



Zenón Franco

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About the Author

Zenón Franco is a Grandmaster from Paraguay, now living in Spain. He represented Paraguay, on top board, in seven Chess Olympiads, and won individual gold medals at Lucerne 1982 and Novi Sad 1990. He is an experienced trainer and has written numerous books on chess.

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Introduction

The idea of this book is to provide training, and thus improve your game. You are invited to leave aside your computer for a while, set up the chess pieces on a board and ‘play’, as if it were a real game.

It is best to move down each page gradually, in such a way as to conceal the next move. Although you will be ‘playing’ each game from one side of the board, sometimes you are asked to decide upon moves for your ‘opponent’. This is because, in chess, we don’t just have to see our own moves, we also have to think about what our opponent is doing, or trying to do, or should do.

You should spend between an hour and a half and two hours on each game. Points are awarded for selecting the best moves and are deducted for blunders. At the end there is a scale to indicate how well you ‘played’.

Of course it is also possible to treat these simply as annotated games, without testing yourself, but the training benefit is greater if you take an active part in the ‘lesson’.

A few years ago it gave me great pleasure to read that the Spanish scientific popularizer, Eduard Punset, believed that it was very important for the student to take an active part in the lesson, since in this way his or her learning would be enhanced. That is precisely the idea behind this book.

My fondness for this type of training goes back to my childhood in Buenos Aires, where I learnt my chess; the many chess clubs there used to hold regular competitions where you had to guess the next move, and this tradition continues to this day.

With the passage of time the pupil became a teacher and in the 1970s I started writing training articles based on this format for the now defunct magazine *El Rey de Argentina*. I still do so today, for various media, and my articles have been the basis for several books in Spanish and one previous one in English, entitled *Chess Self-Improvement*.

This book will also appear in electronic format. The computer is now of huge importance in the dissemination of chess information and it also provides an opportunity for improved training. Used properly, information technology is fantastic, but poor practice can have negative consequences. It is more and more common to come across weak players (and even some strong ones) who rely completely on the computer for their evaluations and even express strong opinions, without being able to back these up with their own arguments.

Nigel Short has written about this in the magazine *New in Chess*, and I was also very amused by the reaction of an American master, who was commenting on a game being broadcast live on ICC (the Internet Chess Club); the player with the white pieces was trying to

win a rook ending with three pawns against two and of course the computer was evaluating this as a draw, assuming best play by both sides. Several low-rated chess fans were expressing their indignation on ICC that the player with White was actually carrying on and still trying to win. The master's response was: "90% of you guys would lose this ending with Black, and the other 10% would even lose it with White."

The structure of the book

The book is divided into four parts.

Part 1 is called 'Attacking the King', which is self-explanatory: in the eleven games presented, the main theme is the attack on the enemy king.

Part 2, with twelve games, is entitled 'Attack, Defence and Counter-attack', where the scenario is the most usual one, in that there are not only attacks but also good defences and successful counter-attacks.

Part 3, is called 'Typical Structures and Positional Play' and consists of twelve games where the main theme is positional play and/or the handling of typical pawn structures.

Part 4, 'Endings', is the shortest section, with five games in which the emphasis is mainly on the final phase of the game.

There is inevitably some cross-over of ideas between the four sections, but I believe that this division is a reasonable one.

As for the scoring, I cannot claim that it is mathematically precise, but I have tried to be as objective as possible in the awarding of points.

In my experience, students (especially younger ones) ascribe great importance to the scoring; I consider it to be a useful challenge and a stimulus to learning; I find that when the children are told that a move can gain points they really sit up and take notice, with improved concentration.

The games have been checked with analysis engines, but obviously, as time passes, improvements might be found. I have tried to reward 'human moves' more than 'computer moves'; I consider it more important to be able to understand a move, rather than justify it tactically with a complex line that only a computer could see.

Wherever possible I have also used the players' own annotations, since there can be no better guide, though I have generally expanded these, since very often what is obvious to a master often requires further clarification to the student.

As always, writing about chess is a pleasure for me. I hope that each one of these forty games will help you to improve your play and your judgment, so that the above-mentioned American master will not be able to include you among the 90% of players he was talking about, and certainly not among the other 10%.

