



Issue No. 5 | Spring 2022

Chess Connections

A space for kids, by kids

Featuring an
interview with
GM Darwin Yang



Contents

Front Cover	01
Designed by: Justin Wang	
Contents	02
Meet Our Team	03
Interview With Darwin Yang IM Justin Wang & NM Davis Zong Jr.	06
Designed by: Anjali Lodh	
The Art of Defense Eddy Tian	18
Designed by: Lulu Huang	
Forgotten Legends: Reuben Fine Jerry Xue	25
Designed by: Ellen Wang	
Why Chess Is Fun Roger Luo	36
Designed by: Ellen Wang	
Our Amateur Team Experience Roger Zhang	40
Designed by: Anjali Lodh	
Be My Valentine/Chinese New Year Drawing Oliver Torgersen	51
Designed by: Ellen Wang	
Mission Statement	55
Back Cover	56
Designed by: Ellen Wang	



Meet Our Team

Editorial and Design Team

IM Justin Wang, *Editor-in-Chief*

Justin first learned chess at age 7 and since has progressed to become one of the most successful young chess players of his age. Justin was granted the FIDE Master title in 2018 and the International Master title in 2019, and ranks first in the US in his age group (as of February 2022). His achievements include an invitation to the 2021 US Junior Championship, 1st place at the 2021 National Online Scholastic Championships, 2nd place at the US Cadet National Online Championship, 1st place at the 2019 U.S. Cadet Championship, 2015 World Open U2200 Co-Champion, and Bronze medal in the World Youth & Cadets Chess Championships U10 in Greece. He is an 8-time invitee to the All-American Chess Team.

Besides Chess Connections magazine, Justin also co-founded Chess In Action, a nonprofit organization in March 2018 with his brother Jason to connect with chess enthusiasts around the world, serving underprivileged communities. Justin hopes to apply his chess skills towards creating lasting change in his local community and in communities nationwide, empowering others to reach their full chess and personal potential. Outside of chess, Justin is a competitive mathematician, pianist, and jump-roper.



WIM Ellen Wang, *Managing Editor, Designer*

WIM Ellen Wang is a 9th 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. Her most recent accomplishments are winning both 2020 and 2021 North American Junior Girls Chess Championships, from which she earned the WIM title and two WGM norms. She also achieved the US National Master title in 2021.

Ellen's other major individual chess achievements include winning three international medals in one summer in 2017: 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 the 2019 K-6 Co-Champion of the Greater New York Scholastic Chess Championships.

Around chess, Ellen has been actively engaged in philanthropic work. She founded her not-for-profit organization Chess Through Challenges Inc. in 2021 and has been endeavoring on closing the gender gap in chess, providing chess resources to underprivileged youth, and utilizing chess as a therapeutic tool. 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.



NM Davis Zong, Jr., *Editor*

Davis Zong is a 10th 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, has won both the elementary and junior high NYC Championships, and won a medal in the U16 North American Youth Chess 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.



Anjali Lodh, *Designer*

Anjali Lodh is a 9th grader at West High School in Iowa. She is the current Iowa Girls Chess Champion and represented Iowa in the Ruth Haring Girls Tournament of Champions in 2019, 2020, and 2022 as well as representing Iowa in the Barber Tournament of Champions in 2021. She co-founded and runs 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, playing tennis, and competing for her school's Science Olympiad team.



Lulu Huang, *Associate Designer*

Lulu Huang is an eighth grader in Virginia. She has been playing chess since she was four. At six years old, she tied for second place at the All Girls National Chess Championship (U8 section). She qualified for the 2021 FIDE World Women Fast Chess Championship USA national team, and she also received Top 10 in the 2021 US Junior Chess Congress U12 section. She is a coach for Phoenix Chess Club, as well as an Intermediate Chess teacher at Hope Chinese School.

Outside of chess, Lulu is an avid Future Problem Solving competitor, having placed first in States and qualifying for Internationals twice in a row. She enjoys both digital art and math competitions in her free time.



Roger Shi, Staff Writer

Roger Shi is a 13-year-old Southern Californian in 7th grade. He is a “Top Blogger” for chess.com and has posted many blogs on chess.com including one that has won “chess.com’s Blog of The Month.” Roger is a USCF Expert and was the team captain of the “San Diego Sorcerers”, who won the 2021 K-8 USATN Tournament. He is a competitive soccer player, and a Manchester United and Golden State Warriors fan. You can check out his blogs on Chess.com at <https://www.chess.com/blog/RodgyReports>.



Roger Zhang, Staff Writer

Roger Zhang is an eighth grader in Livingston, NJ, who will be a freshman in September. He is around 2100 in USCF points, and aspires to become a national master and beyond. Outside of the board, he enjoys running, math, and other games.



Contributors

In random order: GM Andrew Tang, WFM Zoey Tang, Kevin Wang, Dylan Zhang, WIM Lisa Lan Yao, Jason C. Wang, WIM Ellen Wang, NM Davis Zong Jr., WGM Jennifer Yu, Jerry Xie, FM Andy Huang, Daiwen Guo, Eric Wu, IM Annie Wang, WCM Lucia Huang, Lulu Huang, Jerry Chang, NM Erick Zhao, GM Joshua Sheng, FM Evan Park, Oliver Torgersen, Justin Li, Lucas Liu, David Li, GM Darwin Yang, IM-Elect Eddy Tan, Roger Luo




Interview with GM Darwin Yang

From Interviewers:

IM Justin Wang

NM Davis Zong Jr.





Justin: How were you introduced to chess and what initially drew you to it?

Darwin: How was I introduced? I don't think there was any super interesting origin story per se, like an apple falling on Newton's head or something.

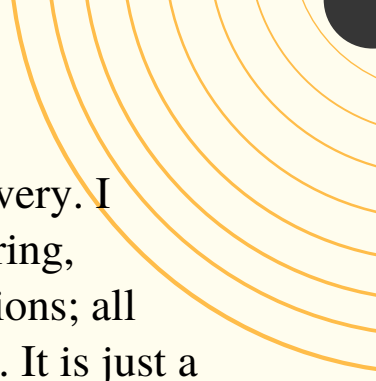
When I was around five or six, I learned the basic chess rules from my father and my brother. When I was seven, it just so happened that I was at an after school program, and we were fortunate enough that there was a Grandmaster who had recently come to that area and started teaching group lessons. Those lessons introduced chess to me and I guess I did pretty well.

You also asked about what drew me to chess. On the one hand, I think I was good at it. On the other hand, there were also a bunch of other people as the friends at that daycare who were playing, so it was like a community. I just really enjoyed playing. I'm sure you can imagine all the reasons why you enjoy chess. And it's probably similar for me. It's just a great game: very deep and very competitive.

Davis: So you seem to enjoy chess a lot. What is your favorite thing about chess?

Darwin: I think that a major aspect of chess is chess as the pursuit, the thing that you're doing - I wouldn't say a career since I was really young, but just the journey of chess: the process of trying to improve and get better and also just chess itself as the game. Chess is so deep and even though it was invented millennia ago, we still don't have the answers to it yet.





There's just so much room for creativity, learning, and discovery. I think it covers a lot of what life is about in a way: just preparing, thinking about it, taking it seriously, dealing with your emotions; all those types of things. I think that just makes it so fascinating. It is just a really rich experience and journey.


Justin: About your chess journey, what is your biggest strength as a chess player?

Darwin: I think that I was always a bit more of a positional type of player: good at intuition and positional understanding. I also think endgames were a particular strength for me, especially when I was younger. A lot of my best results are from end games.

Davis: Well, since you mentioned that endgames were a big strength for you, do you have any particular way to study them?

Darwin: I'm not sure if there's anything in particular that jumps out from or like the secret sauce per se. When I was younger, my coach really prioritized studying endings, and it was kind of natural for me. I think that continuing to work with different materials, studying endgames were helpful.

Dvoretsky's endgame manual was a good resource in those years. I think it really is a lot about understanding. Positional understanding and intuition just happened to connect nicely for me.



Justin: Yeah. So I see that you use many different resources to stay engaged. And so what role did your coaches and parents play in your chess career?

Darwin: Generally speaking, a lot of what coaches do is to provide direction. Nowadays I think there are a lot more resources available for aspiring players or just new players in general like chess.com and other videos.

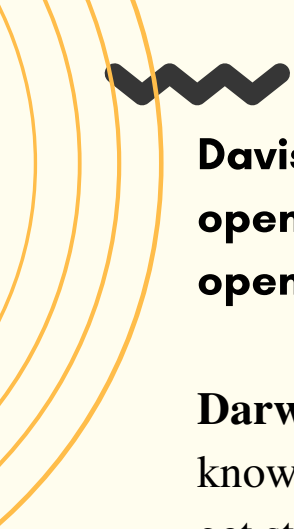
But back then, the coaches could identify what I needed to work on, show me all the material, and guide me through it, which was a big help at a time when even Chessbase was still pretty new. Like I imagine what most coaches do: endgame practice, guiding you through puzzles, the thought process, the concepts, and openings were useful.

