



*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



## No Opening is Worth It

**Question** I am working on an opening repertoire for White and would like to play 1. d4. Because I love to play the Queen's Gambit I usually want to play 2. c4, but that means I have to learn all the Indian, Benoni, Dutch, etc. openings as well. Even if I play or study on a daily basis, is this a realistic goal for a 1700/1800 player? **Martijn Noomen (Holland)**

**Answer** If you want to try 1. d4, try it. If you have to play 2. c4, play it. Of course your opponents can hit you with different moves and lines. That's why chess is chess. It's one of the reasons the game is so appealing. What are you going to do instead? Open with 1. e4? Wouldn't you still need to prepare yourself against a variety of plausible replies, such as the Sicilian, the French, the Modern, and so on?

There's no magic elixir here. Once you get to be a decent player, and your rating indicates that possibility, you have to expect opposition capable of defending itself. They're never going to make your job easy. Nevertheless, whichever opening move you settle on, you can still follow up with lines that satisfy your needs and style. If uncertain how to proceed, I recommend you consult a strong player or teacher to review your game and make pertinent suggestions. I could supply a few pragmatic generalities, but it's always wiser to get specific about improving one's play. Personal advice has a much better chance to succeed, and it can never hurt to learn a little bit more of the truth.



**Question** I am a 23-year-old beginning club player, rated about 1300 (estimation). I have greatly improved my game over the last six months using the ChessMaster tutorials and the “Best Lessons of a Chess Coach” book. I have focused on the endgame for a while, so I am comfortable with my endgame. What I need is to improve my openings, or build an opening repertoire. At the moment, for White I like the Ruy Lopez, and for Black I like the Sicilian. The problem is: There are so many different defenses and variations! It would be great if I could memorize them all, but that’s just not possible. It is very overwhelming. My jaw dropped just looking at the number of variations the Morphy Defense has. How do I decide what to study, for the Ruy Lopez and the Sicilian Defense? **Keith Rocha (USA)**

**Answer** It wouldn’t be unreasonable to question your statement about the endgame, but let’s not go there. Players of 1300 strength, regardless of age or talent, shouldn’t be tackling the myriad variations of any opening or defense. At your present level of play it’s more appropriate to consider the opening inductively. You should be playing over books of collected games that expatiate opening concepts and plans. Have you played through the game collections of Alekhine, Botvinnik, and Capablanca, the ABCs of chess? You’d probably learn more about the initial phase from their play and commentary than you would from books on particular variations. And I’d be surprised if you didn’t find it more enjoyable.

Invest some time in these compilations and you’re likely to develop a greater understanding of opening themes and how they transition to the middlegame. After building a solid foundation, you can attempt to specialize and be more selective. You can even start thinking about the endgame.

**Question** I’m 62, have known chess since I was 12, but never really got round to play and study it seriously. Now I’m retired and started playing at a local, informal chess club. Also, I play a lot on the Internet, mainly at ChessWorld.net, where I feel quite comfortable and enjoy the games and the friendly atmosphere. I do realize, of course, I won’t achieve a high norm in chess. That’s not my wish, but one wants to improve his play to an (unknown) level. I’m therefore trying to create a mini-maxi openings repertoire. With Black I’m okay. To 1. e4 I use the Alekhine and the Scandinavian (Center Counter), and I just bought Chessbase’s *The Pirc Defense* CD-ROM by the Grandmaster School of St. Petersburg. Perhaps I will expand this small repertoire with the Sicilian Accelerated Dragon. With White I only play 1. d4. Recently I came across an opening I didn’t know, the King’s Indian

Attack. Do you think this is a good one to expand to on my openings repertoire for White? And what about Eric Schiller's book *A Hypermodern Openings Repertoire for White*? It's based on the Reti and the English and is in some way, I think, more or less related to the King's Indian Attack. Thank you very much for your advice. I always read your Q & A. **Jan Pot (Belgium)**

**Answer** I am not familiar with Schiller's book, but the King's Indian Attack is a fine opening to learn. With some modification, it can be played against practically anything and anyone, including your local grandmaster. The rudiments are not hard to remember, and the first five moves or so seem to play themselves. As the name implies, it's related to the King's Indian Defense, except that White gets to play it with an extra move. That's why it's called an attack, whether or not White bothers to launch one. If you're going to rely on the KIA for White, there's an argument to be made for also learning the KID for Black against d4 openings. It'll give you more experience with some related motifs, though not all and not with exact correspondence. Moreover, because of the transitional possibilities, it does make sense to explore the Reti and English. Each of them can branch into King's Indian Attack lines, and it can go the other way too. Reti and English situations can arise from the KIA. Makes you want to play one of them, doesn't it?

