



COLUMNISTS

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg

Scholastic Chess Thrives in Pittsburgh

Here we are in March 2005 and a number of exciting tournaments are drawing close; it's also not too soon to be thinking about summer chess camps. Do you have a favorite chess camp you'd like to see mentioned in this column? Perhaps you run a chess camp yourself. Drop me a line at scholasticchess@chesscafe.com and tell me about it. I hope to profile a number of summer chess camps in an upcoming column.

Everyman Quiz of the Month

We are excited to announce a new development in the Scholastic Chess column at [ChessCafe](http://ChessCafe.com). Each month we will present a brief quiz with questions taken from the information provided in one or more earlier Scholastic Chess columns. The first *three* people to respond each month with correct answers will win a free copy of an exciting chess book, courtesy of Everyman Chess Books. This month, our lucky winners will receive a copy of the Kasparov book *Checkmate! My First Chess Book*. Here is our first Everyman Quiz:



1. Who has been WFM Alisa Melekhina's primary chess coach?
 - a) FM Aviv Friedman
 - b) NM Dan Heisman
 - c) Dr. Aleksandr Melekhin

2. Which player from the National K-12/Collegiate tournament was *not* quoted regarding the relationship between food and chess?
 - a) third-grader Paul Taylor
 - b) fifth-grader Eric Rosen
 - c) eleventh-grader Rob Flax

3. In 2004 Canadian 16-year-old Mark Bluvshtein achieved his final GM norm by defeating which player?
 - a) GM Gulko
 - b) GM Novikov
 - c) GM Nakamura

If you don't remember the answers then review past Scholastic Chess columns in the [ChessCafe Archives](http://ChessCafe.com/Archives). Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com, but don't wait too long! Only the first three with correct answers get the book!

SuperNationals III

From April 8-10, 2005, Nashville, Tennessee will be the epicenter of scholastic chess in the United States as thousands of excited players descend upon the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. Instead of the Elementary, Junior High and High School national championships being scattered across the country, all three championships will occur over the same weekend in the same location.



Diane Reese tells me that there will be a special, fun opening ceremony at noon on Friday, April 8, at which they will announce all 58 members of the Trophies Plus All-America Team. She promises that there will be quite a few grandmasters and other chess celebrities in attendance. The USCF press release mentions: GM Anatoly Karpov, GM Susan Polgar, GM Yasser Seirawan, GM Maurice Ashley, GM Hikaru Nakamura, and WIM Jennifer Shahade. There will be multiple lectures and simultaneous exhibitions taking place. I counted a total of eleven

lectures and simuls in the posted schedule. The time control is game/120 for second grade and above, game/90 for players in the K-1 section. Of course, there will also be blitz and bughouse tournaments offered.

A tremendous feature returns to these championships with the generous awarding of full four-year scholarships by the University of Texas - Dallas to the winners of each of the three sections (Elementary, Junior High, and High School). In addition, the top female in each section will receive an automatic qualifying berth into the Polgar National Invitational for Girls championship in August. The official photographers at the event, MyChessPhotos.com, will also be awarding a \$500 scholarship to the player with the greatest upset win. This organization produces memorable photographs and will be taking pictures of every participant.

The USCF expects 5000+ players at this mega-event, with thousands more family and friends in attendance. For at least one weekend, Nashville will transform into Chessville.

2nd Annual All-Girls Open National Championships

The second edition of this open tournament takes place May 13-15, 2005 in Chicago. It is a joint project of the Kasparov Chess Foundation and Chess Wizards. The six-round, game/60 event is open to all girls through age 18, with both blitz and bughouse tournaments as side events. Richard Krueger of the Kasparov Chess Foundation was kind enough to discuss this upcoming

tournament.



At the 2004 All-Girls National Championship

Krueger noted that nearly 200 players attended last year's inaugural event and as many as 300 are expected this year. I asked him how the All-Girls National Championship compares with the Polgar Invitational for Girls Championship. They differ, he mentioned, in that the Polgar event is by invitation with its own criteria for qualification whereas the All-Girls event is open to any interested female player age 18 or younger. "But the goal of both of these tournaments," Krueger added, "is to encourage more girls to participate in chess tournaments and to be active in chess. Therefore both tournaments complement each other."

