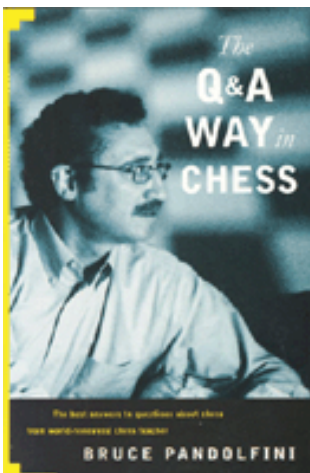




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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 ChessCafe column...

Yes, I have a question for Bruce!

Think Before you Think

Question I remember reading somewhere that you advocated taking one's time if one's opponent were in time trouble. That doesn't seem right to me. Shouldn't you be moving quickly, hoping to make the opponent forfeit? I respect your opinion but your remarks on the subject hit me as being a little off. However, I do like your column and enjoy reading it every month. **Jon Williamson (USA)**

Answer I'm not sure what I said, or if it was me who said it, though I say many dumb things and wish I hadn't. Still, I don't think the advice you're alluding to, whether it came from me or someone else, is off the mark. If your opponent is in time trouble, he or she is likely to be more in tune to the exigencies of the board than you. If you try to blitz your opponent, you're going to be superficial, playing the most obvious moves – the very ones he or she has probably been considering.

A more prudent strategy, it seems to me, would be to start with mindfulness of that condition, factoring your opponent's state into your decision-making. You therefore might find greater profit in opting for a less likely, but good move nonetheless, one on which your opponent has probably invested insufficient time analyzing, if at all. The surprise will likely force your opponent to spend extra time judging it and calculating variations, and that should make him or her more nervous and capable of overstepping or committing a time-pressure mistake. You're not liable to discover such a suitable move if you haven't thought about it.

I would suggest, if plausible, finding and playing a move that contains two threats, one obvious and one more subtle. There's a chance your opponent might focus merely on the palpable threat and overlook the hidden or intangible

one completely. So I agree with you. You shouldn't waste time. You should act with dispatch. But don't just play the first obvious move that comes into your mind. Your opponent's already seen it.

Question I would like to begin tutoring students in chess when I move to the USA in a few years. I have a huge personal library and have been noting all the key positions that gave me "eureka" moments and archiving analysis which I hope to use. Before I move, I plan to spend at least one year competing at chess, but only after I can reasonably hold my own against [Fritz](#). I reckon I can get back to my once glorious 2266 rating. My question is – once I arrive, what steps do I need to take? Are there any organizations I need to join; any qualifications I need to hold, etc? Also how does one go about advertising themselves as a chess tutor? I missed out on my opportunity to play serious chess when I was a kid, but I hope I can make some kind of valuable contribution to help someone else pursue their love of the game in competition. Any help or guidance you can give me would be really appreciated. **Michael Bartlett (United Kingdom)**

Answer It's very hard for a professional chess teacher to earn a living in America, not that it's easy anywhere else. A number of obvious factors play a role, including which part of the country you're thinking about moving to, who you know, how hard you work at it, and just plain old luck. I, for one, was extremely lucky when I started back in 1972. I was in the right place, I knew the right people (by accident), and chess was receiving the greatest kick in the pants possible from Fischer's spectacular victory over Spassky. But despite all my good fortune, I still wound up working 75 plus hours every week. Luck aside, without the effort, I wouldn't have gotten by.

You don't want to go through all the unnecessary and marginally returning activities I went through, nor would you have to these days. A number of organizations and teaching superstructures are now in place and they can assist you. If you're thinking about coming to New York City, the area in the U.S. that affords the most opportunities, you might start by contacting Chess-in-the-Schools ahead of time. Indicate your intentions, explain who you are, and possibly they could fit you into one of their training seminars and find a place for you.

I would also look into the Right Move Program and follow up with queries to the U. S. Chess Federation. The Right Move may need directors and even teachers, and at times the USCF can be extremely helpful, even with all the professional needs they already fulfill. So make certain to let both organizations know you're on your way.

