

The Essence of Chess Strategy

Strategic Elements

Volume 1

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**The Essence of
Chess Strategy
Strategic Elements
Volume 1**

Boroljub Zlatanovic

Thinkers Publishing 2022



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

*To my beloved family
and dear mentors*

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Foreword

I have known Boroljub since childhood. When I think of him, the first word that comes to my mind is “PASSION”. Be it chess or football, the Dunst Opening or the Nimzovich Defense, he always seemed to be able to reach heights due to his devotion and dedication to whatever he was currently busy with. It isn’t surprising that this finally results in his encyclopedic knowledge of whatever area he chooses to focus on. I will mention an interesting episode.

At some point in his life, Boroljub developed an affection for game shows. It didn’t take too long before he became a TV celebrity, giving correct answers to incredibly difficult questions in super diverse areas. I vividly remember almost falling off my chair while I was watching him on “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire”, thinking how can this guy know EVERYTHING?? Quiz show producers simply stopped inviting him under the threat of bankruptcy! When he started teaching, he continued doing it with the same enthusiasm. This sentiment can be felt throughout this book, and together with great material, it gives the reader that little extra something, that can’t be described by words, but only felt.

I really hope that you will enjoy the book, and I recommend that you read through the chapter about “Bad Pieces” attentively – it will bring you quite a few points in the future!

GM Dragan Solak, 2022.

Preface

“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” Sun Tzu

Mostly basing my chess work on this statement of the great Chinese military theoretician, I have managed throughout my chess coaching career to implement many of his principles, and even establish them as being valid for the game of chess. I think the statement above should be taken as an axiom. Thus, strategy must be the leading chess topic, and definitely based on logic. Moreover, strategy must tower over all other chess topics and sub-topics; strategy is the ultimate chess idea and it sublimates and determines other principles.

How to learn strategy? Can it be learned? It can be, of course. And these volumes are the perfect guide to learn (or, more precisely, to learn to understand) strategy.

My idea is to throw light on all the strategic concepts in these volumes. To help you navigate more simply, I have divided all the material into two volumes. This first one is exploring the elements of strategy, explaining typical and essential principles in detail. The second one is about pawn structures. Of course, structures themselves actually mean nothing without recognizing patterns and principles from the elements (because pawn structures are used to determine the values of pieces, for instance). That is why volume two can be considered as an advanced level of strategy. Generally, examples will be based on material adopted from volume one and upgraded.

Volume one is divided into nine chapters and the titles suggest the topic explained in detail. Examples are arranged from less to more complex and I recommend that the reader not skip examples inside the chapters. Moreover, I would ask the reader to go through the chapters in the order in which they are presented in the book, because the most important topics come first. For instance, centralization is the leading principle and it must be kept in mind while working on other topics!

Dear reader, I hope you will recognize the passion, love and devotion I have put into these volumes. Moreover, I hope you will help me to get better in future, so please email any ideas and suggestions to me at borzlat@gmail.com.

Boroljub Zlatanovic, Serbia, 2022.



The Center

I, together with many eminent strategists, consider the center as the ultimate strategic element. And thus, centralization as the ultimate strategic principle. It is a well-known fact that domination (or at least good control) of the center is a precondition for a flank attack. But how to gain control of the center? And what to do if the opponent holds the advantage in the center? How to punish anti-centralizing moves? Is it absolutely essential to occupy the center? And how to do that, using pawns or pieces...? Is it good enough to control the center from a distance?

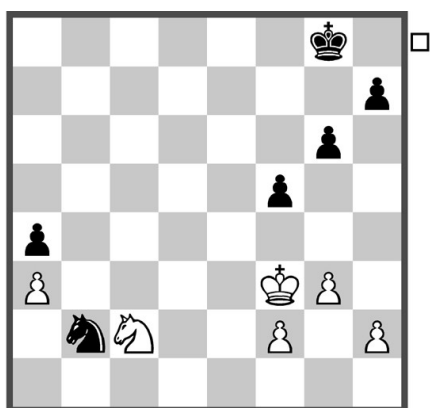
All these questions may look confusing. But do not worry! Dear reader, you will find answers to all these questions and a lot more. You will be fully equipped not only with centralizing concepts, but with all the concomitant principles as well. And, as the ultimate chess idea, centralization will be underlined in all the future chapters, whenever it is important to remind you about its importance and to explore its benefits. I am sure this chapter and this book will help you so much, and centralization based on logic will become your strong strategic weapon.

We will start with some endgame examples, continue with more complex middlegame examples, and eventually present some whole games.



Game 1

♙ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2270)
 ♚ Marcetic, Nikola (2295)
 🌐 Yugoslavia 1995



This diagram is from the author's practice. It is evident that White is much better, thanks to his king's activity. The black king simply cannot get to the center as fast as the white one. Moreover, the black knight is in danger of being locked out. Both the black pieces are so passive, and this makes the evaluation clear. The exposed a4-pawn just aggravates Black's problems. But, I am sure, even without such an exposed pawn Black would have no serious chances to hold – White's superb centralization gives him chances on both flanks.

33. ♔e3

White naturally uses his active king before the black king enters the center.

33... ♔f7?!

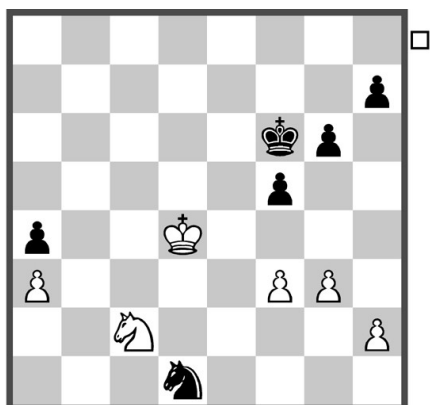
A natural move, which makes White's task simpler.

33... ♘c4+ would be a better defense.
Still, after 34. ♔d4 ♘d2 35. ♔d3! ♘f3
36. h4 followed by attacking the a4-
pawn White will be set for victory.

34. ♔d4 ♞d1

34... ♔e6 35. ♞e3! Black will lose his knight!

35. f3 ♔ f6



Position after: 35... ♔f6

36. ♖b4!

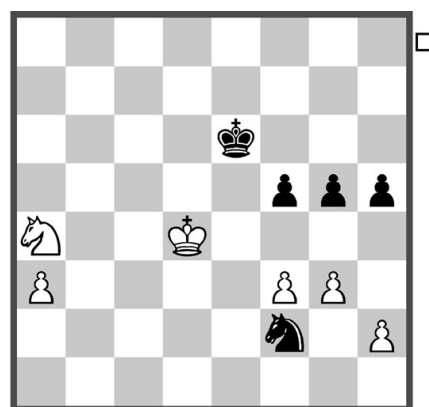
White's king is perfect in the center. It paralyzes both the black knight and the black king. So the white knight must collect the a4-pawn. It goes to

attack that pawn with the help of a check.

36... g5 37. ♖d5+ ♔e6 38. ♖b6 h5

Black tries to organize something, but there is no real action on the kingside. Black can only hope to complicate White's task by reducing the pawn material on the kingside.

39. xa4 f2

Position after: 39... f2

40. c5+

Once again White takes care to exclude the black knight from play. Superb centralization makes that possible.

40... ♔d6 41. ♘d3 ♘h3

41... ♖d1 loses after, for instance,
42. f4 g4 43. a4.

42. f4

White wants to keep the black knight out of play forever. There is no sense in rushing to advance the a-pawn. Sooner

or later it will deflect the black king away from the kingside.

42... h4

Trying to complicate.

43. gxh4!

Maybe not so obvious, but it is definitely not complicated to find this move.

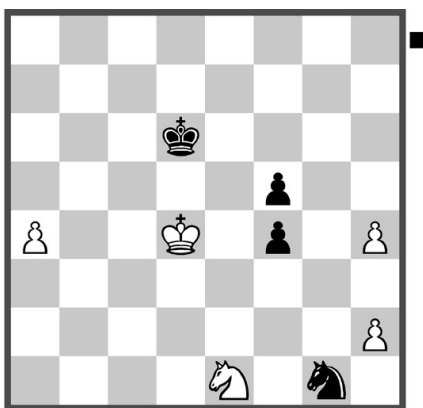
43... gxf4

43... gxh4 44. ♔e3 The knight is lost.

44. a4

Right now. Black is unable to take care simultaneously of both the a- and h-passed pawns.

44... ♞g1 45. ♞e1



Position after: 45. ♞e1

Keeping control of the f3-square.

45... ♞e2+ 46. ♔c4 ♞g1 47. ♔d3

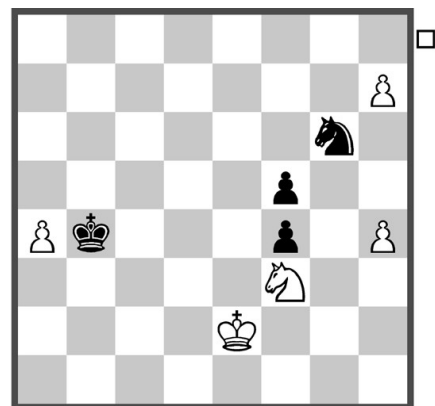
I just continued following the same strategy.

47. h5 would also win easily after, for instance, 47... f3 48. ♞d3 ♞h3 49. h6 ♞g5 50. ♔d4.

47... ♔c5 48. h5!

Now!

