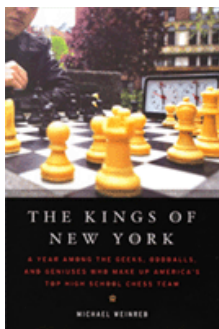




## COLUMNISTS

### Scholastic Chess

Steve Goldberg



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## A Conversation with Eliot Weiss

Eliot Weiss is many things – math teacher, husband and father, founder of and do-everything guy for the celebrated Edward R. Murrow High School chess team. And much more. Read all about him this month ...

### 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 *How to Play Against 1 e4*, by Neil McDonald.

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 February 24, 2010. Send your answers to [scholasticchess@chesscafe.com](mailto:scholasticchess@chesscafe.com). Good luck!

### Problem #1



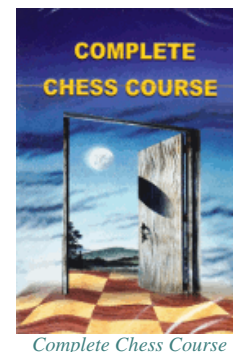
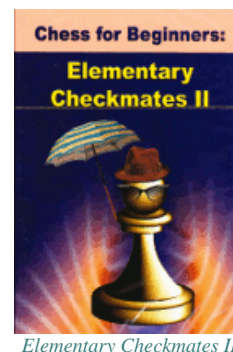
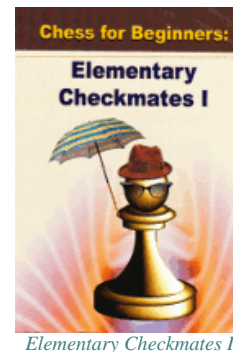
It is Black to move. What would you do?

### Problem #2



It is White to move. What do you suggest?

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After ten consecutive state chess championships, multiple national championships, appearances with governors and presidents, after having been the subject of the award-winning book [\*The Kings of New York\*](#), and the focus of an upcoming movie, the Edward R. Murrow High School chess team has conquered just about every peak in the scholastic chess world. This column's [April 2007](#) edition covered the exciting high school championship race between Murrow and Catalina Foothills High School from Tucson, Arizona.



*Eliot Weiss and wife Eileen*

The architect of this team, the founder and driving force of the Murrow chess team, is fifty-six-year old Eliot Weiss. "I started teaching here in 1981," he said. "I was teaching in middle schools before; I've been teaching thirty-five years total, always as a math teacher. I can't get out of the math classroom! I teach calculus, trigonometry. I've also been teaching at Brooklyn College for the last twenty years, graduate level courses."

"I started the chess team when I started teaching here. I always loved chess, I played when I was younger, but I haven't had time recently to play competitively.

"I also played semi-professional ice hockey, as a goalie. I played four years for Brooklyn College – I went to Brooklyn College for both undergraduate and graduate school. Then after college, I played six years with the New Jersey Rockets, a semi-professional ice hockey team. Then I was traded to a Long Island team, the Long Island Rebels. But it became too much – I was teaching full-time during the day, went to graduate school at night. I didn't stop playing, I just stopped playing competitively."

Besides chess and math and hockey, Weiss also had an affinity for the piano, which has been picked up by his son, Ben. "Benjamin is a pianist, he's unbelievable with the piano," his father beamed. "He could be a professional musician. He's only in ninth grade, but he's fantastic, he's unbelievable, he really is. I taught Ben his first four years, when he was about five years old until about nine, then I got him a teacher. He's so much better now than I am. Just yesterday, I gave him a few pieces to play. I play them first to see what's involved, then he plays. I don't understand how his fingers go right to these keys, he has the time sequence down immediately."



*Ben Weiss and Julie Weiss*

Weiss also has a daughter, Julie, in eleventh grade. She also spent time at the piano, but her interests have taken her in another direction. Weiss explains that "My daughter stopped piano lessons. She was playing a good deal, but she's more of an artist. I don't know if it will make money for her, but we'll see."

