



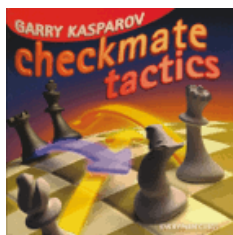
COLUMNISTS

Scholastic Chess

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Starting a Scholastic Chess Club

Playing chess can be fun, but starting and running a scholastic chess club is challenging, and a bit frustrating at times. This month, we hear suggestions from a number of prominent chess coaches regarding how to avoid some of the pitfalls.

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 book *My Great Predecessors, Part III*, by Garry Kasparov.

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 October 27, 2010. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!



Problem #1



[FEN "2r3k1/4nppp/Q3p3/8/1P1q4/4N1P1/5PP1/4R1K1 w - - 0 1"]

It is White to move. What do you suggest?

Problem #2



[FEN "3rkr2/pR2b1pp/2p1qn2/8/4B3/P1P1QPPP/4R1K1 w - - 0 1"]

It is White to move. What should he do?

Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



[Tricks & Traps Vol. 1](#)
by Nigel Davies



[The Secret to Chess](#)
by Maurice Ashley



[Test Your Tactics](#)
by Daniel King

Suppose you have been asked to start a beginner's chess club at a local school or club. Or perhaps your own child is interested in learning about chess and there is no organized scholastic chess club around, so you begin one yourself. Or maybe, like this writer, you have arranged to teach, at a local community center, a bunch of wide-eyed kids who don't know much about chess other than that they want to "get good" at it.

How do you begin? What are your goals? Do you have specific "lesson plans" in mind? What if the kids don't cooperate?

I asked such questions of four prominent chess coaches and received a number of interesting responses, which you'll see below. I'll also occasionally add my two-cents worth.

I heard from the following coaches:

Eliot Weiss – longtime teacher and chess coach at famed Edward R. Murrow High School in Brooklyn, New York. His team was profiled in the wonderfully entertaining book [*The Kings of New York*](#), penned by sportswriter Michael Weinreb.

Ted Castro – chess coach in Northern California with multiple state and national championship students.

Dan Heisman – full-time chess teacher in the Philadelphia area with extensive experience working with players of all ages and abilities, and author of multiple chess books.

Dr. Karel van Delft – longtime chess teacher in The Netherlands and co-author of the excellent book [*Developing Chess Talent*](#).

All the coaches agree that in the beginning, it is important to identify the level of each player. Some youngsters will be total beginners, while others will already know the basic rules and will have had a bit of playing experience.

Dr. van Delft suggests that for rank beginners, after teaching the basics of how the pieces move, about one-third of the time should be spent on teaching simple tactics, about one-third on playing regular games ("learning from the whole" he terms it), and about one-third watching chess movies. I'm sure his students enjoy that! For slightly more advanced students, he spends about half the time reviewing tactics and analyzing games, and the other half he has the kids just play games against one another.

Eliot Weiss says that "I would cover a broad range of chess skills involving openings, tactics, endgames, mates, and other puzzles. I would examine games of tournament play. Give homework, group according to abilities and use a wide range of technology, including computer programs."

Ted Castro emphasizes making it fun for the kids, pairing them up by level and letting them play casual games with each other.

Dan Heisman suggests an ambitious approach. "I would get all the parents as informed as possible (how about including a copy of my book *A Parent's Guide to Chess?*), letting them know about activities and upcoming tournaments. I would set a goal to have everyone play in the local and state championships, and even travel to the Nationals if possible, no matter what the skill of the players. Usually at the start you break up the class into those who know the rules well and those that don't know the rules at all, or need a refresher. That latter group needs more attention at first so they can join the first group later."

Most of our panel coaches advised splitting any class time evenly between instruction and playing, but Weiss had a different opinion. "I would always have more instruction than playing time," he said, "at a ratio of about three to one. Many would play during lunch or during their free periods during the day

in school."

