

My Favorite Event: The 2022 All-Girls Nationals.

BY **LIORA GINZBURG**

ANNOTATIONS BY (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED) **LIORA GINZBURG AND JAY STALLINGS**

HAVING BEEN CANCELED FOR two consecutive years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 Kasparov Chess Foundation (KCF) All-Girls National Chess Championship drew 384 very enthusiastic players, representing 33 states, to Chicago for three days of non-stop chess.

The environment in an all-girls tournament is special. One of my first tournaments was the 2019 All-Girls, and unlike some other events I'd played, when I spoke to my opponents, they genuinely wanted to hear what I had to say. It was the perfect experience to

Team Discovery MS, left to right: Coach Sarah, Ranae Bartlett, Christina Yang, Caroline Wang, Nirvana Rajbhandari, Julie Goldston.

welcome me into the world of serious chess.

I also appreciated the tournament's team-like vibe: players shared a close-knit, yet results-oriented, attitude. There was a sense of camaraderie with people on the surrounding boards. I have yet to play in a tournament that fostered a similar environment. It was great to feel a part of something bigger than myself, especially as someone who had not (at that time) been on a team.

In 2022, I returned to the KCF All-Girls, but this time, I had backup. The Archer School for Girls in Los Angeles sent nine players, including your author, to test our skills, and the team component was invigorating. Our team grew closer through shared struggle, and with each round, my teammates brought new friends they had

just met into our team room. It felt like we were all growing, in chess and in life, with every round.

MISS THREE-TIME

With many players aging out of their previous sections, the competition was fierce, and everyone was trying to prove how much they had improved during quarantine!

Take WFM Iris Mou. She was just 12 years old in April, but she had improved so much that she played up with the older girls. Her gambit was successful, as she went undefeated in the Under-18, scoring 5½/6 to win her section.

Mou is from New York, where she plays on the Dalton chess team. This was her third win at the All-Girls — she was first in



PHOTO: COURTESY RANAЕ BARTLETT

HISTORY OF THE ALL-GIRLS

▶ THE KASPAROV CHESS FOUNDATION celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, and the KCF National All-Girls Championship, founded in 2004, is one of the organization's flagship events. Since 2011, Renaissance Knights Foundation of Chicago has organized this event in partnership with KCF. Renaissance Knights was founded by David and Sheila Heiser.

The event was held first in Chicago (2004-2006), and then Dallas, (2007-2009). After a one-year layover in Columbus, Ohio (2010), it has been held in Chicago ever since. If you look back to the original 2004 rating report, you will see

two future masters (WIM Alisa Melekhina and WFM Abby Marshall) among the Under-12 champions.

The All-Girls highest attendance was in 2018 with 487 players. It dipped the following year primarily because the adjoining Hyatt filled up early due to a Star Wars convention!

The 2023 All-Girls will remain in the Windy City, but it will move to the Palmer House Chicago, one of the largest hotels in the area. Its downtown location is at the heart of the Theater District, and it is two blocks from Millennium Park.

the Under-10 in 2018 and took top honors in the Under-12 in 2019.

I had the "pleasure" of losing to Mou in the second round. As soon as the pairings went up, my teammates started asking me if Mou was "better than our coach." Of course I said, "Yes!" The players on my team were so excited to see such a strong, young female player in action.

NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE (E21)

Liora Ginzburg (1638)

WFM Iris Mou (2173)

2022 All-Girls (2), Chicago, 04.23.2022

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. d4 e6 3. c4 Bb4+ 4. Nc3 O-O 5. Bd2 Bxc3 6. Bxc3 Ne4 7. Qc2 Nxc3 8. Qxc3 d6 9. e4 Nd7 10. Bd3 e5 11. O-O a5 12. Rad1 Qe7 13. Bc2 Re8 14. Rfe1 Nf6 15. b3?

A useless pawn move that weakens the dark squares and lessens the prospects of White's bishop.

15. ... Bg4 16. h3 Bh5 17. dxe5 dxe5 18. g4 Bg6 19. Nh4 Qe6 20. Nf5 b6 21. c5 Qc6 22. g5 Nd7



Right: A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, Sarah Ramson met up with Jedi Master Aayla Secura at the 2019 All-Girls.

