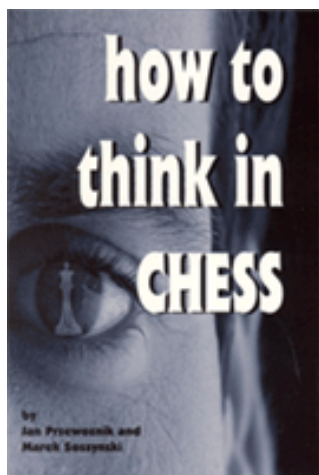




C O L U M N I S T S

*Let's Take A
Look...*

Nigel Davies



We invite you to submit games to be considered by Nigel in this column. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know. Please submit the games (in PGN or CBV format if possible) to: nigeldavies@chesscafe.com. Who knows, perhaps you will see the game in an upcoming column, as Nigel says to you, "Let's take a look..."

Enhancing Chess Player Performance

Much conventional chess literature seems to focus on learning from one's mistakes or learning particular strategies through unpleasant hard work. Are these methods effective? I don't believe so. And what's more I think they permeate our culture in areas outside of chess. Areas such as the education of our kids for example.

I think I know where this thinking comes from. Judeo-Christian tradition is founded upon the idea of sin and punishment thereof. So Western culture is imbued with the idea that we must suffer for our sins, and only through this suffering can we obtain absolution. So if we move our bishop to an inappropriate square, the sin we suffer for it is a loss, and to be absolved we must suffer some more by studying some boring treatise on the matter. Crime and punishment, getting our just deserts.

But let's pretend for a moment that it doesn't have to be that way. What if the way to improve one's chess wasn't through suffering and correcting our sinful ways, but rather through seeking pleasure? Curiously enough it seems that really strong players haven't suffered too much in acquiring their expertise, and in fact they seem to be having plenty of fun when they do chess, whether it's playing or analysing.

Do any chess books talk about this? None that I know of. You might find some references to Mikhail Tal drinking vodka as he played blitz with his trainers, but the way this is written, it's described as his undoing. Mikhail Botvinnik reinforced this idea by stating: "If Tal would learn to program himself properly, then it would become impossible to play him."

Yet what if Botvinnik's remark was just more of the backhanded politicking for which he was so famous? What if Tal's blitz games were his main form of training, and a form that worked well with his strengths of rapid calculation

and psychological awareness? Why should blitz be a worse form of training than stuff like analysing our games and berating ourselves for our bad moves? Especially if playing and experimenting is what turns our chess brains on.

Tal replied to Botvinnik's remark many years later, but one has to read between the lines and understand his sense of irony to see that he didn't really agree. Laughingly he stated: "Botvinnik's right! When he says such things, then he's right. Usually, I prefer not to study chess but to play it. For me chess is more an art than a science. It's been said that Alekhine and I played similar chess, except that he studied more. Yes, perhaps, but I have to say that he played, too." Botvinnik didn't play too much, but this wasn't seen as a major failing. Historical perspective often depends on who did the writing.

Whilst there may not be any chess books that disagree with the conventional view, I recently came across one in my other field of trading. Brett Steenbarger's new book, *Enhancing Trader Performance* presents cutting edge research into the acquisition of competence and expertise. Steenbarger presents a strong case for aspiring experts to follow a path that they naturally enjoy and do well. This fosters confidence, a willingness to engage themselves and leads them to develop unique strengths. Steenbarger also mentions another interesting book focussing heavily on strength building; *Now, Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton makes the case that people develop their potential by building on their strengths rather than overcoming weaknesses.

What does this mean in practice? That people who are good and patient researchers may be very comfortable with studying the old fashioned way, but this just isn't for everyone. When I was running *The Power Chess Program* as a course and sending out monthly units, I noticed that accountants seemed to do particularly well and were usually on time with returning the coursework. But people from other backgrounds struggled with this and often gave up after a few months. The conventional view of the quitters would be that they just didn't have the dedication. A more enlightened conclusion might be that perhaps this form of training just wasn't for them and that they needed another way.

How do you find the right way? Steenbarger suggests: "Whatever your distinctive abilities may be, you're probably already engaging in them." Seen in this light it's probably only worth trying to hit the books if this has been a lifetime characteristic. Those who learn from experience, on the other hand, should probably aim to improve by playing.

My own experience with books has always been a troubled one and I've never cared too much for blitz chess either. But what I've always enjoyed has been to ask questions, try to look at things from a different perspective and then hopefully come up with something of my own.

So I'd start out by looking at a book or magazine as a starting point for a lot

of questions. If something attracted my interest I'd look at it more carefully, and the fact that my mind would then be engaged stimulated study and growth. It may seem hugely inefficient rather than simply studying and imbibing "known" answers, but I'd argue that this has been my own particular route to improvement and as such I should stick to it.

Actually I should do more of it before my rating slips any lower! And I'd advise the reader to find a similar key to his or her own performance.

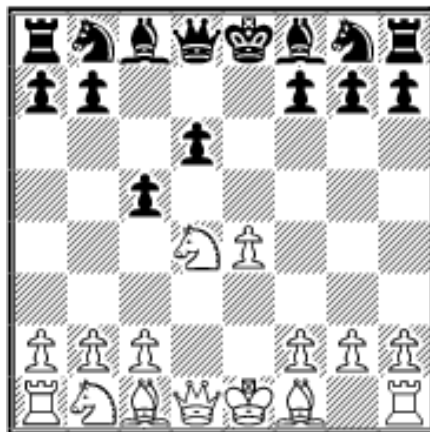
This month's game is a solid performance by White, winning material in the early middlegame and then converting it with consistency and accuracy. It was a friendly game organised when the opposing team didn't turn up.

