

US CHESS PRESIDENT ALLEN PRIEST ADDRESSES COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR ORGANIZATION

# CHESS LIFE

May 2020 | USChess.org

GM  
HUMPY  
KONERU  
**2020**  
Cairns Cup  
Champion



US CHESS

# Chess Life

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## CONTRIBUTORS

### WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

(Cover Story) is one of the top rated female players in the country. She has been a member of the Olympiad team since 2008, representing the U.S. in five Olympiads and four World Team championships. She finished second in the 2019 U.S. Women's Championship.

### GM FRANCESCO RAMBALDI

(Cover Story) is an Italian grandmaster and a member of Saint Louis University's collegiate chess team. He is one of Italy's strongest players and he has found success on a national level both in youth tournaments and in open tournaments, including being crowned the 2016 Italian Rapid and Blitz champion. Francesco has also won numerous international tournaments.

### JOHN HARTMANN

(Ohman) is the *Chess Life Online* editor for *uschess.org*, and beginning in June he will assume editorial duties for *Chess Life*. In 2018 John won the Best Column award from the Chess Journalists of America. You can find him on the web at *Chess Book Reviews* and *First Look Chess*.

### DR. ALEXEY ROOT, WIM

(Chess and Dance) is the author of seven books, including *The Living Chess Game: Fine Arts Activities for Kids 9-14* (Libraries Unlimited, Santa Barbara, California, 2011). She teaches college credit courses, available worldwide via The University of Texas at Dallas eLearning, about chess in education.

### WILLIAM ROOT

(Chess and Dance) teaches chess to homeless children at Vogel Alcove. He has performed with Dallas International Folk Dancers and competed and performed in swing dancing.

### COLONEL ZACK KINNEY, DCDF, RET.

(First Moves) is a champion chess player, elite chess instructor, and coach residing in Maryland. He is a highly decorated chess champion who has won scores of chess awards and accolades. He is currently writing a book for and with The Chess Pioneer, Mike Abron, and he has previously written articles for *Chess Life* on U.S. Armed Forces chess.

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## CLO PREVIEW: WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Each month this space is reserved for a look ahead at what will be covered at *Chess Life Online*.

With the emergence of COVID-19 and all of the restrictions that have been put in place as a response to the pandemic, just about all of the chess events in the world have been postponed or canceled.

Our coverage at *CLO* is driven by real-world, real-time events. We're grappling with the ramifications of the pandemic just like you are, and as such, we're going to be flying by the seat of our pants for awhile ... just like you are too.

Chess can be a balm for tired, distracted souls in this time, and it will be our goal to bring you interesting and engaging content to help you decompress in these trying days.



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# Patterns of

*Although they seem dissimilar, chess and dance have surprising connections.*

By DR. ALEXEY ROOT, WIM AND WILLIAM ROOT

On the surface, chess and dance seem to have little in common. Chess players sit. Dancers move. Yet chess and dance are both life-long hobbies, feature similar terminology, have gender imbalances, may be considered as sport or art, use business skills, and facilitate meeting new people. My son, William Root, and I interviewed four people with connections to chess and dance.

On January 17, William and I met with Grandmaster Julio Catalino Sadorra, the chess coach for The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas), and his wife Katie Ener-Sadorra, who teaches ballet and holds certificates in ballet teaching studies and progressing ballet technique. Their one-year-old son Tigran, nicknamed “Tiggy,” was with his parents for the interview. Tiggy is named after Tigran Petrosian, the former world chess champion. His onesie proclaimed, “Future Grandmaster.”

## Life-long hobbies

According to Julio and Katie, children as young as four or five can start chess and dance. Julio said, “Every kid varies, but 4-6 years old is good for beginning chess at home. Then a school or chess club setting, with an enthusiastic teacher, would be appropriate for ages 7-10. School competitions and regional scholastics could be started around ages 8-9.”

