

Karsten Müller / Jerzy Konikowski

The Best Combinations of the World Champions



Volume 1
From Steinitz to Tal

JBV Chess Books

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Preface

Since every world champion was the most outstanding player of his time, it makes sense to study the various aspects of the royal game using the world champions' games – and of course to enjoy them. In this first of two volumes on the world champions' art of combination, the authors (both recognized experts in the field of chess literature) offer the reader the opportunity of trying to find plenty of these best combinations themselves – and thus to assess and improve their own tactical skills.

But that's not all. In addition to often breathtakingly spectacular sample games, which are thoroughly analyzed and commented on in a comprehensible way, individual pet topics are highlighted in which the world champions have created particularly outstanding works.

So you are invited to take a closer look at how Steinitz handled the 'Steinitz King' – at Lasker's phenomenal art of defense and Capablanca's mastery of 'small combinations' (for which the French term 'petite combinaison' has become common in chess language).

Furthermore, at Alekhine's dashing attacks, at Euwe's seventh sense for dynamic transformations, Botvinnik's tactical solutions to strategic problems, Smyslov's virtuosity even in tactical endgames and – last but not least – at Tal's downright magical tactical works of art with which he not only bewitched his opponents, but the entire chess world.

The game examples and special topics were selected and edited by Karsten Müller – the numerous examples of the 'best combinations' by Jerzy Konikowski, who used material from his numerous books and other publications (see – Index of sources).

The authors would like to thank Mihail Marin for his excellent foreword, Frederic Friedel and Rainer Woisin from ChessBase for the idea of working with QR codes, Thomas Beyer for the perfect layout and Robert Ullrich for the exemplary cooperation.

Karsten Müller/Jerzy Konikowski
Hamburg/Dortmund, February 2022

Tactics – more than a matter of style



Mihail Marin

It is hard to imagine a more effective way of annoying the younger generations than preaching about „the reliable past“. At the same time, it would be a pity if the rich treasure left to us by the former World Champions fell into oblivion. With his new book, Karsten Mueller has managed to fight against the latter without falling into the typical „grandpas' mistake“. The author has gathered a large number of combinations from the World Champions' practice, thus inviting the reader to evaluate, treasure and measure his or her own forces with that of the heroes from the past.

Solving tactical puzzles has never ceased to be one of the most effective training methods.

I used to do that before tournaments intensively, and have encouraged many of my pupils to do it, too, but it can also be a day-by-day activity.

Which is the reason making tactics so important?

Karsten himself has explained in his introduction that the World Champions could be classified into several categories. Is this not one of those situations when several alternative methods could lead to the same goal?

The simplest part of the answer is that solving tactical puzzles systematically improves one's shape, allowing one to take quick correct decisions over the board, no matter whether they are of strategic, tactical theoretical or pragmatic nature.

I could also add that there are many famous cases of games and results turned upside down by tactical operations after one of the players had been outplayed in the theoretical or strategic battle. The reversed situation is less common. It would take a miracle to save a game due to one's strategic superiority after having been caught tactically. True, superior theoretical knowledge in the end-game can sometimes make up for tactical accidents, but if one falls under a tactical attack, things are not likely to get as far as the endgame.

All these are only superficial aspects, though. The inner truth is much deeper. Strong players (and maybe not only they) conduct the biggest part of the game according to their personal taste and style, making possible such classifications as that used by Karsten. However, there are moments when there is only one „best decision“. On such occasions, tacticians and strategists alike have to

forget about their style or preferences and play accordingly to the concrete requirements of the position. Since Karsten has also mentioned the champions' weaknesses, I would add that the impulsive one should use the best of his patience if a strategic solution is required and the lazy one should exit his comfort zone and calculate when things are about to get messy.

It is precisely the latter that is connected with the spirit of this book. The chronologically first hero, Wilhelm Steinitz, famously stated that the player having an advantage can and *must* attack, facing the threat of otherwise losing his superiority or even getting the worst of it. Aged almost 60, the founder of the "new school", based on strategy, illustrated this axiom in his brilliant game against Von Bardeleben, the first Beispielpartie in this book.

Capablanca was widely known as a phenomenal positional player and end-game specialist, but his ability to deliver "des petites combinaisons" was also famous. The latter aspect fails to portrait him as a player with a complete and well-balanced style yet. Small tactical fireworks are only auxiliary tools to the strategic player. The large number of Capablanca's combinations included in this book hint at his tactical mastery and ability to spot the critical moments in the game, too. His game against Zubarjew, Moscow 1925 (number 65) is inserted only from the moment when the piece sacrifice was the only way of avoiding an obvious draw. Those curious enough to check the previous phase of the game will notice that the Cuban had taken the decision a few moves earlier, when he had a choice between playing with a clear advantage and win by force, as happened in the game. The latter surely required some effort of calculation, but Jose Raul was up to the task.