I think that a big help in those years was that my coaches were good at diagnosing and guiding me towards openings. I don't think I can really overstate how much my parents helped. My father was the one who mostly traveled with me when we were going to tournaments.

Especially when you take it seriously and are going for titles, I think it takes a buy-in from the entire family and my sibling. Emotional support, taking care of the logistics for me, reminding me to feed myself, and all those little things were just so valuable.

When I was working on Grandmaster games with an engine and working through what was helpful, they could operate the engine, and they were willing to do so, which I'm always going to be grateful for.






Davis: I noticed that earlier you had talked about openings. How would you suggest other people practice openings?

Darwin: I think there's two parts to it. One is the mechanical part: knowing what to play. That's important. I think that people really get stuck on that sometimes because yes, it's important to know the theory, but if you haven't looked at it in two weeks, staring at it for 10 hours is not going to help you remember it. Working through games and understanding why they're playing in this way is much more important.

I think it's very easy to get stuck in a trap of: I need to learn, learn new openings. The worst feeling I think in my opinion is, when you play something you know but your opponent plays a move that's not in theory. You have no idea why it's not a theoretical response, but even if you knew that they made a small inaccuracy, you still don't know how to punish them. So if you don't understand the opening, then it's also really hard to figure out how to respond.

In my opinion, it's better to just learn a few openings really well; understanding openings at that deeper level before trying to learn too many other things. I did a lot of this; playing mostly 1. d4 for the past six or seven years with a little bit of 1. e4 sometimes, so I do think generally you should try to master a few before proceeding to others. To sum up, memorize the theory, but I think it's really essential to work through games very, very carefully, to understand what's going on.



Justin: Many of our magazine readers have not gone to college yet. Before college, what was your daily study routine?

Darwin: I think this will depend on what you want to get from the game. I think during high school, I was already pretty much at the GM title, so I basically needed to work at the professional level. So I always studied a lot; once I got my homework done I studied during the week. During breaks I would study and play. I think I could go up to 10-12 hours or more on really serious days like break days.


But of course that's not really for everyone, so I wouldn't necessarily recommend that. I think that you should find the balance that aligns with what you're trying to get from chess and what you feel is healthy for you.

If your goals are not like that, and you don't need to work that much then, that's fine; just do as much as you're comfortable doing with, and as much as you can do while staying productive. I know that there are some days for me, at least, where I work for however many hours and I just get fried. There is no hard or fast rule per se, but just do whatever makes sense for you.

Davis: Earlier, you talked about managing time well and not burning yourself out. What things do you think that you learned from chess helped you in life?

Darwin: I believe that chess is like a microcosm of life. For example, chess teaches you the importance of preparing beforehand and how to handle your emotions.

I don't think there is a single chess player on earth that hasn't dealt with struggles including plateauing, feeling frustrated, and making



mistakes. There's also the opposite. Everyone has moments when they feel they are at the top of the world.

I think a big thing for me was that chess put me through all those moments so I could learn how to deal with them constructively. No one's life is smooth, so getting experience from chess was really helpful for me so that I would better deal with the struggles and successes of life.


Justin: What percent of chess do you think is mental, and what percent is technical?

Darwin: The lines are kind of blurred since there are both technical and mental aspects. For one, you need to have some essential technical skills. For example, generally speaking, you are not going to do well if you don't know the openings.

But I also think that chess is more mental than a lot of people think it is. Just because you're a better player, technically speaking, it's not really a guarantee that you'll win. A lot of mental things do affect the course of the game. Like I mentioned, if someone plays a novelty, or you don't know what to do, that can be really disconcerting and could cause you to fumble.

Upsets happen all the time in chess. Time trouble tends to be a great problem for all players. So, I think it would be hard to overstate the mental aspect of chess. I'm not trying to say that it's a hundred percent mental, but I think it's hard to really say that it's not significantly mental. I think that having a good mental attitude toward chess is very valuable. For example, the recent world championship match, is a good example that you could point to about this topic.

Davis: You've probably played in a lot of chess tournaments. Which tournament did you enjoy the most?



Darwin: I had a great time on a number of tournaments like playing for the Pan-American with Harvard when we made the Final Four, or maybe some of the international youth tournaments back in the day like the World Youth or Pan-Americans, just being in that type of environment.

Of course, tournaments are very fun when you're successful. So I guess the other way I can answer this question is, some of those triumphs. For me, my big goal was always to become a Grandmaster, so I would probably have to point towards my third GM norm tournament which was the Bay Area International in I think 2014. It was a bit stressful because I had to win both of my last games to get the norm, so I can't quite say that it was full happiness the whole ride, but I guess I am very fond of that.

Justin: Do you like to practice chess online, with blitz games? Would you recommend that as a way to improve?

Darwin: I think there are a few things that are valuable. One reason that I played blitz was because it was a quick way of practice openings. I don't think this gets into the deep understanding part that I was discussing earlier, but it does help to play some games to have at least something on the line and to keep yourself sharp. I know a lot of people use tactics puzzles to do that, and I did do some of that, but I think blitz, at least for me, was a bit more useful than just solving puzzles.

However, I think I'm probably a bit of a slower player, so playing some of these time controls doesn't always correspond with my tournament style. You could, of course, practice for a low time situation, so I think there's value in it.

You should think carefully about it though. If the reason to play blitz is that you just want to have fun and play a game, that's very good. But in terms of serious preparation, I think you should think about the specific reasons and then make sure that you're trying to fulfill those reasons. For example, if I wanted to practice an opening and I didn't get the chance to play it in the session, obviously I don't think it would be particularly helpful.

Davis: Do you have a favorite chess player, one that you look up to?

Darwin: Carlsen, because he plays in a methodical way that I really admire. Also, I don't consider myself like an opening guru, so I think his style of playing less theoretical openings and grinding on from the middlegame as well as his accuracy in doing so is something I really admire.

Justin: I've heard that you are really into economics. When did you start becoming interested?

Darwin: I took AP Econ in high school and also took some classes in my freshman and sophomore year of college. I was originally a history major but then I switched into Econ in my third year of college. I really did enjoy learning the econ material and just learning more about it appealed to me.

I was also very fortunate to get to know people who were in the field so that they could encourage and give positive impressions. A little tip is that you should talk to professors and teachers to get to know them.



Davis: So this may be a bit far-fetched, but how has chess helped you in the field of economics?

Darwin: I think there are a lot of concepts in economics that just made a lot of sense to me because of chess. The things that you get taught in Econ 101 are opportunity costs, decision-making, and weighing benefits versus costs, which chess provides an intuitive framework for.

After all, we chess players make decisions every turn! So when it's your turn to move, you need to think carefully about what to do. For example, do I want to progress on the queen side or should I defend a bit more on the king side?

So I think a lot of those aspects came together, and it really just clicked for me. In terms of actual content though, I don't think that knowing an opening is really going to help me with my academic work.

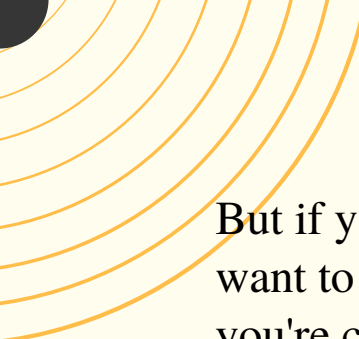
Davis: How did you balance chess playing as well as schoolwork in high school?

Darwin: I think part of it is to be careful with how much I wanted to commit to certain activities. For example, there's a lot of possible extracurriculars you can get involved in, so I mostly just focus on a few and commit a lot to them.

For academic work, I didn't really follow a specific formula.

I just made sure that I took care of my academic responsibilities before chess. Around seventh or eighth grade, I was thinking about whether I wanted to commit fully to chess or not, and I decided that I wanted to do chess and academics at the same time.





But if you want to focus more on chess that's totally fine; if you want to focus more on academic work, that's fine too. Just whatever you're comfortable with. Again, I don't think that what I give will be a solution to everyone; just do what works best for you.

Justin: Did you participate in any other extracurricular activities?


Darwin: Uh, at the time I was really interested in classics. My high school offered Latin and I was always really into it. I was originally a history major in college, so it kind of makes sense that this is something that I enjoy doing.

So classics was probably the main other extracurricular I did. I think it worked out nicely then: I really enjoyed it and I don't think it was a huge amount of time and work. Since I enjoyed it a lot, it wasn't something that I felt burdened to do.

Davis: Do you plan on continuing to play chess for fun?

Darwin: I would really love to; I don't think I've played in a tournament in a long time. The pandemic made everything harder. I decided to commit to academia specifically, and with the PhD program, now this is kind of hard.

