

Top ten tips for Juniors

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I was pleased to be able to attend the Exeter Middle Schools Chess Association congress for young chess-players in Exeter at the weekend. The standard of their chess was variable, but their concentration was intense, their sporting attitude was constant, and their enjoyment obvious. I would like to commend the event and congratulate all concerned in its organisation.

After watching the games I had a sore tongue - I had to bite it so many times! These are the main things I wanted to tell the youngsters during the games, and which parents and teachers could in my view work upon.

Tip 1: Make sure know all the rules and where the pieces go at the start of the game

If you think you know all this, then check that you also know: (a) the touched-piece rules; (b) draw by three-time repetition of position and by 50-move rule; (c) pawn captures *en passant*. All of these were overlooked or misunderstood by some players. [A rule book like the BCF's **Know The Game: Chess** would give you more detail on these.]

Tip 2: Check each move before you play it

Nearly all the games I saw had one or other player able to win pieces that weren't protected. Don't play automatic moves - when you're in check, you can move your king, but you can't move a piece or pawn between your king and the checking piece, and you may be able to take the checking piece. Have a look around at the whole board in case there is something you've missed. Tony Gillam's **Simple Chess Tactics** is good practice for getting your eye in.

But please don't move a piece to a square, hold on to it and then look round - this is quite off-putting for your opponent who cannot see the whole board while your arm is in the way. Also, if you do decide to retract the move, (1) you have to move that piece (touch-move rule) when you might prefer to move a different one, and (2) your opponent now knows what you are thinking about!

Tip 3: Know how to finish off a won game.

I watched a couple of players spend over 50 moves where a bare King was chased all over the board being checked by an enemy Queen - but the Queen alone cannot mate a bare King. If only the player with the King brought their own King up to box in the bare King, he could have finished off the game in no time. In fact, the less you check, the better!

Practice with a friend, trying to win when you have a King+Queen vs. a bare King, or King+Rook vs. King. You can make this a little game yourselves - who can do it fastest? Less than 12 for the King+Queen vs. King and less than 20 for the King+Rook are good scores; the maximum scores for perfect play are 10 and 17 respectively. Watch out for stalemate!

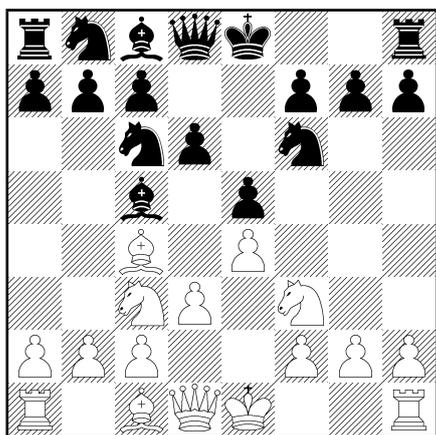
Those are the top three that I'd suggest for many of the players. But even the better ones might also need to pay attention to my next tip for improving their openings.

Tip 4: Play an open, tactical game

- and avoid certain opening lines that won't give you that sort of game. Beginners often play the Four Knights lines like 1. e4 e5; 2. ♖f3, ♘c6; 3. ♘c3, ♘f6, which is usually simply level. Lots of games at the congress in fact started well with the Guioco Piano opening, 1. e4, e5; 2. ♖f3, ♘c6; 3. ♗c4, ♗c5, which is a good opening for juniors. But I then usually saw things quickly get bogged down after 4. ♘c3, ♘f6; 5. d3, when the Knights are all square again, and neither side has a natural pawn break - as a consequence the board remains cluttered and the game slow and dull.

There are all sorts of ways to liven this sort of thing up - for example, White can opt for the Open variation on move four of the GP: 4. c3, ♘f6; 5. d4, e×d4; 6. c×d4, ♗b4+; 7. ♗d2, ♗×d2+; 8. ♘×d2, d5; 9. e×d5, ♘×d5. Or, White has the Evans' Gambit: 4. b4!? ♗×b4 5. c3, ♗a5; 6. d4 when White has a move up on the Open variation at cost of a Pawn. Black can vary with 3. ... , ♘f6, the Two Knight's Defence, with the main lines being 4.d4 or more usually the gambit line 4. ♘g5, d5; 5.e×d5, ♘a5; 6. ♗b5+ c6; 7. d×c6, b×c6;

8. ♕e2. White can't duck into a square-knight line with 4. ♖c3 because 4. ... ♗×e4! (idea 5. ... d5) gives Black a free game (or a free pawn!) As a rule all these lines are going to be more fun and better training for young players than the Four Knights type of development. If you must play the Guioco Pianissimo, as the line with 1. e4, e5; 2. ♗f3, ♗c6; 3. ♘c4, ♘c5; 4. ♖c3, ♗f6; 5. d3 is called, there are some hot tips for this line too.



Guioco Pianissimo

Here's how I see the White side - Black being the same.

Tip 5: Don't be in a hurry to castle: your opponent may play ...Bg4 (or Bg5) and pin your knight against the Queen. If you have castled you probably won't be able to play h3 (or ...h6) without dangerously weakening your king. Steinitz discovered that the sacrificial idea 6. O-O, ♕g4; 7. h3, h5! 8.h×g4, h×g4 was playable for Black in many positions because of the attack on the King down the open h-file: once the Queen gets to h5 White is finished.

