



COLUMNISTS

Let's Take A Look...

Nigel Davies



by Bruce Alberston

We invite you to submit games to be considered by Nigel in this column. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know. Please submit the games (in PGN or CBV format if possible) to: nigeldavies@chesscafe.com. Who knows, perhaps you will see the game in an upcoming column, as Nigel says to you, "Let's take a look..."

The How and the What

I recently saw a newsgroup discussion about tournament preparation. Everything under the sun was mentioned from openings to endings and strategy to tactics with everyone having their own idea about how it should be done. I just commented that "the how is more important than the what," leaving anyone who read this guessing as to what I meant. In fact the comment was deliberately enigmatic...

It really doesn't matter what you study, the important thing is to use this as a training ground for *thinking* rather than trying to assimilate a mind-numbing amount of information. In these days of a zillion different chess products this message seems to be quite lost, and indeed most people seem to want books that tell them what to do. The reality is that you've got to move the pieces around the board and *play* with the position. Who does that? Amateurs don't, GMs do.

Chess is not a game that can be learned from a book any more than tennis or golf. It may look rather academic and there are some scientific elements to it. But the truth is that wiles and playfulness count for far more than "knowing the book." Interestingly my grandmaster colleagues tend to be quick witted, jovial and street wise rather than serious and lofty intellectuals. And most of us will recommend keeping a clear head both before and during a tournament rather than hitting the books.

So why do amateurs believe it is otherwise? One reason may be that people have linked hard work to success and are convinced that the former is a prerequisite of the latter. In many fields this may be true, but the evidence indicates otherwise in chess. Most GMs have just played lots of chess and analysed their games because it was fun! I have read a few books from cover to cover, but many of my colleagues have not.

Before anyone writes in to ask about a book that explains "how it really works,"

I should point out that today's chess industry does have a vested interest in persuading you that you need to be serious. They like to present it as something intellectual to keep selling books, it wouldn't do at all if you were to go to a tournament and spend your time in the bar or analysis room. But this is where you'll often find the titled players, moving the pieces around the board or just relaxing.

There are some books that tell it like it is, but they tend to be quite old. Emanuel Lasker made it very clear that having a clear head and using it was the most important thing. He was downright dismissive of "knowledge" as such. And his namesake Edward Lasker gave a beautiful portrayal of the realities of competitive play in *Chess for Fun and Chess for Blood*. The following extract is wonderfully illuminating:

The professional Chess player makes preparations for his games of a type undreamed of by the amateur. He carefully studies the style of each opponent whom he has to face, by playing over as many of his games as he can find in the records of previous tournaments; to nullify similar efforts on the part of his adversary he chooses an opening quite different from those he has played in earlier rounds; he does not even necessarily play the line he considers best, but keeps that line in store for another, more dangerous opponent he may have to meet in a later round.

If your adversary is known to like a slow positional development, you try to lead the game into an opening which offers early possibilities of hand-to-hand encounters. If he likes to attack himself, you set up a granite wall of defense, in the hope of inducing him to make a premature onslaught.

If you succeed in drawing your man into a variation you have prepared for him, you do not show it by playing rapidly. On the contrary. Although you are quite certain what your next move will be, you may assume a pose of troubled thought and permit several minutes to elapse before making your move, to lull your adversary into a false feeling of security.

These are some of the pleasant little byplays of serious, grim tournament chess; but they become very unpleasant when you are the victim of such psychological tactics yourself!

Well, let us assume that both players have avoided pitfalls in openings not yet fully analyzed, and a more or less even middle game has been reached. Then a silent, deadly struggle ensues for the most minute positional advantage. What wearing effort to remain constantly on your guard and to work out in your mind the positions this or that variation will lead to, though they are never reached in the actual game because your opponent chooses a different road! The emaciating concentration required to keep this network of combinations before you for fully four or even five hours at a stretch, until the game is adjourned for a dinner

interval! How often fatigue dulls your wits and causes you to throw away a good game by a blunder no beginner would make! That harassing time clock! The nerve-racking excitement when you have only seconds left in which to make up your mind, where ten or fifteen minutes would not be too much! The fear that grips your throat when your opponent makes an unexpected move just as you have used up almost all the time allotted to you! The hope which quickens your pulse when he is pressed for time himself in a difficult position! Not to let him benefit by the time you are taking for your own moves, you are often tempted to play too rapidly and then one little error may throw away the fruits of hours of hard labor!

I do not think there is any other mental strain comparable to the exertion to which a tournament game subjects the chess master. Working at what seemed to me the most difficult mathematical problems has never exhausted me nearly as much as playing in a chess tournament; and of all intellectual applications mathematical work is surely the hardest. That is why physical fitness is a most important factor in tournament chess and why young players, whose brains can stand the poisons of fatigue much longer than those of older players have a great advantage.

So the qualities required include cunning, psychological insight, good nerves, fitness, patience, concentration and clock handling. Do chess books teach you these things? No. And there's only one forum where it's worth discussing them too, and that's in the tournament hall.