Jones, D (1008) - Spicer, F (1304)

Friendly Game, 2004

Philidor Defence [C41]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 c5?!



Creating a substantial "hole" on d5.

Recently there's been a surge in popularity for 4...Nf6 5 Nc3 Be7, which is an old line used by Antoshin. Black's other possibility is 4...g6, which was originally popularised by Bent Larsen and then used extensively by British Master John Littlewood.

5 Nf3

5 Bb5+ was also worth a thought, not least since the exchange of light-squared bishops will accentuate the weakness of d5. Black's best is probably 5...Nd7 6 Nf5 a6, but then 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 8 Nc3 looks very good.

5...Nf6 6 Nc3 Bg4

6...Be6 looks better, covering the d5-square and stopping White from putting a bishop on c4.

7 Be2 Be7 8 Bf4 0-0 9 Nd2 Qc8 10 Nc4

10 Bxg4 Nxg4 11 Nd5 would have been another good way to do things.

10...Rd8

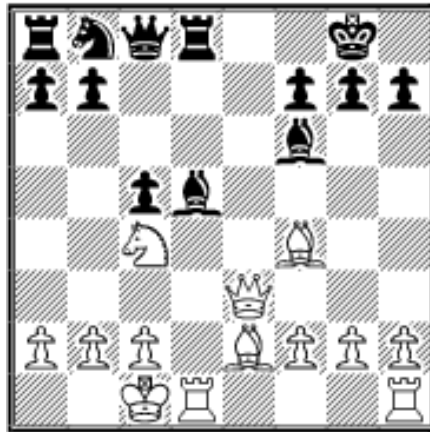
Black should probably have played 10...Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Nc6, though in any

case this is very good for White after 12 0-0-0. Black won't easily rid himself of the weaknesses on the d-file.

11 Qd2 Be6 12 0-0-0

Black's next move frees his position and comes close to equality. White could and should have prevented it with 12 Ne3.

12...d5 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 Qe3 Bf6



Just as he was getting out of trouble, Black puts himself right back in it again. The right way to defend the bishop on e7 was with 15...Nc6.

16 Nd6 Qc6?

Losing. Black has to play 16...Qe6, even though he's facing threats after 17 Qxe6 fxe6 18 Rxd5! exd5 19 Nxb7, when Black's position falls apart after 19...Rc8 20 Bf3.

17 Bb5! Bd4 18 Qe7?!

This might have let Black up for air. White can develop a winning attack with 18 Rxd4!; for example, 18...cxd4 19 Qg3 Qb6 20 Bh6 g6 21 Qe5, etc.

18...Bf6??

Missing his last chance. 18...Qb6 keeps Black on the board, now he is totally lost.

19 Bxc6 Bxe7 20 Bxd5 Bxd6 21 Bxd6 Nc6

After 21...Rxd6 22 Bxb7, Black loses a rook.

22 Rhe1 Rxd6 23 Bxf7+! Kxf7 24 Rxd6



Having won the exchange and a pawn, the endgame is a clear win for White. But what's good here is that he doesn't give Black any chances, not something that's always seen in club games.

24...a5 25 Rd7+ Kf6 26 Rxb7

That makes it a rook and two pawns.

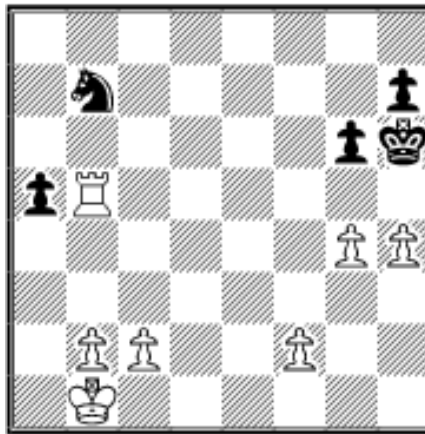
26...Rc8 27 Rb3 c4 28 Rf3+ Kg5 29 Re4 Nb4 30 h4+ Kh6 31 g4 g6 32 Rff4

32.Rf7 would have been a bit quicker, White's first threat being mate via 33 g5+. But the text doesn't spoil anything.

32...Nxa2+ 33 Kb1 Nb4 34 Rxc4 Rd8 35 Rfd4 Nc6

The exchange of rooks makes things easier for White, so this should really have been avoided. But in such a hopeless position there's not really much he can do if White plays accurately.

36 Rxd8 Nxd8 37 Rc5 Nb7 38 Rb5



A good and noteworthy move would have been 38 Rd5!, leaving the knight without a way out. Bishops can also do this to the short-stepping knight.

38...Nd6 39 Rxa5 Nc4 40 Ra4 Nb6 41 Ra6 Nc4 42 b4 Ne5 43 b5 Nxc4 44 f3

44 b6 would have promoted the pawn, but it doesn't matter much.

44...Ne5 45 b6 Nxf3 46 b7 Nxh4 47 b8Q

Nf3

Black could have called it a day at this point, but he continues the game as long as he has pieces left.

48 Ra5 g5 49 Rf5 Nd4 50 Rf6+ Kh5 51 Qg3 g4 52 Qe5+ Kh4 53 Qxd4 1-0

There was mate in one with 53 Rh6, but the text was quite enough to get Black to resign.

Recommended Reading

Enhancing Trader Performance by Brett Steenbarger (Wiley, 2006)

Now, Discover Your Strengths by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton
(Pocket Books, 2005)

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