

**HOW TO REASSESS
YOUR CHESS 4TH
EDITION**

Other Siles Press books by Jeremy Silman

The Complete Book of Chess Strategy (1998)

The Amateur's Mind, 2nd Edition (1999)

The Reassess Your Chess Workbook (2001)

Pal Benko (2003)

Silman's Complete Endgame Course (2007)

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Preface

It's hard to believe, but *How to Reassess Your Chess* first hit the scene more than twenty years ago! As time went by, my ideas changed, expanded, and matured, and I improved each subsequent edition with new material that reflected this shift in perspective. This growing process continued and it became clear to me that a vast overhaul in my chess teaching philosophy necessitated a final edition. Those that enjoyed past editions will discover that I literally wrote this fourth edition from scratch—all new examples, all new prose, highlighted by lots of humor and some very original ways of presenting the material.

One thing was true of all the earlier editions: none were computer checked since powerful chess engines weren't readily available. However, now we're in a different age, and since the advent of computers in every household allows players of any rating to find the flaws in my (and others) analysis, I made a point of putting every position in this edition through a detailed analytical check by both Rybka 3 and Fritz 12. Though I concentrated on concepts over soulless analysis because I thought too many variations can drown out a book's message, there were times when I gave lines that I felt highlighted the point I was trying to make, or presented a detailed analysis that simply was so bizarre or exciting that I didn't have the heart not to include it in the festivities.

This fourth edition is the result of a lifetime of chess coaching and tournament competition. I've removed the extraneous elements from previous editions since I wanted to stay "on point" as much as possible. In fact, I tossed out anything and everything that I felt distracted from the book's real purpose: mastering the imbalances and allowing them to guide you to the correct plans and moves in most positions. On top of that, I also integrated quite a bit of chess psychology into the lessons—you'll find that many of these ideas have never been seen in any chess book before.

More than two decades after I wrote the first edition of *How to Reassess Your Chess*, I still get many kind letters from all over the globe. This new edition will please those that wanted more "Reassess" material, and it will also introduce a whole new generation to a system that makes chess far easier to grasp and thus far easier to enjoy.

It's always been my passion to help people who feel chess mastery is somehow beyond them to undergo a paradigm shift in their chess consciousness. *How to Reassess Your Chess, 4th Edition* was written to elicit that kind of experience. If it helps you, the reader, to grasp facets of chess that were previously invisible, then the years I spent writing this book will be very well spent.

Jeremy Silman
Los Angeles, CA

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my students, who, over the years, have given me permission to use their games as instructive templates. In particular, I must give Pam Ruggiero (aka girl-brain) a full salute for sending me dozens of her games, some of which showed a high level of chess understanding, and others which illustrated weaknesses that most amateur players also share (thereby making these examples invaluable).

A debt of gratitude is also owed to both *New In Chess*, which allowed me to use various quotes from their wonderful magazine, and www.chess.com, that let me reprint some of the articles I wrote for them.

I must give some love to my “posse”—Dr. Manuel Monasterio and the inimitable Vance Aandahl, Grandmasters Yasser Seirawan and Joel Benjamin, and International Masters John Watson, John Donaldson, Dr. Anthony Saidy, and Jack Peters. All of them helped with alternative piece names, analysis, and/or the sharing of general ideas that ultimately enriched the book.

Finally, I want to give a hearty thank you to International Master Elliott Winslow, who was happily retired from all chess-related things, only to be dragged screaming back into the fold when I nagged him, again and again, to put his life on hold and proof this book. Realizing that he had to shut me up or go insane, he ultimately complied.

Introduction

How to Reassess Your Chess is all about turning you, the chess student/lover of the game, into a player with superb positional understanding and skills. You may ask, “Why do I need another instructive chess book?” The answer is: Look at your rating. Look at your playing strength. Do you feel like you have superb positional skills? If not, wouldn’t you like to have them?

As a chess teacher and, more importantly, as a student of the game that personally ran into many hard-to-scale learning plateaus, I fully understand the frustration chess fans experience when they find themselves frozen at a particular skill level. It’s my belief that every player needs a firm chess foundation to reach his potential, and the lack of such a foundation more or less forestalls any real hope of attaining the chess heights most players dream of.

