

Back to Basics:

Strategy

by

Valeri Beim



2011
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

Back to Basics: Strategy
by
Valeri Beim

ISBN: 978-1-936490-49-1

© Copyright 2011

Valeri Beim

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be used, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any manner or form whatsoever or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the express written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Published by:
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
P.O. Box 3131
Milford, CT 06460 USA

<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>
info@russell-enterprises.com

Translated from the Russian by Jim Marfia
Cover design by Janel Lowrance and Zymunt Nasilkowski

Printed in the United States of America



Table of Contents

Preface	5
Chapter 1	
Introduction to Our Theme	9
Goals in Chess	11
Chapter 2	
Strategic Principles	16
Piece Development	16
Chapter 3	
The Center	48
The Center and the Wings	68
Chapter 4: Open Lines	100
Chapter 5	
Weaknesses	140
The Two-Weakness Principle	171
Chapter 6: Coordinating Forces	182

Back to Basics: Strategy

Preface

Playing chess is interesting – but playing and winning is even more interesting!

Which paths lead to victory in a game of chess?

Three such paths are known. The first is a direct attack on the king, with the aim either to mate, or to force the opponent, in defending that attack, to suffer serious material losses. The second is also to obtain enough of a material advantage for an easy win; but this time it is achieved by means of a tactical blow (we will not be examining the case of a horrible blunder by our opponent, since the more playing experience one has, the less often this happens. Besides, training oneself to await stupid mistakes from one's opponent is wrong on principle, and very harmful to one striving for self-realization!).

And the third and final way is the technical, and consists of slowly nursing relatively small and varied material or positional advantages to victory. This path may be the very hardest, and learning to master technique will cost the studious player more time than learning the other playing habits.

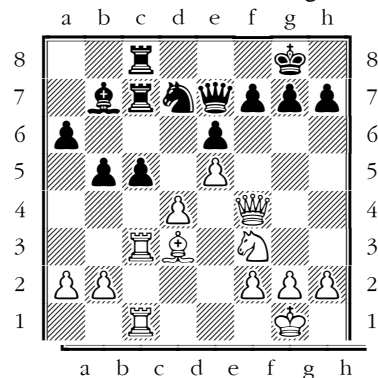
And although all the fundamental methods of play I just listed usually require that a player have different levels of knowledge and different levels of preparation, each of them shares one important general characteristic. And that is: in order to win *by objectively*

proper means – that is, not as a consequence of your opponent's terrible blunder – it is necessary that *objective reasons* for this exist in the position.

Such reasons, *always* contained in the position, are *a superiority for one side in some of the components* which make up a chess position. Such superiorities are usually called *advantages*. There are various kinds of advantages, sometimes in material, other times in the most diverse elements of the position. Advantages of the latter type are commonly referred to as *positional advantages*.

In the main, this book will be devoted to questions of classifying positional advantages and the various operations that can be performed with them.

For now, let's look at a couple of examples, and at how the presence – or absence – of the necessary advantages influenced the outcome of the game.



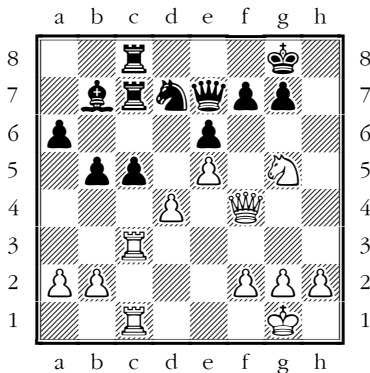
Pillsbury-Burn
Hastings 1895

Back to Basics: Strategy

Here we have a classic (and very typical) example of the successful execution of one of the best-known methods of combinative attack against the king.

Harry Nelson Pillsbury, a legendary American player of the latter half of the 19th century, made excellent use of the tactical peculiarities of this position.

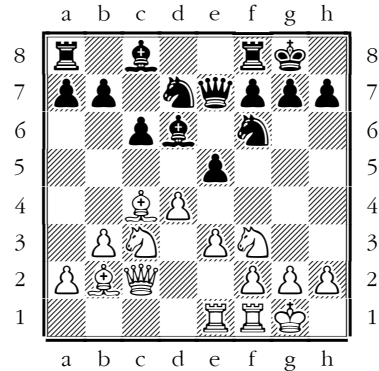
The opening moves of his attack are well-known to any player who has had sufficient experience solving the examples given in any manual on chess tactics: **20.Bxh7+! Kxh7 21.Ng5+ Kg8**. On 21...Kg6, White wins at once by 22.Rg3, when Black has no defense against the fatal jump of the white knight, for example, to the e6-square. However, it should be noted that there are also cases in which such a king maneuver may be what saves Black from this attack!



