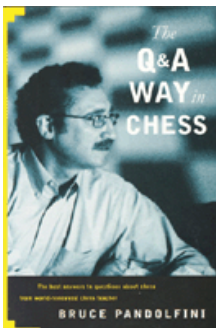




COLUMNISTS

From the Archives

Hosted by Mark Donlan



CHESSTHEATRE

Play through and download the games from ChessCafe.com in the DGT Game Viewer.



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.com 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

We All Have To Start Somewhere

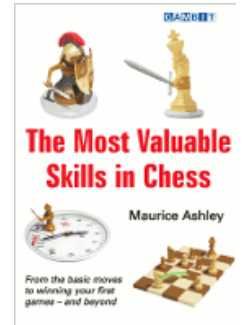
Question I have been playing chess again. I was having difficulty finding people to play with, so I brought my mini-chess set to work one day and people started coming out of the woodwork. Now a bunch of us play during our lunch break. Last week I lost every game. Then, over the weekend, I was reading Josh Waitzkin's book. Today I won both games that I played during lunch. These are the first two games that I have ever won (besides my very first game, which must have been beginner's luck).

My question is very similar to another person's question in your Chess Cafe Q & A column. I read chess books until I am blue in the face. Most of the time I do not know how to implement the ideas and strategies that I learn from the books during a real game. I think my problem is that I spend so much of my brain power trying to set up a game plan for myself that I never know what the other person is up to. How can you train yourself to think a couple of moves ahead when you don't even know where the other person is going to move? Sometimes I think that I am setting up a great strategy for myself only to find that my opponent has checkmated me in the meantime. This is why I intend to castle as soon as possible. Any tips on strategy for a newcomer? Also, what should my main objective be during the opening part of the game?
Donna Brophy, (USA)

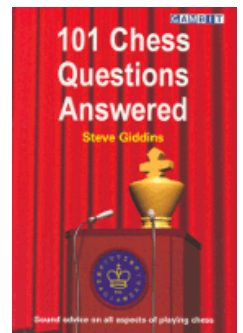
Answer Start by trying to develop a routine. Begin with how you consider your opponent's moves. Let's say your opponent has just moved. If you're keeping score, and I'm not saying that you should, but if you are, write down the move before starting to analyze it. Otherwise, you may become so involved that you forget to record the move or wind up writing it inaccurately. You'll want to avoid such mistakes, for seeing empty spaces or constant smudges and erasures on your score sheets can be awfully unsettling.

Once your opponent has moved and, if you're keeping a record, after you've written it down, try to detect if you're being threatened. (Make sure you're clear on the meaning of the word "threat." Your opponent is threatening you if he is planning to harm you, such as by mating you or winning some of your material. He is not threatening you, however, if he has positioned himself to capture one of your pieces but you are able to respond to the planned capture without disadvantage.) If your opponent's last move doesn't apparently threaten anything, and if it doesn't seem to be particularly directed, then you can probably go on with other aspects of your analysis. If, on the other hand,

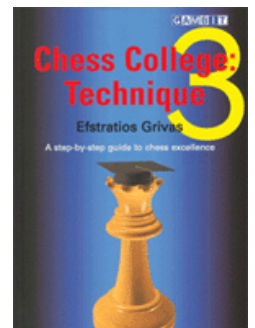
Purchases from our shop help keep ChessCafe.com freely accessible:



The Most Valuable Skills in Chess by Maurice Ashley Now 25% off!!



101 Chess Questions Answered by Steve Giddins Now 25% off!!



Chess College 3: Technique by Efstratios Grivas Now 25% off!!

the move does seem to be threatening, then you must see if you are adequately covered. Usually you can find out what's what by asking a set of internalized questions. These won't necessarily give you the answers, but they should steer you in the right direction and provide a better feel for the situation.

(Eventually, you won't have to articulate these questions at all. As you acquire experience, your mind will start to go through the give-and-take more comfortably. It's just that, before you've made the operation intuitive, you have to begin somewhere, and though this approach is artificial, it lays the groundwork for more natural reactions.)

However you conduct this internal discourse, you should use it to determine various things. In the case where your opponent's last move suddenly threatens one of your units, try to find out if you are defended enough times, if your defenders actually can take back, if the defenders are the right kinds for the chores at hand, if they are too burdened to take back without incurring attendant problems, and whatever else might be deemed relevant. Overriding all these general thoughts, nonetheless, should be hardcore analysis to verify the planned moves.