In my own experience, I recall having a class of about eight elementary school students a number of years ago. I was excited to teach them some of the subtle aspects of the game, and introduce them to a local scholastic chess league, but all they wanted to do was play. Learning to improve was far down their list of priorities, so I quickly modified my approach from half instruction and half playing to quick five minutes of instruction. I then turned them loose to just have fun playing, hanging pieces and all. But I didn't return the following year – I didn't want to be a baby-sitter.

Especially since a group of kids in a scholastic club will invariably be on different levels, it is important to keep them motivated and interested. Weiss advises introducing competition early on, "with points awarded for correct answers to solutions, homework and game play." For students showing strong interest, he suggests assisting them in attending local or even national tournaments, and would enroll the team at an Internet website so that they can play each other from home. To keep things interesting, he teaches a variety of subjects – tactical tricks and traps (pins, forks, skewers, discovered check, overloading, etc.), basic positional understanding, chess stories, and history. He also likes to use puzzle sheet quizzes, and question and answer sessions.

Heisman notes that it is important to provide extra instruction to those kids who may need it. "Once the kids get decent," he says, "you can play intramural matches or matches with other similar schools," in addition to attending local scholastic tournaments. He also suggests setting up a "ladder" within the group for measuring progress among the students.

Castro stresses making lectures fun, and not too long. He advises the occasional rated game, but throws in all the fun variants the kids enjoy, such as blitz and bughouse.

Van Delft adds that it is important to offer activities that are ability-appropriate, and has similar-level kids work together as a team. He keeps things very interactive, asking questions and encouraging his students to discover the answer on their own, rather than simply spoon-feeding them. For problems that appear too difficult, he will pose questions that assist the students in working their way to a solution.

I would add that it is important to understand the kids' motivation. One young girl in the current group I'm teaching is motivated because she wants "to kick the butts" of some boys who told her that only boys can play chess. One of the boys in the class is already pretty good, and just wants to get better. Another youngster knows very little, and is basically there to find out if chess is something he's interested in or not. So instruction and activities have to be developed accordingly, trying to meet all their needs as much as possible.

All the coaches long for as much parental involvement as they can get. "I would always want parents to be involved, in any way they can be," Weiss said. "Teaching, supervising kids at tournaments, helping on trips, etc." Heisman goes even further. "Without parents, chess will take a back seat to everything," he said. "And without parents' planning, kids will be unavailable for big events such as local and state championships. Parents who get to travel to state championships usually get into the sport. Setting up carpools and chaperones for tournaments is *de rigeur*. We may even show them *Searching for Bobby Fischer*." Van Delft adds that if parents are present during teaching sessions, they can follow the lessons and may perhaps become motivated to become chess teachers themselves.

Occasionally, a poorly-behaved child can become a distraction that needs to be addressed. Castro advises using the good old standby, "time out," and will speak to their parents. Heisman says that "You have to determine if the kids really want to be there. And some kids just want to play and not be instructed, so that's another issue." If a child is acting poorly because he doesn't really want to be in the group, Heisman will ask the parent to withdraw the child. In a related issue, he adds that "I would also educate the kids on how to behave during a game: not annoying their opponents, not cheating by helping others, not interfering with other games, when to resign (probably never against very

weak opposition), to play quietly, to get the TD in case of illegal moves or problems."

Van Delft said that he would directly ask the youngster why he or she is misbehaving. He will make the effort to involve them in interesting activities, but ultimately will offer them the choice of either participating properly or leaving the room.

Weiss is direct and to the point when it comes to disciplinary problems. When asked how he deals with such kids, he said, "I would not deal with them. They would be out of the club and off the team."

Any teacher will tell you that having a well thought out lesson plan is crucial to a properly functioning classroom, and a chess class is no different.

For beginners, Heisman says "We would start from scratch with how the pieces move, checkmate and draw concepts. Then let the beginners try to play (they always want to) with supervision to help with basic safety issues and legality." For more experienced players, he reviews the rules of chess and quickly proceeds with basic mating patterns, followed by teaching the importance of knowing when a piece may be safely taken and when it cannot. "With all groups the emphasis will always be on learning safety issues," he added. "Everything else, including how to keep all your pieces active, is secondary. But eventually, most strategy is based on activating pieces as best possible: control the center, castle the king, rooks to open files, don't bring out the queen where it can be attacked by less valuable pieces (not just queen for that matter). But safety, starting with counting skills, is paramount."

