

THE IMPROVING ANNOTATOR

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BOSTON

Introduction

“Annotating games will improve your play.”

The unrated sixteen-year old considered the advice. He knew he had gotten a late start in tournament chess and so decided to give it a try. First he annotated a match between two of his friends. Then, over the next three years, he annotated eighteen of his own games. He tried to be objective and to identify his weaknesses so as to not repeat his mistakes. In the first two years, his rating rose 600 points. In the third year, just after his nineteenth birthday, he became an expert.

That teenager was me, Dan Heisman. Eventually I won the Philadelphia Invitational Championship, got my national master (NM) title from the U.S. Chess Federation, and earned the Candidate Master (CM) title from the international chess federation, FIDE. This turned out to be my second book out of ten (!), and my *Novice Nook* column for Chess Café (www.chesscafe.com) has won several awards for Best Instruction.

I thought these games would make for an instructive book – *The Improving Annotator: From Beginner to Master*. The reader would be treated to good games, interesting positions, and very detailed annotations of complex situations. Since the unique aspect of this book is my improving annotation, the games are presented in the order I annotated them, not in the order they were played.

Only one problem remained. Now that I was a master, should I correct errors in my old notes? For the first 18 games, fixing the notes would destroy the reader’s perception of the improving annotator, so I decided to leave them pretty much alone. (So when you see a game called “My Best Game,” read it as “My Best Game *so far*.”) I did convert these 18 to algebraic notation, made the text just a little more readable, but added a helpful note in brackets only occasionally. For the remainder of the games I did what all good annotators should do today [*i.e.*, 1995, *publication date for the first edition* – Ed.]: double check the analysis of the most complex positions with chess software such as John Stanback’s *Zarkov 3* or Mark Lefler’s *NOW*.

These original and untouched errors in analysis are, hopefully, additionally instructive. As opposed to Bobby Fischer, I will not only not claim that I never made a mistake in analysis, I am somewhat proud of having tried so much and sometimes failed. This book is a testament to those mistakes – and to the learning process involved.

For this updated edition I have left the original games mostly untouched (else the book would not longer represent the notes of an

Improving Annotator); I did not correct my analysis mistakes. The main changes to those games were to fix a few typos and to add bracketed [new] comments. Most of these comments were generated by using 2009 World Computer Chess Champion *Rybka* to help the reader understand the “truth” of the position, especially in the more analytical lines. Comments based on *Rybka*’s analysis are not only in brackets but also begin with “R:”, e.g. “[R: This is the losing move. Black had to play 19...♗ac8, when 20.♗xa5 only gives White a slight advantage].”

Moreover, I used *Rybka* to completely re-analyze and annotate two of the most complicated games in the book (Yehl #10 and Latzel #14; for Dowling #18 see the Appendix of *Elements of Positional Evaluation*, 4th edition). The original annotations to the Yehl and Latzel games are still included, unaltered, but I have added a new section, “*Rybka* Redux,” providing these games a second time with the new, computer-assisted annotations. In addition, I have provided two new games (Mucerino #27 and Rutar #28) to highlight my quest for the Main Line Chess Club Championship in recent years.

The method I use for computer analysis was described in detail in the introduction to my e-book/CD *The Traxler Counterattack*. Briefly, this is as follows: I do not just let the computer run overnight or use something like *Fritz*’s “Overnight Analysis” mode. Instead, I put the engine in infinite analysis mode and painstakingly force the engine to show me the candidate moves. With my background as a chess master and in computer science, I am able to discern which variations are worth investigating. By doing this repeatedly, I create main lines for each critical variation. Some of the new annotations were created in this manner; for others I simply let the computer do a quick “blunder check.”

For each game my objectives are the same: to find the truth, expose the errors, and let the reader know when and how the games were won and lost. Along the way I hope to be instructive as well. I trust you will enjoy playing through these games (and especially some of the fantastic tactical notes) as much as I enjoyed playing and annotating them.

Annotating a Chess Game

The improving self-annotator may annotate primarily to help him understand his own weaknesses and to try to avoid repeating any mistakes.

Any player wishing to improve should first ask their opponent to review the game with them immediately afterwards – the traditional “post-mortem.” Only the opponent knows what he was thinking, so he can provide meaningful (and sometimes not so meaningful) insight into

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why his moves were chosen. But, more importantly, even opponents who are of equal strength or even somewhat inferior can provide important knowledge that you can use to improve. The opponent might understand the opening or endgame better, or he may have seen a particular line of analysis with deeper insight.

