

Mark Lowery's Exciting World of Chess

<http://chess.markalowery.net/>

Advanced Lessons

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Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle

Part 1 - Introduction

by Mark Lowery

Some may question why this lesson is put into Advanced Lessons. I have chosen to place this in Advanced Lessons instead of Beginner Lessons because it is a step up in working on improving chess playing skills, from the rules and basics principles into higher level/advanced concepts. In particular, the lesson includes both beginner and advanced level examples, so I felt it best to place it in Advanced Lessons.

Aren't both these essentially the same thing, just stated differently?

Tactics and positional play – while often taught and viewed as separate and distinct learning aspects of the game of chess –**are interrelated**. In order for a player **to develop a solid framework for his or her game plan, the player must understand the interrelations in order to develop successful combinations to accomplish goals**.

The **tie that binds together all aspects of chess playing is strategy - the implementation of the game plan**. Each cornerstone and building block of the plan's framework "must be coordinated through "combination", or else somewhere along the way the game plan will falter on the shoals of reality that it was in the end analysis a teetering "house of cards". Another way to view this is how I saw it stated on a website promoting the purchase of an e-book on strategy: "Strategy is the most fundamental part of chess. Strategy means systematic action based on a correct understanding of the game, implementing a plan aimed at weakening and – in the end – destroying the opponent's position. Tactics are single moves within the framework of a strategic plan." The last part, as you will see in this lesson, is too narrow in my view because to me "tactics" is broader than just single moves, and both tactics and positional play is interrelated.

If a player's tactical arsenal is limited and/or his or her ability to play combinations is weak, then it is critical for the player's development and improvement for him or her to come to an understanding of the "Why" question... "Why should he or she do this or that?" Or, perhaps more appropriately and importantly framed especially for beginners: "Why should he or she NOT do this or that?"

In order to do accomplish this task for learning and improvement, the player must have a solid understanding of the basics and the interrelationships between tactics and positional play. For example, "Play with your pieces!" is a widely dispensed piece of advice in the chess world, but it is only a "rule of thumb"...that is, a general principle.

There are many positions where pawn advances or captures, for tactical or positional reasons or both, become central keys to a winning strategy. Therefore a player has to know how, where, when, and why to place the pieces and pawns to get the maximum benefit from them. This dictates both dedicated studying and playing (experience) must be employed by a player to improve.

Mark Weeks in his article about “Positional play” on About.com opens the article by stating:

“When there are no tactics, positional play is the main factor.

What do you do when there are no tactics to consider? You try to strengthen your own position and weaken your opponent's position. To do that, you need to know the elements that distinguish a strong position from a weak one.”

To me, viewing the game of chess within this construct has significant inherent limitations.

First, it pits tactics against positional play, which as many chess players have found out results in frustration and more losses than wins.

Second, it suggests that tactics and positional play cannot coexist - which quite simply is not true. His construct states that if you are seeking to play tactical moves - and these are available - then play them.

However, in playing chess it is vitally important to keep in mind to try to **“strengthen your own position and weaken your opponent's position.”** The essence of searching opportunities to apply tactics is precisely to reach that goal, whether a player is at the moment playing tactically or not.

Yet, even this is too simplistic a statement because it ignores the reality that a player should sometimes “sit on the position” or “weaken the position” for strategic purposes...most often seen in endgames when applying the tactical move of sacrifice. When employing any tactical move, the player is always “taking the risk” of “betting” that it will be successful. Hopefully, the player has assessed the value of the tactical move correctly and followed it up correctly - applied the correct move order and calculation. If not, then usually a player will find himself or herself worse off, or more devastating with a sudden lost game.

Without a definition for each of these aspects, then any attempt to answer the questions would be fruitless. The following are the definitions I suggest for this lesson, and around which this lesson is based.

Tactics:

These are **the moves and pawn advances on the board that a player utilizes to effectuate his or her goals**, both offensively and defensively. This is the **“what is available” category**. What specific moves and pawn advances, or short combinations thereof, in the player’s “weapons” arsenal may be employed at any particular point in the game.

In this category we may place tactics such as (but not limited to) en passant, sacrifices, pins, skewers, battering rams, entombment, fork and fork checks, X-ray attack, discovered attack or discovered check, pawn storm, minority attack, suffocation, luring, diversion, distraction, Bishop Pair, and Doubling Rooks.

Positional play:

This is the **“structure” category**. It involves **thinking about both the offensive and the defensive structures for each player**...that is to say, the immediate positioning of pieces and pawns at any given point, what can be forced from the current position or what positions are able to be created through use of available tactical moves, and what might open up inadvertently through mistakes and blunders by the player or the opponent or both.

In this category we may place positional principles and their subsidiary principles, such as (but not limited to) control the center, pawn structure, castling, mobility, centralization, space, place Rooks behind (passed) pawns, Rooks controlling open files, Rook gaining control of the seventh rank, a Knight on the rim is dim, posting a piece to an outpost, and doubling or tripling pawns.

Strategy:

This is the **“how to do it” category**. It is concerned with **how the player executes moves by pieces and pawn advances**...that is to say, primarily **the concept of move order & calculation**. Another way to view it is “what works, what does not work, when, and why”. How does the player accomplish successfully what the player intends to do? How does one play the endgame and checkmate, or alternatively reach a draw or stalemate? How does one go about successfully counterattacking or engaging in counterplay? May one or more of the player’s “tactical weapons”, not being presently available, be opened up by employing what is currently available for tactical moves or pawn advances? Or, alternatively, may the player utilize positional play to open a tactical move or pawn advance up for use on the board?

Think about this though: Do not tactical moves also have necessary positional components to them as part of strategy? Let’s examine some examples.

Entombment: In order to do this tactic, one must create a position (or the opponent must create the position) that allows entrapping a piece or a pawn, thereby removing it as a fighting unit whether temporarily or permanently. At the same time, the entombment itself creates positional imbalance on the board while restricting the opponent's ability to attack and/or defend against an attack or additional tactical maneuvering by the player.

Pinning, skewering, forks and fork checks, X-ray attack, and doubling or tripling pawns in a file: Each involve creating (or having the opponent create) a position on the board in which the tactical move may be employed and used for strategy purposes. Additionally, each are a specific distinct type of positioning of pieces and/or pawns in and of themselves.

Sacrifice: In order to be successful, there must be a definite attainable purpose behind the sacrifice. That purpose is some type of "compensation" for the loss of the fighting unit, and this is most often a weakening of the opponent's position. The example which should most readily come to mind is a Bishop sacrifice against a castled King at h7 or f7 against a Black King castled to the Kingside, or at f2 or h2 against a White King castled to the Kingside.

pawn storm: As a tactical maneuver, rushing pawns in forward advance has two main purposes:

1. To breakthrough the opponent's defensive structure, especially for opening the opposing King up to attack or flushing him from the safety of a castled position. This purpose is specifically aligned with the traditional concept of positional play strategic consideration.
2. To push one or more pawns toward pawn promotion. The purpose of this tactical maneuvering usually is premised on one of the following two strategic purposes: (1) gain a piece through pawn promotion, most often a Queen through Queening; or (2) creating tempo and/or positional imbalance by forcing the player either to divert pieces or to bring the King out from a castled position (luring) in order to defend against the pawn storm and push toward pawn promotion.

Important to note is that "**compensation**" falls into strategy. Why? Because "compensation" always either is an immediate weakening of the opponent's position directly on the board (e.g., breaking the center control, pawn storm, breakthrough), or, it has an indirect effect for positional play by allowing the player to "gain the tempo" for example, allows employing tactics for specific goals, or results in the gaining of material advantage that while not necessarily has an immediate direct effect on positional play, it allows the player to later force positional imbalances on the chessboard.

In the ensuing parts of this lesson, the focus will center upon particular concepts and the interrelationships between tactics and positional play as part of strategic planning and implementing a game plan.

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Advanced Lessons

Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle Part 2A

Control of the Center (Section 1 of 3)

by Mark Lowery

Adapted and developed in part based on Mark Week's article, "Positional play" on About.com.

Control the center of the board

Captain Recon covered basic aspects of controlling the center in his lesson on the subject in the General Lessons. The lesson greatly expands on the subject.

Engrave three different portions of the chessboard into your mind for use in playing chess.

The true center (2x2 square): squares d4, e4, d5, and e5;

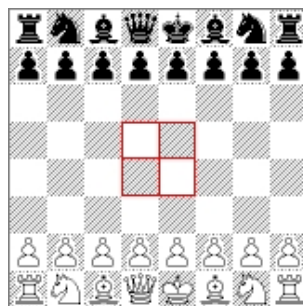
The extended center (4x4 square): encompassing c3, c6, f3, and f6; and

The expanded center (sixteen file squares): the central files d (from d1 to d8) and e (from e1 to e8).

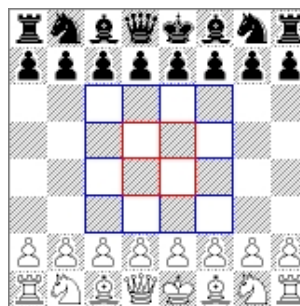
The use of words "center" and "central" should impress upon a player the importance of these areas...power! Except when engaging in flanking attacks and play on the wings, the pieces move through the "Central Hub" of the board - these three areas.

Let's look four board diagrams depicting this Central Hub concept.

