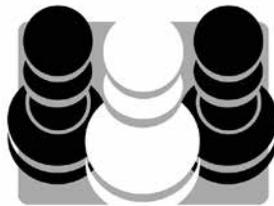


Chess Imbalances

A Grandmaster Guide

By

Mauricio Flores Rios



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To my wife, and our first son Benjamin

Preface

The book you hold in your hands has been almost nine years in the making – an unbelievably long but exciting journey, which started in late 2015. The positive reception to my first book *Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide* was, quite frankly, overwhelming. Just six months after its publication, I was asking myself: is there going to be a next book?

Although many encouraged me throughout the years to simply write a second volume to *Chess Structures* (which I may write someday!), I felt there was an even greater need for a different topic. Having just written a book on how to dissect chess positions based on their pawn structure, I wanted to add more color into these evaluations, and I felt the best way to do that would be adding another dimension of analysis: the material on the board. This is why I embarked on my quest to write *Chess Imbalances – A Grandmaster Guide*, which in my view is the most comprehensive book yet on how to conduct positions with each material imbalance you are likely to encounter in chess.

Coming into this project with a bit more experience, I had the benefit of hindsight – I learned what readers liked the most about my previous book, and leaned on their feedback to make my next book the best it could be. For this reason, *Chess Imbalances*:

- provides textbook-style coverage of the subject
- heavily emphasizes game quality as well as beauty
- is biased towards examples that illustrate ideas in their purest form

By reading this book, you will see everything, from classical knight vs bishop battles to dynamic positional sacrifices. The second half of the book, especially, will have plenty of flashy sacrifices, but always grounded in a solid positional foundation, which I think is necessary for true learning. To share some examples (spoiler alert!), we will see a positional rook sacrifice (for just two pawns!), and even a queen being sacrificed for two minor pieces before the 10th move. I can hardly describe the joy I felt each time I found one of these examples; it's not common for a game to be simultaneously exciting, technically accurate, and pedagogical, so whenever I found one, I immediately knew it had to be part of this book.

I must admit there were times I thought I would never finish this book. Even as I neared the end of it, I had a hard time just “letting go” – I always felt there was room for improvement. Throughout this entire process, I was always grateful to my readers for their kind words of encouragement and for reminding me of the satisfaction that comes from striving for excellence and ultimately delivering something the chess world will appreciate.

Structure of the Book

I have divided our subject into 12 chapters. The first of them, titled *Preliminaries*, serves as an extended introduction. The next eight chapters are divided into two main categories.

Family 1

Chapters 2-5 respectively will deal with *Bishop against Knight*, *Opposite-Colored Bishops*, *The Bishop Pair* and *Rook against Two Minor Pieces*. Neither side can be said to have sacrificed material, hence the section title **Balanced Imbalances**.

Family 2

Chapters 6-9 will discuss *Pawn Sacrifices*, *Exchange Sacrifices*, *Piece Sacrifices* and *Queen against Anything*, the last of which covers various scenarios with a queen being traded for some combination of smaller pieces. Unlike the previous section, these chapters all deal with situations where one side has sacrificed material, so this section is called **Material Imbalances**.

Chapters 10-12

Chapter 10, titled *Imbalances in Practice*, features an assortment of shorter examples that recap a variety of themes discussed earlier in the book. Finally, in Chapters 11 and 12 you will find 30 *Exercises* and their respective *Solutions* to test, develop and further reinforce your understanding of our topic.

I would like to thank the Quality Chess team for their combined efforts throughout this project, from the cover design to the editing, typesetting and proofreading. Almost nine years after the conception of this project, I'm proud to say that the finished version of *Chess Imbalances* far exceeds my prior expectations. I believe chess players of all levels will benefit from it, and will appreciate it for its game collection, the aesthetic beauty of each win, and the lessons that can be drawn from each example.

I hope you will enjoy this book, and that by looking at chess through the lens of material imbalances, you will gain a newfound comprehension of the game we all love.

Mauricio Flores Rios

San Jose, California, December 2024

Family 1

Balanced Imbalances

The next four chapters in this book are all grouped into a family of topics I chose to call “Balanced Imbalances”. These include:

- Chapter 2: Bishop against Knight
- Chapter 3: Opposite-Colored Bishops
- Chapter 4: The Bishop Pair
- Chapter 5: Rook against Two Minor Pieces

What all these chapters have in common (especially the first three) is that these material imbalances can be categorized as *fair trades* rather than material sacrifices. Because of this, most of these positions are close to equal, and there is no concept of material compensation to consider. Hence, the examples we’ll see are almost entirely focused on the interaction between these pieces, and the advantages each may provide.

Another common theme throughout these chapters is the fact that many of these imbalances are most easily appreciated in the ending without other distracting factors to consider. Hence, many of the games we’ll see are very technical endings where only a narrow victory is possible.

The reader should not be discouraged by the complexity of these chapters; this content is suitable for many levels and the key ideas are always highlighted at the start and the end of each game. Having said that, some readers may benefit, from time to time, from skipping long variations and focusing on the main lines and their explanations.

Chapter 4

The Bishop Pair



I have a strong preference for being unbiased in my writing. I believe one can learn the most when we understand not only our plans, but also our opponent's. For this reason, I always try to present winning examples for both sides of the battle, whether it is a material imbalance, a pawn structure, etc. The pair of bishops is an advantage in most positions, and hence it is hard to find representative examples where a knight and bishop defeat the bishop pair. That is, after excluding blunders and isolated mistakes, it is hard to find a systematic way for the knight and bishop team to be superior. In the majority of practical cases, the most one can hope for is a draw. For this reason, when reading this chapter, we will take the perspective of having the pair of bishops, and our task is understanding how the advantage can be converted into a win.

What if we have a knight and bishop in a real game? We should simply use the knowledge from this chapter to find the best defensive mechanisms. That is, we should put obstacles in the way of our opponent's attempts to follow the guidelines we outline here. What if we really wanted to win? Then the last game in the chapter is a nice example to study.

Now, back to the topic. Having the pair of bishops is an advantage in most open positions. This fact is well known, but a simple phrase will not get us very far. This chapter provides instructive examples of the most important plans and ideas. These examples are intended to clarify key questions, such as:

1. What kinds of plans should I pursue to increase the advantage if I have the pair of bishops?
2. How can I decide if a position is "open enough" for the pair of bishops to be good?
3. Under what circumstances would the pair of bishops fail to provide an advantage?