Even though there are three attackers aiming at the pinned c-pawn, a careful examination reveals: a) Black will not want to take with the b-pawn as it would weaken the queenside pawns beyond repair; b) capturing with the knight turns it around so it is a black piece on c5 that is pinned; and c) a capture by the queen would hang the knight IF White's queen were protected. Therefore only 23. Re3! would prevent the loss of the pawn outright.

23. b4? axb4 24. Qxb4 Nxc5 25. Bb3?!

A good idea, but White misses the fact that, in the ensuing moves, Black's knight will be able to escape attack while simultaneously blocking the d-file and indirectly protecting the e-pawn (see move 27 for Black).

25. ... Nxb3 26. Ne7+ Rxe7 27. Qxe7 Nd4!

White is suddenly unable to capture the knight at b3, play the deadly Rd1-d8+, or even take the poisoned e-pawn due to ... Nd4-f3+.

28. Rc1??

(see diagram top of next column)

White lashes out with an attacking move, but Black's heroic knight springs into action once again.

28. ... Ne2+! 29. Rxe2 Qxc1+ 30. Kg2

And Black closed out the game for the full point.



30. ... Qc4 31. Rd2 Qc5 32. Rd8+ Rxd8 33. Qxd8+ Qf8 34. Qxc7 Bxe4+ 35. f3 Bd5 36. Qxe5 Qa8 37. Qe3 Qxa2+ 38. Kg3 Qa8 39. f4 b5 40. Qc5 Bc4 41. h4 Qf8 42. Qa7 b4 43. f5 and White resigned.

Seventeen-year-old WFM Nastassja Matus tied for second place in the Under-18 section. She said that "like many other girls,



Above: Liora Ginzburg at the 2022 All-Girls. Below: the “calm before the storm” in the tournament hall.

[she] made a lot of good friends” at the All-Girls, and that the “very inviting and

comforting environment” is conducive to “making it always a very fun and pleasant experience.”

Ananya Ananth (Virginia) was one of the three co-winners in the Under-14. She enjoys everything about the All-Girls. “I really love the little prizes they give out because it’s something the players can look forward to in each round,” said Ananth. “These events are really nice and fun to play in for me because I have made so many new friends in these tournaments that I still keep in touch with over the years.

“My performance in this event was decent, but not the best. Below is perhaps my most interesting game.”

SICILIAN DEFENSE (B51)

Chloe Stark (1535)

Ananya Ananth (1858)

2022 All-Girls (2), Chicago, 04.23.2022

Annotations by Ananya Ananth

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Nc3 Nc6 4. Bb5 e5 5. d3 a6 6. Ba4 Ne7 7. Be3 g6 8. Bg5 Bg7 9. Nd5 Qa5+ 10. c3 Nxd5 11. exd5 b5! 12. Bb3 Nb8 13. Nd2 h6 14. Be3 O-O 15. Ne4 Qc7 16. Qd2

(see diagram top of next column)

16. ... Kh7!

This move prepares ... f7-f5. If 16. ... f5? immediately White has 17. Nxc5! dxc5 18. d6+. Although the variation 17. Nxc5 f4 18.



Ne6 looks promising for Black, I did not want to take that risk.

17. f4 f5 18. Ng3 exf4 19. Bxf4 Re8+?

The stronger 19. ... g5 wins a piece on the spot.

20. Ne2 Qe7 21. h4 Nd7 22. c4?

This closes the bishop down and gives Black a bigger space advantage on the queenside.

22. ... Nf6 23. Rh3 Ng4 24. Kf1 Qf6 25. Rb1 Bd7 26. Bc2 a5 27. b3 b4 28. Bd1 a4

Breaking into the queenside will give me straightforward ways to win with the open a-file.

29. Rc1 axb3 30. Bxb3 Ba4 31. Rb1 Bxb3 32. axb3 Ra3

White needs room for her pieces but misses the resourceful 33. d4! cxd4 34. Nc1, with 35. Nd3 next.

33. Rh1 Rea8 34. g3?



Even though it is still losing for White, 34. Nc1 would have stopped my next move.

