

Arkell's Endings – February



What is a weak pawn? A pawn that is exposed to attack and also difficult to defend .. – Samuel Reshevsky.

The result of weak pawns is passive pieces.

Here is my last round game from the 4NCL's 29th Congress in Harrogate. I had been off form all weekend, but was hoping to be at my best in the last round where a win would bring me into a share of 1st place. I will use my favourite annotating style, which is to faithfully reproduce my thoughts at the board. I've no doubt that the avid reader wishing to check with an engine will find plenty of flaws in my analysis, and I certainly wouldn't wish to discourage them from doing this.

Martin Burrows (2183) - Keith Arkell (2509)

29th 4NCL Congress Harrogate (5),
22.01.2023

1.e4 d5 I had it in my head that Martin had been exceptionally well prepared for some of our earlier encounters, so I wanted to reduce the chances of falling into any more deep preparation.

2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qd8 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3



5...g6 Given that my general philosophy is to save energy by not preparing before games, it is imperative to negate any work my opponent may have done. In this regard the Centre Counter is ideal as Black has a number of options on each move. For example, at move 3 I have also played ...Qd6 and ...Qa5, and here I usually play 5...Bg4.

6.Bc4 Bg7 7.Ne5 0-0 8.Be3 Nbd7 9.Qe2 Nb6 10.Bb3 a5 Played not so much to gain space as to discourage my opponent from castling on the queenside. Not that I minded his doing so, but it was rather to thwart what appeared to have been his intentions over the last few moves.

11.a3 a4 12.Ba2 c6 13.0-0 Nbd5 14.Bd2 Bf5 15.Rac1 Qb6



By making straightforward moves I have even gained a slight initiative, so I think it's fair to say that the Opening was a success.

16.Nxd5 Nxd5 Of course I would normally recapture with the pawn here as it strengthens my general structure: according to my 'Hierarchy of Pawns' an e-pawn is better than a d-pawn and a d-pawn is better than a c-pawn. However, I didn't see any way in which White could avoid following up with a second capture.

17.Bxd5 cxd5 18.Bc3



Not where he would like to put his Bishop, but there is no choice. My next short sequence was designed to push back White's only active piece.

18...Bh6 19.Rcd1 Qa6



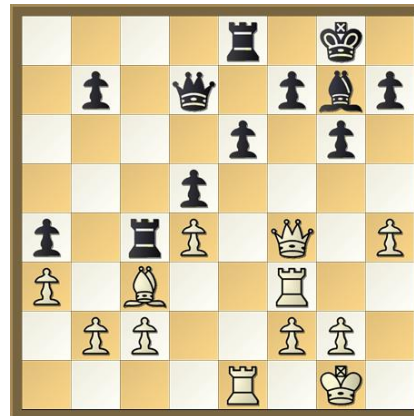
The point is that if the Knight doesn't retreat White must either accept a lifeless endgame facing my two Bishops or sacrifice his c-pawn.

20.Nd3 Rfe8 21.Rfe1 Bg7 22.h3 Rac8 23.Qe3



23...Bxd3 It may seem strange to surrender the Bishop pair so casually, but in truth the light squared Caro-Kann Bishop (the structure is the same as in an Exchange Caro) is an awkward piece to maintain in the long run, with pawns of the same colour on d5 and g6.

24.Rxd3 e6 25.Qf4 Qb5 26.Rf3 Qd7 27.h4 Rc4



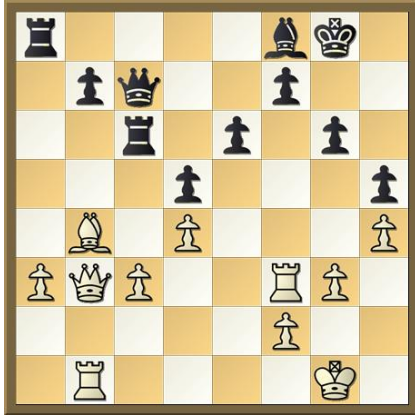
Threatening 28... e5. Given enough time I will double, or even triple on the c-file and then play ... Bf8 menacing the a-pawn and eyeing up the ...b5,...b4 plan.