Before diving into specifics, I would like to make a general statement and provide two caveats:

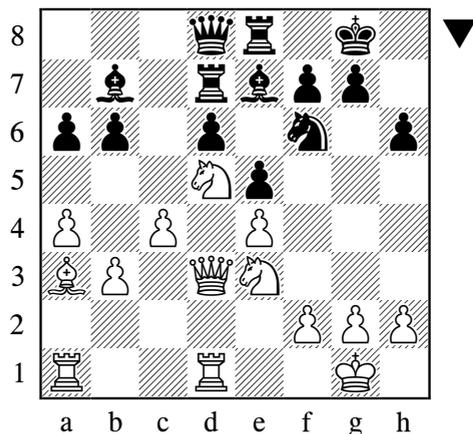
Having the pair of bishops gives a long-term advantage and allows us to press for a win without serious risk. This statement holds true in tactical middlegames, pawn races, and in slow positional endings. It applies to nearly every open position, and even in some relatively blocked games.

The natural question is then, in what context does a pair of bishops fail to provide an advantage? We will discuss two cases:

Case 1

The existence of a major positional weakness can seriously undermine the bishops' power.

As an example, consider the game Tiviakov – Anand, Germany 2012, which was analyzed in *Chess Structures* (Najdorf Type II).



Black's failure to achieve the thematic break ...d6-d5 (or the auxiliary break ...b6-b5) left him with a weak d5-square and a seriously vulnerable d6-pawn. The pair of bishops provides no advantage to Black whatsoever, as the light-squared bishop will likely have to be traded for a knight on d5, while the dark-squared bishop is destined to passively defend the d6-pawn.

Case 2

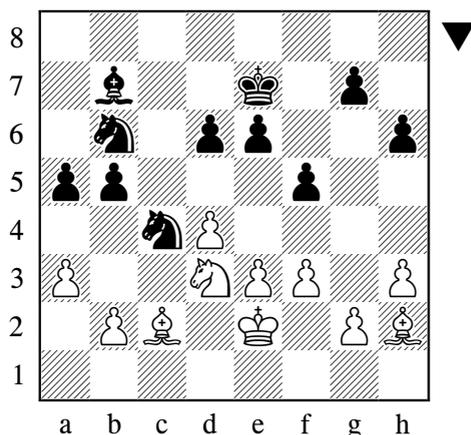
There is no obvious weakness, but the bishops are unable to *cooperate constructively*.

When do bishops cooperate constructively? Two main setups should come to your mind:

1. Bishops act on consecutive open diagonals. Example: ♖c3 and ♗d3, attacking the kingside.

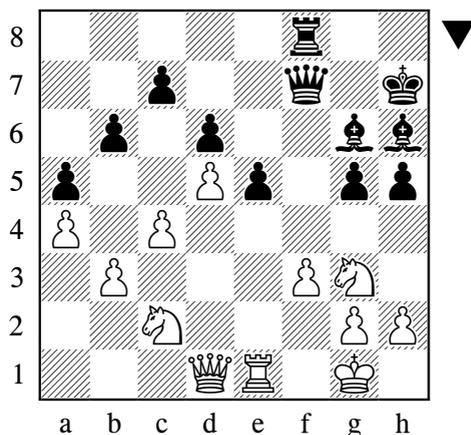
2. Bishops take opposing diagonals, creating a 'crossfire'. Example: ♗b3 and ♗h6, attacking a king on f8.

Keeping these two scenarios in mind, it is easier to decide whether the pair of bishops will be helpful or not. For example, in the game L'Ami – Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2011.



We have a relatively open game, since there are seven pawns per side (a lot), but none of them are blocking each other. There are no serious weaknesses, but the pair of bishops does not have a clear way to cooperate, and therefore does not provide any advantage.

This contrasts with the game Renet – Giri, Mulhouse 2011, analyzed in *Chess Structures* (in the King's Indian Type III chapter).



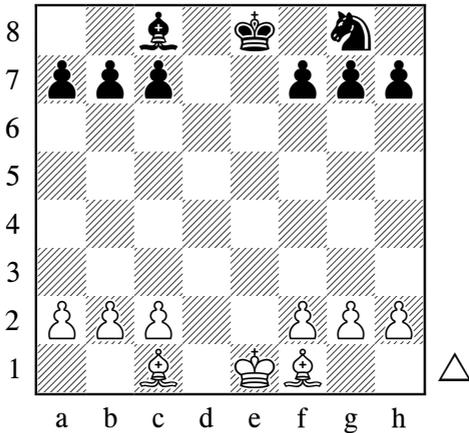
At first sight, the position is fairly blocked, and one might imagine the bishops are unlikely to be stronger than the knights. But after the natural ...g5-g4 they'll cooperate constructively on the adjacent diagonals b1-h7 and c1-h6, giving Black a serious edge.

I hope this brief discussion gives us something to think about as we review the following games. Throughout the following examples (and their sub-variations) we will see dozens of cases where bishops cooperate constructively and decide the game.

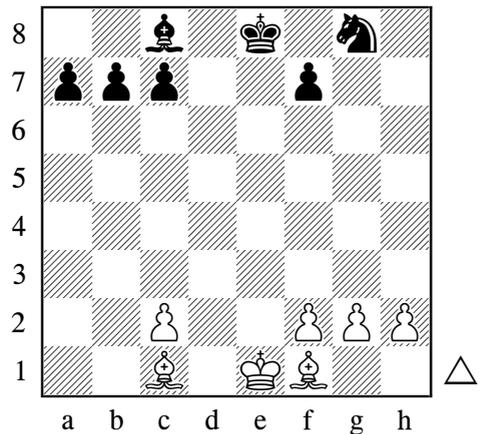
The bishop pair in the ending

We will start by studying complex endings and later move on to middlegame positions. A significant factor in the evaluation of positions with a pair of bishops is symmetry. The bishop pair is an extremely powerful weapon in asymmetric positions, due to their ability to act on both flanks at the same time. This is especially true in pawn races with many open lines. Let us first make this point as clear as possible, by briefly analyzing three simple positions.

Symmetric ending

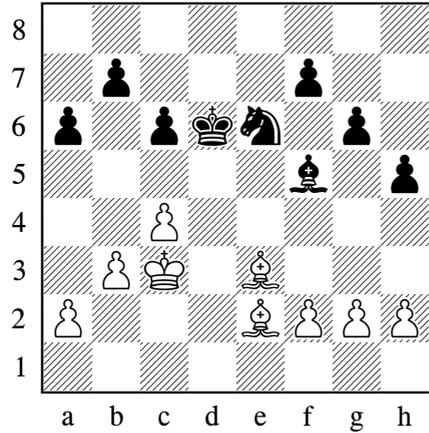


Asymmetric ending



This is the most symmetrical open position we could come up with. There are no weaknesses on either side. The game could continue:

1. ♖f4 c6 2. ♗d2 ♙e6 3. ♙d3 h5 4. b3 ♜e7
5. ♙b8 a6 6. ♙e2 g6 7. ♙d6 ♜d7 8. ♙c5 ♜d5
9. c4 ♜f4 10. ♙f1 ♙f5 11. ♙e3 ♜e6 12. ♗c3 ♜d6 13. ♙e2



White has a small advantage, but there are no weaknesses in Black's camp, and it will be hard to create any. The most likely outcome is a draw.

