

Winter 2025

RANK & FILE

Magazine of the Southern California Chess Federation



Photo courtesy of Irina Nizmutdinova

NM Gordon Xu (University High School) vs Kevin Du (Del Norte High School)

San Diego's High School Team Championship

By Irina Nizmutdinova

SAN DIEGO – The 2nd Annual San Diego Regional High School Team Chess Championship, organized by San Diego Chess Club board members Irina Nizmutdinova and Jonathan Frye, witnessed a significant increase in participation, welcoming teams from across San Diego, North,

South, and East counties, as well as Los Angeles, Orange County, and even Arizona. Building on the success of its inaugural event in May 2024, the tournament expanded its reach, attracting a diverse group of 18 high schools. The field ranged from established high rated chess

teams like University High School from Irvine and Canyon Crest Academy from San Diego to schools fielding teams for the first time. The tournament's popularity was so great that a waiting list formed.

continued on page 10

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**DEADLINE FOR THE Spring 2025 ISSUE IS:
May 31, 2025.**

UPCOMING SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EVENTS

March 28 - 30, 2025

2025 SuperStates

Scholastic & Senior (50+) Championships.

Biltmore Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles

see page 22 for details

May 24 - 26, 2025

45th Annual Lina Grumette Memorial Day Classic

6-SS, 3-day 40/80, SD/30, inc/30 2-day rds. 1-3 G/45, d/10 then merges.

Airtel Plaza Hotel

see page 23 for details

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD

The SCCF Board would like to express its heartfelt condolences to everyone who was impacted by the wildfires that ravaged the LA area early this year.

The Altadena Community Church, home of the San Gabriel Valley Chess Club (SGVCC) since October 2021 burnt down. The fire also destroyed the homes of at least four SGVCC members. The board encourages our membership to visit the club website and support the victims of the terrible Eaton fire.

The SCCF Board would like to welcome GM Andrey Baryshpolets of Ukraine and GM Batchuluun Tsegmed of Mongolia to Southern California. The former tied for first at the Dreaming King open in January this year with IM John Bryant, while the latter tied for first

at the American Open in November also with IM Bryant.

SoCal players continue to rank highly at the major opens. GM Cemil Can Ali Marandi and GM Arman Mikaelyan tied for 2nd-9th place at the North American open in December. FM Bryan Xie and FM Rose Atwell were $\frac{1}{2}$ a point behind sharing 15th-16th place.

SCCF introduced its first inaugural Hall of Fame at the Dreaming King open. IM Cyrus Lakdawala and IA Randall Hough were selected to be the first inductees. SCCF hopes to make this a tradition, inducting people and organizations that made invaluable contributions to chess in Southern California on an annual basis.

The board reminds SCCF

membership of the next big events this year. The Super States end of March at the historic Biltmore hotel in downtown LA and our Memorial Day Classic in Van Nuys end of May. The MDC will be a qualifier to SCCF state championship invitational. The Super States winners will represent SCCF in the 2025 national tournament of state champions in Wisconsin starting July 28th. Our state champions performed very well last year, and the board is confident that the new champions will do even better this summer.

Our Rank & File editor has put together another exquisite issue. We hope you enjoy it, and that you send us constructive feedback on how to improve.

Sincerely,
The SCCF Board

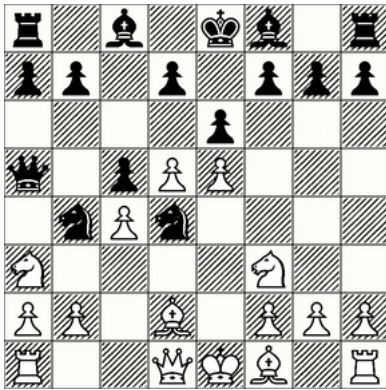


Tactical Slugfest

1. Owen Durby (1868) - Robert Klein (1864)

2024 American Open

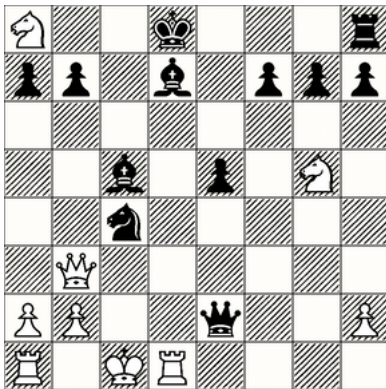
Black to move.



2. Linus Eisenberg (1888) - Max Chang (1701)

2024 American Open

White to move.



3. Julian Colville (2301) - Gordon Xu (2185)

2025 Dreaming King Open

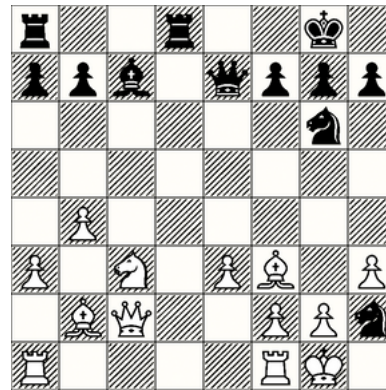
White to move. Take the initiative.



4. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

2025 Dreaming King Open

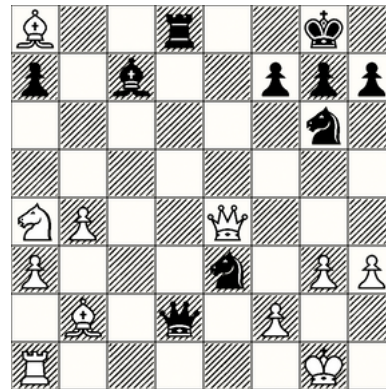
White to move. What is the evaluation?



5. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

2025 Dreaming King Open

Black to move.



6. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

2025 Dreaming King Open

Black to move.



Solutions are on p.23

2024 American Open: IM John D. Bryant

By IM John D. Bryant

IM John D. Bryant (2405)
GM Cemil Can Marandi (2513)
2024 Am Open (7), 1-0

1. e4 {Marandi was leading the tournament by a half point, so I had extra motivation to win.} 1...e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 g6!? {This was a surprise already.} 4. d4 exd4 5. Bg5 Be7 6. Bf4?!

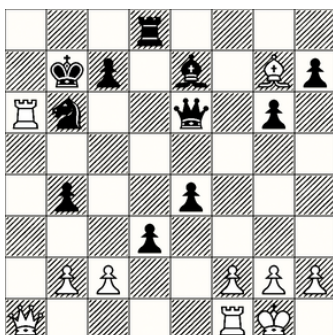


{I spent a lot of time on this move. I knew that White can claim a tiny edge after 6. Bxe7 Qxe7 7. Bxc6 dxc6 8. Qxd4, but I didn't think my winning chances would be that high, so I chose a riskier move. The other move I considered was h4.} 6...a6 7. Ba4 Nf6 8. e5 Nd5 9. Bh6 Nb6 10. Bb3 d6 11. exd6 Qxd6 12. Nbd2! {I thought this was smart since I can't create as many threats if I spend time castling first.}

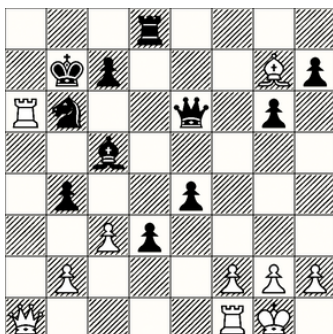


12...Be6 13. Ne4! Qd7 14. O-O Bxb3 15. axb3 O-O-O? {This is too hasty. Instead 15...Rg8! +/- lets Black keep all of his advantages by preventing Bg7 and threatening g5.} 16. Bg7 f5!? {He must have been counting on this move when he castled. I didn't see this

at all. I thought Rhg8 or Rhe8 were forced. After Nf6 the position would be balanced.} 17. Bxh8 fxe4 18. Ne5 Qe6 19. Nxc6 bxc6 20. Bg7 c5 21. b4 {The idea is to meet Rg8 with Bxd4 later.} 21...cxb4 22. Rxa6 Kb7 23. Qa1 d3!



{The position from the time he sacrificed the exchange to now has been equal because Black has this passed pawn to compensate for the material deficit.} 24. c3 {After I spent a lot of time, I made this absurd move which allows him a protected passer. I thought it was more important that I be able to put my bishop on d4.} 24...Bc5 -/+

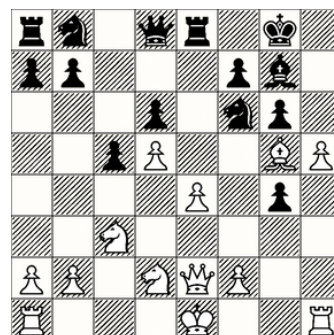


25. cxb4 {I followed up 24...Bc5 with this move which should be losing but...} 25...Bxb4? {it actually won me the game! For some reason I didn't think 25... Bxf2+!! worked, and he thought the same. Stockfish says it's completely winning. After 25...Bxb4, I was in the driver's seat for the rest of the game.} 26. Ra7+ Kb8 27. Bh6 {Since his bishop left e7, he can't block my bishop with g5 anymore, so

my bishop greatly improves.} 27...d2 28. Bf4 Rd7 29. Qa6 {It was important to wait for his rook to block his queen so he can't repel my attack with Qc8.} 29...Qc6 30. Rd1 Rf7? {He was starting to get a little low on time like I was. This was the last mistake. He needed to play 30...Bc5 to slow down my attack and stay in the game.} 31. Be3+- Rf5 32. Bxb6 cxb6 33. Rxh7 Rf8 34. h3 {Safety first. Once my king is safe, I can unleash all of my pieces on his king.} 34...e3 35. fxe3 Be5 36. Kh1 Bxe3 37. Qa7+ Kc8 38. Qa6+ Kb8 39. b4! {I repeated once before time control before I found the winning move.} 39...Re8 40. Qa7+ Kc8 41. b5 Bf4 42. Qa6+ {I have to play here before taking the queen. Watchout for backrank mate!} 42...Kb8 43. bxc6 Re1+ 44. Qf1 Rxf1+ 45. Rxf1 1-0

