

WHAT YOU NEED  
TO KNOW BEFORE  
*Your First*  
**CHESS**  
**TOURNAMENT**



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# What You Need to Know Before Your First Chess Tournament

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*For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be a professional chess player*

# INTRODUCTION

PLEASE NOTE: As I stated in the description of this Amazon Kindle book, this book is not about how to literally play chess. It is about competitive play - playing in official chess tournaments. What qualifies me to write this Amazon Kindle Book? Well, I have over 25 years of tournament playing experience. I learned the rules of the game from my father at the age of 8 back in the early 1990's. I am a class player which means I am not quite an expert (at least not officially), but I still plan on going for the expert title and eventually getting the National Master title.

Chess is believed to have evolved from an ancient 7<sup>th</sup> century game from India called Chatrang, and something that I find rather interesting, the name for modern day chess in the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) is catur. Modern chess has its origins in or around the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

So, what makes a great chess player a great chess player? I would say a powerful memory is the most important characteristic. The reason being that you must be able to remember your mistakes from previous games so you do not repeat the same mistakes, otherwise you will get nowhere. If your memory is not that great, train harder! But always remember, to get good at chess, you must have a deep love and appreciation of the game. There are a lot of good chess players who are not even very talented, they just simply put in the work to get to where they are in chess.

I am not as obsessed with chess as I was as a teenager to be completely honest. Chess is still my favorite "game", but I have moved on to other things these days - specifically online content creation and building my brand, "Cultured Monk Media". These days, I play chess primarily for the social aspect. I meet some great people and have some great times at our chess clubs. Hell, I would say nearly half of my friends were people that I met through chess. Yet, another reason to love the game. Sadly, serious chess players are rather rare. Part of the reason for this is that people get intimidated when they hear of the Royal Game. They think you must have a brilliant mind to be good at chess. No, I am living proof that this is

inaccurate. You do not need to be smart to play the game. Rather, playing the game will make you smarter. Or, at the very least, it will hone your concentration skills and your ability to focus.

Chess is known to tie into intellectual areas such as science and psychology. You so often will hear people say that chess is math. No, it isn't. Chess has little to do with math. The only math that comes in is when you need to be aware of how many pieces are defending a piece you are attacking and vice versa. Chess involves more visuo-spatial intelligence than it does mathematical ability.



# A Few Basics of the Game and Tournament Play

Chess uses a rating system called "Elo". It is named after its inventor, a Hungarian professor - Arpad Elo. At the lower end of the spectrum are class players. This goes from Class A (1800 - 1999) at the top, all the way down to Class J (100 - 199 Elo). Then, of course you have Unrated players - players who are playing in their very first tournament. I have to make you aware that going to a major tournament like The Chicago Open or National Open as your very first tournament is a really bad idea. These tournaments are filled with "sand-baggers" - players in the unrated and low-rated sections that keep their ratings low so that they can win their section of the tournament, and thus win a lot of money. Yes, chess is the only sport where you can totally suck at the game and still make big bucks. This is one thing I do not particularly like about tournament chess! Your rating is labeled as being provisional until, I believe, after your first 20 games. This means your first few scores will be highly volatile according to your wins and losses against players with higher ratings and lower ratings. Your typical tournament is 3 - 5 rounds. Tournaments are run in either a "round-robin" system or a "Swiss" system. In a round-robin system, as with every other tournament sport, every player will play each other at least once. The Swiss system focuses more on how you are performing in the tournament. So, the higher you are scoring in the tournament the harder your competition will be in the next round.

Ahead of your class players (amateurs), you have experts. Experts are rated 2000 - 2199. National Masters are rated 2200+. In the International Chess Federation (FIDE) you are not a master until you have reached 2300 Elo. Once a player reaches a certain "floor", it means that no matter how many games they lose their rating cannot fall below that class. When you get to 2200 (National Master) you are always a master - you earned the National Master certificate. However, the term "life master" applies to a master whose floor is 2200. So, obviously a "life expert" is a player rated 2000 or over whose floor is also 2000. What exactly earns you a floor into the next category I am not 100% sure. This is a technicality.