Now we go to the opposite extreme, by considering a very asymmetric position, where a pawn race is unavoidable. White has a near winning position, for example:

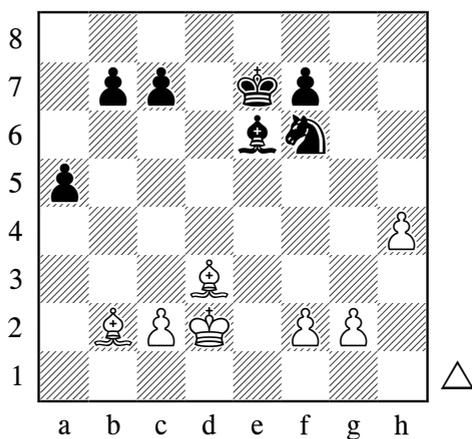
1.h4 a5 2.♙d3 ♘f6

Trying to prevent f2-f3 and g2-g4 with 2...f5 is good in principle, but in this position it runs into: 3.g4! fxg4 (Also losing is 3...♙f7 4.g5.) 4.h5 Black will have to give up his knight, as trying to catch the pawn with 4...♘f6 5.h6 ♙f7 6.h7 ♙g7 fails to 7.♙b2.

3.♙b2

The bishops are acting on adjacent diagonals, a clear sign of their effectiveness.

3...♙e7 4.♙d2 ♙e6



5.f3

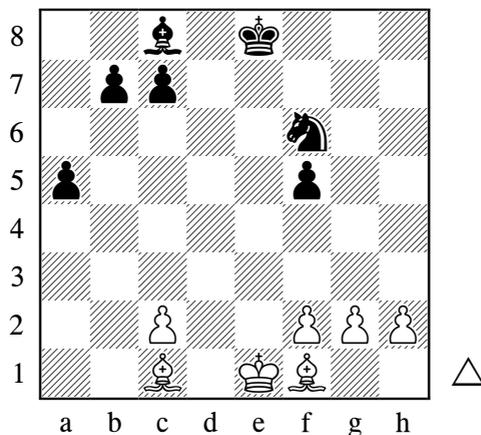
The ability of bishops to act on two flanks at once is well illustrated in this position. They will support the advance of the kingside pawns while preventing the key moves ...a4-a3 and ...b7-b5.

5...c6 6.g4 b5 7.h5 a4 8.h6 b4 9.♙xf6! ♙xf6 10.g5!

This important decoy secures the promotion.

10...♙xg5 11.h7+–

Would three extra moves help?



Having a head start in the race would certainly improve Black's drawing chances, although winning continues to be out of the question. However, even in this case it is easy to see that White's chances are good, as the bishop's long range of action helps to neutralize the queenside pawns without compromising their ability to help on the kingside.

1.f3 ♙e6

Attempting to push immediately with 1...c6 2.c4 ♙d7 3.♙d2 b5 creates too many holes on the dark squares: 4.♙e3 ♙e7 5.♙d4 ♙d6 6.♙f4 ♙e6 7.♙c5 a4 8.♙c1 White is winning material by force.

2.c4 ♘d7 3.♙d2 c5 4.♙c3 a4 5.♙e3 ♙f7 6.♙e2

White will continue with h2-h4 and g2-g4, with a slight advantage. The black pawns on the queenside certainly need attention from White, but it is unclear how Black will turn them into more than a distraction.

Taking advantage of the bishop pair

As we saw in the last three short examples, having the pair of bishops in a very asymmetric position provides a large advantage. For that reason, the following three examples focus on symmetric positions, which is where more insight is needed to know how to make the most out of the bishop pair. Here is what we should do:

1. Place pawns on the color of the opponent's bishop.

Since we have both bishops, wherever we place our pawns will restrict one of them, so it really makes sense to limit the range of action of the opponent's bishop in the process. We will refer to this as the **color-placement rule**.

2. Gain space on both flanks.

A substantial space advantage increases the range of action of our bishops dramatically and allows for the creation of more serious weaknesses. If we place our pawns correctly, our opponent will have a hard time fighting for space without seriously weakening some of his pawns or exposing his king to an unpleasant attack. For example, if our opponent has a dark-squared bishop, we should place pawns on dark squares, say, by playing f2-f4. If our opponent wants to fight for space, he may play ...f7-f5, but then the f5-pawn might become a weakness, as the bishop cannot protect it.

3. Centralize the king.

This is an obvious suggestion, but the main point here is that it would hard for the opponent's king to become centralized without being seriously harassed by the bishops, hence the ability to centralize the king is a serious advantage.

In a perfect game, we would be able to achieve these three goals without problem, and eventually break through the defense. In practice, our opponent may find a variety of defensive resources, from forcing us to violate the color-placement rule, to achieving massive pawn simplifications, hence securing a draw.

4. Trade off a bishop.

One recurring resource used to break through when objectives 1-3 have been attempted is trading off the opponent's bishop and winning the resulting bishop vs knight ending. We will see examples of this in Englisch – Steinitz and Granda – Bachmann.

In today's practice, strong defending players have a good understanding of these rules, so they will find ways to undermine our ability to follow them. For example, by placing their own pawns on the color of their bishop, or finding precise ways to claim space before we can.

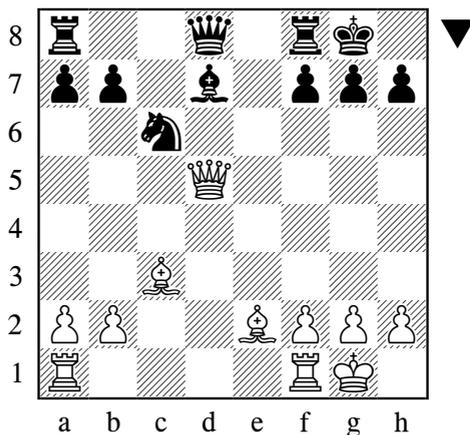
Alexander Grischuk – Michael Roiz

Ningbo 2011

Learning objectives:

1. We examine what happens when the color-placement rule cannot be followed.
2. The massive symmetry in this game gives rise to many instructive variations demonstrating how the bishop pair can aid in the gradual improvement of a position, using the three tools just described. Some variations are lengthy, but also beautiful and pedagogical.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♘f5 4.♖f3 e6 5.♙e2 c5
6.♙e3 ♗d7 7.♗bd2 ♗e7 8.c4 ♗c6 9.0–0
♙e7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.dxc5 0–0 12.♗b3
♗dx5 13.♗xe5 ♗xe5 14.♗d4 ♙d7 15.♙b3
♙xc5 16.♙xd5 ♙xd4 17.♙xd4 ♗c6 18.♙c3



White has won the pair of bishops in a fully open and symmetrical position. Whether or not to trade rooks and queens is essentially a matter of whether we can avoid exchanges while also occupying a useful square. For example, the queen could help in the attack, but only if we could secure a promising square for her. Otherwise trading the queens would be the simplest approach. Since the rooks will be fighting for the only truly open line

(the d-file), this trade is also the most natural continuation.

