

Youngest Chess Author Ever: An Interview with Daniel Naroditsky

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by Jennifer Shahade



Between chess lessons, eighth grade and swimming practice, 14-year-old FM Daniel Naroditsky found time to talk to CLO about his new book, [Mastering Positional Chess](#) (New in Chess Publishing). With the book's publication last week, Daniel Naroditsky has become the youngest chess author ever. [You can read Daniel's full bio](#) and follow his tournaments and appearances [on his official website](#).

Naroditsky talked to CLO about underrated and overrated positional concepts, and explained how the process of writing the book helped him achieve new chess heights, both in terms of understanding and rating.

Jennifer Shahade (JS): In the intro to *Mastering Positional Chess*, you reveal that you write down chess analysis with pen and paper. I'm sure it will surprise our readers that someone so young writes by hand. Why don't you just use a computer?

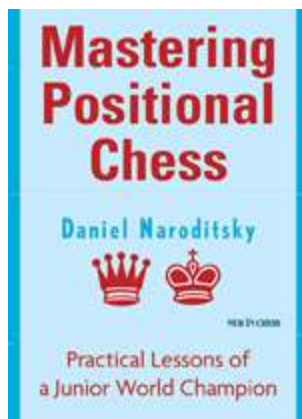
Daniel Naroditsky (DN): I love writing (by hand) in general. When I study openings I write in a notebook rather than just chessbase. I think handwriting immerses you in your subject more than typing up. After handwriting your analysis, you learn the lines better.

JS: Also, when you use chessbase to enter openings, it can be too tempting to turn on an engine....

DN: Yes, I don't want Fritz to analyze everything for me. It's better to analyze with board and only turn on Fritz when you have your own opinions on the position.

JS: How do you define positional chess?

DN: There is a lot of overlap between positional chess and tactical chess. For instance a tactic may set up a positional idea may set up a tactic or vice-a versa.



JS: Which examples are close to embodying in your view, pure positional chess?

DN: In the section about paralysis, I'd say the game Saemisch-Nimzovitsch. It's a pretty well known game, but it's very pure. It's interesting that this game includes very few tactical variations.

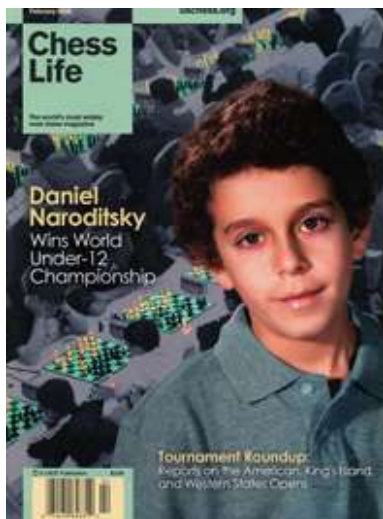
Copenhagen, 1923

White: Saemisch, Fritz

Black: Nimzowitsch, Aaron

1.d4 Nf6 **2.**c4 e6 **3.**Nf3 b6 **4.**g3 Bb7 **5.**Bg2 Be7 **6.**Nc3 O-O **7.**O-O d5 **8.**Ne5 c6 **9.**cxd5 cxd5 **10.**Bf4 a6 **11.**Rc1 b5 **12.**Qb3 Ne6 **13.**Nxc6 Bxc6 **14.**h3 Qd7 **15.**Kh2 Nh5 **16.**Bd2 f5 **17.**Qd1 b4 **18.**Nb1 Bb5 **19.**Rg1 Bd6 **20.**e4 fxe4 **21.**Qxh5 Rxf2 **22.**Qg5 Raf8 **23.**Kh1 R8f5 **24.**Qe3 Bd3 **25.**Rce1 h6 0-1

I'd also give Karpov-Timman (Amsterdam, 1975), which I analyzed in my chapter on defense as an example. It's amazing how Karpov eliminates any tactical bastions and proceeds to crush Timman without any resistance. I love looking at the game because there are few variations.



Daniel Naroditsky on the February 2008 Chess Life Magazine cover

JS: Did you always take to positional chess?

