

Florida **CHESS**

FLORIDA CHESS ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

Spring - May 22, 2026



Inside this issue: Review of "My Life in Chess" by Larry Storch (pictured above)

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Florida Chess Association (FCA) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization devoted exclusively to the promotion of chess in Florida. FCA is the official USCF affiliate for the state of Florida. FCA web site — <http://www.floridachess.org>

floridaCHESS is a publication of the Florida Chess Association and is available four times a year online. **Contact Editor for advertising rates.**

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Cover Art - Photo provided with permission from Larry Storch

Cover Masthead - Mike Halloran

Software - Adobe Photoshop, ChessBase, Microsoft Publisher,



“Foote Notes”



Greetings, Chess Fans!

As we move into another exciting season of Florida chess, I continue to be amazed by the growth and enthusiasm of our chess community across the Sunshine State. From scholastic tournaments to senior competitions, club events to major championships, Florida remains one of the most active and vibrant chess states in the nation.

This issue highlights some of our premier events: the Florida Scholastic Championship, the Florida Senior Championship, and the Florida Women's Championship. Our scholastic players continue to impress with their dedication, sportsmanship, and ever-improving skill. The future of Florida chess remains bright as these new players enter the fray.

The Florida Women's Championship continues to showcase the remarkable talent and competitive spirit of female players across our state. We are proud to celebrate the accomplishments of these competitors and their important role in strengthening and growing Florida chess.

At the same time, the Florida Senior Championship reminds us that chess is truly a lifelong pursuit. It is inspiring to see players who have spent decades enjoying and supporting the game continue to compete at a high level while mentoring the next generation.

I would like to thank the many tournament directors, organizers, coaches, club leaders, volunteers, parents, and players who make Florida chess possible. Our statewide network of dedicated individuals continues to create opportunities for players of all ages.

Our reports this month include a collection of games from recent events, regional updates from around the state, and a look at the life, to this point, of Florida chess personality Larry Storch (as well as a review of Larry's book). Whether you are a seasoned competitor, a scholastic player, a club organizer, or simply someone who enjoys the game, there is something in this issue for you.

Looking ahead, we encourage everyone to support their local clubs and tournaments and to participate in the many events scheduled throughout Florida. Every tournament, lesson, and casual game helps strengthen our chess community.

May all your moves be brilliant and well planned.

George Foote

Editor, floridaCHESS Magazine

from the President's desk

Dear Florida Chess Community,



The 2026 tournament season has been active, with strong participation across multiple state events. This progress is made possible through the continued efforts of our organizers, volunteers, parents, and affiliate programs throughout Florida. Your commitment has driven meaningful growth, and we are proud to have been recognized at last year's U.S. Open for statewide membership expansion from 5,078 to 6,201 members, a 22.12% increase. This level of growth exceeds the total membership of many state chapters and reflects the strength of our collective efforts. Below is a brief overview of recent championship events, their winners, and the pathways they provide to national competition.

Most recently, the Florida State Women & Girls Championship, held April 18–19 in Boca Raton, welcomed 73 players at the Spanish River Library. Organized by Sue Samuels and Eliza Eggert, with Charles Hatherill serving as Chief Tournament Director, the event was a great success. Congratulations to WFM Sophie Li on her perfect 5/5 score, earning the opportunity to represent Florida at the WIM Ruth Haring National Girls Tournament of Champions.

In March, the Florida State Scholastic Championship brought 565 students to Kissimmee for a highly competitive weekend across all age groups. Champions included Andrew Yang (K-1) and Ridhaan Dande (K-3), with Dande qualifying for the GM Maurice Ashley National Tournament of K-3 State Champions. At the elementary level, CM Yi Sha (K-5) advances to the John D. Rockefeller III National Tournament of Elementary School Champions. CM Maxwell Yang (K-8) earned a place in the Barber National Tournament of Middle School Champions, while CM Marvin Gao claimed the K-12 title and will have first dibs at representing Florida at the Denker National Tournament of High School Champions.

The Florida State Senior Championship in The Villages drew 62 players, with FM Julio A. Morella capturing the title and qualifying for the John T. Irwin National Tournament of Senior State Champions for the third consecutive year.

Looking ahead, the Florida Chess Association is entering its election cycle, with seven board positions open. Members interested in contributing at a leadership level are encouraged to submit nominations through the “2026 Election Headquarters” under the Governance Tab.

Florida will also host a major international event this summer in Miami, an event organized by WR Chess with members of the U.S. Olympiad team competing against the Uzbekistan national team, including Candidates winner and potential future World Champion GM Javokhir Sindarov, in a Rapid and Blitz match on July 27–28.

I look forward to seeing you at future events and appreciate your continued support of chess in Florida.

Warm regards,
Bryan Tillis
President, Florida Chess Association

2026 Florida Scholastic Championship by Nick Perez

On March 21, 2026, the best and brightest of Florida's kids, tweens, and teens gathered in Kissimmee, Florida to compete in the 2026 Florida State Scholastic Championship. Held at the Holiday Inn Resort Kissimmee by the Parks by IHG, the competition was held just a stone's throw away from Disney World in the heart of Central Florida. But there was no time for these competitors to grab a quick selfie with Mickey Mouse. For the 565 young chess players, their weekend was dedicated to the pursuit of being able to call themselves "State Champion". My name is Nick Perez. I'm the Executive Director of the Orlando Regional Chess Alliance. I was honored to be invited to help direct this prestigious event.

In the K-1 section, for obvious reasons, there are no games to analyze for these youngsters. But I wanted to share that it was one of the highlights of the tournament for me to see these 5 and 6-year-olds file into the hall for Round 5. The K-1 section is the only section that started the final round early. And to see Senior TDs Charles Hatherill and NM Bryan Tillis lead in these energetic, enthusiastic children to their boards was adorable. Every TD shared knowing smiles watching these kids try to find their board number, figure out which square the queen goes on, and racing around the long tables to be on the correct side of the board.

The winner of the K-1 Championship section was Andrew Yang of The Frazer School with a perfect 5 out of 5. And even though that name might remind you of the 2020 Presidential Candidate, at this time we have no reason to believe that the 51-year-old who supports Universal Basic Income travelled to Florida and disguised himself as a chess-playing 6-year-old.

Melody Zeng, Levi Merkel, Karthikeya Pasupuleti, Logan Zhou, and Joshua Krishtul each finished with 4/5 and won the second through sixth place trophies, respectively.

In the team competition, The Frazer School narrowly outscored Oak Hall by a score of 15.5 to 14.5 to capture the first-place trophy.

In the K-3 Under 600 section, Mansur Kurbangali of Gilchrist Elementary School survived the massive 65-player section with the only perfect score and first place honors. Dhruva Vaddadi took second with 4.5/5. Lucas Meyer, Pratyush Nandy, and Danny Anjarwalla took third through fifth, respectively, benefitting from the best tiebreak scores among the massive logjam of those finishers with 4/5.

This time, in the team competition, Oak Hall finished on the better side of a close race, narrowly defeating The Greene School, 14.0-13.0.

The K-3 State Champion is Ridhaan Dande of Pinecrest Academy Wesley Chapel. Ridhaan won the Championship Section a full point ahead of the field with a perfect 5/5. Daneel Kuznetsov, Dhriti Singh, and Rajiv Honmurgi finished second through fourth, respectively, with 4/5. Hayden Webb snuck into fifth place with 3.5. Dande will now get to be part of history by participating in the 1st Annual (2026) GM Maurice Ashley National Tournament of K-3 State Champions.

Let's take a look at Ridhaan's third round game versus Andrew Pinkoson of Oak Hall.

Ridhaan Dande (1763) vs. Andrew Pinkoson (992)

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. Bb5+ Bd7 5. Bxd7+ Nxd7 6. dxc5 (A French Defense from Dande. Unfortunately for White, dxc5 forfeits control of the center which Black quickly capitalizes on.) 6...Bxc5 7. Nc3 Nxe5 8. Qe2 Nc6 9. Nf3 h6 10. Ne5 Nf6 11. Be3 (Sadly, Black's control of the center means this move will lose a piece to Black's tactics.) 11...Bxe3 12. Qxe3 d4 13. Nxc6 bxc6 14. Qf3 dxc3 15. Qxc6+ Nd7 16. bxc3 O-O 17. Rd1 Ne5 18. Qe4 Qc7 19. O-O Rfd8 20. Rxd8+ Rxd8 21. h3 Qxc3 22. Re1 Nc4 23. Rf1 Nd2 24. Rd1 Nxe4 25. Rxd8+ Kh7 26. Kh2 Qc7+ 27. Kg1 Qxd8 28. Kh2 Qd6+ 29. Kg1 Qd4 30. Kh1 Qxf2 31. a4 Ng3+ 32. Kh2 Nf1+ 33. Kh1 Ne3 34. g3 Qg2# 0-1 Give credit to Pinkoson who did his best to fight off his much higher rated opponent. But sometimes in this game, you're just outmatched.

As it turned out Oak Hall won the team competition for both the K-3 Under 600 and K-3 Championship sections, this time finishing well ahead of their next closest competitor, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy, by a margin of 11.0-7.5.

In another sizable section, Stowe French from Miami Country Day School finished atop the K-5 Under 700, 69-person field to win the title with a perfect score. Eli Weck and Pranav Jagadeesh finished with 4.5/5 and took second and third, respectively. Maverick Lowe and Pranavi Chakravarthy took fourth and fifth, respectively, among a massive tie with 4/5.

The team competition in this section turned out to be a three-way race, as Audubon Park's final score of 13 gave them a one-point victory over Academy Prep Center of Lakeland and The Frazer School, who took second and third, respectively.

The K-5 Championship Section was unsurprisingly a two-horse race between the only two players in the section above 2000. **CM Yi Sha (2129) and Aakash Jani (2029)** collided in the final round as the only two players left with a perfect score. Here is the game they played to decide the State Championship.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nf3 O-O 6. h3 e5 7. d5 Nh5 8. g3 f5 9. exf5 gxf5 10. Nh4 Qe8 11. Be2 Nf6 12. Qc2 Na6 13. Be3 Bd7 14. O-O-O b6 (After a standard King's Indian Defense, white castles queenside setting up a potentially sharp attack for both sides. But the computer prefers, 14...Nb4 followed by 15. Qb1 Ne4 16. Nxe4 fxe4 17. Qxe4 Nxa2+.) 15. Rhg1 Nb4 16. Qd2 a5 17. Bh6 Qe7 18. g4 Bxh6 19. Qxh6 fvg4 20. hxg4 Qg7 21. Qe3 (The bishop trade was favorable for White. White will now have a middlegame attack, without many counterplay opportunities for Black.) 21...Kh8 22. a3 Na6 23. g5 Ng8 24. Bd3 Ne7 25. g6 h6 26. Ne2 Ba4 27. Ng3!? (As tempting as it was to forgo the material for extra tempo, White could have still had plenty of time to attack after playing Rdf1 first.) 27...Bxd1 28. Kxd1 Rf4 29. Nh5 (Though the fork looks winning at first, Black can simply give up the queen for the two white knights. Along with the exchange Black won earlier, the material is enough to compensate for the queen and stabilize the position.) 29...Rhx4 30. Nxc7 Kxc7 31. Qg3 Rd4 32. Ke1 Nc5 33. Be2 Rf8 34. Qh3 a4 35. Rg3 Rf6 36. Bd3 ½-½

The last two moves written are 36...Rf4 37. Be2, followed by both players agreeing to a draw. It's unclear whether Black's last move is Rdf4 or Rff4, but either way Black only has a small advantage at this point. With the material imbalance, a mistake by either side could swing the game wildly. And after five long rounds of competition, it's understandable why these players would agree to a draw here to finish tied at 4.5/5. Great job to both players!

In the end, CM Sha won the tiebreak by a mere half a point to capture the crown over Aakash. Sree Harsha Siliveri, Jacob Vassiliev, and Addison Baumstark each finished with 4 points and won third through fifth, respectively. With this win, CM Sha qualified for the 7th Annual (2026) John D. Rockefeller III National Tournament of Elementary School State Champions. Maintaining their rivalry through many of the age groups, Oak Hall took the team prize in this score over The Frazer School by a score of 14.0 to 12.5.

Before moving on to the older kids, I'll take a moment to talk about the Blitz Tournament that took place on Saturday night after Round 3. For the kids who couldn't get enough chess, this side event crowned Florida Scholastic Blitz Champions in the K-6 and K-12 divisions. This four-round double Swiss tournament was fast paced and action packed.

