



C O L U M N I S T S

The Instructor

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The Chess Cafe***E-mail Newsletter***

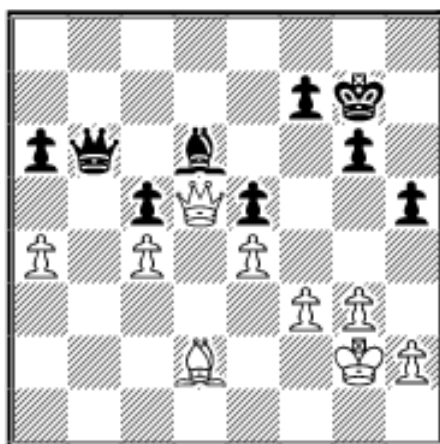
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Active Defense!

There's no such thing as a premature counterattack - Savielly Tartakower

The problem of defending difficult positions was dealt with in detail in my book, *School of Chess Excellence 2 - Tactical Play*, with special attention devoted to the art of altering an unfavorable course of events by distracting the opponent from the realization of his advantage. Such active strategy can be justified not only in the middlegame, but also when there are only a few pieces left on the board.

Gabdrakhmanov – Yusupov USSR Schoolchildren's Championship, Riga 1977

Black has an awful position, thanks to his *very* bad bishop. But even positions like this may be defended successfully.

46...Bd6-c7!

The queen must be set free for active play. For example, after 47 Be3 Qb2+ 48 Bf2 Ba5! 49 Qxc5 Bc3, Black obtains sufficient counterplay.

47 Bd2-c3



Now what should Black do? Passive defense promises him nothing: 47...f6 48 Qd7+ Kg8 49 Bd2 Qd6 50 Qe8+ Kg7 51 Bh6+!; or 47...Qd6 48 f4, with great advantage to White. So Artur decides to sacrifice some material.

47...Qb6-b3!! 48 Bc3xe5+ Bc7xe5 49 Qd5xe5+ Kg7-g8 50 Qe5xc5 Qb3-c2+ 51 Qc5-f2

White gives back one of his two extra pawns, since he cannot see how he will quash his opponent's counterplay after 52 Kh3 Qe2!

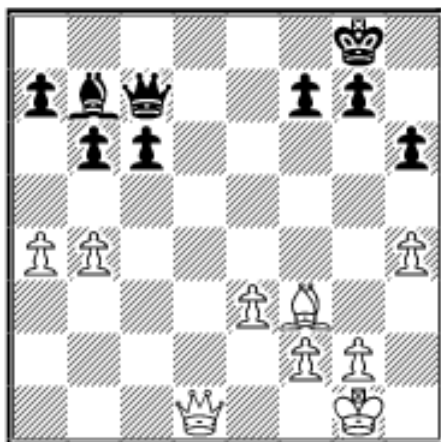
51...Qc2xc4 52 a4-a5 Qc4-b4!

It's important to keep the enemy queen off d2.

53 Qf2-a2 Qb4-e1

White's forces are restricted; his extra pawn is meaningless. The game eventually ended in a draw.

Portisch – Timman Candidates' Matches, 1st Match Game, Antwerp 1989



As in the preceding example, White's advantage flows from the active position of his bishop and queen. But whereas in that game Black's bishop was chronically "bad", here it has realistic chances of getting back into play after c6-c5 or Bb7-c8-e6 - which makes it immediately clear what White should be preventing.

