

Herman Grooten

Chess Strategy for Club Players

The Road to Positional Advantage

Third, Improved & Extended Edition

New In Chess 2017

Contents

Foreword by Jan Timman	7
Preface	8
Chapter 1 Steinitz's Elements	11
Chapter 2 The eye of the grandmaster	23
Chapter 3 Thought process and line of thinking	36
Chapter 4 Material advantage	51
Chapter 5 Weakened king position	69
Chapter 6 Passed pawn	83
Chapter 7 Weak pawns	102
Chapter 8 Training experiment	114
Chapter 9 Strong and weak squares	128
Chapter 10 The pawn islands theory	149
Chapter 11 The pawn centre	163
Chapter 12 The diagonal	182
Chapter 13 Quiz: strong square	208
Chapter 14 The open file	213
Chapter 15 The bishop pair	228
Chapter 16 Control of a rank	241
Chapter 17 A piece out of play	255
Chapter 18 Quiz: open file	270
Chapter 19 Harmony and coordination	274
Chapter 20 Lead in development	289
Chapter 21 Centralization	308
Chapter 22 Space advantage	320
Chapter 23 Quiz: space advantage	337
Chapter 24 Total control	341
Chapter 25 Solutions	376
Chapter 26 Epilogue	450
Bibliography	455
About the author	457
Index of Names	459

Foreword by Jan Timman

Loek van Wely once said of Herman Grooten that his positional rating was much higher than his tactical rating. This is clearly visible in his play and in his writings, and is also reflected in his work as a trainer of such strong players as Van Wely himself and Jan Werle. In my confrontations with these grandmasters I could not help but notice a clear predilection for positional play.

In this ambitious and well-thought-out book, *Chess Strategy for Club Players*, it is gratifying to read that Herman Grooten has been inspired, among others, by my book *The Art of Chess Analysis*. As a player and an analyst I also tend to look first at the strategic features in a position. Obviously, I am familiar with the principles of Steinitz, but this rich book has taught me a lot of new insights and ideas. For example, it was a surprise to read that Soviet players were spoon-fed with Steinitz's Elements, as in my contacts with them I had never noticed this. In my experience Soviet players never mentioned Steinitz, firstly because they did not have access to a lot of 'outside' information, secondly because whenever a 'Steinitzean principle' was under discussion they would invariably come up with the name of a Russian writer who had made the same invention. As for myself, when I was a young chess student I didn't get to know these strategic principles through Steinitz's or Lasker's works, but by reading the manuals of our legendary fellow countryman Dr Max Euwe.

Herman Grooten has considerably modernized and updated the work of Steinitz. Later developments are also investigated and given a place in this extensive survey of chess strategy. With his great experience as a trainer, he manages to display educational insights that can help the reader increase his playing strength.

What gives added value to this work is that many of the modern examples have been derived from training sessions conducted by the author himself. It was highly interesting to read about various experiments he has conducted with his pupils. They illustrate the amount of creativity with which these basic principles can be treated in practical chess. Of course, famous experiments like the ones by Prof. A.D. de Groot have also found a place in this book.

As the author is also a strong practical player who has participated in several Dutch championships, he has enriched his book with a lively account of chess life in the Netherlands in the past 30 years. The episode in which Hein Donner taught Rob Hartoch a lesson about a knight that seemed active but was doing nothing, brought back some fond memories. Donner's brilliant account of this incident can be found in his book *The King*.

In sum, this is a highly instructive book for readers who want to improve their chess skills, but it is much more than that. Herman Grooten has woven a rich tapestry of chess knowledge, science, humour and, above all, love for our great game.

Jan Timman
Arnhem, March 2009

Preface

When in 1995 I published the first part of the trilogy 'De elementen van de schaakstrategie' ('The elements of chess strategy') in the Netherlands, it was received well. In the two years after that, the two sequels appeared, and it became clear that William Steinitz's *Table of strategic elements* provided club players with good 'stepping-stones' for a better understanding of the foundations of chess strategy. In the mentioned series I made an attempt to give an answer to that eternal question that every club player faces: 'The opening is finished, how to continue?'

Steinitz's table provides us with some important information for classifying certain specific features in a chess position, and to use them to design a plan. In the foreword to the Dutch books, my good friend, the indefatigable chess promoter and chess writer Huub van Dongen, wrote: 'The elements of chess strategy taken together are nothing less than a Philosopher's Stone with which the chess master is able to find the golden move in a seemingly totally obscure mish-mash of possibilities. Here, Herman Grooten is standing on the shoulders of great chess philosophers like Steinitz, Lasker, Nimzowitsch and Euwe. This lofty position offers him a good overview. He has applied the insights of these chess philosophers to an enormous amount of examples from practice. Beautiful games, which deserved to be wrested from oblivion even without the pedagogical purpose they are given in this book. It's a joy for every chess student, but above all an homage to the human mind.'

