough, which results in the weakening of Black's light squares.

19...exd5 20.♖xb6 ♖xb6 21.exd5 ♖a6 22.♖xa6 ♗xa6

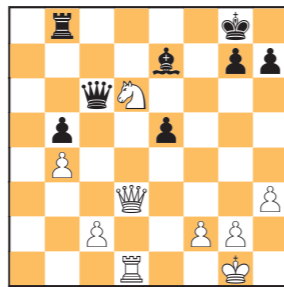


23.♖ge4! The pinnacle of White's strategy. Trading a pair of knights would lead to a positional lockdown like that given in the comments to Black's move 17. The impatient 23.dxc6?! would still maintain some advantage, but Black might still untangle after 23...♗xc6 24.♖xb5 ♖b8 25.♗b3+ d5 26.♖xe5 ♖f8 27.♖d4 ♗a8 28.c3 ♖xb4! 29.♖e1 ♖c5 30.♗c2±.

23...♖b8 24.♖d1 24.♖xf6+! would have ended Black's suffering a little earlier. 24...♖xf6 25.♗f3! ♖c8 26.♗f5! cxd5 27.♖e6+ ♖h8 28.♖xd5+.

24...♗b7 25.♖xf6+ ♖xf6 26.♖e4

♖e7 26...cxd5 27.♗b3!+-. 27.dxc6 ♗xc6 28.♖xd6 Fortunately, "beggars can't be choosers", and Black is forced into a lost rook endgame which White wins without any problems.



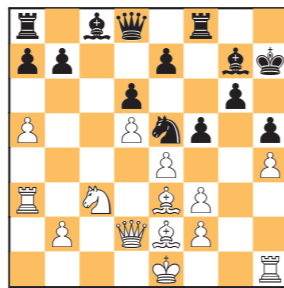
28...♖xd6 29.♗xd6 ♗xd6 30.♖xd6 and White won on move 50.

### CARLSEN'S SUPERIOR SENSE OF PIECE COORDINATION

In my opinion, the following game has one of the coolest demonstrations of what a true positional lockdown should look like.

Vladimir Fedoseev	2700
Magnus Carlsen	2847

FIDE World Cup, Sochi 2021



16...f4! An excellent positional sacrifice, offering White a choice – either to capture on f4 and potentially fall victim to Black's play on the f-file, or to ignore the pawn, but leave the black knight on e5 practically invulnerable.

17.♖xf4 Of course, White accepts the pawn, as dealing with a potential monster of a black knight on e5 is most unpalatable. For example, 17.♖d4 ♖d7 18.♖a2 ♗c7±.

17...♖d7 Black could have played more aggressively on the f-file by 17...♖f7!? 18.♖f1 ♗f8 19.♖xe5 ♖xe5 20.♖g2 ♖d7±, leaving White with lots

### EXERCISES FOR SOLVING

As per usual, I am inviting you, fellow readers, to test your skills in the following puzzles I prepared for you.

1

Boris Gelfand	2727
Viswanathan Anand	2791

Game 7, World Championship Match, Moscow 2012



White to move

2

Wesley So	2760
Ding Liren	2782

Bilbao Masters 2015



White to move

3

Michael Adams	2660
Alexey Dreev	2670

PCA/Intel-GP, London 1995

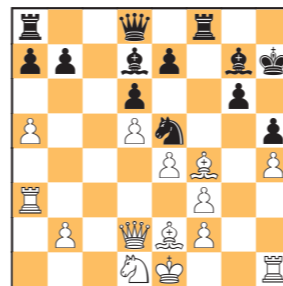


White to move

Solutions on page 35

of problems, as well as retaining a strong bishop pair.

18.♖d1



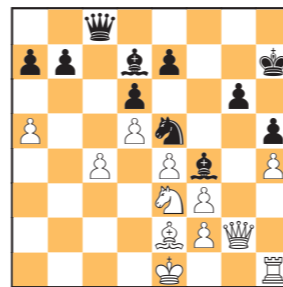
18...♖xf4! Here it is! Black decides that material is irrelevant in this case, as White will now struggle to maintain coordination of his pieces.

19.♗xf4 ♖h6 20.♗g3 ♗f8 Control of the f4 square is essential here.

21.♖e3 ♖f4 22.♗g2 ♖c8 Black's pieces gradually take over all the important files and squares on the board.

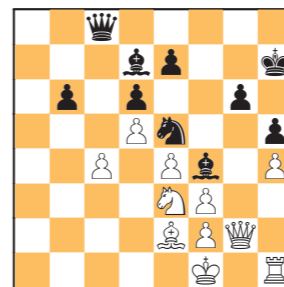
23.♖c3 The best reaction as White needs to somehow try to neutralize the scope of Black's pieces. 23.0-0 wouldn't do White any good, as Black will soon launch a devastating attack on the kingside by 23...♗f6±.

23...♖xc3 24.bxc3 ♗c8 25.c4



25...b5!? A well-timed breakthrough. As White has managed to trade the only black rook, castling is now something of great interest for him, since Black no longer has enough pieces to punish the white king for running off to the kingside. 25...♗c5?! would have been a waste of time as it allows White to reorganize by 26.0-0! ♗xa5 27.♖b1 b6 28.♗f1± when he is not only out of the woods, but in fact, stands better.

26.axb6 26.0-0? runs into 26...♖h3+-. 26...axb6 27.♗g1?? It is difficult to blame Fedoseev for messing this up, as the position is extremely unpleasant for White to play. 27.♖f1! would have been the right approach, but from a practical standpoint this seems a waste of time.

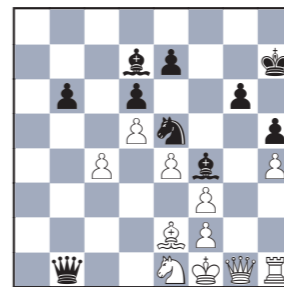


The true intention of this move is to go ♖g1, ♗f1, ♖g2, which from afar seems borderline impossible: 27...b5 28.♖g1 bxc4 29.♗f1 c3 30.♖g2. Here we are, White has managed to regroup his pieces and prolong the fight. 30...♗c5 31.♖c2 ♖a4 32.♗b1 ♖xc2 33.♗xc2 ♖d2∞ and while White is okay, I would still choose Black because of his complete control and strong passed c-pawn.

27...♗a8 Also 27...♗a6+- was good enough.

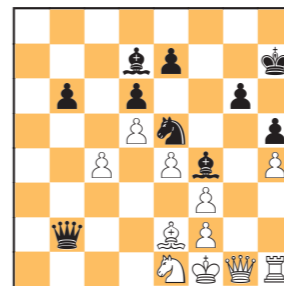
28.♖f1 ♗a2 29.♖g2 ♗a1+? This could have been a costly mistake for Black, as White gets another chance to regroup his pieces.

29...♗b1+! was the precise way, exploiting the black queen's involvement on the b-file. 30.♖e1



30...b5! 31.cxb5 ♖xb5 32.♖xb5 ♖xf3+- resulting in a quite amusing position and one that is very aesthetically pleasing for Black.

30.♖e1 ♗b2



31.♖g2?? Missing out on the only chance White will ever have here.

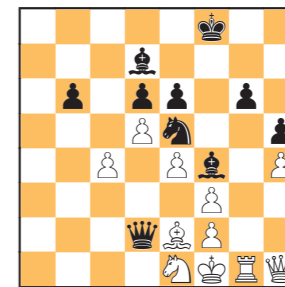


▲ Magnus Carlsen

Photo by Lennart Ootes

31.♖d3! would have been his saving grace, trading off one of Black's most influential pieces. 31...♖xd3 32.♖xd3 ♗c3 33.♖e2 ♗d2 34.♖h2!± and though White can hardly move, Black no longer has a way to make progress without incurring further trades of pieces, which will inevitably allow White to untangle. 31...♗c1+ 32.♖e1 ♗d2 Black will no longer permit White to trade anything, and the game ends quickly, as White essentially runs out of moves.

33.♗g2 ♖g7 34.♖g1 ♖f8 35.♗h1 e6 The final breakthrough of this positional masterpiece by Carlsen.



36.♖g3 exd5 37.exd5 37.cxd5 b5+-. 37...♖f5 Black's last piece enters the battlefield.

38.♖g1 ♖f7 39.♖g3 ♖d7 White has almost nothing he can do against this leisurely maneuver. Black's idea is ...♖c5-b3-d4.

40.♖g5 ♖xg5 41.hxg5 ♖e5 White resigned as there is not much he can do to prevent ...♗c1 and ...♖d3 without significant material losses.



## LEKO'S DEEP FEEL FOR STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES

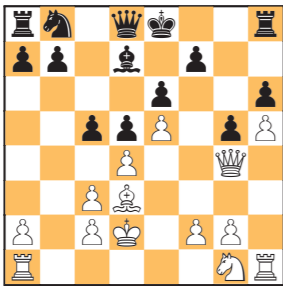
In this final example, to reach positional lockdown White had to underline Black's structural weaknesses.



▲ Peter Leko, Szeged 2015

Peter Leko	2736
Teimour Radjabov	2624

Linares 2003



**13.f4!** Taking immediate advantage of the overextended pawn on g5.

**13...dxc6** Black cannot take on f4, as after 13...gxf4?? 14.♖g7 ♖f8 15.♗xh6+- White will easily promote his h-pawn.

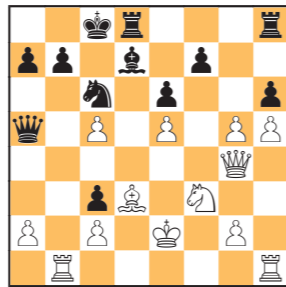
**14.fxg5 ♖a5!** The only appropriate reaction to avoid an immediate demise. The endgame after 14...♗xg5+ is bad for Black. For example, 15.♗xg5 hxg5 16.♖f3 g4 17.♖g5 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖xd4 19.h6+- and once again the h-pawn is unstoppable.

14...hxg5 doesn't work for the same reason – the dreaded h-pawn will conclude the game in White's favor: 15.♖f3 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♗a5+ 17.♔e3+-.

**15.dxc5** White could have tried to tread in far more dynamic waters after 15.♖f3!? cxd4 16.♖xd4 ♖xe5 17.♗f4 ♖c4+ 18.♔xc4 dxc4 19.gxh6 0-0-0∞, when it looks like the poor position of the white king is just enough for Black to be okay. 20.♗ae1 ♖dg8 21.g4 ♗g5 22.♗xg5 ♖xg5 23.♖e4 e5 24.♖f3 ♖xg4 25.♖xg4 ♔xc4 26.♖xe5 ♔e6=.

**15...d4!? 15...♖xe5?? 16.♗d4+-.** **16.♖f3!** The e5 pawn is the cornerstone of White's position and thus should be retained as long as possible.

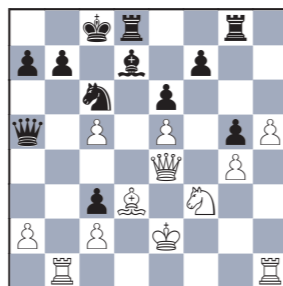
**16...0-0-0 17.♖ab1 dxc3+ 18.♔e2**



**18...♗hg8?!** This move, although seemingly good, achieves nothing in practice. Interestingly, taking on g5 at this very moment was exactly what was necessary for Black. 18...hxg5! 19.h6. However, Black must then find the engine-like 19...a6!, which, in my opinion, is very hard to do over the board. After, for example, 20.h7 ♗xc5 21.♗xg5 ♖b4 22.♖xb4 ♗xb4 23.♖h4 ♗b6∞, God knows what is happening. (I cannot really tell, but the engine believes that this is roughly equal, of course.)

**19.♗e4?!** 19.♖hd1!? is more precise, giving White new and cool possibilities: 19...♔e8 20.♔h7 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♖g7 22.♔g6!! hxg5 23.♔d3+- and again it's all about the h-pawn advance.

**19...♗c7?!** 19...hxg5!? Once again, capturing on g5 was a must. 20.g4

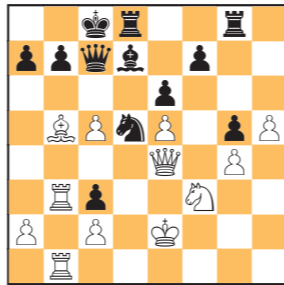


20...♖gf8! 21.h6 f5! 22.exf6 ♖xf6 23.h7 ♖f4! 24.♗e3 ♖h8 25.♖h6 (25.♖xg5?! e5+ and Black's pieces come to life with new targets on the radar – the g4 pawn and the white king.) 25...e5 26.♖xc6+! ♔xc6 27.♖xg5 ♗d8 28.♔f5+ looks quite messy.

**20.g4 ♖e7** Clearly intending ...♔c6.

**21.♔b5!** Taking away one of the few means of counterplay to which Black still has access.

**21...hxg5 22.♖b3 ♖d5 23.♖hb1**

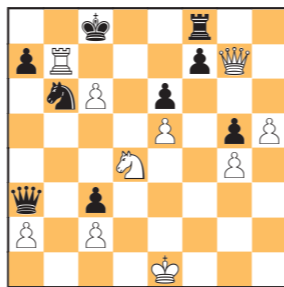


**23...♔c6??** Too slow! 23...f5! had to be played, ripping the white king's position open. For example, 24.exf6 ♖xf6 25.♗e5 ♔xb5+ 26.♖xb5 ♗xe5+ 27.♖xe5 ♖d2+ 28.♔e1 ♖d4!-.

**24.♔xc6 ♗xc6 25.♖d4 ♗a6+ 26.♔e1** White's pieces are all placed so perfectly that there is no longer much Black can do.

**26...♖d7 27.c6! ♖c7 28.♖xb7 ♖xb7 29.♖xb7 ♖b6 30.♗h7 ♖f8 31.♗g7 31.♖xf7** was an easy win, but White had something else in mind.

**31...♗a3**



**32.♗xf8+!** and **Black resigned** as there is no way to avoid ♖b5-d6, followed by c7 and queening the pawn. ■

## SOLUTIONS



1



**19.♖c2!** The weakness of the a6 pawn prevents Black from contesting the c-file properly, so White is quick to take advantage of this.

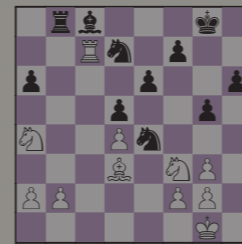
**19...♖bd7 20.♖fc1 ♖ab8 21.♖a4! ♖e4 21...♖xc2** Trading on the c-file doesn't save Black either, as after 22.♖xc2 ♖c8 23.♖xc8+ ♔xc8 24.♗c2 ♔b7 25.♖c5 ♖xc5 26.dxc5 ♗c7 27.b4 e5 28.♔f1 d4



**29.c6!** ♗xc6 30.♗xc6 ♔xc6 31.♖xe5 ♔b7 32.♖f3+- White will find himself in a winning endgame.

**22.♖xc8+ ♔xc8 23.♗c2 g5 24.♗c7** Keeping the queens on the board for a while longer would also suffice. 24.b3!? g4 25.♔xe4 dxe4 26.♖d2 f5 27.♖c4 ♗xd4 28.♖d1 ♗g7 29.♖d6+-.

