



C O L U M N I S T S

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg

Inside the National K-12

Happy New Year to all of our **ChessCafe** fans in cyberspace! The last quarter of 2004 saw a flurry of chess activity throughout the world, much of it involving scholastic participants. I continue to be happily surprised at the intense interest generated by chess among our youth. Alan Kantor, USCF Scholastic and Events Assistant mentioned to me that there are currently 804 official scholastic clubs affiliated with the U.S. Chess Federation. This figure, of course, does not include the many additional independent school and community chess clubs around the country. There are certainly thousands of chess groups throughout North America who meet regularly or semi-regularly, affiliated or non-affiliated, solely for the pursuit of their love of chess (and maybe a bit of socializing as well). Many communities have very active scholastic leagues and on-going tournaments. While these groups cover the entire spectrum from well-to-do to inner-city, from downtown to rural, from raw beginners to powerful grandmasters, all have one basic thread in common – one or more individuals decided they wanted to make a difference, to provide a healthy, safe and fun environment for children. If there's no-one who is willing to step up to the plate and do the organizational work required, then there won't be that high school chess team, that community chess club, the city or state scholastic league. These people deserve our thanks. I'm not one to make New Year resolutions, but I would ask that we all show our appreciation to the many, many dedicated workers who give tirelessly of their time, and often their money as well, to make our chess events and clubs happen. This column wouldn't exist without them, so I'll start. *Thank You!*

Here's your assignment, kids (parents, coaches, TDs, organizers – feel free to pass this homework along to your kids/students/players): send an e-mail or better yet, a handwritten note, to your parents and to others who have helped to create and maintain the chess environment that you enjoy. Take sixty seconds to let them know you appreciate their efforts.

Did You Know?

What city in the world, population 100,000 or greater, boasts the greatest number of grandmasters per capita? The answer is given at the end of this column!

National K-12/Collegiate Tournament, Lake Buena Vista, Florida

This mega-tournament, with 1,632 players ranging from kindergartners to collegians, took place December 10-12, 2004 and was held at the Walt Disney World Dolphin Hotel & Resort complex in Orlando, Florida. I can't imagine a more enjoyable location, whether you're eight or eighty (and there are plenty of eighty-year-olds in Florida). In addition to the main tournament for grade level and collegiate championships, there were also Blitz and Bughouse tournaments and exciting lectures, simultaneous exhibitions, and autograph-signing sessions by the three VIP guests, GM Susan Polgar, GM Maurice Ashley, and current U.S. women's champion WIM Jennifer Shahade.



Robert Singletary served as the Chief Tournament Director and Diane Reese, the excellent USCF National Event Director, was the event organizer. Numerous others served on the TD staff and in other capacities.



Chief TD Singletary is no stranger to the national scholastic chess scene, having directed at least one national tournament every year since 1985. All told, this was the 41st national tournament for which he has served as a TD, and the 16th where he has been the Chief TD. He has also been selected as the Chief TD for the upcoming Super Nationals in Nashville, TN. "I was very pleased with how the tournament went," he commented. "I think Diane Reese did an excellent organizational job for USCF while the staff of the Walt Disney World Resort was always very helpful. In addition, Jennifer (Shahade) and Maurice (Ashley) were extremely helpful and bent over backwards to be an integral part of the tournament. We were also blessed with an excellent directing staff." I asked Mr. Singletary how this tournament may have differed from earlier events, but he remarked, "most of the scholastic tournaments now are fairly consistent in quality with Diane Reese heading up the organizational aspects. The directing staff that is hired by USCF consistently has experience directing national scholastics." Diane Reese noted, "the parents and kids alike really enjoyed the venue" because of being in the Disney environment and having beautiful weather. Additionally, "The TD staff did a great job; all rounds and side events started either on time, or within 10 minutes, even the awards ceremony!!"

