

CALCHESS JOURNAL

Summer 2012



Special Points of Interest:

- *USCF President's interview*
- *Queen's Gambit Play Review*
- *Researching for Chess Dryad*

INTERVIEW WITH MS. RUTH HARING

By Aditya Kumar

Ruth Haring is a Life Member of USCF, an International Woman Master and a member of the Executive Board and President of USCF—besides being a Calchess Board member. Yours truly had the opportunity to interview Ruth on a wide range of topics.

Aditya: Please tell me little bit about your childhood and how you got interested in chess.

Ruth: Initially, when I was a kid I lived in Alaska and there wasn't a whole lot to do so our parents encouraged us to play board games.

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Upcoming Events

Regular (Open)

- Howard Donnelly Memorial Sept. 15
- NHC Summer Championship Sept. 16
- Exchange Open Sept. 22
- Fall Open Sept. 29
- Western States Reno Oct. 19

Scholastic

- Chess4Less BAC Sept. 15
- Cupertino Swiss Sept. 23
- Kids Quads Sept. 30
- Cupertino Swiss Oct. 07
- Weibel Elite Quads Oct. 13

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CHESS FOR LIFE: BRIDGING CHESS & LIFE

By Sydney Liu

I want to become a businessman when I grow up. Or a doctor. Or a lawyer. The truth is, I have no idea what I want to be, but I want to be happy when I get there. While the future remains mysterious, I am confident that the life skills I have developed and will continue to develop on my journey will help me achieve my goals.

Founded in 2011 by high school chess players, *Chess for Life's* goal is to figure out a way to use our knowledge of the game and deploy it to advance scholastic chess and the instruction of life skills useful in real-life professions.

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CALCHESS JOURNAL

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



This is the start of a new school year, and the beginning of the Chess Scholastic year. This year we have another change for the CalChess State Grade Level Championship as it being organized by Elizabeth Shaugnassy and the Berkeley Chess School. Held December 15-16 this year at the outstanding Hilton in Pleasanton, it looks to be an excellent event for all kids.

We are also looking forward to hosting the U.S. Game/60 and U.S. Game/30 Championship in October as well as we just got word that we have been selected

to host the 2013 US Amateur Team (West) Championship again! Your CalChess Board, put a lot of effort into bringing these National Championship events to Northern California and we hope you can add your support with your attendance. Try to start forming your team for the Amateur Team Championship now. Even if you cannot find a partner or enough to fill a team, do not worry, we will be happy to assist you in putting together teams that are short of players. So you have no excuse!

Our certification as a 501c3 organization is almost complete, as we simply need the final verification from the State of California. This will allow us to further benefit our local chess community and if you know of ways CalChess can add our support, please let us know. Of course, if you would like to help CalChess, we would appreciate all the encouragement, promotion and patronage and you can offer!

Look for more updates of some big events coming at www.calchess.org, the winner of the best USCF Affiliate website for the 3rd year in a row.

I look forward to seeing you out there!

Tom Langland
CalChess President

CalChess Board

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Editor Contact: adityavakumar@gmail.com

Interview with Ruth Haring

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At one point my mother taught me and my brother how to play chess and she took us to a local chess tournament. I was around ten at the time - we both played, and found out we weren't as good as we thought. But that's how I initially started playing casual chess.

Aditya: Did you have any chess player as a role model while growing up?

Ruth: I was a product of the Fischer boom. I read multiple books and games and went through the games of *Alekhine*, *Morphy*, *Capablanca*, and other World Champions. We had chess newsletters to read every week and we didn't grow up with computers that we currently use for broadcasting live chess games.

Aditya: Chess in general is increasingly played online. Is this a problem for the future of chess?

Ruth: This is both good and bad, because, on one hand, the internet can network teams across the country and around the world. People from different parts of the country and world who would normally have no

chance of meeting now have the opportunity to play games. In addition, young people and people who are learning chess can utilize computers to aid in their learning, which is great.

On the other hand, however, there is a community of chess players and there is a social aspect to it – when I started playing tournament chess again, I saw people I hadn't seen in 20 years. They would ask me questions about old games that we played, which shows the close-knit chess connection that chess provides in-person.

Aditya: What prompted you to join the USCF board and then become its President? What are your goals at USCF and how did your experience at Calchess count towards it?

Ruth: During the 70s I was one of the top women's players in the country and I was a long time player of the game. After my kids got to college I started to play chess again; I went to a chess tournament and saw that there were some financial problems in the federation and, given my work experience as well as

chess experience, I felt I could contribute and that I was an advocate for the players. The experience has been eye-opening.

The main goal that I have had (and accomplished) is the settlement of early lawsuit against the United States Chess Federation. Another member and I were persistent in the need for the organization to immediately settle its debts. Right now we are still paying off debts and starting to think about how we can promote chess in both scholastic chess as well as involving women in chess.

