



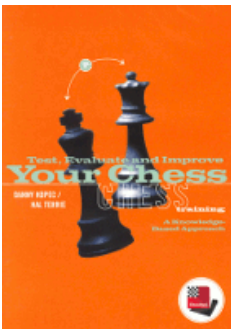
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Test Taking Fun

by Glenn Budzinski

Test, Evaluate and Improve Your Chess: A Knowledge-Based Approach, by Danny Kopec and Hal Terrie, 1997 Hypermodern Press, English Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 235pp., \$17.95

As the title implies, Kopec and Terrie's *Test, Evaluate and Improve Your Chess* is a book of chess tests. In fact, there are six examinations included, each selected with the purpose of helping to identify a player's knowledge of the game as expressed in terms of playing strength, or rating.

According to Kopec, an International Master and a computer science academician who runs an annual summer chess camp, the book contains "an appropriate test for nearly everyone: there are test positions suitable for players of all levels covering all phases and most aspects of chess play – and after you take these tests, study the answers, and review your results, your chess will improve!" (page 3).

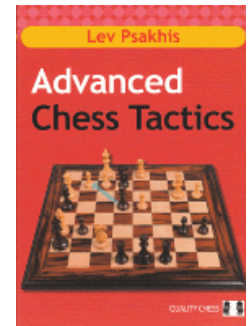
The six tests examine the student's knowledge of a total of 158 different positions. The first of the six chapters covers the twenty-four position, "Bratko-Kopec Test," which originated in 1980 and was used principally "to demonstrate that computer programs lacked certain knowledge which is critical to strong chess players" (page 2), along with the "New Position" test, which added an additional twenty-four positions. Chapter Two consists of the "Camp Test 1995" used, as the name implies, at Kopec's 1995 chess camp. A thirty-five position rook and pawn test can be found in Chapter Three; Chapter Four provides a twenty-seven position test of "Other Endings" and Chapter Five is a twenty-four position "Novice Test", meant for players with a USCF rating of 1500 or less. The final chapter is a one page conclusion. There are also four appendices, a bibliography, a listing that briefly describes each test position, bios of the authors and an introduction.

A reasonable way to validate the authors' claim that their tests accurately identify a player's knowledge (or lack thereof) is to actually take the tests. This writer, who has maintained a relatively stable USCF 2100 tournament rating for more than ten years (with a peak in the 2170s to a low of 2057), appeared to be a good subject.

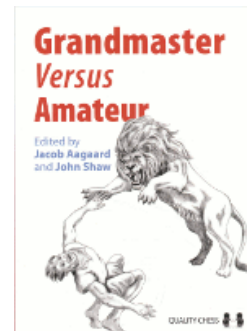
Three tests were taken: the Bratko-Kopec, Camp Test 1995 and the Rook and Pawn Endings Test. In each case, the two minutes per move time limit was adhered to as closely as possible and answers were recorded in the manner suggested.

On the Bratko-Kopec test, which consists of a variety of complex middlegame positions taken mostly from older master games and books, a score of 19 out of 24 was achieved, equivalent to a strong master rating.

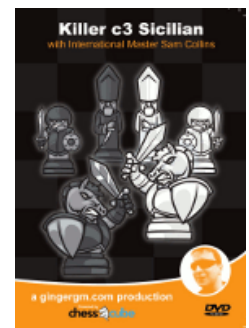
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The Camp Test 1995 covered a diverse range of positions from the early opening to the late endgame. Five of the twenty-four positions came from the Pergamon book *Mastering Chess: A Course in 21 Lessons*, co-authored by Kopec. This writer found this test to be considerably more challenging than the Bratko-Kopec, and it was reflected in his score of 14.8 which did, however, fall in the range of the other two 2100 players cited in Appendix 3 who took the test. (One scored 13.83 and the other, 16.08. It should be noted, however, that in most statistical circles, a sampling of only three players, as is the case here, would not be considered large enough from which to deduce any firm conclusions about identification of knowledge/rating.)