One may argue that due to his exquisite technique, Capablanca would have won even if he had chosen the quiet way, but here is an even clearer case illustrating my preaching about the importance of tactics.



Chapter 1

The first world champion – Wilhelm Steinitz

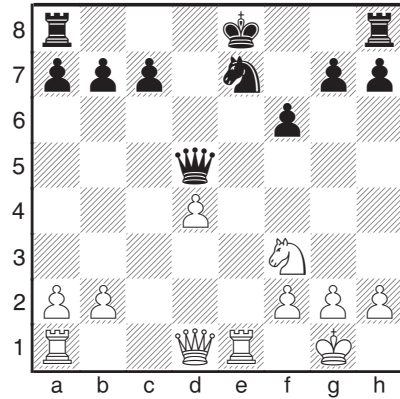
Wilhelm Steinitz (May 14, 1836 – August 12, 1900), a native Austrian (from 1888 US-American), was the first generally recognized world chess champion from 1886 to 1894 (after his victory over the Polish-German master Johannes Zukertort). In a sense, he is considered a revolutionary because he sharply criticized the fierce attacking chess that was prevalent at the time (the so-called 'romantic chess'). Based on his scientific approach, he laid the foundation for the 'positional school' of modern chess by formulating principles of strategy and positional play that are still valid today.

As for his style, he was a 'theorist' (see also the 'introductory remark' on page 10). However, he was also a great tactician, as often strategy and tactics go hand in hand anyway, which is perfectly illustrated in the following game.

Example game



Wilhelm Steinitz
Curt von Bardeleben
 Hastings 1895



**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3
 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 ♙b4+ 7.♘c3**

Instead of this enterprising but risky approach, the quiet alternative 7.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 8.♘bxd2 d5 9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♚b3 ♘a5 11.♚a4+ ♘c6 is the modern main line.

7...d5?!

After the usual 7...♘xe4 8.0-0 ♙xc3, the 'Möller Attack' 9.d5 is considered the critical continuation, although White cannot expect any advantage.

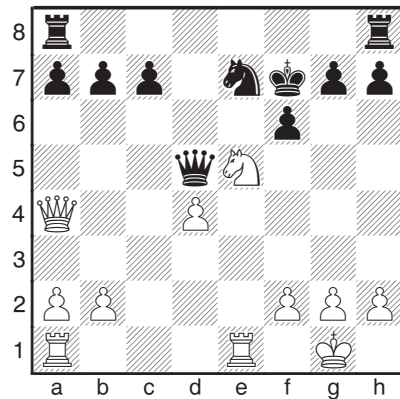
8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.0-0 ♙e6 10.♙g5 ♙e7?!

Kasparov prefers 10...♚d7 11.♙xd5 ♙xd5 12.♞e1+ ♔f8.

**11.♙xd5 ♙xd5 12.♘xd5 ♚xd5
 13.♙xe7 ♘xe7 14.♞e1 f6**

15.♚e2?!

15.♚a4+! is stronger, as 15...♔f7? fails to 16.♘e5+!! (a thunderbolt discovered by GM Geller in 1983).



White wins as shown in the sample line 16...fxe5 17.♞xe5 ♚d6 18.♚c4+ ♔f8 19.♞ae1 ♘g8 20.♞d5 ♚c6 21.♚b4+ ♔f7 22.♞c5 ♚d6 23.♚c4+ ♔f8 24.♞xc7+-.

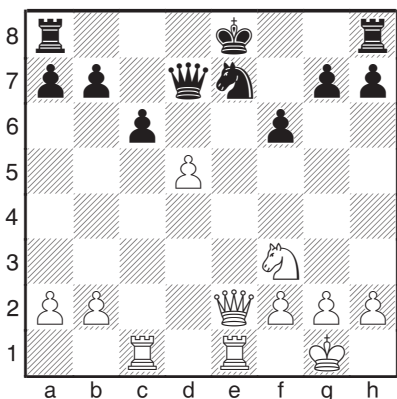
15...♚d7 16.♞ac1

16.♞ad1!? was worth trying. The reply 16...♔f8! is forced, as 16...♔f7? fails to 17.♚c4+ ♘d5 18.♘e5+ fxe5 19.dxe5+-.

16...c6?

After the immediate escape 16...♔f7!, there's no win in sight; e.g. 17.♘d2 ♖he8 18.♘e4 ♘d5= or 17.♘e5+ fxe5 18.dxe5 ♖e6 19.♗f3+ ♔g6 20.♖xc7 b6=.

17.d5!!



In typical fashion, the isolani is used as a battering ram to open lines for the attackers.

17...cxd5?!

17...♔f7 was required, although the attack was still very strong; e.g. 18.dxc6 bxc6 19.♖ed1

(19.♖c4+!? ♖d5 20.♗g4 is also dangerous.)

