TACTICS

FOR TACTICS (CALCULATION) EXERCISES:

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

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

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

STRATEGY

FOR STRATEGY (POSITIONAL) EXERCISES:

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

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

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

Aagaard's
MasterClass
by GM JACOB AAGAARD

Photo by David Llada.

2023 BEST INSTRUCTIVE LESSON AWARD
Chess Journalists of America
American Chess Magazine

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

AAGAARD

SHANKLAND

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

PLAY IT ALONG WITH SAM

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

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

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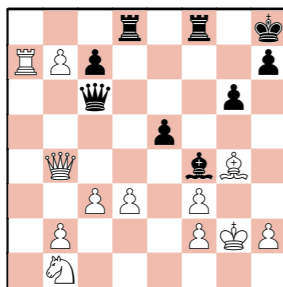
TACTICS

T1 ▼
T2 △
T3 △
T4 △
T5 ▼
T6 △

STRATEGY

S1 ▼
S2 ▼
S3 △
S4 ▼
S5 △
S6 ▼

T1

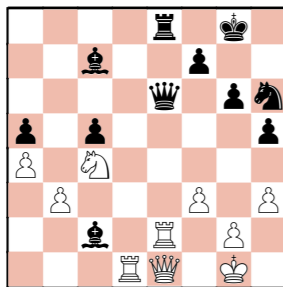| Mikhail Al. Antipov	2608
Shelev Oberoi	2328

Hollywood 2022

23...h5! It's always good to start with the easy ones...
24.♗c8 ♗e3! A nice double attack.
25.♘d2 ♗xa7 and White continued for another seven moves before resigning. **Black won**.

T2

Gabor Nagy	2518
Kassa Korley	2400

New York 2022

36.♖xe6? ♖xe6 37.♕xe6 fxe6 38.♖d7 ♗f4∞ led to an unclear endgame. **White won** the game on move 72, but this was not something anyone could have been certain of at this point.
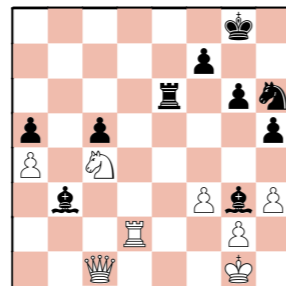
SOLUTION

Sam found the stronger move **36.♖dd2!** with a double attack.

SAM GOT 4/6 ON
THE TACTICS/CALCULATION PAGE

36...♗xb3 37.♖xe6 ♖xe6 38.♕c1 "...and we can play." More than just that!

After **38...♖g3** Sam had not seen further, as he was ready to make a decision.
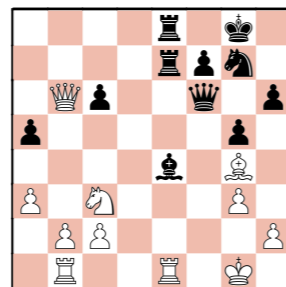
After **39.♖d8+ ♔h7 40.♘d2** White is winning.

T3

Tianqi Wang	2431
Max Gedajlovic	2317

Hollywood 2022

The game entered complicated territory after **28.♖f1? ♕g6 29.♖be1 ♗xc2 30.♖xe7 ♖xe7 31.♕xa5** and **Black** later **won** the game, although Steve [Tianqi Wang's nickname –*Ed*.] was not worse yet.

SOLUTION

Sam felt it was a candidate move exercise as after the strong **28.♖e2!!** Black cannot avoid losing material.
28...♕g6 holds on to the piece, but after **29.♖be1 f5 30.♕xa5! fxg4 31.♕b4** White is a big pawn up and completely winning.
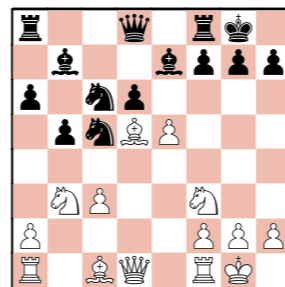28...♗g6 loses to 29.♘d5!.
28...♗f8 29.♖be1 ♗xc2 is also met by 30.♘d5!, winning.

T4

Mikhail Al. Antipov	2608
Andrei Macovei	2482

Charlotte 2022

White played **15.♗f4?** and already stood a bit worse, although he managed to **win** the game later. Sam wanted to continue 15.♘xc5?, recognizing there was nothing more than equality after 15...dxc5.