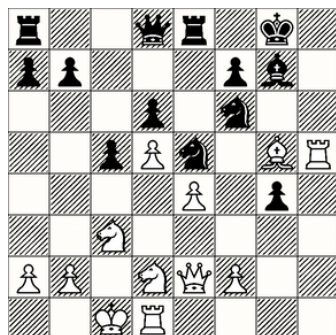
IM Sandeep Sethuraman (2411)
IM John D. Bryant (2405)
2024 Am Open (8), 0-1

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 {He usually fianchettoes against the KID, so it was already obvious that he had aggressive intentions. I was ahead of him by a half point.} 5. Be2 O-O 6. h4!? {I see, so this is what he prepared.} 6...c5 7. d5 h5 8. Nf3 e6 9. Bg5 exd5 10. cxd5 Bg4 {It's a typical idea in Benoni structures to rid yourself of the light squared bishop which is bad.} 11. Nd2 Bxe2 12. Qxe2 Re8 13. g4!? {Wow!} 13...hgxg4 14. h5

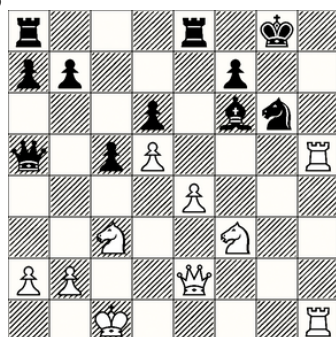


14...gxh5?! {I thought my g4 pawn would keep my king safe and the alternative looked bad. But 14...Nbd7! was best and after 15. h6 Bf8! Black is fine. I saw 15. h6 Bh8 16. h7+ +/- and got scared.}

15. Rxh5 Nbd7 16. O-O-O Ne5

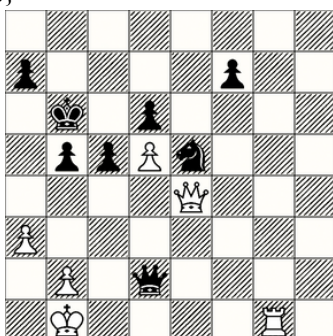


17. Rdh1 (17. f4?! Nxh5! 18. Bxd8 Nxf4 {The knight is untouchable and Black emerges with a rook, bishop, and 2 pawns for the queen. Funny enough, Stockfish still gives White an edge, but I think Black has the advantage in a practical human game.}) **17...Qa5** {I spent a lot of time on this move. The main idea is to try to trade queens with Qa6. Of course, b5 could also be an idea.} **18. Bxf6 Bxf6 19. f4** (19. Rf5! +- {The idea is to follow up with Ng5 later and Black's position folds.}) **19... gxf3 20. Nxf3 Ng6**



21. e5? {This seems like a very sensible move to continue the attack with Ne4, but it gives up all of his advantage.} (21. Rf5 {This doesn't work anymore.} Bxc3) (21. Qc2!! +- {This hard to find move is winning. Nc3 is defended, and after playing e5 later, his queen can assist on h7 for a finishing blow.}) **21...Bxe5!** {I considered dxe5, but it

seemed fairly obvious that I should prefer to trade some pieces off in order to reduce the danger to my king.} **22. Nxe5 Rxe5 23. Qg4 Rxh5 24. Qxh5 Re8 25. Qh7+ Kf8 26. Rf1** {He could have made a draw with 26. Qh6+, so I was very happy to see this move, and from here on I thought I would win.} **26...Ne5** {My knight shines brilliantly. I think it blinded him.} **27. Ne4 Qa6 28. Qh6+ Ke7 29. Qh4+ Kd7 30. Nf6+ Kd8 31. Nxe8+ Kxe8 32. Rg1** {He offered me a draw here, and I instantly declined. Although this is a draw for computers, it seems nearly impossible to save the game for White for a human.} **32...Kd7** {Getting out of check in advance. If Rg8 now, Qf1+ and mate soon follows.} **33. Qh3+ Kc7 34. Kb1 Qe2** {I'm trying to win the d5 pawn or play Nd3/c4.} **35. Qf5 Qd2 36. Qe4 b5?!** {I was debating between this and 36...Kb6! which Stockfish prefers. I figured that my pawns would generate attacking chances against his king and promotion chances if we traded queens.} **37. a3 Kb6** {Now Nd3 is a threat since he can't check me with Qe7.}



38. Rg2?? {Like me he was also low on time. Stockfish claims that 38. Ka1 holds a draw since he can defend b2 with Rb1, and apparently give a perpetual if I try to push my pawns. Even that position still seems nearly impossible to hold to me.} **38...Qd1+ 39. Ka2 f5!** {Here, his hopes were crushed as I collected a third pawn.} **40. Qc2 Qxd5+ 41. Ka1 Nd3 42. Rg5 Qe4 43. Qc3??** {Whoops! This speeds

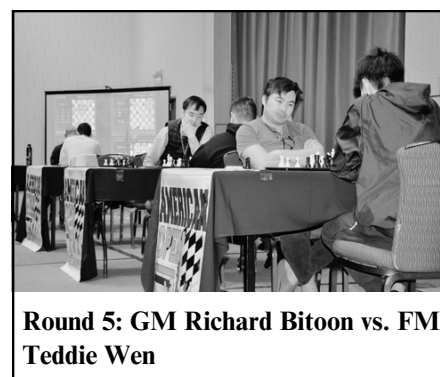
up the loss of the game, although he had already given up once he lost the third pawn.} **43...Qh1+ 0-1**



American Open winner IM John Bryant (left) and Organizer Alfredo Ong (right).



American Open winner GM Batchuluun Tsegmed (left) and Alfredo Ong (right).



Round 5: GM Richard Bitoon vs. FM Teddie Wen

Even World Champions Blunder

By IM Jack Peters

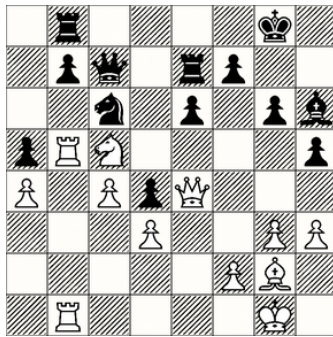
GM Gukesh Dommaraju

GM Ding Liren

World Championship 2024, 11

Poor Ding Liren! He lost a close match by making outright blunders in two games.

The first occurred in the 11 th game of the match.



Ding was under pressure and had to give up his extra pawn. However, 28...Nb4 29. Nxb7 Bf8 would hold White to a small advantage.

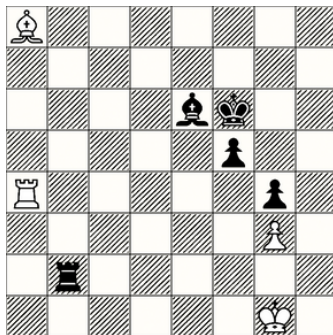
But he chose **28...Qc8??** and resigned after White won a piece by **29. Qxc6**.

GM Gukesh Dommaraju

GM Ding Liren

FIDE World Championship 2024, 14

The second blunder was worse. In the final game of the match, the players reached a clearly drawn endgame.



Gukesh had maneuvered for more than 20 moves without managing to create a single troublesome threat. He cannot exploit his extra pawn, and trading the rooks or bishops only makes the draw more evident.



Photo courtesy of Eng Chin An
Gukesh D. (left) vs Ding Liren (right)

Ding played **54. Rf4 Ke5 55. Rf2?? Rxf2 56. Kxf2**, overlooking that Black could also trade bishops with **56...Bd5**. After **57. Bxd5 Kxd5 58. Ke3 Ke5**, he resigned.

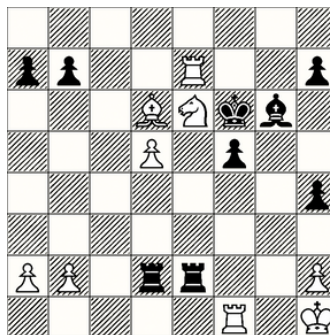
I was surprised that Ding did not continue the game with 59. Kd3 f4 60. Ke2, giving Black a chance to go wrong by 60...fxg3?? 61. Kf1, drawing. Even the correct continuation, 60...f3+ 61. Ke3 Kd5 62. Kf2 Ke4 63. Kf1, poses one more puzzle. Black cannot win by merely maneuvering his king. He must make f3 available by the pawn sacrifice 63...f2! 64. Kxf2 Kd3, enabling his king to win White's last pawn.

This is not the first time a world championship match ended abruptly because of a blunder. Consider game #23 of the Mikhail Chigorin – William Steinitz match in 1893.

GM Mikhail Chigorin

GM William Steinitz

World Championship 1893, 23



Steinitz led 9-8 in a match to 10 wins. But Chigorin was poised to tie the

score, with an extra knight against a worthless doubled pawn. Black's rooks are powerfully placed, and he can dream of getting his bishop to e4 or f3. Nevertheless, White can clinch victory by 32. Rxb7, anticipating 32... Bh5 33. Rb3, or 32...f4 33. Nxf4! Rxb2+ 34. Kg1, or 32...Rxe6 33. dxe6 33...Rxd6 34. e7 a6 35. Re1.

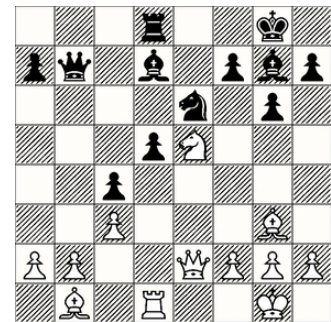
Chigorin turned a win into a loss by **32. Bb4?? Rxb2+**, White Resigns. I regard 32. Bb4?? as the worst move in world championship history.