How to Reassess Your Chess, 4th Edition was designed for players in the 1400 to 2100 range. A close study of its contents will imbue the serious student with a rock solid positional chess foundation, an appreciation of planning plus an understanding of how to make logical plans based on the needs of the position, and surprising insights into previously ignored areas of chess psychology. By employing new ways of presenting concepts and games, and by making the book feel both personal and fun to read, I’ve done everything possible to ensure that studying becomes a joy and that the material presented—often viewed as too complex for the masses—will suddenly make sense and, as a result, be remarkably easy to retain.

Ideally, this fourth edition should be read from beginning to end. However, two indexes add to the ways the book can be read. One acts as both a games’ index and a list-of-players’ index, and can be used to find all the games in the book by a favorite player or, at a glance, just see who played whom. The other index is about chess concepts, and can prove to be a very useful study tool—for example, if you wish to study isolated pawns, just look that up in the index and go to each listed page. This lets you make a detailed examination of any particular concept that interests you.

A word about the examples: you’ll notice that I’ve used games by grandmasters and also games by amateurs! I’ve used new games, and I’ve also used games from the seventeenth century! I made use of blitz games from the Internet, and even used the blitz players’ online names. I have a simple philosophy: if a position or game is instructive, it’s important. I don’t care if Kasparov played it, or if it’s beginner vs. beginner. In fact, lower rated games and/or blitz games often feature the kind of

errors real players make, and this makes the example far more personal for a large range of readers.

To top it all off, I didn't shy away from employing humor if I felt it added to the lesson being taught, or improved the book's overall readability. Who said that it's not possible to study chess, learn advanced concepts, and laugh at the same time? I tell stories in the book that push home a point and also entertain. I used online handles because they are colorful and add to the example's fun-quotient. Why shouldn't chess study be fun?

I honestly believe that a thorough study of this book will take you on an enlightening journey that, ultimately, will shatter your old chess misconceptions and drag you laughing into a Golden Age of chess understanding and chess enjoyment.

Part One / The Concept of Imbalances

Contents

Imbalances/Learning the ABCs

Superior Minor Piece—Bishops vs. Knights

Pawn Structure—Weak Pawns, Passed Pawns, etc.

Space—The Annexation of Territory

Material—The Philosophy of Greed

Control of a Key File—Roads for Rooks

Control of a Hole/Weak Square—Homes for Horses

Lead in Development—You're Outnumbered!

Initiative—Calling the Shots

King Safety—Dragging Down the Enemy Monarch

Statics vs. Dynamics—The Battle Between Short
Term and Long Term Imbalances

Planning—Creating Your Own Future

Talk to the Board and It Will Talk to You

Summary

Imbalances

Learning the ABCs

“A sound plan makes us all heroes, the absence of a plan, idiots.”
—G.M. Kotov, quoting a mysterious “chess sage.”

At some time or other every tournament player learns a few opening lines, some tactical ideas, the most basic mating patterns, and a few elementary endgames. As he gets better and more experienced, he significantly adds to this knowledge. However, the one thing that just about everybody has problems with is planning. From class “E” (under 1200) to Master, I get blank stares when asking what plan they had in mind in a particular position. Usually their choice of a plan (if they have any plan at all) is based on emotional rather than chess-specific considerations. By emotional, I mean that the typical player does what he *feels* like doing rather than what the board is *telling* him to do. This somewhat cryptic sentence leads us to the following extremely important concept: **If you want to be successful, you have to base your moves and plans on the specific imbalance-oriented criteria that exist in the given position, not on your mood, tastes, and/or fears!**

Literally every non-master’s games are filled with examples of “imbalance avoidance.” Beginners, of course, simply don’t know what imbalances are. Most experienced players have heard the term and perhaps have even tried to make use of them from time to time; however, once the rush of battle takes over, isolated moves and raw aggression (or terror, if you find yourself defending) push any and all thoughts of imbalances out the door. In this case, chess becomes an empty move-by-move, threat-by-threat (either making them or responding to them) affair.

