

The Art of Home Analysis



A lecture given by USCF Master Kevin L. Bachler at the CLC Chess Club, March 1, 1991.

Introduction

Fellow chessplayers, this lecture is the first of three lectures this spring by area chessmasters. The topic of this lecture is the art of home analysis. The second lecture, by Master Ken Wallach, is on practical aspects of tournament play. It will include some practical pointers, like when it is best to offer a draw, how to assess your position, and how to analyze. The third lecture, presented by Senior Master Jesse Kraai, focuses on the art of post-mortem analysis. It will include ideas on how to analyze with your opponent after the game, and how to analyze your games after they have been played.

The three lectures this spring form a sort of trilogy. We begin with *how to prepare to play*. In the next lecture, we discuss *practical aspects of how to play*. We finish with *an analysis of how we played*. Notice that the last topic not only flows from the second, but closes the loop, and flows back to the first. When we analyze our past failures and accomplishments we discover our strengths and weaknesses. This list of strengths and weaknesses tells us what we must next learn.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you learn and apply the principles from all three of these lectures to improve your play. Home analysis (education) without practical application is wasteful. Practical application without reevaluation is fruitless. Reevaluation without continued education is futile.

The Purpose of Home Analysis

The first question we need to answer is: Why analyze at home? Why study before play? The obvious answer "to get better" is also trivial. What we really want to know is what purposes does pre-game preparation serve?

I see two aims of pre-game analysis. The first is to

improve my general level of play, by study of a particular opening, learning a new variation, or playing over games or endings. Studying any of these topics contributes to my general playing strength, even though I may be concentrating on a particular area, like pawn endings. In a concentrated form, this type of analysis also serves to prepare for an upcoming event. I call this form of preparation **general preparation**.

The second goal of pre-game analysis is to prepare for a specific opponent. I call this form of preparation **specific preparation**.

This second type of preparation may use several of the same methods as the first type. However, it is the aim, focus, and intention which are different. This may lead me to conclusions which I may not otherwise normally reach. For example, a positional player may decide that *in general* he needs to play more tactically, *but in preparing for a tactical player* he may choose a very positional approach. Therefore, *the current goals of general preparation may be enhanced or impoverished by the current goals of specific preparation*.

We now focus on the following:

- The types of general preparation
- The goals of preparation
- The steps of preparation
- How to study

The Types Of General Preparation

There are two kinds of general preparation: *daily*, and *definite*.

Daily preparation is the preparation which a player does 'all the time'. You read Chess Life and play over interesting games. You solve chess puzzles. You notice something of interest in the **Illinois Chess**

Bulletin and you read it and play over it. Daily preparation consists of our daily diet of chess. You notice **and analyze** important chess topics in the media. Postal chess also may qualify as daily preparation. The last, but most important, type of daily preparation is to read good chess books from cover to cover. It helps to play over 100 of Capablanca's games. It helps to study the games in **The Art of Positional Play**. This is because one of the best ways to improve is to learn the appropriate plans for particular types of recurring positions. Since there are few books that address chess in this way one of the best methods is to digest large quantities of games.

Definite preparation usually arises from an evaluation of your results. If, after analyzing your games, you see that tactics are a weak point, you would study tactics and tactical games. If you find that you misplayed a Slav Defence, you might play over several games of the same variation. Even if you played well you need to keep up with current theory. You do this by replaying games of a specific opening from **Chess Informant, New In Chess, Trends in the "XX"** opening series, or just games that you cull from several sources on your own. The major advantage of a chess database is that you pay someone else 1¢ or so per game to collect these games for you.

The Goals of Preparation

Obviously, the goals of preparation are to get better. More specifically, the goal of daily preparation is to keep up your general level of play. It is like eating healthy foods and taking walks.

Definite preparation helps you to improve targeted areas within your play. For example, you might practice analyzing positions by first giving yourself a half hour, and then working down to fifteen minutes. Kotov claims that this teaches you to analyze more effectively and efficiently.

Definite preparation is more like performing specific exercises to strengthen the desired muscles.

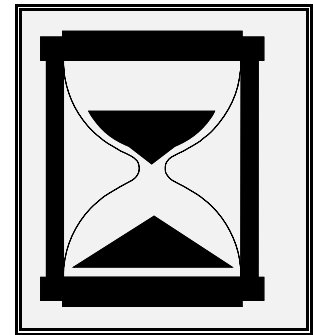
Specific preparation has the goal of defeating a particular opponent. This is the type of preparation a football team does weekly. Did you note that the football team spent months of general and definite preparation before doing specific preparation? Have you also noticed that a football coach will often say, "We'll go with what got us here."?

What that means is that football coaches do not let the demands of specific preparation override the demands of definite and daily preparation. They will seldom choose a course of action that will not improve their team in general, even if it helps to take advantage of the opponent's weakest spot.

For example, if the New York Giants play a team with a weak pass defense, they will throw somewhat more. They will not throw almost exclusively because that is not the nature of the Giants. The Giants run well, and inevitably, they will come back to the run during the game. The result is the Giant's may become a slightly better passing team because of the extra passing work. **But the Giant's do not try to change their entire offensive nature for one game.**

Similarly, when preparing for a specific opponent, it is usually unwise to plan on a large change of style to accomplish the preparation. Instead, it is better, and in the long run more productive, to focus on how the opponent reacts to your particular line of play.

