

East Anglian Daily Times – columns January-June 2011

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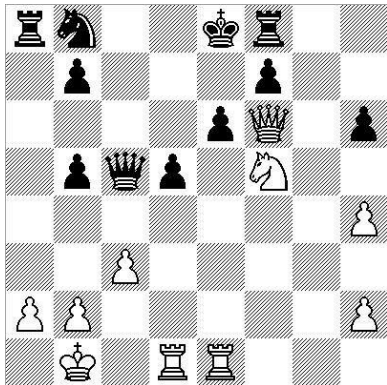
ea110604 D ESX-Writtle-World biggest

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Saturday 1 January 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is Anand-Shah from the 1983 Indian Subjunior Championship. White to play. Solution easy/moderate.

Chess has become big in India following Viswanathan Anand's occupancy of the world chess throne. It seems only fitting that Vishy was present in Ahmedabad to preside over a new world record bid for the biggest simultaneous display.

The old record was set in Mexico in 2006 when 13,446 played against about 600 masters. India blew that record to smithereens when, on Christmas Eve, 1024 masters took on 20,480 opponents on a playing field of 91,000 square feet.

The logistics must have been a nightmare, but the full support of the Gujarat government and the mighty NIIT company, Anand's sponsors, ensured success. The Times of India reported no less than 200 additional masters on standby.

The very same day, 16-year-old Hou Yifan was crowned Women's World Champion. The semi-finals had featured three Chinese and one Indian. In the final, Hou defeated her 23-year-old compatriot Ruan Lufei. That made Hou Yifan the youngest ever World Champion (excluding age-group champions!), ahead of Maya Chiburdanidze, who was 17 when she won the title in 1978. Hou was close to slicing even more off the record in the last World Championship, when she lost the 2008 final to Alexandra Kosteniuk.

Judit Polgar (2691) remains the highest-rated woman. India's Humpy Koneru (2601) and Hou (on the next list) are the only other women to be rated above 2600. Hou has defeated Koneru in the semi-final of the Championship in both 2008 and 2010.

Ruan (2480) - Hou (2591), Antakya 2010. White: Kg7, Rb1, pawn h5; Black: Ke7, Rb6, pawns b2, h6. Black to play. Solution moderate.

Chinese women have dominated the event since Xie Jun won the title in 1991; she held the title until 1996 and again 1999-2001. Zhu Chen (now Qatar) followed in 2001-2004 and Xu Yuhua 2006-2008. In the last ten Olympiads, the Chinese women's team has taken four gold, two silver and three bronze.

Last month, on the 11th, Anand celebrated his 41st birthday, somewhat remarkably, two more than the Women's World Championship finalists combined.

CHESS SOLUTION

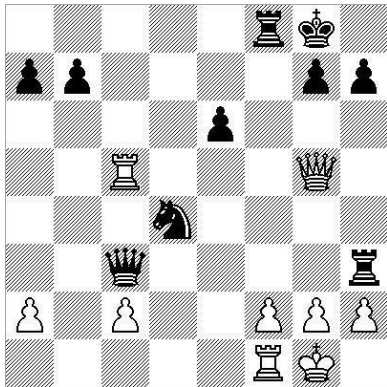
Anand-Shah:

1 Rd1xd5 and Black resigned. Mate is forced, for example 1...Nb8-c6 2 Nf5-g7 or 1...Qc5-d6 2 Qf6-e7+ Qd6xe7 3 Nf5-g7.

Ruan-Hou:

1...Ke7-e6! 2 Kg7xh6 Ke6-f5+ (2...Ke6-f6 also wins and actually forces mate one move quicker) 3 Kh6-g7 Kf5-g5 4 Kg7-f7 Kg5xh5 5 Kf7-e7 Kh5-g4 6 Ke7-d7 Kg4-f3 7 Kd7-c7 Rb6-b3 and White resigned. The outcome is completely obvious after 8 Kc7-c6 Kf3-e3 9 Kc6-c5 Ke3-d3. Make the pieces work and material will take care of itself.

Saturday 8 January 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position (1.) was reached in a very famous game. Black to move.

Here are some more positions. Are they beautiful? Is one more beautiful than the others?

2. White: Ka7, Qg3, Nc5, Nh7; Black: Kh1, Nb4, Nh2, pawn g2. White to play.

3. White: Kc8, Qb8, Bg5; Black: Kg8, Qh8, pawn g7. White's move.

4. White: Ka7, Rb7, Bg5, pawn b3; Black: Ka5, Rd4, Bg4. White to play and force mate.

I'm sure you have your own favourite games and studies, those which you consider to be beautiful. But can chessboard beauty be pinned down, or is it purely in the eye of the beholder? GM Jon Levitt, of Kesgrave, is one of very few who have made a serious attempt to analyse chess beauty. In 1995 Batsford published *Secrets of Spectacular Chess* by Levitt and David Friedgood. A new edition appeared three years ago from Everyman. Whatever you think about the ideas expounded there, you are sure to enjoy the wonderful collection of positions. I urge you to seek it out and read it. You could even borrow it from Kesgrave library were it not for the fact that it is not held by Suffolk Libraries!

CHESS SOLUTION

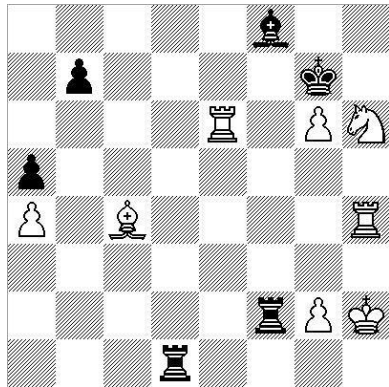
1. Stepan Levitsky - Frank Marshall, Breslau 1912: 1...Qc3-g3 and Black resigned. After 2 Qg5xg3 Nd4-e2+ 3 Kg1-h1 Ne2xg3+ 4 Kh1-g1 Ng3-e2+ 5 Kg1-h1 Rh3-a3, Black will surely win. But, for me, this is kitsch; a diamond stud in a footballer's ear. The move Marshall played is one of five that win, and no better than "sacrificing" the queen on e3 or simply moving her to a3, b2 or b4.

2. A 1927 study by A. Gurvich: 1 Nc5-e4 Nb4-d3 (if 1...g2-g1Q+ 2 Ne4-f2+ Qg1xf2 Qg3xf2) 2 Qg3-f2! Nd3xf2 (both 2...Nh2-f1 3 Qf2-h4+ and 2...g2-g1Q 3 Ne4-g3+ are hopeless) 3 Ne4-g3+! Kh1-g1 4 Nh7-g5 and mate next move.

3. A 1953 study by F. Richter: 1 Kc8-b7+! is the only move to win because, after 1...Kg8-h7 2 Qb8-h2+ Kh7-g8 3 Qh2-a2+ Kg8-h7 (if 3...Kg8-f8 4 Qa2-a8+) 4 Qa2-f7! and Black loses his queen for nothing on six of the seven squares, while 4...Qh8-g8 5 Qf7-h5 is mate.

4. A 1910 study-like problem by T. Nissl. If White could safely put his bishop on d2 or d8, mate would be forced. However, the black rook covers both squares, for now. By threatening mate, in turn, from e1, c7, d2 and d8, White achieves the goal: 1 Bg5-h4 Rd2-d1 2 Bh4-g3 Rd1-c1 3 Bg3-f4 Rc1-c2 (d1 is out of the question because of the c7 square) 4 Bf4-g5, completing a "magic circle."

Saturday 15 January 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from a game in the 1936 Championship of New South Wales, Cecil Purdy - Gregory (Gary) Koshnitsky. White to play. Solution easy.

Can chess ever be easy? Finding the best move in the diagram certainly is.

I believe that George Walker was the first author with enough cheek to write a book entitled *Chess Made Easy*. That was published in London back in the early 1800s. Historical ratings give Walker a peak figure of 2490, near GM strength. The young George was well endowed with cheek; as Hooper and Whyld mention in their wonderful *Oxford Companion to Chess*, "At a time when he was receiving odds of a rook from Lewis he had the temerity to edit a chess column in *The Lancet*."

The USA, though, takes pride of place in the "chess made easy" stakes. Walker's book was preceded by the very first chess book published in the USA, "by" James Humphreys; it had the same title, but was simply a copy of Philidor's work. Fast forward two hundred years to the Chess Made Easy course by a certain "Steve Jacobs, the great!" as he calls himself in his Internet advertisement for it. This "Complete Learning Course on one DVD" is clearly a snip, priced at USD 3,999.95 (yes, there really are three nines following the three before reaching the decimal point) and, if you are in the US, you get free post and packing. There is no Jacobs,S on the FIDE rating list, but there are half-a-dozen on the US list, all unrated except for one with 1278 (about 85 on the BCF scale).

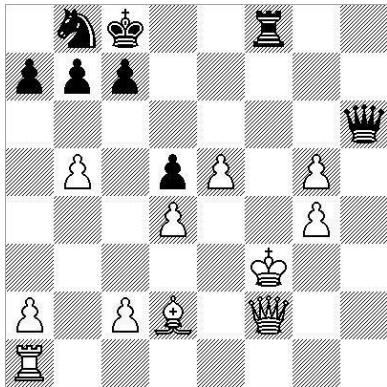
In the two centuries between those works, more than a few books have been published under the same title. The one by Purdy and Koshnitsky (first published 1942) has sold more than 500,000 copies and is good enough to have been plagiarized. The 1999 edition is still available for AUD 8.95, but you'll have to pay the postage from Australia.

There are, of course, some little things, like "checks and captures," which can and do make chess easier than it would otherwise be.

CHESS SOLUTION

With White a piece up, the game ended in easy fashion: 1 Nh6-g4 Bf8-d6+ 2 Re6xd6 and Black resigned since 2...Rd1xd6 3 Ng4xf2 leaves a rook and pawn ending, with two extra pieces for White. "Checks and captures" would have made it still easier: 1 Nh6-f5+ Rf2xf5 2 Rh4-h7+ Kg7-g8 3 Re6-e5+ (eleven of the other 13 checks also force mate, albeit more slowly) 3...Rd1-d5 4 Bc4xd5+ Rf5-f7 5 Bd5xf7 mate.

Saturday 22 January 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Adam Taylor (872)-Angelo Cassar (944), Chingford 2009. White to play. Solution difficult, but thinking "make the pieces work" should help.

Congratulations to the Essex Under-14 "U130" team on winning the East section of the Southern Counties Championship. They will play Surrey, winners of the West group, in the final. This is a magnificent result. Last year, Essex lost both their matches to Kent and failed to qualify for the final. This time the team has topped the group and qualified with a round to spare; winning both matches against Sussex and having beaten Kent 17.5-6.5 in the first leg, the result of the away leg on 13 February can not affect matters.

The competition is a "stars barred" event, limited to players both under the age of 14 and graded below 130 (u1640). Teams of 12 play double-round matches (hence scores out of 24), both home and away. It was also impressive that Essex managed to find so many reserves to turn up to matches, taking five to the away match against Sussex, while Kent were unable to bring any to the match in Wanstead.

Individual mentions must go to top board Adam Taylor of Colchester for a perfect 6/6, to Siddarth Chandrasekaran and Edward Ballard for 5/6 undefeated, and Kieran Marshall who did not make the team but scored 4/4 on the reserve boards.

Two more positions from the same game, the first moderate, the second very, very easy:

2: White: Kg2, Qd2, Ra1, Rf2, Bc3, pawns a2, b4, c2, d4, e5, f4, g3; Black: Kc8, Qh7, Rh1, Rh8, Nc6, pawns a7, b7, c7, d5, g6. Black to play.