48... ♞h3 49. h6 ♞g5 50. h4 ♞f7 51. h7 ♞e5+ 52. ♔e2 ♞g6 53. ♞f3 ♔b4



Position after: 53... ♔b4

Here, being irritated by my opponent's resistance to the very end, I allowed myself to do something I would never advise to anyone else.

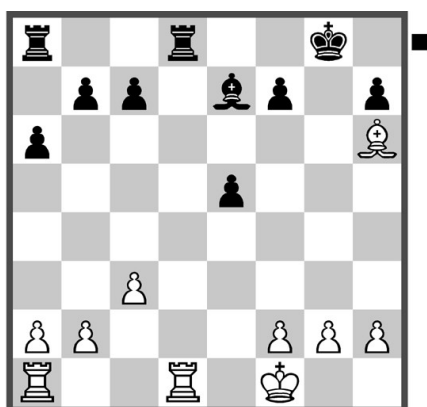
54. ♞e5?

54. h5 would show more respect to the opponent and to the game of chess.

54... f3+ 55. ♔f1 ♞h8 56. h5 ♔xa4 57. ♞g6 1-0

Game 2

♙ Znosko Borovsky, Eugene
 ♚ Alekhine, Alexander
 🌐 Paris 1933



A simple and boring position? How is it possible to create anything there? Yes, Black has slightly better centralization, especially after the next obvious move.

17... f5!

But is that so drastic? Well, it can be. Let's see how the virtuoso Alekhine, of course with some help from his opponent, proves there are many possibilities and superbly realizes his advantage.

18. ♖xd8+?!

White goes for simplifications against his terrible opponent.

18. ♔e2 looks more normal. Then with the obvious 18... ♔f7 Black will keep some plus.

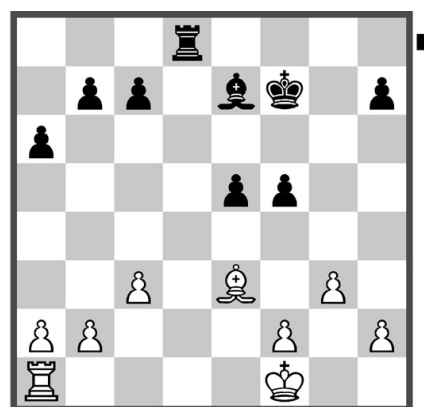
18... ♖xd8 19. g3?!

White already faces some problems.

A) 19. ♔e2?! f4! And there is the problem of the bishop out of play on h6.

B) 19. ♗e3? would surprisingly lead to a lost position after 19... f4!.

19... ♔f7 20. ♗e3



Position after: 20. ♗e3

20. ♔e2 was also possible, and perhaps better.

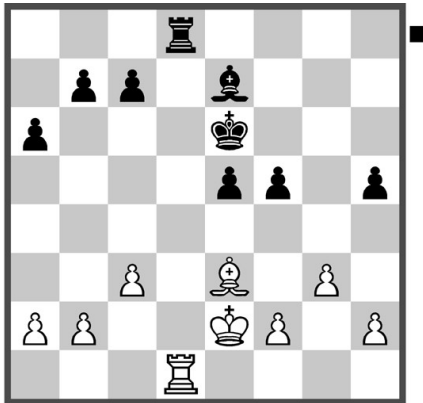
20... h5!

Typical of the great Alekhine! Detecting that White is hesitant, he goes for active play. Psychologically, he forces White to go deeper and deeper into defense.

21. ♔e2

21. h4 ♔e6 could not satisfy White – Black will gain another advantage because White's kingside pawns are fixed on the color of the bishop.

21... ♔e6 22. ♖d1



Position after: 22. ♖d1

22... ♖g8!

Black naturally keeps the rooks on the board.

22... ♖xd1 would give Black nothing because after 23. ♔xd1 White would be able to erect a strong barrier with pawns on b3 and f3.

23. f3

23. h4 ♖g4!

23... h4!

If you want to learn to play in a direct and straightforward way then Alekhine is an excellent mentor.

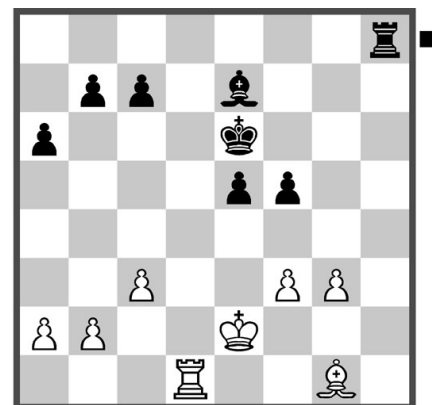
24. ♗f2

24. gxh4? ♖g2+ is just winning.

24... hxg3 25. hxg3 ♖h8

Black has got rid of his potentially weak pawn and opened a file for his rook. Those are real benefits but still nothing definite is apparent.

26. ♗g1



Position after: 26. ♗g1

26. c4 was probably better. The idea is to put the pawns on light-colored squares to set up a barrier and to make them safe from attacks by the enemy bishop.

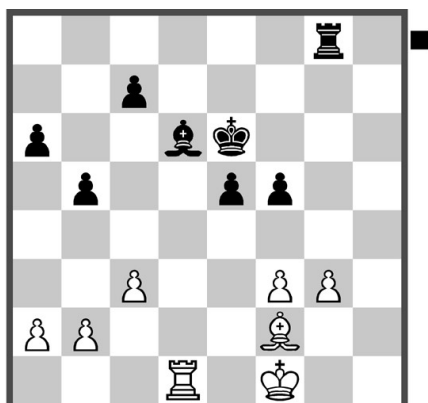
26... ♗d6

26... b5! was better, to prevent White's play as explained in the previous note.

27. ♔f1?!

27. c4!

27... ♖g8 28. ♗f2 b5



Position after: 28... b5

Finally Black plays this move, fixing the white pawns and gaining space. It is easy to see how centralization enables active play on both flanks. After playing on the kingside and making some progress there, Black switches to the queenside. White, having such passive pieces, must play on the side where his opponent decides to operate.

29. b3 a5 30. ♔g2

30. a4? just hastens defeat after 30... bxa4 31. bxa4 ♖b8.

30... a4?!

30... ♖h8 first is more methodical. Then 31. ♖h1? would not satisfy White due to 31... ♖xh1 32. ♔xh1 ♔d5 with the idea of ...e4.

31. ♖d2?

31. ♖h1 was evidently better. White still has some chances with an active rook.

31... axb3 32. axb3 ♖a8

White has definitely been outplayed.

33. c4 ♖a3

33... b4 was another good option.

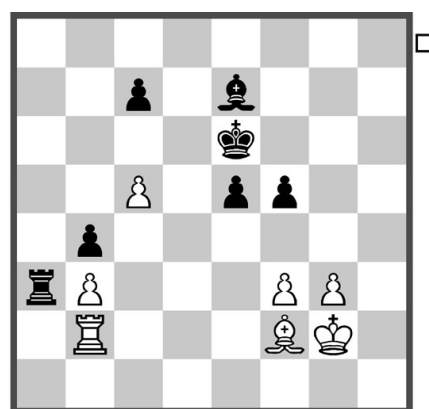
34. c5

Desperation.

A) 34. cxb5 ♖xb3—+

B) 34. ♖b2 bxc4 35. bxc4 ♖c3—+

34... ♙e7 35. ♖b2 b4



Position after: 35... b4

This move effectively isolates the c5-pawn. The game is practically over.

36. g4 f4!

Excellent. Black keeps the white pieces passive.

37. ♔f1 ♖a1+ 38. ♔e2 ♖c1 39. ♖a2

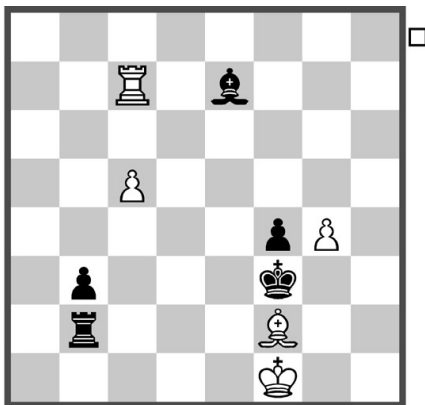
♖c3 40. ♜a7 ♔d7 41. ♜b7 ♜xb3

Black wins material and the result is decided.

42. ♜b8 ♜b2+ 43. ♔f1 b3 44. ♔g1 ♔c6 45. ♔f1 ♔d5

Again centralization.

46. ♜b7 e4 47. fxe4+ ♔xe4 48. ♜xc7 ♔f3



Position after: 48... ♔f3

And centralization produces a mating attack.

49. ♜xe7 ♜xf2+ 50. ♔e1 b2 51. ♜b7 ♜c2 52. c6 ♔g3 53. c7 f3 54. ♔d1 ♜xc7 55. ♜xb2 f2

White resigned. Without making any bad mistakes White lost, almost smoothly. The logical consequence of playing with passive pieces against a centralized army.

