

*Eric Rosen in action on the courts. Rosen, in addition to being the National High School champion, is the number-two singles player on his varsity team. Tennis continues to be a popular activity among chess players.*

# An Encouraging Purr

The mother of the 2011 National High School champion discusses raising a champion.

By Andrea Rosen

Earlier this year, I read Amy Chua's controversial book on parenting, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, where she describes what she proudly calls her "extreme parenting" style: obsessive, hypercritical, and intolerant of anything less than perfection. Her underlying belief is that "children on their own never want to work," and that only shame and unrelenting criticism will eventually produce kids who excel.

Like many other parents, I disagreed with her, but I also found myself harboring doubts. Have I been too indulgent? Did I give my children too much leeway in deciding where to devote their own time? Will failing to insist that they achieve perfection at everything they do lead them to fail to persevere at crucial moments and give up when the going gets tough?

I think my son Eric's clear first-place win at this year's National High School Championship, held April 29-May 1, 2011 in Nashville, Tennessee, offers some vindication to me and all other parents who believe that children, when encouraged to connect with passions of their own choosing, are inclined to work hard and can achieve success at the highest levels through their own intrinsic motivation. As an added bonus, whether or not they win a national championship, chances are their therapy bills as adults will be less.

Eric fell in love with chess at the age of seven, and as a family we've devoted more time and money to allow him to pursue it than many would view as sane. Still, my husband Brad and I never remind him of

that or insist it translate into some tangible result. While we encouraged both our children to work hard at school and get good grades, straight A's were never a goal—a passion for learning was. As for chess, there were times Eric's teachers felt that he wasn't achieving his potential and that he should be studying longer and harder. But growing up he was first an avid soccer player, and later an avid tennis player. It was clear he needed that balance in his life, and more importantly, that in the end, winning was not all that mattered. To me, competing in anything is less about the results and more about what you learn on route. Nine years after he began to play, he's learned plenty, and how to end a game with checkmate might be the least of it. He's empathetic, he learns from his mistakes, he helps others learn from theirs, he loses with grace, and he handles himself like a pro in high-pressure, high-stakes situations.

His win at nationals didn't completely surprise me—I knew he had the potential. But he entered the tournament as seventh seed, and many thought that as a kid from the Midwest, he didn't have a chance over the more experienced and higher-rated East coast players. In the *CLO* article immediately following the tournament, the authors said, "Running the NYC gauntlet on the final day en route to a perfect score has to rank as one of the outstanding individual achievements in this tournament's history."

In a conversation with him after the tournament, he shared his thoughts about

what it takes to get in that winning zone.

First, he says, it's easier to play well if you don't think you're going to win. "I've developed a small superstition that's proven to be true," he said. "Before a tournament, if I feel like I'm going to do well, I always do badly. But whenever I'm pessimistic and think I'm going to do badly, then I do well. This also holds true during the game. If I'm too confident in my position, I'm more likely to make mistakes. When I remind myself that it's possible that I can lose, it's easier to just think about playing good chess."

He came into this year's national championship with the strong memory of a devastatingly poor tournament in the same event the previous year, losing or struggling to get draws against lower-rated players and finishing with just four points out of seven. This year, he says, he had especially low expectations. "I just wanted to enjoy myself, play well, and improve over last year's score. I think having that mindset actually gave me better results."

Second, he says, study the games of great players. While he knew who his main competition in Nashville would be, he didn't spend time before the tournament looking at their games or preparing against specific opponents. Instead, he focused on the U.S. Championship that was taking place during the 10 days prior to the high school championship in Nashville. "Every day I looked online at those games, and that really helped. I could see how good players played, and get inspiration. I also went over my own openings, because really

## Scholastics

that's the most important thing to prepare before a tournament."

During the tournament, his focus carried him through sticky situations in games. "Almost every game had a moment where I got careless at some point and I was either worse, or I was put in situations where I really had to think. A big factor in my success had to do with being mentally determined to stay in the game and recover after my mistakes," he said. "The schedule at nationals makes it as much as a physical test as a mental test," and he added that he felt he had a lot of stamina going into the event.

Eric said he's also developed a trick for gathering his thoughts during tough parts of a game: He pretends he's explaining the game to someone else. "It helps me to organize my thoughts, and it helps me commit myself and feel confident about going in a certain direction."