As for California chess, back in 70s I played here almost every weekend and I always had a focus on the playing. I don't have any time to study as much, *but I fundamentally love chess and that is the number one goal of USCF* – we need to enlarge activities around chess tournament.

Aditya: On the subject of scholastic chess, in some countries such as Armenia, playing chess is almost integral to the school curriculum. What is your opinion of the level of focus on Scholastic chess in US, and how is USCF helping?

Interview with Ruth Haring

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Ruth: We have an exciting level of scholastic membership, but we don't have any integration into chess programs. We are able to sell idea of why chess is so good and growing that is a challenge and ultimately depends on the community. Although the USCF can coordinate, publicize, and initially organize, it is the members who ultimately take the lead.

Chess is important because it allows us to teach young children about life skills such as critical thinking, decision making, and patience.

Aditya: Similarly, how can we encourage more women to join chess?

Ruth: This is interesting because the top levels of women's chess have gotten a lot better in the past years, but the numbers of women playing have not risen dramatically. At certain age groups, there are good percentages of female players and we need to address why some women are dropping out. We are currently seeing uptakes in membership and hope that it will grow in the years to come

by doing some outreach events.

I have spoken with chess moms and asked them why do not participate in chess. Essentially, they feel a social barrier between themselves and chess, which is the fundamental problem in the situation. Our main goal should be to break this social barrier by using as many means as possible. In addition, we have to make chess less about winning and more about enjoyment of the game.

Aditya: Proponents of chess as a spectator sport have attempted to accomplish this; specifically, Jennifer Shahade has done an excellent job with her X Chess Championships. Could this be a possible avenue for encouraging women to play?

Ruth: I have actually spoken to Jennifer and I agree that it would be excellent to have a chess reality television show or something that integrates chess into modern pop culture. If we can do this, it would bring much more people, women and men, into the game.

Aditya: What is your most memorable chess game and why?

Ruth: I've played so many games. I could come up with one, but I've played a lot of games - I enjoyed notable wins against women grandmasters and other strong players, however.

Exciting Finish and Brand New Start for Chess League

NorCal High School Chess League

By Sydney Liu

And then there were four. Monte Vista sat on top with an undefeated record, followed by Mission San Jose, American, and Dougherty Valley. The pressure was on and each game mattered, each move matter. When the trophy was awarded, only one team stood to receive it: Mission San Jose.

While all the top four teams in varsity played high quality chess, Mission San Jose was crowned the champion. The semifinalist teams were no easy crowd. The field of players included one National Master (now FIDE master), three experts, and seven other players rated above 1800. The championship team featured captain and expert Arthur Liou, former junior high and elementary state champion James Kwok, Vincent Tian, former elementary state champion Hemang Jangle, and Gurman Shoker. The team also won the Calchess state championships, displaying their dominance in Northern California chess.

Here is a game between Mission San Jose's Arthur Liou and Dougherty Valley's Benjamin

Tong on board 1 of the varsity championships:

thatart - MateInFifty

0-1, 4/8/2012.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 g6 Hyper accelerated dragon 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nc6 5. Nc3 Bg7 6. Be3 Nf6 7. f3 O-O 8. Qd2 d5 This is one of the common lines of the accelerated dragon. d5 is the point of the early fianchetto. In the normal dragon, a move would have been wasted because the black pawn would have already been moved to d6.



9. exd5 Nxd5 10. Nxc6 bxc6 11. Bd4 Bxd4 12. Qxd4 Qa5 13. Bc4 Nxc3 14. Qxc3 Qxc3 15. bxc3

This position is still theory and is generally considered equal, but black seems to have the more pleasant position because he has a slightly better pawn structure and can try to use the pawn majority.



15... Rb8 16. Kd2 O-O-O seemed necessary 16... Rd8 17. Ke3 Bf5 18. Bd3 Bb3 is stronger. It prevents the black rook from penetrating on the b-file and protects the c-pawn. After Bd3, black can exchange



and go Rb2

18... Be6 19. c4? Don't put pawns on the same color as your bishop. Now the white bishop is tied down to protecting the c-pawn and what's worse is it's mobility is limited. 19... c5 20. Rhb1 Kg7 21. Rb3 Rb6 22. Rab1 Rdb8 23. a4 Rxb3 24. Rxb3 Rxb3 25. cxb3 Notice how all of white's

Exciting Finish and Brand New Start for Chess League

.....Continued from Page 5

Black is clearly better but is it enough to be converted?