**24...♗xc7 25.♖xc7**



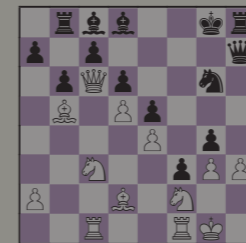
**25...f6?** This seems logical, but there is just too much disarray among Black's pieces. Black would entertain a chance after 25...♔f8!? 26.♖e5 ♖xe5 27.dxe5 ♔e8 28.♔xe4 dxe4 29.g4 a5 30.b3 ♔a6 31.♖c5 ♔d3

32.♖b7+-, though it still looks grim.

**26.♔xe4!** Beginning a forced line that sees White end with massive material gains.

**26...dxe4 27.♖d2 f5 28.♖c4 ♖f6 29.♖c5 ♖d5 30.♖a7 ♖b4 31.♖e5 ♖c2 32.♖c6 ♖xb2 33.♖c7 ♖b1+ 34.♔h2 e3 35.♖xc8+ ♔h7 36.♖c7+ ♔h8 37.♖e5 e2 38.♖xe6** Black resigned as there is no defense to ♖g6+, followed by ♖g7 checkmate.

2

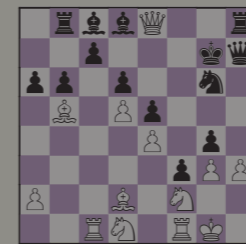


I would not be lying if I said that this game is one of my absolute favorites of all time. Black has invested some material into the attack which, unfortunately, did not get far. However, White needs to find a way to make progress, so how should that be done? **31.♖cd1!** Freeing up the c-file as well as potentially bringing the knight to f5 is the way to go! **31...a6** However...

**32.♗e8+!** Seems like a tactical oversight at first – but wait! There is more!

Any sort of passive retreat, for example, 32.♔d3 would allow Black to consolidate after 32...♔d7 33.♗c3 b5 34.a3 (34.♖e3? ♖f4!! 35.gxf4 ♗h4+-) 34...♖b7∞.

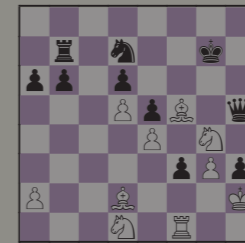
**32...♔g7**



**33.♗xd8!!** This fantastic positional sacrifice is what makes

this game so amazing in my eyes.

**33...♖xd8 34.♖xc7+ ♔d7 35.♖xd7+ ♖xd7 36.♔xd7** Because of how many pieces got off the board, White will never have any issues with their king safety. In the meantime, his minor pieces are about to start dominating the position, leaving Black with nothing better to do but sit and wait for the inevitable. **36...gxh3 37.♔h2 ♖b7 38.♔e6 ♖f8 39.♔f5 ♗h5 40.♖g4 ♖d7**



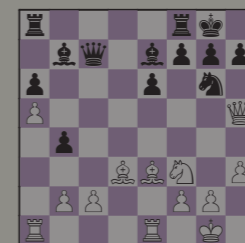
**41.♔h6+! ♔h8 42.♖de3** White's pieces act in perfect harmony and after White takes on f3 it will be an easy win.

**42...♖c7 43.♔xd7 ♖xd7 44.♖xf3 ♖f7 45.♖f5 ♖xf5 45...♗g6 46.♔f8!+-.**

**46.exf5** Three minor pieces for a queen along with White's passed pawns make it an unequal battle.

**46...♗f7 47.♔g5 b5 48.♖h6 ♗f8 49.f6 ♔h7 50.♖ef5 ♔g6 51.♔h4 e4 52.f7 e3 53.♔e7 e2 54.♖h4+ ♔h7 55.♔xf8 e1♗ 56.♔xd6 ♗f2+ 57.♔xh3 ♗f1+ 58.♔g4 ♗c4+ 59.♔f4 ♗e2+ 60.♖f3** Black resigned

3



Sometimes the answer is to just keep it simple!

**19.♖g5!** Forces Black to part ways with his bishop pair.

**19...♔xg5 19...h6?? 20.♖xf7! ♖xf7 21.♗xg6+-.**

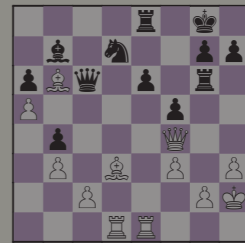
**20.♗xg5 ♗c6 21.♔b6!** I would say that this position is nearly

perfect for the bishop pair, as that is all White needs to fully restrict Black's movements.

**21...f5 22.f3!?** Ensuring that there is no funny business on the a8-h1 diagonal.

**22...♖ae8 23.♖ad1 ♖f6 24.b3** Aiming for ♔c4 to increase the pressure on Black's position.

**24...♖f8 25.♗f4 ♖g6 26.♔h2 ♖d7**



**27.♔c4?!** I think it was better to retain the bishop pair by simply bringing the bishop back by 27.♔f2!?+-, as now Black will be given some respite.

**27...♖xb6 28.axb6 ♗xb6 29.♖e2 ♗c5 30.♗d6 ♗c8?** 30...♗xd6+ was Black's only chance, but the endgame is by no means pleasant.

**31.♖xd6** ♖f8 32.♖e5 ♖c8 33.♖dx6 ♖xe6 34.♖xe6 ♖c6 35.♖e5 ♔c8 36.h4± Black's pawns on a6, b4 and f5 are all weak which makes his position indefensible in the long run.

**31.♖de1** With White completely overwhelming the e6 pawn there is not much Black can do, and the game ends quickly.

**31...♔f7 32.♖e5 ♖f6 33.♖c5 ♗b8**



**34.♔xe6+! ♔g6 35.♔xf5+ ♔h6 36.♗xb8 ♖xb8 37.♔d3 g6 38.♖e7 ♔c6 39.g4** Black resigned



# 11 VASILY SMYSLOV

1921–2010

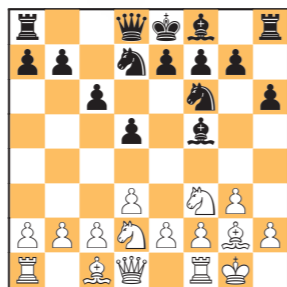


Vasily Smyslov

Max Euwe

Candidates Tournament, Zurich 1953

1.♟f3 ♘f6 2.g3 d5 3.♙g2 ♙f5  
4.0-0 ♘bd7 5.d3 c6 6.♘bd2 h6



7.e4! dxe4 8.dxe4 ♘xe4 9.♘d4!  
♘xd2 10.♙xd2 ♙h7 11.♙c3 ♖c7  
12.♗f3 e5 13.♗fe1 0-0-0 14.♘b3  
f6 15.♙a5 ♘b6 16.c4 ♗d3 17.♗h5  
♗e7 18.♙f1 g6 19.♗e2 ♗d7 20.♗e3  
♘b8 21.♗ad1 ♘c8 22.♙h3! ♗xd1  
23.♗xd1 f5 24.♙b4! ♗f6 25.♙c3  
♙g7 26.♘c5 ♘a8 27.♘xb7 ♘xb7  
28.♗d7+ ♘a8 29.♗c5 ♘b6 30.♗xg7  
♗xg7 31.♙xe5 ♗d7 32.♙xh8 ♘b7  
33.♙d4 ♗e6 34.♙f1 ♙g8 35.b3 f4  
36.a4 fxg3 37.hxg3 ♙f7 38.a5 ♘c8  
39.♙g2 ♗d6 40.a6+ ♘a6 41.♙xc6  
♗xc5 42.♙xc5 ♘b6 43.♙f1 ♙e6  
44.♙e2 ♘d7 45.♙d4 ♘a5 46.♙c3+  
♘b6 47.♙e4 g5 48.♙d4+ ♘a5  
49.♙xa7 ♘b4 50.♙c2 ♘c3 51.♙d1  
♘e5 52.♙e3 ♘c6 53.♙b6 g4 54.♙f4

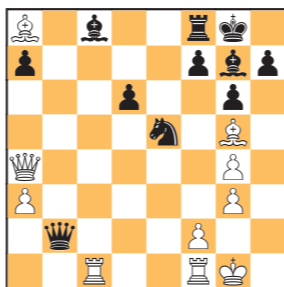
h5 55.♙e3 ♘a5 56.♙e5 ♙c8 57.c5  
♘xb3 58.♙e2 ♘a5 59.♙b5 ♘c4+  
60.♙f4 ♘xe3 61.fxe3 ♘b4 62.♙e8  
h4 63.gxh4 ♘xc5 64.h5 g3 65.♙xg3  
♘d5 66.h6 ♙f5 67.♙f4 ♙h7 68.♙g5  
Black resigned

Mikhail Botvinnik

Vasily Smyslov

Game 14, World Championship Match,  
Moscow 1954

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♙g7 4.♙g2  
0-0 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.0-0  
e5 8.e4 c6 9.♙e3 ♘g4 10.♙g5 ♗b6  
11.h3 exd4 12.♘a4 ♗a6 13.hxg4  
b5 14.♘xd4 bxa4 15.♘xc6 ♗xc6  
16.e5 ♗xc4 17.♙xa8 ♘e5 18.♗c1  
♗b4 19.a3 ♗xb2 20.♗xa4



20...♙b7! 21.♗b1? ♘f3+ 22.♙h1  
♙xa8!!+ 23.♗xb2 ♘xg5+ 24.♙h2  
♘f3+ 25.♙h3 ♙xb2 26.♗xa7  
♙e4! 27.a4 ♙g7 28.♗d1 ♙e5  
29.♗e7 ♗c8 30.a5 ♗c2 31.♙g2  
♘d4+ 32.♙f1 ♙f3 33.♗b1 ♘c6  
White resigned

## Readers' Voices

Karpov, Capablanca, and Carlsen.

It seems Karpov would rather surround and arrest his opponent than kill him. Capablanca was a great positional player and his endgame technique years ahead of his time. Magnus can somehow turn any dry/boring position into a slight advantage where he always seems to come out on top.

Andy Hoey

Reshevsky, Portisch, and Karpov.

Samuel Reshevsky was a superb positional player as well as a brilliant tactician. Lajos Portisch was even known as the 'Hungarian Botvinnik' for his positional style! Anatoly Karpov, described as a 'boa constrictor' for his merciless positional play, would wait for the slightest error by his opponent and then crush him!

Lucien Liboiron

# 10 ULF ANDERSSON

1961–

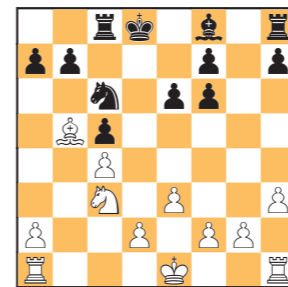


Ulf Andersson

Vlastimil Hort

Las Palmas 1975

1.♘f3 c5 2.b3 d5 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙b2 ♙g4  
5.h3 ♙xf3 6.♗xf3 ♘c6 7.♙b5 ♗c8  
8.c4 dxc4 9.bxc4 e6 10.♙xf6 ♗xf6  
11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.♘c3 ♘d8



13.♙xc6! ♗xc6 14.♗b1 ♘c8 15.♙e2  
f5 16.g4! ♙g7 17.♘b5 ♘b8 18.gxf5  
exf5 19.♗hg1 ♙f6 20.♗g3 a6 21.♘a3  
♙e5 22.♗g5 ♗f6 23.♘c2 ♗e8 24.♘e1  
♙d6 25.♘f3 f4 26.♗d5 ♘c7 27.a4  
♘c6 28.a5! fxe3 29.♗b6+ ♘c7 30.fxe3  
h6 31.♙xc5+ ♘b8 32.♗d5 ♘c7  
33.♘d4 ♗g6 34.♗f5 f6 35.♗d5 ♙e5  
36.♗c5+ ♘d8 37.♘f3 ♗g2+ 38.♘d3  
♗e7 39.♘xe5 fxe5 40.♗xh6  
Black resigned

## Readers' Voices

Benko, Stahlberg, and Marshall.

If you look at Pal Benko's games from Curacao 1962, you will see that he was trying very hard to maximize his virtues against the Soviet Big Red Machine. He did that by transposing his openings. I'll always remember Gideon Stahlberg's game as White in a King's Indian against Geller at Zurich, 1953. True, it was "only a draw," but I used that system many times, beating masters with it. And Frank Marshall? His tactics obscure his appreciation of positional matters.

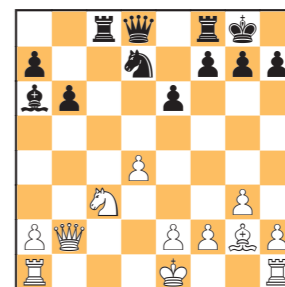
Ed Yetman III

Walter Browne 2550

Ulf Andersson 2545

IBM, Amsterdam 1978

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♙a6  
5.b3 ♙b4+ 6.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 7.♗xd2 c6  
8.♘c3 d5 9.♘e5 0-0 10.♙g2 ♘fd7  
11.♘d3 dxc4 12.♘b4 cxb3 13.♘xc6  
♘xc6 14.♙xc6 ♗c8 15.♙g2 b2  
16.♗xb2



16...♘f6! 17.♘e4 ♗c4 18.♗d1 ♘d5  
19.0-0 ♗e7 20.♗c1 ♗b4! 21.♗xb4  
♗xb4 22.♘c3 ♘xc3 23.♗xc3 ♗xd4  
24.♗a3 ♙xe2 25.♙e1 ♙c4?! 25...♗d2!  
26.♗xa7 g5! 27.♙f1 g5  
26.♗xa7 ♗fd8 27.♙f1 g5 28.♙xc4  
♗xc4 29.♗b7 ♗b4 30.♗c1 ♗d5 31.♗c2  
h5 32.♙g2 b5 33.♗e2 g4 34.h3 ♘f8  
35.♗a7? 35.hxg4 hxg4 36.a3 ♗b3 37.♗e4  
♗xa3 38.♗f4 f5 39.♗b4+  
35...♗d1+ 36.hxg4 hxg4 37.f3 ♗d3  
38.f4 ♗c4 39.♙h2 ♗cc3 40.♗g2 ♗c5  
41.♗a5 ♗h5+ 42.♙g1 ♗d1+ 43.♙f2  
♗hd5 44.♗g1 ♗d5d2+ 45.♙e3 ♗d3+  
46.♙e2 ♗d2d2+ 47.♙e1 ♗b2 48.f5  
exf5 White resigned



# 09 MICHAEL ADAMS

1971 -



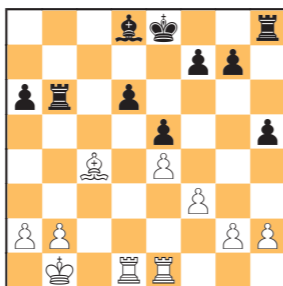
Michael Adams has been a leading figure in British chess since the early 1990s, admired for his unflappable style and brilliant endgame technique. His games exemplify superb coordination of pieces, and his ability to make seemingly quiet positions dangerous for opponents is a hallmark of his success.

