



C O L U M N I S T S

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg

We are pleased to introduce our first regular column dealing with Scholastic Chess. Dr. Steve Goldberg is an optometrist and writer who lives in St. Louis with his wife, three children, a dog, a lizard, and three fish. Winner of many local scholastic tournaments himself, he has taught chess at the elementary school level and is a long-time USCF Life Member. Dr. Goldberg writes on a variety of topics but chess remains his first love. He can be reached at scholasticchess@chesscafe.com.

We hope you enjoy *Scholastic Chess*...

Heraklio, Hershey, and Toronto

I'm pleased to report that since the introduction of this column last month, I've had nearly daily e-mail and phone communication with chess fans around the world. I'm unable to include all of these reports in this space, but I encourage you to continue writing and keeping me informed of events in your part of the world. There's been a lot of activity lately, so let's get started ...

World Youth Championship in Greece

987 players from a total of 78 nations competed in the annual World Youth Chess Championship, held Nov. 4-13, 2004 on the Greek island of Crete. There were 128 titled players, including 4 GMs, 5 WGMs, 26 IMs and 15 WIMs. Keep in mind that all of the competitors were age 18 or younger!

Not surprisingly, the largest contingent of players (54) came from the host country Greece, while 52 Russian youngsters and 38 German players attended. Can you guess which North American country had the most players at this event? The answer, given at the end of this column, may surprise you.

With all of the talk these days about too many drawn games in top-flight chess, it's nice to see that 76% of the games in this tournament were decisive. Congratulations to all of the participants, but I'd like to single out several of the U.S. players:

Daniel Ludwig placed the highest of any U.S. player, finishing in 4th place in the Boys Under-14 section. **WFM Alisa Melekhina** got off to a rough start, losing in the first round, but then went undefeated the rest of the way, reeling off five consecutive victories, followed by five consecutive draws, to finish in 6th place in the Girls Under-14 category. **FM Fabiano Caruana** placed 10th in

Boys Under-12, and **Ray Robson** also placed 10th in the Boys Under-10 section. Another strong finish was posted by **Gayatri Vempati** in the Girls Under-12 division. With only 1½ points after 6 rounds, she swept her last five games to finish with a nice score of 6½/11.

I had the chance to ask Daniel Ludwig a few questions following his excellent performance. The 14-year-old ninth-grader began playing when he was seven and now spends as much as five hours daily working at chess, although he also enjoys “all athletic activities.” This was his first trip out of the country, but he’s not taking much of a break; he’ll be at the National K-12/Collegiate Championship that begins Dec. 10 in Florida, so other ninth graders beware! His advice for his fellow players: “There’s no magical way,” he says. Just “always set high goals for yourself.” This is reasonable advice, indeed, from the top-rated 14-year-old in the country. The USCF December 2004 rating list has him at 2246, easily placing him at master status.

2004 U.S. National Youth Action Championships

554 kids from grades K-12 across the U.S. came together at the National Youth Action Championship Nov. 13-14, 2004 at the chocolate capitol of the world, Hershey, PA. Winners of the nine-round event were as follows:

- Primary (K-3): **Brian Luo** (9.0/9 !)
- Elementary (K-6): **Derek Johnson** and **Andrew Freix** (both 8.0/9)
- Junior High (K-9): **James Critelli** (9.0/9 !)
- High School (K-12): **Daniel Karbownik** (8.0/9)



Second-grader Brian Luo

Shen Luo talks about how Primary Section winner Brian came to be involved with chess: “He initially learned to play chess (circa April, 2003 when he was 5) from his high-achieving high school sister because she was the one who spent the most time with him when we were working. His sister noticed that he mastered games at a rapid pace...and she finally made the judgment to introduce chess to Brian. Since then, the game has drawn him in and his progress has been at accelerating speed.” Brian goes to school at Crestwood Elementary School in Madison, Wisconsin, but spends time after school every

week at both a local high school chess club and the chess club at the University of Wisconsin. As Shen notes, “He could not make such progress without the two clubs...He continues to play the game on the computer though ChessMaster and online. With no fears of playing adults or longer games, he has been an active competitor in local Wisconsin tournaments.” Brian doesn’t limit himself to the chessboard, however. He enjoys basketball, baseball, and soccer, and also plays the piano. That’s not a surprise, seeing the show he put on at this tournament.

