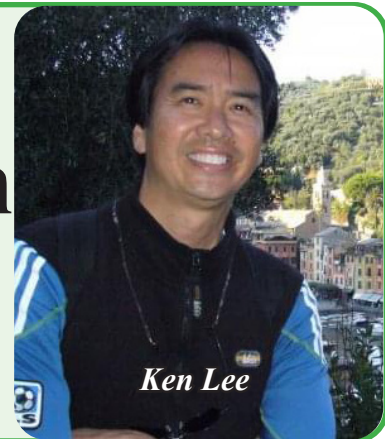


# Sage Advice From PNW Chess Coach Walter Guity



Ken Lee

*“New City, Same  
Passion, Chess is a  
Journey.”*

Ken Lee

**M**oving from the Bronx to Seattle when you're a high school freshman isn't easy. When you add growing up as a second-generation immigrant and speaking Spanish as your first language, the obstacles can feel overwhelming. Walter Guity utilized the life skills he learned from chess to carve out a lane for himself and his family. Now Walter owns and operates Sage Chess (<https://www.sagechess.com/>) and provides individual and group chess lessons to students throughout the Pacific Northwest.

**Ken:** When did you start playing chess?

**Walter:** I was in the sixth grade when my teacher noted that I displayed a talent in math, and he suggested I try chess. I took to the game immediately and I was hooked.

**Ken:** Did you have a lot of early success?

**Walter:** Actually, no. I remember going to my first tournament and losing every game. I went zero for five. Somehow, I didn't get discouraged, and I learned something new from all my games.

**Ken:** Who was your coach at that time?

**Walter:** I was living in the Bronx, New York at that time and my coach was IM Yury Lapshun. He was very encouraging and took the time to analyze all my games after that first tournament. A few tournaments later, I won first place. The contrast of those experiences was eye opening, and I instantly learned the value of losing.

**Ken:** What do you specifically mean by that?

**Walter:** Whether you're an adult or a child, it's so easy to get discouraged when you lose. If you reframe your mindset, you can gain a great deal of knowledge and confidence along the way. I learned that if you have the proper attitude, losing can create opportunities for amazing growth in your chess game and your personal life.

**Ken:** What was your chess life like in middle school?

**Walter:** I enjoyed competing in chess in middle school, and I was even able to go to a few national tournaments. I did relatively well but afterwards, my family moved to Seattle when I was a freshman in high school.

**Ken:** Wow, the transition from the Bronx to Seattle must have been challenging.

**Walter:** It was hard. Being from a Honduran family where Spanish was the dominant language and leaving the diversity of NYC for Seattle was quite a culture shock. We lived in Burien, and I attended Highline High School. I found my tribe, or rather I created my own tribe by starting the chess program at my high school.

**Ken:** How did you have the confidence to do that?

**Walter:** There wasn't a formal chess program at Highline High School, so I founded the first chess club there. Chess helped with the transition in high school because it gave me a sense of identity. I also played sports in school, but chess was really the place where I felt naturally gifted. That confidence helped me throughout middle school and my formative years in high school.

**Ken:** High school can be a very challenging time for young people.

**Walter:** Yes, there's so much going on inside and outside with a teenager. They are becoming connected to the world, to themselves, and to their families. They need that time to find their place.

**Ken:** If your high school was not part of the chess circuit at the time, how did you and your friends keep motivated to keep playing and learning?

**Walter:** It was casual. There were a lot of new players who wanted to learn how to play. We just kept going and eventually we were able to get funding for some boards and clocks. The process of running a club was very instructive.

**Ken:** What are your favorite chess books?

**Walter:** I always loved books with lots of puzzles like *More Chessercizes: Checkmate!* by Bruce Pandolfini.

But my all-time favorite chess book has been *My 60 Memorable Games* by Bobby Fischer. It's a classic because it's so rich with detail. The storytelling and commentary are so amazing. It's also hilarious reading Fischer's commentary, which is kind of unique for a chess book.

