



Barcza Rampant

We have all studied the games of the World Champions, and of their close competitors; but when it comes to the creative output of grandmasters of somewhat lesser rank, we hardly know them – especially if the discussion turns to those who were not of our generation. In fact, any strong chessplayer has some outstanding games in his portfolio. Each one has his own “hobbyhorse” – that is, a type of position in which he was especially skilled.

COLUMNISTS

The Instructor Mark Dvoretsky

I knew the Hungarian, Gedeon Barcza (1911 – 1986) as a good grandmaster of the positional style; but I barely knew anything about his work. A couple of years ago, I leafed through a book by the American grandmaster Pal Benko (who is also from Hungary), consisting of endgame articles which he had published over the course of many years in *Chess Life* magazine. My interest was drawn to those episodes that demonstrated grandmaster Barcza’s mastery of technique. Benko drew his readers’ attention to one of the characteristic features of Barcza’s work: his skill at working with knights. I liked his examples, and would like to show them to you. I shall rely mostly on Benko’s comments, only occasionally correcting and refining some of them.

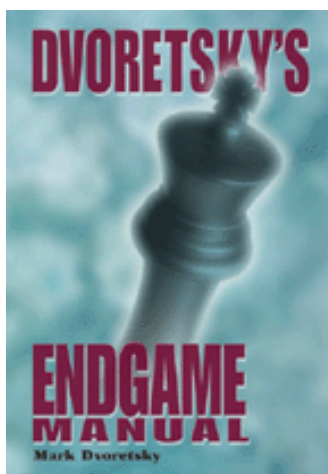
Barcza – Soos

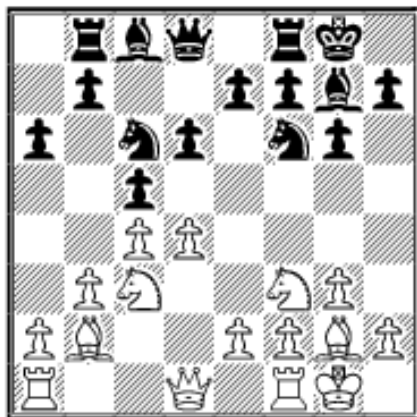
Olympiad, Varna 1962

1. Ng1-f3 Ng8-f6 2. g2-g3 g7-g6 3. b2-b3 Bf8-g7 4. Bc1-b2 c7-c5 5. c2-c4 Nb8-c6 6. Bf1-g2 0-0 7. 0-0 d7-d6 8. Nb1-c3 Ra8-b8

White is preparing 9. d4; it would make sense to hinder this advance by either 8...e5!? or 8...Ne4!?

9. d2-d4 a7-a6?!





This wing action is inappropriate here because the center is still open (White has not played d4-d5). The b6-square is weakened and can be utilized by White's knights. Barcza does not hesitate in transforming the game immediately into the endgame because that is where he felt very much at home.

A game Csom – van der Sterren, Ter Apel 1990, went 9...cd 10. Nxd4 Bd7 11. Nd5 Nxd5 12. cd Ne5 13. h3 Qb6 14. Qd2 Rfc8 15. Kh2, and White had achieved the better

game. Black would have better chances of equality after 12...Nxd4 (instead of 12...Ne5?!) – when your opponent controls more space, you should be striving for exchanges.

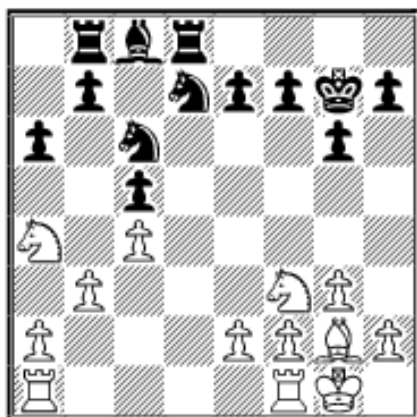
10. d4xc5! d6xc5 11. Qd1xd8

Trading queens is entirely logical since it removes Black's protection of the b6-square. A rapid draw is the last thing on White's mind.

