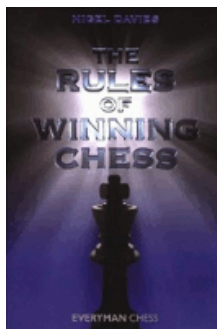




COLUMNISTS

Middlegame Motifs

Nigel Davies



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The Weak Doubled Pawn

Whilst it is not always the case, doubled pawns can become a serious liability. The situation in which they are particularly weak arises when they cannot be protected by their fellow pawns and need to be supported by pieces. Even if such pawns can be defended this way, they can spread gloom over a position by simply requiring such defense. Pieces that are reduced to such a role can be very passively placed and bear the seeds of defeat. Players will usually only accept such pawn weaknesses if they believe they have excellent compensating factors.

One of the best known opening variations in which doubled pawns arise is the Sämisch Variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense with 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.a3 Bxc3+ 5.bxc3. Neither of White's doubled c-pawns can be defended by another pawn because the d-pawn has already advanced to d4. This makes both of them very vulnerable. What does White have as compensation for this weakness? Well, first of all he has the two bishops and his dark-squared bishop in particular can become very dangerous if it gets active. And secondly his d4-pawn is well supported by the pawn on c3, which means that Black will find it difficult to undermine White's pawn center with ...c7-c5.

Because of these clearly defined positional motifs the play can become very sharp, and this opening has been a dangerous weapon in the hands of attacking players such as David Bronstein. On the other hand those who are more structurally inclined, like Vassily Smyslov, appear to have enjoyed playing the black side of this position. This month we will be focusing on the weakness of the doubled c-pawns and seeing how this can be exploited. The two games are both classics featuring world class grandmasters.

Botvinnik, Mikhail – Reshevsky, Samuel

World Championship, Den Haag/Moscow (14), 18.04.1948
 Nimzo-Indian Defense [E29]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Nc6 7.Bd3 0-0 8.
 Ne2 b6 9.e4 Ne8!



[FEN"r1bqnrk1/p2p1ppp/1pn1p3/2p5/2PPP3/
 P1PB4/4NPPP/R1BQK2R w KQ - 0 10"]

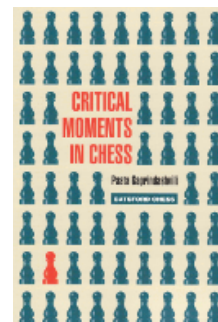
An instructive move. Black avoids the pin with Bc1-g5 whilst simultaneously preparing to meet f2-f4 with ...f7-f5 and routing his knight around to d6.

10.Be3 d6

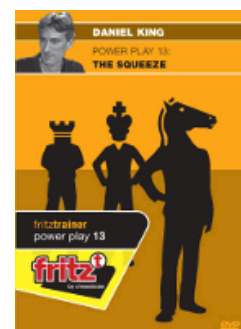
Defending the c5-pawn, but ruling out the possibility of a later ...Ne8-d6.

11.0-0 Na5

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This, together with Black's next, are very typical moves for Black in this line, latching onto the weak pawn on c4.

12.Ng3 Ba6 13.Qe2 Qd7!



[FEN "r3nrk1/p2q1ppp/bp1pp3/n1p5/2PPP3/P1PBB1N1/4QPPP/R4RK1 w - - 0 14"]

Another instructive move. Now Black wants to bring his queen to a4 to have a third piece attacking the weak c4-pawn.

14.f4

14.e5! would have been much more dangerous for Black, immediately unveiling the d3-bishop against Black's kingside. After 14...Qa4 15.Bg5!, White would threaten 16.Be7, so Black should probably play 14...f5 anyway.

14...f5 15.Rae1 g6 16.Rd1 Qf7

After 16...Qa4, White can play 17.d5!?

17.e5 Rc8 18.Rfe1?!



[FEN "2r1nrk1/p4q1p/bp1pp1p1/n1p1Pp2/2PP1P2/P1PBB1N1/4Q1PP/3RR1K1 b - - 0 18"]

After this, White's position starts to develop signs of Rigor mortis. 18.d5 was a more interesting try.

