



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



It's Not in That Book -

Chico Marx

Question I have purchased a few chess books (including some of yours) and I really want to learn the openings. I don't want to memorize a bunch of moves. I would rather learn why certain moves are made, and the principles behind the openings. Is there a book that could help me? **Wayne Raschka (USA)**

Answer Reuben Fine's *The Ideas Behind The Chess Openings* was one of the first books to explain the opening concepts of particular variations. But through the years texts that elucidate chess openings have proliferated and now their combined weight is warping the shelves at fine libraries and book emporia right near you.

I suspect, however, that you're not necessarily going to be satisfied by any one title, no matter its quality or completeness. You can read the best book and still feel frustrated if it doesn't answer your questions suitably. Indeed, the answers you seek might not be found in good books. It could be that you have to get your insights from a few bad books or from no books in particular. Perhaps you'll have to make your most meaningful advances over the course of time by continually facing and overcoming challenging real-game hurdles. That's one of the most reliable ways to gain discernment in chess or anything else: to accumulate enough experience so that you can say with Socratic wisdom that you don't really comprehend very much at all. But at that point you should know at least two things. The first is that no one book, whether it's *The Republic* or the collected jottings of the greatest chessplayer who ever lived, can tell you everything you need to know. The second is that failing to find that book won't stop you from enjoying the study and play of the world's most fascinating game.

Question Hi, sir. Here is a short one! Can you give me the game or at least the final position and the final moves of the famous game in the film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*? **Richard Lefebvre (Canada)**

Answer I could do that, though you might find the actual moves to be chessically immaterial. It was created less with the principles of chess in mind than the dramatic

requirements of filmmaking. Nonetheless, the game did have a redeeming feature. The viewers were not treated to the usual cliché in which one player assertively announces check and the other smiles slyly before responding with checkmate, a situation occurring maybe once a day somewhere on the planet. Now that I think about it, I can't remember the game, but I know it ends in a pawn race resulting in a skewer check and a queen being captured on h8. I can't forget that because cinematographer Conrad Hall had me reset the position twelve times to make sure we got it right. All dozen takes ended with the correct take on h8, and I don't think any of those were mate.

Question I was wondering what the percentages are for being top dog??? For example, if you're an expert or master chess player, are you in the top ten percent or top one percent in the nation or world?? I have the same question for a Class A player as well. I was just curious because I'm a class B player with about 40 games under my belt and I've learned how to play chess 3 or 4 years ago. I want to know how good a Master, Expert, and Class A chess player is with respect to the rest of the chess players in the nation or world? **LCpl David A. Slocum (USA)**

Answer I can't speak about the world (not here), but according to the USCF rating charts for the year 2002, some 23,744 members were rated, and 9,508 of them were scholastic players. The average rating for the 14,236 non-scholastic players was 1485, while the average rating for everyone together was 1161. Since you're in the Marines I'm going to assume you've registered as a non-scholastic member.

The USCF numbers might surprise some people, especially in certain classes. Class-B players fell between the 83.55 and 88.08 percentiles. Players in the A-Class were in the 92.00 to 94.87 percentiles. Experts checked in between the 96.99 and the 98.20 percentiles. Masters filled in the void between the 99.22 and the 99.57 percentiles. All others were in either higher or lower percentile groups, and not unexpectedly, different classes. Since the year is not over yet, and many things could still happen, it's hard to say how it's going to wind up in 2003. I hope this makes clear some of the percentages you need to know in order to appreciate top-doggedness.

Question I am 32 years-old, and I have once again come back to competitive chess after yet another leave of absence. I have recently discovered the joys of web-based correspondence chess. Playing this way is particularly convenient for me as I am the father of a 21-month-old child. CC offers me full flexibility as to when and where I can play. My question is the following: would you recommend CC to intermediate chess players as a tool for improving their play? Obviously, time management is very different than in OTB games but I hope I am right in expecting CC to help me think deeper (rather than faster.) Indeed, for the first time in my chessic life, I find myself double-checking my moves and think one last time about my opponent's potential threats and replies before moving. **Jean-Philippe C. Stijns (USA)**

Answer I advocate virtually all forms of chess as a way to develop one's game, including correspondence chess and its subset on the web. Of course, being mindful that a lot goes on in the universe, I'd restrict my response to context. If you're asking whether correspondence chess could help a player advance more than other forms of chess, I'd have to qualify my answer. For example, if you tend to take too long to move and incessantly find yourself in time trouble, I wouldn't recommend correspondence chess as a way to surmount the problem. If you

ordinarily move too quickly, however, and don't seem to invest enough time in weighing options and reasonable possibilities, then correspondence chess might prove to be beneficial. Undoubtedly, if you habitually play too fast, you'll want to place yourself in circumstances where you have more time to ponder prospects, and, indeed, correspondence chess does afford ample time for deliberate thought. But it couldn't hurt to play with slower time controls in general, nor would it detract from the quality of your play if you consumed more time when practicing. Taking both of those tacks would likely improve your game as well.

