

SF Chess Festival

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By Eric Hicks Chess has come a long way when I was a kid. I remember the only chess playing tournament in my area was a 20 kid pencil prize tourney in the local library. I could not help but think looking over the 20,000 square foot playing venue with views of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge, giant chess sets, a giant jump house, burgers and hot dogs on the barbecue—that kids today have it made. In fact I have never seen such an impressive playing venue anywhere in chess, even in adult chess.

The event started Saturday Morning. Chess For Junior came all the way down from Colorado with 8 kids in full uniform. 4-6th graders and 7th-12 graders had a 2 day venue and k-3rd graders had a one day round-robin schedule, with an option to play in the both the k-3 and the 4-6th which four kids decided to do.

The K-3 tournament was made up of 50 kids. Most of these kids decided to play unrated, and had a good time. Festivities included jump house breaks, Mother's Day cards and a chess work shop. All kids won trophies and even better..a rose to give to their mother!

Nicholas Nip with Proud Coaches Eric and Liina

The 8 person k-3 championship section was a slugfest and nothing but chess for four straight hours. In a round robin every kid plays every kid in the section. There is little waiting in between rounds. As games finish, you play the next available opponent. Since the k-3 championship section was evenly matched with many strong players, the entire four hours was needed to finish the tournament. No fun and games for these kids. One of the most spectacular games was against prodigy 1st grader Nicholas Nip (1366) and 3rd grade stand out Alex Grossman (1250). Nicholas went up two pawns early on, but Alex battled it out, achieving a solid position in the endgame. After over an hour of duking it out, Nicholas was not able to convert his material advantage and the game was declared a draw. After drawing a second game to Eric in an opposite colored bishop ending, things looked grim for the top seeded Nicholas since Alex was pulling off win after win. But suddenly Alex lost his last game to Austin, and then Nicholas beat Austin—and finally we had our 1-3rd grade champion!

Nicholas Nip won the Grand Champion award, a trophy taller than he was! Austin won 2nd, and Alex won 3rd—but all played amazingly well. It is real refreshing to see quality chess at this age level. Watching this tournament I was sincerely excited about the prospects of the future of Northern California Chess. I have never seen this quality of chess at this age—the only sad part is there was no accurate score sheets to show off!

After the prize ceremony, Nicholas Nip decided to showcase his incredible talent with a 6 board simultaneous exhibit taking on all challengers on 6 boards. Challengers included two 1400 players, a dad, and two junior high players. Amazingly Nicholas won all but one of the games which lasted into a close end game. Remember this kid is only in 1st grade! Expect to see Nicholas more in upcoming bay area scholastic tournaments—we are proud to have another young stand out in the Bay Area chess scene!

The 4th through 6th section was a 2 day 6 round dog fight. The first place winner, John Boyle, had an easy time winning every game. But beyond that..things were a difficult struggle. John played like a true champion winning every game seemingly effortlessly.

For 2nd place there was a tremendous struggle culminating in a 4 person tie. Amazingly all 4 players drew their last round in positional struggles. Tied for second were Daryl Neubieser, Mukund Chillankan, Andrew Li, Kevin Zhu and Nicholas Nip. Nicholas, the champion in the k-3 played in both sections, and had an amazing showing given his age. Nicholas only suffered one loss out of 12 games in the two separate tournaments and that loss was to top seeded John Boyle.

The 7th-12th section was won by top seeded Diachi Siegrist (1850) who won every game. 2nd was Jeremy Lowenthal (1279) and third coming all the way from Colorado is Chess for Junior's Richard Mehlinger.

Sunday featured another simultaneous exhibit, this time by National Champion 3rd grader Daniel Naroditsky. Daniel who is rated over 1900 took on 15 challengers at once and won every game. It was an impressive performance by an impressive player. Daniel is the first National Champion in the Bay Area since Vinay Blat. This was the first public simul Daniel has ever performed. As expected, he performed wonderfully with a perfect score.

The three grand champions were all terrific winners in their own rite. It should be mentioned that there was a nice representation of clubs among the three Grand Champion winners. Academic Chess (Nicholas Nip), Success Chess (John Boyle) Berkeley Chess School (Diachi Siegrist).

In terms of club winners—Academic Chess dropped out of the running since AC was organizing the tournament and thus deciding on parameters for deciding the award.

1st place club overall went to Berkeley Chess School

2nd place club overall went to Success Chess.

Top school trophy went to Challenger.

Also part of the festivities was renowned chess authors Eric Schiller and Robert Snyder had chess tables set up for chess analysis in between rounds. Their efforts were appreciated by all!

This tournament was organized by Academic Chess, Eric Hicks and wife Liina Varkâ€¦

Kids will be invited later for rematches on www.chess.ac , the only online chess server built for kids.