28.Qd2 h5 29.b3 To wait or not to wait, that is the question! With or without this break White will have to endure pawn weaknesses on the queenside, just as with more typical Minority Attack positions

29...Rc6 30.Bb4 Rec8 31.c3 axb3 32.Qb2 Rc4 33.Qxb3 Qc7 34.g3 Bf8 Next on the agenda is to remove the

Bishops in order to further expose the targets.

35.Ree3 Ra8 36.Re1 Rc6 37.Rb1

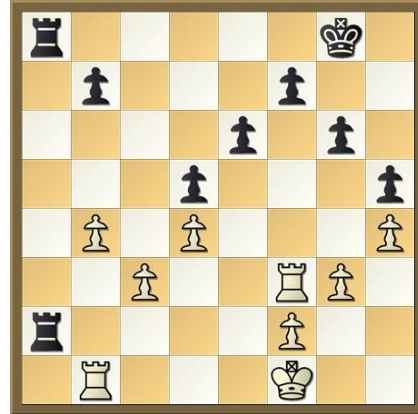


37...Bxb4 38.axb4 38 Qxb4 would be worse still, as after 38...Ra7 an assault on his a-pawn would signal the beginning of the end.

38...Rca6 39.Qd1 ...Ra3 would anyway have forced the Queen back. It is very easy for White to drift into a passive position once a permanent pawn weakness such as that on c3 emerges.

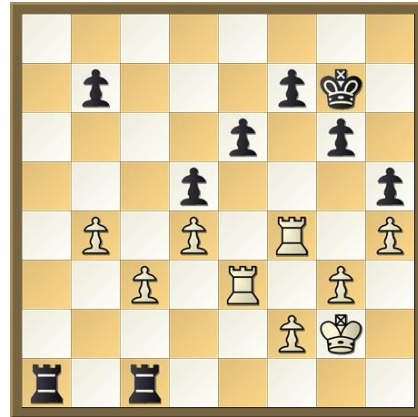
39...Qc4 40.Qf1 I thought that this was too compliant. It would be better to retain some dynamism in the position by keeping the Queens on. Either way Black is now clearly on top.

40...Qxf1+ 41.Kxf1 Ra2



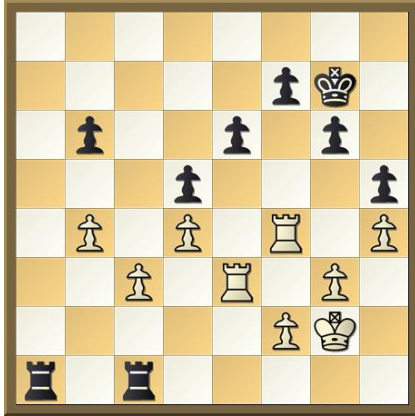
I have written quite a lot about these kinds of positions, and to convert them you need to combine pressure against c3, f2 and the White King. With White completely passive you can then usually break the camel's back with a kingside pawn advance, leading to a mating attack.

42.Re1 Rc2 43.Kg2 Kg7 44.Ree3 Ra1 45.Rf4 Rcc1



46.Kh2 The position was close to Zugzwang. If 46 Rd3 then f6 will lead to the strangulation of either a Rook or White's King. I would encourage you to check this for yourself. Trying to rock the boat with 46 g4 would also not help. A typical line might go 46 g4 Rg1+ 47 Kf3 Ra3 48 gxh5 gxh5 49 Ke2 Ra2+ 50 Kf3 Rc3, with ...Rgc1 to follow.

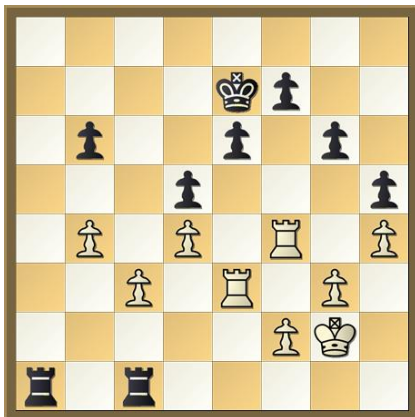
46...b6 47.Kg2



47...Ra7 There is no trivial way to push White over the edge. Why not? Because I need to play...f6, followed by...g5 and...g4 to put the King in a mating net (Rooks on g1 and h1), but I can't play ...f6 without losing the e-pawn. And if I try to support the e-pawn with my King then ...Kf8 runs into Rxe6. Therefore I need to support e6 with a Rook to usher my King round to e7, then pop the Rook back into the attack and finally finish off the game with ...f6 and g5, etc.