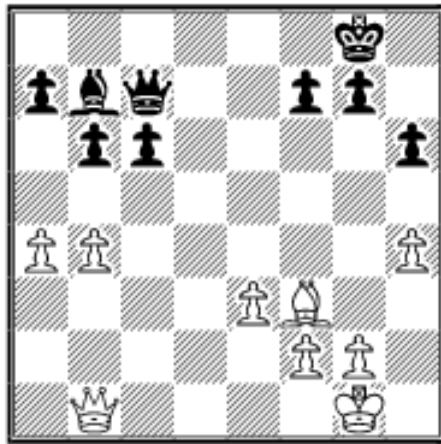
Before examining various prophylactic moves, let's see what happens if we go straight into the queen endgame

with 26 b5. On 26...cb 27 Bxb7 Qxb7 28 Qd8+!? Kh7 29 Qd3+ and 30 ab, one White pawn restrains two of Black's, which assures White a definite positional advantage. 26...c5 27 Bxb7 Qxb7 would be stronger. After 28 Qd6, Black would have some problems, since he cannot activate his pieces: neither 28...c4 29 Qc6, nor 28...Qe4 29 Qb8+ Kh7 30 Qxa7 is good for him; and meanwhile, White wants to strengthen his position by f2-f3 and e3-e4. But the queen is too mobile a piece to be kept out of play for long. 28...Qc8 is possible (29 Qc6 Qd8; 29 h5 Qg4), or the temporizing 28...h5, followed by g7-g6. Here, Black hardly risks losing.

Now, for the prophylactic moves. Remember: White must simultaneously prevent two different tries to activate the bishop. If he plays 26 Qb3?! to prevent 26...c5, Black replies 26...Bc8. Portisch's choice, **26 Qc2?!**, was also unfortunate, since it did nothing to prevent c6-c5. After **26...c5! 27 Bxb7 Qxb7 28 bc Qc6! 29 Qd3?!** (29 h5!? or 29 f3, intending e3-e4 and Kf2-e3, were preferable) **29...bc 30 Qd8+ Kh7 31 Qd3+ Kg8 32 Qd8+ Kh7 33 Qd3+ g6 34 Qc4 Kg7 35 Kf1 Qb6**, and the Hungarian GM was forced to defend an inferior queen endgame for another 70 moves.

White had only one means of keeping the initiative in his grip:

26 Qd1-b1!



Now 26...c5? is bad: 27 Bxb7 Qxb7 28 bc; and White plans to continue 27 Qe4 with the threats of 28 b5 and 28 Qe8+. How does Black defend?

After 26...Bc8?! 27 Qe4, two possible variations are:

27...Bd7 28 Qe7 Qc8 29 a5! c5 (29..Qe8 30 Qd6) 30 bc bc 31 Bd5, or 31 a6 c4 32 Bb7 Qe8 33 Qc5, with a winning position;

27...c5 28 Qe8+ Kh7 29 Be4+ (weaker is 29 h5 Qd7!, when 30 Be4+ now allows 30...f5) 29...g6 (29...f5? 30 Bd5) 30 bc bc 31 h5 Bf5 32 Bd5 Kg7 33 e4, and Black is in serious trouble.

In his comments for the magazine New In Chess, Luc Winants offered the following as a better defense: 26...a5 27 ba ba 28 Qc2 Qd6, followed by 29...Kf8. I don't like his recommendation, since instead of 28 Qc2?, White can play the much stronger 28 Qf5 Bc8 29 Qc5, or 28 Qe4 Qd7 29 Qe5. In addition, the exchange of pawns on a5 is not forced: the direct attack with 27 Qe4! (threatening 28 b5) is tempting - one line is 27...ab 28 Qe8+ Kh7 29 Be4+ g6 30 h5 c5 31 hg+ fg 32 Qxg6+ Kh8 33 Qxh6+ Kg8 34 Qg6+ Kf8 35 Qf6+ Kg8 36 Bd3.

The above variations give us a feeling for the dangers inherent in Black's position after an accurate prophylactic move from White. The solution to his problem lies in thinking prophylactically also, but from the other side - Black must choose active defense, even if it involves sacrificing a pawn.

26...Qc7-e7!

