

DEVELOPMENT OF A CHESS MASTER

55 Game Lessons On Becoming a Master

Eric Schiller

CARDOZA PUBLISHING

*This book is dedicated to all those who have taught me
lessons over the years, on and off the chessboard.*

First Edition

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INTRODUCTION

THE LESSONS

Chess is a game where winning is a result of a mistake. If you don't make a mistake, you can't lose. In most games, both sides make a number of errors and the one who makes the last big mistake, leading to checkmate, loses. All chessplayers make mistakes. Even the great World Champions have managed to play some dreadful moves. Beginners naturally make a lot of mistakes, even accidentally losing pieces, but can often survive or even prevail, with a little help from the opponent. When facing stronger opposition, however, even a small error can lead to defeat. To make progress as a player, your number one task is to eliminate, or at least limit, your mistakes.

This book aims to investigate how bad moves can push past all the superior alternatives, and often lead to defeat. We'll look at typical mistakes as seen in my own games, hoping that you will learn from them and be able to avoid them in your own games. Many of these lessons were painful to me as a player. In most cases, I've been able to understand why the errors were made.

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Although I can't say that all of them have been purged from my system, you'll see examples where I have overcome or avoided some common pitfalls. I'm confident that once you've worked through this book, your play will improve and you will be able to do without some of the painful experiences at the chess board that are a large part of the learning experience.

This book contains valuable lessons in every phase of the game. The first games deal with basic tactical errors, which plague top players as well as beginners. After all, in order to win a chess game, the opponent must make some kind of error. Without a serious mistake, the games are likely to end in draws. There are many reasons tactical errors are made, and half a dozen examples of psychological and other errors are presented.

The next chapter deals with strategic mistakes. Planning is one of the hardest chess tasks. Deciding whether or not the basis for an attack exists, or timing various positional moves, requires great care, and it is easy to slip up. A number of warning signs can be seen in the games analyzed in this chapter.

The opening contains more danger than mere traps, as shown in the next chapter. The art of preparing for battle has been raised to new heights with universal access to chess computers and chess database software. Psychological preparation can be smashed by taking the game out of known paths – but how to know what the enemy knows? I learned a number of lessons in opening strategy and psychological preparation, which are shared here.

The following chapter deals with middlegame lessons, with a baker's dozen of examples of middlegame play gone awry. Advanced strategy and tactics are seen here, together with many psychological mistakes. These were painful mistakes on my part, and I was duly punished for most of them. You can avoid this fate by keeping in mind the psychological traps that are likely to trip you up during the game.

We then reach the chapter on endgames. It took me a long time to even begin serious study of this critical stage of the game, as I explain at the start of the chapter. I have tried to make up for more-or-less ignoring the fundamentals of endgame play by de-

INTRODUCTION

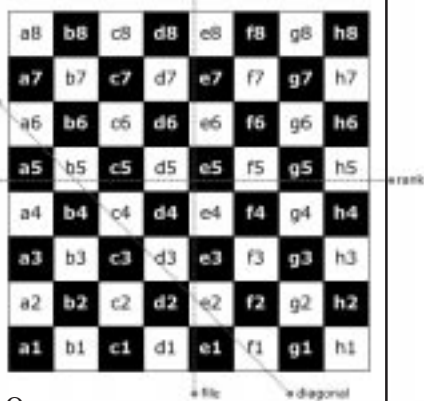
voting considerable study time to it over the past couple of decades. Just because I learned late doesn't mean you can't benefit now by avoiding my mistakes.

After witnessing all of these errors, you might be inclined to wonder how I could ever pull off an upset against my betters. The final chapter shows how I learned some lessons and applied them against top-flight competition. The games in this chapter aren't necessarily my best, but they are instructive wins over players rated from 2400 to 2650. Since my peak rating was 2370, they qualify as major upsets. Most of my opponents were Grandmasters, and with the exception of one simul game from my youth, all were played in tournaments with prize money at stake.

I hope that when you have finished playing over the games in this book you will have learned quite a lot and will make fewer mistakes in your own games. Perhaps the final chapter will help give you the confidence to play fearlessly against all opponents, no matter how high they are rated. Even the very best players are far from perfect, and in any case, if you do not make a mistake, they cannot defeat you!

