

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Great Loser to Grandmaster

### Chess Champion tells students his mistakes made him a better player

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BY LISA CRUTCHFIELD, TIMES DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

International chess grandmaster Maurice Ashley has won a lot of matches. His secret to success, however, is losing.

"I'm a great loser," he said.

"When I lose, I learn. I don't cry, whine, pout, curse, blame my friends, say I didn't sleep enough or blame my wife because she was shouting at me that morning.

"You have to be strong, come back, be a fighter. You come back and be better."



He wasn't just talking about chess.

Ashley, 42, was born in Jamaica and grew up in New York City's Brooklyn borough. He learned chess fundamentals from his brother and taught himself the intricacies from books. "I found that chess changed my life, and I wanted to play and play and play. I played against better players, and yes, some of them kicked my butt. But you can't win all the time."

Still, he said, students should dream big and find ways to make those dreams real. "When you wake up every day, you want to be excited about what you do."

Ashley visited four schools in Henrico County yesterday to speak about chess and his career, and to encourage students to live out their dreams.

And, of course, he managed to play dozens of games -- many at the same time.

Dubbed the "Tiger Woods of Chess," Ashley made history in 1999 when he was named the first black International Grandmaster of Chess.

He has traveled the world, made numerous television and radio appearances, designed chess tutorials, written books and served as commentator for various matches, including the 1996 Man vs. Machine (Garry Kasparov vs. Deep Blue) matches and the 1997 rematch.

Not only did he break racial barriers in the chess world, but he also shattered stereotypes of chess players being a bit on the geeky side.

Yesterday at Jacob L. Adams Elementary School in eastern Henrico, he was energetic, enthusiastic and accessible. He talked sports. Students were impressed when he mentioned he had played chess with celebrities including Bill Cosby, Ludacris and Will Smith (whose wife gave him a chess lesson with Ashley as a Valentine's Day present).

"How many of you play chess?" Ashley asked students. About a third of the hands went up. "And how many think you can beat me?" Most hands stayed up.

"Wow. I like confidence. You have to have confidence in yourself," he said.



After the assembly, members of the school's newly formed chess club set up boards for some quick games. The students divided into teams of two and Ashley roamed between them.

"I'm going to beat the master," said Elijah Dickens, 10. He and Justin Hayes, 9, lasted longer than some. But it took Ashley less than 30 minutes to win 13 simultaneous games.

The last team standing was Asia Farrar, 8, and Mekayla Green, 9. "Your king looks pretty suspect here," said Ashley.

"Help me!" implored Asia.

But a few moves later, the girls' fate was sealed.

"Checkmate," said Ashley. "Game over."