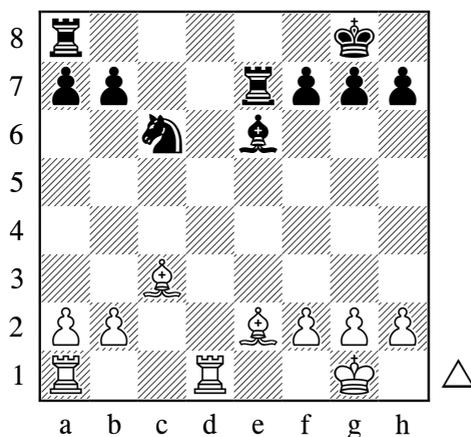
18...♙e6 19.♙c5

If White aims for a kingside attack with 19.♙h5 then comes 19...h6 20.♙fd1 ♙g5. White must choose between trading queens or moving the queen to a suboptimal square: 21.♙xg5 (Or 21.♙f3 ♙fe8 22.g3 ♙ad8 and having queens on the board does not benefit White in any way.) 21...hxg5 This kingside structure is a little worse for White than in the game, since it is hard to advance without trading pawns.

19...♙e8 20.♙fd1 ♙e7

Attempting to keep queens on the board would not pay off for Black, say after 20...♙c7?! 21.♙d3 f6 22.♙g3 ♗h8 (Or 22...♙f7 23.♙h5 g6 24.♙f3 with a slight advantage to White.) 23.♙d3 and the kingside is in danger.

21.♙xe7 ♙xe7

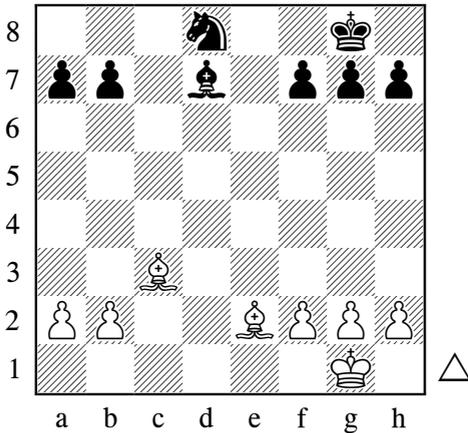


22.♙d2

White can try expanding on the queenside with: 22.b4 ♙e8 23.b5 ♗e7 24.♙f3 ♙ac8 25.♙b4 Preventing ...♙cd8. 25...b6 26.♙d2 Things might seem to be going well for White. 26...f6 27.♙e1 ♗f7 But White's play has now run out of steam. The b5-pawn does not help

to restrict Black's bishop at all (seemingly an exception to Rule 1 from page 146), because the game is too open, and the bishop can remain active on the a2-g8 diagonal.

22...♞d8 23.♞xd8† ♜xd8 24.♞d1 ♞d7
25.♞xd7 ♞xd7



We have reached the endgame of interest. We should first note the differences between this ending and the previous one. The lack of e-pawns means more open lines for the bishops, but also fewer chances to expand and gain space. Black's queenside is intact and he can hope that after ...a7-a6 the pawns will be safe. White is certainly a little better, but it is nothing serious so far.

26.f3

26.f4 should be met by 26...f5! taking control of the light squares. 27.♜f2 ♜f7 28.♜e3 ♜e6 29.♞c4 g6 (The careless 29...♞c6? is practically losing after 30.g4! g6 31.gxf5 gxf5 32.♞d3 ♜g6 33.h4 h5 34.♞c4 ♜f7 35.♞e5, which is similar to the game.) 30.h3 h5! 31.g3 ♞c6 Black has decent chances to hold (see the second segment after this game, starting on page 174).

26...♜e6 27.♜f2 ♞c6 28.♜e3 ♞d5 29.a4 f5!?

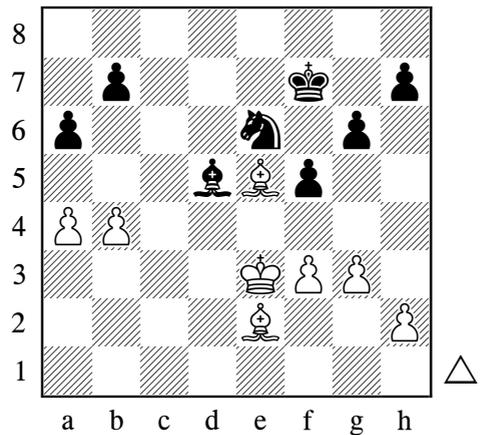
An interesting approach, placing pawns on light squares, forcing White to choose between violating the color-placement rule, or keeping the pawn on f3.

The alternative 29...♜f8 30.♞d3 ♜e7 31.g4 g6 32.f4 ♞c6 33.a5 also gives a pleasant advantage for White, due to the extra space and the potential break with f4-f5.

30.g3 ♜f7 31.b4 a6

Choosing a different pawn arrangement with 31...b6 does not make Black's defensive task any easier after: 32.a5! g6 33.♞e5 Both queenside pawns are now in danger. The most likely continuation is 33...bxa5 34.bxa5 ♞b7 35.♞b8 a6 36.♞e5 ♜e7 37.♜d3 ♜d7 38.♜c4 ♜g5 39.f4 ♜e6 40.♜b4 where Black's position is hanging by a thread.

32.♞e5 g6



33.g4!

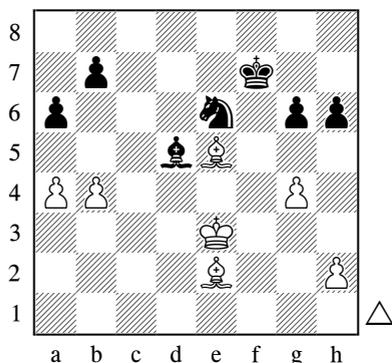
Black must make a critical decision between a trade on g4 and a trade on f5.

33...♞b3?

A serious mistake, allowing White to trade on f5, creating a permanent weakness.

At first sight it seems like the position after taking the pawn could potentially be defensible for Black:

33...fxg4 34.fxg4 h6



In reality White has a clear path to victory:

35.h4!

Next is h4-h5 fixing a weakness on h6.