BRIEF NOTES ON CHESS NOTATION

Each square can be described by combining the file and rank. The horizontal rows of the board, called “ranks” are labeled a–h. The vertical columns of the board, called “files” are labeled 1–8. Each square can be described by combining the file and rank, To indicate a move, we start with the abbreviation of the piece being moved, as indicated in the chart below. If a pawn moves, we don’t bother with any symbol.



King	K	Queen	Q
Rook	R	Bishop	B
Knight	N	Pawns	(omitted)

The abbreviation is combined with the square that the piece lands on. For example, if a bishop moves from f1 to b5, we write Bb5. When a piece makes a capture, an x is inserted between the first letter of the name of the piece in question and the destination square. For example, if the bishop had captured an enemy piece at b5, we write Bxb5.

When a pawn makes a capture, we indicated the file (but not rank) the pawn started on, followed by an x, and then the destination square. If the capture at b5 was made by a pawn on the c-file (at c4), instead of the bishop, we write cxb5..

Kingside castling is indicated by two zeroes separated by a dash: 0-0. Queenside castling is represented by three zeroes separated by dashes: 0-0-0. Check is indicated by a plus sign (+). Checkmate is indicated by the symbol #.

Chessplayers also use a set of symbols to express opinions on the position, or to point out special features. Cardoza Publishing prefers words, but we do adopt the standard suffixes to indicate the quality of a move, as in the following table.

!	Good move
?	Bad move
!!	Fantastic move
??	Blunder
!?	Interesting move
?!	Questionable move

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS

FIRST LESSONS

Tactics are the building blocks of chess and when they fall, the game often falls with them. Tactical errors are more common among beginners but even the most skilled players drop pieces from time to time. World Champions have made tactical errors in the opening that have cost games in as little as a dozen moves. International Masters have dropped games in less than half a dozen moves. So, tactical errors will always be with us assuming my readers are human and not chess-playing computers!

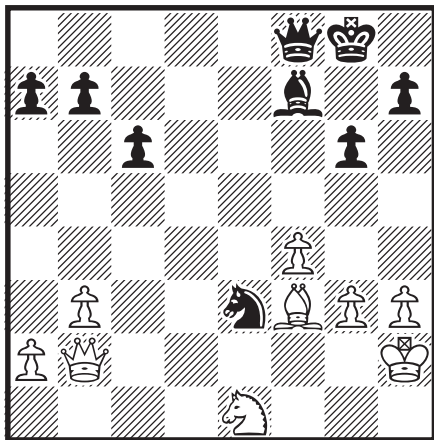
Among accomplished players, a piece is not usually left hanging so that it can be captured in one move. Such errors are rare, and not particularly instructive. Losing a piece in two or more moves to a tactical trap or through an oversight is far more common. Double attacks and discovered attacks should be anticipated, but are often overlooked.

Let's start things off with a few blunders that are typical of amateurs, and trap a few masters, too!

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FORGETTING ABOUT THE EDGES

When a piece or pawn is located on the edge of the board, and is not under attack, it is easy to forget about it. The item seems irrelevant, so no thought is given to it when grinding out analysis. It is easy for opponents, looking for targets anywhere on the board, to take advantage of such errors.



*Manhattan Chess
Club Tournament, 1971*

Position after 28.Bf3, Pehneć vs. Schiller

28...Bd5? In trying to force pieces from the board and draw the game, I overlook the weakness of my pawn at a7.

Game Lesson 1

*Never underestimate the
weakness of pawns or pieces
at the edge of the board!*

29.Qd4! Bxf3?