DN: Not really. When I started playing chess, I knew little about positional chess. I loved the Immortal Game, the Evergreen Game, but when I started to look at Karpov and Petrosian games I started to appreciate the aesthetics. Queen sacks will always remain beautiful but deep maneuvers can now strike me just as much.

JS: As an eighth grade 2400 player, what advice would you give to kids your age who are trying to balance chess and school?

DN: #1- Don't give up. Say you lose a game. I've seen many kids say I'm tired of this game, I lost and what's the point of playing anymore. They should take that loss and learn as much as possible from it.

#2- Enjoy the game and take every tourney as a chance to have fun. Even if you're worse always enjoy the game.

#3-Take lessons if you can. Many GMs are self-taught but it's much easier when there is a stronger player telling you what's good and what's bad.



Daniel at the 2009 North American Open
Photo Chris Bird

JS: Which are some of your most memorable tournaments?

DN: The World Youth Championships! It's great playing around so many different players and nationalities. It is a test to your stamina to play 11 rounds over two weeks. The North American Open was also a big success for me (where he defeated GM Shabalov and broke 2400.)

I also love the genre of European chess tournaments because there is one round a day and I can prepare.

JS: Is there a difference between European and American style of play that you can pinpoint?

DN: It's pretty tough (to generalize) but I think as a rule that in America people know openings really well. European GMs don't strive as much to get an advantage in the openings.

JS:Who are your positional chess idols?

DN:Karpov and Petrosian. Also Fischer. Many people think of Fischer as tactical but when you look at some of his games, they are pure positional chess.



Daniel Naroditsky at a book signing and lecture at the Mechanics Institute on March 14

JS: What about lesser-known players or an American GM?

DN: Leonid Stein, the Russian Grandmaster. As for Americans, GM Vinay Bhat also immediately comes to mind. When I look at his games, I am amazed at the depth of his thought and his positional play. And the combination of his positional and tactical play. (Vinay was happy to see one of his own games in Daniel's book--read more on Vinay's blog.)

JS: Do you study chess with Vinay and other members of [the GM House](#)?

DN: I went to the GM house once for a San Francisco Mechanics US Chess League meeting and it was a great experience.

I played blitz and analyzed with Vinay and also with Shankland, Kraai and Friedel.



Daniel Naroditsky at the 2007 World Youth Championships in Turkey, Photo Dujui Yang

JS: What do you see as your biggest milestone in chess?

DN: [Winning the gold medal at the World Youth Championship \(Boys Under 12 in 2007\)](#) was probably my biggest milestone so far. Becoming a Grandmaster is definitely a future goal. But it's important to me to play for enjoyment and not force myself. I love chess and even if I don't become a GM, I'll still always play it.

JS: So do you enjoy chess all the time, even when say, you're on the worse side of a rook endgame and know you'll have to struggle for hours?

DN: During the game itself, I may be struggling, on a grander scale, I find a tournament very fun.

JS: How has writing *Mastering Positional Chess* affected your play?

DN: I improved a whole lot by writing it. There are so many ideas that I learned, so many games that I saw afresh. It inspired me to play for a win against stronger players. I felt like I could play a GM in a positional game and not get outplayed. As I was finishing the book, I won my first game against a GM, Yury Vovk in July 2009.

Leiden, Netherlands, 2009

White: Naroditsky, D.

Black: Vovk, Y.

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.d4 O-O 6.Be2 e5 7.O-O Nbd7 8.Be3 Re8 9.d5 Nh5 10.g3 Bf8 11.Ne1 Ng7 12.Ng2 f5 13.exf5 Nxf5 14.Ne4 Be7 15.f3 Nf6 16.Bf2 Bf8 17.Bd3 Bh6 18.g4 Nxe4 19.Bxe4 Ne7 20.Qd3 Rf8 21.Bg3 Rf7 22.Qe2 Qf8 23.Rad1 Bd7 24.c5 a6 25.Qc2 Re8 26.Qb3 dxc5 27.Bxe5 Ne8 28.Bxc7 Nd6 29.Bxd6 Qxd6 30.Qc2 b5 31.Rfe1 Bg7 32.b3 Be5 33.Ne3 Ref8 34.Qg2 Kh8 35.Kh1 Rc8 36.Rc1 Qf6 37.d6 Qxd6 38.Red1 Qf8 39.Nd5 Bd4 40.b4 Rd8 41.bxc5 Qxc5 42.Qd2 Bg7 43.Qg5 Re8 44.Qh4 Kg8 45.g5 Be6 46.Rc1 Qa3 47.Nf6+ Bxf6 48.gxf6 Ref8 49.Rc6 Bxa2 50.Qg5 Re8 51.Re3 Qf8 52.Bxg6 hxg6 53.Qxg6+ Kh8 54.Rc5 1-0

