

## CHECKERS IN A NUTSHELL BY RICHARD PASK: WRITTEN FOR MARTIN FIERZ

‘Checkers is an art, the practice of which will enrich your life.’ (Irving Chernev) This guide provides an introduction to the game’s main elements, and should enable you to beat your neighbour with ease. In due course you may also come to appreciate the truth of Chernev’s statement.

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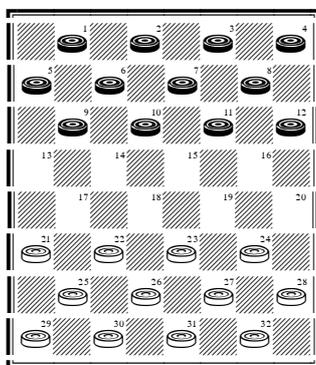
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Checkers, or English draughts, was probably invented in the south of France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The first book in English on the game, William Payne’s *An Introduction to the Game of Draughts*, was published in 1756 - well over 1,000 books, pamphlets and journals have appeared since! -, and the world match championship was established in 1840. Scottish players dominated the game until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the USA leading the way ever since. In 5 matches contested between the USA and the UK & Ireland between 1973 and 2001, the former won them all, with an aggregate score of 324 wins, 81 losses and 595 draws.

### 2. RULES

Diagram 1: The Starting Position



Black to move

A move is recorded by means of two numbers separated by a hyphen; the numbers signifying the squares on which a particular piece starts and finishes. In actual play the black squares are used, but in all publications the white squares are employed for clarity.

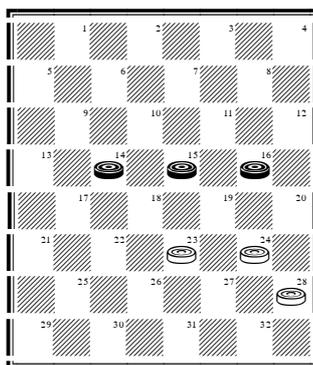
Although one of the key attractions of the game, especially for young children, is its simplicity of form, ‘**Move on the black squares and jump when you can!**’ summing things up succinctly, ironically very few people are familiar with the rules. Here are the most important ones:

- In play, the board is arranged, like chess, with a black square in the bottom left-hand corner.
- Black always move first.
- **All jumps must be taken! There are no ifs, buts or ands!** (If a player has a choice of jumps, he may select any one he wishes; not necessarily that which gains the most pieces.)
- Men can jump kings.
- When a man reaches the final row of the board (king-row) it becomes a king, and the player's move terminates. Kings can move both backwards and forwards.
- A player wins either by removing all his opponent's pieces from the board or by rendering them immobile. That is, **'Last move wins!'**

### 3. BASICS

**FORCE has an important role to play in checkers. Namely, in a free and open position, the gain of a single piece is enough to ensure a won game; the loss of a piece will lose the game.** There are numerous ways of gaining a piece in checkers, the most common of which are the 2 for 1 and the 3 for 2.

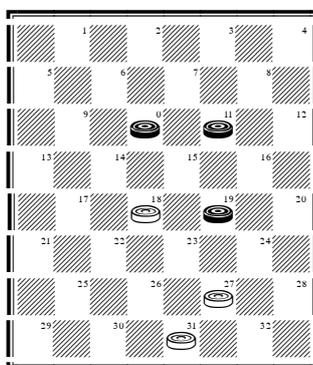
Diagram 2: 2 For 1



White to move and win

Note: throughout this guide, everything is viewed from White's standpoint. Naturally all the ideas given apply with equal force to the black pieces. In Diagram 2 White wins with ... 24-19; 15-24 28-12.

Diagram 3: 3 For 2

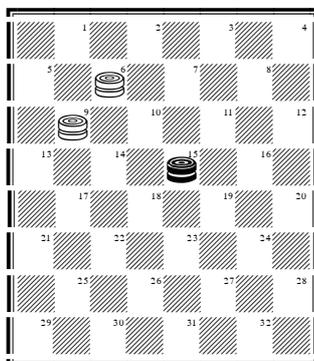


White to move and win

In Diagram 3 White wins with ... 18-15; 11-18 27-23; 18-27 (or 19-26) 31-6.