Once you've satisfied this part of the analysis, return to pondering your opponent's move and commence asking yourself another group of questions. You might start with something like: "Did I issue a threat (or threats) with my own last move?" This or a similar question should function as a reminder to reestablish focus. Continuing on this path: "Does my opponent's move truly respond to mine?" If you had a threat (or threats), and your opponent's move responded to it (or them), this is one thing. But if you had a threat (or threats), and your opponent's move didn't address it (or them), that's quite another. You might be able to win immediately, before your opponent's own aims are achieved.

Following through on this line of thought you might ask: "Can I ignore my opponent's last move and proceed with my own plans?" If you conclude that you can't ignore your opponent's last move, you will have to figure out how to cope with the danger while keeping alive your own previous designs. It would be great if you could reply to your opponent, keep your initial threat or threats (if you had any), and manage to issue still another threat. If you could do this, suddenly your opponent would be faced with multiple threats that might be insuperable.

(Always try to rebut your opponent's moves actively, answering them while generating counterthreats. This is an excellent way to steal the initiative and fuel a winning attack.)

After completing your analysis, and after deciding on your next move, still don't play it yet. Instead, ask at least one more question: "Is there anything I may have missed?" Or "Is there anything I haven't considered, that could mess me up, such as an unexpected check or capture." Regardless how you ask the question, it should serve as a final check to reduce blunders.

Get used to thinking three moves ahead (really three half moves). That is, try to visualize your next move without playing it. Then try to foresee your opponent's best response. Then try to figure out how you should reply to this anticipated move. If you can see these three half moves - your move, your opponent's move, your move again -- at least your head will be in the right place, poised for chess and its rigorous logic.

As far as tips for conducting the opening phase, the basic ideas are well known. Play for the center, either by occupying it, guarding it, or influencing it. Develop your pieces (pawns are not considered to be pieces), move each piece just once, and avoid moving the same piece too often. Do not use the queen too early or too much (let bishops and knights do some of the work), and don't play needless pawn moves. Try to make mainly those that contribute to development. From early on, prepare to castle, and look to gain control of open lines (especially files and diagonals). Where possible, move with threats to keep the initiative or steal it, and be sure to respond to all your opponent's threats (you know, actually look at the other person's moves). Meanwhile, strive to stop your opponent from doing the same desirable things you're

attempting to do (for example, prevent him from castling, if you can). Moreover, when the circumstances call for it, break any principle in favor of the correct move. Seek to understand your mistakes and why you lose. Be objective, give it your all while actually doing, and you'll always be at your best.

Let's be frank. There's no magic here. Doing the right things whatever they are still doesn't guarantee playing a great game of chess. But if you are confident, and learn to trust your own judgments, you will enjoy the game a whole lot more. To realize this state, get into the habit of playing with thoughtful abandon. Don't be afraid to take calculated chances. And don't automatically assume that your opponent has some deep scheme in mind. If you play with such freedom, either of two good things will happen. Either your plans will succeed, and you will win, or they will fail, and you will learn something.

Question I have some of your books as well as others, but I never had one explain on how you go from Master to IM to FM or GM . Do you have to take tests or exams to get from wood pusher? **Ronald F. Stanek, (USA)**

Answer I'm with you. I've never seen a book that could help one reach the grandmaster level, whether by method or test. But there are lots of great puzzle books to enjoy and from which to benefit. Bruce Alberston, Lev Albur, A. J. Gillam, Laszlo Polgar and Fred Reinfeld are just some of the people who offer nice collections of problems. The puzzles from any of their appropriate works should provide you with hours of pleasure, while actually sharpening your skills. Good luck on your test quest.

Question In many books for beginners (I'm thinking of one guy in particular who has written quite a few), the first kind of chess opening that is taught is the double e-pawn opening for the very good reasons, I suppose, that these are the easiest to comprehend in terms of tactics and that these illustrate the basics of good opening play in the most straightforward way. But what is a poor player to do when she or he has been absorbing such material, and the dastardly opponent insists on opening (as White) with 1.Nf3 or 1.b3 or something like that? To say "play good common-sense developing moves" may not exactly cut it those are the kind of moves some of these openings are designed to take advantage of. Another way of putting this question may be: after you make the double e-pawn openings part of your repertoire, what do you learn next? How do you prepare for serious tournament/chess club play? My own solution to this problem has been to adopt a player (Boris Spassky for me) and look closely at his repertoire and adapt it to my own (that means, for White: King's Gambits whenever possible both the Bishop's Gambit as well as the Knight's and for Black an off-beat variation of the Ruy and sometimes the Latvian Gambit (which Spassky played a couple of times) and the Tarrasch against d4. Against the offbeat (read "nonclassical") moves listed above, I take up the challenge and play the classical developing moves and say, "Let's go at it."). **Brenan Nierman, (USA)**

