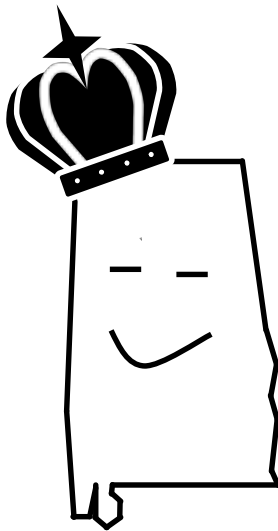


KINGS of my *Home State*

A stylized black and white illustration of the state of Alabama. The state is depicted as a simple outline with a smiling face, consisting of two horizontal lines for eyes and a curved line for a mouth. On top of the state's head is a crown with three points and a small star on the leftmost point.

The Legacies of Alabama's Greatest
20th Century Chess Champions

by Scott Varagona

Scott Varagona

Kings of My Home State:
The Legacies of Alabama's Greatest 20th Century Chess Champions

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Chess diagram designs by Scott Varagona.

For all my friends in the Alabama chess community

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Introduction

This book is a tribute to Alabama's greatest 20th century chess players—the ones I call Alabama's chess "kings." By my definition, the kings would satisfy the following criteria:

1. They were Alabama residents who were at the top of state-level chess for an extended period during the 20th century.
2. They attained (at least) the National Master title.
3. They won at least three Alabama State Championship titles.

The eight main players profiled in this book meet all these requirements and more. We will recount the key moments of their chess careers, get a sense of their playing styles, and explore their memorable games.

THE KINGS

Milan Momic is known as Alabama's first National Master. After immigrating to the U.S. from Yugoslavia and settling in Alabama, Momic became the dominant force in Alabama chess during the 1960s and early 1970s. He won three Alabama State Championships, including back-to-back wins with perfect scores in 1962 and 1963. He also won various Tennessee Open Championships and other prominent tournaments in the Southeast, such as the 1971 Southern Open.

Charles Irvine of Huntsville was one of Alabama's first great junior players of the 20th century. In 1970, he was among the top ten juniors in the country, and he played in the U.S. Junior Championship. His Alabama State Championship successes include wins with perfect scores in both 1969 and 1974.

Kyle Therrell of Birmingham became an Alabama State Champion five times and won more Birmingham City Championships than anyone else in recorded history. He was one of the state's strongest players in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, he is remembered for being a key mentor of Stuart Rachels.

Stuart Rachels is indisputably Alabama's strongest player of the 20th century. As a chess prodigy in the early 1980s, he became a National Master shortly before turning 12, thereby setting a record as the youngest U.S. master up to that time. He later became an Alabama State Champion five years in a row (1982-1986), then a U.S. Junior Champion, and finally, a 1989 U.S. Co-Champion. He holds the International Master title.

Joe Jurjevich, "the Bay Minette Flash," is known for his uncompromising attacking style and lightning-fast play. He became an Alabama State Champion five times and won many other tournaments. His competitive chess career spans nearly fifty years.

Charles Meidinger is one of Huntsville's all-time greats, with tournament successes dating back to the 1970s. He is a five-time Alabama State Champion. Most notably, in 1994, he won a strong Alabama State Championship with a perfect 7-0 score.

Brent Inman of Mobile is a three-time Alabama State Champion and the winner of numerous Mobile City Championships. His colorful personality as "the Great American" has manifested itself on the chessboard in strikingly unusual and entertaining games. In 2019, he became the first ever Alabama Senior Champion.

Bill Melvin is an eight-time Alabama State Champion and an Original Life Master. He was the dominant player in Alabama tournaments for much of the 1990s and early 2000s. For many years, Bill held the record for the highest number of Alabama state titles. He is also famous for outwitting opponents in tactical complications and for miraculously saving—and winning—seemingly hopeless positions.

There are other players who have not met all our criteria for being a “king,” but still made a big impact on 20th century Alabama chess; these players may be found in the **Other Great Champions** chapter near the end of this book.

THE ISSUE OF RATINGS

Readers will notice that I have deliberately avoided putting ratings next to players’ names at the start of annotated games. I, for one, am sometimes prejudiced against a game right away if one of the ratings is much lower than the other. However, as my old friend Kirk Petty always says, the little numbers next to the players’ names only tell us about the players’ *past* performance. I would add that these numbers make no difference to the creative merit—or the instructive value—of the game itself. That is why ratings are omitted from all game headings. (For those who do wish to see the ratings attached to each game, you can find most of them in the Bibliography.)

A WORD ABOUT CITATIONS

In general, I have found that chess authors often cite their sources in a cursory manner—or not at all. For people like me who are interested in tracking down and preserving local chess history, this is a serious problem. So, for the benefit of future Alabama chess historians, I have included a detailed Bibliography at the end of the book, with citations galore. However, I did not include so-called “in-line” citations (such as subscripts pointing to footnotes) throughout each chapter.

Why? Because so much information is packed into this book that, in some paragraphs, nearly every other word would need a footnote attached to it! Such an overabundance of citations would be too distracting and obtrusive. But don't worry: I promise that the Bibliography has all the citations you could ever want.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED ANALYSIS

I dislike chess books that spew reams of unexplained computer analysis at the reader. Therefore, I have tried to keep dehumanizing computer variations at a minimum—or, when there was no avoiding them, I have sought to explain the ideas behind them. Certainly, the engines were helpful in getting to the heart of the matter in many games. I went through a three-step process: first, I would glance through a game by myself to get my own initial impression of it; next, I would take another look with the help of an older chess computer (Fritz 11) to check for tactics and refine my perceptions of the game; finally, I would check over everything with a more powerful present-day engine (Stockfish) that would sometimes find deeper ideas that had been previously missed. So, when I refer to “the computer,” I am really talking about this Fritz + Stockfish collaboration, with Stockfish having the final word. Sometimes, in a complex position, the computers would give a winning line that looked like nonsense. I would ask, “Hmm, what about *this* sequence of moves instead?” In this way, more natural, more *human* continuations are provided whenever possible, in part with computer assistance. The line between man and machine sometimes becomes blurred; when this happens, I will speak of the “cyber-human” annotator.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & THANKS

First, a word of thanks to the USCF folks who digitized and publicly posted all the back issues of *Chess Life*, *Chess Review*, and *Chess*

Life & Review. Having these magazines as a resource was vital indeed, since local Alabama chess literature only goes back so far. Digitized back issues of *Tennessee Chess News* were also instrumental in filling in some gaps, so I am grateful to the Tennessee Chess Association for making those issues available on their website. Credit is also due to the White Collection of the Cleveland Public Library for digitizing many missing *Antics* from the 1970s; thank you, CPL, for safeguarding these precious artifacts for all these years.

However, above all, the greatest thanks go to my fellow chess players (and chess writers) in Alabama. I never could have written this book without having access to the wealth of information in old issues of Alabama's state chess magazine, *Alabama Chess Antics*. Furthermore, I never would have had access to those old *Antics* were it not for the people who supported the *Antics* Preservation Project. I am especially grateful to Charles Anthony, Ken Goodman, Caesar Lawrence, Bill Melvin, Stuart Rachels, Gerald Squires, and Rhodes Peele for providing me with many of the *Antics* magazines that served as source material. I am also indebted to Charles Irvine, Brent Inman, Tom Denton, Bill Melvin, and Stuart Rachels for patiently answering all my questions about Alabama chess history—and, in some cases, even providing me with previously unpublished games.

Finally, a special “thank you” goes to the late Lars Britt, the long-time editor of the *Antics* in the 1980s. Circa 2010, Lars handed me several *Antics* magazines from the '80s and said, “You are the editor now, so these are yours!” He had no idea that, with this simple act, he would send me on an odyssey of Alabama chess history exploration that would someday give rise to this book.

Ultimately, in writing this book, I sought to recognize the achievements of the “kings” and to convey an appreciation for their chess personalities. I hope I have managed to do these legendary

players justice. At any rate, for me, learning more about these players—
and battling many of them over the board—has been a great delight.

Scott Varagona

September 2022

Milan Momic:

Alabama's First King

When Milan Momic was born in Slovenia in the year 1935, who would have dreamed that he would someday become a chess legend... of Alabama?

As the state's first National Master and the winner of multiple Alabama Opens and Tennessee Opens, Momic blazed a trail for the future Alabama chess greats who would succeed him. Even now, over forty years after he retired, he is still remembered as one of Alabama's all-time best. So, let us see how Momic's chess career—or his "chess experience," as he liked to call it—unfolded.

When Momic was seventeen, he learned the rules of chess by watching people play at a local restaurant. He lost every game in his first Zagreb High School Championship, but on his second try one year later, in 1953, he won the whole tournament. After that, he went on to win the Croatian Junior Championship in 1954; clearly, his chess talent already showed great promise. Then, in 1955, his journey took a dramatic turn: he fled from Yugoslavia and began life anew in the United States.

After immigrating to the U.S., Momic settled in Alabama in 1961. Right away, he made his presence felt in the Alabama and Tennessee chess scenes. He took clear first in the 1962 Alabama Open (also known as the Alabama State Championship) with a perfect 7-0

score. He then won the top section of the Rocket City Open in Huntsville and the Mid-South Open in Memphis, reaching a USCF rating of 2250. At this point, *Chess Life* reported that he had not lost a single tournament game since his chess career in the U.S. had started. It seemed the writers for *Tennessee Chess News* were genuinely relieved when Momic did finally lose a game (against John Hurt, at the 1963 Southern Open). Yet Momic's "reign of terror" over the Southeast was just beginning...

In February of 1963, Momic won clear first in the Georgia State Open with 4.5/5. Then, in September, Momic won the Alabama Open for the second year in a row with a score of 7-0. Although his competition in Alabama was far below master strength in those days, even so: getting a perfect score in the Alabama State Championship in back-to-back years was a rare feat. The following year, instead of playing in the Alabama Open, he headed north to the 1964 Tennessee Open; there, he won clear first, with 5/6. To win the major open tournaments of Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee all within a span of two years was quite the trifecta.

Momic's dominance would continue. By the end of the 1960s, Momic had won the 1964 Mid-South Open, the 1966 Alabama Open (clear first, with 6.5/7), the 1968 Tennessee Open, and the 1968 Mid-South Open.

The degree to which Momic outclassed many opponents is clear from games like this:

Milan Momic – David Burris

Tennessee Open (Round 4)

Nashville; September 1968

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 a6 3.c3 d5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.d4 Bg4 6.Be2 e6 7.0-0 Nd7 8.Bf4 Ngf6 9.h3 Bf5 10.c4 Qc6 11.Nc3 Bd6 12.d5 exd5 13.cxd5 Qc7 14.Bxd6 Qxd6



Black's opening play has been suspicious, but how can White punish it?

15.Bd3! Bxd3 16.Re1+!

A sneaky zwischenzug: Black loses the right to castle.

16...Kd8?

Wrong way. Castling kingside "by hand" with ...Kf8, ...g6, and ...Kg7 was much safer.

17.Qxd3 Kc7 18.Ng5 Ne5?

This naïve attempt at defense meets an instant refutation. Still, even with the superior 18...Raf8, Black would have faced serious problems defending his queenside (and his king) after White puts a knight on e4 and a rook on c1.



19.Qg3!

Momic wins at least a pawn. Also possible was 19.Rxe5!.

19...Rae8 20.f4 Nc4 21.Nxf7 Qd7 22.Nxh8 Rxh8

In Momic's hands, the rest was simple:

23.Re2 Re8 24.Rxe8 Nxe8 25.Qf2 b6 26.Qe2 Ncd6 27.Qxa6 Nf6 28.Re1 h5 29.Re6 Nc8 30.Qa8 h4 31.Qc6+ Qxc6 32.dxc6 Nd6 33.Re7+ Kxc6 34.Rxg7 b5 35.Rg6 b4 36.Rxf6 bxc3 37.bxc3 Kd5 38.Rxd6+ 1-0

The 1960s and early 1970s volumes of *Tennessee Chess News* are brimming with Momic victories like this one. Most of these games were one-sided: his opponents made tactical errors and he won material, or they made clear strategic mistakes and he slowly converted his positional edge into victory. Momic's play was very steady, with few errors, and when his opponents finally faltered, he pounced. If the hardest thing to do in chess is "win a winning game," Momic made that seem easy.

WHEN GIANTS ROAMED THE EARTH

In the 1960s, Momic's dominance in Alabama tournaments seemed almost absolute. With just a few exceptions, if he showed up to play, he would win. The same could be said when he competed in Tennessee, which he often did. His rampage through the Volunteer State continued in the 1970s when he won the Tennessee Open in 1970 (clear first, 5.5/6), 1973 (tying for first with 5/6, winning on tiebreaks), and 1974 (clear first, 5.5/6). Momic even took clear first place at the 1971 Southern Open, making him the de facto champion of all the Southeast.

Although Momic swept away almost every southeastern player in his path, a few players in the region could stand up to him: for example, John Hurt of Tennessee, Jude Acers of Louisiana, and Charles Irvine of Alabama. It is no accident that these three players are also local legends. Still, when Momic was playing at his best, he could trade blows with anyone—even grandmasters.

The following is Momic's greatest victory. This game has appeared in the *Antics* at least twice, and the result of the game was reported in *Chess Life* in August 1973.

Milan Momic – Walter Browne

Continental Open
Atlanta; May 1973

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

To play the White side of the Najdorf Variation against “Mr. Najdorf” himself, GM Walter Browne, requires either exceptional bravery or exceptional foolishness. Momic knows no fear.

6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 h6



Modern Chess Openings (MCO) gives this move a ?! mark. Although this line was a favorite of Browne back then, apparently it is questionable by today's standards. Since Black's next few moves are all reasonable, yet he still finds himself in a difficult position, perhaps 8...h6 really is the culprit.

9.Bh4 Nbd7 10.0-0 Qc7 11.Bg3

Although MCO prefers 11.Be2! here, offering a wild line that ends in White's favor after 11...g5, Momic's choice is not bad at all.

11...b5 12.e5 Bb7 13.Qe2 Nd5 14.Ne4



Black has problems dealing with the cramping influence of the e5-pawn. If 14...dxe5 15.fxe5 Nxe5? 16.Qh5, the threat of Nxe6 would make it awkward for Black to defend the e5-knight.

14...Nxf4!? 15.Bxf4 dxe5 16.Nxe6!

The chess romantic in me cannot resist giving this move an exclamation mark. In practice, White's attack could be quite strong, but there is no way to fully calculate anything out. When Bill Melvin analyzed this game for the *Antics* in 1998, it was at this point that his computer began to "smoke."

16...fxe6 17.Qh5+ Kf8 18.Ng5 Bxg5 19.Bxg5 Rc8 20.c3



20...Nc5

The computer recommended 20...Nf6 here. Although Browne would be left with an ugly blob of pawns after 21.Bxf6 gxf6, those very pawns could provide his king some shelter.

21.Be3 Bd5 22.Be2 Ne4 23.Rhf1+ Kg8



24.Rxd5! exd5 25.Bg4 Nd6??

A blunder, plain and simple. In all likelihood, Browne saw the superior defense—25...Rf8 26.Be6+ Kh7 27.Bf5+, etc.—but, still seeking victory, he did not want to allow a perpetual check with 27...Kg8 28.Be6+.

26.Be6+ Kh7 27.Rf6!! 1-0



A stunning blow: Momic has a forced win, e.g., 27...gxf6 28.Qxh6 mate, or 27...Rh8 28.Rxh6+! gxh6 29.Qxh6 mate. What a game!

PLAYING STYLE & OPENING IDEAS

Perhaps it is partially accurate and partially unfair to describe most of Momic's published games as being "routine" victories. It's true that very few of his games from *Tennessee Chess News* or *Alabama Chess Antics* sparkle as brightly as his brilliancy against Browne. Still, Momic was not at fault. Chess in the Southeast was generally at a lower

average level in the 1960s and early 1970s than in later years. He severely outclassed most of his opponents, and so, most of his wins were just too simple and straightforward to be exciting. Still, even if his chess style was not always entertaining, it was certainly efficient. He was not there to “impress the crowd”; he was there to win—and he won.

At first glance, Momic’s 7-0 scores in the Alabama Open suggest he was more a perfectionist than a pragmatist at heart. Nonetheless, Momic was willing to accept short draws when it was prudent to do so. He took the “grandmaster draw” strategy to the extreme in the 1974 Tennessee Open’s final round: the game Wright-Momic went 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 g6 4.d4 cxd4, draw agreed. The November 1974 *Tennessee Chess News* mocked this “miniature” by elaborately annotating it. Clearly, as far as fighting spirit is concerned, this was not Momic’s shining moment. Still, who would presume to start pointing fingers? Decades later, another Alabama player (let us call him “the author of this text”) was once so desperate for a tournament win that he took a last-round draw after just *three* moves. This player is no longer proud of that decision, however. So, I wonder what Momic would say about the issue of grandmaster draws if we were able to ask him now...

To his credit, Momic successfully played a variety of openings and defenses. As White, he played 1.e4 and was happy to enter Open Sicilians, but he preferred King’s Indian Attack formations when playing against the French Defense. He would also play other first moves on occasion. For example, in 1969, he gave 1.c4 a try and won against his great Alabama rival, Charles Irvine. As Black, Momic would play almost anything: the Sicilian Defense, the Caro-Kann, the Modern Defense, the Pirc, the King’s Indian Defense... He even used Owen’s Defense (1.e4 b6) to defeat Tennessee’s John Hurt once in 1963.

Most noteworthy, though, was Momic’s use of the Volga Gambit, 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5, which later came to be known as the Benko Gambit. Various games found in *Tennessee Chess News* show

that, indeed, Momic was an early practitioner of this gambit in the Southeast. In an interview with Bobby Edwards in the May-July 1997 *Antics*, Momic had something to say about the origin of the so-called “Benko Gambit.” Edwards writes:

“Momic wishes everyone to know that it was he, and not Pal Benko that first used what is now called the Benko Gambit. He met and played Benko in Atlanta and it was during the next round that Momic used it against a high-rated player. [Momic] calls it the Volga Gambit. *‘Benko saw me make the first move and said that it was not a good opening; after that he started using it, and everybody called it the Benko Gambit! If you are going to call it Benko Gambit, why not Momic Gambit, because he saw me use it first!’*”



“The Momic Gambit”

According to *Chess Life*, Momic did indeed play against Benko in Atlanta in May 1964. (In fact, Momic drew with Benko; in the end, Momic finished the tournament in second place, just a half-point behind Benko.) The earliest known game at the international level in

which Benko used the fateful gambit was Vukic-Benko, Sarajevo 1967 (0-1). Benko wrote a series of articles about the gambit in *Chess Life* starting in the late 1960s; his first article referencing the gambit was in February 1968, when the opening was labelled as “the Benoni Countergambit.” In his annotations, Benko says that he has used the line with success at the international level, but he never mentions where he first got the idea. Of course, by the time he released his book on the opening in 1973, Benko—and, eventually, most of the Western world—called the opening *the Benko Gambit*.

Could it really have been Momic who inspired Benko to play the gambit that would later bear Benko’s name? Unfortunately, now that Benko has passed away, it is too late to ask him. Like many mysteries of chess history, the ultimate truth may be lost in the sands of time forever. One thing is for sure, though: Benko would have *never* agreed to change the name of his opening to “the Momic Gambit”!

A TRAGIC ENDGAME

Momic was still at his peak early in 1975. He had won the 1974 Tennessee Open just a few months back, and his rating of 2314 towered over the rest of Alabama. When he took clear first place at the 3rd annual Queen of Hearts, surely no one expected this to be his last major tournament success...

However, in 1975, his chess career suffered a terrible blow. At the aluminum plant where he worked in Muscle Shoals, he was accidentally hit in the head by a crane-hook, and his cognitive functions were affected. “After that I was not able to play at my full capacity; my memory was not as good as before,” said Momic. The timing of the accident was especially unfortunate: in 1975, he was given the chance to play in the Goldwater-Marshall Invitational Championship in New York. He did play, but his performance must have been a bitter disappointment: 3.5/9. Later, in June, he played in the “Lucky Open” in Nashville. The name of the tournament was cruelly ironic: although

Momic had won several Lucky Opens before and he entered this one as the 2300-rated top seed, he managed only 2.5/5 points for an abysmal 11th place finish.

After everything that had befallen him in 1975, Momic gave up competitive chess. He was only forty years old when he retired from tournament play. As far as we know, he never played another rated game for the rest of his life. He died in 1997, at the age of sixty-two.

A great chess career had been cut off far too soon... What more can one say? Chess mastery is a precious gift, and we must never take it for granted; after all, we never know when an illness or an accident might take it away.

In honor of Momic and his extraordinary achievements, let us close this chapter with one more of his memorable games. We have seen games he played in Tennessee and Georgia, so it is fitting that we finally see a game he played in Alabama.

Robert Timmel – Milan Momic

Wiregrass Open

Dothan; April 1974

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.a3 Be7 7.Be3 Nf6
8.Nxc6 bxc6 9.e5 Nd5 10.Nxd5 cxd5 11.Qg4 g6 12.Be2 d6 13.f4 f5
14.exf6 Bxf6 15.c3 Rb8 16.Bc1 e5 17.Qf3 e4 18.Qe3 Qb6 19.Qg3 d4 20.h4
Bf5 21.h5 Ke7 22.Qf2 dxc3 23.Qxb6 Rxb6 24.b4 d5 25.g4 Be6 26.hxg6
hxg6 27.Rxh8 Bxh8 28.a4 c2 29.Ra2 Bc3+ 30.Kf1 Bxb4 31.Rxc2 d4
32.Rc7+ Kd8 33.Ra7 d3 34.Bd1 d2 35.Bb2 Bc4+ 36.Kg2 Bc5 37.Ra8+ Kd7
38.Ra7+ Kc6 39.Be5



Momic, who clearly has the upper hand in this ending, has reached a tricky moment. Black would like to force the d-pawn through to promotion, but White seems to have too many threats of his own—for example, if 39...e3?? 40.Bf3+ Bd5 41.Rc7, White mates, or if 39...Rb1 40.Rc7+ Kb6 (40...Kd5 41.Rd7+ Ke6 42.Rxd2 picks off the d-pawn, and the position has become way more of a mess than Black wanted) 41.a5+!, it seems that White wins material. Yet Momic has looked further ahead than that:

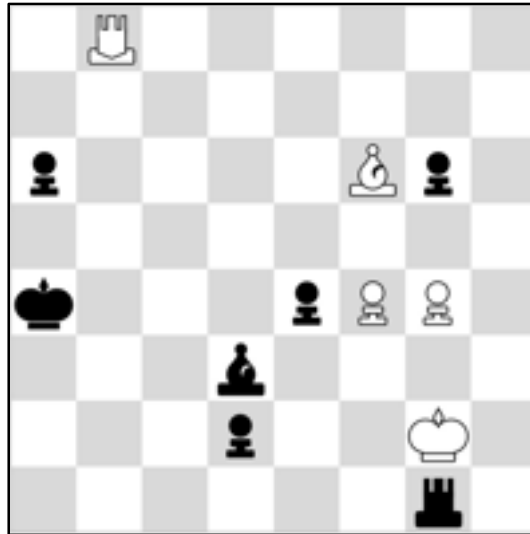
39...Rb1! 40.Rc7+ Kb6 41.a5+ Kxa5 42.Rxc5+



42...Kb4!

Well-played: Momic understood that after 43.Bd6 Rxd1, White's discovered checks would be nothing special. Strangely, in various sources, Momic's 42nd move has been incorrectly written as 42...Kb6?!, which hangs the c4-bishop for no good reason and puts Black's victory in jeopardy. However, in the August 1974 *Antics* where the descriptive notation of the game originally appeared, we see the correct 42...K-N5, i.e., 42...Kb4!.

43.Rc8 Rxd1 44.Rd8 Bd3 45.Rb8+ Ka4 46.Bf6 Rg1+! 0-1



Black finally clears the way for the d-pawn's coronation, so White resigns.

* * *

Alabama's first National Master, Milan Momic, left a legacy that will endure. Over the course of his brilliant chess career, he battled with famous players like Benko, Browne, Byrne, Christiansen, Larsen, Lombardy, and Keres. He won multiple Alabama Opens and Tennessee Opens, a Georgia Open, Mid-South Opens, a Southern Open, and countless other events all over the Southeast. In his prime, when he reigned over Alabama and Tennessee, he made winning a game of chess look easy.

Charles Irvine:

Prince of Huntsville

When people talk about the great Alabama masters of the distant past, it is usually Milan Momic who steals the show. He was, after all, Alabama's most accomplished player of the 1960s and early 1970s. Yet somehow, Alabama chess writers and historians have often overlooked another legend from this period: Charles Irvine of Huntsville. Irvine collected multiple Alabama state titles—and, at his best, he was one of the very strongest junior players in the country. It is high time for us to give Irvine the recognition that he deserves.

Charles Irvine's serious chess career in Alabama started in the late 1960s, when he was about sixteen years old. Early on, he made a big noise in Alabama chess by winning Huntsville's 1968 Midsummer Open (with 4.5/5) and defeating Milan Momic in their individual game. Since Irvine was still a Class A player at the time, this victory was quite an upset. As a bonus, Irvine also won the 1968 Huntsville City Championship that same summer.

Soon, Irvine would prove that he was no mere flash in the pan. In the year 1969, he won the Alabama State Championship with a perfect score (finishing ahead of Momic) and climbed to a rating of 2168. There were only a handful of Experts in the state, so Irvine had already established himself as one of Alabama's most elite players of the day.

The following game shows Irvine at his best as he outplays a major in-state rival.

Marty Appleberry – Charles Irvine

North Alabama Open

Huntsville; May 1970

1.d4 f5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.g3 e6 4.Bg2 Be7 5.0–0 0–0 6.c4 d6

Charles Irvine was surely the most successful Classical Dutch player in Alabama chess history. He used this defensive weapon religiously against 1.d4, 1.c4, and 1.Nf3.

7.Nc3 Qe8 8.Re1 Qg6



Just when it seems Black has a solid grip on the e4 square, White gets to play e2-e4 anyway thanks to a tactical trick:

9.e4! Nxe4 10.Nxe4 fxe4 11.Rxe4

The rook is immune because 11...Qxe4?? 12.Nh4! wins material.

11...Nc6 12.Re1 Nb4!?

A rare choice. Although 12...e5 and 12...Bf6 are more commonly seen, the text move is mentioned by *Modern Chess Openings* as a viable alternative.

13.a3?

Calling Black's bluff—but, considering what happens later on, White would be better off with the cautious 13.Re2.

13...Nc2 14.Nh4 Bxh4 15.Be4



This was White's point: 15...Qf7 16.Qxc2 Bf6 17.Bxh7+ wins a pawn. But now Irvine unveils the brilliant idea that refutes White's entire plan.

15...Nxe1!! 16.Bxg6 Nf3+ 17.Kg2 hxg6 18.gxh4 Nxh4+ 19.Kg3 Nf5+ 20.Kg2 b6



The material count is technically “even,” whatever that means in a position as unbalanced as this. Yet Black’s position is much more fun to play. He has pressure on the long diagonal and the f-file, a strong knight with a support point, and various targets to attack—including White’s king! (By the way, this whole sequence had also been played by another Dutch Defense hero, Bent Larsen, in Neikirkh-Larsen 1958. I wonder if Irvine had been aware of that game.)

