

# CHESS: A KNIGHT'S TOUR

## Playing with the odds-giving

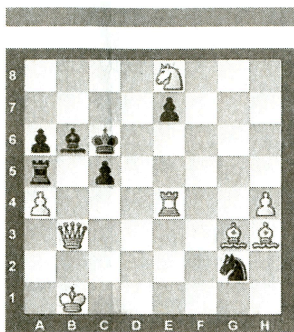
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While it is unlikely that adversaries in any game possess exactly equal ability, many are close enough to engage each other in worthwhile competition. If the skill disparity is too great, though, no meaningful contest can take place. To create a real game, various kinds of odds play have been devised. In racing, for instance, there is the head start. In bowling and golf, scores are adjusted to handicap the better player. Odds-making systems are intended to give each participant a decent chance of winning.

In classroom chess training and clubs, I have found that an elastic system for odds play works well. Suppose superior player A takes off one of his knights (or bishops) before starting play with opponent B. If A wins, the next game he gives up a rook, and so on. If A loses, the odds given are reduced. At some point, the two will reach a mutually challenging level. Player A is motivated to beat the odds; player B is motivated to beat player A.

### Champion odds-givers

In the mid-1800s, Paul Morphy of New Orleans traveled the world in search of chess foes, decisively defeating all he met. That included Adolf Anderssen of Germany, considered by many to be the best player anywhere. After returning to the U.S., Morphy decided to avoid playing a straight-up game against anyone. Even facing America's best, he would start play after removing at



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**Position No. 4367:** White mates in two.

**Position No. 4366:** 1.Qxc3!  
Hint: White mates next with: e4, Qd3, Qxd3.

least one of his chessmen. Commonly, his queen's knight was the victim, but even more valuable men were not safe from ejection either.

Nearly 40% of the 400-plus games in my Morphy database begin with Morphy missing at least one piece. One of his frequent odds' foes was Frederick Perrin, one of New York's leading players who played in the 1st American Chess Congress. Morphy gave him knights-odds in a "first to score five points" match and won 5.5 to .5. This column's game shows Morphy giving away piece after piece to maintain a King attack. Just before mating, he was down a queen, two bishops, and a knight!

Louis Paulsen, one of the best U.S. players of Morphy's time, strongly wanted a match with him on even terms. Regarding Morphy's insistence on giving him

pawn and move odds, Paulsen commented that "it invariably and necessarily results in a kind of mongrel game..." Morphy responded that he was "quite astonished that he [Paulsen] should ask me to play ... on even terms..." Well, there is that Morphy had defeated him eight times previously, losing once.

### Other handicappers

Some odds' games played by famous players still entertain us today. Russian-born Aaron Nimzowitsch, one of the top players in the world in the early 20th century, brazenly started without a queen in the following gem: [Aron Nimzowitsch-Lee-laus-Riga, Latvia, 1910] 1.b3 e5 2.Bb2 f6 3.e4 c6 4.Nc3 Bb4 5.0-0 Bxc3 6.dxc3 0-0 7.Ba3 Re8 8.Bd6 Qb6 9.Nf3 Qxf2 10.h4 h6 11.Bc4+ Kh7 12.h5 b5 13.Bf7 Re6 14.Nh4 Rxd6 15.Rxd6 Qc5 16.Rhd1 Qxc3 17.R1d3 Qe1+ 18.Kb2 Qxh4 19.Bg6+ Kg8 20.Re6 1-0. Note how he used his minor men to restrict and constrict his foe's movements. Then, he "fell for" a combination losing his knight (17.R1d3 Qe1+). By taking the knight, his opponent fell into a 3-move mating combination starting with a rook sacrifice.

### Game of the week

**Morphy-Perrin**  
New York, New York, 1859  
Odds Match (Remove b1 Knight)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4 Bc5 5.0-0 d6 6.b4 Bb6 7.b5 Ne8 8.Nxe5 dxe5 9.f4 d3+ 10.Kh1 Qd4 11.Bxf7+ Kxf7 12.fxe5+ Ke8 13.Qf3 Ne7 14.Qf7+ Kd8 15.Bg5 Qxe5 16.Rad1 Qxg5 17.Rxd3+ Bd7 18.Qf8+ Rxf8 19.Rxf8 mate.

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