

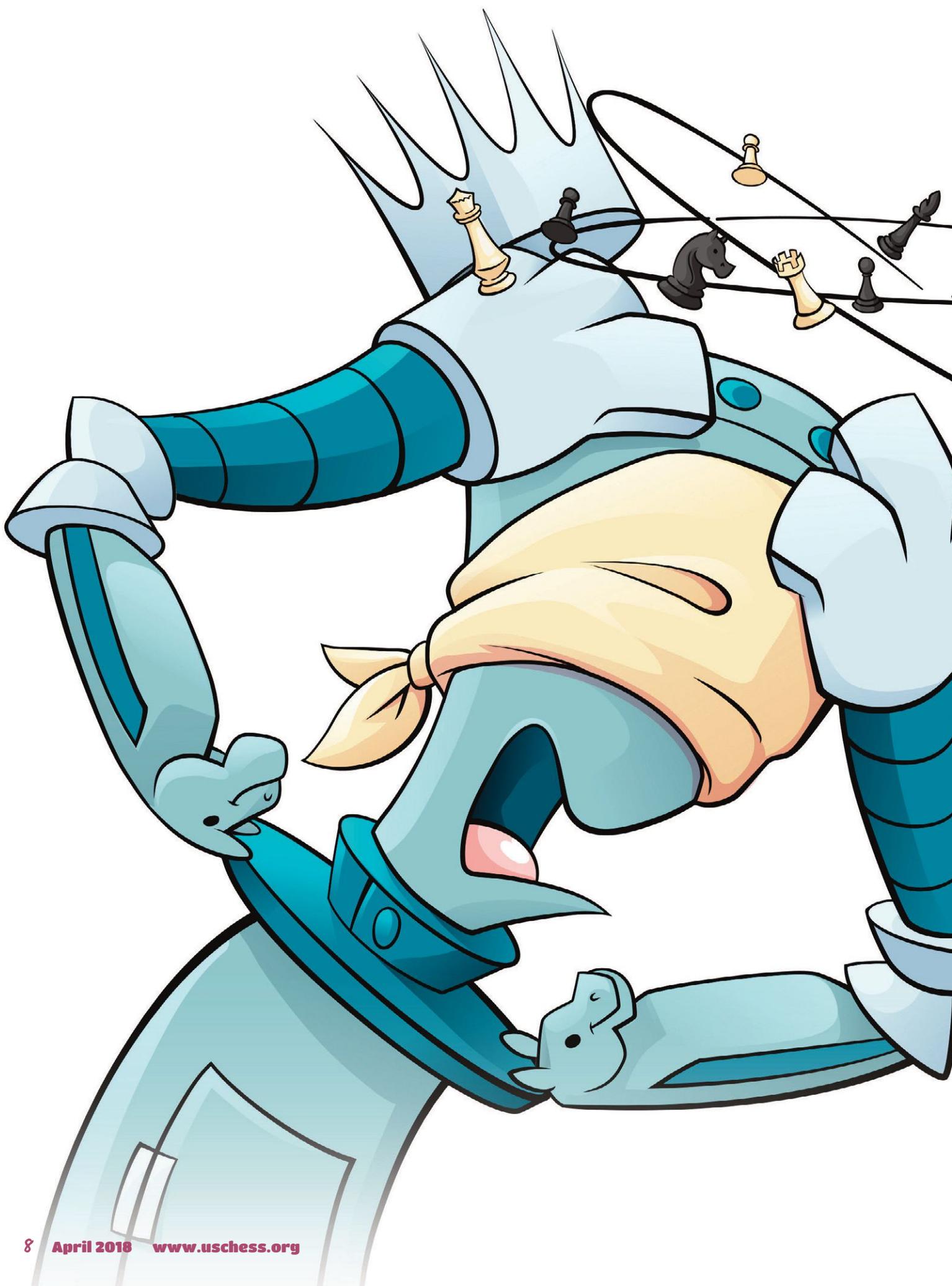
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CHESS LIFE **Kids**



Learn to Play Blindfold Chess!



Learn All About Blindfold Chess!

