

Isolated Pawn - Introduction -

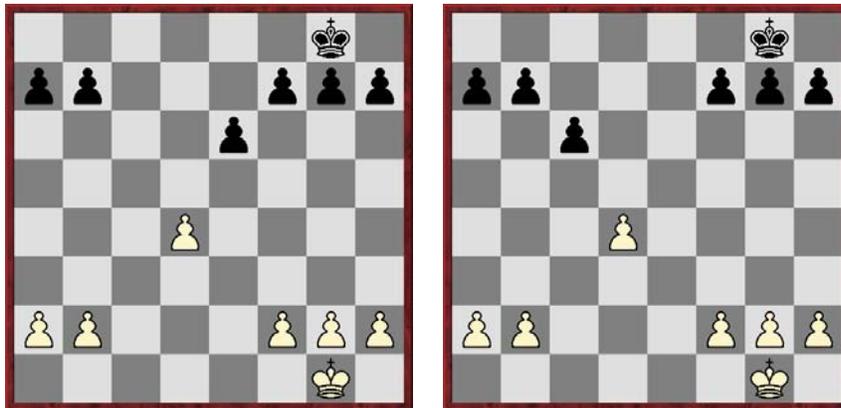
An isolated pawn is cut off from the other pawns, so it can only be protected by its pieces.

The isolated pawn structure can occur in many openings, e.g. for White:

- Alapin Variation (1.e4-c5, 2.c3-d5, 3.ed5-Qd5, 4.d4-Nf6, 5.Nf3-e6, 6.Be3-cd4, 7.cd4),
- French Defense, Exchange Variation (1.e4-e6, 2.d4-d5, 3.ed5-ed5, 4.c4-dc4, 5.Bc4),
- Caro-Kann Defense, Panov Attack (1.e4-c6, 2.d4-d5, 3.ed5-cd5, 4.c4-Nf6, 5.Nc3-e6, 6.Nf3-Nc6, 7.cd5-Nd5),
- Queen's Gambit Accepted (1.d4-d5, 2.c4-dc4, 3.Nf3-Nf6, 4.e3-e6, 5.Bc4-c5, 6.0-0-a6, 7.Bb3-cd4, 8.ed4)

and for Black:

- French Defense (1.e4-e6, 2.d4-d5, 3.Nd2-c5, 4.ed5-ed5, 5.Bb5-Nc6, 6.Ngf3-Bd6, 7.dc5),
- Slav Defense, Meran Variation (1.d4-d5, 2.c4-c6, 3.Nf3-Nf6, 4.Nc3-e6, 5.e3-Bd6, 6.Qc2-Nbd7, 7.b3-0-0, 8.Be2-e5, 9.cd5-cd5, 10.Nb5-Bb8, 11.de5),
- Queen's Gambit-Tarrasch Variation (1.d4-d5, 2.c4-e6, 3.Nc3-c5, 4.cd5-ed5, 5.Nf3-Nc6, 6.e3-Nf6, 7.Be2-Be7, 8.dc5).



The main principle that you should know in positions with an isolated pawn is: **when you have the isolated pawn, keep pieces on the board and when you fight against it, exchange as many pieces as you can.** This is quite easy to explain: with few pieces left on the board the isolated pawn must be protected, so it becomes a major weakness. On the other hand, with a lot of pieces on the board, under its protection, you can launch a kingside attack or make a break in the center.

In the next lessons, we will study in detail how to play with and against the isolated pawn, with many examples. For now, we will give some general considerations:

General Considerations

Let us assume that White has the isolated “d4” pawn (see the 2 diagrams above).

A. When you have the isolated pawn

1. The isolated pawn gives better control of the centre (e5-, c5- squares). Because of this, White has more active squares on which to develop his pieces and has some space advantage.
2. White can make **the breakthrough d4-d5 (the major strategic threat)**, giving him the initiative.
3. Kingside attack possibilities:
 - 3.1. an attack on the f7-square (usually a knight sacrifice happens there);
 - 3.2. a transfer of the rook along the 3rd file to the kingside;
 - 3.3. sacrifices, either with the bishop on h6, or with the knight on e6;
 - 3.4. an attack by advancing the h-pawn (very rare);
 - 3.5. very good play along the e-file.
4. Queenside attack and play along the c-file.

B. When you play against the isolated pawn

1. Control over the d5-square which should be occupied especially by a knight.
2. The king is usually protected with g7-g6 (to stop threats along the b1-h7 diagonal and as long as Black still has the dark-square bishop, there are no real threats on the weakened dark squares.).
3. The possibility of passing into the “isolated pawns structure” (pawns on c3 and d4 without pawns on the b- and e- files, if Black makes the exchange on c3).
4. Knowing which endgames offer better prospects of winning:
 - 4.1. King’s endgame- draw
 - 4.2. Opposite color bishops – draw
 - 4.3. Same color bishops:
 - 4.3.1. Bishop’s having the same color as the isolated pawn: usually draw, but also good prospects for win;
 - 4.3.2. Bishop’s having the opposite color of the isolated pawn: draw.
 - 4.4. Knight endgames – draw
 - 4.5. Knight vs. bishop:
 - 4.5.1. Knight vs. bishop with the same color as the isolated pawn: draw, but the one who has the isolated pawn must play very precisely.
 - 4.5.2. Knight vs. bishop of opposite color as the isolated pawn: draw.
 - 4.6. Bishop against knight - draw
 - 4.7. Queen endgames – draw
 - 4.8. Rook endgames – usually a draw
 - 4.9. Two Rooks + Queen versus two Rooks + Queen – usually win

All these considerations about endgames assume that nobody has other strategic advantages or disadvantages (e.g. an active king, control of open files, other weaknesses).