

## Roman Dzindzichashvili on Chess Openings

What follows is a transcript of the first 24 minutes of a private hour long call with grandmaster Roman Dzindzichashvili and a select group of Bookup 2000 Professional users. Since this call, Bookup has been replaced by Chess Openings Wizard, a program for Windows XP and Vista. More information can be found at [www.chessopeningssoftware.com](http://www.chessopeningssoftware.com)

By the time recording started, Bookup users were already pelting Roman with specific questions on the opening. We could have edited this out but we wanted the transcript to be as true to the phone call as possible. English is not Roman's first language, so some liberties were taken to clarify the transcript.

In these first 24 minutes, Roman hammers home the concept of choosing and playing an opening **as a plan for the middlegame**. He covers the concept of picking openings that **limit the choices for your opponent**. He advises against playing any bad openings (always a temptation for club players) and he gives very specific advice for players who want to improve but don't have a lot of time to study. Finally he points out the importance of picking an **opening system** and not just a variation that your opponent can avoid, leaving you with a need to study another variation as well.

So let's jump into the call...

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**Roman:** To answer this question I have to look in the book. I'm going to skip this kind of question. For some things you can better answers from any book than from me. I don't think I should be answering. So I will try to be as helpful as I can, provided that you are going to be asking questions regarding something that is my specialty.

I got a call today that there was in a new issue of *Chess Life*, the last three or four pages, about our opening book for White. There were pretty good reviews there and that's the book I recommend everyone get.

Maybe we should start?

**Mike:** Yeah, we should start with the call. First of all, not everyone knows me or Roman, so welcome to the call. Some of you are going to be beginners, either with Bookup or with chess openings. Some of you are veterans that I've known for 20 years with the Bookup program. So welcome everybody wherever you are.

I want to tell you what this call is about and then I want to tell you a little about myself, and then I want to introduce our very, very special guest for tonight's discussion.

But first of all, this call is about chess openings. So if you were hoping to call in to have me talk about Bookup or backsolving or chess engines then you'll want to tune in those calls some other time because this call is about chess openings.

I don't think Roman knows that much about Bookup so we'll try to stick to just that topic.

So a little bit about me. Well, my name is Mike Leahy. I'm the guy who created the Bookup system and I started about 25 years ago when I was still studying at Ohio State University and starting a family with Sally and had a new job, and to unwind I would end up at the Dark Horse Chess Club on Thursday nights. I was beaten, soundly, every time I went. So I decided I needed to learn a little bit about openings, because that's what everybody else there was doing. These guys were all theory hounds. These guys had the latest *Shah Matny* bulletins and they were looking up the latest lines in the Najdorf Poisoned Pawn.

I couldn't keep up with these guys, but the job I got was programming computers. This was back in the day, before computers even had graphics. If anyone on the call remembers back that far, the first graphics card was a Hercules graphics card which was monochrome. I started writing Bookup for that. That was the first chess diagram that I'd seen done that way.

So I started making myself a flashcard system that ended up evolving into Bookup. Then I went back, and in one tournament at the Dark

Horse Chess Club I gained a little over 350 rating points. I went from about 1200 to almost 1600 in one big jump in a very competitive round robin tournament with a big club. I did it mostly by "booking up" on all of my opponents. I credit that to just studying openings, and that's where it made the biggest difference. Before that I'd studied endgames and tactics.

And then we kept going. So I've been interested in chess openings ever since.

So who I have on the line is Roman Dzindzichashvili who in my mind is one of the top opening theorists in the world and not just because he's consulted with everyone from beginners to world champions about their openings and also plays very, very well but he does the one thing that I respect more than anything else. He publishes all of his analysis. He's the guy brave enough to put on a DVD or in a book everything he thinks about the opening so that we can pick it apart. Not everybody is brave enough to do that.

**Roman:** The reason I do that is because I retired from active tournament play.

**Mike:** I'll bet that makes a big difference! If you're retired from active tournament play, I say you can say the truth about an opening because you won't lose dinner over the next round or lose anything over the next round if you're not playing. You can just say what's so.

So that's what I respect most about Roman. I had dozens and dozens of people email me back when I requested (about this call) what to ask Roman. The number one question that came up was, "What are you playing right now... and why?" I know, Roman, you play on the ICC (Internet Chess Club) and I'm sure you play more than just casual games. So, what **are** you playing? What kind of openings are you playing and how did you pick them?

