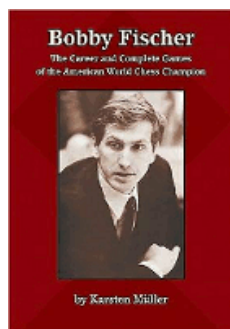




COLUMNISTS

Endgame
Corner

Karsten Müller



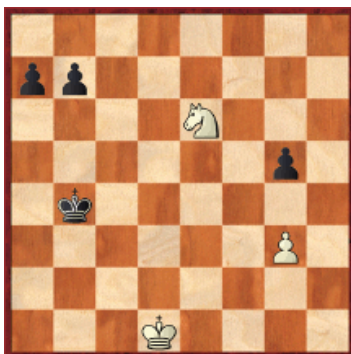
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The Clumsy Knight

Usually a minor piece is much stronger than one or two pawns in the endgame. Still, the relative value of the knight is lower than that of the bishop and it often has problems proving the win. John Upper has sent me a case in point. I hand over the microphone to him:

108.01 Sapozhnikov, Roman (2412) – Upper, John (2228)
National Capital Open (5), 06.12.2009

**66...g4??**

Played on the general principle that the more moves it takes White to win the pawn g4 the more moves Black has to advance the pawns and attack the pawn g3. But Black should be concerned about only one of the following, either saving both a- and b-pawns, or winning White's g-pawn. Unfortunately, I'd read only the first two pages of the chapter on knight endings in [Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual](#). On the fourth page he shows that when pawns are head-to-head (like the g3/g4 duo are now) the knight can safely defend its pawn without being attacked, because then the black pawn g4 prevents the defending king from attacking both the knight h5/f5 and the pawn g3. On its own, that would still make it a draw, but the tempo Black spent on ...g5-g4 allows White to win a queenside pawn and still get back to defend the pawn g3.

Better is 66...Kc3 with the idea 67.Nxg5 (67.Ke2 a5 68.Nxg5 a4 69.Ne4+ Kc2 70.Nc5 a3 71.Nd3= (only move) b5 72.g4 (only move) Kc3 73.Nc1 (only move) b4 74.Na2+ Kb3 75.g5 (only move) Kxa2 76.g6 Kb1 77.g7 a2 78.g8Q a1Q 79.Qg1+ Ka2 80.Qa7+=) 67...Kd3 68.Nh3 Ke3 69.g4 Ke4= the pawn g4 can't be defended by the white king, so there's no way to use the knight to stop the a- and b-pawns without dropping the g-pawn.

67.Nd8!+- b5?!

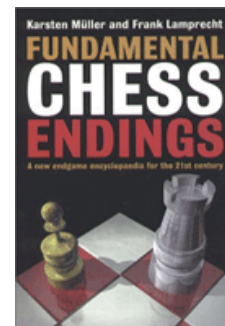
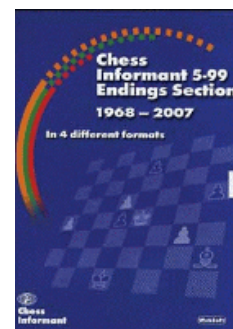
67...b6 68.Nc6+ Kc4 69.Nxa7 Kd3 70.Nc6 Ke3 71.Ne7 (only move) Kf3 72.Nf5+- the black pawn prevents the defending king from attacking both the knight and the pawn, so on 72...Ke4 73.Ng7 Kf3 74.Nh5+-; 67...Kc5 68.Nxb7 + Kc6 69.Nd8+ Kd5+- 70.Kd2 a5 71.Kd3+- the knight goes to h5 and the king stops the pawn a5.

68.Nc6+! Kc3 69.Ne5??

Either time pressure or White hasn't finished the chapter on knight vs. pawn endings either.

69.Nxa7 b4 (69...Kd3 70.Nxb5 Ke3 71.Nd6 Kf3 72.Nf5 Ke4 73.Nh4 Ke3 74.

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Ke1+-) 70.Nc6 b3 71.Kc1 (only move)+-.

69...b4= 70.Nxg4

Now the black king can attack the g-pawn or safely sit on the square in front of it to hold the draw.

70...Kd3 71.Nh2 a5 72.g4 Ke4 73.Kc2 a4 74.g5 Kf5 75.Nf3 a3 76.Kb3 Kg6 77.Ka2 Kf5 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

Many thanks to John for the instructive example and the permission to use it! I had a similar endgame several years ago and even managed to blockade the passed pawns with my knight, but they were just too far advanced:

108.02 Hertneck, Gerald (2475) – Müller, Karsten (2365)
Bundesliga 8990 Germany, 1989



46...Ke6!?

Usually the knight should stop the pawns. The other try with 46...Nc7?! also leads to a draw, as in John Upper's case 108.01: 47.h6 Kf7 48.h7 Kg7 49.g6 b5 50.Kd4=.

47.h6

Of course not 47.g6?? Nf6+ 48.Kd4 Nxh5 49.Kc4 Kd6 50.Kb5 Kc7+.

47...Ne7 48.h7 Ng6 49.Kd4 Nh8 50.Ke4 b5 51.Kd4 Kd6



52.Ke4!

