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Preparation, Psychology, and Dynamism

Steve Goldberg

Chess Secrets: The Giants of Power Play, by Neil McDonald, 2009 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 239pp. \$24.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$20.95)

The author differentiates between what he terms strategists and power players. Strategists are players such as Capablanca, Karpov, and Kramnik, who are more positional players and work gradually to obtain and increase small advantages. On the other hand, power players tend to be more aggressive, more tolerant of risk, and seeking imbalances and tactical possibilities at every turn. McDonald describes it as “a blend of preparation, psychology and dynamism.”

This book explores five such power players: Paul Morphy, Alexander Alekhine, David Bronstein, Efim Geller, and Veselin Topalov. The author demonstrates a bit of dynamism himself in that he doesn't, as one might expect, isolate each of these players within their own chapter or two. Instead, he looks at different aspects of power play, and presents illustrative games from any or all of these players as appropriate.

The table of contents gives a hint regarding the author's categorization:

- The Dynamic Element
- Catching the King in the Centre
- Opening Old (and New) Wounds
- The Life History of a Knight
- The Goldilocks Queen
- Energizing the Pawns
- A Battering Ram on the f-file
- Backward Pawns and Indian Bishops
- The Psychology of Preparation
- The Art of Surprise

Each chapter includes one or more games from each of the five featured “power” players, and McDonald even slips in an “outsider” game (in chapter ten): Fischer-Spassky, game six, from the 1972 world championship, which McDonald calls “the most famous match of all time.”

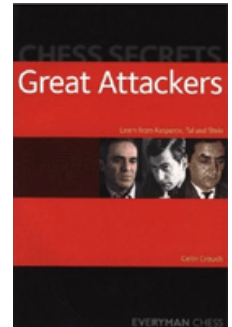
In total, there are eighty-eight well-annotated games spread among the various chapters. These aren't short grandmaster draws – they are fighting games sure to get the adrenaline flowing for the vast majority of chess players.

Moreover, the annotations take the form of textual instruction rather than twenty-ply side variations. The entertaining, informative game notes make this book an excellent instruction manual for players rated less than 1800. Take a look at some of the subtitles:

- The never-ending attack on h7
- A slow burning attack beats a temporary initiative
- A wing pawn adds vital energy to an attack
- Why Alekhine beat Capablanca

Let's look at a sample power play position (after 26.axb5 in Reti-Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925), with a few select comments from the author:

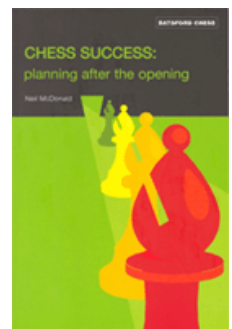
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26...Re3!

Psychology and dynamism! Alekhine doesn't give his opponent a second chance to dislodge the knight from d5 with 27.e4.

27.Nf3?

Reti loses his composure and immediately makes a serious blunder. The knight was performing an important role on d4, guarding both the b5- and e2-pawns. Even worse, retreating it to f3 shuts in the bishop on h1, which loses influence over the centre. This reduction in the energy of the white pieces allows Alekhine to begin a series of tactical operations. The logical move was 27.Bf3!, challenging the black bishop and strengthening, rather than weakening, White's hold over the e2-square.

27...cxb5 28.Qxb5

If Reti had kept his knight on d4 he could have replied 28.Nxb5, and so avoided all the grief that follows.

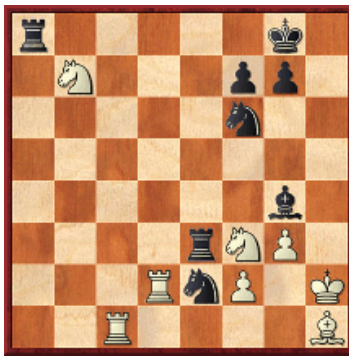


28...Nc3!

Alekhine aims first of all to conquer the pawn on e2. It is a perfect target for the following reasons:

1. It is on a tactically sensitive square, being the distance of a knight's fork from the rook on c1 and king on g1.
2. It is performing a vital defensive role in guarding f3 against the attack of the black rook and bishop.
3. It can be attacked with gain of time by simultaneously hitting the white queen.

29.Qxb7 Qxb7 30.Nxb7 Nxe2+ 31.Kh2



31...Ne4!

Black attacks both the rook on d2 and the pawn on f2. It is worth repeating that he is risking absolutely nothing in leaving the rook hanging on e3. After 32.fxe3 Nxd2 material is equal, but with both the white rook on c1 and the knight on f3 hanging. Therefore Black is bound to get in first when it comes to grabbing material.

32.Rc4!

Reti tries to confuse matters with his clever rook move. If now 32...Bxf3 33.Rxe4!! is a move worthy of one of his endgame studies. Then 33...Bxe4 (after 33...Rxe4 34.Bxf3 equalizes) 34.fxe3 Bxh1 35.Kxh1 Nxg3+ 36.Kg2 gives White a survivable endgame.

32...Nxf2

Alekhine's rook has been hanging on e3 since move 26! But now he removes the threat, winning a pawn and leaving g3 weaker.

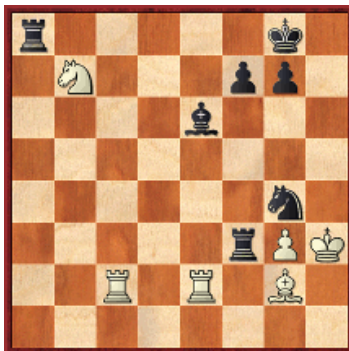
33.Bg2

Hoping for 33...Bxf3 34.Bxf3 Rxf3 35.Rxe2 with good drawing chances.

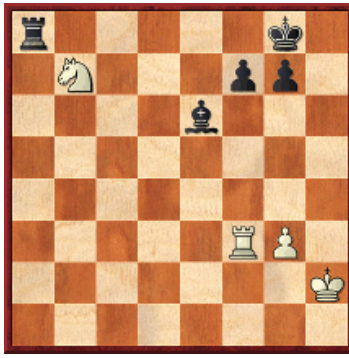
33...Be6!

Beginning a regrouping of his pieces. He attacks the rook on c4 and wins time for his next move which obliges the white king to walk into a discovered attack.

34.Rcc2 Ng4+ 35.Kh3 Ne5+ 36.Kh2 Rxf3! 37.Rxe2 Ng4+ 38.Kh3



38...Ne3+ 39.Kh2 Nxc2 40.Bxf3 Nd4 41.Rf2 Nxf3+ 42.Rxf3



42...Bd5 0-1

A brilliant display of power play by Alekhine. Once he had been given his chance with 26...Re3! he kept Reti under relentless pressure.

While not all eighty-eight games in *The Giants of Power Play* have the kind of “relentless pressure” demonstrated by Alekhine above, they are all entertaining and instructive. If you enjoy chess, you’ll enjoy this well-written book by Neil McDonald.

[Order](#) *The Giants of Power Play*
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