Personally, I have had success with combining a little teaching with a little playing as follows: I will teach how the pawn moves, then have two players play each other with only their pawns on the board. First one to queen a pawn wins. Then I'll teach the bishop move, and have the board set up with all the pawns on their starting squares, and one bishop per side, on its own third rank. Only the bishops can move, and I instruct the players that the first one to capture all of the opponent's pawns wins. It's interesting to see how long it takes before they realize that their bishop can only capture half the pawns on the board, but it helps to solidify both the strength and weakness of the bishop.

Then I move on the knight, and again place all the pawns on their starting squares, and provide one knight per side, anywhere on the back rank. The pawns can't move, only the knight. Whoever captures all of the opposing pawns wins. This game certainly helps the kids to learn the difficult knight move, but it requires careful supervision.

Then I'll do similarly with the rook and queen. These games usually progress pretty quickly, although I'll warn the kids to be careful not to let their rook or queen be captured by their opponent. Too often, the players will move with utter disregard for their opponent's moves and will be oblivious to the fact that they have left something *en prise*.

At times, I'll finish by giving each player a king and all of their pawns, again on their starting squares. I'll instruct them that the pawns may not move, only the king. The goal is to capture their opponent's pawns. Of course, no captures are possible with this scenario, but I have found this to be an instructive way to teach that a king may not move into check.

Eliot Weiss has a detailed ten-week lesson plan he utilizes for beginning players, and he was kind enough to share it with us. Here is how he proceeds:

Week 1 – covers the "basic basics"

- How to set up board and pieces
- How pieces move, including capture, promotion, and *en passant*
- Castling
- Check
- Ending a game: Winning/losing, resignation. Drawing: Stalemate, by agreement, three-fold repetition, perpetual check, fifty-move rule, insufficient mating material.

- Touch-move rule

Week 2

- Value of pieces
- Tactical ideas: forks, pins, skewers, discovered and double check
- Finishing off: king & queen vs. king. Put queen a knight move from enemy king; Force enemy king to edge; Avoid stalemate trap when both king and queen are a knight move away from the enemy king; Move your own king in for kill. King & rook vs. king. Put the enemy king in the box. Make the box smaller; bring your own king up; remember the "do nothing" move to force mate.
- Tips for practical play. Before you make a move ask yourself: Did my opponent's last move threaten anything? e.g., direct attack, fork If I go there can he take me? If yes is it gain, exchange or loss. If I go there do I leave anything unprotected that can be taken? If yes, will I lose material points. If I am attacked I can try: take, move, block, defend. If I am in check I can try: take, move, block. Look for unprotected pieces - your own as well as your opponents. Centralize your pieces - where is the center? Do not bring out the queen too early - you may lose her. Try to use all your pieces.

Week 3 – focuses on how to write down your moves

- Simple terms: Rank, file, diagonal
- Standard algebraic notation: 1 e4 Nf6; 2 d4 Nxe4; Rad5 Nce4 N5f3 capture sign x check + castling 0-0 or 0-0-0 *en passant* capture (exf6) pawn promotion (e8Q)
- Piece values - practice assessing positions with captures, recaptures and multiple exchanges.
- First principles of openings: one or two pawns in opening, not more. Knights before bishops. Do not move same piece twice in opening (unless it wins material or prevents loss of a piece). Castle as soon as possible, preferably on kingside. Play to get control of center.
- First principles of endings. Use your king - in the endgame it is an attacking piece. When ahead, exchange pieces, but not pawns. When behind exchange pawns, but not pieces. Put your rook behind, not in front of, passed pawns (your own or your opponent's). Passed pawns should usually be advanced as quickly as possible.
- Simple technique - King & pawn vs. king. How to avoid stalemate. Advance king before pawn. When king controls queening square then advance pawn. Play simple king and pawn endings for practice.
- Practice simple tactics. Forks, pins, skewers, discovered check, pawn promotion. Tips for practical play from level two. En passant from level one.

