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Chess Lessons Beyond the Board

Pigeons hurriedly fled as a frustrated “I just can’t do it!” echoed through the park. With an internal smirk, I asked, “What’s two times two?” “four,” Max replied, faster than the speed of light. “I bet the first time you learned multiplication, you felt the same way as you do now about chess, so let’s try again.” The sun’s golden glaze fell upon the wooden pieces as I set up a new position. It was a bright and windy Sunday, and just like yesterday and the day before, I was at another park teaching chess. However, I had been looking forward to this particular day for weeks. Today, I had the privilege of teaching a complete beginner. Ever since I started teaching chess, I yearned to once again feel the amazement that had encompassed the game when I first started in July 2021. “Why do you teach?” Max asked with his eyebrows furrowed and arms crossed, “If you’re so good, why don’t you just go to tournaments?” A question I had asked myself frequently.

The chess community has always been very particular about which players were “good.” A so-called “good” player won tournaments or achieved a title such as Grandmaster. If asked about what “good” meant three years ago, I would have said the same. But for each tournament I went to, the thrill of winning subsided shortly after, leaving me stranded in a desert of choices, thinking, “What next?”

As I further explored the 64 squares, I found another promising opportunity: mentoring others. Teaching chess, I realized, was not only about sharing the knowledge I had accumulated

over the years but also about rekindling the fascination and wonder that had drawn me to the game in the first place. It allowed me to see chess through fresh eyes, eyes filled with creativity and curiosity. As I moved the pieces on the board, explaining concepts and strategies, I could see the moment that each student began to grasp the intricacies of the game. The joy of witnessing progress and being there at the "aha" moments was far more rewarding than any tournament victory I had ever experienced. Teaching meant inspiring a love for the game and instilling the confidence to explore it further, leaving behind a legacy of learning. I made a point to explain to my students that chess was not about brute force calculation; it was about understanding the principles, visualizing positions, and developing a sense of harmony on the board. These were the lessons I had learned from my mentors and experiences, and now I had the privilege of passing them on to a new generation of players.

So, when Max asked me why I teach instead of chasing titles, I simply smiled and said, "Because, Max, the real joy in chess is not the trophies or titles. It's inspiring others, igniting the fire of curiosity, and helping them find the beauty in every move."

Soon enough, Max's initial frustration had given way to determination, and he was eager to continue learning. He asked questions, thoughtfully made moves, and slowly but surely, he started to see the beauty and depth of the game. As we played, I couldn't help but smile. I had found my "what's next." It was in nurturing the potential of young chess enthusiasts like Max, in sharing the wisdom I had gained, and in helping them discover the magic of chess. (569)