



How do you celebrate a milestone like 100,000 members? Here's how!

BY JOHN HARTMANN

IT WAS AUGUST 2019, OR WHAT I HAVE come to think of as the “before-time.”

US Chess events and publication staff assembled in a meeting room at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, Florida. The occasion was the 2019 U.S. Open, but the reason for our meeting was to talk about the future.

With roughly 90,000 members on the books, and knowing how membership ebbed and flowed with the scholastic calendar, we were beginning to think about how to celebrate the 100k mark, which we thought we would hit as early as the spring.

And then... well, you know what happened.

We suffered some brutal years in 2020

and 2021. Membership cratered, bottoming out at just over 51,000 in April 2021. But then COVID-19 vaccines became available for all people age 16 and older. Kids were increasingly back at in-person school, and people began to feel more comfortable engaging in social activities like over-the-board chess. Combine this with the tailwind from “The Queen’s Gambit” and the streaming boom, and our members came back in droves.

By April 2022 we had broken 80,000 members. By January 2023 we were at 96,000 and growing. Staff were alerted to the possibility of our breaking the 100,000 member mark in February, and we thought we had a few

weeks to come up with a plan.

We had four days. (Or what felt like four days, anyway.)

How do you commemorate such an important milestone in US Chess history? The first step was to try and identify our 100,000th member, a task that was surprisingly tricky given the rapid pace of membership purchases and voucher redemptions. Eventually a US Chess forensic team — ok, this is an exaggeration, but not by much! — was able to figure out that nine-year-old Luna Thomas from Salt Lake City, Utah, was lucky number 100,000. You can read more about Luna in our April issue.

But we wanted to do more, because this achievement really was a cumulative effort. Our staff had persisted through some trying months. Members had renewed for years at a time to help us keep the lights on. Donations had come in, and in all shapes and sizes. What could we do to thank everyone for pitching in and supporting US Chess?

And then our Art Director, Natasha Roberts, landed on it: “What about a tournament?”

The First Annual Members Only Blitz Tournament took place on the evening of

PHOTOS: BETSY ZACATE (2019 NES, 2019 ALL GIRLS); DAVID LLADA (2022 K12 GRADES); RANDY ANDERSON (2022 NMS); MARK CIESLIKOWSKI (2022 U.S. OPEN); CAROLINE KING (2022, 2023 NHS)



March 10, online at *Chess.com*, with 433 players turning out to compete in nine rounds of G/3+2 action. US Chess and *Chess.com* memberships were awarded to the top five players overall as well as the top five U1800 and U1200 competitors. (See the “At a Glance” box for the winners.)

There were also “bounty” prizes placed on the five US Chess employees — *Chess Life* editor (and your author) John Hartmann, Digital Assistant JJ Lang, Senior Director of Strategic Communications Dan Lucas, Assistant Director of Events Pete Karagianis, and Director of Member Services Korey Kormick — who participated. The first players to defeat each of our staff members received gift certificates to US Chess Sales.

With such a short organizational lead time, we didn’t know what to expect. Would people turn out on a Friday night to compete for membership extensions? Would they compete with integrity? Would our staff members lose all their games?

I’m pleased to report that everything went about as well as could be hoped for. Chief Tournament Director Judit Sztaray ran a tight ship, and the event was largely free from fair play violations.

Turnout exceeded our expectations, with one player — IM Justin Sarkar — deserving special mention. The only IM in the field, Sarkar “latejoined” the tournament after playing in the Friday night blitz at the Marshall Chess Club. Starting with a zero-point bye, he went a perfect 8/8 to claim a share of first place. Thanks for playing, Justin!

From this player’s perspective, the event was a success, despite the lost rating points! Ultimately I scored a reasonable 5½/9, which — after a total brain freeze in the first round,

where I turned a drawn position into a loss by forgetting to move — felt just about right for my level of play.

