

Analyzing Your Games

The do's and don'ts of learning from your games

BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**

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ANALYZING ONE'S GAMES is a key component of chess improvement. The purpose of doing game analysis is two-

fold. We try to find common mistakes in our play, and we work to discover the truth in positions we didn't understand.

A word of caution before we begin: I know it is tempting to rush to check lines with an engine immediately after the game, and I would be lying if I said I don't do this too. Remember that this method offers superficial feedback, and it does not help us with improvement. If you really can't fight the temptation, do a quick run through of the game without saving the engine lines and forget about it. You will need to do a deep dive into the game to truly understand the reasons behind your mistakes.

ANALYZE WITH YOUR OPPONENT

It can be challenging to arrange a post-mortem with your opponent during those grueling weekend tournaments, especially when you are scrambling to find food between rounds. However, if you do find the time, it is immensely useful to discuss the game with your opponent as it will give you a full picture of the flow of the game. You will learn about your opponent's unique experience of the game, and vice versa. A good post-mortem also shows mutual respect. It is no wonder that we often see the top players discussing the game after a long battle.

WRITE DOWN YOUR IMMEDIATE THOUGHTS

It is a good idea to write down your raw

thoughts and feelings about the game right after its completion. These notes can be brief, but be sure to include how you felt throughout the game and point out what you felt were key moments. If you are really pressed for time, try to add quick annotations such as "good move", "blunder," etc., after certain moves so you know which moments to come back to. If you have more time to enter the game into a database, include some quick lines that you considered during the game. It's key to avoid using the engine at this time.

After the tournament is over, make sure all games are in your database and begin to take a thorough look. If you have any quick notes you made during the tournament, add them to your files as well. Attend to this as soon as possible after the completion of the tournament so that the games are still fresh in your head.

Remember: at this stage, there is still quite a lot of work to do before checking your game with the engine.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

First and foremost, remember that there is no point in making excuses; what's done is done. If you can be honest enough with yourself to admit unpleasant truths — perhaps you were feeling too lazy to calculate, fear of a higher rated opponent, or fear of making mistakes, just to name a few possibilities — then you are well on your way to improvement.

The purpose of analyzing your games isn't to beat yourself up for your mistakes, but to understand your strengths and weaknesses. This means analyzing both your wins and

losses, something that isn't always a pleasant process.

DON'T JUST BLAME THE OPENING

Check the database to make sure you played it correctly, but even if you got a bad position straight out of the opening, it does not necessarily mean that you have found the root cause of your problems. Chances are the game became complicated later on, when mistakes were made.

Many players give up on openings too quickly because of few losses. If you are learning a new opening, it is normal to misplay it and even lose many games at first. Instead of just jumping to a new system, try to learn a new concept or an extra line in that variation.

MOVE THE PIECES

I find it useful to initially analyze the game on a physical board. This gives a better feel for the game. If there were any lines that you were afraid of, you have an opportunity to look at them with fresh eyes and without the pressure of the tournament. When working on calculation, the general advice is to focus on visualization by not moving the pieces, but during analysis, feel free to make as many moves as you want. Add your lines to your files.

ANALYZE WITH YOUR COACH

I think this is one of the best ways to utilize a coach, as they are very good at spotting mistakes and patterns you may not have considered, and unlike Stockfish, they can explain things in natural language. If you

are able to annotate your games before your lesson — and, at the risk of sounding like a broken record player, doing so without the engine — this will be very helpful for your coach to understand your thinking and suggest improvements.

LOOK FOR PATTERNS

Game analysis allows us to try and locate patterns in our games, both the mistakes, and the things we do well. Key points to look for: the opening, time management, calculation mistakes, and endgame play. Are you prone to overthinking or making impulsive decisions? When you make mistakes in your calculation, is it because you miss moves / resources for yourself or your opponent? Do you utilize your endgame knowledge in concrete endings? How comfortable did you feel in the opening? Focus on questions like these when replaying the moves.

A BLUNDER ISN'T ALWAYS JUST A BLUNDER

“I had a good position but I blundered in one move” is a very common phrase among tournament players. It is easy to dismiss the whole game because it was resolved by a one-move blunder, but you need to get to the root cause of the problem. Did you have a good sense of danger during the game, or did you simply dismiss your opponent’s play before being felled by a tactic? Did you scatter your pieces all over the board until suddenly one of them fell? Did you miss an intermezzo? Did you manage your time poorly? Did your emotions get in the way? It is important to dig deeper.

CHECK WITH THE ENGINE

Finally, after all of this preliminary work, check your game with the engine and compare your notes. The key here is to stay realistic. If the engine suggests some unusual long sequence that would have given you the win, what are the realistic chances of you finding it on your own? Once an engine spits out a line, you cannot unsee it and everything seems so simple, but life isn’t lived backwards.

Even if you did miss a tactic that you would normally find, remember that these things don’t happen in a vacuum. When you are given a tactic to solve, you know that the position has a concrete resolution, whereas during a game, you are on your own. The goal here is to understand the game as a whole rather than focus on a moment or two where the evaluation jumped.

Another point about engines: if Stockfish suggests a line where the evaluation changes

from +0.2 to +0.4, but your move brought it down to 0.00, you did not blunder. Your games do not get resolved because of a tiny shift in the evaluation; these fine margins are only significant for the very top players.