Adams burst onto the international scene as a teenager, clinching the British Championship in 1989 at just 17 – a title he would ultimately win seven times (1989, 1997, 2010, 2011, 2016, 2018, 2019). On the global stage, he reached the semifinals or finals of several FIDE World Championships, including his nail-biting runner-up performance in 2004 when he lost in tiebreaks to Rustam Kasimdzhanov. Renowned for clarity and an aversion to risk, Adams continually demonstrates how a deep positional understanding can outlast more ambitious but less precise play.

Michael Adams	2753
Loek Van Wely	2693

Hoogeveen 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙e3 e6 7.♙f3 ♘bd7 8.0-0-0 ♖c7 9.♙g3 ♘c5 10.f3 ♘d7 11.♘b3! ♘a4 12.♘xa4 ♙xa4 13.♘b1 ♖c8 14.♙d3 h5 15.♙he1 e5 16.♙f2 ♙e7 17.♙b6 ♙b8 18.♘a5 ♘d7 19.♘c4 ♙xc2+ 20.♘xc2 ♘xb6 21.♙xb6 ♙d8 22.♙b3 b5 23.♘b1 bxc4 24.♙xb8 ♙xb8 25.♙xc4 ♙b6



26.♙d3! ♙f8 27.♙c1 f5 28.♙d5 ♘d7 29.exf5 ♙xf5 30.♙e4 ♙f4 31.g3 ♙f6 32.h4 a5 33.♙c5! ♙f8 34.a3 ♘e6 35.♙c8 ♙e7 36.♙c7 ♙b5 37.♙c6 ♙b6? 38.♙d5+! ♘f6 39.g4 hxg4 40.fxg4 e4 41.♙xe4

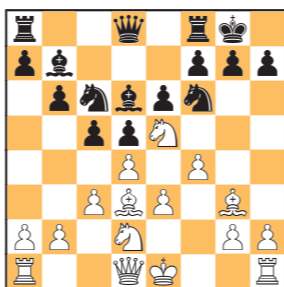
♙d8 42.♙c2 g5 43.♙f3+ ♘g7 44.♙xf8 ♘xf8 45.♙c8 ♘e7 46.h5 d5 47.♙xd5 ♘d7 48.♙a8 ♙f6 49.♙e4 ♙f1+ 50.♘a2 ♙f2 51.♙f5+ ♘e7 52.h6 ♙b6 53.h7 ♙d4 54.h8♙

Black resigned

Sergey Karjakin	2769
Michael Adams	2744

Wijk aan Zee 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♙f4 d5 3.e3 e6 4.♘f3 c5 5.c3 ♘c6 6.♘bd2 ♙d6 7.♙g3 0-0 8.♙d3 b6 9.♘e5 ♙b7 10.f4



10...♘e7! 11.♙f3 ♘f5 12.♙f2 ♙e7 13.g4 ♘d6 14.g5 ♘fe4! 15.0-0-0?! c4! 16.♙c2 b5 17.♙h3?! 17.♙g2 b4 18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.♙e1 17...b4-+ 18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.♙e1 ♙d5 20.♙g1 b3 21.axb3 cxb3 22.♙b1 f5 23.gxf6 ♙xf6 24.♙g4 ♘f5 25.♘d2 ♙a5 26.♘e2 ♙xe5 27.dxe5 ♙ad8 28.♘f2 ♙a1 29.♙d2 ♙c4 30.♙h5 ♙xb2 31.♘e1 ♙xd2

White resigned

## Readers' Voices

**Capablanca, Karpov, and Carlsen.** Capablanca was known for his simple yet effective style of positional play. I still consider him as the greatest positional player in history. Karpov was very interesting, to me at least, for his prophylactic style, focusing on preventing opponents' plans while slowly constructing his own. Carlsen's ability to control the board and convert small advantages into wins has been unmatched in recent decades. I rank him second

only to Capablanca as the greatest positional player.

Tim Corkum

**Karpov, Lasker and Capablanca.** They played on even when at a disadvantage, until only one last resource remained on the board.

Paulo Sunao

**Karpov, Petrosian, and Botvinnik.** Very profound strategic and positional ideas.

Jorge A Morales

# 08 AKIBA RUBINSTEIN

1880 - 1961



Akiba Rubinstein is often described as one of the greatest players never to have become World Champion. Between 1907 and 1914, he was considered a primary challenger to Emanuel Lasker and, from 1911 onward, rivaled Jose Raul Capablanca. Known for a methodical, almost scientific approach, Rubinstein spent countless hours analyzing positions, crafting plans, and refining his techniques.

Richard Reti extolled Rubinstein as “the keystone” of his generation, emphasizing that while Paul Morphy mastered open tactics, Rubinstein pioneered subtle, closed-position strategy. He was especially celebrated for his finesse in rook-and-pawn endgames, many of which are still studied for their technical accuracy.

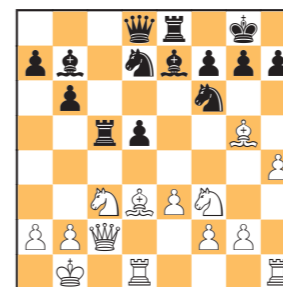
Although a planned match with Lasker was derailed by World War I, Rubinstein's impact remains visible in variations like the Rubinstein Variation of the French Defense (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7) and his contribution to the Nimzo-Indian Defense (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3). Although he battled mental health issues later in life, his legacy as a paragon of patient, precise play remains secure.

Akiba Rubinstein
Richard Teichmann

Karlsbad 1907

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♙g5 ♙e7 5.♘c3 ♘bd7 6.e3 0-0 7.♙c2 b6 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♙d3 ♙b7 10.0-0-0

c5 11.h4! ♙c8 12.♘b1 ♙e8 13.dxc5 ♙xc5?! ♠13...bxc5

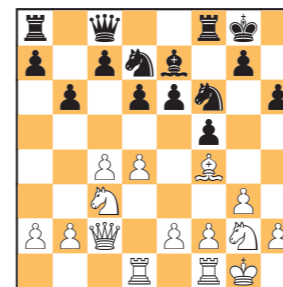


14.♘d4! ♘e4 15.♙xe4 dxe4 16.♘db5 ♙a6 17.♙a4! ♙xb5 18.♘xb5 ♙xg5 19.hxg5 ♙e7? 19...♙xg5 20.♘d6 ♙e7 21.♙xa7±. 20.♙d4 ♙a8 21.b4 ♙c8 22.♘d6 b5 23.♘xc8 Black resigned

Akiba Rubinstein
Rudolf Spielmann

Prague International Masters 1908

1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 b6 5.g3 ♙b7 6.♙g2 ♙e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♙f4 h6 9.♙c2 d6 10.♙ad1 ♘bd7 11.♘e1 ♙xg2 12.♘xg2 ♙c8



13.♙c1! ♙f7 14.f4 ♙b7?! 14...c6!=. 15.d5! exd5 16.cxd5 g6? 16...b5 17.♙xf5±.

17.e4!+- fxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xd5 19.♘c3 ♘xc3 20.♙xg6+ ♙g7 21.♙e6+ ♘h7 22.bxc3 ♘c5 23.♙f5+ ♘g8 24.♙h5 ♘e4 25.f5 ♘f6 26.♙xh6 ♙h7 27.♙e3 d5 28.♙e6+ ♘h8 29.♙g5 ♙f8 30.♘h4 ♙c5+ 31.♙d4 ♙hf7 32.♘g6+ ♘g7 33.♘xf8 ♙xf8 34.♙ff4 c6 35.♙xf6+ Black resigned

## Readers' Voices

**Carlsen, Fischer, Karpov.** Carlsen can just do it all. Incredible vision, awareness, confidence. He is a savant plain and simple. Tactics, positional, psychological – the complete Chess Robot. Fischer was ahead of his time and was able to beat the entire Russian “team” in his quest to be the best. His ability to grind was way ahead of his time. Precursor to Magnus. Karpov was a brilliant strategist and ice-cold positionally. I don't feel he is one of the top 10 best players, but from a positional aspect he was superb – and he could manipulate the game into these waters to maximize his chances.

Shawn Noland

**Nimzovich, Petrosian, and Karpov.** Nimzovich was a visionary who devised and successfully employed new positional concepts such as doubling the c-pawns in the Nimzo-Indian. Petrosian was a master of prophylaxis and outmaneuvering his opponents. Karpov perfected Capablanca's grind style which bumped Capa from my list.

Wayne R. Gradl



# 07 PETER LEKO

1979 -



Peter Leko is recognized as one of the most formidable and solid positional grandmasters of his generation. A Hungarian prodigy who shot up the ranks, Leko developed a deep strategic style grounded in thorough opening preparation and measured decision-making. This calculated approach made him notoriously difficult to beat – always striving to minimize risks without sacrificing ambition.

His refined repertoire included classical main lines intended to

neutralize early threats and steer the game into stable, controlled middlegame scenarios. Leko reached the pinnacle of his career in 2004, challenging Vladimir Kramnik for the World Championship. He led much of the match but was forced into a final-round defeat, ending in a 7-7 tie that allowed Kramnik to keep the title. Leko also won prestigious tournaments such as Dortmund (1999, 2002, 2008) and Linares (2003), consistently finishing near the top of strong fields.

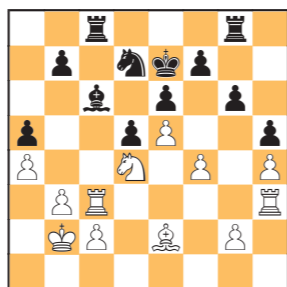
32.♖c5+-) 32.♜xb5±.  
31...f6 31...♜b8 32.♜xc6+ ♖xc6 33.♙xb7  
♖xc3 34.♖xc3 ♜d7 35.♜a3 ♠b4+-.  
32.exf6+ ♜xf6 33.♜xc6+ ♖xc6  
34.♙xb7 ♖b6 35.♖c7+ ♜d6 36.♖hc3  
♜e4 36...♖b8 37.♖f7 ♜e4 38.♖cc7+-.  
37.♖3c6+ ♖xc6 38.♖xc6+ ♜d7  
39.♖a6! ♜c7 39...♜c5 40.♖b6!+-.  
40.♙a8 ♖f8 41.c4!+- ♖xf4 42.cxd5  
e5 43.♖xa5 ♖xh4 43...♖f2+ 44.♜a3  
♖xg2 45.d6+.  
44.d6+! ♜xd6 45.♖xe5 ♜b8 45...♖xa4  
46.♖c5+.  
46.♙d5 ♖g4 47.a5 ♖d4 48.♙f3 ♜f5  
49.♜c3 ♖f4 50.♖e4 ♖h4 51.♖xh4  
♜xh4 52.♙e4 Black resigned

Alexei Shirov	2697
Peter Leko	2722

Candidates Semi-finals, Dortmund 2002

1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4  
♜f6 5.♜c3 e5 6.♜db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6  
8.♜a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♜d5 f5

24.a4 a5 25.♙e2 ♖ac8 26.♖h3 ♙c6  
27.♖g1 ♖h8 28.♖c3! ♠♖c5.  
28...♜d7 29.♖h1 ♖cc8 30.♖hh3 ♖hg8



31.♙a6! 31.♙b5!? ♙xb5 (31...♜b8

all the greatest of his time – he had a huge positional sense and great technique in the endgame. My favorite game is Khan – Capablanca, Hastings 1930. A real classic!

Akiba Rubinstein must be on this list! He was a fabulous positional player who inspired many who came after him – Boris Gelfand, for example! He also had a phenomenal feel for the endgame, coupled with exceptional technique! The game Rubinstein – Schlechter, 1912, is a great example of the crystalline style of Rubinstein!

Here too it's difficult not to mention

Anatoly Karpov! I bet he'll be the one named most often! Again it's difficult for a simple club player to describe the games of such a giant! It seems like he knew instinctively the exact place that belongs to each of his pieces! The game Karpov – Unzicker, Nice 1974, is the perfect example of pure domination, but it's not necessarily the game that impresses me the most. In fact, I have always been impressed by this lesser-known game: Lutz – Karpov, Dortmund 1993, for me a real masterpiece!

Serge Lacour

## Readers' Voices

**Mir Sultan Khan, Rubinstein and Karpov.** There are so many great positional players in history that we can quote: Botvinnik, Capablanca, Petrosian, Karpov, Anand, Kramnik, Carlsen – so to choose only three names is very hard!

Sultan Khan was a shooting star in the history of the game: despite his lack of theoretical knowledge in the opening and the fact that he was reluctant to adopt castling, he produced true masterpieces and beat

## Interview with Peter Leko

### WHENEVER STYLES CLASH, THE MOST FASCINATING BATTLES EMERGE

Hungarian grandmaster Peter Leko, a former World Championship challenger, considers it a great honor to join the ranks of the legends whose games shaped his early chess education. Growing up studying their strategies, he recognizes the strong impact they had on how he views the game, making his inclusion on this list a deeply emotional moment.

By Josip Asik



▲ Vladimir Kramnik and Peter Leko, Brissago 2004

● Where does your understanding of positional play come from? Would you say it reflects your personality, your chess education, or something else entirely? Do you believe this kind of understanding can be taught, or is it more instinctive? I believe it is always a matter of different elements! Chess education in early years has a huge influence, personality plays a huge role, which great chess books you get into your hands as a child... all these elements are crucial!

● Tactics often steal the spotlight, but our readers deeply appreciate the subtle beauty of positional play – the “filigree” technique. What do you find beautiful or satisfying about this style of chess?

The chess book that had the biggest

influence on me was: The lectures of Tigran Petrosyan. It was not just because of the chess content, but also the way how it was written! Every chapter had tremendous soul and I could never get enough of it! I have read the book at least 10 times to treasure each and every word not just chess moves! The chapter about the positional exchange sacrifice was from another planet! From that moment on there was absolutely no question that I wanted to be a great strategist myself, that all was so much for more fun to me than delivering checkmate! True Art!

● Which games from your career best represent your positional style? Could you recall one or two and share what

makes them stand out for you?

