

Bishop versus Knight

The Eternal Battle

Volume 1



First edition 2021 by Thinkers Publishing
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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard

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Proofreading: Bob Holliman

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Production: BESTinGraphics

ISBN: 9789464201161

D/2021/13730/27

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Boroljub Zlatanovic

Thinkers Publishing 2021





*Thanks to my lovely wife Marijana
for her wholehearted support*

Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊕	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+—	White has a decisive advantage
—+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Foreword

In his new endgame series, Boroljub Zlatanovic shows a profound understanding of the most common material imbalance in chess: that of the bishop against knight. The didactic concept of the book is admirable as well as the detailed explanation of the typical characteristics of this endgame. Despite the importance of this subject it has received very little detailed coverage in chess literature and this encyclopedic work will definitely fill this gap and offer a lot of useful tips for practical play.

Alexander Delchev
March 2021

Preface

Bishop or knight? An eternal dilemma! The legendary Bobby Fischer would likely vote for the bishop. Other authorities like Nimzowitsch would prefer the knight. The truth is somewhere in the middle. Of course, it is clear a bishop usually dominates in open positions while the knight should be preferred in blocked positions. But what does that “usually” mean? Are there exceptions? Sure, a bishop can dominate even in a blocked position if the controlled diagonal is important. Further, the knight can dominate in open positions if there is a good outpost or influential place for it.

The pawn structure definitely determines the minor pieces' prospects, and it is extremely important to predict the future properties of the pawn structure early in the game. Nowadays it is not enough to start thinking about the endgame in the middlegame. Today's masters begin their opening strategy based on the arising endgames! Knowing the arising endings may give you some advantage even if the opponent obtained some initiative as was Petrosian's manner.

By studying this book you should discover many properties regarding the combat between the bishop and knight which will open new horizons in your chess understanding.

In this book (Volume 1) I will present direct combat between the bishop and the knight. You may consider this a prelude to Volume 2 where the story will develop with more complex battles as other pieces will be added. There will be sections with rooks and queens added where either the knight or bishop will be superior.

I have no doubts that if you carefully analyze the material in both volumes, you will master both the basic and advanced endgames where one of the key factors will be the material imbalance between having either the bishop or the knight.

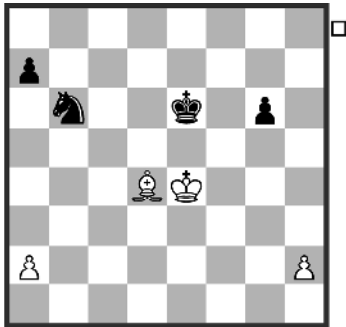
Boroljub Zlatanovic
April 2021



When the Bishop is Superior

Game 1

♁ Krnic, Zdenko (2400)
 ♀ Flear, Glenn C (2460)
 🌐 Wijk aan Zee 1988



It is clear that the bishop is better than the knight in open positions, especially in positions with pawns on both sides. Because of that the next example is tragicomic. The opponents just agreed to a draw... in a winning position for White.

As was proven by Dvoretsky, White is winning after

41. ♔f4

It may look like Black should just sacrifice the knight for the h-pawn and go to a8 with the king securing a draw. However, this cannot be achieved.

41... ♞c8

No other squares are available as the a7-pawn is under attack

41... ♔f7 **42.** ♞xb6! [42. ♔g5 leads to an inverted move order] **42...** axb6 **43.** ♔e5! wins by force.

42. ♔g5 ♔f7 **43.** a4 a5

The most challenging defense.

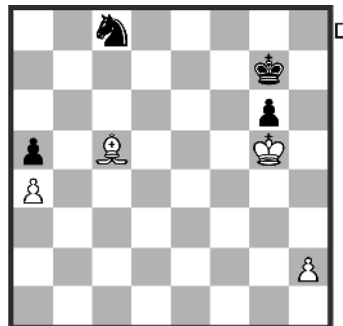
A) 43... ♞b6 44. a5! ♞c8 [44... ♞c4 45. a6+–] 45. a6+–

B) 43... a6 44. ♞c5 ♔g7 45. a5 also wins.

44. ♞c5!

White starts by paralyzing the knight.

44... ♔g7



Position after: 44... ♔g7

The queenside can now be put on hold as White begins to encircle the g6-pawn.

45. h3!

45. h4 fails after 45... ♔f7 46. ♔h6 ♔f6.

45... ♔f7 46. ♔h6 ♔f6 47. h4!