25... a5 26. Be4 Kf6 27. h4 h6
28. g4 g5 Well played plan by black. He puts his own pawns on dark squares and locks ALL of white's pawns on light squares. 29. h5 Ke5 30. Bh7 f6 31. Bg6 31...f5! 32. gxf5 Bxf5 33. Ke2 Kf4 and black should be winning



31... Bd7 32. Be4 e6 33. Bg6 f5
34. Bh7 Bc6 35. Bg6 f4 36. Ke2 Kd4 37. Bf7 e5 38. Bd5 Bxd5

39. cxd5 Kxd5 40. Kd3 Kd6
41. Kc3 e4 42. fxe4 Ke5 43. Kd3 f3 44. Ke3 f2 45. Ke2 Kxe4 **White resigns** [0-1]

The junior varsity section ended with Campolindo defeating American. American is the only team to make the playoffs in both sections and they have done so both years. Campolindo's junior varsity team was made of all unrated players, many of whom had no experience aside from league play.



Major Changes to the Organization

Whereas in the past, the league has been limited to schools with 5 players or more, the league is now changing into a 3 on 3 league with a Swiss format for pairings rather than round robin. Prizes will be set for rating groups. This allows more players to compete and more opportunities to win!

The league will now offer other events as well! Some events will be available to the public, so keep posted! New events will include blitz tournaments and bughouse tournaments.

To be notified of these tournaments, like us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ncachessleague> and follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/NCalChessLeague>

We are always looking for volunteers and helpers, so contact us if you want us to help!. Visit <http://ncachessleague.weebly.com/>

EIGHT BAY AREA JUNIORS QUALIFY FOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

By Aditya Kumar

Once again, the Bay Area is set to send more prolific juniors to the 2012 World Championships. Eight juniors, from Under 8 to Under 18 divisions, are being sent to compete in Slovenia for their respective division title. The tournament will be held from November 7th to 19th in Maribor, Slovenia. Last year, the Championships were held in Brazil, featuring familiar bay area whiz kids Tanuj Vasudeva, Kesav, Wiswanadha, Cameron Wheeler, and Allan Beilin. This year, Rayan Taghizadeh, Cameron Wheeler, Vignesh Panchantham, Siddarth Banik, Kevin Moy, Tanuj Vasudeva, Yian Liou, and Daniel Naroditsky have qualified for the prestigious tournament. We wish them the best of luck!

Below is Cameron Wheeler's recent GM Scalp at the Philadelphia Open annotated by Cameron himself.

Philadelphia International

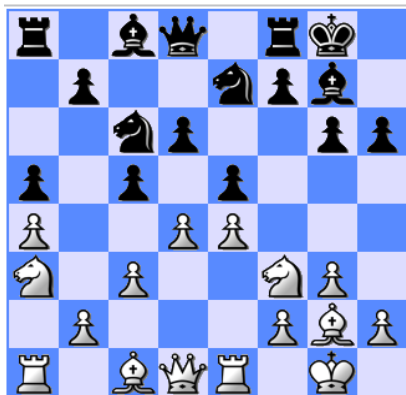
[White "Garcia, Gildardo"]

[Black "Wheeler, Cameron"]

[Result "0-1"]

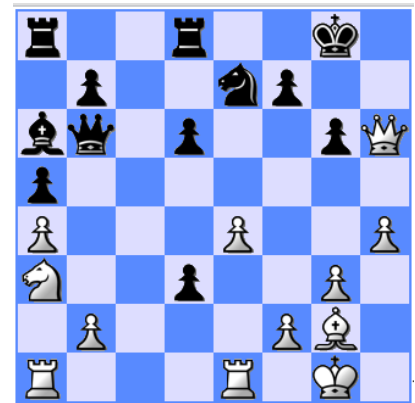
1. e4 e6 2. d3 c5 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. g3 g6 5. Bg2 Bg7 6. O-O Nge7 7. Re1 d6 8. c3 e5 9. a3 a5 {I played 9...a5 to stop b4 but this weakened my light squares} 10. a4 O-O 11. Na3 h6 12. d4 {This gave me a powerful past pawn}

exd4 13. cxd4 Nxd4 14. Nxd4 cxd4 15. Nb5 Qb6 16. Bf4 Rd8 17. h4 Be6 18. Qd2 Bc4 19. Na3 Ba6 20. Bxh6 Bxh6 21. Qxh6 d3 {Here



he got desperate and went for an attack} 22. Qg5 Nc6 23. h5 Qc5 24. e5 {He can't let me trade the queens or I'll be better} Nxe5 25. Qf4 Qb4 {This was bad because of his next move} 26. Bd5 d2 (26... Qxf4 27. gxf4 d2 28. Red1 Be2 29. fxe5 Bxd1 30. Rxd1 dxe5 31. Rxd2 gxh5 {This looked better for him as he can bring his knight to c4 and my pawns are weak}) 27. Re4 Qxb2 28. Rd1 Rd7

{This was a serious mistake because of the hxg6 line} (28... Qxa3 29. Rxe5 dxe5 30. Qxf7+ Kh8 31. hxg6) (28... Bd3 \$1 29.



