

CalChess Kids Are Back in National Spotlight

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The recent CalChess success at national level scholastic chess tournaments continued at the Burt Lerner Elementary Championship on May 12-14 in Denver, CO. A small contingent of only 30 players competed against a field of nearly 2000 to bring home a share of two national titles and an assortment of lesser honors. Two youngsters deserve special commendation: 2nd grader Nicholas Nip took first place in the K-3 section on tiebreaks and 5th grader Rahul Desirazu shared the top honors in the K-5 section (second place on tiebreaks). Local scholastic guru Dr. Alan Kirshner commented that it has been about time that "Nor Cal is back in the national spotlight."

The surge in scholastic results began within the past year when Daniel Naroditsky won the K-3 national championship and seven months later won the top honors in the country for 4th grade. He has since earned the #1 rating for his age in the country (currently 2031 USCF) and represented the United States at the World Junior Championship. Moreover at the National K-12 Championship a month ago, David Chock of Saratoga nearly walked away with the top high school honors, defeating two of the top three seeds and losing only on the top board in the last round. Both David and his school team earned top 4 place trophies.

This short history of success sets the table for the events of last weekend. As scholastic coach Eric Hicks explained recently, the success of Daniel Naroditsky has inspired other local juniors to reach for the stars--that success on the national level is indeed possible. No doubt several youngsters flew to Denver with dreams of being the next CalChess junior to claim a big first place trophy. And for some, their dreams became reality.

K-3 National Champ Nicholas (r) and k-5 Co-champ Rahul (L)

Nicholas Nip (1671 USCF) of San Francisco is no stranger to success. He holds the #1 rating for age 7 and under in the country and has tasted success at the state level and at adult tournaments. Now he was competing in the primary section against kids as old as 3rd grade, despite only being a 2nd grader himself. The odds were long! But after five rounds, Nicholas was sitting pretty with a 5-0 score. He drew games in rounds 6 and 7 against some of the very best 3rd graders in the nation. A total of nine participants ended up tied for first with a 6-1 result. Young Nicholas had played against five of those nine, defeating three and drawing two! Consequently his tiebreaks far exceeded his rivals and Nicholas Nip can now call himself National K-3 Champion! See the photo below for Nicholas' contagious smile as he stands with a trophy as tall as himself. Bravo!

The other local champion took a different route to victory. Rahul Desirazu (1575 USCF) of San Jose was not one of the favorites in the K-5 section, rated below a large number of A and B players. After drawing a 1300 in round 2, certainly a national championship was not very likely. But Rahul got hot and the rest was history. He defeated strong opponents from Massachusetts, New York and Arizona in the final three rounds. He finished with 6.5 out of a possible 7, sharing first place with the section's top rated player, Ryan Moon (1876 USCF) of Georgia. The tiebreaks favored Ryan and Rahul took home the second place trophy. Perhaps Dr. Kirshner saw something in his crystal ball when he confidently wrote after a tournament last November that Rahul "will achieve many more successes." He was right!

Certainly Nicholas and Rahul were the big winners, but many other local juniors can be proud of their results. Two deserve a sentence for their outstanding play. 3rd grader Jerome Sun (1349 USCF) finished with 5.0 in the K-3 section, losing to two much higher rated opponents who both finished part of that nine-way tie for first. He got a 16th place trophy. 6th grader Partha Vora (1617 USCF) competed in a very difficult K-6 section, finishing with 5.5 and the 10th place trophy only after losing to the top seed in the final round. Partha's success also came at the expense of another junior previously named in this article: he defeated Daniel Naroditsky in the fifth round.

Let anyone think that the national scholastic chess championships are merely an opportunity for the top rated players to trumpet their stuff and take home trophies, that is far from the truth. More often than not, the top seeds do not win their sections. Lower rated players beat opponents over 400 points higher with alarming frequency. Partha Vora proved this in Denver. The winner of the K-1 section in Denver was rated 435 and defeated opponents rated over 1000 points higher! Even at the high school level, David Chock and his teammate Jeff Young proved it when both defeated 2450 rated opponents last month. Rocky Balboa would be proud of the role of the underdogs at the national chess championships.

Although the Burt Lerner Elementary Championship is an individual tournament, team honors take a significant role as well. A typical team has one or two strong players who compete for individual trophies while the lower rated teammates try to enjoy themselves, learn some chess and even contribute to the team's total score. A group of 17 children and parents from Mission San Jose Elementary School flew to Denver to taste the national scene. They came away with three individual trophies and four team trophies. The K-3 team of Jerome Sun, Hemang Jangle, James Kwok and Andrew Zhou took home the 4th place trophy while the K-6 squad of Arthur Liou, Kevin Hsu, Vincent Tian and Shoker Gurman won 5th place. The school also took home 17th place in each K-1 and K-5. Congratulations to all of the players and especially coach Joe Lonsdale for all of the hard work over the past year!

complete results: <http://www.alchess.com/chess/06/elem/?page=STANDINGS&xsection=>

K-1 Championship
Mission San Jose Elementary = 17th place team

K-3 Championship
Nicholas Nip = 1st place (national champion)
Jerome Sun = 16th place
Mission San Jose Elementary = 4th place team

K-5 Championship
Rahul Desirazu = 2nd place (co-champion)
Andrew Yeh = 22nd place
David Ma = 2nd place U800
Mission San Jose Elementary = 17th place team

K-6 Championship
Partha Vora = 10th place
Arthur Liou = 15th place
Daniel Naroditsky = 18th place
Kevin Hsu = 2nd place U1000
Mission San Jose Elementary = 5th place team

(Credit for the following photos goes to Sophia Nip, Alan Kirshner and Mark Shelton.)



Nicholas Nip together with teacher Liina Vark on board 1 pre-game



Top three trophy winners from K-3 section.



Rahul Desirazu makes a move.



Rahul Desirazu