In the K-6 section, FM Vivan Mulay finished with the night's only perfect score with an unblemished 8 out of 8! Asher Austin and Ridhaan Dande took second and third, respectively, with 7.5/8. Jacob Vassiliev took sole fourth with 6.5/8. And Joseph Toth had the best tiebreak score out of the pack of 6-point finishers to take the fifth-place trophy.

In the K-12 section, despite the presence of two titled players in the section, the State Blitz title was won by Oscar Williams (2271) with a score of 7.5/8. FM Bresh Chakrabarti, Aaron Marian, and Aniket Shukla captured second through fourth, respectively, with 7/8. Jacorey Bynum, CM Marvin Gao, and Neel Sahai finished with 6/8. But Bynum took the fifth-place trophy on tiebreaks.

On to the middle schoolers! The K-8 Under 1000 section was the largest section of the tournament. With only five rounds and 113 kids competing, there should be no surprise that we had multiple perfect scores. Reyaansh Patel and Panos Kyriakou both finished with perfect scores, but Patel captured the first-place trophy on tiebreaks. Kenny Truong and Lochlan O'Connor finished with 4.5/5 to take third and fourth, respectively. Of the 13 players to finish with 4/5, Anushree Jagadeesh had the best tiebreak score to take the fifth-place trophy.

Lake Highland Preparatory School took the team championship in this category with a score of 14.5. The Frazer School was right behind with 12.5 for second and Academy Prep Center of Lakeland finished with 12.0 for third.

The K-8 Championship section was almost as big with 94 players, but we did get an undisputed champion out of it. **CM Maxwell Yang (2123)** of Falcon Cove Middle School finished with the only perfect score to win the K-8 Championship and advance to the 16th Annual (2026) Dewain Barber National Tournament of Middle School State Champions! Here is his final round game with the black pieces where he clinched the title versus **FM Vivan Mulay (2210)**.

1. e4 c5 (CM Yang as Black played a Sicilian in this must win encounter.) 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. h3 e5 7. Nf3 Be7 8. g4 h6 9. Rg1 g5 10. Nd2 Be6 11. Nc4 b5 12. Ne3 Nbd7 13. Bg2 Rc8 14. Nf5 (Better would have been creating an outpost with Ncd5) 14...Bxf5 15. exf5 Qc7 16. a3 Nb6 17. Bd2 d5 18. Qe2 d4 19. Nd1 (Black has completely taken over the center of the board and White's pieces are cramped and passive.) 19...Nc4 20. Bb4 O-O 21. b3 Nb6 22. Ba5 Bd8 23. Rc1 e4 24. Bxe4 Qf4 0-1

Black forks White's bishop and rook. Unfortunately for White, not only is he losing material, but Black still dominates the center and White's kingside attack never materialized. But hats off to both competitors!

I caught up with CM Yang after he received his championship trophy to get his thoughts on the big win. Let's hear from the champ!

NP: You just won the K-8 Championship. Congratulations! Did you have any games that scared you, made you nervous today?

CM Yang: Actually, today, the fourth game [vs. Damian Alexander, 1904]. It was actually a dead draw. I got really lucky because he traded into a winning pawn endgame for me. That was lucky for me, yeah.

NP: Ok, very nice. And what grade are you in?

CM Yang: I'm in seventh grade now.

NP: Did you play in this section last year? Did you win it last year, too?

CM Yang: I think last year, no. I got second place because of the tiebreaks. I think I lost by like half a point on tiebreaks.

NP: Is this your first time going on to nationals [as the State Champion]?

CM Yang: I think twice before, I don't know. But for elementary school, though.

NP: Are you excited for the Barber National Middle School Tournament?

CM Yang: Yeah!!!

NP: Alright, thank you very much! Congratulations!

CM Yang: Thank you.

The Frazer School dominated the team competition in this section, overcoming Divine Savior Academy by a margin of 15.0 to 10.5

On to the big kids! In the K-12 Under 1100 Section, we had a massive glut of contenders finishing tied at the top of the standings. Nikita Mylotskyi, Ryan Zhang, Nathaniel Munenzon, and Jaden Ayure all went into the second day of play with perfect scores playing on the top two boards of the section. Mylotskyi drew with Ayure and Munenzon drew with Zhang. This led to the foursome shuffling seats and again occupying the top two boards going into the final round. But again, no one was able to break through. This time Zhang drew with Mylotskyi and Ayure drew with Munenzon. The four youngsters thus ended in a tie with four points where they would be joined by three

others. This left a seven-way tie for first in this section. In the end, tiebreaks sorted out the standings, leaving Mylotskyi in first, Zhang in second, Munenzon in third, and Ayure in fourth. Michael Rabelo snagged the last trophy in fifth. But shoutout to our other co-leaders at tournament's end: Nicolas Monterde (sixth) and Salvador Cabrejos (seventh).

Howard D. McMillan Middle School came up big in the team standings in this Under 1100 section, winning with 12 points. The Frazer School took second with 9.5 points with Marine Academy of Science and Technology at FIU right behind with 9.0.

And now for the main event! I must say as a middle-aged man, it's somewhat intimidating being surrounded by scores of teenagers who are less than half my age and have a far greater understanding of chess than I ever will. But I digress!

The winner of the K-12 Championship will not only be the Florida State Scholastic Champion, but will go on to represent Florida in the 42nd Annual (2026) GM Arnold Denker National Tournament of High School State Champions. And going into this Championship event, all eyes were on Florida's own IM Bach Ngo. The International Master not only won this K-12 section last year, but went on to the Denker Tournament and took first place, becoming the National Champion of Champions! By doing so he became only the second Floridian in history to win the Denker joining FM Bruci Lopez from 2002. The question going into this year's State Championship was: Could he do it again?

Well, if he was going to do it, it was going to be a much bumpier road this year. In the 2025 tournament, Ngo went a perfect 5/5 winning the Championship a full point clear of the field. He started out similarly this year, winning his first two rounds. But in Round 3, he ran into some trouble in the form of CM Ubaldo Lopez-Naranjo. Here's their game.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. Qe2 (It's appropriate that CM Lopez-Naranjo plays the Ruy Lopez opening. Here he surprises us with the rarely seen Wormald attack with Qe2. The idea of this variation is to hold the center, while preparing your kingside attack.) 5...d6 6. c3 Bd7 7. h3 g6 8. O-O Bg7 9. d3 O-O 10. Bc2 Nh5 11. Be3 h6 12. Nbd2 Qe8 13. g4 (The attack is unleashed! The provocative g4 sends the king's own guard on the attack.) 13...Nf4 14. Bxf4 exf4 15. Rfe1 h5 16. Nh2 hxg4 17. hxg4 Bf6 18. Qf3 Bg5 19. d4 f6 20. Kg2 Kg7 21. Rh1 Rh8 22. Qd3 Nd8 23. f3 Ne6 24. Rag1 Bb5 25. c4 Bd7 26. Nhf1 Qf7 27. b4 a5 28. d5 Rxh1 29. Rxh1 Nf8 30. b5 Bc8 31. Nb3 (With Black slightly on the back foot here, trying to untangle their pieces, the computer suggests White can take the initiative by sacrificing a pawn with 31. e5 dxe5 32. Ne4, launching a new attack.) 31...Nd7 32. Qc3 Qe7 33. Nc1 Qe5 34. Qxe5 Nxe5 35. Nd2 c6 36. dxc6 bxc6 37. Nd3 Bd7 38. Nxe5 fxe5 39. Rb1 Be8 1/2-1/2

With an evenly contested game throughout and little more progress to be made, this game ended in a draw leaving both players on 2.5/3 going into Day 2. CM Lopez-Naranjo would end up drawing his last two games as well, finishing with 3.5. But IM Ngo still had ambitions of fighting his way back to Board 1.

Meanwhile, two new players would occupy the top board in Round 4 vying to maintain their perfect records. CM Marvin Gao would handle the white pieces versus Abhiram Pothuri in the Sunday morning session. Here's the game.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. b4 (The Portsmouth Gambit variation of the Sicilian in which White sacrifices a pawn to divert Black's c5 pawn, aiming for rapid development, open lines for attacks, and central pressure) 3...cxb4 4. d4 d5 5. exd5 Qxd5 6. c4 bxc3 7. Nxc3 Qa5 8. Rb1 (White seemingly leaves the knight hanging. But with so many open lines of attack, White would be just fine after 8... Qxc3 9. Bd2 Qa3 10. d5) 8...Qe5 9. Bd2 Bb4 10. Rxb4 (The ROOOOOOOK!!!) Qxb4 11. Nb5 Qe7 12. d5 e4 13. Ng5 h6 (A lost tempo. 13...Nf6, followed by castling would have been safer) 14. dxc6 (This will be the first of eight moves in a row where White makes the best move possible. CM Gao will now take down his opponent with scalpel-like precision.) 14...hxg5 15. Ba5 b6 16. Nd6+ Kf8 17. Bb4 Nf6 18. Qb3 a5 19. Ba3 Be6 20. Nc4 b5 21. Bxe7+ Kxe7 22. Qa3+ b4 23. Qe3 Nd5 24. Qxg5+ 1-0

A punishing attack leading to a quick win. This would be useful, not only to give CM Gao extra rest going into the last round, but he would be the only player with a perfect 4/4 going into it. Marvin was kind enough to share his thoughts with me after this Round 4 game.

NP: I'm with Candidate Master Marvin Gao. He just finished his Round 4 match, and it looked like a really, really good one. So, I saw you sacked a rook exchange pretty early on. Was that a line you prepared or something you found over the board?

CM Gao: I played that over the board, but I played it pretty quick because it was very similar to a line I prepared. It was just a little different, though. But I think most of the ideas there still worked.

NP: What opening did it come out of?

CM Gao: It was a Sicilian, and I sacked on...I played b4 early. So, I sacked a pawn.

NP: You've got a perfect score now going into the final round. How do you feel about your odds of winning the State Championship today?

CM Gao: I mean, it's entirely in my hands now. I just need to win the last round. I feel pretty good about it, but I guess, you know, anything can happen.

NP: What's the biggest title you've won to this point in your career? (Silly me, I didn't realize I was talking to the Florida State Champion.)

CM Gao: Probably Florida State Champion in 2025.

NP: Would this be your first K-12 Championship?

CM Gao: I'm not sure. I think so.

NP: What grade are you in?

CM Gao: I'm in 12th.

NP: This is your last year to win this particular tournament. I hear Nationals is next week. Are you going to that?

CM Gao: I will be there, yeah.

NP: How do you think you'll do there? How have you done at Nationals in the past?

CM Gao: I don't know. I think the High School Nationals is pretty tough. The competition is very fierce, but I'll do my best.

NP: Thank you very much for your time. Good luck in the next round!

CM Gao: Thank you.

Round 4 proved eventful for all the top contenders in this Championship Section. IM Ngo would defeat Aarna Warekar to get to 3.5. I caught up with him after his round to get his thoughts going into final round. Here's what he had to say.

NP: Alright, I'm here with International Master Bach Ngo. He just finished his fourth-round match. You're a half point behind the lead going into the last round. How do you feel about your chances? What do you think you need to do in this last round?

IM Ngo: Well, it's going to be pretty interesting. Because if White manages to hold on Board 2, then I would be playing against the leader, a half point behind in a must win situation. And I've been there before many times, but hopefully, fate will be in my own hands and Board 2 holds. Because otherwise the two people with four points in that scenario would play each other. And then I would be unable to do anything about it should anyone get five.

NP: I just saw his game, too. I just talked to Marvin Gao. He got a really nice sacrifice to win on Board 1. Have you played him a lot before? And what would your preparation be there?

IM Ngo: I've played against Marvin many times before. I have a fairly positive record against him. Many wins and a few draws. Marvin played against my teammate, Abhiram Pothuri. And it looks like Marvin prepared a pretty interesting line there with the knight sacrifice that I think my teammate declined after thinking for about 30 minutes on. It'll be interesting to see if I do play him in the last round, if he brings in any preparation of that nature.

NP: What's your biggest title you won at this point? Obviously, you're an IM, so you've got some behind you.

IM Ngo: Well, last year I won the Florida State (Scholastic) and then that qualified me for the Denker and I won that as well.

NP: Oh, wow!

IM Ngo: Yeah. So, then that was pretty nice. And of course, I have many national awards as well.

NP: And you're in 12th grade this year?

IM Ngo: Yes, I'm a senior.

NP: So, last chance to win some of these big high school ones. So good luck, thank you very much for your time.

IM Ngo: Thank you.

