

FM Zierk Wins Falconer Award

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by Michael Aigner



Mechanics' Institute chess director IM **John Donaldson** reports that **Los Gatos High School** junior FM **Steven Zierk** won the **2010 Falconer Award** as Northern California's top rated kid. The cash award, given by former US Senior Champion and longtime **Mechanics' Institute** Trustee **Neil Falconer** to the *highest rated Bay Area player under 18 on the December rating supplement*, is equal to the youngster's rating - in Steven's case **\$2,387**. Past winners of this prestigious prize include IM **Vinay Bhat** (*now a Grandmaster*) and IM **Sam Shankland**.

The fight for this year's came down to the final tournament in Reno, the **Western States Open**, with FM **Daniel Naroditsky** ahead by 45 points. *Steven literally needed to pull off a 2700 level performance*, which is exactly what he did by beating one Grandmaster and drawing with two others. I predict these two teenagers, both now rated above 2420 and ranked in the **top 15 of the country under age 21**, will compete neck and neck again in 2010.

Here's a summary of Steven Zierk's many chess achievements. (*Photo at top by Shorman.*)

- Current ratings: 2420 **USCF** and 2359 **FIDE**.
- Earned SM status in November 2009.
- Earned FM title in July 2009.
- Earned NM title in July 2008.
- Best tournament of life at **2009 Western States Open**: 2700 performance!
- 1st GM scalp: Beat super GM **Loek van Wely** at **2009 Western States Open**.
- 1st IM scalp: Beat IM **Ricardo DeGuzman** at **2008 CalChess Labor Day**.
- 1st NM scalp: Beat NM **Albert Rich** at **2007 Silicon Valley Ch.** while rated 1623.
- Represented CalChess at **2008 Denker Invitational**.
- **CalChess Scholastic Champion** for K-3 in 2001, K-8 in 2007 and K-12 in 2008.
- Big \$\$\$ at World Open: **2nd U2000 in 2007** and **3rd U2200 in 2008**.
- **USCF rating jumped +556 in 2007** (*1549 to 2105*), including +384 over first 3 months.
- Break from competitive chess--2002 through 2006.
- **Won U1400 in 2001 World Open** at age 7.

