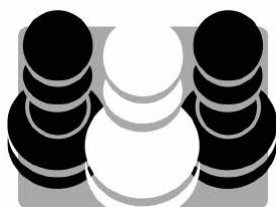


Learn from the Legends 2

By

Mihail Marin



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

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Preface



Twenty years have passed since Quality Chess published one of their first books, *Learn from the Legends – Chess Champions at their Best* (and it is nine years since the third edition of that book was published). I remember how enthusiastic we all were when working on this project and the slight nostalgia I experienced when everything was set and done.

I have put all my energy, knowledge and emotions into every single book I have written since then, but the traces left by *Learn from the Legends* were deep in my soul and not easy to replenish. In particular, the unconditional love I have for my favourite openings, reflected in my more recent works, could not quite match the intellectual and sentimental attachment I have to my classical idols.

A few years ago, I ventured to ask my publishers a question I had been secretly harbouring for a long time: is it high time for writing another book of the same kind? I was blessed with a positive answer and immediately started my new adventure.

The same as with *Learn from the Legends*, this book is a collection of the best efforts of players from the past, whose style and achievements have impressed me deeply. There are a few important differences between the two books though. Each of the heroes in this current book has his own individual style, hard to confuse with that of the others. However, I wanted the respective chapters to have a tighter connection with each other than in the original *Legends* book.

I started my work free of preconceptions but, as the book progressed, it became clear that tactical abilities and attacking skills were common elements in the styles of my heroes. This discovery gave me the general direction for the book, turning it into a slightly unusual form of tactical and attacking manual, within a biographical framework. At the same time, all the players had their own trademark way of preparing and carrying out their attacks. It is easy to notice certain particularities of the double-edged tactical battles in each case too.

I have aimed at using these slightly contradictory findings to give the material both a unifying and a diverse character. Each chapter ends with eight positions offered as *tests*. It is fair to warn the reader that most of them are quite complicated. This makes them suitable for several different approaches. I would recommend starting in solving mode. After reaching the limit of your calculating powers, you may continue analysing by moving the pieces over the board. Finally, the richly annotated solutions should be useful for learning purposes, in the same way as the main examples. If you are looking for a more relaxing read, you can simply skip to the solutions and enjoy the chess on display.

It is easy to notice that the chapters differ in size. This corresponds to my (partly subjective) perception of the degree of complexity of each player's style, as well as their significance as World Championship contenders. These aspects are also reflected in the order in which the chapters are presented.

The book starts with **Leonid Stein**, mainly known as a purebred attacking player, who was haunted by misfortune during his repeated attempts to become a Candidate on the path to the World Championship. As explained in the chapter, the positional build-up also played an important role in Stein's games, as a logical way of preparing his attacks.

Next comes the three-time Candidate **Lev Polugaevsky**, who is widely considered a more well-rounded player than Stein. However, my feeling is that his inner instinct pushed him to attack to no less an extent than his colleague. The main difference was Polugaevsky's discipline and diligence between tournaments. This turned him into one of the most outstanding theoreticians of all time, and resulted in his style becoming more scientific than Stein's.

David Bronstein is the only player in this book who earned the right to challenge for the World Championship. One of the reasons why the chapter dedicated to him does not occupy the top position is that he was a credible contender only for a relatively short period: between 1948 and 1956, at most. At the same time, he was a player without a clear style, who could improvise in every game according to his momentary inspiration. Placed in the middle of the book, the chapter can act as a weathervane (or compass) with references to the other sections.

Paul Keres maintained the level of an elite contender for longer than any of the players above. As will be explained in Chapter 4, his style had a duality in many ways, making him what we might call a universal player. Keres would build his positions in strict accordance with classical principles, but they erupted in wild complications or fierce attacks whenever he was given the slightest opportunity.

Many may be surprised that I dedicated the last chapter to **Lajos Portisch**, but I had both objective and subjective reasons for doing so. Even though he never came close to challenging for the highest title in chess, Portisch qualified for the Candidates eight times, a record beaten only by Korchnoi. In my opinion, Portisch's style is the hardest to understand. Almost unanimously regarded as a theoretician and positional maestro, he gives me the impression of a very concrete player. His moves and general decisions were hard to anticipate; but after his games were finished, they looked logical overall. Like Polugaevsky and Keres, the classical strategist Portisch rarely missed an opportunity to initiate incalculable complications or attacks. He was also one of the players I was rooting for during my teenage years, a period in which I had the opportunity to play three games against him – all ending in my defeat.

The introductions to the chapters do not follow a predetermined structure, except for the fact that I started each one by discussing something about that player that impressed me deeply. In the case of Stein and Keres, this was the romantic and dramatic character of their careers. The other chapters start with a sequence of dialogue, either involving or referring to the respective hero.

I have chosen only games featuring correct concepts and a high degree of accuracy in executing the plans. There are inevitably some mistaken moves by our heroes in the book; but if understood correctly, such inaccuracies can be as instructive as the brilliant moves.

The book pays homage to leading players from the times when players could only use their minds for analysing and playing, without silicon assistance, giving them outstanding intellectual strength. At the same time, the rigorous process of selecting the games should make this book a useful tool for improving the reader's calculation, tactical skills and attacking abilities.

These things having been said, I pass the baton to my heroes.

Mihail Marin

Domnești, November 2024

Lev Polugaevsky



“Did you really play very well, or did *Pouloo* make you a present of a draw?”

I threw a glance at Jean Paul Touze, the manager of my French team Belfort Echecs, and noticed that his giant body was quivering with curiosity. He had no intention of offending me with his question. He just found my draw with Black against Polugaevsky, played on the top board of the match won by our team, quite extraordinary and hard to explain.