35...g5

Or 35...♙c6 36.a5 ♙d5 37.h5 (37.♙f3!?) 37...♙c6 38.♙d3 gxh5 39.gxh5 ♖g5 40.♙c4† ♜f8 41.♙b2 preparing the king's invasion to b6. (The king's invasion needs preparation: 41.♙d4?? ♜f3†.) Black cannot hold the position any longer, for example: 41...♙g2 (If 41...♙f3 42.♙f6 ♖h7 43.♙e5 ♖g5 44.♙f4 ♙xh5 45.♙d5 White wins the b7- and a6-pawns, and the game.) 42.♙d4 ♜e7 43.♙c1 ♜f6 44.♙d5! ♙xd5 45.♙xd5 Decisively winning the b7-pawn.

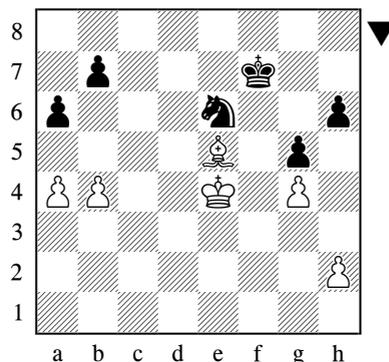
36.h5 ♙b3

The bishop vs knight ending is winning after: 36...♖f8? 37.♙f3! ♙xf3 38.♙xf3 ♖e6 39.♙e4 ♙e8 40.♙d5 ♖d7 41.a5 ♖d8 42.♙d6 ♖f7 43.♙c5! Black is in zugzwang and cannot prevent the white king from decisively reaching f6: 43...♖d8 44.♙e5 ♖e6 45.♙f6 White wins.

37.a5 ♖d8 38.♙c7 ♖e6 39.♙g3 ♜e7 40.♙f3 ♖d8 41.♙d4

Followed by ♜c5-b6, winning.

Another try was 33...fxg4 34.fxg4 g5? anticipating h2-h4, but this is also losing after: 35.♙d3 h6 (Or 35...♖f8 36.♙d6 ♖g6 37.♙d4 ♜e6 38.♙g3 and Black isn't well prepared to meet threats like ♙f5† and ♙c8 combined with ♜c5-b6.) 36.♙e4! ♙xe4 37.♙xe4

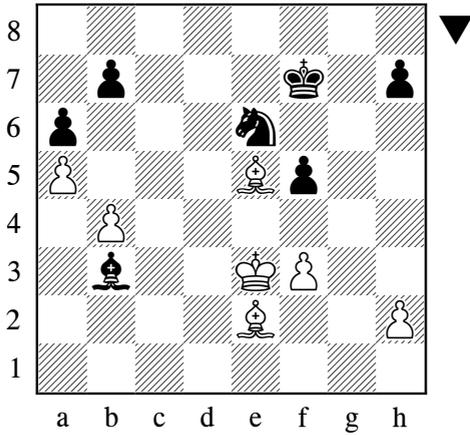


Black is unable to cover all the entry points, and quickly falls into zugzwang. For example: 37...♙e7 38.a5 ♖d8 39.♙f5 ♙f7 40.♙d4 ♖c6 41.♙c5 Black can resign.

Instead, the correct defense was: 33...fxg4 34.fxg4 ♜e8 Black's position is terribly delicate, but at least he has not created any new weaknesses for himself. One possible continuation could be: 35.h4 ♜e7 36.a5 ♜e8 37.♙d3 ♜e7 38.♙e4 ♙c6! It's not obvious how to crack Black's defenses.

34.gxf5 gxf5 35.a5

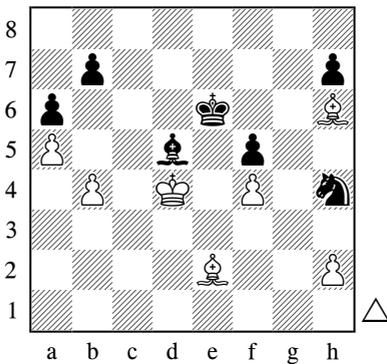
Worse was 35.♙d3?! ♙xa4 36.♙xf5 which has the upside of creating an imbalance, but the downside of trading yet another pawn. Overall, this reduces White's winning chances.



35...♙d5?

This seemingly innocuous move may have been the decisive mistake, as now Black will be forced to bring his king to the g6-square, far from his vulnerable queenside.

A better defensive setup could have been achieved with 35...♜f8 36.f4 ♖e6 37.♗d4 ♙d5 where Black's pieces are doing a good job of holding the position together. Both the bishop and knight can help to protect the most vulnerable point in the position (the b7-pawn). The game could have continued with: 38.♙d3 ♙b3 39.♙g7 ♜g6 40.♙h6 ♜h4 41.♙e2 ♙d5

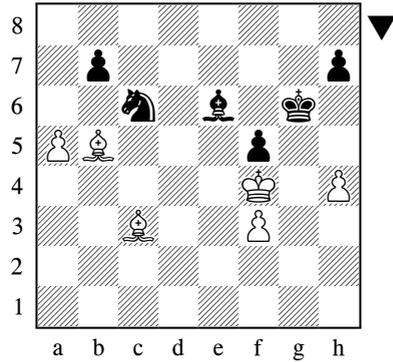


42.♗e3 (42.♗c5 isn't powerful enough now due to 42...♜f3 43.h3 ♜g1 44.♙f1 ♙f3! 45.♗b6. Black may pick among many waiting moves, like 45...♗f7!?, since White doesn't have a strong enough threat.) 42...♜g6

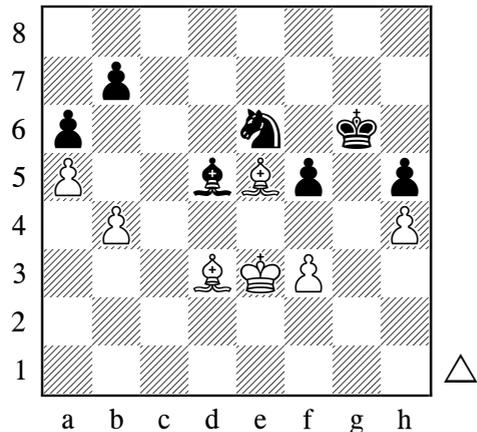
43.♙g5 ♜h8 44.♗d4 ♜f7 45.♙d3 ♜d6 46.♙h6 ♜e4 White has a substantial advantage, but there's no obvious path to convert it into a victory.

36.♙d3 ♗g6 37.h4 h5

If 37...♜d8 38.♙c3 ♜c6 39.♗f4 ♙e6 White can break through with: 40.b5! axb5 41.♙xb5



The b7-pawn is too vulnerable and all White needs to do is find the opportunity to transfer his king to b6, for example: 41...♙d5 42.♙d3 ♙e6 43.♙e1 ♙d7 (Or 43...♗f6 44.h5! followed by ♙c3, winning the f5-pawn.) 44.♙c4 ♙c8 45.♙b3 ♙d7 46.♙d5 h6 (46...♙c8 allows 47.a6! ♗f6 48.♙c3† ♗e7 49.♙xc6 bxc6 50.a7 ♙b7 51.♗xf5 and this opposite-colored bishop ending is an easy win for White.) 47.♗e3 ♗f6 48.♙c3† ♗g6 49.♗d3 ♗h5 50.♙e1 Black is unable to stop the winning maneuver ♗c4-c5-b6.



