

# A Conversation With FIDE Master Ted Wang

Three-time US National Champion

FIDE Master At 11

National Master At 10

Ken Lee

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

**Ted:** I started playing chess about six years ago when I was in Pre-K. I just started playing with some friends and I liked it right away. I'm 11 years old now.

**Ken:** Do you remember your first chess tournament?

**Ted:** Yeah, my first chess tournament was in kindergarten. It was kind of nerve-wracking, and I remember blundering a bunch of checkmates. I ended up winning three out of five games.

**Ken:** Who was your first chess coach?

**Ted:** My first coach was GM Gregory Serper.

**Ken:** That's interesting. Were you

and your family very intentional about working with a GM right away?

**Ted:** Actually, it wasn't even on our radar to work with a GM right away. Normally, working with a GM is for advanced players, but we were fortunate to meet Coach Serper by accident.

**Ken:** How did that happen?

**Ted:** I have an older sister who studies piano with a teacher named Irina Akhrin.

She asked me if I would like to play piano too and I said no :). She then asked me what hobbies I enjoyed, and I mentioned chess.

Irina said that she happened to know a good chess coach and she introduced me to Coach Serper.

**Ken:** That's amazing. Do you think that Coach Serper noticed your chess potential early on?

**Ted:** Coach Serper noticed that I liked to work on tactics. Back then, I liked to watch a lot of YouTube chess videos. He advised me to be much more selective about what

I watch and how I train. He said quality was more important than quantity.

**Ken:** What did he mean by that?

**Ted:** He encouraged me to go deeper with individual lessons rather than trying a bunch of different things.

For example, that would mean learning how to play and defend against a particular line thoroughly versus jumping around from tactic to tactic.

**Ken:** What other elements do you think contributed to your rapid rise in the chess world?

**Ted:** I think at any stage in your chess career, it's helpful to work on chess puzzles. When you are younger, it's hard to sit still, and so you work on mate in two, mate in three, mate in four, and so on.

As you get more experienced/seasoned, the puzzles require more time and hard work to solve.

**Ken:** What are some of your favorite puzzles to work on?

**Ted:** In 2020, during the COVID pandemic, my lessons switched from in-person to online with Coach Serper.

That time gave me a lot of time to work on puzzles. I think I cycled through all the puzzles on Chess.com that were available at the time. So, eventually, I switched to puzzles on ChessTempo.



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**Ken:** Were there other factors that you think contributed to your fast ascent in chess?

**Ted:** When I lost a game or a tournament, I used that disappointment to come back and train harder.

**Ken:** You were able to use setbacks as motivation to work harder?

**Ted:** Yeah. When I lost a tough match, I wanted to work even harder and beat that opponent the next time I faced them.

**Ken:** What does your training schedule look like?

**Ted:** It's not that structured really. I like doing puzzles and I review all my games with Coach Serper. He's good at finding key tilting points in my games and helping me work on those areas.

**Ken:** What is your favorite chess tournament?

**Ted:** The FIDE World Cup Tournament in Batumi, Georgia in 2024 was a lot of fun.

It's a small tournament consisting of 48 players in each section where each federation nominates three to four representatives.

I didn't do very well, but to me it was a good experience because I got to see my friends and made a lot of new friends from different countries. All the games were broadcast live on Chess.com and Lichess which was cool.

**Ken:** What four elements do you think are required to be an excellent chess player?

**Ted:** First, you should be able to focus deeply.

Second, you need the motivation and discipline to work hard.

Third, you must be good at pattern recognition.

Lastly, you should be consistent with your training program.

**Ken:** Can you expand on your ideas about your training program?

**Ted:** It differs from person to person. For me, I have never read any chess books from start to finish. But that's just me.

I like to work on puzzles, and I spend a lot of time studying tactics.

**Ken:** How does your tournament prep change as you get better?

**Ted:** Up until about 1500 ELO, you just go in and play your game. But when you are in the 1800 plus range, the competitive nature of the game requires that you spend time studying your opponent's individual games.

**Ken:** What's the best way to do that?

**Ted:** I go to Chessbase and look at their games.

Chessbase shows, for example, my opponents' favorite openings for White and Black.

Then I use that information to prepare for a specific opponent and style.

**Ken:** How do you measure your success or progress when you train?

**Ted:** I keep it simple. When I train, I work on four tactics per day. I figure that if I get three out of four tactics correct it might translate into a tournament draw or win.

If I get four out of four tactics correct during my chess training sessions, I think it will likely translate into a win during a tournament.

**Ken:** What are your future goals in chess?

**Ted:** My next goal is getting my norms for an International Master title.

**Ken:** What advice do you have for your fellow chess players around the world?

**Ted:** I think it's good to have chess heroes.

By analyzing games on Chess.com, I found the aggressive style of play that I enjoy. By looking at their games first, I discovered my chess heroes are Fischer and Kasparov.

I also think that it's a good idea to experience out-of-state tournaments like Nationals or Supernationals.

**Ken:** How is playing in those tournaments different from those in the PNW?

**Ted:** First, you are playing as a team, so you shift your mentality from an individual to representing Washington State. Second, it adds a whole different level of fun.

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

**Ted:** Washington has great coaches like Josh Sinanan and mentors like Siva Sankrithi who really know how to create a fun team atmosphere when we are travelling out of state.

**Ken:** How so?

**Ted:** Many Washington players travel to out of state tournaments. We often have our own team room. Best of all, we cheer and support each other throughout the tournament!

**Ken:** Any other advice for chess players?

**Ted:** I think the most important thing to remember is the long timeline of chess. I've been playing and working hard on this game for six years. I've had some success, but when I really think about it, what I really am most proud of is that I still love to play the game.

When I play, I also think of this Grandmaster Savielly Tartakower quote to help me stay focused:

"The player who wins the game is the player who makes the next to the last mistake." To me, that means that you never give up and keep fighting all the time.

**Ken:** Check and mate. Thank you.



*Ted Wang—First Place Finish at North American Youth Chess Championship 2024 U12 Section.*