I had so many model games that are very close to my heart it is very difficult to choose: Let me start with the game, which was my first ever game to be published in the Chess informant! I was 13 years old, Leko-Ruzele from Debrecen 1992 (Debuted first time in the Hungarian National Team during the European Team Championship, as a host country we had the chance to participate with a youth Team!) This game illustrates very well that by that point I was all about finesse and just as Tigran Petrosyan I was also looking forward to finishing the game in style after I have built up my position to the maximum! From later period the game from the Candidates 2002 comes to mind vs Shirov, it was a very sharp Sveshnikov main line with lot of complications. I was always very excited in turning extremely complicated complex positions into my territory! That game featured a very nice example of good knight vs bad bishop which was not easy to foresee from distance. I got so much joy and energy from that game which helped me win the Candidates! A more recent example is my game vs Caruana (Fabi already had a rating of 2785 at that time!) from Wijk 2013. It is very memorable, because I was so happy that in a clash of generation I was able to win a lovely model game in the 6.d3 Spanish. It is not everyday that you got to outplay someone with 2785 in a way it happened in that game. When I was able to establish the ♜c4, pawn c3 construction I knew it is only a matter of time when I will win this game no matter how strong or resourceful my opponent is!

● How do attacking-style opponents usually react to a slow but steady positional squeeze? Do you notice them becoming nervous, overextending, or adjusting their strategy?

Whenever there is a clash of style between the players, that can lead to the most fascinating battles! This case obviously whoever gets his will on his opponent has the upper hand. Usually aggressive attacking players



do not like to be squeezed and will look for counterplay no matter what! This is one of the main reasons why a great strategist also has to be a very good calculator to be able to punish the opponent for creating unsound complications.

● It's often said that players in the past had more distinct styles, while today's top players play everything. Do you think that's accurate, or is it overstated? Has modern chess — with engines, rapid time controls, and heavy opening preparation — changed how positional play is approached or valued?

It is absolutely correct to say that in order to succeed in modern times players need to be more versatile. Today's computer preparation forces top players to play every opening. Focusing only on our own main strength is not possible, because this case you will face an opponent who will be perfectly prepared move per move in your favorite opening! In the old days in this regard it was so much easier, because main openings could be employed for many years sometimes decades! Understanding your systems was the main criteria and you did not have to be afraid of engines prep. However no matter how times are changing, one thing is eternal: To get to the top you need to have great fundament!

● Are there specific openings that naturally lead to positional battles? Which ones do you find best suited for a positional style?

Today everything becomes everything, but in general Nimzo Indian with Black and Spanish with both color are my absolute favorite openings. In these openings strategy still remains the key factor over memorisation no matter how strong engines get.

● Positional players can also be very strong tacticians. When does a typical positional player switch gears and strike tactically?

The key element to me is that as a positional player you let the tactics

come to you rather than hunting them! First we build up our position "The Iron Grip" to the maximum and then we strike!

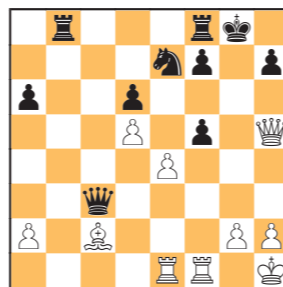
● Which three positional players — past or present — do you admire the most, and what about their play do you appreciate most?

It is very difficult to limit to 3 players I have learned so much from all the legends! From the past Tigran Petrosyan clearly stands out, but later I feel that I have learned the most from Karpov. My first encounter with Karpov dates back to Leon 1993. For the chess media it was a sensation that I had managed to make a draw as a 13 years old, but in reality what I remember from that game is that how with Black in a typically drawish Caro-Kann position Karpov was able to create problems and I had to defend for over 6 hours! I had learned so much from Karpov's games how to squeeze the tiniest of advantages. I have profited from this skill a lot during my career.

● For young players looking to improve their positional play, what would you suggest? Are there any books, games, or training approaches that helped you along the way?

Studying the classic's is not only lot of fun, but also helps us enormously to grow our understanding! Finding chess books that inspire us is very important! Last year I made a 30+ hours Chessable video on the strategy of the classical Spanish based on my games and repertoire. I tried to put all my heart and knowledge into the course! I wanted to give a unique opportunity to everyone who wants to get behind the scenes and try to understand how I look at chess with the same passion as Tigran Petrosyan has infected me with his soul when I was a kid! Most important is to find a way to enjoy the learning process, because chess is an endless journey!

11.♗d3 ♗e6 12.0-0 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7 14.c3 ♗g7 15.♖h5 e4 16.♗c2 0-0 17.♗ae1 ♖c8 18.♖h1 ♖b8!N 19.f3 19.g4 b4 20.cxb4 ♗xd5 21.gxf5 ♖h8=. 19...b4 20.♗b1 bxc3 21.bxc3 ♗xc3 22.♗xc3 ♖xc3 23.fxe4

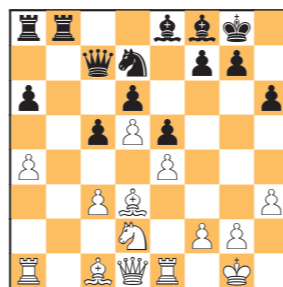


23...f4! 23...♖xc2 24.exf5. 24.♗b3 24.♗b1!? ♗g6 25.e5 dxe5 26.d6 (26.♗xg6 hxg6 27.♖xe5 ♖xe5 28.♖xe5 ♖b2 29.h4 ♖xa2 30.♖xf4=) 26...♖fd8 27.♖d1 ♖xb1 28.♖xb1 ♖xd6. 24...♗g6 25.♖c1 ♖f6 26.♖f5 ♖e7 27.♖c4 a5! 28.h3 ♖b4 29.♖xb4 axb4 30.♗d1 ♖a8 31.♖f2 ♖a7 32.♖c2 ♖g7 33.♖h2 ♖e3 34.♗f3 ♖e1 35.♖c7 ♖g3+ 36.♖h1 ♗e5 37.♗h5 ♖xa2 38.♖xf7+ ♗xf7 39.♖xf7+ ♖h6 40.♖f6+ ♖xh5 41.♖f5+ ♖h6 42.♖f6+ ♖g6 43.♖h4+ ♖g7 44.♖e7+ ♖f7 45.♖g5+ ♖f8 46.♖d8+ ♖e8 47.♖f6+ ♖g8

White resigned

Peter Leko	2735
Fabiano Caruana	2781

Wijk aan Zee 2013



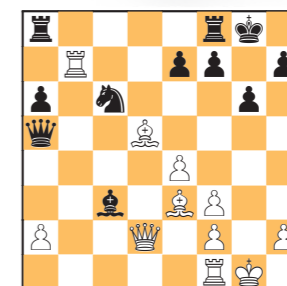
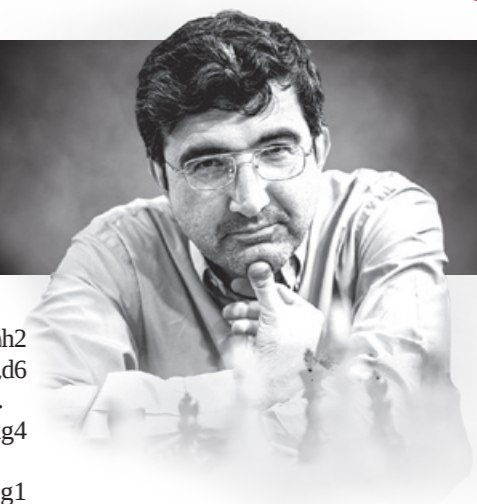
22.a5! ♗f6 23.♗c4 ♗b5 24.♗b6 ♖a7 25.♖e2 ♗xd3 26.♖xd3 ♗d7 27.♗c4!± 27.♗xd7 ♖xd7 28.f4 f6±. 27...♖ab7 28.♗d2 ♖b5 29.♖f1 ♗e7 30.f4 ♗f6 31.g3 ♖b7 32.♖g2 ♗f8 33.♖f2 ♗g6 34.♖af1 ♖e7 35.♖h2 ♖b8 36.♖g2 ♖c7 37.♖fg1 ♖b3 38.f5 ♗f8 39.h4 ♖d7 40.g4! g5 41.fxg6 fxg6 42.g5 hxg5 43.♗xg5 ♗g7 44.h5 ♖b4 45.hxg6

Black resigned

06

VLADIMIR KRAMNIK

1975 -



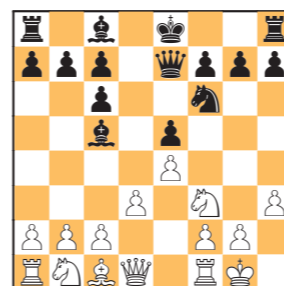
Vladimir Kramnik, the 14<sup>th</sup> World Chess Champion, is upheld as one of the finest positional players of the modern era. His place in chess history was sealed in 2000 when he dethroned Garry Kasparov without losing a single game. Kramnik did not invent an entirely new system; rather, he brought fresh insight to established lines, refining them with subtle positional details.

Unlike pioneers such as Nimzovich, who created broad theories, or Kasparov, known for pinpoint novelties, Kramnik's hallmark was the thoughtful re-evaluation of standard setups. His style combined artistry and thorough logic, reinforcing the evolution of positional play. He was often compared to Anatoly Karpov in his ability to secure a slight yet enduring advantage with White, while as Black he aimed for full equality. Once he gained a marginal edge, Kramnik would build upon it patiently, rarely letting the position slip below a safe threshold.

Levon Aronian	2794
Vladimir Kramnik	2800

Candidates Tournament, Berlin 2018

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.0-0 ♖e7 7.h3



7...♖g8! 8.♖h1 ♗h5!? 9.c3?! 9.♗h2 g6+; 9.♗c3! g5 10.♗xe5 g4 11.d4 ♗d6 12.g3 ♗xe5 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.h4 ♗d7. 9...g5! 10.♗xe5?! 10.d4 g4!? 11.hxg4 ♗xg4 12.dxc5 ♗f4! 13.♗xf4 exf4+-. 10...g4 11.d4 11.hxg4 ♖h4+ 12.♖g1 ♗g3+-. 11...♗d6 12.g3 ♗xe5 12...♗e6! 13.hxg4? ♗xe5+-. 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♖d4 ♖e7?! 14...♖xd4 15.cxd4 gxh3 16.♖h2 ♗e6+. 15.h4 c5 16.♖c4? 16.♖d3 ♗d7 17.c4 0-0-0 18.♗c3 ♖ge8 19.♖e1 ♖e5+. 16...♗e6! 17.♖b5+ c6 18.♖a4 18.♖e2 f5 19.♗g5 ♖xg5 20.hxg5 f4+; 18.♖d3 ♖d8 19.♖e3 ♗c4 20.♖g1 ♖g6 21.♖e1 ♗d3+. 18...f5!-+ 19.♗g5 19.exf5 ♗xg3+! 20.fxg3 ♗d5+ 21.♖g1 ♖e2+-. 19...♖xg5! 20.hxg5 f4 21.♖d1 ♖d8 22.♖c1 fxg3 23.♗a3 ♖d3! 24.♖d1 ♗d5! 24...♗xd1+ 25.♖xd1 gxf2+-. 25.f3 25.exd5 ♖e4+ 26.♖g1 gxf2+ 27.♖xf2 ♖h3 28.♖e1 g3+ 29.♖g1 ♖h1 mate. 25...gxf3 26.exd5 26.♖xd3 ♖xe4! 27.♖e3 f2+ 28.♖xe4+ ♗xe4 mate. 26...♖e2 27.♖e1 27.♖c2 g2+ 28.♖h2 g1♖+ 29.♖xg1 f2+ 30.♖h2 ♖h3+! 31.♖xh3 ♖f3+ 32.♖h4 ♖g3+ 33.♖xh5 ♖h3 mate. 27...g2+ White resigned

Vladimir Kramnik	2770
Garry Kasparov	2849

Game 2, World Championship Match, London 2000

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♗xd5 5.e4 ♗xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♗f3 c5 8.♗e3 ♖a5 9.♖d2 ♗g4 10.♖b1 a6 11.♖xb7! ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♗c6 13.♗c4! 0-0 14.0-0 14.♗d5 ♖ac8 15.♗xc6 ♖xc6 16.0-0 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♖xd2 18.♗xd2 ♗xd4 19.♖xe7 ♖c2 20.♗h6±. 14...cxd4 15.cxd4 ♗xd4! 16.♗d5 ♗c3?! 16...♖xd2 17.♗xd2 ♖fc8 18.♗h6±.

## Readers' Voices

**Petrosian, Fischer, and Andersson.** When these three got it right, they made it look easy. They got it right by correctly assessing the nature of a position, then executed their plans with precision.

Carl Berg

**Pachman, Reshevsky, and Lasker.** I picked them because of their writings and their insights from those writings.

Cliff Sears



# 05 WESLEY SO

1993 -

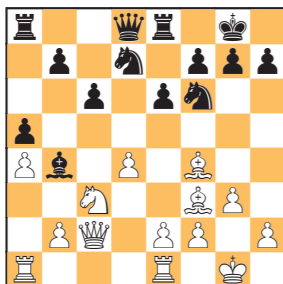


Wesley So has established himself among the strongest positional players of his generation, lauded for strategic insight and a fortress-like defensive style. Born in the Philippines and later representing the United States, So ascended the world rankings swiftly and has placed as high as second overall.

Regardless of color, So tends to erect a nearly impenetrable structure that resists assaults, yet he remains ready to capitalize on any misstep. His notable achievements include multiple Grand Chess Tour victories (2016, 2021), a Tata Steel Masters win (2017), three U.S. Championship titles (2017, 2020, 2021), and a pivotal role in the U.S. team's gold-medal success at the 2016 Chess Olympiad. So's brand of patient, fundamentally sound play confirms that sound strategy can triumph in a climate saturated with theoretical developments.

