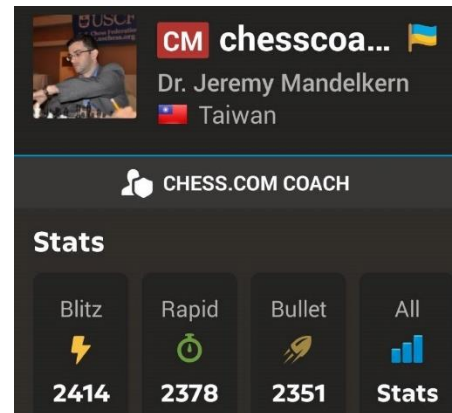


Coach M's 2026 Year of the Horse Puzzle Sheet

by Dr. Jeremy Mandelkern,
PhD in Applied Mathematics,
USCF Candidate Master,
USAT Champion Member, 2011,
“chesscoachtaipei” on chess.com



After attempting this activity, check your solutions with the provided key and let me know how you do!

I'm so much looking forward to continuing working with you in 2026 and seeing you all continue to climb the ranks, grow stronger, and achieve your chess goals!

All the best! Sincerely, Coach M

P.S. (*) Visit my website:

http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/

for more Chess Worksheets & Resources.

Sincerely,

Dr. J. Mandelkern (Coach M)

Coach M's Tip: If a puzzle position is proving too difficult, then set this position up on a physical chess board. After you've formulated your solutions for each position, check your work with the answers given in the back of the worksheet and/or by loading up the PGN file in an analysis board and switching on a chess engine. For each position given, the object is to either give the best move, identify the best line of play, or simply best answer the given chess question. Below is a scoring rubric.

NOTE: Some positions may have multiple solutions. This puzzle sheet has positions in the opening, middlegame, and endgame with all positions drawn from recent illustrative games played online in the Coach M.

Scoring Rubric:

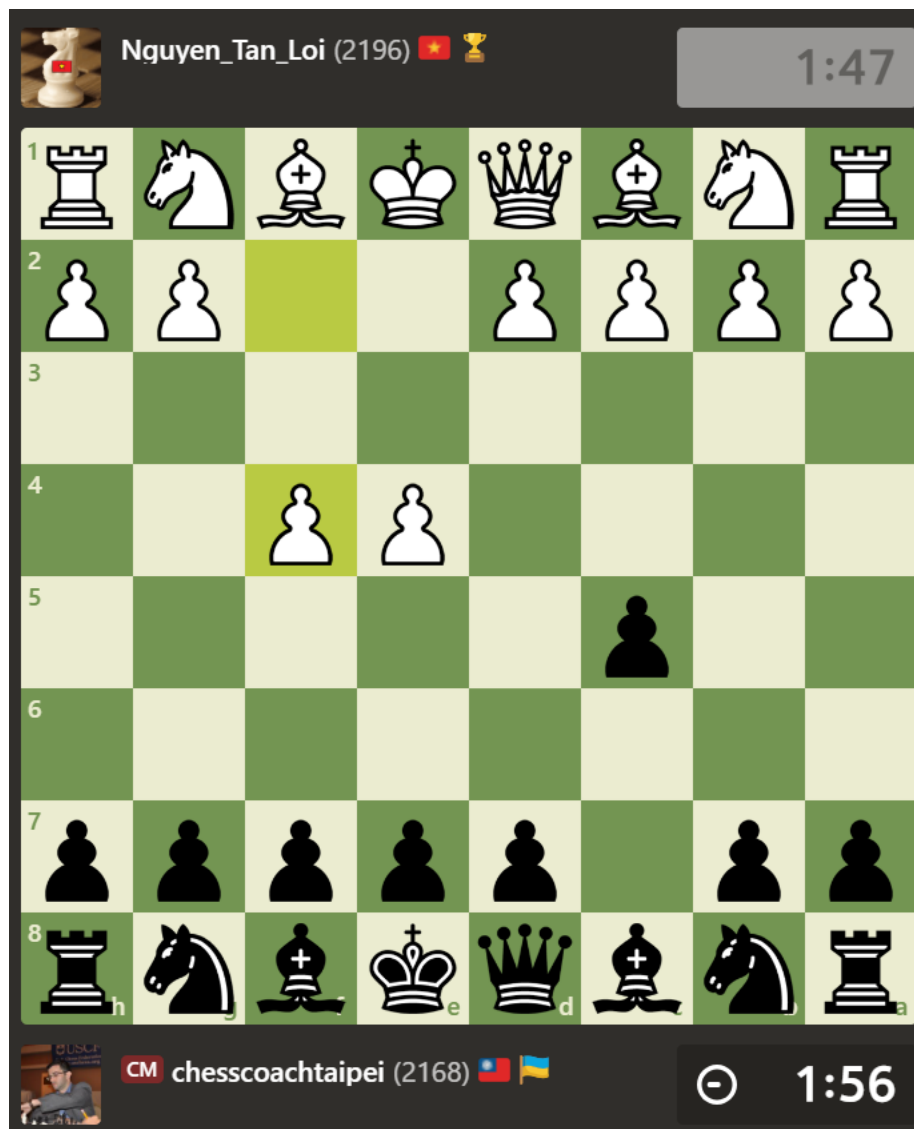
6/6	Super Grandmaster	Elo: 2700+
Miss only 1	FM/IM/Grandmaster	Elo: 2300-2700
Miss 2	Expert/Master	Elo: 2000-2300
Miss 3	Advanced Player/Class A	Elo: 1800-2000
Miss 4	Stronger Intermediate Player, Class B	Elo: 1600-1800
Miss 5	Improving Beginner-Intermediate Player, Class E/Class D/Class C	Elo: 1000-1600
0/6	Beginner	Elo: <1000

