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IN THE ISSUE

Understanding People Through Chess

- Malinda Lu WHS



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Massachusetts Chess Association

October 12 · 🌐

Top prize winners at the 89th Massachusetts Open, held October 9-11 in Quincy, Mass.

Championship Section: Alan Song

Under 2100 Section: Lawrence Tu

Under 1800 Section: Christopher Estremera, Ranjan Dey... [See more](#)

Screenshot of <https://www.facebook.com/masschess/>

Understanding People Through Chess

- Malinda Lu WHS Nov. 2021

When Alan Song, currently a sophomore at Wellesley High School, competed in his first Massachusetts Chess Open in second grade, he had no idea chess was going to become a major influence on both his personal growth and intellectual development. Eight years later, in an interview shortly after winning the championship prize in the same tournament, Alan revealed how chess helped him to understand himself and the people around him; his rational personality could be accredited to the logic and foresight necessary in chess, and it was through the centuries-old strategy game that he had become more aware of this attribute.

When Alan was asked why he enjoys playing chess, he responded simply: "I like how there's almost no luck element."

Meticulously calculating his opponent's every action, Alan predicts the consequence of each move in a game, thereby positioning himself in control of the situation at hand. Chess endowed him with the mastery of being able to navigate events using crystal clear logic, and with the ability to learn and adjust quickly to challenges presented to him, no matter how daunting. It shaped his very way of thinking, and as such is an inseparable component of him.



But it wasn't just chess that influenced him. Alan's own personality has also played a quintessential role when it comes to his performance in chess.

"I'm pretty stubborn," Alan chuckled. "Even when I'm losing, I keep going and sometimes the other person just messes up."

His resilience has helped him to persevere through numerous chess tournaments.

But it's not just about himself. According to Alan, getting upset over a lost game was once the norm for him, just like anyone else. However, with the comfort of his parents who reinforced in him that at the end of the day a singular game was just “not that important in the grand scheme of things,” Alan learned to stay levelheaded even when things did not go his way. He learned to take a step back and view his matches, his tournaments, and -- perhaps most importantly -- his life from a perspective that helped him maintain optimism.

Sometimes, adjusting his perspective to different types of opponents in a chess tournament also helps Alan to stay calm. When competing against lower rated players, he constantly reminds himself that there is a reason for their lower rating and that he simply has to stay focused. In contrast, when faced with higher rated players, Alan often tells himself that he is already “screwed,” thereby lowering his



expectations and relieving stress so that he can perform better. Knowing his own place relative to others allows him to choose the right mindset to be in — a strategy Alan has gradually developed throughout his chess journey. To Alan, the most stressful situations have always come from playing against opponents of a similar level. Be that as it may, no matter the opponent, he has always known that life will go on — regardless of the results.



Chess taught Alan logic and adaptability. It intertwined with his own personal development, shaping him into a stronger individual over time. Now, he wishes to spread the power of chess and the valuable lessons it teaches. At the Wellesley Chinese Language School, Alan is the chess instructor for elementary and middle school students. He teaches chess tactics to inspire natural interest, but makes “boring” moves as well to help the students develop the same adaptability that he obtained from chess. Through chess, he learned skills useful not only in chess itself, but also vital lessons for life itself — skills that he is now ready and willing to give back to his own community.