What is this mysterious allusion to the chessboard’s desires (i.e., doing what the chessboard wants you to do)? What is this “imbalance-oriented criteria” that we are going to have to become aware of, and how do we master its use? What, exactly, is a plan? To answer these questions, the first thing we have to do is understand that **an imbalance is any significant difference in the two respective positions.**

This sounds rather vacuous. How can such a simplistic thing be important? The answer is that it's far from simplistic, and that this easy-to-grasp concept allows any player from 1400 on up to understand most positions in a basic but logical fashion. In other words, where a position may have looked much too complex to fathom, the imbalances deconstruct it in a way that makes it user friendly.

Here's a simple example: if one side has more queenside space while the other side is staring at his opponent's weak pawn, those are the imbalances that delineate the moves and plans that both players would follow. In effect, the imbalances act as a roadmap that shows each side what to do.

The following list of the imbalances will be discussed all through this book:

IN A NUTSHELL

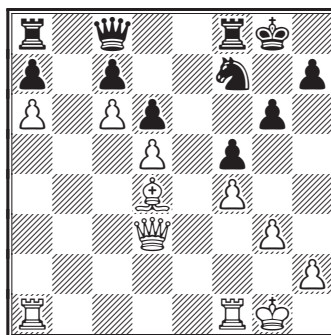
An imbalance is any significant difference in the two respective positions.

- **Superior minor piece**
- **Pawn structure**
- **Space**
- **Material**
- **Control of a key file**
- **Control of a hole/weak square**
- **Lead in development**
- **Initiative** (though I'll usually refer to it as Pushing Your Own Agenda)
- **King safety**
- **Statics vs. Dynamics**

Whole sections are devoted to each imbalance on this list, but first let's take a quick, at times exaggerated, look at all of them. My immediate goal is to give you a feel for what imbalances are. My ultimate goal is to train your mind to embrace "Imbalance Consciousness"—a state where the use of imbalances becomes a natural and often unconscious process.

Superior Minor Piece – Bishops vs. Knights

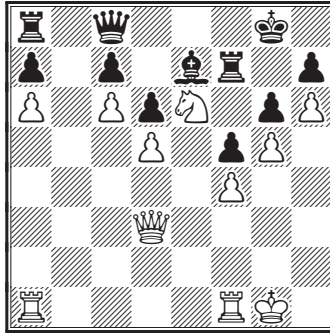
Diagram 1



White to move

Compare white's Bishop, which is eyeing two position-penetrating diagonals, and black's slacker Knight, and you'll immediately know which minor piece is winning this battle. When we add other imbalances into the equation—White has an advantage in both central and queenside space, a target on a7 (which can be gobbled up by Ra1-b1-b7), and chances to mate (after Bc3 followed by Qd4) black's vulnerable King—one could understand if Black chose this moment to resign.

Diagram 2

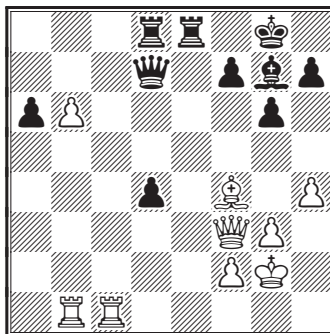


White to move

Black's Bishop, which is caged and useless, is no match for white's Knight, which is the ruler of the known universe. Combined with other favorable white imbalances—central, queenside, and kingside space, control of the hole on e6, and (after Ra1-b1-b7) pressure against a7 and c7—Black would be well advised to resign as quickly as possible.

Pawn Structure – Weak Pawns, Passed Pawns, etc.

