All,

Andrei Timoshenko, ECF 213, doesn't play in FIDE congresses and only has an

ELO of 2271, but is nevertheless a strong player, playing for Peterborough

chess club. He arrived in the area a few years ago and at the start, I was

very apprehensive of him, fearing a good player and his great ability in his

tactics. One dismal crushing and several draws later, I have begun to

understand the ways in which you take on these stronger players, who you

play on a regular basis.

Timoshenko's opening theory is appalling and his tactical ability is

excellent. His end-game play is equally admirable and he has held many a

poor position against me due to being outwitted in tactical warfare or a

lack in the conversion of an end-game advantage.

So, how to take down this formidable opponent, if you don't' rate his

opening theory or his positional understanding?

First of, stay sober! I haven't drank during our last two encounters!

Well, think of strategies against his simplistic positional understanding.

As white last December, I adopted the King's Indian defence, an opening I

nearly never use, to challenge his London-type setup. A slow positional

grind, with the avoidance of tactics led me to a break-through in the centre

and a 25 move victory.

This past Thursday, I took white against him and having had a couple of

games with the Slav, where he has had poor positions after the first dozen

moves, Timoshenko took on a different approach....

[Event "CCCA League Matches 2009-2010"]

[Site "Peterborough, ENG"]

[Date "2010.02.25"]

[Round "6.1"]

[White "Ross, Chris"]

[Black "Timoshenko, Andrei"]

[Result "1-0"]

[ECO "B07"]

[WhiteElo "2205"]

[BlackElo "2271"]

[Annotator "Chris Ross"]

[PlyCount "55"]

[EventDate "2010.02.25"]

[WhiteTeam "new England A"]

[BlackTeam "Peterborough A"]

{B07: Ruy Lopez: Steinitz Defence}

1. d4 d6

2. e4 e5

3. Nf3 Nc6

4. Bb5 Bd7

5. O-O exd4

6. Nxd4 g6

{Timoshenko has played the Steinitz against me once before, and had played a

passive line with Be7 and Bf6, where he was forced to give up his

dark-squared bishop on c3. He only just held the ending. I had naturally

prepared for him and this diversion obviously meant that he had prepared, or

was trying something new.

7. c4 is the theoretic move now, but I wanted to avoid any lines he may have

come up with. So, I was the first to break the theory.

See below for opening references.}

7. b3 Bg7

8. Bb2 Nxd4

{And it became apparent that black was desperately wanting to avoid any

middle-game play and enter immediately into an ending, where he was hoping

to outwit or hold me. I couldn't hope to do this successfully without some

determining factor, so, I avoid this without too much difficulty.}

9. Bxd7+ Kxd7

{A remarkable choice. This clearly indicates that black is wanting the

exchange of queens and to fiddle around in the ending for a slight plus,

where the black king would be centralised. Brave choice, but easily

avoided.}

10. Bxd4 Bxd4

11. Qxd4 Qf6

{And black thought he had equalised, as the exchange of queens seemed

inevitable. Indeed, if white were to exchange, black would have a slight

advantage due to white's lack of development and less active king. All looks

good for black, apart from one annoying little check...}

12. Qa4+

{Keeping the queens on the board and targeting the exposed black king. The

black king doesn't have many squares to hide on and the black queen-side,

especially b7 is a weak point.}

12... c6

13. Nd2 a5

{Black expands on the queen-side, hoping to entrap the white queen, or at

least, limit it's manoeuvrability. To avoid the queen-side pawns becoming

weak, and indeed, becoming vulnerable to attacks by Qb4 etc, black expands

them, hoping to find some cover for his pieces. All is fine for black, apart

from his king-side pieces...}

14. Nf3

{Here I understood that material was actually fairly irrelevant. Development

and open files and diagonals were just beneficial to me. I therefore

discounted any attacks on my exposed queen-side pawn chain. I was prepared

to give those up if I were to obtain open lines towards the black king.

The text move is to develop the knight, threaten e4-e5 opening lines and put

the knight on a secure square, where any king-side attacks by black, if he

were ever to whip one up, would be fended off. Also, f7 is a weak square in

the black camp and if the knight is able to jump into g5, things could look

even more grim for black.}

14... Qc3

15. Rad1!

{at which point, I knew I had a tremendous advantage.

White simply develops and utterly disregards his queen-side pawns. Indeed,

the pawns are entirely irrelevant. The black king is the focus and the

backward nature of the D pawn is the target-point.

White has intensions of Rd3, gaining tempo on the black queen and then Rfd1

to gang up on that vulnerable d6 pawn.

Piece play is the order of the key and while black is messing around with

his queen to avoid any opening lines, white just gets on with bringing out

his pieces. Look at that black king-side...}

15... Qb4

{And finally, black achieves his objective of exchanging queens. Indeed,

forcing the queens off will give black an open A file and the A2 pawn is

very weak. How to react?}

16. e5

{Energetically!

In fact, the D pawn is lost, but clear calculation was required for this and

a deeper positional understanding.

Another excellent element of the development move of 15. Rad1! is

illustrated here.

Note how positional moves will always resolve your tactical problems.

16... d5 now is met by the easy 17. Rxd5+ since the c6 pawn is pinned by the

queen on a4.

Black has to react now, otherwise his position will collapse quickly.}

16... b5

{Forcing the queens off, but that's OK, as I have gained my positional

dream...}

17. Qxb4 axb4

18. exd6!

{The point!

White gains a passed pawn, which is going to be incredibly difficult to

shift.

