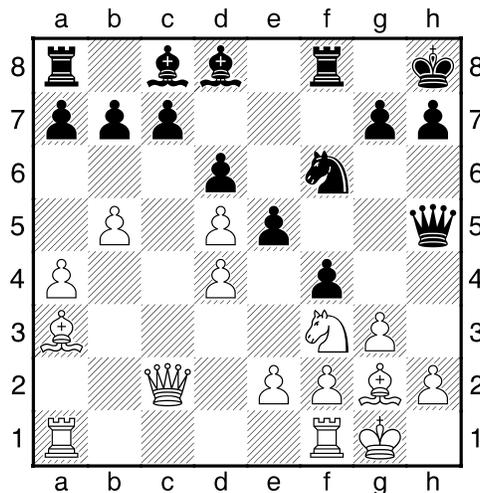


## ATTACK IS THE BEST FORM OF DEFENCE – DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN CONDUCTING AN ATTACK

I have been playing chess for more than 15 years now! My chess strength has gradually improved but not to the level I believe it should be. Throughout my lengthy chess career I have won more than double the number of games I have lost. However, almost more than half of the games I have lost were the games, objectively speaking, I should have won had I not committed one or more of the mistakes I am warning against hereunder.

It is easy to accept defeat if your opponent outplayed you and never gave you a chance to either win or draw. But it is a very bitter pill to swallow if you lose a game that you should have won. The idea of writing this article came to me whilst I was lamenting and spending a sleepless night over a game I had lost to Keith Rust in the Ethekewini Open Tournament (24/02/07). When we reached the position below with Black to play I was confident that I had a winning attack!



Rust K. v Mgaga B., Ethekewini Open, 24/02/07

Playing 15...e4 was so simple and obvious! The knight has to abandon its defensive duty and His Majesty is left with little or no protection against the onslaught combination of the queen, knight, bishop and the rook on the soon-to-be half open f- file! Instead of KISS (keep it simple stupid!), I complicated matters, as I usually do. In my mind I calculated a checkmate or clear advantage in few moves, and this is how the thought process evolved: Firstly, I realized that if I take a pawn on g3 immediately I am threatening to take the knight on f3 with a rook and deliver a mate on h2, so he has to repel that threat by taking back with either h or f pawn. Secondly, I realized that he can not take back with the f pawn as I will play 16...Ng4 threatening mate on h2 or Ne3 winning the exchange! "So he has to take with the h pawn", I told myself. Thereafter, I will play 16...Ng4 and he has no defence against mate after 17. Re1 Rxf3 18. Bxf3 Qh2+ 19. Kf1 Qf2#! So I confidently played **15. ...fxg3** and he replied with **16. hxg3**, as predicted. Then, I said to myself "things are going according to the plan, the point is in the bag" and I played **...Ng4** without much hesitation. Only when he replied **17. Re1**, as predicted, did I realize that after...Rxf3 18.exf3 (not Bxf3) saves the day since f2 is now covered by the queen. Now, the sickening thought that I have let him off the hook again flashed through my mind! I thought for few minutes trying to fight against the realization that I have ruined my attack by not playing the simple e4 when I had a chance to. Ahhhh! then I realized that if I play 17... Bf5 the queen has got to move then I can push my dearest pawn and chase the damn knight away! "What a relief, I 'm still winning! I'm still winning!" Then I played **...Bf5** with a huge sigh of relief. Before even breathing out that sigh, out of the blue **18. e4** appeared on the board and my winning attack was history! I say e4 came out of the blue because in the midst of mixed emotions that engulfed me after **17. Re1** it never crossed my mind that Keith could simply push the pawn to e4 instead of moving the queen.

What is an attack?

Before I deal with the do's and don'ts when conducting an attack, I need to highlight my understanding of an attack. Most of us chess amateurs believe that when you speak of an attack it is when you are going all out to mate your opponent's king.

When I speak of an attack, I do not necessarily mean putting together a combination to bring down the opponent's king. The attack I am referring to is broader than that. I could be launching an attack just to gain positional advantage like critical squares for my pieces or to force an exchange of my opponent's stronger pieces for my weaker ones. Also, I could be launching an attack to gain material advantage which could range from a pawn to a queen. Then, of course, the most common attack we are all familiar with is the one aimed at achieving a checkmate – the royal attack!

