



Intermediate Lecture – Vital Pawn Strategies in Closed Centre Positions

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Main learning points

Closed Centres are positions in which the central pawns have not been exchanged, and are blocked against each other. Because White moves first, it is usually White whose pawns are further advanced. Because his pawns are further advanced, white has extra space in which to move his pieces. The typical pawn structures are as follows:



**Vital freeing move for Black:
Pawn from c7 to c5**



**Vital freeing move for Black:
Pawn from f7 to f5**

In the left hand diagram, if both players castle on the kingside, White is the much more likely player to construct a winning attack in the middlegame. The central pawns make it hard for the black pieces to defend on the kingside, whereas the white bishops have access to open attacking diagonals. On the other hand, black has no weaknesses in his pawn structure, and if he can survive the middlegame he can target the White pawn on d4 and has very good chances in an endgame. To survive the middlegame, it is essential for Black to keep White busy by attacking the pawn centre and using his pieces actively on the queenside. Black's most essential move is to play c5 as early as possible, attacking the base of the pawn chain and opening the c-file for his rooks.

In the right hand diagram, White's space advantage is on the queenside. Black's active chances lie on the kingside, but they depend on Black being able to play the vital move f5. Again this move attacks the base of the white pawn chain and prepares to open the f-file for the Black rooks.

If White is able to prevent Black's vital freeing move, then he will have succeeded in Golden Rule No. 1 - Controlling the Centre. Black will then find it very hard to find an active plan.





Successful attacking chess is usually only possible when your opponent has been prevented from competing for central control. In the following highly instructive game by the great German player Siegbert Tarrasch, the central pawn structure is that in the right hand diagram above. The early struggle revolves around whether or not Black will safely be able to compete for the centre and free his game with pawn to f5. After White successfully prevents f5, Black is left without much space to move and has no active plan. Tarrasch then has all the time in the world to move every single piece carefully to its very best square before he eventually strikes with his winning attack.

S. Tarrasch v J. Showalter
Vienna, 1898

1	e4	e5	22	Be3	g5 (Note 6)
2	Nf3	Nc6	23	Nf3	f6
3	Bc4	Be7	24	h4	h6
4	d4	d6	25	Rh1	Kh7
5	d5	Nb8	26	Kg1	Kg6
6	Bd3! (Note 1)	Nf6	27	Nh2! (Note 7)	Rc7
7	c4	O-O	28	Nf1	Qc8
8	h3! (Note 2)	C6	29	Qe2!	Kf7
9	Nc3	Na6	30	Ba6	Qb8
10	Be3	Nc7	31	Nb5! (Note 8)	Bxb5
11	O-O	Nfe8	32	Bxb5	Rfc8
12	Qc2 (Note 3)	cxd5	33	Bc6 (Note 8)	Bf8
13	cxd5	g6 (Note 3)	34	hxg5	hxg5
14	Bh6	Ng7	35	Qf3 (Note 9)	Rxc6
15	g4! (Note 3)	Nce8 (Note 3)	36	dx6	Ne6
16	Kh2	Kh8	37	Rh7+ (Note 10)	Bg7
17	Rg1	Bd7	38	Ng3 (Note 10)	Rxc6
18	Rg2	Rc8	39	Nf5 (Note 10)	Qc8
19	Rag1	b6 (Note 4)	40	Rgh2 (Note 10)	Ne7
20	Qd2! (Note 5)	Nf6	41	Nxg7	Nxg7
21	Ne1	Ng8	42	Bxg5	Resigns (Note 11)





Note 1	Sometimes it is correct to move a piece twice. Black has lost time moving his knight back, so White has time to move the bishop to a better square. White wants to prevent Black from freeing himself with f5. The bishop move also allows white to play c4, supporting his d5 pawn.
Note 2	White is already controlling the board and can afford to wait before developing his other pieces. h3 limits the range of Black's good bishop. Most importantly, White also prepares g4, with which he hopes to stop f5 for good. Note that h3 and g4 do not weaken White's king in this position, provided that White succeeds in stopping Black from freeing his game with f5.
Note 3	The theme of the game over moves 12 to 15 is that Black is working very hard to prepare f5, and White is working equally hard to stop it. 15.g4! seems to put a stop to it for good, and Black now accepts that he must sit and defend a passive position. In fact, Black should probably have gone ahead and tried 15...f5. It loses a pawn, and is a bit desperate, but once White brings his rooks to the g-file it will be too late.
Note 4	Black is short of useful moves, but 19...b6 does not help. It weakens some light squares on the queenside. Tarrasch adds this to his little list of advantages to be exploited later (Note 8).
Note 5	White unpins his knight. Qd2 also prepares to move his f3 knight to e1, allowing him to build his attack with f4. If the immediate 20. Ne1, Bg5! allows Black to swap his bad bishop. White is careful not to give Black any chances.
Note 6	The move 22...g5 changes the kingside dynamics. f4 is prevented, but Black has now entombed his dark squared bishop and weakened key squares on f5 and h5. White will look to use these squares for his knight or maybe his queen later on. The key file is now the h-file. White will open the h file with h4, and place his rooks on that file.
Note 7	It is instructive how patiently Tarrasch builds his attack. Black is not doing anything threatening, so White takes time to move each piece to its very best square before he attacks. Here, he delays Rgh2, so that he can move his knight via h2, f1 to g3, from where it can choose either f5 or h5.
Note 8	Tarrasch has his eyes on controlling the whole chessboard, not just his kingside attack! To avoid losing rook for knight, Black must now exchange his good bishop. White then exploits the weakness that we noted was created by 19...b6, by playing 33. Bc6. This move blocks the c-file, and prevents the Black king from escaping via e8.
Note 9	White has been very patient in building his advantages. Finally, he is ready to start his attack on the king. The immediate threat is Bxg5. If Black tries to unpin his f6 pawn by 35...Kg6, White will win quickly with 36. Rgh2. For example 36...Rg8; 37. Rh8, Be7; 38. R1h7 (threat Qf5+ and mate), Qc8; 39. Qh3 followed by Rxd7 and mate. So Black has little choice but to sacrifice rook for bishop to buy a little freedom.
Note 10	One by one (moves 37 to 40) the White pieces finally land on their best squares.
Note 11	If 42...Qe6; 43.Bh6 winning the pinned knight is the simplest, but not the only, way to win.

