

NATO Chess 2015 Round 1 Highlights

Jan Cheung, 1 January 2016

Dutch people like sunny weather, but the hot temperature of 35 degrees Celsius at the weekend before the NATO Championship was exceptional. Normal conditions in July in the Netherlands are temperatures of 20 degrees with rain or temperatures of 25 degrees with dry weather.

Having a city like Amsterdam - with 180 different nationalities - as a host location of the 26th NATO Chess Championship surely has advantages. Aside from the chess scene, the city offers a lot of tourist attractions, shopping areas and dining locations. Adding the fact that Amsterdam is easy to reach from abroad and that the city incorporates a navy barracks, it was an ideal location to organize the 26th NATO Chess Championship. To accentuate the tourist factor of the city I added an unofficial Sunday program, in which my role was a tourist guide guiding the chess participants during a bike riding tour. During that tour, nearly all tourists and not touristic areas of the inner city was visited and we even visited the Dutch Chess Championship, which was held at the same city as the 26th NATO Chess Championship.

The 26th NATO Chess Championship had a record of participants and the level of the play keeps increasing each year. Interesting moments of some games have been compiled for the third time in the form of training exercises.

Position 1.



Position after 9...e7-e5 White to move. Choose between A) 10.d5 and B) 10.dxe5.

Position 2.



Position after 9.0-0. Black to move.

Position 3.



Position after 14.f2-f4. Black to move.

Position 4.



Position after 18...Nf5-d4. White to move.

Position 5.



Position after 29...Ne4-c3. White to move.

Position 6.



Position after 21....Nd5-c3+. White to move.

Position 7.



Position after 14.Nc1-e2. What should Black play?

Position 8.



Position after 14...Dd8-d7. What should White play?

Position 9.



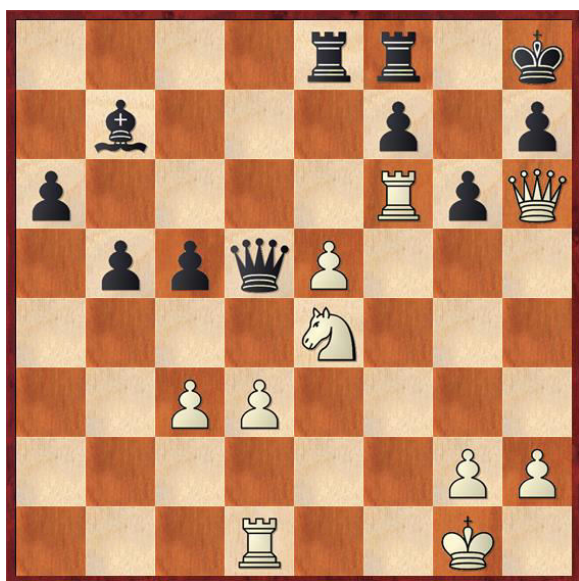
Position after 24.Qc2-e4. What should black play?

Position 10.



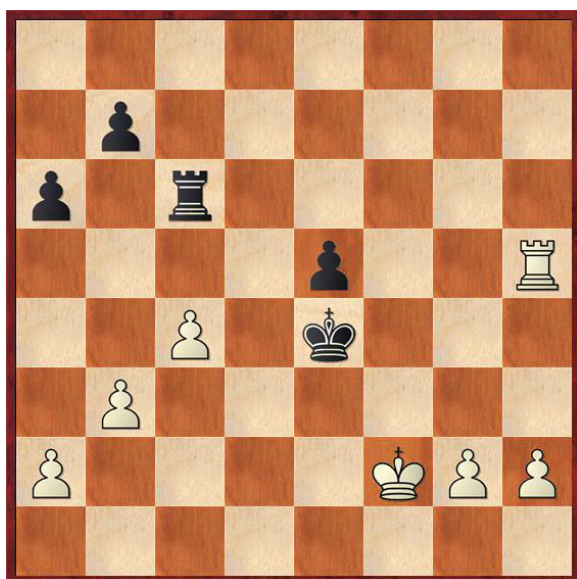
Position after 28...Kg7-h7. White to move. Choose between A) 29.Rfd3 and B) 29.Ne4.

Position 11.



Position after 32.Qg5-h6. What is white's threat and how can black defend against it?

Position 12.



