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**PAWN
ENDGAMES**



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PREFACE

World chess literature abounds in numerous works in which the rich chess experience accumulated over the centuries has been systematically presented. Due to a richness of possibilities and the brilliancy of combinations, the attention of most authors has been centred on the theory of openings and the middle game. By comparison, only a relatively small number of works has been dedicated to the theory of the chess endings. Perhaps because of this, and also due to the wrong approach in the training of the young players, many players have considered the chess endings as less important, as something unpleasant that cannot be avoided from time to time. The truth, however, is quite different! The most profound secrets of chess are hidden in chess endings; the thorough knowledge of the endgame directly determines the horizons of our chess culture.

Not only beginners but also chess coaches and already established players feel the constant need to perfect their endgame technique. There are many reasons for this. I will confine myself to the three reasons that I consider of paramount importance: pedagogical, strategical and temporal.

In order to understand the essence of the game of chess – which is governed by dialectical principles whereby no "law" is absolute or permanent, the knowledge and understanding of the tactical complexity of individual pieces is absolutely essential. As new knowledge is best assimilated by adopting the proven didactic axioms "from the easier to the more difficult", from the "simple to the more complex", the most natural way to discovering, learning and completely understanding the chess game must start with the study of the simplest endings. This initial knowledge is a cornerstone on which the future chess foundation will be erected. The significance of a "tempo", the role of the pawn structure and its influence on the activity of the chess pieces, the better positioning of the king, are all essential elements that stand out especially in this stage of the game.

The average reader undoubtedly knows that the chess game consists of three parts: openings, middle-game and endings. In the opening stage of the game the player tries to deploy his pieces as harmoniously as possible, this will facilitate his task in the middle-game to dominate space and gain a material advantage – a first step towards victory. This advantage is rarely realised in the middle game – rather it is achieved during the transposition to the ending or in the ending itself, usually with very little time remaining on the clock. A player of a broad chess culture, knowledgeable of and conversant with basic chess principles, elementary endings and the more important typical positions, will have less difficulty in making the right strategical decisions in these critical moments, thus creating preconditions for a decisive advantage, or a transposition to a favourable ending. If he cannot convert his positional advantage into victory, he may try exchanging his "weak" pieces for the opponents "strong" pieces – at the same time gaining space and time – thus crowning his superior strategy.

The mastery of the endings is vital in contemporary chess due to the ever faster rate of play. In the "old days", when the games were being adjourned, the player had both the time (till the next morning!) and help of chess literature and, consequently, could excellently prepare for the resumption of the game. Nowadays, however, you must have this knowledge on the spot. The Latin adage "omnia mea mecum porto" could not be more appropriate. There are no adjournments any more, the game must be finished in the first and only uninterrupted session. The knowledge and confidence in one's endgame technique triumph, all the rest conduces to disappointment and defeat.

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2.5. King and Two Pawns versus King and Two Pawns

Although more material generally implies a widening of the scope of strategic and tactical ideas, these endings still belong to the simpler kind of endings, the choice of the plan is mostly determined by the elementary positional principles with which we have already become familiar. Due to material equality these endings are drawn most of the time. The positional superiority plays a principal role. This positional advantage is expressed not only through the more active king position but also depends to a great extent on the pawn structure and the distance of the pawns from the promotion square. It is here that we shall get acquainted with the characteristics of **the doubled pawns**, the new strategic element – **blockade**, the tactical element – **breakthrough**, as well as the more complex forms of **defence by stalemate**.

With regard to the crucial importance of the pawn structure in choosing the plan and strategy, we may divide these endings into three basic groups:

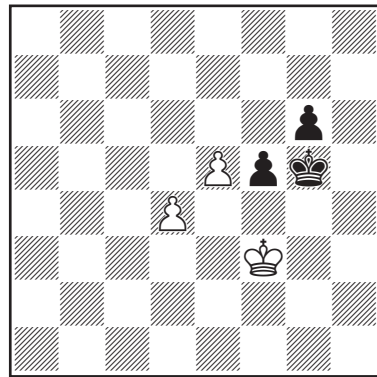
1. with passed pawns
2. with one passed pawn
3. with no passed pawns

2.5.1. Passed Pawns

In endings of two passed pawns each, **the outcome depends on the three basic factors: the pawns' proximity to the promotion square, their**

mobility and relative king position. As we have seen in the chapter King and Two Pawns versus King, **isolated pawns are, as a rule, more powerful than connected pawns** since they can "overstretch" the enemy king by a joint action and reach the promotion square more easily.

124. We shall first examine the simplest case with connected pawns. The following diagram is a study by B. Horowitz, published in 1879.



