

DIAGONALS

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Opening Moves by Victor Tan

Welcome to our inaugural issue of *Diagonals*, a publication of Loudoun Chess, which in turn is not so much a club as a community of interested chess players.

This newsletter exists for the same reason that Loudoun Chess exists and as such, the content and material we hope helps those that seek to improve in chess as well as those that enjoy competition or are in Loudoun County schools. The most specific content of course, is to share news and events which are chess related to Loudoun County and chess players from the county.

Putting this publication together has only been possible because of the help of various volunteers. I'll be introducing them in their respective articles and columns. There should be a little something for everyone regardless of your level or perspective. Do keep in mind that this publication is free and as such, only exists for enjoyment. If you do appreciate our efforts,



feel free to donate to any number of chess activities in the county—which I'll mention below.

Finally, if you have any questions or comments, email me at:

loudouchess64@gmail.com.

CHESS TITLES / RATINGS

- **Grandmaster-(GM)** Awarded by FIDE for three GM norms.
- **International Master-(IM)** Awarded by FIDE for three IM norms.
- **FIDE Master-(FM)** Minimum FIDE rating of 2300 after 24 games
- **National Senior Master-(SM)** USCF Rating 2400+
- **National Master-(NM)** USCF Rating 2200+
- **National Master-(NM)** USCF Rating 2200+
- **Expert/Candidate Master-(Expert/CM)** USCF Rating 2000+

Chess Basics in Loudoun County

First things first, just where can you go to play chess in Loudoun County anyway? Well, it depends on the kind of chess you want to play and how you want to play.

The most accessible chess activity is that of Leesburg Chess Club (<http://chess.meetup.com/272>) which meets at the Starbucks in Leesburg. All levels of players are welcome. Please see their website for more information.

Many public and private schools have chess clubs for their students. Do check with the school or the PTA/PTO for more information about them. If you home school your child, check around to see if there is a

home school network you can plug into.

Up in Purcellville, at the Carver Senior Center, Raymond Duchesne hosts a chess club on Thursday nights with especially good lessons on most evenings. Their schedule is shared on the Leesburg Chess Club website.

For most intents, LCC and Carver Chess Club can be considered as one due to great chemistry.

Loudoun Chess (www.loudouchess.org) organizes tournaments with the Leesburg Chess Club and often holds them at the Carver Senior Center.

There are at least two or three chess players in the county that give lessons if you're interested. Email me for info.

School Chess Club: Chess at Newton-Lee Elementary School

By Shannon Sutter

[Ed: Shannon Sutter is a SEARCH teacher at Newton-Lee Elementary School in Ashburn. The SEARCH program focuses on thinking skills and encourages students to develop an excitement for learning and discovery.]

My chess program truly started because a few students were continuously asking for it, and by a few...I do mean three! I was a complete novice and still remain at the novice level, but decided if there was a need at my school for an opportunity to play chess, then I would seek out the resources to start it.

Everything really came into place with the availability of a classroom for my educational program. I am the gifted specialist at my school and was fortunate enough to obtain a classroom for that year. Well, this afforded my chess program a home! I had the space, now all I needed were the chessboards and pieces! Those were supplied by the amazing parents in my school community. Now...how to offer it to all students 1st -5th grade?

I came up with the idea of offering it during the lunch period which runs a full two hours. I named it *Chess and Chew* and offered it once a week. The caveat...they had to know how to play the game. Why? Lunch is only 30 minutes and no time for instruction of the game could take place in that time frame and allow for students to eat their lunch.

The Big Day! Awe, was what I experienced at 10:45 when the fifth graders rolled in. Panic, was the second emotion I experienced three minutes later...I didn't have enough chessboards for my "standing-room" only crowd. I was so ill-prepared with my 6 chessboards! I couldn't believe that this was truly something so many students would be interested in doing, especially since lunch is when students get to let loose and chat with their buddies...who would want to give that up and go play chess? Who? Boy, if only I had known that the "who" consisted of more than 124 students, I would not have felt like a king in check!

I truly was taken back by the overwhelming response of students who came that day! I was more amazed at their levels of expertise and maturity when playing the game. I had read a few books about chess, but didn't think I would be sought out as a referee for clarification of an "en passant" move or as a reference for questions that arose! Fortunately, I went with a Woodrow Wilson quote, "I not only use all the brains that I



Newton-Lee Elementary student Alex Chang at a recent scholastic tournament.

