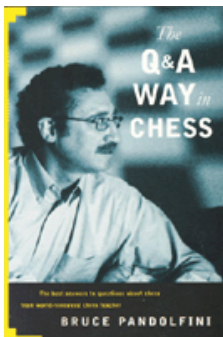




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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Structure and More Structure

Question I have been playing chess for a lifetime it seems and I still have trouble getting down some of the basic strategies. To give you an idea, I still have trouble with the minority attack. How should I go about studying this and other motifs? I know it is two pawns against three on the queenside, but it can happen on the kingside also. Can you suggest a program or format for me to study that will help me understand the minority attack and other important themes, and what openings and players to study as well? Any book ideas would also be appreciated. I do not know how to get started. I am afraid I am not working hard enough.
Barry Robinson (USA)

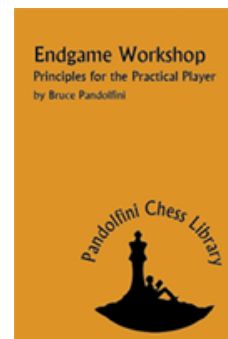
Answer You're afraid you're not working hard enough, and I'm afraid you may be working too hard. Anyhow, I don't know what program would be best for you. I don't even know what time it is. To some extent, developing a program is a personal thing. Formats that have satisfied many different people might fail terribly when adopted by a particular individual. Your strength, experience, available time, location, and Caissa knows what, are just some of the factors that can bear significant impact. And let's not ignore likes, dislikes, and other personal preferences. They certainly could influence how much you derive out of an activity.

Having said all of that, and now I'm starting to wish I hadn't, here's a possible plan that's helped some students in their studies. Let's consider, for instance, the minority attack, which you bring up in your question. The first step you might take is to look up its meaning, even if you think you already know the definition. This you can do online, and you'll find quite a number of elucidating definitions in e-text. Print out a few of those and put them in a folder of gathering material. You'll also benefit from starting an electronic file of the material, accordingly placing at least a few defining articles or pieces there as well.

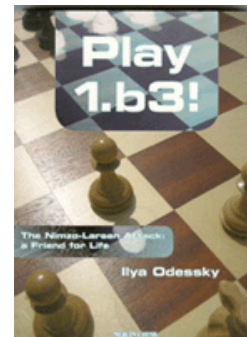
After collecting this initial information, set about tracking down examples and games where the minority attack, or the theme you're interested in, was featured. Hopefully, some of these games and analyses can be found in your home literature. But even if your library is small, or not very functional, you can still derive plenty of clear examples, once again, off the Internet. Print those out as well, and also position them in the developing electronic file. As you're doing this, pretend you're writing your own book, where as you review the accruing illustrations you're also acquiring an overview that allows you to modify and reposition elements within the developing organization. Look through this growing volume on a regular basis, and don't be chary in creating numerous diagrams to accentuate key setups. Chess players tend to be visual beings, and I have every reason to presume you're a chess player.

In doing all of this, you'll become sensitive to which openings are most conducive to producing minority attacks, or the paradigm you are concerned with, and can search opening books and articles for reinforcement to make the ideas more concrete. You should simultaneously become attuned to the use of the idea or technique in the games of particular players, especially noting the way they handle the theme and what openings they rely on to get into it. You may even want to purchase a text or two that seems to offer a good treatment of the thematic notion.

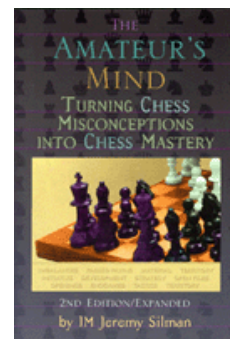
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by Ilya Odessky



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by Jeremy Silman

Thus, for example, if you wanted a book with a good discussion of the minority attack, you might turn to the middlegame works of Max Euwe (*Judgment and Planning in Chess*, for instance) or Ludek Pachman (*Modern Chess Strategy*), and I believe that Neil McDonald (*Starting Out: Queen's Gambit Declined* and other works) also has an excellent explanation of it. Andy Soltis does a nice turn with it, too, in his *Pawn Structure Chess*. Larry Evans moreover has a very instructive analysis of it from his game against Opsahl in 1950, which you can get from several sources. But these are just a sampling of what's out there. The special fun is searching for this stuff yourself, playing scientist/detective, which you can do using any number of catalogs, such as that of the Chesssafe.com.

An important step in instilling this information is using it, to the best of circumstances, in your practice and actual play. To this end you might want to consider working with a partner, he or she helping you with your interests and you in turn lending a hand in the study of what intrigues him or her. Nonetheless, even without such an associate, you always have software out there to help you practice ideas in game contexts. In all your efforts here, it's important to treat your training sessions for real, so that you simulate actual competition and thus are more ready for tournament play, having been there, for the most part, in your preparation.

