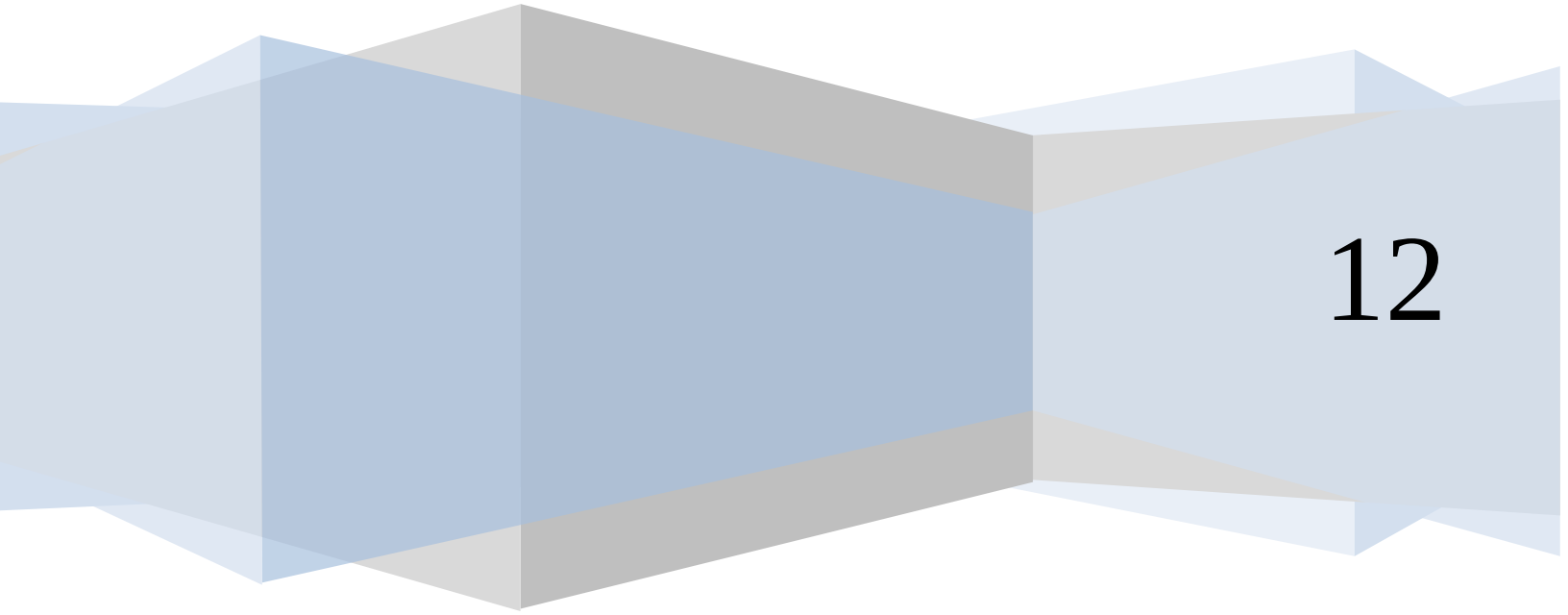
Tactics Time

Interviews w/ Chess Gurus

John Herron Interview

Tim Brennan



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John Herron Interview

Timothy Brennan: Hello, this is Tim with http://tacticstime.com and today I have a very special guest, John Herron. Welcome, John.

John Herron: Thank you, Tim. Welcome to you.

Timothy Brennan: Thanks for being here today. Would you like to take a minute and introduce yourself to everybody?

John Herron: Sure. My name is John Herron. I've been teaching chess to children for about 10 years. I've just recently put out a book with all the lessons I teach called "Total Chess". I'm about a class A/B chess player, although I haven't played tournaments in quite a while. I've been concentrating mostly on teaching chess to children.

Timothy Brennan: Cool. Would you like to say a little more about your book? What kind of stuff's in it?

John Herron: OK. The subtitle is called "Learn, Teach, and Play the Easy 123 Way". And as I started teaching chess about 10 years ago, I was trying to find a way to teach things to kids that was quick and easy and fun. So I hit upon this 123 approach and I kind of categorize everything in chess into this 123 concept.

For example, the chess game naturally falls into three phases – the opening, midgame and endgame, and I've done this for all aspects of chess; for strategies, for tactics, for finding checkmates, virtually everything.

Timothy Brennan: That's cool. I saw one of the videos you did on YouTube and I really liked how you kind of broke the tactic down where you had it. OK, here's like mate in one for example and then that's for beginners. Right, and you took a backup stop and then you set up the move that sets up the move and then.

John Herron: Mate into two as for intermediate players, right?

Timothy Brennan: Right, and then you have the full three move combination. I really like that. I thought that was a good way to do things.

John Herron: Three or more.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah.

