

# Chess Connections

*A space for kids, by kids*

## *Q&A with WGM Jennifer Yu*

*2019 US women's  
champion*



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# Editorial Letter

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July 1, 2021

Dear Reader,

For around one and a half years, over-the-board (OTB) chess has largely hibernated, leaving many players stuck in their homes and playing online tournaments. Now, there is a resurgence of OTB tournaments in the U. S. this summer, with the National Open and World Open attracting many players around the country. It is an opportunity for many chess enthusiasts to test their skills after a long wait, and to also socialize with many other chess players. I hope OTB tournaments will draw more people to chess and connect more people to Chess Connections.

In the second issue of Chess Connections, many new writers are featured while our editorial team has also grown. I am humbly taking the role of Editor-in-Chief, but the success of Chess Connections relies on the entire team, consisting of editors, designers, writers, and you, the readers. Also, in this issue, you will find an interesting interview with WGM Jennifer Yu, the 2019 U. S. Women's Champion. I hope that her advice and her pathway to success will help inspire chess players to gain interest and continue playing chess.

Now and in the future, I envision *Chess Connections Magazine* continuing to connect the global community of young chess players together in collaboration, communication, and harmony. I am proud to share this collection of articles with you today, and hope that the columns found in this issue will be inspirational and motivate you to go further in your chess career. We are consistently in need of dedicated editors and writers, so please join us to make Chess Connections serve the chess community better.

Justin Wang

Editor-in-chief, *Chess Connections*



# Meet Our Team

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## Editorial and Design Team

### **IM** Justin Wang, *Editor-in-Chief*

Justin first started to learn chess at age 7 and is currently an International Master. His notable achievements include finishing in 3rd place in the World Youth U10 Championship in 2015 and winning the U.S. Cadet Championship in 2019.



Justin co-founded the non-profit organization Chess In Action with his brother Jason to promote chess especially with underprivileged communities. Justin's goal for *Chess Connections* is to connect with chess communities around the world and positively influence chess players who want to improve in the game.

### **WFM** Ellen Wang, *Managing Editor, Designer*

Ellen is an 8th grader at Horace Mann School in New York. Since starting chess at the age of 6, she has been playing competitively at the regional, national, and international levels. In 2017, she won three international medals in one summer: Bronze at the Pan American Chess Championships G10, Gold at the North American Youth Chess Championships G14, and Bronze at the World Cadets Chess Championships G10. She was also the 2019 K-6 Co-Champion of the Greater New York Scholastic Chess Championships. Recently, she won the 2020 North American Junior Girls Chess Championship, which awarded her the conditional WIM title and a WGM norm.

Around chess, Ellen has been actively engaged in philanthropic work. Together with her 2020 USATE second-place winning team, the Unruly Queens, she has been hosting free online tournaments and camps, and has been a guest speaker at US Chess Women seminars. Beyond chess, Ellen is a strong debater, a passionate flutist, and an enthusiastic tennis player and swimmer.



## NM Davis Zong, Jr., *Associate Editor*

Davis Zong is a 9th grader at Hunter College High School in New York City. He qualified for and competed at the U8, U10, and U12 world cadets chess championships and has won both the elementary and junior high NYC Championships. He became a national master in 6th grade.

Davis is a writer and editor for the school newspaper. He also wrote several articles on the USCF website. Davis loves to share the beauty of chess around the world.



## Emily Yao, *Director of Design*

Emily is a 9th grader with a love for art and graphic design. Her art accomplishments include Scholastic Art and Writing Awards gold key, 1st place in the HYAC Visual Arts Contest, and an honorable mention in the national PTA Reflections program. She hopes that she will be able to help *Chess Connections* create a wholesome chess community.



## Anjali Lodh, *Designer*

Anjali is an 8th grader from Coralville, Iowa. She is the current Iowa Girls Chess Champion and represented Iowa in the Ruth Haring Girls Tournament of Champions in 2019 as well as in 2020. She co-founded a non-profit chess organization called "Chess Butterflies" dedicated to inspiring young girls to become confident chess players. She is an aspiring graphic designer and loves to design things in her free time. She has also written several articles for Iowa's chess publication, "En Passant." Some of her hobbies include playing violin, trumpet, and playing basketball.



## Jason C. Wang, *Advisor*



# AN INTERVIEW WITH WGM JENNIFER YU



Photo Credit: Saint Louis Chess Club

## From the interviewers

NM Ellen Wang  
IM Justin Wang

*WGM Jennifer Yu is a legend and an icon in US chess history - the first American female to win Gold at the World Youth Chess Championships Girls U12 in 27 years, the first Asian-American crowned the US Women's Chess Champion, and a Harvard student. When interviewed by Chess Connections' editorial team, she reflected on her chess journey and school life, and many lessons she herself learned are certainly inspiring for young chess fans.*

## What attracted you to chess initially?

I was in a chess club at my elementary school, and if we won games we would be given chess keychains. I wanted to collect all of them. The club only lasted about a month, so I didn't get that many.

## What is your favorite aspect of chess?

Probably that every game is its own game; nothing carries over and it's always a fresh start.

## What is your typical chess-studying routine?

For most of my life, my routine would be 95% Chess.com tactics trainer. If you check my stats, I've done an insane amount of tactics, because that's all I would do. Everything else was kind of random. But in the past year or two, I've tried to switch stuff up and actually study.



