



SKITTLES
ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by
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From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, ChessCafe.com has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

The Q & A Way by Bruce Pandolfini

Do This, Don't Do That

Question Every book always says that queen-pawn openings lead to quiet, positional games, whereas king-pawn openings lead to sharp, tactical games. It is not clear to me why this should be true. Why should one lead to positional play and the other to sharp play? **Kevin Tapp (USA)**

Answer I've read enough instructional books to know that presenters often are unclear about what they say and how they say it. In their defense, chess is a complicated game whose best explanations are given not in words but in moves, so its most cogent ideas can easily be lost in translation.

The distinctions you refer to are not hard-and-fast absolutes. Queen-pawn openings are more likely to lead to quiet, positional games, though not necessarily. Some queen-pawn openings can be busy and overtly aggressive. For example, the Colle can result in an abundance of sudden attacks. Meanwhile, king-pawn openings don't automatically trigger sharp, tactical battles. Just consider a few of the blocked up lines in the French Defense or some of the closed variations of the Ruy Lopez. Nor do these distinctions take into account the possibility of transposition, where a clever, dumb, or even standard shift in move order can change either type of beginning into the other.

The differences between open and closed games mainly revolve around the center and how quickly it clears of pawns. If the center opens fairly early, then it's more likely the game will take a tactical turn. If the center doesn't open so rapidly, then it's usual for the game's character to become slower and more positional. But still, this type of generalization lacks the degree of certainty we've come to expect from the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

How does the center typically open? Generally the center opens by exchanging some middle pawns so that there are fewer obstructions to piece movement. For the most part this comes about when at least one side (usually White) pushes both central pawns far enough ahead ordinarily at least to the advancer's 4th rank – to encounter the enemy center directly, making pawn captures possible.

Which beginning move for White (1 d4 or 1 e4) is more likely to lead to such early central activity and therefore an open game? The answer tips toward the king-pawn (1 e4). This is chiefly so because in the original setup the queen-pawn has a natural protector backing it up (the queen), so there's a greater chance its two-square movement could be delayed without disadvantage. The king-pawn, on the other hand, starts the game in front of the king, which is powerless to support its advance at any time. Delay the king-pawn's two-square opener and the opponent may actually seize control of e4 and prevent this advance altogether.

(We also must factor into the mix that, when White starts by pushing the king-pawn, he usually can castle faster than when he opens with the queen-pawn. The additional king safety makes it less perilous to open the center by double pawn advances, which is another reason open games are more likely to ensue from king-pawn openings.)

So if you want to open up the game, thereby increasing the likelihood of tactical play, you have a slightly better chance to engineer it if you begin with e2-e4 and then, at a timely moment, follow with d2-d4 (or d3-d4). But chess doesn't really lend itself to this kind oversimplification, which is why I usually avoid responding to these questions or resort to flippant answers.

Question It has been suggested that one needs an opening as White and a defense against king-pawn and queen-pawn openings as Black. What are the simplest solutions to get a playable middlegame? **Craig Rovinsky (USA)**

Answer There are no simple solutions to insure getting a playable middlegame. If there were, I too might be a player. Therefore, I usually shy away from recommending specific openings and defenses without knowing something about the individual, and even here I'm cautious, for students tend to take such suggestions as gospel.

Nonetheless, if I had to advocate something without regard to the person at hand, I'd probably advise that when one has White to start by moving the king-pawn two squares ahead. I would stress quick development, reasonably early castling, aggressive action, playing with a plan, and all this while actually

looking at the opponent's moves. The latter is very important. And when one has the black pieces, I would urge trying to get the white ones as soon as possible, whether the opponent has opened with the king-pawn or the queen-pawn. Steal the initiative and you can seize the day!

Question Is it true that the pointy-headed guy is worth a ½-point more than the horsey? **Confused (USA)**

Answer This depends what you mean by the colorful term “horsey,” the actual value you have in mind with the concept “a ½-point more,” the nature of this thing you refer to as the “pointy-headed guy,” and what you really intend to signify by using the word “true.”

