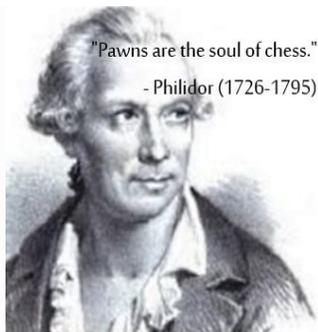


Why pawns are the soul of chess



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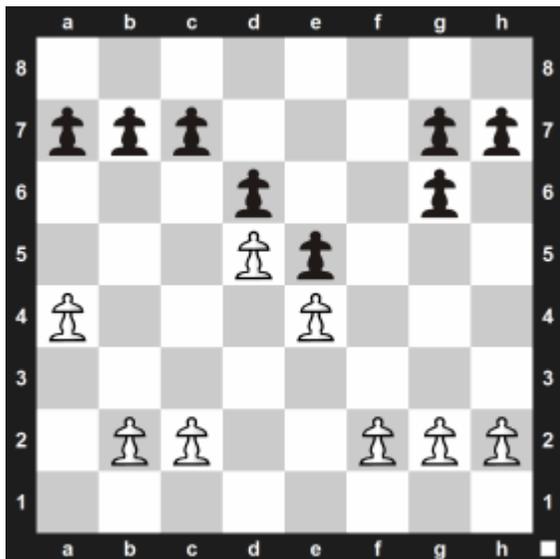
Back in the 18th century the chessmaster Philidor coined the phrase “Pawns are the soul of chess.”

Sounds impressive but what did he mean? And why should pawns be seen as the soul of chess? Any chessplayer who knows the basics of the game can tell you that pawns are weaker than the pieces.

Or are they?

No, they aren't... Individually a pawn may be weak, but together they create a force that is about equal in strength to the queen! However, you need to understand pawn-structures in order to use your pawns better.

Imagine you remove all the pieces from the board and leave only the pawns. What you would see is the pawn-structure.



Here are 3 reasons why pawns are the soul of chess:

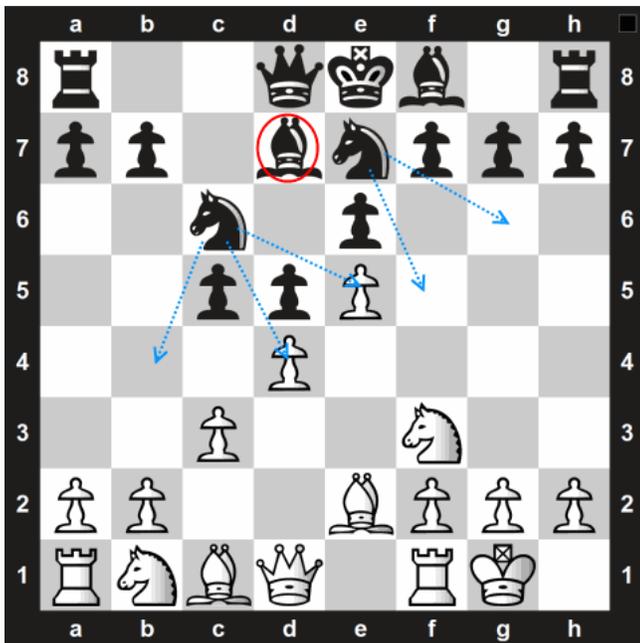
1. Pawns affect the movement of the pieces
2. The pawn-structure determines where the weak squares are
3. Weak pawns are important targets

We will look at an example of each:

1. Pawns affect the movement of the pieces

The pawn-structure has a big impact on the development of the pieces because:

1. Pieces cannot jump over pawns that block them (except the knights of course)
2. Pawns control many squares that prevent enemy pieces moving to that squares



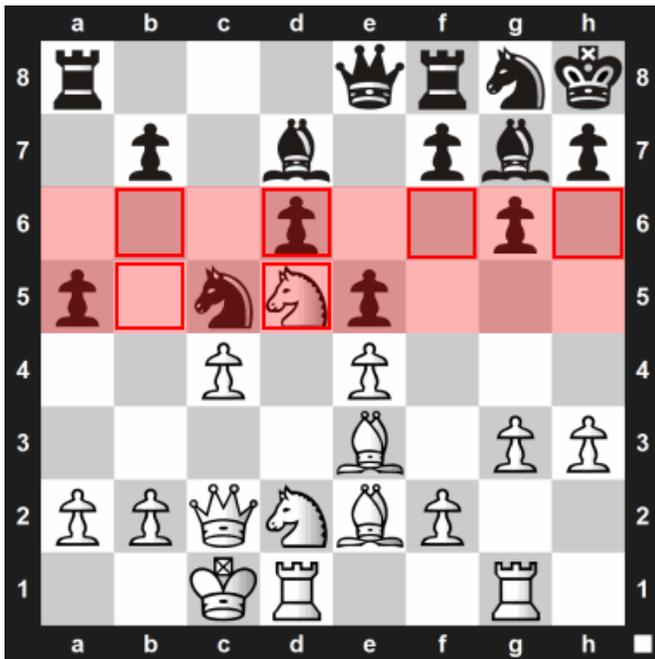
Bishops are typically more affected by pawn-structures than knights

A single pawn might not be very strong, but together they're a formidable team – they control many squares on the board and can drive back enemy pieces that come near their territory.

