



COLUMNISTS

Middlegame Motifs

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Diagonalisation

Games can often be decided by the presence of a single strong bishop, but what is it that can make them particularly strong? The answer lies in the structure of the pawns and how the respective bishops harmonise with this. For a bishop to be exceptionally strong it must obviously be actively placed and not shut in by its own pawns or shut out by the opponents. This, however, is not enough, there must also be a fixed target of attack such as the opposing king. In theory a player's king position is not fixed because the king can be moved, but in practice it usually difficult to reposition a badly placed king on a board full of pieces.

Examples of a strong bishop abound in openings involving a fianchetto, but they are especially common in various defences against 1.e4 involving a kingside fianchetto for Black. This is because White will often try to punish his opponent with the popular plan for White of castling long and advancing his h-pawn up the board. But in doing so he will need to commit his king to the queenside where it can prove vulnerable.

The following two games are wonderful demonstrations of how Black's king's bishop can then be opened up so that it plays a decisive role. Both were played by former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik and both featured the Pirc Defence.

Medina-Garcia, A – Botvinnik, M

Palma de Mallorca, 1967
Pirc Defence [B08]

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Bc4 c6 6.Bb3 0-0 7.Qe2 Bg4! 8.h3 Bxf3 9.Qxf3 e6



[FEN "r1q1rk1/pp3bp/2ppnp1/8/3PP3/1BN2Q1P/PPP2PP1/R1B1K2R w KQ - 0 10"]

Shutting down the activity of White's bishop on b3.

10.Bg5 h6 11.Bh4 Nbd7 12.0-0-0?

Way too ambitious. He should have settled for the quiet 12.0-0 when the position would have been about equal.

12...Qa5 13.Qe2 b5

The advance of Black's queenside pawns nicely compliments the potential activity of Black's bishop on g7. The main target of this action is the pawn on b2 and of course White's king.

14.f4 b4 15.Nb1 d5 16.Nd2 c5! 17.Bxf6 Nxf6 18.dxc5 dxe4! 19.Nxe4 Nxe4

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20.Qxe4 Qxc5



[FEN "r4rk1/p4pb1/4p1pp/2q5/1p2QP2/1B5P/PPP3P1/2KR3R w - - 0 21"]

Despite the exchanges White is in a difficult position. The problem is that there is no real counter to Black's pressure on the h8-a1 diagonal which Black threatens to intensify with 21...Qe7 followed by 22...Qf6.

21.Rd7?

Trying to stop Black's queen from reaching f6 but overlooking a tactical finesse. A more pugnacious try would have been 21.g4, trying to break open the a2-g8 diagonal for his own bishop. After 21...Qe7 22.f5 Qf6 23.c3 bxc3 24.fxg6! (24.fxe6 c2 25.exf7+ Kh7 26.Qxc2 Rac8 27.Bc4 Rxc4 wins for Black) 24...cxb2+ 25.Kb1 White is still in the game.

21...Rad8 22.Rhd1?

White should have admitted his previous move was a mistake by playing 22.Rdd1! when 22...Qe7 23.Rhe1 Qf6 24.Qe5 holds on.

22...Rxd7 23.Rxd7 Qg1+ 24.Kd2

In his initial calculations, White might have missed 24.Rd1 Bxb2+, winning the rook.

24...Qf2+ 25.Kd3 Qf1+ 26.Qe2

After 26.Kd2, Black would play 26...Bxb2 threatening 27...Bc3 mate.

26...Qxf4



[FEN "5rk1/p2R1pb1/4p1pp/8/1p3q2/1B1K3P/PPP1Q1P1/8 w - - 0 27"]

With an exposed king and rapidly diminishing stock of pawns White's position is hopeless.

27.Qf3 Qe5 28.Qb7 a5 29.Qc6 Qxb2 30.Ke2 Qe5+ 31.Kf1 h5 32.Rc7 Qf4+ 33.Ke2 Bd4 34.Rc8 Qe3+ 35.Kd1 Bc3 36.Rxf8+ Kxf8 0-1

This next example shows Botvinnik using the same strategic theme of opening up his bishop on g7. This time his opponent plays rather better, so the

game is more closely contested.

Matulovic, M – Botvinnik, M

World - USSR, 1970

Pirc Defence [B06]

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nf3 d6 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.Qe2 c6 6.Bb3 0-0 7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.Nbd2

And not 10.Nxe5?, because 10...Qa5+ picks up the knight.

10...Qc7 11.Nc4 Nh5 12.Bg3 Nf4 13.Bxf4



[FEN "rnb2rk1/ppq2pb1/2p3pp/4p3/2N1PB2/1B3N2/PPP1QPPP/R3K2R b KQ - 0 13"]

Opening the h8-a1 diagonal for Black's bishop on g7, but really there's not much of an alternative. After 13.Qf1 Rd8, White would be unable to castle.

13...exf4 14.0-0-0?!

The immediate 14.0-0 would lose the b2-pawn after 14...b5; but 14.c3 followed by 0-0 would have been safer. Black's position would be preferable after, say, 14...b5 15.Ncd2 Nd7, but the position would be far less dangerous for White than the game.

14...Bg4 15.e5

Botvinnik pointed out that after 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Qxf3 Nd7, White can't play 17.Nd6?! Ne5 18.Qxf4 because of 18...Rfd8!. But White can do better with 17.Qd3 when his position is not so bad.

15...Nd7 16.Qe4 Rad8

Black could win a pawn here with 16...Bxf3 17.gxf3 Nxe5, but as Botvinnik indicated White would get enough counterplay to draw via 18.Nxe5 Qxe5 19.Qxe5 Bxe5 20.Rd7!, etc.

