

# The International Chess Academy's 20th Anniversary Chess Camp & School

**How a Ten Year Commitment can lead your kids  
to the “Ivy League” Universities!  
(Princeton, Columbia, Dartmouth, & MIT, etc.)**



This summer the international Chess Academy and our Summer Scholastic program will be celebrating its 20th year of existence. Though the school was technically started in 1995 by Moldovan National Champion Diana Tulman, and Women's World Championship candidate WGM Irina Levitina nothing was really “official” in that first year.

Back in those good old days of the “Clinton presidency,” there were vague intellectual promises that the study of chess in one’s youth can lead to success in academics but as with any such statistic there was always something impersonal about random vague numbers. However, since at that point we didn’t have any personal student successes to go on, we made a pitch to parents just based on enthusiasm, and Irina, and Diana’s experience as tournament players, and hoped for the best.

Since that point in time twenty years have come and gone and many parents, and students passed through our doors, with some staying as little as one semester, and some staying for over twenty years. Many successes in state, national, and international tournaments by both individuals and teams representing our schools, showed there was value, at the very least from a “chess” standpoint to be associated with the school. Some students became international masters, and grandmasters, while others became coaches themselves.

However, despite all the successes over the chess board, one of the most interesting observations and accomplishments that we take, perhaps the most pride in, is purely academic.

What we have noticed is that those same “bright” kids who come to us and stay, for approximately a decade, and whose parents put their faith in our organization for all that time, end up attending some of the best colleges in the United States, and THAT! Is not some statistic in some far away study but rather something we have witnessed throughout the twenty years that the International Chess Academy has existed and something that is very dear to our heart.

Recently, we asked many of those top tier “Ivy League,” and “top university” students to condense those “decade” long experiences into a paragraph or two, so they can try to relate the value of the ICA experience in their lives to potential future students, and parents.

Enjoy the read...and we can't wait to see which of your kids will join this list next!

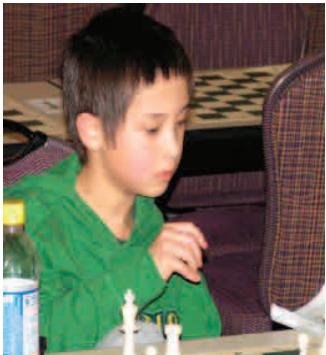


## Ilya Krasnovsky

**4th Year Princeton University  
(15 years with the ICA)**



*"My ~15 year experience at ICA (as a student, tournament player, and coach) has had a profoundly positive impact on the person I am today. Learning, playing, and eventually teaching chess at ICA has offered me life-long friendships, some sick decision-making skills, and loads of fun. It has taken me all over the country for competitive play, and continues to provide me with a way to escape stress and regain focus. I am immensely grateful for all that ICA has done for me, and it is hard for me to imagine a better way of growing up."*



## IM Alex Katz

**1st Year MIT  
(14 Years with the ICA)**



*I think playing chess has several intangible benefits. Obviously this includes things like reasoning and analytical skills, but also subtler things like patience and the importance of staying constantly alert; chess imitates life in that you're never more than one bad move away from disaster. All this shaped my approach not only to the game, but also to academics and life in general. For instance, I never had issues handling long tests and competitions -- a 3 hour test doesn't seem like that big a deal when you're used to competing for upwards of 10 hours a day! Before I started going to ICA, I was young and had no idea about any of the benefits chess would bring; I just enjoyed playing the game. Today, I'm taking full advantage of all of them.*



## Natasha Komarov, PhD

**Carnegie Mellon University Graduate;  
PhD Dartmouth; Math Professor  
(10 years with the ICA)**



*I attended ICA chess school and summer camps between the ages of 9 and 16, and was a coach for another three after, and the experience was incredibly valuable for me. Learning chess and logical thinking skills in a fun and interesting way helped develop and discipline my mind. It also provided a fantastic social atmosphere and friendships that have lasted for over 20 years. The logical thinking framework that I developed at ICA is a large part of what has helped me succeed in my career as a math professor and in countless other aspects of my life.*



### **Chess is a dangerous sport**



## **Mark Vayngrib**

**MIT Graduate; Software Engineer  
(8 years with the ICA)**

*Letting people think is a very dangerous enterprise. I went to chess school for almost 8 years, mostly as a student, eventually as a teacher and camp counselor, but always as a nerd (though I lacked all positive sentiment for the word back then). When I started playing chess, I was already an excellent student in elementary school, but I was perpetually bored. Any creativity I displayed that took me outside the box of a particular assignment, was punished rather than rewarded.*



*Chess school was from a different planet. There was very little learning by rote, and very much learning by experiment and investigation. Instead of asking my brain questions like "do you remember when..." and "do you remember why...", and "what does this teacher want me to write about...", it asked dizzyingly open ended questions like "what would you do?" It granted (you might even say imposed) an amount of freedom you can't possibly experience in traditional schools. Needless to say, I didn't appreciate the ramifications at the time, however much I enjoyed myself.*