SOLUTION

But Black's centre collapses entirely after **15.♗a3!!** "Completely missed it as a candidate," Sam said.
15...♘a7!? The trickiest defense.
1) 15...♘a4 16.exd6 is just winning.
2) 15...♘xe5 16.♘xe5 also loses material.
3) 15...♘xb3 16.axb3 reveals the core of White's idea. After 16...dxe5 (16...♔h8 17.exd6 ♗xd6 18.♖xc6 and White wins a piece.) 17.♗xc6 ♖xc6 18.♕xd8 ♗xd8 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8 20.♘xe5 the win is a matter of technique.
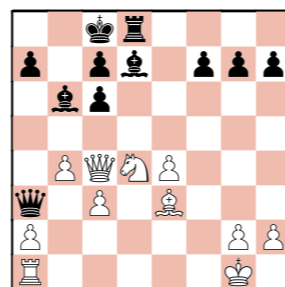**16.♔h1!** and White wins as there is no way for Black to defend. Black's key try was based on 16.exd6? ♗xd6 17.♗xc5 ♗xd5! when he survives due to 18.♕xd5? ♗xh2+.
16...♖c8 17.exd6 ♗xd6 18.♗xc5 ♗xd5 19.♗xa7!.

T5

Kyron Griffith	2354
Ivan Schitco	2530

Hollywood 2022

Black played **19...c5?**, when the game ended in a **draw** after **20.♕d5 ♗a4 21.♕a8+ ♔d7 22.♕d5+ ♔c8 23.♕a8+ ♔d7 24.♕d5+ ♔c8**.
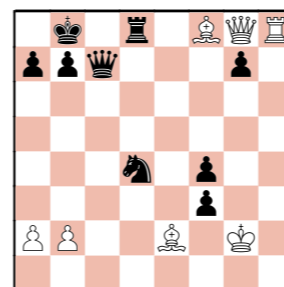
SOLUTION

Sam found **19...♗e6!! 20.♕xc6 ♖d6 21.♕a8+ ♔d7−+** "and stuff is hanging..." to be elementary. Sometimes your heart is filled with hate...

T6

Tanitoluwa Adewumi	2262
Djurabek Khamrakulov	2490

New York 2022

"I suck at these irrational positions," Sam complained.

He wanted to play **28.♔f2?** as Tani had done in the game.

After **28...♔c8 29.♗d3 White won**, but Black is fine with 29...♕b6! 30.b4 ♘e6+ 31.♗c5 ♖c6 32.♕h7 ♘xc5 33.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 34.bxc5 ♖xc5+, when a draw is on the horizon.

SOLUTION 1

The correct first move was **28.♗xf3!**.

Sam was not happy with **28...♔a8!?** 28...♘xf3 loses immediately to both 29.♗d6! and 29.♗c5!.

White has two wins now. But 29.♗c5? ♘e6! would give Black a chance to fight on after 30.♕xe6 ♖xh8 with drawing chances.
29.♗xg7! Oddly this works because it defends the rook on h8. **29...♕c2+** 29...♘e6 30.♗f6!.
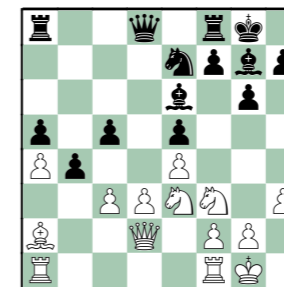**30.♔h3 ♕c8+ 31.♗g4 ♖xg8 32.♗xc8** White wins.

SOLUTION 2

White's even more odd win is **29.♕d5!?**, where the queen is obviously immune due to ♗d6+, but still the key line is **29...♕c2+ 30.♔h3 ♕c8+ 31.♗g4 ♖xf8 32.♗xc8 ♖xh8+ 33.♔g4 ♖xc8 34.♕xd4** and Black will not manage to construct a fortress.

S1

Harshit Raja	2461
Seth Homa	2242

Hollywood 2022

Black did not get much out of a good start to the game after **20...♗xa2? 21.♖xa2 f5** 21...♘c8!? might have given him a slight edge.
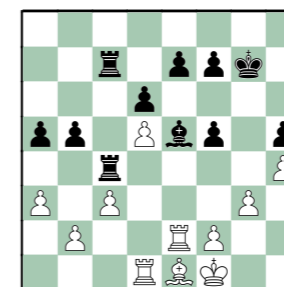**22.♕c2** The chances are level and **White** later **won** the game.