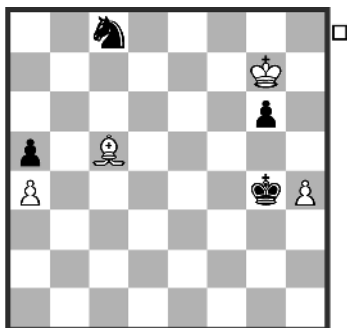
47. ♔h7?! ♔f5 48. ♔g7? [48. ♔h6 with a repetition would win.] 48... g5! 49. ♔f7 g4

A) 50. h4 g3 51. h5 g2! 52. h6 ♘d6+!
53. ♔g7 [53. ♔e7 ♘e4=] 53... ♘e4=

B) 50. hxg4+ ♔xg4 51. ♔e6 ♔f3 52.
♔d7 ♔e4 53. ♔xc8 ♔d5 54. ♘b6
♔c4 55. ♘xa5 ♔b3 with a draw.

47... ♔f5 48. ♔g7 ♔g4

48... g5 49. h5!



Position after: 48... ♔g4

49. ♔f6!

49. ♔xg6? ♔xh4 and the black king would be able to reach the queenside in time.

49... ♔xh4 50. ♔e6 ♔g4

Marching the g-pawn gives nothing.

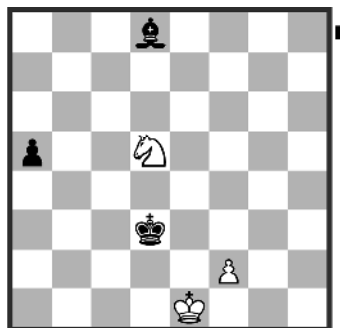
51. ♔d7 ♔f5 52. ♔xc8 ♔e6 53. ♔c7
♔d5 54. ♔b6

After a series of more or less forced moves it becomes clear the black king is unable to reach a8, so Black decides to throw in the towel.

1-0

Game 2

♁ Arnason, Jon Loftur (2435)
♂ Kasparov, Garry (2595)
🌐 Dortmund 1980



This is a very well-known game. Kasparov obtained the bishop pair out of the opening and just exchanged on d3 to convert his positional advantage. Black's active king and ultrapowerful bishop secure an easy win for Black. The point is that the white king cannot reach a2 but it can reach a1 where it will get mated!

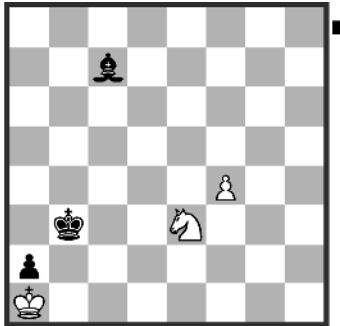
51... a4

51... ♔c4 with ...♔b3 also wins with a different move order.

52. ♔d1 a3 53. ♔c1 ♔c4 54. ♞e3+ ♔b3 55. f4

Instead of resigning White decides to try something.

55... ♞c7 56. ♔b1 a2+ 57. ♔a1



Position after: 57. ♔a1

57... ♞a5

But not 57... ♞xf4?? 58. ♞c4!!=.

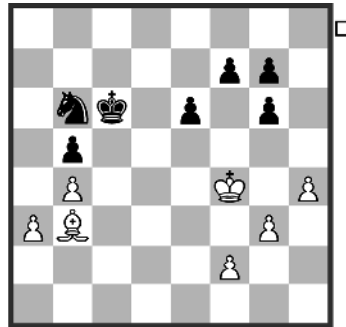
58. ♞d5 ♞d2

There is no defense against Black transferring the bishop to b2 with mate. White resigned.

0-1

Game 3

♟ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2402)
♜ Yordanov, Lachezar (2243)
♁ Skopje 2017



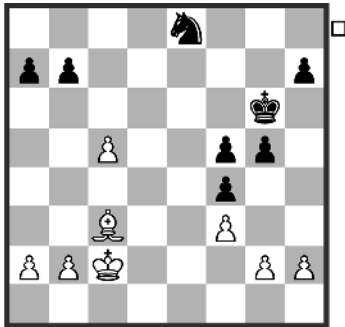
It is a well-known fact that the knight cannot be easily transferred from one side to another whereas the bishop can easily move from one side to the other. The above position comes from one of my own games. White is optically better due to the black pawn structure on the kingside, but the position is fairly closed, and a draw is likely. However, there is a great possibility provided the calculations are correct.

