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Knight against Bishop

Just like the previous strategic element examined (bishop against knight), the concept of good knight against bad bishop is based upon the two sides' pawn-structures.

The presence of central pawns (especially when they are placed on the same colour squares as the bishop) generally favours the knight, as it decreases the scope of the bishop. When, moreover, the pawn-structure is relatively fixed and strong (weak) squares exist, the superiority of the knight increases, since (as we explained in Volume 1 of this series) the knight is a more suitable piece for the occupation of outposts.

The knight is a very flexible piece that can move to any square of the board, but the control it exerts is restricted to only a few squares at a time. Consequently, a closed centre or the presence of pawns on only one side of the board significantly favours the knight and makes it preferable to the bishop, as the latter does have a greater radius of action but is confined to only half the squares of the chess-board. In view of the above we may define the superiority of the knight over the bishop as a consequence of the pawn-structure and especially when the centre is closed, when there is a fixed structure (on squares of the colour of the bishop) or when there are pawns only on one wing.

Although the knight's superiority usually becomes evident in the endgame, there are many examples that display this superiority in the middlegame as well (always under the conditions mentioned above). The secret to determining which of the minor pieces is superior is *the overall examination of the pawn-structure*.

Grivas – Smirin

Tel-Aviv 1991

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 h3 0-0 6 ♙e3 c6 7 ♙d3 ♘bd7

Black can opt for a different set-up with 7...e5.

8 ♘ge2 c5!? 9 0-0

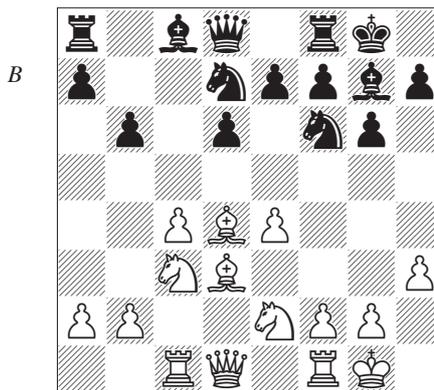
After 9 d5 ♘e5 10 0-0 e6 Black will have excellent play, as he obtains the bishop-pair. The tempo lost (...c6-c5) is offset by the mediocre placement of the knight on e2.

9...b6 10 ♖c1

Here 10 d5!? e6 (10...♘e5 11 f4 ♘xd3 12 ♖xd3) would be unclear.

10...cxd4 11 ♙xd4!? (D)

Perhaps White should have preferred 11 ♘xd4 ♙b7, with equality.



11...♙h6! 12 ♖c2?

A serious mistake. The compulsory 12 f4 e5 13 ♙e3 exf4 14 ♙xf4 ♙xf4 15 ♘xf4 ♙b7 offers chances for both sides.

12...e5! 13 ♙e3 ♙xe3 14 fxe3 ♘c5

White agreed to the doubling of his pawns on the e-file because he thought he could develop an initiative on the kingside and especially on the f-file. Black has a better pawn-skeleton, as his backward d6-pawn cannot be approached by White.

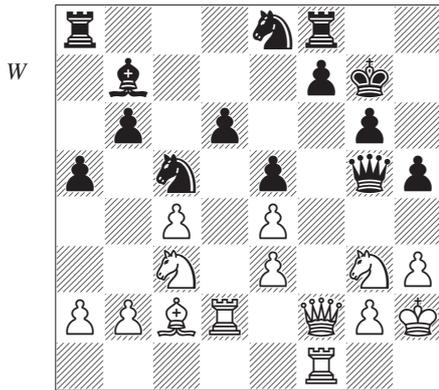
15 ♘g3 ♙b7 16 ♖d2?!

Moves like 16 b4 or 16 ♖cf2 are more in the spirit of White's plan and should be preferred.

16...♖e8 17 ♙c2

17 b4?! ♜xd3! 18 ♜xd3 ♖c7 19 ♖b3 ♜c8 20 ♜d5 ♙xd5 21 cxd5 ♜g7 leaves Black with a clear advantage.