Photo Credit:  
Saint Louis Chess Club

## How do you manage your time during a game?

I'm a time trouble person, but I've been writing down my time next to each move for the past five years or longer. I don't look at the times after the game, but if during the game I realize that I spent ten minutes on a move, I tell myself, "*what are you doing, just move.*" If the time control is something with a sudden death, I try to spend less than half my time before 20 moves. But I'm not the best person to ask.

“

**What are  
you doing,  
just MOVE!**

“

**I am a big believer in treating every opponent the SAME.**

**Do you approach different games/situations with different mindsets?**

I'm a big believer in treating every opponent the same. For example, when you're playing a lower rated player, you should give the game the same focus that you would if you're playing someone higher rated.

I've played in a few must-win situations, and I think confidence is a big thing, which I've realized just very recently. Just give it your best shot; must-wins are very hard.

**What do you think is your biggest strength with the game?**

I used to answer this question with something like “I don't give up!” because I used to be really good at swindling people, coming back from bad positions, or finishing strong in the second half of a tournament—I would have really bad results in the beginning half and then win four games in a row. However, now, this is something I struggled a little bit with. But I still keep fighting!

I would say that I'm also a really creative and aggressive player. I like to try unconventional things during the game—sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, but I think it makes the game interesting.



## How do you cheer yourself up after a big upset?

This is actually one of my strong suits; I can get over bad results very quickly. I think it's just about leaving it in the past and focusing on the next round. Like I said before, it's nice how in every game you can start brand new. At least for me, dwelling on bad results does not help me get motivated for the next round. I just think to myself: *what can I learn from this loss?*

## How do you prepare for a major tournament like the US Women's Championships? In addition to opening preparation, tactics, etc, how do you mentally prepare for the upcoming challenge?

In tournaments like the US Championships where I know who I am going to play, I always scope out the field and start prepping against the players. That's how I approach big tournaments opening-wise.



“

**I can get over bad results very QUICKLY.**

For everything else, I don't really change my routine that much. But before a tournament, I think it's good to just do really simple tactics because it helps with blunders.

## What was your favorite game that you've ever played in the US Women's Championships?

I always say my game against Anna Zatonskih in 2019 because it was the game that won me US Champs, and it was very straightforward.

But in 2018, I did really badly in the beginning rounds of the tournament, like it was awful. I didn't know what was going on. I think it was the day after the rest day, and I was playing Maggie Feng as White. I had several mental breakdowns before this game and I was just so done with this tournament, but I played 1.b4, won the game, and had a 4 game winning streak after that. I really liked that; it was just a fun game.

## What has motivated you to keep improving in chess? What is your goal for your chess career?

Personally, I had a really hard time pushing myself in chess a few years ago. It was something where I was already doing it and I might as well continue; it was my main extracurricular. But in the past few years, chess became something I really wanted to improve at, to see where I would go.

I think every chess player has the goal of "I want to become a grandmaster someday." But right now, I have [around] five IM norms, so I need to get IM, and we'll see what happens after that.



Photo Credit: Saint Louis Chess Club

## What are some other activities you sacrificed for chess?

I remember my freshman year of high school, I tried to do everything. I was doing cross country, a little bit of debate. I still played piano, and sort of did marching band. I was in almost every club. And then in sophomore year, I dropped basically everything. I couldn't do it anymore, it just didn't make sense. A lot of the school activities that I wanted to do I couldn't really do because they all conflicted.

I would also miss a lot of school at a time. In my junior year, I went to the [Women's Chess] Olympiad for two weeks, so I had to make that up. Then I would miss another two weeks of school for US Champs, so that entire year felt like I was just making up schoolwork. It also wasn't the easiest year; junior year is just terrible.

At the time, it was a sad thing. But looking back, I think it was worth it, because I put my time into one thing that I could be good at rather than doing everything that I would just be around average at.

## What do you think you learned from chess that benefitted you for school and life?

I think [it is] handling pressure. Playing chess, you're always in a lot of high pressure situations, either at the end of the tournament or in a game that was extremely important. I think that helped me a lot in school, for example if I had an important test. Once you've been in so many high-stake games, one test does not seem like a lot anymore. It's still important, but it doesn't feel as stressful because you've already had this kind of experience.



We all know that it is hard to find a balance between school and chess, especially in high school. You are an excellent example to look up to, so what advice would you give to students who are also passionate chess players?

I made a mistake my junior year where I took all AP classes and there was a lot of homework every day. It was really hard adjusting to that, along with missing school and taking SAT's. I actually didn't really work on chess that much that year, because it was just so hard. So I think it's good to know how much you can handle, workload-wise, and then leaving at least an hour a day for chess.

“

**Also, procrastination. It's such a BAD thing.**

Know your limits, but still try to take all the classes you can and everything you want to do. My mindset was just like “take every class you can so you can get into college.” Now I look back and realize that I could've chosen a course that would've looked just as good on my transcript and saved me a lot of time had I not been so preoccupied with taking all AP or “advanced” courses. I could've used that time to work on chess, or just talk to my friends.

Also, procrastination. It's such a bad thing, but I still do it a lot. I would've saved so much time if I did the things I actually needed to do not at the last minute. I know a lot of chess players, or people who got into really good colleges, and they always talk about how badly they procrastinate. I think that just goes to show how it's such a myth when I hear parents talk about things like, “*oh, look at these people who are successful, they definitely do stuff on time.*” No, everyone struggles with this.

Which major are you claiming in college?  
How do you envision your chess playing  
after college graduation when you are  
pursuing another career in the  
meanwhile?