18...dxe5 19.dxe5 Ng7 20.Nf1 Rfd8 21.Bf2 Nh5 22.Bg3 Qe8

With the queen having done her job on f7, it looks for a more venomous post on a4.

23.Ne3 Qa4 24.Qa2 Nxc3 25.hxc3 h5!

A nice prophylactic move from Reshevsky, ruling out any counterplay via g3-g4.

26.Be2 Kf7 27.Kf2 Qb3!



[FEN "2rr4/p4k2/bp2p1p1/n1p1Pp1p/2P2P2/PqP1N1P1/Q3BKP1/3RR3 w - - 0 28"]

With the exchange of queens the weakness of White's doubled pawns becomes even more significant.

28.Qxb3 Nxb3 29.Bd3 Ke7 30.Ke2 Na5 31.Rd2 Rc7 32.g4

Desperation.

32...Rcd7 33.gxf5 gxf5 34.Red1 h4 35.Ke1?

A blunder in a difficult position.

35...Nb3 36.Nd5+ exd5 37.Bxf5 Nxd2 38.Rxd2 dxc4 39.Bxd7 Rxd7 40.Rf2 Ke6 41.Rf3 Rd3 42.Ke2 0-1

In this next game, Efim Geller plays rather better than Botvinnik did against Reshevsky, but even so the doubled pawns tell against him. Particularly worthy of note is how Smyslov snuffs out White's kingside play with 13... Qh4, followed by 15...f5.

Geller, Efim – Smyslov, Vassily

Candidates Tournament Amsterdam (2), 28.03.1956

Nimzo-Indian Defense [E29]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.a3 Bxc3+ 5.bxc3 c5 6.e3 b6 7.Ne2 Nc6 8.Ng3 0-0 9.Bd3 Ba6 10.e4



[FEN "r2q1rk1/p2p1ppp/bpn1pn2/2p5/2PPP3/P1PB2N1/5PPP/R1BQK2R b KQ - 0 10"]

10...Ne8

Capturing the d4-pawn is very dangerous for Black after 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 Nxd4 12.e5! Ne8 13.Bb2 Nc6 14.Qh5 g6 15.Qh6, followed by h2-h4.

11.Be3 Na5 12.Qe2 Rc8 13.d5 Qh4!

After 13...Nd6?, White plays 14.e5 Ndx4 15.Qh5 g6 16.Qh6, threatening 17. Nh5.

14.0-0 Nd6 15.Rad1 f5

15...Bxc4 is very dangerous for Black because of 16.f4.

16.dxe6 dxe6

16...f4 is bad because of 17.exd7 Rcd8 18.e5 Ndx4 19.Nf5, etc.

17.exf5 exf5 18.Qf3 Bb7

Here too the move 18...f4 would fail to produce the expected returns after 19. Qd5+ Nf7 20.Nf5.

19.Qf4 Qf6



[FEN "2r2rk1/pb4pp/1p1n1q2/n1p2p2/2P2Q2/P1PB1N1/5PPP/3R1RK1 w - - 0 20"]

Smyslov is playing very securely, so as to keep White's dangerous bishop-pair at bay; if he kills White's piece play, the weakness of the doubled c-pawns is going to make itself felt. After 19...Qxf4 20.Bxf4 Ndx4, White can simply play 21.Bxf5.

20.Bb1 Ne4 21.Rd7 Qc6! 22.Rxb7

This exchange sacrifice is White's best chance, gaining activity for his bishop-pair as compensation.

22...Qxb7 23.Nxf5

23.Nxe4 fxe4 24.Bxe4 may have been better from an objective point of view, but Geller would not have relished playing the endgame that arises after 24...Rxf4 25.Bxb7 Rff8 26.Bxc8 Rxc8.

23...Rce8 24.Qg4 Kh8 25.Ng3 Nxe3 26.hxg3 Qf7

Threatening 27...Rxe3.