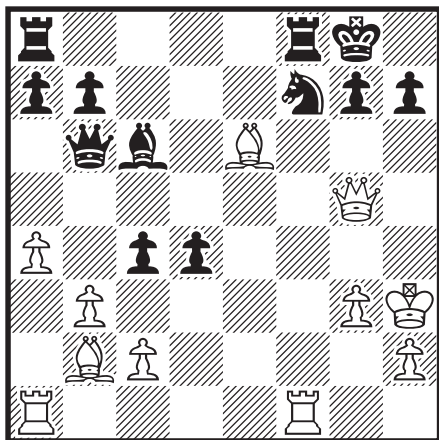
29...Qe7 is strong, but easy to miss. It is natural to think defensively when two pieces are under attack, but, the merit of this move lies in the attack that will come if Black

takes the a-pawn. 30.Qxa7? Nf1+; 31.Kg2 Qxe1; 32.Bxd5+ cxd5; 33.Qb8+ Kg7; 34.Qc7+ (34.Qxb7+ Kh6; 35.Qxd5 Ne3+) 34...Kh6; 35.g4 Qg3+!; 36.Kxf1 Qxh3+; 37.Kf2 Qxg4; Black is on top. **30.Nxf3 Nf5; 31.Qxa7.** White won the endgame.

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS

PINS, FORKS AND OTHER OBJECTS OF TORTURE

Even World Champions make elementary tactical blunders from time to time, but in the following example, played recently, it is clear that I needed to spend more time checking for tactical traps. The pins, counter pins and final fork are quite elegant tactics in the hand of my master opponent, but I really should have seen them coming. Counterpins, where the pinning piece itself placed under a pin by the enemy are among the least obvious moves in chess. See for yourself and learn from this rich example so that you don't blow the win as I did.



*Frisco Masters,
San Francisco 2000*

Position after 22...Nf7, Schiller vs. Longren

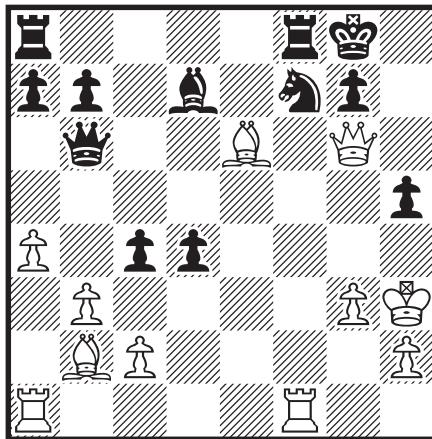
The game has been quite a battle. My king has been driven to h3, where it seems to be safe, and the pin at f7 should lead to the win of a piece. All I have to do is play 23.Qe7! However, I didn't see anything wrong with moving my queen to g4, where it attacks the pawn at d4. I figured that Bxd4 and Qxg7# was coming. It all seemed so simple at the time.

23.Qg4?? h5! Suddenly I realize that taking the pawn allows Black to equalize with a sac on g2, and a discovered attack on the

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bishop at e6. **24.Qg6?** Surely the queen is safer here than at f5? **24.Qf5!** was correct, but I wanted to block the g-pawn, which might get my king into trouble.

It is remarkable that to avoid trouble on the c8-h3 diagonal I needed to bring my queen into the line of fire! Into the crossfire, in fact, as she is vulnerable on the f-file. At least I avoided **24.Qxh5?? Bg2+!!**; **25.Kxg2 Qxe6. 24...Bd7!!**



Position after 24...Bd7!!

I didn't even consider this move, because I didn't realize the bishop was pinned. I had assumed I could always capture the knight with check, but Black's move pins the bishop on the diagonal. Ack! **25.Rae1 Bxe6+; 26.Rxe6.** A rook is usually better than a bishop, but the rook here does not pin the knight, so...

26...Ng5+!!; 27.Qxg5 Qxe6+. I resigned, because I'm going to lose the rook at f1 too. A very painful lesson in basic tactics, which I shouldn't need anymore.

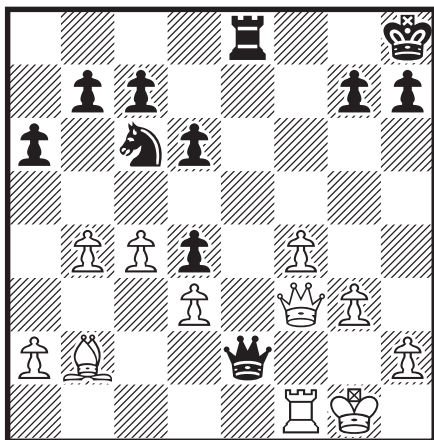
Game Lesson 2

Make sure your pinning piece can't be counterpinned!