Week 4

- Simple terms: Major pieces, Minor pieces, the exchange.
- More principles in openings: Scholar's mate - watch for direct attacks against KB2 square Fool's mate - avoid kingside pawn moves that expose king.
- General principles. Never assume your opponent's last move was a mistake. It may not be safe to capture. Watch everything. The best move is not always the obvious one. When you have seen a good move then look for a better one.
- Endings king and two rooks vs. king, king and two bishops vs. king
- World champions since 1970

Week 5

- Endings king & pawn vs. king. Practice and study endings with pieces in various positions and multiple pawn endings. You should be able to assess any position and know how to play so as to maintain the 'opposition'. King and pawn endings with pawns on both sides of board. Triangulate your king so as not to give away the opposition. When you are a bishop and pawn up avoid ending with a rook's pawn and bishop on the wrong color square.

- Queen & king vs. rook & king. Force opponent's king and rook to side of board, avoiding stalemate traps.
- King & queen vs. king & pawn on seventh rank. Force defending king in front of pawn so you can move up your own king. repeat. Ending is drawn if pawn is on bishop's or rook's file (unless your king is close enough to enemy king).
- Openings: Simple terms - fianchetto, Greek gift. Names of basic king's pawn openings.
- Watch your back rank. Although a castle king is usually safer it is still vulnerable to attack. Watch your back rank and ensure your king is adequately defended. Look for weak points on your opponent's back rank.

Week 6

- Attacks on the e1-h4 (e8-h5) Diagonal.
- The main openings after 1. e2-e4 e7-e5.
- Queen Forks.
- Back Rank Mates.
- Discovered Checks and Attacks.
- The King and Rook Checkmate.
- Opening principles and theory
- The Italian Game (Giucoco Piano).
- The Two Knights' Defense.
- Sacrifices on f7/f2.
- Decoy/Destroy combinations.
- Basic King and Pawn endings.

Week 7

- The Ruy Lopez.
- The Petroff Defense.
- Attacking the castled King.
- Pawn structures and formations.
- Checkmate combinations.
- More about King and Pawn endings.

Week 8

- Gambits.
- The Sicilian and French Defenses.
- Combinations to win material.
- Thinking ahead.
- Strategy - making the most of your pieces.
- Queen endings.
- Rook endings.

Week 9

- The Queen's Gambit.
- Brief introduction to other openings.
- Minor Piece endings.
- Chess History - learn about the World Champions and guess their moves.
- Endgame Studies.

Week 10

- Review
- Chess tournament
- Concluding ceremony

And some final comments from the panel:

Weiss: "Start early, give the kids confidence and build up their self-esteem."

Castro: "If they see that you love what you're doing, it's contagious! Their enthusiasm to play the game and to help you out will flow naturally."

Heisman: "Safety, safety, and safety. The kids who learn to analyze best to keep their pieces safe and win opponent's pieces are always the best. Encourage the best kids to attend events with adults even if the school club is not going."

A final word from me – keep it fun. For beginners, if it seems like it's too much work, what's the point? I hand out "homework" to the kids, but let them know it's optional. Most of them choose to do it anyway, but if I have a kid who just wants to play and has no interest in attaining deeper knowledge, I don't push it. When he's ready, he'll let me know.

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Problem #1



[FEN "2kr3r/pp1q1ppp/5n2/1Nb5/2Pp1B2/7Q/P4PPP/1R3RK1 w - - 0 1"]

It is White to move. What do you suggest?

Answer: 1.Nxe6. From Li Shilong – Wang Hao, Xinghua, 2010.

Problem #2



[FEN "rnnqr1k1/p3bp1p/1pp3pB/2PQPp2/3P4/2N5/PP2BP1P/R4RK1 w - - 0 1"]

It is Black to move. What should he do?

Answer: 1...Nh3+. From Arkadij Naiditsch – Spyridon Kapnisis, Peristeri, 2010.

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