

Welcome back to the Junior Chess Corner! While it has taken longer than I hoped to put together this second article, I hope that there is enough content in this issue to make up for lost time!

Tactics, Tactics, Tactics!!—Part One

This will be the first of at least several segments that will be presented on tactics. There is a very good reason for this focus on tactical opportunities. Master Ken Smith once said that an excellent understanding of tactics will probably get you at least an expert's rating. Why is this? Most games at the class level (under 2000) are decided by tactical mistakes—often simply overlooking the win of material. Outplaying the opponent on a purely positional level certainly does occur in class games, but the results are often more immediately decided by the tactics involved than in a GM game.

Furthermore, having assessed the games I have seen in scholastic tournaments in Oklahoma over the past several years, I have found that relatively simple tactical mistakes decide practically all of the games even in the top sections. In this issue, we will look at some of these games and some of the standard tactical devices that are used in many, many games. This being said, we will also look at some of the psychological elements that can play into this and will build on the previous article discussing openings as well.

Before beginning, however, there is something very important I must note. With the exception of the first game, which contains a pure one-move tactical shot, the tactics in these games are not just tremendously simply forks, skewers, or other devices that just show up out of nowhere. A positional or dynamic advantage typically makes it easier for the tactical resources of a position to be in your favor. Hence, it is important to see how the players in the following games nurse smaller advantages (or fail to do so) before the tactics work out in their favor (or not in their favor if they failed to nurse their advantages). Note, however, that after gaining these advantages a player still has to find the *coup de grace*. We will see more than one example where a player fails to find the important move, resulting in the tide turning slowly to favor their opponent.

The first game in this article is a miniature that has an important tactical motif and several important lessons in the psychological nature of the game.

S McDonough (1291)-S Gehly (1162)

Holiday Scholastic 2006 (3.6) 12.16.06

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Bxc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 Bg4 6. d3

This is the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez. The main imbalance that is created in this opening is White's superior pawn structure versus Black's possession of the two bishops. This variation is often popular with young players, as is the response played by Black. After the more common 6 h3, Black plays 6 ... h5! to keep his bishop on its g4 post. If White accepts the sacrifice, especially in the next couple of moves, he can find himself facing a crushing attack down the h-file. Note that 6 ... Bxf3 is wrong, as Black is giving up his main compensation for his inferior pawn structure—the two bishops. Black wants to extract concessions from White before he acquiesces to an exchange on f3.

6 ... Qf6 7. Bg5?? (D)

This move simply drops a piece. What follows is a case of removing the defender, which is an extremely important tactic to remember, as it occurs very frequently.

7 ... Bxf3! -+

This *zwischenzug*, or in-between move, gives Black a decisive advantage. How is it that a player in the premier section missed a one move tactic that removes the knight from the defense of the bishop while simultaneously attacking the white queen? My guess is that Sean assumed without looking further that the black queen would have to move before Stephen had time to do anything else. It is often human nature to assume that, for instance, a recapture must follow a capture, or an attack on the enemy queen or other valuable piece will force them to move that before they can undertake any other action. However, such a notion is dangerous, and will often blind a player to the whole situation. Unless the opponent is in check, they do not *have* to remove a piece from attack, and sometimes this can allow them to throw in an in-between move that tips the scales in their favor. (A move like 19 Bd5+ in the Cope-Chapman game in the previous article is another example of such a move).

8. Bxf6 Bxd1 9. Rxd1 Nxf6 10. Nc3 Draw Agreed?? (D)

1/2-1/2

Here Stephen accepted a draw offer from Sean, apparently not sure that he could finish off the game. Given some of the games we will see in this article, Sean might not be as out of the game as it looks... but still, accepting a draw here is absolutely unnecessary. While I can understand wanting to cement the upset, even if it is only half a point, this position is much too simple to accept a draw in. Stephen is up a piece for nothing, and it will take a very serious mistake to give Sean any drawing chances at all. Is the higher rating by his opponent's name the catalyst for this? Remember that ratings are only numbers, and anyone at the class level is capable of playing extremely badly. Also, higher rated players rarely offer a draw unless they feel like they are in trouble. Take that as a cue to double check the position to see if they are totally lost or at least in trouble before accepting draw offers like this.

In the following game, we see another won position go by the wayside, although this time it tumbles into a loss rather than a draw.

D Luscomb (1472)-Ra. Farell (1479)

Holiday Scholastic 2006 (3.3) 12.16.06

This is the first of two games that we will see between these two players in this article, and we will examine some common elements that show up in both contests.

1. d4 c5 2. d5 g6 3. e4 Bg7 4. f4 d6 5. Nf3 Nf6 6. e5? (D)

Common theme number one: both players have the same color and play into a weird Benoni. Black gets a good position out of the opening. This move just loses material. Instead 6 Nc3 or 6 Nbd2, defending the e-pawn, seem like sensible ideas.

