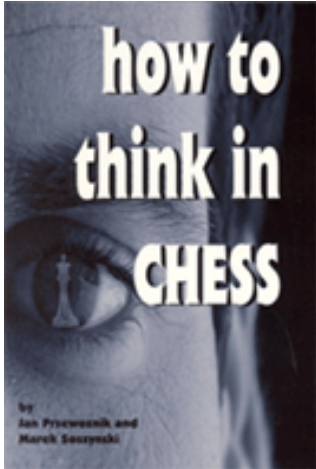




## COLUMNISTS

### Let's Take A Look...

Nigel Davies



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](mailto: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..."

### Red, Red Wine

Back in the 1990s the woman who used to cut my hair invited me for a meal and to play chess against her husband and a family friend. She was slightly taken aback when I asked to be compensated for my time, but I explained that chess is what I did for a living and that this was essentially a chess engagement.

It turned out that I was very well treated. As the evening progressed it became clear that I would never have an empty glass, and I have to say that it was rather a good vintage. After a while the chess set was produced and my two opponents took turns trying to beat me. But this proved to be a frustrating task, as even with my brain "disengaged" my hand didn't play too badly.

After about fifteen unsuccessful attempts, the family friend started gesticulating wildly at random squares, asking if these were the key points. "They're not really relevant," I slurred. "The problem is that you keep leaving your pieces *en prise*." I took another rook and the glass was refilled.

The last thing I remember was being bundled into a car and driven home. But the recollection of the "key squares" thing stayed with me.

One of the problems with many chess concepts is that they're often posited in a way that cannot be understood without someone first having an extensive chess background. So the value of passed pawns cannot be understood without someone first being able to use an extra queen. And open files lack relevance unless someone understands the danger of having a rook on the seventh rank.

As for key squares, they're really abstract. And that's to say nothing of the subtle strategy involved in playing the opening well. Is it any wonder that people try to memorise moves?

Which concepts are most readily understandable? Well mating formations and attacks can be understood because checkmate ends the game. And when someone discovers that it's good to have an extra queen, knight forks and bishop skewers start to acquire real relevance. Not to mention the promotion of pawns.

This line of reasoning provides a nice template for a player's studies in chess, to start out with mating attacks and formations and then move on to ways of winning material and promoting pawns. Openings might be studied with a view to building an attacking

formation in which certain mating combinations are possible, but strategic subtleties will be wasted on players who haven't first mastered the basics. This may seem obvious but it is very common to see lower rated players attempt openings that are just way beyond their understanding. It's like someone who can't count trying to read a book on algebra.

I think this is where more than ninety-five percent of chess books get it wrong, they dive into very sophisticated chess without considering whether the reader has the necessary background to understand it. Why does nobody say there's a problem? Well a few people do, but they're a distinct minority. Most chess readers pretend they can understand everything because they don't want to appear stupid. And thus one can often find players around 1300 discuss the ins and outs of the Sicilian Najdorf before blundering away a piece or two in their next game.

What if someone just can't see tactics well, no matter how hard they try? They should study the endgame, which offers an alternative way of winning games based on learnable technique rather than god given talent. But I haven't met many people who have actually followed this advice.

The following game graphically illustrates the importance of good endgame play, with the advantage changing hands several times in the later stages. I can't stress enough how common this is in club games, so a little endgame knowledge can make all the difference.

**Martin, B (1450) – MacGregor, S (1509)**

Lothians Congress  
Sicilian Najdorf [B84]

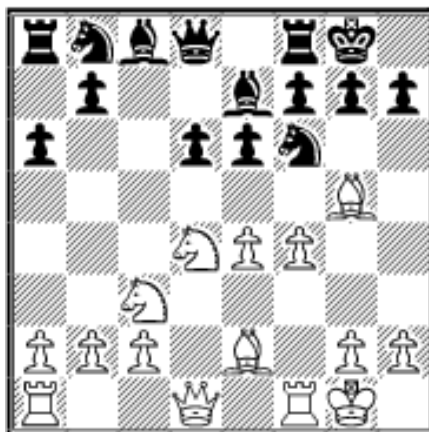
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6**

The big problem with the Najdorf is that so many White players go 2 Nc3 and 3 f4, which is pretty good against 2...d6. This is such a serious issue that Najdorf aficionado Joe Gallagher meets 2 Nc3 with 2...Nc6 and is prepared to go into an Accelerated Dragon after 3 Nf3 g6 4 d4. Of course a second main line Sicilian for special use against 2 Nc3 is not an option for most club players.

**6 Be2 e6 7 Bg5**

This doesn't fit too well with 6 Be2. Keres used to play things like this in conjunction with pressure along the d-file, but he only did it when Black had already put his knight on c6.

**7...Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4!?**



9 Qd3 makes more sense to me, but I don't think Black has anything to fear after 9...Nbd7.

**9...Qb6!? 10 Na4**

White could also consider 10 Kh1, when 10... Qxb2 11 Qd3 threatens 12 Rab1, followed by 13 Nd5. Black's best may be the hard to find 11... Bd8, when 12 Nb3 (threatening 13 a3) 12...Qa3 13 Qg3 (threatening 14 e5) still looks very dangerous.

**10...Qc7 11 f5?! e5?!**

11...b5! 12 Nc3 b4 looks very strong here. Now White gets to stabilise his position and can aim at the d5-square.

**12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Nf3 b5 14 Nc3 Bb7 15 Nd5**

15 Kh1 is better.

**15...Qc5+ 16 Kh1 Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Qxd5 18 exd5 Nd7**



Another strong line is 18...e4 19 Nd2 e3 20 Ne4 Bxb2, which is also very good for Black.

**19 Nd2 Nb6 20 Bf3**

20 c4 bxc4 21 Nxc4 is best and looks somewhat drawish. It won't be easy for Black to get his rooks in.