True Center



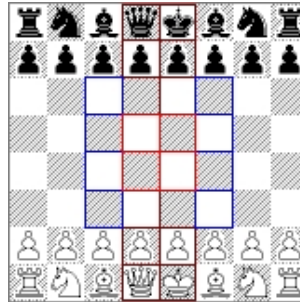
Expanded Center



Extended Center

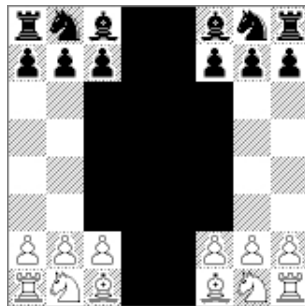


Compiled Center the Central Hub



Some people do better with memorization by doing associations...the best example is mnemonic memorizations such as Roy G. Biv for the colors of the rainbow – Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violate. The Central Hub can be thought of in a somewhat similar manner as well, because visualization can be associated with something that is familiar in chess – the Top of the King’s Crown! So one manner to view the concept: The Central Hub of the Board = Top of the Crown. Look at the follow diagram.

Central Hub = Top of the Crown



As you may see, this view of the chessboard also enables two other visualizations:

First: When considering Kingside and Queenside attacking, counterattacking, and defense issues, the squares outside the Central Hub (or Top of the Crown) represent particularized focus areas for considerations when considering Kingside and Queenside concepts. This is not to say the squares within the Central Hub are less important, indeed they are not. However, one tactical and positional play consideration is the inherent starting weakness of the f2 & f7 squares (discussed later).

Without too much deep thinking, by noting that these squares are next to the Kings and just outside the Central Hub (or Top of the Crown), provide visualization support for the concept that they have inherent weakness at the start of the game.

Second: When considering issues of flank attacks, wing attacks, and other issues of play on the wings or flanks (e.g., counterattacks, counterplay, and defense), the Central Hub (or Top of the Crown) visualization quickly enables a player to concentrate focus on the squares outside of it.

A player should position pieces to:

- 1. occupy the center;**
- 2. control the center; or**
- 3. be within striking distance – be able to move there quickly and efficiently.**

* In the opening and early phases of the middlegame, every time a player makes a move the player must consider its impact on the center, and how it might affect ensuing play and the endgame. For example a player must consider the value of using Knights at “outposts” in the center and the positioning of pawns to occupy or control central squares.

* In endgames, the importance of the center revolves upon the positioning of the remaining pieces and pawns (or pawn). Abandoning the center in an endgame might be the more strategic play, for example when pushing a remote isolated (outside) passed pawn toward pawn promotion.

“Center” considerations regarding mobility and ability to control and defend space and squares

A. All of the pieces, except the Rook, have potential better range of mobility when positioned in the center of the board than on the side. They become more restricted in movement and their ability to control squares usually decreases when farther away from the center. I use “potentially” because this depends of course upon the positioning of other pieces and pawns.

In open versus closed games, it is considered more beneficial to have Bishops in opens games where a Bishop’s movement along the diagonal lines through the center that are not blocked. In closed games where the diagonals through the center are blocked, it is considered more beneficial to have Knights because of the Knight’s unique L-shape moving pattern allowing it to jump over and move around blocking pieces and pawns (the Knight will be covered in Section 3 of this lesson).

This section of the lesson covers issues concerning the Bishops. First, let’s set the stage with some concepts.

*A **Good Bishop** is one that has free reign through the central diagonals because its central pawns are not on squares of its color in the center of the board. That is to say, a player's Bishop is "good" when his or her pawns in pawn chains are not blocking the Bishop's mobility through the center of the board.

* A **Bad Bishop** is one that does not have free reign through the central diagonals because its central pawns in pawn chains are on squares of its own color thereby blocking the Bishop's mobility through the center of the board.

* An **Active Bishop** is one that is serving a purpose on the board at the present time as opposed to sitting on a square waiting to become involved in the fight. An Active Bishop may be either a Good Bishop or Bad Bishop. The sole aspect to consider whether a Bishop is "active" is whether at the present time the Bishop is accomplishing something relative to the player's positional structure and game plan, such as a pin, defensive support, attacking capability, and/or other tactical and/or positional play considerations in the game.

There are three things a player may try to do if he or she has a Bad Bishop:

- 1. Trade (exchange) the Bad Bishop for an opposing Bishop, or exchange it for an opposing Knight.**
- 2. Make the Bad Bishop into a Good Bishop by advancing one or more of the central pawns off the color squares of the Bad Bishop.**
- 3. Move the Bad Bishop so that it becomes active or more active by increasing its mobility through moving it outside the blocking central pawn chain.**

The third maneuver allows the Bishop to become active along other open diagonals on the board, but often requires more dedicated attention to the Bishop's possible mobility along those lines to keep those diagonals open for it to move and thereby have power along those lines. More than one player has through inadvertence or not being familiar with this concept, further blocked in his or her Bad Bishop by placing pieces and/or pawns on squares of the same color in other diagonal lines through which the Bad Bishop could be moved to activate it or make it more active.

The third maneuver normally is the more difficult one because this causes a player to have to think along multiple diagonal lines, including paths to the wings and away from the wings on the board. This also includes having to consider open squares available on shorter diagonal lines to and from the wings and the players' back ranks. Constructing good activity for a Bishop using these diagonal lines requires more concentration because the Bishop will have to move, stop, turn, and then move in one or more different diagonal directions to accomplish the goal. This is a much different and more difficult course than simply looking straight up the long diagonals for instance or along relatively clear paths of other more "obvious" diagonals.

There are two methods to try to visualize and capitalize on using this avenue for a Bad Bishop in order for a player to make it into a Good Bishop and activate it, both based on geometrical patterns.

1. **Triangulation:** The term “triangulation” is used elsewhere in the chess world as well. For purposes of this lesson, I provide the conceptual basis for using the Bishops. The concept involves mentally visualizing two diagonal lines for the Bishop to move with an intersecting common square on a wing of the board and squares on the back ranks of the players, which approximates a triangular view of the Bishop's movement. Progressively smaller triangles exist throughout the board as the diagonal lines away from the center as well.
2. **Diamondization:** The four diagonal lines starting from a square through the wing to a back rank to a wing to back rank and then back to the starting wing, provides the player a “diamond” view for the Bishop's movement. Progressively smaller diamonds exist as the starting squares are moved in toward the center of the board.

Below in this section of the lesson we will review these concepts. But, first let's review some basic considerations. Triangulation and Diamondization may be combined to provide even greater flexibility (mobility) for a Bishop, and may be used for Good Bishops as well. Of course, using these views are more conceptually difficult; yet, recognizing the geometrical patterns can greatly assist in planning and developing long range attacks with the Bishops that are "hidden" and which seem to come out of nowhere to the opposing player. Such attacks are not easily foreseen and defended against by most opposing players, who have to try to visualize what the player is planning from the opposite side of the board (a mirror-like view). That can be a difficult task when things are fairly straight forward on the board with lots of pieces and pawns. It can get downright tricky when a Bishop is in essence hidden.

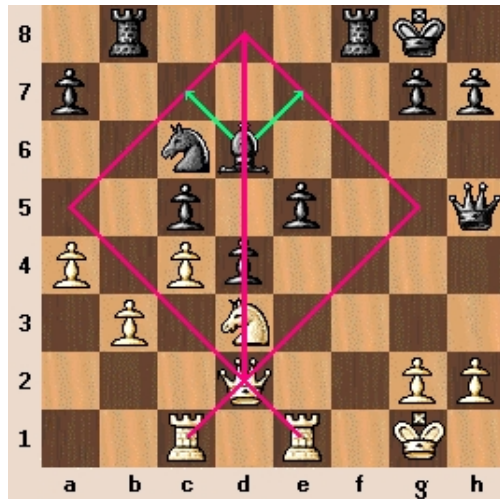
The tactic involves shielding the Bishop behind the player's other forward pieces and pawns and then launching a sideways attack off a wing or back rank of the board from behind the player's spatial lines created by the player's other fighting forward units. While not necessarily easy to construct and carry out, often this is a much more difficult for the opposing player to see coming at him or her. These lines of attacking for a Bishop can be very highly effective as counterattacks and for counterplay. In the right positional structure, a player also can suddenly drop a checkmate on the unsuspecting opposing player like the rhetorical "lead balloon."

Below are two diagrammed boards. The first shows Black with a Bad Bishop at d6. The second shows the same board position, but with the two geometrical patterns of viewing creating activity for the Bad Bishop.

DIAGRAM TPP-B1



DIAGRAM TPP-B1



Hopefully you noted that Black's Bad Bishop at d6 in the position shown is an Active Bishop because it is providing defense for Black's pawn at c5, and tripling the defensive protection for Black's pawn at e5 (also protected by Black's Knight at c6 and Black's Queen at h5) against the double attack by White via White's Knight at d3 and White's Rook at e1. This later tactic is called "**overprotection**" - a concept that refers "to a strategically important pawn [or piece,] or square, that is given more protection than it seemingly needs. Essentially a prophylactic maneuver...the side that overprotects does so in order to dissuade the opponent from launching and attack against that point." {Jeremy Silman, *The Complete Book of Chess Strategy*, at 229).

Additionally, before proceeding, you should note that Black has a line of play consistent with the second of the three principles for making a Bad Bishop into a Good Bishop - to clear a pawn off the same colored square...Black to play and move e4!! Black gets White's Knight because the Bad Bishop becomes a very, very Good Bishop (we can say an excellent Bishop). Why?

