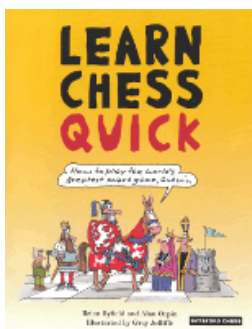




COLUMNISTS

Scholastic Chess

Steve Goldberg



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A Conversation with Ben Finegold Part Two

We continue our entertaining interview with Ben Finegold. Part One appeared in our column [last month](#).

Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive the CD version of *Starting Out: 1.e4!*, by GM Neil McDonald.

We will accept all contest answers for *two weeks* following the appearance of this column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. In order to meet the two-week deadline, please e-mail your responses to me by April 28, 2010. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1



[FEN "3rqrk1/Rb4pp/3Rpp2/1p6/5P2/1P6/1PP3PP/2BQ3K" b -- 0 1]

White has just played Rx7, capturing a pawn. How should Black respond?

Problem #2



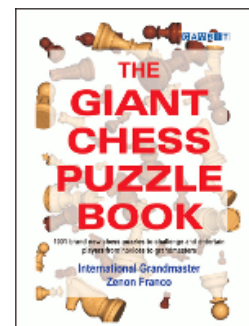
[FEN "2kr4/ppp3Pp/4RP1B/2r5/5P2/8/PP1p3P/3K4" w -- 0 1]

It is White to move. In the actual game, he apparently resigned at this point, but what saving move does he have?

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*Boost Your Chess 1:
The Fundamentals*
by Artur Yusupov



Giant Chess Puzzle Book
by Zenon Franco



*Elements of Positional
Evaluation*
by Dan Heisman

For [Part One](#) of our interview with new grandmaster Ben Finegold, see the March 2010 Scholastic Chess column. The GM-in-residence at the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis discusses a wide range of topics.

National Championships, Spectators, and (Lack of) Help from the USCF Office

"I thought the 2009 Women's Championship crowds were pretty good, but I expect a lot more this year for everything," Finegold said. "I've been to U.S. Championships and Women's Championships, where there aren't any spectators, because they put it wherever they can find. There are virtually no spectators; maybe one or two. It's because of bad location and very bad marketing and PR – very bad. The USCF is just unbelievably awful at that. The USCF should be ashamed of themselves, basically. When they have these huge events, they do nothing. They have a press release on their website – it's a joke."

He was quick to point out the contrast with what he has seen in his short time at the chess club in St. Louis. "But we have a whole marketing team, and we hire PR firms, and we work for months to make sure everybody knows the tournaments are here. We get stuff in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the local papers, of course. It's a lot of hard work to get the PR going.

"I was at a U.S. Championship watching, because I was driving through New Jersey, in Parsippany, ten years ago or fifteen years ago, and I don't know that there were ten spectators. This was in New Jersey, right next to New York City, and still nobody knew about it.

"So even getting twenty, thirty, forty spectators here is like the biggest effort of any event in the U.S. To show you how bad the marketing is in this country for chess, in Las Vegas in 1999, FIDE had the world championship in Las Vegas – all the best players in the world – and my brother and dad went from Michigan, and there was nobody there. There was room to hold like 300 people, and there were like four people. It's the world championship, and it's in Las Vegas, and nobody even knew about it. It's awful.

"So we're going to have more spectators this year, and more room for it."

Not Just a GM

"I'm a Senior TD, so when we have meetings to discuss our tournament schedule and format, I'm very involved in that," explained the GM-in-residence. "A lot of people complained, before I got here, about the format of the tournaments. Before I was officially hired here, they showed me this Thanksgiving tournament they were going to have for 2010, and they said, 'if you want to make any changes, let us know.' I erased everything – there was nothing that I didn't change. I changed the number of rounds, the number of sections, the prize fund, the entry fee, everything. Everything they did made no sense – they just didn't know."



"They want input, so we give a lot of input from everybody who works here. We're going to have a huge, huge prize fund for our Thanksgiving tournament here. We were hoping possibly to use the building across the street for overflow, but we probably won't be able to do that at that point. We may need to find an alternate site, because we're expecting to get at least 175 players or so.

"Right now, the big Thanksgiving tournaments are in Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. Since I lived in Detroit, I was always working at that one; I was directing and playing. We'd get about 130 players. The other tournaments probably get two or three hundred. We'll have one here for everybody."