*But I give chess too much credit. The game itself is not magic, it can't keep you spellbound on its own. Most of the credit belongs to the owners and staff of the International Chess Academy, Diana Tulman and Irina Levitina, who created and embodied its unique atmosphere. I never felt judged by my chess mates for my intellectual and artistic curiosity like I did in elementary and middle school. I never felt like I was being boxed in by my chess teachers. When I came to the ICA, I wasn't in a funnel pointed towards a diploma, but in a reverse funnel aimed at discovery.*



*I don't play chess as often these days, but I still enjoy the benefits. I'm a software engineer and thinking about and answering open ended questions is my job on a good day. In my spare time, I'm mostly drawn to creative activities like music composition, reading (yes, reading is creative!), and writing. Being creative is the most wonderful feeling in the world, and I wouldn't wish on anyone to miss out on it.*



## **Eugene Sokolovsky**

**Columbia Graduate  
(20 years with the ICA)**



*Back in 1995 when Diana started the International Chess Academy I happened to be one of its first students. At that time I was a sophomore at Columbia University. Diana's chess club turned out to be a source of support for me, for both Diana and Irina Levitina gave me the additional warmth and confidence I needed. While interacting with Diana and Irina I learned not only how to improve my chess skills, but also how to face life with dignity and a sense of humor. In short, the International Chess Academy not only increased my chess rating, but also made me a person of a larger caliber.*





## Max Yelsky

**4th Year Johns Hopkins University  
(12 years with the ICA)**



*My time at the International Chess Academy set the stage for my entire life, and I only look fondly back at the memories, friendships, and mentors I enjoyed there. Graduating university this year, and going to work this coming summer, I am sure that without ICA I wouldn't be half the man I am today.*

*I can safely say that my time as a student at ICA was only partially about learning chess strategy and tactics. Of course, the focus is the game: but instead, I learned how to think, prepare myself, read a situation, and handle pressure. Chess gave me the logic skills to handle any mathematical problem and the eloquence to phrase my thoughts. My excellent coaches, like Diana, Slava, and the entire team taught me how to play the game of chess and how to play the game of life equally well, and I still keep in contact with them to this day! But perhaps even more important than the mentors, or the chess skill, were the everlasting friendships I picked up over the years, one minute working with a friend to solve a problem and the next, challenging each other at the board. And occasionally, playing soccer or dodgeball at the ICA summer camp (my favorite!).*

*Later, I went on to coach at the academy, leading some of the younger groups and assisting the head coaches with the older, more experienced groups. I can only hope that I had the same effect on my students that my coaches had on me; from the smiles on their faces, I could tell that they were, at the least, having a good time. But coaching wasn't only beneficial to my students: what they learned from me they paid me back in teaching me, frankly, how to teach.*

*Needless to say, spending my childhood at the International Chess Academy was one of the best decisions of my life, and I encourage people to check it out at every chance I get. I miss every bit of it, from the fun "Don't let the coach see!" bug-house tournaments to the long and grueling hour-long problems. Thanks ICA, for everything.*



## Mark Aksen

**2nd year Princeton University  
(11 years with the ICA)**



*ICA has meant a great deal to me by helping become not only a good chess player but also a better person. I have learned how to be more patient, how to improve from my mistakes and from other people, and how to teach other people. Learning chess at ICA has helped me a great deal in my career, currently studying mathematics at Princeton, by developing my critical thinking and analytic skills. I appreciate the effort that all the ICA staff have put into my growth and I would like to thank them for it.*



## Eliezer Stavsky

Columbia University  
(10 years with the ICA)



*I started studying chess with Diana and Irina about 20 years ago, and it truly has been the gift that has kept on giving. Much has been written in the popular and scientific press about the academic and intellectual benefits of incorporating chess into a child's education; at ICA, the rewards are even more profound. Diana and Irina challenged me intellectually, stimulated my creativity and curiosity, allowed me to grow and mature in ways I could never have anticipated, and provided me with countless opportunities to meet and learn from other like-minded individuals. And all in the context of a nurturing and supportive environment.*

*Diana, Irina and the entire staff are deeply invested in the success of each student, and not only at the chess board, but in all aspects of life. 20 years later, I am still inspired by them, and my appreciation continues to grow. I was fortunate to attend the ICA summer camp and chess school both as a student and, in later years, as an instructor. And having seen it from both sides, I can honestly say that the program they've created is one-of-a-kind – a dynamic and engaging environment where each student is encouraged to explore, to think deeply and carefully, and to grow.*

*These days I don't play chess as much, but no matter. The skills that I developed and the relationships that I formed in those early years have remained deeply meaningful to me and are a great source of joy in my life.*



# Celebrating Twenty Years (1996-2016)