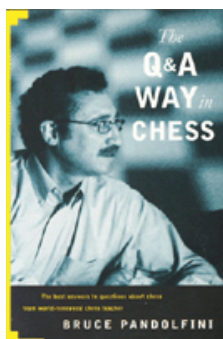




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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Analysis and All That

Question Having read in numerous books and columns how necessary (and important) it is to analyze your own games, I have yet to find anyone writing about the best way (or even a good way) to go about this. I am an average player looking to improve (and who isn't). I have played many games. I do look at my games often, and have submitted them to Fritz from time to time, but find the results less than satisfying. My rating goes up and it goes down, and while I may not repeat the same mistakes, I suspect there is a pattern to my less than stellar play. And perhaps with effective analysis I could improve my efforts in this game. What is it you tell your students, when you want them to learn to analyze? Is there an approach you recommend? Are there sources (printed) that you know of, and which can head me in the right direction? As George Santayana said, "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Thank you for taking the time to respond to my query. **R.D. Behr (France)**

Answer I don't know that there's a best way, but here is a technique that's seemingly worked for others. Input the game into ChessBase or a comparable piece of software. Play over the game a couple of times, maybe even from the other side to widen your perspective. As you're doing this, inject questions, thoughts, evaluations, plans and especially relevant variations into the document, perhaps parenthetically to differentiate them from lines later to be generated by the software.

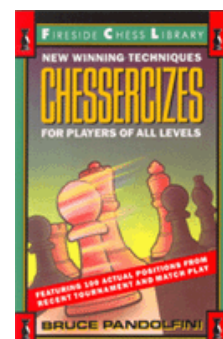
As best as you can try to work out critical variations, answering the concerns raised by your self-directed analysis. If you've done this right so far, everything in the document has come from you, not from corroborative analytic paraphernalia. At this point, after you've done everything you could to enlighten the play, submit the game to Fritz or a similar super partner. To avoid confusion, you might want to re-enter the game in a separate document, with the first rendering containing your efforts and the second that of the electronic tool's.

Then start to compare, seeing to what extent your unaided investigations are confirmed or refuted by the software. After integrating what are likely to be some new ideas, once again analyze the game from the beginning, armed with fresh insights. Keep repeating the process until you are certain you've gotten enough from the effort to have learned a few things. If you do this properly you undoubtedly will spend more time on the analysis of the game than you did playing it. But by the end you should know more about the opening, be aware of specific lines to avoid or pursue, and generally have much greater familiarity with the material, which should undoubtedly help in future contests.

Admittedly, some of this smacks of the artificial, which is always a by-product of rendering activities of the mind into a step-by-step formula. The brain doesn't really function that way, and what occurs in human reasoning isn't always easy to put into the medium of language and neat schemes. It would be additionally helpful to get further feedback from a teacher or strong player, but in the absence of another overview, something like the outlined procedure may provide a foundation for analyzing the game on your own. Naturally, as you actually do this a few times, you might find improvements in the method that more adequately meet your needs, and you'll adjust your approach accordingly. I hope some of this helps, if not in showing what to do, perhaps in suggesting what to avoid. If he were still alive, I suspect Santayana would have something memorable to say about it.

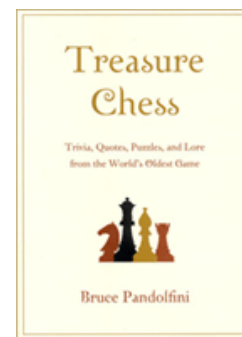
Question As one reads chess books it becomes clear how important analysis is to being a grandmaster or master. Writers and pundits drive home the significance of analyzing positions, when many ordinary players do not know exactly what they are trying to say or what they mean by analysis. Much of the time it seems they mean analyzing variations. Do you foresee any problems

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with all this focus on analysis, or is that the only way to get to be a good player? Finally, can you recommend one or two authors who explain such matters in a way that average players can benefit? **Manny Alvarez (USA)**

Answer If you can't analyze you can't really play chess. So the majority of chess writers and teachers stress analysis. They generally encourage their readers and students to explain their thinking with specific variations, mainly without moving the pieces. In some of my classes, for example, I reinforce this by denying students chess sets. Armed with nothing more than diagrams, with no pieces to touch, they must work out everything in their heads. But in line with your trepidation, at times I fear I'm doing them a disservice. By emphasizing so much analysis, I worry that I'm making them play less intuitively and therefore less creatively.

