

Pawnography wins

"PAWNS are the soul of chess," said the 18th century musician and chess genius Andre Philidor. And so true: pawn structure is the foundation of modern strategy.

In the end-game it might be thought that positions with only kings and pawns remaining would be easy to calculate. In fact some of them reach almost unbelievable depths of subtlety, and few pawn endings among beginners are played accurately.

The concept of "opposition" is fundamental to pawn endings.

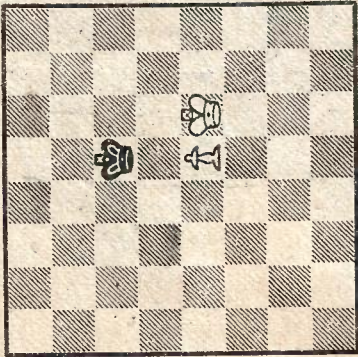
"Opposition" exists when the two kings face each other, as in diagram 1.

Whoever has the move must give ground; the other side is said to have the opposition. (Black to move/White has the opposition.) It is almost always advantageous to gain the opposition.



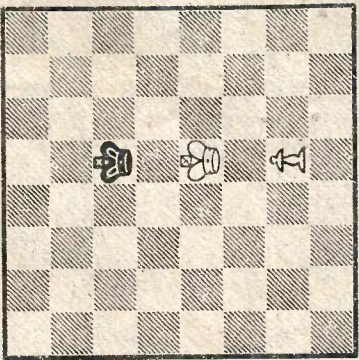
No 1

HERE we have a basic position of king v king and pawn. No 2 is drawn, 1, e5 Ke7. 2, Kf5 Kf7. 3, e6 ch Ke8. 4, Kf6 Kf8. 5, e7 ch Ke8. 6, Ke6 stalemate.



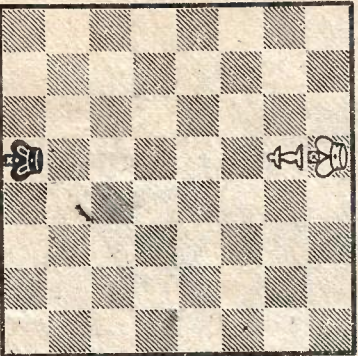
No 2

EXAMPLE 3 is a win. 1, e3 (gaining the opposition) 1... Kd6. 2, Kf5 Ke7. 3, Ke5! Kd7. 4, Kf6 (but not 4, e4? Ke7! draw) 4... Ke8. 5, Ke6 Kd8. 6, e4 Ke8. 7, e5 Kd8. 8, Kf7 and e6, e7 and e8 = Q cannot be stopped.



No 3

BUT WHY should No 2 draw and No 3 win? There is one important difference. In No 3 the white king is in front of the pawn. The king must be used aggressively and the following example is instructive.



No 4

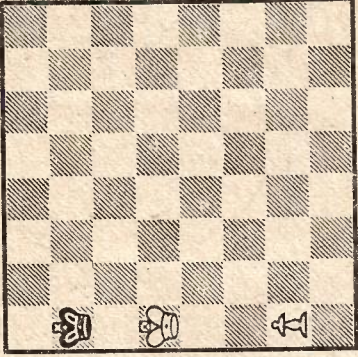
I recommend for those who do not know the king and pawn v king ending that they play this example against someone else until White wins every time against varying defensive moves.

The wrong method is advancing the pawn prematurely with 1, e4? Ke7. 2, Ke2 Ke6. 3, Ke3 Ke5 draw. Eg 4, Kf3 Ke6! 5, Kf4 Kf6. 6, e5 ch Ke7. 7, Kf5 and we have transposed into the diagram 2 variation. Correct is 1, Kf2! Ke7. 2, Ke3! Ke6. 3, Ke4! and we have the win illustrated in No 3.

Three points to remember:

- 1. Advance the king before advancing the pawn.
- 2. Gain the opposition.
- 3. King on the sixth rank in front of the pawn wins with or without the opposition.

JUST to confuse king v king and pawn endings we have that funny creature the rook's pawn.



No 5

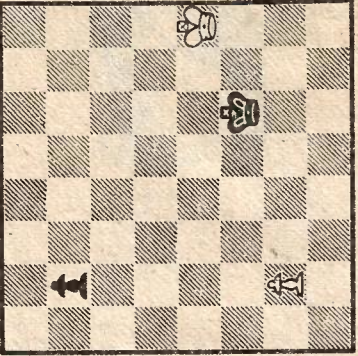
1, Kb5 Kb7. 2, a4 Ka7. 3, a5 Kb7. 4, a6 ch Ka7. 5, Ka5 Kb8. 6, Kb6 Ka8 and White can make no progress since 7, a7 is stalemate.

I remember, when we were learning, my opponent got so depressed by my pawn's steady advance to the 7th that he resigned before we reached the stalemate position!

The rook's pawn is the only exception to No 3, which works on all other files.

THE BEST book in the world on the subject is *Pawn Endings* by Y. Averbakh and I. Maizels, published by Batsford. It is 318 pages long and filled with different examples, themes and ideas. I was given the book by a friend earlier this year and was astounded. The authors have done a brilliant piece of work aimed at the more experienced player. Thumbing through the book and looking at the extensive analysis makes one understand — oh so easily — why chess will never be exhausted.

Here is an extract from the work, a relatively "simple" study by Grigoriev in 1938. It demonstrates the "assault from the rear".



No 6

1, Kg5 Ke4. 2, Kf6 Kd5. 3, Ke7. Black stands at the crossroads: should he continue holding back the white king or push his pawn? 3... Kc6 (if 3... b5 then 4, Kd7 b4. 5, Kc7 Kc5. 6, Kb7 b3. 7, Ka6 Kb4. 8, Kb6 Kc4. 9, Ka5 draws.) 4, Ke6! (Blindly pursuing the same tactic proves fatal to White: 4, Kd8 b5. 5, Kc8 b4 and wins, since compared to the previous variation White's king does not have enough time to reach the black pawn.) 4... b6. 5, Ke5! Kc5. 6, Ke4 Ke4. 7, Ke3 b5. 8, Kd2 Kb3. 9, Kc1 Ka2. 10, b4! draw.

After 10... Kb3. 11, Kb1 Kxb4. 12, Kb2 White has the opposition.

SOLUTION to last week's very difficult knight takes rook checkmate problem, which has since been driving players in London crazy: 1, e4 Nf6. 2, f3 Nxe4. 3, Qe2 Ng3. 4, Qxe7 ch Qxe7 ch. 5, Kf2 Nxh1 mate.

The problem was: Black on his 5th move must play knight takes rook checkmate, and White's first move must be 1, e4. A marvellously economical helpmate and easily the finest I have ever seen within five moves.

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