Rxe5 Qxe5 30. Qxf7+ Kh8 31. hxg6 Qg7 {Black is probably better} 29. Nb5 (29. hxg6 Nxc6 30. Qg4 {This attacks my rook and my knight so he would be winning}) 29... Bxb5 30. hxg6 Nxc6 31. Qg5 Kg7 32. axb5 Qc2 {He has to trade queens here} 33. Qxd2 (33. Rxd2 Qc1+ 34. Kg2 Rh8) 33... Qxd2 34. Rxd2 Rc8 {Here the endgame is better for me but not winning} 35. Ra4 Rc1+ (35... b6 36. Bc6 Rdd8 37. Rad4 {My rooks are passive and he wins d6}) 36. Kg2 b6 37. Bc6 Rd8 38. Rad4 Ne5 39. Bd5 (39. Rxd6 Nxc6 40. Rxd8 Nxd8 41. Rxd8 Rc5) 39... Rh8 40. Rd1 Rc5 41. f4 \$4 {this forces me to move to g4 which gets his king in a mating net} Ng4 42. Kf3 f5 43. Be6 Kf6 44. Bc4 d5 45. Bd3 (45. Bxd5 Rh2 46. Rf1 Rc3+ 47. Rd3 Rxd3#) 45... Rh2 46. Bxf5 {This was his only option} (46. Rf1 Rd2 \$22 {zugzwang}) 46... Kxf5 {The rest was a matter of technique} 47. Rxd5+ Rxd5 48. Rxd5+ Ke6 49. Rd8 Nf6 50. g4 Rh3+ 51. Kg2 Rb3 52. g5 Nh5 53. Rf8 Rxb5 54. Kf3 Rf5 55. Rh8 Nxf4 56. Ke4 Ng6 57. Re8+ Ne7 58. Rxe7+ Kxe7 59. Kxf5 a4 0-1

2012 US CHESS LEAGUE TO START THIS SEPTEMBER

By John Donaldson

This season the Mechanics' will likely have the youngest team in the USCL, with 5 of its 10 players under 17 and 3 of them under 13.

Ratings, based on January 2012 rating list (current rating)

Jesse Kraai 2567 (2567)

Vinay Bhat 2555 (2555)

Daniel Naroditsky 2546 (2552) Age 16

Dmitry Zilberstein 2472 (2467)

John Donaldson 2402 (2408)

Samuel Sevian 2299 (2430) Age 11

Yian Liou 2354 (2426) Age 14

Andy Lee 2273 (2276)

Cameron Wheeler 2154 (2219) Age 11

Kesav Viswanadha 2134 (2219) Age 12

Team Manager: John Donaldson

Assistant Team Manager: Payam Afkham-Ebrahimi

Week 1

Wednesday, September 5

San Francisco Mechanics vs Carolina Cobras, 5:30 pm

Week 2

Monday, September 10

San Francisco Mechanics vs Manhattan Applesauce, 5:30 pm

Week 3

Monday, September 17

St. Louis Arch Bishops vs San Francisco Mechanics, 5:30 pm

Week 4

Monday, September 24

San Francisco Mechanics vs New York Knights, 5:30 pm

Week 5

Wednesday, October 3

St. Louis Arch Bishops vs Seattle Sluggers, 6:00 pm

Week 6

Wednesday, October 10

Philadelphia Inventors vs San Francisco Mechanics, 5:30 pm

Week 7

Monday, October 15

Los Angeles Vibe vs San Francisco Mechanics, 6:00 pm

Week 8

Wednesday, October 24

San Francisco Mechanics vs Dallas Destiny, 5:30 pm

Week 9

Monday, October 29

Seattle Sluggers vs San Francisco Mechanics, 6:00 pm

Week 10

Monday, November 5

San Francisco Mechanics vs Miami Sharks, 5:30 pm

Originally published in the Mechanics Institute Newsletter, written by John Donaldson

GETTING TO KNOW GM NICK DEFIRMIAN

By Aditya Kumar

Renowned chess author and grandmaster Nick DeFirmian came back to his native state of California to serve as the new in-house grandmaster for the Mechanics Institute. Author of Modern Chess Openings, coach of the national-champion Horace Mann chess team, and a world class player, DeFirmian plans to work extensively on the Mechanic's Scholastic Outreach Program. I had the opportunity of interviewing the coveted chess figure on his own chess career, chess in the Bay Area, scholastic chess, and more.