Sometimes if you look up tournament results online or wherever you will see the abbreviation "TPR" which stands for Tournament Performance Rating. This means that if you played at that strength in every tournament, that is what your rating would be.

Chess has a few tricky rules but not too many. Always remember, you can never castle through check (i.e., if your King passes through a square that is attacked by the enemy that is castling through check). However, you can still castle Queenside if the b1 square is attacked by the enemy piece. And Black can castle Queenside if the b8 square is attacked by one of White's pieces. This is a rare subtlety that many do not know about! I must admit, I do not believe I've ever encountered this situation in any game that I have ever played. There is also another capturing rule called "en passant". This is a rule you need to know before your first tournament as this comes up often. If you move your pawn up two spaces (only possible on the very first pawn move of that specific pawn) and it places it adjacent to an enemy pawn, then the enemy pawn can capture it by moving 1 square diagonally directly behind your pawn. Your pawn is then captured. Please note: your opponent can only capture en passant on the very next move. After that, it's too late and your pawn cannot be captured via en passant in a subsequent move by your opponent. One thing that is unclear to me is whether en passant is legal if capturing en passant puts your opponent in check. I bring this up because this came up for the first time in my chess career in an online game I was playing not too long ago. The chess server wouldn't let me make the move. Maybe it was a glitch, or maybe it really is an illegal move. I don't know. I suppose you can ask a TD or look it up on



the web if you want to. This is the other rare subtlety you will probably not have to be concerned about. You must also always remember to set the board up with the White square on your right-hand side of your pieces. I don't know how many times I've seen this goof in movies or ads. You must also be aware that, in official chess tournaments, there is the "touch-move" rule. If you touch a piece in a tournament game, you have to move that piece. Be careful. If a piece is misplaced and off the center of the square it is on you have to say outloud, "adjust" or "J'adoube" which is the official way to state that you are about to adjust a piece. Saying "J'adoube" out loud gives you the right to physically touch and adjust the piece on the square without having to follow the touch-move rule. For my non-francophone readers, "adouber" is the French term for "adjust".

I remember my very first chess book - a fantastic one by Fred Reinfeld entitled "The Complete Chess-Player". Mr. Reinfeld insists that opening by moving your King's pawn up two squares (simply written as 1.e4 in Portable Game Notation) leads to more tactical positions which are less strategy-based. Pushing your Queen's pawn up two spaces (1.d4 in Portable Game Notation) leads to games that involve more positional play rather than tactical play. Mr. Reinfeld goes on to say that positional play is a lot more subtle and takes longer to master. Personally, I almost always open with 1.e4 when I play as White because I like more sharp and dynamic positions. This is also why I play the Sicilian Defense as Black when White plays 1.e4. In the Sicilian Defense, Black pushes his Queen's Bishop's pawn up two squares on the first move (1 ...c5 in PGN). On a side note, you need to know how to record your games in chess tournaments. This is a tournament requirement. They simply call writing down the moves as keeping score.

My favorite chess author is most definitely the International Master (IM) Jeremy Silman who is the author of my most favorite chess book that I have ever read - "The How to Reassess Your Chess Workbook". I got to meet him at chess camp in 1997 in Illinois. Yes, I have been to chess camp so you can officially call me a nerd. He has written many other fantastic chess books as well, such as "The Amateur's Mind: Turning Chess Misconceptions into Chess Mastery" and "How to Reassess Your Chess: Chess Mastery Through Chess Imbalances". Mr. Silman tells us that the

point of the opening is simply to create (favorable) imbalances in the position.

