

8. Positional strengths of pieces

The skill is to place your pieces on the best squares require that you understand the circumstances in which they thrive. In other words, to help your pieces reach their potential you must have knowledge of their particular strengths and weaknesses.

As the leader and manager of your pieces it is your responsibility to lead them to glory! They can only help you if you help them. Their potential is locked up inside them – and it is your task to help them make their best contribution in the interest of the team.

The following points will help you get a good understanding of the “potential” of your pieces. This understanding will help you create the best circumstances for your pieces and avoid situations that weaken their usefulness.

1. The King

The king is the most vulnerable piece on the chessboard since the main goal of the game is to trap and checkmate the king

The King’s strength:

The king is particularly weak in the opening and middle stages of the game but towards the end he will make a valuable contribution to your forces. Due to the way the king moves (one square in any direction) it is particularly good with or against pawns

The King’s weaknesses:

The king is the most vulnerable piece on the board since everything else stops when the king is in check. In the opening and middle-game stage of the game your king is a target to the enemy pieces and you need to be sure you have enough resources near him to defend him against possible attacks.

The king is also a very slow-moving piece, which implies that it cannot quickly run away from danger.

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2. The Queen

The queen is the most powerful piece on the board since it combines the power of the rook and bishop.

The Queen's strengths:

The queen is a strong attacker – particularly in positions with a lot of open lines. The queen is even more powerful if she can get close to the action since she can then use her multi-direction abilities in that part of the board. The queen is very effective in making multiple threats.

The Queen's weaknesses:

The Queen is a vulnerable target. This drawback is the reason why the queen usually can't join the action too soon. Instead, you will generally develop other pieces first and plan a safe square to where you can develop it.

3. The Rook

The rook is the second most powerful piece. Since they move on straight lines they need open ranks and files to be effective. Pushing or exchanging pawns to create open lines is usually the main way of getting the rooks into action.

The Rook's strengths:

Rooks are at their best when they can control open ranks and files. They are not only strong on open lines but they also give valuable support to the other pieces, in particular to the bishops and knights. In the endgame stage of the game rooks are also very useful in helping pawns to advance.

The Rook's weaknesses

Due to their high value, rooks are particularly vulnerable to threats from bishops, knights and pawns. This is because a rook is worth more than those pieces and when one of them attacks a rook, the rook will usually be forced to move to a safe square.

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As with bishops, rooks can get stuck behind locked pawn-structures in which case they can lose a lot of their potential value.

4. The Bishop

The bishop is the piece that can undergo the biggest changes in its level of development. A well-developed bishop can match the strength of a rook, whereas a bishop locked in behind blocked pawns is hardly worth more than a pawn.

The Bishop's strengths:

Due to their long-distance movements, bishops can quite easily have an impact on both sides of the board. There is usually an advantage for the player who owns both bishops over a player who has a bishop + knight (or two knights). They can also perform their attacking role from a safe distance whereas knights need to come close to the action before they can participate in the attack.

The Bishop's weaknesses:

Bishops are vulnerable to threats from pawns and knights. This is because a bishop is generally worth more than a knight and will have to retreat when it is attacked by a knight or a defended pawn.

Bishops are severely affected by pawn-structures. They can become almost useless if they are trapped behind blocked pawns.

Another weakness of the bishop is that they can only move on one colour. This usually becomes an increasingly important factor when one of the players has only one bishop or when both players have one bishop but they move on opposite colour squares.

5. The Knight

The knight is the only piece that doesn't move in a straight line. The unique movement of the knights adds a lot of excitement to the game. Because sometimes it can be hard to spot the surprising fork-tricks that the knight can perform.

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The Knight's strengths:

The knight performs very well in cluttered positions. This is mainly because it can jump over other pieces is not restricted by closed files and diagonals as the other pieces are. The knight can also be an effective attacking piece provided it has access to a safe square near the action. Knights are famous for their unexpected “fork-tricks”!

The Knight's weaknesses:

A knight is a slow-moving piece that often requires a few moves to be developed to its full potential. They are vulnerable to threats from pawns and it isn't easy to find good squares for the knights since the enemy pawns can often drive them back.

Their main weakness however is that they aren't very effective in playing a role on both sides of the board. For example, a knight stuck on the side of the board often has a very limited role.

6. The Pawn

The Pawn's strengths:

What the pawns lack in strength they make up in their numbers. Pawns have a big effect on the whole game since they have a significant impact on the mobility of the pieces and they keep the enemy pieces out of their territory.

Pawns form a solid shield of defence when they stand together. They are also very effective in controlling important squares and chasing enemy pieces away from their territory. Promoting one of them to a new queen will usually result in winning the game.