I'm on a gap year right now, and I'm undecided because at Harvard you choose your major in sophomore year. I used to be 100% pre-med, but now I'm a little bit more flexible so I'm still looking at my options.

I'm definitely going to continue to play chess during college, but after [college], I don't know, it's still kind of up in the air. It just depends on where I'll be.



Have you watched “The Queen’s Gambit”? Does Beth Harmon’s story in certain ways relate to your own, especially the obstacles she faced in a predominantly male world of chess?

I did watch “The Queen’s Gambit,” and I liked it a lot. At the beginning, the obstacles Beth faced were the comments people made because she was a girl, which has definitely happened to me as well. Growing up, I would also hear comments like that. People will always look down on you, or at least they have during my career. If I accomplished something, someone might say like “*oh, that’s because you’re a girl.*” I just try to ignore it. So I do definitely relate to those aspects of the obstacles she faced.

What do you think the chess community can do or the US federation can do to help promote chess among female players?

There are always a lot of girls playing when they first start or in elementary school, and I think the stats support that. The main drop-off point is entering around high school. That matches my personal experience: I had a lot of friends playing chess in my area and I think all of them quit when they got into high school.

It might be good to have tournaments or programs targeting that age, because I think there's a lot of programs targeting the younger demographic. It will definitely help to have girl events for around the high school age because it is good for girls to have peers that they can identify with.

Based on your experience, what do you think is the most valuable help your parents provided to you? As a chess player, what suggestions do you have for chess parents?

My parents always supported me, which was the most important thing. They pushed me even when I didn't want to and at the time, I didn't like it but now I'm really grateful.

But for parents, it's also important to know where the line is. I see this a lot with parents, where they want their kid to do good, but it comes at a very big cost. Just don't push the kid too far, because I think this is a very common thing among chess parents especially. So support your children, but don't become too invested in results.



*Photo Credit: Saint Louis Chess Club*

# A CHRONICLE OF JENNIFER YU'S CHESS JOURNEY

**Started chess  
at school club**

*At the age of 7*

*2014*

**Gold medalist at the  
World Youth Chess  
Championships Girls  
U12 in South Africa**

**3-time winner of the  
National Girls  
Tournament of  
Champions**

*2014/2015/2016*

*2015*

**Winner of the VA  
State Closed  
Championship, the  
youngest player and  
the first female to  
do so**

**US Team member at  
the Women's World  
Team Championship**

*2017*

**Board 5 Individual  
Bronze Medalist at  
the Women's Chess  
Olympiad**



**US Women's  
Champion**

*2018*

**Tied for first at  
Charlotte Chess  
Center's Winter 2018  
IM Norm Invitational**

*2019*

# US Russia

By Roger Shi

# TEAM MATCH RECAP



On February thirteenth, the first GMI US–Russia Team Competition took place online. There were two teams from each country: Team A (USCF rating 1800–2100 or FIDE rating 1800–2000), and Team B (USCF rating 1100–1600 or FIDE rating 1000–1500). After the games, GM Nadezhda Kosintseva reviewed all the games. This wasn't just a friendly sparring match—the top finish from each team (A and B) won \$75.

The format was simple. Participants played 4 games with the same opponent from the opposing

team: two 30 + 10 games and two 5 + 3 games. Winning a G30+10 game earned 5 points (2.5 for a draw and 0 for a loss) and winning a G5+3 game earned 1 point (0.5 for a draw and 0 for a loss). Each team needed at least 24.5 points to win!

*I posted 10 puzzles for you all to solve from the matches. You will be able to know whose move it is to play due to the way the board is flipped. Enjoy!*

	Team A USA	FIDE Rating	USCF Rating	Team A Russia	FIDE	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	US: Russia final	US total	Russia Total
Board 1	Brandon Jiang	1954	2110	Igor Vershinin	1862	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	0 -12	0	12
Board 2	Andrew Jiang		2071	Kirill Smorodkin	1802	Draw	Draw	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	5:7	5	7
Board 3	Marvin Gao	1663	2066	Aleksey Ignatiev		Draw	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	USA Wins	4.5:7.5	4.5	7.5
Board 4	Kevin Su		1979	Ivan Rogov		Russia Wins	Russia Wins	USA Wins	Russia Wins	1:11	1	11
											<b>10.5</b>	<b>37.5</b>
	Team B USA	FIDE Rating	USCF Rating	Team B Russia								
Board 1	Sara Gupta	1282	1582	Leila Tabermakova	1585	Russia Wins	USA Wins	Russia Wins	Russia Wins	5:7	5	7
Board 2	Roger Shi		1572	Mikhail Akinkhov	1561	USA Wins	USA Wins	USA Wins	USA Wins	12:0	12	0
Board 3	Emils Steiners	1292		Kamil Khabibullin	1426	USA Wins	USA Wins	USA Wins	Russia Wins	11:1	11	1
Board 4	David Jin		1390	Lev Shangin	1029 (USCF)	USA Wins	USA Wins	Draw	USA Wins	11.5:0.5	11.5	0.5
											<b>39.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>

#1



Team A, Board 1;  
Level: Intermediate

#2



Team A, Board 2;  
Level: Easy

#3



Team A, Board 2;  
Level: Easy

#4



Team A, Board 3;  
Level: Hard

#5



Team B, Board 1;  
Level: Hard

#6



Team B, Board 3;  
Level: Easy

#7



Team B, Board 3;  
Level: Easy

#8



Team B, Board 3;  
Level: Easy

#9



Team B, Board 4;  
Level: Intermediate

#10



Team B, Board 2;  
Level: Easy

**Solutions on  
next page!**

# ABOUT ME

Hey everyone! I am Roger Shi, I'm currently 12 years old, I like to play soccer, basketball, and of course chess! I am part of the Top Bloggers' program on chess.com, I'm around 1800 online USCF and trying to become titled in the future.

