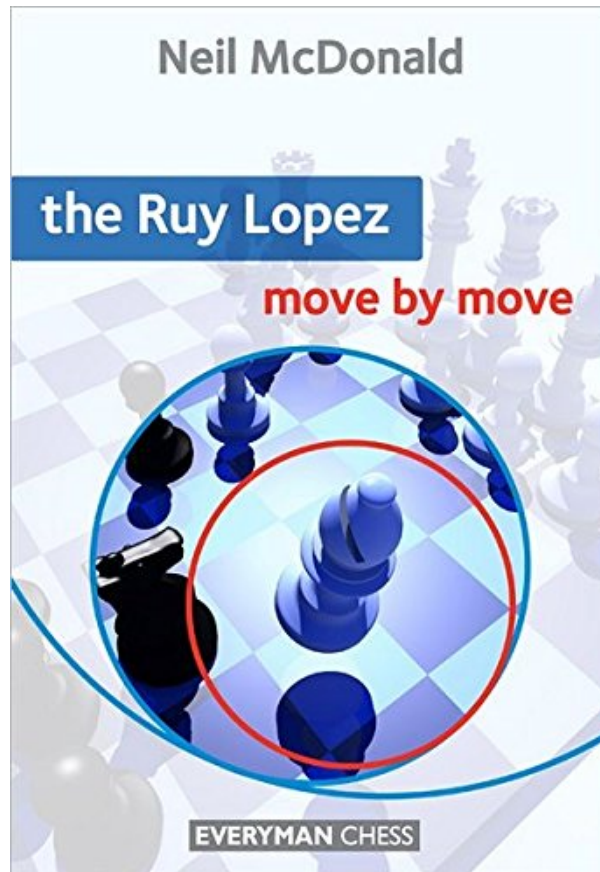


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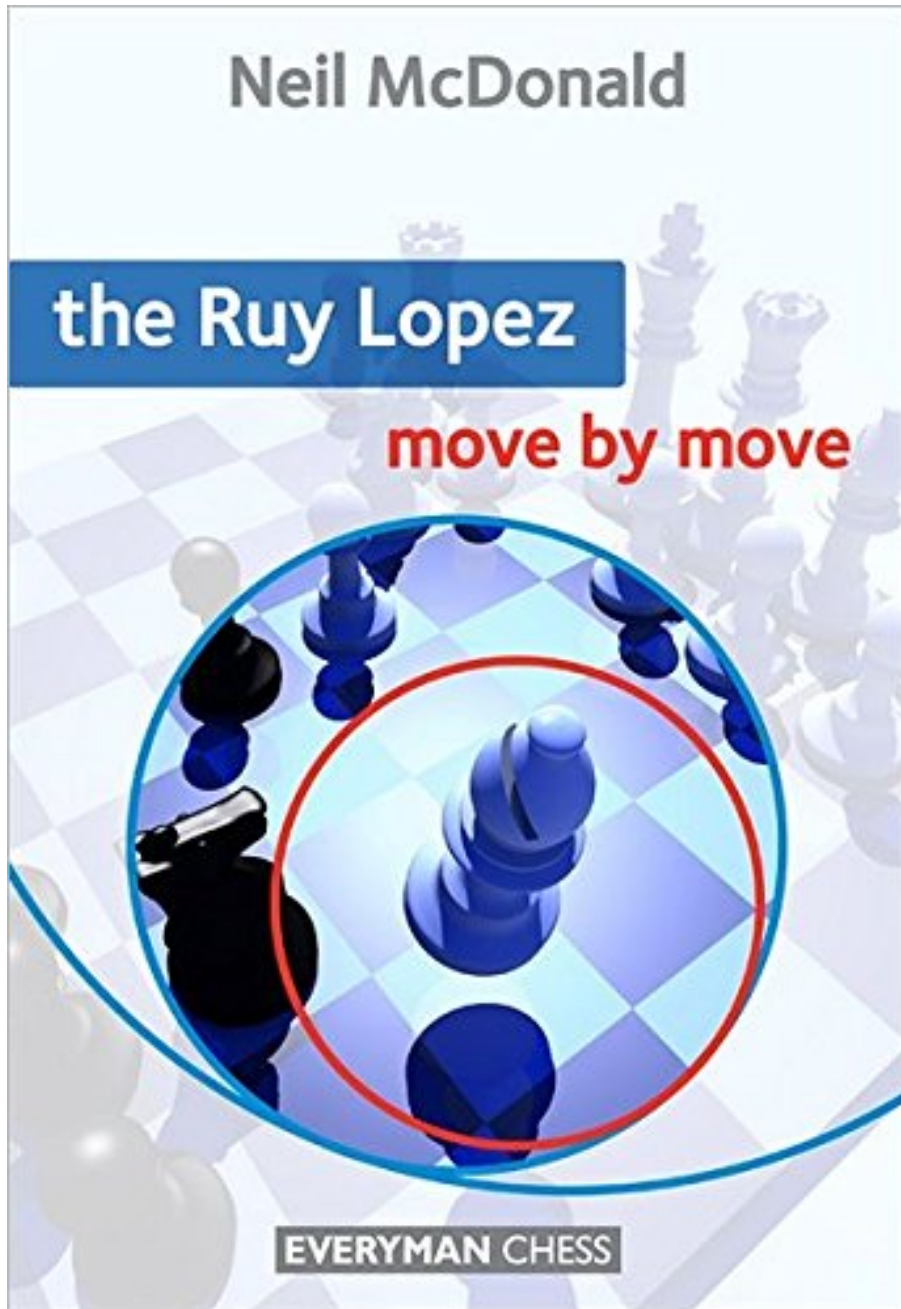
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Neil McDonald

