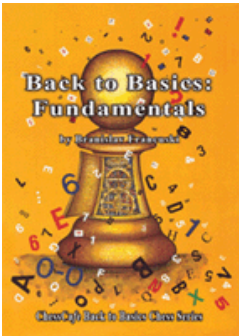




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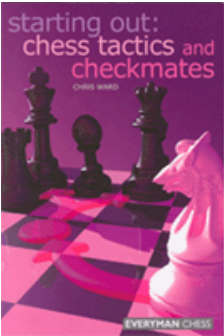
Elliott Liu and the US Championship

FM Elliott Liu just completed his freshman year at Stanford University. He shares with us his experiences at the College Final Four this past spring, and discusses how he combines high-level chess with demanding academics.

The 2009 U.S. Championship was a remarkable event, taking place at the beautiful new St. Louis Chess Club. Ample coverage of the event has been available from numerous sources, but I share a couple brief thoughts and a few of my photos below.

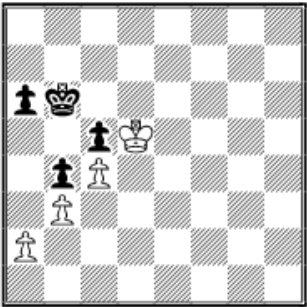
Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive one of the following, at the discretion of **ChessCafe.com**: *Starting Out: Chess Tactics and Checkmates* (CD), by GM Chris Ward.



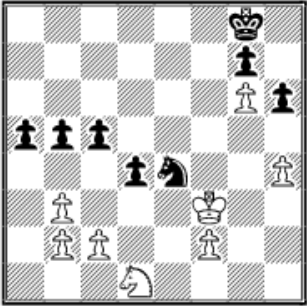
We will accept all contest answers for *two weeks* following the appearance of this column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. In order to meet the two-week deadline, please e-mail your responses to me by July 22, 2009. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1



It is Black to move. What do you suggest?

Problem #2

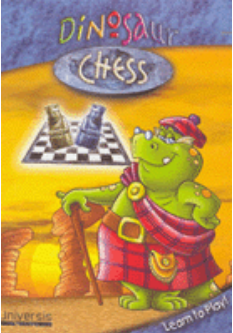


It is Black to move. What do you suggest?

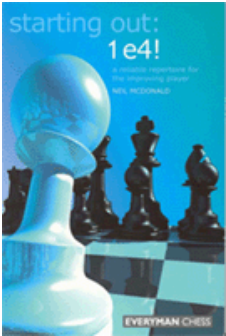
Elliott Liu

FIDE Master Elliott Liu (his last name is pronounced “Lou”) just completed his freshman year at Stanford University, which he described as “an absolute blur.” As in high school, he has a full plate of activities, both chess and otherwise. Nearly three years ago, we did a two-part interview that is available in the [September 2006](#) and [October 2006](#) columns. This month I was interested to hear from Elliott about the College Final Four and his experiences combining high-level chess with high-level academics.

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FM Elliott Liu

For the College Final Four, held this past spring, Liu (rated 2398) held down first board for his Stanford team. Other players included Daniel Schwarz (2317), Matthew Ho (2281), Vaishnav Aradhyula (2225) and Christopher De Sa (2161).

The tournament ended in a tie between the University of Maryland – Baltimore County (UMBC) and the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), host of the event. The UMBC squad won the title on tiebreaks. The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) finished third, followed by Stanford. The team final standings mirrored the ranking of the teams’ average ratings:

- UMBC 2568
- UTD 2546
- UTB 2347
- Stanford 2251

I had the chance to visit the UTD campus a few months ago and enjoyed the opportunity to meet with Jim Stallings, director of the school’s chess program. He jokingly commented that the campus is actually situated in Richardson, a suburb of Dallas. So that would make it the University of Texas at Dallas in Richardson!

“Overall, the organization of the Final Four was pretty good,” Liu said. “One thing that would have been especially helpful would have been a rental car. All the other teams had one because they had members/coaches who were old enough to rent one. The hotel was very nice, but it was a 5-10 minute drive from the UTD campus, so it wasn’t really walkable – especially with all the construction on campus. The Stanford team got to and from the playing site pretty easily with the hotel’s shuttle service, except on one occasion that no one really knows about...”