Bach was right to keep an eye on Board 2 in this round, as it was not only consequential, but it was the last game in the Round 4 to conclude. **Sritej Sattaru (2205)** playing as White battled **Jacorey Bynum (2307)** who handled the black pieces. Let's check out the game. 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Bd3 dxe4 4. Bxe4 Nf6 5. Bf3 Bd6 6. Ne2 Nbd7 7. O-O e5 8. Nbc3 O-O 9. Bg5 Re8 10. Ne4 Be7 11. Nxf6+ Bxf6 12. Bxf6 Qxf6 13. Nc3 exd4 14. Nb5 Qb6 15. Nxd4 Nf8 16. Nb3 Bf5 17. Qd4 Bxc2 18. Qxb6 cxb6 19. Bxb7 Rad8 20. Rfc1 Bxb3 21. axb3 Re7 22. Ba6 Rd2 23. Rc8 g6 24. Bc4 Kg7 25. Ra8 Rdd7 26. g3 g5 27. Kf1 Ng6 28. Be2 Ne5 29. Rd1 Rxd1+ 30. Bxd1 g4 31. Rd8 h5 32. Kg2 Rc7 33. h3 Bynum as Black was slightly ahead for much of the game, but the advantage was never a winning one. The players stopped recording at move 33 as they were both in time trouble in this crucial endgame. They ended up playing well over 100 moves, effectively utilizing their 5-second time delay, both fighting for the full point. But in the end, neither could gain a winning advantage, and the game ended in a draw.

I caught up with both players as they examined their game in a post-mortem session to get their thoughts going into the finale.

NP (To Jacorey): You both got a half point this round, so you're going to be a half point behind the lead going in the last round. Do you think you'll be on top board? What do you think your chances are of getting back into the first place mix?

Jacorey Bynum: I think I'm playing a 2300 next round, so I think it's pretty slim that I win the tournament. But we'll see. I have white in my next round, so I think that I'll do good.

NP (To Sritej): What about you? What do you think your chances are? Do you know your matchup? What do you think going into the next round?

Sritej Sattaru: Definitely going to play someone of Jacorey's level next round, so it's going to be really difficult to be able to win. But I'm going to go win or loss because [it's the] Florida State Championship. I want to go all in.

NP: That was my next question. So must win? No early draws?

Sattaru: No early draws.

Bynum: Same here. Yeah, no draws.

NP: Do you have a good all out opening for White in mind then?

Bynum: Usually the Reti opening with White, but it depends on the player that I'm playing. Like if they have a good repertoire against e4, then I play the Reti opening.

NP: I'll let you guys go. Thank you very much for your time.

Bynum: Yeah, no problem.

So, going into Round 5 there were five players that still had a chance to win the tournament. CM Marvin Gao stood alone at 4 points. IM Bach Ngo, FM Brejesh Chakrabarti, Jacorey Bynum, and Sritej Sattaru were all positioned just behind with 3.5 points. But as Ngo predicted, he would be the one to challenge Gao on Board 1.

As it turned out, FM Chakrabarti would draw against Bynum knocking them both out of contention. And Oscar Williams would hold Sattaru to a draw, ending his chances as well. This meant it would all come down to **IM Ngo** needing a win with White, while **CM Gao** only needed a draw to win the title. Let's see how it played out.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 b6 4. a3 Bb7 5. Nc3 d5 6. cxd5 exd5 7. Qc2 c5 8. Bg5 Be7 9. g3 h6 10. Bf4 Bd6 11. Bxd6 Qxd6 12. Bg2 O-O 13. O-O Nbd7 14. Rfd1 Rfe8 15. dxc5 bxc5 16. e3 Rac8 17. Qf5 Qe6 18. Qf4 (The computer prefers trading queens here. But as this is a must win game for White, he opts to keep the queens on the board to maintain attacking chances.) 18...Nb6 19. Qh4 Qf5 20. Nb5 Rcd8 21. b4 d4 22. Qf4 Qd7 (Now that Black has taken control of the center, White smartly offers the queen trade to try to blunt the attack. But Black finds the best move with Qd7. But this line will

create an imbalance leading to a double-edged game.) 23. Ne5 Rxe5 24. Qxe5 Bxg2 25. Kxg2 Qxb5 26. Qxc5 Qe2 27. Rxd4 Rxd4 28. exd4 Nbd5 (After this massive exchange, we have a rook and two pawns versus two knights. But Black's position could have been much better with 28...Ng5 putting maximum pressure on White's king.) 29. Qc8+ Kh7 30. Qf5+ g6 31. Qf3 Qb2 Unfortunately for us, the players stopped recording at this point due to time pressure. So, I will inform you that the winner of the game and NEW Florida K-12 Champion is CM Marvin Gao. Congratulations!

Sadly, CM Gao had to leave quickly after the tournament, so I didn't get to speak with him again. But I did get some final thoughts from IM Ngo who was incredibly gracious in defeat.

NP: Alright, thanks for talking to me again, Bach. I appreciate it. Obviously, the last round didn't go the way you were hoping. I saw you had an imbalance in the endgame. Were you shooting for that early on? Because you got two knights versus rook. So, were you shooting for that early? Because I knew it was a must win.

IM Ngo: Yeah, I was pressing hard for the win. It got very, very sharp in the middlegame area. I went for a very imbalanced line, as you said. I sacrificed a bit of material there, and then I guess I wasn't really able to recuperate all of it by the end. And that's what hurt me, especially when you go down to one minute and the opponent has two knights like that. It can be incredibly tricky in the endgame, especially if that low time.

NP: Yeah, two knights with all the tactics possible, low time, that is very tough. Your team still won the championship, so that's very nice. You represented us last year in the Denker. Obviously, Marvin's going to do it this year. Do you have any advice for him as he goes in there and tries to repeat your performance?

IM Ngo: Well, I'd like to congratulate Marvin for his performance this tournament. He went a perfect five out of five. And then I was pretty much actually never better in the last round. He was keeping it either equal or slight advantage on his part. So, if he maintains that performance that he put up against me and against other people in this tournament, he'll be sure to perform extremely well at the Denker.

NP: Those are great words. Thank you very much NP for your time. Congratulations.

IM Ngo: Thank you.

So, in the end CM Gao took first. Jacorey Bynum, Aarna Warekar, Sritej Sattaru, FM Brejesh Chakrabarti, Aniket Shukla, Abhiram Pothuri, and Nicolas Wethington all finished with four points and finished second through eighth, respectively. Oscar Williams and IM Ngo finished at the top of a large group of players on 3.5 points and finished ninth and tenth, respectively. In fact, during the awards ceremony, Senior Tournament Director NM Bryan Tillis noted that it shows the depth of our K-12 Section that last year's winner finished 10th this year. This is truly a testament to how hard it is to win this tournament and how much chess talent can be found in Florida's high schools.

As I mentioned during the interview, IM Ngo's team, The Frazer School, won the team championship in this K-12 Championship Section. Miami Country Day School took second.

Thank you to Senior TDs Charles Hatherill and NM Bryan Tillis for their extraordinary leadership in delivering a well-run, successful event. Other TDs included Eliza Eggert, Timotey Gospodinov, Andrew Rea, and Tori Sonza. And special thanks to volunteers Alex Zervas and Aanya Attri.

And most importantly thank you and congratulations to all the kids who participated. Florida is proud of all of you!



Marvin Gao—
K-12 Champ



Maxwell Yang—
K-8 Champ



CM Yi Sha—
K-5 Champ



Ridhaan Dande—
K-3 Champ



K-12 Champion Team—The Frazer School



K-8 Championship Team—The Frazer School



K-5 Championship Team—The Oak Hall School



K-3 Championship Team—The Oak Hall School



K-1 Championship Team—The Frazer School



K-3 Championship Sect. ed. note—we didn't receive a copy of this image. If you have one you can provide we will update the image.



K-3 Championship Section Winners



K-5 championship Section Winners



K-8 Championship Section Winners

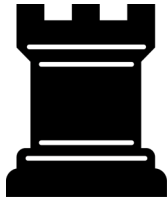


K-12 Championship Section Winners



K-1 Championship

1. Andrew Yang
2. Melody Zang
3. Levi Merkel
4. Karthikeya Pasupuleti
5. Logan Zhou
6. Joshua Krishtul
7. Antharya Akarsh
8. Joseph Aghdashi
9. Aahan Patel
10. Timson Huang



K-3 Championship

1. Ridhaan Dande
2. Daneel Kuznetsov
3. Dhriti Singh
4. Rajiv Honmurgi
5. Hayden Webb
6. Andrew Pinkoson
7. Oscar Morales
8. Suraj Jani
9. Calvin Peter
10. Magnus Deak

K-3 Under 600

1. Mansur Kurbangali
2. Dhruva Vaddadi
3. Lucas Meyer
4. Pratyush Nandy
5. Danny Anjarwalla
6. Caroline Wurtzel
7. Madhura Krthic
8. Natalie Roth
9. Shia Ricci
10. Victor Echenique



K-5 Championship

1. CM Yi Sha
2. Aakash Jani
3. Sree Harsha Siliveri
4. Jacob Vassiliev
5. Addison Baumstark
6. Arhan Bandaru
7. Nicholas Tadros
8. Tanisha Saha
9. Asher Austin
10. James McDonald

K-5 Under 700

1. Stowe French
2. Eli Weck
3. Pranav Jagadeesh
4. Maverick Lowe
5. Pranavi Chakravarthy
6. Maxwell Ji
7. Izran Kurani
8. Adam Malik
9. Sawyer Anderson
10. Brando Ricci

K-8 Championship

1. CM MaxwellYang
2. Diego Jimenez
3. Daniel Brovman
4. FM Vivian Mulay
5. WFM Sofie Lee
6. Analaya Muneeppeerakul
7. Damian Alexander
8. Nicolas Chahin
9. Kostiantyn Retiunin
10. Prajwal Chintamani

K-8 Under 1000

1. Reyaansh Patel
2. Panos Kyriakou
3. Kenny Truong
4. Lochlan O'Connor
5. Anushree Jagadeesh
6. Sanjeev Vikram
7. Matthew Leslie
8. Sayan Nagavalli
9. Zakariya Khan
10. Boris Ellsworth

K-12 Championship

1. CM Marvin Gao
2. Jacorey Bynum
3. Aarna Warekar
4. Sritej Sattaru
5. FM Brejesh Chakrabarti
6. Ariket Shukla
7. Abhiram Pothuri
8. Nocolas Wethington
9. Oscar Williams
10. IM Bach Ngo



K-12 under 1100

1. Nikita Mylotskyi
2. Ryan Zhang
3. Nathaniel Munenzon
4. Jaden Ayure
5. Michael Rabelo
6. Nicolas Monverde
7. Salvador Cabrejos
8. Vihaan Vikram
9. Parvati Chakrabarti
10. Prerona Sarkar

2026 Scholastic Championship—Blitz & Bughouse



FM Vivian Mulay



Oscar Williams



Team Gao

Blitz K- 6

- 1) FM Vivian Mulay
- 2) Asher Austin
- 3) Ridhaan Dande
- 4) Jacob Vassiliev
- 5) Joseph Toth
- 6) Adele Nurmanbetov
- 7) Oliver Olson
- 8) Arhan Bandaru
- 9) Rihaan Gopinathan
- 10) Michael Boguslavskiy
- 11) Sree Harsha Siiveri
- 12) Brody Lin
- 13) Norlan Wang
- 14) Archie Miller
- 15) Andy Lin
- 16) Evelyn Crawford
- 17) Anton Vassiliev
- 18) Hayden Webb
- 19) Izran Kurani
- 20) Ryan Zhang
- 21) Casswyn Kurani
- 22) Jahleel Bryant
- 23) Olivia Hoang
- 24) Travis Faison
- 25) Paxon Anayas

Blitz K- 12

- 1) Oscar Williams
- 2) FM Brejesh Chakrabarti
- 3) Aaron Marian
- 4) Aniket Shukla
- 5) Jacorey Bynum
- 6) CM Marvin Gao
- 7) Neel Sahai
- 8) Advait Nair
- 9) Michael Guan
- 10) Sritej Sattaru
- 11) Daniel Brovman
- 12) Gus Bleakley
- 13) Arav Patel
- 14) William Hardison
- 15) Aarna Warekar
- 16) Platon Kaidash
- 17) Nicolas Wethington
- 18) Arnesh Mohanty
- 19) Philip Parizianu
- 20) Soham Patel
- 21) Anikait Gollakoti
- 22) Aadarsh Sundarapandian
- 23) Srithan Ram Reddy Nalla
- 24) Prajwal Reddy Chintama
- 25) Ayush Roy

Bughouse

- 1) Team Goa
- 2) Team Sattaru
- 3) Team Chakrabarti
- 4) Team Nair
- 5) Team Toth
- 6) Team Baumstark
- 7) Team Jani
- 8) Team Patel
- 9) Team J. Vassiliev
- 10) Team Wang
- 11) Team Bleakley
- 12) Team Sheerer
- 13) Team Siliveri
- 14) Team A. Vassiliev
- 15) Team Valladares
- 16) Team Kropp
- 17) Team Serradet
- 18) Team Caballero
- 19) Team Crawford
- 20) Team Anayas
- 21) Team Santiago
- 22) Team Gunnells
- 23) Team Coley
- 24) Team Ojeda
- 25) Team Cueto

Florida Scholastic Championship Photo Gallery— by Alex Ruiz of AR Photography



Florida Senior Championship

On February 28th and March 1st, The Villages Chess Club hosted the 2026 Florida State Senior Championship at the Lural Manor Regional Recreation Center in The Villages. This Senior Championship is one of the five championships that the Florida Chess Association (US Chess Affiliate) can crown nationally recognized Florida champions.

