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Mark Dvoretsky

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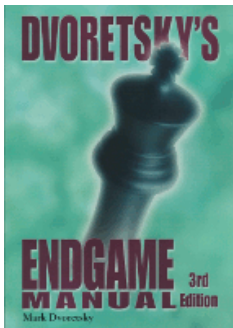
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An Absence of Deep Ideas

Annotating rapid games (those played with a reduced time control) and, even more so, blitz games, is a fairly pointless exercise. It is not even about the almost inevitable abundance of inaccuracies and crude blunders – there are sometimes enough of them in serious "classical" games (although, in general, a significantly lower number). What's more important is the complete absence in rapid chess of any interesting, deep ideas that can only be created through immersion in a position, for which there simply isn't time in a speed game.

A strong player is capable of making many sensible, logical moves at an accelerated pace, and sometimes even pulling off a straightforward combination (pleasant to see, but objectively uninteresting, as thousands of similar combinations have already been played), but has virtually no chance in the limited number of seconds, or even minutes, to create something significant that would subsequently delight chess fans or sophisticated professionals. Of course, I'm not talking about those rare cases when all the main events take place either in the opening stage, which has been studied carefully by one of the players, or soon after it ends.

So am I contradicting myself if I draw your attention to a game from the recent World Cup that was played with the time control of ten minutes per player plus ten seconds per move? Yes, but only partly: this game is important in a sporting respect, but it doesn't have the slightest creative value. However, one episode in the middlegame, and, most importantly, the rook endgame that came about afterward, may be useful for study purposes.

E. Bacrot (2710) – R. Robson (2560)
Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2011
Grünfeld Defense [D76]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cd Nxd5 5.g3 Bg7 6.Bg2 Nb6 7.Nf3 Nc6 8.e3 0-0 9.0-0 Re8 10.Re1 a5 11.Qe2 Be6 12.Nd2 Nb4 13.Rd1 c6 14.a3 N4d5 15. Nce4 Qc8 16.Nc5 Bg4 17.Bf3 Bxf3 18.Nxf3 Nd7 19.Nxd7 Qxd7 20.e4 Nb6 21.Bf4 a4 22.Rac1 Ra5 23.Rc5 Rea8 24.Bd2 Rb5 25.Bb4 e6 26.h4 h5 27. Kg2 Bf8?! 28.Rxb5 cb 29.Bxf8 (29.Ne5 is stronger) **29...Kxf8** (29...Rxf8+/= is better) **30.Ne5 Qe8**


[FEN "r3qk2/1p3p2/1n2p1p1/1p2N2p/
p2PP2P/P5P1/1P2QPK1/3R4 w - - 0 31"]

1.?

White's positional advantage is determined by his better pawn structure and the possibility of soon creating a passed pawn in the center with d4-d5. But besides these long-term pluses he also has some fleeting, temporary ones: the positions of the black rook, knight, and even king are not very good. If he lets his opponent make one or two moves unimpeded (for example, 30...Rd8 or
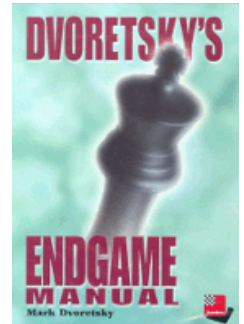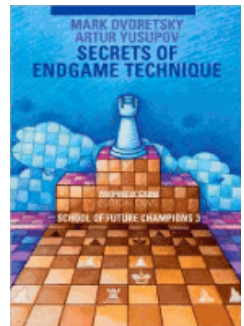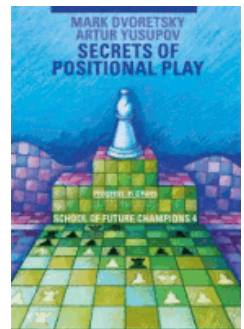
30...Rc8 and 31...Nc4), the temporary factors evaporate and White's overall advantage diminishes. That's why it made sense to start active play on the kingside without delay, where only the black king was located, lacking support from the other pieces.

