

Tips to improve middlegame play

Note: the following tips were taken from the three recent popular RCA lessons on the topic 'middlegame'.

Lesson-1: Chess Strategy: Weak Squares ([LINK](#))

1) Importance of pawns and pawn moves

- Every pawn move in chess is important.
- Moving a pawn means you **control more squares** forward on the board but also leave squares behind.
- Be careful of making pawn moves, but at the same time we must know that pawn moves are part of the game.
- In order to have a **strong pawn center**, you must have your pieces developed to protect it.
- The most important piece in chess is the king. If you're making a pawn move that weakens your king's position, you must have a very good reason to do so.

2) Remove your opponent's best defensive pieces

Usually, the f3-knight (or the f6-knight) is the strongest defensive piece. It protects the h7 (or h2 for White) square, covers the f-file, and also covers several important squares around the king.



The position at the left appeared after Black played **13...Ng4!** This move trades White's best defensive piece, the g5-bishop.

White's dark squared bishop is very valuable, since it can defend many of his weak dark squares (e.g. e3, d4).

Black wants to play on the dark squares, and White's g5-bishop could be a very strong defensive piece (for example, placing the king on h1 and the bishop on g1 would help White protect his center and his king).

3) Have good development of pieces before expanding your center

The following position at the right appeared after White's move 26.Bb5. Even though White has good central pawns, his kingside has huge weakness and his pieces are not as active as Black's.

WHITE	BLACK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good central control – with the e4-pawn and d5-pawn. • King is in huge DANGER! • His pieces are not perfectly placed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He does not have good central pawns like White. • King is safe. • <u>Pieces are perfectly placed:</u> queen and bishop targeting h3, rook attacks the open g-file, and knight is doing well in the center.
<p>Black won the game after 26...Bxh3 27.Kg1 Bxg2 28.Qxg2 Rxg2+ 0-1</p>	



Lesson-2: Bobby Fischer's middlegame rules for playing great chess! ([LINK](#))

RULE – 1: Make sure EVERY piece is always ACTIVE.

- Fischer always made sure his pieces were active.
- He almost never had any bad/passive piece.
- He would recognize the passive pieces (if any) and develop them to make them ACTIVE.
- He avoided unnecessary complications and just brought pieces into play.
- It is essential to have effective PIECE COORDINATION to organize your pieces and make them ACTIVE.

RULE – 2: Attack: move your pieces to the opponent's side of the board.

- Focus your attention on your opponent's half of the board.
- Fischer was known as a player whose main idea was to stymie the opposite side.
- COUNTER-ATTACK is almost always better than defensive moves.
- With this algorithm to find attacking moves, you will find a lot of tactical motifs (pin, discovered check/attack, knight fork, smothered mate, windmill and so on) easily, like Fischer did.



It's Black to play in Diagram 1. Fischer's queen on b6 is under attack. How should Black play here?

By applying "Fischer's Rules", Black should make:

- an attacking move, and
- do so on the opponent's side of the board.

So Black played **17...Be6!** – a counter-attacking move. This move attacks White's c4-bishop. After **18.Bxb6 Bxc4+ 19.Kg1 Ne2+ 20.Kf1 Nxd4+** follows the tactical motif called windmill.

After **21.Kg1 Ne2+ 22.Kf1 Nc3+ 23.Kg1**, Black plays another brilliant move **23...axb6!** – bringing his inactive a8-rook into play!

Diagram 1

Let's see if you can solve the following puzzle, from another Fischer game, by using the "Fischer's Rules".

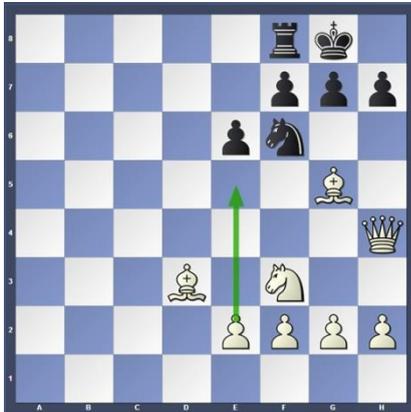


White to play

Can you find the winning blow for White? After calculating all possible variations, please check the answer [HERE](#).

Lesson-3: Deadly attacks in chess: opposite castling ([LINK](#))

Opposite-side castling games are usually very exciting. Because both kings are on opposite wings, each player takes this opportunity to create powerful pawn storms against the opposing king. The side with the **greater initiative** and **faster attack** will most likely win.



kingside

This is a dream position for a kingside attack. The knight on f6 (or f3 for White) is the best defender on the kingside.

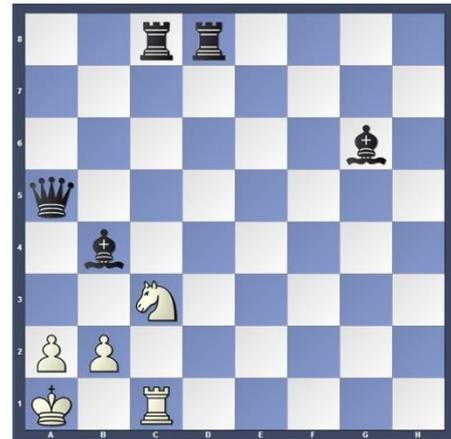
What do you want to achieve?

- Light-squared bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal to create mating threats on h7.
- Pawn on e5 vs pawn on e6.

On the queenside, the position changes significantly if White/Black does not possess a c-pawn.

The most important things are:

1. **Control over the d-file:** this stops White's king from escaping toward the center/kingside.
2. **Possession of bishops:** bishops are very important for the aggressor to achieve victory (the light-squared bishop is extremely strong, since White's king's activity is limited to the a1 square).



queenside

- ✓ Whenever you reach opposite-side castling positions, make sure you **prioritize activity**. It is extremely rare that opposite-side castling positions don't correlate with king assaults. Even in closed positions, both sides attempt to open it up.
- ✓ **Make a plan before you start attacking**. It is important to have a general idea of where you want to locate your pieces and what you want to do. Recognize your opponent's weaknesses and how you can use your pieces to attack. Make sure you also understand your opponent's plan.
- ✓ **Create threats**. The best way to attack is by creating threats while you develop. This way, you force your opponent to defend/worsen his position while you improve yours.

I wish you well-deserved success!

GM Igor Smirnov