The year was 1991. Polugaevsky was far from his heyday and we had heard rumours that he had moved to France to heal from a nasty disease. There must have been some truth in it, as four years later he sadly passed away, aged only 60.

One way or another, in the FIDE list published soon after our game, he still occupied 12th place in the world rankings, with a rating of 2630. For a chess amateur like Jean Paul, the gulf in class between such a living legend and a mere strong young IM (a two-time Interzonal qualifier, who would become a grandmaster in 1993) was simply too large to allow the thought that I could have held my own without a little “benevolence” from my opponent.

My French was not good enough to enter into a long debate and advocate my merits; and I also knew that if I did, Jean Paul would have asked the same question a few more times during our joint dinner. Therefore, repressing my frustration for not having been awarded with a sincere “Bravo!”, I answered: “Lev Abramovich might just have been kind.”

I named my opponent by his name and patronymic, the Russian equivalent to Mr. Polugaevsky, in order to offset the effects of the somewhat disrespectful use of *Pouloo*.

Kind, modest and endearing. This was how I had perceived Polugaevsky when meeting him one year earlier for the first time. I had drawn my game against a young rising star after experiencing some difficulty, and we both rushed to the analysis room. Our seconds joined us immediately after we started the post-mortem. Occasionally my opponent’s second suggested moves or ideas in halting English, but received from his pupil rather rough answers in Russian. Curious about who that submissive and humble person could be, I threw a furtive glance at him: Polugaevsky.

While I was trying to work out a way to restore the right hierarchy, Polugaevsky achieved that by himself. When he suggested the next move and before my opponent could display his usual reaction, I hurried to confirm that this was what I had feared most in the game. A brief check revealed that it would have given my opponent a clear advantage. The roles changed in that moment. Polugaevsky turned into a firm but gentle teacher, while his pupil started listening to his advice more respectfully.



Polugaevsky in Amsterdam, 1984

Lev Polugaevsky had been a prominent player during my childhood and teenage years, when I used to follow all the major world and Soviet chess events by reading the Soviet magazines. He participated three times in the Candidates' matches between 1974 and 1980. He advanced twice (in 1977 and 1980) to the semi-finals, but lost each time to my greatest hero of those years, Viktor Korchnoi.

We could describe Polugaevsky's style the way I used to perceive it then (which roughly concurs with how I do now) in more than one way. If we refer to the different phases of the game, we can call him a *universal player*. His opening preparation was outstanding, involving long and lethally accurate analysis; his middlegame calculation was almost flawless; and his endgame precision, especially after an adjournment, was brilliant.

Things are different if we try to identify Polugaevsky's thinking process. He was at his best when a clear and logical plan was available, or if he could find the truth by calculating long variations. His best games are marked by mathematical precision, both strategically and tactically. As impressive as this portrait may appear, I cannot avoid the feeling of one-sidedness. One of the reasons why he lost his two matches against Korchnoi could be that Polugaevsky was less strong in positions requiring a long struggle without a clear-cut plan and lacking complex tactical nuances. When drawing against him, I was probably fortunate to have reached a simple, almost boring, middlegame position.

This is relative, of course, because Korchnoi had a stronger character, too, if we compare it to Polugaevsky's gentleness during my first meeting with him. If referring only to his over-the-board style and describing it in just a few words, I would choose *logical* and *precise*.

In the book *Grossmeister Polugaevsky*, published in 1982 and compiled and partly written by Damsky (subsequently published in English as *Grandmaster Performance*), Polugaevsky himself expressed a few interesting thoughts about the style of the top players in general. He considers that the vast majority of them were universal, giving as examples the tactical genius Alekhine, who could also display brilliant endgame technique or deep strategic planning, and the outstanding strategist Botvinnik, who occasionally delivered magnificent combinations.

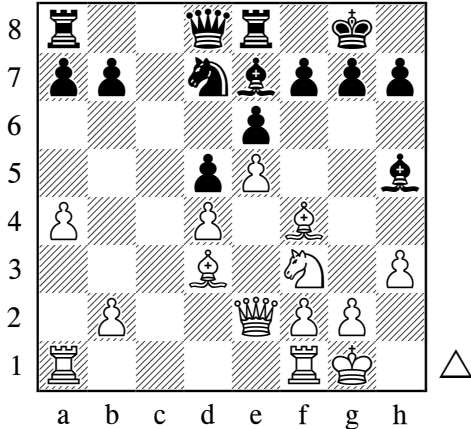
He admits that there are also a few exceptions to this rule, opining that typically this refers to tactical players, who were less skilled in positional play. He might have had in mind players like Tal, while being too tactful to name them.

Polugaevsky does not agree with the belief of many that he was a tactician, claiming that he used to embark on sharp play or long combinations only when this came as a logical follow-up to superior positional play. The game below, played two years after Damsky published the book, supports this point of view. I would, however, go a bit further and highlight that the tight connection between strategy and tactics was broader than this. The final combination in this game did indeed crown Polugaevsky's superior strategy; but during the positional fight, tactical nuances were determining the choices of both players behind the scenes.

GAME 6

Lev Polugaevsky – Eugenio Torre

London 1984



White has more space, but from a static point of view Black is doing fine. He has developed his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain and White has a weakness on b4, which could help Black with his counterplay. Black's only problem is that his knight is passive on d7. Should he succeed in transferring it to c6, Black could look to the future with optimism.

However, the ... $\text{b}8$ retreat runs counter to development and Black should pay attention to the tactical nuances involved. There is a potential threat of $\text{g}7$ followed by $\text{g}5$. I would call this a *mechanical combination*. Even though the black king's safety is an important issue, this tactical operation puts many minor pieces into contact, requiring one to pay special attention to the details.