Liu explains this one occasion: “To make a long story short, on the night before our final match against UTB, the Stanford team was stranded at the UTD campus for three hours. After several increasingly angry phone calls, a taxi finally picked us up. That was just the beginning of the adventure. Our poor driver had moved to Texas from Louisiana five days earlier, so he had absolutely no idea where he was going! Neither did we! Alas, we somehow made it back the 10,000 feet to the hotel by 2:00 AM...only to have to wake up six hours later at 6:00 AM Pacific Time (and we are college students meaning that we normally wake up 5-6 hours later). Needless to say, we were not full strength against the UTB team because all of us were exhausted—hence me hanging a pawn on move 10 and other boards featuring numerous blunders. I still don’t understand why the morning rounds were so early?! The quality of chess goes down (as far as college students are concerned), and I’m sure no one would object to an 11:00 AM morning round and a 5:30 or 6:00 PM evening round.”

Of his three games, the highlight was when Liu defeated GM Leonid Kritz (rated 2668) of the UMBC team. “My other two games were pretty disappointing,” he notes. “Against GM Alejandro Ramirez, I equalized pretty easily with Black and then beat myself by accidentally trapping my own queen! Against IM Mauricio Flores, I forgot the opening and hung a pawn at 9:00 AM (7:00 AM my time - way too early for brain function). My back was against the wall the entire game, but I clawed my way back to a drawn endgame. Unfortunately, I blundered the game away during time pressure at the very end of a five-hour battle.”

Here is the Liu-Kritz game, with annotations generated by [Fritz](#):

Liu, Elliott - Kritz, Leonid

2009 President’s Cup, Richardson, Texas (1), 04.04.2009
French [C16]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Ne7 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 b6 7.Qg4 Ng6 8.h4 h5 9.Qg3 Ba6 10.Bd3

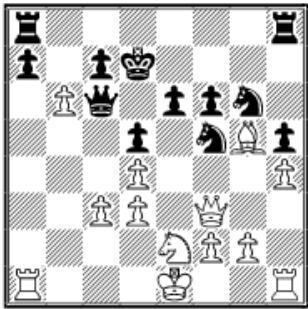
10.Bxa6 Nxa6 11.Ne2 Qd7 and White is slightly better.

10...Bxd3= 11.cxd3 Nc6 12.Bg5 Qd7 13.Ne2 Nce7 14.Qf3 Nf5 15.a4

Qc6 16.a5 Kd7

Better is 16...bxa5!? 17.g3 Qa6=.

17.axb6 f6 18.exf6 gxf6



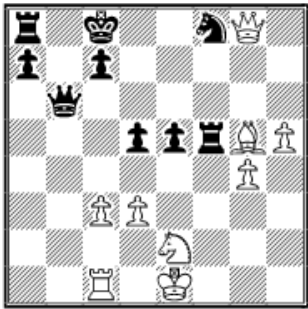
19.Bxf6

19.Rxa7?? That pawn is deadly bait and will cause White grave problems:
19...fxg5 20.Rxc7+ Qxc7 21.bxc7 g4 22.Qxf5 Ra1+ (worse is 22...exf5
23.0-0-+) 23.Nc1 exf5-+ (23...Rxc1+?! 24.Kd2 exf5 25.Kxc1-+) ; 19.
bxa7 is a useless try: 19...fxg5 20.hxg5 Qb6 with Black slightly better.

19...Rhf8 20.Bg5

Better is 20.Kd2!? Qb7 21.Qxh5 Rxf6 22.Qg5 with White slightly better.

**20...Nxd4 21.Qxh5 Nc2+ 22.Kd2 Nxa1 23.Rxa1 Qxb6 24.Rc1 e5 25.
Qh7+ Kc8 26.h5 Rxf2 27.Qg8+ Nf8 28.Ke1 Rf5 29.g4**



29...Rf3??

Makes life more difficult; (Note: Fritz analysis goes from 0.00 after 29.g4
to 7.39 after 29...Rf3.) 29...Qf2+ would hold out: 30.Kd2 Rf7=.