SOLUTION

Hopefully you chose **20...b3! 21.♗b1 ♖b8**, when the white pieces are desperately dominated.

S2

Alejandro Ramirez	2561
Christopher Yoo	2573

Charlotte 2022

Black won this game, although after **27...♖e4?! 28.♖d3 ♔g6 29.♗d2** he did not have any advantage.

SAM GOT 4/6 ON
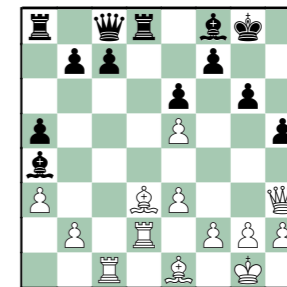**THE MIXED/STRATEGY EXERCISES...**

SOLUTION

Sam and I both found **27...f4!**, with a significant edge for Black, to be automatic. Long term the h4 pawn will be isolated and weak, while White is unable to block the position short term with f2-f4.

S3

Zoey Tang	2206
Evan Park	2364

Hollywood 2022

Zoey is one of the most talented young female players in the USA. However, she lost this game, partly because after **25.♕h4? ♗e8** her advantage was gone. **Black won**.
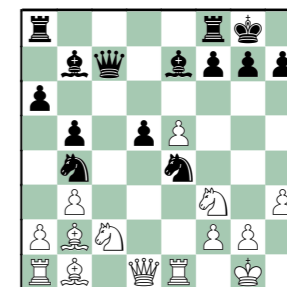
SOLUTION

Having seen a lot of examples like this, Sam and I immediately understood that White needed to play with energy and on the kingside, where her advantage lay.

Thus the correct way to continue was **25.g4! hxg4 26.♕xg4 ♗e8 27.h4** with a strong attack. The game is far from over, but Black is in a desperate situation.

S4

Praveen Balakrishnan	2510
Parimarjan Negi	2639

Charlotte 2022

Negi (and Sam) got his queen into trouble

with **18...♘c3? 19.♗xc3!** White played 19.♕d4!?, which was good enough to develop an attack and win the game on move 28, but the given move is even stronger.

19...♕xc3 20.♘cd4 g6 White can now win after both **21.♗f5!!** and 21.♗xg6!? hxg6 22.♖c1 ♕d3 23.♖c7. **White won**.
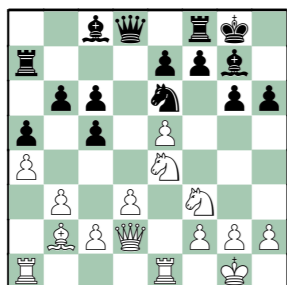
SOLUTION

But Negi was right in following his intuition to exploit the weak c3–square. It is only important to bring up the inactive bishop on e7 to achieve this.

This can be done after **18...♘xc2 19.♗xc2 ♗b4**, when after **20.♖e2 ♖ac8** or directly 20...♗c3, Black is completely level.
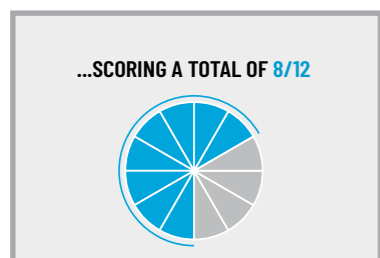
S5

Sriram Krishnakumar	2248
Titas Stremavicius	2515

Hollywood 2022

After **15.♖ad1? ♘d4**, **Black** was fine and later **won** the game on move 43. Also 15...f5!? would give him a good game, which is important, as this is the idea we are up against.

15.h4? was Sam's suggestion. He was not fond of the position, but could not find anything better. After 15...f5! 16.exf6 exf6 17.♘g3 g5∞ Black has full counterplay. The rook is ready to recapture on g7, for example. And after 18.♘f5?! ♘f4 Black would already stand better.
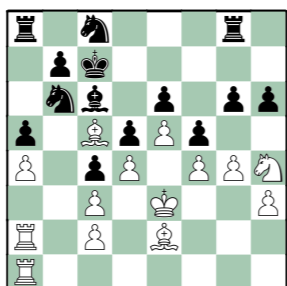
...SCORING A TOTAL OF **8/12**

SOLUTION

For this reason strongest is **15.♘h4!!**, preventing Black from playing ...f7–f5. Then, after something like **15...♘d4 16.f4**, White will slowly build up a strong attack on the kingside, while Black finds it difficult to coordinate his defense.

