



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



Don't Hurry or Worry

Question I am the chess coach for the local elementary school chess club and I was wondering if you could give me some ideas on what to teach kids. I am a fairly good player, but I feel I have taught the kids all I know. They are good, as a matter of fact, they won the West Virginia State Elementary Chess Tournament last year, but I have a very difficult time to get them to slow down and think about their moves. I admit I am not well versed in the different openings and strategies, but I am the only person in the area who can play and is willing to try and coach them. In other words, HELP. Could you please give me some ideas on where I should be leading them? Thank you for your time. **Charles Cook (USA)**

Answer You can get your students to slow down by making them record their moves. If they're playing practice games with clocks, be sure they have enough time both to think and keep a record. If they're not playing with clocks, then they have plenty of time to write comfortably. Have them develop a routine. For example, make them write down the opposing player's moves before starting to think about them. Otherwise, they may become so engrossed in play that they forget to record or scribble bizarre entries by mistake. In trying to correct their score sheets they'll wind up hanging things and getting mated. Some coaches take all this penning a step further, requiring their students to write down each intended move before playing it. This digs the trenches on the routine a bit deeper, while providing a final check to avoid obvious errors before the next move is played.



Another way to get students to slow down is to force them to analyze without moving the pieces. Make it a rule that they have to tell you their thoughts in language, instead of showing it on the board. Let them know that otherwise their answers will be considered wrong, even when they're right. Be consistent about this. They'll start to realize you mean business and it will be to their gain. Not only will moving at a slower pace benefit their concentration and analysis, it will also give them practice at being patient. All young people can use a measure of that.

With regard to teaching them specific chess ideas, probably you should focus on tactics, both in and out of class. Just be sure that, when they're in class, they call out their variations instead of moving the pieces. Moreover, when they're doing homework, insist that they write out complete variations, not just the first moves. If they come back with skeletal solutions, have them take their work sheets back home and do them again. And if you think this may be too discouraging, you can align yourself with those educators who turn such things into positives, not by punishing the offenders, but by rewarding those who give fuller answers, even when the answers are dead wrong.

I wouldn't worry so much about openings. Simply let them study and play their own lines, however they acquire them, especially since you admit you can't really assist them too well in comprehending the material. If you tried to show them variations, you might unintentionally mislead or persuade them to memorize moves without truly grasping content, and nothing is more repugnant to the chess mind than memory without understanding. But if you need to work with some book ideas, why don't you get a few different collections of short, well-annotated games, where important points are explained in words and variations. Then, if they want to learn more, you can direct them to other sources, to be investigated on their own. If you do anything else for them, get them to play often and against good competition. During these games, make sure they take their time and care less about winning for the sake of winning and more for the thrill of experiencing a good fight. Help them to appreciate the uplift of mental battle and you'll be imparting something vital, extending beyond the chessboard, which teachers everywhere strive for and value. Better yet, get them to shake hands after losing and we'd really be impressed.

Question I find myself getting into time trouble a lot in league games (35 moves in 1¾ hours). If I speed up too much, I tend to miss

elements of the position, including tactics. Any advice on how I could manage my clock better? **John Burns (United Kingdom)**

Answer You could try a couple of things. Surely, you don't want to move too quickly at any point, but you shouldn't be wasting time on obvious moves, such as opening variations you're quite familiar with and responses you know to be forced. But be careful here, for even in the most innocent situations, taking a little more time initially could save time later on, especially when a thoughtless response might lead down the wrong path. You also may be wasting time looking at too many things and considering the irrelevant. Try to determine what's germane and keep analysis centered on the most attractive possibilities, at least until you get a handle on the problem. You might consider practicing with a speedier time control, experimenting with different ones to see which give you the right blend of exercise and time to think. If you play enough games under faster conditions, it may carry over naturally, so that you cope better with the time allotted in league action.

In such competitions, it could be advantageous to divide your score sheets into parts before starting play. Simply draw lines under key moves so that you can monitor early enough if you're on track not to overstep. Since 35 moves in 1.75 hours works out to 5 moves for every 15 minutes, you might want to partition your score sheet ahead of time to reflect this. Better yet, try to play the first 10 moves in 20 minutes (instead of in 30 minutes), then follow the formula we've just outlined, and you'll have 10 minutes of safety built-in. Of course, in any particular game, the demands of the position may cause you to break away from this plan. But if it helps you even slightly, it's worth it, for this is a game where little things truly matter.

It could be that the real solution to your problem might be addressed by improving your concentration. If you can stay attentive for longer periods, you'll see more and be more alert. You'll also save time, avoiding waste and reducing the number of efforts you must make to re-enter the analytic forum. Every time you let your mind meander inadvertently, or get up from the board (not that you do this), you must consume additional time just to get back to the game. Of course, we all need to take breaks during intense contests, but these hiatuses should be enjoyed judiciously, when they would be most replenishing. Perhaps you should take a respite right now. If you're having difficulty, sometimes getting away from it all is just what the doctor would order.

Question This is a question not truly related to chess. A year or so ago

I saw *Searching for Bobby Fischer* on television and, as far as I can remember, Ben Kingsley played the role of Bruce Pandolfini. What is the connection between you and that character? **Javi Alvarez (Spain)**

Answer Let me applaud your memory. Ben Kingsley did appear in the film. The connection is that he was playing Bruce Pandolfini, who has spent his life playing a fictional character of the same name.

