

# Chess Praxis

The Praxis of My System

A textbook of practical chess, illustrated with 109 games from my struggles

Aron Nimzowitsch

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## Chapter 1

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# Centralization

This leads to excellent results in modern tournament praxis. The reason is that up until now it has not been well known that under all circumstances the control of the central squares is a strategic necessity; quite often even experienced players simply “run away” from the centre. But in each individual case we must make absolutely sure that any neglect of the central area by the opponent is really punished. Sins of omission as far as the centre is concerned arise because the player is not in the habit of paying attention to the needs of strategy (that is – in other words – strategic carelessness) or because he develops a passion for the flank attack! In the first case, our opponent lets us take the centre away from him and in the second he voluntarily concedes it to us in order to try his luck with a bold sortie down the wing. But a flank attack only has a real chance of success when the centre is closed or can be held stable with a minimum of forces. If the latter is not the case, then the attack fails because of a lack of forces. How can it be possible to successfully link a difficult attack with the heavy demands of a difficult defence? Game 3 illustrates this clearly. The central breakthrough led to complete paralysis – I nearly said demoralization – of the troops taking part in the diversion.

The mechanics of centralization can be seen in the way that, after the necessary restraint of a possibly mobile opposing pawn centre, we draw the noose tighter and tighter around the central

squares. In doing so, we are glad to seize any line or diagonal which may simply pass through the centre. But if we manage to make this long-range action effective and establish some of our pieces in the centre, then we should be really pleased with the success of our policy of centralization. See game 12.

Piling up pieces in the centre in the middlegame (as sketched in above) can be used for a strong attack on the flank, because in the final analysis centralization is not an end in itself, but simply the most rational way to accumulate forces which can be deployed on the wings (see game 8). It is however clear that a sensibly centralized position should in all circumstances be considered *consolidated*.

In spite of everything, a centralized position is not necessarily free from all danger. For example, the opponent might think of getting rid of the centralized pieces by exchanges. In such a case, we need to preserve into the endgame a sufficient remainder of our centralization (game 7). Another danger might be that the opponent *sacrifices* one of his own blockading pieces in order to *suddenly* extend the central terrain. This danger is warded off by aiming to adapt to the new circumstances as soon as possible, perhaps by making a return sacrifice in order to exploit in a sharp way a central blocking diagonal (see game 8). We shall leave you for the present with these short remarks; the rest will become clear from the games themselves and the introductory notes.

### 1. Neglect of the central square complex as a typical, recurring error • The concept of the “central focussing lens”

In games 1 and 2 the central area is neglected for no apparent reason, and in game 3 for the sake of a flank attack; such a strategy can only be successful against faulty counterplay. Compare, moreover, our remarks on pages 13 and 17.

The “central focussing lens” is of course an imaginary instrument, but a very effective one, which in every case tells you whether the move you are about to make would increase or decrease the effectiveness of your forces in the centre. If, during our tournament game in Berlin 1928, Brinckmann had made use of this focussing lens, he would hardly have chosen the move 5...♖b6 after 1.d4 d5 2.♗f3 e6 3.♘f4 ♗f6 4.e3 c5 5.c3 because after 5...♖b6 6.♖b3 ♗c6 7.♗bd2 the centralizing 7...♘d6 proved impossible. Now he should at least have played 7...♘e7, but he chose the decentralizing 7...♗h5 and what came next was a short but effective punitive expedition: 8.♖xb6 axb6 9.♘c7 c4 10.♘xb6 and Black was obliged to recall his knight with loss of time, thus 10...♗f6 which also parries the threat of e3-e4. Next came 11.♘c7 with advantage to White.

Without Black's 7...♗h5, White would have had no justification whatever for his marauding raid, e.g. 7...♘e7! (instead of 7...♗h5?) 8.♖xb6? axb6 9.♘c7 c4 10.♘xb6 ♗d7 and Black gets the attack. We shall find further opportunities to test the usefulness of our lens.

#### Game 1

**Aron Nimzowitsch**

**Carl Oscar Ahues**

Berlin 1928

**1.c4 ♗f6 2.♗c3 c6 3.e4 d5 4.e5 d4 5.exf6 dxc3 6.bxc3 gxf6**

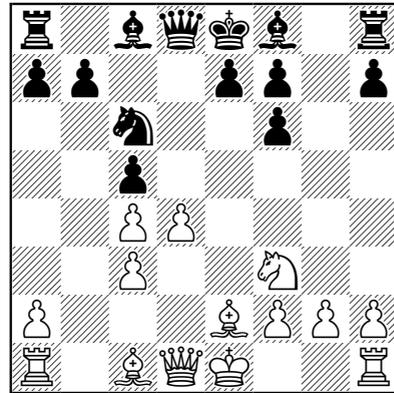
6...exf6 was clearer. Why? It would then no longer be possible to prevent Black from developing with ...♘d6, ...0-0 and ...♞e8. Such a set-up would mean centralization, which is the greatest possible safeguard against any surprise.

