

HONOURERD TRAINER OF THE UKRAINE

A CONVERSATION WITH ALEXANDER VAISMAN

How to become a strong grandmaster

Each of us becomes acquainted with chess in a different way. I remember seeing my father with these unusual figures, and I soon learnt what I thought was an interesting game, similar to a war between two armies. I very soon realized that in this war, victory went to the army which was led by the cleverer commander, but learning how to do this was far from easy! Wanting to learn, but at that time knowing nothing, I made my first steps in that world of people, who are united by a desire to know the secrets of this game. Entry and exit to the world is voluntary and free, but in all my life, I have never met anyone who voluntarily left it forever.

What skills does one need, in order to win at chess?

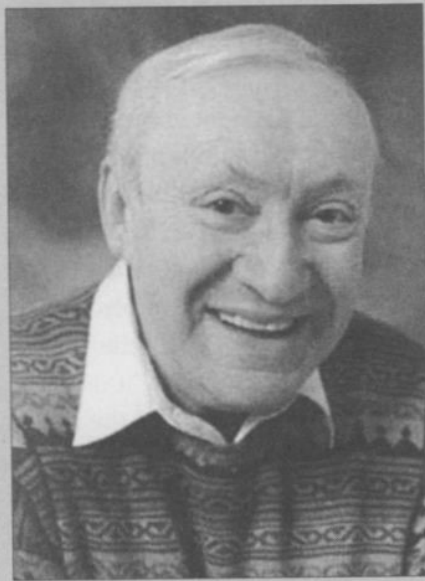
First and foremost, you need a present from God – specific chess talent. This tal-

ent can be greater or lesser, but if it is entirely lacking, then it is impossible to scale the chess Olympus. Not even the most fanatical devotion to chess study, nor participation in numerous tournaments, will help. Talent can only be **developed**. Not even the most gifted trainer can confer talent on a pupil who lacks it.

But chess is a deep and rewarding game. Those who study it seriously, even if only for a short time, before giving it up, develop skills that are extremely useful in life. One eminent trainer told me about a conversation he had with a 'new Russian' (such is the term used nowadays to describe the new young generation of rich businessmen in Russia), the father of one his pupils. After a few lessons, the trainer realized that the boy would never become a strong player, so he told the father this quite frankly. And the reply was this: 'I do not want him to become a strong grandmaster! I just want my son to learn to **think, to foresee and work out**

what his opponent is up to, and to take independent decisions in practice.' The father wanted to use chess to prepare his son for the business world! This businessman understood that people who work on chess for a long time start to understand it subconsciously – **chess is a model of life!** I always tell my pupils that **if the meaning of life is ever discovered, then the meaning of chess will be discovered too.** (This is a subject I have covered in several other articles.)

What does chess talent consist of? And what is talent in general? Here I am reminded of a story from our recent communist past. I was walking along the main street in the then Soviet Ukraine city of Kiev, when I saw in a shop window a book, containing the works of the great Jewish writer Sholom Aleichem. In the Ukraine of those days, where dyed-in-the-wool anti-semitism was the norm, it was a great surprise to see such a book. I picked it up, and started to read the intro-



Born in 1938, **Alexander Vaisman** has been one of the most influential coaches in The Ukraine over the past 25 years. A strong master, who won the Ukrainian Championship in 1975, he has been responsible for bringing through numerous grandmasters, as part of the Ukrainian 'conveyor belt' of chess talent. Based in the city of Kharkov, his most well-known pupils form a virtual roll-call of the grandmaster ranks of The Ukraine: Alterman, Berelovich, Brodsky, Goloschapov, Neverov, Stripunsky... the list goes on.

In the present volume, he presents a summary of the main points of his coaching philosophy, one which has brought him so much success over such a long period.

duction, which was by a great Ukrainian writer, Ostep Vishney. The introduction occupied two pages, but I could not find any details of the contents of the book itself. Vishney talked about the nature of talent, and of its significance, and the need for a talented person to work extremely hard. I came to the last two sentences. The first said simply: 'What is talent? It is this: it exists when it exists, and when it doesn't exist, it doesn't exist!'. This seems to me to be the most 'accurate' summary. As for the second sentence he wrote, we will discuss that later.