White's queen wanted to occupy the important e4 square, so Black takes it under control. True, White could play 27 Qe4 here too - after 27...Qxe4 28 Bxe4, there is no stopping 29 b5, with the win of a pawn. No problem - in the bishop endgame Black's king will come rapidly into play: 28...Kf8 29 b5 Ke7 30 bc Ba6, followed by Kd6, and Black, in any event, does not stand worse.

The sortie 27 Qf5 is totally harmless. The simplest reply is 27...Qxb4! 28 Qd7 Qe1+ 29 Kh2 Qxf2, with a perpetual check.

27 h4-h5

In the Informant, Timman examines 26 Qb1!, suggesting that Black defend by 26...Qe7 27 h5 Kf8. His first move is correct, but his second is wrong: Black loses after 27...Kf8? 28 Qh7 Qxb4 (28...Qe5 29 b5) 29 Qh8+ Ke7 30 Qb8!

So what should Black do? To the rescue comes a simple but elegant bit of tactics.

27...Bb7-c8! 28 Bf3xc6 Bc8-g4

Black wins back the pawn, and equalizes.

And so, White's attempts to force matters lead to nothing. Therefore, he should be patient: **27 g3!**, intending a4-a5, Bg2 (or Kg2); and later, depending on circumstances, he can play on the kingside, try to exploit the pin on the h1-a8 diagonal, or invade at a7 with his queen after opening the a-file. Although this all looks somewhat abstract, there appears to be no easy way for his opponent to free himself; so the pressure on his position remains, which means White retains practical winning chances.

We can see a most convincing demonstration of high-class technique when the opponent does not show strong resistance. This is the picture we see in the following game. The exchange of queens led to an approximately equal position; then, however, Black was gradually outplayed, due to his unjustified passivity, which White exploited in model fashion.

Nesis – Franzen Correspondence 1979-83

1 d2-d4 Ng8-f6 2 c2-c4 e7-e6 3 Ng1-f3 b7-b6 4 g2-g3 Bc8-b7 5 Bf1-g2 Bf8-e7 6 Nb1-c3 Nf6-e4 7 Bc1-d2 Be7-f6 8 Qd1-c2

Another frequently played line is 8 0-0 0-0 9 Rc1. Most likely, Black will exchange on d2 - then, by refraining from Qc2, White will have saved a tempo. On the other hand, the tempo saved doesn't mean too much here - in fact, this whole opening variation has the reputation of being rather toothless, almost a drawing line. Anatoly Karpov would no doubt disagree with this evaluation: he has scored many victories with it. He loves to maneuver back and forth in quiet positions with a tiny edge for himself, provoking and then expertly capitalizing on the tiniest inaccuracy from his opponent.

8...Ne4xd2 9 Qc2xd2 d7-d6 10 Ra1-d1

More frequently seen are 10 d5, or 10 0-0 0-0 11 e4.

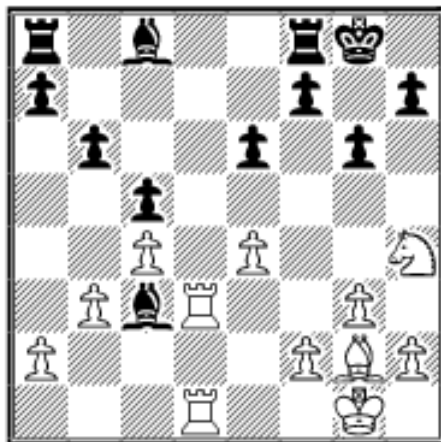
10...Nb8-d7 11 0-0 0-0 12 e2-e4 g7-g6 13 Rf1-e1 Bf6-g7 14 b2-b3 Qd8-e7 15 Nf3-h4

Up to this point, White has played nothing but developing moves, with no definite plan in mind (in such positions, one could expect d4-d5, or h2-h4-h5). But now he has finally come up with something concrete: f2-f4. His opponent hastens to deliver a counterblow in the center before it is completely overrun by White pawns.