Black could parry this threat with ... $\text{g}6$, but this has complex implications. After $\text{g}6$, the natural ... $\text{h}6$ offers White chances for an attack with $\text{g}2$ - $\text{g}3$ (or $\text{g}2$ - $\text{g}4$), $\text{g}2$, $\text{h}1$ and $\text{h}3$ - $\text{h}4$ - $\text{h}5$. Therefore, ... $\text{f}6$ is safer, but this is a small structural concession. Black would have compensation for it only if waiting until White weakens the f-file first with $\text{g}2$ - $\text{g}4$.

16. $\text{f}c1$!

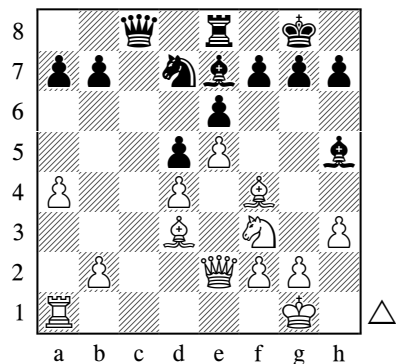
At first sight, White mainly intends to double rooks on the c-file, but we will see that moving with the rook "to the left" has a tight connection with the threats on the kingside.

The premature $\text{g}7$? $\text{h}7$ $\text{g}5$ does not work yet, due to: $\text{g}5$ (Also, $\text{h}6$! $\text{f}7$ $\text{g}6$ leaves White's pieces hanging.) $\text{h}5$ $\text{h}6$ $\text{g}6$ $\text{g}6$ $\text{f}7$ $\text{h}8$ White cannot bring new forces into the attack in time, for instance: $\text{a}3$ $\text{e}7$ In these lines, things would be different if White had the rook on c3, as $\text{g}3$ would then win.

16...a6!?

An ultra-cautious move, giving White a free tempo to continue with his plan. Torre might have feared $\text{b}5$, or $\text{b}5$ after $\text{g}2$ - $\text{g}4$ and $\text{g}6$, but these threats work only under certain circumstances. It could also be that he had not made up his mind yet and wished to provoke Polugaevsky into displaying his cards. The first two lines below illustrate two cases where Torre's fears are realized:

16... $\text{c}8$?! 17. $\text{c}8$ $\text{c}8$



18. $\text{c}1$ (Polugaevsky gives $\text{g}7$? $\text{h}7$ $\text{g}5$ but this is unsound, due to the familiar $\text{h}6$! $\text{f}7$ $\text{g}6$. Even though his comment is mistaken, it is suggestive of the fact

that he was considering the tactical kingside threats an important complement to the fight for the c-file.) 18...♖b8 19.g4 ♕g6 20.♗xg6 fxg6 21.♖b5 ♖d8 22.♗g5 ♗xg5 23.♜xg5 ♜f8 24.f4± White will probably reach a pleasant knight ending, due to his space advantage and better structure.

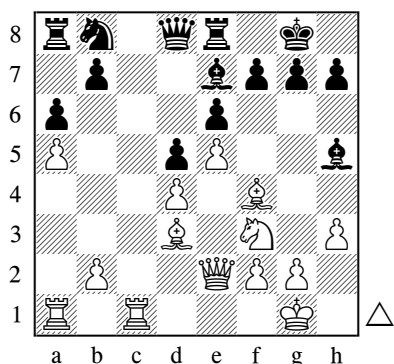
Also problematic for Black is: 16...♗g6! 17.♗xg6 fxg6 18.♖c2 Preparing to double rooks on the c-file. (The more straightforward 18.♖b5 ♖b8 19.a5 is equally strong.) 18...♜b8 (18...♖c8 19.♖ac1± ♖xc2?! 20.♖xc2 only increases Black's problems, as White will invade decisively on the seventh rank.) 19.♖b5± There is no satisfactory way of defending the b7-pawn and the c-file. For instance, 19...b6? 20.♖c7! and White wins.

Had Torre anticipated his problems after White's simple answer to the move he played, he would have executed the main plan at once with:

16...♜b8! 17.a5!?

For reasons revealed soon, it is useful to provoke Black's next move before delivering the combination.

17...a6



18.♗xh7†! ♜xh7 19.♜g5† ♜h6!

It is not easy to rely on such a defence, putting the king into the bishop's range.

White has a mating attack reminiscent of the romantic era after 19...♜g6? 20.♖d3† f5 21.exf6† ♜xf6 22.♗e5† ♜xg5 23.♖g3† ♜f5 24.♖xg7 ♖g8 25.g4† ♜e4 26.♖c3, followed by either ♖e3 mate or f2-f3 mate.

The line which might have prompted Torre to weaken his seventh rank is: 19...♗xg5? 20.♖xh5† ♗h6 21.♗xh6 gxh6 22.♖xf7† ♜h8 23.♖c7! With the knight on d7, this decisive move would not be available.

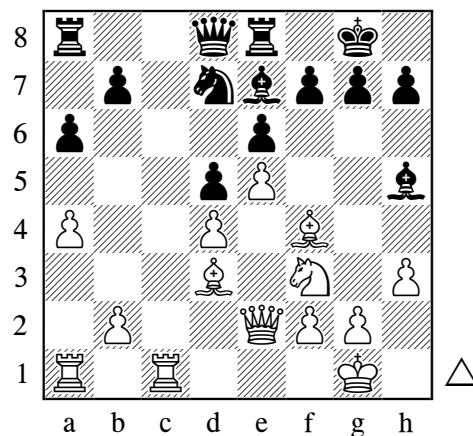
20.♜xf7† ♜g6 21.♜xd8 ♗xe2 22.♜xe6

This is the moment when the pawn on a6 helps White by preventing Black from keeping a piece for three pawns with ...♜a6. 22...♜c6 23.♗e3

Defending d4 and threatening ♜f4†.