I would also contact all the major private teaching programs in the metropolitan area. Such organizers as Sunil Weeramantry, Shernaz Kennedy, David MacEnulty, Susan Polgar, Rich Jackson, Sophia Rohde, Bonnie Waitzkin, Jennifer Shahade, Michael Khordakovsky, Mark Kurtzman, Fred Wilson, Elizabeth Vicary, John McCarthur, Renee Yarzig, Tag Taghian, Harold Stenzel,

Lev Alburt, Steve Immit, Jonathan Corbbalah, Joe Lux, and others you can probably track down on the Internet, are often in need of replacement teachers and assistant tournament directors. At least they know the scene and may be able to guide you.

It would also be prudent to write to the Marshall Chess Club. If you can, reach out in particular to Doug and Mariana Bellizzi, two very caring and intelligent Marshall leaders (both of them have many ideas and the skills to implement them). While the club may not have any available positions, it might be able to supply contacts, useful information, and plenty of spirit.

If you were thinking of moving to the San Francisco area, I recommend you reach out to the Mechanics Institute and John Donaldson, a gifted chess professional who excels in all aspects of the game. He could give you a good sense for what's out there and possibly advise you on your preliminary steps. I would additionally speak to Alex Yermolinsky, Mike Goodall, and Hal Bogner. If you're thinking of moving to southern California, you should explore possibilities with Jeremy Silman and Larry D. Evans, two of the most successful chess teachers in America.

You might also contact UTD (the University of Texas at Dallas), which provides one of the few college chess outlets. The university has some very adept people specializing in chess education, from Tim Redman to Alexey Root, and they may have valuable insights that can aid you in your quest to find a position.

Finally, you should take advantage of the Internet. It can connect you to all kinds of wonderful prospects. You'll find great school programs in Arizona, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Washington, Illinois, and who knows what I'm leaving out as I slump into senility (I'm getting too old to be old). Good luck on your adventure. You are patently a very capable individual who has a great deal to offer the game we all love.

Question I'm living in Porto Alegre in the south of Brazil and have a local rating of 1855. My coach is 2220 (FIDE) and in our last meetings he asked me to play (without clocks) against him in positions in which one side had a great advantage (positional and or material). He played the weaker side, but I always lost. Is this kind of training necessary for someone to improve? Or is he trying to show me that I'll never beat him? Do you play out positions against your students? I think that I should play these positions against a computer, and use the coach time to discuss chess themes. What do you think? Thank you very much for your attention. **Natan Estivallet (Brazil)**

Answer Playing your student can be a valid teaching method, especially if the sessions are supplemented by analysis and discussion. But even without the analysis and discussion, by playing out inferior positions the teacher is thereby showing the student how to salvage difficult situations. He is providing illustrations of resourcefulness, and what memorable examples they are indeed

because they're painful. They demonstrate how much you must still add to your technique. Generally speaking, you shouldn't consider yourself a good player until you are able to win won games. So what your teacher is doing, under the right circumstances, could be insightfully productive.

Of course, other things may be in play here. If your teacher approaches it solely in competitive spirit, and not with his main aim being to help you, get rid of him. If you feel he is merely trying to get a psychological or actual advantage over you for tournament play, get rid of him. If you are regularly being insulted and put down in the process, get rid of him.

I always play out positions against my students. That's a way to test their developing abilities. But once it becomes clear an idea isn't working, I suggest we go back to the point at which the student went awry. We then play it from there again, with the student trying to do better and me doing my utmost to show the student why the right ideas work and the wrong ones don't. It's constant give and take, based mainly on playing out and analyzing real chess positions that come from or are likely to come from the student's games.