The resulting situation is standard for combinations of this sort: White needs to bring his heavy pieces to the h-file as quickly as possible, where they and the knight will combine to checkmate his opponent. The continuation was: **22.Rh3! Qe8**. Other replies lose as well: 22...f6 23.Rh8+ Kxh8 24.Qh4+ Kg8 25.Qh7+ Kf8 26.Qh8#; 22...cxd4

23.Rh8+, etc.; 22...Nf8 23.Qh4 Ng6 24.Qh7+ Kf8 25.Qh8+ Nxh8 26.Rxh8#.

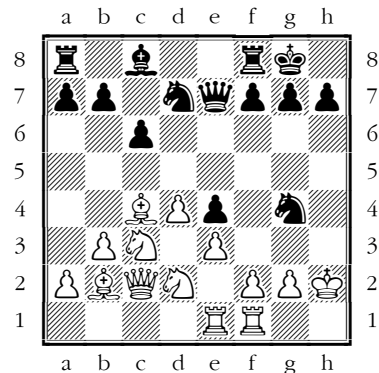
23.Qh4 Kf8 24.Nh7+ Kg8 25.Nf6+ Kf8 26. Nxe8 Kxe8 27.Qg5 cxd4 28.Rh8+ 1-0



Yusupov-Illescas Cordoba
Ubeda 1997

Looking closely at this position from a game between two well-known players, we can see its similarity to the tactical motif just examined. The Spanish grandmaster succumbed to the tempting opportunity to execute this old (probably several hundred years old!) and well-regarded trick, and look what happened:

11...e4 12.Nd2 Bxh2+ 13.Kxh2 Ng4+



But after the forced reply **14.Kg3!** (but not 14.Kg1?? Qh4, when White cannot escape mate; matters would also have ended badly for him after 14.Kh3? Qd6 15.g3 [15.Kxg4 Nf6+ 16.Kg5 h6+ 17.Kh4 Qh2#, 15.Rh1 Nxf2+ 16.Kh4 g5+! 17.Kxg5 Qg6+ 18.Kf4 Qg4#] 15...Qh6+ 16.Kxg4 Ne4#), when it turned out that Black had been too optimistic in his evaluation of the likely outcome of his operation. As detailed analysis of the possibilities in this complicated multi-piece situation shows, in every possible variation that follows (I shall not overburden my readers' attention with these analyses – just take my word for it!), White keeps enough of an advantage to win.

14...Qd6+

After 14...Qg5 15.Ndxe4 Qg6 16.Kf3, the king also runs to a safe haven, with White keeping his material advantage. And there are other possible variations which could also have developed similarly.

15.f4 exf3+ 16.Kxf3 Ndf6 17.Nde4 Nxe4 18.Qxe4 b5 19.Bd3 f5 20.Qf4 Qe7 21.Ke2 g5 22.Qf3 f4 23.Kd1!? Nxe3+ 24.Kc1 Rf7 25.Rh1 Bg4 26.Qxc6 Rc8 27.Qxb5

And now it would appear that Artur has not only a material, but also a significant *advantage in the strength of his position, which in chess is usually referred to as a positional advantage*. This advantage is what allows White to finish the game with a kingside attack of his own.

27...a6 28.Qe5 Qxe5 29.dxe5 Nxb2 30.Reg1 f3 31.Bc4 Rxc4 32.bxc4 Rc7 33.Nd5 Rxc4+ 34.Kd2 Kf7 35.Rxh7+

Kg6 36.Rh2 Re4 37.Rhxg2 fxg2 38.Rxg2 Bf3 39.Rf2 g4 40.e6 Ra4 41.Nc7 Rxa2 42.Kc1 1-0

Before drawing conclusions from what we have observed, I should like to share a few important thoughts. It is quite likely that these examples will seem overly complex to many readers: too many pieces, too many possibilities, with consequences that are difficult, sometimes impossible, to understand.

You shouldn't be afraid of this. From my many years of training experience, I know very well that one and the same chess material can provide useful information to the novice and to the strong professional alike, provided *it is packed with enough information*. Of course, each of these two will see and take away, that which corresponds to his own level of preparation.

Here it is most useful to study material that has been taken from the games of strong players, since the actions these players take are conceived based upon their deep knowledge of the truths of chess play, and filled with interesting ideas.

