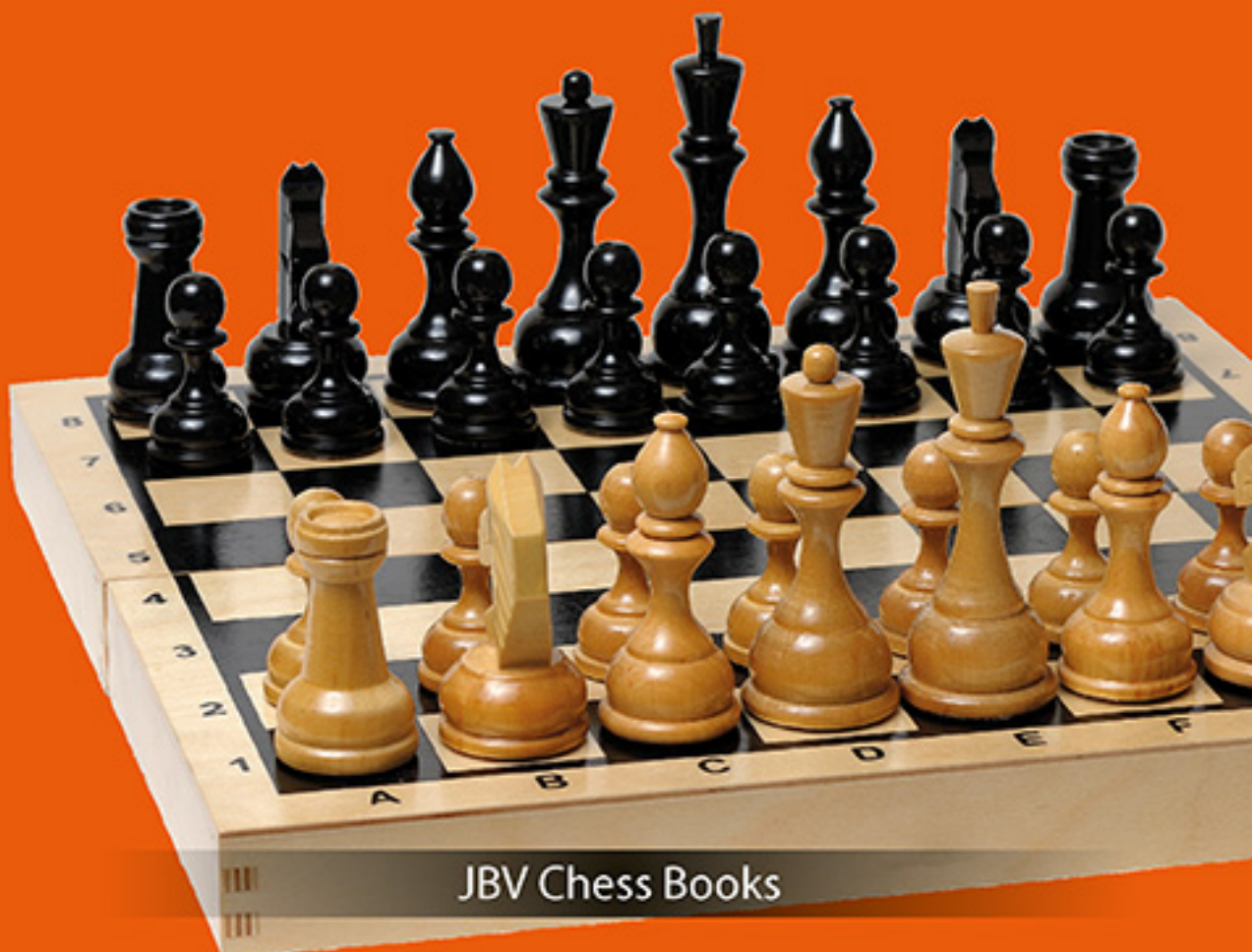


Karsten Müller

Typical Sicilian

Effective Middlegame Training



JBV Chess Books

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Preface

If someone decides to learn Spanish (the language, mind you – not the opening!), he will appropriately acquire textbooks dealing with Spanish – not those dealing with *all* Romance or even all *European* languages.