11...Rf8xd8 12. Nc3-a4

This move would be innocuous if the b6-square had not been weakened.

12...Nf6-d7 13. Bb2xg7 Kg8xg7



14. Ra1-c1!

Insurance against b7-b5.

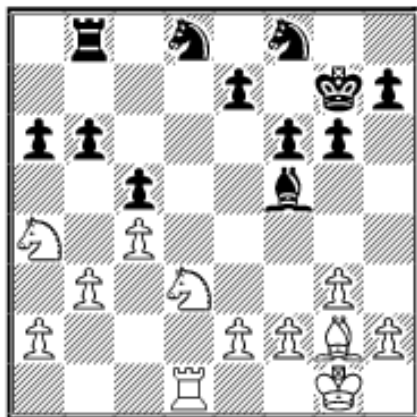
This move illustrates Barcza's favorite theory on the spreading of weaknesses – here from b6 to c5.

After 14. Rfd1 b5, White gets nothing from 15. cb (15. Nb2 Bb7) 15...ab 16. Nxc5 Nxc5 17. Rdc1 Nxb3 18. ab Bb7 =.

14...b7-b6 15. Rf1-d1 Nd7-f8 16. Rd1xd8 Nc6xd8 17. Nf3-e5 f7-f6

Black has a difficult position after 17...Bb7 18. Rd1 Bxg2 19. Kxg2.

18. Rc1-d1! Bc8-f5 19. Ne5-d3



19...Bf5-d7?!

It was high time to eliminate one of Barcza's knights by 19...Bxd3. In this position White's knights, which attack the b6- and c5-pawns, are more useful than Black's bishop, which cannot directly support the weak pawns.

After 19...Bxd3 20. Rxd3 Nde6 or 20...Nf7, White has only a small advantage – which, on the other hand, certainly does not mean that a draw is inevitable. An opponent may be

outplayed from such positions, too – skilled “technocrats” have demonstrated this time and again.

20. Na4-c3 Nd8-c6?

After the text move Black lacks a viable defense. Stout resistance was possible only after the active 20...Bc6, although, in that case too, White would be better after 21.Nf4 Bxg2 22.Kxg2 Nc6 23.Na4, threatening 24.Nd5.

21. Nd3-f4! Nc6-d4

Black cannot play 21...e6? because of 22.Rxd7+ Nxd7 23.Bxc6.

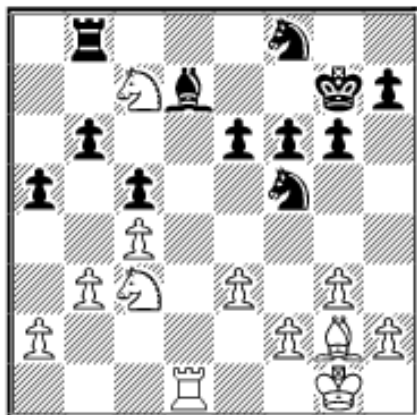
22. e2-e3 Nd4-f5

If 22...Nde6?, White could still gather two pieces for his rook after 23.Rxd7. Now, however, White initiates a strange knight maneuver.

23. Nf4-d5! e7-e6

23...Kf7 24. Nc7 a5 25. Na6 Rc8 was more stubborn, since 26. Bb7 Re8 27. Nd5?, contrary to Barcza's opinion, does not lead to the win of material. Black can meet this either with 27...Bc8 28. Bxc8 Rxc8 (29. Nxb6? Rc6), or 27...Nd6 28. Nxb6 Nxb7 29. Nxd7 Rd8.

24. Nd5-c7 a6-a5



25. Nc7-a6!

A rare post for the knight, but, in this case, a decisive one.

25...Rb8-e8

If 25...Rc8, then 26.Bb7 and Black's rook is still forced to e8, under more uncomfortable circumstances.