Position after 31.Rh7xh5. Black to move. Choose between A) 31...Kd4, B) 31...Rg6 and C) 31...b5.

Position 13.



Position after 23...Qd8xc7. White to move.

Position 14.



Position after 12.Qa4xb4. Choose between A) 12..cxb5 and B) 12...Qd5

Position 15.



Position after 32.Re3-e2. Black to move.

Solutions

Position 1 is the game Steffers – Volodin (1.1).

Pawn d4 is being attacked. White has basically 4 options: defending pawn d4, pushing pawn d4 to d5, exchanging an attacker of d4 or a counterattack of a higher level than blacks attack at d4. There is no counterattack, so the first 3 options are left.

If we look at the functionality of the white pieces, defending pawn d4 is not an option because the white pieces are not controlling the centre. After **10.Nb3 exd4 11.cxd4 Re8** the white pawn at e4 will be vulnerable. Furthermore, the white knight at b3 is misplaced.

So there are 2 options left, exchanging pawn d4 or closing the centre. Is there any difference?

The first choice, **10.dxe5** (option B), opens the position. This move is effective if white can bring his pieces as fast as possible into action. Is this possible? Looking at black's position, you discover that black has a weak square at d5. This is an ideal square for a white knight. After **10.dxe5 dxe5 11.Nc4!**



white wins an important tempo by attacking e5 and heading to e3 simultaneously. Black has several options to defend pawn e5.

1. After **11...Nh5** white can defend square f4 with **12.g3** before continuing his plan to control square d5, for example **12...Bb7 13.Rd1 b5** (or **13...Nc6 14.a4!** conquering square c4 for the pieces) **14.Ne3 c4 15.Bc2** with a better position for white because the black pawns at the queen side are vulnerable.
2. After **11...Bb7** - counterattacking pawn e4 - white can continue his plan to control d5 with **12.Rd1**.

We now know that **10.dxe5** is playable, but what about closing the centre with **10.d5**? After **10.d5** we have to look at the pawn structure and the pieces supporting the pawn structure to give a judgement.



The pawn formation tells us that in general, white has the upper hand at the queen side and that black has the upper hand at the king side. Whites plan is to open files at the queen side with a2-a4-a5 followed by b2-b4 and blacks plan is to support f7-f5. An analysis shows us that blacks plan is easier to play than white.

10...Nh5

heading to f4. Now white should play

11.g3



restricting blacks f7-f5. Because the knight at h5 is now vulnerable in combination with f7-f5, black can transfer this piece to g7 with

11...Bh6!?

at the same time executing the plan to trading off his worse bishop.

12.a4 a6

Restricting whites activity at the queen side. The lesser move 12...Nd7 allows 13.a5!

13.Nc4

This knight is ideally placed at e3.

13...Bxc1 14.Rfxc1 Nd7 15.Ne3



15...Ng7

Supporting f7-f5.

16.b4 f5 17.exf5 gxf5

Black has achieved his goal to create counter play at the king side.



Conclusion: **10.dxe5** (option B) offers white more chances than closing the centre with **10.d5** (option A).

Position 2 is the game Drabke – Maes (1.2).

A typical position of the Modern Opening. Black's strategy is complicated. Black gives white the centre. In the meantime he will occupy the centre with pieces without giving the opponent any attacking targets by playing multifunctional moves around the centre. After completing this task, the next one will be to complete the development or to contest the white centre. This time the centre should be occupied by pawns, because otherwise the white pawn centre is too strong to be attacked.

At the cost of a development disadvantage, black's pawn at c5 is a first attempt to contest the white centre. If it is white's turn, he can consolidate the centre with c2-c3. So a critical move for black is 9...cxd4, destroying the centre. If this move cannot be played, then black has a hard task to find counterplay. Let's analyze if this move is playable. After

9...cxd4 10.Nxd4



black's pawn at b4 and square c6 are weakened, but also white's pawn at e4 and the diagonal b2-g7. Black can develop his pieces while at the same time putting pressure against pawn e4. After

10..Ngf6

White can play

11.Qe1!



attacking pawn b4 and threatening to open the position with e4-e5. Black is far behind development and the position cannot be opened yet. Luckily for black, he can renew the pressure at pawn e4 with

11...Nc5!

