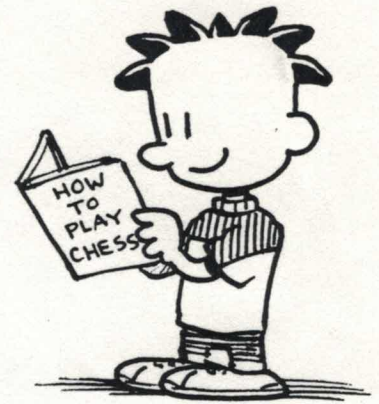


Nov. 4, 1997



Mr. David Mehler
U.S. Chess Center
1501 M. Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear David,

I am writing to thank you and the U.S. Chess Center for offering to put on public display some episodes from my comic strip, "Big Nate", which feature chess as a recurring theme. I am also writing to provide an answer to your question: how and why did Big Nate get interested in chess in the first place?

As readers of the strip know, Nate is an energetic sixth-grade boy whose opinions of his own abilities in art, sports, and romance far exceed the reality. Several years ago, I thought it could make for a good series of strips if Nate were to discover a talent he didn't know he had; and after thinking about it for some time, I wrote this scenario:

Nate's best friend, Francis, is something of a chess whiz and is a member of the school chess team. One day, he challenges Nate to a friendly match, and the two boys make a surprising discovery: Nate is a natural at the game. Although he has never studied the game, Nate possesses a unique and innate understanding of the logic and rhythm of chess; he is able to dominate his match with Francis without a true understanding of chess history, strategy, or even rules. Francis, a chess purist, is galled at Nate's precocity; but he also recognizes Nate's gift and calls it to the attention of Mr. Rosa, the school art teacher and faculty advisor to the chess team. Before long, Nate is the team's number one player, even though he is still referring to knights as "horsies".

My own understanding of chess, I must admit, is even more limited than Nate's. But, as a cartoonist, I saw humor in the spectacle of a boy who is an underachiever in most areas of his life becoming a chess genius. My hunch was that a great many readers of the strip, whether they played chess or not, would identify with Nate's experience. I also felt that beneath the humor in these chess strips was a realistic foundation: a normal kid like Nate, who is energetic and competitive (as most kids are), really would enjoy discovering the game of chess.

Finally, I must also say that writing and drawing these strips has been a great deal of fun for me. I've enjoyed the challenge of writing jokes about a game of which I know very little. I know enough, however, to appreciate the beauty and intensity of the game. And as a former teacher, I am happy to pay tribute to something which so engages and motivates young people in need of direction.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I hope the exhibition is a big success with fans of chess AND comics.

Sincerely, Lincoln Peirce

