

Pawn Center Types

Definitions: The following sections provide definitions for the main terms used in this document.

PAWN CENTER:

For purposes of this discussion, I am defining the “Pawn Center” as being the sixteen squares as shown in Figure 1.

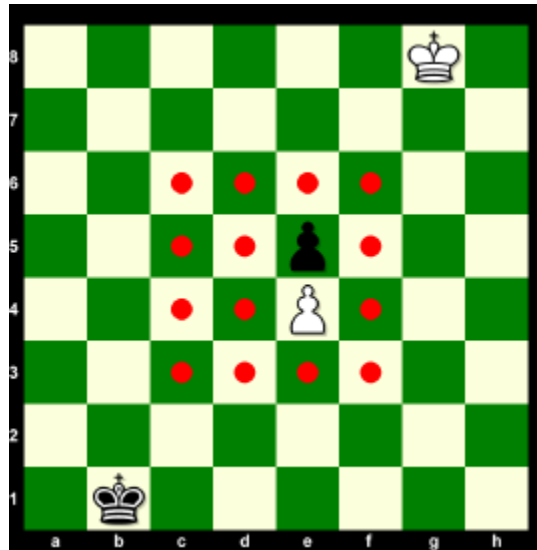


Figure 1: The Pawn Center

RAM:

Two opposing pawns directly facing each other in the “Pawn Center” as shown in Figure 2a and 2b.

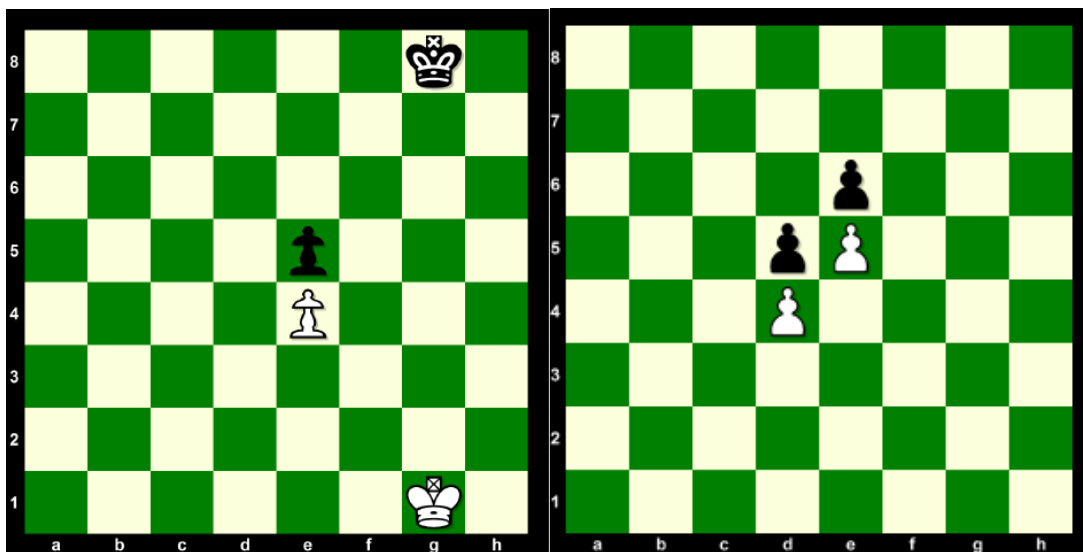


Figure 2a: One Ram

Figure 2b: Two Rams

CENTRAL PAIR:

At the start of the game, there are a total of 8 pawns in the four “Pawn Center” files, or 4 “Central Pairs” of pawns. As the center pawns get exchanged, the number of central pairs decreases, but the number of central pair exchanges increases.

CENTRAL PAIR EXCHANGE:

Normally “Central Pawns” are exchanged in pairs. Initially there are no pair exchanges, but as the number of central pawns gets exchanged the “central pair exchange” number increases. So, there can be between 0 and 4 central pawn exchanges.

NOTE: Occasionally only one pawn gets exchanged. In the case where only one pawn is exchanged, it counts as a full pair exchange for the side that is missing the pawn. However, for the side not missing the pawn it is not counted as a pair exchange.

