

Before developing your Pieces, develop your Luck

"You lucky boy!" was Paul Byway's first reaction to my win against Jeremy Ward in our recent Herts League encounter with Little Heath.....and I could hardly disagree with that assessment. My win on time against Ieuan Ward from the earlier match against Bishop's Stortford was also tinged with a generous dose of good fortune so yes, I've been a very lucky boy indeed.

The title of this article is a quote from the eleven-time Scottish Champion William Fairhurst (1903-1982) who, though England-born, had a huge influence on the development of chess in Scotland. He also built bridges, literally, having had a highly successful career as a civil engineer. I never met the man over the board as he moved to New Zealand in 1970 just as my chess was getting to a level where a game might have been interesting. As for his advice, developing one's luck at chess does not have any theory nor does it come with a set of instructions. We may all have experienced lucky wins and unlucky losses but there are often themes that routinely contribute to them. Being aware of those just might make you a luckier player or as the great golfer Gary Player once said "The more I practice, the luckier I get".

My own chess hero is Emanuel Lasker, whose good fortune has been commented upon many times. Richard Réti wrote, "In analysing Lasker's tournament games, I was struck by his lasting and at first seemingly incredible good luck". In his tournament book for Nuremburg 1896, Tarrasch included a "luck table" to demonstrate how Lasker had scored 5 wins from 5 lost positions. Most commentators recognise that Lasker's real skill in such positions was to continue to set problems for his opponent, while in his book *How to Defend in Chess*, Colin Crouch noted "Lasker's greatest skill in defence was his ability to render a normal (inferior) position chaotic".

An important feature that is rarely mentioned in games from Lasker's era is that of time pressure (they tended to have very generous time controls back then) but as the 20th century progressed the relentless ticking of the clock began to have more of an impact. Now, in the electronic (and silent) age of faster time controls, with increments and playing to a finish, the opportunities for chaos have multiplied such that, almost regardless of what has happened over the board up to that point, luck may ultimately prevail! However, though we may never match Lasker's defensive skill, it might help if you can do something to entice good fortune in your direction.

So, with this introduction, let's have a look at my most recent lucky games. To play through both games with accompanying analysis then open [this link](#) in your browser. (There is also a link on the website home page).

Game 1

White: Ieuan Ward (2290, Bishop's Stortford)

Black: Stephen Swanson (2187, Hertford)

Time Control: Whole game in 70 minutes with a 10 second increment per move from the start.

Some of you will know that I have rarely elected to play league games "to a finish" on the night but the new rules do not allow for the "slow stuff", so I was obliged to use the time plus increment control. Given this feature I had decided that I would play quite quickly and not allow myself to be dragged into playing on the increment. So, by the time we had reached the position below (at what would have been the old-school move 35 time-control) I had over 15 minutes left while my opponent had about 2 minutes.



I'd just played **35.....Rb8-e8** as I was concerned that White might continue with Bh3-c8 to lock the rook out of play, which would have put a severe dent on attempts to generate activity. My other major worry was that White might now manoeuvre his rook round to c8, and the game continued with **36.Ra5-a2 d4 37.Ra2-c2 Re8-e5 38.Rc2-c8** after which White is still winning. However, he has the distraction of Black's central pawns plus he was now down to about a minute plus the continuing increment so I just needed to give him something to think about – to create a bit of chaos.



I played an unusual opening and played it badly so now I'm lost. Black has a simple plan to invade down the a-file and play b4-b3. All I can do is to try to make it just a little bit harder to finish me off – to force Black to find a few more good moves. Also, Black has been playing at a steady pace so no time issues at the moment. So, first on my list, the Black bishop on e6 is a huge piece so we exchange it off with **27.Bf3-d5 Qa7-d7 28.Bxe6+ Qxd7 29.Qg2-b7** and get a little activity.

However, some moves later Black has made progress but at the expense of his clock and we were both down to a couple of minutes plus the increment [Yes, I'd also been using too much time!]. A bit of patience and Black will be home and dry but White's major pieces are still actively placed – so Black deals with that.



Black played **38.....Qe6-c6** - a very human move but not the engine favourite – and I replied with **39. Qf3-f1!**? I didn't like giving up the long diagonal and the

engine prefers the exchange of queens but that would remove any real complications - plus, the move played sets a sort of trap. **39....Rb6-b2 40.Bf4-c1**. I could tell that Jeremy had missed this move and was getting a bit frustrated that he didn't have an immediate win....and his clock was running. His f-pawn is now hanging but the position of the White king looks perilous so surely keeping his rook active with **40....Rb2-c2** would be OK, but it isn't. Not so obvious under time pressure but the best idea now is to play **40....Rb2-b8** when White can't play **41.Qxf5** because of **41....Rb8-f8** winning quickly. Instead, White is more or less obliged to put the bishop back on f4 then I suggest that a good plan for Black is to re-coordinate his pieces - e.g put the queen back on e6, king on h7, rook on d8, bishop on e7 - nothing fancy here. White's weaknesses on h5 and e5 haven't gone away and the passed pawn will continue to be the trump card. Play simple, sensible non-forcing moves, but play them quickly.



In this position I did play quickly, grabbing the pawn with **41.Qxf5** apparently abandoning the defence of my king but after either **Qc6-g2+** or **Qc6-h1+** the king is surprisingly safe on g4. Now the combination of a sudden change in the position and the shortage of time caused Black to err again with **41.....Rc2-e2** then after **42.Bc1-f4**....I offered a draw! Black refused and play continued **42.....Qc6-d5 43.Qf5-c8+** then he blundered horribly with **43.....Kg8-h7** (**Bc5-f8** is equal) which was met with **44.Ra1-a8** when mate is unavoidable - Black has only one sensible check left due to the unfortunate position of his rook on e2 - so 1-0 quickly followed.

So what about that draw offer.....well, I didn't have much time either, otherwise I might have found **42.Bxh6** instead of moving it to f4. I'd been lost since about move 10 so a draw was something of a result for me and I thought Jeremy might have gone for it giving how active I'd suddenly become. However, having been in little danger for the rest of the game, I don't think he could accept the degree to which things had changed and he made those final errors.

Lucky again.....but, as in the first game, partly driven by a shortage of thinking time when the position is still far from simple. So, what are the take home messages from these two games, both played to a finish with an increment.

If you are on the winning side then you could try to simplify things, even at the cost of a bit of material. Make sure your pieces stay co-ordinated and if there is an obvious way to repeat moves then that gains a bit of time. Spending too much time trying to find a forcing continuation when time is limited is a dangerous occupation. Finally, remember that your opponent may not be experiencing the same kind of pressure if he/she thinks they've been lost for a quite a while already.

On the losing side of the position, don't let your opponent simplify to a technical win. Keep active at all costs and try to set some problems – the more chaos, the better. Your opponent has something to lose so they may use too much time trying to protect their hard-fought win – and they may feel that pressure.

No-one ever talks about being lucky to win a won position but it's a very lucky person indeed who gets to win all of them.