

Special Issue
August 24, 2024

Summer Chess

by Derek Jin

Sportsmen's Tennis and Enrichment Center | August 12 – August 23, 2024



Teaching the Summer Chess Program at the Sportsmen's Tennis and Enrichment Center (Sportsmen's) during the past two weeks has been incredibly rewarding for all of our Chess+Math Lab coaches. It was so wonderful to see some returning campers from last year! In two weeks, we covered how pieces move, opening strategies, tactics, end game, as well as some basic pawn structures. The two-week program concluded with a chess tournament to celebrate the strategic thinking, problem-solving, and sportsmanship of the young players, skills that could help the kids excel in chess and life beyond.

Sportsmen's Tennis and Enrichment Center offers free and low-cost tennis, academic, and life skills programming to more than 5,000 youths in the most challenged communities in the City of Boston annually.

Chess+Math Lab offers free chess and math activities to empower underserved population in Boston and Cambridge.

Coaches

Frank Cao
Eric Feng
Derek Jin
Justin L
Christian Li
Alex Meng
Ethan Qiao



Coach Eric and his happy students

Notes from the Coaches (Excerpts)

Coach Eric

We introduced each other and played training games while I instructed and analyzed their games. From this I was able to check their skill levels. Out of the group, three kids stand out while others play at slightly lower levels.

I brought in one big chess set and we worked on puzzles together. I made two teams and they tried to compete against each other for whoever solves it the fastest. The puzzles were mate in 2 and 3, and some of them were actually very difficult. They were still able to solve them with some hints. In the end, the two teams were tied.

Since the score was tied between the two teams the day before, I made the two teams play against each other. I paired people of relatively equal level and set clocks to 10 minutes. The match was best to 3 and Ben's team was able to take the win. I gave out jolly ranchers to everyone and gave 2 for all the winners.

Coach Derek and Coach Justin

During the play session, the kids got in multiple games with each other, and generally, the play was fairly high level. We could tell the kids were thinking hard and everyone was really excited. On one board, we saw one of the kids find a creative attacking sequence that led to an impressive checkmate. For the first ~15 minutes, we wandered around, giving some minor reminders about the clock and not taking your opponent's king. In total, the play session lasted around 40 minutes, and our impression from it was that the kids had a solid grasp of the rules and some basic strategies.

After a short break, we dove into the second part of the camp, which was lectures about basic endgame scenarios. We had a list of scenarios planned including "Queen vs. King," "Rook vs. King," "Queen and King vs. King and Pawn," "Knight vs. Rook," and "Bishop vs. Rook." Because one student had to leave early, Coach Justin decided to start a little earlier and teach him 1 on 1 so that he could learn something before he left. From what I heard, that session went really well, as the student already had a solid endgame background, and Justin was able to get through a lot.

Moving forward, we think the kids are ready for some more complex concepts that verge into the intermediate level - for example, harder endgame scenarios like Queen vs. 2nd/7th rank Pawn, Rook vs. Knight, and Rook vs. Bishop. We also think we may be able to introduce more abstract but important concepts such as doubled pawns, pawn structure, and space.

Notes from the Coaches (Excerpts)

Coach Justin and Coach Frank

Today, similar to last Friday, we started with games. We worked with the 7-year-old Cameron during that time to make sure he knew the rules of moving the pieces, since he had trouble moving them the right way.

After the games, we held a puzzles competition with teams of 4. We set up each team with a board each; one team was given the first guess, and the other team had the chance to get the point if the first team got the puzzle wrong. We ended up going through three puzzles; this was mainly because the last one was quite hard for them to figure out. Four students won the puzzles competition.

Coach Ethan

Today, I started with games for the first 30 minutes, before moving into lecture. In between the games and lecture, I briefly mentioned coordinates. They seem to know what it is, but probably still need a bit more practice. I then taught opposition and the square of the pawn. They probably still need to be a bit more familiarized with these topics, so it probably wouldn't hurt to go over them again.

I spent the remaining time holding a small puzzle competition, with 2 teams of 3 competing who can solve puzzles the quickest. I did this in a format similar to what Justin did on Monday. We only got through 2 puzzles for the competition, as both teams struggled on a smothered-mate puzzle.