It is customary to shake your opponent's hand before you make your first move and say, "Good luck!". If you are playing as Black you press your side of the chess clock which starts your opponent's clock. If your opponent doesn't show up, you need to wait about an hour in most cases before you can claim a victory by forfeit. Sometimes you have to wait until your enemy's flag in the chess clock drops (i.e., when his time has completely run out). However, flags are in what are called analog clocks, and they are fading out in tournament chess nowadays. So, it is most likely you will not have to worry about watching your flag when your time is low because chances are you will be using a digital clock. Typically, Black has the say in which side to put the clock (right or left-hand side). But this is ultimately up to the TD (Tournament Director). The TD always has the final say.

There are many places online to purchase chess equipment. If you need a tournament set (board, pieces and clock), simply use a search engine and search for "tournament chess sets". Yes, Amazon carries tournament "sets" as well.

Most official chess tournaments in the United States will have what they call, "the skittles room". This is the designated room for going over your games with your opponent right after that round is over. It is meant to be both educational and friendly/social.



# Chess on The Web

There are many great places to play chess online. I have been using the Free Internet Chess Server (FICS) since October of 1999. It's always been popular. Another popular server is the Internet Chess Club (ICC), but this site requires a paid-subscription and has slowly but surely been dying over the recent years. You can visit the ICC at [chessclub.com](http://chessclub.com). By far the most popular new place to play online is Lichess.org. A lot of streamers on Twitch.tv use Lichess.org for their live streams. If you wish to stream your Lichess.org games via Twitch.tv, then I recommend using Streamlabs' OBS as your setup. It is the most popular streaming software for all YouTube, Twitch.tv and Facebook. It is for both Windows and MAC. What's more? It's free! Lichess.org also offers a blindfold option where you must remember where the pieces are, and simply click on the squares of where you want to move the piece - the challenge of all challenges!

I highly suggest starting a chess blog so that you can post your games to review them anytime you want. You need to post them in PGN format so you can easily view them via a PGN-viewer like the one at [chesstempo.com](http://chesstempo.com). I use Blogger for my chess blog. Blogger is free, simple and you never have to worry about hosting.

Chessgames.com is one of the most extensive online databases of master+ chess games. I have looked at well over a one-thousand games on this site. You would be surprised how beneficial it can be to your playing strength simply by looking at master strength games even if you don't take your time.

YouTube - you just can't beat it when it comes to the analyses of games in top level chess. YouTube's "Agadmator" is the most popular YouTube channel on YouTube. It is run and owned by one Antonio Radic from

Croatia. Antonio has well over 1 million subscribers on YouTube. "The Chess Website" and "Online Chess Lessons" are a couple of other popular chess channels on YouTube.

One thing that has frustrated me is always having to find a PGN publisher so that people can view my games online. I used KVchess.com for a long time but it has become defunct somehow. It was awesome, but I have not been able to get it to work over the last year or so. I recently posted a FEN position to my chess blog – [lizzichess.blogspot.org](http://lizzichess.blogspot.org). I didn't remember the website I used to get the code. And, yes, please check out my chess blog - "Terlizzi: Life & Games". I cannot stress enough how important it is to document your games and review them regularly even if you do not wish to post them online through a blog. **STUDY YOUR GAMES. REMEMBER YOUR MISTAKES.**

Now, thanks to Covid-19 the US Chess Federation created the “online rating” category. But I’m not a fan of these online tournaments even though they are official. No, I don’t care. I want to play official games in real life and not virtually. Players are getting accused of cheating (getting assistance from chess-playing software like Fritz or Komodo) left and right. There are anti-cheating tactics and algorithms the Federation has in place, but they are not 100% accurate. I’m afraid I’ll get accused of cheating anytime I find a brilliant move and get my membership benefits revoked. I guess I have always had a bit of a guilty conscious.