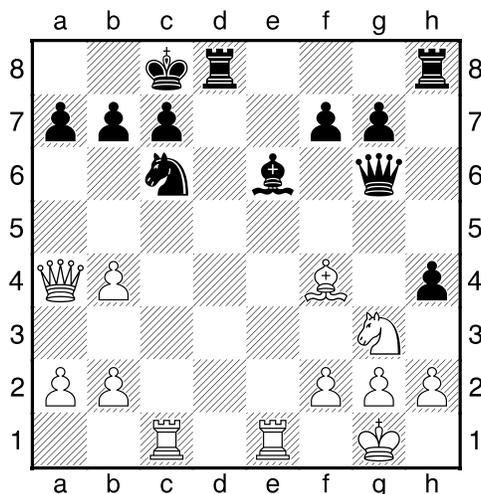
One must always bear in mind that a successful attack that achieves a positional or material advantage does not necessarily mean that you have already won a game - a game is won only after you have checkmated your opponent or when your opponent capitulates. One of the most common blunders is to relax after achieving some advantage, be it positional or material. The legendary GM Garry Kasparov once warned that one's highest level of concentration is required when one has a clear advantage on the board. It is easy to understand why Kasparov offered this piece of advice. My own experience has taught me that when I am under fierce attack, my level of defensive creativity escalates unbelievably. I have also observed many players resisting strong attacks and went on to win or draw such games. Imagine a cornered or wounded tiger that has to fight its way out! Put simply, when you have an advantage you must be very careful because the situation has driven your opponent's level of alertness to its highest peak.

## **DO'S & DON'TS**

### **1. Be confident, but critical of your attack**

You need confidence to be able to even think of launching an attack against your opponent. Confidence is founded on your chess knowledge in general and your preparedness against a particular opponent or tournament. Most players are deceived by the credentials of their opponents. We tend to forget that no matter how strong your opponent is or known to be, he/she is still a human being who is as fallible as you are. In

any event you will hardly come across a grandmaster or a titled player in South Africa. Therefore, face your opponent with confidence no matter who he/she is. When your opponent plays a weak move or what appears to be a weak move according to your standard, and you realize an opportunity of launching an attack, go for it with confidence! In chess you will hardly win games if you do not take calculated risks.



Mgaga B v Danisa C, Durban Club Championships, 2004

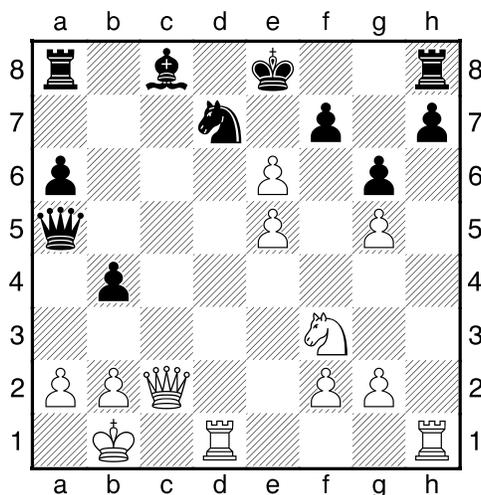
In the position above I was playing against Cyril Danisa, one of the strongest players in KwaZulu-Natal. Danisa had just played 17. ...h4 attacking my knight on g3. I realized that I had a strong attack on the half-open c file and I went for it with confidence 18.Rxc6! bxc6 19.Qxc6. It took a very long time for Danisa to realize that the game was over.

However, your confidence must not overshadow your critical thinking. Always view your own attack with suspicion, not to deter you but to help you look out for all possible defences. Once you notice a possible strong defence that you can not refute, do not fool yourself by hoping that your opponent will not notice it. If you proceed with an attack even after realizing that there is a strong defence available to your opponent, you are committing crime against yourself. You must always think of the best possible defences

you opponent may come up with and calculate how you are going to refute them. Do not move until you see it!

## **2. Do not be complacent and exaggerate the realities of your attack**

This sub-topic is to a large extent related to the one above. However, it is important to independently emphasize the importance of guarding against complacency and exaggerating the realities of your attack. You can uncover the true realities of your attack only if you objectively analyze the position. Do not get carried away by the joy of realizing that one or two lines are going to be successful. Take sometime and also look at those defensive lines that do not look appealing at a first glance. You will be surprised at what you will discover.

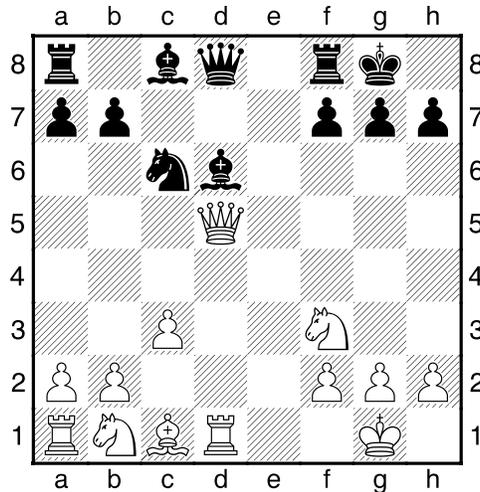


Lewis A v Mgaga B, Moss Kolnik Memorial, 2007

In the above position I confidently played 22. ...Nc5 knowing very well that Lewis' next move was going to be 23.exf7+. I vividly remember that when we were analyzing this game the following day this move was labeled as a “grandmaster move”. However, the reality is that this move was wrong. Lewis anointed my wrong move by playing the automatic but incorrect 23.exf7+ thereby releasing the sleeping monster bishop on c8. Had Lewis simply played 23.Rd5, I was doomed! So, those grandmaster-like moves should be exposed for what they really are. This reminds me of another ‘grandmaster-like’ move that caught me by surprise in my game against Bheki Ngongo a.k.a.