In the next example, Steinitz is the victim, rather than the beneficiary, of self-inflicted catastrophe.

GM William Steinitz

GM Johannes Zuckertort

World Championship 1886, 4



With correct play, chances are even. Steinitz saw a clever idea, **36. Qf3?! Be8 37. Nxc4??**, trying to use the pin on the a8-h1 diagonal. Zukertort's reply, **37...dxc4**, invited 38. Qxb7 Rxd1#. White set one last trap with **38. Rxd8**, hoping for 38...Qxf3?? 39. Rxe8+, but Zukertort chose **39... Nxd8**, White Resigned. He overcame this embarrassment by winning the match handily, 10-5 with five draws.



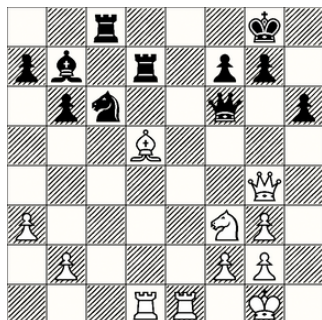
Johannes Zuckertort (left) vs William Steinitz (right)

Overlooking the back rank is rare amongst world champions, but even Anatoly Karpov fell to this same fate.



Photo courtesy of Chessbase
Gary Kasparov (left) vs Anatoly Karpov (right)

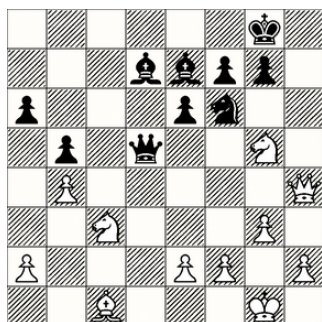
GM Gary Kasparov
GM Anatoly Karpov
 World Championship 1985, 11



White has no more than a tiny edge after 22...Rd6 or 22...Rdd8. But Karpov blundered with **22...Rcd8??**, allowing **23. Qxd7! Rxd7 24. Re8+ Kh7 25. Be4+**. Black resigned because he must lose another piece. After 25...g6 **26. Rxd7 Ba6 27. Bxc6**, the finish could be **27...Qxc6? 28. Rxf7#**.

Sometimes both players overlook a decisive idea.

GM Alexander Alekhine
GM Max Euwe
 World Championship 1937, 16



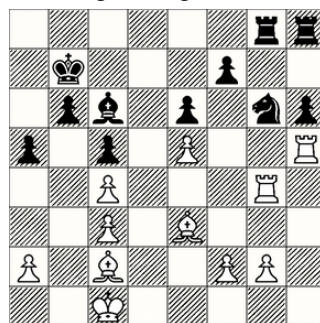
In this position from the 16th game of the 1937 Alexander Alekhine – Max Euwe match, Black has adequate compensation for White's extra pawn after 25...Qc6, 25...Qd6, or 25...Qf5. The game continued **25...Qe5?? 26. Bb2?? Bc6?? 27. a3?? Bd6 28. e3 Qf5**, finishing in a draw at move 65. Neither player noticed the possibility of **26. Qh8+!** or **27. Qh8+!**, which would have won for White.



Max Euwe (left) vs Alexander Alekhine (right)

Magnus Carlsen and Viswanathan Anand shared a similar moment of chess blindness in their 2014 match.

GM Magnus Carlsen
GM Viswanathan Anand
 World Championship 2014, 6



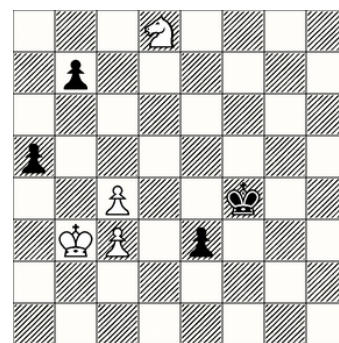
Black's h-pawn is doomed. Magnus saw White's correct plan of bringing his king to protect g2 before capturing on h6. But he started with **26. Kd2??**, giving Black the chance to gain material by **26...Nxe5! 27. Rxc4 Nxc4+ 28. Kd3 Nb2+**. Anand missed it and eventually lost after **26...a4?? 27. Ke2 a3 28. f3**.

Perhaps the strangest blunder was committed by David Bronstein.



Photo courtesy of Mike Klein
Magnus Carlsen (right) vs Viswanathan Anand (left)

GM David Bronstein
GM Mikhail Botvinnik
 World Championship 1951, 6



Bronstein wrote that he knew a draw was inevitable. He sat at the board for 45 minutes, thinking about what opening he would play in the next game of the match. When he realized that he was running short of time, he hastily played **57. Kc2??** instead of the correct **57. Ne6+ Kg3 58. Nd4 Kf2 59. Ka4 e2 60. Nxe2**, which draws. Botvinnik met **57. Kc2??** with **57...Kg3!**, and White resigned.

Bronstein also wrote that he was not too distressed by this loss of a half-point until all his friends tried to console him. Then he lost the following game too.



David Bronstein (right) vs Mikhail Botvinnik (left)

San Diego's High School Team Championship

Draws Teams from Across SoCal and Beyond

By Irina Nizmutdinova

...Continued from Cover

The event attracted a diverse range of players, including a notable collection of top-tier talent. Among them were International Master Ming Lu, FIDE Masters Sihan Tao and Isaac Wang, National Masters Taiwei Wu, Sepehr Golsefidy, Gordon Xu, Andrew Wang, and Vedant Maheshwari, and Candidate Masters Roger Shi and Tori Porat. While these accomplished players contributed to the tournament's competitive atmosphere, the event also warmly welcomed and embraced numerous unrated players.

The championship's success was fueled by the dedicated support of students, teachers, advisors, and parents.

Student Leadership Key to Growth:

While experienced players like FM Sihan Tao (University High School Irvine), IM Ming Lu (Scripps Ranch High School), NM Vedant Maheshwari (Westview High School) and CM Roger Shi (Canyon Crest Academy) provided guidance, student leadership was crucial in forming and motivating teams. Students like Alfonso Sanchez (South Bay Independent Study), Thomas Mitchell and Lorenzo Antonio (Mission Hills High School), and Christian Burns and Vinson Nguyen (Eastlake High School) demonstrated remarkable dedication in recruiting teammates and fostering team spirit. Returning leaders Kathryn Mokhov (Patrick Henry High School) and Ethan Huynh (Fountain Valley High School) continued their commitment to their respective teams.

San Diego Chess Club president Chuck Ensey and Southern California Chess Federation President Alaa Moussa also attended, demonstrating their support for the teenage chess players.



Warren Zhang (San Marino High School) vs Shane Sitaram (Canyon Crest Academy).

The Championship opened with several key matchups, including a highly anticipated contest between perennial powerhouses University High School Irvine and Canyon Crest Academy, as well as a notable pairing between San Marino High School and Westview High School. 1st round

streaming coverage highlighted select top board matches, such as FM Sihan Tao (University High School Irvine) vs. David Liu (Canyon Crest Academy) and Warren Zhang (San Marino High) vs. NM Vedant Maheshwari (Westview High School).



University High School Irvine vs Paloma Valley High School, and Canyon Crest Academy vs San Marino High School.

After five rounds, University High School Irvine emerged as the victor, posting a perfect 5-0 record. Canyon Crest Academy finished second with 4 points. Del Norte High School claimed third place with 3.5 points out of 5, while San Marino High School took fourth with 3 points. Westview High School also earned 3 points but finished fifth due to tiebreakers.

3rd Place Team: Del Norte High School (San Diego County)



Jacob Gelle, Aarav Sonara, Harrish Ahilan, Zoe He, Kevin Du, Manasvi Macha. Team lead: Kevin Du

4th Place Team: San Marino High School (Los Angeles County)



Evan Lew, Andersen Yang, Charlie McDermott, Adelynn Yang, Warren Zhang. Team lead: Warren Zhang

1st Place Team: University High School Irvine (Orange County)



(from left to right) NM Gordon Xu, Brian Lantz, FM Sihan Tao, Alan Yang, CM Tori Porat, NM Taiwei Wu. Team lead: FM Sihan Tao.

2nd Place Team: Canyon Crest Academy (San Diego County)



(from left to right) CM Roger Shi, NM Sepehr Golsefidy, David Liu, Tan Vu, Nathan Guo, Shane Sitaram. Team lead: CM Roger Shi

Dreaming King Open 2025

By Chuck Ensey

There were 202 players this year (including 7 re-entries) over the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, a turnout that was down from the last few years, so a bit disappointing but understandable due to the horrible fires that have recently ravaged the LA area. The event was held at the Sonesta LAX hotel which has been remodeled and received very good reviews from almost all the players. The ballroom is spacious and so were the two large skittles rooms, where relatives of the players hung out along with those who had finished their games. The long hallway leading to main ballroom was kept empty which helped keep the noise down to a minimum. The overall conditions were the best of any event I have ever been to: there was good lighting, lots of space, good TDs, rounds started on time and there were decent restaurants in the hotel along with a few fast-food ones within a short drive.

We plan to be there next January too, so I hope we can get better attendance to make this event as big as it really should be (250 to 300?). We had 15 withdrawals which is about normal; there are always some players who get sick just before the event (flu season?) or have some other problems to keep them from playing. 81 players opted for the 2-day option where they had to play 3 fast games on Sunday at G/40 with 5 second delay before merging with the 3-day players in round 4 at 4:30 to play the rest of the games at G/100 with 30 second increment. We had 3 GMs: Baryshpolets (2634), Mikaelyan (2570) and Tsegmed (2538), plus IM (Bryant, 2527, who is really GM strength). GM Khachiyan unfortunately had to withdraw at the last minute so we missed him, he is a frequent participant in many of the big events in Southern California.