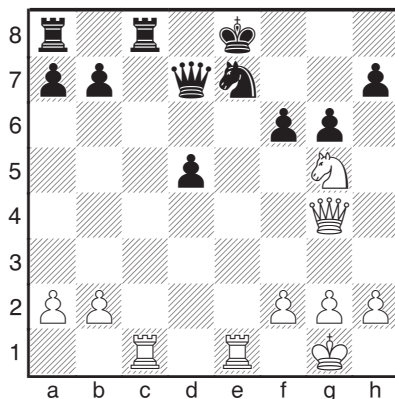
19...♗e6 20.♗xe6+ ♔xe6 21.♘d4+ ♔f7 22.♘xc6 and according to Kasparov, White has good practical winning chances.

18.♘d4 ♔f7 19.♘e6 ♖hc8?!

This runs into a wonderful refutation, but the black position was hopeless anyway; e.g. 19...♘c6 20.♘c5 ♖d6 21.♘xb7 ♖d7 22.♘c5 ♖d6 23.♗h5+ g6 24.♗h4 ♘e5 25.f4 ♘c4 26.b4 f5

27.♖e6 ♖d8 28.♗h6 ♘d6 29.h4 ♘e4 30.h5 ♘xc5 31.hxg6+ ♔xe6 32.♖xc5+-.

20.♗g4 g6 21.♘g5+ ♔e8



22.♖xe7+!!+-

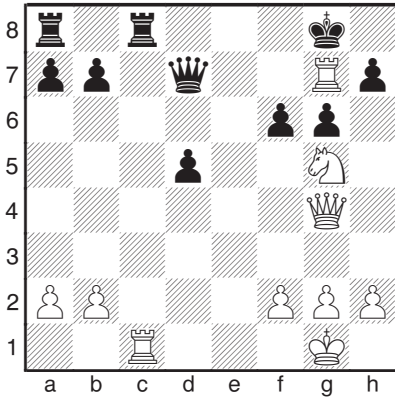
Ready for take off!?

22.♘xh7? ♖xc1 23.♘xf6+ ♔f7 24.♖xc1 ♗e6 would have sold the advantage too cheaply.

22...♔f8

22...♔xe7 (22...♗xe7 23.♖xc8+) 23.♖e1+ ♔d6 (23...♔d8 24.♘e6+ ♔e8 25.♘c5+) 24.♗b4+ ♖c5 (24...♔c7 25.♘e6+ ♔b8 26.♗f4+ ♖c7 27.♘xc7) 25.♖e6+ ♗xe6 26.♘e6

23.♖f7+! ♔g8 24.♖g7+!!



The extraterrestrial rook simply continues its 'mission impossible'.

24...♔h8

24...♔f8 25.♘xh7+ ♔xg7 26.♖xd7+

25.♗xh7+

At this point, von Bardeleben left the tournament hall without a word. He later sent a courier to announce his surrender. Meanwhile, Steinitz showed the spectators the amazing finale.

25...♔g8 26.♗g7+ ♔h8 27.♖h4+

Now Black is forced to finally take this nightmare of a rook.

27...♔xg7 28.♖h7+ ♔f8 29.♖h8+ ♔e7

30.♖g7+ ♔e8 31.♖g8+ ♔e7 32.♖f7+ ♔d8

(32...♔d6 33.♖xf6+ ♖e6 34.♖xe6#)

33.♖f8+ ♖e8 34.♘f7+ ♔d7 35.♖d6#

This masterpiece is rightly considered the most spectacular of Steinitz's games.



Chapter 2

The second world champion – Emanuel Lasker

Emanuel Lasker (December 24, 1886 – January 11, 1941), the so far only German holder of this title, was also a mathematician and philosopher. In 1894 he defeated Wilhelm Steinitz quite clearly (+10 =4 –5) and maintained the chess crown for a period of 27 years (until 1921) and thus longer than any other world chess champion. During this time he defended his title several times – 1896/97 against Steinitz (+10 =5 –2) – 1897 against the American Frank James Marshall (+8 =7 –0) – 1908 against Siegbert Tarrasch (+8 =5 –3) – 1910 against the Austrian Carl Schlechter (+1 =8 –1) and 1910 against the Polish–French champion Dawid Janowski (+8 =3 –0).

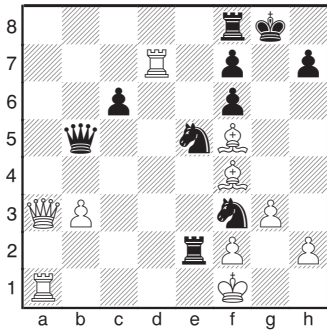
As he stylistically was a pragmatic (see also the ‘introductory remark’ on page 10), we are going to take a closer look at his tenacious art of defense. Furthermore, he could calculate well and far and carry out dashing attacks, as for example in the following game.