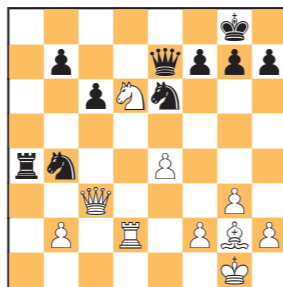
Wesley So	2822
Vladimir Kramnik	2811

Gashimov Memorial, Shamkir 2017



16.♔d1!± ♖e7 17.♘a2 ♙d6 18.♙xd6  
♙xd6 19.♗c1 ♘d5 20.e4 ♘b4

21.♙c3! e5 21...♙ad8 22.♘b3  
♙c7 23.e5±.  
22.♘b3 ♖e7 23.♙g2  
exd4 24.♙xd4 ♘f8?! 24...  
b6 25.♙ad1 ♘f6 26.f3 c5  
27.♙d2 ♙ed8 28.♙f1±.  
25.♙ad1 ♙ed8 26.♙1d2  
26.e5!.  
26...♘e6? 26...b6!  
27.♙xd8+ ♙xd8 28.♘a5  
♙a8 29.♘c4 ♙xa4 30.♘d6



30...♙a1+? 30...c5 31.b3 ♙a6 32.e5±.  
31.♙f1+- ♘a6 32.♙g2 ♘ac7  
33.♘f5 ♙e8 34.♙c4 ♙a8 35.♙d6  
♙f8 36.♙d7 ♙e8 37.♙e5 b5 38.♙a2  
g6 39.♘e3 39.♙xf7! ♘xf7 (39...♙xf7  
40.♘h6+) 40.♙xc7+ ♘f6 41.♙xc6!  
gxf5 42.exf5 ♘xf5 43.♙xe6+ ♙xe6

▼ Wesley So vs. Ian Nepomniachtchi,  
World Rapid and Blitz 2024 Photo FIDE/ Michal Walusza



(43...♘f6 44.♙d7+) 44.♙f3+.  
39...♙e7 40.♙xe7 ♙xe7 41.♘g4! ♙g5  
41...♙d8 42.♘h6+ ♘f8 43.♙h8+ ♘e7  
44.♙xh7 ♘g5 45.♘g8+ ♘e8 46.♙h4+-.  
42.♘f6+ ♘h8 43.♘d7+ ♙xe5  
44.♘xe5 ♘d4 45.♙xf7 c5 46.f4 c4  
47.♘f2 ♘g7 48.♘e3 ♘b3 49.g4 ♘c5  
50.h4 ♘a4 51.b3 cxb3 52.♙xb3 ♘c5  
53.♙d1 h6 54.♘c6 ♘7a6 55.♘d4  
♘e6+ 56.♘e5 ♘ec5 57.♙c2 b4  
58.♘d4 g5 59.hxg5 hxg5 60.f5 ♘d7+  
61.♘d6 ♘f6 62.e5 ♘xg4 63.♘e6+  
♘h6 64.f6 ♘b8 65.♙a4 ♘g6  
Black resigned

Wesley So	2778
Magnus Carlsen	2843

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2018

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♙f4  
♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 a6 7.♙c1 ♙f5  
8.e3 ♙c8 9.♙e2 e6 10.0-0 ♘d7 10...♙e7  
11.♙b3! ♘a5 12.♙a4+ ♘c6 13.♙xa6!±;  
10...♙d6 11.♙xd6 ♙xd6 12.♘a4±.  
11.♘a4 ♙e7 12.h3 0-0 13.a3 ♘a5  
13...b5 14.♘c5 ♘xc5 15.dxc5 ♙f6  
16.♘d4 ♙xd4 17.exd4 ♙f6 18.♙e3 e5  
19.dxe5 ♙xe5 20.♙d2±.  
14.♘c5! ♘c4 15.b4 ♘xc5 15...b5  
16.♘xa6 ♘xa3 17.♘c5 ♘c4 18.♙a1±.  
16.dxc5 16.bxc5?! b6=.  
16...♘xa3 17.♘d4 ♙e4 18.f3 ♙g6  
19.♙b3! ♘c4 20.♙xc4 dxc4 21.♙xc4  
♙e8! 21...♙g5 22.♙xg5 ♙xg5 23.♙c3  
♙fd8 24.♙fd1 h5 (24...♙e5 25.♘f2 ♙f6  
26.♘e2±) 25.♘b3 ♙f5 26.♘h1! ♙g3  
27.♙e1±.  
22.♙g3 e5 23.♘b3 ♙d8? 23...♙f5

Page 30



## Interview With Wesley So

### I ENJOY THE KARPOV STYLE

American grandmaster Wesley So stated that he is stunned and deeply honored to be named one of the 15 greatest positional players of all time in the American Chess Magazine poll. He was also open to sharing, in great detail, the background and development of his understanding of positional play.

By Josip Asik

● Where does your understanding of positional play come from? Would you say it reflects your personality, your chess education, or something else entirely? Do you believe this kind of understanding can be taught, or is it more instinctive?

I'd have to say it is probably a maturing process. I started out with an aggressive and attacking style and only ever played 1.e4 with White and the Sicilian Sveshnikov and Dragon with Black. My rating was 2540. Then, I gradually started to feel an immaturity and superficiality in this style.

In order to progress I decided I needed to increase my opening repertoire, so I included 1.d4. I started to study new chess opening books. *The Grandmaster Repertoire* book series was just coming out then. I studied

the Avrukh 1.d4 books from cover to cover. Other books I remember studying were *The Chebanenko Slav According to Bologan*, *How to Beat the French Defence* by Tzermiadianos, *Opening for White According to Anand 1.e4*, *Opening for White According to Kramnik 1.Nf3*, among others. Studying books and going over the games of great players helped shape my understanding of openings and deepened my chess overall by revealing its inherent beauty.

I understood that to reach the top you have to be a complete all-around player, not just an aggressive, attacking, "showy" player.

● Tactics often steal the spotlight, but our readers deeply appreciate the subtle beauty of positional play – the "filigree"

technique. What do you find beautiful or satisfying about this style of chess?

Well, it is my natural style of play and the one in which I feel most comfortable. I enjoy the style of Anatoly Karpov. Very practical, precise play that maximizes opportunities.

● Which games from your career best represent your positional style? Could you recall one or two and share what makes them stand out for you?

My game against Ding Liren in the King's Indian in 2015 Bilbao is one of my favorites (see page 35 - Ed.). I think in 2018 the Slav Defense against Carlsen at Norway Chess was also very nice. Other games I like include my game against Mamedyarov 2019 in Croatia, and against Kramnik in Gashimov Memorial 2017.

● How do attacking-style opponents usually react to a slow but steady positional squeeze? Do you notice them becoming nervous, overextending, or adjusting their strategy?

Yes, all of the above. Mostly though they try and move faster to unsettle you, threaten with the clock, etc. They will do anything to try and distract you because the slow development of positional play is difficult for the average player... New players, fresh off the internet, often have a one-dimensional understanding of chess and moving fast helps disguise that.

● It's often said that players in the past had more distinct styles, while today's top players play everything. Do you think that's accurate, or is it overstated? Has modern chess – with engines, rapid time controls, and heavy opening preparation – changed how positional play is approached or valued?

Yes. Absolutely. The main culprit might be the ever-reducing time controls. Tournaments keep cutting the play time to favor an online gaming crowd that seeks the adrenaline of the quick win. Now we have events that are even erasing the increment, which is there for reasons they simply don't "get". It is sad that chess rarely produces beautiful games anymore, but what is sadder is that the audience is so poorly trained it doesn't realize it. They are

▼ Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So

Photo by Lennart Ootes





admiring sloppy caricatures of what used to be a great art. Games that once would have been an embarrassment to a great Chesser, are now the norm.

• Are there specific openings that naturally lead to positional battles? Which ones do you find best suited for a positional style?

Some of my favorite openings include the Catalan, English, Ruy Lopez, Queen's Gambit. Other openings that could be very helpful to learn are the Hedgehog, Sicilian Scheveningen, Caro-Kann, French, Reti, etc. Learning and eventually testing out these openings will definitely increase your positional understanding. But you should avoid analyzing them with an engine. I at least find that destructive to learning. It is important to understand the ideas by manually playing them out over the board and questioning each decision made.

• Positional players can also be very strong tacticians. When does a typical positional player switch gears and strike tactically?

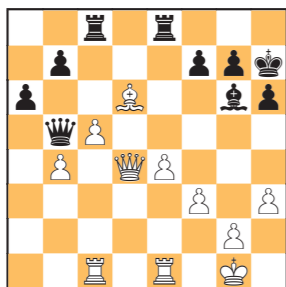
Ideally, it's best to be objective and not be controlled by your style. Simply play the strongest move in each position. And let me be the first to say this is NOT easy.

Personally, I have learned that as a natural positional player, I must play aggressively when I have the advantage, yet all the time trying to stay aware of the danger. It is unbelievably easy to lose with a good position AND an advantage.

• Which three positional players – past or present – do you admire the most, and what about their play do you appreciate most?

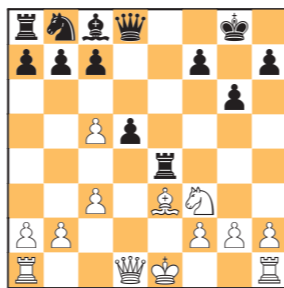
Carlsen, Karpov, and Petrosian. Petrosian is the father of prophylactic chess thinking.

24.♙xe5 ♙e6 25.♖c3 ♙xb3 26.♖xb3 ♙xc5 27.♖xc5 ♖xc5 28.♙xg7!↑; 23...h6! 24.e4 ♙h7 25.♙xe5 ♙xc5+ 26.♙xc5 ♖xe5 27.♖d5!±.  
24.♖d5 ♖b5?! 24...♙c7 25.♙a5 (25.♖xb7 ♙d3 26.♖fd1 ♙b5 27.♙d2±) 25...♙xa5 26.bxa5 ♖e7 27.♖xe5 ♖xe5 28.♙xe5 ♙d3 29.♖fd1 ♙b5 30.♙f2±. 25.♙xe5! ♙e7 25...♖xb4 26.♙d6!+-. 26.♖d2 26.♙a5! b6 27.♙b7!+-. 26...♖fd8 27.♙d6 ♙f6 28.e4 h6 29.♙d4 ♙xd4+ 30.♖xd4 ♖e8 30...a5 31.bxa5 ♖xa5 32.♖a1+-. 31.♖fe1 ♙h7



32.g4! f6 33.f4 ♖c6? 33...♙f7 34.f5 a5 35.bxa5 ♖a8 36.♖b1 ♖xa5 37.♙f2!±. 34.f5 ♙f7 35.h4 ♖a8 36.♖c2 a5 37.g5 ♙h5! 38.g6+ 38.gxf6 gxf6 39.b5! ♖xb5 40.♖b2 ♖d7 41.♖xf6 ♖g8+ 42.♙h2+-. 38...♙h8 39.b5! ♖xb5 40.♖b2

♖c6? 40...♖d7 41.♖d5! (41.♖eb1 ♙f3 42.♖xb7 ♖c6 43.e5 ♖c8!) 41...♖c6 42.♖d3 a4 43.♖b6 ♖c8 44.♖d5! a3 (44...♖a7 45.♖f7! a3 46.c6 a2 47.♖xb7+-) 45.♖xb7 ♖g8 (45...a2? 46.♖xg7+-) 46.c6 a2 47.♖a1+-. 41.♖b6 ♖c8 42.♖d5 a4 42...♖a7 43.♖f7 ♙f3 44.c6 ♖xe4 45.♖xe4 ♙xe4 46.♙f8!+-. 43.♖xb7 ♖g8 43...♙xg6 44.fxg6 ♖g4+ 45.♙f2+-. 44.c6 Black resigned 44.♖c7 ♖e8 45.♖d2 a3? 46.♖xb6+!! gxb6 47.♖h7 mate.



12.h3! 12.0-0 ♙g4 13.♖b3 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 ♖e5 15.♖xb7 ♙d7±. 12...b6 13.0-0 ♙b7 14.♖e1 ♙d7 15.♙d2 ♖e8 16.♙b3 ♖h4 17.♖d2 f6 18.f4 ♖h5 19.♙f2 g5?! 19...d4!? 20.♖xd4 ♙xc5 21.♙xc5 ♖xc5 22.♖xc5 bxc5 23.♙xc5±. 20.c6!+- ♙xc6 21.♙d4 ♙b7 22.♙b5 ♖xe1+ 22...♖ac8 23.♙xa7 ♖cd8 24.fxg5 ♖xg5 25.♖xg5+ fxg5 26.♙b5+-. 23.♖xe1 ♖e8 24.♙xc7 ♖xe1+ 25.♖xe1 d4 25...♖f7 26.♙e8+-. 26.♖e7! ♖f7 27.♖d8+ ♙f8 28.♙xd4 gxf4 29.♙e8! Black resigned

Wesley So	2754
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov	2774

Croatia GCT, Zagreb 2019

1.♙f3 ♙f6 2.c4 g6 3.♙c3 ♙g7 4.e4 e5 5.♙xe5 5.d4 exd4 6.♙xd4 0-0 7.♙e2 ♖e8 8.f3 c6 9.♙c2 d5±. 5...0-0 5...♙xe4 6.♙xe4 ♙xe5 7.d4 ♙g7 8.♙g5! f6 9.♙e3±. 6.♙f3 ♖e8 7.♙d3!? 7.d3 d5 8.cxd5 ♙xd5 9.♙xd5 ♖xd5 10.♙e2 ♖d6 11.0-0±. 7...♙xe4! 7...d5 8.cxd5 ♙f5 9.♖e2 c6 10.d6! ♖xd6 11.0-0±. 8.♙xe4 ♙xc3 9.dxc3 ♖xe4+ 10.♙e3 d6 11.c5! d5 11...♙c6 12.cxd6 cxd6 13.0-0 ♙g4 14.h3 ♙xf3 15.♖xf3±.

• For young players looking to improve their positional play, what would you suggest? Are there any books, games, or training approaches that helped you along the way?

Every player has their own natural playing style which can be modified, aided and abetted, but will still be visible in the background of whatever they play.

Take some time to ignore the calls for flashier play and settle down to examine certain quiet openings. For instance, the Catalan and the English with White. The London and the Italian Game. With Black examine the Ruy Lopez, the Berlin, the French and the Slav Defense. Using a real board and pieces, take apart these games focusing on the strategies of best players who used those openings. Read. Read. Read.

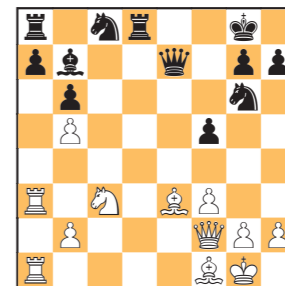
## 04 TIGRAN PETROSIAN

1929 - 1984



Tigran Petrosian  
Boris Spassky

Game 10, World Championship Match, Moscow 1969



24.♖a4!+- ♖e8 25.♙d2 ♖c5 26.♖xc5 bxc5 27.♖c4 ♖e5 28.♙a4 a6 29.♙xc5 axb5 30.♙xb7 ♖xa1 31.♖xc8+ ♙f7 32.♙d8+ ♙e7 32...♙f6 33.♙c3+-. 33.♙c6+ ♙d7 34.♙xe5+ ♙xc8 35.♙xg6 hxg6 36.♙c3 ♖b1 37.♙f2 b4 38.♙xg7 Black resigned

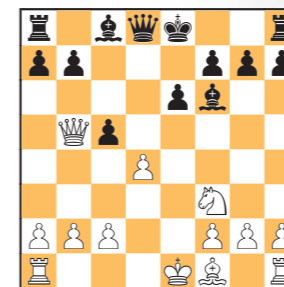
Tigran Petrosian, the ninth World Chess Champion, was unique in using keen tactical awareness primarily to bolster his defense. Petrosian introduced the notion of prophylaxis – identifying and defusing threats before they fully materialized – and fused it with short, concrete calculation. Mikhail Botvinnik famously said, “Petrosian was the only great player whose style has not been totally decoded yet,” underscoring the cryptic nature of his approach.

Nicknamed the “python,” Petrosian strangled his opponents’ play by controlling critical squares and anticipating every counterthrust. Victims of his style often found their best attacking plans turned against them, leading to an unstoppable counterinitiative. He dethroned Botvinnik in 1963 and defended his title successfully against Boris Spassky in 1966. Petrosian left a permanent stamp on opening theory, including his lines in the King’s Indian Defense (1.d4 ♙f6 2.c4 g6 3.♙c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♙f3 0-0 6.♙e2 e5 7.d5) and the Queen’s Indian (1.d4 ♙f6 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 b6 4.a3), both showcasing his commitment to snuffing out potential threats from the outset.

