



CHESS CLUB

“I NEVER LOSE. I EITHER WIN OR I LEARN.”

By Lieutenant Commander Steven Charles

IN MARCH 2017, when I arrived in Stavanger, which is the home town and local club of current World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen, I assumed there would be a club set up already. When finding out there was not, with the kind help of the local welfare and generous support from 426 Services, I canvassed for interest and started a club based on the keen responses I got. The first club nights started in June and took off after the JWC Newcomers BBQ in August. We now have ten regular youngsters visit the club (ages ranging from 7-12) and six regular adult players, together with 25 members on my e-mail list.

We meet once every two weeks in the 426 Services hall. Due to the number of young members wanting instruction, we

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had to split the timings. The younger members come earlier for 20 minutes of hints and tips (I don't like to call them lessons) and then 40 minutes to play a couple of games and practice what they have learned. The adults meet up at any time in the afternoon. Games are limited to 30 minutes all moves each, so even an epic battle is over within the hour, meaning someone is always free to play, and people get to play up to three games against different players. You cannot recreate online the feeling of playing another person over the board with a timer.

Each club night we have a “Star of the Week” award when one of the youngsters gets to take home a trophy until the next lesson and gets a medal to keep. It is awarded, not for the best win, but to someone who has best applied that evening's hints and tips, or has just made a really good, well thought out, move. The chance of winning something is a great way to keep their attention. We have a wide range of abilities, from those who come for the fun of playing and those who are making quite notable advances in their play.

I have not followed any local tournaments yet, but I will be visiting the local club in Stavanger (current home club of the World Chess Champion). They are a small club but they do have tournaments. I would like to establish links and eventually take a JWC team down to play them. What I will start soon is a club ladder and pyramid where people can challenge a higher ranked player to try and take their spot, ultimately leading to a club adult and junior champion who can be challenged at any time.

CHESS IS NOT about winning or losing. And, this applies to the JWC training mission at the operational level for NATO; considering that the JWC focuses on strategic thinking and thinking outside the box. Chess is the ultimate game of skill in both lateral problem-solving and creative thinking. There is no chance, no luck; it is all done by the power of thinking.

The club motto is “I never lose. I either win or I learn.” If you play chess thinking you will win every game, you would slowly drive yourself mad. You play to win, but if you

lose it is important that you learn from it and use it to make you a stronger player—like life— and lose less in the future. Even the world champion loses. He just loses less often than the rest and wins key games. There is a direct link between JWC exercises and chess; using what assets you have, coordinating them, getting the most out of them and getting all elements to work together... these are the key principles of chess. If you do not get all your pieces to work together in a coordinated effort—as One Team, if you like—you will often find yourself in trouble. Chess is, after all, a game of equal opposing forces, a board game re-creating an Article 5 conflict, just without the cyber and hybrid threats!

FOR THOSE WHO play a little, you cannot beat practice against others. Even playing against a computer is limiting as you play against the same style all the time and you do not get those moments of human error that you can spot, pounce on and use to go on and claim victory. The club offers lessons at all levels and has some useful books for people to borrow. For those who are interested, the brain is like any other muscle, it needs exercise. The problem-solving skills and lateral thinking skills you develop through chess are extraordinary. Training your brain to think along chess lines has direct benefits to other aspects of life (as well as what any hobby should), it takes your mind away from daily life. The benefits are so well known that chess is now taught as a matter of course in many UK schools, as well as being mandatory in other countries. Youngsters who are good at math tend to be very good at chess; those who play chess tend to get better at all subjects. It is a board game at the end of the day and like all board games it is fun, but where chess differs is that it trains your brain to think in a particular way, which benefits daily life.

Chess is both simple and complex. I can teach someone to play within 20 minutes. What starts then is a lifetime of endless learning possibilities. After just three moves each, there are over nine million possible board combinations. It is a game where we will always be able to improve, know more and get better.