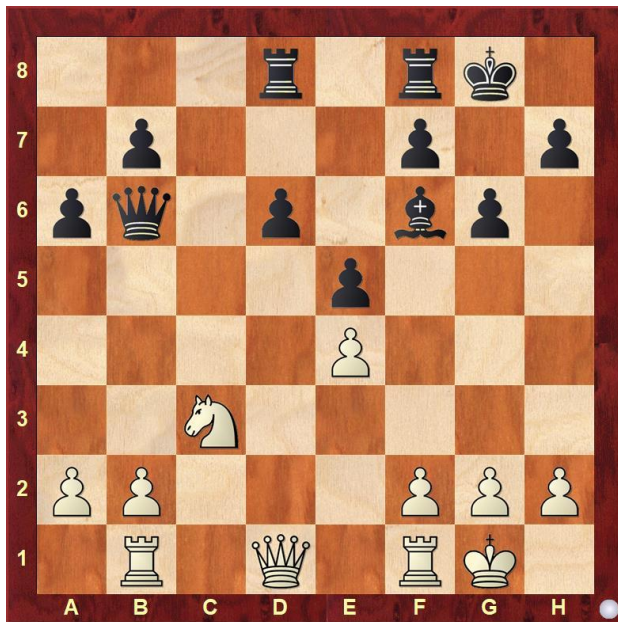
The Pawn's weaknesses:

Pawns cannot move backwards. This means the squares next to and behind them become permanently weakened once they move forward. Pawns become weak once they cannot support each other anymore. Weakened pawns need pieces to support them – which isn't ideal since you don't want your pieces to be forced into positions where they are forced into defensive positions.

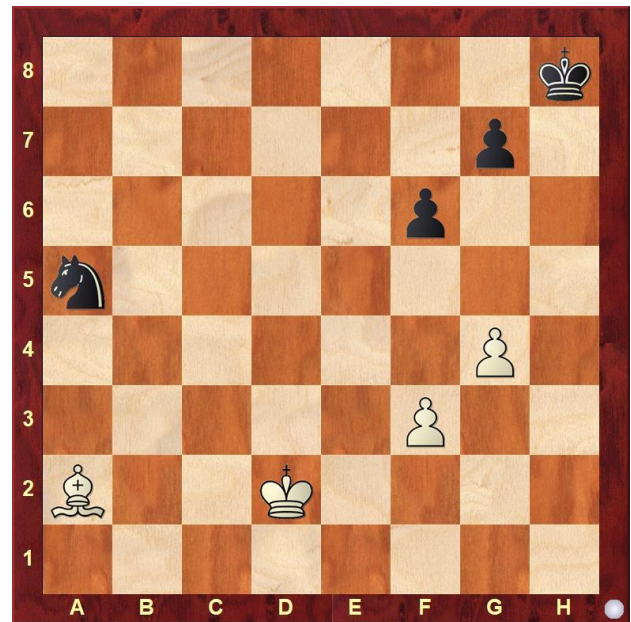
ADVANCED PART 1 LEVEL

8. Positional strengths of pieces (Homework)

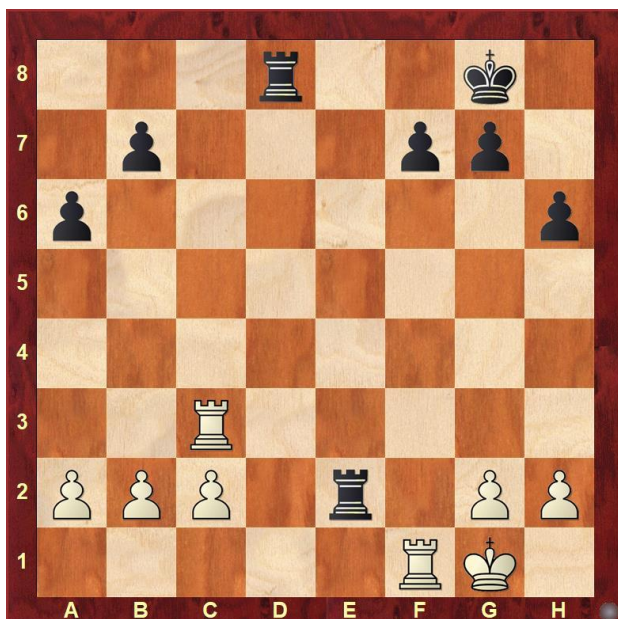
1. White to play and find the best move



2. White to play and find the best move



3. Black to play and find the best move



4. Black to play and find the best move

