

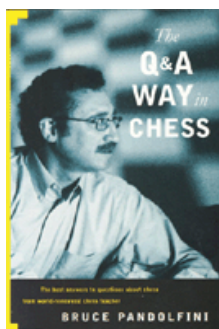


COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini

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Self-Analysis of Games

Question One of the most frequently given pieces of advice is to study your own games. I can see it will bring results in clarifying weak points and areas needing further study. However, I have yet to find a book that discusses how to do this systematically and profitably. I am aware of Yusupov's chapter in the Dvoretsky series, where he describes how he lost to Karpov and deeply analyzed his game. The chapter is instructive, but it does not really give the reader of lesser standards (I vary around 1900 on a good day!) a method to break down the process of analyzing one's games. My thinking is that the following is on the right track:

- A) first analyze how you've played the opening- relatively easy since there are usually opening books which cover the line played.
- B) also analyze how you have handled the endgame - again that is not difficult if the game reaches a standard material distribution, such as rook, bishop, and two pawns versus rook, knight, and two pawns, etc.

But the difficult part is analyzing critical moments of a game, where I may have gone wrong. I have tried putting a game through Fritz, but don't find the comments very strategic or verbally developed enough to be useful. This is the area where I think I could really improve with the right method, but I don't really know of a satisfactory way to do it. Do you have any comments or advice? **Philip Ruttley (USA)**

Answer There is no one way to analyze your own chess games. Moreover, we are all different and, accordingly, approach study in different ways. So in attempting to advise you on your concerns I must simultaneously caution you, in Sisyphus fashion, against taking my advice too religiously. At best it can give you something like a soft structure to play with and manipulate, adjusting and reshaping to accommodate your own needs and tastes. As far as books on this go (how to self-analyze), I understand your dilemma. You have to pick and choose, because no book in particular addresses solely how to self-analyze a chess position. But there are some good writers who have tried to deal with the topic. Some of the authors whose works you might find intriguing are Alexander Kotov, Jeremy Silman, Jacob Aagaard, Karsten Müller, Cecil Purdy, and Igor Khmelnitsky. Also, a lot can be found on DVDs, and there's a ton of stuff on the Internet. Just ask a few questions about how to analyze a chess position and be amazed at what you get back. Nevertheless, let's be specific and see where we can go with this. Something like the following methodology has been adopted by many students with success.

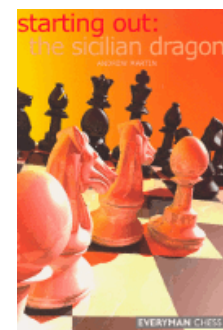
Immediately after finishing a game, rather than doing anything on your own, try to go over the play with your adversary. True, he or she may not have comprehended more than you, but having endured the same time frame, dwelling on similar problems, your opponent might be able to offer insights into a few things you may have missed. After that conversation, or even if it hasn't taken place, go somewhere quiet and play over the game lightly, making sure you note any questions or problems you had during the contest. Write each of these down as they occur to you, being sure to include enough information to trigger pertinent thinking when you attempt to follow up later. As a rule, if you tell yourself to write this down, and don't, you're certain to forget it. Then, let a day or so go by before pursuing the process further. That way your mind can tackle the challenges of self-analysis with fresher energy and possibly newer perspective.

You're now ready to play through the game again, reviewing your notes as you go along, adding other germane thoughts as they come along. Make sure to begin inserting specific variations during this stage, at least little ones that

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push your reasoning. Furthermore, if there are questions remaining, introduce them appropriately into this burgeoning document of sorts. You should be starting to develop a storyline for the game, which it helps to write out, especially trying to articulate your thinking in language that can be read. As Kotov once said, if an idea can't be expressed in words, it doesn't exist. So around your variations should be the wording that puts it all into a readable narrative.

At this point you should turn to software for help, inputting your game into the engine for evaluation and analysis of variations. To be sure, the language won't be there, but undoubtedly you'll be overwhelmed by lines and moves you never considered. Take all of that and use it to revise your self-generated text, so that now the software's ideas become part of it. As you improve your document, do not drop your erroneous thinking. Keep it there, but highlight it in a way that reminds you how off base you may have been. These mistakes and problems are important because they indicate areas worthy of work. Let's not pretend those troubles don't exist. By keeping them present we become more sensitive to them, and that in itself begins to instill the mindfulness needed to address them.

Follow up, if needed, by turning to texts on the opening, middlegame, and endgame that may help further. If uncertain of this new material, introduce it into the software and add those responses to your game essay. Furthermore, throughout the entire set of procedures, make sure to create lots of diagrams, affixing them to the text, wherever they may prove useful, either by command or manually (scotch tape, for instance). Chess is a visual game. Regardless of Kotov's high commissar's thinking or not, it helps to picture the ideas. Finally, after letting a few more days go by – hey, you should be exhausted by now – play over the affair at least one more time. Without the aid of a stronger player, this, with changes to accommodate your personal requirements, is about the best you can do on your own.

