



Modern Chess Magazine

Issue 20

Caro-Kann on the Olympiad
Opening Review

Tactical Rook Endings



Understand the Najdorf Structures - Part 1

**Endgame Series 20:
Active Rook in the
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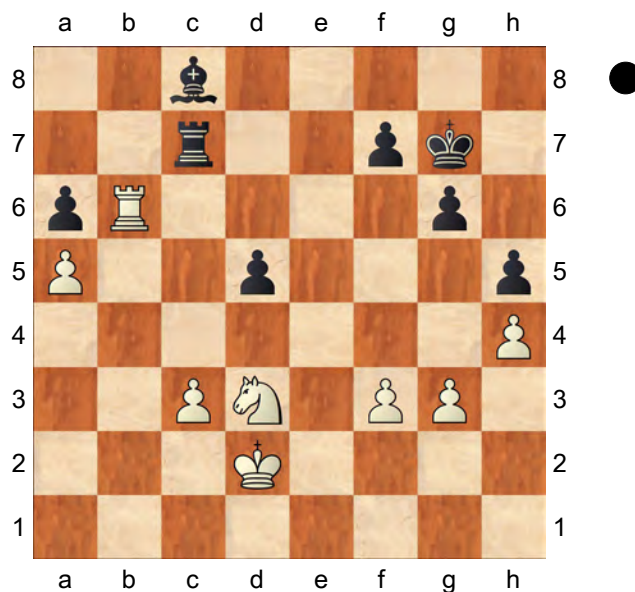
Endgame Series 20: Active Rook in the Endgame



Hello, Dear chess friends! In the new issue of Endgame series, we will cover an important endgame principle: rook activity. Rook is a piece that often shows its greatest strengths in the endgame, when most of the pawns and pieces disappear and it can move freely across the board. According to the statistics published by Mueller and Lamprecht in 2011, the most common type of endgame is exactly rook vs. rook endgame (8.45% in all games played), while endgames involving at least one rook appear in approximately 37% of all games played. So, when you sit at the board, there is more than one in three chance that you will play a rook endgame on that day! I do not think that we need to give further reasons why it is important to have a good understanding of rook's capabilities in the endgame. Now, a well-known rule of thumb says that active rook in the endgame is worth a pawn. This does not apply to all

positions, but in many of them, this is indeed the case. Our goal in this survey is to explore exactly such endgames where activation of the rook is the best strategy, even at the cost of a pawn. We start with a grandmaster encounter from the recently finished Russian Higher League:

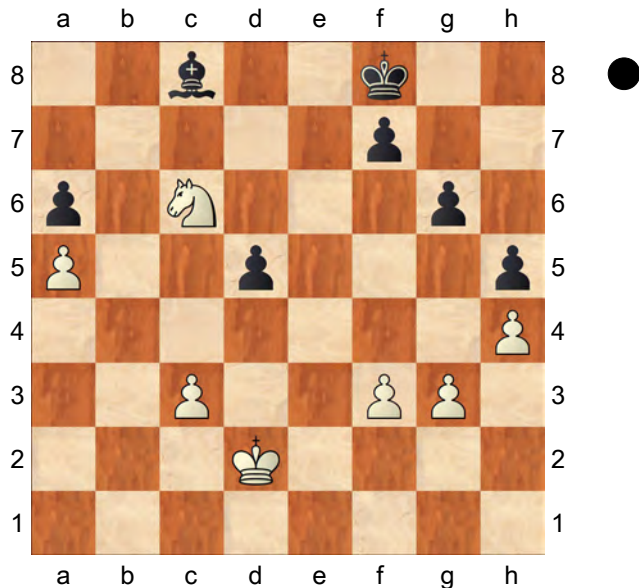
Sarana,A. **2573**
 Zvjaginsev,V. **2633**
 71st ch-RUS HL 2018 (7.1) 03.07.2018



White has a strong pressure in this endgame. Not only does Black have two isolated pawns on the same color as his bishop, but his pieces are also very passive. Black's position looks hopeless on the surface; however, experienced grandmaster Zvjaginsev finds a nice maneuver to activate his rook: **41...Rc4!** reminding White that he has a weak pawn, as well.