Things are very different after the text move (6...gxf6). Black no doubt obtains a “proud” pawn centre, but it is doubtful whether there is a good reason to be proud of this pawn centre at all. Let us examine it: the *mobility* of the said centre is small, e.g. 6...gxf6 7.♗f3 e5 8.d4 e4? 9.♗h4! f5 10.g3 followed by ♗g2 and ♘f4 with paralysing effect. But, as is shown in the note to move 9, “hanging on” to the centre here also proves weak. So, 6...exf6 was the correct continuation.

**7.♗f3 c5**

7...e6 seems positionally more correct, adopting a defensive posture in the centre.

**8.d4 ♗c6 9.♘e2**



**9...f5**

Worth considering was 9...e5 to make a stand (= the policy of hanging on or sitting tight). The continuation would be 10.♘e3 ♖a5 (or 10...b6 11.0-0 then ♖d2, ♗ad1 and White has pressure down the d-file) 11.0-0 ♖xc3 12.dxe5! (much better than 12.♞c1, which would only have driven the queen back into the defence: via a5 to c7) 12...fxe5 (or 12...♗xe5 13.♖d5!) 13.♗g5 ♘f5 14.♗h5 ♘g6 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.♖d5 and wins.

The text move 9...f5 is a serious error, which gives up the whole centre. Relatively the best move was 9...♞g8, although White also remains with an advantage after 10.g3 ♗h3 11.♞b1 ♖c7 12.♖a4 ♘d7 13.♖c2 etc.

**10.d5 ♗a5 11.♗e5**

This decides matters.

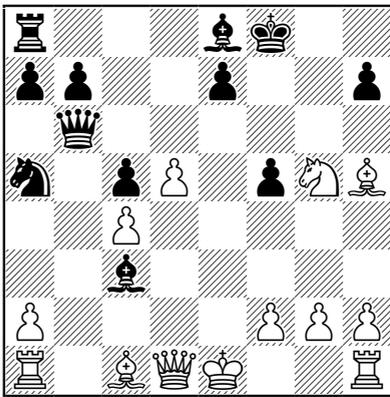
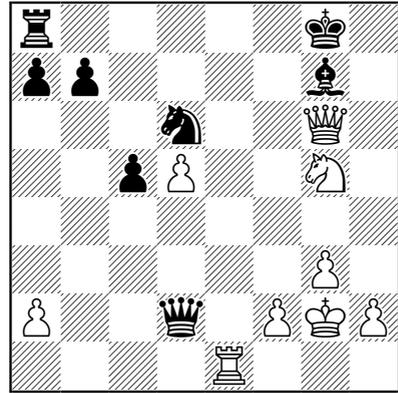
11...♔d7

Or 11...♔g7 12.♖a4† ♕f8 (12...♔d7? 13.♗xd7! ♔xc3† 14.♔d2 ♔xa1 15.♗f6†† ♕f8 16.♔h6 mate) 13.f4 f6 14.♗f3 with total positional domination.

12.♔h5 ♔g7 13.♗xf7 ♖b6 14.♗xh8† ♕f8 15.♗f7

White quite simply returns all the captured material, but obtains a giant of a knight on e6. This is how to do things. You should not always just hang on to material! Flexibility is the watchword! That means transforming one advantage into another.

15...♔e8 16.♗g5 ♔xc3†



17.♕f1!

Not 17...♔d2 on account of 17...♔xh5 18.♖xh5 ♔xd2† 19.♕xd2 ♖b2†.

17...♔xa1 18.♗e6† ♕g8 19.♔xe8 ♖xe8 20.♖h5 ♖a8 21.♖xf5 ♖b4 22.g3 ♖xc4† 23.♕g2 ♖e2

Black is helpless.

24.♔d2

24.♖e1! seems even more accurate: 21...♖xe1 25.♗g5 ♔g7! 26.♖f7† ♕h8 27.♔b2! and wins.

24...♗c4

Or 24...♖xd2 25.♗g5 ♔g7 26.♖e6† with a smothered mate.

25.♖e1 ♖xd2 26.♗g5 ♗d6

The rest is somewhat bloody. Since we are not of a bloodthirsty nature, we shall be brief.

27.♖xh7† ♕f8 28.♖xe7† ♕g8 29.♖h7† ♕f8 30.♖h6† ♕g8 31.♖g6† ♔g7

Poor bishop, its hour has come; its only consolation is not to perish in foreign fields!

32.♖h7† ♕f8 33.♗e6† ♕e8 34.♗xg7† ♕d8 35.♗e6† ♕e8 36.♖e5

1-0

### Game 2

Efim Bogoljubow

Aron Nimzowitsch

London 1927

1.c4 e6 2.♗c3 ♗f6 3.e4 c5 4.g3

Worth considering was 4.♗f3 ♗c6 5.d4 cxd4 6.♗xd4 ♔b4 7.♖d3 (the idea is from Bogoljubow).