Assuming you wish to annotate the game, after reviewing the game with your opponent you can show it to a strong player for further examination, or analyze it in private prior to committing any annotations to paper.

In these days of computer annotations, you should first annotate the game on a word processor (so that it can be modified later) *without the help of a computer chess program*.

Make sure to include clear evaluations of all lines using either symbols (=, \pm) or words (“White is clearly better,” or “Black is winning easily”). Never provide an analysis line leaving the reader wondering what the evaluation is.

After the first pass, use the computer to check your analysis and evaluations, making changes where necessary. By doing the annotation this way, it not only allows you to analyze without computer help (much more instructive), but it also forces you to review objectively what you have done, for double benefit.

If your original evaluation was one of “unclear,” the engine will probably have a clear preference one way or another. Those are almost always instructive lines.

There are three main goals/purposes for annotating a game:

- Instruction
- Entertainment
- History

Any annotated game may contain one or more of these goals. Within each of these goals, subgoals may also differ.

The intended audience is also important. If these are fellow masters, then instructional material is extraneous and possibly even insulting. But the great majority of readers are not masters. Similarly, writing for intermediate players is vastly different from writing to instruct someone who has just learned the moves, or even writing for the general public. For this reason, writing for *New In Chess* magazine is different from writing *Novice Nook* (whose intended audience, ironically enough, is intermediates!), which is different from writing for the local newspaper.

First let’s list considerations for annotating that are independent of the reason for annotation.

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- Show all the points where the game changed from a win to a draw or loss, or a draw into a loss (the latter two are called “the losing move”); provide analysis of what could have been done instead. It is important to keep in mind the game theorem which states that, “your position can never get better when you make a move; your position is exactly as good as your best move.” Of course, that doesn’t mean there aren’t good moves!
- If a move changes the expected result from a win to a draw, a win to a loss, or a draw to a loss, provide one or two question marks. A win to a loss usually deserves both question marks. Also, if a move turns a tough defense into a resignable position (or similarly turns a very easy victory or draw into a tough one), then this might also deserve question marks.
- Give a question mark – or maybe two in egregious cases – for “purposeful errors.” For example, if a player trades down unnecessarily when losing, that violates a very important principle of resistance and may deserve more annotative scorn than a move which accidentally puts a queen *en prise* (which a player would not do on purpose).
- Award exclamation point(s) for:
 - 1) Any “hard to see” move which preserves the evaluation (win or draw).
 - 2) A move that creates great problems for the opponent, giving the mover a much better chance to win.
 - 3) A novel move which affects the evaluation of a known opening.
 - 4) A move which causes psychological problems for the opponent.
- Give a “!?” (“worth consideration”) for a move which is not dubious, and purposely injects excitement or risk into the game.
- Give a “?!” for a move which is dubious but has some interest or is worth a try in difficult circumstances.
- Be objective. It is not credible to sprinkle the winner’s moves with exclamation points and the loser’s with question marks, especially if the winner wasn’t winning throughout the whole game. In this book, especially as my opposition gets tougher, there are quite a few games where I started out with a disadvantage, and this I admit quite freely. Computers should help an annotator to be more objective.

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- Provide both the time control and, if possible, how much time each player had left after each move. At the least you should provide this for your own moves (since it is helpful to have this information anyway when analyzing your games).
- When providing analysis, keep in mind the intended audience when deciding how much detail to provide. The general rule is:
 - 1) Strong players don't need everything pointed out to them; they know when one side or the other has the advantage and if you give them the first few moves of an alternative analysis, they get the picture.
 - 2) Beginners, on the other hand, do not need detailed lines either; they need very gentle, general instruction, with "guidelines" they can remember, such as "Putting Rooks on the seventh rank can be strong."
 - 3) The intermediate player, such as the average club player, is the toughest for whom to annotate. Each has his own strengths and weaknesses so, depending upon his knowledge, may sometimes need to be treated more like the strong player, and other times like a beginner. The intermediate player is often the type who likes the annotator to show the win "in all variations." I have leaned some of my annotations, especially my complicated games against Yehl (Game 10), Latzel (14), Dowling (18), and Lunenfeld (24) in this direction, showing most of the complicated (and usually entertaining) possibilities. For this reason, many of the diagrams in *The Improving Annotator: From Beginner to Master* show pretty analysis that was not played.

