



# Interview with Awonder Liang

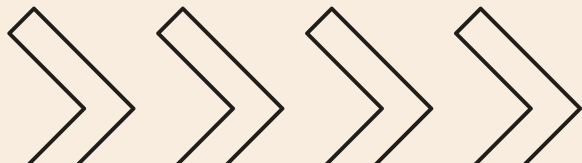


Courtesy of the Saint Louis Chess Club

## Interviewers

IM Justin Wang

NM Davis Zong Jr.





**Justin: How did you start to play chess? What did you think were the qualities or the personal characteristics that made you quickly become a young chess star in your early years?**

**Awonder:** I guess there are two parts to that question. So I started chess very young and my older brother actually started playing chess before me, which was kind of how I got into playing chess. He actually won a medal at a local library and I also wanted that medal. For like the first few years, he was better than me and we would go to tournaments together.

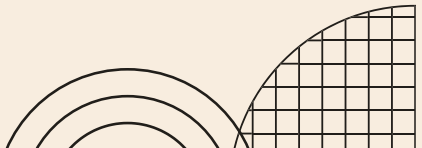
In terms of being a good chess player. I don't know if there are any specific qualities. For me it's a little bit difficult to speak to that. I think you definitely need a lot of time and dedication in order to be a good chess player. I'm a little bit hesitant to put the additional talent label on that.

Certainly, it's possible that I have some natural talent for chess, but I think probably the main thing is just enjoying the game, and the amount of time that's required is of course astronomical for any player. Chess is a really big commitment, and it sort of shortens the story a little bit from how I got started to where I am now, but those are the two main things.

**Davis: You have played in the US championships several times, where the field is very strong. Do you have any specific preparation methods and how do you approach playing strong opponents?**

**Awonder:** That's a very good question. I think the first time I played, I was homeschooled at that time, so I was only doing chess and I did a lot of preparation. The last two times I played, I was already at school, and so I was sort of juggling school and playing the US championships. Of course in 2020, it was online. It's very standard for a lot of Grandmasters, including me, where when you have this kind of big event like this to spend several months preparing, trying to think of openings and particularly weaknesses.

I think my repertoire changes significantly for those kinds of events where you're used to mostly playing low rated players and then suddenly you have to adjust to a much more solid play style. I think it's quite difficult in general. I remember I played this past summer in one of the Magnus tour events, where I got to play Magnus, Wesley So, etc.





I went into that tournament with an attitude that I'm going to try to play more aggressively and I just got absolutely slaughtered. The main thing I think is approaching the tournament correctly from a psychological standpoint.

With the US championships, I've always tried to approach it with a fairly solid attitude, not giving up too many points. I think for other players, they can certainly play in a different way and try to be more aggressive. But for me, I've had a working strategy of playing solid openings and holding with the black pieces, which has been successful — I haven't dropped a game to any of the big three: Wesley, Hikaru, and Fabiano. I think I'm currently sitting at a plus one score against them in our over the board games! Online, I beat Hikaru and lost to Wesley, a fairly acceptable result as well.

Overall I think the main thing was that psychologically I wanted to avoid tilt. I keep playing, and have a solid repertoire that I can always go back to. Other than that, it's just a lot of work commitment: Getting openings into shape and making sure I'm sharp for the event. Certainly, it's a lot harder while juggling school, but I'm pretty happy with my results.

**Davis: It's pretty interesting to hear your game approach of staying solid and not losing!**

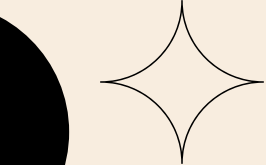
**Awonder:** I think it's hard to say, because in order to grow as a chess player, you don't want to play a really timid style. That's kind of something I've juggled with: You can be a very strong player and essentially still be a chicken. I'm not going to name any names at the top level, but I think there are a few players who definitely don't take as many risks, but they still maintain a crazy high level.

For me, especially with the last few years, I haven't really been trying actively to improve my game. I've been happy playing more solidly and just trying to make a few draws, maybe win a game here or there. And I'm pretty satisfied with that.