Combinations

(Solutions starting on page 176)



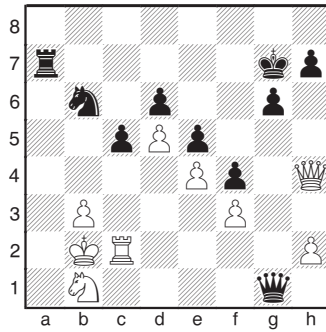
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White to move and win



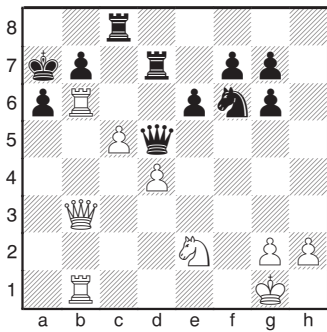
171



Black to move and win



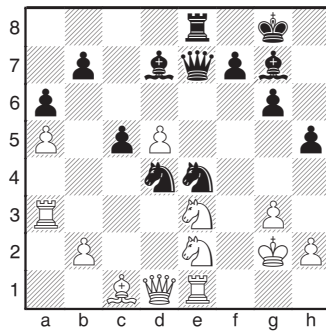
170



White to move and win



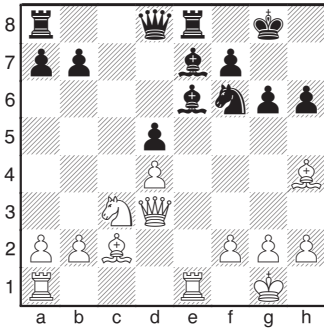
172



Black to move and win



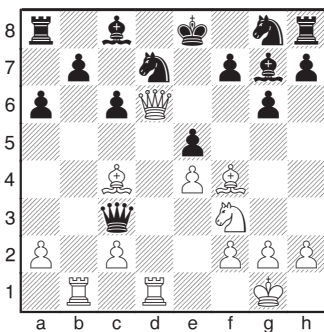
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White to move and win



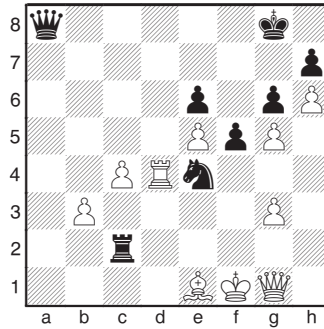
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White to move and win



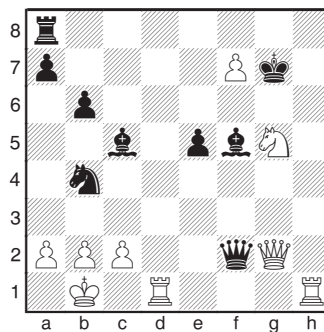
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Black to move and win



176



White to move and win

About the authors

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. As a player he belongs to the type 'activist' – as a trainer and author, however, he is a 'theorist'.



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)

ChessCafe Puzzle Book 1: Test and Improve Your Tactical Vision, 2004

ChessCafe Puzzle Book 2: How to Play Chess Endgames (with Wolfgang Pajeken, 2008)

ChessCafe Puzzle Book 3: Test and Improve Your Positional Intuition (2008)

Bobby Fischer, The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion (2009)

ChessCafe Puzzle Book 4: Test and Improve Your Defensive Skill! (with Merijn van Delft, 2010)

Mastering the positional principles (with Alexander Markgraf, 2012)

The Magic Tactics of Mikhail Tal: Learn from the Legend (with Raymund Stolze, 2012)

Fighting chess with Hikaru Nakamura (with Raymund Stolze, 2013)

The slow (but venomous) Italian (with Georgios Souleidis, 2016)

The Magic of Chess Tactics 2 (with C.D. Meyer, 2017)

Magical Endgames (with C.D. Meyer, 2020)

The Human Factor in Chess (with Luis Engel, 2020)

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 *ChessBase Magazine* since 2006.

The busy and globally recognized endgame expert was named 'Trainer of the Year' by the German Chess Federation in 2007.

FIDE Master Jerzy Konikowski (born 1947) is a recognized German trainer and chess theorist of Polish origin. He completed his studies as a chess coach in Warsaw and was the Polish national coach from 1978 to 1981.

In 1981 he moved to Germany and received German citizenship. He coached the youth team of North Rhine-Westphalia for 15 years and played in various teams in the German 'Bundesliga' from 1983–1994.

His numerous books and articles have been translated into several languages and published in many countries.

He is also a renowned chess composer who created about 400 chess problems, over 100 of which received awards in international competitions. Eight of his problems have been included in FIDE albums, the collections of the world's best problems.

