

The Bishop Pair

Power of the Sun

An Innovative Course

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Efstratios Grivas

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊕	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
⊆	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

Every chess player who wishes to improve his level in the difficult subject of chess is obliged to study methodically and understand the existing principles that govern the theory of the opening, the middlegame and the endgame.

Most chess players focus more on the study of opening theory than any other aspect of the game. The reasons are probably clear: opening theory is easier to learn and can provide immediate results, although this is based more on the opponent's ignorance than our own abilities. Even for a chess trainer, it is easier to teach some variations from this or that opening, or a set of simple tactical motifs, than to engross himself in the exposition of middlegame and endgame theory.

Yes, middlegame and endgame theory does exist. The great difficulty in approaching it lies in the fact that it does not follow absolute and clear-cut paths, but rather involves deep research in the ideas and logic by which specific types of positions are treated. Moreover, unlike opening theory, the theory of the middlegame and the endgame does not change rapidly based on modern developments – rather, it remains almost intact through the years.

In view of the above, any chess player who wishes to follow a chess career or simply become a better player must refrain from the commonplace and assume a different approach. He or she must develop a good understanding of middlegame and endgame theory, so as to be able in their games to proceed in a proper way after the chosen opening has reached its conclusion.

The chess player can differentiate themselves only in the opening; there, each one of us brings forth their own beliefs and convictions, and in general their own experiences and references. Objectively, no opening loses - but also, no opening wins.

The opening is just the beginning of the journey and serves to offer us a comfortable start. But to reach the end of this journey successfully we have to count on our knowledge and experience, as regards middlegame and endgame theory.

Endgame theory teaches us two fundamental issues: First, how to extract the maximum from a basic theoretical position with little material, where the experts (from practice comprising thousands of games) have reached definite conclusions. Second, the way in which we can handle an endgame, depending on the material remaining on the board, and the ideas and plans we should employ.

This second issue is significantly more difficult to master because, apart from making full use of the first one (we must be aware of the possible outcomes of the endgame in question) it is greatly influenced by our experience and understanding, which are basically derived from the images and impressions we have from related positions. A primary role is played here by the effort we have invested in studying.

In middlegame theory, things are even tougher. We are obliged to study various types of positions with specific strategic and tactical attributes, so as to understand the underlying ideas and be able to employ them ourselves in similar situations. While many chess players have studied these topics and acquired knowledge, it is the application of this knowledge in practice that helps differentiate between them. Chess is not a simple game.

The purpose of this series is to introduce the reader to advanced training concepts, using the same methods of presentation and instruction that were taught to great players by famous trainers that they have worked with.

The series will start with the topic of “the Bishop Pair” and we will examine how to handle this “power of the sun” coupling.

Efstratios Grivas
Sharjah, April 2021

Introduction

Terminology

The possession of the bishop pair (vs. bishop & knight, or knight pair) is an important strategic element that may guarantee superiority and even determine the outcome of the game. In modern chess, the bishop pair has been established as a positional advantage in the majority of cases, and it's very common nowadays to hear teachers tell their students 'keep your bishops' or 'capture that bishop'.

In today's chess, the importance given to this element has increased to the point that in some of the most popular opening variations, the main goal has become to gain the bishop pair. That is because the bishop pair can be a powerful advantage in any phase of the game. For example, it's a lethal weapon in an attack against the king. It can also be very efficient in attacking weaknesses: one bishop can put pressure on the target, while the other attacks the defending piece. However, it is the endgame where it is particularly strong.

Larry Kaufman, in his **Evaluation of Material Imbalances** (1999), wrote: "The bishop pair has an average value of half a pawn (more when the opponent has no minor pieces to exchange for one of the bishops), enough to regard it as part of the material evaluation of the position, and enough to overwhelm most positional considerations. Moreover, this substantial bishop pair value holds up in all situations tested, regardless of what else is on the board. This large a bishop pair value is surprising because in the opening Grandmasters will often give up the bishop pair to double the opponent's pawns or to gain a mild lead in development, factors which are generally not worth half a pawn..."

The bishop pair overcomes the problem of having a lone bishop, which can only operate on half the board, half the colours. So, strategically, the owner of the bishop pair can limit his opponent's activity anywhere on the board that's not shielded by pieces. GM **Ludek Pachman** observed that this advantage extends to being able to control and sometimes force an advantageous simplification.

Requirements

The basic requirements for the exploitation of this element are:



<i>SOS Tip 1 - Requirements</i>
<i>1. Open centre (currently, or in the future)</i>
<i>2. Presence of pawns on both flanks</i>

Consequently, possession of the bishop pair does not always guarantee an advantage. Only after careful examination of the respective pawn structures and the situation in the centre are we able to determine whether possession of this element is an advantage. Most chess players have a strong liking for the bishop pair regardless of the specific features of the position. This phenomenon has a simple explanation: a strong positional player can more easily transform the position so as to suit the bishop pair than to suit the knight pair.

However, it has to be remembered that it is the pawns (placement, pawn chains), the soul of the game, that determine whether possession of the bishop pair is an advantage. The bishop pair is usually very strong, because the main disadvantage of a single bishop, its monochromacity, is compensated by the second bishop.

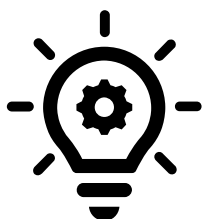
GM **Jonathan Rowson** describes this in his work **The Seven Deadly Chess Sins** as follows: “Although the pair of knights can be very effective, we don't see them as 'a pair' because there is nothing one knight can do that the other can't in principle...there may be something good about the knight pair in a particular position, but this is purely accidental, for there is no reason in principle why a pair of them should be more than the sum of their parts.

“On the other hand, one bishop makes up for the shortcomings of the other, and takes care of its own shortcomings in the process. So what happens when you capture the opponent's bishop is not only that you remove one piece of value, but that you ‘weaken’ the other bishop too.”

The strength of the bishop pair (provided of course that the above-mentioned requirements are met) can be exploited either in the middlegame or the endgame. In the middlegame, bishops can control many squares and from a distance; this implies better control of the position and the prospect of creating a direct attack, either against the king or against other weaknesses. Bishops are also able to restrict the opponent's pieces and create severe (and often insoluble) problems to the opponent, exactly due to their long range of action, which allows them to switch quickly from one target to another without even needing to approach it.

GM **Mikhail Gurevich** (one of the true aficionados of the bishop pair), wrote in his **FIDE Syllabus - The Bishop pair**: “The bishop pair is a powerful weapon. We refer usually to the bishop pair advantage over a bishop and knight, or over two knights. An important point to consider in most positions with the bishop pair is the pawn structure and the existence of pawns on both sides of the board. We will explain how to evaluate the importance of the bishop pair and different techniques of playing with them...

“First of all let us discuss the importance of the pawn structure. There are many possible pawn structures. We will classify them as following: open centre, semi-open and closed positions. Our general knowledge proves to us that the more the centre is open the bigger advantage of bishop pair becomes. This is simple. But each of these structures has its own characteristics and techniques of playing with the bishop pair differentiate considerably.”



<i>SOS Tip 2 - Centre Definitions</i>
<i>1. Open Centre - Two (or more) open (no pawns) central files (c, d, e, f)</i>
<i>2. Semi-open Centre - One open (no pawns) central file or two semi-open central files (c, d, e, f)</i>
<i>3. Closed Centre - No open central files</i>

Just like with any other strategic element, the boundaries between success and failure are not always clearly visible. The games and examples that follow will help to impose on the reader a deeper understanding of the positive aspects of the bishop pair.

Historical Approach

Janos Flesch in his famous **Planning in Chess** wrote: “Throughout human history false dogmas have arisen that greatly influence the politics, the social views and the arts of the particular age. Thus also with chess in its international development. A typical mistake of chess theory and practice in the present age is to overestimate the bishop, and even more so the two bishops, when correspondingly valued against the knight and the two knights!

“Statistics ... have emphasised the superiority of the bishop pair. But all this has come about from a mistaken approach to and a misunderstanding of the middle game. For there is no difference in the value of these pieces whatsoever. But, and this is the point, contemporary chess players use the bishop and especially the bishop pair better and with more assurance than did their predecessors.

“Human beings - owing to their physical build - are less well shielded against attacks from the side than from the front. This disadvantage is more accentuated in our ‘forward-looking’ modern man as he spends a considerable amount of his time behind the wheel or in front of the file or television screen. Perhaps here can be found one of the reasons for overestimation of the bishop’s value ... the truth is that chess players of a previous age knew better how to use one or two knights”

Then it was the turn of **Piotr Romanovsky**: “Thus to the question of whether, in evaluating a position, the factor of the presence of the two bishops for one of the opponents should be taken into account as a particular aspect of the advantage, the right reply, in our view, will be no, it should not. This particular aspect of the advantage does not exist.”

