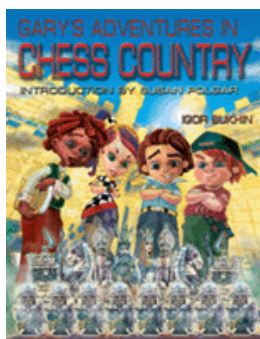




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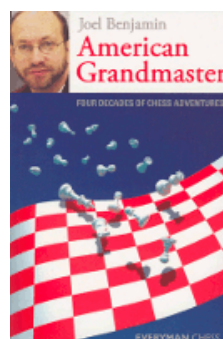
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All-Girl U.S. Chess School  
Part One

The remarkable U.S. Chess School, brainchild of international master Greg Shahade, is approaching its fourth anniversary, but it recently celebrated a special event – the first all-girl U.S. Chess School camp. Held in St. Louis at what is arguably the most attractive chess club in the country, the talented young ladies were instructed by perhaps the top chess trainer in the country, GM Gregory Kaidanov. Here is part one of our coverage of this special week of chess and fun.

## 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 *American Grandmaster*, by GM Joel Benjamin.



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 November 25, 2009. Send your answers to [scholasticchess@chesscafe.com](mailto:scholasticchess@chesscafe.com). Good luck!

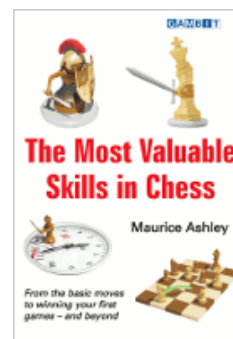
## Problem #1



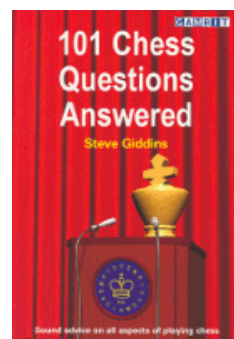
It is White to move, with Black threatening to capture the b2-pawn, and threatening mate on g2. What can White do?

## Problem #2

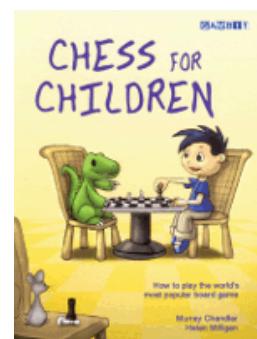
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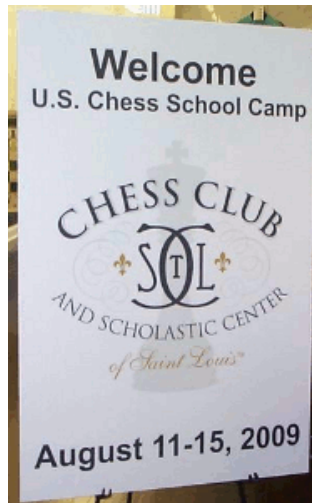


It is White to move. Put your tactical caps on – what should White do?

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### The U.S. Chess School

Greg Shahade's U.S. Chess School (USCS) held its first session in January 2006, in Lexington, Kentucky. It's a remarkable concept, providing a free week of intensive grandmaster instruction to some of the nation's most promising young players.



Two of these week-long sessions were held in 2006, and two more in 2007. In 2008, there were three such gatherings, and in 2009, there have already been three sessions, with a fourth scheduled for late December, in Atlanta.

This month we take a look at the most recent USCS "camp," held in St. Louis this past August. What set this tenth USCS group apart from all previous training sessions was the composition of the students – all girls.

GM Gregory Kaidanov was the primary instructor, as he has been for many of the previous USCS sessions. The site for the camp was the hottest chess club in the U.S., the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis, host of the 2009 U.S. Championship as well as the 2009 U.S. Women's Championship. Both events will return to the St. Louis club in 2010.



The players who attended, ranged in age from twelve to nineteen:

- Abby Marshall
- Darrian Robinson
- Amanda Mateer
- Sarah Chiang
- Megan Lee
- Eve Litvak
- Rochelle Ballantyne
- Linda Diaz

In addition, there were a few others who sat in on some or all of the sessions. Sarah Chiang's precocious nine-year-old brother Jonathan was there (he had been one of the participants at the previous U.S. Chess School), as well as young Margaret Hua, one of the more promising youngsters in the St. Louis area. Several of the girls' parents popped in from time to time as well.

### **Fact or Fiction?**

On the first day, guest instructor and photographer WFM Elizabeth Vicary employed an interesting technique to break the ice and loosen everyone up a bit. She invited all the girls to relate three "facts" about themselves – two true and one false. The others would then try to guess which of the three was a fabrication.

