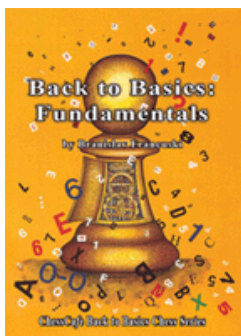




COLUMNISTS

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg



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SuperNationals IV

More than 5,200 young chess players filled the cavernous Gaylord Opryland Resort in Nashville, Tennessee, for the long-awaited SuperNationals IV mega-tournament. This month we hear from the winner of the K-6 section and the winner of the K-3 section. Next month another top young player will share his thoughts as well, as will a participant in the College "Final Four" of chess.

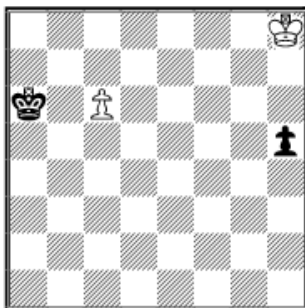
Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive one of the following, at the discretion of ChessCafe.com: *Starting Out: 1.e4!* (CD), by GM Neil McDonald; *Starting Out: The King's Indian* (CD), by GM Joe Gallagher; or *Starting Out: The Scotch Game* (CD), by GM John Emms.



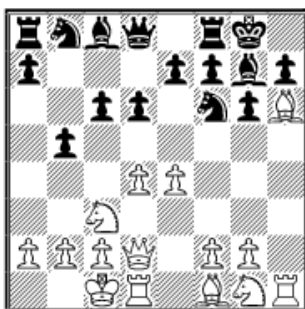
We will accept all contest answers for *two weeks* following the appearance of this column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. In order to meet the two-week deadline, please e-mail your responses to me by May 27, 2009. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1

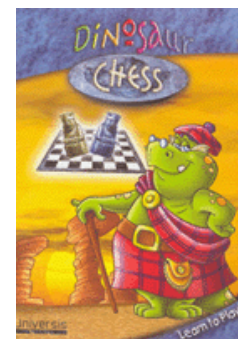


White to move. Can he draw? How?

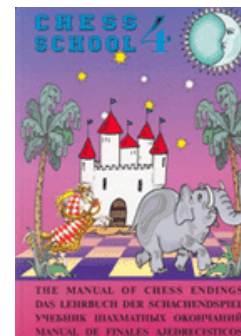
Problem #2



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Black to move. What would you suggest?



Photo: www.mychessphotos.com

If you have been to any of the springtime national scholastic championships – elementary, junior high, and high school – you know what incredible gatherings they are, with a thousand or more youngsters in one place. The tournament hall is eerily quiet, while outside the playing area the kids are bouncing around the skittles room and taking over lobbies and hallways and food courts.

Every four years these championships, known as the SuperNationals, in which all three major events come together in one place and one time, step up to another level. Now we're talking over 5,000 (!) kids, from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Plus thousands more parents, family, friends and coaches.



The 2009 SuperNationals IV was probably unprecedented in the star power that accompanied it. Here is just a partial listing:

- Garry Kasparov
- Current Women's World Champion Alexandra Kosteniuk
- Current U.S. Champion Yury Shulman
- Current U.S. Women's Champion Anna Zatonskih
- Maurice Ashley
- Alexander Shabalov
- Alex Stripunsky
- Astronaut Greg Chamitoff

Attendees were treated to an assortment of simul, book signings and seminars, in addition to giggle overload. It comes and goes much too quickly. But then there's always the next tournament to look forward to.

K-3 Section

Really, it's more than three tournaments in one. Within the Elementary School Championships alone, there are four sections – K-1, K-3, K-5 and K-6.

As the name implies, the K-3 section includes players from kindergarten through third grade. There were 246 entrants in this division, and by the end of the seven-round tournament, one player stood alone at the top, with a perfect 7-0 score. Cameron Wheeler was one of only four players in the entire SuperNationals to emerge victorious in all seven of his games.



*Cameron Wheeler (R),
with Vignesh Panchanatham*

Eight-year-old Cameron is in third grade in Cupertino, California, about fifty miles south of San Francisco. Rob Wheeler, Cameron's father, describes how he initially became interested in chess, three years ago:

At a very young age Cameron showed a remarkable ability and interest in playing games. Whether it was Chutes and Ladders or a card game such as Crazy Eights or Hearts, he quickly learned the rules. Where his friends were typically trying to understand how to play the game, Cameron was busy trying to figure out how to win the game, formulating his own strategies.