Team US Chess was led by Pete Karagianis, who finished with 7½ points. Other staff scores: JJ Lang ended the event with 6½/9. Korey Kormick finished with five points, and Dan Lucas was in the middle of the pack with an even score.

Already we have hired a coach and are training for the Second Annual Members Only Blitz, coming sometime in 2024. ♠

MEMBERS ONLY BLITZ AT A GLANCE

MARCH 10, 2023 | [CHESS.COM](https://chess.com)

OPEN: 1st-5th (in tiebreak order): Adrian Parra, Kumar Kona, Stephen Willy, CM Drhuv Khosla, IM Justin Sarkar, 8/9.

U1800: 1st: Saad Al-deen Mohammad, 7/9. 2nd: Hayk Sardaryan, 7. 3rd-5th: Sebastian Suarez, Bohan Wang, Suranga M. Dharmarante, 6½.

U1200: 1st: JC Abadesco, 5½/9. 2nd-4th: Justin A. Lee, Milam Dobbins, Alexander Rapoport, 5. 5th: Rishik Bhattacharyya, 4½.

For more, visit: new.uschess.org/news/433-compete-first-annual-us-chess-members-only-blitz

OUR MEMBERSHIP THROUGH THE YEARS

BY MELINDA MATTHEWS AND NATASHA ROBERTS

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

A look at US Chess membership on **April 1, 2023:**

Total Membership: **104,645**

Youth (17 and under): **61,420** or **58%** of all members

Females represent **12%** of all members

While they represent **21.5%** of members 10 and under

We have **197** Members **under the age of 1** and **9** **over the age of 100**



1974 ■ 59,779

Membership in US Chess nearly doubles between 1972-1974 following Bobby Fischer's 1972 World Championship victory.

1985 ■ 54,599

Attention again turns to scholastic chess. GM Arnold Denker establishes the Arnold Denker Tournament of High School Champions in 1984, with Alex Fishbein winning the inaugural event in Hollywood, Florida, in 1985.

1972 ■ 30,884

Shelby Lyman's televised commentary — perhaps foreshadowing today's livestreaming — draws rapt audiences as Bobby Fischer wins the 1972 World Championship, igniting a firestorm of interest in chess throughout the nation.



1997 ■ 83,122

The first SuperNationals is held in Knoxville, Tennessee, and attracts 4,298 players.

1977 ■ 46,179

Membership numbers trend downwards as the effects from the "Fischer Boom" begin to fade.

1952 ■ 1,127

The United States Chess Federation forms in 1939 through the merger of the American Chess Federation and National Chess Federation. Combined membership at the time is around 1,000. In 1952, US Chess hires its first Business Manager (a position that later becomes Executive Director) and membership numbers begin to be tracked officially.

1968 ■ 11,202

From the late 1960s-mid 1970s, new national scholastic and youth tournaments, including the U.S. Junior Championship (1966), the National High School Championship (1969), the National Junior High Championship (1973), and the National Elementary Championship (1976), contribute to membership growth.

1958 ■ 2,668

Membership growth remains steady but moderate until 1958, when Bobby Fischer wins the U.S. Championship at age 14, kicking off the "Fischer era." Membership numbers begin to escalate.

2005 ■ 83,547

SuperNationals III, held in Nashville, Tennessee, sets a world record with 5,270 entries. (This record was broken in 2017.)

2018 ■ 91,195

WGM Jennifer Shahade is named Women's Program Director for US Chess and seeks to promote and retain more females in chess.

2-19-2023 ■ 100,179

US Chess's membership tops 100,000 for the first time in its history.



2008 ■ 80,201

The Saint Louis Chess Club opens in 2008, with the World Chess Hall of Fame joining the campus in 2011. The "Sinquefeld Effect" — efforts led by Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefeld to support chess in the United States — contributes to this period of growth for US Chess membership.

2021 ■ 51,777

COVID-19 impacts the world starting in 2020. While the Netflix series, "The Queen's Gambit," fuels intense interest in chess during lockdown, US Chess memberships plummet as over-the-board tournaments cease and players move online.