‘Grandmaster’. In the position below I had just played 11.Rd1 threatening to exchange queens as I was a pawn up already. ‘Grandmaster’ played 11. ...Qb6.

My immediate reaction was that he has just blundered a piece. However, when I looked ‘deeper’ I realized that taking the bishop is fatal because of 12. ...Rd8. I quickly moved my queen to b3. Of course at the time I did not realize that the bishop was free after 13.Re1!



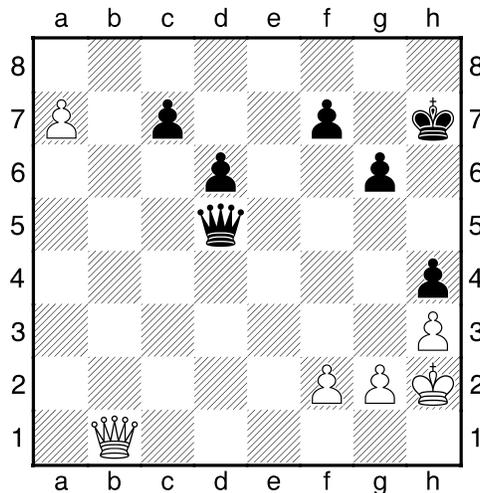
Mgaga B v Ngongo B, DMCA League, 2007

### **3. Do not rush for a checkmate – it is not the only way to win a game**

When you are conducting a royal attack, you must realize that your opponent will not just be like a lamb to a slaughter house – expect and be ready for some fierce resistance. Most of the royal attacks fail because the attacking player is hell-bent on delivering a checkmate only. So even if the checkmate has been well defended the one-dimensional player will continue sacrificing more material hoping for some miracle to happen. It is very important to realize that when your opponent is defending a strong attack, it is inevitable that other weaknesses will be created. You must look out for such weaknesses and capitalize on them.

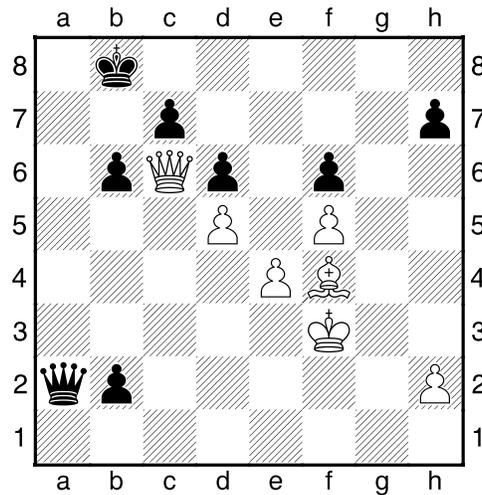
### **4. Look out for and prevent your opponent’s counter-play**

As I said above, some players are most dangerous when they are being attacked. A player who is facing an inevitable mate can conjure up a deadly counter attack if the attacking player is not alert enough. Once you have reached a position where you are certain that a checkmate in few moves (or clear won position) can no longer be defended, look out for any possible counter play that may derail your attack or lead to a perpetual check. Before proceeding with your final onslaught make sure that you prevent such a possibility. It is very embarrassing to have a mate in one which is never achieved because of a perpetual check which you could have avoided by making a quiet move before embarking on your final onslaught. It happened to me in a game against Desmond Rooplal. In the position below I had an opportunity of neutralizing his queen forever by playing 34.Qa1 when he would have been forced to play Qa8 where after I could maneuver my queen to b8 with a clearly won position. However, I played 34.Qb8 allowing queen counter play and after the further moves 34...Qe5+ 35. g3 hxg3+ 36. Kg2 Qf4 37. f3 Qd2+ 38.Kxg3 Qg5+ perpetual check was inevitable.



Mgaga B v Rooplal D, Moss Kolnik Memorial, 2007

My nemesis, Keith Rust had another lucky escape which is almost similar to Desmond's. Please note that I have never won a game against Keith. The best I have achieved so far is a few draws against many losses! When we reached the position below with white to play, I was confident that I had finally broken the hoodoo!



Rust K v Mgaga B, DCC, 04/05/07

Then Keith played 43. Bxd6!? “Is this a last kick of a horse that is about to die?” I asked myself. Then I played ...cxd6?? In my calculation I was expecting Keith to respond by taking on d6, but it wasn't to be. He played the life saving 44. Qxb6+ after which a draw was inevitable. Had I looked deeper I would have realized that 43...Qb3+ was a sure winner!

### **5. Do not focus on the outcome of the game whilst still playing**

When you are busy conducting a winning attack, it is very tempting to start thinking about the implications of your soon-to-be extra point. The prospect of facing an even stronger opponent at the next round may derail your thought process in the current game. Be warned: it is not over until the fat lady sings! Rehearse your victory speech only after you have bagged that crucial point.

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