

A NEW GUIDE TO PLAYING CHESS

BY JOHN LELAND • PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ



Oliver Boydell setting up a game in Battery Park City, in Lower Manhattan, in December.

OLIVER BOYDELL, 11, started playing chess when he was 5, and he has not wasted any time racking up accomplishments since. In 2015, his first year playing, he tied for first place in the national scholastic chess championship among all kindergartners. In 2019, he led his fourth-grade team to the national chess championships. And in 2020? Well, he published his first book: “He’s Got Moves: 25 Legendary Chess Games (as Analyzed by a Smart Kid).”

“He’s Got Moves” is a guide to some of the most exciting chess games played by the greatest grandmasters in history. (“Grandmaster” is the title given to the best chess players in the world, and Oliver hopes to join them one day.) Oliver loves studying chess games and wrote this book so he could share with other kids the excitement of figuring out where a player got an advantage or where someone made a mistake. In it, he

explains nearly every move in each of the 25 games. He also includes general tips like “You can move your king early and still be OK” and “Don’t take any opponents for granted.”

Before the pandemic hit New York City last March, Oliver spent a lot of time playing chess in the city’s chess clubs and parks. His games were usually against older people, and they drew crowds of curious onlookers. Now, between remote school and riding his bike, he plays games online, against opponents from all around the world. “I usually don’t look at what country they’re from,” he says, “but I’ve played people from Russia, Germany, anywhere.” But there’s one aspect of in-person games Oliver misses: psyching out his opponents. “I like to make myself look big and mighty,” he jokes. “It makes your opponent feel nervous and make mistakes.” But he can’t just pull up his hoodie and focus on the board anymore, which means his opponents are safe — for now. ♦