Such emphasis can also invite confusion. The way many teachers talk about analysis, it would be easy to think of it as consisting largely of calculation. And indeed, the calculation of variations as a weapon is quite important. But analysis is so much more than that. There are judgments to be made, assessments and reassessments, maneuvers to be worked out, plans to be developed, problems to be eliminated, targets to focus on, essential questions to be addressed and more. Somehow an amalgamation of all these separate processes must be welded into a strike force complex providing an understanding of the position. The calculation of variations is just one part of it.

Too much analysis might also instill defensiveness and even chess cowardice. That is, by being so concerned with finding proof, one could analyze way too long and terribly unnecessarily, often winding up in time pressure, afraid to do anything without the certainty of confirming variations. Thus, by being excessively careful, seemingly analyzing endlessly, the resulting time pressure could increase errors rather than diminish their likelihood. And while plowing through analytic minefields, we discourage more intuitive play emanating from a natural grasp of positions based on familiarity and much less precise science. If we can't analyze a line fully, some of us become prone to avoiding what otherwise might be correct in the present position and desirable for the course of our chess development.

Many authors in today's chess world have provided informed thinking on the art of analysis. By recommending any of them I may do injustice to the others, and for your particular needs, some of the writers not cited may be more effective. But I will take that chance and mention two of them anyway. Jeremy Silman is possibly the best instructional chess writer now going, and from the past, C.J.S. Purdy stands out as being superbly discerning. In their books you will discover plenty of discussions of the analytic process and effective steps to optimize its implementation.

Question It is often recommended that students study the games of the great masters. Although I am sure there is much benefit to this, the issue of practical game play is hardly addressed in these types of books (nor should it be). For example, especially at the class level (I am a "B" player), there are many games during which a player has an advantage and has the choice of whether or not he should risk this advantage for a tactical "shot." I was wondering whether or not you would recommend a player gamble on a tactical shot and risk the game slipping into equality, or is it most often correct to accumulate small advantages to win the game? In my experience, it seems that at the class level more games are won than lost if a player can set up a difficult problem for their opponent, even if the correct solution is equality. But does this pattern teach bad habits for players as they improve and make it more difficult for them to play stronger opponents? Obviously, this decision is less important at high level chess, since GMs seem to assume that their opponents will find the correct continuation. Thank you and I am eagerly awaiting your response, **Andrew Mancuso (USA)**

Answer As a Class B competitor, which is a player of significant strength, I think it's more important to inculcate a feeling for basic principles and making proper strategic decisions. I'm all in favor of drawing upon tactics, above all when they work and advance the cause, but most teachers would suppress basing one's chess play on looking for anything like cheap shots or mere tricks. Rather they would advocate that their students appreciate the need to gain power over the situation. Being a good chess player is by and large about playing for control of the position. Once you attain that control, you should be

aiming to maintain and increase it. That's where good strategizing comes in, obviously backed up by relevant application of supportive tactics.

So I would cultivate a feeling for keeping that control and not letting it slip away, led astray by superficially appealing attack devices. That doesn't mean you shouldn't make tactical decisions based on having a stratagem or as a necessary to advancing bigger schemes. If you're certain a tactical concept works, and it doesn't lessen your grip on the game, by all means consider utilizing it, especially if the outcome is to increase your overall advantage. But if you're not sure, and the tactic is chancy, I wouldn't want to encourage you to play that way – unless the nature of the position virtually commands it.

