

# OLDIES BUT NOT MOLDIES

By Bob Basalla

Probably the best way to learn anything is to do a lot of it and do it often. That certainly is true of chess where there is simply no substitute for playing lots and lots of games, serious games and fun games, slow game and speed games. There are other things that can help you learn about chess, though. One could study books about tactics, for example, or endgames, positional play and so on. The method I am going to focus on here is this: playing over master level games.

One can clearly learn a lot from playing over one's own games and those of your fellow students. (You'd get the most out of analyzing the games that you *lost* rather than the ones you won, but that is another article for another time.) There is something to be said, however, for poring over the moves of two chess masters to see how it is supposed to be done. One can watch how one side presses the action and how the other side plays to foil this plot. The ideas they come up with as well as how they accurately lay them out on the board can be quite instructive. I'm convinced that playing over thousands of master games helped me progress at least a level or two, as I did not have any formal chess instruction when I was a kid.

Here's what I did. For many years I would play over any and every master game I could get hold of. For instance, I used to play over every game in *Chess Life* (at the time it was called *Chess Life & Review*)! This I did for over a twenty year period. Think of all the games from just this one source. Other books and magazines provided even more games to look through. It didn't matter to me if a game did not feature the particular opening that was playing at the time. I was interested in seeing how *good chess* was played, whatever the opening. (And who knows? Maybe someday I will take up some of these other openings myself!) Besides, if the game reached the ending it didn't matter what the opening was that got them (and us) there. Sometimes I would carefully examine each move to get the most out of it. What was the player trying to do? Why did he play this move now? And so on. Other times I would play over games as if they were a movie, trying to outguess at a glance what the next idea, move or sequence would be. Why don't I follow this successful strategy any more, one may ask. Well, there is something that happens to people once they become adults and settle into their jobs and family life. I no longer have the time.

Now and then when I do have some time I still delight in looking at the latest efforts from the big tournaments and matches held around the world, but now it mainly is for the sheer joy of witnessing brilliant chess. And what's wrong with that? Amazing moves and incredible ideas can both delight us and whet our appetite to play more of this wonderful game ourselves.

Presented here are some of the fantastic games that really got my teenage self enthused about chess. Perhaps they will excite you, too!

## **Adolf Anderssen - Max Lange, Breslau 1859 (Ruy Lopez)**

I can already hear the objections. That game is about 150 years old. What can I possibly learn from such a moldy oldie? Well, these old guys may not have had chess computers, and the improved opening moves we now enjoy had yet to be invented, but these old guys could play some spectacular chess of the kind any of us would wish to have played. I'm not taking away anything from modern master games. They are great, too, but remember, they all got to stand on the summit of all the knowledge learned from studying the games of these old guys!

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nd4** [This unusual move is the so called Bird Variation of the Ruy Lopez opening. Since it violates the sound principle of not moving the same piece twice in the opening without a good reason the Bird Variation is not considered favorably by modern players except

possibly as a surprise weapon, especially in a quick time game. That is not to say that such an opening loses by force, of course.] **4.Nxd4 exd4** [Here we see the real positional problem with the Bird Variation. With Black's king pawn deflected over a file, White can expect later to be able to have a ready made pawn roller with pawns on both e4 and f4, controlling much of the center and waiting for the right later moment to advance. Natural kingside castling by Black might then become a risky matter. See how such a little thing as a deflected pawn can greatly alter the strategy of a game? I have to admit that all of the above analysis was lost on me when I first fell in love with this game while I was still in high school.] **5.Bc4** [Taking aim at a new target on f7 now that the knight on c6 has disappeared. Once again, modern players would probably want to keep their lead in development rather than using it up by moving a developed piece twice. But remember, this was back in 1859 when such "obvious" principles were not beat into the heads of every chess student!] **5...Nf6 6.e5 d5** [This is a common counterpunch in many double king pawn openings where White plays his bishop to c4. It often either gains a tempo as in this game or gains the two bishops on 6.exf6 dxc4.] **7.Bb3 Bg4** [This is the bold move that starts the fireworks. Black forces White's next move but leaves himself with two pieces hanging. What does he have in mind?] **8.f3 Ne4** [The knight is safe for the moment while in reply to 9.fxg4 Black has 9...Qh4 10.g3 Nxg3] **9.0-0 d3** [A powerful move of a type worth remembering. Black clears the g1-a7 diagonal to allow his bishop to develop to a menacing square (c5) with check, accelerating the attack. In addition, notice how the Black pawn keeps the White queen pawn on d2 and White's own bishop stops the movement of the b2 pawn. This means that it will take a while to untangle so as to move the White queen bishop, meaning also that the queen rook will be stuck on a1 for a long time as well. This makes it harder for White's queenside forces from coming to the rescue of his endangered king. Now what is White to do?] **10.fxg4** [Taking the piece and figuring to sacrifice the exchange (rook for bishop or knight) to remove one of the other attackers as they came in. A brilliant series of moves by Black shows that this does not work. However, analysis over a century and a quarter later indicated that White had a defensive resource in 10.Qe1, covering the h4 square from invasion by Black's queen and leaving Black with two forked pieces. Since these lines seem to lead to a good game for White we must consider Black's attack, pretty though you'll soon see it to be, to be less than best play. For many years this was my all time favorite game, but not any more as *the truth* of a position counts more than the beauty. But that does not stop us from admiring this brilliancy now that White has made the fatal, if unforced, mistake.] **10...Bc5+ 11.Kh1 Ng3+** [Of course 11...Nf2+ allows White to get two pieces for his rook after 12.Rxf2. Now White's king is cornered among open lines while his pawns are prettily tripled on the g-file.] **12.hxg3 Qg5** [The threat is 13...Qh6++. Once again White has only one defense since his queen bishop cannot get out due to that plugging pawn on d3.] **13.Rf5 h5** [I think we can all see the mate coming if the queen is taken. So White must give up the rook, but the attack continues unabated.] **14.gxh5 Qxf5 15.g4 Rxh5+** [Another amazing sacrifice that finishes the job.] **16.gxh5 Qe4** [This is the important move to see when sacrificing the rook. It threatens mate on h4 and pins the g2 pawn so White can't give his king any air by moving it. What's more, he also has access to White's back rank. What more could one want from a single move?] **17.Qf3** [Amazingly, White still is reduced to playing the one and only move he has! Black now finishes with...] **17...Qh4+ 18.Qh3 Qe1+** [...and White resigns due to 19.Kh2 Bg1+ 20.Kh2 Bf2+ 21.Kh2 Qg1++. That queen and bishop mating dance is worth remembering, as it will happen in your games from time to time. Watch for it.] blished monthly by Vivacity, Inc., 6568 Maplewood Dr., Suite 201, Cleveland, OH 44124.