I'd say it's also okay to play out those positions against a computer. Such time can be well spent. But there's something in it for a teacher to actually see it all unfolding. It's useful to observe firsthand how quickly you move in certain situations, how comfortable you seem to be, the struggles reflected in your face, and how you might respond to various questions posed along the way. Some things can only be appreciated properly in context – during actual play – and not afterward, when the underlying reasons may be lost or become stale. In short, don't automatically dismiss what your teaching is doing, pro or con. If your relationship is to continue, you should confront your teacher directly, explaining how you feel and trying to get at the principal reasons for his approach. In the end, it may be sensible for one or both of you to apologize to the other.

Question I enjoy the game of chess and have been reading your column for five years now. My question is why do you think someone who starts later in their study of chess cannot become a grandmaster? Is it because older players may not have the time to study seriously or is it because the mind becomes set in its reasoning? If children can have natural talent for the game, can adults discover this talent later in life? What do you think is the main reason that grandmaster status is so elusive when a player starts later in life? **Edward Harmen (USA)**

Answer Your question – a good one – is actually a few questions, but they all lead pretty much to the same answer. As you get older, it becomes harder to ask your mind and body to do extraordinary things. In order to be a chess grandmaster you must learn and eventually know thousands of patterns and ideas. You'll have greater command over all of that if you've had more experience with it. Not just passive experience, though that has value too, but active experience where you've tried to work your way through problems instead of having solutions served up to you in convenient summary. I could show you a typical technique a bunch of times and you might still not be able to

rely on it. But discover the method by yourself and you own it for life. Such valuable practice and familiarity takes time, the one commodity lacking in older chess students.

That's one reason players who learn the game earlier have a big advantage. They have more opportunities to absorb bits of useful information naturally, in context, over time. The main drawback for younger players is that they are going to lose many games at first, and defeat can be incredibly dissuasive. But if the youngsters can get through all of that misery, they have much greater potential to go further up the ladder.

The main reason (if there is just one) that older players fail to do as well as younger ones with comparable talent (yes, older players can discover they have talent for the game as well) concerns concentration. Older players, despite their will power, can't keep focused as steadily or intensely as younger mature minds can. The demands on the brain can be staggering. Let your attention go for a split second and you lose. You might counter, saying that young people tend to go all over the place and constantly lose their attention. That's also true, but it's not true for skilled young adult minds who have had years of training behind them. They don't lose their attention, and they have much greater reserves on which to draw.

You might also raise the point about experience, especially for veteran older players who've had many years of practice and active combat behind them. Don't they simply know more? Can't they suddenly use all of that to make the jump to higher playing levels in later years? This reasoning also relies on a fallacy. While older players may have seen more, they've also forgotten more. Besides, some of the most relevant ideas of all – say, the latest opening lines – they know almost nothing about. So they will find themselves struggling in the beginning of games to grapple with ideas their opponents take for granted, before much of the real thinking begins. The consequence is time pressure and its attendant blundering and bad play.

It can't be ignored: once you've reached a certain level of expertise, some types of experience have greater currency and applicability, and that's where older people tend to fall behind. They don't want to invest the same effort they once did as younger players to assimilate the new chunks of ideas – yet they must. But this doesn't mean that an older, talented, and determined player, starting at a much lower skill level, couldn't become a grandmaster. I've just never seen it happen.

Question The position from the end of the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer* has now become famous. It is also imperfect. Larry Evans and others have shown there is an error and Poe (Sarwer) could have drawn. Don't you think the game, which is supposedly a championship game, should have been chosen more carefully? Why didn't you choose a perfect example of Bobby Fischer's or Garry Kasparov's or even Anatoly Karpov's? That would have appealed to everyone without sacrificing the quality of the movie. Thank you ahead of time.

Max Cramer (USA)

Answer Have you ever observed a third grade game? Even the championship ones are fraught with inexactitudes, strange ideas, and downright mistakes. On one move there's an ingenious notion and on the next move they're back in kindergarten. But let's stay with the facts. You're right about the final position: with correct play it should have led to the draw that Max Pomeranc proposes.

Although the final moves were worked out by Josh Waitzkin and myself just before they were to be filmed, and though several other chess intellects were also involved, such as grandmaster Pal Benko and four or five other IM or better type players, I take full responsibility for its deficiencies. As the technical advisor on the film, I had to approve it before director Steve Zaillian and cinematographer Conrad Hall shot it. Chessically, I goofed; cinematically, the scene comes off memorably.