There was no time for 11...a5 because white can open the position with 12.e5! After 11...Nc5 black gets adequate counter play:

1. **12.Qxb4 0-0 13.Rfe1 Bb7 14.Bxf6 (14.e5 Nd5) 14...Bxf6 15.Qd2 a5 16.b3 e5 17.Nb5 d5** and the bishop pair gives adequate compensation for the pawn.
2. **12.e5**. An attempt to open the position while black has not finished his development. **12...Nxd3 13.cxd3 dxe5 14.Qxe5 Qd6!** By trading queens, black is able to restrict whites activity **15.Qxd6** (or 15.Rfe1 Qxe5 16.Nxe5 Nd5) **15...exd6 16.Nc6 h6** with adequate counter play.

Position 3 is the game Patron- Wantiez (1.3).

White has the centre, but his pieces are not yet supporting the centre. If he has time, then he could move his pieces towards the centre and then he has structural advantage. At this moment, black doesn't occupy the centre. To find counter play, he should strike the centre with his pawns. This means that black has to play 14...d5 or 14...f5. Which is better? We count the advantages and disadvantages of each move.

1. **14...d5** is a natural move: a centre pawn of black (d5) contests a centre pawn of white (e4). However, this move does not solve the question where to find a good square for the bishop at c8. It also does not solve the question how black can improve his position in the following moves.
2. **14...f5** brings imbalance to the pawn structure. Due to the fact that Nd2 is undefended, white cannot play e4-e5. After a trade between pawn e4 and f5, blacks rook at f8 is active. The bishop at c8 can move to d7-e6-f5 depending on the circumstances. The rook at a8 can move to e8. A minor disadvantage of f7-f5 is that it weakens the diagonal a2-g8.

A comparison of 14..d5 and 14...f5 results that 14...f5 is preferable. The game continued as follows.

14...f5! (After 14...d5 white can reply with 15.Bd3) **15.Qg5 Qxg5 16.fxg5 Be6**

Black has successfully destroyed whites centre and has a comfortable game.

Position 4 is the same game Patron – Wantiez (1.3).

The central question in this position is: “Which pieces should be left to play?”. Blacks knight at d4 is attacked. An ideal square is e6, where it can attack pawn g5. This is a clue for not exchanging at e6. The rook at a1 is supporting pawn a2 and should not move. After

19.Rxf8+

black can decide to keep the pressure at a2 or not.

1. **19...Rxf8 20.Bd1!** Preventing the black knight to retreat to e6. **20...Nf5** Heading to e3. Now white can try to create a passed pawn at the queen side with **21.b4!?** with an equal position.
2. **19...Kxf8 20.Bd1!** Preventing the black knight to retreat to e6. **20...Nf5 21.Bc2!** Temporary preventing Ne3. **21...Ke7 22.a3** with an equal position.

Position 5 is the game Helbig – Petat (1.4).

The pawn at d4 is vulnerable. A direct attack with 30.Qxd4 Qxd4 31.Nxd4 doesn't win a pawn because black can win the pawn at c4 back after 31...Rc8. To prevent the counterattack at pawn c4 and continuing attacking pawn d4, the move

30.Qd7!

was played. To play this move, white had to calculate that after

30...Qf6 31.Nxd4 Rd8

he can defend the counterattack with

32.Re8+! Rxe8 33.Qxe8+ Kh7 34.Nf3

keeping up a pawn.

Position 6 is the game Sypien – Oblak (1.6).

The knight at c3 cannot be taken because of the pin at the b file. This means that the white king has to move. On close inspection it has to move to a square in which pawn b2 will be properly defended against a three folded attack. This calls for a move like

22.Kc1!

After this move white keeps his structural advantage after

22...d5 23.Qxc3 (Not 22.Bxa6? Na4!) **23...Qxc3+ 24.bxc3 dxc4 25.Ne2.**

In the game white played

22.Ka1?



This move worsened the position because it puts the king in a pin along the diagonal a1-f6. Black continued to attack pawn b2 with

22...Nd1!

Now a defending move like 22.Qe2 is not possible on account of 22...Rxb2 23.Rxb2 Rb8. Also not possible was 22.Qxd7 due to 22...Rb6 followed by Rf8-b8. White has no other option than blocking the b file with

23.Bb3



The first rank is vulnerable. Black now puts his least inactive piece into play.