**Justin: What kind of things in chess make you enjoy it the most?**

**Awonder:** That's a really interesting question. Right now, I enjoy chess a lot more than I ever have!





I'm currently a college student, so I don't really play chess that much competitively, but one of the things that makes chess a lot more enjoyable is when I was playing much more competitively, where I was in a world of like GM's and everyone was a GM and you were always thinking about your opponents and how to move up.

When I was competing, I was really trying to improve my chess and try to become a stronger player. Now, I'm just trying to be maybe a little bit more creative. I'm trying to find some ideas here and there and the result of the game doesn't really affect me as much as it used to.

Yeah, I'd say those are kind of the few main things there.

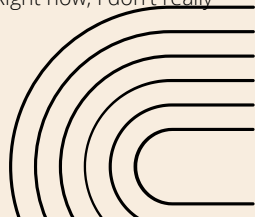
**Davis: Wow! It's cool to hear about which things you enjoy about chess. The next question is: What is your biggest strength as a chess player?**

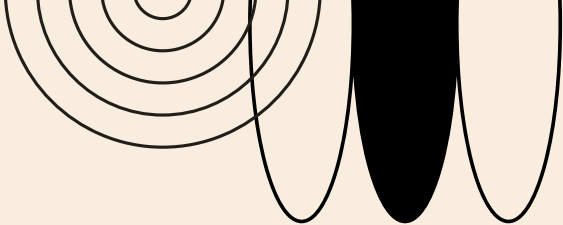
**Awonder:** That also shifted a bit over the years. I think I've gotten a little bit weaker in the past few years — however it looks like my rating is only going up. It's a little bit weird because I think there was a time period where I was very actively working on chess without much improvement. I think I have emotionally matured a lot as a person, which helped me with my decision making in chess.

At the moment, my biggest strength is probably just practicality and being able to make decisions in a very practical manner. Many people, especially younger ones, often just go crazy, especially in quiet positions or positions where you're not too familiar with what you're doing.

Most of the mistakes just boil down to making bad decisions because you're somewhat frustrated. And I think as I've gotten older, I've just been able to calm myself down a little bit more in positions with lots of tension.

Don't take premature actions. If there's some structure that you're not too familiar with, your first instinct shouldn't be to go into tactics. I think those are really, really classic mistakes that would be made by even players as strong as the 2500 - 2600 FIDE range. Right now, I don't really make those kinds of mistakes anymore.





On the flip side — I think there are a lot of weaknesses I have — but some of my strengths are just being able to keep my cool in most games and having a decent time advantage on the clock, which is also very practical. I once recently thought about this and I sort of contrast myself to another player where he tends to win games while my opponents tend to lose games.

From an energy saving perspective, I think it's very helpful. It also relieves the stress and makes the game much more enjoyable. There's no pressure to win a game. You're just relaxing and investing what you can.

### **Justin: What role did your coaches and parents play in your chess career?**

**Awonder:** Of course it's a huge role, right? I wouldn't have gotten to where I am without my parents taking me to tournaments, traveling, and financially supporting me. In terms of coaches, I've had sort of a variety of coaches and I've kind of taken different things away from each of them.

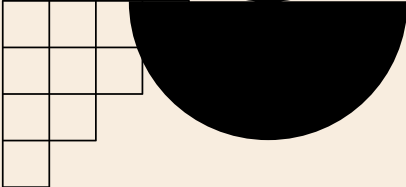
I think the main thing a coach can do is provide a different framework into thinking. Different coaches have different styles in their games and especially as I've gotten to around the 1600-1700 level, there's a limited use for what a coach can do in terms of explicitly giving you a certain style of play.

As I got stronger, it's less about "okay: here's how the game works" and more like: "here's how I think in these certain types of structures." For me, it was best to get a coach that had a very different style from my own because that way, it was easier for me to mesh into different positions.

I think probably the biggest thing that coaches have helped me with is just diversifying my thinking style. In certain positions my instinct might be to look at, let's say, king safety and for the coach, maybe they believe that the pawn structure is more important.

Sometimes I think about certain weaknesses in the position — let's say there's a certain outpost that looks really important — while the coach emphasizes that the weakness on one of the pawns is more important. This sort of analysis helped me a lot once I got stronger.