One good technique, if you don't mind speed chess, is to set up desired positions, and to play from those points countless rapid games with your partner. You'll be surprised how many examples from these encounters could prove useful, strengthening your grasp of the overall idea. Rapid chess practice is also a pragmatic way to extend your opening knowledge, taking lines a few moves deeper than published variations. To be sure, both before and after the speed chess practice, you'll want to analyze very carefully the positions and concepts dealt with at a much slower pace.

There are many other ways to study particular chess constructs, and I could certainly write more about what I've written. But you don't have to be so programmatic about it. You can study free-style, going wherever your feelings and interests take you. It will be a lot more fun, and fun has been known to travel a long way.

Question Teaching chess has helped my game considerably. I do not know how others feel. Maybe they feel teaching chess hurts their game. I have a problem with the teaching of openings. I do not think it is automatic that teachers have to teach e-pawn openings first. I know that was what was played in many of the important chess games of the past. In the world of today that is no longer the way it is. Players like to try all kinds of openings. For example, I play on the ICC all the time with 1.b2-b3, or 1.b2-b4, or c2-c3, and do pretty well. I am clearly getting better and have had enormous success in teaching those openings to students. I do not see why students cannot play the same openings and do just as well as playing 1.e2-e4, maybe better. What do you think? Do you think I should go back to the king-pawn, especially in my teaching? They seem to like these new ideas so much more, and they are winning more, to tell you the truth. I know it sounds silly, but I am now a better teacher, and I feel like playing these openings makes me feel like I am getting younger. **Lester Gold (USA)**

Answer Playing those new openings (by the way, they're not so new) may make you feel as if you're getting younger, but reading your exploits about them has made me feel as if I'm getting older – much older. What's more, whether you're feeling younger or not, it's hard to believe you're doing the right thing, teaching what you're teaching. It's not that those systems (1.b3, 1.b4, and 1.c3) can't be played satisfactorily, especially when followed up with consistent plans. But in using those ideas to introduce opening principles and theory you're skipping a lot of stuff students need to know in order to appreciate what they're doing in context.

There's a reason most textbooks start with e-pawn beginnings, moving from double king-pawn openings to asymmetrical e-pawn defenses, to double queen-pawn openings, to Indian systems, to English and flank openings. That reason concerns logic and the way these openings have flowed out of efforts to deal with the problems of the opening phase historically and conceptually. They move from the direct (the easier to understand) to the indirect (the harder to understand). In the presentation of any subject it's natural to proceed from the simpler to the more complex. If you begin where you're beginning, let's say at level fifty, instead of at level one, even though you've apparently had enormous success with that approach, you're creating potential gaps in comprehension that students will have arduous difficulty overcoming. In fact, they may wind up never knowing what they're doing. You know, like many of us. But hey, if it's worked for you, and it makes you feel younger, I say go for it. If only this way of teaching openings had been known to Ponce de Leon, who knows where the world might now be.

Question I am a teacher in an elementary school in Texas. Although it is not an official part of school activities, I try to include chess several times a week. This largely consists of teaching the moves and maybe basic tactics: mates, forks and other double attacks. My question concerns the teaching of moves. I am not sure which pieces to teach first and in what order. I have tried different methods. Sometimes I have taught the pawn, sometimes the rook, and sometimes the bishop first. Recently, I began thinking it was not a bad approach to start with the corner, first teaching how the rook moves, and then the knight, and then the bishop, moving in towards the center. I thought this might help kids better remember where the pieces go when they are placed into the opening position. What do you think about the order of teaching the pieces? To your knowledge, is there a best way to teach them? **Dorothy Kanajian (USA)**

Answer You should go with whatever works for you, following the order of presentation you find most comfortable. If you feel secure in your approach, you'll do a better job and get your message across more effectively. I don't know that there's a best way or order to teaching the pieces. But I don't think I would necessarily follow the sequence of introduction suggested in your question, rook, knight, bishop, and so on.

Starting with the rook makes sense because of its straight-line horizontal movements, emphasizing ranks and files. Then I think proceeding to the bishop is a good next step. Thus, with these two pieces introduced, you take into account all the lines on the chessboard, and you thereby make it possible to launch the queen, which is just a rook and bishop combined. From there you could move to the king, and then get into the knight, which is obviously a harder piece for most newcomers to comprehend.