Zenón Franco
Ponteareas, Spain, May 2014

With special thanks to Jonathan Tait for his very useful suggestions and improvements.

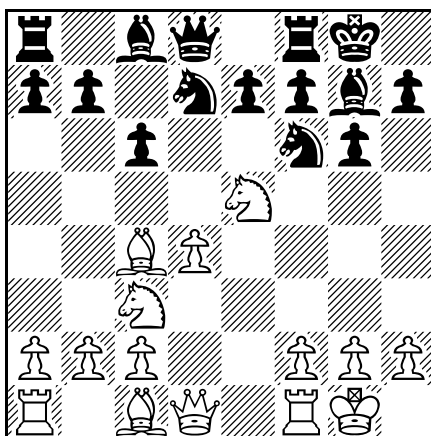
Game 2
White: You
Black: Master
Pirc Defence [B08]

1 e4 d6 2 d4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 ♘f3 c6 5 ♙c4 ♘f6 6 e5

The player with white pieces criticized his own move here: “This is hardly the way to obtain an advantage. The activity of the white pieces turns out to be fictitious.”

6 ♙b3 and 6 ♙e2 are more usual.

6...dxe5 7 ♘xe5 0-0 8 0-0 ♘bd7



– Your Move –

9 f4

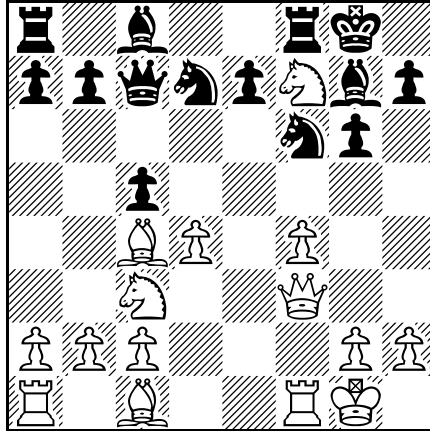
1 point. Semen Furman used to say jokingly, “As you make your bed, so you must lie in it.” White took on a commitment by playing 6 e5 and now he has to justify his ambitious decision.

Taking on d7 or retreating from e5 would be a premature admission of failure, so the knight needs reinforcing in its strong position. However, this move isn’t without drawbacks; for instance, the c1-bishop now has less scope.

9...♙c7 10 ♙f3 a6

Controlling b5, in order to play ...c6-c5 without fearing ♘b5; it also prepares ...b7-b5.

The immediate 10...c5 was also worth consideration, but then the sacrifice 11 ♘xf7 has to be considered – how would you respond to that?

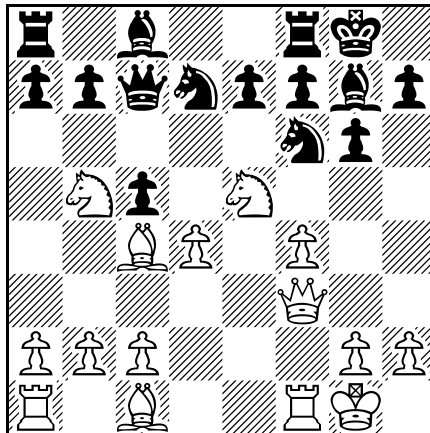


– Your Move – (as Black; after 11 ♖xf7)

Answer: Not 11...♙xf7?! because of 12 ♘b5! ♚a5 13 ♜b3, winning material; if you chose this, **deduct 1 point**.

Much better is 11...cxd4! (**3 points**), when the position would be approximately equal after the practically forced sequence 12 ♘e5+ ♚h8 13 ♘b5 ♘xe5 14 ♘xc7 ♘xf3+ 15 ♙xf3 ♙b8 etc.

11 ♘b5 is another possibility; what would you play now?



– Your Move – (as Black; after 11 ♘b5)

Choose between 11...♜b8, 11...♜a5, and 11...♜d8.