For *instruction*, supplementary considerations include:

- In the opening, discuss any new moves and, if the players do not follow best theory, let the reader know what is currently considered "best."
- Provide the time control and the time remaining after each move. This was done in some of my later games, as it gives insight into the players' thought process. It is important to know when the players are in time trouble. It is also important to be able to calculate how much time was taken on an individual move. A bad move made after 15 seconds of thought is a much different type of error than the exact same move made after 15 minutes of thought.

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- Define terms appropriately. I have found that most players below intermediate level, no matter how experienced, erroneously believe that “winning the exchange” means “coming out ahead in a trade” rather than the chess-specific (and correct) meaning of “winning a rook for a bishop or knight.” Therefore it is important, when writing for lower-level audiences, to carefully define terms that might be standard to a more practiced readership.
- Pick out places in the game where a general principle is exemplified or violated. State the principle and why the move does or does not comply, and the consequences. The more basic the audience, the more simple the principle that can be highlighted. The more advanced the audience, then not only the more subtle the principle, but also noting exceptions to principles can be very instructive. For example, with beginners it might make sense to emphasize, “Move every piece once before you move every piece twice, except if there is a tactic.” For an intermediate readership, “This is the Carlsbad pawn formation where the famous minority attack with b4-a4-b5 can be played for White.”
- When you make mistakes, do your best to explain why you made the mistake (played too fast, lack of tactical vision, got confused and forgot your earlier analysis, etc.). This can be highly instructive, especially if you are able to offer some advice to the reader on how they can avoid similar mistakes in their games!

For *entertainment*:

- Set the “scene” for the game, not necessarily to the detail you would for history (below), but in order to give the reader a feel for the motivations or feelings of one or both of the players.
- Keep notes brief, minimizing analysis.
- Highlight any “human” incidents that occurred during the game, especially those that provide insight or amusement.
- Pick out games and diagram positions that show amusing, or at least easily understood, continuations.
- Consider annotating game segments or problems. Since the purpose is not necessarily to instruct, the lack of the “big picture” is not too important.

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When providing *history*:

- Provide the setting for the game: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. Provide as many details as possible. For example, unlike entertainment or instruction, the round number is important and even the time of day may be pertinent.
- Discuss why the game was important to the players or others who may be involved. For example, it may be the next-to-last round and a player may have needed a win to stay in contention for first place, or to qualify for the grandmaster title.
- Put the “chess time period” in perspective so that readers of a later time period will understand the context of the situation, both on and off the board.
- Discuss the implications of the game results. For example, a Soviet junior game that led the loser to retire to oblivion and inspired the other to continue – and eventually to become world champion – is pertinent to history.

I hope this book will encourage the reader to consider self-annotation as part of any chess improvement program.

*Dan Heisman
April 2010*

Game 1: Early Pawn Power

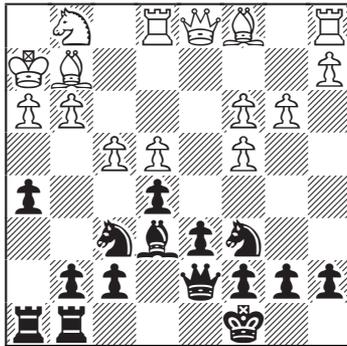
deserved.] I had been trying to think of how to dislodge the knight, but Mrs. Selensky makes it easy. My whole plan had revolved around a way to achieve this dislodgement. She probably either wanted to relocate the knight or push the f-pawn, both of which must be to Black's advantage.

14... **h5**

This looks unnatural, but it contains a deadly threat.

15.f4? ...

[This is more likely the losing move. *Rybka* thinks 15.♔f1 was far superior, when after 15...g5 Black is better but not necessarily winning.]



Position after 15.f4?

Although this threatens to win the bishop, she misses the not so obvious:

15... ♖g4+ -+

This was the third time I had put a piece *en prise* to a pawn in the tournament. Twice it worked, but the third time I missed a winning line.

16.hxg4 ...

Forced. If 16. ♔h1, then 16...♖f2+ wins the queen.

16... hxg4+

17.♔h3 ...

If 17.♔h3 (threatening f4-f5), simply 17...f6 or 17...♖e7 is sufficient for Black because the bishop on h3 won't run away.

17... gxh3

18.♔f3 ...

Of course, if 18.f5, then 18...hxg2+ followed by ...♔xf5 is more than enough.

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18... **exf4**

19.gxf4 **...**

White's king is now looking mighty lonely. The combination starting with 15...♖g4+ has also won a pawn.