Let's take this comparison a little further. If a dictionary is something like an opening book, then a grammar is something like a textbook for the middle game. True, one could fill entire libraries with opening books on the subject of Spanish alone, but what about a corresponding 'grammar'?

Of course, in every middlegame textbook there is one or the other position that is clearly recognizable as *Spanish*, but their number is negligible in the context of French, English, Russian, Italian, Dutch and so forth. And so too for all these other European languages – no excuse me – of all these other *openings* whose middle-game treatment the reader doesn't want to learn at all.

For example, isn't dealing with the issues of hanging pawns and minority attack – the author asks with good reason – just as dispensable for an e4 player as it is essential for a d4 player? – Why should a die-hard enthusiast of Indian openings care about the strategic intricacies of positions resulting from all those complicated Queen's Gambit systems? And of course vice versa: what can a player who 'by nature' avoids fianchetto openings do with all these subtleties of Indian positions?

And it is precisely this conspicuous and astounding vacuum in the area of middle-game literature that inspired me to make an appropriate attempt at improvement: If you want to learn *Spanish* (the *opening*, mind you, and not the language!), you will get a textbook and exercise book in which only *Spanish* is 'spoken' or played.

However, in this current book, only *Sicilian* will be 'spoken'. (Yes indeed – the 'Sicilianu' spoken in Sicily can be seen not only as a dialect, but also as an independent language.) More precisely: the dialect 'Open Sicilian' with the 'small center' consisting of the pawns on d6 and e6, which is typical for the vast majority of Sicilian systems – and which can be supplemented by a7–a6 or transformed by e6–e5 sooner or later.

And I would like to make one more important point in advance. It is an enormous challenge for every chess author to do justice to a readership with the broadest possible skill level. So it would be absurd in the field of opening and endgame literature to offer, for example, 'French' or 'Rook Endgames' for players between 1400 and 1600, between 1600 and 1800, between 1800 and 2000 and so on. Accordingly, one only writes one book on the respective topic and tries to explain all important things as precisely and comprehensibly as possible – and then it is up to each individual reader how intensively he is willing to work with the books in order to achieve the greatest possible benefit.

The task becomes much more difficult with a book like this, which consists exclusively of exercises. Because if the author chooses consistently very simple or consistently somewhat more difficult examples, then in the first case more advanced players shy away because they are underchallenged – in the second case less advanced players because they feel overwhelmed.

And therefore here's a good advice – regardless of your skill level. Take each task seriously, but don't let it become torture! As soon as you encounter too many obstacles or too much resistance, just take the liberty to open the solution section and turn the test book into a textbook!

I would like to thank Rainer Woisin and Frederic Friedel from ChessBase for the great idea of working with QR Codes, Thomas Beyer for the very well done layout and – last but not least – the publisher Robert Ullrich for the overall excellent production.

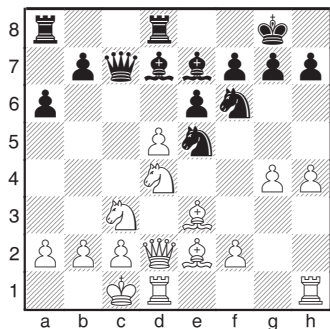
Karsten Müller, Hamburg, November 2022

Exercises

Concrete question (solutions starting on page 51)



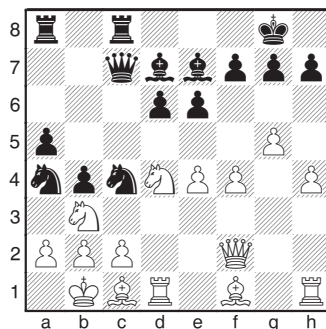
1



How does Black get the most out of his position?



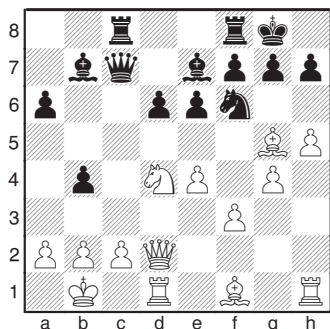
3



Can White tolerate two knights near his king?



