

Introduction

How and why do some chess players win their games in a much shorter time than others? Is it because they're lucky? Is it something to do with their style of play? Or maybe their opponents are just playing weak moves and making a lot of mistakes in the opening?

I suspect that many players would love to be able to finish off their opponents in double quick time, maybe through a brilliant attack or a crafty trap that wins material. Well, this book aims to look at how and why players manage to win in under 25 moves.

It is often a combination of the above factors that lets a player win quickly. After all, a player tends to make his own luck. He does this by picking the right opening and causing his opponent as many problems as possible, especially by throwing them on to their own resources at an early stage. Indeed, your style of play will

have a big impact on the way that the game develops. If you play a slightly risky opening then you will have a better chance of winning quickly, but on the flipside you may also increase your chance of losing quickly. Indeed, you have to be wary about how you approach a game. It is often a good idea to take a bit of a gamble, but usually you must choose the right opponent to take this gamble against.

Despite all of the above, it is still not easy to win in under 25 moves unless your opponent helps you. That is why during the course of this book I have concentrated on how the winner has ruthlessly punished his opponent's mistakes. We will also try to see why one side lost in under 25 moves and what can be learnt from the loser's mistakes. Indeed, having carefully selected the games and highlighted just what the key mistakes were, I hope that

the reader will find each game a simple but instructive lesson. After all, we don't want to repeat the same mistakes!

The Common Mistakes

1. A lack of awareness of the opponent's moves/plans

This appears in the majority of games in this book. The losing player was often just not fully aware of what his opponent was intending.

2. Reacting badly to an opening surprise

A number of players have simply collapsed when they have been taken by surprise in the opening.

3. Playing without a plan

It is all too easy to play meaningless and irrelevant moves if you do not have a plan.

4. Playing into the opponent's hands

You should always try to make life as hard as possible for your opponent. Far too often in this book the losing player has gone that one step too far: for example, he might have grabbed a second pawn when it was time to defend, or he might have thrown himself head-first into an attack when it was time to castle.

5. Defending too passively

This has cost a number of players the

game. Quite simply, passive defence is often wrong.

6. Missing the critical moment

The loser often seemed to have played rather lazily at the key moment(s), possibly due to failing to realize just how critical the position was.

7. Forgetting chess basics


It is often the case that the player on the receiving end of a vicious attack has brought it on himself, especially by leaving his king in the centre or not developing.

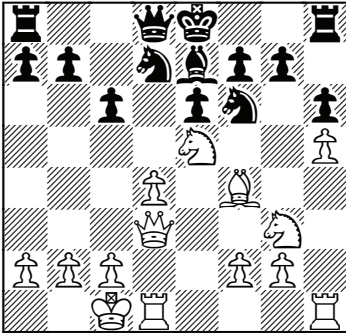
How to Avoid Making These Mistakes

1. Keep your eyes open!

One way to improve immediately is to try and get into your opponent's mind. When he makes a move, do not consider what you are going to do (this will come later!), but first you should think along the following lines: Why did my opponent move that piece? What is he planning? Should I be scared of his plan? How should I stop his plan if I need to? If you start to think like this, you should be able to stop many of your opponent's more dangerous plans.

Let's take a look at an example. This position is taken from Beliavsky-Larsen in Chapter Two.

White has just played 13 e5, so what should Black do?



Well, first of all Black should be thinking: what is White's plan and how, if necessary, do I stop that plan? If Black was thinking along these lines then he would not have played the move he chose in the game:

13...a5?

This is far too slow. Black should have spotted that White was planning 14 ♖he1 and then a sacrifice with 15 ♘g6 or 15 ♘f7. Thus the priority here was to get the black king to (relative) safety. For this reason, for better or worse, Black had to castle kingside. This looks risky, but the black king simply cannot stay in the centre.

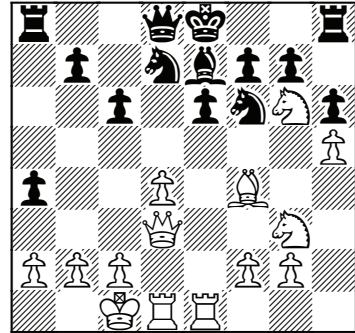
14 ♖he1 a4?

