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# BASIC ASPECTS OF KORTSCHNOJ'S HANDLING OF THE BISHOPS PAIR


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# Introduction

The pieces' strength is closely related with their global mobility. Let us make a small mathematical experiment. We take each of the chess pieces (with the exception of the king and the pawn) and place it successively on all the 64 squares, counting the moves available from each square if the board is empty. The sum of all the possible legal moves for each piece separately gives us a number that we can consider, for abstract reasons only, the intrinsic value of the piece. For instance, the simplest case is that of the rook, which has 14 moves available from any square, which gives us ♖ = 64 x 14 = 896.

If we divide each of the numbers to the immediately inferior one (♕/♖, ♖/♗, ♗/♘), we get the surprise that the results find themselves within a very narrow range (from 1,6 to 1,67), very close to one of the most famous numbers in mathematics, the golden ratio (approx. 1,618). This strongly speaks about the harmonious character of our favourite game, but also causes some confusion: is the knight really that much weaker than a bishop? In the past, Soviets used the expression "the small exchange" to define the relation between the bishop and the knight and I remember having red it also in a recent article. However, in spite of the mathematic inequality, statistics show that in most cases a knight is similar in strength with a bishop. The bishop's much higher mobility is compensated by the knight's ability to access squares of both colours.

Things acquire another subtle dimension when we speak about the bishops' pair.

Some time ago I saw two old games by Kortschnoj where he used the pair of bishops in a way that opened a whole new horizon of thinking in front of my eyes. Soon, I managed to find a couple of more games with related content that helped me give the newly discovered territory a coherent character.

The purpose of this article is to share my experience with the reader. I will not pretend to exhaust the theme (in fact, a whole book would be needed to do that) but focus on certain elements that are characteristic for Kortschnoj's abilities in this field.

Let us try understanding the hidden reasons that make the pair of bishops such a unanimously acclaimed weapon.

As mentioned in the R and B vs. R and N ending article, the higher mobility of a bishop is generally compensated by the knight's ability to access squares of both colours. When bishops act in tandem, the colour limitation does not exist anymore. Moreover, bishops never step into each other's way; they always complete each other's activity by acting on complementary squares.

Let's make some simple experiments with other pieces. We take a pair of knights and place them on, say, d4 and e5. It is easy to notice that the number of squares controlled by them is inferior to the sum of the squares controlled by each knight separately; the f3- and c6-squares are "doubles". The same happens with rooks, especially if they are placed on the same file or rank or with a knight and a bishop placed at short distance to each other on squares of opposite colours.

We can conclude that the degree of cooperation between two pieces has generally a conjectural character. On the contrary, from strict mathematical point of view, the pair of bishops' interaction is optimized independently of their relative placement which respect to each other.

From practical point of view, the optimal cooperation between bishops is achieved when they are placed on neighbour squares. Let's place them on e1 and d1. We can see that two strips of squares on opposite wings are taken under severe observation. Although the bishops are located modestly on the back rank, their action is basically offensive, or to put it with other words, they look only forward Let's move them on slightly more active. I shall choose c2 and c3 because we shall meet this placement more than once in this article. We can notice not only a mathematical increase of the total number of controlled squares but also a diversification of the bishops' concrete tasks. Indeed, they fulfil now a defensive function, too, by protecting several squares along the back rank and the neighbour files, thus inhibiting the penetration of the enemy rooks. The only problem is that the more central the bishops are, the more vulnerable they become, since they completely lack the possibility of defending each other. We shall see possible solutions of this below.

This whole discussion bears a merely abstract character and, what is more important, focuses only on static elements. Being long ranged pieces, bishops are suited for more than that.

Having a highly dynamic style of play, Kortschnoj introduces a new dimension into his handling of the pair of bishops. One typical scenario is that his bishops seem to peacefully rest next to each other on the back rank and then all of a sudden they are sent to concrete missions on the opposite wings, just to return to the base few moves