Good Luck and Do Your Best!

1. OPENING PHASE: White is giving the “McDonnell Attack” a run here. This opening takes its name from the Irish chess master Alexander McDonnell (1798–1835) who used this set-up on multiple occasions in his match with Louis de La Bourdonnais in 1834.

Black to play. What’s the best counter to this McDonnell Attack?

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 4/10)

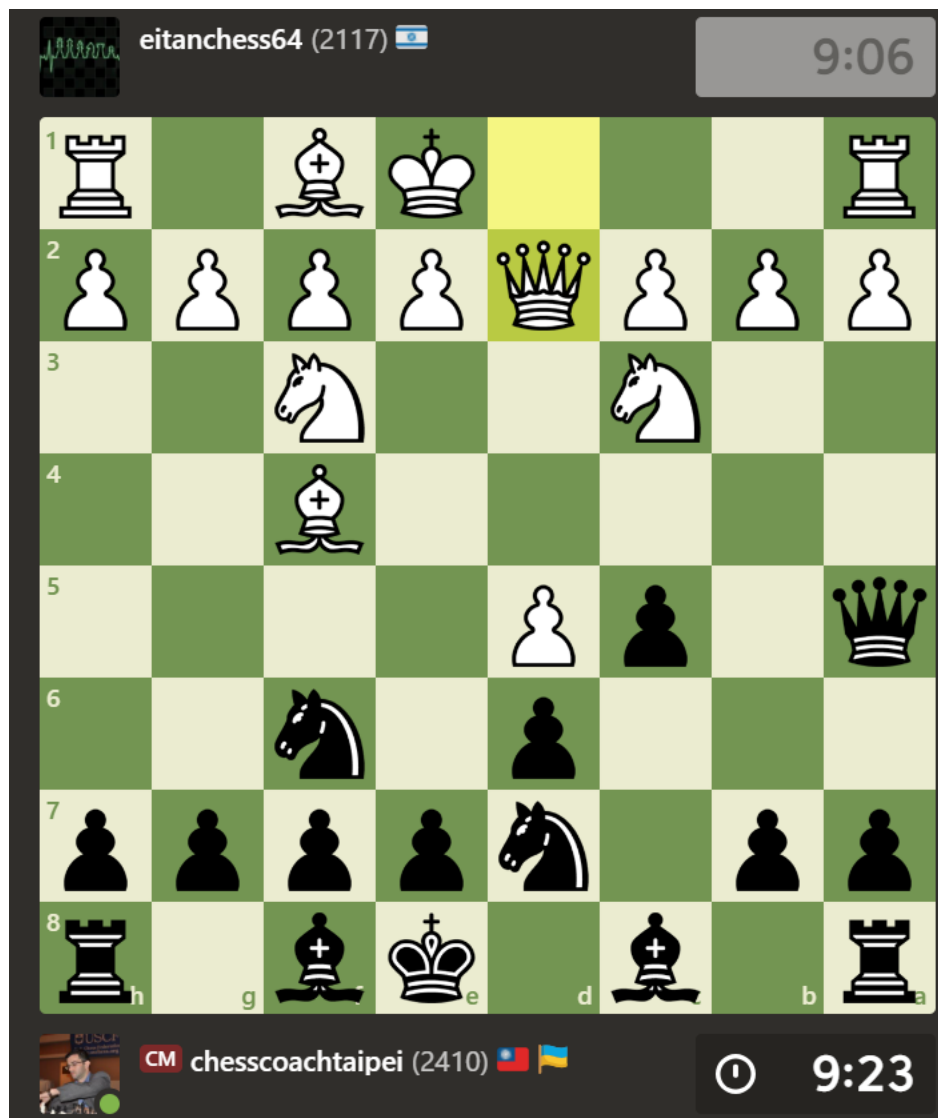


How should black/white continue? Give the best line of play (2) moves deep and provide an evaluation of the resulting position.

2. OPENING PHASE: In the anti-2. Bf4 London/Jobava London opening, the position below was reached from the sequence of moves 1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4 d6 3. Nf3 Nbd7 4. Nc3 c5 5. d5 Qa5 6. Qd2?! (the improvements of 6. a4 or 6. Qd3 retain a small edge for white.).

Black to play. What can be done to exploit the inaccuracy 6. Qd2?!

(Difficulty Level: Easy: 3/10)