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS

THE ANALYSIS AIN'T DONE 'TILL YOU STICK A FORK IN IT

One of the easiest ways to get into trouble is to fail to analyze deeply enough. It is often difficult in a tournament, especially when the clock is counting down, to devote enough time to all the critical lines in a position. Some important variations may extend quite deep and it is easy to lose track. Mental discipline is required. The next game was played when I was a Class D player rated just over 1200. (How proud I was of the 1201 rating!)



*National High School
Championship
New York City, 1970*

Position after 24...Qe2, Schiller vs. Kiefer

25.Qxe2?! A very typical and instructive error. I didn't have the confidence to leave my bishop hanging and try 25.b5! Qxb2; 26.bxc6. The pawn at c6 would be so weak after 16...b6! That would have brought about a roughly level game.

25...Rxe2; 26.Rf2? Simple miscalculation. It is true that I will get the d-pawn if Black gets my c-pawn, but there is also a fork of the pawns at a2 and d3. I should have played 26.b5! Rxb2; 27.bxc6 bxc6; 28.Rf2. **26...Rxf2; 27.Kxf2 Nxb4; 28.Bxd4 Nxa2; 29.Ba7 Nb4; 30.Bb8 c6; 31.d4 d5; 32.cxd5 cxd5.** Black went on to win.

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Game Lesson 3

When you have analyzed a position as deeply as you can, try to go just a bit deeper!

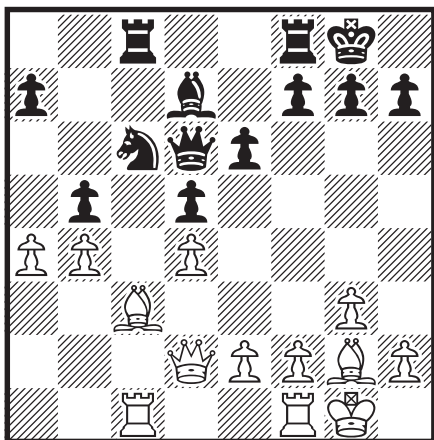
LIBERATION AND REVOLUTION

I did recover from the previous debacle and managed to progress to the next level. The following battle of Class C players shows that there was much yet to learn. Sometimes I fell for the old trap of thinking that a pawn sitting on a square prevents other pieces from using that square. If the pawn moves, then I have time to defend, right?

It doesn't work that way. If a player needs to use a square, which is occupied by a piece, then the best tactic is to move the piece while making a threat. Then the opponent doesn't have time to react. In the next game I walk right into a punch by giving my opponent the opportunity to clear a square with an attacking move.

You can avoid this problem by allowing your imagination to examine scenarios where existing pieces are removed from the board. This is a useful exercise, which can lead to spotting many combinations. At the very least, it helps prevent the kind of error seen in this game.

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS



*Quadrangular Tournament,
Long Island NY, 1970*

Position after 23.a4, Jedzinak vs. Schiller

In this roughly level position, White creates problems for Black. The key to the position is the a3-f8 diagonal. Naturally since White has a blockaded pawn at b4, I didn't give it a thought.

23...bxa4? After 23...Ne7! Black is not worse. **24.b5!** White's clearance sacrifice opened up b5, and now I can't avoid loss of material. **24...Ne7?** After my first error, I never recovered. Black's position was not lost until this move. 24...Nb8; 25.Bb4 Qb6; 26.Bxf8 Rxf8 is best. White will lose the b-pawn, so the position is only slightly better. **25.Bb4.** I resigned.

Game Lesson 4

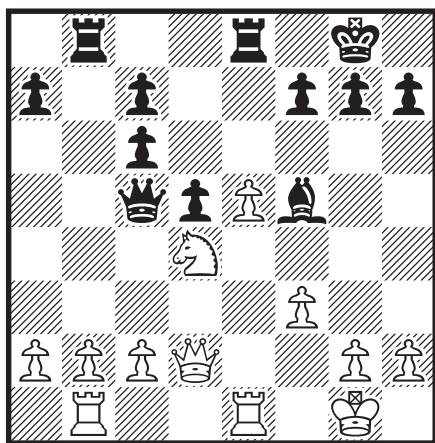
Remember that pieces that seem immobile can sometimes be moved after a preliminary maneuver.