Recently, I looked through one of my favorite games from the 2014 Olympiad. I was surprised by the type of mistakes we both made and the general quality of the game. However, upon reflecting on the high stress situation of playing for your country in a team tournament and all the pressure that it brings, some of the decisions became more understandable to me. Everyone, even the world’s best, can have oversights in the pressure cooker that is over-the-board chess.

As an example, I offer you one of my annotated games from the first round of my first tournament in 2022, against my Olympiad teammate and four-time U.S. Women’s Champion, IM Anna Zatonskih.

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E46)

IM Anna Zatonskih (2393)
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2311)
American Cup – Women (1.4), St. Louis, 04.20.2022

First round games, especially after a long break, are tough on me. The indecision, spending forever on simple moves, and the weighty feeling of every decision all led to my loss in this game. Another reason I experienced difficulty, oddly enough, is because the position was simple. I have often found myself in trouble in those kinds of positions.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 0-0 5. Bd2

I suspected she might try this.

5. ... c5



Varying from 5. ... d5 6. Nf3, which would transpose to my game against Krush from 2018 U.S. Championships, and for which I think Anna had prepared. I am happy I chose a new line over-the-board.

6. a3 Bxc3 7. Bxc3 Ne4

I spent eight minutes on this move.

8. Rc1 d6 9. Nf3 Nd7 10. Bd3 Ndf6

I spent 10 minutes on this move, contemplating whether I should take first on c3 or play ... Nd7-f6. This is poor time management on my part. The normal way to finish development is 10. ... Nxc3 11. Rxc3 b6.

11. 0-0 Nxc3

Another 16 minutes on this decision.

The alternative 11. ... b6 12. Be1 rightfully worried me, as White gets to keep the bishop pair, which will potentially be very dangerous for me. But there is no reason to think for so long here.

12. Rxc3 Qe7



Another seven minutes on this move.

My gut feeling was that 12. ... b6 13. e4 cxd4 14. Nxd4 was a good Hedgehog because of the piece trades, but I was not comfortable making such decisions during the game. I was concerned about 14. ... Bb7 15. Qe2 and somehow getting attacked.

13. Ng5

If 13. e4 then 13. ... e5 was my plan to deal with the central expansion. For some reason I was really worried about this move, but after 14. d5 Bg4 the structure is comfortable due to the exchanges and her bad bishop.

13. ... e5 14. dxc5 dxc5 15. Qb1 g6 16. Ne4 Nd7

With the idea of ... f7-f5. This is overly optimistic.

Better is 16. ... Rd8 17. Nxf6+ Qxf6 18. Be4 Bf5, finally finishing the development of my pieces.

17. Rc2

I missed this move, which was the idea behind 15. Qb1.

17. ... f5 18. Nc3!

A nice maneuver by Anna.

18. ... Nf6 19. Nd5 Nxd5 20. cxd5

Here I've completely lost my sense of danger. I thought this position was completely fine for me, but in reality, she has a passed pawn, better development, and my king cover is slightly weak.

20. ... Bd7 21. b4 cxb4 22. axb4



22. ... e4

This move is insane, and worse, I didn't feel good playing it. I knew that it only weakens my king in the long term, but still I was too tempted.

It's time to do damage control and challenge her on the open file with 22. ... Rfc8 23. Rfc1 Qd6 24. h4 and now if 24. ... Rxc2

(slightly better for White is 24. ... Kg7 25. Rc5 and with the better king and passer she can press for a long time) 25. Rxc2 Rc8 26. Rxc8+ Bxc8 27. Qc2 (note that the endgame is pleasant for White after 27. e4 fxe4 28. Bxe4 but it's not clear that she can convert) White can try to force the matters via 27. ... Bd7 28. Qc5 Qxc5 29. bxc5 Kf8 30. f4 e4 31. Bc4 Ke8 and here the engine says 0.00, but I am not so sure how easy it would be to defend.

23. Bc4 Kg7 24. Rd1 Rfc8

It's reckless of me to allow the pawn push. Blocking the pawn with 24. ... Qd6 is absolutely necessary to survive.

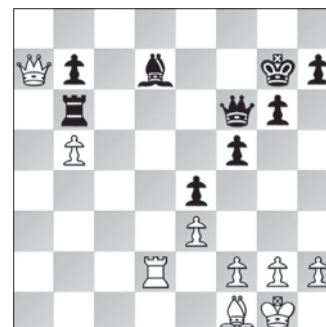
25. d6 Qf6 26. Qa2 Rc6 27. Rcd2 Rb6 28. Qa5 Rc8 29. Bf1

Her king is so secure compared to mine.

29. ... Rcc6 30. b5

The stronger 30. Bb5 wins material on the spot. At the board I thought I had a trick: 30. ... Rxd6 31. Bxd7 Rxd2 32. Rxd2 Ra6. This is the whole idea, trying to exploit the weakness of the back rank. I spotted 33. Qd5! after my 29th move but she didn't see it. After 33. ... Ra1+ 34. Rd1 White successfully defends against my only threat.


30. ... Rxd6 31. Qxa7 Rxd2 32. Rxd2




Despite managing to exchange her passed pawn, I'm still lost. My pieces are stuck and my king is weak. Both of us were low on time, and while her play wasn't precise, I collapsed under the extended pressure.