He acknowledges luck also played a factor. His toughest match was when he blundered early to another Midwest favorite, Indiana's Daniel Gater, and had to fight back. Gater missed a winning move in that game, but had an exceptional tournament overall, losing only to Eric, gaining 55 rating points and coming in second place on tiebreaks.

Eric knows how crucial a good support system is, and he credits his team and coaches for helping with his success. His Niles North High School team has consistently been among the top teams in the state for years before he was a student there. This is despite the fact that the head coach, Niles North High School physics teacher Harry Kyriazes, can play at about a 1200-rating strength on a good day, and the assistant coach, English teacher Heather Ingraham, has developed her knowledge just to the point where she knows how the pieces move and is working on her pins and forks. They almost never go into the playing room during a tournament, and don't look at the team standings. But they do provide a great spread of food. What they lack in in-depth chess knowledge they make up for by being master facilitators. They've created a supportive and nurturing environment where enthusiasm reigns and the students take ownership of their own learning. The results were clear this year: the team took fourth place over much higher-rated competition.

For Eric, the ability to serve as team leader benefitted him as much as his teammates. "After every round, I would go back to our team room and review my game with my teammates. This is mutually beneficial. It's hard to explain, but expressing my thoughts about my game helps get it out of me and clear my head for the next round."

He also knows himself well enough to

separate himself from the group and get some alone time before each round. He was most nervous before his game with Alex Ostrovskiy. "I knew I didn't want to lose that game and have to play a weaker player in the last round just to get an average score. After I won, I was able to relax. I had nothing more to lose."

He felt he had the psychological advantage going into the final round. He led the field by half-point, and was facing number-one seed Marc Tyler Arnold, who was in a must-win situation. His best strategy, he said, "was not to give him a position out of the opening that he would be happy with."

### English Opening (A21)

*Eric Rosen (2274)*

*IM Marc Tyler Arnold (2521)*

*National High School (7), 05.01.2011*

*Notes by Eric Rosen*

After I had beaten Ostrovskiy in the pivotal sixth round, I more or less knew I would be playing Arnold for the championship. I had about an hour to rest, eat, prepare, and keep the nerves from getting to me. Going into the round, I was the only 6/6 score and Arnold was right behind me with 5½/6. I knew that a draw would guarantee me at least a tie for the championship and Arnold was in a must-win situation. I tried not to think about it. I told myself: "Just play good chess."

#### 1. c4!?

An unexpected move. While I am mostly an e4-player, and almost all of my games as white in the database begin with 1. e4. I chose to play the English opening for two reasons: 1) I was expecting Arnold to show up somewhat late to the game (as he did in other games) in order to prepare for me. Playing the English would avoid all of his preparation. 2) I did not want to enter any theoretical Sicilian lines, as I knew Arnold was very booked. I was just aiming for a solid position.

#### 1. ... e5 2. Nc3 Bb4

Sending me out of book and into thought (on just the second move!).

#### 3. Qb3

I was aware that the mainline is 3. Nd5, but I didn't feel comfortable going into that without any preparation. I came up with Qb3 over the board to get out of theory and to simply play chess.

#### 3. ... Nc6 4. Nf3 Be7

Avoiding Nxe5 ideas, and not wanting to concede the bishop pair. 4. ... Nf6? 5. Nxe5! Bxc3 6. Qxc3 wins a pawn for White.

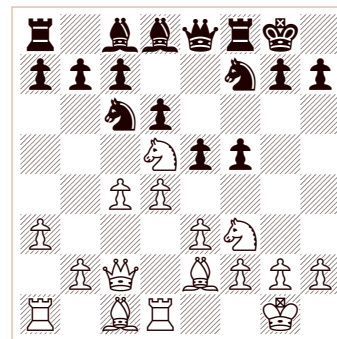
#### 5. e3 d6 6. Be2 Nh6!?

An interesting idea by Arnold. He intends to keep the option of playing f5 open as well as possibly bringing the knight to f5 if White ever plays d2-d4.

