



*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 **Chess Cafe** column...*

Yes, I have a question for Bruce!

COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



Two Much or Two Little?

Question I am writing about my son, who is 8-years old and plays chess well for his age. He has been playing chess since the age of 6, when my husband taught him how to play. However, from the very beginning my son had a chess coach, which he got from his school. This guy isn't a strong player, though he is a good coach, according to my son, and my son and he get along. Anyway, we decided last year that my son needed opening lessons, to say the least, so we took on a new coach just for that, especially after we heard good things about him from people who should know, and even though his fee is high. This new coach is a great player, who knows all the openings, so we are not complaining about the fee. Now my son plays the Alekhine and Gruenfeld Defenses, neither of which he played before working with the new expensive coach, according to my husband! The old coach only showed pawn to e5 for black against e4, and nothing d-pawn openings. Sometimes my son seems confused, but we think he is learning and he is getting better, thanks to the new coach, and my son has gained close to 100 rating points since last year alone (713 to 808, unofficially), according to my husband. We also think that the two coaches don't like each other and it's costing us a lot of money. Do you think we made a mistake? In other words, is it okay to have two coaches at the same time? What would you do? **Melanie Heller (USA)**

Answer First I'd hire a new coach after dismissing the other two. Is it okay to have two coaches at the same time? Sure, though the answer could depend on a number of factors, from the age of the child, to how well the teachers work together, to whether you can afford two. Usually, the younger the child, the wiser it is to stay with just one coach, for older kids can handle divergent opinions better than



younger ones. But even when teaching older kids it's better if the coaches aren't competitive with each other and if they avoid conflicting advice. If neither steps on the other's toes, and especially if one defers to the other on crucial issues, it might go smoothly.

In life we have many teachers, yet our most important teachers tend to be our parents. By nature there are two of them, and this is usually enough. It can be good when parents share certain views, and though disagreements are typical and natural, some clashes in viewpoint can be quite serious. But from your use of the word "we" it would seem that you and your husband are in marital harmony. So, after getting a third coach, you won't have to go out and get a third parent. It might make sense, however, to confine your efforts to raising a healthy child, while leaving chess lessons to the new coach.

Question Since I don't really have time, I play mainly on the internet, especially very fast times, like bullet chess. I don't think my play is improving as fast as I would like, and sometimes I think my game would be stronger at slower time controls. What do you think of 2-minute chess? **Morgan Berger (USA)**

Answer I think it's better than one-minute chess and worse than three-minute chess. Even better would be thirty-minute chess, though I'm not saying your play would then be thirty times stronger. But let me ask you something. Other than inducing carpal tunnel syndrome, do you really think you're gaining much from bullet chess? Take a minute to think about this.

Question I am a 20-year-old player with the rating of around 1750-1800. I play almost all of my chess on the Internet and as a result I only play games with time controls like 15 and 5, 25 and 0, or even blitz sometimes. I never sense the need for more time, but my question is: Is my chess 'missing something' because I never sit down for a 4-hour game at the table? Can this habit stop me from advancing beyond my current level? Thank you very much in advance. **Tzvika Barenholz (Israel)**

Answer Because you're only twenty-years old you'll possibly improve by virtue of playing a lot of chess, regardless how you do it. But of course your chess games should be different and probably superior if you invested more time in them. And unless you're not human your play should also be affected by sitting directly across from real beings, not that modern interfaces don't have character. So why don't you give slower, face-to-face tournament play a try. You may find it fulfilling in ways you've never expected. But if you wind up hating it, you can continue blitzing ahead on the Internet, without giving it another thought.

Question I am a computer professional and in my spare time enjoy reading endgame books. Long back I remember reading that

computers have re-validated Reuben Fine's *Basic Chess Endings* and an errata of the book had been published. I could not find the errata anywhere including the U.S. Chess Federation's site. Can you please let me know where I can source it or a website which has the errata. Similarly do you have such an errata list, if any, for your own endgame book? **Bala Natarajan (USA)**

Answer I do not personally know where you can find a list of corrections for Fine's endgame book, though I know that different people have produced such a thing. I seem to recall that grandmaster Larry Evans has done a good deal of work on this. Perhaps you should check out his past columns in *Chess Life*. As far as my own books go, almost every single one of them could use a good editing job, as innumerable letters and e-mails indicate. To be sure, I'd appreciate it if you let me know the results of your searches, especially if they turn up any complete lists of errors that could be sent to other inquiring readers.

Question I was told that the longest chess game ever went 241 moves. It must be possible to go much longer than that in OTB play. Do you know how long the longest theoretical chess game is? What are the calculations? If you don't know, do you know where I could find this information, or how I could figure it out? **Wolf Teschner (Germany)**

Answer I don't really know what the longest possible game is. Years ago, the mathematician Donald MacMurray did a calculation in *Chess Review*, which I think has since been corrected. I can't seem to find his actual piece, but his analysis took into account the 50-move rule. Since the kings must stay on the board, the greatest number of possible captures is 30. Each pawn can move 6 times at most, which means there could never be more than 96 pawn moves. Adding captures and pawn moves together he got 126. He then multiplied 126 by 49.5 (to avoid a 50-move draw) to get 6,237. But this is not quite right, for some of the captures would undoubtedly result in pawns being eliminated from the board, so the actual figure must be somewhat less than 6,237 moves. I wouldn't be surprised if some of our readers knew the corrected answer. If any send it in, along with the explanation, I'd be happy to publish it in the next column.