**Having got a piece ahead the basic winning policy is to make a series of judicious (non position-weakening) exchanges (such as giving up 1 to take 1) until the situation is reduced to one of those given in Diagrams 4 and 5.**

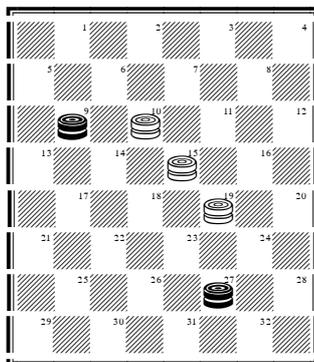
Diagram 4: 2 Kings v 1 King



White to move and win

The winning procedure falls into three parts: 1) The two kings force the lone king back into the 'double-corner' (here, squares 28 & 32) - if it retreats elsewhere there follows instant defeat. 2) One of the two kings enters the double-corner, forcing the lone king out. 3) The lone king is pinned on the side of the board. Thus from Diagram 4 White wins with ... 9-14; 15-19 6-10; 19-23 10-15; 23-27 14-18; 27-24 18-23; 24-28 15-19; 28-32 19-24; 32-28 23-19; 28-32 24-28; 32-27 28-32; 27-31 19-15; 31-26 15-18; 26-31 18-22.

Diagram 5: 3 Kings v 2 Kings



White to move and win

In Diagram 5 the win is swiftly effected by constantly threatening, and eventually forcing, a 1 for 1 exchange; reducing the situation to that given in Diagram 4. The defender, of course, tries to avoid this. White continues ...15-18; 9-5 (9-13 loses quickly by 10-14) 10-6; 27-32 (if 5-1, White replies with 18-15) 19-23 (threatening 6-9); 5-1 (Black must move out of the way) 6-9; 32-28 (if 1-5, White replies with 9-14 creating the threat of two 1 for 1 exchanges on his next move) 23-27 (forming the key position); 1-5 (28-32 amounts to the same thing) 27-23; 5-14 18-9. Mission accomplished!

#### 4. ENDGAME

**‘An endgame is a game ending, in which both sides have achieved a king; or at least have gained a clear run to the king-row.’ (Derek Oldbury)**

Success in the endgame depends in part upon the correct application of general principles and partly upon a thorough understanding of certain key situations.

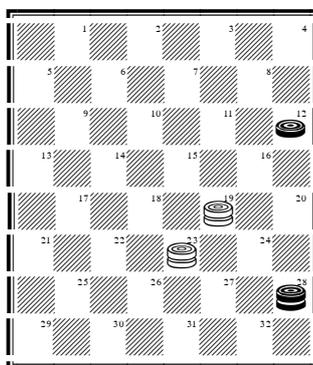
General Principle Number 1: **Try and get ahead in development. In the late midgame and endgame it is an advantage for your men, taken as a whole, to be further advanced up the board than your opponent, and exchanges which serve to boost your pull in this aspect of TIME should be sought.** Achieving a particular goal or objective before your opponent may only be possible if you have this edge.

General Principle Number 2: **Position your kings judiciously.** Namely, you should centralise them, connect them and, when crowning several kings on a crowded board, ensure this is done without any wasted motion.

General Principle Number 3: **Be alert to the ways in which one king can hold two pieces.** For example (Black to move in all cases), a white king on 14 defeats two black men on 5 and 13; a white king on 19 draws against a black man on 12 and a black king on 20; A white king on 23 defeats a black man on 28 and a black king on 32. And so on.

Key Situation Number 1: First Position.

