

Interview with Megan Lee

Ken Lee



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Megan Lee is a familiar name to Northwest Chess Magazine readers. Starting from the age of six, Megan has competed in tournaments throughout the United States. Her current FIDE rating is 2260 and she has achieved the titles of Woman International Master (WIM) and FIDE Master (FM).

I spoke with Megan via WhatsApp to discuss chess, previsualization, and why chess has been such an integral part of her life.

Ken: When did you start playing chess?

Megan: I started playing chess when I was about six. My older brother Michael, who is two and a half years older than me, also plays chess, and has achieved the title of International Master (IM). There was a chess club at Medina Elementary School and my first chess teacher, Woman Grandmaster (WGM) Elena Donaldson, became my coach. In the third grade, I transferred to Stevenson Elementary School and became very involved in their chess club.

Ken: What was your first experience with chess tournaments like?

Megan: The Stevenson Chess Club was so big that it was nice to attend tournaments with all my friends. It was just a fun way to spend a Saturday.

Ken: What kept you motivated to continue to play and study chess during those early years?

Megan: I think I just like really enjoyed solving puzzles. I was having fun and enjoyed hanging out with my friends. I also played piano and swam

competitively as well.

Ken: Did you continue to get coaching from WGM Donaldson throughout your elementary school years?

Megan: When I was around nine, I hit an ELO of around 1400. That's when I started working with IM Coach Georgi Orlov. I continued working with him throughout high school. But I stopped receiving chess coaching as soon as I started to attend university.

Ken: How did chess affect your decisions regarding high school and your university studies?

Megan: In high school, I think the logic of chess helped me excel in certain subjects like math and science that required logic. When it came time for university, chess definitely helped me make decisions based on the information that was presented to me. I remember thinking that I might want to pursue architecture because it was a mixture of math, science and art.

Ken: So, is that what you ultimately decided to pursue?

Megan: My top candidates ended up being Carnegie Mellon, Berkeley, and Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). I applied to maybe 14 schools, but these were the ones I considered most seriously. RISD turned out to be a great fit for me because the classes were small, and they allowed me to explore and try different things.

Ken: I've read that many chess kids tend to develop a number of critical skills including previsualization and the ability to concentrate over long periods of time.

Do you find that your chess skills helped you specifically with your university studies?

Megan: I think chess helps with multi-tasking. Even though multi-tasking sometimes gets a bad rap, it's a very useful skill as a designer. A designer has to think about all the different stages of a product at the same time. For many of my projects, I often utilize computer modeling, but it starts by previsualizing my concepts in my head in three-dimensional form. Chess gives me an edge with that skill because I have had years of practice in previsualizing entire games or sequences of games in my head.

Ken: What are you currently working on?

Megan: I currently run two businesses. I run a brick-and-mortar embroidery shop in Woodinville called Cloth Tattoo (www.clothtattoo.com). This is a B2B model. I also run an online shop called Snippet Studios (www.shopsnippet.com) which provides my own embroidered and design products.

Ken: What other ways has chess helped you in your business life?

Megan: Chess has certainly helped with my memory. I can remember hundreds of people's names, projects and logos. I find I can balance all these projects in my head.

Interestingly enough, chess also helps me manage stress but, in a way, that is counterintuitive. Most people think that I play chess to relax. In truth, playing competitive chess is probably the most stressful thing that I do! That said, importantly, it's my choice to use my time and effort to compete in chess. So, when it comes to work, I have to manage several dozen projects for two different companies. I find that I can manage it quite easily. Chess teaches you to make rational decisions based on the problems that are presented to you. It's good

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training for school, running a business, and for life.

Ken: Do you have any specific advice for students and coaches?

Megan: I think chess students experience the most growth when they are having fun. I want to remind students and coaches alike, to make sure they keep the game fun. Progress will happen for each student at their own individual pace. I also want to tell students that chess is *not* a reflection of intelligence. I think that chess is beautiful. It has helped me connect with many of the most important people in my life. I can't imagine my life without my friends and the game of chess.

Ken: Now that you don't have a chess coach, how do you continue to practice and grow as a chess player?

Megan: As an adult, it's much easier for me to know what my weaknesses are and what I need to work on. As I mature

as a player, self-reflection becomes a critical part of my development. It's my process of becoming a total player. I think and reflect on my psychological state, my habits, my strengths and my weaknesses. Then I come up with a game plan to work on the things I need to do to be successful.

Ken: What are your personal goals for chess?

Megan: Right now, on the horizon, my goal is to become an International Master. And my immediate short-term goal is to do well in the US Chess championship which is being held in St. Louis, Missouri in October.

[Now completed, Megan took fourth place, scoring 6.5/11—Editor.]

Ken: Is there a recent game that you'd like to share with *Northwest Chess* readers?

Megan: I'm proud of the game I played against GM John Fedorowicz at the Charlotte Norm Super Swiss in Charlotte, NC in July 2023. He played straight into my prep and there was a fun tactic at the end.

**Megan Lee (2337) –
John Fedorowicz (2461) [B52]**
Charlotte Norm Super Swiss
Charlotte, NC (R3), July 10, 2023

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bb5+ Bd7 4.Bxd7+ Nxd7 5.0-0 Ngf6 6.Qe2 e6 7.d4 cxd4 8.Nxd4 a6 9.c4 Be7 10.b3 0-0 11.Bb2 Re8 12.Nc3 Bf8 13.Rad1 Qc7 14.Rfe1 g6 15.Kh1 Qa5 16.Qd2 Rad8 17.f4 Qh5 18.Nf3 b5 19.cxb5 axb5 20.a3 Qc5 21.Nd4 b4 22.axb4 Qb6 23.b5 e5 24.Nc6 Ra8 25.f5 d5 26.fxc6 hxc6 27.exd5 Bd6 28.Qe2 Kg7 29.Rf1 Rh8 30.Ne4 Nxe4 31.Qxe4 f6 32.h3 Qxb5 33.Qg4 Qb7 34.Qe6 Bc5 35.Nxe5

1-0



Megan Lee. Photo courtesy of Megan Lee.