You want me to play chess without seeing the board? Are you kidding me?

by Jennifer Vallens



André Danican Philidor playing blindfold chess. In 1783 he played three blindfold games simultaneously after teaching himself to visualize the board in bed at night when he had trouble sleeping. Many considered this a miraculous achievement.

Blindfold chess is the ability to play chess without sight of the board or pieces. “How is that possible?” you may ask. Well, it isn’t magic or a super power. Don’t get me wrong—when my friend GM Timur Gareyev broke

the Guinness World Record for playing not one, but 48, blindfold chess games at the same time, he did perform an extraordinary feat. But anyone can play blindfold chess.

Blindfold chess simply requires

the ability to visualize a position in your “mind’s eye.” You already practice visualization every time you imagine possible moves in your head before making your move on an actual chessboard. You are visualizing the change in

position.

You may wonder if playing blindfold chess will help your overall chess game. The answer is yes. Practicing and playing blindfold chess will strengthen your visualization skills and help you to identify the relationship of the pieces on the board to each other and the squares. This will reinforce your pattern recognition and help you think ahead. And the best part is you can impress your family and friends!

Blindfold chess dates back to the middle ages. It was seen as a way to level the playing field by handicapping a stronger player playing a weaker player.

As players began to showcase

their blindfold chess abilities by playing multiple games blindfolded, there was a concern that playing many games at the same time would drive you crazy. (It was officially banned in 1930 in the Soviet Union [now known as Russia]!) We know now that this is not the case. Blindfold chess actually helps your visual/spatial memory and it is a great training tool to improve your chess game.

So, just like learning to walk before you run, it is best to start small with 20 minutes or so of daily visualization practices. This way you will be able to work your way up to playing a full blindfold chess game and perhaps one day even beat the blindfold chess

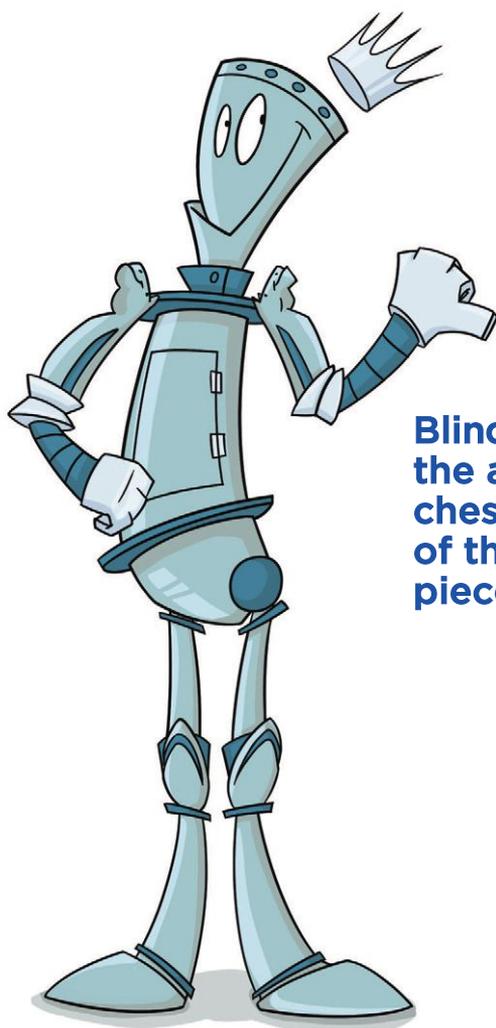
world record!

Understanding the relationship of the pieces to each other and the squares is the cornerstone for playing good chess, blindfolded or not. Here are some tips to get you started.

KNOW YOUR COORDINATES

You probably already know or are learning how to record your moves using chess notation. As you can see in the diagram below, every square is identified by a letter and number. Before attempting to play blindfold chess, it is necessary to be able to identify all the squares on the board and be able to visualize the relationship of one square to another.

Study the diagram below. Begin to notice patterns. What do you see?