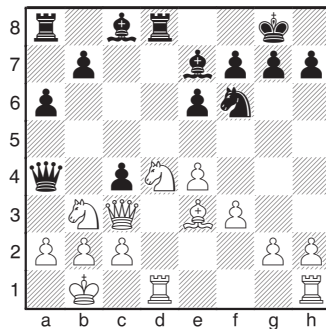
2



Can Black shake off the strong positional pressure by using force?



4

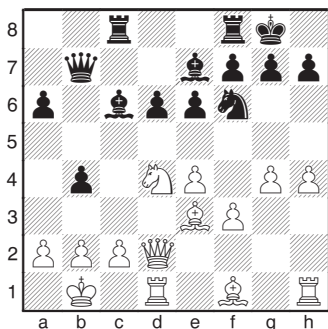


Does the attacked knight actually have to retreat?

Candidates (solutions starting on page 54)



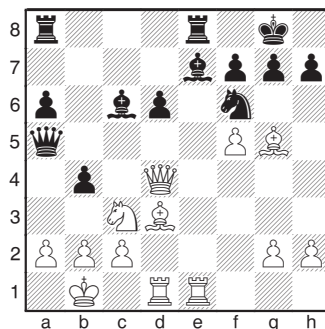
5



What's the huge difference between the candidates 17.g5 and 17.h5?



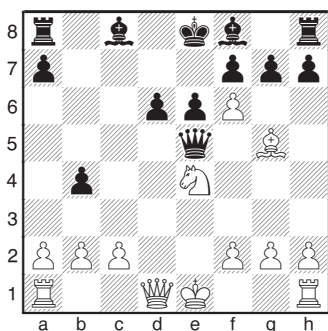
7



Where to put the knight – on e2 or e4? Or is there a much better candidate?



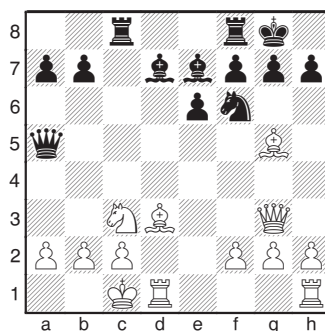
6



Apparently White only has the candidates 12.f3, 12.♔e2 and 12.♔d3. Which is the best – which is the worst?



8

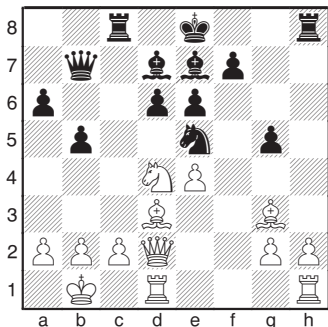


How can the unstable constellation of Black's minor pieces be exploited? With 14.♕xh7+ or 14.♔h4 or not at all?

Concrete question (solutions starting on page 57)



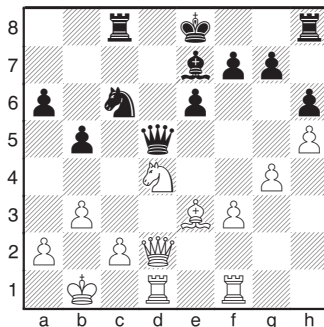
9



Is Black's central fortress really as unshakable as it seems?



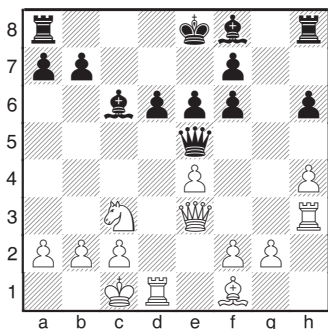
11



How can White exploit the cramped position of the opponent's queen?



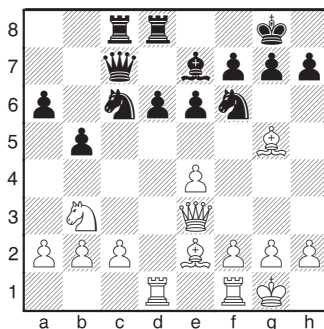
10



How can White exploit the cramped position of the opponent's queen?