I have always followed this principle when presenting material in my books and in my training sessions. Now, about the examples we examined, what have we seen?

First of all, we saw one and the same well-known tactical technique – leading to completely opposite results! If we bear in mind that in the second case, Black, after making the sacrifice, committed no further errors – well, he might have committed a few minor inaccuracies in an already difficult position – lost, then his defeat must be

Back to Basics: Strategy

considered the objectively correct outcome of the game. This gives rise to the question: why was the attack so powerful in the first case, and why did it fall so far short in the second? It was for the purpose of giving a complete answer to this question that I engaged in the entire previous lengthy – but, I am sure, necessary – discussion.

Here it is: the reason that Pillsbury's combination succeeded was that his position before he started the combination was strong enough to render his sacrificial attack successful. In other words, the strength of his position lay in the ability of his pieces to work together in the necessary direction, and also in the enemy king's lack of a sufficient defense. Together, these form White's *accumulated positional advantages*.

In the second example, Black's forces had not yet achieved that *stage of cooperation* necessary to overcome his opponent's defensive barriers.

Another way of putting this would be: *The sole presence of a combinative motif on the board, even if it is supported by a player of top-class tactical mastery, is insufficient basis for the success of a tactical operation!* What else is needed? You need to have sufficient *potential in the position!* In our second case, this potential had not yet been accumulated by Black, and an incorrect impression of the possibilities of his position – overestimating its strength – led Illescas to the mistaken decision, which led in turn to the loss.

Instead of immediately sacrificing, he should have gradually improved the position of his army, seeking to complete its development and set out

his forces harmoniously, refraining for the moment from any sharp action.

Thus we arrive, at last, at the most important point.

If, as we have already explained in the preceding examples, one cannot live successfully in chess *on tactics alone*, what else do we need? We need one more vital element of play. This element is called *strategy*.

The book which you hold in your hands is dedicated to a discourse on the essence of strategy, how it usually appears on the chessboard, and what it consists of.

I have written previously about chess strategy in my book *Lessons In Chess Strategy* (Gambit Publications Ltd., 2003). In working on this new book, I tried to avoid dealing with any theme that was previously covered in the other book. In this, I have more or less succeeded, and thus I hope that each will complement the other.

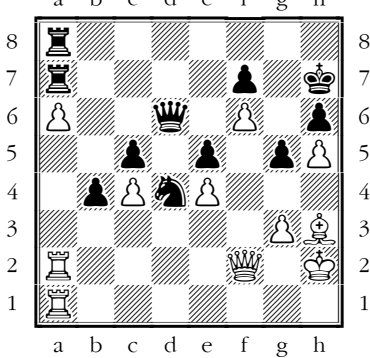
This book was initially intended for those who are taking their first steps studying the truths underlying the battles on the chessboard. But it seems to me that more experienced and better-prepared fighters can also extract something useful from this book.

I hope that such an expansion of its sphere of usefulness will not harm this book, but may instead attract additional interest. As in my previous writings, at this time again I advise my readers that any response from them, whatever it might be, will be accepted by me with gratitude.

Valeri Beim
Vienna 2010

Thus, Bronstein frees his queen from its defensive function, and prepares the decisive strengthening of his position. Black's king will be completely safe, as we shall soon see.

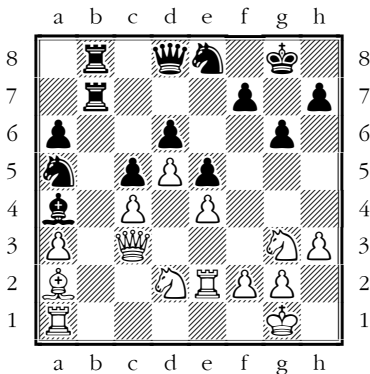
41.h5 g5 42.Qf2 Nd4 43.Bh3 Qd6 0-1



The position speaks for itself. If you compare it to our starting diagram, you can appreciate the maximum possible progress that Black has achieved, while White has in the same time frame achieved nothing.

“Thus, a sensible plan makes heroes of us all.” – Emanuel Lasker.

The following game will be one much closer to our own time.



