

MARCK COBB, '89

## *Parallels of Life and Law in the Game of Chess*

### "LIFE IS A KIND OF CHESS"

The fried liver strategy is not a mealtime ploy by a parent determined to improve the eating habits of a child. Rather it's a strategy in the game of chess that can lead to a near certain defeat if the opponent doesn't recognize it. The similarities of the game's strategies and struggles to those faced in life are what attract some players to the sport.



"The game of chess mirrors life," says **Marck Cobb, '89**, "in that it teaches you skills you will use to succeed in the practice of law and in life."



"The Game of Chess is not merely an idle amusement; several very valuable qualities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired and strengthened by it, so as to become habits ready on all occasions; for life is a kind of Chess, in which we have often points to gain, and competitors or adversaries to contend with, and in which there is a vast variety of good and ill events, that are, in some degree, the effect of prudence, or the want of it. ..."

—Benjamin Franklin, "The Morals of Chess"

Cobb is president of the International Chess Institute of the Midwest in Lindsborg, Kan., a position he's held since 2006. He said he played chess infrequently with a friend when he was in law school, and even though the Air Force Academy he attended had a chess club he didn't participate. It wasn't until his son was in fifth grade and competing in a national chess tournament in Kansas City in 2001 that Cobb became more interested in the game. "He did well and was excited about it and I decided, well, we could have a chess club at the school. So I organized a chess club at the elementary school and ended up being the coach."

For nearly 10 years Cobb coached students in the game of chess, not because he was an expert at the game—he said he knows enough to teach the basics—but because of the game's educational value.

"I knew that teaching chess was basically teaching lifetime skills. It's a very quiet game and that allows [players] to focus their attention on developing their strategies and their tactics, and of course strategy is long-term planning, which you need in life, and tactics are short-term planning which you need in life."

Cobb said the game also benefits players because they learn the importance of personal responsibility. "Obviously they recognize that if they do something wrong they can only blame themselves because it's their

game against another. It's a fun way of learning how to think and be responsible for any consequences."

Cobb explained that players also learn to watch their opponent very carefully, another life skill he believes is extremely important. "That's why I was encouraging [playing chess] because one, I could see the kids were having fun but they were also developing learning skills that would be with them for a lifetime."

If he had to choose a favorite chess strategy, Cobb admitted it would be the fried liver. "The fried liver is basically an element of using the knight tactic, and if the opponent doesn't defend against it then they can get check-mated pretty quickly. They don't see it coming. My son used it on me all the time, and after about three months he could beat me all the time," Cobb chuckled.

Learning from mistakes in life improves future success, Cobb noted, and chess is no exception. "The grand masters say to players, 'Don't worry about losing a game. I've lost more than you'll ever lose.' Being a grand master, they've had to lose a large number of games to get to that level."

For players, chess is not just a game, Cobb said. "We call it a sport and an art because the mental acuity comes from both the analytical thinking side of the brain and

the creative thinking side of the brain.” He pointed out that, just as in law school, chess requires players to see both sides of an issue. “When you’re in grade school you look at one side of the coin—whatever they teach you. When you get to college, hopefully, you get to see a little bit more of that other side but you don’t see as much. In law school, we learned how to think because we look at both sides of the coin. Chess introduces you to that kind of thinking ability.”

**BIOGRAPHY:** **Marck Cobb, '89**, has served the Washburn Law Alumni Association in various capacities, currently as a member of the board of governors. He is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo., and the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif. He served for 24 years with the U.S. Air Force and retired as lieutenant colonel. He negotiated an international treaty for special flight operations between the United States and the former Soviet Union. As Deputy Chief for Long-Range Planning for the Air Force in the Pentagon, he supervised the air operation research plans for the first Gulf War. Cobb has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, and other medals for his flying achievements in Southeast Asia, his diplomacy in Russia, and his accomplishments in the Pentagon. He has served as a legal mediator to facilitate solutions for domestic and civil law issues and served in leadership positions with the American Red Cross Sunflower Chapter in McPherson, Kan.; the McPherson Museum and Arts Foundation; the McPherson Chamber of Commerce; and the McPherson County Bar Association.

## ALUMNI

*In Memoriam*

*Washburn Law mourns the passing of the following alumni, whose deaths were reported to the school between October 16, 2011, and May 20, 2012.*

**42 John R. Alden**, Northbrook, Ill., on Dec. 12, 2011, at age 92

**47 Raymond E. Stein**, Beloit, Kan., on Dec. 8, 2011, at age 94

**49 Les C. Arvin**, Wichita, Jan. 22, 2012, at age 88 • **Conant Wait**, Topeka, on Jan. 11, 2012, at age 90

**52 Joseph L. McClymond**, Breckenridge, Texas, on Nov. 7, 2011, at age 83

**53 Zillman P. Sheldon**, Amarillo, Texas, Feb. 3, 2012, at age 92

**55 Edwin M. Wheeler**, Sarasota, Fla., on Feb. 18, 2012, at age 85

**56 William Patrick “Bill” Higgins**, Wichita, on March 19, 2012, at age 79

**57 William L. Parker Jr.**, Ocala, Fla., on April 16, 2012, age not available

**58 Terrance J. “Jerry” Muth**, Rose Hill, Kan., on Oct. 10, 2011, at age 85 • **James T. Myers**, Medicine Lodge, Kan., on Feb. 19, 2012, at age 80

**60 Colonel Stephen R. Bloss**, Castle Rock, Colo., on April 29, 2012, at age 75 • **Senator Franklin D. Gaines**, Hamilton, Kan., on Dec. 25, 2011, at age 77

**67 Bryson E. Mills**, Wichita, on Jan. 19, 2012, at age 75

**71 William A. Taylor III, ba '68, jd '71**, Winfield, Kan., on March 7, 2012, at age 66

**75 Mary L. Blessing**, Lawrence, Kan., on Jan. 11, 2012, at age 78 • **Donald E. Hill**, Wichita, on Feb. 26, 2012, at age 61 • **The Honorable Thomas L. Toepfer**, Hays, Kan., on April 30, 2012, at age 61

**77 William E. Metcalf**, Topeka, on March 13, 2012, at age 68

**83 Kristine Kathryn Schlaman**, Falls Church, Va., on Jan. 20, 2012, at age 56