CHESS STRATEGY AND TACTICS

EVALUATING POSITIONS


You can use the following scale for roughly evaluating positions by score:

| 2	1½	1	½	0	½	1	1½	2
−+	−/+ or ∓	=+ or ∓	= or ∞	+= or ±	+/− or ±	+−		
winning	much better	Black is better	even or unclear	White is better	much better	winning		

We have been focusing on material scores when evaluating positions: if you are up a knight and a pawn, then you are up four (3+1) points. These material scores provide the baseline for evaluating positions, and are mostly sufficient while you are still dropping pieces and pawns. As you advance and improve your ability to notice things, you evaluate positions with more subtlety: weighing fractions of a pawn based on the many characteristics of a chess position. These characteristics include *central control*, *tempo and piece mobility*, *king safety*, *pawn formations*, and any other strengths and weaknesses you may find in the position. This is where chess becomes artistic, since evaluations often require your intuition.

For any position that is out of balance because there is a sequence of moves still to play, such as rook that is about to be recaptured, you must evaluate the position resulting *after* these moves have been played. In computer chess programming, such positions are said to reach "quiescense" where they can be evaluated without searching deeper.
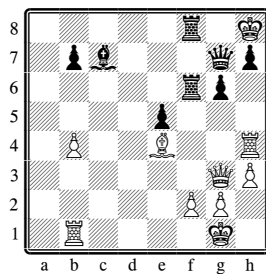
How would you evaluate these positions (all with White to play) from the first four games of the celebrated matches between Louise de Labourdonnais and Alexander McDonnell in 1834?
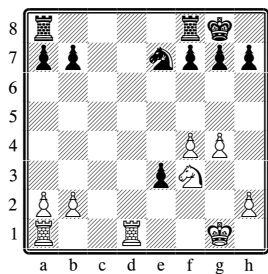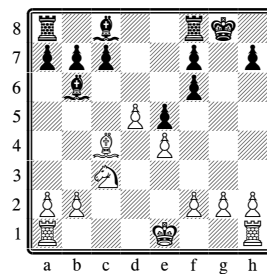

Game 1
La Bourdonnais vs McDonnell
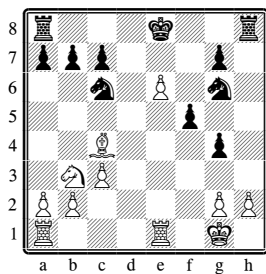
Game 2
La Bourdonnais vs McDonnell

Game 3
La Bourdonnais vs McDonnell

Game 4
La Bourdonnais vs McDonnell