

NEJCA Training (by Sean Milton NEJCA Training Officer)

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Why play Chess?

Chess is fun, its challenging and the ideal sport to play in the Scottish climate. Chess makes kids smarter too. It does so by developing focus, visualisation and planning skills. Research has demonstrated that chess is one of the unique activities that develop both sides of the brain. Regular play builds strong neuron paths to turbo boost brain power.

The beauty of chess is that it stimulates children's minds and helps them to build these skills while enjoying themselves.

Chess helps build individual friendships and team spirit when children compete together. Chess also teaches children about sportsmanship - how to win graciously and not give up when encountering defeat. Chess provides a positive social outlet, a wholesome recreational activity that can be easily learned and enjoyed at any age.

Getting Started

Learning to play chess is easier than you think. The common misconception that chess is difficult and can only be played by Mensa card carrying geniuses is born from the fact that chess at the top level can be very complex. It is a fact, that the number of combinations and variations available on a chess board after each player has made 20 moves is equivalent to the number of atoms in the universe. Thankfully there is no requirement to remember all of them. The beauty of chess is that it is fun and challenging to play at any level. Most kids are able to play an enjoyable game of chess after no more than 20 minutes of tuition.

The best way to start is by playing with a member of the family who knows the basic rules or by joining a local chess club at school or attending NEJCA events.

There are numerous good web sites that can teach you how to play chess. A list of some of the recommended ones can be found in the Chess Bibliography section on this site.

<http://www.chessvariants.com/d.chess/chess.html>

<http://www.sudburychess.org.uk/chessTraining.htm>

<http://www.chessopolis.com/tutorials.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess>

Teaching chess for organisers

Several teaching aids for teachers and chess coaches are available. Two free Scottish-based sources are available.

The first is from Chess Scotland and can be accessed via

<http://www.chessscotland.com/junior/junior.htm>


<http://www.chessscotland.com/junior/schoolclub.htm>

The second is a module-structured .pdf booklet produced by David Leslie of Mearns Chess. Electronic copies can be obtained via the NEJCA, contact Gerald Lobley (NEJCA President) at

g.lobley@abdn.ac.uk

Local Chess Clubs /Organizations

Stonehaven Chess Club

Newton Arms
Old Mill Road
Newtonhill, Stonehaven, Scotland 

Email: neleague@fsmail.net

Bonaccord Chess Club Ferryhill, Aberdeen

<http://www.bon-accord-chess-club.org.uk/findUs.html>

Newmachar Chess Club

<http://www.netmums.com/ne-scotland/local/view/after-school-activities/academic-and-languages/newmachar-chess-club>

Peterhead Chess club

<mailto:taitpert@aol.com>

Inverness Chess Club

<http://www.spanglefish.com/invernesschessclub/>

Competitive Chess Road Map

Chess can be enjoyed when playing against friends and family. As players skills develop the player may look for a greater challenge. The following, lists the options open to each player and describes the level and commitment required.

NEJCA events

These events are played in the local North East area and are held at venues across the region from Stonehaven in the East to Inverness in the West. These tournaments cater for a wide range of abilities. Recent tournaments were attended by novice players and Scottish junior internationalists. See [tournaments](#) page at www.nejca.com

N.E Club games

Local chess clubs compete in the [Richardson Cup](#) and in the local [North East Leagues](#). These team events are generally populated by the more senior and higher graded players from the clubs but are open for juniors of sufficient calibre.

Chess Scotland Congresses

To progress from local to national level, it is essential to increase ones personal grading or to demonstrate a consistent high level of performance against recognised good chess players. This can be achieved by playing local tournaments and club games or playing in regional competitions. Playing at regional congress level has the advantage of increased exposure to players of varying grade and places the player in the selection spotlight as the events are regularly attended by the Chess Scotland selectors.

A typical congress will be played over a Friday (one evening game), Saturday(two games) and Sunday(two games). A bye can be requested for the Friday round. As most of the congresses are held in the central belt area, overnight accommodation is usually required by those travelling from the N.E.

International tournaments

A number of International chess events are supported by Chess Scotland each year. These events pit the best Scottish junior players against the finest players from the international chess community The list of events are listed on the Chess Scotland web

site. Generally these are FIDE organised events. Sponsorship/funding is limited but Chess Scotland endeavour to send a squad containing the best player from each age group, a head of delegation and coach. These trips are generally self funded but competition entrance fees and accommodation are subsidised to some degree.

Grading

A players grading in simplistic terms is calculated by a combination of the average grading strength of opposition played and the points gained against them. Juniors are recognised as having a higher playing ability than their actual official starting grade suggests. To compensate for this junior players have a grading cap removed after they have gained 200 points from that years starting grade. This helps boost the junior player's grade to quickly reflect their grade. Details of Scottish grading can be found on the Chess Scotland web site.

