

Grandmaster Timur Gareev comes to the Conejo Valley

Off da Rook is hosting a 3 day chess camp at the Conejo Valley Chess Club August 15-17, 2014. Events will include a lecture, a blindfold simul and blitz tournament with Grandmaster Timur Gareev. The last day we will run a 4 round rated tournament. Quinn Creger will be acting Tournament Director. All events included for \$95. Register [here](#). Seating is limited to 40 participants. Everyone who registers by 8/4 will receive an exclusive Off da Rook hat signed by Timur.



Congratulations to Wesley So!

Webster University won its second straight Final Four. Webster dominated the tournament with 9.5 points with Wesley So leading the pack. I met Wesley in Las Vegas and got a chance to interview him. See interview on page 12 and more on college chess on page 10-11.



Who wants to be a Millionaire?

If you have not heard about the Millionaire Chess Open, you must be sleeping under a rook (pun intended). With a total of \$1,000,000 in prizes, the Millionaire Chess Open is the highest stakes open chess tournament in history. On October 9-14, 2014, hundreds of participants will make their way to Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada to play, and hundreds of thousands will watch live on line. Led by International Grandmaster Maurice Ashley, this unprecedented tournament will entertain chess fans around the world. See my interview with Maurice Ashley on page 4-5.

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Introduction



This diagram shows how many moves it takes for the knight to move to each square.

This newsletter is written and edited by Jennifer Vallens. Thank you to Larry Smith for your contribution and for being my second pair of eyes:-)

Please know I am not affiliated with any group or organization. The purpose of this newsletter is to help build chess in our community and to entertain. If you would like me to cover your chess event or have feedback on what you'd like to see for future editions, please email me at offdarook@gmail.com

"No Chess Grandmaster is normal; they only differ in the extent of their madness."

- Victor Kortchnoi



Hi, my name is Jennifer Vallens and I am a chess mom living in the Conejo Valley. It has been a very exciting time for me in the chess world. This month I launched my offdarook.com website. I hope you all have a chance to check it out. I for fortunate to attend a 5 day chess camp with my son Evan and met the #2 Chess player in the world, Levon Aronian. I attended my first Chessboxing match. What is Chessboxing you ask? Well, I do my best to explain it on page 16. If you get a chance to experience it, it is a really fun event.

I also competed in the Pacific Coast Open chess tournament in Agoura and played on a mixed doubles team with chess Grandmaster Timur Gareev. This was my first tournament outside of a club tournament. It was exciting to experience it as a participant this time.

Speaking of Grandmaster Timur Gareev, I am running my first Off da ROOK Chess Event August 15-17 in Newbury Park featuring a lecture, blind simul and blitz tournament with Timur. We will also be running a rated tournament. Sign up early as seating is limited to 40 people. Hope to see you there. It is sure to be a fun event.



www.offdarook.com

CHESS CAMP and USCF rated TOURNAMENT August 15-17

Off da Rook is hosting a 3-day CHESS CAMP
featuring **GRANDMASTER TIMUR GAREEV**

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15 7pm-8:30pm

Meet and greet with GM Timur Gareev, the #4 ranked player in the United States. Autographs and photos encouraged. Open play until 10pm.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm

Lecture and Q&A with Timur. Followed by a Blindfold rapid chess simul. (first 10 people who sign up for the event, get to play). We break for lunch and then come back for a Blitz tournament. Prizes awarded to top 3 players.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 17 first round starts 9:30

4 round rated tournament

G/45 Rounds: 9:30am/11:30am/2pm/4pm

Sections TBD (dependant on registrants)

Prizes awarded to top 3 players, best player U1800, U1600, U1400, U1200, U1000

REGISTER ONLINE by 8/1 to guarantee your spot. Limited seating. All registered by this date will receive an autographed hat. *\$20 discount for ACA students.

www.offdarook.com

Location: Conejo Valley Chess Club
300 Giant Oak Avenue
Newbury Park, CA 91320



GM Timur Gareev currently holds the rank of 4th highest rated chess player in the US and 116th in the world with a rating of 2736



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(818) 674-2006
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Q&A with Maurice Ashley

How old were you when you made Master? Grandmaster?

I played in my first chess tournament at 15 and became a Master at 22 before many years later attaining the GM title at 33. In between I graduated college, coached two teams to National Championship titles, got married and had a child. It was a real challenge to stay focused on my ultimate goal, so I was happy to finally achieve it.

Why do you think chess is dominated by men?

