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NM Arslan Otchiyev: Chess Master, MMA Fighter, Wanderer

The 2018 Connecticut State Champion, MMA fighter and CCFC chess coach shares the story of his journey and origins.

Arslan Otchiyev (pictured at right) was born on March 8, 1990 in Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan. He learned chess at the age of nine by watching neighbors play the game in their homes and backyards. Shortly thereafter, he joined a local chess club, and in January 2000, he played in his first tournament.

His chess career would take off starting in 2005, when he won six National U18 Champion titles in Turkmenistan, winning the spring and winter 2005, spring and winter 2006, winter 2007 and spring 2008 semi-annual events.

In 2008, Arslan played in his first FIDE event, the High League Tournament in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The tournament has a minimum rating requirement of 2200 FIDE, and the top four players represent

Turkmenistan in the World Chess Olympiad. Arslan finished fourth in the event and qualified for the 2008 Turkmen team. However, granted an opportunity to start university studies in Ukraine just a few months later, he declined the team invitation.

Later the same year, Arslan left Turkmenistan to attend the National University of Food Technology in Kyiv, Ukraine, to study accounting. In Ukraine, regardless of substantially more grandmaster players, Arslan captured fourth place in the 2009 Kyiv Blitz Championship.

Unfortunately, in 2010, Arslan's chess pursuit would come to an abrupt halt. That year, he completed two International Master norms on 30 games and received FIDE title approval.



However, the Turkmen government refused to issue the IM title without payment of “customary processing fees”. Dejected by the conduct of his federation, Arslan stopped playing chess.

About a year later, in 2011, Arslan became a beneficiary of the US Diversity Visa Program and decided to discontinue his education in Ukraine and immigrate to the United States. However, his accounting degree

would remain one year from complete.

Once in the United States, Arslan first came to live in Norwalk, Connecticut, home of the Chess Club of Fairfield County. He soon became a regular visitor to the club and met another CCFC regular, Georgian GM Mikheil Kekelidze, who at the time lived in New York. It was Kekelidze who directed the late Melvin Patrick to hire Arslan as club instructor. However, Melvin did not have an immediate opening, and it would not be until 2014 that Arslan would become a CCFC instructor.

(Below: Arslan at the board at CCFC FIDE event.)

Since then, Arslan has successfully coached individuals and groups to competition success. Arslan's younger individual students have achieved top five in the U9, U10 and U11 age categories, nationally. Meanwhile, among his many student groups is the Sacred Heart University chess team, whose growing success has been noted at the national and international levels.

Regardless of these great talents and achievements

in chess, the game is only one half of Arslan's professional achievements and pursuits thus far. In 2008, while attending university in Ukraine, he started his Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) career, training in Ukraine in Combat Sambo. His first official match was less than a year later, in 2009, as an amateur after six to eight months of focused training.

After arriving in the U.S., Arslan began to pursue his MMA career more avidly. In 2014, he participated in three amateur fights, including the Premier FC title in Quincy, Massachusetts. In 2015, he fought two more, and again in 2016.

In 2017, he turned professional and fought four times between 2018 and the start of the pandemic in 2020. His overall record stands at 2-2-0.

COVID took a toll on MMA competition, stopping most activities in the sport for about a year. Arslan would have to wait to continue and maintain his physical condition.

Then, in January 2021, Arslan would meet with a new obstacle to continuing



MMA. While training for a return to competition, he suffered a LCL tear in his right knee. Then, after

“MMA is related to chess,” Arslan comments, sitting on his couch in Stratford post-surgery. “Thinking,

In 2013, Arslan moved to Stratford and in 2018 he opened his chess school in neighboring Milford. The



returning to training once more just recently, he suffered an ACL and PCL injury in his left knee, requiring surgery and removing him from training and competition for another nine months.

Regardless of this unlucky injury streak, Arslan firmly believes he can recover, return to training and continue to compete for another two to three years.

However, as many may and likely have asked: Why, of all things, chess and MMA? How are these very different endeavors two sides of the same coin, the same person?

calculation, outthinking, staying sharper, more focused, and especially having greater endurance wins the fight in the end, especially in the U.S. with two and a half hour time control.”

“In Ukraine and Turkmenistan, Game 90 is the standard. No delay, no increment, and usually you play just one game per day. The two and a half hour games here are by far more exhausting.”

(Above: Arslan Otchiyev competing at the Western Massachusetts MMA Tournament in 2016.)

building housing the school is also the location of his MMA training facility, Connecticut Speed School.

In 2018, Arslan won the Connecticut State Championship, in what was just his third non-CCFC tournament since discontinuing chess competition play in 2010. Later that year, he won the New York Open and finished second in the Florida State Championship and third in the Florida State Quick Championship. He also participated in the World Amateur Team from 2017 to 2020. His final game in 2020 was reviewed in his

opponent's podcast for St. Louis Chess Club (see below).

Arslan has not competed since 2020, but he continues to plan his return.

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Below are video selections of Arslan's chess and MMA performances. Arslan also provided the *Journal* with an annotated game from the 2018 Northeast Open against Israeli GM Gil Popilski.

Video: [Arslan Otchiyev v. Caleb Denby](#), World Amateur Team 2020, Caro Kann – Game review by NM Caleb Denby via podcast for St. Louis Chess Club.

Video: [Otchiyev v. Zebian](#), MMA Fight from Hu Ke Lau Showroom in Chicopee, Massachusetts (2016).

Annotated Game: [Arslan Otchiyev v. GM Gil Popilski](#), Northeast Open 2018 (Stamford), Scotch Game.