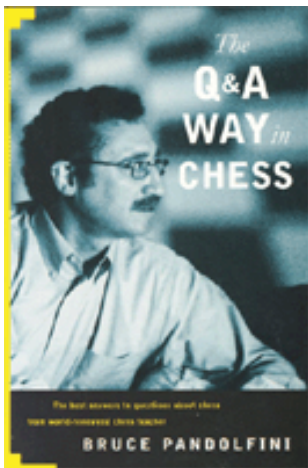




COLUMNISTS

*From the
Archives*

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



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

Bruce Pandolfini

Computers, Bughouse and Beyond

Question Can you provide me with your thoughts about how to study the openings and how to analyze a position using a computer? **Phil Dixon (USA)**

Answer The computer is a great tool, and there are many ways it can be utilized to aid your chess, but here I will limit myself to just a couple of suggestions, as I intend to address the question more fully in a future column.

With regard to opening study, you could play out critical positions to verify book evaluations. In so doing you might find that certain positions, though considered to be favorable for your intended color, leave you feeling uncomfortable in the actual hand-to-hand fight and therefore should be discarded, whereas other situations, though deemed to be slightly inferior for your side, lend themselves to your style and accordingly should be adopted.

You could also analyze the computer’s responses, attempting to generate additional information on lines and variations beyond the last published or considered moves, thus extending “book knowledge.” Even in known territory,

it's surprising how often computers come up with practical opening ideas that have escaped previous human scrutiny.

Nor do you have to confine your use of the computer merely to the opening phase. There's no reason you couldn't also use it to practice your middlegame and endgame technique. Get a hold of a decent collection of master games and input the final positions into a chess program, especially those in which someone has resigned. In each of these contests, see if you can win against the computer from the point of resignation. This is really not a bad way to test your skill, for one of the marks of a good player is the ability to win won games. Regardless of your initial results, constant training like this should sharpen your technique and improve your chess.

Question Do you see any benefits that a chessplayer can obtain by playing bughouse? In general, how do you feel about your students playing in bughouse and/or blitz competition on the day(s) prior to competing in the main event at the Nationals? **Lynne Chapman (Oklahoma)**

Answer Bughouse chess is a constant source of controversy for teachers and parents. They fear that too much bughouse will ruin a youngster's game. They worry that the rules and principles of bughouse, being slightly different, will impact unfavorably on a young grappler's tournament play. Moreover, since bughouse is usually contested at a fast time control, they feel that an excess of it will instill superficiality, which also happens to be an argument against playing too much speed chess.

Critics of bughouse point out other potential issues as well, such as the unreality of some of the positions, with the early presence of multiple pieces of the same kind (three knights, nine pawns, and so on); the strange placement of forces, which occurs because units can be positioned without the usual preparation; and the unnaturalness of playing with a partner, as if real chess games could be salvaged by sudden cooperation or magical intervention.

These are all valid concerns, and most supporters of bughouse acknowledge such potential problems. Rather than disagreeing on these points, however, they are apt to place greater emphasis on what they believe to be the beneficial aspects of bughouse.

A case in point is that advocates admit that bughouse (like speed chess) tends to be overly tactical. But they put a positive spin on this, asserting that bughouse activity gives young chessplayers abundant opportunities to hone their attacking weapons. And while some of these attacks may verge on the fantastic, and therefore are unlikely to arise in standard chess, exponents contend that the unusual situations produced in bughouse actually stimulate imagination and creativity. Moreover, offense is just one side of the coin. Bughousers claim that this variation of chess affords chances not just for tactical growth. They also believe that the continual nature of the onslaught in bughouse augments defensive skills, for it necessitates that practitioners get used to staying on red alert.