I think society frowns on activities where women compete directly with men. I am totally impressed by the women who decide to make a career out of chess since they have such a relatively lonely path to follow. Hopefully, that will change in coming years.

What makes a good chess student?

Someone who loves the game. No one should force you to study chess; you have to want to do it. Studying comes naturally after that.

What about chess intrigues you?

The incredible variety of the game coupled with the no holds barred competitive side. Anything can happen in chess when two really skilled players go after each other's throat.

Besides your love of chess, do you have any other hobbies or interests?

I love staying fit, playing Scrabble, reading, dancing, and watching any activity where someone or some team is trying to beat someone else.

How often do you study chess? Play chess? Do you play online?

I am now a full-time chess promoter, teacher and speaker. Back when I was competing I would study 5-6 hours a day minimum, and 8-10 at my peak.

I never played in too many tournaments because life was often in the way. Same for online play. When you start chess late, life catches up with you pretty quick. That's why it's so important to start kids young.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

The GM title. I could have easily given up since the odds seemed stacked against me. After I achieved the title, my trainer admitted that he didn't think I would do it because I was already on the old side. I was shocked, but I understood, especially now when kids are doing it at 12. But age is but a number in my family. My sister is a World Champion boxer, and she is in her mid-forties!

The kids are playing variations of classic chess (bughouse and blitz), in your opinion, does playing these types of rapid fire games, help or hurt your game of chess?

Anything that keeps kids playing and having a good time works for me. The question is always balance. Too much of anything will take time away from getting good at something else. But I grew up on blitz and things didn't turn out so badly for me.

Do you think with proper training and ambition, anyone can become a chess master? Or in your opinion, are there specific born traits necessary in order to become a master.

I think that there is a reason why the percentages say that very few people will become chess masters. I can't deny the Polgar phenomenon (where a father trained his three daughters to become stars), but I do believe that there is a certain grit, determination, and willingness to come back from terrible losses that marks good players. That, and a mind that soaks up patterns fairly easily doesn't hurt. Still, I believe the pursuit of Mastery is just as important as reaching the goal itself.

I have seen videos of you playing Blitz at the park. You look like you are having so much fun. Do you prefer playing speed chess or tournament chess?

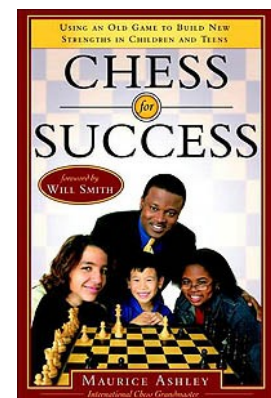
There is no real pressure playing blitz in the park. I remember the days playing my friends under a warm summer sky with the music blasting in the background and everyone trash-talking each other. I made some friends then that remain to this day. Tournament chess is more serious, challenging, and in some ways, more gratifying, but I think blitz has a special place in my heart.

Millionaire Chess Open

October 9-15

Millionaire Chess App available
August 1

www.millionairechess.com



Q&A with Maurice Ashley (cont.)

You mentioned when we met that you think it is a bad practice to “play up”. Can you explain your opinion on this?

I think a lot of parents believe that it puts less pressure on their child if they have them play stronger opponents only. However, if you don't learn how to defeat weaker players or players at your level, then it's fool's gold when you win the odd game against stronger opposition. The Russian school had it right: Beat the people at your level, and prove you belong at the next stage.

Do you have any words of advice to parents of chess players? How can they best support their child through their chess journey? Any do's and don'ts?

Read the book Mastery by George Leonard. Understand that not every child is destined to become a GM. Step back and let them tell you how badly they wish to get good. You are simply a facilitator on their journey. Push too hard, and you will watch them quit in a few years.

Can you tell me about your Millionaire Chess Open Event?

The Millionaire Chess Open has been a dream of mine for over ten years. I'm thrilled to have found a partner in Amy Lee who listened to my passion and embraced it. We are hosting the first million dollar Open in chess history in October at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas. Our vision is to help change the course of chess by exposing a new generation to an event to remember. We have plans to do many more, but the first one is always special. Everyone who can come should try to be a witness to history.



The always looking forward one



The one whos good with kitchen utensils



The one who cuts corners



The one with the awesome house



The Scary one



The Lazy one

Who is Maurice Ashley?