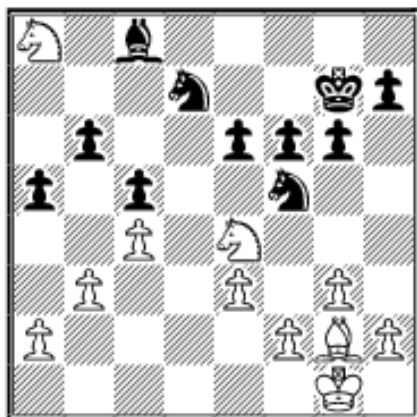
26. Nc3-e4!

Black will not be able to prevent this knight's penetration into d6.

26...Bd7-c8 27. Na6-c7 Re8-e7 28. Nc7-a8!!

The knight's gallop into the far corner is hardly an everyday idea: it exhibits Barcza's undogmatic attitude.

28...Re7-d7 29. Rd1xd7+ Nf8xd7



30. Ne4-c3!?

Benko thinks that 30. g4 Bb7 31. gf Bxa8 32. fe Ne5 33. Nd6 Bxg2 34. Kxg2 Kf8 35. Nc8 Nd3 36. Nxb6 Ke7! would have put White's win in doubt. One could continue the variation: 37. Na4 Kxe6 38. Kf1 Kd6 39. Nc3 f5±. However, replacing the capture of the b6-pawn with the immediate inclusion of White's king is far stronger: 36. Kf3! Nc1 37. Ke4 Nxa2 38. Kd5+-.

30...Nf5-d6 31. Nc3-a4!

Now Black must fatally weaken his queenside pawns. White gets nothing out of 31. Bc6 Ne5 32. Ba4 (32. Bg2 Nd7) 32...Bb7 33. Nxb6 Nf3+.

31...b6-b5 32. c4xb5 Nd6xb5 33. Bg2-c6

Now it's crystal clear why Black should have traded bishops by 20...Bc6, instead of 20...Nc6. Black's light-squared bishop cannot lend support to the weak pawns at a5 and c5.

33...Nb5-d6 34. Bc6xd7 Bc8xd7 35. Na4xc5 Bd7-c6

35...Bc8 is just as hopeless: 36. Nb6 Nb7 (36...Kf7 37. Nxc8 Nxc8 38. Nb7) 37. Ne4 f5 38. Nd2! Nd6 39. Nxc8 Nxc8 40. Nc4 (Benko).

36. Nc5xe6+ Kg7-g8 (36...Kf7 37. Nd8+) 37. Na8-b6 Nd6-e4

Now there are many ways to win, and White chooses the best and most thematic.

38. Ne6-d4 Bc6-e8 39. Nb6-c4 a5-a4 40. b3xa4 Be8xa4 41. Nc4-b6 Ba4-d1 42. a2-a4 Ne4-c5 43. a4-a5 Kg8-f7 44. f2-f3

To prevent the bishop from escaping to g4 (domination!).

44...Kf7-e8 45. Nb6-d5 f6-f5 46. Nd5-c3 Bd1-a4 47. a5-a6! Black resigned.

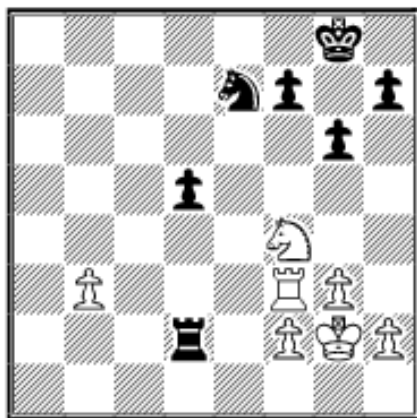
The knights indeed dominated this game. Of White's 47 moves, 23 were made by the knights.

It's no wonder that such performances by Barcza influenced the way his opponents played against him. For instance, at the 1952 Venice International tournament, Barcza's opponent, IM Eugenio Szabados, traded both knights almost immediately after the opening. While he was walking around the tournament hall, another competitor remarked: "You have the worse game now."