Of course, the coach has many different aspects, right? So they act as a motivator. They can concretely help your openings. However I think that I personally have very limited experience with coaching, especially at a higher level.

As a coach, most of the kids that I coach are around like 1000-1200 and it's a very different story.

Both coaches and my parents have been instrumental to my success.

**Davis: Really interesting to hear that you're also a chess coach! The next question is: Which part of the game: opening, middlegame, and endgame is your favorite part and why?**

**Awonder:** I think I enjoy most of the parts. Openings are probably my least favorite part at the moment since I always get a bad position in the opening. I often get demolished in the opening. I've sort of commented on this before, but I think defending in chess is probably my favorite part of the game, and that can happen in either the opening, middlegame or end game.

I think I tend to get into bad positions a lot so just trying to find resources in bad positions is one of my favorite aspects. One of my coaches used to say that I was a very good defender, which is of course, just another way of saying that you get into bad positions, like all the time. It's sort of borne out of necessity, I suppose.

At this day and age, now that I'm sort of more focused on school, probably I would say the middle game is most interesting for me just because there are a lot of different resources and ideas that you can leverage. I feel that that part of chess is most creative.

I've always thought that you can gauge how hard someone is working on chess based on how much they like Chess 960 due to its lack of reliance on knowledge of openings.

Either way, I'd probably have to go with the middle game as my favorite part.

**Davis: Due to the amount of starting possibilities in Chess 960, there's not a lot of theory to be memorized!**





**Awonder:** I mean, it's a little bit of a joke. I think we have a lot of top players that have fantastic openings and also love chess 960.

But I think it would definitely take a lot of stress out of preparing right. In terms of chess, I would certainly like to see it go that way: Not only because my openings suck, but also because I think it would be interesting now that chess is more or less almost solved in the opening phase.

**Justin: So you seem to be particularly good at defending in worse positions. How do you deal with worse positions during a game?**

**Awonder:** I'll sort of answer this one in a different way. When I was younger, I used to be particularly bad at winning won positions. I still am relatively speaking (in certain positions), but I think the main thing is, I learned from my losses.

There was a moment where I realized that almost any position is defensible and this really boils down to a few principles. A lot of British authors have referenced this. Jonathan Rowson had this theory of infinite resistance where there's a certain point where if you make the best move at every single point in a losing position, you're not going to lose the game.

When I'm defending, even in lost positions, I always try and think of ways that I could win the game. From a psychological standpoint, way too many players give up too early and just stop thinking of resources. And I think defending alone almost is what took me from a 2400 player to a 2590 player.

To get past that I would obviously have to stop defending too much and actually start getting into good positions. But really there are hundreds of points of ELO to be gained from just psychologically thinking a different way. It's hard to train that kind of thing because you have to get experience and confidence in order to defend better.

Like, if you're always losing in worse positions, you're not going to have the confidence to be like, all right, I can defend this. Whereas for me, if I blunder the exchange, it's like, all right, now the game has just begun. I can still escape.





It's hard to say how the switch happened for me, but I can say: If people are interested in improving their defense, one interesting place to start are odds matches. Like, there's a few odds matches like Komodo against MVL or Komodo against Hikaru where Komodo is giving away two pawns or a knight at the start of the game and still beating the world-class grandmasters.

Seeing MVL lose a position with a knight up - doesn't it inspire you to continue playing when you're only down two pawns? You're seeing one of the best players in the world unable to convert a knight advantage and get absolutely wrecked.

I think he got like checkmated in 30 moves by the engine and - okay it is an engine - but it still shows the immense amount of resources possible in chess. I think people are just resigning or not putting up stiff resistance way too early. In almost every tournament, I would say I get maybe half a point extra or one point extra in my games from just defending well.

And over time, that adds up to so much rating. I think for players that are looking to improve their defense, the biggest thing comes from just the psychology of not giving up. And then after that, it's just chess, right? Tactics, positional chess, improving your game.