3: White: Kg3, Qc4, Rf1, Bf4, pawns a4, b5, d4, e6, g4; Black: Kc8, Qf6, Re8, Nb8, pawns a7, b7, c7. White to play.

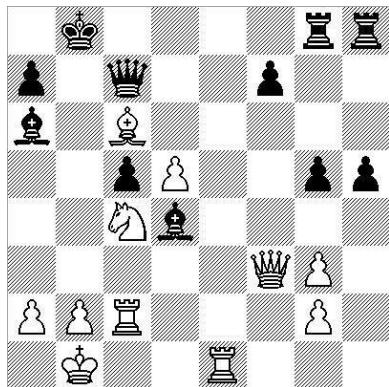
CHESS SOLUTION

1. 1 Kf3-g3! (instead of Bd2-f4, as played). Now if 1...Qh6-g7 (if 1...Rf8xf2 2 g5xh6 and the g- and h-pawns run through) 2 Qf2-e2 Nb8-d7 3 Ra1-f1 Rf8-e8 (otherwise e5-e6) 4 Qe2-f3 Re8-f8 5 Qf3-d3 and White infiltrates, e.g. 5...Rf8-e8 6 Qd3-f5 Re8-f8 7 Qf5-e6 and Black is squashed; 7...Rf8xf1 loses instantly to 8 Qe6-e8 mate and against other moves White continues with g5-g6, Rf1-f7, Bd2-g5 and so on, for example 7...Rf8-d8 8 g5-g6 Qg7-g8 9 Rf1-f7 Qg8-e8 10 Qe6xe8 Rd8xe8 11 g6-g7 a7-a6 12 e5-e6 and Black must resign.

2: 1...Rh1xa1 (instead of Rh1-h2+ as played) wins easily - it actually forces mate, for example 2 Kg2-f3 (2 Bc3xa1 Qh7-h1 mate) 2...Qh7-h1+ 3 Kf3-e2 Qh1-e4+ 4 Qd2-e3 Ra1-e1+ 5 Bc3xe1 Nc6xd4+ 6 Ke2-d2 Qe4xc2.

3: 1 Qc4xc7 mate.

Saturday 29 January 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Shaun Munson (2201) - David Coleman (2247), 4NCL 2010. White to play. Solution moderate.

This season's Four Nations Chess League has three Suffolk-based teams. The Anglian Avengers play in the second division, while the Iceni and a second Avengers team are in the 36 team third division, sharing ninth place. The Avengers first team has got off to a very good start and, after four rounds, is challenging for a top spot, just one point away from the lead in third place. Many interesting positions arose in their games so far, and I have a selection of them today.

Sivakumar Sharma (1450) - Mark Szymanski (1906), 4NCL 2010. White: Kh2, Qf3, Rf4, Rh6, Bc3, pawns b4, c5, f2, g2, h3; Black: Kg8, Qd1, Rd5, Rd8, Bc8, pawns a6, b7, c6, f5, f7, g7. White to play. 1 Rh6-h8+ and 1 Qf3-g3 are both appealing. Is one better than the other? Solution difficult.

Michael Clapham (1916) - Steven Woolgar (1730), 4NCL 2010. White: Kf1, Qc6, Rd3, Bc2, pawns a2, b3, e5, f2, g2; Black: Kg8, Qe7, Rf8, Bc5, pawns b4, e6, f5, g5, h6. Black's last, natural-looking move (g7-g5) was a terrible blunder. White to play. Solution easy/moderate.

An easy one to finish. John Feavoyour (2064) - Petr Vachtfeidl (2038), 4NCL 2010. White: Kg1, Qf6, Rf1, Be5, Nf3, pawns a4, d4, e3, f2, g2, h2; Black: Kg8, Qa2, Rc2, Bc4, Bf8; pawns a7, a6, f5, g6, h7.

CHESSE SOLUTION

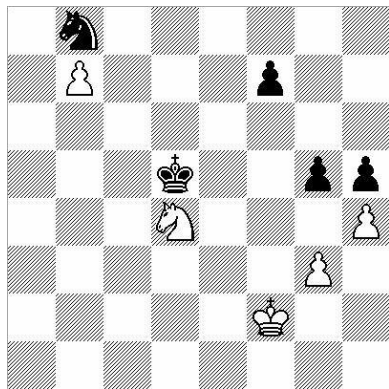
Munson (Avengers 1) - Coleman (Barbican Youth):
White opted for one of the two checks, with 1 Qf3-b3+ and did eventually win after Black missed his way. 1 d5-d6! was the sure way to end it - 1...Qc7-d8 (1...Qc7-c8 2 Re1-e7) 2 Qf3-b3+ Kb8-c8 3 Re1-e7.

Sharma (Metropolitan) - Szymanski (Iceni):
White should have played 1 Qf3-g3, which forces mate, for example 1...Rd5-d4 2 Rf4-h4 Kg8-f8 3 Rg6-h8+ Kf8-e7 4 Bc3xd4 Rd8xd4 5 Qg3-e5+ Bc8-e6 6 Rh4xd4 etc. Black won after 1 Rh6-h8+? Kg8xh8 because now there is a defence to 2 Qf3-g3 with 2...f7-f6 3 Bc3xf6 Rd5-d7 (if 3...Rd8-d7? 4 Rf4-h4+ Kh8-g8 5 Qg3-g6 wins) 4 Rf4-h4+ Kh8-g8 5 Qg3-g6 and 5...Qd1-d5 holds everything, but not 5...Qd1-e1? 6 Qg6-h7+ Kg8-f7 7 Qh7xg7+ Kf7-e6 8 Qg7-g6 and again White conjures up the win.

Clapham (Avengers 2) - Woolgar (Bristol 3):
1 Rd3-d7 Qe7-e8 2 Qc6-c7 Bc5xf2 3 Rd7-g7+ and Black resigned. The end would have been 3...Kg8-h8 4 Rg7-h7+ Kh8-g8 5 Qc7-g7 mate. Black should have played Rf8-f7 instead of g7-g5.

Feavoyour (Iceni) - Vachtfeidl (Metropolitan):
1 Qf6-h8+ was good enough to win, but 1 Nf3-g5 would have ended it right there, since it is mate next move.

Saturday 5 February 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Ilya Nyzhnyk (IM, 2530) - Benjamin Bok (IM, 2453), Wijk aan Zee, group C, 2011. White to play. What should he do about the Nd4 and what should the result of the game be? Solution difficult.

When Robert Fischer qualified for the GM title at the age of fifteen and a half in 1958, it was considered to be remarkable. However, in the 52 years since, 29 players have achieved the feat at a younger age, the Ukraine's 14-year-old Nyzhnyk being the latest, at the end of December. All but five of those successes have come in the decade 2001-2010, 14 of them in the last five years. The trend is accelerating. Why?

As recently as the mid 1980s, tournament opportunities were few and far between, few youngsters had access to quality coaching and the strongest available computer programs were barely nudging a 2000 rating and ran on computers that were still quite expensive.

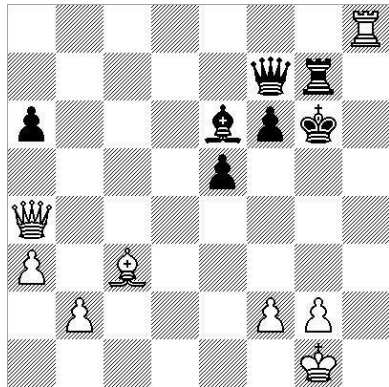
Today, it is easy to play strong opposition, with a large array of tournaments, the Internet and immensely strong computer programs, cheap or even free, providing permanently available sparring partners. The last decade has also seen an outpouring of quality training DVDs. Last but not least, there are many, many more players today, largely thanks to Chess in Schools programmes in dozens of countries around the world.

CHESS SOLUTION

What should White do about the knight? Nothing! Moving it or defending it is just a draw. Leaving it there creates a chance. The game ended 1 g3-g4 h5xg4? 2 h4-h5 Kd5-e5 3 Kf2-g3 f7-f5 (or 3...Ke5-f6 4 Kg3xg4 Kf6-g7 5 Kg4xg5 f7-f6+ 6 Kg5-f5 Kg7-h6 7 Kf5xf6 Kh6xh5 8 Nd4-c2! - looking to dominate the black knight from b4 - 8...Nb8-a6 9 Kf6-e7 Kh5-g5 10 Ke7-d6 Kg5-f5 11 Nc2-b4! the most precise, but many moves win now: 11...Na6xb4 12 b7-b8Q Nb4-d3 13 Qb8-b7 and mate is not too far away, for example 13...Nd3-f4 14 Qb7-f3 Kf5-g5 15 Kd6-e5 Nf4-g6+ 16 Ke5-e4 Ng6-h4 17 Qf3-g3+ Kg5-h5 18 Ke4-e5 Nh4-g6+ 19 Ke5-f6 and mate next move) 4 h5-h6 f5-f4+ (if 4...Ke5-f6 5 Nd4xf5) 5 Kg3xg4 Ke5-f6 6 Kg4-h5 f4-f3 7 Nd4xf3 g5-g4 8 Nf3-g5 Nb8-c6 9 Ng5-e6 and Black resigned; if 9...g4-g3 or 9...Kf6xe6, simply 10 h6-h7.

Black should have played 1...Kd5xd4 since White gets nowhere after 2 g4xh5 Kd4-e5 3 h5-h6 (or 3 h4xg5 Ke5-f5 4 h5-h6 Kf5-g6 5 Kf2-e3 f7-f6 6 h6-h7 Kg6xh7 7 g5xf6 Kh7-g6 8 Ke3-d4 Kg6xf6 9 Kd4-d5 Kf6-g5 10 Kd5-d6 Kg5-f4 11 Kd6-c7 Nb8-a6+ 12 Kc7-b6 Na6-b8 13 Kb6-a7 Nb8-c6+) 3...Ke5-f6 4 h4-h5 Nb8-d7 5 Kf2-g3 Nd7-b8 6 Kg3-g4 Nb8-d7.

Saturday 12 February 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Judit Polgar - Laurent Verat (2235), Bagneux 1988. Eleven-year-old Judit, then unrated, to move. Solution difficult.

Will the girls ever catch up with the boys? There are more than ever playing and there are many women who now hold the full title of Grandmaster, but comparative progress is not really evident.

Judit Polgar is the only one with a real claim to have done so. She entered the top 100 in the world more than twenty years ago, spent some time in the top ten and is the only female ever to have competed in the (open) final of the World Championship (Argentina 2005). She is now a full-time mother of two young children, but at 2686 still ranked 53rd in the world (she started out at 55th in 1989). The next two strongest females actively playing are 16-year-old Women's World Champion Hou Yifan and 23-year-old Humpy Koneru. Those three are the only girls to have beaten Fischer's achievement of qualifying for the Grandmaster title at fifteen and a half. Although both Hou and Koneru got the title younger than Polgar, they rather languish at 211th (2602) and 189th (2607) in the world respectively. In 1991 Judit set the record for the youngest Grandmaster ever. Had she had the opportunity to play in tournaments with Grandmaster norms in 1988 (the year she gained the IM title, two years younger than Fischer and Kasparov) and 1989, it is almost certain that she would have set a more enduring record, quite possibly ahead of that currently held by the Ukraine's Sergey Karjakin, who was just over twelve years and seven months when he qualified for the GM title in 2002.

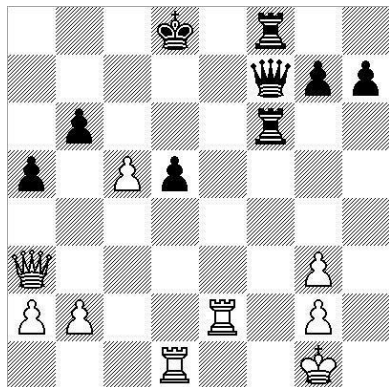
My own coaching experience suggests that girls nearly always start playing a year or so after boys, so that they are quite literally playing catch up. Judit Polgar was an exception and perhaps the wave of Chess in Schools programmes around the world will lead to a more extensive change in that respect.