But I would love to play in a tournament every now or then when I have time. So I think I will keep up with chess to a certain extent. I still really enjoy the game and maybe sometime you'll actually see me at a tournament!



About GM Darwin Yang



After his first official tournament at seven years old, Darwin Yang's early scholastic and international performances included tying for first at the 2006 Pan-American Championships and earning the bronze medal at the 2008 U-12 World Youth Championships. He became an International Master in 2011 and a Grandmaster in 2016. Some of his other achievements are being the 2014 National High School Champion and helping the Harvard team reach the Final Four of College Chess in 2019. Apart from chess and his studies, two of Darwin's interests are sports like football and basketball, along with learning about history.



The Art of Defense

EDDY
TIAN



Introduction

Once you reach a certain level in chess, the benefit of learning new concepts diminishes. Most strong players (let's say above 2000 FIDE) will have a broad understanding of the most important positional concepts and most common theoretical endgames. You could learn about more complex ideas like Lolli's position (think RB vs R Philidor position, but with additional stalemate defenses because it's on the c/f-files or 3rd/6th ranks) or read books like *What it Takes to Become a Grandmaster* (a nice book by Andrew Soltis, though ironically not as good as its prequel); however, you probably won't use these concepts a lot: after all, you became a strong player without learning these things. The usual recommendation for improvement is "lots of practice", which does work: many players in NJ and NY improved through grinding blitz and playing tournaments whenever possible. However, not everyone has that much time; I certainly didn't. In the last two years, I attended an online high school, so my school workload wasn't affected at all by the pandemic. Instead of endlessly playing blitz games, I focused on one specific skill which would be absolutely essential to becoming an IM: defense (which I define as playing in inferior or downright lost positions).

In norm tournaments, especially the invitational round-robin ones, the best mindset is not to win as much as possible, but to avoid losing at all costs—if you lose even a single game, you'll have to take a lot more risks to get the norm. However, chess literature mostly neglects the subject of defense; many strong masters have good calculation skills, good knowledge of theoretical endgames, and a good understanding of positional concepts, but only apply their knowledge from an offensive perspective. Additionally, there are many skills for defense that are not found in other areas of the game. In this article, I will give some guidelines for defending tough positions in all stages of the game. This will be mostly geared towards strong players aspiring to get norms; if you are playing at a lower level, I recommend studying positional play and theoretical endgames as well as practicing calculation (in other words, patch up any holes in your knowledge). Popular methods of learning chess concepts include coaching sessions, master games (ChessBase), blitz games, and books (my personal preferences are Aagard's GM prep series, especially calculation, and Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual). That being said, it's possible that learning about defending will improve your understanding of chess in general. So, enough rambling...

A quick disclaimer: I have added some of my games as examples. Although there are diagrams and explanations, they are far from what I would consider to be complete, exhaustive annotations. I believe that excessive annotations make chess players lazy; we tend to read them without questioning them or figuring out if there's more to the position. Think for yourselves! Finding your own explanations for moves is so much more helpful than me (or your coach, or Stockfish 14) telling you.



Eddy Tian - Jason Liang, NYC Norms GM A (November 2021), W to move

In a tense middlegame position, I “won” the exchange with a small combination, but after some unforeseen resources on my opponent’s part, I landed in this position, which is, as you can see, completely lost. White has no way of preventing Ba4 and c2; many players might resign here, or maybe even earlier. However, it’s a good idea to keep playing in this kind of situation; don’t spend much time, just play moves that don’t lose immediately. Most of the time, you will lose, and not much time is wasted, but some of the time, your opponent will see you playing quickly and relax, thinking they’ve already won. This allows for some unexpected swindles: for example, this game finished 27. f4 Neg4 28. e5 Ne3 29. Qe2 Bxg2 30. exf6 Bxf1 31. Qxe3 c2 32. fxg7

The prosaic Qa8 wins gxf8=Q+ Kxf8 wins easily. Rd8 is the engine’s choice... and also what black played in the game. Can you find white’s last resource? Can you find black’s only winning reply?

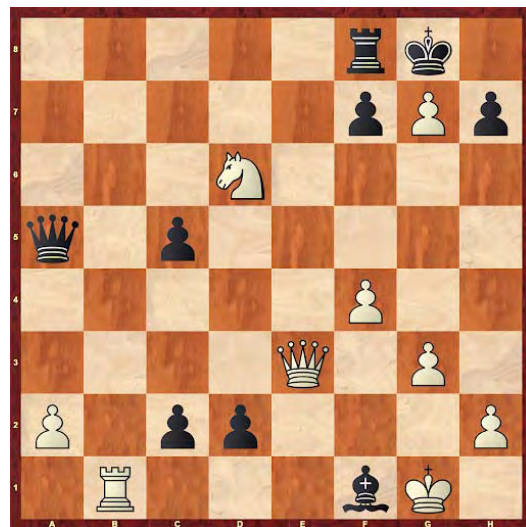
The game finished:

32... Rd8?! 33. Nxf7! Qc7? 34. Nh6+ Kxg7 35. Rb7! Qxb7 36. Qe5+ Kf8 37. Qh8+ Ke7 38. Qg7+ Kd6 39. Qxb7 d1=Q 40. Nf7+ Ke6 41. Ng5+ Kf5 42. Qxh7+ Kg4 43. Qh4+ 1/2-1/2

33... Qa6 was winning; I did see this during the game, so it’s not impossible to find. However, black was under a lot of pressure: an easily won position had become complicated, and oftentimes players will panic and not make the right decision. If he’d played 32... Qa8, I would’ve resigned on the spot; it goes without saying that it’s easier to save a lost game when you can create tricky complications.

In a losing position, you have nothing to lose; aggressively seek counterplay and any sort of complication. Once you get over the fact that you got into a losing position, you will realize that it’s a lot easier to play a losing position than any other position. However, I have seen many games where someone in a worse position just loses hope and pushes wood for an hour before giving up. The moment you recognize that your position is lost, I suggest taking a walk to clear your head so you can put your best effort into saving the game. This applies to any situation where the character of the game has suddenly changed, like when you reach the second time control or if a previously won game descended into crazy complications.

Now, some of you might be saying, “My opponents never throw away wins like that!” While it’s true that saving a lost game requires luck, if you don’t defend well (note that “well” doesn’t mean stockfish-well, it means “doesn’t lose immediately” and “doesn’t give the opponent an obvious response”), your opponent’s won’t have the chance to throw away wins.



Having the right attitude is essential to good defense.

Of course, defending methods vary slightly based on the stage of the game. Here are some general rules for defending in openings, middlegames, and endgames:

Openings

If your opponent is playing quickly and confidently, and you seem to be in trouble, you might be falling into preparation. If you're unsure, never try to play moves that "you think" are part of your repertoire; I have gotten into trouble more times than I'd care to admit by doing this. Instead, assess the position like you would a random position given as a puzzle.

If you are in trouble in the opening, the priority is getting your pieces out and castling (duh). Don't try to grab pawns (I do this a lot, and it usually doesn't end well), and don't be afraid to give pawns. Faced with complications in the center, try to steer towards a familiar pawn structure; faced with an unfamiliar pawn structure, take a moment to figure out the general plans and ideas.

Unless you're me, you probably aren't getting into trouble in the openings too much. If you misremember your repertoire a lot, maybe those aren't the right lines for you, or maybe you don't have time to memorize Sicilian mainlines. If you are losing out of the opening every other game, you are playing the KID and you should stop (I'm only half-joking; openings in which your opponent has a large quantity of viable deviations early on tend to do quite poorly in norm tournaments, especially if you don't play much else).

Middlegames: Tactical Trouble

Who is your opponent? Can you out-calculate them? If so, take inspiration from Tal and make the position as complicated as possible. If not, keep an eye out for simplifying opportunities and try to minimize the tactical weaknesses of your position.

Keep an eye on the clock. Generally, the attacker will need to spend more time than the defender; nonetheless, don't spend too much time as most of your moves will probably be forced.

Trading is a potent tool for any defender; just make sure you aren't making things worse.

Never resort to passive defense only, unless the opponent has sacrificed a significant amount of material. Look for counterplay.

Don't hesitate to sacrifice material to lessen the pressure (don't go overboard, though).