The Elite Section was the largest of the 7 sections with 45 players, and to be in this section you had to be rated at least 2000, with NO exceptions - no "playing up" allowed, hence the name Elite instead of Open. The U2100 Section had 41 players. We also had a rule that you had to be at least 400 points from the top of the section, so for instance at 1300 player could not play in the U1700 section unless they paid a \$100 "play up fee". Most players do not want to play someone who is that much lower rated because they gain practically nothing for beating them as far as rating points are concerned, but if they should happen to lose (or even draw) it could really hurt their rating. I believe almost everyone is in favor of this rule. There were no restrictions for playing up in the U1300 section since players here are often under-rated. The U1100 section was unusually small with only 12 players, last year we had over 40 there; usually we are packed with beginners in that section. The bottom two sections also had lower entry fees right up until the day of the event, but that didn't seem to be enough to entice them this year, probably we can blame the rampant fires again.

Here are the well-deserved prize winners for this tough 6-round event:

Elite Section:

1st/2nd Place: GM Andrey Baryshpolets (5) and IM John Bryant (5), \$1,950 each; 3rd/4th Place: FM Tommy Wen (4½) and GM Arman Mikaelyan (4½), \$900 each; 5th/6th Place: FM Bryan Xie (4) and FM Mikayel Rostomyan (4), \$350 each; 1st/2nd U2300 and 7th Place: a 5-way pooled prize for players with 4 points for \$360 each: FM Carlos Varela, FM Eugene Yanayt, Pearson Hong, Alaa-Addin Moussa and Felix Guo.

U2100 Section:

1st Place: Seryozha Gasparyan (5), \$1,200; 2nd/3rd/4th Place: Gavin Tjipto (4½), Matthew Shuben (4½) and Nathan Weber (4½), \$400 each.

U1900 Section:

1st Place: Jack Fang (5), \$1,200; 2nd Place: JC Abadesco (4½), \$600; 3rd/4th Place: a 5-way tie between players with 4 points for \$120 each: Ryuta Nunez, Jose Cardiel, Gagik Grigoryan, Marc Bronshtein and Edira Xiao.

U1700 Section:

1st Place: Hector Ginete (5½), \$1,200; 2nd/3rd/4th Place: Owen Kozinski (4½), Tony Chen (4½) and Aryan Ali (4½), \$400 each.

U1500 Section:

1st/2nd Place: Adriel Macaspac (4½), \$800 and Daniel Cardiel (4½), \$400 (reduced 50% due to a provisional rating based on only 9 games); 3rd/4th Place: Wenyi Yang (4), Joshua Levin (4) and Aidan Boyd (4), \$333 each.

U1300 Section:

1st Place: Tony Chen (5), rated 1289 provisionally with 9 games (not the same Tony Chen as in the U1700 Section), \$300 (reduced 50%); 2nd/3rd Place: Mike Rores (4½) and Teo Kashper (4½), \$350 each; 4th Place: Justin Pang (4), Logan Kim (4) and Vivaan Varma (4), \$66 each.

U1100 Section:

1st/2nd Place: Kenneth Preston III (5) and Frank Zhang (5), \$450 each; 3rd Place: Emmanuel Vassilakis (4), \$200; 4th Place: Leonardo Lien (3½), \$75 and Jon Lycett (3½), \$25 (reduced 50%, prov. rating).

Chuck Ensey, organizer

FM Carlos Varela of Tijuana, Mexico upset IM Bryant in round 3 of the 2-day schedule on his way to a tie for best U2300.

FM Carlos Varela (2254)

IM John D. Bryant (2527)

2025 Dreaming King Open (3), 1-0

1.Nf3 c5 2.e4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 Nbd7 7.f4 Qc7 8.Qf3 b5 9.0-0 Bb7 10.Bxf6 Nxf6 11.g4 e6 12.g5 b4 13.Ncb5 axb5 14.gxf6 gxf6 15.Bxb5+ Ke7 16.Qh5 Rxa2 17. Kb1 Ra8 18.Rhe1 Bg7 19.e5 fxe5 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.Rf1 exd4 22.Rxf7+ Kd6 23.Rxc7 Kxc7 24.Qc5+ Kb8 25.Qb6 Ra7 26.Qd6+ Ka8 27.Rg1 Bf6 28.Qxe6 Bd8 Rg8 1-0

DKO winner IM John D. Bryant shares two of his games.

FM Eugene Yanayt (2200)

IM John D. Bryant (2527)

2025 Dreaming King Open (5), 0-1

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Bb4+ 4. Nbd2 d6 {This move is only played 3% of the time in the master database. The idea is to play e5 to fight for the center, and keep a closed structure in the event he forces me to give him the bishop pair with a3.} 5. e3 c5?! {Well, since he didn't take the bishop pair, I don't see why I should allow him to now.} 6. Bd3 Nc6 7. a3 Ba5 8. O-O O-O 9. Nb3? {This places the knight on a useless and vulnerable square, as well as blocks b3-Bb2.} (9. Qc2!) 9...Bb6 10. d5? {This seemed to me like he was lashing out in an attempt to justify Nb3, which he must have realized was a mistake.} 10...exd5 11. cxd5 Nxd5 12. Bxh7+ Kxh7 13. Qxd5 Kg8 -+ {Since I can easily parry his "attack" with Bf5, I simply have 2 bishops, a bigger center, and a more harmonious position.} 14. Ng5 Ne7 15. Qd3 Bf5 16. e4 Bg6 17. Rd1 (17. Be3! {At least this prevents Black from getting rid of his only weakness with d6-d5.}) 17...d5 18. Qh3 Qc8 19. Be3 {My pawn was untouchable due to Be2.}

19...Rd8 20. Rac1 d4 21. Bf4 Qxh3 22. Nxb3 Rac8 23. Nd2 f6 24. Nc4 Bc7 25. f3 b5 26. Bxc7 Rxc7 27. Na5 c4 28. Nf4 Bf7 29. Nd5 Nxd5 30. Rxd4 Rcd7 31. exd5 Rxd5 32. Rxd5 Rxd5 {Since we have a position where passed pawns will be created on both sides, the bishop is a lot better than the knight. Moreover, his knight might get trapped here, and my rook is more active than his.} 33. Nc6 Rd2 34. Nxa7 Be8?! {I thought I could trap his knight here, but since he has a way out, simply Rxb2 was stronger.} 35. Ne8 Kf8 36. a4! {I overlooked this rescue operation.} 36...bxa4 37. Nb6 Rxb2 38. Nxc4 Rb3 39. h3? {This is actually a significant error, since he placed his pawn on the same color of my bishop. With h4!, he maintained a small hope of saving the game. Now, it's hopeless.} 39...Bb5 40. Nd6 Bd3 41. Re1 Rb1! {Rooks are drawish pieces, so let's trade them off. As you will see, my king reaches my pawn faster than he does as well.} 42. Rxb1 Bxb1 43. Nc4 Bd3 44. Na3 Ke7 45. Kf2 Kd6 46. Ke3 Bf1 47. Kf2 Ba6 48. Ke3 Kc5 49. h4 Kb4 50. Nb1 Kb3 51. Kd2 Kb2 52. Nc3 a3 53. g4 Be2! {The nail in the coffin. Not a2?? which is a draw!} 54. g5 fxg5 55. hxg5 Bxf3 56. Kd3 a2 0-1

IM John D. Bryant (2527)

FM Mikayel Rostomyan (2372)

2025 Dreaming King Open (6), 1-0

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6!? {I thought he played the Sveshnikov with Nc6, so this was a surprise already.} 3. g3 d5 4. exd5 exd5 5. d4 Nc6 6. Bg2 Bg4 7. h3 {O-O is more common} 7...Bxf3 8. Qxf3 Nxd4 9. Qd3 Nf6 10. Nc3 Be7 11. O-O O-O 12. Bg5 Nc6 13. Bxf6 Bxf6 14. Nxd5 +/- {White has the initiative, a better knight, and a better bishop.} 14...Nb4 15. Nxf6+ Qxf6 16. Qc4 Qb6 17. Rad1 Rad8 18. c3 (18. Rxd8! Rxd8 19. Re1 +- {Re7 will be decisive. Black can play Kf8, but then the h7 pawn becomes undefended.})

18...Nc6 19. b3 Qa5 20. a4? {I lost my initiative with all the pawn moves. Now, my only advantage is the superiority of my bishop over his knight.} (20. Rxd8!)

20...Ne5 21. Qb5 Qxc3 22. Qxb7 Qa5? {Too defensive. He needs to play more actively to fight the long term advantage of my bishop over his knight.} 23. Rfe1? {I lose nearly all of my advantage with this.} (23. Rxd8 Rxd8 24. f4!! +- {Followed by Bd5 or Rd1 leaves Black hopeless.})

23...Rxd1? 24. Rxd1 c4 {He could have done this without giving up the d-file. Now we will see the consequences.} 25. Qd5! Qc3 26. bxc4 Nxc4 27. Qc5 +- Qb3 28. Rd4 Na3 {Desperation. 28...Nb6 29. a5 Nc8 30. Rd7 was similarly hopeless.} 29. Bd5 Qb6 {Defends against Rd8. Otherwise Bxf7+!! wins.} 30. Qxb6 axb6 31. Rb4 Rb8 32. a5 Nc2 33. Rb2 1-0

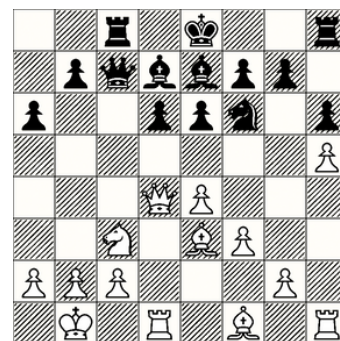
DKO winner GM Baryshpolets also shares his game.