Blindfold chess is the ability to play chess without sight of the board or pieces.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 8 | a8 | b8 | c8 | d8 | e8 | f8 | g8 | h8 |
| 7 | a7 | b7 | c7 | d7 | e7 | f7 | g7 | h7 |
| 6 | a6 | b6 | c6 | d6 | e6 | f6 | g6 | h6 |
| 5 | a5 | b5 | c5 | d5 | e5 | f5 | g5 | h5 |
| 4 | a4 | b4 | c4 | d4 | e4 | f4 | g4 | h4 |
| 3 | a3 | b3 | c3 | d3 | e3 | f3 | g3 | h3 |
| 2 | a2 | b2 | c2 | d2 | e2 | f2 | g2 | h2 |
| 1 | a1 | b1 | c1 | d1 | e1 | f1 | g1 | h1 |
| | a | b | c | d | e | f | g | h |

COORDINATE EXERCISE

Try to picture a white bishop on his starting square (c1). The possible moves for the bishop from that square are the diagonal b2, a3 or d2, e3, f4, g5, h6. Do you see the relationship or pattern from square-to-square?

Now close your eyes and see if you can recall all the coordinates

of the possible squares where the c1-bishop can move.

Can you see any other relationships or patterns between the squares? Try visualizing the black rook on g8. What are his potential next moves? Do you see any patterns?

TESTING YOUR COLOR KNOWLEDGE

Not only is it necessary to identify the squares, but it is also important to know the color of each square. A good way to practice this is to convert each file letter to a corresponding number. The a-file (which comes first if you are reading left to right) will be converted to the 1-file, the b-file will become the 2-file and so on.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 8 | a8 | b8 | c8 | d8 | e8 | f8 | g8 | h8 |
| 7 | a7 | b7 | c7 | d7 | e7 | f7 | g7 | h7 |
| 6 | a6 | b6 | c6 | d6 | e6 | f6 | g6 | h6 |
| 5 | a5 | b5 | c5 | d5 | e5 | f5 | g5 | h5 |
| 4 | a4 | b4 | c4 | d4 | e4 | f4 | g4 | h4 |
| 3 | a3 | b3 | c3 | d3 | e3 | f3 | g3 | h3 |
| 2 | a2 | b2 | c2 | d2 | e2 | f2 | g2 | h2 |
| 1 | a1 | b1 | c1 | d1 | e1 | f1 | g1 | h1 |
| | a | b | c | d | e | f | g | h |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |

Now select a random square. If the total of the two numbers is even the square will be BLACK. If the total of the two numbers is odd the square will be WHITE. Practice by having someone test you with a square—let's say "a7." In your head, this will become 1-7. The total of $1 + 7 = 8$ (or even), so the color of the square is BLACK.

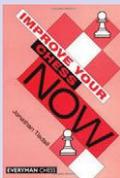
TESTING YOUR INTERSECTIONS

Now, place a rook on a random square on the board. Close your

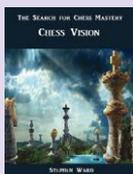
Recommended Reading



Chess Thinking: The Visual Dictionary of Chess Moves, Rules, Strategies and Concepts
Bruce Pandolfini

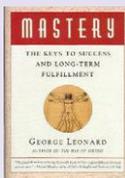


Improve Your Chess Now
Jonathan Tisdall

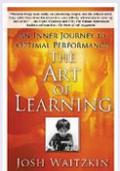


The Search for Chess Mastery: Chess Vision, Checkmate Edition
Stephen Ward

Recommendations from Timur Gareyev in his *Art of Blindfold Chess* booklet include a couple of his favorites on learning and practicing:



Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment
George Leonard



The Art of Learning: An Inner Journey to Optimal Performance
Josh Waitzkin

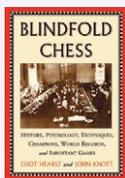
Recommended Websites and Videos

<https://chess24.com/en/learn/advanced/video/lessons-from-blindfold-king/getting-started>

Visualize Chess Training Software

<https://chessfox.com/discover-visualwize/>

History of Blindfold Resources



Blindfold Chess: History, Psychology, Techniques, Champions, World Records, and Important Games
Eliot Hearst & John Knott

