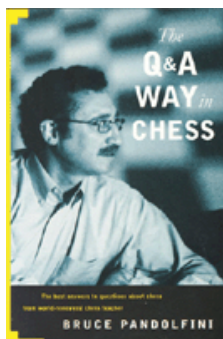




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



CHESSTHEATRE

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A Cure for the Common Bold

Question I play a lot of chess, mostly on the Internet, and, of course, I lose a lot of games. This doesn't bother me. But there is one kind of losing that is really frustrating and even makes me angry with myself. It is blundering away a clear win. Very often when I am clearly better or even simply winning, I'll lose by the most simple oversights and mistakes. I simply put a piece *en prise* or overlook a mate-in-one or a simple tactic. In this way I regularly lose positions that a beginner could win against Kasparov. Mainly this happens in blitz games, but sometimes even in standard games without any time pressure. Losing against a superior opponent or losing a real fighting game is not a problem, but losing like this takes away all the fun. Is there any cure for this disease? Is there any possibility of learning to avoid such blunders? With kind regards, **Joerg Ruetten (Germany)**

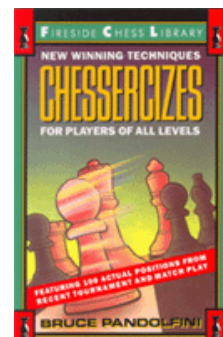
Answer Much of the blundering you're referring to may be a consequence of playing too much speed chess. Although you indicate that you make the same kinds of mistakes in more standard games, with longer time controls, there might be a carry over effect, especially if you engage in blitz contests excessively or as casual warm-ups to more serious efforts. With your mind still operating at the superficial levels relied on for typical rapid play, unconsciously you'd be moving much more quickly than required, and the results could be disastrous.

I'm not suggesting that you give up speed chess altogether. Clearly, you must enjoy it somewhat. Since it doesn't break the law or injure anyone necessarily, and you are patently a rational individual, you are entitled to continue enjoying it. But you might start making sure that there's a definite period of separation between your blitz and more standard chess encounters. It should also benefit you to stay mindful of the predicament, that you may be moving much faster than necessary, if indeed this explains the situation at least partially.

You might also think about developing a routine to follow at the board. Obviously, you must make certain to analyze and understand your opponent's moves before proceeding. Beyond that, you should add to the program regular checks on real and potential dangers. After having decided on your next move and course of action, you should raise questions that bring you back to reality. You could query possible annoyances you may have missed or overlooked in your analysis. That is, you might review all captures and checks, even those you initially considered and dismissed. While these perils may not have been potent at first, and you were right to dismiss them then, as your analysis lengthens, what was immaterial earlier may take on sudden relevance overturning key evaluations and strategies.

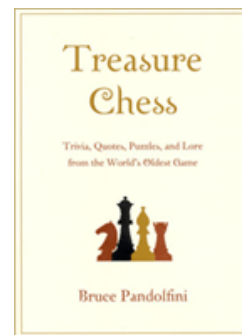
There are, however, no panaceas to this type of difficulty, which, to some degree, afflicts all of us. What's more, my advice can hardly rise above the platitudinous: you have to be more careful. Slowing down, asking pertinent questions, keeping your focus, staying on top of impending troubles and quandaries, and, perhaps most of all, always trying to be aware of what seems to be your chief problem, all has to help, and that's a start. For more than that, as Socrates says at the end of the *Apology*, and here I take liberty with his actual point to close this answer self-servingly, "God only knows."

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Question Several sources advise to analyze your own games as a tool for improvement. There are few explanations about what is the proper way to do it. What is, in your opinion, the best way to analyze one's own games?
Luciano Fier (Brazil)

Answer I don't know the best way. If I did, I guess I would have to tell you. In lieu of that, here's what I'd say to some of my students. Review the game from the perspective you had during actual play. Make notes of questions you had then and have now. Then play over the game a second time from the perspective of your opponent. Merging these two efforts, try to annotate the game as if you were showing it to a class or writing it up for publication. Be sure not to give merely variations. Always put into words what your ideas were and are (you may get some new ones along the way).

After you've done that, submit the game to software analysis. An excellent tool for this is [Fritz](#). See how your lines compare to Fritz's, or to that of a comparable tool, remembering that sometimes, though usually not as adequately, a strong human player can function as that tool. Taking what you believe to be most valuable, add Fritz's ideas to your swelling document. If you have reassessments, and realize some of your earlier ideas didn't work, don't delete them. Rather accentuate them, so that they take on their own life and become uppermost in your mind, since as a package those misconceptions may signify areas to work on.