Lutz-Anand
Germany 2004

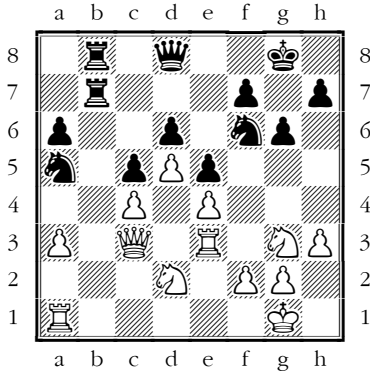
Here there are more pieces on the board than in the previous examples, meaning that there are more factors that need to be taken into account; but our eyes are already fairly well trained to seek out support points in the center of the board, so the d4-square stands out for us in particularly bright colors. Of course, it is only available to the black knights; there is no way for the bishop to get there.

Yet, such a multi-piece position cannot be evaluated based on just one element. What else should we be looking at? Of course, we should note first of all that the sole open file is being occupied only by Black's rooks, and it would be a good thing if we could find them a way to *invade* the enemy camp. (There is another couple of important details in this position – but we will talk about them a bit later.) The conclusion Anand came to, based upon the first two points of evaluation for this position, led him to the following maneuver:

28...Bb3! 29.Re3

Exchanges would lead to the following consequences: 29.Bxb3 Nxb3 30.Nxb3 Rxb3, and then *the only open file* (a theme we shall also be examining in detail) *would remain in possession of Black's pieces for a long time to come.*

29...Bxa2 30.Rxa2 Nf6 31.Ra1



The position has been simplified somewhat, but it hasn't gotten any easier for White. Although it was quite passive, his bishop – now exchanged off – was quite valuable for defensive purposes. It was useful for “hobbling” the black rooks, and also the knight – the b3-square! But even now, being in too much of a hurry to play an immediate 31...Na5-b3 would have been a terrible blunder. In that case, after 32.Nxb3 Rxb3 33.Qxb3 Rxb3 34.Rxb3, Black would lose everything that made up his advantage – and the resulting position would clearly be good for his opponent. This means that Black must find an idea that would help him to *prepare the conditions* for a successful incursion. How do we approach a solution to this problem? Yet another fundamental strategic principle comes to our aid, which will later become the subject of our study. It is called *the two weaknesses principle*, and is formulated approximately as follows: if your opponent's position contains some *significant* weakness, against which your forces can exert pressure, but so far cannot achieve anything decisive, then you must look for an opportunity to create *a second weakness* for your

opponent, preferably *located as far as possible from the first one*. On the other hand, the creation of a *weakness*, per se, may not always be possible. In such cases, you should at least *create some play on another part of the board*, which should also, of course, be far enough removed from the location of the weakness he already has.

What is the point of this recommendation, so difficult to understand, and still more difficult to execute? It is that *a weakness, however it may appear, is first of all an element of the position that requires defending (now, or in the very near future)*. And this leads to the circumstance that it will favor us to give the defending side *additional* problems to deal with, and pieces which will be required in that case to *hurry over a considerably larger portion of the board*. This is the source of this very valuable advice about making the new front a long way from the old one. And that is how we get such a longwinded, but still very valuable principle!

There may be times when I misuse common phrases and descriptions; but I do it exclusively with the goal of making my explanations maximally clear. But how did Anand turn all of this into reality? For him, it worked out very well – strong and clear!

31...h5!

Now we have no difficulty understanding what Black is after. Here, first of all, he is generating play on the opposite side of the board. And in the second place, Anand spotted a possibility of attacking the e4-pawn

(another possible weakness! This is well illustrated by the variation which Anand himself gave. If White were to play 32.Ne2 here, he would lose the pawn after 32...Nb3! 33.Nxb3 Rxb3 34.Qxb3 Rxb3 35.Rxb3 Nxe4. Therefore, Lutz took defensive measures:

32.f3

But now, he has something new to worry about: the dark squares have become a weakness, which his opponent immediately fixes. In general, this is a very useful and also extremely important strategic and technical tool, that of fixing an opponent's weakness. A weak pawn, on the square where it is the weakest; a weak square, so that it can be more easily attacked or occupied. This is the reason Black continued...

32...h4!

White is already in difficulties, having to defend himself constantly. This is also psychologically difficult. In such circumstances, the likelihood of further inaccuracies grows. So it was on this occasion.

33.Ngf1?!

33.Ne2 was more stubborn, although then too, 33...Nh5 would have left Black with a considerable advantage. But now things get very bad.

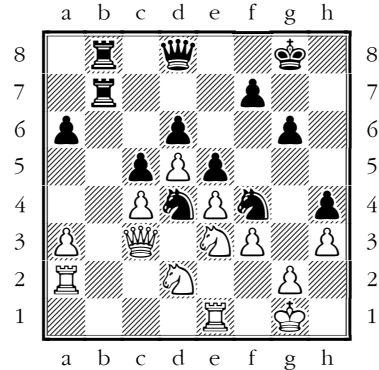
33...Nh5 34.Ree1 Nf4 35.Ne3 Nb3!