17...♖g5 18 ♖e1 a5 19 ♖f2 h5 20 ♜h2 ♜g7 (D)



Black is methodically building up his position, principally aiming for a favourable end-game in which the weaknesses of White's pawn-structure will come to the fore. White must react promptly by regrouping his pieces.

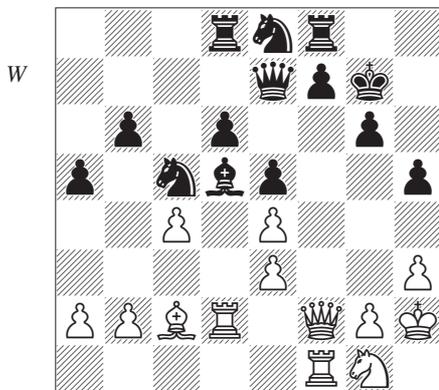
21 ♜ge2! ♜d8 22 ♜g1 ♖e7!

The immediate 22...♜f6? is a gross mistake due to 23 ♜f3 ♖h6 24 ♜xe5!.

23 ♜d5

Compulsory, as 23 ♜f3 ♜f6 24 ♖h4 ♜d7 (threatening 25...♜fxe4!) 25 ♜g5 ♜h7 26 ♜f3 ♖xh4 27 ♜xh4 ♜g5 would be favourable for Black.

23...♙xd5 (D)



24 exd5

24 cxd5 ♜f6 25 ♖f3 ♜c8 leaves White defenceless against the threatened invasion by the black pieces down the c-file, while the c2-bishop will turn into a big pawn.

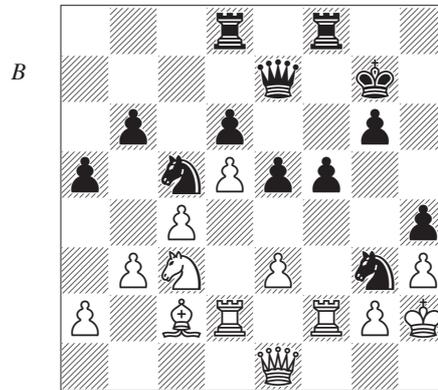
24...f5! 25 ♜e2?!

25 ♜f3 offers better defensive opportunities, as it controls the crucial squares g5 and h4.

25...♜f6 26 ♜c3? h4?

Strategically a correct move, gaining control over the dark squares. However, White's last move allowed Black to cash in immediately with 26...♜g4+! 27 hxg4 fxg4 28 ♖e1 ♜xf1 29 ♖xf1 ♖h4+ 30 ♜g1 g3 31 ♖f3 ♜f8.

27 b3 ♜h5 28 ♖e1 ♜g3 29 ♜ff2 (D)



29...♜a8

Incomprehensible; 29...♜c8 is better. Black has such a good position that he can afford to 'waste' moves without any real consequences.

30 a3 ♜ac8 31 ♜d1 ♖g5 32 ♜g1 ♜f6!

The right plan. Black will concentrate his forces on the kingside and then launch a strong attack with the advance of his f-pawn. It is hard for White to counter Black's plan as he lacks sufficient counterplay (33 b4? axb4 34 axb4 ♜a6).

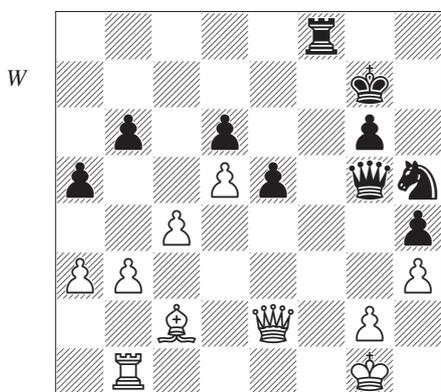
33 ♜b1 ♜d7!

Forestalling any possible counterplay with b4.

34 e4 fxe4!