Chess Coaching

Chess coaching is unique to each player. Novice players require a broad overview of the game whilst more advanced players may require focus on only one aspect. The following are pointers for junior players looking for general guidance on how to improve their game.

There is a myth about studying openings or concentrating on endgames for beginners in that you should study them the most out of any aspect of the game. Understand that you need to study these aspects, but don't make it the highest priority. You need to become 'comfortable' at each stage of the game. Perfect endgame play does you no good if you get slaughtered in the opening consistently, or don't understand the basics of good defence in the middle game and get mated or drop material from poor tactical play.

There are a myriad of openings to choose from. I would suggest choosing two white and two black openings to start with and work on these until you are comfortable.

For Openings, you need to make some decisions and stick to it for a few months to see how it works for you. Determine what openings you like to play, taking into account the complexity of the opening. As a beginner, I would recommend something along the lines of the Caro-Kann (Karpov Pet) as black against 1.e4, and the Slav against Q-pawn openings. Both these openings tend to avoid pawn structure weaknesses, are solid, and are not too explosive. But, this is just my preference explore a few openings and find the one that appeals to your style of play.

I would recommend studying initially only those endgames that are the most frequent.

- 1) Rook Endings
- 2) Bishop vs. Knight

3) Pawn endings

I would not waste significant time on any other endings at first as a beginner because the frequency of them appearing in practical play is comparatively low. Get a basic book on endgame play that explains the basic positional aspects of each kind. Play the computer in a bunch of these endings. Using Chessbase, you can search for practically unlimited amount of endgame positions you can play out for practice. Keep the endgame book open in front of you so you can reference the ideas of what you are trying to accomplish in each category of endgame.

Studying Openings:

Play lots of practice games quickly. You are just trying to get a feel for what types of positions in the middle game you end up with and what types of endgames come about. Pay attention. If you find you do not like what you see at this stage, CHANGE YOUR OPENING.

Once past this stage, examine well-annotated master games, preferably those that explain the strategic goals behind the opening.

Do this for a few months. Once you feel you understand the ideas behind the opening, only then do venture into the realm of Opening Manuals. The only one I would buy is Nunn's Chess Openings but visit the NEJCA website for recommendations submitted over time from some of the strongest players coaches in the N.E. These players have spent years reading through chess books and are well positioned to filter out the wheat from the chaff.

MOST IMPORTANT: Learn how to record your games using Algebraic notation. This allows you to analyze your game afterwards and try to get a better player to go over the game with you at some point, or if not possible, use a chess computer. Fix your opening errors. If your opponent made an opening error, and you did not punish him for it, discover the correct play via computer or reference or better player.

Middle game improvement requires you to pay attention to the types of positions you get in your games from your selection of openings. Does your opening tend to end up with an Isolated Centre Pawn? Perhaps a minority attack is frequent? Locked Centre? If so, read chapters out of strategy books that are specific to the subjects and go over your games intensely where these situations arise. You can improve quickly with a great deal of understanding by using this method. You will also help your pattern recognition skills because you will be playing similar positions in the middle game from the same opening.

Tactics! Tactics! Tactics!

You cannot study tactics and combinational play enough. It is the first and foremost cause of losses in lower rated players games. I would highly recommend the [chess tempo website](#). It's free and one of the best tactic sites I have seen.

The advent of [voice over Internet Protocol](#) and video conferencing has opened up a new medium for chess coaching where distance is no longer an issue. Coaching can be carried out face to face between players in different geographic locations just by switching on their home computer. A number of players in the North East have recently trialled this technology and have received valuable coaching from 2000 plus graded coaches based in Edinburgh. A contract between coach and player is required to agree a fee for the service.

Skype is the most popular provider of video conferencing between Scottish coaches and players but other providers, such as [Empathy](#), [Linphone](#), as well as [Google Talk](#) are available.

Reference material

The following reference material shall be updated periodically on the NEJCA web site as suggestions are collected from prominent chess coaches and players of the N. E. Over time it is hoped that a comprehensive list of the best reference material will be listed to help juniors efficiently learn the game of chess.

<http://www.webspawner.com/users/nehome/index.html> (North East of Scotland Chess League)

<http://www.chessscotland.com/>

<http://www.chessbase.com/>

<http://www.chesscafe.com/>

<http://chesstempo.com>

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<http://www.skype.com>

Nunn's Chess Openings By John Nunn, Graham Burgess, John Emms & Joe Gallagher
544 pages Everyman Chess

[HOW TO BEAT YOUR DAD AT CHESS Hardcover Oct-1998](#) by Murray Chandler