I recently had the pleasure of speaking at length with GM Maurice Ashley and he touched upon a number of topics. He was one of the featured celebrities at the tournament and commented that it was “great to see that much young talent” at the event. He enjoyed the sight of so many kids playing in one location. He graciously provided a lecture, simultaneous exhibition, and an autograph-signing session and when I asked how these went, he simply said, “I was mobbed!” The GM was pleasantly surprised to see that after eight years, kids were still using and discussing his CD-ROM *Maurice Ashley Teaches Chess*. One humorous comment he heard from the kids, however, was “you look much older now!”



GM Susan Polgar also provided two well-attended lectures and signed autographs for the attendees. I was curious if she felt that the kids at the tournament were nervous and tense or if they were able to enjoy the event. “A small percentage has high ambitions for titles or trophies,” she said, “but the majority looks at it as a way to travel, to make friends, and to have a chess experience.” Her impression was that many kids and their families chose to stay a day or two following the tournament to take advantage of the Disney facilities. Her only suggestion for improvement is to have additional organized “fun” activities on-site for the kids.



Chicagoan Brad Rosen, parent of fifth-grader Eric Rosen and editor of the internet chess blog [The 64 Square Jungle](#) made the trip to Orlando with his son. This was Eric's eighth national chess tournament and most successful to date. He was undefeated, finishing with 6 points in the 7-round tournament, winning five games and drawing two. Only half a point separated him from the top two players in his section. "In a lot of ways, I think this was a breakthrough tourney for Eric," said his proud father. "He certainly has never performed this well at a Scholastic National – it will be interesting to see where he takes it from here."

Brad and his wife, Andrea, have been involved with scholastic chess for a number of years, so I was interested in his opinion of this super-tournament. His comments follow. "This was the best in terms of a setting and logistics. The space was large and clean. The distances from the playing area to the hotel were very reasonable. The playing room had high ceilings with good lighting, carpeting and good acoustics; so all that was very nice. The tourney also seemed to run well. Rounds started on time. Parent management (getting parents out at the start of rounds and then letting them back in later to observe) seemed to come off okay. There was a parent observation area as you entered the back of the room. To the right were the 2nd and 3rd grade boards, so you could see those games in action. All the higher grades were to the left starting about 15 tables in. So we couldn't see those games at all, which was fine with me. K-1 was in a separate room and played on a slightly different schedule. I never even saw that room but I heard no complaints ... The skittles room was large and accommodating with ongoing food service. The bookstore was located right in the skittles room which I thought made sense. It seemed like they did some pretty good business ... These events are always intense. I call it the Chess Vortex ... time and space take on a different dimension." What advice might he offer to other families considering entering their child in a similar event? "My only advice as a chess parent is to keep it fun (and I see this one violated constantly). At these Nationals tournaments especially, I observe there is incredible pressure on these kids to perform. We do our best to keep it in perspective." Excellent advice.



Eric Rosen, 5th grade

Please note that the beautiful photos above have all been provided courtesy of [MyChessPhotos.com](#), the official photographer of the National K-12/Collegiate tournament. They took pictures of every participant at the event and graciously made these photos available for our readers to enjoy.

Another proud parent, Mark Taylor of Georgia, talks about his son, Paul. He comments, "My son, Paul R. Taylor, won the third grade championship with a perfect score (7/7). He also placed 18th in K-6 Blitz, ahead of all other third graders. Paul played in his first national tournament two years ago in Atlanta. Although I am not a player, I taught Paul the game when he was five and was not surprised when he soon began to beat me. We first began to realize the extent of his talent when, without any formal study, he won his elementary school championship in his kindergarten year. The following year he won co-championship of the Georgia State K-3 Championship and was the youngest invitee ever to the Georgia State Closed Scholastic. Paul currently studies weekly with an IM; he also studies on computer and attends Advanced Scholastic classes in the Atlanta area. Paul mostly plays in adult tournaments." Mark added, "Besides his skill, Paul's biggest assets are his confidence and his toughness in difficult games. Diet also helped him at Nationals. 'To get focused I eat right,' he says. 'Vegetables instead of meat which makes you sleepy.' His advice at the board: 'Take your time and look for combinations. But don't take too long.' Paul knows how to use the clock as a seventeenth piece."