These words still echoed in my mind when Huub passed away, totally

unexpectedly, in 2011, at the age of 55. With that I lost not only a good friend, but also a mentor, who had managed to win me over to chess when I was a 14-year-old school kid. Huub was not only a strong player, but being an expert in the Dutch language he also helped me with my chess writings later. I have written chess columns for a national and a regional daily newspaper for many years, and currently I make my living writing and analysing topical games for the Dutch-language website Schaaksite.nl.

These words from Huub are perhaps too much of an honour for an author who prefers to remain modest. But after *New in Chess* contacted me in 2008 with the idea to compile an entirely new book on this theme, I was only too glad to start with the job of presenting these strategic 'elements' in a new form. The publisher asked me to make a 'personal' book of it, presenting training material and training methods that played an important role in my career as a chess instructor. I started working on this task, and the book saw the light of day in 2009. In comparison with my Dutch series, 75 to 80 percent of the book was new, with more modern examples, and also revised analyses of the older material. Also, I was able to present examples I had extensively tested during my career as a chess trainer, with the many young talents I had temporarily had under my wings.

During my 40-year career as a chess trainer I have provided players with quite a few rules of thumb to help them

find their way in an apparent morass of position features, ideas and variations. My main intention was to make players familiar with a certain thinking style, which was to help them devise the correct plan and ditto move in each position. This thinking style is elaborated upon in Chapter 3 – in many cases it has proved to be a success formula for the solving of difficult strategic problems. This thinking style, which was new to many, sometimes led to worse results in the beginning. Players would sometimes apply the new information in a wrong way, which cost them points. But after a while, players who internalized this new thinking style were happy when they noticed they had made significant progression. The trainer used to thank them for the patience they had exercised before coming this far...

I have put a lot of emphasis on the classification of various features in the position, while keeping an open eye for special details. After all, a correct assessment of such details can sometimes make all the difference. In order to acquire a better understanding of middlegame situations, it is advisable to train this skill. In each of the chapters, one of Steinitz's elements is discussed, and at the end you will find four exercises every time. And so, since there are 16 elements, you can do 64 exercises, the solutions to which have been extensively analysed at the end of the book. Almost all of the exercises are strategic in nature, but that is not to say that they do not contain tactics! The difficulty lies mainly in the weighing of various ideas against each other. The most important thing is to spot the so-called 'dominant feature'.

This is certainly not easy, and we do expect a decent basic level from the reader. But the model examples have been selected in such a way that the theme is, hopefully, clearly visible. At the same time, we have tried to collect a number of attractive highlights from the history of chess. Should the exercises indeed be too difficult for you, then you can also just play through the solutions. In a couple of other chapters you can train your insights by solving a number of questions in quiz form.

Put a board before you, cover the moves with a piece of card, and shove it downwards after every question. In this way, you can play through the game and try to answer the questions. You can find the solutions immediately after you have formulated the answer for yourself.

Finally, there are a couple of special chapters that contain a profound discussion of a few interesting reflections and 'training experiments'.

In this 2017 edition, a completely new chapter has been added that deals with 'control of the position'. In this chapter we discuss the question how a player can dictate the course of the play. The great strategists from chess history, among whom I would like to single out Tigran Petrosian, are capable of controlling a game from A to Z like no-one else. When manoeuvring, they use many 'Steinitzean principles' to exert pressure on their opponents. At the end of this chapter, the reader can dabble with various themes from Steinitz' table, without knowing which one applies where. Like in a real game!

The greater part of the positions in this book have been tested in training

sessions with talented young players I have had under my wings – either in private trainings or in group sessions. At the risk of forgetting someone, I would like to name a few names of players who have managed to obtain a chess title at a young age. The best known of them are GM Loek van Wely, GM Erwin l’Ami, GM Jan Werle, WGM

Bianca Muhren, GM Wouter Spoelman, GM Robin Swinkels, WGM Anne Haast, GM Benjamin Bok, GM Twan Burg, IM Vincent Rothuis and IM Ali Bitalzadeh.

Herman Grooten,
Eindhoven,
January 2017

Chapter 24

Total control

24.1 Tigran Petrosian

At some time, one way or another, I became intrigued by the play of the ninth World Champion, Tigran Petrosian. The book *Petrosian's Best Games of Chess* by Peter Clarke features proudly on my bookshelf. The English author was clearly a fan of the champion of mysterious chess.