15...c7-c5! 16 d4xc5 d6xc5 17 Qd2xd7 Qe7xd7 18 Rd1xd7 Bg7xc3 19 Re1-d1 Bb7-c8

This craven retreat was not necessary. The more natural 19...Bc6 was quite playable - Black has nothing to fear from either 20 R7d6 Rac8 or 20 Rc7 Rac8!? 21 Rxa7 Rfd8.

15 Rd7-d3



What should Black do now? If White gets in e4-e5, he will have a positional advantage. For instance, 20...Bd4? 21 e5! Rb8 22 Nf3, or 20...Bg7? 21 e5 Rb8 22 f4.

20...Bc3-e5!

Now White can no longer seize kingside space without paying a price for it: on 21 f4, Bd4+ and 22...e5 follows; while 21 Nf3 is met by 21...Bc7 (21...Bg7 isn't bad either) 22 e5 Bb7 23 Rd7 Rad8, preparing 24...Bc6 or 24...Bxf3 25 Bxf3 Rxd7 26 Rxd7 Bxe5.

21 Kg1-f1!?

By first getting his king out of the check, White restores the positional threat of 22 f4. For example, 21...Bb7? 22 f4 Bd4 (22...Bf6 23 e5 Bxh4 24 Bxb7) 23 e5 Bxg2+ 24 Kxg2, followed by 25 Nf3.

Another good idea was to move the king into the corner, with the same check avoidance plan, but also keeping clear the f1-a6 diagonal, which his opponent will soon attempt to open.

21...Ra8-b8

21...b5 22 cb a6 would be premature, in view of 23 b6 or

23 Nf3.

22 f2-f4 Be5-c7

Now 23 e5 would be the natural continuation; however, Black then develops dangerous queenside counterplay by continuing either 23...a6 24 Nf3 b5 25 Nd2 Ba5, or 23...b5 24 cb Rxb5, followed by Rb4 and Ba6.

Therefore, Nesis begins taking prophylactic measures aimed at shoring up the c4 square. The knight cannot be used for this purpose - for the moment, it is needed on the kingside to prevent the opening of lines there (23 Nf3 a6 24 Nd2 e5!)

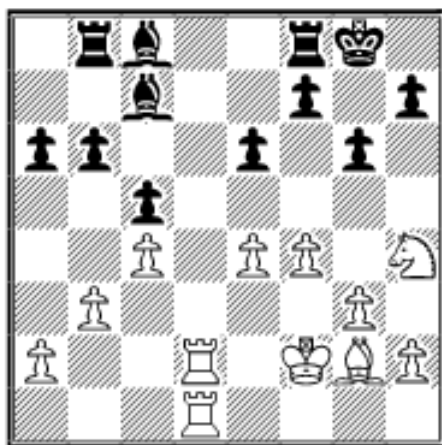
23 Rd3-d2!?

I think 23 Bf3 would have been a bit more accurate.

23...a7-a6

Black would hardly do better with 23...f6 24 Bf3 g5 25 Ng2, or 23...b5 24 cb Rxb5 25 Bf3.

24 Kf1-f2



White is ready to reinforce c4 with Bf1. Still, Black could have generated counterplay with 24...e5 25 f5 b5 26 Bf1 Ba5! 27 Rc2 (White cannot allow the bishop to get via c3 to d4, and if 27 Rd3, then 23...bc) 27...Bd8!

And why must Black play actively? Here, the question is not purely psychological, with Black attempting to distract White from his straightforward strengthening of the position. There is an

objective factor as well: Black has the two bishops. He will derive little benefit from them, so long as the position remains closed and static - in order to exploit them, Black must sharpen the game and open lines.