27.Qh4 h6 28.Bd3 Qf6 29.Qh5 Rd8 30.Be2 Qf5 31.Qh4 Qf6 32.Qh5 Nc6 33.g4 Qf7 34.Qh4 Ne7 35.Qh3 Ng6



[FEN "3r1r1k/p4qp1/1p4np/2p5/2P3P1/P1P1B2Q/4BPP1/5RK1 w - - 0 36"]

36.Qh2?

With both players in time trouble Geller makes it easier for Black. 36.g3! was a better move, keeping Black's knight out of f4.

36...Nf4 37.Bf3 Qxc4 38.g5 Rd6 39.Rc1

After 39.gxh6 Rxh6 40.Qg3, Black even has a mating combination with 40...Qxf1+ 41.Kxf1 Rh1# mate.

39...Rg6 40.gxh6 Rxh6 41.Qg3 Qe4!



[FEN "5r1k/p5p1/1p5r/2p5/4qn2/P1P1BBQ1/5PP1/2R3K1 w - - 0 42"]

Black's queen finishes here entertaining voyage with a neat trick. Should White take the queen, then he loses a piece to 42...Ne2+, 43...Nxg3+ and 44...Nxe4.

42.Qxf4 Qxf4 43.Bxf4 Rxf4 44.Re1 Ra4 45.Re8+ Kh7 46.Be4+ g6 47.g4 Rxa3 48.Re6 Rxc3 49.Kg2 b5 50.f3 b4 51.g5 Rh4 52.Bxg6+ Kg7 53.Kg3 Rd4 54.Be8 b3 55.g6 Rd8 56.Re7+ 0-1

After 56.Re7+ Kf6 57.g7 Rxe8!, White loses his passed pawn.

Exercises (solutions next month)



[FEN "6k1/p1nr2q1/bp2p2p/n1p1Ppp1/2P2P2/PBP1B3/4Q1PP/2N2RK1 b - - 0 28"]

Black to play. How can he exploit the passivity of White's pieces to increase his pressure?



[FEN "1k3r1r/p2q1p2/bp1p1np1/n1pPp3/P1P1P1PP/2PBN1B1/1K2Q3/R6R b - - 0 27"]

Black to play exploited the weakness of White's doubled c-pawns with a deep combination. What was it?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Davies, Nigel (2510) – Dive, Russell (2315)

Wrexham, 1994



[FEN "rn2qrk1/1bb3pp/2p1p3/p1P2p2/PpNP4/1Q3BP1/1P2P2P/R1BR2K1 w -- 0 18"]

White to play. This is not a combination, just a good positional move. How does White get the right set of bishops left on the board?

18.Bf4! A simple and strong move, forcing the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. Black cannot retreat to d8 because of 19.Nd6. **18...Bxf4 19.gxf4** White has a massive positional advantage and later won via a direct attack along the g-file. The rest of the game does not relate directly to the theme, but the reader may enjoy the remaining moves. **19...Ra7 20.Kh1 Qe7 21.Ne5 Ba8 22.Rg1 Rf6 23.Rg5 Kh8 24.Rag1 Rh6 25.R1g3 Qe8 26.Qe3 Qc8 27.Qg1 g6 28.Bh5!** A rare example of a sacrifice on an empty square. Next move I give up a second piece on an occupied square. **28...Rxb5 29.Nxg6+! hxg6 30.Rxg6 Qd7** There's no defense for Black. Now I get to sacrifice a rook. **31.Rg8 + Kh7 32.Rh8+ 1-0**

Alekhine, Alexander – Yates, Frederick

BCF Congress London (10), 1922



[FEN "r5rk/2RN1Rp1/b3p2p/3p1p1P/p2P1K2/Pp2PPP1/1P6/8 w -- 0 36"]

Although this position did not have arise directly from a Stonewall formation it shows the same strategic features. How did White to play crown his excellent positional play?

36.Nf6! The start of a beautiful combination with minimal material. Black cannot take the knight because of mate on h7, but he was probably relying on his next move. **36...Rgf8 37.Rxg7! Rxf6 38.Ke5! 1-0** The sting in the tail. Black cannot put either rook on f8 because of 39.Rh7+, followed by 40.Rcg7 mate.

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