

How Not to Play Chess

Eugene Znosko-Borovsky

21st Century Edition

Foreword by Sal Matera



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How Not to Play Chess
by Eugene Znosko-Borovsky

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Preface

It was back in October 1926, while taking a stroll one day under the port of Liverpool's overhead railway and pondering the lecture I was to give to the city's chess enthusiasts, and with the infernal din of the trains above reverberating in my head, that the title that would set the content and tone of my forthcoming talk spontaneously came to me.

I could never have suspected the popularity that this providential title would acquire. In actual fact, in spite of, or perhaps thanks to, the publication of my small treatise entitled *How Not to Play Chess*, in several countries and in various languages, this title has been emulated many times and even unashamedly copied.

An original title is never risk-free. Mine has certainly attracted its share of ridicule. One harsh and scornful critic even took the opportunity to crack a joke, saying that my unpretentious opuscle demonstrated "how not to write about chess."

Moreover, an attractive title can be the cause of other concerns for the author. A pleasant exterior often conceals an unpleasant truth. Even though, on this point, many readers around the world could not be any clearer, I wonder now whether the amateur players of today really need this book, which was published for the first time in France over twenty years ago.

Certainly, I was often asked to pen a new edition and I was constantly, for many years, questioned about when it would eventually reappear. But, notwithstanding this, chess in France has evolved a lot and I am the first to note the progress. Simultaneous exhibitions are

becoming more difficult and longer as every day passes, and victories achieved at the very start of the game thanks to an elementary blunder by your opponent, so frequent in the past, are now a rare bird indeed.

Nevertheless, there are still novices out there, fortunately, and they are even increasing in number, and average players still lack understanding. If there is a lesson still to be learned from my book, it is precisely the truth that I had identified in all my writings, and that I had asserted for the first time in this book, namely:

“Chess is a game of understanding and not of memory.”

This quote went all around the world. And today it returns to France. Thanks are due to the [1948] publisher Yves Demailly, whose desire is for his justly renowned publishing house to focus on chess publications. France lacks just such a venture and the need for one is keenly felt. It is up to amateur chess to generously support such an undertaking. The present volume is just the first step. Others will follow shortly. Let's hope that chessplayers, on reading the volumes that have come out and those to be published, will derive the same pleasure as international amateurs in times past, and that their own play will benefit.

The choice of the title for this book was not dictated solely by a desire for originality. We have seen that the results obtained from the widely used methods for teaching chess are hardly satisfying and that, as a result, it seems essential that the teaching of chess should be modernized. We wanted to approach the question from another angle, saying to ourselves, “Before making saints, let's first show how not to sin.”

Our readers, after glancing through this book, will perhaps take us to task for having taught them, like so many others, to merely play chess well. But negative advice may actually have a positive outcome. Avoid errors to play well.

Eugene Znosko-Borovsky

Paris

July 1, 1948

***Do not leave any piece without a purpose,
disconnected from the position.***

First, look at whether your pieces have prospects, whether they could occupy better squares and files. Although very well placed, it could be that they have no good move to make, that it is not possible for them to occupy stronger squares or coordinate with other pieces. Even so, it is essential to organize such a connection.

Consider this: an isolated piece, disconnected from the others, may be the reason for your loss. It is easy to see the difference between a mechanical, completely impersonal analysis, all about calculation, and an interior analysis, more qualitative than quantitative and more difficult as a result. Great players, armed with a fertile mind and vast experience, completely ignore the first and only perform the second. Even so, by neglecting the fundamentals of a position, they often commit serious errors.

You know that they do not always perceive in the same way the positions that arise in their games. So be careful. Analyze your position in the order and manner that we have indicated; exterior first, then interior. Tell yourself that this assessment is even more necessary if you have little experience. Your judgment will therefore be soundly motivated, as the laws of mechanics cannot be wrong.

Of course, it is a task that will demand a lot of time to start with, but then this task will become easier. The more often you repeat it, the easier you will see the characteristic elements of a position that you would not have uncovered otherwise. This two-fold analysis also offers the advantage that it can be performed while your opponent is thinking, so without any loss of time.

As it is difficult to do in the heat of battle, it is necessary to take advantage of moments of calm to finish it completely, such as when your pieces are all developed. This two-fold analysis, we have said, allows you to uncover all the characteristics of a position. Let us add that it must be supplemented by what can be called individual analysis. This concerns the essential aspects of a position.

Sometimes it is just one thing that catches the eye: a far advanced pawn for example. Nevertheless, it is the important aspects that are neglected too often: the color of the bishop or the crucial fact of having castled on one side or another. Every move must be assessed considering these features. If we do not see them in time or if we do not give them enough attention, we are lost.

An interior analysis, carried out conscientiously, taking in all the pieces, cannot fail to reveal these essential aspects. You have to see the dangers and the benefits that they conceal in order to act accordingly by formulating a strategic plan. Strong players, especially those who play instinctively, immediately grasp these essential aspects and the correct assessment of the position dictates to them the line of play and indicates to them the right move.

The chess master Janowski once admitted that he played simultaneous games as well as he did serious games: “I immediately see the right move.” he said. “Even so, in tournaments, I check it is the right move by means of careful calculation, whereas in simultaneous displays I do not.”

If you are a genius, you could do the same, dispensing with analysis and throwing this book in the bin. But if you are an average player, if you want to learn to play better, know that there is no other way of

developing this rapid visual assessment, this flair, than by first patiently performing a full analysis to the third degree. If you force yourself to carry out this analysis frequently and meticulously, you will soon be able to see almost immediately the weak point in any given position.