John Herron: Three or more moves then I think of as for the advance level players. And it kind of gives them the pattern and shows them how the pattern builds up so

they can look for it and find it.

Timothy Brennan: Right, yeah. I thought that was great, great idea. Tell us like a little bit more some of your philosophies regarding tactics?

John Herron: Well, tactics now I have – I have some group into related groups of three also. And I actually have eight groups of three for a total of 24 tactics in chess. So I don't know if people have actually tried to categorize tactics in this way before. I can give you the names of the eight groups, a little bit maybe about each one. Direct tactics – by the way they all start with the letter D.

So, direct tactics are the simplest tactics things like a single threat or tying down a piece and filing on with another attacker. Also an x-ray tactic where a piece looks through another piece to attack or defend. Dynamic tactics are probably the most familiar to most chess players, things like forks, pins and skewers. Those are three dynamic tactics.

Then there are three discovered tactics and three double tactics – discovered attack, check and threat; and double attack, check and threat. And those are probably pretty self explanatory to chess players. I have three decoy tactics. And the purpose of a decoy tactic is to get a piece onto the specific square and those are of the trap tactic, allure tactic and interference tactic. And then I have three deflection tactics where the purpose to get a piece off of a square. And those tactics are clearance tactic, undermine and overload.

Then I have three defensive tactics called breakout, counter tactic and the desperado, which again those would all pretty self explanatory to chess players. And the final group is called delay tactics, and they all come from the German word zug, and I've actually introduce the new tactic here called nachzugler, which is like a late comer or delayed tactic where after one player does a tactic, it leaves the position right for the other player to do a comeback or follow up tactic.

And then the two other two tactics after that are zwischenzug and zugzwang, which most people called it zugs zwang. Most chess players know those two tactics also. So that's all the tactics categorized into related groups. It makes a little bit easier to think about them, to learn them, and to find them in chess position.

Timothy Brennan: So the one that you said you introduced, could you explain that a little bit better?

John Herron: Yeah. It's called not nachzugler. And again it has the German word zug, z-u-g, in there which means to tug or to pull. And actually I don't speak German but I look this word up to find the word that had the zug in it that fit what I needed. And that's where a tactic done by one player. He just sees the tactic. He doesn't look deep enough to see that after he does his tactic, it leaves the position open for the

other player to do a counter tactic, and oftentimes a better counter tactic.

You know especially in speed games, a lot of players will see a tactic and they'll just immediately play it. It looks like a good tactic and look a little deeper to see that oh, if I do this tactic, I'm leaving my king and queen in position for a skewer, let's say.

Timothy Brennan: OK. So maybe like the Legal's mate trap where the guy takes the pawn with the knight then black thinks I can win the queen with the bishop but then in reality he thinks at his tactic but then why it has a better tactic which is the checkmate if he falls for that. Would that be an example?

John Herron: Right. Yeah, or sometimes let me try and capture a pawn with their queen, and end up getting the queen trapped, although that's more of a trap tactic than the nachzugler tactic.

Timothy Brennan: And how about the defensive tactics? Because actually I had someone send me an email once, you know what are some examples of defensive tactics and I don't really have a good answer for him. What do you think about that tactic?

John Herron: Well, yeah. I have three and I define a defensive tactic as escaping from one of the opponent's tactics. And the three are a breakout, and that's where you escape from a tactic by using a forcing move. I have three forcing moves because everything comes in threes in my philosophy of chess. Forcing moves are captures, checks and threats.

So you use one of those three ways to escape from a tactic by doing a capture, a check or a threat. I call that a breakout. Then of course the counter tactic would be where you escape from a tactic by using another tactic. So if you have a piece that's pinned for example and is threatened to be lost, maybe you can pin the piece that his pinning you and then that piece cannot capture your pinned piece. That's an example of a counter tactic so choosing another tactic to escape from a tactic.

And then desperado – I think most players know when you have a piece that's going lost, you try to get as much for it as you possibly can so you don't lose it for nothing. That's a desperado tactic. And something a desperado, you just end up losing the minimal amount but there are many times when you can use a desperado in other situations to actually win material.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah. When you say that I think of as I've seen positions where maybe whites kings is stalemated but is down material and then he'll have his rook come out and chase the black king all over the board and the black king can never capture it. Would that be a desperado or that something different?

John Herron: No. I don't look at it as that. I look at that as that's the way to make a draw. I have a whole chapter in the book, a whole section about making a draw. One

way to make a draw is to force the stalemate.

Timothy Brennan: Right. OK.

John Herron: So I look at that a little bit different. Desperado is a piece that's going to be lost and you get as much for it as you can, like if you have a bishop trapped, you get a threat, you'll release the pawn for it. But there are times when a desperado can end up winning material for you, if you look deep enough in the situation. It depends on the position of course. It doesn't always work that way.

