

Calchess Kids Travel to World Championship

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By Eric Hicks

A few of the top Cal Chess kids have been invited by the USCF to compete in the 2006 World Youth Championships in Batumi Georgia (the country). They are currently just arriving in Eastern Europe preparing to try to make their mark on the world in 11 round tournament that will start on Wednesday. To be invited to play for the USCF team, the child must be among the top rated kids in the country. One lucky kid from each age category gets to play as "the official USCF representative" and gets financial assistance to travel to the tournament (Nicholas Nip is the official rep in Under 8 category).

The families involved have been nervous about the prospects of travelling to Georgia Republic and have wavered back and forth on whether to go or not. The US currently has a travel advisory to this region because of the possibilities of a civil war. The relationship between Georgia and Russia is very heated, and there are talks that Russia could send troops in at any minute. Also terrorist attacks by rebel forces, kidnapping etc are also a threat in this region from Chechnyan Rebel groups (famous for recent school house massacre and other brutal attacks). It shows how important a chess world championship is to these families to travel regardless of the risks inherent to this region. We have some chess soldiers in the bay area and let's hope more important than winning they stay safe!

Putting aside the political conditions, the actual living conditions are wonderful in direct contrast to Belford France last year where the political condition was completely safe but the hotel, food etc was horrid.. The hotel and dining facilities in Batumi (all included in the package cost) are outstanding compared to last years conditions.

The following kids will be playing in the world championship: Nicholas Nip in the under 8, Jessica Zhu U8 girls, Alex Grossman u10 (playing for Australia), Daniel Naroditsky under 12.

The ever cheerful and fearless Nicholas Nip and his entourage consisting of his mother Sophia, and coach Liina Vark arrived in Batumi this morning. (Nicholas has promised me he will be the man and keep both ladies safe and stomp on the feet of any man who hits on them). Their trip included sight seeing stops to New York and Istanbul Turkey. Hearing their travelling adventure stories I couldn't help to think of what a dream experience this is for these young children to experience such grand travelling with such a noble purpose of competing in a chess world championship. For sure this will be an experience that all these kids should cherish and remember forever. At such a young age these lucky children are living an incredible dream...given how hard they have worked they deserve it.

Nicholas was extremely fortunate that last minute this year FIDE decided to add an under 8 section. Before this he was expecting to play in the U10, still one of the top american kids in this category but still an underdog in the midst of strong international competition. One thing I really would like to stress to everyone that the age of the child, and the age of the category they are playing in is extremely important in competitions such as this. Luck for Nicholas he barely qualified (given his birth date) for the Under 8 and thus has a rare opportunity to play in a section being one of the oldest (and probably one of the strongest) kids. Nicholas has never lost to a kid younger than him, and has proven beyond any one's doubt that he is the top 8 year old in the country (there were many doubters this time last year). He is the reigning national champion in the K-3rd grade level and now he gets to test his merit at a world level against the strongest 8 year olds in the world. The competition will be fierce. You figure a 8yr old kid has to be a pretty strong contender to travel to politically instable Georgia Republic for a chess tournament. Because of computers used in training the level of chess at a young level has improved greatly world wide. India, for example, has several 8 year old kids who play at super prodigy level including one superstar Prince Bajaj who is fresh from going undefeated at the Asian Championships and trains in India with some of the most amazing prodigies in the history of chess. Nicholas loves stepping up to challenges and is looking forward to his probable match up with the amazing Prince...stay tuned...to get to Prince Nich will more than likely need to break his way through a wave of 1500-1700 obstacles that will be no easy feat.

Nicholas, who has been competing primarily in strong adult tournaments, views playing 8 year olds a cake walk for better or for worse. He is at the top of his game (1936 USCF), and as Michael Aigner wrote is the youngest 1900 player in American history. In Reno he proved that his amazing master performance in the expert section of the Calchess State Championship was no fluke by having another strong expert performance in the Reno Western States Championship expert section (3.5 out of 6 gaining 40 rating points). Liina and I figured preparing Nicholas to play against experts will give him proper bearing to play the "worst case scenario" in the under 8. Certainly no one under 8 in the world is master strength, but there might be one or two experts....Nicholas is prepared for them. Nicholas is capable of amazing chess, but his young age makes playing at a high level every game very difficult so has consistency problems. In Batumi he will have to play 11 strong games to have a chance of his dream of becoming World Champion and an 8 year old Fide Master. (a title that most adult chess players can only dream about). Imagine returning home a world champion AND a FIDE Master...Although Nicholas has a great chance, in his case the biggest challenge is focusing against young kids. In the U8 section no one has FIDE rating so he will be playing in the dark on how strong each kid he is. For example Nicholas could get paired against a hot expert strength prodigy in round 2 and have no clue what he is up against. For this reason Nicholas will have to take every game very serious, which we figure will be very difficult for this particular 8 year old...ironically Nicholas will have the same problem many of his opponents facing him have...8 year old opponents plain and simple LOOK WEAK and are hard to take serious! One thing is for sure, Nicholas as always will be cool and relaxed... probably not buckling or blundering under pressure but also probably not giving 100% every game...we shall see if Nicholas's low key playing demeanor will be for better or for worse...so far his coolness under pressure has payed big dividends in big title tournaments where opponents are usually nervous under the Nipster's big gun.