Neither my wife or I were chess players, but I thought it would be a good activity for him. A friend suggested the computer program "Learn to play chess with Fritz and Chesster." I bought it for him, and he tried it, but at that time he wasn't very proficient on the computer, so he quickly got frustrated with it. Months later, after learning some simpler computer games, he returned to Fritz and Chesster. Within a week he was playing actual games. The second week he played my wife OTB and beat her! Next he moved on to play our 17-year old nephew (who was living with us at the time and knew some chess). In a few days, he finally beat his big cousin one time and we all thought it was a fluke, but by the next week he was winning 40% of the time and in the following week he was winning nearly every game. Of course, we realized that he had some special ability and that is when I went out and bought my first (of many) chess books. For a brief period I was able to stay one chapter ahead of him in the book, but my superior book knowledge was quickly dwarfed by his superior board vision. I still work with him daily as a coach/cheerleader, but we both recognize that there isn't much point in me playing him.

Rob laments the fact that Cameron hasn't had any one coach that has "stuck." Several good coaches have begun working with Cameron, only to be pulled away by business or family obligations. But his father

explained what they have done to overcome this to an extent:

Like Cameron, several of the top bay area kids don't have competitive chess programs at their schools. These kids tend to hang out together at local tournaments and we would arrange get-togethers at a library or at someone's home for informal but "serious" games. This group of kids eventually became an ICC team, competing in the Team4545 league tournaments as the Chesspunks. Eventually, the parents started pooling our resources to fly top coaches out for intensive week and weekend sessions. There have been a handful of sessions, but Cameron has only been able to attend two weekend sessions: one with IM Andranik Matikozian and the other with GM Yuri Shulman. The 'punks include some of the best players in CA (and the nation) including: Tanuj Vasudeva, Vignesh Panchanatham, Cameron Wheeler, Allan Beilin, Kesav Viswanadha, and Armaan Kalyanpur.

The upshot of all this is that I act as Cameron's coach. I gather resources and recommendations from as many sources as I can and come up with plans for what Cameron should be doing, but Cameron is the one who does all of the heavy lifting. One of the traits that separates him from his peers is that he is very self-motivated and driven. My wife and I are constantly checking in to make sure that Cameron is pulling us and not that we are pushing him.

One of Cameron's close friends, Vignesh Panchanatham, was playing in the same K-3 section and in fact was rated a bit higher than Cameron. Both boys knew that either or both might end up playing for the championship, and this made for an interesting dynamic.

Coming to the SuperNationals, we knew that Cameron (#12 seed) and Vignesh (#6 seed) were real contenders for the title. Hanging out between early rounds, the two boys joked about meeting each other in the last round to decide the championship. While we all knew it was a possibility, it seemed like so many things would have to go exactly right for that to actually happen.

Round 5 brought Cameron's first real test, #4 seed Kadir Andres Pillai. The long days and time change took their toll on the NY chess star and in the middlegame he faltered. Cameron emerged from that round knowing that the title was achievable.

Vignesh was given the opportunity to get revenge on Amir Moazami, who beat Vignesh at the Grade-Level Nationals in Houston. This time Amir was no match for Vignesh's attack, and the game ended in a stunning 14 moves. Two of the other top boards drew, and suddenly there were only 3 kids left with a perfect score.

Late Saturday evening, the pairings went up. Vignesh had to play the only other 5.0, Andrew Tang. Meanwhile Cameron had to play the tough #2 seed William Graif, who had beat Cameron just 4 months ago at the Grade-Level Nationals in Orlando. This time it was Cameron's turn to prevail. When Vignesh exited the playing hall with a victory, we knew the two boys would meet for the final match.

Outside the hall, the boys joked about their upcoming game: 1. e4 e5 Draw! Then came the realization that they would have to play each other and one of them would become champion while the other would probably drop to 4-6th place. Both parents were concerned that the boys would have a hard time playing a serious game against each other, and just prior to the start of the round they were all smiles, kicking each other under the table. Once the round started, it was "Game On!." After 2½ hours, the two friends emerged from the playing hall. It was done.

If you look at the pictures on *Chess Life Online* taken by Jennifer Shahade immediately after the round, it is hard to tell who won the championship. Cameron was clearly excited, but he knew that Vignesh was disappointed. Those emotions are difficult for an 8-year-old to handle, but by the time the award ceremony began, the two were all smiles.

Rob Wheeler discussed his impression of the tournament:

We had a blast at the SuperNationals. The venue was pretty incredible, but this trip was “all business.” We learned from our mistakes at previous national events and really kept Cameron pretty isolated, well rested, and nutritiously fed. In his round 5 and 6 games against the top kids from NY, you could really see that his energy level was much higher.

