



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...

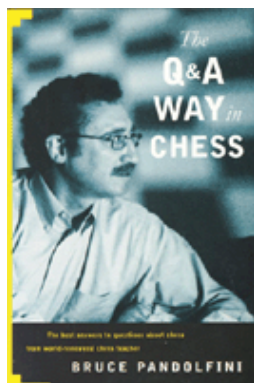
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Play it Again, Al

COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

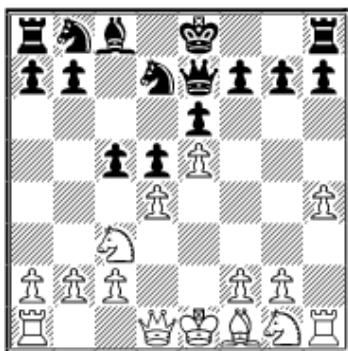
Bruce Pandolfini



Question Al Horowitz was at the filming of *Casablanca* and took photographs of Humphrey Bogart at the chessboard, which were then published in *Chess Review*. The positions in the movie were said to be from a postal game that Bogart was playing, which he would study between takes, and that *Chess Review* would publish the game when it ended. Do you know if this ever happened? Thank you very much for any help or suggestions you can give me with this search. **J. Krousie (USA)**

Answer I do recall a Bogie photograph appearing on the cover of *Chess Review*, I believe, where he's playing chess evidently for real against Charles Boyer on a movie set. There may have been another shot with Bogart playing Herman Steiner, with Lauren Bacall draped over Bogart's shoulder.

In the book, *Chess in the Movies*, Bob Basalla relates that the position in question "is easily derived from a well known variation of the French Defense, Bogart's real life favorite as black. The moves likely were: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 h4 c5 Bxe7 Qxe7."



He suggests that the position is from a postal game that Bogart was playing against Irving Kovner. Perhaps one of our readers can help. Let's see what happens and who writes back. I know we won't hear from Bogart, and I doubt we'll hear from Bacall.

Question My question concerns choosing a style of play. I currently play in the 1400-1600 USCF rating range, though my rating is still provisional. I have Expert level friends who tell me that I should choose only one opening for White and two for Black (one against 1 e4 and one against 1 d4), and play nothing else until I become familiar with all the lines. The problem is that I am still discovering all

the beauty of both "positional" and "tactical" chess, so I like to switch styles of play, depending upon my mood. My aim is to eventually become an Expert strength player. Do I necessarily *need* to pick one style of play if I want to improve? Or can I still improve my playing strength switching back and forth between the two. Thanks so much. **Frank Taylor (USA)**

Answer You can't really choose a style. As the adage goes, you are who you are. But you can determine which style of play is more natural for you. Once you've done that, you can decide upon the openings most conducive to generating positions harmonious with that style. When your friends at the Expert level advise you to play only one opening move for White and two for Black, they probably don't mean because it's automatically best for you. Rather, they are coming down in favor of being more practical. That is, by always playing just a few lines, you concomitantly reduce the amount of effort you have to put into study.

Yet you raise an intriguing point, with which I happen to agree. You're still learning things, such as your most natural style and what you like. So, at first, I'd recommend another course. I suggest you try lots of different openings to see what suits you and what appeals to you. Once you've made those determinations, then you can narrow your search and get more exacting. Instead of arbitrarily settling on one style of play, or one set of openings, it might

behoove you to play with more abandon, assaying all kinds of beginning moves and their corresponding systems. Just be mindful during competition. Moreover, make certain to analyze what happens after you've played, not just from the point of right and wrong moves, but also endeavoring to comprehend how you felt in those games and whether or not you'd like to immerse yourself in those types of positions.

By being so aware and objective, and initially so inclusive, you're likely to derive a larger and fuller sense of your needs as a chess grappler, and also what opening moves and variations are more comfortable for you. Once you've done that, then you can get specific and commit yourself to definite lines and variations for greater, more focused study. Why limit yourself before you know what exists?

Question In Reti's *Modern Ideas in Chess*, he wrote about Capablanca: "From a careful study of Capablanca's games, I learnt in the end that instead of applying Morphy's principle of developing all the pieces as quickly as possible he was guided in his play by some plan based as much as possible on positional considerations. According to that method every move not demanded by that plan amounts to a loss of time ..." I wonder if you could suggest a list of books, starting from a Scholar's Mate level, that teaches one to play in the same way Capa did? I am talking about his way of thinking of course, not about emulating his results.