Advancing to e4 creates a discovered checkmate threat against White at vulnerable h2 through the Bishop and Queen combination lineup - the Bishop along the now open diagonal from d6 to h2, and the Queen from h5 to h2, preventing White's Rook at e1 from capturing White's pawn at e4. Also, the e4 advance not only successfully attacks White's Knight, it also places White into Zugzwang. In order to protect against the Bishop-Queen combination discovered checkmate threat, White has

only four options...break the pawn defensive front shielding White's King with either g3 or h3 (creating a defensive pawn chain) and blocking the checkmate threat, or Nf4 blocking the checkmate threat but this results in removing the blockade of Black's passed pawn at d4 and subjects the Knight to safe capture by Black (either Bxf4 or Rxf4). The capture Bxf4 would be much better because it then attacks White's Queen, and retains the checkmate threat at h2, resulting in the loss of White's Queen!!! I mentioned that with e4 the Bishop became not only a Good Bishop and Active Bishop, but an excellent Bishop! Finally, White has the disastrous ability to block the discovered checkmate lineup with Qf4, which also loses the Queen.

Let's look at some additional tactical and positional play considerations of this position.

Black smartly positioned a Rook in Black's open b file at b8, while White created positional inferiority by not positioning a Rook in that open file.

White created significant positional inferiority on the board through connecting White's Rooks and Queen diagonally on black squares, while Black has a Black Bishop on the board.

White also has a backward pawn at b3 in White's Queenside reverse-V (or backward) pawn chains - b3-a4 and b3-c4 - that is being attacked by Black's Rook at b8 (that is, attacking the rearmost (base) pawn in the pawn chain: the inherent weak point of a pawn chain). In fact, White's pawn at b3 is subject to being freely captured by Black if it is Black's move (Rxb3), or if it is White's move and he or she does not move to defend and protect it. This shows how a backward pawn or a rearmost pawn in a pawn chain can be particularly vulnerable to being attacked and captured.

Black can smash and fracture White's reverse-V pawn chain on the Queenside if Black's Rook is able to freely capture White's pawn at b3, seizing control of the open b file.

Black has a centralized forward V-shaped pawn chain with a passed pawn at d4.

Black has a pawn couple at g7-h7, and White has a pawn couple at g2-h2, and both are pawn islands providing pawn front defenses for the Kings. However, White's pawn island is weak and unable to provide any defense against the Bishop attacking from the Kingside along that side of the "diamond" without severely compromising White's King Safety afforded by the two pawns as a defensive shield in front of the White King.

Black also has an outside (remote) isolated pawn at a7, which also is a backward pawn.

Black additionally seized control of the open f file by positioning Black's Rook at f8.

Black has a significant material advantage with an extra pawn and the Bishop.

The combination of all these factors should lead Black to an easy win, despite starting out with a Bad Bishop.

The next section reviews the other pieces (except the Knight covered in Section 3) and the pawns.

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Advanced Lessons

Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle

Part 2B - Control of the Center (Section 2 of 3)

by Mark Lowery

Adapted and developed in part based on Mark Week's article, "Positional play" on About.com.

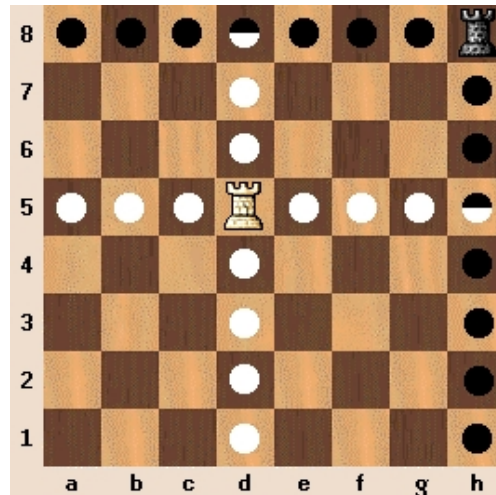
Control the center of the board

Continuation of "Center" considerations regarding mobility and ability to control and defend space and squares

Before proceeding, it bears noting that a player should keep in mind that any piece cannot be attacked from the rear when it is located on a wing or back rank. Similarly, it cannot move to the rear either, so a piece's attacking capabilities becomes reduced. So too, as a piece moves toward the center, this opens more and more squares behind it from which it might be attacked.

B. The Rook has better long-range mobility when away from the center along the available file (vertically) and rank (horizontally), but when more centrally located then the Rook is able to provide better "space" coverage through "quartering" the board along the file and rank from the square upon which it is located. This is shown in the following diagram.

DIAGRAM TPPR-1



The diagram shows that for a given position on the board, no matter which square a Rook is upon it always has a maximum of thirteen squares to which it may move, or move and capture upon.

As one may see from the diagram, positioning the Rook more centrally located allows its mobility to increase with a corresponding opening up of more tactical and positional play opportunities for use of the Rook in combinational play. For example, it allows potentially freer movement of the Rook to open files and getting behind passed pawns to defend them for advancing toward pawn promotion. Further, the above diagram shows that for controlling and limiting space in which an opposing King may move, more centrally located a Rook is able to more significantly limit the opposing King's movement. This has two primary beneficial effects from tactical and positional play perspectives.

1. Limiting the squares to which the opposing King may move allows for easier entombing and checkmating of the opposing King, by creating a positional structure from which the King can be forced to a wing or back rank, and to a corner, all where checkmating the opposing King usually is much easier to be accomplished.

2. The Rook's power to control the file and the rank from its square, blocks the opposing King from coming to the aid and defense of the opposing pieces and pawns located outside of the "quarter" in which the King is entrapped. In order to free up the opposing King, the Rook will need to be moved away either by direct attack from the King, which can move in to attack the Rook only diagonally, or by one or more opposing piece(s) and/or a pawn.

At the start of the game from a positional play perspective, the Rooks start out separated from each other by the other pieces and away from the Queens. Thus, from both tactical and positional play perspectives, one of the purposes of castling early is to connect up the Rooks which enhances their respective powers by allowing them to be used in combinational play together, allows for the possibilities of them working with their Queen and other pieces and/or pawns in active combinational play, allows them to seize control of center and/or open files, and become positioned behind central pawns for defense of the pawns.

Open files often become the center of focus with the players positioning dueling Rooks in the open file to equally contest control of the open file. Such situations may result in Rook exchanges (trades) and the open file becomes a **trading file**, because neither one will move a Rook and give up control of the open file.

Familiar by now, hopefully, is the technique of "**walking a lone opposing King to checkmate with two Rooks**", which involves checkmating the opposing King on either of the back ranks or either of the two wings (a file or h file), by peacefully "walking" the opposing King to doom through consecutive checking on the opposing King.

The walking of the King in checks by the Rooks simply forces the King into an ever decreasing number of ranks or files, one move at a time, leading him peacefully to the slaughter. However, because the Rooks cannot defend themselves diagonally, the primary positional structure for checkmating a King with two Rooks is to split the Rooks far apart, best with the two Rooks on opposite sides of the board with the King trapped in the center.

Sometimes the opposing King might be close to one of the Rooks and/or attempt to move ever closer toward it. Unless the player with the Rooks makes a blunder and allows a Rook to be captured, this attempt by the opposing King to squirm and connive to save himself will go for naught. First, if the Rook is lost by a blunder, all is not lost. A Rook and a King can checkmate a lone King although it is much more difficult and takes a lot longer.

Second, and more importantly from viewing the interrelationship, the player can easily avoid the attempt by the opposing King. This involves allowing the opposing King to move to a diagonal square next to one of the two Rooks to threaten capturing it, and then the player just simply moves that Rook on his or her next move across the files in the same rank to the opposite wing of the board, or vertically up or down the ranks to the opposite side of a file, but not into the same file or rank as the player's other Rook. The King will then be all alone away from the Rooks and easily be lead to checkmate by progressively moving the Rooks in their separate files or ranks, down or up the ranks, or across the files, as appropriate to checkmate the opposing King on one of the back ranks or wings.

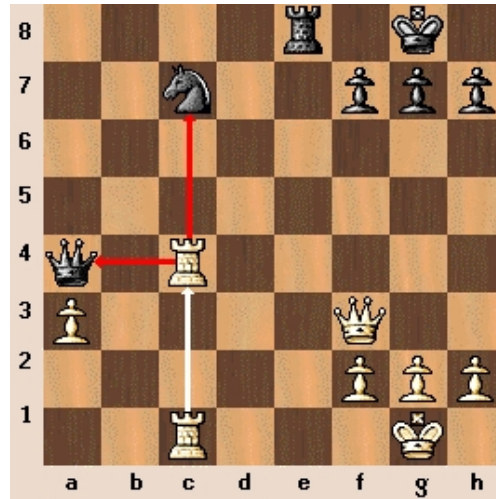
We can see the interrelationship between tactics and positional play in the basic simple endgame as well. A general principle for endgame play is to rush the King into the center of battle. However, this principle does not apply in when two Rooks are walking the opposing King to checkmate.

The player needs to keep his or her King out of play and safely ensconced on a square in a rank or file behind the ranks or files upon which the Rooks are located, with the opposing King on the other side of the board beyond the Rooks, so as not to create a blockade on one of the Rooks.

Connecting up the Rooks also opens the possibility to create Rook lineups in combination in files and ranks, especially open files, to create a powerful **Rook-Rook Battery**. Horizontally, a Rook-Rook Battery on the 7th rank (the opposing player's second rank) with the opposing King trapped on its back rank is especially powerful because of the easy ability to keep the opposing King trapped on the back rank while one or both Rooks are moved across the files to the opposite side of the board away from the opposing King allowing one of them to move to the back rank to checkmate the opposing King. The Rooks in Rook-Rook Batteries also provide excellent defense for each other, and usually open great opportunities to infiltrate the opposing player's space.