Well, both of them were a ‘bit’ dogmatic and this old debate is no longer such a heated one.

GM **John Watson** in his **Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy** writes: “In a majority of cases, modern chess players prefer the two bishops for the very good reason that they tend to win games.

Those rare, completely locked positions, or the more frequent ones in which the side with the knights have countervailing advantages, are a different matter.”

Statistical Overview

GM **John Watson**, in his **Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy**, delves into some very fascinating statistics, concerning our subject. These statistics were based on the large MegaBase database and, although there are some years passed by, I believe that they are still valid and can give some a practical idea of the power of the bishop pair. All these statistics assume that the conditions of the bishop pair vs. the knight pair and level material last at least 6 half-moves:

“With even pawns the two bishops win against two knights about 40% of the time for **either** Black or White, whereas the knights win only 15% of the time. This yields a hefty 63%/37% winning ratio in both cases. Now the normal winning percentage for White/Black is 54%/46% ratio; so the bishop pair creates a 9% improvement for White over the usual percentages, and an amazing 17% improvement for Black!

“When we take all cases of the bishop pair vs. the knight pair, with even material, but including queens and rooks, the winning ratio for the bishops is 62%/38% with White and 57%/43% with Black.”

A very interesting statistical approach, and there is more...

“It is worth pointing out that part of this last winning percentage for the bishop pair is probably due to the fact that the possessor of the knight pair will do almost anything to avoid the pure ending (without other pieces), and may take risky steps to avoid it.

Finally, I should mention **Mayer's** observation that **Mikhail Chigorin** himself, the two knights defender, scored only 29%/71% in games in which he himself had the knight pair vs. the bishop pair.

“The bishop pair vs. bishop & knight case is similarly successful for the bishops. With no other pieces, White's winning ratio is 64%/36%; interestingly, this includes wins for Black (with the bishop and knight) in only 8% of the games! When Black has the two bishops versus White's bishop and knight (again with no other pieces), his percentage is a hefty 62%/38%.

“When queens and rooks are included (but with even material), White's winning ratio with the bishop pair goes to 61%/39%, still well above the 54%/46% norm; and Black's (also with the bishops) is 54%/46%, 8% above average.”



Bishop Pair Versus Bishop & Knight

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Before we get into a detailed study, we have to review some basic concepts that we should know when playing with the bishop pair vs. bishop & knight:

- We should place the pawns on the same colour as our opponent's bishop. In this way, we reduce the mobility of this piece.

- In the endgame, it will always be difficult for the side playing against the bishop pair to transfer his king to the centre, as it will run into annoying checks or even mate threats.

- We should always keep in mind that, once a bigger advantage is obtained, we can trade one of the bishops, turning the position into a simple winning endgame.

- When there are rooks on the board, it is useful to trade one rook in order to reduce our opponent's defensive resources. This combination of rook and bishop pair works very efficiently together;

- When playing the endgame with the bishop pair, we should try to create a passed pawn.

- The bishop pair can also be used to help connected pawns crawl forward and defeat the facing pawns, and to provide a shield for the king to advance behind.

- It is at its strongest when the position is open, so the owner of the bishop pair should prepare one or more pawn breaks to clear the centre. Therefore, when playing against the bishop pair, we should block the position as much as possible, and find or create good outposts for the knight(s).

So, the evaluation of the bishop pair's advantage depends on the character of the position and, especially, on the pawn structure. In general, it behaves the way the single bishop vs. knight does; pawns on both wings enhance it, and the openness of the position enhances it. Blocked positions reduce it, and pawns on only one wing reduce it too.

a) The Open Centre

Positions with two or more open vertical files in the centre, we may call open. This provides the best conditions for the bishop pair and we may use its dominating, long-range powers to develop all kinds of attacks and initiatives.

However, according to GM **Mikhail Gurevich**, the most technical, most 'pure' technique of exploiting the bishop pair advantage in positions with an open centre is the **Technique of Exchanges**. This element is rather important; to know what and when to exchange usually determines the result.

The 1st World Champion **William Steinitz** was a true admirer of the bishop pair and he introduced into practice the **Restriction Method**.

This is quite simple: with the advance of the flank pawns, the side with the bishop pair restricts his opponent's supply of valuable squares and space for his pieces, especially for the knight(s).



SOS Tips - Open Centre

1. Technique of Exchanges

2. Restriction Method

GM **Ludek Pachman** raises four important points on the bishop pair in open positions, in his **Complete Chess Strategy Vol 1** book:

1. In open positions their effectiveness is an extremely important factor.
2. The opportunity for purposeful simplification.
3. The side with the two bishops can bring the king to the centre more easily under their protection.
4. They help by preventing the enemy king from using the otherwise weak squares of a certain colour.



The Horwitz Bishops

A quite interesting case which proves the strength of the bishop pair in open positions is the so-called **Horwitz Bishops**. This is a configuration in which the bishop pair is aggressively placed on adjacent diagonals, which seems to be a great asset. This is also called “raking bishops”, and sometimes “Harrwitz Bishops”. **Bernhard Horwitz** (1807-1885) was a German master and writer.

Endgame

In general, we should appreciate the concept of an open centre in the endgame. This is the most ‘desirable’ set-up for the bishop pair; an endgame with an open centre is like an invitation to heaven! The bishop pair is free to act and present its possessor with plenty of positional and tactical possibilities. In practice the defender rarely succeeds in gaining his goal; usually he ends up with nothing.

The combined power of the bishop pair in such positions, where no central pawns exist, can be compared to two swords controlling the entire board and ‘killing’

anything that comes in their way. Although this sounds more poetic than chessic, it's nothing other than the truth...






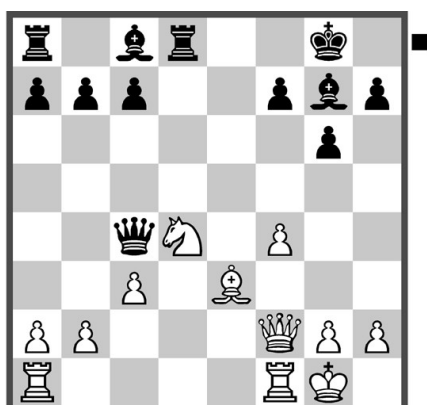
Two Central Open Files

We can start our examination by noting some masterpieces played by the old masters, and especially by the “teacher”, the 1st World Champion, **William Steinitz**.



Game 1

-  Rosenthal, Samuel
-  Steinitz, William
-  Vienna 1873



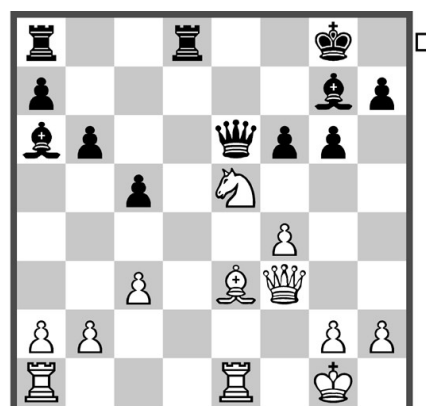
Position after: 16. ♕f2

Of course Black, with the ideal pawn structure for the bishop pair, holds the advantage. The usual Restriction Method comes to the fore:

16... c5 17. ♞f3 b6

Already the d4-square is lost to White.

18. ♞e5 ♕e6 19. ♕f3 ♖a6 20. ♖fe1 f6!



Position after: 20... f6!

And e5 is also “lost”!

21. ♞g4 h5 22. ♞f2 ♕f7 23. f5

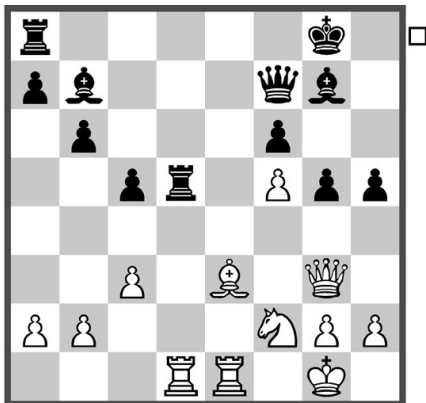
This looks like a good move, but the truth is that the pawn will be just too weak.

23... g5 24. ♖ad1 ♖b7 25. ♕g3

Or 25. ♕e2 ♖d5!