6 ... dxe5 7. fxe5 Nxd5 8. Bb5+ Nc6 9. c4 Ndb4! -+

Another game in which we see a winning position achieved in fewer than 10 moves!! But alas, these quick starts, much like Ohio State and Chicago in the National Championship football game and Super Bowl respectively, ultimately fizzled out. Black overprotects the c6-knight with this move and has ideas of ...Qxd1+ and ...Nd3 that look terribly dangerous for White.

10. Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. 0-0

This move gives up more material--the a1-rook. This is not necessarily a bad practical decision: White realizes he is in trouble and gives up some material to get his pieces into active positions. Besides, allowing ...Nd3+ would not have been healthy for the White king either.

11 ... Nc2 12. Ng5 Be6 13. Nc3 Nxa1 (D)

Black has taken the material on offer and is now a rook and a pawn ahead. However, this has taken precious time, and Black does not make a good transition from attack to defense. This transition is often very difficult to handle in OTB play. It is very difficult to go from the one who is applying pressure to the opponent only to have the pressure reversed back to you. However, the truth of the position is that Black has won game, and the difficulties that White can present with his limited army, while annoying, are just not enough to overcome his own problems.

This also brings us to the second common theme in these games: Rachel gets a winning position by the early middlegame.

14. Nce4 Nxe5

Slightly inferior to 14 ... Bxe5, after which Black intends to play the bishop back to f6 without doing double duty guarding the knight. The bishop is much more secure on f6 than g7, as it is no longer vulnerable to being attacked by a knight on e6.

15. Nxc5 Nxc4?

This mistake is much more serious. Black allows a simple tactic for White to regain some material while keeping the pressure on. The better alternatives are 15 ... a6, 15 ... Kc8, and 15 ... Bxc4. All of these are complicated, but after, for example, 15 ... Bxc4 16. Bxc4 Nxc4 17. Nxf7+ Ke8 18. Ne6 (18 Nxh8, Bd4+ 19. Kh1 Bxc5) Rg8, Black will sacrifice back some material, most likely an exchange, to relieve the pressure from her position. White will still be a piece down and will not have sufficient compensation for his material deficit.

16. Ncxe6+ fxe6 17. Nxe6+ Kc8 18. Bxc4 (D)

Let's take stock of this position. White has regained some of his lost material—he is now only down the exchange and a pawn. However, Black has the serious problem of getting her rooks into the battle. Why is it that White has dictated the action even though down he is down material? The reason is that Black's extra material is sitting on the sidelines, taking no active part in the game. Black still has a clear advantage, but the flow of the game is against her now, and she must regroup quickly to keep the winning advantage.

18 ... Bf6

This is a natural move, securing the e7-pawn, but it misses an excellent defensive idea. Best is the more 'artificial' looking 18 ... Be5! Why is this better? The answer lies in White's dark squared bishop. Black's bishop is headed for d6 to secure the e7-pawn. While the function of the bishop on f6 may look the same, there are actually important differences: on d6 the Black bishop blocks the d-file and, more importantly, only allows White to play the otherwise dangerous Bf4 if he is willing to trade bishops. The extra move in getting to d6 is not as important as these other factors.

19. Ng5 Rf8? =

This move poses serious tactical problems for Black. The dark-squared bishop is now pinned, and hence all of Black's pieces are in awkward positions. Much better is 19 ... Nc2!, which endeavors to get the knight back into the game before White can make anything more of his initiative.

20. Be6+ Kd8 21. Rd1+ (D)

All of a sudden White has the advantage, as all of his pieces are in play while's Black's are doing nothing.

21 ... Kc7 22. Bf4+ Kc6 23. Bd7+ Kb6 24. Be3+ Kc7?? (D)

Black still has outside chances of survival after 24 ... Ka5. Instead, this move falls into a mating net.

25. Ne6+

1-0

Mate follows after 25 ... Kb8 26. Bf4+ Be5 27. Bxe5#.

Common theme number three: David fights back to win. Why is it that David was able to come back from a miserable position in the opening to win? Some of it seems to be David's mindset. David is a fighter and actually seems to play his best when he is at a disadvantage. He has a knack for presenting his opponents with problems to solve even when he objectively has the short end of the position. This is just the way to play a difficult position—not throwing in the towel and hoping for a cheap tactic before resigning, but instead calmly presenting the opponent with problems to face, when the mounting pressure on them to realize their advantage often leads to a mistake. Reviewing the games in the previous article on this subject may also help your understanding of how to play when things are looking grim.

