



## C O L U M N I S T S

*Scholastic  
Chess*

Steve Goldberg



*Winning Chess  
the Easy Way*  
by Susan Polgar

## SuperNationals III

If all of the participants in the just-completed SuperNationals III tournament were stacked one above the next, the line would extend over four miles into the air. In the record-setting event in Nashville, Tennessee, a whopping 5,270 kids, representing nearly every state in the U.S., competed for four days for trophies, titles, and college scholarships. The tournament was held at the massive Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, billed as the largest non-casino hotel in the United States. As the USCF notes, it was the “largest tournament at the largest hotel.” The 5,270 participants represent about a 15% increase over the last SuperNationals held in Kansas City in 2001.



*The SuperNationals opening ceremony*

Many comments have been received, both positive and negative, and as parent Brad Rosen of Chicago observed, “All the kids had a great time, and in the end that’s what counts.” I heard a number of interesting thoughts about this tournament and chess training in general that I’ll share with you below.

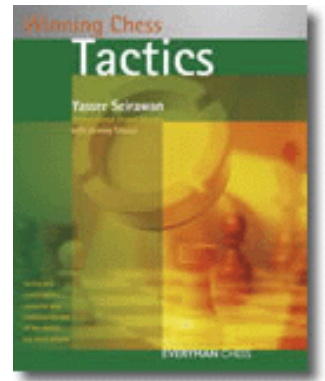
I wish to express deep appreciation to Christopher Oquendo of MyChessPhotos.com and to FM Paul Truong for many of the beautiful photographs displayed in this month’s column.



*GM Yasser Seirawan and fans*

### Everyman Quiz of the Month

We continue our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book, courtesy of Everyman Chess Books, to the first three respondents with correct answers. Remember, the questions are taken from earlier Scholastic Chess columns, which can be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#). This month, winners will receive *Winning Chess Tactics* by GM Yasser Seirawan. Send your answers to [scholasticchess@chesscafe.com](mailto:scholasticchess@chesscafe.com). Good luck! Please note: previous winners are not eligible to enter subsequent contests.



1. Which summer chess camp has the motto: "First Class Instruction in a First Class Setting?"
  - a) Polgar Chess Camp
  - b) Emory Castle Chess Camp
  - c) Kopec Chess Camp
  
2. New USCF Scholastic Director Jerry Nash most recently served as the scholastic director of which state organization:
  - a) Tennessee State Chess Association
  - b) Texas State Chess Association
  - c) Louisiana State Chess Association
  
3. Which of the following tournaments is *not* held in conjunction with the U.S. Open?
  - a) Denker Tournament of High School Champions
  - b) All-Girls Open National Championship
  - c) Polgar National Invitational for Girls

### Did You Know?

Part 1: Can you name the 2005 SuperNationals section with the most participants? How about the section with the least?

Part 2: Which five states had the most players at the 2005 SuperNationals?



*SuperNationals playing hall*

### Upcoming Tournaments

- *Second Annual All-Girls Open National Championships: May 13-15, 2005*
- *HB Global Chess Challenge: May 18-22, 2005*
- *2005 U.S. Junior Open: June 10-12, 2005*
- *2005 Denker Tournament of High School Champions: August 7-12, 2005*
- *Second Annual Polgar Invitational for Girls: August 7-12, 2005*



*GM Susan Polgar instructing youngsters*

### SuperNationals III

The Catalina Foothills High School chess team in Tucson, Arizona has a history of success in national tournaments, but coach FM Robby Adamson kept to himself the goal he set for his team this year. He set the bar high,



seeing a national championship well within the realm of possibility. All year long, he pushed and prodded the team, working on all aspects of the game.

Once per week, the team meets with Coach Adamson for about an hour and a half, reviewing opening strategy (a new opening each week), endgame analysis, and discussing examples from recent tournament play. In addition, every team member receives private tutoring from either Adamson or IM Levon Altounian, one of two international masters in Tucson. The team is also active in the local interscholastic league, which it dominates because three of the four 2000+ rated high school players in Tucson play for Catalina Foothills. Team members participate in a number of “adult” tournaments as well, often traveling out-of-state to do so. Adamson also runs periodic five-hour marathon strategy sessions for both his team members and other local players generally rated above 1800. Of course, the kids also spend time playing quick games via the Internet.