I suggest 31.g4! hg (31...f6 32.Nd3 Nc4 33.gh gh 34.Nf4+/-) 32.Qxg4+/-.

[FEN "r3qk2/1p3p2/1n2p1p1/1p2N3/
p2PP1QP/P7/1P3PK1/3R4 b - - 0 32"]

It's difficult for Black to defend, for example:

32...Nd7 33.Nxd7+ Qxd7 34.h5 gh 35.Qxh5, intending 36.Rd3, with a very dangerous attack;

32...Nc4 33.h5 Nxe5 34.de Rd8 35.Rxd8 (35.Rc1!? gh 36.Qxh5) 35...Qxd8 36. hg (threatening 37.Qf4) 36...Kg7 (the only move) 37.gf+ Kxf7 38.Qf4+ Kg6 39.Kg3+- or 33...Rd8 34.Nxc4 gh (34...bc 35.hg fg 36.Rh1+-) 35.Qxh5 bc 36. Rh1 Ke7 37.Qc5+ Kd7 (37...Rd6 38.d5+/-) 38.Qxc4+/-.

31.Qe3?! Nc4 (31...Kg8+/= is preferable) **32.Nxc4 bc 33.Qc3**

White achieved more with 33.d5!? Kg8 34.d6 Qc6+/-.

33...b5 34.d5 ed 35.ed Kg8 36.d6 Rd8 37.Qf3 Qe5+/=

Soon the game switched to a rook endgame with White a pawn up, which, according to theory, was drawn.

38.Qc3 Qxc3 39.bc Kg7 40.Rd5 Kf6 41.Rxb5 Rxd6 42.Rb4 Rd3 43.Rxc4 Ke5 44.Rc7 Ke6 45.Rc8 Ke5 46.Re8+ Kd5 47.Ra8 Rxc3 48.Rxa4 Ke6 49. Re4+ Kf6 50.Re3 Rc2 51.Kf3 Ra2 52.Rc3 Kf5 53.Rc5+ Ke6 54.Ra5 Kf6 55. Ke3 Ke6 56.Ra7 Kf6 57.a4 Ke6 58.a5
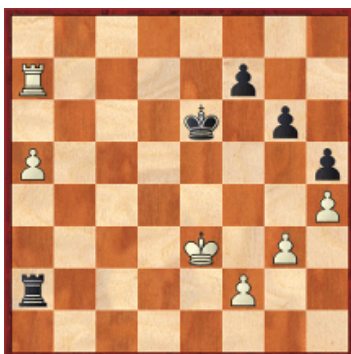
[FEN "8/R4p2/4k1p1/P6p/7P/4K1P1/
r4P2/8 b - - 0 58"]

1...?

On the board there's a typical position with an extra rook's pawn for White with the rook on the weaker side, positioned in the rear behind the passed pawn, and a standard pawn structure on the kingside. We shouldn't be too hard on the players' subsequent actions, bearing in mind that they only had their incremental seconds left. Although we're probably still justified in

drawing some conclusions about their endgame abilities, and contemplating on how thorough knowledge and understanding of theory might have influenced the players' actions even in such extreme circumstances. But the main purpose of investigating the game is to inform (or remind) readers about some typical ideas in this kind of ending.

58...Kf6?!

In such situations, White sends his king towards his passed pawn at the appropriate moment, sacrificing one or two pawns on the kingside. His opponent has to give up his rook for the passed pawn, and the outcome of the battle depends on whether or not Black succeeds in his counterplay on the kingside. In the coming race every tempo may be decisive.

Direct pursuit of the pawn loses: 58...Ra3+? 59.Kd4 Rf3 60.a6 Rxf2 61.Rc7 Ra2 62.a7 Kf5 63.Kc4! – we'll have more than one reason to come back to this important variation later.