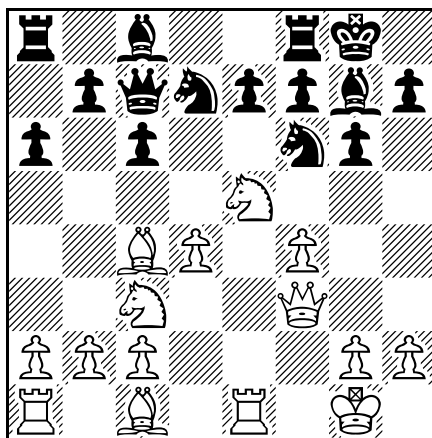
Answer: 11...♖d8?! (**deduct 1 point**) is bad: 12 ♘xf7! ♜xf7 13 ♚b3 e6 14 ♙xe6 ♜e7 15 f5 gxf5 16 ♜xf5 follows, with the initiative and a better position for White.

11...♚b8?! (**deduct 1 point**) isn't playable either, as after 12 ♙xf7+! (even better than 12 ♘xf7) 12...♜xf7 13 ♘xf7 ♘xf7 14 f5! (threatening 15 ♙f4) 14...gxf5 15 ♚b3+! ♘f8 16 ♙f4 e5 17 dxe5 ♘xe5, White's advantage is clear; he has several attractive continuations, such as 18 ♜ad1 and 18 ♜ae1, bringing the rook into the attack, or even 18 ♜e3, planning to answer 18...♘e4 with 19 ♜xe4! fxe4 20 ♙xe5+.

The best response to 11 ♘b5 is 11...♚a5! (**3 points**), and now 12 ♘xf7?! isn't dangerous since Black can play 12...♘b6! 13 ♘e5+ ♘xc4 14 ♚b3 ♙e6 15 ♘xc4 ♚b4 16 ♚xb4 cxb4 17 ♘e5 ♜fc8 with the advantage.

After 11...♚a5, it would be better to play 12 ♙e3 a6 13 ♘c3 with equal chances; Black should then decide between 13...cxd4 14 ♙xd4 ♘g4 and 13...♚b4.

11 ♜e1



– Your Move – (as Black)

11...e6

0 points. The second passive move in a row. This is an unnecessary precaution; the winner said: “Black defends against possible combinative attacks on the f7- and e7-squares. Stronger, however, was the immediate 11...b5! (**4 points**), when the following variation does not work: 12 ♘xc6 bxc4 13 ♘xe7+ ♔h8 14 ♚xa8 ♙b7 15 ♚a7 ♜a8”, winning. White must play 12 ♙b3, but after 12...♙b7, “Black’s position would be in no way inferior.”

If Black didn't mind a draw, then 11...c5 (**2 points**) was playable; a curious possibility then is 12 ♘xf7, when 12...♜xf7? is bad because of 13 ♜xe7, but after either 12...♘b6 or 12...cxd4 White is almost forced to take the draw.

After 12...cxd4, one amusing variation is 13 ♘e5+ ♔h8 14 ♘d5 ♜c5 (not 14...♘xd5? 15 ♘xg6+ hxg6 16 ♚h3+ ♔g8 17 ♙xd5+ ♜f7 18 ♜xe7 and wins) 15 ♘xg6+ hxg6 16 ♘xe7 ♜xc4

17 ♖h3+ ♜h7 18 ♜xg6+ ♔g8 19 ♜e7+ with a draw.

12 ♙b3

White spent some time here considering 12 f5, but he rejected it because Black can simply play 12...exf5!, not fearing 13 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 14 ♜e7 since he has the counterblow 14...♚d6!; for example, 15 ♙xf7+ ♔f8 16 ♜e6 ♚xd4+ 17 ♙e3, and now 17...♚b4 wins material.

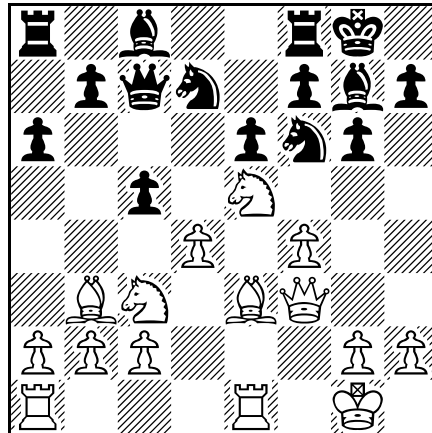
It was also possible to play 12...♚b6, among other moves.

