



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



The Read Not Taken

Question I'm interested in reading chess books and I always remember the things I read. But nowadays, when I read chess books, I feel like I still don't know a lot of things and I'll become bored. I never encountered this type of problem before but now it affects my play in chess and I tend to make mistakes in games. A friend suggested that I should stop reading chess books for a month or two and do other things such as sports, and play more blitz or lightning with friends. Is it a good way to solve this problem? If not, please suggest some other ways for me to solve the problem. Thanks. **Lim Shueh Hann (Malaysia)**

Answer I don't think you should do anything that bores you, even if it used to captivate you. If you're asking whether playing blitz may be a good way to rekindle your apparent waning interest in playing chess at all, the answer is perhaps. It certainly has worked for many others who found serious chess too draining or suddenly no longer exciting. But if you're thinking that a diet of fast chess might re-ignite your past enthusiasm for reading about the game in general, I'd have to say it's not probable. If you're pleased by playing speed chess, it's simply going to encourage you to play more speed chess. Few of us would rather spend time reading about what we could actually experience enjoyably. Nor is it likely that the thought of the actual thing will rival the thing-in-itself, pathology aside, even for those adept at the art of embellishing rooks in the sky. No doubt a good playing encounter may stimulate interest in all aspects of chess and its study. But if one is



particularly concerned with reading about the game (and why not?), surely a better way to fuel such zeal is to find inspiring chess literature and feed off that. One good book might very well lead to another. The problem is to find that first good book.

My advice is to start looking (bookstores, libraries, online catalogs, friends-in-the-know, and so on) with at least the same kind of effort and fervor you've made in preparing this question. You never know what you might come up with, and it may not contain many words at all. A number of the very best works consist mainly of diagrams, often chessic pictures of poetry, and some of those are worth a thousand words or more.

Question Do you agree with the affirmation that “Bobby Fischer was the *first* who demonstrated that chess is *art*?” May I explain that I heard (maybe in bad translation) these very words spoken by the personage played by Ben Kingsley. For me, personally, Fischer was a great follower of many artists, like Morphy or Pillsbury or Marshall or Fine. **Zalmen Kornin (Brazil)**

Answer Bobby Fischer doesn't think this. Ben Kingsley doesn't think this. You don't think this. I'm willing to bet that even the translator doesn't think this. So why should I think it, regardless of the translation? It should be clear to sentient beings universally that thousands of people, and yes, even some non-people, have contributed to the development of the chess art form prior to the first manifestation of the Fischer godhead. I love being counterintuitive and paradoxical, but not to the extent of being slavishly devoted to a fallen idol who seems to live by his own kind of inviolable logic – a logic the four artists you've named might not quite take to heart, even quadrivially.

Question How do I best teach chess to children? I realize it's early with my children, who are 5½-years and 1-year old. Your short-term and long-term advice would be greatly appreciated. I have recently acquired *Maurice Ashley Teaches Chess*; *The Dr. Schiller Chess Game and Teaching Info*; *Chessmaster 6000*; *Lego Chess*; *Extreme Chess*; and *Championship Chess* for my PC. I allow my 5½-year old to get into these programs and play around, but otherwise don't get involved unless he asks me. My thinking – until he loves the game don't try to teach him any more than he asks to learn. Let him choose when or if he wants to load the game, wait until he asks me to bring out the chess set. I am polishing up my game to assist in the development of my children and their chess playing. (I believe chess makes you smarter, etc.). In the last 15 years I have barely played 6 games against humans. Prior to that I had played at the 1800-2000

level for stretches of time. My goals are to have my children be average players who have an appreciation and love for the game. If they never play in a USCF tournament that is fine, but I would hope they would be more than competitive with their average classmate.
Owen Curtis (USA)

Answer You seem to have the situation well in hand. As long as chess provides playful and joyous moments for your children, there should be few difficulties. (I doubt at this juncture you'll have to worry about the 1-year-old cutting school to play chess.) The software you have is more than adequate, but note that innovative products are coming out all the time, so you may want to keep in touch with these new and motivating items when they suddenly might become available. Since your playing strength is at least 1800, you're more than qualified to explain and instill the wonders of the game. So I'd spend less time concerned with developing your already adept playing strength and more on nurturing additional parental teaching skills to keep your presentations constantly exciting and thought-provoking. But it appears that you're very much in charge of the class, and as long as you maintain a measure of sensitivity, you should be able to ward off most potential problems before they need remedy. Just keep showing them your love and it'll become their love too.

Question I notice that some of your answers are very long, and many of them could be turned into columns or books. There are many chess columns and many chess books. It seems like there are hundreds of books on many bookshelves in the stores, like Barnes and Noble and dozens of big chains. I wondered why you don't turn some of your answers into other columns and books, and why you haven't written any chess books yourself, like Fred Reinfeld and du Mont. Maybe you think it would be too hard to do, or maybe you're not really that good, or maybe you haven't thought of it. Does this seem reasonable or am I missing something? **Hal Randell (USA)**

Answer You're missing something.

