

Karel van Delft and Merijn van Delft

Developing Chess Talent

KVDC

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Foreword by Artur Yusupov

The first time I heard about Karel van Delft and his chess activities in Apeldoorn was from my chess mentor Mark Dvoretsky. He recommended me to visit the place. In 1999 I received a phone call from Karel, who invited me to give some chess lessons in Apeldoorn. It would be the first time, but not the last, that I stayed in Karel's house. Of course his son Merijn, now an international master, also attended the workshops. I slept in the so called Bronstein suite, a small bedroom in which David Ionovich Bronstein once spent a few nights.

The chess atmosphere in the house was very impressive. Somehow I had the feeling that there was a chess player in each corner of the house, because many young chess players who attended trainings also stayed in Karel's home. I was very impressed by the chess concept in Apeldoorn: the young players were not only learning some chess ideas from a grandmaster, they were also asked by Karel to give chess lessons to local kids themselves!

I liked the atmosphere so much that I tried to visit Apeldoorn every year. The next opportunity was the so-called 'Chess Experience' week, in which youth teams from Germany and Israël and two teams from the Netherlands played each other and took lessons together from Mark Dvoretsky, Yochanan Afek and me. Later I even started to play for the local team, Schaakstad Apeldoorn.

Recently, after almost ten years of our friendship, we were looking at old pictures in a photo album. I was very pleased to see that many of our students from the first training sessions had become strong players. Some are even strong grandmasters now. Just to mention some names: Jan Gustafsson, Daniel Stellwagen and Sipke Ernst.

In this book you will find a lot of ideas about the development of chess talent and about the creation and stimulation of a local chess culture. Karel and Merijn explain their views and share their experiences in the area of training young talents, coaching pupils, organizing chess events, and communicating and transmitting information to the chess audience.

The reader will find many useful topics and answers to many practical questions: what is the role of the parents, how to stimulate creativity, how to develop self-management, how to analyse your own games, and even: how to organize a weekend tournament...

Karel has worked with young kids for many years. In this book he gives a lot of tips for coaches. I like the part of the book where Karel interviews several grandmasters and trainers about ways to develop chess talent. Karel and Merijn look not only at technical aspects of the training, they also study the psychological aspects of coaching.

The quite unique thing in the Apeldoorn chess culture is that everybody gets involved in the chess activities: from beginner to grandmaster! This is reflected in the weekly SBSA email messages, which are sent to more than 600 recipients.

There are several good traditional events in Apeldoorn, such as Youth Meets Masters, which contribute to the special popularity of chess here. Karel is the motor behind the Apeldoorn chess culture and his practical advice can be very useful for chess organizers.

Being a chess parent himself, Karel knows about all the problems that parents can have in trying to help their talented kids along the difficult road of self-improvement. This book is strongly recommended for chess trainers, chess parents and chess organizers. And of course for the chess talents themselves!

Grandmaster and FIDE Senior Trainer Artur Yusupov

Introduction

How do you develop chess talent, and how do you go about developing a chess culture locally? In this book we discuss subjects in the areas of coaching, training, organization and communication. It is the story of a voyage of discovery, a journey riddled with successes, failures, and, time and again, fascinating encounters with a multitude of chess players.

This journey began in 1990, when 11-year-old Merijn van Delft was allowed to join a school team at the school chess championships of Apeldoorn. At the age of 6, he had learned the rules of the game from his father Karel. This took place on Saturdays in a café, after a morning of shopping on the market. At the school championship, the battle with Marijn Visschedijk, who was three years younger, was blood-curdling. Merijn managed to draw a rook ending with a pawn less. At that time we could not suspect that both players would become national youth champions later on.

This was an experience worth repeating. Merijn wanted to learn to play better, and Karel broadened his knowledge of sport psychology and the organization of training sessions. Merijn became a member of the club De Schaakmaat ('The Chess Mate') in Apeldoorn, but the club's youth competition, which was held on Saturday mornings, could not be combined with his soccer activities. At home, Merijn exercised tactics from books of the Step-by-Step Method by Dutch IM Cor van Wijgerden and Rob Brunia. Karel formed a training group, which consisted of Merijn and a couple of friends. One of the first subjects of study was the book 'Judgement and Planning in Chess' by Dr Max Euwe. With multiple Dutch junior champion Marc Jonker, Merijn analysed his own games in one-hour sessions once a week. They kept this up for several years. Merijn also visited many tournaments.

