

Meridian youngster excels at chess

*Eric Muhr
Staff*

“Neighbors: Coach says Luke Harmon, 5, could be a master of the strategy game.”

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Meridian – Luke Harmon is only 5 years old, but he is already winning trophies at chess tournaments.

And his coach says he could be a master by age 10.

But right now, Luke is not worried about what people think. He just loves to play.

Daniel Vellotti is president of the Idaho Chess Association and Luke’s coach. He said Luke has the potential to really be great.

“He’s different,” Vellotti said. “He’s got this inner drive to play chess, and he’s very competitive. This mix is perfect.”

But Vellotti said he tries not to push too hard because he wants Luke to continue enjoying chess.

“I want to fuel his passion,” Vellotti said. “I want him to go as high as he wants to go. But if he wants to get out of it when he’s 8 years old, I want him to have that right.”

Luke’s mother agreed.

Ava Harmon, Luke’s mom, said she wants Luke to be successful on his own terms.

“We see a lot of parents who really want to win,” Ava said. “That puts too much pressure on kids.”

Ava said the primary benefit of playing chess has been the increase in Luke’s self-confidence.

Being at the tournaments and being able to interact with other kids,” Ava said, “it did give him that sense of confidence.”

Picture: Luke Harmon, 5, shares a fun moment with his chess coach, Daniel Vellotti, at his home recently in Meridian.