Keeping Junior Players in Chess

I asked Finegold what thoughts he had about working to keep youngsters who take up chess to continue playing.

"One of the problems we had in Michigan was that we had a lot of people in the elementary tournament, then less in middle school, and then less in high school, and less in college. If all those elementary kids kept going, we'd have these huge turnouts. It's unfortunate that as they get older, a lot of people quit chess. I think a lot of that is the internet. People can play chess online. Once they get to a certain age, they find places to play online.

"Between the ages of twelve and nineteen people quit more when they were playing a lot, because they find something else to do. It's a tough problem, but there are people at the club who know more about that and how to fix the problem. We actually have a lot of high school and college students that are members here, because our prices [*\$30 annually*] are good for them.

"One thing some schools have done is offer scholarships for chess players, and we're in discussions here; Rex [*Sinquefield*] might talk to someone at Saint Louis University – he knows some people on the board – about getting some chess scholarships going. In fact, one of the things under discussion now, but not finalized, is for the U.S. Junior Championship, some of the prizes being scholarships to local universities. We're trying to get something like that organized. It takes time.

"I'm also a bridge life master, I play in bridge tournaments occasionally now; I used to play a lot more. They have the opposite problem – they don't have any kids. We don't have a lot of older people playing in tournaments, compared to people in their teens and younger kids. Most of the members of the U.S. Chess Federation are under eighteen. In bridge, it's the exact opposite – they say 'how do we get more kids, and how do we keep adults playing?'

"It is a problem with kids that as soon as they get to a certain age, they find something else to do and they stop playing. We talk about how to market more to women and to juniors and to college kids. One of the things we talked about recently was how to get more college kids and have a college tournament. Every aspect of chess is important and we're the scholastic center

also; that's why we're having the camps.

Chess in Europe

Between 1988 and 1992, Finegold lived in Belgium while working to expand his burgeoning chess career. Asked if language barriers posed a problem, he said, "Most people speak English, and I speak a fair amount of French, and I learned a little Dutch and German when I was there. Most everyone speaks English anyway, so it wasn't a big problem. A lot of the strong chess players speak English to each other; that's typical."

He also noted a stark contrast between scholastic chess in Europe and that in the U.S.



"When I was in Europe, which was a long time ago, I didn't really see a lot of scholastic chess. I think in some of the Eastern European countries, they had schools for chess, or chess as a big part of the school curriculum. Here we have a lot of scholastic tournaments where the players may not be so strong, but there are huge turnouts. There [in Europe] they focus a lot on coaching scholastic players, trying to get them strong.

"In tournaments where there were scholastic players, they were generally part of another tournament. They didn't have, for example, a 700-player scholastic tournament; it was more, here's a tournament, and here's the scholastic section. We did that in Michigan a little bit – we'd have regular tournaments and scholastic sections.

"So the big difference here is, we're interested a lot in numbers, getting scholastic members and scholastic tournaments. When they have scholastic tournaments, it's more of an afterthought, because they want their scholastic players to play in adult events, and they're more interested in getting their players good. They teach them early, and if they show talent, then they get special treatment. They probably have fewer players, but they play better.

"Here in this country, with these huge national and SuperNational tournaments we have, I haven't seen anything like that in Europe; it's just amazing."

School Outreach

The official title of the chess club in St. Louis is the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis, and they take the "Scholastic Center" part seriously.

Finegold said that "We have a person on staff here who goes to schools and teaches; a scholastic coordinator – Matt Lodge. His job is to get us in more schools. We just got into a school district about a week ago. A couple days ago I went on a field trip, along with our communications director, Mike Wilmering, and Susan Barrett, who's like Rex's right-hand 'man' – we went to this school down the street – City Academy. They're very interested in having a chess class or chess club at their private school. It's really close to here, about two miles away. I think they're going to have a field trip here, where we'll teach.

"Outreach into schools is one of our big things here. Right now we're in some schools, maybe twenty or thirty schools. I think by the fall of 2010, we're going to be in probably double that.

"We want to be in every school. The goal is to be in every school in the area. We're reaching out to them. One of the things we're doing is we want to actually have competitions. I'm new to St. Louis, but I know there are political issues between all the different kinds of schools – the public and the private, and the different kinds of private. We're going to try to get some league going where they're playing chess together. They've done that in other areas and it's worked out really well."

A U.S. Chess League Team for St. Louis?

Finegold noted that there have been some discussions about placing a U.S. Chess League team in St. Louis, but it doesn't seem likely at the moment.