Middlegames: Positional Trouble

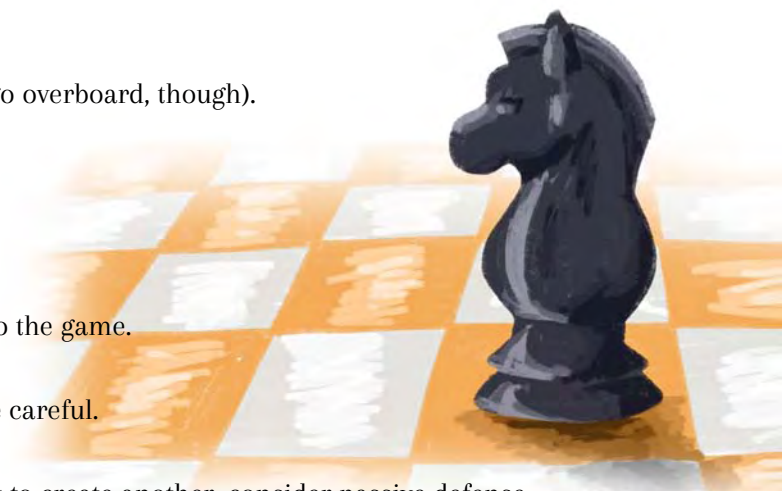
Look for opportunities to complicate the position.

You probably have bad pieces; try to find a way to bring them into the game.

Trading can help, but it can also exacerbate your problems, so be careful.

If you have only one weakness, and it is difficult for the opponent to create another, consider passive defense. Keep in mind that the opponent might mount an attack with their superior position.

In my experience, it is much easier to defend a small material deficit than any positional problem. Again, don't be afraid to sacrifice.



Middlegames: Material Disadvantage

If down an exchange, avoid heavy simplifications and avoid opening the position. The piece is usually better than the rook in the middlegame; you might not even be that much worse.

If down a pawn, unless it is a passed pawn, it probably isn't doing much. Carry on as normal, but be very careful of endgames; they will either make your task easier or impossible.

If down more than that, you will need to light some dynamite on the board. At least if you lose, it will be an interesting game.

"If down more than that, you will need to light some dynamite on the board. At least if you lose, it will be an interesting game."

Endgames

You need to know theoretical endgames. Be mindful of the possible simplifications and avoid/pursue them as you see fit.

Try to get rid of all your opponent's pawns.

Passive defense is much more likely to work in the endgame but make sure that your fortress is actually a fortress. Just follow endgame principles in general.

Miscellaneous

Active > Passive

Trades and pawn structure changes are tools for both you and your opponent.

Material advantage is probably the easiest to defend.

Complications are generally good.

Just because you're losing doesn't mean you can't win.

Prophylactic thinking is great (and not just for defense).

Setting traps is okay, I guess. They haven't really worked much for me at high levels. I focus more on playing surprising moves that might complicate things or catch my opponents off guard.

Finally, keep in mind that these are just general guidelines. As with anything in chess, the concrete situation at hand should be the deciding factor in how you choose to approach the position.

"Just because you're losing doesn't mean you can't win."

Psychology:

Draw offers: I rarely ever offer a draw in a bad position; it's just kinda rude. However, if your opponent is much younger or lower-rated, they might just accept.

Try not to get upset over whatever mistake you made earlier. The past is in the past, you don't have anything to prove in this game anymore.

Take walks, get drinks, lean back in your chair (why do chess players have such bad posture anyway?). If you appear calm, you might give your opponent doubts about how good their position really is. Although this might seem silly, consider that Fischer - Tal game where Fischer made a mistake because Tal laughed at his move (long story). And he said he didn't believe in psychology.

We are all humans (hopefully), and our decisions will inevitably be influenced by our emotions, whether we like it or not. This can aid (or impair) your defensive arsenal, as the following game shows:

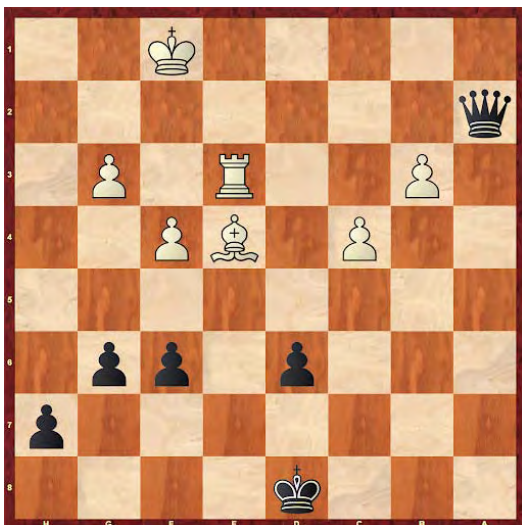
Carissa Yip - Eddy Tian, World Open (July 2021), W to move

This position has quite a story behind it. Apparently, my opponent had stayed up past midnight the day before the game (my dad told me after the round), and she arrived around half an hour late to the game. I was positionally lost out of the opening (I may have insulted this opening earlier in this article), but after a bit of greediness on my opponent's part, the position has become equal according to the engines. However, it's not always easy to accept a sudden change in evaluation; the defender might miss winning opportunities, and the attacker might continue playing as if the position was winning. In this game, we had repeated Qb7+ - Re7 - Qf3 - Re3 twice, but my opponent didn't accept that the position was equal and played Qc6, losing. Can you find the refutation?



Here's the rest of the game.

33. Qc6 Qa5! (the only winning move) 34. Bxf5 Qd2 35. Qb7+ Kf8 36. Qb8+ Re8 37. Qxe8+ Kxe8 38. Re1+ Kd8 39. Be4 Qxa2 40. Re3



If I had a nickel for every time I had to win queen vs rook and piece in a norm tournament, I'd have two nickels - which isn't a lot, but it's weird that it happened twice.

I encourage you to play through the rest of the game on a chessboard. If there's something you don't understand, you may need to work on your knowledge of fortresses and how to break them; many endgame books deal with this topic. The general idea is that I must create a passed pawn that either cannot be blockaded or will help attack the white king. I would also prefer to prevent white from advancing his queenside pawns.

40...f5 41. Bg2 Qd2 42. Rf3 Ke7 43. Kg1 h6 44. Bf1 Ke6 45. Kh1 g5 46. fxg5 hxg5 47. Kg1 Qe1 48. Kh2 Ke5 49. Bg2 Qe2 50. Kg1 Kf6 51. Kh2 Kg6 52. Rf1 f4 53. gxf4 g4 54. f5+ Kf6 55. Kg3 Kg5 56. Kh2 Kh4 57. Kh1 Qe3 58. Bd5 Qh3+ 59. Kg1 g3 0-1

One last thing: how do you train defense? There aren't really any puzzle books focused on defense, although you can always review your own games. If you keep your calculation sharp and keep these principles of defense in mind, you should do well.

Personally, I spend a lot of time studying non-theoretical endgames, Mark Dvoretsky style, and I feel confident in my ability to defend really bad endgames (and also to win better endgames). You might have different strengths, and you can cater your defense style to your strengths: I like simplifying into garbage endgames and holding; others might specialize in creative counterattacks or precise, technical defense (i.e. playing really accurately). In other words, keep honing your chess skills, and keep the aforementioned defense guidelines in mind. When you play a game, you should not feel like you are going to lose, even if you are black against someone with 200 rating points higher.

Sounds oddly specific, doesn't it? Here's one last example game. My opponent won the 2021 US Masters a few weeks before we played this game.

Jose Martinez Eduardo Alcantara - Eddy Tian, NYC Norms GM B (January 2022)

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 Bf5 4. h4 h5 5. Bd3 Bxd3 6. Qxd3 Qa5+ 7. b4

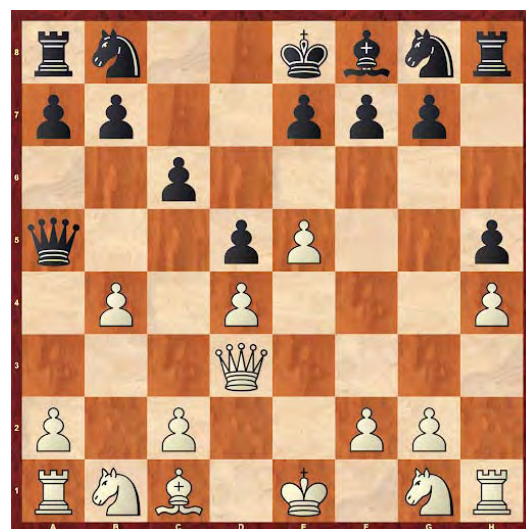
I play the Caro Kann a lot; this was the only time I had ever seen this move. It's not objectively good, but that hardly matters.

7... Qxb4+ 8. Nd2 e6 9. Rb1 Qe7 10. Ne2 Qc7?! (the correct move here is b5, which is "equal", although I prefer black)

11. c4 Ne7 12. O-O Nd7?! (Nf5 is better, as you can see from white's next move)

13. Ba3 c5? (I don't need to tell you why this isn't a great idea. The engine recommends Nb6, but black is doing pretty bad no matter what, so I tried to complicate things.)

14. Nf4 dxc4 15. Nxc4 Nc6 16. d5 Nxe5 17. Nxe5 Nxe5 18. Qb5+ Qd7 19. Qe2 Qc7 20. Qb5+ Qd7



How should white proceed?