Central Pairs Exchanged (Priority)	Central RAMS		
	0	1	2+
0	Dynamic	Dynamic	Closed
1	Mobile	Mobile	Closed
2+	Open	Fixed	Closed

Table 1: Center Types



Figure 3: The Closed Center
(2 rams; 0 central Pawn Exchanges)

1. **Closed centre:** When the centre is blocked and cannot open easily, you have more time to organize your pieces. The play will occur on the flanks of the board. Your chess strategy would then be to optimize the placement of your pieces and prepare to occupy any file that may open up. In blocked positions, *control of an open file* is often a useful advantage.

- a) Attacker: Use your pawns; create a pawn break to open lines on the side where you have a space advantage and attack with the major pieces; OR attack the head of the opponent's pawn chain.
- b) Defender: Use your pawns to counter-attack on the other side of the board



Figure 4: The Open Center
(0 Rams; 2 Central Pawn Exchanges)

2. **Open centre:** An open centre demands that your chess strategy is to have *very active pieces*. In a situation where the centre is open but your pieces are placed passively, you will lose quickly. Positional weaknesses away from the focus of attack are often not so important in open positions, since a well conducted attack would decide the outcome of the game tactically before the weakness can be exploited by the opponent. For example, a position with an isolated centre pawn often has the player with the “weak” isolated pawn gaining compensation in the form of open lines for his/her pieces to attack the King. Many pawn sacrifices are also based on this same strategic principle.
 - a) Attacker: Avoid moving pawns; you should try to occupy the center with pieces and use your pieces to provoke your opponent into making positional or tactical weaknesses. Then focus an attack on those weaknesses.
 - b) Defender: Avoid moving pawns because pawn moves can create weaknesses; Focus on a tactical refutation of your opponent's attack with pieces while trying to avoid creating any pawn weaknesses



Figure 5: The Dynamic Center
(1 Ram; 0 Central Pawn Exchanges)

3. **Dynamic centre:** This simply means the situation in the centre is *not yet clarified*. In this case, *your chess strategy should firstly be to clarify the situation in the centre*. Taking offensive actions on either of the flanks whilst the centre situation is not yet clarified is often a mistake. If you attack on one of the flanks before the centre situation is clarified, a well-timed *counterattack in the centre* could well prove your pieces to be offside and unable to sufficiently defend the weaknesses you created in your own position.
 - a) Attacker: Try to force one's opponent into a pawn formation that he does not want to have. The formation depends upon the minor pieces each player has on the board; be careful about moving pawns on a wing.
 - b) Defender: Try to force one's opponent into a pawn formation that he does not want to have. The formation depends upon the minor pieces each player has on the board. If the opponent tries to attack on a wing, counter-attack in the center.



Figure 6: The Mobile Center
 (1 Ram; 1 Central Pawn Exchange)

4. **Mobile centre:** A mobile center is where you normally have a pawn chain containing at least two united pawns and your opponent has a maximum of one pawn in the center. In this case, *your chess strategy should be to advance your center pawns and create at least one passed pawn in the centre.*
 - a) **Attacker Objective:** Try to advance the mobile pawns to gain more space and central domination; try to create a passed pawn
 - b) **Defender Objective:** Try to either destroy the pawn center or blockade it and prevent the opponent's central pawns from advancing.



Figure 7: The Fixed Center
 (1 Ram; 2 Central Pawn Exchanges)

5. **Fixed centre:** With a fixed center, the pawn position in the center is held in a closely locked grip often consisting of a single RAM. The attacking side stations his pieces in and around the center and occupies the central field to the greatest possible extent. The defending side seeks to drive the enemy pieces away from the central field or to exchange them off.
 - a) Attacker: Move your pieces onto squares that are controlled by your central pawns; control the open files.
 - b) Defender: Drive the enemy pieces away from the center or exchange them off; challenge and fight for control for the open files

Now take a look at my Chess Pawn structures article and see if you can determine the Center types for each opening position. You may be surprised at how many openings are categorized as being either dynamic or mobile.