CHESS SOLUTION

1 Qa4-e4+ wins. If 1...f6-f5 2 Qe4xe5 forces mate, for example 2...Rg7-h7 3 Qe5-g3+ Kg6-h5 4 Bc3-f6 Qf7xf6 5 Rh8xh7+ Qf6-h6 6 f2-f4 and Qg3-g5 next move.

The game continued 1...Be6-f5 2 Qe4-h4 (or Qe4-f3) 2...Rg7-h7 3 Qh4-g3+ Kg6-h5 4 Rh8-g8 and Black resigned in view of 4...Qf7-d7 5 Bc3-d2 Bf5-g4 (if 5...Qd7xd2 6 Qg3-h2+ Bf5-h3 7 Qh2xh3 mate or 5...Qd7-a4 6 Rg8-g5+ Kh5-h6 7 Rg5xf5+) and many moves are crushing, one example: 6 f2-f3 Rh7-g7 7 Qg3-h2+ Bg4-h3 8 Qh2xh3+ Qd7xh3 9 Rg8xg7! Qh3-e6 10 g2-g4+ Kh5-h4 11 Bd2-e1+ Kh4-h3 12 Rg7-h7 mate.

Saturday 19 February 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from an Anglian Avengers-South Wales Dragons 2011 4NCL match. Shaun Munson (2201) - Sven Zeidler (FM, 2247). White to play. Solution difficult.

There are some local tournaments in the next few weeks, so watch out for entry forms, which so far do not appear to be available online. On Sunday 27 February, the Bury St Edmund's Junior Congress will be played at Culford School - I'm sure the Bury Knights Junior Club can help with details, try bobjoneschess@btinternet.com or club secretary Damian Wallace on 01284 756726. A fortnight later, on Sunday 13 March, the Suffolk Junior Open will be played at Woodbridge School. Remember that the top section is, as always, open to adults as well as juniors. Details from Adam Hunt at the school on 01394 615000.

A little further off, you may want to keep the following dates free: 2-3 April Suffolk Championship and Challengers, Ipswich, 16-17 April Great Yarmouth Congress, 22-25 April Southend Easter Congress, 28-30 May Essex Congress, Hornchurch.

A position from another 2011 4NCL game, Mark Gray (2084) - Alan Young (2024). Black, to play, missed a chance here and was ground down by his Anglian Avenger opponent. White: Kf1, Ra1, Rc7, pawns a2, b3, c4, e4, g4; Black: Kf4, Rd2, Nh3, pawns a7, g7, h7.

CHESS SOLUTION

There were some fantastic possibilities hidden in the Munson-Zeidler position.

The game went 1 Re2-e1 Qf7-b7 2 Qa3-b3 Rf6-f5 3 Qb3-b5 d5-d4?? (although White was much better after 3...Rf5-f6) 4 Rd1xd4+ Kd8-c8 5 Re1-e8+ and Black resigned - mate is forced.

Best was 1 c5xb6! Rf6-f1+ (if 1...Qf7-b7 2 Rd1xd5+ Qb7xd5 3 Qa3-e7+ Kd8-c8 4 Qe7-c7 mate) 2 Rd1xf1 Qf7xf1+ 3 Kg1-h2 Qf1xe2 4 Qa3xf8+ Kd8-d7 5 Qf8g7+ and now:

(A) 5...Kd7-e6 6 Qg7-h6+ Ke6-e5 7 b6-b7 Qe2-b5 (or 7...Qe2xb2 8 Qh6-g7+) 8 Qh6-f4+;

(B) 5...Kd7-c6 6 Qg7-c7+ Kc6-b5 7 a2-a4+! with two lines:

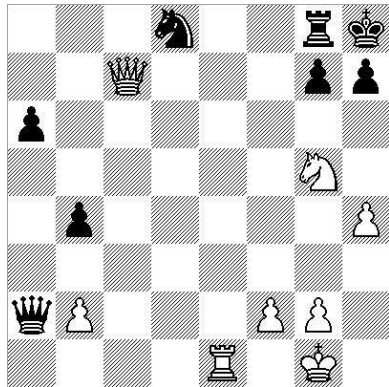
(B1) 7...Kb5-b4 8 Qc7-c3+ Kb4xa4 9 b6-b7 Qe2-h5+ 10 Kh2-g1 Qh5-e8 (if 10...Qh5-d1+ simply 11 Kg1-f2) 11 b7-b8Q Qe8xb8 12 Qc3-a3+ Ka4-b5 13 Qa3-b3+;

(B2) 7...Kb5xa4 8 Qc7-c6+ Ka4-b3 9 Qc6xd5+ Kb3xb2 10 b6-b7 Qe2-e8 11 Qd5-d6 Qe8-h5+ 12 Kh2-g1 and the checks have run out again.

Gray-Young:

Black's active pieces more than make up for White's material advantage. Black missed 1...Rd2-f2+ 2 Kf1-e1 Kf4-e3 which would have drawn after 3 Rc7-d7 Rf2-e2+ 4 Ke1-f1 Re2-f2+ 5 Kf1-e1 Rf2-e2+ and so on, since after 6 Ke1-d1 Nh3-f2+ 7 Kd1-c1 Nf2-d3+ 8 Rd7xd3+ Ke3xd3 only Black can win. Instead, 1...Kf4-f3? 2 Rc7-f7+ was an easy win for White; Black, facing mate, resigned nine moves later.

Saturday 26 February 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Guido Caprio (2272) - Manuel Leon Hoyos (GM, 2565), Cento Open 2011. White to play. Solution easy. Really it is.

Sometimes chess can be easier than we make it seem. What do you make of the following positions from recent games?

Normunds Miezis (GM, 2519) - Klaus Bischoff (GM), Bundesliga 2011. White: Kh2, Qb8, Rf3, Bg2, pawns c4, e4, h3; Black: Kh7, Qg5, Be6, Ne2, pawns e5, g7, h6. White has just played 1 Rf8-f3. How do you think the game finished?

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (GM, 2715) - Ian Nepomniachtchi (GM, 2733), Wijk aan Zee 2011. White: Kg1, Qf5, Rf6, Rg3, pawns a2, f2, g2; Black: Kh8, Qd8, Rd6, Re8, pawns a7, b7, e4, h7. White to play.

Eltaj Safarli (GM, 2629) - Sergei Zhigalko (GM, 2671), Moscow Open Young GM. White: Kh2, Qf6, Rg3, Nc5, pawns b3, d3, g2, h4; Black: Kf8, Qh5, Ra8, Bg4, pawns a6, b4, d5, e5, f7. White to play.

There are often possibilities for finishes both decisive and pretty, if you can just get your pieces buzzing round the enemy king.

CHESS SOLUTION

Caprio-Leon Hoyos:

White moves, threatening mate in one, Black defends the only way he can, and White threatens mate in one again: 1 Qc7-c2 g7-g6 2 Qc2-c7 and Black resigned; mate can not be avoided: 2...Nd8-f7 (or 2...Rg8-g7 3 Re1-e8+ Qa2-g8 4 Re8xg8+ Kh8xg8 5 Qc7xd8 mate) 3 Ng5xf7+ Qa2xf7 (if 3...Kh8-g7 4 Nf7-g5+ Kg7-h6 5 Qc7xh7 mate) 4 Qc7xf7 Rg8-d8 5 Re1-e7 and mate on h7.

Miezis-Bischoff:

The end was 1...Ne2-d4? 2 Rf3-f8 Nd4-e2 3 Rf8-f3?? Ne2-d4? 4 Rf3-f8 and a draw was agreed. Instead, 1...Be6xh3! threatens and forces mate; a few examples: 2 Rf3xh3 Qg5-f4+ 3 Kh2-h1 Qf4-c1+ 4 Bg2-f1 Qc1xf1+ 5 Kh1-h2 Qf1-g1 mate, or 2 Bg2xh3 Qg5-g1 mate, or 2 Bg2-h1 Bh3-f1! (2...Qg5-g1+ wins easily enough, but this forces mate, for example) 3 Qb8-b6 Qg5-h4+ 4 Rf3-h3 Qh4xh3 mate.

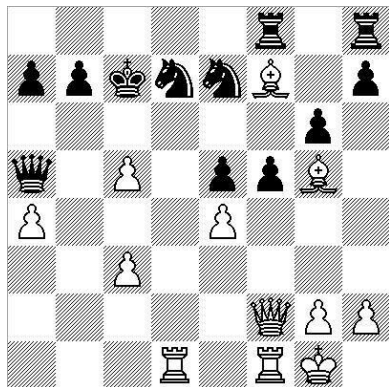
Vachier-Lagrave - Nepomniachtchi:

1 Rg3-g7! Black resigned. Mate is threatened and it is forced: 1...Kh8xg7 2 Rf6-f7+ Kg7-g8 3 Qf5xh7 mate, or 1...Rd6-d1+ 2 Kg1-h2 Rd1-h1+ 3 Kh2xh1 Qd8-d1+ 4 Kh1-h2 Qd1-d6+ 5 Rf6xd6 Kh8xg7 6 Rd6-d7+ Re8-e7 7 Rd7xe7+ Kg7-g8 8 Qf5-c8 mate. 1 Rf6-f7 is similar, but not enough after 1...Rd6-h6 when Black would be OK.

Safarli-Zhigalko:

1 Nc5-d7+ and Black resigned. 1...Bg4xd7 2 Qf6-d6+ Kf8-e8 3 Rg3-g8 is mate, but if 1...Kf8-g8 (1...Kf8-e8 2 Nd7xe5 is just as bad) 2 Nd7xe5 Kg8-h7 (otherwise it is mate) 3 Ne5xg4 Ra8-g8 4 Qf6-f4! (and the threat of Ng4-f6+ leaves Black nothing better than) 4...Qh5xh4+ 5 Rg3-h3 Rg8xg4 6 Qf4xg4 and mate is unavoidable.

Saturday 5 March 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Richard Weaving (2027) - Malcolm Pein (IM, 2390), 4 Nations Chess League 2011. White to play. Solution moderate.

How should you deal with playing a "superior" opponent? One who is rated much higher than you, say 300-400 points. According to the "predicted score" tables used to calculate ratings, the lower-rated player has almost no chance. However, plenty of upsets do occur. Last weekend there was one such on the pitch at Wembley. The previous weekend there were several in the 4NCL matches.

It helps if you play at the top of your game, and your adversary is at or near the bottom of theirs. There are also two things that you absolutely must avoid. One, a common failing, is to decide, before the game starts, that you have no chance. I agree; convince yourself that you will lose and you will. The other is to go "gung-ho" and sacrifice material for the sake of trying to put the opponent off her stride. You should, though, avoid playing passively - get those pieces working. Finally, make sure you take your chances when they do come!

Probably the biggest upset during that 4NCL weekend was the game Marcos Capucci (2229) - David Howell (GM, 2608). Here are two critical positions from that game which you should find quite easy.

White: Kg1, Qe7, Rd1, Rf1, Nc5, Ne5, pawns a2, b3, c4, e3, f2, g2, h2; Black: Kg8, Qb4, Ra7, Rf8, Nf6, Bg7, pawns a6, d7, e6, f7, g6, h6. White's move.

White: Kg1, Qb6, Ra7, Rd1, Nd7, pawns b3, c4, e3, f2, g2, h2; Black: Kh7, Qc8, Rd8, Nf6, Bg7, pawns e5, f7, g6, h6. White to play.