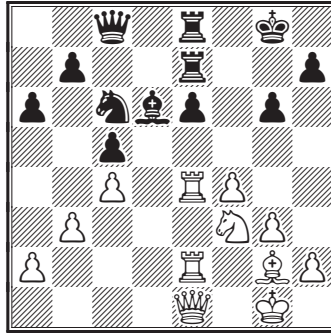
Diagram 3



White to move

Black is a pawn up and he has two passed pawns to white's one passer. Yet, Black can resign! The reason? White's passed pawn is further advanced and all his pieces are working with the pawn to make sure it scores a touchdown on b8: **1.b7** (Threatening to win a whole Rook with 2.b8=Q.) **1...Rb8 2.Bxb8 Rxb8 3.Qc6 Qd8** (No better is 3...Qxc6+ 4.Rxc6 Be5 5.Rc8+ Kg7 6.f4 Bd6 7.Rxb8 Bxb8 8.Ra1 d3 9.Kf3 stopping any d-pawn nonsense and intending Rxa6 followed by Ra8) **4.Qc8 Be5 5.Qxd8+ Rxd8 6.Rc8**, 1-0.

Diagram 4

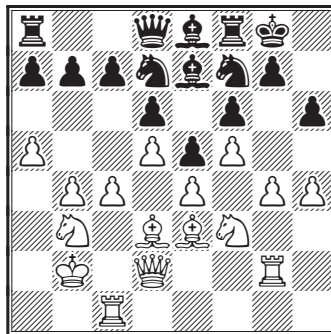


White to move

Black has a weak, isolated pawn on e6. Naturally, White dedicated his game plan to going after it. Thus far, white's Queen and Rooks are piling on the pressure but, since chess is a team game, he's not done yet! **1.Bh3** (A fourth white piece enters the assault against e6) **1...Nd8 2.Ng5** (The entrance of this fifth white piece into the battle for e6 dooms black's pawn.) **2...Bb8?** (This allows a trick that makes black's game even worse) **3.f5! gxf5 4. Bxf5** and e6 will still fall, but now black's King is sitting in "open air" (another imbalance White can use!).

Space – The Annexation of Territory

Diagram 5



White to move

Part Two / Minor Pieces

Contents

Knights / Psychopaths of the Chessboard!

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The Useful Bishop

The Tall-Pawn

Bishops of Opposite Colors

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Bishops—Tests

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Feeling the Minor Piece Tension

The Two Bishops

Two Bishops Antidote—Trade One Off

Free Range Bishops Are Happier Bishops

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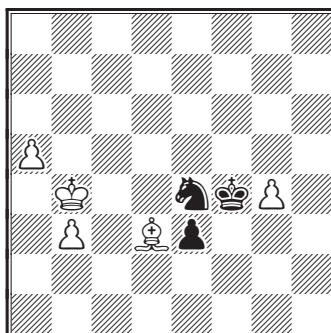
Bishops vs. Knights—Tests

Knights

Psychopaths of the Chessboard!

At times, Knights—also known as nerts, neons, jumpers, octopus, squid, and horses—are very much like clowns. They leap over other pieces, they prance about in a strange drunken gait, their movements make them seem almost alien compared to the other chessmen, and they can even make us laugh when we see a Knight do an octopus imitation by forking the whole royal family and estate (attacking King, Queen, and both country homes/Rooks all at once). However, as any clown-wise child will tell you, there is also something scary about them. They seem docile, but behind the facade and horse-like grin is a psychopath, and nothing is safe.

Diagram 20



Black to move

I was watching a student of mine play random 1-minute games on the ICC (Internet Chess Club) and expected him (he was Black) to resign here. Instead, I was witness to something that seemed more like a tragicomedy (or an episode of the Simpsons) than a chess game:

63...Nf2 64.Be2 Nxf2 65.a6

“Okay” I thought, “it’s over. Time for Black to give up.” Of course, I couldn’t have guessed that black’s Knight was really some sort of ravenous demon in disguise, ready to go on a binge and devour everything in sight.

65...Ne5 66.a7 Nc6+

DOH!

67.Kc5 Nxa7 68.Kb6 Nc8+ 69.Kc7 Ne7 70.b4 Nd5+

DOH!

71.Kd6 Nxb4 72.Kc5 Nc2 73.Kc4 Kg3 74.Kc3 Kf2 75.Bc4 Ne1 76.Kd4 Nf3+ 77.Ke4 Nd2+

DOH!