Aditya: What made you interested in chess? Please give a brief summary of your chess career.

Nick: I learned to play chess from my Uncle and then played in my junior high school club. It was the Fischer-Spassky match of 1972 that really got me involved in tournament chess and the USCF. I played many many weekend tournaments in California, then got my International Master title from the Lone Pine tournaments and then my GM title from going to Europe to play round robins in the 1980's.

Aditya: What would you say is the most satisfying chess game/ tournament you have played and why?

Nick: Probably my favorite game I played was again Miles for which I won the brilliancy prize in the 1990 Manila Inter zonal. For tournaments as a whole, I think winning the 1998 US Championship was my favorite.

Aditya: As someone who

has traveled widely, how would you describe the level of chess activity in Bay Area compared to other regions in the country and internationally?

Nick: Bay Area chess is very good - simply one of the two or three top places in the US. Internationally there are a few places where chess is a higher profile sport - such as in Amsterdam, Moscow, Reykjavik.

Aditya: Is there anything unique to the Bay Area not found in these places?

Nick: The Bay Area is unique in the sense that, unlike places in Europe like London, chess does not have a lot of funding. European corporations fund events such as the Tata Steel and Wijk Aan Zee which we do not have generally in America.

Aditya: Can you tell us about the goals of the Scholastic Outreach Program at the Mechanics that you are directing?

Nick: Scholastic chess in San Francisco has been a bit neglected compared to the other parts of the Bay Area, so we will put effort into the school programs here (any SF principals or teachers interested in a chess program are invited to contact us at chessroom@milibrary.org). We also have some plans for publicizing chess in general with some events that were successfully done in New York.

Aditya: What plans did you set for publicizing chess?

Nick: We are planning several small publicity measures. One thing I liked in New York was the chess-a-thon that would take place in Grand Central Station and Central Park.

Interview with Nick DeFirman

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Everyone would get together in a central location to engage in fun chess-related marathons and races, which garnered media attention. That sort of thing would also work well in the Bay Area.

Aditya: Given your experience in scholastic chess coaching, where do you see opportunities for improvement in Northern California Scholastic Chess?

Nick: I think Northern California Scholastic chess is generally very good. I'm new to the current scholastic scene in the Bay Area though, so I don't know about many things here.

Aditya: You worked closely with the IBM team in constructing the openings for Deep Blue against Kasparov. What do you feel is the biggest advantage of using computers in chess training? What is the biggest downside?

Nick: The upside is considerable. One sees many positions quickly when studying openings or endgames from the databases. Checking the positions for tactics is clearly much done better by computers than humans. On the downside sometimes the computers won't "get" a long term strategic concept, and also one can be too reliant on the computer and not practice thinking oneself.

Aditya: What is your advice in regards to

how much time class A/B/C level players should be investing in opening preparation compared to other aspects of game (middle/end game study)?

I always advocate for A/B/C level players to study endgames. Studying openings is very beneficial if you continue all the way into the strategy of the early middle game.

Aditya: You founded the advocacy group Prochess. How is that progressing and what are its goals in Northern California Chess?

Nick: Prochess is long defunct. A players union is difficult to achieve in Chess, and nowadays I think it's not too useful. It was started over twenty years ago and since then there have been a number of chess organizations. It was functioning well for a while, but the problem with these organizations is that they need more business sense and funds. In addition, the fact that players come from different locations with different interests also made running the organization difficult.

CHESS FOR LIFE: BRIDGING CHESS & LIFE

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Rising senior Aditya Kumar from Fremont is using chess to teach life skills to youngsters. While many would call chess simply a game, Kumar has started a nonprofit organization called Chess for Life to teach vital life skills through chess. "The organization is important because there are so many valuable life skills that can be learned from the game. Patience, critical thinking, and perseverance are just a few of the many - we need more people to understand the connection between chess and these skills. Future doctors, lawyers, business people can all attribute skills they use at their occupations to sixty four squares," states Kumar.

The organization has two main facets: a fund raising section and an education section. To raise money for the organization, various tournaments were held over the recent past. The first fundraiser was the Marketplace Quad, a half day event with a few quads open to scholastic players. Then came the Fremont K-6 Championships, which welcomed players from all across Northern California. This 4-round event attracted over 20 players and ended with a champion: Zarek

Azam, who won both scholarship money and a trophy. Finally, at the end of the school year, was the online tournament (done in conjunction with the NorCal Chess League): the California Online Blitz Championships. FIDE Master Yian Liou dominated this round robin blitz event with a perfect 5/5 score.

Here is a game played between the winner, FM Liou and the second place winner, Divya Natesan (Comments by Sydney):

CadetCten - dnatesan

1-0, 6/10/2012.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 g6 5. c4 The Maroczy Bind is a common choice against the accelerated dragon that Divya played. The idea is to stop the future advance d5, which allows black to equalize in many accelerated dragon lines.