At the same time there's no point in Black waiting passively. Any move that is useful for the future race must be made. 58...f6! 59.a6 Kf5 60.f3 (60.Ra8 Kg4 61.a7 Ra3+) 60...Ra3+ 61.Kd4 Rxf3 62.Rc7 Ra3 63.a7 Kg4 gave an easy draw.

59.a6 Ke6?

If on the previous move the right decision could be made based on common sense and an understanding of the general principles of this kind of ending, then here even a very strong grandmaster would hardly be capable of making a choice without precise knowledge of the theory, and besides that the theory is very complicated and comparatively new, having been worked out only in 2003 (and presented in my *Endgame Manual*).

The draw can only be achieved with 59...g5!, or to be even more precise: 59...Ra4! 60.Kd3 g5!! The move in the game should have led to defeat.
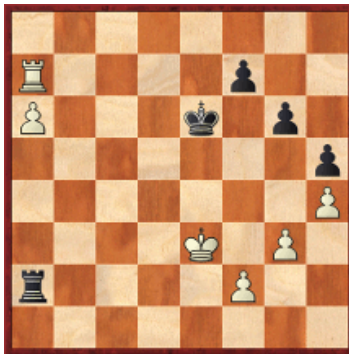
[FEN "8/R4p2/P3k1p1/7p/7P/4K1P1/
r4P2/8 w - - 0 60"]

1.?

60.Ra8?

Etienne Bacrot doesn't know or doesn't remember the conclusions of modern theory. As the Swiss player Johannes Steckner proved, the king has to move forwards with the rook specifically on a7, but not on a8. The main variation is 60.Kd4! Rxf2 61.Rc7 Ra2 62.a7 Kf5 63.Kc4!! Kg4 64.Kb3! Ra6 65.Rc4+ Kxg3 66.Ra4 Rxa7 67.Rxa7 Kxh4 68.Kc3, and so on – the rook turns out to be stronger than the three pawns. Black can defend differently, the position contains quite a few subtleties, but he won't find a way to save himself anywhere.

60...Kf6?

Ray Robson is not only unaware of the latest theoretical discoveries, but apparently is completely unfamiliar with the ideas in this kind of ending – probably because of his youth, he just hasn't had time to study them. Of

course, he should have positioned his king more actively at the first opportunity: 60...Kf5! An "educated" player would have made this move automatically, regardless of how much time he had left. Robson's blunder clearly wasn't accidental: as we already saw this kind of mistake on the fifty-eighth move, and we'll see more of them.

61.Kf3?!

This move, and the following unsuccessful one, by White were provoked by severe time trouble. Bacrot had obviously decided to tread water in order to carve out a little time to think.

61...Ra4 62.Ke2?! Ra3 63.Ra7 Ke6 64.Kd2 Ra2+?!

Why let the king advance? The situation reminds me of the one with which we began our analysis of the endgame (see the fifty-eighth move). It's dangerous to pursue the pawn: 64...Rf3? 65.Rc7 Rxf2+ 66.Kc3 Ra2 67.a7, but it was worth playing 64...f6!.

65.Ke3

In time trouble White doesn't go for 65.Kc3!? Rxf2 66.Rc7 Ra2 67.a7.

65...Kf6 66.Ra8?

Bacrot repeats the same mistake as on the sixtieth move. 66.Kd4! is correct.

In my *Endgame Manual*, from an indentical position, I wrote that 66.Kd4! wins. However, Vardan Poghosyan from Armenia recently proved that, instead of 66...Rxf2, Black is saved by 66...g5!! 67.Kd5!? g4!. Karsten Müller will have more on this in an upcoming *Endgame Corner*.

66...Ra3+?

A move that, even if it isn't losing, is still deserving of condemnation for two reasons. First, Black again misses a chance to activate his king: 66...Kf5!=. Second, it pointlessly takes the attack off the f2-pawn – now taking it with the rook will entail the loss of a tempo.