Paul Taylor, 3rd grade

Taylor was quick to add that other students from Georgia also did quite well. Daniel Gurevich won the Grade 1 section in his first national tournament and 11th grader Kazim Gulamali won his section, as well as tying for first in the K-12 Blitz section and winning the Bughouse event with partner William Stewart. There were 78 players from Georgia, behind only Florida (393), New York (324) and Texas (97). Congratulations to the scholastic chess organizers in the state of Georgia!

This month instead of a player profile, we have a team profile:

In reviewing the final team standings, I noticed excellent results from the Evanston Township High School (ETHS) from Evanston, IL. They only had one ninth grader, so they could not field a 9th grade team, but the 10th grade ETHS team finished third in their section, the 11th grade ETHS team finished in second place (actually tied for first but lost on tiebreak), and the 12th grade ETHS team finished in clear first place in their section.



The Evanston Township HS team had some extra carry-ons to bring home.

Another chess parent mentioned to me that in the Evanston area, the elementary and middle schools have active chess clubs that serve as “feeders” for the ETHS team. I asked Evanston Township High School team coach Ken Lewandowski what effect this has on his school’s team. “There is not much going on at the K-8 level for competition. Evanston has an active group of parents who run everything at that level. Those parents can see how the chess community provides learning opportunities and a chance to feel a part of something. There are monthly Evanston-only K-8 tournaments that many of my high school kids go help out at. It is a real team builder and recruitment opportunity...It gives me a pool of players that already know something and makes the high school job ‘easy’.” Lewandowski, affectionately known as “Lew” by the students, noted that at the high school level there are so many extracurricular clubs and teams (sports and otherwise), that some of the better players do not join the chess club because of conflicting schedules. “One of my best sophomores is one of our better basketball players,” Lew explained. “These schedules are fairly incompatible.”

With a school enrollment of about 3,200 students, there are 24 active chess club members and about another 16 “who drop in sometimes.” A total of 18 players made the trip to Florida for the National K-12/Collegiate tournament. I asked Lew how this trip was funded. “The school provides a budget for the entire chess season. In addition, ETHS sponsors a major high school tournament (coming January 8) which makes some money. This year, the budget was able to pay about half of the trip for each student and they came up with the rest. They were responsible for their own meals but several parents donated extra money and we bought breakfasts and lunches for them.”



Asked how the team operates, Lew explained that they meet after school on Wednesdays and Fridays, with Fridays usually being a time for matches against other schools. They compete in the North Suburban (Chicago) Chess League, which Lew describes as one of the strongest high school leagues in the state. Many weekends the team plays in local chess events and the better players frequently play in adult tournaments as well. When the club is not competing against other schools, players often play challenge matches with each other, moving up and down the team ladder.

Additionally, Lew utilizes chess puzzles and instructional material from *Chess Life* magazine (*Chess to Enjoy* and *Solitaire Chess* columns, in particular) to teach his players. As he explains, “If the players start seeing ‘good’ chess, they learn what it is like. Also, if they can find the winning moves from Master level games, they develop the confidence to look for those moves in their own games.” Lew has also been able to build a rather extensive chess library at the school for the students to utilize. In addition, ETHS has hired a local chess master to provide periodic lessons; he also meets with many of the top players outside of school to analyze their games in depth. The better players on the team also act as mentors for the weaker students, helping them with post-mortem game analysis. “Again, the theory is that seeing good chess leads to more good chess.”

Top player Nicholas Berry, a junior, is one of the players actively working with the local master. He also takes time to tutor several elementary school players. In the 66-player 11th grade section, he finished in second place, losing only to the eventual winner who was rated 500 points above Berry. “Nick really deserves credit for helping this year’s team grow and strengthen,” Lewandowski noted.

