

MY BEST MOVE

HEATHER FLEWELLING

CLASS-A
TOURNAMENT PLAYER

POST-DOCTORAL
RESEARCHER IN
ASTRONOMY

I am a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Astronomy, working on the imaging processing pipeline for the Pan-STARRS telescopes. In life, my best move was to take this job in Hawaii!—I have a wonderful job, I live in paradise, and I have the means to travel to chess tournaments on the mainland!

There are very few women in the sciences and fewer still in chess. In both chess and the sciences, girls lose interest in middle school. In contrast, I started to play chess with my friends in high school. Why was I different? I had good mentors.

When I was a teenager, I looked up to both my dad and Alexey Root (1989 U.S. Women's Champion, and a regular at our chess club). I feel like the support of my family and role models such as Alexey Root gave me what I needed to become a scientist and a chess player.

For this reason, my first win against my father in a rated game was important to me and gives rise to My Best Move. The game itself is terrible, but it was very influential for me. Compared to my expert-rated opponent, I was inexperienced. In the diagrammed position, I was down in material. I won, not because of my brilliance, but because my dad blundered and I saw how to take advantage of his mistake.

Dear ol' dad

Michael Flewelling (2028)

Heather Flewelling (1401)

Action - Fri., Houston, Texas, 07.22.1994



WHITE TO PLAY



PHOTO: JASON CHU

“Why was I different? I had good mentors.”

This is the position before White's 18th move at which point my dad left for 15 minutes to take a phone call. I sat there, looking at my game, imagining all the ways my dad would win, all the while being very annoyed that I had lost material so quickly. This is a terrible attitude to have at the board.

After my dad returned, he played ...

18. Qe2?

Perhaps because I'd already been staring at the board for so long, I realized he had made a blunder. There are all kinds of tactics allowing different forks and pins. Here, I found what I consider My Best Move:

18. ... Nxe3!

This is better than 18. ... Nhg3 otherwise he'd only lose the Exchange when he would have two pieces for a rook and two pawns.

19. Rfc1 Nxc2

Stronger is 19. ... Bd4, but I didn't see it.

20. Qxc2 Nf4 21. Qf3 Qxh3 22. Qxh3 Nxh3+ 23. Kf1 Bxc3

I want to trade off pieces and simplify.

24. bxc3 f5 25. Nf3 Rae8 26. Rab1 b6 27. d4 Re7 28. Nh4 Rfe8! 29. Kg2 Nf4+ 30. Kf3 Re3+ 31. Kf2 Nd3+, White resigned.

My first time beating an expert! And in a rated game!

This game was a game of firsts for me. It was my first win against my dad, the first game I annotated, and the first I memorized. It taught me to never give up, even when I am down. ♣

Whose Best Move would you like to see? Write to us at letters@uschess.org.