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4 The Central Passed Pawn

We have already seen how an isolated centre pawn can surge forward through inadequately defended squares directly in its path. If, in such a situation, the opponent does not consider it advantageous to exchange this pawn, then it may continue further forward, thus becoming a passed pawn (see the game Smyslov-Karpov in the previous chapter). Naturally, there are other means of creating a passed pawn in the centre, but we shall not focus on the creation of a passed pawn here. It will be more interesting for us to study the very essence of the central passed pawn, to understand what is advantageous and what is unfavourable when in possession of a passed pawn in the centre of the board and how to manage it effectively. It must also be mentioned that in this section we will mainly be looking at examples occurring in the middlegame, in so far as it is during this stage of the game that the most interesting events occur.

Smyslov – Keres Zurich Ct 1953

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♙xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 ♖e2 b5 8 ♙b3 ♙b7 9 ♗d1 ♗bd7 10 ♗c3 ♙e7 11 e4 b4?!

This move does not have a good reputation. Theory prefers 11...cxd4.

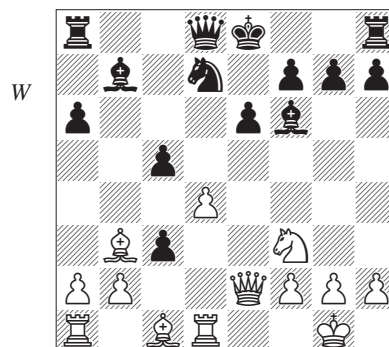
12 e5 bxc3 13 exf6 ♙xf6 (D)

Black also has problems after 13...♗xf6, as shown by 14 dxc5 ♗c8 15 ♗d4 0-0 16 c6! ♙xc6 17 ♗xe6! c2 18 ♗e1, as in Vescovi-Adianto, Bastia 1998.

White now breaks through.

14 d5 e5?!

Black reacts very passively, granting his opponent a clear positional advantage and not having any real counterplay in return. More combative is 14...cxb2 15 ♙xb2 ♙xb2 (15...e5 16 ♗xe5 0-0 17 ♗xd7 ♙xb2 18 ♗xf8 ♙xa1 19 ♗e6! is bad for Black) 16 dxe6 fxe6 (not 16...♙xa1 17 exd7+ ♙f8 18 ♗c4 ♗f6 19 d8♗+) 17 ♗xb2 ♗f6 18 ♗d2 0-0-0 although even



here White has the better chances following 19 ♗g5.

15 bxc3 0-0 16 ♗d2!

The white d5-pawn is the most important factor in this position, considerably restraining Black's pieces. Smyslov transfers the knight to c4 from where it can support the further advance of the pawn while blockading the black c5-pawn, which obstructs the movement of its own pieces – a highly typical stratagem.

16...♙e7 17 ♗c4 a5!?

Keres evidently appreciates the danger to his position and seeks counterplay. After 17...♗e8, 18 ♙a4 is an unpleasant reply.

18 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 19 ♗xe5 ♙f6?!

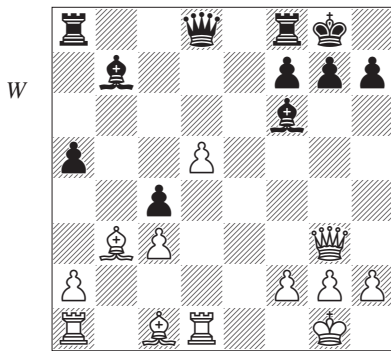
An unfortunate decision. There is no counterplay and the white passed pawn cannot be contained. 19...♙d6 and perhaps even 19...c4 are better moves, although the latter is somewhat dubious.

20 ♗g3 c4 (D)

21 ♙a4!

Black's last move represented an integral part of his plan but White is not forced to capture, as after 21 ♙xc4 ♗c8 22 ♗d3 ♗c7 23 ♗b1 ♗xc4 24 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 25 ♗xb7 ♗xc3 26 ♙b2 ♗c2 Black has chances to save the game. Smyslov's move is stronger – his light-squared bishop moves to support the advance of the passed pawn.