Overall, I thought the tournament was well run, and the kids all had a blast. To pull off an event of that scale is a remarkable achievement. Of course the trip/tournament wasn't without flaws: 1) Bad weather in Dallas on the flight out [from California] delayed both of our flights. We didn't arrive at the hotel until after 1:00 A.M. Thursday evening/Friday morning. 2) After the late night, I wanted Cam to get his rest, so I let him sleep as long as possible, thus we missed the opening ceremonies. 3) Like any tournament, there weren't enough locations where the pairings were posted (initially) and they weren't always posted in a timely fashion. The biggest annoyance was that we had free internet in the rooms, but the pairings weren't updated online before the rounds began. 4) There were several interesting speakers, simuls, signings, etc., but many were held during the round. I didn't feel comfortable attending a talk when my 8-year old didn't know where I would be, so we missed most of those “extras.”

Following the SuperNationals, Cameron played in the CalChess state scholastic championships. Seeking stronger competition, he played one section up (in the grade 4-6 section) and finished just half a point out of first place.

Cameron says that his goal is to achieve expert level (a 2000 rating) by his tenth birthday. Currently rated 1768, that may seem like a tall order, but looking at his historical ratings, one sees that a year ago at this time he was rated 1254. That means he has gained over 500 points in a single year!

Cameron has annotated his crucial final round game against his close friend to decide the national championship:

Wheeler, Cameron - Panchanatham, Vignesh
SuperNationals IV Nashville (7), 05.04.2009
Closed Sicilian [B24]

This was my seventh round game against my good friend Vignesh Panchanatham, also from Cupertino. Whoever won this game would be the national champion.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 e6 4.Bg2 Nge7 5.f4 g6 6.d3 Bg7 7.Be3 b6

I want to develop my knight, castle, and build up a kingside attack, but my position is already worse.

8.Nge2 d5 9.Bf2 d4 10.Nb1

Now he is cramping my position.



10...Bb7 11.0-0 Qc7 12.Nd2 0-0-0

I wasn't expecting him to castle long, but I'm okay with it.

13.Nf3 e5 14.Qd2 h6 15.fxe5 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Bxe5 17.c3

I was trying to open up a file to his king, but better was a4 or b4.



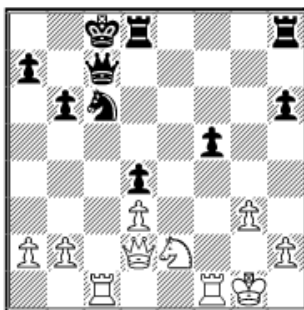
17...f5??

Now I can open the c-file and win a pawn.

18.cxd4 Bxd4 19.Bxd4 cxd4 20.Rac1

Pin to win!

20...Bc6 21.exf5 gxf5 22.Bxc6 Nxc6



23.Rxf5??

Doh! Grabbing pawns. I missed Rxc6 followed by Rc1.

23...Qd7

Fortunately, he missed Kb7.

24.Rf6 Rde8 25.Rcxc6+ Kb7 26.Rxh6 Rhf8 27.Rcf6

Trying to get him to simplify the position.

27...Qg4

But he wants to keep it complicated. I missed Rh7+.

28.Qf4 Qg7 29.Rxf8 Rxf8 30.Qe4+ Ka6 31.Rh7 Qf6 32.Qf4 Qd8

Now I can pick up another pawn.

33.Qxd4 Qxd4+ 34.Nxd4

The queens are off the board, and black has no attacking chances.

34...Rd8??

Vignesh missed a tactic, letting me win a pawn and simplify the position further.

35.Rxa7+ Kxa7 36.Nc6+ Kb7 37.Nxd8+ Kc7 38.Ne6+ Kd7 39.Nf4 b5 40.d4 b4 41.d5 Kd6 42.h4 1-0

K-6 Section

The K-6 section had more than 200 participants and a single player stood atop the section when the dust settled by the end of the seventh round.



Daniel Gurevich analyzes a tough position with Garry Kasparov

With his pre-tournament rating of 2075, eleven-year-old Daniel Gurevich was the second-highest rated player in K-6, but he nearly didn't come to the tournament. His father explains:

Daniel's decision to play in the 2009 U.S. Nationals was somewhat accidental. His prior experience at the Nationals suggested that even at that level playing with peers did not hold much reward. In all three of his previous appearances he ended up playing another kid from Atlanta, Benjamin Moon, for first place. Daniel won two and Benjamin won one. But the rest of the games offered little challenge, and the two could play each other regularly without leaving Atlanta. In the end Daniel decided against going to scholastic tournaments and concentrated on adult events.

