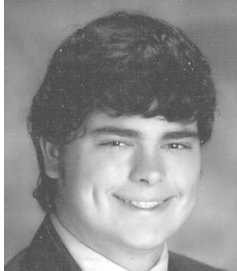


DOBB'S DIAGNOSIS: THE RIGHT TRACK



STARTING IN THE SEVENTH grade, I was a member of my high school's chess club. I will admit, however, that for the first three years of my association with the club I attended almost none of the meetings and participated in none of the events. One

may ask why I was so distant from the team when I cared enough to remain a member. The sad truth is that I was terrified of the faculty advisor—my seventh grade math teacher. Halfway through the tenth grade I finally put my pride on a shelf and went to the club. That was a decision that ameliorated my life to an extent I would never have dreamed possible.

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I quickly learned that I was actually unfamiliar with many of the rules of chess, such as moving *en passant* and castling, and I could not differentiate between checkmate and stalemate. I was trounced fairly easily in every game by the more experienced, stronger players. Even from its resting place on my shelf my pride was wounded; I was determined not to go down so easily ever again. This led me to begin studying chess and setting me on the path that brought me to my current state. (By this I mean that of an active chess player—I have always lived in Ohio).

Now a sophomore in college rather than high school, with the four year anniversary of me learning how to play chess approaching rapidly, I have had to change my views on chess to accommodate the college lifestyle. In this edition of my column, I would like to examine the changes I underwent and explain what those in the same situation, or who will be in this situation soon, can do to ease the transition and to keep chess an integral part of their lives.

As a freshman at Miami University I sought out a team at my new school. Sadly, I was unable to find one, so I started my own! (More details can be found in my other article in this magazine, "Miami Heads to the Pan-American Championships" on page 6.) I was hot off of a strong chess summer, gaining 205 rating points from a combined 6.0/8.0 in two tournaments! Needless to say, I was very proud of this accomplishment, and could not wait to continue improving my game. However, with no competitive players in sight and no car in which to travel to tournaments, I seemed fresh out of luck. I played in but one tournament that year, achieving only an even score as one of the highest-rated players in my division. The rust was showing.

Let us travel through time and space to the next summer, this past summer. I began using an ICC account in earnest, traveling to a tournament about every other weekend, playing in a weekly ladder, and studying when I could in my spare time... all while working more than 40 hours a week at a challenging internship with a top-notch advertising agency. In the end it paid off as I managed a 5.5/9 score in my division of the World Open, placing me at #47 out of 185 on tie-breaks. To put this in perspective, I was seeded #172 out of the same 185 players. My hard work proved successful and I gained 158 rating points from just this one tournament, even after wasting several completely winning positions.

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Although for only a few years, chess has been a vital part of my life. After spending most of my freshman year away from the board and needing a lot of play to get back into shape, I was determined not to let this happen again. I was determined. And still am, not

to only be a summer-time chessplayer. I cannot often travel to tournaments due to a job that has me working nearly every weekend, a rigorous class schedule, and obligations to student organizations and my fraternity on campus. However, I have allowed chess to stay strong in my life, and here is the list of simple changes I made to keep involved in chess even if it cannot always be my top priority.

1. I began carrying a book of tactics in my backpack. Often I find that I will have a couple minutes of sitting in class awaiting the professor's arrival, so why not solve a puzzle or two? It also encourages others to ask about chess, starting conversations and spreading the joys of the sixty-four squares. I typically leave the heartbreaking failures out of these conversations. (I think all tournament players know exactly what I am talking about here.)

2. I have maintained an ICC account. I play at the minimum a few blitz games every day. This does not help me improve, but it certainly helps keep the rust off and helps keep me excited for chess. When I can afford the time I spend hours a day on ICC playing and training. After any tough loss I feel encouraged to study later, and after every tough win I know that the hard work has paid off, even if only a little.

3. I changed my homepage on my internet browser to the USCF site. I also check several other sites daily, such as Chessbase.com, in order to keep in touch with the world of chess. Feeling attached to other players and reading up on tournament results helps keep me connected with chess; when I am able to discuss it or travel to a tournament I can speak knowledgeably. This also takes but a few minutes a day, and there are also puzzles and games by strong players if you wish to solve or play through them.

4. I wear shirts from tournaments in which I participated, as well as humorous chess-themed shirts. This prompts others to ask about my relationship with chess, and just talking about it makes me miss fre-

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quenting tournaments all the more, inspiring me to stay in touch with my chessic side.

5. I started the Miami University Chess Club. While I realize this is not applicable for many, it is important to find other players near you. If your school has a club, participate in it. If there is not a club, start one! It is entirely doable, and readers may contact me with questions or if they need assistance.

6. Here's the big one: when I have time, I practice. I go over tactics, spend time examining my opening repertoire, play through GM games, and pray to Caissa that I may miraculously absorb Bobby Fischer's ghost and skill. I spend most of my time on tactics, as that is what seems most important at my current level.

It is difficult to retain your identity as a chessplayer at college. With the calls of schoolwork, intramural sports, student organizations, Greek life, the opposite sex, new friends, and a slew of other distractions, it is easy to lose your way. I did, and I regretted it. With just these few simple steps you can move chess anywhere along your priority list but easily balance chess and college. ♦ ~Chris Dobbs

Want to learn how to start your own college chess club? Email OCC columnist Chris Dobbs at:

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