

How to improve your chess life

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Everyone will promise it to you, but is there really a sure-fire way to improve your chess? To make you understand the game better? Indeed there is, as one law-student in England discovered. Mind you it may cost him his degree – but what are a few missed lectures for a chess junkie going for the 2200? Here is Aryan's testimony.

Aryan's testimony

By Aryan Argandewal

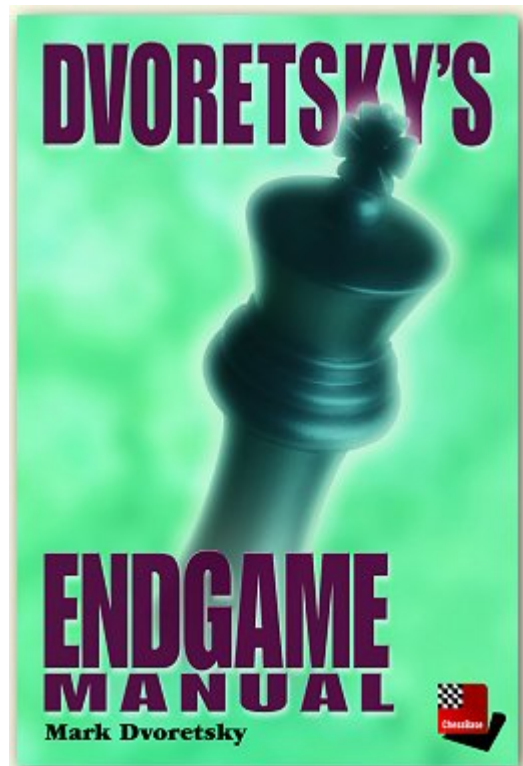
Monday is generally considered to be the worst day of the week, for a good many reasons one might suggest. It is the start of the week after a short, nice weekend. Some still carry their hangovers from Saturday...and here you are back behind the desk! Usual faces, phone calls, arguments, cheap fast food lunch and of course the ongoing tragic state of international affairs which keeps coming through our TV screens.

Not so for me. Monday is the day of the week when I have a guaranteed fixture game at the club. And that means I can't wait until the weekend is over. Sometimes it results in mini-tragedies because I spend all Sunday night studying chess, sometimes till morning. And then, of course, I am late for everything else.

My local chess club is about twelve minutes driving (or five minutes the way I drive!) from my university. It is one of the oldest chess clubs in England. It was founded back in the 18th century. Every Monday I get there first. Reason? I have two late lectures at university from 16:00 to 18:00 hrs. As the club opens at 19:30 I have a whole hour and a half to kill. So I can waste it in a traffic jam or... drive fast to the club and get there more than 90 minutes earlier! So every Monday I get there at 18:05 with an extra 90 minutes to spare!

How do I spend those 90 minutes? You guessed right: I play against Fritz8 for an hour or so. Then I analyze my games. Before I know its time to play against a human opponent!

I am a regular customer of ChessBase. Normally I purchase one training CD at a time. But recently logic slipped away. In my last order I had three CDs: *The Basic Principles of Chess Strategy* Vol. 2 by Prof. Bartashnikov, *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* and Boris Shipkov's *Queens Gambit Accepted*. In fact I ordered five (!) not three. Thanks God the other two (Trompovsky's Attack and Pirc Defence) will arrive in a couple of days. I say thanks God because if all five arrived on Friday I would've probably been hospitalized by Monday!



My ChessBase parcel from Germany was delivered around noon on Friday. So I decided to just have a quick glance through the CDs and go to lecture at 14:00h. I made myself a cup of strong Gold coffee and topped it with thick cream, went to my bedroom.

It was raining outside.

As The Basic Principles of Chess Strategy Vol. 2 quietly slipped into my Toshiba laptop I nervously awaited for the first glance of the material. A quick look at the chapters said everything: Weak and Strong Squares, Piece Activity, Two Bishops Advantage, Attack and Defence, Counterattack, Prophylaxis...



I was reading greedily through the chapters like a kid in a toy store who can't get enough. The material seemed so logical that I was initially disappointed. 'Of course!' - I kept exclaiming to myself every time I read another piece of common sense from the strategy disc. 'Of course!' 'Of course!' 'I knew this! I swear!'...But wait a minute: what is the point of reading if you knew this already? And then it struck me: I knew most of it but my knowledge was not systematic. Imagine building a car without a proper design, aerodynamics and engineering. Even if you are a very gifted wannabe you still need a reliable source of information, a textbook if like. Only then can you rely on your intuition in a given situation. No matter how talented you are, if your randomly acquired knowledge is not brushed, enhanced and most importantly put in order, you won't achieve your goal. I continued

reading...chapter after chapter...game after game.