Timothy Brennan: Right, yeah. I understand what you're saying now, and you know like maybe your knight's trapped on a8 or something so, you know you do instead...

John Herron: At least you get a pawn for it before you lose it.

Timothy Brennan: Right, exactly. Very cool, you said you teach, you give lessons as well.

John Herron: Yeah, I teach after school classes. Right now, I have taught actually in school classes during the school day in one school district. I'm not doing that currently though. I've done summer camps for kids. I've ran hosted lots of tournaments. I've even done some simultaneous exhibitions to get kids interested in chess – almost all geared towards kids. I think that's the future of chess. If you get the kids interested, you know when they grow up, maybe they'll continue to be interested in chess. And they'll spread the word, and spread the knowledge about chess, and what a great game it is.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah. Well, that's wonderful. You know, I get people come into my website looking for information on how to teach kids. You know, I've never done that myself. I mean, I'm actually kind of the opposite where I'm interested mostly in helping adults that are stuck, you know to improve because I see that so much playing in adult tournaments. So I think that's great it sounds like your book would be a great resource for them to use it. If someone one day get a hold of that, what's the best way to do that?

John Herron: Well, they can go to my website, which is HairBall Publishing, http://hairballpublishing.web.officelive.com. If you just search for the title of my book though, "Total Chess", and my name John Herron, you'll find that in a Web search and that will bring you to my website. It's probably the easiest way.

Timothy Brennan: OK, and it's H-E-R-R-O-N.

John Herron: Right. I'm trying to get it stocked on with some of the chess vendors and maybe some of the online booksellers. It's kind of a slow process. I'm a self publisher so I don't quite have the name recognition that some of the big publishing houses have. So it takes a little bit of time to get things promoted and to get some

exposure. This podcast hopefully will help.

Timothy Brennan: Sure.

John Herron: And the book contains everything someone needs to teach a chess class, to learn chess themselves, even if they don't know anything about chess to start. And there's enough material here to challenge kids from elementary school all the way up through high school.

Timothy Brennan: Oh, great. That sounds awesome John. Anything else you'd like to add?

John Herron: I also have another book. It's called "Totally Puzzled", which is also self-published by me. It contains nearly a thousand puzzles and brain teasers. If we're nearly finished, let me leave with a puzzle, a chess puzzle. There's a section of game puzzles in my puzzle book. And the chess puzzle would be this. If you set up all the white pieces for a new game, but none of the black pieces, OK. Now, the puzzle is where you can put the black king so that white can checkmate black in three moves.

Timothy Brennan: OK. So let me just hit it one more time, so you set up all the white pieces…

John Herron: Set up all the white pieces for a new game, but none of the black pieces. OK, so you have an open board with no black pieces, but all the white pieces are set up. Now, you have to put the black king somewhere on the board, that's the puzzle is to trick find where, where can you put the black king so that white can mate black in three moves.

Timothy Brennan: OK.

John Herron: As far as I know, there's only one square where it will work. And there's a lot of open territory.

Timothy Brennan: Black gets the move his king after white's move.

John Herron: Right, that's a mate in three problems. Mate in three problems but you've got to figure out where is black's king. It's as if black's king is invisible at the start and you can tell me where it is. But of course, yeah black makes his move after white makes his move. It's a normal chess problem from that point on.

Timothy Brennan: OK. Well, yeah, I won't be able to – yeah to think about that.

John Herron: You'll solve it, yeah. It's just players can all solve it. You know, Philidor said that "The pawns are the soul of chess". But I say in my book that checkmate is the soul of chess. This checkmate is always there, it's always present in the game. And it's the ultimate goal of every game. To go with my little 123 sayings,

it's very well established that tactics are the heart of chess. I think that's everyone's know that saying.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

John Herron: And then I say checkmate is the soul of chess and I'd say pawns are the backbone of chess. They formed the structure around which the other pieces move. So that's the way I look at that.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah, that already makes sense to me. So, well excellent John. Thanks so much for being here today.

John Herron: No problem. I'd like see more people get interested in chess especially kids. There are probably 10 kids who are interested in chess for every one parent who know how to play chess. And there are probably 10 parents who know how to play chess for every one USCF rated player. So the USCF is a great organization but I think they're only reaching about one in a hundred potential players.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah, I think you're probably right there. I have a lot of people tell me, "Oh, you like chess." And you know, they know how to play and their friend plays and so it's definitely something that a lot of people find interesting if nothing else.

John Herron: I saw a great video on Youtube the other day too that had about 30 minutes of chess art set to music that was very nice watch.

Timothy Brennan: Very cool. All right John, well thank you again.

John Herron: Thank you very much, Tim.

Timothy Brennan: OK. We'll talk to you later.

John Herron: All right, bye.

Timothy Brennan: Bye.

I hope you enjoyed this interview with John Herron!

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