The tournament consisted of five rounds with a time control for rounds 1-3 G/60 d/10 and rounds 4-5 G/90 inc/10 and the players must be age 50+. The tournament had an Open section and a U1800 section for players to choose from. The Open section determined the Florida State Senior Champion.

In 2025, Julio Morella obtained 4.0 out of 4.0 points and was crowned champion. In 2026, Julio Morella was once again crowned the champion as he earned 4.5 out of 5.0 points. Following Julio's outstanding finish was Cesar Bouza in 2nd with 3.5 points and Andrew Rea was 3rd with 3.5 points. A total of 23 players participated in the Open section. Julio has been crowned 3 times in a row as the Florida State Senior Champion.



2026 State Senior Champion—
Julio Antonio Morella Cabrera

The U1800 section was robust with 39 players entered into the event. Abdul Chowdhury scored a perfect 5.0 points to take first place. Walter Downs finished in 2nd place with 4.5 points. The prizes/awards were configured to recognize 1st and 2nd place along with top finishers in U1600, U1400 and U1200. This arrangement created an environment of competitiveness and fun for the players.

Julio will represent the state of Florida Monday, August 3 through Thursday, August 6, at the 2026 John T. Irwin National Tournament of Senior State Champions in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This tournament is the annual invitational event that crowns the U.S. Senior State Champion and determines the national champion for players aged 50+.

The Florida Chess Association and chess players of Florida will be cheering for you.

Valido Bouza,Cesar Jose (2112) - Morella Cabrera,Julio Antonio (2122) [A06]

2026 Florida Senior Chess Championship

1.Nf3 d5 2.e3 c5 3.b3 Nc6 4.Bb2 Bg4 5.Be2 Nf6 6.0-0 e6 7.c4 dxc4 8.bxc4 Bd6 9.Nc3 0-0 10.d3 Rc8 11.Qb3 Qe7 12.Rfd1 Rfd8 13.h3 Bh5 14.Rab1 Rd7 15.a3 Bb8 16.Qc2 h6 17.Ba1 Rcd8 18.Nh4 Ne5 19.d4 Nc6 20.d5 Bxe2 21.Qxe2 exd5 22.Nxd5 Nxd5 23.Nf5 Qe4 24.cxd5 Qxf5 25.dxc6 bxc6 26.g3 Qxh3 27.Rxd7 Qxd7 28.Qb2 f6 29.Qc2 Bd6 30.Rd1 Qe7 31.Qf5 Bc7 32.Rxd8+ Qxd8 33.Qe6+ Kh8 34.Qxc6 Bb6 35.Bc3 Qd3 36.Bxf6 gxf6 37.Qe8+ Kg7 38.Qe7+ Kg6 39.Qe8+ Kf5 40.Qh5+ Ke6 41.Qxh6 Qd1+ 42.Kg2 Qd5+ 43.Kg1 c4 44.Qf8 Qc6 45.Qg8+ Kd6 46.Qg6 Kc7 47.Qf7+ Kb8 48.Qg8+ Kb7 49.Qf7+ Bc7 50.Qg6 c3 51.Qc2 Qc4 52.Kg2 Bd6 53.a4 a5 54.f4 Qd5+ 55.Kf2 Qd2+ 56.Qxd2 cxd2 57.Ke2 Bb4 58.g4 Kc6 59.g5 fxd5 60.fxd5 Kd6 61.e4 Ke5 62.Kd1 Bc3 63.g6 Kf6 64.e5+ Kxg6 0-1

Morella Cabrera,Julio Antonio (2122) - Seibel,F Matthew (1917) [B15]

2026 Florida Senior Chess Championship Chess.com (3), 28.02.2026

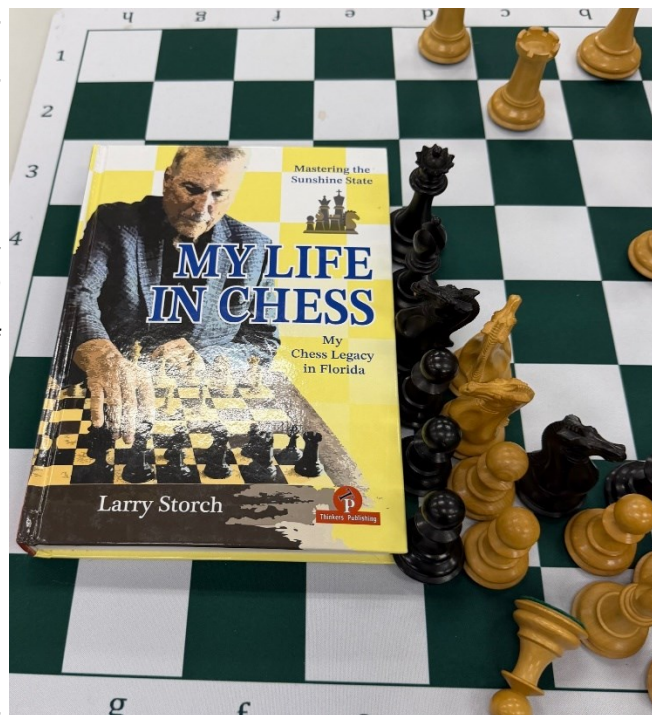
1.e4 c6 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 Bg7 4.Be3 d5 5.Nc3 dxe4 6.Nxe4 Nf6 7.Nxf6+ exf6 8.Qd2 Qe7 9.Be2 Be6 10.0-0 0-0 11.Rfe1 a5 12.Bh6 Re8 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.h3 Qd7 15.c4 b5 16.d5 cxd5 17.cxb5 a4 18.Nd4 Qb7 19.Bg4 Qb6 20.Qe3 Nd7 21.Bxe6 fxe6 22.Nxe6+ Kf7 23.Qxb6 Nxb6 24.Nd4 Rac8 25.Rxe8 Rxe8 26.Rc1 Re4 27.Rd1 Ke7 28.f3 Rh4 29.g4 h5 30.Kg2 hxg4 31.fxd4 Kd6 32.Rc1 Nc4 33.b3 axb3 34.axb3 Ne5 35.b6 Rh8 36.Nb5+ Ke6 37.Nc7+ Kd6 38.Rd1 Kc5 39.b7 Kb6 40.Nxd5+ Kxb7 41.Nxf6 Ra8 42.Rd5 Ra2+ 43.Kg3 Nc6 44.Rd7+ Kc8 45.Rg7 Ne5 46.Nd5 Rb2 47.Kf4 Nd3+ 48.Kg5 Nf2 49.h4 Rxb3 50.Ne7+ Kd8 51.Nc6+ Kc8 52.Rxg6 Rg3 53.Kf4 Rg1 54.Rg7 Nh3+ 55.Kf5 Rf1+ 56.Kg6 Nf4+ 57.Kh7 Ne6 58.Rg8+ Kc7 59.Ne5 Kd6 60.Ng6 Rf7+ 61.Kh6 Rf1 62.Ra8 Rg1 63.Ra6+ Kd5 64.g5 Rg4 65.Ra5+ Kd6 66.h5 Nd4 67.Kg7 Nf5+ 68.Rxf5 1-0

Florida Senior Championship Gallery—Photos by Matt Kolcz



Book Review by Miguel Ararat: My Life in Chess by Larry Storch

Players, famous tournaments, rivalries, games, and chess literature are just some of the elements that compose chess culture. While often viewed as a global community, chess is more accurately a network of local cultures found in every country, state, city, and club. These communities remain interconnected through ratings, tournaments, publications, and media coverage. Although social media has strengthened these connections, much of the history of local chess communities remains undocumented. For this reason, it is especially valuable to see a major publisher bring “My Life in Chess” by Life Master Larry Storch to a broader audience. In this book, the author presents both his journey to chess mastery as a busy adult and the development of chess culture in Florida.

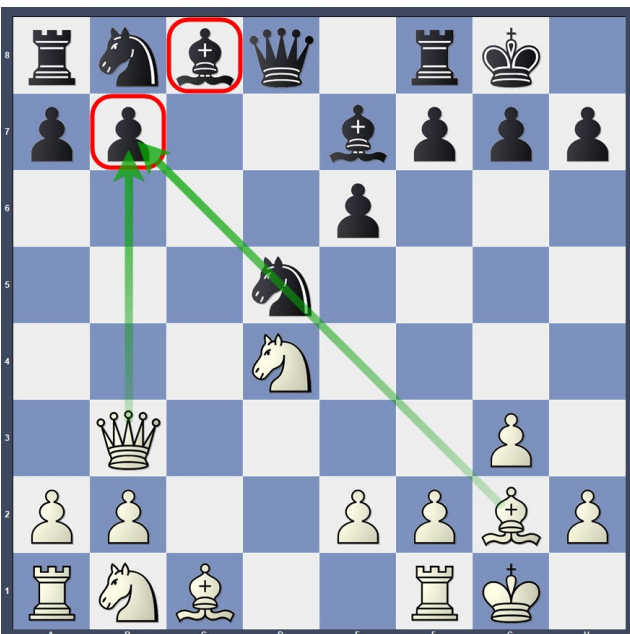


“My Life in Chess” outlines the growth of chess in Florida from the 1970s to the present day. Storch structures the book by intertwining his personal experiences as an adult player pursuing mastery with the stories and games of other strong players across the state. As a result, the reader becomes familiar with chess communities in cities such as Tampa, Tallahassee, Miami, Orlando, and Gainesville.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is its honest portrayal of the path to mastery. Storch presents a realistic account of improvement during the 1980s while balancing work and family responsibilities. Unlike many traditional game collections that focus only on a player’s best games, this book highlights the full process of development, including setbacks and obstacles. This makes it especially valuable for aspiring players who can relate to the challenges of pursuing chess improvement alongside everyday responsibilities such as school, sports, other hobbies, family, and work.

Readers can gain several practical insights from “My Life in Chess”. Beyond deepening their understanding of chess culture and renewing motivation, they can learn how to approach opening preparation and long-term study. Storch emphasizes building a coherent repertoire through classical sources, such as Bronstein’s Zurich 1953, to develop a deeper understanding of structures like the Nimzo-Indian and how to approach Indian Defenses. His games often reflect cutting-edge ideas for their time.

The book’s format—combining critical lines with concise annotations and occasional updates from modern theory—is particularly useful for intermediate and advanced players. One limitation is that beginners may struggle with positions that receive minimal annotation. However, this balance helps maintain the book’s readability and narrative flow. With guidance from a coach or stronger player, less experienced readers can still benefit from the instructional value of the games. From a teaching perspective, several positions serve as excellent training material, especially where positional understanding supports tactical execution.



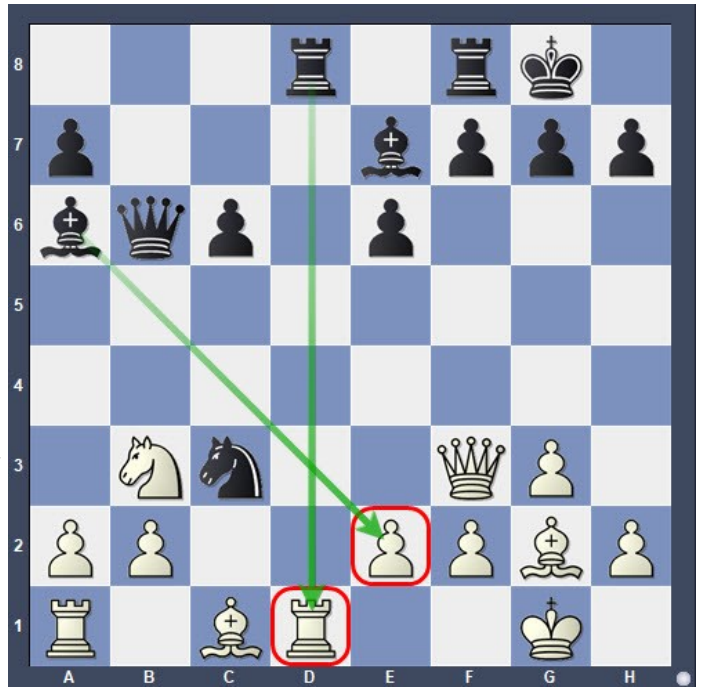
A representative example is Ardaman (2309) – Storch (2164), Central Florida Open 1984. In this game, Black accepts an isolated pawn in exchange for dynamic piece activity. 1.g3 Nf6 2.Bg2 d5 3.Nf3 c5 4.c4 e6 5. 0-0 Be7 6.cxd5 Nxd5 7.d4 cxd4 0-0 9.Qb3!? After 9...Nc6, Black activates the light-squared bishop and builds pressure along the diagonal.