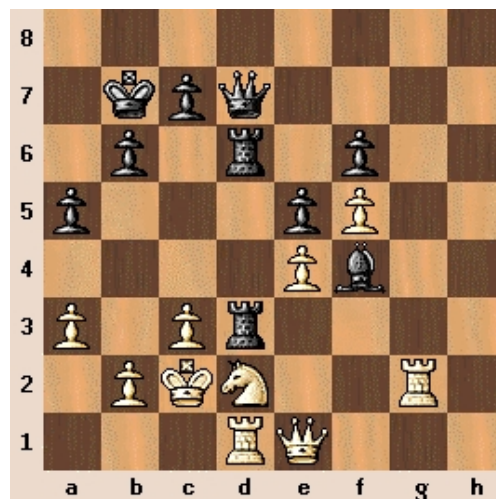
Rook-Rook Batteries are more commonly called Doubled Rooks when lined up vertically in the same file. Doubled Rooks can be combined with a Rook Fork to create great attacking possibilities. The diagram on the next page shows a combination of Doubled Rooks and a Rook Fork attack.

DIAGRAM TPPR-2



Another special combination with the Rooks includes a battery line-up with the Queen in the **very powerful Alekhine's Gun**...which is Rook-Rook-Queen lined in a file with the Queen behind the two Rooks pointed at an opposing player's back rank on which the opposing King trapped in by his own pawns and/or pieces. Below is a diagram of Alekhine's Gun.

DIAGRAM TPPR-3



It is easy to see from the above position that the power of Alekhine's Gun (and indeed the tripling of the Queen-Rook-Rook regardless of the position of the pieces in the file) as a tactical maneuver

is simply overwhelming, especially when as here it is used in combination with another piece...in this case Black's Bishop at f4 relatively pinning White's Knight at d2. If the Knight is moved to b1, b3, c4, f3, or f1 then Rxd1 attacking White's Queen allows mate to follow shortly.

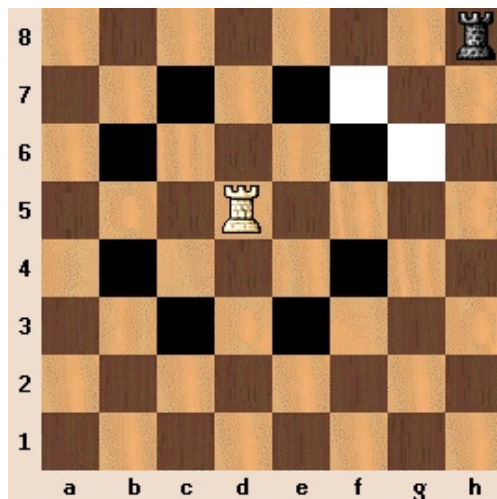
Due to the Rook's movement only horizontally along ranks and vertically along files, a Rook has three inherent weaknesses for exploitation both from tactical and positional play perspectives.

1. A Rook, like any piece or pawn on the board, is potentially susceptible to being attacked, pinned, and skewered by Bishops and the Queen along the diagonal lines. This inherent weakness of the Rook, though, allows viewing entombing the Rook in discrete square and rectangular geometric patterns from both tactics and positional play perspectives. However, at the same, it affords a more difficult confrontation for an opposing player to see attacks of the Rooks launched vertically or sideways through a maze of pieces and pawns positioned on the board, or around the perimeter through the back ranks and wings of the board.

2. When more centrally located, the Rook becomes more susceptible to attacking by a Knight.

Let's look at a diagram with the Rooks positioned as shown in the above diagram. The "filled in" squares are those from which a player's Knight may attack an opposing Rook.

DIAGRAM TPPR-4



3. While a Rook more centrally located "quarters" the board and expands its coverage of "space" on the board, the Rook's linear movement pattern allows for more open attacking against it from a greater number of squares.

However, it is important to note at this point a couple of important tactical and positional play considerations.

1. Because the pawns only advance vertically and capture diagonally in front, getting behind the opposing pawns with a Rook often tremendously weakens the opposing pawns and can open opportunities to break a defensive pawn structure from the rear. This principle is similar to attacking the weak link in a pawn chain - the rearmost pawn.

2. Because the Rook can control a rank horizontally (a Queen may do so as well of course), the strong tactical and positional play power of “a Rook gaining control of the 7th rank” is readily understood because of the ability to block the King into the back rank, while also opening the opponent’s pawns to attack and capture whether located on the 7th rank or more advanced out onto the board.

A Rook that gains control of the opposing player's 7th rank may be referred to as a HOG or a PIG, because of the ability for the player to begin gobbling up opposing pieces and/or pawns while keeping the opposing King at bay. Some refer to gaining control of the 7th rank as setting up a sty (as in a pig's sty).

Let's turn focus to some negative implications from tactical and positional considerations concerning the lack of centralization/failure to castle, and inadequate or lack of development of Rooks.

Rooks left at their home squares (a1 and h1 for White, and a8 and h8 for Black):

1. May become trapped on the back rank in a very weak and vulnerable position, and diminishing its capability for attacking and defense;

2. Are subject to easier entombing;

3. Are subject to being attacked and captured by an opposing Bishop that has been fianchettoed along the long diagonals (a1 to h8, and a8 to h1); and

4. Present opportunities for a player to pin opposing pawns. For Black - pinning White's pawns at b2 and b7 against White's Rooks on their home squares; for White - pinning Black's pawns at b7 and g7 against Black's Rooks on their home squares.

C. The King, when not located in a corner or on one of the wings (a or h files) or back ranks (1st and 8th rank), may possibly move to eight squares. It may only move to three squares when in the corner. Importantly, a King may reach every other square more quickly from the center of the board than one of the corners. When located on d4, for example, a King may reach any square on the board in just four moves without any blocking by other pieces and/or pawns. On h1, for example, a King can reach no farther than the d-file or the 5th rank in four moves, and requires at least seven moves to reach a8. Obviously just from playing games of chess, one likely has gained the experience that some very bad things can happen in seven moves in a chess game.

D. The pawns naturally are special because of their unique advancing and capturing characteristics. When located in a file or h file, a pawn is able to control or capture diagonally only on one square, but if located in any other file then the pawn has the potential to capture or control diagonally two squares. Pawns located in the wing files - absent some usually rare circumstances - will never be able to reach the central files. This knowledge helps a player to understand the positional play aspect of applying the general principle to “capture toward the center” with pawns.

E. The Queen having the powers of both the Bishop and the Rook, has greater potential mobility and ability to control squares and space on the board when more centrally located. However, early in a game, a Queen that is brought out onto the board may become subject to being hounded by the other player’s pieces and/or pawns into a trapped position. Tactically, entombment and capture of a Queen is the goal when launching a dedicated minority piece attack against an opposing Queen brought out too early in the game - the underlying basis for the principle NOT to bring the Queen out too early in the game. The primary reason for this is because development of the opponent’s pieces allow for multiple attacking possibilities in combinations against the opposing Queen with a goal toward entombing and capturing it.

A Queen can become entombed through three possibilities:

1. The Queen’s own pieces and/or pawns entomb it so that she cannot move at all or if she moves is subject to capture (either freely without the capturing piece being able to be recaptured, or in an exchange of Queens or trade for another piece). This is rare, and usually seen only with beginners.

2. A player’s pieces and/or pawns are worked in a coordinated series of combinational play designed to force the opposing Queen into entombment, either by themselves or with the aid of the position of the opposing player’s pieces and/or pawns. This is the more common occurrence seen and it may happen either:

- a. Intentionally because the opposing player allows the Queen to become entombed and subject to capture for tactical or positional play reasons hopefully for adequate compensation; or

- b. Unintentionally through the opposing player making a mistake or blunder, or more than one of either or both.

3. A player being too aggressive in attacking, forgetting about piece safety and positional structure, resulting in him or her opening opportunities for entombment and capture possibilities especially through discovered attacks, pins, and fork checks.

An example of entombment with capture of a Queen was shown in what I call the “Two-Faced Check” in an earlier lesson.



Absent adequate positioning of pieces and/or pawns on the board, it is a fruitless endeavor to try to harass and attack the Queen in the center with a goal of entombing and capturing the Queen in the center. This is because the Queen's combined powers of the Bishop and Rook dictate that the potential great range of movement for the Queen, and the potential number of squares which need to be "covered" to entomb and capture the Queen, is simply overwhelming to handle. At the same time, attempting to do so in the center diverts a player's pieces from defense and other attacking possibilities elsewhere on the board.

Combinational play with the Queen also always has both tactical and positional play components. This is due to the Queen's dual powers of the Bishop and Rook. Thus, for example, often she can be used in multiple ways from the square upon which she is located both offensively and defensively at the same time. With the other pieces, this becomes more difficult to successfully accomplish on the board.

In the next and final section (section 3) in Part 2 of the lesson, we will cover the Knight.

Mark Lowery's Exciting World of Chess

<http://chess.markalowery.net/>

Advanced Lessons

Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle

Part 2C - Control of the Center (Section 3 of 3)

by Mark Lowery

Adapted and developed in part based on Mark Week's article, "Positional play" on About.com.

Control the center of the board

Continuation of "Center" considerations regarding mobility and ability to control and defend space and squares

I left the Knight to last for simple reason is that the Knight is able to jump over pieces and pawns in moving and attacking. The Knight's unique L-shape movement pattern provides exciting tactical and positional play considerations for combinational play. It is with this piece that we will embark on a concentrated study of the interrelationships between tactical moves and positional play.

F. Knights:

Positional play considerations

A Knight always attacks and captures on a square of the opposite color than the square on which the Knight is located. A Knight located within the extended center can possibly move to, or move and capture upon, eight squares. A Knight on one of the wings (a or h files) or back ranks (1st and 8th rank) not in a corner or on b2, b7, g2, and g7, has potentially four squares to which the Knight can possibly move to, or move and capture upon. A Knight when located on b2, g2, b7, or g7, has potentially three squares to which the Knight can possibly move to, or move and capture upon. When on a corner square, the Knight only has potentially two squares to which the Knight can possibly move to, or move and capture upon.