Mihail Tal  
Tigran Petrosian

Candidates Tournament, Curacao 1962

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♙c3 ♙f6 4.♙g5 dxe4 5.♙xe4 ♙bd7 6.♙xf6+ ♙xf6 7.♙f3 c5 8.♙d3? ♙e7 9.♙xf6 ♙xf6 10.♖b5+

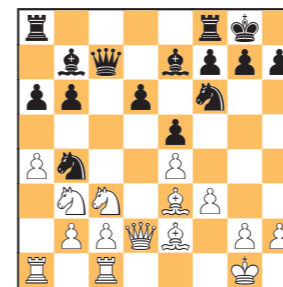


10...♙d7! 11.♖xb7 11.♖xc5 ♖c8±. 11...♖b8 12.♖xa7 ♖xb2 13.♙d3 cxd4 14.0-0 14.♙xd4 ♖c8!! 15.♙b3 (15.0-0 ♖b7 △16...♙xd4) 15...♖c3+ 16.♙e2 ♖xc2+ 17.♙xc2 ♖xc2+-+. 14...♙c6 15.♖a3 ♖b6 16.♙c4 ♖b4! 17.♖d3 0-0 18.a3 ♖a4 19.♖fd1 ♖a7 20.♖a2? 20.♙xd4 ♙d5!!+-+. 20...♖xc4 White resigned

Tigran Petrosian  
Jan Hein Donner

Match/Nation, The Hague 1962

1.e4 c5 2.♙f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♙xd4 ♙f6 5.♙c3 a6 6.♙e2 e5 7.♙b3 ♖c7 8.a4 b6 9.0-0 ♙b7 10.f3 ♙e7 11.♙e3 0-0 12.♖d2 ♙c6 13.♖fc1 ♙b4



14.a5! bxa5 15.♙a4! ♙c6 16.♙b6 ♖ab8 17.♙d5 ♙xd5 18.exd5 ♙d4 19.♙xd4 exd4 20.♙xd4 ♙xd5 21.♖xa5 ♖xa5 22.♖xa5 ♙b7 23.♙d3 ♙d8 24.♖a3 ♙g5 25.♖ca1 ♙f6 26.♙xf6 gxf6 27.♙f2 ♖bc8 28.♖b3 ♖c7 29.♖b6 ♖b8 30.♖a4 h6 31.♖d4 ♖b5+ Black resigned

### Readers' Voices

Botvinnik, Petrosian, and Karpov. They could all capitalize on relatively minor errors by their opponents.  
Roy Benedek

Rubinstein, Botvinnik, and Carlsen. Rubinstein for his grasp of the important features of positions. Botvinnik for his skill in maneuvering. Carlsen - all the above plus the exactness of evaluating positions and conduct of play.  
Karri Laine



03

## JOSE RAUL CAPABLANCA

1888 - 1942



Jose Raul Capablanca, the third World Chess Champion, is frequently applauded as one of the most naturally gifted positional players ever. In contrast to those who sought deep symbolic meaning or grand theoretical constructs, Capablanca prized correctness and practicality above all else.

He wrested the title from Emanuel Lasker in 1921, maintaining a stranglehold until Alexander Alekhine unseated him in 1927. Capablanca excelled at punishing even the slightest mistake, proving that accurate maneuvering can trump more flamboyant yet superficial attacks. His endgame proficiency remains a gold standard for aspiring players.

Among his contributions to opening theory, the Capablanca Variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense (1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♗b4 4.♗c2) and the Capablanca Variation in the Orthodox Defense of the Queen's Gambit Declined reflect his calm, logical style.

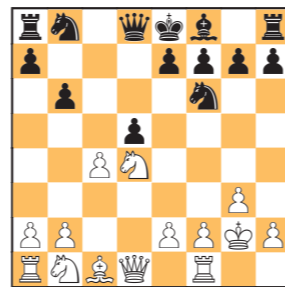
24.♗d3+ ♔g8 25.♗xd7  
♗xc4 26.♗xb7 a4 27.♖d2 ♗xa2  
28.♖f3 ♖e2

White resigned

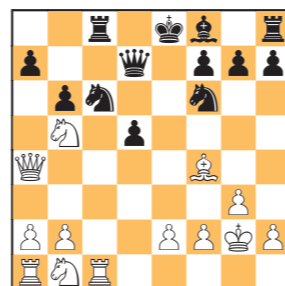
Jose Raul Capablanca  
Alexander Alekhine

Game 3, World Championship Match,  
Buenos Aires 1927

1.d4 ♖f6 2.♖f3 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2  
c5 5.0-0 cxd4 6.♖xd4 ♗xg2 7.♗xg2  
d5 8.c4



8...e6?! 8...dxc4 9.♗a4+ ♗d7 10.♗xc4  
e6 11.♖c3 ♗e7=.  
9.♗a4+! ♗d7 10.♖b5! ♖c6 11.cxd5  
exd5 12.♗f4 ♗c8 13.♗c1!±

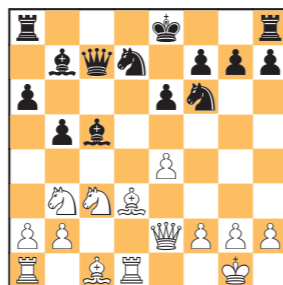


46.♗axf5 ♗xf5 47.♗xf5 ♗g6 48.♗a5  
♗e4 49.♗a6 ♗c2 50.♗f2 ♗e4 51.g4  
♗c2 52.♗g3 ♗b3 53.♗f4 ♗c2 54.h4  
♗b1 55.h5 ♗c2 56.♗e5 ♗b1 57.♗a7+  
♗h8 58.♗b7 ♗d3 59.♗b3 ♗c2  
60.♗b2 ♗d3 61.♗d4 ♗f1 62.♗e4  
♗g7 63.♗d2 ♗b5 64.♗e5 ♗a4  
65.♗b2 ♗c6 66.♗b4 ♗f3 67.♗c4 ♗e2  
68.♗d4 ♗b5 69.♗d5 ♗e2 70.♗f5 ♗f3  
71.♗d7+ ♗f8 72.♗f6 ♗e8 73.♗d4

Black resigned

Friedrich Saemisch  
Jose Raul Capablanca

Moscow 1925

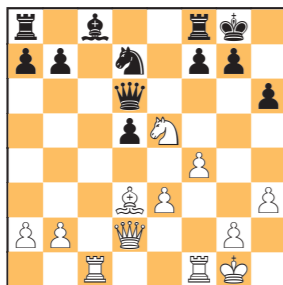


14...♗d6! 15.h3 b4! 16.♖b1 ♖e5!  
17.♗f4 0-0!± 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5  
19.♖d1d2 19.♗c1 ♗e7 20.a3 ♗fd8±.  
19...♗xb2 20.♗ab1 ♗c3 21.♖c4  
a5 22.e5 ♖d7 23.♗xh7+ ♗xh7

Jose Raul Capablanca  
Saviely Tartakower

Moscow 1925

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.♗g5 ♖bd7  
5.e3 c6 6.♖bd2 ♗a5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♗d3  
♖e4 9.0-0 ♖xg5 10.♖xg5 ♖f6 11.h3  
h6 12.♖gf3 ♗d6 13.♖e5 0-0 14.f4 c5  
15.♖b3 ♗b6 16.dxc5 ♗xc5 17.♖xc5  
♗xc5 18.♗d2 ♖d7 19.♗ac1 ♗d6



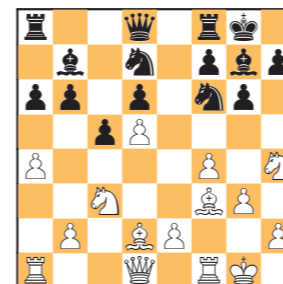
20.♖f3! ♖c5 21.♗b1! f5 22.♗fd1  
♗e6 23.♖d4 ♖e4?! 24.♗xe4! dxe4  
25.♗a5!+- ♗d5 26.♗c5 ♗xa2?  
26...♗d7 27.♗e5+-.  
27.♗xa2 ♗xa2 28.b3! ♗fd8 29.♗a1  
♗xd4 30.exd4 ♗xb3 31.♗b5 ♗c4  
32.♗xb7 a5 33.♗c1 ♗e6 34.♗cc7 ♗d8  
35.♗xg7+ ♗f8 36.♗g6 ♗c4 37.♗c6  
♗a2 38.♗f6+ ♗g8 39.♗a6 e3 40.♗e7  
e2 41.♗g6+ ♗f8 42.♗xe2 ♗f7 43.♗f6  
♗xd4 44.♗e5 ♗xf4 45.♗xa5 ♗g7

13...♗c5? 13...♖e4 14.b4 g5 15.♗e5 f6  
16.♗b2±.  
14.b4! ♗xb4? 14...♖xb4 15.♖d6+  
♗d8 16.♗xd7+ ♗xd7 17.♖xc8 ♗xc8  
18.♖d2±.  
15.♗xc6+- ♗xc6 16.♗xb4 ♖e4  
17.♖d2 ♖xd2 18.♗xd2 0-0 19.♗d1  
♗c5 20.♖d4 ♗e8 21.♖b3 ♗cc8  
22.e3 ♗a4 23.♗xd5 ♗c2 24.♗d2  
♗xa2 25.♗xa2 ♗xa2 26.♗c6 ♗f8  
27.♖d4 ♗h8 28.♗e5 f6 29.♖e6 ♗g8  
30.♗d4 h6 31.h4 ♗b1 32.♖xg7 ♗g6  
33.h5 ♗f7 34.♖f5 ♗h7 35.♗e4 ♗e8  
36.♗f4 ♗f8 37.♖d6 ♗e7 38.♗xf6  
♗a8+ 39.e4 ♗g7 40.♗xg7 ♗xg7  
41.♖f5+ ♗f7 42.♗c7+

Black resigned

Alexander Alekhine  
Jose Raul Capablanca

New York 1927



## Jimmy Adams's Corner

## THE CRYSTAL-CLEAR MAESTRO

I have known many chess players, but among them there has been only one genius – Capablanca! His ideal was to win by maneuvering. Capablanca's genius reveals itself in his probing of the opponent's weak points. The slightest weakness cannot escape from his keen eye. – Emanuel Lasker.

Capablanca's calm style, the harmonic combination of very exact positional understanding with a calculation of variations, imparted a particular elegance to the Cuban's games. With Capa all the pieces played together, they were firmly linked. Capablanca was equally strong in complex and simple positions. – Mikhail Botvinnik

grasp its main features. Capablanca invariably chose the right option, no matter how intricate the position. His style, one of the purest, most crystal-clear in the entire history of chess, astonishes one with its logic. – Garry Kasparov

Capablanca can be regarded as the great master of simplification. The art of resolving the tension at the critical moment and in the most efficacious way to clarify the position as desired is Capablanca's own. – Max Euwe

The greater the artist, the simpler becomes his treatment of complex themes. – Picasso

Jimmy Adams,  
Deputy Editor & Chess Historian

Capablanca possessed an amazing ability to quickly see into a position and intuitively

15...c4!± 16.♗e3 ♗c7 17.g4 ♖c5 18.g5  
♖fd7 19.f5 ♗fe8 20.♗f4 ♗e5 21.♗g4?!  
♖b3+- 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.♗b1 ♗xc3!  
24.bxc3 ♗c5+ 25.e3 ♖e5 25...♗xe3!+-.  
26.♗f3 ♖d3 27.♗h1 ♗xd5 28.♗xb3  
♖xf4 29.♗b1 ♗xe3 30.♖g2 ♗xf3

31.♗xf3 ♖xg2 32.♗xg2 ♗e8 33.♗f1  
♗xf3 34.♗xf3 ♗xg5 35.♗e1 ♗xe1+  
36.♗xe1 ♗g1+ 37.♗d2 ♗xh2+  
38.♗c1 ♗e5 39.♗b2 ♗g7 40.♗f2 b5  
41.♗b6 bxa4 42.♗xa6 ♗e2+

White resigned

## Readers' Voices

Carlsen, Petrosian, and  
Capablanca.

What impressed me most about Magnus Carlsen is his dominance that continues today in a period when computer chess has moved chess towards perfection. It is quite unfortunate that in this case perfection means the death of chess by draws. Personally, I think Carlsen versus Nepomniachtchi, World Chess Championship 2021, Game 6, was a defining moment. With Carlsen winning that complex endgame, having them face each other again in 2023 felt like a bad joke. Carlsen remains the most complete player today.

When you learn from the wisdom of Aron Nimzovich (*Chess Praxis*) and José Raul Capablanca, plus you are taught from an early age to resist the urge to play wild tactics and dubious combinations, you get Tigran strong. He was never my idol, maybe because more often than not I found myself having to play wild tactics and dubious combinations.

For years I admired Gary Kasparov, it was his chess that opened my eyes to what the game truly is. Winning does not happen out of the blue. You need to create the conditions that will support it. That is what Capablanca had a knack for. I still replay his games and positions, be

it complex middlegames or endgames. His ideas and understanding defy the times. Chess engines today might show you a winning line or how to simply choose a drawing line. However, they cannot explain to you why they work. My advice is to study Capablanca.

Valer Eugen Demian

Karpov, Andersson, and  
Smyslov.

Clarity of planning, surety of execution, capability of reading a position accurately. With the advent of the super-strong chess engines, there is no longer real positional play. To play like computers is now the ideal of every grandmaster.

Michel Therrien

Capablanca, Karpov, and  
Petrosian.

José Capablanca for his exceptional simplicity and efficiency and ability to convert small advantages into wins. Anatoly Karpov for his defensive skills and ability to capitalize on weaknesses, additionally his ability to maintain long-term control. Tigran Petrosian for his impenetrable defense and strategic mastery and his excellence in neutralizing opponents and methodically improving his position. See Capablanca vs Alekhine, 1927; Karpov vs Unzicker, 1974; Petrosian vs Fischer, 1971.

William E Roudebush



## A forgotten positional masterpiece by Capablanca revisited

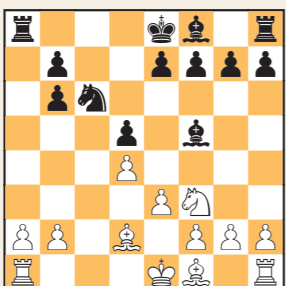
In a 100-year-old game, played on American soil against Janowski, Capablanca's passion for the game doesn't grow cold after an early queen trade, but rather heats up. As early as on move 10, he comes up with the excellent idea of a positional bishop retreat ...♗f5-d7, unprecedented for those old times. As the game slowly proceeds, I will explain its strategic contents in seven key points. Most of them attest to Capablanca's positional skills, but some also point to Janowski's mistakes in the uncharted land of positional chess. Capa crowns his deep, though modestly begun strategy (10...♗f5-d7) the moment his light-squared bishop proudly arrives on e4 via the carefully prepared route ...♗d7-a4-c2-e4.