42. ♞xe6!! fxe6 43. ♔g5

Black resigned. White's h-pawn is unstoppable. Try setting up a board and working out the variations without moving the pieces. **1-0**

Game 4

♁ Fischer, Robert James
 ♚ Addison, William
 🌐 Cleveland 1957



It is very important to remember the possibility of paralyzing the knight. In our next position young Bobby Fischer did not miss it. White is winning because he is practically a pawn up – Black cannot create a passed pawn on the kingside. This is Black’s main problem in the 5...exf6 Caro-Kann and he must avoid simplifications. The white bishop dominates the knight after the next move.

29. ♖e5!

From this moment on the game is played on the principals of pawn end-games. Without minor pieces White is simply winning. The same evaluation is valid for the ending with these minor pieces.

29... ♙h5

Black tries something but White simply advances.

30. ♔d3 g4 31. b4 a6 32. a4 gxf3 33. gxf3 ♕h4 34. b5 axb5 35. a5!

That is the fastest win.

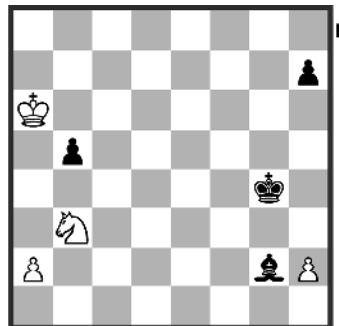
35... ♔h3 36. c6

Black resigned as the rest is easy.

1-0

Game 5

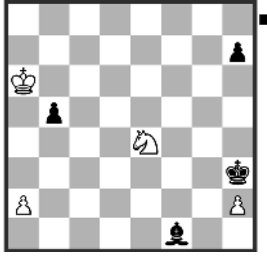
♁ Zueger, Beat (2445)
 ♚ Kouatly, Bachar (2440)
 🌐 Geneve 1988



This example is trivial. White is simply lost as the black bishop easily stops the a-pawn and prevents White from sacrificing the knight for the Black h-pawn.

35... ♙h3

35... ♖f1? looks natural but after the surprising 36. ♘c5!! ♙h3 37. ♘e4!



Position after: 37. ♖e4!

37... h6 [37... ♔xh2 38. ♘f6 h6 39. ♘g4+=] 38. ♘f2+ ♔h4 39. ♔b6 ♔g5 40. ♔c5 ♔f4 41. ♔d4 ♔f3 42. ♘e4 ♔g2 43. ♘f6 Black cannot win.

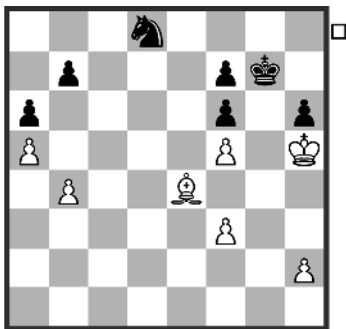
36. ♔xb5 ♔xh2 37. ♔c4 h5 38. ♔d3 h4 39. ♔e2 ♔g3 40. ♘d4 h3 41. ♘f5+ ♔f4 42. ♘e3 h2

White resigned.

0-1

Game 6

♖ Liberzon
♜ Mititelu
♜ Luhacovice 1971



The knight habitually has problems in stopping edge pawns. The following tactical motif is well known and you should remember it.

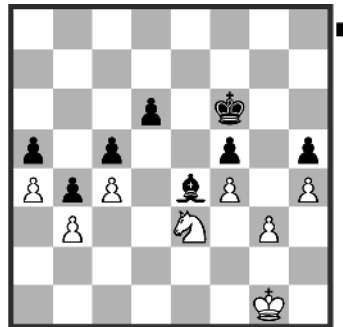
1. b5!

Black resigned on account of 1. b5! axb5 2. ♙xb7!.

1-0

Game 7

♖ Karpov, Anatoly (2725)
♜ Anand, Viswanathan (2635)
♜ Linares 1991



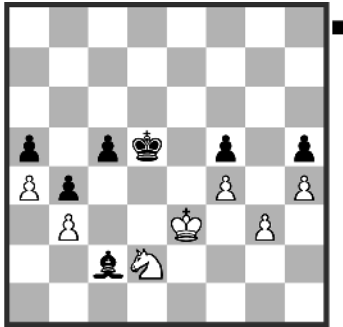
This is a more complicated situation but only at first sight. The black bishop clearly dominates and is ready to attack White's weak queenside pawns. The position may be closed but the knight is not a better piece here. The knight is forced to go to a passive position on d2 to protect the weak b3-pawn. After

opening the position via ...d5 Black will have a much more active king and zug-zwang easily can occur.