## Notable Tournament Achievements:

- 2021 Online San Francisco Scholastic Champion
- 3rd Place finish at k-6 SoCal Championship
- Captain of the San Diego Sorcerers, winner of the USA Team North K-8 Prize.

Checkout my chess.com blog at: [chess.com/blog/Roger436](https://chess.com/blog/Roger436)

## Answer Key:

Problem #1: 1. f6+, Kh7 (If 1...Kg8, then 2. Qh6 with mate on the next move; if 1...Kf8, 2. Qh6+; 1...Ke8, 2. Qh8+ Kd7 3. Nc5#) 2. Ng5+ Kg8 3. Qa7, White is completely winning. A cool line to proceed is 3...h4 4. Qa8+ Qd8 5. Qxd8+ Rxd8 6. e6, and after fxe6, White can play 7. f7+ Kf8 and 8. Ne6.

Problem #2: In the game, Black was unable to find the mate in 3 as follows: 1...Qg4+ 2. Kh1 and 2...Qh3, and it is now unstoppable for White to stop both mating threats on f1 and h2.

Problem #3: White's position is extremely scary with two connected passed pawns racing down the board, although there is a resource that saves the game. 1...Rxc2+ 2. Kxc2 is forced (If 2. Kf1, 2...Qg4 and if 2. Kh1, 2...Qxh2#) and after 2...Qg4+ 3. Kf1 Qh3+, even if the king runs out to e2 there will be no shelter to hide and the queen and rook will work very well to chase the king around.

Problem #4: 1. Bg7! Now why is this move so amazing? Well they can't take on g7 or else Qxg7#, and if they try to protect the bishop they're getting mated, and if 1... Be7, 2. Bxh6 is just crushing! Black will be forced to simply let their bishop be captured! The game continued with 1...b4, 2. Qf6 Qe6 3. Qxe6, and 4. Bxf8 on the next move.

Problem #5: 1. Nxd5 the queen is hanging right? Well yes. Yes it is. 1...Bxd4 2. Nxe7+ Kg7 3. Bxd4 f6 4. Nc6, Qc7 5. Nxb8, Qxb8. White went on to win the game.

Problem #6: A simple mate in 3. 1...Rh7, threatening Rh1#, is unstoppable (1...Kc2 also leads to a mate in 3), but can be delayed after 2. Rg4 Rh1+ 3. Rg1 Rxc1#.

Problem #7: White has just played Rxf5 and overlooked Black's mating threat after Black's previous move, Kc7. The simple mate in 1 is 1...Bd6#.

Problem #8: White's dark-squared bishop is lined up towards Black's queen. White played 1. b5, and the knight and queen are now attacked! White went on to win this game in the next 10 moves.

Problem #9: 1. Nf6+! If 1...Qxf6, White can simply play 2. Rxf8+ and pick up the queen next move and they are winning. The game continued after 1. Nf6+ with 1...Kg7 2. Bxf8+ Kh8 3. Bh6+ and White will deliver mate next move.

Problem #10: I was actually playing this game as Black; did you find the mate in 2 that I spotted? 1...e2+ 2. Rxe2 is now forced and 2...Rg1# is checkmate.



# Alekseenko's Road to the Candidates

By Jerry Xue

The most prestigious event outside of the World Championship Match itself has just concluded, and Ian Nepomniachtchi has earned the right to challenge Magnus Carlsen later this year. In this article, I want to talk about the young Russian wildcard Kirill Alekseenko's performance in the 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament as well as his road to it.

Alekseenko qualified for wildcard contention in the 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament by placing 3rd in the FIDE Chess.com Isle of Man Grand Swiss. He went undefeated through 11 games and scored 7.5 points, facing the likes of Carlsen, Anand, Grischuk, So, and Karjakin. He finished half a point behind Wang Hao, who qualified from the tournament, and Caruana, who already had a spot in the Candidates from being the runner-up in the 2018 World Championship, but he had the highest tiebreaks among the group of players on 7.5.

Because of this amazing performance, he was one of the few players capable of being selected as a wildcard by finishing 3rd place. Because the organizers already announced earlier that a Russian player would be chosen as the wildcard, he was selected.

In the Candidates tournament, Alekseenko did not disappoint. In the first part, he made 5 draws and lost 2 games, which is not a bad performance itself, but had an excellent 2nd half, winning against Grischuk and Giri, two world-class opponents. The youngest player in the field has obviously improved his chess since the last part of the Candidates. Today, I want to show his win against Karjakin in round 11 of the Grand Swiss, which was instrumental in his third place finish.



Alekseenko said in an interview that this is the best game of his career.



In the Candidates tournament, Alekseenko did not disappoint. In the first part, he made 5 draws and lost 2 games, which is not a bad performance itself, but had an excellent 2nd half, winning against Grischuk and Giri, two world-class opponents. The youngest player in the field has obviously improved his chess since the last part of the Candidates. Today, I want to show his win against Karjakin in round 11 of the Grand Swiss, which was instrumental in his third place finish.

Alekseenko said in an interview that this is the best game of his career. Let's take a look at how he beat Sergey Karjakin in the penultimate round and went on to book himself a trip to the Candidates.