Dawid Janowski

Jose Raul Capablanca

New York 1916

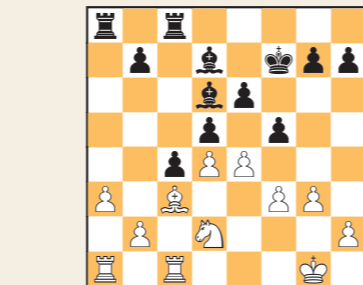
1.d4 ♖f6 2.♗f3 d5 3.c4 c6 4.♗c3 ♗f5?! A hundred years fast forward the chess world knows only too well that Capa's last move is inaccurate. In fact, it took a few decades to establish this unfavorable assessment for Black.  
5.♖b3 Janowski, naturally, wasn't aware of modern chess opening theory which recommends starting with 5.cxd5 cxd5 (5...♗xd5 6.♖b3) and only now play 6.♖b3. Then, after 6...♖b6 7.♗xd5 ♗xd5 8.♖xd5 e6 9.♖b3 ♖xb3 10.axb3, White claims the advantage despite Black having good chances of regaining his lost pawn with 10...♗c2.  
5...♖b6 6.♖xb6?! First point. Janowski is happy to leave his opponent with doubled pawns, whereas Capablanca correctly feels that his activity on the a-file should outweigh any inconveniences. 6.cxd5 was still better.  
6...axb6 7.cxd5 ♗xd5 8.♗xd5 cxd5 9.e3 ♗c6 10.♗d2



10...♗d7! Second point. This is a

Capablanca's extraordinary positional feel. I remember in my childhood reading Botvinnik's high praise for Capa's last move. He wrote that "in those days only Capablanca was capable of making such moves." The Cuban star now retracts his bishop to support the advance ...b6-b5, followed by a ...♗c6-a5-c4 operation on the queenside.

11.♗e2 e6 12.0-0 ♗d6 13.♖fc1 ♗e7! Third point. Capablanca knows better where the king belongs in the ending. It no longer needs to be hidden in the corner but instead can fulfill important strategical tasks in the center.  
14.♗c3 ♖hc8 15.a3 ♗a5 16.♗d2 f5 Preventing a center e3-e4 break for the time being.  
17.g3 b5 Setting in motion Black's main strategy. The knight is ready to soon jump to c4. That would sooner rather than later favorably straighten out the doubled black pawns.  
18.f3 ♗c4 19.♗xc4 Janowski cedes the bishop pair in order to go for a break in the center without delay.  
19...bxc4 Following good planning, Black now enjoys his undoubled pawns.  
20.e4 ♗f7 Making room for his bishop to retreat.



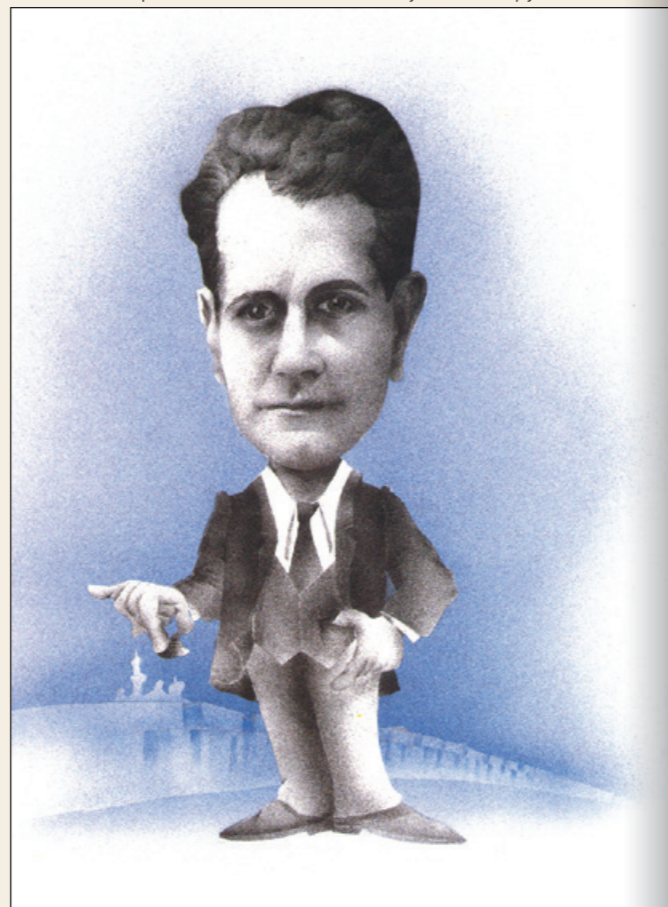
21.e5? This huge positional mistake by Janowski is ignored by both Capablanca in *My Chess Career* and Golombek in *Capablanca's 100 Best Games of Chess*. It makes for our fourth point. The center break without breaking anything is useless!

21.exd5 exd5 22.f4!, as correctly pointed out by Botvinnik, would have fully equalized the game. The white knight would arrive on e5 at short notice.  
21...♗e7 22.f4 b5 The next stage of the game starts with Capablanca wielding both the ...b5-b4 and ...g7-g5 breaks to his advantage.

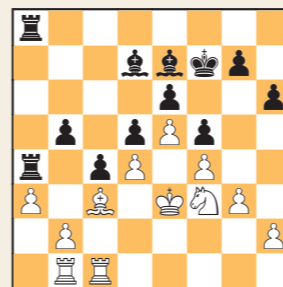
23.♗f2 ♖a4 24.♗e3 ♖ca8 Making

Jose Raul Capablanca

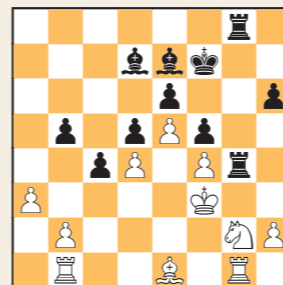
Caricature by Jovan Prokopljivic



...b5-b4 a deadly threat.  
25.♖ab1 h6 26.♗f3



26...g5 Capa now brings pressure to bear on the kingside.  
27.♗e1 ♖g8 28.♗f3 gxf4 29.gxf4 ♖aa8 30.♗g2 ♖g4 31.♖g1 ♖ag8 32.♗e1

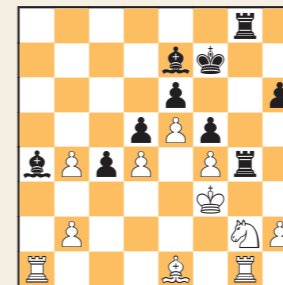


Consequently, Janowski was forced to turn his full attention to defending the kingside. A good moment for Capa to strike on the queenside and he duly does it!

32...b4! A fifth positional point. After a careful preparation lasting 20 moves, Capablanca executes this queenside break at a favorable moment. Remarkably, it best serves Black's light-squared bishop. Capablanca would love to drive it to e4 which would amount to positional humiliation for White.

33.axb4 After 33.♗xb4 ♗xb4 34.axb4 White loses his ability to obstruct the stacked black rooks by ♗e1-g3. Therefore, as pointed out by Capa himself, 34...h5, threatening to advance this pawn even further, should lead to victory for Black.

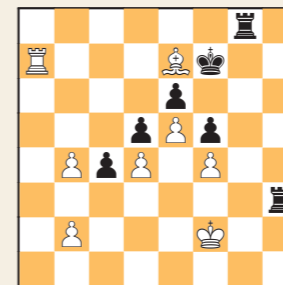
33...♗a4 34.♖a1 Incredibly, Janowski doesn't even try to stop the enemy bishop from getting into the heart of his position on e4. 34.♖c1, however, would have allowed sparks to fly, worthy of our column. 34...♖xf4+!! with twin offshoots 35.♗xf4 (or 35.♗xf4 ♗g5+! 36.♗f3 ♗xc1) 35...♖xg1 equally embarrassing for White.



34...♗c2! Sixth positional point. The black bishop triumphantly reaches the key central square e4 despite many roadblocks, which have suggested such penetration to be impossible.  
35.♗g3 ♗e4+ 36.♗f2 h5 37.♖a7 This belated pin cannot fully avert the damage caused by the mobile black queenside pawn. On 37.♗e3 Black would play 37...h4 anyway.

37...♗xg2 38.♖xg2 h4 39.♗xh4 On 39.♖xe7+ ♗xe7 40.♗xh4+, Capa would have had the pleasant choice between the ordinary 40...♗d7 41.♖xg4 fxg4 (but not 41...♖xg4?? 42.♗g5 and it's White who wins!); and the extraordinary 40...♖xh4!? 41.♖xg8 ♖xf4+ 42.♗e3 ♖e4+, annihilating the white pawns on the fourth rank.  
39...♖xg2+ 40.♗f3 ♖xh2 41.♗xe7 On 41.♖xe7+ ♗f8 42.♗f6 ♖gh8! is an elegant way to win, pointed out by Capa himself.

41...♖h3+ 42.♗f2



42...♖b3! Switching wings yet another time. Note the skill of the famous Cuban who has placed all his pieces on the light squares, immune to all possible captures by discovered check.

43.♗g5+ ♗g6 44.♖e7 ♖xb2+ 45.♗f3 ♖a8 Seventh point. Black's attack has returned to where it started – the queenside. It's decisive now.

46.♖xe6+ ♗h7 White resigned. His own bishop obstructs the possible king escape via g5 in view of 47.♗g3 ♖a3+ 48.♗h4 ♖h2 mate.

## Readers' Voices

Capablanca, Petrosian, Karpov.

I left out Fischer and Carlsen because I would term them "universal" more than positional, while realizing that these are subjective distinctions that mean different things to different people. Capablanca made chess look deceptively easy with his deep understanding of how to maximize the activity of his pieces, while restricting the activity of those of his opponent. Petrosian is justifiably renowned as the master of the exchange sacrifice, and his games show that the "relative point value" of pieces is indeed "relative" and not absolute. Karpov played three sparkling positional masterpieces in 1974: ♗a7 against Unzicker, ♗b1 against Spassky, and ♗de2 against Korchnoi. These games are very instructive and memorable.

David Friedman

Alekhine, Capablanca, and Petrosian.

Because of the depth and accuracy of the strategy in their moves!

Aldemar Escobar

Capablanca, Karpov, and Petrosian.

Capa's 1927 game vs Alekhine is a masterclass of finding simple moves from fiendishly complex positions; Petrosian the "Python" demolished Spassky in the 1966 Candidates move-by-move with a chokehold of seemingly subtle moves; Karpov vs. Korchnoi, 1978 Baguio City, illustrates his depth and understanding of converting subtle mistakes into positional advantages. Fischer too is great, but the others take the cake!

Eswara Kosaraju



# 02 MAGNUS CARLSEN

1990 -



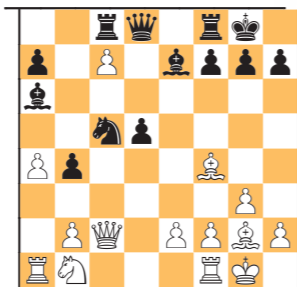
Magnus Carlsen, often regarded as one of the finest players in chess history, stands out for a deep positional understanding and near-flawless strategic intuition. He is famously adept at steering even the greatest rivals into positions that appear innocuous yet hide significant complexities. Carlsen's ability to eke out victories from what most consider drawn or dull setups has become legendary.

He embodies the accumulated wisdom of past champions, mixing classical fundamentals with a willingness to break from theory and discover new ideas over the board. Since defeating Viswanathan Anand in 2013 to become World Champion, Carlsen has dominated across classical, rapid, and blitz formats. His broad opening repertoire, combined with a readiness to wage long endgame battles, underscores his belief in relentless pressure and precise maneuvering over speculative aggression.

Liren Ding	2805
Magnus Carlsen	2875

Croatia GCT, Zagreb 2019

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 b5 8.a4 b4 9.♘fd2 ♘d5 10.♘xc4 c5! 11.dxc5 ♙a6 12.♘e3 ♘d7 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.c6 ♖c8 15.♙f4 ♘c5 16.c7



16...♗d7! 17.♘d2 g5! 18.♙e5 f6 19.♙d4 ♖xc7 20.♗d1 ♘e6 21.♘b3 ♙c4 22.♘a5 ♘xd4 23.♗xd4 ♘g7 24.♖fc1 ♙xe2 25.♖xc7 ♗xc7 26.♖e1 ♙c5 27.♗xd5 ♖e8! 28.♗b7 ♗xb7 29.♘xb7 ♙f8 30.♙c6?! 30.♘d8! ♖xd8 31.♖xe2 ♖d1+ 32.♙f1 ♙c5+ 33.♙e7! 31.f3 ♙c4!+ 32.♖xe7+ ♙xe7 33.♘f2 f5 34.♘e3 ♙g8!? 35.♘d3 g4 36.♘a5 ♙c5 37.♘c4 ♙g1 38.♘e3 ♙e6 39.fxg4 fxg4 40.♘e2 h5! 41.♙d5 ♙d7 42.♙b3

♙xh2 43.♘f2 h4 44.gxh4 ♙e5 45.♘c4 g3+ 46.♘g1 ♙f4 47.♙d1 ♙c6 48.b3 ♘h6 49.a5 ♙e4 50.♘f1 ♘g7 51.♘g1 ♘f6 52.♘f1 ♙e6 53.h5 ♘d5 54.a6 ♘d4 55.♙g4 ♘c3 56.♙e6 ♙c2 57.♘a5 ♙c7 58.♘b7 ♙d3+ 59.♘g1 ♙xa6

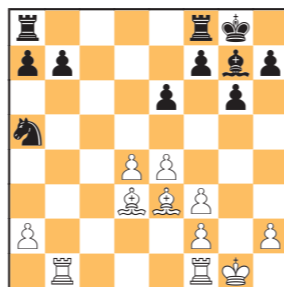
White resigned

Magnus Carlsen	2875
Maxime Vachier Lagrave	2779

Croatia GCT, Zagreb 2019

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♙g7 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.e4 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 c5 8.♙e3 ♗a5 9.♗d2 ♘c6 10.♖b1 cxd4 11.cxd4 0-0 12.♗xa5 ♘xa5 13.♙d3 ♙g4 14.0-0 ♙xf3?! 14...♖ac8 15.♖fd1 b6 16.♙a6 ♖c2 17.♖bc1 ♖xa2 18.♖c7±.

15.gxf3 e6



16.♖fd1!± ♖fd8 17.♙f1 b6 18.♙a6 ♖d6 19.♖bc1 ♖ad8 20.♙g5 f6 21.♙e3 h6 22.♙b5 f5 23.d5 g5 24.♙d2! fxe4 25.fxe4 a6 26.♙a4! exd5 27.♙b4 ♖e6 28.♖xd5 ♙xd5? 28...♖b8 29.♙xa5 bxa5 30.♖c4!±.