Question A friend and I played a game over lunch, and this time I won. I often record the moves and then enter them into ChessBase Light to see where I could've done better. The problem is that the computer showed I had inadvertently played an illegal move (castling after moving the King many moves before), but neither of us realized it at the time. I know the rule, but had forgotten the King had moved to d8. I checked the FIDE website, specifically rule 7.4, but all the rules seem to begin with "If during a game it is found that...." I was glad when he tipped his King, but don't want to have won this way. What happens if "it is found" after the game is over? **Michael Montgomery (USA)**

Answer Rule 101 of the Common Sense Handbook tells us that if the game is over it's over. Whether the mistake wasn't discovered during the contest or one of you purposefully tricked the other or some third unforeseen event transpired (there must be at least one that would work here), it doesn't matter (it does, but it really doesn't). So keep your point, and be thankful ChessBase Light lacks a sense of humor and a chance to eat lunch with your friend.

Question I apologize in advance for not using the correct terms, but I'm somewhat confused. I have no idea what my rating is, but as a guideline, I win about half my games on Yahoo.com against players of about 1200 (I know this doesn't tell you much but it's all I have). I have found dozens of books that describe the basics, and piles of them that discuss openings etc., but even the texts that claim to be "intermediate" seem to assume that I know what a Sicilian opening is (or is that a defense?).

My chess game is much like my golf game, in that, I go out and hack away without really going to the driving range to learn the stroke (if you get my meaning). I read a book that describes a game that was previously played by a Master, and annotates the "why" behind his/her moves, but after they give me a list of 3-4 moves I can't visualize the board in head any longer. I do have ChessMaster software, and that has a large number of games in it, but somehow I'm not even sure how to analyze them. Again, I'm sorry for being so basic, but I seem to have hit a block on how to become a better player. Watching out for potential skewers, forks etc. is fairly straightforward (not that I catch them all the time by any means) and I can formulate an attack without leaving myself too exposed, but beyond that I get a little lost. I see mention of how d4 vs. e4 can lead to an open or closed board, and I can't even see that. I'm not opposed to doing some studying or reading, but I feel it should be of some value or I'd just sit and enjoy a game. I think I'm on the verge of taking my game to the next level of understanding, but need some guidance. **Michael Derksen (USA)**

Answer I think you're doing fine. You have obvious energy and seem naturally curious. Even better, you'd rather sit and enjoy the

experience. That's great, and that's the very disposition of mind a relatively unseasoned player needs in order to make significant progress. There's no better way to enrich one's play than contesting stimulating chess games on a frequent basis. But it also sounds as if you're willing to do some work, as long as it doesn't curtail your enjoyment of the activity. That being so, why don't you give the following suggestion a try?

Start a journal. Every time you play chess and have a question about the position, write it down and date the entry. Regularly review your journal, and where possible and appropriate, seek answers from books, magazines, other chessplayers, software, and the Internet. Even if you never quite get your questions addressed succinctly, the constant perusal of your notebook should induce an influentially unconscious effect on your studies and play so that you indirectly and almost intuitively begin to understand what you never did in the first place. It works like magic, and not even magic does that.

Question I always read your Q & A's with great interest and enthusiasm for your wisdom and clear-cut answers. In one of your recent columns you refer several times to analyze tactical position-diagrams. A couple of months ago I received an e-mail from Jeremy Silman in reply to my question to make the most of my chess study at age 62. I own his two books, *How to Reassess Your Chess* and *The Amateur's Mind*. In his reply he recommended: (1) *How to Reassess Your Chess* to page 28; (2) Read *The Amateur's Mind* from cover to cover; (3) Read *How to Reassess Your Chess* further and completely; (4) Read *How to Reassess Your Chess – Workbook* completely; and to "Get yourself a book with tactical positions and, as you recommend yourself, analyze some positions every five minutes or so you have."

I have two questions. Why should one read a book's first 28 pages, then read another fully, and then return to the first volume? Please note this isn't criticizing Jeremy Silman, I highly respect him as a chess writer! I then bought John Emm's *The Ultimate Chess Puzzle Book*, with no less than 1,000 positions to solve! What I find difficult, when analyzing a diagram, is that when it's Black's move, the diagrams do not reflect a realistic position. What I mean is: Why aren't the diagrams so placed that Black is turned to the player's side, just as in a real OTB game? With the state-of-the-art technology we enjoy, this would be a piece of cake, wouldn't it? I thank you in advance for your wise words. **Jan Pot (Belgium)**

Answer I can't speak for Jeremy, but maybe he thought the initial 28 pages of the first book was a proper lead-in to the entire second book. He also may have concluded that the natural follow-up to the second book was the remaining portion of the first book, from page 29 on. That makes perfect sense. As good as *How to Reassess Your Chess* is, and it's certainly one of the best chess books to appear in the past twenty years, it was not written solely to fulfill your needs as an individual, but rather to meet the requirements of a whole class of readers, none of whom were precisely you (actually, you might want to

confirm this with Jeremy). Nor would I fault him for recommending his own books. They were probably the ones most available.

In answering your second question, I agree that it wouldn't tax modern technology to post the diagrams so that the side to move is always located at the base of the diagram. But why do you assume that such standardization is necessarily a good thing? Imagining yourself sitting on the other side of a diagram is analogous to looking ahead in general. It's just an act of visualization, and the more practice you get seeing in your head and picturing the board from different perspectives the better. Still, there's no reason that most situations and problems have to be posed and viewed from the White side of the board, despite what purists seem to prefer. In fact, it would please me no end if all positions were presented from the Black side, just to vex the heck out of all those it would bother.

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 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

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 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

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