# Computer Chess

Man vs. Machine matches would be a joke nowadays as computers now see EVERYTHING. Garry Kasparov was the first World (Champion to lose a match under standard time control in his famous face-off against IBM's "Deep Blue" in 1997. Some say (especially Mr. Kasparov that IBM cheated and there was human intervention). I am going a little off topic here. Use computers to analyze your games. Always go over them first using the computer in between your ears. You will be more likely to remember your games and mistakes this way. A computer will only display suggested moves and will never give you the reasoning for the moves like a professional coach would. The Hungarian International Master Attila Turzo has been my personal online coach for many, many years. I also traveled down to Kentucky to look over some of my games with the legendary Russian Grandmaster Gregory Kaidanov. I once brought up the topic of having a powerful memory as a pre-requisite to becoming a great chess player. Kaidanov told me that he's known Grandmasters with terrible memories. However, I find this hard to believe, even coming from Gregory Kaidanov. Yes, I disagree with him here.

Fritz from "Chessbase" is my favorite chess program that I use personally to analyze my games. I currently own the version "Fritz 15". I believe they are up to version 17 at the time of my writing this special little eBook. As a side note, when you input your moves from a game into the chess-playing software of your choice (or "engine" as these programs are called in the Chess World) by moving the pieces on the computer screen, the engine will (most of them) automatically translate them into Portable Game Notation (PGN) format. Other notation systems you may hear of include algebraic and descriptive notation. There is also a format for displaying chess positions on a computer or smartphone from games called FEN or a "FEN" diagram. FEN stands for Forsyth-Edwards Notation. I imagine PGN and

FEN systems are programmed via the computer language Javascript, but I don't know for sure.

One excellent book I highly recommend on this topic is former World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov's "Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins". Kasparov tells us that there are two methods for computers to play chess, first and foremost, you have the brute-force method. And this is the superior method. It is the ability to calculate hundreds of millions of positions per second. The other method is to improve the machine's playing strength through improving its ability to discard bad moves. The problem with this second method is that it slows down the machine's search by having a more sophisticated process of analyzing or "thinking". Kasparov's book is rather long but well worth the time to read.

I can remember of my early teen years playing chess against a chess computer - a real chess board that was electronic and that you could adjust the playing strength. I don't believe these types of machines are so popular these days. I look back very fondly of those few years back in the mid and late 1990's. I can remember the dopamine practically flooding my brain as I was playing. There were also some good chess programs for Windows PCs back then too, I can think of one specifically... it was called Power Chess. I can remember it boosting my playing strength from about 1300 to ~ 1550 ELO. I improved greatly simply through play and little study. The younger you are, the easier it will be to improve! Teach your kids before they reach double-digits.





# Chess on the Big Screen (Hollywood)

Chess movies – watch them! Netflix’s “The Queen’s Gambit” that was released in the Fall of 2020 is a fantastic 7-episode mini-series. It was based on a 1983 novel that is of the same name. It takes place during the 1960’s, and the implication here is that Elizabeth “Beth” Harmon is the female version of Bobby Fischer. This mini-series most certainly boosted the popularity of chess throughout the World. Yeah, there certainly needs to be more chess in Hollywood. And I already mentioned how much chess has helped me socially.

If you want to see a movie that is about the 11<sup>th</sup> World Chess Champion Robert James “Bobby” Fischer then I suggest you watch Edward Zwick’s biographical drama “Pawn Sacrifice”. Bobby is played by Tobey Maguire and Bobby’s nemesis, one Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union is played by Liev Schreiber. Unfortunately, a lot of savvy chess players think poorly of this film despite it’s good ratings.

Now, my all-time favorite chess movie is the 1993 film “Searching for Bobby Fischer”. It is also a biographical drama based on a book, but it is not about Bobby Fischer. It is about the former chess prodigy Josh Waitzkin who eventually mastered the game at a noticeably young age. Sadly, the movie is credited with ruining Mr. Waitzkin’s love for the game and is the reason why he gave up chess and lost his love for it. I watched a YouTube clip of Josh Waitzkin a while back, and he said that the movie made him lose his love for chess because it turned him in to a celebrity and somehow totally dissociated him from the game. Josh has a book out called “The Art of Learning” which I’ve always wanted to read but never got around to.

