



ChessCafe.com



BOOK
REVIEWS

Previous reviews are available
in [The Chess Cafe Archives](#).



Orders? Inquiries? You can
now call toll-free:

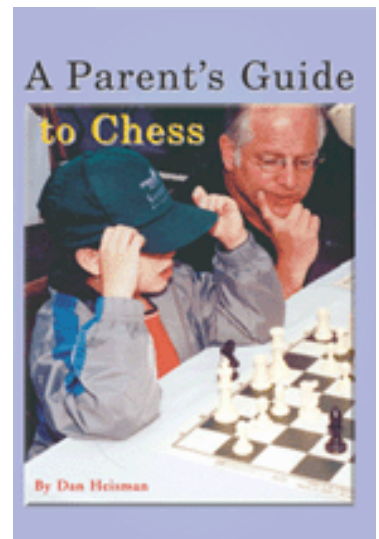
1-866-301-CAFE

Hello Mother, Hello Father...

by Fred Wilson

A Parent's Guide to Chess by Dan Heisman 2002 Russell Enterprises, Inc., Softcover, 153pp., \$14.95

Stories about “soccer Moms” and “hockey Dads” are legion. Parents who are committed to assist and promote the recreational well-being of their children. Driving them to games, waiting for practices to end, holding dinner for late arrivals, etc. What has not been generally realized is that the same phenomenon occurs in chess. However, chess is sufficiently different from more “standard” children’s sporting activities to make it, at least for many parents of chessplaying children, daunting at best and incomprehensible at worst. With the release of *A Parent's Guide to Chess* by Dan Heisman, the confusion is now over.



This book fills a definite crying need occasioned by the tremendous growth of scholastic tournament chess during the last decade. It is very fortunate that a *real* chess teacher and coach, with many years experience dealing with children, parents and tournament directors, has decided to share his valuable knowledge and insights with us. Although directed primarily at parents whose children are beginning to participate in rated chess tournaments, *A Parent's Guide to Chess* also contains much necessary information for neophyte chess instructors and coaches. I would even suggest that parents new to chess competitions read some or much of this book with their child so both will come to understand his rights and obligations as a tournament player.

The book is divided into six chapters, with three interesting



appendices, and is often intentionally repetitive with advice on proper tournament preparation and behavior. For instance, in Chapter 4 (“Tournament Participation”), page 83, when discussing correct behavior for spectators, Heisman says “...that spectators should not do anything a wall wouldn’t do!” Then on page 86 he reiterates that “Spectators should do their best imitation of a wall!” meaning, of course, that almost never should anyone but a TD interfere with a game in progress (I like his second version better but the sentiment is certainly worth repeating). Further proof that Heisman has lots of experience with children’s tournaments (and adult tournaments too!) is his double dose of advice on how to deal with any possible *cheating* (although he never actually uses this word), also in Chapter 4. On page 77 he states “**During the game, if there is any question at all, teach your child to stop his game and GET THE TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR.**” I have seen dozens of cases where even experienced tournament players ‘decide’ how to solve a problem incorrectly, always to the detriment of one of the players. When in doubt, your child should stop his clock and get the TD.” Since this is such good advice for *all* players, not surprisingly on page 81 we also read, “But there is one rule every player must know: if anything strange, unusual or misunderstood is happening at your board, or if you have a dispute with your opponent, **you have a right to—and should—stop your clock and ask a TD a question or make a ‘claim’.**” Since, being a chess teacher myself, I really know how important repetition of fundamental concepts is in learning how to actually play the game, I can certainly agree with Heisman’s feeling the need to repeat essential information about successful tournament play.

Chapters One and Two extol the merits of children playing chess, tell you much about the US, Canadian and World Chess Federations, introduce you to the concepts of chess clubs, tournaments, camps, teams, playing chess with a clock and the essential equipment you will have to acquire. My only cavil here is that Heisman recommends using a scorepad with additional columns for recording how much time is left after each move. But children almost never do this (who has the time in “game/30” anyway?) and usually have large, clumsy handwriting which requires the largest boxes possible to comfortably write their moves in.

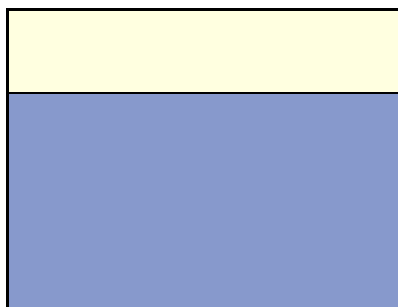
Chapter Three contains standard, but excellent advice about websites and software appropriate for children and their parents.