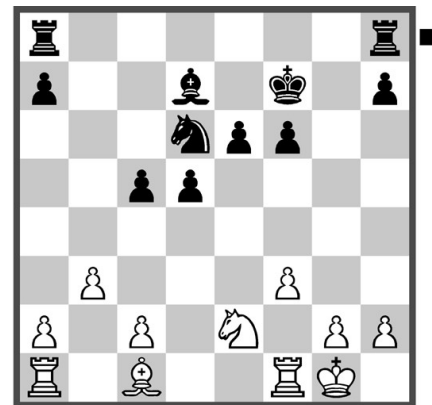
0-1

Game 3

♖ Bogoljubow, Efim

♜ Reti, Richard

♚ Moravska Ostrava 1923



In our next diagram the position is much better for Black. His central pawns will soon put enormous pressure on White's position, forcing his troops to retreat in panic. Black will easily finish his development, posting his pieces behind his pawns and supporting them. Strategically, White has been totally outplayed.

19... e5 20. ♖a3 ♜ac8

The right rook. The other rook will be needed on the d-file, in order to prepare the advance of his pawns.

21. ♜ad1 d4

An instructive moment. In order to achieve full harmony the pawns and the knight should be placed on squares of

the same color and the bishop on squares of the opposite color! At the same time Black restricts White's minor pieces, especially the bishop, and secures the e3-square for his knight.

22. ♖c1 ♘f5

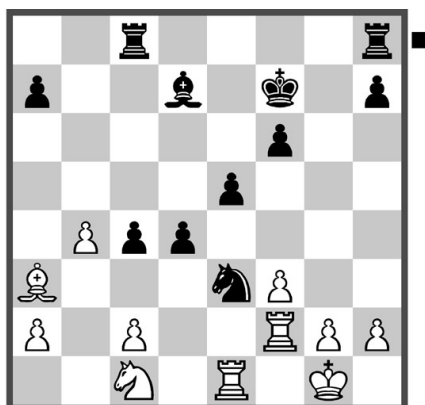
Black has found a target, the pawn on c2.

23. ♖f2 ♘e3 **24.** ♖e1 c4

Direct play. White is just lost – a triumph of centralization.

24... ♙f5 was also a good move, but the move played is better.

25. b4



Position after: 25. b4

In this hopeless situation for White there are many winning plans. Black found a really beautiful maneuver.

25... ♙a4! **26.** ♖ee2 ♘d1 **27.** ♖f1 ♘c3 **28.** ♖ef2 ♘b1?

But Black fails to carry out his maneuver the right way. He had missed White's 30th move.

28... ♘b5 29. ♙b2 c3 30. ♙a1 would win easily – White is really playing without a bishop. A perfect example of how a centralized army easily crushes the opponent's troops. This time it is not about destroying, it is about imprisoning.

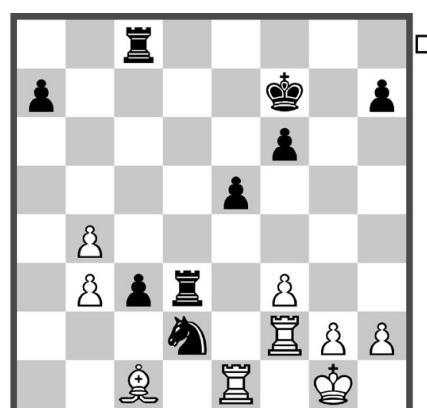
29. ♙b2 c3 **30.** ♘b3

This move delays resignation. Black is forced to find more good moves to convert his advantage into victory.

30... ♙xb3! **31.** axb3

31. ♖xb1 ♙xa2 **32.** ♖a1 cxb2

31... ♘d2 **32.** ♖e1 ♖hd8! **33.** ♙c1 d3! **34.** cxd3 ♖xd3



Position after: 34... ♖xd3

The series of forced moves has finished. White is close to defeat.

35. ♖xd2 ♜xd2

Black transforms the endgame into a trivial one

36. ♜a1 ♔e6 37. ♔f1 ♜xf2+ 38. ♔xf2 c2 39. ♜c1 ♔d5 40. ♔e3 ♜c3+ 41. ♔d2 ♔d4

White is in zugzwang.

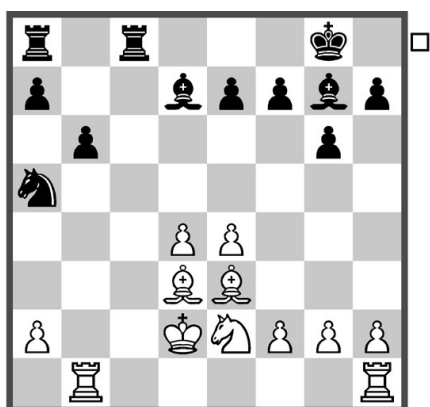
42. h4 ♜d3+

White resigned.

0-1

Game 4

♟ Jussupow, Artur (2665)
♞ Khalifman, Alexander (2650)
♠ Ubeda 1997



White is obviously better. His pawn center is so powerful and it makes a perfect shield for his pieces and his king, at the same time causing some disorder in Black's army.

16. ♖a6

White takes control over the c8-square, aiming to seize the c-file.

16. ♜hc1 was another logical approach, with the idea of directly switching to a minor-piece endgame.

16... ♜d8

16... ♜c7 17. ♜hc1 ♜xc1 18. ♜xc1±

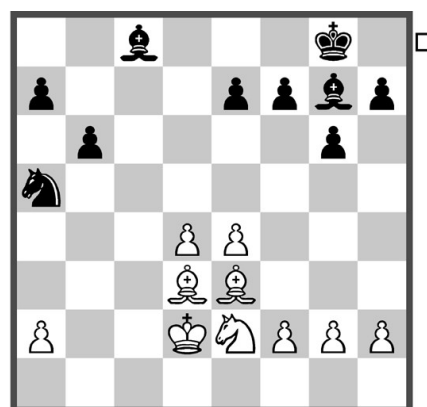
17. ♜hc1 ♖c8 18. ♖d3

When you have a space advantage and a mobility advantage it is useful to keep pieces on the board.

18... ♖b7 19. ♜c7 ♜ac8 20. ♜bc1 ♜xc7 21. ♜xc7 ♜c8 22. ♜xc8+

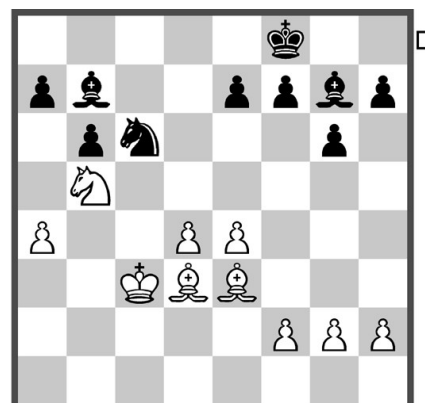
22. ♜xe7? ♖f8 23. ♜e5 [23. ♜d7? ♖b4+ 24. ♔d1 ♖c6-] 23... ♖b4+ 24. ♔d1 ♖c6∞

22... ♖xc8



Position after: 22... ♖xc8

The situation has crystallized. After the more or less forced exchange of all the rooks, we have a minor-piece endgame. White has kept a stable advantage due to his better mobility and more space. All of that due to the powerful pawn center. However, White must take care about further exchanges of pieces – Black's queenside majority has traditionally been seen as a plus.



Position after: 26... Bb7

23. Nc3

Eyeing the b5- and d5-squares.

23... Nc6 **24.** Nb5

White tries to provoke the advance of the black pawns. That would make infiltration easier.

24... Ba6 **25.** Kc3 Kf8?!

The king goes towards the center, but this is not the best plan.

25... e6!? was a logical move. Black would try to prevent White's further expansion and reactivate his bishop via f8.

26. a4!

The pawn is safe there and it liberates the bishop.

26... Bb7

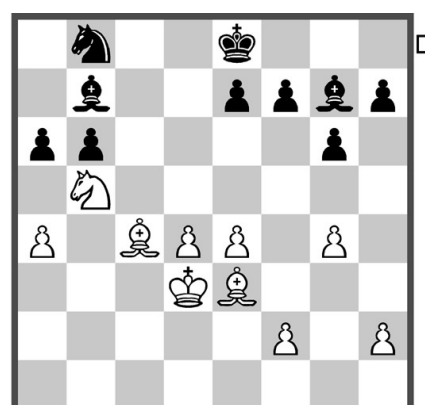
27. g4!?

White expands on the kingside, according to the principle that one should play on the side where one is stronger. Also, this move was played to deter the potential ...f5 strike, which could disrupt White's center.

27... Ke8 **28.** Bc4 Nb8 **29.** Kd3

Of course, not 29. Nxa7 Bxe4.

29... a6

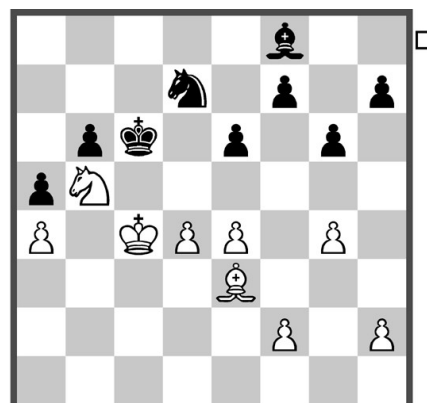


Position after: 29... a6

The knight is under attack. White has provoked ...a6 and now targets the b6-pawn.

30. ♖c7+! ♔d8 31. ♘d5 ♘d7

Black's pieces are more and more passive. The knight on d7 is just a pathetic defender well restricted by the d4-pawn.



Position after: 37... ♕f8

31... ♕xd5 32. ♕xd5 e6 33. ♕c4 This would lead to a hopeless position for Black. White would add the bishop pair to his list of advantages

32. ♘b4!

Attacking both the a6- and f7-pawns.