48.Kh2 Rc7 49.Rff3 Rc6 50.Kg2 Kf8 51.Kh2 Ke7 52.Kg2 Rc7 53.Kh2 Kd6
This move is a bit pointless, but it doesn't do any actual damage.

54.Rf4 Ra7 55.Kg2 Ke7 56.Kh2 Raa1 57.Kg2



57...f6 At last the scene is set for the winning march of my g-pawn.

58.g4 Continuing to fiddle while Rome burns, with 58 Kh2, would allow 58...g5 59 hxg5 fxg5 60 Rf3 f4 61 Rf4 Rh1+ 62 Kg2 Rag1 #, while 58 Kf3 fares little better after 58...Ra3.

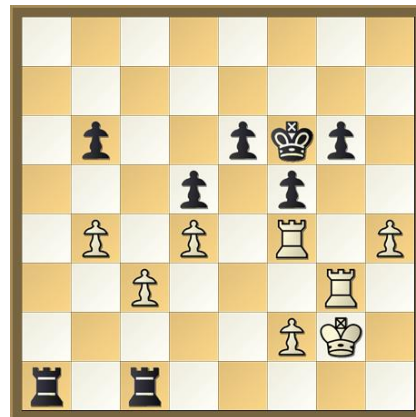
58...hxg4? I was immediately irritated that I hadn't finished off the game with 58...g5!, my favourite chess move.

59.Rxg4 f5



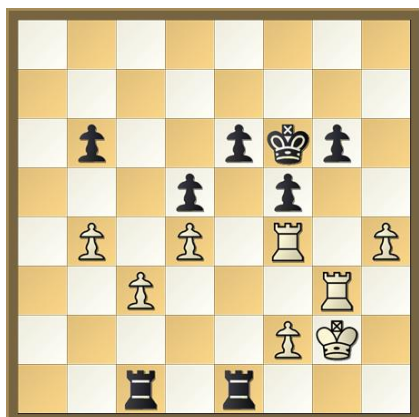
60.Rf4? Had he played 60 Rg5 I would have had to settle for 'only' winning his h-pawn with 60...Rg1+ 61 Kf3 Kf6 62 Rxg1 Rxg1 followed by ...Rg4. Now I am winning the more important c-pawn.

60...Kf6 61.Rg3



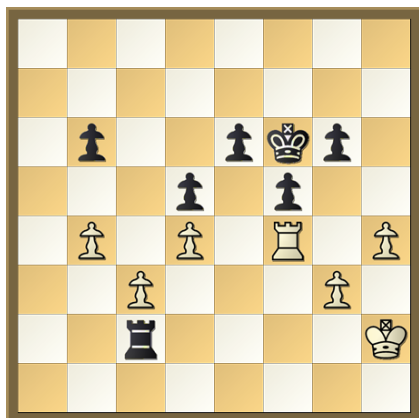
61...Rg1+ Rearranging the pieces. I need the a1 Rook to be attacking the c-pawn while the other Rook removes its defender.

62.Kf3 Rge1 63.Kg2 Rac1



64.Kh2 White can't hold onto his c-pawn as 64 Rff3 allows # in 3 and 64 Rd3 drops the Rook on f4 after 54...g5 65 hxg5+ Kxg5 66 Kg3 (66 Kf3 Re4!) Rh1 67 Re3 b5! Zugzwang! I have to confess to having a cheeky look at the engine to find this last pretty line, but anyway it's clear that by this stage there are many ways to skin the cat.

64...Rh1+ 65.Kg2 Rhg1+ 66.Kh2 Rxc3 67.fxc3 Rc2+



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