



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



Exclam This!

Question I have two short questions. First, I keep getting upset by annotations used by many American chess analysts. They go over a game by a great player for example and 50% of analysis comes down to: "Oh, what a great move, brilliant discovery, blah blah blah, 10 exclamation points..." and also vague generalizations about positions "White has advantage" when he is up a piece, etc - seems like they have little informative to contribute. To what extent do you share in this observation? And another question, do you suppose it's better for improvement to analyze game texts of the greats or read ready analysis? Or may be better do first then second? **Sergei Kanevsky (USA)**

Answer I don't share in your observation, nor do I think it qualifies as an observation, as the word is ordinarily used, even at the Moscow Chess Club. No matter. Surely you must admit there are countless American analysts of the first rank, several of whom recently took part in the U.S. Championship, including Alexander Shabalov, Gregory Kaidanov, Alexander Goldin, Boris Gulko, Eugene Perelshteyn, Alexander Stripunsky, Alex Yermolinsky, Varuzhan Akobian, Igor Foygel, Alexander Ivanov, Gregory Serper, Dmitry Gurevich, and Anatoly Lein, just to name a baker's dozen. I've never seen any of them write blah, blah, blah. With one exception, I've never heard any of them say it either. I'm still trying to decode your second query, since there may be something significant underlying it.



Question Could you please clarify what exactly in chess is the so-called Minority Attack? Are there openings from which it typically arises? If so, would you please be so kind to name some of them? **A. Balkan (Brazil)**

Answer The *minority attack* signifies the combined action of pawn advances and piece activities in a particular sector (for example, on the kingside or queenside). That is, the campaign is delivered by one or more pawns against a larger group of pawns, and the overall assault is typically supported by friendly pieces. The usual aim of the minority attack is to exchange off one's own potential weaknesses in order to transfer their debilitating affects to the opponent. The minority attack can prosper whenever the situation generates pawn imbalances. They occur frequently in certain variations of the Queen's Gambit. A stellar illustration of that motif is the game Evans-Opsahl, from the 1950 Olympiad, which can be found in Irving Chernev's *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played*.

Question I've played chess for about 5 years, and I have been trying to improve for about a year. My rating in our local federation has been 1840 for quite awhile. I have talked to strong players, and they tell me that at my level all I can do to improve is to memorize (study) openings and combinations. Unfortunately, I'd rather study an endgame or try to understand strategic questions in chess games. I love endgames and positional play, and although I know that tactics complete strategy, I only like to study strategy. Does that mean that I can never improve my game or there are other methods to do so?

Christian Avila (Brazil)

Answer There are scores of ways to study chess, perhaps more than all the grandmasters sunning themselves on all the beaches of the world. Indeed, even those elite performers will recommend the study of openings and tactics. But almost none of them will tell you to ignore endgames and strategy, barring momentary confusion over a recent setback. Whatever aspect of chess you study, just keep pursuing the game with passion. If that doesn't work, then the world is truly unfair and nothing really matters.

Question I am an avid pusher of the pawns, and love chess history of the Greats of Chess. In your well-informed opinion, who are the top 5 greatest World Champions? (I realize this question is very difficult to answer because of different eras, difficulty gauging strength of opponents, and many past champions didn't have access to Pentium 3 and 4 computers. In spite of all those variables, I ask you the task of who are your top 5 players of all time. **John Dunajcik (USA)**

Answer Finally, an easy question. But I need to clarify some things. Are we talking about now, or in the future? Are we including computers? Are we basing our answer on ratings, or results in certain types of competitions? Ought we to consider duration at the top, or number of games played as champion? Is superiority over rivals more meaningful than all-time numerical ranking? Do we take notice of the amount of textbook examples and analytic references drawn from their play? Are we to pay attention to published opinions? Does chronological appearance play a role? What about factoring in their writings? Should we compare people who've never played each other, and had no common opponents? So you see, it's a fairly easy inquiry to satisfy, once we've answered a number of preliminary questions first.

Question I have been playing chess online for years. I was fairly serious about it. I just recently began playing in OTB tournaments. When lunchtime rolls around, I find myself at a loss. What is the best for my game? Should I pig out on candy bars? Should I eat an apple? It seems Mexican food has its own advantages. Please help. **Daniel Barber (USA)**

Answer I can understand your culinary cry for help, though finding a kitchen muse might not furnish the solution you seek. The German poet Friedrich Schiller used to keep rotten apples in his desk for inspiration. He stank at chess, but claimed the odor stimulated his literary genius. Who knows where he would have gone with Mexican food. Perhaps the same place I had to go after struggling to digest your question.

Question I play a lot of online blitz (3 or 5 minute) averaging about 2100 on ICC, WCN, Playchess etc. I find that when going back to slow chess at 35 moves in 75 minutes plus 15 minutes playoff in my local league, I hardly feel that I play any better moves at the slow time limit than I do at the fast one. Can you suggest ways of making the maximum use of one's time at slower time limits. **Mark Hannon (England)**

Answer There's nothing wrong with playing both fast and slow chess. Just make sure one doesn't come right on the heels of the other. You wouldn't want to continue merrily along as if the conditions haven't changed. Especially when they have. Playing fast chess is one thing. But if you're playing slower chess, try to utilize more of its defining characteristic – time. Take the time to consider possibilities, and you

won't have to reply as instinctively as you might in online rapids.

