



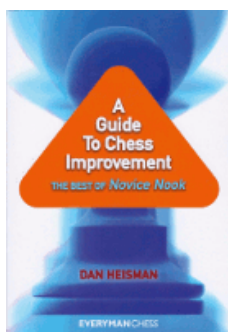
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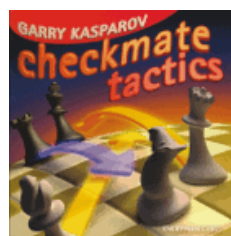
A Conversation with Daniel Rensch Part One

I had the opportunity recently to speak at length with IM Daniel Rensch, who shares his opinions on a wide range of chess topics, including how a small rural school rose to national prominence.

Congratulations are in order to the U.S. squad at the 2010 World Youth Chess Championships in Greece. All the kids seemed to do well, and they came home with a gold medal and two silver medals.

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 the book *Checkmate Tactics*, by Garry Kasparov.



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 24, 2010. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1



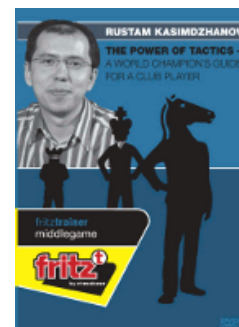
[FEN "2r3k1/3b1ppp/p3p3/3nP1PP/1r1N1P2/5N2/1P6/1KR4R b -- 0 1"]

It is Black to move and win.

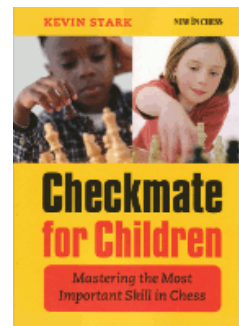
Problem #2



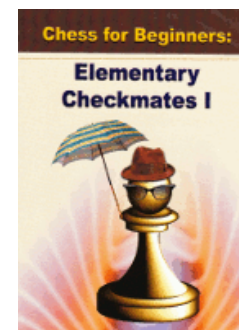
Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



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by Rustam Kasimdzhanov



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It is White to move. What should he do?

The Beginnings

International Master Daniel Rensch, now twenty-four-years old, was born in Mesa, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. At around age five, his family moved to the small town of Tonto Village, Arizona, to join other family members already living there. He attended the Shelby School, a charter school originally started by his grandparents Steven and Trina Kamp.

Daniel was introduced to chess by his grandfather and almost immediately took to the game. Not long thereafter, Mr. Kamp set up a chess program at the Shelby School, with a number of students happily putting in many hours per week studying the game, then playing in tournaments most weekends of the school year.

Remarkably, for a few years, the Shelby School was a national chess power, the I.S. 318 of its day. Numerous state and national team championships followed, and Danny Rensch captured individual championships as well. All from a small school in a small town (population under 2,000) about two hours northeast of Phoenix.



Shelby School chess team, circa 1998

On his [website](#), Danny describes the chess scene at the time: "What did the Shelby School that was different? Every day after school was filled with two hours of chess class. These chess classes were designed to be more difficult than anything the kids would face during tournament play. There were chess slumber parties three or four times a week, and chess tournaments on every weekend."

American Chess Events is Born

Around age thirteen, Danny and his family returned to the Phoenix area, and just a couple years later, Danny and his grandfather (Mr. Kamp) started American Chess Events, as "an umbrella for us to teach in the schools and give private lessons."

Barely a teenager, Danny was an accomplished chess player, while his grandfather handled much of the administrative end. "My grandpa was about a 1400 player, but he started the business – American Chess Events. He handled pretty much all of the business stuff until I was ready to take over. We started when I was still in high school, and it was mainly to teach in the schools, what everybody does. We taught private lessons, group lessons on weekends. Our mission was basically to work with serious chess players."

For awhile, Danny taught at as many as twelve schools at a time, but now teaches at just one – back at the Shelby School, where he donates his time. "After getting married at twenty-years old," he said, "and my wife and I starting a family, and her graduating from Arizona State University with her teaching degree, we decided to move back to the country. It's a beautiful area,

kind of secluded, and it's really great for raising kids."

Teaching Newbies

Although he doesn't work with beginning players very much now, Danny described his preferred approach with kids new to chess:

"I'm a big believer in backwards-to-forwards chess, starting with how the pieces move, maybe let them play a couple games to keep their interest, because they'll keep asking, 'When are we going to play, when are we going to play?' But my opinion is to move as quickly as possible from how the pieces move to the king-and-queen checkmate. Then the two rooks – the rook roller checkmate, and from there moving on the differences between checkmate and stalemate.