**Ken:** Coming from the Bronx, did you bring a certain style of play with you?

**Walter:** I think a certain type of aggressiveness and swagger comes with living and competing in the Bronx. Over there, you find out very quickly your place in the ecosystem. I always apply that sense of confidence when I sit across the board from anybody and feel like I have a chance of winning. It didn't matter their age or race. Being a minority, I often walk into spaces where I know that my community is not well represented. But inside, I tell myself that I belong just as much as the next person.

**Ken:** When did you first start coaching chess as a profession?

**Walter:** I was 20 years old, and I found out that Chess Wizards was looking for coaches. My hobby became a new source of income for me. Chess Wizards allowed me to travel and teach kids of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. To me, it was a reminder of how far something will go if you plant the seed correctly into a child and let it grow.

**Ken:** What else propelled your chess coaching?

**Walter:** After a few years, the COVID pandemic happened, and I started teaching online. When I started teaching via Zoom, it became apparent that I could teach, manage classes, and coach on my own. I launched Sage Chess shortly thereafter: <https://www.sagechess.com/> I named my business Sage because it's another word for a wise person. I believe chess teaches us wisdom and allows us to apply it to our lives in very practical ways.

**Ken:** Your eldest daughter is also named Sage, yes?

**Walter:** That's right. That was something I wanted to pass on to her as well, an appreciation for wisdom. My daughters Sage (9) and Solange (5) both play chess, carrying on the family tradition.

**Ken:** What's something that distinguishes your style of coaching versus other programs?

**Walter:** One thing I see when many of my PNW students play in scholastic tournaments is that they want to win quickly and try to do a lot of tactical tricks. However, they often don't know how to properly finish a game. What I try to teach my students is not only how to gain an

advantage but also keep that advantage throughout the game. While it's nice to win quickly, when you play more experienced players you have to learn to play with endurance and accuracy. I try to separate myself by teaching my students good fundamentals throughout an entire game, not just short checkmates.

**Ken:** How do you sharpen your tool set and make sure you're staying ahead of your students?

**Walter:** I still play competitively myself so that keeps me sharp. More importantly, it also allows me to build empathy for my students. I know exactly what it feels like to be in a tournament. It's a mix of excitement, anxiety and self-doubt.

**Ken:** What else do you do to keep your coaching skills sharp?

**Walter:** I try to surround myself with players and coaches who are stronger than me. I ask them what kinds of things they are doing to develop their students, and we openly discuss what challenges we are facing as coaches. Learning and sharing with my peers is huge because I don't learn nearly as much sitting in front of a chess board by myself.

**Ken:** Is there a particular game from you or your students that you'd like to share?

**Walter:** Yes, here is one between two of my students who participated in the Sage x Wiiser Tournament in September. Here is that game.



*Coach Walter congratulating his students after participating in the first Sage x Wiiser Quads. Photo courtesy of Walter Guity.*

10.Qxd4 e5 11.Qxb4 Bf5 12.Nh4 Bxc2  
13.Rac1 Be4 14.Nxe4 dxe4 15.Qxe4 c5  
16.Bd3 b6 17.Qxh7#

1-0

**Ken:** Walter, can you discuss the difference between what you can coach online vs over the board?

**Walter:** There are benefits to both over the board and online coaching. With OTB, I can teach students to move their pieces with intention and precision. If they move with confidence, their opponent will feel that energy. In over the board chess, there's so much more body language being conveyed vs online chess. Also, a larger emotional investment in over the board games versus online. Over the board players practice emotional regulation more than online players. The games last longer and take an emotional toll while online games tend to be fast and if you lose, you can play another game right away so there isn't much time for reflection.

**Ken:** What does the future hold for you and Sage Chess?

**Walter:** I want to be able to share the bit of talent that God has given me with the next generation and to instill a love of chess in them. I think chess can teach kids to grow, learn, and face all kinds of challenges in their lives. I also like to encourage my students to stick to their path when things get tough. For some students, chess and the victories come easily. For others, they have to build that resilience over time. I tell my students that whatever they have a passion for, stick with it. It worked for me, and it can work for you as well.

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**Sage Guity (526) –  
Kenzo Wang (227)  
[D00]**  
Sage x Wiiser,  
09.2024

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nc6  
3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5  
Bg4 5.e3 e6 6.Bd3  
Bb4 7.0-0 0-0 8.Bxf6  
gxf6 9.Be2 Nxd4