Another major error. Despite being an extremely strong grandmaster, Larsen is playing without a care in the world! Black had to play 14...0-0 here.

15 ♘g6! (see following diagram)

Belivsky has quickly obtained a highly promising position and went on to finish off the game in some style. This just demonstrates that sometimes even top grandmasters lack a sense of

danger. There is hope for all of us!



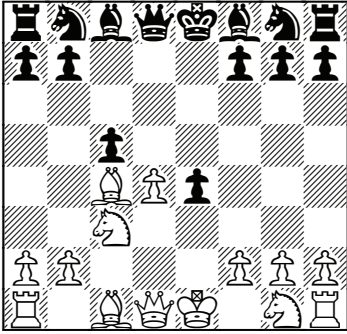
2. Keep your cool

If you are faced with a shocking move do not panic, but try to keep your cool. Think logically, as there is normally a good reason that surprising opening moves are not played. Aim to work out why the move your opponent has played is not employed by the leading players. For instance, perhaps the move weakens the centre or neglects development. If you think along these lines then you will be able to take advantage of your opponents' shocking moves and you may even be able to punish them for giving you a nasty surprise!

In Chapter Two we will see Karl Mah smashing Vuckovic in short order by using a dangerous opening novelty. Let's take a look at the critical position in the opening (see following diagram).

White has just played 6 ♙c4!?, but how should Black react to this plan? If I was faced with a novelty like this, I would want to stick to chess basics, i.e. I would want to develop my pieces. I would not want to play into my oppo-

ment's hands by accepting the sacrifice as he would most likely be well prepared for this. Thus a logical continuation would be:



6...♘f6! 7 ♚b3 ♘c6!

Black develops as quickly as possible and tries to punish White for his unusual opening choice. Black would have a very decent game in this case, even though White can take on f7. However, in the game Black played 6...cxd4? and lost very quickly.

I repeat, when you are faced with a surprise in the opening, do not panic, but try to think logically and continue in a sensible manner.

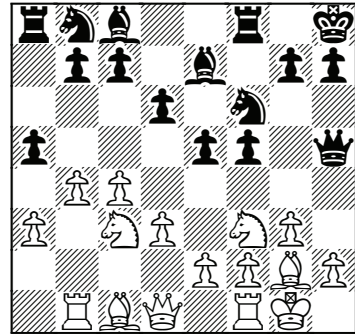
3. Avoid learning an opening parrot fashion

A parrot may be able to speak by listening and repeating some words it hears, but does the parrot actually understand what the words *mean*? That is very unlikely! In a similar manner you really have to know the ideas behind the moves you play.

Do not just learn the moves you

make in the opening, but understand the moves you make! This will help you to handle the resulting middlegame positions better, as you will have an idea about what you should be aiming for there.

Here's a position from Chapter Seven.



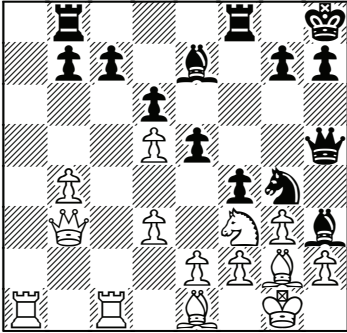
In Sowray-R.Pert Black had employed a Dutch set-up, an opening which may have taken Sowray by surprise. White has to be very careful here as Black is threatening to obtain a large attack after 11...f4!. White needs to take time out from his queenside play to defend, but the game continued:

11 ♚b3?

This is far too slow, but a good example of one side moving their pieces rather aimlessly. White is just playing on autopilot along standard English Opening lines. Here White's queen is actually badly placed on b3. Instead the queen should remain on d1 and White should aim for a queen exchange with e3 and ♘d2. If the queens are exchanged then Black's attack will lose a

lot of its strength. Thus White should have played 11 e3!.

11...f4! 12 ♘d5 ♘xd5 13 cxd5 axb4 14 axb4 ♘d7! 15 ♙d2 ♘f6! 16 ♖a1 ♗b8 17 ♜fc1 ♙h3!? 18 ♙e1 ♘g4!