[To view the game and analysis, please download the PGN \(Portable Game Notation\) file below.](#)

As you can see, Alekseenko is a talented young player with a bright future ahead of him. I wouldn't be surprised if he would be among the world's elite in a few years and I hope you will follow his chess too!

## Bio:

Jerry Xue is an avid chess player from Cary, North Carolina. He recently won the NC K-8 State Championship and will be playing in the Barber Tournament of Middle school champions later this year. Outside of chess, he loves to play tennis as well as his clarinet.

# KIDS HELP K · I · D · S

By Davis Zong

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



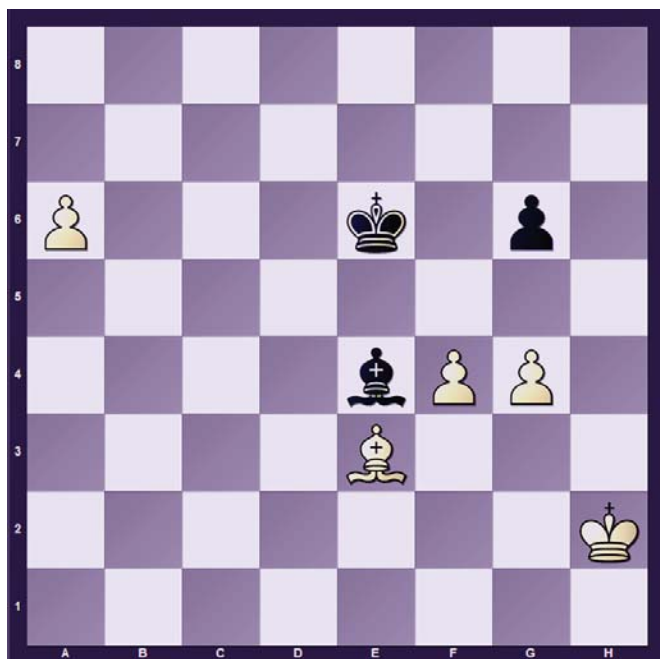
NM Davis Zong Jr. is a 9th grader at Hunter College High School in New York City. He Qualified for and competed at the U8, U10, and U12 world cadets chess championships and has won both the elementary and junior high NYC Championships. He became a national master in 6th grade. He also serves as an Editor for Chess Connections Magazine.

A passionate author describes his involvement in a program called Chess4Unity, and shares positions from endgame sessions he has hosted.

Watching the pieces remotely move around the orderly pixels of the computer screen, I imagined myself face to face with the enthusiastic student, a chess set on the table between us. Gazing at the zoom rectangle on the top right corner, it felt as if I was looking through a portal into another world. I can still remember a World Cadets Chess Championship, where I met my friends Vincent Tsay, Liran Zhou, and Arthur Xu. When they first invited me to Chess4Unity (C4U), a program where older kids help younger kids, I was delighted to interact with other passionate chess players from all over the country, many of whom I had never met before. We would hold events every one or two months, where a few experienced players would teach one or two students in a game review or endgame session. I will present a couple of positions from some of my endgame sessions.

The following position is from one of my games against a Grandmaster, where I was playing black. This opposite colored bishops ending, though simple in appearance, has a hidden forest of complexities and a roller coaster of emotions behind it.

## White to Play:



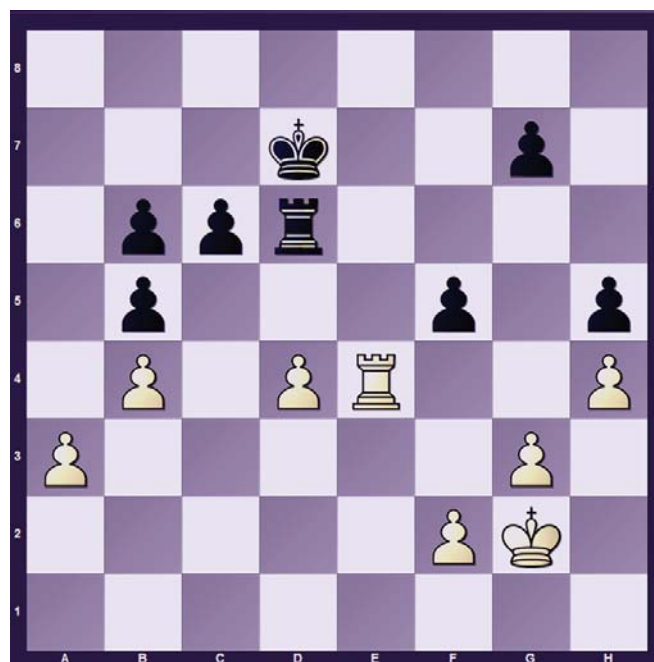
When the student first saw the position, he was convinced that it was an easy draw for Black. After all, all black needs to do is bring the king to a8 and sacrifice the bishop for the remaining two white pawns to leave his opponent with a rook pawn and wrong colored bishop. He triumphantly explained that white needed to bring the king to g5 and play f5 to break through, and that by that time, the black king would be ready on a8.