32... a5

Forced.

33. ♕d5!

This is the point.

33... ♕xd5

A) 33... ♔c8 34. ♕xb7+ ♔xb7 35. ♘c2
This looks awful for Black.

B) So does 33... ♕c8 34. ♘c6+ ♔e8 35. ♕c4.

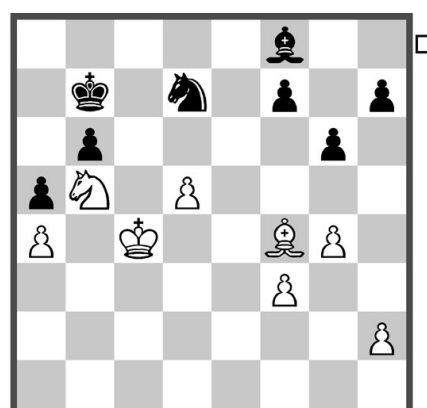
34. ♘xd5 e6 35. ♘c3 ♔c7 36. ♘b5+ ♔c6 37. ♔c4 ♕f8

After a series of easy-to-understand moves, White has just increased his advantage. Black's majority is blocked and useless. White has stable control of the b5- and c4-squares and is ready to use his central majority. But first it is useful to fully activate the pieces.

38. ♕f4 ♕b4 39. f3

Another small improvement. There is no need to rush.

39... ♕f8 40. d5+ exd5+ 41. exd5+ ♔b7



Position after: 41... ♔b7

42. ♘d6+!

The most direct way to win.

42... ♖xd6 43. ♖xd6

White's bishop is dominant. White is practically ahead on material because of the paralyzed black knight.

43... g5

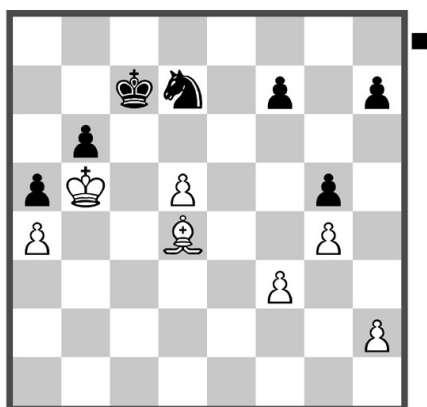
A) Waiting is not good because after 43... ♔a6 44. g5! ♔b7 45. ♔b5 Black faces zugzwang. White wins with 45... f6 46. h4 f5 47. f4.

B) 43... ♞f6 44. g5 The knight is trapped in all lines. 44... ♞e8 [44... ♞h5 45. ♖e5+–; 44... ♞g8 45. ♔b5+–] 45. ♖e5+–

44. ♖g3 ♞f6

44... ♔a6 is not good enough in view of 45. d6 h6 [45... ♔b7 46. ♔b5 ♞f6 47. ♖e5 ♞d7 48. ♖d4+– zugzwang!] 46. ♖f2 ♞e5+ 47. ♔d5+–.

45. ♖e5 ♞d7 46. ♖d4 ♔c7 47. ♔b5



Position after: 47. ♔b5

47... f6

A) 47... ♔d6 48. ♖xb6 ♞xb6 49. ♔xb6 ♔xd5 50. ♔xa5 ♔c5! 51. ♔a6 ♔c6 52. a5+–

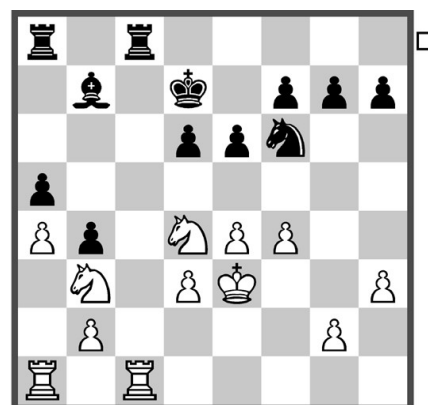
B) 47... ♔b7 48. d6+–

48. ♖f2 ♔d6 49. ♖xb6 ♞e5 50. ♖xa5 ♞xf3 51. ♖c3

1-0

Game 5

♖ Tal, Mikhail (2620)
♜ Kochyev, Alexander
🌐 Russia 1977



This game will introduce the fabulous attacker Tal in a different role. This endgame is proof that he was also an amazing strategic player. The diagram position arose from a Paulsen/Taimanov Sicilian. Black's advance of his queenside pawns is natural, but after Tal managed to exchange queens and remove his pawn from the exposed c2-

square a double-edged middlegame transformed into an endgame clearly favorable for White. Black's advanced pawns are just weak and objects for attack. From this point of view, Black's advance may be counted as just a diversion on the flank. Such flank diversions must be broken with powerful centralization. And that is exactly what White has! The black minor pieces are well restricted by White's powerful central pawn wall, which at the same time provides very comfortable spots for the white knight and king. Let's see how Tal logically proved that Black is hopeless — centralization must crush flank activities!

21. $\text{N}d2!$

Tal regroupes his cavalry. The black a5-pawn is his main target. The knights should be placed on b3 and c4!

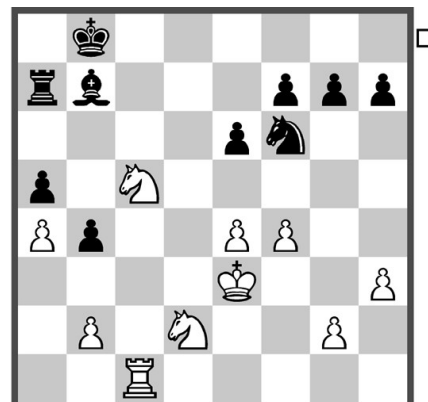
21... $\text{R}a6$ 22. $\text{R}xc8$ $\text{K}xc8$ 23. $\text{N}4b3$

23. $\text{N}c4$ leads to some complications, which White wanted to avoid. After 23... $d5$ 24. $\text{N}e5$ $dxe4$ 25. $\text{R}c1+$ $\text{K}d8$ 26. $\text{N}xf7+$ $\text{K}e8$ 27. $\text{N}g5$ White keeps the advantage, but why let the black army activate itself?

23... $d5$ 24. $\text{N}c5$ $\text{R}a7$ 25. $\text{R}c1$

Take a look at the position and compare White's centralized army and Black's dispersed forces. The game is practically over!

25... $dxe4$ 26. $dxe4$ $\text{K}b8$



Position after: 26... $\text{K}b8$

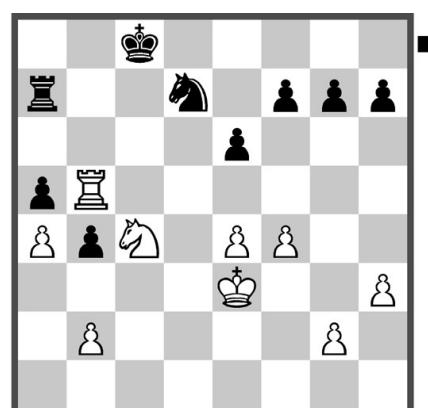
27. $\text{N}xb7!$

Tal chooses the simplest and most direct way to secure penetration and to attack the weak pawn on a5.

27... $\text{K}xb7$

27... $\text{R}xb7$ 28. $\text{R}c5$ This is even worse for Black.

28. $\text{R}c5$ $\text{N}d7$ 29. $\text{R}b5+$ $\text{K}c8$ 30. $\text{N}c4$



Position after: 30. $\text{N}c4$

Another important picture to understand the concept of centralization.

Please, dear reader, compare the white and black pieces at this moment.

30... ♖c7 **31.** ♔d4!

There is no reason to rush. Again, the concept of centralization!

31... f6

Black tries to set up some sort of barrier.

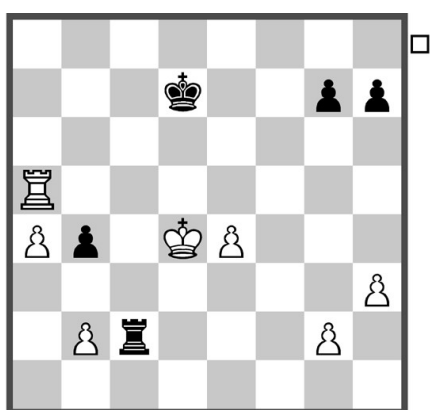
32. ♖xa5

Finally White wins material.

32... e5+

A desperate attempt to activate the rook, but it will cost Black more material. The rest is trivial.

33. fxe5 fxe5+ 34. ♞xe5 ♖c2 **35.** ♞xd7 ♔xd7



Position after: 35... ♔xd7

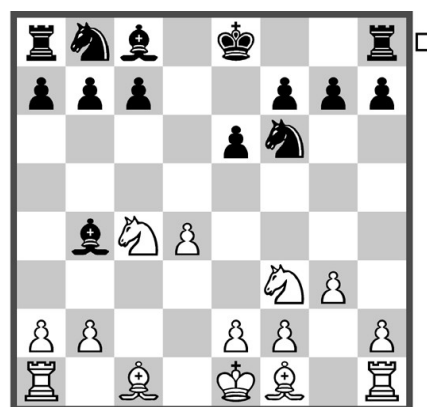
Now it's just a matter of technique. No big deal for the Great Pirate from Riga.

