

A Conversation with NM Vignesh Anand

Ken Lee

Vignesh achieved a US Chess rating of 2202 and the title of National Master by scoring 4.0/4 points at the Plano Swiss, in May 2025.

I sat down with Vignesh to discuss resilience, tactics vs positional play and his advice for young chess players.

Ken: When did you first start playing chess?

I was about four years old and we had a small plastic chess set that I found under the TV stand.

My dad knew a little bit about chess because my grandfather taught him. I was hooked immediately.

My dad taught me the basic moves but, because of my interest in chess, my parents immediately enrolled me in Chess4life classes. I also had a few private lessons with NM Elliot Neff of Chess4Life.

Ken: What was it about chess that intrigued you as a kid?

Vignesh: I like the strategy and beauty of the game, and it really was the first game that sparked my interest.

I was also making a lot of friends and it gave me something to look forward to including lessons and tournaments.

Ken: When did you start participating in chess tournaments?

Vignesh: I was placed in the lowest

quad for my first four tournaments.

I think I lost most if not all of my games, and I was very discouraged. To be honest, I wanted to quit right then.

Ken: What stopped you from quitting?

Vignesh: My mom convinced me to continue playing because I think she had an intuition that chess would be good for me.

At my very next tournament, I did a bit better, and it gave me just enough motivation to keep playing. So, I overcame my first setback at about five years of age.

Ken: It's interesting that it's such a vivid memory for you.

Vignesh: Yes, I have to say that my journey in chess has been a long one. I've had to overcome many setbacks and I'm proud of what I've accomplished.

Ken: What additional coaches did you start working with?

Vignesh: My first private coach was Tim Campbell.

My best friend and I would take lessons from him, and we had a lot of fun playing, practicing and studying together.

I progressed to about 1300 to 1400 ELO and then he told my dad that if I wanted to grow as a player, I should get a new coach.

Ken: How did you feel about that?

Vignesh: I was actually a bit upset about that because I had such a great rapport with Coach Campbell.

Ken: How about your middle school years?

Vignesh: I worked with a few different coaches including a GM from India and another GM from St Louis. I think my rating peaked at about 1600 to 1700 at that time.

I also remember competing in the Under 12 youth category in Mexico City.

Ken: What about high school?

Vignesh: I didn't have a coach during high school. I had moved from a very small private school to a big public high school in Redmond and so I switched my attention to other things.

But I did manage to self-study on my own. And, of course, the COVID pandemic happened during my high school years. Unlike a lot of younger kids who actually started and did a deep dive into chess during the COVID pandemic, I actually took a break during that time.

During my high school years, I got stuck at the 2100 ELO and, to be honest, I would get quite discouraged after a tournament loss.

Ken: What was the most effective way for you to study and accelerate your growth as a chess player during those times?

Vignesh: I bought ChessBase and used other resources like Chess Tempo to help me train.

I would create my own lesson plans by focusing on opening prep. I worked hard to make sure that I had my openings down solid and then I would spend a lot of time doing tactics. I would also read a

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lot of chess books by GM Jacob Aagaard. I think his series of books are brilliant.

Ken: What else kept you motivated during those high school years?

Vignesh: Again, my mom would encourage me. I wasn't a little kid anymore but, occasionally, she would gently bring up the subject.

She would say "Vignesh, ever since you were seven, you had a dream to be a titled player. You should keep pursuing your dream. You can do it."

Ken: How did it feel to have the support of your family?

Vignesh: It was great. They knew that I put most of the pressure on myself, but it was good to give me space.

During my senior year, I decided on a new plan to pursue my goals.

Ken: What new plan did you come up with?

Vignesh: I made a conscious decision to study chess with more intention while I was also pursuing my University studies.

Ken: How did you do that?

Vignesh: I decided to attend the University of Texas at Dallas to major in Criminology. I also did a lot of research and found a strong chess program at the University level.

I was very aware of the strong chess program at University of Texas at Dallas and their coach, GM Julio Sadorra. Even with a very busy schedule, I knew I would be able to play and study with top notch players.

Ken: Were you playing on the University Team?

Vignesh: No, the top players at the University of Texas Dallas were already IMs and GMs. But I took the opportunity to train, study and play with some of the top players. That really helped my game.

Ken: How has your chess game evolved over the last few years?

Vignesh: I think what's contributed most to my personal growth as a chess player was working on my transitioning from a tactical to more of a positional player.

Ken: Can you expand on that idea?

Vignesh: Tactical play focuses on sharp moves and calculation. Positional play is much more subtle and requires



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thinking of long-term consequences.

At the higher levels of chess, I think positional play is absolutely required because it demands deeper levels of understanding about yourself and the game.

Ken: What other decisions did you make during your University years?

Vignesh: I made the decision to enlist in the Marine Reserves so that I could make a little money and study at the same time.

In November, I will transfer to active duty. This means that I will be deployed to either Japan, Korea or some other part of the world.

Ken: When did you feel that you were definitely going to get your NM Title?

Vignesh: I was so sure that I was going to get my NM Title at a particular tournament that I told my friends and family. Unfortunately, it didn't happen so I had to gather up my strength, pick myself up, and fight again at another tournament.

Ken: When did it finally happen?

Vignesh: It was at a small tournament

in Plano, TX that I finally got my NM title in May 2025.

Ken: Wow, that's an amazing story of resilience and growth for you as a chess player and as a young man.

It's interesting that you almost quit chess entirely when you were five years old. Then, when you were in high school you took a long break from chess.

Vignesh: Chess is a lot like life. It's impossible to predict the ups and downs. You just have to make the best possible decisions based on what's presented to you.

Ken: So, after this incredible journey, what advice do you have for young chess players in the community?

Vignesh: I think the biggest piece of advice is playing every chess game like you're starting a new journey. You can't let your past wins or losses adversely impact you. Just play each individual game like a fresh start.

When I reflect on my own path, I think the biggest takeaway for me was just being able to consistently improve over time.

Ken: Check and mate.