<http://blindfoldchess.net/>

<https://youtu.be/oiXvaxsn7tU>

Vision Tests

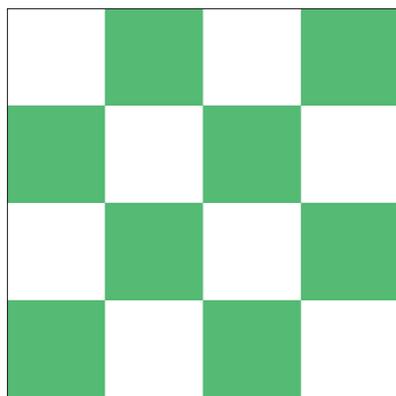
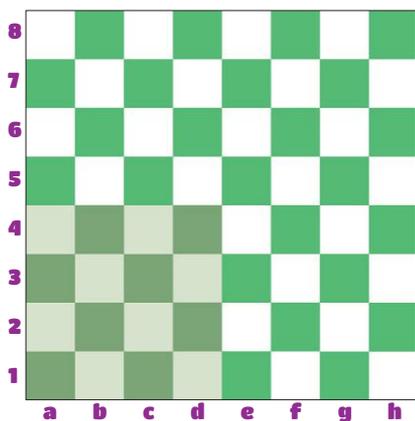
http://www.thechessdrum.net/chessacademy/CA_VisionTest1.html

eyes and see if you can visualize and write down all the squares to which that rook can move. Are you right? Try doing this with each piece. If you can accurately name all the squares, you are well on your way to mastering your visualization of the board.

QUARTER THE BOARD

George Koltanowski, nicknamed “Kolty,” was a brilliant blindfold chess player. In his memoir, *Adventures of a Chess Master*, he describes his approach to blindfold chess.

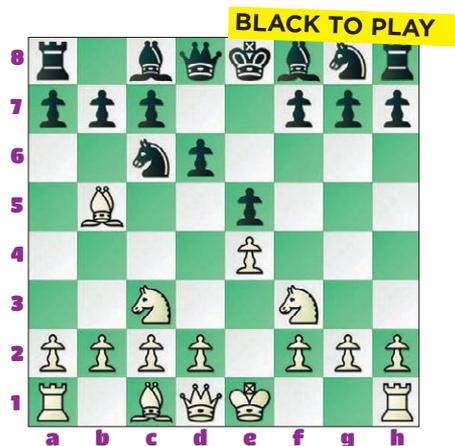
He suggested dividing the board into four quarters. Each quarter looked exactly the same, so really you only need to visualize one quarter of the board at a time.



If you break up your visual of the board into quarters and make sense of what is happening in each quarter of the board, it will help you see the board as a whole.

CREATE A STORY and SAY IT OUT LOUD

When playing blindfold chess, do not just recite the moves but note, as if speaking to yourself, HOW THE POSITION HAS CHANGED. For example in the diagram below ...