2022 ■ 82,949

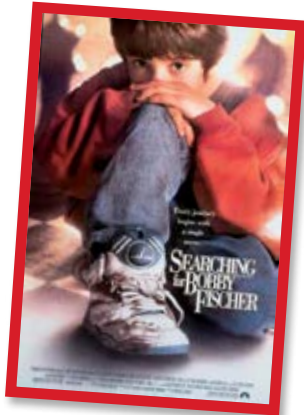
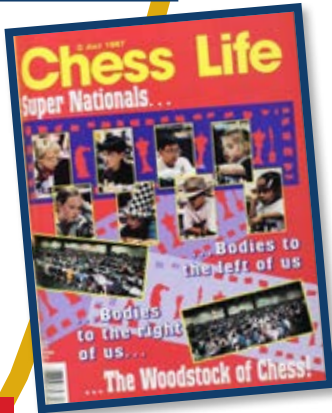
The 2021 U.S. Open and Invitational tournaments kick off US Chess's return to over-the-board play. Membership numbers begin to spike sharply as more OTB opportunities arise.

2014 ■ 77,138

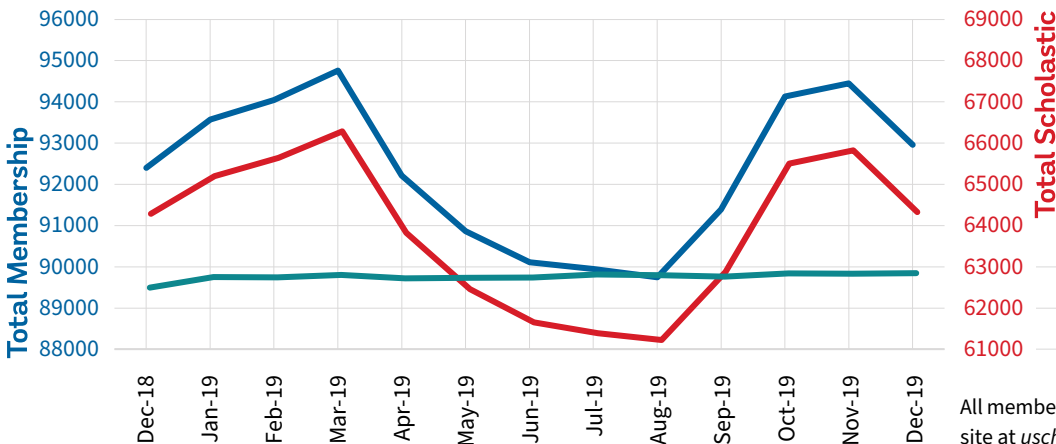
US Chess becomes a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, with a mission to "Empower people, enrich lives, and enhance communities through chess."

1993 ■ 68,679

The movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, based on the book by Fred Waitzkin, is released in 1993 and helps spark a new chess boom that sees membership numbers jump over the next several years.



PEAKS AND VALLEYS OF ONE YEAR: 2019



US Chess membership ebbs and flows throughout the year, with particular correlation to the scholastic season. This graph represents the membership across the calendar year of 2019, comparing the variations in total membership (blue) with those in scholastic related memberships (red) and adult memberships (green). Scholastic activity clearly drives our membership patterns!

All membership data can be found on our website at uschess.org

Puzzles from FIRST ANNUAL



Blitz Tournament

BY JOHN HARTMANN

Our members played some very interesting chess at the First Annual Members Only Blitz Tournament, but they didn't always find all the right moves. Can you do better?

Most of the positions require you to find a mate or win material, and difficulty increases as you proceed. But beware: some positions require you to equalize or find the best defense.