This active defense draws. But not 52.Kc3?? Kc5 53.Kd3 b4 54.Kc2 (54.Ke4 b3 55.Kf5 b2 56.Kf6 b1Q 57.Kg7 Qg6+ 58.Kxh8 Qf7 59.g6 Qf8#) 54...Kc4 55.Kb2 b3 56.Kb1 Kc3 57.Kc1 b2+ 58.Kb1 Ng6 and Black wins, since the knight can act as a source of tempi.

52...Ke6 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

52...Kc5 53.Kf5 b4 54.g6 b3 55.g7 b2 56.gxh8Q b1Q+ is also drawn, but makes no sense from Black's point of view.

I the next example I start a bit earlier:

108.03 Fridman, D (2649) – Krasenkow, M (2656)
9th Amplico Life Rapid Warsaw POL (12), 20.12.2009



Please take your time here and decide how to parry the mating threat h7+ followed by Ng6 mate. To play 48...Rg1 or 48...Rf6?

48...Rg1?

After 48...Rf6, White has nothing better than 49.Rb8+ Kh7 50.Rb7+ Kxh6 51.Ng4+ Kg6 52.Ne5+ with a draw.

49.Kf2 Rg5 50.h7+ Kh8 51.Rf7!

Krasenkow probably missed this shot.

51.Nf7+?? Rxf7 52.Rxf7 Rb5—+.

51...Rg2+

51...Rxf7 52.Nxf7+ Kxh7 53.Nxg5+ is similar; e.g., 53...Kg6 54.Ne4 b3 (54...a4 55.Nc5 a3 56.Kf3 Kf5 57.Nb3 a2 58.e4+ Kf6 59.Kg4+-) 55.Nc3 b2 56.e4 Kh5 57.Ke3 a4 58.Nb1 Kg4 59.Na3+-.

52.Kxg2 Rxf7 53.Nxf7+ Kxh7 54.Nd6 a4 55.Nb5 e5

55...Kg6 56.e4 Kf7 57.Kf3 Kf6 58.Ke3 e5



White wins contrary to 108.02, as his e-pawn remains: 59.fxe5+ (59.f5?? a3 even loses.) 59...Kxe5 60.Kd3 Kf4 61.Nd4 b3 62.Nb5 b2 63.Na3 Ke5 64.Ke3 +-.

56.fxe5 Kg6 57.e4 Kf7 58.Kf3 Ke6 59.Kf4 Kd7 60.Kf5 1-0

Black resigned because of 60...Kc6 61.e6 Kxb5 62.e7 b3 63.e8Q++-.

Sometimes the knight even loses against passed pawns. Rook pawns are the most dangerous:

108.04 Müller, Karsten (2521) – Acs, Peter (2606)
EU-Cup 19th Rethymnon (3), 30.09.2003



49.Kf6!!

49.h6? Ne6 spoils it, as the knight defends the kingside and the king the queenside. White must prevent such a distribution of forces.

49...Ne6 50.Ke5 Ke7 51.h6 Kf7



52.b4!?

This brings Black in some kind of *zugzwang* and takes away the opportunity Nc5-d3-c1.

52.h7?! Nf8 53.h8N+ probably wins as well, but the game continuation is much easier. But not 53.h8Q? Ng6+ when Black manages to defend.

52...Nd8 53.Kd6 Kg6 54.Kc5 Kxh6 55.Kxb5 Kg6 56.a4 Kf6 57.a5 Ke6 58.a6 Kd7 59.a7 Ne6 60.Kb6 1-0

In the last example, the reason for the defeat is different:

108.05 Laznicka, Viktor (2637) – Bologan, Viktor (2692)
World Cup Khanty-Mansiysk RUS (3.5), 29.11.2009



54.h4!

This incarcerates Black's king and starts a fascinating fight between the king and the knight.

54...d5 55.Kg2 d4 56.Kf2 d3 57.Ke1 Nb7 58.Kd2



58...Nc5?

A leap in the wrong direction. The web could be destroyed by 58...Nd6 59. Kxd3 Kxh4 as White's king is badly placed on d3: 60.f6 Kg5 61.f7 Nxf7 62. b7 Ne5+ This check saves Black. 63.Ke4 Nc6 64.Kd5 Nb8 65.Kd6 h5 66.Kc7 Na6+ 67.Kb6=.

59.Ke3 Kg4

59...d2 60.Ke2! (Golubev in *Chess Today* #3310) and now White's king can walk around the mine field: 60...d1Q+ 61.Kxd1 Nb7 62.Kd2 Nd6



Even here some care is required: (62...Nc5 63.Ke3+-) 63.Ke1 (63.Kc3? Kxh4 64.f6 Ne4+ 65.Kd4 Nxf6 66.b7 Nd7=; 63.Ke2? Nxf5 64.b7 Nd4+ 65.Kd3 Nc6=) 63...Nb7 64.Kf2 Nd6 65.Kg2 Nb7 66.Kg3 Nd6 67.Kf4 Nb7 68.Ke5+-.

60.f6 d2 61.Ke2 Nd7 62.f7 Kf5 63.b7 Ke6 64.f8Q 1-0

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