

Kids Check Out Chess

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Tucked In David Moosman's bookcase are titles like Chess Tactics and My Best Games of Chess and The Chess Player's Handbook. "The game of chess is not merely idle amusement" begins a framed saying by Benjamin Franklin that hangs on Moosman's wall.

His shelves are jammed with more than 27 trophies for chess, and his trophies are stuffed with prize ribbons. David Moosman is 11 years old.

Even more amazing? He started playing chess in kindergarten.

"I started because all my friends were playing" said David, a Libertyville, IL resident

"I thought it might be fun. I liked it because got to use my brain in different ways."

He's now mastered the thinking man's game so well that his mom jokes about trying to distract him when the two play.

"I make him face the television," said Lynn Moosman.

"Yeah, but I still win," her son retorted.

The number of children playing chess has increased about 700 percent in the last five years said Kevin Bachler, a chess master from Lake County who runs the Caveman Chess Club at Franklin Elementary School in Park Ridge.

David plays at Caveman every Friday night.

On a good night as many as 125 children show up.

"A game that used to be considered geeky is now considered cool," Bachler said. "Kids realize now that they can be smart and have fun. A lot of my players also play soccer or basketball or some other sport."

That's true for David, who also has trophies for baseball and basketball in his bedroom.

His parents don't insist that he keep playing chess.

"The interest is his own, and we just support that," his mother said.

David began studying chess at St. George's Day School, a private school in Memphis, Tenn. While a student there, he was part of a school team that won the National Elementary Chess Championship three times."

"We were known all throughout Tennessee," he said.

The St. George's team was the first ever in Tennessee to become state champs three years in a row.

David has traveled to San Jose, Calif.; Charlotte, N.C., and Tucson, Ariz., among other cities, for chess tournaments.

The Moosmans moved from Memphis to Libertyville last year, when David's father, Michael, a vice president of a fertilizer company, was transferred.

"When we were told we had to relocate, the first thing David said was, 'Do they play chess in Chicago?'" said Lynn Moosman.

The Moosmans have been fortunate because they can afford to hire a private instructor and travel with David to tournaments all over the country.

But that's not necessary to encourage a budding chess player, Lynn Moosman said.

"You can be actively involved in chess and never travel," she said.

David studies privately with David Monatelli, the chess coach at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire and an instructor at the Caveman Chess Club. Monatelli also instructs two 6-year-olds.

One is astonishing, he said, and could become one of the top 50 players in his age group soon.

Chess is a difficult game for many adults to master. How can a child learn the game?
"If taught well, it's amazing how fast they can pick it up," Bachler said "They're like little sponges."

Lynn Moosman said chess has taught David decision-making skills and also how to lose.

'You learn quickly to take the loss and move on," she said. "He applies that to football. Chess also has a protocol, and part of that is sportsmanship. The games isn't done until you shake your opponent's hand"

A good chess player, David said, is, "someone who can think ahead of what the other person is going to do and who has logic and who has a clear mind and can block out anything else."

Chess players in tournament play earn a rating.

A player can boost her or his rating by beating players with higher ratings.

David's rating is now over 1,000. That doesn't put him in the top 50 for his age, but it's an excellent rating, nonetheless.

"I've been shooting for that my whole life, and I'm finally there," he said

David Moosman listens as his instructor, David Monatelli, teaches him a new opening during a chess lesson in Libertyville.

Looking at his computer screen, David Moosman concentrates during a chess game on the Internet.