23...♜f7 24.♜c7 ♖ad8 25.♜xe8 ♖xe8 26.f4

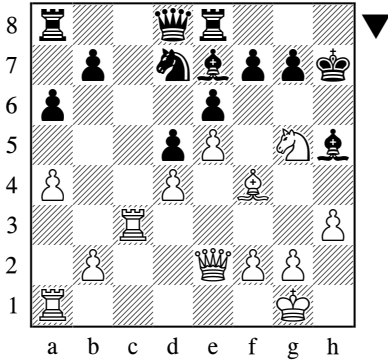
White has a small material advantage, but the position is not entirely clear, as Black's minor pieces are very active.



17.♖c3!?

A perfect square for the rook, at the intersection of the c-file and the third rank. Apart from the obvious ♖ac1, White also has a clear threat on the kingside. Let's imagine for a moment that White gets a free move to carry out his idea:

18.♗xh7†! ♜xh7 19.♜g5†



19...♙xg5

19...♗h6 20.♘xf7† ♗g6 is met by 21.♖g3† ♗xf7 22.♗xh5† ♗g8 23.♙h6 ♙f8 24.♙xg7! ♙xg7 25.♖xg7† ♗xg7 26.♖a3!, with a similar picture to the game. The black king is helpless against the massive attack from all White's pieces.

20.♗xh5† ♙h6 21.♖g3!

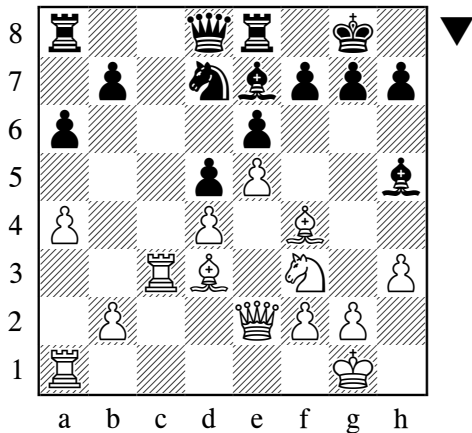
Threatening 22.♖xg7† ♗xg7 23.♙xh6† ♗h7 24.♖a3.

21...♖g8 22.♙xh6 g6

A sad necessity, as if 22...gxh6 23.♗xf7† ♗h8 24.♖xg8† (perfectionists may prefer the calm 24.♖aa3!) 24...♗xg8 25.♗xd7 White has two extra pawns.

23.♗g5 ♗xg5 24.♙xg5±

White has won a pawn and his bishop dominates the knight, which has to defend f6.



17...♙xf3?!

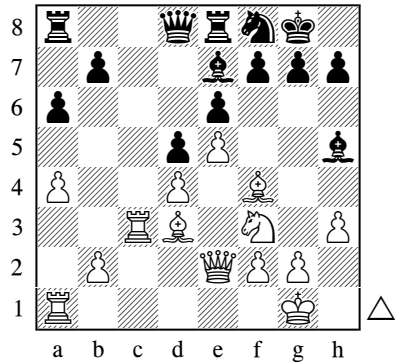
Torre decides to dismantle Polugaevsky's mechanism, but the bishop pair offers White increased flexibility in choosing plans. There are two alternatives to consider:

17...♙b4 would not offer Black an easy life either: 18.♖b3 (18.♙xh7† ♗xh7 19.♘g5† does not work because of 19...♗xg5!) 18...a5 19.♖c1±

It is Black who has queenside weaknesses now. White threatens to increase the pressure with ♙b5 and ♙d2. 19...♖c8? 20.♖xc8 ♗xc8 leaves the g5-square undefended, allowing: 21.♙xh7† ♗xh7 22.♘g5† ♗g6 23.g4 White regains the piece with a winning position.

The safest defence was the seemingly passive:

17...♘f8!



The knight retreat consolidates the kingside and clears space for a global regrouping.

18.♖a1 ♗d7

Attacking the a4-pawn and threatening ...♖ec8.

19.♗c2

It transpires that the knight plays an important role in the fight for tempos! In the event of 19.g4 ♙g6 20.♙xg6 (White loses his domination along the c-file after 20.♗c2 ♙xd3 21.♗xd3 ♖ec8=) 20...♘g6, White needs to spend a tempo on retreating his bishop, after which Black continues with ...♖fc8 and stands no worse.

19...♙xf3!

Black needs to prepare his kingside counterattack, otherwise g2-g4 would put him in a passive position.

20.♖c7

20.gxf3 allows Black to complete his regrouping with 20...♖eb8, planning ...♙d8. (The immediate 20...♙d8 is also decent.)

21.♖c7 ♖e8 22.♗b3 b5 23.axb5 ♙d8 24.♖7c6 axb5 Followed by ...♗g6, with an equal game.

20...♗d8 21.gxf3

White is very active, but Black's resources are not exhausted:

21...♙g5! 22.♙e3

The inevitable exchange of bishops favours Black, but White tries to improve his structure in the process. The game is level after 22.♙d2 ♙xd2 23.♗xd2 ♖e7.

22...♙xe3 23.fxe3 ♗g5† 24.♔f2 ♗h4† 25.♔f1!?

