

How I was tricked into becoming a National Master!

In 1970 I was a stubborn, but lazy, 20-year-old Class B player. I studied openings a little and tactics a little more; but, that was about it. The adrenaline rush I got while playing was what attracted me to the game. I played a lot and had a huge desire to get better. Richard Shorman had befriended me several years earlier, when I was in high school, and I thought of him as my chess teacher. What he thought of me was hard to say.

Senior Master Jude Acers had been a personal hero of mine ever since he let me have a draw in a simultaneous exhibition I had setup for him at Chabot Junior College. So, when Richard offered to let me come with him and Jude to the Alameda Chess Club where Jude was giving another simultaneous exhibition, I jumped at the chance. On the way, Richard stopped at a Casper's Hot Dogs, as Jude was hungry. Not knowing that Jude was a prodigious eater, I foolishly told him to order whatever he wanted and I would pay for it. Richard smiled. I was astonished when he ate hotdog after hotdog; all of them lathered with the works. In retrospect, it was a good investment. He gave me another draw in the simul.

Later, when Richard gave me a ride home, we parked and he gave me a little chess lesson, interspersed with Buddhism, Taoism, The Art of War, the Sutras, etc. I'm not sure how much I took in; I was a pretty poor student and I think he was fully aware of it. I had spent the entire time thinking how to frame my question. Finally, when the lesson concluded, I asked him, "Do you think I have the potential to become a master?" I was shocked when he told me that I would never become a master; but, I could, if I exerted myself, become an expert. I was more than a little depressed as I left his Volkswagen bug.

For the next decade, his words haunted me. My study habits were still mediocre, but a decade is a long time. Finally, near the end of 1981, I became a National Master. I've known Richard a long time and it has been my experience that when he asserted something, he was generally right. But, in the back of my mind was always the fact that he had misdiagnosed my potential.

This morning I had an epiphany. Richard had read me like a book. He knew that I was too lazy to get much better unless he prodded me. So, he used my stubbornness as a teaching tool. HE TRICKED ME!