21.Bg5 Bb7+ 22.Kf1 c5 23.dxc5 bxc5

Black’s knight can now use the d4-square, after which various pieces can use the f3-square. I would even say that White is already positionally lost.

24.Rc1 Rf7 25.Rc3 Raf8 26.Qg4 e5



White is unable to get any kind of convincing counterattack going and can only wait for Black's forces to creep in.

27.Bd2 Nd4 28.Be3 Nf3 29.Qxg6 Nxh2+ 30.Ke2 Rf6 31.Qg3 Nf3 32.Kd1



32...Nd4

The computer insists on 32...Be4! (threatening ...Rf6-g6-g1+) 33.Qg4 Bf5!, and now that the threat of ...Rg6 can no longer be parried, there is nothing better for White than 34.Qxf3 Bc2+. Still, in Irvine's defense, we would argue that simply maintaining the bind is also good for Black.

33.Qh3 Bc6 34.Kd2 a5 35.Qh5 a4 36.Ke1 Rf5 37.Qg4 Bf3 38.Qg6 R5f6



39.Qg3

This drops the exchange, but White probably wanted to avoid the unpleasant invasion seen in the line 39.Qg5 Rh6 followed by ...Rh1+.

39...Ne2 40.Qg5 Nxc3 41.bxc3 Rb8 42.Kf1?

Although 42.Kd2 would hold out for a bit longer, at least the text move ends the suffering quickly.

42...Rb1+ 43.Bc1 Rxc1+! 44.Qxc1 Rh6 0-1



A splendid achievement, and an inspiration to Alabama's future Dutch Defense adherents.

THE U.S. JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP

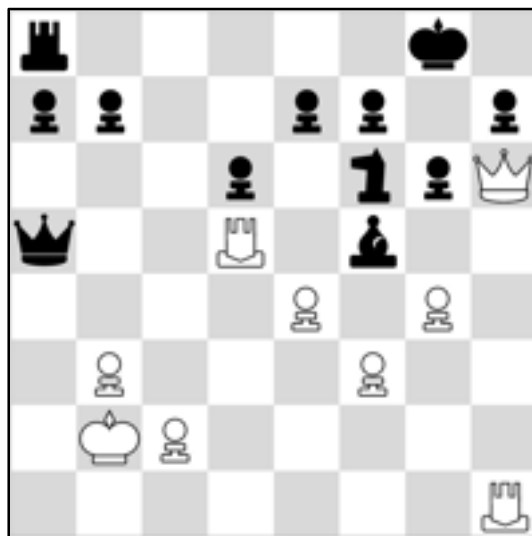
Charles Irvine reached new heights in the year 1970. Not only did he become a National Master, but also, he climbed into the top ten list of juniors (under 21) in the nation. Yet perhaps the greatest honor of all was being invited to play in the U.S. Junior Championship, which was held in July 1970 in New York City. This exclusive, eight-player round-robin would be a serious test for Huntsville's young hero. Unfortunately, in the end, Irvine was outclassed by the higher-ranked players there (such as the eventual tournament winner, future grandmaster Ken Rogoff). Nevertheless, three of Irvine's games from the championship were notable enough to be included in *Chess Life & Review*. One of these games—his superb win against Nebraska's John Watson—even appeared in *The New York Times*.

John Watson – Charles Irvine

U.S. Junior Championship

New York City; July 1970

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Bc4
Nc6 9.Qd2 Bd7 10.h4 Qa5 11.0-0-0 Rfc8 12.Bb3 Ne5 13.h5 Nxh5 14.Bh6
Nd3+ 15.Kb1 Nxb2 16.Kxb2 Bxh6 17.Qxh6 Rxc3 18.g4 Nf6 19.Nf5 Bxf5
20.Rd5 Rxb3+ 21.axb3



Intense Sicilian Dragon middlegames were all the rage in those days. Black has sacrificed the exchange to weaken White's pawn shelter, and White has sacrificed his h-pawn to pry open the h-file. The question is, which king will be the first to get scorched?

21...Qb4!

Irvine calmly prepares ...Rc8 or possibly ...a5; he also succeeds in provoking another weakening pawn move from White.

22.c3?!

An intriguing “cyber-human” line is 22.exf5 Rc8 23.Rd3 Rc6 24.g5 (hoping for 24...Nh5?? 25.Rxh5 and f5-f6) 24...Qc5!.. This last move, which was found by the computer, is the key to the whole variation: apparently, Black has just enough counterplay to hold the balance after, e.g., 25.c4 Qf2+.

22...Qb6 23.exf5 Qf2+ 24.Ka3?



The king will be insecure here, and Watson’s few remaining pawns will begin to fall. Perhaps White should have given 24.Rd2 more consideration.

24...Qxf3 25.Rd4 Qxc3 26.Rc4 Qa5+ 27.Kb2 Qe5+ 28.Ka3 b5 29.g5

A desperate attempt at making something happen on the h-file, but it falls short. Since the computer regards White as being lost anyway, perhaps this move is the best practical choice. At least White is attempting to create some chaos.

29...Nh5 30.Rxh5 b4+!



Very nice: after 31.Ka2? Qe2+! 32.Ka1 Qxh5, White is lost. If 31.Kxb4? Rb8+, then Black mates next move. Of course, if 31.Rxb4? Qa1, then Black mates instantly. This leaves 31.Ka4—but then the computer announces a forced mate in twelve moves. As Anand once said: “In a bad position, all moves are bad.”

31.Ka4 gxh5 32.f6 exf6

More precise, though harder to find, was the immediate mating attack suggested by the computer: 32...Qa1+ 33.Kb5 Rb8+ 34.Kc6 Qh1+! 35.Kd7 Qb7+ 36.Rc7 Qb5+ 37.Kxe7 Re8+ 38.Kxd6 Re6 mate.

33.gxf6 Qa1+ 34.Kb5 Qg1 35.Qxh5



35...Rb8+! 36.Kc6 Qb6+ 37.Kd7 Qd8+ 0-1

Oddly enough, in *Chess Life & Review*, “mate” is written next to this final move—but it’s not mate just yet! After 38.Kc6, simplest is 38...Rb6+ 39.Kd5 Rb5+, winning the queen with mate soon to follow. A masterful display by Irvine on a national stage.

THE BIG FINISH

After struggling at the U.S. Junior Championship, Charles Irvine went on to have better results in the Southeast. He won the 1970 Alabama State Championship; also, he took clear first with 5.5 points at the 1970 Mid-South Open, finishing ahead of some of Tennessee’s strongest players, including John Hurt. A few years later, he came in clear first place in back-to-back Alabama State Championships: he won in 1973 with 6.5/7, and then, even more impressively, he won in 1974 with a perfect 7-0 score. Very few players have succeeded in getting a perfect score at an Alabama State Championship in the post-Fischer era, so this 1974 title must be one of Irvine’s greatest competitive achievements.

Unfortunately, this would also be Irvine's last great achievement at the Alabama State Championship. In the 1975 edition, he blundered his queen in an early round and withdrew. The following year, he opted to compete in the 1976 Tennessee Open instead, but he played poorly and finished with a forgettable 3.5/6. Soon thereafter, he moved away from Alabama and never participated in the Alabama State Championship again. At the time of writing, according to uschess.org, Charles Irvine has not played rated chess in over thirty years.

Still, in the ten-or-so years that Charles Irvine was active in Alabama, he proved that he was one of Alabama's all-time best. He won four state titles, and he is one of the few Alabama players to have defeated the legendary Milan Momic in tournament play. For sure, Irvine proved himself as a worthy rival to Momic. Irvine was also one of Alabama's first great junior players of the 20th century, and one of Alabama's first ever National Masters. He helped pave the way for future chess masters who would someday call Huntsville home.

So, let us not forget the "other" champion from the Momic era: Charles Irvine, Huntsville's chess prince.

Kyle Therrell:

Birmingham's Boss

Kyle Therrell is one of the premier Alabama chess players of the 1980s and 1990s. He is a chess master, a five-time Alabama State Champion, and by far the winner of the most Birmingham City Championships in recorded history.

Kyle's career started in the early 1970s. The *Antics* listed him an unrated player in the 1973 Alabama State Championship crosstable; he would steadily improve over the next few years. In 1976, he came in first at the Alabama High School Championship—even though, at the age of 12, he was not yet in high school—and he was among the top five players in the nation under age 13. In 1977, he managed to win the Birmingham City Championship qualifier tournament, but he lost the final match to Jack Gwin. He again qualified for the final in 1979, this time losing to Steve Hudson. Although Kyle showed great promise in these early years, he had not come into his own just yet.

Still, Kyle did have a significant success in 1979 when he won the Vulcan Open with 4.5/5. He also tied for third with a solid 5/7 score at the 1979 Alabama State Championship. He had become one of the top ten players of Alabama by 1980, and soon thereafter, he became an Expert. But his best days were still to come...

THE BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

It was 1981 when, as the *Antics* put it, the “Therrell Summer” occurred. Kyle swept both stages of the preliminary Birmingham City Championship qualifier with perfect scores; he then won the final match (versus some kid named Stuart Rachels) to become Birmingham City Champion for the first time. After that, at the fiercely contested 1981 Alabama State Championship, Kyle managed to score 6/7 (five wins, two draws, no losses), getting clear first place and winning his first Alabama State Championship title.

The following sixth-round game played a vital role in Kyle’s tournament victory. Kyle had Black against Joe Jurjevich, who was only half a point behind and spoiling for a fight. A turbulent Sicilian Dragon led to the endgame that we now join at move 53:

Joseph Jurjevich – Kyle Therrell

Alabama Chess Championship (Round 6)

Montgomery; September 1981

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6
8.Qd2 0–0 9.0–0–0 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6 11.h4 Qa5 12.Kb1 Rfc8 13.a3 Rab8
14.h5 b5 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Qxd2 18.Nxf6+ Kg7
19.Nh5+ gxh5 20.Rxd2 Kg6 21.f4 Bc4 22.Bd3 b4 23.axb4 Rxb4 24.g4
hxg4 25.Rdh2 Bxd3 26.Rh6+ Kg7 27.cxd3 Rcb8 28.Rh7+ Kg8 29.R7h2
e6 30.f5 exf5 31.exf5 Kg7 32.Rg2 R8b5 33.Rhg1 Rxf5 34.Rxg4+ Rxg4
35.Rxg4+ Kf6 36.Ra4 a5 37.Kc2 Rc5+ 38.Kd2 Ke6 39.d4 Rb5 40.Kc3 Kd5
41.b3 f5 42.Ra1 f4 43.Re1 Rb4 44.Ra1 Rxd4 45.Rxa5+ Ke4 46.Ra1 Rd3+
47.Kc2 Rh3 48.b4 Rh2+ 49.Kc3 Ke3 50.b5 Rh5 51.Kb4 f3 52.b6 Rh8
53.Kb5



Lots of twists and turns led up to this position. Much earlier, Joe Jurjevich had spurned the opportunity to draw by perpetual check, and now, in a tense rook endgame, Kyle is on the verge of punishing him for it. Yet rook endings can be filled with hazards—and, at the end of a long fight, people are always more prone to errors. How exactly should Black proceed?

53...d5!

Right on point: if White would dare try to promote his pawn, Black's rook will preemptively sacrifice itself to stop it, and then White's king will be too far away to help stop Black's passers.

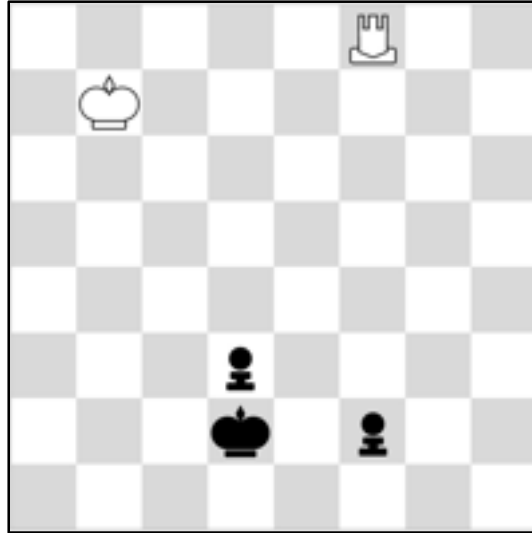
54.Kc5 d4 55.b7

Although White is objectively lost, 55.Re1+!? offered a chance for a swindle: the computer notes that 55...Kd2?? 56.Rf1 Ke2 57.Rxf3! is a draw. Black would have to play 55...Kf2! 56.Rd1 Rc8+ to maintain his winning edge.

55...Rb8

The computer shows that 55...f2! would have given Black a much cleaner win than he managed to get in the game. However, I am grateful that Kyle chose this move because the resulting rook-versus-pawns endgame turns out to be instructive.

56.Kc6 d3 57.Ra8 Rxb7 58.Re8+ Kd2 59.Kxb7 f2 60.Rf8



In theory, the rook cannot stop the pawns alone; the best White could hope for is to eliminate one of the pawns and defend a (lost) rook-versus-queen endgame. In practice, Black has a problem: if he tries to promote the f-pawn directly with 60...Ke1 61.Re8+ Kf1 62.Rd8 Kg2 63.Rg8+, White will just keep checking him. There is another way, however.

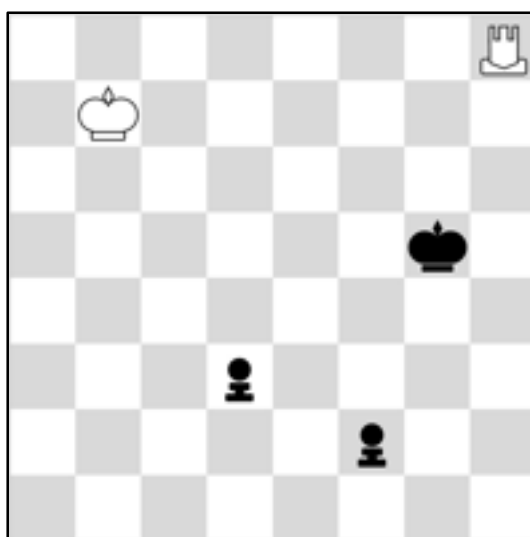
60...Ke2 61.Re8+ Kf3! 62.Rf8+ Kg3?!

Objectively, this move is a step in the wrong direction, although it does not throw away the win. Kyle is hoping to zig-zag up the g- and h-files and eventually force White's rook to commit to h1. Then Black's king will retreat along the g-file and finally escort the pawns forward. (If White plays Rh1-f1, then Black just plays ...d2.) This all seems like a

reasonable idea, but twenty-first century “cyber-human” analysis shows otherwise...

The best way would have been 62...Ke3!—Black’s king should head for the *queenside*, where he will be sheltered from distant checks thanks to White’s king. After, for example, 63.Re8+ Kd4 64.Rd8+ (64.Rf8 d2! 65.Rd8+ Kc3 is easy) 64...Kc3 65.Rc8+ Kb4 66.Rf8 d2 67.Rf4+ Kc5, soon White must bite the bullet and enter the lost rook-versus-queen ending.

63.Rg8+ Kh4 64.Rh8+ Kg5



65.Rh1?

White throws away his last chance for tricks. A far more cunning defensive attempt would have been 65.Rg8+!, tempting Black’s king to come even closer. If 65...Kh6?! 66.Rh8+ Kg6?? (hoping for 67.Rg8+?? Kh7! 68.Rf8 d2, winning) 67.Rh1! Kg5 (if 67...Kf5? then 68.Rf1) 68.Kc6 Kf4 69.Kd5 Ke3 70.Kc4 d2 71.Kc3 Ke2 72.Kc2, then White draws. White’s king was much faster than he seemed!

Therefore, on move 66 of this variation, Black absolutely must retreat with 66...Kg5! and head for the queenside, as we said earlier.

65...Kf4!

Now 66.Rh8 d2! will make a new queen for sure.

66.Kc6 Kf3 0–1

A huge win for Kyle. Though far from perfect, this game does show how intense and nerve-racking state championship battles can be. I struggled to understand the ins and outs of this ending even with the help of the computer, so one can imagine the pressure that both players must have felt over the board.

* * *

Having become a National Master by the end of 1981, Kyle Therrell would go on to become an Alabama champion four more times: he was co-champion with Stuart Rachels in 1982, co-champion with Tom Denton in 1987, co-champion with Charles Meidinger and Bill Melvin in 1992, and co-champion with Bill Melvin and Andrew Whatley in 1995. Along the way, Kyle also won or tied for first in the 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1986 editions of the Queen of Hearts tournament, beating out players like Stuart Rachels, Brent Inman, Tom Denton, and Joseph Jurjevich.

“FRENEMIES”

Kyle’s friendly rivalry with Stuart Rachels was a big theme of both of their careers in the 1980s. They played countless tournament games together—many of which may be found in Stuart’s book, *The Best I Saw in Chess*—and Stuart regards Kyle as having been one of his key mentors. Indeed, Kyle’s advice to Stuart about opening theory played an important role in Stuart’s early chess development.

At the first annual Magic City Open in 1984, Kyle scored a big upset win against an almost 2400-rated Stuart Rachels. Kyle has called this win his best game ever, but it seems the game itself has never appeared in the *Antics*. We are therefore indebted to Stuart Rachels for kindly sharing a copy of his original scoresheet with us. Now, at last, this memorable piece of Kyle Therrell's chess journey can be preserved as part of Alabama chess history.

Kyle Therrell – Stuart Rachels

Magic City Open (Round 4)

Birmingham; December 9, 1984

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Be2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.f4 Nc6 9.Be3 a6 10.Qe1 Qc7 11.Qg3 Bd7 12.Kh1 b5 13.e5 Ne8 14.Rad1 b4 15.Ne4 d5 16.Ng5 Nxd4 17.Bxd4 h6 18.Nf3 Bb5 19.Bd3 Bxd3 20.cxd3 g6 21.Rc1 Qd7



What began as a Sicilian Defense has morphed into something resembling a French Defense gone wrong for Black. All of White's pieces outshine their opposite numbers; meanwhile, Black is cramped, his dark squares are weak, and his king's pawn cover seems sketchy.

Still, if Stuart finds the time to play ...Ne8-g7-f5, then his position will have improved dramatically. Kyle plays with resolve:

22.f5!! exf5 23.e6!

Brilliant: this double pawn sacrifice unlocks the full potential of White's army. Black is in trouble.

23...Qxe6 24.Rfe1 Qd6

Stuart was wise to avoid 24...Bd6? 25.Qh3! followed by Qxh6.

25.Ne5 Bf6 26.Bc5



26...Bxe5 27.Qxe5?!

It is hard to criticize this move too much; after all, in practice, White did get a pleasant endgame. However, Kyle could have favorably won the exchange with the cyber-human idea of 27.Rxe5! Qc6 28.Ree1!, since 28...Rc8 29.Qe3 Nd6? 30.Bd4! leads to disaster on the dark squares.

27...Qxe5 28.Rxe5 f6 29.Rxd5 Rf7

The computer prefers the immediate 29...Nc7!. For example, if 30.Rd7 Rf7 31.Rxf7 Kxf7 32.Bxb4 Nd5, Black's knight becomes much more active than it did in the actual game.

30.Bxb4 Kg7

In his notes jotted on his original scoresheet, Stuart Rachels gave this move a question mark and suggested 30...Nc7. Either way, Kyle has won his material back and can brag about having the better pawn structure, better minor piece, and more active rooks. But is it enough to win?

31.Rc6 Nc7 32.Rdd6 a5 33.Bc3



33...Ne8 34.Rd5 a4 35.Kg1 Re7 36.Kf2 Kf7 37.a3 Raa7 38.Rb5 Re6

Stuart mentioned the possibility of 38...Rad7 in his notes. Then White must be careful, since 39.d4? Nd6! would allow Black's knight to spring back to life.

39.Rxe6 Kxe6 40.Rb6+



40...Kd5?

No one can blame Black for centralizing his king rather than retreating meekly with 40...Kf7—especially since White would then have a free hand to march his king to the queenside. However, it is not so simple: if White's king were to walk too far away, Black could try the computer's idea of ...g5!, starting to mobilize the kingside majority. In some lines, Black could even play ...Re7!?, abandoning the a4-pawn and threatening ...Re2. If it turns into a pawn race, my gut instinct would be to bet on White because of his bishop—but the position seems unclear.

At any rate, the more active text move has a much more serious drawback:

41.Rb8!

Kyle seizes the moment! He had to avoid the careless 41.Bxf6? Nxf6 42.Rxf6, when the “all rook endgames are drawn” principle starts

to kick in. Indeed, the computer's 42...Rb7! would give Black very annoying counterplay.

However, after the text move, Black cannot keep his knight on e8 because of 41...Re7? 42.Ra8. Losing the a-pawn would be the kiss of death for Black, as White's connected queenside passers would be too strong. This means the knight must move, so Kyle will win the f-pawn *and* keep the minor pieces on the board, which makes all the difference. Also note that, although Black's king is centralized and "active," it is stymied by White's bishop and d-pawn throughout all of this.

41...Nd6 42.Bxf6 Ra6 43.Bc3 Nf7 44.Rf8 Ra7 45.Rg8 g5 46.Rg6?



An unfortunate slip at the end of an almost error-free game from Kyle, possibly due to time pressure. However, Stuart returns the favor:

46...f4?

Correct was 46...Ne5!, as pointed out by Stuart. Thanks to this knight, Black would get lots of counterplay—or, after 47.Bxe5 Kxe5 48.Rxh6 Rb7, Black would get another rook ending with drawing chances.

47.Rf6!

Back on track. From now on, Kyle never relinquishes his lead.

47...Kc5 48.d4+ Kd5 49.Kf3 h5



This was the only way to keep White's king out, but now Kyle dismantles Stuart's kingside and the game is finally over:

50.h4! gxh4 51.Rf5+ Kc4 52.Rxh5 Re7 53.Rxh4 Ng5+ 54.Kxf4 Ne4 55.Bb4 Re8 56.Rh7 Nf2 57.Kf3 Nd3 58.Rc7+ Kd5 59.Bc3 Rf8+ 60.Ke3 Nf4 61.Rc5+ Kd6 62.Rg5 Nd5+ 63.Kd3 Rf2 64.Rg6+ Kd7 65.Kc4 Rxg2 66.Rxg2 Ne3+ 67.Kb4 Nxc2 68.Kxa4 Kc6 69.Ka5 Ne3 70.b4 Nc4+ 71.Ka4 Nb6+ 72.Kb3 Kb5 73.Bd2 Na4 74.Bg5 Nb6 75.Bd8 Nd5 76.a4+ Kc6 77.b5+ Kd7 78.Bg5 Kd6 79.a5 1-0

A splendid victory over a formidable rival.

MR. BIRMINGHAM

Aside from his five state titles, the most stand-out feature of Kyle Therrell's Alabama chess resume is his staggering success rate at the Birmingham City Championship. This is quite the feather in his cap: as veteran players from the area can attest, it was an ordeal to become Birmingham City Champion in those days.

From at least the 1970s up through the 1990s, the Birmingham City Championship was a grueling affair consisting of multiple events. Typically, a four or five-round Swiss event—the Birmingham Challenger tournament—served as the preliminary qualifier. Then, the top performer(s) of the Challenger tournament would be seeded into a small round-robin tournament (or, sometimes, a one-on-one match) with the defending champion. Only then, in the Championship final, would the ultimate winner be determined. Afterwards, the newly crowned Birmingham City Champion would rest on their throne until the next year, when the next batch of challengers would arrive...

Having fallen short in previous years, Kyle Therrell hit pay dirt in the drawn-out Birmingham Championship of 1981. First, he won the initial qualifier tournament; next, he won the follow-up round robin that produced a single challenger; then, at last, he defeated the defending champion, Stuart Rachels, in the final match by a score of 3.5-1.5. (In this match, Kyle played the game that Stuart Rachels aptly called "Kyle's Brilliancy." Stuart deeply annotated that game in *The Best I Saw in Chess*, so we refer the reader to Stuart's notes there.) When we consider the player that Stuart Rachels would soon become, we see that winning this match was clearly a splendid result for Kyle. Following up on this success, Kyle defended his city title in 1982.

However, in the 1990s, Kyle truly became *the* Birmingham Champion. Although written records of some championships are unavailable, we know that Kyle won every Birmingham City Championship from at least 1992 to 1997. Talk about dominance! Perhaps this ridiculous streak of victories partly explains why, as of 1998, Kyle stopped playing in the championship and would only direct it instead. After all, what more did he have to prove?

As a tribute to Kyle's legendary reign over Birmingham, let us close this chapter with another one of Kyle's most beautiful wins at another traditional Birmingham tournament: the Magic City Open.

Kyle Therrell – Edwin Battistella

Magic City Open (Round 3)

Birmingham; December 1986

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4



The Four Pawns Attack is the most confrontational line White can play against Alekhine's Defense. Both sides must be prepared for a lot of drama.

5...dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 7.Be3 Bf5 8.Nc3 e6 9.Nf3 Be7 10.d5 Nb4 11.Rc1 exd5 12.a3 Na6?

This passive move costs Black dearly. According to the *ChessBase* online database, far more common is 12...c5 13.axb4 d4, with complications.

13.cxd5



This diagram must be the worst advertisement ever for Alekhine's Defense. All it took was one slip by Black in a sharp position, and *this* happened. I would not necessarily claim there is something inherently wrong with the Alekhine, but it is surely one of those "Don't try this at home" openings.

13...Nc5 14.Bb5+ Kf8

Black cannot even play 14...Bd7 here because of 15.d6 cxd6 16.exd6 Bxb5 17.Nxb5, with a double attack on e7 and c5 (as well as a threat of Nc7+).

15.0-0 Ne4 16.Nd4 Nxc3 17.bxc3 Bc8

This is an unfortunate retreat, but if 17...Be4 or 17...Bg6 then 18.Ne6+!.

18.Qh5 g6

Of course, 18...Qxd5? 19.c4 is no help to Black, but 18...f6 does not work either: after 19.exf6 Bxf6 20.Rxf6+!, the computer announces mate in seven moves.

19.Bh6+ Kg8



20.Rxf7!!

A brilliant strike—the queen cannot be taken: if 20...gxh5, then 21.Rg7+ Kf8 22.Rg3+ Kf7 23.e6+ Bxe6 24.dxe6+ Kf6 25.Bg7 mate. But the true point of the combination is still ahead:

20...Kxf7 21.e6+ Kg8 22.Qf3 Bf6



23.Be8!! Bxd4+ 24.cxd4 Qxe8 25.Qf6 1-0

An absolute wipeout. A breathtaking performance by Kyle Therrell.

* * *

At the end of a competitive chess career spanning about thirty years, Kyle retired from tournament play in the early 2000s. He had made many contributions to chess in his home city, such as mentoring local players and directing tournaments. And, of course, he will always remain a chess master with many championship victories to his name. Kyle Therrell will be remembered as one of the greatest Birmingham chess legends of all time.