CHESS SOLUTION

Weaving-Pein:

1 Rd1xd7+ Kc7xd7 2 Qf2-d2+ Kd7-c8 3 Bf7-e6+ Kc8-b8 4 Bg5xe7 Rf8-e8 5 Be7-d6+ Kb8-a8 6 Be6-d5 is easy enough to find, and it should be clear that White is winning comfortably. The game ended 6...Qb5xa4 7 Rf1-b1 (one could quibble over the relative merits of this and 7 Bd5xb7+ but they both force mate) 7...Re8-b8 8 Bd6xb8 Rh8xb8 9 Bd5xb7+ and Black resigned (9...Rb8xb7 10 Qd2-d8+ Rb7-b8 11 Rb1xb8, or 11 Qd8xb8 if you prefer, is mate).

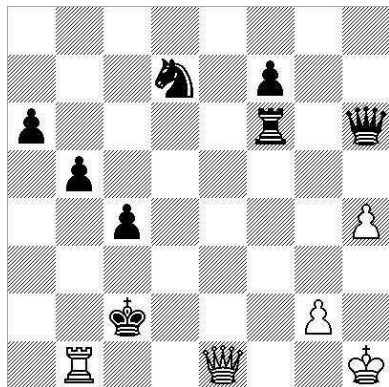
Capucci-Howell (1):

1 Ne5-c6 d7xc6 2 Qe7xa7 gave White a useful material advantage, importantly without giving up any of his positional advantage.

Capucci-Howell (2):

1 Nd7xf6+ Bg7xf6 2 Ra7xf7+ Kh7-g8 3 Rd1xd8+ and Black resigned. 3...Bf6xd8 allows 4 Qb6xg6+ mating and 3...Qc8xd8 4 Qb6xd8+ Bf6xd8 5 Rf7-b7 is utterly hopeless. You didn't overlook the danger to your back rank will you? (1 Nd7xf6+ Bg7xf6 2 Qb6xf6?? Rd8xd1 mate).

Saturday 12 March 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Gawain Jones (GM, 2593) - Martin Burrows (2168), 4NCL 2011. Black to play.

This game could have completed a sensational triple on the theme of playing a superior opponent. It is from last month's match between Pride & Prejudice, who lead Division One with a 100% score against Pandora's Box Grantham, who prop up the table with "nul points." The average ratings of the two teams were 2508 and 2159!

The top three boards, Pandora names second, were: Michael Adams (GM, 2723) - Jerzy Slaby (IM, 2481), David Howell (GM, 2608) - Marcos Capucci (2229) and Jones-Burrows. Adams lost to Slaby and Howell to Capucci (position featured last week).

One thing that can be difficult to avoid, assuming you manage to get a winning position in the first place, is to chicken out and offer your higher-rated opponent a draw. I speak from bitter experience: Kevin O'Connell (2144) - Peter Clarke (IM, 2376), Devon 1970. White: Kg1, Bb5, pawns a4, b2, e7, g3, h2; Black: Kh7, Bf7, pawns a5, b7, b4, f5, g6, h6. White to play. With less than a minute for eleven moves, I offered a draw and Black snapped my hand off. I should have played on - eleven moves in that position ought to take no more than 15-20 seconds (queening and capturing take longer than an ordinary move!).

The higher-rated player may keep going, waiting for "something to turn up." Debtor's prison turned up for Dickens's character Mr Micawber, the equivalent of which for a Grandmaster is a loss to a low-rated player. That's what happened in Adams-Slaby. Sometimes the Grandmaster, who feels that he "ought" to win, moves without performing any inspection. A case in point is Andrea Cocchi (FM, 2281) - Michele Godena (GM, 2541), Cento Open, Italy 2011. White: Kb3, Qc7, pawn b6; Black: Kg6, Qd6, pawns f7, g3. Black to play.

CHESS SOLUTION

Jones-Burrows:

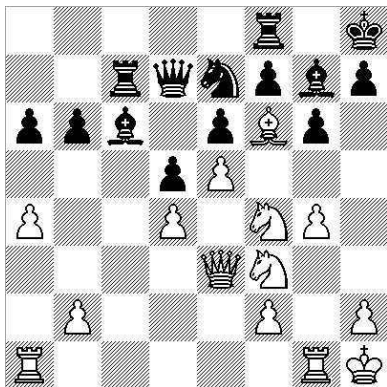
Black played 1...Rf6-f1+ and offered a draw, which was accepted - Black can force it: 2 Qe1xf1 Qh6xh4+ 3 Kh1-g1 Qh4-d4+ 4 Kg1-h1 Qd4-h4+ 5 Kh1-g1.

However, Black was winning comfortably, the simplest being 1...Rf6-e6 2 Qe1-d1+ Kc2-c3 for example 3 Qd1-f3+ (if 3 Qd1xd7 Qh6xh4+ 4 Kh1-g1 Re6-e1+ 5 Rb1xe1 Qh4xe1+ 6 Kg1-h2 Qe1-h4+ 7 Kh2-g1 Qh4-d4+ is trivially easy) 3...Qh6-e3 when the end might be 4 Qf3xf7 Re6-h6 5 Qf7-g7+ (if 5 h4-h5 Nd7-f6) 5...Nd7-f6 6 g2-g3 Qe3-e4+.

Cocchi-Godena:

After 1...Qd6-d3+ 2 Kb3-b4, the game should continue normally, with some chances for Black, but a likely draw. After 1...Qd6xc7?? 2 b6xc7 Black resigned, realising that 2...g3-g2 3 c7-c8Q g2-g1Q 4 Qc8-g8+ reaches a position that does not really need an inspection.

Saturday 19 March 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Joshua Friedel (GM, 2529) - Vishal Sareen (IM, 2358), Reykjavik Open 2011. White to play. Solution moderate/difficult.

A thorough grounding in basic tactics pays huge dividends. The Polgars, when they were young children, ploughed through thousands of tactical positions, as have many since.

The absolute basics are multiple forks and other double attacks, pins, skewers, double checks and discovered checks. They, alone or in combination, are the cornerstones of tactical understanding.

It is important to keep your eye in by looking at a few every day. These ones, on the theme of "pin and win," should be enough for the weekend.

Das Debashis (IM, 2398) - Ilya Nyzhnyk (IM, 2563), Reykjavik Open 2011. White: Ka2, Rb6, pawns a4, b3, c3, h5; Black: Kc2, Rf1, Bc4, pawn a5. Black to play. Solution easy.

An oldie (well it is nearly twenty years old) but goodie: Luke McShane (2000) -Kieran Smallbone (1800), 1993. White: Kc1, Qd2, Rh1, Bd3, Bd4, Nb1, pawns b2, c2, h5; Black: Kh8, Qa2, Ra8, Rf8, Bd7, Nc6, pawns a6, b4, e5, f7, f6, f4. Probably Black thought he was winning comfortably on material, but ... White to play.

Another not so recent one: Nicholas Pert (FM, 2425) - Eddie Dearing (2295), Smith & Williamson Young Masters 1999. White: Kf2, Qh4, Rh7, Ne2, pawns a2, d4, e3, f3; Black: Kf8, Qd3, Rc2, Ne8, pawns a7, b7, d5, e6, f6. Black had pinned the Ne2 and it would be mate in two, except that it was White to play.

CHESS SOLUTION

Friedel-Sareen:

The pin of the Bg7 was exploited nicely by 1 Nf4-h5 and Black resigned. If 1...g6xh5 2 Qe3-h6 Rf8-g8 3 Nf3-g5 and mate on h7, but 1...Bg7xf6 2 Nh5xf6 wins the queen, since Black's only ways of preventing mate (after Qd2-h6) are to play Kh8-g7, Rf8-g8 or Ne7-g8.

Debashis-Nyzhnyk:

1...Rf1-b1. I expect you found that, but did you realise that mate is forced? For example 2 b3xc4 Rb1xb6 and, with White's king trapped, it's just a matter of running out of pawn moves: 3 c4-c5 Rb6-c6 4 h5-h6 Rc6xc5 5 h6-h7 Rc5-c4! 6 h7-h8Q Rc4xa4 mate. After 2 h5-h6 Bc4xb3+ 3 Ka2-a3 Rb1-a1 is mate.

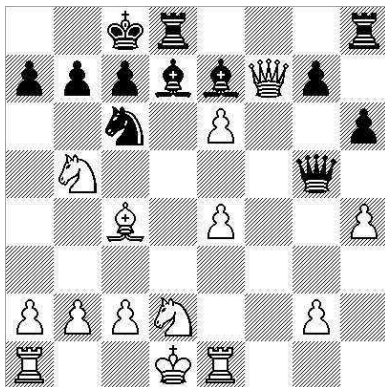
McShane-Smallbone:

1 Qd2xf4! and Black resigned. The pin is deadly: 1...e5xf4 2 Bd4xf6+ Kh8-g8 3 Rh1-g1+ with mate next move but there is no other way to contest Qf4-h6+ and mate follows.

Pert-Dearing:

1 Qh4-h6+ Kf8-g8 (if 1...Ne8-g7 2 Qh6xg7+ Kf8-e8 and White must not waste too much time deciding which of the four mates to select) 2 Rh7-h8+ Kg8-f7 3 Qh6-f8+ Kf7-g6 4 Qf8xe8+ and mate next move.

Saturday 26 March 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game K.A. Mahmoud - O.Bello, World Championship (u10), Duisburg 1992. Black to play. Solution difficult.

Following last week's "pin and win" tactical positions, here are some on another of the main tactical themes, that of discovered check. They should keep you going for a day or two.

A very common variation on the theme was seen in Evelyn Moncayo - R. Ahmed Mohamed, World Championship (u10 girls), Warsaw 1991. White: Kg1, Qe2, Ra1, Rf1, Bc1, Nb1, Ne5, pawns a2, b2, c2, d2, f2, g2, h2; Black: Ke8, Qd8, Ra8, Rf8, Bc8, Bd6, pawns a7, b7, c7, c6, f7, g7, h7. White to play. Solution easy.

But, some rounds later in the same event, White failed to see in time the danger in Moncayo - Alina Calota. White: Ke1, Rc1, Bg3, Nc4, pawns b3, e3, h2; Black: Kg6, Rd2, Bf3, Ne4, pawns f6, g7, h6. Black to play. Solution moderate.

What do you make of this one? C. Brueggemann - K.A. Mahmoud, World Championship (u10), Duisburg 1992. White: Kh1, Re2, Bc4, Bb6, pawns a4, b4, f2, h3; Black: Kg8, Ra8, Rg2, Be4, pawns a6, c6, f7, g7, h6. Black to play. Solution difficult.

There is a supercharged version of discovered check. It comes in the form of double check. This is when the piece which moves, and discovers check, also gives check itself. It is vicious and seriously limiting, since capturing and blocking are ruled out, and the king has no option but to move. More on that next time.

CHESS SOLUTION

Mahmoud-Bello:

In the game, Black played 1...Qg5xh4 but 2 e6xd7+ gave White a quick win. The surprise 1...Qg5xd2+! would have set up a powerful discovered check: 2 Kd1xd2 Bd7xe6+ 3 Kd2-c1 Be6xf7 4 Bc4xf7 Be7xh4 with the better chances for Black.

Moncayo-Ahmed Mohamed:

1 Ne5xg6+ would give White a clear advantage, but 1 Ne5xc6+, as played, is far better, since it attacks and wins the black queen (attacking also the interposing square e7).