Just a little knowledge check; hopefully you didn't make the same mistake my opponent did. Black's king is never really going to be safe; don't trade queens here! Just move back to e2 (only the second repetition).

21. Qxb7? Qxb7 22. Rxb7 exd5 23. Nxd5

(Continued on the next page)



Put your defending skills to use! What's the only move for black here?

23... Rd8! (The rest of the game was relatively balanced according to my engine; however, I was definitely on the back foot for most of it. Feel free to take a look at how I defended the endgame, although there weren't any critical moments from this point onwards.) 24. Ne3 Rd7 25. Rfb1 Nc6 26. Rxd7 Kxd7 27. Rb7+ Ke6 28. Rc7 Nb4 29. Rc8 g6 30. Bb2 f6 31. Re8+ Kf7 32. Ra8 Nc6 33. Rc8 Nd4 34. Rc7+ Ke6 35. Rxa7 Bd6 36. Nc4 Rb8 37. Ra4 Kd5 38. g3 Nf3+ 39. Kg2 Ne5 40. Ne3+ Ke6 41. Bc3 Nd3 42. Nc4 Be7 43. Ra6+ Kf7 44. Ne3 Rb7 45. Kf3 Nb4 46. Ra8 Ke6 47. a4 Nd5 48. Ra6+ Bd6 49. Nxd5 Kxd5 50. Ke2 Be5 51. Bxe5 Kxe5 52. Rc6 Rb2+ 53. Ke3 Rc2 54. a5 c4 55. Rc5+ Kd6 56. Rb5 c3 57. Rb6+ Ke7 58. f3 Ra2 59. a6 c2 60. Kd2 Kf7 61. Kc1 f5 62. Rc6 Kg7 63. Rc7+ Kf6 64. a7 Ke6 65. Kd2 Kf6 66. Rc6+ Kf7 1/2-1/2

I didn't really answer the question: how do you train defense? There are no defense puzzles anywhere, right? Well, actually, there are. A lot of reputable chess trainers promote a technique sometimes called "solitary chess" (some people just say "looking at master games", which is too vague for my taste), in which you play through a game in ChessBase (or anything else) in training mode, guessing the moves.

Typically, people play from the side of whoever won the game, although it is more helpful to guess the moves from both sides. You can use games from top players, players of your level, or even your own games. This is the best way to train defense: pick an opening like the Dragon or the Rauzer (even if you don't play it) and train via solitary chess; whenever you play a losing move or miss a win, save the position somewhere and try to figure out what went wrong (i.e. why you played a bad move). In fact, as you probably realize, solitary chess trains all aspects of chess, which makes it the best way to improve.

"In fact, as you probably realize, solitary chess trains all aspects of chess—which makes it the best way to improve."



Eddy Tian is a freshman attending Montgomery High School in New Jersey and Stanford Online High School. He is rated 2431 (FIDE) and 2472 (USCF), with 3 international master norms and 1 grandmaster norm, all four of which were achieved from July 2021 to January 2022. He has won 3 state scholastic championships for NJ and 1 national championship. He made the All-American Chess Team in 2019 and 2020, and he is currently working on writing a chess book. Apart from chess, he enjoys programming, tennis, playing cello, and studying science.

Forgotten Legend:

Reuben Fine

- By Jerry Xue



In 2014, right before his 2nd World Championship match with Viswanathan Anand, when Magnus Carlsen was asked which players from the past he saw in himself, Carlsen named three players. Two of them were house-hold names. Carlsen named all-time greats Fischer and Karpov. But he also named a slightly more obscure player: Reuben Fine.



Most chess players have heard of Reuben Fine, but they often don't know his story and how strong he was at his peak. According to Chessmetrics, which specializes in historical ratings (before the introduction of formal FIDE ratings), Reuben Fine was world #1 for half a year (from October 1940 to March 1941), and was in the top 3 from December 1938 to June 1942. He held a plus score against Alekhine, Botvinnik, Tartakower, Flohr, and many other players, as well as an equal score against Euwe, Capablanca, and Najdorf.

Photo Source: <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html>)

Unfortunately for chess, he stopped playing chess quite young, and only played 4 tournaments between 1942 and 1947. He briefly came out of inactivity between 1948-1951, reaching #5 in the world. He officially retired from chess in 1951, and decided to pursue another career, psychology, earning his Ph. D from the University of Southern California in 1948, and eventually going on to become a professor.



Beginnings (1922-1932)

Reuben Fine was born on October 11th, 1914, in the Bronx, to a poor Russian Jewish family. He was taught chess by his uncle when he was eight, and quickly became a strong player. As a young teenager, he hustled for money at the Manhattan Chess Club, and eventually became one of the best blitz players in the world, able to hold his own against the fourth world champion Alexander Alekhine as early as the early 1930s.



REUBEN FINE

According to Denker and Parr in their book, *The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories*, Fine's first master-level event was the 1930 New York Young Masters Tournament. He achieved more success the following year (1931), when although he also lost a close match against Arnold Denker, future Grandmaster, and the "Dean of American Chess", he won the 15th Marshall Chess Club Championship, finished second at the New York State Championship, and led his college (CCNY) to the National Collegiate team title. These successes, specifically the final one, inspired him to try playing chess professionally.

Photo Source: Source: <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html>



Rising Star (1932-1935)

While 1931 was indeed quite successful for Fine, he achieved even more success in 1932. He managed to defeat Herman Steiner (who was at that point ranked #57 in the world with a rating of 2532 by Chessmetrics) 5.5-4.5, and won his first US Open with the astronomical score of 9.5/11. However, this was only half a point more than Samuel Reshevsky, who would go on to become his biggest rival. In that same year, he once again won the Marshall Club Championship, and also played his first elite tournament (Pasadena 1932), where he scored 5/11 against a field with the likes of Alexander Alekhine, Isaac Kashdan, Samuel Reshevsky, and others.



Another big success for Fine came when he won a spot on the U.S. team by scoring 8/10 at the Olympiad Selection Tournament in 1933. He scored 9/13 (+6-1=6) at the Olympiad that year, winning a silver medal for his performance on board 3, and helping team USA win the gold medal. He once again won the U.S. open that year, this time with the even more tremendous score of 12/13, once again only a half point ahead of Reshevsky, and won the Marshall Club Championship for the 3rd consecutive year. These fantastic results catapulted him into the top 50 in the world by the end of 1933.

Photo Source: Source: <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html>

He continued his dominance in the U.S. chess scene into 1934, defeating Al Horowitz, a 3-time U.S. Open Champion and another leading U.S. chess player 6-3. He shared 1st at both the U.S. Open (his third consecutive time winning the U.S. open) with rival Reshevsky, and Mexico City. While not entirely a failure, Fine “only” managed to share 3rd at Syracuse, behind Reshevsky, who won the event.

In 1935, he made his European debut at Lodz, sharing 2nd with 6/9 behind Tartakower. He then won at Hastings with 7.5/9 a full point ahead of Salo Flohr.

One of the Strongest Players in the World (1936-1941)

Fine's tremendous results in 1936 and 1937 catapulted him into the world's elite. In 1936, he won at Oslo and Zandvoort with 6.5/7 and 8.5/11 respectively, shared first at Amsterdam with 6/7, shared third at Nottingham with 9.5/14, placed 2nd at Hastings with 7.5/9 (behind Alekhine), and tied for third at the U.S. Championships, behind Reshevsky and . In 1937, he won at Leningrad, Moscow, Margate, Ostend, Stockholm, defeated Stahlberg in a match, and placed 2nd at Semmering/Baden. His only bad result was at Kemerli, where he only scored 9/17.



In 1938, he shared 4th at Hastings, placed 2nd at the U.S. Championship, once again behind his rival Reshevsky, and shared first with Keres at the AVRO tournament with 8.5/14, considered to be one of the strongest tournaments ever. Unfortunately, Keres had the higher tiebreak.

Then, World War II broke out, and the world championship as well as other prestigious events in Europe were canceled. During the war, he worked for the U.S. Navy and as a translator. During his spare time, he got into chess writing, and edited *Modern Chess Openings*, wrote the acclaimed book *Basic Chess Endings*, as well as *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings*.

Photo Source: Source: <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html>

With the more prestigious European events now canceled, Fine played a few American events during the war, winning the 1939 U.S. Open ahead of Reshevsky, the 1939 Marshall Club Championship, the 1940 U.S. Open, New York State Championship ahead of Reshevsky, the 1941 Marshall Club Championship, the 1941 U.S. Open, and the Washington D.C. Chess Divan title.

These absolutely crushing and dominating victories caused Chessmetrics to rank him as world number 1 from October 1940 to March 1941. He was only surpassed by Mikhail Botvinnik, and his ranking naturally plummeted as he played very few serious tournaments from 1942 to 1947. This was mainly due to him working on his doctorate in psychology. However, after Alexander Alekhine died in the midst of the war in 1946, a World Championship tournament was needed.