Stuart Rachels:

Alabama's U.S. Champion

Of all the chess players Alabama produced in the 20th century, the strongest—and certainly the most famous—is Stuart Rachels. As a young chess prodigy, Stuart quickly became a chess master and ruled almost absolutely over Alabama chess for much of the 1980s. He won major tournaments right and left, including multiple Alabama State Championships. Then, at his peak, he had his greatest national triumph: he tied for first at the 1989 U.S. Championship to become a U.S. Co-Champion and an International Master. Although he retired in the early 1990s when he was still in his prime, the legend of Stuart Rachels still lives on in Alabama.

To date, more has been written about Stuart Rachels than any other player profiled in this book. Stuart himself has written a book, *The Best I Saw in Chess*, brimming with recollections of his rich chess career. Therefore, in this chapter, my approach will be much lighter. I will attempt to summarize Stuart's whole chess journey—but, in the spirit of this book, I will mostly focus on the Alabama-centric portions of his early chess career: from the very beginning in 1979 up until his final Alabama State Championship in 1986.

ALABAMA'S PRODIGY

According to an *Antics* article written by his father, Stuart learned how to play chess at age eight. He played in his first ever chess

competition in 1979. (It was a small scholastic tournament in Atlanta; Stuart won 4-0.) Soon thereafter, he would play as an “adult” in the Novice section of the 1979 Queen of Hearts tournament in Montgomery. He steadily improved over the next few months, even tying for first in the Amateur section of the 1979 Alabama State Championship with 6/7 points. By August of 1980, Stuart had already become one of the top ten players of Alabama.

Having become Birmingham City Champion for the first time in 1980, Stuart received a further boost by winning Huntsville’s flagship tournament, the Space City Open, in March 1981 with 4.5/5. In the span of two years, Stuart’s rating had jumped from a provisional rating of 1496 to a regular rating of 2165. And then, in August of 1981, being 11 years and 10 months old, Stuart became the youngest ever U.S. National Master. It was now clear that Alabama had its own bona fide chess prodigy.

The following game from this period gives us early hints of Stuart’s potential. Although Stuart played this brilliancy when he was only 11 years old, he still regards it as one of the best games of his whole chess career. (For much more comprehensive annotations by Stuart himself, see Chapter 24 of *The Best I Saw in Chess*.)

Kyle Therrell – Stuart Rachels

Space City Open (Round 4)

Huntsville; March 1981

**1.e4 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.Qxd4 e6 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Qe4 d6
8.Nbd2 dxe5 9.Nxe5 Nf6 10.Qa4 Qc7 11.Ndf3 Bd6 12.Nxc6 Bd7 13.Bg5
Bxc6 14.Bb5 Nd5 15.Nd4 0-0 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Bxc6**



At first glance, White might appear to have the advantage. He has an extra pawn and the two bishops; although his king remains in the center, there does not seem to be any danger there. Black's next move shatters this illusion.

17...Nxc3!

As an old friend of mine would say: "The cat is amongst the pigeons."

18.bxc3 Rac8 19.Bf3

In *The Best I Saw in Chess*, Stuart suggested 19.Bd2! as an improvement. To be fair to Kyle Therrell, it is not yet obvious that White *ought* to give back the piece. Black does indeed have compensation, but Stuart still has to prove that his sacrifice is sound...

19...Qxc3+ 20.Ke2 Qb2+



The proverbial “dark clouds” are gathering, yet Kyle continues to cling to his extra material.

21.Bd2 Rc2 22.Rad1 Bb4 23.Qd7 Ba5!



At last, the point of Black's play is revealed: thanks to this hard-to-find move, Stuart can introduce his other rook into the game and

overwhelm White's defenses. The best White can do is give up his queen for two rooks:

24.Be4 Rd8 25.Qxd8+ Bxd8 26.Bxc2 Qxc2 27.Rb1 Bb6 28.Rhc1 Qe4+



The exposed position of Kyle's king tips the scales in favor of Stuart's queen. In the end, after the bishops get traded, Stuart wins the endgame in grand style:

29.Be3 h6 30.Rb3 Bxe3 31.Rxe3 Qxg2 32.Rc8+ Kh7 33.Rc7 a5 34.Rxf7 Qxh2 35.Rxe6 Qh5+ 36.Rf3 Qb5+ 37.Rd3 Qc4 38.Re5 Qxa2+ 39.Ke3 a4 40.Ra5 Qc4 41.Ra8 Qb4 42.Ra6 Qc5+ 43.Ke2 h5 44.f3 h4 45.Kd2 Qb4+ 46.Ke3 h3 47.Rd4 Qe1+ 48.Kf4 0-1

This may well have been one of the finest games ever to be played in Alabama.

* * *

We should note that Stuart's success in the early 1980s extended beyond tournaments in Alabama. For example, in May 1982, he was co-winner of the U.S. Junior High Championship (with 7.5/8). He then tied

for first at the U.S. Junior Open in June, with 7/8. However, since Alabama chess is our focus, let us bring the discussion back to the state championship, where history would soon be made...

FIVE IN A ROW

Stuart's first great state championship success came in 1982: he reached 5.5/7 points to become an Alabama state co-champion together with his mentor and rival, Kyle Therrell. (Both players finished behind Stuart's trainer, IM Boris Kogan, who had 6.5/7; however, as a Georgia resident, Kogan could not win the state title.) Then, in the 1983 Alabama State Championship, Stuart improved on his previous year's result by going undefeated and tying for first place with Tom Denton at 6/7 points. The following year, Stuart did better still: he got clear first at the 1984 Alabama State Championship with 6/7 points (5 wins, 2 draws). His rating was 2388, which was over 100 points ahead of his closest rivals in the tournament. The cover of the November 1984 *Antics* simply said: "Rachels Wins Again!"

This game from the 1983 championship speaks volumes about Stuart's stature in Alabama chess during these years.

Tom Denton – Stuart Rachels

Alabama State Championship (Round 4)

Ft. Rucker; September 1983

1.g3 Nf6 2.Bg2 d5 3.Nf3 e6 4.0-0 Be7 5.d3 0-0 6.c3 c5 7.Nbd2 Nc6 8.Qc2 Qc7 9.c4?!



Just when it seemed e2-e4 was coming, Tom jukes towards a different kind of pawn structure. Yet this move seems out of place: if White had wanted to play c4, he could have done that in one go several moves earlier. Now the opening becomes less like a King's Indian "Attack" and more like a King's Indian "Reversed."

9...b6

Also to be considered was 9...d4, gaining space and practically forcing White into a reversed Benoni after, for example, 10.a3 a5 11.e3 e5. Yet perhaps Stuart would have preferred playing the "Black" (in this case, White) side of such Benoni structures. After all, in 1983, Stuart willingly played the Benoni as Black in a simul game with Garry Kasparov!

10.b3 Bb7 11.Bb2 Rad8 12.Rfe1 e5 13.Nh4?

Tom Denton criticized this move in his *Antics* notes, and rightly so. The knight must soon retreat.

13...g6 14.cxd5 Nxd5 15.Nhf3 Nd4!

A classic strategy: this knight will be a pain for White, and the only way to get rid of it is with e2-e3 (which weakens the d-pawn) or by trading it (which, after ...exd4, exposes the pawn on e2 to attack). Tactical tricks from White fall short, e.g., 16.Nxd4 exd4 17.Bxd4? (counting on 17...cxd4? 18.Qxc7 and Bxb7) ...Nb4!, winning for Black.

16.Qc1 Bf6 17.Nc4 Rfe8



Black has established a Maroczy bind, and White gets too eager to break out of it:

18.Ncxe5? Bxe5 19.Nxe5 Qxe5 20.e3 Nb4!

Impressive: to play this, Stuart had to calculate all the upcoming tactics like a machine.



21.exd4

The best defense. The only other option was 21.Bxb7 Nxd3 (see analysis diagram).



Then the alternatives are:

- 22.exd4 Qxe1+ 23.Qxe1 Rxe1+ 24.Rxe1 Nxe1, winning the exchange;
- 22.Bxd4 cxd4, winning at least the exchange;
- 22.Qc3 Nxb2 (even stronger, though more complicated, is the computer's 22...Qf5!) 23.exd4 Qxd4 and Black is up a pawn, e.g., 24.Rxe8+ Rxe8 25.Qxd4 cxd4 26.Rb1 Re2;
- 22.Qd2 Nxe1 23.Rxe1 (if 23.exd4 cxd4 and Black intends ...Qe2; 24.Kf1? fails to 24...Qb5+!) 23...Nf3+ 24.Bxf3 Rxd2 25.Bxe5 Rxe5 wins.

21...Qxe1+ 22.Qxe1 Rxe1+ 23.Rxe1 Bxg2 24.Kxg2 Nxd3



Remarkably, after all that analysis, Black's reward is only an endgame where he will be up by a single pawn. Nonetheless, after many further moves—and some imprecise play from White—Stuart managed to convert his tiny advantage: **0–1**.

* * *

By the year 1985, Stuart was rated in the 2400s and his dominance in Alabama tournaments was obvious. The following game

from the 1985 state championship is a good illustration: as White, he steamrolls his opponent in 22 moves.

Stuart Rachels – Ray Downs

Alabama State Championship (Round 5)

Birmingham; September 1985

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Be3 Be7
8.Qe2 0-0 9.0-0-0 a6 10.Rhg1!



I am no expert on the subtleties of the Sicilian Defense, but here, even I can tell White is winding up for a killer punch. It is easy to imagine g2-g4-g5 and f2-f4-f5 knocking Black clear out of the ring.

10...Qc7 11.g4 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Nd7 13.g5 b5 14.Bb3 Re8?

An understandable mistake: Black wants to prepare ...Nf8 to defend against Qh5 and Rg1-g3-h3. Yet the computer's 14...Nc5! was stronger because it gives Black the option of eliminating White's dangerous light-square bishop. With the bishop gone, Black can play

...Bb7 and, if needed, ...e5, ...g6, and ...f6, to defend the h-pawn laterally with a major piece.

15.Qh5

From here on, Black's position quickly slides into the abyss. Somehow, Black's play is, as Carlsen says, "too weak, too slow." Stuart's army swarms over the kingside.

15...Nf8 16.f4 Bd8 17.f5!

If Black takes this pawn, then White plays the thematic Nc3-d5-f6+! with a winning attack.



17...g6 18.Qh6 e5 19.Nd5 Qd7 20.Nf6+ Bxf6 21.gxf6 Ne6 22.fxe6 1-0

A fiery demolition!

After that game, Stuart went on to win clear first at the 1985 Alabama State Championship with 5.5/6. Then, in the year 1986—now rated a colossal 2508—he won clear first with 5.5/6 to take the state title

yet again. Thus, Stuart Rachels became the first (and, so far, the only) player ever to win five consecutive Alabama State Champion titles.

BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS

It goes without saying that, in addition to his state championship victories, Stuart was also running around winning other substantial Alabama tournaments throughout the 1980s. *Antics* magazines are overflowing with stories about him winning the Birmingham City Championship, the Vulcan Open, the Magic City Open, and the Queen of Hearts. Unfortunately, in 1987, his chess activity in Alabama began to wane because he started college at Emory University in Georgia. He missed the Alabama State Championship that year—and, as it turned out, he would not play in the Alabama State Championship ever again.

However, he continued playing in bigger tournaments at the national and international level. For example, he performed well at the 1987 New York Open tournament, defeating his first ever grandmaster and finishing just shy of an IM norm. In 1988, he became U.S. Junior Champion and participated in the World Junior Championship.

Then came his greatest chess success. As the 1988 U.S. Junior Champion, he had qualified to participate in the 1989 U.S. Championship. He entered the tournament as a huge underdog, being a mere FM in a field chock-full of GMs. Yet Stuart achieved the “impossible”: he played the tournament of his life, scoring +4 with no losses, to tie for first with GMs Yasser Seirawan and Roman Dzindzichashvili. Out of the blue, Stuart Rachels had become a U.S. Champion and an International Master.

Aside from an exhibition game against Garry Kasparov in 1988, Stuart’s battle with GM Sergey Kudrin in the 1989 U.S. Championship is probably Stuart’s most famous game. Stuart annotates the game extensively in *The Best I Saw in Chess*, and we cannot hope to improve

on Stuart's notes here. Let us simply replay the moves without annotation, and watch as this off-beat Sicilian Dragon sets the board aflame:

Sergey Kudrin – Stuart Rachels

U.S. Championship (Round 10)

Long Beach; 1989

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.g3 g6 7.Nde2 Bd7
8.Bg2 Qc8 9.Nd5 Bg7 10.0-0 Nxd5 11.exd5 Ne5 12.a4 Bh3 13.Ra2 h5



14.Bxh3 Qxh3 15.f3 g5 16.Kh1 Bf6 17.b3 Qf5 18.Nd4 Qg6 19.c4 g4
20.Rg2 h4 21.gxh4 Rxh4 22.f4 Nd7 23.Nb5 0-0-0 24.Nxa7+ Kb8 25.Be3
Rdh8 26.Qe1 g3 27.Qa5 Rxh2+ 28.Rxh2 Qe4+ 29.Kg1 Qxe3+ 0-1



Steve Hudson's remarks in the November 1980 *Antics* were prophetic: Stuart Rachels really could give people "Dragonphobia." An unforgettable brilliancy from the strongest tournament ever won by an Alabamian.

"SEARCHING FOR STUART RACHELS"

When we look back through various *Antics* articles and tournament reports in the 1980s and 1990s, we find quite a lot of hero worship directed toward Stuart Rachels. It made sense that his contemporaries were so starstruck: he was a record-breaking chess prodigy and Alabama's only U.S. Champion, after all. Sadly, by the time my chess career had started in the late 1990s and I began learning bits and pieces of Stuart's story from older players, he had already vanished. Stuart Rachels had retired from competitive chess by the end of 1994.

During one of my early tournaments in Alabama, around the year 2000 or so, I innocently asked two older players if they knew why Stuart had quit competitive chess. One of them started to say

something like, “Chess can be a painful game...” The other player shushed him, as if he were about to tell some dreadful secret that a young player like myself should not hear. I found out later that plenty has been said—especially by Stuart himself—on his decision to retire. (For example, see the September 2008 *Chess Life* as well as Stuart’s interview on the *Perpetual Chess Podcast* in 2020.) I will not rehash all his reasons here; ultimately, it is his own business. Suffice it to say, he seems to have lost his competitive fire—and that is okay. Nobody has a “moral duty” to play serious competitive chess if they do not want to, regardless of their talent. Besides: although his chess career was relatively short, he left behind a monumental legacy. Moreover, if Stuart was ever disillusioned with chess, then his wonderful book, *The Best I Saw in Chess*, would later paint a much brighter picture—both of his own career and of the royal game itself.

Nonetheless, I always regretted that I had never gotten to play against Stuart Rachels myself. He was like “the Fischer to my Karpov.”

One summer in the early 2000s, Kirk Petty’s chess club was hosting one of its many Birmingham area tournaments. At the tournament site—the Birmingham Bridge Club—there were two adjacent rooms connected by a door; our chess tournament was taking place in one room, and a bridge competition was taking place in the other. Can you imagine my surprise when I was told that the legendary Stuart Rachels was playing bridge next door? (Kirk Petty jokingly called our chess tournament the “Stuart’s in the Next Room” Open.) The strongest Alabama chess player of the 20th century was *right there*—but, alas, he was just out of reach, and he was playing the wrong game!

When I was young, I always thought of Stuart as an unreachable, larger-than-life legend from days gone by—like some “Wizard of Oz” of Alabama chess. However, while I was writing this book, there was a plot twist: Tom Denton was kind enough to introduce me to Stuart via social media. Finally, after all these years, I got to communicate directly with Stuart Rachels. I felt like I was peering

behind a curtain to find that, lo and behold, the “Wizard of Oz” was a man that I could actually talk to. He very kindly answered my questions about Alabama chess history, and even contributed some lost *Antics* volumes to the ACF’s archives. It was still clear, however, that Stuart had no plans to return to tournament play.

Yet the story does not end there. A miracle occurred in 2021: thanks to Tom Denton’s encouragement, Stuart came back out of retirement (at least briefly) to play in the Alabama Quick & Blitz Championships and promote *The Best I Saw in Chess*. At last—after waiting over twenty years for my chance—I finally got to play against Stuart Rachels in a tournament game. He crushed me convincingly; however, for once in my life, I didn’t mind losing. It was a dream come true simply to play the legend, even in just a single blitz game. I thank my lucky stars for that opportunity. (By the way, Stuart was the victor in both the 2021 Quick Championship and the 2021 Blitz Championship. “Rachels wins again,” even after all these years...)

One final thought: Stuart Rachels is living proof that chess tournaments and chess communities can make a huge difference in people’s lives. The great Alabama players who were around while Stuart was on the rise—Kyle Therrell, Tom Denton, and Brent Inman, to name a few—helped foster Stuart’s talent by challenging him in tournament after tournament, game after game. Stuart’s early chess experiences in Alabama taught him many formative lessons and helped lift him up to the master level at an incredibly young age. And, in turn, Stuart uplifted Alabama chess. If nothing else, he inspired everyone around him, and he made his teachers, his friends, and his chess community proud. He showed the entire country what an Alabama chess player could achieve.

In his relatively short career, Stuart Rachels became a five-time Alabama State Champion, a U.S. Junior Champion, a U.S. Champion, and an International Master. He accomplished things that other chess

players could only dream of. For certain, the Alabama chess community will remember this legendary champion forever.

Joseph Jurjevich:

The Bay Minette Flash

Among the Alabama chess elite, there is a certain player with “big hair” and a larger-than-life playing style. He blitzes his way through trap-laden openings, bedevils his opponents with sharp tactics, and swindles his way to countless victories. He is a National Master, a five-time state champion, and—for many Alabama players—a huge headache to face over the board.

Of course, I am talking about Joseph Jurjevich, the “Bay Minette Flash.” With his berserker ways, he has been tearing through chess tournaments for nearly fifty years. So how exactly did he become such an Alabama chess legend?

The Jurjevich family arrived on Alabama’s competitive chess scene in 1974. At first, Joe was overshadowed by one of his siblings—his brother Robert was the first Jurjevich to become state champion, in 1978—but Joe gradually came into his own. After achieving a Class A rating, Joe’s first big success arrived when he became Alabama State Co-Champion (along with champion Steve Hudson) in the year 1980. Further tournament wins in southern Alabama helped push Jurjevich into the Expert class. Soon, he began winning tournaments all over the state. He tied for first at the 1981 Vulcan Open, came in clear first at Alabama’s 1981 Chess Olympics, and then tied for first at the North Alabama Open in 1982. In addition, he shared first place at the Pensacola Beach Open in 1980, 1981, and 1982.

Jurjevich's success continued in the mid-eighties. In 1984, Jurjevich lived up to his nickname, "the Bay Minette Flash," by winning the Alabama Speed Chess Championship. And finally, after going on a chess rampage in the summer of 1985, he attained the National Master title.

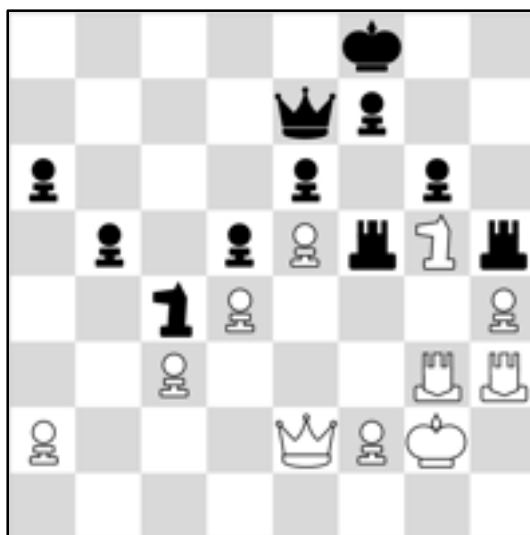
At his best, Joe could outwit even the strongest players in the state:

Joseph Jurjevich – Stuart Rachels

Firecracker Open (Round 2)

Montgomery; July 6, 1985

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 g6 4.0-0 Bg7 5.Re1 Nf6 6.c3 0-0 7.d4 cxd4
8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 Ne4 10.Nc3 Nxc3 11.bxc3 Bf5 12.Bd3 Bxd3 13.Qxd3 e6
14.Bg5 Qc7 15.Qe3 Na5 16.Bf6 Nc4 17.Qg5 h6 18.Qh4 Rac8 19.Bxg7
Kxg7 20.Qf6+ Kh7 21.h4 Qd8 22.Qf4 Qe7 23.Nh2 h5 24.Nf3 Kg7 25.g4
hxd4 26.Qxd4 Rh8 27.Kg2 Rh5 28.Rab1 Rch8 29.Rh1 Rf5 30.Rh3 Rhh5
31.Rg3 b6 32.Rh1 b5 33.Rhh3 Kg8 34.Ng5 a6 35.Qe2 Kf8



White has provoked kingside weaknesses and menacingly lifted his rooks up to the third rank, but how is Black's fortress to be breached?

36.Rf3!

The fortress is not as solid as it seemed. Since the f7-pawn is lost after 36...Rxf3? 37.Rxf3, Black must allow the trade 37.Rxf5—and then, cracks will start to appear in Black's position.

36...Kg7?!

Knowing what happens in the game, perhaps 36...Rh8!? is stronger. That way, Black would have the option to recapture on f5 with the g-pawn, and he might still hope to get counterplay with ...b4 someday.

Anyone in the mood for cyber-human madness should investigate 36...Rxh4!? 37.Rxf5 exf5 38.Rxh4 Qxg5+ 39.Kh3 Qg1!, although this could just lead to perpetual check.

37.Rxf5 exf5 38.Qf3 Nb6

Perhaps 38...Nd2!? 39.Qxd5 Rxh4 40.Rxh4 Qxg5+ was worth a try.

39.Qf4 Nc4 40.Rh1! Nb6 41.Re1

Jurjevich calmly regroupes. Black misses his e-pawn now: White will always threaten to break through with e5-e6.

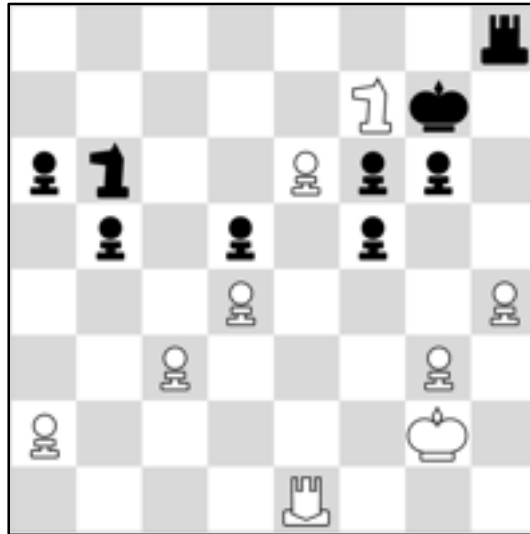


41...Qc7?

It is only here that Black goes seriously astray. He missed his last chance to block White's e-pawn: 41...Nd7! intends ...Nf8 and ...Ne6. If 42.e6, then 42...Nf8! anyway, taking advantage of the pin on the e-file. Note that 43.Nxf7? Nxe6 44.Qe5+ Kxf7 would then cost White a piece.

Nevertheless, we must be fair to Stuart: only an icy-hearted computer could stand leaving the queen on e7 at a time like this!

42.Qg3 Rh8 43.e6! Qxg3+ 44.fxg3 f6 45.Nf7

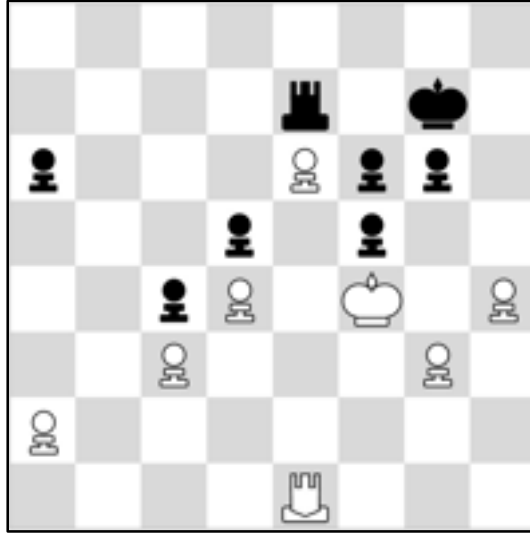


45...Re8?

Black's rook is coming to e7, but rooks are unhappy blockaders. I would have preferred 45...Rb8, so that 46.Nd6 can be met with the computer's 46...Nc4!. Then Black's king has time and room enough to get to e7 or e8, and Black's rook can come to b6—or find new life on the b-file if White goes for 47.Nxc4 bxc4.

46.Nd6 Re7 47.Kf3 Nc4 48.Nxc4 bxc4 49.Kf4

White is now winning. There is no way for Black to stop h4-h5 because of the amusing 49...Kh6 50.h5! Kxh5 51.Rh1 mate.



49...Kf8 50.h5 Rg7

Nor would 50...Kg7 51.hxg6 Kxg6 help Black, as he would soon be zugzwanged to death.

51.hxg6 Rxc6 52.Kxf5 Rxc3 53.Kxf6 Rxc3 54.Ke5 Rh3 55.Kd6 Rh7 56.Rf1+ Ke8 57.Rb1 1-0

* * *

In 1989, Jurjevich had his greatest tournament success in Alabama: he won the Alabama State Championship with a perfect 6-0 score, finishing ahead of other legends like Kyle Therrell, Charles Meidinger, and Brent Inman. Jurjevich's third round game from the '89 championship shows off his attacking prowess once again:

Joseph Jurjevich – Charles Meidinger
Alabama State Championship (Round 3)
Montgomery; September 1989

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5



This Najdorf Sicilian position was a “tabiya” for many top-level Alabama games in the 1980s and 1990s.

13...Nc5?

Evidently, this is a mistake. In later games, Meidinger would have a lot more success with 13...Bxg5+.

14.f6! gxf6 15.gxf6 Bf8 16.Bh3 Bd7 17.e5 d5?

Now Black is in real trouble, as the f7-pawn becomes his Achilles’ heel. Castling queenside would have been a much more interesting defensive try.

18.Qh5! b4? 19.Nxd5!



A thematic Sicilian sacrifice and a harsh blow. Jurjevich's attack will sweep Black off the battlefield.

19...exd5 20.e6 Ba4 21.exf7+ Qxf7 22.Rhe1+ Ne4 23.Qe5+



23...Be7

If 23...Kd8, then simplest is 24.Ne6+ followed by Ng5+, winning Black's queen.

24.fxe7 Rg8 25.Be6 Qg6 26.Bxd5 Qh6+ 27.Kb1 Nc3+ 28.bxc3 1-0

* * *

Jurjevich would win his third state title in 2002 under strange circumstances: two non-Alabama residents—one an IM, the other an FM—had “invaded” the championship and scored 5/5 and 4/5, respectively. Thus, Jurjevich's score of 3.5/5 was enough to become a top-scoring Alabama resident and win the title of Alabama State Champion (along with co-champions Charles Meidinger and myself). This modest score of 3.5 is probably the lowest score ever to earn the Alabama State Championship trophy—a most unusual statistic to have on one's chess resume.