After 34...f4? 35 ♙d1! White would be back in the game.

35 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 36 ♖xe4 ♜xf2 37 ♜xf2 ♜f8+ 38 ♜g1 ♜f6 39 ♖e2 ♜h5 (D)



The piece exchanges have clarified Black's advantage. He has a superior minor piece and his domination of the dark squares guarantees either a winning attack or a much better ending. The pawn-structure doesn't help White at all, as almost all of his pawns are placed on the same colour squares as his bishop, while the protected passed black e-pawn must also be taken seriously into account.

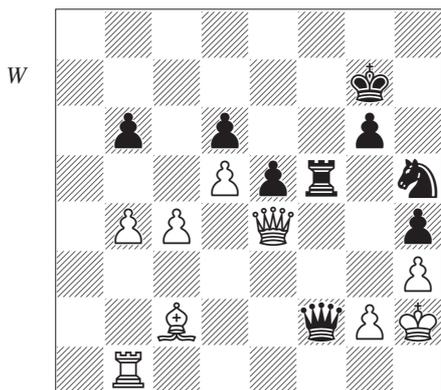
40 b4

The ending resulting from 40 ♖g4 ♗xg4 41 hxg4 ♘g3 is winning for Black.

40...axb4 41 axb4 ♖f4 42 ♖e4

Forced (42 ♗f1? ♘g3!) because Black was threatening 42...♘g3 43 ♖d3 e4!.

42...♖f2+ 43 ♖h2 ♗f5! (D)



The last stage of the attack: the black rook enters the fray via the g5-square, from which it not only attacks but also defends against White's threats on g6.

44 ♗c1

White would also lose after 44 ♔d3 ♖g3+ 45 ♖h1 (45 ♖g1 ♘f4) 45...♘f6! 46 ♖e2 ♗f2.

44...♗g5 45 ♖f3 ♗xg2+!

With a simple tactical stroke Black clarifies the result of the game.

46 ♖xg2 ♖f4+ 47 ♖g1 ♖xc1+ 48 ♖h2 ♖f4+ 49 ♖g1 ♘g3 0-1

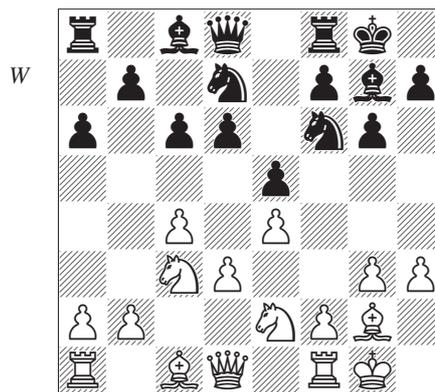
Oney – Grivas

Athens 1984

1 c4 g6 2 ♘c3 ♔g7 3 g3 ♘f6 4 ♔g2 0-0 5 e4 d6 6 ♘ge2 e5 7 d3 c6 8 0-0 ♘bd7

Black has also tried the immediate 8...a6 9 a4!? a5! 10 h3 ♘a6 11 f4 ♘d7 12 ♔e3 ♘dc5 with unclear play, Turner-Grivas, Athens 1997.

9 h3 a6 (D)



10 ♔e3

Another possibility is 10 a4!? ♘e8 11 a5 f5 12 exf5 gxf5 13 d4 ♖f6 14 ♔e3 ♖f7 15 d5 c5 16 f4 e4 with a satisfactory position for Black, Koliopoulos-Grivas, Athens 1992, but White can improve his play.

10...b5 11 ♖d2 ♔b7 12 ♔g5?!

A pointless move. White should prefer 12 b4 or 12 f4 with an unclear position.

12...♘c5! 13 b4 ♘e6 14 ♔h6

This shows how pointless 12 ♔g5 was, as White has now been compelled to waste a tempo.

14...♔xh6! 15 ♖xh6 c5!

After Black has rid himself of his 'bad' bishop (with some help from White), he attacks