

The Green Bay Open

45 years of fun, all made possible by one man.

BY STEVE ERBACH

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ULTI-DAY ANNUAL tournaments have been around Wisconsin for years. The North Central Open is 59 years old and the Northeastern is 55. The Western Open, last held in 2007, ran for 50 years — no less than Bobby Fischer himself played at the first one in Milwaukee in 1957. And, of course, there's the 93-year-old Wisconsin State Championship. Arpad Elo himself (yes, THAT Arpad Elo!) won that title nine times.

But we believe that the Green Bay Open (GBO) is the only annual tournament in the nation that has been organized by the same man over its entire run: Luke Ludwig

Left: Luke (r) and Doug Younkle in 1988. Right: Mike Nietman presents Luke (l) the Outstanding Career Achievement Award in 2013.

of Green Bay, Wisconsin. This year's event will be the 45th.

The first Green Bay Open took place in 1977 and — except for 2020, when the world shut down for COVID-19 — has been held annually in “Titledown, USA” ever since. (I'm sure everyone knows that “Titledown, USA” means “Green Bay, Wisconsin.”)

Because of its modest prize fund, masters have generally given the GBO a pass. Just two international masters came, saw, and conquered in past years: IM Stanislau Smiatankin in 2004 and IM Erik Santarius in 2019. Each player gained two rating points for their perfect 5-0 scores!

Before the 40th GBO in 2016, Luke published a 90-page tournament book that contained all crosstables through the 39th GBO and featured games from every tournament.

This year Luke will publish an omnibus volume of all 44 events to-date.

Here are some statistics from the 40th Anniversary tournament book:

- Highest 10-year average attendance: 79.6 (1997-2006)
- Highest attendance: 95 (2001 & 2016)
- First year a master participated: 1982 (GBO #6)
- First year a FIDE titled player participated: 1994 (GBO #18; he didn't win)
- Number of GBOs with FIDE titled players: 12
- Most wins or ties for first place: 7 (Tom Moore and Alex Betaneli)



- Number of GBOs with no masters: 13 (including seven of the last nine)

That last statistic is telling. As Luke put it, “I’ve always said that the GBO is for us regular players!”

When I asked Luke about the tournament’s success, he immediately pivoted to offer high praise for the volunteers:

“The GBO could not have lasted this long without the help of many individuals throughout the past 40 years. I need to specifically express my gratitude to my brother, Tom; Doug and Gina Younkle; Steve DeRosier; Kelly Borman; Tim Bogenschutz; Nathan Schaan; Bruce LaPlante; and Bill Schmitt. Sadly, Bruce and Bill, and most recently, Kelly [2021], left this world. All of them are sorely missed.” To honor Kelly Borman, Luke will award a perpetual trophy for the top Junior in the GBO Open section.

Luke also praised Tony Sperbeck, chess table maker extraordinaire; frequent assistant TD, Andrew Becker; and Lynn Schmidt, née Younkle, who designed the cover for the 40th anniversary book.

Luke calls himself “old school.” He doesn’t even own a cell phone! But he’s definitely not a Luddite. He has a computer for email and such, and he uses WinTD to pair his tournaments (but he likes to keep pairing cards at the ready!). And he may be one of a few who still uses good old-fashioned results cards, too.

From 1977 through the early 90s, the GBO was held at the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, a school that opened in 1968. The facilities were modern and had that “new college smell,” but the campus was isolated from nearby hotels and restaurants. For the next 15 years, the GBO was held at the Midway Motor Lodge, near storied Lambeau Field. It featured a stage where the top boards played. In recent years the Radisson Hotel, on the grounds of the Oneida Casino, has been the playing site, right across the street from Austin Straubel International Airport.

The GBO traditionally has been a single-section tournament, but this year a Reserve (under 1600) section has been added. And even though Luke prefers a time control with no increment or delay, this year’s time control will be Game in 90 with — wait for it! — a 30-second increment. After finally committing to an increment, Luke had to go lie down!

Organizer Luke has also directed all but one GBO. He played in 1979, winning the tournament for himself as a Class B player. Here is one of his games from that event.