"At least," Szabados replied, "I am freed from his terrible knights!" And, this strategy worked: the game ended in a draw.

Barcza – Sanchez

Munich ol 1958



The ending is theoretically very interesting. White's outside passed pawn would give him an obvious advantage in a knight or pawn ending. With rooks still on the board White's superiority is not as marked. So, trading rooks is the logical plan. But the obvious 42.Rd3?! is answered effectively by 42...Rb2! and White is not making any progress.

42. Rf3-e3! Kg8-f8?!

42...Nc6! (intending to meet 43. Re2 by 43...Rd4, with equality) would seem to have the obvious shortcoming of allowing White to force a more favorable version of the exchange of rooks: 43. Rd3. But in fact, Black would not be forced to exchange, but could quite easily sacrifice a pawn temporarily, only to win it right back with 43...Rb2! 44. Nxd5 Na5! (44...Ne5 45. Rc3 Ng4 46. Ne3! Nxf2 47. Rc2 Rxc2 48. Nxc2 would be less convincing, as Black's troubles continue) 45. b4 Nc6 = (as indicated by Vadim Zvjagintsev and Ernesto Inarkiev).

In the starting position, I believe the chances for both sides are about equal: the activity of Black's pieces compensates for his opponent's outside passed pawn.

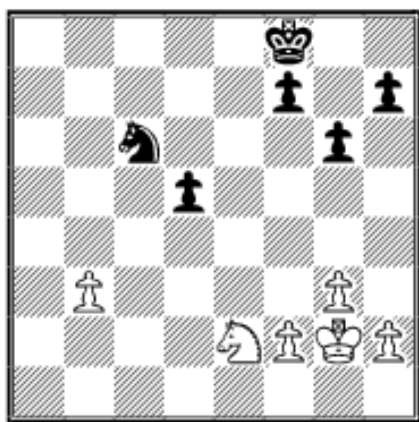
But this certainly doesn't mean a draw is inevitable – in order to finish the game successfully, it is necessary to match the opponent step for step, predict his plans (both the tactical and the strategic), and create your own plans to counter them. Luis Sanchez' understanding of the endgame was not on the same level as that of the grandmaster, and it is precisely this circumstance that determined the outcome of the battle – certainly, it was not the superiority of White's position.

43. Re3-e2! Rd2xe2?!

This is more or less forced since White was threatening 44.Rb2, in accordance with Tarrasch's precept that a rook stands best behind the passed pawn. One possible line could have been 43...Rd4 44.Rb2 Nc6 45.Ne2! Rb4 46.Nc1! Nd4 47.Rd2 Ke7 48.Rd3 Kd6 49.Na2 and White wins.

As Benko noted previously, the outside passed pawn gains added weight if the rooks are exchanged; therefore, he should have paid more attention to the option of refusing the exchange. In Benko's indicated line, 46...Nd4? is inferior: if instead we play 46...Ke7! 47. f3! (47. Nd3 Rd4 is useless, and the knight would stand poorly on a2) 47...Kd6 48. Kf2 (intending 49. Nd3) 48...Rb7!? Now Black is superior in the center, his pieces stand excellently – clearly, White has not the slightest advantage here.

44. Nf4xe2 Ne7-c6



White has a miniscule edge because of his outside passed pawn. If the knights were off the board, the win would be elementary. In their presence, however, nobody would be startled if White agreed to a draw here. But this was not Barcza's way. Often he would win just such endings by increasing little advantages, even against strong opponents.

45. Ne2-c3!

The only correct continuation; for example 45.Nf4 is bad because of 45...Nb4 and White has nothing (46.Kf3 Nc2!).