Blitz reveals talent!

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it more effectively. He quickly identifies the main points in what his trainer tells him, or in what he reads in books, correctly identifies the moments when it is right to follow this or that chess principle, or to use a certain technical device.

Talented children can usually play blindfold games almost immediately. They move quickly, calculate variations

rapidly, and are good at blitz and rapid games. There is a good rule of thumb for trainers – '**blitz reveals talent**'. I mean, specifically **talent, not strength** – for the latter, talent is necessary, but not sufficient. Grandmaster B, at the age of 12, played so fast that, in a bid to get him to slow down and play more thoughtfully, I advised him to write down in an exercise book all the moves he had considered, before actually playing his move. The child took no more than one minute to write down seven (!) candidate moves, and to play an eighth. Now that is talent!

One should draw a distinction between chess talent and ordinary memory. Many children can easily and quickly remember a large number of chess variations, especially things that they like, but this does not necessarily mean that they can use this knowledge effectively in practice. For the latter, chess talent is also needed. Any form of memory, including one's chess memory, can be developed and improved with the help of special exercises. The main things needed are desire, patience and time.

The role of parents

Talent comes from God, but the role of parents is no less important in the development of a young player.

- * First of all, it is vital to identify as early as possible the capabilities of the child, and to create the optimum conditions for it to realize those abilities. Chess ability becomes evident almost as soon as the child has learnt the moves. This usually happens at

around the age of 5-6, sometimes even earlier. Therefore parents should take steps for its development, as soon as possible. The earlier the child starts, the quicker it will develop. The future World Champion Boris Spassky was already a first category player (equivalent to about 2300 in today's FIDE rating terms – *Translator's note*) at the age of 11, which was a great achievement for his time. More recently, the Chinese player Bu Xiangzhi was a grandmaster at 13!

- * There have been many arguments about whether chess is a sport. The former President of the IOC, Juan Samaranch, even ordered special research, as a result of which it was decided in principle that chess should be included in the Olympic games. Chess players themselves do not doubt that chess is a sport. And in sport, one can hardly count on success, unless one's parents have endowed one with good health, and do all they can to develop and improve it. Of course, everybody needs good health, but this is certainly true of chess, which requires physical and psychological endurance over a prolonged period. This is even more true in our own time, when a typical game can last 5 – 7 hours, and sometimes a player must play two games a day, even in major international tournaments. And many players, my pupils included, sit at the board several hours, without even getting up. Therefore, in my individual work

with pupils, I always write as one of the points for them to work on, 'jog regularly each morning, and visit the swimming pool at least twice a week'. Jogging and swimming are two ideal sports for chessplayers! Garry Kasparov loves both, and can swim for 1.5-2 km at high speed, without a break. I think he knows what he is doing!

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- * It is also very important that the child be born with a strong nervous system, which its parents can help to preserve. In this respect, the psychological climate which the child's rela-



Garry Kasparov

tions create around it is of the greatest importance. The parents' faith in their child, and understanding of its hopes and desires, strengthens the spirit of a young chessplayer and is a very important factor in strengthening its nervous system. I recall the following example. One time, I was approached by a talented young player, who lived in a city where there were no facilities for the serious study of chess. The child was forced to live alone in another city, to cope by himself with life's everyday problems, and study in a new school. I asked him more than once how come he had ended up being allowed to live alone at such a young age. Only when he had become a strong grandmaster did he tell me the words of his mother: 'Never kill a dream!'. My compliments to the mother! There are not many who would do such a thing. If she had been different, would her son have become such a strong GM? I rather doubt it; unfortunately, there are many examples of the opposite phenomenon.

The parents of many famous chess players are well known in the chess world, but the role of parents in the development of their children's talent is a subject that remains to be researched in detail.

It is possible to become a strong grandmaster, despite having problems with psychology, even to the extent of beating oneself about the head after losing or playing badly; practical examples of this are well-known. But it is impossible to reach the very top, given the current level of competition.