23...c4! 24.Qxc4 Rfc8

In the game white thought to transfer into an ending between a queen against rook and 2 light pieces, but this turned out to be an error because the white pieces are not coordinated.

25.Qxc8+ Rxc8 26.Rxd1 Qe5

And black got the initiative. Together with his strong centre pawns he won the game. The weak first rank does not yield a decisive advantage. Playable was:

25.Qd3! Rc1+ 26.Ka2 Nc3+ 27.bxc3 Rxc3 28.Qd4! Qxd4 29.Rxd4

And black has nothing better than

29...Rbxb3

Weaker is 29...Rcxb3 30.Rb4!

30.Ne2 Rxa3+ 31.Kb2 Rab3+ 32.Ka2 Ra3+ with perpetual check.

Position 7 is the game HC Andersen – De Cat (1.8).

White has a strong square f5. Black must try to cover this square before white gets a firm grip on it. The knight at d7 can be rerouted to cover this square.

14...Nb6!

This move gives black sufficient counter play. Here are some examples.

1. **15. Rb1 Nc8** (15...Nc4!? is also possible: 16.Qd3 0-0 17.0-0 Bc7) **16.e4 Ne7 17.0-0 0-0.**
2. **15.b3 axb3 16.cxb3 Nc8 17.0-0** (17.h4 Ne7 followed by Dd8-a5)) **Ne7 18.Qc2 e4.**

Position 8 is the game Pos – Rosenkilde (1.9).

Black is planning to play f7-f5. Could this be prevented? No, but this move can be made less attractive by disrupting black's pawn structure with

15.h5!

For both sides, the position is complicated. Here are some examples of plans.

1. First, let's see what happens when black is trying to play f7-f5 immediately. This move has the disadvantage that it creates a gap at square g5 for a white knight.
15...f5? 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.Ndf3



White has a good position due to black's gap at g5.

2. Maybe black can prevent the gap at g5 by a preparation move h7-h6? The answer is: no, because white's h4-h5 in combination with h7-h6 had made f7-f5 less attractive by reducing the activity of black's dark squared bishop at g7. **15...h6?! 16.Bf3!**



White's plan is to trade off his worst bishop at g4, if given the chance. **16...Rae8 17.Re1**

Enabling Nd2-f1. A complicated position for both sides. White has a plan – bishop trade at g4 – , but black has none because f7-f5 is not a good plan in combination with h7-h6.

3. Just as you don't know what to do, you should come back to the Steinitz elements of chess: Black plan is to improve his position by first moving his pieces to the most ideal squares. The inactive knight at e7 will first be put to d6. **15...Nc8 16. f4 Nd6 17.Ndf3**



With a complicated position.

Position 9 is the game Petruszewski – Casteleijn (1.12).

White has two simultaneous threats: b4-b5 and Qe4xf3. This could only be prevented by **24...Rxc3**.

After 25.bxc3 Nd5



black has compensation for the exchange, due to the vulnerable position of the white king. Here are some examples.

1. **26. Rc1 Nf6 27. Qg2 Qd3+!?** (Also possible is 27...Nd7!?) **28.Kb2 Nd5 29. Qf1 Qe4** with compensation.
2. **26. Rd3 Nf6 27.Qe2 Nd5** with repetition of moves.
3. **26. Rxd5!? cxd5 27.Qxd5 Rc8 28.Re1 Bf6 29.g5 Rd8 30.Qg2 Qd3+** with an unclear position.

Position 10 is the game Picart – Crapulli (1.14).

White has structural advantage – one pawn more than black and centralized pieces. The only weakness in whites position is the pin at d6. According to Steinitz elements of chess, a queen trade will benefit the side with structural advantage. The underlying argument is that the main functionality of the queen is to cover weak squares in one's own position. Without queens at the board, the structural weaknesses will be more visible than with queens at the board

After

29.Ne4! (option B) **Qxc5 30.Nxc5**

white has increased his grip at the position because black has no counter play.

In the game white played

29.Rfd3?

This move loses the control at the f file and therefore, it doesn't improve whites position. After

29...Nd5!

