

Interview with US Champs Youngest Contender, Daniel Naroditsky

April 14, 2011
by Alan Kantor



Daniel Naroditsky, at just 15 years old is an IM, author and the youngest competitor in the 2011 US Chess Championships, set to kick off in Saint Louis on Friday, April 15th.

Most recently, Naroditsky was featured in a CLO video interview, where he was forced to choose the winner in unlikely chess battles such as Taylor Swift vs. Justin Bieber. The questions only got more difficult as Alan Kantor caught up with Daniel Naroditsky on the field, the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis and his own road to qualification.

Alan Kantor (AK): You have had quite a few accomplishments at such an early age? How did you do that?

IM Daniel Naroditsky (DN): Success in chess requires hard work and unrelenting determination. Of course, in order to achieve success I had to make many sacrifices. I

often cannot find time for other things I love.

AK: You tied for second through fifth place at the 2010 U.S. Open - were you surprised to finish at the top?

DN: I was very surprised! I was hoping to finish somewhere in the top third, but from the start things went very well and I found myself in contention for first throughout the tournament. After I drew my last game, I was ecstatic when I found out that I had qualified for the U.S. Championship in St. Louis!

AK: What was your best tournament overall?

DN: My best tournament result ever was winning the World Youth Chess Championship under 12 in Antalya, Turkey in 2007. I was clearly the underdog, but managed to persevere through eleven grueling rounds and come out on top with the score of 9½ out of 11.

AK: Tell me how you got started in chess?

DN: I remember my brother Alan teaching me chess while we were on vacation by the lake. At first I wasn't too attracted to the game, in part because I was getting crushed by my brother every time. Eventually, however, I fell in love with the game and managed to win the first tournament I entered.

AK: Any long-term goals for you?

DN: My current long-term goal is to become a grandmaster. I would also like to play in the chess Olympiads for the U.S. Team.

AK: You became the youngest-ever published author after you published *Mastering Positional Chess*. (Daniel's book is available at USCF Sales.) Did that take you long to produce? Do you enjoy writing?

DN: *Mastering Positional Chess* took about four years to produce. At first, I started analyzing all of my losses in a purple notebook (by hand), and eventually my notes grew until the notebook was completely filled up. Then, I decided to enter them into the computer, and after another year of editing and working on my notes, I sent the original manuscript to several publishers, and the book was accepted for publication by the premier chess publishing house, New in Chess.

I have always loved writing, and the shelves in my room are packed with all kinds of notebooks. When I was little, I loved writing short stories, but when I discovered chess, I started analyzing every game I could find, and eventually these notes grew into a book.

AK: You indicated in an earlier interview that you like to play strong players as that is the only way you learn from your mistakes. Have you seen benefits from other games after losing? What are they?

DN: When I play a strong player and lose, my errors and weaknesses emerge, allowing me to work on my game effectively. When I play a weaker player and win, none of my real weaknesses are truly highlighted. Therefore, while it is certainly unpleasant to lose, it is the only way to improve.

AK: How do you deal with a loss?

DN: Usually, I like to relax and not think about the game. Sometimes, it's very difficult to recuperate after a painful loss, but even then it's necessary to pull myself together and persevere.

AK: [The Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis](#) is really awesome. How does this site compare to other places you played?

DN: I'm really looking forward to visiting this incredible club! I've played in both squalid and glamorous places, but from what I've seen in the photographs, the best places I've played in will pale in comparison to the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis.

AK: How do you feel about the media coverage that you have gotten in chess? How do you plan to deal with the media coverage you probably will get in this tournament?

DN: Certainly, media coverage in chess has promoted the game greatly. One can only admire the countless journalists that are trying their hardest to teach the public about the true charm of chess.

However, there are some people who try to write to about chess without having the slightest clue about the true complexity and subtlety of the game. The lack of respect for the game of some interviewers is unbelievable; I have even been asked "what is your favorite chess piece?"

Also, it was upsetting to read the comments left on various blogs after the publication of my book. For example, one person went as far as offering to bet all his money on the fact that I did not actually write the book. I wish I knew who he or she is, as I would have certainly been rich by now!

AK: Playing in tournaments takes a lot of time and study. How do you juggle that with school and other interests?

DN: I'm honored to attend one of the best schools in the country, Crystal Springs Uplands School in Hillsborough, California. Not only are my classmates very encouraging and understanding, my teachers and the school administration are also very accommodating and supportive. In order to focus on chess, the school has allowed me to take a one year sabbatical. I'm taking online classes at the Stanford University Online High School, and studying on my own. Usually, it is very difficult to balance chess and school. Tournaments rarely take place on school breaks, and I often have to miss weeks at a time in order to play in a tournament.

AK: Do you hope to be world champion someday?

DN: Most serious chess players dream of becoming world champion. For the past 200 years, this dream has only come true for a handful of people.

AK: What do you hope to get out of this year's championship, besides winning of course?

DN: I have never had the incredible experience of playing the country's leading chess players in one tournament! I'm sure that no matter how I play, this experience will serve to hugely improve my play.

AK: You always look calm, cool and collected. I thought young players are restless and nervous. What advice can you give to young players about this?

DN: Chess is a very serious game, and anybody who wants to achieve success in chess has to treat the game with the respect it deserves. Serious chess games are very demanding, and require the utmost patience and concentration. I would advise aspiring players to maintain their composure and concentration during the game.

AK: Who is your all-time favorite chess player?

DN: I have many different heroes in chess, but if I had to choose one it would certainly be Garry Kasparov. I have had the privilege of meeting and studying with him, and I admire him for his incredible dynamic style and depth of thought.

AK: How much time do you devote to studying chess?

DN: I study chess for several hours every day. Sometimes, I spend the entire day at the chessboard.

AK: Chess tournaments are like work. It can be stressful. What do you like to do to unwind?

DN: Chess tournaments are indeed hard work. I love to take walks before or after especially grueling games, and generally speaking, it's very important to maintain a strict regimen throughout the tournament.

AK: What advice can you give to young players that try to follow in your footsteps?

DN: As with any other profession, one can see gratifying results only after many years of demanding practice and seemingly monotonous work, be it shooting hundreds of free throws in an empty gym or playing thousands of scales on a piano.

Follow the US Chess Championship on uschesschamps.com, which will feature live onsite commentary with GM Maurice Ashley and CLO editor WGM Jennifer Shahade. Also be sure to enter your fantasy chess team at fantasychess.saintlouischessclub.org

Stayed posted on Daniel at danielnaroditsky.com and also see previous CLO interviews with Daniel by Jennifer Shahade and Christian Glawe & Christine Hartman (video).