11 Exchange Rates

You are bound to see, sooner rather than later, a chart giving the “values” of the pieces. How much they are “worth”, often expressed in units of “pawns” (or, worse still ‘points’), as though a “pawn” was a genuine currency unit.

P=1   N=3   B=3   R=5   Q=9

This gives rise to many problems. Your parents (and maybe you) know that we live in a world that has floating exchange rates, not ones fixed to the gold standard.

Yet, ceteris paribus (World Champion Lasker’s favourite phrase for “other things being equal” - of course they never are), these values can be useful. What to do? After 25 years of searching, I still have no really good answer. But there are some clear pointers:

- **those numbers CHANGE constantly**, like currency exchange rates, but more extreme.
- chess has GUIDELINES NOT RULES (the only fixed rules are the Laws of Chess).
- One firm rule – do not make rules
- So avoid things like Q=9  P=1  therefore “can’t” or “mustn’t” play Queen takes pawn if it loses ‘points’.

White to move.

So, what’s good? What’s best?

Rb3xb4  is +9

Bf7xg8 is +2  (5-3, since the bishop can be taken)

Qh2xh7 is -8  (9-1).

Which would you choose?

Throw the abacus away. (answer)

White to move.

A simpler choice - only two captures.

Qd7xh3 is +5.

Qd7xb7 is -8  (9-1).

Which would you choose?

Throw the abacus away. (answer)
A famous game.

Black “can’t” play Queen takes pawn.

1...Qg5xg2 was played!

If 2 Qf3xg2 Ne4-c3+ ("can’t" do that either, because White “just takes it for nothing”) 3 Qf3xc3 Qg2-e2 mate.

Chess is dynamic NOT static.

Black is a piece down, a full “-3” on the pocket calculator.

Of course, with the Bc5 covering the g1 square, a check on the h-file would be murderous, but he can’t (1...Qg7-h6+ 2 Bd2xh6).

The game ended 1...Qg7-g6 0-1.

White resigned because of:

2 f5xg6 h7xg6+ 3 Bd2-h6 Rh8xh6 mate.

Or the weird defence (surely not seen by the players):

2 Rf1-f2 Bc5xf2 2 Qd1-g1 Bc5xg1 3 f5xg6 Bg1-c5 and Black is winning but some work will be required.

PLAYING GAMES (Piece Values) - Place the pieces, in turn, on a central square (e5 will do) of an empty board and count how many squares they can move to.

K – 8
R - 14
B - 13
Q - 27
N - 8
Interesting? A queen really is a R+B, but she is stronger than that, why? (answer)

The B is almost as mobile as the R, so why is the R considered to be stronger? (answer)

The N covers fewer squares than the B, so why consider them to be of similar value? (answer)

Basically, it's down to what might be called "second-level" mobility:

The N can reach parts that other Bs cannot (they being limited to squares of only one colour).

The queen, represents R+B, but it is a very special bishop that can operate on both light and dark squares.

ANSWERS

- 1st diagram:
  I would choose to lose 8 points with
  
  1 Qh2xh7+!

  It is easy to see the end: 1...Kh8xh7 2 Rb3-h3+ and mate next move (3...Qb4-h4 4 Rh3xh4).

- 2nd diagram:
  Qd7xb7+ because after ...Ka8xb7 (forced) it is stalemate. Qd7xh3 allows Black a choice of mates in one:
  ...Rg8-g1 or Qf2-g1.

- PLAYING GAMES (PIECE VALUES)

  Question 1:

  Because the bishop is tied to squares of just one colour, so the queen is clearly more maneuverable.

  Question 2:

  The rook can get to every one of the 64 squares, the bishop only half of them.

  Question 3:

  Pretty much the same reason again - the bishop can rapidly reach half the squares, the knight is much slower, but it can get to any square in the end (do you know the fable of the tortoise and the hare? Well, this tortoise can also hop!).