Maurice Ashley made history as the first Black International Grandmaster and translated his love to others as a three-time national championship coach, two-time author, ESPN commentator, iPhone app designer, puzzle inventor, and motivational speaker. He is working as a Joint Fellow at Harvard and MIT to bring the benefits of chess and other classic games to a wider educational audience through the innovative use of technology.



Incredibly passionate about chess, Maurice is now helping to raise the stakes with the Millionaire Chess Open. For 10 years, he has wanted to host a tournament of this quality and caliber, and is thrilled to be realizing this dream. After several conversations with Maurice, I was extremely impressed with his engaging manner and philosophical outlook on the world. He poetically spoke of each chess game as a story that unfolds. His optimism is infectious. He is someone who is willing to take a chance in the face of opposition. I admire his ability to realize his dream and hope Millionaire Chess is a success!



Here is Maurice with Kayden Troff. Kayden is a 16 year old from Utah and just made Grandmaster. Look out for interview with Kayden in my next newsletter!

OFF da ROOK Millionaire Team

***Register under the OFF da ROOK team name. If we get at least 10 people signed up with this team name, all team participants will RECEIVE A \$50 REBATE.**

MILLIONAIRE CHESS

***\$50 Rebate**

**\$1,000,000
GUARANTEED**

OCTOBER 9-13, 2014
LAS VEGAS

That's right: a million dollars absolutely guaranteed! No other Open tournament in the long and storied history of chess has ever come close to guaranteeing that kind of prize money. The Millionaire Chess Open will signal a new era in prizes and recognition for players at all levels.

*International Grandmaster
Maurice Asbley*



ENTRY FEE

\$1,000 before Jul 31, 2014
\$1,500 Aug 1 through Oct 8, 2014
\$2,000 Oct 9 through 3:30 p.m. Oct 10, 2014

"Can't wait for the tournament!!! It's going to be a historic event! I play 4-5 tournaments a year, but this one will be the most important for me."
Grandmaster Gregory Kaidanov

VISIT WWW.MILLIONAIRECHESS.COM FOR MORE DETAILS

THE MC EXPERIENCE

We believe a chess tournament should be a unique and pleasurable experience, so we're offering amenities that will cater to our players and their guests. It is our intention that anyone who visits our events will walk away with memories that last a lifetime. Some amenities include: gift bags, opening breakfast, red carpet, VIP room, discount to the LINQ Project, 24-hour answering service, and more.



PRIZE FUND FOR TOP SECTIONS

Open section: 1st - \$100,000, 2nd - \$50,000, 3rd - \$25,000, 4th - \$14,000, 5th - \$8,000, 6th - \$4,000, 7th-20th - each \$2,000, 21st-50th - each \$1,000
1 2350-2499: 1st - \$40,000, 2nd - \$20,000, 3rd - \$10,000, 4th - \$5,000
1 U2350: 1st - \$40,000, 2nd - \$20,000, 3rd - \$10,000, 4th - \$5,000
1 U2200, U2000, U1800, U1600: 1st - \$40,000, 2nd - \$20,000, 3rd - \$10,000, 4th - \$5,000, 5th - \$3,000, 6th - \$2,000, 7th-20th - each \$1,000, 21st-50th - each \$600

Local Clubs and Events

American Chess Academy

ACA offers group classes at Calabasas and Simi Valley locations Monday-Friday for kids 5-16 years. Visit <http://www.achessacademy.org/> for more information.

Contact: Jerry Yee (818) 915-5572.

Thousand Oaks Chess Club

Meets Mondays 6:00-8:45pm. Goebel Senior Center at 1385 E. Janss Road. Casual play and rated tournament play. All ages welcome. Contact: Cindy Garcia at thousandoak-schess@att.net

Ventura County Chess Club

Meets Mondays at 7pm. Grace Lutheran Church, 6190 Telephone Road, Ventura. Contact: Norman Coats. Contact Phone: 805-701-0010. email: picturethis6@verizon.net. <http://www.vcchess.com/>

Westlake Village Library

Wednesdays 4-5pm, the Westlake Village library will offer beginning chess with Larry Scott consisting of half hour of instruction, followed by a half hour of play for 6-12 year olds. For more info. contact the library at 818-865-9230.

West Valley Chess Club

Meets Thursdays 6:30-10:30. 7353 Valley Circle Blvd., West Hills. Continuous rated tournaments, blitz, casual play. Contact Jerry Yee (818) 915-5572 or at jy-ee6@socal.rr.com.

