



*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



Play to Please

Question I've a son of 3 years and a half. At what age could I teach him to play chess? Which pedagogy do you recommend? **Daniel Mouron (Switzerland)**

Answer Ordinarily I'd say you could teach most kids starting at about four or five. But there's nothing intrinsically wrong with beginning earlier, especially if your child shows interest and you can do it in a nurturing way. I have a hunch you can, so why not give it a try? As far as a particular curriculum, I wouldn't restrict it in any way, though I'd keep it simple and playful. If your child seems excited by what you do, whatever you're doing is probably working. And if you find you're taking a wrong turn, you should be able to switch course and go on to something else without harm. Just have your eyes open and stay alert. The essential thing is to keep it fun, while trying to present most ideas in the context of a game. But instead of playing to win play to please. If you're enjoying the time together, there's an excellent chance so is your child. Sharing the same favorable experience is the best way for a parent to teach a child anything. Good luck.

Question I have read that several of the chess pieces have changed since its introduction into Europe during the Crusades. Originally the bishop was a ship (which would explain its diagonal move) and the castle was originally an elephant. Is this true? If so, I would like to get a chess set that uses the original pieces. Do you know of a source? **Lincoln Loftus (USA)**

Answer You have it backward. In Chataranga, the earliest form of Indian chess, predating the Crusades by more than 500 years, the bishop started as an elephant (which could explain its diagonal move), and the rook began as a ship. Actually, it might have been a chariot.



There are advocates for both possibilities, and you can learn about the controversy by reading Henry Davidson's *A Short History of Chess*. You may indeed be able to find a chess set that uses reproductions of the original pieces, but I'm not aware of anyone selling them. If I see anything informative on this, I'll mention it in a future column.

Question Do you know what's the #1 best-selling chess book ever? I once read, although I haven't verified it, that *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan is the #1 best-selling scientific book ever. So it would be interesting to know what's the answer for chess. **Miguel Lim (USA)**

Answer The two best-selling chess books of all-time are supposedly *An Invitation to Chess*, by Chernev and Harkness, and *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess*, by Fischer (who, rumor has it, never saw the book before it was published), Margulies, and Mosenfelder. Both of these classics have sold more than a million copies in all their editions. Maybe now they will sell a few copies more.

Question I was wondering if playing over games of a GM, say, Shirov, or Karpov, is a reliable way to improve my game. I am a 1900 nationally rated player, and without more than a couple of hours a day to practice. Is style easy to absorb this way? **Saulo de Tarso Pires da Silva (Brazil)**

Answer Of course playing over the games of grandmasters should be beneficial to your chess. How could one not profit from studying the play of the game's leading exponents? Perhaps your fear is that Kasparov, Kramnik, Anand, and the like may confuse you with their subtlety. If so, you have a point. But while you may not grasp everything they do without clarification, as an A-Player you should be able to understand most of their moves once they've been explained. If not, then you're probably not an A-Player. And if, as students, we strive for perfection, how can we attempt to emulate what we've never experienced? Finally you ask if style is easy to absorb. If this means that you're curious whether an A-Player can assimilate some aspects of a grandmaster's style by studying his or her games, the answer is surely "yes." But maybe you're asking something else. Maybe you're wondering if studying the games of great players is the best method to improve your play. If so, the answer is definitely "no." Much better would be to play challenging opposition on a regular basis and to have those games analyzed by a strong, but sympathetic player. But don't let me dissuade you from plunging headlong into Shirov and Karpov.

Question Is the Giuoco Piano dead? It's my favorite opening and I love the Moeller and the Max Lange Attack! I was just wondering why I never see GM's play this. **David A. Slocum (USA)**

Answer Are you kidding? The Giuoco Piano is more alive than ever, even at the grandmaster level. Especially in the last ten years, with competitors needing to find weapons unfamiliar to their adversaries,

old and discarded ideas have found new life, even at the top levels of chess. The Berlin Defense to the Ruy Lopez, essayed in the Kasparov-Kramnik Match, is a case in point. At lower levels, in club and amateur play, the Italian Game reigns supreme. And let's not forget the Four Knights, though often I try and my students won't let me.