Answer You start by talking about chess books for beginners, but it's not clear what you mean by the term "beginner." When most chess teachers refer to beginners, they mean rank beginners or near rank beginners. These are adults and children who need to learn, or learn more about, moves, rules, and the most elementary chess concepts. I hope you do not intend to include in this group unknowledgeable people who've been playing the game for awhile, but who remain unschooled on its finer points. Nor should you include in this category, it seems to me, experienced players who play terribly. These players may play as if they've just learned, but they're not beginners either. I think many of them might find the term "beginner" disparaging, and I do not suppose (correct me if I'm wrong) that you intend to insult anyone.

Accordingly, chess books for true beginners tend to present moves, rules, and a few basic principles, nothing more. They almost never go into great detail on any opening in particular, even double king-pawns. So I'm going to assume that you don't mean books for beginners. Instead it appears that you are actually talking about books for casual and average players who have never really gotten any better, experienced amateurs and tournament players who seem to be in a rut, and other similar kinds of chess combatants who want to

improve their game. These people have virtually no interest in moves and rules. Rather they want to better their already existing level of play, so they will probably require more sophisticated texts, including books that concentrate on the opening phase, such as treatises on specific openings and variations.

It's easy enough to agree with your point when you say that most books for beginners (though, again, it's obvious you don't mean beginners, but something like amateurs or casual players) advise using double e-pawn games, because "these are the easiest to comprehend in terms of tactics" and also because they "illustrate the basics of good opening play in the most straightforward way." But then you add that this will not help if the opponent begins with "1. Nf3 or 1. b3 or something like that," when you imply that "common sense developing moves" might be refuted because they "may not exactly cut it."

Something is not quite right here. Of course common sense developing moves will probably fail against more polished beginnings, as would trying to hit a Pedro Martinez fastball with a little league bat. But what else can an unschooled player (forget about a beginner) do other than to use common sense? Should he instead respond with state of the art precision? No, of course not. He can't. Such knowledge is the province of the strong, experienced player. The casual player, because there really isn't any other avenue open to him, must rely on common sense, and even if he gets crushed by his opponent's greater expertise, at least he can learn something and thereby hope to become stronger. After the game, after his common sense and limited know-how have probably failed, he can ask questions or go back to the books. He can attempt to find out the right moves and nurture his developing education.

Common sense and general principles must be relied on when one doesn't have exact knowledge. When one does know what to do, he does it. In life, we may learn some simple specific things first, but it's hard to be specific at a higher level when one doesn't know how to be general at any level. It would be nonsensical for writers of introductory chess books seriously to entertain the idea of replacing, for instance, the game Morphy vs. the Duke and the Count, as antediluvian and overused as it is, with an *avant-garde* positional masterpiece in Reti's Opening from a recent Slovenian Championship.

You go on to say, it would seem tendentiously, that "Another way of putting this question may be: after you make the double e-pawn openings part of your repertoire, what do you learn next?" (I'm assuming you mean, what should you learn next?) Anyhow, this is not a true rephrasing of your earlier question/statement. It's an entirely different question/statement. I would address it by saying that you should study anything you like. Just go where your interests take you. If you're not really getting anywhere, there's a chance it has less to do with what you're studying and more with how you're studying. Use your time effectively, and you'll probably increase understanding, win a higher percentage of games, and actually relish the entire experience a lot more. Your next question, about preparing for tournament play, will be considered in a future column.

Finally, you give a piece of advice yourself, which is to assume, at least partially, a particular player's opening repertoire. This, it turns out, is an excellent idea, and I heartily endorse it, as do many chess teachers. It's essentially what Bobby Fischer did when in his youth he adopted some of Isaac Boleslavsky's favorite lines (without, of course, playing 1. d2-d4). May you have Fischer-like success in all your future chess endeavors.