2. The pawn-structure determines where the weak squares are

Weak squares generally refer to squares on the 5th or 6th rank (inside enemy territory) that cannot be defended by pawns.

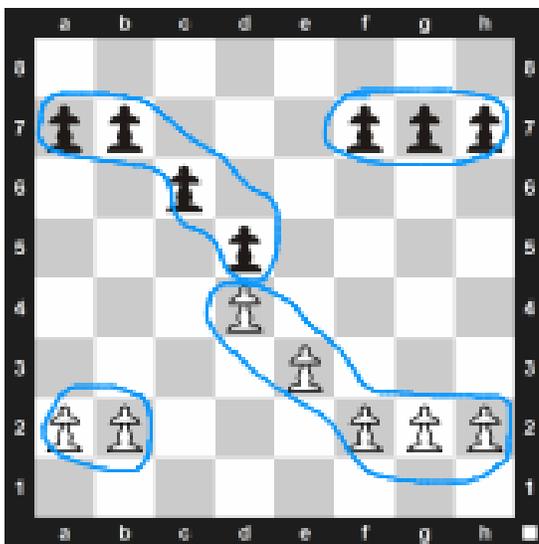
a Square that cannot be defended by a pawn can more easily be occupied by a piece. Therefore, weak squares are often an opportunity to further improve the development of your pieces. Naturally it should also be noted that weak squares near or in the center are usually more useful than the weak squares on the sides.



 Weak squares cannot be defended by pawns.

The diagram above comes from a game between Magnus Carlsen vs Judit Polgar. Carlsen used the weak squares to infiltrate black's territory and won the game in the end. The example clearly shows why you should think carefully before pushing pawns, since they create weaknesses that are permanent.

When pawns can defend themselves, they are strong. At the start of a new game all the pawns are connected, but as the game continues and some exchanges are made, the pawns may become disconnected. When a group of pawns gets disconnected from the rest of the pawn-structure they become a **pawn-island**.

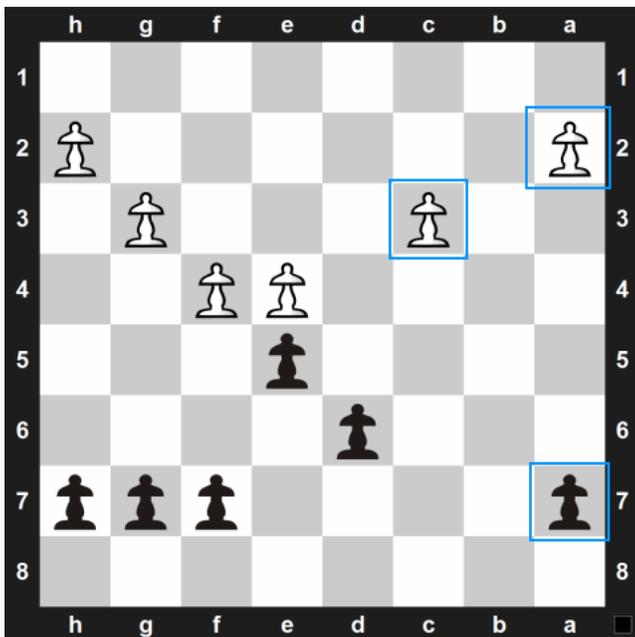


In this example diagram both white and black have 2 pawn-islands each. Generally, the more pawn-islands you have, the weaker your pawn-structure is.

3. Weak pawns are important targets

When the structure becomes fragmented, the pawns are weakened. Since pawns cannot move backwards or sideways they are vulnerable and depend heavily on the support of other pawns or pieces.

A weak pawn cannot be defended by other pawns. We don't want to allocate valuable **pieces** to protect pawns – the pawns should be able to protect themselves, and if they can't – they are weak.



Weak pawns are pawns that can't be protected by other pawns

Hot tip: Pawns can't move backwards and moving a pawn has permanent consequences. Only move a pawn when moving it helps you achieve important objectives such as development of your pieces or controlling the center!