[Other moves are too passive:
41...Kf8 42.Nb4 Rc5 and here White forces a favorable rook trade: 43.Rc6! Rxc6 44.Nxc6

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In this endgame, Black is lost because his pawn structure violates Capablanca's rule. Bb7 45.Nb4 Ke7 46.Kd3 Kd6 47.Kd4+- and Black will soon get into zugzwang.]

[or 41...Rd7 42.Nb4 d4 43.c4+- when White gets a passed pawn.]

42.Ne5 White wins a pawn with this move, but, as we shall see, this also allows Black to activate both his rook and bishop.

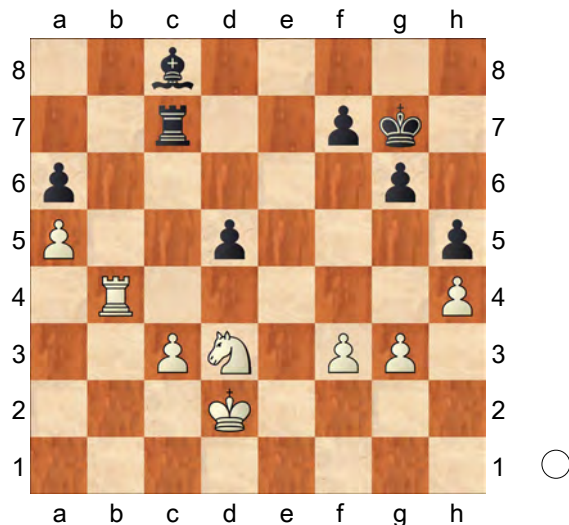
[White had many other possibilities at this point: 1) 42.Rd6 is another way to win a pawn, but after Ra4 43.Rxd5 Bb7 44.Rd7 Bc6! (an important intermezzo) (44...Bxf3? 45.Ne5) 45.Rc7 Bxf3 46.Ne5 Bd5=

Black returns it, with a great position.]

[2) 42.Nb4 stopping Rc4-a4 maneuver, but here Black has d4

43.cxd4 Rxd4+ 44.Ke3 Rc4 45.Nxa6 Ra4=]

[similar is 3) 42.Rb8 Bf5 43.Nb4 Rc5=]
[Finally, the most stubborn option was
4) 42.Rb4!? Black retreats Rc7

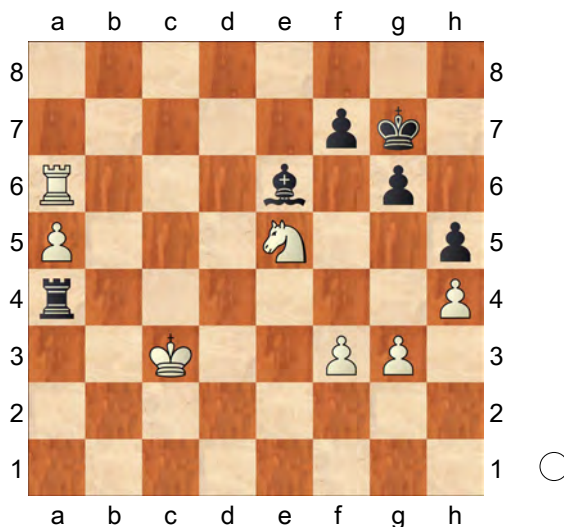


and surprisingly, White does not have a good way to improve his position. Both his c3- and a5-pawns are a burden, so it is difficult to rearrange his pieces in a better way. For example: 43.Rd4 (43.Rb8 Rc4↔; 43.Nf4 Rc5↔) 43...Be6 44.Nc1 Rc5 45.Nb3 Rc7 and White's positional advantage may just prove insufficient to win the game.]