Thus it was that Coach Adamson felt his team was capable of competing against other teams with stronger players. Their experience and mental toughness would provide them with an edge that ratings alone can't reflect. Before leaving for Nashville, Adamson sprung his expectations on the team. “You shouldn't go,” he told them in all seriousness, “if you don't believe that you can win the championship.” The players sat speechless for a moment, but realized that this was what they had been trained to achieve. They trusted their 2400-rated coach who himself had won national individual championships in 1984, 1986, and 1988 and had been a member of three national championship teams, in addition to coaching four other teams to national titles. He also was one of only 64 invitees to the 2005 U.S. Championship. This was a coach who had been through the trenches of championship-level chess.



*Catalina Foothills chess team*

As the tournament began, the team met with success, with player after player winning their games. I asked Adamson if there was much opportunity for non-chess diversions to allow the players to clear their heads a bit. He responded that it was difficult enough just to get them to eat between rounds. Their nervous energy was depleting their appetites. As the tournament progressed, the team found themselves leading in the quest for the team championship, but in the final round, the team faltered a bit, falling into a tie with Edward R. Murrow High School of New York. However, they were declared the 2005

National High School Team champions on tiebreak points. Adamson was especially proud of this achievement, particularly in light of the fact that a number of Russian immigrants attend Murrow High School (of course, chess has long been part of the national culture in Russia). A look at the rosters shows that the top two boards of the Murrow team, Saljivus Bercys and Alex Lenderman, are both 2400+ players, whereas the top player on the Catalina Foothills team began the tournament with a rating of 2071.



*An excited fan displays autographs*

Coach Robby Adamson generously shared his time and thoughts with me and he has some interesting observations. He genuinely expected his team to be victorious, noting that every year one or two Arizona teams or individuals win national scholastic titles. In Tucson in particular, cooperation is strong among chess coaches, teams, and players, producing an active scholastic schedule for the students. He stresses the importance of a large amount of practice and playing. In contrast to many other chess coaches, he doesn't necessarily decry the explosion of Internet chess. In fact, he maintains that a player may be able to achieve quite a high OTB rating by playing a massive number of games via the Internet, simply from the sheer experience it entails, even without really attaining a true understanding of the game. Adamson notes that a player can gain valuable experience from playing a large number of Internet and blitz games, but he must understand the fundamental difference between blitz and regular chess and truly understand the necessity to take the time needed during tournament play. To go beyond, however, and attain master status, Coach Adamson says that frequent over-the-board tournament play against good competition is required. Therefore, his teams play in more Open tournaments than in scholastic tournaments because of the generally higher standard of competition. He points out that a player can "hit a wall" at around the 2000-2100 rating level since in tournaments he will frequently be paired with opponents who are essentially professional chessplayers and who have the ability to devote the major part of their day to chess study.

An example of a beneficial form of Internet play, he notes, is when two players decide they want to work on a specific opening and will spend ten games or so playing a pre-determined opening line, thus learning to grasp the fundamental nature of the position. He stresses that while understanding some level of opening theory is essential, if a player is simply working on rote memorization, he will not succeed. He must learn the underlying plans of the openings so he doesn't get lost as soon as he is out of his "book." It strikes me that GM Susan Polgar's monthly articles on the opening in *Chess Life* are especially tuned to teach this since she covers the basic plans for both white and black in her column. When I asked Adamson which Internet site he prefers for finding opponents, he replied without hesitation, "ICC (the Internet Chess Club) is the best by far."

Regarding the use of software, he recommends a combination of ChessBase and Fritz, with ChessBase used to locate games with a specific opening that a player wants to study, and Fritz used to analyze the games in depth. He suggests that for players rated above 1600, Fritz is one of the best chess programs available.

Regarding chess success in general, Adamson commented that although most chessplayers tend to be intelligent, this alone is not sufficient to reach a high level of chess ability. He described most smart people as linear thinkers, but he went on to say, "In chess, one needs to know when rules can be broken. Many highly intelligent people seem to have trouble with this. This is part of what makes top level chess so difficult to achieve. It has been said that 'chess is the great equalizer,' meaning that age, size, gender don't matter – mental ability is all that counts."