I could almost imagine him banging out the moves over the board as he exclaimed the following line leading to a draw: 1. a7 Kd7 2. Kg3 Kc7 3. Kh4 Kb7 4. Kg5 Ka8 5. f5 gxf5 6. gxf5 Bxf5! 7. Kxf5, 1/2-1/2. The fun was only beginning, though. After he thought a bit more, he realized that it was a guaranteed white win! In a blissful moment of realization, he saw that after 2. f5 gxf5 3. gxf5, the pawn was taboo. After 4. Bd4 and 5. f6 the black king would be tied to the passer and white's king could slowly inch to b8 and promote the a-pawn to win. (On 3...Kc8 4. f6 Bd5 5. f7 black loses by a single tempo!). Ultimately, the verdict of the position did transpire to be 1-0, but not after many plot twists. Here is the main line: 1. a7 Kd6! 2. Bb6!! (2. f5 gxf5 3. Bf4+ (3. gxf5 Ke5 =) Ke6 4. g5 Bd5! =) Bd5! (2...Kd7 3. f5 gxf5 4. gxf5 Kc8 5. f6 +/-, winning by a tempo) 3. Kg3(h3)! Kd7 4. Kh4 Kc8 5. Kg5 +/- and now although black's bishop is one move quicker to stop the f-pawn, it is one move slower to protect g6. In the real game, after 1. a7 Kd6 2. Bb6 Bd5 the opponent, under time trouble, played 3. g5 instead of the winning Kg3/h3, allowing me to acquire a draw. That's pretty cool for a position with only 8 pieces!

Here is another one of my games against a Grandmaster, where I was playing white. The decision in the diagram below may seem automatic, but there is more than what meets the eye.

When I presented this position, the student was intrigued at why he would be given such a boring, drawn rook endgame. It almost seemed like I pulled up the wrong study, but this dull looking position is what had been intended. Surprisingly, the result of the game hinges upon white's next move! The call is obviously between 1. Re5 and 1. Rf4, but which one? The latter seems to attack f5 and protect d4 while 1. Re5 g6 seems to just drop a pawn, so evidently it's a no-brainer, right? Nope. After a few sample lines of 1. Rf4 g6 it seems that black is winning no matter what white plays and that is indeed the case: there is no stopping Ke6-d5 and Re6-e1 followed by the a3 and d4 pawns dropping. A sample black win goes: 1. Rf4 g6 2. Kf1 Ke6 3. Ke2 Kd5 4. Kd3 Rd8 (threatening Ra8) 5. Rf3 Ra8 6. Kd2 Re8 7. Kd3 Re4 8. Rf4 Re1, when a3 and/or d4 will go soon. In fact, white is lost after 1. Rf4 despite the equal material. The pawn sac 1. Re5 g6 turns out to save white, as long as he sacrifices it correctly with 2. d5!, allowing a fortress after both 2...cxd5 3. Kf1 Kc6 (3...d4 is playing with fire: 4. Rxb5 d3 5. Ke1 d2+ 6. Kd1 and white is the one playing for the win!) 4. Ke2 d4 5. Kd3 = and 2...Rxd5 3. Rxd5 cxd5 4. f4 d4 5. Kf3 Kd6 6. Ke2 and white draws by moving

## White to Play:



the king to d3 if black's king goes to d5. What a bolt from the blue! This time, I lost the 50-50 and went 1. Rf4, after which black won with Ke6, g6, Kd5, and a breakthrough via the a3/d4 weaknesses. Looks like I wasn't so lucky this time!

Seeing the curious look in the student's eyes while he cracked the puzzle followed by the vivacious eureka moment of discovery, I felt all the more happy to share a journey with many fellow chess enthusiasts. Although the pandemic has set us apart more than ever, it also brings us closer together, because nowadays, everything is just one Zoom meeting away.

# ***The US Chess Program:*** *Fostering Independent Growth in Youth Chess Players*

**BY ANDY HUANG**

**W**hen I was five years old, I stumbled across archaic wooden pieces in the basement of my house. I was fascinated by the intricately carved horses and royal figurines and ran to my dad to ask him what they were. My dad explained they were chess pieces and taught me the rules of the game, and I quickly became mesmerized by its deep variations. After playing for over a decade, I have reached among the top 10 youth chess players in the nation. Through my experiences playing on the US Chess team, I can see how the US Chess Federation does take a heavy handed approach with its chess players. Unlike its Russian counterpart, the US Chess Federation (USCF) argues, through the lack of direct resources given to youth chess talent, that chess talent should not be nurtured through a structured program. Instead chess talents should be left alone to grow and improve independently.

There are a lot of talented youth chess players in the US. In the Standard Top 100 Juniors, a list that compiles an official ranking of the top youth chess players in the world, there are ten

players from the US ("FIDE"). However, the USCF does not do much to nurture this talent. There are no frequent gatherings of youth talents nor are there coaches or resources provided for youth talents for their development. However in Russia, there is a deep tradition of formal training for young chess talents. The Soviet chess school, which was a state-sponsored school during the time of the USSR, is famed for producing hundreds of grandmasters and dozens of world champions (Serper).