"The way I was seeing it, they were much more interested in us having a team than we were," he said. "We said that we'll have a team, the local yokels, and they didn't want that. They wanted our team to be really good and very competitive. They wanted us to get an outside GM to play, like from Chicago. [*Club Executive Director*] Tony Rich and I were on the same page and thought that that's not something to spend money on. If I would play, and maybe Charles Lawton, and possibly Michael Brooks, and maybe Doug Eckert, we could have a team with an average rating of maybe 2300 or 2350. They wanted more than that. If we do join the league, it will probably be in a few years.

"We have so much going on here, that was something I didn't think was really important, but we're getting sort of pushed, because [*USCL founder*] Greg Shahade's sister is Jen. But Tony and I decided that it just wasn't something to spend a lot of money on, but we'd like to be in the league eventually. It wasn't something I thought would help our club more; I thought it would help them more.

"A lot of the chess clubs there [*in the USCL*] aren't even chess clubs; it's just like this city has a team. They're just people from the area and they play somewhere. It's not really a club. Eventually, I think we'll have a team, and my hope is that we're competitive just having local players, by attracting more players here. If it's the St. Louis Chess Club team, we'd like it to be our team, not 'let's call that guy 500 miles away and have him play' for us."

Private Lessons

"I give private lessons once a week to the people who work here, and that keeps me busy, because we have a lot of employees here, and I give lessons whenever people want them. We haven't done a big advertising push that I give lessons, because I'm actually doing so much with lecturing and the meetings that we have, and just playing other club members, and giving the people here private lessons. The goal is that I give more and more paid lessons, and then the people who work here will get less and less. The weekly might go to biweekly or monthly.



"On Sundays, we have a kids class and we're going to do a big advertising push for it. We had it sort of infrequently and different people were teaching

it, but they assigned me to teach that class. I do a lot of different stuff here; one of the goals when I started was about half my work would be private lessons and right now, it's probably only about twenty percent. There's a lot of other stuff that has to be done.

"I have a student I've had in Phoenix for forever, because he used to live in Michigan, and we do it over the internet about once a week, and I have a couple in Michigan I work with also, so I still have some leftover students from before I moved here."

Other Interests

"I like bridge, I used to play poker a lot, I used to play golf and tennis a lot, but it's hard to play golf and tennis in Michigan. Other than chess, it was a lot of bridge. I didn't have a lot of free time, because I've had a wife, and another wife, and my two kids, and I needed to make money playing and teaching chess.

"I like playing bridge a lot because it's relaxing; you don't have to do well. In chess, if I don't do well, I hear about it a lot. And I hear about it financially too.

"I haven't played bridge since I moved here; I played a lot in Michigan. Actually the first time I was ever in Missouri – I think that's right – was in Kansas City in 2001 or 2002. There was a bridge nationals, and I won a free trip there, for winning some local event, and we came in third in the national event. Kansas City was quite nice. I traveled around the country playing bridge, but not for financial reasons – it was just because I liked to play."

I asked Finegold if there was some sort of "ICC" equivalent in the bridge world. "Yes, there are a lot of places to play online, but I don't like playing bridge online. I like playing in clubs or tournaments; there's much less of a social aspect online."

"Our Goal is to Rule the World!"

Finegold mentioned that he and the other movers and shakers in the chess club have very high aspirations for what the club can become.

"We have a lot of goals. One of the meetings I was at last week, it was surprising how much we wanted to do and how much we were talking about. We want to do everything. We want to have all the national tournaments and make them better, have more prize money, and get every school here, and have more members than any club, a bigger web presence, make the club nicer. We want to do everything; we have departments to do all that. Our goal is to make the club better – make it better for our members, make it better for the schools, and make it better for the strong tournaments.

"One thing Rex and I talked about a couple months ago was having a super-duper GM tournament here. He said they have one in Dortmund, they have one in Linares, they have one in Wijk aan Zee, why don't we have one? Why can't it be St. Louis as part of that? We want the top players in the world, and the top organizations to know that we're here, and we support high level chess.

"So it's possible in the future we'll have some kind of eight-player or ten-player super round-robin where if you thought the U.S. Championship was strong, here you would see the top players in the world. We're thinking about trying to do that once a year, but that's a long-term goal. We want to make sure that everything else we do is pretty nice.

