Happy 2nd Birthday Tactics Time Newsletter!

This month (May 22nd was the exact date) is the 2nd year anniversary of my first Tactics Time e-mail newsletter!

At the time when I first sent my first newsletter, I only had 4 subscribers - Randy Reynolds, Fred Spell, Anthea Carson and myself.

Since that time two years ago I have grown to having over 1600 subscribers!

I really appreciate everyone that signs up for the newsletter, and takes the time to read it.

Recently I have been getting a lot of questions about the newsletter, and thought I would take a few minutes to answer some of them.

Brad Lundstrom came up to me at the recent Memorial Day tournament in Denver, and told me how much he enjoys the newsletters, and asked me how long it takes me to write each one.

The answer is that it kind of depends. Normally if I think of an idea or hear a good idea, I will write down the idea in my phone, so I don't forget it. I listen to a lot of audio books, which is where I get a lot of the ideas that I write about. I try to read a lot as well, and whenever I don't know something I make a point to look it up, and learn about it. I can spend hours reading wikipedia.

I write the newsletters in pieces. Sometimes I have a good story, but not the rest, so I will do that part, then save it for later. Sometimes I have a good tactic, but not a story, so I do that part. When I am in the zone, I can normally write them in 15-30 minutes. I use the same template, which saves a lot of time, and
I can type pretty quickly.

Richard "Buck" Buchanan asked me, "Where do you get the games from"?

I was kind of surprised he asked me this, because I have got literally hundreds of games from him! I am fortunate to live in a state (Colorado) where a lot of people publish their games.

Life Master Brian Wall is the Godfather of writing chess email newsletters, and has been doing it for years and years. Paul Anderson has also been writing email newsletters for a very long time as well, and has published hundreds of games. Others like Fred Spell, Randy Reynolds, Chris Peterson, Buck Buchanan, and others publish hundreds of games per year. Entering games into PGN format from raw score sheets is a thankless job, and I am grateful that they publish so many games.

I also have had people email me their game collections, which is really helpful. I basically save every game I can get my hands on.

Hey Man! These chess problems are too easy!

Probably the biggest "complaint" that I get about the newsletter is that the problems are "too easy".

It is challenging for me to find the right balance of problems to put in the newsletter (and book). I have some people on my list that are literally chess champions (like Joel Johnson, who is a former US Senior Champion), and others that barely know how the pieces move, or how to read chess notation.

Really my "target audience" is people who are in the 1200-1400 range that want to get to the 1600-1800 range.

Looking at a ton of games between people in this range, I found that most of their games are being won and lost by simple tactics.

They are not losing because they missed a 5 move combo. They lost because they missed a 1-2 move combo, which are the types of things I have in my newsletter.

So really these are the people I want to help the most.

I played 5 rated games on Sunday at the Memorial Day G/30 tournament in Denver, and 4 out of 5 were decided by some kind of 1-2 move tactic. I'm ashamed to say that I was on the receiving end of a one move tactic!
In this position, I was white. I am up 4 pawns against Victor Huang (1722). I have a million ways to win - and all I have to do is not screw up. We each have less than five minutes on our clock, but this should be plenty of time.

I am running down the field for a touchdown with no one in front of me, and all I have to do is not drop the ball.

I decided to protect my e3 pawn and offer a trade of Queens with the move Qf4?? which allows the simple knight fork, Nh3+ forking the King and Queen.

As soon as I hit my clock, I saw it, but it was too late.

He forked me, and I grasped defeat from the jaws of victory.

This was a horrible way to lose, and I felt horrible after the game. I tossed and turned all night having nightmares (knight mares) about this blunder.

I literally wrote a book on chess tactics, and I am still missing a one move tactic like this!

BTW, you can see the complete game here: http://tacticstime.com/brennan-huang/

But that is the reality of class player games - simple tactics like this are deciding who wins and loses - especially at faster time controls like G/30.

Everyone makes mistakes and misses simple tactics sometimes - that is part of what can make chess so frustrating!

So that is the dilemma - in the "real world" of class player rated chess games - players are losing games because they miss 1-3
move deep tactics and combinations. Simple knight forks, missed checks, overloaded pieces, removing the defender, etc.

But as soon as I present this exact position as a "tactics problem" then it becomes "too easy".

I actually have to throw out most of the game winning tactics, like the one above, that I see because they are "too easy".

So that is kind of the challenge that I have, and it is a fun challenge. I really want to help chess players out there win more games, and get a higher rating, and I think mastering the basics inside and out, and backward and forward is really the key.

Thanks again for being a subscriber to my newsletter! I really appreciate that!

Your Friend,
Tim