Diagram 6: First Position

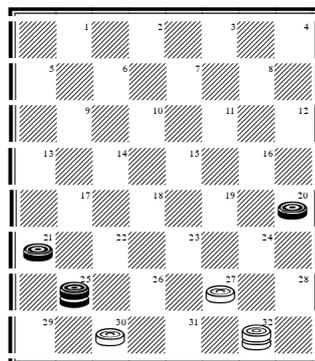


White to move and win

Diagram 6 represents but one specific example of a generalised situation known as First Position. It is characterised by the following features: 1) White has the ‘opposition’. This means ‘to be in a position to check the advance of opposing pieces beyond a certain point.’ (Derek Oldbury) Pair off 12 and 19 (there is one intervening square), mentally move 23-27 and you will see that White has the opposition. 2) At least one of Black’s pieces is a single man. 3) White has, or can develop, two kings, while keeping Black’s single man pinned to the right-hand side of the board. 4) Black’s other piece, which becomes a king in the double-corner, is unable to reach the opposite double-corner. **White’s winning procedure**, the details of which are beyond the scope of this guide, **consists of attacking Black’s king, immobilising it, and forcing Black’s single man to advance into trouble.** Black naturally tries to delay this advance for as long as possible.

Key Situation Number 2: Second Position.

Diagram 7: Second Position



White to move and win

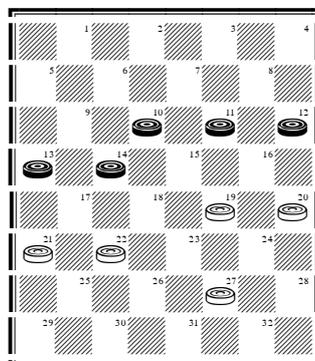
Again, Diagram 7 represents just one specific example of a generalised situation known as Second Position. Its characteristic features are: 1) White has the opposition. 2) One of the black men is held on 21, and the other on the opposite side of the board. 3) The third black piece is, or can become, a king, although its scope is severely limited. **The winning procedure**, though lengthy, is very mechanical, and **consists of three phases: 1) Crowning three kings, while keeping the two black men pinned to the sides of the board. 2) Exchanging off the black king; changing the opposition in the process. 3) Exchanging off the black man on the right-hand side of the board and regaining the opposition.**

**5. MIDGAME**

‘The climactic point of the midgame is reached when the defender has completed his defensive combination or, in cases where the defence has been unsuccessful, the attacker has completed his winning combination. After this climactic point is reached, the midgame structures begin to melt away leading to the endgame.’ (Maurice Chamblee) **The early midgame** (arguably the most important part of the game) **leads from the opening up to the climactic point; the late midgame leads from the climactic point to the start of the endgame. (If indeed there is one.)**

LATE MIDGAME

Diagram 8: Fifth Position



White to move and draw

Fifth position is one of the classic late midgame positions. It has arisen on thousands of occasions, and an understanding of its key points is essential. From Diagram 8 White continues ... 20-16! (Black was threatening 11-15); 11-20 27-23; 20-24 22-18; 24-27 18-9; 10-14 9-6; 27-31 6-2; 31-27 2-6; 27-18 6-9; 13-17 19-15; 18-11 9-18; 17-22 18-25; 11-15 25-22! Drawn. At the last move, 21-17? would lose. Can you see why?

### EARLY MIDGAME

Here again a grasp of general principles is crucial, as is an understanding of key formations.

General Principle Number 1: Try and gain at least equal control of the centre; represented by squares 14, 15, 18 and 19.

General Principle Number 2: Don't underestimate the value of side moves. Although limited to moving in just one direction, as opposed to two in the centre, a man on the side is immune from capture and can be used both for supporting and 'cramping' purposes. For example, a white man on 13 can support an advanced man on 9 and, in conjunction with a man on 18 can be used to impose a cramp - restriction of mobility - on Black's double-corner. Likewise, a white man on 20 can be used to support a man which has infiltrated on 16 and, in conjunction with a man on 18 can be used to impose a cramp on Black's single corner. Also, an exchange at the side can be effected with just two men. (Three in the centre.)

General Principle Number 3: Develop your single-corner men (those on 21, 22, 25 and 29) rapidly. This is because, with only one entry square to the king-row, this area of the board is less vulnerable to attack than the double-corner.

General Principle Number 4: Protect your double-corner (24, 27, 28 and 32). Set the board up ready for play, and remove the four men in the double-corner. You'll see how vulnerable it is!