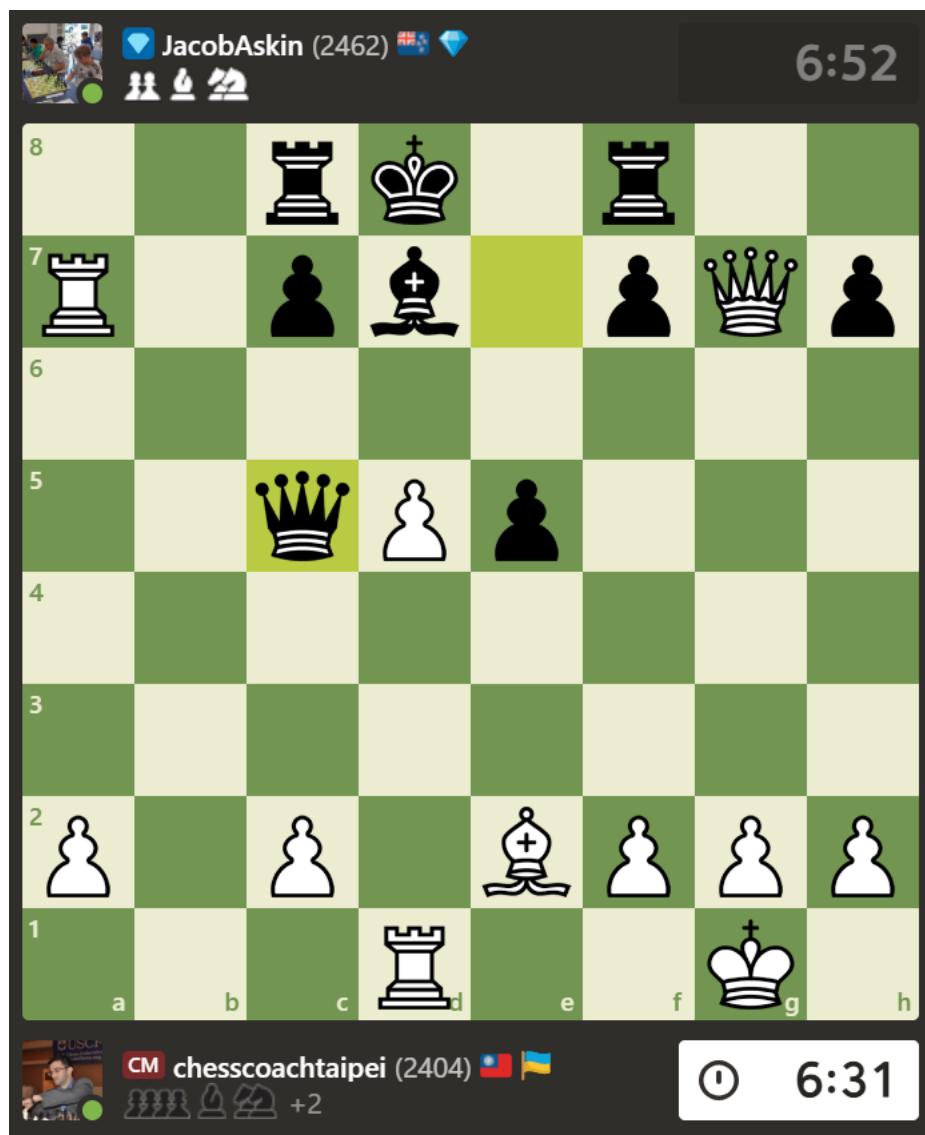


How should black/white continue? Give the best line of play (2) moves deep and provide an evaluation of the resulting position.

3. MIDDLEGAME PHASE: Even strong players cannot keep a poor defense afloat against best play. This is a hopeless middlegame position reached from the dubious “Englund” gambit after the sequence of moves 1. d4 e5? 