"Awe, was what I experienced at 10:45 when the fifth graders rolled in. Panic, was the second emotion I experienced three minutes later..."

have, but all that I can borrow." Borrow being the operative word, I borrowed a lot of students' chess knowledge that day!

Chess and Chew runs smoothly now. I have worked out all the glitches and have the opportunity to feel good when asked about a certain move that I now know and can respond somewhat intelligently on. The room is still crowded, but there are boards for all students who enter. I take a lot of joy in seeing a new face enter the room, always eager to explain that he/she had a parent teach him/her so they could participate in *Chess and Chew*!

I have referred to *Chess and Chew* as a program, but I guess the more correct term would be opportunity. The school day doesn't allow for me to instruct students on the game, however many students come to my room to borrow the chessboards during indoor recess



to teach their friends.

My chess program is growing and I am looking into adding more days next year or possibly even an after-school program. I don't think there is a *Chess and Chew* day that goes by without parents coming in to see what it is all about. I am very grateful to have such supportive parents who are aware of the educational aspects of chess and such enthusiastic chess playing students!

One Evening in Manhattan

By Scott Knoke



[Ed: Scott Knoke is a gentleman with interesting stories. He was kind enough to share with us some of his personal memories.]

When former world chess champion Boris Spassky was in New York in 1974, Sidney Fried threw a party for him in his spacious Manhattan apartment. Sidney kindly invited me as I was an employee of his. He had hired me the previous year as a copy editor for his chess book publishing company, RHM Press.

Many of those attending were GMs: Robert Byrne, then chess columnist for the *New York Times*; Arthur Bisguier, who had been the 1954 U.S. chess champion; and others. Also there was the well known chess author and columnist Andy Soltis, now a GM, who had published a collection of Spassky's games. I was particularly excited to meet Jack Collins, who was famous as Bobby Fischer's chess mentor.

GM Spassky was accompanied by his wife; his trainer, GM Igor Bondarevsky; and an agent of the Soviet secret police. This gentleman had the duty of making sure Spassky didn't talk politics (and perhaps making

sure he didn't defect). The secret police agent was young, spoke perfect English, and had precise, impeccable old-world manners. He kissed hands and bowed slightly, heels together; the women loved him.

Spassky is a friendly, sociable guy and was everyone's hero at the party. I had little personal time with him as he was followed around everywhere by a crowd of admirers. The Soviet secret police agent watched him like a hawk. Whenever he was talking to someone for too long, his handler would go

"This gentleman had the duty of making sure Spassky didn't talk politics (and perhaps making sure he didn't defect)."

up and tell him he was "needed in the other room" and escort him to safety.

Early in the evening the Soviet contingent seemed stiff and ill at ease. Then someone suggested skittles, and a Russian clock, one of those big white plastic monsters, was produced. That brought out the smiles and everyone loosened up. Collins, in his wheelchair, started playing with someone.

I did get to talk a bit with Robert Byrne, whose weekly chess column I never missed reading. He had been U.S. chess champion in 1972 and had become a world championship candidate by finishing third in the 1973 Interzonal. In their Candidates match in January 1974, just a few weeks before the party, Spassky beat him and knocked him out of the running.

GM Byrne, not knowing me, must have assumed I was strong like the other guests. At the time I spoke only descriptive notation, not algebraic. I had seen a line in the Pirc that is sometimes called the Byrne Variation and I asked him about it. He started lecturing me in algebraic on long variations, speaking quite rapidly; he might as well have been speaking in Mandarin. I kept replying "right, sure, OK . . ."

A Bit of Methodology

By Raymond Duchesne

[Raymond Duchesne is the main host of the chess club at the Carver Center in Purcellville. He will admit to having played tournament chess more than two decades ago and has been giving regular lessons to many of us—both in class and across the board]

If you come to the Thursday classes at the Carver Center, you know that I insist strongly on the use of the following method to evaluate chess positions:

1. Gather as many features about the position as you can. (By feature, in chess we mean things like “The black pawn in d6 is backwards” or “White has a weakness on the first rank: his king could be mated if a black rook can penetrate.” Once you have played a little, you will learn to recognize that type of features quickly.)
2. Based on the features you have found assemble ideas to form plans. (An idea would be: “I’ll focus on the weak backward pawn on d6” and the plan would be “I’ll concentrate my forces –bishop, queen and rooks- on the weak d6 pawn.”)
3. Now that you have a few plans at your disposition, make a mental list of the candidate moves that will help you carry out your plans.
4. Lastly, analyze the candidate moves and choose the best. If you have time and are unhappy with the search results, go back to the beginning and refine each step else, rely on your practical instincts...