Michele Panizzi (Malta)

Answer Like you, I doubt that even Capablanca at his most eloquent could teach anyone to play exactly like Capablanca. But if we look at enough Capablanca games, and read his revealing explanations, there's a chance we could play slightly more like Capablanca than we do now. To that end, you could obtain benefit from a number of titles of the past, the present, and maybe even the future (let's see what happens).

Confidently, if you want to get an overview and greater inkling into Capa's play, I would turn to Reti's *Masters of the Chessboard*. While you're at it, you might add to your reading queue Max Euwe's treatment of Capablanca in [volume two](#) of his *Middlegame* book. I would also peruse Capablanca's own works, including [Chess Fundamentals](#), and, of course, *Last Lectures*. If you want to work with a more contemporary elucidation, I'd check out Kasparov's appropriate [volume](#) in his *My Great Predecessors*. His analysis of Capa's play should put a nice "capper" on the entire enterprise.

But, I must say, none of these books are especially tuned to those players who either rely on, or tend to fall for, the Scholar's Mate. I suspect that you're being modest about your own play, and you probably don't utilize, or encounter very much, that deceptive queen and bishop sortie yourself. I'd say I occasionally use it, but then people might believe me.

Question I am a long time tournament player, and I have been reading your comments on how to improve at chess, it's all good advice. Which brings up the following philosophical question on my part: I feel as if I know much more about chess than I did years ago, yet it is not reflected in my rating. How is that possible? **Tom Fogec (USA)**

Answer There are several ways it could be possible. The most obvious one being that you simply don't perform at your best under competitive conditions. Another reason could be, and I'm not saying it is, that your original rating may have been off base, and you weren't as good as the rating indicated. In a similar anomaly, for whatever reason, it's possible you're presently underrated, and you're actually much stronger than the number designates. But I think there's another consideration you're not weighing here. And that has to do with the nature of chess development. Improvement in chess often seems to proceed in the following manner.

Let's say, to get to the next level, you have to learn 337 things. (I realize critics may call this number into question, but I happen to be fond of it, so I'm going to use it for the remainder of this explanation, at the risk of being perceived as unimaginative and obtuse.) As you progress along, learning the 335th item, and then the 336th, clearly adding knowledge and know-how, your actual play, over what seems to be a flat plane, might not appear to improve much in performance strength. Suddenly, however, you learn that 337th fact or idea, and you make a huge jump to the next level. This advance could seem inexplicable, the way it abruptly happens. Nonetheless, it's likely you've been getting better all along, but the gains didn't manifest themselves until everything was integrated into place. Chess learning, though not precisely comparable to this analogy (what could be), does seem to behave a little like that. For all you know, you may be on the verge of a big vault in playing ability at this very moment. Let's hope so.

Question Are you familiar with the principles that state: (1) knights before bishops; (2) castle early; (3) play for the center; and (4) don't bring out the queen early? How good are these as principles, since they seem to be violated so often? I get the impression from some of your

writings that you don't consider them too reliable. What's your opinion of them and how effective and accurate do you think they are? Do you tell your students to do all of this or not? What do you tell them? (I am 59-years-old; maybe you would tell me differently, because of my age.) Thank you for answering my question, even if you decide not to answer it. **August Lawson (Canada)**

Answer I've decided to answer it. It turns out I am familiar with the four principles you've mentioned, though my own aging brain makes it hard for me to remember much about what I remember. But I think your impression is somewhat right. That is, I don't deem those four principles as absolutes, and I try to be careful, making sure to offer them with provisions and exceptions. The last thing I would want is for my students to follow them blindly. (I have an irresistible foreboding that I've answered a question like this before and can't recall when. Oh, well, if I have, maybe you can find my previous answer and compare this with that as a measure of my fast fading memory skills.)

In most chess situations, if you know what to do, you do it. If you don't know what to do, you might turn to such generalizations to kick the thinking process into gear. You could begin your ruminations, for instance, with a set of questions. The procedure might commence something like this: Is there a principle that applies here? Oh yeah, there's that. But does it actually work as stated in these circumstances? Let's see. Then you take it from there, fueling your dialectically inspired ratiocination with analysis and concretely specific moves and variations. Who knows where that could lead?