▼ Carlsen's covers



## Jimmy Adams's Corner

### THE FIGHTING SUBCONSCIOUS GENIUS

Magnus is the greatest competitive chess player of all time with a phenomenal number of tournament and match victories to his credit during a quarter century intensive career.

From his early years as a chess prodigy he displayed enormous natural talent and fantastic memory and lost no time in becoming a grandmaster in his teens and then world champion a few days before his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

Already by this time he had played double the number of competitive games than his contemporaries and accumulated a huge amount of chess knowledge. In fact it seemed he hardly needed to think before making a move—perhaps because subconsciously he was able to rapidly compare his present position on the board with related patterns of play from other games that were stored in his superb memory bank. Hence his brilliant results not only at classical play but also at various forms of speed chess.

Thus he can be compared to Capablanca in respect of his quick sight of the board and identification of what really mattered in any given chess position. However, like another former World Champion, Emanuel Lasker, Magnus did not by any means choose the 'best' move as would for example be recommended



▲ Magnus Carlsen Photo by Lennart Ootes

by a computer, but one that would lead to positions he would find "easy to play" and likely be uncomfortable or unexpected by his opponent. This is why being a fiercely fighting player as well as an innate chess genius he was able to win so many games and set him apart from his more 'conventional' contemporaries.

Today's elite grandmasters are all-rounders and can play any type of position whether that be tactical or technical. But Magnus can play positional chess just like Capablanca or Karpov, as well as attacking chess like Alekhine or Tal.

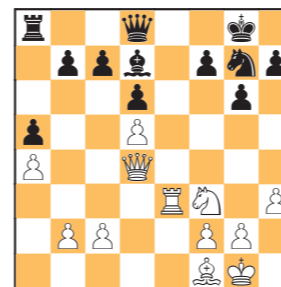
Jimmy Adams,  
Deputy Editor & Chess Historian

29.exd5+– ♖e4 30.♖c8+ ♘f7 31.a3 ♙e5 32.♙e8+ ♘g7 33.d6 ♖d4 34.d7 ♘b7 35.♙e7 ♖e4 36.♖c6 ♙d4 37.♖c7

Black resigned

Magnus Carlsen	2843
Levon Aronian	2764

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2018



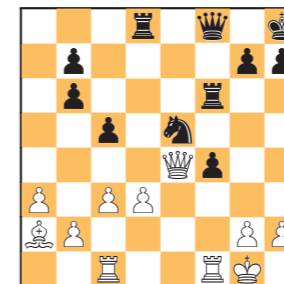
23.g4!± c6 24.c4 ♘e8 25.♗f4! ♘g7 26.♖b3 ♖b8 27.♘g5! ♘f6 27...♗f6 28.♗d2±.

28.♖f3!+– h6 29.♘e4 ♘xe4 30.♗xf7+ ♘h8 31.♗xg6

Black resigned

Peter Svidler	2735
Magnus Carlsen	2845

Grenke Chess Classic, Karlsruhe/Baden Baden 2019



23...♘g4!+ 24.♖ce1 ♘e3 25.♖f2 ♖e8 26.♗xb7 g5! 27.♖fe2 g4 28.♖f2 ♗h6! 29.♗c7 ♖ef8 30.h3 gxh3 31.g3 fxg3 32.♖xf6 h2+ 33.♘h1 g2 Mate.

## Readers' Voices

Capablanca, Lasker, and Carlsen.

I admire their styles and how they approach positional play. Capablanca had a deep strategic understanding. His knight play was elegant and effective in controlling the board. Emanuel Lasker was able to adapt to the style of his opponent and to enter challenging complex positions. For some reason Magnus Carlsen is the best, as he can move on from equal or slightly worse positions to outplaying his opponents tactically.

Despite their different positional styles, their games are a source of inspiration for many players. It would be very instructive to show the game Capablanca vs. Janowski (New York, 1918), a Queen's Gambit Declined.

Manuel A. Paz

Capablanca, Karpov, and Reshevsky. Honorable mention: Petrosian.

For Capablanca in particular, it's the clarity of his play. For all, it's their patient and pragmatic approach to the game.

Chris Dick

Carlsen, Karpov, and Botvinnik. Carlsen is great in every aspect of chess, but that shouldn't discount his greatness in any single aspect. He always knows where to put his pieces for maximum effect. Karpov is the greatest positional prophylactic player, taking Petrosian's acclaimed expertise and going beyond it, by combining prophylaxis with advancement of his own positional plans with moves that Kramnik calls multi-functional. Botvinnik elevated positional play from "an important factor in chess" to "the most important factor in chess".

Jonathan Crumiller



01

## ANATOLY KARPOV

1951 -

Anatoly Karpov, the 12<sup>th</sup> World Chess Champion, remains a towering figure in positional play, known for a style often likened to a “boa constrictor.” He excelled at gradually accumulating small, nearly imperceptible advantages, leading adversaries into positions where they could hardly move without worsening their fate.

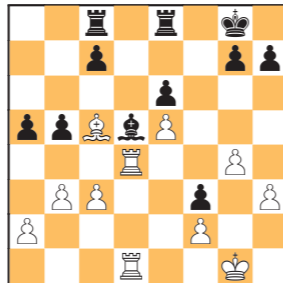
Karpov’s innovations in active prophylaxis and positional domination informed a generation of players who realized the importance of piece placement over quick pawn thrusts. He famously became champion by default

in 1975 when Bobby Fischer declined to defend, thereafter fending off strong challenges from Viktor Korchnoi. Though he relinquished the title to Garry Kasparov in 1985, his hallmark strategies – patient maneuvering, space control with minimal risk, and a near-psycho sense for the critical moment – remain profoundly influential. His games continue to serve as a guide for those seeking a logical, strategic approach rather than relying solely on brute-force calculation.

Anatoly Karpov	2725
Viktor Korchnoi	2665

Game 14, World Championship Match, Baguio City 1978

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♙b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♙e6 9.c3 ♙c5 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♙c2 ♙f5 12.♘b3 ♙g4 13.h3 ♙h5 14.g4 ♙g6 15.♙xe4 dxe4 16.♘xc5 exf3 17.♙f4 ♟xd1 18.♙axd1 ♘d8 19.♙d7 ♘e6 20.♘xe6 fxe6 21.♙e3 ♙ac8 22.♙fd1 ♙e4 23.♙c5 ♙fe8



24.♙7d4 ♙d5 25.b3 a5

26.♘h2 ♙a8 27.♘g3 ♙a6 28.h4 ♙c6 29.♙xd5! exd5 30.♙xd5 ♙ce6 31.♙d4

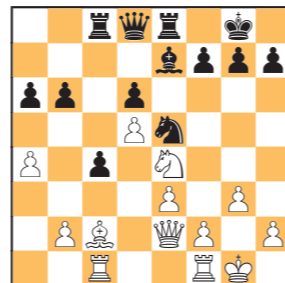


c6 32.♙c5 ♙f8 33.a4 bxa4 34.bxa4 g6 35.♙xa5 ♙ee8 36.♙a7 ♙f7 37.♙a6 ♙c7 38.♙c5 ♙cc8 39.♙d6 ♙a8 40.♙xc6 ♙xa4 41.♘xf3 h5 42.gxh5 gxh5 43.c4 ♙a2 44.♙b6 ♘f7 45.c5 ♙a4 46.c6 ♘e6 47.c7 ♘d7 48.♙b8 ♙c8 49.♘e3 ♙xh4 50.e6+ Black resigned

Anatoly Karpov	2725
Lajos Portisch	2630

Tilburg 1988

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♙b7 5.♙g2 ♙e7 6.♘c3 ♘e4 7.♙d2 ♙f6 8.0-0 0-0 9.♙c1 c5 10.d5 exd5 11.cxd5 ♘xd2 12.♘xd2 d6 13.♘c4 ♙a6 14.♙b3 ♙xc4 15.♙xc4 a6 16.a4 ♘d7 17.e3 ♘e5 18.♙e2 c4 19.♙e4 ♙e8 20.♙c2 ♙c8 21.♘e4 ♙e7



22.b3! cxb3 23.♙xb3± ♙d7 24.♙xc8 24.♙xa6!? ♘f3+ 25.♘g2 ♙xc1 26.♙xc1 ♙g4∞. 24...♙xc8 25.♙b1 ♙f5 26.♘d2 ♙b8 26...♙c8 27.e4!. 27.♙d1 ♙c8 28.♘b3 ♙f6 29.♘d4 ♙b7 30.♙c2 30.f4 ♘d7 31.♘c6 ♙e8 32.e4±. 30...g6 30...♙xd5? 31.♙xb6+.

31.♙e2 ♘g7 31...♙xd5? 32.♙c7±. 32.♙b3 ♘d7 33.♘c6 ♙a8 34.♙b4 ♙c7 35.♘g2 h5 36.h3 ♘g8 37.♙d1 ♙e8 38.g4! hxg4 39.♙xg4 ♘g7 40.♙xd7 ♙xd7 41.♙f4 ♙h8 42.♙g4 ♙e8 43.♙xb6 ♙h4 44.♙f3 ♙xa4 45.♙b8 ♙d7 46.♙a8 ♙h4 47.e4 ♙f6 48.♙d3 ♙b7 49.♙b8 ♙d7 50.♙c2 ♙a3 51.♙b3 ♙a1?? 51...♙xb3 52.♙xb3 ♙c8 53.♙g3 ♙e8=. 52.♙f3!+- ♙b7 53.♙xf6 ♙b5 54.♙c3 ♙f1+ 55.♘g3 ♙g1+ 56.♘h4

Black resigned

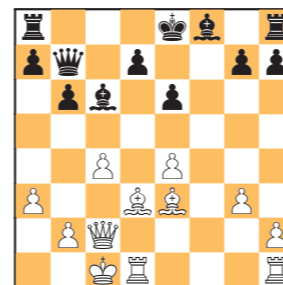


▲ Anatoly Karpov and Vladimir Kramnik, Wijk Aan Zee 2018 Photo by Maria Emelianova

Christopher Lutz	2550
Anatoly Karpov	2725

Dortmund 1993

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.a3 ♙a6 5.♙c2 ♙b7 6.♘c3 c5 7.e4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♘c6 9.♘xc6 ♙xc6 10.♙f4 ♘h5 11.♙e3 ♙b8!? 11...♙c5 12.♙xc5 bxc5 13.g3±. 12.g3 12.0-0-0 ♙d6 13.g3 ♙e5 14.♙e2±. 12...f5!? 13.0-0-0 ♘f6 14.♙d3 ♙b7 15.f3 fxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♙xe4 18.fxe4 (18.♙xe4? ♙xe4 19.fxe4 ♙c8?) 18...♙e7 19.♙hf1 ♙f8=.



## Jimmy Adams's Corner

## THE STRATEGIC SPIDER IN ACTION

12<sup>th</sup> World Champion, Anatoly Karpov had a clear strategic chess style closely resembling that of his hero Capablanca. Much of the time it seemed he could carry out his winning plans without meeting any resistance from his opponents. His games defined what positional play was all about.

## Passed Pawns

Karpov was a self-professed positional player whose greatest satisfaction came “from a game conducted according to all the rules of strategy, with its ruthless logic.” What could be more ruthless than creating and pushing a passed pawn inexorably to the queening square as Karpov did time and time again.

## Exploiting Weak Pawns

Then there was the ‘Karpov pile-up technique,’ directing his full military might against a doubled, isolated or backward pawn, which would frequently lead to the collapse of his opponent’s position.

## Endgames

Karpov liked endings! Nothing pleased him more than patiently squeezing out a win from a microscopic advantage.

## Space Advantage

This gave Karpov all the time in the world to push the opponent’s pieces into retreat and then prepare for a decisive breakthrough with his far advanced forces.

## Controlling open lines

The paralyzing effect of Karpov’s domination of an open file or a seventh rank was another

ever-present theme resulting in a decisive incursion into the opponent’s position.

## Creation and Exploitation of Weak Squares

Such squares would then be occupied and serve as mighty outposts for Karpov’s hostile forces to participate in offensive action.

## Opposite-colored Bishops

Although these may be considered a drawing resource in an ending, Karpov showed time and again how they could be a terrific attacking force when heavy pieces were still on the board.

## Spiderman

Yes, Karpov’s play could be spider-like because he had a knack of driving enemy pieces into confined spaces and then weaving the most deadly webs to trap them alive.

## Tactical Play

Karpov didn’t go looking for trouble. By this we mean tactical trouble. He’d rather not get involved but like he said “If the opponent offers sharp play I don’t object.” Indeed he conducted quite a few checkmating attacks against a king in the center or one that had castled kingside or queenside.

## Vitamin K

However, Karpov’s greatest strength was his superb intuitive feel for knowing on which square each and every one of his own men should be placed in order to achieve maximum harmony and efficiency. More than any other grandmaster he achieved victories against the highest caliber of opposition principally by his more purposeful placement of pieces.

Jimmy Adams, Deputy Editor & Chess Historian

17...♙d6! 18.♙hf1 ♙e5 19.♙f4 19.♘b1±. 19...♙b8! 20.♙e2 20.♙e3=. 20...0-0 21.♙h5 ♙xf4! 21...♙xf4+ 22.gxf4±. 22.gxf4 ♙xf4+ 23.♘b1 ♙e5 24.♙xe5 ♙xe5 25.h3 a5 26.b3 d6! 27.♙d2 ♙e8 28.♘c2 ♙g6 29.♙df2 ♙c8 30.♘d1 ♙d4 31.♙a2 ♙c5 32.♙g2 ♙h5 33.♙f3 ♙e8 34.♘c2 g6 35.♙e2 ♙e5 36.♙d3 ♘g7 37.♙g4 g5 38.♙f1 ♙c5 39.♘b2 ♙g6 40.h4 gxh4 41.♙xh4 ♙g5 42.♙h2 ♙g3 43.♙c2 ♙d4+ 44.♘c1 a4

45.bxa4 ♙xa3 46.♘d2 ♙g3 47.♙d3 ♙g5 48.♙fh1 ♙e5 49.♙h3 ♙d4 50.♙3h2 ♙g3 51.♙f1 ♙f6 52.♙b1 ♙g5+ 53.♘c2 ♙e3 54.♙a1 ♙g1 55.♙d2 ♘f6 56.a5 bxa5 57.♙xa5 ♙c5 58.♙a1 ♘e5 59.♙f1 ♙g1 60.♙dd1 ♙e3 61.♙f8 ♙g2+ 62.♘b3 ♙h2 63.♙b1? ♙h5+ 64.♙e1 ♙f2 65.♙f1 ♙c5 66.♙e1 ♙e2!!-+ 67.♙a2 ♙h3+ 68.♘b2 ♙a3+ 69.♘a1 ♙d3 70.♙b1 ♙b4 71.♙c1 ♙d2 72.♙d1 ♙c3+ 73.♘a2 ♙xc4+ 74.♘a3 ♙e2 White resigned