There is so much to say about each of those four points that one could spend a few years expanding each one of them. However I would like to attract your attention to the fact that the method is very universal; you can use it to (attempt to) solve most problems that are coming your way: checker problems, engineering issues and even some big life dilemmas. The reason is simple: the method tries to copy the way humans think in general. We are not computers, we are ill equipped to look at all possible solutions to a problem or to analyze in depth: we have to make choices based on advice, imperfect knowledge and

repeating patterns that we have been able to identify. It is well known that in chess, what separates grand masters from the rest of us is their ability to immediately identify the relevant patterns in a position and focus their minds on solving the two or three associated issues.

So, if the method reflects the way I think, why bother? What’s the purpose? The idea behind the method is to not just to reflect the way we think but also to add some discipline to our thinking process, take advantage of our natural strengths (the identification of patterns, the way we can play with and merge ideas in our mind) and hide our weaknesses (our relatively bad computation skills, our imperfect memory, our limited stamina...). I will expand on this, in the context of chess positions, in future articles but I will first attempt to show the generality of the method by applying it to a different kind of problem.



Why not apply the method to the following general problem: “How can I become a better chess player?” (Or how can I help my kid/student become a better player?) Let’s try!

1. Features: what could they be?
 - a. I am human (I have a certain stamina, a certain type of psychological profile; I am a slow/quick, deep/superficial thinker; I blunder a lot)
 - b. I (don’t) have a lot of time to play or study.
 - c. I (don’t) like to study (With books, friends or computer)
 - d. I (don’t) know a lot about endings, tactics, strategy and/or openings.

e. Chess is a timed, two persons game with strict rules governing the game itself but also behavior of the players.

f. Chess is often played using an exhausting tournament format.

g. Many more...

A point is apparent in making that list, there are very many dimensions of your personality as well as the game itself to consider **BEFORE** you make an improvement plan. Play a few tournaments, analyze games between world champions and you will be soon convinced that games are often decided by factors like psychology and stamina. Why ignore those factors in



your preparation?

2. Ideas and plans: once you have built your own list of personalized features, try to prioritize. Remember the features in that case are traits of your personality, generalities about chess playing etc... and write down any idea that could help you get better marks in your own eyes. (Look and ask around.) Once you have all the ideas in place make a few plans by fitting some of those ideas together. One of the great benefits of listing the features **BEFORE** coming up with ideas is that you may be able to make some serious economy of time by fitting ideas together.

3. Candidate moves. Let's consider a scenario...

Features:

- I spent a lot time studying strategy and endings (I was told one could not become a GM without mastering those areas)

- I lose most of my games on time or because of some stupid tactical trick...

Ideas:

- I must address the time issue
- I must improve tactically

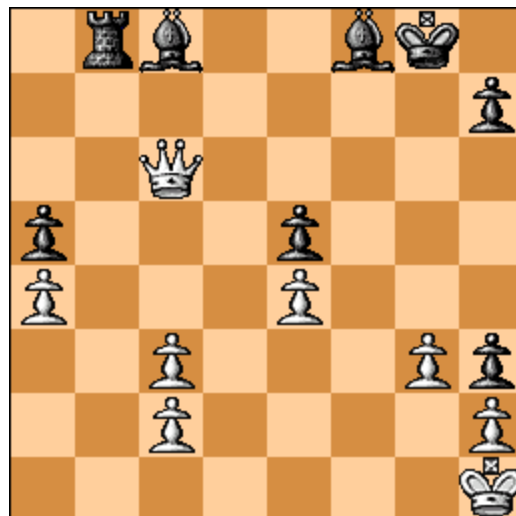
Candidate moves to remedy the situation could be:

- Play blitz games
- Study openings
- Do a lot of tactical exercises
- Change your attitude (Tactics is at least as important an aspect of chess as strategy: don't be a snob!)
- Change your lifestyle: go play soccer, jog (Maybe I am lacking stamina during those week-end games)