32. ... Be8 33. Rd4 Kh6 34. Qa5 Kg7 35. h4 Re6 36. g3 Rd6?? 37. Qc7+, Black resigned. ♠

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Now for the Endgame

What to know, and why, in king and pawn endings.

BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**

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NDGAMES ARE THE FOUNDATION of chess. If you are serious about chess improvement, you must know key endgame

positions and concepts, and you must know them cold.

This is especially important in this era of ever-faster time controls. By the time you reach the last phase of the game, you will likely be tired and low on the clock. You will need to rely on your endgame knowledge in order to play well. In this column, we will sketch a few key concepts in king and pawn endgames, while the focus of the next one will be on rook endgames.

My favorite book for basic endgames is GM Yuri Averbakh's *Chess Endings: Essential Knowledge*. It breaks down endgames into logically ordered chapters, and it discusses practical endgames that every chess player must know.

GM Jesus de la Villa's *100 Endgames You Must Know* is another comprehensive book for all types of endgames. However, this book goes into quite complex endgames that may not yet be useful for the reader; for instance, knowing how to perfectly defend with a rook against a rook and a bishop should not be your top priority when studying endgames just yet. I would recommend studying the first 4-5 endgames of each chapter as those endgames are practical and useful. You can always come back to the more complex endgames as you become stronger. This is an excellent book to have as a reference.

While they are rightfully popular, I would recommend staying away from Dvoretsky, Nunn, and Aagaard for now, as their books (while excellent) are written for very strong

players. It's important to study material that is appropriate for your level to maximize comprehension and recall.

Another great tool is the various drills on *Chess.com*, where you can practice endgames by playing them out against the computer. There are two relevant drills for these purposes: "Endgame Fundamentals," which offer theoretical knowledge, and "Endgame Practice," which allows you to put this knowledge to use. The direct link is www.chess.com/practice/drills. Lichess also has an endgame puzzle database broken down to categories, such as rook and pawn endgames. Visit that at lichess.org/training/themes.

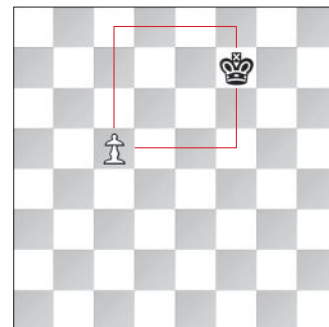
There are several theoretical positions — positions where you know the correct evaluation just by looking at them — that you need to know by heart. I can't emphasize enough the importance of practicing these endgames and executing them with accuracy each time. You want to get to the point where you convert the winning positions, and defend the drawn ones, 100% of the time.

Among the most fundamental of these positions are king and pawn endings. Invest time in studying them. King and pawn endgame puzzles are also great for working on calculation. Due to the limited number of moves, we can calculate them out to their final result.

Here are some key concepts of king and pawn endgames.

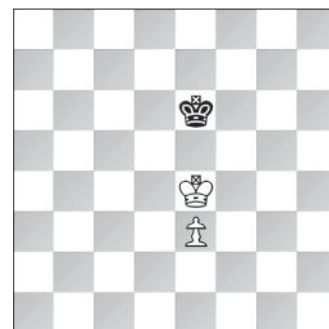
(see diagram top of next column)

The rule of the square is a fundamental concept in king and pawn endings. Draw a diagonal line from the pawn to the end of the board, creating an imaginary square



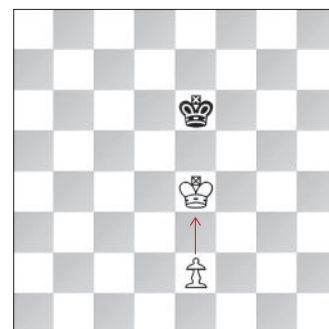
RULE OF THE SQUARE

from the two ends of the diagonal. If the king can enter the square, then the king can catch the pawn.



THE OPPOSITION

The opposition occurs when two kings oppose each other with an odd number of squares between them. Whoever is on turn must give way, allowing the other king to pass. Generally you want the opposition, and not to lose it.

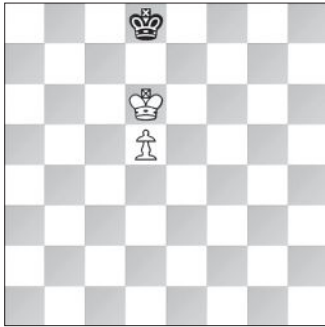


SPARE TEMPO

The "spare tempo" is a situation where the side on turn can "pass the move" to the opponent by moving a pawn that does not change the nature of the position. This puts the opponent in *zugzwang*.

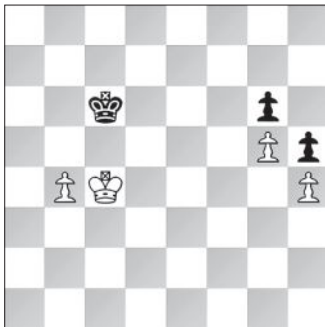
(see diagram top of next column)

If the white king is on the 6th rank in front of its pawn, the position is winning regardless of whose turn it is and where the pawn is.