2. dxe5 Nc6 3. Nf3 Qe7 4. Bg5 Qb4+ 5. Bd2 Qxb2 6. Nc3 Bb4 7. Rb1 Qa3 8. Nd5! Bxd2+ 9. Qxd2 Kd8 10. e4 Nge7 11. Be2 d6 12. O-O Bd7 13. Rxb7 Rc8 14. Rd1 Nxd5 15. exd5 Nxe5 16. Nxe5 dxe5 17. Qg5+ Qe7 18. Qxg7 Rf8 19. Rxa7 Qc5.

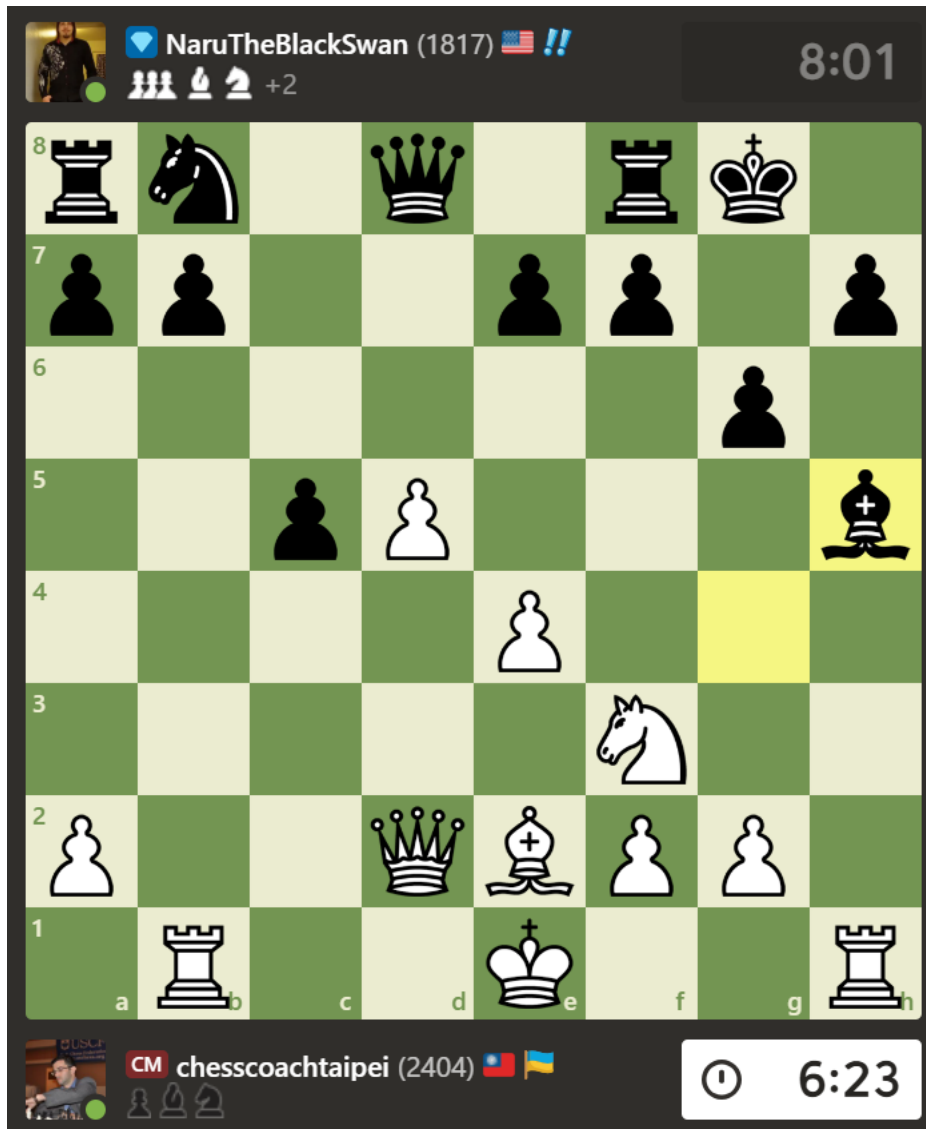
White to play. Put this Englund gambit player out of their misery.