The black king is soon to be harassed and the passed pawn is going to be

shoved down black's throat.}

18... f6

{Preventing the white knight from landing on e5 and forcing the passed pawn

home.}

19. Rfe1

{Again, simple development.

The rook stands on an open file and prevents the black knight on g8 from

being developed. If the black knight were to move, then Re7+ will be

decisive. White has a huge advantage, but how to put black to bed...}

19... Rxa2

{An obvious-looking move, regaining the pawn and activating the black rook

on the 7th rank. However, that pawn wasn't necessarily going anywhere and

lack could have considered trying to release his kingside by 19... h5 with

the idea of Rh7 etc. Slow, but the white plan would still stand.

Now, white stands massively better, has a passed pawn, wonderfully placed

pieces, but where's the coup de grace?}

20. Nd4!

{Again, excellent positional play will resolve any tactical complications

that occur.

Why is the knight's development so good then?

Well, the simple threat of Ne6 and either Nc5+ or even Nf8+ must mean that a

check is given to the black king and the passed pawn will advance on d7 and

inevitably, through.

The knight currently defends c2, stopping the black rook from taking on c2

and the black queen-side pawns look weakened.

Black thought for a long, long time now and could not find a solution to his

problems. He finally bailed out with one final desperate try.

I'll leave you with the delightful task of figuring out the various wins

if black were to take the passed pawn with 20... Kxd6.

21. Ne6 forces Ke7 22. Nd8+ Kf8 23. Rd7 forces Nh6 24. Ne6+ Ke8 and if

nothing else at all, and no mating nets can be found, you can simply rely on

25. Rd8+ picking up the rook in the corner. There are other attractive

alternatives, but I didn't bother wasting time on them, as I knew taking the

passed pawn would lead to sure termination.}

20... Nh6

{Sheer desperation. Black sacrifices the knight for 2 pawns, but in doing

so, another mating net is woven around the black king. The ending is

technique now.}

21. Re7+ Kxd6

{This is forced as retreat to the back rank allows Nxc6 or Ne6 tactics, or

simply advancing the pawn with check and Nxc6 mates!}

22. Nf5+ Kc5

23. Nxh6 Rxc2

24. Nf7 Ra8

25. Nd6

{Setting up the mating net that I had foreseen when winning the knight on

h6. Black was completely oblivious of it, since he was now short on time and

was seeking last-minute hopes of perpectuals on the 7th rank. Yeah, right!}

25... Raa2

26. g4

{neatly demonstrating the utter domination of the position. White even has

time to clear his back rank, but more importantly, I safeguard the e4

square.}

26... h5

{Not seeing the danger in time. 26... f5 27. gxf5 gxf5 28. Rxh7 Rxf2 is a

technical win for white, but the win is more difficult to prove.}

27. gxh5

{Strictly not necessary, but with both players short on time, I banged out

this move more or less to reach the time control than anything else.

Naturally, my opponent responded in kind, rather than thinking about it, but

I guess he had given up by now.}

27... gxh5

28. Ne4+

{Completing the mating net.

28.. Kb6 29. Rdd7 is curtains for black.

Black resigned without any further consideration.}

28... 1-0

{Motto: Don't be scared of higher-rated opponents than yourself, especially

if you know their game, their weaknesses and play to a planned strategy and

execute good positional chess in the process.}

Opening references:

A.  
7. c4 Bg7 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. c5 Ne7 10. Nc3 O-O 11. Bf4 d5 12. exd5 Nxd5 13.

Nxd5 cxd5 14. c6 Bg4 15. Qxg4 Bxd4 16. Rad1 Bxb2

17. Qd7 Qf6 18. Bxc7 d4 19. Rfe1 Bc3 20. Re7 d3 21. Rxd3 Bb4

Magem Badals,J (2515)-Eslon,J (2420)/Palma de Mallorca 1992/TD/1/2-1/2

(84)}

B.

8... Nf6 9. Nd2 O-O 10. Bxc6 bxc6 11. Rb1

Re8 12. Re1 d5 13. e5 Nh5 14. N4f3 Nf4 15. Nf1 Qe7 16. Ne3 Red8 17. Qd2 Be8

18. Ng4 Ne6 19. Nf6+ Kh8 20. Ng5 Nxg5 21. Qxg5 h6 22. Qh4 g5 23. Qh3 d4

Boric,M (2345)-Knezevic,M (2430)/Pula 1991/TD/1/2-1/2 (46)})

C.

8... Nf6 9. Re1 O-O 10. Bxc6 bxc6 11. Nc3 Ng4 12. h3 Ne5 13. f4 c5 14. Nf3

Nc6 15. Na4 Bxb2 16. Nxb2 Qf6 17. Nd3 Rab8 18. Qd2 Nd4 19. Nxd4 Qxd4+ 20. Qf2 Qxf2+ 21. Kxf2 Rfe8 22.

e5 Bc6 23. Rad1 Rbd8

Kaiser,E-Knoerzer,C/Wuerzburg 1998/EXT 2001/1-0 (56)})

D.

8... Nf6 9. Bxc6 bxc6 10. c4 O-O 11. Nc3 c5 12. e5 Ng4 13. Nf3 Nxe5 14. Nxe5

Bxe5 15. Qd2 Bc6 16. Nd5 Bxb2 17. Qxb2 Bxd5 18. cxd5 Qg5 19. Rad1 Rfe8 20. Qc3 a5 21. Qd3 a4 22. Rde1 axb3 23. axb3

Babuiian,L (2398)-Novikov,M (2489)/Moscow 2006/EXT 2007/0-1 (57)})

Chris Ross  
February 2010