36. ♖a7+ ♔e6 **37.** ♖xg7 ♖xb2 **38.** g4 h5 **39.** gxh5 b3 **40.** h6

1-0

Game 6

♟ Botvinnik, Mikhail
♟ Vidmar, Milan Sr
♟ Staunton Memorial 1946



We can hardly call this an endgame. But very soon some pieces will be traded and this is an important moment to start with. White has better development and some chances to establish control over the center. He played a natural move.

9. ♞d2 ♞xd2+ **10.** ♞fxd2!

A very important moment and a very instructive move. White does not recapture with the king although that may look natural, intending to connect the rooks. Instead White opens the long diagonal for the bishop on g2 and uses

the moment to transfer his knight towards the queenside. White will target the black queenside with all his pieces. At the same time White makes it possible to establish pawn control over the center with e4 and possibly f3 or f4.

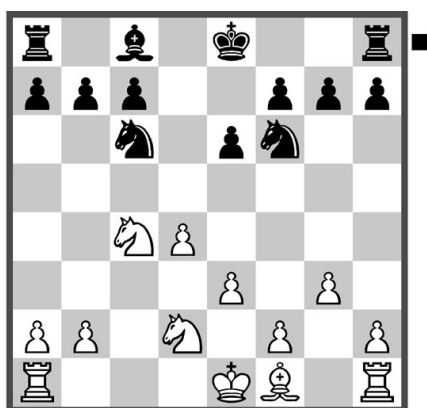
10. ♔xd2 ♘e4+ [or simply 10... b6]
11. ♔e3 ♘d6 looks less promising for White than the continuation played in the game.

10... ♘c6

Black suddenly has problems to finish the development of his queenside.

10... ♖d7 11. ♖g2 ♖c6 12. 0-0 White has better chances.

11. e3



Position after: 11. e3

11... ♘b4?!

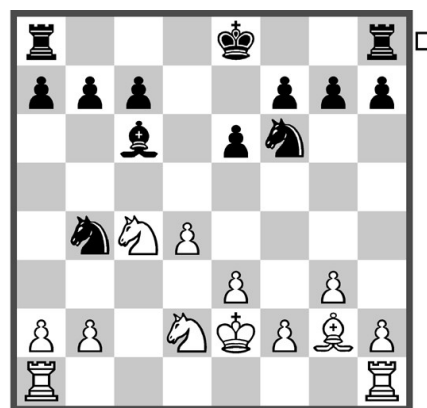
This is just a diversion. With undeveloped pieces and a lack of space, it cannot be a good solution. The result

of the move played is just a waste of time. 11... ♖d7 was needed. After 12. ♖g2 0-0-0 13. ♔e2 White is evidently (much) better, but that would be the lesser evil for Black.

12. ♔e2!

Eliminating the primitive threat while supporting development and centralization.

12... ♖d7 13. ♖g2 ♖c6



Position after: 13... ♖c6

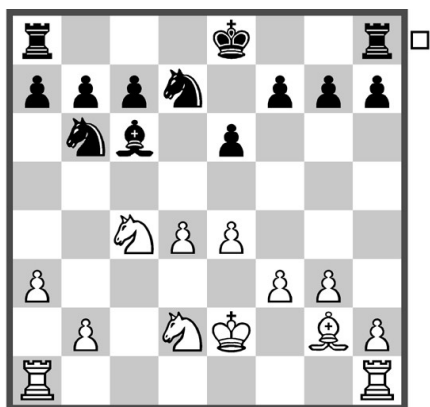
14. f3!

I like this move so much. It may look as though White renders his own bishop passive while making the black bishop an “attacker”. Yes, but after the inevitable e4, White will launch his central pawn mass. In this case it will be good to keep pieces on the board – the powerful phalanx will drive the black minor pieces back and help the white pieces become very active!

14... ♘d7 15. a3

White begins the procedure mentioned above.

15... ♞d5 16. e4 ♞5b6



Position after: 16... ♞5b6

17. ♞a5!

Such a simple and excellent move. White attacks both the bishop and the b7-pawn, threatening to destroy the black queenside. Actually, the a5-square is a very comfortable spot for the white knight which, together with the bishop on g2, puts tremendous pressure on the b7-square and the black queenside in general.

17... ♞b5+ 18. ♔e3 0-0-0

Black has dealt with the immediate threats but his position remains awful.

19. ♖hc1 ♞b8 20. b3 ♞d7

If Black must go in for this, it is clear that his opening strategy is wreckage. Stay there for a moment to compare the

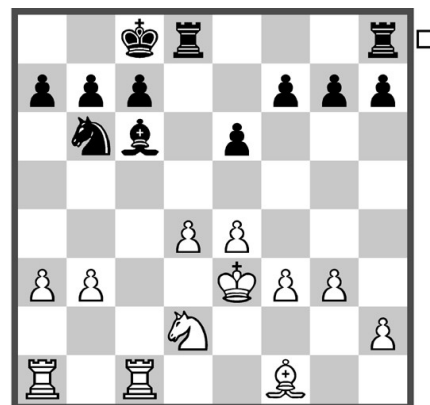
white and black armies, the centralized and the scattered army.

20... ♞c6 21. a4!+-

21. ♞f1 ♞c6!

Black naturally reduces White's pressure by trading a passive piece for an active one.

22. ♞xc6 ♞xc6



Position after: 22... ♞xc6

23. a4!

White drives the black pieces further and further back.

23... ♞e8 24. a5 ♞a8

24... ♞d7 25. a6 b6 26. ♖c3 ♞b8 27. ♖ac1 ♖c8 28. ♞c4 White plans ♞d6, just winning.

25. a6 b6 26. b4

While the white army is centralized and

harmonious, the black army makes a tragicomic impression.

26... ♔b8

26... c6 27. ♙b5 ♔c7 28. ♙xc6+-

27. ♖c3

27. b5! would finally lock up the entire black army.

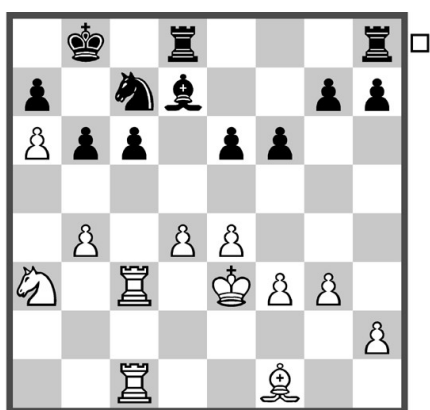
27... c6 28. ♖ac1 f6

Preventing ♘d2-c4-e5.

29. ♞b1

The white knight finds another route.

29... ♙d7 30. ♞a3 ♞c7



Position after: 30... ♞c7

31. b5! ♞xb5 32. ♙xb5?

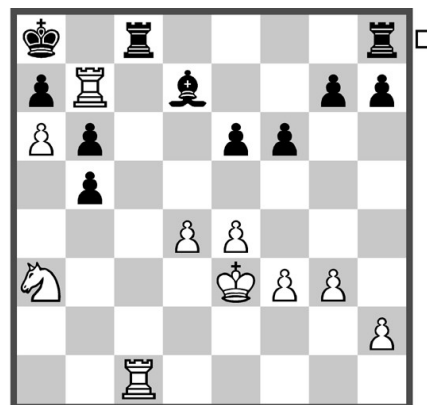
32. ♞xb5! cxb5 33. ♖c7 This would give a clear win after 33... ♖c8 34. ♖b7+ ♔a8 35. ♖xc8+ ♙xc8 36. ♖xg7 ♙xa6 37. ♖f7.

32... cxb5 33. ♖c7 ♖c8

This loses.

33... ♙c8! was the best defense. 34. ♞xb5 ♖d7! 35. ♖xd7 ♙xd7 36. ♞xa7 ♔xa7 37. ♖c7+ ♔xa6 38. ♖xd7 ♖c8 White stands better but Black has some small chances of survival.

34. ♖b7+ ♔a8



Position after: 34... ♔a8

35. ♖xd7!!

This was White's point. The knight and the rook will create a deadly combination and Black is simply helpless.

35... ♖xc1 36. ♞xb5 ♖hc8 37. ♖xg7

37. ♖xa7+ ♔b8 38. ♖xg7 Of course, this is also winning.

37... h6 38. ♖xa7+ ♔b8 39. ♖b7+ ♔a8 40. ♖a7+ ♔b8 41. ♖b7+ ♔a8 42. g4

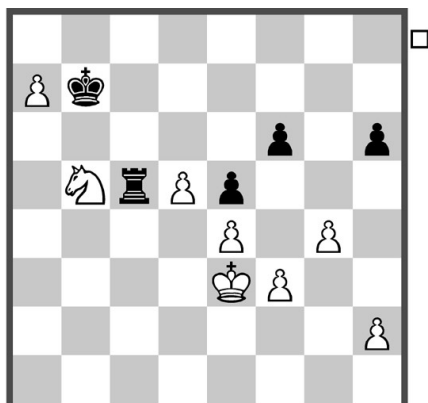
42. ♖e7 was more methodical.

42... e5

Black tries his luck with some complications.