78.Kd4 Nxc4, 0-1. An epic tragedy for White, but Black had to be rather pleased with himself!

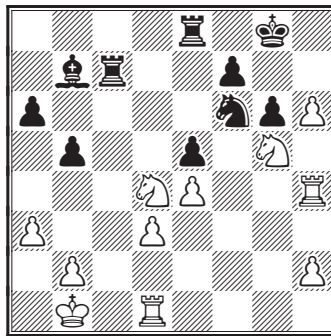
I can imagine many of you telling me, “Who cares? White went crazy and gave everything away. Surely a really good player wouldn’t fall victim to such foolishness?”

One would think so, but let’s take a look at a game of the 15th World Chess Champion, Vishy Anand. You’d consider him a “really good player,” wouldn’t you?

V. Anand - V. Ivanchuk, World Blitz Moscow 2007

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Bd3 Bc5 6.Nb3 Ba7 7.Qe2 Nc6 8.Be3 d6 9.N1d2 Nf6 10.f4 0-0 11.Bxa7 Rxa7 12.g4 b5 13.0-0-0 Rc7 14.Rhg1 Qe7 15.Kb1 Nd7 16.g5 Bb7 17.Rg3 Nb4 18.Rh3 g6 19.Qg4 Rfc8 20.Qh4 Nf8 21.a3 Nxd3 22.cxd3 h5 23.gxh6 Qxh4 24.Rxh4 Nh7 25.Nd4 Nf6 26.N2f3 Re8 27.Ng5 e5 28.fxe5 dxe5

Diagram 21



White to move

This was the final game of the event, and would determine who would earn the title of World Blitz Champion. In other words, they had to play quickly but it was serious business! Anand had outplayed his opponent and now had a forced win.

29.Ndf3??

The god of Knights wasn’t kind to Anand in this game. He missed 29.h7+ Kg7 (29...Kh8 30.Rf1 is easy) 30.Nde6+! (It’s always a scary thing when animals attack.) 30...fxe6 31.Nxe6+ Kh8 (31...Rxe6 allows 32.h8=Q+) 32.Nxc7. This would have been rather nice, but having overlooked the possibility and

granting Black a reprieve, the lone enemy Knight suddenly takes matters into its own hands/hoofs.

29...Nh5! 30.Rg1?

Missing his last chance to keep a slight pull: 30.d4 exd4 (Much too risky is 30...f6? 31.dxe5 fxe5 32.Nxe5 Kh8 33.Rd6) 31.e5 Bxf3 32.Nxf3 Kh7 33.Rhx4 Kxh6 34.Rd6.

30...Kh8

White threatened Rxh5, creating a nasty discovered check down the g-file.

31.Nh3

Anand's once mighty Knights go into full retreat mode.

31...Bc8 32.Nf2 Nf4

A nice square, but who would guess that this lone, unassuming Knight would go on a tear and win the game all by itself in just a few more moves?

33.Nxe5??

This Knight gets uppity and destroys the f4-Knight's defender.

33...Ne2

Argh! Suddenly the e5-Knight and the g1-Rook are both hanging at the same time.

34.Re1 Nd4

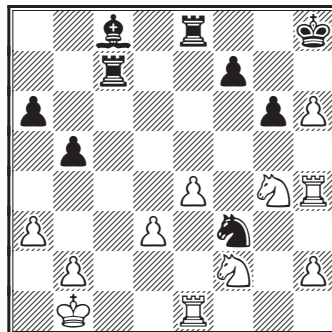
Black's Knight shows no mercy. Now e5 is still hanging, so White moves it to safety. To be fair, White no longer had a satisfactory reply—the black Knight had already injected its venom into the white position and, as everyone knows, there is no antidote for a horse bite.

35.Neg4

35.Nfg4 Bxg4 36.Nxg6+ fxe6 37.Rxg4 Kh7 was a better shot, but also pretty depressing.