*The Catalina Foothills national championship team.  
Left to right: Coach Robby Adamson, Pasha Savine, Sean Higgins,  
Landon Brownell, Bryant Brownell, Chris De Sa, Vaishnav Aradhyula*

Robby Adamson is now an attorney in Tucson, but still plays frequently and offers private tutoring in addition to coaching the Catalina Foothills team. His experience isn't limited to playing and teaching – he has also directed national tournaments for over 15 years. As such, I asked him his general opinion of the 2005 SuperNationals and he said that any tournament of this magnitude is bound to run into some problems, but that overall he felt it was well run. He concurred with others that it was expensive to attend the event, but noted that many schools hold fundraisers prior to such tournaments to help defray the cost for the players and their families.

Sophomore team member Sean Higgins credited the success of the team to its cohesiveness and to Coach Adamson's motivation. He noted that most of the players have been playing and training together for a number of years. "We build on each other quite a bit," he said, adding that there is spirited and healthy competition among one another. In the fall there are usually scholastic tournaments every weekend or two, and the team frequently travels as a group to California for Open tournaments. Sean was also quick to credit Coach Adamson for preparing the team well. When possible, Adamson tries to review past games of likely opponents to provide his team members an idea of what they might expect to see.

Sean performed quite well at the SuperNationals, achieving a score of 5/6 heading into the final round, only to lose to a master and finish in a multi-player tie for 23rd place among the 355 players entered in the K-12 championship section. His rating now lies just shy of 2000. The highlight of the tournament for him was the team's outstanding performance, but Sean also enjoys the opportunity to compete with other players and teams from around the country.



*GM Maurice Ashley giving a simul*

Asked to explain his personal training regimen, he mentioned that like other team members, he attends the school chess club weekly and also benefits from private lessons from Coach Adamson every week or two. In addition, he takes advantage of the long strategy sessions Adamson offers during the year. When on his own, he doesn't follow a specific agenda. Rather, he simply studies "whatever I feel like at the time." As for his goals in chess, Sean remarked that each year after "nationals," Coach Adamson sits down with each player to set a personal rating goal to achieve by the start of next year's national championship. The idea is to come up with a challenging but achievable goal, typically in the neighborhood of a 100-point gain. Sean apparently far exceeded his rating target, having gained nearly 300 points since this time last year.



I was curious about the nature of the private lessons he receives from Adamson. There is no set formula, however. Shortly after a tournament, they may review together Sean's games. Other times, Sean will ask questions regarding specific opening positions, such as "once I reach this position, what do I do?" Occasionally, Adamson will assign tactics homework for Sean to work on, and perhaps most beneficial, Sean is sometimes asked to annotate a game in-depth. At the following lesson, the two of them carefully review this annotation to determine where he was correct in his analysis and where he may have been off a bit. Sean and Adamson have now been working together for about three or four years.

Asked what advice he might offer other kids looking to improve, Sean suggested spending most of one's time reviewing general opening strategy and middlegame tactics. He stressed the importance of playing in as many tournaments as possible, "otherwise, you won't know if your studying is paying off."

Catalina Foothills may not have the nation's highest-rated team, but they appear to be a motivated and level-headed bunch, and they are deservedly the 2005 National High School Team Champions. With the core of their team still freshmen and sophomores, they are likely a team to watch for the future as well.



*GM Susan Polgar with happy players*

GM Susan Polgar is always a pleasure to speak with, and I asked her how she thought the tournament went. Noting the record number of kids, she said, "I am very happy to see the wonderful turnout. The volunteers and TD staff worked very hard. They deserve a lot of credit for a magnificent event. However, I think it could have been even better." She lamented the high cost of hotel rooms and convention center restaurants. "I realize that it was a beautiful resort but I wish parents wouldn't have to dish out that much... But overall, I give it a B."



As Robby Adamson noted, any tournament of this size is going to have some unforeseen difficulties and one chess parent I spoke with indicated a number of concerns. He concurred with Susan Polgar's opinion about the high cost of food. He described it as "nothing short of price gouging, which is really sad because a lot of people – kids, young families – are already stretching just to get there in the first place." The Blitz tournament was also a point of contention, apparently having ended prematurely. However, what happened as the main tournament was getting ready to begin was of greatest concern to this parent. There was a long delay to the start of round one and in the view of this parent, "Here was one of the most disturbing sights and examples of horrific crowd control I have ever witnessed. Thousands of people were herded into a basement corridor and then were not allowed to enter the tournament for quite a while. This was truly a ... disaster waiting to happen. If a fire alarm was pulled at this moment (as one was earlier in the morning) scores of fatalities would have likely resulted. I squeezed my way out and called house security... Thankfully, the doors opened before anything bad happened."