Question I have heard about people playing blindfold chess (without view of the board). My question is are some people born with this ability or is there a way to train to do it? **Valerio Cassimatis (Canada)**

Answer Yes, some people do seem to be born with an innate propensity for visualization, which can translate to an ability for blindfold chess if life so directs. But the skill can also be enhanced by experience and proper training. Indeed, there are techniques one can tap to aid performance, but these in no way can replace real talent. They can only supplement it. Here's what I do with my own students, some of whom are young children, just to make them

more at ease with doing things in their heads.

First of all, I insist they always analyze without moving the pieces, no matter how hard the position. If they have difficulty, I help them along and try to guide them through it. After awhile they naturally become more comfortable by virtue of automatically analyzing in their heads all the time.

I especially encourage them to become familiar with the board, including its lines, colors, connection points, and key squares. As far as playing a whole game in their heads, I try to get them to do a number of particular things in our practice sessions: to visualize the move being played; to say the move in algebraic notation, and sometimes additionally in descriptive notation (I won't let them say things like "now I want to go here," and they point to a square this is unacceptable); to make all kinds of associations, where, after indicating a move, they identify supportive pieces, relations between pieces and squares, future possibilities, and any other germane information; to classify potential tactics or themes that seem to be relevant to the developing situation; finally, to give a very definite reason for playing the candidate move, to explain it in context of the entire game.

This last task is the crux of the method. The idea is to create a narrative, a storyline, where all the story's facts are connected by logic. By taking these steps (visualizing the move, saying it, describing it, with lots of classification, and explaining it, especially by creating a storyline), one has a number of different linchpins to fall back on in order to play through a game without sight of the board.

(Actually, this technique is not new. Many chess concepts and classic games are taught by narrative, where the presenter tries to convince us that the contest was won by virtue of a grand design. The reality may be nothing like this, of course, but that's how chess writers and teachers often illustrate the material, attempting to unify it and make it memorable.)

Let me reiterate: Doing these things will not, in themselves, produce a great blindfold player. But if you have no particular visual skill to start with, or if you do and simply want to arm yourself to the teeth with memory tools, using a method such as this lends structure to the process and augments whatever native aptitude one has. Just because you have talent doesn't mean you shouldn't also have technique. Maybe George Koltanowski doesn't rely on associative tricks, but how many of him are there?

Question My sons are four and two years old. I suggest the older one can start playing chess now. Indeed, we tried to play some games. But I cannot remember how I learnt chess playing and I am afraid of frustrating my son in using all the pieces. Have you any hint teaching little children for me ? Or are there any good chess books for young beginners? **Tom Dette (Germany)**

Answer I understand your concern about using all the pieces, and how this might be confusing. Judge the situation for yourself. If, in teaching your son, you feel that too much information at first might lead to overload, then hold back a bit. There's nothing wrong with proceeding inch-meal, inventing chess-like activities and puzzles that use fewer pieces to introduce the real game gradually. You can always expand or correct the youngster's understanding over the course of time. There are rules by which to play chess, not to teach it.

However you do it, try to offer a totally fun experience. Make the game seem both exciting and important. Avoid debilitating competitions. Build confidence, which is the secret of all good teaching. If you teach by playing not a bad idea don't play to win. Play to teach. You may feel this is untruthful, and not the way of the world, but there's plenty of time for truth and reality.

A child has a right to be a child, but if you insist on playing for real, you can still do it gently and compassionately. You can even be creative. For instance, when you're playing a youngster, and it comes to the point of winning, you might say: "Here I can win in one move. If you can show me how, you win. If you can't, I win. Take your time and find the right answer. And if you tell me how to win, without moving the pieces, you win twice." Such an approach can keep a student involved to the very end of the session, and it encourages

analysis in the head. It also allows you to play an actual game, without having to lose on purpose, while giving the young one a means to save face. But the truth is, within reason, it almost doesn't matter what the teacher does, as long as he shares his love for the subject with the student.

You ask about chess books for children. There are a number of good texts for kids, but instead I'm going to suggest one created for parents and teachers, George Francis Kane's *Chess and Children*. Published in 1974, this is a brilliant path-finding work, written by one of the best chess teachers there ever was. It's worth making the effort to track down.

A final piece of advice. If you can associate your child with a great teacher, no matter the discipline, whether it's chess or anything else, do so. It's always worth it. How will you recognize a great teacher? Don't worry. You will.