Even playing 1.e4, e5; 2. ♗f3, ♗c6; 3. ♘c4, ♘c5; 4. ♖c3, ♗c6; 5. d3, d6; 6.h3 is not advisable as Black may play the standard sacrifice ...Bxh3 at some point. (See Tatai-Korchnoi and and liubarski - sultanbieff at the end of the Technique section.)

Tip 6: The key question in this line is: how are you going to develop your queen's bishop?

White on move six can go 6. ♕e3 hoping for 6. ... ♕×e3; 7. f×e3 when there is a juicy half-open f-file to attack along. Black is better off calmly retreating with 6. ... ♕b6 or even leaving the Bishop at c5.

Tip 7: The analysts gradually agreed that 6. ♕g5, the Canal Variation, is the best move.

One line of this goes 6. ... , h6; (this is OK for Black before castling) when the main line goes 7. ♕×f6, ♖×f6; 8. ♗d5, ♖d8. White has given up the Bishop pair to achieve a bit of initiative. [There is a hairy line with 6. ♕g5, h6; 7. ♕×f6, ♖×f6; 8. ♗d5, ♖g6! 9. ♗×c7+ which is supposed to be poor for Black if White plays 9. ♖g1 instead, but White has to prove it!] Other ways to play for Black are to hit the other bishop with 6. ... , ♗a5 (as in the final game) or to play himself 6. ... , ♕e6.

Tip 8: in the Canal Variation: to emphasise the pin on the Nf6,

if you're allowed, with moves like Nd5, and otherwise threaten to give Black doubled, and therefore weak, f-pawns. I played a miniature with this theme at the British Universities' Congress some years ago:

Regis (Exeter) - Orpwood (Salford), BUCA.

1. e4 e5 2. ♘c4 ♗c6 3. ♗c3 ♗f6 4. d3 ♕b4 5. ♗ge2 O-O 6. O-O d6 7. ♕g5 ♗a5 8. ♕×f6! g×f6 9. ♗d5 ♘c5 10. b4 ♗×c4 11. d×c4 c6 12. b×c5 c×d5 13. c×d5 d×c5 14. ♗g3 ♖h8 15. ♖h5 ♖d7? 16. ♖h6 ♖d6 17. ♗h5 ♖g8 18. ♗×f6 ♖g7 19. ♖×g7+ 1-0 (Ne8+ will leave White a rook ahead)

Tip 9: again in the Canal Variation: move the Nc3 to e.g. d5 and play for c3 and d4 with a central space advantage. The knight can relocate to e3...

Tip 10: try to open up the f-file with f4:

this will require you to play Be3 to stop a check from the Bc5 and to move the other Knight e.g. Nh4. From h4 the Knight can threaten to go to f5 when Black may be reluctant to remove it by ...g6 which will create weaknesses. A Queen's Knight that has travelled from c3-d5-e3 also puts pressure on this square, and if Black does play g6 then Ne3-g4 hits all the soft spots.

A game for the better players to study:

we can see many of these themes at work in this game by the Swiss master Werner Hug:

Hug-Barle, Pula Interzonal 1975. 1. e4 e5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3. ♘c4 ♘c5 4. ♗c3 ♗f6 5. d3 d6 6. ♕g5 ♗a5 7. ♕b3 ♗×b3 8. a×b3 ♕e6 9. ♗a4 h6 (9. ... , ♕b6 10. ♗×b6 a×b6 {or 10. ... , c×b6; 11.d4! with a superior pawn structure} 11. ♖×a8 ♖×a8 12. ♕×f6 g×f6 13. ♗h4 Pritchett) 10. ♕h4 ♕g4 (10. ... , g5 11. ♕g3 ♗d7 12. ♗×c5 ♗×c5 13. b4 ♗d7 14. d4) 11. ♗×c5 d×c5 12. h3 ♕×f3 13. ♖×f3 ♖d6 14. ♕×f6 ♖×f6 15. ♖×f6 g×f6

(Here we have the doubled f-pawns again)
16. ♖a5! {accurate: forces a permanent weakness on a7. Black must divert his King to the Q-side when a shift to the f-file catches him wrong-footed. Black is probably already lost.} 16. ... , b6 17. ♖a6 ♔d7 18. O-O ♕c6 19. f4 ♕b7 20. ♖aa1 ♖h7 21. f×e5 f×e5 22. ♖f6 White now wins a pawn while Black struggles for counterplay. 22. ... , a5 23. ♖f5 ♖e8 24. ♖af1 ♖e7 25. ♖h5 ♖e6 26. ♖hf5 ♖e7 27. g4 ♕c6 28. ♖f6+ ♕b5 29. R 1f5 a4 30. b×a4+ ♕×a4 31. ♖h5 c4 32. d×c4 ♕b4 33. ♖h×h6 ♖×h6 34. ♖×h6 ♖d7 35. ♖f6 ♕×c4 36. ♕f2 ♖d2+ 37. ♕e3 ♖h2 (37. ... , ♖×c2 doesn't help, e.g. 38. ♖×f7 c5 39. ♖f2 ♖×f2 40. ♕×f2 ♕b3) 38. ♖c6+ ♕b5 39. ♖×c7 ♖×h3+ 40. ♕f2 ♖h2+ 41. ♕g3 ♖e2 42. ♕f3 ♖e1 43. ♖e7 f6 44. g5 f×g5 45. ♖×e5+ ♕c4 46. ♖×g5 ♖f1+ 47. ♕e2 ♖b1 48. b3+ ♕c3 49. ♖b5 ♖c1 50. ♖×b6 ♖×c2+ 51. ♕e3 1-0