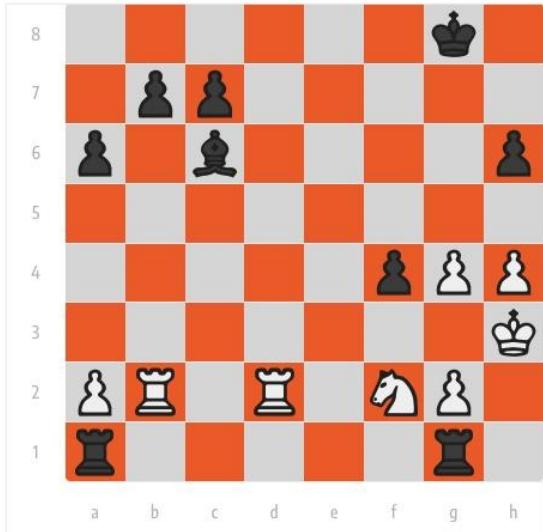
Coach Alex and Coach Ethan

We spent this day on a tournament. It was four rounds and each side had seven minutes. The format was round-robin rather than knockout, so everyone played four games, except for one kid who had to leave after the third round. The prizes for the top three were magnetic chess sets, and first place also got a medal. Everyone who participated got candy.

The kids were competitive against each other, and while first place went clear with a perfect 4/4 score, 2nd and 3rd had to be determined through a tiebreak blitz game where each side had three minutes each. There likely would have been another tiebreaker had the kid who dropped out continued playing.

They also learned some USCF rules including hitting the clock with the same hand that you move pieces with, and not being allowed to pause the clock while going to the bathroom. We didn't talk about touchmove to allow them to think more about moves without being forced to play a blunder.

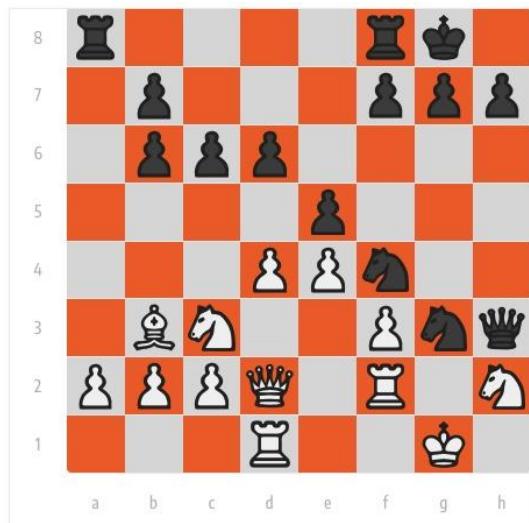
Puzzles



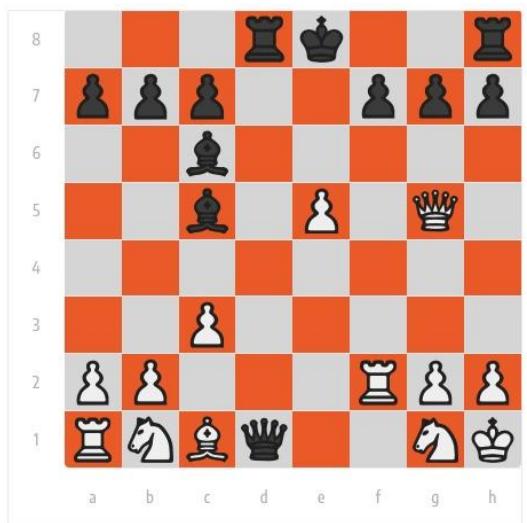
Mate in two. Black to move



Mate in two. Black to move



Mate in two. Black to move



Mate in two. Black to move

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Chess Fun

Coach Derek
explaining end
game strategies



Coach Frank
giving 1 on 1
lesson



Coach Justin
analyzing a
game



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Chess Fun

Coach Eric
and Coach
Steve and
the class



Coach Eric
explaining a
mate in 2



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Final Tournament



Coach Alex (1st left), Coach Ethan (1st right), and Tournament Participants

Recommendations

We want to express our gratitude to Ms. Wiley and Ms. Mines-Smart for providing us with this wonderful opportunity, as well as to the enthusiastic and engaging students in the class.

Recommendations for our young chess players

Continue the practice

By dedicating a short amount of time each day to play and practice, you will witness remarkable progress in your skills. Consistency is the key to unlocking the full potential of your strategic thinking, problem-solving, and patience. Remember, every move is a step towards becoming a better player.

Websites

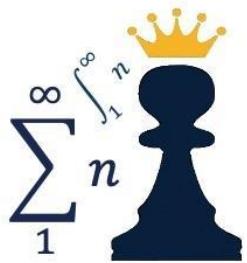
Chess.com and lichess.org are excellent options to explore. Both platforms offer free sign-up and the opportunity to play games against opponents from around the world. Additionally, chess.com provides complimentary lessons to further enhance your skills.



Coach Derek (left), Coach Justin (middle), Sportsmen Chief Operating Officer Ms. Mines-Smart (right)

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CHESS + MATH LAB
EMPOWERS MINDS WITH CHESS AND MATH



Our Team

Derek Jin



President & Co-Founder

Alexander Meng



Vice President & Co-Founder

Eric Feng



Vice President & Co-Founder