30.Qxd5 Qf2+

30...Rb8 is no salvation 31.Qxf3 Nd7 32.Ra1+-.

31.Kd2 Rb8 32.Qd8+ Kb7 33.Rb1+ Kc6 34.Qxb8 Ne6 35.Qe8+ 1-0

35...Kc5 36.Be7+ Kd5 37.Qd7#



Regarding campus life, Liu commented, “Going to a school like Stanford definitely inhibits chess-playing time, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. The Stanford experience is too much of a good one. In my opinion, there is not another school in the nation that is as well rounded as Stanford – the academics, the athletics, the social life, the weather (although I’m from San Diego so not really a change) and just the people you meet in your daily life. It almost feels like you’re going to Camp Stanford at a gorgeous resort. But, this is not really that different from the previous six years of my life either. I’ve always had to find a healthy balance between all the stuff I have going on in my life because I try to be as well-rounded and multi-dimensional as possible. I don’t have a regular chess schedule that I stick to, but I do try to stay in mental shape here and

there by playing on ICC and having a quick lesson once every two weeks [with IM Cyrus Lakdawala from San Diego].”

Besides playing chess and studying, Liu keeps very busy with various intramural sports and has joined the campus Sigma Chi fraternity. He also has produced a number of instructional videos for chess.com and has worked with the Hip-Hop Chess Federation and WuChess. He enjoys working with the youngsters at these events, noting that “The kids seem to have a really good time, and that’s all that matters to me – the fact that I helped make a difference for them. And, I get to play chess against legendary rappers, so how cool is that?”

Going to school in Northern California provides great opportunities for travel. “I’ve been able to head down to gorgeous Monterrey Bay/Carmel and Santa Cruz and up to San Francisco occasionally, which make for nice locations when you want to get off campus. I’ve also been rafting on the American River and camped out at Yosemite and Lake Tahoe (for snowboarding particularly). I’ve even driven six hours back down to Los Angeles to see the Stanford vs. UCLA football game.”

He hasn’t declared a major yet and is as yet uncertain about what direction he wants to take after school. “I have a ton of varying interests, but I’m confident my career path will work itself out. I guess my dream job right now would be the team doctor or surgeon for a professional sports team. That would combine my love for helping people, for the most complex, intricate, and beautiful machine on earth (the human body), and for sports simultaneously. What could be better than getting paid to sit courtside every game or stand on the playing field with the athletes every game, and when one of the treasured physical specimens goes down everyone turns to you to solve the problem?”

I recall when visiting the UTD campus that I was surprised at how virtually invisible the chess club appeared to be, considering the outstanding national success of the school’s chess team. I realize that having a powerhouse chess team isn’t quite the same as winning a football or basketball championship, but a visitor to the campus could stroll the grounds of UTD and have no idea at all that half a dozen GMs and IMs represent the school in national competition.

Liu echoed similar thoughts about his own campus. “Unfortunately, the Stanford chess team is more or less invisible in the school community, and I wouldn’t expect anything to change. I actually don’t mind that we don’t receive that much attention. But, I do have lots of friends who now know how good we are because I’ve told them. And to any high school student reading this who is a strong chess player, know that our board 4 is over 2200!”

Regarding his future in chess, Liu said “I do not have any specific goals as far as chess is concerned for the next few years. I still enjoy the game very much, and I think it will be a lifelong love and a nice hobby. I plan on trying to have as much fun as possible with it and take any progress that comes my way in stride. My goals are to improve, to play in tournaments in cool locations (before I can no longer compete freely when I grow up and start working during the summer – I feel old saying that), and to meet as many interesting people as possible (and we know that it’s not too hard to meet ‘interesting’ chess players). I also want to spread my knowledge about this great game to as many people as possible by continuing to teach both in San Diego and now in the Bay Area at my new home up north – individuals privately, camps, schools, etc. I love teaching others.”

Liu currently has two IM norms. “I got my first one by winning the gold medal at the 2006 Pan-American U18 Championship, and I got my second one at last year’s New York International in 2008,” he explained.

He’s planning a busy summer. Liu competed in the 2009 New York International, where he drew with GM Giorgi Kacheishvili, but withdrew from the tournament after a few disappointing results. He also plans to play in the World Open and in two invitational events – the Southern California Championship and the U.S. Junior Championship in Milwaukee.