25... ♖d5!

(see diagram next page)



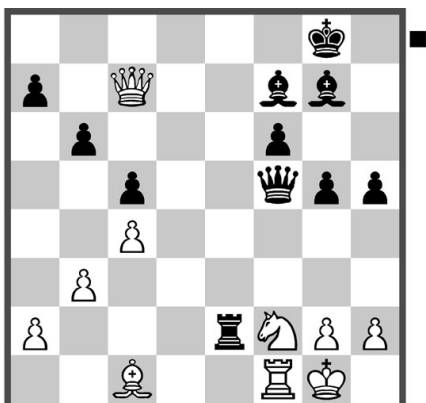
Position after: 25... Rxd5!

Black could pick up the a-pawn with 25... Rxd1 26. Rxd1 Qxa2, but as White could present some counterplay with 27. h4 g4 28. Rd7, he preferred to leave it for a later stage...

26. Rxd5 Qxd5 27. Rd1 Qxf5

Black has maintained his bishop pair and even won material - the end should not be too far off.

28. Qc7 Bd5 29. b3 Re8 30. c4 Bf7
31. Bc1 Re2 32. Rf1



Position after: 32. Rf1

32... Qc2 33. Qg3 Qxa2 34. Qb8+
Kh7 35. Qg3 Bg6 36. h4 g4 37. Nd3
Qxb3 38. Qc7 Qxd3

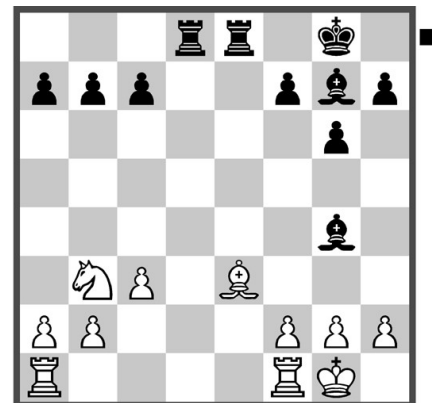
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Game 2

♞ Englisch, Berthold

♟ Steinitz, William

🌐 England 1883



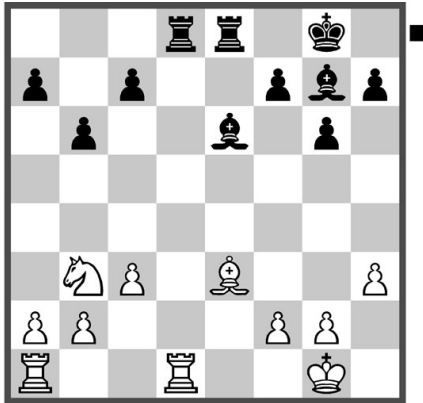
Position after: 17. Nb3

This is a good example of how to play with the bishop pair in an otherwise almost symmetrical position.

17... b6!

This is a typical strategy: Black strengthens his light-squared bishop as it has no counterpart and restricts White's knight at the same time.

18. h3 Be6 19. Rfd1



Position after: 19. ♖fd1

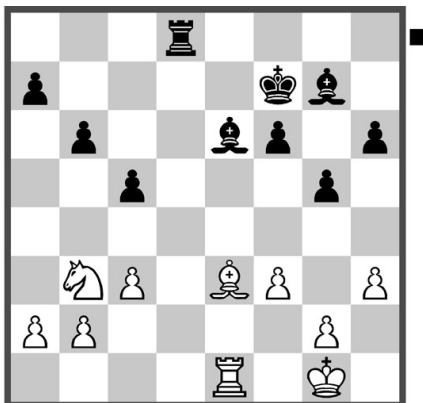
19... c5!

Continuing the strategy of restriction.

20. ♗g5 f6 21. ♗f4 ♔f7 22. f3 g5 23. ♖xd8 ♜xd8 24. ♗e3 h6

Finally all Black's pawns are on dark squares!

25. ♜e1



Position after: 25. ♜e1

25... f5

Steinitz wants to grab space on the kingside with ...f4 and to follow up with

...a5-a4-a3, or with a further advance on the kingside.

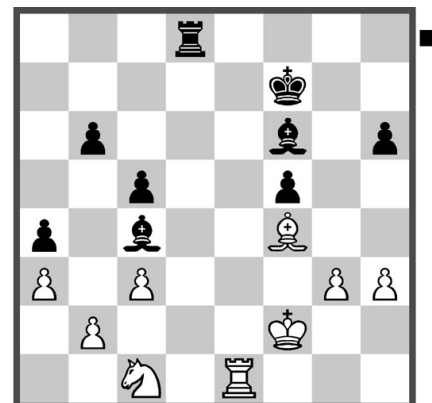
26. f4 ♗f6 27. g3 a5!

Planning to create weaknesses on White's queenside with ...a4-a3.

28. ♞c1 a4 29. a3 ♗c4

This domination of White's knight is called "corralling". A serious chess player should know this important motif by heart!

30. ♔f2 gxf4 31. ♗xf4

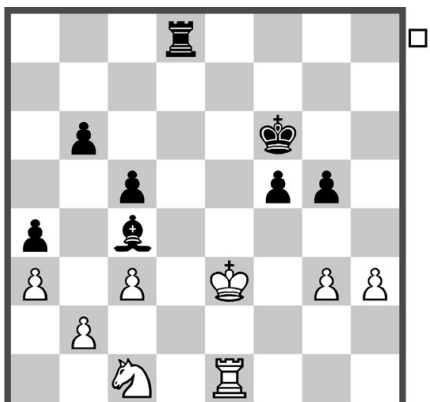


Position after: 31. ♗xf4

31... ♗g5!

Threatening to exchange White's best defender, the dark-squared bishop. This transformation of one advantage into another is one major asset of the bishop pair, as it is usually easier for the player with the bishops to exchange one pair of minor pieces.

32. ♖xg5 hxg5 33. ♔e3 ♔f6



Position after: 33... ♔f6

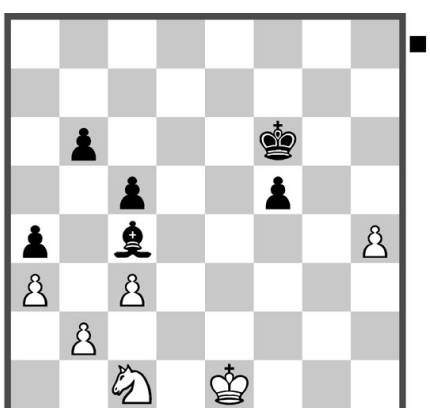
34. h4?

This loses by force

A) 34. ♘e2? ♖d3+ 35. ♔f2 ♖d2 also loses;

B) White had to try something like 34. ♖g1 and hope to hold.

34... gxh4 35. gxh4 ♖e8+ 36. ♔f2 ♖xe1 37. ♔xe1



Position after: 37. ♔xe1

37... ♔e5! 38. ♘e2 ♖xe2 39. ♔xe2

The pawn ending is winning for Black as his active king is more important than White's outside passed pawn.

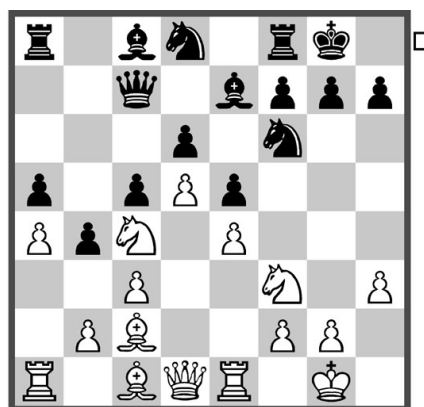
39... ♔f4 40. c4 ♔g4 41. ♔e3 f4+ 42. ♔e4 f3 43. ♔e3 ♔g3 0-1

It is widely accepted that we tend to learn from our predecessors and then improve that knowledge and/or the technique. This is what we call the **Steps of Learning**.

The 3rd World Champion, **Jose Raul Capablanca**, was able to study the play of the 1st World Champion, **Wilhelm Steinitz**, and understand how to handle the bishop pair with accuracy and efficiency...

Game 3

- ♖ Capablanca, Jose Raul
- ♜ Vidmar, Milan Sr
- 🌐 New York 1927



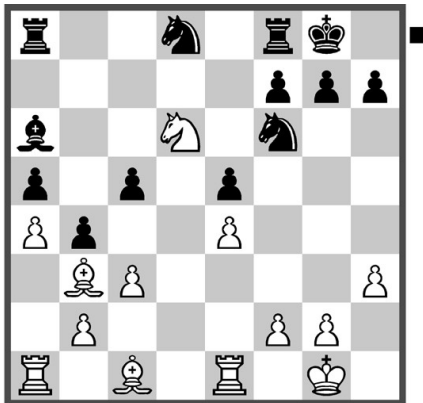
Position after: 15... a5

White's opening spatial advantage does not guarantee anything particularly impressive but the combination that follows does!