40... ♖b1 41. ♘f1 ♙c2! 42. ♘d2

The minor pieces have done their jobs. It is time for the kings to engage.

42... ♔e6 43. ♔f2 d5 44. cxd5+ ♔xd5
45. ♔e3



Position after: 45. ♔e3

45... ♙d1!

Forcing the white king to come to d3 when a nice tactical shot will decide game.

46. ♔d3

46. ♔f2 ♔d4

46... ♙xb3

A decisive fork follows the capture on b3 thus White resigned.

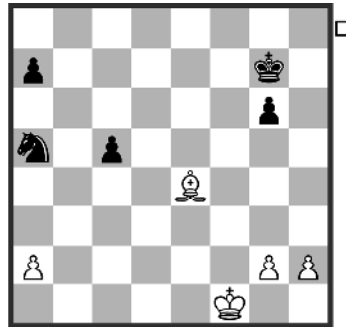
0-1

Game 8

♖ Spassky, Boris Vasilievich

♚ Fischer, Robert James

♁ Santa Monica 1966



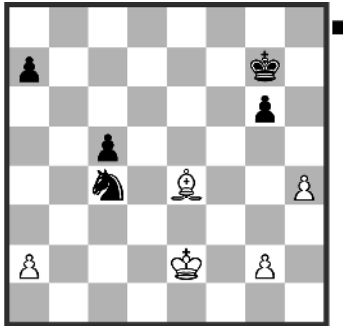
The diagram shows a famous ending between Spassky and Fischer. This ending has found a place in many books as a typical example on our topic. The bishop is better than the knight with pawns on both flanks. Black's position looks hopeless. There are two methods of defense for Black: (1) establishing a barrier and (2) transforming the end-game to a theoretical draw by eliminating the white a- and g- pawns. Let us see what happened.

35. h4?!

Played to fix a target on g6.

35. ♔e2 ♘c4 36. ♔d3 is natural, although after 36... ♘d6 Black sets up a barrier.

35... ♘c4 36. ♔e2



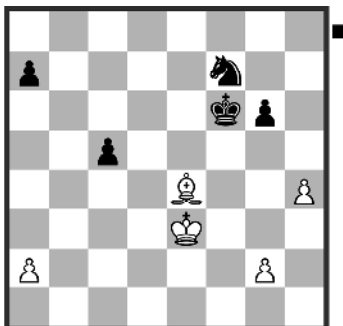
Position after: 36. ♔e2

36... ♘e5?

36... ♘d6 would be better, while 36... ♔h6 is the best move. Having prevented h5, Black will go for ...g5. After trading pawns, he should be able to achieve a draw.

37. ♔e3 ♔f6 38. ♔f4 ♘f7 39. ♔e3?!

39. ♙d5 ♘d6 [39... g5+ 40. hxg5+ ♘xg5 41. ♙c4 must be winning.] 40. g4 threatening g5 and ♔e5 should be winning.



Position after: 39. ♔e3?!

39... g5?

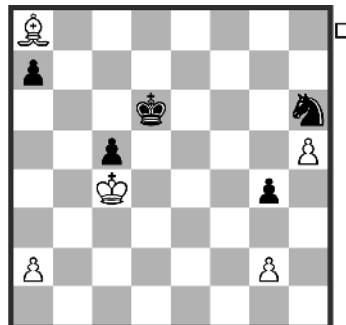
There was not need to play this. If White returns, Black should follow the same recipe. 39... ♘d6 with the above-mentioned barrier.

40. h5 ♘h6

40... ♘d6

41. ♔d3 ♔e5 42. ♙a8 ♔d6 43. ♔c4 g4

Or 43... ♘g8 44. a4 ♘h6 45. a5 ♘g8 46. ♔b5 ♘h6 47. ♔a6+-.



Position after: 43... g4

44. a4

Nice technique. The candidate pawn for promotion should be advanced even before it becomes a passer.

