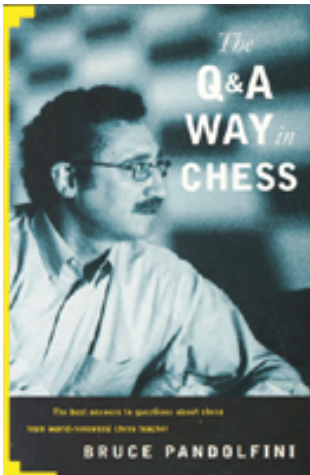




COLUMNISTS

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.com column...

Yes, I have a question for Bruce!

Losing Doesn't Matter?

Question I read your June [column](#) in which Srinath Kay wrote that the most essential talent a strong chess player must have is the talent to be able to love chess irrespective of the number of losses incurred. In my opinion, losing is not irrelevant. It reminds me of the story of the fellow who played once and won and who said to himself: I must be a great player and kept doing the same things every time. I think one should take into account the results of his games. Do you think that one should be able to love chess, or anything, without taking results into consideration at all? From my experience, I can say results are very important. I remember losing two games in a row, and feeling as if I were worthless. That has to affect future play. **Michele Panizzi (Italy)**

Answer I agree with you. It is hard to love any endeavor, particularly chess, without some kind of success or encouragement. I have to laugh when I hear people say that it's not about winning or losing, but the simple act of playing. Tell that to the millions of people who have abandoned chess because they couldn't seem to win enough games. Ego gratification is very important in chess, even for adults. No matter what the platitudes and bromides of failed competition have to offer, there aren't too many of us willing to continue playing if we constantly lose. What fun is that? I think it's fair to say, however, that winning without any challenge is not very much fun either. Who wants to win game after game against the illogic and chaotic execution of Precambrian trilobites?

One of the main pleasures of chess comes from playing with intelligence and reason to outwit opponents, beating them skillfully and artfully. That doesn't mean one can't take a measure of pride in saving a hopeless game with a draw, or even in losing a difficult game in which one puts up heroic defense and simply gets outmaneuvered by superior strategy and precise tactics. But in the latter instance, the case of the difficult loss, it's hard not to feel drained and somewhat depressed if the activity itself is to have any real meaning. And it's not going to have very much meaning if the result is irrelevant. Imagine how absurd it would be to extend the same indifference from uninvolved game to uninvolved game, over a lifetime of apathetic play.

In your own situation, while I'm not suggesting that you deceive yourself into thinking losing isn't painful, at least try to gain something from your defeats. Surely, don't excuse your losses away, pretending they mean nothing. To be sure, assuming a positive attitude, seeing the chess glass as half full, rather than half empty, review and analyze your defeats afterward, aiming to learn how you could have done better. By doing that, by showing that playing to win (but with understanding) *does* matter, you're bound to prevail more often and, I suggest,

enjoy it much more, regardless what anyone said or implied in the last column.

Question I am an intermediate player and seek to improve my skills. I find that I learn better through exercises, and not just by playing or reading books (I do that too). However, the only chess workbook I know of is Jeremy Silman's [Reassess Your Chess Workbook](#). Do you know of any good chess workbooks? **Douglas Yeo (Singapore)**

Answer There are numerous exercise/workbooks. Almost all of them are adequate, in that they contain chess positions for you to solve and work out, and even if the writers of such texts are idiots, and only a handful of them are, the chess copy editors are usually sufficiently aware to check out the variations to confirm their accuracy. And if they're occasionally wrong, or were on some kind of hallucinatory drug when the editing process really mattered, then you can take delight in, and still derive profit from, correcting them, as diligent students often do.

The problem is finding a text that satisfies your level of play and style of use. Rather than listing hundreds of admirable titles, possibly to the dismay of some of the authoring elite, I recommend that you go to a few bookstores, sampling and tasting the volumes, opening each one and getting a sense for its effect on you. That's a very good way to start your investigation on what's out there. If you want to extend your search, and avoid getting your hands dirty (I'm assuming your keyboard is clean), you can see even more on the Internet, say, at a superb online catalog, such as that at [USCFSales.com](#). Good luck on your excellent chess adventure.