Last month's [column](#) touched upon some of the issues unique to female chessplayers. I asked Mr. Krueger what might be done to encourage more girls to get involved and stay involved with chess. He replied, "It is a fact that chess in later school years has been dominated by boys in the past. Kasparov Chess Foundation is working with schools throughout the country to encourage girls to continue playing chess throughout their education. Tournaments and educational outreach programs are addressing this issue and should help to even the score, so to speak... Such initiatives as All-Girls nationals surely will be attracting more and more girls to participate in chess competitions. Of course, this tournament should become a flagship for many other tournaments for girls that could be organized on regional or local levels." In a similar vein, GM Susan Polgar notes that a number of states are now organizing specific qualifying events for her Invitational for Girls national tournament.



Intergalactic Bughouse Championship

Various state, national, and even world championships are commonplace. How often do you get an opportunity to participate in an *intergalactic* tournament? On Thursday, June 9, 2005, the Intergalactic Bughouse Championship will take place at the Las Vegas International Chess Festival. Registration is on-site only, presumably as a courtesy to those participants from other galaxies, whose e-mail and internet registrations wouldn't have arrived for several more millennia. No word in the press release about valet parking for your spaceships.

Did You Know?

The longest-reigning world chess champion retained his title for nearly 27 years. Can you name him?

Profile of the Month

Previous columns have profiled successful players and teams. This month we speak with national master Jerry Meyers, chess organizer and teacher extraordinaire who has played a major part in making Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania a major scholastic chess center.

In the first column from [November 2004](#), I noted a *tournament organizer and teacher in one community who has galvanized chess to the point that there are more elementary and high-school kids with USCF ratings there than in much larger cities*. This person is Mr. Meyers, who in addition to being an over-the-board Master, was also awarded the correspondence Senior IM title for his success in postal play.

In 1993 he began the Chess-for-Pittsburgh-Youth program, which now provides chess instruction in over 30 schools and a number of public libraries in the Pittsburgh area. A full-time chess teacher, he also works with the Pittsburgh Chess Club. The local newspapers frequently call upon Jerry for information about chess activities and in 2003, WQED (the Pittsburgh public TV station) conducted a brief interview that aired repeatedly. This was followed by a lengthy "Cover Story" headline appearance on their *onQ newsmagazine* which aired on February 17, 2005. In this fabulous feature produced by Tonia Caruso that runs approximately ten minutes, Meyers is shown teaching in one of the schools he visits, and a number of kids explain why chess is so attractive to them. They have some surprising answers at times!



Jerry Meyers

The segment opens in dramatic fashion, music playing, showing Meyers carrying his distinctive chess bag and the narrator begins: "The bag is unusual and at first glance, so is the mission. Nearly every day this man visits a different elementary school in the city of Pittsburgh. Meet Jerry Meyers. He's not there to teach reading or math or even science. He's there to teach chess."

Asked to explain the allure of chess, Meyers responds “I just think chess is a way of stimulating kids’ minds, getting them thinking and having fun at the same time... At the start, when they’re just beginning, the first thing that chess is doing for them is getting them to look more carefully at what’s going on around them. It’s getting kids to look more carefully, to focus, and to start to concentrate.”

A smiling fifth-grade girl is asked if she looks forward to Meyers’ visits. “Yes – one reason is that we get to eat lunch a little earlier... but another reason is that he’s a good teacher and he helps us learn better ways to play.” An earlier lunch – yet another benefit of chess.

The interviewer observes that, “there’s no question these kids are having fun, but there’s a lot more to this game. In fact, some studies suggest the educational benefits of chess may be endless.” While “endless” may be stretching the point, Meyers clarifies: “There have been a number of tests which show improvement in standardized test scores both in reading and in math. There’s logical thinking going on in chess, there are patterns that are very similar to math... Chess is the ultimate concentration game because ... you start to think about sequences. ‘If I do this, how’s the other person going to respond?’ You start to anticipate what’s going to happen.”



The Pittsburgh Youth Chess Dragons winning team

After speaking with a schoolteacher at the school, the interviewer comments, “Her students can’t get enough of the game!” Asked if she thought the students could grasp chess, the teacher states, “I didn’t think they’d pick it up as quickly as they did, but Mr. Meyers presents it in such a fabulous way that they want to learn...It has helped with their critical thinking, their strategies; they love chess. We were learning the pieces in Spanish also, and they love to be able to help each other.”