S6

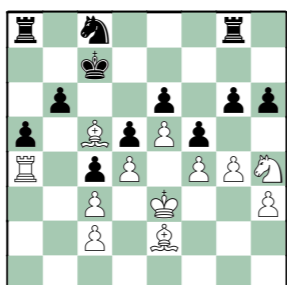| Alder Escobar Forero	2510
Joseph Wan	2153

Charlotte 2022

Black played **36...♖a6?**, which seems a bit random.

After **37.♖g1!?** the position was sharp and full of complexities. White could also follow Stockfish 15, when after 37.♗xb6+!? ♘xb6 38.♘f3 White is fine, based on 38...♖xa4 39.♖xa4 ♗xa4 40.♖xa4 b5 41.♖a1 being perfectly safe for him. **1-0**

SOLUTION

Sam did not hesitate finding **36...♘xa4! 37.♖xa4 ♗xa4 38.♖xa4 b6!** The key move.

If White retreats the bishop, the rook gets trapped. Black thus gains an extra pawn.

39.♗d6+ ♘xd6 40.exd6+ ♔xd6 41.♘f3 fxg4 42.hxg4 g5 The position opens up and Black has a decisive long term advantage. ◼

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1 The MAGNIFICENT 3
REMARKABLE RECENT GAMES

By **GM Sarunas Sulskis**

This time I have selected all my games entirely from the World Cup in Baku 2023. Fittingly, the World Cup is a selection in its own right. The 200 best men and 100 women had been carefully selected by FIDE from all over the world. Spurred on by the knockout format of the Cup, coupled with financial incentives, the players really gave their best.

The outcome of the World Cup, both Open and Women, is too well known for me to repeat it. Although the names of both Indian 18-year-old prodigy Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa and to some lesser extent, Bulgarian Nurgyul Salimova, had been hitherto known to chess lovers, these two were, in my humble opinion, the brightest discoveries in Baku. Their mighty efforts for worldwide recognition are reflected in two of my selections.

PRAGG PROVES HIS QUEEN IS TOO GOOD TO DIE

The first installment of my column deals with Praggna's Round 2 heroic feat against the Frenchman Maxime Lagarde. Actually, it was the young Indian's first game in Baku as thanks to his high seeding he didn't need to play in Round 1. However, before getting into a mission of praise, I would also like to say a few words about Lagarde.

It's not the first time the poor French GM has hit the pages of our magazine and my column in particular. Mostly thanks to my unwavering efforts, he usually enters our magazine on the losing side. Yet I've come to appreciate his natural propensity for violent king hunts, notwithstanding the amount of material shed on this noble goal. Lagarde's determination often provokes powerful counterattacks and results in wild complications all over the board.

In a similar vein, I think Pragg should be thankful to his bold opponent for opportunities he'd kindly offered him for a spectacular counterattack with the black queen lodged deep in White's rear on g1. This win by Black was so good – and instantly acclaimed by the chess media – that it undoubtedly gave the young Indian star the wings of confidence to soar high and mighty. In fact, as high as to reach the very final of the World Cup and, thereby, secure his qualification for the Candidates' Tournament despite his tender age.

C60

Maxime Lagarde	2599
R. Praggnanandhaa	2690

Round 2, Game 1, FIDE World Cup, Baku 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘ge7 Quite a rare Ruy Lopez sideline, undoubtedly Pragg's specialty for the World Cup. It seems to have served its initial task

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well as the surprised Frenchman now took nine minutes to ponder his choice.

4.♘c3 This move has been trending lately although in general it's behind the classic 4.0-0 and 4.c3 in popularity.

4...♘g6 Meanwhile Pragg follows the classic strategy endorsed by the legendary Paul Keres in other branches of the Ruy Lopez. The black knight is transferred to g6. From here it protects e5, heads to f4 and doesn't obstruct his queen's view along the d8-h4 diagonal. The drawback, however, is that the knight may become harassed by the h2-h4-h5 rook's pawn run. It's not advisable to ask the white bishop to declare its intentions by 4...a6 as it may then turn its attention towards the black king by means of 5.♗c4.