Although the white pawns are only one rank nearer to the promotion square and momentarily lack the support of their king, **Black to move will lose** due to the very unfavourable position of his king.

White is now threatening in earnest the advance of the d-pawn while the back king is excluded from the defence via the squares f5/f6 since 1... f4 2. d5 ♔f5 is met by the simple 3. d6 winning the f-pawn.

1... ♔h6 2. ♔f4

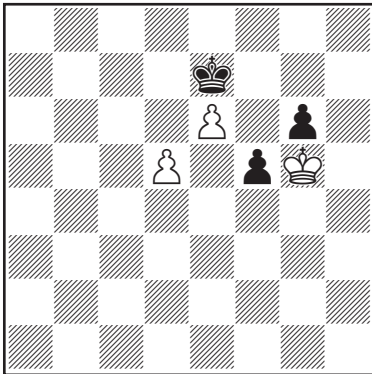
Immediately blockades the enemy pawns so as to ensure the greatest

edge possible in the ensuing race towards the promotion square. Also possible is 2. d5 ♖g7 3. ♖f4+—

2... ♖g7 3. ♖g5 ♖f7 4. d5

Now we can see the enormous significance of a timely blockade. The black pawns have remained very far from the promotion square, whereas the white pawns have gradually got nearer. Naturally, they cannot reach the eighth rank on their own and will require at the critical moment the support of their king. As a consequence, the white king will have to leave the enemy pawns' square but the pawn race will be uneven since the white pawns will be much nearer to the promotion square.

4... ♖e7 5. e6!



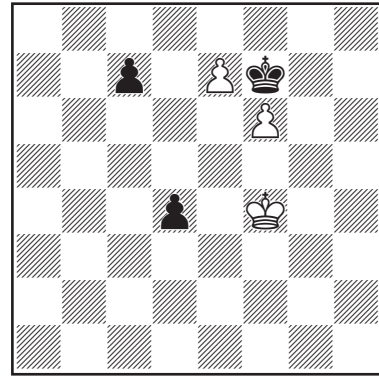
A mistake is 5. d6+? due to 5... ♖e6 6. ♖xg6 f4 7. d7 ♖xd7 8. ♖f7 f3 9. e6+ ♖c7 10. e7 f2 and the pawns promote simultaneously.

5... ♖d6 6. ♖f6!

Now the white king can afford to leave the square of the f-pawn since its e-pawn is quicker.

6... f4 7. e7+— etc.

125. A study by J. Bechting, published in 1894, is considered as the classic reference on the theme of the well-timed leaving of the pawn's square.



White's pawns have advanced far but converting this advantage into victory is made difficult due to the good position of the black king.

If the black king were at e8, White would win easily with 1. ♖e5 since due to a mating threat ♖e6 and f7, he would gain a huge tempo to capture the d-pawn.

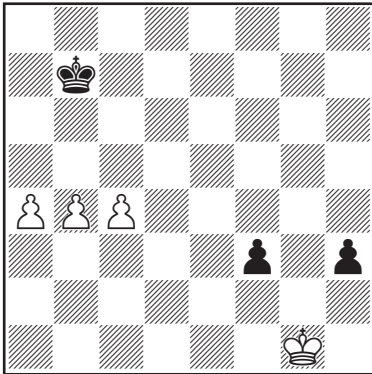
White to move wins with:

1. ♖f3!

The direct 1. ♖e4? is not good due to 1... c5 2. ♖d3 (of course not 2. ♖d5?? d3 and Black is quicker) 2... ♖e8 3. ♖c4 (the triangulation 3. ♖d2 does not work due to 3... c4=) 3... ♖f7= since White could not gain a tempo. This means that White must go to e4 only when the black pawn reaches c5!

1... c6

158. It is important to know that **Black always wins in an analogous position with the white pawns on the fourth rank** – even when he has to leave the ideal defensive square b7.

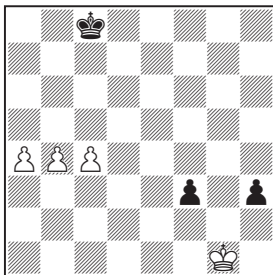


When White has the move the position is crystal-clear since on any pawn move the black king will get in front of the pawn e.g. 1. a5 ♖a6 or 1. b5 ♜b6 or 1. c5 ♜c6 forcing the rival into zugzwang. **Black to move also wins** provided he grasps an important detail i.e. that the squares a6 and c6 are "taboo". Therefore, the most logical is:

1... ♜b6

Since it limits most White's choice.