Prior to an interscholastic tournament, Meyers reminds the kids that, “Our goal is not only to produce winners, to take home ribbons, it’s to challenge yourselves.” Nevertheless, the kids eagerly anticipate the challenge of playing other students. “They’re all excited,” he continues. “All of them want to say ‘My school is the best.’ There’s school spirit, there’s sportsmanship involved...I

tell the kids, 'Be gracious in winning, be gracious in losing.'”

The interviewer is amazed at the perseverance of the kids. One fifth-grade boy who has been playing only a few weeks is asked how many games he has won. He smiles sheepishly as he holds up one solitary finger, but says that he enjoys chess and intends to continue learning the game. Meyers isn't surprised. “When a kid acquires a new skill, they can develop a certain self-confidence that carries over into other activities. Kids get excited and their excitement is contagious. When they're having fun and they're enjoying themselves, you see a smile on a child's face. There's nothing like that.”

The interviewer, who doesn't play chess herself, observes that, “What the program is about is learning more while having a good time... What's really amazing in all of this is just how much fun these kids are having...I can't say enough how much the kids love it.”



Chess-for-Pittsburgh-Youth players

I don't know what the viewership of this station is, but certainly this program provided excellent, positive publicity for the world of chess. I was curious how the TV feature came about. “To be honest,” Jerry said, “I suspect the TV bit was primarily due to a suggestion by one of my supporters who is the head of a large local foundation that also provides major support to WQED. She suggested it to them. However, the station first ran a short interview with me to see what I was about and if it made sense to put me on 'onQ.' The interviewer in the program liked the story, thought I presented well, and she took it to the next level.”

Regarding foundation grants, Meyers noted that “I [have to] renew annually, and I am never guaranteed anything. Still, the program has been going since January 1996. As to how I accomplished it, I leveraged off classes I was already teaching in private and suburban schools. Through word of mouth, I met some parents at a few city schools that were interested in chess. I attended a meeting called something like 'Meet the Funders' which included a session where groups seeking funding got to sit down at lunch with various Foundation people. Perhaps I was lucky to find a sympathetic ear, but I also think I presented my project in way that made sense. I told my story of teaching chess in just a few private and suburban schools and how it grew as parents talked to

each other about it. I talked about stimulating children's minds and what I thought were the benefits of chess. I suggested offering the same program to city school children with Foundation money and starting small with just a few schools as a pilot. That is how it got started. First I received funding from the Buhl Foundation's Frick Educational Fund. Then they helped connect me with the Grable Foundation and The Heinz Endowments."

Meyers, who has a B.S. degree in business as well as a master's degree in psychology, insists the key to his success is treating chess teaching as a business, not merely as a hobby. "People cannot teach chess full time unless they can make a reasonable living doing it. Chess needs to be run professionally and it needs to create a viable career path for promising young people who want to justify devoting the enormous quantities of time it takes to become good at chess." Meyers clearly believes that chess is a natural discipline to teach in the schools. "When I think about the goals of education, it is not hard to see many ways that chess promotes them. I think parents also naturally see the benefits of chess, especially when they watch the faces of children at play. Unfortunately, many school administrators are too busy with the day to day business of running schools to really think about how chess fits in. But you can work with your natural allies, such as parents and various teachers who operate closer to kids and see everyday what the learning process is actually about."

He offers additional insight into his teaching methods: "The key element to my program is interaction with the kids. I try not to teach *at* them. I am always posing questions. I search for faces that are not paying attention and call on them. The philosophy is the same as on the chessboard. Find which of your pieces aren't active enough and put them to work. You need to get the whole group alert and responsive. Questions can be tailored to individual children. Each question has to be at a level they can understand and not be too hard, while still leading them forward a little."

The success of Meyers' programs is a good indication that his methods work. He estimates that there are approximately 1800 kids in the Pittsburgh area with USCF ratings, and many others who are not USCF members, but are involved in classes at school. Dan Heisman, heavily involved in scholastic chess himself in the Philadelphia area, notes that Pittsburgh, with much less population, seems to be the scholastic chess center of Pennsylvania. In my [January 2005](#) column, I made the following statement:

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.

Jerry Meyers is one person who decided to make a difference, and there are many, many children and parents in western Pennsylvania who are glad he did. His website can be seen at www.youthchess.net.

Did You Know Answer

Dr. Emanuel Lasker defeated Wilhelm Steinitz to win the title of World Chess Champion in 1894 and held it until his match with Capablanca in 1921, resigning because of poor health.

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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