

The Chess Champions of Nūhaka

by Kiwa Hammond

The game of chess is very old, but it's still popular – and it's played all over the world.

People play chess in London, New York, Paris, Nūhaka ... Nūhaka? Where's that?

The Travelling Chess Team

Nūhaka (or Ngā Nūhaka to use its proper name) is a small town near Wairoa. It's home to the Ngāti Rākaipaaka people. There's only one school in Nūhaka, and it's a school with a difference. The students know all about chess. Not only that – they're really good at it! The school team has done well at tournaments all around the country. So how does a student become a member of the Nūhaka School travelling chess team?



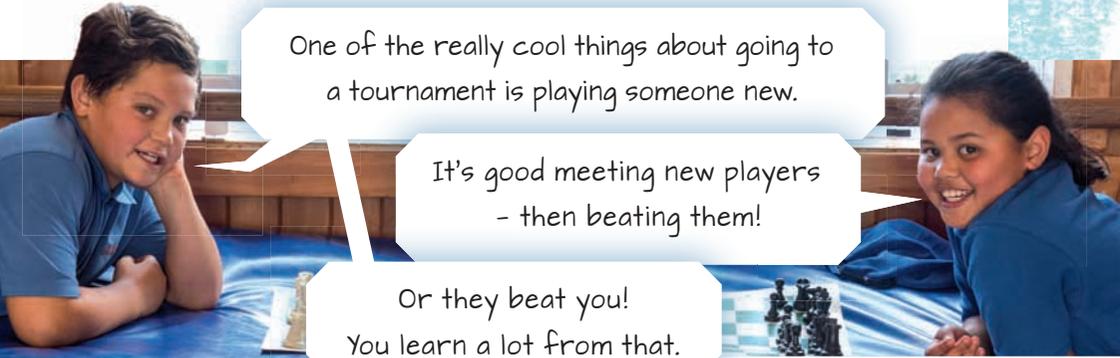
First, you need to be a really good player.

We play games against each other to find the best players.

But you don't just have to be a good chess player. It's also important to support and encourage the other team members.

Always Learning

The students get to know each other's moves and strategies because they play one another every day. But at tournaments, they often play total strangers.



One of the really cool things about going to a tournament is playing someone new.

It's good meeting new players - then beating them!

Or they beat you!
You learn a lot from that.

In chess, there's always a lot to learn, such as the special moves with names like The Lawn Mower, Queen's Gambit, The Fork, and The Pin. Knowing when to use these moves is just as important as knowing how to do them.



When you play, you learn to focus on what's happening on the chessboard.

All that concentration must be working. Nūhaka School's chess players have won or finished near the top in many tournaments. Their champion chess team is well known in Hawke's Bay and throughout New Zealand too.

The Dark Horse



One chess trophy in particular is very special at Nūhaka School. It's the one the students all want to win. The trophy is called The Dark Horse in memory of a man who came to Nūhaka School to teach the kids about chess.

That man was a very talented chess player named Genesis Potini. Genesis was from Gisborne. As part of a group called the Eastern Knights Chess Club, he taught children from Gisborne how to play chess. At the same time, he inspired them to believe in themselves. In 2014, a movie called *The Dark Horse* told his story. Sadly, the real Genesis passed away before the movie was finished.



Genesis dedicated his life to teaching as many children as he could about chess. He believed that being involved in chess could change their lives. Genesis and other adults from the Eastern Knights Chess Club regularly visited Nūhaka School to share their skills. When the students were ready, the school formed a chess team of its own.

Ask anyone at Nūhaka School, and they will tell you it's an honour and a privilege to be picked for the team. It's also lots of fun.

It's great when we go to the big tournaments. We go to new places and do cool stuff - and we play chess!



Keeping the Passion Alive

The children who Genesis taught are now grown up, and there's a new set of students at Nūhaka School. They have the same passion for chess that Genesis inspired in their older brothers, sisters, and cousins. Today, if you walk round the school during break, you'll see children of all ages gathered round chessboards and the big outdoor chess set. Some will be playing while others will be watching, encouraging, and giving advice.





Some games are quick, and you'll hear the winner call out "Checkmate!" Other games can take a long time and still end in a stalemate (a draw).

But it doesn't matter how long a game takes or who wins – the players always shake hands and congratulate each other. You'll hear them say "Good game" and "Well done". This is a very important part of chess because it's showing respect for your opponent.

And don't be surprised if you also hear the following words:

Can you play chess?

Do you want a game?

and then ...

CHECKMATE!



CHESS NOTATION

What are these strange letters and numbers?

Are they some kind of secret code? No – they're part of a special language used by people who play chess. The language is called "notation". It's the way chess players keep a record of all the moves they make in a game.

For chess notation, each chess piece (except the pawns) is given a letter. Each square on the board is given a letter and number.

	White	Black
1	e4	Nc6
2	Nf3	d6
3	b4	f5
4	Bc4	Nf6

	
King = K	Bishop = B
	
Queen = Q	Rook = R
	
Knight = N	Pawn = NO LETTER

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h		
1										1
2										2
3										3
4										4
5										5
6										6
7										7
8										8
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h		

Notation tells you which piece moved and which square it moved to.

e4 means the white pawn moved to square e4. (A player knows which pawn must have moved because, under the rules, only the pawn on e2 is able to move to e4.)

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	
1									1
2									2
3									3
4									4
5									5
6									6
7									7
8									8
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	

Nc6 means the black knight moved to square c6. (Again, only the knight on b8 is able to move to c6, so a player reading the notation will know which black knight moved.)

Chess players can use notation to replay a game and learn from it.



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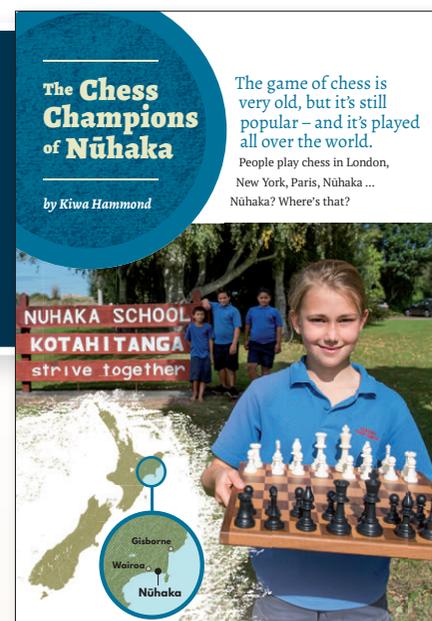
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