Question I've noticed that I play either very aggressive or very passive. I play lots of Solitaire with Kasparov, Anand, Karpov, Short, and Fischer games. I can sometimes guess the moves, but I noticed that the moves I guess are either very aggressive or very passive. Is there a good way to find out what my particular style of play is? If so, is Solitaire a good way to refine it? **Cecil Brown (USA)**

Answer It sounds as if you haven't found yourself yet, and you keep finding other people, albeit, some of the greatest players in history. My suggestion is that you have your play analyzed and directed by a teacher or strong player. Have him or her assess your strengths, weaknesses, and personality, so you can eventually discover your true self and get more out of your chess (with your own help of course). Forget about guessing moves in Solitaire Chess. You can guess many of the moves, guided by the hints and commentary of contrived presentation, and this means practically nothing. You can fail to guess most of the moves and still be a powerful player. You don't want to guess moves. You want to understand them. This requires good use of time, unfettered thinking, and love for the game – all three of which can be nurtured by regularly playing stimulating chess with challenging players. You'll get far more from those efforts than from trying to guess the next Kasparov move down the page.

Question Thank you for your column, books and everything else you have done to help chess enthusiasts enjoy the game even more. Enjoying the game for its experience, and NOT for the ratings or even wins, seems to be one of the underlying themes of your column, so I thought I should ask this (perhaps rhetorical) question: Why is it that the world of chess is so riddled with lack of respect for opponents and petty bickering between Grand Masters rather than the sportsman-like conduct that fits this truly noble game? Throughout its history, it seems that the world of professional players has been full of conflict, petty intrigue, disdain for the opponent and prima-donna like behaviour. All of Alekhine, Capablanca, Bogoljubov, Keres, Botvinnik, Fischer, Karpov, Kasparov, Kramnik seem to have, at one point or another, engaged in deriding their opponent publicly, blaming

each other for what not, refuting the score of games as the result of Party interference or something else, avoiding each other and generally behaving like an intellectual-heavy-weight version of the World Wrestling Federation. Even worse, the same behavior of contempt and feeling of intellectual superiority seem to even be thought in chess books and courses. Silman does it throughout his books and even you are depicted to espouse that philosophy in the film *Searching for Bobby Fischer* (this does not seem to fit the statement you make in your column but perhaps you've changed your point of view or the film was seeking more drama). Any other game, it seems to me, seeks to relate itself to its fans and promote likeable personalities of its stars, while chess has accumulated a long record of contempt and ridicule of its amateurs and has produced some of the most unlikable characters as its champions. Could this be a natural behavior for a game that is so devoid of chance and circumstance that any win or loss is treated like an automatic statement about the relative value of the players' intellect, or is it just a plain case of poor behavior? I used to play competitive rugby, a game where you literally inflict and receive pain, and yet I have never seen such lack of respect for the opponent on the rugby field that I have seen reading chess books and magazines. Perhaps the intellectual comparisons are something that is more difficult to bear than pain? Or am I just bestowing a poor judgment on the world of chess based on insufficient knowledge and a few extreme examples? **Philip Palaveev (Bulgaria)**

Answer I don't know that what you state about chess is true, and if it's true, I don't know that it especially applies to chess. Granted, some leading chessplayers have been known not to get along with specific rivals, and there have been infamous feuds. Alekhine and Capablanca, Botvinnik and Keres, and even Kasparov and Karpov come to mind. But at the heart of such rivalries usually there's a core of adversarial respect. Alekhine might have avoided a return match with Capablanca, but it wasn't because he thought Capablanca was an inferior player. Rather, he admired Capa's play and studied it in great depth. Botvinnik probably disliked Keres, and he did criticize his match play, but at the same time praised Keres as an outstanding tournament competitor, second to none in his time. Kasparov and Karpov may not be on the best of terms, but each has admitted that "the other" was the other great player in the world during their classic confrontations. Nonetheless, these examples are not indicative of all chess combat, and surely most champions and grandmasters seldom are quoted saying anything critical in print. Many ignore personalities altogether, preferring to talk mainly about chess.

But let's say you're right, and chessplayers tend to say nasty things

about their competitors. Is this unique to chess? Are chessplayers any more flagrant in their criticisms than scientists, philosophers, and artists? Isaac Newton went out of his way to crush anyone who might have detracted from his theories. Schopenhauer thought Hegel was a lower-life form. Freud despised Adler. Picasso had no respect for other artists. Hemingway repeatedly put down Fitzgerald. And just recently, in "Wittgenstein's Poker," the hatred between Popper and Wittgenstein was made public. The list goes on and on. It almost seems to be a truism, that leading intellectuals tend to loathe rival intellectuals. So I don't think it's necessary to single out chessplayers.

Perhaps athletes and other physical competitors seem better natured. You indeed may have experienced good sportsmanship in rugby. If so, it could be because athletics offer a chance to release tensions denied in more confined competitions. But I wonder if this is really true, that sports people handle these things better. Joe Dimaggio and Ted Williams definitely didn't like each other. Each thought the other was not as good a hitter, got too much attention, and was paid more than he was worth. Hall-of-fame football coach Vince Lombardi strongly put down his AFL opponent in the 1967 Super Bowl. After the game was over, and Lombardi could afford to be magnanimous, he dismissed the Kansas City Chiefs as being second-rate. Muhammad Ali, to psyche-out his opponents, often described them in ungenerous terms. And what about the incessant trash-talking and show-boating in much of today's big-time sports. All of this is downright ugly. I'm not saying chessplayers are beyond reproach. The game is fiercely competitive, and tense conflict can bring out the worst in people. To be sure, some chess authorities can be unkind in their public responses, but so are many of our greatest scientists, artists, writers, philosophers, statesman, and even our most cherished athletic heroes. Maybe there's more to this, but let's just leave it at that.

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