Question Hi, Bruce. I read in Skittles room from Michael de la Maza and he gives a method to win ELO points. The central point is to solve 1000 positions of increasing difficulty. Is he right? Is that so easy? So we can reach 2000 or 2100 just with this approach. I am 1800. **Carlos Guaimare (Venezuela)**

Answer I wasn't aware of the correspondence between the number of problems solved and the gain of ELO points, but analyzing 1,000 positions of any difficulty probably won't hurt your game. But whether or not this is the best way to get to 2000 or 2100 depends on the 1,000 positions in question, who you are, who selects and organizes the positions, several other things, and lastly if this actually is the best way to improve your play. Look, there is no royal road to learning, and laboring through 1,000 positions will surely prove this. I'm certain you'll get something from the task, but generally the surest way to improve is to play good competition every week. Then you should follow up by trying to learn from the mistakes and decisions made and not made in those games. This you can do on your own or preferably with the help of a facilitator. So give the 1,000 positions a try, but get the facilitator.

Question Do you have any insight on how to keep girls playing chess? I have a 13-year-old daughter, rated over 1100, who has been playing only one year. However, many parents and teachers keep referring to the fact that girls drop out of chess as they move up in school. Already, she is sometimes the only girl playing in her section at scholastic tournaments. I didn't know if you had first-hand knowledge of this in your teaching career. **Randy Wheelless (USA)**

Answer Almost every chess teacher is concerned with this situation. Generally they try to motivate girls the same way they try to motivate boys, by imparting their own love for the game and creating a fun experience. Now it may be true that, with regard to chess competition, girls drop off considerably as they move ahead in school, but so do boys. After the sixth grade there appears to be a common decline of interest in extracurricular activities.

It's also easy to understand how difficult it is to participate when you feel different from the rest of the group. But so much depends on a positive attitude. Being a girl can be as much an advantage as a drawback, depending on which side of the coin is up. Girls, for instance, have an immediate psychological edge when competing

against those boys who tend to be afraid of losing to girls.

Parents and teachers sometimes try to counter such problems of outlook by encouraging over-compensation. To this end, you should persuade your daughter that by working more diligently she has an opportunity to outdo the boys, and that success chiefly depends on the effort made. Emphasize that little things matter, and that she can gain on the boys by attending to those details that most people (boys and girls) are likely to ignore, because they fail to work hard enough.

Since mindset and attitude are so crucial, don't be afraid to inject a timely positive note. The key is knowing how to turn weaknesses into strengths. For instance, point out that when boys see your daughter as being "merely a girl," they are setting themselves up for a surprise, and she could defeat them if they take her for granted. Some 13-year-old girls might actually consider being the "only girl" as something desirable, as a chance to compete with boys on an equal level, in a realm where physical differences are irrelevant. The truth is that boys will probably appreciate and admire such intrepid girls for their spirit and willingness to take part in a world dominated mainly by boys.

Perhaps most important is how your daughter views herself. Help her to realize that she is not an oddball, but rather someone very special, who is dedicated, mentally tough, and worthy of respect. To be sure, if all of this works, she should become a stronger chessplayer. But even if her chess advances only slightly, the right approach can improve her self-image, and if this isn't good for her, what is?

Question I have a question about a program for study. I am a 14-year-old player, obviously improving, as I have gone up in rating about 300 or 350 points since January. Anyhow, I wanted to know how much study and play you think would be required to be an expert in a year. Also, a factor is my coach that comes every week. (I'm 1600 right now.) I would like your master analysis in helping me out with that, as it is my chess goal for this year. **Garrett Smith (USA)**

Answer Chess improvement is not like this. There is no automatic formula to gain 400 or more points in a year, let alone to insure rising from Class B to Expert. But it's clear you have a passion for chess. So it probably doesn't matter what you do. You're bound to fly ahead merely on your love for the game. But if I were you I'd try to find stimulating opponents who I could play seriously every week. Then I'd analyze those games with my teacher. This would probably aid my game the most. But you sound like the type of kid who will forge his own path. So remember Yogi Berra's sage advice: "If you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Reader e-mail: It's time to catch up on the e-mail, and readers' responses to past questions.

In response to a question by Bala Natarajan about corrections for Reuben Fine's *Basic Chess Endings*, **Dr. Joe Wagner (USA)** writes: "A writer asked for published errata for Reuben Fine's *Basic Chess Endings*. I have a booklet of such corrections (only 11 pages) copyrighted in 1990 by Samuel Louie of Davis, California. Unfortunately it does not give any means of contacting Mr. Louie and I could find no listing for him in an Internet search. It appears likely that it was self-published. Perhaps other readers may provide means of reaching Mr. Louie." **Michael Henderson (USA)** adds: "A list of some corrections can be found at bereolos.tripod.com/bce.html."