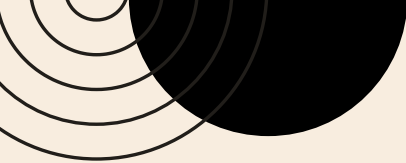
**Davis: It's funny that you mentioned odds, because on chess.com there's this feature that allows you to play lower rated players at odds. For example, if you play a player 500 or 600 points lower you will be down two minor pieces!**

**Awonder:** I mean that's a whole other story! I have a friend here who's rated about 1000 to 1200. And so I started the game. Sometimes I was down all four minor pieces. Sometimes, my entire queenside was gone. And that one I lost actually. But those are always fun. It's always fun to play because the odds are balanced at around 50-50. It's nice that you mentioned that because actually I've played that one, but only for fun.

**Davis: Of course. So our next question is: From a scholastic to a professional chess player, what are the biggest changes that you made to grow into a more mature/professional chess player?**

**Awonder:** Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't describe myself as professional first of all, but I think for me, I never really had a specific goal in mind when I was younger - it was just absorbing as much chess information as possible. I think a lot of players sort of make this mistake where they set a certain rating goal and setting a huge study plan: I will study some hours of tactics a day, do some end games, do some openings, or others are like, let me just study the London system for the next 20 years and hope I get to 2000.





For me, I didn't really have a huge study plan. I would just read whatever is available and do whatever tactics interest me but it's really about having this continually just for chess. And like, even though I'm not like studying chess right now, working on chess, I still like to keep up with the chess news and look at the latest games and so on.

I hear you ask about what changed, but the most constant thing is having this interest in chess and trying to keep up with what's happening. As for what's changed, mostly it has been my attitudes.

I'm not really feeling the pressure to win games. For example, I learned to be okay with a draw, and keeping it more under control — not really going crazy in certain games. I think that happens naturally as you get older; you're just becoming more mellow and tempered.

I don't think there's really been a huge shift in how I approach the game and how I love the game. Overall, I think it's been a pretty good journey.

### **Justin: How would you suggest studying or practicing openings, middle games and endgames?**

**Awonder:** That's an interesting question. I'm not sure I'm best equipped to handle these kinds of questions. I've always thought it's a little bit difficult to receive advice from. It also depends on what your audience is, I suppose, but it's still difficult.

Advice from my perspective: It's a little better to seek out people that are just slightly better than you. In general, I think people are way, way too focused on memorizing openings. Additionally, people don't use the engine enough in openings.

So this kind of sounds like it's like an oxymoron, but in terms of memorization, I think people should focus more on trying to understand the resulting opening positions. For almost every opening I've analyzed, the main thing for me is to immediately play training games in those openings.

You can do that with a friend or with other chess players, and it really just helps you get an idea of what's happening in the openings, what to do in the position, and what to do afterwards.





When people prepare new openings, they often memorize until move 10 and immediately blunder on move 11. That happens way too often. So I think training games can kind of get you away from that. And the second point on using the engine is that you can have a very strong engine like stockfish 14 on your own computer.

There's really no excuse not to go up to depth 40 or 50, which I think everyone should be doing nowadays if you're studying chess seriously. I've had so many games where like my opponents just aren't doing that and you just blow them away.

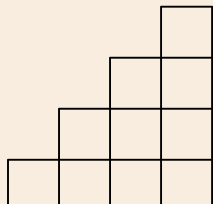
People sort of don't realize how powerful these new engines are and that you really have to take them to a very high depth to get any sort of accurate result. That being said, if you're playing more casually and you just want to improve your opening, you don't really have to use the engine as much.

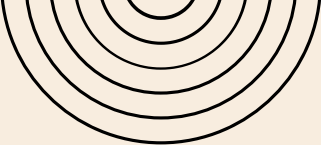
This is sort of more geared towards mastering up players. If you have an idea of the overall structure of the opening, you'll be familiar with the plans and themes you've played after say dozens of training games in a specific opening.

Then, the broader picture of what the resulting end games or middle games will look like will gradually become clear to you, right? If you study your mistakes in those training games with an engine, you'll sort of see like, okay, here's how you want to play in these kinds of structures. Here's where my pieces should be. Generally, actually playing over the board helps you retain the information much better compared to passive training with a friend or an engine.

For me, that's always been the biggest way that I train. Of course there's targeted training, like doing tactics or puzzles, and that's also helpful as well. For me, it's all about the practicality: Like how would I actually handle this position in a game?