Following the classroom format (or pretending you're writing for an audience at [ChessCafe.com](#)), explain what you've missed, including the reasons behind the mistakes, even if you believe a particular error or inaccuracy to be trifling. At the end of your efforts, the totality of those simple oversights may indicate a more serious pattern that needs greater focus. In the end, play over the game one more time, to make certain you haven't missed anything, but also to get a sense for how everything integrates into the whole. If you wind up finding something new and somehow missed earlier, it will serve you well, driving home the point that the pursuit of excellence is an ongoing process that never seems to stop.

Question I have a Jerger mechanical clock that is 28-years-old and it still works great. But I have decided that I need to join the new millennium and buy a digital clock. What brand and type of clock would you suggest? With all the different brands and models, it seems a little confusing to me, as so many of them look like they have the same features, so any suggestions will be appreciated. **Jack Harris (USA)**

Answer Forgive me on this one. I can't recommend anything I know nothing about. I already give enough advice I can't back up, and I don't want to encourage you to spend money on such flimsy knowledge. But I know there's a wealth of great items to be found in the [USCFSales.com catalog](#), with explanations to help you distinguish between pros and cons of an item. To be sure, if I were to seek a chess product for myself, heaven forbid, that's where I'd probably start. For now, however, I'm staying with my outmoded broken clock. Since I haven't played a real game for over thirty years, I find that my old time piece is just as functional as those reflecting the present state of the art.

Question During the last two years I have probably solved more than 1,800 tactical positions (e.g. all three-move mates from that Polgar book *5333+1 Chess Positions – 1200 puzzles!*). I think my tactical vision and playing strength have increased, but now I am faced with another problem: in many of my games, tactical motifs or mating patterns come into my mind very fast. In an instant I picture the moves that I think are good to mate my opponent or to win material, but in doing so I tend to sacrifice my pieces too quickly. Maybe I am too fast and impulsive (this wonderful knight fork on e7 must be possible!). Very often I find that I have overlooked something. Perhaps my opponent makes an intermediate move or gives an intermediate check; also there could be another move

order in the chain of exchanges that results in me losing material (and the game)! I think my problem lies in the difference between the book puzzles and real match play. In the books there is always a solution and seeing the motif actually means solving the puzzle. In reality there is only a motive, but not all the time to find a tactically correct solution. I feel I have lost the ability to distinguish between book puzzles and match play and I realize that I have difficulties in calculating the variations quickly and correctly till the end. I would be grateful if you could advise me if there is any way to sharpen my calculation skills and give me any tips on how to distinguish between the book positions (with a definite solution) and real games (without waterproof tactical opportunities)? Thanks in advance, **Daniel Heddergott (Switzerland)**

Answer It seems as if you've analyzed your troubles most astutely, and it's evident you understand a good deal of what's going on: you apparently have trouble distinguishing between setup situations, such as puzzles, where there's an anticipated solution, and real-game instances, when no immediate shot or motif may be prominent, if existent at all.

I'm not so sure that you have to treat those two types of situations so differently. You should be completely open and intent in both cases.

Even though in one set of circumstances you know there to be a definite solution, such as a winning shot, perhaps you should treat the other kind of position not so dissimilarly. While you may not have to find, from move to move, a decisive stratagem in ordinary over-the-board play, you still should be looking for the best or most practical move to advance your cause. In a way, that quest for certainty flourishes on the same truthful plane, subject to comparable laws of analytic investigation.

In all cases you should be looking for candidate moves, winnowing down choices to the best options, and making determinations on what you think to be best or most practical alternatives. In book situations, that often hinges on committing to "sacrifices." But really it implies a need to calculate forced sequences more than anything else, since the types of sacrifices entailed in many puzzles aren't really sacrifices at all, inasmuch as the resulting circumstances can be seen with definiteness. What kind of sacrifice is it, to give up the queen, knowing that such an act results in a winning game? That's not a sacrifice. That's a sham (or pseudo) sacrifice, and you can check out the differences between it and true (or real) sacrifice in various books, such as Leonid Shamkovich's excellent *The Modern Chess Sacrifice*.

