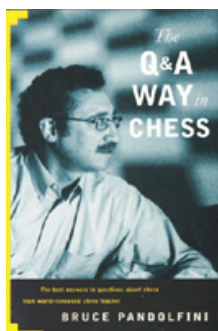




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A
Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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Stop and Face the Monster

Question I would like you to know that I really enjoy your column and the accessible way in which you present your material. I have a question concerning preparation for a specific opponent. I am preparing for a tournament game (club closed championship final, one game a week). The player I am facing always tries to play the Stonewall Dutch against 1.d4. The problem is, he knows my repertoire very well, and the last time we played, he move-ordered me into playing something I did not particularly like. With the white pieces, facing either 1.d4 f5 or 1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 f5, I play systems based on Bg5 and d5. Against other more mainstream openings I play 2.c4. The problem I have is that I am being move-ordered out of it because after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 f5, I can't play d5; and I don't like Bg5 in this position either. Now I know I can play systems based on g3, Bf4 and have a good position. And I probably will, which as far as I can tell is theoretically slightly better for White. I just wanted to know if there's a way to avoid the Stonewall formation from this move order? On a psychological level, how do you prepare for an opponent that you know very well but that also knows you very well? I am especially concerned since he is my study-and-analysis partner and we have played hundreds of games against each other. **Raphael Rosado (USA)**

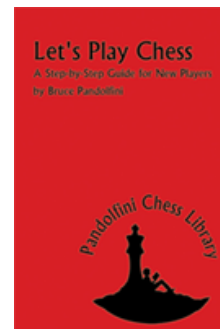
Answer Assuming it's not time for a new study colleague (only kidding, he sounds like a nice guy), I suppose you could avoid the Stonewall setup altogether. That you can do with a gambit. Thus, after 1.d4 d5, you could stop Black in his tracks with 2.e4. But this is the Blackmer-Diemer, and it entails some risk, which may not be up your alley. Or, if Black answers 1.d4 with 1... e6, you could convert the whole thing to a French Defense with 2.e4. Even if you're not particularly comfortable with the French, it might not be a bad idea to throw your opponent off stride now and then with such a twist. At least you could feel as if you're still exercising a measure of control, with you, not just your opponent, determining the course of the game. Playing out of your element, in addition to forcing you to work harder at the board, and compelling greater focus, has the additional virtue of putting your opponent a little on edge, so that he begins to question and doubt his own choices. It might lead to his changing defenses (or sparring partners) completely to avoid what you've been doing.

To me it seems as if you may be placing too much emphasis on the fact that you can't stop your opponent from getting into a Dutch. Why do you have to stop it? Does it win by force? Is there new analysis suggesting that it wins perforce? I tend to doubt it. In fact, as you patently imply in your question, White gets a definite edge in most of its variations. But, as I'm certain you also know, you can't always get what you want. Sometimes you simply have to accept circumstances and make the best of it.

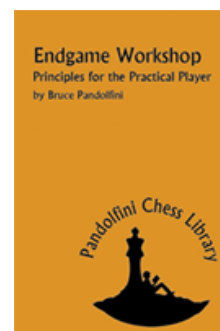
As far as preparing for such an opponent, that is, one who knows you very well, there are no automatic remedies or steps to take. The most obvious answer is that you don't show him everything in practice. It might help to try defending his lines, from his perspective, against another training associate, thus playing one off against the other. I'd also look into getting a good piece of software, such as [Fritz](#). Playing the position from your opponent's side may give you a different, but valuable take on things, whether it's against another person or an integrated set of performing algorithms. The programmed replies of the software especially may introduce all kinds of useful notions, since you can barrage it day in and out repeatedly and without too many limitations. Who knows what new ideas may thereby find entrée into your consciousness.

You might also check out Botvinnik's remarks on the matter. Besides playing the Dutch and finding insidious ways of getting into it, he also played a

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by Alex Angos

number of practice matches against various competitors such as Salo Flohr. In a famous essay he wrote on that match, he laid out principles for facing a particular opponent over and over. The wisdom of that presentation still has value today and perhaps could offer some solace, if not insights to help you through the present predicament.

Fortunately, however, and as you've ostensibly come to accept, even if you don't find a way to stop the Dutch directly, I suspect you can handle it without much difficulty. Turning back to Botvinnik, he had a noteworthy suggestion for dealing with dislikes and personal discomfort in opening play. He suggested, in playing these practice games, going directly into the teeth of the worst of it. By trying to solve such difficult problems, regularly submitting to and grappling with unpleasant choices, case-by-case, set-by-step, gradually working your way through them, eventually one gets good at coping with them. Presaging all the popular advice gurus, Botvinnik advocated turning weaknesses into strengths long before it became a catchphrase for the self-help generation. You obviously have a good sense for the problem, even if it really isn't one, and seem close to accepting the obvious solution: allowing the Stonewall setup and simply outplaying your opponent anyway. Let's see how often he wants to play the Dutch, or anything like it, when he almost never gets a good game with it, or anything like it.