The mother of one of my pupils told me, when her son was still very young, about the characteristics of his nervous system. Sure enough, it was precisely these characteristics which, **when he was already a grown adult**, prevented this strong (and talented) grandmaster from withstanding the psychological blows experienced during tournaments. His play gradually lost its edge and he became extremely cautious, which led to a collapse, every time he had realistic chances of a high place in a tournament. It was as if he prematurely became satisfied with a certain level of play.

Achieving the heights in chess requires a strong nervous system, able to withstand the inevitable and frequent blows of fate. A chess player needs the psychology of a 'killer', as the Danish grandmaster Bent Larsen once wrote.

* Chess is a model of life, and it is its parents who first develop in a child such qualities of character as objectivity, persistence, patience, etc. – qualities which are extremely useful not only in chess, but in life generally. Ambition and willpower, which allow a talented youngster to develop, despite the difficulties he may face, are qualities which need to be developed when very young. It is equally important to develop fantasy and imagination – all these qualities will later be reflected in one's games. All of my experience as a trainer has convinced me that **the way a person is in real life is the way he is at the chessboard too!** A coward will never become a good attacking player, a

person lacking in self-confidence will always suffer from time-trouble, one who cannot force himself to work will play superficially, and the one who lacks objectivity will always overlook his opponent's counterplay. And all of these character traits are developed in childhood!

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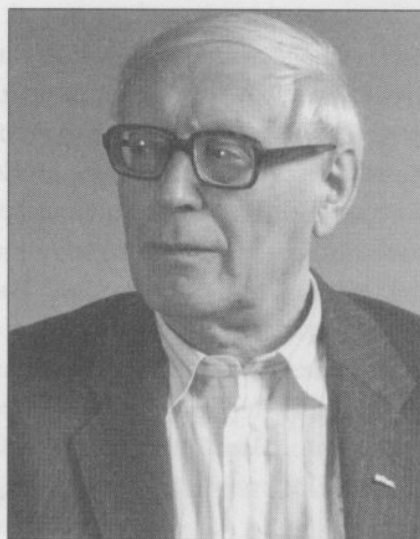
I can cite a particularly good example: one of my pupils had a very difficult character as a child, considering himself superior to those around him, and consequently was very unpopular amongst the other children. But this unpleasant character trait brought him dividends at the chessboard. The youngster ALWAYS started calculating variations without any idea of what his opponent's counterblows might be, and would go on to find a huge number of possibilities for the opponent! Nowadays he is a grandmaster and still has this quality. 'We are all made what we are in childhood'!

The intellectual glass ceiling

Chess is an intellectual game, and the role of intellect is significant. One can achieve considerable, if not to say great, chess strength, without paying any attention to one's general intellectual development. But there comes a moment in the life of

every chess fanatic, who is uninterested in anything outside of chess, when he seems to run up against an invisible wall, preventing him from progressing any further. And no amount of work or tournament practice can overcome this. His play becomes stale and results deteriorate.

Chess at the highest level demands a deep, I would even say philosophical, approach towards evaluating what is happening to one at any given point in one's career, and in what direction future work should be directed. Of course, it is not essential to have a university education, but having an intellectual interest in problems which are far distant from chess, and having an all-round cultural development is far from an unimportant component of the success of a grandmaster. In answer to the question of why grandmaster X had not become World Champion, Mikhail Botvinnik said 'In order to play chess, one needs intellect as well'. And although I categorically disagree with this assessment of the particular grandmaster of



Mikhail Botvinnik

whom Botvinnik was speaking, his basic thought seems to me to be absolutely right.

Once, when studying with a girl pupil, I noticed that there was something inharmonious, almost 'ugly', in the way she physically moved the pieces. Eventually I said to her 'You are a girl! You should have some feeling for beauty!' And I took her on a visit to the local museum of art. Now she is a grandmaster. Maybe it helped...