16. Nfxe5! Qa6

Or 16... dxe5 17. d6 Qxd6 18. Kxd6 winning for White .

17. Qb3 dxe5 18. d6 Qxd6 19. Kxd6 Kxd6 20. Nxd6



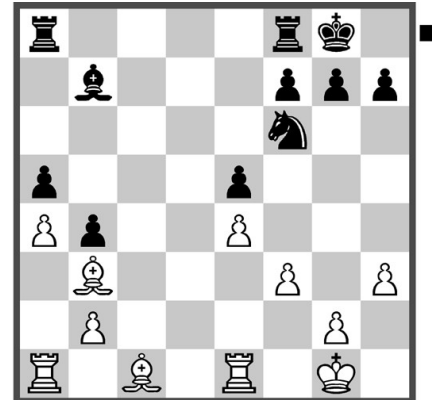
Position after: 20. Nxd6

Now White can claim a pleasant advantage, based on his bishop pair.

20... Nb7?!

After the passive text move, White's hands are free. Preferable was 20... Rb8 , although White stands clearly better after 21. Qc4! Qxc4 22. Nxc4 Nc6 23. Qd2! , as the a5-pawn is rather weak – but at least he wouldn't possess the bishop pair!

21. Nxb7 Qxb7 22. cxb4 cxb4 23. f3!



Position after: 23. f3!

Stabilising the centre and cutting off any potential black activity. The upcoming Qe3-b6 will clearly undermine Black's main weakness: the a5-pawn.

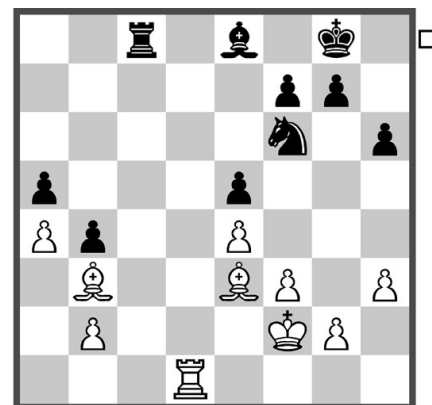
23... Rfd8

The alternative was 23... Nd7 24. Qe3 Rfc8 25. Red1 Rc7 26. $\text{Rd6}\pm$

24. Qe3 h6

24... Rd3 25. Qc4 Rd6 26. Red1 Rad8 27. Rxd6 Rxd6 28. Rc1 Rc6 29. $\text{Rd1}\pm$

25. Red1 Qc6 26. Rac1 Qe8 27. Qf2 Rxd1 28. Rxd1 Rc8



Position after: 28... Rc8

J.R.Capablanca now follows with the Restriction Method.

29. g4!

With the idea of h4 and g5; Black has no defence to oppose the dominating bishop pair.

29... ♖d7?!

Blunders usually come in difficult positions, but even after 29... ♖c6 30. ♖c1 Black will not last long...

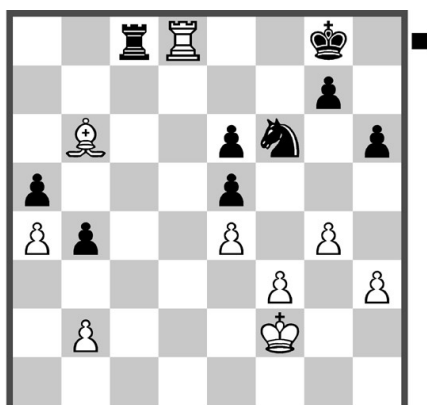
30. ♖b6! ♖e6

30... ♖a8 loses to 31. ♖c7.

31. ♖xe6 fxe6

Or 31... ♖c2+ 32. ♖e3 fxe6 33. ♖d2+-

32. ♖d8+!



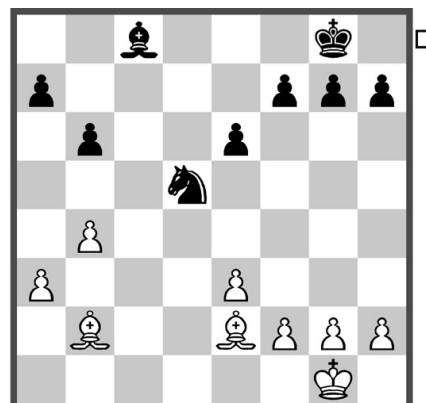
Position after: 32. ♖d8+!

Simplification guarantees a trivial win.

32... ♖xd8 33. ♖xd8 ♞d7 34. ♖xa5 ♞c5 35. b3! ♞xb3 36. ♖xb4 ♞d4 37. a5 1-0

Game 4

♖ Gurevich, Mikhail (2633)
 ♜ Sandipan, Chanda (2522)
 ♁ Gibraltar 2006



Position after: 20... ♖xc8

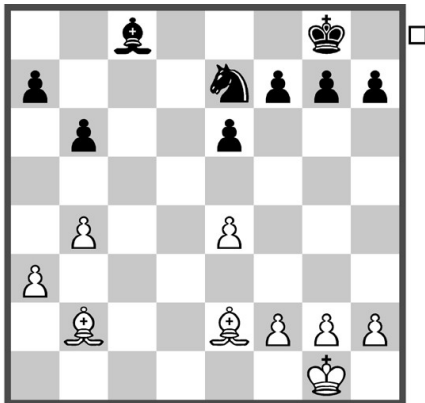
White has achieved the exact material that he was aiming for: the bishop pair versus bishop and knight in the endgame. A typical and pleasant advantage, where the game usually goes in his favour. Although there are no weaknesses in Black's position so far, the fact that White possesses the bishop pair with an open centre and pawns on both sides of the board, makes this endgame extremely difficult for Black. Gaining space in the centre is the first stage in White's plan: he should activate his bishops as much as possible,

create pawn weaknesses in his opponent's position (on both sides preferably), centralise his king and create passed pawn(s). Black faces a long and difficult defence.

21. e4!

Restricting the black knight from the centre.

21... ♞e7



Position after: 21... ♞e7

If 21... ♞f4, then 22. ♞c4 (with the threat of ♞b2-e5-b8) 22... ♞g6 23. b5±

22. b5!

This creates weakness number 1, the a7-pawn.

22... f6

With the idea of 23... ♔f7, 24...e5 and 25... ♞e6, trying to block the position in the centre as much as possible.

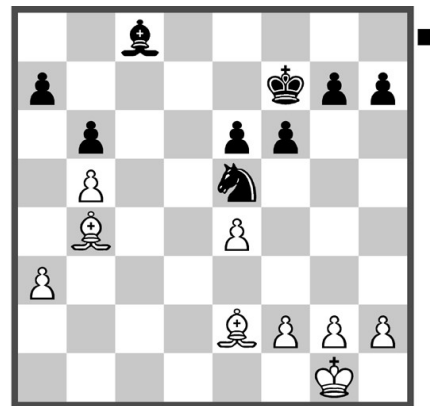
23. ♞c3

Planning ♞b4-d6-b8.

23... ♔f7

Or 23... e5 24. ♞c4+ ♔f8 25. ♞b4±

24. ♞c4 ♞g6 25. ♞b4 ♞e5 26. ♞e2

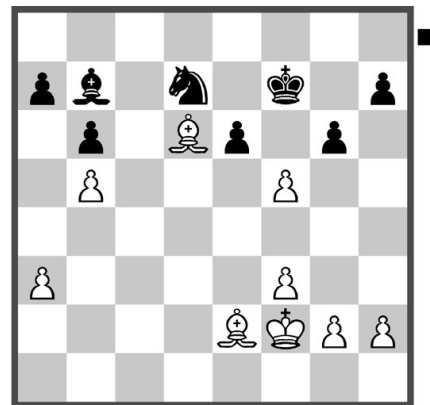


Position after: 26. ♞e2

26... ♞b7

26... ♞d7 27. ♞d6 ♞c5 28. f3 e5 29. ♞b8±

27. f3 ♞d7 28. ♞d6 g6 29. ♔f2 f5 30. exf5



Position after: 30. exf5

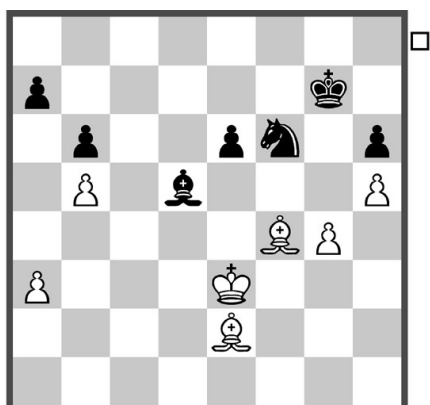
30... gxf5

30... exf5 was probably a better decision, although after 31. ♖c4+ ♔f6 32. ♔e3, White stands clearly better.