Question I've been trying to study endings and have run into a couple of problems. Firstly, many of the books I've seen seem to strive to make the material as boring as possible. Can you recommend anything that would make it a little more, well, fun? My other problem is just getting through so much information. Is there any way to narrow it down somewhat? Are certain endings more important than others? I already know the basic stuff, some king and pawn endings, Lucena's position etc. I'm just not sure what comes next. If it helps, I'm around 2000 FIDE. **Michael Duke (United Kingdom)**

Answer Fun? I can't tell you what it is to have fun, but from the few past experiences I've had with the concept, I think I know what it is when I'm sensing it. As I recall, there's a lot of laughing and smiling. Since looking for shots can be a great deal of fun, and at times very rewarding, and since ninety-five percent of chess relies on tactical reasoning, even for the endgame, you might consider focusing on ending tactics. There are several wonderful treatises of endgame stratagems, including one by Ban and another by [Van Perlo](#). I've probably left out a couple of dozen people who've also produced comparably stellar tomes. But starting with the works of those two authors, you might be able to springboard into worthwhile follow-up texts as your training advances.

As far as reducing your study tasks, I can well understand your dilemma. You don't want your routines to become nothing but work, yet you'd like your efforts not to be superficial. Unfortunately, that's not so easy to do, if it can be done satisfactorily at all. Chess is a complex game, and there's much to assimilate. The best way to absorb the game, of course, is through interactive experience, where information becomes a part of you by actually doing. Yet that can take years, and there's no assurance of success anyway.

I could say that fifty percent of all endgames contain rooks, while a hundred percent of all endgames contain kings. Therefore, if you focus chiefly on those two kinds of endgames, you'd be going about it in a more practical way, but that regimen would leave out huge chunks of valuable and delightful material. Instead of proceeding in a manner that may spawn gaps in your developing knowledge, perhaps you could be more inclusive in your approach, while progressing with a definite plan.

Here's something you could try. Whenever you come upon an intriguing endgame, analyze it for essential or pragmatic themes. Because chess ideas have the capacity to be ridiculously visual, create diagrams for each of those positions, as well as for their critical stages. Wherever possible, as well as producing diagrams for the actual situations in which you first encountered the motifs, also make up diagrams with reduced elements on the board, so that only certain memorable patterns are stressed. To that end, be sure no extraneous pieces or pawns remain in the paradigms.

The next step is to make flash cards of those positions, with useful data written on the back side of each diagrammed card. And don't be afraid to draw lines on diagrams if you decide it makes them more illustrative and thereby cues to inspire the use of such weapons in your own play. As you start to collect these diagrams, regularly arrange and rearrange them in order, preferably in blocks of three and four, as if you were making a presentation before a class and had to give a session on the endgame. Even go to the extent of pretending to give the lecture, as many teachers practice doing. Whatever ideas you wind up expressing based on those exemplary sequences, ensure that each one, as well as each series, can lead to the next, as best as possible. Indeed, it's important to find the right language to impel your narrative, for that can make it more memorable.

As you become a better and more informed "teacher" you'll also be assimilating information naturally for your own use. Over time, you may even gather sufficient examples to write your own book. Some day that book might appear on someone's list, on the same page with those of fellow endgame travelers Ban and Van Perlo. Okay, maybe that won't happen. But if it's fun you're after, while learning endgame fundamentals, this is an off-the-beaten way to try it that could lead to real gains.