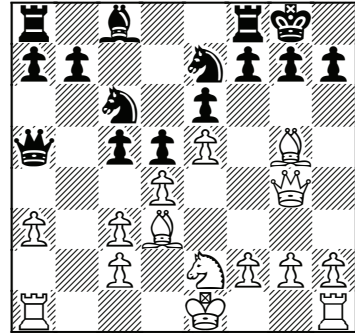
Black has obtained an ideal attacking situation. All of his pieces are hovering around the enemy king and White lacks any real counterplay. Black quickly went on to deliver checkmate.

4. Play to your strengths and avoid playing to your opponent's strengths

If it is clear that your opponent wants a messy, complicated game with pieces flying all over the place, then it may be a good idea to try and play as solidly as possible. This will frustrate your opponent and hopefully tempt him to play in a frivolous manner. I will use one of my own games from Chapter Three, Gullaksen-Williams, as an example of what not to do (*see following diagram*).

I feel much more comfortable when attacking than being on the receiving end of an onslaught. For this reason I was already feeling a bit uncomfort-

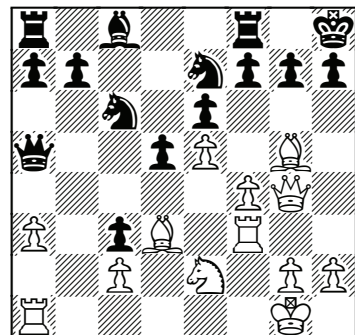
able here as it was clear that White had a dangerous attacking position. This was partly due to a bad opening choice on my part. When entering this line of the French Defence Black has to be willing to defend.



10...cxd4?

This is far too greedy and alarm bells should have been ringing. A better approach would have been 10...♘g6 in order to bring some pieces over to defend the king.

11 f4 ♙h8 12 0-0 dxc3 13 ♜f3

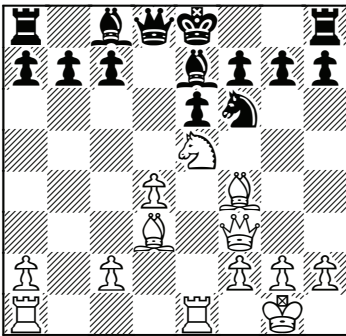


With his rook swinging across to either g3 or h3, White's attack proved far too strong and I lost a painful game.

What did I learn from this game? Well, I never played that opening variation again! Instead I now try to always play in a much more counterattacking manner and avoid those lines which require solid defence.

5. Look for active counterplay

When a player comes under pressure they may well roll up into a ball and try to absorb the blows. This is a common mistake. Instead it is often better to grab the bull by the horns and play as actively as possible. This may mean entering sharp complications, but in some positions you must be willing to do this. Let's take a look at a game from Chapter Three, Stellwagen-Rees.



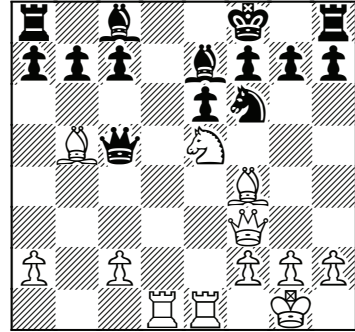
15...0-0?!

This may appear a sensible choice, but Black remained under serious pressure after

16 ♖h3! g6 17 ♜ad1.

For this reason I would have been tempted to try 15...♙xd4!?. This is obviously risky, but as Black was under pressure anyway, why not grab an-

other pawn? At least this means that Black will win any endgame. Play could have continued 16 ♙b5+ ♚f8 17 ♜ad1 ♜c5...



...when White has compensation, but Black is two pawns up! Indeed, an unbalanced game lies ahead.

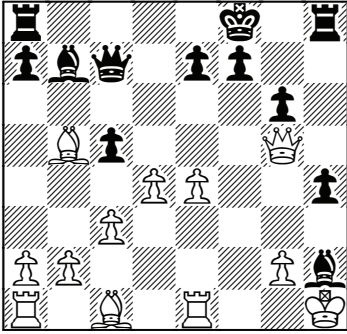
Active defence is often the best way to continue. Try not to be tempted to play too passively, but rather fight fire with fire!