Fine was invited to participate in the 1948 World Championship tournament, but surprisingly, declined the invitation. The reason why is still unclear to this day, and there has been a lot of speculation involved. Fine himself has provided many different reasons. At the time when he declined it, he stated that he was busy in his work on his doctoral dissertation. He also wrote that he didn't want to spend a lot of time preparing and then seeing it canceled (For a while, it was unclear whether or not the event would take place). It has also been proposed that Fine was afraid of collusion.

Regardless of the reason, Fine's withdrawal from the World Championship tournament is still an unsolved mystery. Here is a collection of some of Fine's own statements on his withdrawal from the tournament (credit to chess historians Edward Winter and Edward Tassinari).

Photo Source: Source: <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html>

February 1948: “Professional duties make it impossible for me to get away in time to play in the tournament.”

November 1948: “At the time of the tournament, I was not teaching, but working on my doctoral dissertation. I was not bound by any contract to the university. I withdrew from the tournament because I did not care to interrupt my research. Needless to say, nobody had consulted me on whether the dates set were convenient for me.”

1958 (from his book *Lessons from My Games*): “The next year they [presumably the Russians] changed their minds again, and the tournament was held. By that time I was embarked on my new profession as a psychoanalyst and was unable to play.”

1973 (from his book *Bobby Fischer’s Conquest of the World’s Chess Championship*): “... called off by the Russians as part of a kind of blackmail scheme to force the players to compete in Russia. My own refusal to play in 1948 was motivated in part by the uncertainty about whether the Russians would come to the playing hall at all, and if so, under what conditions.”

1973 (from his book *Bobby Fischer’s Conquest of the World’s Chess Championship*): “... I was absorbed in another profession, psychology, and no longer cared to participate.”

October 1984 (from an interview with Bruce Pandolfini in the October 1984 issue of *Chess Life*): “By the time the original six-man event was revived, Fine had opted not to compete. He feared that if he went to the Netherlands in 1948, the Russians might not participate anyway, and thus he would have wasted a whole year of his life in preparation. Moreover, it seemed foolish to play in Moscow, in such hostile circumstances. Therefore, he withdrew from the competition and immersed himself in his new career.”

September 1989 (this was an excerpt from a letter Fine wrote): “The tournament was finally arranged for 1948, to be played half in the Netherlands and half in the Soviet Union (where the safety of the foreign masters was questionable). I did not play because of the expense involved, most of which I was expected to pay myself; and because I considered the tournament as it was arranged to be illegal. TASS fabricated a story that I had had to desist because of career pressures. (In fact, I was not at that time employed; I was working on my doctorate.) The TASS story was a total fraud.”

Brief Resurgence (1948-1951)

After completing his doctorate, Fine decided to return to competitive chess for a while. He won an elite tournament at New York in 1948 with a monumental score of 8/9. Some participants included Najdorf, Euwe, Kashdan, Denker, and Pilnik. Chessmetrics rates his performance rating for this event even higher than his 1938 AVRO showing. He followed this up by drawing a match with Najdorf (4-4) in 1949, which catapulted his world ranking back into the top 5.



He was then invited to the 1950 Candidates tournament, which he yet again declined. His final event was the Wertheim Memorial in 1951, where he placed 4th with 7/11, behind Reshevsky, who won the event. He then announced his retirement and became a professor of psychology.

Fine (right) watching a game from the 1955 U.S. Women's Chess Championship. Here, he was already completely retired. (Photo Source: <https://worldchesshof.org/hof-inductee/reuben-fine>)



Contributions to Chess

Fine wrote many, many books, some on chess, some on psychology, and some on both chess and psychology (*The Psychology of the Chess Player*, 1967). Here are a list of his books regarding chess:



- *Dr. Lasker's Chess Career*, by Reuben Fine and Fred Reinfeld, 1935
- *Modern Chess Openings*, sixth edition, 1939
- *Basic Chess Endings*, 1941, McKay
- *Chess the Easy Way*, 1942
- *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings*, 1943
- *The Middlegame in Chess*
- *Chess Marches On*, 1946
- *The World's A Chessboard*, 1948
- *Practical Chess Openings*, 1948
- *The World's Great Chess Games*, 1951
- *Lessons From My Games*, 1958

- *The Teenage Chess Book*, 1965 (assisted by son Benjamin Fine)
- *The Psychology of the Chess Player*, 1967
- *Bobby Fischer's Conquest of the World's Chess Championship: The Psychology and Tactics of the Title Match*, 1973

Photo Source: <https://worldchesshof.org/hof-inductee/reuben-fine>



Best Game

Do you think Reuben Fine had a similar style to Magnus Carlsen? See for yourself in the following game.



French Defense, Winawer Variation (C17)

Reuben Fine (White)

Mikhail Botvinnik (Black)

AVRO (1), Netherlands, 11.06.1938

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. dxc5 Ne7 6. Nf3 Nbc6 7. Bd3 d4 8. a3 Ba5 9. b4 Nxb4 10. axb4 Bxb4 11. Bb5+ Nc6 12. Bxc6+ bxc6 13. Ra4 Bxc3+ 14. Bd2 f6 15. O-O O-O 16. Bxc3 dxc3 17. Qe1 a5 18. Qxc3 Ba6 19. Rfa1 Bb5 20. Rd4 Qe7 21. Rd6 a4 22. Qe3 Ra7 23. Nd2 a3 24. c4 Ba4 25. exf6 Qxf6 26. Rxa3 Re8 27. h3 Raa8 28. Nf3 Qb2 29. Ne5 Qb1+ 30. Kh2 Qf5 31. Qg3 1-0



Sources:

- C, S. B. "Reuben Fine: Speed Demon." *Chess.com*, 16 June 2018, www.chess.com/article/view/reuben-fine-speed-demon. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.
- "Edward Winter Presents: Unsolved Chess Mysteries (9)." *Chess News*, 3 July 2007, en.chessbase.com/post/edward-winter-presents-unsolved-che-mysteries-9-. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.
- Pandolfini, Bruce. "Reuben Fine: The Man Who Might Have Been King." *Chess Life*, Oct. 1984, pp. 24–27.
- "Reuben Fine." *World Chess Hall of Fame*, 23 Mar. 2017, worldchesshof.org/hof-inductee/reuben-fine. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.
- "Reuben Fine | Top Chess Players." *Chess.com*, www.chess.com/players/reuben-fine. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.
- Winter, Edward. "Reuben Fine, Chess and Psychology by Edward Winter." *Www.chesshistory.com*, 13 July 2021, www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fine.html. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.



Jerry Xue is an 8th grader in Raleigh, NC. He is an avid chess player, and the current NC K-8 State Champion. He hopes to become a national master. Outside of chess, he also loves playing tennis and the clarinet.

WHY IS CHESS

FUN?

By Zhongming Roger Luo





We all know that chess is fun. Many people reading this article will agree with me, but why?

I personally think that chess is fun because there are endless possibilities! There are also many different strategies, game plans, tactics, openings, endgames, and attacks to learn. Even when you become world champion, you can still invent something new. And if you're not world champion, you still have things to learn and master. Learning about tactics, strategies, and attacks are very exciting. Whenever we run out of things, you can always invent more. The possibilities are endless! But when you learn, those ideas don't just stay in your head. They get played on the chessboard, and that brings us to reason number two: the thrill of making a brilliant move or an exciting attack.

Think about it: When your bishops are positioned perfectly, breathing fire down the board; your rooks are on those amazing open lines; furthermore, be aware, your queen can move in any direction! How amazing is that? Every time you find an idea and checkmate your opponent, you have fun and feel proud. Then, you feel even happier because you realize all those hours of learning finally paid off!



When all your pieces are where you want them to be, and you have lots of space, you can do this thing called cat and mouse which is how chess players say wait around and make slow improvements to your position. It is much easier to attack than defend, and if your opponent is defending, he has a higher chance of making a blunder. Your opponent will also spend more time, leading to time pressure. Pro tip: When you're losing, make everything complicated! Attack more! Make life hard for your opponent! If you are losing and you attack, it might be so complicated that your opponent makes a blunder or loses on time! Also, blunders and time pressure will make your opponents more stressed and you even happier.

Blunders also lead to tactics, and that now leads us to reason number three: Advanced tactics are amazing! That kind of goes with reason number two, but it is still different. We all know that tactics are fun, and when you play an advanced one, you feel so proud! Then you win the queen and then you don't have to waste brainpower thinking about positional maneuvers, outposts, and weak pawns- the queen will cover it! And if you really don't want a long game, then you can just use your queen in some brilliant tactics. Always be on the lookout!

And for the fourth and final reason: Trophies! Do you remember when you got first place, a big shiny trophy, and prize money? I don't even have to explain this last reason. We all know that trophies are amazing.

And that's why chess is fun!