However, any king retreat to the eighth rank wins! 1... ♜c8



A) 2. c5 ♜c7 3. b5 ♜b7 and now 4. a5 (whilst in case of 4. c6+ follows 4... ♜b6 5. a5+ ♜c7 6. a6 ♜b6 and on 4. b6 wins 4... ♜c6 5. a5 ♜b7—+) is met by 4... ♜b8!—+

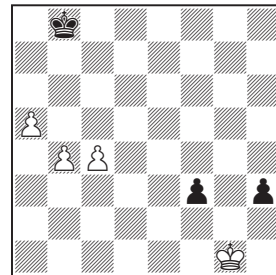
B) To the same position conduces also 2. b5 ♜b7 3. c5 ♜c7—+

C) 2. a5

C1) If 2... ♜b7? 3. c5! and Black would be in zugzwang.

C2) As well as in the case of 2... ♜c7? 3. a6! that is 3... ♜b6 is met by (whilst on 3... ♜c6 due to 4. c5 ♜c7 5. b5+—) 4. b5 ♜a7 5. c5+—

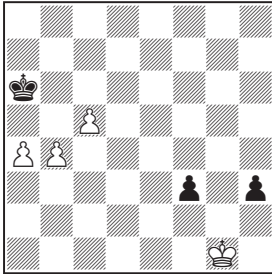
C3) 2... ♜b8! Unique.



3. b5 (If 3. c5 follows 3... ♜b7! 4. b5 ♜b8!—+; while on 3. a6 Black has 3... ♜a7 4. b5 ♜b6 5. c5+ ♜a7 6. c6 ♜b6—+) 3... ♜b7 and Black blocks the white pawns by force winning a decisive tempo. If 4. c5 (whilst 4. a6+ is met by 4... ♜b6 5. c5+ ♜a7 6. c6 ♜b6 and on 4. b6 wins 4... ♜c6 5. c5 ♜b7—+) 4... ♜b8—+

Also the symmetrical 1... ♜a8 2. c5 ♜b8!, as well as 1... ♜b8 2. c5 lead to the same type of position (or 2. a5 ♜a7—+ or 2. b5 ♜b7 3. c5 ♜c7—+) 2... ♜c7 3. b5 ♜b7—+ etc.

Why are the squares a6 and c6 "taboo"? In case of 1... ♖a6? there would follow 2. c5! and Black could choose zugzwang by:



A) 2... ♖b7 3. a5+-

B) or by 2... ♖a7 3. c6! ♖b6 (3... ♖a6 4. a5! ♖a7 5. b5+-) 4. b5 ♖c7 5. a5 etc.

1... ♖c6? is met by the symmetrical 2. a5! ♖c7 (or 2... ♖b7 3. c5) 3. a6! ♖b6 (or 3... ♖c6 4. c5) 4. b5+- etc.

2. b5

That is, obviously weak is 2. c5+ due to 2... ♖c6+-, as well as 2. a5+ in view of 2... ♖a6+-

2... ♖b7

Any declining of the king to the seventh rank is good. Loses, however, 2... ♖c5? in view of 3. a5+-, as well as 2... ♖a5? due to 3. c5+-

3. a5 ♖a7

It is important to note that at this point the black king must remain on the seventh rank.

Good is also 3... ♖c7 4. b6+ (or 4. a6 ♖b6, that is 4. c5 ♖b8) 4... ♖c6! (not 4... ♖b7? due to 5. c5 and Black will

lose due to zugzwang) 5. c5 ♖b7+-

Weak is 3... ♖b8? due to 4. c5 ♖a8 (or 4... ♖c8 5. a6) 5. c6+-

If 3... ♖c8? or 3... ♖a8? 4. a6 ♖c7 (or 4... ♖a7) 5. c5+-

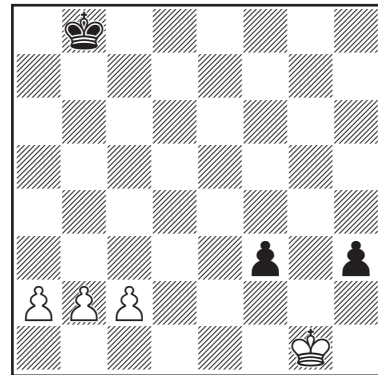
4. c5

In case of 4. a6 ♖b6 5. c5+ ♖a7 6. c6 ♖b6, or 4. b6+ ♖a6 5. c5 ♖b7+- Black achieves the winning zugzwang.

4... ♖b8!+-

And Black wins as in example 157.

159. When the white pawns start out from their initial positions, Black wins as well. The blockade of the enemy's pawns should be executed as soon as possible, since **victory is possible only if all white pawns are forced to move.**



White must attempt to occupy with two pawns as much space as possible while keeping the third pawn far in the rear for the sake of a "tempo" move.

1. c4 ♖b7 2. a4