

THINK LIKE A STRONG PLAYER

Part I

Immediately after every of your opponent's move you should answer to the following 2 questions:

1) What are your opponent's **THREATS**?

A threat can be: a mate attack or other threats against the king, gaining material, gaining a very good position for a piece, gaining the control of an important square, line or diagonal, or other tactical or strategic advantages that the opponent can gain at the next move.

Then, you should evaluate which of the threats are real. Not all threats are REAL and in this concern many chess players usually make mistakes. For example: if your opponent is threatening to gain the bishop-pair, you should evaluate whether this is really negative for you in the *concrete, exact* position you have on the board. Only real threats should be taken into consideration.

2) What are the **CONSEQUENCES** of your opponent's last move?

Almost every move has a good effect and a collateral effect which may be negative (chess moves have pluses and minuses). For example: by moving the bishop from c8 to f5, Black is gaining the control over the b1-h7 diagonal, BUT, at the same time, he is losing the protection of the b7-pawn.

Also, you should always evaluate the consequences of your own moves before playing them.

The consequences of the moves have usually a geometrical nature and they can be: opening a file or a diagonal, blocking a piece with another, weakening a square or a pawn structure, a piece left without defense, and many others that you will soon learn to notice very clearly. All our annotated games at ICS include questions and answers about the consequences of the moves in all important moments, showing you again and again how to evaluate them and also how important this evaluation is in practice.

A strong chess player should be used to evaluate these consequences in a matter of few seconds or even in fractions of a second. It is something you should train your mind to do in order for it to realize these evaluations automatically, after a while, without you even being conscious about it. It will be a very big step forward in your chess improvement and we will insist on this during the 1 year course.

Most of the moves consequences should be kept somewhere in your mind for future uses. *For example*, if at the 23rd move, your opponent weakened his king's protection by

playing his knight away from f6, you can use this later when you decide to go for an attack with Qh5, at the 30th move.

The habit of evaluating the consequences of a move and their recording somewhere in your mind will help you a lot even in developing your calculation power (and also in avoiding overlooks and blunders!). All elements, such as occupied squares, an open diagonal, an overloaded piece, a weak square somewhere, a pinned pawn, are very important during the game of chess and your mind's ability to use them will bring you satisfaction in practical games. In the case of complicated positions (and simpler positions too), your head won't be spinning anymore, instead the position's resources will reveal themselves in front of your eyes sooner and simpler.

So, you will be taught how to evaluate the consequences of chess moves along with all our annotated games, but first you need to know some important elements:

- a) The most important consequences are given by the pawn moves because they cannot move backwards. The pawns defend 2 squares (or 1 square in case of the marginal ones) and the move of a pawn will leave 2 undefended (or even weak) squares but it will defend other 2. Also the pawns can block pieces behind and can fix the structure in the centre for a long time. The pawn moves open files, ranks and diagonals for a long term, so, in conclusion: any pawn move must be very well evaluated.
- b) All moves have one common and very important consequence: Time. This is why all moves should bring you closer to your objective (see "to do list"), they can be useful to you and irritating to your opponent. *For example*, even a move which improves the position of one of your pieces may be bad, because that move might "eat" from the time allocated to a plan, which is more important than the actual move.
- c) Of course, a very important consequence is given by the side where you castle the king. Castling on a different side from your opponent may change completely the character of the future play. Taking this into consideration as well as point b), it might be good to delay the castle in *some* situations.
- d) When playing a piece, some squares on the board become defended or attacked, but other squares become unprotected. This is source of many blunders or overlooks during practical chess you can avoid or take benefit from.

TO DO list

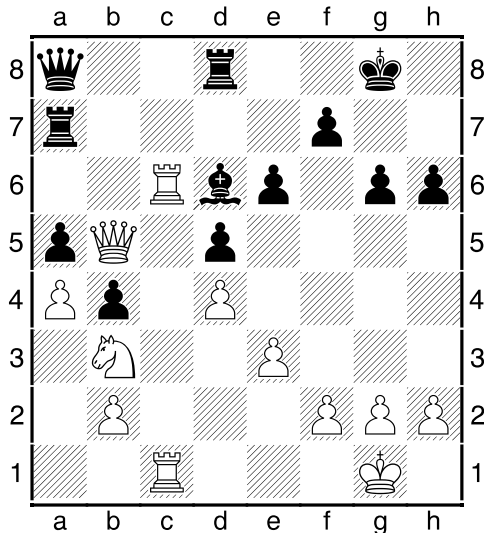
Once every 3-10 moves (this varies a lot according to the position's characteristics), in the key-positions, you should make a "TO DO" list. In this list, you should add all you want to realize in the given position.

Therefore you can add: finishing the development, the occupation of an open file/diagonal, creating weaknesses in the opponent's position, improving the position of your pieces (one of the most important things to be taken into consideration) and so on.

While the first 2 questions (about threats and consequences) should be answered to after every of your opponent's move, the "TO DO" list should be created at some given moments, when the characteristics of the position changed or when some of your "to do" tasks became "done" jobs.

An excellent explanation on what this list is about is given by the following example:

EXAMPLE OF CREATING THE TO DO LIST:



In this position, White's advantage is clear. White conquered the c-file, with an outpost on c5, and Black has a complex of weak squares (a5, b5, c5, c6) immobilizing his pieces in passive defense. Even if White is so strong on the queenside, there is no possibility for him to improve the position or to force a win.

However, for an expert eye, the structure in front of the black king is weak too and White (the former World Chess Champion, Petrosian) will use this weakness to win the game by a direct attack on king. In order to attack the king with major pieces, White needs open files, so he needs to advance the pawns on that side.

Advancing the pawns on the kingside would

weaken the white king's position too, complicating the position with an unclear outcome. So, Petrosian is making up his "TO DO" list:

- 1) Put the king on safe, by bringing him to the queenside (a maneuver which is possible due to the total control of the only open file on the board);
- 2) The advance of the kingside pawns in order to destroy the black king's protections – this is possible because the black pawns are weak and White will be able to force exchanges on that side;
- 3) Bringing the major pieces on the best positions, ready for the decisive transition on the kingside at the right moment ... and, the final attack.

If you are interested, the game continued: 28. g3 Kg7 29. Kf1 Kg8 30. h4 h5 31. R1c2 Kh7 32. Ke1 Kg8 33. Kd1 Kh7 34. Kc1 Kg8 35. Kb1 Kh7 36. Qe2 Qb7 37. Rc1 Kg7 38. Qb5 Qa8 39. f4 Kh7 40. Qe2 Qb7 41. g4 hxg4 42. Qxg4 Qe7 43. h5 Qf6 44. Ka2 Kg7 45. hxg6 Qxg6 46. Qh4 Be7 47. Qf2 Kf8 48. Nd2 1-0

The "TO DO list" is another very important element that will help chess players think in an organized manner, make plans of play, and be consistent in their realization. We will insist on this "TO DO list" during our 1 year course and the annotations, questions and answers of the instructive games will be also focused on how and when to create this list.

If you want to improve your chess, you need to start building and using this TO DO list in every game from now on. It won't be easy to find the right elements to add on this list, but our training will help you. At the same time as your chess knowledge becomes better and wider, you become a better player. However, an unorganized thinking is the worst thing that may happen to a player, so endeavor to organize your mind starting with this moment and you won't find yourself saying "I'm stuck and I don't know why I am not improving?!"

CONSEQUENCES and TO DO LIST

The Consequences of the moves and the "TO DO" list are very strongly connected. **You will see that identifying the consequences of your opponent's moves can extend your TO DO list with new elements such as: a new weaken square could offer to one of your pieces a good outpost, etc.**