"A lot of times I like to give them puzzles setting up positions and asking them, 'Is this checkmate or is this stalemate?' What happens if you don't do that, and you release them into the wild and they play a lot of games, for the next few weeks you're fielding questions with the kids raising their hands, 'Is this checkmate? Is this stalemate? What is this?' Even with the kids who are quick and get checkmate down, it's still so fresh in their head that they have a hard time with the differences. So what I like to do, immediately after teaching them checkmate/stalemate, is to give them worksheets that are just a bunch of positions and they circle checkmate or stalemate. I try to clarify the difference in their heads.

"My whole method is really Soviet – I like to do all endgames first, for a very long time. We start with the basic checkmates and go on to the king and pawn endings, hopefully being able to learn the basics of the opposition. But it's not even really about the dynamics of king play, it's about making sure that if they have a pawn, they can get it to the other side of the board and queen it, without cooperation from their opponent.

"I think psychologically for kids it's big when you get them to the step where they realize that they can develop a plan and win. It doesn't require their opponent to mess up. With little kids, they always want to play for tricks, or they think that their winning has to do with their opponent missing something. That's almost more fun for them, because there's still that game aspect of it, but at the highest level of chess, it's so much more of a science than it is an art. Kids have a hard time wanting to buy into the mindset that you can develop a plan, where the best move can come from your opponent and it doesn't make a difference.



Danny Rensch

"So I like to work a lot on endgames, because psychologically the sooner I can establish that in their thought process, then you can move on to all the other aspects of the game, tactics and everything. They have it in their head, 'Okay, I know how to get my king on the sixth and my pawn on the fifth and queen a pawn. Now I know how to checkmate, because I did that two months ago.' It's just backwards to forwards chess. They understand the evolution how that pawn gets to queen, and they already know how to checkmate with

the queen. So they learn how to develop plans that don't require your opponent to mess up. Much later on, it's much easier to stop them from playing 'hope chess' and bad tactics, because they already have this discipline instilled – 'I want to develop a plan where the best move is coming from my opponent, and it doesn't matter.'

"Ultimately, it's a goal of getting them to think about positional chess rather than just tactics. It's the opposite of how a lot of coaches do it. For a lot of coaches, it's tactics, tactics, tactics, and more tactics, for a very long time. But if I had my way, for the first six months they would maybe play five chess games. Then they would have all the basic checkmates down, and they would be able to win a king and pawn ending, by force, against me. I also like to do a lot of positions where you start with king and three pawns against king and three pawns, and one side gets an extra a-pawn on the other side of the board. Then you move it to a b-pawn, then to a c-pawn. This employs principles of decoys, and they begin to understand this method where the pawn pushes forward and the king goes over. I would prefer to work with things like that, building principles of technique, how to win in positions they are supposed to win. That's my philosophy."

Teaching More Advanced Kids

With his American Chess Events company, Rensch has chosen to work virtually solely with kids beyond the beginning stage, since his goal is to take kids who are already serious about chess, and provide them with the skills to reach master level or beyond.

"The tournaments that I run are for those rated 1000 and up," he said. "We maintain a pretty strict format. I'm usually pretty rigid about that. There's a lot more money to be made if I open it up. If there's an Under 1000 section, for the same venue, I'd have twenty more players, and that much more money, but it's just not what we do."

"Our philosophy is chess excellence, and wanting players to become masters, not just something they're going to do along with their list of soccer, piano, etc. They may do those other things, but chess is a top priority for them. That's our philosophy – the Master Treks."

"Right now I don't teach in any schools. Rarely, I teach group lessons. Mainly, I teach privately, I teach online a lot, and I run our tournaments, the Master Treks, which are designed for the better players in the state."

"I always pay for masters to be in the top sections, to play the highest rated kids, and then that trickles down. These kids are all growing, and they're under-rated, but they hop into the top section, and there's always masters there to beat them up and push them back down. You see a lot of people struggle to get over the 2000 hump. These tournaments are designed for 2000 and up, 1700 to 1999, then 200-point intervals after that, pretty much down to 1000."

"We used to have Master Trek tournaments about every other week, but now we do it once a month. A lot of that is not because they weren't working, it's just that I have a lot of other stuff on my plate. I'm working full-time for chess.com, and by extension, chesskid.com, which is our website just for kids."

Copper State Invitational

Rensch certainly does have a lot on his plate. In addition to his extensive website work, he runs the new Copper State Invitational tournament, where FIDE norms are available. "My grandfather and I always wanted to do tournaments like the Copper State, with direct connections with helping players get in touch with the FIDE atmosphere, with titled players, and helping scholastic kids not stop at that plateau, where they get better than a lot of the casual adult players in the state."



John Lalonde (L) of Abstrax, Inc., with Danny Rensch

Danny has obtained sponsorship from a number of individuals for the Copper State event, and he describes it as a community effort, which obviously took a lot of work. "The first year we did it, it was a big success, and people got norms, and the next time we did it, last year, we had four or five norms, including Robby Adamson who got his final IM norm," he noted.