Conejo Valley Parks and Recreation

The Conejo Parks and Rec offer Chess instruction at various park locations. Classes taught by Norman Coats, Jack Cashman and Larry Scott. See <http://www.crpd.org/> for more details and registration.

**WEST VALLEY CHESS
WEEKLY RATED
TOURNAMENTS
THURSDAYS
6:30PM-10:30PM**



Jerry Yee takes on the role of taxi driver when not coaching. Here he is with his ACA group on way to Chess Camp with Levon Aronian.

American Chess Academy



**Weekday classes in Calabasas and Simi Valley
YEAR ROUND!**

Calabasas
5034 Parkway Calabasas (2nd floor)
Calabasas, CA 91302

Simi Valley
1925 Royal Avenue
Simi Valley, CA 93065

Chess Instruction for Kids of ALL levels!



ACA is perfect for....

- Kids who need a more flexible schedule
- Kids who want to meet other kids that are passionate about chess
- Kids who want to study at novice or intermediate skill levels
- Kids who want to participate in USCF rated chess event

ACA's chess program CAN and WILL take a child to higher skill levels!

*Earn a USCF Chess rating
and become a better
scholastic tournament player*

WWW.ACHESSACADEMY.ORG



For more information, please contact:
Coach Jerry Yee (818) 915-5572
Coach Armen (818) 640-5974

Email: ARTMIK@CHARTER.NET

ACA is a non-profit organization (EIN#26-3269678) Disclaimer: ACA is not affiliated with LVUSD & MUSD

Larry Smith Annotates game won by Rachel Burak

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 h6?

A typical beginner's move. Black knows about the (usually premature) "lighthouse" attack on the f7 square after Ng5, and thus prevents it. But, as Black begins each chess game essentially a tempo behind, as White gets to move first, piece development is especially critical for Black in the opening. Better are 3 ... Bc5 (the Giuoco Piano), 3 ... Nf6 (the Two Knight's Defense, which leads to a very complicated game after 4 Ng5 d5), or even the rare Hungarian Defense with 3 ... Be7.

4.d3

Certainly not a bad move, but I would want to try to "punish" Black's 3 ... h6 via 4 d4, 4 Nc3, or 4 c3, seeking to establish a nice pawn center after 5 d4.

4...Nf6 5.Nc3 Bc5 6.h3

White returns the favor and makes an unessential pawn move. This is not quite as weak as Black's 3 ... h6, but why not? Well, I can think of two reasons. One, White, because she moves first, does have an extra tempo to spend as she wants to. Two, White is even in development, and so spending a move on a pawn move is not a big problem. However, please note that White should not be afraid of the following sequence: 6.0-0 Ng4 7.h3 Nxf2 8.Rxf2 Bxf2+ 9.Kxf2 because the two minor pieces are worth more than the Rook and pawn, especially in the middlegame.

6...d6 7.0-0 Be6 8.b3

Better are 8.Bb3 or 8.Bxe6. The text leads to a certain rigidity in White's pawn structure that Black would be well-advised to leave as is (i.e., no need to play ... Bxc4).

8...Bd4

Another common amateur mistake: for the sake of a one-move threat (9 ... Bxc3), which White will of course see, Black spends a tempo to allow White to gain a Bishop for a Knight, which in most positions is a valuable long-term advantage.

9.Nxd4 Nxd4 10.Be3 Nc6 11.Re1

Better is 11.f4 trying to utilize the Rook along the f-file.

11...Bxc4 12.bxc4

Capturing towards the center - good!

12...Nd4

I have to ask: if Black wanted the N on d4, then why was it moved just two moves earlier? More wasted moves!

13.Bxd4 exd4 14.Ne2 c5 15.c3

Very good! White strikes in the center and seeks to eliminate the somewhat cramping Black d4 pawn.

15...dxc3 16.Nxc3 0-0 17.Rb1 b6 18.Qf3

18.f4 Gaining space and controlling center squares with a pawn is another idea.

18...Re8 19.Rbd1 Re7 20.d4

Another good move: the threat is 21 dxc5 when Black cannot play 21 ... dxc5, and thus 21 ... bxc5 would be forced, leaving Black with a very weak backward d-pawn.

20...Qe8

Black avoids the 21 dxc5 threat - good!

21.Re2 a6 22.e5!

Taking advantage of the overloaded BQ, which has to guard both the R@a8 and the White e5 pawn advance - it can't do both!



Larry Smith Annotates game won by Rachel Burak

22...dxe5

22...cxd4?? 23.exf6 Rxe2 24.Nxe2 rescues the WN: note how 21 Re2 made this possible!

