

**CALIFORNIA'S  
CHESS TALENTS!**  
**EPISODE #4**  
**WGM ROCHELLE  
WU**  
**BY FM KEVIN PAN**

Rochelle Wu is one of the most accomplished Californian juniors, winning gold on numerous occasions on the international stage and recently competing in the 2022 U.S. Women's Championship. Starting chess at the age of six, she rose to prominence in 2016 by winning the World Cadet Chess Championship. In 2019 at the age of 12, she became the youngest player ever to represent the U.S. in the Women's Olympiad team tournament, competing alongside the likes of IM Yip and WGM Foisor. Recently, Rochelle achieved her final norm for the WGM title. How does she handle all the pressure and balance her chess career with numerous other activities? I had the lucky opportunity to speak with Rochelle and gain valuable insight and advice.



[KP]: Hello, everyone. Today we have Women's Grandmaster Rochelle Wu with us today. Rochelle, congratulations on recently achieving your WGM title. How does it feel to hold one of the highest titles in chess?

[RW]: It feels pretty unreal, to be honest. Like when I first started, I had no idea I was going to be here, so it's like, it's a pretty cool experience.

[KP]: You achieved not only the WGM title but also the International Chess Federation (FIDE) Master title in 2022. You accomplished so much during the tail end of the pandemic while most chess players out there were unable to play over-the-board events. Can you share your journey? How were you able to keep playing high level tournaments during the pandemic?

[RW]: I think that when I was younger, I definitely played a lot more tournaments. I saw you at a bunch of tournaments, too, but I was basically playing tournaments like every single week. And the pandemic kind of cut down on how often I was able to play tournaments, too. But I think it was like a blessing in disguise because playing a bunch of tournaments honestly kind of wore me out. So, I'm definitely glad that I was not able to play as much. We definitely had to fly a lot more than usual. And I don't remember the last time I played a tournament in California.



We always just had to go out of state.

[KP]: So, you mentioned playing so many tournaments when you're younger. Now let's talk about how you got started. I noticed you started playing in 2012 when you were 6, and in four years you were rated over 2000. You also won gold in the World Cadet tournament that year. In those four years, you played around 200 tournaments, or almost one a week. Did you have any special tricks to keep yourself energized and focused?

[RW]: Honestly, just bring a milkshake for each game. It was definitely tiring, but I feel like as long as you have friends and people to socialize with during tournaments, it's not that bad. You kind of just have to find something that motivates you and excites you to keep going.

[KP]: Thinking 24/7 about chess doesn't really help, right? So, you have to, like, balance yourself.

[RW]: Yeah.

[KP]: Okay, cool. cool. So, was there any particular moment or any tournament that you felt frustrated in your journey and how did you get over it? Was there any particular moment, or any tournament, that you felt frustrated or challenged? How did you get over it?

[RW]: There were probably many tournaments that made me feel that way. Like, there's this one time I played in the US Cadets. I think it was in 2017 or 2018, and I got 0.5 out of 7. It was pretty discouraging, but I feel like you just have to change your viewpoint on tournaments. Like nowadays, whenever I have a bad result, I kind of just view it as a learning experience, like it happens for a reason - I wasn't prepared, or I should have studied more. It reminds me that I have a lot to learn and honestly, I don't view it as a bad thing anymore.

[KP]: So now moving on to a few more general questions. So, what part of chess do you like the most?

[RW]: Winning.

[KP]: Relatable. Is there anything you dislike about chess - losing?

[RW]: I dislike losing. Getting bad positions out of the opening. Not having anyone to hang out with during tournaments. Just like in a not ideal tournament situation, you know?

[KP]:. Yeah. So which chess players do you admire the most? And what do you like about them?

[RW]: Honestly, I admire, like, a lot of my friends who play chess. Especially like women in the chess world. They are people that I can



look up to and go to for guidance and advice. Not even in chess, but also in life too, because a lot of them, like they balance their school and chess life really well. And it's just really inspirational to see.

[KP]: Okay. So, returning to the 2016 world, because that tournament where you won gold. How did you feel winning that tournament? How did it influence you on and off the board? Like you were talking about the lessons outside of chess. Did you have any special memories of that event as well?

[RW]: Yeah, that event was definitely one of my favorite chess moments of all time. I remember after the last game; it didn't really sink in yet until like so many people told me congratulations. And I was just like I was in shock because my dad expected me to get last place or something. So, it was just like an unreal moment. It felt like a really special day. It's like your birthday times ten, you know?