Question I would like to forward to you a question that has been puzzling my mind for a very long time now. In the Ruy Lopez, many variations start off like this: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4, and now Black has several options. But after Black's fourth move (4...Nf6, 4...d6, etc.) and the appropriate White reply to it, very often Black decides to play b7-b5 anyway (on the 5th, 6th or 7th move or so).

The question is: If Black intends to play b7-b5 anyway, why not immediately do so on the 4th move? I'm not pleading in favour of an immediate b5, I can easily live with delaying it myself, it's just that I'm curious about it. **Marja Vercammen (Belgium)**

Answer While this variation has been essayed in serious events, its unsound look has generally dissuaded strong players from including it in their standard repertory. What I would say about it to my own students would be something like this.

By playing 4...b7-b5, instead of waiting to a later point, when circumstances might be slightly more favorable, Black decides to thwart the possibility of capture on c6 once and for all. But after the bishop is forced back to b3, the position resembles an Italian Game (1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4), with two important advantages for White. His bishop is safer at b3 than it is at c4 (where it can be attacked with tempo by either d7-d5 or Nc6-a5); and, by playing b7-b5, Black has accepted certain weaknesses, especially along the d5-a8 diagonal, which he doesn't have in the Italian. In fact, after 5. Bb3, Black is practically compelled to go after the bishop with 5...Nc6-a5, which weakens control of e5 and d4. This makes it much easier for White to open with d2-d4. If Black plays 5...Nf6, he then runs into the dangerous 6. Nf3-g5, when the intrusion of the knight here is more annoying than in the Italian. So if you want to play an early b7-b5, before the situation stabilizes, fine. Make sure you understand the corresponding problems that could arise, however, otherwise you may find yourself in trouble fast. This may not be the answer you were seeking, but it's the guidance I would offer my own students, and practical advice is what most of us live by.

Reader Response The following e-mail from **Glenn Petersen** was written in response to the previous column. It is particularly informative, and I would like to share it with you.

"No one is that old" is the heading for your first question, which dealt with promoting a pawn. The reader was under the misconception that he was limited to choosing from the pieces that had been captured by his opponent.

That probably was a "local" rule at some point in the history of the game, and I assume that is what you were driving at when you chose the header. Modern rules have pretty much been standardized for the last two hundred years, and no one could be that old. We do know that at one time pawns could only promote to the piece on the file they began on: knight pawns to knights, elephant pawns to elephants (yes, it was a long time ago) and that may have been the basis for the "local rule" and misunderstanding. I say that because . . .

During the same time period, various rules existed for the game, even within different regions of India. For instance, whoever moved first had the option of

making four to nine moves simultaneously. The number of moves was agreed upon, and the pieces did not cross the middle of the board. This became infused with the newer pawn moves, the double-step. The pawn moves one or two squares on its first move, a new concept to speed up the game (long after it was decided to alternate moves between players).

When Atlantic City's Caesars Palace sponsored a simultaneous exhibition for Kosovoan refugees housed at Fort Dix, New Jersey, the exhibiting master, Glenn Umstead, ran into a similar situation concerning "localized" rules. In Kosovo, White moves twice! How this rule came into being, we'll never know. I believe it is the result of an older rule (simultaneous moves by white) being influenced by newer rules (pawn moving one or two squares) and a compromise being reached. Why not move a pawn one square and then move a piece?

We know it is not a new wrinkle; they've been playing this way for hundreds of years prior to what we consider to be the emergence of the modern game. So maybe "No One Can Be That Old" should be replaced with "No One Has To Be That Old."

Mr. Petersen, the editor of *Chess Life*, adds: "Giving Check to the Queen" is another rule that survives to this day in various parts of the USA! "You didn't say 'En Garde' when you attacked my queen!" You'd be surprised at the number of times that question is asked by new USCF members. "But that's the way I was taught."

Thank you, Glenn. Permit me to throw into the mix a few other popular misconceptions, including "a king can't take a king;" you can only promote to a piece that's previously been captured (as discussed in the original column); that you don't have to move the piece if you haven't taken your hand off it; and that you don't have to play by a rule if it hadn't been "called" earlier. I hear these things all the time, along with other numerous pearls of misguided or misinformed wisdom.

This article first appeared at ChessCafe.com in November 1999.

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)

[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)

[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

© 2009 BrainGamz, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"[ChessCafe.com](#)@" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.