**Nominating FM Jon Jacobs for 2025 Chess Journalist of the Year**

As a long-time tournament director and officer of the Massachusetts and New Hampshire Chess Associations, I nominate Jon Jacobs for the highest distinction in U.S. chess reporting and writing: 2025 Chess Journalist of the Year.

Jon is a past scholastic and junior champion (circa 1970-75) who went on to win awards for instructional chess writing, lead an influential anti-cheating movement, and teach chess in New York City schools. In the past year he has reinvented himself as both reportorial curator and first-person narrator of significant moments in U.S. chess during his lifetime. His cover stories since December for both of America’s major chess magazines bridge the illusory gap between “chess journalism” and “chess history,” demonstrating that original reporting on the past can deepen our understanding of the present. That’s also a goal of the biography book on super-organizer and National Scholastic Championships founding father Bill Goichberg that he’s toiled at for two years, and of his six-months-old social media series, A Pawn Made Flesh. Jon also created and runs [The Fish That Roared](https://www.facebook.com/groups/942969445790845) chess group devoted to great upset games -- the topic of another book project and of his recent Chess Life cover story.

[A Pawn Made Flesh](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61568668591626) showcases never-before-published details of U.S. chess incidents and people (see posts linked below) plus occasional musings about hot-button topics such as:

* cheating;
* whether people can learn to emulate how engines play;
* whether chess outcomes ever turn on luck (apart from blunders);
* how well is chess served by low-titled “influencers” attracting huge Instagram followings through feeds that emphasize physical beauty and lifestyles.

Jon has said he aspires for A Pawn Made Flesh to recreate the spirit of the best online chess discussion forums of the 2000s and 2010s: the blogs of Mig Greengard (“Daily Dirt”), Mark Ginsburg, Dennis Monokroussos (“The Chess Mind”), and Michael Goeller (“Kenilworthian”).

Two magazine cover stories and a social media publishing platform might seem a thin foundation for a JOY award. But JOY needn’t be a production sweepstakes reserved for a “workhorse” who churns out a flood of stories. Nor is Jacobs a slouch at production: besides the magazine articles (which totaled 14,000 words and presented 15 annotated games, several of whose scores were available nowhere before, not even in databases), his 50 substantial stories published on A Pawn Made Flesh since its December 2024 launch total 34,000 words, not counting videos, reels, and derivative posts shared via Facebook groups, his personal timeline, and related X (Twitter) and Instagram accounts. Based on Meta Business Suite analytics Jon showed me, posts from A Pawn Made Flesh were viewed more than 96,000 times, getting 1,100 reactions and 900 comments. (His engagement statistics per post compare favorably with both US Chess and ACM’s respective Facebook pages). Authors such as Dan Heisman, Charles Hertan, Cyrus Lakdawala, John Hilbert, Jennifer Shahade, David MacEnulty, and Gary Lane have engaged with the posts, as have other high-profile chess figures like Andy Ansel, David Llada, Kenneth Regan, and Mark Taylor.

Three posts were reprinted in successive issues of Oklahoma Chess Magazine, published by the Oklahoma Chess Association. Jon also was the subject of a wide-ranging interview in The Chess Journalist’s April 2025 issue. His chess background including CJA award history can be reviewed [here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DMGPOXFmiS3VYWu3QpMqQ0y76_IMj3nf/view?usp=sharing).

I know that Jon’s work isn’t the typical fare for a Chess Journalist of the Year winner. But elevating his contributions would add a fresh branch to the tuning-fork-shaped tree that the JOY contest has grown into. And it would please the many American chess players and fans who enjoy revisiting personages and events from their own late-20th-century past: a rich vein of content distinct from both today’s chess scene (whether in its world-elite or scholastic flavors) and ancient history of the Morphy / Steinitz / Capablanca variety.