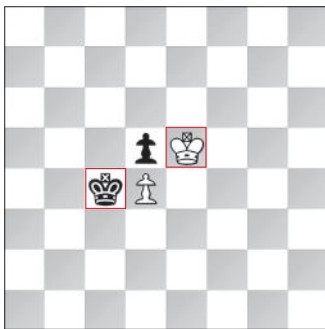
KING ON THE 6th (OR 3rd)

The same rule applies when the black king is on the 3rd rank. Note that the rule does not apply to a- or h-pawns.



OUTSIDE PASSED PAWN

An outside passed pawn is separated from the rest of the pawn islands by several files. It can be hard for a king to catch in a race.



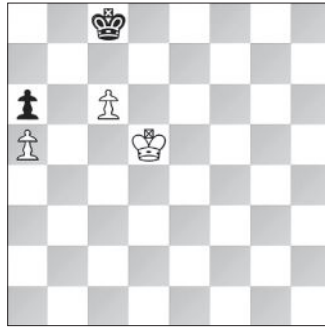
CORRESPONDING SQUARES

Corresponding squares are squares of mutual *zugzwang*. If one player moves to a square, then the opponent must be able to move to the corresponding square to force a *zugzwang*. This is a very complex topic.

Let's see how some of these ideas work in practice with a few examples.

(see diagram top of next column)

Triangulation is a technique designed to lose a move and put the opponent in *zugzwang*.



WHITE TO MOVE

The winning idea is to get the king to b6 and capture the a6-pawn. The corresponding squares are (a) c5 and c7, and (b) d6 and d8. This means that when the white king goes to c5, Black must be able to play ... Kc7 to hold a draw, and when the white king goes to d6, Black must be able to meet this move with ... Kd8.

1. Kc4

White is going to lose a move by triangulation, passing the move to Black. After 1. Kc5 Kc7 White can't make progress, i.e., 2. Kd5 Kc8 3. Kd6 Kd8 4. c7+ Kc8 5. Kc6.

1. ... Kd8 2. Kd4

Steady on. Black must not play ... Kd8-c7, and instead has to wait on the back-rank.

2. ... Kc8

Of course 2. ... Kc7 will lose immediately to 3. Kc5 as in this position Black cannot prevent entry on the b6-square.

3. Kd5!

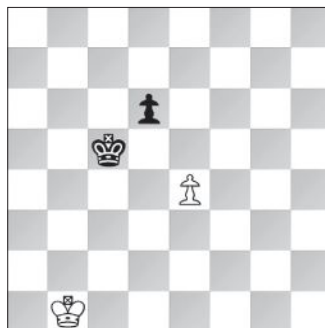
We reached the same position where we started, but it is Black to move!

3. ... Kc7

Or 3. ... Kd8 4. Kd6 Kc8 5. c7 Kb7 6. Kd7 and wins.

4. Kc5 Kc8 5. Kb6

Winning the second pawn and the game.



WHITE TO MOVE

Here we must combine knowledge of the opposition and the importance of the 6th rank to find the right answer.

1. e5!

After 1. Kc2 Kd4 2. Kd2 White can try to hold the opposition. However, after 2. ... Kxe4 3. Ke2 Kd4 4. Kd2 Black has a spare tempo with 4. ... d5. This forces White to give up the opposition after 5. Ke2 Kc3 6. Kd1 Kd3 7. Kc1 Ke2 and now Black will promote.

What about 2. e5? White can try giving up the pawn now, but after the correct 2. ... Kxe5 (not 2. ... dxe5? 3. Kd2 Ke4 4. Ke2 when White will get the opposition and hold the draw) Black holds the opposition. Every move makes a difference in this simple endgame!

1. ... dxe5 2. Kc1

The key to this position is to hold the distant (kings facing off at five or seven squares instead of three) opposition. If 2. Kc2? Kc4 3. Kd2 Kd4 4. Ke2 Ke4 Black gets the opposition and wins.

2. ... Kd4 3. Kd2 Ke4 4. Ke2

White holds the opposition and saves the game.

4. ... Kd4 5. Kd2 e4 6. Ke2 e3 7. Ke1 Kd3 8. Kd1 e2+ 9. Ke1 Ke3, stalemate.

You may wonder how often these basic ideas become relevant at the board. My answer? More often than you'd think!

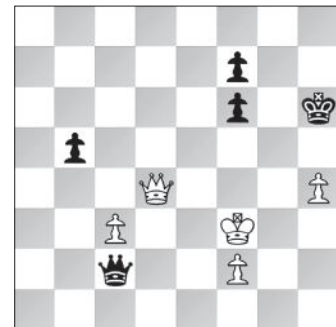
Here's an example of what I mean.

TRANSITIONS

GM Magesh Panchanathan (2466)

Eshaan Hebbar (2057)

2023 Carolinas Classic (4), 06.10.2023



BLACK TO MOVE

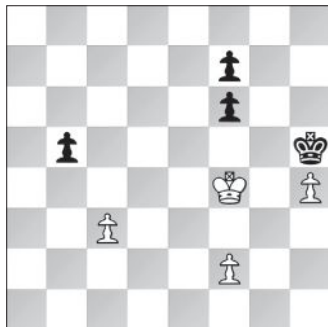
I recently played in the 2023 Carolinas Classic when the game at the adjoining board

caught my attention. It's a perfect example of how experienced grandmasters defeat young up-and-comers in endgames where the young opponent runs out of patience and tries to force matters.