23.dxe5 Nh7 24.Nd5 Rd7

24...Rxe5 25.Ne7+ Rxe7 26.Rxe7 Qxe7 27.Qxa8+ wins the exchange

25.Rdd2

25.Rde1 appears more natural.

25...Rad8 26.Qg3 b5

Better is 26...Qe6! and Black is no worse! Chess is a tough game, but one in which the alert player always can find their chances! Never give up hope!

27.Nf6+! Nxf6 28.exf6 Qf8

28...g6 29.Rxe8+ Rxe8 30.Rxd7+-

29.Rxd7 Rxd7 30.Re8!! Rd1+

30...Rd8 31.Qxg7# - the BQ is pinned! And of course if 30...Qxe8 31.Qxg7#. A sparkling finish!

31.Kh2 g6 32.Rxf8+ Kxf8 33.Qb8+ Rd8 34.Qxd8#

A very well played attack by White. 1-0

LS



If you would like Larry to analyze one of your games, please send your game to offdarook@gmail.com for consideration.

MASTER TIPS:

3 ... h6? Try to avoid unnecessary pawn moves in the opening! Developing a piece is usually preferable, if possible.

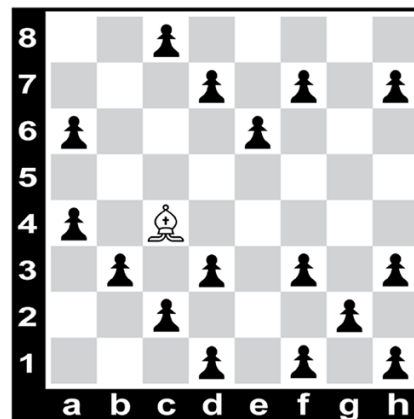
8 ... Bd4 One-move threats (9 ... Bxc3), if insufficiently backed up, are often a waste of time. Also, Bishops are slightly better than Knights, so avoid this exchange unless you get something useful in exchange for this trade.

12... bxc4 Capturing towards the center with pawns is usually best, because pawns near the center are more valuable

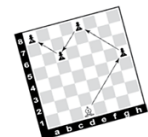
30 Re8!! Examine forcing moves! Even moves that look impossible sometimes work, and you must try these moves in your head in case they do!



PUZZLE OF THE DAY



The bishop must capture all of the pawns without moving to an empty square.



BISHOP

A bishop moves diagonally, in any direction. It can get rid of all four pawns by moving diagonally up and right, then up and left, then down and left, and finally, up and left. Four pawns, four moves. An efficient way to describe this is by writing the moves like this:
 b5 e8 c6 e8

More puzzles & books at www.learningdiagonal.com

What is College Chess?

By Jennifer Vallens

This was an exciting year in College Chess. For those of you who are not familiar with the college chess scene, there are two significant college chess tournaments that take place every year. They are the Pan-American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championship and the President's Cup.

The Pan-American is hosted in part by the United States Chess Federation. It is open to any team comprising four players and up to two alternates from the same post-secondary school in North America, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. The Pan-American is held annually, usually December 27–30. The current format is a six-round fixed-roster team Swiss System tournament.

The winning team is considered to be the top college or university team in Pan-America. In the event of a tie, the title is shared among the top scoring teams. The top four school move on and compete in the President's Cup (informally known as the "Final Four of College Chess" and typically held in the first weekend of April.

The President's Cup determines the U.S. college team chess champion. The top winning four US school chess teams from the Pan-American play a round robin tournament. The winning school takes possession of the perpetual trophy, originally donated by President Franklyn Jenifer of UT-Dallas in 2002, for one year.

The Pan-American tournament this year resulted in a final four that was both predictable AND surprising.

The interesting fact about this tournament is that University of Illinois tied for First Place in the PanAm which qualified them for a place in the Final Four. They are/were considered the underdogs.

The top chess schools (Webster, UNMB and Texas Tech) actively recruit from all over the world and these schools offer full and partial scholarships and other incentives.

The University of Illinois does not offer chess scholarships, like many other top chess schools. The chess club is completely student run. They solicited donations in order to compete in the President's cup and through these donations, were able to hire a Chess Coach to train for the event.

The Four teams that made up the Final Four were Webster University, Texas Tech, University of Illinois and University of Maryland –Baltimore.

