Chess Bibliography: Test your endgame ability

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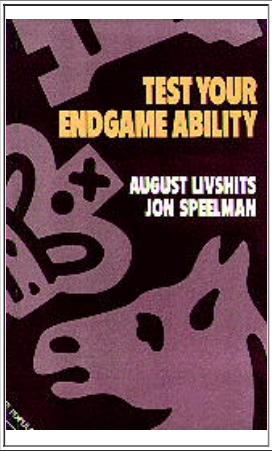
Test your endgame ability



Title: Test your endgame ability
Author: August Livshits & Jon Speelman
Editorial: Bastford
ISBN: 0-7134-5567-5, 201 pages
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Abstract: This book presents a superb collection of practical endgame studies selected from the greatest endgame composers, arranged within chapters of increasing difficulty. There's a well thought marking scheme which permits the reader to work out his rating at this difficult area of chess. 522 diagrams, 87 test sheets of 6 positions each.

Review:

This book is eminently usable. Its layout has nothing to do with that of most other books about chess endgames. Here, a collection of *practical* endgames studies is presented, for the reader to carefully study them, and solve within a given amount of time, and with a number of marks to be won for each correct solution.

The authors have carefully selected each study so that the student can learn some tactical aspects of each type of ending. The positions themselves are from some of the world's greatest composers, you can find here works from **Moravec**, **Grigoriev**, **Rinck**, **Korolkov**, **Kubbel**, **Chekhover**, **Reti**, **Nadareishvili**, **Kasparian**, **Cheron**, **Troitsky**, **Liburkin**, **Centurini**, **Loyd**, etc, to name but a few.

The book begins with an **Introduction** where the authors, August Livshit, a leading Soviet trainer, and top Grandmaster Jon Speelman, present their work, and make plain from the start the *practical* aspects of it. In their own words:

*" ... Unfortunately the great majority of published studies have absolutely nothing in common with practical chess-playing as they start from unnatural and unwieldy positions ... The reader will **not** find such examples in this collection ..."*

After this encouraging Introduction, we find in **How to use this book** a simple explanation of the mechanics of the tests: every group of 6 positions constitute a test, with a certain amount of time allocated for the set, from 50 to 150 minutes. Each correct position wins you some marks, certain errors deduct marks, and your overall marking for the group is compared with a given expected value. The final score can then be converted to an ELO rating with the help of a given *Rating Conversion Table*, ranging from ELO 1000 to 2800. Of course, this is equally valid both for human players **and** chess programs, too, so you can develop an endgame ELO rating for either you or your favourite program.

In Chapter 1, **Pawn Endings**, the authors tells us a bit of chess history, with illustrative positions from **Polerio**, **Carrera**, **Ponziani**, and **Reti**, and also introduce some of the basic guidelines for this important type of endgames. Then we find 18 Test sheets (108 test positions), with allocated times form 50 to 150 minutes, and scores ranging from 50 to 110 marks.

Then, in Chapter 2, **Knight against Pawns**, the authors introduce this kind of endgames, with no less than 10 historic positions explained in details, as a kind of prologue to the 12 Test sheets (72 positions), times from 60 to 150 minutes.

Chapter 3, **Bishop against Pawns**, presents the reader with 10 Tets sheets (60 positions), times from 90 to 120 minutes, full of extremely interesting positions which could very well arise in practice. A few of these endings are very difficult, being some of the most complex theoretical positions knowm.

Chapter 4, **Knight Endings** deals with one of the most difficult and comparatively least investigated aspects of endgame theory. The authors state the basic premises and appropriate course of action to take for this endings, illustrated with 3 sample positions fully analyzed. After this preamble, we find 5 Test sheets (30 positions), times from 70 to 150 minutes, to develop and sharpen our skills.

The second most frequent type of endings (after Rook endings) is discussed in Chapter 5, **Bishop v Knight Endings**. The authors show off some important points, illustrated with 4 sample positions, then 14 Test sheets (84 positions) await us, times from 90 to 150 minutes. The learning process continues ...

Next, the authors introduce a difficult ending, which unless played very carefully ends easily in a draw. It's Chapter 6, **Opposite Coloured Bishop Endings**, and after explaining the main rules with the aid of 3 auxiliary positions, we have to study and solve 4 Test sheets (24 positions), times from 75 to 120 minutes, a total of 250 marks to be won.

Less prone to draws, Chapter 7 discusses **Same coloured Bishop Endings**, where the authors first tell us about the main plans to have in mind when dealing with this rather frequent endgame, then we find 7 Test sheets (42 positions), times from 70 to 120 minutes, to try and apply the aforementioned plans.

Then, Chapter 8 deals with **Queen Endings**, allegedly the most difficult type of endgame, both for human players and computers. The queen being the powerful piece she is, requires the utmost patience and precision to handle successfully in an almost empty board. The authors warn us about some important points, then 4 Test sheets (24 positions), times from 90 to 150 minutes, await us, frightening indeed !