Tactical play considerations

The Knight has two primary tactical points for consideration from a tactics standpoint:

1. Fork attacking, fork checking, and fork checkmating. Fork attacking and fork checking involve either attack on two opposing pieces or an opposing piece and opposing pawn (the most frequently encountered during games). This is the classic example of "**Double Attack**", which can of course be effectuated with other pieces and pawns. However, there can also be triple fork attacks and fork checks, occurring on three opposing pieces, or two opposing pieces and an opposing pawn, or an opposing piece and two opposing pawns, or three opposing pawns.

2. Controlling squares. This point revolves around positioning the Knight on a square that is an outpost for a purpose such as defense of a passed pawn, in front of an opposing pawn to blockade it from advancing, or so that Knight may efficiently and quickly use its special moving capability of jumping over obstructing pieces and/or pawns either for attacking, counterattacking, counterplay, or defense, especially in a closed game.

a. Outposting. Outposting is a tactical technique of getting a Knight to a forward square position most often centrally located (e.g., a White Knight at e5) from which it becomes very difficult for the opposing player to dislodge without the opposing player having to concentrate significant resources. When a Knight is successfully outposted, especially to central squares, the Knight's mobility and ability to jump over intervening pieces and pawns to develop threats, capture opposing pieces and pawns, and to deliver checks and possible checkmates, most often is increased to very high degrees for tactical play to develop and alter strategic goals within the player's game plan.

b. Blockading. The Knight is best the piece on the board to provide blockading of passed pawns to prevent their advancing toward pawn promotion. Doing so requires the opposing player to commit material resources and tempi to try to break the blockade. This tactical technique has secondary effects such as:

1. disrupting the flow of the opposing player's game plan;
2. allowing the player usually to gain positional superiority and/or material advantage through captures of opposing pieces and pawns by other pieces and/or pawns of the player which might not otherwise occur if the opposing player did not have to commit resource and tempi to try to dislodge the blockading Knight. Perhaps the best example of the strength of a blockading Knight comes to the fore in a particular type of opening...where one player has two Knights + King versus a King + a passed pawn. The general rule is that two Knights + King versus King is a draw because the two Knights cannot force mate, although mating is possible if the opposing player with the lone King makes a mistake or blunders. However, the dynamics on the board change entirely if the opposing player has a passed pawn. This is covered in two other lessons...The Troitzky Line and The Second Troitzky Line.

Interrelationship Considerations

A Knight blockading an opposing pawn from advancing forward in a file is perhaps one of the best examples for interrelationships between tactics and positional play for strategic purposes. The tactic of blockading with the Knight effectuates entombing the opposing pawn, provided there is no pawn of the player in a diagonal square which the opposing pawn may capture using its special type

of capture advance. Blockading and entombing of the opposing pawn, at least temporarily and perhaps permanently, removes it as a threat for pawn promotion.

From a positional standpoint, so long as the Knight is not forced away, diverted away, lured away, or voluntarily moved away from blockading the pawn, this often creates a significant positional infirmity for the opposing player.

At the same time, if the blockade square is centrally located, understanding the Knight's increased mobility in the central files or center of the board from a positional play perspective as noted above dictates an appreciation for the better tactical and positional play usage of the Knight's blockading and entombing of an opposing pawn in a central file, rather than on a wing file (a or h file) or in the b or g files.

The opposing player has several choices. He or she could choose between:

1. Letting the pawn remain blockaded and entombed; or
2. Expend tempos to try to attack the Knight to force it to move, or either to distract or lure it away from the blockade square, in order to open the file for the opposing pawn to advance toward pawn promotion; or
3. Continually expend the "power" of a piece, or if available use another pawn in a pawn chain, to defend that opposing pawn; or
4. Attempt combinations of the above to free the pawn; or
5. Simply abandon defense of the blockaded and entombed opposing pawn allowing the player to attack and capture it either immediately or later

The interrelationship between tactics and positional play for a blockading Knight does not stop here. For example, if the blockaded and entombed pawn is defended by another opposing pawn in a pawn chain, this opens up the rearmost pawn in the pawn chain to possible attack (the inherent weakness point of a pawn chain), which has the rippling effect of forcing the opposing player similarly to choose between abandoning defense of the rearmost pawn in the pawn chain subjecting it to possible attack and capture, or expending the "power" of a piece to defend it.

Due to the Knight's unique L-shape movement pattern and ability to attack away from pieces and pawns on a square located in a different file and rank, especially allows for a wide range of possible combinations to be employed for a Knight to attack and check a King, and to attack rearmost pawns in pawns chains, from tactical and positional play and maneuvering perspectives.

Using a Knight to blockade and entomb an opposing pawn from advancing frees up the player's other pieces for use other than to attack and/or blockade the opposing pawn from advancing, which has the relative effect of potentially increasing their respective powers and mobility.

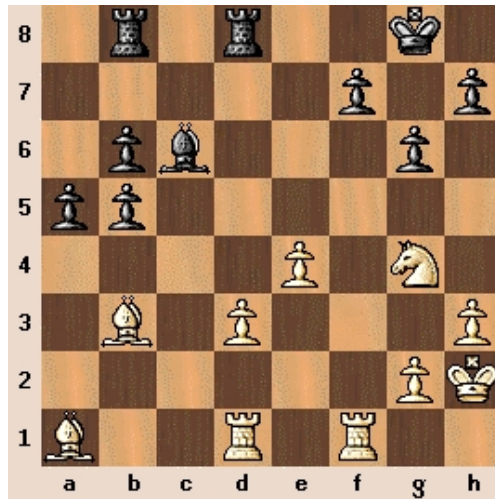
The interrelation between tactics and positional play in the framework of the game plan from a strategy perspective again does not stop. Why? Let's continue exploration.

If an opposing pawn is blockaded and entombed, is not the defensive value of placing a Rook behind it from a positional play perspective diminished - if not completely eradicated if the opposing pawn is permanently blocked from advancing? If the possibility exists that the blockading Knight will voluntarily or be forced to abandon the blockade square at some point, the value of the Rook behind the pawn as a principle will retain some vitality of course. This does not lessen, though, in any way that the Rook's value is diminished at least temporarily from offensive (attacking) and defending capabilities elsewhere on the board so long as the opposing player retains it behind the pawn, other than for the squares between the Rook and the opposing pawn, and the squares along the rank horizontally from the square upon which the Rook is positioned.

The potential or actual combinational building blocks of the game plan's framework continue to pile up. For example, if a Rook behind the pawn is used for defense, this opens the possibility of the player seeking opportunities to force the Rook away from defense of the opposing pawn through tactics such as attacking, luring, diversion, and distraction. The positional structure could create the opportunity for the player to seek positioning of a piece or additional pieces, or pawn, in a sustained attack of increasing threats against the blockaded and entombed pawn to overwhelm the defense afforded by the Rook behind it. The opposing player may then choose to abandon defense of the blockaded and entombed pawn, by moving and activating the Rook elsewhere on the board for offensive or defensive purposes.

Let's look at next diagram with White to move, from one of my games where I was playing White and the Black player stubbornly refused to resign. Following the diagram are some of the tactical and positional play considerations for combinational play and strategic purposes to consider. There are of course others and feel free to use the position to test various lines and see what works and what does not work and why). I recommend setting up a board, or using a computer program to setup a board, and then work through the lesson and explore other possibilities.

DIAGRAM TPPK-1



Black of course should have resigned, being so significantly down in material, and with two central connected pawns in a central pawn chain against him blocking clear movement of his Bishop through the center. Before White moves, a quick glance shows two significant vulnerable squares against Black's King castled to the Kingside. - f7 and h7. White's Queen Bishop at a1 also is controlling the long diagonal from a1-h8.

Black's pawn at f7 is the rearmost pawn in the Kingside pawn chain (f7-g6), is pinned by White's King Bishop at b3, and is under a double attack from the King Bishop and White's Rook at f1. Black's pawn at h7 is the rearmost pawn in the Kingside's other pawn chain (h7-g6), and is able only to be protected by the King or moved to h5 created a three-pawn chain f7-g6-h5). The two pawn chains as existing are connected forming a familiar defensive V-shape pawn front for the castled Black King. Black has additional positional infirmities.

Black's King Bishop is defending the pawn at b5, the forward pawn in Black's Doubled Pawns in the b file. However, the Bishop is undefended and thus subject to possible attack. The Bishop cannot be defended, except by a Rook or the Black King. For the Black King to defend the Bishop, Black would have to expend significant tempos for the Black King to get into a position even to attempt to defend the Bishop. Additionally, in order to keep the defense of the forward pawn in the b-file, Black's Bishop would have to stay on one of the three available diagonal squares - c6, d7, and f8.

Black's Rook at c8 is behind the rearmost pawn in the b6-a5 pawn chain, providing defense of the pawn. However, in this position the Rook only accomplishes that singular purpose, and in any event the pawn is blocked from forward advancing because of

Black's pawn at b5. If the Rook is moved out of the b file, then the rearmost pawn in the Queenside pawn chain would become undefended. The Rook can move to b7, which would retain defense of the pawn at b6. In fact, only a Rook or the Black King may defend the rearmost pawn at b6 in the pawn chain.

Expenditure of significant tempos would be required to get the Black King into a position to attempt to defend the pawn.

There are of course additional positional infirmities for Black, some readily apparent, and others that would occur as a result of various tactical and positional play maneuvering.