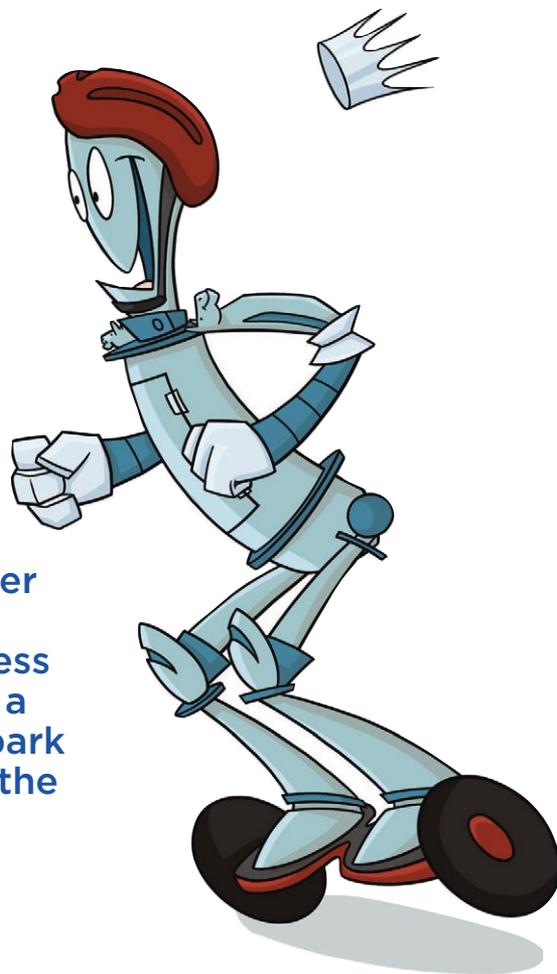
If Black now plays ... Bd7, you

should not just think in terms of memorizing the move ... Bd7, but its consequences also, making a point of saying to yourself, “My knight on c6 is no longer pinned, can move freely, and also now defends the e5-pawn. My rook on a8 is now connected to the queen on d8 and there is nothing now defending my pawn on b7.”

These conversations with yourself will help you see the relationship of the pieces on the board.

RELATIONSHIPS OF PIECES

Connections help memory. Blindfold chess is not just remembering, “I went here and he went there.” To master blindfold chess, it is more important to understand patterns and



Bobby Fischer would play blindfold chess while taking a walk in the park or riding on the train.

relationships of the pieces and ideas. The best way to do this is to create a story that makes sense to you.

It is easier to understand a plan or pattern than the actual moves. For instance, when castling ... it is easier to remember, "I have castled kingside and my pawns have not moved. I need to watch out for a back-rank mate in the endgame." This approach is better than, "My rook is on f1 and my king is on g1, and I have a pawn on f2, a pawn on g2, and a pawn on h2."

For example, if you play the King's Indian opening, then you know you must play ... h6 so the knight cannot come to g5 and e6. Visualize the position and common patterns in your games.

REVIEW YOUR OWN GAMES FIRST

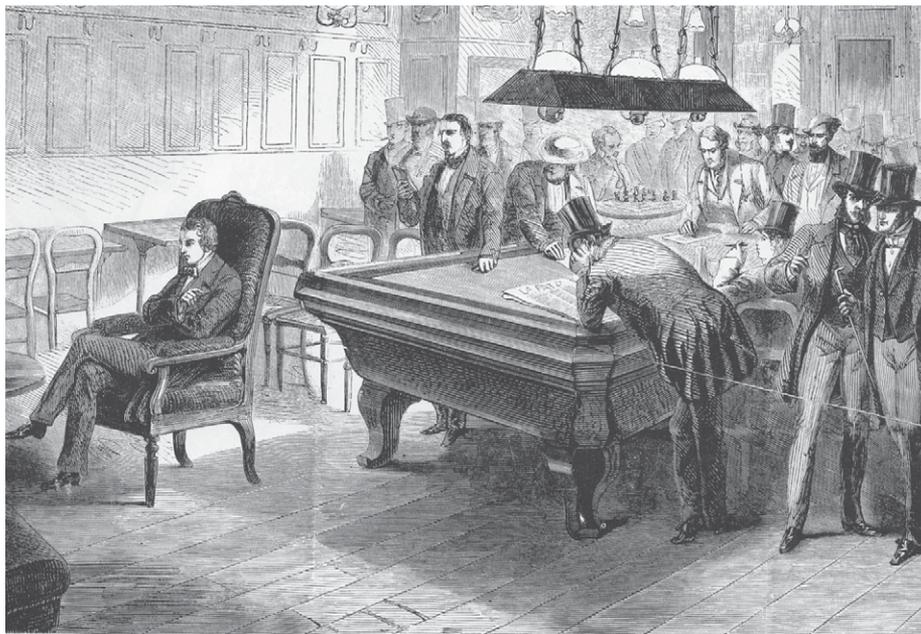
Pick a game that you have played. See if you can play the game in your mind's eye without use of the board. Do you remember what your plan was? Who was positioned where and why? Can you quarter the board in your mind and set up those pieces on an actual board correctly?