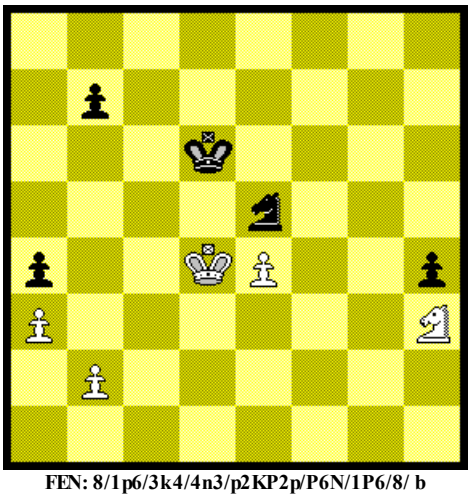
On the other hand, Chapter 9 is about **Rook Endings**, the most frequent type of endgame in practice. The authors are fully aware of its importance in practical play, and after a detailed introduction in which the main features are discussed with the aid of 6 typical positions, fully analyzed, they present us with 13 Test sheets (78 positions), times from 90 to 120 minutes, for us to pass our final examination, no less than 1100 marks to be won !

The book closes with a most useful **Index of Composers**, where we find the 180+ composers whose works are featured in this book, arranged in alphabetical order, from **Adamson** to **Zhilis**, and next to each, the numbers of the corresponding diagrams, for easy reference.

Here is a sample position from this book: quoted from pag. 92, **Knight Endings**:

... But see how easily Nimzowitsch converted the advantage of a passed rook pawn into a victory against Emanuel Lasker. Even though material is still equal, everything goes extremely smoothly ...

Pag. 92: E. Lasker vs. Nimzowitsch: Black to play and win



FEN: 8/1p6/3k4/4n3/p2KP2p/P6N/1P6/8/ b

1. ... b6 !

Reviewer Notes:

This endgame may seem simple, but it has some surprises. Here, the only move that wins is **1. ... b6!**. If at once **1. ... b5 ?**, Black cannot improve the position of his king. By playing the text, Black loses a move and forces White to play in the critical position.

The Principal Variation as given in the book goes like this:

1. ... b6! 2. Nf4 b5 3. Nh3 (if **3. Kc3** then **3. ... Ng6! 4. Nh3 Kc5** wins) **3. ... Nc6+ 4. Ke3 Kc5 5. Kd3 b4 6. ab+ Kxb4 7. Kc2 Nd4+ 8. Kb1** (or **8. Kd3 Ne6 9. Kc2 Kc4** wins) **8. ... Ne6 9. Ka2** (if **9. Kc2** then **9. ... Kc4** wins) **9. ... Kc4 10. Ka3 Kd4 11. Kxa4 Kxe4 12. b4 Kf3 13. b5 Kg2**

and White resigned.

Chess Genius 1.0, running on a P100 and using a hash table of 320 Kb, does not see the merits of **1. ... b6!**. After thinking about it for more than 7 hours, it looks at 16/28 plies and selects **1. ... Ne5-g4**, with a value of +0.39. The winning line is too deep, requiring at least 26 full plies to discover.

Chess Genius 5.0 (PANEK), running on the faster hardware of the lot, and with a 10 Mb hashtable, doesn't see **1. ... b6!** either. At 10/22 plies, it prefers **Ne5-g4** briefly, at +0.39, then, still at 10/22, changes to **Ne5-c6+**, slightly better at +0.42, seen in 42 seconds.

By the time it reaches 13/25 plies, 5 min. 22 sec. have elapsed, and **Ne5-g4** is rediscovered, at +0.66. Letting the search go deeper, it doesn't change its mind, and at 17/29 plies (which takes 2 h 12 min to reach) it still prefers the same move with the same value, resulting in this predicted Principal Variation: **e5g4, h3g5, g4f2, ..., etc**.

Crafty 12.9, running on a P133 with 6 Mb for the main hash table and 1 Mb for the pawn structures hash table, does prefer **1. ... b6** at depths from 6 plies, which takes less than a second and evaluates to +0.860, to 13 plies, which takes 1h 28m, with a value of +0.948.

But then, after 3h 22m have elapsed, still at 13 plies, it changes its mind to **1. ... Nc6+**, evaluated at +1.008. Continuing the search to 14/16 plies takes nearly 5 hours, and also selects this move, this time at +0.968. If you are eager to have a look at it, this is Crafty 12.9's analysis:

```
depth    time    score   variation
  6      0.74    0.860   b6 Nf4 b5 Kc3 Kc5 Nd5
  7      2.98    1.076   b6 Kc3 b5 Kb4 Nc4 Kxb5 Nxb2
  8     18.10    0.930   b6 Kc3 b5 Nf4 Nc4 Kc2 Kc5 Nd5
  9      1:05    1.060   b6 Kc3 b5 Nf4 Nc4 Kc2 Kc5 Ne6+ Kd6 Nf4
 10      5:51    0.948   b6 Kc3 Kc5 Ng5 b5 Nh3 Kc6 Nf4 Nc4 Kc2
 11     16:33    0.976   b6 Kc3 b5 Ng5 Ke7 Kb4 Kf6 Nh3 Nc4 Kxb5 Nxb2
 12     66:08    0.960   b6 Kc3 b5 Ng5 Kc5 Nh3 Kc6 Kc2 Kb6
                         Nf4 Kc5 Nd5
 13     88:31    0.948   b6 Kc3 b5 Kd4 Nc6+ Ke3 Na5 Ng5 Nc4+
                         Kd4 Kc6
 13    202:15    1.008   Nc6+ Ke3 Kc5 Kd3 Ne5+ Kc3 Ng6 Kd3
                         b6 Kc3 b5 Kd3 Ne5+ Kc3 Kc6 Ng5
 14    295:37    0.968   Nc6+ Ke3 Kc5 Kd3 Ne5+ Kc3 Ng6 Kd3
                         b6 Kc3 b5 Kc2 Kc4 Ng5 Nf4 e5
```