Black created 2 simultaneous threats: attacking pawn f2 and threatening to attack Nd6 twice. White can still defend with **30.f4 Rfc8 31.Qa3** for example, but is going to lose control of the position after **31...Rcb8 32.c4 bxc4 33.Nxc4 Qxa3**.

Position 11 is the game Noviks – Lazar (1.15).

White main threat is Rf6-f3 followed by Ne4-f6. Blacks plan is to exchange an attacking piece with

32...Qb3!

After

33.Re1 Bxe4 34.Rxe4 Qd1+



Black has adequate resources to defend whites king attack:

35.Rf1 Qxd3 36.Rh4 g5

This defensive move has made blacks 32th move 32...Qb3 possible. After

37.Qf6+ Kg8 38.Qxg5+ Qg6 39.Qf4 Kh8

Black has successfully defend himself against the king attack. After

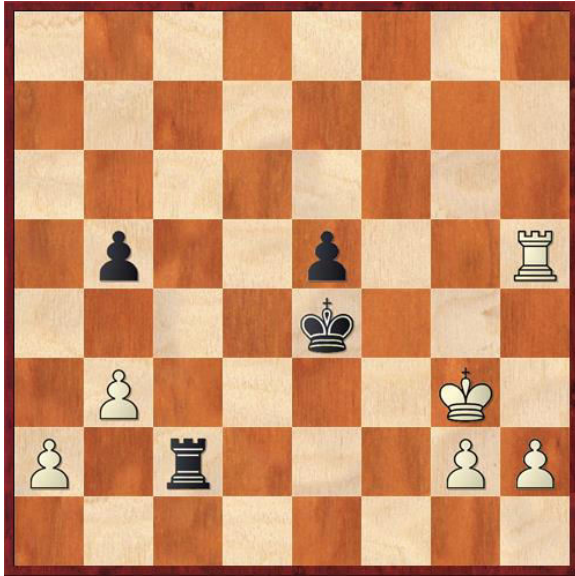
40.Rh6 Qg7 41.Rf6 Rg8

The position is somewhat equal.

Position 12 is the game Bohn – Cappon (1.20).

Black has one pawn less than white, but black has some compensation because the black king is very active. The passed e pawn could be used for counter play if blacks king has moved, but this costs time. Black has another piece, the rook, whose position could be improved by opening the c file. From the three moves 31...Kd4, 31...Rg6 and 31...b5, only the last one creates a direct threat which white cannot deny. After

31...b5! 32.cxb5 Rc2+ 33.Kg3 axb5



Black has improved a piece, the rook, while white has not made progress with his passed pawns at the king side. Black should have adequate counter play.

Other moves are too slow:

1. **31...Rg6? 32.h4 Kd4 33.Rg5** and the white pawns at the king side are rolling forward.
2. **31...Kd4 32.g4 b5 33.g5! bxc4 34.Rh6** and the white pawns at the king side has made a lot of progress.

Position 13 is the game Keough – Giedratis (1.30).

The black knight at c3 is vulnerable. White wants to pin the knight with Re1-c1, but this move should only be played when black cannot give a knight check at e2. The game went as follows.

24.Rc1 Rc8 25.Kf1 Qc5

Giving more resistance was the move 25...d5 26.Ne2 f3! 27.gxf3 d4 and now white should play the centralizing move 28.Qe6 keeping the initiative.

26.Ne2 f3

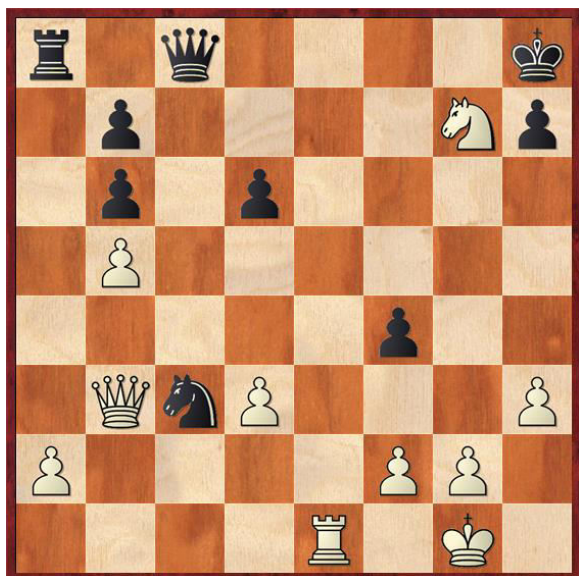
The same plan with 26...d5, but now it becomes clear that the black queen was more dangerous at the diagonal b8-h2 then at c5.

