

Cheating and gamesmanship at chess

Most of us have heard about the cheating allegations over-the-board at the top level, but the Club player mainly encounters it online.

I recently came second to a patzer in a blitz tournament on lichess, who, in spite of a rating below 1400, managed to play like a genius. All six of his games were without any blunders, mistakes or inaccuracies! To be fair to lichess, I reported him and moments later he was banged to rights. Except I still came second. I am hoping that as with the Olympics and drug cheats, Lichess will send me an email in a few years' time to tell me that I have retrospectively been awarded first place.

So, not much overt cheating then, but I have certainly encountered *gamesmanship* in OTB play.

Sometimes, it's difficult to identify whether the behaviour is deliberate or whether the opponent is genuinely unaware of his off-putting behaviour.

Some of the characters I have encountered over the years:

Mr Mumbler, usually an elderly gentleman often with a beard, who mutters under his breath and in theory to himself but in practice audibly to his opponent. The interference to the concentration is all the more intense because of the low volume of his unintelligible utterances.

Mr Cougher and Ms Sneezer are usually accidental proponents of their art and intermittent according to their state of health. Nevertheless, the occasional gamesman can often be pinpointed by his habit of always aiming his spluttering to the board and pieces rather than politely turning away before projecting his or her germs.

Mr Fresser likes to snack over the board. He is a rare species these days as he is fast becoming a social outcast. Certainly, I am glad to say, apple-eaters seem to have died out completely.

Professor Heavy Breather is identified by his regular gasping and panting. In my experience, the Prof is nearly always doing it deliberately. I have often encountered no such intermittent audible inhaling and exhaling when seeing people such as the Prof socially, just when playing them at chess.

Professor Heavy Breather has a close relation, Herr Klinsmann, who is well known for his less than subtle acting. Rather than going down too easily in the box like his football-playing namesake, the Mr Klinsmann at the chess board is best exemplified by setting a trap with a poisoned piece and then acting as though he has just blundered terribly. A microsecond will pass after releasing his piece when he will look shocked and despondent and here it is important to take a little time otherwise you might find yourself rushing nonchalantly into a minefield with a vice-like trap snapped around one of your monarchs.

Other opponents to be wary of are those with poor personal hygiene, for example, BO or halitosis and here I would advise taking on board the Stoic message of Marcus Aurelius: "If you are pained by an external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs you, but your own judgement about it. And it is in your power to wipe out this judgement now."

It may take practice but in the end one can train oneself to embrace the odours coming from across the board, although most definitely not the person emitting them!

Beware of children! They have a number of weapons in their armoury. Most notably bashing down the pieces, saying "j'adoube" or more commonly "I adjust" the whole time, and, most dangerously,

playing incredibly fast. This last threat is often accompanied by them looking bored if you take over a minute on any of your own moves. My advice when playing a strong child is to use the force of their own manoeuvre against them, in a manner similar to aikido, and bore them to death and they will be the ones who lose concentration. This comes easily to me as my playing style has often been compared to a snail on Mogadon!

In my experience, much more common than gamesmanship is a lack of sportsmanship. This is always on behalf of the loser. Winners, of course, are always magnanimous, full of encouraging words with messages like 'hard luck, you played well'.

I have to say I have rarely heard the loser focus on anyone but themselves. Congratulations are invariably offered through gritted teeth and accompanied, by such statements as "I should have had you there", "you were lucky you had that resource", "I always had the edge but got into time trouble" etc.

Of course, when I get home and analyse the games with the help of Fritz or Stockfish, it transpires that we both played like complete imbeciles anyway.