Choosing a trainer

And now we come to the most important step for the parents of a child, once they have realized that he or she has some

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promise as a chessplayer – **the choice of a trainer. This is as important as the choice of a surgeon to carry out an operation! One cannot have an operation performed by one surgeon, then later go back and see what would have happened if another surgeon had been used.**

Unfortunately, when it comes to this vitally important step, parents are unlikely to have any serious information as to what their child needs from a trainer, or how they should choose one. Indeed, where can one read about what chess

training involves? What are the **rules of chess training**? Is there such a science as that of training a chessplayer? Are there any scientifically-based books on chess training? One can only give negative answers to all of these questions. It is interesting that within the world-renowned chess faculty at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture, there is no subject 'chess training'!

How do practical players manage when they act as trainers? This is how. The weaker ones teach the children what they know themselves, turn the children into pale copies of themselves (it is well-known that a copy is always worse than the original), and kill all traces of originality in the child. If the player is strong, then he usually fulfils the role of second, for which he is likely to be well qualified. This is an important role, but only at a **high level** of chess.

I have frequently been surprised, when talking to strong players, about their ignorance of key questions regarding training, which seriously hampers their ability to act as trainers. Knowing maths or physics does not suffice to make one a decent

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teacher of these subjects. Just imagine what would have happened if the great pole-vaulter, Sergey Bubka, had swapped

roles with his trainer, and let the latter do the actual vaulting in competition! I think you can see my point. In the words of the old English saying, '**cobblers should stick to their lasts**', i.e. each should stick to what he is good at. Many players, having become grandmasters or international masters, cannot wait to take up training, but the results are often far from satisfactory.

A mistake in the choice of a trainer can often lead to very serious consequences. One cannot go back in time...

How should one choose a trainer for one's child? In the opinion of Mikhail Botvinnik, the most important quality of a serious trainer, as opposed to a dilettante, is the ability to pass on his accumulated professional knowledge and experience. It is not everybody who can do this, and can bring real benefit to a talented young player. One can have great personal experience and serious practical strength, and yet be ineffective as a trainer, if one does not have the ability to pass on this experience to one's pupils. Such a trainer may not actually spoil a pupil, but can seriously hold back his progress.

By the same token, one can have considerable teaching experience, and the desire to work with young players, yet still be ineffective, if one lacks the necessary practical chess knowledge and experience. Such a trainer will also be unable to help a talented youngster to develop. He will be unable to pick out from the ocean of chess knowledge that which is most important, or distinguish the truth from falsehoods. His pupils will often

waste time and effort on matters which are of little or no importance, or on mistaken ideas or conceptions, and on ineffective training methods. I am familiar with several such trainers, and their unfortunate 'victims'.

But whereas the results of an incompetent doctor can clearly be seen, chess trainers tend to get away with their errors. Years later, one hears such conversations as: 'Do you remember such-and-such a youngster? He (or she) never made it.' It is usually assumed that nobody is to blame, 'it is just one of those things' – the chess trainer is rarely held responsible for his mistakes!

To succeed in modern chess, one must have a universal style of play, handle all stages of the games with confidence, have the ability to play positions of widely differing types and from many different openings. The programme for such preparation requires **several years of extremely hard work, under the guidance of an experienced, qualified and thoughtful trainer.**

For example, to be able to play the endgame well, one must remember the methods of play in over 3,000 typical endgame positions, which will usually take a talented youngster some 2-2.5 years of hard work. But how does one find such a trainer? To be quite honest, I don't know! I believe that the **decisive role is played by the experience and intellect of the child's parents.**

Our greatest help, and our greatest hindrance

And now some sad words: 'Parents are our greatest help, and our greatest hin-

drance!’, as a famous American swimming coach once said.

Sadly, parents do not always help the development of a young player. One does come across cases where parents seem to treat their youngsters like racehorses, backing them to win all the time. They often fail to understand that during the development and training phase, the major successes are still in the future, and the desire for quick results leads to inappropriate preparation and over-straining of the nervous system, which can damage the player’s development in the longer term.

Chess is a game for grown-ups!

All junior competitions are only a preparation for adult events. Take football, for example.

In this respect, I cannot but mention FIDE policy regarding junior events. In order to make more money for itself, FIDE has now started running World Junior Championships at ever-lower age groups, now down to U-10 and even U-8. The FIDE officials clearly do not care about the fact that such competitive burdens are undoubtedly harmful for the development of young children. There is no other branch of sport that runs World Championships at such age levels. And how many of these young champions ever get anywhere in adult chess? I know of only one – Boris Avrukh.

