



COLUMNISTS

Middlegame Motifs

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The Power of Passed Pawns

When Aaron Nimzowitsch wrote that "a passed pawn is a criminal that must be kept under lock and key," he was not far off the mark. The value of pawns can rise dramatically as they approach the eighth rank and completely overturn conventional material assessments. Accordingly, they should be pushed! There are several ways in which a passed pawn can win the game. The first and most obvious is that it might actually promote and become a queen, thereby leading to a decisive material advantage. A second and more subtle way is for a passed pawn to provide a distraction that can draw the opposing pieces away from a vulnerable part of the board. Often you get these two dynamics combined as the possessor of the passed pawn gradually manoeuvres his opponent towards the precipice.

In the first of this month's games, we see a classic demonstration of passed pawn power from the great Akiva Rubinstein. After gaining a passed pawn, he uses it to distract his opponent's forces whilst bringing his own king to a better position ready for the endgame. A timely simplification is followed by some classic endgame technique on Rubinstein's part.

Canal, Esteban – Rubinstein, Akiva
 Karlsbad (17), 20.08.1929
 Symmetrical English [A30]

1.Nf3

Very trendy amongst the younger masters of the time. Perhaps he also hoped to bamboozle the elder statesman with his hypermodern opening.

1...Nf6 2.b3 g6 3.g3 b6 4.Bb2 Bg7 5.Bg2 Bb7 6.0-0 0-0 7.c4 c5 8.d3 d5!



[FEN "r1q1rk1/pb2ppbp/1p3np1/2pp4/2P5//1P1P1NP1/PB2PPBP/RN1Q1RK1 w - d6 0 9"]

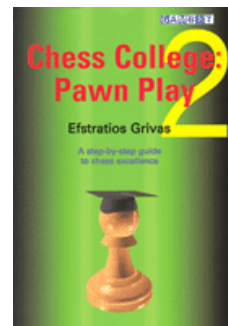
Exploiting White's passive 8.d3 to take space in the centre of the board. 8.Nc3 would have been better.

9.cxd5 Nxd5 10.Bxg7 Kxg7 11.Qd2 Nc6 12.Nc3 Nxc3 13.Qxc3+ Kg8 14.Qb2?!

Another quite passive looking move that allows Black to take more space. 14.e3 was better, trying to get in Rfd1 and a quick d3-d4.

14...Qd6 15.Rfd1 Rad8 16.Rd2 Rd7 17.Rad1 Rfd8 18.h4 e5 19.e3 h6

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[FEN "3r2k1/pb1r1p2/1pnq2pp/2p1p3/7P//1P1PPNP1/PQ1R1PB1/3R2K1 w - - 0 20"]

Setting up slightly better protection of his kingside dark squares and preparing to meet 20.h5 with 20...g5.

20.Bh3

The bolt for freedom with 20.d4 runs into 20...cxd4 21.exd4 e4 22.Ne1 e3!, which inflicts heavy damage on White's kingside.

20...Re7 21.Bg2

In this position, 21.d4 is strongly met by 21...exd4 22.exd4 Qf6!, hitting the knight on f3 whilst pinning the d4-pawn against White's queen.

21...Qf6 22.Nh2 h5 23.Nf3 Nb4!

This attack on the d3-pawn drives White into an even more passive position.

24.Ne1 Bxg2 25.Kxg2 a5!



[FEN "3r2k1/4rp2/1p3qp1/p1p1p2p/1n5P//1P1PP1P1/PQ1R1PK1/3RN3 w - a6 0 26"]

Maintaining an iron grip on the position by preventing the idea of a2-a3 and b3-b4.

26.Nc2 Red7 27.Nxb4

This leaves White's a2-pawn vulnerable, but he was rather at a loss for good alternatives.

27...axb4 28.Qc2 Qc6+ 29.f3 Rd5 30.Kf2 Qd7 31.Kg2 f5 32.Qc4 Kg7 33.Kf2 Rf8

Combining threats against the d3-pawn and White's kingside. The threat now is to create a breach in White's position with 34...f4!, and this teases another concession out of White.

34.f4 Rd8 35.fxe5 Rxe5 36.Qf4 Rd5 37.Qc4 Qc6 38.Qc2 Qf6 39.Qc4 Qc6 40.Qc2 b5!