**Question** My rating is 1305 Australian and I have the Fritz6 program. I beat Fritz6 at around 1700 with White and around 1500 with Black. Should I be beating players of that rating in competition or should I be beating players of a higher rating? I have beaten a player rated 1590 once with Black. Also, I seem to have lost the art of seeing moves ahead. Could you please tell me what I can do to fix this problem of seeing ahead? **Gary Newton (Australia)**

**Answer** With your first question I think you're really asking something else: Do the Fritz6 ratings correspond well to ratings earned in over-the-board competition? The answer is no, they don't. But let's not pick on Fritz. None of the other commercial products (nor any of the Internet services) reflect a one-to-one ratio between their ratings and real ratings. A better gauge of whom you should be beating over the board is the rating you actually earn over the board. If you want to describe your backyard, start with your backyard.

About seeing ahead. It takes an awful lot of study to attain the expertise and facility to perform any aspect of chess as an art. So it's doubtful that you've lost anything, let alone the "art of seeing moves ahead." There are ways, however, to improve your calculation of

variations. By far the most important training is to analyze without moving the pieces. Do this regularly, always working out the probable moves and lines in your head, and over the long haul your analytic skills should sharpen. Indeed, your ability to do this may even develop into an art. If not, perhaps it will at least demonstrate a good deal of craft.

**Question** In a recent column you wrote "...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?" I quite agree, but find the "seeing ahead" part of the game to be quite difficult. Are there ways to develop this ability? Also, I would be very appreciative if you could provide a brief list of some useful books of chess puzzles (I'm fairly new to chess literature). Finally, with a view to choosing a couple of openings to concentrate on, I'm searching for a good current instructional book that would explain the how's and why's of the openings. I have Byron Jacob's book *Mastering the Opening*, and find that although it presents its information very well, it lacks depth and discussion of particular moves. (I enjoyed my dad's books by I. Horowitz, but I suspect they're quite dated, and my chess computer will often make a move on its third or fourth move that Horowitz doesn't cover.) I would be extremely grateful for any assistance you could provide in these matters. **Nathan Bauman (Canada)**

**Answer** You can improve your skill at "seeing" positions by trying to analyze in your head as often as possible. This may not be an aspect of your problem, but if you find that controlling yourself is difficult, that it's hard to resist a board and pieces once they're set up, never take them out in the first place. Better yet, hide the set or give it away, preferably to someone who isn't concerned with visualization.

Work with diagrams. When you're considering a puzzle, just focus on the puzzle. Only consult the notes and answers after you've spent some time with the chess picture. And don't be afraid to close your eyes and do some thinking and imagining without looking at anything. If you've ever seen Kasparov play a chess game, you can't miss how he occasionally looks away from the board, sometimes even at the ceiling, obviously trying to blot out the visual noise so that he can think without interference.

There are a ton of chess puzzle books. Even the ones universally despised have utility. They contain diagrams, which is what most sentient chess beings require. Rather than telling you the name of a

volume that might work for you – an apparently nice person, but one whose chess needs are somewhat nebulous – why don't you check out the ChessCafe online catalogue. It has sufficient information and description to help you make a discriminating selection. In the same catalogue you'll also encounter books that explain opening concepts. Some of these manuals, though not all, offer Horowitz's bold clarity in a contemporary setting.

**Question** I was reading the Sept. 25 article, and I read your answer to the kid going to boarding school. I am just curious as to what exactly the program advocated by Jack Collins is? Could you give some information about the man and his plan, or tell me where I could find it? **Jesse Wilson (New Zealand)**

**Answer** Mr. Collins passed away last year. He never really put his plan in print. In conversations with him and his students that spanned some thirty years, I deduced this much. The course consisted of between 1000-1500 games, from various texts. Essentially, the student had to play through 100 games of every world champion. If he couldn't come up with 100 games for a particular player, he'd go with whatever could be found.

In addition to the world champions, Collins tapped the games of Tarrasch, Rubinstein, Pillsbury, Marshall, Nimzovich, and other immortals. The course wasn't a rigorous one in the strictest sense. He didn't give any tests, and the same collections weren't always used. If anything, Jack mainly played with his students, trying to teach them in practical ways. He had great presence, naturally inspiring people to learn about the game. Despite Jack's encouragement, not every one of his students followed the program. Some even wondered what I was talking about when I brought it up, so I stopped mentioning it. Unfortunately, I put it in a column and now have to account for my words, ill-considered as they were. But I still think Jack had a wonderful idea.

**Question** I recently picked up a Graham Burgess book, *Chess, Tactics and Strategy*. In the book Burgess says "of all the masters I have known, only one has used the term pigs for rooks – Seirawan." Waitzkin, in *Attacking Chess*, says you used the term in your lessons with him. Where did you learn the term "pigs?" **Jim Jones (USA)**

**Answer** The term was very popular in American chess circles back when I was kid, especially in Washington Square Park and at the Manhattan and Marshall Chess Clubs. But it didn't signify any old

rook. It referred particularly to a rook on the 7<sup>th</sup> rank. Now that was a true pig.

When I was a teenager, I asked Al Horowitz why such a rook was called a pig. Horowitz – who was a real verbissener – proceeded to use his rook to chomp a bunch of his opponent's pawns in a money game. "It just eats, and eats, and eats," he noted dourly. Once Al Horowitz explained anything, it stuck.

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