

WHY SOLVING PROBLEMS IS NOT ENOUGH TO IMPROVE YOUR CHESS!

P.B.Dhanish
AICCF Champion
<pbdhanish@gmail.com>

There have been several articles in recent issues of the Bulletin extolling the virtues of solving problems: Three movers as well as otherwise. I was expecting some dissenting voices. But there being none, to stimulate discussion and to prevent incorrect notions from leading youngsters astray, I am taking up the cudgels myself. I request the previous authors not to take offence and give their comments on my points.

I agree that solving problems can be useful to improve one aspect of playing chess, that is, calculation. But is that all to success in chess? Of course not! In my opinion, what is most important is the ability to evaluate positions. Nobody can calculate all variations till mate is reached, except in problems. So, there has to be some stage where you decide that the move chosen is the best for you to play. This is based on your evaluation of the position. How does one learn to evaluate positions? First we start with the material equivalents in terms of pawns, but soon we find that it is not sufficient. Is the knight

better than the bishop? Yes, if the position is closed. Great chess players have studied thousands of games and the patterns observed have been generalised and stored in their brain. When they see a similar position, they immediately start playing similar moves, with hardly any calculation.

A case in point is that computers have been able to solve three movers or four movers in seconds for quite some time, but they performed poorly in actual games. It was only when the evaluation functions became sufficiently sophisticated that they have been able to defeat humans. And where do computers make mistakes against human beings? In dynamic unbalanced positions: See game at the end illustrating a 'human' win against a pure engine from the recent freestyle tournament and the comment by Dagb Nielsen, one of the centaurs, taken from the Rybka forum <http://rybkaforum.net>.

Problems usually have very unusual positions. Such positions are special, in that the normal moves do not work and that is the charm of the

problem! Learning such positions is not useful for normal chess as they are peculiar ones. Far better, would be to solve tactical positions from real games.

Even then, things are not straightforward. When solving such positions, you are told to look for a particular result. Then you can put all out efforts to search till the solution is found. But in real games, you have limited time, and you have to judge whether a forced solution is likely. If not, you are merely wasting time.

What about correspondence chess(CC)? Since almost everybody analyses with engines, the possibility of tactical mistakes is almost nil. Now, it is mistakes in strategy which lead to a decisive result. Comparing CC with Over The Board Chess (OTB) is meaningless. Earlier also, one could move pieces on the board while analysing in CC, and now engines have made it a different game altogether. It's impossible to say whether a good OTB player can become a good CC player. OTB players depend a lot more on memory, especially during the opening stages and endgame stages. OTB players especially lack patience; they just cannot wait four years to win a game or a championship. (The last AICCF Championship, 1506 took 4 years to finish. With email and server, it's much faster, I could win WCCC30PR01

<http://www.iccf-webchess.com/EventCrossTable.aspx?id=8766>
in a little more than a year).

In conclusion, it would be far better to spend your time studying strategy or other annotated games

rather than solving problems.

White: Flyingfatman, 2682

Black: Mission control, Rybka 2.1d3 mp, 2468

6th Freestyle Tournament, Final

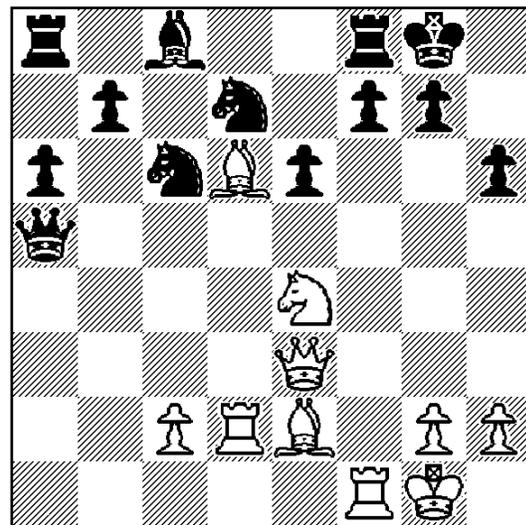
playchess.com #101513

2007.06.22

Sicillian Poisoned Pawn, B97

Notes by the winner

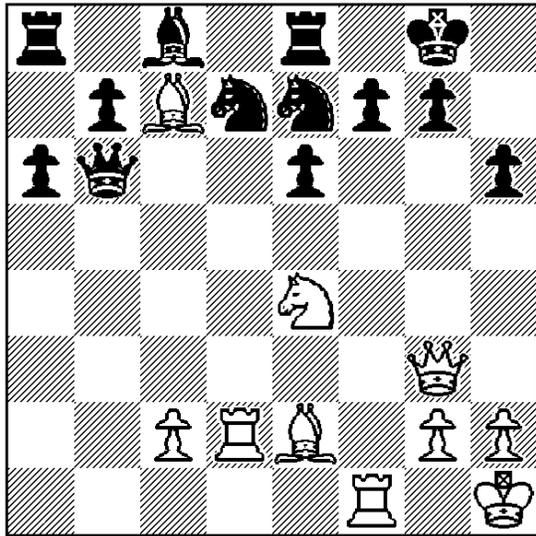
**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6
7.f4 Qb6 8.Qd2 Qxb2 9.Rb1
Qa3 10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 Nfd7
12.Ne4 Qxa2 13.Rd1 h6 14.Bh4
Qd5 15.Qe3 Qxe5 16.Be2 Bc5
17.Bg3 Bxd4 18.Rxd4 Qa5+
19.Rd2 O-O 20.Bd6 Nc6 21.O-O**