And why is it that Rachel lost these games after obtaining winning positions? The main reasons why players with winning positions often fail to finish their opponent off is that when people think that they are winning, they often tend to relax or they get too nervous. Relaxing is a big mistake, because a wounded or cornered opponent is the most alert one. They will likely be more alert than ever to both your possibilities and their own, while relaxing can often blind you to their most dangerous ideas. Meanwhile, getting really nervous can sometimes cause you to forget tactics that you have previously analyzed.

The next game we will look at is a good example of slowly building a positional advantage until tactical opportunities appear.

T Spotnak (1170)-J Cope (1635)

2002 JH Nationals (K-8 Champ.) (3.14) 5.11.02

1 e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bc4 Nc6 4. d3 a6 5. Nc3 Nf6 6. Ng5 e6 7. 0-0 b5 8. Bb3 Be7

White's relatively offbeat opening play has taken the game into positions where knowledge of theory is basically unimportant and understanding the possibilities inherent in each player's position is the most important factor. In this position White should be playing on the kingside and Black should be playing on the queenside, because they have space advantages in those areas.

9 f4 0-0 10. a4 b4 11. Ne2 h6 12. Nf3 Qb6 (D)

Black can now lay claim to a slight advantage due to White's problems with piece coordination and the possibilities on the queenside and the g1-a7 diagonal. This move threatens to win a piece by a discovered check after ...c4.

13. Be3?!

This move is definitely inaccurate. White is already sensitive on the dark squares, particularly on the kingside, and yet he chooses a move that forces him to part with his dark squared bishop for a knight. Not only will Black have the advantage of the two bishops if the game ever opens up, but he may also be able to create dangerous threats on White's weakened dark square complex.

13 ... Ng4! -/+ 14. Qd2 Bf6

Black takes advantage of the fact that White's bishop is locked in by taking the opportunity to probe the b2-pawn before exchanging on e3.

15. Ra2 Nxe3 16. Qxe3 Na5 (D)

With the White bishop marooned on b3, Black will soon have two bishops against two knights in a game that will slowly begin to open up.

The two bishops typically work together in harmony much better than a knight and a bishop or two knights, particularly on an open board. The reason for this is that each complements the other, controlling the squares that its brother cannot. Hence, having two bishops against two knights is often a very favorable imbalance in favor of the side with the two bishops. This is not always the case, however, as knights may tend to dominate the bishops in very closed, locked positions. The problem for White in this game is that Black has pawn breaks to open up the game and make his bishops the better minor pieces.

17. Nc1 Qc7 18. e5 Be7 19. c3 Nxb3 20. Nxb3 bxc3 21. bxc3 c4! (D)

This move breaks up White's pawn structure and gives him serious positional problems on the queenside.

22. Nbd2 cxd3 23. Qxd3 d5 24. Nb3?!

This gives up the chance to try to liquidate the isolated c-pawn by playing c4. This pawn will be a liability for the rest of the game.

24 ... Bd7

This is the correct post for the bishop, as here it pressures a4 and keeps at least one White piece tied to its defense.

25. Nfd4 Rfc8

Here I made the time control with about 5 minutes to spare. Now I had the chance to settle down and take my time while trying to find a way to increase my advantage. Black has a clear advantage here, as he has all of the play. White is reduced to passive defense on the queenside in the hopes that Black cannot find a breakthrough.

26. Rc1 Qc4 27. Qf3?

While trading queens was also very unpleasant for White, this simply fails to defend everything.

27 ... Bxa4 -- 28. Rb2 Ba3 29. Na5 (D)

White's pieces are strewn out and loose—several of them are undefended and/or under attack. However, White seems to be holding on by one move attacks. Here I saw that my positional advantage was huge and that several of my opponent pieces were hanging by a very loose thread. Since White has such serious difficulties, it makes sense that Black should have a way to exploit the tactical weakness of White's pieces. Hence I played the powerful...

29 ... Qxd4+!!

Absolutely! After this move White's position falls down like a house of cards. White loses a lot of material and Black gains an attack on White's king to go with his other advantages.

30. cxd4 Rxc1+ 31. Kf2 Bxb2 (D) 32. Kg3 Rc3 33. Nb7 Rxf3+ 34. Kxf3 Ba3

Here I went on to with my massive material advantage.

0-1

The last instructive game of this installment is probably the most important—mainly for the ideas that we can glean out of one particular position.

D Luscomb (1472)-Ra. Farell (1479)

Oklahoma K-12 2006 (3.2) 11.18.06

1. d4 c5 2. d5 g6 3. c4 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. g4?!

This is an original but also questionable idea. White has used all five of his moves to this point on pawn moves, which is very concerning. Since the center is closed, this is not as big of a problem as it might be in an open game. However, if Black can find a way to open up the game here White might have serious problems with lack of development and king safety. It is true that this move gains kingside space, but it seems to me that White should be using this move on a developing move.