As far as the rapid nature of the play and its concomitant lack of depth, bughousers and speed players turn this around, asserting that it compels greater intensity and concentration. If in these fast sessions, you let your attention wander, they argue, you'll probably overlook winning moves or worse, miss threats and lose. Those in favor of bughouse and rapids also state that in these versions of chess one gets to engage in numerous games during a session, as opposed to a mere one or two. Participants thus encounter in a typical series many more ideas than they ordinarily do in a single chess game, even if such a contest is more thoughtful and lasts much longer than the entire group of faster games. Of course, critics of bughouse could counter these contentions reasonably, but probably not with enough certainty and finality to settle the debate.

Teachers and parents frequently argue in favor of bughouse from a non-chess perspective. That is, some aspects of bughouse, while not specifically adding anything to the quality of one's chess, may contribute to the individual's overall growth. Bughouse enthusiasts offer, for instance, that the game promotes cooperation and gives practice at socialization. A nice by-product of this, they add, is that the sting of losing, a deterrent for many young chessplayers, can be minimized by virtue of sharing the blame for the defeat with one's partner. Chess purists understandably might cringe at these arguments, but such considerations are quite important to parents and teachers concerned with a young person's well-rounded development.

Bughouse can be plenty of fun, and it may enable indifferent players to keep their hand in standard chess. Some chess teachers discourage bughouse altogether. I don't go that far, but I do try to distance young players from excessive bughouse or speed chess just prior to serious competition, where impulsiveness, a likely carry-over, can be disastrous. But computers, bughouse, speed chess, and related activities, offered in proper proportions, can indeed, in my opinion, supplement the play and study of standard chess while helping to create an effective and fulfilling instructional environment.

Question In the film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, there is a scene in which you (portrayed by Ben Kingsley) sweep the pieces off the board in order to get Josh Waitzkin (Max Pomeranc) to analyze a position in his head. Did this really happen? Also, did you always place such an emphasis on analyzing without moving the pieces? **Sy Hartman (New York)**

Answer The particular scene you've asked about never took place. Over the years, I've performed many antics to get the attention of my students, but before the film I never scattered all the chess pieces with abandon, nor did I ever do anything like that with Josh Waitzkin.

This dramatic device was the invention of gifted screenwriter and director Steve Zaillian. He thought it up, and I think it works very well in the movie. So well, in fact, that it inspired me to add this artifice to my arsenal of teaching tricks after the film's release –another illustration of real life imitating art. But it didn't go anywhere.

With regard to making students analyze in their heads, I see nothing eccentric about this. It's the hallmark of the strong player, so why shouldn't I require my students to practice doing this as often as possible? You'll find that most chess teachers also encourage their students to analyze without moving the pieces, if merely to cut down on touch-move blunders. Students naturally resist analyzing in their heads at first, but regular effort on the teacher's part, as well as a steady diet of winning because of it, can usually lessen the resistance to it over time.

While I have always stressed analyzing without moving the pieces, there's a little more to it. When I first started teaching I found myself getting sick fairly often. I realized that one of the reasons for this was the mutual touching of chess pieces between me and the students. These objects, whether Staunton design or not, can be loaded with germs.

One wintry day, I went to a student's house to give a lesson and found him to be terribly sick with a common cold. I wondered why the parent hadn't called me to cancel the lesson, when he explained it all away, saying that the coughing and sneezing were nothing to worry about and that I shouldn't be so paranoid. He even offered some tissues.

That's when I decided to introduce a new kind of lesson. Instead of sitting together with my student at the board, I had him take up residence on the couch, while I found my niche on a comfortable chair, twenty feet away. For the entire hour we talked chess without a set but with a twenty-foot buffer zone. It was a hard lesson, and an expedient one, though by its termination I felt something had clicked. What's more, so did the student, who came away with a true sense of accomplishment. The father got the left over tissues.

Thereafter, I had students analyze in their heads almost all the time, even when they weren't sick and there were no comfortable chairs. Eventually I figured out how to make much of this head stuff work, and I really think my students were the primary beneficiaries, which is nothing to sneeze at.

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