12...c5

– Your Move –

13 ♙e3

1 point. Completing development; White gains nothing by opening the position with 13 d5 exd5 14 ♙xd5 ♜b6! etc.



– Your Move – (as Black)

13...cxd4?

If you chose this move, **deduct 2 points**, as we are at “the critical point of the game. With this exchange Black frees the locked-in bishop on e3, and all White’s pseudo-active moves in the opening prove in fact to be useful.” (Tal)

It was better to play 13...b5! (**4 points**), when 14 ♚xa8? ♙b7 15 ♚a7 ♜a8 favours Black, since the black queen is stronger than the rooks and the b3-bishop is out of the game; in fact this bishop will be sorely missed on the kingside after an eventual ...♚c6 or ...♚b7.

Instead, White intended to reply with 14 dxc5, obtaining three minor pieces and a pawn for the queen after 14...♙b7 15 c6 ♜xe5 16 fxe5 ♙xc6 17 exf6 ♙xf3 18 fxg7 ♜fd8 19 gxf3 etc.

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Less complicated and fully satisfactory was 13...b6! (2 points).

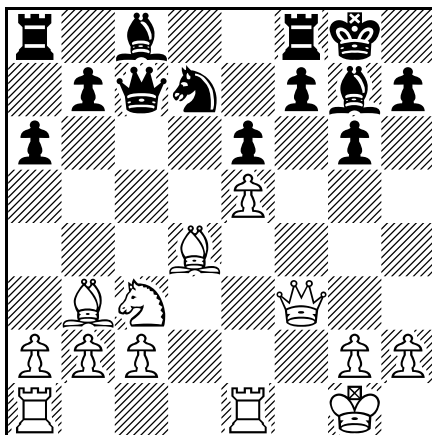
14 ♖xd4 ♘xe5

– Your Move –

15 fxe5

2 points. “Only with the pawn, of course, because White is not at all afraid of losing it.”
(Tal)

15...♞d7



– Your Move –

16 ♞e4!

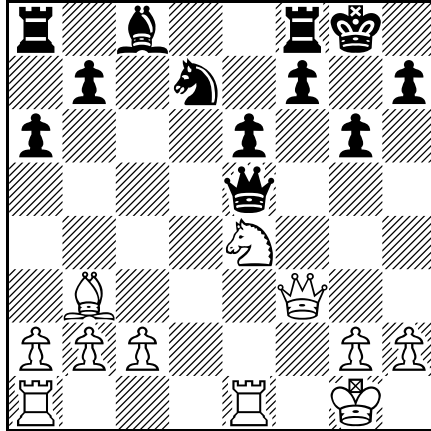
4 points. “The threat of 16...♞c5 was much more dangerous than the attack on the e5-pawn.” (Tal)

16...♞xe5

16...♞xe5? loses to 17 ♞f6+.

Now the dark squares on the kingside lose an important defender.

17 ♞xe5 ♚xe5



– Your Move –

18 ♖ad1

1 point. An important reinforcement arrives, threatening 19 ♖xd7.

18... ♗g7 19 ♘d6 ♙c5+ 20 ♕h1 ♘e5

20... ♘f6? loses to 21 ♙xf6+!.

21 ♙f4 f6

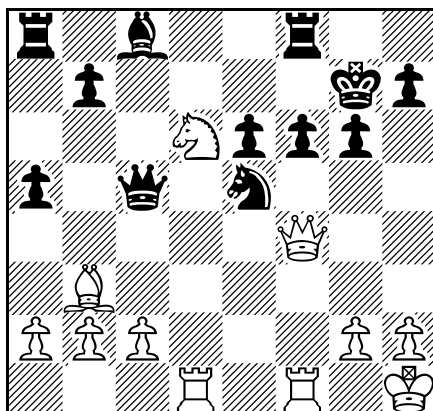
– Your Move –

22 ♖f1

2 points. “With all his pieces in dominating positions, the conditions are right for White’s attack to develop unhindered. First of all he takes control of the square f6.”(Tal)

Now 23 ♘e8+ is threatened.