Unfortunately, there is another extreme too. Not having the patience to await the results they desire, and acting no doubt from the best of motives, some parents try to make their child combine chess studies with higher education. The result

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is that both areas of study suffer. One must have the courage and intellect to choose one or the other. **And parents should never try to impose their own will on their child, in this respect.** How many psychological traumas and even tragedies have resulted from this! **Parents are always the first to blight a talent,** according to a maths professor of 26 years’ standing, from Novosibirsk.

‘Our brains are made in such a way that if you really want something, you should



Boris Avrukh

go for it!'. As a chess trainer, I totally agree with this. In my time, I have twice encountered this problem of university education. Both youngsters became strong grandmasters. Grandmaster B gave up university after 2.5 years, whilst grandmaster M is still studying to this day. Both had great chess potential. Indeed, I honestly believe that M could have seriously challenged for the World Championship, and I know that my opinion is shared by several other professionals. But... the boy was forced to go to university. Time passed, and with it passed his chance to become World Champion. What a shame... 'Never kill a dream', as they say. Not the dream of the child, nor that of his trainer...

And as for the young talent himself...

And what should the young talent himself do, so as to ensure that he will not waste time and effort in his development as a player?

Most of all, a player must be able to work hard and systematically. How many highly promising youngsters have failed to make the grade, for the lack of this ability! I always remind my pupils: **'Talent has one advantage – the right to work harder than others'**. Simple common sense convinces one of the truth of this.

Suppose that in order to master a certain piece of chess material, a talented youngster needs 10 minutes, and a less talented one 20 minutes. If the talented one does not spend the necessary 10 minutes, whilst the less gifted works for his full 20 minutes, who will benefit most?

Only the most fanatically keen young chessplayer can spend hours every week sat at the board, reading chess books and solving numerous different tactical positions, or 'boring' endgames. Garry Kasparov once wrote 'I understood very early on that everything in life comes at a price. And the only currency with which a talented youngster can pay is his childhood...'

So what is the conclusion? Here I wish to reveal the second part of the what Ostop Vishney wrote, in the book I referred to earlier: 'When talent and hard work come together, then one gets the things of which one reads'. There is only one formula for success in this world: **TALENT + WORK.**

Right from childhood, young sportsmen live in conditions of permanent time-shortage. School, regular training, competitions, etc. It is essential to develop the ability to allocate one's time efficiently, and use it to maximum effectiveness. This ability is a major factor in determining the **speed** with which a young talent develops.

Objectivity above all

It is impossible to count on serious success in chess, without having a healthy dose of ambition. It is precisely this that is frequently the key factor in incentivizing a young player to work at chess. But it is equally important that such ambition remains within bounds, and does not become excessive or turn into narcissism. It is vital to develop the ability to assess one's achievements objectively, and identify openly and honestly one's strengths and weaknesses.

'Chess, most of all, teaches one objectivity. One can only become a great master by honestly appraising one's strengths and weaknesses – just as in life itself', wrote Alexander Alekhine. One particularly talented young pupil of mine showed outstanding results when young. At the age of 13, he became Ukrainian U-16 champion, and at 14, he took the silver medal in the U-18 section. Even so, I was forced to criticize the quality of his play. Unfortunately, his response to this was usually to say 'But I won!'. It is hard to argue with this – in sport, the result is everything, they say. But in truth, the decisive factor is always the **play**. I was forced to explain patiently to him that, despite his victories, with such a standard of play, he could not hope to achieve real successes in the future. The critical moment came after the following argument: if 1,000 men all play badly, one will come first, and one last. But that does not mean that the winner is any good! Or, as the saying goes, 'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king'.

The boy thought about this, and began

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to become noticeably more objective about his successes. I even heard him several times dismiss his wins as being insignificant, because they were achieved against weak opposition. Sure enough, he soon started achieving more serious re-

sults – wins and other medal placing in the Ukrainian championship, international tournaments, etc. Nowadays he has a rating around 2600.