So therein may be an aspect of the problem. You're perhaps making sacrifices in your games that aren't pseudo sacrifices: they're possibly real ones, for which the consequences aren't being concretely analyzed and appreciated. If that's the case, stop doing it. Whether you're solving puzzles, or actually playing, don't make or advance a tactical idea, such as a "sacrifice," without being able to see the scope and clarity of the resultant conditions. Furthermore, practice treating all situations with the same objective approach, making certain to follow specific analytic steps, without skipping stages in the process. Unless you're terribly short of time, or some other confusing or inexplicable circumstances weigh in, avoid entrusting to moves and plans you can't grasp with precision and confidence.

Question This may seem like an odd question, but it's something I have been curious about for some time. The question has two parts. There are many interesting chess software products coming to the market nowadays. What is your opinion on their effectiveness in improving a chess player's over-the-board results, compared to traditional study of printed materials? Second, do you have any tips for individuals wanting to create and market their own software products to the chess public at large? Specifically, how would you recommend introducing the chess world to a new software product? **Jonathan Allen (Canada)**

Answer For the most part, I believe the ocean of new software now available has the potential to improve study efforts greatly. In fact, such developments already have, as manifest by the burgeoning of chess talent at unprecedented skill levels around the world. Among the noticeable gains it's now possible to see many more variations and positions in the same time period than ever before. The old way, moving pieces by hand, remains draining and time-wasting in comparison. And if one has to track down specific positions, or vast numbers of analogous ones, a product such as ChessBase is indispensable. I can't tell you how much time I've invested in trying to remember where I saw something without ever finding the source. Do a search on ChessBase, and even if you don't find exactly what you want, you may come up with a hundred situations just as good or better.

That doesn't mean that "hi-tech" doesn't bring with it a set of corresponding problems. It does, such as encouraging superficiality, merely by enabling us to treat circumstances casually and without due consideration. But we can counter those tendencies, tapping the new technology and being careful to take a little more time examining what our keyboards have so conveniently put at our mental fingertips. As far as marketing new technology, I have nothing of value to say. The last time I got involved in such an enterprise I made a fool of myself, and the software made a fool of me. I also lost a lot of money. So good luck, and if you get a good idea, as Lasker once suggested, it may not be so imprudent to look for a better one.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What is the most common mistake the average player makes?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

Which chess book was the most enjoyable you ever read?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Mark Taylor (USA) writes: Jan Hein Donner's [The King: Chess Pieces](#), collected by Tim Krabbé and Max Pam, translated by Richard de Wege, published by New In Chess (2006). The greatness of Donner's journalism is easy to see: he eschews objective reporting for an outrageous subjectivity; he digresses liberally; he pauses to discuss abstract ideas; he thoroughly maligns his enemies in print; his is a pugnacious intellect; he lacks all modesty; he is at home in hyperbole; he fairly sings and roars and whines and jokes his way through his lively, passionate columns. In short, he breaks all the rules. He gets away with it. Then there is his prescience about future world champions, his imaginative experiments in chess journalism, his sheer wit: intellectual, curmudgeonly, funny, timeless, and right on target. There is also an underlying honesty, almost embarrassing at times, and an accompanying sense of vulnerability by which Donner leads us (unconsciously, I think) to forgive the curmudgeon in him. A brain hemorrhage partially debilitated Donner in 1983, but he continued writing. "My world has become very small now, but a chess player is used to that." He died of a gastric hemorrhage five years later.

Never has a chronological collection of selected columns gripped me with the suspense – yes, suspense! – of a novel. I read his youthful columns of the 50s, already full of pith and vinegar, and soared with him, writing at the height of his powers, in the 60s and 70s, all along knowing that the hemorrhage was coming. As I read through the collection, I came to care about Donner's death. I didn't want those datelined columns to end and I am sorry that he can write no more of them. I don't know if [The King](#) touches others this deeply, but I know there is not one adult (nor at least one precocious child) in the chess world that I cannot recommend this

book to.

Unless you are a chess-playing monkey, an intellectual non-entity, a gaping dullard, a ninny, (but definitely not too busy), it is inconceivable that you do not read this book. It is thought-provoking in ways you cannot imagine chess journalism can be. It is provocative. It is infuriating. It is funny. I love it because there is a unique pleasure in being near a great mind when it's thrown off all conventional expectations and, damn the torpedoes, just lets it rip.

(BP – Actually, Mark Taylor, an editor of *Georgia Chess* magazine, provided a delightful response that dwarfed all the other replies received this month, so we're going to let it stand by itself. Besides, he's right: Donner's book is indeed wonderful.)

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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