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KING OF KANSAS



Jack Easton, 15, practices chess for about three hours a day to ensure he is on the top of his game. Easton said he hopes to start a chess club next year at Manhattan High School.

Staff photos by Chris Bromson

Teen chess champ looks to start team at Manhattan High

Lee Hane
lhane@themercury.com

Sometimes things really are black and white, but that doesn't necessarily make them easy to see.

For an accomplished chess player like 15-year-old Jack Easton, figuring out his next move is a lot more complicated than it may seem to someone who isn't remotely familiar with the game.

First he chooses an opening — a sequence of initial moves, of which there are hundreds — and then he relies on his own calculations to come up with the best

tactics, or subsequent sequences of moves throughout the rest of the game. The goal of any tactic, Easton said, is to put his opponent into a bad move, because it only takes one mistake to determine who wins the game.

Making a good calculation depends to some extent on how accurately a player can see into the future by thinking in terms of mathematical probability — sometimes five to 10 moves out.

Easton, a rising sophomore at Manhattan High, said he doesn't think someone who is really good at math



Easton plays a game of chess with Ryan Hahn, 16, at his family's home. Easton, who recently won the all-age Kansas Open Chess Tournament, has been tutoring Hahn on his game.

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ON THE MOVE



CITY COMMISSION

Commissioners to weigh annexing Blueville Nursery

Jeff Spurgin

The Manhattan City Commission will consider annexing Blueville Nursery into the city during its Tuesday meeting.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. at City Hall. The first reading item is related to the \$6.4-million contract for

about for the Anderson and Kimball Avenue streets. For the intersection.

The annexation will involve the retail center for Blueville Nursery, approximately 6.2 acres southwest of the Anderson and Kimball Street intersection.

In a related action, the commission will

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RILEY COUNTY

County agrees to sell 4 buildings

Dylan Tyson
dtyson@themercury.com

The Riley County Commission will begin the process of selling the county's Courthouse Plaza East building and other county buildings.

The commission came to a consensus Monday to publish two notices of intent to sell property, one for the Courthouse Plaza East building, 113 N. Fourth St., and another for the bulk sale of the Emergency Medical Services building, 2011 Clifton Road, the Forensic Mental Health building, 2001 Clifton Road, and the Geological Society building, 2005 Clifton Road.

The Plaza East building houses a variety of county departments and programs, including the board of county commissioners, community corrections, county counselor, emergency management and GIS.

Commissioner Ron Wells said he was hesitant to approve the notice for the Plaza East building because the commission has not found a new location to move to.

"Right now I'm not in favor of selling this building, because we don't have enough information on where we're going to go," Wells said.

Commission chair Ben Wilson said publishing the notice is the first step to finding a new location for the county's operations.

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1,524 advance ballots in

Dylan Tyson
dtyson@themercury.com

Riley County clerk Beth Vargo reported the county had received 1,524 advance ballots for Tuesday's primary election by the end of Saturday. Advance voting in person ended at noon Monday.

Vargo encouraged county residents who have not yet returned mail-in advance ballots to bring them into the courthouse rather than sending them in the mail. They're due by 7 p.m. Tuesday.

"It's a little bit too late to send that in the mail to get it here in time," Vargo said. "I encourage people to walk those ballots into the office. We do have a ballot box where they can deposit those there."

Polls for the primary election will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday.

WEATHER FORECAST

KING OF KANSAS



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Teen chess champ looks to start team at Manhattan High

Lea Skene
lskene@themercury.com

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tactics, or subsequent sequences of moves throughout the rest of the game. The goal of any tactic, Easton said, is to nudge his opponent into a bad move, because it only takes one misstep to determine who wins the game.

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The Neighbors

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Teen chess champ looks to start team

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could also be really good at chess.

"You keep the chess board in your head and you predict what's going to happen," he said. "You need to make sure that the move will work before you do it so that's why you think about it first, like if I move here, he moves here, and so on."

To a certain degree, Easton said winning at chess is also a mind game.

"Usually I don't try to psych somebody out," he said. "But sometimes when I know I'm winning I'll lean back in my seat and be like, I got this now."

Easton has been playing chess for several years, and it's obvious his calculations are fairly reliable. At least according to his track record, he doesn't often choose a bad move.

A few weeks ago, Easton won the Kansas Open Chess Championship, a tournament open to players of all ages.

He also won the Kansas scholastic chess tournament earlier this year, open to elementary and high school students. Because of his win there, Easton is representing the state of Kansas and Manhattan High School at the Denker chess tournament in Indiana this week, a national scholastic tournament open only to state winners.

Easton plans to start a chess club at MHS this year. He said he knows of at least two other players who will participate but is hoping for a few more so the club can compete as a team at tournaments

around the state.

Now one of the best players in his region — currently he's the third highest rated player in Kansas — Easton has worked hard to get where he is. He said he practices around three hours a day, by playing or watching games on the internet, studying tactics and taking lessons once a week via Skype with a Grand Master in Tennessee.

Easton recently earned the rank of Master, one of a series of titles assigned to chess players by the World Chess Federation based on a point system.

When players participate in official chess tournaments, they receive points for their performances, and the number of points a player receives for winning a game depends on the skill level of his opponent.

Becoming a Grand Master, the highest rank possible, requires a certain number of wins against other Grand Masters.

According to local chess aficionado and KSU chess club champion Mory Mort, it's incredibly difficult to achieve. He said there are only about 1,000 Grand Masters in the world, and no one from Kansas has ever held the title.

Easton said he has yet to win against a Grand Master but has played in three games that ended in a draw. Based on where he is now, he said he doesn't expect to become a Grand Master anytime soon but hopes to receive the title someday.

The number of points Easton wins in the mean-

time depends largely on how many tournaments he is able to participate in. When it comes to access to tournaments, he said living in Kansas is a definite disadvantage.

"There aren't too many challenging people left in Kansas," he said. "Or Oklahoma, or Nebraska."

Easton and his dad, an engineering professor at K-State, drive to Dallas every few weeks to participate in tournaments there. Within the past few years they've also traveled to California, Florida, Las Vegas, and Washington, D.C. for competitions.

Easton recently returned from a chess camp in Arizona.

Easton's mother, Kelly, said being a chess mom is no small task, especially considering the time and money it takes to travel to tournaments across the country. But the job comes with a few perks, she said.

Kelly said Easton originally started playing chess as part of the family's home school program, which involved each of the children competing in one academic activity and one athletic activity, and his knack for the game soon became clear.

"Being a chess mom, I wish it was just buying a T-shirt and holding up a foam finger, but it's a little more complicated than that," she laughed. "But I do like it because chess tournaments are climate controlled. I'm also a tennis mom and a soccer mom, and it can be quite hot out there watching his older brother play tennis."