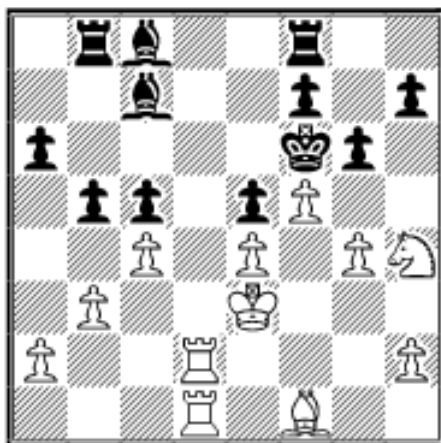
24...Kg8-g7?! 25 Kf2-e3

25 Nf3 was worth looking into.

25...e6-e5 26 f4-f5 b6-b5 27 Bg2-f1 Kg7-f6

Again, 27...Ba5 28 Rc2 Bd8 suggests itself.

28 g3-g4



Black has not played with sufficient energy; but now comes a serious strategic error.

28...g6xf5?

This exchange produces a static position, with a clear advantage to White. Active counterplay was still possible here. True, the 28...h5?! break is dubious, in view of 29 gh Kg5 (29...gf 30 Nxf5 Bxf5 31 Rf2) 30 fg! Kxh4 31 g7 Rg8 32 h6, and White's pawns are too powerful. For example, 32...Bg4 33 Be2 Bxe2 34 Kxe2! Kh5 35 Rg1 Kxh6 36 Rd3, and mates by force.

Black had to steel himself and march his king into the enemy camp to gobble the g4-pawns: 28...Kg5! 29 Nf3+ Kxg4. It is of course impossible to say positively that the king would be safe here; but there's no mate yet, so the outcome of the game remains uncertain.

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29 g4xf5

A questionable move, since the knight must now spend some further time at the board's edge. 29 Nxf5! was very strong. If 29...Bxf5 30 gf Rfd8, then either 31 Rd7, with the threat of Be2-h5, or 31 Rxd8 Rxd8 32 Rxd8 Bxd8 33 cb ab 34 Bxb5, with a winning bishop endgame.

29...Kf6-e7 30 Ke3-f3!

Black has no counterplay: his two bishops remain passive. Now White can unhurriedly improve the placement of his pieces. First, he clears the e3 square for the maneuver Ng2-e3-d5.

30...Rf8-d8 31 Rd2xd8 Bc7xd8 32 Nh4-g2

Chasing after the pawn would be wrong here: 32 Rd5? Bb7! 33 Rxe5+ Kd7! 34 Ng2 Bf6 35 Rxc5 Bd4.

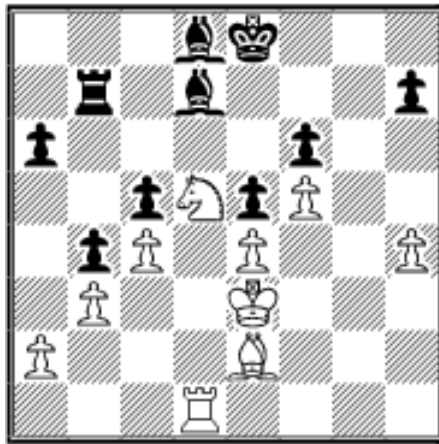
32...f7-f6 33 Ng2-e3 Bc8-d7 34 Ne3-d5+ Ke7-e8 35 Bf1-e2 b5-b4

After 35...Bc6 (intending 36...Bxd5), White can choose between the quiet 36 Kg4!? Bxd5 37 Rxd5 Be7 38 Kh5, and the more forcing 36 cb!?! ab 37 Nxf6+! Bxf6 38 Rd6 Rb6 (38...Bxe4+ 39 Kxe4 is no better) 39 Rxc6 Rxc6 40 Bxb5 Kd7 41 Kg4 Kd6 42 Bxc6 Kxc6 43 Kh5.

36 h2-h4!

White's rook has two files, the d- and the g-, but invading down either of them is no simple matter. Now, if the pawn could be pushed as far as h6, White would get a forward base at g7, which would considerably increase the effectiveness of the g-file invasion threat.