Question I am currently rated 1340. I would like to compete against other people, but don't want to be a sandbagger. I play an expert chess player three times every day: two 15 minute games and one 30 minute game. Sometimes I play like an 1800 player and sometimes I play like a 1200 player. Is this good for my improvement? Any suggestions? **Robert Zak (USA)**

Answer I suggest that you confirm your rating with the USCF, compete against other people without sandbagging, and continue to engage in chess, though preferably with opponents just a little better than you, not a lot better. Also I recommend that you play more like an 1800 player and less like a 1200 one, though how could you tell if you lose every game to an expert? By the way, ask him if he thinks this is good for your improvement.

Question I have two nieces of 8 years of age. What is the best way to introduce them to chess long distance? It should be noted that their parents do not play. **Jay Kantor (USA)**

Answer Start by telling them to get new parents, which you can do by correspondence, telephone or e-mail.

Question At what age could lessons begin? **Mary Bogart (USA)**

Answer I find that the best age to start teaching a youngster chess is five or six. I've introduced a number of students to the game at four, the same age that young people start grappling with other abstract concepts, complex ones in math and music, and it's supposedly also the age at which Capablanca, world chess champion from 1921-27, learned merely by watching his father play. I've heard of a few kids learning earlier than that, not nearly as spectacularly, and one well-known chess teacher told me he began teaching his son at two. The teacher felt the lessons weren't very effective, though I should point out that his son went on to win several National Scholastic Championships.

Another parent I knew was a devotee of Dr. Sinichi Suzuki and his teaching methods in music. The parent believed that doing certain things from the time of the child's birth and after could instill a receptivity to chess. Specifically, he felt the groundwork for developing a strong player could be laid by dangling

mobiles of chess pieces above the crib, affixing large diagrams of chess positions on the walls and ceiling, displaying pictures of famous chessplayers and events in the child's room and throughout the living space, giving the child stuffed chess toys to play with and look at, singing songs and reading poems with chess themes, visiting tournaments and chess events, and simply by talking about chess at every opportunity. I suppose doing these things couldn't hurt, and might even help, though this is an area of childhood development needing further research.

Probably the best thing a parent could do to encourage a child to play chess early on is simply to manifest a personal interest in the game. This should be sufficient, for children naturally learn by wanting to imitate their parents, their first role models. So in the Suzuki Method it's the parents who are obliged to take the initial lessons in the child's presence, hoping to impel the learning process. Perhaps this is what happened to Capablanca, when at age four he became inspired by watching his father play.

Nevertheless, while learning at an early age can be advantageous, merely because the more experience you accumulate the better, it can also lead to an attendant problem. Namely, losing, and young children are going to lose quite often. Since the main reason for doing anything at an early age is ego gratification, frequent defeat may prove to be so discouraging that the child winds up losing his passion for chess and abandons the game completely. Some teachers therefore recommend immersing the novice in serious competition at a later age, say, twelve or thirteen, when one is more able to cope with the pain of failure. Yet if somehow the individual can learn at a young age and keep his shell intact, those in the know say this is the way to go to attain real mastery.

But rather than starting at a particular age, it's perfectly acceptable for the parent to introduce chess whenever it seems appropriate. If the child gets excited, the parent can take it a bit further. If the child shows no interest, or very little, the parent can drop the matter and go onto something else. This try-and-see approach is not a bad one for the teacher either. Anyhow, most of us know that children shouldn't be forced into doing or learning things simply to please parents or teachers. We also appreciate that even when the activity or lesson has relevance to their maturation and well-being, children still learn better when the presentation is playful and fun.

I'm reminded of an epigram from Martial about teaching:

Do the children crowd around your desk?
That's the test. It's not in the text, for school should be like play.
Put down the straps and paddles;
Lessons aren't battles.
We learn most in summer anyway.

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