Question I am a medical student from New Delhi. I have been playing chess for the last 6 months. I am facing some problems and I want to ask some questions. I want to improve my opening play. I have got *Chessplayer's Handbook* by Howard Staunton and *Modern Chess Openings* by Nick de Firmian. I mostly play the Giuoco Piano as White as well as Black. I do not know how to study openings from the books. Whether I should cram them or else. I do not know what to move if the opponent moves something else, other than what is given

in the book. I also want to improve my tactics or middlegame as a whole. How can I develop an eye for them as well as combinations? I also want to improve my endgame. How should I go about it systematically? During an opening I'd like to know which side to attack. I play around 10-15 hours a week with Chessmaster 8000 and around 5-6 hours with human players. I also solve chess problems and see GM's games from the Internet and newspapers. I am rated 1600 on the ICC in Standard Chess and 1250 in Blitz. One last question: I have been told that I think in those terms in which only a GM should think, like losing the initiative early while playing with White or losing the king's bishop for the opponent's knight, etc. Finally, could you please suggest some books according to my level of play? **Nitin Sharma (India)**

Answer I can't answer your questions specifically because the parameters you've offered are open to further inquiry themselves. This reduces us to generality, and general recommendations often fail when applied to real people. You're a flesh-and-blood person, and it's as an individual that you should tackle these issues. The background you've offered about yourself is helpful, but there are too many unknowns that can only be elicited by considering your responses to a whole set of investigative questions beyond the scope of this column. If you really want to get a more accurate take on your situation, you should have your game evaluated by a competent professional, possibly over several sessions. As a medical student, you know there are no quick fixes or panaceas for some of the circumstances you've posed. Whatever you should do, it's clear you'll want to proceed from a greater awareness of who you really are as a chessplayer, not as a construct.

But let me offer one suggestion. Rather than going from Z to A, why don't you go from A to Z? That is, instead of memorizing lots of variations and key positions up front, why not rely on your actual chess games to generate areas for subsequent study? Whenever you play and record a serious chess game, try to review it immediately after its completion, especially to determine material you need to explore in books and data bases, or perhaps even by consulting other players. In this way your game will develop naturally, based on the problems you truly and regularly face. It'll mean so much more to you, and you'll get so much more out of it than contrived drudgery. Don't you have enough of that in medical school as it is?

Question I am a medium-strength club player who enjoys the study of chess, both from written sources (books, magazines) and computer sources (Internet games and CDs). I am curious about whether it is

best to analyze positions on the board or to look at the PC screen. I find it more pleasurable and easier to analyze from a board, but with so many PC sources, I find myself looking at a PC screen a lot and where the temptation to click away and move the pieces is great. Is there any experience or research that suggests people analyze better (without moving the pieces) from a board than from a PC screen, and what is your general advice about the correct training technique when being confronted with a position on a PC screen – analyze from the screen or print it out and set up the position on the board? **Michael Marshall (Denmark)**

Answer I'm unaware of any relevant studies, though obviously positions set up on a board have apparently greater dimension, inasmuch as the pieces and the squares they occupy are then palpable things. Chess, however, is a game of ideas, and the same terrain and figures are also concepts needing no physical reality. The computer screen therefore is more than adequate to represent such abstractions, assuming the interface is sufficiently clear to be seen satisfactorily. Moreover, by virtue of being on screen, it becomes much easier to sample variations, regardless how intricate, without losing your starting place. Setting up situations by hand, on the other hand, can be quite tiring, confusing, error-prone, and resultantly discouraging. So it seems much more can be achieved over shorter span by using the marvels of modern technology. And if you want to take more time on any given position, you can do so on screen just as well as you can on board. I suspect that you are adroit enough to profit from both ways of studying chess, and needn't worry about it too much. Nevertheless, if you feel more comfortable using an actual chess set and pieces, and find it more pleasing, by all means do so.

I realize there are detractors of computer chess, many from outside the game's domain, who tend to put it down as superficial, especially because things can go by so quickly it seems hardly possible to give them serious thought. But thinking time is not the sole factor. Intensity can play a role, and often a truer picture doesn't begin to emerge until many examples are considered, albeit if only tangentially. The trick is knowing when to invest greater oomph in one thing than dispersed energy over many things. It's doubtful that anyone – even non-playing critics of chess -- can appreciate either approach properly if they've never explored both.

Question My name is Josh and I'm 17-years-old. I am from San Antonio, Texas and I'm not a prodigy or a great chessplayer, but I do love chess. I know you are probably sick of answering questions, so I will make it short. Other than paying for a tutor, how can I find out

what I need to work on as a chessplayer? I have no problem reading up on chess or studying matches but how do I know what to work on without knowing what my weaknesses are? Any help would be appreciated. **Josh Jouffray (USA)**

Answer The most accurate indicator of what you need to do is your own play. Here's what I'd do if I were you. I'd play as much serious chess as I could, against the best players available. I'd approach each game with total concentration, as if the future of humanity depended on my efforts, just as any artist would in any discipline. After each contest I'd try to understand why things happened and how I could have done them better. If necessary, I'd ask every good player I could corral what they thought of this and that. If I were to read books, and certainly I would, I'd turn to collections of annotated games that would allow me to get inside the heads of top players, so I could be just a little bit more like them – those who've been through the wars and lived to tell about it. Overall, I'd give each game and every task my full heart, believing that our world is basically fair, and trusting that sincerity and dedication will bring insight and ultimate success. I'm not you, and I'm not sure this is where you're at, but that's what I'd do if I were there.

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