9...Nc6 10. Nxc6 bxc6 11.Rd1 Qb6 12.Nd2 Ba6! Here Black’s light square bishop comes to life with pressure on e2, 13.Qf3 Rad8 14.Nb3 and now Black has the chance to use the pressure on the a6- f1 diagonal with The key moment arises with 14...Nc3!!

Nc3 illustrates how dynamic play can outweigh structural weaknesses. This type of example is particularly valuable for developing

players, who often favor tactics without fully understanding the positional foundations that make those tactics effective. 15.Re1 Nxe2+ 16.Rxe2 Rd1+ 17.Bf1 Qb5! 18.Kg2 c5! 19. a4 Qd7 20.Qe3 Qd5+ 21. Kg1?? Rxf1 22.Kxf1 Qh1 is a model game in playing the opening thematically, taking on static weakness in exchange for dynamic potential and concrete play when the opportunity arises.

Beyond instruction, the book highlights the role of key individuals and institutions in the growth of chess in Florida. Figures such as Harvey Lerman and Alex Zelner, along with organizations like the Central Florida Chess Club (CFCC), played an important role in creating competitive opportunities for players. My own experience connects with this aspect of the book. In the mid-2000s, when I began playing tournaments in the United States, the CFCC stood out as a hub for serious amateur competition. I recall a brief interaction with Larry Storch before a final round of the Orlando After Memorial 2006 chess tournament. His focused approach to preparation and willingness to engage with a lower-rated player left a lasting impression on me. That experience later motivated me to play regularly at the CFCC, despite the two-hour drive from Gainesville.



“My Life in Chess” captures the personalities and competitive spirit of chess communities across Florida, serving as both an instructional resource and a historical record of the game in the Sunshine State. While its strong regional focus may feel somewhat niche for some readers, this same focus is also one of its greatest strengths. The book addresses a gap in local chess literature and may serve as a model for similar efforts in other regions.

In addition, Storch portrays figures such as Walther Cunningham, a California master who later became a professor at the University of Florida. These accounts, along with preserved scoresheets and personal records, reinforce the importance of documenting local chess history. In my own case, this book has renewed my motivation to continue working on a project based on Cunningham’s games and notes. In this way, “My Life in Chess” not only documents history, but also encourages others to contribute to it.

EVENT Florida Open			
DATE 9-4-83		OPENING Scandinavian	
WHITE L. Storch 2127		BLACK W. Cunningham	
WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK
1 e4	d5	21 Rf3	Resigns
2 exd	Nf6	22	
3 d4	Nxd5	23	
4 c4	Nb6	24	
5 Nf3	Bg4	25	
6 e5	Nbd7	26	
7 Be4	e5?	27	
8 Qb3	Qf6	28	
9 Qxb7	Bxf3	29	
10 gxf	c6	30	
11 Qe5+	Ke7	31	
12 d5	Nxe5	32	
13 Be3	Ncd7	33	
14 Ne3	Qx+3	34	
15 d6+	Kxd6	35	
16 Rd1+	Ke7	36	
17 Be5+	Kf6	37	
18 Qd8+	Kf5	38	
19 Bb3+	Qxd3	39	
20 Rxd3	Nxc5	40	

EVENT Orlando			
DATE 8-3-84		OPENING Sicilian	
WHITE W. Cunningham		BLACK L. Storch 2181	
40 in 1 1/2			
WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK
1 e4	c5	21 exd	exd
2 Nf3	Nc6	22 Bd3	Bd6
3 d4	cxd	23 Qh5	a5
4 Nxd4	Nf6	24 Qxh7	a4
5 Nc3	d6	25 N.c	Be5
6 Bg5	Qd2	26 Be2	Qf2
7 Qd2	a6	27 Kh1	Qx2
8 O-O-O	Bd7	28 Qb6	Kh7
9 f3	b5	29 Qe3	d4
10 h4	kt	30 Qd2	Kxh4
11 Nce2	Qa5	31 Qxb4	d3
12 Kbl	Be7	32 Qxh4	dxc+
13 Bxf6	gxf	33 Kxc2	Bc4+
14 Nxc6	Bxc6	34 Qxe4	Qxe4+
15 Nd4	Bb7	35 Rd3	Rc4+
16 Be4	O-O-O	36 Kbl	Rxc4
17 Qe2	Kb8	37 Rxc4	Qe2
18 f4	Rhe8	38 Rd4	Kh7
19 f5	d5	39 Rc2	Qf4
20 Nb3	Qb6	40 Rc1	Qxf5

Overall, “My Life in Chess” is a meaningful contribution to chess literature, particularly for adult improvers, coaches, and players balancing chess with professional and personal responsibilities. It combines instruction, history, and personal narrative in a way that is both engaging and practical, while also inspiring further efforts to preserve the rich and often overlooked history of local chess communities.

Games From Recent Events by Miguel Ararat



(306) Morella Cabrera, Julio Antonio (2122) - Yunioe Santos (1835) [B01]
2026 Florida Senior Chess Championship The Villages, FL, US (1.1), 28.02.2026

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qa5 [3...Qd6 This move, along with Qd8, are playable variations of the Scandinavian defense. The regular playing of 3...Qd6 by GM Sergey Tiviakov has caused a surge in popularity of this variation even over 3...Qa5 not that long ago. Since Carlsen's victory over Caruana in 2014, the queen retreat to d8 has gained popularity and was suggested by A. Colovic in his latest Chessable course for beginners, My First Opening Repertoire: Scandinavian Defense which will bring a new wave of amateur players to the Scandinavian ranks. It is important to point out that Tiviakov good results with 3...Qd6 do not rely only on the opening choice, but in a strong positional and technical play. For example, the game against Kevlishvili in 2023 is model game in opposite color bishop endgame technique. 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3 c6 6.g3 Bf5 7.Bg2 e6 8.0-0 Be7 9.Bf4 Qd8 0-1 (74) Kevlishvili,R (2539)-Tiviakov,S (2548) Utrecht 2023; 3...Qd8 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3 Bg4 6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 c6 8.Ne2 e6 9.g4 Qd5 10.Bg2 Nbd7 11.Qg3 Qc4 12.Qb3 Qxb3 13.axb3 Bd6 14.c4 a6 15.Be3 0-0-0 16.0-0-0 0-1 (50) Caruana,F (2801)-Carlsen,M (2877) Tromsøe 2014]

4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3 c6 [5...Bg4 At club level, Bg4 is often played and sometimes used by chess elite players during blitz or rapid tournaments. White uses the bishop on g4 as a target and the game takes an unconventional path early in the game. For instance, White is able to postpone securing his king with castle. and

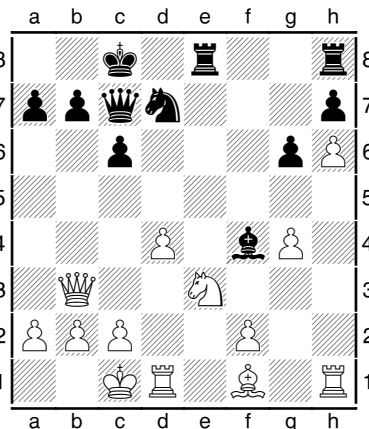
acquire as much space as possible, while Black will rely on a tactical operation to level or win the game. 6.h3 Bh5 7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5 e6 9.Bg2 c6 10.h4 Nbd7 11.Nc4 Qa6 1-0 (32) Karpov,A (2720)-Larsen,B (2605) Mar del Plata 1982]

6.Ne5 Bf5 7.g4 Bg6 8.h4 Nbd7 9.Nc4 Qc7 10.h5 Be4 11.Nxe4 Nxe4 12.Qf3 Nd6 13.Bf4 0-0-0 14.0-0-0 e6 15.h6 g6 16.Bxd6 Bxd6 17.Qxf7 Rdf8 18.Qxe6 Bf4+ 19.Ne3 [This move blocks the check and open the g8 - a2 diagonal for the white queen. However, 19.Ne3 allows Black to capture the pawn on f2 and decrease White's advantage.]

[19.Kb1 Re8 20.Qf7 Ref8 21.Qe7]

19...Re8 [19...Bg5 20.Kb1 Re8 21.Qb3 Rhf8 22.Nc4 Rxf2 White a solid pawn up and has the advantage.]

20.Qb3 [#]



20...Bxe3+ [Black gets impatient and exchange on e3 instead of building the pressure as in the variation above with Rhf8, Nf6-Nd5 and only the 21...Nxe3]

[20...Rhf8 21.Bd3 Nf6 22.Rhg1 Nd5 23.Kb1 Nxe3 24.fxe3 Bxe3 25.Rh1=]

21.fxe3 Qg3 22.e4 Qf4+ [22...Qxg4 23.Bh3 Qf4+ 24.Kb1+- A very instructive moment in this variation. Even when Black gets a pawn back he is down 7 points thanks to White's superior minor piece and mobile pawn center and a deadly pin along the h3-c8 diagonal.]

23.Kb1 Rxe4 24.d5 Rd4 [24...cxd5??

25.Qc3+ The back rook on h8 falls.]

25.Bg2 Rxd1+ [25...Qxg4 26.Bf3 Qf4 27.dxc6 Nc5 28.Rxd4 Qxd4 29.cxb7+ The Black king is "naked" and it is difficult to defend. On top of that has a decisive material advantage.]

26.Rxd1 c5 [Black keeps the lines closed at the cost of giving White a strong pass pawn.]

27.d6 Nb6 28.Qe6+ Kb8 29.Qb3 [This is enough to win and Black resigned.]

[29.Qe7 This move forces Black to sacrifice the knight to stop mate on b7 for a few more moves. 29...Nd5 30.Bxd5 Qb4 31.Qc7+ Ka8 32.d7+-]

1-0

(310) Logan, Zhou (785) - Leon, Wu (
Florida State Scholastic Chess 2026

1.e4 c5 [This game in round four was crucial and had an impact on the final outcome of the K1 Team Championship. Frazer School and Oak Hall were neck and neck to win this year's team trophy. Both schools sought to win the team trophy by taking points from their direct competitors, with Zhou representing Frazer and Wu representing Oak Hall.]

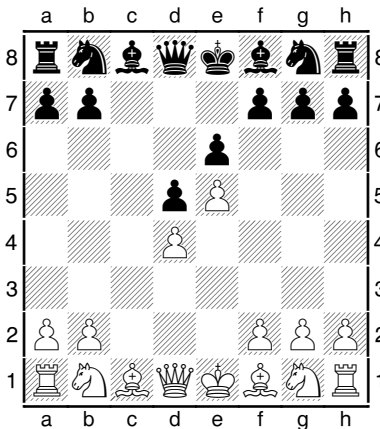
2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 [The Smith Morra Gambit is a sensible choice to play against a higher rated opponent. White gets a lot of play for the pawn in the main lines of the Smith Morra Gambit and it is understandable Black refused to take on c3.]

3...e6 [A sensible approach tha avoids complications.]

[3...dxc3 4.Nxc3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.Bc4 d6 7.e5 dxe5 (7...Ng4 is a better choice.) 8.Qxd8+ Nxd8 9.Nb5 Rb8 10.Nxe5 Black still a pawn up, but White has a dangerous lead in development and has the initiative. To some chess players a lead in development and the initiative are worth a pawn. 10...e6 11.Nc7+ Ke7 The Black king will be permanently weak and Kristjansson will take advantage of this until deep in the

endgame. This is an instructive game on the initiative from opening to deep into the endgame. 12.Be3 Nc6 13.0-0 Nd7 14.Nxf7 Kxf7 15.Bxe6+ Kg6 16.Bxd7 Bxd7 17.Rxd7 Ne5 18.Rd5 Rc8 19.Rxe5 Rxc7+ 20.Kb1 a6 21.Rd1 Kf7 22.Bb6 Re7 23.Rf5+ Ke6 24.Rxf8 Rxf8 25.Re1+ Kd7 26.Rxe7+ Kxe7 27.Bc5+ Ke8 28.Bxf8 Kxf8 29.Kc2 1-0 (29) Kristjansson,B-Roberts,M Harrachov 1967]

4.cxd4 d5 5.e5 [[#]



The game becomes an Advance French with well defined plans for both sides. White will play on the kingside and Black will try to undermine White's center with f6 and pressure against the pawn on d4.]