***Print stories:***

Alan Trefler: The Underdog Who Scraped the Sky (Chess Life, June 2024 cover story, pages 32-42)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HlFHXxNo62RAdaRm8DWKLLxaG_W6tlt5/view?usp=sharing>

Caissa’s Impresario: Bill Goichberg

(American Chess Magazine #42, December 2024 cover story, pages 10-27)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cENwuHxfJoCJy7qB0g2wxLDYI72UiPvP/view?usp=sharing>

***Selected online stories (social media):***

[Pal Benko’s Pairing “Zwischenzug” Won Him a U.S. Open Title](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19B1jTv8CF/)

Before the final round of the 1974 U.S. Open, super-TD George Koltanowski revised his already-posted Board 2 pairing under pressure from GM Pal Benko. Benko got a 300 points lower rated opponent, won the game, and finished tied for 1st with Czech GM Hort. This never-before-published revelation came from Bill Goichberg, the tournament’s organizer and co-sponsor.

[A Historic Milestone In Combatting Cheating In Open Tournaments](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AykjWYLhr/)

An original account of a 2004 encounter with a soon-to-be-infamous cheater that drove Jon to organize a movement that in the ensuing two years pressured organizers and the USCF to do more to address cheating in open tournaments.

[Death Throes of the Flea House: A First-Hand Report](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CEBHaVM6f/)

Much has been published about the iconic hustlers’ emporium that overlooked Times Square for three decades. This piece nevertheless broke new ground with an eyewitness account of the club’s last-gasp attempt to rebrand as a brothel.

[Should Chess Problems And Studies Be Deleted (a La DOGE) And Renamed As “Puzzles”?](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19C2hzXAcM/)

Chess problems and studies have their own FIDE titles, specialized magazines, websites, databases, books, elaborate terminology, pantheon of admired composers, separate competitions for composers and solvers, and other hallmarks of a distinct subculture. But some GMs and IMs have fallen in with a trend toward referring to mate-in-x problems and sophisticated endgame studies as “puzzles,” a child-friendly label that when used in this way erases an entire branch of chess culture that’s been delighting and enlightening people for centuries. This essay kicked off the battle to reclaim public recognition of problems and studies, under their traditional names.

[Playing Blitz With Bobby Fischer Near His Apex: A First-Hand Account](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FBTzMkugC/),

And [Playing Bobby Fischer Blindfold: Another First-Hand Account](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19C932K55R/)

New details about two little-publicized incidents when the soon-to-be World Champion played impromptu blitz games with fans at tournaments. The second story unearthed a hidden gem: an overlooked 2018 [YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8JFph3h5lE) recording by a 1971 Fischer opponent who was named in various articles and described in a book co-authored by GM Joel Benjamin… but the player’s telling of his own story on video has never been mentioned in any chess publication, to my knowledge.

The A Pawn Made Flesh series also brims with wit, humanity, and even practical chessboard advice such as:

* [Chess Tip of the Day: Don’t Run TOWARD the Sound of Gunfire!](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EiSM7qSvm/) (about a Manhattan cops-versus-robbers gunfight whose sounds reverberated through a World Open playing hall, luring many players to the window to watch)
* [A Funny/Poignant Encounter With an “Unrated” Ringer](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15cMmyeqRx/) (How Jon was “spanked” in an Under-2000 tournament by a foreign national champion who had just competed in a FIDE Zonal championship and emerged with a plus score.)
* [Chess Dreams, Part II: Was This Endgame Worth Breaking A Date For?](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19suGygPFs/) (Jon yielded a draw to keep his date with a girlfriend who was an heiress. A dreamed sequence of moves that night revealed that had he continued the game, he would have won and positioned himself to achieve an IM norm if he could win the next round.)
* [Tal, Inspiration, Hallucination, and the Binding Of Isaac](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/12H5HjKQaJf/) (If you hear a voice telling you to sacrifice your bishop, is God speaking to you? Or are you going insane? Just be grateful the voice didn’t command you to sacrifice your son.)
* [Concrete Evidence of Luck In Chess](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17yemeosi4/) (The debate over whether luck ever drives chess game results isn’t as simple as it seems, even if you define blunders out of the equation.)
* [Remembering Two NY Chess Regulars Lost to COVID Five Years Ago](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1J5ELHyeNd/) (On the fifth anniversary of the pandemic’s surge into New York, Jon paid tribute to two active and popular local players whose lives the virus claimed.)

Robert Messenger