At the end, even GM Kaidanov got into the act. Here are the three statements he came up with:

1. "I was once thrown in jail for a day for protesting the communist government in Russia."
2. "I once played a chess game in which I sacrificed, in order, a pawn, a minor piece, a rook and a queen."
3. "I once flew to England just to attend a rock concert, then flew back home."

Some in the audience guessed that he had not truly ever sacrificed pawn, minor piece, rook and queen, in that order. Others guessed that it was too outlandish to have flown to England just for a concert. But all agreed that it sounded "too normal" that he might have spent a day in a Russian prison for protesting the communist government. In fact, that was his false statement!

### **Bumping Into Your Chess Ceiling**

Once this exercise concluded, Kaidanov got up to speak, and he kept the players at rapt attention. He utilized a variety of both true and fictitious stories to get his message across, and he was quite effective.



He stressed that a player can play chess without any serious study, but will eventually reach a ceiling, at which time his improvement stops. To move forward, hard effort is required. Even memorization of reams of opening material or endgame positions will not likely yield a significant rating increase, he said.

Instead, he stressed, what is required is to identify your weaknesses, and go to work on those specific areas. That is why some players might spend a large amount of time working on chess, but have little to show for it. "They're not working on what they're supposed to be working on," Kaidanov explained.

So analyzing one's own games, and focusing on your own weaknesses, is the path to improvement. And he commented that it is important to write down your thoughts about the game afterward. He also stressed the importance of "talking to yourself" during a game; for example, "She just moved there to avoid the threat I had created," etc.

Sometimes, psychological factors may play as big a part as perpetual time trouble or calculation errors. Kaidanov presented a case of a young player who was advancing rapidly, but started playing poorly when his rating reached 2180. His problem? He was so fixated on breaking the 2200 level, as several of his friends had done, that he lost the concentration and focus that had brought him to the brink of being a master. Kaidanov told him that he will not be much different as a 2200 player than he is as a 2180 player, but to the young man, it was a massive, almost insurmountable, difference.

Kaidanov noted that his presentations during this chess camp are meant to be discussions, not lectures. He encouraged as much participation as possible, and commented that what students will learn from the camp is commensurate with how involved they are in these discussions.

### **Concentration**

For the initial part of the camp, all students were scheduled to play a rated game with another student. Kaidanov asked that for this game, each player have in mind one specific aspect to concentrate on, and that this be written down, but kept private. It was to be shared with Greg Shahade, but not other students. This one aspect could be anything of the student's choosing, or could be one of several that Kaidanov offered:

1. Ask every move, "what is my opponent's next move?"
2. Calculate as many candidate moves as possible.
3. Calculate as deep as possible.
4. Don't fall too far behind my opponent on time.
5. Fight hard and maintain concentration regardless of the position on the board, whether winning or losing.
6. Constantly keep track of my and my opponent's good and bad pieces; make sure that I have every piece "in the game"; be aware of which pieces to keep and which to trade.
7. Be careful about every trade and make sure that every trade is either forced or is good for me.

Elizabeth Vicary asked if more than one such goal could be written down and stressed for this game. "The answer is no," Kaidanov said, "and I'll tell you the reason. It is very difficult to really concentrate on more than one of these at a time."

The key, though, is not to pick a subject area that you are already good at! "Pick something that you are not so good at," Kaidanov said.

### **On Being a Female Chess Player**

On day two of the U.S. Chess School in St. Louis, Elizabeth Vicary began the discussion, addressing issues of being a female chess player in this strongly male-dominated activity.

She described the "weirdness" of being one of only a few women, or perhaps the only woman, at a chess tournament.

"People treat you strangely because you're the only female," she said. "This can have an effect on how a person develops as a chess player. There's a feeling of being watched, and wondering if people are thinking, 'she must not be very strong.'"



Vicary asked if the girls felt as if people were paying special attention to them at tournaments. Some agreed, while others weren't aware of this occurring. One girl specifically said that she avoids large tournaments because she feels more pressure of being observed; smaller tournaments are less of a problem in this respect.

Another girl noted with consternation that often a low-rated player will be watching, and offer suggestions after the game. "The little girl must be stupid," she assumes the observer is thinking. "I don't think this would happen if I was a guy," she said.

Vicary has had similar experiences, and noted that perhaps a grandmaster or international master might be able to quickly glance at a game that she has spent hours poring over, and offer useful comments. But anyone less than an IM, she thought, even a regular master, would be unable to do so.

At this point, Kaidanov pointed out that in many cases it may just be a matter of a boy wanting to talk to the girl, and not knowing what else to say. "What else is he going to talk about?" Kaidanov asked.

Nevertheless, one girl said, "If it's condescending, it's annoying when they're trying to tell you what you should have done."