**Roman:** I play openings I normally used to play in tournaments. Also I have kind of a special, designed repertoire for blitz games and that's not something I would recommend to others because I played actively

for 40 or 45 years studying openings and I have a lot wider opening repertoire than maybe most of the GMs. That's why I afford to play various, different openings, but that's not something I would recommend because in order to switch from one opening to another, you must know that you are very good at this one. Not too many world championship contenders did this in strong tournaments. I think of world championship contenders, Kasparov, Karpov and maybe a handful of others could do this but that's not normally a good idea.

What I play on ICC, not necessarily because I know every opening so well that I can switch, when I play a blitz game I want to experiment and resolve part of the game. It's as essential and important as it would be in a tournament. So openings are very, very important. I agree with Mike, what he said, but I have to add one more thing. You should never view an opening as a way to start the game like I have to know how to start the game. Openings teach you a lot about strategy, a lot about tactics because when you learn openings you learn tactics. A lot of the openings have a lot of tactics in them.

In the opening, every opening, and there is no exception, you have to build a plan for the middlegame. That's how you should view the opening, and not as "a way to start the game." It is a way to start the game, but it is a lot more than just that.

Now if you're ready to go to questions, I'm ready to do that.

**Mike:** Okay, anyone have any burning questions for Roman?

**Caller 1:** What kind of repertoire, what openings would you recommend for someone who is an attacking player but doesn't have a lot of time on his or her hands?

**Roman:** You know, I've noticed this. Over ninety percent of questions that come regarding chess are more general. When you ask me a question, a concrete question, for an attacking player who doesn't have much time, what repertoire, it's still general. Let me tell you why. First of all it depends on what your strength is and on your knowledge of openings. What is your strength?

## Caller 1: 1900

**Roman:** 1900. I would definitely recommend for White 1.e4 and when you play 1.e4 for White and they play Sicilian and you don't have much time to study... You have to know this one thing. The Sicilian is the opening where 90 percent of the choices are for Black! Black chooses the variation. Black chooses the subvariation in the variation and various different continuations. So based on your question, you don't have time to study everything especially when it's not up to you to deviate. So then I would recommend you pick up something other than one of the regular or popular variations. For example c3 on the second move or Nc3 on the second move as a Closed Sicilian or Nc3 followed by f4. That's something I have a lot of analysis for, the Grand Prix. That's what I would recommend.

I would definitely not recommend playing a Sicilian gambit or Wing gambit on the second move, e4, Nc3 and b4 because those are simply bad openings, bad variations for White. With a normal continuation for Black, with solid play for Black you will not even get equality for White. Basically Nc3 or pawn c3 on the second move. Nc3 contains two variations, the Closed Sicilian and the Grand Prix. That's what I would recommend if you don't have much time on your hands and you want to get a reasonable position and know what your plan is.

For Black, what would I recommend? For Black it is a little more difficult. I would recommend you play the Sicilian and I would always recommend you play the Accelerated Dragon variation. There you have to learn a lot more, but there are openings where you don't get to learn much. There are openings where you play ...d6, ...e6, ...g6, ...b6. It's like a subvariation of the Modern but you don't have a good position. You know, you can play on the third move h6 and on the second move a6 and you are out of the book but you don't get a good position. You want to get a reasonable position with a clearly outlined plan and learn a minimum – but necessary – amount of theory, the number of variations you have to learn. Without studying any theory, there is no answer, no way of doing it.

So that's what I would say.

**Caller 1:** Versus 1.d4?

**Roman:** Versus 1.d4 I would not go with 1...d5 because when you go ...d5 most of the choices there are for White. So you should choose something where *you* have more choices. I would go with either King's Indian or the Queen's Indian and Nimzo. That will significantly cut down White's possibilities and be easier to learn.

Actually on my DVDs I created a set of 1, 2, 3 and 4 where I cover every variation with a complete repertoire for White and for Black. That covers everything. In one of the questions I got via email that Mike sent me – I don't know if this person is on now or not – in the Accelerated Dragon why don't I cover Qa5? Who asked that question?

**Mike:** Someone emailed you that question?

**Roman:** Yes, it was Johan G.

**Mike:** Ah, yes, from the Netherlands. (*It was 3:00 AM in the Netherlands* - Editor)

**Roman:** Is he online?

**Mike:** I don't know. Johan, are you online? Probably not.

**Roman:** He asked why I recommend on my DVD Qa5 in the Accelerated Dragon on move 7 but in my book I don't even mention this move. Well, let me explain something. In the book, it's whatever fits with the repertoire for Black. It's not a complete encyclopedia. I should go either with Qa5 or with pawn a5 – and I hate to pick one of them. If I went with Qa5 then I would have been asked why not pawn a5? Qa5 is also a very sound variation.