the Ruy Lopez

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This is a new series which provides an ideal platform to study chess openings. By continually challenging the reader to answer probing questions throughout the book, the Move by Move format greatly encourages the learning and practising of vital skills just as much as the traditional assimilation of opening knowledge. Carefully selected questions and answers are designed to keep you actively involved and allow you to monitor your progress as you learn. This is an excellent way to study any chess opening and at the same time improve your general chess skills and knowledge.

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*Important ideas absorbed by continued practice

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About the Author

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writers, with many outstanding works to his name. He is also a respected chess coach who has trained many of the UK's strongest junior players.

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Great Opening Book for the Improving Player

By Mitch

I'm not an IM or a GM. I'm a 50+ year-old player who was away from chess for nearly three decades and returned actively to the game about a year ago. I've used a professional coach off-and-on, which has helped. I own lots of ChessBase videos. They help a lot. So do the videos on sites like ChessLecture.com and Internet Chess Club. I also own lots of chess books.

Like many chess players, owning lots of books doesn't mean I've read them all. Most, I have read bits and pieces. Only a couple have I read cover-to-cover. Most of the opening books I own, I bought with the plan of understanding more, as my experience grew and the lessons I was learning finally congealed.

I own several books by Neil MacDonald. All are excellent. For my level of play, his new book, "The Ruy Lopez: Move by Move," is simply the best opening book I own. By far, too.

This book reaches the goldlocks region -- not too hard and not too simple for the improving player (somewhere between 1600 and 2000 ELO, I'd say). This is not a repertoire book aimed at chess professionals. This book aims squarely at helping the club player to really understand the Ruy Lopez in general and the major variations in particular. This is done with the new question and answer format in this new Everyman Chess series.

Let me give you an example:

MacDonald asks, "How does white create an escape hatch for the bishop on a4 in the Steinitz Defense (page 16)?" The answer most readers would give is 8.c3. MacDonald explains how this is not a bad reply, but he also describes the positional features in the position and explains Carlsen chose 8.a4! in his game against Topolov in Nanjing during 2010.

Another brief example:

After white makes the typical Ruy maneuver of the queen knight b1-d2-f1, MacDonald provides the best explanation I've ever read why Ng3 is preferable in the position on the board to Ne3. He patiently describes the virtues and weaknesses of e3 in a way that is crystal clear.

You get question and answers that you'd expect from a coach to help you understand what is going on in the opening.

One last brief example:

MacDonald asks, "When should I play d2-d3."

Again, the clarity of the answer is astounding. Of course, it depends. MacDonald walks the reader through those considerations. As he reminds the reader, the earlier you play d2-d3, the more information you give the opponent about the coming pawn structure. For example, with an early d3, black can consider a fianchetto on the kingside. Keep your intentions hidden for an extra move or two, and black's practical options change.

Nowhere, have I seen another writer on chess openings explain these matters, let alone do it so lucidly.

I would argue this new book is not for the complete beginner. You should already understand the basics of positional considerations. As long as you can understand positional considerations, when someone points them out to you, then you have the necessary foundation for "The Ruy Lopez: Move by Move." If you know the basic principles of positional chess but aren't yet especially good at seeing them over the board, this book will help you ALOT.