There is quite a bit of diversity among the team members. They range from kids taking Advanced Placement classes to those in remedial and special education courses, yet the kids help each other and get along well, with academic differences rarely interfering with team camaraderie. In fact, when I asked Lew if there was much team spirit (since chess is after all, a game played one-on-one), his simple response was, “*very much so!*” He noted that many of his players have been competing with and against each other for as much as ten years, dating back to early elementary school. “There is a great deal of friendship involved,” he insisted. As an example, several of the players who won both individual and team trophies at the Florida tournament gave their team trophies to other players who had not won any individual honors. Lew also pointed out that many alumni return to help tutor K-8 and the high school students, as their time allows.



Among the team members are four girls. I asked the coach how they interact with the boys. “With all four females being seniors this year, they have the advantage of age and ‘maturity’ over my mostly junior/sophomore team. The boys know they have been around longer and give them the respect they deserve...I find them to be a little ‘calming.’ The guys do watch their language more (although the girls have the potential to give as good as they get).”

How does Lewandowski attract kids to the team? “Recruiting is always a balance between getting the best out of them and offering a good time to keep them interested. Some meetings end up being nothing more than a bughouse/blitz time. I used to disapprove of bughouse, but have learned that it at least shows how pieces interact and cooperate so it might have some teaching value. This does keep them interested. Also, some of the ‘B Team’ players have a better shot at Blitz/Bug than G/45 chess against the top players...Mr. DuBrow and I also like a variety of board and computer games. In September and March-June, we often offer those in addition to chess. Every year we get some kids to come for gaming and then get interested in chess for the next season.”

Team member Rob Flax (currently in his junior year at ETHS) is impressed by both the support the school provides and the manner in which coach Lewandowski runs the club. “I was really surprised freshman year at how supportive the high school has been for our team. We have a full set of Chronos clocks ... many other clocks, and lots of boards and sets... The trickiest part of having a successful team in my opinion is finding players who want to improve and work at it. While the majority of our ‘A’ team works privately with tutors, myself included, Mr. Lew provides opportunities to kids who ask. His puzzles are stimulating and fun and I often find myself stumped on the tricky ones. Lew also provides refreshments, though he insists on only providing healthy foods. It works just fine, and sometimes we pitch in to help pay for food, too. Snacking material is a huge incentive for some to actually show up on a Friday afternoon.”

Lew did have some suggestions to offer for next years’ National K-12/Collegiate tournament: “Let the coaches into the playing room. This has been allowed at nearly every other event and has worked.” In addition, “Find more appropriate trophies. Yes, they are impressive but what can I do with four

three-foot tall trophies? We almost did not get them on the airplane home!” Another concern was that, “Overall, I find the TDs a little inconsistent (and I have been one in the past). More warnings are given without recording than I like so that future problems with the same player only get another warning.” This might explain the discomfoting note I received from one parent claiming several instances of cheating among a few of the players at the tournament, although most others I spoke with were not aware of this problem. However, 11th grader Flax, quoted above, did encounter an unpleasant surprise. “I did experience cheating firsthand: there was one game I was playing and I had a huge advantage (read: up a queen, rook, and two pawns by move 16), so I got up to look at other games and get a drink of water. I come back and the position has changed slightly. A bishop has mysteriously moved to where my opponent now has a clever discovered attack...I was a little shaken that it would be attempted.” Lew keeps such matters in perspective. “If someone has to cheat to win at chess,” he says, “they have a big problem and our complaining won’t solve that.” The good news is that Flax won that game anyway. My advice, though, would be to *always* contact the TD immediately in such cases. Otherwise one encourages the cheating to continue.

Any final thoughts, Coach? “I think the top thing is to make it fun for the kids.” Good advice, indeed.



The ETHS team

Some fun facts about the tournament:

- Players came from 41 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and ... 6th grader Dyland Xue arrived from Tsinghua Elementary School in the People’s Republic of China.
- Nearly 44% of the participants came from two states – Florida and New York.
- The school that brought the most players? Hunter School in New York, with 49 kids.
- The advance entry list posted by USCF prior to the tournament showed that 538 school teams were registered, and the players came from a total of 316 cities. New York City alone had 180 entries, about 11% of all

participants.

