



*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 Postman Always Zings Twice

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



Question Which type of chess is stronger: e-mail chess or chess over the board? **Romualdo Pina (Puerto Rico)**

Answer By e-mail chess I presume you mean online chess, though I'm not sure what you're asking. Are you curious which form of chess is better, especially for you? Are you wondering which manner of playing chess produces higher quality contests in general? Or are you really asking something else and I haven't figured it out yet? My answers to each of these questions might be different, if I could satisfy them at all. But let's continue the charade and pretend I can.

I can't say which means of playing chess would be more appropriate for you as an individual because I know nothing about you. But perhaps you wonder which method leads to superior play. Alas, it appears that the scientific world, ever in search of new research topics that may win funding and influence people through publication in prestigious journals, has yet to discover this particular field of study. I don't think they know if there's a correspondence, and I know I don't. There are, it seems, no studies to draw upon for corroboration either way. It seems to me that playing superb chess is more likely to be a variable of time than how you move the pieces. I'm not sure that it matters whether you grasp them or click them, as long as you spend a sufficient period analyzing the position. The more time you invest, the more likely you'll produce exceptional results. Now if you're actually concerned with something else, and I've missed the point, perhaps



some of the confusion stems from the electronic medium used to pose the question. If you could ask the same query in person, without the filtering effect of an interface, it's possible I might come up with the brilliant response you certainly deserve. For now, you'll have to settle for a mundane one.

Question I would like to work out an elaborate program (not a computer program, but rather a school program), which will be helpful to players from the green level (1000 Elo) to the master class (2000, 2200, or even 2400). I saw a few of them written by very good experts, like for example, Kevin Spraggett, Michael de la Maza, etc. My question is simple: Is there any way to connect all programs to ONE, which will guarantee achieving great improvement to all, or at least most of them? Maybe people are so different, that it is impossible to make ONE program for ALL players. What do you think about it?

Tomasz Pinal (Poland)

Answer If you're asking about creating a standardized curriculum, I agree with you. People have different needs and learn in a variety of ways. It would be great to have an approved regimen, but there's no real consensus on this, despite the excellent work of many top academics and theorists. Even where two or three manage to agree, four will usually debate over emphasis, order of presentation, choice of specific examples, and the division between theory and application. I might also point out that many of the chessically learned vigorously dispute the value of certain authorities, styles of play, opening preferences, grading levels and rating correspondences, length of courses, the apportioning of study and practice, and reading lists. I'm sure I've forgotten something the enlightened wouldn't. Certainly, in trying to establish a core curriculum, you might face a battle comparable to meeting up with your worst opponent, but many times exacerbated, multitudinously around the globe, by the interminable nattering of irritated, often mean-spirited disputants who produce an endless stream of ungrammatical, ill-conceived, poorly written, mistyped Internet complaints and objections they deem to be valuable and right on the money. But you sound determined and sincere, and maybe those are the qualities needed to knock out the teeth of such imbecilic and unyielding resistance in countless chatrooms worldwide.

Question I am an Internet chessplayer, with a lowly rating of 1178. I am curious about this: what to do when the opposing queen moves out early. Many chess books advise one not to move the queen early as it is easily attacked. However, I was playing this game when suddenly the black queen developed on move 3. I was at a loss. This player made a mistake, but how to exploit it? Due to my confusion, my

enemy easily took the initiative, until he made a blunder and allowed me to force mate. If only he had played better. **M. Tan (Malaysia)**

Answer The books aren't wrong, at least not about this. The queen shouldn't be moved out early unless the situation renders it necessary or clearly desirable. Now maybe you played imprecisely, missing ways to capitalize on your opponent's violation of principle. Or perhaps you didn't miss anything and only think you did. But whatever the circumstances, and here there are many possibilities best left unmentioned, something tells me you shouldn't base your interpretation of chess theory solely on the conduct of this one game. I suggest you play a few more before coming to any definite conclusions.

Question I'm a player who enjoys playing the Pirc as Black and the Modern against 1. d4. I always played the Queen's Gambit as White, but I just don't feel comfortable with it. Is there an opening you'd suggest for White which fits my style? I have an 1114 rating (provisional) and I'm from Philadelphia. **Vince Piskorski (USA)**

Answer Why don't you continue playing for Black what you already take pleasure in, namely the Pirc and the Modern. I'm also in harmony with your decision to abandon Queen-pawn openings when you have White. Otherwise, it might open you up to a double d-pawn rejoinder, with the possibility of the dreaded Queen's Gambit not far off. So with White why don't you play anything other than 1. d2-d4, say 1. e2-e4, and see what happens. Undoubtedly you need more experience before settling on a definite repertoire, so it makes sense to experiment during these learning stages, as your 1114 provisional implies. I hope these suggestions are both helpful and fit your style, not that I would respond differently if you lived anywhere else.