31. g4!

This creates a passed pawn on the kingside and by using the classical principle of the two weaknesses, makes Black's position practically indefensible.

31... fxe4 32. fxe4 ♖d5 33. ♔e3 ♔g6 34. h4 h6 35. h5+ ♔g7 36. ♖g3 ♞f6 37. ♖e5 ♔f7 38. ♖f4 ♔g7



Position after: 38... ♔g7

39. ♔d4

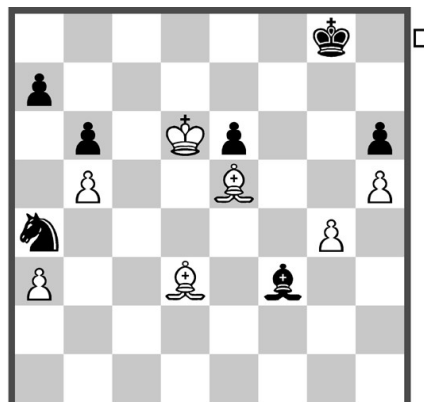
With the idea of ♔e5-d6-c7-b8, although 39. ♖b8 ♞d7 40. ♖xa7 e5 41. ♖f3± was good as well.

39... ♞e4 40. ♖e5+ ♔f7 41. ♖f4 ♔g7 42. ♔e5 ♞c3 43. ♖d3 ♖f3 44. ♔d6

White continues his plan, and creates the threat of 45. ♖e5+

44. ♔xe6 ♖xg4+ 45. ♔d6±

44... ♞a4 45. ♖e5+ ♔g8



Position after: 45... ♔g8

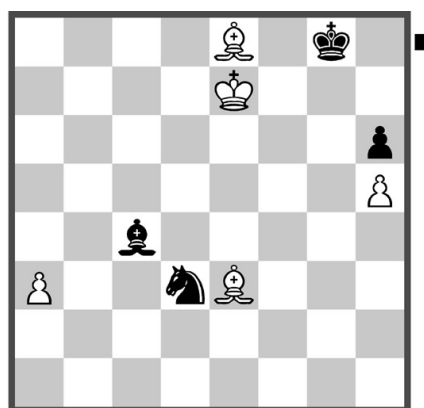
46. g5 ♞c5

The only move as after 46... hxg5 47. h6, the h-pawn is unstoppable.

47. ♖g6 ♞e4+ 48. ♔xe6 ♞xg5+ 49. ♔e7 ♖e2 50. ♖b8 a6 51. bxa6 ♖xa6 52. ♖a7 ♞f3

52... b5 53. ♖d3+–

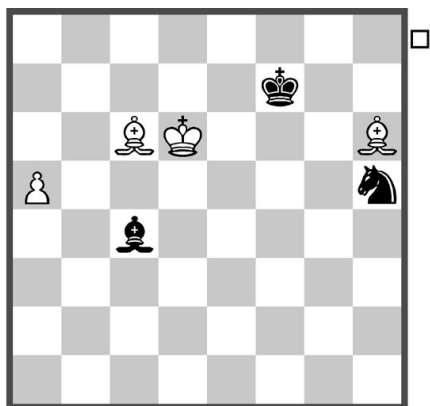
53. ♖xb6 ♞e5 54. ♖e8 ♖c4 55. ♖d4 ♞d3 56. ♖e3



Position after: 56. ♖e3

56... ♔g7 57. a4 ♞b4 58. ♖d4+ ♔g8

59. a5 ♖d5+ 60. ♔d6 ♘f4 61. ♙e3
♔f8 62. ♙c6 ♘xh5 63. ♙xh6+ ♔f7



Position after: 63... ♔f7

64. ♙d5+!

In this way, White converts the advantage of the bishop pair into material, as Black's pieces are unable to stop the a-pawn.

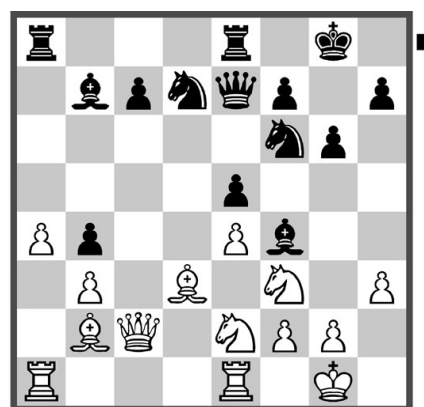
64... ♙xd5 65. ♔xd5
1-0

Top players are very well trained in the various techniques of typical strategic motifs. And this is the main reason why they have climbed to the top!

In the following game the time control was short (a rapid game), but still White treated the needs of the position extremely well and accurately, cashing in the point without facing too many problems:

Game 5

♙ Harikrishna, Pentala (2719)
♚ Amin, Bassem (2686)
🌐 ICC 2020



Position after: 22... ♘e2

White has achieved a slight advantage out of the opening and Black needs to be careful...

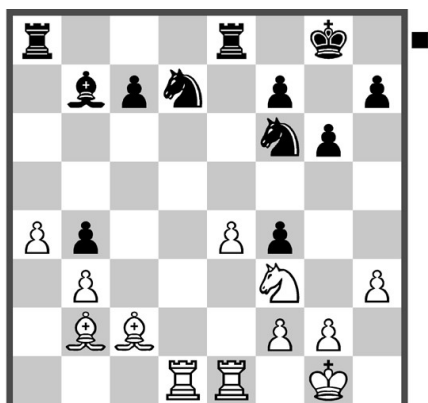
22... ♔c5?

Simply a bad move which hands White the bishop pair.

Better was 22... ♙h6 23. ♙c1 ♙xc1 24. ♖exc1 ±

23. ♘xf4 ♔xc2 24. ♙xc2 exf4 25. ♖ad1

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 25. ♖ad1

White's domination is clear and Black will find it difficult to defend.

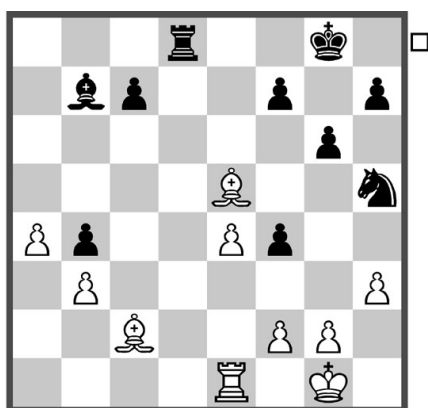
25... ♖ad8

Maybe the passive 25... ♖e7 26. ♘d3 ♘e8 27. ♖c1± was a better try.

26. ♞e5! ♞xe5?!

Black shouldn't agree with White's plans; better was 26... ♞c5 27. f3 ♞h5 28. ♞d3±

27. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 28. ♘xe5 ♞h5



Position after: 28... ♞h5

29. ♖d1!

White is playing simply but rather effectively. With his last move he stops any black counterplay (...♖d2), while the black pawns will start to fall...

29... ♖e8

There was no longer any salvation:

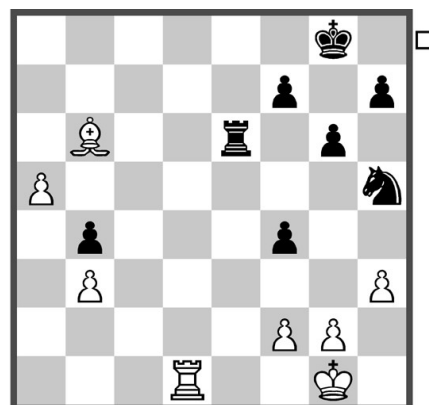
A) 29... ♖c8 30. ♖d7+ , or

B) 29... ♖xd1+ 30. ♘xd1 ♘xe4 31. ♘f3! ♘d3 32. ♘b7+–

30. ♘xc7 ♘xe4 31. ♘xe4 ♖xe4 32. a5

The passed a-pawn will cost Black the exchange and the game.