34. ... Ra2 35. Qd1



35. ... Qe7! 36. Bd2 Bc3! 37. Nxc3 bxc3 38. Qe1 Qxe1+ 39. Bxe1 Ra1?

With time running low, I played a move that I knew was winning, but missed the quick mate 39. ... Ne3+ 40. Kg1 Rg2 mate.

40. Rxa1 Rxa1 41. Kg2 c2 42. Bd2 Rxh1 43. Kxh1 Nf2+ 44. Kg2 Nxd3 45. Kf3 c1=Q 46. Bxc1 Nxc1 47. b4 Nd3 48. bxc5 Nxc5 49. Kf4 Kg7 50. g4 fxg4 51. Kxg4 Kf6 52. Kf4 g5+ 53. hxg5+ hxg5+ 54. Kg4 Ne4, White resigned.

Jasmine Su won the Under-12 division. Here, she gets to play a clearance move that simultaneously threatens a pin and a fork!

BAM!

Parinya Jain (1610)

Jasmine Su (2103)

2022 All-Girls, Chicago, 04.23.2022



BLACK TO PLAY

15. ... Ne4!

Jasmine threatens the queen and the rook-fork on the f2-square. If 16. fxe4 Black wins the queen with 16. ... Bg5.

A WINNING TEAM'S RECIPE

Teams from New York City dominated the

event, taking 17 of 18 of the top three spots across the six sections. Nothing new there. But in the Under 16 division, it was Discovery Middle School from Madison, Alabama, that took home the national title. So how did they do it?

MEET RANAE BARTLETT

Ranae Bartlett is the Executive Director of the Madison City Chess League and a current Madison City Council member. She has guided the chess programs in Madison from their very humble beginnings to national prominence. In 2019, the League received a Women's Program grant from US Chess that supported bringing more Madison girls into the game.

While the pandemic initially foiled these efforts — the 2020 and 2021 All-Girls were canceled due to COVID-19 — the team kept training in preparation for 2022. This year, with the return of the All-Girls, preparation kicked into high gear with the following initiatives:

- They hired WGM Irina Levitina who instructed and inspired the students;
- They created fun activities that helped motivate and unify the team;
- Sarah May, who had played in the event 9 and 10 years before, returned to coach the team in Chicago;
- A teacher sponsor, Julie Goldston, made the trip in support of the team;
- A financial sponsor, Nilmini Thompson (CEO of SPS, Inc.) helped cover expenses of the team's trip to Chicago this year.



Above: the victor has claimed her spoils as Dena Wang (Hunter College Elementary, New York, NY) takes home the U8 trophy.

With all this support, the girls were able to play their best chess ever and earn the title of national champions. Truly a team effort! ♠

Jay Stallings and Patricia Brennan contributed to this article.

2022 KCF ALL-GIRLS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AT A GLANCE

APRIL 22-24, 2022 | CHICAGO, IL

INDIVIDUAL

U18: 1st: WFM Iris Mou, 5½/6, 2nd-4th: Omya Vidarthi, WFM Nastassja Matus, and Sneha Prabu, 5. U16: 1st-2nd: Asha Kumar, Yesun Lee, 5½/6, 3rd: Ria Raj, 5. U14: 1st-3rd: Kally Wen, Chloe Gaw, and Ananya Ananth, 5/6. U12: 1st: Jasmine Su, 6/6. 2nd-4th: Parinya Jain, Kylie Zhang, and Michelle Zhang, 5. U10: 1st: Ananya Wadhwa, 6/6. 2nd-4th: Sophie Li, Alice Chovanec, Anagha Sinkar, and Neeli Buchireddy, 5. U8: 1st: Dena Wang, 6/6. 2nd-5th: Rongyu Jiang, Adorabella Zhu, Tiffany Li, and Scarlett Kong, 5.

TEAM

U18: Dalton (New York, NY). U16: Discovery Middle School (Madison, AL). U14: Success Academy Hudson Yards (New York, NY). U12: Hunter College Elementary (New York, NY). U10: Anderson School (New York, NY). U8: Lower Lab School (New York, NY).