

Here are some questions that Igor Khmelnitsky was asked about his new book and his answers. Please contact Igor Khmelnitsky at publishing@IamCoach.com if you have any questions or comments.

Q: How different is this new book from your prior two Chess Exam books?

A: The new book uses the approach familiar to the readers of my "*Chess Exam and Training Guide*" (2004) and "*Chess Exam and Training Guide: Tactics*" (2007). Since the self-assessment is not focused on just a single subject (e.g., tactics), the new book is more similar to my first Chess Exam. I've introduced the new match format to make it more fun, while preserving all of the educational benefits. I've added several new rating categories. Also, for my readers interested in learning and improving more than in testing, I've added "quick observations" and "summary" paragraphs to each of the answers. For the novice players, these paragraphs can serve as hints. At the same time, the more experienced readers will be able to compare their thinking with my thought process (summarized in these paragraphs) in different types of critical positions. Overall, I am excited about the changes and looking forward to feedback from readers and reviewers.

Q: Why "match" and why against Bobby Fischer? How is extensive was your research about Fischer?

A: I'm expecting that match format will add a little more excitement to the overall "solving and learning" profile of the book. And I am a strong believer that to improve in anything, you need to be excited and enjoy the learning process. Bobby Fischer is a chess legend and I have always enjoyed studying his games. He was able to dominate his opponents with ease and they often faltered in critical positions. Over the years, I spend countless hours studying Fischer games and identifying critical positions suitable to be used as exercises. I utilized them in my own training, with my students and now in this book. One of my main goals is to show that if you play well in critical positions, you can do well even against a very strong player. Also, the vast majority of the positions I use in my book has never appear in a puzzle form before. I decided not to elaborate much on Bobby Fischer's personal issues and also his chess career. So, much has been written on Bobby Fischer by qualified individuals. My skills are in testing and coaching, and that is where the focus of this book is. There are few curious tidbits that I have found in the old magazines and shared with the readers in the "Take a Break" sections found between the "matches."

Q: Could an average player really expect to score a "win" or a "draw" against Fischer, if he or she found a correct move in one of your "game" diagrams?

A: Probably not. The game score is purely for fun and assigned based on a position. Of course, one could always practice the position against a computer to see how he or she would do against a very strong opponent.

Q: What about the novice players - will they benefit from your book? What rating level of your readers are you targeting?

A: All three of my books have a wide range of positions with difficulty from beginner to master level. Also, the rating tables assign ratings from 600 to 2600. Therefore, the answer is "yes." I learned from the feedback that some of the novice readers found it difficult to use the "testing" mode when the majority of the problems were challenging to them. Hence, many of them read my books in the "lecture" mode. They simply studied each position, then compared their thoughts and answers with mine. I took this into account in my new book. First, I offered the "match" format, aiming to make testing a bit more exciting. Second, I added "quick observation" and "summary" paragraphs that could be used as hints. While more experienced players with ratings 1400-2300 could use either "exam" or "lecture" mode, all those who are specifically trying to improve, including novice readers, should use the "exam" mode.

Q: Is it easy to calculate an estimated rating using your tables? How accurate is this rating?

A: It takes a minimal effort - I'd say 20-30 minutes maximum, upon completion of the exam. For each of my books, I also have MS Excel tools and complimentary PDF files to make this process even easier. The rating

tables are reasonably accurate. Some people report remarkable results; i.e., their overall rating was within 30 points of their official over-the-board (OTB) rating. Considering all the reasons why this might not happen (they are listed in the book), I always regard this with amazement. The key benefit of my books is, however, not related to the accuracy of the overall rating. It is in seeing the big picture and finding your weak and strong areas. For example, let's assume your OTB rating is 1700 and your overall rating from my book is 1900. Should you be excited? Yes, of course. But not too much. Possibly you are an excellent solver at home, but not under the game pressure. There are many other possible explanations. Instead of dwelling on this, take a look at your other ratings. To average to 1900 overall, your Middlegame could possibly be 2100 and Endgame 1700; or Attack 1900, Defense 2000, Counterattack 1500. Look over all of your ratings, find the lowest rated categories, then refer to the corresponding chapters in the training guide section to find ways to improve.

Q: Why do you call your books Exams? Do your readers have to go through some preparation before taking them?

A: No special preparation is required. I called them Exams because the objective, format, and outcome are in some way similar to the medical examination given by your family doctor. Sometimes you don't have any specific problem and just want your doctor to assess your health situation and give recommendations so you can feel better. The doctor asks you questions, runs some tests, then gives a recommendation, maybe a prescription or referral to do more tests or see a specialist. Well, my books offer a similar approach. You answer questions, fill out charts, and find out weak and strong areas of your game. Then you are given suggestions on how to improve. Not surprisingly, I got this idea while sitting at the office waiting for my family doctor. Thankfully, the wait was longer than usual, and I had time to formulate the whole concept.

Q: Your earlier books have "Training Guide" as a part of the title, but not your new book. Why is that?

A: The game of chess is evolving, but a lot of the key concepts remain the same, at least for players below the Master level. My first Chess Exam was aimed at providing my readers with an overall assessment. It included an extensive training guide section (60+ pages) covering all aspects of chess. My second book was focused on Tactics. Once again it had an extensive section (40+ pages) devoted to tactical training. The new book You vs. Fischer opens a new "match" series. It once again offers the reader an opportunity to do an overall self-assessment. It also introduces a couple of reports not offered in my prior books. When pondering my training recommendations, I made a decision to include specific training suggestions that cover only the topics of the new rating reports. So the new book will have 4-5 pages with tips and specific training instructions. My training suggestions offered in prior books still very much apply. This will be the common theme of the "Chess Exam Matches" series. Note that I continue working on the "Chess Exam and Training Guide" series as well. Books on strategy, endgames, and calculations are all being planned. I do intend to include a comprehensive training guide on each of the topics, similar to what I've done in my book on Tactics.

Q: You write in English, which is not your first language. How do you overcome the language challenges?

A: While I'd love for my books to be considered literary masterpieces, I set a much more modest objective - I want to be able to convey my ideas in a clear and concise form. I value my reader's time and don't want to waste it. I have prepared material that I feel is interesting and important, I have found a format that is easy to follow, and I use language such as how I speak in my face-to-face lessons. To make sure that I stick to my objective and write and produce books of high quality, I constantly seek support and ask for feedback. Through my websites, I keep close contact with my readers; I take very seriously every e-mail and letter I get, no matter whether it contains praise or a constructive criticism. I also have a strong network of volunteers. Some review, test, and critique my exercises, while others proofread and offer editorial suggestions. I've had plenty of chess friends from my years as an active player, and I've gained many more as I've started writing. I'm grateful for their support!