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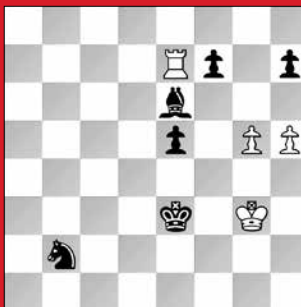
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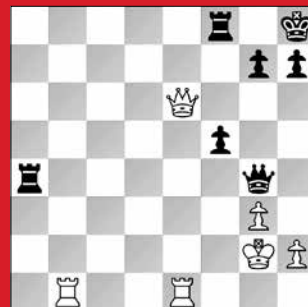
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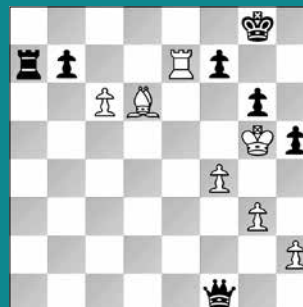
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TACTIC 15.



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TACTIC 16.



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TACTIC 17.



WHITE TO MOVE

SOLUTIONS MEMBERS ONLY

(1) **43. Qh4 mate.** (Iraklic – rompom777, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (2) **11. ... Nxe4+, White resigned.** (BambiPumpkin – Priyansh_2011, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (3) **29. ... Rxh3 mate.** (Kai-m – SaltwaterCrocodiles, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (4) **11. Bxc6+ bxc6 12. Qxd4,** and White went on to win. (YOURKINGWILLFALL4SURE – 1g61-0, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (5) **21. ... Bb4!**, pinning the queen to the king and winning 14 moves later. (BambiPumpkin – Molang_25, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (6) **33. Ng8+ Kg6 34. h5 mate.** (angrystatevoid – LiadCuba, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (7) White can break through with **48. Rxe6! fxe6 49. g6 hxg6 50. hxg6** and wins. (Strobex – magnusmoney, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (8) The back rank is a problem, so White should have played: **34. Rb8! Ra8** 34. ... Rxb8 35. Qe8+ Rxe8 36. Rxe8 mate; 34. ... Ra2+ 35. Kg1 Qd4+ 36. Kh1 and Black is out of steam. **35. Rxa8!** Unexpected, but winning. **35. ... Rxa8 36. Qe8+ Rxe8 37. Rxe8 mate.** (Fanrong 276 – OsmingDefense, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (9) **25. Nh6+ Kh8 26. Qg8+ Rg8 27. Nh7 mate** or 27. Ng7 mate. (bishop512011 – darknesstoggled88, Members Only Blitz, 03.10.2023) (10) Here Black needed to notice the traffic on the h1-a8 diagonal to find the equalizing **32. ... Bb7! 33. Kg1** or 33. Rhe1 d4+ 34. Be4! dxe3 35. Bxb7 exf2 when Black is slightly better **33. ... d4 34. cxd4 Bxh1 35. Kxh1** with rough equality. (Rooksheet – BKSCh3ss, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (11) Black is a move away from consolidating their extra pawn, so White has to move fast. In the game they played 26. c3, but stronger