32... ♖e7 33. ♘b6 ♖e6



Position after: 33... ♖e6

34. a6

Also good was 34. ♖d8+ ♔g7 35. ♖b8+–

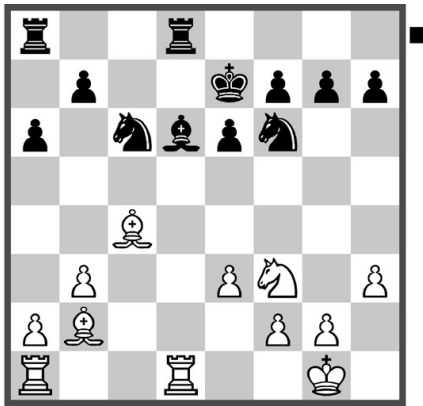
34... ♖xb6 35. a7 ♖a6 36. ♖d8+ ♔g7 37. a8=♚ ♖xa8 38. ♖xa8

And Black decided he had suffered enough...

1-0

Game 6

♁ Carlsen, Magnus (2815)
 ♚ Nisipeanu, Liviu Dieter (2659)
 🌐 Romania 2011



Position after: 18. h3

An early queen exchange doesn't undermine the initiative process and here Black's position is worse than it looks. White's bishop pair together with the lack of any counterplay makes it difficult to defend, especially in a practical game and especially with little time. White's plan is to advance the kingside pawns, gaining more space, and then trying to create a weakness in Black's pawn formation. Possibly disappointed by the course of the game, Black failed to put up his usual tough resistance.

18... g6?!

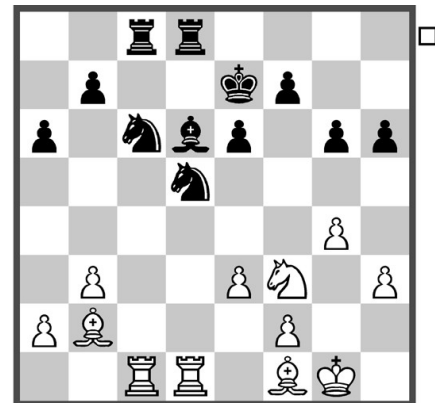
This somewhat strange-looking move is meant to prepare ...♞d5. But on d5 the knight won't be doing much anyway, while the weaknesses created by the text move will soon prove fatal.

18... h5 was preferable, stopping g4, at least for a while. Magnus Carlsen said he would play g3, ♔g2 etc, when Black has no active play, but it was still probably better than the game.

19. g4! h6

19... h5 is answered by 20. g5 ♞d7 21. ♔g2 with an advantage.

20. ♞f1 ♖ac8 21. ♖ac1 ♞d5



Position after: 21... ♞d5

22. h4! ♔e8

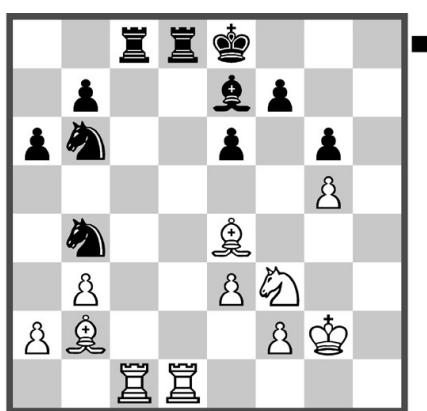
Too passive. Something like 22... ♞cb4, was called for, trying to get some counterplay as quickly as possible.

23. g5 hxg5?!

After this slight inaccuracy, the position

becomes really difficult. The opening of the h-file doesn't help Black according to Carlsen and now his position is more or less winning. Black must try to keep the kingside closed and therefore 23... h5 was necessary.

24. hxg5 ♖e7 25. ♔g2 ♞b6 26. ♙d3!
♞b4 27. ♙e4



Position after: 27. ♙e4

And now Black is really lost.

27... ♞xa2

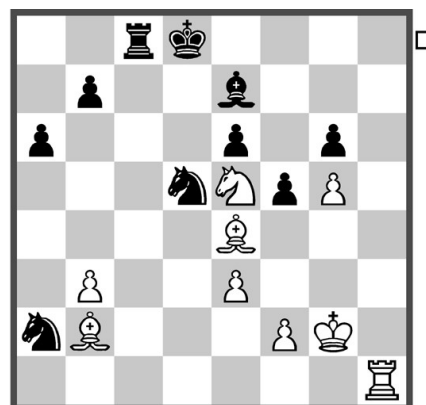
There was no salvation in 27... ♜xc1
28. ♜xc1 ♞d3 29. ♙xd3 ♜xd3
30. ♙d4 ♞d5 31. ♜c8+ ♔d7 32. ♜b8
♔c7 33. ♜g8+–

28. ♜xd8+ ♔xd8 29. ♜h1

Black is temporarily a pawn up, but his position is lost: the bishop pair dominates the board and the rook is going to come to h7, with the knight going to e5.

Black simply can't withstand such pressure.

29... ♞d5 30. ♞e5 f5



Position after: 30... f5

31. ♙xd5

Black resigned

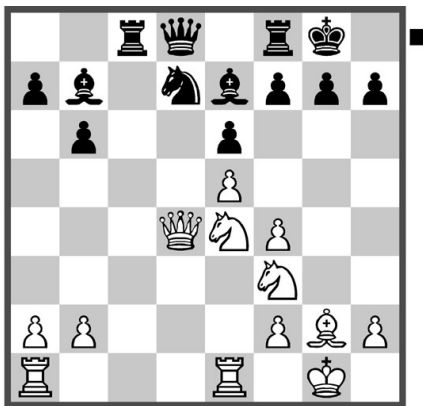
Black's position has fallen apart. He resigned due to 31... exd5 32. ♜h8+ ♔c7 33. ♜h7 ♔d8 34. ♙d4 and huge material losses are unavoidable: 34... ♜c6 [34... ♞c1 35. ♞xg6 ♙xg5 36. ♙b6+ ♔e8 37. ♜h8+ ♔f7 38. ♜xc8] 35. ♜h8+ ♔c7 36. ♞xc6+–

1-0

As we have already noted, the bishop pair is a strong element to fight against, so the defending side should avoid any further weaknesses, otherwise things can get scary.

Game 7

♙ Grivas, Efstratios (2507)
 ♚ Parligras, Mircea Emilian (2542)
 🌐 Greece 2007



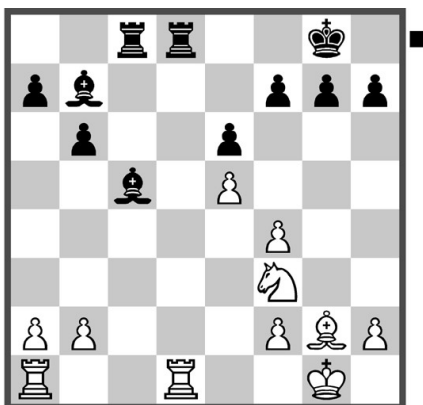
Position after: 17. gxf4

Black secured the bishop pair, along with the better pawn structure.

17... ♞c5!

Simplification to a much better ending!

18. ♞xc5 ♙xc5 19. ♚xd8 ♜fxd8 20. ♜ed1



Position after: 20. ♜ed1

20... h6!

Not allowing the ♞g5-e4 manoeuvre. As said, Black has a steady advantage based on his bishop pair and the White's weakened pawn structure – but White can still fight!

21. ♜ac1

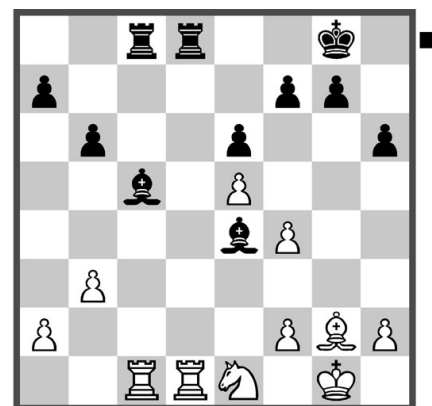
21. ♞e1?! is bad on account of 21... ♙a6 22. ♙f1 ♙xf1 23. ♚xf1 ♜d4 24. ♜xd4 ♙xd4 25. ♜b1 b5

21... ♙d5 22. b3 ♙e4?!

This looks good but in fact helps White. Instead, 22... ♙f8 was called for.

23. ♞e1?

White missed again his chance!



