

Chess on the Net

Danny Rosenbaum reveals how to get the most out of chess on YouTube and Twitch

Chess players these days are faced with a wealth of material to choose from, whether they want to improve their game or simply be entertained. Some of the obvious places to turn are books and DVDs, but this article is going to focus on the fast-growing areas of videos and streams.

It's sometimes difficult to see the wood for the trees and, with chess channels and content proliferating, any attempt to be up-to-date would always be doomed to fall a couple of tempi behind. Instead, therefore, of trying to provide a comprehensive map of the terrain, I have outlined a personal collection of some of the most useful, informative and entertaining resources.

At the latest count, I have subscribed to about 300 chess channels on YouTube – which is, at first glance, ridiculous. However, if I find a channel with merit, very often I will subscribe simply to support and provide encouragement to the person who has gone to the trouble of uploading the content. The benefits of subscribing to particular channels on YouTube are pretty limited. The main ones are making a channel that you are interested in easier to access, and the ability to have notifications of new content.

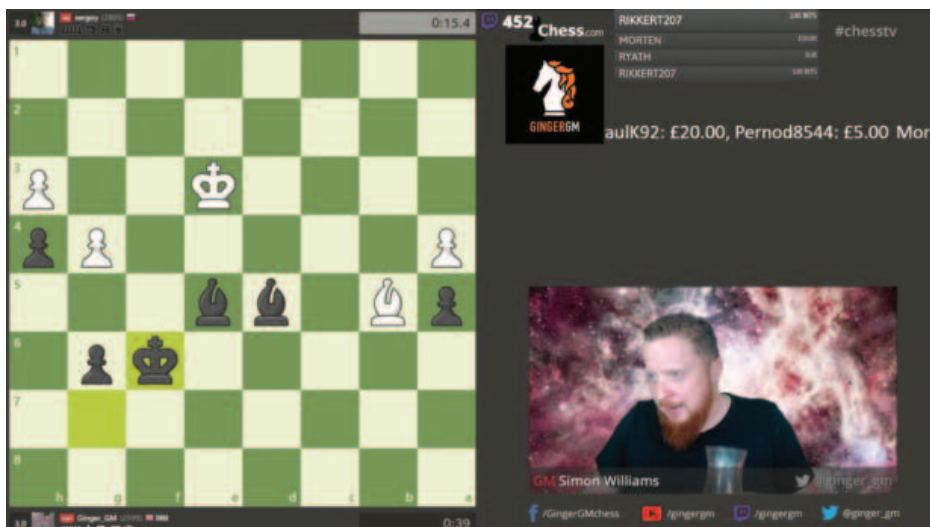
Subscribing on Twitch (twitch.tv) is another matter altogether. Each streamer has his or her rules. Benefits are at the discretion of the streamer and can include, for example, subscriber-only simul and blitz games with the streamer, or sometimes subscribers can send in their games for analysis.

One big difference, of course, is that subscribing on YouTube is free, whereas on Twitch it involves a monthly fee (although you do get one free sub a month if you are with Amazon Prime). That said, simply 'following' on Twitch has the same benefits as 'subscribing' on YouTube.

A BIT OF FRIENDLY BANTER

There are many videos that are (forgive the pun) streams of consciousness, where we are treated to the inner thoughts of the streamer whilst he/she is playing a succession of games. Although known mainly for this type of content, many of the streams in this section also have a variety of high quality instructional videos.

A danger with watching strong players playing blitz and bullet games is that one can



The Ginger GM, Simon Williams, has a big online following – on both Twitch and YouTube.

become very passive and spend hours watching without learning very much. When the player is bantering whilst playing there is very little time to think for oneself whilst spectating. Nevertheless, it is amazing how clearly some of these very strong players are capable of expressing their decision-making process whilst bashing out, or more accurately clicking out, the moves.

When the video is a short one, for example, featuring just one game, viewers might consider watching it first with the sound off, and thinking about the game for themselves as it progresses, before playing the video again with the sound on to compare their thoughts with those of the presenter. Another technique to enhance engagement and employ the little grey cells is to pause the videos at key moments and think for yourself what you would do before continuing with the video and seeing what actually happened.

Many of the channels which I mention are on both YouTube and Twitch. I have avoided peppering this article with lots of web addresses for each channel. You can easily reach them by simply searching for their name within YouTube or Twitch.

ChessNetwork

This is the channel of Jerry, an FM from Pennsylvania. He is a class act and, although not the strongest player to broadcast, he is one of the most entertaining and informative. As well as streaming his own games, he provides all manner of instructional videos

like analyses of famous chess games, and how to solve puzzles. With around 1450 videos uploaded at the time of writing, there are hundreds of hours of excellent viewing available for all playing strengths.

If you ever find yourself playing against someone doing a live stream I recommend that, if you have the stream on in another browser tab, you switch the sound off so that you can concentrate and after the game play it back to hear the streamer's insights.