was **26. a5!**, trying to deflect the queen to a bad square. Best is **26. ... Qc6!** not 26. ... Qb5 27. Ba4 (or 27. Nf6+) which loses material, or 26. ... Qa7 27. Nf6+ **27. Ba4! Qxe4 28. Qxe4 Bxe4 29. Bxd7** with an unbalanced, if equal, position. (chessprodigy0768 – BachBean, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (12) White missed the pretty **18. Qg8+!! Nxd8 19. Bg7+ Bxg7 20. hxg7 mate** (chessfeels – Shades25, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (13) White looks to be crushing, but only one move really works: **21. Rd1!** A lovely, quiet move that puts a finger on all of the weaknesses of Black's position. It's essentially *zugzwang!* **21. ... Kg7** Black has no good moves: 21. ... Nxd5 22. Bxd8 N5b6; 21. ... Qa5 22. Bxf6 Nxf6 23. Nxf6+ **22. Nxf6** and White should win. (adi1998 – Lelik2013, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (14) Down material? No matter – attack! **32. Kh6! Ra8 33. cxb7!** Now promotion is inevitable, and White is equal in all lines: **33. ... Qa6** 33. ... Rd8 34. Rd7! Re8! 35. b8=Q Rxb8 36. Bxb8 Kf8! 37. Bd6+ Ke8 38. Re7+ Kd8 39. Rxf7; 33. ... Qa1 34. bxa8=Q Qxa8 35. Rc7 **34. bxa8=Q+ Qxa8 35. Re5** with an even position. (austintrzpc – AnimalLover500, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (15) **26. Nh4!** Initiating an unstoppable series of threats. The game continuation 26. Re8+ Rxe8 27. Rxe8+ Kh7 28. Qf5+ Qg6 is better for White, but not yet winning. **26. ... Nf6** Alternatives: 26. ... Kh8 loses to 27. Qxg7+ Kxg7 28. Nf5+; 26. ... g6 27. Nf5; 26. ... Rc2 27. Qxg7+ Kxg7 28. Nf5+ **27. Nf5!** Not 27. Qxg7+? Kxg7 28. Nf5+ Kf8 29. Nxd6 Nxe4 30. Nxc8 Rxc8 31. Rxe4 with equality. **27. ... Qf8** Or 27. ... Nxd4 28. Nxd6 Rd8 29. Re8+ Rxe8 30. Rxe8+ Kh7 31. hxg4 **28. Nxe6+! Kh8** 28. ... Kh7 29. Qf5+! Kxh6? 30. Rh4+ **29. Qh4!** Subtle!

29. ... Nxe4 29. ... gxf6 30. Qxf6+ Qg7 31. Re8+; 29. ... Nh7 30. Nf5 and the attack rages; 29. ... Rc1 30. Nf5+ Kg8 31. Ne7+ **30. Nf5+! Kg8 31. Ne7+ Qxe7 32. Qxe7,** and White should win. (ChariotChess – cubester123, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (16) Black's threat is 1. ... Nd7-e5, hitting the trapped bishop. If 2. Nxe5 dxe5 and White loses material. There's only one move: **18. e4!** Not 18. Qe1? Ne5 as in the game, while Black has the initiative after 18. Re1?! Ne5 19. Be2 **18. ... Qe7** Now 18. ... Ne5?! is met with 19. exf5 and the pin saves the bishop. **19. exf5 Rxe2 20. Bxe2** is equalish. (billy1223344 – rompon777, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023) (17) I like the main move best for aesthetic reasons, but there's a dual solution here. Stick with me – it's worth it. **41. Nd6!** It takes the engine a long time to see the strength of **41. Ne5! Qe2** (worse is 41. ... Qb5 42. cxb4 axb4 43. R1xc6+) **42. Nd7!** threatening mate in three with 43. Nc5+ Kb5 44. c4+! and 45. Rb7 mate. Black's best is **42. ... c5!** (worse is 42. ... Kb5 43. Rb7+) and now White has to switch gears and open lines with **43. cxb4!** (43. Nxc5+? Kb6 and Black wriggles out) **43. ... axb4 44. Nxc5+** and the hunt is on. **41. ... Qd3 42. Nb7!** Hop, hop, hop. **42. ... Kb5** Alternatives: 42. ... Kb6 43. Nc5 threatening mate in one; 42. ... Qe3 avoids the fork but hangs mate: 43. Nc5+ Kb5 44. c4+! dxc4 (44. ... Kb6 45. Rb7 mate) 45. Rb7 mate **43. a4+!** or 43. Nc5 with the idea of c3-c4+ and mate to come; Black has to pitch the queen or the game after 43. ... Kb6 44. Nc5 **44. Nc5 Qe3 45. c4+! dxc4** 45. ... Kb6 46. Rb7 mate; 45. ... Kb4 46. Rb7 mate **46. Rb7 mate.** (Pupcing116 – Strobex, Members Only Blitz [analysis], 03.10.2023)