For example, I play the Holmov against the Pirc. The Holmov is a 'garbage' line. If I am due to play an expert on the Pirc, will I choose to learn a new line versus the Pirc? No! If my lines are bad, I need to change them as part of my overall plan, not



Kotov gives advice on how to analyze faster, so you use your clock wisely!

for one particular player. Learning a new opening is a massive process that takes a great deal of time and effort. This effort cannot be expended for one game. To prepare for my opponent, I will continue to play the Holmov and will study it exclusively, keeping in mind my opponent's tendencies. If I try to learn a new line, I will probably end up in a variation that I know less about than my opponent, the Pirc expert.

Be true to yourself. If you need a change, make it for general reasons, not for one game.

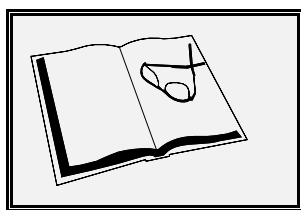
The Steps of Preparation

What are the steps in the process of preparation?

For daily preparation, the process is primarily one of *keeping your head in chess*. That is, paying attention to the media for chess news, articles, etc. that would be pertinent in your daily chess development. This function is performed inexpensively by reading *Chess Life*, *ICB*, *Inside Chess*, *Badger Chess*, etc.

For definite preparation and specific preparation, the steps are the same, although the implementation varies slightly for each.

Step 1. Determine what it is that must be studied. From the perspective of definite preparation, a list should be maintained, prioritized, and periodically reevaluated. The topic at the top of the list should be the one studied.



Don't just use your chess books as a place to store your glasses. Read them!

Step 2. Locate a reasonable amount of reference material given the available study time. Some of this material should be timely, while some should be of a more 'evolutionary' or theoretical nature. As your base of theoretical knowledge increases, the

amount of timely material you study relative to that subject should also increase.

You may ask, "How do I find this material?" There are several ways. First, try looking through sources you know. *Chess Informant* and *New In Chess* are particularly good for this. Next, look through opening manuals. They frequently reference games which you can look up in general sources like *Informant*, or in a specific reference, like a book on the player involved or from the tournament in which the game was played. If possible, find the game in more than one source, to get multiple opinions on the annotations.

Don't waste your time finding more material than you have time to study. A little material goes a long way!

Step 3. Study, study, study. Play over the games you have selected as many times as time allows. You may also wish to record the reference for certain games, so that you may easily refer to it in the future.

How to Study

Many chessplayers do not have a good concept of how to study. There is a tendency to study a large quantity of games. This is usually a poor method until the higher levels of play have been reached. Then it is more likely for a player to see if a game should be gone over again.

For Class B and below, and perhaps even Class A, games should be gone over carefully and thoroughly. Something can be learned from **every** master game.

How is a game thoroughly studied? It is tiresome and tedious work. I use basically the same method whether I am studying one of my games, or a grandmaster game. However, I do vary this method for special cases of definite or specific preparation, as described below.

First, I play through the game once, in a light, almost cursory way. This gives me an opportunity to get some familiarity for the game, to notice important points in the contest.

This phase will generally take no more than fifteen minutes. If I had recently played the game, (within a day or so) I might skip this step.

Second, I play over the game again, this time making light notes. I allow about ½ hour to 1 hour for this phase of my analysis.

Third, I put the game away for a couple of days, and repeat step two. This provides an opportunity for a fresh look, and lets me see how my thinking changes over time, by comparing my two sets of analyses.

Fourth, I annotate the game in depth, spending at least two hours, and perhaps as many as four, writing extremely comprehensive and in-depth notes. On rare occasions, I will spend even more time analyzing. This is particularly true if the analysis is to be published. After a day or two, I will come back, and rewrite the notes. I will then play back through them, to look for expansion and errors. When done, I compare to book annotations if any are available.

Finally, I collect the notes by category of game into specific files for future reference.

That's my basic study method. It's simple, but it is effective. It is also a great deal of hard work. For specific cases of specific or definite preparation, I will vary the above routine as follows.

First, I find several references and cross-references.

Second, I play through each reference, simultaneously examining any cross reference, and using the annotator's notes.

Third, as I play through the games, I make notes regarding the variances of ideas. That is, I list the differences between variations and why they occur.

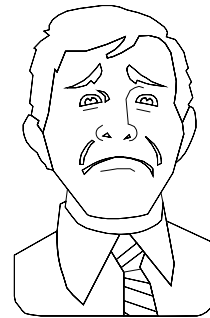
For example, if I were studying the King's Indian Attack, and ran into two possible variations on move thirteen, I would record the variations, what the different ideas were, and why.

Fourth, I would compile these notes into files,

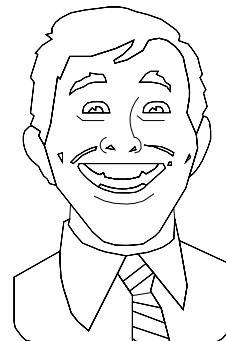
sometimes using binders, for future reference.

