



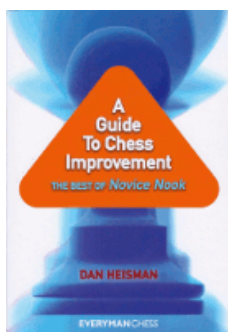
## COLUMNISTS

## Scholastic Chess

Steve Goldberg

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## A Conversation with Daniel Rensch Part Two

In last month's column, we began our interview with international master Daniel Rensch of Arizona. We complete it this month, in which Rensch discusses under what circumstances chess may help kids in other academic areas, and he offers a number of suggestions regarding how to improve the image of chess.

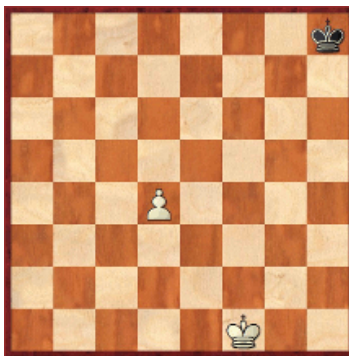
## Everyman Quiz of the Month

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 *How to Win at Chess – Quickly!*, by Simon Williams.



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 December 22, 2010. Send your answers to [scholasticchess@chesscafe.com](mailto:scholasticchess@chesscafe.com). Good luck!

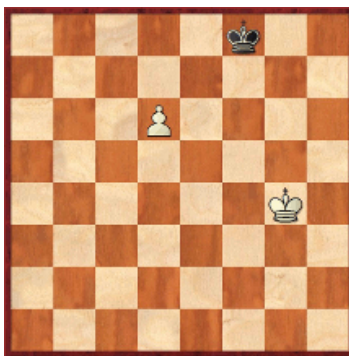
### Problem #1



[FEN "7k/8/8/8/3P4/8/8/5K2 w - - 0 1"]

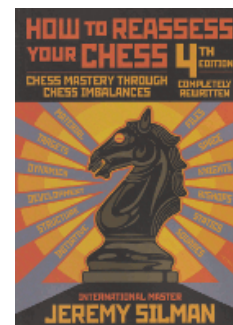
It is White to move and win.

## Problem #2



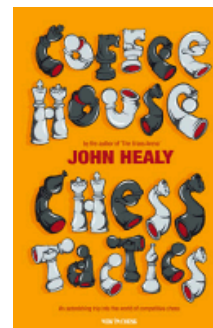
[FEN "5k2/8/3P4/8/6K1/8/8/8 w - - 0 1"]

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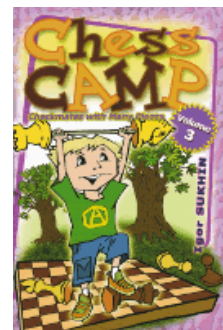
## How to Reassess Your Chess

by Jeremy Silman



## Coffeehouse Chess Tactics

by John Healy



Chess Camp, Vol. 3

by Igor Sukhin

### **Does Chess Help With Other Academic Subjects?**

Many research studies have been referenced over the years to demonstrate how chess-playing youngsters seem to perform better academically after they take up the game, compared to their non-chess-playing peers, or compared to themselves in their pre-chess days.

But at what level do these benefits accrue? Does simply learning the rules of the game suffice? Or perhaps, must a child reach Expert level or higher to demonstrate these "chess benefits?"

This month, we continue our interview with Daniel Rensch, who has strong opinions about whether chess does or does not improve a kid's academic work outside of chess.



IM Daniel Rensch

"Chess obviously does all those things for kids as far as improving their cognitive ability, their social skills, their math skills and reading – all the things that chess has been shown to do," he said. "I'm a big believer in that, but I'm also one who believes that those benefits have also been taken advantage of by a lot of scholastic teachers around the country, in terms of their ability to build a quick program that oftentimes becomes a 'run 'em in, spit 'em out' quantity kind of deal. They're taking advantage of that kind of mindset.

"In my opinion, if chess is just another casual thing a kid does – if it's a way for the parents not to have to pick them up on Wednesday because they have an hour of chess class, I'm not really sure that it does all those things. But when chess is taken to at least a slightly higher level, where the student does become a little more of a serious tournament player, whether or not they become a master, if it becomes an ambition of theirs, I believe that's really where you start to see the separation, with the kids having better test scores and getting better in other areas of their lives.

"From what I've seen, for kids who stop early, chess helps them while they are doing it, but it won't stay with them their whole lives unless they took it to a certain level, where they can't ever lose it. I think this has been taken advantage of by a lot of coaches around the country. It's not a bad way, but it's not how we think of chess.

"The way we build our program is to really challenge kids and help them to continue to progress because when they're young, they can. But if it's designed as a quantity, run 'em in, spit 'em out K-6 program, then it's not designed to really help them progress beyond a certain point. That's really been my experience."

## Time to De-Nerd Chess

Most chess players who truly devote themselves to the game tend to sequester themselves away for long periods of time, studying and analyzing, annotating their games, playing over master game collections, or playing chess online. But if taken to excess, to the exclusion of nearly everything else, might there be a social cost?

Rensch touched upon this issue, and suggested ways in which to counter this possible effect.

"I think it's more of a problem in terms of chess and its place in society and culture. I believe that it's promoted as a nerd sport and being intellectual elitist, even. There are kids who are naturally a bit introverted anyway. If a kid like that finds chess, and attaches to the part of chess that promotes this kind of self-consumed thinking, and the kid is able to do what he wants to do all the time, I guess chess is not a team sport in that way.

"I would say it's really about the individual as far as how they choose to live their life; if chess becomes a way to separate further, if they're just a shy person, I don't think that's a big problem. People grow differently. But if we're talking just chess, I believe that there's been a major problem in the game in that it's been promoted as a nerd sport, so that when a kid reaches puberty, let's be honest, he cares a lot about what the world thinks about him, from girls to who-knows-what. It's just not the cool thing to do.