12

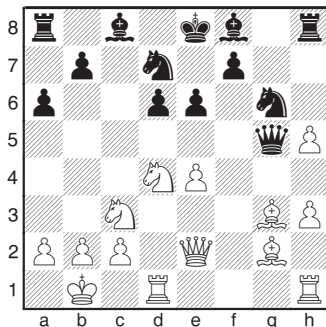


Is the move 16.c4 only anti-positional or really bad?

The relegation candidate (solutions starting on page 154)



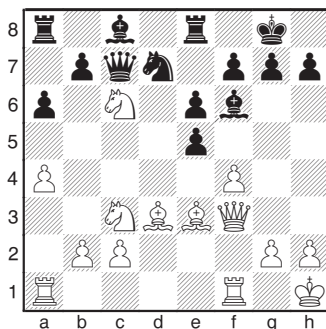
153



Which move should Black stay away from: 16...♔xg3 or 16...♔xh5?



154

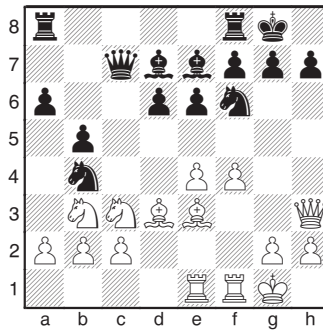


The clear relegation candidate is 15...bxc6, 15...♔xc6 or 15...exf4?

Violence or pressure increase? (solutions starting on page 156)



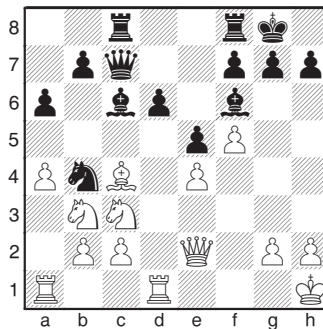
155



White to move



156



Should Black play 17...♙xe4 or reinforce his position?

Solutions

1

Mazzoni – Vieillefond

Paris 1954

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
5.♗c3 d6 6.♕g5 ♕e7 7.♖d2 0-0 8.0-0-0
♗c6 9.♕e2 a6 10.h4 ♖c7 11.♕f3 ♗d8
12.g4 ♕d7 13.♕e3 ♗e5 14.♕e2 d5
15.exd5

1) In the game, Black chose the clear relegation candidate **15...exd5?** because he had overlooked the refutation on move 17.

16.g5 ♗e4

16...♗fg4 17.♗xd5 ♖d6 18.♗xe7+ ♖xe7
19.♗he1 is also ~+–.

17.♗xe4?

However, the opponent also missed 17.♗xd5! ♖d6 18.♖a5 with a tendencial winning position.

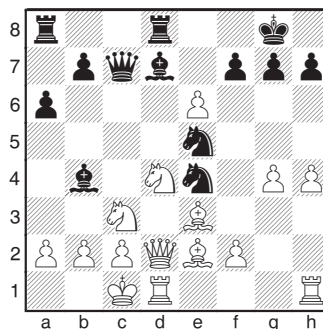
17...dxe4=

2) **15...♗xd5 16.♗xd5 exd5** is unclear – and after **15...♗exg4 16.♕xg4 ♗xg4 17.♕g5** it doesn't matter how big the white advantage is, especially since on move 15 Black has a much stronger continuation after which the question arises as to how big the *black* advantage is.

3) **15...♕b4!**

a) After **16.♕g5 ♗xd5! 17.♕xd8 ♗xd8 18.♗h3 ♗g6** Black has already more than just compensation given his splendid piece activity.

b) And after the daredevil alternative **16.dxe6 ♗e4!**



17.exf7+ ♕xf7 18.♗xe4! ♕xd2+ 19.♗xd2 the situation is similar, albeit with different signs. Regardless of completely insufficient material compensation, the enormous activity of the white pieces ensures that Black's advantage is not yet in the winning range.