The ability to be objective enables one to avoid many humiliating defeats, resulting from over-estimating one's position, and playing on the basis of what one wants to play, rather than what is necessary. The same lesson applies in life as well.

How often should one play in tournaments?

The strength of any player is only measured by his or her results in tournaments. In sport, there is **only one criterion** – the result. If one disagrees with this, and tries to substitute some other criterion, then we lose the whole essence of sport. The tournament table shows who is strong and who weak. And comments like 'this player is more talented', 'he blundered in time-trouble', 'he lost a winning position', 'bad luck', etc, are only for the fans. There is no luck. If something happens, it happens for a reason; one just needs to divine the underlying cause.

However, the tournament table is only the tip of the iceberg. Only the sportsman and his trainer know of the numerous hours of training which have gone before. To prevent the young player's nervous system being exhausted, it is essential that the time he spends on chess is carefully planned. Here is an approximate guide.

Pure 'chess preparation' can be split into three parts: preparing for tournaments, playing in tournaments, and analysis of

the performance. These three parts should be distinguished from general preparation, which occupies about half of all one's time. If the remaining time is split between the three parts outlined above, this leaves about 50 days per year for playing in tournaments. This gives us the average of 50 games per year, which was recommended by Botvinnik. For a long time, Garry Kasparov followed the plan of playing approximately 55 games per year.

And, although the tempo of life has certainly increased sharply in recent years, and computer programs have appeared, which can help a player considerably, and although advances in medicine have led to improved physical condition for many chess players – despite all of these factors, the number of days in a year remains the same! Considering the current realities of life, I still believe that **a young player should not play more than 60 games per year.** This allows him to maintain over many years the work capacity of his nervous system.

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When I started to work with the future grandmaster Goloschapov, it turned out that he had played more than 100 games in the current year. His **first** tournament after he started working with me was not until some **eight months** later, and he im-

mediately took first place. I should to present here a list of the other players in the event, with their current titles in brackets: 2. R. Ponomariov (IGM, ex-FIDE World Champion) 3. V. Malakhatko (IGM), 4. S. Ovseevich (IGM) 5. V. Baklan (IGM). 6. A. Zubarev (IGM) – the best young players in the Ukraine at the time, and amongst the best to this day.

How to create an effective system of study

Every trainer follows his own idea of how to work, taking into account (one hopes!) the particularities of his pupil. I have discussed above the lack of any scientific methods of chess training, and therefore I should like to emphasize to the reader that **what follows is only my own personal opinion.**

The first manual on the basics of chess is of considerable importance. I believe that to this day, the best such manuals are those by the all-time greats of chess:



Alexander Goloschapov

Lasker, Capablanca, Nimzowitsch and Réti. These books deal with questions of strategy, openings and the endgame. I recommend that even grandmasters should periodically return to these books at certain moments in their chess development.

The next stage is the study of the laws of chess strategy and of the games of the great masters of the past. 'In chess, there is a great deal that is known and unexplored', wrote ex-World Champion Vasily Smyslov, 'and in order to advance, one must know what has already been achieved in the past'. The main aim of this stage is to master, as quickly as possible, what has been achieved up to our own time. Studying the classical heritage, as represented by the best games of previous generations, allows a chess player to develop his erudition, to store in his memory many 'typical' middle-game and endgame positions, and to build an opening repertoire that suits his style of play. In this regard, it is hard to overstate the importance of having an experienced trainer, who can help the pupil orientate himself correctly in the ocean of chess books and monographs which exist.

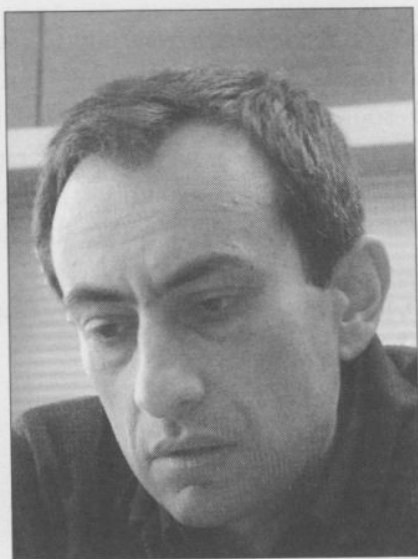
Usually, in a bid to achieve quick results (often to satisfy the secret desires of their parents and trainers), young players ignore the study of such basics of chess, and proceed straightaway to the study of opening theory. This, in my view, is **a major error of principle**. It breaks one of the most important principles of any field of study – go from the simple to the more complex. In building a house, one does not start with the roof, but with the foun-