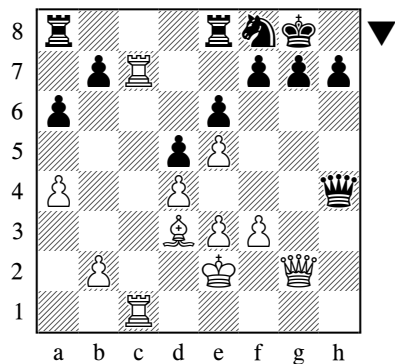
The only way to keep the game going.

25...♗xh3† 26.♗g2 ♗h4

Despite his extra pawn, Black would be too passive after 26...♗xg2† 27.♔xg2 ♖ab8 28.b4!±.

27.♔e2

After giving up the pawn, White has regrouped properly and threatens ♖h1 followed by ♙xh7†! winning, while also maintaining pressure on the queenside.



27...♗d8!

White can use the tempo spent on 27...g6? for taking the g5-square under control with 28.f4. The point is that after 28...♗d8 29.♗g5!±, Black does not get to free his position with ...♖e7.

Parrying the threat with 27...h6? runs into different problems: 28.♖g1 g6 29.♖h1 ♗g5 30.♗xg5 hxg5 31.♖xb7 With the knight so passive on f8, Black is simply lost.

Finally, 27...♖e7? 28.♖7c2 threatens ♖h1, and after 28...♖ee8 29.♖h1 ♗d8 30.♙xh7†! ♗xh7 31.♗h3 White recovers his material with a winning position.

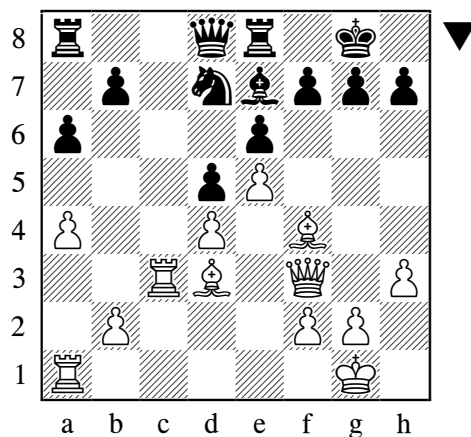
28.b4!?

28.♖xb7 ♖e7 frees Black's play sufficiently to level the game.

28...♖e7 29.♖7c2

White maintains his activity and pressure, but Black's extra pawn is likely to compensate for that.

18.♗xf3

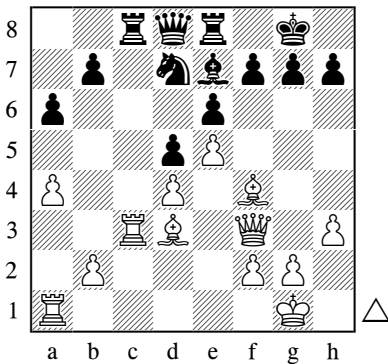


18...♗b8?

The maxim "better late than never" does not apply now. Moving the knight far from the kingside gives White a free hand to launch a decisive attack.

Black did not have an easy position though, as shown by the following analysis of his alternatives.

Fighting for the open file with 18...♖c8 would not bring any relief.



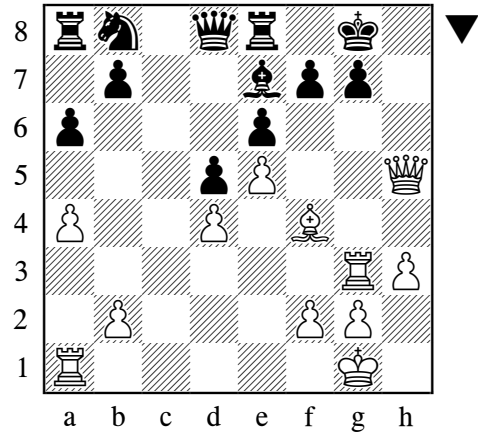
19.♞b3 (I slightly prefer this over the line given by Polugaevsky: 19.♞xc8 ♜xc8 20.♞c1 ♞b8 With a slight advantage to White.) 19...♞c7 (19...♞c7 loses a pawn: 20.♞c1 ♞b8 21.♙xa6 ♞xc1† 22.♙xc1 ♞c7 23.♞c3!±) 20.♙d2! Threatening to provoke the weakening of the queenside with ♙a5. It is worth noting that the bishops exert pressure on both wings and control all the invasion squares for Black along the c-file. 20...♞c8 White has reduced Black to passivity and can start a slow attack with, say, 21.h4!

Similar is 18...♞b6 19.♞d1!?, indirectly defending d4 and planning ♞b3 and/or a4-a5.

19.♙xh7†!

Torre might have been aware only of the mechanical tactical threats mentioned already, which he had removed with the exchange on f3. This time, the sacrifice is the introduction to a pure mating attack, of which the greatest tacticians in history would be proud. It is hard to believe that Polugaevsky had calculated all the details, but he surely felt that he can use all his pieces in the attack, while the black knight and a8-rook are mere spectators.

19...♙xh7 20.♞h5† ♙g8 21.♞g3



Threatening ♙h6.

21...g6

The alternatives were no better:

21...♙f8?!

This just offers White a free tempo.

22.♙g5!

22.♙h6! is also strong.

22...♙e7

22...♞b6 leads to a quick mate after 23.♙f6 ♖d7 24.♞xg7† ♙xg7 25.♞g5 ♖xf6 26.exf6, as indicated by Polugaevsky.

22...f6 leads to another line where all White's pieces join the attack decisively: 23.exf6 Threatening f6-f7 mate. 23...♞d7 24.fxg7 ♙xg7 25.♙f6 ♞e7 26.♞a3! White wins.