On the other hand, this same parent offered glowing reports about the opening ceremony with its spirited marching band and All America Team presentation. He added, "We now see a lot of people from across the country we know and this is great." He was also pleased to see "a bunch of the top shelf kids (across ages, ethnicities, geography) playing endless games of blitz."

I spoke with Jerry Nash, the new USCF Scholastic Director and he reports, "A number of us have been working on the post-event evaluation for several weeks now. And we have received e-mails from across the country from people who have offered thoughtful, constructive advice for the next event. My own list runs 3-4 pages typed! We learn from each event." I'm glad to see that the USCF appears to be taking these concerns seriously.



Nash shared some other thoughts as well: “For an event of this size and nature, I thought the tournament went smoothly overall ... Some have suggested that we have grown too large to keep holding events like this. While the jury may still be out on that decision, I would offer the following thoughts. First, SuperNationals have become not just a tournament but a convention as well. Any time you have over 10,000 people in one place the logistics change considerably. What people expect from the event also changes. We must address both of those issues as well as others in the months ahead. Second, a tournament of this size can serve as a promotional event for chess.”



I asked the new Scholastic Director if there was any thought to making the SuperNationals a more frequent event and he responded, “I suggested to Diane Reese (USCF Events Coordinator) that we have a SuperNationals once a month for the health benefits. I think I walked at least 10-15 miles in those four days. She did not seem receptive to the idea, to say the least!”

Nash said in closing, “A special thank you goes out to the volunteers provided through the Tennessee Chess Association. They worked long hours to help the event staff do their job more efficiently. And thanks, of course, is because of

Diane Reese, the tournament staff, and the Scholastic Council members who all invested an immense amount of time and energy to make the event a success. But all of that would have been in vain had it not been for thousands of family members, teachers, and coaches who believe in the value of chess enough that they would bring their students from across the country to Nashville. They are the heart and soul of the growth of scholastic chess!”

Mark your calendars for the next SuperNationals: April 3-5, 2009, again at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville.

Listed below is a partial list of winners at the SuperNationals. For a complete list, see the USCF [website](#).

- *High School Championship Section*: nine-way tie among Xiao Cheng, Ruixin Yang, Salvijus Bercys, Aaron Kahn, Jouaquin Banawa, Kazim Gulamali, Thomas Gossell, Matthew Klegon and Brian Goldstein.
- *Junior High School Championship Section*: three-way tie among Joel Banawa, Parker Zhao and Jonathan Hilton.
- *Elementary School Championship Section*: Ray Robson



Winners of the University of Texas – Dallas (UTD) four-year college scholarships (if the university’s entrance requirements are met) are Xiao Cheng, Joel Banawa, and Ray Robson, as winners of the three championship sections.

The top girls in each section won automatic berths into the 2005 Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls. The top finishers were Vanessa West in the High School Championship section, Abby Marshall in the Junior High School Championship section, and Yang Dai in the Elementary School section.





Congratulations to these young combatants and to all the other players who participated.

### **America's Foundation for Chess**

I recently heard from Wendi Fischer, the National Scholastic Marketing Director for America's Foundation for Chess, often referred to as AF4C. This non-profit group is probably best known for sponsoring the annual U.S. Chess Championship, an arrangement between AF4C and the USCF which continues until the year 2010. The stated purpose of the group is to promote chess in American schools and in American culture. Wendi describes in greater detail: "The US Chess Championship is our primary driver on the culture side. As for schools, we have a scholastic initiative called First Move™. First Move uses chess as a tool to teach higher level thinking skills and increase math and reading scores and build self-esteem. The kids learn chess, but our focus is not on creating chess players, it's creating better thinkers. The program is taught in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, one hour a week for the entire school year. In an effort to get parents more involved, we help our schools host Family Chess Nights. These are a hit with all involved. The most recent one we held brought in more people than any other school event they had held in 5 years, and it was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade families. First Move is currently in Washington and California and will be in Florida this fall as well."