Concerning the question about the longest possible chess game, **Kevin Bonham (Australia)** writes: "In your column you ask the length of the longest possible game assuming that the 50-move draw rule is used. I have often seen a figure of 5,949 moves quoted. That was before King vs King was an automatic immediate draw, but the calculation was also incorrect anyway and I believe (though I'm not absolutely certain) that the longest game is presently drawn with Black's 5898th move. Note that the figure changes with slight changes in the Laws of Chess."

"The calculation given by McMurray is wrong for two reasons. Firstly while there can be 96 pawn moves and 30 captures, unless some of those captures are by (not of!) pawns, then the pawns never get past each other and make all their moves. It is necessary to have 8 captures by pawns so all the pawns can pass each other and promote, so the figure to be multiplied is 118 not 126, as 8 of the pawn moves are also captures."

"Secondly, while McMurray multiplies by 49.5, this is wrong. The game is drawn only after 50 moves by both players without a pawn move or capture, so long as the side making the pawn move or capture is the same one to make the last pawn move or capture, then that adds 50 moves to the total, not 49.5. So the base figure is 118x50, or 5,900."

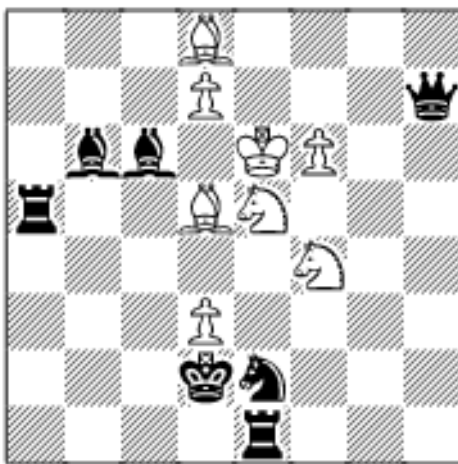
"It's a bit trickier than that because there must be several changes in whose turn it is to make the pawn move or capture through the game. Assuming Black makes the first capture, we need a switch to White making the captures so that White can get pieces out and give them up on squares which double White's pawns on files to leave gaps for Black's pawns to pass through. Then we need another change back to Black making these captures. At this stage both sides have unpromoted pawns so we need another switch for White to promote those pawns and take Black's pieces, and a final switch for Black to take White's surviving pieces. Each switch costs half a move, so on Black's 5898th move, a king capture of White's remaining piece, the game is drawn as only two kings are left and FIDE Law 1.3 applies immediately. (Does the USCF have this law too?)"

"To illustrate how to do a 5,898-move game, here's an example. Both

sides just move other pieces around in the meantime without triple-repeating: Black takes White's knights by gxf6 and bxa6 (100 moves); Black's knights take White's queen and rooks (150 moves); White plays d3 and e3 (99.5 moves); White takes four Black pieces with pawns: hxg3, exf4, dxc4, axb3 (200 moves); White takes Black's other three pieces with bishops (150 moves); Black takes White's bishops: fxe6, cxd6 (99.5 moves); White's pawns are on the b, c, f, g files, Black's are on the a, d, e and h files; Black makes 44 pawn moves including eight promotions (2200 moves); White makes 42 pawn moves including eight promotions (2099.5 moves); White takes Black's eight promoted pieces (400 moves); Black takes White's eight promoted pieces (399.5 moves); King vs King, game drawn immediately by FIDE law 1.3.

“This makes a total of 5,898 moves. If anyone thinks they can make one go for longer, I would like to see them construct an outline game like the above to prove it rather than just supplying an abstract ‘calculation’.”

Several readers replied to the question the Devil's Cross. **Brian Palmer (Scotland)** replies: “An answer, actually, to Hector Aldape's question about a game ending with the men in the form of a cross. There's a short article under “Sign of Cross” in the *Oxford Companion*



to Chess. In the position shown, play goes as follows, with the devil as Black: 1...Nd4+ 2. Kd6 Qxd7+ 3. Nxd7 Rxd5+ 4. Nxd5 Re6 mate.

Joe Sonas (USA) states: “Just a quick note about the reader who asked about the cross problem. I think that there is a whole class of problems where a player is supposedly playing against the devil, and just as the devil makes his final move to checkmate the

person, that move makes the pieces form the shape of a cross, and the devil vanishes in a puff of smoke instead.”

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