

Let most kids spend the summer swatting balls, snaring frogs and slapping bugs. Some would rather push pawns.

An exercise for the mind

Chess camp – a different kind of summer activity

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Ryan Schikowski, 10, ponders the pieces at the Vivacity Chess Camp
The Plain Dealer photo by Edric Morales.

O R A N G E – Ryan Schikowski has not mastered chess yet, but he’s sure got the patter down.

“I’m getting pieces for free!” the 10-year-old cries, snatching a knight from Gabe Schmitt, 8.

Gabe moves.

“I know what your plan is!” Ryan says. He advances a piece and taps his fingers. “Oh, come on. Aren’t you going to play? Nine, eight, seven...”

Gabe silently moves his surviving knight to threaten both of Ryan’s rooks.

“You got me in a fork!” Ryan cries.

And you thought chess was hush-hush.

Let most kids spend the summer swatting balls, snaring frogs and slapping bugs. Some would rather push pawns.

They’re honing their handiwork this summer at Vivacity Chess Camp, a program with moves of its own. Vivacity was hosted this week by the Orange Community Education and Recreation Department between a June session in Mayfield Heights and an Aug. 4 to 8 session in Beachwood.

The dozen children ages 4 through 13 at the Orange camp said they’re glad to spend two hours per morning learning indoors instead of lollygagging outdoors.

“It makes you think,” says Ryan.

“I like doing checkmate,” says Victoria Rai, 7.

The youngsters even like the pieces. “I like the noise they make,” says Ryan.

Vivacity Chess is a one-man, or make that one-master, operation. The year-round program of classes, tournaments and more is run by Aleksandr Kitsis of Mayfield Heights, former champion of Moldava.

Kitsis says the game is a fun way to sharpen brains.

“Chess is gymnastics for our mind,” says Kitsis. Players make choices, face the consequences quickly and learn to adjust- skills that help off the board.

Besides, indoor games help to while away this soggy summer. But Kitsis hopes someday to have the best of both worlds, moving the camp to a park pavilion.