- The section with the most players was the 5th grade division, with a final total of 238 players, closely followed by the 4th grade section which had 223. I noticed that the numbers dwindled for the high school level, though, with 252 entrants from grade 9 through 12 (among the K-12 grades, the 12th grade section had the fewest players, with 26). The college division fielded 24 participants.

Kudos to two students profiled in last month's column. 2nd grader Brian Luo tied for second in his section with a score of 6/7, and 9th grader Daniel Ludwig tied for second in his division with a score of 5½/7. Ludwig also tied for first place in the Blitz K-12 side event.

Next year the National K-12/Collegiate tournament will be held in Houston. According to Mike Nietman, USCF Scholastic Council Co-Chair, the event will be alternating between Orlando and Houston for the next several years.

2004 Pan-American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championship, Wichita, Kansas

Wichita, Kansas hosted the Pan-American Intercollegiate Team Chess tournament from December 27-30, 2004, the first time this tournament has been held in the midwest. For the second year in succession, the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) "A" team upset its archrival University of Maryland – Baltimore County (UMBC) rivals to win the event. Dr. Mikhail Korenman, director of the Karpov School of Chess in Lindsborg, Kansas, was the organizer of the six-round championship. Accompanying the team event was an open tournament and a scholastic tournament as well.

In UTD's decisive match with UMBC, the Texas team prevailed by a convincing 3-1 score despite UMBC having two grandmasters and one international master on its team. The UTD group, however, was also strong, with three international masters. A major assist to the UTD team occurred when the school hosted the UTD Grandmaster Invitational about two weeks prior to the Pan-Am tournament, which "gave the UTD players a chance to 'practice' against superior competition for nine straight days," according to a school press release. Jim Stallings, the Associate Director for Chess and Education at UTD, makes the point that although the UMBC-A team had an average rating of 2552 and the UTD-A team came in with an average rating of 2440, the level of competition is very close. Especially in a team event such as this when a single win or loss will often mean the difference between the team winning or losing a match, and perhaps thereby winning or losing the tournament title. Stallings compares play at this level to Olympic speed skaters where mere hundredths of a second may separate one performer from another. Of note was that the two new co-chairs of the USCF College Chess Committee were both at this event. Zachary Cohn, graduate math student at Stanford, co-chairs this committee with UTD's Jim Stallings.

Dr. Korenman described the annual Pan-Am tourney as "very friendly," with

his only complaint being a decrease in the number of schools represented. There were 23 teams at this year's event, down from 35 a year ago. "We only lost four colleges, but they each brought four teams," lamented Korenman. He described his primary goal as increasing the participation for next year, noting that quite a number of colleges and universities maintain chess teams. "They need to come to the Pan-Am tournament," he said. When I asked him how this might be achieved, he commented, "That's the million-dollar question. I don't know, but I'll be talking to Mr. Karpov later today."

Korenman has worked hard to make the hamlet of Lindsborg, Kansas an important chess center. He points out that this community will also be the site of the "Final Four" competition occurring in April 2005, matching the top four finishers among US schools from the Pan-Am event. In addition to UTD and UMBC, Miami-Dade College and Stanford University will compete at the Final Four tourney.

Junior Orange Bowl International Scholastic Chess Championship, Miami, Florida

So you thought the Orange Bowl was just for football? The 7th edition of the Junior Orange Bowl International Scholastic tournament took place December 27-29, 2004 in Miami. The seven-round event featured four sections based on age: 9 and younger, age 10-12, 13-15, and 16-19. In addition to the main tournament, there were also Blitz and Bughouse championships held. A total of 138 players participated, from Florida and Virginia and from across the Caribbean and Central and South America. Organizer Arden Dilly explains why the tournament takes place at the Embassy Suites Hotel near the Miami airport: "I especially like the place because all of the rooms are suites, they give great service, the rooms come with complimentary breakfast for everyone ... they give free wine to adults, soda to kids, and popcorn to both between 5:30 PM and 7:30 PM. In addition, they sell hamburgers and hotdogs for lunch ... They have also, after we ran in to a misunderstanding, agreed to furnish pizza." Dilly adds that, "The fish ponds, waterfall, and greenery really make it a relaxing place to play." Next year's event is already set for December 2005 at the same location.