[FEN "3r4/6k1/2q3p1/1ppr1p1p/1p5P//
1P1PP1P1/P1QR1K2/3R4 w - - 0 41"]

Introducing another thematic idea, a pawn lever with ...c5-c4. With the constant threat of this move hanging over his head, Canal tries to get some freedom.

41.Rc1 R8d6 42.d4

So the pawn is no longer being targeted on d3, though it is still unable to leave the d-file because of the pin against his rook on d2.

42...Qd7 43.Rcd1 Kf7

And not 43...cxd4? because of 44.Qb2!, winning back the d4-pawn with a much freer position than before.

44.Qb2 Qd8 45.Kg2 Rd7 46.Kh2 Kg8 47.Kg2 Kh7 48.Kh2 f4!



[FEN "3q4/3r3k/6p1/1ppr3p/1p1P1p1P//
1P2P1P1/PQ1R3K/3R4 w - - 0 49"]

At long last a breakthrough that gives Black a passed d-pawn. But even after this the position is very difficult to win.

49.exf4

49.gxf4 Qxh4+ would lead to a winning attack on White's king so he is forced to capture the other way.

49...Rxd4 50.Rxd4 cxd4 51.Rd3

51.f5!? would have been a better try for counterplay.

51...Qf6 52.Qd2 Qd6 53.Kg1 Kg7 54.Kh2

54.f5 would no longer help White, because of 54...gxf5 55.Qg5+ Qg6, ending the counterplay.

54...Qc5 55.Kg2 Qd5+ 56.Kh2 Qe4 57.Kg1 Kf6 58.Kf2 Ke6 59.Rf3 Rc7 60.f5+ Kd5!



[FEN "8/2r5/6p1/1p1k1P1p/1p1pq2P//
1P3RP1/P2Q1K2/8 w - - 0 61"]

Avoiding 60...gxf5 61.Rf4!, when White would be right back in the game.

61.Rf4 Rc2!

Simplifying into a winning rook endgame.

62.Rxe4 Rxd2+ 63.Kf3

63.Re2 Rxe2+ 64.Kxe2 gxf5 would give Black a winning pawn endgame.

63...gxf5 64.Re8 Rxa2

Finally picking up the pawn that was weakened by White's twenty-seventh move.

65.Rf8 Rb2!

The fall of the b3-pawn will give Black another passed pawn.

66.Rxf5+ Kc6 67.Rxh5 Rxb3+ 68.Ke4



[FEN "8/8/2k5/1p5R/1p1pK2P/1r4P1/8/8 b - - 0 68"]

68.Kf4 Re3 would make Black's b4-pawn too strong, all the more so because its colleague on b5 would prevent it from being attacked from behind by White's rook.

68...Rxb3 69.Kxd4 Kb6 70.Rg5 Rh3 71.Rg1

The only way to stop the b-pawn.

**71...Rxh4+ 72.Kd3 Rc4 73.Rb1 Rc3+ 74.Kd4 Ka5 75.Ra1+ Ra3 76.Rh1
Ka4 77.Rh8 Rg3 78.Kc5 Rc3+ 79.Kd4 Rc4+ 80.Kd3 b3 0-1**

The following game is a relatively modern example of a passed pawn deciding a game, with Boris Spassky drawing blood in his successful 1969 match against Tigran Petrosian. This time the passed pawn largely does the damage on its own, though there is a brief moment (23.Qf5, threatening 24.Ng5) in which the element of distraction is in evidence.

Spassky, Boris – Petrosian, Tigran

1.e4 Nf6 2.Nc3 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.d4 c5 5.cxd5 Nxd5 6.e4 Nxc3 7.bxc3 cxd4 8.cxd4 Bb4+ 9.Bd2 Bxd2+ 10.Qxd2 0-0 11.Bc4 Nc6 12.0-0 b6 13.Rad1



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/p4ppp/1pn1p3/8/2BPP3/5N2/P2Q1PPP/3R1RK1 b - - 0 13"]

At the time this was a new move, but it makes perfect sense. White is following the well known principle of getting his rook behind his d-pawn, one that will soon become passed.

13...Bb7 14.Rfe1 Rc8 15.d5! exd5?

According to Efim Geller, Black should have tried 15...Na5! when 16.dxe6 Qxd2! (And not 16...Nxc4? because 17.exf7+ Kh8 18.Qxd8 Rcx d8 19.Rxd8 Rxd8 20.e5 would create an unstoppable passed pawn duo on the e- and f-files) 17.exf7+ Kh8 18.Nxd2 Nxc4 19.Nxc4 Rxc4 20.e5 Bc8! 21.e6 Bxe6 22.Rxe6 g6 would lead to a rook endgame in which Black could hold the draw. Obviously, these lines would have been difficult to calculate at the board, even for a player of Petrosian's ability.