Question I have a kindergartner who likes to play chess. He learned to play this past summer from studying Maurice Ashley's software. He's rated about 700 and would like to get better. I am not a chess player and do not know how to organize a study program for him. I've read several of your books such as your *Endgame Course*, *Weapons of Chess*, *Traps and Zaps*, etc, and we've learned a lot. However, I am still looking for a systematic way to introduce concepts that he can learn and attempt to apply during his games. I guess I'm really asking for a road map to help him get to about 1300 in the next couple of years. He'd really like to beat "Josh at 6 years old" on Chessmaster

7000. Thank you for your time. **J.J.Walls (USA)**

Answer It may not be that easy to beat Josh at six, but if you want a structured textbook to work with why don't you try either the *Comprehensive Chess Course* by Lev Alburt or *Learn Chess* by Alexander and Beach. Both of these are first-rate. I would also continue to use software, such as the Chessmaster series, or any of the other excellent products you can find in the **ChessCafe.com** and USCF online catalogs. You might also turn to the superb problem books of Fred Wilson and Bruce Alberston. I use some of these in my classes when students need tactical practice. But all of these materials, as illuminating as they can be, are no substitute for regular play against challenging opponents. Crown these games with objective analysis from a competent observer and I think you'll be doing your best to arm your son for chess combat and solid growth.

Question I've been playing chess for a couple of years now, mostly in the internet, but some weekly games with a friend. I've bought and read some books and videos, but I haven't really improved that much. What more can I do? What software programs would you recommend? **Ed Sandri (USA)**

Answer Many software programs could be helpful, though perhaps you should recharge by reviewing your play with an experienced teacher. You don't have to make this a regular thing, but it might be prudent to have him or her analyze a bunch of your recorded games to see where you stand and what you should be doing. You could even ask to have a program laid out that could be followed on your own, with periodic checkups. This makes sense to me, for otherwise you might find yourself floating or drowning when you could actually be getting somewhere on foot, back on earth.

Question I study a lot, go to several tournaments each month, and have a chess coach who comes once a week. I have been to many tournaments and have won money in them several times. In the past few months my rating has increased several hundred points and now I am a class D player. I was thinking about going to the World Open and playing in the Open section because I think I could learn a lot from playing against some strong players. I was wondering what you think about lower rated players playing up. Is this a good idea, and do you think this is a good way to improve? **Ben Inskeep (USA)**

Answer If you can deal with the blows of defeat, nothing is better than playing up. Contesting stronger opposition on a steady basis, under tournament conditions, is the ideal way to increase your playing ability, especially when you also have a coach who afterward could analyze your play to suggest improvements. In chess, fortune doesn't always smile on the brave, but taking chances is surely one of the best ways to learn.

Question In reading one of your past answers it seemed that you might know something about James Joyce and Samuel Beckett as chess players. Somewhere I heard that Joyce and Beckett both played chess. Do you know anything about this? **Warren Anderson (USA)**

Answer From the little I know Joyce didn't play chess at all, and though he made several inscrutable references to chess in *Finnegan's Wake*, it appears that he actually detested the game and its passionate adherents. I recall some story about his association with J. F. Byrne, an avid chessplayer and owner of 7 Eccles Street, the house where Leopold Bloom "ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls." Apparently Joyce would meet Byrne at a local pub, which happened to contain a few chess tables. Since Byrne was invariably playing chess, Joyce would have to sit idly by until the session's completion, no matter how long it took, and there's no evidence that Joyce ever had an epiphany to participate.

I don't know if Beckett was a player either, though he certainly wrote about the game a great deal and in a strange Beckett-like manner. Take his play *Endgame*, where the characters seem as lost as trapped knights on the edge. This is often reinforced in most productions by the play's set resembling the corner of a chessboard. And in one of the most lifeless sections of his novel *Murphy*, not to be confused with the two related works *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, Beckett devises a 43-move chess game that is quite illogical, but definitely unique. The accomplices are Murphy, a man who epitomizes the cliché "death warmed over," and the curious Mr. Endon, who seems to be the catatonic product of a frontal lobotomy. (I trust, as alluded to in *People* magazine, it's the Murphy character, not the Endon, which Ben Kingsley drew upon for his portrayal of me in *Searching for Bobby Fischer*.)

The playing surface in *Murphy* is a stretched white sheet that Beckett says is as "smooth and taut as a groaning wife's belly," and the author matter-of-factly annotates the actual chess game as if he were making comments in a tournament bulletin. At the start Endon takes the Black pieces because he always does. If presented with White, unaccountably "he would fade, without the least trace of annoyance, away into a light stupor." Then there are the moves, if you can call them that. After Murphy opens with e2-e4 (actually given in descriptive notation), the analytic note is: "The primary cause of all White's subsequent difficulties." Later, a bizarre king's move prompts: "Never seen in the Café de la Regence, seldom in Simpson's Divan." A sphinx-like repetition of moves then provokes Mr. Endon to turn his rooks upside down. My personal favorite is Beckett's comment to a senseless knight's move. "No words can express the torment of mind that goaded White to this abject offensive." It all ends with: "Further solicitation would be frivolous and vexatious, and Murphy, with Fool's Mate in his soul, retires." But why give Murphy

the last thought? Let's instead end on Mr. Endon.

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