Here's a bit of practical psychology of the sort that wins chess games but doesn't appear in the books. One of the points of choosing the Accelerated Dragon rather than the 2...d6 move order is that a lot of amateurs have seen White's attacking plan based on playing Be3, Qd2 and castling long. But if you try it against the Accelerated, Black gets a very good game because he can play ...d7-d5 in one move:

Guo,C (1768) - Fortman,Z (1908)

Missouri Class Championship, 2003

Sicilian B34

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3

At these levels some sort of "anti-Sicilian" is more the exception rather than the rules. So normally one can expect a Morra, 2 c3, 2 f4 or 2 Nc3 and 3 g3.

One thing I've found interesting is that after 2 c3 many Sicilian players at amateur level play the same moves they would against an Open Sicilian. Accordingly I once prepared one of my students in the variation 2 c3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 and now the Dragon players would go 5...g6 whilst the Najdorf players would play 5...a6. This is a classic illustration of how people can "follow the book" without putting their brains into gear first.

2...Nc6 3 d4

And here one might almost be surprised not to see 3 Bb5. This has been all the rage at every level.

3...cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6

I've long held the view that the Accelerated Dragon is a great choice for players under 2200. White often plays the usual Dragon moves automatically, letting Black get ...d7-d5 in without first losing time by putting the pawn on d6. And few White players below FIDE Master/IM strength handle the Maroczy Bind (5 c4) very well.

5 Be3 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 f3?!

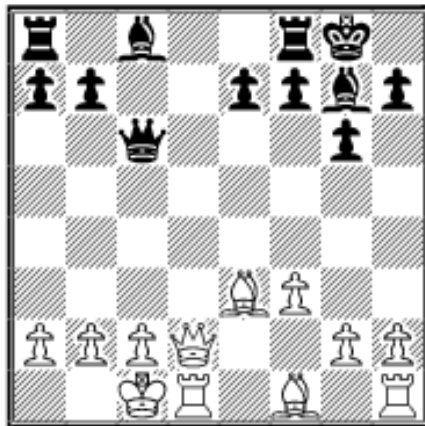
Already a mistake; White should play 7 Bc4 here, but after 7...Qa5 he has to castle short.

7...0-0 8 Qd2

8 Bc4 may be relatively best. After the text move I already prefer Black.

8...d5! 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5

10 Nxc6 bxc6 gives Black a half open b-file; the fact that the c-pawn is isolated is of little importance.

10...Qxd5 11 Nxc6 Qxc6 12 0-0-0?

Castling into it; White should close the h8-a1 diagonal with 12 c3 and try to tough it out.

12...Be6 13 a3?!

13 Kb1 looks slightly better, but it's still very good for Black.

13...Rac8 14 Bd3 Rfd8 15 Qe2

White may well be lost in this position. 15 Kb1 is a better try, when I'm not totally convinced Black is winning. For example, there's the line 15...Qd5 (15...b5! may well be better, playing for the attack) 16 c4 Qxd3+ 17 Qxd3 Rxd3 18 Rxd3 Bf5 after which 19 Rhd1 Rd8 (or 19...Rxc4 20 Bxa7) 20 Kc2 Rxd3 21 Rxd3 Bxd3+ 22 Kxd3 Bxb2 23 Bxa7 Bxa3 White can exchange your last queenside pawn with 24 Bd4 Bd6 25 h3 f6 26 c5 Bg3 27 Kc4 followed by Kb5 and c5-c6.

15...a6?

Black can win on the spot with 15...Bxb2+ 16 Kxb2 Qc3+ 17 Kb1 Qxa3 etc.

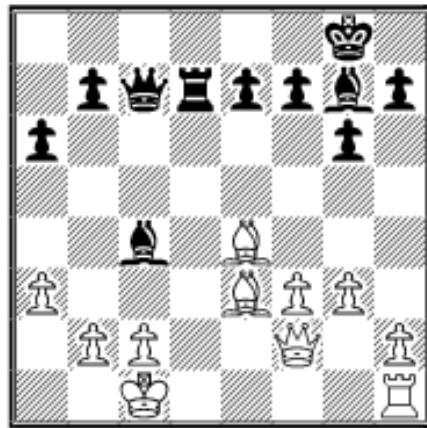
16 Be4 Qc7

Here, too, Black can play 16...Bxb2+ 17 Kxb2 Qc3+ 18 Kb1 Qxa3 winning.

17 Rxd8+ Rxd8 18 g3?

The losing move; White should try to exchange pieces with 18 Rd1.

18 Bc4 19 Qf2 Rd7



Black can also play 19...f5 when 20 Bb6 Qe5 21 c3 Bh6+ 22 f4 Qxe4 23 Re1 Qd3 24 Bxd8 Qxd8 is clearly better for him.

20 c3 f5 21 Bc2 e5

Tartakover, who fought in both world wars, would probably have annotated this move with the words “forward patrol.”

22 Rd1 Rxd1+ 23 Kxd1 Bd5 24 Qd2??

A blunder in an inferior position.

24...Bxf3+ 0-1

Recommended Reading

Chess for Fun and Chess for Blood by Edward Lasker (Dover, 1962)

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