

Tactics Time

Interviews w/ Chess Gurus

Paul Anderson Interview

Tim Brennan



11

Paul Anderson Interview

Timothy Brennan: Hi everybody! This is Tim Brennan with <http://tacticstime.com> and today I have a very special guest, Paul Anderson. Thanks for joining me today Paul.

Paul Anderson: No problem. Thanks for having me Tim.

Timothy Brennan: You're welcome. So, why don't we start off you can tell everybody a little bit about yourself and how you get into playing chess.

Paul Anderson: Sure yeah. I've been playing chess probably about 14 years now and so I got sort of late start I guess a lot of the tournament players start when they're kids. And I started well after college, but it actually started because of email had come about in early the 90s and I got an account from the university.

01:00 Anyway that account they kept active after you graduated, so I would stop by the university to check my email. And if I didn't get an email, it was kind of waste of trip. So, my idea was I would play chess against my dad and my sister to make sure every time I went, I would have an email.

[Laughter]

Timothy Brennan: That's interesting, that's funny. So basically you got into playing correspondence chess so you'll always have an email when you have to go check your email.

Paul Anderson: Yeah it was like you know it was text based. So, it was just like a you know capital letters were white and lower case letters were black. And I just make a little board and then you type in the Algebraic moves and I send it to my dad. He'd adjust the board and put his move in. My sister did it too one game with my dad and I liked it and kept playing it.

02:03 Timothy Brennan: So you aren't even using like Algebraic notation or anything like that?

Paul Anderson: Well no. You would use Algebraic notation you know you have like a little text board and then below the text board, you would have the Algebraic notation. So, it wasn't quite a PGN file, but it looked similar, but it had like a text-based board and then it had the Algebraic notation below it.

Timothy Brennan: Okay. I got it so it's kind of like an ASCII art board kind of thing.

Paul Anderson: Yeah. I don't know if anybody remembers the old telnet servers. It

was kind of like that you know, scrolling text forward, but it was just an email.

Timothy Brennan: That was interesting I mean especially these days because people are complaining you know they had too much email and you know stuff like that. So that's great. So, how you'd make the transition to tournament chess and stuff like that?

03:01 Paul Anderson: Yes so I actually beat my dad, first time I played him, beat my sister the first time I played it. He I guess kind of was mad and wanted to win, so we played it again and she quit. So, we still get emails from him and then he beat me like the next four games and that when I realized I needed to get better at chess. And I started going to the Colorado Springs Chess Club, and that after playing like a couple of months there, they told me yeah you should join and play the tournament chess games too.

Timothy Brennan: So what were the steps you took to get better at chess?

Paul Anderson: Initially, I just started playing a lot and so to get better, to beat my dad, I started playing at the club and just playing through a lot of mistakes I was making and then also playing online through like telnet server, but I found I like playing over the board better than online because of all the problems you get online.

04:12 Timothy Brennan: Right. That's cool. What it is about chess that you like the best?

Paul Anderson: Well I mean I like the challenge, I like you know being able to compete in a sense against somebody, and try and improve, you know getting involved in the tournaments was you know very attractive. And I always felt I could get better and just slowly kept improving and so that sort of kept me going was the fact that I did see improvement. And my dad and I were very close and when he would get beat, he would sort of focus on his game and then I would lose one and so our match the whole time we're playing was very even.

05:12 It wasn't until just recently that I started winning more often and not losing to him, winning and drawing at least.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah I saw some of your games I mean you guys had some really long games. I think a couple of the games are even like over 100 moves long I mean they were real battle.

Paul Anderson: Yeah that was a fun game to play against him because you know I looked at the position and I thought well this could be drawish, but even he gave me a book called "Reuben Fine's Basic Chess Endings." And so it explained about you know if you have a pawn and a bishop, and he has a bishop and it's the right square with the queen then it is yeah very complicated, very long ending, but there certain things you can do to win it.

06:03 And so, I did you know I sort of looked at that, how to play that ending from Reuben Fine and use it to be beat him which of course he had actually given me this thing for Christmas.

[Laughter]

Timothy Brennan: That's cool.

Paul Anderson: That was one of the games where we actually we had met on vacation and it was up in the Glenwood Springs actually at the hot springs lodge. And I told him that I was going to win this you know and so we actually played it out at the hotel. And he realized it was forced win and he resigned, so he didn't quite go as long as he could have, but it was over 100 moves.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah that's a long game. So, you went from all the way from being a beginner to all the way to being the club champion right?