Before I used brute force calculation in most positions. Now if the position is getting closed, I use more verbal explanation asking myself things like, *How do I stop this regroup, Where can I maneuver my worst pieces to, What is my opponent doing, or trying to do?*

All that said, it's important not to downplay tactics, especially when it's do or lose.

JS: What are your favorite books?

DN: I really like [Mihail Marin's books](#) especially *Learn From the Legends*. It's packed with so many great ideas. It has an overview of every World Champion and near Champion, and he analyzes a trait, like how Fischer uses a bishop. The quality of the analysis is great.

Another writer I love is Garry Kasparov especially the [Great Predecessors series](#). The way he puts ideas into words is absolutely great. He holds a biannual session for talented American juniors in New York and I've attended six times. It's absolutely wonderful needless to say.



Garry Kasparov and Daniel Naroditsky

JS: I'm sure many of our readers would love to be a fly on the wall during those Garry Kasparov sessions! [Macauley Peterson made a video](#) and wrote a Chess Life Magazine article, [Kasparov's Curriculum](#) about a December 2008 [Kasparov Chess Foundation](#) master class training session. What was your impression of Kasparov and the sessions?

DN: What we do is pick out four games and we analyze them all together. The level of energy Kasparov exerts, and the accuracy of his analysis in seconds is just amazing. He also listens to all of our ideas, and takes everything into account. He is never dismissive.

JS: Do you have any ideas or plans for a follow-up book?

DN: I am writing one on endgames right now. Originally I didn't like to study endgames but [Gregory Kaidanov](#) brought a love for endings into my game. And Lev Psakhis, who is coaching me now, is a huge endgame specialist. I learned a lot of things about endings that I've never heard before and I hope to share some of them in my next book.



GM Larry Evans with Naroditsky

Evans held the record for the youngest American chess author for over 60 years. Evans wrote a book on Vienna 1922 at 16-years-old.

JS: I have your book open to a well put line in your Maneuvering chapter, "Never be satisfied with the placement of your pieces. If you see a better square for one or more of them, look for ways to get the piece there; and mainly, use your imagination." How long did it take for you to internalize this concept?

DN: Before when I had some nicely placed, centralized pieces, I would think, "Let's start attacking!" Because my pieces were still not optimally placed, Kaidanov would ask me, "What piece would you choose to transport, if you could pick any square." Take the knight, take the bishop, I would look at any way to

improve my pieces even if it looked impossible at first glance.

JS: What are some over-rated positional concepts?

DN: Analyzing different pawn structures. I don't know about other players but for me, during the game, regardless of the pawn structure, I look at the general ideas of the position. I don't think the main ideas depend on the pawn structure. The exception is the isolated queen pawn structure, which you should spend more time studying.

JS: What about an under-rated positional concept?

DN: I'd say positional sacrifice, because I haven't seen it covered in many other books. If you look at Grandmaster games, often the unnoticed small pawn sack is the key to the whole game. For instance in Petrosian-Romanishin, the knight sack on d5 was the key to victory.



Romanishin-Petrosian, Yerevan 1975 Position after 16. Nc3-d5

Spend more time on positional sacks and once you have more confidence in that area, you can sack a pawn without fear.

Daniel's book is coming soon to USCF Sales. Also see his [official website, DanielNaroditsky.com](http://DanielNaroditsky.com) for events, news and photos. Daniel's next tournament will be the Far West Open in Reno (April 2-4), which Michael "f-pawn" Aigner will cover for CLO.