5...Nc6 6.Nf3 Nge7 7.Bb5 [7.Nc3 Nf5 8.Bb5 Be7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Ne2 f6 Black attacks White's central pawns and White overprotects d4. White stands better thanks to his spatial advantage, but Black has enough counterplay against White's center.]

7...g6 [No a bad move, probably the timing is wrong. Black wants to play Bd7 and see White's response before committing to g7-g7. It is commendable that Black despite his short age came closer to viable plan against White's structure. For instance, take the game by French Advance Specialist Sveshnikov to see the timing and use of g7-g6.] [7...Bd7 8.Nc3 Nf5 9.0-0 Be7 10.Bd3 g6 11.Bxf5 gxf5 12.Bh6 Rg8 13.Ne2 Qb6 14.Qc1 Rc8 15.Qe3 Nb4 16.Rac1 0-1 (46) Berzina,I (2292)-Sveshnikov,E (2521) Tallinn

2013]

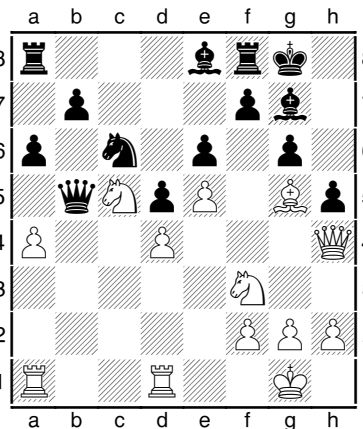
8.0-0 Bg7 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Ng5 [10.Bxc6 Nxc6 11.Bg5 f6 12.exf6 Bxf6 13.Bxf6 Qxf6 14.Re1 White blockade the d4 and e5 squares and stands better.]

10...a6 [10...Qb6 11.Bxc6 Nxc6 Black is close to equality and only has to solve the problem of developing his light square bishop.]

11.Bxc6 Nxc6 12.Qg4?! [This move is a strategic mistake. In this pawn structure both players have well defined plans and there is not that much scope for over aggressive or creative play. Just play on the central dark squares.]

12...Qb6?! [A natural move that attacks White pawn at the base, but the right plan is to attack the head of the pawn chain with f6. This positional inaccuracy lands Black in a worse position.]

13.Qh4 h6 14.Nf3 Bd7 15.b3 [15.Rd1 A hard to find positional pawn sacrifice to dominate the dark squares. 15...h5 16.Bg5 Qxb2 17.Na4 Qb5 18.Nc5 Be8 19.a4 #]



White is pawn down by his grip on the position give him a winning game. This variation is more for the reader to understand the nuances of the Advance French Structure and how a pawn sacrifice has positional purpose in addition to tactical play.]

15...h5 16.Bg5 f6?? [Black blunders.] 17.exf6 Bh8 18.Qf4 [18.Na4 Qb4 19.Nc5 Be8 20.Nxe6]

18...Rf7 [18...Qd8 Sacrificing the exchange seems more resilient for Black. White remains winning but technique is required to convert the exchange into a full point. 19.f7+ Rxf7 20.Qxf7+ Kxf7 21.Bxd8 Rxd8]

19.Bh4 Rff8 20.Qh6 Bxf6 21.Bxf6 Rxf6 22.Ng5 e5 23.Qh7+ Kf8 24.Qh8+ [24.Nxd5 is mate in 6 move according to the engine, but most humans players will go for the large material advantage as Zhou did in the game.]

24...Ke7 25.Qg7+ Kd8 26.Qxf6+ Kc8 27.Qxg6 Qb4 28.Rac1 Nxd4?? 29.Nxd5+ [White keeps taking material instead of going for mate, but his approach wins the game too.]

[29.Qg8+ Kc7 30.Nxd5+ Kd6 31.Ne4#]

29...Kb8 30.Nxb4 [White checkmated his opponent a few moves later.]

1-0

(309) Zhou,Jainchao (2669) - Amburgy,Ryan (2436) [A06] 31st Space Coast Open 2026 Melbourne, Florida, US (5.1), 26.04.2026

1.Nf3 d5 2.b3 c5 3.e3 [White defines the role of the bishops early in the game. The dark square bishop will operate along the a1-h8 diagonal and the light square bishop can be deplored to the f1-a6 diagonal or h1-a8 long diagonal with a double fianchetto. This approach of developing bishops before knights goes against the rule of thumb most club players follow. White is clearly using a sophisticated opening development scheme, as evidenced by this. GM Zhou aims to have an opening setup with maximum flexibility that gives his opponent chances to go wrong since opening theory is of limited use against White's highly flexible system. In other words, the GM aims to outplay his opponent in the middlegame and take out the opening preparation of long and concrete variations from the equation. White's approach is a great fit for open tournaments, where the highly

rated player wants lower ranked opponents to think on their own and not rely on opening theory or 'playing for free', standing on well establish opening moves.]

3...Nc6 [3...a6 A flexible response by Black. 4.Bb2 Nc6 Here White can go for d4 or play a double fianchetto with g3. 5.d4 (5.g3 Qc7 6.c4 dxc4 7.bxc4 Bf5 8.Nc3 1-0 (26) Almasi,Z (2707)-Gaponenko,I (2437) Douglas 2017) 5...cxd4 6.Nxd4 Nf6 7.Be2 1-0 (23) Firouzja,A (2763)-Rudd,J (2230) London 2024]

4.Bb5 e6 [4...Bd7 is a set up used by Caruana against So in 2021. Black can aim to a more quiet game with Bd7 and play an equal position for long time as in the game by GM Pap cited below. A instructive win from an space advantage. 5.Bb2 (5.0-0 Nf6 6.Bb2 e6 7.d3 Be7 8.Bxc6 Bxc6 9.Ne5 Rc8 10.f4 0-0 11.Nd2 b5 12.Rf3 d4 13.Nxc6 Rxc6 14.a4 a6 15.axb5 0-1 (32) Barrero Garcia,C (2321)-Pap,M (2491) Seville 2018) 5...e6 6.c4 Nge7 7.cxd5 Nxd5 8.0-0 a6 0-1 (44) So,W (2772)-Caruana,F (2806) Saint Louis 2021]

5.Bb2 Nge7 6.0-0 a6

[6...Bd7 This move is an alternative here with less than 20 games in the database. Usually, the higher rated player wins after 6...Bd7. From this point of view Amburgy choice, 6...a6 isa sound, practical choice.]

7.Bxc6+ Nxc6 8.d4 cxd4 9.Nxd4 [White has an asymmetric pawn structure and a safe king. White has the easier task ahead in the game despite the position being equal.]

9...Qh4 [Black wants to develop his dark square bishop to d6 with a matting threat on h2.]

10.Nxc6 [10.c4 Bd6 11.Nf3 Qh5 12.Nc3 dxc4 is not possible because the bishop on d6 drops.]

10...bxc6 11.Nd2 Bd6 12.g3 Qh3 [A positional game becomes sharp, and White stands better, but Black has the prospect of active play if

White reacts inaccurately in the next few moves.]

13.Bxg7 Rg8 14.Ne4 [The only move to retain the advantage and avoid perpetual check since the knight defends g3. If Black captures the knight, White takes the bishop on d6.]

[14.Bb2?! Bxg3 15.fxg3 Rxg3+ 16.hxg3 Qxg3+ 17.Kh1 Qh3+= Perpetual check.]

14...Be7 15.Nf6+ Bxf6 16.Bxf6 [#] White navigates the early complications with skill and it is time to exploit the extra material and the weak, uncastled black king.]

16...Rg6 [Black counts on attacking along the h file and the a8-h1 diagonal exploiting the opposite color bishops and semi open g file.]

17.Qd4 [17.Qf3?! White is unable to defend the bishop on f6 and the h2 pawn. 17...Rh6 18.Rfc1 Qxh2+=]

17...c5 18.Qf4 Bb7 [18...Rh6 19.Bh4 White defends the h2 pawn and is winning.]

19.Qc7 [White eliminates the dangerous light square bishop that aims at his king and consolidates is position.]

19...Rxf6 20.Qxb7 Rd8 21.Qc6+ Rd7 22.f3 [A move that requires a five move calculation. The idea is to capture on a6 and be able to defend the king with the maneuver Qa4-g4. The pawn on f3 defends the white queen on g4. This is an example of the skill GM posses to convert and advantage when precise calculation is required.]

22...Qh5 [22...h5 23.Qc8+ Rd8 24.Qxa6 h4 25.Qa4+ Ke7 26.Qg4 [#]]

23.Qxa6 Rxf3 24.Qc8+ Rd8 25.Qxc5 [White establishes two connected outside pass pawns, and every piece exchange will make it easier to promote the pawns. Converting the material becomes less technical for White.]

25...Rxf1+ 26.Rxf1 Qe2 [The Black queen is actively posted, but lacks support of the Black rook. White just needs to roll the queenside pawns.]

27.a4 Rd7 28.Qc8+ Rd8 [28...Ke7 29.Rxf7+ Kxf7 30.Qxd7+ Kf6 31.Qxh7 Qxe3+ 32.Kf1 The white king will find refuge in a2 if the black queen chase it.]

29.Qc3 Rd7 30.Qd3 Qh5 31.a5 Qe5 32.Qd4 Qg5 33.Qf4 Qg6 34.a6 [Black has not counterplay and White's pawns just roll to promotion the game is over.]

34...Qxc2 35.a7 Qa2 36.Qb8+ Rd8 37.Qb7 f5 38.Qxh7 Qa3 39.Qh8+ Kd7 40.Ra1 Rxh8 41.Rxa3 Ra8 42.h4 Kc6 43.h5 Kb5 44.h6 Kb4 45.Ra1 Kc3 46.h7 Kd3 47.h8Q Rxh8 48.a8Q Rxa8 49.Rxa8 Kxe3 50.Re8

1-0

(305) Morella Cabrera,Julio Antonio (2122) - Andy Rea [C00]

2026 Florida Senior Chess Championship The Villages, FL, US

1.e4 [The 2026 Florida Senior Champion's fate was determined by the following game. This game, while only sixteen moves long, is packed with valuable lessons for amateur chess players. First, the game highlights that in addition to the main lines, the Chigorin variation leads to numerous positions with scope for creative play. Second, the model game Chigorin - Zinkl is a precursor of the Indian set up that was later perfected in the 1950s. Finally, this game illustrates the difficulty of assessing a pawn sacrifice for dynamic compensation, even for players who have a rating over 2000 USCF.]

1...e6 2.Qe2 [A radical solution to the French Defense. White opposes the d5 pawn push that attack his e4 pawn and set up the stage for a complex strategical battle in the main lines of the French Defense. The strategy behind 2.Qe2 was devised by the great Russian player Mihail Chigorin in the last part of the 1800's. Chigorin's idea can create serious

problems to Black and the game Chigorin - Zinkl, Berlin 1897 illustrates all the active possibilities at White's disposal.]

2...e5 [Black transposes to an e4–e5 position in which the loss of time is compensated by the awkward position of the white queen on e2.]