"Having the U.S. Chess School here once a year would be really nice. We want to have more camps in the summer. We want to outreach in every area, not just one. Whatever we're lacking in, we're going to try to improve. We have different departments for all of that stuff. Our goal is to rule the world – we want everything!"

Don't Force Chess on Kids

I mentioned to Finegold that my own children never have developed much interest in chess, despite my cautious attempts at introducing them to the game.

"Some kids right away think it's interesting, and some take some time," Finegold said. "My daughter thinks it's boring, but my son liked it right away. When he was four, he was playing in tournaments. He really wanted to play. But it's not for everybody."

"Some people just aren't interested in chess. When I teach a class of a bunch of kids and some of them are sort of forced to be there, some get interested and some don't. That's with everything. Trying to make kids interested usually isn't a good idea."

We also discussed the benefits of chess for children with autism. "A lot of people I know have autism and play chess, and I've actually seen programs about this," Finegold continued. "I have a relative and a friend who are really big into autism and they work with autistic kids and they really like the chess aspect. Chess is really helpful; for some kids, that's by far the best they can do as far as a sport or game is concerned. Chess is really good for autistic kids."

How to Play Against Kids

For post-adolescent chess players who find themselves matched against a youngster, Finegold had some words of advice:

"Beat 'em while you can. Generally against kids, you want to bore them. You want to make the game boring, and usually older players can play those positions better than younger players. The longer the game goes, you would think the older player would get tired, but a lot of times the kid loses patience."

"So when I play really young players I try to avoid opening theory that they've been studying for the last three years, and play old stuff, get really boring positions, make them think that it's equal and there's nothing to look at. That's what I do personally."

"Younger players play really fast and they play a lot of theoretical sharp lines. I try to avoid all that, and get them out of their comfort zone."

A Day in the Life of a Grandmaster

I asked Finegold what a typical day looks like for him, but he responded, "There's no typical day here, but I'll try. Often, there are meetings where we discuss various things. A lot of time it's PR for the club, or other things like the U.S. Championship, or the Women's, or other tournaments we're having. We have weekly staff meetings also, on Thursdays, and those usually last about an hour."

"Almost every day I give a private lesson to an employee because there are a lot of employees and I give them all lessons. I play a lot with the members. We're open a long time every day, sometimes eight or ten hours. So if I'm sitting around the club, and somebody wants to play a game, I'll play games with members of the club."



"I help out organizing the tournaments also, trying to figure out good formats. We've changed the format of some of them. Every day it's different. I think

when I first got here, a lot of it was just playing members of the club, just casual games. I've played 300-400 by now, games that take ten or fifteen minutes, and I play a lot of the employees also, because the employees want to. We play each other when there's down time during the day.

"Every day's different. Sometimes I'm here for ten-twelve hours and there's a lot of meetings and chess lessons and playing people, and sometimes I'm here for five or six hours. There's not really much to do, so I play chess with the other people. We talk about our tournament games and other stories.

"I set my own hours – I don't have to come in every day, but I like coming in every day. I read an article about two weeks ago, and I assume this was for publicity – sometimes you're skeptical. But a company, I think in Washington State, has a new rule that there is unlimited time off, with no reason given. 'I'm not coming in today,' and there's no questions asked. That's how they do it. They said they got more productivity out of their workers and they work more, just by doing that. Just treat people like adults. That's their new rule and people think this is the greatest place to work and they're afraid to abuse it. They might get fired if they abuse it, even though they won't. They're afraid they will in this job market.

"So I was thinking, that's sort of what I do. If I never came in, it probably wouldn't matter. I probably wouldn't get fired, because I don't really have a job description. I'm the GM-in-residence, so I do what I think should be done, and what they think should be done. Because of that, I come in every day and I do as much as I possibly can, because I think that's what I should be doing.

"I think the club should be better, in every area, and if I can help improve it or give suggestions, that's what I do. I'm here for the members, and I live a block away, which helps a lot. I'm almost always here when we're open. There was a day I was going to take off on a Sunday about three weeks ago, but I was here all day.

Top-Notch Staff

"Everybody here is a great employee. I've been in a lot of chess clubs in the U. S. and I've worked at chess clubs. This has great employees; the people here really work hard and for many long hours, and they're really good at what they do. You can see as a result what a really nice club we have.

"Tony has a really good eye for hiring people that do a good job and weeding out those who don't. The people I've met here are really good at what they do and they're really good with the public, good at getting members. It's a really nice place to work."