38.f4

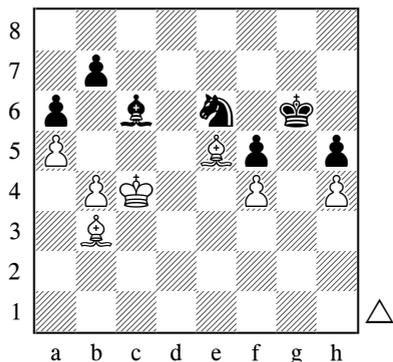
White has fixed all his pawns on the color opposite to his own unopposed bishop, a clear violation of the color-placement guideline. Does that give Black chances to hold the position? The answer is “no”. In fact, if White finds the correct winning procedure, there is nothing Black can do to save the game anymore. In simple terms, the reason White is winning in spite of having violated the rule is because the weaknesses on f5 and h5 (and potentially b7) are far too serious and completely make up for White’s limited light-square control.

38...♙c6 39.♗d2 ♙b5 40.♙c2

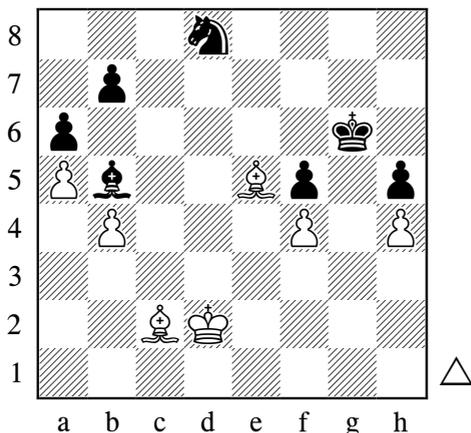
40.♙xb5?? axb5 is a disaster for White. Black could now press for a win, as White lacks entry points, the game is blocked and the knight is superior in this position.

40...♘d8

Attempting to guard the a2-g8 diagonal does not solve anything: 40...♙c4 41.♗c3 ♙d5 42.♙d1! Black is in zugzwang (42.♙a4? ♗f7 covers the e8-square.) 42...♙c6 (After 42...♗h6 43.♙a4 ♗g6 44.♙e8† ♗h6 45.♙f7 Black is running out of moves. 45...♙a2 46.♙f6 ♙d5 47.♙g5† ♗g7 48.♙xh5 White is winning.) 43.♗c4 ♗h6 44.♙b3 ♗g6



45.♙c2! Another zugzwang. 45...♙f3 46.b5 axb5† (Black can’t avoid taking on b5 with 46...♙g2 due to: 47.♙d3 ♙f3 48.♗b4 Threatening to gain a pawn on a6, thereby forcing 48...axb5 49.♗xb5.) 47.♗xb5 ♙e4 48.♙d1 White is going to win after ♗b6 followed by ♙a4-d7-c8.



41.♙b3

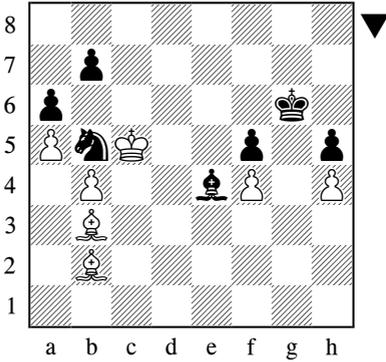
Heading towards d5, while also keeping the black king locked out of the game.

41...♙e8

If 41...♗c6 42.♙c3 the bishops do a wonderful job of keeping the black king out of the game. The threats ♙e6-c8xb7 and ♗e3-d4-c5-b6 cannot be stopped simultaneously, for example: 42...♗e7 43.♗e3 ♗h6 44.♙e5 ♗g6 45.♙d6 ♗c6 46.♙e6 ♗a7 47.♗d4 ♗f6 48.♙b3 Followed by ♗c5-♗b6, winning.

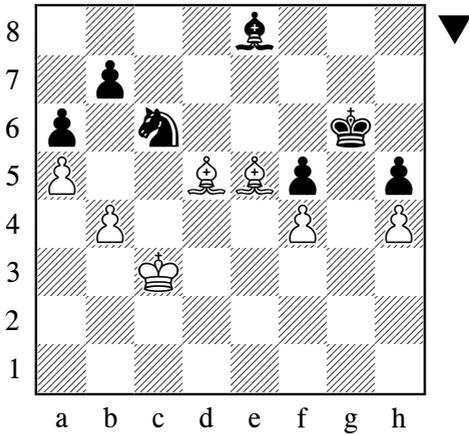
42.♗c3 ♗c6

Black is also lost after: 42...♙f7 43.♙d1 Threatening ♙f3. 43...♙d5 44.♗d4 ♙e4 45.♗c5 ♗c6 46.♙c3 ♗a7 47.♙b3 ♗b5 48.♙b2



What a picturesque position! Black's king is completely cut off from the game, and next White can choose between ♖b6, ♕e6 and ♕c8, or simply exchanging bishops with ♗d5.

43. ♗d5

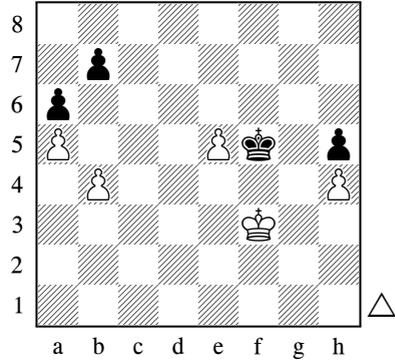


43... ♗f7

Fighting for the a2-g8 diagonal, and probably hoping to bring the king to the queenside where it is needed the most.

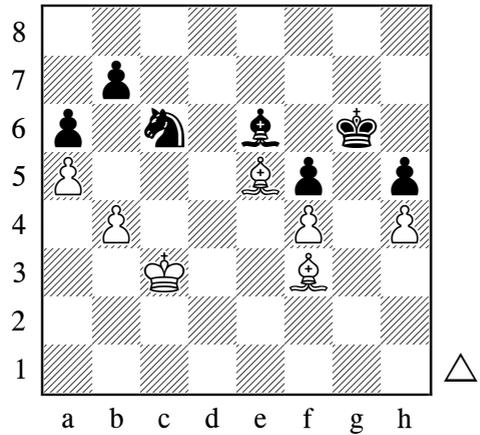
Capturing the bishop with 43...♗xe5 44.fxe5 does not help Black, since 44...♗c6 is refuted by 45.♗d4! and now Black is forced to go into a lost pawn ending: 45...♗xd5 (Advancing with 45...f4 does not help due to 46.♗xc6 bxc6 47.♗e4 f3 48.♗xf3 ♗f5 49.e6! ♗xe6 50.♗e4 winning the opposition and the game. Furthermore, waiting with 45...♗g7 loses by

one tempo after 46.♗c5 ♗g6 47.♗xc6 bxc6 48.e6 f4 49.♗xc6 f3 50.e7 f2 51.e8=♖† promoting with check.) 46.♗xd5 f4 47.♗e4 f3 48.♗xf3 ♗f5



49.e6! ♗xe6 50.♗e4 Gaining the opposition and winning: 50...♗d6 51.♗f5 ♗c6 52.♗g5 ♗b5 53.♗xh5 ♗xb4 54.♗g6 The h-pawn is too fast.