When does such a strategy call out to you? Generally, you should press plausible risks when you have the worst of it. In those instances, it might make sense to take reasonable chances, especially if their failure to be realized doesn't sink you completely. So, to get back to one aspect of your question, before deciding on how to play, I would first try to understand the character of the position. I would want to know who stands better. I would also want to develop a plan around that appraisal. If tactical play apparently falls in line with that valuation, so be it. If tactical play doesn't seem to be recommended, I'd opt to increase or maintain control. And again, if a tactical possibility presents itself, I'd surely analyze the possibility to see where it leads.

Finally, despite your concerns, I wouldn't be turned off to examining the games of great players, especially if the moves are explained informatively and with a notion to providing real understanding. You will find in the analyses of Alekhine, Botvinnik, Capablanca, Bronstein, Keres, Tal, and Kasparov, powerful insights that can help players of almost all levels. It would seem the "B" class comes within the parameters of that encapsulation.

Question What does it mean to "strangle your opponent" and how do I do it?
Asaph Ho (Singapore)

Answer There's a chance no one is going to believe that this is a real question, which gives me even more incentive to answer it. Unfortunately, the best I can come up with is that it has to do with having such dominance over the position that the opponent has almost nothing meaningful to pursue other than waiting for the inevitable or Godot. Probably, after getting a stranglehold on the situation, having achieved such Caissic bliss, you would want to deny all forms of counterplay, contenting yourself with strengthening your placements, avoiding weaknesses, and building steadily toward a final breakthrough, or something like that. I hope that this reply takes care of your question's possible chess meaning. As far as its other implication, concerning the criminal arts, you'll have to turn to another type of professional to get more appropriate advice.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

Is there a playing strength that most average adult beginners could achieve?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

How can FIDE improve its present world championship cycle?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Jack Harris (USA) writes: Wow! What a question! I think there are only two remedies to improve FIDE's present world championship cycle. First, improve FIDE's ranks and officers. Second, abolish the cycle, and let the ELO/rating system take over, like in tennis.

Brenan R. Nierman (USA) writes: For starters, who can name all the FIDE-approved world champions and give an example of one great game that they played? That's the problem. We all have our favorite Capablanca game, Alekhine game, etc. The names of the truly great world champions roll off our

tongues. And even those who almost made it, but missed the mark (Keres, Bronstein, Korchnoi) have a place of honor. In the old days, when the world champion “owned” the title, no one questioned his right to be called the world champion. Paradoxically, under FIDE, we have seen several “world champions,” the like of which I hope we never have to endure again.

For me, the great world champions were products of classical round-robin tournaments and fixed-limit matches of ten, twelve, and twenty-four games. So let’s go back to a system that takes the best of that and have zonals, interzonals, a candidate’s tournament modeled on the great candidate’s tournaments of the fifties and early sixties, and a world championship match of twenty-four games maximum, held every five years. All of the games in the cycle, from zonals to the championship match, would be played at a time control of something like 40/2½ and then SD/1. A five-year cycle would allow time for excitement to build, and FIDE would not have to worry about people knowing the identity of the champion, because they would have plenty of time to get to know him or (hopefully, one day) her. The classically-inspired time controls would allow the games to have some lasting value as works of art.

The problem with FIDE’s approach in the past is that it did not produce credible champions. Even a tournament of the best players, without adequate time controls or numbers of rounds, can be suspect. Will it happen? I wonder. I think that many people are too hooked on the idea of making chess akin to something like bowling or golf, where people without anything else to do will flip on the TV and mindlessly watch balls of various sizes cascading down fairways or lanes. To be sure, that stuff has its place, and I have even found it somewhat soothing to enjoy. But, of its very nature, chess is and never will be that kind of sport. Paradoxically enough, the one time that the masses of people were attracted to watching chess in this way was when the battle of the titans took place on a volcanic island, at classical time controls and players worthy of the title. We are, most of us, all familiar with the games of Bobby and Boris. And, thanks to that event, we are also familiar with one of the men who brought us those games, whose column at ChessCafe.com we eagerly seek out every month.

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!](#)

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