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# Lincoln 13-year-old prepares for U.S. chess championships

By Sharon Kolbet  
Staff writer

In a game that often requires decades to master, Keaton Kiewra, a 13-year-old Lincoln resident, quickly is becoming a standout in the national chess scene.

Kiewra would like to become a U.S. chess champion, and though he is only a teenager, he has attracted attention within the chess community.

Kiewra started playing chess at age 6 and entered his first tournament when he was 7. In 1998 he won the Nebraska High School Chess Championship as a fifth grader. Later that year, he took home the title of sixth grade national champion. Currently he is ranked fourth in the country among players his age.

When Kiewra was a second grader, his father, Ken Kiewra, noticed that Keaton had an "aptitude for games." By this time the young Kiewra already had mastered checkers, so his father introduced him to chess. It soon became apparent that Kiewra possessed a remarkable ability to calculate moves and memorize plays, his father said.

Seeing that Keaton's abilities had eclipsed his own, Ken Kiewra found a chess coach for his son in 1997. Keaton began working under the guidance of Dr. Tom O'Connor.

O'Connor lives in Lincoln and is the co-coordinator of the Writing Lab at the UNL College of Business Administration. He has been coaching Kiewra for the past three years and has witnessed Kiewra's chess ranking rise dramatically.

"From 1997 to the present, Keaton gained 900 points in the chess standings, making him one of the best scholastic players in the country," O'Connor said. "If he were to gain another 900 points in the next three years, he would be one of the best chess players in the world."

O'Connor likened Kiewra's playing style to the strategy used by the former world champion Bobby Fischer.

Fischer gained notoriety for his aggressive style, and in 1962 at the age of 15 years, 10 months, he became the youngest player ever to win the U.S. chess championship.

"Keaton is 13, and right now he is rated higher than



Sharon Kolbet/DN  
**KEATON KIEWRA, 13, plays chess last Saturday at Yia Yia's in downtown Lincoln. Kiewra, who plays chess with a Russian grand master via telephone, will participate in the U.S. Open beginning Friday.**

*"Keaton is 13, and right now he is rated higher than Bobby Fisher was at the same age."*

**Dr. Tom O'Connor**  
Keaton Kiewra's coach

Bobby Fisher was at the same age," O'Connor said.

O'Connor isn't the only one to notice Kiewra's potential. Recently the 13-year-old was honored as one of only five students invited to New York to attend an elite chess camp with grand master Edmar Mednis.

Kiewra also participates in

twice-weekly lessons, via telephone, with a Russian grand master. All of this instruction is intended to help Kiewra prepare for the coming U.S. Open Chess Championship, which starts Friday in Minneapolis.

Kiewra was relaxed when speaking about the upcoming U.S. Open tournament. He said he thinks tournaments are fun, and he looks forward to playing at an elite level, with players much older than himself.

Kiewra said he doesn't expect to win this year's tournament, but he knows it will be a good experience. While some may be surprised at the 13-year-old's articulate and easy-going nature, O'Connor says that Kiewra's poise can fool an opponent.

"(Kiewra) is a gentleman at the board," O'Connor said, noting Kiewra's aggressive playing style. "Keaton doesn't defend, he counterattacks."