44. ♗f3 ♗e6



45. ♗c7!

Black resigned, as he is completely lost due to the threat of b4-b5 followed by a5-a6. For example:

a) 45...♗h6 46.b5 axb5 47.a6 ♗c8 48.♗b6 Followed by a6-a7, winning the knight.

b) Or 45...♔d7 46.♕c4 and the king is coming to b6. 46...♙e8 (46...♕f6 47.♙xh5 wins.) 47.♕c5 ♔d7 48.b5! axb5 49.a6 White wins.

c) 45...♖a7!? probably deserved a try. 46.♕d2! (46.♕d4?? ♖b5† 47.♕c5 ♖xc7 48.♕d6 seems to be completely winning, but it actually fails. 48...♖b5† 49.♕xe6 ♖d4† After this unexpected fork, the game would end in a draw after an interesting line: 50.♕d7 ♖xf3 51.♕c7 ♖xh4 52.♕xb7 ♖f3 53.b5 h4 54.bxa6 h3 55.a7 h2 56.a8=♚ h1=♚ 57.♚e8† With perpetual check.) 46...♖c6 47.b5! ♖d4 48.♙xb7 ♖xb5 49.♙b6 The a5-pawn decides the game.

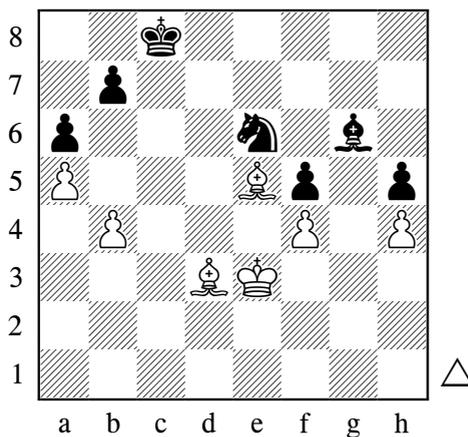
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Final Remarks

1. Following the color-placement rule is not always possible. Skilled defenders will find ways to force us away from this guideline. Nevertheless, here the presence of serious weaknesses like the f5- and h5-pawns compensates for this problem.
2. A crucial difference between this game and the previous two examples is the amount of pawns. Some positions can be more technical due to the reduced material, but at the same time, the bishops are so much stronger, and there are so many additional resources, like the ability to keep the king locked in on the kingside by simply placing the bishops on b2 and b3.
3. Overall, I think this is a very clean and instructive example, as it not only helps us understand the pawn placement rule better, but also illustrates many standard procedures to break through the defense, like the persistent creation of zugzwangs.

Could the king save the game? Not really...

In the game we have just seen, even though the bishops did a great job of keeping the black king from traveling to the queenside, this does not mean Black could have drawn the game had his king made it there. Take the following position as an example, where White wins easily.



1. ♙f1!

Clearing the path for the king.

1...♕d7 2. ♙g2 ♕c8 3. ♙h3!

Restricting Black's moves.

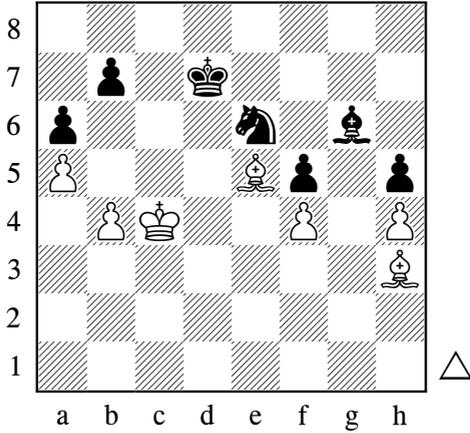
3...♕d7

Relocating the knight does not help: 3...♖d8 4.♕d4 ♖c6† 5.♕c5 ♖xe5 6.fx5 ♕c7 (Or 6...♕d7 7.♕b6 winning.) 7.♕d5 b6 8.e6 f4 9.♙g2 Followed by ♕e5, and White wins.

4.♕d3 ♕c8

Similar is 4...♕c6 5.♕c4 followed by ♙g2.

5.♕c4 ♕d7



6.b5!

This move will either create a vulnerable pawn on a6 or help to attack the weak b7-pawn.

6...♙c8

Also winning for White is 6...axb5† 7.♙xb5 ♙c8 8.♙b6 ♘d8 9.♙g2 ♙e8 10.♙c7 ♙c6 11.♙xc6 ♘xc6 12.a6!.

7.♙b4

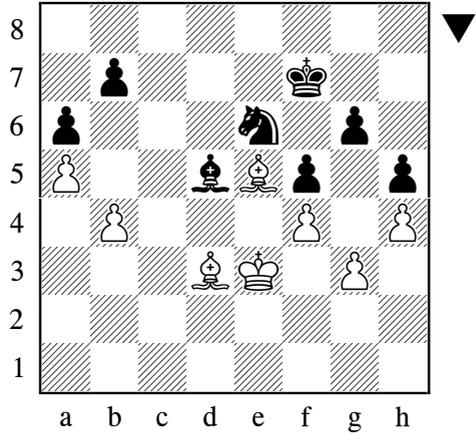
Waiting for the king to leave c8.

7...♙d7 8.bxa6 bxa6 9.♙f1

Winning the a6-pawn, and the rest is easy.

Consequences of violating the color-placement rule

To further elaborate on the discussion in the previous game, let's consider this example.

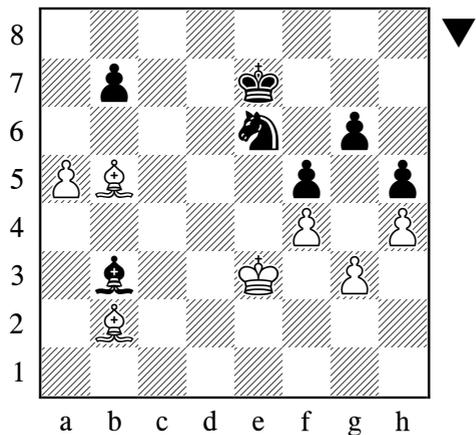


White has violated the color-placement rule with every single pawn, but the addition of pawns on g3 and g6 has rendered the weak f5- and h5-pawns untouchable. The color-placement rule applies well now, as White will struggle to win. The game might continue:

1...♙e7 2.b5

Other moves do not seem promising.

