



*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 Caro Can Can

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



Question I have been playing chess now for about 7 years, virtually everyday for hours on. Lately, I have been playing this opening which is probably a transposition, but as of yet I still can't find it in any books. It starts out like a Caro-Kann. Against most unrated guests and other amateurs I seem to be scoring well with it. Only once in a while do I lose. And, boy, do I lose!!!! Well, anyway, I was just wondering if you had any opinions about it. It starts e4/c6, d4/e5, dxe5. From this point I usually play Bc5 or Ne7, a curious opening gambit. It seems positionally good for White, but so far I seem to be throwing most of my opponents off guard. Well, that's my question. I would love to hear your comments about it. Maybe I found something in the Caro-Kann that has been overlooked and may become a surprise weapon for masters and grandmasters. **Jack Morris (USA)**

Answer I applaud your invention and exuberance, but I have a few doubts. Besides the probable unsoundness of the gambit, I don't see how the pawn being at c6 does much for your game, given the way you are following up, unless you have something in mind that I haven't considered. Are you planning to support the advance of the d-pawn or to give the queen access to the queenside? In either case, I don't see that White has much to fear. Of course, if you really like it, I suppose you could even play it from a double king-pawn defense against those you know will continue with 2. d2-d4. In that case you could trick them and play 2...c7-c6, reaching the same gambit by transposition. I am not sure if your idea will attract many grandmasters. But they laughed at Pasteur, and think what milk would be like without him. So you go right ahead. It's people such as you, braving the unknown with new ideas and weapons of thought, who may one day guide the rest of us to enlightenment.

Question I have a question regarding opening training - particularly using Fritz. As Black, I want to develop a repertoire against 1.d4 and 1.e4. So, against 1.d4 I



might want to try the Nimzo-Indian and against 1.e4, I might want to try the Sicilian. The problem is that under each general defense, there are large numbers of variations, such as the Dragon or the Najdorf. Moreover, what I end up playing is going to depend on white's second move. So, I'm not sure exactly how I go about developing a small and focused repertoire. Can you offer advice? I hope that was clear. **David Kaplan (USA)**

Answer You could take any of several different approaches to develop a serviceable repertory. Numerous books treat this very problem, offering the reader a set of consistent replies, for both White and Black, to whatever reasonable moves might occur in the opening. You could go to a large bookstore and review the titles, looking for an appropriate one. Quite possibly you'll find a treatise that works for you. You could also go through the online catalogs, many of which provide a sufficient description of hundreds of new books and see what you can find in those.

Another idea is to adopt the opening repertoire of a particular good player. They've already done the assignment for you, so to speak, and they wouldn't have gotten terribly far unless their own systems were decent ones. Just pick up a game collection or two of a player you admire and use that as the backbone for your own set of openings and defenses. You could even assume the responses of your favorite software, not that the logic there is likely to be as strong as it would be in the games of a great competitor. Even so, it's a starting point, and you can always modify the variations as you begin to feel more comfortable.

You might also consider asking a strong player or teacher to evaluate your game, to see what lines he or she thinks are suitable for you. And finally, perhaps you don't have to worry so much about studying lines at all. Maybe you could do what thousands of players do: just play and go along with what comes into your mind over the course of time, from move to move and session to session, experiencing the joy of learning by losing hundreds of games to good players. They'll show you what to do and not to do (by taking your pawns and mating you), and you'll have the additional satisfaction of knowing that you've given them many moments of incalculable pleasure. What goes around comes around, and eventually you'll get paid back for your time, effort, and magnanimous spirit.

Question When we prepare for a particular 'opening' for Black with the help of Encyclopedia of Chess Opening (ECO), after adopting a line we come across a symbol '=' (equality). Though we know that it would be sufficient for a player with Black if he gets equality at the earliest, what would be preferable for the White player? Whether he can prefer 'unclear' for 'equality' line (leave alone 'slight plus for white'). Also, what is the exact meaning of 'equality'? Whether both the players can easily identify the equality position on the board during the play? Kindly clarify. **S.Susil Kumar (India)**

Answer Don't place too much emphasis on these evaluations. I think it was Emanuel Lasker who said that one out of every three of them are wrong (he

actually said he'd be willing to argue the other side). Try to move away from merely accepting these symbols. Instead, work on understanding the reasoning that produced them. White wants to at least maintain his opening initiative, emerging with the better middlegame prospects (some definite advantage, such as greater space, continued initiative, superior dynamics, or some combination of elements conferring a playable edge).

When we say the position is equal, that doesn't mean the game should end in a draw. It could mean that both players have about equal chances to win, which indeed may result in a draw, or that White's strengths are offset by Black's, or both, or even something else. In all cases, it really helps to spell out what is meant by the term "equal." And when a move or position is said to be unclear, that generally suggests that it's impossible to say for sure who will get the upper hand, mainly because analysis isn't conclusive. That's why symbols can't compare with language, where so much more can be explained and clarified. Symbols tend to delineate either too little or too much. We usually rely on words to paint in the color.