2

Kristjansson – Muir

Bulgaria 2003

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
5.♗c3 d6 6.♕g5 e6 7.♖d2 ♕e7
8.0-0-0 9.f3 a6 10.♗b1 ♗xd4 11.♖xd4
b5 12.h4 ♖a5 13.♖d2 b4 14.♗e2 ♖c7
15.g4 ♕b7 16.♗d4 ♗ac8 17.h5

The constellation ♖d2/♕g5 in connection with the latent weakness of the c2-pawn seems to call for a rather simple combination. But beware, because White might administer a very bad-tasting antidote.

In the game, Black fell into the trap with **17...♕xe4??** (△17...h6 18.♕h4±).

18.h6!

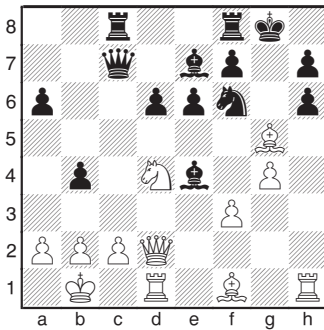
White takes advantage of the fact that the combinatorial approach does not involve any concrete threat and can accordingly be ignored.

On the other hand, after 18.♙xf6?? ♙xf6 19.fxe4 ♙xd4 20.♙xa6 ♖a8 21.♚xd4 ♖xa6 22.h6 e5 23.♚xb4 ♖fa8, Black's plan would work out in full.

18...g6

The supposed follow-up combination 18...♙xf3? only makes matters worse, because after 19.♗xf3 ♗e4 20.♚h2! ♗xg5 21.hxg7 the attack penetrates.

- 1) 18...♙g6 19.hxg7 ♖fe8 (19...♙xg7 20.♙d3!) 20.♙d3! ♠♗h2
- 2) 18...gxh6



- a) 19.♙xh6! ♙g6 20.♙d3!
 - b) 19.♖xh6!? ♙g6 20.♙d3!
 - c) 19.♙xf6!? ♙xf6 20.fxe4 ♙xd4 21.♙xa6!
- 19.♙xf6 ♙xf6 20.fxe4 ♙xd4 21.♙xa6!+-**
 And since 21...♖a8? loses a piece after 22.♚xd4, Black has to say goodbye to an exchange without significant compensation.

3

Atalik – Collin

France 1983

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♚d2 ♙e7 8.0-0-0 0-0 9.♗b3 ♚b6 10.♙e3 ♚c7 11.f3 a6 12.g4 b5 13.g5 ♗d7 14.h4 ♗ce5 15.♚f2 ♗c5 16.♙b1 b4 17.♗e2 ♗a4 18.♗ed4 ♙d7 19.♙d2 a5 20.f4 ♖fc8 21.♙c1 ♗c4

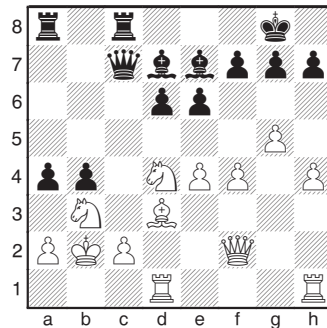
Since, in addition to the knights, there are also three major pieces and two pawns 'in the area', one would almost see the reduction of the attacking potential by means of exchange as a reflex action. And accordingly, in an internet game, the text move **22.♙d3?** might be mistaken for a mouse slip.

♠22.♙xc4 ♚xc4 23.h5; 23.f5±

22...♗cxb2!!

In this way, Black takes into account the fact that the knights are placed in an extremely threatening manner – but stand in the way of the rest of the troop (especially the a-pawn and the battery on the c-file).

23.♙xb2 ♗xb2 24.♙xb2 a4



25.♗b5

- 1) Of course, the attacked knight cannot retreat to a1 or c1 because of the threat ♚c3+ followed by a3 – and 25.♗d2? fails to 25...♚c3+ 26.♙c1 ♚xd3 or 26...b3+-.