36...Rb8-b7 37 Kf3-e3



How can Black defend?
 37...Bc6? would be a mistake, in view of 38 Bh5+ Kf8 39 Nxb4. The only move to hinder White from realizing his plan was 37...Kf8!, and if 38 h5, then 38...h6! 39 Rg1 Be8, covering all the invasion squares.

37...a6-a5?

Opening the a-file gives Black nothing; now, his opponent's plan goes through unhindered.

38 h4-h5 Kg8-f8

Perhaps he should still have tried 38...h6 39 Rg1 Kf8 here, but after 40 Rg6 Be8 41 Rxh6 Kg7 42 Rg6+ Bxg6 43 fg, Black has a hard time defending against the threat of knight to f5.

39 h5-h6 a5-a4 40 Be2-h5

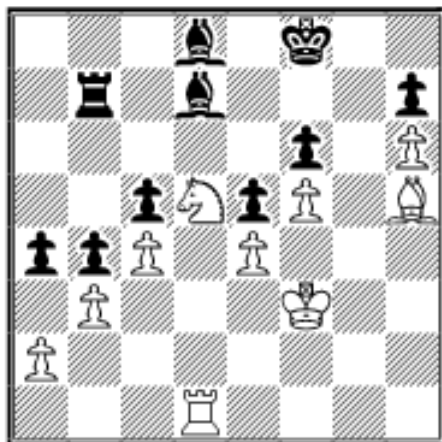
40 Rg1 Be8 is premature.

40...Rb7-a7 41 Ke3-f3!

An economical way of parrying Black's only hope of counterplay: 41...ab 42 ab Ra3, which can now be met by 43 Ne3! Ke7 44 Rg1 Rxb3 45 Rg7+ Kd6 46 Rxh7, and the h-pawn queens.

41...Ra7-b7

How does White continue?



“An open line is frequently like an open wound.” (S. Tartakower) White has to invade by one of the open files, but for now, he can't. 42 Rg1 Bc6 is useless. 42 Ne3 is tempting, with its threat of 43 Rd6, and if 42...Ke7? 43 Bg6! But Black replies 42...Be7! 43 Rg1 Bd8

44 Rg7 Bc6.

Noting that this defense works only with the White rook at b7, White plays for zugzwang.

42 Rd1-d2! a4-a3 43 Rd2-d1!

And there it is.

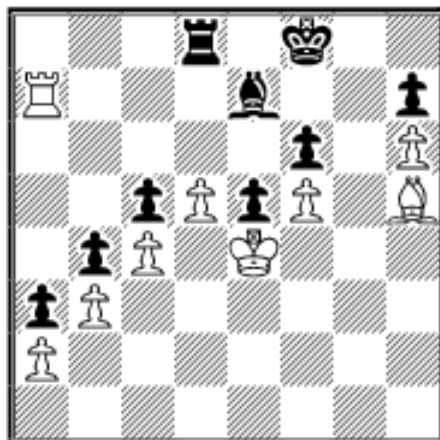
43...Rb7-a7 44 Nd5-e3

Zugzwang again. With the rook at a7, 45 Rd6 Ke7 leads nowhere; but now what should Black play? After 44...Rb7(c7) 45 Rd6 or 44...Be7 45 Rg1, the rook invades.

44...Ra7-c7 45 Rd2-d6 Bd8-e7 46 Rd6-b6 Rc7-c8 47 Ne3-d5 Bd7-c6 48 Rb6-a6

Threatening 49 Ra7.

48...Bc6xd5 49 e4xd5 Rc8-d8 50 Ra6-a7 Rd8-d6 51 Kf3-e4 Rd6-d8



52 Bh5-g6!

Having strengthened his position to the utmost, White finally delivers the conclusive blow, which has for so long been hanging in the air.

52...h7xg6 53 f5xg6 Rd8-e8

54 d5-d6

Black resigned

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Translated by Jim Marfia

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