A quick analysis of the positional structure on the board dictates a conclusion that mating Black from this position should not be that all that difficult. Of course, White could move and capture the pawn at f7 with the Queen Bishop (Bxf7) checking Black's King, or alternatively capture the pawn at f7 with White's Rook from f1 (Rxf7). The Knight would then come into consideration for play in later moves, and mating Black will not be all that difficult. However, let's look at moving the Knight to explore various tactical and positional play considerations. There are many tactical and positional play lines available, so I present some of them here and allow you to use the example to work out others on your own.

White could also choose instead to attack and check with the Knight, either at f6 or h6.

Let's look at some possibilities with Nf6+.

1.Nf6+ {fork checking Black's King and pawn at h7}

Line 1

If 1...Kh8 (to keep defense of the pawn at h7)

2.Nd7+ {utilizing the discovered check to attack White's Rook at b8, but no reason exists to go for the capture of the Rook}

3.Kg8 Bxf7#

Line 2

If 1...Kg7 {to keep defense of the pawn at h7}

White utilizes a discovered check to attack White's Rook at b8.

2.Nd7+

then if 2...Kg8 Bxf7#

then if 2...f6 {block check} White could capture the Rook, offering the Knight up to capture 3.Nxb1 Rxb1 employing tactical maneuvering of simplification in for endgame play: When a player is up in material, trade/exchange pieces (that is, trade down).

Line 3

Let's look at another possibility. White could employ the tactic of "**sit on the position**" - keeping a move in reserve for the time being and doing something else on the chessboard.

3.Bxf6+ {fork check}

This attacks Black's Rook at d8 while retaining the Knight attack on Black's Rook at b1 (White "sits on the position"). After Black moves the King to h6, White could follow with a trade down simplification of a minor piece (either the Bishop or the Knight) for the Rook, but let's see what other possibilities White opens after employing "sit on the position."

3...Kh6 4.Ne5

White abandons the attack on Black's Rook at b1; but substitutes an attack on Black's Bishop at c6 while still employing "sit on the position" and retaining the attack on Black's Rook at d1. This now opens two threat, both 5.Nxc6 with result of forking White's Rooks, and 5.Nf7 fork checking and doubly attacking White's Rook at d8, which remains attacked by White's Bishop at f6. Black spots that later possibility and is able to defend against it either with Be8 or Rf8.

Let's look at Rf8 first.

4...Rf8 5.Nf7+

White forces the trade - effectuating simplification via trade down because Black only has two choices, and brings his two Bishops in together close against Black's King which is severely limited in movement from h6.

If 5...Kh5 then 6.g4#, forcing Black into 5...Rxf7 6.

Now let's look at Be8.

4...Be8

This appears to defend f7 and keeps defense of the pawn at b5, the rearmost pawn in the Black's Queenside pawn chain; but, White follows with a sustained attack against Black's Bishop.

5.Bf7

White attacks Black's Bishop again, which has no safe square to which it may go without being subject to capture.

Black must not capture White's Bishop in a trade/exchange maneuver, because if 5...Bxf7 6.Nxf7 {fork checking and doubly attacking White's Rook at d8, but White could care less about that attack because has mate to follow} 6...Kh5 7.g4#

So Black chooses to move it to d7, where Black's Rook at d8 defends it.

5...Bd7 6.Bxg6 {a clearance sacrifice placing Black into Zugzwang}

Black must capture the Bishop back with 6.hxg6, because of the possible mate threat via 7.Nf7#, but it doesn't matter.

If Black instead responds 6...Be6 to protect against 7.Nf7#, then White responds 7.Rf4 with unstoppable mate to follow via 8.Rh4#.

If Black does do the capture back, this avoids the 7.Rf4 followed by 8.Rh4# threat because Black's g pawn can now move 7...g5 in reply, attacking Black's rook, defending h4, and thereby also opening h7 as a flight square to the rear which was not available if White did not capture the Bishop back.

6...hxg6 7.Nf7+ {fork check}

This results in doubly attacking White's Rook at d8, which is only defended by White's Rook at b1.

If 7...Kh5 8.Rf4

Threatens follow-up 9.Rh4#.

If Black responds 8...Bg4 {blocking 9.Rh4#} then 9.hxg4#.

If Black responds 8...g5 {attacking White's Rook and defending h4}

White should respond 9.Bxg5 (White could do 9.Kxg5, but better is 9.Bxg5).

If Black responds with 9...Bxh3, thinking perhaps to open the h-file for later possible sideways checking attack with Black's Rook from d1 to h1, White responds with 10.Rh4+ {fork check and blocking the possible checking attack threat of Rh1+ by Black}.

Now Black must move the King to g6 (10...Kg6). White could do simplification and offer a trade of the Knight for the Bishop by simply taking the Bishop (11.Rxh3); however, why not "sit on the move" of taking the Bishop and protect the Knight instead? 11.Rf1 with mate to follow shortly even if Black then moves the Bishop to a safe square and attacks the Knight.

11...Be6, attacking the Knight 12.Rf6+ {fork check} Kg7

White could follow with the simple 13.Rxe6.

Let's examine, though, the Knight.

13.Ne5 (places Black in Zugzwang).

If Black attempts to counterattack, White simply mates. 13...Rf8 14.Rg6#

If 13...Rb7 to try to protect the 7th rank, then 14.Rg6+ Kf8 15.Rh8+ Rg8 {block check} 16.Rhxg8#

If 13...Bf7, then 14.Rgxf7+ Kg8 15.Rfh7 and mate will follow shortly regardless what Black does.

If 15...Rd7 (or Rb7) 16.Rh8+ Kg7 17.R4h7#

If 15...Kf8 16.Rh8+ Kg7 17.R4h7#

Now let's go back and examine another possibility for Black at move 2.

If 2.K...h6

White could capture Black's Rook at b8 (3.Rxb1), offering an exchange to Black via 3...Rxb1, and then gain control of the 7th rank with follow-up of 4.Rxf7.

Instead, White can do 3.Be5 {double attacking Black's Rook at b8}

Now if Black takes the Knight, White has tremendously devastating opportunities:

3...Rxd7, then White could simply safely captures the Rook at b1 (4.Bxb1), thereby trading down, clearing Black's back rank of the Rooks, and keeping the threat pressure of the double attack of White's Bishop and Rook against the pawn at f7.

Alternatively, White could instead be much more direct:

4.Rxf7 ("sits on the position" of the Bishop attacking the Rook at b1, and forcing a, exchange/trade down simplification maneuver by attacking White's Rook at d7 (4...Rxf7 Bxf7). Why is this forced? White's moved 4.Rf7 opens a possible deadly latent attack/check on Black's King if Black moves the Rook to the back rank.

3...Rdd8 4.Bg7+ Kh5 5.g4+

If 5...Kh4 6.Bf4+ 6.g5 Rxh7#

If 5...Kg5 6.h4+

Black has two options, 6...Kxg4 and 6...Kxh4, both of which will lead to mate. I'll leave you to work out various mating lines. However, I'll present you with one outrageously long possibility just for the fun of it.

6...Kg5 7.h4+ Kxh4 8.Bf6+ g5 9.Rxh7+ Kxg4 10.Be6+ Kf3 11.Rh3+ Ke2 12.Bg4+ Kf2 13.Rf3+ Ke2 14.Rff1+ Ke3 15.Bxg5+ Kd4 16.Bf6+ Kc5 17.Rf5+ Kd6 18.e5+ Ke6 19.Rf4+ Kf7 20.Bg5+ Ke8 21.Bh5+ Kd7 22.Rf7+ Kc8 23.Bg4+ Rd7 24.Bxd7+ Kc7 25.Be6+ Bd7 26.Rxd7+ Kc8 27.Ra7#

This concludes discussion of Control of the Center. Hopefully, from this base of knowledge of the interrelationships between tactics and positional play you will be able to work out many other additional tactical and positional play considerations out for yourself through study and experience for issues of mobility and ability to control and defend space and squares.

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Advanced Lessons

Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle

Part 3 – Additional Basic Considerations

by Mark Lowery

Adapted and developed in part based on Mark Week's article, "Positional play" on About.com.

We shift focus now to some additional basic considerations.

I. Open lines.

Mobility and controlling and defending space and squares are applicable elsewhere on the board besides in the center. The Queen, Rook, and Bishop are more powerful when located in open lines than closed lines. Open lines are those ranks, files, and diagonals on the board upon which pawns are not obstructing movement.

II. Piece Activity and Development.

A common characteristic attaches to the center and open lines...active pieces are more often than not better than inactive pieces.

A player must "develop" his or her pieces in order to make them active, that is to say, get them out on the board off their home squares. The principle to keep them actively developed applies throughout the game. The King most often bides his time during the early to middle part of the game defended and inactive, passively watching what is going on in the battle. However, the principle to activate the King and rush it toward the center of battle in the endgame shows even with the King, activation and development are very important.

III. Pawn Structure.

The position of pawns is known as the pawn structure, when disregarding the position of the pieces. Good pawn structure is created when the pawns provide defense and offense capabilities for each other...are able efficiently to work together. Good pawn structure also occurs when the player's pawns block or restrict the opponent's pieces and/or pawns, but do not block movement of the player's pieces or advancing of the player's other pawns. An example of usually bad pawn structure is the doubling or tripling of pawns in a file.

IV. Strong and Weak Squares.

Strong squares are controlled by the player's pieces and/or pawns. Weak squares are ones that the opponent controls with his or her pieces and/or pawns. Logically, one may see that most often a player's strong squares are usually the opponent's weak squares, and vice versa. Strong and weak squares are not determined only by the pawn structure, but it is a foundational base for understanding strong and weak squares.