THE OPPONENT IS NO DUMMY!

As in any sport, you need to respect your opponent! There is a danger when things go too well and you manage to get an advantage early in the game against an experienced and talented

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opponent. It is easy to become complacent, and assume that your opponent is going to continue to make mistakes. After obtaining a good position, you can be tempted to play ambitiously and boldly in positions that require patience and slow play.



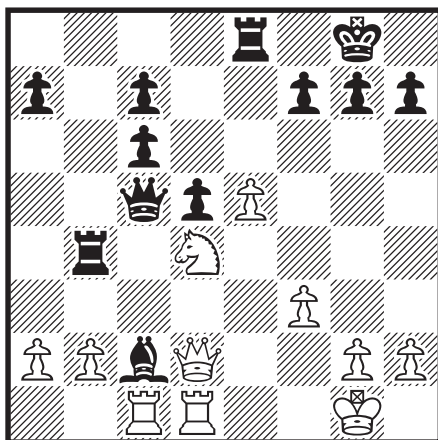
*Berlin Summer Open,
Berlin, 1984*

Position after 19.Nd4, Minic vs. Schiller

The opening had been going so well that I thought I had a clear win of a pawn here. It turns out to be a major tactical miscalculation! **19...Bxc2??** Retreating the bishop to g6 would have maintained equality. **20.Rbc1 Rb4.**

I had counted on this little tactic to put enough pressure at d4 to hold the position. **21.Red1!**

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS



Position after 21.Red1

Oops! I forgot my own bishop was pinned. I have to exchange pieces and make the most of the situation. **21...Rxb2; 22.Rxc2 Rxc2; 23.Qxc2 Qxc2; 24.Nxc2**. The pawns don't make up for the missing knight. White had a clear advantage and went on to win.

The error here was one of disrespecting my IM opponent. Something should have told me he wasn't going to hang a pawn for nothing!

Game Lesson 5

When things are going well against a strong opponent, be especially vigilant and check all tactics carefully!

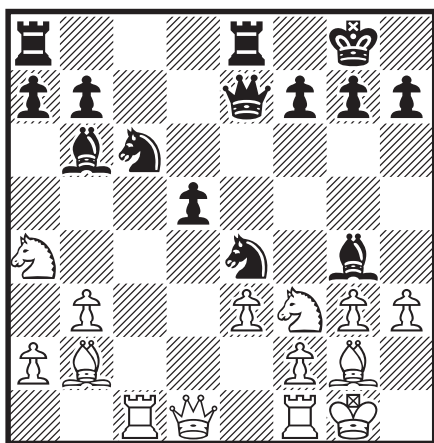
KNOW ALL THE MATING POSITIONS!

There are not all that many types of checkmates, and it helps to know every one of them. Sometimes tragedy occurs when a winning position turns into a loss because of a type of checkmate that you haven't seen before.

That's the case in the next game, but had I not overlooked a

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basic trapped piece tactic along the way I wouldn't have needed to know it. The entire game is interesting and was widely published. We pick it up in the early middlegame, where I use a fine sacrifice to gain a winning position.



*Groningen GM Open,
Netherlands 1996*

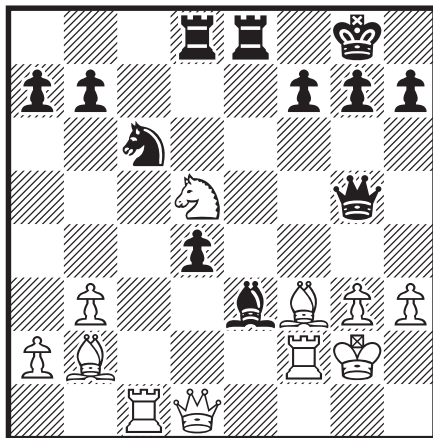
Position after 16.h3, Meins vs. Schiller

This looks like a strong move since, if the bishop retreats, the power of the pin is lessened. Black, however, has other plans. On 16.Qxd5, I intended either 16...Nb4 or 16...Rad8. The former looked good to me during the game, but maybe it fails to a maniacally tactical line; 17.Qe5 Qxe5; 18.Nxe5 Bf5; 19.Bxe4 Bxe4; 20.Rc4 Nd3; 21.Rxe4 Nxb2; 22.Nxb2 f5; 23.Rf4 Rxe5; 24.Nc4 Rd5; 25.Nxb6 axb6; 26.a4 b5; 27.Rb4. White is clearly better.