19... **♖e7**

Saving the bishop and threatening 20...♖h4 and then ...♖f2+.

20.♖g1 **♖h4**

21.♗e3 **...**

Developed at last. Here, the fatal consequences of 9.e3 can be seen.

21... **♞e7**

The knight wishes to join in on the kingside "fun."

22.♖e2 **f5?**

Black finally makes a serious error, allowing White counterplay. I was trying to open up the kingside. Of course, White cannot play 23.♗xa7 because of 23...b6, trapping the bishop.

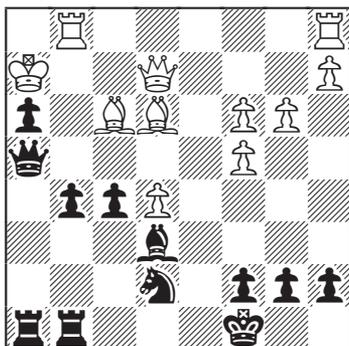
23.e5?? –+ **...**

After this, White's game becomes untenable. 23.e5 actually justifies Black's last move. Simply 23.exf5 is strong, opening diagonals for the bishops. If 23...♞xf5, White has 24.♗f2 or even 24.♗xa7 if nothing else, because of the discovery on Black's bishop. If 23...♗xf5, then 24.♗f2 ♖f6 (forced) followed by 25.♗d4 is just one reasonable line at White's disposal.

23... **dx5**

24.fxe5 **g5**

Is that three connected passed pawns I see marching upon White's naked king in the early middlegame?!



Position after 24...g5

Game 1: Early Pawn Power

25. ♖ad1 ...

This loses quickly, but there wasn't much to be done.

25... **g4**

26. ♗xg4 ...

White must lose a piece. If 26. ♗h1?? g3+ and mate next move.

26... **fxg4**

27. ♗f2 ...

Now at least opposite colored bishops allow White to do some blockading.

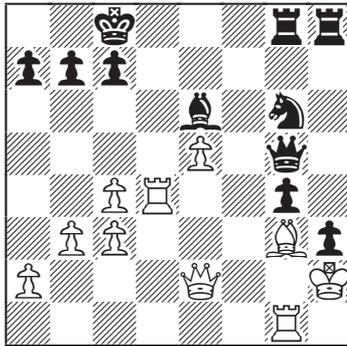
27... **♖g5**

28. ♖d4 **♗g6**

Threatening 29... ♗f4.

29. ♗g3? ...

There goes the blockade.



Position after 29. ♗g3?

29... **♗h4**

Of course. The threat of ... ♗f3+ with a double fork, winning material, forces the following exchange:

30. ♗xh4 **♖xh4**

31. ♖g3 ...

To stop 31 ...g3+.

31... **♖g5**

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On 31... ♖xg3+ 32.♔g3 h2, White can simply play 33.♖d1 and the outcome would be delayed.

32.a4 ...

Might as well try a pawn-roller. Of course, White neglects Black's infiltration while doing so.

32... ♖f8

33.a5 ♖c1

34.a6 ...

34.♖d1 was "better," but Black could then try 34...♖f7+ with what appears to be a quicker win.

34... ♖f1

White can resign. It was Sunday and the trains to my suburban home were only running every few hours. It was now nearing the time I had to leave in order to make the next train, but I felt it was impolite – and possibly counterproductive – to inform my opponent of my desire not to extend the game longer than reasonable. Besides, my opponent had no way of knowing her opponent would not play like a 1400 player, who would normally have the possibility of messing up royally.

35. ♖3xg4 ...

Desperation.

35... ♖h1+

36.♔g3 ♖g1+

37.♔h2 ♖xg4

38.axb7+ ♔b8

The simplest and safest.

39. ♖xg4 ...

With the extra piece attacking g5 via ... ♖h1+ and ...♖g1+, Black prevented the white queen from capturing on move 38 with check.

39... ♖h1+

There are undoubtedly quicker wins, but I was playing at lightning speed, hoping to catch my train. Unfortunately, my opponent must have been upset that I was trying to speed things up, so she had now slowed down to five minutes a move!

40.♔g3 ♖e1+

Five minutes later...

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41. ♖xe1

♜xe1

42. ♘h2

...

Resigning is sometimes hard.

42...

♜e2+

43. ♘h1

h2

The aliens have now convinced my opponent that “Resistance is Futile.”

0-1

I missed my train.