Since there were more young players in Apeldoorn who wanted to be trained, Marc Jonker, Renate Limbach (who, sadly, would later on pass away at a very young age) and Karel van Delft set up a youth training system which would last for about 5 years.

Contacts were established with (grand)masters and other strong players, who gave training sessions in Apeldoorn and often stayed the night. Guests came from Belorussia, China, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Israel, Uzbekistan, England, Germany, Georgia, Poland, and a few other countries. Those contacts were easily made. During a world championship in Groningen, a brief conversation with Mark Dvoretzky led to an exchange of emails, and during the annual Liberation tournament in the nearby town of Wageningen, Baruch Kolthoff had struck up a conversation with David Bronstein. Many top-class chess players turned out to be normal human beings who had a telephone number and an email address.

With, among others, David Bronstein, Loek van Wely, Mark Dvoretzky and Artur Yusupov, the development of chess talent was discussed. A number of talks were done in the shape of interviews. Karel had the idea that those interviews might contribute to the development of a multi-faceted chess culture, and that young players would be stimulated by contacts with top-class players. There were many talks with many chess players. For example with Yochanan Afek, who gave many trainings and gladly shared his rich experience with Apeldoorn trainers and organizers. It didn't take long before Merijn achieved his first

results. At 16, he became Dutch champion in his age category, and in 2003 he became an International master.

In 1998, Cees Visser, Merijn van Delft and Karel van Delft started the SBSA, which is short for 'Stichting Bevorderen Schaken Apeldoorn' ('Foundation for the Promotion of Chess in Apeldoorn'). This gave rise to numerous initiatives. A number of those activities will be mentioned in this book. The foundation cooperates closely with chess clubs and school chess clubs in Apeldoorn.

SBSA supported the initiatives by the local clubs SVA and ASG to merge into Schaakstad Apeldoorn (i.e. 'Chess City Apeldoorn'). This concentration of forces, together with the attraction of sponsors, resulted in the recruitment of a team that now competes on the highest level in the Dutch national club competition. Karel was the team captain for six years, then Merijn took over for four years. The bottom line is that approximately half of the players must originate from Apeldoorn, and that players 'from outside' should also participate in local tournaments and give youth trainings. Today, a handful of youth players from Apeldoorn have made it to the first or second team of Schaakstad Apeldoorn, and various national youth titles have been won.

In this book, with 'the development of chess talent' we mean: reaching the height of your powers. Performance ability is a resultant of talent, training circumstances, motivation, physical condition and mental skills. This book is aimed at trainers, coaches, organizers, youth players and their parents, and others who may be interested. Many of our readers may be standing at the beginning of a journey that is similar to the one we started all those years ago.

Our coaching philosophy presupposes a considerable sense of responsibility with young players for their own development and results. We believe that good training contributes to a successful personal development. At the board, chess is an individual sport. But in a broader sense, chess is teamwork, and it offers the possibility to meet many people and acquire new insights.

Chess players differ in talent, age, gender, character, motivation, style of learning, available possibilities, experiences, etcetera. *The chess player does not exist.* Certain points of advice in this book may be more relevant in certain phases of development or for certain individuals, and less for others. If we give novice chess players the advice to apply certain verbal rules of thumb, we realize at the same time that a grandmaster's thinking is less verbal, and more space-oriented. However, sometimes you have to be taught something explicitly in words in order to make progress, whereas at a later stage you will learn less verbal and more differentiated.

This book does not hand the reader recipes, but it does provide ingredients for talent development and the creation of a chess culture. You can apply the contents to your own situation, and use what is useful for you. Many aspects of chess development intertwine. To dissect them is, in our opinion, the best way to make these aspects easier to grasp. This approach will now and then lead to repetition, but this will make for easier reading. You cannot be conscious of an abundance of advice all the time, and you don't have to. You can incorporate your insights into your daily routines, and then you will start using them automatically after a while. The information in this book serves as a springboard and a signpost for young players who want to develop further. With the help of their trainer, their coach or their parents they can solve their own

puzzle with this information. In this book we will often use the terms 'trainer' and 'coach' alternately. These duties overlap, and they are often performed by one and the same person. We will always choose the term which best suits the subject under discussion.