[2...Be7 3.g3 d5 4.d3 Nf6 5.Bg2 0–0 6.Nh3 Currently, 6.Nf3 is the preferred move at this point. 6...c5 7.0–0 Nc6 8.c3 dxe4 9.dxe4 e5 10.Na3 Chigorin, the master of knights play starts a manuvre to place this knight on e3 to exert pressure against the d5 and f5 squares and the second knight from h2 to f2. 10...h6 11.Nc2 Be6 12.f3 Qd7 13.Nf2 Rad8 14.Ne3 g5 15.Kh1 Kh7 16.Qc2 Kh8 17.Nf5 Bxf5 18.exf5 Rg8 19.g4 Kg7 20.Re1 a6 21.Bf1 Rge8 22.Bd3 Qc7 23.h4 [#] A bold pawn sacrifice to create attacking chances against the Black king. However, 23.Be4 is required to prevent Black amazing pawn counter sacrifice 23...e4 that vacates the e5 square for a knight. This is rich position for the student of the game to analyze independently. (23.Be4 c4 24.Be3 White retains his opening advantage.) 23...Rh8 24.Kg2 gxh4 25.Be4 Nd5 26.Bxd5 Rxd5 27.Ne4 Rhd8 28.Re2 Qd7 29.f6+ Bxf6 30.Bxh6+ Kxh6 31.Nxf6 1–0 (31) Chigorin,M-Zinkl,A Berlin 1897]

3.Nf3 [3.g3 Nc6 4.c3 Bc5 5.Bg2 Nf6 6.b4 Bb6 7.Na3 0–0 8.d3 d5 9.Nf3 d4 10.b5 Ba5 11.0–0 Bxc3 12.Rb1 Nb4 13.Nxe5 a6 14.f4 axb5 15.Nxb5 Rxa2 16.Qd1 c5 17.Ba3 Rd2 18.Qa4 Ng4 19.Nc4 Rxd3 20.Bxb4 cxb4 21.Qc2 Re3 22.Bf3 Be6 23.Ncd6 d3 24.Qg2 d2 25.h3 Nh6 26.Rbd1 0–1 (26) Zvjaginsev,V (2659)-Morozevich,A (2707) Mainz 2005]

3...Nc6 4.c3 d6 [4...Nf6 This move take the game to an Indian like pawn structure and this 1.e4 game becomes a 1.d4 game. 5.d4 d6 6.d5 Ne7 7.h3 g6 8.c4 [#] White has the thematic space advantage and Black will fight back against White's massive center with Nh5 and f7–f5 with a sharp middlegame in the spirit of the Mar del Plata Variation of the Kings Indian Defense. Alternatively,

Black can play Benoni style with c6 and b5 with pressure on the central light squares as in the game Bernard - Slipak, Argentina 2019.]

5.d4 Bg4? [Black wants to put pressure on the d4 pawn, but his idea is refuted tactically by White and he loses the b7 pawn.]

[5...Nf6 Transposing to an Indian structure is the best option for Black in this position. Due to the fact that his queenside knight is on c6, the Benoni-type approach with queenside play and the swap of the light square bishop at c8 is not a viable option. The position requires a Kings Indian set up with g6 and retaining the light square bishop to enhance Black's kingside attack. In the Kings Indian with a blocked center, Black launches a kingside pawn storm that involves the sacrifice of the Bc8 to open lines against the white king. From a dynamic perspective, it is in Black's best interest to save a tempo and leave the bishop on c8 to speed up the kingside play. 6.d5 Ne7 7.c4 g6 8.Nc3 Bg7 9.h3 Nh5 10.Be3 f5 Black's play forces White to castle queenside and a complex, sharp middlegame awaits both players. 11.0–0–0 0–0]

6.d5 Nce7 7.Qb5+ c6 8.Qxb7 [[#] Black is a pawn down, but can create counterplay along the a and b files and exploit White's lag in development.]

8...Rb8 9.Qxa7 cxd5 10.Na3 [10.exd5 This the recommended continuation by the chess engine, but a human will not consider this variation that speeds up the opponent's development and puts his queen back on the d1 square. 10...Nxd5 11.Qa4+ Bd7 12.Qd1 Ngf6]

10...Bd7 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Qa6 Nc7 13.Qe2 Nf6 [Black develops his pieces easily while White has to uncoil his position slowly.]

14.g3 Be7 [14...e4 15.Nd4 d5 16.Nac2 The threat was Bxa3. 16...h5 17.Bg2 h4 [#] Black has compensation for the pawn.]

15.Bg2 0–0 16.Bf1 [I am not sure about the reason behind this move. My guess is that White wants to control the d3 square and prevent the plan discussed in my annotations above. However White loses valuable time and leaves his king in the center. Black uses his mobile central pawn majority to activate his pieces and attack the White king in the center. According to the chess engine Black is winning here.]

[16.Nc2 Re8 17.0–0 White is up a pawn, has two connected pass pawns, but it is not easy to use his material advantage thanks to Black's central control and potential to put pressure on the a and b pawns with his heavy pieces. We have a Benko type position in which White is a pawn up, but Black has positional, long term compensation for the material. The chess engines are of limited use here. To analyze this position our best tool is the analogy with the benko Gambit thematic manuvres such as c5– c4 and Nd3. Here Black can play for Ne6 –c5 and Nd3 with e5–e4 with serious pressure on White's position.]

16...Ra8 [Black missed his chance and the game ends in a draw.]

[16...d5 17.Nc2 Bc5 18.b4 Bb6 19.Bg2 Bb5–+]

½–½



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Oak Hall Eagles Capture National Title at 2026 USCF Elementary Championships

by Roberto Pescador

Baltimore, MD - More than 2,500 young chess players from across the country converged on Baltimore this past weekend for the United States Chess Federation's 2026 National Elementary Championship. Over seven intense rounds, each lasting up to three hours — students competed for individual honors and national team titles in one of the largest scholastic chess events in the nation.

Oak Hall School delivered a standout performance, claiming the **National Championship in the K-1 section** and earning an additional top-tier result in the K-1U500 section.

Oak Hall Wins K-1 National Championship in a Tiebreak Showdown

In the premier K-1 Championship section, the Oak Hall Eagles secured the national title after a dramatic battle with New York's Spyer Legacy School Dragons. Both teams finished with **19 points**, but Oak Hall prevailed on tiebreaks, **89.5 to 79.5**, reflecting the strength of their opponents throughout the event.

Top performers included:

- **Melody Zeng** – 5 points (rating rises to 1275)
- **Tanner Samant** – 5 points (rating rises to 1065)
- **Levi Merkel** – 4.5 points (rated 1166)
- **Leon Wu** – 4.5 points (rated 1064)

Additional strong contributions came from:

- **Miyuki Phillips** – 4 points (rated 845)
- **Xenos Vrakas** – 3 points (rated 558)
- **James Courter** – 3 points (rated 653)

This victory adds to Oak Hall's storied legacy, bringing the school to **31 official national chess championships**.

Eagles Dominate the K-1 U500 Field

While the K-1 U500 section does not award an official national title, Oak Hall's performance was nonetheless exceptional. Competing against **45 teams**, the Eagles finished in **sole first place with 21.5 points**, edging out New York's Trinity School by just half a point.

Leading the team:

- **Maximo Brooks** – 6.5 points (six wins, one draw), tying for **first place individually**

Strong supporting scores came from:

- **Landon Reintgen** – 5 points
- **Asher Blumberg** – 5 points
- **Jordan Epstein** – 5 points
- **Maxton McDaniel** – 4 points

This commanding finish highlights the depth and promise of Oak Hall's youngest competitors.

A Tradition of Excellence Continues With another national championship added to its record, Oak Hall School continues to stand among the nation's elite scholastic chess programs. The weekend showcased not only the team's competitive strength but also the dedication, discipline, and sportsmanship of its youngest players.



Melody & Miyuki



Fr; Xenos, Leon, Tanner, Levin. Br; Melody Miyuki

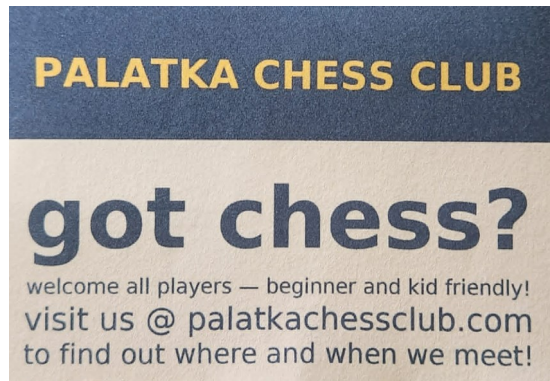


Maximo Brooks & Coach M.

Northeast Regional Report

By
Anthony Cipollina

It's an absolute pleasure to watch chess grow in the North East Region. Several years ago the Volusia County Chess club decided to hold an annual scholastic championship. It started with very few players but has since grown so much that we decided to hold a Spring Scholastic this April that had a great turnout and was won by George Junkin pictured below.



. In addition to this, there are meetings in Keystone Heights run by Alfienyka Butler. More information can be found on their website listed above on their card or on their Facebook Page "Chess Club in Palatka, FL. It was at this Spring Scholastic that I got to sit down with Chris and Jen of the Palatka Chess Club, our featured club of the quarter. Chris tells me that the Palatka Chess club was officially founded about a year and a half ago by Mike Eidson. Mike is the one who finds the venues and dates for their meetings and Chris runs the events. Much like the Cheesy Chess Club whose catch phrase is "Wanna Play?" the motto of the Palatka Chess club is "Got Chess," and speaking of Cheesy, it's nice to see members like Chris Cocker showing up at the Palatka meetings. It's amazing how we're all connected. The Palatka Chess Club recently had their first scholastic and beginners' chess tournament which drew 14 people (pictured below), most of whom were unrated or never played in an official tournament. This tournament was made possible by sponsorship from the Jenkins Community Rec Center. At this tournament, 5 USCF Membership and entry fees were given away. Normal meetings are at Jenkins from 4:30 to around 6:30 on Mondays



If you are in the North East Region and have newsworthy information you'd like mentioned, please contact me. I'd be happy to come out. See you next quarter!

Central Regional Report

By Mike Moschos

As you travel throughout the state of Florida and participate in or observe chess tournaments, you notice the steady/significant increase in the number of chess players registered in these events. United States Chess Federation (USCF) Statewide membership has expanded from 5,078 to 6,201 members, a 22.1% increase. This level of growth surpasses the total membership of many state chapters and reflects the strength of the entire chess community. The current USCF Florida state affiliate is the Florida Chess Association (FCA) . The FCA was established in 1939, with the objective of broadening and developing chess as both art and recreation, making it a significant element of culture in Florida. An example of a Central Florida initiative to promote chess is the Orlando Regional Chess Alliance (ORCA). Both the FCA and ORCA are volunteer-run, nonprofit entities dedicated to fostering a culture of learning and elevating the game of chess in the state of Florida.

Chess tournaments and clubs can be found in places like Boca Raton, Miami, Palm Beach, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Orlando, Kissimmee, The Villages, Gainesville, Jacksonville, the Space Coast, Tallahassee and various University/ College campuses - just to name a few. Every region of the state is represented with chess clubs and tournaments. Factors attributing to this steady growth are things like the surge in population, Florida Chess Association initiatives, outstanding school chess clubs and private academies, quality on-line chess platforms/social media pages, movies/documentaries and more.

Throughout the past decades, there have been many individuals who shaped/formed chess in Central Florida to include players, organizers, directors, and other support personnel. During those times, there was no internet, email, social media, and other technologies. It took many volunteer hours to establish a chess club, which entailed communications, advertising, organizing and directing tournaments, etc. Looking back, some of the individuals who contributed to the shaping and progression of chess included, but not limited to:

- Mike Peterson, Frank Redway, Scott Mayer, Larry Storch, Paul Hargett, Harvey Lerman, Mike Spedale, Nick Schoonmaker, Chuck Hall, Dan Ludwig, John Ludwig, Ray Robson, John Nardandrea, Bob Persante, Tim Tusing, Pete Dyson, Steve Vigil and Alex Zelner

In 2025, a book was published entitled *My Life in Chess, Mastering the Sunshine State; My Chess Legacy in Florida*, by Larry Storch and published by Thinkers Publishing. This book is available at US Chess Federation Sales. It is a biography of Larry Storch and his chess journey from the 1970's to the present day which encompasses playing in, directing and organizing chess tournaments in Central Florida and throughout Florida.

The Early Years

In 1973 Larry joined the Orlando Chess Club where he met several players that would help define/form Larry's future chess career. In his free time in order to study chess, Larry made use of books that were available, had multiple chess sets surrounding him and utilized notebooks with handwritten moves. Just like chess players today, Larry waited impatiently for the latest addition of Chess Life magazine to arrive at his home to study. His professional career was working full-time in the Orange County Public schools as a Middle School/High School teacher.

In 1976 Larry was elected as President of the Orlando Chess Club and still had the competitive passion to become the best player in the club. 1977 was the year of Larry's first major tournament win at the ICI Jacksonville Open. The first-place prize was \$200. Then in May of the same year Larry played in the Florida Experts event in the top section, which was a round robin with 6 players and being the lowest rank would be extremely challenging. One of the games featured a poisonous new line against the Dragon Sicilian (B79) which resulted in an early advantage and an eventual win. Another highlight in that year was at the Florida State Championship with a defining win against Ed Celorio a Cuban master from Miami and a 7-time Florida State Champion.