(Difficulty Level: Easy: 2/10)



4. MIDDLEGAME PHASE: Black's Grunfeld defense has gone all wrong after the sequence of moves 1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. c4 g6 4. cxd5 Bg7 5. Nc3 Nxd5 6. e4 Nxc3 7. bxc3 c5 8. Rb1 Nc6?! 9. d5! Bxc3+ 10. Bd2 Bxd2+ 11. Qxd2 Nb8 12. Be2 O-O 13. h4! Bg4 14. h5! Bxh5. White to play and force a quick win in this early middlegame position.

(Difficulty Level: Hard: 6/10)



White to play. Give the winning line of play (3) moves deep.

5. ENDGAME PHASE: The endgame position below arose from the sequence of moves 1. d4 c5 2. d5 d6 3. c4 g6 4. Nc3 Bg7 5. Nf3 Nf6 6. e4 O-O 7. Be2 Bg4 8. O-O Nbd7 9. h3 Bxf3 10. Bxf3 Ne8 11. Qc2 f5?! 12. exf5 gxf5 13. Re1 Ne5 14. Be2 f4 15. Bf1 f3 16. g3 Qd7 17. Kh2 Nf6 18. b3! Rf7 19. Bb2 Raf8 20. Rxe5! dxe5 21. Bd3 e4 22. Nxe4 Nxe4 23. Bxe4 e6? 24. dxe6 Qxe6 25. Bd5 Qe2. White can obtain a winning position from a precise sequence of forcing moves. How to achieve this?

(Difficulty Level: Medium: 6/10)