5... Bg7 6. Nc2 Nf6 7. Nc3 O-O 8. Be2 d6 9. O-O Be6 10. b3 Qa5 11. Bd2 Eyeballing the queen. While immediate discoveries may not work as if black plays something like 11...a6, 12.Nd5 will not win any material after 12...Qd8 11... Qe5 12. f4 Qc5 13. Kh1 ?? A move like a6 or Qb6 would have sufficed. Although white would still have a better position, black would not be down material. 13... Nxe4



14. Nxe4 Qb6 15. Bc3 f5 15...f5 seems like a slight mistake. Now the pawn on e7 can become a potential weakness as it is backward and on a half-open file. The king is slightly more exposed as well. 16. Bxg7 Kxg7 17. Ng5 Bd7 18. Qd2 h6 19. Qc3 Rf6 20. Nf3 Kf7 21. Rad1 Qc5 22. b4 Qb6 23. c5 Qc7 24. Bc4 Be6 Here, d5 seems to hold onto material for a bit longer. The point of d5 is after Bxd5+, Kg7 and there is no pin on the c6 knight as it happens in the game.

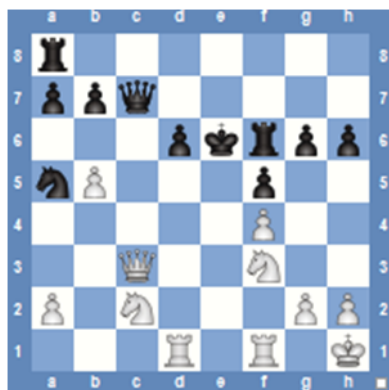
CHESS FOR LIFE: BRIDGING CHESS & LIFE

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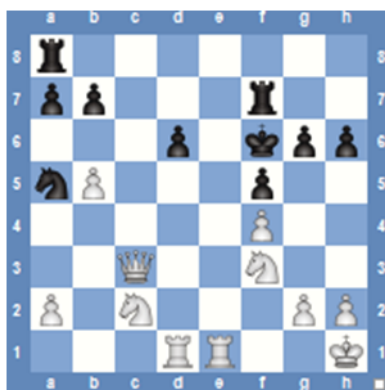
onto material for a bit longer. The point of d5 is after Bxd5+, Kg7 and there is no pin on the c6 knight as it happens in the game.



25. cxd6 exd6 26. Bxe6 Kxe6
27. b5 Na5 The queen comes off.



. Qxc7 Rf7 29. Rfe1 Kf6 30.
Qc3# Black checkmated



[1-0]

The education section will feature events that will allow kids to play chess and learn at the same time. Youngsters will be able to play chess not only with their peers, but also with high school students, who will be teaching the relationship between chess and life skills. There will also be an opportunity for the kids to interact with professionals. They can ask questions, explore the professions, and see the connection between chess, the life skills they learn, and the professions.

The money raised from the organization will go towards making the Class Championships a buy-one get-one entry free event for female chess players to increase the number of women in chess, one of the goals of the organization.

Visit the website at chess-forcharity.weebly.com/ to follow the upcoming events and donate to the cause.

THE QUEENS GAMBIT PLAY

By Frisco Del Rosario

“The Queen’s Gambit” sold out three shows in its debut July 27 and 28 at The Exit Theatre in San Francisco. It was the first production by Faultline Theater Inc., a theater company comprised mostly of UC Berkeley students and graduates.

Written and produced by Iris Kokish, “The Queen’s Gambit” is a study in female empowerment, spanning the life of a rising young master and told within the length of her national championship match.

From childhood, Vera Levitan is enmeshed in a triangle with her father and her coach. Alexander Levitan calls her “son” for the chess mind almost exclusively found in boys, while Maya Gurevich seeks to mold Vera in her image, after her own femininity was subdued by the misogynistic chess community. While Vera blossoms over the chessboard — described in the script as “a separate space constructed entirely to house the mind” — she wrestles in the physical world with gender roles proscribed by societal, familial, and competitive convention.

Kokish unfolds the three-sided story in a “duologue” structure, inspired by the format in the police drama “A Steady Rain” by Keith Huff. “The duologue structure is a perfect device for a chess play,” said Kokish. “The actors talk to the audience (in monologue) and break into scenes with each other.”

Three chess sets on stage enable “The Queen’s Gambit” to progress visually — from

Vera’s childhood in Alexander’s apartment, to her grueling study sessions in Gurevich’s studio, to the national championship pairing the women against each other. Gwen Kingston as Vera changes costume accordingly — she wears souvenir T-shirts from Alexander’s tournaments, a staid business outfit like Gurevich, and as she emerges from beneath her elders, Vera allures in a short gold tube dress. “If my figure throws a man so far off his game that he loses, then he’s an idiot, and I say let him lose”, she says, empowered by dress and appearance.