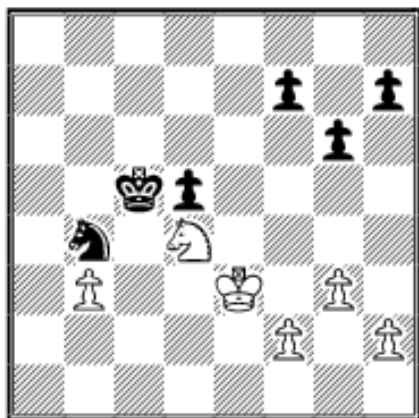
Well, I don't think it's all that obvious that the simple 45. Kf3 Ke7 46. Ke3 Kd6 47. Nd4 is any weaker than the game continuation – especially if you consider the variation analyzed in the following annotation.

45...Nc6-b4?!

If 45...d4 46.Na2 Ke7 47.Kf3 and White has the edge.

Zvjagintsev and Inarkiev continued as follows: 47...Kd6 48. Ke4 f5+ 49. Kd3 Kd5 50. f4 (50...Ne5+ was threatened) 50...g5! 51. fg Ne5+ 52. Ke2 Ke4, with fully adequate counterplay; or 51. b4 gf 52. gf Nd8 (threatening 53...Ne6) 53. Nc1 Nc6, with equality.

46. Kg2-f3 Kf8-e7 47. Nc3-b5! Ke7-d7 48. Kf3-e3 Kd7-c6 49. Nb5-d4+ Kc6-c5



A few careless moves, and Black's position has indeed become difficult.

50. h2-h4!

The principle of two weaknesses!

The b-pawn pins down Black's forces, and White turns his attention to the other wing. Now, if Black were to play 50...h5, White would have proceeded with 51.f3, followed by 52.g4, either to loosen Black's pawn

formation or to create a passed h-pawn, most dangerous in knight endings.

50...Kc5-d6 51. g3-g4! Kd6-c5

Black is thrashing to and fro because of the belief that any pawn move would injure his position.

52. f2-f4

Perhaps 52. h5 would have been more accurate, threatening to push the pawn to h6, fixing the pawn at h7 for later attack.

52...Kc5-d6 53. Nd4-f3!

The threat of 54.Ng5 now forces Black to make a weakness on the kingside.

53...f7-f6

The alternative, 53...h6, could have been met by 54.Ne5 Ke7 55.Kd4. Black would not have been able to hold out much longer.

54. Nf3-d4

Zugzwang! Any Black move involves some sort of concession.

54...Nb4-a6

Of course, 54...Kc5 55.Ne6+, followed by 56.Nf8 decides.

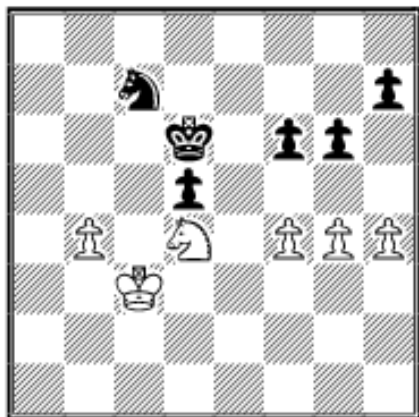
55. Nd4-c2!

Exploiting the opportunity to prepare the advance of his queenside passed pawn.

55...Kd6-c5 56. Ke3-d3! Na6-c7 57. b3-b4+ Kc5-b5 58. Kd3-c3 Kb5-c6

If 58...Ne6 59.Nd4+ and White wins the pawn ending easily.

59. Nc2-d4+ Kc6-d6



60. Kc3-d3!

Careful! The move 60.Kb3 would have been a mistake because 60...g5! 61.hg fg 62.fg Ke5 would have rescued the game for Black.

It should be added that Black would meet 62. f5 (instead of 62. fg) with 62...Ne8!, followed by 63...Ke5, but not 62...Ke5? at once, because of 63. b5!+-.

And 60. h5 would meet the same reply,

60...g5!.

60...Nc7-e8

Once again, Black fails to find the best defense. White's task would have been much more complex after 60...Na6!?

61. f4-f5!

Threatening to create an outside passed pawn by 62. fg hg 63. h5.