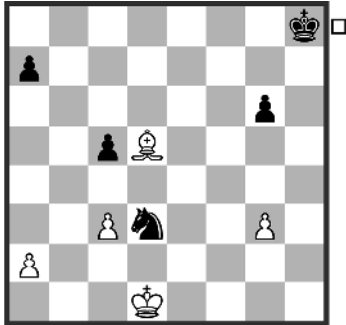
44... ♘g8 45. a5 ♘h6 46. ♙e4 g3 47. ♔b5 ♘g8 48. ♙b1 ♘h6 49. ♔a6 ♔c6 50. ♙a2

Black resigned.

1-0

Game 9

♁ Wojcieszyn
♚ Gerss
♁ BRD 1975



White is much better due to his better bishop and more active king. With his next move White activates his king.

1. ♖e2?!

1. ♖c2! ♗e5 2. ♖b3 would be better as the white king will invade via the queenside.

1... ♗e5

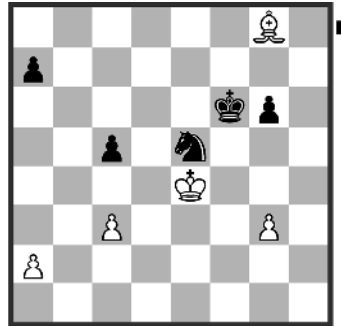
1... ♗b2 loses to 2. ♖b3.

2. ♖e3 ♖g7 3. ♖e4 ♖f6 4. ♖g8?!

Vacating the d5-square for king.

4. ♖b3 would be a more precise way to vacate d5, but after 4... g5 [4... ♗g4 now would be bad because after 5. ♖d5 ♗f2 6. c4 White should win.] 5.

♖d5 ♗d3 6. ♖c2 [6. ♖c4 ♗f2] 6... ♗c1 7. a4 ♗e2 is defendable.



Position after: 4. ♖g8?!

4... ♗c6?

4... ♗g4! 5. ♖d5 ♗e3+ 6. ♖xc5 ♗f5 7. g4 ♗h6 is a nice, forced line leading to a draw.

5. ♖b3

5. ♖d5?? ♗e7+→

5... ♗e7 6. g4

Black is almost in zugzwang.

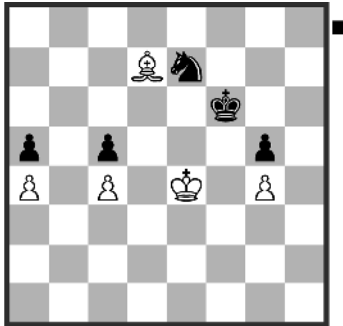
6... ♖g5

6... g5 would not help as will be seen.

7. ♖e6 ♖f6 8. ♖d7 g5

With Black to move the white king would penetrate therefore White must pass the move to Black.

9. a3! a6 10. a4 a5 11. c4



Position after: 11. c4

Finally reaching the zugzwang position.

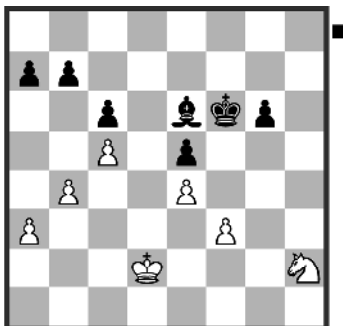
11... ♖g6 12. ♔d5 ♕e7 13. ♗f5 ♞h4
14. ♚e4

Black resigned.

1-0

Game 10

♚ Vasilchenko
♜ Gleizerov
♜ SSSR 1987



Black's more active king and White's passive knight gives us a clear diagnosis

that Black is much better. It is his turn, and he activates his king.

1... ♖g5 2. ♔e3 ♗h3!

A good waiting move which paralyzes the knight. Black looks to penetrate via f4 with his king.

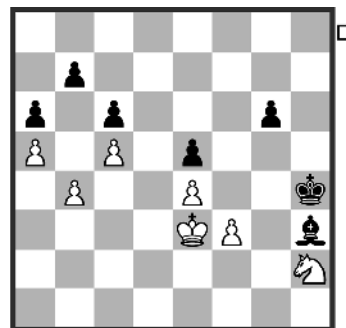
3. a4

3. ♔e2 allows infiltration via f4. After 3... ♖f4 4. ♔f2 g5 5. a4 a6 6. a5 g4 the game is easily won for Black.

3... a6

Eliminating any sort of counterplay on the queenside.

4. a5 ♔h4



Position after: 4... ♔h4

Zugzwang is coming.

5. f4

5. ♔f2 g5 6. f4 a desperate try: 6... g4!
7. ♔e3 ♖g3+.

5... ♔g3!