As with chess, when to begin ballet classes depends on the individual child and when they are ready for a formal class setting with other children. Katie said that dance class readiness typically happens around ages 5-6, at the start of kindergarten. Having an early start, or not, does not make or break a dance career, though Katie recommends some type of movement

training by ages 8-9. “Introduce your child to chess or dance in a fun, stress-free way,” said Katie. “A child’s body is not ready for ballet technique at ages 5-6; foster feeling rather than form at that age. For example, do not spend much time at a ballet barre but learn how to move to music.”

On the other end of the age spectrum, chess and dance can help senior citizens. After following 469 subjects ages 75 years and older for more than five years, researchers found that “like education, participation in leisure activities may lower the risk of dementia.” Published in 2003 in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the “Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly” article postulated that dancing and playing board games like chess may “improve cognitive reserve.” Cognitive reserve is the ability of your brain to improvise to get jobs done. Even if there is physical brain damage—for example from Alzheimer’s disease—your behavior may not show deficits because your brain has found work-arounds.

## Movements and Etymology

Both chess and dance have words and phrases describing where two objects are in relation to each other. In chess, the objects are squares, edges, or chessmen. In dance, the objects are people, parts of the room, or parts of bodies (such as feet). One common chess phrase is “a knight’s move away.” In Latin ballroom dance, a “knight’s move away” of two people is called “fan position.” In a knight’s move away and in fan position, the objects are a “capital L-shape” distance from each other.

Both chess and dance have also redefined

English words relating to direction. A “diagonal” in math can be at any angle, but in chess or in ballroom dance a diagonal is always at a 45-degree angle. The word “forward” in chess means toward your opponent’s position. I move my white pawn “forward” toward the black side of the board and my opponent moves his or her black pawn “forward” toward my white side of the board. In ballroom dance, “forward” is often used interchangeably with the clockwise direction in which couples move around the floor.

## Gender Imbalances

While girls are about 20 percent of US Chess members under age 18, about 10 percent of the 3.5 million children taking ballet classes in the U.S. are boys. These percentages affect how many women are among the world’s top chess players and how many men are exceptional ballet dancers.

In ballet performance, according to ballet teacher Katie Ener-Sadorra, there are more highly-skilled women than men. She said, “For a ballerina, getting a full-time performing job with a professional ballet company is extremely competitive. It is less competitive for men to get into a professional ballet company.”

Compared to similarly-rated men, women may earn more money playing chess. For example, Grandmasters Wenjun Ju and Aleksandra Goryachkina competed for 500,000 euros (approximately \$553,725 U.S. dollars) in the January 2020 Women’s World Championship match. Men rated at their level (just under 2600 FIDE) don’t have the opportunity to play matches with half-million-dollar prize funds.

# *Movement*



GM MAURICE ASHLEY HITS THE DANCE FLOOR AT THE 2017 SINGUEFIELD CUP OPENING CEREMONY. "DANCERS CHOOSE THE KIND OF DANCES THAT MAKE THEM FEEL GOOD ABOUT BEING ON THE FLOOR," SAYS ASHLEY, LIKENING IT TO THE WAY SOME CHESS PLAYERS PREFER AGGRESSIVE ACTION OVER SLOW POSITIONAL BUILDUP.

Girls and women partaking in traditionally masculine activities are less stigmatized by society than boys and men in traditionally female activities. For example, “Good Morning America’s” Lara Spencer said, in an August 23, 2019, broadcast, “Prince William says George absolutely loves ballet. I have news for you, Prince William. We’ll see how long that lasts.” After Spencer apologized for her remarks about six-year-old George, Fox News host Raymond Arroyo commented, about ballet, “It’s not exactly the, you know, exemplar of a male.”

According to Hilary Levey Friedman, writing in *The Atlantic* in 2013, who interviewed 38 families with at least one elementary school-age daughter in either competitive chess, dance, or soccer, “multiple forms of femininity are seen as acceptable by parents and by children.” Therefore, meeting Women’s Program Director Jennifer Shahade’s goal of 50 percent female US Chess membership may be more likely than ballet classes becoming 50 percent male.

