

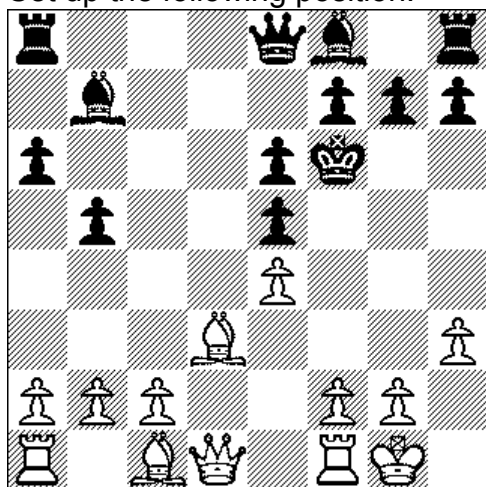
Talking it Through

By Bob Basalla

What do you do when you can't figure out what to do? I hope your answer to that question is to think about it some more rather than just guessing a move. Even a bad idea usually works out better than no idea at all. But how do you get an idea in the first place when the "normal looking" moves are not of any use? Here is something that works for me when this happens.

What I do is "talk it through" to find out what I need to do in a certain position. This type of "talking" goes on inside my head. (Of course in a tournament you cannot speak to yourself out loud. That would be weird as well as illegally distracting to your opponent.) I ask myself about the important things in the position and what I would like to do if I could set my pieces up in their perfect way. I have found many times that this method helps me find the logic of a plan and often suggests the move I should play. Naturally, I then have to analyze that move to convince myself that it really works the way I think it might. But more times than not it turns out to really be a worthwhile way to play. Let us talk ourselves through a couple of examples from my games.

Set up the following position:

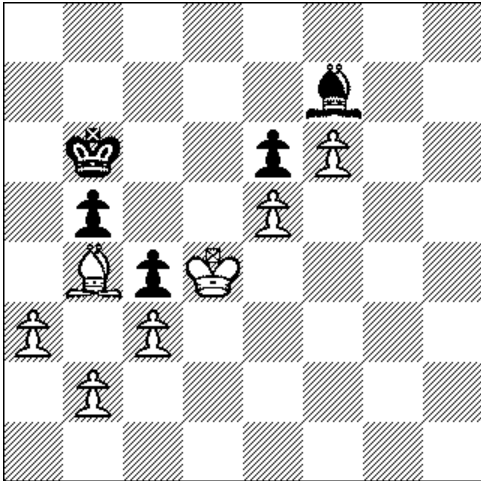


I had White in the above position in a Cleveland Chess Association Club League game on 11/18/88. What's more, it was my move. What to do? On the surface things look pretty even. Black has a doubled e-pawn that gives white a 3-2 pawn majority on the queenside for the endgame. One should always look at possible endgames well before they arrive so you can steer play if need be into an endgame that is favorable to your side. But any endgame is a long ways away, and besides I wanted to attack him in the middlegame. The important thing to notice here is that my king is safely castled and his is not. It is going to take him two more moves to shuffle off to the kingside, and I don't think he'll be interested in castling the other way since he's so wide open over there. So

how do I activate my pieces without giving him time to get away? I need a threat!

Given what was just discussed (in my head, remember) and casting about a bit, I came up with an excellent idea. I played **13.Pc2-c4**, attacking a pawn. If Black now takes the c-pawn (13...Pb5xc4) White can sneak in the in-between move check, **14.Qd1-a4+**, forcing the king to give up castling and remain in the open for the rest of the game. The same happens on the side stepping 13...Pb5-b4. Probably best is guarding with 13...Bb7-c6 but after 14.Pc4xb5 Black will be left with a weak isolated pawn that is constantly under attack. Black may be able to castle but it will probably cost him this "button" to do so. In the game Black tried another move that looked reasonable but did not work out so well: **13...Ra8-d8**. This threatens ...Bb7xe4 so White had to be ready with a reply. Fortunately there is a good one: **14.Qd1-b3** piling up on the b-pawn once more. Black gave in with **14...Pb5-b4**, which leads to a quick crush: **15.Qb3-a4+ Rd8-d7, 16.Bc1-e3 Qf6-d8, 17.Pc4-c5 Bf8-e7 (Too late!) 18.Pc5-c6 Rd7xd3, 19.Pc6xb7+ Ke8-f8, 20.Ra1-c1** and White wins easily.

Here is an endgame where I talked my way into a win. The pieces are placed as follows:



I am White here in this game from the 1996 Ohio Chess Congress, 8/31/96. In spite of being two pawns up the win is still not easy as bishop of opposite color endgames are often hard to win. Why? Because all of the pawns on each side usually end up on the color opposite to that of the other guy's bishop. This means that only the king is available to attack and win them, and the other fellow's king is often hard to push out of the way. I still felt confident here as I had made a lot of progress since this endgame began. My opponent was hanging tough, though. First, more progress: **76.Pa3-a4 Pb5xa4** (Black had to trade here as otherwise I could get a passed pawn on a5 and advance it to force a trade of my a-pawn for both of Black's queenside pawns with an easy win.)

77.Kd4xc4 Kb6-c6, 78.Kc4-d4 Kc6-b5, 79.Bb4-d6 Bf7-g6, 80.Pc3-c4+ Kb5-c6, 81.Kd4-c3 Bg6-e8 (A must move pretty soon so as to protect the a-pawn. Notice that the Black bishop is tied down to guarding the f7 square to keep the f-pawn from queening — a big trump card for White.) **82.Kc3-b4 Kc6-b6, 83.Bd6-e7** (Forcing a king move by Black.) **83...Kb6-c7, 84.Kb4-c5** (I could have played 84.Pf6-f7 Be8xf7, 85.Kb4xa4 with connected passed pawns, but that would then activate his bishop and I still wasn't sure I could force through a win. I decided to continue the "squeeze.") **84...Be8-f7, 85.Be7-d6+ Kc7-b7**. And here we have a problem. The a-pawn can never be won, and White's king is prevented from advancing. So let's talk it through. White would like to get his king to e7, winning the bishop who would have to give himself up for the f-pawn. But every time the White bishop moves from d6 the Black king can step back over to c7 to block my king's path. Is there any way White can keep control of c7 while allowing his king to step up to d6. Indeed there is, and a little calculation shows that it works! **86.Bd6-b8!** White can afford to give up his one and only piece since he will soon win it back with a winning king and pawn ending to boot. **86...Kb7-c8** (Black tries to keep White from e7 by not taking the offering.) **87.Kc5-d6 Kc8-d8, 88.Bb8-c7+ Ke8-d8, 89.Pc4-c5** and White goes on to win. Whould'a thought it?