*Greg and Jennifer Shahade*

### **Avoiding Time Trouble**

On day three of the U.S. Chess School, GM Kaidanov began speaking about avoiding time trouble.

To avoid chronic time trouble, Kaidanov advises, "For the next few months, start focusing on this, like it is the only problem in your chess. So it means that when you enter your next tournament, your result will be irrelevant. Whether you lose all of

your games, or win your games, is completely irrelevant. Your main focus is not getting into time trouble."

"If you lose all your games, but in none of the games you are in time trouble, you won the tournament. That's how you should think about it, because this is the only way to fight this problem."

He mentions that if you say to yourself, "I will try to watch my time, and do something else," it's not going to work. "You have to give this full attention," he emphasizes.

In keeping with his previous advice to maintain a chess notebook, he stresses that if you do get in time trouble, you should write it down.

"I know how your mind works. The reason you're ending up in time trouble almost in every game is because you're trying to use every excuse to spend more time on every move. You have to switch this mode to a completely different mode. You have to use every excuse to spend less time on every move."

"The first guideline, which most of you probably already know, is to try to spend no more than half of your time on the first half of the game. For example, if the time control is 40/2, you want to have no more than one hour spent on your first twenty moves."

"Let's say you have 40/2 time control. Second guideline: use no more than twelve minutes for one move. You should be very strict about this. For example, let's say you've taken seven minutes for a move; give yourself three more minutes to make a decision. If you spend seven minutes, you more or less know a lot about the position. You have the moves which you've looked at, and you see some positions which you've calculated. Give yourself three more minutes to compare them and make a decision."

"What I do in those cases, when I spend too much time on one move, once I have taken seven minutes, I take my eyes off the board. Try to think, 'What did I calculate so far? I looked at this move, and this is the position that is happening; I looked at that move, and that is the position that is happening. Here I'm down a pawn, but I have some initiative. Here

[in this other position], material is equal, but my position is somewhat passive."

As an aside, here, Kaidanov mentioned that if a player has a tendency to play passively and often thereby loses, he or she may need to consciously be aware of the need to possibly sacrifice a pawn for greater activity.

"If you can't decide, close your eyes and make one of the moves. Otherwise, you will spend another half an hour debating between two of those, and you still will not decide. There is a very good chance you will play a third move which is much worse than those."

Kaidanov then looked directly at the students and asked them, "Which is better, 1.e4 or 1.d4?" The students were all silent, somewhat dumbfounded. "That's an easy question!" Kaidanov said. "OK, I'll ask another question. After 1.e4, which is better, 1...c5 or 1...e5?" Again, the girls were stumped, but one finally said, "...e5," and another called out, "...c5." Kaidanov then smiled and admitted, "Of course, it's impossible to say. Both are fine; it's a matter of taste."

"I can ask this question many more times - on move three, on move four, on move five, on move fifteen. What I'm trying to tell you is, in the first half of the game, the choice of move is often just a matter of taste. There is no best move. Don't waste your time in the first half of the game, because somewhere around move ten or twelve or fifteen, you can play this and you can play that, and it doesn't matter. This move is okay, and this move is okay. They will lead to two different positions, but they are not going to lose a game for you. Unfortunately, this is exactly where most of you spend a lot of time. Then, of course, somewhere between move twenty-five and forty, you will have just one winning move, or one move that draws the game. The price of the move goes very high, and that's exactly where you don't have any time left, because you wasted your time on moves which were irrelevant. When it's time for the move which pretty much decides the game, you don't have any time left."

"Let's say you have a worse position, and you look at maybe three different moves. After each one of these moves, your position is still bad. It's understandable that you don't want to make a move, but the fact that you will take longer will not make your position better. What will help you is this idea about a relatively best move, not the move that will solve all your problems, because such a move doesn't exist. The position is already worse. So go with the relatively best move. Given that the position is bad, you just need to find the best of the worst. So again, make your calculations, take your eyes off the board, and decide on your move."

Tune in next week for Part Two of our coverage of the all-girls U.S. Chess School session.

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## Answers to Last Month's Quiz

### Problem #1



How can White force a win here?

**Answer:** 23.Qd8+ Kc5 24.Qa5+ b5 25.Qxa7+ 1-0 (it is mate in two),  
from Abby Marshall – Emilia Horn, 1st Mind Sport Games, Beijing 2008.

## Problem #2



Black has just played 51...Rxd7. Both White and Black have pawns on the verge of queening. How can White put the game away?

**Answer:** 52.Rf1+ and Black immediately resigned, from Sam Shankland – Le Quang Liem, World Youth Chess Championship, Vung Tau, Vietnam 2008. Shankland tied for first place and thereby earned an automatic international master title.

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