Daniel Naroditsky, the other Bay Area super prodigy, is in the ironic position of being the veteran experienced player. He is not new to international competition and actually placed 5th in the under 10 category last year. He has a fide rating of over 2000. Danya is known for his intensity and, unlike his younger counterpart, is known for playing consistently strong and playing his heart out over the board no matter who he is paired against. Daniel manages to play intensely against all opponents perhaps because of his experience. Danya knows that even lower rated kids can pull off big upsets and respects even the lowest rated opposition. This year will be much tougher since Danya is playing in an age category where he will be one of the younger competitors. Again...age is extremely important in these competitions.. When you consider that Danya will be able to play in this same category for the next 2 years...imagine Danya's strength in 2 years when compared to today. To win this competition he will have to play and beat strong master strength opposition. Just as an example of the type of kid Danya will play against, in the same section is top 12yr old American Ray Robson who is a strong USCF master who Kasparov once called "the future of American chess." (hopefully Danya and Nicholas will soon change Kaspies mind on this issue). Ray is just one example of many masters playing in Danya's section. The good news is that many feel Danya is underrated and is actually playing at USCF master strength himself. He has recently beat many masters in rated tournament play... so it wont be a big surprise for many calchess people if Danya pulls off some upsets and finishes well. But in this tournament, because of his 10 year old age, Danya find himself in the unfamiliar position of being an underdog in the under 12. Hats off to Danya for once again showing his fearlessness and merit to play in a youth tournament in the unfamiliar position of not being a favorite. Danya is traveling with his mother.

Whenever you have competitions like this you have the super stars..the participants with a chance to win it...and the brave souls who although are a long shot to win, value the chance to compete in a world class event like this. The other two bay area players in the world championship are Jessica Zhu 12 (1207) playing in the girls under 8, and Alex Grossman 1582 (playing for Australia) playing in the u10. Any respectable finish by these two children will and should be respected and celebrated.

We wish the best for these 2 kids who are bravely taking on some of the best young players in the world. Alex has been jumping in strength lately and his biggest goal is get some good playing experience and most importantly the life experience of competing in a world championship chess match.

We at Calchess wish all our kids the best of luck.

Follow the forums for constant updates on the tourney. Dont be shy to post your support for these kids...the kids mention in this article do follow the forums through their families...encouraging words from the calchess public does help....so please voice your support. I would like to remind everyone that although these kids are super chess players and are often viewed as monsters or beasts by the calchess players who have to play against them, they are still just kids with fragile kid personalities. I personally have picked some sobbing super kids off the chessboard after a hard loss and know how hard it can be with the expectations so high on kids like these. These kids endured incredible hardships and work loads to get to this level and part of the reason they did it was to win over the communities in which they play....I think that it would do them good to know that the communities they are part of (in this case the chess community) are behind them. Also remember that these kids are gifted with amazing memories and probably will remember encouraging words for the rest of their lives which could pay later chessly dividends...(Just THINK: discounted GM chess lessons) ;)

Win or lose (and I guarantee their will be lots of both) our kids could use your support!

Here is a recap of what Michael Aigner posted to the forums regarding the tournament:

NM Michael Aigner writes in the forums: "Two local juniors are competing in the **World Youth Chess Championship** scheduled for **October 18-29** in Batumi on the Black Sea coast of Georgia (the country). Congratulations to **10 year old Daniel Naroditsky** and **8 year old Nicholas Nip** for earning the right to represent the USA. Such honors come as no big surprise for Daniel (commonly known as "Danya") and Nicholas, since both have won national scholastic championships and are currently ranked #1 in the country for their age.

Now they will face the world's best in Batumi--Danya competing in the U12 and Nicholas in the U8 division. How will they fare against the top youths from Russia, Europe, India and China? Danya has positive experience to draw upon, having performed well a year ago in Belfort, France to finish in 5th place in U10. However, he will now play opponents up to two years older than him in U12. On the other hand, this is Nicholas' first venture on the international scene. Certainly as America's first ever 1900+ rated 8 year old, he is ready to rock the planet.

The tournament play begins on Wednesday. Over the next week and a half, the boys will play eleven rounds. The winner of the U12 division earns the automatic FM title; presumably the U8 winner gets the same prize, but FIDE regulations do not state that explicitly. Stay tuned to this forum for daily updates courtesy of Vladimir Naroditsky, father of Danya, and Eric Hicks, coach of Nicholas."

Also Jessica Zhu will be playing in the girls U8 division. She is rated 1207 USCF, and will face tough competition.



Nicholas fresh arrival in Batumi (US team jacket)



Daniel Naroditsky



Alex Grossman



Batumi Georgia on the black sea