In the current school year, there are 26 schools participating in the First Move program, utilizing 110 teachers and reaching approximately 2,500 students. AF4C hopes to add another 4,000 students to their programs in the 2005-2006 school year. All schools are eligible to participate in areas served by AF4C. As Wendi explained, "One of the things that makes chess such a wonderful learning tool is that it works with the most challenged learners to the brightest learners, in the inner-city and in the suburbs. We have all different types of schools participating and all students can benefit from First Move." Executive

Director Heather Ramsey wrote, “The First Move program builds self-esteem and provides a learning platform that enables all children to succeed, regardless of race, income or ethnic background. Many participating schools are desperately underserved ... These are the communities who benefit from First Move the most.” She notes that demand is currently outstripping the resources of AF4C, so they have been actively courting donors. A look at the AF4C website reveals astounding success in the area of fundraising, both in terms of the number of donors and the amount of the donations. Wendi Fischer explained, “We are a non-profit organization, we aren’t out to make money off the schools; we want to make better thinkers in the schools. People believe in what we are doing, they can see the results. One of our donors recently attended a First Move class. When asked what he thought, he replied in a rather shocked voice, ‘They were *all* engaged, it was amazing.’ Building a strong foundation of thinking skills, skills people use their entire lives, is something we find many people support.”

AF4C has already begun their expansion process in San Diego and Tampa, with Philadelphia to follow in the 2005-2006 school year. “Because AF4C is committed to maintaining the quality and integrity of our program,” Fischer commented, “we are planning slow and steady. The overall goal is to have chess in the classroom of all 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders across the country, but it will be a few years.” It is important to note that although the First Move program instructors are mentored by chessplayers, the actual chess instruction is done by school teachers in their own classrooms.

Regarding recent discussions concerning ideological clashes between proponents of scholastic chess and proponents of adult chess, Fischer acknowledged, “While our curriculum does focus on learning higher level thinking skills and not competitive chess play, we understand the importance of competition and encourage our students to play, and to win and lose, realizing that you learn more from a game you lose than a game you win.” She stressed that AF4C supports both worlds, scholastic and adult chess.

“As a former teacher with a passion for education, I love First Move and what I have seen it do for students,” she says. “By using chess as a learning tool, students have fun while increasing their ability to think critically, analytically, and abstractly. In addition, important social and interpersonal skills are learned as students interact with one another. These skills are so important to develop, especially at an early age.”

While we may not see grandmasters coming from the ranks of the First Move program, nevertheless if our children can benefit from chess instruction to better develop other skills, I believe that they have been well-served; if they also develop a love for the game and continue, so much the better.

## **U.S. Chess League**

IM Greg Shahade is the brainchild behind this new chess league, composed of teams in eight U.S. cities. While not a scholastic league, there are number of young players scheduled to participate. For example, U.S. Junior Champion Lev Milman and Matthew Hoekstra, both students at Duke University, will play for the Carolina team, and the entire Dallas entry is composed of students at the University of Texas – Dallas. In addition, IM Pascal Charbonneau from the University of Maryland – Baltimore County (UMBC) has agreed to play for the Baltimore entry.



To avoid one or two cities overwhelming the other teams with strong GMs, there is an average team rating cap of 2400. Each team is composed of up to eight members, four of which play at a time. The 10-match season is scheduled to begin around the end of August and continue until about mid-November. The matches will be held on Wednesday nights and will be played and broadcast via the Internet Chess Club. There will be two divisions of four teams each, with the division winners fighting it out for the U.S. Chess League championship. While there are no monetary prizes offered by the league, some teams are actively pursuing corporate sponsorship. I asked Commissioner Shahade what led to the idea of forming the league and he responded that it was just “something that needs to be done.”

At the U.S. Chess League [website](#), it is noted that although the league will not be able to offer a slam dunk contest for audiences, “a clock slamming contest is a strong possibility.” We wish Greg and the players much success in this new endeavor.

### **Answers to Did You Know?**

Part 1: The Elementary School K-5 Under 900 section had the most entrants, with 525 players, and the High School K-12 Unrated section had the least, with 135 participants.

Part 2: New York led with a whopping 786 players, followed by Texas (436), Florida (351), Tennessee (337), and North Carolina (269).

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Have something newsworthy you'd like to share? E-mail me at [scholasticchess@chesscafe.com](mailto: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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