

A Conversation With Coach Tim Moroney

Ken Lee

Tim Moroney has been sharing his passion for chess with students for 25 years. A five-time national scholastic champion and US Candidate Master, Tim brings his deep knowledge of chess at the highest level to help students grow their skills. As a certified FIDE Instructor, Tim is an expert in the tools that players need to succeed and provides valuable insight into every student's chess journey. His background in childhood development and counseling makes him an expert in working with students of all ages and skill levels. Tim is committed to helping every student learn and grow at their own pace.

I sat down with Coach Tim to discuss critical thinking, the benefits of chess, and the psychological world of games.

Ken: When did you first start playing chess?

Tim: When I was eight my older brother taught me the basic moves. It wasn't until I was 11 that I learned about tournaments and took more interest in chess.

I came across a chess store in a mall in Warren, Michigan, that hosted a chess club and local events. My family gave me the opportunity to try out an unrated

beginner's tournament.

Ken: What did that first tournament mean to you?

Tim: I remember vividly that I won my first game and then lost all the remaining games. I wasn't concerned about the results, but the tournament made a significant impression on me.

I remember soaking in the experience of it and thought it was a lot of fun.

Ken: Who was your first chess coach?

Tim: My first coach was a gentleman who worked at that chess store. His name was Louis Cycone, and he worked with me for a few years. He was a great mentor, and we became lifelong friends.

Later, I branched away and did mostly self-teaching and worked with some other coaches here and there.

Ken: What was your experience with chess during your middle school years?

Sometimes, you hear about middle school students getting burned out on chess and losing interest.

Tim: Sometimes kids push hard in too many tournaments over a short period of time. In other cases, the emphasis on

competition and ratings discourages them. You have to love doing it for the game to not feel burnout, and keep a healthy balance between playing for enjoyment, for learning, and for rating growth.

For me, my opportunity to be involved in the competitive scene

was completely self-driven.

I was motivated because I've always seen chess as a way to challenge myself and compete against myself. Chess provides a platform to learn and improve skills and then go back into a tournament and test those new skills.

The results of an individual tournament were not what mattered in the long run. If I kept challenging myself and improving, the growth would come in time.

Ken: How about your high school years? Were you part of the chess team?

Tim: No, I wasn't part of a high school chess team. I was still very much a self-driven kid.

I used those years to compete and coach as well.

I was only 13 when I had my first opportunity to assist with after school chess classes. When I was 15, I started branching out on my own teaching classes and working with private students.

Ken: Did you develop your own personal coaching style?

Tim: Throughout the years, I developed my own syllabus for students reaching various goals. I would have lessons for students who were just starting in chess and just learning the basics. I also developed lessons for tournament competition.

Ken: What were some of the other benefits of coaching for you?

Tim: I found coaching helped me improve my own game. Additionally, I was starting to earn money at an early age and learning the value of hard work. That does a lot for a young person's sense of identity and confidence.

Ken: What did you decide to study



Don't miss out on the opportunity to make
your next move in the game of real estate.
Your kingdom awaits!

Contact Lin S. Shih
(206) 954-0963
lin@linshih.com

Coldwell Banker Bain

during your university years and how did chess influence your decision?

Tim: One of the things that fascinated me in chess was how different people's personalities were expressed when they played.

You could see it in their opening choices and how temperament was reflected in their handling of different positions.

With this interest in the influences on decision making, I decided to study psychology.

Ken: What career did you pursue?

Tim: When I relocated from Michigan to Washington, I continued my schooling but also found work counseling at a residential facility for at-risk kids.

At that facility, I started a program that utilized chess as a part of a therapy program.

I wanted to reach kids and give them the opportunity to work on themselves, solve problems, and set themselves up for success.

Ken: Was there a definite fork in the road (pun intended) where you decided to work as a clinical therapist or chess coach?

Tim: For a long time, I couldn't work as a full-time chess coach, and so I had to work a couple of jobs to make it work.

That's how I imagined my life would be—a full-time job and teaching chess where I could on the side.

Ken: What was a turning point for you?

Tim: I was working with high-risk kids from the ages of six to 16, but I found it was important to me to be able to reach students at an earlier stage in their life circumstances.

I wanted to instill life skills and tools to help influence choices they were making very early in their lives so they could set themselves on a better path.