In order to use time efficaciously it helps to have a routine, a set of steps you can follow when you don't know what to do. When you do know what to do, you'll just do it, dispensing with routine altogether. Not surprisingly, even players of the same skill level have different procedures, so you'll have to work out what's comfortable for you. But generally it's prudent to divide your thinking twofold: what you do on your move and what you do on your opponent's.

On your move, make sure you understand your opponent's last move, if it issues any threats, and whether or not it responds to your previous plays. Since your clock is running, you shouldn't dither. You need to be specific and get on with it. Things are entirely different when your opponent's clock is ticking. That's when you can let your mind explore and wander. It's on your opponent's turn that you can ask investigative questions about planning, evaluate future attacking possibilities, and consider potential enemy threats you must ward off before they become monstrous. If you partition your thinking accordingly, being specific and general at the appropriate times while maintaining your concentration, you should squeeze a little more out of your play – and that's in a game where little things really matter.

Question I am 21-years old and started playing chess at age 4. Even though I always loved the game very much and was reasonably talented, I wasn't able to find a steady chess partner to polish my skills and never tried to compete in tournaments as well. My rating has been estimated several times at 1700 back when I was playing in school at age 13-14. After a 4 years break, my strength significantly decreased thus leaving me in a lot of trouble with 1200 players. I was wondering if you had any tips or advice to quickly get rid of the rust? My other question would be the following: I live in a small town where people are poor and quite bored. Recently, I had the idea of starting a chess club and bought several sets for that purpose. They almost never heard of the game and are quite enthusiasts about it so it looks like it's gonna be a big success. My problem is that I am planning to teach the "Comprehensive Chess Course (1 & 2)" by Lev Alburt and Roman Pelts to kids between 11 and 17 years old (plus some adults). Would you consider I have enough background and knowledge to do more good to my students than the opposite? What would the do's and don'ts be? **Mickaël Nadeau (Canada)**

Answer To get back in shape I'd recommend doing two things posthaste. First, you should inundate yourself with tactical exercises, trying to solve book after book of them without moving the pieces. If

you're not sure where to start, get a big source text (such as Polgar's wonderful *Chess* or that terrific volume by Alburt and Pelts) and plunge into it. At first, don't worry about the difficulty of the examples. If they're too hard, move on to those you sense you can handle. If you feel they're a little basic, you can always proceed through them more expeditiously. It's even okay to look at examples you've seen before, since you can always review secondhand material and profit anew. If you once put away a particular problem in a minute, the next time you see it try to find the answer in thirty seconds. Aim to get so aware of themes that you can look and know, without too much analysis at all. That way you can reserve the real thinking for when it truly counts, for more complex situations and for actual play.

That brings us to the second thing you need to do: play a lot of chess. Whether the games are fast or slow, waged under tournament conditions or not, you should hunt down the most challenging opponents available. Play at all times of day, under varying conditions, until you feel more battle-ready. But whatever the circumstances, whether you're fresh or tired, the play is offhand or serious, give it your all. You can't expect to benefit meaningfully from an activity without making a personal commitment to the investment.

Are you qualified to teach others? Only you and your students can determine that. But your questions are logical and your concern seems quite genuine. I think I'd be willing to risk sending my own students to you. Unfortunately, I don't have any that far north.

Question How does someone go about learning how to play blindfolded. I have a hard time studying books because I need a board in front of me or Chessmaster. I wish to study in my head for the convenience of it. **Emidio Santos (USA)**

Answer If you really mean blindfold chess, you might start by wearing a blindfold. But perhaps you mean something else. Maybe you'd like to learn how to analyze in your head, without moving the pieces. If that's what you're after, the way to improve is quite simple. Just analyze in your head every chance you get, with no exceptions. It may be difficult at first, but if you regularly force yourself to see variations and move sequences by imagining and visualizing, you'll get better at it eventually. Doing so may never quite become convenient, but surely practice should improve your facility for such calculations. There are no tricks to replace talent and hard work. If you already have the talent, fine. It will take you so far. But there's no

escaping the work.

Question Recently I persuaded a friend of mine who didn't play very often to play a game with me. The result: She turned into a chess maniac. But I think she will soon be frustrated because she doesn't have the feeling that her game improves (although it does). So my question: Are there any exercises or something that you could recommend to her? **Thomas Ferenci (Austria)**

Answer You may want to pick up a copy of *Das leidenschaftliche Spiel*, by Gustav Schenk (Carl Schünemann Verlag, Berlin 1936). The English version is called *The Passionate Game*, and since the book is all about a kind gentleman who teaches a female companion chess, both you and your friend might benefit from the reflection it provides.

I think it's best that you recommend the exercises. Beyond that, she probably needs some winning and a little encouragement. For the typical chessplayer the two are practically synonymous. The problem could be that she's only playing you, and losing all the games. If so, find her other opponents to play with, preferably some for whom she could hold her own. But if she's been beating you, then something is not quite right in Austria.

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