### Sport or Art?

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) asked for chess to be included at the 2024 Paris Olympics, but the International

Olympic Committee did not consider FIDE’s application. Break dancing will be the only dancing competition in the 2024 Paris Olympics. Break dancing is new for 2024 and marks the first time that the World DanceSport Federation has been successful at adding a dance competition to the Olympics. However, the World DanceSport Federation has about a dozen DanceSport disciplines that are not in the Olympics, including all forms of partner dancing.

Katie Ener-Sadorra said, “Dance is both an art and a sport. Dance is an art because of the heavy emphasis on the aesthetic. In ballet, the technique and the athleticism serves the aesthetic. Artistic expression is the goal. Competition is not the goal of ballet as it is in chess. In ballet, dancers are meant to be performing and ballet meant to be watched.” Science now plays a role in how dancers train. Katie said, “Research in dance medicine and science has given us healthier and more physiologically appropriate ways to train dancers to achieve the desired ballet technique and aesthetic.”

Grandmaster Julio Sadorra believes that chess is a mental sport. Julio said, “Chess can be rigorous and energy-draining. Each

classical game typically takes four hours. You can lose weight during chess tournaments. For peak chess-playing performance, physical fitness is important. Chess is also a science, because of the research and the theory. Chess has become even more scientific because of the use of computers as a training tool.”

At least in terms of the Olympics, the most prestigious competitive venue for most sports, chess and dance are mainly on the outside looking in. And, in many countries, Olympic sports receive much more funding.

### Making a Living

Chess players and dancers can make a living by performing, competing, teaching, organizing, directing/judging, and writing/creating content. Grandmaster Julio Sadorra said, “In chess, there are purely competitive players making a living from tournaments only. However, it is very tough if you are out of the top 30 in the world.” Viswanathan Anand, a 50-year-old grandmaster and former World Chess Champion, is one of those in the top 30 in the world.

Anand’s competitive chess career has lasted longer than the performance careers of many dancers. The average retirement age for

## THE DANCING GRANDMASTER

William and I have watched videos of Grandmaster Maurice Ashley playing chess in the park with “trash talking” opponents. We have viewed his commentary on world-class chess tournaments. And we have seen videos of a salsa-dancing Ashley as the center of attention in a club. On February 21, via email, William and I asked Ashley three questions about chess and dance.

### Are both chess and dance international languages, and if so why?

It’s a given that both arts are truly as international as they come. Visit any Olympiad and it’s clear that chess is a world-wide phenomenon, played in over 200 countries. However, we have to admit that dance is far more a part of the human soul as any toddler will show you if you put on some random piece of music that has any kind of beat!

### How do chess and dance allow you to express your personality or personal style?

Humans work best when we are in tune with who we are. Both chess and dance offer this opportunity to follow rules, but at the same time express how we feel and communicate within these constraints. Just like certain chess players prefer aggressive action as opposed to slow positional buildups, dancers choose the kind of dances that make them feel good about being on the floor. Whether it’s a fast salsa style with lots of energetic spins or a slow and sensual bachata number that allows the partners to connect on a deeper level, each style of music has a feel that attracts different adherents. You won’t catch many Sicilian players reveling in the Caro-Kann!

### How would you compare learning moves in chess to learning moves in bachata and salsa?

I think that in both chess and dance there is a phase of extreme awkwardness when the moves do not seem natural and one really has to keep practicing over and over to reach any decent level of competence. However, at some point things just start to click and then the pleasure of being able to do one or two things well inspires the learner to dive into each activity more and more.

professional dancers is 35. Women may retire from performing even younger, especially after having children, in part because of the physical changes from giving birth and in part because they may not want to tour when their children are very young. When they have young children, ballerinas may begin a second career of dance teaching. In contrast, men who retire from performing in ballet companies often go into management or choreography, both of which pay better than teaching.