45. ... Qf5+??

This normal looking check costs Black the game! One takeaway: do not enter king and pawn endgames unless you are absolutely sure of the result.

46. Qf4+! Qxf4+ 47. Kxf4 Kh5



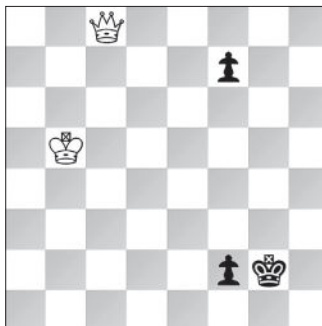
48. Ke4!

This must have been the move that Black overlooked. White goes for the b-pawn, as capturing the pawn and promoting will take nine moves, while Black will need 10

moves to capture both h- and f- pawns and then promote. Remember to always begin with candidates when calculating!

The natural 48. Kf5 leads to an easy draw by force as all the pawns will come off the board: 48. ... Kxh4 49. Kxf6 Kg4 50. Kxf7 Kf3 51. Ke6 Kxf2 52. Kd5 Ke3 53. Kc5 Kd3 54. Kxb5 Kxc3.

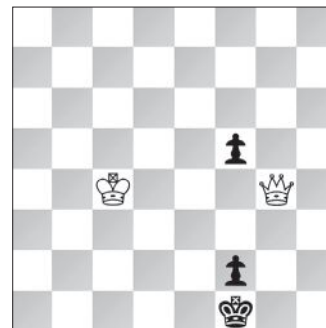
48. ... Kxh4 49. Kd4 Kg4 50. Kc5 Kf3 51. Kxb5 Kxf2 52. c4 f5 53. c5 f4 54. c6 f3 55. c7 Kg2 56. c8=Q f2



This queen against bishop pawn endgame would be a draw were it not for the extra f-pawn! Having it removes Black's hopes of stalemate through giving up the f2-pawn, because the second pawn can move, burning a tempo. We can really appreciate the

depth of White's calculation to correctly force a queen trade and enter this king and pawn endgame.

57. Qg4+ Kf1 58. Kc4 f5



59. Qf3

Of course not 59. Qxf5?? Kg2 60. Qg4+ Kh2 61. Qf3 Kg1 62. Qg3+ Kh1.

59. ... Ke1 60. Qe3+ Kf1 61. Kd3, Black resigned. ♡

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9:41
Chess
Let's play chess!
You go first.
Make a move to begin!
OK
Your move!

The Initiative

Demystifying one of chess' most important concepts

BY WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

W

E'VE ALL HEARD THE PHRASE "White [or Black] has the initiative" before, and we've all seen positions where one side has

it. But explaining what the initiative is, and then knowing how to use it in our games, is not so easy.

For our purposes, we can define the initiative as a situation where one side commands the game, making threats that cannot be ignored. This is usually a short-term advantage, and it can easily dissipate if not utilized. We can use the initiative to prevent our opponents from doing something useful, or we can convert the initiative into a more long-term advantage. These might include material advantage, a better pawn structure, a space advantage, or saddling our opponents with bad pieces that cannot be improved.

When it comes to playing with the initiative, time is everything. By this, I don't mean the time on your clock — although that is always important! Instead, I'm talking about time on the board. It is of utmost importance to put pressure on your opponent, forcing them to respond to your threats instead of improving their positions.

One typical example of "having the initiative" is being ahead in development. When one side has a lead in development, the other side often needs just a few moves to catch up. So the player ahead in development takes the initiative by creating threat after threat, preventing the opponent from finishing their development. There are many

examples of this kind of play from the old masters. Here's one of my favorites.

FRENCH DEFENSE (C10)

Aron Nimzowitsch
Simon Alapin
Casual game, St. Petersburg, 1914

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. exd5 Nxd5

More common is 4. ... exd5, opening the diagonal for the c8-bishop. But opening theory is not our main focus here.

5. Nf3 c5 6. Nxd5 Qxd5 7. Be3 cxd4 8. Nxd4 a6 9. Be2 Qxg2

This is too greedy. Black is undeveloped and losing precious time by grabbing pawns.

10. Bf3 Qg6 11. Qd2 e5



12. 0-0-0!!

Having just about finished development, White is ready to bring his rooks into play

and hunt the enemy king. Why waste time by moving the knight?

Here's what happens if White plays without gusto. After the sensible-looking 12. Nb3 Be7 13. 0-0-0 Black has the strong 13. ... Qf5!, an intermediate move that helps deal with the upcoming Rh1-g1. Play continues 14. Bd5 0-0 and Black manages to get his king to safety, with queenside development to follow. White has no direct threats, although there is quite a bit of compensation associated with the half-open g-file.

12. ... exd4

Black can try to get his king to safety, but we see why White's move was so brilliant with 12. ... Be7 13. Rhg1! Now that this move comes with tempo, Black lacks time to safeguard the ruler. Play continues 13. ... Qd6 14. Nf5! (every move with force!) 14. ... Qxd2+ (note 14. ... Bxf5 15. Qxd6 Bxd6 16. Bxb7 nets the Exchange) 15. Rxd2 g6 16. Ng7+ Kf8 17. Bh6 Kg8 18. Rgd1 and even with the queens off the board, Black's troubles continue, i.e., 18. ... Nd7 19. Nh5!.