22...a5



Hoping to expel the d6-knight with ...♖a6, and in some cases threatening ...a5-a4.

– Your Move –

23 h4!

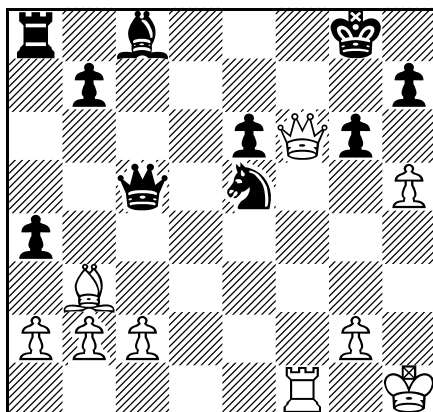
3 points. More support for the attack.

The attractive sacrifice 23 ♖e8+?! (**deduct 1 point**) leads only to equality after 23...♗xe8 24 ♗xf6+ ♕g8 25 ♔d8 ♖xd8! (25...♙d7? 26 ♙xe6+!) 26 ♗xd8+ ♕g7, and there's no more than a draw. No better is 25 ♔de1, as Black can simply play 25...♗f8 26 ♗xf8+ ♗xf8 27 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8 28 ♖xe5 ♙e7 with a level ending.

23 ♖e4?! ♗e7 isn't justified either, since it only helps the defence.

23...♖a6

After 23...a4, White has 24 ♙xa4!. The position is still not ripe for unleashing 24 ♖e8+?! ♗xe8 25 ♗xf6+ ♕g8 26 ♔d8 ♖xd8 27 ♗xd8+ ♕g7 28 ♗f6+ ♕g8 29 h5 – why not?



– Your Move – (as Black; after 29 h5)

Answer: White threatens 30 h6, but Black can play 29...♘d7! (**2 points**), when the a8-rook joins in the defence. Now 30 h6? fails to 30...♜f8, so White should play 30 ♙xe6+ ♙xe6 31 ♜xe6+ ♚g7 32 ♜f6+ with a draw.

The computer suggests some other ‘imaginative’ moves that don’t lose, such as 29...h6 (**1 point**) and 29...♘f3 (**1 point**), but for playing moves like these it’s better to have silicon assistance.

On the other hand, 29...gxh5? loses in several ways, one being 30 ♜g5+ ♚h8 31 ♜f7 ♘xf7 32 ♜xc5 with a decisive material advantage, thanks to the threatened mate on f8.

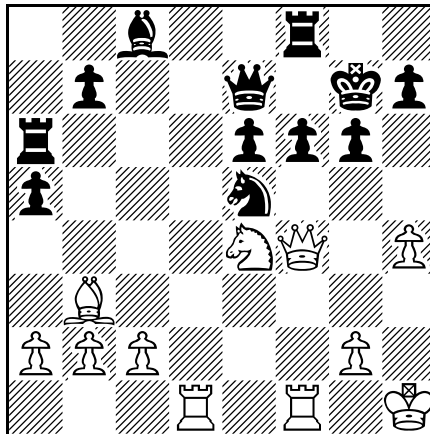
– Your Move –

24 ♞e4

1 point. Now the best course is to target the f6-pawn.

Again after 24 ♞e8+?! (**0 points**) 24...♜xe8 55 ♜xf6+ ♚g8, there’s no more than a draw.

24...♜e7



– Your Move –

25 h5!

2 points. This was what White intended with 23 h4, though exact calculation is required.

25...h6

Preventing 26 h6, but at some cost.

Instead, after 25...a4 White could play 26 h6+ followed by 27 ♘xf6; whereas in reply to

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25...g5, White would have played 26 ♔g3, threatening 27 ♖xf6 and 27 ♖xg5, and the defence is difficult.

What was the best response to 25...gxh5 - ?

– Your Move – (after 25...gxh5)

Answer: White has 26 ♖xf6! (1 point) and Black can't play 26...♔xf6? because 27 ♔g3+ wins.