The only move to win the game.

6. f5 ♔xh2

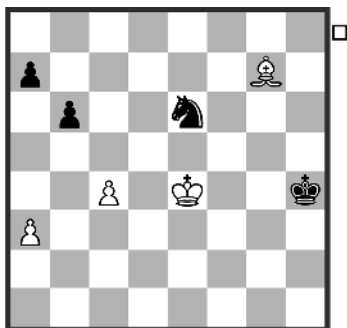
Black avoided all the tricks and White resigned.

6... gxf5?? 7. exf5 with a draw!

0-1

Game 11

♖ Mecking, Henrique (2620)
 ♜ Uhlmann, Wolfgang (2555)
 🌐 Manila 1976



The bishop will occupy a central post paralyzing the knight and will further be able to attack the black pawns from behind. White's serious positional advantage is evident, but material is reduced, and the black king is not as far from the queenside as it may appear.

43. ♙e5 ♘c5+

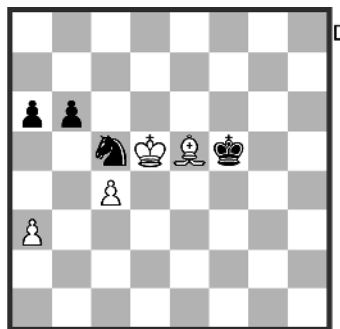
43... ♔g4 44. ♙d5 ♙f5 45. ♙b8 ♘f4+
 46. ♙c6 ♘d3 47. ♙xa7 ♘e5+ 48. ♙d5
 ♘d7 would also lead to a draw.

44. ♙d5 ♙g4 45. ♙b8 a6 46. ♙e5

The bishop eyes the d4-square.

46. ♙a7 gives nothing after 46... ♘a4.

46... ♔f5



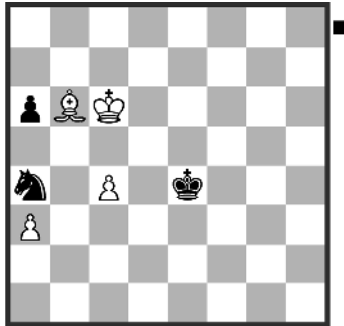
Position after: 46... ♔f5

47. ♙c3

While it was good to place the bishop on d4 White wants to play a better version where the black king is held back a bit.

47. ♙d4 ♘a4 48. ♙c6 ♙e4 49. ♙xb6
 ♘b2 50. c5 ♘c4 51. a4 ♙d4 would lead
 to a draw.

47... ♘a4 48. ♙d4 ♙f4 49. ♙c6 ♙e4
 50. ♙xb6



Position after: 50. ♖xb6

50... ♔d3??

50... ♞b2 is drawish. After 51. c5 ♞c4
52. a4 ♔d4 we achieve the drawish position mentioned above.

51. c5 ♔c4

Now the black king is on the "wrong" side, he should not stand behind the passed pawn because there are no chances to secure a draw by sacrificing the knight for the c-pawn in some positions.

52. ♙a7 a5

52... ♞c3 53. ♔b7+-

53. ♙b6 ♔b3 54. ♔b7 ♞c3 55. ♙xa5
♞d5 56. ♙b4

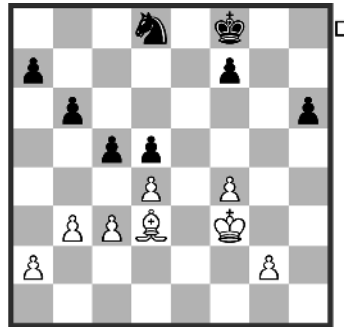
White has connected his pawns and the win is secured.

56... ♞e7 57. c6

Black resigned. 1-0

Game 12

♙ Browne, Walter Shawn
♚ Pilnik, Hermann
🌐 Lone Pine 1975



Black just made a terrible positional mistake by advancing his pawn from c6 to c5. Instead, he should just regroup to c5. Instead, he should not stand behind the passed pawn because there are no chances to secure a draw by sacrificing the knight for the c-pawn in some positions. His move is a mistake as it not only allows White to open the position, but it gives White the option of creating an outside passed pawn after exchanging on c5 followed by b4. However, White has a more concrete way in mind.

45. dxc5 bxc5 46. c4!

Yes, this is the way.

White allows the pawns to be fixed on the "wrong" color while opening up the e4-square for his king. The impact is immediate, the game is practically over.

46... d4