13. Bxd4 Nc6

After 13. ... Be7 the simple 14. Rhe1 is good enough: 14. ... 0-0 15. Rxe7 Nc6 16. Bxc6 bxc6 17. f3 followed by Rd1-g1. White is already attacking and targeting the g7 square, while Black is still not developed.

14. Bf6!! Qxf6 15. Rhe1+ Be7

Or 15. ... Be6 16. Qd7 mate.

16. Bxc6+ Kf8 17. Qd8+ Bxd8 18. Re8, mate.

We can't forget the timeless classic: the Opera Game. I am sure you have seen this game at least once, maybe simply for aesthetic reasons, but there is a reason it is so well known. Morphy's play is an exemplar of energetic chess. He is relentless in optimizing his initiative, move by move.

PHILIDOR'S DEFENSE (C41)

Paul Morphy

Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard
Paris Opera, 11.02.1858

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 Bg4 4. dxe5 Bxf3
5. Qxf3 dxe5 6. Bc4 Nf6 7. Qb3 Qe7 8. Nc3
c6 9. Bg5 b5



10. Nxb5!

The most natural looking move in the position also gives the advantage away: after 10. Be2 Nbd7 the knight is free to move as there is no longer a b7-pawn under attack. The knight rejoins the game with tempo after 11. 0-0 Nc5 12. Qa3 a5 and it is now the white queen that is awkwardly placed. Black is ready to move their queen, then the bishop, and finally castle. As Black maintains control of the center, there is no way for White to target the uncastled king

10. ... cxb5 11. Bxb5+ Nbd7 12. 0-0-0!

White gets the king to safety and brings another piece into the game. The d7-knight is now hanging due to the pins.

When I show this game to my students for the first time and ask them how else can White pressure the d7-knight, their response is usually 12. Qa4. But this move doesn't really attack d7. White doesn't want to capture the pinned piece, as it is (at least for now) sufficiently defended. It might look like an attacking move to "pile on the pin," but it doesn't create any threats, and it allows Black to trade queens with 12. ... Qb4+ 13. Qxb4 Bxb4+ 14. c3 Be7 followed by ... 0-0-0. This variation is contrary to our goals in attacking play: we did not create any threats, and we allowed our opponents to finish their development.

12. ... Rd8 13. Rxd7! Rxd7 14. Rd1

By giving up the Exchange, White turned the defending d8-rook into a useless pinned piece. White is creating threats with every move.

14. ... Qe6

If 14. ... Qb4 15. Bxf6 Qxb3? 16. Bxd7 mate.

15. Bxd7+ Nxd7 16. Qb8+

The stunning finish!

16. ... Nxb8 17. Rd8, mate.

Now, let's be clear. Just having the initiative does not mean that you are going to inevitably crush your opponent, but it does mean that they will come under some serious pressure. It is entirely possible that with good defense, your opponent can fend off your threats and come out unscathed.

But always keep practical play, and human moves, in mind. The engine may say that the position is equal, but think about whose moves are easier to find. Do not be afraid of giving up a pawn for long-term, active play. It is very hard for humans to be under pressure for a series of moves and not make mistakes. If the engine evaluates the position as equal when one side is down a clear pawn, imagine how hard it is for your opponent to find the best moves over the board.

As a final example, here's a game where GM Irina Krush used the initiative to good effect against your author. Irina and I have crossed swords many times throughout the years, and normally, I am on the defensive side of some strategic battle with Black, and on the attack with the White. This time, I was on the receiving end of more aggressive play.

MOVE BY MOVE

GM Irina Krush (2432)

WGM Tatevi Abrahamyan (2294)

American Cup (Women) (1), St. Louis,
03.17.2023



17. Be1!

Improving her worst placed piece — always a good idea! The bishop is headed to h4, where it will pin the f6-knight.

17. ... Nc5 18. Bb1

Offering the pawn in order to grab the initiative.

18. ... Rxe3 19. Bh4



It's true that White does not have any direct threats right now, but she has more active pieces. The d4-knight and the f3-pawn are dominating my light-squared bishop. There is no good way to deal with the pin on the f6-knight, and the e2-knight is ready to join the action via the g3-square. And while my dark-squared bishop is quite good, there isn't much happening on the a7-g1 diagonal.

19. ... Re5

I should have recognized the danger and taken quick action with 19. ... Ne6, challenging the centralized knight. After 20. Nf5 Bb5! is the correct way of handling this position, activating my own pieces and giving back some material. Now it would be dangerous for White to grab the Exchange: if 21. Nxe3 (better is 21. Re1 Bxe2 22. Rxe2 Rxe2 23. Qxe2 Nf4 24. Qe7 when White maintains the pressure after 24. ... Qxe7 25. Nxe7+ Kf8 26. Nf5) 21. ... Bxe3 22. Qb3 (hanging on to the rook is inadvisable, i.e., 22. Rc2? d4! and Black takes the initiative!) 22. ... Bxe2 23. Qxe3 Bxf1 24. Rxf1 leaves White with compensation for the pawn via the bishop pair.

20. Ng3 Bc6?

Ceding control of the f5-square was a critical error.