Adult events, even local ones, offered challenge and opportunity. Chess-wise, they gave an opportunity to face much tougher opponents and learn from them. But they also offered prize money. Daniel quickly realized that as a much more attractive opportunity than, say, a lemonade stand. Daniel never asked parents for games or toys, but he had a different kind of dream. He is just as passionate about music as he is about chess. His piano repertoire consists of professional pieces that require a good instrument. He still did not expect the parents to buy a grand piano for him, but instead started saving his chess winnings year after year. The dream came true (of course with some help from parents) when he turned 11. Now he is

a proud owner of a vintage grand piano from a famous American manufacturer.

Daniel's father explains what changed the youngster's mind about coming to the SuperNationals:

This year's SuperNationals offered a different kind of challenge for Daniel. First of all, the winner of a K-6 section would receive a full scholarship to UT Dallas. Second, in order to win it, being a 5th grader, Daniel would have to play kids who are a year older than he is. The fact that the competition included 6th graders Jarod Pamatmat and David Adelberg who did well at the 2008 World Youth Championship only helped his resolve. Daniel did not get noticed despite his previous successes and wanted to prove that he was just as good as the kids that did get a lot of publicity. He decided that was enough of a challenge to rise to.

The idea of a scholarship came after Daniel took the SAT in January 2008. Despite being just 10, he scored high enough for most universities in Georgia and started bugging parents about going to college early. He was done with elementary school program before he turned five and was supposed to start kindergarten. Local schools did not offer a challenge, so his parents were forced to homeschool Daniel. He did not slow down after that and was ready for high school before the end of 3rd grade. Right now he is working on AP- and college-level classes. His favorite subjects are math and science, but he also loves languages and reads tons of books, in both English and Russian. He also loves swimming, which he took on at age 4 and pursues with the same level of dedication as everything he does.

Daniel's father Roman explained to me that although Daniel was born in the U.S., both parents speak Russian at home, and school subjects are taught in both English and Russian. Asked to describe Daniel's training routine, his father explained:

As far as his chess training is concerned, it is hard to give advice, since Daniel and his parents are themselves groping for a way in the dark. He is yet to find a coach that would provide a real sense of direction. Flying under the radar, as Daniel was until now, did not help attracting much interest from the professional coaches. Daniel was the first student for both his local coach, master Michael Elkin, and IM Kirill Kuderinov from Kazakhstan, although both did a wonderful job. Chess books have always been a major source. Currently, Daniel is working through the School of Chess Excellence series by Dvoretsky, which he prefers to read in the original language. Before the SuperNationals Daniel concentrated on openings and after it switched to endgames. Of course, he never forgets about tactics, following Korchnoi's famous advice. Whenever he has an opportunity, Daniel plays chess online, but there is no routine.

The Atlanta chess scene does not offer many opportunities to play in major tournaments, so with limited resources his parents have to pick and choose the ones he can attend. He never played in any international tournaments for the same reason. The next big one will probably be the World Open in July.

Daniel commented that he still works with national master Michael Elkin, and credits IM Kuderinov's work with him over the previous six months as contributing to Daniel's victory at SuperNationals. He is clearly a very focused young man. "I loved the hotel both times I was at SuperNationals [he won the K-1 section at SuperNationals III in 2005]. I liked to walk around the Garden Conservatory and relax. I never made it to the skittles room because I didn't want to get distracted from the tournament. The schedule is really tough. It is hard to play your best chess, and winning the tournament becomes a matter of endurance."

Daniel has annotated his final round game that brought him the K-6 title this year:

Daniel Gurevich (2075) - Sarah Chiang (1950)

SuperNationals IV (7), 05.04.2009

Caro-Kann Defense [B13]

This was my last round game against Sarah Chiang. We both had 5½ points, and we both needed to win. The game was an interesting Caro-Kann, but the game was really over by move fifteen.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.c3

The Exchange Variation of the Caro-Kann.

5...g6 6.Bf4 Bg7 7.Nf3 Nh6?!

The start of a dubious plan. 7...Nf6!? was better.

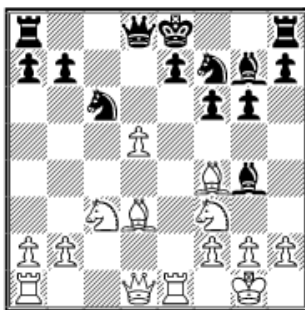
8.0-0 f6 9.Re1 Nf7 10.c4!