Often it's not really clear how Petrosian won his games. At first sight not a lot is happening, and many positions appear to be completely equal. But suddenly he has obtained a clear advantage. And before his opponent knows what's happening, he is looking at a cheerless position. How on earth did he do it? Studying the games of the ninth World Champion has clearly helped me as a player to improve my strategic insight significantly. One term springs to my mind if I am to characterize his play: 'total control!'

His positions are usually super-healthy. Hardly any weaknesses in his pawn structure. Active pieces, long-term play. All founded on formidable chess insight.

For people who like sparkling attacking play, Petrosian is the wrong man. They will be inclined to label his play as 'boring', 'defensive' and 'risk-free'. With the exception of the first of these stereotypes, I cannot blame them. Petrosian treats a chess game as a kind of 'catenaccio' (an Italian soccer strategy). From a closed defensive formation, the footballers try to tempt the opponent

into making mistakes. And then their punishment is merciless. This playing method has brought Italy great successes in soccer. Petrosian's play has been compared with catenaccio, but also with the hunting methods of a tiger. His first name Tigran seems to point to this as well. A tiger stalks its prey, now and then striking out with its claw to wound it. And when the prey no longer sees a chance to escape, it is devoured.

24.2 Exploiting small advantages

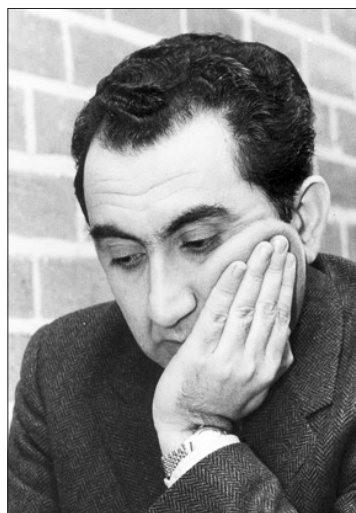
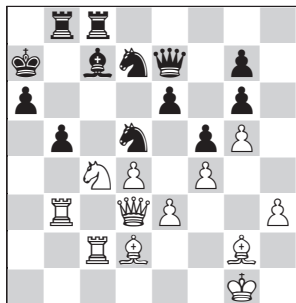
The way in which Petrosian caused the strongest players in the world to falter is far from boring to me. Obviously this is a matter of taste, but after a closer look at the profound way in which Petrosian tackles his victims even the fiercest attacking player will feel a glimpse of admiration.

Petrosian was a past master in collecting and exploiting minuscule advantages. It is not surprising that at times he managed to obtain a good knight against a bad bishop seemingly out of nothing. Or the opposite: a mighty bishop versus his opponent's crippled knight. Many attacking players have crashed on his cunning defence. With his prophylactic way of thinking, he was, as it were, moving along with his opponent. If there was a remote danger, somewhere on the horizon, he reacted immediately. This way of playing proved to be very frustrating for many opponents. How could they ever unsaddle this superman? Any attempt was parried even before

the actual skirmishes started! And if the position did become sharp, the former World Champion turned out to be an excellent calculator and an inventive defender.

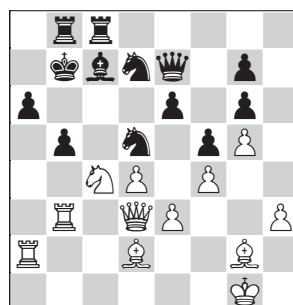
Garry Kasparov
Tigran Petrosian

Tilburg 1981 (7)



Tigran Petrosian

32...♔b7



After a heavy strategic struggle, Kasparov has driven his opponent into a corner by active play and by sacrificing a pawn. The black king is highly exposed, and the white pieces have taken up menacing positions.

32. ♖a2!

The exclamation mark was given by Kasparov. Perhaps there was an even stronger plan at hand. It was possible to play the knight to a3, introducing sacrificial possibilities on b5. Black can parry that threat with, for instance, (32. ♘a3) 32...♙b6, but after 33. ♖a2 ♖b7, the black king is suddenly on the long diagonal. With 34. ♘c2! ♖a8 35. ♘b4, White can quickly exert pressure on d5. Even if Black can avert the first threats by 35...♙d6, after 36. ♖b1 followed by ♙b3, he faces a renewed attack on his pinned knight on d5. Black remains under heavy pressure, and it doesn't look as if he will be able to work his way out of it any time soon.

Petrosian makes a wise decision, removing his king from the a-file in advance, as the a6-point may come under fire very soon. Obviously, taking the white knight is taboo, in view of 32...bxc4 33. ♖xa6+!, with mate by force.

On 32...♙d6, White has a combination that yields him an advantage: 33. ♖xb5!? ♖xb5 34. ♘xd6 ♙xd6 35. ♙xb5.

33. ♙b4?!

Kasparov: 'Strangely enough, this natural move, building up the pressure, is a serious mistake. I underestimated