The Chess Cafe

E-mail Newsletter

Each week, as a service to thousands of our readers, we send out an e-mail newsletter, *This Week at The Chess Cafe*.

To receive this *free* weekly update, type in your email address and click Subscribe. That's all there is to it! And, we do not make this list available to anyone else.



Chapter Four, Tournament Participation, contains almost everything you could possibly need to know about good tournament preparation and behavior. It clearly explains what “byes”, “tiebreaks” and “ratings” are, and why they are necessary. I feel the only omission here is that while pointing out if neither player has a clock they can begin the game without one, Heisman doesn’t warn the parent that probably after one hour most TDs will put the kids on a clock *with only five minutes for each side!* So, if your child is not used to “speed chess” they will be at a great disadvantage. I personally recommend you get your child a clock and get him or her used to it as soon as possible.

Also, although not in the USCF rulebook, a very common expression—at least in the NYC area—for the rule that “if you purposely touch or displace an opponent’s piece you must capture it” is “piece contact”. I wish Heisman had mentioned this—certainly the children I teach like and remember “piece contact” and call each other on it often.

Chapter Five, The Road to Improvement, is a terrific piece of writing; this is where Heisman displays the great wisdom he has acquired from many years of teaching experience about the varied learning processes of different children. In fact, he recognizes something which I wish more parents would, namely that most children want chess to be fun and not work! On page 94 he sums it up well: “If your child only likes to play, that is fine! In fact, students who believe that studying chess is work, not fun, are probably in the great majority of young players. You may have a mental picture of the stereotypical chess student, locking himself in his room reading chess books, but though they usually turn out to be some of the best players, these ‘chess work is fun’ students, like Josh Waitzkin in *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, are relatively rare. Students who do not wish to study problems and famous games are much more common. These students should slowly improve as they play more games, and will do so somewhat quicker if they at least attempt to recognize their mistakes and try to minimize repeating them in future play.”

Chapter Six, The Personal Side of Chess, is a nice summation of how children should deal with their emotions when facing competition, and even occasionally the pressure of unsportsmanlike behavior. I just wish Heisman had mentioned one thing when noting that, of course, children should not worry about their rating. Children know, and parents must understand, that there is a magic line that only one out of a hundred children

will cross regarding their official rating. The magic number is 900 and most children whose rating goes above this will become good, even better than average players. My colleague, Bruce Alberston, one of the finest chess instructors in the United States, believes that probably even less than one out of a hundred children who have ever played scholastic chess will achieve a rating of 900, and points out that almost all children rated about 900 are already at least as strong as most adults rated 1200. I believe that Heisman did not mention this because he dislikes our current rating system with published numerical ratings (see his recent essay on chesscafe.com) and hopes it will be radically changed. I disagree with him and believe parents should understand that even if their child does not reach 900, he can still have a lot of fun and gain valuable skills playing competitive chess.

Now for one major and a couple of minor quibbles:

Amazingly, *A Parent's Guide to Chess* lacks an index and sorely needs one! Although you can often find out where this or that topic is discussed by poking around in the glossary, this is not always possible and it is too time consuming.

Appendix A, A Glossary of Chess Terms, which I gather was largely assembled by the editor, Taylor Kingston, is adequate, but has a few odd omissions. Curiously, the term "battery," meaning two (or three) straight line pieces on a file, rank, or diagonal, the chess teacher's "best friend," is missing. I wish I had a nickel for every time I heard a five or six year-old say, "I made a battery and mated him." Children love the term, remember it, and use it often. Also, under the definition of "Pin," while the diagram displays both *absolute* and *relative* pins, the term "relative" pin is neither used nor defined. Also the definition of "Sacrifice" would read better if he wrote, "A move in which one player deliberately gives up a **piece** of higher value for one of lower value" rather than "...gives up a **man** of higher value..." Last, but certainly not least, a definition of "double check" is required.

Finally, Appendix C, Special Issues for Moms: "Chess Moms Speak" by Lois Deckelbaum and Barbara Schoener, is not only delightful, but filled with valuable advice by two mothers who have really "been there".

In sum, an excellent book and one that all prospective chess parents and most chess instructors should own.

Fred Wilson is a respected chess book dealer and chess instructor in New York City, located at 80 E. 11th Street and also has interesting listings of mostly out-of-print books on his website at <http://www.fredwilsonchess.com> .

[Order](#) *A Parent's Guide to Chess*
by Dan Heisman



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2002 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.