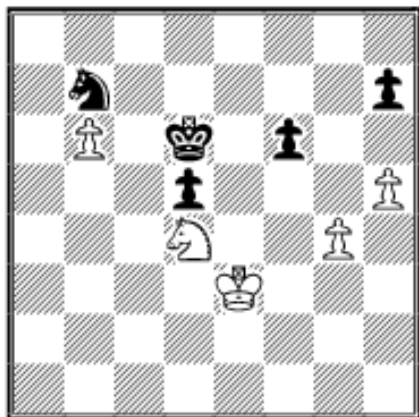
61...g6xf5

On 61...Ng7, Benko gives 62. fg hg 63. Ne2! (63. Ke3!? – Inarkiev – is also strong) 63...Ke5 (63...f5 64. g5 Ne6 65. Nd4 Nf4+ 66. Ke3! Ng2+ 67. Kf3 Ne1+ 68. Kg3 Nd3 69. h5 f4+ 70. Kh4 gh 71. g6 Ke7 72. b5+- – Dvoretsky) 64. b5 Kd6 65. Nf4! g5 66. h5! gf 67. h6, and wins (as we have indicated previously, the knight usually has a hard time against a rook pawn).

62. Nd4xf5+ Kd6-e5 63. b4-b5 Ne8-c7 64. b5-b6 Nc7-a6 65. Kd3-e3 Na6-c5

The try 65...h5 can be answered by 66.Kf3.

66. h4-h5 Nc5-b7 67. Nf5-d4 Ke5-d6

**68. Nd4-b3?**

The straightforward 68. Kf4! would have hammered it home. If 68...Nc5, then 69. Kf5 Ke7 70. Nb5 Nb7 71. Nc7 Nd6+ 72. Kf4 d4 73. Nb5+-. And on 68...Kc5, while 69. Ne6+?! Kxb6 70. Nf8 (70. Kf5 Nc5 71. Nf4 d4 72. Kxf6 d3 73. Nxd3 Nxd3 74. Kg7 Nf2 75. g5 Ne4 76. g6 hg 77. h6 Ng5 78. Kxg6 Ne6 =) 70...h6 71. Nd7+ Kc6 72. Nxf6 Nd6 is unconvincing, 69. Nf3! Kd6 (69...Kxb6 70. Kf5+-; 69...Nd6 70. b7 Nxb7 71. Kf5+-) 70.

g5 fg 71. Nxc5+-.

The text could have cast the win into doubt.

68...Kd6-c6 69. Ke3-d4! Kc6-d6?

Now Black's position is hopeless. But after 69...h6!, White would be in zugzwang: any move weakens his position. For example, 70. Ke3 Kxb6 71. Nd4 Nd6, or 70. Nd2 Nd8 71. Nf1 Ne6+ 72. Kd3 Kxb6 (72...Nf4+!? 73. Ke3 Ne6 = isn't bad, either) 73. Ne3 Kc5 74. Nf5, and the game would most likely end in a draw. Unfortunately, the errors committed by both sides in this stage were not explained by Benko.

70. Nb3-c1! Nb7-d8 71. Nc1-d3 Nd8-c6+

After 71...Ne6+ the conclusion could have been 72.Ke3 Kc6 73.Nb4+ Kd6 74.Nxd5! and White wins.

72. Kd4-e3 Nc6-e7 73. Nd3-b4 h7-h6 74. Ke3-d4 f6-f5 75. g4-g5! f5-f4

In the line 75...hg 76. b7 Kc7 77. Nxd5+ Nxd5 78. Kxd5 g4, White has the pleasant choice between either freezing the enemy pawns by 79. Kd4 or immediately advancing his h-pawn to queen.

76. g5xh6 Ne7-f5+ 77. Kd4-d3 Nf5xh6 78. Nb4xd5! Black resigned.

Both examples are very instructive, particularly for those who, like Barcza, have a relationship with their cavalry.



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