That's the most you should expect from nostrums: to trigger logical thinking. Principles, which are often nothing more than biteless clichés, should be relied on to do no better than ignite the reasoning chain. You still have to analyze and mull over what works by evaluating real moves. And even if you start with what seems to be a trustworthy guideline, your investigation and questioning may lead you to play in a way that contravenes the very generality you started with. Truly, it's difficult to find one that doesn't have limitations.

As an opening principle, *play for the center* isn't bad, though it's not always clear what that means. You can play for the center by occupying it, guarding it, or influencing it. Beginners often overemphasize the occupying aspect, leading them to strive for central occupation when such placements are incorrect or premature. *Castle early* is okay, but a more accurate principle might be *prepare to castle early*. You surely want the option of castling quickly if you need to or if it's desirable, but you don't necessarily want to castle if you have better, more immediate things to do, or if castling leads to trouble. *Don't bring out the queen early* is not a bad admonition, except, of course, if by bringing out the queen early you can win at once, or even derive merely a slight edge (whatever works, works). Finally, *knights before bishops* can almost be ludicrous, even Ludicris. If everybody played that way, chess openings would reduce to absurdly symmetrical four-knight setups. I don't know the first person to write that principle. I just know I'd like to attack him (I mean, in principle).

Question Recently in *Chess Life* you reviewed Kasparov's *How Life Imitates Chess*, which supposedly offers observations on business. I was impressed with what you had to say, but I wasn't certain what you yourself knew about business, or even what Kasparov knows about business. Beyond chess, how smart is he? I was wondering if you had a business background. I don't always agree with you, although I usually find your columns provocative, stimulating, and entertaining. **Shawn Westford (UK)**

Answer I've had no business training whatsoever, and I probably have no business answering business questions or writing reviews about books that touch on business or business questions (I'm glad we got that out of the way). But Kasparov's book, while offering business asides, is mainly about chess and life, and is a briskly invigorating read. Moreover, whatever one thinks about Kasparov personally, it's hard not to admire him. I wouldn't be surprised if he knew something about everything. Okay, maybe a little surprised, but there's no doubt in my mind that he is one of the smartest people on the planet. That much you should be able to tell without having to read *How Life Imitates Chess*, or my answer to your question, which, by the way, I found provocative, stimulating, and entertaining.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What is highest rating range that most starting adults are assured of reaching?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Terry Jones (USA) writes: The book I would choose for the title of “most important” in the last decade would be Jeremy Silman’s [Amateur’s Mind](#). I realize that many would argue with this choice, but to my amateur’s mind, I think IM Silman did a real service to the bulk of chess players in the English speaking world. He taught us how to think about chess, and how to get on track to improve. I think it does the most good for the most players, grandmasters being a rather small minority of chess players. I certainly haven’t read all the chess books, I suspect no one has or would want to, but I would place this book in the “breakthrough” category. Chess is as much about kids playing on the back porch, or old fogies (i.e. me) playing in the park, as it is about Wijk an Zee. As an aside, I think the book concerning chess that I most enjoyed in the last ten years would be Pal Benko’s [autobiography](#), which was co-written by Mr. Silman with GM Benko.

Randy Ryner (USA) writes: For me, Watson’s [Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy](#) is the book of the decade. I always have had trouble deliberately implementing strategy into my games and strategy books did not help. Only tactics and endgame books were helpful to me. Watson’s book, though supposedly not instructional, opened my eyes to how I should try to play chess. On my own, with all the concrete analysis I could muster. By the way, I taught some endgames to low rated ICC players in LeChess club using your book. Then I got to watch one get a win by marching his king to the eighth rank.

Jim Marshall (USA) writes: I.A. Horowitz and Fred Reinfeld published a book for the Fireside Chess Library called *How to Think Ahead in Chess: The Methods and Techniques of Planning Your Entire Game*. It is in the old descriptive notation. If I may be so bold, it would be fabulous if you would work with the Fireside people to bring out an updated algebraic version.

(BP – I agree, that was a great book, and it should be redone in algebraic.)

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