Not just like, okay, here's the evaluation of the computer at depth 25, which is almost meaningless in terms of what people are trying to do in a real game. So I think those are kind of my two main gripes about opening preparation: that people are stopping the engine way too early because we sort of viewed these engines as a God.





As strong as they are, engines are also fallible so people don't take them to heighten up depths and also people are sort of approaching openings and the game as a whole, not really as a structure, but sort of as set of moves that you need to memorize in order to get to the middle game without dying.

With all that being said, I'm sort of hypocritical. Hypocritical in the sense that my openings right now are just complete garbage. So it's a little bit funny for me to be saying all this. I think it's sort of more of how I would approach things if I could approach things in a more professional way.

Obviously, if you have a limited amount of time, then something's got to give, right? So you sort of have to make do with what you have.

**Davis: It's funny how you mentioned that people don't run the engine long enough because for some positions like fortresses or other positions, the engine just cannot evaluate the position correctly, even if you're running them for a long time.**


**Awonder:** Right? Obviously some people only run it pretty long and don't actually understand the position, which is pretty bad. So, I would say you have to both run the engine long and understand the position. And probably the understanding part is more important, but don't get annihilated in the opening because so many people make this mistake and it's just ridiculous. We have the hardware and engines at this point. I think there's not really much of an excuse to be playing lines that just get refuted.

**Davis: The next question is: Before college, what was your chess study routine and tournament frequency?**

**Awonder:** For a few years I was actually homeschooled at Wisconsin homeschooling. You send the board of education a report saying that we're doing school and everything's great. For me, it's hard to speak to that because I never really balanced chess and academics fully.

For the past few years, I've really been only focused on school and making sure I get the grades and I'm enjoying that part. About my routine, I'll do some chess exercises here and there on the weekends or play blitz.





Most of my time nowadays went to writing essays and doing homework, probably similar to what you guys are doing right now. So for me, there has never really been a clear balance. I sort of just did what I wanted to.

As for tournaments, at that point I was probably playing around four or five tournaments a year, so definitely much less than when I was competing more regularly - it's whatever works for the individual.

I've never really been the kind of guy who was like, okay, I have to do two hours of tactics. It was more like: I might read an article. I might like to read a magazine. I'd like to follow the top games for a bit, but it's always been probably much more casual for me.

### **Justin: Can you talk about chess as a game: the aspects of technical vs. psychological and tactical vs. positional?**


**Awonder:** That's a pretty interesting question. Chess probably has a huge psychological aspect, which I think is not really being discussed. But it's also because it's hard to pinpoint psychological theory and make it scientific.

I think my chess has gotten a lot more practical and in that sense, I like to put pressure on my opponents, not just on the board and finding unpleasant moves, but also on the clock.

If you specifically want to look for a move that challenges your opponent, that can be very different sometimes compared to looking for the best move in the position. Oftentimes though, the best move will just be the most challenging move.

From a psychological standpoint, you should take your time but also you want to make your opponent think. I think it's very obvious that if your opponents are in time trouble for instance, you should not simply blitz your moves. I think a lot of these sorts of things are obvious when I'm saying them, but it's not something that you consciously think of during games.

It was only very recently that I actually started employing these ideas, but you specifically want to play against the opponent. I'm actually not so sure how useful it is to actually take this as advice, because on the one hand, I think if you're actually trying to improve your chess, you should always play with the goal of playing the best move.





In individual games, it can work pretty well when you play a position unfamiliar to your opponent, but at the end of the day, you still have to find the good moves. People sometimes can overestimate the importance of certain things, like either one of these two aspects.

You have to balance both of them. Positional and Tactical play are just so interrelated. For example, it's hard to find the best positional moves without having a concrete basis for them. Probably the biggest weakness that I've had for many years has been my calculation in a targeted position: like finding the one concrete line that saves the game.

I think there's certain parts of my game which are kind of overlooked for a bit. Maybe it's a little bit too late to go back and try to fix them, but overall it presents a pretty big challenge: Like how do you balance all these aspects of your game?