I haven't even mentioned the pawns, which actually are explained first by most teachers more usually than any of the other pieces. The result is students start moving their pawns from the get-go and often too often. Walk by a class of children just learning how to play and you'll be surprised how many pawn moves are made before any piece other than the queen is advanced. But, again, if you want to progress via your method of explanation, moving in toward the center, piece after piece, go right ahead. The important thing is that you enjoy what you're doing. You'll do a better job and your students will be the beneficiaries. Eventually, even if you make mistakes, your charges will let you know all about it and everyone should gain. At least that's the hope.

Question In the film Searching for Bobby Fischer a number of parents behaved childishly. No doubt the film does mirror some of the typical bad behavior prevalent at children's tournaments. But I wonder how often children act badly during these events, such as lying and trying to cheat. Also, what is the worst example of a coach's behavior you've ever seen? Have you ever seen a coach act harmfully and make hurtful comparisons? I especially am thinking of the instance in the film where Ben Kingsley accuses Josh of being "no Fischer." Also, do you ever know what

happens to some of these kids afterward, when they grow up? I am curious what reflections you may have here. Let me also say I enjoy your columns and look forward to reading them every month. **Joe Blasco (USA)**

Answer Most coaches treat their students quite wonderfully, but I do recall an instance where a ten-year old girl lost a key game, and her team fell out of first place. With the parents standing around, at the moment she resigned, her coach went up to her and issued from behind his hissing teeth: “You just cost your team the national championship.” He then furiously stormed off. I wanted to punch him in the face, but I was struck with compassion for the aggrieved girl. Stumbling a few steps ahead before falling into her mother’s arms, the girl let loose a flood of uncontrollable tears. Soon after that she gave up serious scholastic competition, and her coach. Now she’s a major advertising executive, a wife and a mother, but she still plays chess just for fun.

On a lighter note, I don’t know what to call it, but I remember another incident from the same period. Two youngsters (I think fifth graders) were involved in an extremely tense, final round game, the outcome of which would decide the championship. At a crucial moment the player to move grabbed a bishop. Moving it anywhere would result in instant mate. Suddenly seeing the win in view, the other player yelled out “touch move.” There were twenty or so bystanders (random adults, coaches and other kids) taking this in. The player who committed the infraction immediately shouted back “I never touched it.” The problem was, as he said this, he was holding the bishop in his right hand, for everyone to see. But not in the least fazed, he came back with: “I mean j’adoube.” It was clear this was a contention that couldn’t be supported, in view of the evidence. But somehow he did (I expressed what I had seen to the director at the time, but I had to catch a train and didn’t know what had happened until days later). Apparently, the transgressor had argued and argued, and eventually the director gave in. The game was resumed, and the youngster who had touched the piece won the game and the tournament. That was years ago. Since then the kid has grown up and gone into corporate law.

Question After a year’s break in playing [and directing a film with none-other than Raymond Keene in!! (Voiceover!)] and a notable drop in strength, I returned to my ridiculous library of 300+ chess books to get back into the right way of thinking. Old gems I am rediscovering include [The Amateur’s Mind](#) by Jeremy Silman (my first chess book) and *Simple Chess* by Michael Stein. It’s amazing how reading these “simplistic” books helps me shake the old bad habits that have returned since my break. I was wondering if you have a small list of similar books/materials that you recommend to mature students, just to get them into the habit of thinking correctly again about the various facets of the game? No more than five, though! I wouldn’t want other readers to end up with a library like mine. Thanks and all the best, **Michael Bartlett (United Kingdom)**

Answer This is a tough call, Michael. Like you I tend to have more books than I care to count. But your question is a stimulating one. Often chess players think about which books are the very best. But the thought of turning back to simpler tomes for a kick in the pants or to whet one’s appetite for getting back into the game is a nice idea worthy of discussion. For sure, several books come to mind, including those you’ve already mentioned. Still, for me, one such book in particular stands out. Simple, clear, artful, and most powerful – no chess book strikes me as satisfying your conditions more than Capablanca’s *Last Lectures*. This is a book every good player should read at least once, and if one has already read it, but not recently, it’s time for a second read. It makes you realize what can be done in very little compass. I still find it remarkable how much art that incredible genius conveyed in that little volume without having to fall back on the false god of endless analysis.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

Which simple chess book is most worthy of being read again?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

We received many responses to the [August](#) question of the month:

When do you play your best chess?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Sally Bass (USA) writes: I find I play my best chess when I play strangers. When I play my friends, I lack the killer instinct. I guess I am not a very good chess player. But then neither are they.

Bob Grielson (USA) writes: Late at night, especially when my opponent has had too much to drink.

Tim Spanton (England) writes: Generally, when my opponent fails to play his best chess.

(BP-Apparently, comedians must like this column.)

The Q & A Way is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next [ChessCafe.com](#) column...

[Yes, I have a question for Bruce!](#)

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