35...Nf3

Diagram 22



Summary

- The ability to laugh at your opponent's threats while also seeking the very best for your own position is a huge one.
- You will gain huge dividends by creating an "I'll do what I want no matter what you say" attitude in chess.
- If your opponent sends you a subliminal "you have to" command, challenge it and let him know that the only agenda that's going to be pushed is yours.
- Instead of the word *initiative*, which few really understand, I use terms such as "macho chess", "pushing one's own agenda", "rubbish", "I will find a way", "I must", and "I'll do what I want no matter what you say" to illustrate and teach.
- I consider the initiative to be a physical manifestation of a psychological battle; both sides champion their view of things in the hope that the opponent will have to eventually forgo his own plans and react to yours.
- You can train yourself to fully understand and use these concepts by studying grandmaster games and getting a feel for the way the chess gods always stress the positive aspects of their game, and/or you can (and should!) practice this in your own games (tournament or blitz!), making sure that every game you play is a live lesson in positive cues like "Rubbish!" "I must find the best move!" "I will make full use of the positive imbalances in my position!" "I'll do what I want to!" and other nuggets of that nature. Yes, it *will* go horribly wrong from time to time, but that's how you learn. When you get nuked (which is inevitable—it happens to everybody), get up, wipe away the radioactive dust, and try again and again and again.
- A key position is, in my view, a very personal thing—while one player might see a particular situation as a key position that demands a huge effort to solve, another will see the same position as easy and thus not important at all. A position is only "key" if you sense that the correct move or plan will have a major impact on the game, but the right move or plan isn't clear to you.
- The terms, "lazy move", "soft move", and "half move" all describe a move that doesn't do as much as it should.

Macho Chess – Tests

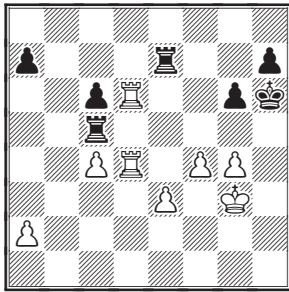
Since my ideas about chess psychology are almost certainly new to you, the chance to test your ability to excise “I can’t” and “I have to” from your inner chess dialogue, and to push your own agenda whenever reasonably possible, should prove both interesting and useful.

If you have trouble solving the tests, don’t worry—that means we’ve uncovered something you don’t understand, and this allows you to fix things by rereading the previous material or by picking up the bits of knowledge you’re missing in the answers that start on page 509.

PART FOUR - TEST 16

Diagram 195

[Level: 1600 - 2000]

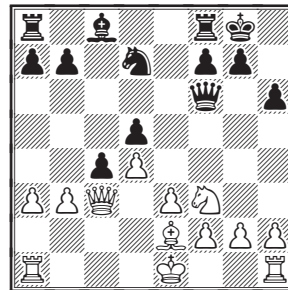


White to move

PART FOUR - TEST 18

Diagram 197

[Level: 2000 - 2500]

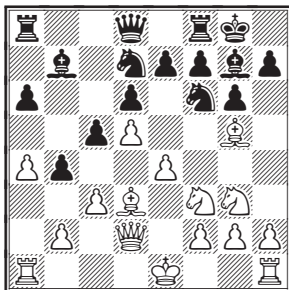


Black to move

PART FOUR - TEST 17

Diagram 196

[Level: 1800 - 2000]

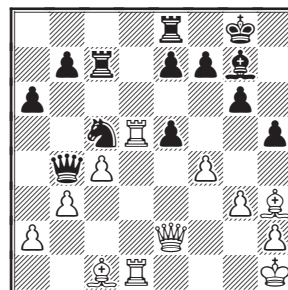


Black to move

PART FOUR - TEST 19

Diagram 198

[Level: 1400 to 2200]



White to move

make even one move, sitting there watching dinosaurs fly through the air until his flag fell on move one). Others gave pot a try (in fact, many players used it before, during, and after play!), others speed, and others opium. Times were quite different then, especially when you consider that too much caffeine is now a FIDE offense, and if you're caught a couple times imbibing too many cups, you can be banned for a few years. That's quite a huge leap from the "Exploration Uber Alles" mentality of the 60s!