I'm not saying that you should ignore these assessments. But try to comprehend their source and don't be afraid to question them. When you can do that – when you're not dependent on other people's detritus – that's when you know you've really arrived. Good luck. You sound like a sincere chessplayer and I'm sure you're ready to rely on your own thinking.

Question Love your column. I read it all the time. Just a quick general interest query for ya. Any clue as to how many Grandmasters (both male and female) there are currently in the world? Are there separate norms between the genders???? I remember reading that somewhere. Why bother making the distinction? If the Polgar sisters can do it, why shouldn't other females be expected to raise their game? Just curious on your thoughts. **Matt Arguin (Canada)**

Answer A grandmaster is a grandmaster, whether it be male, female, or e-mail, unless the title is not "grandmaster" but something else, such as "other type of grandmaster," or some diminishing "other" appellation. Judith and Susan Polgar have achieved the actual grandmaster title, with no qualification, and they aren't alone. Most women now play without expecting any quarter, and considering the nature of the typical male player, that's the way it should be. Presently, there are anywhere between 550-600 grandmasters in the world. I do not know how many of these are or claim to be men. I think there may be about 100 women who have won the lesser distinction of women's grandmaster, and some of these have garnered the general title, and a few of them may even be better than that. I'd suggest the creation of an even higher title, but someone important might take me seriously.

Question I am a chess student. I know the opening, and I know many middle games. But I wonder what is the strategy I should use the most in most chess positions. I have heard it described that there is one primitive strategy I should

know very well. Do you know what the strategy is? **Ahmed Elgindy (Libya)**

Answer I not exactly sure what you're asking. If chess shows us anything it's that there's usually an appropriate strategy and it should be determined by the specific circumstances before you. If you're wondering whether certain strategies seem to happen more often than others, I'd answer most definitely "yes."

The two most typical strategies in chess are to simplify or to complicate. All the elements can weigh in here, but let's just focus on material. You should simplify when you are ahead in material, for example, because you'll want to emphasize your material advantage while keeping control of the situation. In contrast, you should complicate when behind in material because you'll need to preserve the material you have in order to get back in the game. Also, by keeping it complex, there's a greater possibility your opponent could go astray and throw away his or her advantage.

Generally, you simplify by trading pieces and avoiding unclear variations. You complicate by avoiding trades and seeking difficult to analyze variations. Most of chess is about control. The superior side tries to maintain control and the inferior side tries get control, and so it's natural for the strategies that drive these particular movements to predominate. I don't think I would describe either approach as being primitive, though it might be presumptuous to speak with the same confidence for some of the players who regularly employ these strategies.

Question I love chess and hope to become a chess teacher. People tell me I'm about what would be considered a 1600 USCF player, though I am not officially rated. I need to create a teaching system or repertoire for my students, and I don't know where to start. Obviously, you have made a living in this area (everyone says this). How did you get started? Maybe what you did would be useful to me. I need to start somewhere, and I also worry about teaching chess as a business, since I lack the knowledge how to do it. It would be alright to get one of your humorous answers. **Anthony Franco (USA)**

Answer When I first started in this business it wasn't a business. And personally I had no real talent for chess, teaching, commerce, or anything else. Actually, what I loved to do was read, though I didn't have much aptitude for that either. But it was 1972, Bobby Fischer was conquering the world, and it was one of those things where I happened to be at the right place at the right time – I guess. I was granted opportunities and worked hard to take advantage of them. Since I didn't know what I was talking about, or frankly how to teach at all, I started by consulting the few texts out there that seemed to organize the lessons in a logical and stimulating way. You know, those by Reinfeld and Chernev, writers admired by every serious player.

I began collecting interesting didactic positions: examples that really illustrated useful points and did so in exciting but instructionally clear variations. It took awhile, but as the positions accumulated, and my familiarity with them

increased to the extent that I could pretend to know what I was talking about, the word got out and I began to attract more and more students. The situation fed off itself, and old students who should have despised me but didn't were encouraging new ones to seek me out. Soon it became possible to earn a living from doing what I realized I enjoyed doing the most.

Along the way I continued to improve my storylines while observing good teachers in action, to see if what they offered could be adapted to my own method. I'd say the teachers I learned the most from were Shelby Lyman, George Kane, Frank Thornally, Sal Matera, Julio Kaplan, Larry D. Evans, and Jack Collins, but certainly I benefited from many other fine teachers as well. I doubt that any of them gained as much from me as I gained from them, especially if we factor in the particular students I actually did encourage to take their lessons.

In due course I grew tired of hearing myself talk and elected to follow a new path. I decided to bring nothing pre-packaged to lessons and treat each student and situation as being truly unique. My teaching would thereby stay fresh and challenging, and I could get by without having to prepare anything. My secret plan was to convince students that they could do it all on their own, without my help – in fact, it would be to their advantage to get rid of me. Somehow this backfired and my dearth of true understanding became paradoxically appealing to them. Suddenly, I had more students than ever before. So you see, if you don't know how or what to teach but make your lack of knowledge a selling point, thereby turning a weakness into a strength, you'll have no trouble putting yourself over as a chess teacher. You might even make a living at it.

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