5 ... Nf6 6. g5 Nfd7 7. Nc3

David finally develops a piece on move seven!! White is not in terrible danger because of the closed nature of the position, but he cannot afford to mess around much longer. Further delays in development might give Black dangerous chances to try to sacrifice through the wall of pawn and get at the relatively open White king.

7 ... Nb6 8. Bd2 0-0 9. a4 Bd7 10. f4 e6 11. Qf3 exd5 12. cxd5 f5 13. Bd3?! (D)

Rachel is fighting to open the center to the White king, which is still sitting precariously on the e-file. Here David misses a chance to play 13 gxf6, which Fritz says nearly equalizes the position. However, my silicon friend's evaluation is not the whole story here: the fact is that in the position after 13 gxf6 Qxf6, White is facing a period of definite pressure down the e-file and the f-file and has no real permanently safe home for his king, as the pawn cover on both the kingside and the queenside is compromised. In the short term,

White's king should be safe on the queen's wing, but the problem is that once Black sets up the ... b5 break White will have serious difficulty keeping his position intact. This kind of pressure is not nearly as difficult for a computer to handle as it is for a human.

13 ... fxe4 14. Bxe4 Nc4 15. Bc1 Qe7 16. Nge2 Bf5 17. Bd3 Bxd3 18. Qxd3 Nb6

White still has definite difficulties here, although the pressure on his position is not quite as acute as it was only a couple of moves before. White's king is still in danger along the e-file and White must take measures to ease this problem.

19. h4? (D)

Consistent, but absolutely wrong. This move completely ignores White's main problem: the safety of his king. Instead, White seems to be trying to make some kind of kingside attack tactically justify his position. The problem for White is that it is his king that is the one that is truly in danger. It is still sitting on the open e-file and desperately needs to be evacuated to one of the wings. In fact, although the kingside is open, it is probably White's best chance to cure (or at least limit the damage from) both his king safety problem and his problem with developing his queenside pieces. If he can hold onto the f4-pawn, which is the key to the kingside structure, White has chances to hold the position. After this, however, Black has a chance to make a masterful stroke.

I encourage you to spend some time looking at this position and see if you can come up with the correct move for Black in this position. My guess is that most strong players will intrinsically feel the move to play in this position even if it is difficult for them to explain why. It is also important to understand why the game continuation, which may seem logical, is not the correct idea. Black has the advantage at this point, but the next move is crucial to how big of an advantage that will be: a winning advantage versus a clear advantage. This may determine whether Black can finish off the win. If there is one position in this article that I feel an incredible amount can be gleaned from, it is this one: basically, this is the critical position of the entire article.

19 ... Re8? (D)

This move seems logical enough. Black puts her rook on the open file and tries to put serious pressure on the White position down the e-file. Why is it that this approach is incorrect? The main problem for Black is that, while White is struggling to get all of his pieces into play, Black also has pieces sitting on the sidelines. Attacks typically succeed only when the attacker brings the force of their whole army against the opposing army. For instance, note how in the previous two games in this article most or all of the attacker's pieces are involved in the action (Luscomb's pieces in his attack in the above game and my pieces against Spotnak). Furthermore, using the e-file as the only avenue of attack limits Black's chances of success.

The correct move is the far from obvious 19 ... Na6!! (D) Why does this knight shuffle to the side of the board mean so much to this position? The answer is that it brings Black's remaining pieces into the attack. The a6-knight is headed for the excellent b4-square, where it gain time by attacking the White queen and will also threaten to play to c2 or d3. The b4-square is especially good for the Black horse because it is a permanent outpost and cannot be chased away by a White pawn. This knight placement should make the c4-square once again accessible to the other Black knight, as a b3 advance by White in this position would critically weaken the long diagonal with the e2-knight being pinned. Meanwhile, the a8-rook will slide over to e8. While both rooks would like to be on e8, they cannot both stand there. However, the rook on f8 is already performing some useful attacking functions by sending pressure down the f-file and keeping a watchful eye on the f4-pawn, which is somewhat loosely defended because, as was previously noted, the

knight on e2 is pinned. Once these pieces get to their posts, the whole Black army will be ready to fight, and the White king will have trouble finding an address where he is properly defended against an attack. White's serious problem is that he not only has positional problems but also that it only take a couple of moves for Black to make the above plan a reality.

White continued **20. Nb5**, attempting to take the initiative for himself. After **20 ... Rd8 21. h5 Nxd5 22. hxd6 hxg6 23. f5**, White went on to win a complicated battle. Notice how, in this position, Black's pieces are not very active and are instead having trouble finding good squares. To me, this game is a gem simply because of the position after White's 19th move. Be sure to understand why 19 ... Na6!! is such a good move, and you will most likely see some improvement in your tactical skills.

Additional reading on tactics is also highly recommended for you to improve your skills even more!