In 2006, yet again, Jurjevich won the state championship trophy on tiebreaks after scoring 4/5. In 2008, although he narrowly lost the blitz tiebreaker at the end, he had nevertheless shared first place at 4/5 points to become an Alabama state co-champion. Thus, he reached a milestone that very few players have reached: five Alabama state chess champion titles.

A DIFFICULT OPPONENT

In my view, the best word to describe Jurjevich's style is “rude.” Rejecting polite positional finesse, Joe goes for games that are very raw and tactical. For example, he plays 1.e4 to attack like mad as White, and he counterattacks with defenses such as the Benoni as Black. He sometimes plays his openings in a very coarse manner, trying to catch his opponent in simple traps. But even if his opponent dodges the traps, Jurjevich still knows how to outplay them in the resulting positions. Worse still: if Jurjevich gets into trouble, and even if he *deserves* to lose, he usually finds a way to escape. What an annoying foe!

I, for one, have been the victim of his bothersome brand of chess on multiple occasions. Twice, I had a winning material advantage against him, but I fell behind on the clock and he swindled his way to a draw in both games. Once, I had an overwhelming attack going against his king, but then I lost my way—and he broke through with his own attack and crushed me. (Immediately after the game, he informed me that I had missed a draw by perpetual check earlier.) On other occasions, I simply fell victim to a dreadful tactic and lost on the spot, like this:

Joseph Jurjevich – Scott Varagona

Chris Bond Memorial (Round 3)

Montgomery; August 11, 2018



I had just played ...Rf8-f6?? on move 25 to reach this diagram position. The e5-pawn had seemed quite safe...

26.Qxe5!

Disgusting: thanks to a back-rank threat, White wins material *and* forces Black into a hopeless endgame, which I lost. “All you had to do was play ...h6, and then I have nothing,” said Jurjevich after the game. Urgh!

Yet the game with the direst consequences was this one: the final round of the 2006 Alabama State Championship. It is by no means a “great” game in some higher sense—but, of all the games Joe and I have played, this one best illustrates his uniquely nasty chess style.

Joseph Jurjevich – Scott Varagona

Alabama State Championship (Round 5)

Montgomery; September 3, 2006

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Qe2!?



A crass opening trap: of course, White is hoping for 5...Ngf6?? 6.Nd6 mate. No decent Caro-Kann player would fall for this nowadays. Still, for my opponent to insinuate that I *might* fall for the trap was more than insulting. White’s fifth move certainly set the tone for the rest of the game.

5...e6

A sub-par response. I believe Black can take more advantage of 5.Qe2 with 5...Ndf6!. Then 6.Nxf6+ Nxf6 just leaves White with an awkward queen, whereas 6.Ng3 gives Black the option of developing the light-square bishop outside of the pawn chain with ...Bg4—a luxury that Black doesn't always get in these ...Nd7 lines.

6.Bf4 Ndf6 7.0-0-0!?

Immediately inviting combat. Both of us had to win this game to become co-champion, so there was no point in beating around the bush.

7...Nxe4 8.Qxe4 Nf6 9.Qe1 a5

Black might have tried the more reserved 9...Bd6, intending to challenge White's control over e5. Black could follow up with ...Qc7 and possibly ...b6 and ...Bb7, whereupon queenside castling is possible. This does happen in some ...Nd7 Caro-Kann lines.

10.Nf3 Bb4 11.c3 Be7 12.Bd3 a4 13.Be5?! b5?

When 13.Be5?! appeared, I remember feeling quite taken aback that I was being allowed to play 13...a3. Yet the fact that Jurjevich was allowing ...a3 caused me to talk myself out of playing it. I should have played it anyway.

14.g4!?



A staggering move. Black has not even castled yet, and White is already attacking! Of course, there are potential problems on g7—but, if I castle, then g4-g5 followed by Qe4 looks dreadful. Even worse: with this sudden kingside skirmish, I have forgotten about my own queenside chances.

14...Kf8?

Karpov had a lot of success playing this move in certain Caro-Kann lines. As it turns out, this is not one of those lines... and I am not Karpov.

15.a3!

Better late than never. From now on, Black cannot break through the queenside anymore unless he sacrifices material.

15...Nxf4?

Too helpful to White, and inconsistent to boot. The whole point of 14...Kf8 was to avoid letting White rip open the kingside, but now:

16.Bxg7+! Kxg7 17.Rg1 h5 18.h3 Qd5 19.Be4 Qb3



This is one of those messy middlegames where the computer fusses about something new on every single move. However, the simple truth is that White is practically winning. Why? Although both sides have weak squares around their kings, Jurjevich has ways of breaking through in the long run, and I do not. Not unless I unsoundly sacrifice a bunch of material. Black's queen can dance around White's king, but that accomplishes nothing concrete.

20.Bc2 Qd5 21.Be4 Qa2 22.hxg4 h4 23.Qe3 Ba6 24.g5 Rac8 25.Bb1 Qb3
26.Qe5+ Kg8



27.d5!!

A shocking trick. I had anticipated 27.g6 f6, when my queen protects the e6-pawn and the kingside files stay closed for now. Instead, after 27.d5, my queen's view of e6 has been blocked, and now g5-g6xf7+ is a gigantic threat. As a bonus, Jurjevich has cleared the way for his own queen to protect c3 in case Black tries a desperate queenside sacrifice. He has also cleared the d4 square, which makes Nd4 possible in certain variations.

27...Bxa3

Even though this should not work, at this point I have no other hope. Joe will just shred my position if I play quietly.

28.bxa3 cxd5 29.Kd2! b4 30.axb4 Rh5 31.Bc2 Qc4 32.Qe3 d4 33.Nxd4 e5 34.Nf5 Kf8 35.Qxe5 1-0

I kept squirming out of frustration, hoping for a cheapo against White's king, but Jurjevich never gave me any chance. He won the game, reached 4/5, secured another state title, and even got the championship trophy on tiebreaks.

Yet again, thanks to Jurjevich, another of my tournaments had gone down the toilet. This game left such a bitter taste in my mouth that I never played the 4...Nd7 line again! That is the kind of effect that Jurjevich can have on his opponents, apparently. Still, he has a healthy plus score against various Alabama players, so at least I am not alone...

LATER YEARS

Although Jurjevich had achieved the National Master title, his rating fell back below 2200 in the '90s. He was unable to climb back up to 2200 in subsequent years. Perhaps a certain unevenness in his style is the culprit: reaching and maintaining a 2200 rating in Alabama requires iron-clad consistency. In contrast, Jurjevich's wild play has a lot of ups and downs.

Still, Jurjevich remained a dangerous competitor in Alabama for years and years. In addition to his previously mentioned state championship victories, he won the 2006, 2008, and 2018 Chris Bond Memorials, and he tied for first in the 2014 Queen of Hearts. Also—ever the speed demon—he tied for first in the 2010 Alabama Quick Chess Championship and won the 2020 Alabama Blitz Championship. Considering the longevity and scope of his chess career, it is no wonder that Jurjevich was inducted into the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame in 2021.

And with that, we bid adieu to my *bête noire*: Joe Jurjevich, the Bay Minette Flash.

Charles Meidinger:

Magnificent 7-0

You would not guess it from his quiet demeanor, but Charles Meidinger has been a fearsome chess force in this state for decades. He is a five-time Alabama State Champion, a Huntsville City Champion, and an all-around Alabama chess legend.

Meidinger first appeared in the *Antics* in December 1975: as an unrated player, he stunned everyone by taking second place at the Black Warrior Open, in a field of 34 players. He was rising through the ranks of Alabama chess as a college student in the '70s; in the year 1977, the *Antics* listed his rating as 1695. He was an Expert by the year 1981, and he would continue fighting his way up through the 2100s in the next few years. The *Antics* first listed his rating as 2200+ in 1987, when he won clear first place at the Huntsville Open Championship with 5.5/6. Being a National Master—one of just a few in the state at the time—solidified his place at the peak of Alabama chess in the late '80s.

However, it was the early '90s when he really hit his stride. He became state champion or co-champion three times in four years (1991, 1992, and 1994) and won other significant tournaments in the Alabama chess circuit, including a Magic City Open (1991) and two Space City Opens (1992, 1993). Yet his most incredible achievement of this period—and, arguably, of his whole chess career—was his Alabama State Championship win in 1994, with a perfect 7-0 score.

THE PERFECT RUN

When we see the top line of the 1994 state championship crosstable in the *Antics*, we cannot help but do a double take. A “clean” score, in a seven-round tournament?! With a field including National Masters and Experts, as well as many dangerous Class A players, merely getting clear first is impressive—but scoring 7-0 is almost unbelievable. So, let us see how Meidinger’s “Fischer-like” state championship happened...

Meidinger breezed through Round 1 of the championship with an easy win as Black against a Class A player. However, Meidinger faced a harder task as White in Round 2: his opponent—a young Andrew Whatley—sought to get some initiative in a Two Knights’ Tango.

Charles Meidinger – Andrew Whatley
Alabama State Championship (Round 2)
Montgomery; September 3, 1994

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 Nc6 3.Nc3 e5 4.d5 Ne7 5.e4 Ng6 6.Be3 Bb4 7.f3 Bxc3+
8.bxc3 d6 9.c5 0-0 10.Bd3 Nd7 11.cxd6 cxd6 12.Ne2 Qc7 13.0-0 Nc5
14.Kh1 f5 15.exf5 Bxf5**

White has the two bishops, but right now his minor pieces seem ineffective. In contrast, Black’s c5-knight enjoys a nice support point, and the g6-knight could leap to f4 to support a kingside attack later.

Meidinger takes his fate into his own hands with a series of exchanges:



16.Bxf5! Rxf5 17.Qd2

Perhaps even more accurate was the immediate 17.Ng3!.

17...Raf8 18.Ng3 R5f7 19.Bxc5! Qxc5 20.Ne4



The tables are turned: now it is White with the superior minor piece. His queenside initiative and pressure on d6 seem much more urgent than Black's nebulous kingside attack.

20...Qa3?!

The queen has an awkward time defending d6 now.

21.Rab1 Qa6 22.c4! Rc7

Black's pieces are getting distracted away from the kingside, which is always a bad sign, but how else is Black supposed to stop c4-c5?

23.Rfc1?!

A tiny slip that gives Black the chance to fight back. Better was the immediate 23.c5! dxc5 24.d6, followed by Qd5.



23...Rfc8?

The saving grace was 23...Rxc4! 24.Rxc4 Qxc4 25.Nxd6 Qd4!, a clever defense found by the computer. If 26.Qxd4 exd4, the d4-pawn will give Black counterplay. In fact, if 27.Nxb7 Rf5! 28.d6 Rd5, Black's rook is perfectly placed, and Black's passed pawn is at least as dangerous as White's.

24.c5!

Now White is crashing through, and Black does not get another chance.

24...dxc5 25.d6 Rc6 26.Qd5+ Kh8 27.Ng5 h6 28.Nf7+ Kh7 29.d7

Black struggled in vain until move 52, then finally waved the white flag: **1-0**.

* * *

An even tougher test awaited Meidinger in Round 3: he had Black against another soon-to-be Alabama chess legend—Bill Melvin. Knowing these two players, it was no surprise that a sharp Najdorf Sicilian appeared on the board. White sacrificed a knight for two pawns; pieces were flying everywhere. When the dust finally settled in the endgame, the time had come for a pawn race... Or had it?

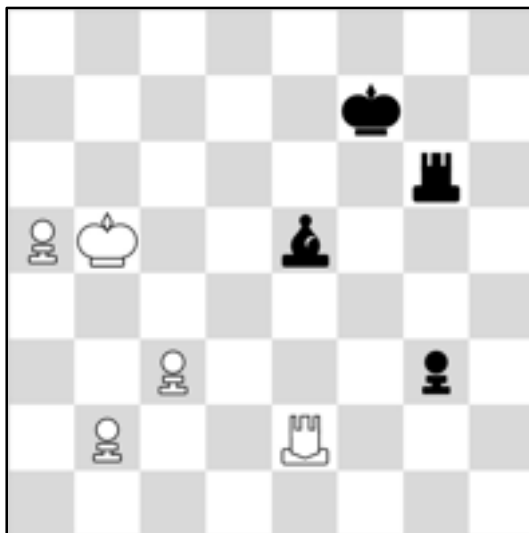
Bill Melvin – Charles Meidinger

Alabama State Championship (Round 3)

Montgomery; September 4, 1994

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5 Bxg5+ 14.Kb1 0-0 15.Qg3 Bf6 16.fxe6 Nb6 17.exf7+ Rxf7 18.Ndxb5 axb5 19.Nxb5 Qe7 20.Qxd6 Bg4 21.Qxe7 Rxe7 22.Rd3 Rxe4 23.Bg2 Rb4 24.Nc3 Rc8 25.a3 Rbc4 26.Bd5+ Nxd5 27.Nxd5 Bd8 28.Ne3 Re4 29.Nxg4 Rxg4 30.Rhd1

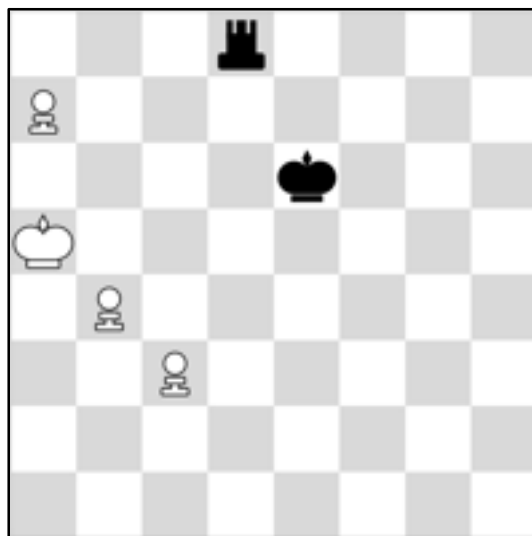
Bf6 31.c3 h5 32.Kc2 Be5 33.h3 Rg2+ 34.R1d2 Rxd2+ 35.Rxd2 Kf7 36.a4 g5 37.a5 Rc6 38.Kb3 g4 39.hxg4 hxg4 40.Kb4 g3 41.Kb5 Rd6 42.Re2 Rg6



43.a6??

“Passed pawns must be pushed” —but not this time. White had to play 43.Rxe5! g2 44.Re1 g1Q 45.Rxg1 Rxd1 46.a6 and try to win the pawns-versus-rook endgame. This ending turns out to be very tricky, especially from a human point of view, but with the computer’s help I have come to believe that White should win. For Black, the best defensive hope seems to be 46...Ke6! 47.a7 Rg8 48.Kc6 Rd8! (This is the key idea: Black can check White’s king away with ...Rd8-d7-d6 if needed.) 49.b4 Rd6+ 50.Kb7 Rd7+ 51.Kb6 Rd6+ 52.Ka5 (White makes one last attempt to get the other pawns rolling.) 52...Rd8.

This calls for an analysis diagram:



Analysis diagram (after 52...Rd8)

White can still blow this ending with 53.b5??, whereupon Black escapes with a draw. (For those who want proof, a sample line would run like this: 53...Kd6 54.b6 Kc5 55.b7 Rd1 56.Ka4 Kc4! White is on the brink of promotion, but he will never get the chance thanks to Black's checkmating threats. After 57.Ka3 Kxc3 58.Ka2 Rd2+ 59.Kb1 Rd1+ 60.Ka2 Rd2+ 61.Ka3 Rd1!, it's finally clear that White is getting nowhere.) However, after the precise 53.c4!, White's victory is assured. The pawns will march forward slowly, but in the end, they cannot be stopped.

Very intricate lines indeed! Of course, understanding this position is much easier for a cyber-human analyst than the "regular" humans caught up in the turmoil of the actual game.

43...Bb8!

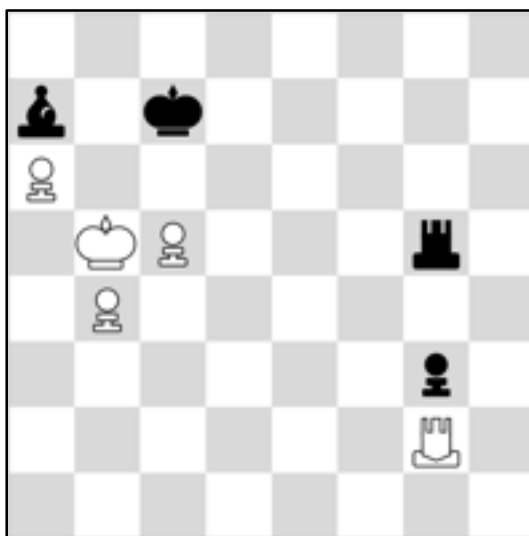
Alert play by Black: the immediate 43...g2?? would have thrown away the advantage, thanks to 44.Rxg2! Rxg2 45.a7 Rxb2+ (or ...Rg8) 46.Kc6, and White draws. But now, the threat of ...g2 is real.

44.Rg2 Ke7 45.c4 Kd7 46.b4 Kc7 47.c5 Ba7?!

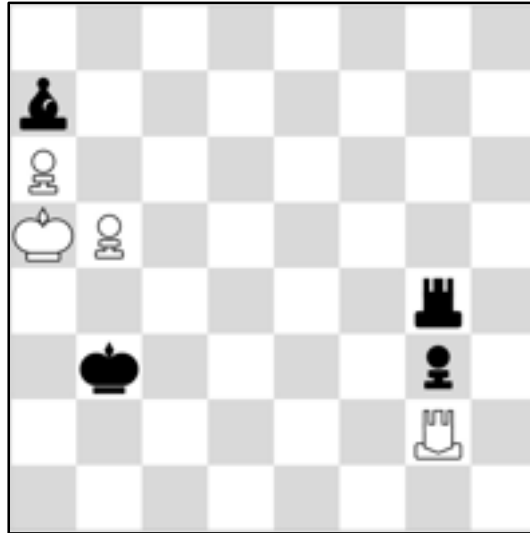
More accurate was 47...Rg4! to prevent White's king from retreating.

48.Kc4 Rg5! 49.Kb5?

Now Meidinger gets to correct his previous misstep. Black faces a lot more technical difficulties in converting his advantage after 49.Kd3!, running back to the kingside.



49...Rg4! 50.Ka5 Kc6 51.b5+ Kxc5 52.Rc2+ Kd4 53.Rd2+ Kc3 54.Rg2 Kb3 0-1



A hectic endgame with some bumps along the way—but, in the final analysis, it was Meidinger who proved to be more cunning.

* * *

After getting a win in Round 4 against a master from another state, and then a win with Black against Tim Bond's Reversed Grunfeld in Round 5, Meidinger was at 5-0. He was already in the sole lead and one full point ahead of his closest pursuers. Just one more win might suffice to clinch the state title. And so, the stage was set for his Round 6 game against Rhodes Peele.

Charles Meidinger – Rhodes Peele
Alabama State Championship (Round 6)
Montgomery; September 5, 1994

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7 5.e3 0-0 6.Nf3 h6 7.Bxf6

More common is 7.Bh4. Then, 7...b6 leads to the Tartakower Variation, which gave rise to many epic World Championship games in the 20th century.

7...Bxf6 8.Rc1 Re8 9.Bd3



9...c6

Black needs to solve “the problem of the c8-bishop” —namely, how can Black develop that piece without compromising his position? Here, Black decided not to accept potential pawn weaknesses after 9...b6 10.cxd5 exd5 and eventually ...c5. Instead, he prepares to play ...Nd7 and break out with ...e6-e5 later.

10.0–0 Nd7 11.Re1 dxc4 12.Bxc4 e5 13.h3!

A strong prophylactic move, restricting the c8-bishop. Otherwise, ...Bc8-g4 would endanger White’s d-pawn someday.

13...exd4 14.exd4 Nb6 15.Bb3 Bf5

Although Black has finally untangled his queenside pieces, White still has some annoying pressure on f7. Isolated pawn positions where the e6-pawn is missing can give White extra potential for aggression, or even tactical tricks.

16.Qd2 Qd7

Black is not yet in danger, but preferable was 16...Qd6!, stopping White's next move.

17.Qf4 Rad8 18.g4!?



A feisty advance—especially in contrast with all the slow, polite buildup that came before it. Perhaps this aggressive approach is justified, considering the potential long-term weakness of the isolani.

18...Bh7?

With f7 under fire, surely 18...Be6! had to be correct. I wonder if Rhodes feared that White would switch to attacking on the other diagonal after 19.Bc2.

19.h4 Bxh4?

The final slip. Surely there was a better defense than this. If nothing else, there is always the computer's idea of 19...Rf8, simply refusing to panic. Easier said than done...

20.Ne5 Rxe5 21.dxe5 Bg5 22.Qf3 Bxc1



23.e6! Qd6 24.Qxf7+ Kh8 25.e7 1-0

A very classy win by Meidinger.

* * *

As fate would have it, thanks to the results on other boards in Rounds 5 and 6, Meidinger had already secured clear first in the tournament with a round to spare. All that remained in Round 7 was to finish the perfect run:

Patrick Alford – Charles Meidinger
Alabama State Championship (Round 7)
Montgomery; September 5, 1994

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 a6 5.Bg5 Nc6 6.Qd2 Nf6 7.Bd3 e6 8.c4 Be7 9.Nc3 h6 10.Bf4 g5 11.Bg3 Nh5 12.0-0-0??



12...g4!

The trap is sprung: Black wins material. At last, Meidinger can breathe a sigh of relief. He did it!

13.Ne1 Bg5 14.f4 gxf3 0-1

An extraordinary tournament performance that will forever have a place in Alabama chess history.

MEIDINGER'S LEGACY

After his successes in the '90s, Meidinger became an Alabama State Co-Champion in 2002, and again in 2012. He is now one of the few players ever to have garnered five or more Alabama State Championship titles. He has had other fine results since then: for example, he won the 2019 Huntsville City Championship (ahead of Bill Melvin and Miles Melvin) with 4.5/5, and he won a prize for best first board at the 2020 U.S. Amateur Team Championship South. Although Meidinger's overall performance in the 21st century has been less

consistent than it was at his peak in the '90s, he has remained one of the state's most dangerous weekend warriors. His induction into the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame in 2021 was well-deserved.

I have battled Charles in various Alabama tournaments through the years. He has always been a gentleman and a good sport when we played, and our games have always been interesting. I remember one game where he completely outplayed me from an equal position. Even before I blundered a piece at the end, it was clear I was strategically lost—but I could hardly understand what I had done wrong. As Bill Melvin once told me, “Charles in his prime was a most difficult opponent. He could grind down anyone just playing solid chess.”

Here is one last amusing story from another game with Meidinger—our first ever encounter, which was in 2004. In an unusual middlegame position, Meidinger missed a tactic and I won heavy material: the game was suddenly over on move seventeen. The TD, Kirk Petty, was visibly shocked. Kirk began writing something in big letters on a sheet of paper... As I walked out of the tournament hall, Kirk followed close behind, holding a sign up above my head that said: “LUCKY.” Having written this chapter about Meidinger, now I understand just how lucky I really was!

Charles Meidinger is one of the greatest Alabama chess champions of all time. He has proven to be a tireless fighter, and his competitive spirit continues to inspire us. You never know when “the beast of 1994” may strike next...

Brent Inman:

The Great American

One of the most colorful chess masters Alabama has ever produced—both on and off the board—is Brent Inman. A three-time state champion and a many-time Mobile City Champion, Brent's unique playing style has confounded and entertained Alabama chess players for decades.

Brent Inman's chess career in Alabama kicked off in the late 1970s. After being listed as an unrated player in the December 1977 *Antics*, Brent began working his way up through the ranks with solid performances in various small tournaments, mostly in his hometown of Mobile. Brent's name became better known statewide when he took second place in the Amateur section of the 1978 Alabama State Championship, and *Antics* editor Lars Britt called him the "Great American." The nickname would stick forever—in fact, for much of the 1980s, tournament crosstables in the *Antics* would list Brent's name as "Brent Inman, G.A." (See the end of this chapter for the full backstory behind the famous nickname.)

The first great chess success for Brent came at the 1980 Pensacola Open, where he tied for first (4.5/5) with a performance that TD Rich Bellezza regarded as Brent's "coming of age." Soon thereafter, he tied for first at the 1980 Jaguar Open, defeating Joe Jurjevich in their individual game. Then, rated 1933, Brent tied for first at the 1981 Queen of Hearts (Open Section) with 4/5. He would break into the Expert class

and win his first Mobile Chess Championship title later in this same year.

The following highlight shows what a trickster Brent could be, even in these early days:

Luismar de Brito – Brent Inman

Winter Knights Open (Round 2)

Jackson (MS); December 4, 1982

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 f5 4.d4 fxe4 5.Nxe5 Nf6 6.0–0 Be7 7.c3 0–0
8.Qb3+ d5 9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.Bxc6 Ba6 11.Bxa8 Bxf1 12.Bxd5+ Nxd5
13.Kxf1 Kh8 14.c4 Nb4 15.Be3 Nd3



White—a strong master—is up two pawns, so of course he should win if the game takes a “normal” course. How did Brent manage to swindle his way from this starting position all the way to mating White in just a few more moves?

16.Nd2 Nxf2!

Suddenly, things are not so simple. For example, after 17.Bxf2 Qxd4 18.Nf3!? Qf6!, White's advantage is gone.

17.Kg1!

White is still up by a pawn and he has stabilized the position to some degree, but it's not over yet.

17...Bg5 18.Rf1??

This natural move seeks to win a piece in the line 18...Ng4? 19.Bxg5 Qxd4+ 20.Be3 Qxe3+ 21.Qxe3 Rxf1+ 22.Nxf1. However:

18...Nd3!



A shocker. Unexpected retreating moves that are *also* attacking moves are always the trickiest. With the queen on b3 blocked off from the defense, White is helpless: if 19.Rxf8+ Qxf8 20.Nf1 (or 20.Bxg5 Qf2+ 21.Kh1 Qe1+, with mate next move—analysis by Brent Inman) 20...Bxe3+ 21.Nxe3 Qf2+, Black soon mates. Otherwise:

19.Bxg5 Qxd4+! 20.Kh1 Rxf1+ 21.Nxf1 Nf2+ 0–1

White resigns. It's mate in two.

THE "MASTERPIECE"

It seems Brent is always on the lookout for interesting and creative middlegame ideas. He is good at setting strategic or tactical traps for his opponent, as well as finding hidden resources in tough situations. And sometimes, all these features of his style come together to produce games that are just plain bizarre.

The following game captures Brent's chess personality like no other. Brent was surely speaking tongue-in-cheek when he called this game his "greatest masterpiece," but it ranks up as one of the most memorable pieces of chess absurdism ever to appear in the *Antics*.

John Daugherty – Brent Inman

Alabama State Championship (Round 2)

Mobile; September 1, 1984

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4

The Nimzo-Indian and the Queen's Indian have been staples of Brent's repertoire throughout much of his career.