Some people dubbed 'stream snipers' deliberately listen to gain an unfair advantage, but sometimes this can backfire. An amusing instance of this is in ChessNetwork's 3-minute clip 'How to trick a stream sniper'.

John Bartholomew

One of his fascinating series of videos, available in a playlist on YouTube, is 'Climbing the Rating Ladder'. In each video John Bartholomew plays opponents within different grading bands. Here, he comments on the opponents' moves as well as his own and you can see clearly the different ways of thinking, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the different rating levels. Another very instructive series by this popular IM from Minnesota is 'Chess Fundamentals'.

GingerGM

GM Simon Williams's channel has plenty of entertaining and informative content. Some of the games he analyses are not the obvious

ones, for example, Healey-Eames and the extraordinary game Gareyev-Zulfic. His post-mortems of his own games at the 2019 British Championships are well worth watching.

Occasionally streamers will play against each other and each upload the video to their own channel. That way you can compare how the two sides looked at the game. In the instance of the Ginger GM playing Ben Finegold (his channel is GMBenjaminFinegold), this was spiced up with a little bit of trash talk.

GMHikaru

There is something mesmerising about watching Hikaru Nakamura's live stream. Whether he is playing Blitz or Bullet or moving at the speed of light on Chess.com's puzzle rush, or simply analysing Super GM games, he is eminently watchable. It is astonishing to see how quickly he thinks, and what's more, and unusually for a very strong player, he elucidates his thought process very clearly. Much of his chat is not on chess and that might bother some people, but to my mind it adds to the fun of the stream. Hikaru is one of the best at interacting with the audience and he offers very open candid opinions on all manner of subjects including his chess rivals.

Hikaru's is one of the streams where you might get more out of watching it live on Twitch, not just because of the adrenalin rush, but also because his use of background music means that some of the videos when played back have sections without audio.

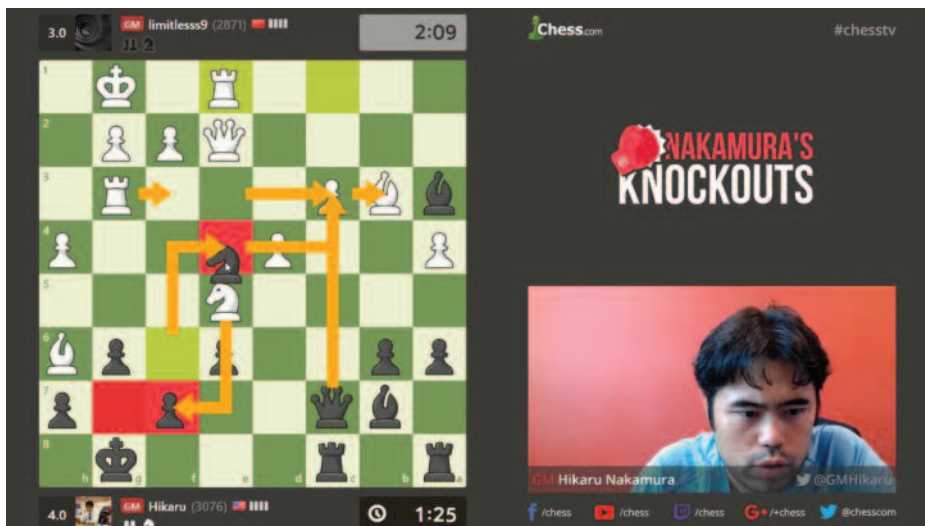
Vidochesstraining (YouTube), Sladgie (Twitch)

If Hikaru is Twenty-20 cricket then IM William Paschall is a five-day test match. He has a very laid-back style and the slower pace ensures that his is one of the most instructional streams available. It is also a good example of the benefits you can get by subscribing on Twitch.tv. For example,



Don't just rely on other people's playlists, compile your own. For example, if you have an opening that interests you, seek out and compile videos on it that you can keep in a easy-to-find place, thereby using the playlist as a filing system.

Look at the content description and comments sections of videos for helpful timecodes. Some videos take a while to get to the point and a comment might highlight this by remarks with time codes such as "Game starts at 4.00" or "Watch the amazing queen sac at 32.06".



We might need to pause the stream to spot Black's plan, but Hikaru Nakamura sees it in a flash.

Paschall's subscribers can send their games in for him to analyse.

As I mentioned above, there are numerous quality channels and everyone will have their own favourites. There are so many more that I could mention. For example, Chessexplained and Kingscrusher make excellent viewing. However, this is not designed to be a comprehensive list, otherwise this article would have ended up rivaling Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

EDUCATION! EDUCATION! EDUCATION!

These channels are more focused on instruction and less on banter.

