

MAKING THE RIGHT MOVES

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Charles H. Featherstone/Columbia Basin Herald Ephrata High School freshman Max Boruff won the Ryan Pugh Memorial Chess Tournament in early February.

MOSES LAKE — In the basement of the Assembly at Moses Lake, some kids are learning the fine points of playing chess.

According to Kris Dexter, their teacher, they meet here every week to play and hone their skills. This Wednesday evening finds these kids facing off, doing the chess equivalent of workout exercises — putting just three or four pieces on the board to learn how they move by trapping a king.

Or, fight to a draw, what Dexter called “opposition of position.”

“There’s no way the king can move without being captured,” Dexter points out as Andrew Mansfield moved his king and bishop to trap Timothy Tormozov’s king.

And seeing how it worked, both Mansfield and Tormozov reset their pieces. And run the drill again.

"We do a lot of these kinds of exercises," said Mansfield, a sophomore who is homeschooled.

Mansfield, who started playing chess about four years ago after being introduced to the game in his homeschool co-op, was the second runner up in the Ryan Pugh Memorial Chess Tournament in Ephrata on Saturday, Feb. 3.

"Last year I won two out of five games," Mansfield said. "This year I won five out of five."

Troy Pugh and his brother Roger, the organizers of the chess tournament, said he began the tournament 12 years ago to honor their late brother Ryan, who as a teenager was a three-time winner of a chess tournament in Linden. They set up the Waypoint Foundation, in part, to sponsor the tournament, which is open to kids from kindergarten to high school seniors.

According to Pugh, 87 kids played in the tournament from across the Grant County.

"You don't have to be good, you don't have to have a rating. We want everyone to have a good time," Pugh said.

Chess, Pugh said, teaches some important lessons in life — the ability to concentrate and plan, to see consequences, to think before moving, and that every move should have a purpose.

"We like to think these are things that can be learned on the chessboard," Pugh said. "It helps teach thinking and planning."

Tournament winner, Ephrata High School freshman Max Boruff, agreed. He won \$500 for coming in first place, with second place winners Mansfield and Tim Novitsky each winning \$200, according to Pugh, who added that everyone who played got \$5.

"I think more about what to do, I think ahead, every move has a consequence," Boruff said.

"It was fun," Boruff said of the Saturday tournament. "But a couple of my matches were really close; he could have beat me."

Boruff said he has been playing chess since he was 8, when his father first taught him how to play. He watches videos about the game — how to improve his play — as well.

"I play all the time," he said.

And back in church basement, Dexter has his kids set up a few pieces on a board and go through their drills again and again. The first goal is familiarity, and then eventually mastery.

"This brings it down to a simple level, we build on that and we build on that," he said. "Once they know the movements well, they can move the piece without thinking."