67.Kd4
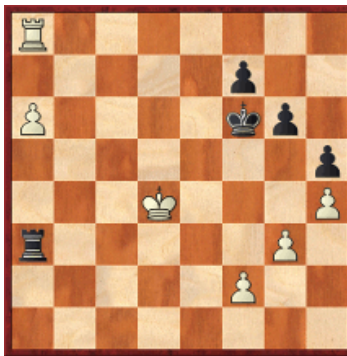
[FEN "R7/5p2/P4kp1/7p/3K3P/r5P1/
5P2/8 b - - 0 67"]

1...?

67…Ra2?

He would manage to save himself only by playing 67...Kf5! Karsten Müller gives the following variations:

68.f3 Rxf3 69.Rf8 Ra3 70.Rxf7+ Kg4 71.a7 Kxg3=;

68.Kc5 Kg4 69.Kb5 Kf3 70.Rf8 Kxf2 71.Rxf7+ Kxg3=;

68.Ra7 Kg4 69.Rxf7 Rxa6 70.Ke5 g5 71.Rg7 (71.hg Ra5+ 72.Kf6 Ra6+ 73.

Ke7 Kxg5=) 71...Kf3 72.Rxg5 Kxf2 73.Kf4 Ra4+ 74.Kf5 Ra6! 75.Rxh5 Kxg3=.

68.Kc5 Rxf2

68...Kf5 69.f3 f6 (69...Ra3 70.Kb4 Ra2 71.Kb5 Rb2+ 72.Kc6 Rc2+ 73.Kd6 Ra2 74.Ke7 f6 75.a7+-) 70.a7! doesn't help.

[FEN "R7/P7/5pp1/2K2k1p/7P/5PP1/
r7/8 b - - 0 70"]

There's an important theoretical position in the diagram that is famous from the game Unzicker – Lundin (Olympiad, Amsterdam, 1954). White wins easily by transferring his king to h6 and then playing 1.Rb8 Rxa7 2.Rb5+.

69.Rd8

As Müller pointed out, 69.Rb8! Rc2+ (or 69...Ra2) 70.Kb6 Rb2+ 71.Ka7 Re2 72.Rb5+- is more precise.

69...Ra2 70.Kb6 Rb2+ 71.Kc6 Rc2+ 72.Kb7 Rb2+

[FEN "3R4/1K3p2/P4kp1/7p/7P/6P1/
1r6/8 w - - 0 73"]

1.?

73.Ka8?

In time trouble any knowledgeable player would put his king specifically on a8 – so as not to prevent the pawn from taking a step forward. In the overwhelming majority of similar situations this logic is justified, but not here! Only with time to think would you manage to recognize the necessity of leaving the a-pawn under the defense of the king, which makes itself plain in the variation 73.Ka7! Kf5 74.Rb8! Ra2 75.Rb4!

As Müller showed, other attempts to defend don't help: 73...Re2 74.Rd5 Rb2 75.Rd6+ Kf5 76.Rb6 Re2 77.Rb4+-, or 73...Rb3 74.Rb8 Rxg3 75.Rb5 Re3 76. Kb6 Re6+ 77.Ka5 Re7 78.Rc5! Ke6 79.Kb6 Re8 80.a7 f5 81.Ra5 f4 82.a8Q Rxa8 83.Rxa8 Kf5 84.Kc5 Kg4 85.Kd4 Kxh4 86.Ke4 Kg3 87.Rg8+-.

73...Kf5!

This time Robson guessed the right move. 73...Rb3? 74.a7 Kf5 75.Rb8 Rxg3

loses to 76.Rb5+ Kf4 (76...Kg4 77.Rg5+) 77.Rb4+ Kf5 78.Kb7 Ra3 79.a8Q Rxa8 80.Kxa8 f6 (80...g5 81.Rb5+ Kg4 82.hg h4 83.Kb7 h3 84.Kc6 h2 85. Rb1 Kxg5 86.Rh1) 81.Kb7 g5 82.Kc6!.

74.a7

74.Rb8!? Ra2 (the pawn is under fire, so there's not time to put the rook on b4) 75.Rb5+ is more dangerous for his opponent.