In contrast to the transforming Vera, the elder characters Maya (Dana Zook) and Alexander Levitan (Alex Bonte) do not change costume — symbolizing two opposing forces on the chessboard and in Vera’s life.

Alexander is a sturdy man in black whose declining chess ability and increasing dependence on Vera coincide with his failing eyesight.

THE QUEENS GAMBIT PLAY

Bonte supplies Alexander with an overbearingness, and occasionally crushes his daughter (the balance of power is clear, but off-stage, Kingston is two years older than Bonte, whom Kokish described as a powerhouse, and director Cole Ferraiuolo's first choice to play Alexander).

Maya is a champion for — and of — women in chess. Her battles at — and away from — the board have been fought against the odds and at great cost. The reigning champion sits regally but rigidly in a severe hair bun and white suit, camouflaging herself inside the boys' club of grandmaster chess (out of character with her hair down, Zook is gorgeous and almost unrecognizable).

Grandmaster Gurevich is modeled after the Polgar sisters of Hungary, whose father sought to show that genius could be made as well as born. Laszlo Polgar taught them at home, concentrating on chess after eldest daughter Susan showed interest. Susan was a sensation in women's events, but it was youngest daughter Judit who rose to the world's top 20 overall, joining the grandmaster community as a teenager — with the media scrutiny and male abuse that entailed.

The sexual harassment endured by Gurevich in "The Queen's Gambit" is based in fact. "Every atrocious thing that happened to Maya in this play has happened to me or one of my friends in tournament settings," said Kokish, an experienced player. "Frankly, some chess playing boys are immature people, and we're putting them opposite a girl for five hours."



Red is an in-between color where chess is concerned. Sometimes red squares on a chessboard are light, and occasionally red pieces are dark. At the center of "The Queen's Gambit", auburn-haired Gwen Kingston wields red pieces in the critical game, draping an impudent elbow over the back of her chair following her first move. Kingston was director Ferraiuolo's only choice to play Vera — "Gwen is an incredible actress who can play such a wide range of characters, and [Vera] ages from 17-to-27 over the course of a 75-minute show." said Kokish."

With Vera's third move, she steers the game toward quiet water, when it's revealed that in spite of her evolution as a bold woman, her chess has always been cautious and dull, according to Alexander. "Vera has built this wall around herself, and she likes being safe on the chessboard because she doesn't get that feeling anywhere else," said Kokish, who shielded herself at the board for many years with a fully-brimmed hat.

THE QUEENS GAMBIT PLAY

With a grandmaster title and the national women's championship at stake for Vera, the game goes on, while "The Queen's Gambit" duologue unfolds around it. "I don't need your permission to win," the student tells the teacher.

"Chess is an obsession that challenges you to be more than human, more than machine," says Vera. "It's more than just a game. It's a story, and everyone understands a story."

Producer Iris Kokish was a tournament veteran while she was in high school, a student of South Bay master Alexander Levitan (for whom she named the character). She plays at the Berkeley Chess Club when law school allows.

Actors Dana Zook and Gwen Kingston knew how to move the pieces, but as production began in June, Kokish coached them in the physical act of moving pieces. "We worked on that natural feel," she said. "[The actors] had to memorize games and positions, and pick up details like remembering to punch the clock with each move.

The Gurevich/Levitan championship game is a copy of Asztalos-Breyer, Debrecen 1913. "I had to find a Slav that was about 30 moves long with a nice finish," said Kokish. She shared the game score with annotations in the program, fretting a little because the result of the game is a spoiler for the play, if someone thinks about it.

Gurevich and Levitan both quote Leonore Gallet — a gifted violinist and chessplayer — from Lasker's *Chess for Fun and Chess for Blood*: "When a woman thinks of a beautiful

move, she is liable to also think about how beautiful she looks in making it". Kokish remembers from her tournament experience reaching for a piece, and suddenly being aware of how her nails looked. "The truth is that any insecurity a teenager can possibly have is heightened when they're sitting three feet across from someone for five hours," she said.

To impart the feeling of a chess tournament on the cast, Kokish staged a rehearsal at the Mechanics Institute Chess Room on Post St., which she described as "church-like, much more real than 'Chess: The Musical'."

"It was a helpful rehearsal," said actor Alex Bonte. "It adds to our seriousness, and [Kingston] and I bonded in the gravity of that room."

"The theater community and the chess community have been unbelievably encouraging," said Kokish. "The theater community had to embrace this play about chess, while the Mechanics Institute let us use their space for a rehearsal, and the Berkeley Chess School gave us a beautiful set to use."