Question One occasionally hears of a very talented chess player, who goes quite far, but never makes it to grandmaster. Without getting into the specific characteristics of what it takes to be a grandmaster, who in your opinion, of all the talented players you saw in your time, was the most talented who never got to be a grandmaster? Does anyone stand out, who should have gone further and didn't? **Marc Janson (USA)**

Answer Are you kidding? That's a very difficult question to answer, since no matter how talented one is, becoming a grandmaster is still something else. But I suppose I'll play along. It's a rainy day, and if I had something better to do, I'd do it. The one player who stands out, who I thought was remarkably talented – I mean, truly talented – was Bernard Zuckerman. He got to be an IM, which is no mean feat. And he was also known as an openings wizard. Yet he was so much more than that. When it came to describing and explaining chess ideas, his grasp of situations was incredibly on the money. I think he was the single most articulate chess player I ever met. There are others who will say the same thing. Now I shouldn't be talking about him this way because he still exists. I wouldn't want to provoke him into finding the language that reduces me to a chess concept, an insignificant one at that.

Question A quick question for you: I am a recreational player (approx. 1450 ELO) and I have always enjoyed the approach you've taken to your instruction. One book in particular is a great joy to read and I have found to be extremely instructive. It is *Winning Chess* by Chernev and it was published by Fireside years ago. Is there any chance of having this great book updated to algebraic and re-published? **Ralph Lavalley (USA)**

Answer I agree; it is a great book, and it should be in algebraic notation. More and more we're seeing some of the old classics being updated and changed from descriptive to algebraic. But there are questions about copyright and so on. Irving Chernev is no longer with us, so his estate would have to be approached, if not others. Hopefully, somebody will do this someday and this excellent book will continue to charm and win others to the fold.

Question The Manhattan Chess Club is supposedly the oldest chess club in the United States. It goes back many years. What about the Marshall Chess

Club? Isn't that an older club? Since both are in New York, which one do you prefer playing in presently? Could you explain your choice? Thank you. I enjoy reading your answers to the questions players send in. **Thomas Massey (USA)**

Answer The Manhattan Chess Club sadly went out of existence in 2002. At that point, having been inaugurated in 1877, it was the second oldest important chess club in the United States. (Perhaps there's some small club I'm unaware of that's been around for an ungodly number of years.) The Franklin-Mercantile Chess Club in Philadelphia was formed in 1885, it's an especially good and historic club, and it's still around. Then there's the Harvard Chess Club, which I think goes back to 1874. But the oldest major chess club still in existence is The Mechanics' Institute Chess Club of San Francisco at 57 Post Street. That club goes back to 1854, though the original site was destroyed in the great fire of 1906. The Marshall Chess Club, while one of my favorite places on Earth, is not as old as you might think. It was formed in 1915, although the club didn't move to its current home (23 West 10th Street) until 1931. I loved the Manhattan Chess Club, too, but since it's no longer around, the choice between these two great New York institutions has been made for me. I prefer to play at the one that's still extant.

Question You are a well-known chess teacher and have many students. You have given many chess lessons. Do you play your students during these lessons? If you play your students during lessons, do you ever lose on purpose, maybe many times, or make bad moves on purpose? Why would a teacher do that? Is it to deceive people into thinking they are doing better than they are actually doing, so they think you are really such a good teacher that they will want to keep taking lessons from you, so that you make more money? I am not saying you do this, but I know a chess teacher who I am sure keeps his students on the hook that way. I would be interested in your response to what I have just written. Or am I missing something? **Don Stritch (USA)**

Answer I'm not sure what the heck you're talking about. How does losing to a student convince him or her to stay on with the same teacher, especially if the teacher keeps losing? If I were taking chess lessons, and consistently beat my teacher, I'd start looking for another teacher fast. That doesn't mean, as an educator, I wouldn't play a questionable move for didactic purposes, to see how a student responds. I would never pretend to make such mistakes, however, not even with an inconsolable child, who psychologically needs to win at all costs, just to build them up falsely. But let's confine our discussion to normal adults – you know, like some of the people you may play chess with.

At the beginning of such instructive contests, I'd tell the student that I intend to make purposeful mistakes, where I deem it might be helpful. For example, if it introduces a situation I think the student needs to work on or could benefit from. Now, as a misguided business strategy, teachers sometimes try to come off as stronger than they are, pretending to be, let's say, "A" players when they are really "B" players. But it probably doesn't occur to many of such bent that, by appearing incompetent, they can do better financially. Or am I missing something?

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published below.

What category of player makes the best chess teacher?

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