21...♗e7 22 ♙f4!

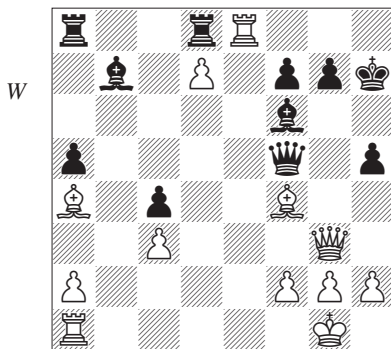


As things turn out, White is prepared to return the pawn provided that he can push his passed pawn.

22...♖fd8

22...♖a3 23 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 24 dxc6 ♖xc3 25 ♖xc3 ♙xc3 26 ♖ac1 is also poor for Black, but by now everything is bad.

23 d6 ♖e4 24 ♖e1 ♖f5 25 d7 h5 26 ♖e8+ ♙h7 (D)



27 h4!

The assessment of the position is simple – Black will have to give up the exchange for the passed pawn. Even so, achieving a large advantage is one thing, but converting it into the full point is something quite different. Of course 27 ♙c7 ♖xd7 28 ♙xd7 ♖xd7 29 ♖xa8 ♙xa8 is also possible but here White still has to overcome prolonged resistance from his opponent based on the bishop-pair (for example, 30 ♙e5?? h4 31 ♖f4 ♖d5). The text-move is directed at exchanging one of the bishops, after which Black's resistance would be greatly weakened. Smyslov's games provide superb assistance for those wishing to improve their technique, as he was always very careful and extremely accurate when realizing an advantage. To tell the truth,

fully mastering this aspect of chess is exceptionally difficult; it would be much nicer to be born with such ability.

27...♖a6 28 ♙g5!

As mentioned earlier, this is stronger than 28 ♙c7 ♖xd7. Now time-trouble is the only difficulty left for White to overcome.

28...♖xd7 29 ♙xd7 ♖xd7 30 ♖ae1 ♖d6 31 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 32 ♖b8 ♖f5 33 ♖h8+ ♙g6 34 ♖d8 ♖b5 35 ♖d6+ ♙h7 36 ♖d8

By repeating moves White gains time, which is important in order to reach the time-control. The rest is simple.

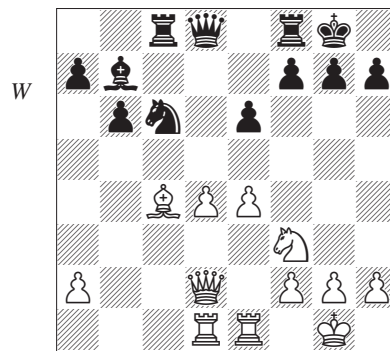
36...♖c5 37 ♖e3 ♙d5 38 ♖h8+ ♙g6 39 ♖d8! ♙f3 40 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 41 gxf3 1-0

In the next game a passed pawn in the centre proves to be a serious force.

Spassky – Petrosian

Moscow Wch (5) 1969

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 d4 c5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e4 ♘xc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♙b4+ 9 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 10 ♖xd2 0-0 11 ♙c4 ♘c6 12 0-0 b6 13 ♖ad1 ♙b7 14 ♖fe1 ♖c8 (D)



15 d5 exd5

This is a well-known variation of the Queen's Gambit. Along with Black's last move, 15...♘a5 is also possible, after which White usually sacrifices a pawn with 16 ♙d3 exd5 17 e5! and turns his attention toward the opponent's king.

16 ♙xd5

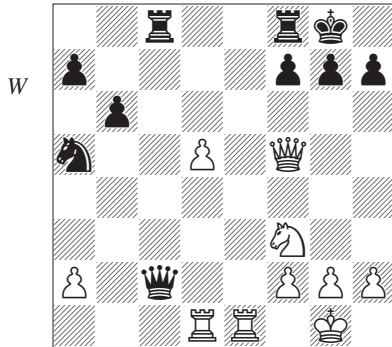
Less popular is 16 exd5 ♘a5.