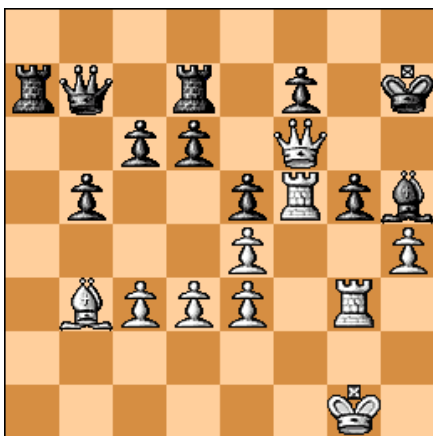
4. Analysis. Your two measures of success are your results and your level of enjoyment. (Don't forget the second measure: if chess is not fun, you should definitely revise your plans). It is often difficult in a case like this to do a deep analysis and arrive at a conclusion before actually executing the plan (there is not the equivalent of checkmate or loosing your queen in this case -I hope-); however in most cases where a change in attitude or lifestyle is possible it should be given more weight since it will have a pervasive effects on all aspects of your game! The good thing is you have all your life in front of you: this is long term planning and you can go back on your moves.

Simple Puzzles

Here's a couple of simple puzzles that newer players might find helpful. White to move in both cases.



Simple Puzzles continued...



Loudoun Chess

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*Playing hard and
having fun!*

Why Loudoun Chess?

Some of you may be wondering why there is another organization or group for chess in Loudoun County. The answer is really simple. Loudoun Chess has goals which are different enough that a separate organization is a better solution.

Many of the activities that will be organized around Loudoun Chess is easily in concert with Leesburg Chess Club (led by Larry Hughes) and the Carver Senior Center Center Chess (led by Master Raymond Duchesne) and can be thought of as cooperative and complementary. Loudoun Chess is not going to exclude either but will in fact, try to bring different activities and serve as a a touchpoint for the younger generations in Loudoun County at the same time.

We are going to encourage chess improvement through competition and education as well as help the county's parents, teachers and schools bring chess to the kids.

Chess Parent

OK, so you are starting out your child in playing chess. There are lots of things that I can say and lots of approaches you can take. However, chess is not just tournaments for your child. It is about giving him or her something that may last a lifetime.

The first question is not for a your child or the chess coach or another parent. The first question is for *yourself*. It is made up of a single word. **Why?** Why are you teaching your child chess? Why do you want him or her to get better in chess? Why bother? Only you can answer that.

In this column, one question I get asked by other parents is for book recommendations.

Can you recommend me starter books for my children?

Yes, go get Chess Tactics for Kids and How to Beat Your Dad at Chess, both by Murray Chandler. You can use them by either going through them with your child or if your child is capable of some self study, learn by looking at the diagrams.

Starter books for the Chess Parent?

The Complete Idiot's Guide To Chess, Third Edition by Patrick Wolff.

Affordable and excellent coverage of chess in general.

Tournament Talk

Here are a few things you might want to know about draws in USCF tournaments.

1. All draw claims are draw offers That means that if both players agree, it is over, even if the claim is not good.
2. If your opponent claims a draw, you may not want to accept but have him call the TD over to decide. If incorrectly claimed, the TD may reduce his time. So you might just want to keep quiet and let the TD go through his decision making process.
3. If you delivered stalemate (and that was your intention), you don't need to press the clock but you should press the clock to lower the chances of a dispute.
4. Write down all the moves, it makes your draw claims a lot easier to substantiate.
5. The proper timing to offer a draw is to make your move, release your piece, offer your draw (before pressing the clock). If you opponent says no or touches a piece, go ahead and press your

clock. Of course, if you are in a time scramble, you may not feel like following this procedure.

6. If you are offered a draw by your opponent before he moves, you should tell your opponent to make his/her move first. He cannot withdraw his offer after his move. You should then consider the resulting position and then accept or reject the offer.
7. How to claim a draw by 3rd occurrence of a move? You should write the move down that will cause the 3rd occurrence of the position; NOT play the move; stop the clock; and call a TD and make the claim. If your opponent cause the 3rd occurrence before your move, then you just stop the clock and make the claim. You must be on move to make the claim (i.e. your opponent must have pressed the clock already) even if your very next actions are to write down his move and stop the clocks anyway.