▮▮ ***[USCF argues], chess talent should not be nurtured through a structured program. Instead chess talents should be left alone to grow and improve independently.***

These talents would then teach the next generation of players and systematically produce professional players. Today, while they do not receive the same state-support as back in the times of the Soviet Union, chess schools are still

prominent in Russia. A new chess academy just opened in Khanty-Mansiysk, showcasing a very modern center for formal chess instruction. "The Academy building comprises two training halls, a specialized multi-purpose room containing 128 game tables and an adjustable spectator space as well as a computer room equipped with the specialized software enabling the Chess Academy students to compete with counterparts from any part of the world" (Gazprom). However, USCF does not have such schools to nurture the talent in US youths. In fact, they do almost nothing compared to Russia. The only camps that US youth talents have together are about once a year and are not even organized by USCF. The camps are conducted by an independent nonprofit company called the US Chess School. The program was created to provide the nation's youth talent with high class training. Founder Greg Shahade started the camp to fill the void in the lack of formal training American chess players received:

“*At the time (2006), there weren't any organizations that offered this level of training for free to promising young players. These players work incredibly hard, and they deserve opportunities to improve their game with the help of great coaches. The Chess School also gives students the chance to meet other players like themselves, forming relationships that will last beyond their camp, and, ideally, strengthen the community of strong players across the country (US Chess School).*”

Besides these yearly high quality camps, the only other resources given to US chess talent is money for transportation to and from and a coaching staff at the World Youth Chess Championships. The World Youth Chess is an international competition that attracts the top young chess talent with representatives from over one hundred countries. It is the equivalent of the Olympics for youth chess players. At the World Youth tournament, there is a reserved analysis room for the US team. Between tournament games, players can go there to meet with coaches and fellow players to analyse and discuss their games. Besides the resources provided in the most important youth chess tournament and its affiliation with Shahade's annual camp, USCF leaves US chess talent to find their own drive and improve off of their own ambitions.

After qualifying for the All-American Chess Team in 2016, I've improved by working on chess with a private coach solving a lot of chess puzzles involving common piece arrangements. This helps me to improve my pattern recognition

and see optimal piece coordination when playing in competitive games. However, I still work independently on most aspects of chess, using online resources and

chess programs to help me improve. I frequently practice openings by playing speed chess games online. This allows me to play a lot of games in a short amount of time and work on different variations of a variety of openings. Additionally, I read a lot of chess books and magazines, especially articles by Grandmasters, the highest title someone can attain in chess. Even if they aren't directly there talking to you, their knowledge is in the words they have written and to understand and absorb that knowledge can lead to great progress as a player. I think that working independently really helps players' self-improvement because there is no one else there pushing them to improve. Everything that they do and gain from working alone is based on their own accomplishments and so working alone can be more fulfilling. Adelina-Gabriela Chelcea summarizes what it means to independently learn:

|| *Being an independent person means becoming self-aware, self-monitoring and self-correcting. You have to know what you need to do and how to take the initiative rather than waiting to be assigned any tasks. Doing what is needed to the best of your ability, without the need for external prodding, and working until the job is completely done can be a*

*difficult activity. It is necessary to learn to work at a pace that you can sustain, to accept your mistakes without looking for excuses and to refuse to let self-doubt or negative emotions due to negative past experiences change your path (Chelcea 1).*

To become good enough to qualify for the All-American Chess Team, I really had to practice a lot. After discovering chess, I quickly developed a fiery desire for the game. Every day, early in the morning, I would wake up, shake my father awake, and ask him for a chess game. Before and after school, I would play as much chess as I could. Having such a deep passion for chess let me spend so much time on it and allowed me to practice chess enough to become a top tier youth chess player. Youth chess champion Wesley Wang summarizes this thought, "Having a passion for chess really lets you spend a lot of time on it and allows you to have fun playing chess, even when practicing the nitty-gritty things that are the most difficult and annoying to practice. This allows you to become a great chess player". Gary Robson, father of chess Grandmaster Ray Robson, shares an anecdote of young Ray learning the same lesson:

|| *If there is something unique about Ray, then it's his perseverance at such a young age. I suppose that most three-year-olds would have given up on a game that they lost ten or twenty times in a row. Ray, however, lost hundreds of consecutive games during the first year that we played chess, but he kept on playing nonetheless... He was a good student, listening to what I said, thinking about it, and sometimes asking questions. And then with his newfound knowledge and a growing confidence in himself, he'd challenge me again. And again. And again and again. And finally, when he was just four years old, he beat me in chess for the first time (Robson 19).*

This highlights the passion that young Ray felt for the game. He was in love with chess enough to play over and over again even though he lost so many times. This led to his being a good student of the game and eventually a great chess player because he really wanted to be good at something he loved.

In Russia, there is heavy pressure on talents to become professional and always be number one, winning awards and representing Russia well. By not having a formal chess school for talents, the USCF is also not pressuring talented players to reach their full potential. If chess is not what they want to pursue in their life then it is okay for them to not play competitively. *"As I grew up, we still played chess, but it was less often. I never became great at the game, but I have always enjoyed playing. Today, I still classify myself as a novice chess player, but I enjoy teaching the students in my gifted program to play chess, often starting with kindergarten and continuing through fifth grade,"* said Thomasina

Adams, who has a masters degree in special education. Not forcing chess talents into professional play also lets them focus on their academics or other interests. Although interestingly, playing chess will most likely help people with their academics as well. A group of researchers led by Dr. Michael Rosholm, who currently works at TrygFonden's Center for Child Research, studied the relationship between chess and mathematics, *"As such, chess requires both cognitive abilities (attention, perception, information processing, memory and problem solving) and non-cognitive skills (patience, discipline, self-control and social skills). Strengthening these skill sets through chess may prove beneficial for children's academic performance,"* (Rosholm 2).