#### 7. 0-0 0-0 8. a3

A waiting move which I figured would become useful later in the game. White waits for Black to play ... f7-f5 so he can respond with d2-d4. If 8. d4?! immediately, then 8. ... exd4 9. exd4 Nf5 seemed comfortable for Black.

#### 8. ... f5 9. d4 Nf7 10. Rd1 Qe8 11. Nd5 Bd8 12. Qc2



After 12. Qc2

White's plan here is very straightforward: play b2-b4 followed by Bb2 and increase the tension in the center. If Black ever plays ... e5-e4, then White can respond with Nd2 and f2-f3 breaking up the center.

#### 12. ... Nb8!?

I did not consider this strange move for Black. While almost all of his pieces are on the back rank, there are no weaknesses to attack. Black is planning ... c7-c6 and ... Nd7-f6 with a balanced position. I joked after the game that perhaps ... Nh8 was his next move, setting up a Fischer-random position. Worse is 12. ... e4?! 13. Nd2 g5 14. f3 exf3 15. Nxf3.

#### 13. b4 c6 14. Nc3 e4!?

Probably not the most accurate move. While the knight is forced to retreat, f2-f3 will come next breaking up the center. It doesn't look like Black will be quick enough to play ... d6-d5. Perhaps 14. ... g6 followed by ... Nd7-f6 is better, maintaining the tension; 14. ... Nd7? fails to 15. Qxf5.

#### 15. Nd2 Nd7 16. f3 exf3 17. Nxf3 Ng5

Preparing ... d5 with 17. ... Nf6 doesn't quite work: 18. Bd3 g6 19. e4! with a nice position for White.

#### 18. Nxf3 Bxf3 19. e4!

Gaining space in the center and securing a comfortable advantage.

#### 19. ... f4

Perhaps this line is better than the



game's: 19. ... Bxc1 20. Raxc1 fxe4 21. Qxe4 Nf6. However, Arnold was in a must-win situation and it doesn't seem like Black has too many winning chances here.

#### 20. Bf3 Qg6 21. Qe2

It is not easy to play Black in this position. ... Re8 runs into Bh5, while ... Nf6 runs into e4-e5.

#### 21. ... c5!?

Arnold played this move after a long think. Black intends to open up either e5 or c5 for the knight and develop the c8-bishop.

#### 22. dxc5 dxc5 23. Rd5!

Preventing ... Ne5 and taking over the fifth rank.

#### 23. ... Be7 24. Rf5 cxb4

For some reason when I played Rf5, I forgot my b4-pawn was hanging. However, it seems like White will have more than enough attacking resources to compensate for the pawn.

#### 25. axb4 Bxb4 26. Nd5 Bc5+ 27. Kh1 Nb6

There is nice compensation for the pawn after 27. ... Rxf5 28. exf5 Qxf5 29. Bxf4.

#### 28. Rxf8+ Bxf8 29. Bxf4 Nxd5 30. exd5

As we entered this position, I had 40+ minutes to Arnold's 15 minutes. With a nice edge on time and position, I knew I was the only player playing for a win. I still had to be careful: 30. cxd5?? Qf6!

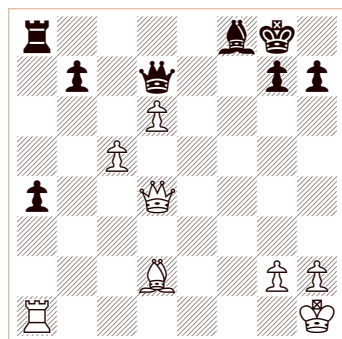
#### 30. ... Bf5 31. Qf2 a5

Or 31. ... b6 32. Be3! threatening Bxb6 is strong for White.

#### 32. Qd4 Bg4 33. Bxg4 Qxg4 34. d6 Qd7 35. c5

The sad bishop on f8 is immobile for the rest of the game.

#### 35. ... a4 36. Bd2!



After 36. Bd2

Maneuvering the bishop to c3 where it will defend the queening square on a1 and try to prepare mating ideas on g7.

#### 36. ... a3 37. Bc3 a2 38. Rf1 Kh8 39. Qc4

It's worth noting that Arnold had less than two minutes on his clock at this point and I had around 20.

#### 39. ... b6?

Missing the threat. 39. ... h6 was necessary, but Black's position is still very unpleasant.