Personally, I always had a serious sensitivity to sugar, and this more or less destroyed my career since I never made proper adjustments to the problem. In my youth, I would toss down chocolate bars during play, but would start falling asleep as the game progressed. I actually found myself waking up in several games with twenty to forty minutes having ticked off my clock! Later I would try juice, but even that level of sugar wiped me out and led to endless blunders as my brain melted and vision blurred. I only cured the problem in my final couple of tournament years—I brought a high-grade ginseng root to the board and sucked on it all through the game.

Ultimately, you have to figure out what's right for your body. Knowing which foods and beverages work for you is extremely important. And, if you find coffee wakes you up and allows you to play at your usual level, or if cough syrup (banned by FIDE) is needed so you don't cough and disturb your opponent—go for it. Last I heard, coffee and over the counter cough syrup are legal in the real world—and personally, I would love it if my opponent glugged down forty cups of java. I can't understand why any chess organization has a say in such things.

* * * * *

Is Chess a Gentleman's Game?

Anonymous asked:

I thought chess was supposed to be a gentleman's game, but at times my opponents act rudely during tournament play. What can I do about this?

Dear Anonymous,

During a tournament in Los Angeles, two players got into a fight while playing and began stabbing each other with their pens. This is probably not a good way to deal with a rude opponent. In fact, the only correct thing to do when an unruly imbecile is sitting opposite you is to find the tournament director and ask him to put an end to your opponent's deplorable behavior before it escalates into something like the aforementioned duel.

Rude and/or crazy behavior is a time-honored part of the game. The 16th Century Spanish priest and chess player Ruy Lopez de Segura recommended that, when playing outside, you should always face your opponent toward the sun so he will be unable to see the whole board through his permanent squint.

I've personally faced players who covered the whole spectrum of bizarre behavior: one guy would whistle a song (his tone would get more dominating if he felt he was doing well, and it would taper off into a beaten, pathetic drone if he was losing), another would mumble, an old man made disgusting gagging sounds from the first move to the last, another old man kept saying, "Go get the body! Go get the body!" over and over, and one guy who appeared to have a bird's nest on his head kept picking at it, popping whatever he had gotten from the nest into his mouth.

Here are a few more that I've faced, all of which are 100% true:

- A famous IM used to empty one of those huge plastic coke bottles and fill it with tequila. He'd keep it on the table, ready for use in case of an "emergency." His philosophy was, if something unpleasant happens on the board, take several deep glugs directly from the bottle and drink your worries away. He tried this on me once, emptied the bottle, and ended up with his face literally lying flat on the table. When it was his turn to move, his hand would rise up blindly, grope for a piece to move, and then (after pushing some piece somewhere) fall limply back to the ground. After he hung all his pieces, he quietly resigned and stumbled out of the hall.
- I first experienced this one while playing a well-known chess politician. After I made a move that my esteemed opponent felt was annoying, he slowly took a sandwich out of his backpack, carefully unwrapped it, and then took huge, loud bites—chomping sickeningly as if he was a lion eating human flesh. Once the sandwich was consumed, he then made eye contact with me, smiled, calmly reached into his pocket, and took out some dental floss. Then he flossed away, bits of sandwich flying all over the board.
- Many decades ago, I was teaching a fourteen-year-old girl who was all the rage. She did TV interviews, was big with celebrities, and was considered to be the next big chess thing by many pundits. While watching her play a tournament game, she hung a piece and, shockingly, quickly wrote a letter and handed it to her opponent under the table. It said, "Please don't take my piece. My father will beat me if you do!"
- When things have gone badly and it's time to resign, some players have a final bit of fun by making use of creative ways to give up. Alekhine once threw his King across the room in disgust, while Nimzovich (against Saemisch) stood on the table (and by some accounts got down on his knees) and shouted, "Gegen diesen Idioten muss ich verlieren!"—"Must I lose against these idiots!"
- Finally, while playing an event in London, an opponent of mine found a far calmer way to end the game—he simply pushed all the pieces off the board and onto my lap, and then got up and walked out of the tournament hall.