Another chess movie which I really enjoy and never get tired of is a film called “The Luzhin Defence” which is loosely based on a lesser-known top-level chess player by the name of Curt Von Bardeleben who was a prominent player in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bardeleben is played by John Turturro. Bardeleben committed suicide by jumping out of a window in 1924 at the age of 62. He is known for walking out on a game against the first official World Chess Champion Wilhelm Steinitz. He is responsible for the chess term, “pulling a Bardeleben”. I try to be as respectful to my opponents as I can after a loss but will admit that it most certainly is not easy. There have been days when tournament losses made me stay in my room all day for days. Yes, losses do and will always hurt. They are very painful. No, you will never learn to be okay with them. But you can’t let your losses discourage you. I lost a lot of games before improving. I would have not got to a top-level class player without my many losses. My official tournament history score in the United States Chess Federation (USCF) as of July 2021 is 75 wins, 20 draws and 72 losses. Yes, statistically I am likely to win 51% of my tournament games. If you want to see your statistics go to <https://new.uschess.org/player-search> and type in your eight-digit USCF ID number. Click “submit” and then click on your name. This will bring you to the page that has all your information regarding all of the tournaments you’ve played in, and it will also list your current USCF rating. You then need to scroll down to the bottom section, and in the right-hand column there will be a “show game statistics” link. Click the link and you will be directed to a page that will list many interesting statistics about the games you played.



# Final Thoughts

Unfortunately, as chess-players, we must admit that the future of chess is not a very bright one thanks to computers. Computers are literally solving the game. The 2018 World Chess Championship was the first World Championship where every single game was a draw - yes, all twelve games were a draw! Part of the reason for this is, I believe, due to computers expanding opening theory. Computers have pointed out the best first 15 - 25 moves or so.

Who is my favorite chess player of all-time? Bobby Fischer for # 1, then Garry Kasparov (admittedly, Garry is the greatest chess player of all-time) and then Alexander Alekhine, The Russian World Champion born in the late 1800's as my #3. Alekhine is awesome because of how aggressive his play was. And I like the Defense system that is named after him, appropriately called, "Alekhine's Defense". Sorry to go off track a little here but a quick jsyk, in the Alekhine's Defense, Black responds to 1.e4 with 1...Nf6, usually White will follow up with 2.e5, attacking the Knight and Black will move his Knight out of danger to the d5 square (Quick reminder: columns are tagged A to H from White's left to right, and the rows are numbered 1 – 8. White's first left-hand square is a1 and Black's is h8.). Not only is Bobby Fischer my favorite chess player of all-time, but he may just be my biggest hero, even of all my heroes outside of chess. Bobby was a genius, as are/were all the greatest chess players of all time. Bobby was a high school drop-out, as is yours truly, and Bobby most definitely held the World in contempt which was something I strongly related to as a teenager. I suppose those last two statements are the reason for my affinity towards Mr. Fischer.

There is a board game that is older and supposedly even more complex than chess - it's the Japanese brain-twister - "Go". I tried getting into it a few years back but just never really saw the beauty in it that I see and have always seen in chess. I also spent many months trying to improve at Go but never did get any better. It is a game that just really doesn't mean anything

special to me like chess does. There is nothing, nor will there ever be anything like chess.

Men and women think differently, and chess is proof of this. In the entire history of chess, there has only been one elite female chess-player. Her name is Judit Polgar, and she is a Grandmaster from Hungary. Born in 1976, she became the youngest Grandmaster in the history of chess at the time at the age of 15 years and 4 months. Her sisters are chess-players as well but are not as strong. So, if you are a female reading this, do not be discouraged! You could be the next Judit! Of course, these days there are 13-year-old and even 12-year-old Grandmasters.

*"Chess is beautiful enough to waste your life for."*

- International Grandmaster, Hans Ree.