42... ♖b1 43. ♘c7++–

43. d5 ♖1c5 44. ♖a7+ ♔b8 45. ♖b7+ ♔a8 46. ♖xb6 ♖b8 47. ♖xb8+ ♔xb8 48. a7+ ♔b7



Position after: 48... ♔b7

49. ♘d6+

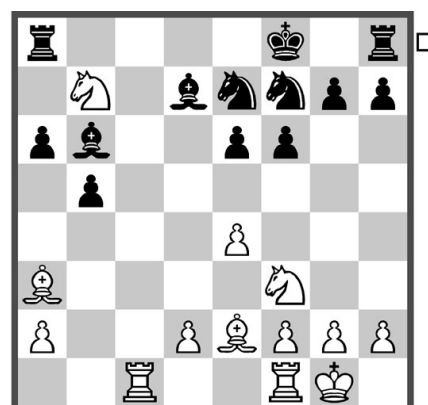
White goes for the simpler and more prosaic win.

49. d6 would also win after 49... ♖c8 50. ♔d3 ♖c1 51. h4 and Black is hopeless.

49... ♔xa7 50. ♘e8 ♔b6 51. ♘xf6++ ♖c3+ 52. ♔f2 ♖c7 53. h4 ♖f7 54. ♘h5 ♔c7 55. g5! hxg5 56. hxg5 ♖h7 57. ♘f6 ♖h2+ 58. ♔g3 ♖h1 59. ♔g2 ♖h8 60. g6
1-0

Game 7

♟ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2386)
♞ Djuric, Zoran (2234)
♠ Serbia 2008



This diagram illustrates an atypical position. But, still it is not difficult to reach a diagnosis – White is much better. There is no harmony in the black army and the king is unsafe. Black has not completed his development and has problems with White's powerful centralization. Having good centralization against uncentralized troops, a player must build up his own centralization. The next move is obvious.

20. d4 ♘d8

Trying to reduce material and make space for the king.

20... ♖c8 can be chosen with the same idea of reducing material. Nevertheless, after 21. ♘d2! ♙xd4 22. ♘b3 ♙b6 23. ♘7c5 Black's position looks hopeless.

21. ♞c5!

Of course, White does not trade. This knight performs miracles in this game and is a real bone in the throat for Black. Do not allow exchanges when you have advantages in space and mobility.

21... ♖a7 22. d5!

The player having the initiative must play aggressively or the initiative might just vanish. The d5-pawn restricts the black knight on d8 and the bishop on d7. Also, the d4-square is vacated for the knight on f3.

22... ♔f7

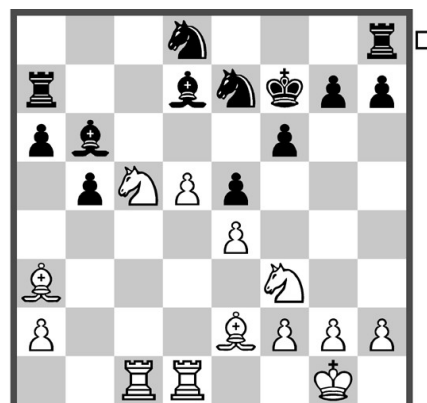
Capturing would just boost White's initiative. 22... exd5 23. exd5 Now Black is unable to prevent infiltration on the e6-square.

23. ♖fd1

23. ♖d1 was another good possibility. The idea is, of course, to place the bishop on b3 and support pressure on the e6-square. The fact that White has plenty of good possibilities is one more proof that Black's position is very bad.

23... e5

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 23... e5

That move blocks the position and slows White's attack. On the other hand, White gets a strong passer on the d-file. White has lost some aggressive possibilities, but his long-lasting advantage is enough to guarantee the win.

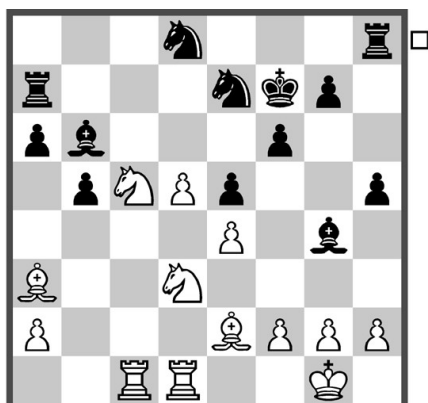
24. ♞e1

This knight is not needed on the kingside anymore. There are many good options for it on the queenside.

24... h5

Preventing White from playing ♖g4 after capturing on d7, but White is not obliged to capture this bishop. The other black one is more valuable — the bishop on b6 covers many weak squares on the queenside. White's knight perfectly is placed on c5 and he regroups patiently behind it.

25. ♞ed3 ♖g4



Position after: 25... Bg4

26. f3!

The pawn chain suggests that White should exchange the light-squared bishops, but that would help Black to reduce the pressure on him. The move played is much better; White gains a tempo and the black pieces remain stuck.

26... Bc8 27. Kf1 Ng6 28. Rd2

Time to double rooks.

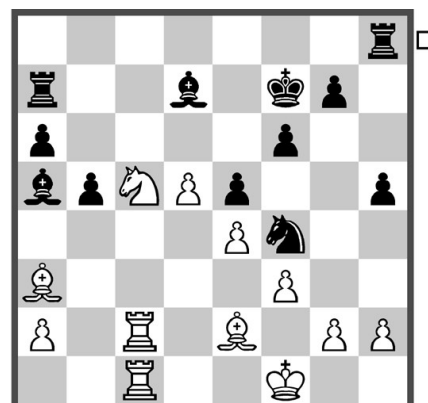
28... Nb7 29. Nb3

Keeping pieces on the board and threatening 30. Rxc6.

29... Bd7 30. Rdc2 Na5 31. Nxa5

Only now does White allow an exchange of material. The point is that he sees a possibility for infiltration.

31... Bxa5 32. Nc5 Nf4



Position after: 32... Nf4

A) 32... Bc8? 33. Nb3+-

B) 32... Be8 33. Nb3 Bb6 34. Rxc8+-

33. Nxd7

The simplest solution.

33... Rxd7 34. Rxc6

Black faces an unpleasant choice: to capture the bishop on e2 and continue playing with the worse bishop, or to play against the bishop pair which will soon become very dangerous. White also has much better pieces and a superior pawn structure, even the safer king. The position is already completely won for White.

34... Ra8 35. g3 Ng6 36. Bd1

Here I missed a much better move, because I had been focused on infiltrating the queenside and simultaneously activating this bishop.

36. f4! was immediately winning:
 36... ♖e7 [36... exf4 37. ♙xh5 ♜h8
 38. e5!] 37. fxe5 fxe5 [37... ♖xc6
 38. e6+] 38. ♜e6+.

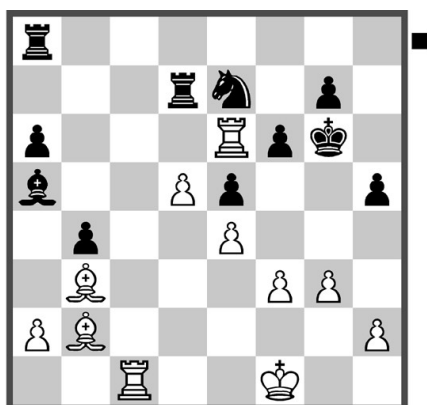
36... ♖e7 37. ♙b3

The black king must escape -- the white bishops are too dangerous.

37... ♔g6 38. ♜e6 b4

Black blocks one white bishop.

39. ♙b2



Position after: 39. ♙b2

39... ♙c7?

But now the other white bishop gets a fantastic diagonal.

A) 39... ♜b7 40. d6 ♖g8 41. ♙d5

B) 39... ♖g8 40. ♙xe5

40. ♙a4 ♜ad8 41. ♙xd7

Black plays on but his resistance is a

waste of time and no more comments are needed. With a few trivial tactical shots White easily converts his advantage.

41... ♜xd7 42. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 43. d6 ♜c6
 44. d7 ♜xe6 45. d8=♔ ♔f7 46. ♙c1
 ♜c6 47. ♙d2 ♜c2 48. ♙xb4 ♖c6
 49. ♔d5+ ♔g6 50. ♙c5 ♖a5 51. f4
 ♖c4 52. f5+ ♔h7 53. ♔e1 ♖b2
 54. ♙f8 ♜c1+ 55. ♔e2 ♜c2+ 56. ♔f3
 ♖c4 57. ♔f7 ♖d2+ 58. ♔e3 ♖f1+
 59. ♔d3 ♜d2+ 60. ♔c3

1-0

Game 8

♙ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2331)
 ♚ Zivanovic, Zoran (2062)
 ♛ Serbia 2006

1. e4 e5 2. ♖c3 ♖c6 3. ♙c4 ♙c5
 4. ♔g4

This move deserves a much better reputation. I think it is a logical attempt to exploit the unprotected g7-pawn. Actually, there is a strategic idea based on some tactical shots.

4... g6?!

Now White's idea gets validated – Black has voluntarily weakened his kingside. That move simply should not be played with the bishop already activated on c5.

4... ♔f6? is, by the way, a well-known mistake. After 5. ♘d5! ♔xf2+ 6. ♔d1 Black is hopeless due to problems with his c7- and g7-pawns and his queen in danger of being imprisoned.

5. ♔f3

Necessary, to avoid ...d5. And to get time to prevent ...♘d4.

5... ♔f6?

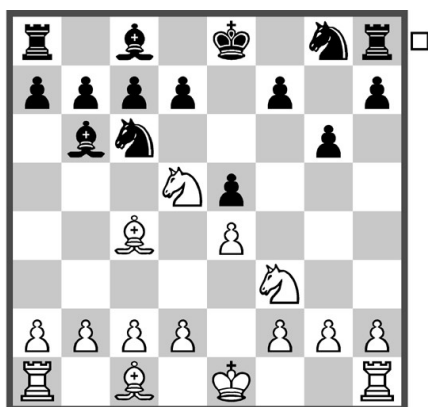
Even one move later that move is terrible. This time it is a strategic mistake.