Now my position is better. The game opens up, and the bishop on g7 becomes awkward, and the e6-square is weak.

10...Bg4?

This is not the best move. Now I gain a few tempos and Black cannot finish developing. Better is 10...dxc4!? 11.Bxc4 0-0 12.h3 My position is still better, but at least Black has castled.

11.cxd5 Qxd5 12.Nc3 Qd8 13.d5+/-



My position is much better and Black can barely castle.

13...Nce5 14.Bb5+ Nd7

If 14...Bd7!?, then 15.Nd4 0-0 16.Bxd7 Qxd7 17.Ne6+/- and White's position is crushing.

15.Qa4?!

I could have played better. I should have conserved my energy and played 15.d6! immediately: 15.d6! e5 16.Nxe5!! and White is completely winning.

15...Bxf3 16.gxf3 f5 17.d6 e5 18.Nd5 0-0 19.Bxd7 exf4 20.Nc7 Ne5 21.Qb3+ Kh8 22.Nxa8 Qxd7 23.Nc7 Qxd6 24.Ne6



24...Qc6??

Black still had minuscule chances to survive, but after this blunder, the game is over.

25.Rxe5 Bxe5 26.Nxf8 g5 27.Qf7 Bg7 28.Ne6 1-0

K-8 and K-9 Sections

K-8 was a large section, with 242 participants. George Qi took clear first with his perfect 7-0 record. Christopher Heung was half a point behind, with six others tied with 6 points.

In the K-9 section 115 players took part. Two players shared the top spot with scores of 6½/7 – Ryan Moon and Ben Gershenov. Ryan took the title on tiebreak points. Tying for third and fourth places were Andrew Ng and Michael Christianson.

K-12 Section

At times, some of the top scholastic players decline to play in scholastic championships since they may only get a challenging game the last round or two, if at all. But a number of highly rated players were present in the K-12 section, including GM-elect Robert Hess and his 2537 rating, Marc Arnold (2425) and Shinsaku Uesugi (2334), along with quite a few other masters and experts.

It's not often in this country that one has a chance to face a grandmaster-elect at a scholastic event, and Hess showed why he has a lofty rating and title. He finished with a perfect 7-0 record, edging out Uesugi who finished second with 6½ points. Arnold shared third place with four other players at 6 points.

In Memoriam

Landon Brownell (1989-2009) was an integral part of the powerful Catalina Foothills (Arizona) High School chess teams that won three national titles between 2005 and 2008.



Landon Brownell
Photo: Chess Life Online

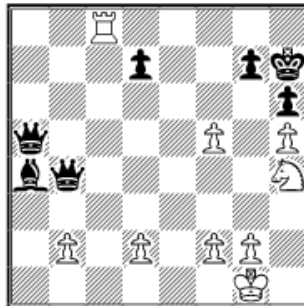
A Bakersfield, California news service reported that on April 21, Landon “became fatigued and dozed off” while driving. Ironically, friend and fellow chess master Elliott Liu just finished taking a class on sleep deprivation at Stanford University. His professor stressed the highly dangerous effects of inadequate sleep when driving, claiming that it is even more dangerous than driving drunk, as horrendous as that is.

“To have Landon fall asleep at the wheel, mirroring exactly what we learned in class, hits me hard,” said Liu. “[My professor’s] persistent message just turned into reality for me. We will all miss Landon greatly.”

Catalina Foothills coach Robby Adamson has written a touching memorial to Landon at *Chess Life Online*. May his family, which has suffered too many tragedies, be comforted by his memory, and may we all learn to avoid such preventable accidents.

Answers to Last Month’s Quiz

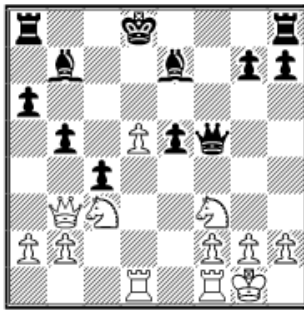
Problem #1



White to move and win.

Answer: *1.Ng6* and Black can delay but can’t prevent *Rh8#*.

Problem #2



It is White to move. His queen is trapped but how can he lose only a piece rather than his queen?

Answer: *1.Nh4 Qh5 (if 1...Bxh4 2.Qb4) 2.Qc2. Both problems are from [Back to Basics: Tactics](#), by Dan Heisman.*

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