The 2014 President's Cup was held April 4-6 at the NY Athletic Club in New York City. It was sponsored by Booz Allen Hamilton and the Chief Arbiter was Michael Hoffpaair. The Arbiter is responsible for acting as TD and ensuring all rules and regulations are followed.

Irina Krush and Max Dlugy provided live commentary at the event and was broadcasted on chess.com and the games were made available on monroi.com.

The 2014 President's Cup Winning team was Webster University and was led by GM Susan Polgar.

Susan Polgar heads SPICE (Susan Polgar Institute for Chess). Her organization is dedicated to bridging the gap in chess from scholastic to adult players. She offers several programs benefiting chess in schools and promoting women's chess. Polgar held the Women's World Chess Championship title from 1996-1999. She made history as being the first female to qualify to compete in the Men's World Chess Championship, among many other chess endeavors. She has led the winning President's Cup team for four years in a row, twice as head of Texas Tech and now twice as head coach for Webster University.

In addition to her many accomplishments, a great deal of controversy surrounds her. The controversy in the US began in 2007 when claims against her and her husband were made regarding defamation and undermining election efforts of a USCF co-board member. That resulted in her being kicked out of the USCF in 2010.

Her controversy continued. In 2012, Polgar announced that she was taking her entire chess team from Texas Tech University where she was the head chess coach to Webster University when funding issues arose at Texas Tech. Texas Tech could not meet her funding request of \$1 million.

She also has been attacked for her recruiting tactics and use of billboard advertising and social media. Naysayers voice that she is buying the national championship.

She even gets flak for requiring her team to participate in Cross Fit exercise program as part of their training program.

More controversy ensued when Webster team member Wesley So decided to switch federations from the Philippines to the United States.

But Susan Polgar isn't the only controversy surrounding college chess.

The USCF took over the Pan American from the intercollegiate League of America. The USCF has made no effort to control colleges from enticing Grandmasters from all over the world with full run scholarships for the purpose of winning the tournament. Many chess team members are in their 30s and 40s. The only requirement is that the USCF requires is that the teams are comprised of "legitimate college students". This loose interpretation of the rules includes graduate students.



What is College Chess (continued)

College Chess became big on the scene in the early 1990s. There are two primary reasons for this. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought an influx of very strong eastern European and former Soviet players to the US. The other reason being that smaller colleges and universities were seeing the value of recruiting chess players to their schools. They found that chess players helped fill their engineering and math programs. Because of this, many schools rewarded chess players with sizable scholarships and incentives.

In addition to Webster, some of the other universities that invest heavily in their school chess programs include University of Maryland, Texas Tech, University of Dallas, Tennessee Tech and University of Texas Brownsville.

The University of Dallas (UTD) offers a full ride scholarship including cost of tuition and mandatory fees through 4 years of enrollment. Additional scholarship includes a \$1,000 per semester contribution toward housing expenses. This scholarship is awarded to the winner of the Denker Tournament of High School championship.

The USCF has been discussing what to do with kids between 14-18 who often drop off the chess scene during and after high school. The USCF currently has over 80,000 competitive members under the age of 18. These kids either drop chess in order to focus on their vocational studies or those serious about continuing with their chess career often forgo a college education to focus solely on chess.

With scholarship opportunities like Denker and programs like Susan Polgar's Foundation which helps promote chess in schools are steps in the right direction in bridging the gap from scholastic players to lifelong competitive adult players.

The next step is getting chess built into schools as part of the primary curriculum in the United States. Chess is incorporated in the scholastic curriculum in more than 35 nations across the globe, including Brazil, China, Armenia, Venezuela, Italy, Israel, Russia and Greece.

Wesley So has a peak rating of 2744 and is ranked #15 in the World!

Final Four (President's Cup 2014)

Webster University WINNERS (average team rating 2743)

<http://www.webster.edu/spice/chess-team/>

Ray Robson 2714

Georg Meier 2701

Wesley So – 2760 see interview on page 7

Le Quang Liem 2795

Fidel Corrales Jimenez 2632

Anatoly Bykhovksy 2581

Head Coach: GM Susan Polgar / (chess@webster.edu)

Texas Tech (average team rating 2588)

Yaroslav Zhrebukh 2706

Elshan Moradiabadi 2658

Andrey Gorovets 2603

Luis Carlos Torres 2381

Faik Aleskerov 2385

Head Coach: GM Alex Onishchuk (texastechchess@ttu.edu)

University of Illinois (average team rating 2260)

Eric Rosen 2398

Xin Luo 2261

Michael Auger 2256

Akshay Indusekar 2028

Head Coach: GM Yuri Shulman

University of Maryland - Baltimore County (average team rating 2524)

Niclas Huschenbeth 2620

Akshayraj Kore 2585

Levan Bregadze 2518

Nazi Paikidze 2371

Sabina Foisor 2311

Head Coach: GM Sam Palatnik (ChessClub@umbc.edu)



Q&A with Wes So

First off, congratulations on your team's win in the President's Cup (Final Four). How did it feel to win as a team in comparison to other tournaments that you have won individually? Was there more or less pressure?