Chess players might note some common threads in Kokish's play and Walter Tevis' novel with the same name. There's a prodigious female chess player in both, with one parent, and she drinks too much for a while. Kokish said she hasn't read *The Queen's Gambit*. On the other hand, Jennifer Shahade's *Chess Bitch: Women in the Ultimate Intellectual Sport* is quoted during the play, and "inspired much of the discourse throughout the production", Kokish said.

RESEARCHING FOR CHESS DRYAD

By Kerry Lawless

ChessDryad was first started to be a repository for California chess magazine and column scans, so that future chess historians could use them for research. No one else had done it, and I felt it needed doing as soon as possible, because most chess periodicals and columns are produced on cheap paper that decomposes rapidly compared to books. It was only after I started it, that I realized that photos, game score sheets and other ephemera were important as well.

California became a state on September 9, 1850. The first recorded chess event was the July 21, 1851 San Francisco arrival of Pierre Saint-Amant, as the French Consul to the newly created state. He was one of the top players in the world during the 1840s. Since then, there have been thousands of volunteers helping tens of thousands of players to play hundreds of thousands of games. Most of this activity would be lost, if not recorded. As a researcher, I want to stop this bit of chess history in California from sliding into oblivion.

Chess history can be broken down into components. Each component poses questions that the chess historian needs to answer.

- **Players:** When and where were they born? How did they learn to play? When did they start playing? Where do/did they play? What city do/did they live in? What is/was their rating or title? What were their results in matches, tournaments and club play? Did they volunteer their time to help with chess clubs, chess tournaments or chess organizations? If they are deceased, when and where did they die?
- **Matches:** Who played the match? Why did they play? Where did they play? What are their ratings? What was the result?

- **Tournaments:** When and where was it played? Who played? What were the results?
- **Clubs:** When was the club formed? Where was it formed and is it still in the same location? Who organized it and who runs it now? What events does the club sponsor? Is the club still in existence?
- **Organizations:** Who organized it and for what purpose? What does it do? Who are its officers? Does it organize players or clubs? Is the organization still in existence?

The tools needed to research these components can also be broken down:

- Columns can appear daily to once a month. Since they are written to sell newspapers or magazines, they almost always have a chess problem and or world chess news. The best columns also have local chess news. I chosen five columns from the hundreds that were written as my choices for the best California history sources.
- The [San Francisco Argonaut](#) carried some important SF regional columns: The first two of these columns in the [Argonaut](#) are important, because there are no other examples from this period.
- The [Los Angeles Times](#) has the honor of having the longest running California Chess Column. This is, absolutely, the best source for Southern California chess history. It also had some columns before the continuous one started.
- The [San Francisco Chronicle](#) has published some very important columns: Ernest J. Clarke, Dean of Pacific Coast Chess, produced a very fine column with lots of local news.

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- The San Francisco News also had an important column, but I haven't researched the International Master (1951) Imre Konig years yet.

- The Hayward Daily Review had a great SF East Bay Area Column: one of the only sources for San Francisco East Bay news. Most of the columns contained local news, with an occasional column translated from Russian periodicals.

- The Sacramento Bee had a relatively long running column with occasional local news.

- Periodicals: The frequency of publication for periodicals generally ranges from every two weeks to four times a year. Because of the longer publication intervals, they have more information per issue. For chess historians, good regional chess magazines have lots of local news. Information that historians look for:

1. Comprehensive player biographies or obituaries.

2. Club activities with date, meeting place, officers and members, photos, and other club information.

3. Tournaments; dates, winners, prizes, games, photos and, most important, complete cross-tables.

4. Tournament bulletins: A very important source of games (of course), but can also give a feel for the era being written about...essential for the historian!

- Published during the event are the closest a non-participant can ever get to

the event being reported on.

- Published after the event can be either an initial impression or a comprehensive overview.

5. Rating lists are very important for charting a players rise and/or fall. It also gives an indication of strength, or a snapshot in time, of individual players in matches and tournaments. Of course, the USCF Rating Lists are the gold standard. But, there are other rating lists, which used in conjunction with the USCF list, can give a better all around view of a player's lifetime strength.

6. Trophies & plaques: Club trophies often contain lists of club champions that aren't listed anywhere else.

When I first started this project, I thought I would scan what I could find and that would be it. But, lo and behold, new chess artifacts turn up almost daily. Right now, I have scanned less than ten percent of what I have backlogged and my research has shown that I probably have much less than fifty percent of what's available of the columns and magazines. I'm beginning to realize that this project might take a little longer than I originally thought.

This article has been condensed for the Journal—you can read the article in its original extended format on ChessDryad.com