

WINNING CHESS STRATEGIES

By

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CHESS ELEVATION

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Introduction

I have written a number of books about “winning chess”, with the series adopting this title. All the rules and basic information were covered in my first book, *Play Winning Chess*; tactical themes were explored in my second book, *Winning Chess Tactics*; and now, in *Winning Chess Strategies*, I take you on a journey to a whole different level of chess understanding. On this level, you no longer spend entire games reacting to your opponent; instead, you are proactive. You think through a position, set a goal and methodically find ways to reach it.

Hundreds of thousands of books have been written about chess. What can you hope to learn from this one? With all modesty, a lot. The aim of this book is simple: to make you think about chess in a different way. In my two previous books, I showed you chess as an *art* and a *sport*. In this book, I show you chess as a *science*. My goal in this book is to make you realize that behind the pushing of little wooden men around a checkered board lies a lot of thought. Some of the ideas that make up the science of chess have been used for centuries – millennia, in fact. They have been researched, recreated and refined to suit our purposes and are used by today’s grandmasters to reach the perennial goal: to win that next game of chess.

To be able to understand the techniques I teach in the next 11 chapters, you should already know the following:

- You must know the *rules* of the game – how the pieces move, how to castle, what en passant is and so on. (You’ll find all these rules explained in *Play Winning Chess*.)
- You must know the *relative values of the pieces*.
- You should be familiar with *basic chess terminology*. For those of you who don’t know *luft* from a *fork*, and *counterplay* from a *blockade*, I’d advise you to have a look at the Glossary at the end of *Play Winning Chess*. If you don’t have that book yet, I’d say this is a mistake you need to hurry up and amend as quickly as possible.
- You must be able to read algebraic *chess notation*. If you can’t, the sample games will appear to be nothing but gibberish! Again, if that sounds foreign to you, I will once again suggest you consider getting a copy of *Play Winning Chess*.

- Though not absolutely necessary, you will find it useful to know the *four elements of chess* – *force* (material), *time*, *space* and *pawn structure* – and their associated principles, as described (you guessed it) in *Play Winning Chess*.

With these humble building blocks, I will teach you how to understand what is happening in any given chess position and how to formulate a plan for success based on the clues you can find in the position. By focusing on the positional features rather than the tactical features of the game, you will learn to build your strategy slowly and confidently, secure in the knowledge that the fundamental principles you are following can't lead you astray.

But isn't positional chess boring? Isn't it more exciting to sacrifice a few pieces and hack your enemy's king to death? Yes, a sacrificial attack is enormous fun, but just as a skilled counter-punching boxer can eventually knock out a pure slugger, a skilled positional chess player can usually take the force out of an attack and grind his opponent into the dust. You will learn that haymaker blows must come from positionally superior situations, which means that even the finest attackers in history have had to master planning and strategy. Few amateur players work at developing their strategic skills, so the fact that you are reading this book should give you an enormous advantage over your competition. Imagine your opponents' positions falling apart again and again, and imagine their frustration when they can't figure out why they keep losing to you! As a player who earned his living on the strength of his strategic skills, I can attest to the fact that it's no fun being squeezed to death by a positionally savvy opponent. But it's oh-so-satisfying to be the one who is doing the squeezing!

As in my previous books, I refer to all chess players as *he*. Boys and men continue to make up the majority of the chess playing public, though girls are increasingly interested in the sport – particularly following the screening of the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*. Hopefully, some of them will read this book, and some of them will go on to tournament competition armed with the strategic skills they will learn here. Watch out, men! They will be formidable opponents!

Yasser Seirawan, St. Louis, December 2025

CHAPTER 3

Stopping Enemy Counterplay

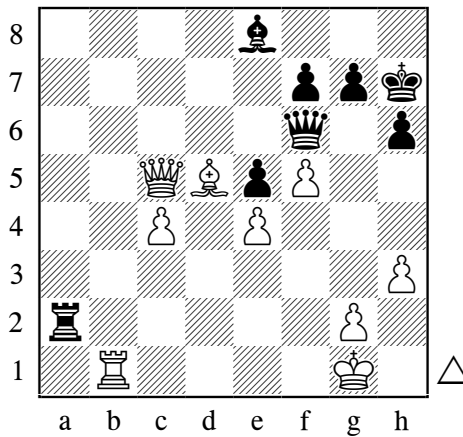


At some time or other, we all find ourselves with an advantage in position, be it large or small. It's part of the natural ebb and flow of the game. Whether we can convert that advantage into a win is a completely different matter. Rarely will your opponent be so depressed over his positional shortcomings that he will lay back and allow you to wreak havoc upon him. More than likely, he will begin his own aggressive action, fighting for some sort of counterplay. In these cases, you must stay calm, refuse to overreact and implement this strategy:

Try to find the perfect balance between defense and a continuation that furthers your own plans.

