

# THINK LIKE A STRONG PLAYER

## part I

**Immediately after every move of your opponent** 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 what of the threats are real.** Not all the threats are REAL and here many chess players make a mistake. For example: if your opponent is threatening to gain the bishop-pair, you should evaluate if this is really bad for you in the *concrete, exact* position you have on the board.

Only the 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 not be good (the chess moves have pluses and minuses). For example: moving the bishop from c8 to f5, Black is gaining the control over the b1-h7 diagonal, BUT, instead, he is losing the protection of the b7-pawn.

The same you do with the opponent's moves, you should do with your own moves. You should always evaluate the consequences of your moves before playing them.

The consequences of the moves are usually of geometrical nature and 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 learn to see very clearly and quickly. 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 the importance of this evaluation in practice.

A strong chess player should be used to evaluate these consequences in a matter of few seconds or even in a second fraction. It is something you should train your mind with now but, in a while, your mind will do it automatically, even without your conscious notice. 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 Consequences of the moves should be kept somewhere in your mind for a future use. *For example*, if at the 23<sup>rd</sup> move, your opponent weakened his king's

protection by playing away his knight from f6, you can use this later when decide to go for an attack with Qh5, at move 30<sup>th</sup>.

The habit of evaluating the consequences of a move and their recording somewhere in your mind will help you a lot even for your calculation power (and also for avoiding overlooks and blunders!). All the elements, 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 ability to use them will bring you satisfaction during your practical games. During complicated positions (and simpler positions too), your head won't be spinning, but the position's resources will unearth themselves in front of your eyes quicker and simpler.

So, you will be taught about evaluating the consequences of chess moves along with all our annotated games, but it is important to give some important elements first:

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

### **TO DO list**

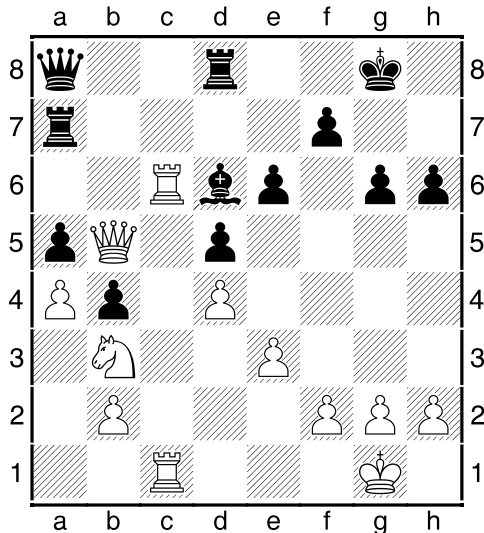
Once at every 3-10 moves (this varies a lot according to the position's characteristics), in the key-positions, you should make a "TO DO" list. In this list, you should add all you want to realize in the given position.

In this list, you can add: finishing the development, the occupation of an open file/diagonal, creating weaknesses in the opponent 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 after every opponent's move, the "TO DO" list should be made up at some given moments, when the characteristics of the position have been changed or when some of your "to do" tasks became "done" jobs.

An excellent explanation on what is this list will be 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 any 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 for them, 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 (maneuver possible because of 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 the chess player to think in an organized manner, to make plans of play, and to 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, apart of the elements to add into it.

If you want to improve your chess, you need to start building and using this TO DO list on every game from now on. It won't be easy to find the right elements to add into this list, but our training will help you and while your chess knowledge will become better and wider, you will become better. However, an unorganized thinking is the worst thing may happen to a player, so endeavor to think in an organized manner right from now and you won't find you saying "I'm stuck and 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. After recognizing the consequences of your opponent's moves, you will learn that some of them (as for example, weakening of a square) will be worth to extend your TO DO list.