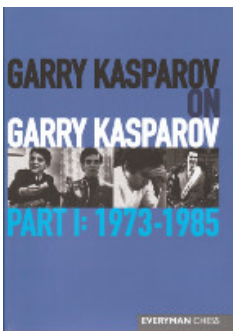




The Skittles Room



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We Are the Ninety-Nine Percent!

An Interview with Lothar Hirneise, President of the ACO

What is the ACO?

The Amateur Chess Organization (ACO) is a new chess organization that will organize world championships for amateurs, youth, and teams, starting in 2012.

What are the basic ideas of the ACO?

Ninety-nine percent of all chess players have an Elo rating of less than 2400 and do not earn a living from chess. We are here for precisely this group of chess players; young, old, and those in-between. The priority of the ACO is to promote amateur chess worldwide and to bring amateur chess closer to the general public with the help of effective media events. The ACO stands primarily for fun in chess and for social exchange among chess players.



Lothar Hirneise

What led to the founding of the ACO?

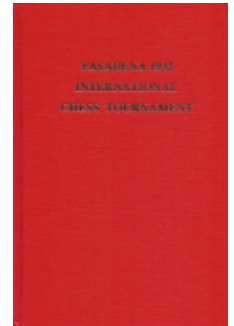
The idea for the ACO came from chess enthusiasts from several countries in 2009. The main point of our initial discussion was that we believed (and still believe) that it is unfair that the vast majority of chess players are amateurs, but that the world chess federation is dedicated almost exclusively to professionals and (elite) youth.

There have been conflicts within FIDE during recent years that were and are not conducive to the sport of chess. Examples include the world championships cycle or the extreme dominance of certain individuals within FIDE.

Which tournaments will the ACO host?

Beginning in 2012 we will annually organize multiple ACO world championships, including the "ACO World Amateur Chess Championship," which will be played in seven rating groups, the "ACO World Youth Chess Championship" (U08 to U20), and the "ACO World Amateur Team Championship," played in four rating groups.

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Where will these world championships take place?

To meet the demands of ACO to bring chess closer to the public with the help of effective media events, we have decided to organize our world championships in spectacular and world-famous places. We made this decision with respect to the fact that the last major chess events were held in less-known places like Kazan, Jermuk, or Astrachan. Therefore our World Amateur Chess Championship will take place from the 6th until the 15th of July 2012 in Dubai. The award ceremony with the gala dinner will take place in the ballroom of the finest hotel in the world, in the exclusive seven-star Burj Al Arab. This will be a truly unique event, not only for players but also for all attending.

In regards to the World Youth Chess Championship, we considered what would be the best venue for children and their parents. Therefore, we will host our first youth world championship at the favorite place of all children – Disneyland in Paris. To make it possible for all children and young people to participate, the world cup will be held in the summer of 2012, from the 4th to the 12th of August.

The third world cup will be the "ACO World Amateur Team Championship." This tournament will take place over New Year's Eve of 2012. It will be a huge event with the greatest New Year's Eve chess party in the world! All games will be played in teams of four. There are no restrictions for the composition of a team. The exact venue is not set at the moment. However, more detailed information will be posted soon on [our website](#).

What conditions must all players meet to be able to participate in your World Championships?

From 2013 on this will be possible only by qualification through a national championship. In our anniversary year 2012, however, we want to give as many players as possible the opportunity to be at a world championship. The exact conditions can be found on [our website](#). But for space reasons there are participant limitations in all championships.

Can an average chess player afford some of these venues?

Absolutely yes! We can offer for our participants an extra-reduced price for the stay at Disneyland, which, for example, surely won't be more expensive than the FIDE World Youth Championship 2012 in Maribor, Slovenia. In addition, the ACO World Youth Chess Championship in Paris is logistically much easier and cheaper to reach than the FIDE World Junior Championship in Maribor. All international airlines fly to Paris and the rail link is excellent as well.

But also for the World Amateur Chess Championship in Dubai, including the gala dinner at the Burj Al Arab, we can offer a unique special price thanks to generous sponsors.

What role does performance play in the ACO?