07:00 Paul Anderson: Yeah last year was the first year I ever won at the Club Championship which is a lot of class A expert-type players. And so, it's a tough tournament to play in and I usually don't do very well on it, but I finally did well enough perfect yet to win every game usually to win this thing and I finally did it. I won it last year.

Timothy Brennan: That's awesome. Congratulations.

Paul Anderson: Yeah thanks. It's you know it was something I didn't realize you know that meant as much to me until I won it and then I realize yeah this was a nice thing to have completed that you know I played in it 14 years in a row and finally won the thing.

Timothy Brennan: That's great. That's really good persistence you know on your part. It sounds like I mean you've gone all the way from basically a beginner to, you're what like a strong A player expert level.

08:01 Paul Anderson: Yeah I mean I guess it's technically I don't know the official rating, but USCF and so it's close to expert. I've gone over expert once, but I'm struggling to get back there now and of course you know chess a lot of things in your life affect how you play. So, it's not always easy to play your best.

Timothy Brennan: So what advice would you give somebody who wants to go from being a beginner to an expert? I mean you've shown that that's a reasonable goal I guess I mean...

Paul Anderson: Yeah I think it can be done. There are things that you know when I started playing chess I had heard which sort of put this imaginary obstacles in my way, you know like I started I think when I was in my close to 30 when I started

playing chess and one of the things that I heard is well you're going to peak at 35, you can't, once you 35 your mental ability is going to go down and that's going to be your highest rating.

09:07 And it turns out that wasn't true and then also, I heard somebody had said you can go to about 1800 without studying openings and you can do that, but once trying above 1800 you have to know the openings. I still haven't studied openings yet and so that's not true either.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: I think the main thing that I did which you know you now have access to was to get a chess program, a database and put your games in and to go over them with you know either computer or somebody else, it's easier with the computer because you can do that anytime you want, but to go over your games and having a database to store them and be able to go over them I think was the turning point for me getting much better.

10:01 Timothy Brennan: Yeah. I was actually going to ask you about that because you did you, send me your database and I was really impressed at how meticulous it was and how far it went back, and you know how you have all your games and you want to just go into a more little detail at how you did that if someone listening wanted to kind of repeat what you did?

Paul Anderson: Yeah I mean initially you have to learn the Algebraic notation, you have to know how to record your game and you know if you keep playing rated tournaments, they'll give you score sheets and you know you just record it. And so that's initially how I started, I recorded these games and I just save them because I wasn't really motivated to go over it. If I lost, you know I was too depressed about the game to want to go over it and if I won you know I just figured out that was the greatest thing in the world why do I need to go over games for?

11:07 But when I finally got a computer database as you enter it in, it will actually give you a quick assessment of the position, you'll also see that your games that you've lost necessarily weren't as bad as you thought. And the games that you won were a lot of mistakes you've made that your opponent didn't take advantage of, so you weren't as great as you thought that brings you sort of into balance and you're realize yeah there still a lot of errors I can improve.

And you know I started putting them all into the database. I went back and went through all the games of every tournament game I ever played I put into the database. And then I also started when I did a website was to analyze the games and let the computer analyze it, and really look more deeply at the games and what I was doing wrong and learning about where I make mistakes and what position I do better and what positions I don't and then focusing on my strengths and avoiding playing to my weaknesses, and just by doing that....

12:15 Timothy Brennan: So, what would be an example like of something you learn through doing the computer analyze that you might not have realized otherwise that you're able to fix and correct?

Paul Anderson: Some of the computer analysis you can see that sometimes it's your opponent you know if you play with the same person regularly some people you do better against than others. And then if you realize that some of that comes out of their style of play, you know if you're a positional player and they are positional, well you know if you beat him all the time because they never create any tactics well you know you realize that yeah you have a very strong positional sense and you can take advantage of real subtle things leading to the end game.

13:06 But then if you play with somebody else who is much lower rated than you and you have trouble against this person and it's because they play very tactically, well then you realized yeah that's a weakness you have is the tactics and somebody who is an attacking player you know will do much better statistically than they should against you is because they're taking advantage of that weakness you have.

And the one specific example I could think of recently is there's this guy, Alex Torres who as long as I play really positional and I play really solid I beat him every time, but then I get careless and I let it get really tactical he gets a lot of wins against me. And so, he got a lot of you know my rating points. He took it from me because there's a big rating gap and I shouldn't be losing to him as often as I do.

