

CREATIVE ANNOTATION MARKS

By Bob Basalla

I've told this anecdote before, but it deserves retelling here. A young student of a fellow chess instructor asked a very interesting question. Since on a scoresheet a check is written as a plus (+) and checkmate is given as two plusses (++) (To be sure, the hashtag (#) is now often used for the checkmate symbol), what was the symbol for stalemate?

I found this to be an original and pertinent question! There did seem to be a hole in standard chess notation. Stalemate should have its own symbol! And so, to rectify the situation I resolved to create one.

The new symbol required three qualities. It should be succinct, no more than two or three keystrokes to render it. It should use only letters or symbols available on a standard Western typewriter keyboard. And if possible, it should not be arbitrary as otherwise all such entries to the "stalemate symbol sweepstakes" could be viewed as equally valid; things would come down to merely a matter of taste.

The reasoning for my proposal goes thus: Check is given as a single plus (+). Checkmate, being a definitive game ending check, is given as two plusses (++). An even position (drawn, assuming best play, of course) is represented by the equals sign (=). Therefore, to my mind, stalemate should be two equals signs (= = with a space between so it wouldn't look like this: ==). That would indicate stalemate is a game ending definitive draw, completely analogous to the reasoning for the checkmate symbol. Make sense?

Naturally, success at concocting a viable new basic annotation symbol goes to one's head. "Why can't I create even more revolutionary notation and annotation marks?" I immediately asked myself. So I set to it and here are the results, admittedly mostly of the tongue in cheek variety. Hope you enjoy.

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First, we need to review the basic annotation marks already accepted so readers will understand when we riff off them. Here they are:

! means a good move
!! means a great move
? means a poor move

?? means an outright blunder

?! means a doubtful or dubious move, probably bad

!? means an interesting, tricky, possibly good move

A triangle is interpreted as "with the idea of"

An infinity sign (effectively a sideways 8) means the position is considered unclear

means White won

means Black won

1/2-1/2 means a drawn game

+- means White has a winning position

-- means Black has a winning position

+/- means White stands clearly better

--/+ means Black stands clearly better

+/= means White is slightly better

=/+ means Black is slightly better

= means an even position

means castles kingside

0-0-0 means castles queenside

+ means check

++ means checkmate

is another denotation for checkmate

= = is my suggested notation for stalemate

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Acronym shorthand for phrases used in e-mails and the like could be co-opted for the annotator's quiver. Consider these:

1.Pe4 Ph5 LOL

1.Pe4 Pc5 2.Pb4 OMG

1.Pe4 Nc6 2.Nf3 Pf5 WTF

And so on.

>< (made from the "greater than" and "lesser than" symbols typed consecutively) could stand for an extra big or significant capture. A worthy example would be Morphy's queen sacrifice against Paulsen in the American championship tournament of 1857 which the new notation would accentuate like this: 17...Qd3><Bf3!!

[] (consecutive brackets) could symbolize lack of space or maybe a completely blocked position.

An upside-down exclamation point before a chess move followed by an exclamation point after the move signifies a

good move in the Spanish Game, or at least by a Spanish player. The same would apply to an upside-down question mark before and an upright question mark after for a bad Spanish Game play. Obviously, all the other annotation verdicts (!!, ??, ?!, !?) could follow suit in the same manner.

(#?) before the first move of a game score clues the reader in that the board was set up wrong with h1 being a dark square (a hashtag sort of resembles a portion of a board). Similarly, [KQ] means the positions of the White king and queen started reversed (White king on d1, White queen on e1). [qk] would correspondingly mean that the Black king and queen started reversed. [KQqk] of course indicates that both sets of kings and queens are reversed. (White pieces being displayed in caps and Black pieces being displayed in small case is a convention taken from Forsyth-Edwards notation. Look it up.)

===== depicts a so—so---so dead drawn position.

An underscored 0 in a result (0-1 or 1-0) informs us that not only has said player lost, they also hit their rating floor.

=/0 implies that although the position is in actuality even, Black is sure to screw it up. 0/= is its White counterpart.

0/0 betokens both players being objectively lost.

Consecutive infinity symbols represent “it is unclear that the position is unclear.”

+, +, +... followed by the infinity symbol describes a perpetual check. An infinity symbol before or after a single + might be misinterpreted as meaning “it is unclear this is a check.”

\$=\$ evinces a Grandmaster draw in a late round of an Open.

0-0-0-o-... is the symbol for a too-vigorously castled king sliding off the board.

Ph8(Q?R?N?B?) indicates that the cis-pawn is still troubled and questioning how (or if) it should transition.

!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?,, randomly, endlessly, represents an irrational annotation for an irrational move.

(--Pc4-c2) White should retract his previous move before the opponent returns from the restroom.

A triangle followed by a timepiece face expresses “with the idea of starting the opponent’s clock.”

0% signals the reader about the annotator’s further interest in commenting on this game.

F@#&!S*^T should be the international symbol for a particularly infuriating move.

Quotation marks around a plus (“+”) symbolize what is commonly referred to as the spite check (Example: Qc4“+”). “ ” around other symbol sets would correspond to other pointless moves or ideas, “as if” in various contexts.

® would be reimagined as meaning “random moves would improve the play hereabouts.”

© would of course be a copyrighted move. You may have heard about the push to allow copyrighting of games, assuring a consistent stream of income for budding professional chess players. Well, below the radar there is underway a similar push to copyright individual moves. Already a market has been established for the purpose of selling these “move futures,” like bitcoin in a way. Predictably, chess oligarchs and their lackeys with political “ins” and/or “pull” have already corruptly snapped up the choice property (Pe2-e4 and the like). But many more remain to be purchased. I am proud to announce my very own proprietary move: Pg7xNh8(B)+. It cost me a pretty penny, but when copyrighting moves becomes a reality, I will be on the ground floor with lucrative royalties set to pour in hand over fist. I invite you to get in the habit of employing my move in as many of your games as possible! I won’t gouge you; I intend to make my profit by volume. And use my move a second time in the same game for free! BOGO for Bogo! Don’t give your “move rental” money to those other guys.

Got any ideas of your own? I thought so! Find a way to send them to Bob Basalla so we can further flesh out later iterations of this article. All those with accepted entries will be given full credit for their brainstorm.

"The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand."
~ Vince Lombardi