During the game and when annotating it, Polugaevsky did not take 22...♞e7! into account, but this is the engines' slight favourite over the alternatives. However, I am not even sure if we can call a move a "favourite" when it results in a huge winning evaluation for White. There are several tempting ways for White to continue:

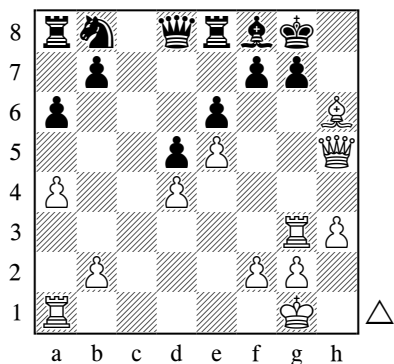
i) The most natural sequence is 23.♙f6 ♖d7 24.♞h6 ♖xf6 25.exf6 g6 26.fxg7. White is a clear exchange up, but optically things may not seem that simple because of the weakness on d4. However, the fight for the c-file also favours White, as does the possible

h3-h4-h5. 26...♖xe7 27.♗f4 ♖c8 28.♖c3 ♖c4 29.♖ac1 ♗b4 30.♖f3 ♖xc1† 31.♗xc1 ♗xd4 32.♗c7 ♗g7 33.♗xb7 White's material advantage will decide matters.

ii) White's position is so good that he can even spend two tempos bringing his last reserves into the attack with 23.♖aa3 ♖d7 24.♖af3. For example: 24...g6 25.♗g4 ♖c8 26.h4 ♖c4 Threatening ...♖xe5. 27.♖f4 Black is helpless against White's massive attack.

iii) Finally, we have 23.♖g4, threatening ♖h4. 23...g6 24.♖f6 ♖g7 25.♗h4 Threatening ♖xg7, followed by ♗f6† and ♖h4, mating soon. 25...♖xf6 26.exf6 In view of the threat of ♖xg6†! followed by f6-f7†, Black needs to defend the queen. 26...♖d7 27.♖a3 A familiar rook lift. 27...♖c6 28.♖ag3 Threatening ♖xg6†! 28...♖e7 29.fxe7 ♗xe7 30.♖xg6† fxg6 31.♖xg6† ♗g7 32.♗h6 ♖e8 33.♖xg7† ♖xg7 34.g4 The gradual advance of the connected passed pawns guarantees an easy victory for White.

23.♖h6 ♖f8



24.♖xg7†! ♖xg7 25.♗g4 ♖f8 26.♗xg7† ♖e7 27.♖g5†

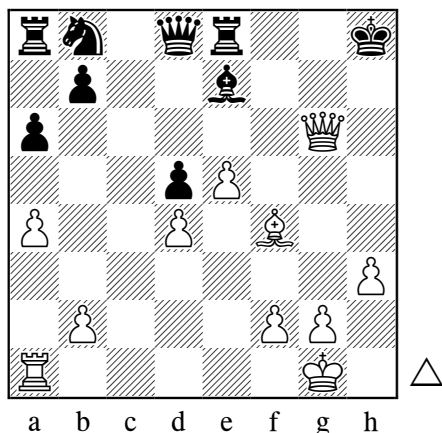
White wins the queen at the end of this line from Polugaevsky.

21...♖c6 22.♖h6 ♖f8 23.♖xg7† does not change anything significantly compared with Polugaevsky's last line above.

22.♖xg6†!

An easy sacrifice to play, since it is obvious that White always has perpetual check in hand.

22...fxg6 23.♗xg6† ♖h8 24.♗h6† ♖g8 25.♗xe6† ♖h8 26.♗h6† ♖g8 27.♗g6† ♖h8



28.♗h5†!

After grabbing the pawn on e6 with gain of time, Polugaevsky switches to the best attacking set-up.

28...♖g8 29.♖h6

Threatening ♗g6†.

29...♖f8 30.♗g6† ♖h8 31.♖xf8 ♖xf8

Each new exchange and sacrifice weakens the defence of the black king, but not the strength of White's attack, as we will see.

Polugaevsky gives the short winning lines 31...♖e7 32.♗f6† and 31...♗d7 32.♖g7†!

32.♗h6† ♖g8

Has White exhausted his resources? Should he force a draw by perpetual?

33.♖a3!

Not really! The reserve rook joins the attack against the naked king.

1-0

Tactics and strategy complemented each other marvellously in this game. On the other hand, we can notice that the manoeuvring phase was relatively short, inducing the thought that the tactical nuances mentioned in the comments and the final combination played the main part.



Polugaevsky contemplates his sixth move against the strong Estonian player Iivo Nei, after the unusual opening sequence 1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.d4 e6 5.♘c3 ♙b4. This is the first round of the Hoogovens tournament, played in Beverwijk on 12 January 1966. Polugaevsky will go on to win the game and eventually the whole event, with an unbeaten score of 11½/15.



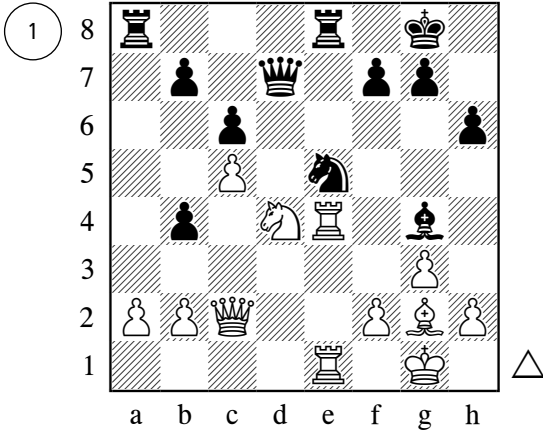
A 21-year-old Jan Timman watches Polugaevsky at the 1973 AVRO tournament.