4.e3 c5 5.Ne2 cxd4 6.exd4 d5 7.a3 Be7 8.c5 b6 9.b4 bxc5 10.dxc5 e5

This push seems too hasty, being that the d-pawn will be tough to maintain. If the pawns move any further, they will leave weak squares behind. *Modern Chess Openings* recommends a plan with ...0-0 and ...a5, trying to undermine White's queenside.



11.g3! d4??

Now the bridges are completely burned. There may still have been a chance to hold the pawn center with ...h6!? (stopping Bg5) and ...Bb7.

12.Bg2! e4 13.Nxe4 Nd5 14.Qxd4



As Brent put it, Black has “sacrificed” both of his center pawns. For what? Good question. Perhaps Brent merely offered the pawns up as a sacrifice to the chess gods? If so, then they sure did reward him...

All joking aside, right now White threatens to win even more material with Nd6+ (or Qxd5 and then Nd6+).

14...Bb7 15.Qxg7

There was also 15.Nd6+ (as mentioned by Brent), but at this point, almost any reasonable continuation by White will win. It would take a miracle for Black to crawl back into the game...

15...Rf8 16.Bh6

Being that White has not one, not two, but *three* extra pawns, he should just count his blessings and castle around this point. Yes, White is still winning after 16.Bh6, but he’s tempting fate.

16...Nd7 17.Nd6+?!

This idea would have been good several moves back, but here, it is way too over-the-top. The simple 17.Qd4 consolidates.

17...Bxd6 18.cxd6 N5f6!

Surprise: out of the blue, ...Rg8 threatens to win the queen. There is also ...Bxg2. The game is getting out of control.



19.Qg5 Bxg2 20.Qe3+ Ne4 21.Rg1 Qf6!



Utter chaos. An annotator's job is to make logical sense of a game, but what point is there in applying rationality to an inherently irrational situation? The complications seem to favor White, and the computer agrees. Still, with both kings stuck in the center and all these pieces buzzing about, anything could happen.

22.Rc1 Ne5 23.d7+

Not bad, but 23.Rxg2 was preferable. White need not fear 23...Nf3+ 24.Kf1 since the e4-knight is pinned and there is no ...Ned2+. Either way, at this point there are just too many lines to consider; let us simply watch the madness unfold.

23...Kxd7 24.Rd1+ Nd6 25.Rxg2 Rfe8 26.Qf4 Qe6!



27.Qe4?

In the heat of the moment, White stumbles. Considering the threat of ...Nd3+ and the sorry state of the rook on g2, the computer's impossible-to-spot 27.Kf1!! was best. That move would prevent various bothersome checks and help White restore the harmony among his forces. The position would still be messy, but long, alien-like variations from the computer show that White could keep his advantage.

It is hard to criticize White too much since 27.Qe4? is so natural: it threatens the seemingly devastating Qb7+. However...

27...Qxh6! 28.Qb7+ Ke6

Believe it or not, Black's king is perfectly safe. The computer confirms that any attempted power play from White will backfire. For example, after 29.Rxd6+? Kxd6 30.Qa6+ Nc6, the threat of ...Qc1 mate stops White dead. Thus, White should probably grab the repetition 29.Qd5+ Kd7 30.Qb7+ while he can. Or, if he feels gutsy enough to keep the game going, the computer's 29.Qd5+ Kd7 30.f4!? looks like the best option.

29.Nf4+?? Kf5!



As the saying goes, forced moves are good moves—especially when they win. Somehow, in the eye of the hurricane, this king is completely untouchable.

30.Qd5 Rad8 31.Kf1 Ne4 32.Qb3 Nd2+ 33.Rxd2 Rxd2 34.g4+ Nxg4 35.Qxf7+ Nf6 36.Rg3 Qxf4 37.f3 Qe3 0-1



In the final position, the piece on f5 seems more like a court jester than a king. A surreal game!

THE FRUIT OF TANTALUS

Throughout the 1980s, Brent Inman was often a serious contender for the Alabama State Championship title, but somehow the title kept eluding him. He came close many times; nevertheless, time and time again, he came up short. In 1984, he finished tantalizingly near to his goal—undefeated, with 5.5 points out of 7—but still just a single half-point behind Stuart Rachels. He had another near-miss in 1987, when a last-round loss to Kyle Therrell (who became champion instead) again left Brent out of the winner's circle. These two attempts would be the closest that Brent would come to the crown for many years.

Still, Brent fought on, performing well at various tournaments in Alabama and neighboring states throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. He played in a U.S. Open and had a wonderful result, tying for top Expert prize and breaking through the 2200 barrier to become a National Master. He later tied for first in the 1992 Louisiana

Championship with 6/7 points. Of course, throughout this period, he was also winning various Mobile City Championships. For example, in 1989, he won clear first with 4.5/5 ahead of 27 other players—including three computers.

Finally, in the 1996 Alabama State Chess Championship at AUM, his perseverance paid off. After many ups and downs, Brent clawed his way to 4.5/6 points to become a top-scoring Alabama resident (along with Rhodes Peele). Thus, Brent became a state champion for the first time, and he also won the championship trophy on tiebreaks. Despite all the setbacks he faced in previous state championships up until that point, Brent had kept fighting until finally reaching this goal—just like, one might say, a true “American.”

BRENT AT HIS BEST

It can be tough to pin down exactly when a person’s “best time” as a chess player has arrived. Is it when their rating reaches its peak? Is it when they are the most creative? When they achieve the most tournament wins? Or is it when they play their most beautiful games? Each of these approaches is plausible. Still, if we judge purely based on performance in the Alabama State Championship, the ultimate “trial by fire” in the state, Brent’s best time must have been in the late 2000s. He became state co-champion in 2006 (with 4/5) and then tied for first (again with 4/5) to become co-champion in 2008. He had other nice wins in this period as well, such as first place (with 4.5/5) in the 2008 Louisiana G/30 Championship.

The following key game from the final round of the 2008 Alabama State Championship illustrates Brent’s ingenuity once again.

Will Stevenson – Brent Inman

Alabama State Championship (Round 5)

Mobile; September 21, 2008

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Bc4 Nd7 7.0-0 Nxe5
 8.dxe5 Bf5 9.Qe2 e6 10.Bb3 Qc7 11.Nd2 Bc5 12.Nf3 Bg4 13.Re1 0-0
 14.Qc4 Bxf3 15.Qxc5 Bh5 16.Bg5 b6 17.Qc4 h6 18.Qh4 Bg6 19.Bd2 Qd8
 20.Qc4 c5 21.Rad1 Qc7 22.Bc1 a6 23.a4



This position arose from Alekhine's Defense, an opening which Brent successfully adopted about three decades into his chess career. Black had played ...a6 (intending ...b5), so White played 23.a4 to stop Black's threatened queenside expansion. However, considering what happened in the game, White probably should have settled for the modest 23.Qe2.

In this innocent-looking position, Brent uncorks a creative idea that turns the game on its head:

23...b5!! 24.axb5 Nb6! 25.Qg4 c4 26.Ba2 axb5



Out of nowhere, White's light-square bishop finds itself banished from play. Not to mention, Black will control the d5-square and soon the whole d-file.

27.Bb1 Rfd8 28.Bd2 Rd5 29.Qe2 Rad8 30.Ba5 Rxd1?!

Brent found fault with this move after the fact. Black did not need to resolve the tension on the d-file so hastily. Still, in time pressure, 30...Rxd1 has a good practical point:

31.Rxd1 Rxd1+ 32.Qxd1 Qd7!

This is it—Black breaks the pin and invites White to trade queens. The problem is, with the bishop stuck on b1, White will be playing the endgame down a piece for at least five or six moves. Maybe White's king can crawl over to the queenside to untangle things, but what if the knight hops over to a4 in the meantime? Or what if Black somehow gets in b5-b4-b3?...



33.Qe2??

It is no shock that Will Stevenson balked at the endgame I just described. Who can blame him? However, with the computer's help, let us explore the possibilities a bit further: 33.Qxd7 Nxd7 34.Bc7 Nc5 (34...b4? 35.Ba2! and White escapes) 35.Bd6 Na4 36.Ba3 Nb6 37.Kf1 Nd5 38.Bc5 b4. (See analysis diagram below.)



Now, after 39.Ba2? b3! 40.cxb3 c3! Black wins a piece or promotes. On the other hand, 39.Ke2? c3! puts White in a different quandary, since 40.bxc3? Nxc3+ wins a piece, 40.Bd4? b3! 41.Kd1 Nb4! wins material, and 40.b3 is simply grievous.

White has to be very clever to survive: with 39.Ke1! the king inches nearer to the action without exposing himself to the danger of knight forks on c3. If 39...c3 (or 39...b3 40.Kd2 and White is untangling things bit by bit) 40.bxc3! Nxc3 41.Bxb4 Nxb1 42.Kd1, the point is revealed: Black won the bishop, but now the knight is trapped.

So, with perfect defense, White should be able to hold the ending arising from 33.Qxd7. We reach this conclusion only after lengthy analysis, however. During the game, in time pressure, the optical illusion created by 32...Qd7—namely, that White must avoid this “piece down” ending at all costs—was a powerful one.

33...Nd5 34.Qd2 Qa7!



Now Brent's threats along the a-file prove to be unanswerable.

35.Bc3

If, for example, 35.Kf1 (trying to alleviate back-rank problems), Black has 35...b4! 36.Bxb4 Qa1!, nabbing a bishop, or 36.Bd8 Qa1 37.Qc1 b3, with a winning breakthrough.

35...Qa1 36.Qd1 Nxc3 37.bxc3 Qxc3 38.f4 Qe3+ 39.Kh1 Qxf4 40.c3 Bxb1 41.Qxb1 Qxe5 42.h3 0–1



A fine win that earned Brent his third state title.

GRAY-HAIRED LIONS

In 2019, the ACF sponsored the first ever Alabama Senior Chess Championship, a tournament for players age 50+. Many wily veterans and long-time weekend warriors of Alabama chess showed up to do battle. The competition was fierce: to paraphrase Steinitz, “the gray-haired lions can still bite.” Former state champions Charles Meidinger and Tom Denton both made aggressive bids for the new title. However,

in the end, it was none other than Brent Inman who emerged victorious (with 3.5/4) to become the very first Alabama Senior Chess Champion.

Brent's third round game with Meidinger stood out from all the rest. As Black in a Nimzo-Indian, Brent had an isolated pawn; however, weak squares started to appear in his position and White ended up with the initiative. Time for Brent to perform one more "magic trick":

Charles Meidinger – Brent Inman

Alabama Senior Chess Championship (Round 3)

Montevallo; June 8, 2019

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 0-0 5.Nf3 c5 6.dxc5 Bxc5 7.Bg5 Be7 8.e3 Nc6 9.Be2 d5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.0-0 Be6 12.Rfd1 Qa5 13.Nd4 Rac8 14.Nxc6 bxc6 15.Bd3 h6 16.Bh4 Rfd8 17.Ne2 Qb4 18.Bg3 Nh5 19.Nf4 Nxf4 20.Bxf4 c5 21.Qd2 Qb6 22.Be5 Kf8 23.Bc3 Rd7 24.b3 d4 25.exd4 cxd4 26.Ba5 Qb7 27.Qe2 Rc5 28.Bd2 Bd5 29.f3 Rc6 30.Bb5 Re6 31.Qd3 Rd8 32.Ba5



White is threatening both Bxd8 and Qd3-h7-h8+. Instead of defending passively, Brent takes a shocking gamble:

32...Bg5?!? 33.Bxd8! Be3+

Black has sacrificed a whole rook in pursuit of a do-or-die attack. Although the attack should not succeed, the entire complexion of the game has changed in just two moves. Now White is under extreme pressure to defend perfectly.



34.Kf1??

White blinks for one instant, and the game is lost! The only defense was 34.Kh1!, giving White's queen access to the f1 square if needed.

34...Bxf3!

We see now that with the king on h1, 35.Qf1! would have been possible. White would defend both b5 and g2, beat back the attack, and win. But now, there is no defense.

35.Qc4?

The most tenacious try would be 35.Rd2!, attempting to protect g2 and potentially create an escape route by Kf1–e1–d1 in some lines. Then Black's choice is difficult because he has so many tempting attacking moves.



Analysis diagram (after 35.Rd2!)

Both 35...Bxg2+ and 35...Rg6 look eye-catching. However, from a human standpoint, the clearest continuation is 35...Be4!. Even then, there are many lines to consider. The computer shows the way: 36.Qe2 (if 36.Qc4 Bxd2 then Black wins the rook back and gets a raging attack for free) 36...Bxg2+! Black waits until now to take on g2 in order to deflect the queen away from defense of b5. 37.Qxg2 Qxb5+ 38.Qe2 (38.Ke1 Bxd2+ 39.Kxd2 Qb4+ and White is soon mated; 38.Re2 Qf5+ 39.Ke1 d3 40.Rxe3 Rxe3+ 41.Kd1 Re2 42.Qh1 Rc2 leads to mate in 5) 38...Qf5+ 39.Ke1 (39.Kg2 Qd5+! 40.Kh3 Bxd2 and the rest is easy) 39...Bxd2+ and Black wins the queen.

35...Bxg2+ 36.Ke1 Qf3 37.Qe2 Bf2+ 38.Kd2 Qc3# 0–1



A thrilling king-hunt with a lot of hidden depth. One could stare at the analysis diagram (after 35.Rd2) for hours and still barely scratch the surface of the possibilities.

THE "GREAT" NICKNAME

The story of Brent's chess career could never be complete without an answer to this burning question: where did his nickname come from? According to Brent, it all started during his early days in the Mobile Chess Club, when he was about 16 years old:

"I was a very sarcastic kid," said Brent. "I already had an odd habit: whenever someone said something I thought was stupid, I'd look thoughtfully at him/her and say, 'You're a Great American.' I usually liked to pat them patronizingly on the head while saying it."

However, at one Mobile tournament, Brent took this theme to another level.

At the time, *the Great American Smokeout* (an American Cancer Society anti-smoking campaign) was underway, and posters for the

campaign were all over the place. So, being the jokester that he was, Brent found a red, white, and blue *Smokeout* poster and folded it into a placard so that only the words “Great American” were visible. Then, before the start of a game with his chess mentor, Mike Hiers, Brent set the placard in front of his opponent.

“Mike was now a great American,” said Brent. “But I did not pat his head.”

The amusing incident had an unexpected consequence. For whatever reason, Lars Britt—Mobile’s most prolific chess reporter, and Mike Hiers’ best friend—would start referring to *Brent* as the Great American instead!

“Ever after, Lars called me ‘The Great American’ every time he wrote *anything* about me,” said Brent. Soon, Lars Britt would become the editor of the *Antics*, and then the inevitable happened: as Brent put it, “My sobriquet went statewide.”

This also explains all the other nicknames to be found in the *Antics* throughout the 1980s. “Soon *everyone* wanted his own nickname, but they had to create it for themselves, so they never really went very far,” said Brent. “Tom Denton called himself ‘The Man from E.G.O.’ while Daniel Miller had to settle for ‘Driller’ Miller. There were others, but mine was the first and best. I ate it up!”

With the NM title, three Alabama State Championship titles, a slew of Mobile City Championships, the first ever Alabama Senior Champion title, and countless other tournament wins—not to mention, the best nickname ever—it is only fitting that we count Brent Inman among Alabama’s chess kings. Three cheers for the Great American!

Bill Melvin:

“Incorrect” Chess

Bill Melvin is living proof that chess just doesn't make sense.

Picture this: an Alabama State Championship begins. Bill misplays his first game, he gets checkmated, and it seems he's already done for. Yet he goes on to win with a dashing attack in round two, like nothing happened. In round three, when an intense tactical game erupts, Bill triumphs and earns another point. He riskily grabs material and outwits his fourth opponent; in round five, in a dubious position, he leads his opponent astray in complications and finishes him off with a clever sacrifice in the endgame. Then, on the last day of the tournament, although he starts with a loss, other results go his way and he gets one last chance. In the final round, a sharp and dangerous Sicilian Defense arises, and the state title hangs in the balance. Somehow, Bill survives—and wins.

Bill's rivals groan. They had slipped up and lost crucial games near the end of the tournament, or they had made one too many draws earlier on. Now, thanks to his dramatic last-round win, Bill overtakes them. In the end, the stars align, and Bill Melvin is crowned champion once again.

This may sound like a tall tale, but it really happened. In fact, it was not just at this tournament (the 2000 Alabama State Championship) that Bill managed to work such magic. Bill has built a chess career on playing irrational games, extracting improbable wins from strange positions, and simply confusing his opponents any way

he can. With his “incorrect” style, he has accumulated tons of tournament wins—including state and city championships—as well as multiple USCF master titles. So, let us take a closer look at “the man, the myth, the legend...”

Bill Melvin’s chess career began quietly in 1982: as an unrated 17-year-old, he scored 4/8 at the U.S. Junior Open in Tennessee and tied for the top unrated prize. His name first appeared in the *Antics* in the crosstable for the Brewer State Open of December 1982, with a rating of 1494. By the mid-1980s he was already an Expert, and in 1987, he became a National Master. In the late ’80s and early ’90s, the tournament victories really started pouring in. He won his first state title at the 1990 Alabama State Championship, scoring 5/6 and getting clear first place; he then seized a second championship victory by tying for first in 1992. By the end of the ’90s, Bill had amassed three more state titles (in ’95, ’97, and ’98), multiple Huntsville City Championship titles, and numerous wins at Vulcan Opens and Space City Opens. He even attained a 2300+ rating in 1996 when he won the Southern Congress tournament with a perfect 5-0 score. Already, Bill had secured his place among Alabama chess legends.

It was also during this period that Bill played his best game. Bill called the game “the Immortal Mr. Magoo,” owing to the way he stumbled into his finest combination:

Bill Melvin – Robert Cunningham

Atlanta Action Tournament (Round 4)

Atlanta; August 6, 1994

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Ne7 5.Nf3 c5 6.a3 Bxc3+ 7.bxc3 Bd7 8.Bd3 Ba4 9.0-0 Qa5 10.Bd2 Nbc6 11.c4 Qc7 12.cxd5 Nxd5 13.dxc5 Nxe5 14.Nxe5 Qxe5 15.Qg4 Bc6 16.Rae1 Qc7 17.c4 Nf6



18.Qxg7!

A big surprise. Black could now cut his losses with 18...0-0-0 19.Qxf6 Rhg8!, when he should win some material back on the d-file, but he must be thinking: surely White cannot get away with taking this “poisoned” pawn?!

18...Rg8?? 19.Rxe6+! fxe6

Now for the twist that Bill hadn’t anticipated: he cannot play 20.Qxc7? because of 20...Rxg2+ followed by ...Rg7+. However, White has an unbelievable resource:

20.Bg6+!! Kd8

Of course, if 20...hxg6, then 21.Qxc7 wins material now that the g-file has been closed.

21.Qxf6+ Qe7 22.Ba5+ b6 23.Rd1+ Bd7?

Knowing what happened in the game, a stronger defense would have been 23...Bd5, which gives Black’s king more breathing

space. The computer still shows White is winning after 24.Qf3, but Black could have staved off death for much longer. Instead, the text allows a brilliant finale:



24.cxb6!! Qxf6 25.b7+ 1-0

Bill Melvin gives the devastating final variation in his notes: 25...Ke7 26.Bb4+ Kd8 27.bxa8Q+ Kc7 28.Ba5 mate. A game for the ages.

CHAOS INCARNATE

Bill Melvin thrives in messy, irrational positions. Many of his games feature unusual material imbalances, strange pawn structures, or wild tactical chaos. He goes out of his way to create unbalanced positions, always seeking to find a way to win. Even when faced with a dry, equal position, he usually spurns draw offers and fights for victory until the end—sometimes embracing big risks to do so. Although he has lost games this way, he has won many more thanks to his tenacity.

The following game that Bill played against his long-time rival from Tennessee, Peter Bereolos, illustrates Bill's style at its best.

Peter Bereolos – Bill Melvin

Space City Open (Round 3)

Huntsville; April 24, 1999

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6

The Benko Gambit suits Bill perfectly, as imbalances appear on the board right away. Peter ups the ante by choosing a sharp variation:

5.Nc3 axb5 6.e4 b4 7.Nb5 d6 8.Bf4 Nxe4 9.Qe2?



Modern Chess Openings condemns this move because of Black's reply, and mentions 9.Bd3 instead. Either way, a bizarre game is in store.

9...g5! 10.Be5 dxe5 11.Qxe4 Bg7 12.d6 Ra5 13.Rd1



Who would dare attempt to make sense of this diagram? All we can be sure of is that Bill feels happy in such positions. Perhaps it would have been wiser for White to pick a calmer line.

13...0-0 14.h4 g4 15.dxe7 Qxe7 16.Nd6 Rd8 17.Nxc8 Rxd1+ 18.Kxd1 Qd7+ 19.Bd3 Qxc8 20.Qxh7+ Kf8

Nothing comes of White's kingside invasion: Bill gives 21.h5 Qd8 22.h6 Bf6, for example. Black's bishop can always retreat to h8 to block the pawn if needed. Meanwhile, Bill's own play is just getting started.



21.Bc4 Qd7+ 22.Ke1 Qd4! 23.Qc2 e4 24.Ne2 Qxb2 25.Qxb2

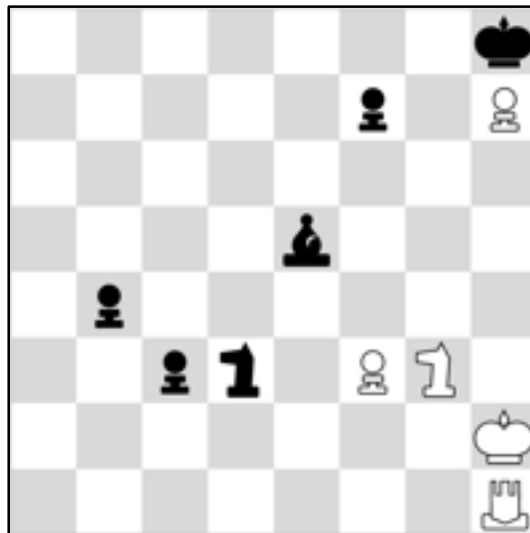
This move leads to a lost endgame. An interesting swindle attempt would have been 25.Qxe4!? with the threat of Qb7; for example, the computer points out that 25...Qa1+ 26.Kd2 Qxh1?? 27.Qb7! wins for White. Yet Bill would have surely seen this and played 25...Qa1+ 26.Kd2 Bh6+! 27.Nf4 Qc3+ (or ...Qb2+) instead. Thanks to the idea of ...Ra7! followed by ...Rd7 or ...Re7, Black is still winning.

25...Bxb2 26.Ng3 Nc6

All the smoke has finally dissipated, and now Black's queenside initiative is the key factor. White tries desperately to push his h-pawn and create counterplay, but Bill's pieces are too strong:



27.h5 Ne5 28.Bd5 c4 29.Bxe4 Rxa2 30.Bb1 Bc3+ 31.Kf1 Rb2 32.Bf5 Nd3
 33.h6 Rxf2+ 34.Kg1 Bd4 35.Kh2 Be5 36.h7 Rd2 37.Rf1 Kg7 38.Bxg4 Rf2
 39.Rh1 Kh8 40.Bf3 Rxf3 41.gxf3 c3 0-1



The pawns prevail.

Bill has bowled over countless other strong players in games with a similar feel as this one. (Indeed, when we browse through the 1990s *Antics*, it is difficult to *avoid* finding such games.)

“KILLING FIELDS”

One hallmark of Bill’s play is his ability to catch opponents off guard in seemingly innocuous positions right out of the opening. He knows a host of lines where unsuspecting opponents tend to go wrong; Bill calls such positions “killing fields.” Even Alabama’s strongest players have fallen victim to these pitfalls. For example, in the Keres Attack:

Bill Melvin – Kyle Therrell

Huntsville Vacation Finals (Round 4)

Huntsville; August 29, 1992



In the last few moves, Black has played both ...a6 and ...Nb6—a fatal mistake. At first, this seems like a relatively innocent Keres Attack position, but then:

11.Nxc6! bxc6 12.Qd4! 1–0

Bill has tricks up his sleeve in other openings as well. For example, when he plays the Black side of the Queen's Gambit Accepted—and certainly the Benko Gambit—White should duck and cover.

Yet not all the killing fields involve immediate tactical traps. In some cases, it is just a matter of luring the opponent into an unfamiliar and strategically treacherous opening. For example, as White, Bill has tricked many players with his favorite off-beat variation of the double king-pawn opening, the Ponziani: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.c3!?. Bill knows the theoretical ins-and-outs of this line very well; he typically handles the imbalances that arise better than his opponents do.

Of course, there is also his secret weapon as Black against Bird's Opening: the obscure but venomous Mestel Variation of the From's Gambit. He has used it to good effect in games like this one:

Adam Caveney – Bill Melvin

Queen of Hearts (Round 3)

Montgomery; February 20, 1999

1.f4 e5 2.fxe5 d6 3.exd6 Bxd6 4.Nf3 Nf6

Almost everyone follows in Lasker's footsteps with 4...g5 here. The Mestel Variation with 4...Nf6 is less well-known, but just as dangerous if White is unprepared.

5.d4 Ng4 6.Qd3

White dodges the first pitfall. Many a player has missed that ...Nxb2 was a threat.



6...0-0?

Black avoids the main line (6...c5), perhaps to drag his opponent “out in the streets,” as Bill likes to put it, but 6...0-0 is a risky choice. White can get away with 7.e4! now, since 7...Nxb2? 8.e5! (with problems on h7) is terrible for Black, and otherwise, the g4-knight may never find a good square. In his book *Bird's Opening*, IM Timothy Taylor gives 7...c5 8.e5 Be7 (8...Re8 9.Be2 only helps White) 9.h3! Nh6 10.Bxh6 gxh6—White has a huge center and an extra pawn, while Black's pawn structure is in shambles. Surely no one would want to play as Black after 11.d5.

Still, Bill has based a whole chess career on outfoxing his opponents with risky moves like this.

7.g3?!

The gamble pays off. This move is common in the Lasker Variation, but it may hurt White more than it helps in this line of the Mestel.

7...c5!

The position is going to be a mess, but now Black will have the initiative for sure. This is exactly the kind of game that Bill lives for.

8.Ng5!? g6 9.dxc5?

White seems to be spinning out of control with all these extravagant moves. He has too many weak squares and lags too far in development to justify opening things up. It would be much more in the spirit of the position to expand with 8.d5 or 9.d5. That would keep the position as closed as possible, while also attempting to make White's extra pawn into a force instead of a target.