I feel there is less pressure when playing in a team event. The responsibility, preparation, and work is divided within the team members. I am glad to be a part of our team and do my share.

At what age did you become a Grandmaster?

My father taught me chess when I was 7. I was fascinated with how the pieces move. We started reading chess books and I would replay tons of games in the hopes to improve. I joined weekend competitions and age group championships.

My first international event was in 2003. Greece World Youth Under 10. I became a Grandmaster when I was 14. At that time it was good for 7th youngest in the world to achieve the title. I think it was that time I decided to be a chess professional.

What is your highest rating?

FIDE 2744, which was good enough for the 15th place in the World.

For what accomplishment are you most proud?

2x Collegiate Chess Champion and World University Games Champion. I have several other wins like the Capablanca Chess Memorial and Las Vegas Triple Crown last year.

Do you play chess online?

Yes, I do play chess online. I have accounts on ICC Chessclub, Playchess, and chess.com.

I also give lessons and do coaching. I want to help other players who want to improve. I take my students very seriously and my aim is for him/her to reach the best that they can be! For further info, feel free to send me a message. Email:

wesley_so16@yahoo.com or wesleyso39@webster.edu

How many hours a day do you train?

I train anywhere between 2-8 hours per day. But I don't work everyday. It really depends on my schedule. I can train really hard at times, and I can be lazy too, but when I work I try to get the most out of my time. I know hard work and preparation is important for me to continue improving and achieve my current goal of reaching 2750+.

You recently switched chess federations. What is the biggest advantage of being part of the United States Chess Federation?

I think the biggest advantage is: exposure. I will be able to play in strong events that I won't be able to otherwise, fight for medals in team events, and work with stronger teammates. In addition my family has been living in North America already for several years, and I think it makes a lot of sense for me to switch federations.

How did you come to study with Susan Polgar at Webster University? Did she seek you out?

Yes, Susan recruited me to join her team in 2009. I was only 15 then, but I was fascinated of the idea of playing serious chess while studying in a university. I joined her team in 2012, and I didn't have any regrets.

Are you also a Cross Fit enthusiast? Do you think physical stamina helps you with your mental stamina? Are there any other routines or practices you do to help you prepare for a game?

I like CrossFit, I wish they would do exercise sessions longer than 1 hour. Physical shape definitely affects a chess player. Chess games and tournaments can drag out and take a long time, and to have full energy the whole time is hard. If you look at the top players these days, notice that all of them are in a good physical shape.

I sleep a lot during tournaments. At least 8-9 hours a day, preferably longer. And avoid doing anything tiring an hour before the game.

What was the worst chess mistake you recently made?

Over the board, you have to see my game against Dutch GM Giri in 2010. I was White, completely winning and blundered a mate in 2.

Do you analyze your games immediately following your rounds in a tournament?

It's good to take a quick look, but I don't analyze my games too deeply during a tournament. Experience tells me it's not too helpful, as there is only a small chance that the same position would arise again in the same tournament.

You just completed your Sophomore year at Webster University. What are you studying besides chess?

I am studying Finance. My parents are both accountants, very good in math, and they said they would help me with any problems I have about that subject.

How do you see yourself 10 years from now?

It's hard to tell. A World Champion?!

I imagine you don't have much free time, but do you have any other hobbies or interests?

I like physical and outdoor activities. Sports, running, partying, whenever I have the time. Watching and following sports. I also love road trips around the US. My dreams include going to an NBA Basketball game and Universal Studios.

I try to read different kinds of books everyday. I think they are better than surfing the Internet.

Do you have any advice for kids to help them become better players?

If you really want to improve, work hard, be confident, and never give up. Or just be my student :)

Do you believe that anyone can become a Master or Grandmaster? Why or why not?

I think anyone can become a Master as long as they are serious about it and get the right training. Becoming a Grandmaster is a lot trickier, because you do need International exposure to get it.