Unfortunately, this writer's copy of the book contained six blank pages in the Rook and Pawn Endings section, which meant that nine positions were omitted altogether and three answers were unavailable. Since no explanation of scoring could be found (which may appear on one of the missing pages), there was no way to form any generalizations about the 10 out of 23 score, other than the fact that this writer's rook and pawn ending skills could use a little work. Reviewing the Levenfish and Smyslov classic *Rook Endings*, cited in Kopec and Terrie's bibliography, it should be pointed out that positions on the test did seem to address many of Levenfish and Smyslov's twenty-two concluding maxims.

Similar to other tests that one encounters in life, chess tests also contain an element of controversy. Kudos to the authors for highlighting some potential problems and criticisms at the end of Chapter One (pp. 26-28). For instance, a factor that affects results is the two minute per move time limit. As K & T mention (comparing the thought processes of humans versus machines), "During actual games human players tend to non-uniformly allocate their time to individual moves. Thus a chess master typically spends ten or twenty more minutes in a position which is identified as 'critical' for finding a key move or a key plan..."

K & T additionally advise us that "Certainly, a few positions in the experiment are not ideal, and a few are even controversial as to what the best move is, but this will not significantly invalidate a human or machine subject's overall score." Perhaps, but why not just avoid controversial positions altogether? One such position is #57 from Camp Test 1995, a variation of the Schliemann Defense to the Ruy which occurs after the moves 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 d4 fxe4 5 Nxe5 Nxe5 6 dxe5 c6.



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pp1p2pp/2p5/1B2P3/4p3/8/PPP2PPP/RNBQK2R w KQkq - 0 7"]

Although White's best move may be the piece sacrifice 7 Nc3, chosen by Kopec and Terrie, the outcome up the road is not as clear as the authors seem to indicate. They provide the continuation of 7...cxb5 8 Nxe4 d5 9 exd6 Nf6 10 Qd4 and conclude "with a dangerous attack" for White in their solution (page 84), which flies in the face of two respected sources on the Schliemann, Mikhail Tseitlin, in his 1991 book *Winning With the Schliemann* and Jimmy Adams' 1982 monograph *Schliemann/Jaenisch Gambit*. Both Tseitlin and Adams continue the 10 Qd4 line by following games: Tseitlin cites Black as having the advantage after move seventeen in Gonzales-Montalvo from 1978 and Adams offers Semkov-Antonov from 1980, a twenty-four move draw which mirrors Gonzales-Motalvo at least through move seventeen. On the other hand, Tseitlin does concede that Kopec and Terrie's choice of 7 Nc3 is probably best in that particular position, although the subsequent

continuations hardly look dangerous for Black.

Another controversial position is #53 from Camp Test 1995, which is reached after the moves 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Qd7 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 b6 7 Qg4 f5 8 Qg3 Ba6 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 Ne2 Nb8 11 Nf4 Nc6.



[FEN "r3k1nr/p1pq2pp/1pn1p3/3pPp2/3P1N2/P1P3Q1/2P2PPP/R1B1K2R w KQkq - 0 12"]

White plays 12 Nxe6 because, according to the authors, 12...Qxe6 13 Qxg7 Qg6 14 Qxh8 "favors White since Black is unable to trap the White queen." (page 83) Would someone please show all of us non-USCF 2400 players, who have not seen (or cannot remember) IMs Mike Valvo and John Watson and GM Ian Rogers' 1989 analysis in *Inside Chess*, why the white queen can't be trapped?

While the tests do seem to do a reasonably good job of pinpointing one's present playing strength (at least in the case of this writer), how much a player's game actually improves after taking them and studying the answers, is less than clear. Other than the rook and pawn endings test, positions tend to be isolated examples from which it is difficult to draw general inferences as to whether or not (and to what degree) a certain type of position is understood. Thus, what does it really mean if one incorrectly answers the question on isolated pawns? In many cases, the sample of positions concerning a specific topic is just too small to establish any definite conclusion about one's knowledge (or lack thereof) of that concept.

Perhaps this writer should be accused of chess insanity, but to him, Kopec and Terrie's tests actually seemed enjoyable to take. In addition to the entertainment value, the reader will also get a good idea of the breadth of his chess knowledge compared to others. As long as too much more is not expected, this unusual book should prove to be a worthwhile addition to most anyone's chess library.

[Test, Evaluate and Improve Your Chess](#) is available in ChessBase format in the [ChessCafe.com](#) shop.

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