Then it’s back to school again in the fall, which, given Liu’s hectic schedule, is likely to be a blur once again.



2009 U.S. Championship

The Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis hosted the recent U.S. Championship and I believe it is fair to say that players and spectators alike were overwhelmed with the facilities and the organization of the event. The gala opening ceremony was outstanding, the playing area was roomy, well-lit and quiet, and excellent live commentary was presented daily by Jennifer Shahade and Emil Sutovsky.



WGM Jennifer Shahade and GM Emil Sutovsky in the commentary room

Of course, few events are without a glitch or two, and this tournament was no exception. Early on there was a problem with the live game transmission to the internet, but this was resolved relatively quickly. It was gratifying to see so many of America's top players gathered for this championship, in contrast to recent years in which several top GMs declined to participate.

A humorous event occurred at the opening ceremony when one of the speakers struggled a bit with a Russian player's name. I happened to be sitting directly behind Yury Shulman, Gregory Kaidanov and Boris Gulko, and couldn't help but notice their bemused expressions, as if to say, "Another American who can't pronounce our names!"

The players could be vicious at the chess board, but before and after the rounds, they seemed to be very cordial with one another. Small groups of players were frequently seen strolling together through the fashionable neighborhood, in search of a place to eat or drink. They were also generally very friendly with spectators, sometimes following some of the late-running games on the wall monitors with the other on-lookers.



IM Irina Krush with Macauley Peterson

I don't want to leave anyone out, but special congratulations are due to club founder Rex Sinquefield, chess club Executive Director Tony Rich, Jennifer Shahade, Emil Sutovsky, Chief TD Carol Jarecki, Assistant TD Chris Bird, Macauley Peterson and photographer Betsy Dynako for all of their outstanding work.



*Eventual winner GM Hikaru Nakamura
discussing his game six draw*

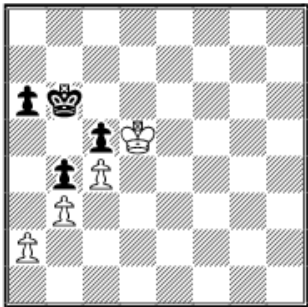
The crosstable for the championship is available [here](#) and the games may be downloaded [here](#). Photos of the festive closing ceremony can be seen [here](#).

The 2009 U.S. Women’s Championship is scheduled for the same venue this fall, and it appears that the 2010 U.S. Championship will be returning to St. Louis. Make your plans now to attend!

I share more of my experiences at the U.S. Championship [here](#).

Answers to Last Month’s Quiz

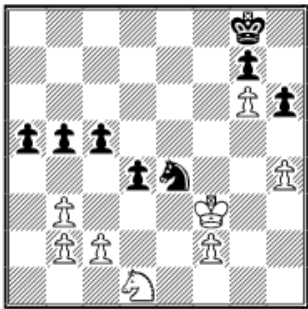
Problem #1



It is Black to move. What do you suggest?

Answer: 1...Ka5 2.Kxc5 stalemate.

Problem #2

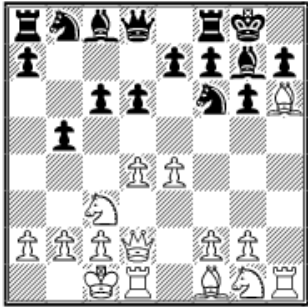


It is Black to move. What do you suggest?

Answer: 1...Nc3 2.bxc3 a4 3.cxd4 cxd4 4.c3 a3. Both problems are from Just the Facts by Lev Alburt & Nikolay Krogius.

Correction

The following problem was presented as part of the Everyman Quiz in our [May 2009](#) column:



The answer provided in our [June 2009](#) column read as follows: **1...b4! 2. Nce2** (2.Bxg7 bxc3!) **Nxe4 3.Qf4 Bxh6 4.Qxh6 Nxf2.** (from Ray Cheng’s *Practical Chess Exercises*).

Alert reader George Liu pointed out, however, that after 4...Nxf2 there is the problem of 5.Qxh7 mate! As he suspected, I inadvertently omitted the h4-pawn from the diagram.

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