Pawns, unlike the pieces, have natural strong and weak squares. Strong squares are the diagonal square(s) where the pawns may capture the opponent's pieces and/or pawns...thereby controlling those squares. There are two sets of weak squares for pawns. First, weak squares are the ones directly in front that can be blocked by an occupying opponent piece or pawn, stopping forward advancing of the pawn. The squares to the rear of a pawn also as weak squares, because the pawn cannot defend itself from attack from the rear, and a player must defend the pawn with one or more pieces or another pawn such as in a pawn chain. This positional consideration shows the importance of the principle of the "weakest link" being the rearmost pawn in the pawn chain.

Pawn structure dictates how well pawns are able to cover, work together, and complement each other.

In the initial position before the start of the game, White has a weak square at f2 and Black has a weak square at f7 because these squares are protected only by the King at that point, who is not a good defender or offensive fighter until later stages of play.

V. King Safety.

That brings us to another positional factor. The role of the King changes as the pieces disappear from the board. When there are many pieces on the board, particularly the major pieces, the King is weak. When there are few pieces on the board, the King is strong.

VI. Positional Summary.

A. Good position is one where:

1. the pieces influence the center,
2. the line pieces are on open lines,
3. the pawn structure is good, and
4. the King's role is appropriate to the phase of the game.

B. Bad position is one where:

1. the pieces ignore the center,
2. the line pieces are on closed lines,
3. the pawn structure is weak, or
4. the King's role is inappropriate.

In a game between masters, an advantage in any one of these factors can be enough to win the game. Positional play can bring excellent positions. It can be used to put the opponent under enormous pressure, reduce their counterplay, and generally put the opponent on the rocks! However to finish off the game usually requires a tactical blow which will convert the advantage in a technical way. The name given to a series of tactical moves that may involve a sacrifice is a combination.

For example if one has a passed pawn, there may be a tactical combination to forcefully push to pawn promotion and "Queening. If the opponent's King Safety is suspect, there may be a combination to checkmate. Tactical ability and the ability to spot combinations thus helps to convert positional advantages into more concrete gains.

VII. Tactical Awareness in Implementing a Positional Game Plan.

Even strongly positional players should be aware of the tactical resources hidden in the position. Even if combinations are not played, it is very important to have tactical awareness when trying to carry out positional plans. Positional plans can fail tactically even though their concept is very good.

Generally, strong positional players often really know how to put their opponent under a lot of positional pressure! If they improve their tactical awareness while still sticking to their fundamental game plan, they would be even more effective players. They would be less likely to fall for silly tactical traps set by their opponent.

Do not beat around the bush excessively with positional play- when there is a clean kill tactically then simply employ that play instead.

It is not enough to judge positions based on how good they look, and superficial judgments. Tactical variations provide reassuring evidence for one side being better or worse.

Being able to survive in tactical situations requires recognizing that type of positional structure on the board. Positions can be broadly categorized as "open", i.e. full of open lines and piece play as opposed to "closed", e.g., blocked and full of maneuvering. In open positions, tactics can dominate completely, and the value of formulating positional plans is less because it is very important simply to calculate all the necessary variations to stay alive in the game!

The positional player protagonist could argue that they play positional openings and stay well clear of tactical complications. However, what if the opponent influenced the game tactically by playing gambits, etc.? The positional player needs to be tactically aware even if they do build their own infrastructure in terms of openings for example, for supporting their playing style.

VIII. Results-Focused Path for Improvement for the Developing Chess Player.

Generally, a chess player should focus learning tactics before delving greatly into positional play, because winning will usually be a result of tactics not positional play.

The more abstract elements of chess should be given to developing players later after they have become more familiar with the basic arsenal of tactics. Winning games tactically is a good basis for greater sophistication in terms of developing positional play, and being able to outplay the opponent positionally, and accumulate small advantages.

Getting results is always a good incentive for finding out more about chess!

Most beginners would enjoy mating their opponent and gaining a victory.

Chess games can produce results quickly!

Pieces and pawns must be coordinated in an dance of combinations! Combinative ability always (!) improves results, gives one satisfaction in enjoying the beauty of the art of chess, teaches about direct piece play, and ensures that positional play learned later will not be for its own sake!

IX. Positional Play : Piece Placement.

Some elements of piece play which are in the arsenal of every good player.

The arsenal of every good player has a solid foundation of the elements about Positional Play and about Pawn Structure.

Two major guides are by Aron Nimzovitch, the author of two ground-breaking books published in the 1930s: My System and Chess Praxis

Structural Aspects.

A. First Part - The Elements:

Focus on the Center and Development

Develop Open Files

The Seventh and Eighth Ranks

The Passed Pawn

Exchanging and Trading

The Elements of End Game Strategy

The Pin

Discovered Check

The Pawn-Chain

B. Second Part - Position Play:

The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Center

The Doubled Pawn and Restraint

The Isolated QP and His Descendents

The Two Bishops

Over-Protection

Maneuvering Against Weaknesses

X. Some Fundamental Concepts.

A. Rook on the 7th Rank.

The term 7th rank might be confusing unless you realize that it can be counted from the side of each player. The 7th rank of one player is the 2nd rank of the other player, where the pawns are placed at the start of the game.

Nimzovitch devoted an entire chapter to the subject of Rook on the 7th rank and also the 8th rank, also called the back rank. All players learn quickly that a Rook on the 8th rank can checkmate an enemy King that has failed to create a flight square (a move called "luft") resulting in the dreaded backrank mate.

A 'Rook on the 7th' attacks opposing pawns on the Queenside and on the Kingside, prevents the Black King from reaching the center by the shortest route (and indeed can trap the opposing King on the 8th rank), and may be used to threaten opposing pawns from behind if they advance.

B. Two Rooks on the 7th Rank.

If one Rook on the 7th rank is a powerful weapon, then two Rooks on the 7th are often sufficient to win by force. Two Rooks on the 7th often compensate for a significant material disadvantage by delivering perpetual check to a King trapped on the back rank.

C. Rook in the Endgame.

While discussing the power of the Rook, it's worth remembering the endgame principle that Rooks belong behind passed pawns. As a pawn advances, the Rook's space increases.

D. Bishop Pair.

Nimzovitch devoted another chapter to the Two Bishops, more commonly called the Bishop Pair. Despite a material advantage, a Bishop Pair often has great tactical power, yet also can be used for tremendous positional power and entombment of the opposing King. Activating pieces in combined action with a Bishop Pair most often is simply devastating to the opponent. Their combined action often prevents establishing an opposing Knight in the center, where most often

it is it at its most effective position and assist in limiting the Knight's ability to gain an outpost - 'an outlying or frontier settlement'. An outpost is often associated with an open file, and the combination of an outposted Knight and an open file can be downright deadly to the opponent from a positional play perspective.

E. Doubling Rooks on an Open File.

Often there is simply great power, both positionally and tactically, if a player can get rooks doubled in an open file. If the Queen also were in the open file as well, we could say that the open file has become "tripled" in power. The most powerful "tripling" would be the two Rooks backed up by the Queen pointed toward the opponent's backrank...the famous Alekhine's Gun.

F. Blockade.

Nimzovitch is perhaps best known for his ideas on the blockade, where a piece or pawn prevents another pawn from advancing by occupying the square in front of it. Blockades of pawns can be effectuated either by the player using a piece or pawn to do the blockade or by forcing the opponent to have doubled or even tripled pawns in a file. Centralized blockades often are virtually impossible to dislodge without the opponent committing significant fighting forces directed at dislodging the blockader, giving the blocking player a big advantage.

G. Cramped Terrain.

Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of blockade is the "cramped terrain" (control of space and mobility). An opponent's position can become so restricted that neither one or more pieces can move, thus becoming entombed and removing them from the interplay of the battle on the board. This often allows the other player to freely organize offensive and defensive positions, develop tactical moves, and concentrate focus on attacking maneuvers which the opponent is at a great disadvantage to counter and defend against.

H. Attacking the Pawn-Chain at its Base.

Nimzovitch believed, and the point has been proven repeatedly, that the weakest point of a pawn chain is its base where the pawn is not protected by another pawn. The opponent will have to commit one or more pieces to defend the weakest link in the pawn chain, which may often divert it from being used for positional and tactical play by the opponent.

I. Defending a Flank Attack.

Oftentimes, there becomes a race to push pawns on opposite sides of the board, with corresponding need to develop flank attacks to stop the pawns from pushing toward pawn promotion (if possible). A good principle to employ as a counter, though, is of defending a flank attack by active play in the center! Opening center play when faced with a flank attack usually yields more freedom of play.

J. Provoking a Weakness or Weaknesses for the Opponent.

Positional play often does not, in and by itself, tend to provoke a weakness or weaknesses in the opponent's positional structure. Rather, the focus should be using tactical strikes and maneuvers to break open an opponent's defensive positional structure through which a weakness or weaknesses may develop and be exploited.

Mark Lowery's Exciting World of Chess

<http://chess.markalowery.net/>

Advanced Lessons

Tactics vs. Positional Play? The Illusionary Battle

Part 2 Control of the Center – Full Game Example

by Mark Lowery

The following game example is not a particular spectacular game. White gets himself into so much early trouble that the chance of White winning fairly could be described as virtually nonexistent from the first few moves of the opening absent Black being a complete dunderhead. Fortunately for us, Black did not play like White. Black's game plan presents an excellent game to review regarding tactics and positional play considerations involving center control; or more precisely, the negative consequences that can ensue by paying too much attention to center control coupled with abandoning basic principles. Black engages in beautifully choreographed coordinated flank attacks on both the Kingside and Queenside, sandwiching attacks on White's center control, which are a veritable treasure trove worth taking a bit of time to savor. In another lesson on attacking, I reviewed a game involving the use of persistent initiative to continually pressure methodically to annihilate the opponent. This game is in the same genre. However, from very first moves of the opening, Black uses a steady sustained series of coordinated attacks right through to the end of the game to crush White, aided by White's self-destructive game plan.