We have been able to consult a great number of youth players, parents, trainers, coaches and strong players. We are very grateful to them for their cooperation. We thank Willy Hendriks for his permission to include his article on the SBSA Youth Academy here, and also Dharma Tjiam for his contribution to the Apeldoorn Analysis Questionnaire. We thank Yochanan Afek and Harold van der Heijden for their permission to publish their endgame studies, Arne Moll and Roeland Pruijssers for their game analyses, Peter Boel for the translation, Henk Vinkes for doing the layout, and Sipke Ernst for his contribution as editor. We also thank Fred Lucas, Cocky van Delft, Cobie Joustra and Ferdi Kuipers for their pictures and Trix Meurs for her drawing. Pictures without credits are mostly by Karel van Delft. Above all we thank Artur Yusupov, with whom we have had many inspiring conversations about the contents of this book.

We invite you to visit our site www.chesstalent.com.

Reactions are welcome via email to info@chesstalent.com.

Karel van Delft
Merijn van Delft

A - COACHING

A1 Top-class sport

A1.1 Educational value

Top-class sport can offer many good things: experiences, friendships, prizes, social recognition and surprising, sometimes even paradoxical insights. To develop a specialism at a young age has many advantages. Chess contributes positively to the education of people. Cognitive skills like research, calculation and reasoning are important in other areas of life as well. Also, social skills are developed, such as resilience, perseverance, self-respect and respect for the opponent, the ability to formulate thoughts and exchange thoughts with others. Training in groups and visiting tournaments together is fun, and it stimulates the development of cognitive and social skills.

A1.2 Time investment

Well-motivated young players can play chess for ten to more than twenty hours a week without any problem. Especially if this is instead of the twenty hours that many youths spend in front of the television or a game computer. This is true for teenagers, and sometimes also for children from eight years old or so. Four-year-olds can already learn the moves and then play a game where both sides have one piece, when the trick is to capture the opponent's pawns. If children take pleasure in this game, they will later automatically play chess more often. Children and teenagers are capable of much more than is often expected from them, and most of the time they are perfectly capable of indicating themselves how much time they can – and want to – spend on trainings and self-study.

Chess study is inspiring if trainings are varied, if they yield new insights and skills, if there is room for creative thinking and fun, and if researching skills are developed. This applies to trainings in group sessions, but also to individual study. One condition is that the study material and the exercises are in line with the interests and the development level of the participants. For any form of top-class sport, twenty hours per week is a normal time investment. Some people see this as monomaniacal. But this is not necessarily the case, as long as there is a well-thought-out scheme for trainings and competitions. If you want to reach to the top, you're going to have to invest time. If we calculate properly, we see that most grandmasters, like other top-class sporters, have invested at least 10,000 hours in their careers: ten years times fifty weeks times twenty hours.

B - TRAINING

B1 Organizing trainings

B1.1 Structure and culture

The coaching of young top-class sportsmen is not only a question of 'structure' – i.e. rules and schedules. 'Culture' is at least equally important: what is the degree of motivation of all the parties involved, and how do they get on with each other? Chess can be a highly social activity. At the board you are on your own, but training can be done with others. You stimulate each other, learn from each other and collect knowledge of other insights and approaches. It can also be great fun. The most important thing about chess remains that you derive pleasure from it, socially as well as intellectually.

B1.2 Computers and the Internet

Everything used to be different. Chess players browsed through chess magazines searching for new opening variations – some of them collected opening ideas in a card tray. Games were adjourned after 40 moves and resumed later on. The computer and the Internet have exerted a strong influence on the chess world in a time span of approximately two decades. Chess players use the computer in different ways. You can install a chess program like Fritz and play games against it. It is also possible to analyse games and positions. In many chess programs, databases with games and positions can be stored. It is also possible to create databases with your own games and/or positions. Good chess programs have an opening book as well. Chess publishers put CD-ROMs and DVD's with training material on the market: annotated games, for instance, or collections with tactical positions, endgame studies and videos on which chess masters explain games. Via the Internet, you can use a computer chess program to play against other players worldwide. This is done via chess servers like ICC or Chessbase's Playchess.

Chess trainers often use computers. Via Internet they are sent games by their pupils in pgn format and these are entered into their chess program. Via a chess program they can easily select positions from games and put the diagrams on paper or add them in a text. The computer is also useful when preparing for opponents. Databases (on CD-ROM, DVD or via the Internet) contain games of many players, and with them their opening repertoire. A chess engine can also check if there is a tactical flaw in an intended plan.