Question After returning to the game following a thirty-year break, I am studying a great deal, using both books and the excellent [Chess Mentor](#) program, and feel my game has progressed a great deal. However, I find that I have become much more familiar with a two-dimensional board and things I would see quite quickly in a book or on screen are not as immediately evident to my eye when playing with a three-dimensional set. I am not talking just about a lack of tactical awareness because I do not actually have someone tap me on the shoulder and say "White to win in four moves," but also a reduced positional sense. Is this a familiar problem, and would the likely solution be the somewhat laborious one of setting up any positions I play in two-dimensional study on a three-dimensional set? **Chris Stratford (England)**

Answer It's a typical problem, and many players tend to have trouble reconciling the disparate feels of two- and three-dimensional chess. The remedy you suggest may truly provide an alleviation of the difficulties, but it sounds like an awful amount of unpleasant, time-consuming work. One question I have concerns which of the two arenas has greater appeal for you. If you prefer online chess, and since there are vastly more opportunities to partake of it than there are for playing opponents directly at tournaments and clubs, maybe you shouldn't worry about it too much, simply going on with your screened encounters, trying to conduct them under the most favorable parameters you can find or establish.

Of course, you can go another way. Rather than translating all your thinking into three-dimensional versions, you could try to determine what it is about two-dimensional chess that enables you to play better. Once you've gotten a better take on that, on what motivates and strengthens your play online, perhaps you could integrate some of those ideas into your OTB play, creatively adapting your strong points to satisfy needs in the area beyond your immediate comprehension. That's how many of us succeed, finding analogous ways to do what we already do well. But you must do it for yourself, your own way, as Kasparov has offered in his new book, *How Life Imitates Chess*.

Question I play both real time and correspondence chess. I am *much* better at correspondence chess than I am OTB. And I don't use a computer for my correspondence games. It seems like when I move the pieces, and can actually see them in a final position, I can make more accurate moves. Obviously, you can't do this in an OTB game, so how can I translate my correspondence prowess to help my OTB ineptitude? **B.K. Barnett (USA)**

Answer That's a good question. I wish I had a good answer. One virtue of correspondence chess is that it affords you an abundance of time to think. Perhaps you should begin your approach to over-the-board play with a positive outlook, knowing that your postal experiences have conditioned you to use all of your available time, whereas many of us, unschooled in correspondence, are prone to move too quickly. On the other hand, you must be mindful of a downside, and that has to do with the time constraints placed on your OTB play. For the most part, and within reason, time pressure is nonexistent in correspondence play. Take too much time in face to face situations and you're going to overstep.

So I don't see there being much direct value to your correspondence encounters for over-the-board games. It's after OTB games are finished that your postal past may come valuably into perspective. Since you're used to analyzing moves and contingencies in depth, you can apply the same thoroughness to your OTB games after they're completed, in the process deriving greater benefit from the activity and ultimately making you a stronger player. Eventually, if you remain cognizant of the true gains to be realized from your correspondence experience, your mind will inevitably find its own utility, raising you to the next overlook, in view of where you want to be.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What do you envision as the ultimate tool for studying chess?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

What is the ideal time control for tournament play?

Among the many interesting replies was the following:

Michael Bartlett (USA) writes: I don't mind so long as I have enough time to visit the bathroom in between moves.

Lee Lahti (USA) writes: One that is at least a minute longer than the time control of the game I am currently playing.

Richard Becker (USA) writes: My gut instinct is the longer, the better. Both players should have all the time they need to look for the best possible move, limited only by their skill, not by the hands on a clock. But on the other hand, extremely long time limits could lead to fewer games played. Let's face it – we all show up to play, and it would be nice to play plenty of games. I've played in tournaments where the time control was 30/90 SD/60, so each player has 90 minutes for their first 30 moves, then 60 minutes for the remainder of the game. With each player getting 2½ hours for their moves, each game can last up to five hours, which is a nice, long time control while still easily allowing two games per day in a weekend tournament. Play the first game of the tournament Friday night, and you've got the makings of a fine five round event. So I'd say that somewhere in the range of each player having 2½-3 hours for all their moves would be my ideal for tournament play.

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