4...d5 5.e5 d4 6.exf6 dxc3 7.dxc3

There was nothing wrong with 7.bxc3, e.g. 7.bxc3 gxf6 8.d4 (8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♔b4† 10.♔d2 ♖xd4 11.♔xb4 ♖c4† 12.♔e2 ♖xh1 13.♖d6 ♗c6 ♔f3 and wins). However, the text move is also playable since the black pawn majority should hardly be able to get going.

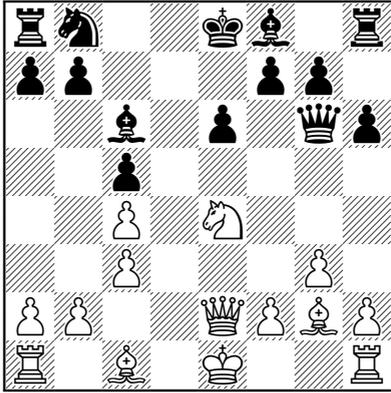
7...♖xf6! 8.♗f3

Here 8.♔g2 had to be weighed up carefully, e.g. 8...♗c6 9.♗e2 e5 10.0-0 and then f4. The text move makes it harder for the bishop's diagonal to be used effectively against the centre.

8...h6 9.♔g2 ♔d7! 10.♗d2!

With this, he to some extent compensates for the error on move 8.

10...♔c6 11.♗e4 ♖g6 12.♖e2



12...♙e7

Not 12...f5 on account of the reply 13.♙f3 then ♗d2 and the e5-square remains permanently weak. You can see that the problem White has to solve here is a double one:

1. Black's majority has to be *restrained*.
2. Dominance of the *centre* must be achieved.

This (double) problem can be solved, up to a point. However, it can only be done by the most accurate use of the forces he has available.

13.0-0 0-0 14.h4!?

He is neglecting the centre! Why not 14.f4! If then 14...♗d7, he plays 15.♙d2 ♖h8! 16.♙ae1 ♗f6 17.♙c1 (intending ♗e4-d2-f3-e5). After the general exchanges started on move 17, then we can still see a possibility of Black advancing his pawn majority.

14...f5 15.♗d2 ♙xg2

He is avoiding the trap 15...♙xh4 16.♗f3!

16.♙xg2 ♗c6 17.♗f3

Intending ♙f4.

17...f4

Barring the gate. Next comes a final attempt at consolidation and then White's game collapses.

18.♙e1 ♙f6 19.♙e4 fxg3 20.fxg3 ♙d6

The g3-pawn is weak, he is badly developed and has an open king position – too much of a bad thing, even when you have a centralized position. It can now be appreciated how much damage was done by 14.h4.

21.g4 ♙xe4 22.♙xe4 ♙af8 23.♙e3 ♙f4

Less experienced readers should pay attention to the work done down the f-file.

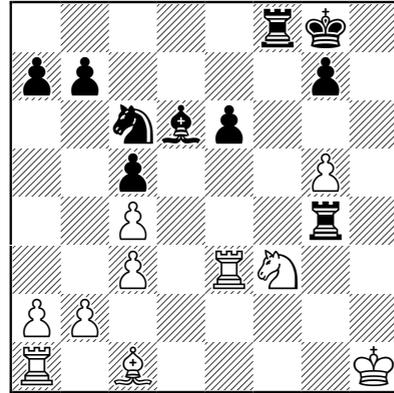
24.g5

24.♙xe6 ♙xg4† 25.♙f2 ♗e5 leads to disaster.

24...♙g4† 25.♙h1

Or 25.♙f2 ♗e5 26.♙e2 ♙g2† 27.♙f1 ♙g3 winning a piece.

25...hxg5 26.hxg5



26...♙f7 27.♗g1

After 27.g6† the best is 27...♙f6 (not 27...♙e7 because of 28.♗h2 ♙h8 29.♙e2 ♙gh4?? 30.♙g5†).

27...♙h8† 28.♗h3 ♙e7 29.b3 ♙f4 30.♙f3 ♗e5 0-1

### Game 3

Aron Nimzowitsch

Theodor von Scheve

Ostende 1907

1.♗f3 d5 2.d3 ♗c6 3.d4!

Because now the opposing c-pawn is blocked by its own knight.

3...e6

3...♗f6 is better.

4.e3 ♗f6 5.c4 ♙e7 6.♗c3 0-0 7.♙d2 ♗e4

Correct play. Note that the invasion could hardly be successfully prevented by 7.♙d3 either (instead of 7.♙d2 as played), e.g. 7.♙d3 ♗b4! 8.♙e2 c5.

8.♙d3 f5

Not very good! You cannot play a Stonewall with a knight on c6. Black should have contented himself with 8...♗xd2 9.♙xd2 ♗b4 10.♙e2 dxc4 11.♙xc4 c5.