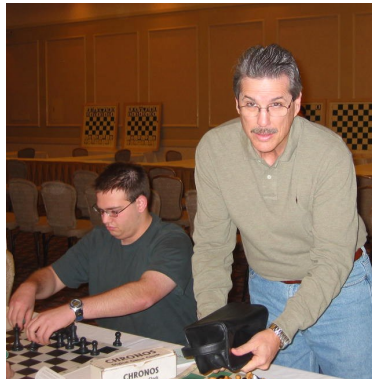
The following year, "The 1978 State Championship was played over Labor Day weekend in Orlando and was won by GM Arnold Denker. While I was playing my third-round game on board 13, Arnold finished his game on board one . As he was leaving the hall, he stopped at my board taking in the position, then moved on. After the game I ran into the former U.S. champion at McDonalds. He came up to me and asked, "Did you play it " Play it? I inquired. "Yes, the rook sac". "and did you follow up with the Knight move?" Yes, I did. In the minute he glanced at my board, he saw what I took twenty minutes to calculate. "

Chess Career Accomplishments for Larry Storch

- Achieving master rating (1984)
- Achieving the Original Life master title; 300 games as a master (1992)
- Earning title of Orlando Chess Club champion (defeating Mike Petersen in 1983 and Harold Alford in 1984)
- Creating the Central Florida Chess Club in 1986
- Getting elected Central Florida Chess Club President in 2000 and serving for 26 years

- Winning the CFCC Championship five times
- Winning the 2005 CFCC Championship by defeating both Wilmer Chavira and Ray Robson both with black in the last two rounds of the tournament
- Playing in 28 United States Amateur Team tournaments
- Larry's team winning the United States Amateur Team tournament five times, the last time in 2016 when all of the players including Larry, John Nardandrea, Bob Persante and Peter Dyson were seniors
- Winning the State Quick Chess title 1997
- Beat 7-time State Champion Ed Celorio in 1977 as a 1900 player
- Playing a draw with the former U.S. Champion, Arnold Denker in 1979
- Playing U.S. Champion Lev Alburt on the stage at the 1985 US Open
- Defeating Senior master Miles Ardaman twice in 1988 when he was rated over 2500
- Defeating US Woman's champion Ester Epstein (2325) at 1998 World Open
- Defeating Vasik Rajlich (2325) with a brilliant queen sacrifice in the last round of the 1998 North American Open
- Successfully guiding the Central Florida Chess Club through the COVID years and growing our tournaments and treasury

If you would like to read about the early, middle, and twilight years of Larry's chess career, I recommend purchasing the book. The book contains over 120 annotated/illustrated games as played throughout Larry's chess career. In addition, the reader can picture in their mind the history of chess in Central Florida and the Sunshine State. This book applies to readers who enjoy biographies and those who want to understand the concepts of chess openings, strategies, risks & rewards, creativity, and resilience.



South Regional Report

By Chris Gween

Community and Compassion: Wellington Library Chess Tournament Draws Big Crowd



The quiet of the Wellington Branch Library was replaced by the intense focus of thirty competitors in April as the community gathered together for the Wellington Library Chess Tournament. A free event organized by Robert Abramovich, the tournament proved that when the barriers to entry are removed, the game of chess can serve as a powerful tool for community building with many of the participants competing in their very first over-the-board tournament.

By hosting the event at a local library and removing entry fees, the event created a welcoming atmosphere that provided a friendly introduction to newcomers of tournament play. The "no-pressure" environment greatly encouraged good sportsmanship and new learning opportunities.

The competition was divided into three skill-based tiers, allowing for balanced matchups across all experience levels. Congratulations to Trichur Narayanaswamy for taking the Beginner section and Brett Strong for winning the Intermediate section. The Advanced section saw a hard-fought battle for the top spot, resulting in Gabriel Araujo and Nick Petrides finishing as co-champions.

In addition to the games, the event served as an opportunity to support a worthy cause. Throughout the tournament, donations were accepted on-site for Blood Cancer United (formerly the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society). These voluntary contributions from the players and spectators highlighted the community's willingness to give back while enjoying the game they love.

The Wellington Library Chess Tournament serves as a blueprint for grassroots growth in Florida. It showcased how a single organizer's vision, paired with local library support, can foster a love for the game while making a real-world impact.

It is through local events like this, bringing new players together for their first-ever tournament experience, that the momentum for Florida chess continues to grow.



Spring Strategy in Bloom: A Masterclass at the 2026 Florida Women's & Girls' Championship

From rising scholastic stars to seasoned masters, the Florida State Women's and Girls' Championship showcased the remarkable caliber of female chess players in our state. Held at the Spanish River Library in Boca Raton, the tournament was fueled by a high level of play and an undefeated run in the open section.

WFM Sophie Li dominated the Women's Championship section, finishing with a flawless 5.0/5.0 score. Her perfect sweep secured her the state title and the honor of representing Florida at the Ruth Haring National Tournament in Grand Rapids, Michigan, this summer.

The future of Florida chess was equally bright in the scholastic sections, where young stars displayed remarkable skill. Congratulations to our 2026 Girls' Scholastic Champions: Melody Zeng (K-1), Navya Gupta (K-3), Abigayil Zenn (K-5), and Yauheniya Birykh (K-8).

The tournament's success was made possible by the dedicated efforts of organizers Sue Samuels and Eliza Eggert, with Tournament Director Charles Hatherill of the Vero Beach Chess Club ensuring the competition ran smoothly.

The Florida Chess Association remains committed to providing a dedicated platform for women and girls to excel. Events like these are crucial for building a community where female players feel supported and challenged. We are proud of all participants who made this event a success.



2026 Florida Woman's
Champion—Sophie Li



Abigayil Zenn



Yauheniya Birykh



Navya Gupta



Melody Zeng



Gina Wett—Sr. Champ

One move at a time: How a national master is rebuilding Tampa's competitive chess community

With permission: ISABELLA DOUGLAS, Beacon correspondent



TEMPLE TERRACE — For years, Tampa's chess scene had a quiet problem: plenty of casual meetups, but no true competitive club where players could train, compete in rated tournaments and build a lasting community.

National master Truman Hoàng decided to change that.

Hoàng, who is also a two-time national scholastic champion, top 10 U.S. Open finisher and a player rated 2180 — placing him in the top 1.5% of chess competitors — launched Tampa Champions Chess, a chess academy now serving more than 85 students.

The 25-year-old Tampa Palms resident and Middleton High School graduate started the club with Daniel Mendoza, a 26-year-old South Tampa resident and one of the club's coaches, about two years ago after realizing the region lacked a consistent, tournament-focused space.

While nearby St. Petersburg has a long-established club, Hoàng said Tampa's competitive scene faded as older, well-known organizers retired, stepped away or died. Now, through weekly lessons, rated tournaments and school partnerships reaching dozens of students, he is working to rebuild a pipeline for local players — and revive a community he said once thrived.

"There were big pillars of the community who kind of faded out," he said. "I feel like we're taking on the torch."

The club draws players of all ages, from young, experienced competitors sharpening their skills to older adults eager to learn the game for the first time.

Hoàng coaches one of those experienced younger players: seven-year-old Ali Tazabekov.

Ali first started playing chess when he was five years old. Since then, he has competed in multiple tournaments, earning several first-place finishes. He is ranked 1300 in rapid chess, an intermediate level, although advanced for kids, he said.

His mother, Kamilla Tazabekova, said finding serious chess opportunities locally in Odessa was difficult. That challenge is what eventually led them to the club in Tampa, even though the weekly drive takes nearly an hour.

However, it is all worth it for Ali, who loves the thrill of competition and the possibility of how far the game could take him.

His long-term goal is already clear.

“Grandmaster,” Ali said, the highest title a chess player can achieve.

Alongside young prodigies like Ali, the club also welcomes players who are just beginning their chess journeys. Mendoza — one of the club’s coaches and Hoàng’s business partner — teaches an unexpected student.

One of Mendoza’s most memorable students, he said, is an 80-year-old woman who only speaks Spanish and had never played chess before. Because she couldn’t find a teacher who could instruct her in her native language, Mendoza took her on individually.

For Mendoza, teaching has become one of the most fulfilling parts of running the academy. He enjoys introducing students to chess history, famous games and legendary players, and seeing that excitement spread as they learn.

The club also functions as a space for social connection. Mendoza said tournaments provide younger players with a way to build focus, critical thinking, memory and sportsmanship, while adult players can unwind, meet others and engage in a shared passion.

For Mendoza, the mix of ages and abilities is exactly what makes Tampa Champions Chess special: from children dreaming of grandmaster titles to newcomers rediscovering the joy of the game later in life. The success of the program at local schools reflects this approach.

After a year of running the chess program at Carrollwood Day School, students competed in their first local tournament in September 2025.

By their second tournament in October, the school clinched first place in the beginner division of the monthly Altons 4 Chess Tournament, Hoàng said. Around that same time, he also began working at Peninsular Prep, where students continued their success — winning first place at a subsequent Altons 4 tournament and finishing just half a point shy of first in the Advanced Section.

Hoàng also emphasizes the importance of philanthropy and community engagement.

He has volunteered at Academy Prep Tampa Chess Fest in 2024, 2025 and 2026, mentoring and playing with disadvantaged youth. In spring 2025, he organized a community chess teaching event at Joshua House in Lutz, where volunteers introduced foster children to the game.

That same year, students also participated in Academy Prep’s Chess Fest, an event that helps raise tuition funds by having students play and teach community members.

For Hoàng, these experiences exemplify his vision for chess in Tampa: combining excellence with community.

“What distinguishes chess from other games is the history, strategy and the fact that anyone, regardless of age, race, gender or background, can achieve excellence,” Hoàng said.

Tampa Champions Chess is open to all community members on Saturdays, with group lessons from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. for \$15, followed by casual community play from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at 5035 E. Busch Blvd., Suite 7.

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Other Organizations

ACP : American Chess Promotions	(478)973-9389
BRCC: Boca Raton Chess Club	(561)302-4377
CACC: Castle Chess Camp	(404)314-3142
CCA : Continental Chess Association	(914)496-9658
CFCC : Central Florida Chess Club	(407)312-6237
CCJ : Chess Club Joy	(727)776-5583
CFORCC : Chess for Charity Club	(904)677-1445
FSCL : Florida Scholastic Chess League	(786)444-2467
GCC : Gator Chess Club	Thomas@floridachess.org
HCA : Hanley Chess Academy	(714)925-3195
JAXCC: The Jacksonville Chess Club	(904)607-9111
VILLC: The Villages Chess	(407)497-2261
KCF : Kasparov Chess Foundation	(773)844-0701
MCC : Manasota Chess Center	(941)313-5589
OCC : Orlando Chess Club	(407)721-4262
OCG : Orlando Chess & Game Center	(407)248-0818
PBC : Palm Beach Chess	nmbtillis@gmail.com
SPCC: Saint Petersburg Chess Club	
SCO : ScholasticChess.Org	(904)304-1639
SCCF : Space Coast Chess Foundation	(321)431-3060
TCC : Tallahassee Chess Club	(850)345-7838
USCF : US Chess Federation	(800)903-8723
VCCC : Volusia County Chess Club	(386)316-3700
SOCC: South Ocala Chess Club	(404)242-6728

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I am Theo Slade and I offer chess lessons in person and online. I usually give lessons in Saint Cloud, but I can even come to your house!

I was England's top scorer at the World U16 Olympiad in China and in 2012 I captained England to victory at an international tournament.

Peak USCF rating: 2318

Every review I have received has been 5-Star!

"Incredibly practical teaching style. I can truly appreciate a tutor that gets straight to the point, doesn't focus on fluff and provides the most concise explanations" - Sebastian

Theo is an amazing chess instructor, he was absolutely wonderful with my son (8). He adjusts the lessons to his skill level seamlessly" - Janessa B.

"He's excellent at understanding the ideas behind the systems and looking at your games and style of play to help you develop the right repertoire" - Jeffrey

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CHESS CALENDAR

Florida Chess Tournaments

Date	Event	Location	Contact
June 20-21	Sunshine Open	Orlando, FL	CFCC
July 15	PCB July Open	Palm Beach Chess	PBC
July 25	Villages Simul & Training	The Villages, FL	VILLC
Aug 22-23	Saint Petersburg Classic	St. Petersburg, FL	SPCC
Sept 5-7	Florida State Championship	Melbourne, FL	FCA

*Additional Tournament info at FloridaChess.org and ChessRegister.com

FCA Florida 2026 Affiliates

Academy Prep Center of Lakeland
Alton Academy 4 Chess
B & B Chess Club
Boca Raton Chess Club
Bortnik's School of Chess LLC
Capablanca Chess Academy
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Magazine due dates: Spring April 30 - Summer - July 30, Fall - October 30, Winter - January 30

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