PLAY GAMES BACKWARDS

Success in standard chess and blindfold chess involves the ability to see the final position clearly. Start with one of your own games. Set up your board with your checkmate position. Can you play the game backwards?

STUDY THE CHESSBOARD

I can't stress enough that the foundation for becoming a stronger player is to know the board inside and out. You can



Paul Morphy held a blindfold exhibition in 1858 against the eight strongest players in Paris. His six wins and two draws was considered a stunning result—what would those Parisians make of Timur Gareyev's 48-board exhibition?

begin by setting up a board with pieces in their starting positions and then move on and test yourself with an empty board. Look for the relationships of the pieces and the squares. Some ideas to consider:

- Visualize common positions for the pieces. For example, knights on c3, f3, c6 and f6.
- Visualize castling kingside and then castling queenside.
- Visualize the squares where you commonly see knight forks.

Now that you have practiced some visualization techniques and have mastered the board, it is time to play a game.

PLAY ON A BOARD WITHOUT NOTATION HELP

I suggest you start by playing a chess game on a board that does not have any number and letter coordinates. Are you able to notate your game without these

tools?

When you have mastered that, you can start playing blindfold chess.

PLAY ON A BOARD WITHOUT PIECES

Start with a board without pieces. You and an opponent can notate your moves on your notation pads. See how far into the game you can play without consulting your notation sheet to recreate the game in your mind.

Continue to play until either you reach checkmate or you are unable to keep up without peeking at your notation sheet. **Do not give up!** Now try to replay the game on the board with the pieces, but without looking at your notes and analyze your moves. Look for the relationship between the pieces and the squares.

It is far more difficult to play blindfold chess without pieces AND a board. But knowing the

board inside and out will prepare you.

PLAY WITHOUT A BOARD

Test your blindfold chess skill without the board or notation. You can do it anywhere. Bobby Fischer, America's world champion from 1972-1975, would play blindfold chess while taking a walk in the park or riding on the train.

PRACTICE ONLINE WITH BOOKS AND VIDEOS

Many chess servers and software programs now have a blindfold chess setting where you can play without the pieces on the board.

Another way to practice is to go through game diagrams in books starting with games that are only 10 to 15 moves long.

Only look at the text with the notated move and do not look at

the diagram. Use a sheet of paper if you need to stop your temptation to look at the diagram. Try to play out the game in your mind's eye and visualize the moves in your head. Look for the patterns and relationships between the pieces.

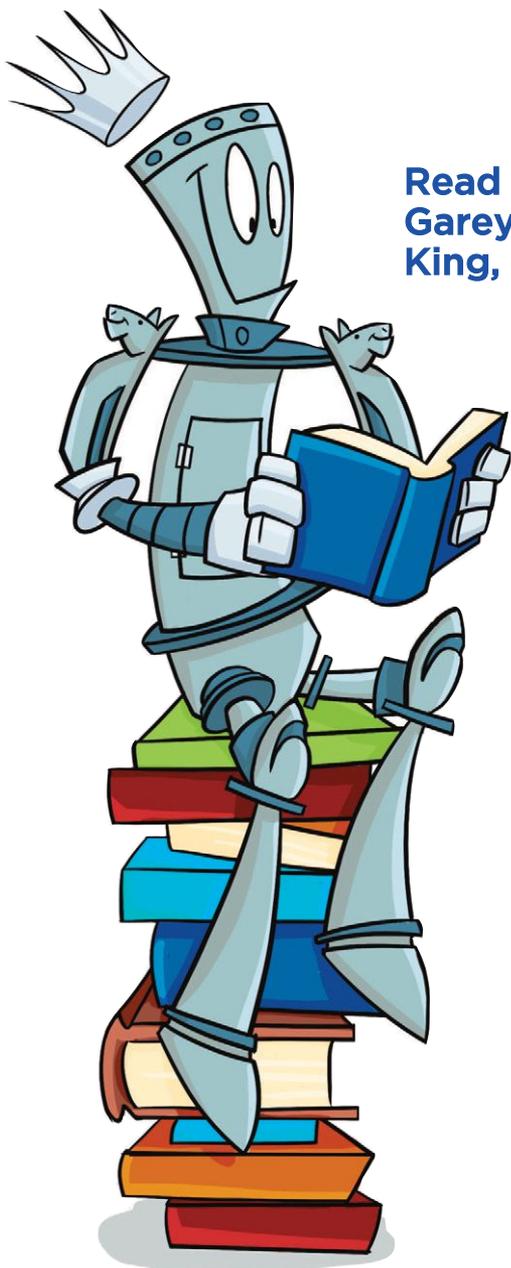
Some sample questions you can ask yourself include:

