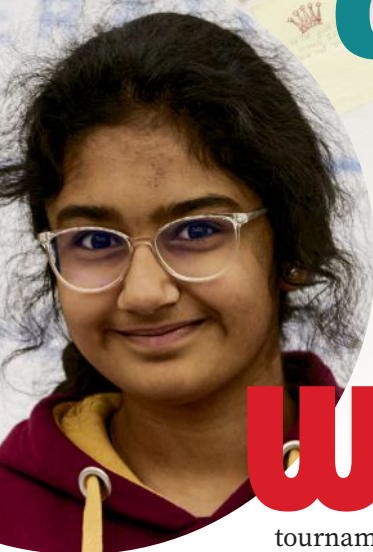




Checkmates and Nail Paints!

BY DANNIKA THAKA



WHAT WAS THE busiest place outside the tournament hall at the 2024 National High School (K-12) Championships? It was room 337 at the Baltimore Convention Center, where girls from all over the country played human chess, did their nails, and had a lot of fun. You might know it better as the Girls Club.

Why is the Girls Club so important? Most players at national events are boys, many of whom know each other from previous tournaments. They analyze their games, play bughouse, run around, and play pranks on chess moms and dads.

It's important for girls to meet each other too, and to have a chance to learn from each other and bond. Over the years, the

US Chess Women's Committee decided to create the Girls Club, where girls and their families could hang out between rounds with friends old and new.

The Girls Club is the perfect place to chill! Here we get to play chess, do treasure hunts,

Top: WIM Carolina Blanco, Left: WGM Sabina Foisor, Right: Rochelle Ballantyne



and sit at extravagant nail stations. There are always special guests too, and in Baltimore, we got to meet two awesome women: 2017 U.S. Women's Champion WGM Sabina Foisor, and Rochelle

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*I love how **supportive** it is to all the girls and a **safe atmosphere** for everyone.”*

Ballantyne, who is a lawyer and a US Chess rated expert. If her name sounds familiar, it might be because you saw her in the documentary *Brooklyn Castle*.

Rochelle and Sabina are complete opposites when it comes to chess. Sabina is a d2-d4 player who wins with positional style, locked pawn structures, and long, strategic endgames. Rochelle starts with her king's pawn, and aggressively hunts her opponent's king with tactics, sacrifices, and checkmate combinations.

We got to play against both Rochelle and Sabina when they gave a tandem simul. (That's when two players take turns making moves against lots of opponents.)

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*I love Girls Club because it makes me feel **powerful**.”*

I thought it was really interesting that they both admitted to being worried about playing positions they didn't know, right from the first move.

Rochelle and Sabina have taken different paths through life. Sabina is a professional coach and commentator, while Rochelle plays chess for fun instead of as a job. But both players talked about how important the game





was for them growing up, and how chess helped them earn college scholarships!

Each year the US Chess Women's Committee comes up with new ideas for the Girls Club. This year, we had a wall covered with sticky notes where girls wrote down why they liked the Girls Club. (Some of these sticky notes are the fancy quotes in this story! ~ed.) We ended up with more than 100 reasons why the Girls Club is so great!

There's also a full schedule of fun events. We started with donuts (yum!) on Saturday, followed by a guest speaker and a pizza party! Then came the tandem simul, followed by some fast games between Rochelle and Sabina. It was so interesting to watch!



watch Rochelle and Sabina review multiple games at the same time, and seeing their passion for chess really motivated me. In the future, I'd like to be a guest in the Girls Club, helping with analysis and working with young players!

Some of the best times were between rounds when there were no lectures or meetings. Music was playing, and we girls were talking, playing games, and mixing polish with mountains of glitter to make our nails sparkle. In the Girls Club we make new friends while our parents and coaches chat and learn from each other. It make chess just that much better! ♠️

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It is important for girls to see role models who look like them.”

On Sunday there was a town hall meeting and a raffle. There was also a lot of game review, where we could bring our games from the tournament. It was amazing to