Chess organizers also often use computers. With the help of computers and special programs they can quickly make pairings for competitions and

C - ORGANIZATION & COMMUNICATION

C1 Organization

C1.1 Top-class sport and recreational sport

Top-class sport and recreational sport are often worlds apart. But this does not always have to be the case. Of course you do not have to bother a seven-year-old girl who attends lessons and plays a weekly game at the school's chess club with information about grandmaster games. But a simul with twenty other children against a strong former student of the school can be a lot of fun. Children will be amazed that such a boy or girl can play so many opponents at a time. Parents who come to watch will also think of it as a marvellous achievement. Their amazement will grow when they watch a blitz game – they never imagined that chess pieces could fly over the board so quickly! In The Netherlands people have never played chess as massively as when Max Euwe became World Champion. People clung to the radio massively. We are talking about a time when there weren't any computers – there wasn't even television.

Even though hardly any Dutchman will understand the difference in level between the World Champion and the Dutch number 1000, still having a champion can stimulate many people to start practising a sport. Although, people are not always up to date everywhere. Once grandmaster Artur Yusupov, a member of Schaakstad Apeldoorn, visited the town house of his home town in Germany. He mentioned his name to the civil servant, who frowned: 'Yusupov, Yusupov..., that's a well-known name.' A chess grandmaster nods politely in such cases. 'Ah, now I remember', said the civil servant. 'Of course – you are the husband of the coach of the school's chess team that took second place in the national championships!'

Many top-class chess players enjoy the experience of now and then giving workshops to well-motivated youth players. This not only applies to top players at the local club, but also to international masters and grandmasters. In order to analyse a game, an interest in children is the chief didactic prerequisite. If necessary, a more didactically experienced person can be asked to assist. The children will have a field day. Actually, top players are more often than not willing to do this. It's just that nobody asks them. In fact, that was exactly what grandmaster Jan Timman replied when asked why he was hardly involved in the education of young top talents. The authors of this book know from their own experience that he was already prepared to give workshops years ago.

For talented youth players, teaching is a good possibility to develop

D - INTERVIEWS

D1 David Bronstein

'Researching, developing possibilities. That's what chess is about.'

'You shouldn't solve problems, you should create them', said grandmaster David Bronstein (72), who gave a guest training in Apeldoorn on October 8, 1995. Good calculation of variations is useful, but what matters most in chess is the way you approach problems. That is also what chess trainings should be about. By researching and discussing together, you can increase your understanding of chess and derive joy from it. Various strong youth players joined the workshop: Tim Lammens, Merijn van Delft, Jochem Snuverink, Tim Rimmel, Dennis de Vreugt, Joyce Fongers, Joost Hoogendoorn, Vincent Deegens, Joost Mellegers en Jaap Houben. Freelance journalist Peter Boel made a report for the local newspaper 'Apeldoornse Courant', and guest trainer Dharma Tjiam of De Schaakmaat was present as a listener. The training session was organized by Karel van Delft with financial support by local waste paper trader Schrijver.

Bronstein is positively brimming with ideas about creativity and coaching. He shows great respect for the Dutch World Champion Max Euwe. With Euwe, Bronstein shares the urge to let others share his passion for the game. We haven't been able to report any positive utterances about today's Dutch chess prominents. Money and points, that is what they are after, Bronstein thinks. Dr. Euwe was of a different mould; at least he loved chess and he wanted to teach it to young people. 'I wonder if these boys here would have learned to play chess if there had been no Euwe', Bronstein said. A weekend with Bronstein is overwhelming. What an abundance of energy this man has! And his understanding of the game is stupendous. Obviously, without this understanding he would never have been able to off-handedly produce so many games and positions that corresponded to the questions put forward by the training participants.

One time, in 1951, Bronstein was almost World Champion, but when the match ended in a 12-12 tie, Botvinnik kept the title. However, with 'Zurich 1953' Bronstein did put the best tournament book of all time to his name. This book is still available.

Bronstein is not exactly charmed by the current generation of top players. They prepare the game to death and hardly dare to tread new paths. He plainly calls Kasparov and Anand 'gangsters' who do not stoop to cashing 1.5 million dollars for games where hardly anything new is tried out. 'It has never happened before during a world championship that in a game, the players repeated the previous game with changed colours and then agreed to a feeble draw.' Bronstein thinks this is outrageous, and he thinks that Karpov's games are more instructive than Kasparov's. Bronstein thinks it is even more outrageous that he himself has been given an Elo rating of 2400-something. 'I am being judged by my current competition results. As I am getting older, I'm not so good at visualizing (calculating by heart) any more, and because of this I lose a

E - APPENDICES

E1 Analysis Questionnaire

By analysing your own games, you will learn from your experiences. This will provide you with insights which you will be able to use in the future. An analysis questionnaire can help you analyse your games thoroughly.