All told, 226 chess positions were developed for the film. Very few of them appear in the movie's resultant form. Unappreciated by many observers, the final game (meant to be 72 moves, hearkening back to the year Fischer made it all possible), had to correspond to various developments in the script reflecting the human side of the mental battle.

Thus, if a bishop had to move to a certain square by a particular move, the game had to show it. If three moves later the queen had to be lost by a discovery, the game had to show it. If three moves after that the queen had to be won back by a knight fork, the game had to show it. And so on and so forth.

You can see as such a contest progresses that it becomes increasingly burdensome, and almost impossible, to meet the requirements of championship chess while satisfying the needs of good filmmaking. One of the two art forms had to be sacrificed somewhat to satisfy the more compelling needs of the other. The dominant art form here is film, not chess. Chess is merely the subject matter. In the end, all of us did the best we could to make the moving picture experience, what people were paying for, as enjoyable as possible.

That doesn't mean we were willing to abandon the chess to the theater of the absurd. Quite the contrary, we did all we could within the given parameters to please the hardcore chess audience as well. But the film, obviously, had to comport to the standards of third-grade championship competition. It would have been easy to offer a final position from Troitzky or Grigoriev – in fact, we tried that, it didn't work – but that would have seemed contrived. Knowledgeable people would have recognized the idea for what it was, a perfect scenario, and not as the flawed creation of gifted youngsters. (Third-grade talents don't think like Troitzky or Réti, and if they say they do they're lying or deluded.) Relying on a perfect position would have shifted the emphasis from film to chess, and at a hundred thousand dollars a day, I don't think Paramount would have been overjoyed about it.

I don't find it strange at all that there were mistakes. I'm sorry there were, and are, any slip ups (these days, film can last forever). I sure tried my best to avoid errors. Indeed, it was the hardest task I ever had. But I do like the way the final position ties into the leitmotif of Josh's overuse of the queen. In the end, he has to conquer his weakness and use it to his advantage. I also think Steve Zaillian created a brilliantly charming film, one that every year garners more and more followers and solidifies its place in chess lore.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

When do you think Kramnik will be dethroned as world champion?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

We received many responses to the [January](#) question of the month:

Which tournament or match book is your favorite?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Terrance P. Jones (USA) writes: Fortunately, you asked for my favorite tournament book. I'm completely unqualified to suggest the best. My favorite is the *First Piatigorsky Cup*, edited by Isaac Kashdan. It was published in 1965 and to me the content was simply magical. I was a very young chess player and was quite excited to think that such a tournament was held in this country. It was not so much the book itself, but rather the place and time during which I read it. I was completely fascinated by the game, playing almost daily with friends. I still have the book in my library and, along with [My System](#) by Nimzovitch and *500 Master Games of Chess* by Tartakower, it has been in my possession for nearly 45 years.

John Manahan (USA) writes: for tournament book: [Curacao 1962 – The Battle of Minds That Shook the Chess World](#) by Jan Timman; for match book: *Kasparov and Deep Blue* by Bruce Pandolfini.

The tournament book is full of drama, controversies about game-fixing, Mikhail Tal unable to finish the tournament, Petrosian-Geller tandem, Soviets short draw, Korchnoi's relationship with other Soviet players, and of course the games: Fischer, Petrosian, Tal, Keres, Korchnoi, Geller, etc. And it's written by Jan Timman!

The match book opens a new world of chess: chess computers! It is like having Pandolfini at your side, talking to you about the game (minus the moustache wagging and saliva traveling). This facet is why I commend the book. Maybe I'm not that good in chess and chose books that are not that analysis laden. I chose these books because they interest me and for the joy of their simple narrative style and analysis.

(BP- Thanks for the compliment. I surely can use it. But I personally prefer several other books on the Kasparov-Deep Blue match.)

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Yes, I have a question for Bruce!

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