

How much opening knowledge does a novice need?

Contributed by Sciurus
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While playing against the computer, I often mess up badly in the opening. Most articles about learning to play chess say that beginners should not spend too much time on openings, but rather study tactics and endgames. I agree with the general idea of this and think it really does not matter to know the fine points of one opening line or another at the level I play. However, running into serious trouble during the opening phase isn't fun either.

Up to now, I tried to follow some advice I read somewhere: after the game, I would look up the opening and see what went wrong (I just bought a copy of MCO-14 for this, which will certainly cover more ground than Reuben Fine's "Ideas Behind the Chess Openings" that I grabbed from a local library a few weeks ago. However, for a beginner like me the more wordy style of Fine's book comes in handy). This certainly gave me some experience, but even if I wouldn't have such a terrible memory there are simply too many opening moves around! Therefore, I continue to get into messed up games regularly.

One reason why I am (still) hesitating to study openings is that if I look up an opening line I always see comments like "gives white an advantage". In most cases, however, I don't understand what the fuss is about because I simply do not have the knowledge/experience to see this "advantage". Nevertheless, I feel that I need to improve my opening play. Therefore, I decided to simply pick one opening move and stick with it for the foreseeable future. Starting out with the same move will hopefully cut down on the number of traps I can fall for and if I continue to look into MCO-14 after each game I will hopefully learn something. The only problem is, which opening should I choose? Every opinion I saw on which one is good for beginners seemed to attract others stating the opposite. Therefore, I will go with the best advice I found so far: at the beginner level, all openings are sound. The biggest obstacle for me will be to not waste time browsing through websites and books any more but simply to stick with one of them!