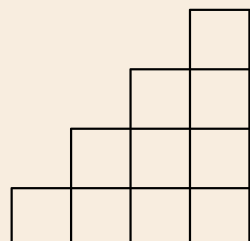
How do you try and improve one side? I don't really have an answer. You'd probably have to go to a coach for that. In the end, they are your specific issues that you should improve on personally.

**Davis: You have probably played a lot of tournaments in your life. Which tournament did you enjoy the most?**

**Awonder:** I think I enjoyed a lot of events. I always liked playing in St. Louis since I typically tend to do pretty well there. The St. Louis club area is very familiar to me and I really like the atmosphere there. One of the most beautiful tournaments that I've played in is the Reykjavik open in Iceland, which — funnily enough — I've always done rather poorly there. So maybe it's better to not play in such a beautiful place.

There are so many more of them; I think it's hard for me to really rank them in a list.

**Justin: You are not only good at long time control but also good at rapid and blitz games. What do you suggest younger chess players do to be good at all time controls? How should they practice?**





**Awonder:** When I was younger, I was quite bad at blitz and this was more representative of the fact that I just never played blitz. When you're studying chess, you don't really prioritize blitz, so you don't play. So maybe that fact that I've improved at blitz is more indicative that I just stopped.

I wouldn't say that I'm particularly good at blitz and rapid - I think it's just more representative of my chess strength. I'm certainly not at the level of, let's say Andrew Tang or something where the disparity between his chess rating and blitz rating is much bigger than mine.

I think if you're looking to improve your blitz chess, the best way for me is just to improve your classical chess because a large part of blitz is just exposing what your intuition thinks about certain positions and how you get that intuition is by actively practicing it in hard scenarios where you're constantly thinking and having to calculate.

That practice comes in the form of classical chess. So in that regard, if you want to improve your rapid, you should want to improve your classical.

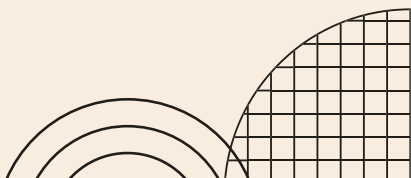
**Davis: Alright. That's a very interesting take! So the next question is, do you have a favorite chess player, one that you look up to?**

**Awonder:** I think I've never really had someone that I really particularly liked. At the top level, there are certainly players that I try to emulate. So I kind of look at their games and I don't know, it's sort of nice to see how they win games.

I think there are many elite players that have this principle where they seem to win games completely out of nowhere.

For Magnus, it's just something he does. I think from the juniors, Vincent Keymar has been really interesting to me in that his moves are just very sensible - nothing crazy - but just the most sensible chess, and he's a fantastic player.

I've always really admired his games and the way that he makes chess look really simple. Obviously Magnus is always on the list, but I mean, he's on everyone's list, right? So I've tried to fix some players. Maybe some people are less familiar with it.





**Justin:** Interesting. We are now moving to the questions that are slightly beyond chess. Can you share with us your school experience? You started with a normal school, then you became homeschooled, and then you went back to a normal high school. Is that right? When you made those decisions, what were the biggest challenges at the time?

**Awonder:** For me I've never really had a super life goal. I think I'm not very organized at that aspect and I just try and take it one step at a time. I think even during chess, I never really have a plan for what I'm doing. I just sort of make moves and see what happens.

For me personally, like my chess, the story's a little bit unique. There are not really a lot of players, especially American juniors that really forgo school, as far as I can tell. For me personally, it was a little bit difficult at first, but eventually, I was able to adjust to making friends and talking to teachers.

To get my grades in order, chess slowed down; it didn't really come to a standstill, but it was definitely less of a priority. I sort of went through the things that you guys are going through or, or maybe we'll go through soon: typical public high school life.

In general, school has been a lot more fun in having friends, hobbies, etc. So in that sense, it has a lot less stress and a lot less pressure.

But on the other hand, part of me really likes the pressure of competing and trying to engage. Overall, both school and chess have been really enjoyable.

**Davis:** Have you ever considered becoming a full-time chess player and do you still aim to become a world champion?

**Awonder:** I mean, that's the thing everyone says when they're like six or seven; we always want to be a world champion. For me it's always been less and less realistic.

