

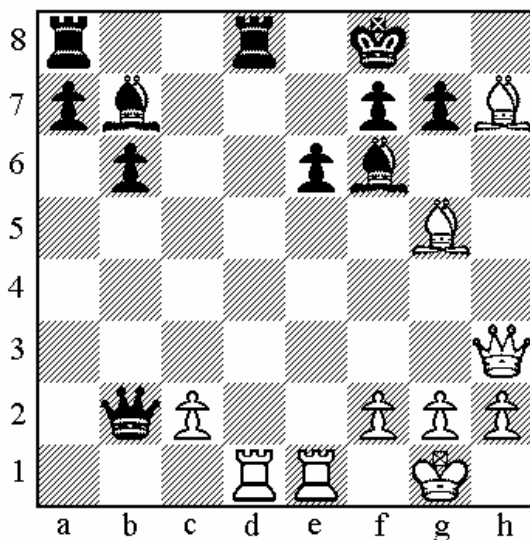
MISSING OPPORTUNITIES

By Bob Basalla

If you play chess long enough you will eventually have a collection of games where you regret that you failed to see some neat tactical idea. Sort of like the bird watcher who was looking the other way when his one and only chance to spot the rare green billed, ruby breasted, golden domed, yellow-eyed sapsucker flew by behind him. Well, unless someone tells him, the bird watcher would be luckier than the chess player, because the chess player is sure to find the tactic, or be shown it at some time afterwards. And the laments begin: Why oh why didn't I see that?

As examples of missed opportunities I will present positions from two of my games. These are not particularly painful examples as I won both contests anyway, but I still wish I had seen these "sapsuckers" when they flitted into view. They would have been prized specimens in my zoo of good moves.

For best appreciation, set up the following position on a board:



It is my (White's) move in this position from a Cleveland Chess League game in the mid-1980's. (Yes, we had chess even back then—and the wheel and fire, too!) A quick scan of the scene shows that I am trying to mount an attack against the Black king of my fellow expert opponent as compensation for the queenside pawns taken by his foraging queen. Note that his position is quite compact and not easy to breach.

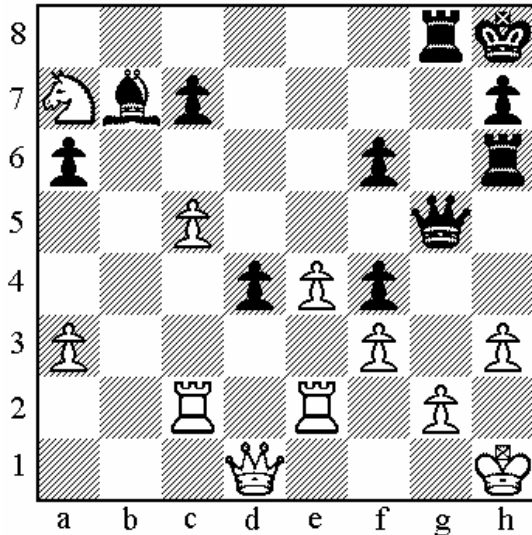
I played **1.Bg5-c1** to redeploy and keep the initiative. He responded **1...Rd8xd1** under the general principle of reducing the attacking forces and trading pieces when up a pawn. Note I cannot grab the queen (2.Bc1xb2) as the penalty would be checkmate (2...Rd1xe1++), so I recapture **2.Re1xd1**. Now he went **2...Qb2-c3**, attacking my queen and trying to steal the initiative for himself. In hindsight, a better move would have been **2...Qb2-e5** as you will shortly see.

Now I made the nice looking, if obvious, move **3.Bc1-a3+**. See that he cannot take the bishop with his queen as it is guarded by my queen way over on h3. Also, he cannot block my bishop with his own (3...Bf6-e7) since that would leave his queen undefended and lost to my lady. So the only reasonable move was **3...Kf8-e8**. And here I came up with another very pretty looking move that I was quite proud of at the time: **4.Bh7-d3**, opening the h-file line for my queen as well as swinging my bishop over for a devastating check on b5. See that the bishop on a3 is still indirectly defended as **4...Qc3xa3** loses to that **5.Bd3-b5+**. A cute situation has arisen where White has a good attack (I thought) even though none of my pieces are beyond my third rank! In reality, defenses are available, but black failed to find one of them and quickly lost from here. I should mention that we were both inexcusably a little short of time, thereby "explaining" the missed best moves.

After the game, we two players, and an assortment of other experts and Class A types, were sitting around beginning an analysis of this finale. Does Black have a way out? Can White force a win against best play? Fairly early in this wood shifting party a lowly 1300 rated player stepped forward and meekly suggested an alternative to my "pretty" move **4.Bh7-d3**. His move was: **4.Qh3xe6+!!** Now if **4...Pf7xe6**, **5.Bh7-g6** is a stunning mate, the only other choice being the

routine **4...Bf6-e7**, **5.Qe6xe7++**. Needless to say, none of us “experts” had yet seen this possibility, so in that way it was a bit embarrassing. How I wish I had played that queen sacrifice; it would still stand to this day as the prettiest mate I had ever pulled off. Oh well.

Here is another game position with a little trickier missed opportunity:



It's my move in another mutual time scramble as Black in this early 1980's Cleveland Club League match game. (Note how many great moves are missed because of time pressure. Moral: Don't get in time pressure!) With my scattered pawns I must figure to win in the middlegame. Given a few more moves White will consolidate his defense and escape, even managing to save his wayward knight on a7. Now I saw the key idea but I played it in a messy, less convincing way. I went **1...Rh6xh3+** **2.Pg2xh3 Pd4-d3** **3.Re2-g2 Pd3xc2** and luckily won when White panicked and traded rooks and forced a trade of queens when the knight remained trapped and lost. Played in the correct order, my idea wins cleanly, and so must be regarded as a genuine missed opportunity. The right way to do it is **1...Pd4-d3!**, because if **2.Qd1xd3** Black has

2...Rh6xh3+ **3.Kh1-g1** (3.Pg2xh3 allows 3...Qg5-g1++) **3...Qg5-h4** and checkmate cannot be prevented. This means that **1...Pd4-d3!** would have won a clear rook, and needless to say, the game. At least I didn't end up losing. Maybe sometime I will show you missed opportunities that led to less favorable outcomes for my side.