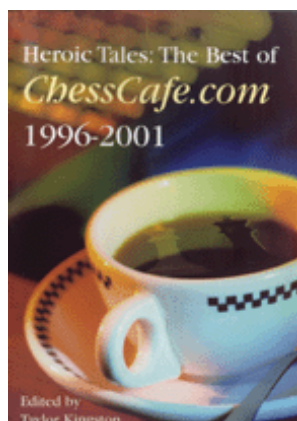




BOOK REVIEWS

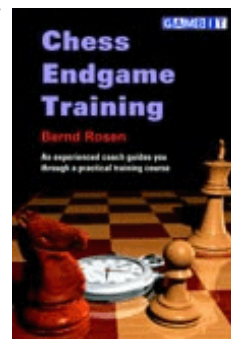


Training the Trainers

Bill Kelleher

Chess Endgame Training by Bernd Rosen, 2003 Gambit, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 176pp., \$19.95

Everyone knows that studying the endgame is good for you. The old Soviet School placed great emphasis on it, as do chess trainers the world over. Nonetheless, chess players would rather spend most of their time studying the intricacies of the Najdorf or the Kings Indian. Endgame study for most of us has always been an afterthought. It is not that we don't know we should study endgames, but it is the chess equivalent of eating your green vegetables – a pretty bland diet.



It should come as no surprise to the reader that opening manuals are, by far, the best selling chess books. Middle game tomes are second with endgame manuals trailing along at the end of the line. However, with the success of *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* maybe we will witness a change in the buying habits of the chess public. Gambit Publications, perhaps sensing a trend, has now released *Chess Endgame Training*, by the German FIDE master and trainer Bernd Rosen.

Rosen originally wrote this book as a training tool to teach the endgame in classes he conducts in various German chess clubs. The book is aimed at relative endgame novices. As he states in his introduction, "The reader is assumed to only to have the most basic endgame knowledge (especially the mating of the 'lone king'). His idea was to gather endgame material in an accessible format for teachers to use when conducting training sessions. It was not originally designed for the students themselves. "Thus", as Rosen goes on to say, "the teacher can start immediately without any further preparation." In this Gambit edition he states that the book can also be used for self-instruction. However, it is not clear to me that a book written for trainers can also be used by students, but more on this later.

Although the book is relatively short (176 pages), it consists of 17 chapters. The first 15 chapters are devoted to the actual lessons, while chapter 16 is a test on the material covered in the previous chapters. Chapter 17 gives advice to prospective teachers who wish to use this book as a training tool.

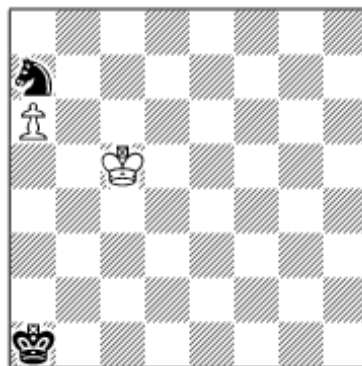
The first five chapters are devoted to king and pawn endgames, and cover such topics as the opposition, passed pawns, *zugzwang*, and the like. Chapter six discusses the uniqueness of the rook's pawn in endgame play, while chapters 7-9 deal with pure knight and bishop endgames. Chapters 10-13 cover rook endgames and the final two chapters are on queen endgames. Complicated endgames with more pieces are beyond the scope of the book.

Although the layout of the book is pretty typical of endgame manuals, the pedagogical method is somewhat unusual. Each chapter begins with an introductory example that illustrates an important basic principle of the type of endgame under discussion. For instance, the first chapter on king and pawn endings begins with an example which explains the “Rule of the Square”. This introductory example is followed by a series of exercises of increasing difficulty for the student to solve. These exercises are followed by the correct answers, with detailed explanations of the principles involved.