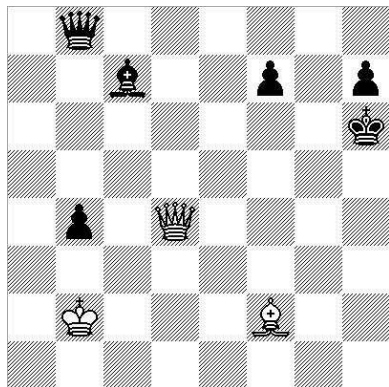
Moncayo-Calota:

1...Rd2-e2+ and if 2 Ke1-d1 Re2-g2+ 2 Kd1-e1 Rg2-g1 mate. The game ended 2 Ke1-f1 Ne4-d2+ 3 Kf1-g1 Re2-g2+ 4 Kg1-h1 Rg2xg3 mate.

Brueggemann-Mahmoud:

Black played 1...Rg2xf2+ but, after 2 Re2xe4, White was better, although Black ultimately won the game. 1...Be4-f3! was the move of choice - it makes for a more powerful discovery and Black should win easily after 2 Re2-e3 Rg2-g4+ 3 Re3xf3 Rg4xc4 and White can not even defend the Q-side pawns (4 Bb6-c5 a6-a5! or 4 Bb6-a5 Rc4-c1+ and the a-pawn will fall).

Saturday 2 April 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram shows a 1930 composition by Alexey Troitzky. It is one of the positions set for the finalists in the 2010-2011 Winton Capital British Chess Solving Championship. White to play and win.

Dr John Nunn has set a major new record. Having won the Winton Capital British Chess Solving Championship for the 6th time, he now holds four major titles simultaneously: World Champion, European Champion, Champion of the International Solving Contest and British Champion.

Nunn stormed to first place in the British, completely solving 12 of the 13 problems, for a massive score of 60/65, 7.5 points ahead of guest solver GM Eddy van Beers of Belgium. Third to fifth places were close fought: 3 FM Michael McDowell 50.5, 4 GM Jonathan Mestel (ex-World Champion and 16 times British Champion) 49.75, 5 IM Colin McNab 49.75 (slower on time than Mestel).

A second position from the event, which also fits my theme of the last few weeks. By K. Sumbatyan, it dates from 2003. White: Kg7, Rf6, Rf3, Bh4, pawn h5; Black: Kg2, Qd8, Bd4, pawns e5, f2. White to play and win.

CHESS SOLUTION

Troitzky:

1 Qd4-f6+ Kh6-h5 2 Qf6-f5+ Kh5-h6 3 Bf2-e3+ Kh6-g7 4 Qf5-g5+ Kg7-f8 (if 4...Kg7-h8 5 Be3-d4+) 5 Be3-c5+ Bc7-d6 (or 5...Kf8-e8 6 Qg5-e7 mate) 6 Qg5-e5! (a two-way pin) 6...Kf8-g8 (alternatives are no better: 6...f7-f6 7 Bc5xd6+; or 6...Qb8-b6 7 Bc5xd6+ Kf8-g8 8 Qe5-g5+ Kg8-h8 9 Bd6-e5+, while 6...Qb8-d8 7 Bc5xd6+ Kf8-g8 transposes to the main line) 7 Bc5xd6 Qb8-d8 (or 7...f7-f6 8 Qe5-e6+) 8 Qe5-g3+ Kg8-h8 9 Bd6-e5+ f7-f6 10 Qg3-g5! with another two-way pin to end Black's resistance (checks on d4 or d2 are clearly futile).

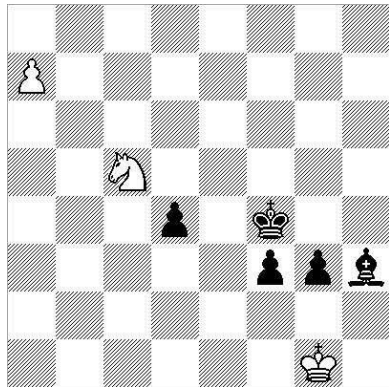
I do not remember seeing this composition before, but it would grace any collection of tactical positions on the theme of the pin.

Sumbatyan:

1 Rf3-g3+ Kg2-f1 (if 1...Kg2-h2 2 Rf6xf2+ Bd4xf2 3 Bh4xd8 and the h-pawn romps home to win: 3...Kh2xg3 4 h5-h6 e5-e4 5 h6-h7 Bf2-d4+ 6 Bd8-f6 is clear) 2 Rf6xf2+ Kf1xf2 (or 2...Bd4xf2 3 Bh4xd8 Bf2xg3 4 h5-h6) 3 Rg3-h3+! Qd8xh4 4 Rh3xh4 Kf2-g3 (everything is hopeless, 4...e5-e4+ 5 Kg7-g6 Kf2-f3 6 Kg6-f5) 5 Rh4-e4 Kg3-f3 6 Re4xd4! (the only way to win!) 6...e5xd4 7 h5-h6 d4-d3 8 h6-h7 d3-d2 9 h7-h8Q d2-d1Q 10 Qh8-h5+ and White must resign.

The variation 7...Kf3-e2 8 h6-h7 d4-d3 9 h7-h8Q d3-d2 10 Qh8-h5+ is a simple technical win, but you must know the important pattern: 10...Ke2-e1 11 Qh5-h1+ Ke1-e2 12 Qh1-e4+ Ke2-d1 13 Kg7-f6 Kd1-c1 14 Qe4-c4+ Kc1-d1 15 Kf6-e5 etc.)

Saturday 9 April 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Tana Holusova - Maria Kursova, World u10 Girls Championship, Cala Galdana 1996. White to play. Solution difficult.

The most remarkable positions sometimes turn up in the most unexpected places. Games played by primary school children are a happy hunting ground for them.

Occasionally, I encounter something truly exceptional. Nothing more so than the position above. Both players have since made considerable strides. White has become a Woman FIDE Master, while Black gained the Woman Grandmaster title in 2007. I can't help wondering, though, whether they remain blissfully unaware of how their game all those years ago (it was two thirds of a lifetime!) might have ended. In practice, White went wrong here and lost rapidly.

Here is another special position, from the very same round of that 1996 World Girls u10. Bianca Muhren - E. Dulgher. White: Kb1, Qd3, Rd1, Na3, pawns b2, c3, g4, h6; Black: Kh8, Qf4, Ra8, Re4, pawns b3, e6, f6, g5, h7. Black to play. Black should win from this position (she lost). The big danger is that with her king trapped in the corner, Black could get mated. What would you play?

CHESS SOLUTION

Holusova-Kursova:

1 a7-a8Q fails miserably to 1...f3-f2+ 2 Kg1-h1 f2-f1R (or Q) mate.

White played 1 Nc5-d3 but after 1...Kf4-e3 she soon had to resign:
2 a7-a8Q f3-f2+ 3 Nd3xf2 g3xf2+ 4 Kg1-h2 f2-f1Q 5 Qa8-e8+ Ke3-d2 6 Qe8-e4 Qf1-g2+ 7 Qe4xg2+ Bh3xg2 8 Kh2xg2 Kd2-e2.

So, what should White have played? The beautiful 1 Nc5-e4!! If 1...f3-f2+ 2 Ne4xf2 or 1...Kf4-e3 2 Ne4xg3 f3-f2+ 3 Kg1-h2, White wins easily, so Black must go in for 1...Kf4xe4 2 a7-a8Q+ and then there are two important variations:

(A) 2...Ke4-f4? 3 Qa8-b8+ Kf4-g4 3 Qb8-c8+ Kg4-h4 4 Qc8-h8+ Kh4-g4 5 Qh8xd4+ Kg4-g5 6 Qd4-e5+ Kg5-g4 7 Qe5-e4+ Kg4-g5 8 Qe4xf3 with an easy win.

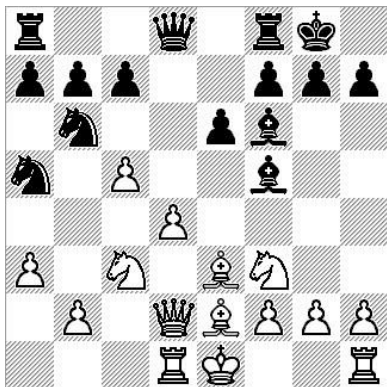
(B) 2...Ke4-e3 3 Qa8-a3+ Ke3-e2 (or 3...d4-d3 4 Qa3-e7+ Ke3-d2 5 Qe7-g5+ Kd2-d1 6 Qg5xg3) 4 Qa3-a2+ Ke2-e3 5 Qa2-a3+ with at least a draw by perpetual check, unless there are any more mistakes!

Muhren-Dulgher:

She played the "obvious" 1...Kh8-g8?!, falling into a mate and resigning after 2 Qd3-d7! Kg8-f8 3 Qd7-g7+ Kf8-e8 4 Qg7-h8+ Ke8-e7 5 Qh8xh7+ Ke7-f8 6 Qh7-g7+ Kf8-e8 7 h6-h7 (mate is soon forced, even if Black gives up her queen for the h-pawn).

1...Ra8-g8 (I like this paradoxical move, but both the amusing 1...Ra8-e8 2 Qd3-d8 Re8-g8! and 1...Ra8-f8 also win) 2 Na3-b5 Re4-e3 3 Qd3-d4 Re3-e2 4 Qd4xf4 (if 4 Nb5-d6, threatening mate, 4...Rg8-a8!) 4...g5xf4 and Black should win comfortably.

Saturday 16 April 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Mark Bluvshstein-Aikhan Safaru, World u10 Boys Championship 1998. Black to play.

Recent positions have been rather difficult. Today I offer you a bunch of easy positions. The only stipulation I give about each one is which side is to move. Just find the best you can. Nothing deeper than two moves.

Juan Benito Imaz (2286) - Glenn Flear (GM, 2530), Basque Team Championship 2002. White: Kh1, Qb6, Ra1, Rb1, pawns a2, g2, h2; Black: Kg8, Qc6, Re3, Bc4, pawns d7, f7, g7, h5. Black to play.

Bakhar Khallaeva-Gizem Acar, World u10 Girls Championship 1998. White: Ka5, Qh1, Ra1, Bb3, pawns a3, c2, d3; Black: Kc8, Qd4, Rf2, Bf5, pawns a6, b7, c5, f4, g4. Black to play.

Kjartansson-Villaraga, World u10 Boys Championship 1992. White: Ke2, Qe3, Rf2, pawns a4, b3, d4, g5, g4, h4; Black: Kg8, Qh3, Rf1, pawns a7, d5, f7, h7. Black to play.

Vjatseslav Soskov-Djurabek Khamrakulov, World u10 Boys Championship 1997. White: Kh1, Rd4, Re6, pawns c5, h3; Black: Kh8, Rg2, Bc6, pawns b5, d2, h6. Black to play.

Irina Krush-Danielle Collins, World u10 Girls Championship 1991. White: Kg1, Qg3, Re1, Bb2, Bc4, Nc3, pawns a3, b4, f2, f3; Black: Kg8, Qh3, Rb8, Ba7, Nd4, Nf6, pawns a6, b7, f7, g7, h6. Black to play.

Bassem Amin-Raouf Mamedov, World u10 Boys Championship 1998. White: Kh3, Rc3, Bg3, Ne4, pawns: a2, b2, e5, f2, g4, h2; Black: Kg8, Rc8, Bb5, Be7, pawns a7, b7, e6, g6, h7. Black to play.

CHESS SOLUTION

Bluvshstein-Safaru: 1...Na5-b3 and White could have resigned; he struggled on for the best part of twenty moves.

Benito Imaz-Flear: 1...Re3-e1+ 2 Rb1xe1 Qc6xb6 and White resigned. From Glenn's new French book *Tactimania*, drawing exclusively on positions from his own games and those of his wife Christine (WIM) and stylishly illustrated by their son James.

Khallaeva-Acar: 1...Qd4-d8+ 2 Ka5-a4 b-b5 mate.