PowerPlayChess

GM Daniel King of *How Good is Your Chess?* fame provides match reports and analysis of top games. In each video, he tends to focus on one game, with the analysis usually lasting 15-20 minutes. Sometimes less is more and I find the length just right to keep my interest and concentration. If you're

interested in particular players Daniel King has handily sorted the videos into playlists on YouTube arranged by player. Unsurprisingly, by far the greatest number of videos are devoted to games by Magnus Carlsen. His playlist has 320+ videos. There are also playlists sorted by event so anyone so minded can look back at, for example, the London Chess Classic of 2012 and see a video for each round.

Agadmator

Antonio Radic, better known as Agadmator, is a Croatian Candidate Master whose infectious enthusiasm helps to explain why he has amassed an incredible 460,000 subscribers. The number is growing fast. He recently gave up his job as a graphic designer to concentrate on making chess videos. Like GM Daniel King, Agadmator tends to focus on one game in each video. He features a wide variety of games including many historical ones.

Saint Louis Chess Club

There are hundreds of instructional videos available on the St. Louis Chess Club YouTube



Our own Daniel King's 'PowerPlay Chess' channel has racked up more than 17 million views since launching on YouTube back in 2012, in large part due to his clear delivery and excellent material.

channel, catering for the whole gamut of abilities from beginner to advanced. They tend to be live recordings of lectures given to students at the club. Several GMs are featured, perhaps most prominently Ben Finegold. My own preference is for GM Varuzhan Akobian and GM Yasser Seirawan, who are both very clear and empathetic communicators. The latter together with WGM Jen Shahade and GM Maurice Ashley forms the core of St. Louis's live coverage team.

HIDDEN GEMS

The channels above have built up huge audiences partly because of very actively adding new content. This section covers a few lesser known channels. The first two seem to be dormant, but that takes nothing away from the content already sitting there waiting to be explored.

Majnu 2006

Majnu started posting videos on YouTube in 2006, but unfortunately stopped four years ago. He often analysed standard games in great depth. His style is very clear and there are lot of videos that club players would appreciate. An unusual and thought-provoking Majnu video was 'Chess: the great technique of anchoring', which provides some useful advice on the psychology of chess.

Peter Lalic

Unfortunately, there have been no new uploads for about five years, but Peter Lalic had a range of absorbing videos. Peter's style was unique and full of charisma. Examples of his most instructive content can be found in his playlist 'Chess Endgame Course', which has, appropriately, 64 excellent videos.

GM Matthew Sadler and Game Changer

These are two separate YouTube channels from Matthew Sadler. The latter is in conjunction with WIM Natasha Regan.

20th Royal Beacon Seniors Congress

Monday 4th –
Friday 8th November

2 sections:
Genuine Seniors (65+)
"Juniors" (50+)

Entry forms downloadable on
keverelchess.com



The St. Louis live coverage is always very slick, especially when they show the Grand Chess Tour.

Whether writing books or giving talks, GM Matthew Sadler is one of the best chess communicators out there and his videos maintain this high standard. There's not a huge number of videos in these channels, but all of them make for worthwhile viewing.

SERVERS

Chess servers have come a long way in recent years. Whilst the ICC may be the Roscoe Tanner of servers, to my mind Chess.com, lichess, and Chess24 are Federer, Nadal and Djokovic, although don't ask me which is which!

One point of this admittedly flawed analogy is that the older ICC was very focused on serving up games, whereas the last three have moved the goalposts for chess servers. They have developed many excellent features. Indeed, today's armchair chess player is truly spoilt. It is not within the scope of this article to discuss these features, but servers are mentioned here as they are relevant with regard to accessing video content. Putting aside the paid content that is available depending on the level of your membership, there are a number of ways to watch free videos and streams via these servers.

When you log on to lichess you can see towards the top left of the page who is currently streaming and click the link to watch them. This is a good way to discover streamers you may otherwise have been unaware of. One such stream for me was 'PeshkaCh', aka Tihon Chernyaev, who was born in just 2010. Chess.com has a similar facility. When you hover over 'watch' on the left-hand panel of the front page you can see all the streamers currently broadcasting.

When there is an important online tournament like Arena Kings on Chess.com or the Titled Arena on lichess, there are a large number of streamers to choose from. In the latter event you will often find Magnus Carlsen playing. His monikers include 'Dr Drunkenstein' and 'manwithavan' which he

used whilst playing on the move.

Chess24 provides a great way of following all the tournament games whilst also watching live commentary. As well as the St. Louis commentators, a couple of my favourite commentators you can watch this way are Peter Svidler and, less frequently, Peter Leko. Meanwhile you can track for yourself the progress of all a tournament's games on the same page as where the video is streaming.

FUN CLIPS

The Danny Gormally Show on GingerGM's YouTube channel features some great impersonations, while 'Worst Chess Stalemate Fails' is a hilarious collection of reactions to stalemate via Alexandra Botez's channel. Also worth a watch is ChessNetwork losing to scholar's mate and being unable to stop laughing.



Danny Gormally should consider a sideline as an impressionist. His take on some of the UK's GMs is spot on.