

The Opera Game

Paul Morphy vs Duke Karl of Brunswick and Count Isouard · 1-0

Paris, Opera House · Paris FRA · 1858.11.02

Paris, 1858 · annotated by Morphy

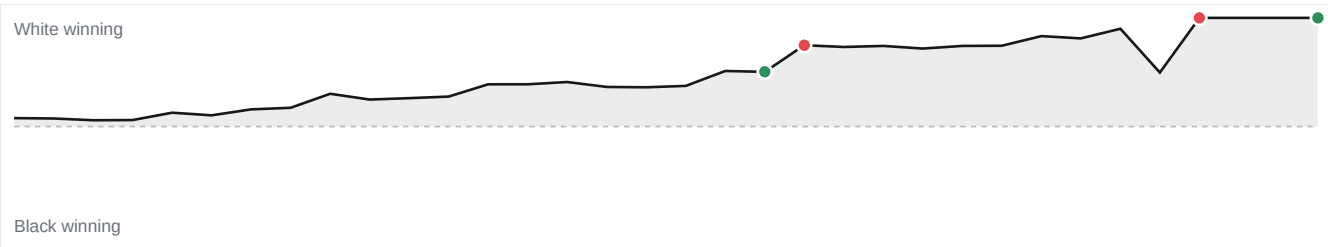
AT A GLANCE

17 MOVES PLAYED	4 KEY MOMENTS	100% WHITE'S CHANCES AT THE END	1-0 RESULT
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AMONG THE KEY MOMENTS

	WHITE	BLACK
Blunders	0	1
Mistakes	0	1
Great moves	1	0
Brilliant moves	1	0

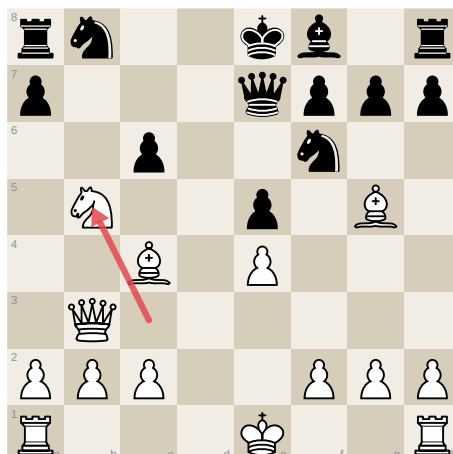
HOW THE GAME SWUNG



THE GAME

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Bg4 4.dxe5 Bxf3 5.Qxf3 dxe5 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.Qb3 Qe7 8.Nc3 c6 9.Bg5 b5

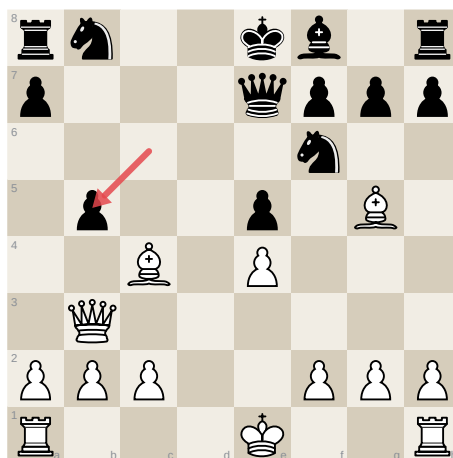
10.Nxb5!!



After 10.Nxb5: Brilliant · White's chances 75% → 75%

With a winning advantage for White, 10.Nxb5 is a brilliant move that keeps the win on track. This sacrifice of about 1.0 pawns of material is the strongest move here, one even strong players usually miss at this level, leading to 10.Nxb5 Qb4+ 11.Nc3 Qxb3 12.axb3 Bb4 (+3.0) which wins a pawn. The alternatives fall short: 10.Bxf6 Qxf6 11.Nxb5 cxb5 12.Bxb5+ (+1.0) leaves White with an outside passed pawn on c2 and only a slight edge, while 10.Be2 Nbd7 11.O-O Nc5 12.Qa3 (+0.3) leads to a level position. White exploits a queenside pawn majority.

10...cxb5?

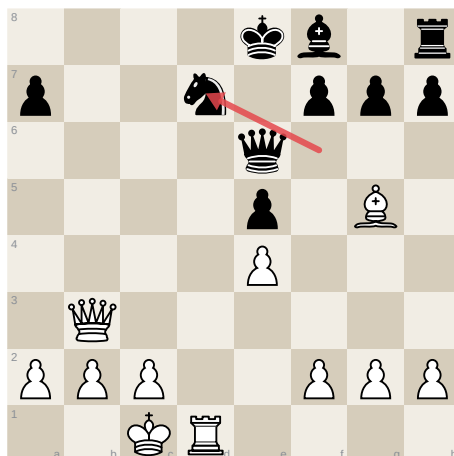


After 10...cxb5: Mistake · Black's chances 24% → 13%

10...cxb5 was a mistake, an obvious try that leaves White with a winning advantage. White answered with 11.Bxb5+ Nbd7 12.O-O-O Rd8 13.Rxd7 Nxd7 (+5.3) and created an outside passed pawn on c2. The strongest move, 10...Qb4+, is a rare find that most players never see, which would have left White with a winning advantage but without a queenside pawn majority, while 10...Na6 11.O-O-O Nc5 12.Qc3 a5 (+4.1) would have opened the d-file toward the white king. Next time, look at the holes on c5 and d5 before you trade pawns and give the opponent a passed pawn.

11.Bxb5+ Nbd7 12.O-O-O Rd8 13.Rxd7 Rxd7 14.Rd1 Qe6 15.Bxd7+

15...Nxd7??

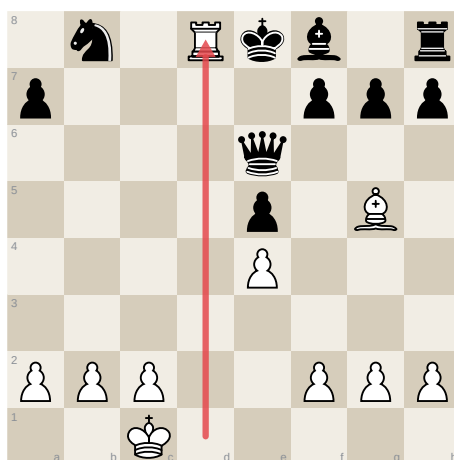


After 15...Nxd7: Blunder · Black's chances 8% → 0%

15...Nxd7 was a blunder that walks into a forced mate. White answered with 16.Qb8+ Nxb8 17.Rd8# to end the game on the spot. The strongest move, 15...Qxd7, is a natural move most players find, and after 15...Qxd7 16.Qb8+ Ke7 17.Qxe5+ Kd8 (+6.7) or 15...Ke7 16.Qa3+ Kd8 17.Bxe6+ Kc7 White is still winning but has no immediate mate. Prefer the natural recapture that keeps the king safe over a move that opens the floodgates.

16.Qb8+ Nxb8

17.Rd8#!



After 17.Rd8#: Great move · White's chances 100% → 100%

A forced checkmate is delivered by 17.Rd8#, a great move that exploits the weak back rank of the Black king. The game ends immediately with 17.Rd8#, whereas any other move would have handed a winning advantage to Black. White had to find this exact blow, as both 17.f4 Nc6 18.fxe5 f6 19.Be3 (-6.3) and 17.Be3 Qxa2 18.c3 Nc6 19.f4 (-6.4) let the win slip away.