**20...Rac8 21 Rac1?**

21 c3 is necessary.

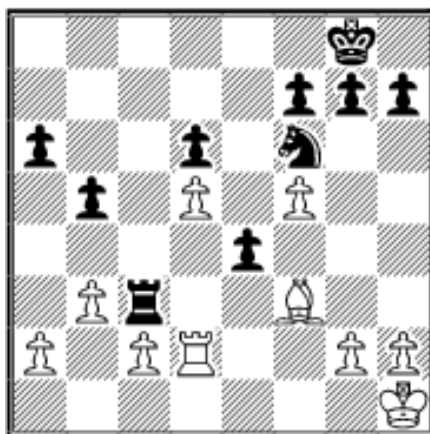
**21...Bg5 22 Rf2 Rfd8**

Black could also cash in with 22...Bxd2 23 Rxd2 Nc4, which leaves the rest of White's queenside pawns weak once the b2-pawn has gone.

**23 b3 Rc3 24 Be4 Rdc8 25 Rd1 Bxd2 26 Rxd2 Nd7**

With Black's knight coming to f6, White is in deep trouble here.

**27 Rf3 Nf6 28 Rxc3 Rxc3 29 Bf3 e4**



There's a case for bringing the king to the middle with 29...Kf8 before trying to cash in. But there should be several ways to do this.

**30 Bd1 e3**

30...Rc5 also looks good.

**31 Rd4 Rxc2 32 Bxc2 e2 33 Rd1 exd1Q+ 34 Bxd1 Nxd5**

This endgame looks winning, but it might not quite be as easy as it seems, because Black has a knight against a bishop and White can centralise his king.

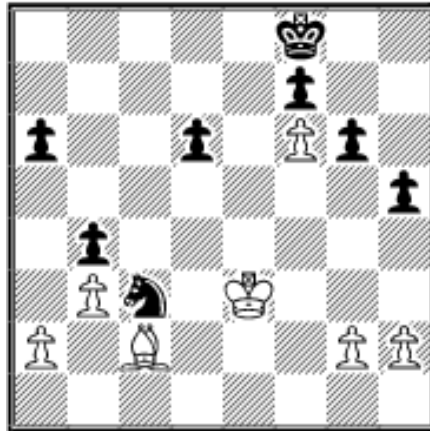
**35 Bc2 b4!?**

It was worth considering an immediate 35...Kf8, as with Black's knight on d5 there are no f6 tricks.

**36 Kg1 Nc3 37 Kf2 Kf8 38 f6!**

Some technical problems are starting to materialise.

**38...g6 39 Ke3 h5?**



Losing valuable time. 39...Nxa2 should be played, when 40 Kd4 Nc3 must be winning in the long run, as White can't approach Black's queenside pawns.

**40 Kd4 Ke8 41 Bd3 a5 42 h3**

42 a3 also looks like it should at least draw – I don't see how Black defend the b-pawn, so White will get an outside passed pawn.

**42...Nxa2 43 Kd5 Kd7**

Black can also play 43...Nc1 44 Bc4 Kf8 45 Kxd6 a4 46 bxa4 b3 47 Bd5 b2 48 Be4 Nb3 49 h4 Nd2 50 Bd3 Ke8 51 Kc6 Nc4! 52 Kb5 Nd2 53 Kc6 Nc4, which seems to draw by the skin of his teeth.

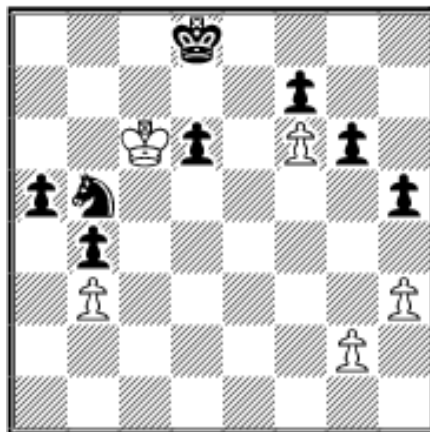
**44 Bb5+ Kc7 45 Kd4**

I don't understand why White didn't play 45 Be8, which looks like a draw after 45...Nc3+ 46 Kd4 h4 47 Bxf7 Kd7 48 Bxg6 Ke6.

**45...Kd8 46 Kd5??**

And this should lose. 46 Bc4 is necessary.

**46...Nc3+ 47 Kc6 Nxb5??**



47...a4 wins.

**48 Kxb5 Kc7**

Here Black can draw by going after the f6-pawn with 48...Kd7

**49 Kxa5 Kc6 50 Kxb4 d5??**

50...Kd5 still seems to draw, because Black get f6; for example, 51 Kb5 (51 Kc3 Ke5 52 Kc4 d5 + 53 Kd3 Kxf6 54 Kd4 Ke6 55 b4 Kd6 56 b5 h4 57 b6 Kc6 58 b7 Kxb7 59 Kxd5 Kc8 60 Ke5 Kd7

61 Kf6 Ke8 62 Kg5 wins back the pawn on h4 with a draw) 51...Ke4 52 Kc6 d5 53 Kd7 d4 54 Ke7 d3 55 Kxf7 d2 56 Ke7 d1Q 57 f7 also queens and makes a draw. Now it's lost

because of the outside passed pawn.

**51 Kc3 Kc5 52 b4+1-0**

I got the impression that time trouble may have been a factor later on.

### **Recommended Reading**

[\*Endgame Strategy\*](#) by Mikhail Shereshevsky (Everyman, 1994)

*How to Play the Chess Endings* by Eugene Znosko-Borovsky (Dover, 1974)

[\*Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual\*](#) by Mark Dvoretsky (Russell Enterprises, 2006)

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