IM Daniel Rensch

"Chess has established itself at different universities, there are chances for scholarships, it's just become more mainstream, with a lot of scholastic programs. In that way, it has been good – this large spread of the scholastic community in the quantity of the game.

"The scholastic programs have been great, but I'm talking about the chances of actually creating an American world champion who is healthy in mind and spirit, who's not a complete social introvert and intellectual elitist. That's something that I'd like to be a part of helping – to make chess more mainstream in our society, make it something so it's not only nerds are attracted to, if you want to be blunt about it.

"There are a few things that need to happen for that to be the case. I think that we need lots of universities giving scholarships. These universities have so much money, it's ridiculous. There's so much corrupt money in the NCAA sports – college football and everything else. You hear about it every other day.

"When universities are giving more scholarships, I think that will change the culture of the game. It will give more of a purpose, not only for kids to be interested, but for parents to keep their kids interested because they see that light at the end of the tunnel, so it's not a choice between athletics and chess.

"I also think that there needs to be a better stage for the professionals. I think that the United States Chess League has been doing wonders in that area, creating this huge atmosphere for a lot of the chess professionals around the country to compete against each other. It's like an NBA for chess. Even though the money's not there yet, I think it can be, if it's done right."

With his company, American Chess Events, Rensch has been reaching out to dedicated students willing to put in the effort to markedly improve. "The other thing I would like to do," he said, "is to change the view of chess in our society, everything from the financial status, getting out of the 'starving artist' mentality that most professional chess players live with, all the way to possibly becoming a mainstream, media-commercialized sport, seeing it more often on television.

"I think having an infrastructure for the professionals like the U.S. Chess League, and having more universities, in my opinion, all universities, giving ten to fifteen scholarships a year for chess. It's not that much when you consider how much money they're making at all the NCAA athletics. You'd have to convince them of the benefits of it. When people start to see what chess is attracting, and the type of benefits at their school, I think they will. It takes people with entrepreneurship, with attitude, and people with charisma, and the motivation to want to convince people of something to change in the chess world. That's something I'm trying to do."



IM Daniel Rensch

To date, Rensch has not been able to approach universities to pitch his ideas; his time has been consumed with running his chess company, organizing tournaments, his work at chesskid.com and chess.com, and spending time with his wife and children. Not to mention his ambition of becoming a grandmaster, not being satisfied with being an international master. But he hasn't lost sight of his larger goals.

"Something I want to do is go after all the major schools. To me, it's a step-by-step process. If I achieve some of the things I want to, and get to a little higher comfort level, into a situation where I feel capable about going after that, and spending a lot of time, perhaps I can do it. I think it might take a lot of time and a lot of convincing to get people on board with what chess can do for their universities.

"When you're trying to do something big, changing the culture of a particular thing, with chess as with anything else, I think you have to have a little bit of a pedigree, and try to achieve a couple things so that people will listen to you."

### **His Own Chess Career**

As noted, Rensch has aspirations to move beyond international master, to achieve the grandmaster title. Is there someone he trains with?

"Alex Yermolinsky is a really good friend of mine and we work with each other; he donates his time anytime I ask over the last few years. I've had a number of different coaches, but Yermo is the only person I would consider my mentor, my trainer in the chess world, as far as a titled player goes.



GM Alex Yermolinsky

"I lost some time myself. After graduating high school and thinking I was going to be a chess pro for a few years, I didn't play for awhile, because I had some medical issues. I had some ear problems, and ended up having a bunch of ear surgeries for a couple years. So I didn't play from about the age of twenty to twenty-three. But that's OK – at the time I wasn't able to travel or fly, but I was able to stay home, start a family, and work on growing my business. It all works out in the end."

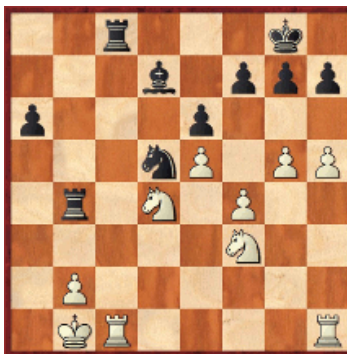
With his effort to become a GM, I asked Daniel if he has anyone "in the wings" prepared to take over his duties at American Chess Events.

"Right now, that doesn't seem to be a possibility. I'm just trying to figure out a way to keep going and not lose sight of those goals, but maybe be a little more patient. The situation that I'm in is a little bit different from the rest of my peers, as far as their ability to shove everything else aside and be chess professionals for a few years. Most people don't have a wife and two children at twenty-four, let alone a growing business and all these other things. But I feel really thankful for my situation. It's different, and it's interesting. I may not be a grandmaster tomorrow, but I plan to get better at chess for the next twenty-five years. A lot of people have thought that as soon as you get married and have children, it's going to start hurting your game. But I don't believe that having a wife and kids can do anything but help me focus on what I need to do. It means more because we're doing it together."

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## Answers to Last Month's Quiz

### Problem #1

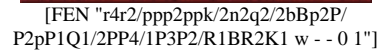


[FEN "2r3k1/3b1ppp/p3p3/3nP1PP/  
1r1N1P2/5N2/1P6/1KR4R b - - 0 1"]

It is Black to move and win.

**Answer:** 1...Nc3+. If 2.Rxc3, then 2...Rxc3. If 2.Kf2 Ne2+. And if 2.Ka1 Ra4#. From Rogers–Ashley, 1994.

### Problem #2



**Answer:** 1.Bg5 Qd6 2.b4 Bb6 3.a5. From Giri-Azimova, St. Petersburg, 2007.

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.



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