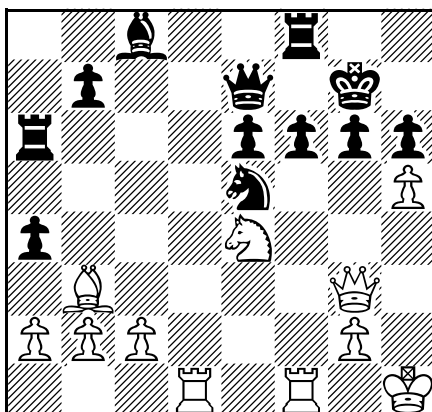
– Your Move –

26 ♔g3!

2 points. Renewing the threat of ♖xf6 and exploiting the fresh weakness at g6.

26...a4

After 26...♔c7, one convincing line is 27 hxg6 a4 28 ♖xf6! (28 ♔xf6! is also strong) 28...♔xf6 29 ♔xf6 ♖xf6 30 g7, as pointed out by Tal, and now if 30...♔xg7 then 31 ♔f1+.



– Your Move –

27 ♖xf6!

2 points. The demolition begins.

This time 27 ♖xf6? is bad and **loses 3 points** – why?

– Your Move – (as Black; after 27 ♖xf6)

Answer: Because of the calm defence 27...♔a5!! (3 points), defending the knight; Black wins a piece and the game.

27...♔xf6 28 ♔xe5 axb3

– Your Move –

29 axb3!

1 point. There is no need to hurry, since White's position is strong enough to stand the loss of a tempo.

29...b6

The pin is very annoying and Black can't get rid of it without losing material or coming under a mating attack, as Tal pointed out. Let's examine his variations, first analysed forty years ago, yet they still stand up to the scrutiny of current analysis engines:

a) 29...♔f7 30 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 31 ♜c7+ etc.

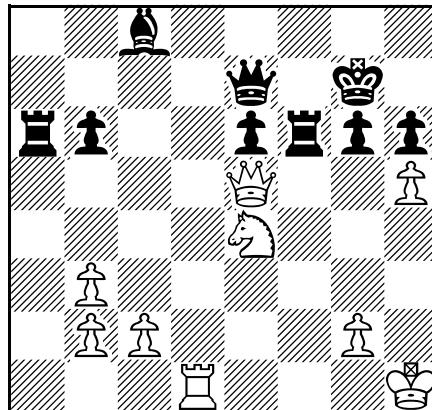
b) If 29...g5, there's a win with 30 ♜f1 ♜a5 31 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 32 ♜xf6 and the h6-pawn will soon be lost.

c) After 29...gxh5, it's best to continue as in the game, although 30 ♖xf6 is also strong, as after 30...♜xf6 31 ♜c7+ ♔g6 32 ♜xc8, Black's king is too exposed.

In this last line, why is 30 ♜f1 inferior?

– Your Move – (as Black; after 30 ♜f1)

Answer: Because Black can force an exchange of queens and reach a satisfactory position with the counter-blow 30...♜a5! (**2 points**).



– Your Move –

30 b4! 1-0

2 points. This is best, as “the threat is stronger than the execution” (Nimzowitsch, and others). It prevents ...♜a5 and at the same time maintains all the threats.

Mikhail Tal vs. Istvan Bilek, Miskolc 1963.

Some lessons from this game:

1. “In for a penny, in for a pound”. (9 f4!)
 2. Sometimes, even against a strong tactician, it’s necessary to enter complications. (11...b5!, 13...b5!)
 3. Preventing the opponent’s activity can be as important as activating one’s own forces. (13...cxd4?, 13...b5!, 13...b6!)
 4. Don’t forget to ‘invite everyone to the party’, bringing fresh forces into the attack. (16 ♖e4!, 18 ♙ad1!, 23 h4!)
 5. Beautiful sacrifices were always present when Tal was on the attack. (16 ♖e4!, 27 ♙xf6!)
- Italics refer to variations, as opposed to moves actually played.*

How did you do? (Maximum score: 45 points)

More than 39 points: Super-Grandmaster.

Between 35 and 39 points: Grandmaster.

Between 29 and 34 points: International Master.

Between 21 and 28 points: You play almost like Tal!

Between 10 and 20 points: You found several key attacking moves.

Less than 10 points: You must keep trying.