

Local chess players gamble in Las Vegas

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U2200 champion Drake Wang

By NM Michael Aigner

A large number of northern Californians fly or drive to Las Vegas during the last week of 2005 for the North American Open. This event has become a West coast cousin of the annual World Open in Philadelphia, complete with high entry fees and a correspondingly large prize fund. Of course, this was Las Vegas, Sin City and the gambling capitol of America! A total of 658 players showed up to play in the "Goichberg lottery" (named after organizer Bill Goichberg).

The 105 player Open section featured 20 Grandmasters and a large number of International Masters. Your reporter had the honor of playing (and losing to) GM Jaan Ehivest. Moreover he was paired with two GMs, two IMs and two untitled players rated around 2400 USCF. Another famous player in attendance was GM Alexandra Kosteniuk. This was one tough tournament!

And yet one player distinguished himself from all the other GMs: Hikaru Nakamura. The reigning U.S. Champion gave up just two draws in seven rounds and took first place all alone. He impressively pushed GM Nikola Mitkov off the board on the white side of the Scotch game in the last round.

A few local players performed well in the top section. Most notable was FM Alan Stein who scored 5.0 and qualified for the U.S. Championship. He faced four GMs and one strong IM, losing just once while defeating GM Vadim Milov. IM-elect David Pruess and FM Dmitry Zilberstein each finished with 4.5. Pruess narrowly missed out on tiebreaks for qualifying for the U.S. Championship. FM Bela Evans shared top U2300 honors with 4.0.

The biggest story for Northern California came out of the Expert section. High school junior Drake Wang scored five wins and two draws for a share of first place and the biggest paycheck of his young life. As an additional reward, his rating now exceeds 2200 USCF! Those who know Drake realize that his goal for 2005 was to become a master--and he achieved it in the final week of the year. Congratulations to NM Drake Wang! :lol:

Very few other local players finished at or near the top of their section. Kudos to Adarsh Konda and John Jaffray in the U2000 section (tied for 3rd) and Jennifer Livschitz in the U1400 section (tied for 5th). A number of NorCal residents scored 4.0 or 4.5 in their respective sections--enough for a respectable result but not enough to win money.

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U.S. Champion GM Hikaru Nakamura



GM Jaan Ehvest



GM Alexandra Kosteniuk



IM-elect David Pruess