Question I'm 43 and just starting to study chess with the aid of the Chessmaster program. Realistically, what standard can I hope to achieve and how should I be going about studying. **Robert Asser (United Kingdom)**

Answer Doing puzzles and solving tactical problems on a steady basis should be very helpful. You can either use a book to that end (any that seem inviting are fine), or you can take advantage of the new software, such as the Chessmaster program. Whichever source you consult, I would plan on setting aside at least three or four hour or half-hour periods a week to do this. But even more important would be to play regularly against challenging opposition. Ideally, it would be great if

your play were frequently critiqued. This way you could better understand what you're doing wrong while getting suggestions on what to do about it.

What standard can you realistically achieve? That's hard to say, without knowing much more about you. In general, an intelligent 43-year old student, with sufficient time to study and play chess, should at least aim to become the equivalent of a USCF 1800 player. It's possible to achieve a higher level, but most experienced chess teachers would not make greater claims unless they felt certain, after some reasonable analysis of your potential, that you as an individual were capable of more.

Question Thanks for a very wise column. My problem is that I don't believe in myself. I'm an 1800 player, and whether I play against higher or lower rated players, I don't have any confidence to win at all. I keep on thinking that they are better than me and that affects my game. I'm not playing my usual style, etc. Could you give me advice? I'll never improve without it. **W.C. Nienaber (USA)**

Answer I'd worry less about losing and focus more on having pure fun. This you can do by winning a lot, so maybe you have to find more suitable opposition. It would help if you stopped doubting yourself. Just play your usual style. I believe in you, no matter who you play or how you do. Now go out and gain a couple of hundred rating points for the Gipper.

Question I have read that math, piano and chess all connect together. I am curious to know how true this statement is. I have spoken to a few chessplayers and some say there is no math correlation whatsoever. Other chessplayers have a strong interest in playing the piano. I am interested to read your comments on the matter. When one plays the piano and takes math lessons as extra activities will it help improve their game of chess? **Helen Jamison (USA)**

Answer There's no certified correlation between mathematics and chess, though some qualities may be useful in the performance of both disciplines. Part of the confusion on this comes about by misuse of the term mathematics. Is it particularly mathematical to count pieces and pawns? No, this is common sense arithmetic, nothing more. By the same token, how much math is needed to figure out the number of moves it takes to get somewhere on the board? The real trick is keeping the picture of it in your head. Something similar could be said for recognizing a pattern by the arrangement of pieces. Sure, it has

somewhat to do with geometry, but is such perception predominantly mathematical or simply spatial? Can we really say that the mental exercise of proving a theorem exactly corresponds to analyzing a chess position?

Nor is there evidence to confirm that mathematicians excel in chess or that chessplayers necessarily succeed in math. Of course, there are examples blending the two fields. Emanuel Lasker and Max Euwe, two world chess champions, were professional mathematicians. Math genius Carl Friedrich Gauss established that it takes five queens to influence the entire chessboard. But he wasn't interested in how this could be done chessically. He simply wanted to prove it mathematically, without any regard to specific positions whatsoever. And while Hungarian math whiz John von Neumann loved chess, his good friend Albert Einstein hated it.

Much the same kind of thinking applies to the comparison of music and chess. Now here it gets complicated, though, because both pursuits are commonly viewed as artistic. While many musical artists enjoy chess, and many chessplayers love music, very few individuals have developed real expertise in both, and surely no direct relation between chess and music has ever been established. Nonetheless, there's much general talk that suggests more intimate relationships among the three practices.

Actually, most of the scientific research has focused on just two of the three: music and math. Current studies suggest that simply listening to music won't turn you into Einstein. Listening to music analytically is another matter, and that sort of training does seem to correlate with better mathematical skills and musical expertise. Math and music get circuited close together, in the brain's left hemisphere. Interestingly, this is only a little away from one of the several locations for processing language. As for chess, we just don't know enough to say, although one recent study suggests that grandmasters input and manipulate the same chess information differently than young learners. But maybe we surmised that already.

The only nexus I know of for sure concerns prodigies. Psychologists such as David Feldman, have found that these three areas spawn prodigies in great number for some reason. The thinking is that each of these disciplines requires a special language. Some children are able to intuit these wordless tongues and go quite far, sometimes before they have acquired advanced language skills. But true masters in any field aren't made so intuitively. They still need great practice, experience, and even the use of many words.

Does this nebulous association mean that taking math or music lessons is likely to improve your chess per se? Perhaps, though if you really wanted to take lessons in math or music, you should do so because you wish to improve in either of these fields and accordingly would enjoy the challenge. To better my chess, however, I wouldn't go to a musician or mathematician. I'd go to a chessplayer, the very best one I could find, whether I liked him or not. Actually, let me think about that.

Copyright 2002 Bruce Pandolfini. All Rights Reserved.

[Yes, I have a question for Bruce!](#)



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)

[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)

[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2002 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe®**" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.