I am Roger Luo and I am 10 years old. I started playing chess online in May 2020 during the pandemic, and I played my first on-site tournament last October. My favorite activities are doing math, especially hard algebra, reading, playing video games with friends, and obviously, playing chess.

Our Amateur Team Experience

Roger Zhang



From left to right, Roger Zhang (8th), Lev Koganov (8th), Claire Cheng (7th), Quan Tran (7th)

Roger Zhang is an eighth grader in Livingston, NJ, who will be a freshman in September. He is around 2100 in USCF points, and aspires to become a national master and beyond. Outside of the board, he enjoys running, math, and other games.

There are four Amateur Team events in the US, but the Amateur Team East (USATE) is always the largest. Located in Parsippany, NJ from 2/19-2/21 (President's Day Weekend), there were over 250 teams of four players each! Most were from the tri-state area but there were some teams with players from much further away like Massachusetts and Florida, for example. The Amateur Team tournaments are also the only team events open to all players, and some retired players play no event but the USATE each year. Even more interesting is that there are so many special prizes, and during the beginning of each round there are very cool giveaways and events. All of that creates a rich and exciting experience both over the board and away from the board, a feeling unique only to the USATEs.

In the past, I've played in four USATEs and it has mostly been with my chess friends. This year, however, I focused on promoting chess in my school in Livingston, NJ (only 10-20 minutes away), and I made a school team to participate in the USATE. Our school is not the strongest, but we have a relatively high rated team. I was on board one. Board two was a long time friend of mine and around 1750 rated, Lev Koganov. Board three, despite being only 1700, was a very promising and talented person Quan Tran, who moved here a few years ago. Finally, the last board was my neighbor Claire Cheng, who I was also friends with from a long time ago.

The USATE is so different from other tournaments because it is a team event. In the end our team got 3/6, which was not the best score, but that is not what I will be taking away from the event. What strikes me as the most special in the USATE is how team members help each other and encourage each other over the board and outside of it. It is also a great time to share games and stories with each other.

We were lucky to get the best middle school team, and we all felt good about it, but I also really enjoyed how we encouraged, inspired, and comforted each other during each of our games. That is what makes it very different from an individual tournament. In this article, I want to show a few moments from my games that made a great impact on all of us during the tournament. Claire also shared with me a game she played that had a lasting effect on her, and I will conclude with it.

Roger Zhang (2109) - Nicholas Figorito (2162) USATE 2022 (round 2)

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 c5
5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Ne7 7.h4 Qa5
8.Bd2 Qa4 9.h5 h6**



9...cxd4 wins a pawn, but after 10.cxd4 Qxd4 11.Nf3 Qe4+ 12.Be2 the queen is likely to be vulnerable. Usually, the plan is to form some attack on the kingside because h4-h5 weakens the pawn structure on that flank. **10. Nf3** This is the most played and totally reasonable, but 10.Qg4! is even better because it forces Black to make a weakening king move. After 10...Kf8 (10...Nf5 11.Bd3 and White still threatens to take on g7), White can choose between the risky and adventurous 11.Rh3 and the safer 11.Qd1, with good prospects. After the game move, Black may be able to castle queenside **10...b6** 10...Nc6 was the book move 11.Rh4! This is an excellent way for the rook to join the game, and it is even more powerful with the queen on a4. The king can still find safety by going to g1. Now the queen lacks a good square. 11...c4 was best, but still White has a strong attack, and the queen is still misplaced. **11.cxd4?** This may be understandable, but it is very dangerous and leads to a great initiative for White.

12. Nxd4 Qd7 (otherwise Bb5+) **13.Bb5 Nbc6 14.Qg4 Kf8** and this leads to the next key moment.



White's initiative has been gone as far as possible, and now White needs to continue the attack. Otherwise Black may recover by playing Qc7, attacking the e5-pawn, and then trading off the knights while developing the bishop. The most tempting continuation is 15.Rh3 (threatening Rg3), but after 15...Nxe5! the queen is hanging and is more important than the pin. In the game, I tried it the other way around and first played **15.Qg3!** This is probably the best move and I was certainly happy.

Black didn't have good choices and got into a losing position. **15...Qc7** **16.Bxc6 Nxc6** **17.Nxc6 Qxc6** **18.c4!?** **18.Rg4** is better, but this move clearly threatens Bb4+ **18...a5** **19.Rg4 dxc4?** **19...Ba6** is the best, and White would need to find **20.Kf1!** (the idea is to give the king safety then continue the attack) to keep the advantage. **20.Rxg7 Qe4+**



21. Kf1? **21.Be3!!** is very counter-intuitive unless White understands the idea. After **21...Qxc2** **22.Rd1!** is another important move, cutting off the Black King's escape. White has too many threats like Bxh6, Rg8+, and Rd7, and will quickly mate the King. **21...Qxc2?** My opponent did not see what I was doing, but no other move works but **21...Bb7!!**.

This is a very hard resource because Qxc2 and Ba6 are so tempting that few people would even consider this move. But the point is that if **22.Bxh6?** **Qxg2!+** **23.Qxg2 Bxg2+** and Black will win the bishop back with about an equal position. True, **22.Kg1** will avoid the threat, but the path to victory is much harder than the one after **21.Be3!!**. **22.Rg8+!** **Rxg8** **23.Bxh6+ Ke7** **24.Qxg8** Before I played **21.Kf1**, I had checked like ten times if Black had any resources, and he did not. So I won against little fight during the rest of the game. **24...Qd3+** **25.Kg1 Bb7** **26.Bg5+ Kd7** **27.Qxf7+ Kc6** **28.Qxe6+ Kb5** **29.Be3 Ka4** The king is still not safe here **30.Qxb6 Qd5** **31.Qg6 Rg8** **32.Qc2+ Kb5** **33.Rb1+ Kc6** **34.f3 Qd3** **35.Qa4+ Kc7** **36.Qxa5+ Kc8** **37.Qc5+ Kd8** **38.Qb6+ Ke8** **39.Qe6+** and mate was inevitable, 1-0. I knew that Quan lost a very quick game and his confidence was clearly shaken. But we managed to draw a higher-rated team with my victory and it gave him the support to win the next morning. In my next game, I wasn't so lucky.

Leo Jiang (1634) - Roger Zhang (2109), USATE 2022 (round 3)



The opening was not great for me, but it was clear that he misjudged a position where he had a strong attack against my two-pawn advantage. In the middlegame, I defended very well, much better than his attack, and I wanted to trade pieces for the win. I was clearly three pawns up with only a small attack, and it was clear that he was getting desperate. Here was when my troubles started...

27...Ne5?! 27...f5! was better, despite weakening a bit of the kingside. The bishop on g7 really wants more scope and after **28.Bg5 Qf7** Black gets some counterplay. **28.Nxe5 dxe5 29.Be2 Rg8 30.Rbf1 Bb5!**

The only logical follow-up, otherwise **Rf5** or **Bh5**. **31.Bxb5 Rxb5 32.Rf5!** This is a well-designed trap in the sense that it was not obvious. At least, not for me. I expected White's only threat to be **Rh5**, which would be met by **Bf8**. Here I wanted the win to be a bit more clean, but **32...Bf8**, was more than enough. **32...Qf7** was also a viable alternative that prevents White's main threat. I played **32...Rb6** and the next move, **33.Qxh7+!** totally caught me off guard. Here, I quietly resigned. 1-0. Most people would be emotionally crushed by such a defeat. First, my opponent was five hundred points below. I had also tossed away a game with only one imprecise move. I had worked so hard before to evaluate a complicated position and defend a strong attack, and one move throws it all out (that's just the nature of chess). But I still remember how my team and friends comforted me after I finished. And we won. During the beginning of the next game, I was over it.

25.Ng3 Ke6 26.Nf5 Bf8 (of course, not 26...Kxf5?? 27.Rxd7+-) **27.g4?!** It's true that White's task is getting harder and harder, but this move clearly gave me the sign that White was about to lose all of his counterplay. Now, White can forget about creating a passed pawn on the kingside. In reality, it is a 2 bishops vs rook winning position. **27...Bd5!** Important for the bishop to keep the position because Black wants to eventually play Ne5. If 27...Ne5? right away, then 28.Rd8 penetrates and Black probably doesn't have an advantage anymore. **28.b3 b5 29.Kg2** White is getting ready. **29...Ne5 30.Kg3** If White doesn't play this then Black will play h5 and undermine the knight in some way, or go for a queenside attack. **30...Ng6 30...h5!** was even better because after 31.gxh5 Nd3 the knight is trapped! **31.h4**



This was the decision that I was most proud of. White is posing a big question. If Black does not take, then White will take on g5 and go Rh1, creating a lot of counterplay. If Black takes then how will White defend against the h6 pawn and also continue the attack? In the game I figured out that I would win with a game plan, one that would allow me to win a queenside pawn. If you asked if I had calculated the rest, I would have said so. **31...gxh4+!** After a long think, I thought that this was necessary. **32.Nxh4 Nxh4 33.Kxh4 Be7+! 34.Kh5 Bg5** Now the pawn is defended and the king cannot go back. White doesn't have any open files yet. **35.Kg6 Ke5 36.Rh1 Be6!** The second step is over. The king is cornered in a cage and can only go as far as e8. The rook has no penetration points on the d-file, and that is the only open file. **37.Rg1 a5!** Now, weaknesses are created. White cannot advance any pawn because one would fall **38.Kg7 a4 39.bxa4 bxa4 40.a3**

The weaknesses are on dark squares, but it creates an opening for the king. **40...Kd5 41.Kh7 Kc4 42.Kg6 Kb3** and White resigned. In any case, Black will win a pawn on the queenside and use it to promote or win the g4-pawn, which frees the g5 bishop to help the passed pawn promote. I probably played as well as a grandmaster in the whole game, but I learned a lot from this game too. I can say that it was another reason why I will remember this tournament, even if it was only a modest 3/6.