▶ Alex Betaneli is a FIDE Master and a chess tutor in the Milwaukee area. He’s played in 13 GBOs in a span of 21 years. He won or tied for first in seven of them. He said, “I’m pretty demanding when it comes to good playing conditions, so the mere fact that I played there 13 times means that [Luke] does a very nice job.”

In 1991, 15-year-old Alex came to the United States with his family as political refugees from Soviet Georgia. His “city of arrival” was Green Bay, Wisconsin, and he has lived in the state ever since. Luke welcomed Alex to the Green Bay Chess Club, and Alex’s first US Chess rated tournament was the 1991 GBO.

One year Alex came to the Radisson Hotel/Casino site with his friend, IM Erik Santaribus, just to spectate. Well, *mostly*: “The poker room at that hotel is very, very good!”

Alex continued: “Out of all the organizers I know, [Luke] is definitely one of the most detail-oriented, who really strives to have the best conditions for the players. You feel like you’re playing in an upscale event. ... I like to soak in the atmosphere. I always appreciate playing when he organizes.”



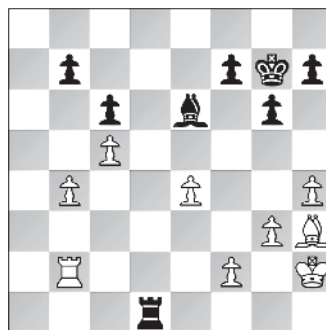
KING’S INDIAN DEFENSE (E72)

Luke Ludwig (1722)

Mike Piehl (1766)

Green Bay Open (3), 08.25.1979

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 g3 3. g3 Bg7 4. Bg2 0-0
5. d4 d6 6. e4 Nbd7 7. Nge2 e5 8. 0-0 c6
9. h3 Re8 10. Be3 Qa5 11. a3 Qc7 12. b4
Nb6 13. dxe5 dxe5 14. Bxb6 axb6 15. Na4
Be6 16. c5 b5 17. Nb6 Rad8 18. Qc2 Nd7
19. Nxd7 Rxd7 20. Rfd1 Red8 21. Rxd7
Qxd7 22. h4 Bh6 23. a4 bxa4 24. Qxa4 Qd3
25. Qa5 Rd7 26. Qa8+ Kg7 27. Qb8 Rd8
28. Qxe5+ Kg8 29. Nf4 Bxf4 30. Qxf4 Qc3
31. Rb1 Qd4 32. Qc1 Bc4 33. Qb2 Qxb2
34. Rxb2 Rd1+ 35. Kh2 Kg7 36. Bh3 Be6,
“White wins.”



POSITION AFTER 36. ... Be6

The provided game score ends here, and it’s not clear if the players stopped writing moves or if Black resigned. But White is indeed winning.

The key line runs as follows: 37. Bxe6 fxe6 and now 38. b5! cxb5 (or 38. ... Rc1 39. bxc6 bxc6 40. Rb7+ Kg8 41. g4! Rxc5 42. g5!) 39. Rxb5 Rd7 40. Kg2 and this is a winning rook and pawn endgame for White. He has two pawn islands compared to Black’s three, and the more active rook to boot. One plan would be to trade the c-pawn for Black’s b- and e-pawns, transitioning to a clearly winning position.

For most of the 21st century, Luke has organized the GBO while suffering from something called “essential tremors,” a Parkinson’s-like affliction that makes it hard for him to write. (When I asked him to autograph my copy of the 40th GBO tournament book, he had to lean on the pen so hard it almost punched through the page.) But he soldiers on as he always has.

No deep pocketed benefactor backs the Green Bay Open. No Hollywood stars promote the tournament like Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall did back in the 40s. No grandmaster ghosts haunt the hallways, as they do at the Marshall Chess Club in New York.

The Green Bay Open is just a bunch of regular chess-loving folks who come together every year, thanks to one kind, unassuming man who has hosted it for decades. ♠

Find all the details for the **45th Green Bay Open** in this month’s TLA section, or visit: new.uschess.org/45th-annual-green-bay-open