Rivals again at Wijk aan Zee 1979

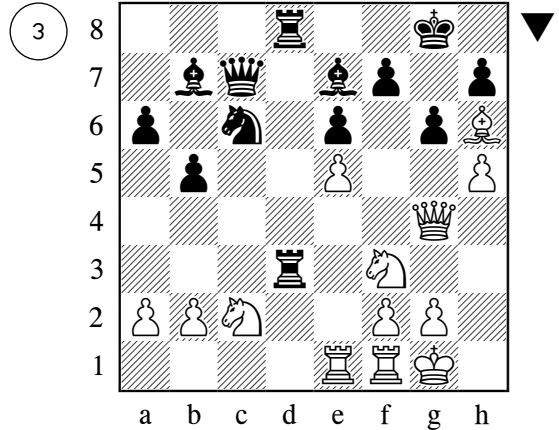
Tests

Polugaevsky – Smyslov, Moscow 1979



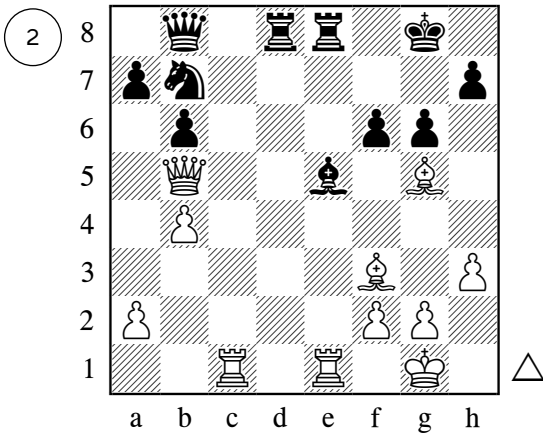
White's advantage is obvious, as Black's minor pieces are hanging and the b4-pawn is weak. There is only one clear path to the win though. Can you find it?

Chikovani – Polugaevsky, Mogilev 1978



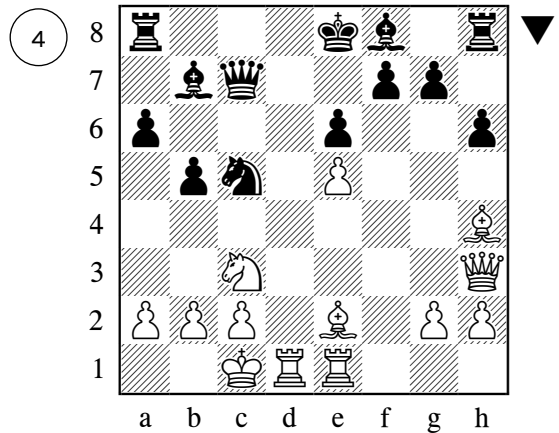
Play continued 22...♖xf3! 23.gxf3 (23.♗xf3 ♜d4 wins material) 23...♜xe5 24.♕f4 ♕d6 25.♕xe5 ♕xe5, when White tried 26.♞d1. Is there a forced win for Black?

Polugaevsky – Bilek, Buesum 1969



White has the bishop pair and the black king is vulnerable. On the other hand, Black has achieved a reasonable regrouping and some control over the dark squares. Polugaevsky's combination proved that the former aspects are more relevant, resulting in a beautiful win.

Grünfeld – Polugaevsky Riga 1979



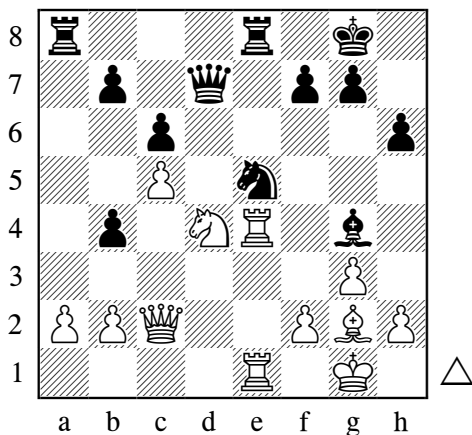
White has a considerable advantage in development, but as so often in the Sicilian Defence, Black has the better structure and promising queenside counterplay. Evaluate Polugaevsky's 17...b4.

Solutions

TEST 1

Lev Polugaevsky – Vasily Smyslov

Moscow 1979



21.h3!!

After this apparently modest move, the black bishop does not have any good squares. When playing it, Polugaevsky anticipated Smyslov's last trick. The alternatives were not as strong:

21.♖xe5 ♜xe5 22.♞e5 ♝xd4 retrieves the piece for Black with an equal game.

21.♞b3± wins the b4-pawn soon, but the technical process of conversion would not be trivial.

21...♙xh3!?

The best chance. Other moves lose immediately:

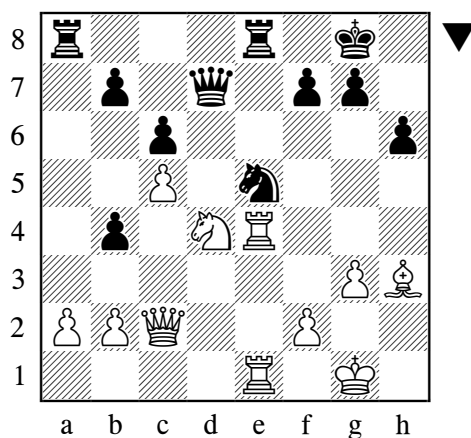
21...♙f5 22.♘xf5 ♝xf5 23.f4 wins the pinned knight.

Or if 21...♙h5 22.♞xe5, the bishop is hanging.