16...Nxf2! A very strong sacrifice, which gives Black a definite advantage. **17.Rxf2 Bxf3.** The only correct continuation, since 17...Qxe3 fails to 18.Nxb6! and 17...Bxe3; 18.hxg4 is too much of an investment for Black. **18.Bxf3 Bxe3; 19.Nc3 Qg5.** There is no need to capture either rook when the bishop is so strong.

20.Kg2 d4; 21.Nd5 Rad8.

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS



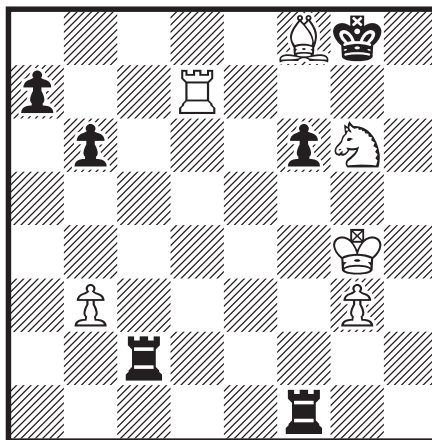
At this point I thought the game was simply winning, but White found a strong reply. **22.Rc5 Bxf2; 23.Kxf2 Ne5!** It took me far too long to work out the complications, and I caught up to my opponent on time. Each of us was down to 12 minutes for the remaining 17 moves. **24.Qxd4.** What a picture! White has veiled threats against g7 and the move Ne7+ must always be attended to. Black does not seem to have much of an attack, but in fact the attack continues. **24...Nxf3.** This undermines the knight at d5 and exposes the White king. Each of us is down to 8 minutes here. **25.Kxf3 Qf5+?!**

Wrong check. I missed the fact that the White knight is lost after ...a6 and ...b6, so that White cannot afford to exchange queens. On 25...Qh5+; 26.Qg4 Qxg4+; 27.hxg4 b6; 28.Rb5 a6; 29.Rxb6 Rxd5; 30.Rxa6 Rd3+; 31.Kf4 Rd2, Black wins. I must admit that I missed the entire line with ...b6 and ...a6. This would have been a much more efficient line, but my move should also win.

26.Nf4 Rxd4; 27.Rxf5 Rd2; 28.Bc3 Rxa2; 29.Nh5 f6 Now 30.Bxf6 fails to 30...g6! **30.Rb5 Rd8; 31.Nf4 Rc2; 32.Be1 b6; 33.h4 Rd1?** This rook should have stayed home, but I didn't see any possible threat to my king. Extreme time pressure was forcing me to play quickly. **34.Bb4 Rf1+; 35.Kg4 g6; 36.h5.** Here

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all I had to do is play 36...Rb1, but with both flags hanging, I thought I saw a mating net. **36...Kg7?; 37.hxg6 hxg6; 38.Rd5.** Now things are tougher, because the simple 38...Rc7 fails to 39.Ne6+. Checking at f5 was necessary. **38...Kh6??** Now White forces mate, a pattern I have never encountered. I just never saw it coming. **39.Bf8+ Kh7; 40.Rd7+ Kg8; 41.Nxg6!**



Position after 41.Nxg6

At first I thought I had won on time here, but I had forgotten to notate the exchange at g6. Then I thought that the position was not winning for me. Eventually, I realized it was lost because of the checkmate at g7.

I had never seen this checkmating pattern, using bishop, knight and rook with no supporting king or pawns. Perhaps if I had a minute or two I might have figured it out, but my waste of time and poor decisions in the middlegame were the real culprits.

Mating positions should be part of your

Game Lesson 6

Study and learn all mating positions, even those that seem to be rare or improbable!

LESSONS IN BASIC TACTICS

standard arsenal, and all checkmates need to be learned if you want to avoid a fate like this. One of my best games ever, and a major upset in full view of a lot of top professionals, ruined because of time trouble and ignorance!