Those were some of my games that taught me important lessons, and now let's go to one of Claire's games. This one was also played in round 4, against an expert, with more than a 450 point upset. Clearly, it was one of the best games she played recently, and one that uplifted her a bit.

Shawn Martinez (2085) - Claire Cheng (1601), USATE 2022 (round 4)

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 d6 3.Bb5+ Bd7 4.a4!?
 It is a very interesting move, keeping the bishop, hoping that Black plays a6 to take advantage of it **4...a6 5.Bxd7+ Qxd7 6.f4?!** Not a great move.

Here, White was clearly intending to get a Closed Sicilian, but after this White has no advantage. **6.Nge2** with ideas of d4 was better. **6...Nc6 7.Nf3 e6 8.O-O Nf6 9.d3 Be7** Now, this is almost like a Grand Prix. **10.h3 O-O 11.g4**



Like most Closed Sicilian games, White mobilizes for a very quick kingside attack, and hopes to mate Black before White collapses on the queenside. This brings a lot of sharp and exciting play, especially since the center can be opened! **11...d5!** A very reasonable move, making the mark on the center before White attacks.. **12.e5 Ne8 13.Ne2?!** This knight move's purpose is unclear, and the knight should have stayed on c3 to defend as long as possible.

A more critical move is 13.a5, when Black would either have to take the a5 pawn eventually or play b6 (or b5), hampering the attack **13...f6 14.c3 14.d4 cxd4 15.Nexd4 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 fxe5 17.fxe5 Nc7** was also more than fine for Black. **14...d4!** But this is even stronger, cutting off the pawn from getting to d4. White's center is looking a bit shaky now **15.cxd4 cxd4 16.Qb3 Nc7 17.Bd2**



The last few moves have all been very logical, and here a point is reached where Black has a few tempting options. Here, she erred a bit **17...a5?** A good alternative is **17...fxe5!**, where Black would have a comfortable position either after talking with the pawn or the knight, then playing Nd5.

White's kingside prospects are all but gone, and the e6 pawn is not as big a weakness. **18.Qc4?** White returns the favor. I believe that after **17.exf6** White should be at least okay. White has reasonable chances to gain space on the kingside, and most importantly, Black has a weak e6 pawn while the White weakness has been traded off. **18...Rfd8?!** Again, returning the favor. What should have been played on the seventeenth move also applies here. **19.exf6!** Now, White goes for it **19...Bxf6 20.Ng3 Be7** As you'll see, Black's idea was Nb4, but probably the knight on d5 was better **21.Rae1 Nb4?** This is understandable, and Black has clear ideas, but it simply comes a bit too late. White attacks in the center faster. Here, it's difficult to tell Black what to do. **22.Ne5 Qd6?!** **22...Qc8** was better, but White already has a massive advantage. In the diagrammed position, however, White had a clear way to win.



23.Bxb4?? Giving up all of the advantage. **23.Nf5!** was best, and then after **23...Qc5 24.Rc1!!** (there's two exclamation marks because of what happens next) Probably, White overlooked how dangerous Black's situation is. White is immediately threatening to take the queen or take the bishop. If **24...Qxc4** then **25.Nxe7+** wins a piece. There's nothing else other than **24...Ncd5** (**24...Nbd5 25.Qb3** and White is threatening **Nxe7+**, with no defence)., after which **25.Qb3!** is a key move, much stronger than **25.Qxc5**. Finally, after **25...Qb6** there's the lethal **26.Nxe7 Nxe6 27.Rc6!!**

Interference that's really hard to see from the start. Black must give up the queen because **27...bxc6 28.Qxe6+ Kh8 29.Nf7+ Kg8 30.Nh6+ Kh8 31.Qg8+ Rxc8 32.Nf7#** with a classic smothered mate. A lot to see from the start! **23...Qxb4!** From now on, Black plays very well. The point is that the knight is not free. After **24.Qxc7 Rac8** the queen is trapped. **24.Nf5 Bc5 25.Ng3** Now, the knight finds nothing on f5 and retreats **25...Nd5** Suddenly, Black is back in the game! Her pieces are just as active as White's pieces. **26.Qa2?** Losing a pawn to a simple tactic. Trading the queens was better. **26...Nxf4 27.Ne4 Be7 28.Rxf4** Obviously White did not do it on purpose, and had thought that his attack on the king would overpower the exchange. Claire handled it pretty well. **28...Qxe1+ 29.Kg2 Ra6?** According to the engine, this is the difference between a win and a draw. **29...Rd5!** was a better way of defending the e-pawn, but it was far from obvious.

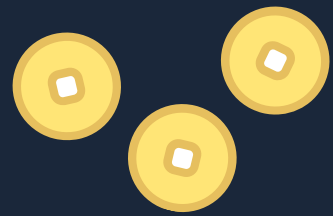
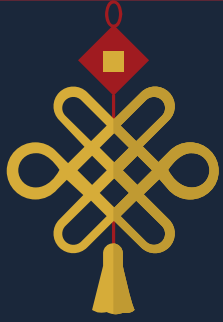
30.Rf7 The engine believes that 30.Qc4 with the idea of going to c7 was better, but White did not see it.

30...Qb4 31.Rf2 Rf8! After Black traded the rooks, she sailed to victory. **32.Rxf8+ Bxf8 33.Nc4 Qe1 34.Ncd6 Qe2+ 35.Kg1 Rxd6 36.Nxd6 Bxd6 37.Qc4 Qh2+ 38.Kf1 Qxh3+ 39.Kf2 Qg3+ 40.Kf1 Qf3+ 41.Ke1 Bb4+ 0-1**

Although the early middlegame was imperfect, she still came back from a worse position and defended an attack, without giving up her confidence. In our round four, Quan also beat an expert and although I didn't win the fourth round, we had great chances to beat a 2174 average team (the highest average was 2200). We ended up drawing to them, which was still a great result. Before the tournament, I was friends with all of my teammates, but never seriously played with them over the board. I know that this tournament was a great experience for all of us, and there were a lot of lessons and upsets for everyone.

It was really exciting and a pleasure to work with them as a team, not just individually, and that, as I said before, made the USATE special every year. These four games were just a couple of games from our experience together, and each of us had a lot of our own struggles but we complemented each other in the experience, and with that we not only got the top MS team but also had great chances with teams much higher rated than us. I really enjoyed working with them this year!







Oliver





Have drawn

A

Pretty red rose

Pink rose for

You as special gift!

Very much

Appreciation

Love

Every day and

Night

To all of you!

I

Never

Ending

Smile when thinking

Delightfully

About

You!



Hello! I am Oliver "OZ" Torgersen. I am 9 years old, and live in Texas! My favorite activities are Chess, Cub Scouts and Fishing. I have been playing chess for 2 years and recently played in my first face to face chess tournament. I started playing chess during the pandemic, so I have played a lot of online chess, but it's a little bit different when you are across the table from your opponent. It adds a new element of the game for me to learn about. I finished in 7th place, and can't wait for my next face to face tournament.



MISSION STATEMENT

- *Promote chess in all communities, especially school-aged children and under-privileged groups*
- *Provide school-aged chess players a platform to showcase their talents, convey their valuable voices and creative ideas*
- *Build stronger chess communities by sharing experiences, knowledge, information and enjoyment of chess*

We hope that Chess Connections can bring our chess community one step closer, starting ...

ONE STORY AT A TIME



CHESS CONNECTIONS MAGAZINE

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Please join our mission to connect young chess enthusiasts and build stronger chess communities by sharing your memorable chess games, tournaments, positions and stories in any type of writing or artwork!



WEBSITE

<https://chessconnections.org>



TO SUBMIT

<https://chessconnections.org/writing-for-chess-connections/>



CONTACT US

ChessConnectionsMag@gmail.com