FM Bryan Xie (2395)

GM Andrey Baryshpolets (2634)

2025 Dreaming King Open (6), 0-1

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Bg5 e6 7. Qd2 a6 8. O-O-O Bd7 9. Kb1!? ({more common are 9. f4 and 9. f3 Be7 10. h4}) 9...Be7 10. f3 Nxd4 11. Qxd4 Rc8 12. h4 Qc7 13. h5!? ({perhaps more dangerous was 13. Qd2 or 13. g4}) 13...h6 14. Be3

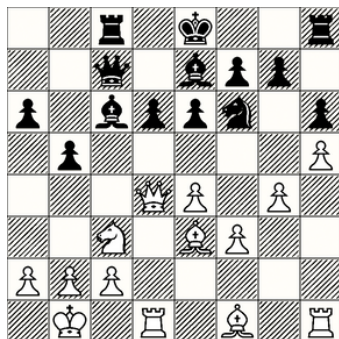


14...b5

{Better was 14...Bc6 preparing to meet g4 with d5. Black is fine after 15. g4 (15. Qd2 b5 ∞) 15...d5 16. g5 hxg5

17. Bxg5 e5 18. Qf2 d4 19. Bxf6 Bxf6 20. Nd5 Bxd5 21. exd5 =)

15. g4 e5? {here it is a serious mistake. It was necessary to play Bc6 first} (15...Bc6



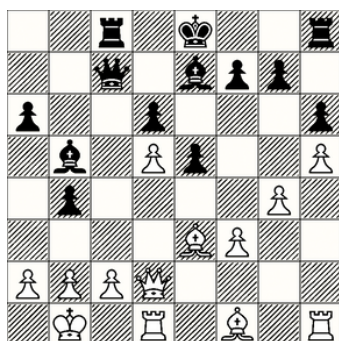
16. Be2

(16. g5 hxg5 17. Bxg5 Rxh5 18. Rxh5 Nxh5 =/+)

(16. Qd2? b4 17. Ne2 Nxe4! 18. fxe4 Bxe4 -/+)

16...e5 17. Qb6 (17. Qd2 b4 18. Nd5 Nxd5 19. exd5 Bxd5 =/+) 17...Qxb6 18. Bxb6 b4 19. Nd5 Nxd5 20. exd5 Rb8 21. dxc6 Rxb6 =)

16. Qd2 ({White also has a better endgame after} 16. Qb6 Qxb6 17. Bxb6 Rc6 18. Ba5 Bd8 19. Bb4 Ke7 20. a4 bxa4 21. Nxa4 Bc7 +/-) **16...b4** **17. Nd5** (17. Ne2 Be6 (17... O-O!?) 18. Ng3 d5 19. g5 ♗ {with sharp play}) **17...Nxd5** **18. exd5 Bb5**



19. Bh3

({I was hoping for} 19. Bxb5+ axb5 {which gives Black some chances on the queenside} 20. Rc1 (20. Rh2!?) 20...Qc4 (20...Qa5 21. a3 Rc4 ({Black has a nice resource} 21...Qa8! 22. Qxb4 Qxd5 23. Rhd1 Qc4 24. Qxc4 bxc4 ∞) 22. b3 Rc8 (22...Rc3 23. axb4 Qxb4 24. Kb2 Bf6 {I calculated this line during the game and thought

that Black was fine here. However, I missed that after} 25. Qxc3! e4 26. Qxf6 gxf6 27. Ra1! +- {threatens c3} exf3 28. Ra8+ Kd7 29. Rxh8 {with decisive material advantage})

23. Qxb4 Qxb4 24. axb4 Rc3 25. Rce1 O-O +/-) 21. b3 Qc3 {with unclear game})

({Black is in trouble after} 19. Rg1!? Bxf1 20. Rdxfl Bg5 21. Bxg5 hxg5 22. Rc1 +/-)

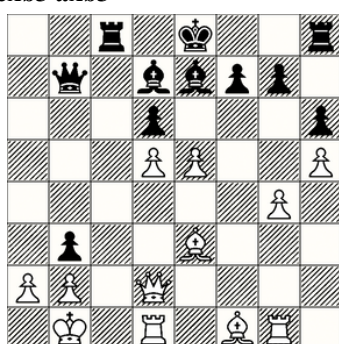
({or} 19. f4 exf4 20. Bxf4 O-O 21. Rg1 Bxf1 22. Rdxfl Bg5 23. Bxg5 hxg5 24. Rc1 +/-)

19...Bd7

(19... Rb8 20. f4 →)

({It was necessary to sacrifice a pawn to stop White's attack on the kingside} 19...Bg5! 20. Bxg5 hxg5 21. Rc1 f6 22. Qxb4 Bc4 23. Rhd1 a5 24. Qa4+ Ke7 25. Bf1 Bxf1 26. Rxf1 Qc4 +/- {and White is only slightly better.})

20. Bf1 (20. f4 exf4 21. Bxf4 O-O 22. Rdg1 Rfe8 23. Bf1 Bf6 24. Bd3 Bc3! ∞) **20...Qb7** {I did not want to repeat the position and decided to take more risk.} **21. Rg1 a5** **22. f4 a4** **23. fxe5 b3** **24. cxb3 axb3**



25. a3

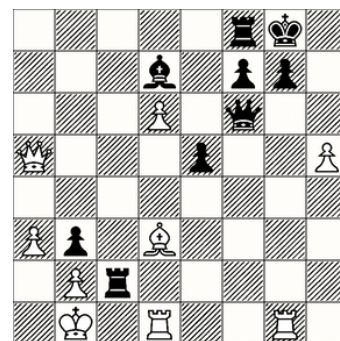
(25. exd6 Bxd6 (25...bxa2+ 26. Ka1 Bxd6 27. Bd4 f6 28. Qe3+ Kf7 29. Qe4 +-) 26. Bf4 O-O 27. Bxd6 Qa7 28. axb3 Qxg1 29. Bxf8 Rxf8 30. Bb5 Qxg4 31. Bxd7 Qxd7 32. d6 +/-) (25. e6 fxe6 26. Bd3 O-O 27. g5 hxg5 28. a3 +/-)

25...dxe5 **26. d6 Rc2** **27. Qa5**

(27. Qd5 Qxd5 28. Rxd5 Bf6 29. Rc5! Rxc5 30. Bxc5 O-O 31. Bd3 +/-) (27. Qb4 Qxb4 28. axb4 Bg5 ♗)

(27. dxe7!! {gives a forcing win} Rxd2 28. Bxd2 Kxe7 29. Bb4+ Kd8 30. Bg2 (30. Rg3!?) 30...e4 31. Rd4 Re8 32. Ba5+ Kc8 33. Rc1+ Kb8 34. Rb4 Qxb4 35. Bxb4 Bxg4 36. Rc3 f5 37. Rxb3 +-)

27...Bf6 (27...Qe4 28. Bd3 Qxe3 29. dxe7 Kxe7 30. Rge1 Qd4 31. Qxe5+ Qxe5 32. Rxe5+ Kf6 33. Rd5 Rc7 34. Bf5 Bc6 35. Rd6+ Ke5 36. R6d3 Rb8 +/-) **28. g5 hxg5** **29. Bxg5 Qf3** **30. Bd3 O-O** ({Better was} 30...Rg2 31. Rgf1 Rf2 32. Rfe1 (32. Bxf6 Qxd3+ 33. Ka1 O-O 34. Rg1 Rg2 35. Bxe5 Rxg1 36. Rxg1 f6 37. Bc3 ∞) 32...O-O 33. Bxf6 Qxf6 34. Qxe5 Bg4 +/-) **31. Bxf6 Qxf6**



32. h6?! ⊕

({It was better to begin with} 32. Rgf1! Rf2 (32...Qg5 33. Qb4 +/-) 33. Rxf2 Qxf2 34. Qxe5 Qf3 35. Qe2 Qxe2 36. Bxe2 Rd8 +/-) (32. Bxc2? bxc2+ 33. Kxc2 Qf5+ -+ (33...Bf5+ 34. Kd2 Qh6+ 35. Ke2 Qxh5+ -+))

32...g6? ⊕ (32... e4! 33. Bxc2 bxc2+ 34. Kxc2 Rb8 35. b4 ∞ {with a sharp position and mutual chances}) **33. Rgf1 Qxd6** **34. Bf5??** {White makes a decisive mistake in mutual time-trouble}

(34. Bb5? Qc5 35. Rxd7 Rxb2+ -+) (34. Be4 ∞)

(34. Bc4!! +- {was winning for White} Qe7 35. Rxd7! Qxd7 36. Qxe5 {and checkmate on g7 is unavoidable}) **34...Rf2** (34...Bxf5 {was also simple enough} 35. Rxd6 Rf2+ 36. Kc1 Rc8+ 37. Kd1 Bg4+ 38. Ke1 Re2+ 39. Kd1 Rh2+ -+)

35. h7+ Kg7 **36. Be4 Qd4** **0-1**

Lessons from the World School Chess Championship in Peru: My Journey to Growth

By NM Felix Guo

The World School Championship in Peru was one of the toughest tournaments I had ever played: a grueling nine-round battle against some of the best young players in the world. As one of only six players representing the USA, I felt both immense pride and pressure. Wearing my country's colors, I wanted to prove myself.

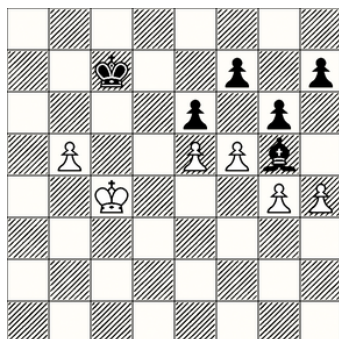
Beyond the chessboard, I had an unexpected moment—local media interviewed me and my mom, asking about my journey, my training, and what it meant to represent the USA. It was exciting, but I knew my real story would be written over the board. Coming in as one of the top-seeded players, I had high hopes. I believed in my skills, but what I didn't realize was how much this tournament would teach me: not just about chess, but about resilience, decision-making, and mental strength.