5... ♘f6 6. ♘ge2 d6 7. d3 A double-edged position.

6. ♘d5!

With gain of tempo White establishes control over the entire center, at the same time accelerating development and restricting the black minor pieces.

6... ♔xf3 7. ♘xf3 ♙b6



This simple retreat proves that Black is basically unable to do anything. The knight goes to b3 and the pawn to f3 to reinforce the center.

12... 0-0-0 13. ♖b3 ♙a5+ 14. ♔f1!

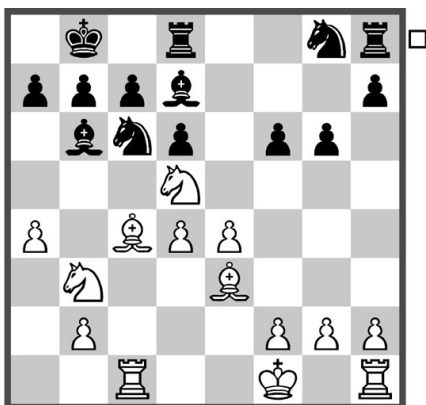
No way is White going to trade. Now he wants to harass that bishop, probably with ♙b5 attacking its defender.

14. ♖xa5 ♖xa5 15. ♙d3 This approach would not spoil anything, but White played a more methodical move.

14... ♔b8 15. ♖c1 ♙b6 16. a4

16. f3 followed by ♔f2 was another, trivial method to build the initiative. But White, standing perfectly in the center, decided to attack immediately on the flank. That is permissible when one has such an advantage.

16... ♙d7



Position after: 16... ♙d7

17. ♙b5?!

17. ♖a1! was a simpler solution and not too difficult to see. Then 17... ♙a5 [17... ♖a5 18. ♖xa5 ♙xa5 19. b4+—] 18. h4! would underline Black's helplessness.

17... ♖a5?!

An inaccuracy.

A) 17... f5!? was better although after 18. exf5 gxf5 19. g3 White keeps the advantage.

B) 17... ♙e6!? was another better solution. Still, after 18. ♙c4! White will keep all his pluses.

18. ♖d2!?

18. ♖xa5 was more direct. Now 18... ♙xa5 [18... ♙xb5+ 19. axb5 ♙xa5 20. h4! is hopeless for Black] 19. b4 c6 20. ♙f4 would keep a big advantage.

18... c6?

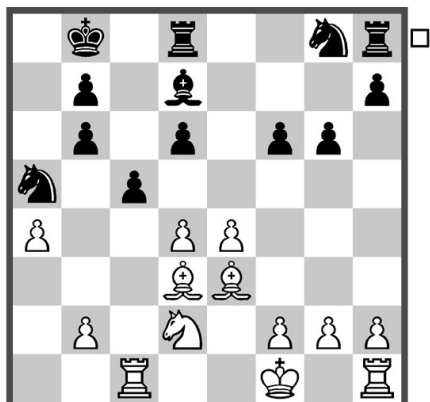
Black takes radical measures to get rid of the active white pieces, contrary to Nimzowitsch's advice to do it patiently. Disaster results.

18... ♖c6 was necessary though after 19. ♖b3 Black faces difficult problems.

19. ♖xb6 axb6

19... cxb5 20. ♖xd7+ ♖xd7 21. axb5+—

20. ♖d3 c5



Position after: 20... c5

To rescue the knight.

21. ♖f4

21. b4! cxb4 22. d5 That would be a beautiful win, crowning White's centralizing strategy.

21... ♖xa4 22. ♖a1 ♖c6?

22... c4 would delay resignation. But after 23. ♖xa4 cxd3 24. h4 with ideas of h5 and ♖h3-d3 the result will be clear.

23. dxc5 g5 24. ♖xd6+ ♖xd6 25. cxd6

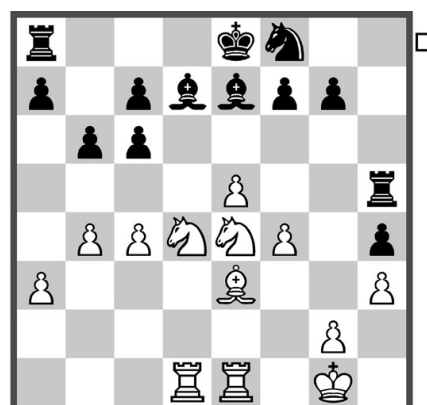
No more comments are needed.

25... ♖d7 26. b4 ♖c6 27. ♖c4 ♖e6 28. ♖xb6 ♖a7 29. ♖e2 ♖h6 30. ♖a5 ♖d8 31. ♖ha1 ♖xd6 32. ♖d5 ♖xd5 33. exd5

1-0

Game 9

♖ Motylev, Alexander (2675)
 ♜ Harikrishna, Pentala (2645)
 🌐 China 2005



This position arose from the Berlin Defense in the Ruy Lopez and Black has played a bit too passively. As a result White has achieved dangerous centralization while all the black pieces are on the rim. However, it looks like Black has managed to stop White's phalanx in the center and thus has a solid position, but he is about to receive a shock.

20. f5!?

White advances anyway.

20. c5 was a solid, more strategic option. After restricting Black's minor pieces and fixing the structure on the queenside White would be able to organize kingside play.

20... c5?

White's direct play confused and probably scared Black.

20... ♖xf5 was necessary, but after 21. g4! hxg3 22. ♘xg3 ♙g6 23. ♘h5 ♙h5 24. ♖d2 White wins the exchange. Although it is not clear if White can smoothly convert his advantage, it is clear that Black did something bad in the opening if he must go for this line.

21. f6!!

Black missed this powerful strike. He is just lost now.

21... gxf6

What else?

21... cxd4 22. fxg7+–

22. exf6 cxd4

22... ♙d8 23. bxc5 bxc5 24. ♙g5+–

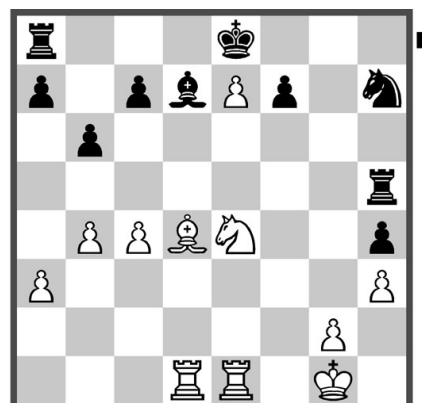
23. fxe7 ♘h7

A) 23... dxe3 24. exf8=♔+ ♔xf8 25. ♖xd7+–

B) 23... ♘e6 24. ♘f6++–

24. ♙xd4

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 24. ♙xd4

24... ♖h6

The storm has passed and everything is crystal clear now. The game is practically over. White won with straightforward play.

25. ♘c3 ♖c8 26. ♙e5

26. ♙f2 keeping the e7-pawn was another plan. It's a matter of style.

26... ♔xe7 27. ♙xc7+ ♙e6 28. ♘d5+ ♔f8 29. ♙f4

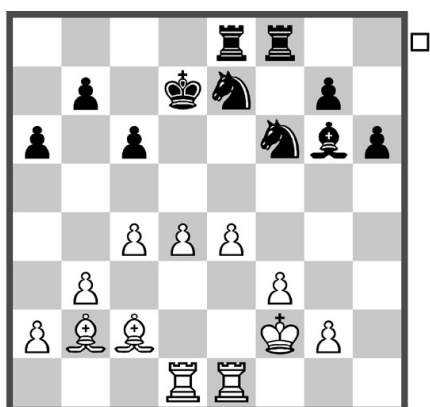
Complete chaos in the black army and perfect centralization of the white troops!

29... ♖g6 30. ♙d6+ ♔g7 31. ♘e7 ♖xc4 32. ♙e5+ ♔h6 33. ♘xg6 ♔xg6 34. ♖d4 ♘g5 35. ♖xc4 ♙xc4 36. ♙d4 ♘e6 37. ♙f2

1-0

Game 10

♙ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2393)
 ♚ Der Manuelian, Haik (2277)
 🌐 Serbia 2019



Here is a position with a material imbalance on the board. How to evaluate it? At first glance, White's space advantage secured by his powerful pawn center is clearly an important factor. Actually, it is crucial! Black cannot easily stop the white phalanx. Even if he sacrifices back a piece for two pawns, White will dominate with his bishop pair in an extremely open position with pawns on both flanks! Thus, Black's position is awful. White, naturally, did not hesitate. With all his pieces optimally placed, it is time for pawn play.

25. d5! ♞c8

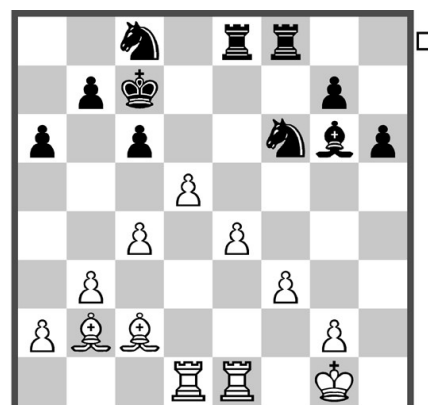
Black hopes to organize a blockade by provoking White into advancing further.