I stopped reading for a minute, looked through the window. It was getting dark and that meant I missed both my lectures. It was still raining outside. I continued reading through to midnight, and then through to morning. I left my bedroom only to make two half-pounder pre-made cheeseburgers in the microwave, so I must have lost around three minutes of my precious time! Oh, and on the way back saluted a Chinese friend whose English pronunciation resembles my tactical play. And back to reading. By midnight Sunday (!) I thought I needed a break, as by then I had been in my bedroom for a very unhealthy 37 hours!

I am an average player but like every other chess enthusiast in the world I want to become a strong player (Elo 2200+). I know that most of us have their limitations. But after reading through a few ChessBase CDs I can see that it is possible to improve your game dramatically. That very night I saw the first fruits of my endeavors: I was thinking differently. I was seeing things on that magical chessboard that I never did before. Actually I had encountered those thoughts previously, but only subconsciously. And the situations accompanying them arose randomly, without planning, without positional fight.

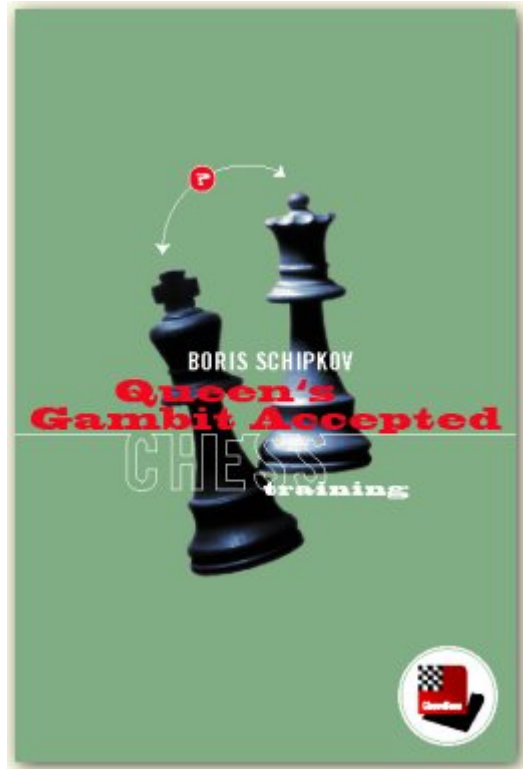
Let me clarify this: most average players have an opening repertoire, learn a few tactical tricks, which rarely go beyond the absolute pin. And that is it. An average player's game starts well, with good moves thanks to their knowledge of the opening theory. And then it gets chaotic. In other words chaos dictates the course of the game, not the player. There is no strategic depth. This is where you can tell the difference between strong players and the rest of us out there.

The problem is, if your knowledge of chess has not been put in order you cannot improve your game by definition. The process of learning becomes boring because you cannot create those winning, magical instances on a regular basis, again and again. And that's where the line draws between strong and average players. When you see a strong player across the board you can be sure he sees worlds that you and I don't. But the good news is, there is a key to every door.

In the 'Basic Principles of Chess Strategy' CD you'll find specially chosen Test Games where you can personally evaluate your strategic vision. I started the disk by testing myself before going through the texts to evaluate the margin of improvement afterwards. You get an average of four minutes to guess a certain move of a real game played by GMs. I scored impressively: 97.2, but of course it was due to the fact that I had an average of four minutes per move and there was no pressure of a real tournament game plus, of course, you get several attempts for each move. With every new attempt you are down-marked. Even so it was a good start.

Texts are well written and always followed by examples and well-annotated games. But what really makes the book precious is the near to perfection quality of the texts. Let me give you an example: under the topic Pawn Minority Attack you get at least eight diagrams explaining the basic idea of the attack. After each diagram a text follows. "The goal of the minority attack is to create a weak black pawn on c6 by advancing White's b-pawn, followed by a full-scale attack against that weakness. When b4-b5 is about to be played, it is important for White to prevent the possible response c6-c5. To that purpose he needs good control of the c-file, especially the c5-square." Several illustrative diagrams follow this text. This perfect blend of diagrams and comprehensible texts ensures I would say about 90% feedback success. It is impossible to read and not understand the principles, even if you are a very average player. You are bound to improve your strategic vision. The Basic Principles of Chess Strategy Vol. 2 is an absolute masterpiece, thanks to the efforts of Professor Bartashnikov.

Of course, different people use material differently. It is not guaranteed that with a ChessBase CD you will have reached Elo2000+ by the end of next season. But take this from me, an average club player: your game will improve in ways you never expected.



This is my collection of Chessbase software:

1. Fritz 8
2. Queens Gambit Accepted by Boris Shipkov (scores 10 out of 10, absolute classic)
3. Queens Gambit with Bf4 system by Rustem Dautov (scores 7 out of 10, limited illustrative diagrams and text)
4. Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual (10 out of 10, all-time classic)
5. Basic Principles of Strategy by Prof. Bartashnikov (10 out of 10, classic)
6. Intensive Course Tactics by George Renko (10 out of 10 perfect, for the intermediate player)
7. Mating Attack against 0-0 by Rainer Knaak (6 out of 10, similar positions appear too often and no texts)
8. Trompovsky's Attack
9. Pirc Defence

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