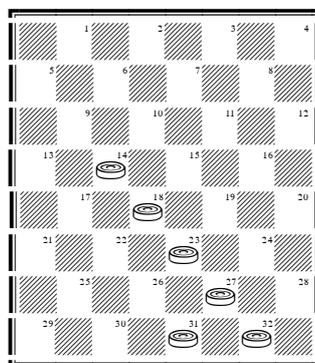
General Principle Number 5: Be completely flexible regarding the movement of the men in your king-row; definitely don't make it a rule to retain them all! However, retaining two men on 30 and 31, particularly in conjunction with the 'apex man' on 26, forms a very sturdy defensive structure, and is worth remembering. Moving the man on 31 early often leads to a structural weakness.

General Principle Number 6: Don't overdevelop your men. In the opening and early midgame it is usually disadvantageous for your men to be further advanced than your opponent's - you might run out of moves!

**The early midgame largely operates in the element of SPACE and is fundamentally about formations.**

### Key Formation Number 1: The Long Dyke

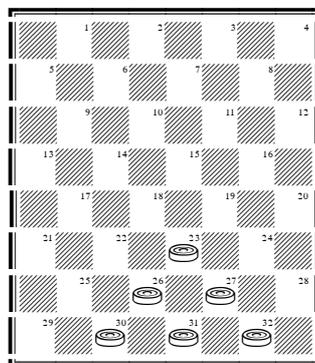
Diagram 9: The Long Dyke Formation



Screening out all the other men on the board, Diagram 9 represents a fully developed long dyke formation. **This is essentially an aggressive formation** because it is directed towards the opponent's double-corner, **and the purpose of the dyking player is to dominate the centre and force the opponent's men on to inferior squares at the side of the board.**

Key Formation Number 2: The Pyramid.

Diagram 10: The Pyramid Formation



Screening out all the other men on the board, Diagram 10 represents a 'fully developed' pyramid formation. (Actually these six men haven't moved!) **This is a very defensive formation which, unlike the long dyke, can be employed by both players simultaneously.** During the course of the game it is often reduced to just three men on 26, 30 and 31 as mentioned earlier, and then just to the man on 31.

## **6. OPENING**

'The opening is an initial combination of moves, fully executed, resulting in the achievement of definite, complete, preliminary objectives by both sides.' (Maurice Chamblee) At the start of the game the forces are of course equal, but the advantage of having the first move means that Black possesses the initiative. The seven possible initial moves are given here in order of strength, together with White's seven possible replies to each one in strength order.

- **Strongest 11-15:** Exits from the single-corner towards the centre. **Replies:** 23-19, 22-17, 23-18, 24-20, 22-18, 24-19 and 21-17 (allows Black to cramp with 9-13 at the next move).
- **9-14:** Towards the centre, but exiting from the more vulnerable double-corner. **Replies:** 22-18, 22-17, 24-20, 24-19, 23-19, 23-18 (horrible!) and 21-17? (loses!).
- **11-16:** Moving from the single-corner, but directed to the side. **Replies:** 22-18, 23-18, 24-19, 22-17, 21-17, 24-20 and 23-19 (horrible!).
- **10-15:** Towards the centre, but from the double-corner, and opens up a 'hole' on 10. **Replies:** 21-17, 22-17, 22-18, 23-18, 23-19, 24-19 and 24-20.
- **10-14:** A flanking move which allows White several good replies. **Replies:** 24-19, 22-18, 22-17, 23-19, 24-20, 23-18 (not nice!) and 21-17? (loses!).
- **12-16:** Ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in strength purely because White can cramp Black's single-corner with the immediate 24-20. **Replies:** 24-20, 22-18, 23-18, 24-19, 22-17, 21-17 and 23-19 (horrible!).
- **Weakest 9-13:** Exits from the double-corner to the side. **Replies:** 22-18, 24-19, 23-18, 23-19, 24-20, 22-17 and 21-17 (allows Black to cramp with 11-15 at the next move).

'The strength or weakness of an opening move is measured in terms of the strongest *immediate* reply.' (Maurice Chamblee)