After 20. ... Rc8 21. b4 Na4 (21. ... Ne6? 22. f4) 22. Rxc8 Qxc8 23. Bxf6 gxf6 24. Qd3 the position looks ugly, but at least the game is not immediately over.

21. f4 Re8 22. Nh5 Ncd7 23. Nf5 g6 24. Nh6+ Kf8 25. Nxf6 Nxf6 26. Ng4 Nxg4 27. Bxd8 Ne3 28. Bxb6, Black resigned. ♠

Space

What it is, and how to use it

BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**

T

O HAVE SPACE ADVANTAGE in chess means that you control more of the board, specifically your opponent's half of the

board. This normally happens through pawn advancement, which takes away squares from your opponent's pieces and leaves more squares for yours.

There are several openings where one side — usually Black — gives up the center in the hope to strike back later, including the French, the King's Indian Defense, the Stonewall, etc. If you are like me and play one of these openings stubbornly, you probably have felt the pain of misplaying the structures and scrambling to find moves for pieces that are stepping on each other's toes.

On the other end of things, having a space advantage can be one of the more enjoyable ways of dictating the course of a game. You can have a space advantage through various means, such as controlling the only open file in the endgame, or possessing a bishop in an open position against a knight. There are a few general principles to follow when you have this type of advantage.

AVOID PIECE TRADES

As a general rule, the side with the space advantage would prefer to keep more pieces on the board, while the side with less space would prefer to trade pieces. Having more pieces and no space makes it difficult for the player to find moves, as the pieces are fighting over a limited number of squares and getting in the way of each other.

Of course, this rule is not written in stone, and if exchanging means removing one of your opponent's only defenders, or gaining a material advantage, then you should not shy away from this decision. In order to successfully utilize your space advantage, you should remain patient, not rush your decisions, and minimize counterplay. Here's an example by one of the great strategists in chess history.

DUTCH DEFENSE (A92)

Tigran Petrosian
GM Igor Bondarevsky
Soviet Championship (17), Moscow,
12.11.1950

1. Nf3 e6 2. g3 f5 3. Bg2 Nf6 4. 0-0 Be7 5. d4 0-0 6. c4 c6 7. Qc2 Qe8 8. Nbd2 d5 9. Ne5 Nbd7



10. Nd3!

Keeping the knights on the board makes life difficult for Black, as both black knights want to be on the e4-square. This is what we call “superfluous knights.” The same argument can be made about the white knights, both of which want to be on e5, but stationing them on f3 and d3 for the time being does not come with a downside. One further point: the e5-square is an outpost, whereas e4 is only a temporary home for the black knights due to a possible f2-f3.

10. ... Ne4 11. Nf3!

Avoiding exchanging a pair of knights again.

11. ... Nd6 12. b3 b5 13. c5 Nf7

Here 13. ... Ne4 feels more natural, but White can proceed as he did in the game with 14. a4 bxa4 15. Rxa4 and eventually kick the knight out with f2-f3.

14. a4 bxa4 15. Rxa4 Bf6 16. Bb2 a6

17. Nfe5!?

Known for his prophylactic thinking, Petrosian must have foreseen Black's upcoming ... g7-g5 move and decided to ultimately exchange a pair of pieces on e5.

17. ... Nfxe5 18. dxe5 Be7



19. f4

The exchange on e5 alleviated some of Black's suffering, but his remaining pieces are not exactly moving freely. White also stopped Black's idea of ... g7-g5, leaving his opponent with a limited number of squares for his pieces.

19. ... Rb8

The rash 19. ... g5 20. fxg5 Bxg5 21. Bc1! would saddle Black with major weaknesses after the d3-knight lands on f4.

20. Rfa1 Rb5 21. b4 h5 22. Bc3 h4 23. e3 Nb8 24. Ne1!

The beginning of a typical maneuver: the knight is headed to the d4-square.

24. ... Rb7 25. gxh4 Bxh4 26. Nf3 Bd8 27. h4 Qh5 28. Be1 Bd7 29. Qf2 Kf7 30. Bf1 Rh8 31. Bxa6 Nxa6 32. Rxa6 Be7 33. Ra7 Rhb8 34. Rxb7 Rxb7 35. Nd4 Qh8 36. Qg3 Qb8 37. h5 Ra7 38. Rc1 Qg8 39. Qg6+ Kf8 40. b5 Qf7 41. bxc6 Bc8, and Black resigned.

Now compare the opening in the Petrosian game to a position that emerges from the Semi-Tarrasch after **1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. e4 Nxc3 6. bxc3 c5 7. Nf3 cxd4 8. cxd4 Bb4+ 9. Bd2 Bxd2+ 10. Qxd2 0-0 11. Bc4 Nd7 12. 0-0 b6 13. Rfe1 Bb7**, where White enjoys control of the center.

Even though Black has given up the center, all the pieces have designated squares: the knight and the bishop are happy where they are, the a8-rook will go to c8, the queen has a spot on c7 and the-f8 rook can either live on e8 or d8. Not all space advantages are winning, it seems.