6. Spend more time on critical moments

During a typical game there will likely be three or four critical positions. The important thing to remember is that when these moments arise, you must slow down and really try to get to grips with the position. I'm talking about those positions which require a decision that changes the course of the game. For example, transforming the pawn structure, entering into some tactics, or deciding which pieces to exchange in an endgame. Such moments are often said to be 'critical'.

Let's take a look at one of my wins

to demonstrate where an opponent went wrong at a critical moment. This position is taken from J.Cobb-Williams in Chapter Seven.



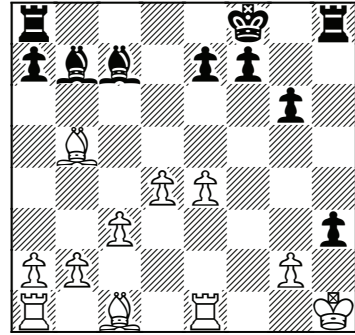
We have a very sharp position on the board. White has good control of the centre, but I have active play on the kingside. It is White to move and the critical move must be 20 ♔xc5. This is obviously what White should analyse first as it wins a pawn and offers an exchange of queens.

When you have a chance to win material, calculate the consequences of capturing that material. If you can get away with capturing the extra material then it is often a good idea to do so. Just think what the latest version of *Fritz* would do!

Instead the game saw:

20 ♙d3? ♗h3!

After this Black's attack proved to be very dangerous and I won in just five more moves. So what would have happened if White had played 20 ♔xc5? Black's best response is probably 20...h3 21 ♔xc7 ♙xc7.



Black's attack looks dangerous, but White is better after 22 d5! hxg2+ 23 ♙xg2 ♖h2+ 24 ♙f3. This could have led to a far different result than in the game.

When you reach a critical moment, slow down and calculate! These decisions can easily change the result of the game.

7. Don't forget to develop and castle

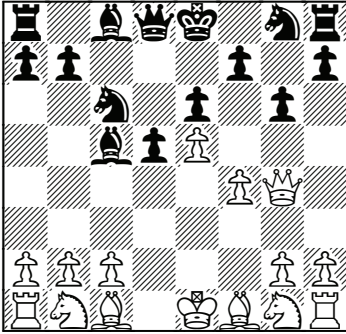
Simple rules really. There is no point in getting flash until your king is safe and your pieces have taken up good squares. An attack will not work without good coordination between the attacking forces. Moreover, it's seldom bad to give your king some protection.

The following position was reached in Sondergaard-Nielsen from Chapter Two (see following diagram).

White has already played the opening stage of the game very badly. He has played the weakening move f2-f4 and the only piece he has developed is his queen, which is most certainly not ideal. But what should White do now?

How to Win at Chess – Quickly!

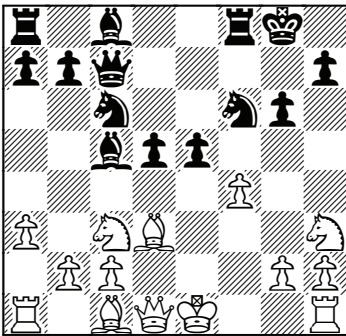
Developing the minor pieces would seem like a good plan, but White had other ideas...



7 a3?

There is no time for this!

7... ♖b6 8 ♘h3?! ♜f6! 9 ♙d3 ♚c7 10 exf6?! ♜xf6 11 ♚d1 0-0 12 ♞c3 e5!



Black is already on the verge of winning. He has the better development and good control of the centre. On the other hand, White's king is stuck on e1 and he is lagging behind in development. Black went on to win in short order.

Chess is a hard pursuit and one mistake can cost you the game, so stay aware, stay awake and keep concentrating! Tim Rice has said that 'chess is the only game greater than its players', which may be true but we still must aspire to improve. Indeed, I hope that you enjoy this book and that it helps to improve your rating! After studying all 50 games you should be able to punish your opponents' unusual or bad opening moves with swift and direct action. I also hope that you will avoid making the same mistakes that a number of the losers in this book made.

Simon Williams,
Farnham,
April 2010