

6. Etiquette for Chessplayers

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Curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Sadly behind us are the days when admission to a chessboard was only to be gained by gentlemen and those of fine and cultured habits. Since the regrettable extension to the hoi polloi of rights of entry, standards of behaviour have not merely slipped, but plummeted to reprehensible depths. The time has come to reassert the equity by which those of natural grace and elegance may demand at the very least a modicum of decorum in dress and act of the Socially and Culturally Underprivileged Majority (hereinafter referred to as SCUM) who infest the tournament scene.

To that end, we have pleasure in providing a useful guide to right and proper manners for the chessplayer in the most commonly encountered circumstances. Those to whom gentle birth has given natural polish, may regard the remarks which follow as a refresher course. Others, less fortunate, to whom fate has provided lower natal credentials, should study these notes with diligence, that they too might some day aspire to standards of dignity to be expected of a gentleman and chessplayer.

Upon Introducing Oneself to One's Opponent

Good breeding demands at the very minimum a brief but cordial exchange of salutations before the commencement of a chess game. If at all possible, a mutual acquaintance of the

contestants should be prevailed upon to make the necessary introduction. Chivalry demands that the lower-rated player be presented to the higher-rated. Never introduce an international master to a grandmaster without first asking the grandmaster's permission.

A fraught situation can arise if no intermediary may conveniently be procured to conduct the ceremony of introduction. Under such conditions, it is permissible to make one's own introductory promotion. Should the opponent be seated at the board, one attracts his attention by drawing back one's own chair with the left hand, making just the hint of a squeak on the floorboards, while extending the right arm in greeting. The handshake pressure should be firm but gentle. A slight bow is acceptable, but smartly clicking the heels is considered the epitome of uncouth Teutonic oafishness. In the event of this being the first encounter between the players concerned, he with the higher rating has the privilege of requesting that the other divulge his name, with the polite inquiry: 'Who are you, then?' A genuine interest in the identity of his inferior should be demonstrated by cupping a hand round the right ear as he replies and saying: 'What?' followed by impelling the score-sheet in his direction with instructions to inscribe his name in legible capitals.

On Moving The Pieces

Grasp the piece to be moved firmly between forefinger and thumb (or, in the case of the knight, between middle finger and thumb with the forefinger resting lightly between the ears*), lift the piece clearly above the level of the other men on the board (but never more than half an inch higher than the king), and move it directly and briskly to the intended destination. To push, flick or nudge a piece forward is considered most unseemly. When making a pawn move, the little finger should be extended.

To effect a capture, the enemy man should be removed from the board with the left hand (little finger extended, of course,

*The knight's, not yours.

should a pawn be captured), prior to occupying the vacated square with one's own piece in the right hand. One-handed captures, with whatever juggler's virtuosity they may be performed, are to be avoided as ostentatious and vulgar. The Chinese Ping-pong opening, involving the launch of the King's pawn some twenty feet into the air before stroking it down onto K4, may be tolerated as a harmless oriental eccentricity.

Writing the Moves

On transcribing a knight move to the score-sheet, one must take pains to ascertain whether the knight involved is an hereditary baronet. In such cases, the appellation 'Sir' must be inscribed before the move, and 'Bart' added after the square to which said piece has journeyed.



Winning

When the opponent has perpetrated a crass error, thereby rendering his game immediately beyond the slightest hope of redemption, one may look at him, but never stare, in amazement. Should he not resign immediately, only the ill-bred will be seen to yawn or consult their watches. One is permitted, however, to extend an invitation to others to share the mirth one harbours at the opponent's poor play and to express their intense amusement by gathering round the board and pointing in ridicule at the unfortunate wretch.

On conclusion of the game, the winner should compliment the loser on his high standard of play as exemplified by some, if not the majority, of his moves. The victor ought also to proffer helpful advice to aid the further study of his defeated adversary thereby leading to an eventual improvement in his game. Magnanimity in victory should always extend to drawing the attention of the vanquished to his every error, however trivial, that he might better extirpate them from his future excursions into the chess arena.

On Losing

Throwing oneself prostrate onto the floor and beating the ground with one's fists is a shabby demonstration of petulance in which no gentleman should indulge. A certain restrained amount of dignified rancour is, however, permissible and indeed expected under these strained circumstances. A good wallow in self-pity is the privilege of every loser. Refusing to shake hands with one's vanquisher is, on the other hand, clear evidence of a want of good breeding, notwithstanding the extreme fortune without which his victory could never have been registered. Resignation should be accompanied by a pertinent congratulatory message: 'I hope that makes you happy, you smug bastard; there's certainly not much else in your flaccid, philistine existence to be cheerful about.'

On retiring to your room to throw objects at the wall, always remember to beware of ricochets.

Upon Others Losing

One's friends and colleagues should be treated with the utmost sympathy after losses. Black morning coats, tall hats, black gloves and tie should be worn. If a message of condolence seems appropriate, verbosity should at all costs be avoided. A brief commiseration, such as 'Hard cheese, old fruit', will be fully adequate. This particular phrase is especially suitable owing to its easy translation into outlandish tongues for the benefit of foreign folk.

Consoling lady chessplayers after defeat is one of the peripheral occupational duties of the gentleman chessmaster. When pressed into giving succour and helping bolster the moral fortitude of such a distressed damsel, one must ensure always that the lady in question is allowed a few minutes to herself following the defeat. These important moments will give her the opportunity to meditate upon her misery, to reflect on the deeper and more meaningful aspects of existence, to experience the pure suffering caused by a great grief, and to throw an almighty tantrum with much kicking, stamping and screaming.