That depends on the definition of performance, and we should consider youth and adult chess differently. When it comes to adult amateurs in chess, don't you think that someone with an Elo of 1700 is at the board fighting just as hard as someone with an Elo of 2500? If you look at the many draws of the grandmasters, you can sometimes tend to believe that amateurs fight over the board harder than many professionals. In the case of adults, this fighting spirit does not necessarily translate into rating gains. It translates into a continued desire to play chess. Think about the large loss of members that all chess

clubs complain about. In my own club, there is currently only one men's team. Four years ago we had five teams.



We face the possibility that tournament halls will be empty in the future if we don't develop amateur chess!

This is a bit different amongst the youth. Of course, the ACO will encourage also the performance of younger players, and it has commissioned one of the best youth coaches in the world, GM Zigurds Lanka, as the national youth coach for Germany. We want to establish this concept of cooperation with top trainers in other countries as well.

The Disneyland venue for the youth world cup means that kids will come to our world championship to have fun and they will play also because they seriously want to become the world champion! In our view, there is not a better place for this than Disneyland in Paris. Our aim is to make each ACO World Championship a memorable event for the players as well as for those accompanying the players. Not everyone can be the world champion, and that's why the informal Olympic motto, introduced by Pierre de Coubertin, "The most important thing is not to win but take part!," is of great importance to the ACO.

What are the plans of the ACO at the national level for amateur chess players?

In autumn of 2012 we will start the German Amateur Chess League as a test run for other nations. In this league we do not follow the current federation's organizational structure in order to let friends play together in a team, even if these friends are not members of the same club. To participate, each player needs just three more chess enthusiasts to form a team. Dates and venues will be determined by teams independently within a framework set by the ACO. To guarantee a homogeneous skill level, the teams will be divided into skill-level groups. These teams will then have one month to report results. Teams are not tied to fixed times and dates, but they can organize their league games freely and independently. This system leads to better social contacts, play at private places such as in an apartment or in the garden is allowed, and the players can get to know each other better after the game. The league also meets a big need of many league players, namely not to have to play chess on Sunday morning at nine o'clock, as is the current norm in German league play.



What is the relationship of the ACO to FIDE?

The ACO is a fully independent organization, and we see ourselves as a complement to FIDE, not as competition. We are open to any cooperation, and enjoy working together with national associations, tournament organizers, and chess players all over the world. Of course, we are aware that the ACO is something new for FIDE and that some officials will see us only as competitors. But I can say that we all share the same goal: to promote chess and to bring this great game and the fun of playing to as many people as possible. Some officials will not understand this, of course. We accept this and will show that we will be pleased to work together with everyone who loves chess as much as we do. But in any case, we will not abandon our philosophy or methodology and will do everything possible to promote amateur chess worldwide.

What are the advantages?

The advantages are obvious. Avoiding the federal structure's power struggles within the organization is one. What a great achievement this could be was evident last year at the machinations during the FIDE presidential election in Khanty-Mansisk. The biggest advantage is quick decision making and implementation of agreed measures. In our fast-moving world, decisions must be made locally and promptly, and not until after the next election. Obsolete structures lead in many sports, unfortunately, to the continual addition of impediments instead of benefits. Another crucial advantage over existing federations is that all management, marketing, and information technology tasks are performed by professionals. You can also see by the success of Formula One or the various boxing organizations that these organizational structures fit much better into the 21st century.

What plans does the ACO have for the future?

Planned are other national and international chess events for amateurs and an innovative training system for students and instructors. For the design we were able to commission, among others, as already mentioned before, the world-class coach Zigruds Lanka. In addition, we have developed a new Internet platform for chess players in a multi-year collaboration with a leading information technology company. Next year we go online with the platform. The platform offers a unique combination of an online chess community, the opportunity to compete with other players in live chess and online chess, as well as many unique features that allow and promote social interaction. I cannot reveal everything, but we plan to be, purely and simply, the best chess community in the world.

Our CEOs, GM Falko Bindrich and IM Tobias Hirneise, are responsible, amongst other things, for organizing the world championships, and are also working with mathematical experts on a new global rating system.

Can you finally tell us something about yourself?

I myself am an enthusiastic amateur chess player. I started attending chess tournaments about ten years ago, primarily with my two sons, Jens and Tobias. Professionally, I ran the international non-profit organization Cancer 21 for fourteen years. Previously, I was active in the boxing scene, and along with many other activities, I've sponsored various Olympic Games as an official sponsor. If you would like to know more about me, you are welcome to visit [my homepage](#).

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