Kjartansson-Villaraga: 1...Rf1-e1+ 2 Ke2xe1 Qh3xe3+ is much more convincing than the unfortunate choice White made in the game: 1...Rf1xf2+? 2 Ke2xf2 Qh3xh4+ 3 Kf2-f3 Kg8-g7 4 Qe3-e5+ Kg7-g6?? 5 Qe5-f6 mate.

Soskov-Khamrakulov: 1...Rg2-g4+ 2 Kh1-h2 (2 Re6xc6 Rg4xd4 is much the same) 2...Rg4xd4 and White resigned - he is getting mated.

Krush-Collins: The white king is unable to move, so checks should be even more interesting than usual. 1...Nd4xf3+ and White resigned. 2 Qg3xf3 Qh3xf3 is winning comfortably, 3 Re1-e2 Nf6-g4 even forcing mate, for example 4 Nc3-d1 Qf3-g3+ (exploiting the diagonal pin) 5 Kg1-f1 Ng4-h2+ 6 Kf1-e1 Nh2-f3+ 7 Ke1-f1 Qg3-h3 mate.

Amin-Mamedov: 1...Bb5-f1 mate.

Saturday 23 April 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Shaun Munson (2201)-Alan Merry (1979), Suffolk Championship 2011. Black to play. Solution difficult.

Alan Merry of Bury St Edmunds is the new Suffolk Champion. The sole player not from Ipswich, he scored 4.5/5 ahead of 2 Ian Wallis (1977) 3.5, 3 Stephen Gregory (2099) 2.5, 4-5 Edward Matthewson (unrated, ECF163) and Shaun Munson 2, 6 Martin Fogg (1923) 0.5. Merry, 14, thus becomes the youngest Suffolk Champion since Nick Pert won the title at the age of twelve.

The Challengers section was won by Leif Dixon of Cambridge with 4/5, ahead of 2 Colin Roberts, Bury St Edmunds 3.5, 3 Keith Woodcock, Ipswich 3, 4 Rob Kelly, Manningtree 2, 5 Samuel Brennan, Ipswich 1.5, 6 Steve Moss, Ipswich 1.

Unusually for all-play-all tournaments, both sections saw the top two playing one another in the final round. The games were drawn, but had Wallis and Roberts won, then they would have taken the respective titles (Wallis on tie-break).

Merry-Gregory:

White: Ke1, Qg6, Ra1, Nh6, pawns a4, c5, d4; Black: Kh8, Qf3, Ra7, Bc7, pawns b7, c6, d5, f6. Black to play.

CHESS SOLUTION

Munson-Merry:

Black played 1...Bd7xg4! Perhaps White was shocked or surprised. Clearly 2 Kg3xg4 Qh8xh5+ is a disaster: 3 Kg4-g3 Qh5-h4+ 4 Kg3-f3 g5-g4+ 5 Kf3-e3 Qh4-e1+ 6 Bf1-e2 Qe1xe2 mate.

White played 2 Nh5xf4+? but, again, it is fairly obvious that White is going to get mated, and he was, after 2...e5xf4+ 3 Kg3-f2 (3 Kg3xg4 Qh8-h5 mate) 3...Qh8-h2+ 4 Kf2-e1 (if 4 Bf1-g2 Qh2-g3+ 5 Kf2-f1 Qg3-e3 forces mate) 4...Qh2-g3+ 5 Ke1-d2 Qg3-e3.

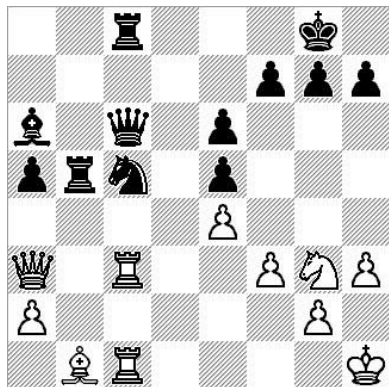
So, if Nh5xf4 is clearly losing, is there anything else? Yes! 2 Qc7-g7+! Qh8xg7 3 Nh5xg7 Bg4-d7 4 Ng7-e6 would have given Black an awful lot of work to do, and maybe White can even draw (there are certainly realistic chances).

Merry Gregory:

1...Bc7-a5 mate looks easy, but in the heat of battle Black played 1...Qf3-g3+ 2 Qg6xg3 Bc7xg3+ and, although Black stands better, White should probably be able to draw. Perhaps Black realised what he had missed, because he went downhill and lost the game.

Psychology is a phenomenally important part of chess. If you are shocked by a move, you may fall to pieces. The same is true if you suddenly realise that you have just missed a golden opportunity. It tends to play on the mind and it often becomes impossible to play even half-way decently. Sometimes, one such shock can lead to a whole string of losses.

Saturday 30 April 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Michael Clapham (1916) - Geoffrey Taylor (1950), Anglian Avengers 2-Gloucestershir Gambits, 4NCL Division Three. White to play. Solution easy/moderate.

This weekend is crunch time for promotion and relegation. No, not those unimportant football matches which will probably see Norwich promoted to the Premier League. Something much more important - the Four Nations Chess League.

Both Anglian Avengers teams are pushing for promotion. The first team presently sits atop the Division Two table and is clear favourite for promotion to the top tier. The 4NCL still names their divisions one, two and three. The second team occupies fifth place in Division Three, with four teams to be promoted. East Anglia's third team, the Icenis, currently in tenth place in Division Three are also still in with a shout.

This is the final weekend, with three matches to be played, the last on Monday. Good luck to both teams. The full AA squad consists of 27 players whose ratings range from 2260 down to 1578.

What could be simpler than this endgame position: Ian Ponter (2040) - Ian Wallis (1977) from the Gloucestershire Gambits-AA2 match. White: Kd1, Rh5, pawn h7; Black: Kb2, Rh8, pawn c4. White to play. Solution easy.

Finally, a difficult one. John Feavyour (2069) - Phil Hopkins (1914), Icenis-AA2. White: Kf5, Ra5, Ra7, pawns d4, f4; Black: Kd6, Rg3, Rh8, Ba8, pawns c6, g7.

CHESS SOLUTION

Clapham-Taylor: Black's pawn "advantage" counted for nothing since 1 Bb1-d3 gave White an extra piece and a comfortable win. If 1...Rb5-b8 simply 2 Rc3xc5. Black played 1...Qc6-d6 and was ground down after 2 Bd3xb5 Ba6xb5 3 Rc3xc5.

Ponter-Wallis: Several moves draw, the most instructive, in comparison with what happened in the game, being 1 Rh5-h4 Kb2-b3 2 Kd1-c1 with a clear draw, but not 1...c4-c3? 2 Rh4-b4+ Kb2-a3 3 Rb4-b7 and White wins.

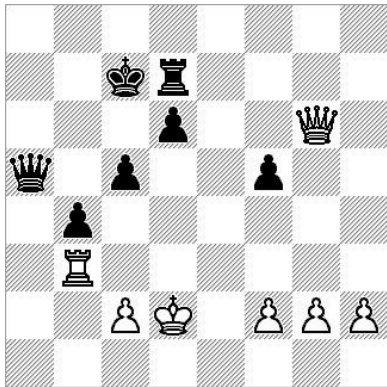
In the game, White played 1 Rh5-h3? and after 1...c4-c3 was hopelessly lost. The game ended 2 Rh3-h2+ Kb2-b1 (not 2...Kb2-b3? 3 Kd1-c1 drawing) 3 Rh2-h1 Rh8xh7 (3...c3-c2+ wins a bit more quickly) 4 Rh1xh7 c3-c2+ 5 Kd1-d2 c2-c1Q+ and White resigned.

Feavyour-Hopkins: Quite obviously, there is no way to defend the Ba8. Black played 1...g7-g6+ and the game soon ended in a draw.

There was, though, something better: 1...Rh8-h5+ 2 Kf5-e4 Rh5xa5 3 Ra7xa5 Ba8-b7 and Black emerges with his extra piece intact.

That, in turn, might get you thinking about the very best move here, the surprising 1...Ba8-b7!! White has nothing better than 2 Kf5-e4 Bb7-c8 since 2 Ra7xb7 fails to 2...Rh8xh5+ 3 Kf5-e4 Rh5xa5 with a whole extra rook.

Saturday 7 May 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game John Curtis (2123) - Stephen Gregory (2099), Bristol-Anglian Avengers, 4NCL 2011. Black to play. Solution moderate.

Anglian Avengers just missed the Division 2 title, but comfortably gained one of four promotion slots, as did Bristol.

Some of the games in that match were incredibly hard fought and continued to the very last breath, none more so than Mark Gray (2084) - Joseph Stewart (2082). White: Kg2; Black: Kg4, pawn g3. White to play. Solution easy.

Another bitter-ender from the same match: Stephen Dilleigh (2098)-Philip Tozer (2151). White: Kh6, Bb7, pawn h5; Black: Kf6, Rg7, pawn f4. Black to play. Solution easy.

Matters were less favourable in Division 3, Avengers' second team lost two of their final three matches and slumped to eleventh, a point behind the other team from East Anglia, Icen who were 8th equal.

CHESS SOLUTION

Curtis-Gregory:

1...c5-c4 wins comfortably. The game ended 2 Rb3-b1 b4-b3+ (2...Rd7-e7 is also crushing) 3 Kd2-c1 Rd7-e7 and White resigned - it is clear that he is going to be mated, for example 4 Qg6-f6 Re7-e1+ 5 Kc1-b2 Re1xb1+ 6 Kb2xb1 Qa5-a2+ 7 Kb1-c1 Qa2xc2.) 2 Rb3-e3 is no better; just one example: 2...b4-b3+ 3 c2-c3 b3-b2 4 Re3-e1 Qa5-d5+ 5 Kd2-c2 Qd5-d3+ 6 Kc2xb2 Qd3-d2+ 7 Kb2-a3 Qd2xc3+! 8 Ka3-a4 Qc3-b3+ 9 Ka4-a5 Kc7-c6 and mate in two.

Gray-Stewart:

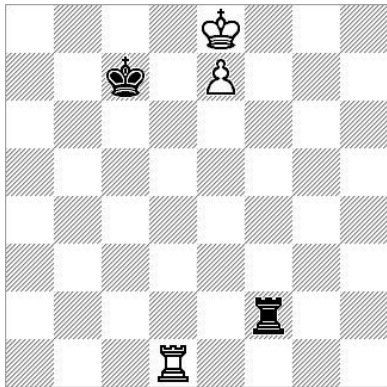
White's 105th move was Kg2-g1, demonstrating that he was not too tired to remember this simple but crucial theoretical endgame position, and a draw was agreed.

Never forget - the king must drop back in line with the pawn. Stepping to the side loses: 1 Kg2-h1? (1 Kg2-f1? Kg4-f3 2 Kf1-g1 is the same in a different order) 1...Kg4-f3 2 Kh1-g1 g3-g2 (wins because it is not check; if this was check, then Black would have to stalemate the white king or give up the pawn) 3 Kg1-h2 Kf3-f2 4 Kh2-h3 g2-g1Q and mate in two: 5 Kh3-h4 Qg1-g6 6 Kh4-h3 Qg6-g3 mate (or to h5 of course).

Dilleigh-Tozer:

I do hope you were not tempted to snatch material with 1...Rg7xb7? stalemate. There are many moves that win - moving the rook along the g-file (but not g2 or g6!) or elsewhere along the seventh rank (with the exception, of course, of h7). Black played 1...Rg7-g3 and his opponent really did go the bitter end, not resigning until after the further 2 Kh6-h7 f4-f3 3 h5-h6 f3-f2 4 Bb7-a6 Rg3-g1 5 Kh7-h8 f2-f1Q 6 Ba6xf1 Rg1xf1 7 Kh8-g8 Rf1-a1, not quite playing to mate: 8 Kg8-h7 (8 h6-h7 Ra1-a8 mate) 8...Kf6-f7 9 Kh7-h8 Kf7-g6 and mate next move.