[KP]: Did that inspire you to take chess even more seriously?

[RW]: A little, but I was like ten at the time, so I didn't really know what it meant for the future. Honestly, up until then, I kind of saw chess as more of just like one of my side hobbies. I also did some other extracurriculars. I didn't view

chess that seriously. I know I'm better at it than I was at swimming or whatever, but honestly. I think it kind of put a little bit more pressure on me, which did not feel great. But I mean, I don't really regret anything.

[KP]: All right. So, another special tournament you took part in was the 2019 Women's Team Olympiad tournament, where you were actually the youngest player ever to represent the US. So how was that experience and how did the unique team atmosphere feel?

[RW]: Oh, actually, it felt really interesting because I remember having my birthday during the event. It was really interesting to have an actual team dynamic because, you know, like the US amateur team events. I feel like there you're not really as connected with your team. It's just like you're playing side by side. But like in this kind of big event, you're eating dinner together. you're hanging out on the rest day; you're always preparing and giving each other pep talks and stuff. Like everything was really special. It's just a really unique environment.

[KP]: Since then, you have obviously continued to be very successful. You received the WIM title in 2019 and as I mentioned, the FM & WGM title in 2022. You also recently competed in the US Women's Championship. Was there a game or two that you particularly



liked in your entire chess journey that you remember?

[RW]: Honestly, I don't know about this one because my memory is not great. I know that there were definitely some games that stood out to me or have haunted me over the years. Like, there's nothing that I'm like, oh my God, I played so well in this game. I'm going to remember it forever, you know?

[KP]: Were there any games that you needed to win for a norm, or the title and you actually managed to win?

[RW]: The last game when I was getting my last WGM title, I remember I was so nervous for it before the game because I was like, Oh my God, if I don't win, Then I came here for nothing, and I'm literally never going to get it. So, I guess I put a lot of pressure on myself. But I, I actually think I played really well that game and I guess everything worked out. It was a pretty nice game in my opinion.

[KP]: So how does what you learn from chess apply to your life outside of chess?

[RW]: It definitely makes me more of a social person. One experience I had in chess was going to the Kasparov chess camps where you have to present six of your own games to the best player that ever lived. It was really

nerve-racking for me and like, I just wanted it to be over as soon as possible because I was just outside of my comfort zone. But it definitely helped me, like in school, because now I don't really get nervous talking or giving presentations standing in front of the whole class. I don't care if it makes me look dumb or whatever, because, you know, this experience has humbled me and it's like, what worse could happen, you know?

[KP]: So, I think we've already talked a little bit about women in chess. Obviously, you're a very strong player regardless of gender, but how do you think the chess community should encourage more women to start playing and possibly replicate your level of success? And if a young girl asks why she should play chess, what would your answer be?

[RW]: Honestly, I feel like they could add more female prizes to tournaments. I mean, it's kind of a male dominated sport. It's no secret that most women are lower rated in general compared to men. So, I feel like there could be more prizes targeted for women. And I think that, honestly, tournaments can be kinder to women as a whole, because the ratio between men and women is pretty bad and it can be really intimidating. So, I think as soon as the ratio becomes closer, then I think that it would definitely just make women more comfortable in playing halls in



general. And the second question was how would I encourage young girls to start playing chess?

[KP]: Yes, how would you encourage them and what would you say to them?

[RW]: I would tell them that it's pretty good for college. When you're doing your college apps, I think that it's a pretty unique hobby. It's not something that a lot of people in schools really pursue. And I think it's just a really nice way to meet new friends and live a second life, you know?

[KP]: Yeah. Okay. So final question. Let's look a little bit into the future. So, you're a WGM now. What's your next goal in chess? Do you plan to continue playing professionally after you graduate or when you become an adult?

[RW]: I honestly think that my goal right now is just to win the U.S. Juniors. I also want to qualify for the Olympiad and keep playing in the U.S. championship. And I actually plan on playing chess after I graduate. I'm just not sure if I want to do it professionally or as a hobby.

[KP]: Thank you, Rochelle, for giving all this advice and very interesting insight in your career. Thanks.

[RW]: You're welcome. Thanks.



*2016 World Cadets Chess Championship Team USA. WGM Rochelle Wu is the 5th one from the left on the 2nd row; FM Kevin Pan is the 2nd from the left on the 2nd row.*



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