2) However, 25.♔b1 was an option to bet on the defensive power of the ♖d4; e.g. 25...axb3 26.cxb3 ♖a7 (26...♖a5!?) Now the obvious threat is 27...e5 – rook moves like 27.♖hf1 or 27.♖h2 can be answered strongly with 27...d5!± Δ28.exd5 ♙c5 – and also after 27.♖b2 ♖c3 (27.♖c5 Δ♖a5) Δ28.♗e2 ♖c5, the verdict ± is probably justified in view of the initiative, the bishop pair and the anchor square on c3.

25...♙xb5 26.♙xb5 axb3 27.cxb3 ♖a5

Again, 27...d5!± deserved serious attention; e.g. 28.exd5 ♙c5 (28...♖a5!?) 29.♖e2 ♙d4+ 30.♖xd4 ♖c3+ 31.♔b1 ♖xd4±.

28.♙a4 ♖c3± Δ♖ac8 etc.

4

Kaidanov – Fishbein USA2003

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♖d2 ♙e7 8.0-0-0 9.♗b3 ♖b6 10.f3 ♖d8 11.♗b5 ♗e5 12.♙e2 a6 13.♙e3 ♖c6 14.♗5d4 ♖a4 15.♔b1 d5 16.♖c3 ♗c4 17.♙xc4 dxc4

I) In the game, after **18.♗d2 e5 19.♗e2 ♖b5∞**, White didn't have much to be proud of.

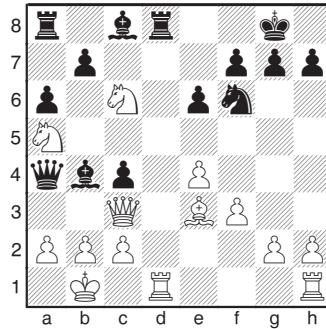
After 19...♙e6 20.♖xe5 ♙d6 with the possible continuation 21.♖g5 h6 22.♖h4 ♙e5 Black would have excellent compensation.

20.a4 20.♖xc4?? ♖xd2-+ 20...♖xa4 21.♖xc4 ♖e8

II) With the alternative **18.♗a5!?** White can't uproot trees. However, he can at least hope that the confusion that this move is even possible will lead to inaccuracies on the part of the opponent.

A) After 18...♙b4?? there are even two ways to win.

1) 19.♗dc6!



a) 19...♙xa5 20.♗xa5

– 20...♖e8 21.♗xc4
– 20...♖xd1+ 21.♖xd1 ♙d7 22.♗xb7; 22.♗xc4

– 20...♙d7 21.♗xb7; 21.♗xc4 +++

b) 19...♙d7 20.♖xb4 ♙xc6 21.♖xa4 ♙xa4 22.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23.♗xb7

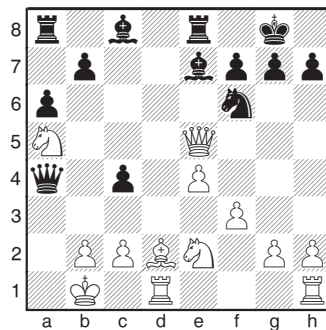
2) 19.♖xc4! ♖xa5 20.♗b3

a) 20...♖xd1+ 21.♖xd1 ♖b5 22.♖d8+ ♙f8 23.♙c5! und nun e.g. 23...♗d7 24.♙xf8 ♗xf8 25.♖c7!

b) 20...b5 21.♖c6 ♙b7 22.♖xb7 ♖a4 23.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 24.♗d4

B) So apparently 18...e5 is the only move – and after **19.♗e2** Black can continue with a real or a temporary pawn sacrifice.

1) 19...♖b5 20.a4! (20.♗xc4 ♙e6?) 20...♖xa4 21.♖xe5 ♖e8! 22.♙d2



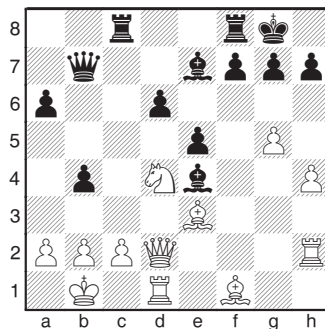
a) Now 22...b6? 23.c3 xa5 d5± leads to a clear advantage.

b) On the other hand, after 22...♙e6 23.♘c3, 22...♙d8 23.♚c3 or 22...♚b5 23.♚c3 the advantage remains minimal.