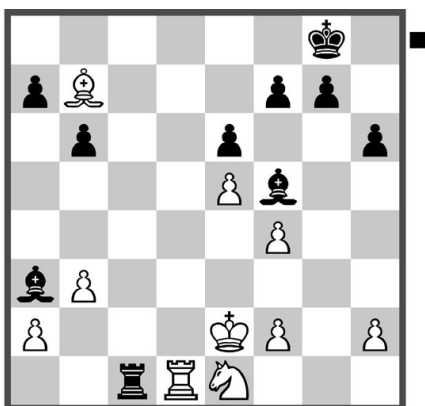
Position after: 23. ♞e1?

Best was 23. ♞d4! ♙xg2 24. ♚xg2 a6 25. ♙f3 ♜d5 26. ♞e2 ♜cd8 27. ♜xd5 ♜xd5

23... ♙f5!

Preserving the bishop pair and targeting the a2-pawn.

24. ♔f1 ♘a3 25. ♖xc8 ♜xc8 26. ♘b7 ♜c1 27. ♔e2



Position after: 27. ♔e2

Setting a (final) trap into which Black falls.

27... ♘b1?

27... ♜xd1! 28. ♔xd1 ♘c5 29. ♔e2 ♘b1 30. a4 ♘a2 is an easy win for Black.

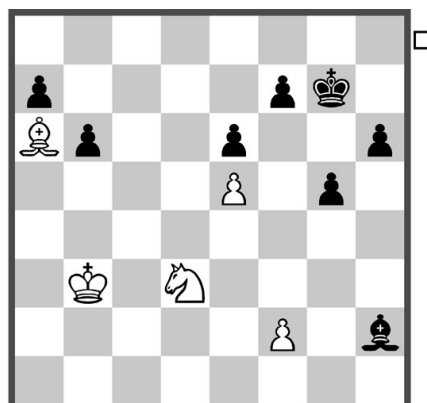
28. ♘a6! ♘xa2! 29. ♖xc1 ♘xc1 30. ♔d1! ♘xf4 31. ♔c2

And the a2-bishop is a goner ! But Black still preserves his advantage as he gets plenty of pawns for the lost piece.

31... ♘h2

The correct pawn; Black must create passed pawns.

32. ♞d3 g5 33. ♔b2 ♘xb3 34. ♔xb3 ♔g7



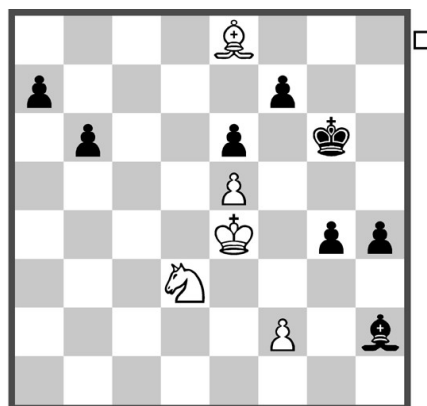
Position after: 34... ♔g7

White has won a piece for four pawns and three of them are passed and dangerous. Anyway, Black is not in a position to lose and he can calmly improve his position.

35. ♘b7 g4 36. ♔c4 ♔g6 37. ♔d4

White cannot go after the queenside pawns: 37. ♘e4+ ♔g5 38. ♔b5 h5 39. ♔a6 h4 40. ♔xa7 ♘xe5 41. ♞xe5 ♔f4 42. ♞xg4 ♔xe4→

37... ♔f5 38. ♘e4+ ♔g5 39. ♘c6 h5 40. ♘e8 ♔g6 41. ♔e4 h4



Position after: 41... h4

42. ♞f4+

42. f3 g3 [42... gxf3 43. ♔xf3 ♔f5
44. ♙xf7 ♙xe5] 43. ♘f4+ ♔g7
44. ♘g2 h3 45. ♘f4 g2 46. ♘h3 a6–+

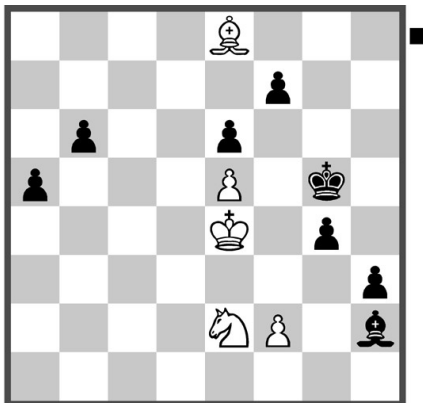
42... ♔g5 43. ♘e2 h3 44. ♙c6

44. ♙xf7 ♙f4! 45. ♘xf4 h2–+

44... a5

White is lost and the end of the game was:

45. ♙e8



Position after: 45. ♙e8

45... ♙f4! 46. ♙c6 h2 47. ♔d4 a4
48. ♔c4

48. ♘c3 a3 49. ♘a2 b5 50. ♙g2 ♙d2
51. ♔d3 ♙e1 52. ♔e2 ♙a5 53. ♘c1
♔f5–+

48... ♙xe5 49. ♔b4 f5! 50. ♔xa4 f4
51. ♙h1 f3 52. ♘c1 g3!

0-1

Simple positions do not necessary lead

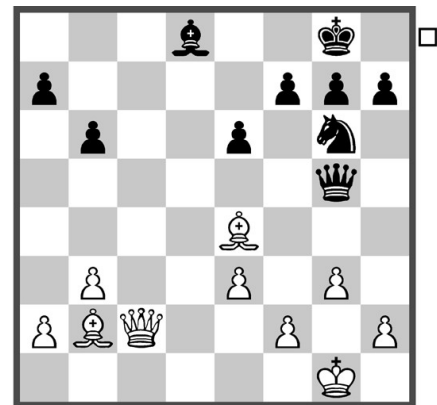
to a draw. What is really important is what remains on the board and not outside of it!

Game 8

♙ Damljanovic, Branko (2530)

♚ Barlov, Dragan (2490)

♁ Yugoslavia 1989



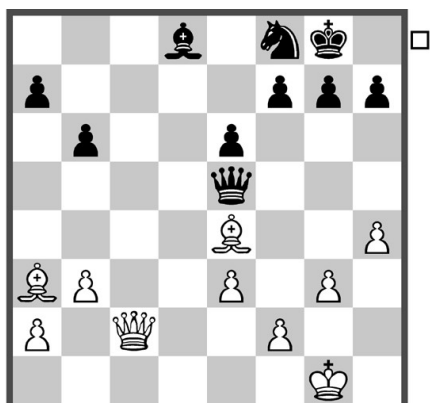
Position after: 21... ♙xd8

This time queens are on the board, but this cannot really help Black to defend.

22. ♙a3!

A very strong move which emphasises Black's back-rank weaknesses. Due to a lack of piece coordination, Black's position deteriorates step-by-step until his position becomes critical. The initiative rests firmly with White, and he treats the final phase of the game with the utmost accuracy.

22... ♘f8 23. h4 ♔e5



Position after: 23... ♖e5

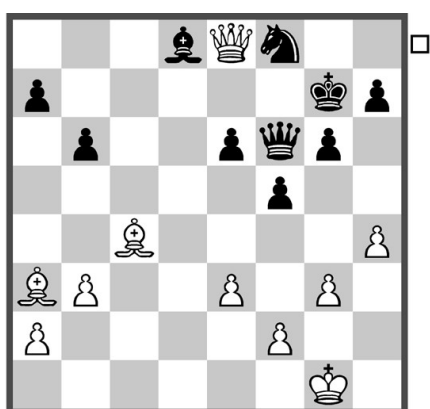
24. ♖c6! f5

Black desperately needs fresh air to parry the threat of ♖e8, but now a new target (the e6-pawn) is created.

25. ♖e8 ♖f6 26. ♗d3!

The bishop is transferred to c4, attacking the weak black e6-pawn.

26... g6 27. ♗c4 ♖g7



Position after: 27... ♖g7

28. ♗d6!

This stalemates all of Black's pieces, and he now finds himself in zugzwang. Black

might as well have resigned here, but under time pressure he instinctively played on.

28. ♗xf8+? ♖xf8 29. ♖xe6 ♗f6 would give Black some survival chances...

28... b5 29. ♖xb5 ♖f7 30. ♖b8 ♗e7 31. ♗f4 ♗f6 32. ♗c7 h6 33. ♖xa7

The black queenside simply falls!