14:00 He can be dangerous you know. I mean I like his spirit. He's just you know he's sort of never gives up, doesn't mind losing material. He doesn't get depressed when he throws away something. He'll just keep attacking and often it pays off.

Timothy Brennan: Right yeah exactly. That's interesting. So I think I remembered reading when you're preparing for the club championship, you did some like home preparation against some of the people you're likely to play. Is that true and can you share any advice about how you won about that?

Paul Anderson: That again was basically using the database that I had. You know I had 500 games that I've played over 14 years and when you're playing this club championship it's easier to know.

15:00 You don't play all your games in one day. You play one game a day each week. So, each week you get a break and you kind of know who you're going to play and what color you're going to be.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: So you can go into your database and say let's just filter for this particular player. And I did that against Dan Avery. I looked at every game I play against Dan Avery. There's only a couple in there. And I found the ones what I want

and I figured out well you know if I can get him in time pressure, keep the game even, and you know focus on going into a very long end game and just keep it from getting too tactical, I have a better shot.

And so that kind of preparation I did, not really grandmaster-type preparation, but it was just something to boost my confidence. Yes, I can beat Dan and here's how I can do if I just play smart and focus on making the game as long as possible and hopefully that he will make mistake toward the end game which is where I was able to beat him before.

16:10 Timothy Brennan: Do you look at other games like between maybe like publishers or other you know what I mean, not just necessarily against you, but maybe Dan Avery versus Tim Brennan or something like that?

Paul Anderson: Yeah, it's hard to do that. My database obviously is I have immediate access to, but finding yeah games Dan played against other people is much more difficult and then you also have to play it out by hand or put into your own database.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: Or if you collect other people's game which is probably a good thing to do you would have that.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: So, my database is basically I've got you know a million games from grandmasters, but then I also have like 500 of my own and that's about it.

17:01 Timothy Brennan: Right. So then, you write a weekly newsletter. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Paul Anderson: Yeah I started just publishing online a website about chess and putting a game online, you know taking games I've played from my database and analyzing with my computer and putting them online, and writing about the news. And I've done that now for seven years and that one helped to just regularly go over games because I had to pick a game each week to put out in my little blog.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: And then also, people would give their games too which also now I do have a database of other people that's not as big, but sometimes I will get games from other people and that will go into another database I have as well. So, yeah it's called "The Colorado Springs Chess News".

18:02 And it's basically just local news about events and local interest and humorous stuff

about chess just to continue to promote people coming to and playing chess in Colorado Springs.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah that's great. I mean I really enjoy your newsletter. You know I think it's funny and you know you're always very reliable you know every Monday and Tuesday beginning of the week, you send it out and definitely would encourage people to subscribe it out and even if you don't live in Colorado Springs or Colorado you know it's...

Paul Anderson: Chess players yeah. Some chess players if they find something they like they'll keep with it and I've got players from you know Norway and Germany who are on the email list.

19:00 I now know how to read, I think I don't know it's either Swedish or Norwegian. I got an auto-reply from this guy every time he's not you know at work and if the email doesn't go right to him and it's like "takk for den mail" it's how you say, thanks for the mail in Norwegian or Swedish I forgot where it is from, but cause it's auto-reply sent back to me and saying he's out of the office.

Timothy Brennan: That's great. So, another fun thing you do is that I've seen pictures you play Monk chess, are you still doing that?

Paul Anderson: Yeah, the chess as a monk is for Renaissance Festival that occurs here in Larkspur, Colorado. And it's just the way to promote chess by playing attendees of the Renaissance Fair in a game.

20:09 And they pay a dollar and they put prizes up if they win, they can get the prize. If they lose, you'll get a dollar, you keep the dollar.

Timothy Brennan: So you win almost all your games there I imagine.

Paul Anderson: Yeah. It's probably the most ego boosting atmosphere for chess because you win like 99, 95 percent of the games and it showed you how so much better tournament players are.

Timothy Brennan: Right

Paul Anderson: Because yeah you can't have that same winning percentage like consistently playing people who are playing the tournaments.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: But at the Renaissance Festival, there so many people think they know what they're doing, but just major thing to really easily...

Timothy Brennan: So then you crush their ego and then they want to play again.