[FEN "K7/5p2/P5p1/1R3k1p/7P/6P1/
r7/8 b - - 0 75"]

1...?

In the variations that arise with 75...Ke4? 76.a7 Kf3 77.Rb3+ Kg4 78.Kb7, Black lacks precisely one tempo to save himself. On 78...f6 or 78...f5, there follows 79.Rb6! (threatening 80.Ra6) 79...Rxa7+ 80.Kxa7+-. But in the case of the waiting move 78...Ra1, White doesn't choose 79.Rb6? Rxa7+ 80.Kxa7 Kxg3=, rather 79.a8Q Rxa8 80.Kxa8, and, with a pawn on f7, Black's counterplay comes too late.

A draw can only be achieved by means of 75...Kg4! 76.Rg5+ Kh3 77.Kb7, and now the white rook, which is able to protect the king from vertical checks, doesn't help it against the checks on the horizontal. So Black plays 77...Re2 (it's also possible to start with 77...Rb2+) 78.a7 Re7+ 79.Kb6 Re6+ 80.Kb5 Re8=.

74...Kg4 75.Rb8 Ra2 76.Rb3

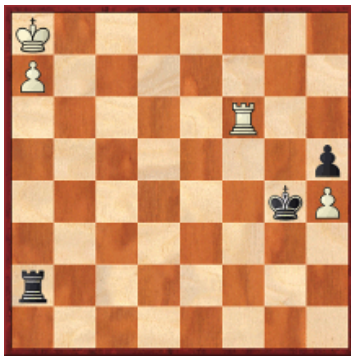[FEN "K7/P4p2/6p1/7p/6kP/1R4P1/
r7/8 b - - 0 76"]

76...f6

76...f5 77.Kb7 f4 78.gf Kxh4 79.a8Q Rxa8 80.Kxa8 Kg4= isn't bad either.

77.Rb6 (77.Kb7 g5=) **77...g5**

Or 77...Kxg3 78.Rxf6 Kxh4=.

78.Rxf6 gh 79.gh

[FEN "K7/P7/5R2/7p/6kP/8/r7/8 b - - 0 79"]

1...?

79...Kxh4?!

With his flag hanging Black doesn't manage to work out that besides the planned pawn capture he had another candidate move at his disposal. A stronger one: 79...Rb2!. The h4-pawn is still lost, but White only manages to free his king from confinement with a substantial loss of time: 80.Rf8 Kxh4 81.Rb8 Ra2 82.Kb7 Kg3=.

80.Kb7 Rxa7+ (81.Ra6 was threatened) **81.Kxa7 Kg3 82.Rg6+! Kf3 83.Rh6!**

An interim check to win a tempo is a standard method in a rook versus pawn battle. Bacrot is familiar with it, and so he successfully uses it even in severe time trouble. True, the position still remains drawn.

83...Kg4 84.Kb6 h4 85.Kc5 h3 86.Kd4 Kg3 87.Ke3
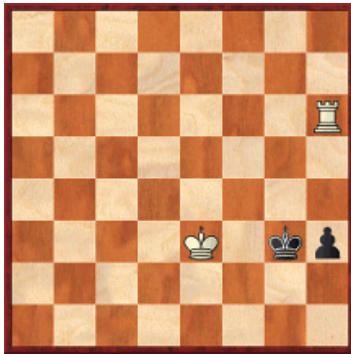
[FEN "8/8/7R/8/4K1kp/8/8 b - - 0 87"]

1...?

An important position has been created that should be included in the arsenal of every player's endgame knowledge. If Robson had known it he would automatically have played 87...Kg2! 88.Rg6+ Kf1! or 88.Ke2 h2 89.Rg6+ Kh1! with a draw.

87...h2??

A terrible blunder that has been made by many masters and grandmasters who in their turn hadn't worked on studying endgame theory.

88.Rg6+ Kh3 89.Kf2 h1N+ 90.Kf3 Kh2 91.Rg7 1-0

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