

Andover girl is youngest U.S. female chess master

By Cristela Guerra
The Boston Globe

ANDOVER, Mass. (AP) — Carissa Yip can play chess with her eyes closed.

The Andover sixth-grader doesn't need a board, no stoic chessmen at the ready. In her mind, she can lead a kingdom into a war of wits and strategy, visualizing each move. And several that will follow.

That helps explain how, in February, the 11-year-old became the youngest female in the United States to earn the title of chess master. When she beat Alexander Ivanov last fall at the New England Open, Carissa became the youngest female ever to defeat a grandmaster.

"It's a challenging game and I like that about it," she says. "I prefer to play with someone who's actually good. And I also like the pretty pieces."

When Carissa knows she's winning, her eyes narrow and a look of glee floods her face. A sideways grin forms. Her opponents don't always see it coming, but that face symbolizes the end is near. Her focus is always two, four, six, 10 moves ahead of her opponent.

Carissa, who attends Doherty Middle School in Andover, has interests other than chess. She counts eating sushi, reading, and playing with "Big Pea," her grandmother's cat in China, among the things she likes to do.

And always there is chess. She has competed everywhere from Slovenia to the United Arab Emirates. Like the legendary chess prodigy Bobby Fischer, Carissa learned to play at age six. She'd wanted to join the chess club in kindergarten, but she didn't know how to play. Her father, Percy Yip, an IT architect, began with the basics in first grade.

She progressed quickly. After claiming the title of chess expert, she needed just 609 days to reach master status in March, according to the Massachusetts Chess Association.

At tournaments, her father doesn't watch. He doesn't want her to be nervous. During games that can last hours, she looks meditative and far older than her years. She prefers long games because



they allow her to calculate. The concentration level of this petite girl with a barrette in her hair intimidates some of her opponents. When asked if she takes special enjoyment in beating adults, Carissa replied that she likes beating anybody.

Still, sometimes reactions from the grownups she defeats aren't as mature as they could be. She remembered one of her first tournaments and a particularly unhappy competitor who did not like losing to a seven-year-old girl.

"He threw a temper tantrum," Carissa said. He shouted that he hated playing against kids.

"You lost to a little girl," her father recalls thinking to himself. "Why are you yelling at her? You should be ashamed."

Paul Godin, an electrical engineer and computer scientist from Bedford who participates in several chess clubs, is proud to say that occasionally his games with Carissa come to a draw. Most of the draws are in quick turns of blitz chess, a fast game played with timers that usually lasts five minutes or less.

What differentiates Carissa from other players, he says, is her ability to improvise. The first 10 moves in many games are often memorized theory or known methods of attack. But Carissa is quick to adapt and can usually find a way to win.

Chess, he says, is an "exercise in

abstract, logical, deductive reasoning." It's thinking and creating worlds. It's imagination.

As good as Carissa is, she is not beyond making a careless blunder. "Oops" occasionally slips out in play. Her chess rating is 2203. By comparison, the highest-ranked chess player in the world is Magnus Carlsen, 24, of Norway, with a rating of 2863, according to the World Chess Federation.

In Massachusetts, there are seven male grandmasters and one female grandmaster. There are 10 male international masters and one woman international master. And there are 73 masters, of which 47 are active, according to Francisco Guadalupe, director of events for United States Chess Federation (USCF). It takes winning hundreds of games and beating far stronger competitors to achieve master status.

That happened for Carissa on February 21 at the Boylston Chess Club Legends of Chess tournament. She was exhausted. She'd just completed the World Amateur Team tournament the week before in New Jersey. She returned home, and that Saturday, after winning two games against an expert and a master, respectively, she was ready to bow out. But playing a third round against Chris Williams, a master, meant earning 40 points and achieving the

STRATEGIC MASTER. Carissa Yip waits for her father, Percy Yip, to make a move during a chess match at their home in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, in this July 9, 2013 file photo. Only five years or so since first picking up the game, Carissa has risen so far up the rankings that she has reached the expert level at a younger age than anyone since the chess federation began electronic recordkeeping in 1991. (AP Photo/The Sun of Lowell, Julia Malakie, File)

master title herself. She'd never beaten Williams before. Torn and tired, Carissa was unable to focus and afraid of losing. Losing, she says, makes her feel empty.

Her father told her to not worry about her rating. He said to follow her heart. She won. USCF made it official last month, proclaiming Carissa a chess master and record-breaker.

"She's persistent," says her mother, Irene Yip, a software engineer. "If she wants something, she keeps asking you, especially if she doesn't like the answer. She's stubborn."

Her mother maintains balance. If her daughter were to decide tomorrow that she no longer wanted to play chess, neither parent would object, she says.

Carissa has said she wants to be a world champion chess player, a professional golfer, and a policewoman. Her mind flits, finding new interests, as sixth graders do. If a chess game bores her, she gets up and wanders around the table. Her father scolds her for not sitting still.

At a tournament recently she watched a man perform magic tricks and begged him to teach her. She couldn't bear not understanding.

March 6 was a relaxed night with the Billerica Chess Club. Carissa sits across from Godin and the clock starts. Blitz chess. She waits. She strikes the timer, her plastic wristwatch peeking from under her sleeve. Godin puts his head on his hands and counters. The pint-sized chess master calls his move "cheesy." At another point, she mutters, "You saw that coming to you."

Sometimes she sacrifices a piece to gain an advantage. She knows the king can be a weakness but actually quite formidable in the end game. But her favorite piece is the queen, "the only lady" on the chessboard.

"Chess takes a lot of practice," she says. "It teaches you patience."

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9							6	
7	2		9					
4	6							
		2	4		5	8		
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					3		8	1
5							2	
3	7	1	2	9				

Difficulty level: Medium #84239

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last week's puzzle

Puzzle #86727 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

8	9	5	6	1	7	3	4	2
2	7	4	8	5	3	9	1	6
3	1	6	4	9	2	5	7	8
6	8	1	5	3	4	7	2	9
5	4	7	2	8	9	1	6	3
9	2	3	7	6	1	8	5	4
7	5	9	3	2	6	4	8	1
1	6	8	9	4	5	2	3	7
4	3	2	1	7	8	6	9	5

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First robot into Fukushima reactor stalls, but gets some data

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the plant damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO plans to send in a different, amphibious robot next year for further investigation of the three reactors that suffered meltdowns.

Computer simulation and cosmic ray examinations have shown that almost all fuel rods in the Unit 1 reactor have melted, breached the core, and fell to the bottom of the containment chamber.

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA



■ Polo
Polo's "Talking Story" column will return soon.