27.gxf3 Qf5 28.Rxc3 Qxh3 29.Kg1 Re8 30.Qf7

and white won later the game.

There was an alternative solution, although it is computer like. The black king position can be vulnerable after

24.Ne6 Qc8 25.Nxg7!



At first sight this move will immediately decide the game:

25...Kxg7 26.Re7+ Kh6 27.Qf7. After **27...Qg8** white will win with **28.Qxf4+ Kg6 29.Qxd6+Kh5 30.g4+**. If you don't have adequate time at the clock, you will not play 26.Ne6 because it is still not clear whether white can keep his material advantage after (**24.Ne6 Qc8 25.Nxg7**) **25...Ne2+! 26.Rxe2 Qc1+ 27.Kh2 f3!**



White has gained a piece, but the position is a mess because black has created a lot of counter threats: g7 is vulnerable, white's king position is shattered and black could threaten perpetual check. This is a hint saying that the move sequence 24.Rc1 and 25.Kf1 is more practical than 24.Ne6 and 25.Nxg7. Now white has a lot of moves.

1. **28.Re7?? fxg2 29.Kxg2 Qg5+** and white will even lose the game.
2. **28.Re8+ Rxe8 29.Nxe8 Qf4+ 30.g3 Qd2! 31.h4! h5! 32.Kh3! Qc1! 33.g4!** keeping the extra piece and escaping perpetual check.

3. The most practical move is **28.Re3!** After **28...fxg2 29.Kxg2 Rg8 30.Kh2 d5 31.Qxd5 Qc7+ 32.Rg3 Rxg7 33.Qd4** black has regained the piece, but the pin at g7 will force him in a lost pawn ending.

Position 14 is the game Allmann – Wagenaar (1.49).

Black has temporary advantage: 1) development advantage and 2) white cannot castle anymore. The question is how to keep the temporary advantage. If there are no queens at the board, then blacks advantage will disappear. So for black it is important to keep queens at the board. It is time to calculate. In the game black played

12...Qd5

Winning a tempo.

13.Nf3

Attacking d4.

13...Bh3+

Winning a tempo, but what about pawn d4?

14.Kg1 cxb5 15.Qxd4

And black is a pawn down, queens are off the board, and whites king is not in danger. White can be satisfied.

The question is whether

12...cxb5

Is better. At first sight, it does not win tempi and it allows white to attack pawn d4 with

13.Nf3

But now comes there is a difference. We have seen that blacks queen played two moves at option 12...Qd5 – Qd8-d5xd4. Could black win some time by playing fewer moves with the queen? The answer is yes.

13...Re8!

The white king now has to defend pawn e2. Now 14.Qxd4 fails after 14...Bh3 15.Kg1 Bg2



Winning a piece! So white has nothing better than taking another pawn at b5, otherwise black has a superior position.

14.Qxb5



This move however, gives black time to target pawn e2 with tempi.

14...Rb8! 15.Qd3 Rb6!

The danger is not Bc8-h3+ anymore, but Bc8-a6!. White cannot defend pawn e2 and blacks keeps the initiative after

16.Kg2 Ba6 17.Qd2 Rxe2.

White has another option 13.Qxb5 after 12...cxb5, but blacks plan will be the same: 13...Rb8! 14.Qc4 Rb6! 15.Nf3

15...Re8! 16.Nxd4 Ba6! 17.Qa4 Rxe2! with a winning position.

Position 15 is the game Christen – Murray (1.50).

Whites weakness at the diagonal b8-h2 allows black to win the exchange with

32...Ng3! 33.Kg1 Nxe2+ 34.Rxe2.

The game is not yet over because the position is closed. Black now controls the position and he has two plans. 1) to win space with f5-f4 and 2) to neutralize whites bishop pair. In the game black rushed with 34...f4?, allowing white to take over the initiative with 35.f3. Black has structural advantages, so better is playing a move that controls the position, for example

34...Qh5 (heading to h4). After 35.Bd1 Qh4 36.Bc2 Bf4!

Black has made some progress, but the game is still not yet decided.