Saturday 14 May 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



In the diagram, it is White to play. What result?

While preparing my lectures for a training seminar that I will give in Algeria, my mind has turned to basic rook endings. Players rated over 1400 ought to have some understanding of the most basic ones. Stronger players ought to have them at their fingertips. But do you? Try playing them against your computer.

- A. White: Kh8, Rg8; Black: Kd6, pawn c5. White to play. What result?
 B. White: Kb6, pawn c6; Black: Ka1, Rd5. White to play? What result?
 C. White: Kb1, Rc1; Black: Kb4, pawns b3, c3. White to play. What result?

CHESS SOLUTION

Diagram:

White wins easily by "building a bridge". I have no idea why it's called a bridge, but the name seems to make it easier to remember the idea - a fourth rank bridge. One way is 1 Rd1-c1+ (driving off the black king en route to the fourth rank) 1...Kc7-b6 (1...Kc7-d6 shields his opposite number: 2 Ke8-d8 and the pawn promotes) 2 Rc1-c4 Rf2-e2 3 Ke8-d7 Re2-d2+ 4 Kd7-e6 Rd2-e2+ 5 Ke6-d6 Re2-d2+ 6 Kd6-e5 Rd2-e2+ 7 Rc4-e4 and the checks run out. However, 1 Rd1-d4 works just as well and shows a swing-bridge in action: 1...Rf2-c2 2 Rd4-f4 so the king can emerge on the f-file free from checks, and the pawn promotes even more quickly.

A.:

White wins with 1 Rg8-g5! (all other moves draw). The trick is to make the black king's journey just that bit too long. Obviously, if the pawn advances then, as soon as it has ventured too far away from its king, the rook goes and snaffles it, so 1...Kd6-c6 2 Kh8-g7 Kc6-b5 3 Kg7-f6 Kb5-b4 4 Kf6-e5 c5-c4 5 Ke5-d4 c4-c3 6 Rg5-c5 and it is high time that Black resigned.

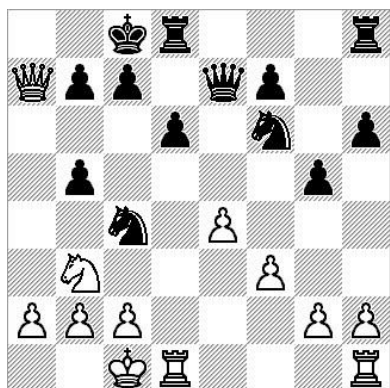
B.:

White wins!: 1 c6-c7 Rd5-d6+ 2 Kb6-b5 (not 2 Kb6-c5? Rd6-d1 draws) 2...Rd6-d5+ 3 Kb5-b4 Rd5-d4+ 4 Kb4-b3 Rd4-d3+ 5 Kb3-c2 Rd3-d4 6 c7-c8R! threatening mate on a8 (6 c7-c8Q? throws away the win - 6...Rd4-c4+ and White has to play 7 Qc8xc4 stalemate) 6...Rd4-a4 7 Kc2-b3! and to avoid mate on c1, Black must give up the rook. A thing of great beauty.

C.:

White wins. He starts by shifting the rook sideways (but not to d1). Here is the idea: 1 Rc1-h1 Kb4-c4 and I'll show you two slightly different paths: 2 Rh1-h4+ Kc4-d3 3 Kb1-c1 b3-b2+ 4 Kc1-b1 Kd3-d2 5 Rh4-d4+ Kd2-e3 5 Rd4-d1 Ke3-e2 6 Kb1-c2, or 2 Kb1-c1 Kc4-d3 (if 2...Kc4-b4 3 Rh1-h8 Kb4-c4 4 Rh8-b8) 3 Rh1-h4 b3-b2+ 4 Kc1-b1 Kd3-d2 5 Rh4-c4 Kd2-d3 6 Rc4-c8 Kd3-d2 7 Rc8-d8+.

Saturday 21 May 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position arose in the game Carlos Saenz - Jose Correias, Zaragoza Championship, Spain 1992. White to play. Solution moderate/difficult.

The Suffolk Megafinal of the British Land Chess Challenge took place earlier this month at Woodbridge School.

These events are always a great success, but what was particularly impressive about this year's event, which gathered together 97 qualifiers, was the exceptional success of the girls.

22 girls out of a total of 97 may not sound a lot, but that's about four times as many as you might expect given the percentage of active female chess players in England, which has always lagged behind most European countries in this respect. Not only were the numbers good, the results were outstanding, the girls taking first place in three of the seven sections!

Leading scorers:

Under 7-8: 1 Mario Saenz de Villaverde 5.5/6; 2= Aaron Saenz de Villaverde, Louise Funnell 4.

Under 9: 1 Nathan Dowrick 6/6; 2 Alex Sheerin 5; 3= Oliver Phelan, Amelia Mires 4.

Under 10: 1 James Phelan 5.5/6; 2= Clement Wallace, Cathy Xu, Alex Rolph 4.5.

Under-11: 1 William Sait 6/6; 2 Hugo Kelleway 5; 3= Champion Mitchell-Cotts, Felix Kibble 4.

Under-12: 1= Jack Cuddihy, Alba Saenz de Villaverde 5/6; 3= Albert Xu, Patrick Gembis 4.

Under 13-14: 1 Emilia Jewell 5/6, 2= Haroon Majeed, Matthew Marshall, Sean Cuddihy, Sean Colliety, Samuel Kerruish 4.

Under 15-18: 1= Sam Brennan, Anna York-Andersen 5.5/6; 3= Arkaidy Stepanyan, Nikolay Lastochkin 4.

A nice easy position now. Jonathan Rowson (GM, 2576) - Eddie Dearing (IM, 2412), London League 2011. White: Ka2, Rd1, Nf5, pawns b2, b3, d7, f4, g4, h3; Black: Ke7, Rd8, Rh2, pawns a6, b7, f7. The king is in check. You have a choice of three squares.

Don't miss my current favourite chess video "Lets Chess Again" (<http://www.ukschoolschesschallenge.com/>) courtesy of Alex & Marcus of St Andrew's Primary School, Much Hadham, Herts., Mike Basman and the British Land UK Chess Challenge. No prizes, though, for improving upon 4 b2xa3.

CHESS SOLUTION

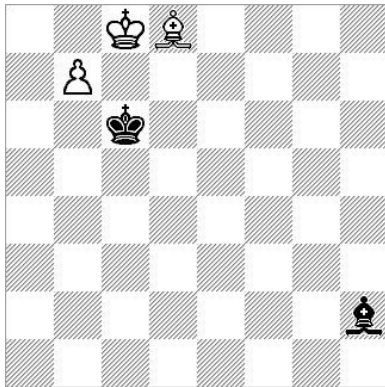
Saenz-Correias:

White is a piece down and you may not think he is threatening anything much, but Black immediately resigned after 1 Nb3-c5! The only way to avoid mate on b7, by playing 1...d6xc5, falls foul of 2 Qa7-a8 mate, because the d-file is now open and the Rd1 cuts off the black king's escape route. Nor does 1...c7-c6 help: 2 Qa7-a8+ Kc8-c7 3 Qa8xb7 mate.

Rowson-Dearing:

You should have chosen f8. Black decided to keep the d-pawn under attack, with 1...Ke7-e6??, which was met by 2 Rd1-d6 mate (the same move would be the reply to Ke7-f6).

Saturday 28 May 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is a very famous study composed by Luigi Centurini in 1847. White to move.

This position has thrilled players and infused a sense of wonder for more than one and a half centuries. White wins easily if he can promote the pawn safe from the attentions of the black bishop. That's easy IF we can find a safe way of putting the white bishop on c7. The immediate Bd8-c7 is clearly not on.

Perhaps there is some cunning way to deflect the black bishop. But for the geographical limitation of the board, we could try Bd8-i3, but, apart from the fact that we can't play such a move, Black does not have to take it - he would simply move his bishop to another (safe) square along the i1-b8 diagonal.

The solution is difficult, but once seen, you will surely remember the idea for the rest of your life.

But what practical use is it? It is always useful to know which positions are winning and which are not. White: Kc4, Bc3, pawn b4; Black: Kg4, Bd8. Black to play. What result?

CHESS SOLUTION

1 Bd8-h4 Kc6-b6 2 Bh4-f2+ Kb6-a6 3 Bf2-c5 Bh2-g3 (If Black puts the bishop on f4 or e5, White proceeds in the same way) 4 Bc5-e7 Ka6-b5 (The black king has to come back, otherwise Be7-d8-c7) 5 Be7-d8 Kb5-c6 (Back to the original position, but with one big difference - Black's bishop more exposed.) 6 Bd8-h4!

A pretty picture, and the key idea that leads to victory. Other moves can be said to win (more slowly) but only by coming back to this key idea, for example: 6 Bd8-g5 Kc6-b5 7 Bg5-d8 Kb5-c6 8 Bd8-a5 Bg3-h2 9 Ba5-e1 Kc6-b5 10 Be1-f2 Kb5-a6 11 Bf2-c5 Bh2-g3 12 Bc5-e7 Ka6-b6 13 Be7-d8+ Kb6-c6 14 Bd8-h4.

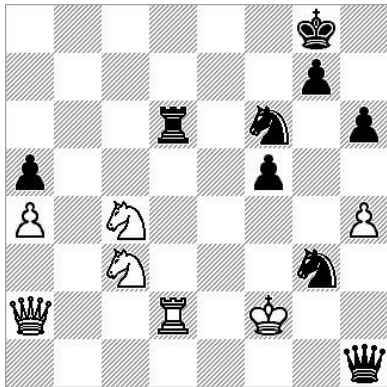
Back to the main line of the solution: 6...Bg3-h2 7 Bh4-f2 Bh2-f4 8 Bf2-a7 Bf4-h2 9 Ba7-b8! Bh2-g1 10 Bb8-g3 Bg1-a7 11 Bg3-f2! Superb!

The second position is from the game Taimanov-Fischer, Buenos Aires 1960. The result ought to be, as it was in the game, a draw: 1...Kg4-f4 (f3 or f5 will do as well) 2 b4-b5 Kf4-e4 3 Bc3-d4.

Now you could draw with 3...Bd8-a5, provided you avoid 4 Kc4-c5 Ba5-c7? when White wins because the black king is not close enough: 5 Kc5-c6 Bc7-a5 6 Bd4-b6 Ba5-d2 7 Bb6-c5 Bd2-a5 8 Bc5-d6 Ba5-d8 9 Bd6-c7.

Fischer played 3...Bd8-c7, showing his understanding of the bishop sacrifice method to prevent the pawn reaching b7 (and Centurini's winning procedure). After 4 Kc4-c5 Ke4-d3 5 Kc5-c6 Kd3-c4 6 Bc4-b6 Bc7-f4 7 Bb6-a7 Bf4-c7 the draw was agreed.

Saturday 4 June 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Bert Enklaar-Mike Basman, World Under-26 Team Championship 1965. Black to play. Solution difficult.

This week I am reminded of records.

The Essex League has been won by the powerful Writtle club. This is the sixth year in a row that they have lifted the trophy, the ninth time this decade, the tenth in the last twelve years and their thirteenth success ever. An amazing achievement, and it is necessary to go back to the early years of the 20th century in order to find anything comparable; then the Leyton club also won the title six years in a row (1908-1913). Ilford (27) and Southend (18) are still well ahead in overall victories, from Leyton (16) and Writtle. The seventeen seasons 1946-7 to 1962-3 saw only two names engraved on the trophy - Ilford and Southend.

Special congratulations to Writtle's Match Captain, and Club Secretary, Ivor Smith.