- What is White's plan?
- Is White attacking on the queenside?
- Is Black about to unleash a pawn storm?

Remembering the relationship between the pieces is key. See if you can re-create the game on the board from your memory.

You can also apply a similar technique to videos by closing your eyes and listening to the video. Pause at key moments and see if you can visualize the next move. Then open your eyes and see if the image you have in your head matches the image you see on the screen.

Whether you master blindfold chess or not, these visualization techniques will improve your chess game and make you a stronger player. So go play chess—without a board and pieces!



Read more about Timur Gareyev, The Blindfold King, on page 30.



My First Move



GM Timur Gareyev, Blindfold King and Guinness World Record Holder

In this column, we feature advice from your chess heroes and explore what shaped their development when they were Chess Life Kids like you!

How it began

My grandfather taught me how to play chess when I was six years old. I enjoyed the game as I had the freedom to create and rule the magical world of legendary battle between two armies and masterminds.

Maintaining enthusiasm

I developed focus despite the internal and external urges to do something else. To be honest, it was rather 50/50 in terms of quality effort versus just having a good time and doing whatever else I was up to.

Choosing a chess career

I was 8 years old when I played my first tournament. After several years and many competitions, I finally was presented with the opportunity to play internationally at the top junior level. I managed to win the Asian Championship U-14 when I was 12. This served as a great source of acknowledgement and motivation to reach the grandmaster level and aim for the top.



Playing blindfold chess with FMs Shahi Harshal and David Shailesh, from India

How a blindfold chess novice became a Guinness Book record holder for his 48-board blindfold simultaneous exhibition

I attempted blindfold chess on multiple boards for the first time less than seven years ago out of sheer curiosity! The challenge of being able to see through the variations in the games I read [about] in chess books and magazines attracted me early on. I would follow the tactical and strategic ideas to the best of my visualization abilities. This practice of blindfold chess training transferred over to better preparedness when it came to tackling multiple games of chess without sight of the chessboard.

The offbeat way he maintains energy during his blindfold simultaneous exhibitions

I enjoy staying in shape during the match as it keeps the blood flow going. Riding a [stationary] bike [during the match] certainly generates energy! I also like to have plenty of water and fresh snacks like fruits, fresh squeezed juices, and cut-up vegetables as I did during my world-record event.

What's next after breaking a world record?

This year I plan to share interesting ideas and techniques on blindfold chess in the book I am working on.

The chess hero's chess hero

I learned from many champions including my legendary coach Georgy Konstantinovich Borisenko. His legacy included training his wife, Belova, who reached candidates matches of women's world championships, as well coaching World Champion Nona Gaprindashvili.



Timur with Blindfold Chess simultaneous exhibition participants Darin and Sarah Shundo at OFF da ROOK chess camp



Facing Hao Wang on board one at the World Youth Championship U-16 in India



Studying chess with his cousin (left) and his first coach, Aleksey Mikhailovich

Favorite openings

My grandfather taught me how to play the King's Gambit and my father showed me the Queen's Gambit. I stuck with queen-pawn openings for many years and now enjoy experimenting with the King's Gambit and other wild lines. The King's Indian and nowadays the Dragon are among my favorites.

Favorite books

Georgy Lisitsin's *Strategy and Tactics in the Art of Chess* included the Four Knights' opening sacrifice on e4 explaining the benefits of seizing the center. Later on, after missing an important win in a youth championship, my father helped me master the checkmate with bishop and knight using the book.

My best chess advice

Persist in your vision and journey to the ultimate victory.