In essence, I am writing my own quick summary opening manual.

The Shortcut



Bad news. There is no good shortcut.



Good news!! There are things we can do that take less work and still make us better players.

There is nothing you can do which is as effective as extensive studying. There simply isn't. But, there are many things you can do which are nearly as effective and use less time.

1. Among the easiest, cheapest thing you can do is actively pursue a reasonable amount of daily preparation. When *Chess Life* comes, actually play over a few of the games, taking at least 15 minutes, and preferably a half hour on each. Do the same with your other chess magazines.

2. Post - mortem every game you play. Listen to your opponent's ideas. He may be wrong, but listen anyway. Judge his ideas and see if you can do better in the post - mortem.

3. Ask strong players for pointers or to help with your post mortems. Tell them your ideas. **But be careful.** It is easy to brush off a strong players ideas by telling him your own. Listen, and try to practice, what he suggests. Besides, if you don't listen to him, he may wonder why you bothered him in the first place, and not analyze with you anymore.

4. Play openings that are sound, solid, not not subject to the whims of fashion and theory. You might try the Scotch, or the Closed Sicilian as White. Theory on these openings changes slowly, so what you learn accumulates. **There is less theory inflation.**

5. Take chess lessons. These can take two forms. One form is the kind where you take the lesson and do no outside homework, the other includes homework. Even if the homework is minimal (2 hours per week, with a one hour lesson), the latter is substantially more productive. In this case, the teacher acts as a guide, doing much of the sorting work for you. You only need to look at the final theoretical material.

Each of these methods can work together to make your study time more productive.

Example

In 1978, I was scheduled to play Bill Barta in our club championship. The year before I had finished 2nd to Barta by a ½ point, after blundering a clear win into a draw against him. I wanted this game!

Knowing Barta played the Paulsen or Taimanov variations of the Sicilian Defence, I compiled and studied the following games. As a result I became very good at finding the best moves in this variation over the board for a period of about six years. Unfortunately, after I obtained an opening advantage, I blundered and lost the game. The list, and game follow. Numbers are page numbers.

Games of Anatoly Karpov: 96, AK-Pozdnkov; 114,AK-Panno; 207,AK-Taimanov, see 61HKW; 220,AK-Hübner; 239; AK-Visier; 271,AK-Hübner (Leningrad lzt); 314,Garcia-AK;

How Karpov Wins: 37,K-Hartston; 44,Keene-K; 50,K-Kurajica; 21,K-Hort; 59,K-Kudryushov; 61,K-Taimanov, see 207 GAK; 72,K-Gouveia;78,Estevez-K;81,K-Hübner,see220 GAK; 96,Alvarez-K; 98,Saren-K; 120, K-Visier,see 239GAK; 148,K-Ken Smith; 210, Smejkal-K; 263,Garcia-K see 314 GAK; 268, Kaplan-K;

My Best Games (Karpov): 39,Smejkal-K,see 210 HKW; 170, Tukmakov-K; 252,K-Olafsson; 144, K-Hübner, see 220 GAK; 271, Torre-K. **ECO II, Pages 199-202.**

Bobby Fischer's Chess Games: F is white is all: 52Reshevsky, 169Rossetto, 264Nicevski, 300Portisch, 313Najdorf, 426Petrosian, 231Petrosian, 245Matulovic, 246Soos, 388Petrosian.

First I would look for the games that occur in all three books most frequently, and examine those. They are probably the best and the theoretically most important of the lot. Here is the game with Barta: Bachler-Barta, 12/14/78: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 Bd3 Qc7 6 00 Nc6 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 c4 Nf6 9 Qe2 d6 10 Nc3 Be7 11 f4 Bb7 12 Be3 00 13 g4!?! Rfd8 14 g5 Ne8 15 Qf2 d5 16 f5 e5 17 Bb6 Qd7 18 Bxd8 Rxd8 19 cxd5 cxd5 20 g6 fxg6 21 fxg6 Qg4+ 22 Qg2 Bc5+ 23 Kh1 Qxg2+ 24 Kxg2 Nf6 25 Nxd5 Nxd5 26 Bc4 hxg6 27 Bxd5+ Bxd5 28 exd5 Rxd5 29 Rad1 Bd4 30 Rf3 Rc5 31 Rd2 Rc6 32 b4 Rc4 33 a3 Rc6 34 a4 Rb6 35 Rc2 g5 36 Rb3 Kf7 37 b5 axb5 38 axb5 Rb7 39 b6?? Rxb6 40 Rc7+ Kf8 41 Rxb6 Bxb6 42 Rb7 Be3 43 Kf3 Bf4 44 h3 Kg8 45 Ke4 Kh7 46 Kf5 Kh6 47 Ke6 e4 48 Kf5 e3 49 Re7 Kh5 50 Rxd7 Kh4 51 Rh7+ Kg3 52 h4 gxh4 53 Rg7+ Kf3 54 Rg4 Bg3 55 Re4 h3 0-1.