Bogolyubov - Hasenfus

Kemer-Riga 1939

1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 f5 3.g4?



This pawn advance is just a little too aggressive play on White's part. It is quite hard to discern White's thinking here. The g-pawn advance simply gives up a pawn. Perhaps he was thinking to

fianchetto to the Kingside for Bishop play along the long diagonal as part of his strategy for center play. Indeed, White does do so a little later. However, White's next few moves dictate he was concentrating more immediately on center control, one of the prime objectives in the opening. But using a self-destructing pawn advance seems a little odd to say the least. Better would have been g3, to create the V-shaped pawn defensive front through two connected pawn chains (f2-g3 and h2-g3). The g4 pawn advance also opens a hole at h3.

3...fxg4 4.Ne5 {White centralizes the Knight at e5, but it does not really give White true control of the center. Black can still attack the Knight to force it away (d6) or offer an exchange (Nc6). However, Black has a much stronger immediate tactical maneuver, one that strongly gives Black the initiative. White's Knight attack on Black's pawn at g4 will shortly be shown to be wishful thinking.

4...Qh4! {Black glaringly shows White the gravity of the error in making the g4 advance and exposes the mistake of thinking Ne5 was a good way to attack Black's pawn at g4. White simply has no way to dislodge Black's Queen from the h file, which seizes control of the h-file and Black's Kingside.}



5.e4? {White opens a double attack on Black's pawn at g4 with Knight and Queen. White piles onto the previous pawn advance mistake with another overly aggressive advance. First, it creates an undefended central pawn at e4, hanging pawns in a pawn island at d4-e4. This is White's third pawn advance in the first 5 moves of the opening, violating two basic principles: (1) to make only one or two pawn moves in the opening; and, (2) to rapidly develop the pieces. e3 would have been the better pawn advance in any event. It also seems clear White did not anticipate a continuing simple Kingside attack by Black.}

5...g3! {Opens an early double check trap threat. White cannot capture toward the center with the pawn at h2 as it would simple result in the loss of the King Rook. If 6.fxg3 Qxe4+ {a fork check winning White's King Rook through a latent attack threat.}}

6.Bg2 {White finally gets the chance to fianchetto to the Kingside and defends against the latent attack threat. }

6...gxf2+! Kf1 {One has to wonder just what White was thinking...perhaps focusing on the center control too much? White's outpostting of the Knight to e5 defended by the pawn at d4 is indeed a usual opening or early middlegame tactical maneuver sought by White. However, it simply allows White to wreak destruction on White's Kingside, allows Black to get a far advanced passed pawn that effectively partially entombs White's King, and deprives White from castling either to the Kingside or Queenside. Hardly seems adequate compensation for seeking center control, which itself does White no good. }



7...Nc6 {Black continues attacking, shifting the attack to center of the board by directly challenging White's center control with an attack on pawn at d5 and White's Knight on e5. }

8.Nxc6 bxc6 {applying the positional play principle of capturing toward the center with a pawn AND opening the dire latent attack check threat of Ba6+ }

9.c4 {White sees the latent attack threat and advances to block it. However, this creates a currently hanging pawn at c4 that Black can exploit. White could have done Nc3 to allow for blocking the check with the Knight via Ne2, but this is easily parried with White doing Bb4 attacking the Knight. However, White now has holes at h3, f3, and e3 }

{continued next page }



9...Nf6 {Black sits on the position for the moment instead of absolutely pinning White's pawn at c4 with Ba6. Black instead shifts the attack back to the Kingside, continuing the pressing attack against the center by hitting at White's pawn at e4. This sets up possibility for the Knight to move to g4 for defense of Black's pawn at f2 and create the possibility of launching an attack on White's pawn at h2.}

10.e5 {White's pawn advance both counterattacks Black's Knight and creates a pawn chain with a passed pawn in the center. This advance also creates an open game. Up to this point, the game has been a closed game because White's central pawn at e5 was blocking White's fianchettoed King Bishop's movement along the long diagonal from a8-h1.}

10...Nd5 {Strong central positioning of the Knight, much better than Ne4, where it would be defended by Black's Queen, although White would have the opportunity to trade pieces (Bxe4 Qxe4). Trading down when up in pawns, as White already is in this game, is a general tactics principle called simplification that Black eschews in favor of a well-coordinated sustained back and forth attacking game plan. Positioning the Knight at d4 allows Black to shift the focus of attacking back to the Queenside. The board position below is after the 11th move, provided at the top of the next page.}



{if} 11.cxd5 Ba6+ {The decisive latent attack lying in wait because Black sat on the position earlier.}}

11.Bf3 Ba6! {Now Black employs the tactic of absolutely pinning White's pawn at c4. Having secured White's Kingside and effectively trapped White's King, Black re-launches the continuing press of attack back on the Queenside. Having lost the initiative so early in the game, White cannot even begin to stop Black's increasingly dizzying "tennis like" back and forth persistent initiative attacking maneuvers.}

12.b3 {to defend c4 and creates a defensive Queenside pawn chain}

{if} 12.Qa4 {A meaningless counterattack by White. The threat to White's Bishop is as porous as a sieve. The power of Black's Knight in its strong centralized position would come to the forefront of the battle.}

{then} 12...Nb4! {Black would defend and protect the Bishop at a6, block White's Queen from defending White's pawn at c4, and re-empower the Black's latent check attack on White's King via White's absolutely pinned pawn at c4.}

{if} 13.b3 {To defend c4, simply loses the Rook.}

{if} 13.Be2 Bxc4 14.Bxc4

(if instead 14.Nc3 Be7 15.Bf4 Bxe2+ 16.Nxe2 Qh3+ 17.Kxf2 Nd3+ 18.Kg1 Qg4+ 19.Ng3 Nxf4)

14...Qe4! {Crushes White. Black gets White's Rook. If White does not capture Black's pawn at f2, then Black will also get White's Queen Bishop with a skewer check. If White does capture Black's pawn at f2, then Black's Queen takes White's King Rook and also wins White's remaining Kingside pawn in the h-file, and White's King is completely open and undefended.}}

13...Nc2 {gets White's Queen Rook}}

12...Be7 13.Kg2 {White frees the absolute pin on c5, launching a direct attack threat of capturing Black's Knight at d5. Do you see Black's tactic?}



13...O-O!! {Black leaves the Knight subject to capture by White's pawn at c4.}

14.Rf1 {White counterattacks against Black's passed pawn at f2.}

({if} 14.cxd5 f1=Q+ 15.Rxf1 Bxf1+ 16.Qxf1 Qxd4 {Black wins White's Knight (Nc3 to block Qxc3), Bishop and Knight (Bb2 to block Qxb2, and now to defend the Rook with the Queen, White must move the Knight to a3, c3, or d2, upon each of which Black can safely capture the Knight with Black's Queen), or the Rook if White does not block the attack with either the Knight or the Bishop.})

14...Rxf3! {A very nice sacrifice.}

15.Qxf3



({if} 15.Kxf3 Rf8+ 16.Ke2 Qe4+ 17.Kd2 Bg5#)

({if} 16.Kg2 Qe4+ 17.Kg3 Bh4+ 18.Kh3 Rf3+ 19.Kg2 Rd3+ 20.Qf3 Qxf3#)

({if} 16.Kg2 Qe4+ 17.Kh3 Rf3+ 18.Qf3 Qxf3#)

({if} 16.Kg2 Qe4+ 17.Kh3 Rf3+ 18.Kg2 Rd3+ 19.Qf3 Qxf3#)

15...Rf8 (attacking White's Queen, which forces her away from in front of the passed pawn at f2 allowing the Rook to re-defend it.)

(Black could choose instead to do:

15...Qxd4 {Attacks White's Queen Rook, but White can save the Rook by giving up the Knight with 16.Nc3 {to block the attack on the Rook} 16...Nxc3. If White instead moved 16.Bb2 {to block the attack on the Rook}, then this loses both the Bishop and Knight via 16.Qxb2 and now to defend White's Queen Rook with the King Rook, White is must move the Knight to a3, c3, or d2, on each square the Knight may be safely captured by Black.}

16.Qd3 Qg4+ 17.Kh1 Nb4! {Attacking White's Queen.}



18.Qg3

{if} 18.Qe3 Nc2 {Fork, but the move would be much more tactically devious and devastating than capturing White's entombed Queen Rook.}

{then} 19.Qd3

{if} 19.Qc3 {White seeking to protect against Nd1, still loses.}

19...Qe4+ 20.Qf3 Qxf3#)

19...Ne1 {White wins. Threatens mate with Qh2. Mate unstoppable. White can only sacrifice White's Queen to delay it.}

20.Qg3 Qe4+ 21.Qf3 {block check} Qxf3#)

(21.Qg2 {block check} Qxg2#)

18...Qxd4 {Attacks White's entombed Queen Rook, but Black has a much more devious plan in mind because White can parry that threat with a block.}

19.Nc3 Bh4! 20.Qe3 c5 21.Qxd4 cxd4 0-1



Black crushes White's center pawn structure with devastating effect. White resigns because Black attacks the en prise Knight and threatens Bb7+ with mate to follow. White loses for a number of reasons, but it all started with White's concentrated focus on gaining and maintaining center control that in the end yielded him nothing but the misery of a sustained sifting attacking game by Black through persistent initiative and the pain of an overwhelming loss, due to his failure to pay attention to basic principles. 0-1