A Strong Start, A Tough Reality Check

The tournament started smoothly. I won my first game with confidence, but Round 2 delivered a harsh lesson. I built up a winning position, applied pressure, and waited for my opponent to crack. Then, my chance came: a single move that would have ended the game immediately.

Felix Guo (1882)

Rodrigo Moises Morante Cama (1515)
2024 World School Championship (2)



I missed it.

If I took the e6 pawn instead of taking the bishop, I would be winning.

The opportunity slipped away, and what should have been a win turned into a frustrating draw. That moment stuck with me, but I had no time to dwell on it. I bounced back with two consecutive wins, setting up a critical Round 5. Victory here meant staying with the leaders; a loss would be a disaster. After an intense battle, I won, reaching 4.5/5 and keeping my title chances alive.

A Costly Mistake

Round 6 put me on Board 3 against another strong contender. The game was long and tense, with chances for both sides. Then, I got another golden opportunity—a move that would have turned the game in my favor. But I hesitated, overthought, and let it slip.

Felix Guo (1882)

FM Christopher Munoz Ramos

2024 World School Championship (6)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.c3 Nf6 4.h3 Nc6 5.Bd3 e5 6.Bc2 g6 7.d4 exd4 8.cxd4 cxd4 9.Nxd4 Bg7 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.Nc3 O-O 12.O-O Bb7 13.Be3 Re8 14.Re1 Here I was already feeling quite good, because my pieces were pretty good and his bishop on b7 was not.



Felix Guo (left) at 2024 World School Championship.

14...d5 15.Bd4 Nxe4 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Bxe4 dxe4 18.Nxe4 Now I am much better, because I have a really good knight against a bad bishop.

18...Re5?? (18...Qxd1 was best. 19.Raxd1 Bc8 20.Nc3 Bf5 21.Rxe8 Rxe8 22.f3 Rb8 23.Rd2 Be6 24.Kf2)

19.Qf3??

19.Qb3 would have won the game. The idea is to also play Qc3 pinning the rook while attacking the bishop. I had had the same idea with 19.Qf3, but just forgot that 19.Qb3 also does the same threat while having another threat of attacking the bishop.

19...c5 20.Rad1 Rxe4 21.Qxe4 Bxe4 22.Rxd8 Rxd8 23.Rxe4 Rd1+ 24.Kh2 Rd2 25.Ra4 Rxb2 26.Rxa7 Rxf2 27.Rc7 Rxa2 28.Rxc5 At this point, I was pretty sure the game would be a draw, because this was a theoretical draw and I knew how to not lose. 28...h6 29.Rc3 h5 30.h4 Re2 31.Kg3 Kf6 32.Ra3 Re4 33.Rb3 Kf5 34.Rf3+ Ke6 35.Ra3 f6 36.Ra6+ Kf5 37.Ra5+ Re5 38.Ra3 Rc5 39.Re3 Rc4 40.Rf3+ Ke5 41.Re3+ Re4 42.Ra3 Rg4+ 43.Kh3 Rd4 44.Kg3 g5 45.hxg5 fxg5 46.Ra1 Rd5 47.Kh2 Kf5 48.Kg3 Rd3+ 49.Kh2 h4 50.Ra5+ Kg4 51.Ra4+ Kh5 52.Ra2 Rd5 53.Rb2 g4 54.Ra2 Kg5 55.Rb2 Rd1 56.Rb5+ Kf4 57.g3+ hxg3+ 58.Kg2 I offered him a draw and I was sure we would draw now. This was an even simpler theoretical draw and I finally relaxed. 58...Rd2+ 59.Kg1 Ra2 60.Rb3 Rf2 61.Rb4+ Kg5 62.Rb5+ Kh4 I thought I remembered that with a knight's pawn, passive defense works. 63.Rb1 Kh3 64.Ra1 Rf5 65.Rb1 g2 0-1 Black wins.

I forgot about this idea. Dropping the rook to the back rank would have made a draw. Passive defense doesn't work with doubled pawns, and you have to do active defense. For the last

couple of moves, I had stopped thinking and just assumed it was a dead draw. I now pay the price. Black is threatening to play 66...Rf1 and after the trade, 68...Kh2, with a winning pawn endgame. 66.Rb3 is met with 66...Rf3.

Hours of defending later, I made one careless move, and just like that, the game was over.

As I sat back in my chair, staring at the massive tournament hall, reality hit me. One move had undone everything. My mom, who had supported me every step of the way, was there, but at that moment, neither of us had words. We just felt the weight of that loss.

That night, I barely slept. I kept replaying the game in my mind. What if I had found that winning tactic? What if I had just played one different move?

Fighting Until the End

Determined to move forward, I won Round 7 with a clean and confident game. My hope for a strong finish was still alive.

Then came Round 8: a game that changed everything.

I outplayed my opponent early, but as I kept searching for the perfect move, my clock kept ticking. Time pressure crept in. In the final moments of a chaotic endgame, my opponent offered me a draw. My mind raced. I knew I had been winning, but my advantage was slipping. Should I take the draw or push forward?

I chose to fight.

And then, disaster struck. With seconds left, I played a move, and before I could even process it, my flag fell. I had lost on time.

My opponent stood up in shock. I sat there, devastated. I had been winning. I had a chance. But poor time management cost me everything.

Felix Guo (1882)

Barrantes Cueva Mateo Josue (1604)

2024 World School Championship (8)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.c3 Nf6 4.h3 Nc6 5.Bd3 e5 6.Bc2 g6 7.d4 Bg7 8.d5 Ne7 9.O-O O-O 10.a4 a6 11.Nbd2

Ne8 12.b4 Here I already had a decent advantage with more space in the middle and the queenside. I will attempt to open on the queenside and Black will attempt to open on the kingside. 12...b6 13.bxc5 bxc5 14.a5 Bd7 I spent time thinking about Nc4, Ba4, Qe2, but went with Bd3. This took a lot of my time and I should have played a faster move. 15.Bd3 f5 16.Qe2 fxe4 17.Nxe4 Bc8 18.Bg5 Qc7 19.Rfb1 Nxd5 20.Bc4 I am now much better, as I have the open file and very active pieces. Black pawns are very weak. 20...Be6 21.Qa2 (21.Qd1 would have been better and after 21...Qf7, White has the really brilliant move 22.Bh4!!, threatening Ng5)

21...Qf7 22.Rb6 Ndc7 23.Bxe6 Nxe6 24.Nxd6 Nxd6 25.Rxd6 Nf4 26.Qxf7+ Rxf7 27.Bxf4 Rxf4 My advantage has dissipated, and I am still slightly better, but it is even. My opponent offered a draw, and I should have taken it, but I felt ambitious and kept on playing. 28.Ra3 Rf6 29.Rd5 Re6 30.Ng5 Rc6 31.Ra4 After 31.Rb3, my advantage is back, because I have the open file and I will infiltrate. After Rb7, my pieces swarm into Black's camp, and the Black bishop becomes very bad.

31...Rb8 32.Ne4 Rb5 I have gotten really low on time now, under a minute and I was playing very quickly. 33.Nd6 Rb8 34.Nc4 Rb3 35.Rd8+ Kf7 36.Rd7+ Kg8 37.Rd3 I am playing way too passively. Rb3 earlier was the better move, now Black has taken over. 37...e4 38.Re3 Rxc3 39.Rxe4 Bd4 40.Ne3 Rf6 0-1 White runs out of time.

That loss ended my hopes for a title. I won my final round, but it didn't change the reality: this tournament was not a victory—it was a lesson. I didn't even want to stay for the closing ceremony. Neither did my mom. Instead, we left for the airport early, sitting there in silence, feeling the weight of the tournament. Months of preparation,

close calls, and hard-fought battles had led to this moment. It hurt.

What I Learned

Looking back, this tournament was one of the most valuable experiences of my chess career. Every tough game, every painful loss, every missed opportunity shaped me into a stronger player. And ultimately, these lessons helped me become a National Master:

1. **Perfection isn't the goal.** You don't always need the best move, just a good move. Overthinking costs time, and time is everything.
2. **Time management is key.** Never spend too long on a single move. Trust your intuition and keep the game moving.
3. **Adapt to the position.** If you lose your advantage, don't keep playing as if you're winning. Adjust, refocus, and fight for the new reality.
4. **Losing isn't the end.** It's part of the journey. After a loss, reset. Take each game one at a time. The best players are the ones who recover the fastest.

This tournament wasn't my greatest success, but it was one of my most important experiences. Every setback, every tough moment, every heartbreak was a stepping stone to improvement.

To anyone struggling to improve, keep pushing. Learn from your mistakes. Embrace the struggle. Because in chess, as in life, the real victory is growth.

Experiencing the Warmth of Peru

One of the things that made this tournament special was the people. The locals in Peru were incredibly friendly, and I even got asked for an autograph during a round break! Beyond the competition, I made a lot of new friends from different countries, sharing stories and learning from each other. That's something I truly love about traveling for chess—the opportunity to meet players from around the world, experience different cultures, and grow both as a person and a competitor.

Journey to National Master: A Dream Comes True at the Dreaming King Open

By NM Felix Guo

The elusive National Master (NM) title had been my dream since I first picked up a chessboard. I started playing seriously during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, watching strong titled players dominate online and over-the-board (OTB) tournaments. I knew then that I wanted to be part of that group. Little did I know, the road to a title would be anything but effortless.

In 2022, just one year after I began competing in rated OTB chess tournaments, I achieved an 1800+ rating, and then I quickly plateaued. It took persistent effort and countless hours of study to break past that barrier. By 2023, I reached 2000, but my progress slowed again. Still, I kept pushing forward, eventually breaking through 2100, which set the stage for my next challenge.