42...Ra4 43.Rc6 Be6

[Of course, not 43...Bb7? 44.Rc7+-]

44.Rxa6 d4! This simplifying move makes Black's life much easier. **45.cxd4 Rxd4+ 46.Kc3 Ra4**

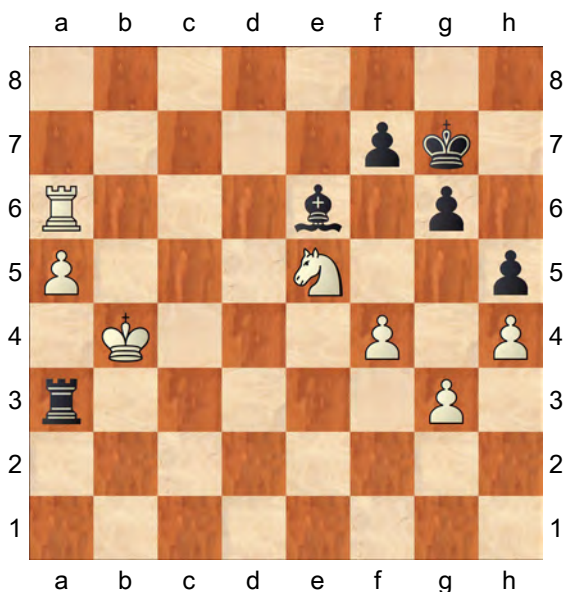


What a transformation! Just a few moves ago, black pieces were stuck on last two ranks. Now black rook is more active than the white one, while the bishop can operate on the whole board. Black has a completely adequate compensation for the pawn, which was proved in the game: **47.Kd3 Bd5** It is important to put pressure on White's kingside pawns.

48.Ra7

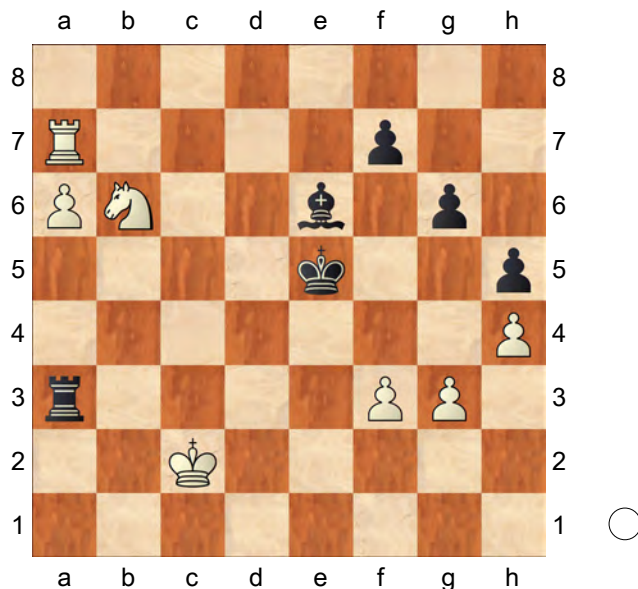
[48.Kc3!? may have been more precise, not allowing a black king to activate.]

[On the other hand, 48.f4 leaves the g3-pawn exposed and after **Be6 49.Kc3 Ra3+ 50.Kb4**



Rb3+! (**50...Rxc3?! 51.Rc6 Rb3+ 52.Kc5 Ra3 53.a6**) **51.Kc5 Rc3+!** (the purpose of these checks was to drive white king to a worse position) **52.Kd6 Rxc3 53.Rb6 Ra3=** Black is in time to stop the a-pawn.]

48...Kf6! 49.Nd7+ Kf5 50.Nb6 Ra3+ 51.Kc2 Be6 52.a6 Ke5



Now Black king is active as well. **53.Ra8 Kd4! 54.a7 Ke3** Black's counterplay comes just in time. **55.g4 Kxf3 56.gxh5 gxh5 57.Kb2 Rb3+!?**

[57...Ra5= does not allow the pawn promotion, but why complicate matters. The bishop vs rook endgame is a dead draw.]

58.Kc1 Rxb6 59.Rd8 Ra6 60.a8Q+ Rxa8 61.Rxa8 Kg3 62.Kd2 Kxh4= 63.Ra3 Kg4 64.Ke2 h4 65.Kf2 f5 66.Ra6 Bd5 67.Rh6 Be4 68.Rh7 Bd5 By activating his rook and putting it behind the a-pawn, Zvjaginsev followed the well-known Tarrasch rule that states: ⇔↗The Rook's place is behind the passed pawn; behind the enemy pawn in order to hold it up, behind one's own in order to support its advance.↗↗ One should remember this rule because it holds true in most cases. Let us see another instance where the defender employed this endgame strategy.

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