On the Offering of the Draw

To a grandmaster: a draw may only be offered by an untitled player to a grandmaster from a position of tangible superiority. The correct phrasing to adopt on such an occasion is: 'Your grandmastership, might I be so bold at this juncture of the contest to beg to suggest in all humility, the halving of the point?'

Should the grandmaster himself propose a draw, a summary refusal is the height of impropriety. Declining is permissible only with due deference to the grandmaster's superior status. Thus: 'Though fully content to earn half a point against such a powerful adversary, I would be willing to invest that and more in the continuation of this contest, that I might exploit to the full the opportunities to learn more of this wondrous game, such as are afforded to me by the privilege of sharing a board with your good and illustrious self.'

To the Queen or Prince of the Blood Royal: should the vagaries of the pairing system during a weekend tournament place one against the Queen (or a Prince or Princess of the Blood Royal), the correct form of a draw offer is as follows: 'May it please your Majesty (Royal Highness); with the profoundest veneration (greatest respect), Your Majesty's (Royal Highness's) most faithful (humble) and dutiful (obedient) subject (servant) craves leave to petition for a draw.'

A royal offer of a draw must not be refused except in case of death. Such an offer should immediately be accepted in writing formally in the third person.

Upon Being Asked to Spy for the Russians

The Cambridge chessplayer, astute, educated, refined and drunk on the heady wine of Shakhmatny Bulletin and Soviet opening theory, may frequently be approached by seedy Eastern European types and asked to spy for the Russians. Under such circumstances, one should not let one's political views overcome proper notions of respectability. The offer should be politely declined in such a manner as not to have deleterious effects on one's future Soviet tournament invitations. 'Sir, I regret that my proclivities are exclusively heterosexual, thereby disqualifying me from the post you suggest on grounds of occupational unsuitability' is a convenient response to extricate oneself without any risk of causing offence.

This simple mode of disentanglement is less efficacious on being visited in one's room during a tournament by a scantily dressed, alluring female representative of a communist state, exuding unashamed sexuality, her luscious body straining temptingly against the confines of her remaining garments. Such a callipygean temptress can offer to the young and susceptible Cambridge chessmaster an opportunity to behave with indiscretion. Whatever the provocation during such social visits, however, the true gentleman will never overstep the bounds of decorum; socks are not removed before luncheon.



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Concerning Sacrifices

There is an art and propriety in the offering of sacrifices to the opponent which requires a natural delicacy of disposition to comprehend. Be it correct or totally unsound, the amount of material sacrificed must be neither gaudily too valuable, nor miserably insignificant. An ostentatious sacrifice of queen or two rooks, while doubtless affording a crude pleasure to those of low birth among the spectators, will mark one as a vulgar fellow to be shunned by the higher echelons of society.

Always accept the offer of a piece or pawn by the opponent. However humble the giver, your appreciation of his goodwill can only properly be signified by taking what he is willing to sacrifice. No matter how blatantly erroneous the offer, never demean the dignity of the poor chap by uttering a deprecatory

expression such as, 'I fear I rob you'. The receipt of the gift should, however, be acknowledged by a brief note of gratitude.

On Nonentities

Having become a famous player, one will frequently be approached by nonentities who will attempt to engage one in conversation, saying: 'You don't remember me, but . . .' Their presumption should be rewarded by immediate interruption with: 'Yes I do; I beat you in a simultaneous display but five years past; a Nimzo-Indian Defence if my memory fails me not. You should have played the rook to d8. A most egregious error.' Then walk briskly away, leaving the bystanders lost in admiration.



On Disgusting Habits

Certain players, not of good homes or family, indulge in certain vile and unmentionable forms of behaviour while seated at the board. These shabby and unseemly displays should not be tolerated. Should the perpetrator ignore your frowns and persist in his unspeakable ways, address him firmly thus: 'Sir, if you do not desist from your ungentlemanly ways, which I find injurious to both my concentration and my finer feelings, I shall have no alternative but to summon the tournament director and have you expelled.' This threat is the merest bluff, since the tournament director is in all probability at the very least a nose-picker, unsympathetic to the higher values of an aesthete. Should the opponent therefore respond unfavourably with: 'Sod you, mate', or similar phrase, the threat should not be invoked, but this very utterance will have conveyed upon the injured party the right to a hefty kick to the ankle of his adversary.

Never eat beans before a game.

Clothing Oneself in the Proper Manner

Far too often, the reprehensible habit of appearing ill-clad at the chessboard goes without being sufficiently decried. Those not to the manner born, and of slovenly upbringing, may be seen in jeans and tee-shirt, with decaying sandals on their sockless feet. Such attire is permissible under but one single circumstance: when the opponent is a young product of the Soviet factory, in his mass-produced, well-ironed natty suit and poncey imitation suede footgear, pretending to be a gentleman. In that case, the dirtier the tee-shirt the better.

On all other occasions, as every true gentleman will need no reminding, the correct dress is lounge suits for the middle game and evening dress for the ending. Gloves should not be removed before the end of the opening. Hat and umbrella or cane should be left at the door. Hat and cane may, however, be taken to the board if the game is to be a short, pre-arranged draw.