This book also does an excellent job of pointing out tactics. Again, MacDonald will point out the tactical opportunities and provide a brief analysis of a few moves.

There are plenty of diagrams in the book. Most two page spreads have at least two and sometimes three diagrams. This is not a book loaded with numerous and lengthy variations. I'd argue, MacDonald has found an ideal mix of prose and brief analysis to reinforce the points he's making in the text.

This is the second book in this new "Move by Move" series from Everyman. Lakdawala wrote the first, on the Slav. It's also excellent. Everyman Chess is to be applauded for this new series. I own dozens of their "Starting Out!" and "Play the" series. I find those series to be uneven. Some excellent works, some OK, and a few are disappointing. It's risky to generalize from two books, but so far, this new series is consistently the best for my level play.

I bought this book and Lakdawala's "The Slav: Move by Move" with the expectation that I'd "grow into" them. They fit me perfectly right now. Lest I forget, what really does fit me so well about these books is that they really help you to understand how opening considerations affect middlegame and endgame play. These books take you through a combination of high level, recent and classic games.

OK, this review is probably sounding like a paid advertisement. I'm not a professional reviewer. Just an improving player who is really, really pleased with this new book by Neil MacDonald and this new series from Everyman.

34 of 35 people found the following review helpful.

Ruy Lopez Move By Move review

By WuvMuffin

I had just received this book today and spent most of today reading through the book. After reading Giants of Strategy by McDonald I was not disappointed at all by what McDonald is trying to convey as I read through the book. Although it is a plan based White repertoire there are some variations that are missing, but at the same time, even if you take the Ruy Lopez for a test drive after reading this book at club level you won't be blown out of the water by some analytical update Carlsen made in the Breyer because the Ruy Lopez (as mentioned) is a plan based opening. Had it been something sharp like the Marshall Gambit or the main line Zaitsev then being confronted by new analysis might be troublesome, but thankfully, McDonald provides pretty much a bulletproof repertoire. But however, there are some holes in some of the main lines and some sidelines. Allow me to elaborate:

The Chigorin repertoire: Although McDonald covers structures in the Chigorin (closed d5-e4 chain (akin to the Old Benoni structures) and semi-Open with an open C-file) he more or less only covers the Keres variation (11. ... Nd7), 11. ... Bb7 and parts of the main line such as 12. ... cxd4 with the idea of Nc6 and Bd7 and 11. ... Oc7 12. ... Rd8. I remembered the recommendations that Mihail Marin gave from his book "A Spanish Repertoire for Black" and that he recommended 12. ... Bd7 (Petrosian System) and 12. ... Nc6 (Rubinstein System). I tried looking for transpositions into those lines from McDonald's book but I don't

think he covered those variations, so coverage on how to combat these lines would be nice. At the same time I also don't believe I have any credibility in making this assessment seeing as I myself do not play nor study the Chigorin.

The modest center vs the Berlin repertoire: I have some issues with McDonald recommending 4. Qe2 against the Berlin. As John Cox from "The Berlin Wall" pointed out, Black can transpose into the Worall Attack with a simple 4. ... a6. McDonald did not cover this. Thankfully putting the Bishop on a4 is thematic and White is very unlikely to be blown out of the water as long as he plays his pawns on c3-d3-e4. His coverage against 4. Qe2 Bc5 and explanations for positional features against 4. Qe2 Bc5 is excellent though.

The Neo Archangelsk Defence vs. d3: I have some knowledge of this opening seeing as I play it as Black and often transpose into this line from the Berlin. My issue with his recommendation is that he wouldn't elaborate on more alternative moves from Black. I went through this section several times to make sure I haven't missed anything only to learn that he hasn't covered lines where Black plays Bb6 early or develops his light squared Bishop to e6 to contest with the White Bishop for the a2-g8 diagonal (well he does sort of comments on them, but not in great detail). Although McDonald claimed that in response to Be6 White should play Bc2 but missed an idea that Black could redevelop his Knight from c6 to e7 and play for the kingside with ... f5 and attempt to play in a fashion similar to Alekhine-Rubinstein Vilnius 1912 or the Zaitsev: an idea frequently occurring in the Boleslavsky Hole structures in the Sicilian, King/Old Indian structures and the Zaitsev main line. But this complaint is a mild complaint

Despite these flaws I still think this book is great for those who want to play either side of the Ruy Lopez. This book is a good survey for both colors because he/she must learn about thematic White maneuvers and motifs and compare and contrast those themes as to how Black plays against those motifs. Knowing the difference between playing against a4 and d4 as the Neo Archangel to knowing the difference between the Breyer's take on playing against a4 and d4. Also, learning how the Bishop move to b7 in the Zaitsev slows down the Nb1-Nd2-Nf1-Ng3 Knight hop and why g6 is played when a White Knight lands on g3. He even shows you Black playing the Marshall Gambit!