For example, Otis Sallid began as an actor and dancer in Broadway shows, then found better-paying jobs such as choreographing the hit television show “Fame” and directing and choreographing the live segment event for the 40th Super Bowl. Chess careers may follow a similar arc. Sallid’s nephew is Jerald Times, whose peak FIDE rating was 2400. William and I interviewed Times in person on February 19. Times moved from chess playing to chess teaching. Then, in 2019, Times took a job as director of chess for Success Academy in New York City.

Both chess teachers and dance teachers must convince decision-makers that their disciplines offer benefits. “Chess makes kids smart,” a slogan popularized years ago by US Chess, attracts the interest of parents and schools. Dance is often marketed as “exercise in disguise,” which gets the attention of senior centers, schools, and parents.

Winning titles and competitions helps teachers attract students. A grandmaster can generally command a higher rate for his or her chess lessons than can a non-titled chess player. On dance teachers’ resumes, competition successes merit their own sections. One prestigious title is “rising star” available in many partner dance disciplines. In both chess and dance, winning a national championship may lead to charging higher rates and to being considered a celebrity.

Katie Ener-Sadorra noted that both chess teachers and dance teachers are most often freelancers or independent contractors. Even though Katie teaches regularly at Royale Ballet Dance Academy, she is not an employee there. As an independent contractor, she does not get health insurance through her work. Her husband Julio also was a chess independent contractor before he became a salaried chess coach at UT Dallas in February of 2019.

Most top chess and dance competitions take place in hotel ballrooms. Organizers must be skilled in booking hotels, securing room discounts, budgeting entry fees and prizes based on expected attendance, and promoting the competition. At competitions, another revenue stream is merchandise, such as branded clothing, videos, and books. Another



PHOTO, ABOVE: GM JULIO SADORRA WITH WIFE KATIE ENER-SADORRA AND BABY TIGRAN “TIGGY” SADORRA; BELOW: DR. ALAN SHERMAN, DIRECTOR OF THE CHESS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY, DANCING A WALTZ WITH JENNY LI.

way to make money through competitions is to become a tournament director or arbiter (chess) or a judge (dance).

Writing books and articles (such as this one) is an income stream for chess professionals. Julio Sadorra added, “An emerging way to earn money is by online streaming. The Chessbrahs are a prime example of earning money through providing chess-ter-tainment. I did some banter blitzing with *Chess24* and *Chess.com*; chess-ter-tainment takes some other skills like connecting with your audience.”

### May I have this game (dance)?

However, not every grandmaster wants to connect with the public. William and I asked Julio how grandmasters feel about random chess players challenging them to games or asking them for chess training advice. Julio replied, “I cringe at the elitism of the chess world where some grandmasters turn down games or even conversations with lower-level players. But there are many exceptions. When I was a young chess player, my dad and I were looking for help. We did not know which books to study. Grandmaster Eugenio Torre gave us advice, recommending books to us.”

Dallas Swing Dance Society, a non-profit organization promoting partner dancing, provides five guidelines for asking someone to dance. In the opinion of William Root, an affiliate member of Dallas Swing Society, the two most important principles from those guidelines are, “Asking a specific person politely, ‘Would you like to dance?’ And being aware, which depends on the dance venue, how many dances you are expected to dance with that person.” It could be one dance up to a maximum of four dances.

William is also a chess player and tournament director. He said, “The partner dance etiquette is similar to chess. In a social chess setting, you should ask one person to play. At the end of that first game, if there is no one else available to play, it is generally good form to ask if this person wants to play again with colors reversed. If the answer is ‘no,’ thank the person for the game.”

### Begin Again

A lifelong chess player, William Root took up partner dancing two years ago. William said, “With new hobbies comes the joy of learning new things. When taking up a new hobby, you learn much more quickly than when you have already been immersed in an activity for years. It’s refreshing to be a beginner again.”

Before you head to the nearest ballroom for chess or dance, remember that all people have a lot to offer intellectually and socially. Partnering up for a chess game or a dance will enrich your life. ♠