Mikhail Botvinnik – Ilia Kan

Leningrad 1939



Let's look at an example. This position is clearly winning for White, with his extra pawn and powerful centralized bishop.

However, Black has a trump of his own, his aggressively-placed rook on the 7th rank. The power of this piece enables him to threaten 1...♙g5. If White allows this move, Black will win; checkmate on g2 can be avoided only by 2.g4 (2.♙f2 loses the queen to 2...♜xf2) 2...♙d2, with a quick mate to follow.

How should White react? Threats to one's king often breed mindless terror. Many players would panic with something like 1.♙b4?? ♙g5 2.♜b2. The idea is good, as trading would indeed take the sting out of Black's attack. However, Black would then play 2...♙c1†, picking up the white rook and turning a lost position into an easy win.

Having seen the black threat, if all White thinks about is defense, he will lose the game. Instead, having noted the threat, he should look at his own advantages and try to combine an aggressive plan of action, that makes use of his pluses, with a defensive scheme. This is how it is done.

White is a pawn ahead. Because it is a passed pawn, he would love to push it down the board and create a new queen. What's preventing the promotion? The white queen is in the way of its

own pawn. He must move the queen if he wants to make immediate use of the extra pawn on c4. Now comes the critical decision: where can he move his queen that also prevents the threat of ...♖f6-g5? Because White has a material advantage, he would also love to trade queens. So White should play:

1. ♕e3!

This both stops the enemy attack in its tracks and furthers White's own goals.

In the following sections we will examine two methods of dealing with enemy counterplay. The first is to be on the alert for your opponent's tactical threats. The second is to keep your opponent as helpless as possible.

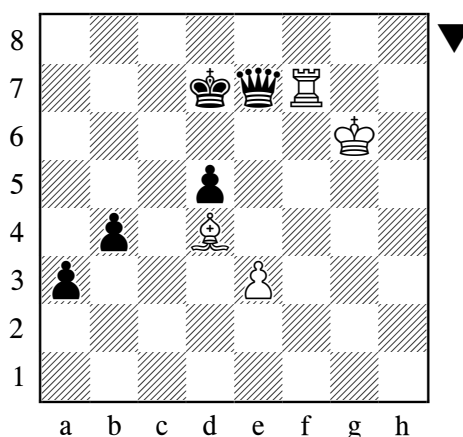
Spotting tactical threats

Often when you are winning a chess game, there comes a moment when you want to get things over with. As soon as your opponent moves, you rush in with your own response. This lack of care has led many potential victors down the road to oblivion. It takes only one moment of inattention to fall for some hidden tactical trick.

As I explain in *Winning Chess Tactics*, tactics are maneuvers that take advantage of short-term opportunities, with the goal of supporting your own strategy or destroying your opponent's strategy. For more information about specific tactics, I refer you to that book. Here, we will look at a couple of examples of what can happen if you underestimate your opponent's tactical possibilities.

Vladimir Makogonov – Mikhail Botvinnik

Sverdlovsk 1943



Black is about to lose his queen and will soon be a piece down. However, his passed pawns on the queenside are so strong that one of them will be promoted very soon, and Black will win the game.

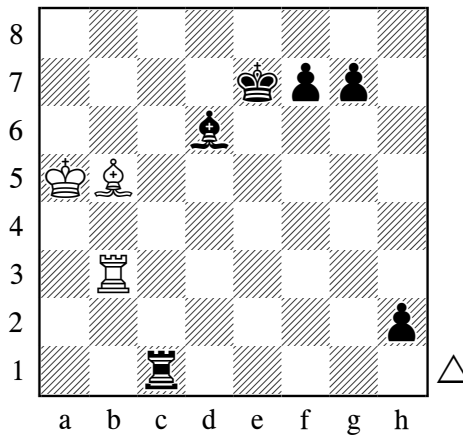
Confident that victory will soon be his, Black could easily throw out 1...b3??. Imagine his horror when he realizes that 2.♖xe7† ♕xe7 3.♙c5† followed by ♙c5xa3 tosses the sure win away in one move! Alert to this possibility, Black played instead the simple:

1...♗xf7! 2.♕xf7 b3

White is helpless before the threat of ...b3-b2 followed by ...b1=♗, so he gave up.