Upcoming Events

The *HB Global Chess Challenge* takes place in May 2005 in Minneapolis. With a guaranteed \$500,000 prize fund, it will be the richest open tournament in history, with a scholastic tournament scheduled to coincide with the main event. GM Maurice Ashley is the driving force behind the HB Global Chess Challenge and he notes that although he doesn't expect the scholastic section to be huge (perhaps 400+ kids playing), it will provide a wonderful opportunity for them to be immersed in this monumental chess experience. At the time I spoke with Ashley, there were already 21 GMs signed up to play, with relatively little marketing effort, including some who have been retired for over thirty years! In his words, "It's the talk of the town and the talk of the nation."

A major problem in the chess world is that relatively few are able to make a decent living from the game, with the result that many of our young stars essentially leave the game as they enter college or shortly thereafter. Ashley is trying to address this problem with his Generation Chess company, started two years ago. "If I was Tiger Woods, I'd be making millions," he said. Looking back, he commented that after all of the time and effort and dedication it required to reach the grandmaster level, he had to stop and ask himself, "Now I'm a grandmaster. Where do I go from here?" To answer that question, he began Generation Chess with the goal of making chess more similar to tennis in regard to income opportunities for the players. The HB Global Chess Challenge is the first step in that direction. Maurice is very animated and very excited about what this tournament may be able to do for chess. His expectation is that perhaps four or five similar events might be held annually, with prize totals reaching or exceeding \$1,000,000 per event. Although the entry fee is steep at \$345, a reduced-fee early registration (\$295) is available until March 1 and the GM was quick to note that the section prizes are set up such that if you finish in the top 50 within your section, your prize winnings will cover the entry fee.

The *2nd Annual All-Girls National Chess Championship* is set to take place in Chicago, May 13-15, 2005. This six-round event is sponsored by the Kasparov Chess Foundation and will feature Blitz and Bughouse side events. In the main tournament, six sections are offered, based on age, for girls through age 18.

SuperNationals III, April 8-10, 2005 in Nashville, TN

The last SuperNationals, in 2001 in Kansas City, saw a whopping 4,580 kids in attendance. How many will be in Nashville this year? It's getting close – you can count on in-depth coverage here at the Scholastic Chess department of **ChessCafe!**

Final Notes

Last month our primary player profile was of new Canadian GM Mark Bluvstein. Word comes from Canada that he has been named the 2004 Canadian Chessplayer of the Year, as voted on by chess journalists. Congratulations, Mark!

Correction from December's column: we may have inadvertently given the impression that Carol Jarecki was the chief TD at the recent National Youth Action championship. In fact, she was the floor chief who generously filled in at the last moment for another TD who had a family illness to attend to. Tim Just was the chief TD for this event.

Watch next month for a player profile on a youngster who served as the model for a chessplaying character in an upcoming novel. We'll also discuss the status of girls in chess in 2005.

For those of you who may not already be familiar with the [Internet Chess Club](#), check it out. There are wonderful instructional videos available and

ChessCafe's own NM Dan Heisman hosts an informative internet radio program Thursday evenings at 9:00 P.M. Eastern time.

What is the city with the greatest number of grandmasters per capita? According to a report by Gavin Rabinowitz in the *Guardian Unlimited*, St. Petersburg has one grandmaster per 215,000 citizens, and Moscow is blessed with one grandmaster per 170,000 residents. But number one in the world is Beersheba, Israel which counts eight grandmasters among its 183,000 citizens, for a ratio of one GM per 22,875 residents.

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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