And this is the final blow.

36.Ra2

Anand rated the position after 36.Nxb3 Rxb3 37.Qd2 Qg5 as winning for White. For clarity's sake, I will add a few more moves: 38.Kh1 Rb2 39.Nc2 Qxg2+, and there is really nothing more to be said. After...

36...Nd4



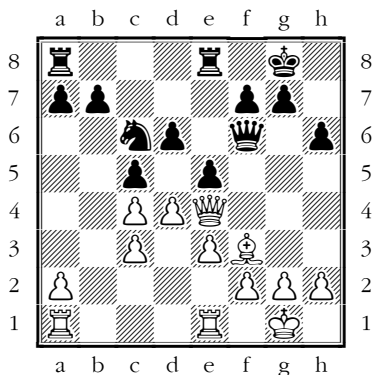
Lutz decided that there was no point in continuing the game against Anand in such a position. And really – White is completely helpless. Enough is enough.

0-1

And once again we note that, just as in the preceding example, a comparison of the starting and ending diagrams shows that White has made no progress, while Black's achievements have been enormous. The reason is the same: total domination of the center.

It is not just knights that find employment in the center, although it suits them most of all. Other pieces too may exploit this particular section of the board to great advantage.

Back to Basics: Strategy



Botvinnik-Chekhover
Leningrad 1938

The strategic focus of this position is unmistakable: at this moment, it is all happening in the center, and White needs to come to an immediate decision about how to define the position there, without hesitation. The continuation was...

16.dxc5!

In this situation, a very powerful solution. With 16.d4-d5, White would seize space and maintain his central pawn massif in more compact form; but the position in that case would have become blockaded, which is more attractive to a knight, as a rule, than to a bishop.

16...dxc5

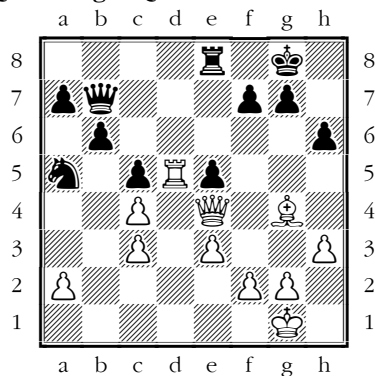
But now, despite the fact that all White's queenside pawns have now become isolated, and this should be considered a drawback of the exchange, White will reap great profit from it, based upon the following factors: the bishop is now very well placed, controlling all of the *free central squares* and the most important (because of its influence on the center) long diagonal. In addition, the central

support point d5 ends up completely under the control of White's *pieces*.

17.Rad1 Rad8 18.Rd5 b6

Exchanging on d5 would not be good for Black. After 18...Rxd5 19.cxd5 Ne7 20.Qa4 Rd8 21.Qxa7 Nxd5 22.Qxc5, he would lose a pawn without compensation. This means that Black will be unable to neutralize his opponent's two previously mentioned vital trumps.

19.Red1 Na5 20.h3 Rxd5 21.Rxd5 Qe7 22.Bg4! Qb7



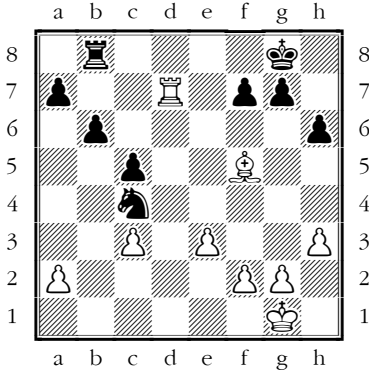
23.Bf5!

A most important square for the bishop: from here, it defends the queen and prepares the rook's invasion of the seventh rank.

23...Qb8

It is important that Black cannot play 23...g6?, because of the variation 24.Bxg6! fxg6 25.Qxg6+ Kf8 26.Rd6, and wins.