### **Edward R. Murrow High School**

Opened in 1976, Edward R. Murrow High School is located in the heart of Brooklyn, in the Midwood section of the city (not to be confused with Midwood High School, in almost the same neighborhood).

Weiss describes the area around the school: "It's a mixed neighborhood. If you go a couple blocks in one direction, it's more minorities. A couple blocks in another direction, it's all Jewish and Russian."

"The school is a typical inner-city school. We have over 4,000 kids in the school, and we have all sorts of problems that every inner-city school has. It's not a test school, like Stuyvesant where you have to take a test to get into the school."

"The school takes all kids in the immediate neighborhood, and after that, you have to apply, and you have to be on certain lists. We have to take a certain quota of students who are above average, below average, on average, so it's a mix."

Weiss said there are not really any "feeder" schools for Murrow. "Any kid from middle school can apply. In the past, we had more say as to who we select. Now, it's more the central New York City Department of Education who does the selecting."

"Kids come to Murrow from all over Brooklyn, some kids travel an hour and a half to get here. One particular kid, a wonderful girl, she's in my Calculus class, travels easily an hour and a half. She has to go to Manhattan first. She lives in Brooklyn, but the way the connection is with the subway, it's easier for her to go to Manhattan, change trains, then take another train back here to Brooklyn."

### **Murrow Chess Club**

The chess club at Murrow is an after-school program, and despite its phenomenal success, its existence hinges on the energy and perseverance of Weiss.

"There's absolutely no funding for my teacher time, there's no funding for the students' tournaments and travel anywhere," he lamented. "Everything is privately donated. It's unfortunate – I wish that chess was part of the curriculum, at least part of my teacher time. I wish I had one or two classes set up during the day where students could take a course, but it never worked out. So it's always after school, usually a couple of times per week."

So what goes on at the chess club meetings? "We go over positions, openings, all sorts of things, tactics, endgames. We review games that the kids have played at various tournaments in the city. We do go to tournaments a lot. We go to the [Right Move](#) tournaments – they're fantastic because it's free. It's wonderful; Fred Goldhirsch pays for all the tournament fees. And there's the organization Chess-in-the-Schools; they have free tournaments all over the city, and a lot of our kids go to those. Some kids go to the Marshall Club and play, but they have to pay for that.

"We have a lot of brilliant students at the school who have never played chess before. I've got this one kid, he's a junior, and he just started playing chess this year. He's the captain of the math team, and he's absolutely brilliant. He just started playing in September; now he's rated over 1200 or 1300. The kid is amazing, so I don't know what to expect from him. I'm sure in another year or so, he's going to be close to an expert.

Although many of his players take advantage of the Chess-in-the-Schools tournaments, the program is not able to assist the chess team at Murrow. "They don't fund any high schools, and they don't fund any schools that are average to above-average. They only would fund schools that are in the underprivileged neighborhoods in New York City. They don't work with high schools at all," Weiss noted, although he added that they do provide assistance in arranging SAT reviews and helping with college applications.

As much as he might like, Weiss is unable to do much in the way of recruiting talented players to Murrow. For example, Elizabeth Vicary's powerful [I.S. 318](#) team is also in Brooklyn, but Weiss says "I know the coach very well – John Galvin – and we're always talking. If he has a good kid that he wants to come to Murrow, he tells me and I talk to the kid and the parents, and then I give the name downstairs and we see what we can do. In the past couple of years, there's less and less the administration says they can do."



*Murrow team in 2007, co-national champions*

Weiss noted that "We have a totally new administration, a new principal, a new assistant principal, a new assistant principal in charge of guidance. The entire administration has changed." As a result, there is not a deep-seated attachment to the past history of Murrow, in particular the widespread publicity garnered by the nationally-respected chess team.