2) 19...♙e6 20.♚xe5 ♘d7 21.♘c3 ♚b4 22.a3 again with a minimal advantage in the lines:

a) 22...♘xe5 23.axb4 ♙xb4 24.♙b6

b) 22...♚xb2+ 23.♙xb2 ♘xe5 24.f4 or 24.♙a2!? (Δ♘b7) Δ24...b5 25.h3 followed by f4 etc.



a) 20.♙g2 ♙xg2 21.♚xg2 exd4 22.♙xd4±

b) 20.♘b3 ♚xc2 21.♚xc2 ♙xc2+ 22.♚xc2 ♚f3±; 22...♚e4

2) After 17.h5! ♘xe4? (♞17...♘d7 18.g5±) 18.fxe4 ♙xe4 19.♚h2 e5, the crucial difference to 17.g5 would have become apparent.

5

Garcia Gonzalez – Alvarez Teran

Spain 2011

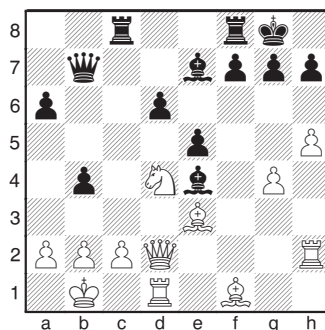
1.♘f3 c5 2.e4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♚c6 6.♙g5 ♙d7 7.♚d2 ♚c8 8.♘xc6 ♙xc6 9.f3 a6 10.0-0 e6 11.♙b1 ♙e7 12.h4 0-0 13.♘e2 b5 14.♘d4 ♚b6 15.g4 b4 16.♙e3 ♚b7

Given the instability of the e4–pawn and a possible double attack on h1 and c2, the question of which pawn should go first does not depend on positional but clearly on tactical factors.

1) In the game White played 17.g5?, almost forcing his opponent to seize the initiative with 17...♘xe4!

(For no apparent reason, however, the latter hesitated, and after 17...♘d7? White was spoiled for choice whether to take a significant advantage with 18.g6, 18.h5 or some other move.)

It could have followed 18.fxe4 ♙xe4 19.♚h2 e5



Because the knight can move forward with 20.♘f5 and after 20...♙xc2+ 21.♚xc2 ♚xc2 22.♚xc2 White would almost have a winning position given his extremely active pieces (and regardless of the reasonably balanced material).

3) It remains to be noted that 17.♘xc6 ♚xc6/♚xc6 18.h5± is also strong, while 17.♙d3 only leads to a minimal advantage after the correct continuation 17...♘d7 Δ♘e5.

17...d5? 18.g5 ♘h5 19.♘xc6± Δ19...♚xc6 20.exd5 ♚xd5? 21.♙xa6+–

About the author

GM Dr. Karsten Müller was born on November 23rd, 1970 in Hamburg. He studied mathematics and received his doctorate in 2002. From 1988 to 2015 he played for the 'Hamburger SK' in the German 'Bundesliga' and in 1998 he was awarded the title of Grandmaster. The busy and globally recognized endgame expert was named 'Trainer of the Year' by the German Chess Federation in 2007.



He is the author (or co-author) of the following highly esteemed works:

Secrets of Pawn Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, 2000)

Fundamental Chess Endings (with Frank Lamprecht, 2001)

Danish Dynamite (with Martin Voigt, 2003)

Test and Improve Your Tactical Vision, 2004

How to Play Chess Endgames (with Wolfgang Pajeken, 2008)

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Bobby Fischer, 60 Best Games (2022)

His excellent series of ChessBase-DVDs Chess endgames 1-14 also attracted attention.

Müller's popular column Endgame Corner was published at 'www.ChessCafe.com' from January 2001 until 2015, and his column Endgames is published in Chess-Base Magazine since 2006.

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