16...♘a5?

Theory disapproves of this move and instead recommends 16...♖c7 or 16...♖e7. Things are now difficult for Black.

17 ♖f4 ♗c7 18 ♖f5 ♙xd5 19 exd5 ♗c2 (D)

It is difficult to find good moves – White also has a clear advantage after both 19...♘c4 20 ♘g5 g6 21 ♖h3 h5 22 ♙e4 and 19...♗d6 20 ♘g5 ♖g6 21 ♖xg6 hxg6 22 d6! ♘b7 23 d7 ♙cd8 24 ♙e7 ♙c5 25 ♙d6!.



20 ♖f4!?

Spassky had a choice between 20 ♗xc2 ♙xc2 21 ♙e7 ♙d8! 22 ♙xa7 h6!? with an undoubted advantage but unclear consequences, and the move played in the game, which plans to combine the advance of the passed pawn with threats against the black king. It is not easy to say for certain which of these paths is the more accurate as a decision such as this depends largely on the personal preference and temperament of the player.

20...♖xa2 21 d6 ♙cd8 22 d7 ♗c4 23 ♖f5 h6

In the event of 23...♗c6 24 ♙e5, 24...♗e6 seems to be best met by 25 ♖xe6 fxe6 26 ♙c1, when the powerful knight and passed pawn give White a decisive advantage. 24...♖f6!? is also interesting although even here Black is in a bad way.

24 ♙c1 ♖a6 25 ♙c7 b5?! (D)

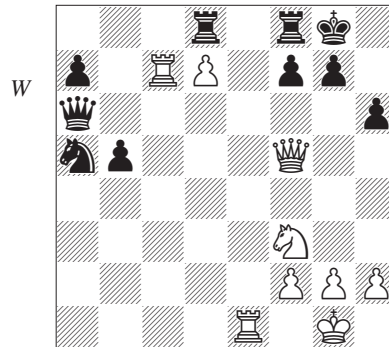
I consider 25...♘b3 to be a stronger move in this position, although after 26 ♗d5 ♙c5 27 ♙e5 White still has an indisputable advantage. After the move played, White's advantage is decisive.

26 ♙d4

26 ♙e8! appears to be more forceful. After 26...♘b7 27 ♙c8 ♖a1+ there is 28 ♙e1, after which I cannot see how Black can continue.

26...♖b6?

The tension begins to tell on both players, but the consequences of their mistakes have

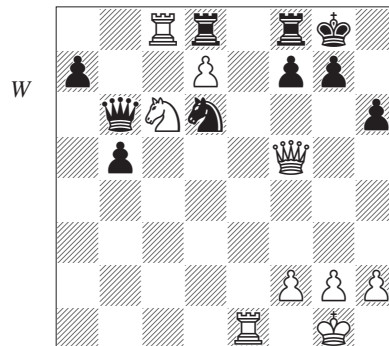


quite different outcomes! Black fails to find the best defence, 26...♗d6! 27 ♘xb5 ♗d2, after which the position is far from clear, but now White wins quickly.

27 ♙c8! ♘b7

The knight cannot be taken by 27...♗xd4 due to 28 ♙xd8 ♙xd8 29 ♙e8+, while 27...g6 28 ♙xd8 ♖xd8 29 ♖xb5 also fails to save the game. The critical line 27...b4 28 ♙e8 ♗xd4 29 ♙xf8+ ♙xf8 30 ♙xf8+ ♙xf8 loses to the shattering blow 31 ♖c5+!!, which Black had evidently missed when making his 26th move.

28 ♙c6 ♙d6 (D)



Black may have overlooked White's next move, but the game is over in any case.

29 ♙xd8! ♙xf5 30 ♙c6 1-0

To summarize – in the middlegame the central passed pawn can be exceptionally dangerous if its advance is supported by pieces. In such positions the passed pawn can force the enemy pieces aside and the space left behind can be used for its own pieces to exploit. At the same time this pawn strives to promote itself to a queen – and sometimes manages to do exactly this! This is why a pawn such as this diverts the