Becoming a full-time chess player is really, really hard, in that, right now I think I'm ranked maybe in the top 180 or so in the world and everyone's trying to reach the top 100 and the top 50. Like if, if you get into the top 50, you kick someone else out of the top 50, so in that aspect, it's very competitive.





From a safety net point of view, going to school is much nicer, more enjoyable, and more relaxing. So I think there was a period of time where I wanted to pursue chess professionally, but as I've gotten older, that has sort of waned a little bit.

But something you always think about was what you could have been, but at the end of the day, that's how life rolls out. I really can't complain about what has happened.

**Justin: Now you are in college. How do you think you will balance chess and academics in college?**

**Awonder:** I think with college it's been maybe even more chess heavy because we have a great team here. So at the University of Chicago we have chess club meetings once a week and we also have tournaments and other activities that we'd host.

So it's definitely been a lot of fun here. I think chess is something that I just keep on the side — I'm more of like a casual chess player, just like a hobbyist. But I enjoy playing, I enjoy meeting new people through chess.

And that's one of the most enjoyable parts of the entire game. As for competitive playing, as I've said, that's definitely waned a bit, but there are so many different aspects that you could still be involved in chess, like the organizing aspect, meeting new people, and you can volunteer.

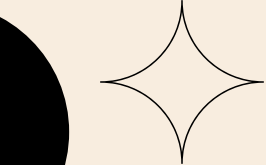
There are so many different things you can teach people. There are so many different things you can do and still be involved within the game. And so in that regard, I've maybe even been more involved in the game than I've ever been while I was actually playing competitively.

**Davis: So the next question is: Aside from chess, did you participate in any other extracurricular activities?**

**Awonder:** Not crazily. I do go to badminton clubs sometimes and I just started playing bridge (like a card game but with a bidding process). Just started getting into that. For the most part, it's sort of been that school has been taking a good amount of my time like going out with friends and so on. So college has been mostly an enjoyable experience; I think there's a lot of things you can do.

**Justin: What are the differences between studying chess and studying other things?**





**Awonder:** One of the things that chess players have that's unique is that, you know what it's like to spend years doing one specific thing, right?

Many chess players have played chess for up to or more than 10 years already! With chess, you're focused on studying just one thing for such a long period of time. It makes you understand what it means to be good at something in a way that is maybe not that similar in like other things.

For example, I can't really think about any other discipline where I've really focused all my effort and energy into one thing. So I think once you realize that it sort of makes studying everything else a little bit easier.

I think we chess players should really take this as an opportunity to feel confident about the rest of life. The world is yours. You can do whatever you like and be quite successful at that.

**Davis: Okay. So a final question before we wrap up is — you sort of touched on it in your answer to the last question — What are the important things you learned from chess that have helped you in your life?**

**Awonder:** I think that still remains to be seen! I think even the concrete stuff, like patience, analytical thinking, strategic thinking, and just being able to concentrate for hours on end really helps in life.

But from a broader perspective, just being able to be an expert in any subject at all, I think, is really impressive. Just being able to have the mental focus, long term thinking, and perseverance, because I think all of us have gone to where we are not by playing a game of chess and quitting. I really like being able to spend years on a single thing.

Once you shift to a different field, like school or something like that, you'll be able to transfer your thinking and approach from chess, and it makes it a lot easier. So to the dedicated chess players out there, the future - whether it contains chess or not - will definitely be bright.



# About Awonder Liang



Photo credit: Eric Rosen

As a chess prodigy, Awonder won the World Youth Championship in both 2011 and 2013. He has formerly held records for being the youngest expert, youngest master, and youngest IM in the US. In 2014, he broke the record of youngest American to earn an IM norm, and broke the record of youngest American to earn the IM title the year after. When he achieved his Grandmaster title at the 2017 Chicago Open, he became the tenth youngest in the world to do so. He won the US Junior Championships in 2017, 2018, and 2019 which qualified him for the US Championship the following years. He placed 5th place in the 2020 US Championship, and his current FIDE rating is 2613. Awonder's hobbies include biking, badminton, taking walks, visiting Chinatown (pretty sure that's a hobby too!), and watching TV.