As a repertoire for White I have found that the material on playing d3 as a great choice for White (seeing as I will say it again, plan based) and more likely to remain bulletproof against accelerating theory, although, there are some changes I would love to make to the current repertoire:

4. d3 Bc5 5. Nc3! as played by Peter Svidler against Kramnik is what I would recommend against the Berlin. There is something elegant about recommending this variation seeing as it fits in well with McDonald's recommendation against the Archangelsk as well. After Nc3 if Black plays a6 to create an escape for the c5 Bishop White can continue Ne2 with the idea of Ng3. If Black plays 5. ... d6 White can play Na4 and make an attempt to claim the Bishop pair. Thankfully this line just requires one to make use of a database.

I did not like his recommendation against the Zaitsev. I felt that going into the main line with 12. a4 h6 is the better. And no, I am not recommending 13. Bc2 going into the labyrinth of insanity but actually 13. d5. I feel like this line is more compatible with the Breyer. Sadly there are many side variations for Black which is probably why McDonald felt reluctant to recommend 13. d5.

Overall this is a very well written book and of very high quality seeing as it had been written by Neil McDonald (maybe a bit of a high praise on my part but *Giants of Strategy* was brilliant). This book is of course a repertoire book but really all repertoire books are just starter books. You're going to have to do some hard work with scouring theoretical tomes for ideas and move-orders, database work and of course analytical study to accompany your newfound general knowledge of the Ruy Lopez. Some of the main lines

recommended might need to be expanded upon by the reader (Zaitsev, Chigorin, 4. Qe2 Berlin lines, "Moeller" lines(McDonald is quite clever in making his readers do homework isn't he?)).

As for books to accompany this book, I highly recommend John Cox's Berlin Wall which will also help players on the White side play the Berlin proper, Easy Guide to the Ruy Lopez by John Emms has some lines that are still viable today such as his Zaitsev main line, the Vol 1 and 2 of Opening for White According to Anand and of course Mihail Marin's Chigorin Repertoire.

Anyways, sorry for the lack of structure. I just sort of wrote down a scramble of things on my mind about the book.

Overall highly recommended.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Vintage McDonald

By Goosemeyer

Neil McDonald has two special skills as an author. First, he knows exactly which concrete features of a position his audience won't fully appreciate, and second he has an extraordinary ability to elaborate in such a way that you will grasp and retain the lessons. On the other hand, his opening books generally lack a systematic nature or any kind of meta-lessons. He was made for the illustrative games format. His books come across to me like a collection of beautiful vignettes, but lacking theme (an exception would be his Starting Out: Queen's Gambit Declined). It's almost inconceivable that the reader won't find enough such useful vignettes to warrant buying his books though. They're pretty much required purchases if the subject matter is interesting to you.

In this latest offering we have a format where McDonald can be at his best. These are deeply verbally annotated illustrative games, but with a strong thematic focus. He succeeds very well in opening up the Ruy Lopez to less experienced readers like me. The deeply annotated games are particularly appropriate for the opening, given that often you are still "in the Ruy" deep into the middle game, and he retains the thread well. He offers a pretty high quality starter-kit repertoire so that you can begin to play the Ruy to build some confidence, but addresses the historical mainlines with due diligence too. Obviously detailed instruction on the whole body of the Ruy would look like the Library of Congress, so he has some significant space limitations to contend with, but I think he remained at a consistent level of instruction throughout and didn't skimp on the essentials. No mean feat. If you stand back and reflect on the task that confronted him it must have been very daunting.

So, in summary, a fine author, lots of detailed explanation, an introduction to the feel of the opening and associated middlegames, and enough thematic guidance that you will be able to improvise when you hit unfamiliar territory. You will need to back it up with some more theory but you won't regret buying it.

PS: If you choose to play the Ruy and to face the Berlin proper, I can't recommend The Berlin Wall: The Variation That Brought Down Kasparov highly enough. Also, Chess Blueprints: Planning in the Middlegame is a general middlegame book that might be worth a look. Donaldson described it as "a guidebook to how to play middlegames arising from 1.e4 e5 (mostly the Ruy Lopez) primarily from White's perspective", but I haven't read it so I can't elaborate.

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