5.d4 On an immediate 5.h4 Lagarde was probably concerned with 5...♘d4 6.h5 ♘f4 7.♘xe5? ♕g5 when Black is already close to winning.

5...♘xd4 6.♘xd4 exd4 7.♕xd4 c6 8.♗e2 ♕b6 The point.

9.♕d3 The queen swap on Black's terms 9.♕xb6?! axb6 has so far found few followers. The dumb corner rook would then suddenly become a flourishing businessman.

Lagarde, however, had an alternative to the retreat by 9.♗e3 ♕xb2 (Nevertheless, Black has a safer path to tread – *9...♕xd4 10.♗xd4 ♘f4*) 10.♖b1

9.♕d3 The queen swap on Black's terms

Sarunas Sulskis is a nine-time champion of Lithuania and a regular member of his country's national team. As a teenager, he studied at the Botvinnik–Kasparov Chess Academy and later graduated from the Kaunas College of Management and Law. He qualified three times for the knock-out World Championship, and his most notable recent result is a victory at the traditional 2022/23 Hastings Chess Congress. In addition to his achievements as a player, Sarunas is a FIDE trainer, arbiter, writer, and passionate chess promoter.

A) 10...♕xc2? is unlikely, though, despite appearances, it doesn't lose the queen on the spot – 11.♖d1 (*11.♗d3 c5; 11.0-0*) 11...c5 12.♕c4 ♘e5.
B) 10...♕a3 11.0-0♕.
9...♗e7 10.f4 After a deep think Lagarde comes up with an aggressive move which, according to my database, is a novelty. 10.0-0 is the customary move which, however, is less demanding on Black – 10...0-0.
10...0-0 Pragg spent some good 20 minutes on this simple move. He could have counter-struck Lagarde immediately by 10...d5 11.exd5 ♘h4, but probably decided to bring in the rook to proceed more forcefully with his counterattack. From this you can glean both the drive and ambition of the 18-year-old Indian star! Lagarde must have already achieved notoriety with ACM readers due to his fearless uncompromising style. It's not the first time I have chosen and highlighted his games. Nevertheless his unrelenting straightforward pursuit of an enemy king is often asking for trouble and generates sparkling counterattacks in return. Alas,

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way too often at the expense of this valiant French GM.

11...d5! It is high time for Pragg to strike in the center as Lagarde has burned his bridges with 10.f4 and 11.h4. Pawns simply no longer count.

The greedy 11...♗xh4+? just helps White to open up the h–file for his attack.

A) Yet, knowing Lagarde's ferocious style, one cannot rule out even the incredible exchange sacrifice 12.♖xh4! ♘xh4 13.♕g3 ♘g6 (*13...♘g1+ 14.♗f1*) 14.f5 ♘e7 15.♗h6 ♕d4 16.♖d1 ♖f6 17.♖d6! and Lagarde would have heroically achieved his aim!
B) 12.g3 ♗e7 13.♗e3 ♖xb2 14.♔f2♗.
12.h5 On 12.exd5 Black's counterattack flows smoothly after 12...♘xh4 13.g3 ♗f5 14.♕d2 ♖ae8!?, the point being 15.gxh4 ♗xh4+ 16.♖xh4? (*16.♔d1 ♕f2*) 16...♕g1 mate.
12...dxe4

13.♕g3! Lagarde sets his queen against the black king, thereby displaying the main point of his strategy. Praggnanandhaa now faces a tough challenge. Will he take his knight to the corner now?

Both 13.♕xe4? ♗h4+ 14.♔d1 ♖d8+ 15.♗d2 (*15.♗d3 ♗g4+*) 15...♖xb2 16.♖b1 ♕xc3–+; and 13.♘xe4 ♘h4, give Black an easy time.

13...♘h4! No way! Pragg only goes forward. White is forced to take the offering since refusal would signal a complete failure of his strategy.

The knight's shameful desertion 13...♘h8? would have empowered White – as after 14.♗e3 ♕xb2 15.♗d4! ♕xa1+ 16.♔d2 e3+ 17.♔xe3, he is winning.