

“HUNTING THE HIPPO” (with Seal-Sweeps!)

I. Hippo Definition:

A “Hippo” formation is any passive formation in which a player moves most of his pawns to his third rank and then plays a waiting game by just shuffling his pieces to and fro behind this row of pawns. For the purposes of this example, we shall assume that the shuffling, defending king stays UNCASTLED, in the center of his back rank. (Note: If the defender DOES eventually castle, then this lecture should be studied in conjunction with the full “Tips for the Attack” lecture.)

II. The “Seal-Sweep”:

This is an attacking process that uses a pawn sacrifice in order to both open lines for the Attacker’s pieces, as well as to simultaneously congest the mobility of some of the Defender’s pieces.

III. The Seal–Sweep Technique:

Advance one of two pawns in a duo. When the opponent captures this pawn (the sealer) then push your remaining pawn (the sweeper) past the pawn that you have just sacrificed. This action will open up both a file and some diagonals for you, while the defender’s extra pawn will block the free movement of his own pieces.

IV. Your Optimal Attacking Formation:

- #1) Move your four central pawns to your fourth rank.
- #2) Develop your two knights to your bishop three squares.
- #3) Then move your bishops out of the way of your two rooks – normally this will mean either fianchettoing both of your bishops, or at the least, moving your bishops back to their starting squares.
- #4) Castle.
- #5) Move your queen and both of your rooks to the two central files.

V. Important Points to Remember:

- Frequently, (although not always,) the two chief enemy defensive pieces that you wish to congest with a Seal-Sweep sacrifice are a bishop that is fianchettoed and a rook that is on an open file.
- When attacking “Hippo” formations, it really is of CRITICAL importance to use the Seal-Sweep maneuver in order to achieve a successful breakthrough.
- Sometimes one Seal-Sweep pawn sacrifice alone is not sufficient to fully open the defender’s pawn cover. So, if the first Sealing pawn is guarded by a friendly pawn, then the Sweeping pawn will produce a double attack (i.e. two pairs of enemy pawns in tension).
This extra pawn tension should suffice to open up enough lines to enable you to penetrate with your pieces and win.

VI. Key Questions & Answers:

Q: Are 3 central pawns abreast a better attacking formation than 2 central pawns abreast against a “Hippo” type of defensive formation?

A: Yes, but a 4-pawn attack is even better!

Q: Well then, is a 5 or 6 pawn attack better than a 4-pawn attack?

A: No! Using the primary and secondary CENTRAL pawns are more than sufficient. To use more than 4 pawns for this task will both weaken your king’s protection as well as create numerous holes that your opponent can probe which will distract your pieces away from their primary goal: breakthrough in the center.

Q: What is the most effective order in which to first play the sealer move and then to play the sweeper move; should I play P-K5 first and then play P-Q5, or should I play P-Q5 first and then follow up with P-K5 ?

A: Normally it won’t matter but beware of lines where you either lose material or trade your Queen.

Q: But I may sacrifice 1 or 2 pawns! How will I know if I’ve “gotten my money’s worth”?

A: Assuming that your 4 pawns are on your fourth rank, while those of your opponent are on his third rank or less, then the sacrifice of one or even two pawns is almost always well worthwhile.

(Example positions for the above are in the accompanying Chess base database.)