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Rodman made man a chess fan

EVANSTON | His software is now used in 1,600 schools

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BY KEVIN MACK Chicago Sun-Times

Steve Lipshultz will be honored as 2009 Chess Educator of the Year today. But perhaps he couldn't have done it without Dennis Rodman.

Lipshultz, 57, is the creator of "Think Like a King" chess software, used by 1,600 schools nationwide. But 15 years ago, the Evanston physician and Northwestern professor admitted to "rudimentary" chess skills and scant involvement with the game.

That is, until his son's friend at Highland Park's Braeside Elementary caught a Rodman jersey at a Chicago Bulls game.

"[Students] passed it around like some sort of religious artifact," Lipshultz said about the next day's show-and-tell. "I was appalled: Dennis Rodman is a role model for kids?"

Inspired, Lipshultz helped start a chess club at Braeside and devised "Think Like A King" to instruct the club's 50 enthusiasts. Through the software, he aimed to make intellectualism "cool."

Today, the University of Texas at Dallas will present an educator award to Lipshultz at ChessFest, organized annually by McDermott Library and the chess program at the university.

Teaching logical reasoning

"Think Like A King" is not just to train good chess players, but to use chess to develop critical thinking skills," Lipshultz said. "Chess can teach students to reason logically and to find success in thinking."

The company grew rapidly to become the official scholastic software of the United States Chess Federation. But the operation is still run by Lipshultz and his wife, Leslie, out of Highland Park.

"Think Like A King" features interactive tutorials as part of a scholastic chess curriculum. Its lessons, valuable for both formal clubs and novice home players, target specific mental processes that are essential to developing minds.

"That's why I named it 'Think Like A King' instead of 'Play Like A Grandmaster,'" Lipshultz said. "It's about thinking, not just chess."