Some people may think that USCF does not give many resources to US youth chess talents because USCF does not care about chess like Russia does. It is true that culturally, chess holds a much larger role in Russian society. Adelman and Shay, two journalists, interviewed

Russian champion and world number Garry Kasparov:

*Among other things, Kasparov talks about the role of chess in terms of bringing people together as a bonding mechanism, mechanism that would make the game an important educational tool, the role more broadly of games and sports in building a national consciousness or a national identity, and why and how he personally transformed himself from basically being a chess grandmaster to becoming a political activist*

*-(Adelman 1).*

Although chess may have a deeper cultural history in Russia, it is clear that USCF does care about their youth talent. For example, USCF worked hard to find a sponsor for the youth chess team. Our sponsor, Two Sigma, provides us with high quality team uniforms each year. When competing in the World Youth chess championships the uniform helps the team to feel a sense of unity and teamwork and to feel pride in what they have all accomplished.

The difference of resources given to US youth talent when compared to the resources given to Russian youth talent

is very big however, this is because of the difference in fundamental beliefs. The Russians have a strict mentality where chess players are molded into professional players to represent their country. The US has a much more lax mindset, allowing players to independently study chess or even to let them pursue something else altogether. Although both methods have their benefits, I'm glad the USCF allowed me to independently flourish into the chess player I am today.



“ *I'm glad the USCF allowed me to independently flourish into the chess player I am today.* ”

Andy Huang is a junior attending Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. He has been playing chess since he was five years old and has become a two time state and national champion. He has represented the U.S. in multiple international events. In his free time he reads, plays tennis, and hangs out with friends.

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# OPENING TRAPS

By Daiwen Guo

Opening traps usually work against people who are relatively new to the game, like beginners and early intermediate players. These traps may not work against more advanced players, like higher intermediate and advanced level players, but they are still useful to know in case your opponent plays them against you.

## THE FRIED LIVER TRAP



*Position after 5...exd5*

The Fried Liver Trap usually works against less experienced players; beginners and early intermediate level players, but not against more advanced players. It wins, or results in an even or better position for Black. When it goes the way Black probably wants it to, it will look like this: (1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Nc6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Ng5 d5 5. exd5 Nd4 6. d6, Qxd6 7. Nxf7 Qc6 8. Nxe8 Qxg2 9. Rf1 Qe4+ 10. Be2 Nf3#). In the position to the left, Black could also go 5... Na5 after exd5, moving to attack the bishop.



*White, despite being up a whole rook, is smothered in just 10 moves!*

However, White can defend in several ways, and I will show you one: (1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Nc6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Ng5 d5 5. exd5 Nd4 6. c3), and the plan is foiled. White is slightly better but the position is almost equal.



*6. c3, kicking away the knight is the best way to refute the trap. Although white has a slight edge, the game goes on.*

## THE SCOTCH TRAP



*The starting position of the Scotch.*

This trap that can occur after the Scotch Opening is played allows White to win a knight in the best case scenario, and in the worst case, the trap doesn't work and white has a slight edge. The trap goes like this: (1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nxd4 5. Qxd4 Nf6 6. e5 Nh5 7. g4 Qe7 8. gxh5), and White has won a knight and has a better position. However, if Black plays something different, White would either end up with an even position or a winning position.



*Here, Black's knight is trapped.*

I will show you two ways to avoid losing the knight. (1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nxd4 5. Qxd4 Nf6 6. e5 Ng8). This is not really a failed variation of the trap because you can see that White is clearly better, but White would have probably wanted to capture the knight instead. I would not recommend doing this if you were playing Black in this trap because then your position wouldn't be very good. The other way to avoid the trap is to just avoid moving the knight to f6 and play a developing move other than Nf6. Here's an example: (1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nxd4 5. Qxd4 D6 6. Bf4 Nf6 7. f3 Be7), and the position is almost equal. White is still a bit better though.



# **WAR OVER THE BOARD**

**BY ERIC WU**



War over the board,  
chess is for everyone;  
yeah, chess is a sport.  
Never show remorse.

Taking out the king,  
and I do it with a horse-  
I mean a knight.  
I feel like a knight,  
clashing with opponents  
up until midnight.

6 hour games,  
I could do this all day.  
Sitting at the board while  
I just hopped off a flight.

I look at my opponent,  
look him in his eyes.  
Playing mind games,  
because this is showtime.

I do it for my team.  
I do it for my school.  
I do it for my city and  
everything I'm for.



*Eric is a rising sophomore at Phillips Exeter Academy. He has played chess ever since his second grade, becoming 4-time NJ state champion for his age. His rating is around 2000. When he is not playing chess, he enjoys investment, rap, business, and photography.*

Ok we start off,  
shake hands, clock's ticking.  
Look down at the board,  
it is time for a decision.  
Do it with precision.  
Playing out the opening,  
trading, not to mention;  
working on position.

Now it's the middlegame,  
pieces set and everything.  
I hit him with a pin.  
I hit him with a fork.  
Taking his pieces,  
now this man is...

And I'm scheming and I'm brewing,  
giving pawns their needed movement.  
Looking at his posture I just learned what the word doom is,  
open up his king now this kid is just my student.

Teaching him attacking, battery on the king.  
Move my minor pieces all at high speeds.  
Get the queen activated, killer on a spree;  
hit him with the checkmate, murder at the scene.

Line it up with yellow tape, the king's a dead body.  
Suffocated by his pieces, he needs ventilation.  
Dismantled his position and he ain't got compensation,  
chess is war and rightly so, it has consequences.



A photograph of a wall with several framed pictures and a flag on the left side. The flag is partially visible, showing stars and stripes. The framed pictures are arranged in a grid pattern, with one larger picture in the center and smaller ones around it. The background is a dark wall.

# *Are you a young chess enthusiast with a story to tell?*

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