

DISCARDING LIKE PIECES

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ABSTRACT

The guideline of ‘discarding like men’ to estimate the merit of a chess position is well known. This note corrects a previous reference to a citation of it – and compares it with some statistics.

After discussing 5-man positions, Beasley and Whitworth (1996) cite a commonly-held guideline: “More complicated positions can usually be evaluated by ignoring like pieces.” They did so after stating the caveat “It is assumed that the position is ‘typical’: in other words, that both sides have organized their forces to reasonable advantage and that neither King is trapped against the side of the board”.

Previously (Nalimov, Wirth and Haworth, 1999), I accidentally misquoted this excellent source, omitting both the ‘usually’ and the *typical positions* caveat. With fulsome apologies to Beasley and Whitworth for the displaced misquote, this note examines to what extent the guideline holds good. The web (Tamplin, 2001) provides full statistics for the 2/4- and 3/5-man comparisons, some statistics, q.v. Table 1, for the 4/6-man comparison from the best estimates available (Wirth, 2000; Hyatt, 2001; Thompson, 2001), and the density of won positions in KQKQ and KQKQKQ after shallow wins are discounted.

Similarities between the 4/6-man percentages are not obvious, so indeed, *untypical positions* should be discounted. These are arguably positions where White or Black can or must force conversion to a successor endgame in a few plies. Current endgame tables show forced wins but not forced draws: some relatively short computations remain to be done to enable these “drawn positions with depth” to be discounted as well.

		4-man Wh. win %	+Q %	+R %	+B %	+N %
KQKQ	wtm	41.74	61.10	67.74	41.81	41.07
	btm	0.45	20.01	19.85	5.43	3.57
KQKR	wtm	99.01	81.84	90.18	----	----
	btm	65.51	37.86	48.28	57.51	59.11
KRKR	wtm	29.12	67.74	47.56	----	----
	btm	0.67	19.85	6.13	2.54	1.78
KRKB	wtm	35.12	----	57.63	52.69	----
	btm	3.23	2.14	9.41	8.22	14.35
KBKN	wtm	ε	45.52	----	11.70	1.69
	btm	0.00	5.70	2.74	0.98	0.05

Table 1. Some 4-man/6-man comparisons of White’s winning chances.

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