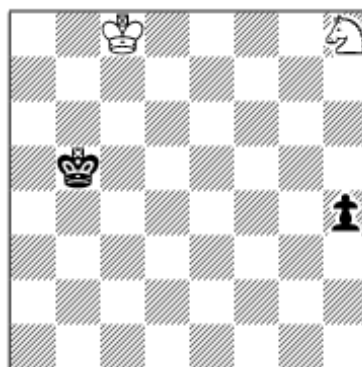
The unusual aspect of the book is that the initial example does not completely prepare the reader for the problems that follow, which are both more complicated, and also introduce new endgame principles. It should be said that Rosen does, for the most part, take care to gradually increase the difficulty of his examples. Nonetheless, it seems to me that an inexperienced player (to whom the book is targeted, after all) might find this teaching method frustrating.

Consider the first chapter on queen and pawn endings. The author’s introductory example demonstrates how a king and queen win against king and pawn, when the defending side has a d-pawn on the seventh rank. However, the first two problems that the student must solve also have the pawn on the seventh, but it is located on the a and c-files respectively. As any experienced player knows, these positions are drawn unless the stronger side’s king is fairly close to the pawn. One can well imagine a novice player banging his head against the wall trying to figure out how to win the game.

In the chapter on knight and pawn endings there is a much more extreme case. The example problem shows how a knight can stop a pawn from queening even without the support of the king:



The first problem for the student to solve is very easy, but the second one is extremely difficult.



The solution is **1.Nf7! h3 2.Nd6+ Kb6! 3.Ne4 h2 4.Nf2! Kc6 5.Kb8! Kd6 6.Kb7 Ke6 7.Kc6 Kf5 8.Kd5 Kf4 9.Kd4 Kf3 10.Nh1 Kg2 11.Ke3 Kxh1 12.Kf2** Stalemate! How in the world can beginning students, with only two basic endgames under their belt, possibly solve a problem of this difficulty?

Now there is a school of thought that says that trying and failing will only make the resulting solution that much more vivid for the student when he or she finally looks it up in the answer section. But I do not think this is exactly what Mr. Rosen had in mind when he originally wrote the book. He wrote the book to be used in training sessions where the students divide into teams to solve the problems. Consider the advice he gives to teachers: "Especially during the solution phase, keep in close contact with the teams. If necessary, give advice or point out errors in the analysis. During this phase, you learn where the problems are and thus you can better focus on them in the concluding discussion." When you take into account that the students will be of slightly differing levels, that there will be animated discussion, and that there will be a teacher there to answer your questions, it is obvious that in this setting the frustration quotient will be non-existent. How it will work for a student working alone is another question.

There are also some odd gaps in the overall endgame coverage. For instance, although there are four chapters devoted to rook and pawn endings, there are only two examples of R +4Ps versus R+3pawns where each side has three pawns on the kingside and the stronger side also has an extra rook's pawn on the queenside. More importantly there is no discussion of the case of the rook's pawn being on the six with the stronger side's rook in front of the pawn. This is an extremely common and important endgame, but the student gets no guidance on how to play this position, or what the overall evaluation is. Attentive readers of **ChessCafe** may remember that Mark Dvoretsky devoted two of his columns last year to this ending, and the analysis totaled 40 pages!

The concluding chapter of the book gives advice to teachers who wish to use the book as a training tool. In my opinion, this is the strongest part of the book. People wishing to teach the endgame in chess classes will find a complete lecture course laid out for them.

Rosen recommends that each training session be divided into three parts. In the first part, the teacher lectures on the opening example of each chapter on a demonstration board, giving the salient points of the ending in question. The students are then divided into groups, and work together solving the exercises. Finally, the teacher discusses the exercises with the entire class on the demonstration board.

The author also discusses more general topics. For instance, he tells the prospective teacher how much time should be spent on each part, as well as what materials are needed. He also gives advice on seating arrangements, preparing materials in advance, encouraging student participation, and the like. In addition, he gives specific advice for teaching each chapter.

The author has made an honest effort to write a helpful endgame manual for beginners, but this is not the book that I would recommend to those looking for an endgame primer. However, if you are one of those hardy souls who enjoy marching into the unknown alone, by all means give it a chance. On the other hand if you are teaching chess to relative beginners, and need an endgame book aimed specifically at this audience, this may be just what you

are looking for.

Order *Chess Endgame Training*
by Bernd Rosen

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