24.Rd7! Rd8 25.Qxe5! Nxc4 26.Qxb8 Rxb8



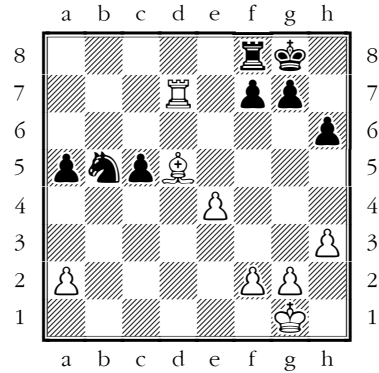
White's excellent activity has led to this position, the evaluation of which is unmistakable. White has a great advantage – indeed, from a strategic standpoint, it is already decisive. Its components are as follows: first of all, a powerful rook on the seventh rank – a place where you can always find a few enemy pawns. (In Russian professional chess slang, such a rank is called “glutton’s row,” which perfectly captures the attraction of such a rank for rooks.) Meanwhile, the black rook is passive. Also, White’s bishop is far stronger now than the opposing knight, since the latter cannot even dream of having any support points in the center, while the bishop has everything it could want, namely: nothing obstructs it, it stands ready to coordinate with its rook, which cooperation will prove very effective, since *bishop and rook complement each other well in a natural way (just as does the similar pairing of queen plus knight!)*

27.Be4!

Centralization of the bishop, leading to the previously mentioned cooperation, is more important here than the win of a pawn, which, after 27.Rxa7?! Nd6 28.Bd7 Ne4 29.c4 Rd8, would let Black

have counterchances. Here we have another extremely typical case: *having achieved a considerable advantage, it is most important not to sell out too cheap, allowing yourself to be tempted by small material acquisitions.* Taking the bishop to the key d5-point will bring White far more.

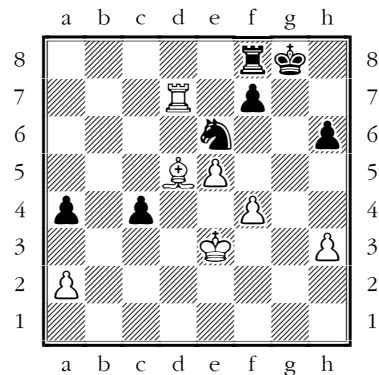
27...Na3 28.Bd5 Rf8 29.e4 a5 30.c4 b5 31.cxb5 Nxb5



32.e5

Now the pawns join in to help the pieces, and soon the king comes on board as well.

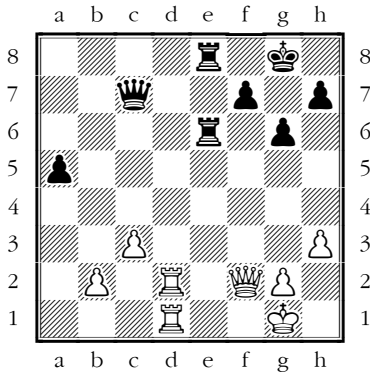
32...a4 33.f4 Nd4 34.Kf2 g5 35.g3! gxf4 36.gxf4 Ne6 37.Ke3 c4



A very instructive situation: with few forces left for either side, all of White's are active and cooperate fully, as if they were formed into a single fist; meanwhile, Black's are passive and scattered. So it is no surprise that the game ends very quickly.

38.f5 Nc5 39.Rc7 Nd3 40.e6 fxe6 41.fxe6 1-0

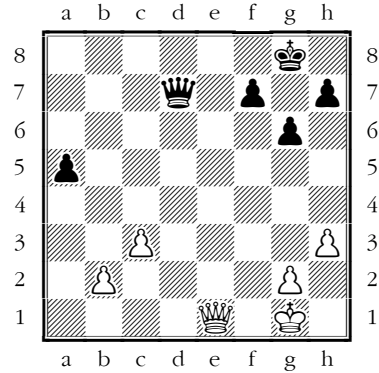
Even the powerful queen is subject to the same rules of centralization!



Capablanca-Roething
New York casual game, 1909

At first glance, it is hard to give either side the preference: material is even, each side securely controls its own open file. On the other hand, there are two "asymmetrical" factors: the black king is better protected than White's, but White has an extra – and passed – pawn on the queenside. From this, it follows that Black should keep as many pieces on the board as he can, and use them to attack the opposing king; while White, conversely, should trade off as many pieces as he can, so that his passed pawn can shine forth in full glory. It was White to move here, and Capablanca forced exchanges:

35.Rd7 Re1+ 36.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 37.Qxe1 Qxd7



38.Qe5!

The first centralized piece in this ending. From here, it can control a great number of squares. And although Black's position is still defensible, it will require accurate play.

38...Qd1+?

Alas, this maneuver is already unfortunate, leading to great difficulties. He should have played 38...a4.

39.Kh2 Qb3 40.Qxa5 Qxb2