0-1

Illustrative Example 4



One of the worst (and most costly) examples of inattention that I've ever seen occurred in a Junior World Championship event. Both players were nine-year old girls who had long ago lost interest in the game. White, behind by three pawns, had already resigned herself to defeat and was playing only through inertia. Black, who had decided that the game was as good as over, was not even looking at the board. Instead, she was literally dancing for joy, because with this victory came the title of World Champion for Girls Under Ten! Black's coaches and parents were frantic. They wanted her to sit down and take the game seriously; there would be plenty of time for celebration after the competition. But because nobody is allowed to offer advice while a contest is in progress, they were forced to watch in horror as the drama unfolded.

In this position White decided to throw in a couple of spite checks before giving up:

1.♖e3†

Black was in a world of her own. Without so much as a glance at the board, she grabbed her king and plonked it on f8.

Instead, 1...♕d8 2.♖e8† ♕c7 would end the game, as would 1...♕f6 2.♖f3† ♕g6.

1...♕f8?? 2.♖e8#

The reply brought poor Black crashing back to reality, but by then it was too late. The World Champion title was gone, and euphoria was replaced by hysteria.

1-0

The moral of this story?

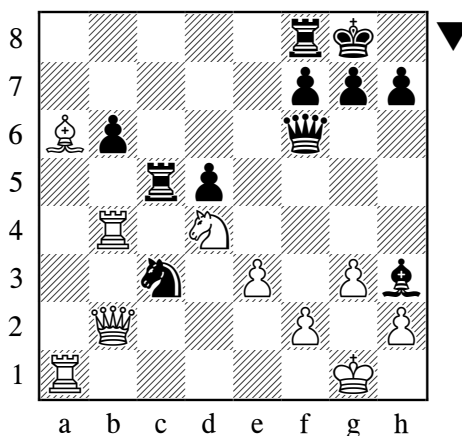
“It’s not over till it’s over” may be trite, but it’s true, for all sports. Avoid overconfidence and never play quick moves.

Remember, the game is not over until a player either resigns or it is checkmate!

At times you may think you have a clear advantage, and then the sudden appearance of a tactic will force you to reassess the situation. When these nasty situations arise, you must keep your head clear and go into *damage-control mode*, just as Bobby Fischer did when faced with this situation in the US Championship.

Samuel Reshevsky – Robert James Fischer

New York 1963



Black is a pawn up. He would like to defend his pawn on b6, which is being attacked by the white pieces on b2 and b4.

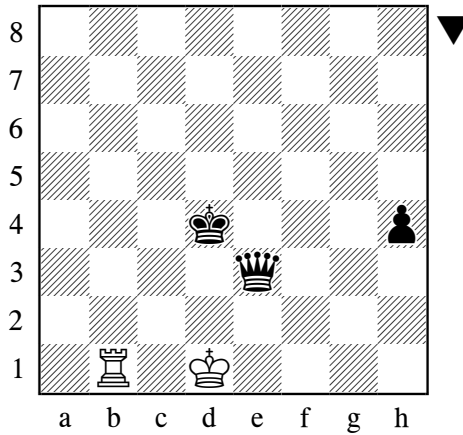
The obvious defense is 1...♖b8, which most people would play without too much hesitation. However, this would be met by the annoying 2.♙f1!. The issue with Black’s position is that the positionally desirable 2...♙xf1? runs into 3.♖xb6!!, and White would win immediately because of the weakness of Black’s back rank. 3...♖xb6 4.♙a8† leads to checkmate.

In the actual game, Fischer saw his predicament, kept calm in the face of the attack, and accepted that his b6-pawn was a goner. He played to extract White’s newly found fangs.

1...b5 2.♙xb5 ♘xb5 3.♖xb5 ♖xb5 4.♙xb5 ♙e5

White emerged with a small advantage, but the trades had depleted most of White’s aggressive potential, and Black was able to save the game.

Exercise 3



Black is obviously winning, and he can choose from among many tempting ideas, such as 1...h3, 1...♙g1† and 1...♔c3. Is there anything wrong with the last option?

Keeping your opponent helpless

Chess can be played on several levels. On the one hand, you can play to create a work of art – a brilliant game that other players will study and admire. On the other hand, you can play chess as a sport, in which case you want to achieve victory in the safest, most economical manner. For most people, creating a work of art is not easy, especially when an opponent is determined to get in the way. However, while you are striving to attain the immortality that accompanies the creation of a masterpiece, you can increase your chances of winning games by honing your ability to limit your opponent's chances, which is something that you have more control over.

Illustrative Example 5