Question What is the correct way to analyze a game? **Rasel Mahbub (Bangladesh)**

Answer I've already written too many books, most of which I can't stand to look at again. I don't really feel like writing one now, but it might be easier to do that than answer your question. Before I would even attempt to answer that question, I'd have to ask you a few questions first. Are you alluding to analyzing a game you've played already and want to examine afterward? Do you mean analyzing someone else's game, perhaps even a famous one? Or do you mean giving denotation and connotation to a game you are presently playing and in which you'd like to get your bearings? And if you're referring to one of your own games, do you want to analyze it for your own benefit, so that you can learn and play better in the future? Or are you considering publishing your analysis so that others could follow, understand, and learn from it as well?

Beyond analyzing a game, there are other circumstances that might also apply, such as how to analyze individual positions. You might be trying to find a particular tactic. Or perhaps you're hoping to come up with a plan of action. Is the position a natural one? Or does it reflect a composed problem? Do you have a good deal of information to start with? Or is the pool of data very limited? All of these situations and attendant circumstances would command differences in approach. So, you see, I wouldn't even attempt to answer this question without beginning with greater specificity. I mean, I could attempt it, probably not very successfully, and possibly sounding even more ridiculous than I have already. But why risk losing any more readers when I still have a few questions yet to answer and conceivably pose in reply?

Question I'm twenty-three-years old and have recently been getting back into chess after a several-year hiatus. I played a decent amount during my middle teenage years, and although I was certainly never great, I played reasonably well against my peers, showed improvement, and had a lot of fun. I can tell that after a few years off my skill has decreased significantly. I was wondering if you have a suggestion about the best ways to start studying the game a second time. I'm particularly interested in trying to find a coach, but I'm wondering if it would be better to do that right away, or rather spend a few months re-learning on my own (through books and practice) some of the old skills that I already learned once. (I'm thinking when I stopped playing I would have been in the 1400-1500 range, like I said not great but good enough to beat most of my friends.) Also, in general, what do you think would be better - forking over a lot of cash to meet with a better, more experienced coach, but on a less frequent basis, or finding a less experienced coach that I could afford to have more constant contact with? Thanks for your column. Reading your answers to other player's questions has answered some of the same questions I have had! Thanks, **Matt Bauer (USA)**

Answer Playing a lot and solving many tactical problems constitute the typical two-barreled answer. Yet there's not necessarily a best way to do it, only ways that work for you or don't. It can't hurt to try a few things, but I would keep your cash. You never know when it might come in handy. You might start by picking up a batch of current chess magazines, such as *Chess Life* or *New in Chess*, see what's happening, and smooth the way into getting reacquainted. A lot of basic information can be found online, and much of it is free. If I were attempting to go this route, I'd play over a bunch of recent, critical games, say 50-100 of them. It wouldn't be necessary to analyze any of them in depth. Merely play through them at a reasonably rapid pace, sensing out some of the new ideas and ramifications. Once you find something you like you could then decide to pursue it more in depth, with particular passion, but you don't have to do any or much of that yet.

Perhaps you could write down some remarks, indicating what you'd like to follow up on and noting relevant or interesting asides that bear further attention. You can make your task much easier if you acquire [ChessBase](#) or a comparable product. Things proceed so much faster on screen that, over a given period of time, you'd be able to scrutinize much more material than over the board. But playing is the real thing, so I would also start contesting regularly at clubs and informal settings, with friends and strangers alike, speed chess and all, to induce ideas and that special chess feeling before entering the world of serious competition.

It's certainly not necessary to play in tournaments at first, though there's nothing wrong with that either, especially if you don't mind losing a few pawns and maybe a couple of hundred rating points. No matter, you're just looking to get some spring training under your belt. After a month or two of getting your feet wet, perhaps then you'll want to test yourself more in tournament play. I would try to play, say, thirty tournament games before seeking out an instructor, so there doesn't have to be anything formulaic about it. Maybe then I'd try to find the best instructor I could afford, still keeping some cash, to analyze the batch and tell me where he or she thinks I stand.