2...axb5 3.♙xb5 ♙b3 4.♙b2

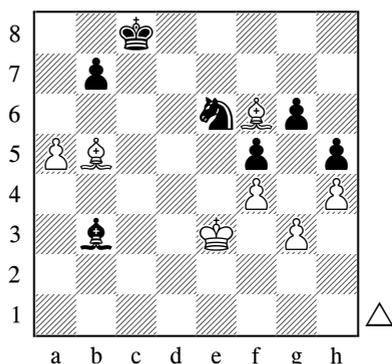


We have reached a critical position. A bad move here would cost Black the game, while a precise defense would nearly secure a draw.

4...♔f7?

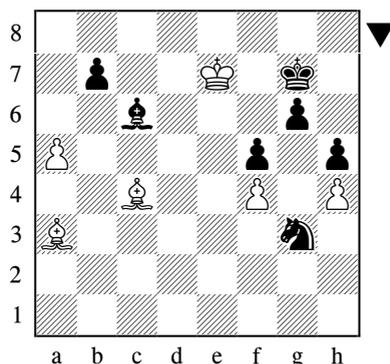
This looks like it should work, but is actually losing in a very instructive way.

The careless 4...♔d8? is punished by: 5.♙f6† ♔c8



6.♙e8!! A strong piece sacrifice. 6...♖c7 7.♙xg6 ♖d5† 8.♔d4 ♖xf6 9.♔e5 White is getting three pawns for the piece, and the ending is easily winning. For example: 9...♖g4† 10.♔xf5 ♖e3† 11.♔g5 ♔d7 12.♙xh5 ♔e7 13.♙g6 The pawns roll down the board with decisive effect.

I originally intended to say that 4...♖c7 was a good defensive mechanism. 5.♙f1 ♖d5† 6.♔d4 ♖f6 7.♙g2 (The reason for my initial optimism is that 7.♔c5 ♖d7† 8.♔b5 ♙d5 gives Black a promising defensive setup.) 7...♖e4 Blocking the bishop by offering a “poisoned pawn” (as taking it results in a drawn ending). However, White has a clever response: 8.♔e5! Keeping the king active and threatening a potential invasion on the f6-square. Black is unable to hold the game, and the fact he may capture the g3-pawn is not helpful at all. One funny way to end the game could be: 8...♙a4 9.♙f1 ♙c6 10.♙a3† ♔f7 11.♙c4† ♔g7 12.♔e6! ♖xg3 13.♔e7



Black’s extra pawn on the kingside is useless, and now White’s bishops are so powerful they can even be used to checkmate the opponent after: 13...♖e4 14.♙b2† ♔h7 15.♔f8 Mate is unavoidable. 15...♖d6 (Or 15...g5 16.♙g8† ♔g6 17.♙f7† ♔h6 18.hxg5† ♖xg5 19.♙g7† ♔h7 20.fxg5 followed by g5-g6.) 16.♙g8† ♔h6 17.♙g7#.

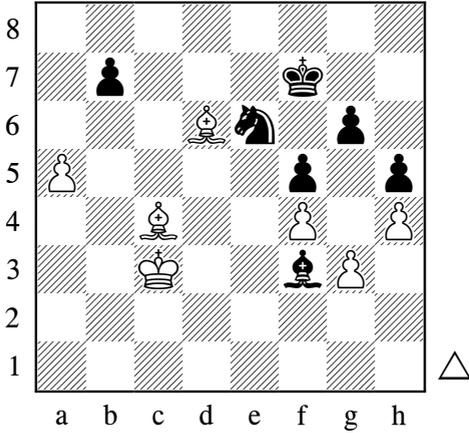
The only good defense appears to be 4...♙d5!, guarding the key h1-a8 diagonal, and keeping Black’s position stable for now. Still, please note that (even if the position is technically drawn) White has excellent winning chances due to the fragility of Black’s position.

5.♙a3!

Cutting off the king from the queenside. Now White breaks through.

5...♔g7 6.♔d3 ♔f7 7.♔c3 ♙a2 8.♙d6 ♙d5 9.♙c4 ♙f3

White also wins after 9...♙xc4 10.♔xc4 ♔e8 11.♔d5 ♔d7 12.♙a3! followed by ♔e5-f6.



10.♔b3!

White wins after this precise move.

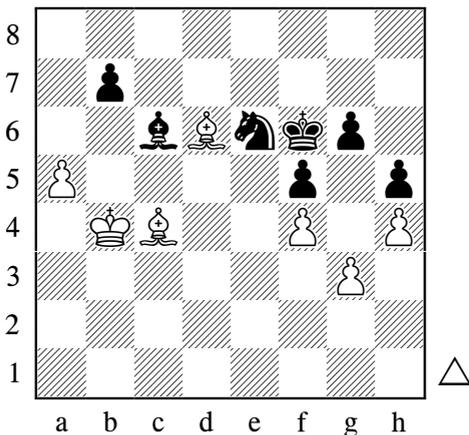
The direct 10.♔b4 ♕c6 11.♖b5? would spoil the game after 11...♗xb5 12.♔xb5 ♔e8 13.♔b6 ♔d7 14.♖e5 ♔c8, with a draw.

10...♔f6

10...♖g2 is effectively the same: 11.♔a4! Heading to b5. 11...♗c6† 12.♔b4 Zugzwang. 12...♔f6 13.♖b5 We are back in the main line.

The black king is now one square further from e8, and White can proceed with:

11.♔b4 ♕c6



12.♖b5! ♗f3

The point is that 12...♗xb5? 13.♔xb5 simply loses the b7-pawn.

13.♖d7 ♖e2

This is forced to prevent the white king coming to b6.

14.♖e8

Threatening ♖e5†, winning the g6-pawn and the game, forcing Black's king to retreat further.

14...♔g7 15.♖e5† ♔h7 16.♖f7 ♔d8 17.♖d5

White is easily winning after the invasion ♔c5-b6.

The bishop pair in the middlegame

The middlegame examples we will analyze center around checkmate attacks, simply because the bishop pair allows for these attacks to take place in optimal conditions. Asymmetry continues to be favorable for the bishop pair, and the color-placement rule remains a powerful tool in guiding our decisions. Gaining space continues to be a good idea, and doing so close to the opposing king is now even better; and easier, as our opponent would be very reluctant to push pawns near his king in the presence of a bishop pair.

Obviously, the endgame Goals 3 and 4 (king centralization and trading off the bishops) are no longer advisable, but as a substitute, remember that sacrificing an exchange for the opponent's bishop can lead to many interesting tactical possibilities, as we will see in the first example of this subsection.