Ken: What was a critical step for you to make a direct connection to kids?

Tim: I had my eyes set on Seattle. It had the kind of chess community I was looking for where I could grow as a coach and a player. In 2016, I moved from Spokane to Seattle and was able to start coaching full time.

Ken: I've read many books which discuss the benefits of chess related to the development of executive function skills such as meta-cognition, planning, goal setting and resilience.

With your background in psychology, what other benefits do you see for young people playing chess?

Tim: Chess provides an excellent way to develop and practice critical thinking skills. It teaches people to seek out answers for themselves, to process new ideas, and to question and challenge those ideas.

The ability to critically think through material you're presented with is such an essential skill for everybody navigating the world.

What's amazing about chess is that you can continuously test yourself and your theories in a safe setting.

Ken: Can you expand on that idea?

Tim: Chess offers a competitive environment that ultimately has

minimal consequence.

You can sit down and play a game and if you make a wrong decision, you simply reset and start a new game.

If you are intentional in learning from every experience, you can repeat that exercise as many times as you want and can rapidly iterate. Every game is an opportunity to learn lessons and improve yourself.

Ken: Do you think that makes chess unique?

Tim: It's hard to find other scenarios where kids can navigate so much decision making and engage critical thinking skills so rapidly.

Chess provides a unique environment where you can be required to make high-pressure, split-second decisions, or have long games with lots of slow, carefully thought-out decisions. Chess offers a realm of flexibility for focused quality practice over time.

Ken: Do you prefer online or over the board coaching?

Tim: There are benefits to both. I tend to like in-person over the board. I find that particular learning environment helps students conceptualize their thoughts and connect with ideas more clearly.

Ken: When did you start your own coaching business?

Tim: I stepped away from Chess4Life in January of 2024. It was time for me to give more time to a larger volume of students. Now I work with Excel with Chess and coach at several public and private schools.

I also get to continue working with my private students. It's a perfect blend for me because I also now have more time to work on my own chess goals.

*What's
amazing
about chess
is that you can
continuously test
yourself and your
theories in a
safe setting.*



WE'RE HIRING CHESS COACHES!

- Coach School Clubs & Summer Camps
- \$50-\$100 per Club based on experience
- All equipment & materials provided
- Guarantee 2+ Coaches for all programs

Contact Us at
schools@excelwithchess.com

Ken: What specific goals do you have for yourself?

Tim: I love tournaments and want to play more for the joy of it. I still get enormous satisfaction sitting at a board and uncovering what is happening in a position.

A chess tournament provides an environment where you can enter a flow state of deep concentration. It's one of my favorite places in the world—to just be present.

Ken: Do you currently work with a trainer?

Tim: I don't have a trainer I'm actively working with, but it's been on my mind to start working with one again.

One of the things I'm trying to be intentional about this year is not to overly focus on my rating.

I want to be in a space where I don't want to squash the love that I have for chess and embrace the feeling of just being in a tournament.

Ken: To the outside world, you peer into a chess tournament and see intensity and competition. They don't see the richness of all the stories that are going on in each individual competitor's head about what they're experiencing.

Tim: Everyone is experiencing their own individual story at a chess tournament and it's a beautiful thing.

Ken: To wrap up, do you have any suggestions for chess parents and others on how to support the chess community?

Tim: I think one challenge for a lot of parents is figuring out how best to support their kids, particularly if they don't have much chess experience themselves.

My mom was one of the fiercest advocates that I've ever known in all my years in the chess community. She did it through her unwavering support of me though she couldn't offer the chess knowledge, the emotional support she offered was invaluable.

Ken: What else can parents do to support their chess kids?

Tim: My mom was very observant.

She took a keen interest in what she saw from other parents and coaches. She noticed how they were reacting to circumstances and the choices they were making.

Ken: What do you think about the future of chess specifically in the Pacific Northwest?

Tim: Right here in Washington, we have one of the largest scholastic communities in the country and there's a lot of potential here to continue growing and nurturing the community.

We just finished the state championship with almost 1,500 kids

showing up and competing.

I think the next step for Washington is finding how to empower those kids to take their interest to another level.

This could be a golden age emerging when you have many young players who are playing at high levels. I'm very excited for the future of chess in the Pacific Northwest.



Tim Moroney at the 2025 Washington State Championship. Photo credit: Meiling Cheng.