2024 World School Championship: Learning from Losses

At the 2024 World School Championship in Peru, I led the leaderboard with 4.5/5, tied with a dozen others. The stakes were high—an FM title awaited the winner. After an early draw in Round 2, I clawed my way back with three consecutive wins, setting up a critical Round 6 showdown against Chilean FM Christopher Munoz Ramos.

The game started in my favor, and I nearly won a piece with a tactical idea, but I had missed it. Later, I miscalculated, and the position shifted into an inferior rook endgame. Hours of defense brought me to what I believed was a theoretical draw. Confident, I relaxed—only to realize I'd missed a simple move. My opponent seized the opportunity, and I resigned, devastated but determined to recover.

With 4.5/6, I rebounded the next day, scoring a win to reach 5.5/7. In Round 8, I faced a slightly lower-rated opponent. I declined a draw offer, aiming for a win, but poor time management cost me the game on the clock despite a promising position. This brutal loss taught me a valuable lesson: sometimes, chess isn't just about winning—it's about how you respond when things don't go as planned.

2024 North American Open: Pushing Through Adversity

Getting off to a strong start, I entered Round 4 of the North American Open in Las Vegas with a perfect 3/3. Unfortunately, I woke up sick that morning with a pounding headache and nausea. Despite my condition, I faced a 2264-rated opponent. The game was grueling, and although my position worsened, I found a resourceful defense to seize the advantage. Ultimately, I settled for a draw to avoid risks.

NM Nicky Korba (2264) Felix Guo (2180)

2024 North American Open (4), ½–½

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nc3 Nc6 4.Bb5 Bd6 An interesting opening idea. (I prepared: 5.a3 Nd4 6.Bc4 O-O 7.d3 h6 8.Be3 Ng4 9.Bd2 Nf6)

At this point in the tournament, I was ok with a draw. **10.h3 c6 11.g4!? b5 12.Ba2 Nh7 13.h4 Qf6 14.Nxd4 exd4 15.Ne2 Qf3 16.Rf1 Qf6 17.Rh1 Qf3 18.Rf1 Qf6 19.Ng3 Bc7 20.g5 hxg5 21.hxg5 Nxg5 22.Nf5 d5 23.Qh5 Bd8??** A blunder. (23...Bxf5! 24.exf5 Qxf5 I saw this idea later.) **24.Rg1**

(24.Rh1! g6 25.Qh6 gxf5 26.Bxg5 White is crashing through.) **24...Bxf5 25.exf5 Qxf5 26.Bxg5?**

A mistake because it lets me simplify. **26...f6 27.O-O-O fxe5 28.Rde1 Qf7 29.Qh3 Re8 30.Rxe8+ Qxe8 31.Rh1 Bf6 32.Kd1 Rd8 33.Qh7+ Kf7 34.Qh5+ g6 35.Qg4 Kg7 36.Qh3 Qh8 37.Qf3 Qg8 38.Qh3 Kf8 39.Re1** White offers a draw. I could have played on, but I accepted the draw offer because I got scared about his pieces infiltrating. I feel like a draw was a reasonable result. ½–½

It was exhausting, but it taught me that you don't always get to play at your best. Sometimes, you have to push through discomfort and play with what you've got.

Round 5 was a quick draw against another National Master, leaving me still in contention. Round 6, however, was pivotal. Winning against a strong FM would push my rating past 2200 and earn me the NM title.

The game was complex, with both of us burning time early. At a critical moment, my opponent sacrificed a knight, leaving me just three minutes to calculate. Unsure, I declined the sacrifice and entered an endgame a pawn down. Miscalculations led to a two-pawn deficit, and I lost the game. My dream of achieving the NM title in 2024 slipped away in this tournament, but I knew I still had another chance: the Dreaming King Open.

2025 Dreaming King Open: Dream Comes True

The new year brought the Dreaming King Open, where I was just 14 points shy of the NM title. However, a scheduling conflict with my speech and debate tournament on the final day meant I could only compete in four rounds. Despite this, I decided to give it a shot.

In Round 1, I claimed a straightforward win against a National Master. This vaulted me to Board 1 in Round 2, where I faced a 2380 FM. A win would guarantee the NM title. Unfortunately, I fell behind early in the opening and couldn't recover, losing decisively. In Round 3, I faced a strong 2100-rated opponent in a complicated game. He faltered in time trouble, and I capitalized to win.

Felix Guo (2186)

Glenn Zhang (2114)

2025 Dreaming King Open (3), 1-0

1.e4 c5 Not the move I was expecting. I had expected my opponent to go for e5. **2.Nf3 d6 3.c3 Nf6 4.h3 g6 5.Bd3 Bg7 6.Bc2 Nc6 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 O-O 9.O-O Nb4?! I** felt like this was a little bit dubious even though the engine thinks it's fine.

10.Bb3 a5 11.Nc3 b6 12.e5 Ne8 13.Ng5!? Very interesting move, threatening Nxf7 ideas and e6.

13...Bb7 (13...e6 14.d5 What I was going to play, just blowing up the center.)

14.e6 f6 15.Nf7 Qc7 16.a3 Na6 My position is just better. **17.h4** would have been the best. **17.Be3 Rc8 18.Rc1 Qb8 19.Bc2 f5 20.g4 fxe4 21.Qxe4 Nf6 22.Qg5?**

Completely overlooking **22...Nc7!** (I was considering either **22.Qg5** or **22.Qh4**. **Qh4** was much better.) **23.Nh6+ Bxh6 24.Qxh6 Nxe6 25.f4** I still have compensation for the pawn, and I felt like my position was pretty decent. **25...Ng7 26.f5 gxf5 27.Bxf5 Nxf5 28.Rxf5 Kh8 29.d5 Rg8+ 30.Kh2 Rg6 31.Qh4 Rf8 32.Bd4 Bc8??** (Already, the position was hard to play, but e5 would have saved it. **32...e5!! 33.dxe6 Rg2+**)

33.Rg5 Rxe5 34.Qxe5 Now it is hopeless.

34...Bb7 35.Re1 Qd8 36.Ne4 e5 37.dxe6 Bxe4 38.Rxe4 d5 39.Rf4 1-0

Once again, I found myself on a top board for Round 4, facing yet another 2300 FM. For the third time, a win would crown me a National Master.

This FM was known for his deep opening preparation, often building a massive time advantage. To surprise him, I opened with **1. b3**, but he seemed prepared. I spent a lot of time navigating the middlegame, while he stayed ahead on the clock. Then, he made a critical tactical error. I capitalized swiftly, converting the position into a win and finally earning my NM title!

Felix Guo (2186)

FM Julian Colville (2301)

2025 Dreaming King Open (4), 1-0

1.b3 I spent a lot of time preparing first moves. I looked at all moves including **a3**, **h3**, and **g3**. I finally decided on **b3**, as I had lost a game to an IM previously against **b3**. **1...e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.e3 Nf6 4.Bb5 Bd6 5.Ne2 a6 6.Bxc6 dxc6 7.O-O O-O 8.d3 e4**

I had prepared up to here. My opponent was still playing really fast which surprised me. I decided to take some time to figure out the best move. **9.h3 Bf5 10.Ng3 Bxe3?! 11.fxe3 Nd5?** A huge mistake. My opponent simply miscalculated.

12.Rxf5 Nxe3 13.Qh5 g6 14.Rg5 The move my opponent missed. Now, this is over for Black. **14...Nxc2 15.Nd2! f6 (15...Qxd3 16.Bf6)**

16.Rxe6+ hxe6 17.Qxe6+ Kh8 18.Nxe4 Qxd3 19.Rf1 Nd4 20.Rxf6 Qb1+ 21.Kh2 Nf3+ 22.Rxf3+ Qxb2 23.Nf6 Rxf6 24.Rxf6 1-0

It's Not the End, Just the Beginning

Looking back, the journey to NM wasn't a straight path. It was filled with ups and downs, moments of doubt, and lessons learned through both victories and defeats. Here are a few things I've learned along the way that I hope to share:

- **Perseverance:** There were so many moments where I thought I had reached my limit. After each loss, I felt crushed. But each time, I reminded myself that the journey doesn't end with one setback. What matters is how you bounce back.
- **Patience:** Achieving big dreams takes time. There were tournaments where I was close, but not close enough. I had to learn that improvement doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, and it's okay to fall short as long as you keep pushing forward.
- **Trust Your Instincts:** In those key moments where I had to make quick decisions—whether it was a time scramble or a complex tactical shot—trusting my instincts was sometimes the key to overcoming the pressure. Chess is as much about the mindset as it is about the moves on the board.
- **Focus on the Process, Not Just the Outcome:** I used to fixate only on titles and ratings. But over time, I realized that the process of improving and learning was more fulfilling than just reaching the end goal. Every game, every challenge, is an opportunity to grow.

Winning the NM title is a major milestone in my chess journey, but it's far from the end. In fact, it's just the beginning of the next chapter. I will continue to push forward, finding joy in every improvement along the way. The journey never stops, and I'm excited for what lies ahead.



Felix Guo at 2024 World School Championship.

SCCF inducts IM Cyrus Lakdawala and IA Randall Hough to Hall of Fame

By CM Ala'a-Addin Moussa

When Dewain Barber, Dean of Scholastic Chess, approached SCCF board late last year with the idea of establishing a Hall of Fame, the question was not whether to do it. The question was why it has not been done yet. The board assembled a nominations committee with the participation of Dewain Barber, and Phil Chase who is authoring a book on the history of chess in Southern California. The board, after weeks of deliberations, finally decided to induct IM Cyrus Lakdawala and IA Randall Hough, a founding board member of SCCF, to its inaugural Hall of Fame at the Dreaming King Open January 20th, 2025.

SCCF board intends to induct new nominees on an annual basis. Here are the highlights of our 2025 inductees' contributions to chess. Many are taken from Phil Chase's upcoming manuscript.



Cyrus receiving his plaque from SCCF secretary Chuck Ensey at the SDCC.