Unfortunately, Rensch lost money on the tournament the past two years, despite the sponsors he was able to obtain. But he plans on continuing the event, though he promises some exciting changes to the format. "It will be really cool, in terms of groundbreaking coverage with live broadcasts of the games, but perhaps a little bit of a smaller event. It's been a wonderful event, and it's a total representation of the goals of our business, what we want to do."

Chesskid.com

He was also excited to discuss the chesskid.com website he has been busy with.

"The main features of the chesskid.com website – things that separate it from other scholastic-driven chess websites – are the safety features," he said. "No kid can have an active gold membership there, which is getting access to all the things they want, without their parent having a membership – some guardian, either a parent or a coach. That also allows the parent or guardian to actually impersonate their kids' accounts. Unlike Facebook or any other kind of social networking site, there's never anything that can't be viewed by the parent, literally through the child's eyes. The parent can actually 'become' the child and see what they've been up to. On top of that, no adults that are not the child's guardians can even become friends with the kid.

"So there's a lot of original safety features; this is not a social networking chess education site where a kid can get on and be exposed like they might, for example, at ICC or at our site, chess.com. These are big chess sites without very many safety features – but that's not the purpose of ICC or chess.com. Those safety features are some of the things we like people to be aware of, so they're really encouraged to get their kids active on the site. They can get access to all this awesome chess education without parents having to worry about them, as far as predators and the like.

"I was hired by chess.com full-time April 1 of this year, but I've been working with them for over two years now. My role grew – I was the guy who did videos, and content and articles for them, and they liked what I was doing. It grew and they were expanding and doing very well. A good buddy of mine was their main director of content – IM David Pruess. Around April they decided to double his position, and they hired me on with him, so we're both co-directors of content and professional relations."

World Youth Chess Championships

The 2010 World Youth Chess Championships were held in Halkidiki, Greece in October, and the U.S. squad performed wonderfully. FM Steven Zierk captured first place and a gold medal in the Under18 section, with his undefeated 9½/11 score.



Steven Zierk (L) and Kayden Troff
Photo: *Chess Life Online*

In the Under12 section, Kayden Troff had a 9/11 record, good for second place and a silver medal. Also with a 9/11 score was Jeffrey Xiong, in the Under10 division, which also yielded him a silver medal for his second-place finish.



Jeffrey Xiong
Photo: *Chess Life Online*

In addition, there were a number of other top-ten finishes:

- Cameron Wheeler (5th place, Under10)
- Samuel Sevian (6th place, Under10)
- Vignesh Panchanatham (9th place, Under10)
- Awonder Liang (9th place, Under8)
- Margaret Hua (10th place, Under10 Girls)
- Annie Wang (6th place, Under8 Girls)
- Emily Nguyen (9th place, Under8 Girls)

By winning the Under18 division, Zierk is awarded the international master title, and earns a grandmaster norm as well. Here is one of his games from the event:

Zierk, Steven – Upadhyaya, Anwesh

World Youth Championship, Greece, 2010
Scotch Game [C45]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.e5 Qe7 7.Qe2 Nd5 8.c4 Ba6 9.b3 Qh4 10.a3 Bc5 11.g3 Bxf2+ 12.Qxf2 Qe4+ 13.Kd2 Qxh1 14.Bg2 Qxh2 15.cxd5 0-0 16.dxc6 Qh5 17.Nc3 dxc6 18.Kc2 Rfd8 19.Bf4 Qf5 + 20.Kb2 Rab8 21.Qxa7 g5 22.Qxa6 gxf4 23.Qe2 fxg3 24.Be4 Qg5 25.Kc2 Re8 26.Rg1 h5 27.Bd3 Rxe5 28.Ne4 Rxe4 29.Qxe4 Qc5+ 30.Bc4 Qxg1 31.Qg6+ Kh8 32.Qh6+ Kg8 33.Qg6+ Kh8 34.Qxh5+ Kg7 35.Qxf7+ Kh8 36.Qh5+ Kg7 37.Qg5+ 1-0 With mate coming shortly.

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Problem #1



[FEN "2r3k1/4nppp/Q3p3/8/1P1q4/4N1P1/5PP1/4R1K1 w - - 0 1"]

It is White to move. What do you suggest?

Answer: 1.Nf5!! If 1...Nxf5, then 2.Qxc8+. If 1...Qxb4, 2.Nxe7+ Qxe7 3.Qxc8+. Or 1...exf5 2.Qxc8+ Nxc8 3.Rc8#. From Khmelnitsky-Kabiatansky, USSR 1989.

Problem #2



[FEN "3rkr2/pR2b1pp/2p1qn2/8/8/4B3/P1P1QPPP/4R1K1 w - - 0 1"]

It is White to move. What should he do?

Answer: 1.Bc5+ Qxe2 2.Rxe7+ Qxe7 3.Rxe7#. From Bogoljubow-NN 1935. Both problems from *The Mammoth Book of Chess*, by Graham Burgess.

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