#### 40. Qxa2! Qd8

Nor 40. ... Rxa2 41. Rxf8 mate.

#### 41. Qe6 bxc5 42. Be5 Ra7 43. d7 Ra8 44. Rf7 Qg5 45. h3! Black resigned.

Avoiding back-rank threats and threatening Bxg7. Black's position is hopeless. 45. Bxg7+? Qxg7 46. Rxg7 Ra1+.

The end of the game, he said, was nerve-racking for its own reasons: he knew he could win, and there were about 100 people watching in front of the stage to witness if he faltered. "You just have to focus on the game and celebrate afterwards," he said.

After years of playing high-level events, he's got some advice for parents. He said he thinks it helps that Brad and I never told him we expected him to win or made him feel bad afterwards if he didn't. "I think I did that to myself," he said, "but that's another story."

The opportunity to play stronger opponents, along with learning how to move on from his losses, he says, has been a key part of his success. He credits his coach Dmitry Gurevich for helping with that. Despite being the lowest rated player at last year's Junior Closed, Eric had a break-out tournament and finished in the middle of the pack with 4½/9. He checked in with Dmitry after each round, and said Dmitry's style of not focusing too much on his mistakes during the tournament helped his confidence. "There were a few games where I was winning, but I ended with either a draw or a loss, and Dmitry told me not to worry about it, just to play the next game. I think that really helped me relax," Eric said. "After the whole tournament, we went back and focused on why I lost and what my mistakes were, but I think right after you lose, you just have to move on."

Eric advises parents to give their kids space after a tough loss. "Just leave them alone." Berating a player for losing, or showing them how they missed an easy win, he says, "can be psychologically devastating and make it very hard to play the next round."

Telling someone they need to win the next round isn't helpful either. "If anything, it will make it worse. They should just have an open, relaxed mind, and try to forget about any pressure or the result."

Parents can also make sure their kids eat well and stay healthy, he said.

Eric's next goals for chess are to play well enough to get a chance against stronger opponents this summer at the World Open in Philadelphia in July (*just completed as Chess Life went to press*), the Metropolitan Chess tournament in Los Angeles in August, and in the fall at the World Youth Championships in Brazil. He's also looking forward to attending the U.S. Chess School in August in Saint Louis.

And my next goal? Well, move over Amy Chua—I think there's room on the bookshelf for a different sort of book: *The Encouraging Purr of the Pussycat Mama?* ■

## 2011 National High School Championship At A Glance

### Date:

April 28-May 1, 2011

### Location:

Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, Nashville, Tennessee

### Top Finishers:

*K-12 Championship (Individual)*, 1st, 7: Eric Rosen; 2nd-9th, 6: Daniel Gater, Alec Getz, Nick Thompson, Michael Vilenchuk, Andrew Ng, Evan Sandberg, Michael Chiang, Sean Vibbert. *(Team)*, 1st, 20½: Hunter College Campus School. *K-12 Under 1600 (Individual)*, 1st-2nd, 6½: Watson Fu, Vishal Bharadwaj; 3rd-6th, 6: Danny Sepler, Ja'monte Adams, Akshay Saini, Sean Chung. *(Team)*, 1st, 19½: P.S. 124. *K-12 Under 1200 (Individual)*, 1st, 7: Marshall Sumwalt; 2nd, 6½: William Giguere; 3rd-8th, 6: Daniel Henning, Austin Kasabri, Dominic Zirbel, Jack Mockler, Sahil Patel, Alexander Moore. *(Team)*, 1st-2nd, 20½: Vianney High, East Side Community High School. *K-12 Under 800 (Individual)*, 1st, 7: Wilson Cheah; 2nd-10th: Lucas Henigan, Nicky Hart, Mazhar Siddique, David Moran, Bardia Jahanshahi, Kevin Wang, Saurabh Singh, Philip Gubbins, Zachary Ashbel. *(Team)*, 1st, 22: Northwest High School. *K-12 Unrated (Individual)*, 6½: Evan Aubry; 6: 2nd-6th: Jacob Overman, Ed Ordonez, Andrew Tat, Ryan Klasky, Scott Hagen. *(Team)*, 1st, 20: Hinsdale Central High School

### Chief Tournament Director:

Wayne Clark