Here is a position from the game Ivor Smith (2145)-Matthew Webb (2020), played in the 2009-10 season of the 4NCL's second division. White: Kg1, Qh8, Rf1, Ne5, pawns d4, f2, g2; Black: Kg5, Qf5, Rc2, Nh5, pawn g6. White to play. Solution moderate/difficult.

On a much sadder note, this year's 62nd Essex Chess Congress (formerly Ilford Congress), due to be played last weekend in Hornchurch, was cancelled due to a lack of entries.

Which is the world's biggest chess tournament? Sweden's Schack4an immodestly trumpets the title on their web site. They make the claim on the basis of having 12,000 children from 600 schools involved. Mike Basman's British Land UK Chess Challenge makes the same claim, with a great deal more justification. In the first year, 1996, Mike had 23,000 children from 700 schools and this year there are 62,500 children from 1,900 schools taking part. Those numbers look conclusive to me, unless you know of an even mightier event somewhere else in the world.

CHESS SOLUTION

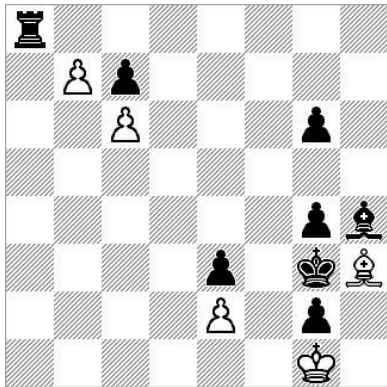
Enklaar-Basman:

1...Nf6-e4+ was good enough: 2 Nc3xe4 Ng3xe4+ 3 Kf2-e3 Qh1-h3+ and mate is forced (4 Ke3-f4 g7-g5+ 5 h4xg5 h6xg5+ 6 Kf4-e5 Qh3-g3+ 7 Ke5xf5 Qg3-f4) so White resigned, but have a biscuit if you spotted the superior 1...Qh1-f1+ 2 Kf2xg3 f5-f4+ 3 Kg3-h2 Nf6-g4 mate.

Smith-Webb:

White won easily enough after 1 Qh8-d8+ Nh5-f6 2 Ne5-f3+ Kg5-g4 3 Qd8-h8 Nf6-h5 4 Nf3-e5+ Kg4-g5 5 g2-g4 Qf5-f6 6 f2-f4+ Kg5-h4 (or 6...Nh5xf4 7 Ne5-f3+ Kg5xg4 8 Qh8xf6) 7 Qh8-h6 Rc2-c3 8 g4xh5 and Black resigned (if 8...Rc3-g3+ 9 Kg1-f2 forces mate). However, there was a neater finish available: 1 f2-f4+ Nh5xf4 2 Ne5-f3+ Kg5-g4 3 Qh8-h4 mate.

Saturday 11 June 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



What do you make of the diagram position? White to play and draw. Solution very tricky.

I have just finished the first draft of a Training Manual for coaches. Researching the history of the rules of the game, I found some truly weird and wonderful things.

Take, stalemate, for instance. I'm sure you know that it counts as a draw. However, I doubt you knew that it has, at various times, also counted as a win for White, half a win for White, a win for Black, a win for the player administering stalemate, a loss for the player administering stalemate, and even an illegal move.

Now, pawn promotion. You have perhaps come across players who believed that promoting to a queen was obligatory (possibly the fault of profligate use of "queening a pawn" instead of "promoting a pawn"). Yet there have been many times and places where they would have been right - there was no choice but to take a queen. At other times, it has been obligatory to take a rook, knight, bishop or queen appropriate to the file on which the pawn promotes (respectively a-h, b-g, c-f and a queen for both d- and e-files).

I expect you know that a player could, conceivably have nine queens, but have you ever considered the possibility of having nine light-square or nine dark-square bishops? It could happen, although I doubt that it has.

Have you heard of the 1862 British Chess Association rule of pawn promotion to ... a pawn? I have a vision of eight white pawns all lined up across the eighth rank. That might make a good position for a club quiz night.

This position is from the game Jim Plaskett (GM, 2480) - Jonathan Parker (2310), British Championship, Eastbourne 1991. White: Kg2, Ra4, pawns a7, f4, h2; Black: Kh4, Ra8, pawns f7, g4, h7. Black to play. Is the black pawn on g4 still pinned against his king by the Ra4? Another tricky one.

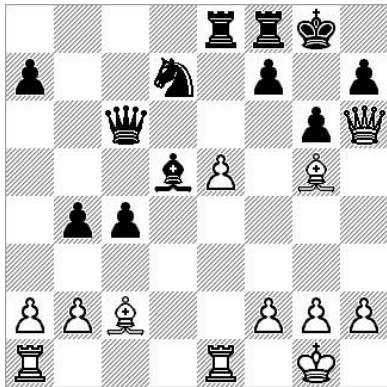
CHESS SOLUTION

In the diagram, White has only one way to avoid the mate which arrives after, for example 1 b7xa8Q g4xh3 and there's no stopping 2...h3-h2 mate. Perhaps I should have told you that the 1862 British Chess Association rules apply! 1 b7xa8P draws (unless you are adhering to one of those other old rules), since 1...g4xh3 is stalemate and other moves permit White to play Bh3xg2 with an easy draw.

Plaskett-Parker:

No and Yes! White's last move was f2-f4. Since the pawn is not pinned, Black can play ...g4-g3, but he can't play the en passant capture ...g4xf3+ because it is pinned!

Saturday 18 June 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position is from the game Glenn Flear (IM, now GM)-Alexandre Domont (FM, now IM), Geneva 1986. White to play. Solution easy??

What is an easy position? The answer is, of course, one where I see the solution almost immediately. However, if you do not see what I see, then you may consider that solution to be difficult.

Today's positions are all "easy." The one in the diagram is from the lowest (Apprentice) level of Glenn Flear's new book *Tactimania*. Classification of positions is always tricky, but I would call this at least moderate.

Laura Pino-Husain Hazuin, World under-10 Girls' Championship 1997. White: Kg1, Qb7, Rc3, Rd4, Nb3, pawns a2, c4, f3, g2, h3; Black: Kg7, Qe8, Rc8, Rg5, pawns a7, d6, f7, f6, g6, h7. Black to play. This one is easier, but not entirely simple. I would probably classify it as easy/moderate.

Erdene Ganzorig-Dieter Lutz, World under-10 Boys' Championship 1998. White: Kd1, pawns a2, b3, g7; Black Kd3, pawns a5, b4, d2, h2, h6. Black to play. This really is easy, but how many moves force mate?

Sometimes, even the "easiest" position is not so easy. White: Ke1; Black: Ke3, Qh2. Black to play. I have seen dozens, maybe hundreds of beginners struggle with this. It seems that they do not "see" that, after Qh2-e2, the queen is protected by the Ke3 and cannot be taken. The "corridor" mate is even harder for them.

CHESS SOLUTION

Flear-Domont:

Easy when you understand the idea. White wants to give checkmate on g7. He can further the idea by playing Bg5-f6 and, if Black takes it, White can recapture (e5xf6) again threatening mate on g7. However, with two pieces (Qc6 and Nd7) covering the f6 square, Black seems safe.

The "easy" answer is 1 Bc2-a4! and if Black "just takes it", then Bg5-f6 forces mate. If Black moves the queen to e6, then white takes on d7, reducing the number of defenders of the f6 square, winning easily. The game ended with Black's resignation after 1...Qc6xa4 2 Bg5-f6.

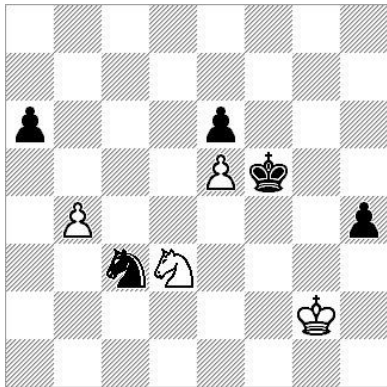
Pino-Hazuin:

White may be "winning 27-25" on the abacus, but the game ended in checkmate: 1...Qe8-e1+ 2 Kg1-h2 Qe1-g3+ (it is important not to be distracted by the Rc3) 3 Kh2-g1 Qg3xg2.

Ganzorig-Lutz:

Black played 1...h2-h1Q mate. 1...h2-h1R mate was just as good. But with White playing on in such a hopeless position, I would have been sorely tempted to play 1...h2-h1B 2 g7-g8Q Bh1-f3 mate, or, most likely, 1...h2-h1N 2 g7-g8Q Nh1-f2 mate. This is the only game position I know of where all possible pawn promotions force mate.

Saturday 25 June 2011
By Kevin O'Connell



The diagram position arose in the game Leonid Krits (GM, 2672) - Davorin Kuljasevic (GM, 2570), Final Four, USA 2011. Black to move. Solution difficult.

Are gender barriers in chess being overcome?

Susan Polgar, the eldest of the three famous chess sisters, has been working hard to try and do just that. She knows about the problems first hand.

Her article in the FIDE Trainers' Commission Chess Syllabus set out the difficulties. She prefaced the article with: "Can female players be as good in chess as male players? The answer to the question is, 'yes'." She outlined ten problem areas, some of the most important being intimidation and lack of both social and family acceptance. She also suggested some solutions, but did not include that of establishing role models.

She and her sisters provide inspirational examples to follow. Judit was among the top ten players in the world and refused to play in any female only competition. Susan played both open and female only events, and held the title of Women's World Champion 1996-1999. It is her latest achievement, though, that deserves to make the biggest headlines.

To set the scene, the "Final Four" is an important US Collegiate Team Championship. The team from Texas Tech University were the underdogs in the competition. These are no ordinary teams, "only" three of the five underdogs have the Grandmaster title, but they won the event! The most unusual thing, though, is that they are coached by a woman - Susan Polgar.

That is a real first in US Collegiate sport, roughly the equivalent of a woman managing a Championship football team. Who will follow Susan? Are there any role models in this country?

CHESS SOLUTION

Knight endings are tricky because winning a piece is often not good enough, so 1...Kf5-e4 2 Nd3-c5+ Ke4xe5 only draws, for example 3 Kg2-h3 Ke5-d5 4 Nc5xa6 e6-e5 5 Kh3xh4 e5-e4 6 Kh4-g3 Kd5-d4 7 Na6-c5 e4-e3 (if 7...Nc3-d5 8 Nc5xe4) 8 Kg3-f3 Nc3-d5 9 Nc5-e6+ Kd4-d3 10 Ne6-c5+ Kd3-c4 11 Nc5-e4 Kc4xb4 12 Ne4-f6.

The elegant solution was 1...Nc3-a4! dominating the other horse and allowing the black king to wreak havoc. The game ended with White's resignation after the further 2 Kg2-h3 (or 2 Kg2-f3 h4-h3 3 Kf3-g3 h3-h2 4 Kg3xh2 Kf5-e4 5 Nd3-f2+ Ke4xe5) 2...Kf5-e4 3 Nd3-c1 Ke4xe5 4 Kh3xh4 Ke5-d4 5 Kh4-g4 Kd4-c3 6 Nc1-e2+ (if 6 Kg4-f4 Kc3xb4 7 Kf4-e5 Na4-c5) 6...Kc3xb4 7 Ne2-d4 Na4-c5 8 Kg4-f4 a6-a5 9 Kf4-e5 a5-a4 10 Nd4-c2+ Kb4-c4 11 Ke5-d6 Nc5-b3 12 Nc2-a3+ Kc4-b4 13 Na3-c2+ Kb4-c3 14 Nc2-a3 Nb3-d4 15 Kd6-e5 Kc3-b4 16 Na3-b1 Nd4-b5 17 Ke5xe6 Nb5-c3 18 Nb1-d2 a4-a3.