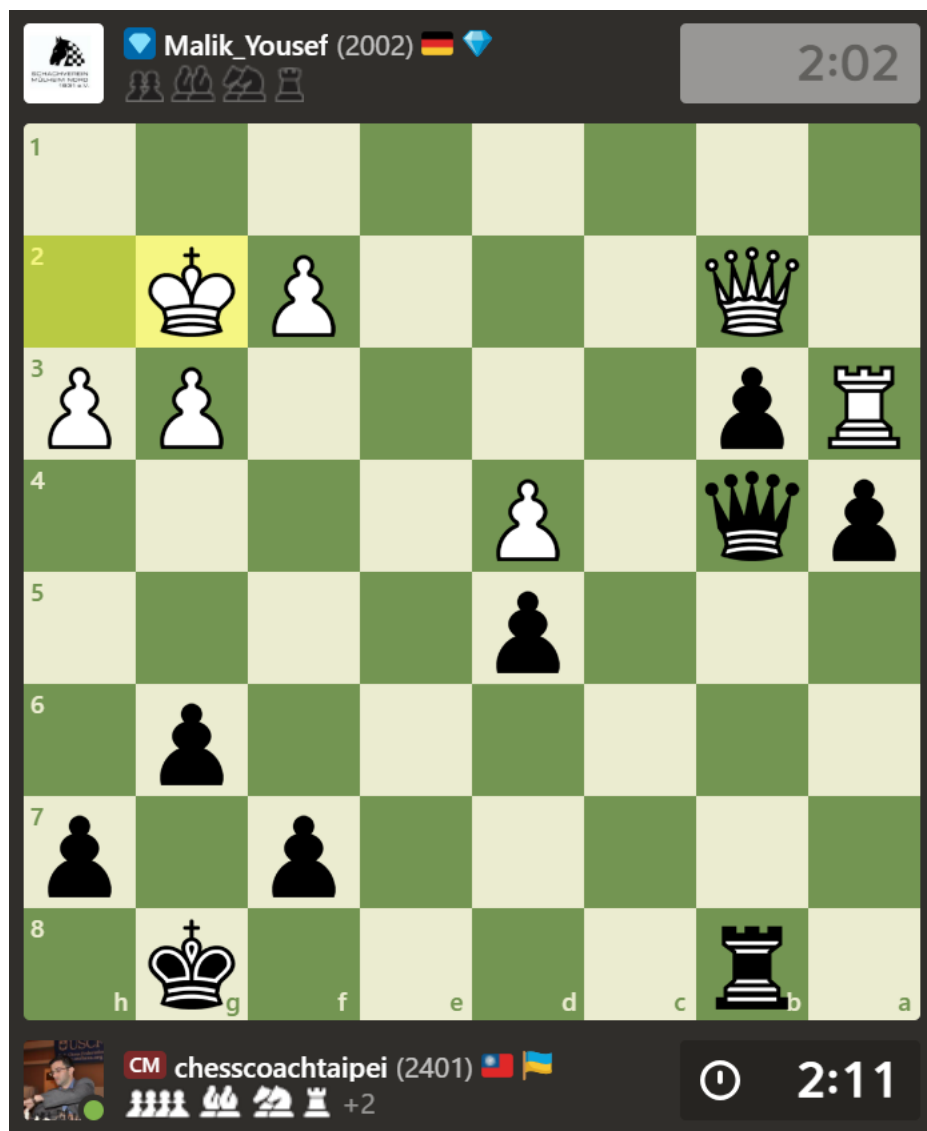


White to play. How to force the win here?

6. ENDGAME PHASE: The position below arose from 1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 c6 3. d4 Nf6 4. Nc3 e6 5. a3 dxc4 6. e3 b5 7. Be2 Bb7 8. O-O a6 9. b3 cxb3 10. Qxb3 Be7 11. a4 O-O 12. axb5 cxb5 13. Ba3 Nbd7 14. Rfc1 Nb6 15. Bxe7 Qxe7 16. h3 Rfc8 17. Ne5 Nfd7 18. Nxd7 Qxd7 19. Qd1 b4 20. Nb1 a5 21. Nd2 Nd5 22. Rxc8+ Qxc8 23. Ne4 Nxe3 24. Qd3 Bxe4 25. Qxe4 Nd5 26. Bf3 Qc6 27. Qd3 a4 28. Qd2 Qb7 29. Qb2 b3 30. Ra3 Qb4 31. Kh2 g6 32. g3 Rb8 33. Bxd5 exd5 34. Kg2.

How best to break the blockade and push for the win? Black to play.

(Difficulty Level: Easy: 3/10)



Select Full game links/Solutions/PGN/Image Files

1. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/148126860846>. Black counters the McDonnell Attack with **2...d5!** Play should continue as demonstrated in the game link. Black has a nominal opening edge (between -0.20 and 0.00).
2. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/147696749498>. Black achieves an opening edge with **6...b5!** White's correct 6th move alternatives, 6. a4 and 6. Qd3, prevent (or at least delay) this beneficial move for black. Black has a significant opening edge (between -0.60 and -0.40).
3. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/146373326974>. White wins quickly with **20. d6!** which cuts off the queen's defense of the f8 rook. Checkmate is forced after the game continuation, 20.d6!
4. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/146173443630>. White is crushing black after **15. g4!** See the game continuation from the link above for the concrete winning line of play.
5. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/145098770710>. Just the sequence beginning with **26. QxQ** is concrete. See the game continuation from the above link which leaves no chance for black to survive.
6. Game link: <https://www.chess.com/game/live/145176669520>. Break the blockade with **34...QxR!** and drive the b and a pawns all the way!

After attempting this activity, let me know how you did!

I'm so much looking forward to continuing working with you in 2026 and seeing you all continue to climb the ranks, grow stronger, and achieve your chess goals!

All the best! Sincerely, Coach M

P.S. (*) Visit my website:

http://drmtutoring.com/en_US/chess-tutoring/

for more Chess Worksheets.

Best,

Coach M