



TAI'LOM JACKSON CREDITS THE U.S. CHESS CENTER WITH CHANGING HIS LIFE AMBITION. UPON GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL, TAI'LOM ATTENDED THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ON A FULL SCHOLARSHIP AND CURRENTLY WORKS FOR A GLOBAL AEROSPACE AND DEFENSE COMPANY.

everybody is "Yes."

Mehler recognized something special in Tai'Lon.

"Tai'Lon was a particularly bright kid," Mehler says. "You could see the spark in his eyes."

"He caught on very quickly to the game," Mehler recalls. "I encouraged him to participate in our Sunday program," he says of the Sunday classes that the center offers to young people.

"Because he came from a background of extreme poverty, he couldn't make it from where he lived in Anacostia without my giving him bus fare," Mehler says of the neighborhood where Tai'Lon lived. "So I gave him bus fare and he came."

"He was very excited about coming and learning and chess."

Tai'Lon ultimately won the right to represent the District of Columbia in the 2012 Denker Tournament of High School Champions.

Tai'Lon didn't exactly set the chess world on fire. In fact, he finished 48 in a field of 48 players.

But you can't measure the value of this particular experience strictly in terms of wins, losses, and rating points.

"The experience my mother and I had in flying across the country to play in the chess tournament changed my ambitions," Tai'Lon wrote in a 2015 letter to Mehler. "Without the U.S. Chess Center, I would not be in college now."

And not just any college. Back when he was at Ballou, Tai'Lon won a four-year scholarship to The George Washington University (GWU). He graduated from GWU

this past spring. He is currently employed as a background investigator at a global aerospace and defense company.

Tai'Lon's story is just one of several that demonstrates how the U.S. Chess Center has been an active and influential player on the chess scene in and around the nation's capital. To get a sense of how diverse the Chess Center's activities are, consider the fact that the Center offers chess classes at a mosque in McLean, Virginia.

The center has drawn support from politicians, such as U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin, to chess legends such as Garry Kasparov, who appeared via Skype to converse with kids participating in a tournament to mark the center's new location.

Among the many young chess players who have participated in the center's tournaments is 16-year-old IM-elect Jennifer Yu of Ashburn, Virginia, who recently won international attention and a bronze medal at the 2018 World Women Chess Olympiad in Batumi.

Jennifer recalls playing in several tournaments and events hosted by the U.S. Chess Center when she was young. She recently gave a simultaneous exhibition at the center's grand re-opening in Silver Spring.

She described the center as a "stable place to play chess."

"It's a lot more fun. Kids make friends," Jennifer says. "You can always count on it." ♦

Since 1992, the U.S. Chess Center has taught chess to more than 35,000 children in the D.C. metro area as a means of improving their academic and social skills. For more information about the Center, visit www.chessctr.org.

FACES ACROSS THE BOARD

By AL LAWRENCE



**GLENN
BUDZINSKI**

NEWTOWN,
CONNECTICUT

"The game you keep for life"

Glenn Budzinski planned a career in the foreign intelligence service after his postgraduate studies at Georgetown University. But traveling the world in a trench coat ultimately didn't appeal. That was lucky for Connecticut chess.

Forty years ago, Glenn was a young member of the old Newtown Chess Club. Moving back to town a generation later, he used the local library to reboot the club, now grown to 60 members.

"My mother taught me to play chess when I was four, probably to give her some occasional peace," he said. Glenn and his uncle Paul played throughout the years. Paul recently passed away at age 96—"We had a correspondence game going right to the very end. Chess is the game you keep for life." But it was high school algebra teacher/chess team coach Dave Strong, a two-time state chess champ and Connecticut's all-time winningest high school girls' basketball coach, who introduced Budzinski to competitive chess. The two still get together.

In the primordial internet era, Glenn produced probably the first-ever U.S. electronic chess column, the "Weekly Knight," plus one of the first master-game databases, the "Electronic Chess Library." He wrote hundreds of online chess reviews.

Retiring from the corporate legal world six years ago, he founded the nonprofit Connecticut Kids Play Chess, Inc., "to offer real chess instruction in schools, not just play time." In an era when more than half of U.S. lawyers and medical students are women, Budzinski sees "no reason for more girls not to play chess, the ultimate brain game."

So last fall, he arranged for attorney FM Alisa Melekhina to visit his chess camp. "Gracious, bright, and elegant, she bonded with the girls. A female role model is crucial." This summer, Glenn "took a shot" to bring U.S. Champion GM Sam Shankland to Newtown, sending a "cold" email to the grandmaster's website. That paid off with an impressive lecture and simultaneous exhibition (simul). Glenn wasn't so lucky with GM Magnus Carlsen, even before he was world champ, whose agent wanted a prohibitive \$20,000 for a 30-board simul. "Plus dinner—that part seemed important."

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