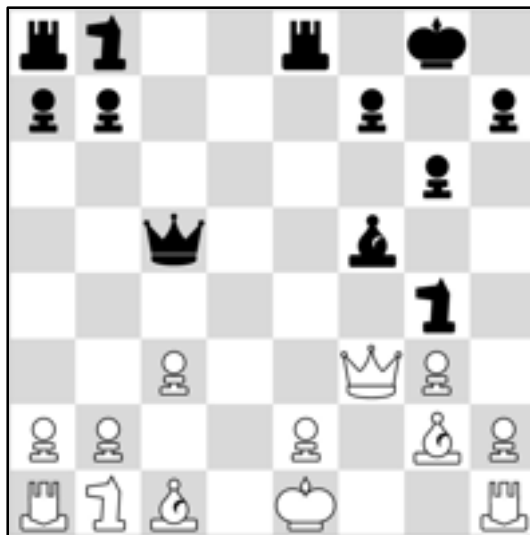
9...Bxc5



10.Ne4

As ugly as this middlegame looks for White, the computer assures us that 10.Qxd8 Bf2+! is no barrel of laughs either. In any event, Black is winning.

10...Qb6 11.Qf3 Bf5 12.Nxc5 Qxc5 13.c3 Re8 14.Bg2



14...Ne5!

Bill also mentions the possibility of 14...Be4, although there is no immediate win after 15.Qf1. As Bill put it, 14...Ne5! is “more fun” for Black—and Bill is very strong in “fun” positions...

15.Qd5 Nd3+ 16.Kd1 Qe7 17.Qf3 Bg4! 18.Qe3 Qd7 19.Be4 Rxe4! 0–1



If 20.Qxe4, then 20...Nf2+.

Woe to the one who stumbles unarmed into a killing field.

CAÏSSA'S ALCHEMIST

Once upon a time, in an Alabama State Championship game, Bill Melvin was completely busted. His king was out in the open, caught amid enemy crossfire in the center, with no escape. When I walked by the game and took a brief glance at the board, I was sure that Bill's opponent should easily deliver mate within four or five moves. I turned back to my own game—and then, the next thing I knew, Bill had miraculously weathered the storm, outplayed his opponent, and won.

I had never seen such a comeback before. Bill's king was clinically dead, and yet, somehow, he lived. I would later learn that this was no isolated incident. Many other players in Alabama have witnessed, or fallen victim to, this strange power Bill has. I would like to call it *chess alchemy*: the ability to turn a chess position that is pure

rubbish into gold. Gerald Larson put it best when he once said to me: “Bill Melvin is the most dangerous player in America... when he’s losing.”

Frisco Del Rosario – Bill Melvin
 Greater Alabama Open (Round 5)
 Montgomery; August 11, 2002

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.e3 b6 4.Nf3 e6 5.Bd3 Bb7 6.Nbd2 d5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.b3
 Bd6 9.Qe2 0–0 10.Bb2 Nc6 11.a3 Re8 12.0–0 Ne4 13.Rfd1 f5 14.Qf1 g5
 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.g3 Re6 17.Rac1 Rh6 18.Qg2 Qe7 19.h4 Nxg3 20.Nxg5
 Ne5 21.Bxe5 Bxe5 22.fxg3 d4 23.e4 f4 24.gxf4 Bxf4 25.Bc4+ Kg7 26.Ne6+
 Kh8 27.Nxf4



Black is down two full minor pieces and could practically resign right now. He only has vague attacking chances on the kingside, and maybe some hope of tactics involving pinning White’s queen to his king. Bill played 27...Qxh4 and soldiered on. Within fifteen moves—
 28.Rf1 Ba6 29.e5 Re8 30.Bxa6 Rg8 31.Qxg8+ Kxg8 32.Bc4+ Kh8 33.Ng2
 Qh2+ 34.Kf2 Rg6 35.Rg1 Qg3+ 36.Ke2 Qxe5+ 37.Kd3 Qf5+ 38.Ke2 Qh3

39.Kf2 Rf6+ 40.Ke2 Qh5+ 41.Kd3 Qf5+ 42.Ke2—somehow, the following position had appeared:



White still has a material edge, but for Black, it is all about “mind over matter.” 42...d3+! A most unpleasant shot. If 43.Bxd3 Qf2+, the rook on g1 is lost, yet the computer confirms that this was the least of the evils available to White. 43.Kd1?? Qg4+ 44.Nf3 Rxf3 0-1. How does Bill do it?

Another memorable game with this same theme:

Matan Prilleltensky – Bill Melvin

North Tennessee Winter Open (Round 1)

Clarksville; January 18, 2003

1.e4 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 Nc6 6.Nc3 Qa5 7.Bd2 Nxd4 8.Nf3 Ne6 9.Bc4 Nb6 10.Nb5 Nxc4 11.Bxa5 Nxa5 12.Nfd4 Kd8 13.Nxe6+ fxe6 14.Rc1 Nc6 15.Nd4 Ke8 16.f4 g6 17.0-0 Bg7 18.a3 Rf8 19.b4 a6 20.Nxc6 bxc6



Bill had blundered his queen to a tactic in the opening, and now (as Black in the diagram position) he should be hopelessly lost. However, in the coming moves, his opponent failed to find a concrete, target-based plan that would break through and win. Instead, White began goofing off with his extra material, hoping the game would win itself. Meanwhile, Bill slowly untangled his position, broke lines open for his bishops and rooks, and by move 55...

21.Qd2 Bh6 22.a4 Rb8 23.Rc4 Kf7 24.a5 Rb5 25.Rc5 Rb8 26.g4 Kg8 27.g5 Bg7 28.Rf3 h5 29.Rd3 Rb7 30.Rc4 Kh7 31.Qc2 Rc7 32.Rh3 Rf5 33.Ra3 Bb7 34.Qc1 d6 35.exd6 exd6 36.Qe3 e5 37.h4 d5 38.Rc1 Rxf4 39.b5 Rg4+ 40.Kh2 Rxh4+ 41.Kg1 Rg4+ 42.Kh2 d4 43.Qd2 c5 44.b6 Rc8 45.Rg3 Rh4+ 46.Rh3 Rf4 47.Rg3 c4 48.Re1 Rcf8 49.Qb4 Rf2+ 50.Kg1 R8f7 51.Qxc4 e4 52.Qc5 e3 53.Qc4 Be5 54.Rgxe3 dxe3 55.Re2 Rf1#



...he checkmated White (0–1). Absolute wizardry!

THE COMEBACK

After his great successes in the '90s, Bill continued his winning ways in the year 2000: in an exceptionally tough field, he recovered from a "Swiss Gambit" to become Alabama State Champion once again. The following year, he took clear first at the state championship with a commanding score of 5.5/6. These back-to-back state titles in 2000 and 2001 brought his grand total to seven—the record for the most Alabama state titles up to that point.

However, from 2002 to 2015, although he still had success in other tournaments, he suffered through a long state championship victory drought. He was painfully close to winning in 2006 and 2009, but he stumbled in the very last round both times. Up-and-coming players were starting to get in his way. It happens to us all: time marches on, and even the greatest players start to fall behind...

Still, like the true “chess alchemist” that he is, Bill was destined to bounce back and strike gold once again. At the strong 2016 Alabama State Chess Championship at UAH, Bill won clear first (with 5.5/6) in spectacular fashion and extended his state championship record to eight titles. This performance would be the beginning of a great comeback period for Bill: in 2018, he tied for first at the Rea Hayes Open, the Falcon Chess Invitational, and the Huntsville City Championship, and then won the North Alabama Championship outright. In addition, with a strong showing at the 2018 Washington International, he secured the last norm he needed for the Norm-Based Life Master title.

As the saying goes, “Every great fighter has one great fight left in him.” Let us hope that Bill Melvin has *many* more great fights left in him, for years to come.

BILL’S LEGACY

When we think of Bill Melvin’s great chess achievements, the massive number of tournament wins and state championship titles will always spring first to mind. The various USCF master titles he earned through the years—National Master, Original Life Master, and Norm-Based Life Master—also deserve mention. And, of course, he has played many beautiful and memorable games.

However, in addition, Bill has made tremendous contributions to Alabama chess culture and organization. For example, he served as ACF president for many years, directed tournaments, and mentored younger players—including his own son, Miles. More recently, in 2021, Bill helped create the Alabama Chess Hall of Fame. (Bill himself was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2022.)

Bill has also written voluminously for the *Antics*. Since winning his first state championship in 1990, he has authored over 60 *Antics* articles. His work ranges from instructive and thought-provoking to

downright off-the-wall, but it is always entertaining. He generously shares his honest insights about his games, even at the risk of revealing information to potential rivals. He also annotates his own losses in addition to his wins; few players are humble and good-natured enough to do that.

Finally, on a personal note, it is hard for me to overstate how important a role Bill played in my early chess career. To improve as a chess player, one must play against stronger players. Thanks to Bill's frequent participation in Alabama chess tournaments in the 2000s, I regularly got the chance to do battle with a chess master—and a legendary multi-time state champion—right in my own backyard. I learned so much from the games we played. Bill even annotated some of his games against me for the *Antics*—a very kind gesture indeed, and truly uplifting for a younger player trying to make a name for himself. This is the sort of difference that an Alabama chess “king” can make in the lives of the next generation of players, and it is something for us all to aspire to.

Bill, after four decades of tournament play, your chess is still evergreen. Alabama is lucky to count you among its kings.

Other Great Champions

In addition to the eight “kings” profiled in this book, there are other 20th century Alabama chess champions who made an impact and deserve recognition for their achievements. I will profile seven of these champions here. Note that each of these players won at least two state titles.

A complete list of all the Alabama chess champions from 1954-2022 may be found at the end of this book.

GORDON BATES

The very first Alabama State Championship took place in Birmingham in 1954, and Gordon Bates of Birmingham won this inaugural tournament with a score of 5.5/6. He therefore holds the distinction of being the first ever Alabama State Champion. He won the title a second time in 1965.

The following game from his latter championship win appears in the December 1965 volume of *Chess Life*:

S. Martinez – Gordon C. Bates

Alabama Open Championship
Birmingham; September 1965

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bf5 5.Ng3 Bg6 6.Nf3 Nd7 7.Bd3
Bxd3 8.Qxd3 Ngf6 9.0-0 e6 10.c4 Be7 11.Bf4 0-0 12.Rad1 Qa5 13.a3
Rfe8 14.Rfe1 Nf8 15.Ne5 Rad8 16.Qe3 c5 17.dxc5 Bxc5 18.Qe2 Bd4

19.Nf3 e5 20.Bg5 Qa4 21.Bxf6 gxf6 22.Nf5 Ne6 23.N3xd4 exd4 24.Qg4+ Kh8 25.Rxe6??



As pointed out by John Collins, the annotator of this game for *Chess Life*, White's move 25.Rxe6?? was a critical mistake. White has forgotten that his queen is tied to the defense of the d1-rook, and now he quickly loses control.

25...Rg8! 26.Qh5? Rg5 27.Qf3 Rxf5! 28.Qd3 fxe6 0-1

Being a Caro-Kann aficionado myself, it is nice to know that Alabama's very first state champion also had success with this rewarding defense.

BRAD GAMBRELL

Brad Gambrell of Birmingham was one of the most recognizable names in Alabama chess for many years. A founding member of the Birmingham Chess Club, Brad was constantly in the

running for the state title during the 1950s and early 1960s. He just barely missed out on the title due to tiebreaks in 1957 and 1959, but then twice he won the title outright: in 1961, with a perfect 7-0 score, and again in 1964 with 6/7.

In the September 1990 *Antics*, Ernie Cockrell reminisced about Brad “King’s Gambit” Gambrell: “Sometimes he played the gambit in a tournament, against a lower rated player. Sometimes, in our skittles games, Brad played the King’s Bishop Opening, sacking his bishop on f7 for two pawns, and we would have a wild game.”

As we see from the game below, in addition to the King’s Gambit, Brad Gambrell could play the Queen’s Gambit as well:

H.B. Gambrell – Jack Gwin

Birmingham City Championship Challengers Final

Birmingham; July 26, 1980

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7 5.e3 0–0 6.Nf3 h6 7.Bh4 Ne4 8.Bxe7 Qxe7 9.Nxe4 dxe4 10.Nd2 e5 11.d5 Bf5 12.Qb3 c6 13.Be2 cxd5 14.cxd5 Nd7 15.0–0 Nf6 16.Rfd1 Rfd8 17.Nb1 Rd6 18.Nc3 a6 19.Rd2 Rad8 20.Rad1 g5 21.a4 h5 22.a5 h4 23.Na4 h3 24.g3 Bg4 25.Bxg4 Nxd4 26.Nb6 Qf6 27.Qc4 Qf3 28.Qf1 Kg7 29.Rc1 Rf6 30.Rc3 Rh8 31.d6 Rd8 32.d7 Rh6 33.Rc8 Rhh8 34.Rxd8 Rxd8 35.Qxh3 Nf6 36.Qg2 Qf5 37.h3 Kf8 38.g4 Qf3 39.Rd6 Ng8 40.Qg3 Qxg3+ 41.fxg3 Ne7 42.b4

White somehow survived Black’s kingside aggression in the middlegame, and now Brad’s reward is the towering pawn on d7. Jack Gwin tries in vain to remove it:



42...Nc6 43.Nd5!

Protecting b4, preventing ...Ke7, and planning to win more pawns with Nf6. That is a lot of accomplishments for just a single move!

43...Nb8 44.Nf6 Ke7 45.Nxe4 Nxd7 46.Rd2 Rg8?

Even without this blunder, Black is surely lost anyway. White can always create an outside passed pawn with h3-h4 in the long run.

47.Rxd7+! 1-0

KEN WILLIAMSON

Ken Williamson of Mobile—and later, of Huntsville—was an active Alabama chess player during the '50s, '60s, and '70s. He won three Alabama state championship titles (in 1957, 1971, and 1972) and placed highly in many other tournaments.

Ken Williamson – James Mitchell

Mid-South Open (Round 4)

Memphis; November 1964

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.Qg4 cxd4 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bd3 Qc7 7.Qg3 Bd7 8.0–0 0–0–0 9.Re1 g6 10.a3 Nh6 11.c3 dxc3 12.Nxc3 Nf5 13.Bxf5 gxf5



14.Bg5!

Suddenly, Black is out of good options. If 14...Be7 15.Nb5, then White's knight hops triumphantly into the d6-square. If 14...Ne7, then the computer suggests 15.Rac1! Bc6 16.Nb5 followed by Nd6+ (and then possibly Nxf7). Finally, if 14...Rg8, then the pin is an illusion because 15.Bxd8! attacks Black's queen.

14...Re8 15.Bf6

White wins material a different way, and soon his knight gets to d6 after all:

15...Bc5 16.Bxh8 Rxh8 17.b4 Bb6 18.Nb5 Qd8 19.Nd6+ Kb8 20.Nxf7 Rg8 21.Nxd8 Rxd8 and White won. 1–0

STEVE HUDSON

Although his time at the top of Alabama chess was relatively brief, Steve Hudson of Birmingham won or tied for first in three Alabama State Championships (1976, 1979, and 1980). In 1979, he defeated both Kyle Therrell and a young Stuart Rachels to win the Birmingham City Champion title.

The following victory comes from his 1979 state championship, which he won with a perfect score.

Steve Hudson – Mike Lucas

Alabama Open (Round 6)

Birmingham; September 1979

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Bd3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 dxc6 7.0-0 e5
8.f4 Bc5+ 9.Kh1 Nf6 10.f5 b5 11.a4 Bb7 12.Qe2 Qc7 13.Bg5 Be7 14.Nd2
0-0 15.Rf3 h6 16.Be3 Rac8 17.Rh3 Kh7 18.g4 c5 19.g5 c4



20.gxf6 cxd3 21.Bxh6!

A simple yet lovely queen sacrifice: 21...dxe2 22.Bxg7+ Kg8 23.Rh8 mates.

21...Bxf6 22.Bxg7+ Kxg7 23.Qg4+ 1-0

TOM DENTON

Tom Denton, a.k.a. “the Man from E.G.O.,” was one of the strongest players to emerge from Mobile in the 1980s. He was a key player on the McGill-Toolen High School chess teams that won the Alabama High School Team Championships in 1979, 1980, and 1982. After having success in scholastic chess, Tom soon reached the summit of “adult” chess in Alabama as well. He tied for first with Stuart Rachels at the 1983 Alabama State Championship with 6/7; this was arguably Tom’s greatest result. He became co-champion (with Kyle Therrell) a second time in 1987.

Tom Denton, Stuart Rachels, and Kyle Therrell were “the big three” of state championship chess in Alabama for much of the 1980s. Battles among these three would often play a crucial role in deciding the outcome of the whole tournament.

Tom Denton – Kyle Therrell

Alabama State Championship (Round 3)

Ft. Rucker; September 1983

1.d4 Nf6 2.g3 d6 3.Bg2 g6 4.e4 Bg7 5.Ne2 0-0 6.0-0 Nc6 7.Be3 e5 8.c3 Re8 9.Qd3 Bd7 10.Nd2 Ng4 11.d5 Ne7 12.Rae1 Nxe3 13.Qxe3 f5 14.f4 Rf8 15.Qd3 h6 16.Kh1 Kh7 17.Bf3 fxe4 18.Bxe4 Bh3 19.Rg1 Qd7 20.Nf3 exf4 21.Nxf4 Bf5 22.Nh4



White's knights turn out to be more than a match for Black's bishop pair. The g6-pawn will soon fall.

22...Rae8 23.Nfxg6 Bxe4+ 24.Rxe4!

A dashing recapture, and much stronger than 24.Qxe4. Black is paralyzed by an avalanche of discovered check and double check threats.

24...Nxxg6 25.Nxxg6 1-0

The knight cannot be taken, and White still threatens Nxf8+. If, for example, 25...Rf6, then 26.Re7!! Rxe7 (26...Qf5 27.Qxf5 Rxf5 28.Rxe8 wins the exchange; 26...Qd8 27.Nf8+ Kg8 28.Qh7+ Kxf8 29.Qxg7 mates) 27.Nf8+ wins the queen.

For another example of Tom Denton at his best, see the game Rachels-Denton 1983 in *The Best I Saw in Chess* (Chapter 16) by Stuart Rachels.

ANDREW WHATLEY

As Alabama's most successful junior player of the mid-to-late 1990s, Andrew Whatley won or tied for first in five Alabama Scholastic Open Championships and numerous other state-level tournaments, including two state championships. He became a Denker Tournament of High School Champions co-winner in 1997 and won the U.S. Junior Open in 1999. He is also one of the only Alabama players ever to attain the FM title.

Andrew Whatley – Gilbert Ferber

U.S. Open (Round 1)

Alexandria (VA); August 1996

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Bg5 Nbd7 4.Nbd2 e6 5.e3 Be7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 0–0
8.0–0 h6 9.Bh4 b6 10.Ne5 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Nd7 12.Bg3 Bb7 13.f4 c4 14.Bc2
Nc5 15.Nf3 Qc8 16.Nd4 Ba6 17.f5 Bg5 18.Bf4 Bxf4 19.Rxf4 Nd3 20.Bxd3
cxd3 21.f6 g6 22.Rh4 Kh7 23.Qg4 Rh8



24.Rxh6+! Kg8 25.Rxh8+ Kxh8 26.Nc6!?

This move wins—but, in his *Antics* notes on this game, Whatley points out a more efficient way: 26.Qh4+! Kg8 27.Nc6!, and mate is unstoppable after 27...Qxc6 28.Qh6.

26...Qg8 27.Rf1 Qh7

There was also 27...d2, but that would only postpone the inevitable. If nothing else, White would soon be two pawns up after 28.Rd1.

28.Rf3 d2 29.Rh3 Qxh3 30.Qxh3+ Kg8 31.Ne7+ 1–0

MATTHEW PUCKETT

Matthew Puckett became a National Master in 1995 and an Original Life Master in 2022; he was an Alabama State Co-Champion in 1999 and 2019. Matthew's long and successful chess career already spans thirty years.

As a teenager, Matthew was one of Alabama's top-rated scholastic players of the 1990s. He was the Alabama Scholastic Individual Open Champion in 1994 and 1995, and he represented Alabama at the Denker Tournament of High School Champions in 1993, 1994, and 1995. In addition, he twice participated in the U.S. Cadet Championships, coming in second place in 1996.

Matthew Puckett – Rohan Talukdar

Charlotte Open (Round 5)

Charlotte (NC); December 28, 2021

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4 6.Qxc4 0–0 7.e4 Be6 8.Qb5 Bd7 9.Qb3 c5 10.d5 b5 11.e5 Ng4 12.Bf4 c4 13.Qd1 b4 14.Ne2 Qb6 15.Ned4 Rc8 16.h3 Nh6 17.g4 f6 18.e6 Be8 19.Rc1 c3 20.bxc3 bxc3

21.Qb3 Na6 22.Bc4 Nb4 23.a3 Na6 24.Qxc3 g5 25.Bh2 f5 26.Be5 Bxe5
27.Nxe5 Qd6 28.Nxf5 Nxf5 29.gxf5



With an aesthetically pleasing triangle of pawns, Matthew has an absolute stranglehold on Black's position. Amusingly, Black cannot even play 29...Bb5 because 30.Nf7! leads to mate on h8. Instead:

29...Rxc4 30.Nxc4 Qxd5 31.Rg1 Qxf5 32.Qe5!

"Darned if you do, darned if you don't." Black must either trade queens or face a vicious attack.

32...Qxh3 33.Qxg5+ Bg6 34.Ne5 Qxe6 35.Rc6 Qa2



36.Rxg6+!

The most clinical solution, not even giving Black the chance to deliver a single check.

36...Kh8

Otherwise, 36...hxc6 37.Qxc6+ Kf8 38.Nd7 mate.

37.Nf7+! 1-0

Long Live the Kings

I hope you have enjoyed getting to know these legendary players a bit better. I certainly have. Some of these legends I never met, and several others never faced me head-to-head in competition, but the rest—whether they realize it or not—have driven me nuts at the chessboard with their tricky play. It has been an honor to fight against such legends, to defeat them, and yes, even to be defeated by them. Having written this book, now I more deeply appreciate and understand their chess.

At the end of the first chess book I ever owned, *Chess for Beginners* by I. A. Horowitz, a diagram shows Black's king getting spectacularly checkmated. After Horowitz explains why it is indeed mate, he ends the discussion (and the book) by saying: "The game is over. The King is dead. Long live the King." The statement "Long live the King" resonated in my mind at the time, and it stuck with me forever. My mother once told me that she has the same feeling about it: somehow, it is a powerful and profound statement. Although one king may die or fall from power, the next one will take his place. The lineage will continue. The legacy of the old kings will live on.

Every chess player's story is different, and so it is also with Alabama's greatest champions. Some played intensely for just a single decade; others have careers spanning forty years or more. Some chose to retire while still in their prime; others fight on as weekend warriors for as long as they can. They all have their own playing styles, personalities, and chess philosophies. Yet, in the end, these legendary players have all enriched Alabama chess in their own way. I am grateful to all of them for everything they have done for our chess

community, and for the splendid games that they have shared with us through the years.

These kings will be remembered. Long live the kings!

Bibliography

All sources are listed under the subsection(s) of each chapter where they are used, with a brief description of the information found in each source. Sources are generally listed in the order in which they are used. Instead of writing *Alabama Chess Antics*, we simply write *Antics*; instead of writing *Tennessee Chess News*, we simply write *TCN*.

Milan Momic: Alabama's First King

"Alabama's First Chess Master" by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 25. (Background information about Momic is given, as well as a synopsis of his career, i.e., his "chess experience." Note: Momic's score from the 1963 Alabama Open is incorrectly reported in this article. He actually scored 7-0, based on other sources—e.g., see some of the entries below.)

"In the United States," *Chess Life* February 1963, p. 44. (Results from Momic's first three USCF tournaments are provided; his USCF rating is listed as 2250. Momic goes 7-0 in the 1962 Alabama Open.)

"Southern Championships," *TCN* September 1963 (vol. 5, no. 5), p. 4. (Momic loses a USCF rated game for the first time. He lost to John Hurt.)

"Alabamian Takes Georgia Open," *Chess Life* March 1963, p. 57. (Momic wins the 1963 Georgia State Open.)

"Down Memory Lane," *Antics* December 1988, p. 13. (The original crosstable for the 1963 Alabama Open shows that Momic won with a 7-0 score.)

"Here and There," *Chess Life* October 1963, p. 260. (Momic goes 7-0 to win the 1963 Alabama Open.)

"Momic New Open and Wright New State Champion," *TCN* September 1964 (vol. 6, no. 5), p. 1-2. (*Momic wins the 1964 Tennessee Open.*)

"Momic Repeats to Retain Mid-South Crown," *TCN* January 1964 (vol. 6, no. 1), p. 1. (*Momic wins the 1963 Mid-South Open.*)

"Momic and Hurt Tie for Lead in Mid-South," *TCN* January 1965 (vol. 7, no. 1), p. 1-2. (*Momic wins the 1964 Mid-South Open on tiebreaks over John Hurt.*)

"Labor Day Roundup," *Chess Life* October 1966, p. 240. (*Momic wins the 1966 Alabama State Championship with 6.5/7.*)

"The World of Chess," *Chess Review* February 1967, p. 35. (*Momic wins the 1966 Alabama State Championship with 6.5/7.*)

"Momic New Open – Bob Coveyou State Champion," *TCN* September 1968 (vol. 10, no. 5), p. 25, 27, 30. (*Momic wins the 1968 Tennessee Open; the notation for Momic-Burris 1968 is provided, but the players' ratings are not listed.*)

"24th Tennessee Open to be Really Big!!" *TCN* July 1968 (vol. 10, no. 4), p. 18. (*The 1968 Tennessee Open is set to occur in Nashville, August 31-September 2.*)

"Alabamians Win Mid-South," *TCN* January 1969 (vol. 11, no. 1), p. 1. (*Momic wins the 1968 Mid-South Open.*)

"Chess Life, Here and There," *Chess Life* March 1969, p. 127. (*Momic wins the 1968 Mid-South Open.*)

WHEN GIANTS ROAMED THE EARTH

"Milan Momic New Open and Jim Wright State Champion," *TCN* September 1970 (vol. 12, no. 5), p. 31, 33. (*Momic wins the 1970 Tennessee Open.*)

"John Hurt New State Champion," *TCN* September 1973 (vol. 15, no. 5), p. 43, 46, 51. (*Momic wins the 1973 Tennessee Open on tiebreaks over John Hurt; an example of Momic playing the Benko/Volga Gambit is provided.*)

"Momic New Open – Thomas State Champion," *TCN* September 1974 (vol. 16, no. 5), p. 49-50, 56. (*Momic wins the 1974 Tennessee Open.*)

"At the Southern," *TCN* September 1971 (vol. 13, no. 5), p. 35. (*Momic wins the 1971 Southern Open.*)

"Chess Life, Here & There," *Chess Life* October 1971, p. 571. (Momic wins the Region IV Championship, i.e., the 1971 Southern Open.)

"Southern Championships," *TCN* September 1963 (vol. 5, no. 5), p. 4. (Momic loses to John Hurt.)

"North Alabama Open 1968," *TCN* May 1968 (vol. 10, no. 3), p. 16. (An example of Acers defeating Momic is provided.)

"Nine Georgia Players Attend Huntsville Open," *Georgia Chess Letter* August 1968, p. 41. (Momic loses a game to Charles Irvine.)

"Perfect Score – Huntsville Senior New Chess Champ," *The Birmingham News* September 2, 1969, p. 6. (Irvine wins the 1969 Alabama State Championship with a perfect 7-0 score and finishes ahead of Momic, who came in second.)