Are you planning to attend the Millionaire Chess tournament? As a player or spectator? What are your thoughts on chess as a high stakes game?

I love Vegas, though I am not sure if I would attend the event. First of all it is my 21st birthday on the start of the event (October 9)! And I have school classes. That tournament will be assuredly tough though.

Whom do you most admire and why?

My favorite chess player is Carlsen.



August 3

- Summer Fiesta Championship
- Chess Park in Santa Monica
- Chess Palace

August 11

- TOCC Summer Blitz
- Goebel Senior Center in Thousand Oaks
- TOCC

August 15-17

- Off da ROOK Chess Event
- Conejo Valley Chess Club in Newbury Park
- Offdarook.com

August 15-17

- Central California Open
- Fresno, CA
- Continental Chess Association

August 25, Sept. 8, Sept. 15, Sept. 22, Sept. 29

- TOCC Summer's Swiss End
- Goebel Senior Center in Thousand Oaks
- TOCC

August –September 1

- Southern California Chess Open
- San Diego
- <http://www.scchess.com/calendar.html>

September 14

- ACA L.A. Back to School Chess Championship
- Glendale
- American Chess Academy (ACA)



Chessboxing?



Chessboxing is a new hybrid sport combining the mental sport of Chess with the physical sport of Boxing.

It was first conceived by two brothers who were both amateur boxers and club chessplayers living in South London. In 1972 a Hong Kong martial arts film, "The Mystery of Chessboxing" was released and inspired a popular rap track by the rap group the Wu-Tang clan with the same name. Prominent members of the Wu-Tang Clan are avid chess players as well.

The World Chess Boxing Organization was founded in 2003 in Berlin with the first Chessboxing club appearing in 2005. The sport is now governed by the World Chess Boxing Organization in Berlin and World Chessboxing Association in London.

A full match consists of eleven rounds: six rounds of rapid chess following with five rounds of boxing (3 or 4 minutes long). Chess and Boxing rounds alternate until the end of the match. There is a one minute break between each round for each opponent to collect themselves and change gear. Chess clocks are used. The players typically wear closed back headphones during the chess rounds to avoid being distracted by the live chess commentary.

I was fortunate to attend a live Chessboxing match in Los Angeles. Andrew McGregor is the founder of the Los Angeles Chessboxing club and holds events dedicated to supporting charities. Andrew's costumes and comical presence helps make the event amusing and fitting for the whole family to enjoy.

A feature length Chessboxing documentary titled "CHESSBOXING: The King's Discipline" is in post production. The film explores the history of Chessboxing. It is produced by David Bitton and Anonymous Pineapple Productions.



About the LA Chessboxing Club

The LA Chessboxing club was founded in January 2010 by Andrew McGregor as North America's first Chessboxing club. Chessboxing is a new sport in which one 3-minute round of chess is followed by one 3-minute round of boxing and then back to the same chess game against the same opponent. Whoever wins by either checkmate or in the ring first wins.

Embracing the novel sport concept, the club makes a statement about the diminished appreciation to two of history's most glorious sport disciplines - chess, where computers are now outsmarting any human player and boxing, smothered by mass media and big payday promoters. By creating a unique challenge for both body and mind, the club focuses on reviving the Olympian ideals of a "healthy mind in a healthy body," while creating the opportunity for anyone to train and rise to the challenge.

For more information on the LA Chessboxing Club, click [HERE](#).



Highlights from Metropolitan/ACA Camp

Evan and I attended the Metropolitan/ACA 5 day Chess Camp featuring lectures from Levon Aronian (#2 in the world). Here are a few photos from this event. More photos can be found on www.offdarook.com under the Events section.



Girl Power! World Chess Champion and Women's Grandmaster Tatev Abrahamyan serves as a role model for these up and coming chess stars. Front row: Natasha Mertens, Gloria Galassi and Joy Chu.



Here are some of our ACA students. Featured are Rachel Burak and Ruby Henrickson (in the back row) Evan Vallens, Trent Chu and Noah Estiva (front row)



The camp held 4 sections divided by rating. Each section held a tournament. The winners of each section got a chance to play Aronian on the final day. Here is Kayden Troff playing Aronian. Troff is a 16 year old Grandmaster. He will be featured in the next Off da ROOK newsletter.



Our very own ACA student, Ruby Hendrickson plays her favorite opening as white against Levon Aronian.



Here is Levon Aronian and Coach Jerry Yee