At the Amsterdam IBM tournament, 1972

22...♙xh3



22...♝xd4!

This is the defence Smyslov had relied on.

23. ♖g2!

The planned refutation of Black's combination. White defends f3 and it is inevitable that he will win the knight.

Alternatives are less convincing:

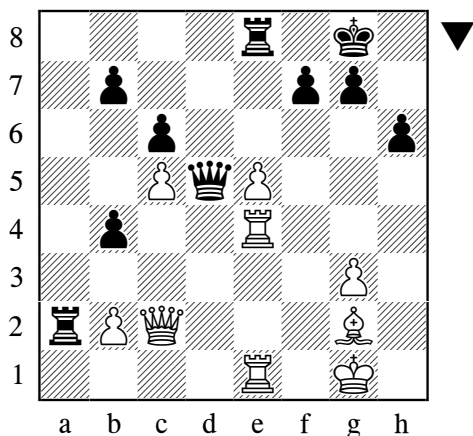
23. ♖xd4? offers Black too much material compensation for the queen: 23... ♗f3† 24. ♔f1 ♖xe1† 25. ♔g2 ♗xd4 26. ♖c4 b3 27. axb3 ♖d8†

23. ♖e2 wins a piece under less clear circumstances than in the game: 23... ♖xc5 24. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 25. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 26. ♖xe5 g6 27. b3 ♖xa2 With three pawns for the bishop Black can still fight.

23. ♔f1 also wins, but it is less natural than Polugaevsky's move.

23... ♖d5 24. f4 ♖xa2 25. fxe5

White soon won.

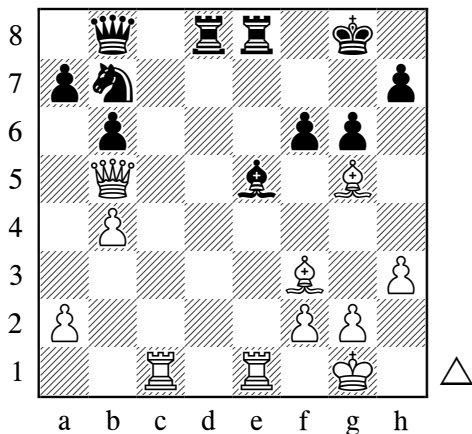


25... b3 26. ♖c3 ♖d8 27. e6 fxe6 28. ♖g4 ♖d7 29. ♖xb3 ♖a5 30. ♖c3 ♖da8 31. ♔h2 e5 32. ♖ge4 1-0

TEST 2

Lev Polugaevsky – Istvan Bilek

Buesum 1969



27. ♖xe5!

This thematic and natural move is the strongest. When playing it, Polugaevsky had to take into account Black's resources.

A neutral move such as 27. ♖h6 allows 27... ♗d6 followed by ... ♗f5 soon, with excellent play for Black due to the control of d4.

27. ♖xf6 wins a pawn, but is not too convincing: 27... ♖xf6 28. ♖xe8† ♖xe8 29. ♖xb7 ♔g7± Black has reasonable chances to hold a draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops, as his king is relatively safe.

27... ♖xe5

Polugaevsky gives 27... ♖xe5 28. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 29. ♖xf6 as winning. Indeed, after 29... ♖f5 30. ♖xd8 ♗xd8 31. ♖c8 ♖f8 32. ♖d5† White has an extra pawn and crushing domination.

28. ♖c4† ♔g7 29. ♖c7†!

It is essential to occupy the seventh rank, as if 29. ♖f4? ♖d7 Black is out of danger.

29... ♔g8 30. ♖xf6!!

The most difficult move of the combination, maintaining control over the seventh rank but allowing a thematic counterblow.

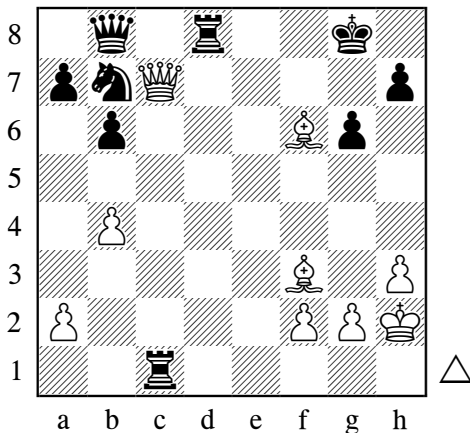
Instead, 30. ♖xb8 ♜xb8 31. ♙xf6 offers White just good compensation for the exchange. The least Black could do is 31... ♜f5 32. ♙h4 ♜xf3!? 33. gxf3 ♜d6 34. ♙g3 ♜c8±. Due to White's kingside weaknesses and the quick path for the black king to the centre, the most likely result is a draw.

30... ♜e1†!

30... ♖xc7 31. ♜xc7 leaves all Black's pieces hanging: 31... ♜e1† 32. ♙h2 ♜d6 (Or if 32... ♜b8 33. ♙d5† ♙f8 34. ♜xh7, White threatens mate in one and wins the b8-rook.) 33. ♙e7 ♜xe7 34. ♜xe7 ♜d8 35. ♜xa7 White has a decisive material advantage.

31. ♙h2 ♜xc1

The white queen is pinned and hanging. Did Polugaevsky miss these aspects?



32. ♙d5†!!

No! Black resigned, as this counter-blow allows White to use the pinned queen to close the mating net: 32... ♙f8 (32... ♜xd5 33. ♖xb8† ♙f7 34. ♖xb7† is curtains, too.) 33. ♙g7† ♙e8 34. ♙f7 mate. A fantastic finish to the combination.

1-0