Interesting, but not quite a novelty. It was played for the first time, I think, in a rapid game Shirov-Gouliev, 2007.04.06, Calatrava. However, in most public discussions (and in Georgiev's The Sharpest Sicilian), only 21.Bxf8 has been mentioned, so it was a nice move to get in vs. .a pure engine given that the Mission control team was not booked against it. I had prepared the 10.e5 attack and the then-novelty 21.0-0 also before the 5th Freestyle final, but Hercules01 (=Mission

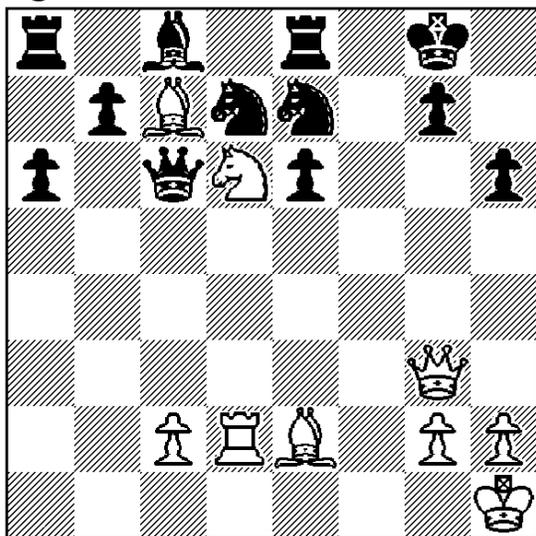
Control) played the off-beat 6...h6 in that game.

21...Re8 22.Qg3 Qb6+ 23.Kh1 Ne7 24.Bc7!!

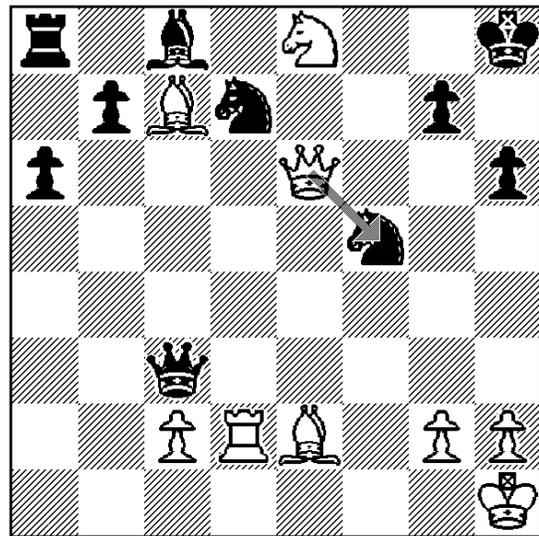


24.Bc7!! vs. Mission Control has to be one of the deepest tactical shots in Freestyle chess ever. When Mission Control resigned, 15 minutes after 24.Bc7 was played, most kibitzers had still not seen the crucial point given below. 24.Bc7 (with 30.Qxf5 point) was found and played within 3 minutes of active centaur analysis, illustrating that in some positions, centaurs can be almost infinitely faster than a pure engine. I worked with a couple of Rybkas in this game.

24...Qc6 25.Rxf7 Kxf7 26.Nd6+ Kg8 1-0



The point being: 27.Nxe8 Nf5 28.Qg6 Qc3 29.Qxe6+ Kh8



30.Qxf5!! White goes further down in material, but establishes a crushing mating attack 30...Qxd2 31.Qf7 Qc1+ 32.Bf1 Qa1 33.Bd6! with the neat tactical point of c2-c3 (allowing Bd3 after Qxc3), then Bf8, then check with Qxf8, and then Bd3+ g6 Nf6+ and black must give the queen, for example: 33...a5 34.c3 Qxc3 35.Bf8 Nxf8 36.Qxf8+ Kh7 37.Bd3+ g6 38.Nf6+ Qxf6 39.Qxf6

The Editor adds:

In fairness to D.M.Modak, it should be mentioned that his articles mentioned Problem Solving only as a means of improving tactical prowess for OTB. In CC it becomes irrelevant. The series of articles by S.M.Mody expound the Chess Problem as an art form and has nothing to do with actual play (OTB or CC). Interestingly Modak mentions Advanced Chess and Dhanish Freestyle Chess. These are forms of chess play that differ from CC only in the time factor.