"Chess Life, Here & There (Region IV)," *Chess Life & Review* August 1973, p. 450. (Momic defeats GM Walter Browne at the 1973 Continental Open.)

"Continental Open 1973," *TCN* September 1973 (vol. 15, no. 5), p. 48. (The notation for Momic (2303) - Browne (2525) from the 1973 Continental Open is provided.)

"Milan Momic's Best Game" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* August-October 1998, p. 4, 7. (Bill Melvin annotates Momic-Browne 1973.)

"Tribute to the Legend 5" by Bryan Tillis. *Antics* Summer 2014, p. 9-10. (The game Momic-Browne appears in the *Antics* a second time.)

Modern Chess Openings by Nick de Firmian. 15th edition; Random House, 2008. p. 258. (Some details on the variation of the Najdorf Sicilian seen in Momic-Browne are provided.)

PLAYING STYLE & OPENING IDEAS

"Annotated Games" by Mack Garner, *TCN* November 1974 (vol. 16, no. 6), p. 69. (Wright-Momic, the "grandmaster draw," is presented with satirical annotations.)

"Three Games by Milan Momic" by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 26. (In Momic-Hurt, we see an example of Momic's King's Indian Attack versus the French Defense.)

"Koploy Takes Third in Huntsville," TCN September 1969 (vol. 11, no. 5), p. 30. (*Momic wins with the English Opening against Charles Irvine's Dutch Defense.*)

"Game from Heart O'Dixie Tourney" by John Hurt. TCN July 1963 (vol. 5, no. 4), p. 4. (*Momic uses Owen's Defense to defeat John Hurt.*)

Various games by Momic (showing his playing style and opening preferences) may be found in the following TCN volumes: July 1963, September 1963, September 1964, January 1965, March 1965, May 1965, September 1966, May 1968, September 1968, November 1968, January 1969, July 1969, September 1969, November 1970, January 1971, July 1971, November 1971, January 1972, July 1973, September 1973, May 1974, November 1974.

"Alabama's First Chess Master" by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 25. (*Momic talks about his encounter with Pal Benko and the origins of the Benko Gambit.*)

"Music City Summer Tournament 1971," TCN July 1971 (vol. 13, no. 4), p. 31. (*Momic uses the Benko/Volga Gambit.*)

"Tennessee Open Games," TCN September 1973 (vol. 15, no. 5), p. 46. (*Momic uses the Benko/Volga Gambit.*)

"Benko Scores in Atlanta," *Chess Life* June 1964, p. 145. (*Momic draws against Benko at the 2nd Annual Atlanta Open in May 1964.*)

"No Problem" by Pal Benko. *Chess Life* February 1968, p. 56. (*Benko writes his earliest article discussing what would later become the Benko Gambit. Here, the opening is labeled as "Benoni Counter-Gambit."*)

"More Benoni Countergambit" by Pal Benko. *Chess Life & Review* January 1970, p. 22. (*Benko writes another article on what would later become known as the Benko Gambit.*)

The Benko Gambit by Pal Benko. RHM Chess Publishing, 1973.

A TRAGIC ENDGAME

"3rd QoH." *Antics* March 1975, p. 10. (*Momic is rated 2314 at the start of the 1975 Queen of Hearts in February; Momic wins clear first with 4.5/5.*)

“Alabama’s First Chess Master” by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 25. (Edwards discusses Momic’s career-ending accident.)

“1975 USCF Futurity-Qualifier – 8th Goldwater-Marshall Invitational” by Mike Goodall. *Chess Life & Review* June 1975, p. 342. (Momic finishes the tournament with 3.5/9.)

“Lucky Open #4, Open Division,” *TCN* July 1975 (vol. 17, no. 4), p. 46. (Momic finishes with 2.5/5 in 11th place.)

“Milan Momic’s Best Game” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* August-October 1998, p. 4, 7. (Momic dies in November 1997.)

“The Wiregrass Open,” *Antics* August 1974, p. 11. (The notation for Timmel-Momic is provided. This original notation appears to be correct, aside from one minor typo on move 31: we should see RxP instead of PxP. The players’ ratings are not listed.)

“Three Games by Milan Momic” by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 26. (Edwards provides notation for the game Timmel-Momic, but this notation appears to contain mistakes; for example, the unnatural moves 42...Kb6 and 45...Ka5 differ from the original game score printed in the August 1974 *Antics*. There are other typos as well. It appears mistakes were made when the notation was converted from the original descriptive notation to the algebraic notation; the original notation seen in the August 1974 *Antics* seems far more plausible.)

“Alabama’s First Chess Master” by Bobby N. Edwards. *Antics* May-July 1997, p. 25. (Edwards provides a list of Momic’s most famous opponents. Note: the way Edwards presents this list in this article is misleading. In fact, these are not the opponents that Momic faced in the 1975 invitational tournament; rather, these were the most famous opponents that Momic had played in his whole chess career.)

Charles Irvine: Prince of Huntsville

“Chess Life Here and There...” *Chess Life* March 1969, p. 89. (Charles Irvine wins Huntsville’s 1968 Midsummer Open and the 1968 Huntsville City Championship.)

"Huntsville Tourney Won by Local Player," *TCN* September 1968 (vol. 10, no. 5), p. 26. (*Being a Class A player, Charles Irvine wins the Midsummer Open in Huntsville with 4.5/5 points, ahead of Momic.*)

"The World of Chess – Alabama," *Chess Review* November 1968, p. 325. (*This report seems to contain errors. The tournament being referenced in this Chess Review article, although labeled "Alabama Open," does not seem to be the true Alabama Open. Rather, it is a mixture of the 1968 Alabama State Championship and the 1968 Midsummer Open. See "The Lost State Champions: Part II" in Spring 2022 Antics for details.*)

Private Correspondence with Charles Irvine, 2021. (*Charles Irvine indicates that he defeated Milan Momic in their individual game at the 1968 Midsummer Open, and that the alleged "Alabama Open" referenced in the November 1968 Chess Review was not actually an Alabama Open. Irvine also recalls that he won four Alabama State Championships: in 1969, 1970, 1973, and 1974.*)

"Rating Supplement, Spring 1968," *Chess Life* March 1968, p. 104. (*Irvine's provisional rating is 1877.*)

"Perfect Score – Huntsville Senior New Chess Champ," *The Birmingham News* September 2, 1969, p. 6. (*Irvine wins the 1969 Alabama State Championship with a perfect 7-0 score and finishes ahead of Momic, who came in second.*)

"USCF Annual Rating List," *Chess Life & Review* December 1969, p. 523. (*Irvine is rated 2168 and far outranks nearly every other Alabama player at the time.*)

"Momic Wins North Alabama Open Tournament," *TCN* July 1970 (vol. 12, no. 4), p. 25. (*The notation for Appleberry-Irvine 1970 is provided; the players' ratings are not listed.*)

Modern Chess Openings by Nick de Firmian. 15th edition; Random House, 2008. p. 499-500. (*Some details on the variation of the Classical Dutch seen in Appleberry-Irvine are provided.*)

THE U.S. JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP

"Rating Supplement, Summer 1970," *Chess Life & Review* June 1970, p. 336. (*At age 19, Irvine is rated 2209 and is one of the top ten juniors under age 21 in the country.*)

"Rogoff Repeats as U.S. Junior Champion," Chess Life & Review September 1970, p. 485. (Various details about the 1970 U.S. Junior Championship are provided. A tournament crosstable is also provided, as well as the notation for various games by Irvine from the championship, including Watson-Irvine.)

"The Top 25 Juniors," Chess Life & Review June 1970, p. 336. (In the month before the game Watson-Irvine took place, Watson was rated 2119 and Irvine was rated 2209.)

"Alabama Open," Antics September 1973, p. 5. (Details about Watson-Irvine appearing in Horowitz's New York Times column are given.)

THE BIG FINISH

"Irvine Retains State Crown," the Huntsville Times, September 9, 1970, p. 4. (Irvine wins the 1970 "Alabama State Open Chess Tournament.")

"Charles Irvine Wins Mid-South," TCN January 1971 (vol. 13, no. 1), p. 1, 3. (Irvine scores 5.5 points at the 1970 Mid-South Open and gets clear first.)

"Alabama Open," Antics September 1973, p. 3-4. (Irvine wins the 1973 Alabama State Championship; Irvine uses the Classical Dutch Defense with success.)

"State Championships," Antics October 1974, p. 1-3. (Irvine wins the 1974 Alabama State Championship with a 7-0 score.)

"New Champ!" Antics October 1975, p. 1-2. (Details of Irvine's unsuccessful 1975 championship are given.)

"30th Tennessee Open," TCN September 1976 (vol. 18, no. 5), p. 62. (Irvine finishes with 3.5/6.)

Charles R. Irvine player profile,
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlMain.php?10238706>. (Irvine is listed as inactive at the time of writing. According to this profile, Irvine has not played in a tournament since at least 1991.)

Kyle Therrell: Birmingham's Boss

"Alabama Open," Antics September 1973, p. 4. (Kyle Therrell, formerly known as Dana Therrell, is listed as unrated in the 1973 Alabama State Championship.)

"Alabama High School Championship" by Roger Rowlett (with an editor's note by Bill Bryan). Antics June 1976, p. 2. (At age 12, Therrell comes in first at the Alabama High School Championship, although he is not yet old enough to be eligible to win the title.)

"Picture Page," Antics November 1976, p. 12. (Therrell is 4th in the nation under age 13.)

"Birmingham Championship" by Jack Gwin. Antics December 1977, p. 21. (Therrell wins the 1977 Challengers tournament but loses in the final match to Jack Gwin.)

"Birmingham Championship," Antics November 1979, p. 4. (Therrell qualifies for the 1979 Birmingham City Championship final.)

"Steve Hudson Wins Birmingham City Championship," Antics November 1979, p. 5. (Steve Hudson takes first place in the final round robin; Therrell takes third.)

"Vulcan Open," Antics August 1979, p. 9. (Therrell wins the 1979 Vulcan Open with 4.5/5.)

"1979 Alabama Open," Antics November 1979, p. 6. (Therrell ties for third in the 1979 state championship.)

"Top Ten Contenders," Antics August 1980, p. 1. (Therrell was among Alabama's top ten rated players in 1980.)

"Queen of Hearts," Antics April 1981, p. 16. (Therrell is rated 2008 at the start of the 1981 Queen of Hearts.)

THE BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

"Birmingham Chess Club News: Therrell Summer," Antics November 1981, p. 23. (Therrell wins the Birmingham City Championship challengers tournament, the round robin final, and the final match.)

"The 28th Annual Alabama Chess Championship," *Antics* November 1981, p. 14-19. (Therrell gets clear first in the 1981 championship with 6/7; the notation for the game Jurjevich (2099) - Therrell (2090) is also found here.)

"Brewer State Open," *Antics* January 1982, p. 4. (Therrell is listed with a rating of 2225, which shows he had become a National Master by December of 1981.)

"Stuart & Dana State Champs," *Antics* November 1982, p. 1. (Therrell & Rachels tie with 5.5/7 to become 1982 Alabama state champions.)

"1987 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* May 1988, p. 10. (Therrell and Tom Denton become 1987 Alabama state champions.)

"The Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* Fall 1992, p. 4. (Therrell, Melvin, and Meidinger become 1992 Alabama state champions.)

Alabama 1995 State Championship crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199509047980.1> (Melvin, Therrell, and Whatley become 1995 Alabama state champions.)

"The Queen of Hearts: 50 Years of Memories" by Scott Varagona. *Antics* Winter 2022, p. 11. (Therrell ties for first in the 1982 Queen of Hearts. The original tournament crosstable was provided by TD Clay Branum.)

"Queen of Hearts" by Clay Branum. *Antics* April 1983, p. 10. (Therrell wins 1983 Queen of Hearts ahead of Brent Inman, Tom Denton, and Stuart Rachels.)

"Queen of Hearts," *Antics* June July 1984, p. 13. (Therrell wins the 1984 Queen of Hearts ahead of Jurjevich.)

"Queen of Hearts" by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* August 1986, p. 18. (Therrell wins the 1986 Queen of Hearts ahead of Stuart Rachels.)

"FRENEMIES"

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (In the Preface, Rachels discusses Kyle Therrell's role as his mentor. In Chapter 8, Rachels annotates the game Rachels (2200) - Therrell (2120) from the year 1981.)

"Stuart Rachels – the Greatest?" by Kyle Therrell. *Antics* May-July 1998, p. 13-17. (On page 15, Kyle mentions that his best game was his win against Stuart Rachels at the end of 1984.)

Original scoresheet for Therrell (2205) - Rachels (2388) from the first annual 1984 Magic City Open, by Stuart Rachels. (*Stuart makes a few comments on the game in the margins.*)

MR. BIRMINGHAM

"Birmingham City Championship Report," *Antics* November 1983, p. 21. (*Therrell is listed as the incumbent Birmingham champion from the previous year, 1982.*)

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (*In Chapter 8, Rachels annotates "Kyle's Brilliancy," Rachels (2200) - Therrell (2120) from the year 1981.*)

Private correspondence with Stuart Rachels, 2020. (*"Kyle's Brilliancy," i.e., Rachels-Therrell 1981, was round 2 of the 1981 Birmingham City Championship final match.*)

1992 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199207112130> (*Therrell takes clear first in the final round robin.*)

1993 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199307244390> (*Therrell takes clear first in the final round robin.*)

1994 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199407302320> (*Therrell takes clear first in the final round robin.*)

1995 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstables from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199508016610> (*Therrell ties with Andy Reeder in the final round robin and Therrell wins the tiebreaker match.*)

1996 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199607270070> (*Therrell takes clear first in the final round robin.*)

1997 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199707267190> (*Therrell takes clear first in the final round robin.*)

1998 Birmingham City Championship Qualifier tournament crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199807194570> (*Therrell directs the tournament.*)

1998 Birmingham City Championship Final crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199807256740> (*Therrell does not play in the final.*)

“The Magic City Open” by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* March 1987, p. 8. (*The notation for the game Therrell (2271) - Battistella (2014) from the 1986 Magic City Open is provided.*)

ChessBase online database: <https://database.chessbase.com/?lang=en> (*Statistics on the Alekhine’s Defense Four Pawns Attack line with 12...c5 are provided.*)

Kyle Therrell player profile on uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlTnmtHst.php?10236746.1> (*Therrell plays in his last USCF-rated tournament to date in March 2002.*)

Stuart Rachels: Alabama’s U.S. Champion

ALABAMA’S PRODIGY

“Stuart’s First Tournament” by James Rachels. *Antics* May-July 1998, p. 17. (*Stuart’s father discusses Stuart’s early chess career, including his first tournament in 1979.*)

“7th Queen of Hearts – Novice,” *Antics* March 1979, p. 10. (*Stuart plays in the Novice section of the 1979 Queen of Hearts, scoring 2.5/5.*)

“Vulcan Open,” *Antics* August 1979, p. 9. (*Stuart is rated 1496 in May 1979.*)

“1979 Alabama Open – Amateur,” *Antics* November 1979, p. 8. (*Stuart ties for first in the Amateur section of the 1979 Alabama State Championship with 6/7.*)

“Top Ten Contenders,” *Antics* August 1980, p. 1. (*Stuart is among Alabama’s top ten rated players in 1980.*)

"Birmingham Championship," Antics November 1980, p. 19. (Stuart defeats the incumbent Birmingham City Champion, Steve Hudson, to become the new city champion.)

"Space City Open," Antics June 1981, p. 16. (Stuart gets clear first at the 1981 Space City Open. His post-tournament rating would be 2165.)

"Stuart Sets Record," Antics November 1981, p. 3. (Stuart breaks the record for youngest National Master in United States history up to that time.)

"Stuart Rachels - The Greatest?" by Kyle Therrell. Antics May-July 1998, p. 13-17. (The notation for Therrell-Rachels 1981 and Kudrin-Rachels 1989 is provided.)

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (In Chapter 24, Rachels annotates the game Therrell (2030) - Rachels (2105) from the year 1981.)

"Space City Open," Antics June 1981, p. 16. (Therrell-Rachels took place in round 4 of the 1981 Space City Open.)

"Birmingham Chess Club Newsletter," Antics August 1982, p. 22. (Details are provided on Stuart's successes at the U.S. Junior High Championship and the U.S. Junior Open.)

FIVE IN A ROW

"Stuart & Dana State Champs," Antics November 1982, p. 1, p. 3. (Stuart Rachels and Kyle Therrell become 1982 Alabama State Champions.)

"Rachels, Denton Win Title" by Bill Tompkins and Joel Galle. Antics November 1983, p. 1, 4-5. (Stuart Rachels and Tom Denton tie for first in the 1983 Alabama State Championship; Rachels' rating is 2363; Tom Denton's rating is 2038.)

"The 1984 Alabama State Chess Championship" by Lars Britt. Antics November 1984, p. 3-6. (Stuart wins clear first at the 1984 Alabama State Championship.)

"Rachels Wins Again!" Antics November 1984, p. 1. (See cover title and photo.)

"1983 - 'The Year of the Underdog'" by Tom Denton. Antics November 1983, p. 6-7. (Tom Denton annotates the game Denton (2038) - Rachels (2363) from the year 1983.)

Private correspondence with Tom Denton, 2020. (*Denton-Rachels 1983 did not end when the notation in the November 1983 Antics ended; there were many further moves, but Rachels eventually won.*)

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (*In Chapter 1, Rachels annotates his 1983 Benoni game against Kasparov.*)

“1985 Alabama State Chess Championship: Stuart Snares State” by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1985, p. 3-5. (*Stuart wins clear first at the 1985 Alabama State Championship; the notation for the game Rachels (2477) - Downs (2085) from the 1985 state championship is provided.*)

“Stuart Rachels – State Chess Champion,” *Antics* December 1986, p. 6. (*Stuart gets clear first at the 1986 Alabama State Championship; his pre-tournament rating is 2508.*)

BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS

“Birmingham Chess Club News,” *Antics* December 1988, p. 16. (*An example of Stuart Rachels winning the Vulcan Open is provided.*)

“The Magic City Open” by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* March 1987, p. 8. (*An example of Stuart Rachels winning the Magic City Open is provided.*)

“12th Annual Queen of Hearts” by Lars Britt. *Antics* May 1985, p. 4. (*An example of Stuart Rachels winning the Queen of Hearts is provided.*)

“New York Open 1987: International Section” by Stuart Rachels. *Antics* August 1987, p. 6. (*Stuart announces he will miss the 1987 Alabama State Championship; Stuart defeats his first ever grandmaster and almost makes an IM norm.*)

“Birmingham Chess Club News,” *Antics* December 1988, p. 16. (*Stuart Rachels wins the U.S. Junior Championship.*)

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (*At the start of Chapter 3, Rachels discusses his experience playing in the 1988 World Junior Championship; in the Preface, Stuart gives an overview of his 1989 U.S. Championship victory; in Chapter 14, “The Best I Played in Chess – Weary Joy,” Stuart annotates the game Kudrin (2668) - Rachels (2570) from the year 1989 and gives further details on his successful U.S. Championship; in*

Chapter 4, "That's All, Folks," Stuart presents his very last rated regular tournament game, which took place in the year 1994.)

"1980 Alabama Championship" by Steve Hudson. *Antics* November 1980, p. 5. (Steve Hudson makes his "Dragonphobia" remark.)

"SEARCHING FOR STUART RACHELS"

"Where Have You Gone, Rachels, Shaked & Rao?" by Mike Klein. *Chess Life* September 2008, p. 27-28. (Stuart discusses his decision to retire.)

"Former Child Prodigy, now Philosophy Professor, IM Stuart Rachels on his book, *The Best I Saw in Chess*," interview on the Perpetual Chess Podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I59bv1dPXOI>. (Stuart discusses his decision to retire.)

2021 Alabama Quick Chess Championship (Open) crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202106053942.1> (Rachels finishes in clear first place with 4.5/5.)

2021 Alabama Blitz Chess Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202106054022> (Rachels finishes in clear first place with 5/5 points and defeats Scott Varagona in round 4.)

"Searching for Stuart Rachels" by Scott Varagona. *Antics* Spring 2021, p. 11-14. (The story of the game Varagona-Rachels in the 2021 Blitz Championship is presented.)

Joseph Jurjevich: The Bay Minette Flash

"The 1982 Summer Chess Olympics," *Antics* November 1982, p. 12. (Jurjevich is referred to in the *Antics* as the Bay Minette Flash.)

"Queen of Hearts Amateur," *Antics* April 1974, p. 3-4. (John, Joseph, and Robert Jurjevich are listed in the 1974 Queen of Hearts Amateur tournament crosstable as unrated.)

"1978 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* November 1978, p. 9-13. (Joseph Jurjevich's brother, Robert Jurjevich, wins the 1978 Alabama State Championship.)

"June Tornado," *Antics* August 1979, p. 5. (Joe Jurjevich reaches a rating of 1971 in the year 1979.)

"1980 Alabama Open," *Antics* November 1980, p. 4. (Jurjevich ties for first with Steve Hudson in the 1980 state championship; Jurjevich becomes co-champion.)

"Azalea City," *Antics* June 1981, p. 4. (Jurjevich is rated 2060 at the start of this March 1981 tournament.)

"1981 Vulcan Open," *Antics* June 1981, p. 20. (Jurjevich ties for first in the 1981 Vulcan Open.)

"The 1981 Summer Chess Olympics" by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1981, p. 12. (Jurjevich gets clear first with 4/4 at the 1981 Summer Chess Olympics.)

"North Alabama Open" by Ray Robertson. *Antics* August 1982, p. 12. (Jurjevich ties for first at the 1982 North Alabama Open.)

"1980 Pensacola Beach Open," *Antics* January 1981, p. 4. (Jurjevich ties for first at the 1980 Pensacola Beach Open.)

"Pensacola Beach Open" by Lars Britt. *Antics* June 1982, p. 4. (Jurjevich ties for first in the 1981 Pensacola Beach Open.)

"Pensacola Beach Open" by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* April 1983, p. 6. (Jurjevich ties for first in the 1982 Pensacola Beach Open.)

Antics November 1984, p. 2. (Jurjevich wins the 1984 Alabama Speed Chess Championship.)

"Master Flash: Jurjevich Breaks 2200 Barrier," *Antics* November 1985, p. 2. (Jurjevich becomes a National Master in the summer of 1985.)

Original scoresheet for Jurjevich (2210) - Rachels (2442) from the 1985 Firecracker Open, by Stuart Rachels.

"Firecracker Open" by Samuel Bonham. *Antics* August 1985, p. 14. (The game Jurjevich-Rachels takes place in Round 2; the tournament takes place in Montgomery.)

"1989 Alabama State Championships" by Rich Bellezza and Eddie Kemp. *Antics* November 1989, p. 12-14. (*Jurjevich wins the 1989 Alabama State Championship with a perfect 6-0 score.*)

"Joe Jurjevich vs. Charles Meidinger," submitted by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* November 1989, p. 18. (*The notation for the game Jurjevich (2213) - Meidinger (2235) is provided.*)

"Games from the Champ" by Michael Schaetzle. *Antics* November 1994, p. 14. (*Examples of Meidinger's future success with 13...Bxg5+ are presented.*)

"2002 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* Fall 2002, p. 9-14. (*Details are given on the 2002 state championship; Jurjevich shares the title with Meidinger and Varagona; Jurjevich wins the trophy on tiebreaks.*)

"53rd Alabama State Chess Championship" by Caesar Lawrence. *Antics* Fall 2006, p. 13. (*Jurjevich becomes a 2006 state champion along with two other players with a score of 4/5 and wins the trophy on tiebreaks.*)

2008 Alabama State Championship (Open) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200809218481.1> (*Jurjevich ties for first to become an Alabama State Co-Champion in 2008.*)

2008 Alabama State Championship Tiebreaker crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200809218481.4> (*Jurjevich loses in the tiebreaker.*)

A DIFFICULT OPPONENT

Jurjevich-Varagona, Chris Bond Memorial 2018: game score from Scott Varagona's archives.

2018 Chris Bond Memorial (Premier) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201808116142.1> (*The players' ratings in the game Jurjevich (2070) - Varagona (2267) from the 2018 Chris Bond Memorial are provided.*)

Jurjevich-Varagona, 2006 Alabama State Championship: game score from Scott Varagona's archives.

2006 Alabama State Championship (Open) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200609035261.1> (*The players'*

ratings in the game Jurjevich (2155) - Varagona (2118) from the 2006 Alabama State Championship are provided.)

LATER YEARS

Joseph Jurjevich player profile on uschess.org:

<http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlTnmtHst.php?10767555> (*Jurjevich is a National Master; however, his rating falls below 2200 in the year 1995.*)

2006 Greater Alabama Open – Chris Bond Memorial crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200608069661.1> (*Jurjevich gets clear first place.*)

2008 Chris Bond Memorial Classic crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200808097461.1> (*Jurjevich gets clear first place.*)

2018 Chris Bond Memorial crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201808116142.1> (*Jurjevich gets clear first place.*)

Queen of Hearts XLII crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201402092172.1> (*Jurjevich ties for first place in the 2014 Queen of Hearts.*)

ACF Quick Championship 2010 crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201006191791> (*Jurjevich ties for first place.*)

Alabama Blitz Championship 2020 crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202008222592> (*Jurjevich gets first place.*)

Charles Meidinger: Magnificent 7-0

“Black Warrior,” Antics December 1975, p. 3. (As an unrated player, Meidinger ties for second, and takes second place on tiebreaks, at the 1975 Black Warrior Open.)

“Summer Rating Tornado” by Wally Helgeson. *Antics* December 1977, p. 20. (Meidinger’s rating is listed as 1695 in the year 1977.)

“The 1981 Summer Chess Olympics” by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1981, p. 12. (Meidinger has become an Expert by 1981.)

“Huntsville Open Championship,” *Antics* August 1987, p. 3. (Meidinger wins the Huntsville Championship with 5.5/6 and his post-tournament rating is 2214.)

“1988 Alabama Chess – Top 50,” *Antics* March 1989, p. 24. (In 1988, Meidinger is one of only a few NMs in Alabama; in fact, on this rating list, he is second only to Stuart Rachels.)

“1991 State Open,” *Antics* 1992, vol. 1, p. 14-17. (Meidinger becomes an Alabama co-champion in 1991.)

“The Alabama State Championship,” *Antics* Fall 1992, p. 4. (Meidinger becomes an Alabama co-champion in 1992.)

“Meidinger Sweeps State Championship” by Rhodes Peele. *Antics* November 1994, p. 10-11. (Meidinger wins the 1994 Alabama State Championship with 7/7; the tournament crosstable shows who he defeated in each round.)

Magic City Open 1991 (Open Section) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199112085780.1> (Meidinger wins the 1991 Magic City Open.)

Space City Open 1992 (Open Section) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199204125940.2> (Meidinger wins the 1992 Space City Open.)

Space City Open 1993 (Open Section) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199304043970.1> (Meidinger wins the 1993 Space City Open.)