17.Qxf4 Bxf3 18.Qxf3 b5 19.Ne3 Nxe5 20.Qg3 a5 21.a3 Kh7 22.Ng4?

This attempt to simplify leaves Black with the initiative. White should have tried 22.f4!? Nd7 23.f5, offering the exchange of queens whilst trying to break open Black's king position.

22...h5 23.Nxe5 Bxe5

This position now bears a remarkable resemblance to the previous example. Once again Botvinnik is aiming to increase the pressure on the h8-a1 diagonal.

24.Qf3 Kg7 25.Rhe1 Bf6 26.c3 c5



[FEN "3r1r2/2q2pk1/5bp1/ppp4p/8/PBP2Q2/1P3PPP/2KRR3 w - - 0 27"]

The pawns march forward to prepare ...b5-b4. 26...Qxh2? would have been quite wrong because of 27.g3 threatening 28.Rh1.

27.Rxd8 Rxd8 28.g3

28.h3 would have been better, as with the pawns on dark squares they can become vulnerable in an endgame.

28...c4 29.Bc2 b4 30.axb4 axb4 31.cxb4 Qb6

According to Botvinnik, this was not the most accurate. He should have played 31...Qa7! when 32.Kb1 Ra8 33.Qa3 Qb6! 34.Qxa8 Qxb4 35.Qa3 Qxe1 + 36.Ka2 Qxf2 would harvest White's pawns.

32.Rd1



[FEN "3r4/5pk1/1q3bp1/7p/1Pp5/5QP1/1PB2P1P/2KR4 b - - 0 32"]

32...Qxb4?!

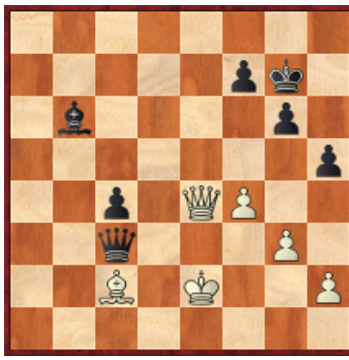
Once again not the best. Black should have played 32...Re8! when 33.Rd7 Qxb4 34.Qd5?! Re1+ leads to mate.

33.Rxd8 Qxb2+ 34.Kd1 Bxd8 35.Qd5 Qf6 36.Ke2

36.f4 might have been better, trying to get in f4-f5.

36...Bb6 37.f4 Qc3 38.Qe4

Playing for an opposite-colour bishop endgame with 38.Qe5+ would certainly need to be considered. But after 38...Qxe5+ 39.fxe5 Bg1 40.h3 Bd4 41.e6 f5! Black seems to be winning.



[FEN "8/5pk1/1b4p1/7p/2p1QP2/2q3P1/2B1K2P/8 b - - 0 38"]

38...Bd4

38...Bg1! was much more accurate; for example, 39.f5 Be3! 40.Qxe3 Qxc2+ and Black wins.

39.f5?

Losing immediately. 39.Kf1! would continue to resist.

39...gxf5 40.Qxf5 Qe3+ 41.Kf1

41.Kd1 is answered by 41...Bc3!.

41...Qg1+ 42.Ke2 Qxh2+ 43.Kd1 Qg1+ 44.Ke2 Qe3+ 45.Kf1 Qxg3 46.Qh7 + Kf8 0-1

Exercises (solutions next month)



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/5bp/2p3p1/p2Pn3/Pp6/1B2BP1P/1PPQ2P1/R3K1NR b KQ - 0 15"]

Black to play has a winning sequence involving the h8-a1 diagonal. What is it?



[FEN ""3b2rk/7p/p7/2pbqNrm/Pp1p1R2/1P1Q2P1/1BPN1R1P/6K1 w - - 0 34"]

In this position, it is White who decides the game on the h8-a1 diagonal. How did he do it?

Ojanen, Kaarle Sakari – Trifunovic, Petar

Mar del Plata (6), 1953



[FEN "1r3rk1/p4ppp/2q1p3/1pPn4/
3Pb3/P3B3/3QBPPP/R4RK1 b - - 0 20"]

Black to play has successfully blockaded the hanging pawn duo but now managed to use the blockading pieces to great effect. How did he do it?

20...Bxg2! This won an important pawn; White cannot take the bishop because of 21...Nxe3+.

Nimzowitsch, Aaron – Tarrasch, Siegbert

St Petersburg preliminary (5), 28.04.1914



[FEN "3r1rk1/p3qp1p/2bb2p1/2pp4/8/
1P2P3/PBQN1PPP/2R2RK1 b - - 0 18"]

Black to play used his hanging pawns to initiate a powerful attack. How did he do this?

18...d4! 19.exd4 Bxh2+! 20.Kxh2 Qh4+ 21.Kg1 Bxg2 A classic double bishop sacrifice to expose White's king. I explored this concept in more depth in a previous column, but here it comes with a hanging pawn twist. **22.f3 22. Kxg2 Qg4+ 23.Kh2 Rd5** wins immediately. **22...Rfe8 23.Ne4 Qh1+ 24.Kf2 Bxf1 25.d5 25.Rxf1 Qh2+** wins White's queen. **25...f5 26.Qc3 Qg2+ 27.Ke3 Rxe4+ 28.fxe4 f4+ 29.Kxf4 Rf8+ 30.Ke5 Qh2+ 31.Ke6 Re8+ 32.Kd7 Bb5# 0-1**

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