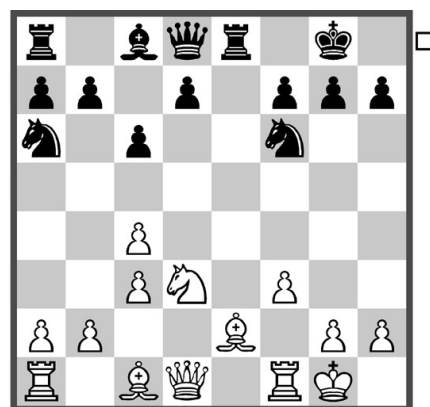
33... g5 34. hxg5 hxg5 35. ♗b6 ♗d7 36. ♗d4

1-0

Game 9

♗ Moskalkenko, Viktor (2532)
 ♗ Cuartas, Jaime Alexander (2522)
 ♗ Catalonia 2012

1. c4 c6 2. e4 e5 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. ♖c3 ♗b4 5. ♗xe5 0-0 6. ♗e2 ♖e8 7. ♖d3 ♗xc3 8. dxc3 ♗xe4 9. 0-0 ♖a6 10. f3 ♖f6



Position after: 10... ♖f6

White has the bishop pair and the more free position, but is far from showing something concrete. Re-arrangement of the pieces should be a priority here.

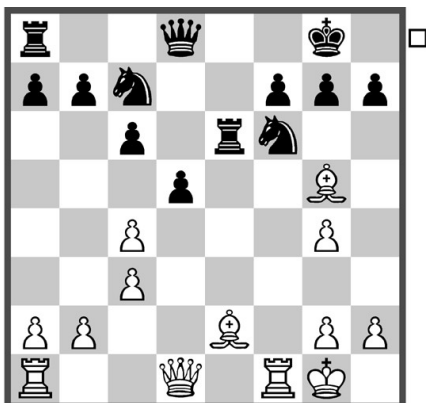
11. ♖g5 ♞c7 12. ♞f2

Threatening ♞e4 or ♞g4.

12... d5 13. ♞g4

It seems that 13. cxd5 ♞cxd5 14. c4 h6 15. ♖d2!± is quite nice for White.

13... ♖xg4 14. fxg4 ♖e6



Position after: 14... ♖e6

15. ♖d3!

Forcing central exchanges.

15... dxc4

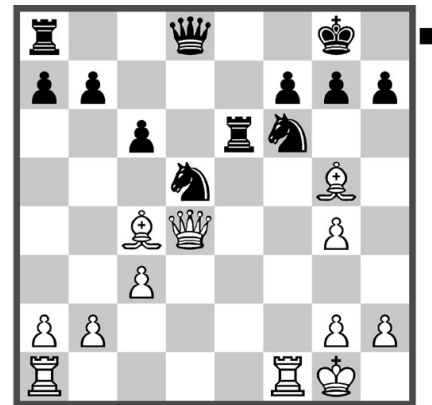
15... h6 16. ♖h4 doesn't change much.

16. ♖xc4 ♞cd5

White would have a free hand after the

queens' exchange: 16... ♖xd1 17. ♖axd1 ♞fd5 18. ♖b3±

17. ♖d4!



Position after: 17. ♖d4!

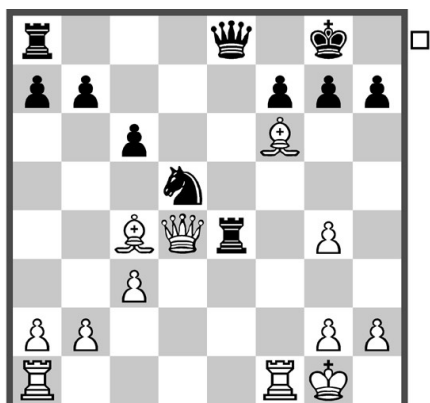
White has an evident advantage in the form of the bishop pair and several nasty pins. The doubled pawns on the g-file are of little consequence; in fact, the f-file allows White to pour even stronger pressure onto Black's position.

17... ♖e8?

17... ♖b6 is a good way to counter White's initiative, though after 18. ♖xb6 axb6 White can simplify to an advantageous rook ending with 19. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 20. ♖xd5 ♖xf1+ 21. ♖xf1 cxd5 22. a3 with a clear advantage. Black is not yet lost, of course, but he would certainly have a difficult defence ahead of him.

18. ♖xf6 ♖e4

The move that Black prepared with his 17th move.



Position after: 18... Rxe4

18... Rxf6 19. Bxd5 Rxf1+ 20. Rxf1 cxd5 21. Qxd5± would simply leave White a pawn up.

19. Bxg7!

A nice concept! White gets rook, bishop and pawn in return for his queen, but more importantly, the black kingside will have been weakened due to the disappearance of the g-pawn. White needed to see deeply into the position to ensure he could indeed make this factor a decisive influence on the outcome.

Black was clearly expecting the queen to retreat: 19. Qf2 Nxf6 [19... Rxc4 20. Bd4!] 20. g5 leaving White with a slight initiative.

19... Rxd4 20. Bxd4 Qd7

It turns out that White's Rf5 cannot be stopped for very long, so Black tries to glue his position together. Should he play any other move, then 21. Rf5, or 21. Rae1, would have been the

response. For instance: 20... Qe4 21. Rae1 Qxg4 22. Bxd5 cxd5 23. Rf3!+-

21. Rf5!

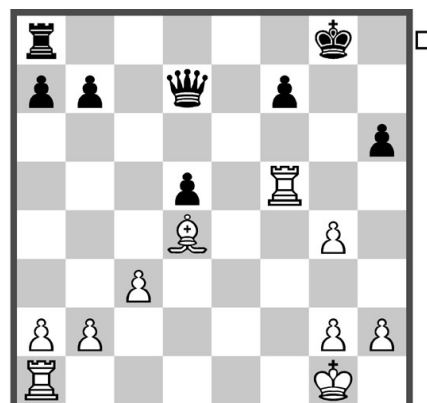
The threat is Rg5+, followed by Bc5+, winning.

21... h6

What else?

If 21... Qe7? 22. Re5 Qh4 23. Rf1+-

22. Bxd5! cxd5



Position after: 22... cxd5

23. Rf6!

With very subtle finesses, White has found the right path for the rook to infiltrate the black kingside. There is now no defence and the game soon ended.

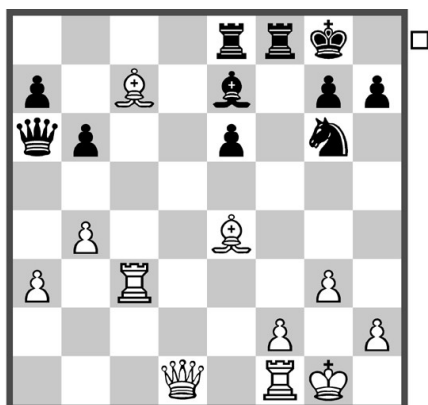
23... Re8 24. Rxh6 f6 25. Rf1 Qxg4 26. Rxf6 Qh5 27. Rf3! Re4 28. Rf8+ 1-0

Three or More Central Open Files

The more the better is the motto! Quite naturally, too, as in this case the bishop pair has more space to manoeuvre and to dominate.

Game 10

♔ Capablanca, Jose Raul
♚ Znosko Borovsky, Eugene
🌐 Paris 1938



Position after: 22... fxe6

White's bishop pair and superior pawn structure should be enough to bring home the full point.

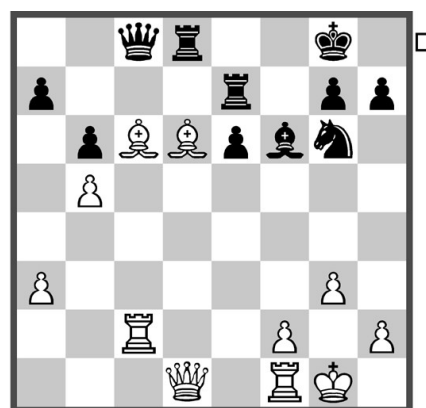
23. ♖c6 ♗f6 24. b5 ♔c8

24... ♕a5 25. ♖d3 ♖c8 26. ♗d6 ♗e7

27. ♗d7 wins material.

25. ♖c2 ♖e7 26. ♗d6 ♖d8

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 26... ♖d8

27. f4

Although other moves like 27.Re1 or 27.Be4 look extremely strong, Capablanca's solution is "pleasant"! White includes the f1-rook into the action, achieving complete domination!

27... ♔h8?!

Black had to get rid of the bishop pair with 27... ♖c7 28. ♖f3 ♗e7 29. ♖d3 ♗xd6 30. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 31. ♕xd6±, although he will likely not save the game...

28. ♖ff2! ♖f7

28... e5 loses to 29. f5 ♘f8 30. ♖cd2+–

29. ♖fd2