THE PERFECT RUN

“Games from the Champ” by Michael Schaetzle. *Antics* November 1994, p. 14. (The notation for Meidinger’s Round 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 games are provided. Note: in the *Antics*, there are some notation errors in a few of these games. For example, in Round 2, Meidinger-Whatley, Black’s 21st move was actually 21...Qa6, not ...a6. In the Round 3 game, Melvin-Meidinger, Black’s 24th move was actually 24...Rc8, not ...Re8.)

Melvin, B-Meidinger, 1994 Alabama State Championship: game score from Charles Meidinger's archives.

"Meidinger Sweeps State Championship" by Rhodes Peele. *Antics* November 1994, p. 10-11. (*The ratings of the players in the presented games from the 1994 Alabama State Championships are provided in the tournament crosstable: Meidinger was rated (2186) when he played these games against Andrew Whatley (1964), Bill Melvin (2173), Rhodes Peele (1870), and Patrick Alford (1836).*)

MEIDINGER'S LEGACY

"2002 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* Fall 2002, p. 9-14. (*Details are given on the 2002 state championship; Meidinger becomes a state co-champion.*)

"Letter from the Editor" by Scott Varagona. *Antics* Fall 2012, p. 2. (*Meidinger becomes an Alabama State Co-Champion in 2012.*)

Huntsville City Championship 2019 crosstable from [uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org):
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?201909232952> (*Meidinger wins the 2019 Huntsville City Championship.*)

"2020 U.S. Amateur Teams: South" by Aamir A. Azhar & Yousef R. Azhar. *Chess Life* July 2020, p. 22-23. (*Meidinger wins the top first board prize for his 4.5/5 performance on the "Huntsville Rookets" team.*)

Private correspondence with Bill Melvin, 2021. (*Bill Melvin discusses Meidinger's style.*)

Brent Inman: The Great American

"Turkey Shoot" by Larry Britt. *Antics* December 1977, p. 22. (*Brent Inman is listed as an unrated player at this November 1977 tournament.*)

"1978 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* November 1978, p. 9-12. (*Brent gets second place in the 1978 Alabama State Championship, Amateur Section; the caption under his photo calls him "Great American."*)

"The 1984 Alabama State Chess Championship" by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1984, p. 3. (*An example of "Brent Inman G.A." is seen in a tournament crosstable in the Antics.*)

"1980 Pensacola Beach Open," *Antics* January 1981, p. 4-5. (*Brent ties for first at the 1980 Pensacola Beach Open.*)

"Coming of Age" by Rich Bellezza. *Antics* January 1981, p. 5. (*Brent ties for first at the 1980 Pensacola Beach Open.*)

"The 9th Annual Jaguar Open," *Antics* January 1981, p. 14. (*Brent ties for first at the Jaguar Open with Tom Denton, ahead of Joe Jurjevich.*)

"Queen of Hearts," *Antics* April 1981, p. 16-17. (*Brent ties for first at the 1981 Queen of Hearts, Open Section; his pre-tournament rating is 1933.*)

"Ye Olde South" by Lars Britt. *Antics* August 1981, p. 21. (*Brent has achieved an Expert rating of 2067 by April of 1981.*)

"Mobile Chess Championship," *Antics* November 1981, p. 26. (*Brent wins his first Mobile Chess Club Championship in August 1981.*)

"From the Winter Knights Open" by Brent Inman. *Antics* February 1983, p. 10. (*Brent annotates the game de Brito (2403) - Inman (2123) from the Winter Knights Open of the year 1982.*)

"Winter Knights Classic," *Antics* February 1983, p. 7. (*The crosstable for the Winter Knights tournament is given; de Brito-Inman takes place in Round 2.*)

Winter Knights Classic tournament ad from *Antics* November 1982, p. 5. (*The Winter Knights tournament takes place in Jackson, Mississippi.*)

THE MASTERPIECE

"Daugherty-Inman" annotated by Brent Inman. *Antics* November 1984, p. 8-9. (*Brent annotates his "greatest masterpiece," the game Daugherty (1957) - Inman (2107) from the 1984 Alabama State Championship.*)

"The 1984 Alabama State Chess Championship" by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1984, p. 3. (*The 1984 state championship takes place in Mobile; the game Daugherty-Inman takes place in Round 2.*)

Modern Chess Openings by Nick de Firmian. 15th edition; Random House, 2008. p. 555. (Some details on the variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense seen in Daugherty-Inman are provided.)

THE FRUIT OF TANTALUS

"The 1984 Alabama State Chess Championship" by Lars Britt. *Antics* November 1984, p. 3. (Brent ties for second place, half a point behind Stuart Rachels.)

"1987 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* May 1988, p. 10. (Brent loses in the last round to Kyle Therrell.)

Brent Inman player profile on uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlMain.php?11337546> (Brent has the National Master title.)

Private correspondence with Brent Inman, 2019-2020. (Brent ties for top Expert prize at a U.S. Open in the late '80s or early '90s; this is when he achieves the National Master title.)

1992 Louisiana State Championship crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199209076740> (Brent ties for first with 6/7.)

"The 1983 Mobile Championship," *Antics* January 1984, p. 10. (Brent gets clear first place at the 1983 Mobile City Championship.)

"1989 Mobile City Championship," *Antics* March 1990, p. 15. (Brent gets clear first place at the 1989 Mobile City Championship with 4.5/5; he finishes ahead of three computers.)

"1996 Alabama Chess Championship," note by Rhodes Peele. *Antics* November 1996, p. 9. (Brent Inman and Rhodes Peele become 1996 Alabama State Champions.)

"Crosstables," *Antics* November 1996, p. 14. (Brent scores 4.5/6 at the 1996 Alabama State Championship.)

BRENT AT HIS BEST

“53rd Alabama State Chess Championship” by Caesar Lawrence. *Antics* Fall 2006, p. 13. (*Brent becomes a 2006 state co-champion along with two other players with a score of 4/5.*)

2008 Alabama State Championship (Open) crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200809218481.1> (*Brent ties for first to become a 2008 Alabama State Co-Champion; the players’ ratings in the game Stevenson (2035) - Inman (2133) are provided.*)

2008 Louisiana G/30 Championship crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200806283331> (*Brent gets clear first place with 4.5/5.*)

Stevenson,W-Inman,B, 2008 Alabama State Championship: game score from Brent Inman’s archives.

Private correspondence with Brent Inman, 2019-2020. (*Brent gives some commentary on Stevenson-Inman.*)

“Back After a Break” by Brent Inman. *Antics* Spring Summer 2008, p. 6. (*Brent mentions having “only recently” taken up playing Alekhine’s Defense.*)

GRAY-HAIRED LIONS

“The Alabama Senior Chess Championship,” report by Scott Varagona; game submitted by Brent Inman. *Antics* Summer 2019, p. 10-11. (*Details on the inaugural Alabama Senior Chess Championship are given; the notation for Meidinger (2000) - Inman (2111) is provided.*)

THE “GREAT” NICKNAME

Private correspondence with Brent Inman, 2019-2020. (*Brent explains the origin story for the “Great American” nickname.*)

Bill Melvin: "Incorrect" Chess

"2000 Alabama State Championship Report" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* November 2000, p. 5-9. (*Bill gives his own account of the 2000 Alabama State Championship.*)

"2000 Alabama Chess Championship Crosstable," *Antics* August 2001, p. 18-19.

Private correspondence with Bill Melvin, 2020. (*Bill was 17 when he played in his first tournament, the U.S. Junior Open, in 1982; he scored 4-4 and tied for the unrated prize; he became a National Master in 1987.*)

"82 Junior Open," *TCN* August-September 1982 (vol. 24, no. 4), p. 42-43. (*Bill Melvin appears as an unrated player in the crosstable for the U.S. Junior Open.*)

"The 2nd Annual Brewer State Open," *Antics* February 1983, p. 4-5. (*Bill Melvin appears on the crosstable with a rating of 1494.*)

"The 1985 Vulcan Open" by David Rachels. *Antics* August 1985, p. 6-7. (*Bill has a pre-tournament rating of 2082.*)

"Magic City Open," *Antics* March 1990, p. 4. (*Bill ties for first at the 1989 Magic City Open.*)

"Alabama Champions," *Antics* 1991, vol. 1, p. 6-8. (*Bill gets clear first with 5/6 at the 1990 Alabama State Championship.*)

"Vulcan Open Crosstable," *Antics* 1991, unlabeled volume (vol. 4?), p. 8. (*Bill gets clear first place, and is listed as having a pre-tournament rating of 2212, at the 1991 Vulcan Open.*)

"The Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* Fall 1992, p. 4. (*Bill ties for first to become an Alabama State Co-Champion in 1992. Kyle Therrell won the trophy on tiebreaks.*)

Alabama 1995 State Championship crosstable from [uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org):
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199509047980.1> (*Melvin, Therrell, and Whatley become 1995 Alabama state champions.*)

"44th Alabama State Championship Crosstable," *Antics* November 1997-January 1998, p. 15-17. (*Bill becomes Alabama State Champion along with Andrew Whatley.*)

Private correspondence with Bill Melvin, 2020. (*Kyle Therrell won the state championship tiebreaks in 1995; Bill won the tiebreak in 1997.*)

"Crosstables," *Antics* November 1998-January 1999, p. 15-16. (*Bill Melvin gets clear first in the 1998 Alabama State Championship.*)

Huntsville City Championship 1995 crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199510131660> (*Bill becomes the 1995 Huntsville City Champion.*)

"The Killing Fields" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* February-April 1999, p. 5. (*Bill won the 1997 and 1998 Huntsville City Championships with 5-0 scores.*)

"1998 Vulcan Open" by Bob Rieves. *Antics* August-October 1998, p. 10-12. (*Bill wins clear first with 3/4 at the 1998 Vulcan Open.*)

1994 Space City Open crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199404178910> (*Bill ties for first at the 1994 Space City Open.*)

1995 Space City Open crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199503195480.2> (*Bill gets clear first at the 1995 Space City Open.*)

"Space City Open Crosstable," *Antics* August-October 1999, p. 12. (*Bill Melvin gets clear first place at the 1999 Space City Open.*)

"Road to a 2300 Rating (Part II)" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* February 1997, p. 17-21. (*Bill reaches a rating of 2300 by going 5-0 in the 1996 Southern Congress tournament in Atlanta.*)

27th Annual Southern Congress crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199604074560.1> (*Bill reaches a 2305 rating.*)

"The Immortal Mr. Magoo" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* November 1994, p. 12-13. (*Bill annotates his greatest game, Melvin,B (2173) - Cunningham (2204), from the year 1994.*)

CHAOS INCARNATE

"Space City Open Games" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* August-October 1999, p. 7-9. (*Bill annotates the game Bereolos (2380) - Melvin,B (2271) from the year 1999.*)

Modern Chess Openings by Nick de Firmian. 15th edition; Random House, 2008. p. 669-671. (Some details on the variation of the Benko Gambit seen in Bereolos-Melvin,B are provided.)

“KILLING FIELDS”

“The Killing Fields” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* February-April 1999, p. 4-5. (Bill mentions getting his first ever win against Kyle Therrell using a trap in the Keres Attack.)

Huntsville Vacation Finals crosstable from uschess.org:

<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199208298950.1> (Bill defeats Kyle Therrell with the Keres Attack trap in the game Melvin,B (2218) - Therrell (2211).)

“Road to a 2300 Rating (Part II)” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* February 1997, p. 18. (Bill uses the Ponziani to defeat a master: Melvin,B-Bereolos, 1996.)

“Andrews-Melvin Vulcan Open 2002” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Fall 2002, p. 14. (Bill uses the Queen’s Gambit Accepted to defeat a master.)

“Ups and Downs of a Sacrificial Madman” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* May-July 1999, p. 8. (Bill annotates the game Caveney (2075) - Melvin,B (2271) from the year 1999.)

Bird’s Opening by Timothy Taylor. Everyman Chess, 2005. p. 156-159. (Details are provided on the sideline of From’s Gambit seen in Caveney-Melvin,B, 1999.)

CAÏSSA’S ALCHEMIST

“Big Swindles” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Winter 2002, p. 9. (Bill annotates the game Del Rosario (2027) - Melvin,B (2208) from the year 2002.)

“Recent Games” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Summer 2003, p. 18-23. (Bill annotates the game Prilleltensky (1856) - Melvin,B (2200) from the year 2003.)

2003 North Tennessee Winter Open crosstable from uschess.org:

<https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200301193260.1> (This tournament takes place in Clarksville.)

THE COMEBACK

“2000 Alabama State Championship Report” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* November 2000, p. 5-9. (*Bill wins the title of Alabama State Champion in the year 2000.*)

“2001 Alabama State Championship,” *Antics* November 2001, p. 4. (*Bill gets clear first with 5.5/6 at the 2001 Alabama State Championship.*)

2006 Alabama State Championship crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200609035261.1> (*Bill misses out on a state co-championship because of a last-round loss.*)

2009 Alabama State Championship crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?200909131561.6> (*Bill misses out on a state co-championship because of a last-round loss.*)

“Bill Melvin Wins 8th State Title” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Fall 2016, p. 4-6. (*Bill gets clear first at the 2016 Alabama State Championship with 5.5/6.*)

“Two Last Round Games” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Summer 2018, p. 4-8. (*Bill ties for first at the 2018 Rea Hayes Open in Tennessee and the 2018 Falcon Chess Invitational in Montevallo, Alabama.*)

“Fall Tournament Results,” *Antics* Fall 2018, p. 15-16. (*Bill ties for first in the 2018 Huntsville City Championship and wins clear first at the 2018 North Alabama Championship.*)

“Washington International Games” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Spring 2019, p. 4-8. (*Bill achieves the final norm needed to attain the Norm-Based Life Master title in 2018.*)

BILL’S LEGACY

Bill Melvin player profile on uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlMain.php?12406133> (*Bill has the National Master, Original Life Master, and Norm-Based Life Master titles; he has directed various tournaments in Alabama.*)

“President’s Message” by Bill Melvin. *Antics* November 1996, p. 3-4. (*Bill becomes Alabama Chess Federation president.*)

"Melvin,B-Varagona,S" by Bill Melvin. *Antics* Winter 2002. (*An example of Bill annotating one of his losses for the Antics is provided.*)

Other Great Champions

GORDON BATES

"Bates Scores in Alabama Meet," *Chess Life* Vol. VIII, No. 23 (August 5, 1954 edition), p. 1. (*Gordon Bates wins the first Alabama State Championship.*)

"Alabama State Championship," *Chess Life* Vol. VIII, No. 24 (August 20, 1954 edition), p. 7. (*The crosstable for the first ever Alabama State Championship is provided.*)

"Chess Life, Here and There," *Chess Life* November 1965, p. 248. (*Gordon Bates wins the 1965 Alabama Open.*)

"Games by USCF Members" annotated by John W. Collins. *Chess Life* December 1965, p. 261. (*Collins annotates Martinez-Bates from the 1965 Alabama State Championship; the players' ratings are not listed.*)

BRAD GAMBRELL

"Lines from Ernie Cockrell" by Ernie Cockrell. *Antics* November 1989, p. 11. (*Brad Gambrell is mentioned as being one of the founding members of the Birmingham Chess Club in the early 1950s.*)

"Scrivener Wins Alabama Open," *Chess Life* Vol. XII, No. 4 (October 20, 1957 edition), p. 1. (*At the 1957 Alabama Open, Ken Williamson and Brad Gambrell were the top Alabama players with scores of 5-2 each, but Ken Williamson won the state title on tiebreaks.*)

"Di Paula 1959 Alabama Open Champion," *Chess Life* Vol. XIV, No. 15 (April 5, 1960 edition), p. 1. (*Brad Gambrell ties for first in the 1959 Alabama Open, but Di Paula won the tiebreaker.*)

"Alabama Champ," *Chess Life* October 1961, p. 284. (*Gambrell goes 7-0 to win the 1961 Alabama Championship.*)

"Chess Life, Here and There," *Chess Life* October 1964, p. 248. (*Gambrell gets clear first at the 1964 Alabama Open.*)

"Lines from Ernie Cockrell" by Ernie Cockrell. *Antics* September 1990, p. 4. (*Ernie Cockrell writes about his memories of "Brad King's Gambit Gambrell."*)

"Birmingham Chess Club: Special Issue of the Club Newsletter: H. B. Gambrell," *Antics* June 1981, p. 23. (*The notation for the game Gambrell-Gwin, 1980, is provided; the players' ratings are not listed.*)

KEN WILLIAMSON

"Scrivener Wins Alabama Open," *Chess Life* Vol. XII, No. 4 (October 20, 1957 edition), p. 1. (*Ken Williamson becomes the 1957 Alabama State Champion.*)

"Tennessee Beats Alabama," *TCN* January 1972 (vol. 14, no. 1), p. 1. (*Ken Williamson is identified as Alabama State Champion, which indicates that he won the title in 1971.*)

"Alabama Open," *Antics* October 1972, p. 2. (*Ken Williamson wins the 1972 Alabama State Championship; the report says he "again took the State title," which is further evidence that he was the 1971 champion as well.*)

"Mid-South, 1964," *TCN* January 1965 (vol. 7, no. 1), p. 7. (*The notation for Williamson-Mitchell is provided; the players' ratings are not listed.*)

"Mid-South Open," *TCN* November 1964 (vol. 6, no. 6), p. 2. (*The 1964 Mid-South Open is set to take place in Memphis in November.*)

STEVE HUDSON

"Alabama Open," *Antics* November 1976, p. 6-7. (*Steve Hudson wins clear first at the 1976 Alabama State Championship.*)

"1979 Alabama Open," *Antics* November 1979, p. 6-7. (*Steve Hudson wins clear first at the 1979 Alabama State Championship with a 7-0 score; the notation for the game Hudson (1945) - Lucas (1930) is provided.*)

"1980 Alabama Open," *Antics* November 1980, p. 4. (*Steve Hudson ties for first and wins the tiebreaker at the 1980 Alabama State Championship.*)

"Hudson: Steve Hudson Wins Birmingham City Championship," *Antics* November 1979, p. 5. (*Hudson finishes ahead of Therrell and Rachels.*)

TOM DENTON

"1979 Alabama Hi School Team Championship," *Antics* June 1979, p. 6-9. (*Tom Denton plays on McGill-Toolen's team, which won the 1979 Alabama High School Championship.*)

"Alabama Hi School Team Championship: McGill-T. Retains Title," *Antics* July 1980, p. 14. (*Tom Denton finishes with a 5-0 score as second board of the winning McGill-Toolen team in 1980.*)

"Alabama Hi School Team Championship," *Antics* August 1980, p. 8-9. (*A full report and crosstable of the 1980 Alabama High School Team Championship is provided.*)

"Alabama High School Team Championship 1982" by Lars Britt. *Antics* June 1982, p. 10-11. (*As first board, Tom Denton leads his McGill-Toolen high school team to victory at the Alabama High School Team Championship of 1982.*)

"Rachels, Denton Win Title" by Bill Tompkins and Joel Galle. *Antics* November 1983, p. 1, 4-5. (*Tom Denton ties for first with Stuart Rachels at the 1983 Alabama State Championship.*)

"1983 – 'The Year of the Underdog'" by Tom Denton. *Antics* November 1983, p. 6-7. (*Tom Denton is 'the man from E.G.O.'; Tom annotates Denton-Therrell.*)

"Rachels, Denton Win Title" by Bill Tompkins and Joel Galle. *Antics* November 1983, p. 1, 4-5. (*The players' ratings in the game Denton (2038) - Therrell (2257) are provided.*)

"1987 Alabama State Chess Championship," *Antics* May 1988, p 10-11. (*Kyle Therrell and Tom Denton become 1987 state champions.*)

The Best I Saw in Chess by Stuart Rachels. New in Chess, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 2020. (*In Chapter 16, Rachels annotates the game Rachels (2292) - Denton (2109) from the year 1983.*)

ANDREW WHATLEY

1992 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199203217180.1> (*Whatley ties for first in the High School, i.e., Open section.*)

1993 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199305080020.1> (*Whatley gets clear first in the Open section.*)

1996 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199603024100.1> (*Whatley gets clear first in the Open section.*)

1997 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199703152160.3> (*Whatley gets clear first in the Open section.*)

1999 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199903138580.4> (*Whatley gets clear first in the Open section.*)

Alabama 1995 State Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199509047980.1> (*Melvin, Therrell, and Whatley become 1995 Alabama State Champions.*)

"44th Alabama State Championship Crosstable," *Antics* November 1997-January 1998, p. 15-17. (*Bill Melvin and Andrew Whatley become Alabama State Champions.*)

"My Best Game from the Denker" by Andrew Whatley. *Antics* November 1997-January 1998, p. 13-14. (*Andrew Whatley becomes co-winner of the 1997 Denker Tournament of High School Champions.*)

"Winning the U.S. Junior Open" by Andrew Whatley. *Antics* August-October 1999, p. 4-6. (*Andrew Whatley wins the 1999 U.S. Junior Open.*)

Andrew Whatley FIDE player profile: <https://ratings.fide.com/profile/2013312> (*Whatley is an FM.*)

"The U.S. Open" by Andrew Whatley. *Antics* November 1996, p. 16. (*Whatley annotates Whatley-Ferber, 1996.*)

97th Annual U.S. Open - 1996 tournament crosstable from uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199608166460> (*The players' ratings in the game Whatley (2192) - Ferber (1839) are provided, as well as the location of the tournament.*)

MATTHEW PUCKETT

Matthew Puckett player profile on uschess.org:
<http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlMain.php?12569456> (*Puckett becomes a National Master in 1995 and an Original Life Master in 2022; he has been playing tournament chess since 1992.*)

"1999 Alabama State Championship Crosstable," *Antics* November 1999 - January 2000, p. 14. (*Matthew Puckett becomes Alabama State Co-Champion along with Andy Reeder. Stephen Muhummad of Georgia won the tournament, but he was not eligible for the title.*)

"Nearly Killed on Cloud Nine: My 2019 Alabama State Championship" by Scott Varagona. *Antics* Fall 2019, p. 6-15. (*Varagona and Puckett tie for first at the 2019 Alabama State Championship.*)

"Fall Photos and Tournament Results." *Antics* Fall 2019, p. 16. (*Puckett becomes 2019 Alabama Co-Champion.*)

1994 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199403042640.4> (*Puckett wins the 1994 Alabama Scholastic Individual Championship, Open Section.*)

1995 Alabama State Scholastic Individual Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199503043090.1> (*Puckett wins the 1995 Alabama Scholastic Individual Championship, Open Section.*)

1993 National Denker Tournament of High School Champions crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199308140020> (*Puckett represents Alabama in the 1993 Denker Tournament of High School Champions.*)

1994 National Denker Tournament of High School Champions crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199408197430>

(Puckett represents Alabama in the 1994 Denker Tournament of High School Champions.)

1995 National Denker Tournament of High School Champions crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199508181880> *(Puckett represents Alabama in the 1995 Denker Tournament of High School Champions.)*

1996 U.S. Cadet Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199608256550> *(Puckett gets second place at the 1996 U.S. Cadet Championship.)*

1997 U.S. Cadet Championship crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?199707139040> *(Puckett plays in the 1997 U.S. Cadet Championship.)*

Chesstempo.com games database:
<https://old.chesstempo.com/gamedb/game/5263919> *(The notation for Puckett (2141) - Talukdar (2329) is given.)*

2021 Charlotte Open crosstable from uschess.org: <https://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202112302852.1> *(Puckett plays Talukdar in Round 5.)*

Long Live the Kings

Chess for Beginners by Al Horowitz. Harper Perennial, New York, 1992 (original edition published by Z. E. Harvey, Inc., 1956). p. 138.

Alabama State Champions List 1954-2022

The following list is based on my own research, expanding upon—and, in some cases, correcting—an earlier list published in the February 1997 *Antics* by Bobby Edwards. Justification for most entries in this updated version of the list may be found in “Alabama State Champions List” (Spring 2022 *Antics*) as well as “The Lost State Champions” (Spring 2020 *Antics*) and “The Lost State Champions: Part II” (Spring 2022 *Antics*). For some championships in the distant past, determining the winner’s name has been difficult. Still, at the time of writing, based on all information available to me, I believe that this list is correct and complete. If we discover that more corrections do need to be made to this list, the corrections will be noted in future volumes of the *Antics*.

1954 Gordon Bates
1955 Lt. Edmund Godbold
1956 Michael J. Deleanu
1957 Ken Williamson
1958 Brad Wade
1959 Frank Di Paula
1960 Dr. Rodney Baine

1961 Brad Gambrell
1962 Milan Momic
1963 Milan Momic
1964 Brad Gambrell
1965 Gordon Bates
1966 Milan Momic
1967 Marty Appleberry
1968 Charles Cleveland
1969 Charles Irvine
1970 Charles Irvine
1971 Ken Williamson
1972 Ken Williamson
1973 Charles Irvine
1974 Charles Irvine
1975 Elias Antonas
1976 Steve Hudson
1977 Dr. Fredrich Bittner
1978 Robert Jurjevich
1979 Steve Hudson
1980 Steve Hudson / Joe Jurjevich
1981 Kyle Therrell
1982 Kyle Therrell / Stuart Rachels
1983 Stuart Rachels / Tom Denton
1984 Stuart Rachels
1985 Stuart Rachels
1986 Stuart Rachels
1987 Kyle Therrell / Tom Denton
1988 Mark Walton
1989 Joe Jurjevich
1990 Bill Melvin
1991 Hisham Sunna / Charles Meidinger
1992 Kyle Therrell / Charles Meidinger / Bill Melvin
1993 Scott Godfrey
1994 Charles Meidinger

1995 Kyle Therrell / Bill Melvin / Andrew Whatley
1996 Brent Inman / Rhodes Peele
1997 Bill Melvin / Andrew Whatley
1998 Bill Melvin
1999 Andy Reeder / Matthew Puckett
2000 Bill Melvin
2001 Bill Melvin
2002 Joe Jurjevich / Charles Meidinger / Scott Varagona
2003 Joseph Marcrum
2004 Gerald Larson / Ozgur Aktunc
2005 Scott Varagona
2006 Joe Jurjevich / Brent Inman / Calvin Bomar
2007 Scott Varagona
2008 Scott Varagona / Joe Jurjevich / Brent Inman / Alex Weiner
2009 Bradley Denton / Will Stevenson
2010 Emory Tate
2011 Will Stevenson
2012 Bryan Tillis / Charles Meidinger
2013 Scott Varagona
2014 Stephen W. Adams
2015 Scott Varagona
2016 Bill Melvin
2017 Scott Varagona
2018 Scott Varagona / Tyler Freeman
2019 Scott Varagona / Matthew Puckett
2020 Scott Varagona
2021 Chibuzo Ilonze
2022 Scott Varagona

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Varagona is a National Master and Original Life Master from Birmingham, Alabama. He is the first person to become Alabama State Chess Champion ten times. He has served as Editor of *Alabama Chess Antics* for over ten years; along the way, he has also won awards from Chess Journalists of America for his writings on chess in Alabama. He has a Ph.D. in Mathematics from Auburn University and teaches mathematics as an Associate Professor at the University of Montevallo.