From that point onward, meeting with your coach once or so every week, I'd have him, her, or it (watch out if robotics gets into chess coaching), consistently critique my play. Generally, the best way to improve is to immerse in constant pressure situations requiring decisions and problem-solving. These situations will undoubtedly lead to mistakes. Some of those mistakes will be corrected by you, your advisor, or circumstances. Over the course of time, trying to fathom your way through the game's endless and constant tribulations, making mistakes and attempting to correct them, under a variety of different conditions and settings, eventually you'll find yourself improving and developing into a stronger player. Does this method of experiencing, analyzing and correcting always work? No, nothing does, but it's a fairly good way to acquire greater technique and real skill. So, to get back into the game, my advice is to play a lot, solve many problems, and save what cash you can.

Question I once asked a grandmaster how many moves he calculates before playing a move. He replied, "I always try look at least three moves ahead." Since then I've always tried to apply that principle to my own games. But recently someone brought to my attention that three moves could mean either three full moves or three-ply. For example, three-ply could mean "1.e4 e5 2. Nf3," while three full moves would mean "1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6." Which is it? When grandmasters talk about looking "X number of moves ahead" (e.g., Magnus Carlsen in an interview has said that he can sometimes look up to twenty moves ahead, while Anand stated that in typical positions he only needs to look six moves ahead, etc.) do they speak in terms of ply or full moves? **Peter Lewis (Canada)**

Answer Without context, it's hard to know what the grandmasters were trying to convey. Nor should you make the mistake of thinking because one grandmaster says something every other grandmaster would say the same thing. They say lots of different things in different ways. What's more, while some positions lend themselves to precise calculation, and therefore invite lengthy analysis, other positions are practically impenetrable and must be approached more generally, intuitively, and strategically.

As a rule, however, everyone should look ahead, regardless of ability or circumstances, at least three half-moves (or ply). You should keep in mind the move you'd like to play, the move you think your opponent is going to play after that, and the move you're going to answer with after that. Encapsulating it, you should be able to see your move, their move, your move. That three-ply rule is a basic and a given if one is going to play chess with any kind of logic at all. But I'm not sure what your GM was referring to when he said, "I always try look at least three moves ahead." See if you can ask him again.

Question I grew up in and learned chess in the Midwest, though I didn't become a chess player until I moved to the east as a teenager. Now I am thirty-two-years old. I love great chess minds and have built up a great collection of books, with more than 500 volumes. Like everybody else, I have favorites. [*Silman's Complete Endgame Course*](#) by Silman is a great book. I also love [*Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*](#) by Dvoretsky, the world's greatest chess teacher, *Leonid Stein: Master of Risk Strategy*, by Gufeld, [*1.b4*](#), by Konikowski and Soszynski, [*My 60 Memorable Games*](#) by Fischer, [*Danish Dynamite*](#) by Müller and Voight is written brilliantly, and the New Sicilian Dragon by Williams, which is a great book. I know you must also have a great collection and have read many books to be where you are. I also want to say that my collection also has many of your books, and I appreciate what you have done. Without knowing all the books in my library, and the books I've mentioned are representative of most of them, is there a particular book you could recommend that I should add to my library, taking a chance that I might not have it, that you also love yourself? I'm thinking not only of the chess content but also it must be written very well, like some of the books I've recommended, not all of them, but some of them, for the literary content.

Leon Domskey (USA)

Answer If this is a joke, I guess I can say it made me smile. If it's not, I'm going to go out on the limb and suggest you get *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald. But don't get it for the literary content. Get it for the chess.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What is your definition of a good chess player?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

What is the most intriguing of all chess concepts?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

David Lemper (USA) Most intriguing is *zugzwang*. Throughout the opening and middlegame, having the tempo is so valuable. This gets turned upside-down if *zugzwang* occurs in the endgame. The concept, although not the name, was known in Shatranj in the Ninth century.

Hans Peter Roggensack (Germany) The most intriguing concept is how to free your game by taking off some pieces of your opponent best without losing any of your own pieces.

Adam Chrisney (USA) For me, in the last couple of years, the most intriguing thing has been the relevance of "pawns are the soul of chess." I hear a lot of mid-level players joke about the maxim, but not me. In my studies, I work on tactics all the time and rotate my more in-depth study amongst openings, endings, and strategy books. But through all of it ... whether it's a strategy book by Euwe, or a Sicilian opening or Howell's endgame book (which I don't think gets enough recognition for such a short and basics-focused book), or whatever, I continue to be fascinated by how I am repeatedly drawn back to how one simple pawn move (or non-move) can have such relevance to strategy, tactics, piece strength, center domination, etc. Remove a pawn from a position you're reviewing or move a single pawn one square and – poof! Your strategy implodes and/or a position gets blown! At

least for now, that's the most intriguing concept to me. Everything seems to build from the pawns (or the lack thereof).

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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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