

With the passing of another year I suddenly realized that 2008 was the 40th anniversary of the start of my chess library. I can still remember walking into a drug store in my hometown of Jackson, Minnesota as a young teenager in 1968 and glancing at the paperback book rack when, lo and behold, what should I spy but a chess book with a bright cover entitled **The Complete Chess Player**, by Fred Reinfeld. I quickly purchased the book and used it to the point that the colorful cover eventually became nothing but a distant memory and its yellowed pages with my faded notes now elicit fond memories of countless after-school chess sessions in Mr. James' high school classroom. Later, I purchased a well-worn copy of **The Golden Treasury of Chess** from my high school chess buddy, Mike, and right after graduation, picked up I.A. Horowitz's **Winning Chess Tactics Illustrated** and Nimzovich's **My System**, from a bookstore in Mankato.

I have a love-hate relationship with the latter book; if I had a dollar for every time I started out to read **My System** from cover to cover, well, let's just say I could afford to buy a lot more chess books! I like Nimzovich's writing style and his sometimes contrarian chess theories and so finally, a couple of years ago, I managed to get all the way through the long, and deep, text. Hey, better late than never!

Over the decades, as my finances and the opportunities allowed, I added to the modest collection of books, which now numbers over 80. Since chess players are people and people like to brag (and since I definitely can't brag about my *rating!*), I think I can honestly say that while I don't have the largest chess library in the world (or even in the state of Minnesota), I will stack my collection up against anyone's when it comes to high-quality chess books. In addition to **My System**, there are other immortal classics like Dr. Tarrasch's **The Game of Chess**, Dr. Lasker's **Lasker's Manual of Chess**, and Capablanca's **Chess Fundamentals**. If you're talking 'cream of the crop', throw in Bobby Fischer's **My 60 Memorable Games**, Bronstein's **Zurich International Chess Tournament, 1953**, Alekhine's **My Best Games of Chess 1908-1937**, and possibly the best chess book in my collection, Edward Winter's magnum opus **Capablanca**.

You'll find a lot of books by and about Capablanca in my chess library; eleven at last count! As you may guess, he is my favorite player and in my opinion, the greatest chess player of all time. The odd thing is that the player with the next-largest number of books in my library (4) is Bobby Fischer, one of my *least* favorite players! Give me credit for acknowledging genius, no matter how disagreeable I may find it.

In addition to purchasing chess books, I have also received some as gifts. Several years ago a great friend gave me a large number of chess books which he and his father had owned. Many were hard cover and the quality of the books gave my library a real 'shot in the arm'. A sister picked up Raymond Smullyan's **The Chess Mysteries of the Arabian Knights** at a library book sale for me, and another friend gave me a brand-new copy of **The Life and Games of Akiva Rubinstein (Volume 1)** this past Christmas.

If it seems like I am rambling on with meaningless details about these books, it's because I feel that most chess players look upon their chess books as more than just pages bound together. To me, they are friends; old comrades who have stood by my side through many a tough battle on the 64 squares. They are teachers who will patiently repeat their lessons to me, over and over, as many times as I ask. And they are memorials. Memorials to the genius of great men (and some remarkable women) who sacrificed a great deal during their lives for the sake of this game/science/art.

And like people, several of these books are under-appreciated or forgotten. Sink your teeth into **Grandmaster of Chess: The Complete Games Of Paul Keres** (actually only 80 games!). Want a wonderful, well-organized openings book for the novice or casual player which shows why certain moves are and aren't made in the openings? Try Irving Chernev's **Winning Chess Traps**. Want to read a fun collection of lightly-annotated games by a great player? Get **Frank J. Marshall's Best Games of Chess**. Want a follow-up book to Reti's classic **Modern Ideas in Chess**? Look to **Dynamic Chess: The Modern Style of Aggressive Play** by R.N. Coles to continue the study of the evolution of chess openings and middle game planning.

There are so many great chess writers represented in my library that it would be difficult to say who is 'first among equals'. Fred Reinfeld deserves mention, and not just for the sheer volume of his life's work. Irving Chernev and Edward Lasker make reading about chess both interesting and fun, and each of them earns high marks. Ditto for David Bronstein and Savielly Tartakower. And though he didn't really like to write, Capablanca also did an excellent job on his chess books.

However, my personal choice would probably be Eugene A. Znosko-Borovsky. As Philip W. Sergeant said, "In the teaching of chess he may claim to have no superior." In **A Primer of Chess**, the great Capablanca credited Znosko-Borovsky, one of the few chess masters who ever beat him, as having written the only book on the middle game (**The Middle Game in Chess**) worth reading. His classic little book **How Not to Play Chess**, along with Chernev's **Logical Chess: Move by Move**, should probably be the second and third chess books, respectively, that every serious beginner should own. My own collection of Znosko-Borovsky books is complete except for **How to Play Chess Endings**, which was out-of-print when I tried to order it some time ago.

I'll close with two pieces of advice to everyone who is starting to build their own chess library. First of all, it's easy to accumulate chess books without ever reading them (something I and a lot of other chess players are guilty of!). I would make it a rule, with the exception of large reference books like **Modern Chess Openings**, to not buy another chess book until you've finished reading the last one you bought. Hey, I know what it's like to walk into a Barnes and Nobles and find a chess bonanza at the bargain table (I once picked up Lazlo Polgar's massive tome **Chess** for just \$10!) and there will be other times when you just can't walk away from a good deal. Unless the only reason you buy chess books is because you like to collect them and not to use them to improve your game, at least *try* to follow that rule!

My second piece of advice is to not overlook Dover Books as a source of chess books. Because some

of the books they carry are the older classics, and in descriptive notation, some people may question just how valuable they are. Believe me, if a chess book originally written in 1910 (i.e. Edward Lasker's **Chess Strategy**) is still being carried by Dover, it's good! Obviously, no one should look to a book like that for the latest opening variations. However, sound opening theory is sound opening theory and chess traps are chess traps and a lot of what these older books have to say about the openings is still correct. Given the high cost of newer chess books, Dover's prices on their selections are extremely reasonable.

And if the book happens to still be in descriptive notation, well it always puzzles me how the same whiz kids who can create their own customized chess databases, play internet chess, and make a grandmaster-strength program do everything but wash the dishes are suddenly imbeciles when it comes to learning descriptive notation. Trust me, it's worth the effort! Take care.