IA Randy Hough



Randy directing state open 2024 (Courtesy SDCC).

- National Master Certificate, 1984
- Randy Hough has been involved in every aspect of chess organization, policymaking, and journalism for over five decades.
- After starting with the Riverside Summer Open in 1974, he eventually directed dozens of major tournaments, including the US Open in 2003, US Invitational in 1993, and 27 American Open tournaments. In the 1980s, Randy earned the titles of National Tournament Director and International Arbiter.
- Randy was an active player during the Fischer Boom years and has continued playing without a pause until the present. Meanwhile, he became involved in chess governance, first as a founding member of SCCF, later as the technical director for the USCF, and twice served as an Executive Board member.
- As a journalist, Randy was founding editor of Players Chess News, which broke new ground in speedy worldwide coverage in the early Eighties. He later wrote over 100 articles for Chess Life and Chess Life Online and served for 17 years as Secretary/Treasurer of Chess Journalists of America.
- Despite running many national events, Randy continued to run local club tournaments, notably at the Pasadena Chess Club, one of the most prominent clubs in SoCal for decades.

IM Cyrus Lakdawala

- Prominent chess author and player. Especially during the 1990s he was one of the most dominant SoCal chess players in open and closed events.
- Hailing from San Diego, Cyrus Lakdawala defeated chess masters as a teenager, achieving high-level success in his late 20s and 30s.
- Cyrus won the SoCal Open on three occasions (1987, 1995 and 2003) and won the Closed Invitational State Championship five times (1994, 1997, 1998, 2000 and 2004).
- In 1987, Cyrus won the National Open, and in 1998, he won the American Open and the US G/60 Championship.
- Cyrus won the US G/30 three times in the early 2000s. He won the American Open blitz in 1986 and the National Open blitz in 2000.
- He has played approximately 4,000 rated games in a 55-year career.
- In 2024, Cyrus completed his 71st chess book, including move-by-move analysis of players from Capablanca to Caruana.
- From 1983 to 1992, Cyrus wrote a syndicated chess column for Copley News Service, which was featured in over 300 newspapers, worldwide.
- His Rank & File partnership with IM Jack Peters was so well regarded as a high point in local chess journalism. There can certainly be no better gift for a chess player than to learn more about the game with rigor and humor, the trademark of Cyrus and his prolific pen.



Experience Counts at Holiday Swiss!

By John Wright



Axel Miller (right) versus Evan "Jet" Lew (left) in the final round.

The five round Holiday Swiss concluded on December 10 and drew 64 players. The Under 1700 Section, with 29 players, was like its own tournament. When the dust settled it was Irwin Landau (92 years young!) who collected the top cash prize of \$150 with an undefeated score of 4.5/5. After starting out with four straight wins, he was trying for a fifth

but had to concede a draw against Desmond Weisenberg in a complicated Rook and Bishop versus Rook ending after Weisenberg invoked the fifty move rule. A native New Yorker and former editor of Consumer Reports, Irwin has been playing chess since the age of 12 and was a member of the Manhattan Chess Club when Bobby Fischer played there. An unassuming man despite all his accomplishments and proximity to chess history, he's been a mainstay of SGVCC since our move to Altadena. With so many saying chess is a game for the young he reminds us that experience does count. Axel Muller won the Over 1700 Section with a score of 4.5/5 and top honors in the Under 1000 Section were shared by Daylen Riggs and Caden Chwang, each with 4/5.



Under 1700 section winner 92-year-old Irwin Landau.

Support Eaton Fire Victims

By John Wright

Please join us in showing our support for Altadena Community Church (ACC) and San Gabriel Valley Chess Club (SGVCC) members who lost so much. On the evening of January 7, the ACC caught fire about 10:30 PM. It had been SGVCC's home since October of 2021. Sadly, it burned to the ground, leaving its staff and congregants without jobs or their place of worship. ACC had a long tradition of supporting many community groups in its Heicher Hall that adjoined the Church. These included not only SGVCC but also a choral and folk dancing group. Pastor Paul, facility manager Susannah Mills, and their staff had been so supportive of SGVCC. The fire also destroyed the homes of at least four SGVCC members.



Altadena Community Church.



The Eaton Fire ravages Altadena.

Below are four Go Fund Me pages that we hope you will consider. Every small amount helps.

www.gofundme.com/f/support-altadena-community-church-after-the-eaton-fire

www.gofundme.com/f/help-mar-craig-rebuild-after-fire-loss

www.gofundme.com/f/help-the-carrollchandlers-rebuild-after-disaster

www.gofundme.com/f/susannahs-home-destroyed-in-the-la-fires

Tactical Slugfest Solutions

By WFM Angela Liu

1. Owen Durby (1868) - Robert Klein (1864)

9...Qxa3! 10. bxa3 10...Nbc2 11. Qxc2 Nxc2 -+

2. Linus Eisenberg (1888) - Max Chang (1701)

21. Rxd7 Ke8 (21...Kxd7? was played in the game. 22.Qxb7+- Kd6 23. Ne4+ Ke6 24. Nc7+ Ke7 25. Nd5+ Ke6 26. Nc7+ (26. Nxc5+-) 26...Ke7 27. Nd5+ Ke6 ½-½) 22. Rd3 Qe1+ (22...Be3+? 23. Kbl+- White's King is safe.) 23. Rd1 (23. Qd1? Qxd1 24. Rxd1 Be3+ 25. Kc2 Bxg5+-) 23...Be3+ 24. Kc2 Qe2+ 25. Kc3 Bd4+ 26. Rxd4 exd4+ 27. Kxd4= Black's initiative fizzles out.

3. Julian Colville (2301) - Gordon Xu (2185)

17. 0-0-0! (the game went 17. e6? Qe7 18. 0-0-0 fxe6 19. Rxh1 0-0-0?! 20. Bxe7 Rxc4 21. Bxd8 Kxd8=) 17...Rxc4 18. Nxc4 Bxc3 only move. 19. e6! (19. bxc3 is winning too. 19...Nf2 20. Qf3 Qe1 21. Qf2+-) 19...Nf6 20. exf7+ Kf8 21. Qf3 (21. Nh7+!? Kxf7 22. Rf1+-) 21...Qd6 22. c5+- With 23. bxc3 coming next and an exposed Black King, White is winning.

4. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

White is winning after 21. Bxb7 Nxf1 22. Bxa8 Nxe3 23. Qe4! Qd6 24. fxe3! (24. g3?! was the game. 24...Qd2 25. Na4? brings us to the next puzzle.) 24...Qh2+ 25. Kf1 Rd2 (25...Qh1+ 26. Ke2+-) 26. Ne2+- for example: 26...Rxb2? 27. Qe8+ Nf8 28. Bd5+-

5. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

25...Nd1!+- forks the Bishop and pawn.

6. Sarthak Gattani (2086) - Julian Colville (2301)

28...Bxc3 29. Ne4 (29. fxg3 Qd4+ 30. Kh1 Qxa1+-) 29...Bxf2+-+ (29...Qd4+-) the game went: 30. Kh1 Qe3 31. Bc6 Qf3+ 32. Kh2 Bg3+ 33. Nxc3 Rd2+ 0-1

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6-SS, G/80; d10

SCHOLASTIC CHAMPIONSHIPS

6-SS, G/80; d10

K-12	1000+
K-8	800+
K-5	600+
K-3	500+
K-1	300+

JUNIOR VARSITY

5-2SS, G/25; d/5

K-12	U 1600
K-8	U 1400
K-5	U 1000
K-3	U 700
K-1	U 300

SCHEDULE

SAT 3/29 10 am, 2 pm & 5 pm;

OF ROUNDS:

SUN 3/30 9 am, 1 pm & 4 pm.

SAT 3/29 10 am, 2 pm & 5 pm;

SUN 3/30 9 am & 1 pm

FRIDAY NIGHT

Friday Bliz

Championship

BugHouse

Championship

FRI 3/28 6:30 - 8:30 pm

RATED 1-DAY EVENTS

Saturday / Sunday Action

K-2 / K-5 / K-12 5SS,

G/25;d5.

SCHEDULE OF ROUNDS: SAT: 10 / 11:15 /
12:30 / 2:30 / 3:45 SUN: 9 / 10:15 / 11:30
/ 1:30 / 2:45

NOT-RATED 1-DAY

EVENTS

Saturday / Sunday Rising Stars

K-2 / K-5 / K-12 5SS, G/25;d5.

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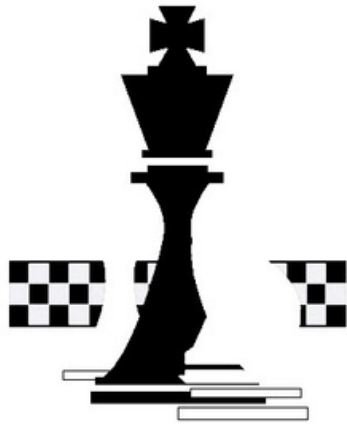


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More details, advance entry lists: www.scchess.com

On-Site Registration: ends 9:30 a.m. 5-24
(3-day), ends 8:30 a.m. 5-25 (2-day)

Rounds: 3-day 10-4:30 Sat. & Sun, 9:30-4:30 Mon.

2-Day 9-11:30-2 Sun (G/45, d/10), then merge with
3-day at 4:30

Info: randallhough@gmail.com

Hotel Rate: \$119 Airtel Plaza Hotel, (818) 997-7676
Request Chess Rate,

Sunday, May 25

MDC Blitz. 5-SS, G/5, d/2. Airtel Plaza Hotel, 7277 Valjean Ave, Van Nuys, CA 91406.

Prize fund will be entries minus expenses. EF: \$20. **Reg:** On site registration only

Rounds begin at approximately 9 PM Higher of Regular or Blitz rating is used.

INFO: randallhough@gmail.com

For May 24 Scholastic info, see

http://www.scchess.com/calendar_kids.html

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