FLANK ATTACKS

Having a grip on the center allows one to play for a flank attack, even when the kings are castled on the same side. Of course, the player with more space is better positioned to start such an attack, as tactics will also favor the side with better pieces.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E18)

GM Anatoly Karpov (2725)

GN Valery Salov (2660)

Linares (1), 1993

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Bb7 5. Bg2 Be7 6. Nc3 Ne4 7. Bd2 Bf6 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Rc1 c5 10. d5 exd5 11. cxd5 Nxd2 12. Nxd2 d6 13. Nde4 Be7



14. f4 Nd7 15. g4 a6 16. a4

Stopping Black from gaining space on the queenside.

16. ... Re8

Black needs to move quickly for counterplay, even if it comes at the expense of a pawn: 16. ... b5! 17. axb5 axb5 18. Nxb5 Nf6 19. Nxf6+ Bxf6. Not only did Black trade a pair of minor pieces, but his bishops are now very active; he can even try to exploit White's weakened kingside and dark squares. This is a great example of how to fight back when lacking space.

17. g5

White now has a solid grip on the position, making it more difficult for Black to find active play.

17. ... Bf8 18. Kh1 b5 19. axb5 axb5 20. Nxb5

Finally Black sought counterplay through a pawn sacrifice, but it is too late now, as his dark-squared bishop can't easily activate. If we compare it to the note to move 16, this version is more desperate and less effective.

20. ... Qb6 21. Nbc3 Qb4

Not 21. ... Qxb2?? 22. Rb1 winning the b7-bishop.

22. Qd3 Nb6 23. Qg3

Transferring the queen to the kingside.

23. ... Kh8

If 23. ... Nxd5 24. Nxd5 Bxd5 25. Nf6+! gxf6 26. gxf6+ Kh8 27. Bxd5 with a winning position.

24. Rcd1 Nc4 25. b3 Nb6 26. g6 fxe6 27. f5

Black cannot defend his king, as most of his army is stuck on the queenside and cannot easily come to its aid.

27. ... gxf5 28. Rxf5 Nd7 29. Rdf1 Ne5

30. R5f4 Qb6 31. Ng5 Ng6 32. Nf7+ Kg8

33. Qxe6!!, Black resigned.

A memorable finish! We sometimes forget what a good tactician Karpov could be.

SPACE IN THE ENDGAME

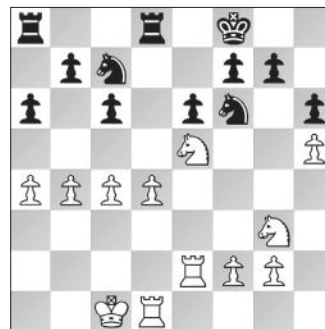
Trading pieces does not always offer solace to the side with less space, especially if the remaining pieces still lack comfortable squares and there are no possibilities to create counterplay. Here's an example.

FORWARD!

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan (2361)

GM Anna Ushenina (2451)

Women's Olympiad (11.3), Batumi, 10.05.2018



WHITE TO MOVE

23. a5!

With this move, White takes full control of the queenside. It will be hard for Black to create any pawn breakthroughs with ... b7-b6, as it would leave the c6-pawn extremely weak.

23. ... Nce8

If 23. ... Nd7 24. Ne4 Nxe5 25. dxe5 would leave the c7-knight completely dominated. Once the white knight lands on c5, it will

be impossible for Black to hang on to her queenside pawns.

24. Kc2 Nd6 25. f3 Rac8 26. Kc3 Rc7

27. Rh1

Defending the h5-pawn in order to improve the g3-knight. I am quite proud of the patience I showed in this game!

27. ... Ke7 28. Nd3

Aiming to prevent Black's knight from getting to f5. We see why this is important after 28. Nf1 Nf5 29. Rd2 Nd7. Black has improved her position a bit, as my h1-rook is out of the game.

28. ... Kd7 29. Nf1 Ke7

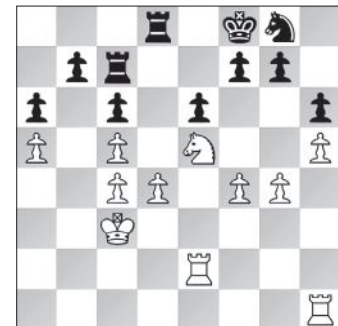
Now 29. ... Nf5 runs into 30. g4 as the d4-pawn is not under attack.

30. g4 Kf8 31. Ng3 Nc8 32. Ne5 Nd7 33. f4

I have to admit something: I did not have a specific plan in mind here, but I knew that marching all my pawns forward would somehow make life unbearable for my opponent!

33. ... Ne7 34. Ne4 Ng8 35. Nc5! Nxc5

36. bxc5



The change in pawn structure favors me, as I now have a clear target on b7 as well as the possibility of creating a passed pawn or weakness after I play g4-g5.

36. ... Nf6 37. g5 Nd7 38. Nf3!

Avoiding exchanging as it would activate her rooks. The black knight does not have a bright future in this position.

38. ... hxe5 39. fxe5 Ke7 40. h6 gxe6 41.

gxe6 Rh8 42. Ng5

The distant passed pawn will prove too much to deal with.

42. ... e5 43. dxe5 Nxc5 44. h7 Rd7 45. Rf1

Ke8 46. Ref2 Re7 47. Kc2 Ne6 48. Ne4 Kf8

49. Nf6 Ng5 50. Rg2 Nxe7 51. Rh1 Re6 52.

Rxe7 Rxh7 53. Rg8+ Ke7 54. Re8, mate. ♠