When you analyse a game, you have to think of a lot of things. The most important points are mentioned in this list. Not all questions apply every time. Analysing games takes time. But it has the advantage that you discover what your strong and weak points are. Keep in mind that it is better to analyse one game thoroughly than ten games superficially. First fill in the questionnaire by yourself, and then discuss it with a strong player. It is also useful to analyse a game with your opponent afterwards. Your opponent may be able to explain certain things to you. It may also be instructive because he/she may have thought about the game in an entirely different way than you. This also applies to games you have won! On the basis of your experiences you can make additions to the lists. You can also make a list of points of attention that you want to keep in mind in the future.

Technical questions

1. Which opening was played? Do you play it more often? Why? Do you know the ideas behind the opening? Do you know the tricks? Is it a quiet opening or an aggressive one?
2. Until which move did you know the opening (suggestion: look what you can find in opening books)?
3. Were there any remarkable situations in the opening (e.g. transposition of moves, unnecessary loss of tempo)?
4. Which moves took you a lot of time? Why?
5. Which of your opponent's moves surprised you? What did you expect and how did you plan to react?
6. Which of your and your opponent's moves do you find very good? Why? (you can describe this in variations and/or in words. Did you mainly play actively (with initiative) or passively (waiting)? Why?
7. Which of your own and your opponent's moves do you find very bad? Why?

F – GLOSSARY

- Activity – effectiveness of pieces
- Adjournment – break during a game, which is continued later
- Advanced Chess – chess variant where consultation of computers is allowed
- Aiming – bringing a piece, via a threat, to a square where it can attack
- Algebraic notation – notation system that codes moves with letters and numbers
- Ambition – goal which a player wants to achieve
- Analysis – investigation of a position
- Analysis questionnaire – questionnaire that enables the user to analyse a position systematically
- Angstgegner – weaker or equivalent opponent against whom performance is bad
- Annotated games – games with annotations in words and/or variations
- Arbiter – referee in chess
- Artistic aspects – esthetic qualities of a position
- Attack – activity aimed at assailing the enemy position
- Audience – spectators at a chess game
- Back rank – first or eighth rank on the board, 'bottom rank'
- Back-rank mate – mate with rook or queen on the bottom rank
- Backward pawn – pawn that is less far advanced than its colleagues and cannot be protected by them
- Bad bishop – a bishop that is hindered by its own pawns standing on the same colour
- Bad form/Loss of form – a player performs below his normal level
- Battery – two pieces standing on one file, rank or diagonal, making a combination possible
- Bind – grip on the position, and the space advantage that goes with it
- Bishop endgame, Bishop ending – endgame/ending where there are only bishops and pawns left on the board
- Bishop pair – two bishops, as opposed to e.g. bishop and knight, or two knights
- Blindfold chess – variant where the players do not see board and pieces, they must visualize them in their heads
- Blitz – a chess game with a very short time-control, often five minutes per player per game
- Blitz tournament – tournament with games with a very short time-control
- Blockade – stopping an opponent's pawn by putting a piece on the square before it
- Blunder – a grave mistake that results in a great disadvantage
- Board – the playing field, consisting of 64 squares
- Bolthole – playing a pawn forward to prevent the own king to fall victim to a back-rank mate (also: *luft*)
- Boxing in – to deprive a piece of the possibility to escape (also: 'enclosing')
- Breakthrough – when a pawn breaks through the enemy lines
- Brilliancy prize – prize for the most beautiful game in a tournament
- Browsing – spontaneous and unordered investigation of interesting issues
- Buchholz – criterium to determine the final rankings or the pairings by looking at the opposition each player has faced
- Bye – free round
- Caissa – goddess of chess
- Calculating ability – the ability to calculate variations
- Calculation – ascertaining with the help of variations where a combination leads to
- Candidate moves – moves that come into consideration to be played
- Capturing – conquering a piece or pawn of the opponent
- Castling – playing king and rook in one move
- Centralization – putting pieces in the middle of the board
- Centre – the four central squares of the chess board
- Character – mental qualities of a person
- Chasing – forcing an enemy piece with threats to go to a certain square
- Check – the king is under attack
- Checkmate – see 'Mate'
- ChessBase – German chess publisher
- Chess clock – clock that registers how much thinking time players use