Finegold contributed an annotated favorite game of his, from a wild encounter with GM Julio Becerra. Finegold notes that he tried to make the game boring, but was unsuccessful. See for yourself:

Finegold, Benjamin – Becerra, Julio

Las Vegas International Chess Festival (6), 07.06.2009
Slav Defense [D13]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bf4

Becerra loves exciting chess, so I tried to make the game boring. I was unsuccessful!

6...e6 7.e3 Nh5 8.Bg5 Qb6 9.Rb1 h6 10.Bh4 g5 11.Nd2 Ng7

Julio is intent on getting the two bishops. The game is unbalanced, so Julio gets what he wants. This makes sense in any case, as it was the last round, and winning meant some money, whilst drawing would be bad for both of us.

12.Bg3 Nf5 13.Bd3 Nxg3 14.hxg3 Qd8!?

I like retreating my queen as well, especially Qd1 with white! The queen isn't really doing anything on b6, so Julio plays for an attack on the kingside.

15.a3 Bg7 16.Rc1 Kf8!? 17.b4 Bd7 18.Nb3 Be8 19.Nc5 Qe7

I liked my game here. Now I decided to give my Nc5 the nice d3-square.

20.Be2 Rd8 21.f4!?



[FEN "3rbk1r/pp2qpb1/2n1p2p/2Np2p1/1P1P1P2/
P1N1P1P1/4B1P1/2RQK2R b K f3 0 21"]

I thought it was time to do something aggressive on the kingside. Julio agreed!

21...h5!?

Rarely have I been so shocked whilst playing a strong GM. I could not figure this out, which explains my bad play later! Best is now 22.Bxh5, but I did not understand what he was doing, so I played ...

22.Rxh5 Rxh5 23.Bxh5 gxf4 24.gxf4 e5!?

Shocked again! I thought my opponent was going crazy, but he was just playing strong aggressive moves!

25.fxe5 Qh4+?!

Better was 25...Bh6.

26.Kf1!



[FEN "3rbk2/pp3pb1/2n5/2Np2B/1P1P3q/
P1N1P3/6P1/2RQ1K2 b - - 0 26"]

26.g3!? I did not consider this "computer" move.... 26...Qxg3+ 27.Kd2 (27. Ke2 Qh2+ 28.Kd3 Nxe5+! 29.dxe5 Qxe5=) 27...Nxe5! unclear.

26...Nxe5!?

I still cannot believe Julio played so many unexpected moves. I thought he just went "nuts" during the game, but as the game went, I thought I was worse!

27.dxe5 d4 28.Qf3!

Played after *very* long thought! This move is best.

28...Qh1+ 29.Ke2 Qxc1 30.Ne6+ Kg8!

30...Ke7? 31.Nxg7!+-.

31.Nxd8 Qc2+ 32.Kf1 dxc3 33.Bxf7+ Bxf7 34.Qxf7+ Kh7 35.Ne6 Qd1+ 36.Kf2 Qd2+ 37.Kf1 Qd1+ 38.Kf2 Qd2+ 39.Kf3 Qd5+?

Black should draw after 39...Qd1+! 40.Ke4 Qg4+ 41.Kd3 c2! 42.Kxc2 Qe2+ 43.Kc3 Qxe3+ 44.Kc4 Qe2+ 45.Kd4 Qxe5+ 46.Kd3.

40.Kg3! Qxe5+ 41.Kf2 Qf6+

Forced.

42.Qxf6 Bxf6 43.Ke2+- c2 44.Kd2 Bb2 45.Kxc2 Bxa3 46.Kb3 Bc1 47.e4



[FEN "8/pp5k/4N3/8/1P2P3/1K6/6P1/2b5 b - - 0 47"]

This is a *very* tough ending for black, and Julio was not able to hold.

47...Kg6 48.Kc4 Kf6 49.Nc5 b6 50.Nd3 Be3 51.b5 Ke6 52.Nb4 Kd6 53.g4 Bh6 54.Nd3 Be3 55.Ne1! Ke5 56.Kd3 Bh6 57.g5 Bf8 58.Nf3+ Kf4 59.e5 1-0

A tremendous battle, and, unlike a lot of players, who lose a long tough battle, Julio was very gracious at the end. A real class GM.

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Problem #1



It is fifteen-year old Ben Finegold with White to move. What would you do?

Answer: 1.b4. From Finegold-Smith, Westland 1985.

Problem #2