Nevertheless, Weiss has been accused of heavy recruitment of strong chess players to Murrow. "That's what people think. It's a misnomer that I go around recruiting. People always joke around that I sit at Kennedy Airport, or I have a desk in Red Square in Moscow. Luckily, around Murrow it's a good neighborhood, a good school, one of the top schools in the city, so a lot of bright kids want to come here. Some of them play chess and some of them start to play chess here."

The Greater New York Scholastic Chess Championship was held recently, and Weiss brought about twenty-five Murrow players to the event. This produced an odd conflict, however, as he explained: "I'm also the coach of my



children's team. They go to Hewlett High School and have a seven-member team and they played there. In fact, for the first time, they competed against Murrow. It was interesting. I knew that day would come eventually. We talked about it years ago – what if they play against Murrow? – and now they did." He was proud that his daughter Julie, in one of her games, was able to achieve a stalemate against her opponent's much stronger forces.

In recognition of ten consecutive state chess championships, Weiss and the Murrow team were recently invited to meet New York Governor David Paterson. "That was fun," said Weiss. "He's a nice guy, very friendly. He has an amazing story. He graduated law school and he's legally blind. But he can see the pieces, so we played, about eight moves, then all of a sudden he gave up - he couldn't play any more. But he spent about half an hour with the team and me."



*Governor David Paterson resigns against Weiss*

Despite the state championship streak that continues, the Murrow team isn't quite the powerhouse it had been recently, when it was lead by the duo of international masters Alex Lenderman (now GM-elect) and Sal Bercys. But it still has some strong players, as Weiss describes:

"One kid, his name is Markel Brown, he's a good strong player, about 1700. He's a good tactical player. We have another kid who's really improved a great deal – Vadim Libo – he's skyrocketed. He was at about 1000 a year and a half ago, and now he's up to 1650. I've got another kid, Alan Pizarro, he's also rated about 1700. But we don't have any 2000 players."

### **Famous Rita**

Murrow's next major tournament will be the spring Nationals taking place this year in Columbus, Ohio. Despite no school funding at all, Weiss plans on bringing about twenty-five players, thanks to the extremely generous contributions from "Rita," the benefactor who has bankrolled the Murrow chess team for years.



*Irina Krush, lower left; Rita, center right*

"Money is no object, money is not a problem at all, because of this one person, Rita. She has been helping us the last ten years; she gives us everything that we need. It is incredible, an amazing story," Weiss said. He describes how it came to be:

"In 2000 she heard on '1010WINS,' a famous radio station in New York City, a news radio station, that there's some chess team that needed money to go to

the Nationals. She couldn't hear what the school was, so she called the radio station, and the radio station told her that it was Murrow High School. So she called Murrow, she spoke to me, and the rest is history. The interesting thing is that, who listens to the radio, especially in a taxi? That same year, in 2000, I had a lot of publicity, because I needed money. I was desperate. We were in every major daily paper in New York City – the Post, the Times, Newsday, and the Daily News. We were on every TV station – CBS, NBC, ABC. And with all that publicity, she heard it on the radio, in a taxi. I still can't believe the story. She's given us everything we needed, every year for the last ten years. It's wonderful – I can make these plans, I can take twenty-five kids.

"I already made the arrangements. We're flying to Ohio [for the 2010 spring Nationals]. Chess-in-the-Schools isn't flying to Ohio, they're taking a bus, from New York to Ohio, which is about twelve hours, at least."

Again, it's Rita to the rescue.

## Answers to Last Month's Quiz

### Problem #1



White has just moved Ba5, skewering Black's queen and rook. How does Black respond?

**Answer:** 1...Qc5!, threatening 2...Qf2# or 2...Qg1+ followed by 3...Qd1#, generating a rather unique and beautiful mate. From Shabalov-Naroditsky, 2009 North American Open.

### Problem #2



This one may be a little easier. It is White to move.

**Answer:** 1.Qxh7+ Kxh7 2.hxg5+ Kg6 3.Ne7#. From 1001 Brilliant Ways to Checkmate, by Fred Reinfeld.

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.

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