Alan Kantor, USCF Scholastic and Events Assistant, commented on the perfect performances by Brian Luo and James Critelli: “... it was a long tournament. Nine rounds is a lot of rounds and give anyone a lot of credit ... to finish 9-0 whether you are an adult or a child.” I asked Alan if he thought that many of the players had an opportunity to enjoy the pleasant “extra-curricular” activities in the Hershey area, but he noted that with a grueling nine-round tournament, it is difficult unless the participants plan on spending an extra, non-chess day in the area.

ChessCafe's own Hanon Russell summed it up well when asked if the tournament was a success: “Diane Reese did her usual good job running things, as did TD Carol Jarecki and her support staff. Almost 600 kids ran around screaming, yelling and laughing, so I think it was a success!”

First Annual National Law School Chess Championship

This inaugural tournament held November 6, 2004 at the Ave Maria School of Law in Ann Arbor, Michigan, drew over sixty participants. The event included two divisions – a General class for unrated players, and an Expert class for players who have official chess ratings. The General class games were at a time speed of game/25, while the Expert games were played slightly slower at game/45. The winner of the Expert class was Stanford Law School student **Anne Marie Rosas**. International Master Ben Finegold was also on hand, playing a simultaneous exhibition with participants and spectators. This national tournament was the brainchild of Ave Maria third-year student Chris Esseltine and Dean of Admissions Michael Kenney. It may be a bit of a stretch to include this in a column for scholastic chess, but I thought it deserved a mention.

Did You Know?

Not surprisingly, **GM Hikaru Nakamura** (who turns 17 on Dec. 9) is the top-ranked U.S. player on the FIDE Top Juniors list. The FIDE list for October 2004 shows him ranked #6 in the world, with a rating of 2620. **GM Luke McShane** of England is #5 at 2629. Number one is **GM Teimour Radjabov** of Azerbaijan, 43 points ahead of Hikaru.

Player Profile of the Month

Our scholastic chess player profile for December involves the amazing new Canadian grandmaster **Mark Bluvshstein**. Born in Russia, Mark moved with his family to Israel when he was five years old. Six years later, the family settled in Toronto, Canada, where he is now a 16-year-old high school student at

Newtonbrook Secondary School.

*GM Mark Bluvstein*

Mark's parents already had chess coaches working with him at the age of six. "Mark's chess growth and activities were always a big part of family life," noted Ilia Bluvstein, Mark's father. I asked Ilia when he first came to realize Mark's tremendous potential, and he responded that it was when Mark was 11 years old and "crushed" an international master in a tournament. Already Mark was one of the strongest players in Toronto.

Fast-forward five years to the 2004 Montreal International tournament. Here Mark defeated 42-year-old GM Novikov in 28 moves to achieve his final GM norm. His grandmaster title was confirmed at the recent FIDE meetings at the Calvià Olympiad. For those of you who were wondering, FIDE provides an official certificate of grandmaster status, but new GM Bluvstein is still awaiting his.

Perhaps encouraged by his new GM title, Mark shined representing Canada at the 2004 Calvià Olympiad. Playing board 3, he achieved a score of 8½/12 (7 wins, 3 draws, 2 losses), good for 5th place among 129 men's teams competing. This is all the more impressive when one realizes that beginning with round 3, eight of his next nine opponents were GMs!

For all his success, Mark remains very level-headed and well-rounded. Fluent in Russian, Hebrew and English, he studies chess about 20 hours per week, but also makes time for basketball, soccer and tennis. He says he is able to maintain an active social life despite his dedication to chess. He credits his loving family as "the one thing that contributed [most] to my rise as a chess player. I need to thank my family for giving me all the possible opportunities to develop." His proud father notes that Mark's "success and failure is our family's success and failure." He is quick to add, however, "at the same time, our family lives a normal life. All the members of our family are professionals and have full-time

jobs. We did not [have to] sacrifice our professional careers for Mark.” Mark’s father Ilia is a candidate master (FIDE rating 2117), but his mother and 23-year-old sister do not play chess.