21:00 Paul Anderson: The people sometimes will show up at Renaissance Festival, you know there's a lot of kids too, a lot of kids want to play. Every now and then you'll get an adult who likes to play. And if they don't mind losing you know if they have that spirit they just keep playing over, over and over again and then eventually they will get a win, so probably they're just persistent and some people who really don't like losing you know don't really stick with chess too much.

Timothy Brennan: So, you're doing it like a simul or you're just playing like one person at a time?

Paul Anderson: No, I will play two people at a time. Often it's just one game, but if you get two people who are interested you have to play both board at the same time. I would play it up to maybe four people at ones at the Renaissance Festival.

Timothy Brennan: I've never been to the Renaissance Festival. I need to really check that out. When does that start? Later in the summer?

22:00 Paul Anderson: Eight weeks usually it's June and July, just the weekends, Saturday, Sunday eight weeks June and July.

Timothy Brennan: Okay. Yeah I need to really check that out. So one other fun thing you do is you post a lot of videos with themes about chess from different TV shows. Those are kind of fun. Are you recording those yourself or where do you get all those?

Paul Anderson: No, I just... the stuff is DVDs like sitcoms or old shows, like, "Oh, there's a chess thing." And nowadays you can digitally capture that stuff fairly easily. My son does it and then you just put a small clip on and share with people you know that sort of highlights how chess is viewed by the main stream, media, filmmakers, TV makers those kind of things.

23:06 The one video clip I put up the most there the most popular is actually Bob Newhart, the old Bob Newhart Show from the 70s where he is playing his neighbor in chess and it's just like a 30-second clip and it's kind of a joke. And you know for some reason, it gets tons of hits on You Tube. And people seem to love that one.

Timothy Brennan: What are the other stuff you have on there?

Paul Anderson: Yeah the other ones I like more serious chess players like an interview with Bobby Fischer, that one is very popular.

Timothy Brennan: Right.

Paul Anderson: Where you know he is interviewed after winning the 11th World Championship. He becomes 11th World Champion and he gets interviewed and that one is real popular and obviously it makes sense to the chess players especially.

American chess players know Bobby Fischer and familiar with him and love to hear his stuffs since he did so well with chess and then left so abruptly and didn't play for so long.

24:13 And know with him gone you know it sort of a nostalgic thing as well.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah definitely. That's great. Very cool. Thanks for all your contributions you know to chess. You know those are all great stuffs. So, before we wrap this up, anything else you want to add?

Paul Anderson: I guess the only thing I could say is that you know I did put that database on the website that you can actually buy all my games for a penny a game, 500 games in the website. You know I was surprised that you actually purchased it, but it sounds that you liked it.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah definitely.

25:00 Paul Anderson: You know people can definitely learn how to manage the database from it and learn a little bit about chess as well. And so if anybody wants to buy it, it's there and I'll leave it up and anybody who wants to go there can get access to all my games.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah I think those are some really good tips that you gave about analyzing your game and looking for the mistakes you're making and you know not just the amusing hey I won that game there's nothing here for me to look at you know. So, I think those are great tips you shared there.

Paul Anderson: I appreciate the way you've encouraged me. It's your suggestion to get on You Tube and to get on Facebook. And you know I've met a lot more chess players around the world because of some of your suggestions. So, I do appreciate what you do as well.

Timothy Brennan: I think next step for you would be get on Twitter, you know there's a lot of chess players on Twitter and you know you can just spit out 140 character sound bites you know whenever you update your newsletter.

26:12 So that you get some followers that way as well you know that's kind of easy thing to do.

Paul Anderson: That might be the next step for me.

Timothy Brennan: Yeah, check that out.

Timothy Anderson: So well thanks again Paul for joining me and so this is Tim Brennan with <http://tacticstime.com> and thanks for listening. Bye.

I hope you enjoyed this interview with Paul!

He shares some really great tips about how you can take your game from the beginner to expert level, and I hope that they inspired you to improve your game as well.

I especially liked how Paul never gave up, and continued to make small and consistent improvements to his game. The parts where he was talking about ignoring the limiting beliefs that other people were telling him were very powerful as well, and good advice for everyone.

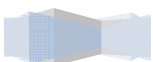
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If you have any suggestions, or comments or questions, I would love to hear them. Please email me at tim@tacticstime.com.

Your Friend,

Tim Brennan
<http://tacticstime.com>

P. S. If you want to learn everything you need to know about raising chess your rating, you need to check out my **101 Tactical Tips** and **Tactics Time** programs. You can learn all about them below:





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