Let's go on to the next question.

**Caller 2:** After 1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nc6 What do you think about that?

**Roman:** Well, what do I think. There are several ways White can get a very comfortable position. I don't think it fully equalizes. Okay there are several ways. The most popular move is Nf3, I think. The line that I like that I think gives White some advantage is a very simple line. After ...Nc6 move Nf3 and on ...Bg4 play cxd5 and on Bxf3 simply play exf3 and on ...Qxd5 play Be3 and on ...e5 play Bb4 (sic). White has two bishops and some advantage. There are a lot more competitive lines for White.

Are you asking this question because you are interested in what to do with White or do you want to play it for Black?

**Caller 2:** I was thinking about it as Black.

**Roman:** As Black. This is, again, a lazy way of getting out of the opening. Let me tell you something. After 1.d4 d5, if all you're going to have there after 2.c4 Nc6 then I have another question for you. What are you going to do if after 1.d4 d5 White plays 1.Nf3?

**Caller 2:** Ah, that's a good question. I guess 2...Nf6.

**Roman:** 2...Nf6. And now after 3.c4?

**Caller 2:** I'd probably take and play the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

**Roman:** That's very good. Now I have a simple question for you. So it's up to your opponent if you can get it or not. You know I have a lot of analysis, even on DVD and I played a lot of tournament games where I played this "Dzindi-Indian" opening, they called it. 1.d4 g6 2.c4 Bg7 3.Nc3 c5 4.d5 Bxc3 You guys probably know what I'm talking about, right?

**Mike:** Some of us have seen it, yeah.

**Roman:** I stopped doing that because after 1.d4 g6 2.c4 Bg7 if White does not play Nc3 and have to go e4 then we don't get it. So what is the point of spending a lot of time studying some opening where, if

White doesn't want to, you can never get it?

That's why I would recommend not "move study" but some particular system, a whole strategic system such as the Queen's Indian and Nimzo Indian. After 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 whether White goes on the third move Nc3 or Nf3 or pawn g3, the strategic ideas are all the same. That's why you want to learn openings that will serve you for a very long time. But ...Nc6 if you learn it and play it, it's okay but you cannot get it every time. You need something else as well.

**Caller 2:** What do you think about the Queen's Gambit Accepted?

**Roman:** The Queen's Gambit Accepted is a very solid opening, always was, and now is. Somebody who puts in a decent amount of time studying it, I think you should pursue it because it gives very healthy play for Black. This is a very sound opening. The reason I don't play Queen's Gambit Accepted is because it's not as competitive. It's not as much strategic play but it's very healthy. So it's a matter of taste. It's like arguing what is the best food in the world? You like that and I like this. You like Mexican and I like Chinese. Actually I have to love Mexican because I live here. You celebrate Columbus Day, but here in Mexico it wasn't Columbus and it wasn't his day!

So that's my answer. You can learn various different openings but first you have to have one that serves you no matter what White does. You know what you're doing. You know the basic strategy, your plan and what you're playing for. And then you can make it wider, wider and wider, your opening repertoire.

**Caller 2:** Okay.

**Roman:** Okay, next question?

**Caller 3:** Roman, on your tapes which I enjoy very much, you offer to help if some questions come up and I don't know how to reach you.

**Roman:** When I said on this tape, you can get in touch with me, what I meant by this if you buy the DVD, you have on the DVD who the

producer is. I meant through him. Right now I can give to all the listeners my email address. You can always contact me through email and if you include your phone number I would be happy to call you and spend a short period of time explaining. My email address is...  
(*edited for privacy - the one on the recording is obsolete - editor*)

I promise I will answer every email that I get.

**Caller 3:** Thank you very much!

**Roman:** You're welcome.

**Caller 3:** Have you considered doing a book on Bookup for one of your openings? You know, in Bookup you have separate books for different things and have you considered doing one of your books for Bookup?

**Roman:** I think after this call, when Mike calls me, when everybody's off line. (chuckles) We've talked about it. Nothing is out of the question.

24:20

*"When you learn openings, you learn tactics."* - Roman Dzindzichashvili