I asked Mark, Ilia, and Mark’s Israeli coach GM Alex Huzman what advice they would offer to young players seeking to improve their chess. As the father of a strong GM, Ilia advised combining theory and practice: “Play...study chess...play...study chess...play...study chess...” GM Huzman, who also coaches GM Boris Gelfand and numerous other grandmasters and defeated Kasparov at the 2003 European Union Championship, adds not to expect quick, easy results. He stresses reading chess books (he is particularly fond of those by Kasparov), but most important, he says, is the careful analysis of completed games, both one’s own and others. He also cautions against too much “fast” chess, claiming that the “speeding of time controls brings chess to death.” Mark himself speaks with a maturity beyond his sixteen years when he suggests that the “only advice I can give is [to] work hard, but keep your priorities straight. Do well in school, because a career in chess does not promise a whole lot in many cases.”

Mark is the recent recipient of a \$7000 grant by the Chess’n Math Association, Canada’s scholastic chess organization. Mark and his family are very grateful for the help of such benefactors. “It requires a lot of money to nurture a chess talent (going to tournaments abroad, coaching),” notes Ilia Bluvstein. “In many cases, families of top players cannot afford to provide adequate financial support to develop chess talent.”

I similarly commented to Mark that many people have lamented the fact that as promising young players enter college, many of them effectively drop out of chess, for a number of reasons. “It is hard to find a way,” he said, “in which chess players can stay in the game during post-secondary education, but I know the States are doing a great thing giving chess scholarships. I know at least a dozen chess players who study in Baltimore and Dallas [who] get scholarships. I see this as the best way to keep these players playing.”

We look forward to watching Mark as he further develops his outstanding chess talent and brings pride to his family and to his country. Though a Canadian citizen, Mark is ranked #30 among all USCF players and is the third-ranked player in the USCF under age 21 (only GMs Nakamura and Akobian are ahead of him). We’ll have more on the issue of chess scholarships and what can be done to assist young chess stars in future columns. My thanks go out to Canadian friend David Cohen and to the Bluvstein family for their assistance in the preparation of this player profile.

Hospital Fundraiser by 12-year-old Canadian Master

A beautiful event took place on November 14, 2004, when 12-year-old Canadian master and Ontario High School Champion **Shiyam Thavandiran** conducted a 20-board simultaneous exhibition to benefit the Hospital for Sick Children Foundation in Toronto, Canada. Nineteen kids and one adult paid \$10 each to play against Shiyam, while others donated another \$160 for a total of

\$360 raised for the hospital. Shiyam had a perfect $+37 =0 -0$ score (a number of players chose to play a second game). Kudos are due to Michael McArthur who kindly donated the use of the facilities and equipment of the Thunder Chess Club, and to David Cohen, founder and organizer of this exhibition (this was the third such exhibition held). “The hospital loves it when kids raise money for kids,” said Cohen. “As soon as I advertise one exhibition, I get a different kid volunteering for the next one!” The only downside has been that the participants from the last two exhibitions have come only from the “inside circle” of the player providing the exhibition. “As with the previous exhibition,” Cohen commented, “I was the only outsider to tackle the master...I was mystified by the non-attendance of outsiders.”



*Photo of Shiyam Thavandiran,
courtesy of photographer David Cohen*

For those of you in the Toronto area, the next exhibition (in 2005, exact date not yet set) will feature **Jonathan Tayar**, the Canadian Under-16 champion. Let's see if a greater cross-section of the chess community can take advantage of the wonderful opportunity to play a master and raise funds for a good cause at the same time.

While the actual amount of money raised in these exhibitions has been small, the effort and time expended by all involved is most commendable. I hope that these exhibitions and similar events elsewhere continue to garner good publicity for chess while reinforcing the importance of reaching out to help others.

Here's the Answer!

The answer to the question about the number of players from North American countries playing at the World Youth Chess Championship in Greece: Canada actually brought the most players (28). The United States had 24 participants, and Mexico was close behind, with 20 players.

Coming Events

- *National K-12/Collegiate Championship, Dec. 10-12 in Lake Buena Vista, FL*
- *Pan-Am Intercollegiate Tournament, Dec. 27-30 in Wichita, KS*
- *SuperNationals III, April 8-10, 2005 in Nashville, TN*

Watch for discussions of these events in upcoming columns. Are you going to any of these tournaments? Keep me posted!

Have something newsworthy you'd like to share? E-mail me at scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. I can't promise that I'll be able to respond to each e-mail, but every one will be read and considered. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names and age of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know.

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