



The Art of Positional Play in Chess

By Samuel Reshevsky

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Samuel Reshevsky is the ideal person to write a book on positional play because that was exactly the way he played: positionally. Reshevsky preferred to crush his opponents slowly, like a python, rather than to win with a blaze of tactics. Reshevsky was capable of great tactics, but felt it easier and more secure just to win by the slow build-up, gaining small advantages and then waiting for the opponent to throw himself on the sword with a brash counter-attack. The disadvantage is this takes a long time and most of the games in this book are long, but that makes them more instructive. A game won by sharp tactics does not teach much, unless that exact tactic arises again. The slow build-up that Reshevsky specialized in can be repeated again and again to bring home the point every time. Reshevsky goes through positional values, such as open files, avoidance of doubled pawns, consequences of weak pawns, bad bishops, unsupported pawn chains, blockade vs. breakthrough, using minority attacks, passed pawns in the middle game and rooks behind passed pawns. In each of these cases, he uses a top level grandmaster game to illustrate it, showing how the greatest players use these motifs to win their games at the highest levels.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Samuel Reshevsky was born in Ozorkow, Poland on November 26, 1911. Most chess players reach their peak at age 30. It was Reshevsky's misfortune that he reached his peak during the World War II years, when he was probably the strongest player in the world. He played in the World Championship tournament in 1948 and in the Candidates Tournament in Zurich 1953. In both events, there were rumors and reports of collusion by the Soviets to prevent Reshevsky from winning the world championship, which he probably would have won in a fair contest. Fischer is quoted as saying that Reshevsky was the strongest player in the world and would have easily defeated World Champion Botvinnik in a match. However, Reshevsky never got the chance. There is no doubt at all that Reshevsky was the strongest USA player. He won the US championship seven times, in 1936, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1946 and 1969. Reshevsky remained a world class player even after he had passed 60 years old. He even won a game in Moscow against Smyslov in 1991 when Reshevsky was 80 years old. He defeated Grandmaster and US Chess Champion Larry Christiansen just a few months before he died. He died on April 4, 1992 at age 81. You will see in this book his wins against some of the strongest players in the world when he was elderly. This is an advantage to the positional style of play. Playing positionally correct moves does not require a calculation of specific tactics. Thus, it can lead to wins even if the player is not tactically sharp. Reshevsky proved this again and again. He started his career as the greatest child prodigy in chess history, playing nearly master strength chess when he was eight years old. He went on a tour first of Europe and then America, giving simultaneous chess exhibitions against adults and winning almost every game. As a 9-year old, his first American simultaneous exhibition was with 20 officers and cadets at the Military Academy at West Point. The photo of him playing in this exhibition is one of the most famous in chess history. He won 19 games and drew one. He toured the country and played over 1,500 games as a 9-year old in simultaneous exhibitions and only lost 8 games.

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