25... cxd5 26. cxd5 ♞exd5? [White wins easily after 26... ♞fxd5? 27. ♞xg7+–] 27. ♞xf6+–

26. ♞g1

Useful prophylaxis. This position presents a very instructive picture. I often ask my students to explore it. Simply, let's just look at ranks one to five and ask the question: where are the black pieces? By regarding the position this way one must come to this concrete conclusion: White has a tremendous mobility and space advantage due to his ultra-powerful pawn wall in the center.

26... ♞c7?!



Position after: 26... ♞c7?!

Black wanders around provoking advances. However, there is nothing real he can try.

27. d6+!?

White accepts the challenge.

27. ♖e2 and doubling rooks before the strike was probably a better option.

27... ♔d7 28. c5

I wanted to keep the knight out of play. I did not see how Black would be able to stop my phalanx.

28... b6?!

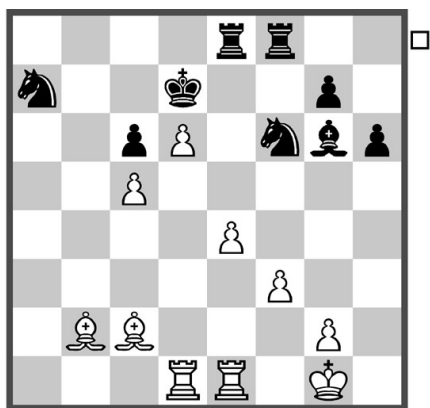
I had foreseen this desperate attempt to liberate the black army. It will just hasten Black's defeat.

29. b4 a5 30. a3

I followed my plan. If Black opens the position my rooks will invade. If he blocks the position, my pawn chain would keep his knight out of play.

30. cxb6 would be a more direct approach.

30... axb4 31. axb4 bxc5 32. bxc5 ♞a7



Position after: 32... ♞a7

That was Black's idea. Now White is just winning after a relatively simple regrouping.

33. ♖a1 ♞b5 34. ♙d3

With the simple idea of taking the knight and invading on the seventh rank.

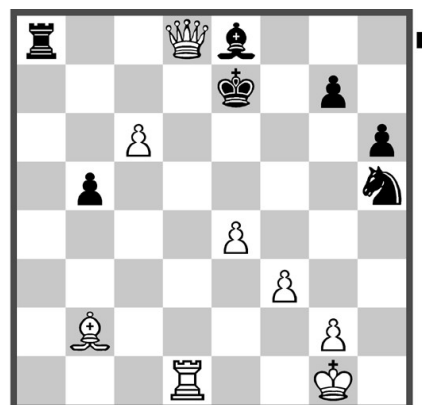
34... ♞h5

34... ♖a8 35. e5! ♖xa1 36. e6++—

35. ♙xb5 cxb5 36. ♖a7+ ♔e6 37. d7

This wins by force.

37... ♖a8 38. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 39. ♖d1 ♔e7 40. c6 ♙e8 41. d8=♚+!



Position after: 41. d8=♚+!

41... ♖xd8 42. ♙a3+! ♔f7 43. ♖xd8 ♙xc6 44. ♖c8 ♙d7 45. ♖c7

Black resigned.

1-0

Game 11

♚ Steinitz, William

♜ Potter, William

♜ Simul 1871

Let's now see a few games where players just neglected the concept of centralization and allowed the opponent to dominate the center. Beware in your future games — centralization is the supreme chess principle! Our next game is ancient, played in the era of romanticism. Attack was the supreme principle then. But, as you already know, attack without centralization means nothing.

1. e4 b6 2. d4 ♘b7 3. ♘d3 e6 4. ♘e2 ♘e7

Do not be astonished by Black's opening. That was 1871 and the game was played in a simul.

5. 0-0 ♘f6?

If previous moves are not labeled as bad, this one is a direct mistake. Black's idea was to provoke e5, to open the long light-squared diagonal and... deliver mate! Actually, Black just wastes time and allows White to implement powerful centralization.

6. e5!

Of course. White should say "Thanks" when playing that.

6... ♘g8 7. f4

White expands to punish Black's inaccuracy.

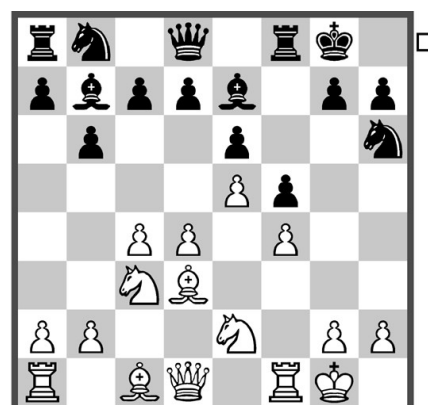
7... f5

I will not spend too much time showing and examining potential lines. Basically, that would not make much sense from this time distance. Black wants to activate his knight on h6 and open the g-file. As I said, he wants to directly mate his outstanding opponent.

8. c4!

Not only supporting centralization but also playing according to Nimzowitsch's principles established half a century later. White organizes an attack on Black's pawn-chain base on e6.

8... ♘h6 9. ♘bc3 0-0



Position after: 9... 0-0

10. h3!

This move prepares ♖e3 which will in turn prepare d5 — there will not be a bishop check on c5 anymore. White has enough time to organize whatever he wants.

But not 10. d5?. There's no reason to allow 10... ♗c5+.

10... a6

Restricting the knight on c3! The exclamation mark is given for Black's enthusiasm.

11. ♖e3 ♔h8 12. d5 ♕e8

Black follows his idea. Now his queen joins the "attack".

13. ♕b3

White finishes his development. The queen eyes the bishop on b7, with threats of c5 and d6.

13... ♖a7

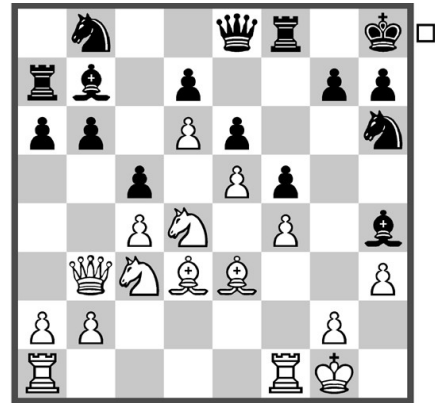
Surprisingly, Black chooses a "defensive" move.

14. d6!?

White immediately strikes.

14... ♗h4

14... cxd6 15. ♕xb6 ♖c6 16. ♖d4

15. ♖d4 c5

Position after: 15... c5

Black blocks with gain of tempo. It seems he has achieved something, and actually he is even setting a trap. Alas, White has a simple and strong reply.

16. ♖f3

But not 16. ♕xb6?? cxd4 17. ♕xa7 ♗xg2—+ and, rather surprisingly, Black will win!

16... ♗d8

Picturesque! I think you could hardly imagine a stranger setup for the black pieces.

16... ♗xf3 17. ♖xf3 ♗d8 18. ♗xc5+—

17. a4!

Again, White undermines Black's structure.

17... ♖c6 18. a5 ♘xa5 19. ♖xa5 ♙xf3

19... bxa5 20. ♙xc5+–

20. ♖xf3 g5

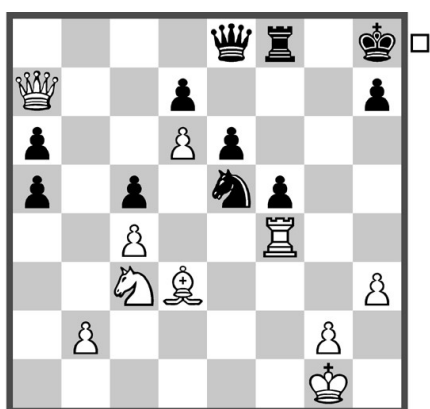
Finally Black launches his “attack”.

20... bxa5 21. ♙b8+–

21. fxg5 ♘f7 22. ♙f4

Steinitz really liked to win in style. He keeps offering the rook.

22... bxa5 23. ♙b8 ♙xg5 24. ♙xa7 ♙xf4 25. ♖xf4 ♘xe5



Position after: 25... ♘xe5

The dust is settling after the storm. White must re-establish centralization and harmony, and his material advantage will guarantee an easy win.

26. ♙e2 ♙b8 27. ♙xc5 ♘g6 28. ♖f2 ♙xb2 29. ♙xa5 ♙d2 30. ♙a3

White protects the d6-pawn. This clinches the win.

30... ♖b8 31. c5 ♙e3 32. ♙f1 ♖c8 33. ♙b2

Forcing simplifications.

33... ♙xc5 34. ♙xa6 ♖f8 35. ♘e4+ ♙e5 36. ♘c5! ♖f7 37. ♙c8 ♙xb2 38. ♖xb2 ♘e5 39. ♖e2 ♘c4 40. ♖xe6

As I said, he liked to win in style.

40... ♘b6 41. ♖e7 ♖f6 42. ♙xd7 ♖xd6 43. ♙xf5

Black resigned. Although it really looks like a big accomplishment to survive 40+ moves with such an “anti-centralizing” style, I think Black did not even manage to confuse the great Steinitz. All we got from this game is a very instructive lesson for the topic of the role of the center and centralization. For us that is more than enough!

1-0

Game 12

♙ Alekhine, Alexander

♚ Maroczy, Geza

♜ Karlsbad 1923

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 ♙e7 5. ♙g5 0-0 6. e3 ♘e4

This move is a famous maneuver freeing Black’s play. However, some problems