16.Bxd5 Na5 17.Qf4 Qc7 18.Qf5 Bxd5 19.exd5



[FEN "2r2rk1/p1q2ppp/1p6/n2P1Q2/8/5N2/P4PPP/3RR1K1 b - - 0 19"]

Obtaining a powerful passed d-pawn that will ultimately decide the game. Spassky will have no qualms about pushing it.

19...Qc2 20.Qf4

20.Qxc2 Rxc2 21.Re7 would have been another strong line.

20...Qxa2

Here Geller suggested that Black should have played 20...Rce8, which he claimed would hold the position after 21.d6 Rxe1+ 22.Rxe1 Qd3. But White has a strong line of play in 23.Nd4 Nb7 24.h3 followed by 25.Nf5, both holding the d-pawn and creating threats against Black's king.

21.d6 Rcd8 22.d7 Qc4 23.Qf5



[FEN "3r1rk1/p2P1ppp/1p6/n4Q2/2q5/5N2/5PPP/3RR1K1 b - - 0 23"]

Briefly menacing Black's kingside with the threat of 24.Ng5 whilst supplying further support for the d-pawn.

23...h6

23...Qc6 is strongly met by 24.Ne5 Qe6 25.Qc2, intending 26.Qc7.

24.Rc1! Qa6 25.Rc7 b5 26.Nd4! Qb6

26...b4 27.Qe5 would threaten both 28.Nf5 and 28.Ra1, with decisive effect.

27.Rc8 Nb7 28.Nc6 Nd6 29.Nxd8!

An attractive finish to a powerfully played game.

29...Nxf5 30.Nc6 1-0

Black has no good defence to 31.Rxf8+ followed by queening his d-pawn.

Exercises (solutions next month)



[FEN "r3r1k1/3q1pbp/p2P2p1/1p6/2p5/2P2Q2/P4PPP/3RRNK1 w - - 0 25"]

This position arose in the 1969 Hungarian Championship. How did White to play use his passed pawn to secure victory?



[FEN "8/pR4pk/1b2p3/2p3p1/N1p5/7P/PP1r2P1/6K1 b - - 0 31"]

This position provides a graphic illustration of the strength of passed pawns.
How did Black pull off a spectacular win?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Geller, Efim – Smyslov, Vassily

Candidates Tournament Zurich (7), 09.09.1953



[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?

28...Nd5! Using the pin on White's doubled c4 pawn to bring his knight to a much stronger square. Black threatens both to capture the pawn on c3 and play 29...Nxe3 followed by taking on c4. **29.Bd2 gxf4!** In the game Smyslov played 29...Nxf4, but the text is even stronger. **30.Bxf4** After 30.Rf3, Black has 30...Nxb3 31.Nxb3 Qg4. **30...Nxc3 31.Qc2 Bb7** and Black's extra pawn, pressure on the a8-h1 diagonal and outpost on e4 gives him a winning position.

Diez del Corral, J – Larsen, Bent

Palma de Mallorca, 1969



[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?

27...Nxe4! A fantastic move, exploiting the pressure on White's doubled pawns to force through ...f7-f5. **28.Bxe4 f5 29.gxf5 gxf5 30.Bxf5 Rxf5 31.Nxf5 Qxf5** Black has emerged the exchange down, but with the fall of the c4-pawn his king position becomes fatally weak. **32.Rhf1 Qg6 33.Rg1 Nxc4+ 34.Ka2 Qe8 35.Qc2 Ne3 36.Qe4 Nc4 37.Qc2 Bb7** The fall of White's d5-pawn signifies the beginning of the end. **38.Rad1 Ne3 39.Qb3 Ba6 40.Ka3 Bc4 41.Qb1 Nxd1 42.Qxd1 Qf7 43.Rg2 Rg8 44.h5 Rg5 45.h6 Qh7 46.a5 b5 47.Qf3 Rf5 48.Qe4 Qxh6 49.Kb2 Rf1 50.Be1 Rf4 51.Rg8+ Kb7 52.Qg2 Rf7 53.Bd2 53.Qg4 Rf2+!** leads to mate. **53...Qh5 54.Rg7 Ka6 0-1**

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