

Our Brightest Chess Hours

The Chess Friends

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, and The Legend Vivi

Howdy! It's The Chess Friends! Last year in September, for the first time, *Northwest Chess* magazine published one of our blogs, [Our Darkest Chess Hours](#), and since then, every month, we have been contributing our articles to the magazine. Can you believe it's been a full year?! It took a lot of brain-storming, dedication, and discipline, month after month, to write and submit our article on time, to be considered for the next issue! We are thankful for the opportunity to share our thoughts, and grateful to Editor Jeffrey Roland for giving us freedom to express our opinions and make silly jokes. We're also grateful to those who gave us support, friendly comments, and questions, and all of you who looked forward to reading The Chess Friends article every month. To all our dear readers, it means a ton to us to hear how much you like to open the magazine to find our article there! We learned so much, gained so many new experiences, and made new friends along the way. Onward to year two!

For this issue, to celebrate the one-year anniversary of *Northwest Chess* articles by The Chess Friends, we decided to echo our first ever published piece, and share *Our Brightest Chess Hours*! We hope they will remind you of your own chess memories and make your heart warm and your face as smiley as Peshka's!

The Legend Vivaan

Friendship and Service

As I was reflecting on my chess career, which spans more than half my life, there were so many moments that came to my mind as bright. While medals and trophies may be bright, literally, the moments that stood out most to me were rooted in friendship and service. I've

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE TROPHIES...



made so many friends through the chess world, and the chess world is truly my second home. While competing is fine, I love meeting people of all ages, sharing stories and experiences, and learning more together through the game we love so much. It doesn't matter whether it's in the Pacific Northwest, or anywhere in the world that chess takes us, it feels like home. One of the greatest highlights for me is that I get to have a fellow homeschooling chess friend, Siana, over every week, and we play chess, we analyze, we play lots of other games, and we have a blast!

In 2025, I won the adult Washington State Championship, Sensations Section, that came with a big prize fund, \$225! A few weeks before, I learned about a new

friend, Atlas, who suffers from chronic pancreatitis. Before the tournament began, both me and Sarang decided that any money we won would be donated to [Mission Cure](#), committed to searching for a cure for pancreatitis. This motivated me to fight even harder over the chess board. Ultimately, we got to meet Atlas in person and CBS National News' David Begnaud carried a story on his [Dear David segment](#) that helped raise even more funds for Mission Cure and awareness for pancreatitis. We continue to donate all the money we receive through chess, whether it's from playing, writing, or coaching, to support causes we believe will make a positive difference in the world. With that in mind, let's turn it over to my big bro The Myth Sarang to share his brightest moments.

The Myth Sarang

Writing and Coaching

Like Vivaan said, competing is fine, and while I thoroughly enjoyed winning the U11 US Junior Open in 2024 among other titles, it's the sharing and giving back that matters the most to me. From the age of six, I wrote daily and journaled. At eight, I wrote my first book, [Do Brown Cows Make Chocolate Milk?: Family Experiences Around Child-Led Learning](#), with my Dad, Mom, and little brother The Legend Vivaan. The experience of sharing my voice with people of all ages from all over the world totally changed my perspective on life.

Shortly thereafter, I got to writing even more with my buddy The Man Benji, and [The Chess Friends](#) were born. Since then, we've been [blogging](#), writing articles for *Northwest Chess* magazine, and published one book, [Q&A Chess: Tournament Edition](#), with another in the works (stay tuned!). Hearing stories from

IT'S ABOUT SHARING...



so many about how our writing has helped them means the world to me. Meeting Benji weekly and sharing ideas and writing in a way that helps other kids and adults alike appreciate the chess world is super rewarding! After taking several college writing courses, I also started my own blog, ProdigyStrats.com, to help people get a glimpse into my world and hopefully help them in theirs, whether through chess, music, cooking, gaming, sports, travel, or yoga.

Coaching chess has been a major highlight for me this past year. I helped coach the King's High School Chess Team in their inaugural season and they got second at State Individual! More than that, all the players improved considerably, and I'm proud of the team chemistry I helped facilitate. I now have multiple private students and work with a free by-kids-for-kids chess school, which you can learn about at PawnToQueenChessCoaching.com. I've particularly enjoyed talking chess pedagogy with Coach Tim Moroney and other leaders in the Northwest Chess community and love designing new curriculum and helping fellow strong kid chess players into coaching as well. Now let's turn it over to my fellow author and dear friend The Man Benji to share his brightest chess moments.

The Man Benji

The Light of the Game

When I think of my brightest chess hours, I don't remember winning a tournament, gaining rating, or taking a trophy home. What comes to mind is the

game itself. When I play chess, I enjoy thinking hard about a position and using all my brainpower to find brilliant and flashy moves. That is the source of chess light for me. Do you know those light bulb moments in your head? That's what I play for, even if the end result is losing a game. Experimenting and coming up with ideas, even if they end up being errors, is part of the process.

Like the second World Chess Champion Emanuel Lasker, who said, "Without error there can be no brilliancy," I think that *Yesterday's errors can become tomorrow's brilliancies, if you let them teach you.*

For example, I might be trying a new opening for the first time at a tournament. It might not work out well, which is understandable since it's new. So, I would play on, but lose more games with it. I could get disappointed, to put it mildly, and sink into a dark hour, thinking that it's the opening's fault, or worse, it's my fault! Or I could convert these unproductive thoughts into energy that powers me to study what went wrong in that line. Then, in the next tournament, I might get better results, and the feeling that your hard work has paid off will create another source of light.

Last year, when I wrote about my darkest chess hour, I described a disappointing performance at a tournament. What I didn't realize after that tournament, or even when writing about it a year later, is that it wasn't a dark hour, but a breaking point that fueled the light within. You know glow sticks, those little plastic tubes, that, when you bend them, you break the smaller glass container inside, then the two solutions mix and give off light in a process called chemiluminescence? My process is called *chess-luminescence*, but unlike the disposable glow sticks that last only a

few hours, chess-luminescence keeps on shining!

The thing is, we have to create our own light; that way it shines the brightest. For me, learning chess and trying something new is what creates the light. It's now part of me, a must-have feature, like in creatures that shine their way in the darkest seas and oceans. (Fun fact, in 2008, Dr. Osamu Shimomura shared a [Nobel Prize in Chemistry](#) for his work in bioluminescence, studying luminous jellyfish *Aequorea* right here in Washington, in Friday Harbor on San Juan Island!)

The darkest chess hours are fleeting, but the brightest hours keep shining, illuminating our chess journey forward. Does that mean it's always daytime in chess? When do the chess lights turn off so we can get some rest? When we call it a knight!

Ha! We can't have a celebratory article without our critically acclaimed knee-slappers, can we? Here they are, sunny and bright edition!

What did the light bulb in Benji's head tell him during the chess game?

"Watt's up?"

Why does ice cream play chess only during the long days of summer?

Because when it's summer, anything is popsicle!

What did the sunscreen say to its opponent after losing the chess game?

"Please, don't rub it in."

How many chess players does it take to change a light bulb?

None, that's what TDs are for!

Why do light bulbs play chess?

To practice their brilliance.

Three Cheers, Fellow Future Master Chess Friends!

The Man Benji,

The Myth Sarang,

The Legend Vivaan

IT'S ABOUT THE GAME!