dations. In any battle, including chess (remember – chess is a model of life!), victory goes to the army which has prepared a good plan in advance and which is better able to conduct the fight. In trying to commit to memory as many fragments of contemporary grandmaster games as possible, a player does not have the time for a critical look at them, or to understand their basic ideas and to think up any original ideas of his own. But all of what he remembers will sooner or later be forgotten or go out of date. My pupils, grandmasters Brodsky, Stripunsky, Berelovich, IM Schmuter, etc. **only started studying modern opening theory once they were already international masters**. Furthermore, it was precisely the absence of stereotypes and rote learning that enabled them to find a great number of new and interesting ideas, which they continue to use even to this day.

A basic understanding of the opening, in my opinion, only involves being familiar with the basics of chess strategy generally. In order to study openings at a basic level, and choose a repertoire, one needs only a short course in openings, and certainly not an encyclopedia!

Annotate games!

Right from childhood, a player should learn to analyse and annotate ALL of the game she or she plays. I would like to remind readers of the title of Garry Kasparov's first book *The Test of Time*. In it, you will find the games of the future World Champion, with commentaries written after the games were played, and with additional, 'mature' comments



Alexander Berelovich

added later. The main conclusion is evident from the title – the commentaries have stood the test of time.

The analysis of games, understanding what happened in them, explaining and **noting** assessments, the reasons for the moves played, the threats and reactions to them, etc. – all of this is a huge stimulus to the growth of a player! Even games played at rapid time controls should be analysed. I believe that such games are, if anything, even more informative for determining the strengths and weaknesses of a player. At slower time-limits, one's weaknesses can be concealed behind long thought, but in rapid and blitz games, they stand

Even rapid games should be analysed. Such games are even more informative for determining the strengths and weaknesses of a player

out much more clearly. Kasparov's trainer Alexander Nikitin has written that the future World Champion used to write notes even on his blitz games.

Keeping a note of time usage during a game is also extremely helpful in identifying a player's weaknesses. Understanding and explaining the player's weaknesses becomes much easier, when one takes into account the amount of time spent on this or that decision.

After each tournament, the player must write an account of each game played, with the variations he considered and the thoughts which were in his head at the time, so that these can be compared later with what emerges from a calm analysis. Special attention should be paid to the transition stage between opening and middlegame, so as to establish how well the events of the middlegame correspond with the logic of the opening set-up.

Analysis of the opening phase should end with a short summary of the best continuations, supported by examples from grandmaster play. The annotations of the game overall should end with an assessment of one's own play and conclusions (the reasons for victory or defeat, including non-chess factors, and conclusions about what should be done to avoid a repetition of negative factors). Such work on annotating a game should take 4 – 5 hours.

At a higher level, it is also useful to annotate other players' games, although this is much more complicated, since it is always much more difficult to understand what motivated the players and what were the bases for the decisions taken.

And finally... play blitz!

If I were to say this is bad, you would not believe me. Is it bad to eat sweets? No, providing it is not done to excess. Too much blitz chess, of course, is harmful, since it can lead to superficiality. But, as the saying goes, 'everything in moderation!' Strong chess players are strong at blitz. Sometimes, in order to develop their self-confi-

dence, I recommend my pupils (even grandmaster pupils – they too are human, and sometimes suffer from a lack of self-confidence!) to play blitz or rapid tournaments. The only condition I impose is that they must play openings that they do not usually play – this helps!

So, play blitz. After all, **chess is a game – our beloved game.**

Alexander Vaisman's three favourite chess instruction books

1. *My System* by Aron Nimzowitsch
2. *Zurich International Chess Tournament, 1953* by David Bronstein
3. *My Great Predecessors* by Garry Kasparov